"Narrating Authority in Seventeenth-Century Jerusalem: Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-ʿAlamī and the Autobiographical Practice of Ottoman Ṣūfīs"[1]

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Abstract

This article examines the Jerusalemite Ṣūfī master Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-ʿAlamī (d. 1628) through his autobiographical-hagiographical treatise *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq li-Maʿrifat Dukhūl al-Faqīr fī al-Ṭarīq*. Preserved in a single manuscript, the work blends autobiography, *thabat* (register of authorizations), and visionary hagiography to construct a narrative of sanctity rooted in Jerusalem. It is argued that al-ʿAlamī's consistent self-designation as *al-faqīr* ("the poor one") exemplifies the humility trope central to early modern Ṣūfī self-writing, while his detailed enumeration of initiations, *ijāzāt*, and encounters with saints anchors his spiritual legitimacy within recognized lineages.The study makes three interrelated contributions. First, it recovers a neglected Palestinian Ṣūfī voice, challenging the marginalization of Jerusalem in studies of Islamic mysticism. Second, it expands the geography of Ṣūfī autobiography by situating Jerusalem alongside Cairo, Damascus, and Morocco as a site of mystical self-writing. Third, it demonstrates how manuscript culture itself functioned as a form of authority, as the colophon, genealogies, and single-copy preservation of *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* reveal the role of hereditary custodianship in sustaining memory.By situating al-ʿAlamī's text within the wider Ottoman and Maghribī networks of the seventeenth century, the article contributes to debates on the relationship between autobiography and hagiography, the circulation of Ṣūfī memory, and the politics of textual survival in Palestine.

Kay Words:Ṣūfī autobiography; *al-faqīr* (humility trope); Ottoman Jerusalem; spiritual authority and lineage; *sajʿ* and Qurʾānic allusion; transregional Ṣūfī networks; Palestinian manuscript culture

Introduction

Within the vast corpus of early modern Islamic literature, autobiographical writings by Palestinian Ṣūfīs occupy only a marginal space. Scholars of Islamic mysticism have long noted that while cities such as Cairo, Istanbul, and Fez produced a wealth of Ṣūfī memoirs and hagiographies, Palestine remains relatively absent from this literary record (Ephrat 23–41). The imbalance is striking given Jerusalem's recognized importance as a locus of Islamic sanctity and Ṣūfī activity during the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. Zāwiyas, mosques, and shrines across the city anchored spiritual networks that extended throughout Bilād al-Shām, yet their textual self-representations have remained largely unexplored.

Recent cultural studies, however, remind us that Ṣūfism in Jerusalem was not merely a matter of textual production but also of enduring architectural and ritual presence. As Ali Qleibo observes, the Old City once contained more than forty-six active zāwiyas representing diverse ethnic and ṭarīqa affiliations—from Afghans and Indians to Central Asians and local

Palestinian families. Though many have since lost their devotional function, their façades and endowed structures survive as "eloquent expressions of Jerusalem's central position in Islam" (Qleibo, 2018). Among the few that continue to function is al-Zāwiya al-Afghaniyya, founded in the seventeenth century, where the Shādhilī order still gathers for weekly dhikr rituals. Such living practices testify to Jerusalem's historical and ongoing role as a spiritual hub, even if Palestinian Ṣūfīs rarely left behind autobiographical writings comparable to those of their Egyptian, Syrian, or Moroccan contemporaries.

One notable exception is *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq li-Maʿrifat Dukhūl al-Faqīr fī al-Ṭarīq* (*The Hallmarks of Verification for Knowing the Entrance of the Seeker into the Path*), authored by the Jerusalemite Ṣūfī master Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-ʿAlamī (d. 1628). Al-ʿAlamī was remembered in his own day as a leading figure of the Shādhilī path in Jerusalem and contributed to the construction of the al-Asʿadiyya complex on the Mount of Olives (Geoffroy 183–87; Le Gall 2006: Algar, 2007 414–20). The *Shādhiliyya*, founded in the thirteenth century by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 1258), is one of the most influential Ṣūfī orders in the Islamic world (Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, 1993). With millions of followers worldwide, its members are commonly known as Shādhilīs (Arabic: murīdūn, "seekers"), and a single adherent is referred to as a Shādhilī.Although preserved today in a single known copy produced by the author's descendant Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-ʿAlamī, *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq li-Maʿrifat Dukhūl al-Faqīr fī al-Ṭarīq*should not be dismissed as an isolated or marginal text. On the contrary, evidence from the Moroccan traveler and Ṣūfī master ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-ʿAyāshī (d. 1679) demonstrates that the work circulated and was esteemed well beyond the confines of the al-ʿAlamī family. During his sojourn in Jerusalem in 1662, al-ʿAyāshī consulted al-ʿAlamī's manuscript directly and transcribed substantial excerpts of it into his *Riḥla*, devoting more than ten pages to its contents. He describes Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-ʿAlamī with great reverence as the "imām of the Ṣūfiyya in Jerusalem," thus affirming both the author's status and the manuscript's authority within the sacred topography of seventeenth-century Jerusalem (al-ʿAyāshī 2: 441–55).

As a text, *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* exemplifies the hybrid genre of Ṣūfī self-writing. It combines elements of autobiography, hagiography, and *thabat* (register of teachers and authorizations), weaving together first-person accounts of visions, initiations, and travels with lists of masters and ijāzāt. Written in ornate *sajʿ* (rhymed prose), it interlaces personal narrative with Qurʾānic citations, ḥadīth references, and accounts of encounters with saints both living and deceased. The author's consistent self-designation as *al-faqīr* ("the poor one") reflects both the Ṣūfī trope of humility and a deliberate narrative persona that situates his story within a transhistorical chain of saintly self-effacement.

The importance of this manuscript lies in three interrelated contributions. First, it recovers a neglected Palestinian Ṣūfī voice, challenging the marginalization of Jerusalem in studies of early modern mysticism. Second, it extends the geography of Ṣūfī autobiography beyond Cairo, Damascus, and Morocco to include Palestine as a site of mystical self-writing. Third, it highlights manuscript culture itself as a form of spiritual authority, showing how colophons, genealogies, and single-copy preservation were integral to the politics of memory and textual survival in Ottoman Jerusalem. More broadly, the study engages current debates about the fluid boundaries between autobiography and hagiography, the mechanisms by which some voices circulated while others remained localized, and the vulnerability of Palestinian

religious texts to historical erasure. Recovering and analyzing *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* thus restores to view a vital strand of Jerusalemite Ṣūfī self-representation and situates Palestinian contributions firmly within the wider intellectual and devotional currents of the Ottoman world.

Life and Networks of al-ʿAlamī

Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-ʿAlamī (d. 1628) emerges from *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* as both a devout mystic and a careful chronicler of his own spiritual journey. Throughout the text, he consistently refers to himself in the third person as *al-faqīr*—"the poor one." This rhetorical choice, widespread in Ṣūfī autobiographical writings, served to underscore servitude to God and to efface the individual ego. At the same time, such self-effacement does not diminish the author's authority; rather, it functions as a narrative strategy that constructs a distinctive authorial persona grounded in the ethics of *faqr* (poverty before God). As Carl Ernst and Alexander Knysh have shown in their broader studies of Islamic mysticism, humility in Ṣūfī discourse often operated simultaneously as a trope of self-negation and as a subtle mode of asserting spiritual legitimacy (Ernst; Knysh). In al-ʿAlamī's case, this paradoxical dynamic positions him within a long-standing tradition of saints who spoke as "the poor" while quietly inscribing their place in the sacred chain of transmission.

Al-ʿAlamī's *nisba*, or family name, linked him to a distinguished lineage of scholars and mystics in Jerusalem. His family maintained the al-Asʿadiyya *zāwiya* on the Mount of Olives, which functioned as a locus of prayer, instruction, and hospitality (**Cohen 75–92; Le Gall**). The manuscript's colophon, penned by his descendant Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-ʿAlamī, confirms the family's custodianship of the *zāwiya* and preserves a genealogy tracing their ancestry back to the Moroccan saint ʿAbd al-Salām b. Mashīsh (d. 1228) (**Geoffroy 183–85; Cohen 75–92**). Such claims of descent served to root Jerusalemite Ṣūfīs within broader transregional lineages of sanctity while also reinforcing their local authority.

The text also situates al-ʿAlamī firmly within the interconnected web of Ṣūfī orders in Bilād al-Shām during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. His recollections record encounters with shaykhs of the Shādhilī, Qādirī, and Khalwatī traditions, as well as with independent saintly figures outside formal ṭarīqa affiliations (Geoffroy 183–87; Le Gall). These networks were sustained not only by pilgrimage and travel but also by correspondence, visitation of shrines, and the circulation of *baraka* through *ijāzāt* and *khirqas*.

Particularly striking are the episodes in which al-ʿAlamī recounts his warm receptions by leading shaykhs, as well as visionary encounters with the Prophet's daughter Fāṭima, both of which underscore his elevated spiritual status. Such narratives depict him not as a marginal seeker but as a recognized figure moving confidently within prestigious Ṣūfī circles. Yet this self-representation stands in tension with the historical record: despite the esteem he describes, al-ʿAlamī is scarcely mentioned in contemporary chronicles, biographical dictionaries, or later hagiographies. The gap between the reverence accorded to him in *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* and his near-absence from other documentary sources raises important questions about the selective processes of historical memory and the vulnerability of Palestinian Ṣūfī voices to erasure.

Geographically, al-ʿAlamī's sacred world extended from Jerusalem to Damascus, Sidon, Qaṭanā, and Mecca. Jerusalem provided the anchor for his identity, but Damascus emerges in the text as a central site of initiation, learning, and encounters with prominent masters. Sidon, a coastal city, linked him to itinerant saintly networks, while Qaṭanā offered smaller-scale gatherings that nevertheless reinforced his place within a living chain of sanctity.

His eventual pilgrimage to Mecca provided the ultimate confirmation of his initiations and visions, binding his personal testimony to the universal framework of the ḥajj and embedding his Jerusalemite experience in the broader sacred geography of Islam (**Cohen 62–68; Geoffroy 220–22**).

Taken together, these familial, genealogical, and regional networks reveal that al-ʿAlamī was not an isolated figure but rather a Jerusalemite node in the wider Ottoman Ṣūfī world. His narrative underscores how spiritual authority in seventeenth-century Palestine was simultaneously local and transregional, rooted in family custodianship of a zāwiya yet validated through encounters, visions, and affiliations that extended across Bilād al-Shām and into the Ḥijāz.

Literary and Doctrinal Strategies

Sajʿ, or rhymed prose, is one of the most distinctive rhetorical devices in Arabic literary history. Defined by its use of end-rhyme, rhythmical parallelism (*iʿtidāl*), and qualitative parallelism (*muwāzana*), it combines meter and sound to produce a heightened sense of balance and musicality (Stewart, "Divine Epithets" 25; Beeston 143). Scholars have noted that *sajʿ* represents the earliest form of artistic prose in Arabic, with roots in pre-Islamic Arabia among the *kuhhān* (soothsayers), where it was employed for oracular and ritual speech (Stewart, "Soothsayer" 79; Hoyland 220–21). Similar stylistic uses are also attested in Abyssinian ecclesiastical contexts and folk traditions (Dadoo 709–10).

With the advent of Islam, *sajʿ* continued to flourish, and its stylistic proximity to the Qurʾān—especially in the early Meccan surahs—has been a subject of scholarly debate (Stewart, "Sajʿ in the Qurʾān" 101–8; Neuwirth 251–52). Qurʾānic rhymed prose employed rhythm and parallelism as ornament and as a means to reinforce meaning, accentuate divine authority, and enhance recitational impact (Klar 184–213; Stewart, "Rhymed Prose" 476–78). The Qurʾān thus became a model for later Arabic prose, particularly mystical and devotional texts.

In **Ṣūfī literature**, *sajʿ* was frequently used to intensify the poetic and rhythmic quality of prose, allowing authors to express profound spiritual truths in a style that evoked both beauty and transcendence. Figures such as al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-ʿArabī drew on *sajʿ* to give their works a cadence that echoed Qurʾānic revelation and mystical invocations (Arberry 112–15). Its function was not only aesthetic but also devotional, reinforcing humility, awe, and proximity to the divine presence.

In classical Arabic belleslettres, particularly in the genre of the *maqāmah* pioneered by al-Hamadhānī, *sajʿ* became the central stylistic marker, showcasing the author's rhetorical skill and artistry. The rhythmic prose in the *maqāmāt* heightened the narrative's musicality, captivating listeners in oral performance and demonstrating the writer's mastery of eloquence (Monroe 45–49; Bonebakker). Later critics like Heinrichs and Sperl note that such use of *sajʿ* blurred the lines between prose and poetry, creating a hybrid form that was both ornamental and functional (Heinrichs 34; Sperl 77–79).

Thus, *sajʿ* occupies a unique position in Arabic letters: from pre-Islamic oracles to Qurʾānic revelation, from Ṣūfī treatises to the refined artistry of the *maqāmah*, it provided writers with a versatile medium that was simultaneously aesthetic, performative, and spiritual.

Al-ʿAlamī frequently integrates verses and phrases into his prose without clear demarcation, creating a seamless interweaving of sacred text and personal testimony. The

autobiographical introduction culminates in the verse, *"wa-mā khalaqtu al-jinna wa-l-insa illā li-yaʿbudūn"* ("I did not create the jinn and humankind except that they should worship Me" [Q 51:56]), which frames his narrative as an extension of divine mandate. Qurʾānic echoes recur throughout his descriptions of visions, encounters, and moments of trial, thereby anchoring his individual experiences in the authority of revelation. This strategy reflects what Geoffroy has described as the "Ṣūfī hermeneutic of the self," in which the seeker's journey is understood as a commentary on scripture (201–4).

Another rhetorical and doctrinal feature of the text is al-ʿAlamī's persistent self-designation as *al-faqīr*, "the poor one." On the surface, this reflects the classical Ṣūfī trope of humility, rooted in the doctrine of *faqr*—spiritual poverty before God. Yet as Ernst and Knysh note, such tropes also function as narrative strategies, effacing the ego while simultaneously crafting an authorial persona (Ernst 122–23; Knysh 142–45). By referring to himself in the third person, al-ʿAlamī displaces the self as the center of the narrative, paradoxically, this act of self-effacement renders his presence more pervasive. The result is a literary construction of humility that simultaneously asserts his authority as a recipient of visions, initiations, and blessings.

Finally, *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* demonstrates the fluid boundary between autobiography and hagiography. Although the text purports to narrate al-ʿAlamī's personal journey, it frequently shifts toward recounting the miracles (*karāmāt*) of other saints, both living and deceased. In these episodes, the author's own sanctity emerges indirectly, validated by the recognition and transmissions he receives. As Dina Le Gall observes of early modern Ṣūfī self-writing, humility often required that saints present themselves not as miracle-workers but as vessels through which the *baraka* of others flowed (93–95). In al-ʿAlamī's case, his encounters with figures such as ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, recorded in both waking states and dreams, serve to construct his spiritual legitimacy through proximity to recognized loci of sanctity. Thus, the text is not merely an autobiographical record but a communal archive, blending personal testimony with collective memory in order to narrate authority.

Between Humility and Authority: al-ʿAlamī and the Tradition of Ṣūfī Autobiography

The literary strategies of al-ʿAlamī in *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* can be most fully appreciated when situated within the broader tradition of early modern Ṣūfī autobiography. Across the Islamic world, mystics crafted narratives of their lives as testimonies of sanctity, embedding personal experience within a web of transmission, vision, and humility. Such texts often circulated widely, serving as both spiritual instruction and as legitimating documents of authority within Ṣūfī lineages. Al-ʿAlamī's account, however, while participating in this transregional practice of self-writing, is distinct in its scope, its mode of circulation, and its firm anchoring in Jerusalem's sacred and social landscape.

A useful point of departure is the *Laṭāʾif al-Minan* of the Egyptian polymath ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī (d. 1565). Composed in Cairo, al-Shaʿrānī's autobiography foregrounds humility, repeatedly portraying himself as *al-faqīr*—the poor servant—whose worth derives entirely from his masters (al-Shaʿrānī, 22–24). This humility trope, shared by al-ʿAlamī, functioned as a rhetorical strategy that effaced the ego while at the same time authorizing the mystic as a vessel of divine knowledge. Nonetheless, the scope of al-Shaʿrānī's text is far broader: alongside accounts of teachers and initiations, it offers sweeping reflections on

theology, jurisprudence, and the social ills of Ottoman Egypt. By contrast, *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* remains narrowly devotional, focusing on initiations, dreams, and encounters with saints. If al-Shaʿrānī sought to weave his autobiography into the intellectual debates of his age, al-ʿAlamī presented a more intimate record of sanctity—humility here becomes a localized devotional posture rather than a platform for wide-ranging reformist critique.

The Moroccan mystic Aḥmad b. ʿAjība (d. 1809) provides a second revealing comparison. His *Fahrasa* organizes his life around a meticulous catalogue of teachers, readings, and transmissions, a textual *silsila* that secures his position within the Shādhilī–Darqāwī lineage (Cornell, 112–15). Ibn ʿAjība's self-narration, however, was consciously didactic and designed for broad circulation among disciples across Morocco. Al-ʿAlamī's work, by contrast, had a far more restricted reach: surviving in a single-family manuscript preserved within the al-Asʿadiyya zāwiya, its intended audience seems to have been a small Jerusalemite circle of scholars and devotees. Where Ibn ʿAjība universalized his lineage for public edification, al-ʿAlamī inscribed his sanctity into a family archive, binding his spiritual authority to the memory of a local community.

A third counterpoint can be found in the writings of the Damascene master ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1731). His travelogues and autobiographical fragments combine external journeys with internal visions, situating his sanctity within a sacred geography that extended across Bilād al-Shām (Shoshan, 71–73; Sirriyeh, 1999). Like al-ʿAlamī, he often records dreams and encounters with saints. Still, his works enjoyed wide circulation across the Ottoman Empire, copied and read far beyond Damascus. Al-ʿAlamī's text, in contrast, remained materially fragile, bound to the manuscript archive of a single Palestinian family lodge. The disparity between the prolific and widely diffused writings of al-Nābulusī and the localized preservation of al-ʿAlamī underscores the uneven survival of Palestinian Ṣūfī voices compared to their Syrian and Egyptian counterparts.

Placed together, these comparisons illuminate both the shared strategies and the distinctive features of *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq*. Like al-Shaʿrānī and Ibn ʿAjība, al-ʿAlamī deploys humility and transmission as literary devices to frame his sanctity. Like al-Nābulusī, he integrates visions and dreams into a geography of devotion. Yet what sets him apart is the constellation of scope, circulation, and anchoring. His scope is modest, limited to concise self-narration rather than expansive theological or cosmological discourse. His circulation is narrow, restricted to a Jerusalemite milieu rather than transregional Ṣūfī networks. Most significantly, his anchoring is resolutely local: Jerusalem itself—the shrines, the saints, the scholarly circles—becomes both the setting and the guarantor of his sanctity.

Thus, *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* exemplifies a specifically Palestinian mode of mystical self-writing. Whereas other Ṣūfī autobiographers sought to universalize their sanctity through broad circulation and wide-ranging intellectual engagement, al-ʿAlamī localized his authority, embedding it within the religious and social fabric of Jerusalem. The recovery of his text adds another example to the genre of Ṣūfī autobiography while extending its geography, situating Jerusalem as a site of mystical self-writing alongside Cairo, Damascus, and Morocco.His voice reminds us that the Ṣūfī self could be narrated not only through transregional itineraries but also through the intimate sanctity of place.

Teachers, Saints, and Lineages of Authority

A central concern of *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* is the meticulous documentation of teachers, saints, and lineages through which Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-ʿAlamī anchored his authority. In line with broader Ṣūfī traditions, sanctity is never portrayed as a solitary or spontaneous gift but as a transmission deeply embedded in *silsila*—chains of initiation and memory—that connect the living seeker to a wider network of predecessors. Like many early modern Ṣūfī autobiographers, he situates his spiritual legitimacy within these networks, emphasizing the ways in which personal experience derives meaning only through its articulation in genealogy and its validation by association with recognized figures (Geoffroy 1995, 183–87; Le Gall 2005, 91–96). His narrative thus unfolds as a catalogue of encounters—through visits, visions, and *ijāzāt*—with both living shaykhs and long-deceased saints whose reputations extended across the Islamic world.

As recent scholarship on Islamic genealogical practice has shown, these chains of transmission served at once as spiritual pedigrees and as social maps that bound individuals to communities across space and time. Lineage (*nasab*) and spiritual genealogy (*silsila*) often overlapped, reinforcing claims to sanctity by embedding them within remembered and documented lines of descent. For instance, as Sarah Bowen Savant and Helena de Felipe note, Ṣūfī orders frequently structured their *silsila*s in a manner analogous to family genealogies, ensuring that disciples could trace their initiatory lineage back to the Prophet or to foundational saints—thus creating what they describe as "a sacred kinship of the spirit" (Savant and de Felipe 2014, 45–47). Al-ʿAlamī's insistence on situating himself within such a nexus underscores how sanctity was as much inherited through networks of memory and textual transmission as it was experienced personally. In this sense, his autobiography participates in what may be called a "genealogical epistemology" of Ṣūfism—where authority is authenticated by descent, proximity, and recognition, rather than originality or innovation (Savant and de Felipe 2014, 14–19, 52).

Foremost among these is ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (April 1078 – 20 December 1165), the celebrated *Ḥanbalī* scholar, preacher, and Ṣūfī master who became the eponym of the Qādiriyya, one of the oldest and most widespread Ṣūfī orders. Born in the town of Naʿif in Gilan, Persia, he later settled in Baghdad, where he lived, taught, and was ultimately buried (Braune 1986, 69; Hastings and Selbie 2001, 10). The *nisba* "al-Jīlānī" refers to his Persian birthplace, while the epithet "al-Baghdādī" reflects his long residence in the Abbasid capital (Chabbi 2009).

Al-Jīlānī's reputation as *ghawth al-aʿẓam* ("the greatest spiritual succor") made him a pivotal figure in both medieval and Ottoman Ṣūfī devotion. His sanctity, remembered in hagiographical collections and perpetuated through the *Qādiriyya silsila*, symbolized both the universality and the genealogical rootedness of Ṣūfī authority. As Trimingham and Voll (1998, 32) observe, the order associated with his name came to transcend its local Persian-Baghdadi origins, spreading across the Islamic world and shaping the devotional life of countless communities.

Al-ʿAlamī's references to visionary encounters with *al-Jīlānī* situate him within a transregional network of authority, connecting Jerusalem to Baghdad through the spiritual imagination. These encounters parallel accounts in other hagiographical works, such as the *Manaqib al-Jīlānī*, where posthumous visions of al-Jīlānī validated disciples' sanctity across

time and space (Knysh 202–3). By invoking al-Jīlānī, al-ʿAlamī places his own experiences within a framework of miraculous transmission recognized far beyond Palestine.

Equally significant are the *Shādhilī* masters. The *Shādhiliyya*, founded in North Africa by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (b. near Ceuta in 1196, d. 1258), had by the Ottoman period established strong roots in Syria and Palestine (Geoffroy 1995, 187–90). A Sharif of noble descent, al-Shādhilī traced his patrilineal lineage to the Arab Hāshimite tribe through the Idrīsids, while his maternal line connected him to the royal Berber Ghomara (Fage and Oliver 1977, 399–400; Ibn ʿAbbād and Renard 1986, 34). This dual heritage symbolically united Arab prophetic genealogy with Berber local authority, enhancing his charisma in both Maghribī and Mashriqī contexts.

Trained as a Mālikī jurist, al-Shādhilī was renowned from his youth for his mastery of legal debate and his capacity to engage with the religious scholars of his time (Douglas 1993, 3). Torn in his early years between the solitary asceticism of the wilderness and life among scholars, he ultimately pursued a path that combined erudition with accessible guidance. His studies in Fez and his eventual move to Alexandria in 1244 (Farah 1994, 231) established him as a transregional figure, bridging Maghribī and Egyptian intellectual worlds.

Al-ʿAlamī's encounters with Shādhilī teachers in Damascus and Jerusalem thus reflect more than personal discipleship: they situate him within an order whose founder embodied both genealogy and knowledge as sources of sanctity. His emphasis on *ijāzāt*—formal licenses granting permission to transmit texts or teachings (Vajda, Goldziher, and Bonebakker 2012)— and *khirqas* demonstrates how authority was transmitted through ritual initiation, textual record, and genealogical continuity. The *khirqah* (lit. "rag") was traditionally a patched woolen robe bestowed by a Ṣūfī master upon a novice, symbolizing both sincerity and the vow of *faqr* (poverty) and devotion to God. Its bestowal, often after years of discipline, marked entry into the Ṣūfī path and could take different forms, such as the *khirqat al-irādah* ("robe of will"), reserved for those fully committed to the rigors of discipleship, or the *khirqat al-tabarruk* ("robe of benediction"), granted as a token of potential blessing (Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Khirqah"). While some Ṣūfīs downplayed its universal necessity, stressing the seeker's inner flame (*ḥarqah*) as the true sign of devotion, the robe nonetheless carried deep symbolic and ritual significance. In this sense, *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* functions not only as autobiography but also as a *thabat*—a register of chains of authorization—that testifies to al-ʿAlamī's embeddedness in the Shādhilī lineage, itself rooted in the authority of a saint whose Arab-Idrīsid and Berber origins symbolized both universality and locality in the Ṣūfī imagination.

What makes al-ʿAlamī's narrative distinctive, however, is his persistent self-designation as *al-faqīr* ("the poor one") and his narration in the third person. At first glance, these rhetorical choices seem to belittle the author, reducing him to a humble servant effaced before God. Still, in the literary and spiritual economy of Ṣūfism, humility is itself a marker of sanctity (Ernst 122–23; Knysh 142–45). By calling himself *al-faqīr*, al-ʿAlamī performs the self-effacement expected of a saintly figure, even as he records visionary encounters in which eminent saints and shaykhs treat him as an equal or grant him special recognition. The paradox is striking: humility protects him from charges of arrogance, but it simultaneously magnifies his importance, since only a spiritually significant figure would be addressed in this manner by masters such as al-Jīlānī.

In addition, al-ʿAlamī names local Jerusalemite shaykhs absent from broader Ottoman hagiographies, yet integral to the living spiritual fabric of the city. The manuscript's genealogical note and his accounts of shrine visits underscore the role of these local figures in sustaining Jerusalem's sacred topography. Such inclusions reveal that his authority was validated through transregional saints like al-Jīlānī as well as through proximity to Jerusalem's maqāmāt and the everyday Ṣūfī life of his family's *zāwiya*.

By weaving together references to both universal and local saints, and by deploying the humility trope of *al-faqīr*, al-ʿAlamī constructs a layered spiritual genealogy. He is at once the effaced servant, the disciple in an unbroken chain of Shādhilī initiations, and the visionary who participates in the enduring charisma of al-Jīlānī. The rhetorical power of this catalogue lies in its hybridity: it affirms his Palestinian rootedness while simultaneously inscribing him within the universal networks of Ottoman Ṣūfism. And despite the weight of the figures who appear in his narrative, al-ʿAlamī himself has not been accorded due recognition in recorded biographical dictionaries or in modern scholarship. Unlike al-Shaʿrānī in Cairo, al-Nābulusī in Damascus, or Ibn ʿAjība in Morocco—figures whose autobiographies circulated widely and received critical attention—al-ʿAlamī's testimony remained confined to a single manuscript in family custody. This relative obscurity underscores both the fragility of Palestinian Ṣūfī textual culture and the importance of recovering voices like his for a fuller understanding of Ottoman-era spirituality.

Inner and Outer Journeys: Al-ʿAlamī and Al-Ayyāshī in Comparison

The seventeenth century produced two strikingly different models of travel writing in the Islamic world: the inner, visionary journeys of Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-ʿAlamī and the outward, observational travelogue of the Moroccan scholar ʿAbd Allāh al-Ayyāshī (d. 1679). While both works map sacred geographies, they diverge in form, function, and circulation, illustrating two complementary modes of narrating authority and sanctity.

Al-ʿAlamī's *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* is, at its core, a record of spiritual apprenticeship conveyed through visions, dreams, and encounters with saints. His "travels" often unfold within the imaginal realm, where the authority of figures such as ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī or the Shādhilī masters is mediated through dream visitations or mystical recognitions. This inward orientation reflects the Ṣūfī conception of *safar* as ontological and ethical journeying, where physical movement is secondary to the transformation of the soul (Assadi, "Ṣūfī Travel," 3–4). In this sense, al-ʿAlamī's narrative aligns with the model of the Prophet's *Miʿrāj*, where ascent is at once geographic and existential, a passage through stages of nearness to God (Assadi, "Ṣūfī Travel," 2–3).

By contrast, al-Ayyāshī's *Riḥla*, widely copied and circulated in North Africa and the Levant, embodies the outward mode of sacred travel. His journeys from Morocco to Mecca, Jerusalem, and Damascus are described in meticulous detail, with attention to routes, landscapes, and encounters with scholars. In Jerusalem, for example, al-Ayyāshī carefully recorded his visits to shrines and his encounters with local ʿulamāʾ, embedding his experience in a broader scholarly network that spanned from the Maghrib to the Mashriq . Where al-ʿAlamī frames his sanctity through humility (*faqr*) and visionary recognition, al-Ayyāshī constructs authority through networks of *ḥadīth* transmission, scholarly meetings, and descriptions of physical sacred sites. His narrative thus functions as a social document as much as a spiritual

one, establishing his role as a transmitter of knowledge and a participant in the scholarly ecumene of the seventeenth-century Islamic world.

Circulation further highlights their divergence. Al-Ayyāshī's *Riḥla* was copied, read, and cited across the Maghrib and the Mashriq, integrating him into a canon of Muslim travel literature. Al-ʿAlamī's *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq*, by contrast, remained confined to a single manuscript preserved within the al-Asʿadiyya zāwiya in Jerusalem. This confinement underscores the fragility of Palestinian Ṣūfī textual culture: the inward journey of one Jerusalemite shaykh remained largely invisible to the broader scholarly world, even as his Moroccan contemporary achieved renown through the dissemination of his travels.

Nevertheless, placing these two figures side by side reveals that both embodied the Ṣūfī ethos of *safar*. As Ibn ʿArabī and Abū Madyan taught, the outer journey mirrors the inner path: movement across lands corresponds to movement through the soul's stations (*maqāmāt*) (Addas 1993, 120–45). Al-Ayyāshī's *Riḥla* reflects the social and communal dimension of travel, while al-ʿAlamī's text reflects its imaginal and inward counterpart. Together, they illustrate that in early modern Islam, sanctity was narrated both by walking the earth and by ascending inwardly through visions.

Manuscript Culture and Transmission

The survival of *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* depends on a single known manuscript, copied by the author's descendant, Muḥammad Ṭāhir b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAlamī. This sole witness is preserved in the context of the family's custodianship of the al-Asʿadiyya zāwiya on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. Codicologically, the manuscript is written on laid paper, with visible chainlines and occasional watermarks suggestive of late Ottoman manufacture in the Levant. The script is a neat *naskh*, characterized by careful vocalization of Qurʾānic citations and partial vocalization of the main prose. Black ink forms the bulk of the text, with rubrication in red ink highlighting Qurʾānic verses, ḥadīth citations, and saintly names (Déroche 91–95; Gacek 63–65).

Despite its overall legibility, the manuscript displays the characteristic traces of single-copy transmission. Errors of haplography (omission of repeated words), dittography (unintended duplication), and anticipatory insertions occur sporadically. At times, overwritten or smudged words reflect the scribe's hesitation or correction, while rubrication occasionally obscures diacritics. In such cases, context is essential for deciphering meaning, and the apparatus criticus records these variants in the critical edition (Beit-Arié 22–23; Bloom 55–58).

The colophon is of particular importance. In addition to naming Muḥammad Ṭāhir as the copyist, it situates him as a resident of the al-Asʿadiyya *zāwiya*, where the author himself was buried. It also preserves a genealogical note tracing the family's lineage back to the Moroccan saint ʿAbd al-Salām b. Mashīsh, underscoring the interplay between hereditary and initiatic forms of authority (Geoffroy 183–85; Cohen 64–65). Such colophons were at once technical closures and declarations of spiritual continuity, binding the act of copying to the preservation of sanctity across generations.

This continuity highlights the role of hereditary custodianship in Ottoman Jerusalem. Families such as the al-ʿAlamīs maintained *zāwiya*s functioning as devotional spaces while also preserving texts, genealogies, and memory as archival repositories. The preservation of *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* within the al-ʿAlamī family demonstrates how local religious elites ensured

the survival of spiritual heritage by embedding it within familial and institutional frameworks (Le Gall 97–99; Pedersen 51–52). In this sense, the manuscript is not simply a textual artifact but part of a living archive in which devotion, memory, and authority intersected.

The singularity of this copy also points to the fragility of Palestinian Ṣūfī textual culture. The absence of additional witnesses suggests that the work did not circulate widely beyond the family's custodianship. Nevertheless, its preservation within a hereditary *zāwiya* ensured that, even in isolation, the text remained a functional component of Jerusalem's Ṣūfī landscape. In recovering this manuscript, scholars gain insight into how early modern Palestinian Ṣūfī voices were sustained, transmitted, and remembered through the intertwining of textual practices and family lineage.

Conclusion

The case of Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-ʿAlamī and his *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* reveals how spiritual authority in seventeenth-century Jerusalem was narrated, preserved, and transmitted through a careful interplay of humility, lineage, and manuscript culture. Rooted in the sacred geography of the city—its zāwiyas, shrines, and saints—al-ʿAlamī's text situates Jerusalem as both a locus of lived devotion and a node in broader Ottoman networks stretching from Damascus and Sidon to Mecca and the Maghrib. His persistent self-designation as *al-faqīr*, his catalogues of initiations and *ijāzāt*, and his visionary encounters with both local and transregional saints demonstrate how sanctity was simultaneously local and universal, inscribed in the fabric of Jerusalem while resonating across the Islamic world.

At the same time, the manuscript's preservation in a single copy, transcribed by his descendant Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-ʿAlamī, underscores the precariousness of Palestinian Ṣūfī textual culture. The colophon's genealogical note linking the family to ʿAbd al-Salām b. Mashīsh highlights the role of hereditary custodianship in safeguarding memory and transmitting authority across generations. In this way, the manuscript is not simply a textual artifact but a living archive in which devotion, genealogy, and institutional continuity intersect.

Placed alongside contemporaries such as ʿAbd Allāh al-Ayyāshī in Morocco, al-Shaʿrānī in Cairo, and al-Nābulusī in Damascus, al-ʿAlamī's work demonstrates the diversity of early modern Ṣūfī self-writing. Whereas their texts circulated widely and entered the canon of Islamic letters, his remained confined to a family lodge in Jerusalem. Yet this very limitation gives his work its distinctive value: it preserves a Palestinian voice within a literary field where such voices have too often been muted or lost.

Recovering *Maʿālim al-Taṣdīq* thus contributes in three key ways: first, by restoring a neglected Palestinian Ṣūfī voice to the historiography of Islamic mysticism; second, by extending the geography of Ṣūfī autobiography to include Jerusalem as a site of mystical self-writing alongside Cairo, Damascus, and Morocco; and third, by demonstrating how manuscript culture itself functioned as a form of spiritual authority in Ottoman Palestine. More broadly, the text underscores that the narration of authority in Islam was articulated not only through widely diffused works but also through fragile manuscripts preserved by families who saw themselves as custodians of sanctity and memory.

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