

mentioned belong to the systems of thought that were developed in the Abbasid East and in Umayyad al-Andalus, and the Almoravid and Almohad West. Fatimid Cairo is not studied *per se* but is treated only as an explanatory counter-model. It is therefore a Sunni point of view that is developed, contrary to what the mention of Cairo in the title might suggest. In addition, of the seven thinkers studied, only one, al-Ġazālī, is oriental. However, his presence in Akhtar's book is due to the major role his writings played in the West in the twelfth century. Thus the perspective of the book is decidedly centred on pre-modern Western Sunnism. This very "Western" orientation of the book is confirmed by the absence of references to Makram Abbès's books on al-Māwardī (*Islam et politique à l'âge classique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009; and 'Alī Ibn-Muḥammad al-Māwardī and Makram Abbès, *De l'éthique du prince et du gouvernement de l'État*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2015) or the articulation of religion and politics in the classical period of Islam despite the fact that these studies deal with the same issues as Akhtar's, with a similar approach to the texts, yet from a Middle Eastern perspective.

In conclusion, the reviewer can only praise the author for the very pedagogical and didactic nature of his presentation of the philosophical and mystical analyses of the thinkers he chose. The subject is complex, but its treatment is clear. Nevertheless, it is regrettable that he ignored some French works that could have usefully completed the bibliography and references. Apart from this criticism, Akhtar's book is excellent. This review reflects unfortunately only very partially the finesse of the author's analyses, erudition, knowledge of the sources, as well as the relevance of his remarks, not to mention his brilliant contextualization of the philosophical debates and their implications for the political field.

**Pascal Buresi**  
EHESS Paris

C.Z. CHOWDHURY:

*A Ṣūfī Apologist of Nīshāpūr: The Life and Thought of Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī.*

(Monographs in Arab and Islamic Studies.) xii, 228 pp. Sheffield and Bristol: Equinox, 2019. ISBN 978 1 78179 522 4.

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This contribution has two purposes. One is to provide scholars of Islamic culture and religious studies with the first comprehensive study in English of Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī's (d. 412/1021) thought and methodologies in defending Sufism and defining its borders, constituents and relationships with other aspects of Islamic piety. The second purpose is to examine al-Sulamī's apologetic project in defending Sufism against both internal Sufi polemics and external detractors. That al-Sulamī's *oeuvre* needs to be examined and the representations of his apologetics need to be thoroughly reconstructed is undoubtedly important. However, I do not agree with Chowdhury who asserts that unlike his contemporaries and predecessors such as al-Junayd, al-Sarrāj and al-Kalābādī, al-Sulamī has been overlooked in European scholarship (p. 4). Actually, they have all been generally ignored. Al-Sarrāj's (d. 378/988) *Kitāb al-Luma'*, for instance, is the earliest and most important encyclopaedic manual for studying Sufism and the Sufi system of

thought. In spite of its importance, it has not sparked any comprehensive study of its own. The same could also be said of al-Kalābādihī's (d. 380/990) *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*.

Chowdhury relies on a Riyāḍ manuscript containing 26 treatises attributed to al-Sulamī (known as Sulamiyyāt), to offer a comprehensive analysis of al-Sulamī's methodology, his approach to Sufism and its specific relationship to the Khurāsānian denomination of Sufism as well as the broader notion of what the author calls "Šūfī orthodoxy", the *ahl al-sunna wa-l-ḥadīth* whose members were principally Shāfi'ites and Ash'arites (p. 68).

The monograph includes a brief introduction and eight chapters. After a detailed survey of the literature on al-Sulamī in chapter 1, chapter 2 is dedicated to the historical, social, and religious context of Nishapur. A special focus in this chapter is dedicated to the emergence of Sufism and its sophisticated relationships with other types of Islamic thought. Chapter 3 examines the main figures who inspired and influenced al-Sulamī and his world views, and chapter 4 is dedicated to al-Sulamī's biography. The latter includes his circle of teachers and students, the criticism addressed to him by some detractors on issues of *ḥadīth* transmission and inclusion of so-called heretical traditions, and his alleged plagiarism from al-Sarrāj. Chapter 5 provides a survey of al-Sulamī's *oeuvre* supported by detailed references to a broad array of manuscript materials and secondary literature. Chapter 6 refers to the mystical lexicon of al-Sulamī, and chapter 7 is dedicated to his method of self-transformation. The last chapter summarizes al-Sulamī's apologetic agenda through systematizing Sufism and bringing it into agreement with the Sunnah.

Chowdhury's monograph would have benefitted from an introductory reference to what apologia and apologist mean in early medieval Islam, and the ways in which these Western terms fit with Islamic religious thought and rhetoric. While it could be argued that a great part of Sufi textbooks and anthologies written during this time are, by their very nature, apologetic, even if certain authors do not appear explicitly to respond to any criticism, such a reference at the beginning of the book would still be useful.

Chowdhury makes the point that al-Sulamī's apologetic strategies in portraying Sufism as an organic part of Islam can be found throughout his diverse writings. He also investigates the common fabrication accusation levelled at al-Sulamī and his understanding of the prophetic traditions, and deals with it impressively. Chowdhury also refutes those who would accuse al-Sulamī of plagiarizing al-Sarrāj by citing two extensive examples and noting al-Sulamī's cultural scene, where oral and written transmission of data played a fundamental role and where overlap would naturally occur. The shared perspectives of al-Sulamī and al-Sarrāj, for example, go far beyond phrasing and structures. They share a more sophisticated interest in the experiential encounter with the Quran and the esoteric implications of God's name and the letters constituting God's speech. Al-Sulamī's *Sharḥ ma'ānī al-ḥurūf* corresponds with al-Sarrāj's references to the terms *ḥarf* (pl. *ḥurūf*) (letter/letters) and to al-Sarrāj's discussions of the devotional practices through which the mystic experiences the beatific vision of God's secrets behind every letter of His speech (Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Luma'*, Leiden, 1914, pp. 74, 89).

The term *rukhaṣ* (dispensations) interested al-Sulamī on different occasions in his works (pp. 123, 159). I think the author should have detailed the semantic changes in the Sufi perception of *rukhaṣ* and how it later came to describe the behaviour of a particular group of lay-affiliates in the writings of Abū al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī (d. 563/1168) and his nephew, Abū Ḥaḥṣ al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234).

Chowdhury's investigation of al-Sulamī's method of self-transformation needs a clearer statement on what distinguishes al-Sulamī's so-called method from those of

other contemporaries including the *malāmatiyya*. Chowdhury's reference to "isnād provisions" as part of al-Sulamī's apologetics is not accurate. Al-Sulamī used *isnād* since this was one of the basic features of the Islamic writing tradition and was not considered an apologetic tool. Al-Sulamī's exegesis, on the other hand, could certainly be added as part of his apologetic tools. On a technical level, while the translations of many passages of primary sources are a significant contribution of Chowdhury's book, some long quotations of secondary literature are unnecessary (pp. 68–9, 71).

To sum up, *A Ṣūfī Apologist of Nīshāpūr* provides a study model for examining important Sufi authors during the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries. This endeavour is particularly significant in light of the fact that al-Sulamī differs prominently from other contemporary authors of Sufi compendia since he did not provide us with one comprehensive textbook that combines Sufi rules of ethics, jargon, training methods, biographies of great masters, and al-Sulamī's own conception of the different ranks of the Sufi path. Examining al-Sulamī through a multiplicity of documents and writings is very compelling.

**Arin Salamah-Qudsi**  
University of Haifa, Israel

ABŪ ḤAYYĀN AL-TAWḤĪDĪ and ABŪ 'ALĪ MISKAWAYH:

*The Philosopher Responds. An Intellectual Correspondence from the Tenth Century.* Edited by BILAL ORFALI and MAURICE POMERANT.

Translated by SOPHIA VASALOU and JAMES E. MONTGOMERY.

(Library of Arabic Literature.), xli, 300 pp. (Volume One), xi, 324 pp. (Volume Two). New York: New York University Press, 2019.

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The *Kitāb al-hawāmil wa-l-ṣawāmil* is a collection of 175 questions that the philosopher-litterateur Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023) addresses to the philosopher and historian Abū 'Alī Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), accompanied by the latter's answers. The peculiar collective nature of the work – responding to the literary form of *masā'il wa-ağwiba* – and the wide range of themes covered – reflecting the variety of al-Tawḥīdī's interests – make it an exceptional portrait of the "dialogic spirit of the intellectual culture" (p. xiv) that flourished at the Buyid court in the fourth/tenth century.

Two fundamental merits of this publication are immediately evident. It constitutes the first critical revision of the *editio princeps* published in 1951 by Aḥmad Amīn and Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr. Based on a new examination of the *codex unicus* (MS Aya Sofya 2476) the two editors, Bilal Orfali and Maurice Pomerant, propose both conjectures to the transmitted text and various corrections to the previous edition. In addition, the work's first full-length English translation, by Sophia Vasalou and James E. Montgomery, is printed on the page facing the Arabic text, this being the second complete translation in a Western language, after the Italian version published in 2017 by Lidia Bettini.