

Qāḍizādeli Revivalism Reconsidered in Light of Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī's *Majālis al-abrār*

Mustapha Sheikh

Submitted to the University of Oxford in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology
St Cross College
Michaelmas 2011

Transliteration Guide

Arabic	Symbol	Arabic	Symbol
ا	A	ط	T
ب	B	ظ	Z
ت	T	ع	ʿ
ث	Th	غ	Gh
ج	J	ف	F
ح	H	ق	Q
خ	Kh	ك	K
د	D	ل	L
ذ	Dh	م	M
ر	R	ن	N
ز	Z	ه	H
س	S	و	W
ش	Sh	ي	Y
ص	Ṣ	ء	ʾ
ض	Ḍ	ة	A/T

Short Vowels:

ـُ	u
ـَ	a
ـِ	i

Long Vowels:

و	ū
ا	ā
ي	ī

Diphthongs:

وِ	aw
يِ	ay

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to thank the many people that made this thesis possible. I am sincerely grateful to Professor Yahya Michot, my supervisor during the first year of this research, for his unfailing support, advice, instruction and ideas. The time I have spent in his company has been invaluable and I can only hope that our friendship continues long into the future. I thank my present supervisor, Dr M.A. al-Akiti, for all of his support, advice and confidence in my ability to work autonomously. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr Erin Dailey, whose insightful comments in the final stages of writing up were priceless. My thanks also to Dr Christine Woodhead for very kindly assisting me with the translation of Qāḍizāde's *Risāleh*.

I could not have completed this thesis without the generosity of various family members and friends. In particular, I am grateful to my grandfather, Sir Mota Singh, and grandmother, for their support and love at crucial points along the way. I wish to thank Nahim Ahmed, Simmi Khan and Anis Sardar. I am grateful for the financial assistance provided to me by the Ethnic Minority Foundation, the Oxford Centre of Islamic Studies (OXCIS) and HRH Turki al-Saud. During my stay in Turkey, I benefitted from the support and generosity of Dr Recep Şentürk, Professor Mehmet İpşirli, Dr Sait Özervali and the Turkish Diyanet's Centre for Islamic Studies (İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi).

I am eternally grateful to my mother and father, for the love, support and guidance they have shown to me over the years, and to my two younger brothers, Bilal and Muhammad,

for keeping my feet on the ground. Finally, I thank my beloved wife, Sofia, for her endless love, support, patience and complete conviction in my ability to complete this research. I dedicate this thesis to her and to my children, Yusuf, Ayesha, Khadija and Suleyman.

ABSTRACT I

Shaykh Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī (d. 1041/1632), Ḥanafī jurist, theologian and Sufi, is largely an unknown figure to scholars of Ottoman religious history. Progress towards disclosing key aspects of al-Āqḥiṣārī's thought has been made in recent times thanks to the important contributions of Y. Michot, who has, in particular, demonstrated the association of al-Āqḥiṣārī with the Ottoman puritanical movement, the Qāḍīzādelis. Building upon Michot's work, this study delves further into the works of al-Āqḥiṣārī, especially his seminal contribution, the *Majālis al-abrār*. The study sets out its main themes and the authorities on which it is based; it then moves to show the degree of overlap between al-Āqḥiṣārī's understandings and Naqshbandī Sufism, as well as the extent to which his thought converges with that of better-known Ottoman puritans such as Birgivī Efendī (d. 981/1573) and Qāḍīzāde (d. 1044/1635). It is suggested that the impact of the *Majālis al-abrār* on the Qāḍīzādelis had the outcome in the second half of the seventeenth century of increasing the violence of their activists, a development which ultimately led to their downfall.

A key aspect of this study is the re-examination of the view that the Qāḍīzādelis were a proto-Wahhābī or proto-Salafī movement, which is typical in the existing literature. Whilst demonstrating the influence of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) and his teacher, Aḥmad b. Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), upon al-Āqḥiṣārī's thought, the limits of this influence are clearly demonstrated by bringing to light al-Āqḥiṣārī's distinct doctrinal and legal positions, which were very much embedded within the Ottoman Islam of his times. Ultimately, by studying the relationship between al-Āqḥiṣārī's masterpiece, the *Majālis al-abrār* and Qāḍīzādeli and Naqshbandī beliefs, the study aims to place the movement in its own Ottoman, Ḥanafī, and Sufi milieu, thereby challenging the dominant approach which reads the movement through modern paradigms.

ABSTRACT II

The religious landscape of Ottoman Turkey during the 11th/17th century was dramatically altered by a movement of puritanical reform known as the Qāḏīzādelis. Scholars and sermonists associated with the movement came to dominate the pulpits of Istanbul's imperial mosques for the best part of the century. The aim of the movement was to claim back Islam from corrupt scholars and deviant Sufis by promulgating a return back to the way of the Ancients (*Salaf*), formulating a unique approach to the spiritual path (*taṣawwuf*), and engaging in a form of activism which was not shy of adopting violence. Whilst most recent scholarship on the Qāḏīzādelis has tended to see the movement as an aberration in the history of Turkish Islam, closer to historical reality is that the Qāḏīzādelis were members of the learned establishment, had personal and ideological connections with Sufism, and were even in close alliance with the Ottoman authorities for a considerable period in the 17th century.

Studies on the Qāḏīzādelis have generally highlighted the role of Birgivī Meḥmed Efendi (d. 981/1573), Qāḏīzāde Meḥmed, Üṣṭüwānī and Vānī Efendi. The personality of Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī (d. 1040/1631), Ḥanafī jurist, Sufī and activist, in contrast, has been unknown in connection with the movement, that is until recently, thanks to the important contributions of Y. Michot.

Al-Āqḥiṣārī is a fascinating case: he composed over twenty treatises of varying lengths, many of which display a clear leaning towards Qāḏīzādeli-type activism and reform. Y. Michot's translation of al-Āqḥiṣārī's epistle in which the Anatolian outlined why he supported the prohibition of tobacco has to some extent demonstrated this. Yet al-Āqḥiṣārī's scholarly *oeuvre* consists of much more than jurisprudence: he wrote on theology, Sufism, and the science of Qur'an recitation. There is therefore still much to be learnt about the inner workings of the intellectual *Weltanschauung* of this key Ottoman scholar.

One text in particular was almost certainly the most significant contribution of al-Āqḥiṣārī to the revivalist movement – namely, the *Majālis al-abrār wa masālik al-akhyār wa maḥāyiq al-bidaʿ wa maqāmiʿ al-ashrār* - *The Assemblies of the Pious and the Paths of the Excellent, The Obliteration of Innovations and the Curbing of the Wicked*. Though ostensibly no more than a commentary on one hundred *ḥadīths* collected in the *Maṣābīḥ al-Sunna* (*The Lamps of the Tradition*) of Abū Muḥammad Ḥuṣayn b. Masʿūd al-Baghawī (d. 515/1122), the work is in fact a reformist manifesto which highlights the excesses of mystics, the innovations in popular religion and various doctrinal heresies which its author believed threatened the pristine religion. Significantly, despite the monumental work that it is, the *Majālis al-abrār*, like its author, has been almost entirely overlooked by scholars of Ottoman religious history. One of the central purposes of this study is to remedy this situation.

Yet there is more reason to investigate al-Āqḥiṣārī and his *Majālis al-abrār* than simply the lack of scholarly attention hitherto afforded them. The study of 17th century Ottoman reformism seems to have reached an impasse insofar as scholars have been incapable of moving beyond a reading of the Qāḍīzādelis through modern paradigms. Furthermore, much of the literature to date has taken for granted the Qāḍīzādelis as they are remembered in Turkish consciousness, without attempting a serious historicisation of the movement.

The need to rectify the dislocation between memory and historical reality is long overdue. It is the aim of the present study to begin this process, via a textual archaeology of the *Majālis al-abrār* of Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī. And by situating someone as seminal for the Qāḍīzādeli movement as al-Āqḥiṣārī within the Ottoman religious milieu of the 17th century, a more precise understanding of the social, political and religious agenda of the Qāḍīzādelis is achievable.

Some of the findings will perhaps come as a surprise to those familiar with the Qāḍīzādeli movement. For instance, the *Majālis* betrays al-Āqḥiṣārī's own understanding of the spiritual path, one which overlaps in many respects with Naqshbandī Sufism. He

draws frequently from the works of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) and his teacher, Aḥmad b. Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), despite the animosity which these names could provoke in an Ottoman religious milieu infused with fervour for the thought of Ibn ʿArabī and Fakhr al-Rāzī. Al-Āqḥiṣārī’s advocacy of the principle of “enjoining the good and forbidding wrong” was of a level unknown in the literature of Qāḍīzādeli activism. It is very possible, therefore, that his influence on the movement caused in some way the violent turn which Qāḍīzādeli activism took around the second half of the 17th century. Indeed it is one of the hypotheses of the present study that this forgotten puritan played as central a role in the evolution of Qāḍīzādeli revivalism as his predecessor Birgivī, and probably even the movement’s own eponym Meḥmet Qāḍīzāde.

The design of this study is guided by its commitment towards analytical depth over historical narrative. Whereas previous studies on the Qāḍīzādelis have mostly favoured historical narrative over nuance, and as such have been quite arbitrary in treating the debates which engaged the Qāḍīzādelis, this study commences with a broader assessment of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s ideological outlook – his views on Sufism and his understanding of religious innovation – and only then moves to examine the details of his reformist programme. It is hoped that this approach will allow for a greater appreciation of the intricacies of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s reform programme and avoid the generalisations and misinterpretations that have beleaguered some of the earlier studies in the field.

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ABBREVIATIONS

*EI*² *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition

İA *İslam Ansiklopedisi*

The Balance of Truth *Mīzān al-ḥaqq fī ikthiyār al-aḥaqq* - *The Balance of Truth*

Majālis *Majālis al-abrār*

Q *Qur'an*

INTRODUCTION

During the 11th/17th century the religious landscape of Ottoman Turkey was dramatically shaken by the Qāḍīzādelis, a movement of puritanical reformers and activists named after Qāḍīzāde Meḥmet Efendī (d. 1044/1635). Qāḍīzāde and several of his key associates came to dominate the pulpits of Istanbul's imperial mosques and engaged in a campaign to claim back "true Islam" from corrupt scholars and deviant Sufis.¹ Promulgating a return back to the way of the Ancients (*Salaf*), a new vision for the spiritual path (*taṣawwuf*) and an associated activism which did not hesitate to employ violence as a *modus operandi*, the Qāḍīzādelis would disseminate their teachings through both the oral and written word. They gave renewed life to the centuries-old dialectic between heresy and orthodoxy, and although frequently presented as an aberration in the history of Turkish Islam, in fact the Qāḍīzādelis drew as much from local, Turkish Islam as they did from foreign schools of thought. The Qāḍīzādelis not only left an indelible mark on Ottoman piety, in posterity they would serve as paragon for generations of revivalists both in Turkey and the other parts of the Muslim world.

Qāḍīzādeli polemic consisted of invective directed at a host of religious doctrines and practices which texts of the movement suggest had currency in Ottoman lands. Among these were practices such as praying at the graves of saints, audible *dhikr* (remembrance of God), mystical singing and dancing, and extra-scriptural prayers performed in

¹ On the corruption of the Ottoman learned institution see M. Zilfi, *Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Post-Classical Age (1600-1800)* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica [Studies in Middle-Eastern History, 8] 1988). On Sufi antinomianism in the Ottoman Empire, see A. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Middle Period 1200-1550* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

congregation. The movement was not content to root out heresies which impinged upon their interpretation of pristine Islam; it also targeted various social norms and behaviours which it believed compromised upright Muslim behaviour. In this regard, its members were actively opposed to the consumption of coffee, tobacco and opium, and attacked *kahvehanes* where such past-times, deemed by them as licentious, typically occurred.² To many it seemed as though the Qāḍīzādelis simply had an insatiable appetite for censure and violence; their attacks upon religious and social practices which were both embedded and cherished in Turkish society were seen by many as senseless and without any regard for the predilections of wider society.

Hitherto, studies on the Qāḍīzādelis have highlighted the role of Birgivī Meḥmed Efendi (d. 981/1573), widely considered the spiritual inspiration of the movement; Qāḍīzāde Meḥmed, under whose leadership the movement was catapulted into the political centre of Ottoman society; and Üşüwānī (d. 1072/1661) and Wānī Efendi (d. 1096/1685), leaders of the movement in the latter half of the 17th century.³ Their contributions to the movement and their works have generated some scholarly interest, such as Birgivī's *al-Ṭarīqat al-Muḥammadiyya*, a text which by the 18th century was one of the most widely owned books in Ottoman lands and which even today maintains its place on the curricula

² Coffee-houses played a major role in the exchange of ideas and indeed rumours concerning the politics of the day. The seeds of sedition were frequently sown here and during the 17th and 18th centuries, coffeehouses were the bane of more than a few sultans and viziers. On this see M. Zilfi, 'The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul,' *Journal Of Near Eastern Studies*, 45 (1986), pp. 256-257; also F. Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul: 1700/1800* (California: University of California Press, 2010).

³ Notable examples are N. Öztürk, 'Islamic Orthodoxy among the Ottomans in the Seventeenth Century with Special Reference to the Qāḍī-zāde Movement' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1981); Ş. Çavuşoğlu, 'The Kadizadeli Movement: An Attempt of Şeri'at-Minded Reform in the Ottoman Empire' (unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1990); M.D. Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam. Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

of madrasas across the Muslim world.⁴ But until very recently, the personality of Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī (d. 1041/1632), Ḥanafī scholar, Sufi and contemporary of Qāḍīzāde Meḥmed, was unknown in relation to the Qāḍīzādelis. First introduced to the academic community by Y. Michot, in his critical edition and translation of the 16th/17th century scholars's *Risāleh dukhāniyyeh*, or *Epistle on tobacco*⁵, al-Āqḥiṣārī's case is most interesting. He composed over twenty treatises of varying lengths, many of which intersect with broader Qāḍīzādeli concerns. Michot's translation of al-Āqḥiṣārī's epistle, in which the Anatolian outlined why he was opposed to tobacco, has to some extent demonstrated this. Yet al-Āqḥiṣārī's scholarly *oeuvre* consists of much more than jurisprudence: he wrote on theology, Sufism and the science of Qur'an recitation, among other subjects. There is therefore still much to be learnt about his particular contribution to Ottoman revivalism in the 17th century.

One of al-Āqḥiṣārī's seminal contributions to the revivalist movement was almost certainly the *Majālis al-abrār wa masālik al-akhyār wa maḥāyiq al-bida' wa maqāmi' al-ashrār* - *The Assemblies of the Pious and the Paths of the Excellent, The Obliteration of Innovations and the Curbing of the Wicked* (hereafter *Majālis al-abrār/Majālis*). A commentary on one hundred *ḥadīths* collected in the *Maṣābīḥ al-Sunna* - *The Lamps of the Tradition* of Abū Muḥammad Ḥusayn b. Mas'ūd al-Baghawī (d. 515/1122)⁶, the

⁴ T. Krstić's survey of library catalogues of Ottoman manuscript collections reveals that in the most prominent Rumeli collections, in Sarajevo and Sofia, the list of most copied works (after the Qur'an) is led by Birgivi's *al-Ṭarīqat al-Muḥammadiyya* and *Vasiyyetnāme* (*Risāle-yi Birgivi*). Üştüwānī's *Kitāb* was also among the most widely circulated books. (*Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Ottoman Empire*) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 29.

⁵ Y. Michot, *Against Smoking: An Ottoman Manifesto*. An introduction, edition and translation of Aḥmad Rūmī Āqḥiṣārī's *al-Risāla al-dukhāniyya* (Leicester: Kube Publishing, 2010).

⁶ Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn b. Mas'ūd b. Muḥammad al-Baghawī, Shāfi'ī jurist and prolific author in *ḥadīth*. He is most famous for his *Sharḥ al-sunna* and *Maṣābīḥ al-sunna*. See E. Dickinson, 'Baghawī', *EL*².

Majālis al-abrār is a manifesto for reform, aiming to bring religious doctrines and practices back in line with Ottoman orthodoxy.⁷ Even a cursory perusal of its contents makes clear why it deserves inclusion alongside the better-known texts of Qāḍīzādeli Islam.⁸ Significantly, despite the magisterial work that it is, the *Majālis al-abrār*, like its author, has been almost entirely overlooked by scholars of Ottoman religious history. Indeed one of the central purposes of this study is to remedy this situation.

Yet there is more reason to investigate al-Āqḥiṣārī and his *Majālis al-abrār* than simply the lack of scholarly attention hitherto afforded them. The study of Qāḍīzādeli Islam seems to have reached an impasse – whether in Turkish or English – insofar as scholars have been incapable of reading the movement as anything other than proto-Wahhābī, fundamentalist or otherwise retrograde, rather than situate the movement in its specific Ottoman Ḥanafī and Sūfī milieu.⁹ Much of the literature to date has taken for granted the Qāḍīzādelis as remembered in Turkish consciousness, rather than attempt a nuanced

⁷ In the context of this study “orthodoxy” is used as a synonym for the normative Islam of the Ottoman “Ulamā”, which was characteristically based on scripture and the Ḥanafī legal tradition. On the Ottoman learned establishment see M. Zilfi, ‘The Ottoman Ulema,’ in *The Cambridge History of Turkey: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603-1839*, edited by S. Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). On the construction of orthodoxy in Islam see A. El Shamsi, ‘The Social Construction of Orthodoxy,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, edited by T. Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸ See p. 66 for the contents of the *Majālis*.

⁹ See for example Joseph Von Hammer, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches* (Vienna: C.A. Hartleben’s Verlage, 1829-1830; reprint, Granz: Akademischen Druck, 1963), 5: 163-164, 528-531; 6: 5-8, 182-185 (page references are to reprint edition); F.W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973), 2: 420-423; A. Galanté, *Histoire des Juifs d’Anatolie*, vol. I, *Les Juifs d’Izmir* (Istanbul, 1937), pp. 250-252; Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Mevlânâ’dan Sonra Mevlevîlik*, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: İnkilap ve Aka, 1983), pp. 158-168; Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. I, *Empire of the Gazis: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire, 1280-1808* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 206-207; A.Y. Ocak, ‘XVII. Yüzyılda Osmanlı İmparatorlugun’da Dinde Tasfiye (Püritanizm) Teşebbüşlerine Bir Bakış: “Kadizâdeliler Hareketi”,’ *Türk Kültürü Araştırmaları*, 1-2 (1983): pp. 208-226; H. İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, translated by N. Itzkowitz and C. Imber (New York: Praeger, 1973), especially chapter 18; M. Zilfi, *Politics of Piety*; M. Zilfi, ‘The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in 17th Century Istanbul,’ *Journal of Near-Eastern Studies*, 45 (1986), 251-269; Ş. Çavuşoğlu, ‘Kadizadeliler,’ *İA*.

understanding of the Qāḍīzādelis on the basis of rigorous historiography. Indeed the failure of some scholars to scrutinise earlier historical and biographical accounts has led to gross errors of judgement with regards to the movement's *raison d'être*. Thus the Qāḍīzādelis are sometimes presented as absolute rejectors of Sufism¹⁰, as representatives of a proto-Wahhābī/Salafī orientation¹¹ or as somehow *sui generis*, neither originating from within the ranks of the ʿIlmiyye¹² nor from the commonalty (*rāʿiyya*).¹³

The need to rectify the dislocation between memory and historical reality is long overdue. It is the aim of the present study to begin this process, primarily via a reconstruction of al-Āqḥiṣārī's thought through a textual archaeology of the *Majālis al-abrār*. An attempt is also made to situate al-Āqḥiṣārī within the Ottoman religious milieu of the 17th century, which in turn hopes to shed more light upon the programme of reform associated with the Qāḍīzādeli movement and provide a degree of analytical clarity hitherto lacking in much of the scholarly literature.

Some of the findings will perhaps come as a surprise to those familiar with the Qāḍīzādeli movement. For instance, the *Majālis* betrays al-Āqḥiṣārī's conceptualisation of the spiritual path, one which is contiguous in many of its aspects with the Naqshbandī Order; al-Āqḥiṣārī draws heavily from the works of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) and his teacher, Aḥmad b. Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), despite the negative

¹⁰ To date I am not aware of any study which has avoided this error.

¹¹ See especially Çavuşoğlu's 'The Kadizadeli Movement' and C. Kafadar, 'The Myth of the Golden Age: Ottoman Historical Consciousness in the Post-Süleymanic Era,' in *Süleyman the Second and His Times*, edited by H. Inalçik and C. Kafadar (Isis Press, 1993).

¹² The ʿIlmiyye is the Ottoman learned institution. See S.A. Somel, *Historical Dictionary of the Ottoman Empire* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2003), p. 129.

¹³ See for example N. Öztürk's, 'Islamic Orthodoxy'.

associations the name of the latter carried; al-Āqḥiṣārī's advocacy of the principle of enjoining good and forbidding wrong (*al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa l-nahy 'an al-munkar*) was of a level hitherto unknown in even Qāḍīzādeli literature, suggesting a role for him in the increasing of violence among Qāḍīzādeli activists in the latter half of the 17th century, a policy shift which ultimately led to their downfall. Indeed it is one of the hypotheses of the present study that this forgotten puritan played as central a role in the evolution of Qāḍīzādeli revivalism as Birgivī, and probably even the movement's own eponym, Mehmet Qāḍīzāde.

The study comprises of five chapters. Chapter I commences with a historical survey of the Qāḍīzādeli movement, focussing in particular on its first phase, followed by a critical assessment of the literature; Chapter II introduces Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī and the *Majālis al-abrār*; this being his major authorship, it will be used to situate al-Āqḥiṣārī within Ottoman Turkish religious society, as well as to serve as the corner-stone for a reassessment of Qāḍīzādeli activism generally. A straightforward biographical account of al-Āqḥiṣārī's life and work is hindered by the fact that he is virtually ignored by Ottoman chronicles and biographies. The mention that he is given in the addendum (*dhayl*) to Kātīb Çelebi's *Kashf al-ẓunūn* is no more than a brief statement, which in fact misidentifies him as a shaykh of the Khalwatī Order. There is no alternative therefore but to understand his aims, his vision and surmise something about his life via his works. The chapter also introduces the themes and specific content of the *Majālis al-abrār*, as well as the authorities cited by al-Āqḥiṣārī; Chapter III begins the textual archaeology of the *Majālis al-abrār*, commencing with an investigation into al-Āqḥiṣārī's spirituality. The

chapter highlights al-Āqḥiṣārī's advocacy of and commitment to the Sufi path, and demonstrates the continuities and convergences which his outlook has with the Naqshbandī Order. It is argued that, despite these continuities, al-Āqḥiṣārī was unlikely to have been a Naqshbandī; in appropriating doctrines and key aspects of the order's devotional regimen, he was contributing towards a repackaging of Sufism, which had already been initiated in the Ottoman Turkey by Birgivī in the 16th century; Chapter IV focuses on the principal concern of the *Majālis*, namely the discussion of newly invented practices in ritual worship, or *bidʿa*. The *Majālis* is a text which should be viewed as belonging to the genre of Islamic legal works known as *kutub al-bidʿa*. The positions of those who contributed to this topos are perhaps surprisingly homogenous, despite coming from different backgrounds, legal affiliations and eras. Whilst al-Āqḥiṣārī cites some of the well-known works from this corpus, it is clear that he is most influenced by the *Iqtidāʾ al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* of Ibn Taymiyya. Here we are presented with a difficulty, insofar as there is no clear citation of the *Iqtidāʾ* or unambiguous reference to Ibn Taymiyya; as such, the chapter undertakes a detailed textual comparison, aiming to demonstrate the influence of the Damascene upon al-Āqḥiṣārī, as well as the places in the *Majālis* where the Anatolian either cites verbatim or paraphrases parts of the *Iqtidāʾ*. The chapter concentrates on those views of al-Āqḥiṣārī, and aspects of his reform programme, which bring him in-line with the Qāḍīzādelis; Chapter V surveys the activism of al-Āqḥiṣārī, in particular his emphasis on forbidding evil. There is also a discussion of the broader implications of the research findings and an examination of al-Āqḥiṣārī's influence in India.

The architectonic of the present work is guided by its commitment towards analysis over historical narrative. The study therefore commences with a broad assessment of al-Āqḥiṣārī's ideological outlook – his views on Sufism and his conceptualisation of religious innovation – and then proceeds to examine the specifics of his revivalist programme. It is hoped that this approach will allow for a greater appreciation of the intricacies of al-Āqḥiṣārī's reform programme and also avoid the generalisations and misinterpretations that have beleaguered some of the previous scholarship undertaken on the Qāḍīzādelis.

There are several limitations to this study which warrant attention. Given the paucity of biographical material any assessment of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī is possible only via a reading of his written works. The reconstruction of al-Āqḥiṣārī is therefore limited to his *persona* that he allows us access to in his writing. Therefore it is impossible to speak with any certainty about his personal religious affiliations. In terms of scope, the aim of this study is primarily to understand al-Āqḥiṣārī's intellectual contribution to Ottoman 17th century revivalism; it does not attempt to investigate, except tangentially, al-Āqḥiṣārī's legal positions, which are to be found in abundance in the *Majālis al-abrār*. Also, whilst it is argued that the *Majālis al-abrār* should be seen as a text within the corpus of Qāḍīzādeli literature, there is no attempt to undertake a detailed textual comparison between the *Majālis* and other texts which would further justify this.

The *Majālis*, although virtually ignored by Turkish and Western scholarship, was twice edited in India. The first was in Delhi in 1866 by Subḥān Bakhsh al-Shikārpūrī,

comprising an interlinear Urdu translation, bearing the title *Khazīnat al-asrār – The Treasury of Secrets*; the second was in Lucknow, in 1903, by ‘Abd al-Walī al-Madrāsī, also with an interlinear Urdu translation, bearing the title *Maṭārī al-anzār, tarjama Majālis al-abrār – The Objects of Examinations, Translation of The Sessions of the Pious*. Whilst some consideration will be given to what might have been the possible appeal of the *Majālis* for the nineteenth century Indian reform movement, there is a need to establish how the text reached the Indian Subcontinent from Ottoman Turkey. Such a line of inquiry, whilst highly important, cannot be undertaken here.

In the tradition of Y. Michot, al-Āqḥiṣārī will largely be allowed to speak for himself. Translations from the *Majālis al-abrār*, as well as other relevant material from al-Āqḥiṣārī’s *oeuvre*, feature in generous amounts within the body of the present study. The study has recourse to a manuscript of the *Majālis* since, although there do exist at least two editions of the text, they are regrettably based on incomplete copies and therefore cannot serve as the basis for this study.¹⁴ The manuscript, bound in leather and decorated with a floral motif, is of thin paper, each folio bordered with a red frame; there are annotations and corrections in the margins, written mainly in Arabic but also Turkish. The text is written in the Naksh script, cursively although in a regular style. At certain places there are additional papers attached, with notes. There are no stamps suggesting who the original owner might have been or signs that it was an endowment. Whilst the date of the copy and copier are not available anywhere in the manuscript, a watermark

¹⁴ Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī, *Majālis al-Abrār*, MS. Michot 0402. The manuscript was kindly provided to me by Y. Michot, who is the owner of one of the rare complete extant copies. For more on the manuscript see Chapter II. The incomplete Urdu editions are of ‘Abd al-Walī Madrāsī, *Maṭārīh al-anzār, tarjama Majālis al-abrār* (Lucknow: Maṭba‘at al-Āsī l-Madrāsī, 1321/1903) and Subḥān Baksh al-Shikārpūrī, *Khizānat al-asrār, tarjama Majālis al-abrār* (Delhi: Maṭba‘ Muṣṭafā‘ī, 1283/1866).

clearly visible on one of its folios suggests that it was copied sometime around the end of the 17th century or beginning of the 18th century, within a century of al-Āqhiṣārī's death.¹⁵



The first folio of the MS Michot 0402

¹⁵ Y. Michot, *L'opium et le café* (Paris-Beirut: Albouraq, 2008), pp. 56-58.

Finally, there is a technical point relating to the use of the term “Qāḍīzādelis” which warrants attention. The expression is ambiguous since, whilst in academic studies it is used to describe the ideological movement first initiated by Birgivī in the mid-16th century, historically it was first employed by Ottoman chroniclers to describe very specifically the following which Meḥmet Qāḍīzāde gained subsequent to his debates with the Khalwati shaykh Siwāsī Efendī. These chroniclers were not employing the term to describe a particular ideological phenomenon *per se*, but rather an uncouth mob. Indeed the suffix *-lar* in Turkish, when attached to a person of repute, produces an expression referring to the group normally associated with that person – thus *Qāḍīzādeliler* can be rendered ‘Qāḍīzāde’s following’, or something of the like. Throughout the present study the term Qāḍīzādeli, and by extension Qāḍīzādelis, refers specifically to the ideological phenomenon first initiated by Birgivī in the 16th century, and which took root in Ottoman Turkey during the 17th century.

I. OTTOMAN PURITANISM

This chapter introduces the Qāḍīzādelis, focussing particularly on Meḥmet Qāḍīzāde and the earliest phase of the movement's evolution. It consists of a literature review, highlighting those lacunae in our knowledge on Qāḍīzādeli activism which presently impede an accurate understanding of the movement in its historical context, and also a revisit of the popular narrative that associates the rise of the movement with Ottoman socio-political decline in the 17th century.

Violence in Istanbul

The Qāḍīzādelis, also known as the *fakiler* (legists)¹⁶, are named after Meḥmed Qāḍīzāde, a scholar-activist born to an Anatolian judge in Balıkesir, close to the Marmara coast, in 989/1582.¹⁷ Qāḍīzāde at first received his religious education from several students of one of the century's most respected scholars, Birgivī Meḥmed b. Pīr ʿAlī (d. 980/1573)¹⁸, also a son of Balıkesir and an activist in his own right. This early association with

¹⁶ *Faki* (Arabic. *faqīh*) was the generic title given by Turks to one who had any professional connection with Islamic law. In fact, within legal circles, it was more specifically the appellation of one who had knowledge of the law but not necessarily capable of deriving or executing law. These two latter roles were in the remit of the *mujtahid* and *qāḍī*. For more on these groupings, see W. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). See also D.B. McDonald, 'fakīh', *EF*². On the political role of the *fuqahā* in Muslim societies generally, see N. Feldman, *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State* (Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); W. Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); A.K.S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory: The Jurists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

¹⁷ On the Qāḍīzādelis and Meḥmet Qāḍīzāde, see Ş. Çavuşoğlu, 'Kadıızādeliler', *İA*, 24: 100-102; idem., 'The Kāḍīzādeli movement', pp. 68-74.

¹⁸ On Birgivī, see Kasim Kufrevi, 'Birgewi (Birgiwi, Birgeli) Mehmed b. Pir 'Ali', *EF*²; A.T. Arslan, *Imam Birgivi: Hayati Eserli ve Arapça Tedrisatındaki Yeri* (Istanbul: 1992); Atsız, *İstanbul kütüphanelerine göre Birgili Mehmet Efendi (929-981 = 1523-1573) bibliyografyası* (Istanbul: 1966).

Birgivî, albeit via his students, would prove life-changing for Qāḍīzāde, bearing upon his own religious *Weltanschauung* for the remainder of his life.

Heralding from a family of teachers and scholars, it was perhaps a foregone conclusion that Qāḍīzāde would himself follow the path of religious training. As was the norm for those intent on a career within the Ottoman learned institutions, Qāḍīzāde set off for Istanbul hoping to be accepted at one of its reputable seminaries. Once in Istanbul, armed with the privileged training he had received in his own village, Qāḍīzāde easily gained acceptance at the *madrassa* of his choice, to begin a new phase in his academic life which would eventually lead to a career in sermonising and admonition (*al-wa^cẓ wa l-nāṣiḥa*).¹⁹

Perhaps from a desire for change, Qāḍīzāde apparently forsook the path of learning for initiation into the Khalwatī Order which at that time was one of the largest Sufi brotherhoods in the Empire.²⁰ In no time he became disillusioned with the order and its libertine ways, only to return to the path of preaching though this time without ever again looking back.²¹ It is not clear that Qāḍīzāde completely turned his back on the mystical path, however, and it is certainly not something that he ever suggests in his works. Indeed, he continued to show deep reverence for Birgivî Efendî, who was both a Sufi and major advocate of the mystical tradition. It is incontrovertible, however, that he remained

¹⁹ Madeline Zilfi, *Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Post-Classical Age (1600-1800)* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica [Studies in Middle-Eastern History, 8] 1988), p. 131; Çavuşoğlu 'Kadızâdeliler', *İA*, p. 100.

²⁰ On the Khalwatī Order, see B.G. Martin, 'A Short History of the Khalwati Order of Dervishes,' in *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, edited by N.R. Keddie (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1972).

²¹ *The Balance of Truth by Kâtib Çelebi*, translated with an introduction and notes by G.L. Lewis (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), pp. 132-133; M. Zilfi, *Politics of Piety*, p. 131; Çavuşoğlu, 'Kadızâdeliler', *İA*, p. 100.

antagonistic towards the Khalwatī Order, writing against it, engaging in debate with its leaders, and even encouraging a campaign of violence against its lodges and members up until his death in 1635.

Qāḍīzāde would be recorded in the chronicles of Ottoman history as a hard-liner who instigated a violent campaign against popular religion and culture. Chroniclers focus on Qāḍīzāde's stinging and vituperative criticism of the Sufi orders and his rallying of support for a violent campaign against them.²² Yet he might have been remembered for altogether different reasons: he was a master orator which is indicated by the swift progression he made up the *wāʿiẓ* hierarchy, landing one position after another at the great imperial mosques – Sultan Selim I mosque, Beyazid, the Süleymāniye, until eventually he reached the pinnacle of the preacher career ladder by becoming imam of the Aya Sofya in late 1631.²³ Furthermore, he was a respectable scholar, who authored several treatises on both doctrinal and legal issues, and could boast among his students the prolific polymath Kātib Çelebi.²⁴ Unfortunately, in an age when exceptional scholarship abounded, these were not items that would make the news.

²² The most important Turkish chronicles which speak about the Qāḍīzādelis are Nev'izāde 'Aṭāī's *Ḥadā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq fī takmilat al-Shaqā'iq* (Istanbul, 1268/1851-52); İbrahim Ḥasib 'Uṣṣākīzāde's *Dhayl al-Shaqā'iq*, Süleymāniye Library, MS. *Çelebi Abdullah* 260; Meḥmed Şeyhī, *Waqāyī' al-fuḍalā'*, Süleymāniye Library, MS *Hamidiye* 939. There is also a body of European contemporary and near-contemporary European accounts of the Qāḍīzādelis: J. Thévenot, *L'Empire du Grand Turc Vu par Un Sujet de Louis XIV: Jean Thévenot* (Paris; Calmann-Levy, 1965), pp. 173-175; Paul Rycaut, *The History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, 5th edition (London, 1682), pp. 242-243; Louis Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires du Chevalier d'Arvieux*, 6 vols. (Paris: C.J.B Déléspine, 1735), 4: 390-391; John Covell, "Extracts from the Diaries of Dr. John Covell, 1670-1679," in *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*, edited by J. Theodore Bent, Hakluyt Society no. 87 (London, 1893), pp. 268-269.

²³ M. Zilfī, *Politics of Piety*, p. 131.

²⁴ See Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, pp. 135-136.

One of the most well-documented events in the life of Qāḍīzāde was his clash with the head of the Khalwatī Order, Shaykh Siwāsī Efendī (d. 1048/1639) in 1633 at the Sultan Ahmad mosque. The debate happened to fall on the Birthday of the Prophet (*Mawlid*), which was perhaps ironic because in contrast to the majority of Ottoman Turks, Qāḍīzāde was completely opposed to this celebration, claiming that it was not a practice of the early Muslim community. The debate was organised in such a way that the two preachers would take it in turns to step up to the pulpit to make their case to the congregation. The event is reported by several near contemporary writers, but none is as thorough as Kātib Çelebi who, in his *Mīzān al-ḥaqq – The Balance of Truth*, provides many of the arguments put forward by both camps. He introduces the two opponents in the following excerpt:

Shaykh ʿAbd al-Majīd ibn Sheykh Muharram ibn Mehmed Zīlī, known as Sīvāsī Efendī, was the deputy of Sīvāsī Shams Efendī, the Shaykh of the Khalwatī Order. Coming to Istanbul, he became Sheykh in the retreat which was widely known by his name. When Sultan Ahmed built his new mosque, he gave Sīvāsī the position of preacher in it. He died in October 1639, a saintly septuagenarian of illuminated mind. He was the author of some treatises in Turkish and he wrote poetry under the pseudonym of Sheykhī. When he used to recite the *Fātiha* in his sweet voice, before delivering his sermon, it gave delight to his hearers. His friends relate many stories of his miracles.

The Imam Qāḍīzāde was Sheykh Mehmed Efendī, son of Toghānī Mustafā Efendī, a Qādī of Balıkesir [...] These two Sheykhs were diametrically opposed to one another; because of their differing temperaments, warfare arose between them. In most of the controversies I have mentioned in this book, Qāḍīzāde took one side and Sīvāsī took the other, both going to extremes, and the followers of both used to quarrel and dispute, one against the other.²⁵

²⁵ Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, pp. 132-133.

Kātib Çelebi dedicates the *Mizān al-ḥaqq* to enumerating each of the points of disagreement which engaged the two disputants, providing very interesting details, anecdotes and his own analysis of the contentious issues. In his estimation there were twenty points of dispute in total; all of them had been raised as problematic by members of the juristic community at some point in the past. The issues were: the use of stimulants such as coffee, tobacco and opium; singing, chanting or musical accompaniment in *dhikr*; dancing in Sufi ceremonies; pilgrimages to the tombs of alleged saints or the otherwise blessed; the invocation of blessings upon the Prophet and his Companions upon every mention of their names; the collective performance of supererogatory prayers which were not original to the early community; the practice of cursing the Umayyad Caliph Yazīd (d. 63/683); and shaking the hands after prayer and bowing down to superiors. In matters of belief, the contentious issues were: the heresy of believing in Ibn ʿArabī's 'oneness of being' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*); belief in the immortality of Khidr; the belief that the Prophet's parents died as believers; and the reference to Islam as 'the religion of Abraham'.

Qāḍīzāde was very much an advocate of the jurists' position on these points of contention; his basic view was that they were heresies of belief or practice which could not be justified by the *Sharīʿa*. Siwāsī, as head of the Khalwatīs, was naturally inclined towards a position of accommodation, and indeed sought to demonstrate that each one of the practices or beliefs was justified, and even commendable. The debate left few among the attendees indifferent: two opposing camps were created, to be referred to for the duration of their active existence in the rather derisory way of "Qāḍīzāde's lot" (*Qāḍīzādeleler*) and "Siwāsī's lot" (*Siwāsīler*). Perhaps most significantly, the debate from

this point on spread to the streets of Istanbul. Kātib Çelebi describes what became a protracted battle of ideas in the following excerpt:

For many years this situation continued, with disputation raging between the two parties, and out of the futile quarrelling a mighty hatred and hostility arose between them. The majority of Sheykhs took one side or the other, though the intelligent ones kept out of it, saying, 'This is a profitless quarrel, born of fanaticism. We are all members of the community of Muḥammad, brothers in faith. We have no warrant from Sīvāsī, no diploma from Qādīzāde. They are simply a couple of reverend Sheykhs who have won fame by opposing one another; their fame has even reached the ear of the Sultan. Thus have they secured their own advantage and basked in the sunshine of the world. Why should we be so foolish as to fight their battles for them? We shall get no joy of it.'

But some foolish people persistently attached themselves to one side or the other, hoping to become famous like them. When the cut and thrust of verbal contention from their several pulpits was near to bringing them into real warfare with sword and spear, it became necessary for the Sultan to discipline some of them and administer a box on the ears in the shape of banishment from the city. It is among the duties of the Sultan of the Muslims to subdue and discipline ranting fanatics of this sort, whoever they may be, for in the past manifold corruption has come about from such militant bigotry. No importance should be attached to the apparent righteousness of the fools on either side; neither side should be allowed to triumph. The order of the world is achieved, under God, by not letting the people go beyond the bounds laid down for them. 'God's mercy on a man who recognised His decree and does not transgress His limits.'²⁶

²⁶ Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, pp. 133-134.

There were certain customary practices which Qāḍīzāde saved his especial repulsion for, among which the consumption of tobacco was certainly at the fore.²⁷ Before him, Ottoman ‘ulamā’ had addressed the issue of smoking, many of them formulating fatwas of outright condemnation.²⁸ Qāḍīzāde’s own position was very much in line with this, and whilst none of his writings on tobacco have been preserved, we are told by chroniclers such as Şolakzāde, Silāhdār and Na‘īmā, that he formulated both religious and rational arguments in support of the banning of the substance.²⁹ Two earlier sultans, Murād III (982/1574-1003/1595) and Aḥmad I (1012/1603-1026/1617), had criminalised smoking already, and attempted to close down coffeehouses;³⁰ their measures, however, proved unsuccessful, and it was not until the reign of Murād IV, supported as he was with Qāḍīzāde’s anti-tobacco position, that, according to the same chroniclers, the Sultan took a particularly heavy-handed approach, issuing an edict demanding the razing of all the coffeehouses in Istanbul where tobacco was smoked.³¹ Baer describes what the atmosphere of the time was like, and how, after a major fire in Istanbul in 1633, smokers and coffee-drinkers were scapegoated by the authorities as being the cause for the wrath of God descending upon the inhabitants of the city:

²⁷ It is likely that this sentiment would have been commonly held even outside scholarly circles. Smoking in the 17th century it seems was associated with some rather unsavoury habits, as F. Klein-Franke points out: ‘One has to imagine that tobacco smoking [...] was accompanied by the constant noise of sneezing, suckling and spitting.’ Cited in Michot, *Against Smoking*, note 3, p. 23.

²⁸ See S. Çavuşoğlu, ‘The Kādizādeli Movement’, pp. 209-210. One such fatwa was issued by Yaḥya Efendi (d. 1043/1644), Shaykh al-Islam, cited also by Çavuşoğlu: ‘Question: When tobacco smokers arrive at the mosque, Muslims are annoyed because of the bad smell of their mouth and their garments. Tobacco is harmful in various ways to people who are addicted to it. Besides, engaging in this despised act leads to idleness. The sultan has therefore issued a decree for its prohibition. How should one act towards the ones who violate this prohibition? Answer: The imperial decree which forbids people from smoking is in accordance with Shar‘a. All Muslims should abide by it since this would be an auspicious act. Those who accept this prohibition deserve to enjoy worldly benefactions. Those who continue to smoke deserve a great punishment. They should be prohibited firmly and by way of compulsion.’ Ibid, pp. 219-220.

²⁹ Şolakzāde, *Tārīḥ*, 753; Na‘īmā, *Tārīḥ*, 6: 221. Cited in S. Çavuşoğlu, ‘The Kādizādeli Movement’, pp. 217-218.

³⁰ S. Çavuşoğlu, ‘The Kādizādeli Movement’, p. 216.

³¹ S. Çavuşoğlu, ‘The Kādizādeli Movement’, p. 216.

Some blamed such widespread immorality and vice for a great conflagration that burned perhaps one-fifth of the city; the prohibition of coffee and tobacco and the razing of the places where they were consumed was issued soon after the fire since coffee, tobacco and wine appeared to incite men to commit abominable acts and sexual violence and engage in debauchery. Countless humble coffee drinkers and tobacco smokers were executed in Istanbul and wherever Murād IV travelled. Such an atmosphere of terror was created that everyone's intentions were considered suspect; innocent people, even young sons of imams who stayed too late at mosque, were executed for not going about at night with a lantern. While en route to the Baghdad campaign, Murād IV had fourteen people executed for using tobacco, including the head of the gatekeepers and Janisseries.³²

The relationship between Qāḍīzāde and Sultan Murād was mutually beneficial; the former witnessed his own reformist ambitions unfolding in front of him; the latter was able to see to it that the coffee-houses – the hotbeds of revolt – were dealt with in a single sweep. In this context, Nā'īmā says,

His Majesty Sultan Murād Khān had demolished the coffee-houses in order to control and instruct the people, and issued a strict prohibition, for the purpose of preventing the consumption of tobacco and removing its existence entirely. He threatened those who were careless with violent punishment and death. At about that time Kāḍizāde Efendi, in order to obtain recognition from the exalted sovereign, expounded the matter of the illegality of tobacco, according to his own false opinion, using independent reasoning and rational and traditional proofs. He raised his voice to the vault of heaven, uttering immeasurable fallacies.³³

³² *Honoured by the Glory of Islam*, p. 67.

³³ Cited in Öztürk, 'Islamic Orthodoxy', p. 203. It is unclear from Nā'īmā's statement whether Qāḍīzāde went as far as to support the execution of those caught smoking. If indeed he did, it would be interesting to know what his scriptural justification for this was. In any case, there certainly existed the view among some contemporary observers that Qāḍīzāde's personal campaigning against smoking was pivotal, such as the view of one who said, 'Qāḍīzāde preached every Friday from the pulpit of the Hagia Sophia, and wasn't that the reason the coffeehouses were closed and public gatherings were forbidden?' Cited in Baer, *Honoured by the Glory of Islam*, p. 66.

Again, Qāḍīzāde was by no means the first scholar to criticise those Sufis who he believed to be violating precepts of the Sharīʿa, or indeed the first to oppose social norms such as smoking and coffee-drinking. He himself was keen for his detractors to recognise that he was only invoking the orthodox view on such matters. Indeed at one point in his *Risāleh* he proclaimed that the same innovations (*bidʿa*) which he opposed were also opposed by the majority of the jurists of his age: ‘I have seen [these innovations mentioned] in more than a hundred reliable books, and I have discussed [them] with contemporary religious scholars from Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem and Cairo, Damascus and Aleppo, the Maghrib, the Uzbeks and India.’³⁴

Perhaps what marked Qāḍīzāde apart, at least in the Ottoman context, was his determined resolve to see these heretical practices and beliefs completely wiped out, and his willingness to support violence to see his vision realised.³⁵ In this context, Zilfi’s says, ‘Kāḍizāde asked of his adherents not only that they purify their own lives, but that they seek out sinners and in effect force them back onto “the straight path”. Few people disputed the authenticity of the command. Many, however, questioned Kadizade’s attempt to strip it of its limiting context and invoke it as a universal call to arms for extirpating heresy’.³⁶

³⁴ Qāḍīzāde, *Risāleh*, MS. Michot 0802, f. 90v.

³⁵ Zilfi is of the view that the vision of the Qāḍīzādelis was to return their community back to the “golden age” of early Islam: ‘Emulation of the patriarchs became the ideal for the community’s behaviour, rarely tried but always valued. The patriarchal golden age is an actuality, its every detail known through the Koran and the life of the Prophet. The community, in its grasp of those details, theoretically holds the blueprint for the age’s recapture. At issue was the degree to which the community could stray from primordial practice, the “way” of the Prophet (*Sunna*), without losing its Islamic character and plunging into sin or unbelief’. *Politics of Piety*, p. 135.

³⁶ M. Zilfi, *Politics of Piety*, p. 137.

Notwithstanding his willingness to support violence, it would be incorrect to portray Qāḍīzāde as an advocate of unfettered aggression, as Zilfī suggests. In fact, in his call for people to intervene – even with violence – in practices which he and others deemed to be immoral or illicit, he was advocating only the principle of *ḥisba* (literally, taking account), known also as “enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong” (*al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa l-nahy ʿan al-munkar*).³⁷ This meant that he would not have crossed the boundary of promoting violence as a *modus operandi* for societal control unless he had the support of the authorities. Though it could be conceded that the attention Qāḍīzāde gave to forbidding wrong was unprecedented in a society which otherwise reflected a fairly liberal attitude towards religious heresies, and had a typically permissive social culture,³⁸ once again, he cannot be viewed as the first to invoke the principle of *ḥisba*. Indeed the principle had already been written on quite extensively by Birgivī, a man

³⁷ Whilst the two terms, *ḥisba* and *al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf* are sometimes used synonymously, there is a subtle distinction which is noteworthy: the latter refers to the general principle of enjoining good and forbidding wrong, and is traceable back to the earliest scriptural sources; the former, which is a non-Qurʿanic term, refers more specifically to the functions of the person entrusted by the authorities to undertake the duty (*muḥtasib*). The *muḥtasib* was first appointed sometime in the 3rd/9th century, whilst legal literature first treated the subject in the 5th / 11th century. (See Cl. Cahen, R. Mantran, A.K.S. Lambton and A.S. Abzmee Ansari, ‘*Ḥisba*’, *EF*²). The most expansive study on the subject of *al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf* in a Western language is M. Cook’s, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), a work that includes what is probably the most extensive bibliography on the principle. Here I mention some of the sources which informed the Ottoman understanding of the issue generally, and the Qāḍīzāde movement in particular: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-amr bi l-maʿrūf wa l-nahy ʿan al-munkar min Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Beirut: 1983); Ṭashköprüzāde (d. 968/1561), *Miftāḥ al-saʿāda*, edited by K. K. Bakrī and ʿA. Abū l-Nūr (Cairo: Dār al-kutub al-ḥadītha, 1968), 3: 301-10; Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-amr bi l-maʿrūf wa l-nahy ʿan al-munkar*, edited by Ş. Munajjid (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-jadīd, 1976); idem., *al-Ḥisba fī l-Islām* (Kuwait: 1983), the translation of which is *Public Duties in Islam: The Institution of the Ḥisba*, translated by M. Holland (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1982). See also, M. Cook, ‘*Al-nahy ʿan l-munkar*’, *EF*².

³⁸ Marc Baer says in this regard that prior to Qāḍīzāde’s engagement in active reform (or compelling other Muslims to behave piously), “forbidding wrong” had not been a defining feature of Ottoman Sunnism. Earlier influential Muslim scholars, such as Ṭashköprüzāde (d. 1561), had a very cautious attitude towards the use of violence by ordinary Muslims (i.e. non-state actors) engaging in the practice. He was opposed to ‘commoners taking up arms to censure their sinning neighbours and had declared, “God preserve us from those who show fanaticism in religion”’. (Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, p. 65).

whom Qāḍīzāde had been profoundly influenced by, and before him Tashköprüzāde.³⁹ Birgivī wrote specifically on the subject of forbidding wrong in at least two separate works, and although he did not elaborate on the details, he did quote extensively from the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions, all in the aid of driving home in the minds of his reader the critical importance of this principle for the preservation of the Sharī'a.⁴⁰ Yet despite his zealousness, Birgivī departed little from the classical formulation of the doctrine, insofar as he saw its implementation as hierarchised, permitting only the authorities to employ coercive measures.⁴¹ M. Cook explains Birgivī's position on the basis of his treatment of enjoining the good in *al-Ṭarīqat al-Muḥammadiyya*:

Birgivī states that the duty of *ḥisba* is collective given the power to perform it and the absence of harm; the sinner too is obligated; one must not merely forbid offenders, but must also socially ostracise them; harsh words are employed in situations where leniency has not worked. He categories *ḥisba* into the classical tripartite division of hating an evil with the heart, criticising it with the tongue and stopping it with the hand. He considers that the first of these is incumbent upon all, the second on the scholars, and the third on the state. Birgivī holds that one may proceed even where this will lead to certain death; one thereby enters the ranks of the most excellent of martyrs.⁴²

It appears that while *ḥisba* remained essentially a hierarchised duty in the thought of Birgivī, and was probably also viewed as such by Qāḍīzāde, successive generations of Qāḍīzādeli activists departed from the way of their mentors, holding that the duty in all of its aspects – forbidding evil by the heart, the tongue and physically – fell on the shoulders of all members of society, whatever their social standing. More is to be said about this below.

³⁹ See above, note 38.

⁴⁰ Birgivī's most extensive treatment is found in the Arabic *al-Ṭarīqat al-Muḥammadiyya* (Cairo: 1937); he also treated the subject in Ottoman in his *Risāle-i Birgivī* (Üsküdar: Dār ü'ṭ-ṭibā'at il-cedide, 1805).

⁴¹ M. Cook, *Commanding Right*, pp. 324-325.

⁴² M. Cook, *Commanding Right*, pp. 324-325

It is useful to consider Qāḍīzāde's stance towards those he called "deviant Sufis", particularly since a significant part of his reformist agenda was dedicated to criticising this group. Qāḍīzāde focussed his most stinging attack on some practices which were associated with the Khalwatī Order. We know that he identified the Khalwatīs, and to a lesser degree the Bektāshīs and Bayrāmīs, as a group within society to whom the major portion of the blame for laxity in religious practices should be attributed.⁴³ It seems he regarded them as responsible not only for the decline in religious standards but also for a perceived socio-economic and political decline which he considered had befallen Ottoman society. But was he, along with his sympathisers, unique in his position against these Sufī orders? Certainly not; in fact, this was rather typical of the attitude of many of the ʿulamāʾ of the time. It is worth recalling that the ʿulamāʾ considered themselves the guardians of Islam: they typically functioned at the centres of the Empire and were keen to maintain their influence both within higher officialdom and among the masses. More specifically, ʿulamāʾ opposition to the Khalwatīs, and those orders which were akin to them, were founded upon two premisses: one was political – the Khalwatīs were a threat to the Ottoman state because of their Shīʿī affinities; the second was doctrinal – in their adoption of extra-scriptural religious practices which were not sanctioned by the Sharīʿa, the sacred law was being somehow existentially threatened. G. Martin says, 'To many of the informed ʿulamāʾ, the beginnings of the Khalwatiya – and some other orders like the Badr al-Diniya, Baktashiya, and the Bayramiya – were suspect because they could be equated with the origins of the hostile Safavids. As the *silsilas* of these orders show,

⁴³ Çavuşoğlu, 'Kadıızādeliler', *İA*, p. 101; M. Zilfi, *Politics of Piety*, p. 133ff.

many of the forefathers of the Safavid order, like the Shaykhs Saif al-Din of Ardabil and Ibrahim Zahid of Gilan, reappear in the Khalwati and other chains of descent'.⁴⁴

As for the Khalwatīs, they had already begun a process of internal reform perhaps under the pressure of orthodox criticism and the suspicious eyes of the authorities. By the middle of the sixteenth century, as hostilities were intensifying between the Sunnī Ottomans and the Shīʿī Safavids, there is evidence to suggest that as part of the Khalwatī drive towards a Sharīʿa-styled reform, they sought to conceal the existence of Shīʿī imams within their *silsila* by erasing them altogether.⁴⁵ They also became increasingly detached from the masses in their attempt to shake free from various excessive ritual practices and popular personalities, who were seen as dubious in the eyes of the establishment scholars. This internal reform was highly effective for the Khalwatīs, particularly during the reigns of Süleymān and Selīm II. During these periods, the Khalwatīs were able to expand their numbers in Istanbul and to establish new *tekkes*; they achieved the same in the Anatolian provinces.⁴⁶ Thus by the time of Qāḍīzāde's opposition to them in the 17th century, the Khalwatīs had already manoeuvred themselves into a position of political favour. Qāḍīzāde was clearly troubled by this and likely aware that anything short of a virulent campaign against them would be unlikely to unhinge them. Thus, his debates with Siwāsī and his motions against the Khalwatīs can be

⁴⁴ B.G. Martin, 'Khalwati Order of Dervishes', p. 284.

⁴⁵ Martin notes that the Shīʿī Safawiyya Order and the Khalwatīs had in common five out of twelve imams in the standard Twelver Shīʿī series. He suggests that the two orders were like "twin brothers", and had the Khalwatīs gone elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, it might have adopted a completely Shīʿī doctrine. 'Khalwati Order of Dervishes', p. 284.

⁴⁶ Martin, 'Khalwati Order of Dervishes', p. 285.

interpreted as part of his broader attempt at dislodging the order from its position of influence.

Qāḍīzāde would probably have cherished the prospect of personally leading a war of attrition against the Khalwatīs. Unfortunately for him, even when his relationship with Murād IV was at its closest, his Khalwatī counterparts – most particularly Siwāsī Efendi – were also enjoying the benefits of the Sultan’s patronage. At best, therefore, Qāḍīzāde would only be involved in relatively low-level legal reforms, such as the closing down of coffeehouses. No doubt, Murād IV would only have backed those of Qāḍīzāde’s proposals which were advantageous to his own rule, and in the case of closing down coffeehouses, he was more interested in clamping down on dissenting voices than in seeing to it that the Shari‘a was not being contravened.⁴⁷

Qāḍīzāde remained an intimate of Murād IV for the remainder of his life. Despite the close relationship he was able to develop with the Sultan, it was his successors who would exploit the inroads he himself made into higher officialdom. The movement came to hold a virtual monopoly on the religious agenda of the Seraglio by the 1640s, especially among the halberdiers, palace guards, sweet makers, gatekeepers, servants of the inner palace, harem eunuchs, and artisans, and in the market among the merchants. Members of these well-connected groups, according to Bauer, served as mediators

⁴⁷ On Murād IV’s own interest in seeing the closure of coffeehouses, see Zilfi, *Politics of Piety*, pp. 138-139. In this context, one is reminded of Paul Rychaut’s condemnation of the coffeehouses as ‘melancholy places where Seditions were vented, where reflections were made on all occurrences of State & discontents published and aggravated.’ (*The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, p. 130).

‘proselytizing the Qāḍizādeli path to piety’.⁴⁸ In what has been described as the second phase of the Qāḍizādeli campaign under the leadership of Üstüwānī Meḥmed Efendi,⁴⁹ affairs began to take a more bloody turn. Backed by the support of the Seraglio and from segments of the commonalty, the Qāḍizādelīs received official sanction to use violence against their opponents. Most often it was the Sufīs who would be on the receiving end of this violence, but frankly anyone involved in an activity which the Qāḍizādelīs had listed as immoral was liable to suffer at their hands. They were also quite prepared to anathematise those whom they considered perpetrators of heresies. Baer notes that the most unsettling aspect of Qāḍizādeli condemnations was their labelling as acts of disbelief (*kufṛ*) even those common practices which the Sharīʿa seemed to accomodate. These included invoking blessings on another by saying, ‘God be pleased with him’; embellishing the reading of the Qurʾan; chanting the call to prayer with a musical tone; invoking blessing on Muḥammad by offering the benediction, ‘May God shower benedictions upon him and bless him’; and supererogatory services of worship performed on the night of the first Friday of the month of Rajab and the night of the twelfth of the same month, the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet, and the Night of Power and the twenty-seventh night of Ramadan.⁵⁰

In their attacks on the Khalwatīs, but also the Mawlawīs, the main pretext was a fatwa of Shaykh al-Islām Bahāʾī Efendi in favour of smoking, an issue already much exploited by Qāḍizāde himself in his sermons and writings.⁵¹ Other justifications for singling out these

⁴⁸ Baer, *Honoured by the Glory of Islam*, p. 69.

⁴⁹ Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’, esp. p. 215ff; Çavuşoğlu, ‘The Kādizādeli Movement’, esp. p. 107ff.

⁵⁰ Baer, *Honoured by the Glory of Islam*, p. 66.

⁵¹ Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’, p. 237.

orders were the performance in their *tekkes* of the Sufi *raqs*, *dawarān* and other innovations. All would culminate in 1650 with the Qāḍīzādelīs acquiring a court-order (*fermān*) from the Grand Vizier Melek Aḥmad Pasha, ordering the demolition of some of the *tekkes* belonging to the Khalwatīs and Mawlawīs. When the *fermān* was delivered, the Qāḍīzādelīs themselves immediately began implementing it with the help of soldiers, and launched their first attack on the Khalwatī *tekke* in Demür Qapu, where not only did they destroy the building but they also physically attacked those who were in the *tekke*. This policy of violence would continue for at least a decade, until the age of the Grand Vizier Köprülü Meḥmed. Under pressure from influential segments of Ottoman high officialdom, who were understandably perturbed by Qāḍīzādeli violence, Köprülü eventually circumscribed the activities of the Qāḍīzādelīs, exiling several of its leading members. Qāḍīzādeli over-zealousness would lead ultimately to their own end. Kātib Çelebi, in the following excerpt, describes the sentiment the movement generated among wider Ottoman society:

Now we see how arrogant they are who assert that they enjoin right and forbid wrong. The noblest Prophet used to deal kindly and generously with his community. The arrogant men of later time, not seeing the disgrace of running counter to him, label some of the community as infidels, some as heretics, some as profligates, for trifling reasons, without fear of God or shame before His Prophet. They bring the people to the grievous state of fanaticism, and cause dissension. Ordinary folk know nothing of these rules and conditions; thinking that it is obligatory in every case to enjoin right and forbid wrong, they quarrel and are pertinacious with one another. The baseless wrangling in which they engage, with stone-like stupidity, sometimes leads to bloodshed. Most fighting and strife between Muslims arises from this cause.⁵²

⁵² Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, pp. 108-109.

Whilst there is little doubt that Qāḍīzāde held particular distaste for the permissive attitude of some Sufi groups, and he would write at length about their embracing of newly-invented practices, or *bidʿa*, given the fact that his criticism of the Sufis is invariably directed towards specific beliefs and practices, there is already a strong case to be made that he was not an absolute opponent of Sufism as a discipline within the Islamic religious tradition. One can even surmise from the fact that Sufism was so embedded within the Ottoman religious consciousness, that Qāḍīzāde would not have been able to progress up the *wāʿiz* hierarchy, or enjoy the associations with the ruling elite, if he had not been an affiliate, or at least loosely connected with, one of the main Sufi orders. Even Sultan Murād IV, who famously supported various aspects of the Qāḍīzādeli reform campaign, had strong personal ties to certain Sufi orders. Zilfī notes that his mother, Köem Mahpeyker (d. 1651), was a generous Khalwatī benefactress. Murād himself, on his accession in 1623, had been girded with the dynastic sword by Shaykh ʿAzīz Maḥmūd Hüdāʾī (d. 1628/29), and during the course of his reign, became fond of the Mawlawī Shaykh Doḡani Aḥmad Dede, who spent hours at the palace, often performing the Mawlawī *samāʿ* expressly for the Sultan.⁵³ Thus the idea that Qāḍīzāde would have been able to find favour with the Sultan whilst holding all Sufis as avowed enemies is not easily squared.

A final point worth considering when assessing Qāḍīzāde’s personal role in the reform campaign associated with the movement he is said to have founded: whilst he was criticised by some of his contemporaries and near-contemporaries for what were clearly

⁵³ M. Zilfī, *Politics of Piety*, pp. 139-140.

very strong views that he held on various religious and social practices, all of which he considered were contraventions of the Sharīʿa, he himself was spared the severest condemnations of the chroniclers and biographers; these in fact, were reserved for activists involved with the later movement, who were prepared to personally take coercive measures in order to see to it that the particular socio-religious environment they so longed for was realised. This being so, it is important that the student of the movement does not conflate the approach of Qāḍīzāde with that of the movement in its later stages, at least not until the time when more evidence transpires to support this.

The Literature

The Qāḍīzādelis appear to have first attracted the attention of serious Western scholarship about thirty years ago. This relatively recent interest is perhaps linked to the need for understanding cataclysmic events in recent Muslim political history such as the Iranian Revolution and the revivalist phenomena associated with it, as well as a developing interest in the pre-modern antecedents of such phenomena. The violence which early Ottoman historians and chroniclers attribute to the Qāḍīzādelis, and the apparent continuities between the movement and modern-day Muslim fundamentalism, would no doubt contribute to increasing interest of scholars and historians. Studies on the Qāḍīzādelis, much like the literature on Islamic fundamentalism (with some exceptions), reflects a clear bias against the movement and its programme for reform – this perhaps is in part due to the natural disdain which violence can evoke; but there is also the disappointing truth that much of the source material of modern scholars has come from the opponents of the Qāḍīzādelis. The polemic of early biographers, chroniclers and other

Ottoman observers of the time, most of them native but some also foreign, has often been accepted without scrutiny. Since most contemporary accounts view Qāḍīzāde's reform campaign unfavourably, it is then only natural that the secondary literature and research reflects this attitude.

Apart from associated problems of the historical accuracy of these accounts which form the basis of so much recent scholarship on the Qāḍīzādelis, there is a further problem of an ostensible lack of interest in understanding the Qāḍīzādeli movement and their reform programme via a study of the texts which associated activists produced. Given the large corpus of works connected with the movement, some directly and others rather more loosely, this lack of interest is somewhat suprising. It would not, however, be the first time that the predominant research on Islamic revivalism and reform has been skewed in favour of biographical accounts and chronicles rather than texts.⁵⁴

Several contemporary and near-contemporary Ottoman chroniclers provide most of what we know about the Qāḍīzādelis. One of the most prominent of the contemporary histories written shortly after the era of the Qāḍīzādelis was that of Mustafa Na'īmā (d. 1128/1716).⁵⁵ His chronicle of events is also one of the lengthiest and most detailed accounts. Treating the movement under the events of the year 1066/1656, Na'īmā preambles his account with an outline of the dispute between the 'ulamā' and the Sufis.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ O'Fahey laments this very phenomenon when considering the research which has been written on Neo-Sufism in his introduction to *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad Ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition* (London: Hurst & Company, 1990).

⁵⁵ Na'īmā, or Muṣṭafā Na'īm, was born in Aleppo, probably in 1065/1655, the son of a Janissary commander. See C. Woodhead, 'Na'īmā', *ET*².

⁵⁶ Na'īmā, *Tārīḥ*, 6: 218.

After providing his reader with biographies of the major Qāḍīzādeli protagonists, and detailing a list of nineteen controversies which constituted the Qāḍīzādeli programme of reform, Naʿīmā concludes by reporting stories replete with examples of Qāḍīzādeli notoriety in order to ‘demonstrate their insincerity and hypocrisy’.⁵⁷ Naʿīmā is particularly hostile in his attitude towards the Qāḍīzādelis, portraying them as a destructive and uncouth mob. In his PhD thesis, on the Qāḍīzādelis, N. Öztürk suggests that Naʿīmā’s hostility may have been due to his affiliation with the Bektāshi Order, who were denounced by the Qāḍīzādelis.⁵⁸ It is also possible that he was merely reflecting in his own work the sentiments of his primary informants, the historians Vecihī Ḥasan Efendī (d. 1081/1670) and Behcetī İbrāhīm Efendī (d. 1094/1683).⁵⁹

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿAbdī Pāšā (d. 1103/1692) is another 17th century Ottoman observer who recorded events in which the movement became embroiled. His is a damning report, describing Üşüwānī, Sayyid Muştafā and Türk Aḥmad, key Qāḍīzādeli activists from the later period, as ‘gossipers and disturbers of the public peace by their sermons’.⁶⁰ Silāḥdār Meḥmed Aga (d. 1136/1724) may also be considered from among this group of Ottoman observers who were critical.⁶¹ But perhaps most interesting is the view of the well-known

⁵⁷ Naʿīmā, *Tārīḥ*, 6: 226-230.

⁵⁸ Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’, p. 4. For a complete survey of the early chronicles and biographical accounts which cover the 17th century, see Öztürk’s introduction, *ibid*, pp. 1-16.

⁵⁹ Vecihī Ḥasan Efendī says that Meḥmet Qāḍīzāde’s aim was to become attached to Murād IV by issuing edicts in support of his efforts to ban alcohol and tobacco. Vecihī describes the movement after Qāḍīzāde as being a group ‘chasing fame and high positions’. (*Tārīḥ-i Vecihī* cited in Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’). Behcetī İbrāhīm Efendī, who was the imām of Köprülüzāde Ḥāfiẓ Aḥmad Paşa describes the motive of the Qāḍīzādelis as being the ‘attainment of renown’. (*Tārīḥ-i Sülāle-i Köprülü* cited in Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’). For more details about both of their accounts, refer to Çavuşoğlu, ‘The Kāḍizādeli Movement’, pp. 8-10.

⁶⁰ ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿAbdī Paşa, *Vekāyi ʿnāme-i Sultān Meḥmed Rābiʿ*, Suleymaniye library, MS. Hafid Efendi 250, f. 22v, cited in Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’.

⁶¹ *Silāḥdār Tārīḥī* (Istanbul, 1928), 1: 57-59, cited in Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’.

Ottoman writer and traveller Evliyā^o Çelebi (d. 1095/1684), who provides what was almost certainly the position of high officialdom towards the Qāḏīzādelis. Relating an anecdote about a Qāḏīzādelī activist from Tire, who was engaged in ‘forbidding evil’ (*nahy ‘an al-munkar*) in his community, Evliyā^o takes a clearly scornful tone towards the man, deeming the duty and right to apply this principle of correction within the exclusive ambit of the ruler and his officials.⁶²

The views of a certain English traveller Sir Paul Rycaut (d. 1700) who was sometime Secretary to the Ambassador in Istanbul and consul in Izmir are interesting, as these present a contemporaneous Western perspective which, though not always based on first-hand information, must at least have been reflective of the position of those elite members of Ottoman society with whom he had contact. Rycaut says the following.⁶³

But these modern times have produced other sects amongst the Turks, some of which seem in part dangerous, and apt to make a considerable rupture in their long continued union; when time changes and revolutions of State shall animate some turbulent spirits, to gather souldiers and followers under these Doctrines and other specious pretences. One of which is called *Kadizadeli*, a sect sprung up in the time of *Sultan Morat*, whose chief propagator was one Birgali Effendi [...] This poisonous Doctrine is so infectious, that it is crept into the Chambers of the *Seraglio*, into the apartments of the Ladies and Eunuchs, and found entertainment with the *Pasha’s* and their whole Court; this sort of people are great favourers and lovers of their own Sect, courteous and hospitable to each other, and if any by chance receives a guest within his gates of their own judgement, besides his diet and fare with much freedom, he is accommodated with a handsome bed-fellow of which sex he most delights: they are very frank and liberal and excessive in their readiness to do

⁶² *Seyāhatnāme (Tārīḥ-i Seyyāḥ)*, cited in Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’, p. See also Robert Dankoff, *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990).

⁶³ Other European diplomats and travellers whose writings constitute primary sources for the 17th century Ottoman religious milieu include J. Thévenot’s *L’Empire dy Grand Turc Vu par Un Sujet de Louis XIV: Jean Thévenot* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1965) and Louis Laurent D’Arvieux’s *Mémoires du Chevalier d’Arvieux*, 6 vols. (Paris: C.J.B. Deléspine, 1735), esp. 4: 390-391.

each other service in his Court and Militia, desirous withal to propagate that of Kadizadeli amongst the vulgar, that they being a sever, morose and covetous people, might grow rich, and spare for the benefit of his Exchequer; for the Sect of Kadizadeli before mentioned, is of a melancholy and stoical temper, admitting of no musick, cheerful or light discourses, but confine themselves to a set gravity; in publick as well as private they make a continual mention of God, by never wearied repetition of these words, *Ilahe ila Ellah*; that is, I profess there is one God: there are some of these that will fit whole nights bending their bodies towards the Earth, reciting those words with a most doleful and lamentable Note; they are exact and most punctual in the observation of the rules of Religion, and generally addict themselves to the study of their Civil Law, in which they use constant exercises in arguing, opposing and answering, whereby to leave no point undiscovered or not discussed. In short, they are highly pharisaical in all their comportment, great admirers of themselves, and scornors of others that conform not to their tenets, scarce affording them a salutation or common communication; they refuse to marry their sons with those of a different rite; but amongst themselves they observe a certain policy; they admonish and correct the disorderly; and such who are not bettered by their persuasions they reject and excommunicate from their Society. These are the most part tradesmen, whose sedentary life affords opportunity and nutriment to a melancholy, and distempered fancy.⁶⁴

Rycaut, who spent eighteen years in the Ottoman lands as a diplomat, describes the Qāḍīzādelis as a recently evolved sect in Turkish lands, and a dangerous one at that in his estimation because of the ability they had to stir up the masses into rebellion. Though his contempt for the movement is perhaps understandable, and might be attributed to his assessment of them as a politician and that his informers would probably have been members of high officialdom, his account is otherwise quite an accurate representation. Their description as an austere and conservative folk, given to religious rites and worship all tally with other sources on the movement, and, more importantly, the texts which are associated with them.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 129-131.

⁶⁵ In a useful article on how Rycaut's travelogue should be read, L. Darling cautions that Rycaut's account was not simply intended by him for a common readership, but as he states in his acknowledgement, 'as a

A rather more balanced account of the Qāḍīzādelis, inasmuch as it is critical of both parties in the debate, is that of Kātib Çelebi. His is a refreshing variation on the dominant sentiment of contempt shown by other contemporaneous and near-contemporary observers, and is as much prescriptive of what best-practice is as far as religion goes, as it is descriptive of the Qāḍīzādelis and their opponents. The *Mizān al-ḥaqq* was Kātib Çelebi's last work, completed in 1656. In it he details the points of controversy related to doctrine, law and social custom which locked Qāḍīzāde and Siwāsī in battle, and by extension all those who would take one or the other side. The central message of the *Mizān*'s author, which he enunciates after virtually every account, is the futility of trying to force people to abandon practices which, while he admits may not be justifiable according to the strict letter of the Sharīʿa, do not seriously conflict with it either, and have, in any case, become embedded in custom (*ʿurf*). According to the English translator of the *Mizān*, G. Lewis, '[*Mizān al-ḥaqq*] breathes a spirit of liberalism and good sense, enlivened with a mordant humour. The author is never afraid of speaking his mind: if he thinks that a Shaykh al-Islam is exhibiting raving lunacy, or if some other distinguished person is talking like a pompous prig or a gibbering idiot, he says so.'⁶⁶ Beyond this, the accuracy of the *Mizān* may be corroborated by its regular consistency with the key texts associated with the Qāḍīzādelis.

matter worthy of the consideration, or concernment of our Kings or our Governors'. It would thus be dangerous to consider it a straightforward eyewitness account of the Ottoman people and government in the seventeenth century. See L. Darling, 'Ottoman Politics through British Eyes: Paul Rycaut's "The Present State of the Ottoman Empire"', *Journal of World History*, 5 (1994), pp. 71-97, esp. p. 90.

⁶⁶ G. Lewis, *The Balance of Truth*, p. 12.

The tenor of the secondary sources does not depart significantly from that of the primary sources. Of particular note are the views of I. H. Uzunçarşılı⁶⁷ and Halil İnalcık. The latter, in a chapter entitled ‘The Triumph of Fanaticism’, describes the actions of Qāḍīzāde and his followers as nothing less than religious fanaticism. Explaining that at the heart of their cause was ‘the rooting out of innovations’, İnalcık makes the following assessment of the movement:

Among the Ottoman official circles, the general view of ‘innovation’ was based on the tolerant hanafite concept of *icmā* as a basis for religious and legal opinions. Against this, Mehmed of Birgi and the *fakīs* adopted the strict traditionalism of the *hanbalites*. These regarded as contrary to Islam any innovation which an objective interpretation of the Koran and the sunna could not admit. They opposed mysticism and any esoteric interpretation of the principles of religion. In our own day the modernization of Islamic societies has again caused a collision of these two opposing views.⁶⁸

Few Western Ottomanists have attempted a detailed study of the Qāḍīzādelis; most that treat the Qāḍīzādeli controversy spanning from the mid to late-17th century do so only in a tangential way.⁶⁹ The several detailed studies which are available are briefly considered below.

The first is the PhD thesis of N. Öztürk, who sees the *raison d’être* of the movement as having been the application of *al-amr bi l-ma^crūf wa l-nahy ^can al-munkar*.⁷⁰ Öztürk, drawing upon early chronicles, divides the movement into three distinct phases, each

⁶⁷ Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, 1: 343-367.

⁶⁸ H. İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*. Translated by Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 185.

⁶⁹ See for example M.A. Cook, *Commanding Good*, pp. 323-329 and Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, both of whom discuss the Qāḍīzādelis tangentially but nevertheless provide very useful insights.

⁷⁰ Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’.

differentiated both in terms of the mode of activism and the extent of influence. He charts the first phase of the movement as being the era of Birgivî, the intellectual forefather, and his disciple Qāḍīzāde. In the second phase, the leadership of the movement was assumed by Üşüwānî and ʿAbdül Aḥad Nūrî (d. 1061/1650). In the final phase, Öztürk regards Wānî Efendi's continuation of the earlier programme of reform to have brought the movement to its ultimate end. Despite the contribution Öztürk makes to our understanding of some of the key religious controversies of the time, and his bibliography of texts and translations, his thesis is flawed for several reasons. He mistakenly presents the Qāḍīzādelis as having been absolutely opposed to Sufism; whilst it is true that they were opposed to the Khalwatî and Mawlawî orders, and others of similar ilk, nothing in the key texts of the movement would indicate an *in toto* rejection of Sufism. Öztürk merely posits this without any substantiation. In fact, Sufism was very much embedded in Ottoman consciousness and had a significant presence in daily religious practice; any group involved in proselytisation which rejected Sufism would effectively be emasculating itself. It is very unlikely that the Qāḍīzādelis would have achieved their limited yet dramatic hold over Ottoman political and religious society, and made the inroads they did, had they presented themselves as opponents to Sufism.

Öztürk's thesis is also problematic for his reading of the Qāḍīzādelis through the lens of contemporary Salafî ideology. His insistence that the movement was Salafî, influenced by the Ḥanbalî school, though informed by some degree of textual citations, nevertheless

overlooks the continuities between the movement and its own Ottoman-Hanafī heritage.⁷¹ Whilst the stamps of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim on the movement are incontrovertible, it is lacking in candor to overlook the mark of the Ḥanafī legal tradition, or the Mātūrīdī doctrinal system, or indeed Sufism, on Qāḍīzādeli thought.

Öztürk not only neglects to place the Qāḍīzādelis clearly on the ideological map but he also struggles to situate them within the Ottoman social hierarchy. In the main, he presents the Qāḍīzādelis as a group distinct from both the ‘ulamā’ and popular preachers; there are times, however, when he moves between regarding them as sermonists (*wā‘izīn*) of ‘ulamā’ stock⁷² on the one hand, to sermonists who were opponents of the ‘ulamā’ on the other.⁷³ The fact is that, whilst many of the followers of the movement were from the laity, Qāḍīzādeli leaders were members of the Ottoman learned institution.

Another important study is the PhD thesis of Ş. Çavuşoğlu.⁷⁴ Much like Öztürk, she presents a rich survey of most of the primary and secondary sources, both Western and Turkish. In keeping with Öztürk, she also sees the movement as having existed in three-phases, and places particular emphasis on the alleged political, economic and moral crisis of the 17th century, which she believes created the fertile ground necessary for the germination of Qāḍīzādeli rhetoric and activism. Despite the contribution Çavuşoğlu’s thesis makes in providing lengthy translations from key Qāḍīzādeli texts, her own study

⁷¹ For Öztürk’s discussion of the Taymiyyan, Ḥanbalī influence on the Qāḍīzādelis, see ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’, p. 132ff. The Salafī outlook of the Qāḍīzādelis is at one point described by Öztürk as “intolerant” and “narrow-minded”. (‘Islamic Orthodoxy’, p. 27).

⁷² Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’, pp. 61-62.

⁷³ Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’, pp. 418-421.

⁷⁴ Çavuşoğlu, ‘The Kāḍīzādelī movement’.

departs little from Öztürk's analysis of the movement. A case may be made in defence of Çavuşoğlu for her attempt at a more nuanced analysis of the ideological outlook of the Qāḍīzādelis. In her estimation, the Qāḍīzādelis are best understood as "Sharī'a-minded" reformers who stood in contrast to reformers of the age who favoured the Qānūn over the Sharī'a. This bifurcation is in fact Cemal Kafadar's, who justifies its use in the following excerpt:

Ottoman intellectual history should take note of at least two distinct and often rival attitudes within the decline-and-reform discourse of the post-Süleymānic age [...] the vision of an exemplary Ottoman order, with a mature political-legal-social paradigm, located in a classical age stretching from Meḥmed the Conqueror to Süleymān the Lawgiver, is generally presented as if it were the only Ottoman perspective on Ottoman history. With its emphasis on the *kānūn*, this might be considered the dominant position represented by the better-known reformists like ʿAlī, Koçi Bey, Hezārfen Hüseyin. It would be more accurate, however, to regard this *kanūn*-minded viewpoint as only one position, related to specific social groups which wanted to revive "the Ottoman tradition" as they understood it and as it suited them [...] we must here consider at least one other strand of thought in Ottoman cultural history which has hitherto been either neglected or underrated in terms of its contribution to the decline and reform discourse. This *selefi* ("fundamentalist") strand, with deep roots and influential representatives in earlier Islamic history, ran through Ottoman intellectual life over many centuries and did not fail to produce its own critical stance on the trajectory of the Ottoman order, particularly in the post-Süleymānic age. For this specific and not insignificant group, the "golden age" paradigm was particularly meaningful, but there was only one golden age and that was way back in the time of the *selef*, namely Prophet Muhammad and his companions. *Selefi* thinkers had their own traditionalist program of reform which they had elaborated in various treatises presenting different views, at times sharply different ones, than the reform treatises of *kanūn*-minded intellectuals like ʿAlī or Koçi Bey.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ C. Kafadar, 'The Myth of the Golden Age', p. 42. On the "golden age" paradigm, see also M. Zilfi, *Politics of Piety*, p. 135.

By the expression ‘*selefi* strand’, Kafadar alludes to reformers such as Birgivî and Qāḍîzāde. To describe them in such terms is once more to commit the error of projecting back upon them a contemporary paradigm rather than attempting to position them precisely via rigorous historiography. Equally problematic is the use of the term “fundamentalist” in relation to the Qāḍîzādelis, which although in currency at the time of Kafadar’s writing, has since been abandoned by many in the social sciences, particularly in the context of contemporary Islamic movements.⁷⁶

There are further complexities which render problematic the analytical categories adopted by Kafadar to describe the Qāḍîzādelis. To create a dichotomy of Ottoman intellectual life during the 16th and 17th centuries on the basis of those in favour of the Sharīʿa and those in favour of Qānūn both simplifies the historical reality as well as obfuscates the nexus between the Sharīʿa and Qānūn in Islamic history.⁷⁷ The two were enmeshed, and it could be argued that these two legal frameworks have had a contiguous existence since the earliest evolution of Muslim legal theory.⁷⁸ Most significantly in this context, the

⁷⁶ On the problems with the term “fundamentalism”, see D.M. Varisco, “Inventing Islamism: The Violence of Rhetoric,” in *Islamism: Contested Perspectives on Political Islam*, edited by R.C. Martin and A. Barzegar (California: Stanford University Press, 2010).

⁷⁷ Here it is useful to consider the nature of the Sharīʿa and Qānūn and the nexus between the two systems which for centuries co-existed to form the Ottoman law. Sharīʿa in the context of Ottoman Turkey was synonymous broadly with the Ḥanafî legal tradition, as preserved in case law and jurisprudential treatises. Imber notes that, ‘Before the mid-nineteenth century the Sharīʿa had undisputed intellectual and ideological hegemony throughout the Islamic world. However, since it did not provide all the material necessary for a working legal system, with both governmental and civic institutions, it had to coexist with laws appropriated from non-Scriptural sources; these could be on the basis of the ruler’s discretion or on the basis of custom. In the Ottoman Empire, Qānūn was the term used for these non-Scriptural laws. In theory, the non-Scriptural Qānūn laws should not conflict with any definitive injunction of the Sharīʿa; there was often also a determined effort on the part of jurists to find a foundation for Qānūn laws, however flimsy it may be. In practice, however, there are clear cases in Ottoman history when Qānūn laws were in flagrant conflict with basic Sharīʿa laws.’ (C. Imber, *Ebu’s-su’ud: The Islamic Legal Tradition* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997], esp. Chapter 2).

⁷⁸ This is especially so if the principle of public interest (*maṣlaḥa*) is considered as an early juristic attempt to formulate laws that had no clear foundation in the Sharīʿa. On this principle, see H. Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2003), pp. 351-368.

usage of these terms obscures the actual premises upon which intellectuals from the period were predicating their responses to the socio-political status-quo.

The case of Birgivī, who criticised the cash-waqf system, is one example of just how problematic such a bifurcation of Ottoman intellectual history is. Whilst the subject is something of a digression, it is a necessary one to highlight just how inadequate the language employed to describe the religious landscape of the Ottoman 16th and 17th centuries can be. Birgivī's harsh criticism of the cash-waqf,⁷⁹ which he considered to be a harmful deviation from the Sharīʿa, should, according to Kafadar's bifurcation, be considered an attempt at "Sharīʿa-minded reform": In contradistinction, Abū l-Suʿūd's (d. 981/1574) support for this mode of transaction should be described as "Qānūn-minded". Whatever the appeal in describing the approaches in this way – after all, the cash-waqfs, were an example of where the Sharīʿa was flagrantly contravened - Abū l-Suʿūd, in his defence of the cash-waqf, drew upon support from classical Ḥanafī law. Firstly, he used the fatwas of Muḥammad al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805) and Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798), both of whom pronounced the permissibility of endowments on moveables (contrary to the view of the majority of jurists). He then argued that cash is a moveable and so can be made the basis of an endowment. Even more controversially, he then used legal subterfuge (*hīla*), to allow the charging of interest on loans made on cash-waqfs. It was from loans at interest that cash-waqfs derived their income.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ In general, a *waqf* is the endowment of property for charitable purposes. See R. Peters, 'Wakf', *EP*².

⁸⁰ Imber explains the legal stratagem as follows: 'In the collection of legal exemplars which [Abū l-Suʿūd made for working judges, he included a model for a certificate confirming the validity of a cash trust. In it, he refers not to the payment of interest, but instead uses the euphemism that was in common usage, 'legal transaction' (*muʿamala sharʿiyya*). This, he makes clear to a questioner, was simply an old trick for circumventing the prohibition on usury: "To be valid, how should a legal transaction be carried out? Answer: The trustee legally sells some merchandise to ʿAmr for 1,100 aqches. He delivers the merchandise

What becomes clear is that Abū l-Suʿūd predicated his justification for the permissibility of cash-waqfs on Muslim legal theory, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, the methodological framework employed to discover the Sharīʿa. It is thus inaccurate to describe his sanctioning of cash-waqfs as somehow indicative of “*Qānūn*-mindedness”. In contrast, Birgivī was not only opposed to cash-waqfs because they were in conflict with clear precepts of the Sharīʿa; he also furnished what we might term secular justifications, such as that the associated interest earned on loans had become widespread in his time and were demonstrably threatening the social order: they were therefore in direct conflict with the public interest.

Birgivī wrote several rejoinders against Abū l-Suʿūd's position, each constructed on the basis of legal (*sharʿī*) and rational (*ʿaqlī*) arguments. Two in particular were decisive in their critique, and would throw the debate wide open for a long time after. The first was Birgivī's *al-Ajwibat al-ḥāsima li-ʿurūq al-shibhat al-qāsima* - *Zealous Answers to the Roots of Divisive Doubts*, following the scholastic form and argument of a predecessor, Çivizade, but apparently containing a far more robust and detailed analysis of the

to ʿAmr who, after taking possession, sells it to Bekr for 1,000 aqches. After receiving [the merchandise], Bekr says: ‘Give the money for it to Zeyd’ and gives the merchandise to the trustee as a pledge for 1,000 aqches. This has been considered permissible. This clumsy device disguises a loan at interest as a double sale and an unredeemed pledge, and requires two collaborators, apart from the borrower, Zeyd.” Imber points out that most trustees were unlikely to have resorted to this rather burdensome trick. Records suggest that few founders of trusts required borrowers to deposit a pledge with the trustee, or to name a guarantor, which suggests that they lent the money and received interest directly. This trick was for those of more religious persuasion for who this stratagem would make interest allowable. (*Ebu's-suʿud: The Islamic Legal Tradition*, p.145). It is worthy of mention that Abū l-Suʿūd was not the first to permit cash-waqfs or interest-earnings made on loans from them. Jon E. Mandaville has undertaken extensive research on cash-waqfs in the Ottoman Empire, finding the earliest recorded usage of cash-waqfs and interest earnings on them dating back to the first half of the fifteenth century. See his article, ‘Usurious Piety: The Cash Waqf Controversy in the Ottoman Empire’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 10 (August, 1979), pp. 289-308.

problem.⁸¹ The second treatise, which contains Birgivī's clearest statement regarding the impermissibility of interest bearing loans, *Al-sayf al-sārim fi 'adam jawāz waqf al-manqūl wa l-darāhim - The Sharp Sword for the Inadmissibility of the Movable and Cash Waqfs*, is cited here. In this, Birgivī says:

Thus has the invalidity of the cash waqf been exposed. In it there are the sources of many evils. One is the non-payment of the ordained zakāt. A second is the interruption of the regular course of inheritance, an adjudging and execution of testaments involving cash waqf despite suspicions as to its validity, thus withholding truth from the truthful, an ugly oppression. A third, the seizing of the substance of the waqf by its administrators; they carouse, and when they are asked to surrender the waqf the judge prevents this. Or when someone dies and the inheritance is damaged. Verily, there are among them children and madmen. As He has said, 'Those who eat the property of orphans, oppressing, will eat and find fire in their stomachs; they will pray burning.' A fourth, the man who makes a cash waqf will become poor, despite what he thinks. Moreover, he believes that he no longer is obliged to celebrate the Day of Sacrifice, or the Breaking of the Fast, or charity to the poor, or the Pilgrimage, or any of those things. He thinks he has the right to take zakāt and other things forbidden the rich. He is a great offender in this. A fifth, that cash waqf is in little-esteemed books wherein joint partnership, commerce, and the like is mentioned. Now in our day they profit from usury in the very fashion that the Prophet of God censured. The scholars also censured it, made clear its sinfulness. A sixth, that most of the waqf administrators are ignorant and don't recognize the pictures of usury in the Book; they make profit with loans and sale. Any loan from which profit is made is usurious. Some of them lead a dissolute life, taking interest without even going through the motions of using legally permissible devices to do so. They make waqf of usury and the forbidden, pure and simple, giving it to the administrators who consume the usury. They are in the same position as someone struck mad and frenzied by the devil.⁸²

⁸¹ According to Mandeville, Birgivī, as the outstanding Arabic grammarian of his day and lifelong teacher of law, was on firm ground in this treatise, and he methodically, word by word, phrase by phrase, picked Ebū l-Su'ūd's argument to pieces. 'Words and sentences out of context, classics misquoted, manipulations of meaning, irrelevant citations, they are all brought out disdainfully for the academic world to see.' For Mandeville, Birgivī is clearly the better scholar. See Mandeville, 'Usurious Piety', p. 304.

⁸² Cited in Mandeville, 'Usurious Piety', pp. 305-306.

That the terms “*Sharīʿa*-minded” and “*Qānūn*-minded” do little to explain why the positions of Birgivī and Abū l-Suʿūd were so polarised on this issue is clear. Despite seeking to protect the Qānūn laws which allowed for cash-waqfs and the interest-based profits linked with them, Abū l-Suʿūd is undifferentiated from Birgivī in his attempt to use Sharīʿa-backed arguments to justify his position. For Abū l-Suʿūd, then, the Sharīʿa continues to be the *Grundnorm* of his legal consciousness; at no point does he allow for a circumvention of the Sharīʿa towards a completely secular-based vindication of the Qānūn law. As Mandeville perceptively notes, one would have to concede that Birgivī produces the strongest rational (i.e. non-Sharīʿī) arguments in support of his position. He argues that moveables should not be permitted for use as waqfs since they can pass hands, which undermines the *raison d’être* of this religious tradition. With regards to the problem of usury, the protection of the economically disadvantaged is the *ratio legis* which underpins the Qur’anic and *ḥadīth*-based prohibition. Birgivī sees the interest charged on loans from cash-waqfs as exploitative and the legal stratagem which seeks to render it permissible as no more than a circumvention of a clear-cut rule.

Çavuşoğlu appears not to have perceived any problem in adopting Kafadar’s nomenclature and proceeds to use the terms as a key part of her analysis: ‘The followers of Kādizāde saw obedience to and application of the serīʿat as the one and only solution to Ottoman decline. They can therefore be considered serīʿat-minded reformers as opposed to the Ottoman intellectuals of the post-Suleimanic age for whom the idea of “kānūn” was the essential element of reform.’⁸³ In what seems to be an attempt to clarify the term “Sharīʿa-minded”, Çavuşoğlu further describes the Qāḍīzādelis as *Salafis*, but

⁸³ Çavuşoğlu, ‘The Kādizādelī movement’, p. 37.

unfortunately this has the unwanted effect of further obscuring rather than clarifying the ideological standpoint of the movement. Going beyond both Kafadar and Öztürk, Çavuşoğlu divides up the whole intellectual history of Islamic thought according to this bicompartmentalisation, *Salafi* and non-*Salafi*, perhaps deeming this necessary as part of her project to ‘trace back the origin of Kādizādelī thought to the selefī tradition’; a tradition which she says ‘represented the traditional-conservative trend in Islam which came to be characterised by its emphasis on preserving the purity of Islam extant during the time of the Prophet and the Four Righteous Caliphs’.⁸⁴

A further problem with Çavuşoğlu’s study is her positioning of the Qāḍizādelis in opposition to the Sufis: ‘With the stated purpose of restoring the purity of the Islam extant during the time of the Prophet and the Four Righteous Caliphs [the Kādizādelis] rejected all religious practices which had emerged in subsequent periods as bid‘ats (innovations), and they targeted the activities of Sufis, the most obvious bearers of these bid‘ats in seventeenth-century Ottoman society.’⁸⁵ At best the Qāḍizādelis are portrayed by Çavuşoğlu as Wahhābi-Salafīs, and at worst as qiyās-rejecting Zāhirīs. The reality, however, could not be farther from this; the same Qāḍizādeli ideologues whom Çavuşoğlu presents in her study were all, without exception, affiliates of the Ḥanafī school of law, doctrinally Māturīdī, and either directly affiliated or loosely connected with one or another Ottoman Sufī order. As good Ḥanafīs, they would, far from

⁸⁴ Çavuşoğlu further says, ‘The selefis strictly opposed the ‘eşhābü’r-re’y’ who used reason and individual opinion. They placed absolute reliance on the traditions of the Prophet [...] at various periods in Islamic intellectual history, selefī tendencies culminated in polemical works and movements opposing various other tendencies such as the rationalism of the “ehlü’l-kiyās” [...]’. (‘The Kādizādelī movement’, p. 37).

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 1. Elsewhere, Çavuşoğlu states that her inquiry will proceed with a focus primarily on “the tension between the Sufis and the Kādizādelis”. (‘The Kādizādelī movement’, p. 23).

maintaining a stubborn adherence to *ḥadīth*, have been accommodating of juristic analogy (*qiyās*), juristic preference (*istiḥsān*), public welfare (*maṣlaḥa*) and most importantly, custom (*ʿurf*).⁸⁶ Birgivī, for example, wrote several texts on Ḥanafī law, and clearly adhered to the Māturīdī creed in his *al-Ṭarīqat al-Muḥammadiyya* and his *Risāleh*, primarily a catechism of Sunnī doctrine. As intellectual heirs of Birgivī, but also as students of the Ottoman madrasa system which was Ḥanafī-Māturīdī, it is of little surprise to find Qāḍīzādelī treatises and catechisms also representative of these dominant Ottoman schools.

Among the published works on the Qāḍīzādelis, perhaps the most extensive is Madeline Zilfi's *Politics of Piety*. Zilfi's study, now a classic in the field, is distinguished for being the first serious attempt to understand the inner workings of Qāḍīzādelī ideology and activism and also because of her largely dispassionate tenor. Her treatment of the Qāḍīzādelī movement is in fact a part of a broader study of the Ottoman ʿIlmiyye. There is no doubt that hers is a hugely important contribution to our understanding of the Ottoman learned institution during the 16th and 17th century, the function and importance of ʿulamāʾ within it, the corruption that beset the hierarchy, and the reasons for the gradual fall from grace of the ʿIlmiyye towards the onset of modernity. Her inclusion of the Qāḍīzādelis within the context of this study is clear: she sees them as a response to both ʿIlmiyye corruption, social degeneration and political-economic crisis. Despite a very persuasive and detailed survey of the ʿIlmiyye, Zilfi's treatment of the Qāḍīzādelis is over-reliant upon information supplied by the Ottoman chronicles of the seventeenth

⁸⁶ On the Ḥanafī use of these legal sources (*uṣūl*) to derive law, see H. Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*.

century. Her study thus errs in its presentation of the Qāḍīzādelis as a movement opposed to Sufism, distinct from the ʿulamāʾ (though Zilfi does accept that some Qāḍīzādeli activists were from the ʿulamāʾ), and ultimately its view of the movement as an aberration the existence of which is explainable only by the Ottoman political, economic and moral decadence of the seventeenth century. This view – namely, that the movement would not have appeared had it not been for the difficult period which the Ottomans were experiencing – is a common one shared by many Ottomanists writing about the Qāḍīzādelis. The extent to which this topos has permeated Qāḍīzādeli studies makes it important to investigate just how accurate it is to view the Qāḍīzādelis as somehow a mere symptom of a broader Ottoman socio-political crisis.

An Ottoman Crisis

Crisis and upheaval are often followed by a determined effort to make sense of what has gone wrong. Sometimes the course of action taken after a crisis is to force a return to the *status quo ante*, or better, to create anew a “golden age” which has become more intensely longed after because of the incumbent state of turmoil. This is such a familiar theme that historians, when trying to understand reformist or revivalist movements, often find it useful to think about the social-political-economic circumstances in which such movements evolve and function; the most plausible explanation for their appearance is often seen to be socio-political crisis. In the context of seventeenth century Ottoman Turkey, the century which is often spoken of as having witnessed the rise and fall of the Qāḍīzādelis, Ottomanists invariably preamble their analyses of the movement’s

appearance and evolution by speaking about the social-political-economic crisis of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries; a crisis is, after all, the perfect setting for the rise of fundamentalism, especially the sort which Qāḍīzādeli activists are often deemed to have represented. There is good reason, today, for rethinking this theme which has beset histories of the Empire until as recently as the 1990s.

The classical view in Ottoman history holds that the seventeenth century marks the beginning of Ottoman decline.⁸⁷ In this century, political and economic upheaval in the Empire resulted in the first major social and political unrest; at the same time, a perceived disintegration of morality held by religious sections of society resulted in the rise of religious extremism. Many histories of the Empire covering its final demise are based on this model, none more well-known perhaps than Bernard Lewis' *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*.⁸⁸ But more recently, this narrative is being contested. Some Ottomanists

⁸⁷ The 17th century is not only seen as a turbulent period in the Ottoman context; in fact, there is a huge body of scholarship on the global economic crisis of that century, said to have been set in motion by population increases not matched by a commensurate level of food production. In this connection, there has been a long debate among historians about whether individual cases of crisis across the world can be seen as inter-connected, and, by extension, whether there is a possibility of formulating a general theory. The debate as to whether there was a general crisis in the 17th century began in 1954 in the journal *Past and Present*, which instigated a body of research in the subsequent two decades. Of significance are the papers collected in Trevor Aston (ed.), *Crisis in Europe, 1560-1660* (New York: Basic Books, 1965) and Geoffrey Parker and Lesley M. Smith (eds.), *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978). On the crisis in non-Western lands, see S.A.M. Adshead, 'The Seventeenth-Century General Crisis in China,' *France/Asie* 24 (1970), pp. 251-265; William S. Atwell, 'Ming Observers of Ming Decline: Some Chinese Views on the "Seventeenth-Century Crisis" in Comparative Perspective,' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1988), pp. 316-348; and Jack A. Goldstone, 'East and West in the Seventeenth Century: Political Crises in Stuart England, Ottoman Turkey, and Ming China,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 (1988), pp. 103-142. A different explanation for the connectedness of economic and political changes across the globe was given by Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 3 vols. (New York: Academic Press, 1974). Work on the subject which began in earnest during the 1950s was halted within two decades, after the publication of a synthesis concluding bluntly that the research had not demonstrated the correctness of either position.

⁸⁸ Chapter II in Lewis' history, 'The Decline of the Ottoman Empire', is an example of his adoption of the classical declinist paradigm. (*The Emergence of Modern Turkey* [London: Oxford University Press, 1961]). Another unmistakable example of interpreting Ottoman history through this same paradigm can be

are no longer convinced that the 16th and 17th centuries mark the beginning of a period of Imperial decline. This is in part because of a growing scepticism regarding the objectivity of the early Ottoman observers who first described a decline, and in part because of a growing body of historical data garnered from Ottoman archives which appear to belie the classical view.

The decline paradigm, which is thought to have extended for the last four centuries of the Empire's existence, was first posited by members of the Ottoman elite, who wrote nostalgically about the "good old days" of Süleymān I and the period immediately before him. It was they who complained of institutional corruption, venality, and incompetence, and whose opinions were adopted by later Ottoman writers and chroniclers, who in turn were used by Turkish historians during the early Turkish republic, who in turn were adopted by Western Ottomanists.⁸⁹ In an informative paper highlighting this very theme, D. Quataert, who contests the decline paradigm, begins by outlining the view of historians who hold the view that the Ottoman Empire had been on the path to collapse for approximately four centuries:

Between 1300 and 1566, the Ottoman Empire expanded steadily under the guidance of ten sultans who were remarkable for their warrior and/or administrative skills. Decline set in at the apex of Ottoman power, under Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (1520–66), who foolishly allotted power to a concubine who became his wife, with devastating effects on the Empire. The accession of his son, Selim "the Sot," affirmed the maxim "the fish begins to rot from the head" and the rule of the harem only made things worse. Coupled with the price revolution triggered by the influx of American

observed in N. Itzkowitz, *Ottoman Empire and Islamic Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1980), esp. the chapter, 'Ottoman Consciousness'.

⁸⁹ D. Quataert, 'Ottoman History Writing and Changing Attitudes: Towards the Notion of "Decline",' *History Compass*, 1 (2003), pp. 1-10 (p. 1).

silver, the foundations of Ottoman power were permanently shaken. In the paradigm under challenge here, Ottoman decline began in the late 16th century and continued until 1922, when the Ottoman Empire finally disappeared. While there were competent sultans and bureaucrats who occasionally struggled to right the ship of state, incompetence and backwardness prevailed. Thus, in the 17th century, incompetent, sex-crazed, or venal rulers were incapable of maintaining control. The disastrous defeat of the Ottoman army before the walls of Vienna in 1683 made the decline visible to all and the Empire subsequently staggered from one defeat to the next. Crowned with the title “The Sick Man of Europe,” the Empire survived because of divisions among its enemies. In the 19th century, possible salvation appeared in the form of westernization, as Ottoman leaders sought to import military and administrative models from Europe. But the changes made were incomplete, both too few and too late. Ineptitude and retardation permitted nationalism to spread among the subject peoples; the imperial structure, thus unable to adjust, was torn apart from within. The last of the groups to gain national identity, the Turks, administered the final blow in 1922 and the Turkish Republic was born in 1923. Having eagerly sought to end the Ottoman “yoke,” the Turkish and other successor states then struggled to eliminate its legacy and achieve modern nation– statehood.⁹⁰

With historians such as Quataert, there is a growing sense that the early observers of Ottoman decline were not dispassionate in their observations, but, rather, participants with vested interests. Quataert argues that some historians take the view that those pessimistic Ottoman observers were “disgruntled losers” who had ‘failed to obtain the promotions and recognitions they felt they deserved’.⁹¹ Perhaps understandably, they attributed their own failures to a system of promotion and recognition that had broken down and become corrupted.⁹² Since the objectivity of the Ottoman observers first came into question among Ottomanists, a steady stream of scholarship revisiting the period began in the 1990s to question the idea of Ottoman decline. One of the key features of recent scholarship which has revisited the decline model is to analyse Ottoman realities within the context of the Ottoman experience, rather than to measure it against particular

⁹⁰ Quataert, ‘Ottoman History Writing’, p. 4.

⁹¹ Quataert, ‘Ottoman History Writing’, p. 3.

⁹² Quataert, ‘Ottoman History Writing’, p. 3.

models of change.⁹³ These have departed considerably from the view that political and economic progression takes only one form, namely that experienced in Western nations, and that other parts of the world should be judged against these particular modes of development.⁹⁴

Given the changing terrain of Ottoman historiography generally, it seems appropriate that the widely held view among writers on the Qāḍīzādelis concerning the rise of the movement, in particular that it was connected with Ottoman decline dating from the 17th century, should also be revised. Notwithstanding the historiographical issues which are connected with understanding Qāḍīzādeli revivalism, it is also important to consider when Ottoman revivalism first evolved and also what the movement's activists saw as the *raison d'être* of their own campaign. These also militate against the view that the 17th century was significant for the rise of the Qāḍīzādelis.

Firstly, to connect the rise of the Qāḍīzādelis too intimately with the political-economic climate of the seventeenth century is to overlook the fact that the roots of their revivalist ethic are traceable back to the middle of the sixteenth century, the period of Sultan Süleymān I (1520-1566), under whose reign Birgivī first began to introduce Ottomans to the idea of religious reform. It is true that more violent expressions of Qāḍīzādeli

⁹³ See for example R. Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State, The Ottoman Empire, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Albany, State University of New York, 1991); D. Howard, 'Ottoman historiography and the literature of "decline" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,' *Journal of Asian History*, 22 (1), 1988, pp. 52–76; A. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680, I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁹⁴ Examples of studies which have seen the West as the paradigm for development and modernisation include D. Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (Chicago: Chicago University, 1965); Rostow, W.W., *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971). S.N. Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities,' *Multiple Modernities*, 129 (2000), pp. 1-29, is an example of more recent scholarship which challenges the literature of the post-WWII decades.

activism were manifested in later phases of the movement, well into the 17th century, but the intellectual cogs which were so vital to the development of their reformist agenda were set in motion in the so-called “golden-age” of Ottoman imperial history. Secondly, it was not only Mehmed Qāḍīzāde and his successors who were openly critical of what they saw as the excesses of Sufi piety, state transgressions and general moral decline; in fact, we have evidence of ‘Ilmiyye ‘ulamā’ also holding the same concerns and voicing their anxieties about non-Shar‘ī practices.⁹⁵ This challenges the view that the concerns of the Qāḍīzādelis were somehow unique to them, and that otherwise there existed a quietist attitude in Ottoman society. Thirdly, the ethic of activism – or in the terminology of Islamic revivalism, *işlāḥ* and *tajdīd* – is firmly embedded within Islamic doctrine, subsumed under the rubric of the duty of enjoining good and forbidding wrong – *al-amr bi-l-ma‘rūf wa l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*. The duty is viewed as “an individual obligation” (*farḍ ‘ayn*) when other members of society are failing in its performance, and it is certainly not conceived of as implementable only during a socio-economic crisis. Anything deemed good might be encouraged, and anything deemed evil prevented and it is often difficult, given the nebulous nature of concepts like good and evil, to predict when someone might take it upon himself to reform society. As such, the Qāḍīzādelis, a movement which considered itself actively engaged in forbidding wrong, might easily have appeared at any other point in Ottoman history.

⁹⁵ Kafadar says, ‘Towards the end of his reign, Murād III (r. 1574-95), grandson of Suleymān the Magnificent, was haunted by occurrences which he read as signs of the corruption of his time. In 1594, for instance, Istanbul suffered a devastating fire, not an infrequent hazard of life in the city; but this time flames reached the gates of the palace whereupon Murād is reported to have said: “This occurrence in our vicinity is a sign for us!” And he is related to have shed blood-filled tears soon thereafter when one of the ships passing by the shore pavilion where the sultan was resting, blasted salutary cannon shots as was custom, which on that inauspicious occasion, shattered the glass windows of the kiosk as well as a piece of crystal right next to the sovereign. (‘The Myth of the Golden Age, p. 37).

II. THE THIRD MAN

This chapter serves as an introduction to Aḥmad al-Āqḥiṣārī's works, highlighting his broader doctrinal and legal orientation, and, most importantly in the context of the present study, introduces the key themes of his most significant intellectual contribution, the *Majālis al-abrār*. That al-Āqḥiṣārī was one of a triumvirate alongside Meḥmed Birgivī and Qāḍīzāde is largely unknown among students of the Qāḍīzādeli movement, despite the fact that manuscripts of his *Risāleh* were being circulating in late-17th and 18th century Turkey, bound in a single volume together with the *Risāleler* of his ideological comrades. It is for this that Y. Michot referred to him as “the forgotten puritan” of Ottoman Islam. Furthermore, Michot has argued that if reintroduced to the academic community, al-Āqḥiṣārī and his *Majālis* could not only reveal more about the Ottoman 17th century but shed light on Islamic spirituality in other parts of the Muslim world, particularly the Indian subcontinent.⁹⁶

It should be noted that there remains a lacuna, as far as information on al-Āqḥiṣārī's life is concerned, which the most detailed textual study cannot remedy. Yet until we have sources which reveal more about his personal life, there is little alternative but to attempt a reconstruction of his *persona* via an archaeology of his *Majālis* and his other works. The hazardous nature of such a task has been highlighted in the introduction, since we can know only what al-Āqḥiṣārī chooses to reveal about himself. Nevertheless, it is hoped that much is still to be gained via a textual reconstruction.

⁹⁶ Michot, ‘Kātib Çelebi's time: some views on the Ottoman society in the *Majālis al-abrār* of Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī,’ (unpublished paper delivered at ISAM, Istanbul, 2008).

From Cyprus to Āqḥiṣār

Despite the large number of works which Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī composed, and the high esteem with which his *Majālis al-abrār* was regarded – particularly within the 19th century Indian reform movement – we know surprisingly little about the life of this Anatolian scholar and reformer. Al-Āqḥiṣārī was born in Cyprus to a Christian family before being taken away as a child after the Ottoman conquest of the island between 977/1570-981/1573 and converted to Islam.⁹⁷ Initially sent to join the Devşirme for a religious education, he eventually became a Ḥanafī scholar of some stature, able to write as well in Arabic as in Turkish. His writings are indicative of a man at ease writing on a range of religious subjects, most of which were afforded significant deference. His was an era which, it is worth remembering, saw a dramatic shift away from the rational sciences (*‘ulūm ‘aqliyya*) in preference for the revealed sciences (*‘ulūm naqliyya*).⁹⁸ Al-Āqḥiṣārī probably spent most of his life, once having arrived on the mainland from Cyprus, in Akhisar, Western Anatolia. But apart from this we can say no more about the details of his lineage, education, associations or movements.

Y. Michot has urged that al-Āqḥiṣārī be read within the reformist milieu of his time and presents three reasons to support this. Firstly, al-Aqḥiṣārī’s *oeuvre*, especially his writings on Sufism, clearly bears the mark of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) and, to a lesser extent, though no less significantly, Aḥmad b. Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). In this, al-Āqḥiṣārī is like Birgivī, Qāḍīzāde and other revivalists of his age, who were also

⁹⁷ Y. Michot, *L’opium et le café*, p. 54.

⁹⁸ Kātib Çelebi laments this shift in his *Mīzan al-ḥaqq* (See in particular pp. 25-26).

invoking the names and/or scholarship of these 7th/13th-8th/14th century reformers in support of their programme of reform. Secondly, al-Āqḥiṣārī held Birgivī Meḥmed Efendi, the spiritual father of the Ottoman revivalist movement, in particularly high regard. In his commentary of Birgivī's *al-Durr al-yatīm fī l-tajwīd – The Unique Pearl, concerning the Recitation of the Qur'an*, he begins with the following invocation: '...the shaykh, the active and strong scholar (*al-ʿālim al-ʿāmil al-qawī*) Meḥmed b. Pīr ʿAlī al-Birgivī - may God make the Garden his refuge, give him to drink a pure beverage and quench his thirst...' ⁹⁹ Thirdly, there is a strikingly large number of manuscripts in which the texts of Birgivī's *Vasiyyet-Nāmeḥ*, the *Epistle - Risāleh* of Qāḍīzāde Meḥmed (d. 1145/1635) and al-Āqḥiṣārī's *Creed - Risāleh fī l-aqā'id* (or *Risāleh*, or *Vasiyyet-Nāmeḥ*) are bound together as a sort of sacred trilogy; this indicates that in the minds of many, the religious *Weltanschauungen* of these three scholars were seen as both pivotal and convergent. ¹⁰⁰

The lack of biographical data on Aḥmad al-Āqḥiṣārī was of no great consequence to the 19th century Indian reform movement. Al-Āqḥiṣārī's *Majālis* was translated into Urdu and was considered as significant for the reformist agenda as Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'*. The Urdu translation, *Nafā'is al-azhār*, of Muḥammad Kifāyatullāh al-Dehlawī, begins with a quote of Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dehlawī, famous son of Shāh Waliullāh, who says about the *Majālis*, '*Majālis al-abrār* is a book which covers the science of exhortation (*waʿẓ*) and admonition (*naṣīḥa*), and presents many benefits about the secrets of the *Sharīʿa*

⁹⁹ Cited in Michot, *Against Smoking*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Michot, *Against Smoking*, pp. 1-2. In MS. Michot 0802, al-Āqḥiṣārī's *Risāleh* appears between Birgivī's and Qāḍīzāde's. Michot gives details of other manuscripts in which the three are bound together: Istanbul, *Yazma Bağışlar* 6494; *Laleli* 2461, 2463, 2468, 2470, 2473, 2474, 2476, 2477, 2478, 2481, 2482. (*Against Smoking*, p. 2).

prescriptions and about jurisprudence (*fiqh*), wayfaring (*sulūk*) and a refutation of evil innovations and customs. We do not know much about the author, other than what we can garner from his authorship. The author of this book is a scholar (*‘ālim*), pious (*mutadayyin*) and god-fearing (*mutawarrī‘*); he was master of the various religious sciences. How excellent is the statement of the one who said, “Do not look at who is speaking, look at what is being said.” This is since men are known by the truthfulness of their words; the truth is not known by the status of men.’¹⁰¹

Given the paucity of biographical material on al-Āqḥiṣārī, we would do well to adopt Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s recommendation and unravel al-Āqḥiṣārī’s religious orientation on the basis of his works. Certainly there is much to learn about him from the authorities he cites, scholars whom he demonstrates particular reverence for, the theological and legal affiliations he appears to have had; even the manner with which his work has been received by contemporaries and in posterity serves as a useful indicator of how his admirers read him.

Al-Āqḥiṣārī’s fundamental doctrinal affiliations are easy to garner. In keeping with most members of the Ottoman learned establishment, al-Āqḥiṣārī’s doctrinal views on the attributes of God, the necessity of arriving at a rational basis for God’s essential unicity (*tawḥīd*), and similar questions, betray a clear preference for the Māturīdī school.¹⁰² The first three chapters of the *Majālis* make clear the importance of correct doctrine before embarking upon the spiritual path, and it is in each of these that he draws upon many of

¹⁰¹ In the Urdu translation of the *Majālis al-abrār*, Kifāyatullāḥ al-Dehlawī (Karachi: Dār Ishā‘at), p. 36.

¹⁰² On Māturīdī doctrine, see M. Çeric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of Abu Mansur al-Maturidi* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995).

the classical *kalām*-theological arguments. His *Risāleh*, which is primarily focused on creed, also presents a palpably Māturīdī approach to doctrinal questions.¹⁰³

Particularly interesting is the importance with which al-Āqḥiṣārī held the science of *kalām*; in this, he was in keeping with the both the stance of the ʿulamāʾ but also fellow Qāḍīzādelis, such as Birgivī.¹⁰⁴ Whilst aware of the rejection of *kalām* by some ʿulamāʾ (he makes no mention of who), al-Āqḥiṣārī makes his clearest apology in defence of it in his *Risāla fī l-taqlīd*.¹⁰⁵ He begins by correcting those who might be opposed to *kalām* because of al-Shāfiʿī's frequently cited statement, that the advocates of *Kalām* (*Ahl ʿilm al-kalām*, literally the “People of the Science of *Kalām*”) should be whipped with palm branches (*jarīd*). On this al-Āqḥiṣārī says that al-Shāfiʿī was merely addressing those *mutakallimūn* who had Muʿtazilī affiliations. He argues that the term *mutakallim* during al-Shāfiʿī's era was used solely by the Muʿtazila which created a certain ambiguity for the undiscerning. Since the Muʿtazila were employing *kalām* arguments to support their own heresies, they were indeed deserving of a lashing, according to al-Āqḥiṣārī. He adds that al-Shāfiʿī had it wrong – such people deserved to be whipped with iron rather than palm branches.

¹⁰³ The theological texts taught on the Ottoman madrasa curriculum were Ashʿarī, despite the Ottomans being generally of the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī school. The primary books taught in *kalām* were the *Sharḥ al-ʿaqāʾid* of al-Taftazānī (d. 793/1390) and *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid* and *Sharḥ al-mawāqif* of Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1423). To understand the influence of the Ashʿarī school on Ottoman science and thought, see *Change and Essence: Dialectical Relations Between Change and Continuity in the Turkish Intellectual Tradition*, edited by S. Gunduz and C.S. Yaran (Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series IIA, Volume 18, Washington D.C.: 2005). For more on the Ottoman madrasa curriculum, see F. Robinson, ‘Ottoman-Safavids-Mughals: Shared Knowledge and Connective Systems’, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 8 (1997), pp. 151-184.

¹⁰⁴ See for example Birgivī's *Vassiyetname*, in *The Path of Muhammad*, translated by T. Bayrak (Canada: World Wisdom, 2005), pp. 3-4.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Āqḥiṣārī, *Risāla fī l-taqlīd*, MS Harput 429, fols. 29r-37r.

Al-Āqḥiṣārī warns that the label “People of *Kalām*” is not only used to describe the Muʿtazila, but also for the shaykhs of *Ahl al-Sunna*, such as Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī and his followers – he cites Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāʾīnī, the Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī and Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī. For al-Āqḥiṣārī, these imāms ‘established the proof of God and His Prophet’; they were the auxiliaries of the religion, who did more to curb Muʿtazila heresies than simply hand out lashings with iron or palm; according to al-Āqḥiṣārī, these men ‘destroyed the heresies of the Muʿtazila through definitive arguments’.¹⁰⁶

In the second session of the *Majālis*, al-Āqḥiṣārī is forthright about the place of *kalām* within his epistemology, and its utility as a means to knowledge:

The way to the knowledge of God, the Exalted, is by two routes: the first is the path of the People of Reason and Argumentation (*Ahl al-naẓar wa l-istidlāl*) and the second is the path of the People of Spiritual Exercise and Exertion (*Ahl al-riyāḍa wa l-mujāhada*). Those travelling on the path of the People of Reason and Argumentation, if they hold to a religion (*milla*) from the religions of the Prophets then they are [known as] the Dialecticians (*Mutakallimūn*). If not, then they are [known as] the Peripatetic Philosophers (*Ḥukamāʾ Mashshāʾūn*), a group from among the Philosophers who have chosen the method of Aristotle in relation to discourse (*baḥṭh*) and demonstration (*burhān*). [These latter] are not from the people of religion. Those travelling on the path of *riyāḍa* and *mujāhada*, if their spiritual exertion is in agreement with the *Sharīʿa*, then they are [known as] law-abiding Sufis (*al-ṣufiyyat al-mutasharriʿūn*); if not, then they are [known as] Illuminationist Philosophers (*Ḥukamāʾ Ishtirāqiyyūn*), a group from among the Philosophers who have chosen the method of Plato in relation to intuition (*kashf*) and contemplation (*ʿiyān*). These are not from the people of religion either.

This said, each path is made up of two groups; those believers (*al-muʾmin*) who know God (*al-ʿarīf bi-llāh*), are only two from these groups: the first are People of Reason and Argumentation and the second are the People of Witness and Contemplation (*Ahl al-Mushāhada wa l-ʿiyān*). This is since if their knowledge of Him, the Exalted, is by way of arguing with rational

¹⁰⁶ Al-Āqḥiṣārī, *Risāla fī l-taqlīd*, fols. 34v-35r.

proofs (*dalīl ʿaqlī*) and revealed proofs (*dalīl naqlī*), then they are from the people of external knowledge and demonstration (*ahl al-ʿilm al-zāhir wa l-burhān*); if their knowledge of Him, the Exalted is, by way of witnessing with inner-sight (*ʿayn al-baṣīra*), then they are from the people of internal knowledge and contemplation. The attainment (*ḥāṣil*) of the first path is the perfection of speculative power (*quwwa naẓariyya*) and ascension through its stations; the attainment of the second path is the perfection of practical power (*quwwa ʿamaliyya*) and ascension through its levels. This is the real miracle (*karāma ḥaqīqiyya*) which manifests at the hands of the Friends of God (*walī Allāh*).¹⁰⁷

The method of *kalām* is therefore considered one of only two authentic and acceptable paths towards knowledge of God by al-Āqḥiṣārī. Elsewhere in the *Majālis*, he speaks about the need for the science of *kalām* to ‘establish and defend the correct creed (*al-ʿitiqād al-ṣaḥīḥ*), differentiating it from heretical beliefs’.¹⁰⁸ Whilst he concedes that one who has arrived at a belief in God through blind acceptance (*taqlīd*) is nevertheless a believer (*muʾmin*), he warns that ignorance of the proofs of the *mutakallimūn* which they constructed in support of dogmatic questions (*masāʾil ʿitiqādiyya*) can render a person sinful.¹⁰⁹ More radical than this, he says that, ‘[such a person] is left to the will of God: if He wishes, he will forgive him and enter him into Heaven without punishment and if He

¹⁰⁷ *Majlis II*, f. 6v-7r.

¹⁰⁸ On the Ashʿarī-Māturīdī emphasis on the need for founding belief in God’s existence upon rational proof, see A. Shihadeh, “The existence of God,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, edited by T. Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 197-217.

¹⁰⁹ *Majlis VI*, f. 19r. Elsewhere al-Āqḥiṣārī takes the view that success and failure on the spiritual path are partly contingent on observance of the law, and partly on learning the essential doctrines as formulated by the *mutakallimūn*: It is necessary that the worshipper who is compos mentis occupies himself with this formula in order that his heart finds contentment and so that he prepares himself for [receiving] knowledge of God the Exalted. Before becoming occupied [with this formula], it is incumbent that he learns from the science of *kalām* what will cause his creed to be sound, in accordance with the People of the *Sunna* and the Communion (*Ahl al-Sunna wa l-Jamāʿa*), such that he can vouchsafe himself from the uncertainty of the heretics. The heart, as long as it is muddled by the darkness of doctrinal heresy, will not be enlightened by the lamps of pious action.” *Majlis I*, f. 3v.

wishes, He will punish him in a measure commensurate with the sin, only then entering him into Heaven.’¹¹⁰

Throughout the *Majālis al-abrār* al-Āqḥiṣārī provides *kalām*-based arguments for the existence of God, creation *ex nihilo*, and other dogmatic points, in a repetitious way as is customary of his style. These figure mostly in the early sessions that deal with theological questions.¹¹¹ It becomes clear that al-Āqḥiṣārī takes *kalām* to be a vital offshoot of the religious sciences, an essential aspect of theology, and something which he is willing to cite time and again in the *Majālis*.

Betraying his Ḥanafī leanings, throughout the *Majālis* and his other epistles, he cites key Ḥanafī legal texts, their commentaries and glosses when treating legal questions. On occasion he cites the positions of other schools; this is usually to highlight that other schools also support the specific position he presents or because jurists of his own school have not treated an issue to the required depth; he therefore turns to the views of foreign schools for authoritative support of his own argument. He does this most particularly on the question of innovation, *bidʿa*, where he draws heavily from Ibn Taymiyya of the Ḥanbalī school and Ibn al-Ḥājj and al-Ṭurṭūshī of the Mālikī school. The former is cited far more often.

In terms of authorships, al-Āqḥiṣārī composed a number of texts and epistles, most of which exist only as manuscripts in library archives. The majority are no more than five

¹¹⁰ Al-Āqḥiṣārī, *Risāla fī l-taqlīd*, f. 35r.

¹¹¹ See especially *Majlis III* through to *XI*.

folios in length; all treat various issues relating to ritual practice, doctrine or social customs which have a bearing on religious practice and belief. The following is a list of titles prefacing some of al-Āqḥiṣārī's epistles. It is clear from his interests how closely they correspond to the interests and concerns of Birgivī, Qāḍīzāde and others, and why a study of al-Āqḥiṣārī could shed more light on the nature of the reform movement in 16th and 17th century Turkey:

Risāla fī l-bid'at al-sayyi'a wa ghayr al-sayyi'a – Epistle on pernicious and non-pernicious innovations (The same epistle is held in the Sülemaniye library bearing the title *Risāla fī dhamm al-bid'a – Epistle on the censure of innovation*).¹¹² This epistle highlights the harms of innovations in religious practice drawing at length from Ibn Taymiyya's *Iqtidā' širāt al-mustaqīm*. It is a virtual replica of *Majlis XVIII*.

Risāla fī bayān kull min ṣalāt al-raghā'ib wa ṣalāt al-barāt – Epistle making clear [the status of] the prayers of Raghā'ib and Bārāt.¹¹³

Risāla fī man' al-taṣliya wa l-tarḍiya wa l-ta'mīn waqt al-khuṭba – Epistle on the interdiction to ask for God's blessings on the Prophet and for His satisfaction with the Companions, as well as to say "Amen", during the Friday sermon.¹¹⁴

¹¹² MSS. *Dārūlmesnevi* 258, ff. 105v-110v (1093/1682); *Harput* 429, ff. 158r-164v; *Reşid Efendi* 985, ff. 83r-86r. Yazmalar: Manisha *İHK*, 45 Hk 2937/2, ff. 21v-27r.

¹¹³ MSS. *Dārūlmesnevi* 258, ff. 91v-99r; *Harput* 429, ff. 148r-157v; *Reisülküttab* 1182, ff. 123v-127r; *Reşid Efendi* 985, ff. 77v-83r. Yazmalar: Manisha *İHK*, 45 Hk 2937/3, ff. 27v-36r.

¹¹⁴ MSS. *Harput* 429, ff. 77v-84v; *Kiliç Paşa* 1035, ff. 69v-70r; *Reşid Efendi* 985, ff. 87v-92r; *Reisülküttab* 1182, ff. 57v-64r; *Şehid Ali Paşa* 1189, ff. 98r-104r. Yazmalar: Manisha *İHK*, *Akhisar Zeynelzade Koleksiyon*, 45 Ak Ze 5998/2, ff. 20v-29r (1310/1891).

*Risāla fī anna l-muṣāfaḥa ba'da l-ṣalawāt al-khamṣa bid'a makrūha – Epistle explaining that shaking hands after the five prayers is a detestable innovation.*¹¹⁵ The epistle deals with a subject popular among Qāḍīzādeli activists. Al-Āqḥiṣārī goes some length to explain why the interdiction of this social exchange is necessary – it is considered a duty (*wājib*) by most people now such that if one does not turn to shake the hand of his neighbour in the prayer it is considered a sin. Al-Āqḥiṣārī also points out that it was a practice of the Shī'a and so should be avoided since it is an imitation of the misguided. The contents of this epistle are to be found in *Majlis L*.

*Risāla fī ḥurmat al-raqṣ wa l-dawarān - Epistle on the prohibition of dancing and whirling.*¹¹⁶ Al-Āqḥiṣārī anathematizes those who consider dancing permissible (*mustaḥill al-raqṣ kāfir*) based on an alleged consensus of earlier jurists. He cites Mālik, al-Shāfi'ī, Aḥmad and other authorities in order to further strengthen his claim. At one point he says that only people deficient in intelligence dance and that it is 'not even befitting of women and children.' Among the reasons he cites for its prohibition is that the one dancing 'resembles an ape' and 'he mixes worship with jest'.

*Risāla fī l-radd 'alā maqābiriyya – Epistle refuting the visitors of tombs. Or Radd al-Qabariyya – Refutation of the visitors of tombs.*¹¹⁷ This epistle begins with the following statement of gratitude to the Ḥanbalī Ibn al-Qayyim: 'These pages I have

¹¹⁵ MSS. *Harput* 429, ff. 72r-73r; *Reisülküttab* 1182, ff. 64v-65r. See also *Esad Efendi* 3599, ff. 218v-237v; *Şehid Ali Paşa* 1189, ff. 98r-104r. Yazmalar: Manisa *İHK*, *Akhisar Zeynelzade Koleksiyon*, 45 Ak Ze 5998/2, ff. 20v-29r (1310/1891).

¹¹⁶ MS. *Harput* 429, ff. 65r-72r. See also *Hafid Efendi* 453, ff. 79r-85r.

¹¹⁷ MSS. *Fatih* 5398, ff. 71r-86v; *Hafid Efendi* 453, ff. 90r-117v; *Harput* 429, ff. 100r-118v; *Kiliç Ali Paşa* 1035, ff. 49v-68r. Yazmalar: Manisa, *İHK*, 45 Hk 2937/1, ff. 3v-20v.

taken from the *Ighāthat al-lahafān fī makā'id al-Shayṭān* of the Shaykh, Imām and °Allāma Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya – may God place his soul among the souls which have returned to their Lord pleasing (*raḍīya*) and pleased (*marḍīyya*), which he wrote for some brethren. I have appended some of what I have found in other authoritative books because there are many people in these times who have made some graves like idols.’ The epistle does indeed draw heavily from the *Ighatha* to describe the history of grave-worship and idolatry and the rationale which underpins the prohibition. The epistle is a virtual replica of *Majlis LVII*.

Risāla fī ḥukm al-dukhān – Epistle on the [Legal] status of tobacco smoking. Or *Risāleh dukhāniyyeh – Epistle on tobacco.*¹¹⁸ This is fundamentally a fatwa which argues for the prohibition of tobacco; citing Galen and Avicenna as medical authorities, Marghinānī and other Ḥanafī jurists, and drawing heavily from al-Lāqānī’s epistle on the same subject, it is a carefully crafted, systematic exposition of the harms of tobacco.

The *Majālis al-abrār* is al-Āqḥiṣārī’s longest work and subsumes many of the concerns and interests which he treats in the shorter epistles. Michot highlights the fact that al-Āqḥiṣārī recycles material from the *Dukhāniyye* and, via a table of correspondences, is able to show that *Majlis XCVI and XCVII* are essentially both abridgements of his fatwa against tobacco. I have, in my own reading of the *Majālis*, found other places in the text

¹¹⁸ MSS. *Dārülmecnevi* 258, ff. 70v-74v; *Harput* 429, ff. 194r-199v; *Kiliç Ali Paşa* 1035, ff. 31v-36v; *Reisülküttab* 1182, ff. 52v-57r. See also the extract copied in MS. *Giresun* 114 (28 Hk 3587/7), p. 27: *Maṭlab fī ḥaqq al-dukhān – Inquiry concerning tobacco*. Yazmalar: Manisha İHK, Akhisar Zeynelzade Koleksiyon, 45 Ak Ze 1602/1, ff. I+1v-6r; İHK, 45 Hk 2937/5, ff. 43r-47v. This bibliography, together with other works of al-Āqḥiṣārī, are in *Against Smoking*, pp. 7-8 and Y. Michot, *L’opium et le Cafe*, p. 55, n.1.

where material is recycled, which further reinforces the usefulness of studying al-Āqḥiṣārī's ideas through what is his magnum opus. Of course there the benefit of al-Āqḥiṣārī's habitual recycling is that the ascription of the corresponding texts to their author is reinforced.

By virtue of Michot's study of the *Dukhāniyye* a fairly accurate dating of the *Majālis* is possible. Michot discovers that the *Dukhāniyye* draws heavily upon the *Kitāb naṣīḥat al-ikhwān bi-ijtināb al-dukhān* – *The Book Recommending to the Brothers to Keep Away from Tobacco*, a treatise authored by the Mālikī shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Laḳānī (d. 1041/1631); both the *Dukhāniyye* and the *Majālis* with councils *XCVI* and *XCVII* were authored sometime between 1025/1616, the date of the composition of the *Naṣīḥa* in Cairo, and the year that al-Āqḥiṣārī passed away, i.e. 1041/1631 or 1043/1634. Michot points out that the implications of this are that the *Dukhāniyye* and the *Majālis* were thus composed during the years immediately preceding, or corresponding to, the imperial ban on tobacco proclaimed by Murād IV after the great fire of Istanbul in 1043/1633.¹¹⁹ The *Majālis al-abrār* was surely al-Āqḥiṣārī's most significant scholarly contribution, indicated by the fact that the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul alone holds over forty hand-written copies.¹²⁰ Though commanding primary focus in this research, there will be occasion when other epistles of al-Āqḥiṣārī's will be introduced either for elucidation of discussions in the *Majālis* or in order to understand aspects of his thought which are not treated at all in the *Majālis*.

¹¹⁹ *Against Smoking*, pp. 34-35. See p. 30ff for the table of correspondences establishing the recycling of parts of the *Dukhāniyye* within the *Majālis*.

¹²⁰ For a description of these manuscripts, see Y, Michot, *L'opium et le café* (Paris-Beirut: Albouraq, 2008), pp. 56-61.

Majālis al-abrār: A Manifesto for Reform

Before entering upon a discussion of the *Majālis*' themes, it is worth considering who the intended audience of the text is. Michot is probably right when he asserts that 'the pious rigorist admonitions of the *Majālis* are not primarily intended for a prince or a ruler but, rather, for the *petit bourgeois* milieu of Ottoman bazaaris, ulema and civil servants'.¹²¹ This statement, however, requires qualification: The *Majālis* is composed in Arabic, in a style which is loquacious and very repetitive. It is replete with jargon, demanding of its reader a familiarity with theology, jurisprudence, Sufism and philosophy. Whilst, then, the message was probably aimed in the first instance at the *petit bourgeois*, al-Āqḥiṣārī would probably have wanted the content to be modulated by the scholar or the sermonist in a way appropriate to its final audience.

For the sermonist, each *Majlis* would provide a structure for his Friday sermon (*khuṭbat al-jumu'a*) or for his study circle (*ḥalqa*). The repetition of material, which might have indicated that the *Majālis* is primarily for the purposes aforementioned, is apologised for in the introduction, suggesting that al-Āqḥiṣārī wanted the text at the same time to be read as a monograph. Of course, the fact that each chapter is individual is also suggestive of this.

It is difficult not to speculate on the rationale underpinning al-Āqḥiṣārī's choice of title. The word *majlis* had currency in Ottoman society among Sufi circles especially, and was

¹²¹ Y. Michot, *Against Smoking*, p. 12.

used to describe sessions for *samāʿ* and *dhikr*.¹²² The assemblies organised for more trivial pursuits, such as smoking tobacco and opium, were also referred to *majālis*. It is possible that al-Āqḥiṣārī was communicating a message to those who organised assemblies of the sort just mentioned, signalling that theirs were attended by the impious, whereas those who might lend an ear to a reading of his *Majālis* were of an altogether more savoury ilk. Another possibility is that al-Āqḥiṣārī was contrasting sermons which are based on the *Majālis al-abrār* with those sermons of the arrogant sermonists, who in *Majlis LXXXII*, he accuses of organising “assemblies of the impious”.¹²³

It is also very likely that al-Āqḥiṣārī was hoping to appeal to an audience that places emphasis on the *ḥadīth*, but also Sufī orders like the Naqshbandīs who sought to support wherever possible their own practices with the *ḥadīth*, all part of a project aimed at strengthening claims to orthodoxy. This might be garnered from the content rather than the title of the work, since the *Majālis* is an explanation of one hundred *ḥadīth* from the *Maṣābīḥ al-sunna*. As for choosing the *Maṣābīḥ al-sunna*, it is not difficult to see that al-Āqḥiṣārī was trying to ensure the popularity of his work by linking it to one of the most important *ḥadīth* collections taught on the Ottoman curriculum.¹²⁴

¹²² See F. Robinson, ‘Madjlis’, *EF*² for a general survey of the term in each of its social and political usages. See also R. Sellheim, ‘Samāʿ’, *EF*².

¹²³ *Majlis LXXXII*, f. 226v.

¹²⁴ On the *Maṣābīḥ al-sunna* see F. Robinson, ‘Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals’, p. 176.

The hundred topics entered upon in the *Majālis* are as follows:

- 1 *Dhikr Allāh*
- 2 Eminence of *dhikr*
- 3 Eminence of faith
- 4 Love of the Prophet
- 5 Faith in his teachings
- 6 Tasting the savour of faith
- 7 Faith in the Prophet
- 8 Obeying and disobeying the Prophet
- 9 Following the Prophet
- 10 *Mu'min, muslim, mujāhid...*
- 11 The best *dhikr* and invocations
- 12 The intercession of the Prophet
- 13 *Ikhḷās al-tawḥīd*
- 14 The faith that will save
- 15 *Fiṭrat al-islām*
- 16 The various kinds of *kufr*
- 17 The prohibition of praying near tombs
- 18 The various kinds of innovations
- 19 *Raghā'ib* and other innovated supererogatory prayers
- 20 *Faḍā'il al-Ḥajj* and its innovations
- 21 *Faḍā'il al-zakat* and forsaking it
- 22 *Faḍā'il al-ṣawm*
- 23 Eminence of fasting in Sha'bān
- 24 *Laylat al-barā'a: sunna* and innovations
- 25 The sighting of the Ramaḍān new moon
- 26 Ramaḍān
- 27 Intention, fasting, breaking the fast
- 28 *Tarāwīḥ* prayers
- 29 Delaying the prayer and breaking the fast
- 30 Expiation for breaking the fast
- 31 Ramaḍān retreat and *Laylat al-Qadr*
- 32 *Ṣadaqat al-fiṭr*, the two feasts and their innovations
- 33 Fasting in Shawwāl
- 34 The ten first days of Dhū l-Ḥijja
- 35 The sacrifice than three days
- 36 Mu arram and 'Āshūrā' fasting
- 37 'Āshūrā': traditions and innovations
- 38 Curing the sick
- 39 *ayra* and *fāl*, blameworthy and sunnī
- 40 Brotherhood in this world's affairs prohibitions
- 41 Disasters, repentance and invocations
- 42 Repelling disasters with invocations
- 43 Praying in case of frights
- 44 Prayers for the solar and lunar eclipses
- 45 Praying for rain
- 46 Learning the prescriptions and Qur'an
- 47 Psalmody of the Qur'an
- 48 The call to prayer
- 49 The eminence of Friday
- 50 Shaking hands
- 51 The obligation of prayer
- 52 The obligation of praying as prescribed
- 53 The five daily prayers and expiation
- 54 The eminence of collective prayer
- 55 Funeral prayer
- 56 Saying *Lā ilāha illā Llāh* and Paradise
- 57 The visitation of tombs
- 58 Remembering death and getting ready for it
- 59 The plague and prophylaxis
- 60 Patience in case of plague
- 61 The eminence of patience and disasters
- 62 On the ḥadīth "Collect five things..."
- 63 The calling of servants to account
- 64 Calling oneself to account before death
- 65 Inviting the *umma* to repent now
- 66 On the ḥadīth "God accepts the repentance..."
- 67 The intelligent and the foolish
- 68 *Taqwā* and good character
- 69 Licit earnings
- 70 The prohibition of monopolies
- 71 The fates of traders in the hereafter
- 72 Trading, truthfulness and trustfulness
- 73 The true nature of usury
- 74 Forward buying (*salam*) and other contracts
- 75 Begging
- 76 The rights of slaves
- 77 The prohibition of homosexuality
- 78 The prohibition of drinking wine
- 79 The prohibition of cheating (*fulūl*)
- 80 The appearing of troubles (*fitna*)
- 81 Judges, bribes and false testimonies
- 82 Who should be appointed preacher
- 83 The renewers of the religion, every century
- 84 Eminence of being the first greeting another
- 85 Turning away from a Muslim brother for more
- 86 The prohibition of low opinion and spying
- 87 Frequenting pervers and eating with them
- 88 The best action: loving and hating for God
- 89 Following the Prophet's commands and
- 90 The preeminence of God's mercy
- 91 "Satan circulates in man like his blood"
- 92 Being tempted is not punished
- 93 Satan and the angel are close to man
- 94 Islam started as something foreign
- 95 The grace of good health
- 96 Not entering the mosque if smelling bad
- 97 Forsaking what one should not be interested in
- 98 Recommendation concerning women
- 99 On the ḥadīth "Ask for advice of women..."
- 100 Women's obligations towards their husbands¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Cited in Y. Michot, *Against Smoking*, pp. 11-12.

The list reveals the scope of the *Majālis* – al-Āqḥiṣārī clearly intends to cover the major questions of Islamic theology, law and mysticism in his age. Perhaps what the list does not suggest is the amount of repetition which occurs in the *Majālis*. It seems al-Āqḥiṣārī was not intending to conceal this; with an unrepentant tone, he states in the preamble to the *Majālis* that he intends to benefit the reader by repetition of “important topics”.

Al-Āqḥiṣārī’s Sources

The choice of authorities quoted by al-Āqḥiṣārī betrays his doctrinal leanings and exhibit the specific nature of his reformist agenda, in particular his critique of specific Sufi practices such as the visitation of graves for the purposes of intercession. The preamble to the *Majālis* provides us with a clear statement of intent:

This text (*maktūb*) [that has been] penned is an explanation of some of the great *ṣaḥīḥ* and *ḥasan ḥadīths* contained in the book *Maṣābīḥ* [...] I have compiled it for some brothers and have appended to it what I have found [to be relevant] from the authoritative books (*al-kutub al-muṭabara*) in the [sciences of] *tafsīr* (exegesis), *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *kalām* (dialectical theology) and *taṣawwuf* (Sufism). I will make clear the correct doctrines (*ʿtiqādāt ṣaḥīḥa*) and the actions of the Hereafter (*ʿmāl al-ākḥira*) and I will warn of (*uḥarrizu*) seeking assistance from the graves (*istimdād al-qubūr*) and other [such actions] which are done by the disbelievers (*kafara*) and the people of innovation, who are misled and misleading sinners (*ahl al-bidaʿ al-dāllat al-muḍillat al-fajara*); this is because I have seen many people in these times who have made some graves like idols – they pray at them and offer sacrifices there. There issues forth from them deeds and statements which do not befit the people of faith (*ahl al-īmān*). Therefore, I want to make clear what the Law (*sharʿ*) has brought in this regard, so that truth will be differentiated from falsehood.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ *Majālis*, f. 1r.

It is obvious that *ḥadīth* is an important authority cited in the *Majālis*, but what is interesting in this preamble is that al-Āqḥiṣārī does not in any way suggest what the basis is for selecting *ḥadīth* from the *Maṣābīḥ* which he commentates on; it appears as though he selected those *ḥadīth* which aided his stated intention of ‘making clear what the Law has brought’ in matters relating to customary practice, and which were practiced by “the people of innovation”. There are, however, also other books of tradition which al-Āqḥiṣārī cites, it is not that he restricts himself to traditions in the *Maṣābīḥ*, and there are ample references to the Qur’an throughout also. The Qur’an and *ḥadīth* are the two authorities most frequently cited, no doubt to provide strength to his own doctrinal and legal positions. Qur’anic citations are often accompanied by commentaries based on classical *tafsīr* – Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid and Ḍaḥḥāk are among the early commentators he uses particularly often. This is indicative of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s attempt to find support for his own doctrinal persuasions by invoking names associated with the ancients, *Salaf*, those early Muslims whose views are considered by Sunnīs to be virtually unchallengeable; it was a wise strategy to adopt, one which he may have adopted from his readings of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim; at the same time, al-Āqḥiṣārī appears rather sparing in his use of later scholarship, and when he does so, it is most often of jurisprudential works.

When citing jurisprudential rulings al-Āqḥiṣārī has clear preference for the Ḥanafī school. He cites several of the most respected jurisprudential works of the time: the commentary on the *Majmaʿ al-baḥrayn* of Firiṣhti-Oğlu (known as Ibn Malak), Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, al-Jaṣṣāṣ when treating the rites of the Ḥajj, Qāḍīkhān’s *Fatāwā*, Imām Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Sattār al-Kardārī’s (d. 642/1244) *al-Fatāwā al-Bazzāziyya* and the most distinguished

of the legal manuals on the madrasa curriculum, the *Hidāya*, al-Marghinānī's commentary on al-Qudūrī's *Bidāyat al-mubtadī*, together with Ibn Humām's commentary. It is primarily when treating issues from the perspective of legal theory that al-Āqḥiṣārī ventures outside of the Ḥanafī school, and it is here that he can be found citing al-Ṭurṭūshī, Abū Shāma, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim.¹²⁷

The two latterly mentioned authorities, both representative of the Ḥanbalī school, are used extensively, more than any other non-scriptural authority cited by the Anatolian. One finds especially when treating the visitation of graves, prayer besides graves and the heresies of specific Sufis, that al-Āqḥiṣārī marshals the arguments of these two Ḥanbalī scholars, particularly Ibn al-Qayyim. Here al-Āqḥiṣārī is in keeping with the tradition of Birgivī, who was probably the first to introduce a Ḥanbalī critique into the Ḥanafī Ottoman milieu, as well as other Qāḍīzādeli reformers. His reliance on the Qur'an, *ḥadīth*, early authorities and later Ḥanbalī scholars betrays al-Āqḥiṣārī broader attempt to return religious practice back to the "Muḥammadan Path" – the model which was first brought to Ottoman attention by Birgivī.

It is striking that al-Āqḥiṣārī uses Ibn Taymiyya but is careful not to cite him or his works directly. Probably one of the reasons for this was that Ibn Taymiyya was critical of Islamic personalities whose names were held as sacrosanct in Ottoman lands - especially

¹²⁷ Sanūsī on *kalām* (f. 18v); al-Qushayrī's *Tabḥīr* (f. 23r); al-Jaṣṣās, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Tafsīr* (f. 24r); Ghazālī's *Iḥyā* (f. 25r) and *Ayyuha l-walad* (f. 25v); al-Qurṭubī's *Tadhkira* (f. 32v); Ibn Qayyim *Ighātha* (f. 50v; 51v-r, 138r; 158v); al-Ṭurṭūshī (f. 52v; 73r on Barā'at); *Majma' al-baḥrayn* (f. 60v); Firishte-Oglu (Ibn Malak) *Sharḥ majma' al-baḥrayn* (f. 60v); Abū Bakr al-Rāzī for a fatwa on Ḥajj (f. 64v); Abu l-Qāsim al-Ṣafādī (f. 64v); Abū Layth (f. 65r) on Ḥajj; Qāḍīkhān *Fatāwā* (f. 86r); Ibn Sīnā (f. 85v); Galen (f. 85v) both on Tobacco; Imām al-Kardārī, Muḥammad b. °abd al-Sattār (d. 642) *al-Fatāwā al-Bazzāziyya* (f. 108v); Abū Shāma (f. 158v); al-Marghinānī *al-Hidāya*; Ibn Humām *Sharḥ*.

al-Ghazālī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Ibn ʿArabī. This would have meant the rejection of anyone advocating his ideas. Kātib Çelebi gives a sense of what the mainstream sentiment was likely to have been in Turkey towards the Shaykh al-Islām. In the following excerpt, he mentions Ibn Taymiyya in the context of his prohibition of visiting graves:

[Ibn Taymīya's] extremism in several matters of this kind caused him to fall foul of the Ulema in Egypt and Syria; they subjected him to many inquisitions and brought him to trial before the Sultan of Egypt. The public were divided, both sides numerous broadsheets. Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Qayyim were his disciples; in their writings they deal exhaustively with these inquisitions. His opponents declared Ibn Taymīya an infidel and eventually imprisoned him. He died in prison in 728/1328.¹²⁸

Conclusion

Despite the lack of vital information in the sources of Ottoman history relating to al-Āqḥiṣārī's personal life, it is not difficult to elicit from the *Majālis* his fundamental legal and theological views. Most significantly for the present study, we can elicit from the text's intellectual concerns and its citations of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim that the *Majālis* fits neatly within the Qāḍīzādeli corpus of activist manuals. Yet there is much which is yet to be garnered from a close textual archaeology of the *Majālis*. Central to this study is the unearthing of the sources of al-Āqḥiṣārī's spiritual outlook, as well as the extent to which his *Majālis* was influenced by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim. These questions will be addressed in the following chapters.

¹²⁸ Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, p. 93. For a closer examination of why al-Āqḥiṣārī may have omitted Ibn Taymiyya's name, see Chapter IV.

III. MUHAMMADAN SPIRITUALITY

This chapter aims to reconstruct Aḥmad al-Āqḥiṣārī's spiritual orientation on the basis of his *Majālis al-abrār* and the smaller, but equally significant, *Risāla fī-l-sulūk*. The chapter proceeds to dissect al-Āqḥiṣārī's spiritual approach into its constituent parts; as this is undertaken, it becomes apparent that he is drawing from a tradition which had solid foundations in Turkey: Naqshbandī Sufism. Along the way, the chapter seeks to eliminate the possibility of a Khalwatī influence on al-Āqḥiṣārī and concludes with confirmation of the centrality that mysticism had within his religious *Weltanschauung*.

The Naqshbandī Paradigm

There are several pertinent reasons why it is apt to commence a study of the *Majālis al-abrār* by first attempting to situate al-Āqḥiṣārī within the broader spiritual tradition. For one, the opening chapters of his *Majālis* treat issues which fall under the general rubric of *taṣawwuf*. The first *Majlis*, for example, is on the remembrance of God (*dhikr Allāh*), which both describes the merit of the action and the preferred method with which to undertake it. The subsequent chapters also focus in the main on *dhikr* and its repercussions – gnosis (*maʿrifa*), miracles (*karāmāt*) and sainthood (*wilāya*) – and there is significant treatment of deviancy, both in matters of belief and practice. Secondly, it is a stated aim of al-Āqḥiṣārī to 'make clear the correct beliefs (*iʿqādāt ṣaḥīḥa*) and the works of the Hereafter (*aʿmāl al-ākḥira*), and to warn against seeking aid from graves

and other practices of the disbelievers (*kafara*) and heretics (*ahl al-bida'*).¹²⁹ This raises the question, what notion of orthodoxy and orthopraxy does the Anatolian reformer have in mind? In pointing out correct beliefs and practices, is he in fact advocating a specific school of law or mystical order? These are questions which deserve attention. Their responses will effectively contextualise the ideas, the proselytisation and indeed the invective which one is confronted with in the *Majālis*. By treating these at the outset, a contextualisation of many related issues which al-Āqḥiṣārī broaches in the *Majālis* will be facilitated – issues which would otherwise appear rather disjointed.

There are lengthy condemnations in the *Majālis* of several religious practices which had widespread currency in Ottoman Turkey, particularly amongst the more libertarian Sufi orders. We already know that Aḥmad al-Rūmī is opposed to any act of ritual worship which has not explicitly been sanctioned by the Prophet himself – he is opposed to extra-scriptural prayers which are performed in congregation, psalmody of the Qur'an, shaking hands after prayer, singing and dancing and so forth. In later chapters when some of these issues are investigated, one will see him as no less rigorist than contributors to the anti-*bida'* literature who came before him, whether Abū Shāma, al-Ṭurṭūshī or Ibn Taymiyya. For two matters in particular, however, al-Āqḥiṣārī reserved his most venomous opposition – both were directly related to the Sufis. The first of these was mystical revelation (*kashf*) which usually accompanied rigorous spiritual exercise (*mujāhada*); and the second was the veneration of graves (*ta'ẓīm al-qubūr*) with the intention of seeking the intercession of and supplicating to the inhabitants.

¹²⁹ *Majālis al-abrār*, f. 1r.

At times, al-Āqḥiṣārī moves from general criticism of mystical practice to a specific attack in which he speaks directly about the Sufis he has in mind. We are familiar with just how antagonistic the Qāḍīzādelis were towards the Bayrāmīs, the Mawlawīs and antinomianism in all of its varieties. We are also familiar with their particular antagonism for the Khalwatīs. In an entirely analogous manner, whilst al-Āqḥiṣārī only intimates at other Sufi orders, with regards to the Khalwatīs - “the people of retreat” (*aṣḥāb al-khalwa*) – he speaks quite forthrightly.

Whereas Qāḍīzādeli opposition to Sufi practices has invariably been understood as the movement’s absolute rejection of Sufism – Ahmet Yaşar Ocak’s description of them as, ‘le seul mouvement antisoufi au vrai sens du mot dans l’histoire ottoman’ is a typical example of this¹³⁰ - a reading of al-Āqḥiṣārī leaves no room for doubt that his criticism is was of an intra-Sufi kind.¹³¹ This is since in the *Majālis al-abrār*, and indeed other works of al-Āqḥiṣārī, our author speaks clearly about the centrality of the spiritual path in Islam; there is no doubt that it forms a key part of his religious itinerary. Yet at the same time, al-Āqḥiṣārī does not make clear whether he is an advocate or affiliate of a specific order. There is no mention of an *isnād*, a *silsila*, well-known *Mashāyikh* who might indicate the preference for a specific order, or indeed the mention of any Sufi orders by name;¹³² one is left only to speculate therefore about what model of Sufism he supports. This said,

¹³⁰ A. Ocak, ‘Oppositions au soufisme dans l’Empire ottoman aux quinzième et seizième siècles,’ in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, edited by F. De Jong and B. Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 610. Zilfi should be included here, as well as other mentioned in the survey of literature. These scholars have perhaps been led to this by the fact that the movement would go to quite extreme lengths to stop practices it deemed heretical; it is indeed difficult to reconcile how such extremism could be associated with a Sufi movement.

¹³¹ Examples of intra-Sufi criticism in the history of Islam abound. See for example J. Van Ess, ‘Sufism and its opponents: reflections on topoi, tribulations, and transformations,’ in *Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 22-44.

¹³² Even the Khalwatīs, who were on the receiving end of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s polemics are not named in the *Majālis* explicitly, but only as *aṣḥāb al-khalwa*.

there is a rather striking resemblance between the model al-Āqḥiṣārī presents, especially in his *Risālat al-murshid wa l-murīd*, and the methodology of the Naqshbandī Order. There is much more to be said about this, but before commencing any further, the broader dynamics of Naqshbandī piety deserves some attention. If indeed al-Āqḥiṣārī was drawing from the Naqshbandī Order, a survey of the key doctrines and practices by which the order differentiated itself from others, and a subsequent assessment of these in light of al-Āqḥiṣārī's own agenda for spiritual reform will serve us well.

The Naqshbandīs

The Naqshbandīs derive their name from Bahā° al-Dīn Naqshband (d. 791/1389), the epithet of the fourteenth-century master of the order Muḥammad al-Uwaysī al-Bukhārī.¹³³ Weismann explains that a combination of the Persian words *naqsh* (imprint) and *band* (seal) form to mean that the divine name of God is fixed in the heart.¹³⁴ As was usual with Sufī brotherhoods, guilds of law and schools of theology, it was the disciples of Bahā° al-Dīn who would themselves establish the founding principles of the path and then invoke the name of the master as a source of legitimisation.¹³⁵

The order is considered to have passed through various phases in its history, each distinguishable by certain changes in emphases marked by powerful personalities

¹³³ I. Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 14

¹³⁴ I. Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, p. 14.

¹³⁵ I. Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, p. 14.

connected with it.¹³⁶ Hourani presents them as follows: from Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 11/633 or 12/634) to Abū Yazīd Tayfūr al-Bistāmī (d. 263/877 or 264/878) Naqshbandīs call it the ‘Ṣiddīqiyya’; from Abū Yazīd to ‘Abd al-Khālīq al-Ghujdawānī (d. 561/1166) the ‘Tayfūriyya’; from al-Ghujdawānī to Bahā’ al-Dīn Naqshband the ‘Khojagawaniyya’; from Naqshband to Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1034/1624) ‘The Naqshbandiyya’; from Sirhindī to Khālīd al-Baghdādī (d. 1242/1827) the ‘Mujaddidiyya’; and from Khālīd onwards the ‘Khālidiyya’.¹³⁷

Despite new changes in direction under the impact of its masters over time, there would continue to exist essential attributes of the order in terms both of its broader doctrinal outlook and its distinct attitude towards the Sharī‘a. Two markers of Naqshbandī piety that set it apart from most other mystic orders were sobriety (*sukūn*) against intoxication (*sukr*), and scripturalism against mystical intuition. Towards explaining these markers, D. Le Gall says:

Doctrinally, the Naqshbandīs did not view their fidelity to the *Sharī‘a* as a public or political commitment, but rather understood it to entail sobriety in devotional practice and personal observance of religious duties [...] The *tarīqa* literature illustrates an orthodoxy construed in a rather specific way. What is meant in the Naqshbandi manuals by observance of the *Sharī‘a* is in fact the notion of adopting the rigidity (*al-akhdh bi-l-‘azīma*) as opposed to taking legal dispensations (*al-‘amal bi-l-rukhsa*). [...] the *‘amal bi-l-‘azīma* was viewed as constraining behaviour rather than mystical journeying or doctrine. It was framed as a matter of individual observance of sharī‘a duties such as prayer and especially ritual purity more than a summons to sharī‘a-abidance

¹³⁶ A. Hourani, ‘Sufism and Modern Islam: Mawlana Khalid and the Naqshbandi Order’, in *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (University of California Press, 1980), p. 79.

¹³⁷ Hourani, ‘Sufism and Modern Islam’, p. 79.

in the larger society. And it was thought to be embodied especially in the Naqshbandi devotional regimen, with silent dhikr at its core.¹³⁸

The Naqshbandīs differentiated themselves from competing orders in several other ways. One of these was to project back their initiatic chain, or *silsila*, not as was customary for almost all Sufi orders, to the Prophet via his cousin and son-in-law Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), but rather to the Prophet via Abū Bakr, close companion of the Prophet and first caliph of Islam.¹³⁹ Abū Bakr was seen as an emblem of piety and conservatism, and also as one of the staunchest advocates of the Sharīʿa from among the Prophet's companions; the Naqshbandīs would hope that their connection to him might reflect their broader commitment of bringing mystical practice in line with the Qur'an and *Sunna*.

The conservatism of the Naqshbandī Order is explained by its seventeenth century personality, Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, also known as Imām Rabbānī.¹⁴⁰ For him, the distinctive features of the Naqshbandī way, in particular its strict adherence to the *Sunna*,

¹³⁸ D. Le Gall, 'Forgotten Naqshbandis and the Culture of Pre-modern Sufi Brotherhoods,' in *Studia Islamica*, 97 (2003), pp. 87-119, esp. pp. 92-93.

¹³⁹ H. Algar, 'The Naqshabandi Order: A Preliminary Survey of Its History and Significance,' in *Studia Islamica*, 44 (1976), pp. 123-152 (p. 126). Algar further explains that for those who believe in the retrospectivity of the *isnād* tradition, the Naqshbandi association with Abū Bakr becomes interesting for political reasons: firstly, it immediately positions the Naqshbandīs in contradistinction to other Sunni Sufi orders, who typically trace their lineage through ʿAlī; secondly, and more fundamentally, from the doctrinal perspective, it places them in opposition to the Shīʿa, who were perennially viewed as enemies by the Naqshbandīs. Algar argues that, notwithstanding the obvious political implications of the connection back to Abū Bakr, there are other more pertinent reasons to consider why the Naqshbandīs would prefer to view their order as having its source in a notable companion such as Abū Bakr. Says Algar, 'The Naqshbandīs have always prided themselves that their path is that of the Companions of the Prophet, with nothing added or subtracted – theirs is a path which shuns all forms of innovation and which adheres strictly to the Sharīʿa for spiritual realisation. The austerity, conservatism and largely uncontroversial life of Abū Bakr reflect those qualities which the Naqshbandis were zealously advocating. For more on this, see Algar, 'The Naqshabandi Order', pp. 123-152, esp. p. 126ff; See also D. Le Gall, pp. 107-108.

¹⁴⁰ On his life and works see Y. Friedmann, *Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); I. Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, pp. 55-67; and A. Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), pp. 90-95.

are most clearly expressed in its avoidance of musical sessions (*samāʿ*), dervish dances (*raqs*) and *dhikr* with loud voice; its eschewal of excessively austere practices and severe exercises; its observance of moderation in food, drink, sleep and dress; its disparaging of ecstasy (*wajd*), visions (*mushāhadāt*) and illuminations (*tajalliyāt*); its censuring of boastful claims and ecstatic statements (*shaṭḥāt*); and its subjection of mystical revelations (*makshūfāt*) to the doctrines of the Law.¹⁴¹ Sirhindī insisted that the goal of Naqshbandī *taṣawwuf* is neither union with God, nor participation in His attributes, but simply to obey the Sharīʿa and to be a faithful servant of God. For him, there is no stage higher than the stage of servanthood (*ʿabdiyāt*).¹⁴² Sirhindī was thus an ardent advocate of Sharīʿa-faithfulness, and his project of synthesising the Sharīʿa and *Ḥaqīqa* left an indelible mark upon Naqshbandī piety to this day.

At the level of practice, a key differentiator of the Naqshbandīs, separating them from virtually all other Sufi brotherhoods, was their adoption of the silent *dhikr*, something which they claimed was inherited from Abū Bakr. Algar relays the origin of the silent *dhikr*, a story which returns to the moment of the Prophet’s migration from Mecca to Medina in the year 633:

¹⁴¹ M.A. Ansari, *Sufism and Shari‘ah: A Study of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi’s Effort to Reform Sufism* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1986), p. 17.

¹⁴² Ansari, *Sufism and Shari‘ah*, p. 17. In his *Maktūbāt*, Sirhindī says: ‘The object of man’s creation is to worship and obey God as He has ordained; and the object of worship and obedience is to achieve conviction (*yaqīn*) which is the essence of faith [...] The object of *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ* which are the essence of *walāyat*, is to acquire this conviction, and nothing else. If one understands *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ* in any other sense which suggests the fusion (of man) into God, it is a blasphemous distortion of truth. Many things come from the mouth of a Sufi in the state of intoxication, which it is his duty to eventually overcome, turn to God, and ask for His forgiveness. Ibrāhīm b. Shaybān, one of the great Sufis mentioned in the *Ṭabaqāt*, says: ‘The real *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ* consist in sincerely believing in the unity of God (*ikhlās al-wahdāniyya*) and honestly living as His bondservant (*ṣiḥḥat al-ʿubūdiyya*). Anything over and above it, is sheer error and infidelity’. (Cited in Ansari, *Sufism and Shari‘ah*, pp. 176-177).

It is held that the Prophet instructed Abu Bakr in what is known alternatively as hidden or silent dhikr (*dhikr-i khafī*) and dhikr of the heart (*dhikr al-qalb*), as opposed to open or vocal dhikr (*dhikr-i jahr*) and dhikr of the tongue (*dhikr al-lisān*). The transmission of the dhikr took place during the hijra when the Prophet and Abu Bakr were together in the cave: Abū Bakr faced the Prophet, his breast turned towards him, sitting on his heels with his hands placed on his knees and his eyes closed. The Prophet then silently enunciated the form of the dhikr- *lā ilāha illa'llāh* - three times, and was followed by Abū Bakr. This transmission of the dhikr signified the beginning of the *silsila* that was ultimately to acquire the designation Naqshbandī, and also furnished the archetype for all subsequent initiation into the *silsila*. Initiation is essentially the transmission of the dhikr, from the most recent link in the initiatic chain to the new disciple.¹⁴³

The Naqshbandīs have generally taken the silent *dhikr* to be more meritorious than the audible *dhikr*, without expressly condemning the latter. There have been in its history those of its shaykhs who moved beyond disapproval of the audible *dhikr* to complete interdiction; the author of the *Tuhfat al-ṭālibīn*, who proclaimed that it was of ‘no benefit’, is an example, as is Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī.¹⁴⁴

The most important principles of the Naqshbandī way are set out in *Kalimāt-i qudsiyya* – *The Sacred Words*, of the eighth master of the order, °Abd al-Khāliq al-Ghujduwānī; they betray the rather distinct approach of the order towards mystical wayfaring. The work

¹⁴³ Ansari, *Sufism and Shari‘ah*, p. 129. Le Gall notes, ‘For the Naqshbandīs, silent dhikr meant more than the shunning of loud singing, musical accompaniment, and dance. It entailed a technique of enunciating the dhikr formula "There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God" (*lā ilāha illa Allah Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*) in the heart, so that the recitation would be inaudible and imperceptible even to a person standing next to the reciter. Moreover, rather than simply an inaudible recitation, this was meant to be an individual, interiorized, and continuous technique that one performed at all times and while engaged in a myriad of activities. Ideally it was to become a "natural disposition" (*malaka*), which even the reciter's heart would cease to sense, so as to become oblivious to anything that was not God, including the very act of remembrance." In a well-known formulation of Tāj al-Dīn al-'Uthmānī, it was this "continuity" (*dawām*) of "servitude" and "presence with God" that was the epitome of the Naqshbandi creed.’ (‘Forgotten Naqshbandīs’, p. 94).

¹⁴⁴ See D. Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandīs in the Ottoman world, 1450-1700* (Sunny Press, 2006), p. 116. For Sirhindī's view, see *Al-Maktūbāt al-rabbāniyya* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 2004), 1: 440.

outlines eight principles of the path which aim at governing the doctrinal and ritual methodology of the Naqshbandīs.¹⁴⁵ Two points in particular are striking and will certainly shed further light on the kind of activist-orientated Sufism which we shall be treating in the pages below in relation to al-Āqḥiṣārī. These are:

- 1) *Khelvet dār anjumān* – solitude within society: this proceeds from the recognition that seclusion from society for the purpose of devotion may paradoxically lead to an exaltation of the ego, which is more effectively effaced through a certain mode of existence, and activity within society; inspired by devotion to God.
- 2) *Safar dār vatan* – journeying within the homeland: this principle establishes the importance of the disciple undertaking his spiritual journey within the boundaries of his homeland, rather than seek to migrate from it in the hope of attaining spiritual realisation whilst on his travels.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ The eight principles are categorised into two groups of four: The first includes *bāz gasht*, *yād kard*, *yād dāsh*, and *nigāh dāsh*. The second group comprises *hūsh dar dam*, *naẓar bar qadam*, *safar dar waṭan*, and *khalwat dar anjuman*. For the translations of these, with explanations, see Th. Zarcone, ‘Khawādjagān’, *ET*². The first group described are said to be shared with all other Sufi orders. The second set of principles, however, are what set the Naqshbandīs apart. *Safar dar watan* and *khalwat dar anjuman* are explained in the body of the this study. The second two principles of group two, *hūsh dar dam* and *nazar bar qadam* – awareness in breathing and keeping watch on the steps – allude to an Indian influence, according to Weismann. He quotes Khani, who explains them as the means to keep the heart from distraction when, respectively, the breath enters the body and the eyes look at the world. See Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁶ Algar explains this further: ‘The outward journey through the world, it is true, may serve as a mirror and support for inward wayfaring, but it too is liable to defeat its own purpose, and become an end in itself. Hence the Naqshbandis have emphasized the inward journey, the journey in the homeland that is man’s own inner world and the receptacle of God’s grace. (‘The Naqshbandī Order’, p. 134). Sirhindī, in his *Maktūbāt*, says about this principle, ‘Travelling within one’s homeland is from the firmly established principles of the great masters of the Naqshbandī path, may God sanctify their secret. This order derives a certain experience from such a journey, for it allows for the final stages of the path to be enjoyed very early on’. (*Maktūbāt*, 1: 194). Elsewhere, Sirhindī says it is an essential characteristic of man that he is in need of social interaction, to be in communion with people of his own kind; he is civil (*madanī*) in nature and this is the will of God. Further, says Sirhindī, this is part of man’s perfection, since it is a characteristic endowed by God himself. It follows that a person should be accepting of this part of his nature; if he attempts to deny it within himself, believing that he can dispense with social interaction altogether, he not only proceeds against his own nature, he further risks becoming arrogant. This also connects back to the

Both of these principles characterise a marked shift from the customary demand of many Sufi orders upon the disciple to retreat into isolation and also to migrate from his homeland in the pursuit of a shaykh and/or spiritual ascension. They also highlight the clear aim of the Naqshbandī Order, namely the achievement of personal spiritual reform by direct involvement within the life of the community. These principles aid in explaining the frequent association of the Naqshbandī Order with social reform and political activism.¹⁴⁷

The *rābiṭa* is the last of the spiritual practices of Naqshbandī Sufism which will be surveyed here, once more because of the way in which the Naqshbandīs have used it as a marker of difference, as well as the relevance it has for the present study's aim of reconstructing al-Āqhiṣārī's outlook on Sufism.

importance of remaining within one's homeland. On this, see *Maktūbāt*, 2: 482-483. I. Weismann, says of the two principles – travelling in the home and solitude in the crowd – that they are 'the most consequential in terms of their contribution to the social and political evolution of the Naqshbandīs'. He further says, 'Both reveal a sense of mystical superiority and are paradoxical in nature, a fact that betrays their Malamati origin. The latter of the two in particular is emphasised in the *Rashahat*: "Khwaja Baha'uddin Naqshband was asked: on what is your way founded? He replied: on this phrase, namely solitude in the crowd, which means to be outwardly with the creatures and inwardly with the Creator...God's word [in the Qur'an]: men whom neither commerce nor trafficking diverts them from remembrance of God, indicates to this state." This principle is opposed to another common Sufi practice, the seclusion (*khalwa*) of the adepts in an isolated place in order to conquer the lower soul (*nafs*) and ward off worldly thoughts, which the Naqshbandiyya describes as befitting the weak souls. Conversely, seclusion in the crowd enabled craftsmen and traders, the mainstay of the early Naqshbandiyya, to join the brotherhood without giving up their occupation. Finally, the principle of *safar dar watan* and *khalwat dar anjuman* could be interpreted as encouraging the Naqshbandīs to be involved in the world as part of their mystical vocation.' (*The Naqshbandiyya*, p. 28).

¹⁴⁷ Algar charts the evolution of the Naqshbandīs from a relatively undifferentiated mystical order into a politically and socially active movement that gained a firm foothold in both the religious and political spheres. The process was particularly influenced by Khwāja Naṣir al-Dīn ʿUbaydallāh Aḥrār (d. 895/1490). Algar explains that for Aḥrār, his political activity which aimed at securing the welfare of the Muslims and the supremacy of the Sharīʿa became a *maqām*, a station on the mystical path. It was a 'vision that has continued to dominate Naqshbandi political activity down to the present, and being in itself a mode of devotion, it by no means contradicts the inward cultivation of spirituality but complements it'. ('The Naqshbandi Order', pp. 137-138).

Naqshbandīs have long held that their own order is pre-eminently superior to other orders. According to I. Netton, ‘Their arrogance is matched only by their fierce orthodoxy and desire to adhere to the Sharīʿa as a fundamental ethos’.¹⁴⁸ One of the keys to understanding this self-confidence is to appreciate the centrality of the *rābiʿa* in the Naqshbandī path. Le Gall has suggested that this method ‘became prized only among nineteenth-century Khālīdīs, and that until then it had been viewed with suspicion, primarily because its casting of the shaykh as so utterly indispensable to the mystical quest created potential for abuse.’ She continues, ‘Early Ottoman Naqshbandīs seemed to celebrate the *rābiʿa* as a pillar of their devotional regimen, and some went as far as to call it the most superior or “closest” of all spiritual techniques’.¹⁴⁹ Literally meaning “binding”, *rābiʿa* refers to the technique of keeping the image of the master in the heart, whether he is present or absent. On the part of the master, he is required to reciprocate by turning his heart towards the disciple, referred to as *tawajjuh* (literally, orienting). Hereby, a bond of love is created.

¹⁴⁸ Netton, *Sufi Ritual: The Parallel Universe* (Surrey: Curzon, 1999), p. 61. In the *Maktūbāt*, Sirhindī wrote to various acquaintances pointing out why he believed the Naqshbandī path was the greatest (*aʿẓam*) of all the mystical orders. He argued, amongst other things, that the Naqshbandī path was unique in its principles of *saḡar dār waṭan* and *khalwat dār anjūmān* which afford the disciple speedy results. In all, throughout the *Maktūbāt*, there are at least ten letters written to different acquaintances in which Sirhindī claims the superiority of the Naqshbandīs over all other orders. A contemporary Naqshbandi shaykh, Nazim al-Qubrusi, is apparently no less confident: ‘The Most Distinguished Naqshbandi Order surpasses others in its ability to educate our souls in...[The] highest and very fine aspects of Islamic teaching [*sic*] ... the Naqshbandi Order teaches the very highest good manners, manners which make its followers lovely to their Lord and to all good people .. the Naqshbandi Order originated in the heart of the Prophet, and its authority was passed down through Abu Bakr from one Master to the next in an unbroken chain of succession reaching into our time. Since Abu Bakr, among all the Prophet’s companions, was the only one to receive the full inner truth of the Prophet’s heart, the Naqshbandi Order inherits the fullest and finest of those Prophetic teachings ... The ‘Naqsh’ [design, ‘tattoo’] of the heart is Allah. Whoever wants that ‘Naqsh’ on his heart will come to the Naqshbandi way. *It is the highest way in all religions ... The highest of all religions is Islam and the highest level in Islam is the Naqshbandi order.*’ (Cited in Netton, *Sufi Ritual: the Parallel Universe*, p. 61).

¹⁴⁹ Le Gall, ‘Forgotten Naqshbandīs’, p. 95.

Weismann suggests that, at a practical level, the *rābiṭa* allowed charismatic masters to increase their influence over the disciples and to expand the sphere of their spiritual authority, while leaving them time for other pursuits.¹⁵⁰ Whilst such analyses are indeed useful, the view of the Naqshbandīs has long been to see the *rābiṭa* as a key instrument for achieving extinction (*fanāʾ*) in the divine. Since extinction in God is deemed to be the final stage of spiritual ascendancy – and therefore the most difficult stage – the Naqshbandīs developed a tripartite system whereby the disciple annihilates himself first in his shaykh (*fanāʾ fi-l-shaykh*), then in the Prophet (*fanāʾ fi-l-rasūl*), and then finally in God. The first two stages both facilitate progress towards the end goal, but also, mean that the shaykh remains involved in the disciple's wayfaring. The shaykh acts as a bridge to the divine.¹⁵¹

According to Le Gall, the *rābiṭa* was used by Naqshbandīs as a substitute for ascetic exercises, *mujāhadāt*, such as supererogatory fasting, night vigils and ritual seclusion; these were derided by them just as they were derided by the legists, since they were not scripturally sanctioned.¹⁵² She further explains that, more generally, the *rābiṭa* was conceived as sharing the sober, interiorised, and continuous character of the silent *dhikr* and the *murāqaba*.¹⁵³ In all, the *rābiṭa* was another key differentiator of Naqshbandī

¹⁵⁰ Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, p. 29.

¹⁵¹ For more on the concept of *fanāʾ fi-l-shaykh*, *fanāʾ fi-l-rasūl* and *fanāʾ fi-llāh*, see J. Ter Haar, 'The Spiritual Guide in the Naqshbandī Order,' in *The Heritage of Sufism*, Vol. II, edited by L. Lewisohn, p. 320. Le Gall says, 'In several ways the *rābiṭa* represented the epitome or apex of two staples of the Naqshbandī claim to superiority, the *suḥba*, "intimate companion-ship" between shaykh and disciple, and the *irshād* or close guidance through which the shaykh led his disciples on a transformative process of advancing toward mystical union. It is in this context that some Naqshbandīs described the *rābiṭa* as enabling shaykhs to lead their disciples to "witnessing" in the shortest time.' ('Forgotten Naqshbandīs', pp. 97-98).

¹⁵² Le Gall, 'Forgotten Naqshbandīs', p. 95.

¹⁵³ Le Gall, 'Forgotten Naqshbandīs', p. 95.

practice, one which would place them yet again in opposition to other Sufi orders who had devotional practices which were incompatible with the Sharīʿa.

This much for Naqshbandī doctrine and praxis; the history of the Naqshbandī Order in Ottoman lands, particularly up until the 16th century, has been well-studied. There is a body of literature on the key shaykhs of the order and the nature of its political involvement in the affairs of the state. Much of it points towards a mystical order which was able to embed itself within Turkish society and establish a good deal of respect from within the ʿIlmiyye and from the authorities. Explaining the place the order secured for itself following its first introduction into Ottoman lands in the 15th century, Algar says:

The order has played a role of cardinal importance in the spiritual and religious life of the Turkish people. Sober and rigorous, devoted to the cultivation of God's Law and the exemplary model of the Companions, it was above all the order of the ulama: countless members of the learned institution gave it their allegiance. But men from all classes and professions have been affiliated to it, and its influence has extended beyond the major cities into provincial towns and villages as well. It can be said that after Transoxiana, Turkey became the second major center of the Naqshbandiya, and today, after the passage of Central Asia under Russian control, it is the most important area of Naqshbandi concentration, with the possible exception of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent.¹⁵⁴

Yet, given the relative paucity of research on the political and social involvement of the Naqshbandīs in Turkey from approximately the second half of the 16th century through to the 17th century, one might be forgiven for wondering whether the Naqshbandīs had recoiled into some sort of protracted *khalwa*. This is since they all but disappear off the radar until their dramatic reappearance which manifested in the Mujaddidī-Khālīdī line.

¹⁵⁴ Algar, 'The Naqshbandī Order', pp. 140-141.

Had the order simply become eclipsed by competing orders, such as the Khalwatīs, who had made determined in-roads into the ‘Ilmiyye?¹⁵⁵ Or had the Naqshbandīs converged into the ranks of the Qāḍīzādelis, such as the case of Osmān Bosnevī, a Naqshbandī shaykh who adopted Qāḍīzādeli rhetoric as a way of emphasising Naqshbandī superiority and “a tool in the competitive struggle among tariqas”?¹⁵⁶ These are but speculations until we learn more about the role of the Ottoman Naqshbandīs in the 17th century.

Good Sufi, Bad Sufi

Aḥmad al-Āqḥiṣārī clearly holds the mystical path in the centre of the life of a believer; in fact, the very first *ḥadīth* in the *Majālis* which he cites from the *Maṣābīḥ al-Sunna*, of the Shāfi‘ī exegete and traditionist al-Baghawī, is one which underlines the importance of the remembrance of God, *dhikr Allāh*. The opening passages betray the extent to which Sufism permeates al-Āqḥiṣārī’s religious outlook. He appears both prescriptive and critical, and his positions on a series of practices which were commonplace in Sufi tradition are striking. *Majlis I* commences with the following *ḥadīth*:

[The Prophet], upon him be peace, likened the one who remembers [his Lord] to a person who is alive, since what is intended by ‘the one who is alive’ is one who possesses true, everlasting life. This is achieved only by the remembrance of God, since remembrance (*dhikr*) grants life to the hearts of those who meditate and necessarily prepares them for [receiving] the knowledge of the Lord of the Worlds and arrival to eternal life in the Land of Bliss. He who is bereft of *dhikr* is like one who is dead since he is bereft of

¹⁵⁵ On the Khalwatī attempts at conciliation with the juristic community see B.G. Martin, ‘The Khalwati Order of Dervishes’.

¹⁵⁶ We know from Le Gall that Osmān Bosnevī, a Naqshbandī who became embroiled in the Qāḍīzādeli affair, probably adopted their rhetoric as ‘a way of emphasising the Naqshbandī devotional probity and superiority and a tool in the competitive struggle among tariqas.’ (‘Forgotten Sufis’, p. 98). The question arises, was Bosnevī an anomaly or were there others?

that which gives life to his heart and that which necessarily prepares him for knowledge and eternal life. This is since the honour of man and the excellence by which he surpasses other creatures occurs only by [his] preparedness for [receiving] the knowledge of God, the Exalted. [This is] achieved by his heart rather than by one of his limbs [...] He will only find contentment in the remembrance of God, the Exalted. This is just as God the Exalted says: ‘Truly in the remembrance of God do hearts find contentment.’^{157,158}

As is characteristic of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s method, he proceeds to dissect the *ḥadīth* after an initial cursory examination it, treating several issues that are connected with it and the broader context. Here he explains: 1) the way in which *dhikr* is to be performed 2) the prerequisites of *dhikr* 3) the consequences of prolonged meditation:

And the best [form of] remembrance (*dhikr*) according to that which has been reported in this *ḥadīth* is [the repetition of], ‘There is no god but God (*lā ilāha illallāh*)’. It is necessary that the worshipper who is *compos mentis* (*mukallaf*) occupies himself with this formula so that his heart finds contentment (*yaṭmaʿinna qalbu-hu*) and so that he prepares himself for [receiving] knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of God the Exalted.¹⁵⁹

Al-Āqḥiṣārī presents a foundation-stone of Sufi epistemology – the nexus between *dhikr* and divine knowledge, *maʿrifa*, the latter of which is a central pursuit of the mystical path. Here is also the tacit acknowledgment of the superiority of the inner, *bāṭin*, over the outer, *ẓāhir*, that is of the spiritual over the material. How, then, is *dhikr* to be performed?

Al-Āqḥiṣārī provides us with the two modes in the *Majlis II*:

¹⁵⁷ Q.13.28

¹⁵⁸ *Majlis I*, f. 3r.

¹⁵⁹ *Majlis I*, f. 3r.

The remembrance (*dhikr*) of God is the pre-eminent demand (*al-maṭlūb al-aʿlā*) and the furthest objective (*al-maqṣūd al-aqṣā*). It is of two types: the first is *dhikr* with the tongue and the other is *dhikr* with the heart. *Dhikr* with the tongue is that which is uttered on the tongue and heard by the ears; it consists of sounds and letters. As for *dhikr* with the heart, it is neither uttered on the tongue nor heard by the ears; rather, it is the contemplation and observance of the heart; it is the highest ranking [form of] *dhikr* and it near certain that this [is the form of *dhikr*] intended by here, i.e. the contemplative, internalized *dhikr*. This is since this is the [form] which has additional excellence over and above expending wealth and self, as has come in the report: ‘An hour’s contemplation is better than seventy years of worship.’ This is not achieved except by the servant’s persistence in *dhikr* with the tongue together with a presence of heart until the point at which the *dhikr* becomes firmly embedded in his heart and takes control of him in such a manner that, were he to shift his attention away from it, it would be a burden for him, just as at the beginning [of his spiritual quest] it was a burden for him to become constant in doing it.¹⁶⁰

The two excerpts above – the first of which underlines the excellence of making *dhikr* using the formula, *lā ilāha illallāh*, and the second making clear al-Āqḥiṣārī’s preference for the internalised or silent method (*dhikr al-khafī*) – bear a resemblance to the Naqshbandī prescription of silent *dhikr*. That the silent meditation with the formula *lā ilāha illallāh* is characteristically Naqshbandī is clear; discussion on this has preceded, where it was also noted that this particular method is given the authority of the Prophet, connected back to him via Abū Bakr. Yet there remains in al-Āqḥiṣārī’s position some ambiguity: it is uncertain in the second of the two excerpts whether he is an opponent of the vocalised *dhikr*. Certainly implicit in what he says is that a novice may at the commencement of meditation make use of their tongue, until the point at which they are able to benefit from the remembrance of the heart, *dhikr bi-l-qalb*. This said, does al-Āqḥiṣārī take the view that the audible *dhikr*, *al-dhikr al-jahrī* is permissible? We cannot

¹⁶⁰ *Majlis II*, f. 6v-r.

understand this from him, since elsewhere, in the *Risāla fī dhikr al-lisān wa l-al-qalb*, al-Āqḥiṣārī writes in greater detail and in less ambiguous terms: there he says that the audible *dhikr* is prohibited (*ḥarām*) and to engage in it is to commit a sin for it is an action which has no root in the practice of the Prophet or the Companions.¹⁶¹

In this short treatise on *dhikr*, al-Āqḥiṣārī says that, apart from those actions for which loud *dhikr* is obligated – such as when one utters the testimony of faith, which must be done loudly at least once in a lifetime, when making the call to prayer (*adhān*), the *takbīrs* of the Eid prayer, and a handful of similar instances – the *Sunna* insists both women and men perform *dhikr* with an inaudible tone (*al-ikhfāʾ*). Al-Āqḥiṣārī cites several verses of the Qurʾān and various *ḥadīths* to support his position, among them, ‘And remember your Lord in your soul, with humility and in reverence, without loudness in words, in the morning and evenings; and be not of those who are unheedful’ (Q.7.205). He then says, ‘God has [in this verse] commanded one to perform the *dhikr* and supplication (*duʿā*) silently; to make these audible is proscribed since the command (*al-amr*) to undertake one action is at once the prohibition (*al-nahy*) of its opposite. The thing which has been prohibited is *ḥarām* and to undertake a *ḥarām* action is a sin (*māʿṣiya*).’¹⁶² Whilst the Naqshbandī insistence upon silent *dhikr* has already been noted, it is still useful to compare al-Āqḥiṣārī’s position to his contemporary, the Naqshbandī Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī. In his *Maktūbāt*, he responds to a question about *dhikr*:

¹⁶¹ *Risāla fī dhikr al-lisān wa l-qalb* – Epistle on the remembrance of God by the tongue and by the heart, MSS. *Darülmüşnevi* 258, ff. 99v-104r; *Harput* 429, ff. 49v-55v; *Şehid Ali Paşa* 1189, ff. 88v-94r. See also a *Risāla fī l-dhikr* – Epistle on the remembrance of God, in MS. *Harput* 429, ff. 85v-93r. *Yazmalar*: Çorum, *Hasan Paşa IHK*, 19 Hk 797/4, ff. 8v-12r; Manisa, *IHK*, 45 Hk 2224/10, ff. 82r-93r; 45 Hk 2937/4, ff. 36v-42r.

¹⁶² *Risāla fī dhikr* (MS *Harput* 429), f. 49v.

I have been asked how it is that I forbid *dhikr* with a loud voice and condemn it as an innovation (*bidʿa*), but do not condemn many other things which had not existed at the time of the Prophet such as the shirt open in front (*libās farjī*) and pyjamas. Please note that the acts of the Prophet were of two kinds: those that were performed as *ʿibāda*, an act of worship, and those that were done as *ʿurf* and *ʿāda*, habits and customs. The acts which were done as *ʿibāda*, we consider deviations from them to be evil innovations, and condemn them strongly, for they are innovations in religion (*dīn*) and must be rejected. But the acts which were done as part of habit and custom, we do not regard deviations from them as innovation, and do not proscribe them. For they do not belong to religion (*dīn*); their existence or disappearance depends upon the custom of society rather than religion.¹⁶³

There is a distinct tenor in al-Āqḥiṣārī’s opposition to the audible *dhikr*, one which does not entirely square up with Sirhindī’s attitude. After all, al-Āqḥiṣārī seems to authorise the novice to perform *dhikr* audibly until the point at which he is able to undertake the silent *dhikr*; Sirhindī on the other hand is emphatic: the audible *dhikr* is a *bidʿa*. Despite this apparent tension, al-Āqḥiṣārī may still be considered an advocate of the Naqshbandī method. This is since the Naqshbandī position has not historically been monolithic on the question of audible *dhikr*. After Baha’uddīn Naqshband, whilst the silent *dhikr* did become the dominant practice among Naqshbandīs, this did not prevent practical disagreements among successive Naqshbandī masters on what attitude should to be taken vis-à-vis the audible *dhikr*. Weismann explains that the debate started as early as Baha’uddīn’s learned disciples, Muḥammad Parsa and Yaʿqūb Charkhi. Parsa accommodated the audible *dhikr* whilst affording greater preference for the “elevated” silent method. He described it, just as al-Āqḥiṣārī does above, as appropriate for beginners who should aim to internalise it when they advance further along the mystical path. On the other hand, Parsa stressed that the audible *dhikr* must not be performed as a means to gain fame or material benefits, as perhaps was sometimes customary. Charkhi

¹⁶³ The translation is of Ansari, *Sufism and Shariʿah*, pp. 22-23. See also *Maktūbāt*, Vol. I, 232, p. 440.

took a radical approach, rejecting the audible *dhikr* altogether. He claimed that Baha'uddīn proscribed it and that it had no basis in the Qur'an and the *Sunna*. This position was to receive the sanction of his influential disciple Aḥrār.¹⁶⁴ The significance of this long-running tension within the Naqshbandī Order is that al-Āqḥiṣārī may well have been in contact with the Parsaic approach to *dhikr*, and therefore in line with the Naqshbandī tradition on this question.

Al-Āqḥiṣārī moves next to highlight his concerns about those frauds on the mystical path who, despite their charlatanism, are able to achieve certain states which Sufis traditionally claim for themselves. These states are routinely the outcome of prolonged *dhikr* and spiritual exercise (*mujāhada*). The Sufis believe that sustained *dhikr* leads to the removal of barriers (*ḥijāb*) between the spiritual aspirant and the Divine. This makes possible mystical revelation, known in Sufi parlance as *kashf*. Schimmel notes that some Sufis have classified the different kinds of revelation according to the different levels of consciousness on which they occur and whether they lead to intellectual or intuitive knowledge of the Divine.¹⁶⁵ Although there are variances among Sufis in their approach to treating the subject of *kashf*, there is consensus among them that this is a key mode of acquiring divine knowledge. Schimmel says, '[Sufis] all clearly distinguished the *ilm*

¹⁶⁴ Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁵ For these classifications, Schimmel quotes Khwāja Mīr Dard's, *Ilm al-kitāb*: 1) *kashf kawnī*, revelation on the plane of the created things, which is a result of pious actions and purifications of the lower soul; it becomes manifest in dreams and clairvoyance; 2) *kashf ilāhī*, divine revelation, which is a fruit of constant worship and polishing of the heart; it results in the knowledge of the world of spirits and in cardiognosy ("soul reading") so that the mystic sees the hidden things and reads the hidden thoughts; 3) *kashf aqlī*, revelation by reason, which is essentially the lowest grade of intuitive knowledge; it can be attained by polishing the moral faculties, and can be experienced by the philosophers as well; 4) *kashf imānī*, revelation through faith, which is the fruit of perfect faith after man has acquired proximity to the perfections of prophethood; then he will be blessed by direct divine addresses; he talks with the angels, meets the spirits of the prophets, sees the Night of Might (*Laylat al-qadar*) and the blessings of the month of Ramadan in human form in the *alam al-mithāl*. See *Mystical Dimensions in Islam*, pp. 192-193.

ladunnī, the “wisdom that is with and from God” and is granted to the gnostic by an act of divine grace, from normal knowledge.’¹⁶⁶ This mode of knowledge has, according to Sufis, solid foundations in the story of Moses and Khidr, which appears in Qur’an XIV.¹⁶⁷

The spiritual aspirant will continue to experience various degrees of *kashf* as he ascends the stations of spiritual realisation. But this is not the only reward on the spiritual path. Accompanying divine knowledge (*maʿrifa*), as a bi-product of the purgatorial-meditational process, is the ability to perform saintly-miracles (*karāmāt*). These miracles range from walking on water, flying through the air to possessing the ability to mind-read.¹⁶⁸ For some, so profound is the bi-product that it can become more important than the original goal, that of drawing closer to the Divine. Yet for others, particularly disciples, miracles can serve as a yardstick against which the spiritual guide may be

¹⁶⁶ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions in Islam* p. 193.

¹⁶⁷ It is in the story of Mūsā and Khadr, which for Sufis has been the source of a great many spiritual lessons, and which tells of the encounter between two of the most perfected of God’s servants, that the basis for *ʿilm ladunnī* is found. Many Sufi commentaries have explained the significance of the encounter between these two personalities, seeking to draw out the wisdoms contained within it. Ibn ʿAjlaba’s commentary on this is interesting: ‘The knowledge which flows into the heart without any acquisition or learning is called *ʿilm ladunnī*. The Prophet has said, “Whoever acts with what he knows, God will grant him knowledge of that which he did not know.” This can only happen after the heart is purified from all imperfections and vices, and you disentangle it from all associations and things which occupy it. When the purification of the heart is complete, and it is attracted towards the presence of the Lord, knowledge issuing from God Himself, *ʿilm ladunnī*, will flow into it; so too will flow into it the Divine Secrets, some of which are communicable and some of which remain incommunicable. The latter are a gift for their possessor. Some of this knowledge which flows in to the heart includes information about destiny, knowledge regarding the Sharīʿa, secrets concerning legal particulars, and other things which are in the knowledge of God.’ Cited in M. Sheikh, ‘The Story of Musa and Khidr’, *Sufi Wisdom*, 19 (Istanbul: Altinoluk, 2009).

¹⁶⁸ Schimmel explains: ‘The theologians carefully discussed the theories of miracles: the saint’s miracles are called *karāmāt*, “charismata”, whereas the prophet’s miracles are classified as *muʿjizāt*, “what renders others incapable to do the same,” and the two types must never be confused. The general term for anything extraordinary is *khāriq ul-ʿāda*, “what tears the custom” (of God); i.e. when God wants to disrupt the chain of cause and result to which we are accustomed, since He usually acts in this or that way, *khāriqa* may be performed and change the course of life. The mystics have also argued, in lengthy deliberations, about whether miracles are performed in the state of sobriety or in that of mystical intoxication. They have classified the miracles under different heading - Subkī distinguishes twenty-five main types – and the whole collections have been composed to show the various kinds of miracles performed by Muslim saints.’ (*Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 206). See also, L. Gardet, ‘karāma’, *EF*.

judged at the level of master and thus differentiated from both false guides and the common man.

Up until this point there is nothing that would unduly trouble the orthodox, scripturalist mindset. However, when spiritual progress is used as a warrant to remove from oneself the burden of adhering to the Sharīʿa, alarm bells begin to sound within orthodox circles. Already in al-Āqḥiṣārī's time, antinomianism presented a major affront to the conservative Sufi orders. It appears, according to the *Majālis*, that antinomianism was especially rampant amongst the Khalwatīs, the Sufi order which al-Āqḥiṣārī specifically singles out for attack. In actuality there were several antinomian Sufi orders which were flourishing during the period.¹⁶⁹

Al-Āqḥiṣārī is particularly severe towards those who claim mystical revelation without having any credentials in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and orthodox creed (*ʿaqīda*). In this, he is completely in line with the widely held view among Sufis – that the novice aspiring to travel the spiritual path must learn the key precepts of these two religious sciences before commencing his journey.

¹⁶⁹ The Turkish Khalwatīs during the 16th and 17th centuries were frequently criticised by the orthodox ʿulamā, who were often also representatives of the Naqshbandī order. Their attacks against the Khalwatīs carried significant weight, and as explained by B.G. Martin, were focussed on several elements: 'A political one, which suggested the Khalwatīs were disloyal to the Ottoman state because of the vague Shiʿī affinities; a doctrinal one – they were thought by the ʿulamā' to be too close to Folk Islam and too far from the Sharīʿa; and a kind of cultural hostility, which made the learned see them as the generators and enthusiastic spreaders of *bidʿa*, undesirable innovation. This standpoint derived from the view that the ʿulamā' had of themselves as the vanguard of orthodoxy. Then also, some of the ʿulamā' were very intolerant of the way of life, the clothing, the disorderly personalities, and other externals of some Khalwatīs. They disapproved of the extreme *ghulāt* or *malāmatī* style in Sufism, which was as much a shock for them as the contemporary hippies and yippies are for some sections of the American middle classes.' ('The Khalwatī Order of Dervishes', p. 283). On the antinomian Sufi orders of Ottoman Turkey see A. Karamustafa's *God's Unholy Servants: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Middle Period 1200-1550* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

Advancing to higher levels before perfecting the foundations and demarcating the pathways is [mere] satanic haste and egotistic caprice. The fate of such a person is debasement in both this world (*dunyā*) and the Hereafter, since he will be deluded by mental fantasies and satanic illusions which he considers to be saintly miracles (*karāma*), though they are in fact traps which increase him in variegated forms of misguidance. This is since whoever busies himself with remembrance (*dhikr*) and spiritual exercises (*riyāda*) before learning of the science of kalām that amount which makes his creed sound and in accordance with *Ahl al-Sunna wa l-Jamāʿa*, and by which he can protect himself against the uncertainties of the heretics; and [who learns] of the science of Jurisprudence that amount which makes his actions sound and in accordance with the immaculate Law (*al-Sharīʿa al-muṭahhara*), it is probable that there will occur to him what seems to be the unveiling of some things or [that he witnesses] unnatural phenomena (*khāriq al-ʿāda*) by virtue of his spiritual exercise or the deception of Satan – this sort of thing has been narrated from some of the spiritually trained disbelievers. Thus he may believe that it is sainthood and a miracle when in fact it is a trap and self-deceit; it is anything but sainthood and a true miracle.¹⁷⁰

How is it that *kashf* and *karāmāt* serve as yardsticks by which a master is judged a true master despite such attainments not being the monopoly of Muslim saints? Indeed the two phenomena are a feature of the mystical path across many religious traditions, not only of Islam. Al-Āqḥiṣārī is in no doubt that over-emphasis of either *kashf* or *karāmāt* is useless since, for him, miracles have a natural explanation – they arise as a consequence of spiritual exercise just as, for example, great demonstrations of strength are possible as a result of intensive physical training. One would therefore do better to equate a miracle of the spirit with an extraordinary display of physical strength, and just as the latter should not be taken as an indication of God’s endorsement of an individual, neither should the former.¹⁷¹ But this is not all; there are those who are able to perform

¹⁷⁰ *Majālis II*, f. 6v.

¹⁷¹ This was very much the view of Ibn Taymiyya also. About the relativity of *kashf*, he remarks, ‘A Christian monk, when he polishes his soul, sees in it the image of the Trinity, and is addressed through it. Since he had the image of Trinity before, his soul when polished by devotions, sees the image in vision. On the other hand, a Muslim who loves God and the Prophet in a dream as he believes him to be, and sees God in a dream as he imagines Him’. Cited in Ansari, *Sufism and Sharīʿa*, p. 135.

extraordinary feats and speak as though they have experienced *kashf* who in fact could not be further removed from the path of the Sufis.

It sometimes happens that a person is able to achieve *kashf* at certain times as well as the ability to do something extraordinary such as flying through the air, etc, and then people take this as evidence of his sainthood (*wilāya*). Furthermore, they do not permit anyone to oppose him, despite the fact that such things may obtain at the hands of someone who is not in the habit of performing ritual purification or cleansing himself in accordance with the demands of religion. Now, the Prophet has said, ‘God is clean and loves cleanliness.’ Elsewhere, he has said, ‘God is good and accepts only good.’ Yet, such a person neither performs the ablution nor prays the obligatory prayers; indeed, [he may even] be defiled, or in contact with dogs, or in contact with rubbish tips and other impure places where there is to be found jinns and devils. How, then, can such a person be a saint (*walī*)? The saint, as is mentioned in the books of theology (*kutub kalāmiyya*), is one who knows God (*‘arīf bi-llāh*) and His attributes, is constantly engaged in acts of obedience (*tā‘āt*) and avoiding sinful deeds (*ma‘āṣī*) and prohibitions (*muḥarramāt*), is an avoider of vanities, passions and caprices, not one defiled by impurities, or in contact with dogs, or abandons the prayer and other ritual worship; neither is he one who has lost his mind, and uncovers his modesty, undressed.¹⁷²

So much for the charlatan, but what about the one who has been hoodwinked? Why do people take the bait? Al-Āqḥiṣārī explains what he perceives to be the root of the problem, namely that people mistakenly believe that every extraordinary act constitutes a saintly miracle (*karāma*) and is therefore a sign indicating towards a person’s sainthood (*wilāya*). Such people are no longer able to differentiate the friends of God from the friends of Satan; they are unable to see that miracles of this sort can be performed by anyone.¹⁷³

¹⁷² *Majlis II*, f.8v.

¹⁷³ *Majlis II*, f. 8v.

The author of the *Majālis* proceeds with a typology of miracles. He gives descriptions of the prophetic miracle (*mu^ʿjiza*), the saintly miracle (*karāma*) and the false miracle (*istidrāj*). This last category is vitally important for disciples to reflect upon. *Istidrāj* happens at the hands of those who are either non-believers or heretical Muslims, and who are granted the ability to make extraordinary things happen. The miracle is false because it serves to both further the self-deception of the one performing it – he becomes convinced of his own *wilāya* – and it can also deceive onlookers into believing that such a person is a saint. The differences between the three categories of miracle are subtle and they can certainly not be told apart by the fundamental nature of the act. Indeed, only close scrutiny of the performer can reveal the true nature and quality of the act that he performs. Al-Āqḥiṣārī explains,

It is known assuredly that unnatural events are not exclusively connected with prophetic miracles (*mu^ʿjiza*) and saintly ones (*karāma*); it may also be a false miracle (*istidrāj*). Whenever [the unnatural phenomenon] occurs at the hands of a person whose is not observant of the Shari^ʿa then it is judged to be a false miracle (*istidrāj*) rather than a [true] miracle (*karāma*). What is judged a [true] miracle is the impossible that manifests at the hands of a righteous worshipper whose probity is well-known. This aforementioned restriction is cautionary to exclude a false miracle, which is [defined] as a manifestation or unnatural event appearing at the hands of the wretched, such as the anti-Christ (*Dajjāl*) and the Pharaoh (*Fir^ʿawn*) and the ignorant misguided and misleading ones. For, indeed, the impossible can manifest at the hands of the pious just as it does at the hands of the wretched (*shaqiyy*).

Whatever is manifest at the hands of the one who is governed by the Law (*Shar^ʿ*) is a cause for him to increase in his struggle to [perform acts of] worship, whereas whatever is manifest at the hands of he who is not governed by the *Sunna* is a cause for him to increase in distance and self-deceit. Satan continues to deceive him until he loosens the noose of Islam from his neck by getting him to deny the limits of the Law and its rulings, the lawful and the prohibited. Based on this, it is incumbent that the heedful worshipper ensures that all his actions are aligned with the judgements of the Shari^ʿa, as long as

he is alive and in possession of his faculties (*‘āqil*). It is not permissible that he act in contravention of the judgement of the Sharī‘a at any moment.¹⁷⁴

Here then al-Āqḥiṣārī presents a guide to be employed for the purposes of assessing both the quality of inspirations received through spiritual exercise and the status of the performer of a miraculous act. For him the Sharī‘a is the ultimate criterion against which all thoughts and inspirations are measured; those thoughts which are aligned with the Sharī‘a are accepted as truth and those which contravene it are to be ignored as satanic. Any miracle which does not result in its performer increasing in his adherence to the Sharī‘a, but instead distances him further from it, should be considered spurious. Al-Āqḥiṣārī clearly wants to render such inspirations and miracles subordinate to the Sharī‘a, and would almost certainly be in keeping with the broader position of the ‘ulamā’, who looked with mistrust at any sources of knowledge not directly moderated by themselves.¹⁷⁵

How far is al-Āqḥiṣārī in keeping with the Naqshbandī view on *kashf*? Aḥmad Sirhindī, a contemporary of our author and well-known initiator of the Mujaddidī line of Naqshbandī Sufism, also denied that *kashf* is an independent source of knowledge, and therefore is not to be placed on par with the Sharī‘a:

¹⁷⁴ *Majlis II*, f. 7v.

¹⁷⁵ Al-Āqḥiṣārī accommodates spiritual unveiling, *kashf*, as a means towards knowledge, though makes it clear that it is subordinate to knowledge received in the Qur’an and *Sunna*. In much the same way, Ibn Taymiyya did not completely reject *kashf* as a means towards affirmative knowledge. He says, ‘A section of the people of dialectic theology (*Ahl al-kalām*) and reason reject many of the things that [al-Ghazālī] has said, and think that devotion and purification of the heart does not contribute to knowledge. They are certainly wrong. The truth is that piety and purification of the heart are some of the great means of acquiring knowledge.’ (Cited in Ansari, *Sufism and Shari‘ah*, p. 136).

[*Kashf*] can only act as an interpreter of the Prophetic revelation (*wahy*) concerning matters of faith. “Inspiration (*ilhām*) only brings out the non-apparent truths of religion; it is not to add upon its truths. As *ijtihād* reveals rules that are implied (in the Sharīʿa), similarly, *ilhām* reveals the hidden truths (of faith) which ordinary people are not able to see”. Second, even in this capacity of interpreter, *kashf* is not infallible; like the *ijtihād* of a *mujtahid*, the *kashf* of a Sufi may be right or it may be wrong. Inspiration is uncertain (*ẓannī*) and the revelations of *kashf* do not generate truth. Third, if the ideas of a mystic in the light of his *kashf* contradict the views of the theologians of the *Ahl al-Sunna* they should be treated as the product of intoxication (*sukr*) of the Sufi and rejected as untrue. “There are mystical ideas which conflict with the views of the *Ahl al-ḥaqq* [...] in such cases the truth is with the ‘ulamā’ of the *Ahl al-ḥaqq*. At another place [Sirhindī] writes: “The criterion of the validity of mystical ideas (*‘ulūm ladunniyya*) is that they should agree with the clear ideas of the disciplines of the Sharīʿa; if there is a hair’s breadth of divergence, it is due to *sukr*. The truth is what the ‘ulamā’ of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa l-Jamāʿa* have established. All else is blasphemy (*zandaqa*), heresy (*ilhād*), and the result of intoxication (*sukr*) and ecstasy (*ghalbat al-ḥal*)”. In other words, the *kashf* of the Sufi is subject to the authority not only of the text of the Qur’an and the *Sunna*, but also of their interpretation by theological reason.¹⁷⁶

The degree of parity between al-Āqḥiṣārī and Sirhindī is unmistakeable. Neither denies a place for knowledge acquired via *kashf*, but at the same time both afford value to *kashf* only with the proviso that it is supported by the interpretations of the ‘ulamā’. The attempt to appeal to the ‘ulamā’ is a well known feature of Naqshbandī Sufism. They recognised that the Sharīʿa lay at the core of the learned sphere; they were ever trying to prove that theirs was the form of spirituality among the Sufi orders closest to the Sharīʿa. There is no doubt that Sirhindī did so within the context of the Naqshbandī tradition; it would be premature at this stage to say anything definitive about whether al-Āqḥiṣārī was functioning within the same orientation.

¹⁷⁶ Ansari, *Sufism and Shari‘ah*, p. 72.

We are told by Ismāʿīl Pāsha (d. 1339/1920) that ‘Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Āqḥiṣārī al-Rūmī al-Ḥanafī was a shaykh of the Khalwatīs’ (*min mashāyikh al-khalwatiyya*).¹⁷⁸ This is apparently corroborated by H. J. Kissling’s genealogical tree of the Khalwatī Order, in which there is mention of an Aḥmad al-Rūmī at position sixty-six.¹⁷⁹ Whereas the name of Aḥmad al-Rūmī in Kissling’s genealogical tree might refer to virtually anyone in 17th century Ottoman Turkey, the biographical entry of Ismāʿīl Pāsha is unquestionably a reference to the author of the *Majālis*. This is since Pāsha lists several authorships with the name of al-Āqḥiṣārī - *Risālat al-dukhāniyya*, *Sharḥ al-durr al-yaṭīm fī l-tajwīd* and *Majālis al-abrār*. The question that beckons is whether there is any truth behind the assertion that al-Āqḥiṣārī was a Khalwatī.

It seems to the present author that any link of al-Āqḥiṣārī to the Khalwatīs on the basis of the *Majālis* cannot be substantiated. In fact, there are some rather compelling reasons which would lead one to the view that the Ottoman scholar was diametrically opposed to the order. For one, al-Āqḥiṣārī strongly criticises the *Aṣḥāb al-khalwa*, “The People of Retreat”. Since the *khalwa* is a central part of the Khalwatī spiritual regimen, this naturally raises serious doubts about any possible affiliation. Similarly, the cautious attitude of al-Āqḥiṣārī towards mystical visions, his criticism of audible *dhikr* and his

¹⁷⁷ The *khalwa* is a key practice of most Sufi orders, with special emphasis placed on it by the Kubrawīs, the Shādhilīs, the Qādirīs and, of course, the Khalwatīs. See H. Landolt, ‘Khalwa’, *EF*².

¹⁷⁸ I. Pāsha, *Hadiyyat al-ʿārifīn asmāʾ al-muʿallifīn wa āthār al-muṣannifīn min Kashf al-Zunūn* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2008), 6: 142.

¹⁷⁹ H. J. Kissling, *Aus der Geschichte des Chalvetijje-Ordens*, in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 103, 1953, p. 233-289; p. 285, 287 & Table 2. Y. Michot, in *L’Opium et le Café* (p. 54) and *Against Smoking*, had also taken the view that al-Āqḥiṣārī was a Khalwatī. Since the publication of both works, he has since revised his view, basing it also on al-Āqḥiṣārī’s critique of the “*aṣḥāb al-khalwa*”.

opposition to musical accompaniment all add strength to the implausibility of any affiliation.

In the following excerpt, al-Āqḥiṣārī speaks about the *Aṣḥāb al-khalwa*, and the problems he believes are associated with the practice of retreat, for whatever duration it may amount to:

There are some people in our times who enter into retreat (*khalwa*) for three days or more, and who, when they reappear even if after only [having been in retreat] once or twice, claim that they have attained to a state of perfection and have reached the stations of the men [of the spiritual path]; [this is] despite the fact that they engage in actions which contravene the noble *Sunna*. If their likes are rebuked for what they engage in, they say, ‘The proscription of that is but in the knowledge of the outward (*‘ilm al-zāhir*), whereas we possess knowledge of the inward (*‘ilm al-bāṭin*); therefore, such things are permitted. To arrive at God, exalted is He, does not happen except when the knowledge of the outward is rejected. You all take from the Book (i.e. the Qur’an), whereas we, by virtue of the retreat (*khalwa*) and the blessing of the shaykh, reach to God, the Exalted. Various branches of knowledge are revealed to us without any need on our part to take recourse in the Book or reading it in the presence of a teacher. If there originates from us a hated action, or [an action] which is prohibited, we are made aware of its proscription in visions; thereby we come to know of the permissible (*mubāḥ*) and the proscribed (*ḥarām*). As for what you say is proscribed, we have not been made aware of its proscription in visions, thus we know that it is not proscribed.’¹⁸⁰

Al-Āqḥiṣārī speaks about the “People of *khalwa*” rather than the Khalwatīs specifically because there were several orders in Ottoman Turkey that had integrated the *khalwa* into their devotional regimen. So whilst he was probably speaking in the first instance to the Khalwatīs, the order most renowned for the practice of retreat, he no doubt also had in mind other orders. It might be argued on the basis of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s statement above that

¹⁸⁰ *Majlis I*, f. 4r.

he is more interested in the ramifications of the *khalwa*, in particular those visions that lead to abandoning of the Sharīʿa. The difficulty with accepting such an argument is that al-Āqḥiṣārī is otherwise silent about the *khalwa*, insofar as it appears to have no place whatsoever within his own approach to the mystical path. Indeed at no point in the *Majālis* does he have anything positive to say about it.

It is clear from the statement of al-Āqḥiṣārī above that he has little faith in those who enter into *khalwa* and then emerge claiming to have attained gnosis, which they then use to vindicate themselves when they contravene the Sharīʿa. This is because, in al-Āqḥiṣārī's epistemology, revealed knowledge – *al-sharīʿa al-munazzala* – is the ultimate *magisterium*. Whilst he also accommodates reason as a source of knowledge, it is only in the restricted manner delineated in *kalām*-theology. As far as mystical visions are concerned, they can only corroborate what is in Scripture; they are not an independent source of knowledge.

Al-Āqḥiṣārī further states that the one who contravenes a single judgement of the Sharīʿa has disobeyed God and is deserving of His punishment. Accordingly such a person is not to be considered from among the saints (*walī*), despite possessing the ability to perform miracles. It is in this regard that al-Āqḥiṣārī is not content for his reader to merely agree with his opposition to the *Aṣḥab al-khalwa*. He positively demands participation in his campaign:

The duty upon whoever hears the likes of these false utterances is to rebuke the speaker, whilst being absolutely certain about the falsity of his speech –

without dither or hesitation. If one does not, then he is from among them and shall be judged a heretic (*mubtadi*^c).¹⁸¹

For al-Āqḥiṣārī, the *Aṣḥāb al-khalwa* have either forgotten, or did not take it upon themselves to learn in the first place, the correct doctrines of the religion. Failing to recognise the all-pervasiveness of the Sharīʿa, they have reached the point at which there is an ‘affinity between them and Satan’.¹⁸²

[Satan] shows them such things of illumination that it becomes a cause for them to fabricate [lies] and to become deceived into thinking that they are good-doers and ennobled in the sight of God; they do not know that Satan continues to make appear good for the people of *khalwa* (retreat) and the people of spiritual exercise (*mujāhada*) actions (done) in accordance with desire (*shahwa*) and dreams, without them seeking recourse to the Sharīʿa.¹⁸³

Whilst the rationale for al-Āqḥiṣārī opposition towards the *Aṣḥāb al-khalwa* is becoming clearer, there is still a question that has not been fully answered: why does al-Āqḥiṣārī take such a hard-line position against them? Was he unaware of the evidence furnished by the advocates of the *khalwa*, namely that it was the practice of all the Prophets, and also exists, albeit in a restricted sense, in the practice of *īʿtikāf*, a form of retreat practiced in the final nights of Ramadan? Here it should be noted that al-Āqḥiṣārī is not necessarily opposed to the *khalwa qua khalwa*. Far more insidious for him are the resulting mystical visions. It seems from the *Majālis* that some advocates of the *khalwa* took their mystical visions and inspirations to be equivalent to divine revelation. According to al-Aqḥiṣārī such people make the following claim: ‘The thoughts of the heart, that is in the protection of God, the Exalted, are infallible.’ He continues, ‘This is of the greatest tricks of the

¹⁸¹ *Majlis I*, f. 5v.

¹⁸² *Majlis I*, f. 5v.

¹⁸³ *Majlis I*, f. 5v.

enemy (Satan?)!'¹⁸⁴ As such, al-Āqḥiṣārī is not prepared to accept mystical as a trustworthy foundation for knowledge.

Much of what our author has to say about the types of inspiration which the retreat can induce has been taken from Ibn al-Qayyim's *Ighāthat al-lahafān*, mainly verbatim, somewhat reorganised and rarely directly cited.¹⁸⁵ He follows the same tripartite typology of the Ḥanbalī theologian, dividing inspirations into lordly (*ilāhiyya*), satanic (*shayṭāniyya*) and egoistic (*naḥsāniyya*). Accordingly, he insists that a person should scrutinise his inspirations in order to decipher whether they are of lordly origin, and therefore to be heeded, or whether of satanic or egoistic origin, and therefore to be ignored. At no point is a person protected from inspirations of a satanic or egoistic nature, no matter how advanced on the mystical path, since 'the two will never part from him until death; they flow in him like the blood in his veins.'¹⁸⁶ For al-Āqḥiṣārī, only a prophet can rely upon inspiration, for it is only a prophet who is blessed with infallibility (*ʿiṣma*): 'The Prophets are middle-men between God, the Exalted, and His creatures, insofar as they deliver His commands (*amr*) and prohibitions (*nahy*) and His promises (*waʿd*) and His threats (*waʿīd*). Apart from them, no one is infallible.'¹⁸⁷ Al-Āqḥiṣārī is so adamant about this that, like Ibn al-Qayyim before him, he says that anyone who believes he no longer needs to adhere to the religion of the Prophet as a result of his mystical visions and inspirations has committed the greatest act of disbelief (*min aʿẓam al-nās kufran*). Even when someone is convinced that he has been inspired by the Lord, 'he

¹⁸⁴ *Majlis I*, f. 5v.

¹⁸⁵ See especially Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ighāthat al-lahafān fī maṣāyid al-shayṭān* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-islāmī, 1989), 1: 192-4.

¹⁸⁶ *Majlis I*, f. 5v.

¹⁸⁷ *Majlis I*, f. 5v.

must turn to a scholar who knows the [true] meaning of it; if the meaning is obvious (*ẓāhir*), then it need not be interpreted but simply clarified. If, however, it is not obvious (*ẓāhir*), requiring interpreting, then it should be done in the correct manner.’¹⁸⁸ For al-Āqḥiṣārī, Khalwatīs who claim to have received knowledge of the Sharīʿa whilst in *khalwa* have nothing to do with the pristine religion as practiced by the *Salaf*. Their error is to pay heed to their visions and inspirations. The way of the *Salaf*, in contrast, was to give no such importance to inspirations:

Indeed ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, in spite of his being the master of those inspired through meditation (*mulhamūn* and *muḥdathūn*), would, whenever inspirations appeared to him, not give them a second glance, or judge according to them or act upon them, until weighing them against the Book and the *Sunna*. These ignoramuses (*jāhil*), when they see visions, judge in favour of their inspirations over the Book and the *Sunna*, not giving them (i.e. the latter) a second glance. The realised scholars of the spiritual path, however, hold fast to the Book and the *Sunna*, and measure their actions, words, spiritual struggle and visions against them both. Whatever does not measure up against these two scales, or is infirm against these two witnesses, are not given any consideration.¹⁸⁹

Is there any benefit in meditation if it can lead to destructive ends, such as the abandonment of the Sharīʿa? Al-Āqḥiṣārī reminds us that the one busied in meditation must hold fast to the Sharīʿa in all his words, actions and states without contravening it at all. He should know that the acceptable form of meditation is that which is done consistently and with concentration: ‘Meditation has a starting-point and an end-point. Its starting-point necessitates companionship and love, as does its end-point.’ It is a means for drawing closer to the divine. It is not for any other purpose, according to al-Āqḥiṣārī.

¹⁸⁸ *Majlis I*, f. 5v.

¹⁸⁹ *Majlis I*, f. 5r.

The one graced with the ability to be constant in meditation will find solace in it and in his heart will be sown love for the object of his remembrance. Such a person eventually dislikes to be in any other state and will naturally disassociate from all else. But that will be as far as it goes for al-Āqḥiṣārī. There is no use in hoping that any states of ultimate perfection can be attained through such meditation, much less the attainment of infallible thoughts. ‘Complete benefit is [only achieved] after death, since only then will he be severed from all besides God, the Exalted.’¹⁹⁰

It is clear from this survey of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s views on the *khalwa* that he is as conservative as Ibn al-Qayyim was before him on the nature and purpose of *dhikr*. Anyone who abandons the Sharīʿa because of inspirations received during *dhikr*, failing to make the Qurʾan and *Sunna* the ultimate criterion for distinguishing the lordly inspirations from the satanic, is a disbeliever. But there is a point at which the *Majālis* and the *Ighāthat al-lahafān* depart from each other: the latter moves beyond simply opposing the *khalwa* and the claims of its practitioners; in passages immediately after his discussion on the *khalwa*, Ibn al-Qayyim takes issue with *ṭarīqa*-oriented Sufism. He counts among the machinations (*kayd*) of Satan over men on the spiritual path his ability to guide to all sorts of deviations, such as the wearing of particular uniforms, the oath of allegiance (*bayʿa*) to a particular shaykh (*shaykh muʿayyan*), adherence to “invented spiritual orders” (*ṭarīqa mukhtaraʿa*) and the acceptance of commands from a shaykh as though they were religious obligations (*farīḍa*).¹⁹¹ It is difficult not to see this as opposition to formalised Sufism. Is al-Āqḥiṣārī’s position comparable? This important question needs

¹⁹⁰ *Majlis I*, f. 5r.

¹⁹¹ See Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ighātha*, 1: 195-196.

to be addressed, since it raises questions about how al-Āqḥiṣārī conceived the mystical path, how he believed it should be travelled and what his view of the formalised Sufism of his age was.

Al-Āqḥiṣārī on Ṭarīqa-oriented Sufism

It is clear that in al-Āqḥiṣārī's religious *Weltanschauung* Sufism holds a central place. What is not as transparent, at least from the content of the *Majālis*, is what al-Āqḥiṣārī's position is on the formalised Sufism of the orders. Was he affiliated to a specific order? Did he appropriate principles or practices of existing Ottoman orders or did he take a different approach to mysticism altogether? For answers, we must look beyond the *Majālis al-abrār* to other works in his corpus. One text in particular, *Risāla fī l-sulūk wa anna-hū lā budda li-l-sālik min murshid* – *The Epistle on Spiritual Wayfaring and the Necessity for The Spiritual Aspirant to Have a Guide* proves revelatory.¹⁹² The title of the epistle alone is striking since it challenges the popular image of the Qāḍīzādelis as anti-Sufi. Its content alone reveals much about its author's approach and is sure to stir the imagination of even the most ardent sceptic.

In the *Risāla fī l-sulūk* we are confronted by indications which, when synthesised, apparently betray al-Āqḥiṣārī as, firstly, an advocate of formalised, *ṭarīqa*-oriented Sufism, and secondly, as a scholar who had a predilection for the Naqshbandī Order. Commencing with an emphasis upon the importance of the mystical path, al-Āqḥiṣārī

¹⁹² *Risāla fī l-sulūk wa anna-hū lā budda li-l-sālik min murshid*, MS. Harput 429, fols. 73r-78v.

claims that man is only differentiated from other creatures by an innate capacity to reach the state of gnosis (*maʿrifa*)¹⁹³:

Know that the nobility of man and his excellence over all other creatures is for nothing other than his preparedness to receive knowledge of God, the Exalted; he can only prepare for the knowledge of God with his heart, not with any of his limbs. It is not intended by [the word] ‘heart’ that curved piece of flesh because this is a piece of flesh which is found in all creatures, even in those which are dead; there is no [intrinsic] value to this. What is rather meant is the subtle spiritual light which is connected with this physical heart; its connection to it is as the connection of accidents with essences, or as attributes with their composites. The heart, in this sense, is referred to also as spirit (*rūḥ*), soul (*naḥs*) and intellect (*ʿaql*); it is the essence of man, it is the seat (*mahbaṭ*) of illuminations of the Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*); it is the thing which knows God, acts for God, strives towards God, unveils God, which is addressed (*mukhāṭab*), which is demanded of (*muṭālab*), rebuked (*muʿāṭab*) and punished (*muʿāqab*). The limbs are but corollaries; they are at the service of [this heart], which it employs like a king employs his citizenry (*raʿiyya*). [This heart] only finds solace in the remembrance of God, as God has said, “It is only in the remembrance of God that hearts find contentment”.¹⁹⁴

In this preamble, just as in the *Majālis*, al-Āqḥiṣārī makes it clear that Sufism lies at the very heart of his religious *Weltanschauung* and it is on this basis that there can be no question of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s opposition to Sufism. He proceeds to underline the merit of remembering God via the formula *lā ilāha illallāh* and, as has been indicated at an earlier point in this chapter, the formula is the foundation-stone of the Naqshbandī *dhikr*.

The best of remembrance according to what is transmitted in the *ḥadīth* is the formula *lā ilāha illallāh*. It is essential that the spiritual aspirant (*sālik*) occupies himself with the remembrance of *lā ilāha illallāh* so that his heart becomes content and is prepared to receive knowledge of God (*maʿrifat Allāh*), the Exalted. However, before he occupies himself with it, he must

¹⁹³ *Maʿrifa* has been described by D. Brown as ‘an apprehension of the divine unity in such a way that awareness of self is lost in awareness of God’. (*A New Introduction to Islam, 2nd Edition* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 202.

¹⁹⁴ *Risāla fī l-sulūk*, f. 73r.

learn the basics of dialectical theology (*kalām*) so that his creed is correct, in accordance with the *Ahl al-Sunna wa l-Jamāʿa* and protected from the doubts of the heretics (*mubtadiʿa*). This is because as long as the heart is defiled with the darkness of doctrinal heresy (*bidʿa iʿtiqādiyya*) the light of obedience cannot enlighten it. It is also imperative that he learn the basics of Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) such that his actions are in accordance with the pristine Sharīʿa, in line with the four schools (*al-madhāhib al-arbaʿa*). If he does not, then proceeding towards the inner meaning of matters before perfecting the foundations and knowing its paths is mere satanic haste and egoistic caprice; it will result in harm (*faḍīha*) for such a person in this life and the next.¹⁹⁵

It is clear from the above that al-Āqḥiṣārī, notwithstanding the centrality of Sufism within his religious *Weltanschauung*, is not willing to relegate Sharīʿa-knowledge to a position subordinate to mystical experience, and in a manner rather typical of him, he summarily reminds his reader that a foundational knowledge of orthodox creed – which in al-Āqḥiṣārī’s estimation is the Ashʿarī-Māturīdī variety – and jurisprudence are essential prerequisites for the wayfarer on the mystical path.

The idea that a “true shaykh”¹⁹⁶ is both “perfect” (*kāmil*) and “perfecting” (*mukammil*) is a familiar topos in Naqshbandī Sufism.¹⁹⁷ Once such a shaykh is discovered, the aspiring wayfarer should not delay in offering him allegiance (*bayʿa*) so that he may receive from him permission to perform the *dhikr*. The *bayʿa* also sets into motion a relationship which is said to surpass even the bond between parent and child. Naqshbandīs are well-known for the emphasis they place upon a disciple fixing his heart upon the personality of the shaykh, a state known as *rābiʿa*. Whether in his presence or absence the disciple should

¹⁹⁵ *Risāla fī l-sulūk*, f. 73r.

¹⁹⁶ In Sufism, the *shaykh* is the spiritual master (plural: *shuyūkh*, *mashāyikh*). Having himself traversed the mystical path, he knows its traps and dangers, and is therefore essential for the aspiring novice or *murīd*, who must place himself totally under his guidance. He thus becomes the novice’s spiritual father and ‘educator’, *al-shaykh al-murabbī*. His closeness to God makes him a saint (*walī*), and provides the basis for his authority. See E. Geoffroy, ‘Shaykh’, *EF*².

¹⁹⁷ Ter Haar, ‘The Importance of the Spiritual Guide in the Naqshbandī Order’, p. 319.

observe a constant bond with his shaykh. On this, Ter Haar notes, ‘the task of the spiritual guide *vis-a-vis* his novice in the Naqshbandī Order is quite often described as a process of “upbringing” (*tarbiyyat*).’¹⁹⁸ The duty of “upbringing” is conjoined with the more traditional role of the shaykh as instructor, *mu‘allim*, with the distinction that the former role now takes priority and thus marks out the Naqshbandī shaykh from the masters of other orders. As regards al-Āqḥiṣārī’s take on the *murshid-murīd* nexus, he is an advocate of the variety of relationship which places the *murīd* in complete subservience to and reverence of the *murshid*. In fact, he is arguably extreme in the demand he places upon the *murīd* and the obedience he is to show to the *murshid* when he suggests that the relationship between the two is analogous to the corpse (here the *murīd*) in the hands of a person preparing it for burial (here the *murshid*). The following excerpt provides more details on this theme, making clear just how proximate al-Āqḥiṣārī’s version of the *murshid-murīd* relationship is to the Naqshbandī Order:

Furthermore, through the course of his occupation with [*dhikr*], he must have a righteous and perfected shaykh and guide who can serve as a representative of the Prophet, God’s peace and blessings be upon him, thereby ensuring that the disciple (*murīd*) is preserved from slipping, purged of his base traits, and endowed with higher virtues in their place. The condition for any shaykh to play the role of representative of the Prophet is that he be a scholar who adheres to the Sharī‘a in his words, deeds and beliefs; [he] should himself be following a person of spiritual insight who is connected in an initiatic chain (*silsila*) all the way back to the Prophet. He should excel in the training of his ego (*riyāḍat nafsīhi*) and should imbibe excellent virtues. The trouble is that today it is rare to find such a man – he is even more precious than red sulphur (*al-kibrīt al-aḥmar*).¹⁹⁹ However, whoever is lucky enough to find such a

¹⁹⁸ Ter Haar, ‘The Importance of the Spiritual Guide in the Naqshbandī Order’, p. 319.

¹⁹⁹ Ter Haar cites Muḥammad Pārsā, disciple, second successor and chief ideologue of Bahā’ al-Dīn Naqshband, who shares the same sentiment as al-Āqḥiṣārī in his *Qudsiyya Kalimāt-i Bahā’ al-Dīn Naqshband*. ‘Previously there were many competent guides, but in recent times their number has fallen sharply, to such an extent that they have become an exceptional phenomenon, even more precious than red sulphur’. ‘The Importance of the Spiritual Guide in the Naqshbandī Order’, p. 318. Of course it is

shaykh should respect him outwardly and inwardly. As for outward respect, he should not argue with him or try to protest in front of him about issues even if he knows [the shaykh] has erred; instead, he should do what he orders him within his capacity. He should not exaggerate in performing the supererogatory prayer in his presence. As for inward respect, it is not to oppose inwardly whatever he has accepted from his shaykh outwardly, so that he does not become a hypocrite. If he is incapable of this, he should abandon the *ṣuḥba* [of his *shaykh*] until [such a time as] his outward [state] is in harmony with his inward [state]. This is since the condition for receiving Divine emanations (*istifāda*) from the Unitary Presence (*ḥaḍra waḥdaniyya*) is to have the heart connected (*rabṭ*) with the shaykh in a way of submission and love. He should believe that this manifestation is what God himself has apportioned for him (*lil ifāda ʿalayh*) and that he would not have attained this emanation were it not for his shaykh, even though the world might be full of *shaykhs*. And if the inner (*bāṭin*) of a *murīd* becomes transfixed on another, his inner will not open up to the Unitary Presence [...].²⁰⁰

As al-Āqḥiṣārī proceeds with his exposition of the *murshid-murīd* relationship, his position appears to move ever more in line with the relationship as it was conceived in the Naqshbandī tradition. I argue that what confronts us in the following excerpt is quite possibly the most striking evidence of our author drawing from the order. For one, he speaks explicitly about the *rābiṭa*. Furthermore there is a description of how the central formula of *dhikr*, *lā ilāha illallāh* is to be read – yet again we are presented with a technique which is characteristic of the Naqshbandīs. Finally, there is a discussion on *fanā*²⁰¹, which also appears to be taken from Naqshbandīs.²⁰¹

impossible to know whether al-Āqḥiṣārī was familiar with Pārsā's work. On the expression *kibrīt aḥmar* (red sulphur), see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 236-237.

²⁰⁰ *Risāla fī l-sulūk*, f. 74v.

²⁰¹ For the Naqshbandīs, *fanā* is a process of three stages: the first is *fanā' fī l-shaykh*, the second, *fanā' fī l-rasūl* and the last is *fanā' fī Allāh*. These three steps allow the process of annihilation to proceed in a controlled and systematic way; above all, they ensure that the shaykh is intimately involved with the *murīd* throughout his journeying along the mystical path and cement firmly the idea that the goal of the mystical path cannot be achieved without complete obedience to the shaykh. On the stages of *fanā*²⁰¹, see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 236-237 and Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, p. 60.

It is important for the disciple be focussed in one direction (*jiha*), for his orientation towards God is via that direction. That direction is also the spirit of the Messenger of God, prayers and peace be upon him, who is in the world of spirits (*‘ālam al-arwāḥ*); just as the prayer is not accepted unless it is done towards the Ka‘ba, emanation (*fayḍ*) is not attained from God except by way of following the Prophet and submitting to him and attaching the heart (*rabṭ al-qalb*) to his prophethood (*nubuwwa*) and the belief that he is the means (*wasīla*) towards God, not any other Prophet; for despite other Prophets all being on truth, no emanation is attained without connecting the heart to the Messenger of God. Thus, since the shaykh is a representative of the Messenger of God, it is necessary that [the disciple] orients himself completely towards his shaykh by way of connecting his heart to him; he should be certain that no emanation can be obtained except via his shaykh - despite the existence of other saints who are also guides and guided themselves. He should be sure that his seeking of support from his shaykh is tantamount to seeking support from the Messenger of God, since his shaykh has taken [the path] from his shaykh, who has taken it from shaykh to his shaykh, all the way back to the Messenger of God [...] Thus the connection of the heart with the shaykh is a major corner-stone of emanation. In fact it is the ultimate corner-stone, and for this reason, all Shaykhs have greatly emphasised this condition. They have gone so far as to say that the disciple should resemble in his obedience to his shaykh the dead body [in its submission] to the one who is tasked with performing its funeral ablution.²⁰²

These are unlikely words from a man who was pivotal for the Qāḍīzādelis. The Divine emanation (*fayḍ*) which al-Āqḥiṣārī speaks of here, or the “enabling energy”, as it has been described by one scholar of the Naqshbandī tradition,²⁰³ is only achieved via the shaykh, who is the representative of the Prophet Muḥammad in the lower world (*dunyā*). The Prophet himself stands out among all other Prophets as the perfect receptacle of this *fayḍ*. What makes orientation towards the shaykh all the more important is that it is impossible to orientate oneself directly towards the Divine – man is bound by direction whereas the Divine is not. The shaykh is thus the only means for a disciple to attain *fayḍ* and achieve the desired ends of the path. When al-Āqḥiṣārī speaks about the connection

²⁰² *Risāla fī l-sulūk*, f. 74r.

²⁰³ A. Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Shaykh* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1998), p. 118.

of the disciple's heart (*rabṭ al-qalb*) with the shaykh's, we are reminded of the Naqshbandī emphasis on the same, expressed by one of the order's masters in the following manner: 'In our path arriving at the degree of perfection is related to a connection (*rābiṭa*) with the exemplary shaykh. The sincere disciple, through his love of the shaykh, receives divine energy (*fayḍ*) from the inner being (*bāṭin*) of the shaykh and becomes coloured with the colour of the shaykh, having an essential connection to the shaykh [...] they call this annihilation in the shaykh, the beginning of true annihilation [in God]. [Anyone doing] *dhikr* without bonding his heart with the master and without achieving annihilation in the shaykh will not arrive.'²⁰⁴

Al-Āqḥiṣārī already emphasises in the *Majālis al-abrār* the importance of the formula *lā ilāha illallāh*, explaining that it is the single-most important formula on the spiritual path. Here he describes the precise method of how it is to be incorporated into the *dhikr*.

The *murīd* once he has received the Word of Unicity (*kalimat al-tawḥīd*) from his shaykh, should occupy himself with great energy. When repeating the formula, he should begin by drawing the *lā ilāha* from the centre of his chest, which is the home of the soul; he should then lengthen the utterance of *lā ilāha* whilst he moves his head towards his right shoulder; focussing his heart on the magnificence of God; this should suppress the soul; then he inclines his head towards his left side, thrashing *illallāh* with strength upon the physical heart whose position is slightly left of the chest, under the left breast; this should be done in such a way that the *dhikr* impacts upon the heart, and the heat of the fire reaches the heart [...]²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ A quotation of Khwāja Muḥammad Maʿṣūm (d. 1096/1684), shaykh of the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidīs after Ahmad Sirhindī, cited in Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet*, p. 131.

²⁰⁵ *Risāla fī l-sulūk*, f. 75v.

Finally, al-Āqḥiṣārī divulges to the reader the fruits of *dhikr*. In a style which is perhaps more reminiscent of Ibn ‘Arabī or Aḥmad Sirhindī, he charts the three degrees or stations that a wayfarer (*sālik*) traverses on the path of annihilation, and emphasises with each description just how fundamental the shaykh’s role is in protecting both the sanity of the *murīd* and ensuring that he does not fall victim to the machinations of the ego which are symptomatic of the process of annihilation.

The *murīd* should repeat the formula [*lā ilāha illallāh*] until all the darkness of existence is drowned out by the view of his witnessing (*naẓr shuhūdihī*) and the Light of Divine Oneness (*nūr al-tawḥīd*) is manifested. At this point errors should be guarded against. The Divine Manifestation (*tajallī*) and first-hand experience of Oneness (*tawḥīd ‘iyānī*), according to what the shaykhs and realised teachers (*muḥaqqiq*) have said, is of three stations (*martaba*): The first station is that of Unity in Action (*al-tawḥīd fī-l-aʿāl*). The wayfarer (*sālik*) at this station witnesses God’s agency in the world and among his creatures. The acts of servants are shut-off to him so that he does not see them as actors. He is thus in utmost need of a perfect guide and noble shaykh who is able to teach him how he is to differentiate actions of volition [from non-volitional actions] and thereby escape from the doubt he is in and so that he does not adopt the doctrine of involuntarism (*al-jary al-yātil*). The second station is that of Unity in Attributes (*al-tawḥīd fī l-ṣifāt*); the wayfarer at this station is shown the eternal attributes of God; when this happens, all accidental attributes are shut off to him and he becomes unconscious of himself; he claims to have absolute power, complete knowledge and to possess all the eternal attributes; he forgets servitude (*‘ubūdiyya*) and claims lordship (*rubūbiyya*) [...] He is thus in the utmost need of being shown evidence of his own existence and nature so that he does not adopt the doctrine of those who believe in *waḥdat al-wujūd* (*al-wujūdiyyīn*), those atheists (*mulḥidīn*) who are both misguided and misleading. The third station is that of unity of essence (*al-tawḥīd fī l-dhāt*); the wayfarer at this station is shown the essence of God (*dhāt Allāh*), the Exalted, and becomes a person of unicity (*ahl al-waḥda*), veiled from multiplicity, unconscious of his own actions, attributes and self; he thus is in utmost need of being shown evidence of multiplicity, his own actions, attributes and self; even non-necessary existence, merely potential (*mumkin*) because *tawḥīd*, according to al-Junayd al-Baghdādī, is the singling out of the Eternal (*qadīm*) from the accidental (*ḥādīth*) [...] The Ancients (*Salaf*) would say, ‘Whoever does not have a shaykh, Satan is his shaykh’. Indeed the perfect shaykh who clings to the

Sharī^ca protects the *murīds* when the veils fall away from them and unicity is unveiled from the perils of predestination (*jabr*) and atheism (*ilhād*), and the belittling of the Sharī^ca.²⁰⁶

The nature of this study does not permit a more detailed survey of the *Risāla fī l-sulūk*. Yet these passages alone highlight just how central Sufism is in al-Āqḥiṣārī's thought. Whilst there is not enough here to regard him as a Naqshbandī, at the very least one can see the appropriation of key aspects of Naqshbandī devotion, particularly in regards to the role of the *murshid*. And whilst al-Āqḥiṣārī does not explicitly advocate formal initiation into a *ṭarīqa*, I believe there is little doubt that he viewed structure as an important dimension of the disciple's journey and that one attach themselves to a *murshid* in order to achieve this.

It is unsurprising that there are such convergences between al-Āqḥiṣārī's approach to the mystical path and the Naqshbandī Order, especially given the penetration of the order into the Ottoman learned institution, which had occurred at least a century prior to al-Āqḥiṣārī. As to whether there is a possibility that he was appropriating devotional practices of another Sufi tradition, whilst it cannot be absolutely precluded, the only realistic alternative to the Naqshbandīs would have been the Khalwatīs. Given al-Āqḥiṣārī's opposition to the Khalwatī Order, it makes it highly improbable that it would be a source. Finally, to return to the question raised in the previous section, we are now also in a position to conclude that al-Āqḥiṣārī did not share the *Ighātha*'s opposition to *ṭarīqa*-oriented Sufism. It is an important insight, since it demonstrates the limitations of Ibn al-Qayyim's influence upon al-Āqḥiṣārī.

²⁰⁶ *Risāla fī l-sulūk*, f. 76v.

Saints: Dead and Alive

Most Sufi orders afford a special position to saints, known in Sufism as *awliyā*^o. The cult of saint veneration may have developed as a natural corollary of the sanctified status of the Prophet Muḥammad; or perhaps it was appropriated by Muslims from foreign schools of mysticism which they came into contact with. Whatever the case, the practice soon evolved into a complex of different practices and beliefs. Intercession, miracles, ceremonies at shrines and other forms of veneration became intricately woven into the cult of saints; its popularity soon became a concern of the jurists and theologians, and even at times the state.²⁰⁷

One aspect of the cult of saints, which stems from the ideas of Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and after him Ibn al-ʿArabī, was the idea that saints were able to achieve stations that surpassed even those of the Prophets. With this was associated the concept of *khatm al-wilāya*, the seal of sainthood. Al-Āqḥiṣārī had strong views, composing an epistle specifically on the subject.

You should know that the Muslims are agreed (*muttafiqūn*) about the excellence of a prophet over the saint; the prophet combines both the station of sainthood (*martabat al-wilāya*) and the station of prophethood (*martabat al-nubuwwa*). Given that the saint does not reach the degree of the prophet – since from the exclusivity of the prophet is that, along with sainthood being a firmly established [trait] within him, he is also protected (*maʿṣūm*) from sin (*maʿṣiya*), safe (*maʾmūn*) from an evil end (*sūʾ al-khātima*) by testimony of the incontrovertible texts (*al-muṣūṣ al-qāṭiʿa*) [of the Qurʾan and *ḥadīth*], honoured by revelation (*musharraf bi-l-waḥy*), despatched (*mabʿūth*) with

²⁰⁷ For more on this theme, see M. Schöller, *The Living and the Dead in Islam: Studies in Arabic Epitaphs, Vol. II: Epitaphs in Context* (Wiesbaden, 2004), esp. Chapter 1.

[the task of] reforming the world and organising the immanent and the eternal, among other perfections which are not to be found within the saint – no weight should be given to some of the heretical Karrāmīs who say that the saint might reach the degree of prophet or those Bāṭinīs who say that sainthood is better than prophethood [...] there are those who claim that the Seal of the Saints (*Khātām al-awliyāʾ*) is better than the Seal of the Prophets (*Khātām al-anbiyāʾ*) [...] Anyone who receives the message of [the Prophet], upon him be peace, cannot become a saint without following him. Whoever thinks that there are saints who can lead to God without need of [the Prophet], upon him be peace, is a heretic (*mulḥid*) and disbeliever (*kāfir*). It is incorrect for him to furnish proof from the story of Mūsā and al-Khiḍr since Mūsā, upon him be peace, was not sent to al-Khiḍr but rather he was sent to the Children of Israel; it was not incumbent upon al-Khiḍr to follow him. Notwithstanding this, what al-Khiḍr did was not a contravention of the Sharīʿa; rather, it was in accordance with it, but because Mūsā was not aware of the causes which permitted those [actions of al-Khiḍr] he censured him [...] As for the message of our master Muḥammad, upon him be peace, it is general (*ʿamma*) for all creatures (*khalq*) – the jinn from them and the men. There is no path to God except by following him, upon him be peace, inwardly (*bāṭinan*) and outwardly (*ẓāhiran*).²⁰⁸

The visitation of graves and the veneration of saints have already been shown in previous research to have been a major point of contention between the Qāḍīzādelis and their opponents. It is clear from the intensity of the debate that there was considered to be a great deal at stake. And given the importance of the intercession of saints in Sufism, it is not difficult to understand why this would be so.²⁰⁹ By the time of Kātib Çelebi's survey of the visitation of graves in his *Mizān al-ḥaqq*, the debate is likely to have been saturated. In chapter thirteen of the *Mizān*, Kātib Çelebi makes the following remarks:

Most lawyers have said, 'To allow the asking of aid from the dead is to slacken the reins of the common people. From this arose idolatry in olden time [...] Then, as the question of pilgrimage to tombs had become hotly disputed, both parties found it necessary to resort to arbitration. At the arbitration, the middle course was chosen, and this ruling was given; those who understand the subtleties of the attachment of the soul to the body and to

²⁰⁸ MS *Harput* 429, f. 38r-39r.

²⁰⁹ For more on the intercession of saints in Islam, see V.J. Hoffmann, 'Intercession', *EF*.

the tomb, and who find a difference between appeals made at tombs and those made elsewhere, may address themselves to the tombs, subject to certain conditions. This some sheykhs have done, and their doing so is not polytheism. There are even degrees of monotheism. The monotheism of Abraham was pure monotheism. Those who devote themselves to God 'Heart and body and soul' pay no heed to mediation. Most possessors of spiritual power are of this kind, whereas men of lower degree find it necessary to provide themselves with intermediaries and go between in seeking and avoiding, in matters spiritual and physical. So long as there is no intention of worshipping the intermediary, no polytheism is involved. The proper behaviour for those who take the middle course is this: when they reach the goal of their pilgrimage they should do no more than recite a fatiha to win the approval of God (glorious is his splendour) and dedicate the reward thereof to the soul of the occupant of the grave. They should have no other idea. They should neither kiss the tomb nor cling to it. If fortunate enough to visit the hallowed tomb of the Lord of Men, the Prophet, they should stand before it with hands clasped in front of them, in the prescribed manner, in heartfelt devotion and prayer. They should not be guilty of the indecorum of clinging to the grill or kissing it. This is the form laid down in the holy law. Any other mode of behaviour is evidence of disrespect.²¹⁰

Kātib Çelebi's account is revealing. Firstly, it becomes clear from the detail he provides that the position of the 'ulamā' was one of opposition to visiting graves for the purpose of beseeching the deceased, irrespective of their status when alive. This is significant because Qāḍīzāde and his sympathisers, who obviously shared this oppositional stance, is frequently presented by scholars as having been almost unique in his strict attitude on the matter. Secondly, Kātib Çelebi himself clearly sides with the 'ulamā' position on the proscription of doing anything at a grave other than supplicating for the deceased. He also is opposed to the popular practices associated with graves, such as kissing, touching or doing anything physical to them. He attributes to the first serious proscription of visiting tombs to Ibn Taymiyya and describes the opposition he faced for his views. Finally, it is interesting that in Kātib Çelebi's mind, the issue had reached an impasse, at

²¹⁰ Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, pp. 92-94.

which point both sides of the argument needed arbitration. Whose verdict it is which Kātib Çelebi describes as the middle way is undisclosed; what is clear is that he believes that the ‘ulamā’ opposed to the visitation of graves and the supplication to the deceased had veered towards fanaticism.

At this point it is worth noting who the most prominent opponents of this practice were during this period. Birgivī was probably the first in Ottoman society to highlight the problem of visiting graves and marshalling arguments from Ibn al-Qayyim in order to support his case. He dedicates an epistle to the subject, *Risāla fī ziyārat al-qubūr* and also treats the subject in his *Ṭarīqat al-Muḥammadiyya* and the *Vasiyyet-nāme*. His reliance on Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim is striking, though he desists from explicitly mentioning the former. Birgivī’s epistle is virtually replicated by Qāḍīzāde in his *Irshād al-‘uqūl*. Al-Āqḥiṣārī must be included amongst these two revivalists once more; in the *Majālis al-abrār*, *Majlis XVII* is devoted to the prohibition of praying near tombs and fifty-seventh is devoted to the visitation of tombs. As with Birgivī, al-Āqḥiṣārī too composed an epistle on the subject, *Radd ‘alā al-maqābirīyya – A Refutation of the Grave-worshippers*. In keeping with his revivalist comrades, al-Āqḥiṣārī is explicit about his main source, Ibn al-Qayyim, and is particularly emphatic in his adulation for the mediaeval Ḥanbalī in the introduction to the text:

These pages I have taken from *Ighāthat al-lahafān fī makāyid al-shayṭān* of the shaykh, the imām, the ‘allāma, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya – may God accept his soul amongst the souls of those who have returned to their Lord both pleasing and pleased. I append to this some of what I have discovered in other authoritative books; this is because many people today have made shrines out of some tombs, to which they pray, make sacrificial offerings, and various kinds of ritual and statements stem from them which do not befit the

People of Faith (*ahl al-īmān*). I thus wanted to make clear what the Sharīʿa has said regarding this matter, in order that the truth stands clear from falsehood for all who want to correct and purify faith from the machinations of Satan.²¹¹

Al-Āqḥiṣārī begins by quoting the Prophetic Tradition, ‘May the curse of God be upon those Jews and the Christians who took the graves of their Prophets as places of prostration (*masājid*).’²¹² He quotes the tradition from the *Māṣābīḥ al-sunna*, before explaining that the reason for the Prophet’s invocation against the Jews and Christians was that due to their offering of prayers at the burial sites of prophets: ‘[They do so] either because they consider that to prostrate towards their graves is an act of reverence (*taʿẓīm*) – which is in fact an act of open associationism (*shirk jalī*); or they believe (*ẓannan*) that to face their graves during prayer is more acceptable to God, the Exalted, since it deserves two merits, it is worship of God as well as an act of reverence for a prophet – this is hidden associationism (*shirk khafī*). It is for this reason that the Prophet, upon him be peace, prohibited his nation from praying at graves, so that they avoid resembling [Jews and Christians] despite having perhaps an ulterior motive.’²¹³

The Ottoman revivalist, after tracing idolatry back to the era of Noah²¹⁴, goes on to cite Ibn al-Qayyim’s *Ighāthat al-lahafān* extensively:

²¹¹ *Radd ʿalā al-maqbariyya*, MS Harput 429, f. 100r.

²¹² *Majlis XVII*, f. 50v.

²¹³ *Majlis XVII*, f. 50v.

²¹⁴ Al-Āqḥiṣārī says, ‘The first instance of idolatry occurred amongst the people of the Prophet Nūḥ, upon him be peace. It happened because of their obsession (*ʿukūf*) with graves. This is what God informs of in His Book where He says, ‘Noah said: “O my Lord! They have disobeyed me and they follow (men) whose wealth and children give them no increase but only loss. And they have devised a tremendous Plot and they have said (to each other), ‘Abandon not your gods: Abandon neither Wadd nor Suwāʿ, neither Yagūth nor Yaʿūq, nor Nasr.’ Ibn ʿAbbās, God be pleased with him, and others from the ancients (*Salaf*) have said, ‘These people were a righteous lot among the tribe of Nūḥ the prophet, upon him be peace. Then the people

Ibn al-Qayyim in *al-Ighātha* says, quoting his shaykh, ‘The cause (*illa*) for which the Legislator (*Shāriʿ*) prohibited taking graves as places of worship is that many people commit either major associationism (*al-shirk al-akbar*) or something less than it. Indeed associationism (*shirk*) at the grave of a man who is deemed righteous is dearer to the hearts than associationism [committed] at a tree or a rock. This is why you will find many people at graves standing humbly, out of fear and humility, worshipping reverently (*fī qulūbihim*) in a way which they do not do even at the houses of God (*buyūt Allāh*), the Exalted, or before dawn (*waqt al-saḥar*). They hope (*rajā*) for things through the blessing (*baraka*) of their prayers there and supplications which they do not hope for at mosques. In order to terminate the fundamental constituent (*mādda*) of this harm (*mafsada*), the Prophet, upon him be peace, prohibited praying at graves altogether, even if the praying person does not do so to attain blessing from the place, just as he prohibited prayers at the rising and the setting of the sun and when it reaches its zenith because these are times at which the Pagans (*Mushrikūn*) intend to worship the sun. So he prohibited his nation from praying at these times even if they do not intend what the Pagans intend. If a man prays at a grave because he believes it to be blessed then [his action] is the very act of waging war (*‘ayn al-muḥāraba*) against God and His messenger and is a contravention of His religion (*dīn*) and initiating a practice of religion (*ibtidāʿ dīn*) which God has not given permission for; indeed practices of worship are based on the following of the *Sunna* and not [based on] whims and innovation. Muslims are agreed upon what they know of the religion of their prophet, that praying at graves is forbidden because the danger of committing [an act] of associationism (*fitnat l-shirk*) there or the similarity that it has to idolatry (*‘ibādat al-aṣnām*).²¹⁵

Despite the clear rationale for laws prohibiting prayer and supplications at graves, the Turks of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s time were obviously not in agreement. It is perhaps for this reason that al-Āqḥiṣārī moves towards virtual fanaticism when he begins to explain that the very act of visiting graves is unlawful unless very strict conditions are met. It is here that he is completely in line with Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim:

became obsessed with graves, making statues. As time elapsed they started to worship them; these were the beginnings of idol worship.’ (*Majlis XVII*, f. 50v).

²¹⁵ *Majlis XVII*, f. 50r.

The visitation of graves is of two sorts: a lawful visit (*ziyāra sharʿiyya*) and an unprecedented visit (*ziyāra bidʿiyya*). As for the lawful visit which the Prophet himself permitted, the purpose of it is two things: firstly to serve as a warning (*ittiʿāz*) and a lesson (*ʿtibār*) for the visitor; and secondly for the benefit of the people buried, who receive the salutations of the visitor and his invocation for them. As for the unprecedented visit, it is that visit for which prayer is intended [at the graves], or circumambulation of them, kissing them, pressing of cheeks against them, taking soil from them, invoking their occupiers, and seeking their intercession (*istighātha*), asking them for victory (*naṣr*), for provision (*rizq*), health, children, for relief from distress and other similar needs. Such was the way of the idolaters, who would ask their idols; and indeed this is the source of this adage and unprecedented [form of] polytheism (*ziyāda bidʿiyya shirkiyya*). None of it whatsoever is derived legitimately according to the consensus of the Muslims since the Messenger of the Lord of the Worlds did nothing of the sort and neither did his Companions, their successors or the imams of this religion.²¹⁶

Al-Āqḥiṣārī is also in keeping with the hard-line taken by Birgivī and Qāḍīzāde. His views would have locked him in battle, along with his intellectual comrades, with the head of the Khalwatīs, Siwāsī Efendī, and all those who advocated the visitation of graves for the purpose of seeking intercession of the dead.²¹⁷

A question arises at this point: whilst on several key areas of practical and theoretical mysticism al-Āqḥiṣārī's views appear to converge with Naqshbandī Sufism, is his view on the visitation of graves a point at which two paths finally diverge? It is known that the

²¹⁶ *Majlis XVII*, f. 50r. Al-Āqḥiṣārī's views on this are comparable to Birgivī's *Radd al-Qabariyya* (Suleymaniye Library, MS Esad Efendi 3780), ff. 54v-55v and Qāḍīzāde's *Irshād al-ʿuqūl*, f. 173r. Üstüwānī Mehmed Efendī stated his views on visiting the graves in his collection of discourses. In a section on shirk, when explaining that out of six kinds of shirk there is a type called *shirk tarībī*, he begins to speak about the unlawfulness of praying to the dead. See *Kitāb-i Üstüwānī*, f. 176v.

²¹⁷ Siwāsī Efendī's views in support of this are found in his *Durar al-ʿaqā'id*, f. 58v. There he argues that the visitation of the grave is of benefit to both the visitor and the soul of the deceased. If a righteous person is visiting the soul of a sinner, then the former's supplication could reduce the punishment of the latter. Alternatively, if the deceased led a righteous life – or in fact was a saint – then the visitor is set to benefit from emanation (*ḥayāt*) and light (*nūr*) by virtue of his contact with the soul of the deceased. He quotes in this regard a spurious *ḥadīth*, 'When you have difficulties in your affairs, seek help from the inhabitants of graves.' For more details of Siwāsī's argument, refer to Öztürk, 'Islamic Orthodoxy', pp. 368-369.

Naqshbandīs, especially in the post-Mujaddidī phase, placed great importance upon visiting shrines of the great saints. Indeed in modern Turkey, many of the great *turbas* were renovated by Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī patrons. Yet it is also true that Mujaddidī-Naqshbandī Sufism is not homogeneous; indeed it might even be viewed as having taken a distinctly popular form in the modern age. Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī and Shāh Waliullāh (d. 1175/1762) both adopted strict positions on the visitation of shrines. They both also imposed strict conditions on what is permissible to do at shrines, and certainly made no allowances for any form of worship or invocation to the souls of the deceased.²¹⁸ Both lived through times when pilgrimages to shrines were commonplace and certainly al-Āqḥiṣārī, Birgivī and Qāḍizāde were responding to similar practices in the Ottoman context. It is therefore still possible to view al-Āqḥiṣārī's condemnation of certain practices as falling within a Naqshbandī paradigm.

It is worthy of note that to prohibit the visitation of shrines does not imply an opposition to communicating with the spirits of the deceased. As part of their daily liturgy, Naqshbandīs seek to establish contact with the spirits of past masters during the *rābiṭa*, hoping to attain divine emanation from this. The *rābiṭa* is said to facilitate a connection with the spirits of Prophets and saints without having to traverse geographical space. This is also one of the reasons that Naqshbandīs are able to advocate the principle of *safar dar waṭan*. Given this, there are Naqshbandīs who could readily proscribe such practices as the visitation of shrines when they perceived this to lead to greater harm – essentially

²¹⁸ On Shāh Waliullāh, see J.M.S. Baljo, 'Shah Waliullah and the Dargah,' in *Muslim Shrines in India*, edited by C.W. Troll (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2nd Edition 2004), pp. 189-197.

invoking the concept of *sadd al-dharīʿa*²¹⁹ – without at the same time barring a connection to the souls of deceased saints.

Conclusion

It is clear from this chapter that Sufism was of central importance in the thought of Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī. He is unambivalent about his belief in the necessity for every Muslim to be engaged in personal spiritual struggle; His position is clear about the remembrance of God, *dhikr*, being the instrument *par excellence* for achieving spiritual purification, and the surest way towards preparing the soul for direct knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of God; Finally, he is unyielding about the essential need of a spiritual wayfarer for a guiding shaykh, who, in al-Āqḥiṣārī's view, serves as the representative of the Messenger of God, ensuring that the disciple does not become self-deceived whilst travelling on the spiritual path. The shaykh is the nexus between the disciple and the spiritual world, as well as between the disciple and the souls of past masters and Prophets. Above all, the shaykh is the nexus between the disciple and God. We see in al-Āqḥiṣārī a Sufism which in many respects is rather typical of the orders, which in Islam first evolved from about the 6th/12th century. The content of his approach is easily garnered from the *Majālis al-abrār* and the *Risāla fī l-sulūk*.

²¹⁹ Al-Āqḥiṣārī explains that the Prophet prohibited the visiting of graves during early Islam to block the means towards associationism (*shirk*), since the Companions were still new converts. This was lifted later, but he certainly is of the opinion that it can be reinforced if circumstances once more dictate the need for prohibition. See *Majlis XVII*, f. 51v.

The attempt to position al-Āqḥiṣārī's *Majālis* and *Risāla fī-l-sulūk* within the context of the existing orders of the time has demanded more. Though ultimately it is clear that he does not fit neatly into a particular order, the survey of Naqshbandī Sufism above has allowed for a recognition of the extent to which al-Āqḥiṣārī's understanding of the spiritual path overlaps with the order. It is perhaps inevitable this would be so, given both the firm roots of the order within Ottoman society since as early as the 15th century, and the orthodoxy which it claimed for itself. In all it is difficult not to assume that al-Āqḥiṣārī's emphasis on the silent *dhikr*, the *rābiṭa*, the status and role of the shaykh, the necessity of the shaykh being perfect (*kāmil*); and in contrast, his opposition to the visitation of shrines, the belief in the finality of sainthood (*khatm al-wilāya*), and various extra-scriptural devotional practices; were not in some way of Naqshbandī influence.

Notwithstanding the overlap between al-Āqḥiṣārī's understanding and Naqshbandī Sufism, there is one inescapable truth: at no point does al-Āqḥiṣārī mention the Naqshbandī Order explicitly, or cite any of the well-known Naqshbandī masters, whether in the *Majālis* or the *Risāla fī l-sulūk*. An attempt to understand why this may be so is provided in the final chapter of the thesis.

IV. INNOVATION (*BIDʿA*)

This chapter seeks to investigate the philosophical underpinnings of Qāḍīzādeli opposition to innovations (*bidʿa*), to position them on the ideological spectrum so as to understand which tradition they draw upon for their conceptualisation, and also to demonstrate, by a process of both elimination and comparative textual analysis, the nature of the connection between the movement and the Damascene Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya.

A Complex Discussion

The tension between tradition and innovation is one that is hardly unique to the history of Islam. Since it is in part a tension which develops because of religion's natural predilection for the past (usually a specific point in the past) over the present and future, it is observable across religious boundaries. At its root is a concern for how closely the beliefs and practices of a believing community, in any given point in its development, are in keeping with the beliefs and practices of the religion's founder and earliest practitioners. Often developing in its wake are revivalist movements which attempt the task of practically steering a community back to its supposed origins.

In the context of Islamic intellectual history, this tension manifested itself in a very particular way. After the fall of the Muʿtazilites during the late Abbāsid period, legalists (*fuqahāʿ*) would take over the reigns from theologians (*mutakallimūn*) in determining correct religious practice. Whereas the theologians were more concerned with delineating

doctrinal orthodoxy and heresy, the jurists spent most of their efforts on delineating correct practice, or orthopraxy, from incorrect practice. They were therefore less interested in doctrinal heresies, though admittedly ritual practice and theological doctrines were sometimes entangled.²²⁰ Therefore the language which evolved to describe heretical practices, and also beliefs (but only as an extension of the first), came about in an intellectual milieu dominated by jurists.

Yet the origin of the most important term used by both jurists and theologians to describe heresies, *bidʿa* (innovation), was the origination of the Prophet himself.²²¹ And the issue of innovation might never have been contested had the Prophet himself not counselled his community to emulate his example, whilst exhorting them at the same time to scrupulously avoid departing from it. According to a tradition in the *ḥadīth* collection of Muslim, the Prophet would preambule every sermon of his with a warning about the perils of inventing (*iḥdāth*) new things in the religion.²²² In *Majlis XVIII*, al-Āqḥiṣārī quotes two Prophetic traditions, the first, ‘Every innovation (*bidʿa*) is misguidance,’ and the second, which does not explicitly make use of the term *bidʿa*, but does mention *muḥdath*

²²⁰ On the rise to prominence of the jurists in the wake of the so-called “fall” of the Muʿtazilites, see J. Van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

²²¹ With the appearance of the concept of the Prophetic Way (*sunnat al-nabī*), which indicated the tradition of the Prophet which he himself sanctioned – either verbally, practically or by tacit approval – the term *bidʿa* came into usage as a contradistinction. For more on the early development of the term *sunna* refer to J. Schacht, ‘Sur l’expression “*Sunna* du Prophete”’, *Melanges d’Orientalisme offerts a Henri Masse* (Tehran, 1963), pp. 361-365; G.H.A. Juynboll, ‘Muslim’s Introduction to his *Ṣaḥīḥ* translated and annotated with an excursus on the chronology of *fitna* and *bidʿa*’, *JSAL*, 5 (1984), 263-311 and ‘Some new ideas on the development of *sunna* as a technical term in early Islam’, *JSAL*, 10 (1987), 97-118.

²²² In the tradition related by Jābir, whenever addressing the people, the Prophet’s eyes would redden, he would raise his tone and his anger would become severe till it was as though he was warning an army. He would then, in his opening address, warn that every innovation is pernicious (Muslim, 4: 1885).

(invention), ‘Whoever invents something in this matter of ours (i.e. religion) which is not from it shall have it rejected.’²²³

Whereas the Prophet’s language was simple, the notion of “inventing religion” was possibly blurred in the period of the the second caliph, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 43/644). Apparently, one day after observing the performance of the *tarāwīḥ*-prayer in congregation, something which the Prophet did not himself encourage, ‘Umar is reported to have said, ‘What an excellent innovation it is’ (*ni‘mat al-bid‘a hiya*);²²⁴ this was a no less than a proclamation for many jurists in posterity who would invoke the authority of ‘Umar in order to justify a typology of innovations, ranging from praiseworthy (*ḥasana*) to blameworthy (*sayyi‘a*). Since, in the view of Sunnī Islam, ‘Umar had been invested with legal authority by the Prophet himself – the Prophet is believed to have commanded his community to follow his Way (*Sunna*) as well as the way of the ‘Rightly-Guided’ Caliphs after him²²⁵ - these same jurists argued that the Prophet’s *ḥadīth* on *bid‘a* was qualified (*mukhaṣṣaṣ*) by the ‘specific (*khāṣṣ*) statement of ‘Umar.

²²³ Jurjānī in his *Ta‘rīfāt* says that ‘*ibtidā‘* is the creation of a thing unprecedented in material and time, such as the intellect; it is the opposite of composition (*takwīn*) which is preceded by material substance, and *iḥdāth*, preceded by time (p. 11).

²²⁴ Bukhārī, XXXII, 227. The tradition is also collected in Mālik’s *Muwaṭṭā‘*, and is quoted in full here: ‘Mālik related from Ibn Shihāb from ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd al-Qārī said, “I went out with ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb in Ramadan to the mosque and the people there were spread out in groups. Some men were praying by themselves, whilst others were praying in small groups. ‘Umar said, ‘By Allah! It would be better in my opinion if these people gathered behind one recite.’ So he gathered them behind ‘Ubayy b. Ka‘b. Then I went out with him another night and the people were praying behind their Qur’an recite. ‘Umar said, ‘How excellent this new way is, but what you miss while you are asleep is better than what you watch in prayer.’ He meant the end of the night, and people used to watch the beginning of the night in prayer.”’ *Al-Muwatta‘. Imam Malik*, trans. A.A.at-Tarjumana and Y. Johnson (Norwich: Diwan Press, 1982), pp. 47-48.

²²⁵ Abū Dāwūd, XXXX, 4590, al-Tirmidhī, 2676.

Bidʿa would thus become a contested subject in the history of Islamic thought, with few books of law and ethics omitting some kind of survey. Those which treated the subject as a principal theme did so as part of a perennial reformist current in Islam, often aiming to curb perceived societal maladies. Generally, anti-*bidʿa* literature is characterised by its adoption of a critical stance on all traditions, customs, behaviours and aspects of communal engagement which have no direct association with the life of the Prophet or his early community, yet are believed by those who enact them to be *qurubāt* – that is, actions which bring one nearer to God. Since the time of Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), in particular, it would be the reported statements of the Prophet which Sunnī Muslims would use in order to differentiate the *Sunna* from *bidʿa*.²²⁶

Al-Āqḥiṣārī's *Majālis al-abrār* should be seen both as a work which stands within a long tradition of writings on *bidʿa*, alongside texts written by representatives from most of the major schools of law, but also as one of several texts from the 16th and 17th centuries that were connected with the Qāḍīzādeli movement. Among the contributors to the Ottoman corpus on *bidʿa* was Birgivī, who wrote on the subject in *al-Ṭarīqat al-muḥammadiyya*. Qāḍīzāde also penned two epistles, *Qāmiʿat al-bidʿa nāṣirat al-Sunna*, *Dāmighāt al-mubtadaʿa*²²⁷ and the *Risāleh*.²²⁸ He also included a chapter on the subject in his *Irshād al-ʿuqūl*.²²⁹ As for the *Majālis*, it is ostensibly dedicated to the theme of innovation, with the term featuring in both the title of the work, in the subtitles of no fewer than seven of

²²⁶ For al-Shāfiʿī's role in securing for the Prophetic *Sunna* unique priority after the Qurʾān as a source for establishing jurisprudential rulings, refer to J. Schacht, *The Origin's of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), Chapt. 2 and 3, F. Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) and Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *Risāla: Treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence*, trans. Majid Khadduri (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1987).

²²⁷ Qāḍīzāde, *Qāmiʿat al-bidʿa*, Suleymaniye Library, MS. *Birinci Serez* 3876, f. I.

²²⁸ *Risāle-i Qāḍīzāde*. See especially, ff. 87v-r.

²²⁹ Qāḍīzāde, *Irshād al-ʿuqūl*, Chapter II, f. 124v.

the one hundred *majālis* within it, as well as frequent instances throughout where al-Āqḥiṣārī highlights the many innovations of his time.²³⁰

Most interestingly, al-Āqḥiṣārī conceptualisation of *bidʿa* is influenced by Ibn Taymiyya, yet because he does not expressly mention his source, it is rather difficult to demonstrate this borrowing without a close textual comparison. Why al-Āqḥiṣārī would leave Ibn Taymiyya’s name out of the *Majālis* is a matter for speculation. It is possible that Ibn Taymiyya’s name was for some in the Ottoman era synonymous with heresy. It is perhaps understandable that al-Āqḥiṣārī, who would certainly have wanted to appeal to a wide audience, would have wanted to avoid any explicit association. If not this pragmatic purpose, the name of Ibn Taymiyya may simply have been omitted in order not to turn away a potential convert from the work of a “foreign school”. In any case, it is not uncommon to find scholars omitting the names of their controversial sources. We find in the works of the Ottoman Birgivī, and also even from stalwarts like Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, a precedent for this.²³¹ Perhaps what marked Ibn Taymiyya’s name apart is that one finds it disappearing from the works of later borrowers rather more frequently than with other infamous personalities.

²³⁰ For example see *Majlis*’ XVIII, XIX, XX, XXIV, XXXII, XXXVII, XXXIX.

²³¹ Details of Birgivī’s usage of Ibn Taymiyya are given later in this chapter. On Ghazālī, see M. Afifi al-Akiti’s doctoral thesis, ‘The *Maḍnūn* of Ghazālī: A Critical Edition of the Unpublished *Major Maḍnūn* with Discussion of His Restricted, Philosophical Corpus’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, Oxford University, 2007) in which the author shows al-Ghazālī to have made use of Avicenna and other peripatetic philosophers without express mention of his sources.

Bid'ā: A Clarification

It is important to clarify a rudimentary yet rather commonly made error: Western studies on *bid'ā* which fail to approach the concept and its employment through the lens of legal theory often fail to appreciate the precision with which Muslim jurists have invoked the term. This might be the result of overlooking the semantic and legal connotations of the word, or because of the seemingly arbitrary ways in which it is defined and applied. Whatever the case is, there is a marked tendency in the writing of some scholars that indicates they have decided to avoid the semantic minefield rather than seek to navigate through its traps. The result is sometimes a misreading of Islamic legal texts which deal with this subject.²³²

Whilst the term *bid'ā* has been used discursively over the centuries there is at least some level of agreement amongst Muslim jurists about the broad ambit of the term. For the majority, *bid'ā* is employed in the legal (*shar'ī*) context to refer to those innovative ritual practices or heretical beliefs that cannot be justified in some way by recourse to the foundational texts of Islam. Social practices and customary usage which have no bearing on religion *per se* do not usually fall within the scope of the term, even when it might appear that issues which have been classed as *bid'ā* ostensibly appear to be from the

²³² For example, M. Fierro takes for granted the view that *bid'ā* is applied to both religious and social practice in, 'The Treatises against Innovations,' *Der Islam*, 69 (1992), pp. 204-246. See also B. Lewis, 'Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy in the History of Islam,' *Studia Islamica*, 1 (1953), pp. 43-63; M. Talbi, 'Les Bid'ā,' *Studia Islamica*, 12 (1960), pp. 43-77; J.P. Berkey, 'Tradition, Innovation and the Social Construction of Knowledge in the Medieval Islamic Near East,' *Past and Present*, 146 (1995), pp. 38-65; V. Rispler, 'Towards a New Understanding of the Term *Bid'ā*,' *Der Islam*, 68 (1991). In Berkey, the term *bid'ā* is translated as "custom". It is noteworthy that none of the aforementioned studies attempts to conceptualise *bid'ā*.

genus of day-to-day social transactions. In view of the complex nature of this discussion, it would be useful to develop a clearer understanding of the term *bid'a*.

The Qur'an, the primary source of legislation in Islam,²³³ has something to say about innovation in a verse in *al-Ḥadīd*. According to commentators, a group of Christians were rebuked for having introduced the practice of monasticism into their tradition. In the verse, the eighth form perfect of the infinitive *bid'a* is used. It is emboldened in the text below:

ثُمَّ فَفَعَلْنَا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِم بِرُسُلِنَا وَقَفَعْنَا بِعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ وَآتَيْنَاهُ الْإِنْجِيلَ وَجَعَلْنَا فِي
قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ رَأْفَةً وَرَحْمَةً وَرَهْبَانِيَّةً ابْتَدَعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَاهَا عَلَيْهِمْ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ
رِضْوَانِ اللَّهِ فَمَا رَعَوْهَا حَقَّ رِعَايَتِهَا فَآتَيْنَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ
فَاسِقُونَ.

Then, in their wake, We followed them up with (others of) Our apostles: We sent after them Jesus the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy. But the Monasticism which they **invented** for themselves, We did not prescribe for them: (We commanded) only the seeking for the good pleasure of God. But that they did not foster as they should have done. Yet We bestowed, on those among them who believed, their (due) reward, but many of them are rebellious transgressors. (Q.57:27)

Commentators and jurists have deduced from this verse that God alone is the one who has sole legislative authority on matters of ritual and religious practice. Some of the followers of Jesus are accused of having invented, or innovated (*ibtada'a*), forms of ritual

²³³ The extent to which the Qur'an has informed Muslim law in practice is an interesting question, especially since the strictly legal content of the Qur'an is rather thin. It helps to explain why *ḥadīth* is so important to Muslim jurists as are the pragmatic principles of the legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), particularly *urf*, *ʿāda* and *maṣlaḥa*. For more on this discussion, see W. Hallaq, *Introduction to Islamic Law* and Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

worship, most particularly monasticism, for which they had no authority in the Gospels. It is their action which is said to be rebuked here.²³⁴ Importantly, this verse, which is the only one in the Qur'an where this verbal form occurs, censures the guilty party for their innovating in matters of religious practice only, and not in other spheres of human activity.

Similarly, Prophetic Traditions that warn against innovations make it clear that it is only those accretions into religious practice that are blameworthy, rather than innovation in the broader semantic sense. We can cite here al-Āqḥiṣārī's *Majālis* for two examples:

The Messenger of God, prayers and peace of God be upon him, said "To proceed: indeed the best of speech is the Book of God, the Exalted, and the best of guidance is the guidance of Muḥammad and the worst of affairs are its inventions, every invention is an innovation, and every innovation is a misguidance." In another *ḥadīth*, narrated by ʿIrbād b. Sāriya, he, upon him be peace, said, "Whoever amongst you lives after me shall see much discord; so you should cling to my way (*sunna*) and the way (*sunna*) of the well-guided caliphs. Cling to it and hold on to it with your molars. Beware of matters invented, since every invention is an innovation, and every innovation is a misguidance."²³⁵

²³⁴ See for example al-Ṭabarī's, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl ʾāy al-Qurʾān: Taqrīb wa Tahdhīb li Imām al-mufasssīrīn wa l-muʾarrikhīn, Abī Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī*, abridged and annotated by S. Khālidi (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1997), 7: 239-240. There are alternative readings of this verse; perhaps most famous is that of the Muʿtazilite jurist and exegete, Jār Allāh Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 537-6/1143-4). On the basis of his commentary, an English rendition of the verse might read as follows: 'Then, in their wake, We followed them up with (others of) Our apostles: We sent after them Jesus the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him compassion, mercy and monasticism, which they invented. We did not prescribe this [monasticism] for them except as a means for them to seek the good pleasure of God. But some did not foster it as they should have done. Yet We bestowed, on those among them who believed, their (due) reward, but many of them are rebellious transgressors.' For Zamakhsharī, this more positive reading of monasticism would absolve God from having inspired a sinful act to people, a deduction which might be made on the basis of the mainstream reading given above. See al-Zamakhsharī's *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-taʾwīl* (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1995), 4: 468-469.

²³⁵ Al-Āqḥiṣārī, *Majlis XVIII*, f. 53r. The juxtaposition of *bidʿa* and *sunna* in the second tradition deserves some attention. It suggests that the terms are antonymous, as explained by a recent scholar of Islamic law: '*Sunna*, in both the language of the Arabs and the Sacred Law, means way, as is illustrated by the words of the Prophet, "He who inaugurates a good *sunna* in Islam...And he who introduces a bad *sunna* in Islam..."',

Abū Iṣḥāq al-Shāṭibī (d. 789/1388), the 8th/14th century Andalusian legal theoretician, is one of the few Muslim authorities to formulate a definition of *bidʿa*. His *al-Iʿtiṣām – The Refuge* goes some way towards explaining the problem of innovation, and, whilst untypical of the anti-*bidʿa* literature in the depth of analysis, it indicates just how precisely the term has been employed:

It is well-established in legal theory (*ʿilm al-uṣūl*) that judgements (*ḥukm*) relating to the actions and statements of servants (*ʿibād*) are of three types: 1) A ruling which necessitates the meaning of a command (*amr*), whether it be obligatory (*wājib*) or recommended (*mandūb*); 2) A ruling which necessitates the meaning of prohibition (*nahy*), whether it be reprehensible (*makrūh*) or proscribed (*ḥarām*); and 3) a ruling which necessitates permission (*ibāḥa*). Thus the actions and statements of servants are limited to the following three types: 1) a required act; 2) an act whose avoidance is obligatory; 3) an act permissible to either undertake or leave.

That which must be avoided conflicts with the two former types and is of two sub-categories: either it must be avoided, and [therefore] prohibited, because it is a special contravention (*mukhālaḥa khāṣṣa*), irrespective of anything else. If it is prohibited then the action is labelled a sin (*maʿṣiya*) and the one who carries it out is labelled a sinner (*āthim*); or it must be avoided, and [therefore] prohibited, because it conflicts with manifest legislation (*ẓāhir al-tashrīʿ*), insofar as [it involves] applying restrictions (*ḍarb al-ḥudūd*), specifying certain modalities (*kayfiyyāt*), observing specific postures (*ḥayʾa muʿayyina*) or specific times, [in a manner] which is permanent.²³⁶ [This latter

sunna meaning way or custom. The way of the Prophet in giving guidance, accepting, and rejecting: this is the *sunna*. For “good *sunna*” and “bad *sunna*” mean a “good way” or “bad way”, and cannot possibly mean anything else. Thus, the meaning of “*sunna*” is not what most students, let alone ordinary people, understand; namely, that it is the prophetic hadith (as when *sunna* is contrasted with “*Kitāb*”, i.e. Qurʾān, in distinguishing textual sources), or the opposite of the obligatory (as when *sunna*, i.e. recommended, is contrasted with obligatory in legal contexts), since the former is a technical usage coined by hadith scholars, while the latter is a technical usage coined by legal scholars and specialists in fundamentals of jurisprudence. Both of these are usages of later origin that are not what is meant by *sunna* here. Rather, the *sunna* of the Prophet is his way of acting, ordering, accepting, and rejecting, and the way of his Rightly Guided Caliphs who followed his way acting, ordering, accepting, and rejecting. So practices that are newly begun must be examined in light of the *sunna* of the Prophet and his way and path in acceptance or rejection.” N. Keller, *The Concept of Bidʿa in the Islamic Shariʿah* (<http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/nuh/bida.htm> last accessed 05/01/2010). For other definitions of *Sunna*, see W. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunnī ʿUṣūl al-fiqh* (Cambridge: University Press, 1999), p. 194.

²³⁶ Examples of each of these modalities of *bidʿa* are provided by al-Shāṭibī later in the text: an applied restriction might be when someone vows to fast while standing throughout it; a specified modality might be

kind] is the invention of something new (*ibtidāʿ*), an innovation (*bidʿa*). The one who does it is labelled an innovator (*mubtadiʿ*).

Building upon the above, *bidʿa* is a [term] expressing ‘an invented path in religion, which runs parallel (*tuḍāḥī*) to the Law (*shariʿa*), and is undertaken with the intention of exaggerating (*mubālagha*) in the worship (*taʿabbud*) of God, the Sublime.’ This is the definition according to those who do not include customs (*ʿādāt*) within the scope of *bidʿa* because they prefer to limit its scope to acts of worship (*ʿibādāt*) [...] Based on this definition, if what is invented is something which relates to daily life, such as innovations in industry or building, then such a thing would not be labelled a *bidʿa*.²³⁷

Works which might be classified within the corpus of anti-*bidʿa* literature²³⁸ do not often provide a definition of *bidʿa* or even a clear statement on its ambit – they merely assume the reader’s knowledge of what criteria is being used to separate correct practice from innovation. What al-Shāṭibī is able to do here is to formulate clearly the concept which the contributors to the anti-*bidʿa* literature have in mind. In doing so he was almost certainly aware that jurists before him – and most particularly his Mālikī predecessors, such Ibn Waḍḍāḥ, Ṭurṭūshī and Ibn al-Ḥājj – had potentially left a lacuna by failing to define clearly the parameters of their inquiry. Notwithstanding this, it is not difficult to garner from the manifold examples of innovations which jurists present in their works that each is connected either directly to a religious practice or else has some religious connotation.

to make *dhikr* in a circle with a single voice; and an appointed time might be make a celebration out of the birthday of the Prophet (*al-ʿItisām*, p.31).

²³⁷ Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-ʿItisām* (Beirut: Maktabat al-ʿāriyya, 2002), p. 29. Āqḥiṣārī is equally unambiguous when he excludes customs from the ambit of *bidʿa*. He says: ‘[The term “innovation”] in the two traditions, though general, incorporates all forms of invention. However, its generality is not according to its wider linguistic implication, but rather its specific legal implication. Hence it does not include customs in the first instance, but instead is restricted to certain creedal issues and modalities of worship.

²³⁸ See next section for a list of these.

The Theoretical Dimensions of the Bid^ca Debate

In an attempt to ascertain the deeper philosophical underpinnings of the anti-*bid^ca* literature, we are required to take up the work of one who has perhaps been unique in his ability to present the philosophical and sociological bases for the prohibition of inventing religion. He is the Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya and his seminal piece on this subject is the *Iqtidā^o al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*. Although this work is largely typical of *bid^ca* literature, it is distinguished by the depth of its argument against *bid^ca*. M. Umar Memon says,

What is remarkable is that in the scaffolding of this theoretical structure Ibn Taymiyya strained all the resources of his imaginative mind. He not only employed the traditional sources of knowledge such as the Koran and *Sunna* but also fully exploited another less orthodox avenue of cognizance, viz., logic, reason. More than once he ingeniously shows how these practices, and arguments upholding them, cannot be sustained in the light of reason.²³⁹

Memon nowhere fleshes out his observation and so this lends the opportunity here to understand more closely what the rational bases were for Ibn Taymiyya's strong condemnation of *bid^ca* and, by extension, what may have attracted the attention of later scholar-activists such as al-Āqḥiṣārī.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*, p. 6.

²⁴⁰ The *Iqtidā^o* was also an influence upon the conceptualisation of *bid^ca* in the Indian Subcontinent, as the final chapter discusses. This is another good reason to undergo a deeper level of analysis of its key thesis.

Ibn Taymiyya believes that people invent ritual practices and participate in them because they have been incapable of finding spiritual sustenance and contentment in adhering to the Qur’ān and the *Sunna*, and/or because they are too arrogant to submit themselves to the Divine command.²⁴¹ For Ibn Taymiyya it is ultimately a malady of the heart which creates space for innovations. The three classes in society – amīrs, ‘ulamā’ and the simple-pious – are driven to various innovations because of their failure to adhere to the precepts of the Divine law. The innovations of the amīrs include their “cruel laws” that they pass, such as the non-*Shar‘ī* fines and taxes. These they are led to because they have neglected to uphold the duty of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. If they took only what was their legal right and distributed it as the Divine law demands, seeking thereby to consolidate God’s religion rather than themselves; and if they exacted punishments on the elite as well as the unfortunate, seeking to instil in people by doing so a mindful awareness of God, they would be in no need of expropriating wealth or introducing non-*Shar‘ī* canons.²⁴² As for the ‘ulamā’, if they adhered to the Qur’ān and gained a true understanding of its verses and precepts – which they should recall are from God’s signs (*āya*) to mankind – and upheld the *Sunna*, they would find all the useful branches of knowledge that they need. They would not fall into the errors of the theologians or the speculations of the jurists who are led to one unreliable judgment after another.²⁴³ As for the commonfolk, if they worshipped their Lord by the words and deeds which He has legislated for them and ‘tasted the sweetness’ of doing so, they would reach the spiritual stations they aspire to. They would not have any need to replace the

²⁴¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidā’*, p. 292.

²⁴² Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidā’*, p. 281.

²⁴³ Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidā’*, pp. 281-282.

recitation of the Qur’ān with listening to musical instruments or to substitute Prophetic invocations with invented litanies.²⁴⁴

Ibn Taymiyya accepts that some of those who indulge in innovative religious practices can potentially reap spiritual gains. This, he believes, is inevitable since every innovation is built upon a valid *Sharʿī* practice such as meditation (*dhikr*) or fasting or praying. Some innovations may even be the outcomes of mistaken juristic interpretations (*ta’wīl* and *ijtihād*) of Scripture. What is the position of such people in the sight of the Lawgiver? According to the Damascene, they will be rewarded for those aspects of their worship which have a legal basis and they will be forgiven for those aspects that are outright *bidʿa*, with the proviso that they have been led to the innovation by their interpretation.²⁴⁵ Lest he be accused of sanctioning the invention of religion, Ibn Taymiyya is keen to point out that the “good” elements of innovations are outweighed by the “evil” elements – *al-ithm akbar min al-naḡ*²⁴⁶ – and anything in which the evil is preponderant over good is by default prohibited in the *Sharʿa*. Since assessing the relative harms and benefits of a thing require a perceptive mind, the masses are entreated by the Shaykh al-Islām to cling stubbornly to the Qur’an and the *Sunna*.²⁴⁷

Ibn Taymiyya offers interesting rational arguments aside from the textual for why religious innovations are harmful: some are applicable to all innovated acts of worship and others are specific. But without exception, the most worrying attribute of all

²⁴⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidāʾ*, pp. 281 – 282.

²⁴⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidāʾ*, p. 290.

²⁴⁶ Here he alludes to Q.2.219, in which alcohol and gambling are considered prohibited because the evil in them is preponderant over the benefit.

²⁴⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidāʾ*, p. 290.

innovations for the Damascene is that they are ‘derivates of disbelief’ (*mushtaqq min al-kufr*).²⁴⁸ Each one in some way directs people away from the worship of God alone and from the following of the *Sunna*. For every newly invented religious practice there is substituted a sanctioned rite of worship; if the proliferation of *bidʿa* is allowed to continue without criticism, the result would be the complete corruption and distortion of Islam, which according to Ibn Taymiyya was the fate of Christianity and Judaism.²⁴⁹

Since many religious practices that are considered *bidʿa* are not pure inventions but often the adaptation and integration of foreign rites into Islam, Ibn Taymiyya deals for almost half of the *Iqtidāʾ* with the concept of assimilation and imitation (*tashābuh* and *taqlīd*). He believes that the idea of dissimilarity or differentiation of the believer from the non-believer is one of the central objectives of God’s revelation. Such a rationalisation is quite unique in Muslim jurisprudential theory. Here Ibn Taymiyya explains the theoretical basis for one of the most controversial debates in Islamic law:

It is in accordance with wisdom that God legislated for the Prophet such deeds and tenets as would clearly differ from those of the God-displeasing and gone-astray. He enjoined the Prophet to differ from them in his way of life, even though to many their harm was not evident, and that for a number of reasons some of which are:

1. Participation in conduct breeds homogeneity and resemblance in the participants, which leads to accord in morals and deeds. And this is evident. Thus, for instance, one who dons himself in the vesture of the learned feels a certain affinity with them, or, for instance, one who wears the outfit of the fighting soldiers finds in himself an affinity with the latter’s character, and unless an obstacle comes in his way his nature conforms to that character.
2. Difference in conduct brings out dissimilarity and separation which has the effect of fending off divine wrath and prevents going astray. Conversely, it

²⁴⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidāʾ*, p. 289.

²⁴⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidāʾ*, p. 289.

would incline man towards those who enjoy divine guidance and pleasure. Thus, indeed, the God-drawn difference will stand out clearly between His host of those in bliss and His unhappy enemies. The more man's inner life is perfect and the more he understands Islam, true Islam – not mere outward parading as a Muslim, nor blindly following mere traditional beliefs as a whole – the greater is his urge to differ both internally and externally from the Jews and Christians, and the stronger is his urge to keep his distance from their characteristics.

3. Finally, a common way of life promotes social interaction to an extent that distinction between the right-guided on the one hand and the God-displeasing and gone-astray on the other vanishes. There may be further reasons involved in divine wisdom.²⁵⁰

The significance of this rationalisation of *bid'ā* should not be underestimated. Too often the philosophical underpinning of the anti-*bid'ā* position is overlooked by scholars, resulting in some cases in misunderstandings and assumptions. Understanding how Muslim jurists and theologians have conceptualised *bid'ā* is central to fathoming how the term is utilised in legal discourse. The assumption that *bid'ā* in Muslim jurisprudence is an umbrella term that signifies every newly invented matter, religious and customary, simply does not correspond with the usage of the term in legal literature.²⁵¹

It is seen clearly from the justification above that Ibn Taymiyya deemed *bid'ā* a threat to the very foundations of Islam, most importantly perhaps because of its propensity to corrupt the religion. What does not particularly strike the present author, however, is a sense that Ibn Taymiyya hoped to gain through his condemnation of *bid'ā* a monopoly on transmitting legitimate knowledge, or aimed at preventing the masses from undermining the authority of the *ʿulamāʾ*, or still that his condemnation of various new forms of

²⁵⁰ Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*, pp. 97-98.

²⁵¹ Ibn Taymiyya makes it very clear that only innovations of *sharʿī* nature are considered pernicious, rather than innovations of a social, technological, or other nature: 'Clearly the Prophet did not intend by his words, "every innovation is error", every act that was to be done for the first time, because even Islam – nay, every religion brought by a prophet – is a wholly new act. He rather intended those new acts which he had not himself laid down.' See Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*, p. 235.

worship in popular culture stemmed from a deeper fear of the widespread public transmission of the word of God.²⁵² This is not to say that such motivations did not figure at all, but rather that it is possibly an error to overlook the explanations that the opponents of *bidʿa* present themselves. Whereas some working in the service of the authorities may have outlawed certain practices for political ends, many other contributors to the anti-*bidʿa* literature were not aligned to a government. Ibn Taymiyya, Birgivi and al-Āqḥiṣārī are three such examples.

Does any of the deeper rationality which led Ibn Taymiyya to his oppositional stance on *bidʿa*, and that is so characteristic of the *Iqtidāʾ*, manifest itself in Birgivi, al-Āqḥiṣārī or even Qāḍīzāde? As for Birgivi, he is unambivalent when he asserts that the root cause of dogmatic heresies and innovations in religious practice are but an attempt to satisfy egoistical desire.²⁵³ We have already seen this in the *Iqtidāʾ* where Ibn Taymiyya asserted the arrogance of those who struggle to subjugate themselves to the precepts of the Qurʾan and the *Sunna*, as well as the spiritual weakness in such people, which hinders them from finding contentment in the religion taught by the Prophet. Both Birgivi and Ibn Taymiyya are criticising certain Sufis first of all, who for them were the most likely to invent new forms of worship. Akin to Ibn Taymiyya, Birgivi considers that the evil of abandoning a legally established ritual is less destructive to one's religion than the evil which accompanies the invention of new ritual practices. This is since a proliferation of the latter will ultimately result in the corruption of the religion.²⁵⁴

²⁵² These are some of the reasons that J. Berkley provides in his rationalisation of *bidʿa* discourse. See his paper on 'Tradition, Innovation and the Social Construction of Knowledge'.

²⁵³ Birgivi, *The Path of Muhammad*, p. 72.

²⁵⁴ Birgivi, *The Path of Muhammad*, p. 73.

Al-Āqḥiṣārī asserts that the innovator (*mubtadiʿ*) only invents new practices of worship, towards aggrandising his own religiosity, since he does not truly believe that the *Sharīʿa* as brought by the Prophet is complete:

Bidʿa is more evil than sinning since the person who enacts a *bidʿa* considers that the Prophet has been somehow deficient, though he may claim that he is extolling the Prophet by enacting it. This is since he is claiming that his *bidʿa* is better than the *Sunna* and more correct; he is challenging God and His Messenger by deeming good what the Law (*sharʿ*) despises and what it prohibits, namely the invention of religion. God has legislated for His worshippers acts of worship which are sufficient for them and has perfected for them their religion, completing His favours upon them. He informs in His noble Book: ‘This day I have perfected your religion for you, completing My favour upon you.’ Hence [the maxim], ‘augmenting the already perfected [renders it] deficient’. To do so is tantamount to having an extra finger. It is an established matter in legal theory (*ʿilm al-uṣūl*) that the righteous deed is known from evil deed, according to the true scholars, by recourse to the Law rather than to the intellect.²⁵⁵

In this passage al-Āqḥiṣārī reiterates the idea that innovation is more harmful than open disobedience since the first eventually becomes integrated within the religion through habit and custom, whereas the second remains a sin and therefore an act that people will feel guilt about doing. This idea is found in Ibn Taymiyya as too is the art of producing rational proofs in order to augment scriptural proofs.

Qāḍīzāde’s *Risāle* is distinct from the works of our two previous authors in that he is far more concise, uses the vernacular and formulates rather simplistic rational arguments. These features may indicate that he had a wider audience in mind when composing his work. Notwithstanding this, he is determined to prove that innovations in ritual practice

²⁵⁵ *Majlis XVIII*, ff. 55r-56v.

are a threat to the religion, and to its principal expositor, namely the *Sunna*. He seeks to demonstrate in the following passage the idea that should a believer occupy himself with merely the acts of worship required of him by the *Sharīʿa*, there would not be a moment of his day remaining for him to perform any of the invented ritual practices that some Sufis and other innovators have produced.

The Morning Prayer is two cycles, the noon prayer four; the late afternoon prayer is four and the evening prayer three. The prayer at nightfall is four cycles. There are two for the Friday prayers. [Even] if one thousand cycles are performed voluntarily in the place of one of these prayers, they are of no value [...] The *Sunna* prayers are also of two types. One is the the strongly-recommended (*sunna muʿakkada*) prayer. His Excellency the Prophet always performed two cycles before the morning prayer, four before the noon prayer and two afterwards; two after the evening prayer and the same after the nightfall prayer. He performed four cycles before the Friday prayer and four afterwards; he never omitted to perform the wakening prayer. [There are] at least two and at most twenty cycles of the merely-recommended (*sunna ghayr muʿakkada*): two after the noon prayer, four before the late afternoon prayer, six after the evening prayer, twenty prayers of the “repenters” (*awwābīn*) after the main *awwābīn* prayer; then four cycles before the nightfall prayer and two afterwards; four cycles for the *tasbīḥ* prayer and two for the *shukr al-wuḍūʿ* prayer. There are two cycles for greeting the mosque and if in the course of one day and night one is present and enters the mosque five times, that makes twenty cycles.

Performing every day and night the canonical obligation, the recommended and the *sunna* prayers totals one-hundred and thirty-four cycles. There are *sunna* prayers which are canonically done at certain times [...] in total sixty four cycles. The obligatory and *sunna* prayers for Friday and the four required prayers for the two festivals total twenty four cycles. In total these 88 cycles plus the previously mentioned 134 together make 222 cycles of prayer [...] for those brothers in faith who wish to worship and to draw near to God Almighty through prayer, what is necessary is that they should worship with the prayers which his Excellency the Prophet of God taught to the community. Let them not suppose that worship and drawing near occur by means of prayers which are innovation, popular custom and essentially lies and which have been fabricated [as if they were according to] the *Sharīʿa*. This is not [true] worship. It is injurious.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ *Risāleh*, f.87r and f.87v.

The survey above demonstrates that the Qāḍizādelis were as inclined to justify their arguments against innovation on the basis of reason. Ultimately, innovations present a threat to the authentic religious practices and they effectively vie for the believer's time and energies. The Qāḍizādelis were not all willing to restrict themselves to mild exhortations and rationalisations, however. In al-Āqḥiṣārī's *Majālis*, as will be shown in the following chapter, one will find him openly inciting his audience to take personal responsibility for the changing the status quo. This probably served as the precedent needed by the Qāḍizādelis, who in their later evolution adopted a more violent campaign to uproot innovations they believed had become embedded in Ottoman society.

Are we in a position to say something about the success of Ibn Taymiyya and his heirs in their campaign to extirpate “innovations” from the fabric of Islamic piety? Memon, for one, suggests that Ibn Taymiyya was a failure. Kātib Çelebi prophesied the same when he argued in his *Mizān al-ḥaqq* that the militancy of Qāḍizāde and his mob was always destined to fail. He went as far as to say: ‘Once an innovation has taken root and become established in a community, it is the height of stupidity and ignorance to invoke the principle of “enjoining right and forbidding wrong” and to hope to constrain the people to abandon it.’²⁵⁷ Indeed, if the yardstick for measuring their success is to be the extent to which “innovations” ceased being practiced, then they were perfect failures. However, Ibn Taymiyya and his heirs were unswerved by the high probability of their anti-*bidʿa* campaign failing. The purpose of exhorting people to refrain from inventing

²⁵⁷ Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, p. 89.

religion was driven by a firm belief in vanguardism, the kind that Sayyid Qutb many centuries later would revive. Ibn Taymiyya outlines his position thus:

Let it not be asked what the benefit is in preventing what the Qur'an and *Sunna* have foretold are bound to occur. This is because they both also foretell that there will always be in this nation (*umma*) a group which clings tightly to the truth which God has sent His Prophet with, prayers and peace of God be upon him, up until the Last Hour. [This group] will never unite on misguidance. Thus when [one is involved] in preventing [these innovations, etc.] they are contributing to the growth, the support and the increase in faith of this victorious party. We ask God to make us from among them.²⁵⁸

Without doubt Ibn Taymiyya, Birgivi, al-Āqḥiṣārī and Qāḍīzāde each considered themselves amongst that group which, irrespective of its size, and despite its opponents, continued to “enjoin the good and forbid the evil”.

The Bidʿa Literature

As I have suggested above, al-Āqḥiṣārī's *Majālis* might usefully be seen as a work that continues a long tradition contributed to by Muslim jurists and theologians that has been called the anti-*bidʿa* literature, or “treatises against innovation” (*kutub al-bidaʿ*), a genre which became independent of the *ḥadīth* literature in the 3rd century of Islam.²⁵⁹ In order to locate al-Āqḥiṣārī more precisely within this tradition, with the specific aim of ascertaining his ideological source, a survey of the ways in which previous legal theoreticians categorised *bidʿa* is necessary.

²⁵⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidāʾ*, p. 44.

²⁵⁹ See M. Fierro, ‘The Treatises against Innovations’; see also V. Rispler, ‘Towards a New Understanding of the Term *Bidʿa*,’ *Der Islam*, no. 68 (1991), p. 323.

Writings against *bidʿa* were not only within the corpus of jurisprudential literature; the subject was also treated in heresiographical treatises that dealt with dogmatic innovations (*kutub al-milal wa l-niḥal*), the professions of faith (*ʿaqāʾid*), the treatises of *ḥisba* (the principle of “enjoining good and forbidding wrong”) and *fatāwā* collections. But as mentioned already, there is a corpus of literature, largely polemical and dating back as early as the 3rd century A.H., which is dedicated to the examination of *bidʿa*. The following titles are of some of the most well-known works from this literature. Their authors did more than simply make the subject a peripheral one within their jurisprudence; each deemed *bidʿa* a pressing enough problem to warrant separate works on the theme. I mention only those scholars and their works that pre-date the 11th/17th century, since it is these which will aid in locating al-Āqḥiṣārī’s source:

- 1) The Mālikī Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Waḍḍāḥ al-Qurṭubī (d. 286/900), *Kitāb al-bidaʿ*;
- 2) The Mālikī Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Walīd b. Randaqa al-Ṭurṭuṣhī (d. 519/1126), *Kitāb al-ḥawādith wa-l-bidaʿ*;
- 3) The Ḥanbalī Abū l-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAlī Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 596/1200), *Talbīs Iblīs*;
- 4) The Ḥanbalī Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Maqdisī (d. 642/1245), *Ittibāʿ al-sunan wa ijtināb al-bidaʿ*;
- 5) The Shāfiʿī Abū Shāma, Abū l-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ismāʿīl (d. c. 666/1268);
- 6) The Ḥanbalī Aḥmād b. Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), *Kitāb iqtidāʾ al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm, mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jahīm*;

- 7) The Mālikī Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥājj al-ʿAbdarī al-Fāsī (d. 736/1336);
- 8) The Mālikī Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā al-Lakhmī al-Shāṭibī (d. 789/1388), *Kitāb al-Iʿtiṣām*;
- 9) The Ḥanafī Ṣāfi l-Dīn Idrīs b. Baydakīn b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkmānī (8th-9th/14th-15th century), *al-Lumaʿ fī l-ḥawādith wa-l-bidaʿ*;
- 10) The Mālikī Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Burnūsī Zarrūq al-Fāsī (d. 899/1494), *ʿUddat al-murīd al-ṣādiq/al-Bidaʿ wa-l-ḥawādith*;
- 11) The Shāfiʿī Abū l-Faḍl ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abū Bakr al-Suyūṭī (d. 910/1505), *al-Amr bi-l-ittibāʿ wa-l-nahy ʿan al-ibtidāʿ*.²⁶⁰

All of the above mentioned works, with the important exception of the *Talbīs* and the *Iqtidāʿ*, divide *bidʿa* into at least two types. The following table, reproduced from V. Rispler with several additions of my own, provides the various ways that scholars have classified *bidʿa*.²⁶¹

Jurist	Date of Death	The Classification of <i>bidʿa</i>	Legal Affiliation
Al-Shāfiʿī	204/820	<i>bidʿa munkara</i> <i>bidʿa ḍalāla</i> <i>bidʿa maḥmūda</i> ≠ <i>madhmūma</i> ²⁶²	

²⁶⁰ For full references of these works, and the translations that have been produced for some of them, refer to M. Fierro, *The Treatises against innovations*.

²⁶¹ V. Rispler, 'Toward a New Understanding of the Term *bidʿa*', p. 324.

²⁶² Quoted in Abū Shāma, *al-Bāʿith ʿalā inkār al-bidaʿ wa l-ḥawādith*, p.12.

Ibn al-Jawzī	596/1200	<i>Bidʿa</i> in ritual practice is <i>ḥarām</i>	Ḥanbalī
Ṭurṭūshī	510/1126 or 525/1131	<i>bidʿa- muḥarrama</i> <i>bidʿa makrūha</i> <i>bidʿa wājiba</i> <i>bidʿa munkara</i> ²⁶³	Mālikī
ʿIzz l-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām	666/1262	<i>ḥarām-makrūh-</i> <i>mubāḥ-mandūb-</i> <i>wājib</i> ²⁶⁴	Shāfiʿī
Abū Shāma	662/1266	(<i>ḥasana</i>) <i>mustaḥsana</i> ≠ <i>mustaqbaḥa</i> <i>muḥarram makrūh</i> ²⁶⁵	Shāfiʿī
al-Nawawī	676/1277	<i>ḥasana</i> ≠ <i>qabiḥa</i> ²⁶⁶	Shāfiʿī
Al-Turkmānī	7 th /13 th	<i>mubāḥa-yuthāb</i> <i>ʿalayhā-makrūha-</i> <i>muḥarrama-</i> <i>mustaḥsana</i> ≠ <i>mustaqbaḥa</i> ²⁶⁷	Ḥanafī
Ibn Taymiyya	728/1328	<i>bidʿa luhgawīyya</i> ≠ <i>bidʿa sharʿiyya</i>	Ḥanbalī
Ibn al-Ḥājj al-ʿAbdarī	737/1366	<i>wājib-mandūb-</i> <i>mubāḥ-makrūh-</i> <i>ḥarām</i> ²⁶⁸	Mālikī
Shāṭibī	790/1388	<i>bidʿa ḥaqīqiyya</i> ≠ <i>iḍāfiyya</i> <i>ṣaghīra</i> ≠ <i>kabīra</i> ²⁶⁹	Mālikī

²⁶³ *Kitāb al-ḥawādith wa l-bidʿa*, p. 15.

²⁶⁴ *Qawāʿid al-aḥkām wa maṣāliḥ al-anām*, 2: 204-205.

²⁶⁵ *al-Bāʿith ʿalā inkār al-bidʿa wa l-ḥawādith*, p.13.

²⁶⁶ Quoted in Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥāwī li-l-fatāwā*, 1: 296.

²⁶⁷ *Kitāb al-lumaʿ fī al-ḥawādith wa l-bidʿa*, p. 37.

²⁶⁸ *Kitāb al-madkhal*, 2: 115.

²⁶⁹ *Al-ʿItisām*, pp. 272-278.

Ibn Rajab	794/1392	<i>bid'a la-hā aṣl ≠ bid'a lā aṣl lahā</i>	Ḥanbalī
Suyūṭī	911/1505	Mentions all the classifications of al-Shāfi'ī and others from his school	Shāfi'ī

Al-Shāfi'ī, widely considered to be the first jurist to write a complete treatise on *uṣūl al-fiqh*,²⁷⁰ is also perhaps one of the earliest to use 'Umar's statement as a justification for dividing *bid'a* into two types, the objectionable (*madhmūm*) and the unobjectionable (*ghayr madhmūm*).²⁷¹ Others divided *bid'a* into more categories, for example the Shāfi'ī jurist al-ʿIzz b. ʿAbd al-Salām (d. 660/1262)²⁷² who opted for a five-fold typology in line with the categorisation of legal norms.²⁷³ Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām's categorisation was accepted widely by Shāfi'ī jurists after him, who had great reverence for this *Sulṭān al-ʿulamāʾ*, but also by scholars of other *madhhabs*, as evidenced by Turkmānī.²⁷⁴

Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Taymiyya, both Ḥanbalī jurists, rejected altogether the notion that *bid'a* in matters of religion might be conceived positively. But it would be wrong to assert, for all the influence that they had on the later Ḥanbalī school,²⁷⁵ that they

²⁷⁰ For an alternative perspective of this popular view, see Chapt. 1 of J. Schacht's, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

²⁷¹ Al-Shāfi'ī is cited by Abū Shāma, *Bā'ith*, p. 23.

²⁷² See his *Qawā'id al-aḥkām*.

²⁷³ The five categories of *ḥukm* according to the legal schools (which the Ḥanafīs divide into seven) are: obligation (*wujūb*), recommendation (*istiḥbāb*), permission (*ibāḥa*), detestation (*karāha*) and prohibition (*tahrīm*). See W. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories*, pp. 40-41.

²⁷⁴ See his *al-Luma'*.

²⁷⁵ There is a debate about whether Ibn Taymiyya can be considered a Ḥanbalī, or, indeed, whether he deemed himself to be so. See the study of A.H. Matroudi, *The Ḥanbalī School of Law and Ibn Taymiyya: Conflict or Conciliation* (London: Routledge, 2006). It is most probable that he considered himself an

somehow represented all Ḥanbalīs, as some have mistakenly asserted.²⁷⁶ Ibn Rajab (d. 794/1392), Ḥanbalī theologian and jurist of the 8th/14th century, makes clear his position in *Jāmiʿ al-ʿulūm wa l-ḥikam*, a commentary on Nawawī’s compilation of forty *ḥadīth*. For Ibn Rajab, there is scope for newly invented religious practices so long as they have a basis (*aṣl*): ‘The ḥadīth [whoever invents something in our affair which is not from it, it shall be rejected] makes an explicit (*manṭūq*) statement, namely that every [innovative] action which is not validated by the Law (*sharʿ*) is rejected; [there] is an implicit (*mafhūm*) statement, namely that every [innovative] action which does have a source (*aṣl*) in the religion is not rejected.’²⁷⁷ He thus leaves open the possibility that innovations in matters of religion are acceptable if they have a precedent in the Law.

The position adopted by Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Taymiyya thus becomes distinct in the corpus of *bidʿa* literature. Both men limit the scope of *bidʿa*, clearly differentiating themselves from other Muslim jurists and theologians. The consequences of this for the present study are significant.

Taymiyyan Influences

Ibn Taymiyya is far more thorough in his treatment of *bidʿa* than Ibn al-Jawzī. He is, in general, much more interested in treating the ramifications of innovations for the religion, and goes some way to describing specific forms that they can take. He speaks of *bidʿa* in

independent *mujtahid* since he digresses from mainstream Ḥanbalī positions far too often to be sensibly deemed a jurist-*muqallid* from within the school.

²⁷⁶ See for example the assertion of V. Rispler, *A New Understanding*, p. 325.

²⁷⁷ Ibn Rajab, *Jāmiʿ al-ʿulūm wa l-ḥikam* (Amman: Dār al-Furqān, 1990), p. 77.

almost every major piece of writing; even a cursory database search for the term in the *Majmūʿ al-fatāwā* is indicative of this – the number of occurrences exceeding two-hundred and thirty.²⁷⁸ There are two significant works of Ibn Taymiyya composed on *bidʿa* which he makes frequent reference to: the *Iqtidāʾ širāṭ al-mustaqīm* – *Adhering to the Straight Path* and *Qāʿidat al-sunna wa l-bidʿa* – *The Formula [Distinguishing] the Sunna from Innovation*.²⁷⁹ It is in the first of these treatises where one is confronted with a very interesting continuum of ideas which links the Anatolian al-Āqḥiṣārī to Ibn Taymiyya.

In the *Iqtidāʾ*, the Damascene Shaykh al-Islam constructs a complex argument aiming to convince his reader that the *ḥadīths* concerning *bidʿa* preclude the possibility of developing a juristic typology of the concept in any way that bears resemblance to the deontology of legal norms which developed in Islamic legal theory. He finds no justification for building an argument in support of a typology of *bidʿa* on the basis of ʿUmar’s statement, *niʿmat al-bidʿa*, whether that justification is sought in consensus or in customary usage. Those who do so are ignorant of the *Sharīʿa*, as far as Ibn Taymiyya is concerned:

Some people say that innovations are dividable in two types, the praiseworthy (*ḥasana*) and the reprehensible (*qabīḥa*). They employ the statement of ʿUmar, God be pleased with him, ‘What an excellent innovation this is! (*niʿmat l-bidʿa ḥādhi*)’, about the *tarāwīḥ*-prayer in support of their argument. They also use other statements and deeds which, although appearing after the death of the Messenger of God, prayers and peace of God be upon him, were

²⁷⁸ Database search results obtained from <http://www.al-eman.com/Islamlib/viewtoc.asp?BID=252> , last accessed 05/04/2010.

²⁷⁹ See, for example Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb ʿilm al-sulūk in Majmūʿ al-fatāwā* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2000), 10: 194.

not reprehensible because of proofs indicating their praiseworthiness either from Consensus (*ijmāʿ*) or analogical reasoning (*qiyās*). To these a man not grounded in the principles of knowledge (*uṣūl al-ʿilm*) sometimes adds many a custom of the people, making these also as arguments for the merit of some innovations, either by making what he himself has grown accustomed to a Consensus (*ijmāʿ*) (though he does not know the position of the rest of the Muslims concerning it) or for his loathing of abandoning what he is accustomed to. He is of the status [of the people referred to] in the verse, ‘And when it is said to them, “Come to what God has revealed and to the Messenger”, they say, “What we find our ancestors following suffices us.”’ (Q.5.104). How often some eminent men of learning and piety advance arguments that are out of keeping with those principles of knowledge upon which reliance is sought in matters of religion.²⁸⁰

The deeper logic which lies at the heart of Ibn Taymiyya’s conceptualisation of *bidʿa* has been explored in an earlier part of this chapter. At this point, I am concerned with demonstrating the genealogy of ideas which connect al-Āqḥiṣārī and Ibn Taymiyya. A comparison of the *Iqtidāʾ* with al-Āqḥiṣārī’s survey of *bidʿa* found in the eighteenth *Majlis* leaves little room for doubt that the Damascene theologian is the latter’s chief source. The following pages will demonstrate where al-Āqḥiṣārī draws from the Damascene either verbatim or paraphrases him. The excerpts selected are polemical in nature. They are responses to a would-be opponent who claims that customary religious practices are good innovations by virtue of popular acceptance. Both Ibn Taymiyya and al-Āqḥiṣārī reject the idea that popular acceptance can be considered a benchmark for what is sound or rejected religious practice. Both begin their counter-polemics with the same two Prophetic traditions:

²⁸⁰ *Iqtidāʾ al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaḳīm, mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jaḥīm*, edited by ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Hindāwī (Beirut: Maktabat al-‘aṣriyya, 2003), pp. 270–271.

To proceed: indeed the best of speech is the Book of God, the Exalted, and the best of guidance is the guidance of Muḥammad and the worst of affairs are its inventions: every invention is an innovation, and every innovation is a misguidance.’ This tradition, reported in the authenticated [*ḥadīths*] of the *Maṣābiḥ*, was narrated by Jābir, God be pleased with him. In another tradition, narrated by ʿIrbād b. Sāriya, he, upon him be peace, said, ‘Whoever amongst you lives after me shall see much discord; so you should cling to my way and the way of the Rightly-guided caliphs. Cling to it and hold on to it with your molars. Beware of matters invented, since every invention is an innovation, and every innovation is a misguidance.’²⁸¹

Both men are keen to see that the *ḥadīth* which appears to be prohibiting the originating of new religious practices remains operative, despite the traditions preserving what appear to be newly inaugurated religious practices of the Prophet’s Companions, and which have indeed been used as proof by those seeking to interpret the anti-*bidʿa* *ḥadīths* in a way which justifies the idea of positive innovations. The principal argument shared by both reformers, and which will be clear from the inter-textual comparison, is as follows: if there is any benefit in a newly originated religious practice then its usefulness must be attested to by the Scripture or the Prophetic *Sunna*. If there does exist a supporting proof from either of these sources, then the newly originated act has a legal basis justifying its origination. Ultimately, in such a case, the Qur’an and the *Sunna* might be seen as originating the new practice in the first place. Thus the original prohibition remains closed off to any attempts of qualification. All of the arguments presented are conspicuously legal in character, probably aiming to sway jurists before others. Ibn Taymiyya’s *Iqtidāʾ* is presented in the left-hand column and al-Āqḥiṣārī’s *Majālis* in the right. The Arabic text precedes the English translation.

²⁸¹ The expression is in Āqḥiṣārī, *Majlis XVIII*, f. 53r. See also Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidāʾ*, p. 267.

وأما المعارضات فالجواب عنها بأحد جوابين # إما بأن يقال ما ثبت حسنه فليس من البدع فيبقى العموم محفوظا لا خصوص فيه # وإما أن يقال ما ثبت حسنه فهو مخصوص من هذا العموم فيبقى العموم محفوظا لا خصوص فيه # وإما أن يقال ما ثبت حسنه فهو مخصوص من العموم والعام المخصوص دليل فيما عدا تخصيص فمن اعتقد أن بعض البدع مخصوص من هذا العموم احتاج إلى دليل يصلح للتخصيص وإلا كان ذلك العموم اللفظي المعنوي موجبا للنهي # ثم المخصص هو الأدلة الشرعية من الكتاب والسنة والإجماع نصا واستنباطا وأما عادة بعض البلاد أو أكثرها وقول كثير من العلماء أو العباد أو أكثرهم ونحو ذلك فليس مما يصلح أن يكون معارضا لكلام الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم حتى يعارض به # ومن اعتقد أن أكثر هذه العادات المخالفة للسنة مجمع عليها بناء على أن الأمة أقرتها ولم تنكرها فهو مخطئ في هذا الاعتقاد فإنه لم يزل ولا يزال في كل وقت من ينهى عن عامة العادات المحدثّة المخالفة للسنة

As for the contention, it can be countered by one of two replies:

1) Whatever is established as good cannot be an innovation, thereby

في عهد الصحابة [أدبنا له ما ثبت حسنه بالدلالة الشرعية الصحيحة فهو] أما أن لا يكون بدعة فيكون عموم العام في الحديث على حاله ويكون مخصوص من هذا العام والعام الذي خص منه البعض دليل فيما عدا المخصوص فما ادعى نبوت حسن العبادة المحدثّة وكونها مخصوصة من هذا العام يحتاج إلى دليل يصلح أن يكون مخصصا لأن عادة أكثر البلاد وقول كثير من الزهاد والعباد ليس مما يصلح أن يكون معارضا لكلام الرسول عليه السلام وذلك الدليل المخصص هو الدليل الشرعي من الكتاب والسنة والإجماع الذي هو مختص بأهل الاجتماع وليس لأهل الاجتهاد من الزهاد والعباد فهو في حكم العموم لا يقتد بكلامه إلا أن يكون موافقا للأصول والكتب المعتبرة

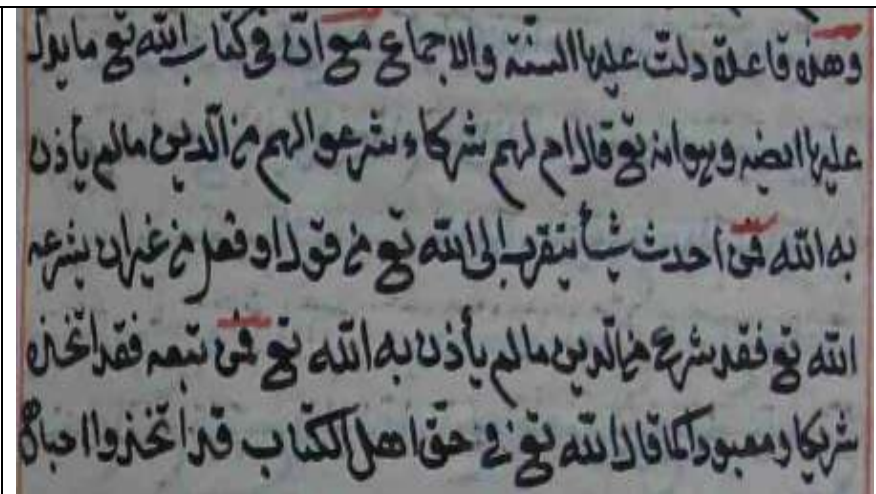
[To a contender] it can be argued that whatever is established as good on the basis of a sound legal indication is [one of the following]:

leaving the general rule operative without admitting of an exception. 2) Whatever is established as good is an exception from the general rule, and so the generality remains preserved without allowing for exceptions. Or it may be said that whatever is established as good is an exceptional case of the general rule, and the general rule having been so characterised by an exceptional case is an indication for the rest of the cases other than the exceptional case. Whoever believes that some innovations are exceptional cases within the general rule must produce a proof justifying the exceptional treatment, otherwise the letter and spirit of the general principle must remain a proof for prohibition. The particularising agent (<i>mukhaṣṣiṣ</i>) must be a legal argument from the Book, the <i>Sunna</i> or Consensus which have the force of authority or are inferred as such. The local customs of one or most cities, so also the views of many scholars and the pious, albeit the majority of them cannot justifiably contradict the Prophet's utterance, prayers and peace of God be upon him. Whoever believes that most of these customs, though consensually viewed as contradicting the <i>Sunna</i>, derive their validity from the fact that the community has supported, rather than rejected, them is mistaken. There will always be in every time those who forbid novel customs which run counter to the spirit of the <i>Sunna</i>.²⁸²	1) Not an innovation at all thereby preserving the generality of the general rule in the two <i>ḥadīths</i>. 2) It is an exceptional case (<i>makhṣūṣ</i>) in the general rule. A general rule which has in it some exceptional case is only an indication for those things which have not been excluded from it. If someone claims that the good of an innovated religious practice is established and that it is an exceptional case within the general rule, then he is required to furnish proof that can correctly be deemed a particularising agent (<i>mukhaṣṣiṣ</i>). The local customs of most cities, and the sayings of most ascetics (<i>zāhid</i>) and worshippers (<i>ʿābid</i>), cannot be correctly considered to validate the contravention of the speech of the Messenger, upon him be peace. The particularizing agent (<i>dalīl mukhaṣṣiṣ</i>)²⁸³ should be a legal one from the Book, the <i>Sunna</i> or the consensus of the qualified jurists (<i>ahl al-ijtihād</i>). Any ascetic or worshipper who is not from among the qualified jurists²⁸⁴ is of the status of the laity – one whose views are not considered valid unless they are in conformity with the principles [of religion] and the authentic books.²⁸⁵
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²⁸² Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidāʾ*, p. 271. The translation is a modification of M.U. Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), pp. 232-233.

²⁸³ There is clearly an error in the manuscript at this point: *dalīl makhṣūṣ* should in fact have been rendered *dalīl mukhaṣṣiṣ* (see Yazma Bagislar manuscript, f. 64v-r). The translation thus departs from the manuscript at this point in favour of the correct reading.

وهذه قاعدة دلت عليها السنة والإجماع مع ما في كتاب الله من الدلالة عليها أيضا # قال تعالى ^ أم لهم شركاء شرعوا لهم من الدين ما لم يأذن به الله ^ فمن ندب إلى شيء يتقرب به إلى الله أو أوجهه بقوله أو فعله من غير أن يشرعه الله فقد شرع من الدين ما لم يأذن به الله ومن اتبعه في ذلك فقد اتخذ شريكا لله



This rule is indicated by the *Sunna* and the consensus (*ijmāʿ*) as well as what indications exist concerning it in the Book of God. God says, “What! Have they partners, who have legislated for them some religion without the permission of God?” So whoever invents a thing in order to gain closeness to God or makes it a requirement by his speech or action, when God Himself has not legislated for it, then he has indeed legislated a thing in religion which God has given no permission for. Furthermore, whoever follows him has taken him as a partner and a deity. This is what God, the

This rule is indicated by the *Sunna* and the consensus (*ijmāʿ*) as well as what indications exist concerning it in the Book of God. God says, “What! Have they partners, who have legislated for them some religion without the permission of God?” So whoever invents a thing in order to gain closeness to God, whether it be a statement or action, when God Himself has not legislated for it, then he has indeed legislated a thing in religion which God has given no permission for. Furthermore, whoever follows him has taken him as a partner and a deity. This is

²⁸⁴ The copyist makes a second error here: the Arabic text, *wa laysa ahl al-ijyihād mina l-zuhhād wa l-ʿubbād* should be read *wa man laysa min ahl al-ijtihād min al-zuhhād wa l-ʿubbād* (see Yazma Bagislar manuscript for correction, f. 64v-r). The translation thus relies on the correct reading in the Yazma Bagislar manuscript.

²⁸⁵ *Majālis*, f. 54v-55r.

Exalted, says about the People of the Book: ‘They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords below God’ (Q.9.31).²⁸⁶	what God, the Exalted, says about the People of the Book: ‘They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords below God’ (Q.9.31).²⁸⁷
قال سبحانه [^] اتخذوا أحيارهم ورهبانهم أربابا من دون الله والمسيح بن مريم وما أمروا إلا ليعبدوا إلها واحدا لا إله إلا هو سبحانه عما يشركون [^] قال عدي بن حاتم للنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يا رسول الله ما عبدوهم قال ما عبدوهم ولكن أحلوا لهم الحرام فأطاعوهم وحرّموا عليهم الحلال فأطاعوهم # فمن أطاع أحدا في دين لم يأذن به الله من تحليل أو تحرّم أو استحباب أو إيجاب فقد لحقه من هذا الذم نصيب كما يلحق الأمر الناهي أيضا نصيب God, the Exalted, says, ‘They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords below God, and (they take as their Lord) Christ the son of Mary; yet they were commanded to worship but One God, there is no god but He. Praise and glory to Him: (Far is He) from having the partners they associate (with Him).’ [^]Adī b. Ḥātim said to the Prophet: ‘They do not worship them!’ to which the Prophet replied, ‘They do not, but they do make for them lawful that which is unlawful and these, they obey them, and they make for them unlawful that which is lawful and these, they obey them.’ Anyone who	This is what God, the Exalted, says about the People of the Book: ‘They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of God’ (Q.9.31). [^]Adī b. Ḥātim said to the Prophet, upon him be peace, ‘They do not worship them.’ [In explanation], the Prophet said, ‘They obeyed them; whoever obeys someone in some religion for which there is no permission from God, the Exalted, has worshipped him and taken him as a lord.’²⁹¹

²⁸⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqṭāʿ*, p. 271.

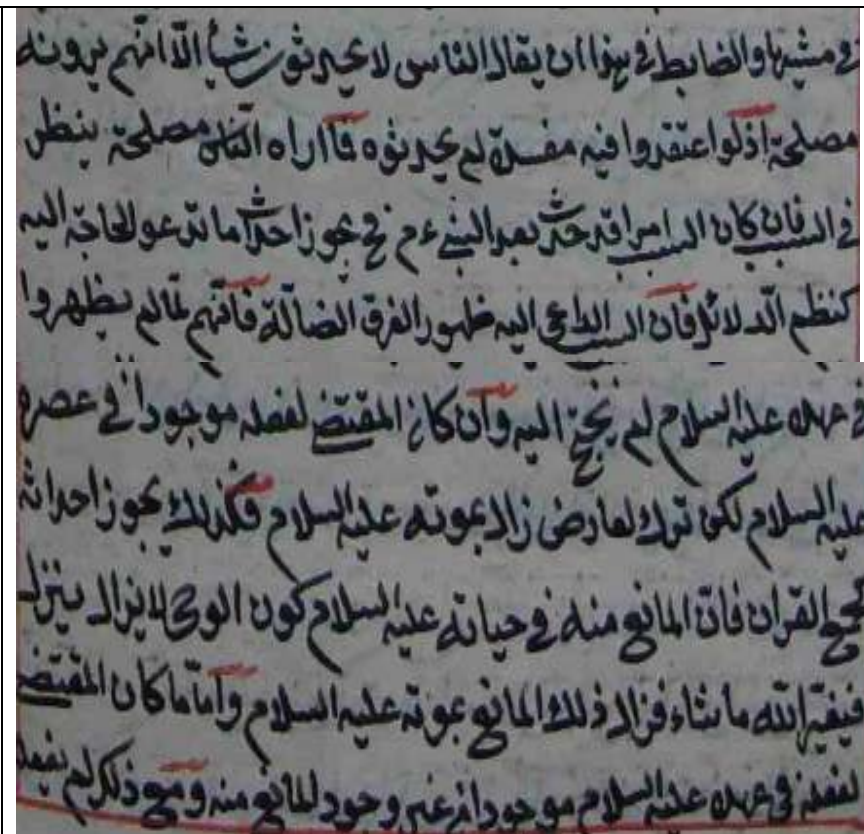
²⁸⁷ *Majālis*, f. 55r.

²⁹¹ *Majālis*, f.55r.

obeys someone concerning a religious matter God has not prescribed as lawful, unlawful, commendable or obligatory will be thereby considered reproachable, which is also true of him who commands this man to do or not to do something.²⁸⁸

وهكذا جمع القرآن فإن المانع من جمعه على عهد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم كان أن الوحي كان لا يزال ينزل فيغير الله ما يشاء ويحكم ما يريد فلو جمع في مصحف واحد لتعسر أو تعذر تغييره كل وقت فلما استقر القرآن بموته صلى الله عليه وسلم واستقرت الشريعة بموته صلى الله عليه وسلم أمن الناس من زيادة القرآن ونقصه وأمنوا من زيادة الإيجاب والتحرير والمقتضي للعمل قائم بسنته صلى الله عليه وسلم فعمل المسلمون بمقتضى سنته وذلك العمل من سنته وإن كان يسمى هذا في اللغة بدعة

The same is true also for the manner in which the Qur'an was put together. What prevented its compilation during the Prophet's lifetime was the fact that it was still being revealed to him and God would alter or retain whatever parts thereof He wished. Had it been put together in a single volume, it would have been difficult or impossible to register an alteration every time it was introduced. But once the Qur'an and the *Shari'a* had been permanently fixed, with the death of the Prophet, the Muslims were spared



The rule in this respect may be formulated as follows: People do not originate a thing unless they see in it a benefit; if they thought it was harmful, they would not have originated it. So, whatever the people deem of benefit should be judged according to the cause it serves:

²⁸⁸Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidā*, p. 272.

further alteration by increase or decrease in the number of Qur'anic verses, as they were also a further increase in both positive and negative obligations. The provision for it was already there in the *Sunna* and the Muslims acted likewise. Though an innovation in the language, the act is nevertheless a *Sunna* of the Prophet.²⁸⁹

والضابط في هذا والله أعلم أن يقال إن الناس لا يحدثون شيئاً إلا لأنهم يرونه مصلحة إذ لو اعتقدوه مفسدة لم يحدثوه فإنه لا يدعو إليه عقل ولا دين فما رآه المسلمون مصلحة نظر في السبب المحجوج إليه فإن كان السبب المحجوج إليه أمراً حدث بعد النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم لكن تركه النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم من غير تفريط منا فهنا قد يجوز إحداث ما تدعو الحاجة إليه وكذلك إن كان المقتضي لفعله قائماً على عهد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم لكن تركه النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم لمعارض قد زال بموته # وإما ما لم يحدث سبب يحجج إليه أو كان السبب المحجوج إليه بعض ذنوب العباد فهنا لا يجوز الإحداث فكل أمر يكون المقتضي لفعله على عهد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم موجوداً لو كان مصلحة ولم يفعل يعلم أنه ليس بمصلحة # وأما ما حدث المقتضى له بعد موته من غير

- 1) If the cause relates to a matter occurring after the Prophet, upon him be peace, then [know] that it is permissible to originate whatever there is a need for, such as the composing of polemical arguments. This is necessitated by the need to expose misguided groups. There was no need for [polemical arguments] during his time, upon him be peace, since such groups had yet to appear.
- 2) If the need to originate it was present during his time, upon him be peace, however was abandoned due to an impediment, which now, after his death, was lifted, then here also it is permissible to originate it, such as the compilation of the Qur'an. What prevented it being done in his life, upon him be peace, was the fact that revelation (*wahy*) was still being received, and [with it the possibility] that God changes whatever He wills. This preventative disappeared with his death, upon him be peace.
- 3) As for a requirement to originate [an innovation] being present during his life, upon him be peace, without the existence of an impediment, yet he, upon him be peace, still did not enact it, then to originate it is to alter the religion of God, the Exalted. This is because if there was [truly] any benefit in it, he would have enacted it, upon him be peace, or at least encouraged it [...] Examples of it are the call to the two Eid prayers. Following its institutionalisation by certain Sultans, the Scholars rebuked it judging it to be hated (*makrūh*). If it were not for its innovativeness being the evidence for its hatred, it would have been said that is [an act

²⁸⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidāʾ*, p. 277. Here the translated text is highlighted so that it can be matched to its equivalent in *Āqḥiṣār* in the facing column.

معصية الخالق فقد يكون مصلحة

The rule in this respect may be formulated as follows: People do not originate a thing unless they consider it beneficial. If they believe it harmful they would not originate it, because neither reason nor faith call upon to do so. Whatever appears to Muslims as positive must be investigated as to the need that necessitates it. If the need warranting it arose after the Prophet's death but was left by him without any negligence on his part, then it is permissible to originate what the need warrants. The same applies also if the need for originating it was present during the Prophet's lifetime but which he abandoned in view of an impediment which now, after his death, has been lifted.

As for what is originated without, however, a need warranting it, or what does warrant it are human transgressions, then, the innovation is not permissible. Any matter which may have been necessary in the Prophet's lifetime but which was not acted upon by him is simply not a positive need.²⁹⁰

of] remembering God, the Exalted, and a calling of creatures to come to the worship of God. It would then have been an analogue of the call for Friday prayer.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Ibn Taymiyya, *Iqtidāʿ*, p. 278

²⁹² *Majālis*, f. 55r.

The correlation between the two texts on the basis of the comparative study above is revealing, but it would be premature to assert a definitive genealogy from al-Āqḥiṣārī to Ibn Taymiyya before first eliminating the possibility that al-Āqḥiṣārī is using Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. This is since the theology and ethics of Ibn Taymiyya are, in the words of J. Bell, ‘expressed once again and elaborated, often with a new refinement, in the work of Ibn al-Qayyim’.²⁹³ Describing Ibn al-Qayyim’s broader intellectual outlook, Bell says, ‘Throughout the evolution of [Ibn al-Qayyim’s] thought the fundamental theological positions remain the same, faithfully reflecting the doctrine of his teacher. It is, for the most, only the style and the scope of his writings which set them apart from the compositions of Ibn Taymiyya.’²⁹⁴

There is no doubt that al-Āqḥiṣārī draws heavily upon Ibn al-Qayyim elsewhere, particularly in the early sections of the *Majālis* on Sufism. However, having undertaken an index and database search of Ibn al-Qayyim’s twenty-four major monographs, I have found no passages which bear any resemblance to the discussion of *bidʿa* as seen above.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ J. Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), p. 103.

²⁹⁴ J. Bell, *Love Theory*, p. 103.

²⁹⁵ The database search using a resource available at http://www.islamport.com/isp_eBooks/qym/ [last accessed 22/05/2010], included the following texts: *Aḥkām ahl al-dhimma*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1997); *ʿĪlām al-muwaqqiʿīn ʿan rabb al-ʿālamīn*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1973); *Ighāthat al-lahafām min maṣāʾid al-shayṭān*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifā, 1975); *Ijtimāʿ al-juyūsh al-islāmiyya*, 1 vol. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob Al-ilmiyyah, 1984); *al-Amthāl fī l-Qurʾān al-karīm*, 1 vol. (Tanta: Maktabat al-Ṣaḥāba, 1986); *al-Tibyān fī aqsām al-Qurʾān*, 1 vol. (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr); *al-Jawāb al-kāfi*, 1 vol. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob Al-ilmiyyah); *al-Rūḥ fī l-kalām ʿalā arwāḥ al-amwāt wa l-aḥyāʾ bi-l-dalāl min al-Kitāb wa l-Sunna*, 1 vol. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob Al-ilmiyyah, 1975); *al-Ṣalāt wa ḥukm tārikihā*, 1 vol. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1996); *al-Ṣawāʿiq al-mursalaʿalā l-Jahmiyya wa l-Muʿaṭṭila*, 4 vols. (Riyad: Dār al-ʿĀṣima, 1998); *al-Turuq al-ḥukmiyya fī l-siyāsāt al-sharʿiyya*, 1 vol. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Madanī); *al-Furūsiyya* (Hāʾil: Dār al-Andalus, 1993); *al-Fawāʾid*, 1 vol. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob Al-ilmiyya, 1973); *al-Manār al-munif*, 1 vol. (Aleppo: Maṭbaʿat al-Maktūbāt al-Islāmiyya, 1983); *al-Wābil al-Ṣayyib min al-kalīm al-ṭayyib*, 1 vol.

It is noticeable above that, for the most part, al-Āqḥiṣārī's treatment is congruous with Ibn Taymiyya's approach. Al-Āqḥiṣārī, however, rarely quotes verbatim from the *Iqtidā'*. His is mostly a re-expression of his source text, something he is likely to have preferred because of Ibn Taymiyya's treatment being rather prolix and at time abstruse. Al-Āqḥiṣārī demonstrates that he has read the survey of the *Iqtidā'*: he is not merely regurgitating material. He does rely heavily on his source text, but manipulates his extractions expertly, adding and subtracting at will, altering the architecture and arrangement of points. Indeed, it was by no means a straightforward task to extract from *Majlis XVIII* the places where al-Āqḥiṣārī had referred to the *Iqtidā'* because of the rearrangement of the source material. Certainly al-Āqḥiṣārī's skill as a writer are brought out from his ability to refashion the relevant parts of the *Iqtidā'* for his own purposes and audience. This would have been particularly important for a work like the *Majālis*, since it was, among other things, intended as a manual for sermonists.

(Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1985); *Badāʾiʿ al-fawāʾid*, 4 vols. (Mecca: Maktaba Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1996); *Tuḥfat l-mawdūd bi-aḥkām al-mawlūd*, 1 vol. (Damascus: Maktaba Dār al-Bayān, 1971); *Rawḍat al-muḥibbīn wa nuzhat al-mushtāqīn* (Dar al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyya, 1992); *Zād al-maʿād*, 5 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassat al-Risāla, 1986); *Shifāʾ al-ʿalīl fī masāʾil al-qaḍāʾ wa l-qadar wa l-ḥikma wa l-taʿfī*, 1 vol. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1978); *Ighāthat al-lahafān fī ḥukm ṭalāq al-ghaḍbān* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1986); *ʿUddat al-ṣābirīn wa dhakhīrat al-shākirīn*, 1 vol. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyyah); *Madārij al-sālikīn bayna manāzil iyyāka naʿbudu wa ʿiyyāka nastaʿīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1973); *Miftāḥ dār al-saʿādaw a manshūr wilāyat al-ʿilm wa l-idāra*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyyah); *Hidāyat al-hayārā fī ajwibat al-yahūd wa l-naṣārā* (Medina: Islamic University).

Linking the Majālis al-abrār to al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya

Birgivī Meḥmet Efendi is the man most likely to have introduced the Taymiyyan school to Ottoman Turkey. During his era, most Ottoman ‘ulamā’ were largely inclined towards the Fakhr al-Rāzī school.²⁹⁶ Birgivī, however, shared many of the views of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim and, like his predecessors, he was of the view that extra-scriptural religious practices which were commonplace among certain Sufis especially, denigrated the religion and led Muslims away from the *Sunna*. Whilst his main focus was on criticising these Sufis, Birgivī did not refrain from attacking other ‘ulamā’ for their corruption. He disseminated his views mainly through the written word, never allowing an opportunity to admonish and advise his readership to pass him by, even when writing texts completely disconnected from theology, law or ethics.²⁹⁷ One of his best known works, one for which even today there exists no less than two-hundred hand-written manuscripts in the Süleymaniye Library, is the *Ṭarīqat al-Muḥammadiyya* (hereafter *Ṭarīqa*) – *The Muḥammadan Way*, now a widely relied upon reference for Sufi disciples. Composed in Arabic, A. Ocak reiterates the widely held opinion that it initiated the first Qāḍīzādeli murmurings that would swiftly evolve to shake the Ottoman lands during the 17th century.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ A. Ocak, ‘Religious Sciences and the Ulema’ in *Ottoman Civilization*, edited by H. Inalcik and G. Render (Ankara: Ministry of Culture, 2003), p. 263.

²⁹⁷ Birgivī’s *al-‘Awāmil*, one of the most widely taught grammar texts in Turkey even today and evolving out of Jurjānī’s *Miat ‘āmil*, is a prime example of this. Every sentence he constructs in order to demonstrate a grammatical rule is a statement of admonition or spiritual advice, with a basis in the Qur’ān or *Sunna*. One wonders whether his instigation may have been to primarily revive the reader spiritually aside from merely composing a primer in grammar.

²⁹⁸ A. Ocak, ‘Religious Sciences and the Ulema’, p. 263.

Birgivi's conceptualisation of *bid'a* is also demonstrably influenced by Ibn Taymiyya. Though his treatment of the subject is markedly more concise than that of the *Majālis*, there are still clearly discernible influences of the *Iqtidā'*. It is clear from the survey of Ibn Taymiyya's position on *bid'a* that he is not willing to accept that innovations in ritual practice are acceptable, and he is categoric in his opposition to those who cite the statement of 'Umar' '*ni'mat bid'a*' in support of a qualification (*takhṣīṣ*) of the *ḥadīths* opposing *bid'a*. Ibn Taymiyya's argument – that 'Umar was using the word *bid'a* in its lexical sense, is found in Birgivi in the following:

One might ask, How can you reconcile the words of the Prophet when he said, 'All innovations are perversities, a straying away from the right path,' with the words of the experts in canonical law, who say that innovations are sometimes permissible in harmless everyday occurrences – for instance, the use of a sifter, or eating wheat cleansed of its bran? [...] Our answer would refer the literal meaning of the word *bid'a*, which means simply something that appears afterwards, whether it be a custom that appears after another custom or a fashion of worship that appears after another way of worship. The word *bid'a* – innovation – is derived from *ibtidā'* – the origin, the first appearance of a thing, and simply means that which comes after the original.²⁹⁹

B. Radtke is of the view that there is nothing to indicate a linkage of Birgivi to Ibn Taymiyya, and thus reaches the conclusion that there cannot be asserted any Taymiyyan influence on the *Ṭarīqa*: 'In der Gegnerschaft gegen diese Tendenzen der, wie er meint, zeitgenösschen Sufik greift er nun nicht auf Ġazālī und *auch nicht auf Ibn Taymiyya* zurück, sondern auf die *ḥanafitische Rechtstradition*.'³⁰⁰ His assumption is difficult to accept since his basis for it is his observation that neither Ibn Taymiyya's name nor a

²⁹⁹ Birgivi, *The Path of Muhammad*, p. 71.

³⁰⁰ Bernd Radtke, 'Birgiwī's *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*. Einige Bemerkungen und Überlegungen', *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 26 (2002) 159-174 (p. 172).

single authorship of his is explicitly cited in the *Ṭarīqa*. Such an approach would also mean denying that there is any influence of the Damascene theologian on al-Āqḥiṣārī. Yet the textual comparison has shown quite conclusively that there is indeed a link between al-Āqḥiṣārī and Ibn Taymiyya. Indeed a further question is whether there are any places where the marks of the *Ṭarīqa* can be shown within the *Majālis*? Here we can cite the following, in which the very same examples of newly invented utensils appear, in the same order, in both works:

محدث بدعة وكل بدعة ضلالة والمراد بالبدعة المذكورة في الحديث
 الحديثين البدعة السيئة التي ليس في الكتاب السنة اصل و
 ظاهر وخفي ملفوظا ومتنظ لا البدعة الغير السيئة التي يكون
 على اصل وسند ظاهر وخفي فافلا لا تكون ضلالة بل قد تكون مباد
 كما استعمل المنخل والمواظبة على اكل لب الخنطة والشيء منه وقد تكون
 مستحبة كبناء المنارة وتصيف الكتب وقد تكون واجبة كنظم الدلائل
 لردة شبه الملاحدة والفرق الضالة لالة البدعة لأمعيا أحدها لغوي
 عام وهو المحدث مطلقا سواء كان في العباد أو من العباد أو اثنا في
 شرعي خاص وهو الزيادة في الدين أو النقصا منه بعد الصحابة
 بغير اذن من الشارع لا قول ولا فعلا ولا صريحا ولا اشارة فانها
 في الحديثين وأن كانت عامة تشمل جميع المحدثات لكن عمومها ليس
 بمعناها اللغوي العام بل عمومها بمعناها الشرعي الخاص فلا تتناول
 العباد الاصل لا تقتصر على بعض الاعتقادات وبعض صور العباد الا انه
 لم يبعث لتعليم امر الدنيا وإنما بعث لتعليم امر الدين يدعيه قوله
 عليه السلام انتم اعلم بامور دنياكم اذا امرتكم بشيء من دينكم فخذوه في البو

عرابض بن سارية رضي وجابر فان قيل
 كيف التطبيق بين قوله على السلام كل بدعة ضلالة
 وبين قول الفقهاء ان البدعة قد تكون مباحا
 كما استعمل المنخل والمواظبة على اكل لب الخنطة
 والشيء منه وقد تكون مستحبة كبناء المنارة
 والمدارس وتصنيف الكتب بل قد تكون واجبة
 كنظم الدلائل لردة شبه الملاحدة ونحوه قلنا
 للبدعة معنى لغوي عام هو المحدث مطلقا عادة
 او عباداة لا يضا اسم من الابتداء بمعنى الأول
 كالرفعة من الارتفاع والمخلقة من الأول
 خلافا وهذه هي القسمة في عبارة الفقهاء
 يعنون بها ما احدث بعد الصدر الأول
 مطلقا ومعنى شرعي خاص وهو الزيادة في
 الدين أو النقصا منه لمحدثان بعد الصحابة
 بغير اذن من الشارع لا قول ولا فعلا

One might ask, How can you reconcile the words of the Prophet when he said, ‘All innovations are perversities, a straying away from the right path,’ with the words of the experts in canonical law, who say that innovations are sometimes permissible in harmless everyday occurrences – for instance, the use of a sifter, or eating wheat cleansed of its bran? Further, sometimes innovations are considered desirable – for instance, the building of minarets for mosques, or the building of schools for the teaching of theology and sciences, or the production of books, etc. Sometimes such an innovation becomes an obligation – for instance, the gathering of worldly proofs to refute the views of heretics.

Strictly speaking, the religious meaning of innovation is the addition to, or subtraction from, the religion as it was at the time of the Prophet and his Companions, especially when these changes cannot be substantiated by anything said or done by the originator of the religion. The concept of innovation within its strictly religious context can only apply to forms of worship, but not to everyday life and customs.³⁰¹

Intended (*murād*) by the word ‘innovation’ in these two traditions is the pernicious (*sayyīʿa*) variety [...] Unintended is the innovation which is non-pernicious, that which has a basis and an clear or subtle support; this sort is not an error, in fact it may be permissible (*mubāḥ*), such as using the sifter or regularly eating wheat cleansed of its bran and satiating oneself with it; it may be recommended (*mustaḥabb*) such as the construction of minarets and the authoring of books; it may be obligatory (*wājib*) such as composing evidences to refute the uncertainties of the heretics and the misguided sects. “Innovation” (*bidʿa*) has two meanings: one is general and linguistic, referring to ‘invention’ in the absolute sense, whether it is [the invention of] customary practice or religious practice. The second is specifically legal, namely a commission or an omission in regards to the religion, after [the era of] the Companions, without authorisation from the Lawgiver, whether in word or deed, explicit or implicit. [The term ‘innovation’] in the two traditions, though general, incorporates all forms of originating. However, its generality is not according to its wider linguistic implication, but rather its specific legal implication. Hence it does not include customs in the first instance, but instead is restricted to certain creedal issues and forms of worship.³⁰²

³⁰¹ Birgivi, *The Path of Muhammad*, p. 71.

³⁰² *Majālis*., f. 54v.

It would appear from the textual comparison above that there is a continuum in Birgivī through to al-Āqḥiṣārī on the concept of *bidʿa*. The possibility that both are taking from a third source is difficult to exclude conclusively, but it is highly unlikely. The view that eating utensils are an innovation, as well as the ‘eating of wheat cleansed of its bran’, difficult to locate in any other works listed in the anti-*bidʿa* literature. It is therefore very likely that al-Āqḥiṣārī knew Birgivī’s *Ṭarīqa* and there is every possibility that he drew upon it in his own analysis of *bidʿa*.

It is observable that al-Āqḥiṣārī’s employment of Ibn Taymiyya in his own condemnation of *bidʿa* is considerably more frequent than Birgivī. This indicates that al-Āqḥiṣārī could not have been relying solely on Birgivī in his analysis would have had direct access to Ibn Taymiyya’s *Iqtiḍāʾ*.

What’s in a name?

It would be useful at this juncture to reflect on why al-Āqḥiṣārī chose to omit the name of Ibn Taymiyya in his *Majālis*. There are several possibilities: the first is the attitude of Ibn Taymiyya on the visitation of graves for the purposes of intercession, a view which was well-known to the Ottoman ‘ulamāʾ. Kātib Çelebi includes Ibn Taymiyya’s view when dealing with the topic of shrines in the *Mizān al-ḥaqq*:

Of those who held this view, Ibn Taymiyya went so far as to forbid visiting even the tomb of the noblest Prophet himself. It was he who said, ‘The fact

that Umar, when it was desired to pray for rain, would not appeal at the tomb of the Prophet, but sought instead the mediation of ‘Abbas, is proof that it is best to seek the mediation of the living.’ His extremism in several matters of this kind caused him to fall foul of the ulama in Egypt and Syria; they subjected him to many inquisitions and brought him to trial before the Sultan of Egypt. The public were divided, both sides numerous broadsheets. Ibn Kathir and Ibn Qayyim were his disciples; in their writings they deal exhaustively with these inquisitions. His opponents declared Ibn Taymiyya an infidel and eventually imprisoned him. He died in prison in 728/1328.³⁰³

It was also circulating in Ottoman Turkey, well in advance of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s time, that Ibn Taymiyya faced unyielding opposition for his harsh views on this issue, and the matter of intercession (*tawassul*) generally. Sivāsī, for one, in his *Durar al-‘aqā’id*, seems to exploit this fact in his own defence of intercession and the visitation of graves for the purpose of deriving benefit from the deceased. He mentions Ibn Taymiyya’s opposition to visiting graves for intercession and that he was subsequently excommunicated by the scholars of Egypt for it. Sivāsī is unambiguous about his feelings towards Ibn Taymiyya: by denouncing the practice as un-Islamic, Ibn Taymiyya had gone astray and therefore deserved the criticism of his peers. It was only after “careful investigation” that the ‘ulamā’ of his time reached the conclusion that Ibn Taymiyya must be killed; it was only because the Damascene had begged for forgiveness and repented that he managed to escape execution.³⁰⁴ Despite the problems relating to the historicity of Sivāsī’s narrative of events – Ibn Taymiyya was not threatened with death, and neither do we have any record of him recanting his views – Sivāsī probably shared a narrative which had currency at the time among members of the ‘Ilmiyye and Sufi orders who were in support of intercession at shrines. Despite the lack of historical evidence to support the details of

³⁰³ Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, p. 93.

³⁰⁴ Sivāsī, *Durar al-‘aqā’id*, f. 59r, cited in Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’, p. 233.

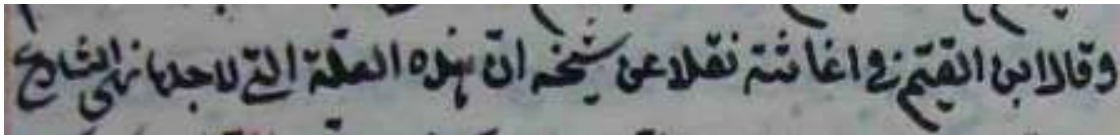
Ibn Taymiyya's so-described treatment and excommunication, it might still have been enough to deter al-Āqḥiṣārī.

Another possibility is that any scholar invoking Ibn Taymiyya's name may have been seen to be making a political statement. Ibn Taymiyya's so-called "theology of liberation", which sought to "free man from the worship of slaves and return him to the worship of the Creator of slaves" (*min 'ibādat al-'ibād ilā 'ibādat rabb al-'ibād*)³⁰⁵ landed him in trouble with the authorities in his own lifetime. M. Umar Memon says: '[The authorities] could not put up with Ibn Taimiya's polemical zeal and having realised that [his] dream of recasting Muslim society in the image of its *Salaf* – a dream which was perfectly embodied and chalked out to the last minute details in his *Kitāb as-siyāsa ash-shar'īya fī iṣlāḥ ar-rā'ī wa 'r-ra'īya* – was out of keeping with the historical evolution and reality of Islam's political life, brought him to his last trial in which the privilege of giving fatwas was withdrawn from him and he was imprisoned in the Citadel at Damascus where 26 months later he died.'³⁰⁵ Therefore, any author ostensibly seeking to revive the Damascene's thought may have been suspected of stirring up anti-establishment sentiments, of propagating a revivalist doctrine in order to directly challenge the position of the Sultan and/or the 'ulamā'.

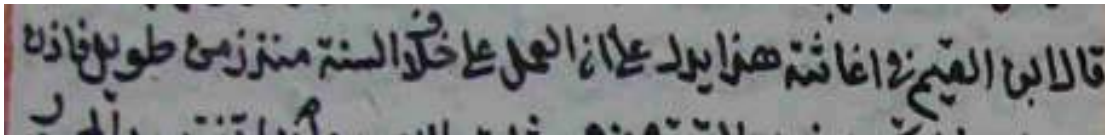
In general, whether one considers Ibn Taymiyya's theological, legal or spiritual thought, he was a man who had a propensity to offend. In fact some of his theological views which led to his imprisonment are not even easily reconciled with the theological beliefs

³⁰⁵ Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*, p. 47.

of Birgivī and al-Āqḥiṣārī, who, as faithful Māturīdīs, would have been offended; he contravened what was considered the community's consensus on several juridical issues. In contrast, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya is mentioned explicitly by al-Āqḥiṣārī, as well as his work the *Ighātha*, as the following excerpts show. The first example is also one in which al-Āqḥiṣārī alludes to Ibn Taymiyya with the words 'Ibn Qayyim says in his *Ighātha*, quoting his shaykh...' (*qāla Ibn al-Qayyim fī Ighāthatihi naqlan ʿan shaykhihi*):



The second example shows al-Āqḥiṣārī referring to Ibn al-Qayyim alone.³⁰⁶



It is impossible to make a definitive statement about why al-Āqḥiṣārī thought it unacceptable to mention Ibn Taymiyya when at the same time he makes explicit mention of Ibn al-Qayyim. Presumably, the name of the student did not resonate with the same negative connotations carried by that of the teacher. Perhaps also, the approach taken by Ibn al-Qayyim when writing on Sufism, which by his own admission borrowed the very

³⁰⁶ The first line is found in *Majlis XVII*, f. 50r, and the second in *Majlis LVII*, f. 158r.

terms of Sufism, might have meant that his thought was more palatable to Ottoman religious society with a predilection for Sufism than was the work of Ibn Taymiyya.³⁰⁷

Pernicious Innovations

This section presents the remaining features of Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī's thought on religious, social and political life in Ottoman Turkey, thereby completing the image of him as a scholar who is justifiably situated within the Ottoman revivalist milieu of the 16th and 17th century. The matters of dispute between 'ulamā' like Birgivī and al-Āqḥiṣārī, and those who would oppose them (most notably among the Sufis), are presented by Kātib Çelebi in his *Mizān al-ḥaqq*. Disputes over a host of religious practices and social customs took place, specifically on whether they were acceptable in the eyes of the Law. Among these were singing and dancing, congregating for supererogatory prayers, the performance of *dhikr* out aloud, drinking coffee and smoking tobacco, shaking hands after prayer, invoking blessings on the Prophet and his Companions, reciting the Qur'an melodically and the visiting of tombs. Many have already received attention in earlier chapters. Al-Āqḥiṣārī not only contributes his own views on each of these issues, he also appears to adopt the same positions as Birgivī before him and his contemporary Meḥmet Qāḍizāde. Yet for all the convergences, there

³⁰⁷ Even some of the titles of Ibn al-Qayyim's spiritual works were based on the titles of well-known Sufi manuals, such as his *Madārij al-sālikīn*, the commentary on the *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* of al-Anṣārī, and the *Rawḍat al-muḥibbīn*. For more on the differences in approach of Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Taymiyya in their spiritual writings, see J. Bell's chapter 'Love in the Works of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya', *Love Theory in Later Ḥanbalite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979).

is a distinct style of writing which marks al-Āqḥiṣārī apart from other revivalist of his time. His methodical and analytical approach to tackling each of these issues is impressive, as will hopefully become clear in the following pages.

Al-Āqḥiṣārī's views are mostly found in the *Majālis al-abrār*, but there were also epistles written by him which contain discussions not found in the *Majālis*. Of course it is not possible to survey al-Āqḥiṣārī's position on each of the issues, to the depth which they deserve; here only a select number will be presented. Nevertheless, it is hoped that they will provide clear insights into the way in which al-Āqḥiṣārī tackled such issues and demonstrate the inner workings of his polemical legalistic approach. Above all, they will provide further support for the view that al-Āqḥiṣārī was at once a member of the ʿIlmiyye and a man with clear sympathies for the revivalist programme of the Qāḍīzādelis.

On supererogatory prayers in congregation

Kātib Çelebi provides some historical background to this debate which raged between the Qāḍīzādelis and their opponents during the 16th and 17th century:

It should be known that the lawyers have handed it down, in the canonical books, that with the exception of one or two kinds of prayer, the performance of supererogatory prayers in congregation, by prior arrangement, is abominated. By the end of the third century after the Flight of the Prophet, however, Raghā'ib prayers had arisen in Jerusalem and had won great popular esteem. Subsequently it became customary to perform the prayers of

Berāt and the Night of Power in congregation, and customary it has remained. Some Ulema spoke out against them, saying that they were innovation and the performance of supererogatory prayers in congregation was abominated. All to no purpose; the people's enthusiasm increased. Legal opinions were sought and the elders of Islam gave their fetwas, some declaring the practice approved, some saying 'Let them make their vow and pray'. But custom was on the side of their performance, and the law ordains respect for custom, and it is agreed that there is certain harm in trying to prevent any innovation or disapproved practice. The fetwas therefore mostly chose the lesser of the two evils. The civil authorities were not usually obliged to prevent these prayers, and, when they were obliged, knowing that the people would not be prevented, they turned a blind eye.³⁰⁸

The passages provide something of a history of the Barāt prayer and the communal prayer on the Night of Power. We should add to this the Raghā'ib prayer, which was also on the list of contentions of both sides of the debate. The suggestion of Kātib Çelebi is that only the common-folk moved towards positions of extremism regarding congregating for such prayers, presenting the 'ulamā° as a class which somehow transcended these polar extremes. The sources which have been engaged for the present research, however, reveal a very different picture. They show clearly that the 'ulamā° and sermonists were also involved, and, if anything, it was from them that these discussions emanated and then filtered to the masses.

The question of prayers in congregation on the nights of Raghā'ib³⁰⁹, Barāt and the Night of Power was a hugely contested issue during the period we are concerned with, and it

³⁰⁸ Kātib, Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, p. 97.

³⁰⁹ The prayer of Raghā'ib is performed on the eve of the first Friday of Rajab. Considered "The night of the prayer for extensive and desirable gifts"; the prayers and supplications contain hundreds of invocations, prostrations and recitations from the Qur'an. See M.J. Kister, 'Radjab', *EF*². Maribel Fierro, in her survey of the treatises on *bid'a*, shows that the prayer was recorded by many of the contributors to the *bid'a* literature amongst the popular innovations. Al-Turṭūshī mentions it in his *Kitāb al-ḥawādith wa l-bida'*, and

was a dispute that took place within the ʿIlmiyye and filtered out to the laity, despite what Kātib Çelebi describes above. In his *Risāleh*, Qāḍīzāde says, '[The innovators] have introduced prayers like that of Raghāʾib, Barāt and al-Qadr. The ʿulamāʾ, however, reject these prayers and have raised objections in other parts of the Muslim world.'³¹⁰ We know that, apart from Qāḍīzāde himself, among the ʿulamāʾ who were locked in this debate were his disciple Üṣṭüwānī, and our own author, Aḥmad al-Rūmī. There would have certainly been others. It is al-Āqḥiṣārī's views on this that we now turn to.

Firstly, al-Āqḥiṣārī is opposed to the sanctification of any period of time or geographical place which has not been sanctified already by the Sharīʿa. To do so is nothing less than reviving the ancient customs of the pagan Arabs, when such customs and celebrations had already been substituted by the Muslim festival of Eid that falls twice in a lunar year and the days of *tashrīq* that follow both dates. The only geographical places which Islam has sanctified, according to al-Āqḥiṣārī, are the Kaʿba at Mecca, ʿArafāt, Minā and Muzdalifa. Al-Āqḥiṣārī insists that each of these time periods and places have associated with them particular acts of piety which are directed to God. It thus cannot be correct to add any more to these for this would essentially be to inaugurate new forms of religion.³¹¹

On the Raghāʾib prayer, al-Aqḥiṣārī begins the twenty-fourth *Majlis* with a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet in which he says, 'God descends to the lower heaven on the middle night of Shaʿbān to forgive a greater number than the hairs on the sheep of [the tribe of] Kalb'.

is, in turn, quoted by Abū Shāma and al-Suyūṭī; Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Ḥājj, al-Turkmānī and Ibn Fūdī also included the prayer among the innovations. See Fierro, 'The treatises against innovations', p. 226.

³¹⁰ Qāḍīzāde, *Risāleh*, f. 91r.

³¹¹ *Majlis XIX*, f. 59r.

The narration is of ʿĀʾisha and is counted among the good (*ḥasan*) traditions that are collected in the *Maṣābīḥ al-sunna*. A lengthy survey follows the *ḥadīth*, as is typical of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s style in the *Majālis*. In this particular instance, given the anthropomorphising of God, where He is said to descend from Heaven, our author preambles the discussion with a brief and rather interesting semantic discussion. It highlights once more why it is patently wrong to consider al-Āqḥiṣārī, and indeed his Qāḍīzādeli comrades, as “Salafīs” or “Wahhābīs”. In the excerpt, adhering to important theological principles of the Māturīdī and Āshʿarī traditions, al-Āqḥiṣārī is keen to prevent any construal of God as a “moving” (*mutaḥarrik*) Lord on the basis of this *ḥadīth*. According to Ashʿarī theology, movement (*intiqāl*) necessitates change (*taghayyur*) and is thus impossible of God. For al-Āqḥiṣārī it is impermissible to read the *ḥadīth* literally:

The meaning of [this *ḥadīth*] is that God transitions on that night from the attribute of Sublimity (*jalāl*) – which necessitates the subjugation of enemies and taking revenge from sinners – to the attribute of Beauty – which necessitates mercy and forgiveness. The *ḥadīth* must be understood in this way because descent (*nuzūl*), ascent (*ṣuʿūd*), movement (*intiqāl*) and rest (*sukūn*) are all attributes of finite bodies (*ajsām mutaḥayyiza*), whilst it is known by incontrovertible rational and transmitted proofs that God is far removed from being a body or finite [...] thus the meaning of this is what the *Ahl al-ḥaqq* state, namely that His mercy descends and He increases in grace and forgiveness for his worshippers.³¹²

The statement is of a variety which could provoke most Ḥanbalīs. Ibn Taymiyya in particular spent much energy on rejecting a theology of God which strips Him of the attributes spoken about in the Qurʾan and *ḥadīth*. Whilst it is true that al-Āqḥiṣārī shared

³¹² *Majlis XXIV*, f. 72v-r.

with Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim views relating to certain aspects of religious practice, he could not be at greater odds with them on questions relating to theology, and specifically the attributes of God.

Al-Āqḥiṣārī proceeds to highlight a dispute which obtained on whether this night should be exalted above other nights. There are many *ḥadīths* apart from the one which introduces *Majlis XXIV* on the nobility of this night, and al-Āqḥiṣārī mentions that a number of the Successors (*Tābiʿūn*) were known to have held the night in high regard (he mentions Khālīd b. Miqdān, Maqḥūl, Luqmān b. ʿĀmir among others) but the situation changed significantly once news of the importance of the night spread throughout the lands. Al-Āqḥiṣārī says that, at this point, the scholars of the Ḥijāz denied the excellence of the night and believed anything to do with it was a *bidʿa*. Here, as jurists are wont to do, al-Āqḥiṣārī attempts to reconcile between the two extremes:

The truth is that if the believer occupies himself on that night in worship of various kinds, such as prayer, recitation, *dhikr* and invocation, then it is permitted and not disliked; however, to congregate on this night in the mosques, small and large, to offer supererogatory prayers in a congregation, as is the custom in our time, is reprehensible (*yukrah*). This is the view of al-Āwzāʿī, the imām, scholar and jurist of the people of Syria. To light many lamps and candles in both the small and great mosques on that night is not permitted (*lā yajūz*) because of what has been mentioned [in this regard] in the *Qaniyya*, that to light many lamps on the night of Barāt in the streets and souqs is an innovation (*bidʿa*), as well as in the mosques.³¹³

The Anatolian scholar then emphasises his earlier position, but this time in far stronger terms:

³¹³ *Majlis XXIV*, f. 72r.

To believe that any of this is pious (*qurba*) is from the greatest of innovations (*bidʿa*) and the worst of evil acts (*sayyiʿa*). Furthermore, to congregate on this night for supererogatory prayer is a pernicious innovation (*bidʿa qabīḥa*) which must be avoided (*yajibu al-ijtināb ʿan-hā*) because the Jurists have agreed upon the reprehensibility of congregating for all supererogatory prayers except the *tarāwīḥ*-prayer, the prayer for rain (*ṣalāt al-istisqāʾ*) and the eclipse prayer (*ṣalāt al-kusūf*) with the condition that there are four besides the imām.³¹⁴

After explaining that congregating for prayer on Barāt was not the practice of the Companions or the early Muslims, al-Āqḥiṣārī cites al-Ṭurṭūshī for the story of how it was inaugurated. According to this narrative, in the fourth Islamic century, a man from Nāblus entered the al-Aqṣā mosque on this very night and began to pray. Shortly, he was joined by a second man, and then a third, and a fourth, and so on, until a large congregation was established. In the following year, the same prayer in congregation was performed, and this continued until news of it began to spread throughout the Muslim lands.

Finally, al-Āqḥiṣārī offers his advice to the believer who cannot change this situation, yet recognised the obligation of enjoining good and forbidding wrong: a person who cannot find a mosque where such a reprehensible prayer is not being performed is better off praying at home. Now despite the fact that it is disliked to pray the obligatory prayer at home, in this case, according to al-Āqḥiṣārī, it is far worse to swell the numbers of the “People of Innovation” (*Ahl al-bidʿa*), which is in fact prohibited. This is al-Āqḥiṣārī’s general advice. He then addresses the people of knowledge specifically: they should be even more careful not to attend mosques where the Barāt prayer is being performed

³¹⁴ *Majlis XXIV*, f. 72r.

because this will inevitably set a precedent which will be imitated by the commonalty (*al-‘awwām*). Beyond this, one must feel a sense of disgust within their heart towards this action of the ignorant, considered by al-Āqḥiṣārī the very lowest degree of faith; this then absolves the one who is incapable of changing the custom of the people.³¹⁵

Al-Āqḥiṣārī is thus in complete agreement with other Qaḍīzādeli revivalists on the matter of performing supererogatory prayers in congregation. Qaḍīzāde, Üşüwānī and Wānī are all of the view that the practice of congregating for Raghā’ib, Barāt and Laylat al-Qadr are innovations. The only prayers according to each which are acceptable to congregate for are the *tarāwīḥ*, *kusūf*, *witr* and *istisqā’*. There is, however, one final point to note about the nature of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s view on such practices: he is even more rigorist than his fellow activists, and even the views of Ibn Taymiyya on newly inaugurated rites of worship appear less severe. According to the Anatolian reformer,

It is not for anyone to claim that though such prayers are *bid‘a* they involve supplications and readings from the Qur’an and therefore [one may] hope for a reward commensurate with these supplications and readings. To such a person it is said, since prayers of this sort are innovations and misguided (*ḍalla*), what they contain in terms of supplications and readings are effectively the mixing of good actions with evil ones, which is an evil in itself, more distasteful than the first; therefore it is incumbent that such an action is avoided.³¹⁶

³¹⁵ *Majlis XXIV*, f. 73v.

³¹⁶ *Majlis XIX*, f. 61r.

On shaking hands

According to the Qāḍīzādelis, turning to shake the hand of a fellow Muslim after the completion of the obligatory prayer is an innovation in religion which is to be avoided. There are two reasons that explain the preoccupation of the Qāḍīzādelis with this otherwise banal social transaction. The first is that it had become commonplace in Ottoman Turkey, so much so that the Qāḍīzādelis and their ideological antecedents decided something had to be said about it. Second, its performance was widely considered to be a duty on all those praying in congregation; a novelty of this sort, which could not be supported by Prophetic tradition, would not be tolerated by the hardliners. This was just the combination of components for which the Qāḍīzādelis had opposed so many other religious and social practices. Yet it would be an error to consider the Qāḍīzādelis the first (or indeed the last) to have had issue with the shaking of hands. The issue first attracted the attention of jurists centuries earlier: Ibn al-Ḥājj speaks about it in his *Madkhal*, al-Nawawī in his gloss on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim and Ibn Taymiyya in his *Fatāwā*. The Qāḍīzādelis were well acquainted with these oppositional voices from the past and made frequent references to them in support of their own campaign against the practice. Kātib Çelebi in his *Mizān* explains the background to the discussion:

Shaking hands was originally the *Sunna* when paying homage or on meeting. The noble Companions (the approval of God Almighty be on them one and all) used to shake hands when they met one another, and to say ‘God pardon me and you!’ There are many traditions of the Prophet to this effect [...] Later the practice fell into desuetude, and people came to do it only after prayer; in Turkey, mostly after the Friday prayer. As this was an innovation based on custom and use, certain preachers forbade it as being a heretical Shiite practice. A *fatwa* was sought, and the reply was this: the heretical Shiite practice is to shake hands after all five prayers every day. The shaking of

hands after the Friday prayer is a special case. For it is better in the case of firmly-rooted innovations to temporize as far as possible, and to put people in the right.

On this matter also discussion arose, though not to such an immoderate extent, and a few people abandoned the practice. Most people however regard it as a religious duty, particularly at festivals.³¹⁷

It is not clear who issued the fatwa allowing the shaking of hands after Friday prayer; such a liberal fatwa certainly would not have been issued by any one of the scholars associated with the Qāḍīzādelis, and in this regard, Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī is no different. He too preferred the stricter view which was an absolute ban on the action unless done in the normal context of meeting and greeting. To do so after the Friday Prayer or after the Eid Prayer he considered an innovation which should be rejected. To use in support of such a practice *ḥadīth* such as, ‘No two Muslims meet each other and shake hands except that their sins are forgiven before they separate,’ is, according to al-Āqḥiṣārī, unjustified since it has no relevance to the context of the prayer. In fact, it is rejected on the basis of ‘Ā’isha’s narration, ‘Whoever invents (*aḥdatha*) anything in this affair of ours shall have it rejected’.³¹⁸ Al-Āqḥiṣārī also mentions that the Shī‘a shake hands after the prayer, perhaps to dissuade his Sunnī audience from imitating them. Al-Āqḥiṣārī calls upon the authority of Ibn Ḥajar of the Shāfi‘ī’s and Ibn al-Ḥājj of the Mālikīs, both of whom considered shaking hands after prayers a reprehensible act. As part of his justification for opposing it, al-Āqḥiṣārī describes how far rooted the practice has become in Turkish society of the 17th century:

³¹⁷ Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, p. 101.

³¹⁸ *Majlis L*, f. 137r.

The people have now become so accustomed to this practice and are so entrenched in the belief that it is a binding *Sunna* that they do not permit the abandoning of it. It has even reached us that one of the well-known scholars has said that it is from the rites of Islam and so should not be left by the people of faith. Look, O people of justice, if the belief of the elite is like this, then what of the belief of the commonalty?³¹⁹

The sort of reaction is typical of Qāḍīzādeli reformers and reminds in particular of Qāḍīzāde and Wānī Efendī. Over against each of these, Kātib Çelebi argued for a position of moderation, as he was wont to do for all of the issues which the Qāḍīzādelis had taken a rigorist position on. He agrees with Qāḍīzāde concerning the novelty of handshakes after the prayer and recommends that one does not initiate it. If one is turned to for a hand shake, then it is a greater evil to refuse, since this would offend a fellow believer, which is a sin worse than the act of shaking hands after prayer.³²⁰ This is typical of Kātib Çelebi's view, namely that one should accommodate norms which have become widespread as much as possible, since it is unbecoming of a Muslim to oppose what has received the sanction of custom. Al-Āqḥiṣārī could not be any further from this position. His view is that one should stand up for truth even if it means one is alone in doing so:

When an act runs contrary to the *Sunna* then there should be no consideration given to it or attention. Deeds contrary to the *Sunna* have been undertaken since time immemorial and so you should be extremely cautious of newly invented matters. Even if the majority have agreed upon a deed, you should not be deceived by their conformity upon something invented after the era of the Companions. In fact, you should investigate their states and deeds because the most knowledgeable of them and nearest in proximity to God – the Most High – are those who are most similar to them and most aware of their way. Among [the Companions] are those who took the religion

³¹⁹ *Majlis L*, f. 137r.

³²⁰ Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, pp. 101-102.

[directly]; they are the source for transmitting the *Sharīʿa* from the possessor of the Law.³²¹

For this he cites Ibn al-Qayyim and Abū Shāma, the latter of whom is quoted as saying: ‘The command to adopt the way of the majority means [to adopt the way of] truth and its people, even if those who cling to it are few and those who contravene it are many; this is since the truth is that which the first majority were upon – namely, the Companions – and so there is no consideration given to large numbers of people who are upon misguidance.’³²² Through such motivational instructions, it is very likely that al-Āqḥiṣārī was trying to encourage himself as much as he was attempting to encourage his reader.

Conclusion

The study of *bidʿa* in the thought of al-Āqḥiṣārī has been revelatory. Firstly, the influence of Ibn Taymiyya upon 17th century Ottoman revivalism, which has never properly been demonstrated until now, can finally be spoken about with greater clarity. The omission of Ibn Taymiyya’s name from the texts of the period has been one of the key reasons for the scepticism of some academics about any such link. Al-Āqḥiṣārī’s use of *Iqtidāʾ al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, revealed by the close comparative study, is therefore the first important step towards allaying doubts of this kind.

Further, this part of the study has attempted to show that al-Āqḥiṣārī, and indeed Birgivī, were influenced more deeply by Ibn Taymiyya than might first be assumed. They appear

³²¹ *Majlis L*, f. 138v.

³²² *Majlis L*, f. 138v.

to have appropriated the rational arguments furnished by the Damascene in his *Iqtidāʾ* in order to support their own opposition to innovations that have not been sanctioned by the Sharīʿa. This level of Taymiyyan influence is again a new insight, one which I hope will provoke further scholarly inquiry.

After a treatment of al-Āqḥiṣārī's rationale that underpins his opposition to *bidʿa*, the chapter commenced with a survey of some innovations which he opposed, highlighting the resemblances between his own positions and other Qāḍīzādelis. As explained in the introduction to this study, this approach allows for a more nuanced appreciation of why the Ottoman puritan was opposed to these and other religious practices which he considered novelties. Such an approach helps to avoid reading him as simply a regressive scholar who was opposed to *bidʿa* because of an obstinate obsession with tradition. The methodological approach taken might serve as a model for future studies on the Qāḍīzādelis, even of those who have already received scholarly attention.

A final point to consider is how al-Āqḥiṣārī's ostensible infatuation with exterminating religious innovations – and we should include with him Birgivī and Qāḍīzāde – can be squared with the religious milieu of his time. How might we reconcile his position on *bidʿa* with his own advocacy of Sufism? The answer may yet again lie in local Naqshbandī Sufism, which has already proved in the previous chapter as a useful analytical tool with which to understand al-Āqḥiṣārī's thought. Whilst I am presently unable to draw upon an Ottoman Naqshbandī view on *bidʿa* from the period in question, it is possible to draw a comparison between al-Āqḥiṣārī and Aḥmad Sirhindī, both of

whom were contemporaries. In his *Maktūbāt*, in answer to a question on how *dhikr* should be performed, Sirhindī states clearly that he is opposed to audible *dhikr* because it is a *bidʿa*; in the following excerpt, we also learn about how Sirhindī conceptualised *bidʿa*:

I have been asked how it is that I forbid *dhikr* with a loud voice and condemn it as an innovation (*bidʿa*), but do not condemn many other things which had not existed at the time of the Prophet such as the shirt open in front (*libās farjī*) and pyjamas. Please note that the acts of the Prophet were of two kinds: those that were performed as *ʿibāda*, an act of worship, and those that were done as *ʿurf* and *ʿāda*, habits and customs. The acts which were done as *ʿibāda*, we consider deviations from them to be evil innovations, and condemn them strongly, for they are innovations in religion (*dīn*) and must be rejected. But the acts which were done as part of habit and custom, we do not regard deviations from them as innovation, and do not proscribe them. For they do not belong to religion (*dīn*); their existence or disappearance depends upon the custom of society rather than religion. Indeed the custom of some lands is often different to the customs of other lands; indeed, sometimes the customs of a single land can be variegated, depending upon the era; it is likely that to adhere to normal traditions can actually yield positive results and be a cause of happiness. May God make us stand firm upon adhering to the way of the Master of Messengers.³²³

The vocal *dhikr* was not the only practice which Sirhindī opposed. Musical sessions (*samāʿ*), spiritual dancing (*raqs*) and celebrating the birthday of the Prophet were all outlawed for him. In various places of his *Maktūbāt*, Sirhindī referred to these practices as *shirk*, *kufṛ* as often as he would refer to them as *bidʿa*. Ansari argues that if we consider carefully the things which Sirhindī condemned as *bidʿa*, it is clear that they introduce things into the religion which have no basis in the sources of the religion – namely the Qurʾan and *Sunna*:

³²³ Cited in Ansari, *Sufism and Shariʿah*, pp. 22-23. See also *Maktūbāt*, 1: 440.

Sirhindī laments that the ‘ulamā’ of the time who are guardians of religion and whose duty is to save the masses from *shirk* and *bid‘a* are themselves involved in those practices. ‘The world is drowned’, he says, ‘in the sea of *bid‘a* and delights in its black acts; the ‘ulamā’ of our time have become preachers of *bid‘a* and destroyers of the *Sunna*. No one has the courage to speak against *bid‘a* and revive the *Sunna*. Most of the ‘ulamā’ lead people to *bid‘a*, and prove that they are commended and desirable’.³²⁴

The convergence between Sirhindī and al-Āqḥiṣārī on the problem of *bid‘a* is striking and once more shows that for the Naqshbandī Order at least, al-Āqḥiṣārī’s hardline views on *bid‘a* were quite at home.

³²⁴ Ansari, *Sufism and Shari‘ah*, p. 23.

V. FORBIDDING EVIL

This chapter investigates an aspect of al-Āqḥiṣārī's thought which might rightly be perceived as a hardline approach to religion. He addresses issues relating to social behaviour, customary habits, politics and religious authority. Two aspects are brought to light in the following pages: first, that al-Āqḥiṣārī's interests were diverse; second, that he was quite prepared to advise the common man to take action in order to remedy a societal malady, by force if nothing else can achieve it. His rigidity and militancy must have been quite unlike anything known in Ottoman Turkey and begs the question, whether he is responsible for the rather more violent approach taken by the Qāḍīzādelis as they entered into phase two of their existence.

A Hardline Agenda

On coffee and tobacco

Coffee first arrived in the Ottoman Empire from the Yemen in around 947/1540 and tobacco from the Americas during the same century. The two substances, rather inevitably, became popular within a short space of time, and Istanbul was soon saturated with *kahvehanes* built as places for the consumption of both. William Biddulph, in his *Travels of Certayne Englishmen in Africa, Asia, etc...Begunne in 1600 and by some of them finished – this yeere 1608* (London, 1609), gave a vivid description of the coffeehouse, at a time when it was unknown in contemporary Europe:

Their most common drinke is *Coffa*, which is a blacke kinde of drinke, made of a kind of Pulse like Pease, called *Coaua*....It is accounted a great curtesie

amongst them to give unto their friends when they come to visit them, a Fin-
ion or Scudella of *Coffa*, which is more holesome than toothsome, for it
causeth good concoction, and driveth away drowsinesse.

Some of them will also drink Bersh or Opium, which maketh them forget
themselves, and talk idely of Castles in the Ayre, as though they saw Visions
and heard Revelations. Their *Coffa* houses are more common than Ale-houses
in England; but they use not so much to sit in the houses, as on benches on
both sides the streets, neere unto a *Coffa* house, every man with his Fin-
ionful; which being smoking hot, they use to put it to their Noses & Eares.
And then sup it off by leasure, being full of idle and Ale-house talke while
they are amongst themselves drinking it; if there be any news, it is talked of
there.³²⁵

The coffeehouse in the 17th century was clearly not a Starbucks or Costa; as described
above, the Turkish customer could order anything from a coffee to opium. This helps to
understand why coffee was viewed by some observers as of the same genus as a drug.
Indeed Francis Bacon (1561-1626) classified “coffa” with opium, tobacco and betel, as a
fortifying and analeptic drug rather than a beverage, considering it as such because of
how it was consumed:

Certainly this berry coffa, the root and leaf betel, the leaf tobacco, and the
tear of poppy (opium) of which the Turks are great takers (supposing it
expelleth all fear). Do all condense the spirits, and make them strong and
alleger. But it seemeth they were taken after several manners; for coffa and
opiuium are taken down, tobacco but in smoke, and betel is but champed in the
mouth with a little lime.³²⁶

Muslim jurists felt compelled to respond to these two new substances which the *Shariʿa*
was apparently silent on. Varying degrees of response issued forth from jurists, ranging
from absolute interdiction to complete license. Often, the most under-developed

³²⁵ Cited in B.A. Weinberg, B.K. Bealer, *The World of Caffeine: The Science and Culture of the World's
Most Popular Drug* (New York; London: Routledge, 2001), p. 149.

³²⁶ Cited in B.A. Weinberg, *The World of Caffeine*. Bealer., pp. 149-150.

arguments were presented by jurists in support of their views.³²⁷ As more knowledge surfaced about the harmful physical effects of smoking tobacco, the more astute jurists who stood opposed to smoking began to bolster their fatwas against tobacco by incorporating the latest medical evidence available to them. The greater the sophistication of the fatwas, the more likely it was that the authorities would initiate practical legal measures against tobacco.

In some parts of the *Majālis*, as well as the *Risāleh Dukhāniyye*, al-Āqḥiṣārī presents what must surely have been the most sophisticated and developed fatwa against tobacco during the 17th century. His arguments are drawn from the Qur'an, *ḥadīth*, medicine and a deep-set mistrust of the West from whence it came. He describes it in no uncertain terms as the substance which 'originated from the infidels, the enemies of the people of faith', 'an affliction affecting all of mankind, be it the elite or the commonalty'. Though representative of the general position of the 'ulamā', one senses that for a man already lamenting a society which had departed from an acceptable standard of religiosity 'the introduction of tobacco into an Ottoman empire must have meant a societal cataclysm of satanic proportions'.³²⁸

³²⁷ M.A. Nadwi explains that most jurists likened tobacco to wine in sinfulness and harmfulness and accordingly considered it proscribed. He mentions that among the Ḥanafīs who took this view were al-Shurunbulālī, al-Musayyārī and al-Ḥaṣkafī. It was the use of the analogical method which led them to this judgment. In contrast to this view, scholars such as 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, the 17th century Syrian Ḥanafī and Naqshbandī, judged smoking to be permissible (*mubāḥ*) on the basis that it is dissimilar to wine (a kind of negative analogy): he argued that since it doesn't lead to inebriation, the loss of intellect, the clouding of the mind or harm to the body, it cannot be forbidden. For more on the earliest juristic responses to tobacco, see the forward to Y. Michot's *Against Smoking*, pp. x-xii.

³²⁸ Michot, *Against Smoking*, p. 22.

We are availed of a detailed survey of al-Āqḥiṣārī's fatwa by Y. Michot's translation of the *Dukhāniyye*. Here, only the key premises upon which the fatwa is built shall be presented. The first proof for the prohibition of tobacco furnished by the Anatolian revivalist is Qur'anic. Rather than attempt an analogy by extending the Qur'anic prohibition of wine, al-Āqḥiṣārī decides to employ what appears to be a juristic maxim: 'If no advantage – religious or worldly – derives from the [freely] chosen (*ikhtiyārī*) action emanating from a legally responsible person (*mukallaḥ*), such an action oscillates between futility (*ʿabath*), amusement (*laʿib*) and caprice (*lahw*)'.³²⁹ For the author of the *Dukhāniyye* the Qur'an makes no distinction between these three futile actions – each one is equally pernicious. Since smoking tobacco affords no religious benefit, and also lacks any worldly benefit since it neither satiates nor possesses medicinal properties, it is from those actions done purely from caprice. This alone would be sufficient for al-Āqḥiṣārī to consider it prohibited. Of course al-Āqḥiṣārī cannot make do with this otherwise vague justification – it would certainly not appease those already taken to the view that the gates of *ijtihād* shut and therefore all issues unresolved by the earliest jurists – smoking being among them – should remain licit. He continues to bolster his argument by citing Avicenna and Galen, medical authorities who spoke about the 'desiccating effects of smoke on bodily humours' which in turn lead to sickness. Due to the obligation to protect oneself from harm, says al-Āqḥiṣārī, it is therefore not permissible to use tobacco. The fatwa continues, revealing more pronouncedly al-Āqḥiṣārī's legal acumen – he develops his argument methodically, drawing upon jurisprudential theory wherever appropriate, and is obviously familiar with the body of earlier legal judgements on similar noxious substances which he renders analogous to tobacco.

³²⁹ Michot, *Against Smoking*, pp. 45-46.

It might be argued that al-Āqḥiṣārī's argument lacks originality since he draws heavily from the fatwa of his contemporary, the Mālikī shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Laḳānī (d. 1041/1631), one of the very first issued on tobacco. Michot insists that, notwithstanding al-Āqḥiṣārī's debt to al-Laḳānī, he should be given credit for putting his (unreferenced) borrowings to good use as he 'works out a far better conceived, and convincing, indictment against smoking than the Egyptian scholar.'³³⁰ Indeed for the most part, the fatwa is nothing less than a juristically rigorous and robust statement against smoking – as such it reinforces the view of al-Āqḥiṣārī as a jurist at the apex of his profession. Is there any point at which his more hard-line rhetoric surfaces? Indeed there is: 'Every individual, the jurists have said, on whom an abominable smell is found by which one is offended, it is obligatory to expel him from the mosque, even by dragging him by his hand and his foot – but not by his beard or the hair of his head. In this time, it is consequently obligatory to expel from the mosques – the small ones and the great ones – many of the imāms and muezzins on whom there is an abominable smell.'³³¹

Judging by his largely underdeveloped argument against coffee, it seems that the substance was not viewed by al-Āqḥiṣārī as quite the threat that tobacco posed to the health of both society and the individual. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that he makes a short statement on it in the *Dukhāniyye*.

Likewise, also, for coffee, this new invention which exerts a general fascination and whose calamitous [vogue] is so widespread that it has become the cause of various sorts of acts of disobedience and various types of forbidden behaviour. Using it necessarily forces one to observe these

³³⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

³³¹ Ibid, pp. 53-54.

forbidden behaviours during gatherings, to mingle with the fools and the vile, to receive it from the hands of beardless youths, to touch their hands, and to commit acts of disobedience. Now, all this violates manliness (*murūʿa*) and brings down probity (*ʿadāla*). “It is not permitted to anybody,” the legists have said, “to contribute to the tarnishing of his probity by committing actions demonstrating his vileness.” “Everything,” they also said, “which is the cause of an act of disobedience is prohibited, and everything whose corruptive nature is known to be like the corruptive nature of things with which a [divine] threat is associated, or a Legal sanction, or a curse, is a great sin.” Now, how little is coffee free from any of these [aspects]! It is thus incumbent upon the intelligent person to keep away from it, totally; all the more so as, by continuing to drink it, some harm is produced which affects the body when one abstains from it.³³²

Al-Āqḥiṣārī is able on this occasion to reinforce his own view with that of Abū Ṣuʿūd Efendi’s own fatwa, the Shaykh al-Islām and Muftī of the Rūm – highlighting perhaps his ability to find praise for someone whom he would often hold completely opposing views to.³³³ His own response is relayed by al-Āqḥiṣārī: ‘To issue a fatwa allowing something which the adepts of debauchery apply themselves eagerly to engage in is among the things that anybody afraid of God Most High and fearing Him would hardly ever undertake!’³³⁴ We know from Kātib Çelebi that Abū Ṣuʿūd also issued the notorious command that ships bringing in coffee beans should have holes bored into them so that they sink with their loads.³³⁵ Would the knowledge of an age when people would be sat at the breakfast table pouring boiling water over their Nescafe instant coffee granules have had any bearing on the decisions made by muftis such as al-Āqḥiṣārī? As much as one would like to think it would, it is rather more likely that for rigorist pietism of this sort it would be of no consequence.

³³² Michot, *Against Smoking*, pp. 64-65.

³³³ Ibid, p. 65. See also Çavuşoğlu, ‘The Kadizādeli Movement’, p. 218.

³³⁴ For Abū Ṣuʿūd’s fatwa see M.E. Duzdağ’s *Şeyhülislām Ebusuʿūd Efendi’nin fetvalarına göre Kanunı devrinde Osmanlı hayati - Fetāvā-yi Ebusuʿūd Efendi* (Istanbul: Şûle Yayınları, 1998).

³³⁵ Kātib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, p. 60.

On the corruption of the authorities

Much has been written by Ottomanists on the disintegration of the Ottoman imperial hierarchy during the post-Suleimanic age. The disintegration extended beyond the Seraglio of course, besetting the army and the learned institution – the ‘Ilmiyye. Interest in the decline of the ‘Ilmiyye in particular can be traced back to 16th century chronicles; historians such as ‘Alī (1541-1599) and Selānikī (d. 1600) both speak about it, criticising the body of ‘ulamā’ as a whole who did little to prevent the decline, and discussing how corruption pervaded the ‘Ilmiyye institution to such an extent that it ultimately resulted in its near complete breakdown.³³⁶

None were more critical of the moral laxity and decline in religious authority of the ‘Ilmiyye than certain members of the ‘ulamā’. In this regard, Meḥmed Birgivī is most noteworthy. In several works written during the latter part of his career he made significant challenges to what he saw as unacceptable practices given sanction by the Ottoman religious establishment. One of the most significant challenges he made was to the fatwa permitting cash trusts. Sometime between 1546 and 1547, Çivizāde, Qāḍī‘askar³³⁷ of Rumelia, issued a fatwa stating that cash trusts were *ḥarām*, and managed to persuade Sultan Süleymān I to abolish them by decree. Subsequently, the

³³⁶ There is a very useful chapter on the breakdown of the ‘Ilmiyye in ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’, pp. 68-77.

³³⁷ The Qāḍī‘askar, literally ‘judge of the army’, was a position which dates back to the era of Murād I (d. 1389), who made the first appointment in Bursa in 765/1363. He designated the holder of the post with authority for military jurisdiction and supervisory powers over all *qāḍīs*. Whereas to begin with, the holder of the post was effectively the leader of the ‘ulamā’, by the middle of the 16th century, thanks to the activity Abū Şu‘ūd Efendi, the Mufti of Istanbul would come to wield ultimate authority over all ‘ulamā’ of the Empire. See Gy. Káldy Nagy, ‘Kāḍī‘askar’, in *EP*².

Muḥtār of Istanbul Abū Şuʿūd Efendi, a pragmatist by anyone’s standard, saw that such a lucrative means of earning should be granted licence; he thus responded with his own fatwa pronouncing them valid.³³⁸ Finding in Abū Şuʿūd’s fatwa the legal justification he needed, the Sultan swiftly countermanded the first decree which outlawed the cash trusts with a second which returned their original legal status. At this point, Birgivî Efendî, who had already composed a work on the issue, *Inqādh al-hālikîn*,³³⁹ responded directly to Abū Şuʿūd’s fatwa with a definitive rebuttal, *Sayf al-Şārim*, in which he maintained that the Shaykh al-Islām was in error and that the usury involved in cash loans made on these trusts was completely outlawed by Ḥanafî law.³⁴⁰ The second significant intervention of Birgivî was his fatwa condemning those ʿulamāʾ who would take payments for reciting the Qurʾan or for praying over the deceased. In the *Īqāz al-nāʾimîn wa ifhām al-qāşirîn*, he maintained that using money earned from such means was *ḥarām* and had no place in religion.³⁴¹

In the *Majālis*, Aḥmad al-Rūmî shares many of the sentiments expressed by Birgivî in his epistles prohibiting both cash trusts and the receipt of money for reciting the Qurʾan. He is perhaps even more stinging than Birgivî of ʿulamāʾ who sanction such means of income, condemning severely both those sanctioning and those actively participating in the act. For him, the ʿulamāʾ have the role of curing people’s hearts, yet their own hearts

³³⁸ See fn.50, p.35 for Abū Şuʿūd’s justification for cash trusts.

³³⁹ This epistle insists on the illegality of making cash endowments, other than at the time of death, in order to secure religious reward. For more details on this text, see Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’, p. 142ff.

³⁴⁰ C. Imber notes that Birgivî Çivizade were both closer to the mainstream position in the Ḥanafî school and therefore correct in their views. However, Abū Şuʿūd invoked the *uṣūlî* principle of *maşlahā*, public interest – he believed that it was not in the public interest to abolish cash trusts. See *Ebu’s-Suʿud*, pp. 144-145. For details on the cash trust controversy refer to J. Mandeville’s paper, ‘Usurious Piety’.

³⁴¹ See Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’, pp. 142-143; Çavuşoğlu also has a useful section on the cash trust controversy in her thesis, ‘The Kadizâdeli Movement’, p. 55ff.

are diseased. Moreover, instead of being moral guides reminding the commonalty of the Day of Judgement and Hell, they corrupt them even more by charming them and deluding them with idle hopes in the divine mercy. To cap this, they then charge money for their services!

The physicians, these are the ulema and, in this time, they have become sick, seriously sick, to the point of being unable to treat themselves, not to speak of treating others. This is the reason why the disease is general, the therapy has been interrupted, and the creatures are perishing. Or, rather, the physicians keep themselves busy with various ways of misguiding [people]. Would to God, if only, as they do not improve matters, they were not corrupting them! If only they were keeping silent and were not talking! When they speak, in their religious exhortations, they indeed do not aim at anything else than to win the hearts of the commonalty. Now, they do not obtain access to them but by making mention of the hope [in God] and the [divine] mercy, as that is more pleasing to the ears and lighter on [human] nature. The creatures thus leave their sessions of religious exhortation (*majlis wa 'z*) with, as sole profit, an overplus of insolence in committing actions of disobedience. Now, as long the physician is like that, the sick are led to perish because of the remedy, as it is administered in the wrong manner.³⁴²

Given his warning to *‘ulamā’* who use their own religious gatherings, *majālis*, for the purposes of making a living, thereby tarnishing the good name of religion, one cannot help wondering whether in some way al-Āqḥiṣārī is in part writing the *Majālis al-abrār* with the aim of recovering something of the respect he believes the sermon might have lost. Certainly in the next excerpt, he is damning of those gatherings which are supposed to fill hearts with faith, but instead seem only to fill the pockets of the sermonists.

³⁴² Cited in Michot, *Against Smoking*, pp. 15-16.

One ought to know that when the ulema, in the sessions which they devote to knowledge, solicit something from the people, doing so is not licit for them, as this is earning something by means of a scholarly activity and an action of obedience [to God], no matter whether they solicit [it] for themselves or for others. Among the blameworthy solicitations is the fact of offering a little in order to take a lot, as is done when one is invited to weddings or circumcisions, as well as the fact of taking care of [someone else's] sheep with the intention of keeping its offspring, as it is said that it is about this that His words, Exalted is He, were sent down: "And show not favour, seeking worldly gain!"³⁴³

Those deserving the position of wā'iz

In *Majlis LXXXII* (Who should be appointed preacher and who should be prevented) Aḥmad al-Āqḥiṣārī describes the qualifications of a worthy preacher: 'Whoever is found to possess knowledge (*ʿilm*), religiosity (*diyāna*) and sound creed (*ḥusn ʿaqīda*) should be granted permission (*yuʾadhdhan lahu*) to exhort the masses. One not possessing these attributes should not be granted permission for fear that he will lead people to innovation (*bidʿa*) and misguidance (*ḍalāla*), just as is happening in our time."³⁴⁴ In his typically reductionistic style, al-Āqḥiṣārī divides those who exhort the masses into three types: The first, according to al-Āqḥiṣārī, has been virtually non-existent for centuries – he is the leader (*amīr*) who stands up and personally exhorts the people. Such amīrs according to al-Āqḥiṣārī are only to be found in early Islam – here too is an obvious intimation that Muslim government has moved away from the Islamic ideal. The second is present, but apparently still rare: he is the state-appointed preacher. The last type of preacher, by far the most common according to al-Āqḥiṣārī, is the arrogant (*mukhtāl*), self-appointed

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ *Majlis LXXXII*, f. 226r.

prattler (*fudūlī*), who craves leadership. This sort of a person preaches only in order to capture the hearts of his audience; his attention is only on the mercy of God rather than His punishment. People therefore leave his session feeling more encouraged to commit sins.³⁴⁵ This sort of *wāʿiẓ*, who mixes his exhortation with innovation (*bidʿa*) should be prevented; no one should be in attendance of such sessions (*majlis*) unless intending to refute the heresies being uttered. He next describes the aim of the path of *wāʿẓ* and *naṣīḥa*:

The *wāʿiẓ* should be bent on inviting people away from the temporal (*dunya*) towards the Hereafter, and from sin (*maʿṣiya*) towards obedience (*ṭāʿa*) and from sickness (*marad*) to certainty (*qanāʿa*). He instils in them a love for the Hereafter and an abhorrence for the temporal; he instructs them on ritual practice (*ʿibāda*) and God-consciousness (*taqwā*) since most are predisposed to straying from the path of the Law (*minhaj al-sharʿ*) and hastening to whatever displeases God, the Exalted.³⁴⁶

Any preacher whose exhortation is not thus characterised is a preacher of evil (*wabāl*). It is a duty on the one possessing strength and ability to remove him from the pulpit (*minbar*) of the Muslims, in accordance with the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil (*al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa l-nahy ʿan al-munkar*).

It seems clear that al-Āqḥiṣārī had little faith in the authorities to remedy the problem of arrogant and ignorant preachers presiding over the mosque pulpits. As Michot notes, he believed that the quality of leadership had declined since the earliest times; it follows that the appointees of the state reflected the overall drop in standards. More serious than this, he accused the authorities of not following the Islamic Law accusing them of disbelief

³⁴⁵ *Majlis LXXXII*, f. 227v.

³⁴⁶ *Majlis LXXXII*, f. 228v.

(*kufir*). He therefore probably held the view that the fate of the religion rested in the hands of those credible and sincere religious scholars, counting himself among them no doubt, as well as every sincere individual, irrespective of their social standing.

Tyranny of the Authorities

The job of the true scholar and *wāʿiẓ* is not only to admonish and advise the commonfolk about the importance of adhering to the Sharīʿa: forbidding wrong requires that advice is also directed at the authorities. Even the Sultan is deserving of chastisement if he is failing in his duty as representative of God on earth. The Qāḍīzādeli revivalists did not shy away from the duty of admonishing the ruler even when other scholars were content to turn a blind eye to various transgressions of the state. Qāḍīzāde himself composed a rather bold treatise on just governance, in the knowledge that one who offends the Sultan is liable to be executed without judicial inquiry. His *Tāj al-rasāʾil wa minhāj al-wasāʾil*,³⁴⁷ written in Turkish and presented to Murād IV, was a four-part epistle which introduced the political theory (*siyāsa sharʿiyya*) of Ibn Taymiyya as a standard of how just rule is to be dispensed, the position and rights of non-Muslim subjects in Islamic society, the collection of land tax (*kharāj*) and *jizya*, the sources of revenue of the treasury (*bayt al-māl*) and a commentary of a text by Aristotle on the art of war. It seems his aim in presenting this work to the Sultan was to point out to him just how far the government had strayed from the Sharīʿa. Lest the Sultan take offence at this

³⁴⁷ Qāḍīzāde, *Tāj al-rasāʾil*, Suleymaniye Library, MS. *Haci Mahmud Efendi* 1926.

circumlocutory criticism of his ability to rule with justice, Qāḍīzāde presented a second, refashioning his advice within an ode. His *Qaṣīda*, said to have impressed the Sultan to such an extent that he launched the Rewān campaign as a result, is also full of insightful couplets decrying Ottoman moral decline amongst the ‘ulamā’ especially.³⁴⁸

Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī was also of the view that admonishing the authorities was the unshirkable duty of the ‘ulamā’. Furthermore, he seems to have taken some satisfaction in doing so, his own manner appearing much more severe and vituperative than any of his fellow revivalists. In *Majlis LXXX*, ‘Regarding the appearance of tribulations and contraventions of the Law’, he calls for a complete application of the Sharī‘a by the authorities, not simply a partial implementation admixed with custom and caprice. Noting this faith which al-Āqḥiṣārī placed in the Sharī‘a and particularly in its capacity to bring about a just order, Michot says, ‘For all those who see the *Sharī‘a* as a totalitarian system of law, it will be a surprise to read Aḥmad al-Rūmī’s call for its implementation as a way to curb the despotism and injustice of sultans and cadis. A barrier against tyranny—that is indeed how our author sees the “Muḥammadan Way/Law (*shar‘*)’.³⁴⁹

Al-Āqḥiṣārī paints the picture of an Ottoman government and judiciary which had forgotten the rule of law; Ottoman institutions exercising arbitrary force over the populace, despotic and far-removed from the Muḥammadan Law. In contradistinction to Kātib Çelebi, who believed it useless to oppose customs which had become embedded in

³⁴⁸ Öztürk, ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’, pp. 155-156.

³⁴⁹ Michot, *Against Smoking*, pp. 17-18.

society, al-Āqḥiṣārī believed that customary practice, when allowed to penetrate the decision making process of the authorities, become the mainstay of tyrannical governments and policies. For al-Āqḥiṣārī there was no justification for this preference of custom over the Sharīʿa – in fact, when governments made decisions on anything other than the Sharīʿa they committed disbelief. On this, Michot says, ‘By saying so, [al-Āqḥiṣārī] could be presented as being as radical as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr anathematizing the Mongol Īlkhāns following the *Yasa* of Genghis Khān in preference to the *Sharīʿa*, or as the modern Islamists fomenting rebellion against their governments when the latter substitute foreign, man-made, legislations for the divine one. Just like Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Kathīr or these Islamists, Aḥmad al-Rūmī most probably has in mind Qur’anic verses like *al-Mā’ida* - V, 44, *Those who do not judge by what God has sent down—it is they who are the faithless.*’³⁵⁰ The following passage, from *Majlis LXXX*, illuminates al-Āqḥiṣārī’s position on the authorities:

As injustice and corruption overcome them, it is also likely that the [authorities] do not comply with the Way/Law (*sharʿ*) in their governments (*ḥukūmāt*). Rather, they depart from it in favour of [various] species of injustice and policies (*siyāsāt*). They spill blood and seize properties without right and believe that they are right in committing these sins. And they do not know that, by believing that, they depart from Islam. Sometimes, they crucify the thief and kill him, believing that it is permitted to crucify him and to kill him. By believing that, they become unbelievers because the [Legal] punishment (*ḥadd*), for the thief, is not to crucify him and to kill him. Rather, his punishment is to cut off his hand, because of His words, Exalted is He: ‘As for the thief, both male and female, cut off their hands.’ Sometimes, their king becomes angry with one of them and he commands [his people] to kill him without any reason obliging to kill him. So they kill him, believing that his command is right, and a duty for them (*wājib ‘alay-him*). By believing that, they become unbelievers, as ‘[There is] no obedience to a creature while disobeying the Creator’, according to what is reported in the *ḥadīth* [...] This being so, one must know that many of the authorities (*walī*) of our time and

³⁵⁰ Michot, *Against Smoking*, p. 19.

of the cadis of our age have gone out of (*hajara*) the Muḥammadan Way/Law (*shar'*) and invented (*aḥdatha*) an unsatisfactory path, which they called "custom" (*'urf*). Acting on its basis has so spread among them that the Way/Law (*shar'*) is almost refused. Indeed, they do not decide a case by simply [following] the Way/Law (*bi-ma al-shar'*), without mixing custom [with it], but they decide many cases by simply [following] custom (*bi-ma al-'urf*), without mixing the Way/Law [with it]! And they believe that, by simply [following] the Way/Law, order (*niẓām*) will not be achieved and the situation of humans will not be made right. They say so openly and they do not consider it reprehensible!³⁵¹

The sections above not only reveal the views of al-Āqḥiṣārī on certain social practices, political realities and the role of religious authority, but also, and in some ways more importantly, the extent to which al-Āqḥiṣārī was an advocate of activism over against political quietism and apathy. This is so whether we understood activism from the doctrinal point of view, namely enjoining good and forbidding evil, or in the sense that it has been used to describe post-18th century revivalist movements, namely political activism. What we observe in al-Āqḥiṣārī's thought is the juxtaposition of Sufism with a form of activism, sometimes bordering on militancy, that is at once striking and unprecedented for his age. Indeed there are implications for this convergence of Sufism with activism for the still unresolved debate on Neo-Sufism. The following section will highlight some of the implications a clearer understanding of al-Āqḥiṣārī's thought can have for this debate.

³⁵¹ Michot, *Against Smoking*, pp. 19-21. See also *Majlis LXXX*, f. 221v-r.

Neo-Sufism Again

Polemic over Neo-Sufism is one of the recurring topoi engaging scholars investigating Islamic revivalism in the 18th and 19th century. The term seeks to describe the idea that a new form of Sufism emerged in this period which was to some extent demystified and also sought to root itself in the Qur'an and *Sunna*.³⁵² For an explanation of the term, we may look to the scholar widely considered to have coined it, Fazlur Rahman. For Rahman, Neo-Sufism was a form of spirituality 'largely stripped of its ecstatic and metaphysical character and content, replaced by a content which was nothing else than the postulates of the orthodox.'³⁵³ By the 'postulates of the orthodox', Rahman meant the specific influence of the 'ulamā', who emphasised upon the 'original moral factor and puritanical self-control' in Sufism, 'especially at the expense of the extravagant features of popular ecstatic Sufism'.³⁵⁴ Rahman believed that Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim were the avant-garde of this new trend.³⁵⁵ For him, they would demonstrate the possibility of delivering Sufism from innovative practice whilst maintaining many of the claims of intellectual Sufism and employing the whole range of essential Sufi terminology.

In his own study of the phenomenon he sought to describe, Rahman surveyed various revivalist movements, including the Wāḥḥābīs of Arabia, the Indian reform movement of

³⁵² On Neo-Sufism, see J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); *The Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, edited by Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987); John O. Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1982).

³⁵³ Rahman, *Islam*, 2nd Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 206.

³⁵⁴ Rahman, *Islam*, p. 206.

³⁵⁵ Rahman, *Islam*, p. 195.

Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī, the Idrīsī Brotherhood of Morocco and the Sanūsiyya. For him, as for other scholars, each movement constituted an example of reformed Sufism. Indeed many of these groups adopted the same name, *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*, the Path of Muḥammad. Whilst Rahman was sure that the similarities between these “re-oriented” Sufi groups was no accident, he lamented the lack of evidence which could support a causal connection between them.³⁵⁶ Rahman was also keen to underline the danger in generalising about these revivalist phenomena, citing Sayyid Aḥmad’s movement as an example. He argued that in all probability,

The puritanical trends which had been originally present in the Indian reform school had already become accentuated in India because of the emphasis on Ḥadīth and the struggle to rid the Muslims of superstitious cults which were seen to be an inroad of Hinduism into Islam. In the activist hands of Sayyid Aḥmad, a zealous crusader, this becomes the perfect analogue of Arabian Wahhābism.³⁵⁷

After providing several other examples of pre-modern puritanical reform, and describing in much the same way the problem of explaining them as simple Wahhābī off-shoots, Rahman eventually conceded that the only way to view the phenomenon of pre-modern reform in different parts of the Muslim world is as something ‘analogous but otherwise ubiquitous’.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ Voll too perceived a clear focus on the Prophet Muhammad in the type of Sufism emerging – the tradition of the *al-Ṭarīqat al-Muḥammadiyya* being an important dimension of this – and concluded that study of this dimension in particular could make intelligible the frequent association of Neo-Sufism with *ḥadīth* studies in eighteenth-century revivalism.

³⁵⁷ Rahman, *Islam*, p. 203.

³⁵⁸ Rahman, *Islam*, p. 206.

In the early 1990s some scholars began to question the postulates of the neo-Sufi hypothesis, arguing that it lacked historiographical evidence to support its distinction between post-18th century *ṭarīqas* and their classical antecedents. O’Fahey and Radtke have perhaps expended most effort in this direction.³⁵⁹ Whilst conceding that there may be some semantic utility in the term for describing certain new organisational phenomena that appeared in various areas of the Muslim world in the 18th and 19th century, they advised extreme caution when using it for the intellectual content of these phenomena.³⁶⁰ The Sufism of Shaykh Aḥmad Idrīs, described by Rahman as the representative of Neo-Sufism *par excellence*,³⁶¹ is shown by O’Fahey to be at odds with many of the traits said to be common to neo-Sufi movements.³⁶² O’Fahey notes that in regard to the intellectual content of neo-Sufism, very little basic research has been done; many of the writings of

³⁵⁹ R. O’Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint* and O’Fahey and Radtke, ‘Neo-Sufism Reconsidered’, *Der Islam*, 70 (1993), pp. 52-87.

³⁶⁰ See O’Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, esp. Chapter 1.

³⁶¹ Rahman, *Islam*, p. 207.

³⁶² Based on the studies of Rahman, Trimmingham, B.G. Martin and Voll, O’Fahey and Radtke summarise the key dimensions of Neo-Sufism as follows:

- I. Rejection of “popular” ecstatic Sufi practices such as dancing, the “noisy” *dhikr*, saint worship and the visiting of saints’ tombs.
- II. Rejection of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s teachings, especially his doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.
- III. Rejection of the *murshid/murīd* relationship and the hierarchical mystical Way leading to *fath* or “illumination”; emphasis on moral and social teaching.
- IV. “Union” with the spirit of the Prophet, with a general emphasis on the “Muḥammadan Way”.
- V. Legitimation of the position of the order’s founder through his having received prayers, litanies and his authority generally directly from the Prophet.
- VI. Creation of mass organisations hierarchically-structured under the authority of the founder and his family.
- VII. Renewed emphasis on Ḥadīth studies.
- VIII. Rejection of *taqlīd* and the assertion of the right to exercise *ijtihād*.
- IX. The will to take political and military measures in defence of Islam.

This list, together with a detailed discussion of the neo-Sufi hypothesis, is in O’Fahey and Radtke, ‘Neo-Sufism Reconsidered’, p. 57.

the leading figures have yet to be published and studied, and in many cases they have yet to be found.³⁶³

H.C. Kim has argued that both the proponents and critics of the concept of Neo-Sufism are unanimously agreed about the ‘broader social and political changes that have necessitated the shift from the local-based and ecstatic-weighted forms of Sufism to urban-centred, Shari’a-oriented, activist and sober varieties.’³⁶⁴ Whilst this may be true, we can no doubt anticipate much more in the future both in favour of and in opposition to the neo-Sufi hypothesis.

Whilst a fuller discussion of the implications that the findings on Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥiṣārī might have for this debate is beyond the scope of this study, and is also at this time beyond the ability of the present author, it is important to consider what potentialities exist as a result of the reconstruction of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s *persona*. Firstly, to understand the juxtaposition of Sufism and activism which is present throughout al-Āqḥiṣārī’s work is not easy. Much has been said above about the Naqshbandī roots of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s approach to Sufism; the possibility even that Naqshbandī orthodoxy might have had something to do with his hardline approach on the question of *bidʿa*. Yet al-Āqḥiṣārī’s seems to evade any label that we might give him. The fact that he makes no mention of the Naqshbandī Order, coupled with the mode of activism which he advocated, make it unlikely that he was a Naqshbandī. Yet at the same time, he does not present an approach to Sufism which might be described as demysticised; his schema of

³⁶³ O’Fahey, *Enigmatic Shaykh*, p. 2.

³⁶⁴ H.C. Kim, ‘The Nature and Role of Sufism in Contemporary Islam: A Case Study of the Life, Thought and Teachings of Fethullah Gülen’, unpublished doctoral thesis, Temple University, 2008, p.26.

*fanā*³⁶⁵ which has been considered above is a clear example of why it would be incorrect to view him as a pre-modern Wahhābī. An eclectic approach to Sufism is perhaps one way to describe al-Āqḥiṣārī's approach, but this does not really account for so much else that he integrated into his understanding of the spiritual path. Whilst the content may not be easily described, the influence which it would come to wield is quite dramatic. It was an influence not limited to al-Āqḥiṣārī, but that would include other key associates of the Qāḍīzādeli movement.

Qāḍīzādeli influence in territories beyond Ottoman Turkey began as early as the 18th century. Influential texts of the movement, such as Birgivī's *al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya*, which already had gained hallowed status in Ottoman Turkey, gained reverential status in some of the most important capitals of Islamdom, including Cairo and Delhi. Birgivī's reformist outlook, in particular, would contribute to both the form as well as content of revivalist movements elsewhere; the *Ṭarīqa Muḥammadiyya*, which for Birgivī appears to have connoted an approach to Sufism anchored in the Qur'an, the *Sunna* and the practice of the *Salaf* was an appellation taken up by other revivalists and used to describe their own movements.³⁶⁵

As for al-Āqḥiṣārī's *Majālis al-abrār*, whilst in post-17th century Turkey it was virtually forgotten, it was able to find renewed life within the Indian reform movements from the 19th century onwards. His spirit of activism appealed to those in posterity who possessed

³⁶⁵ Two studies in particular highlight the influential role of Birgivī's *Ṭarīqa* on subsequent activism: R. Peters, 'The Battered Dervishes of Bab Zuwayla', esp. pp. 94, 102-103; Leïla Cherif-Chebbi, 'L'Yihewani, Une Machine De Guerre Contre Le Soufisme En Chine?', in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, pp. 576-602, esp. p. 579.

a similar zeal for the revolutionary, and who found the work of al-Āqḥiṣārī applicable to their own social milieu. There are two notable instances of al-Āqḥiṣārī's influence in posterity, both of which are connected with India. The first, chronologically, was via a pamphlet written in Persian which made extensive use of the *Majālis al-abrār* – namely, *al-Balāgh al-mubīn fī aḥkām rabb al-ʿalamīn* – *The Manifest Proclamation Concerning the Rulings of the Lord of the Worlds* [hereafter, *al-Balāgh al-mubīn*].³⁶⁶ In the main, the text is a polemical work whose author was opposed to a plethora of religious practices and innovations which he believed corrupted Islam. It includes a catalogue of the objectionable practices of Indian Muslims connected with the cult of saints; a comparison is drawn between these practices and the objectionable practices of Heathens, Jews, Christians and deviant Muslims; and it explains the correct way of seeking mediation (*wasīla*) of saints as opposed to the belief in intercession (*shafāʿa*) practiced by the saint-worshippers.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ On this text, see M. Gaborieau, 'A Nineteenth-Century Indian "Wahhabi" Tract Against the Cult of Muslim Saints: *Al-Balāgh al-Mubīn*,' in *Muslim Shrines in India*, edited by C.W. Troll (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2nd Edition 2004).

³⁶⁷ Gaborieau, 'Wahhabi Tract'. See also, A. Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 209. The preamble to the text should be compared to al-Āqḥiṣārī's preamble to the *Majālis* (see above, note 102); the similarities are striking:

This treatise, called *al-Balāgh al-mubīn*, explains the verses of the Qur'an, the Traditions (*ḥadīth*) of the Prophet and the Traditions (*athar*) of his Companions as well as the sayings (*akḥbār*) of the great saints (*awliyāʾ-i ʿazam*), in the hope that Allah may extend His mercy to the community of His Prophet and dispel the schism (*fitna*) which has spread among the Muslim masses because of their association with the Hindu polytheists (*mushrikān-i hunūd*), confirming this verse of the Qur'an: 'Most of the People, although they believe in Allah, associate partners with Him' (Q.12: 106).

This treatise has been written so that Allah 'may prove right what is right, and prove wrong what is wrong, even if the wrong-doers are displeased'; this is the promise of Allah. [...] This schism is the worship of tombs (*gor-parasti*). These tomb worshippers are also called 'saint-worshippers' (*pīr-parast*). These tomb worshippers consider their abominable cult as better than obligatory or commendable ritual acts (*ʿibādāt*); they think that they can replace all obligatory rituals; reversely they do not think that any obligatory ritual can replace the worship of tombs. (Cited in M. Gaborieau, p. 209).

In his study on *al-Balāgh al-mubīn*, M. Gaborieau aims to discover its author. Along the way, he dismisses the popular view that the text was a work of Shāh Waliullāh al-Dehlawī, citing in support of his argument a series of internal and external evidences; indeed his study makes the compelling case that the text was composed either by Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī or one of his disciples, and that it was written probably during the middle of the 19th century.³⁶⁸ Gaborieau discovers that the text discloses two key attitudes: the first is an obvious preference of its author for the Naqshbandī Order, and the second is a rather acute respect for the Ḥanbalī school, displayed by its frequent citations of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's *Ighāthat al-lahafān fī maṣāyid al-Shayṭān* as well as his teachers *Iqtidā' al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*.³⁶⁹ In connection with this, Gaborieau asks whether the apparent influence of the Ḥanbalīs over "Indian Wahhabis" such as Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī and his disciples came directly through texts or through intermediaries. He hypothesises:

One cannot help being impressed by the fact that the most often reprinted Indian Wahhabi tracts, the *Nasihat al-Muslimin*, bears the same title as a work of Muhammad ibn 'Abdul Wahhab (d. 1792), the founder of the Wahhabi school in Arabia. The affiliation of Indian Wahhabis to the Hanbali school of thought was most probably through the Arabian Wahhabis: a textual comparison of the works of the two schools would certainly confirm this hypothesis. If it proves true, one has to assume that the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya reached India in the first decades of the nineteenth century from Arabia through pilgrims, that is to say at the same time that they reached Indonesia by the same channel.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ Gaborieau's central argument against *al-Balāgh al-mubīn* being the work of Shāh Waliullāh is that its radical teachings do not reflect his own rather more moderate positions on many of the practices it criticises, particularly the visitation of tombs. With its minimal Sufī dimension, it cannot either be a composition of the later *Ahl al-ḥadīth* movement, which completely excluded Sufism from its own religious outlook. (See especially 'Wahhabi Tract', p. 230).

³⁶⁹ See Gaborieau, 'Wahhabi Tract', p. 213 and p. 219 on the author's preference for the Naqshbandī Order and p. 220 on his "Ḥanbalī-philía".

³⁷⁰ Gaborieau, 'Wahhabi Tract', p. 232.

Gaborieau admits that his hypothesis is a reversion to an older position, shared by some colonial British writers and Orientalists who, in his own expression, were known for “lumping together” Arabian and Indian reformists under the label Wahhabi,³⁷¹ rather than seek to find local origins to the Indian reform movements of the 19th century. He perhaps could not help this since he lacked information on both al-Āqḥṣārī and the *Majālis al-abrār*, able only to discern that they were always cited in *al-Balāgh al-mubīn* in connection with the *Iqtidāʾ* and *Ighātha*.

The textual study of the *Majālis al-abrār*, which forms the core of the present research, and the findings which have been detailed, throw open a third possibility in connection with the question of how Ḥanbalī ideas reached the Indian Subcontinent. So whilst there remains the possibility that autochthonous influences from antecedent Indian ideological strains inform 19th century Indian revivalism³⁷², as well as connections with Arabian reformers³⁷³, there is now a clear trail which leads us all the way back to Turkey in the 16th and 17th centuries. It should be noted that this third trail also leads to a much more

³⁷¹ Three examples of such are mentioned by Gaborieau: T.P. Hughes, *A Dictionary of Islam* (London: 1885; reprinted in Lahore, Premier Book House, 1964); W.W. Hunter, *The Indian Muslims: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?* (London: Trubner & Co., 1871; reprinted Varanasi, Indological Book House, 1969), pp. 659-662; and Y.B. Mathur, *Muslims and Changing India* (Delhi: Trimurti Publications, 1972), pp. 72-102.

³⁷² The key influences here would be of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, Shāh Waliullāh al-Dehlawī and Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, Waliullāh’s son. For example, in his study of 18th century Indian revivalism, Rizvi relays a list of un-Islamic customs prevalent among Muslim women in India which Sirhindī presented. Among these, were. See p. 188 in particular.

³⁷³ Here it should be noted that the possible connections of the 19th century Indian reformers with “Arabian Wahhābīs”, are not limited to Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb; Gaborieau points out that Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī, and his party of *Mujāhidīn*, contacted Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī (d. 1249/1834), the Yemenī reformer, in 1822 on their return from Mecca to perform the *Hajj*. This they did to obtain a book of Traditions (*ḥadīth*); there are later points of contact also, which Gaborieau correctly highlights warrants investigation. One of the possible influences of al-Shawkānī was as the inspiration for Shāh Ismāʿīl Shahīd’s rejection of *taqlīd*. (See M. Gaborieau, ‘Criticizing the Sufis: The Debate in Early-Nineteenth-Century India,’ in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, pp. 465-466).

familiar Ḥanafī-Māturīdī-Naqshbandī milieu. At the same time, the Ottoman link does not preclude the possibility of Arabian Wahhābī influence, since, as Gaborieau notes, the mark of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb on some of the literature connected with the Indian reform movement is too striking to dismiss.³⁷⁴ To say more at this stage would be premature. It is clear however that a revisit of *al-Balāgh al-mubīn* is needed, one which should focus, among other things, on investigating whether the citations of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim in the text are via the *Majālis al-abrār* or directly from source.

A second, more direct route, by which the *Majālis al-abrār* informed the Indian reformist milieu of the 19th century was via two Urdu translations, completed in the latter part of the century by scholars connected with the Deoband seminary.³⁷⁵ An Urdu edition, which was probably based on the first Indian lithographs, *Nafāʾis al-azhār*, of Muftī Kifāyatullāh al-Dehlawī is still in circulation today in the bookstores of India and Pakistan.³⁷⁶ It demonstrates the fact that the *Majālis* was not only circulating in radical reformist movements such as Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī's, but also in more moderate ones like that of Deoband. In any case, what both spheres of influence indicate is that al-Āqḥiṣārī's ideas were as alive in the context of 19th century India as they were in 17th century Turkey, and that he is indeed a scholar who behoves greater attention, especially

³⁷⁴ Gaborieau points to the fact that the most frequently reprinted treatise of the Indian reform movement is the *Naṣīḥat al-muslimīn*, which shares the same title as a work by Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. A textual comparison between these two works would demonstrate whether there is indeed any more substantial relation. ('Indian Wahhabi Tract', p. 232).

³⁷⁵ See above, note 13 for the full titles of these translations.

³⁷⁶ M.M. Kifāyatullāh al-Dehlawī translation of *Majālis al-abrār* (Dār al-Ishāʿat: Karachi, 1398/1978). Given the association of Muftī Kifāyatullāh with the Urdu translation, the *Majālis* continues to be influential in Deobandi circles even today. A renowned scholar of Deoband, Kifāyatullāh was *muftī* and teacher of *ḥadīth* at the Madrasah-yi Aminiyyah in Delhi, founded at the end of the 19th century. (See B. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*) [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982]).

of those interested in the pre-modern antecedents of contemporary Islamic revivalism and reform.

The question of how Ottoman religious texts travelled from Turkey to India is an interesting one. Above we have seen that Gaborieau for one assumed that reformist ideas probably reached India via pilgrims visiting Arabia for the Ḥajj. It is of course a possibility that Qāḍīzādeli literature too first arrived in Arabia via Turkish pilgrims, to be then taken east. But there are other, albeit less obvious, possibilities. One such route was via the Sufi orders, in particular the Naqshbandīs, which were important vehicles for the transmission of knowledge, culture and even trade.³⁷⁷ Already, some significant studies, first initiated in the 1970s by J. Voll, have demonstrated the existence of networks built around Sufi orders, which linked various revivalists active in the 18th and 19th centuries, and spanned from India to the Arabian Peninsula. Such discoveries shed light on how Qāḍīzādeli texts travelled to India, Indonesia and elsewhere.

Voll has described the participation of the Mizjaji family in Yemen within an informal network of scholars, many of whom were involved in revivalist activity during the 18th century. By noting the links via this family, Voll demonstrated the ties among groups which might otherwise appear unrelated.³⁷⁸ Important scholars who were involved in this network included Ibrāhīm al-Kurānī of Medina (d. 1101/1689); his son, Muḥammad

³⁷⁷ An interesting and relevant study on the interconnectedness of the Ottoman, Safavid and Moghul Empires, highlighting the role of spiritual networks in disseminating ideas and texts between them, is F. Robinson's 'Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals', esp. pp. 164-171.

³⁷⁸ Voll, 'Linking Groups in the Networks of Eighteenth-Century Revivalist Scholars: The Mizjaji Family in Yemen,' in *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, edited by N. Levtzion and J.O. Voll (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), p. 75.

Ṭāhir (d. 1145/1732); Muḥammad Ḥayāt al-Sindī (d. 1163/1749), the teacher of Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb; Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī; and members of the Aḥḍal family, who had connections with the 19th-century revivalist, Aḥmad b. Idrīs (d. 1253/1837). Voll is emphatic that participation in any revivalist network did not mean the existence of homogeneity in terms of content of teaching.³⁷⁹ Nevertheless, he asserts that there was a ‘relatively common mood or tone within the network,’ in so far as those connected had ‘a general dissatisfaction with conditions as they were and a sense of hope for improvement’; and that this hope for improvement was ‘oriented toward human activities rather than expectations of eschatological intervention’.³⁸⁰ In the scholarly core of the network, Voll notes that many of the linking figures can commonly be identified as scholars of *ḥadīth* and as affiliated with a brotherhood organisation – the one order which appears as most common among the revivalists was that of the Naqshbandī Order.³⁸¹ But the content of their mysticism was a variety of the Naqshbandī path, rather than what may be more conventionally known as Naqshbandī Sufism proper. On this, Voll says:

During the eighteenth century the revivalist mood frequently found among the Naqshbandis seems to have been developed even further. It seems to have combined, in some cases, with North African approaches to mass *tariqahs* to produce the neo-Sufi-type order.³⁸²

The obvious question is whether the Naqshbandī Order, or a variety of it, was what also linked the Ottoman reformers of the 16th and 17th century, such as al-Āqḥiṣārī, to the 18th

³⁷⁹ For example, Voll points out that, ‘Some, like Wali allah and Ibrahim al-Kurani seem to have been aiming at synthesis and trying to avoid extremes while others, like Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, clearly stressed exclusiveness and absolute answers. Some were militant while others were politically quietist. Some stressed *ḥadīth* in their studies while others were more concerned with Sufism or *fiqh* or philology.’ (‘Linking Groups’, p. 80).

³⁸⁰ Voll, ‘Linking Groups’, P. 81.

³⁸¹ Voll, ‘Linking Groups’, p. 81.

³⁸² Voll, ‘Linking Groups’, pp. 84-85.

century revivalists in Arabia and elsewhere? The likelihood certainly exists, especially as we know from studies such as R. Peters' on the Dervishes of Bab Zuwayla³⁸³ that Birgivi's *al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya* and other puritanical literature was inspiring anti-dervish violence in Cairo during the 18th century.

There is every possibility that a closer examination of other Qāḍīzādeli texts, and a generally more nuanced approach to pre-modern Ottoman revivalism and reformism, will shed important light on the debate surrounding Neo-Sufism. There are clearly dimensions of al-Āqḥiṣārī's thought, for example, which overlap with later revivalist phenomena; the Indian reform movement was almost certainly attracted to the *Majālis al-abrār* because of these. The content of the reformist message of Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī is strikingly similar to al-Āqḥiṣārī's own reformist outlook: Both men were critics of Sufi deviancy whilst maintaining a Sufi dimension.³⁸⁴ Birgivi's influence cannot be discounted, both in terms of his works and also approach to Sufism. Many of the convergences are not new; they have been known to scholars for some time. Yet there has been a delay, I believe, in affording them the attention they deserve. It is possible that what has impeded scholars from looking more closely at 16th and 17th century Ottoman revivalism, and its connection with later movements, has been the overwhelming inclination of scholars studying the Qāḍīzādelis to view them as opponents of Sufism. If indeed this one of the reasons, it is hoped that this study will prompt renewed interest in the movement and its ideologues.

³⁸³ See above, note 326.

³⁸⁴ On Sayyid Aḥmad's "minimal Sufi dimension", see Gaborioeau, 'A Wahhabi Tract', p. 207.

Conclusion

In August 2005 an article published in a leading British newspaper described the alarming rate at which ‘ninety-five percent of millennium-old buildings’ had been demolished in the historic city of Mecca.³⁸⁵ ‘The cradle of Islam is being buried,’ writes its author, ‘in an unprecedented onslaught by religious zealots. Almost all of the rich and multi-layered history of the holy city is gone.’ Blame is squarely placed on the Wahhābīs, ‘the driving force behind the demolition campaign that has transformed these cities,’ a movement whose ‘motive behind the destruction,’ is their, ‘fanatical fear that places of historical and religious interest could give rise to idolatry or polytheism, the worship of multiple and potentially equal gods.’

Whilst the Wahhābī state of Saudi Arabia continues to enjoy an enduring political friendship with many Western governments, the Western media and a growing number of academics increasingly view Wahhābism as the source of Muslim fanaticism and intolerance. As lamentable as the destruction of Muslim antiquity may be, and as regressive as the Wahhābī state of Saudi Arabia has proven itself at certain moments in its history, to see its violence in the name of religion as somehow unprecedented is incorrect. Rather than see modern Islamist violence as wholly attributable to Wahhābī Islam, we would do well to consider the extremism shown by the Ḥanafī Qāḍizādelis and their heirs in Ottoman lands: It is abundantly clear that the actions of contemporary Wahhābīs are pallid when compared with the Ottoman puritans, who engaged in ideologically-motivated violence well before them, in the 17th and 18th century. Examples

³⁸⁵ Daniel Howden, ‘The destruction of Mecca: Saudi hardliners are wiping out their own heritage’, *The Independent*, 6 August 2005.

include the battered dervishes of Bāb Zuwayla, in Cairo, who were attacked by swords and cudgels for merely holding a *dhikr* session. Their attackers were a group of Turkish students apparently inspired by the Qāḍīzādeli approach of forbidding evil, one for which official sanction was not a prerequisite.³⁸⁶ We could also note the violence of the Qāḍīzādelis of the 17th century, which included their attack on the Khalwatī tekke in Demür Qapu. Nāʿīmā reports about this incident that they not only destroyed the building, but that they also physically attacked those who were in the tekke; the instigation for this attack was the performance of loud *dhikr* and the *dawarān*.³⁸⁷

And whilst we consider the source of Qāḍīzādeli violence, we should pay especial attention to al-Āqḥiṣārī. Though a careful study of other Qāḍīzādeli literature before is needed to say anything definitive about the views of its key formulators on the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil, it is very unlikely that anything will come close to al-Āqḥiṣārī's hard-line approach. He was not afraid to advise violence as a *modus operandi* for forbidding wrong if no other option was available, and he certainly makes no issue about who should or should not be undertaking the duty. His statement on tobacco-smoking imams and muezzins is an example of this; so too is his recommendation that arrogant preachers be removed from the pulpit. He also makes direct reference to ʿUmar's destruction of the famous tree at which the Prophet received

³⁸⁶ For a full account of this event, see R. Peters, 'The Battered Dervishes of Bab Zuwayla: A Religious Riot in Eighteenth-Century Cairo', in *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, edited by N. Letzcion and J.O. Voll (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987). In the account, the chronicler mentions that just a day earlier, these students had been studying Birgivi's *al-Ṭarīqat al-Muḥammadiyya*.

³⁸⁷ See Öztürk, 'Islamic Orthodoxy', p. 238. At times, such attacks would be preceded by letters of threat sent to the tekke. Öztürk translated the following letter which was signed by Üṣṭuwānī and sent to the shaykh ʿAbd al-Karīm Çelebi (d. 1106/1694): 'It has become an obligation to stop you. Since you have been performing raqs and dawarān, we will raid your tekke, murder you and your followers, dig up the foundations of your tekke to the depth of a few arshin and pour its earth into the sea. So long as this degree of care is not shown, it will not be lawful to perform the ṣalat in that place.' Ibid, p. 240

the oath of allegiance from the two Medinian tribes, al-Aws and al-Khazraj – a clear encouragement for authorities to do the same whenever there is fear of over-reverence. Taking it much further, he rebukes the one who sees an evil and does nothing to stop it: ‘The duty upon whoever hears the likes of false utterances is to rebuke (*inkār*) the speaker whilst being absolutely certain about the falsity of his speech, without dither or hesitation; if he does not, then he is from among them and shall be judged a heretic (*yuhkam bi-l-zandaqa*).’³⁸⁸ A question which surely arises is to what extent did al-Āqḥiṣārī influence the hardline approach of Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb? Was Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb familiar with the *Majālis al-abrār*, and if so, did it inform any of his works? These are matters which surely deserve attention, especially if an accurate picture is to be had concerning the extent to which the Wahhābīs are culpable for modern Islamist violence.

³⁸⁸ *Majlis I*, f. 5v.

CONCLUSION

At the commencement of this study, I was acutely aware of the dearth of biographical data available on the author of the *Majālis al-abrār*. Indeed all that was available to me at the time was a solitary line in Ismāʿīl Pāsha – that ‘Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Āqḥiṣārī al-Rūmī al-Ḥanafī was a shaykh of the Khalwatīs’ (*min mashāyikh al-Khalwatiyya*).³⁸⁹ A visit to Istanbul in the summer of 2008 did not alter this situation in any way. What I did discover, having spoken to some members of Istanbul’s scholarly community, was how little interest there was in al-Āqḥiṣārī and, in general, how little appetite there was for research on the Qāḍizādelis. In some respects there was a degree of satisfaction in this, since I was exploring a *terra incognita*, but it was nevertheless perplexing as to why such a significant text, and clearly so important a scholar, remained all but unknown. It is possible of course that the uninterest is somehow connected to discomfiture over this period of Ottoman religious history, and that the forgotten Ottoman puritan, al-Āqḥiṣārī, was a victim of this. The *Majālis al-abrār*’s preoccupation with *bidʿa*, attested to so clearly in its title, is perhaps another possible explanation, since it almost cries to be categorised as a proto-Wahhābī text. In any case, the situation at the close of this study in regards to biographical data is no different to that at the start, except with one exception: we know now just how wrong Pasha was to cite al-Āqḥiṣārī a shaykh of the Khalwatīs.

The overlap of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s understanding of spirituality with Naqshbandī Sufism is quite possibly the most important finding of this study. It was initially determined from a

³⁸⁹ I. Pāsha, *Hadiyyat al-ʿarīfīn*, 6: 142.

reading of al-Āqḥiṣārī's *Risāla fī l-sulūk*. Had it not been for the discovery of this small epistle, it is doubtful that the linkage would have been made at all since, despite the relative magnitude of the *Majālis al-abrār*, it is more concerned with highlighting deviancy than presenting a clear outline of what its author's vision of authentic spirituality was. This is not to suggest that the *Majālis* does not betray in its own manner al-Āqḥiṣārī's predilection for the spiritual path.

That a Qāḍīzādeli should be so obviously influenced by Naqshbandī Sufism would have been all the more remarkable had it not been for suggestions towards the same in the work of others. The first to suggest a Qāḍīzādeli-Naqshbandī connection was D. Le Gall, who, in her research on the pre-Mujaddidī Naqshbandīs of the Ottoman Empire, presented the case of Osman Bosnevī, a Naqshbandī shaykh who was also close companion to the later leader of the Qāḍīzādelis, Meḥmed Uṣṭuwānī. Le Gall noted the role of the shaykh in the Qāḍīzādeli affair, which she inferred from Nāḥimā's *Tārīḥ*, in which Bosnevī is described as 'teacher of the pages in the Palace [and] preacher of the Süleymāniye [Mosque]'.³⁹⁰ Since the *nisba* 'Bosnevī' was not mentioned in Nāḥimā's history, Le Gall furnished further proof for his identification on the basis of another account, documented by Usakīzāde in his *Zeyl-i shaqā'iq*.³⁹¹

The second to suggest this link was I. Weismann, who in a monograph on the Naqshbandī Order, remarked on the possibility that Naqshbandi influence upon the formation of modern Islamic trends might precede the 18th century, and be traceable to

³⁹⁰ Cited in Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism*, p. 152.

³⁹¹ Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism*, p. 152.

the second half of the sixteenth century in Ottoman Turkey. He described the ‘project of Birgivī’ as an early expression of this tendency, especially his idea of the “Muḥammadan Way”.³⁹² Weismann noted Birgivī’s close connections with the Amir-i Bukhari lodge, the principal Naqshbandī institution in Istanbul at the time, and two of its headmasters. Also noted was Birgivī’s admission into the ranks of the scholarly estate by virtue of the patronage of the brother-in-law and disciple of a certain Shaykh Abdüllatif, and that later Birgivī was installed in the College of Birgi, from where he derived his name, through the patronage of Sultan Selim II’s tutor and disciple of Shaykh Sha‘ban.³⁹³ Birgivī’s connection with the Naqshbandīs went beyond this: Weismann says, ‘Despite his censure of the Sufi brotherhoods, Mehmed Birgevi’s teachings were taken up by several Naqshbandis of Istanbul who supported his emphatic orthodox outlook. Most prominent were Mehmed Ma‘ruf Trabzuni (d. 1594), translator of Kashifi’s *Rashahat ‘ayn al-hayah* into Turkish, and Ahmed Tirevi (d. after 1620), head of the Hekim Çelebi lodge.’³⁹⁴

Whilst both Le Gall and Weismann described points of contact between the Qāḍīzādelis and Naqshbandīs, neither was able to furnish any textual evidence to support their assertions. Perhaps from the lack of such evidence, Algar made the following remark in his review of Le Gall’s paper:

Entirely unconvincing is Le Gall's attempt to link the Naqshbandis, in the person of Şeyh Osman Bosnevî, with the Kadızadeli movement, a major protagonist in the ‘battles over orthodoxy’. As she affirms, the historian Na‘imā does indeed mention a certain Şeyh Osman, a preacher at the Süleymaniye mosque, as an associate of the Kadızadeli leader, Mehmed

³⁹² Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, p. 134.

³⁹³ Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, p. 134.

³⁹⁴ Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, p. 134.

Üstüvânî, but without qualifying him as Bosnevî. ‘Şeyh Osman’ was not exactly a rare name at any point in Ottoman history, and the detail that like the Şeyh Osman mentioned by Na‘imā the Bosnian bearer of this name preached in a number of Istanbul mosques hardly suffices to prove their identity. Similarly, the fact that Bosnevî's preceptor, Ahmed Tirevî, may have been close to Mehmed Birgili, a scholar invoked by the Kadızadeli movement as its intellectual source, is a flimsy foundation for the thesis Le Gall expounds in four and a half pages of pure speculation.³⁹⁵

Whilst Algar's cynicism was not unfounded, the view of the present author is that his criticism was unduly harsh. Nevertheless, we are now in a much stronger position to speak about a Naqshbandî connection, as well as to speculate on why Naqshbandîs such as Tirevî would have found an appeal in the sort of religion being preached by al-Āqḥiṣārî.

We have seen that the notion of spirituality and the spiritual path, as it was formulated by al-Āqḥiṣārî, appears to intersect with Naqshbandî Sufism at several points. In fact, if one considers the way in which the Naqshbandî Order presented itself, both positively and negatively, the parallels between al-Āqḥiṣārî and the order become striking.³⁹⁶ In terms of negative differentiation, al-Āqḥiṣārî clearly sought to set apart his own vision of the spiritual path from the *Aṣḥāb al-khalwa* and what he saw as their contraventions of the Sharī‘a. He opposed mystical whirling, audible *dhikr* and the view that mystical visions were a reliable source of knowledge. He is ambivalent about ascetic practices

³⁹⁵ H. Algar, review of *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700*, by Dina Le Gall, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 18 (2007), pp. 414-420. (pp. 419-420).

³⁹⁶ Le Gall explains the negative and positive ways in which the Naqshbandîs set themselves apart from other Sufî orders: beginning first with the positive aspects, they placed focus on the silent *dhikr* together with a specific manner of enunciating the *dhikr* formula *lā ilāha illallāh* in the heart; the *rābi‘a* was given a special place in the devotional regimen of the Naqshbandîs, some considering it as the superior of all spiritual techniques. On the negative side, the Naqshbandîs defined themselves in opposition to other Sufis and their common devotional practices, which they cast as unduly emotive, inferior, ostentatious or incompatible strict observance of the Sharī‘a. Long periods of fasting, mystical music and dancing and the *khalwa* all fell under this rubric. (‘Forgotten Naqshbandîs’, pp. 94-96).

(*mujāhadāt*), perhaps in part because of his suspicion towards the miracles, mystical visions and inspirations (*kashf*) associated with them, but also because of the extreme demands they place on a disciple. This is akin to the Naqshbandīs, who, as Le Gall notes, were ‘known for their own attitude of ambivalence towards *mujāhadāt*’.³⁹⁷ As for positively differentiating his approach, al-Āqḥiṣārī professed that meditation using the formula, *lā ilāha illāllāh*, was the most elevated form, and insisted that it be should be done silently; he advocated the *rābiʿa* and that a disciple should display complete obedience to his shaykh. Even in the activism of al-Āqḥiṣārī - in his insistence on *al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa l-nahy ʿan al-munkar* – it is possible to see an overlap with the Naqshbandī practice of “activity-in-this-world” (*khalvet dār anjumān*).

Yet for all these interesting commonalities, neither the *Majālis al-abrār* nor the *Risāla fī-l-sulūk* are to be read as handbooks of Naqshbandī Sufism. This is since al-Āqḥiṣārī is silent about the Naqshbandī Order, its associated literature and its personalities. Indeed at times this Anatolian scholar is unclear about the precise method he envisions for the spiritual path: whilst on the one hand he insists that every wayfarer (*sālik*) should have a shaykh, linked in a line of shaykhs back to the Prophet, he does not unequivocally advocate that one should commit to spiritual order. What was it, then, that al-Āqḥiṣārī was proposing in his formulation of the spiritual path? What we read in the *Majālis al-abrār*, and in several of al-Āqḥiṣārī’s shorter epistles, is an attempt to anchor spirituality, and indeed general religious practice, in the *Sunna* of the Prophet, and in particular the *ḥadīth* literature. What has been said about an activist Sufī movement elsewhere seems relevant to explain the the case of al-Āqḥiṣārī: that he sought to position the personality

³⁹⁷ Le Gall, ‘Forgotten Naqshbandīs’, p. 96.

of the Prophet at the fore of his schema in order to effectively create a model of authority in which sainthood and religious leadership would be predicated on the imitation of the Prophetic archetype. This is not to be confused with the Muḥammadan paradigm of Hākim al-Tirmidhī and those of his school, whose system, it has been suggested, entailed a substitution of a God-centred mysticism with a prophet-centred one.³⁹⁸ In the approach of al-Āqḥiṣārī, attention on the Prophet clearly means an emphasis upon the Law before all else. Ultimately, al-Āqḥiṣārī sought a rapprochement between the Sharīʿa and *Ḥaqīqa*, which was to be achieved primarily through close study of the religious observances of the Prophet as recorded in the sound traditions (*ṣiḥāḥ*). This helps to understand why he chose to frame the *Majālis* as a commentary on the *Maṣābīḥ al-Sunna*. Only from the Prophetic tradition could there follow an authentic model of *Imitatio Muḥammadi*. Spiritual practices which could not be justified by the texts of the Qurʾan and *ḥadīth* were to be condemned as innovations.

In pursuit of his vision, al-Āqḥiṣārī drew from the works of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, something typical of the Qāḍīzādelis, but nevertheless unconventional in an intellectual milieu infused with Ḥanafī and Māturīdī thought. Why al-Āqḥiṣārī and his fellow-revivalists should have had recourse to these early reformers is not difficult to discern: they had already done much of the work of critiquing the “errors” of the Sufis, in dogmata and ritual practice. They were also ostensible supporters of a Sufism anchored in the Sharīʿa. Their project clearly inspired al-Āqḥiṣārī and other Qāḍīzādelis in their efforts to reform the Sufism of their own age.

³⁹⁸ On this see S.H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1972).

Whilst it is significant that al-Āqḥiṣārī, along with his fellow Qāḍīzādelis, drew inspiration from Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, it is important to consider the limits of this influence. Whereas al-Āqḥiṣārī clearly shared with Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim their outlook on innovation and their opposition to various religious practices, particularly of certain sectors of the Sufī community, it is clear that on dogmatic questions al-Āqḥiṣārī and other Qāḍīzādelis could not be any further from them on the ideological spectrum. As a case in point, we may cite the very distinct attitude of the Qāḍīzādelis towards dialectical theology (*kalām*). We have already seen in an earlier chapter that al-Āqḥiṣārī was an advocate of Māturīdī theology. He was also a staunch defender of *kalām*. This is in stark contrast to both Ibn Taymiyya and his erstwhile student, neither of whom concealed their disdain for *kalām*-theology.

Whilst for the Ashʿarīs and Māturīdīs *kalām* was seen as synonymous with the principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*), Ibn Taymiyya held that the philosophical proofs of the *mutakallimūn* were redundant in the face of the Qurʾan and *Sunna*, both of which provide superior and sufficient rational proofs for the key points of belief. He says in one place,

These [principles] which [the *mutakallimūn*] call the principles of religion are in reality not part of the principles of religion that God prescribed for his servants...When it is understood that what is called ‘principles of religion’ in the usage of those who employ this term, consists of indeterminacy and ambiguity caused by equivocal coinage and technical terms (*li mā fī-hā min al-ishtirāk bī-ḥasab al-awḍāʿ wa l-istiḥālat*), it becomes evident that the principles of religion accepted by God, His Messenger, and His believers, are that which was transmitted from the Prophet.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁹ Translation in M.S. Özervali, ‘The Qurʾānic Rational Theology of Ibn Taymiyya and his Criticism of the *mutakallimūn*,’ in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, edited by Y. Rapoport and S Ahmed (Karachi and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 82. It is worth noting that Ibn Taymiyya’s theology had at its essence a call to return to the way of the first generation of Muslims and a rejection of foreign, particularly

Ibn Taymiyya says elsewhere, and with all severity, that the so-called principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*) as described in the works of the *mutakallimūn* are more aptly called the “principles of Satanic religion”.⁴⁰⁰ Whilst he does not call either the Ash‘arīs or the Māturīdīs outright heretics simply for their advocacy of *kalām*-theology – indeed, he allows belief to be predicated on *kalām* arguments for those whose natural dispositions (*fiṭra*) have become corrupted and who have no alternative but to establish belief in God through philosophical arguments⁴⁰¹ - one doubts whether al-Āqḥiṣārī would have found Ibn Taymiyya’s latitude in any way compensatory. It remains intriguing that, notwithstanding these significant differences in doctrine, al-Āqḥiṣārī and his Qāḍīzādeli comrades were not in any way deterred from invoking the views of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim on other matters of religion.

At this point it is worth considering the significance of al-Āqḥiṣārī for Qāḍīzādeli activism. Ideologically, there are many indications to suggest that he was as important for the movement as Birgivī and Qāḍīzāde. Mention has already been made of the manuscripts in which his *Risāleh* was bound together with the epistles of Birgivī and Qāḍīzāde, suggesting that he was perceived by some in Ottoman Turkey as pivotal for the

Neoplatonic, influences in the Muslim conception of God. According to him, excessive intellectualism serves only to weaken the faith of the ordinary believer, and leads ultimately to schisms amongst the ‘Ulamā’. Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) must always maintain its simplicity, and it should appeal to the masses as well as to the elite. For Ibn Taymiyya, this was the way of stability; the *kalām* theologians, on the other hand, were responsible for the corruption of the creed, never firm on a position for long and always adapting doctrines to suit their views. He says, ‘You will find that the adherents of *kalām* are the foremost amongst people in shifting from one position to another, certain of a position at one place and then certain of its contrary, [all the while], accusing opponents of disbelief! This is evidence for [their] lack of certainty. Cited in M. Sheikh, ‘Ibn Taymiyya on the Attributes of God’, unpublished MSt thesis, University of Oxford, 2007, pp. 18-19. On Ibn Taymiyya’s theology, see also H. Laoust, *Essai les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taki-d-Din Ahmad b. Taimiya, canoniste hanbalite* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l’Institut d’Archeologie Orientale, 1939).

⁴⁰⁰ Cited in Özervali, ‘Qur’ānic Rational Theology’, p. 82.

⁴⁰¹ For more on this see W. Hallaq, ‘Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God,’ *Acta Orientalia*, 52 (1991), pp. 49-69.

movement. Furthermore, the textual study has demonstrated both al-Āqḥiṣārī's depth of scholarship and the scope of his interests. He also composed a host of works which cover the whole gamut of religious sciences taught in his time. He must have been a man viewed with respect within the 'Ilmiyye establishment and surely possessed a voice which carried weight. It is very likely that his support would have afforded the Qāḍīzādelis greater credibility. Apart from his *Vassiyetname (Risāleh)*, which was composed in the vernacular, all of his authorships were written in Arabic, which would have appealed to fellow 'ulamā' but, beyond this, would also have made them accessible to scholars in other parts of the Muslim world. This would have facilitated the dissemination of the Qāḍīzādeli message far and wide. Finally, whilst al-Āqḥiṣārī can be seen as a reformer of the same ilk as Birgivī and Qāḍīzāde, in some ways he appears a more prolific and able scholar. His works frequently betray a manner of writing which is lucid, scientific and articulate.

It is quite possible that al-Āqḥiṣārī was pivotal for the movement's trajectory for less savoury reasons: the greater violence displayed by the Qāḍīzādelis from the second half of the 17th century was possibly informed by al-Āqḥiṣārī's ardent advocacy of the *ḥisba*. Earlier formulations of Qāḍīzādeli Islam, traceable back to Birgivī, inclined towards leaving forceful intervention to the authorities. By the time of the second phase of Qāḍīzādeli activism, under the leadership of Üṣṭüwānī, a very different tenor characterised the campaign of the Qāḍīzādelis: they were far more brazen in their approach, often taking violence into their own hands without the express sanction of the authorities. This change in attitude has to be accounted for, yet the obvious candidate,

Meḥmet Qāḏīzāde, does not appear to be the source of it, since he was clearly working within the ambit of what was officially sanctioned. His proximity to Murāt IV indicates this but also, as is clear from his *Risāleh*, there is no mention of the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil. Birgivi's candidacy is also doubtful, as has been argued in an early part of this study.

In al-Āqḥiṣārī's case, we are confronted by a different reality. He was not at all opposed to the common man taking matters of *ḥisba* into his own hands. At one place in the *Majālis*, he insists that the congregation physically removes an imām who is found reeking of tobacco or any other such "abominable odour", even if this means dragging him out by his hands and feet.⁴⁰² In another instance, any preacher (*wā'iz*) whose sermon is not in conformity with the Qur'an and *Sunna* should be physically removed from the pulpit in accordance with the dictates of enjoining good and forbidding evil. At no point does al-Āqḥiṣārī restrict this task to the authorities. Indeed, since imams and preachers were official appointees, it is clear that al-Āqḥiṣārī was encouraging the commoner to undertake the task. With scholars of al-Āqḥiṣārī's standing take such hardline positions, it is little wonder that the Qāḏīzādelis would soon begin entering mosques, tekkes and coffee-houses in order to mete out punishment to those contravening their version of Islam. It is also little wonder that Ottoman Turks would soon demand of the authorities that they took action to prevent these unsanctioned acts of violence.

⁴⁰² Michot, *Against Smoking*, pp. 53-54.

The research findings open up new possibilities of understanding the religious terrain of Ottoman Turkey during the 16th and 17th century. Thus far, research on the Qāḍīzādelis has placed little or no emphasis on contextualising the ideational content of the movement's programme for reform; instead, the movement has been viewed through post-18th century paradigms, usually Salafī, giving little or no consideration to the differences which exist between modern forms of revivalism and the revivalism of the Qāḍīzādelis. Furthermore, although recent research on the Naqshbandīs of Ottoman Turkey, such as the studies of Le Gall and Weismann, has brought attention to points of contact between some Qāḍīzādelis and the Naqshbandī Order, there has not been any substantive work completed aiming to unearth the foundations of such contact. Clearly the study of intellectual history and phenomena which are related to it demands close examination of associated literature whenever we have access to it. When this endeavour is undertaken – and wherever possible, married with information garnered from biographical sources and chronicles – a more accurate reconstruction of the past is achievable.

There is yet much work to be done on Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Āqḥīṣārī specifically and the Qāḍīzādeli movement in general. Of particular interest is the influence of the Qāḍīzādelis in posterity. Investigating the works of other prominent Qāḍīzādeli personalities, perhaps by replicating the methods applied in the present study, could clarify whether the same admixture of Sufism and activism are present. If indeed it can be proven that there existed a similar model of Sufism in other reformist literature of the time, we would then be confronted by the possibility that al-Āqḥīṣārī, the Qāḍīzādelis, and the handful of

Naqshbandīs of Istanbul who it is suggested had adopted the Muḥammadan Way – Meḥmed Ma^ʿrūf Trabzūnī (d. 1594), translator of Kāshifī's *Rashahāt ʿayn al-ḥayā* into Turkish, and Aḥmad Tirevī (d. after 1620), head of the Ḥekīm Çelebi lodge being among these⁴⁰³ - constituted a network of revivalists of far greater significance than anything yet discovered in the Ottoman 17th century. The influence in posterity of al-Āqḥiṣārī's *Majālis al-abrār*, Birgivī's *al-Ṭarīqa al-Muḥammadiyya* and other Qāḍizādeli texts upon Indian revivalism, Arabian revivalism and other similar phenomena also behove further investigation. But I believe, most importantly, focus should be given to the influence of the Qāḍizādeli corpus on the ideas and writings of Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. At present studies on 18th and 19th century revivalism emphasise the connections and networks linking Arabia with India, without demonstrating the same level of interest in possible Ottoman involvement in these networks. It is hoped that this study has provided a few good reasons why such investigations are now all the more urgent.

⁴⁰³ Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya*, p. 134.

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