On the Material and Social Conditions of Khalwa in Medieval Sufism

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Fig. 1 Courtyard of the *khānqāh* of the Mamluk sultan Baybars al-Jāshankīr (r. 1309-1310) in Cairo. Note the *khalwa* cells with wood doors that face the courtyard on the ground floor. Above the cells are living quarters for Sufis who lived in the khānqāh.

Eyes Burning Like Embers

1 Egyptian Sufis of the tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries recorded several extraordinary stories about a Kurdish émigré to Cairo, a Sufi master called Yūsuf al-Kūrānī (d. 768/1367). Al-Kūrānī was famous for, among other things, his practice of *khalwa*: self-isolation, typically in a small cell, in order to focus on pious devotions. Sufi biographers recount how when al-Kūrānī would emerge from khalwa he was so powerful that his eyes, "burning like embers," bestowed miraculous power and authority on other people just by looking at them. On two separate occasions his glance happened to fall upon a dog. So powerful was his gaze that in each case the local people and other canines sought the dogs out, followed them around, and mourned them when they died. In one case, the dogs developed a small shrine cult around the dog saint's tomb.[1] On one hand, these stories are clearly about the unique power and authority of al-Kūrānī as a Sufi master and his skill as a teacher. Indeed, his biographers remember him chiefly for his popular and effective training regimen for novices, a reputation supported by

the number of texts he wrote devoted to explicating in clear and plain language both the practical and theoretical aspects of his approach to Sufism.[2] On the other hand, these stories underscore the unique and powerful effects of the practice of khalwa. They demonstrate what happens to Sufis when they are properly trained, prepared, and then exposed for extended periods of time to the presence and power of the divine reality, *al-Ḥaqq* (The Real). Al-Kūrānī's powerful gaze was produced by a combination of his own training regimen, his physical and mental discipline, the material conditions of the cell, proximity to divine power, and the expectations of his students. Furthermore, al-Kūrānī's time in khalwa spent communing with The Real not only transformed him, intensifying and focusing his already potent powers, but in so doing transformed the material and social relations of those around him as well. In this particular case, that transformation is apparent in his flaming eyes, in his powerful gaze, and in the fact that a mere inadvertent glance could completely reconfigure the social order, even among canines.[3]

2   The practice of khalwa is rooted in the late antique matrix of ascetic Christianity. But by the seventh/thirteenth century, Sufis had developed it into a distinctly Islamic practice that was ubiquitous across the medieval Islamic world. Muslim authors (as well as some Jews) produced a sizable body of literature devoted to explicating its function in both practical and theoretical terms.[4] It is clear from these texts that khalwa consists of a demanding and difficult array of conceptions and practices that required a great deal of time, particular material and social conditions, and intense preparation and discipline. The latter were critical because khalwa was fantastically dangerous. The Andalusian Sufi Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) cautioned that one who undertakes khalwa "must be courageous and brave, not weak or cowardly" because of the devastating psychological and physical harms that may befall the unprepared practitioner.[5] These dangers stemmed largely from the fact that khalwa left the mind particularly susceptible to the influence of passing thoughts (*khawāṭir*), the source of which were believed to be either divine or satanic, angelic or demonic. But other negative effects quickly rippled out beyond the psychological. The Central Asian Sufi master Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 618/1221), wrote of a man who entered khalwa without proper guidance and quickly went mad; he became an unbeliever, cursed his mother, and ate his own feces.[6] One of Kubrā's students, Najm al-Dīn Dāya Rāzī (d. 654/1256), warned that a devotee in khalwa must be absolutely committed to his *shaykh* and to following his precise guidance. If not, Satan will appear to that devotee in the form of his *shaykh* and obliterate his confidence, mental stability, and physical ability to remain in the cell. However, when one is absolutely committed to one's master (by having "tied his heart to the shaykh"), the disciple will be protected by the promise of the prophet Muhammad when he said, "One who sees me in a dream, has seen me. Satan cannot take my form."[7] So well-known and harrowing were these dangers that they even turn up in the encyclopedic treatise on Mālikī law and popular practice in Egypt by Ibn al-Ḥājj (d. 737/1336), who writes at great length about the dangers of entering khalwa unprepared and without the guidance of a qualified teacher.[8] Ultimately, however, and despite all these risks, the rewards were well worth the effort. Only khalwa could produce such extended proximity to the divine Real, producing new insights about reality, inculcating new forms of knowledge, transmuting the Sufi's body, and allowing

him to live amidst the distractions of society without deleterious effect. There are so many wondrous benefits associated with khalwa that the Egyptian Sufi ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī (d. 973/1565) devoted an entire book to recounting in great detail all the distinct forms of knowledge, esoteric and exoteric, God bestows upon the practitioner of khalwa.[9] These texts also make clear that the psychological and spiritual benefits of khalwa are inseparable from the embodied practice and its material and social contexts. Rather than producing disembodied minds, stripped of corporeality and social consciousness, entering khalwa reconfigured the body and mind, opening up an entirely new sensorium and providing access to unseen realms. Rather than shutting off the senses, this reconfigured self was able to experience vivid sensory inputs—sounds, smells, lights, things, persons, animals. These phenomena were not psychic ephemera, symbolic representations, or projections of interior states. A khalwa cell was a vibrantly material place in which Sufis interacted with and produced affects in all manner of human and non-human things. Likewise, and even more importantly, all those vibrant things interacted with and produced noticeable and lasting affects in Sufis. Al-Kūrānī's burning eyes are not merely symbolic. Nor are they simply charismatic proofs of his ascetic abilities or representations of his spiritual power. Al-Kūrānī's eyes burned because the things he encountered in khalwa changed them and caused them to burn, an effect that persisted even after he left the cell, at least for a time. Khalwa was not simply being alone in a small room for a while. It was a process in which elements corporeal, material, spiritual, imaginal, and social were all entangled together, producing uniquely powerful affects in those who entangled themselves. A thorough description of the medieval practice of khalwa must account for all these elements—human, spiritual, material, and social—the ways they interact and the affects they produced.

3 This article offers one possible approach to theorizing the heterogenous elements of khalwa coherently by insisting that we take the material and the social as seriously as we do the human and the spiritual. My focus is on a number of Arabic treatises on khalwa most of which were written in the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries. Some of these texts are explicitly about khalwa, like *Risāla fī l-khalwa* (Treatise on Khalwa) by Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 618/1221) and *al-Khalwa al-muṭlaqa* (The Ultimate Khalwa) by Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), while others treat khalwa as part of a larger exposition about Sufi devotions, like *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif* (The Gifts of Gnosis) by Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), *Risālat al-anwār* (Treatise of Lights) by Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Manārat al-sāʾirīn* (The Lighthouse for Travelers), by Najm al-Dīn Dāya Rāzī (d .654/1256), and *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ* (The Key to Happiness) by Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309). Among the latter I draw heavily on one text in particular: *al-Waḥīd fī sulūk ahl al-tawḥīd* (The Unique Guide to the Comportment of the Sufis) by the Upper-Egyptian Sufi Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī (d. 708/1308). Ibn Nūḥ's *al-Waḥīd* is a free-wheeling and wide-ranging text on Sufism in Upper Egypt during the late Ayyubid and early Mamluk period.[10] The text combines elements of the Sufi manual, doctrinal treatise, memoir, biographical dictionary, and hagiography in service of a detailed picture of the history, scope, and variety of Sufism in Mamluk Upper Egypt. In the course of his discussion, Ibn Nūḥ often includes detailed narratives and descriptions of various Sufi practices that illustrate his broader themes. Elaborate and fascinating stories involving khalwa occur frequently, a few of which I will relate here with an eye

for what these stories might reveal about the material and social contexts of its practice. At the same time, I aim to formulate an approach to studying medieval Sufi texts that is informed by recent scholarship on religion and materiality. But I want to stress that what follows is not an attempt at a comprehensive explanation of khalwa. There are hundreds of Sufi texts from across the Muslim world which deal with khalwa in some way, revealing a wide variety of practices, attitudes, and spaces. It would be folly to attempt any general accounting of or definitive approach to khalwa, for, as Scott Kugle has shown, Sufis have theorized the relationship between the body, the self, and the social in a variety of complex ways, expressed in a variety of different media.[11] Rather, my remarks here are preliminary and meant to be suggestive, the result of my narrow reading in the particular medieval Sufi milieu in which Ibn Nūḥ, whose *al-Waḥīd* first drew my attention to the critical social and material dimensions of khalwa, participated. My references to several other well-known texts on Sufi khalwa thus serve as reference points that have helped to explicate this milieu. Many of these texts were written prior to Ibn Nūḥ's treatise and provide a solid grounding in the Sufi tradition he inherited and was familiar with. Most of these are normative texts containing prescriptive accounts of khalwa. Ibn Nūḥ's accounts, while clearly indebted to this normative tradition, are much more descriptive in nature and thus offer an interesting window onto the practices surrounding khalwa. Occasionally I refer to texts written after Ibn Nūḥ's demise when they elucidate a particularly ambiguous idea within the Sufi tradition to which Ibn Nūḥ contributed.

4 Readers should know that there are other important Sufi traditions of khalwa that fall outside of the purview of this article. For example, I do not discuss texts of the Khalwatī order, which is so named for the centrality of khalwa, but whose formation dates to a much later period.[12] Nor do I discuss the Naqshbandī principle of *khalvat dar anjuman*, retreat in the midst of society, which is rooted in a different set of assumptions about the nature of the Sufi path and constitutes a Sufi milieu Ibn Nūḥ would have been unfamiliar with.[13] What follows, then, is meant to be suggestive rather than exhaustive of the Sufi tradition as a whole. It is meant to draw attention to elements of khalwa which are often ignored in its explication as a spiritual retreat in scholarly writing on Sufism.

5 Historians of Sufism have tended overwhelmingly to focus on the personal or spiritual function of khalwa rather than its material or social contexts.[14] The following definition of khalwa is fairly representative of the scholarship: "a method of withdrawal or isolation from the world for mystical purposes."[15] Whether deliberately or not, these studies rely on a Weberian framework of mystical practice. They cast khalwa as a "flight from the world" in which Sufis use khalwa as means to separate themselves from society and to subdue and subjugate the body and ego-self (*al-nafs*) in order to achieve "a subjective condition of a distinct kind."[16] Theorized in this way, khalwa would seem to be the mystical technique *par excellence* for negating both the body and the world, leaving only the heart, the reflective site of *maʿrifa* (or gnosis), and producing a purely intellectual experience. However, such descriptions are contingent upon a Cartesian mind-body dualism that betrays a Christian-inflected bias against the body that Sufis would have found baffling.[17] Sufis certainly developed complex techniques to exercise control over their unruly physical selves, but not to negate them. In his discussion of khalwa, for example, Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī, explicitly links

excessive mortification of the body with Christians and Buddhists.[18] Rather than a mystical technique, it is perhaps more helpful to think about khalwa in terms of the Arabic concept of *zuhd,* which is not the asceticism of the spiritual athlete, but "rather a code of behavior that should be followed by any pious Muslim."[19] This approach to the body stands in stark contrast to the Christian ascetic heroes of the late antique Roman world. Narratives of these ascetics, drawing heavily on earlier martyrological narratives, valorized "in pornographic detail" the destruction, violation, and rupture of the body.[20] Zuhd, by contrast, is an ethical disposition of detachment. It is an attitude of indifference to worldly trappings, not a categorical rejection of them.[21] In other words, a *zāhid* (one who practices zuhd) could be wealthy or impoverished so long as they care nothing for wealth or poverty. This is precisely the sentiment we find in most descriptions of khalwa. In early Sufi literature, we find Sufis explicitly prioritizing an ethic of detachment over bodily mortification: Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072-3) describes khalwa as a separation of character traits, good from bad, and not the separation or withdrawal of the body from society, citing a Sufi who charged his companions to "wear with people what they wear and eat what they eat, but separate yourself from them in your heart of hearts."[22] The fundamental issue at stake in these accounts is that the self, a complex whole comprised of heterogenous parts—primarily the body, soul, and ego—is simply not properly organized, oriented, and disciplined. The problem lies not in the parts themselves, but that they are collectively disorganized, undisciplined, and in disharmony with the environment. These Sufis inhabit what Talal Asad has called "untaught bodies."[23] The techniques involved in Sufi devotional exercises, including khalwa, were thus designed to teach those bodies some discipline. By entering khalwa and following the specific devotional instructions of his shaykh, a Sufi could reconstitute the self in such a way that it will function correctly, capable of interfacing directly with the realm of the unseen (*al-ghayb*), the hidden world beyond the senses, and ultimately gain access to the divine presence itself.[24] In other words, a human being cannot access that realm of the unseen without a body and the material and social conditions required to discipline it. As Kugle puts it, for Sufis "[t]he body is a limitation that allows us to move beyond limitations."[25] But, and this is critical to my understanding of khalwa, these useful limitations are inseparable from the material and social conditions in which they exist. The body of the Sufi, the material facts of the cell, and the guidance and expectations of other human beings are all irreducible and irreplaceable components of khalwa; we must account for all of them equally and holistically.

6 To get a better sense of what I mean here, a brief examination of the word khalwa is in order. The word itself covers wide semantic ground, referring to the physical cell, to the devotional practice that took place therein, and to the social relationships that governed it all. In other words, khalwa is both a process and an entanglement of multiple elements. Describing khalwa this way has the advantage of not requiring us to pry these semantic fields apart, for medieval Islamic sources do not. In Arabic texts a typical locution for the practice is *al-shaykh adkhala al-murīd fī l-khalwa*, literally "the master placed the novice into khalwa," a phrase that elegantly encompasses all these elements: the material space itself, the corporal practice within the cell, and the social relationship of master-disciple that governed the entire enterprise. It was a

physical space, constructed of specific materials in a precise way, wherein the body, its components, and the environment were reconfigured into a properly functioning unit. But khalwa was much more than a room with a body in it. It was a space rendered extraordinarily powerful by socially constructed norms and expectations, and above all by the presence of The Real. It is significant that many Sufi authors insisted that the cell be located within a populated house; it was in dialogue with the master in the context of the collective expectations of fellow Sufis that rendered the experience intelligible for the adept. The process of khalwa entailed the formation of new selves which were reconstituted within new relationships to society—both narrowly construed as the society of local Sufis, and broadly construed as society outside the walls of the hospice.[26]

7   In order to understand the complexity of Sufi khalwa, both holistically and historically, as the totality of its material, social, and human components, we must get away from the notion that Sufism is best understood as a form of mysticism, a framework that is too often rooted in what Elizabeth Spelman describes as "psychophilic somatophobia."[27] Studies of Sufism *qua* mysticism are underwritten by a mind-body dualism that privileges belief over practice, the spiritual over the physical, and the individual over the social. In certain comparative contexts, this analytical framework makes sense. Indeed, my argument is not that Sufism is *not* mysticism but rather that the kinds of questions such a framing elicits are not well suited to understanding khalwa. Centering questions about the corporality, materiality, and sociality of khalwa promises to provide a much clearer idea of what the practice involved and how it functioned within Sufi praxis more broadly. There are several trends in recent scholarship on religion that may be useful in that respect. Based in part on a dissatisfaction with the constructivism inherent in the linguistic turn in religious studies, there has been a marked shift towards the material.[28] The last twenty years have seen a growing body of scholarship pushing historians and scholars of religion to include material culture and the body in their analyses.[29] Sonia Hazard has described this scholarship as "the material turn" in religious studies, comprised of several distinct lines of inquiry and methodologies.[30] Likewise, Thomas Tweed has described this larger shift from belief to practice, and especially the development of the concept of "lived religion," as "the quotidian turn" in religious studies.[31] However, as effective and salutary as this scholarship is, for my purposes it is hamstrung by an anthropocentric and instrumentalist approach to material culture that marks a sharp distinction between the human and non-human. Drawing on the work of Jeremy Stolow, Hazard argues that the material turn (and, I would add, the quotidian turn) is predicated on "the notion . . . that technologies serve as pliant tools to better fulfill prior religious intentions. . . . [This instrumentalism] is rooted in a false dichotomy in which religion is equated with human agency on the one hand, and technology with inert materiality on the other."[32] At the same time, Severin Fowles wonders if in the turn toward things "we have over-privileged a crude notion of presence linked to physicality and tangibility, as if the only meaningful relations were those between entities that can be seen, smelt or felt."[33] Fowles wants to take "absent objects" seriously, by which he means very specifically material objects that are not there (like a lost set of keys, or the absence of people on a normally busy street).

8   I would add that much of the material/quotidian turn in religious studies is organized around an incoherent object of study. The history of religion, as category and field,

is the history of its interiorization, privatization, and spiritualization, all predicated on a valorization of the primacy of belief over practice. In the pantheon of early comparativists of religion, William Robertson Smith (d. 1894) is the only scholar I am aware of who wrote about religion (or at least one form of religion) primarily in terms of ritual and practice and not belief: "Ritual and practical usage were, strictly speaking, the sum total of ancient religions."[34] Smith's insistence on this point stands in stark contrast to the colonial anthropologists and sociologists of religion in the Anglophone and Francophone world and their near singular focus on animism.[35] It is not that early scholars of religion simply ignored the material or the quotidian. They invented and constructed the category of religion itself as one predicated on the primacy of belief in spiritual beings; material or social concerns like the totem or the fetish were secondary effects of that bedrock belief. So, there is an inherent tension involved in the analytical construction of concepts like "lived religion," "everyday religion," or "material religion," wherein the foundational *a priori* disciplinary distinction between sacred/profane that locates and authorizes the object of religion is erased by paradoxically locating the sacred within the profane. This paradox raises another question: What, exactly, are we studying?

9   Is the object of our inquiry material religion or religion, studied materially? This distinction is subtle, but critical because the former assumes a stable and identifiable phenomenon. The latter, by contrast, is merely one approach to religion among many. In other words, there is a tendency in much of the work on material religion to assume and posit that the material analysis is itself only the product of a *particular* data set: material religion, which would appear to be a subset, perhaps, of material culture (chairs, books, houses = pews, gospels, synagogues). From this perspective, it would appear that the scholars of material religion have discovered a new, hitherto overlooked, stable object to study; the trick is simply to find it and describe it. But "material religion" is not analogous to "material culture," at least not as typically construed, because the objects of analysis and their respective conceptual apparatuses are not the same (just as materiality and material culture are not the same).[36] Material culture generally refers to the objects humans make, the meanings they ascribe to them, the ways they interact with them, and so on. Scholarship on material religion does all these things as well, of course. But it does so on the back of a kind of *sui generis* materiality that exists uniquely *qua* religious artifact *before* scholars interact with it.

10 These are the two traps I would like to avoid in my description of khalwa: an *a priori* categorical distinction between the "material Islam" of the cell and the (non-material?) Islam of the Sufi; and an anthropocentric instrumentalism that amplifies that distinction by subordinating the socio-material elements of khalwa to its psycho-spiritual effects. One means to avoid these traps can be found in the body of scholarship generally described as the new materialism. While there are several distinct trajectories within this scholarship, "the general consensus seems to be that new materialism embraces a non-anthropocentric realism grounded in a shift from epistemology to ontology and the recognition of matter's intrinsic activity."[37] In other words, matter has a vitality and agency that exists independently of human beings. Whether one is looking at stars, rocks, elbows, street trash, baptism, or complex societies, the new materialism insists that our knowledge about a phenomenon is provisional and incomplete, our experience

of it partial and limited, unless we accept and account for the vitality and agency of all those things, human and nonhuman, that make it what it is.[38] I take an expansive definition of non-human agents to include all manner of things which humans can become entangled with, from rugs, rocks, and snakes to cemeteries, voices, and *jinn*.[39] But there is more! Discursive agents like stories and *dhikr* formulas also possess a vitality and the power to elicit affects in other agents.[40] Likewise, we can think about the agency of institutions, or "social facts," which have an existence apart from any individual person while possessing the ability to shape human behaviors and non-human processes.[41] I would suggest, therefore (borrowing language from Jane Bennett) that all these non-human agents are "vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics."[42]

11   But medieval khalwa was not simply a jumble of independent and free-wheeling human and non-human elements. As Karen Barad argues: "Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating."[43] Barad's philosophy of agential realism seeks to understand the role of "human *and* nonhuman, material *and* discursive, and natural *and* cultural factors in scientific and other social-material practices."[44] I propose, then, that we think about khalwa as an entanglement, a process of engagement between multiple agents that has profound effects for all parties involved. From one perspective, that of the Sufi undergoing khalwa, this entanglement is precisely the process of disciplining the self in order to produce yet more entanglements with the world of the unseen. Unlike the Deleuzian concept of assemblage, which similarly rejects a distinction between the human and the non-human, Barad's entanglement places an ethical demand on the scholar herself as she becomes entangled in turn.[45] Thus, not only do I argue that the entanglements of khalwa necessarily entailed an ethical response from the Sufi—described below as the reintegration into society through new entanglements with the social world—but I would also suggest reading these texts elicits an ethical response from the one entangled in these stories, namely me. Indeed, reading and engaging these narratives has had a profound effect on my understanding of the agential and vibrant nature of all matter and the implications of living in a world of human and non-human agents. There is much more that could be said here. But my goal is not a defense of new materialism or an explanation of agential realism, both of which can be found elsewhere.[46] My goal is primarily to articulate the conceptual framework that emerged from my own entanglements with new materialist ontologies and medieval Sufi khalwa texts. In what follows I flesh out these entanglements using examples from Ibn Nūḥ and other Sufi authors, organized heuristically into three broad categories of agents with which a Sufi in khalwa was entangled: the material, the Real, and the social. But I have a secondary goal as well, to introduce some of these ideas into Sufi studies more broadly. This is not to say that Sufi studies are not already engaged with some of these ideas. As Sonia Hazard has noted, many fields have been engaged with and productive of many of the ideas associated with the new materialisms without being a product of this particular academic genealogy.[47] For example, Shahzad Bashir's *Sufi Bodies* is not explicitly a work of new materialist scholarship. But his work would nevertheless be at home within any number of new materialist discourses.[48] Others are more directly engaged. Michael Muhammad Knight's *Muhammad's Body* takes up

the Deleuzian notion of assemblage to trace the multiple networks that produced the prophetic body in multiple ways.[49] And in his recent book, *Islam and the Devotional Object*, Richard McGregor brilliantly theorizes the ways that religious objects negotiate with and resist the creative ideas associated with them.[50] But in general the new materialist ideas I discuss here have yet to appear in studies of medieval Sufism. What follows will, I hope, introduce a wider audience to the utility and value of this important body of work.

The Material

12 In a section of his treatise devoted to the Sufi practice of dhikr (the mindful recitation of litanies), Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī describes how dhikr should be performed in the khalwa cell:

> And these cells are famous and well known. They should be just tall enough to stand up and just wide enough to sit down. They should not have any kind of window because a window will attract the eye's inclination for light and separation (*tafriqa*) occurs in the light. But there is unification (*jam'iya*) in darkness. And the entire purpose [of dhikr] is unification of the heart.[51]

This brief passage encapsulates how most Sufis in this milieu understood the basic purpose and function of khalwa: to eliminate all distractions and focus the mind and body on a singular goal. And while Ibn Nūḥ does not provide much detail about the cell itself we can deduce a great deal about the general conditions of physical spaces of khalwa from other sources. It is not always entirely clear what earlier Sufi authors meant by khalwa, other than that they often stress practicing devotions away from habituated areas. But with the institutionalization of Sufi thought and practice during the late-tenth and early-eleventh century, we see the standardization of the practice across a wide swath of territory.[52] The evidence suggests that the development of khalwa, as Ibn Nūḥ would have known it, does not predate the mid-twelfth century. For example, when Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) writes about khalwa he is still concerned with the earlier debates about the merits of isolation vs. companionship, arguing that an absolute preference for either one is a mistake.[53] Elsewhere, al-Ghazālī describes his own isolated devotions (*al-'uzla, al-khalwa*) that took place not in cells but within locked rooms in the Umayyad mosque in Damascus and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.[54] The earliest text in which it is absolutely clear that khalwa has become standardized as a distinct practice that involves retreating into a cell is in the writings of Abū Ḥafṣ al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234).[55] As Michel Chodkiewicz has shown, most everything that al-Suhrawardī describes here is scattered across earlier sources, but al-Suhrawardī was the first to systematically arrange it and provide concrete instructions.[56] After al-Suhrawardī there is a certain uniformity in the descriptions of the practice that indicate a high degree of institutionalization and underscores how important the physical space was for Sufi practitioners. The khalwa cell was a small room within the house of the master, or multiple cells within a larger hospice. Ibn al-'Arabī insists that while the space should be quiet, the cell itself should be located within a house full of people.[57] The cell was just tall enough to stand, just wide enough to sit, and just long enough to

prostrate in prayer. The only aperture was a lockable door. As Ibn Nūḥ stressed, there should be no windows because no light whatsoever should enter the cell.[58] The cells were constructed of brick or stone with a wooden door. The only sounds in the cell would be that of gently murmured chanting and breathing. In the early stages of research for this article I suspected the cell must have smelled a bit of unwashed human and sweaty laundry given how long the Sufi spent in there, but this was certainly not the case. The cells would have smelled of perfume or incense; as a place of dhikr, the cell would have been immaculately cleaned and perfumed prior to habitation and regularly thereafter.[59] Cleanliness, daily ablutions, and immaculately clean clothing were fundamental requirements for practitioners of khalwa.[60] Ibn al-ʿArabī suggests that those prone to lice should shave off every bit of their hair so as not to be distracted by all the creeping and crawling around.[61]

13   Contrary to what one might expect, the Sufis were very pragmatic about food, drink, and comfort while involved in khalwa. The object was to maintain a precisely neutral corporeal equilibrium. This equilibrium meant nourishment to keep the body alive, functioning well, and to prevent it from becoming a distraction. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā recommends that "nourishment should not be too much or too little, but just enough to keep the ego self (*nafs*) quiet."[62] Our authors insist that intake be precisely calibrated to each individual by the master (often framed in medical terms) so that one will neither be excessively hungry nor excessively full. Ibn al-ʿArabī is quite detailed on this point. He instructs his reader to prepare his own food in order to suit his own disposition (*mizāj*). If one does not know one's disposition, he should consult a doctor for a diagnosis and for the proper diet. The main rule is that one should eat "light food, which reproaches nature, is slow to digest, satiates, but does not require frequent trips to the bathroom."[63] In his discussion of food, al-Suhrawardī's focus is on paring down one's food intake to that which is *ḍarūra*, or "necessary." For some, such necessity may amount to eating nothing for days at a time, but he concedes that when it becomes a distraction it would be better to eat every day than attempt such feats of fasting.[64] Some of the authors outline a strictly vegetarian diet. Ibn al-ʿArabī counsels to "pay close attention to your nourishment, it should be something fatty but not from an animal."[65] Dāya Rāzī (d. 654/1256) also has a quite detailed discussion of the relationship between nourishment and the proper constitution (or lack thereof) of the body, going even into the difference between a carnivorous and herbivorous diet.[66] Ibn Nūḥ marvels at a man who undertook forty-day stretches of khalwa and ate only raisins.[67] Aḥmad al-Ṣayyād (d. 670/1271-2), an early Rifāʿī master, advises eating a very specific diet exactly twice a day: barley bread, sweet water, and almonds every morning and evening.[68] Sleep should be kept to a minimum, but one should not be too tired either. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā recommends that one only sleep when absolutely necessary.[69] Al-Suhrawardī suggests the same.[70] Aḥmad al-Ṣayyād, is more specific, noting that sleep should occur at night, for not less than two but not more than four hours.[71] The Kubrawī master ʿAzīz al-Dīn Nasafī, who lived in the seventh/thirteenth century, went so far as to articulate that the cell should be neither too hot nor too cold.[72]

14   As for the body itself, it should also be properly prepared and precisely arrayed within the space of the cell. There were a number of physical preparations that precede entry to the cell. Al-Suhrawardī encouraged a healthy preliminary regime of weeping, for

example.[73] The ideal comportment was to sit cross-legged, straight-backed, with hands on knees, facing Mecca. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā commends sitting cross-legged, although he does allow sitting on the heels or squatting if necessary.[74] ʿAziz al-Dīn Nasafī, describes several different bodily postures.[75] Most texts prescribe a series of vocal litanies (*adhkār*, *awrād*, etc.) that, over time, will become internalized, or "implanted in the heart," so that vocalization is no longer necessary.[76] Each particular master had his or her own idiosyncratic program of recitation. Al-Kūrānī describes the precise way in which the embodied practice of dhikr constituted the practical bridge connecting the realms of material existence and divine existence.[77] Nasafī, for example, advocated a fully embodied dhikr that involved striking the body with the fist; while this would be painful "at first," the practice would eventually become fully integrated and interiorized, and the pain would disappear.[78] Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāḥ al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309) explains how the different names of god produce specific emotional effects and healing benefits depending upon which name is chanted.[79] Ibn al-ʿArabī also describes different types of devotions within the cell and the different forms of enlightenment that will result from each type.[80] Al-Kūrānī has a similar discussion.[81] Al-Suhrawardī adds a temporal component as well, stressing that khalwa requires "structuring one's moments and disciplining the limbs away from forbidden activity."[82]

15 It should be clear at this point that the physical space of the cell acts in concert with all these other elements to structure and discipline a Sufi's body. It is not that a Sufi uses the space instrumentally, as some kind of simple technology, but that all these agents within and around the body are intra-acting together. A fascinating example of what I mean here is the description by ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī of a rope that helped him stay awake during khalwa:

> One of the things I worked out by myself, without the direction of a shaykh, was to attach a piece of rope to the ceiling of the khalwa cell and tie the other end around my neck while seated. It didn't reach the ground and thus prevented me from lying down. So, I would place [the rope] around my neck from the evening prayer until the morning prayer. I did this for years.[83]

A truly holistic account of khalwa, must pay attention to the ways these non-human agents participate alongside the human Sufi to produce very specific phenomenal results.[84]

16 The sources repeatedly stress the importance of following all the aforementioned requirements quite strictly. Every single element—the physical dimensions of the cell, the clothing worn, specific types of food and drink, the activities of the limbs and tongue, insects, and weather—they are all intra-acting and entangled elements of a phenomenal process in which the body of the Sufi is transformed (as are the other elements). Ibn Nūḥ provides us with one of the clearest descriptions of how this entanglement transforms the body in the process:

> This is the fastest way to enlightenment of the heart (*fatḥan li-l-qalb*) and proximity to the Lord (*qurban min al-rabb*), which is to say the *dhikr* aloud, continuously, so that the heart and tongue are united and the light of the heart rends the heavens and rends Satan. At that point the light of the heart will

strengthen and take over his dhikr. Then the dhikr of the tongue will weaken and the limbs will fill with light. The heart will be purified of anything else (*al-aghyār*), whisperings will be cut off, and the devil will not dwell in his courtyard. He will become receptive to divine onrushes and a polished mirror for manifestations and divine gnoses.[85]

As I noted at the beginning of this section, the goal of the material-physical practice of khalwa is to effect what Ibn Nūḥ calls *jamʿīyat al-qalb* (unification of the heart), a unification that would be fractured and disrupted by mundane sensory distractions (light, sound, body aches, temperature fluctuation, etc.).[86] The material constraints of the cell and its various components act on the body to facilitate a kind of centripetal bodily flow that creates a unified self. Ultimately, the intra-action of this careful orchestration and entanglement of space, place, time, body, and matter produces a newly articulated self, which is then capable of a new entanglement with the divine presence of The Real.

The Real

17 Ibn Nūḥ recounts an utterly fantastic tale of a wandering Sufi and his recently converted friend who encounter a group of Sufis on the road led by a mysterious master. They decide to follow the group back to the master's home for refreshments. There the Sufi falls into a kind of trance (*ghayba aw-bahta*) after seeing the beauty of a young servant boy and eating some marvelous apricots. The story is worth quoting at length:

> Suddenly [my friend] placed his hand on me and I noticed that everyone had finished eating. The shaykh said, 'Bring the Sufi newly arrived among you.' They took my hand as they might take the hand of one who has an audience with a king.
>
> When they had placed me in front of him, he said to me: Muhammad!
>
> I said: Yes?
>
> [He said]: The apricots pleased you! The young man pleased you!
>
> I replied: My lord, you are one of the spiers of hearts (*jawāsīs al-qulūb*)!
>
> The shaykh said to one of the Sufis: Take this plate of apricots, the young man, and this Sufi and place them all in this khalwa – and he pointed to a khalwa cell—and lock them in without the key.
>
> So, they placed me and the apricots and the young man in the cell and locked the door. No sooner had I sat down then the apricots had become snakes and were circling all around me. And the young man had turned into a pig and was baring its tusks as it turned to me. I was struck with indescribable fear, pain, and weeping. I pleaded for someone to help me, but none came. All the other Sufis uncovered their heads and began crying. But they knew better than to ask the *shaykh* to intercede.

> I continued in this condition until [my friend] threw himself against the door of the cell saying: 'Master I beg you in the name of God to take mercy on him, for he is the reason I became a Muslim and entered this noble [Sufi] path!'

This entreaty does the trick and the master releases our Sufi and asks him: "How was it in the cell with your beloveds?" Muhammad does not answer but simply asks permission to leave. "But," his friend objects, "where will you find another [master] like this? Or training like this?" To which poor Muhammad can only respond, "I am not able to handle his method."[87]

18   Severin Fowles writes that the goal of a materialist analysis should "be to draw the immaterial into the field of encounter and expose the ability of non-things no less than things, immateriality no less than materiality, and absence no less than presence to intrude upon human lives and stand, object-like, before perceiving subjects."[88] While taking seriously the presence of non-human agents is one of the hallmarks of the new materialism, there is also good precedent for this analytical stance from the sociology of Islam, Bryan Turner's discussion of Max Weber specifically. It is well known that Weber's *verstehende* sociology involved a two-part stance: first to interpret the precise ways in which actors themselves make sense of their motives, actions, and social relations; and second to place these emic interpretations into an etic/comparative explanatory framework. In other words, verstehende sociology depends upon the double move, from interpretation to explanation. However, Turner criticizes Weber on one hand for not following his own method when he wrote of the prophet Muhammad and Islam (he ignored Muslim interpretations). On the other hand he critiques Weberian sociology as fundamentally predicated on a definition of the social that "explicitly excludes the subjective behaviour of a solitary actor and the subjective behaviour of individuals or an individual to animals and to inanimate objects."[89] Turner's critique extends not only to Weber's exclusion of animals and objects, but also "interactional dilemmas which arise from their commitment to superhuman or supernatural actors, so too it precludes the analysis of social orientation to sacred objects or sacred places."[90] Following Fowles and Turner, in this section I ask what khalwa looks like if we take seriously the presence of such superhuman actors.

19   Ibn al-ʿArabī characterizes the nature of khalwa broadly as one's "innermost secret speaking with the Real [in a place] where there is no other thing or person but him." ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 730-6/1329-35) glosses this statement: "This is the reality of *khalwa* and its true meaning. As for its form, it is comprised of any regimen of piety that leads to this result."[91] The "innermost secret," of course, being precisely the reconstituted and centripetally interiorized self in khalwa. ʿAmmār al-Bidlīsī (d. between 590/1194 and 604/1207–8) contends that khalwa leads to "witnessing" (*mushāhada*), which is "the end of the stations,"[92] and then actually equates the station of "perfect/complete witnessing" (*al-mushāhada al-kāmila*) with divine disclosure: "sometimes [the devotee] is witnessed and sometimes he witnesses."[93] Najm al-Dīn Kubrā portrays this transformation as "closing off the paths of the [external] senses," which leads to "opening the senses of the heart."[94] In fact, the auditory and the visual were linked synesthetically for Kubrā and those who trained in the Kubrawī tradition.[95] Others describe this process as polishing the mirror of the heart to the point that it

becomes reflective of The Real.[96] But Kubrā, Ibn al-ʿArabī, and the others do not mean the elimination of the sensing body in favor of pure *cogito*, but a rearrangement of the self in such a way that it can ignore one kind of sensory data in order to accommodate another. To return to our hydraulic terms, we might say that most of the Sufis of this period theorized the self as a complex system of flows (physical, sensory, emotional, psychical) that functioned together to facilitate mundane social intercourse. What the Sufis describe in khalwa is, in effect, the employment of a technology to reconstitute these pathways and reroute these energies in ways that are both traditional and novel; khalwa is a means to perform the ambiguity of the self, "to reverse the flow of the body" as Gavin Flood has suggested in his discussion of asceticism.[97]

20 This new self, an entanglement of multiple elements reconstituted as an interiorized unity, will then have access to and intra-act with an entirely new realm of sensory input, a presence from the realm of the unseen. Some of this input was auditory. During one of his experiences in khalwa, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā was able to hear the devotions of the angels and noted that at a certain point they began speeding through their devotions as a child who fears his father.[98] A few pages later he writes of being able to communicate with his master al-Bidlīsī telepathically from the cell and hear his master's voice. Later, when Kubrā hears music during his devotions, al-Bidlīsī tells him it is a bad sign and to exit the khalwa or he will either go crazy or perhaps even die.[99] Al-Suhrawardī relates the story of a man in khalwa who intuits that his son is about to fall off a ship and drown, so he is able to project his voice from within the cell so that his son heard it and did not fall in.[100] Aḥmad al-Ṣayyād relates a story about Aḥmad al-Rifāʿī hearing a voice in the cell telling him that god will grant him three wishes.[101] There are many other such examples.

21 Other forms of input were explicitly visual. While al-Suhrawardī cautions that the purpose of khalwa is not to have visions, he nevertheless acknowledges that the sincere practice of khalwa and dhikr will result in a state in which certain forms and imaginings will appear that are revelatory.[102] Ibn al-ʿArabī claims that one will see wondrous things when practicing what he called *khalwat al-hudhud*, which involved crushing the hearts of hoopoe birds (*al-hudhud*) into a powder and eating it.[103] Similar to visions experienced in dreams, these visions also require the help of one's master to decipher. Indeed, ʿIzz al-Dīn al-Kāshānī for example, describes visions of the unseen that occur during khalwa as functionally similar to those seen in a dream; they may be true or false. At the same time, he differentiates these visions from the unveilings of the unseen realm experienced by a Sufi in khalwa who is fully awake and present; the latter are always true.[104]

22 Ibn Nūḥ tells of an Upper-Egyptian Sufi who, upon placing a disciple into khalwa, casually mentions "a reciting cat and lamb" whom he'll meet in the cell. The story continues in the Sufi's own words:

> So I entered the cell reciting *sūrat Yāsīn* [from the Qurʾān]. Suddenly a cat appeared, sat in front of me, and recited *Yāsīn* with me from its beginning to its end. I sat in a state of alarm because of it. On the second day I was reciting and performing *dhikr* and suddenly a lamb entered before me, placed its mouth upon

my mouth, and recited *Yāsīn* from its beginning to its end. And on the third day I left the door of the cell open so that if something appeared I could get out. But a huge serpent descended from the door and began to grow larger until it completely filled up the cell around me. I recited the name of God until it departed.[105]

Ibn Nūḥ's account here makes it clear that the Sufi would have been unable to complete his devotions as intended without the quite material ways in which these superhuman agents kept him in the cell and focused him on his task. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā recounts fighting with "the accursed one" by using the sword of focused intention—*sayf al-himma*—which quite literally has the name of God written down the length of it, to vanquish distracting thoughts.[106] Najm al-Dīn Kubrā travelled outside his cell and entered the sun.[107] He even received a text message once: in his cell Kubrā sees a piece of paper with a string of letters written on it, which he proceeds to write down for himself. Later, a man sees the string of letters and reveals that it is actually the greatest name of God.[108] One practitioner fasted so intensely that God made an apple appear to him. When he cut the apple open a *ḥawrāʾ* (one of the beautiful-eyed women of paradise) popped out, which pleased him greatly and negated his hunger.[109] In a remarkable passage, the typically sour Ibn al-Ḥājj writes: "It is related about one of them that an intense hunger and need struck him so he implored God in his *khalwa* and requested support (*al-ʿaṭāʾ*) from him. Then he heard a voice saying: Do you desire food or silver? He said, silver, absolutely, and quick as a flash he held 400 dirhams."[110]

23 These are all forms of sensory input involving either the presence of non-human actors or scenes playing out within the realm of the unseen. Unlike the intra-actions described in the previous section that were intended to produce entanglements of a newly reconstituted self, in this case, Sufi authors are describing intra-actions with superhuman agents that are only possible given the newly disciplined and reconfigured self. Ibn al-ʿArabī describes how one must have already become able to spend extended periods of time alone, in silence, eating and drinking very little prior to any subsequent activity. "So when your *nafs* becomes comfortable with withdrawal and isolation, you are ready to enter khalwa," which I take to mean a secondary state of entanglement with the realm of the unseen.[111] Sufi authors described the entanglement of this newly constituted self in different ways. Ibn Nūḥ uses a compelling graphological metaphor to describe this process, explaining that one must erase what is written on a tablet before writing something new "because writing atop writing obliterates both writings altogether."[112] In other words, the purpose of khalwa is not an erasure of the self but rather the creation of a self that is capable of intra-acting with input from the realm of the unseen. One of the most explicit descriptions of this process is in a short treatise by Ibn al-ʿArabī. In his *Risālat al-anwār* (Treatise on Lights), he describes time spent in khalwa as a progression of unveilings of The Real. If at any of these unveilings one is satisfied with the progress made, unveilings will cease. But for those who press on, the unveilings will continue until the Active Intellect (*al-ʿaql al-awwal*) is unveiled, and ultimately that which moves the Active Intellect itself (*al-muḥarrik*) will be unveiled.[113] And if you proceed beyond that point,

> you will be erased, then removed, then annihilated, then pulverized, then eradicated, to the point that the effects of the erasing and its companions are

completed in you. Then you will be established, then made present, then made to persist, then joined together, then appointed. You will be clothed in the appropriate robes and you will return to your level (*madraja*) and you should examine all the forms that you saw, until you return to the world of your senses, which is tied to the earth.[114]

Again, the apparent annihilation of the self is not the end game here. Rather, annihilation describes the process in which the previous entanglement of the Sufi in the cell gives way to an intra-action with elements from the realm of the unseen and, ultimately, the Real. Note in particular that Ibn al-ʿArabī charges his reader here to "examine all the forms that you saw" *before* returning to mundane sensory perceptions. Elsewhere, in his much more complicated *Meccan Openings*, Ibn al-ʿArabī situates khalwa within his complex metaphysics that link the senses to multiple modes of divine knowledge.[115]

24 This intra-action with the Real produced significant material and social affects in a Sufi entangled in khalwa. The significance and permanence of these affects (not the affects themselves) are often marked by the metaphor of death in these texts. While many of these texts speak of entering the cell as a form of death, as a body being interred in a crypt, or as a body being prepared for burial, this does not mean the end of that body. Rather, this death is processual, a way of creating a new (in a sense, resurrected) self within a new relationship to society. ʿAmmār al-Bidlīsī, has a fantastic exposition of this idea in which he refers to devotees as martyrs because they have killed their former selves, passions, and desires "with the swords of strenuous practice and piety . . . sticking to the Sufi hospices as if they were in the graves of the people of destiny."[116] Elsewhere, al-Bidlīsī tells Kubrā that he should not intend to stay in the cell for forty days, for that will surely end in disappointment. Rather, he should intend to enter the cell as though he is entering the grave until the day of resurrection. This attitude will ensure success.[117] Kubrā himself had his initiates who intended to enter khalwa washed in the manner of a corpse being prepared for burial (*ghusl al-mayyit*).[118] The post-death reintegration into society is made absolutely explicit when Ibn Nūḥ recounts that when one Sufi exited the cell after his devotions, the assembled Sufis celebrated his emergence by holding an ʿurs, a term referring both to a wedding feast and to the anniversary of a saint's death.[119] Not surprisingly, then, the term for the end of khalwa is *jalwa*, which generally refers to the presentation of the bride to the groom before the wedding ceremony, but here it clearly means exiting the cell and reintegrating the Sufi into the social body. This is an important point because it indicates that the entire process of khalwa does not end with the exit from the cell but with a new entanglement, a new intra-action within the realm of the social.

The Social

25 We can get a sense of the often quite social nature of khalwa from an account that Ibn Nūḥ relates about a young novice undergoing khalwa under the watchful eye of his Sufi master. "[The *shaykh*] took my hand and placed me in a cell, gave me a dhikr to chant

and stipulated that I must not sleep at night and that I must remain ritually pure ('alā l-wuḍū').” Critically, the master does not just leave him in the cell alone to fend for himself, lest he misunderstand the experiences that occur therein. “[The *shaykh*] came to see me every three days, and when he would enter [the cell] he would explain to me what had happened to me [during the previous days].” After a period of time, the shaykh “smiled in my face and told me that my enlightenment (*fatḥī*) was imminent and left.” True enough, his master was correct:

> Then the enlightenment from God came. I experienced something I am not able to describe and my spirit constricted dramatically.
>
> [The *shaykh*] said to one of his servants: Take him out [of the cell] for he is no longer able to bear it, lest his spirit leave [his body].
>
> He brought me out of the cell and [I found that] Sufi masters from all over had come to see my master. For it is their custom that when a Sufi exits khalwa they come and gather *baraka* [from him], for such a person has come from the presence of God.”[120]

It should be clear by this point that despite all the talk of isolation and solitude in modern scholarship, medieval khalwa cells were chock-full of all kinds of human and non-human beings involved in all kinds of ways. These intra-actions range from simple one-on-one diagnostic sessions with a Sufi master, to socializing with human and non-human beings within the cell, including Sufis outside the cell. Khalwa was not nearly as disconnected from the material and social world as we often imagine. In fact Ibn al-ʿArabī is quite explicit on this point, noting that “the purpose of removing oneself from the company of others is not to be removed from them physically, but rather that your heart and ears not be a container for the useless speech they bring.”[121] Accounts of Sufi novices consulting with their mentors during the process of khalwa are an integral part of the literature. Indeed, “tying one’s heart to the *shaykh*” is one of the fundamental rules of the practice.[122] This was because of the unpredictable and often confusing nature of the experience; only the master could properly parse the significance of what happened, as Ibn Nūḥ described in the anecdote above. Najm al-Dīn Kubrā writes that the shaykh is there for the purpose of “solving difficult problems and interpreting experiences.[123] Al-Suhrawardī insists that the visionary experiences of the true devotee require explanation, either from the Sufi master or directly from God.[124] Ibn al-ʿArabī notes that only a truly gifted shaykh can help one who is unprepared for khalwa.[125] In his commentary on this statement, ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428) observes that one will hear and see all manner of remarkable and terrifying things in the cell and it is only the shaykh who can help the novice understand what these are all about.[126] ʿAzīz al-Dīn Nasafī claimed that merely gazing upon the face of the master every seven to ten days during khalwa would strengthen the disciple’s resolve.[127] ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 736/1336) describes how the novice should attempt to communicate with the master intra-mentally from within the cell; one should only leave the cell to consult face-to-face in the event that one lacks such a telepathic ability.[128] In all these cases, the master and disciple must work together whether in order to complete khalwa successfully. We could add here that the different types of dhikr performed within khalwa not only produced

unique intra-actions within the cell, but they marked and contributed to the social differentiation of Sufi communities from each other in the world outside the cell.[129]

26 But as interesting as these conventions with the shaykh are, what are most fascinating to me are accounts in which large numbers of Sufis are seen in and around the practice of khalwa. Al-Suhrawardī grants a dispensation to those who are too weak to leave the cell for communal prayers and admits that it is okay if someone comes into the cell to pray alongside them.[130] In Ibn Nūḥ's account of the Sufi and his "beloveds"—the apricots and young servant boy recounted above—note that the other Sufis are all gathered outside the cell and are active participants in the events unfolding within. And while Ibn al-ʿArabī recommends that one keep their practice of khalwa a secret from others, he still advises novices to post someone outside the door of the cell, just in case things get a little too Real.[131] There are also accounts of mass khalwa, that is to say multiple people undergoing khalwa together at the same time. Aḥmad al-Ṣayyād describes a Rifāʿī ritual known as the *khalwa muḥarramīya,* which was, as its name implies, a special khalwa begun on the second day of ʿĀshūrāʾ during the month of Muḥarram. This khalwa lasted for seven days and involved all the brothers entering khalwa at the same time together, presumably each in his own cell. Note the overlapping entanglements of all the Sufi brothers involved in this practice: they were to fast for seven days on a strictly vegetarian diet, stay awake for seven days, remain in a state of ritual purity for seven days, change their clothes every day, and chant a set of prescribed litanies together after each prayer.[132] ʿAbd al-Raʾuf al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621) tells of a Shādhilī Sufi who heard a voice in the midst of khalwa telling him to go out and talk to people. When he exits the cell he finds that he can now see what is in the hearts of other people, which manifests as the people appearing to him as monkeys, dogs, pigs, and rabbits. This was all too much for him to handle and he asked to be veiled again.[133]

27 In all these cases, the Sufi is fundamentally changed by the process of khalwa. Not surprisingly, then, emerging from khalwa could mark one's authority or indicate a chain of charismatic succession.[134] This was clearly the case for the Sufis of medieval Upper Egypt, who used khalwa to indicate or determine leadership of a group. For example, after the well-known master Abū l-Ḥasan Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh (d. 612/1215) died, there was some confusion about who would succeed him. Should it be his son Ḥasan (d. 655/1257) or his prized pupil Abū Yaḥyā ibn Shāfiʿ (d. 647/1249)? The matter was definitively resolved when Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh's son Ḥasan submitted to and entered khalwa under the guidance of Abū Yaḥyā. This was a definitive and socially marked sign that the son deferred to the authority of Abū Yaḥyā.[135]

Conclusion

28 I hope to have shown here the utility of a new materialist framework to analyze these medieval accounts in order to understand khalwa holistically, taking into account the myriad social and material elements that made the practice effective. At the most basic level of description, the purpose of khalwa was to allow communion with The Real, an encounter that not only transformed individual Sufis, intensifying and focusing their

spiritual energies, but in so doing transformed the material and social relations of those around them as well. But access to the divine realm of the unseen and the presence of The Real required a disciplined and properly organized self. This disciplined or reconstituted self was achieved through the intra-action of the body with a diverse host of agents. Simply put, access to The Real would be impossible without the aid of all those non-human agents inside the cell and the human agents outside the cell. Furthermore, the affects generated by these

Fig. 2 Another view of the khānqāh of sultan al-Jāshankīr.

entanglements produced lasting effects in the social world that rippled out from the cell as well. The significance and power of khalwa is thus only truly generated in the collective effervescence of a community of Sufis and non-human agents, the seen and the unseen. It is only in and through the interconnected nodes of the material, the practical, and the social that khalwa becomes efficacious. This, again, is why so many of these authors insist that the cell be built within the confines of a populated space. The large state-sponsored *khanqah* of the Mamlūk Sultan Baybars al-Jāshankīr (r. 708/1308 – 709/1309) in Cairo illustrates this quite well. The accompanying image shows the courtyard of the khanqah and the large number of khalwa cells built around it on the ground floor, the entrance to each marked by a simple wooden door.[136] For Ibn Nūḥ and the milieu of Sufism he represents, khalwa was never simply a private, spiritual, or mystical affair. It was an ethical entanglement with all these elements that produced new selves and new relationships to society. Likewise, my entanglement with these narratives and some of the new materialist scholarship has fundamentally changed my own conception of self and my ethical responsibility to all those human and non-human agents with whom I intra-act on a continual basis.

expert guidance.

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Citation Guide

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Notes

1. These accounts can be found in ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Maktaba wa- Maṭbaʿat Muḥammad ʿAlī Ṣabīya, 1965), 2:59; ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-durrīya fi tarājim al-sādat al-sūfīya* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1999), 3:111; Yūsuf ibn Ismāʿīl al-Nabhānī, *Jāmiʿ karāmāt al-awliyāʾ*, ed. Ibrāhīm ʿAṭwa ʿAwḍ (Porbandar, India: Markaz-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat Barakat-e-Raza, 2001), 2:535. Compare these accounts of dog saints and dog shrines to Devin DeWeese, "Dog Saints and Dog Shrines in Kubravī Tradition: Notes on a Hagiographical Motif of Khwārazm," in *Miracle et Karama. Hagiographies médiévales comparées*, ed. Denise Aigle (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 459–97; Devin DeWeese, "Aḥmad Yasavī and the Dog-Men: Narratives of Hero and Saint at the Frontier of Orality and Textuality," in *Theoretical Approaches to the Transmission and Edition of Oriental Manuscripts: Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Istanbul, March 28–30*, 2001 (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2007), 147–73.

2. Ahmed El Shamsy, "Returning to God through His Names: Cosmology and *Dhikr* in a Fourteenth-Century Sufi Treatise," in *Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy*, ed. Alireza Korangy et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

3. The fact that the story involves dogs (and not some other animal) is important. Dogs appear quite often in medieval Sufi stories as the embodiment of ambiguity. They were ritually impure and maligned by the prophet in a number of *ḥadīth*s. At the same time, they were prized by hunters in rural areas and were essential to public health in urban areas by keeping the streets clean of trash. This ambiguity provided Sufi biographers with a salient means of narrating the ways Sufis often worked within and on the margins. See Nathan Hofer, "Dogs in Medieval Egyptian Sufi Literature," in *Our Dogs,*

Our Selves: Dogs in Medieval and Early Modern Art, Literature, and Society, ed. Laura D. Gelfand (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 78–93; Jenny Berglund, "Princely Companion or Object of Offense? The Dog's Ambiguous Status in Islam," *Society & Animals* 22, no. 6 (2014): 545–59.

4. Paul Fenton, "La Pratique de la retraite spirituelle (Khalwa) chez les Judéo-Soufis d'Égypte," in *Le Développement du Soufisme en Égypte à l'époque Mamelouke*, ed. Richard McGregor, Adam Sabra, and Mireille Loubet (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2006): 211-52.

5. Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī, "Al-Khalwa al-muṭlaqa," in *Majmūʿat rasāʾil Ibn ʿArabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Mahajja al-Bayḍāʾ, 2000), 1:423-54, quotation on 432. Ibn al-ʿArabī discussed khalwa in a wide variety of places across multiple works and Suʿād al-Ḥakīm has done a great service by collecting the references in Suʿād al-Ḥakīm, *al- Muʿjam al-ṣūfī: al-ḥikma fī ḥudūd al-kalima* (Beirut: Dandara, 1981), 433–38.

6. Kubrā, *Risāla fī l-khalwa*, published in Gerhard Böwering, "Kubrā's Treatise on Spiritual Retreat, Risāla fī'l-Khalwa," *Al-Abḥāth: Journal of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, American University of Beirut* 54 (2006). My thanks to the author for kindly sending me an offprint of this valuable article.

7. Najm al-Dīn Dāya Rāzī, *Manārāt al-sāʾirīn wa-maqāmāt al-ṭāʾirīn* (Cairo: Dār Suʿād al-Ṣabbāḥ, 1993), 412.

8. Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal* (Cairo: Dār Maktabat al-Turāth, 1960), 3:147-158.

9. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Jawhar al-muṣūn wa-l-sirr al-marqūm fīmā tantajih al-khalwa min al-asrār wa-l-ʿulūm*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ḥanafī (Dār Jawāmiʿ al-Kalim, n.d.).

10. On Ibn Nūḥ and the still unpublished *al-Waḥīd*, see Denis Gril, "Une source inédite pour l'histoire du taṣawwuf en Égypte au viie/xiiie siècle," in *Livre du centenaire 1880–1980,* ed. J. Vercoutter (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1980), 441–508; Denis Gril, "Une émeute antichrétienne à Qūṣ au début du VIIIe/XIVe siècle," in *Annales Islamologiques* 16 (1980): 241–74; Denis Gril, "Le soufisme en Égypte au début de l'époque mamelouke d'après le Waḥīd fī sulūk ahl al-tawḥīd de ʿAbd al-Ghaffār Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī (m. 708/1308)," in *Le développement du soufisme en Égypte à l'époque mamelouke,* ed. Richard McGregor and A. Sabra (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2010): 51–73; and Nathan Hofer, *The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173-1325* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 181–249.

11. Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

12. Martin, "A Short History of The Khalwati Dervishes"; Rachida Chih, "Cheminements et situation actuelle d'un ordre mystique réformateur: la Khalwatiyya en Égypte (fin XVe siècle à nos jours)" *Studia Islamica* 88 (1998): 181-201; John Curry, *The*

Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire: The Rise of the Halveti Order, 1350-1650 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

13. Jürgen Paul, *Doctrine and Organization: The Khwājagān/Naqshbandīya in the First Generation after Bahā'uddīn* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1998).

14. The only studies devoted explicitly (more or less) to the subject during this time period are Ernst Bannerth, "Dhikr et Khalwa d'après Ibn'Ata Allah," *Mideo* 12 (1974): 65–90; Hermann Landolt, "Khalwa," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition; Jamal Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of ʿAlāʾ Ad-Dawla as-Simnānī* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 120–45; Bernd Radtke et al., "Two Sufi Treatises of Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs," *Oriens* 35 (1996); Michel Chodkiewicz, "Les Quatre morts du Soufi," *Revue de l'histoire Des Religions* 215, no. 1 (1998): 35–57; Muhammad Isa Waley, "Contemplative Disciplines in Early Persian Sufism," in *The Heritage of Sufism: Classical Persian Sufism from Its Origins to Rumi (700-1300*, ed. L. Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 497–548; Muhammad Isa Waley, "'Aziz al-Din Nasafi on Spiritual Retreat (Khalwa)," *Sufi: A Journal of Sufism* 17 (1993): 5–9; Hamid Algar, *Čellā," in Encyclopaedia Iranica;* Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 314–17; Nelly Amri, "Khalwa et bayt al-khalwa dans le soufisme Ifrîqiyen du IVe/Xe siècle au Xe/XVIe siècle: quelques remarques sur la pratique, ses lieux et sa diffusion »," *al-Sabîl: Revue d'histoire, d'archéologie et d'architecture Maghrébines [enligne]*, no. 4 (2017); Samir Staali, "La Retraite spirituelle *Khalwa* dans la pensée Arabo-Musulmane : origines, pratiques anciennes et actuelles, et dimensions mystiques" (Unpublished PhD thesis, Lyon 3, 2014); Böwering, "Kubrā's Treatise on Spiritual Retreat;" ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Bakrī, "*Kitāb al-khalwa li-Ibn ʿArabī: dirāsa wa-taḥqīq*," *Tasavvuf* 37 (2016):1-44.

15. B. C. Martin, "A Short History of the Khalwati Dervishes," in *Scholars, Saints and Sufis Muslim Religious Institutions Since* 1500, ed. Nikki R. Keddie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 275.

16. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 544–45. Ironically, given the fact that Sufis are almost universally described as mystics, most were actually much closer to Weber's ideal type of the inner-worldly ascetic who rejects the world but nevertheless continues to work within it to effect transformation.

17. Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

18. Abū l-Ḥafṣ ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī, ʿ*Awārif al-maʿārif* (Cairo: n.p., 2004), 197.

19. Leah Kinberg, "What is Meant by Zuhd'," *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985): 40.

20. Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 124–27.

21. We can contrast the forms of late antique Christian piety with the view promoted by Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) in his *Kitāb al-zuhd*. Feryal Salem describes Ibn al-

Mubārak's approach to zuhd as an example of a "sober and moderate trend of piety" that had nothing to do with wealth or possession, but rather someone who held that wealth was no problem so long as one loves poverty. Feryal Salem, *The Emergence of Early Sufi Piety and Sunni Scholasticism: 'Abdallah b. al-Mubarak and the Formation of Sunni Identity in the Second Islamic Century* (Leiden: Brill 2016), 109, 112.

22. Alexander D. Knysh, trans., *al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism: al-Risala al-Qushayriyya fi 'ilm al-Tasawwuf*, (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 2007), 123.

23. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 77.

24. For a general overview of the world of the unseen, see D. B. MacDonald L. Gardet, "al-Ghayb," in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 1025-1026.

25. Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, xii.

26.   Here I am drawing on Richard Valantasis, *The Making of the Self: Ancient and Modern Asceticism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 7: "At the center of ascetical activity is a self who, through behavioral changes, seeks to become a different person, a new self; to become a different person in new relationships; and to become a different person in a new society that forms a new culture."

27. On "psychophilic somatophobia," Elizabeth Spelman, "Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views," *Feminist Studies* 8 (1982): 119.

28. Peter J. Bräunlein, "Thinking Religion Through Things," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 28, no. 4–5 (2016), 365–99.

29. Major achievements in this respect are *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* (2005 – present); Daniel Miller, ed. *Materiality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); David Morgan, ed. *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (London: Routledge, 2010); Manuel A. Vásquez, *More than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press on Demand, 2011); Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer, eds., *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); Sally Promey, ed. *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); S. Brent Plate, *Key Terms in Material Religion*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); Vasudha Narayanan, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Materiality* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2020).

30. Sonia Hazard, "The Material Turn in the Study of Religion," *Religion and Society* 4, no. 1 (2013), 58-78

31. Thomas A. Tweed, "After the Quotidian Turn: Interpretive Categories and Scholarly Trajectories in the Study of Religion since the 1960s," *The Journal of Religion* 95, no. 3 (2015): 361–85.

32. Hazard, "The Material Turn," 68, citing Jeremy Stolow, *Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and the Things in Between* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

33. Severin Fowles, "People Without Things," in *An Anthropology of Absence: Materializations of Transcendence and Loss*, ed. Mikkel Bille, Frida Hastrup, and Tim Flohr Soerensen (New York, NY: Springer, 2010), 23–41, quotation on p. 25.

34. William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites: First Series. The Fundamental Institutions* (New York: A. and C. Black, 1889), 20.

35. By colonial anthropologists of religion, I mean that they were part of the system of knowledge production described by David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

36. Fredrik Fahlander, "Differences that Matter: Materialities, Material Culture and Social Practice," in *Six Essays on the Materiality of Society and Culture* (Gothenburg: Bricoleur Press, 2008), 127–54, esp. 129-131.

37. Christopher Gamble, Joshua S. Hanan, and Thomas Nail, "What Is New Materialism?" *Angelaki* 24, no. 6 (2019), 111–34, quotation on 118.

38. To offer some sense of the variety and applicability of this work, note its rapid proliferation across the humanities and social sciences. Jussi Parikka, "New Materialism as Media Theory: Medianatures and Dirty Matter," *Communication and Critical/ Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (2012): 95–100, quotation on 96. On digital materiality more broadly see Ramón Reichert and Annika Richterich, "Introduction: Digital Materialism," *Digital Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (2015): 5–17. On the new materialism in archeology, see Christopher Witmore, "Archaeology and the New Materialisms," *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 1, no. 2 (2014): 203–46; in religion, see Hazard, "The Material Turn"; Tamsin Jones, "New Materialism and the Study of Religion," in *Religious Experience and New Materialism: Movement Matters*, eds. Joerg Rieger and Edward Waggoner, Radical Theologies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016), 1–23; in sociology, see Nick J. Fox and Pam Alldred, *Sociology and the New Materialism: Theory, Research, Action* (London: SAGE, 2016); in history, see Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, eds., in *Writing Material Culture History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

39. George Ioannides, "Vibrant Sacralities and Nonhuman Animacies: The Matter of New Materialism and Material Religion," *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 26, no. 3 (2013): 234-253. See also Anna L. Peterson, "Material Religion, Materialism, and Non-human Animals" in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Materiality*, eds. Vasudha Narayanan (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2020), 274–89.

40. Jerry Lee Rosiek and Jimmy Snyder, "Narrative Inquiry and New Materialism: Stories as (Not Necessarily Benign") Agents," *Qualitative Inquiry* 26, no. 10 (2018): 1-12.

41. Ian Lowrie, "What Sort of Thing is the Social? Or, Durkheim and Deleuze on

Organization and Infrastructure," in *The New Politics of Materialism: History, Philosophy, Science,* eds. Sarah Ellenzweig and John Zammito (London: Routledge, 2017), 154-177.

42. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 5.

43. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), ix.

44. Ibid., 26.

45. On the assemblage, see Thomas Nail, "What is an Assemblage?" *Substance* 46 (2017): 21-37. On the ethics of agential realism, see (in addition to Karen Barad's work), Jerry Lee Rosiek, Jimmy Snyder, and Scott L. Pratt, "The New Materialisms and Indigenous Theories of Non-Human Agency: Making the Case for Respectful Anti-Colonial Engagement," *Qualitative Inquiry* 26, no. 3–4 (2020): 331–46.

46. In addition to the texts I have already cited, I have found the following particularly helpful: Tamsin Jones, "New Materialism and the Study of Religion," in *Religious Experience and New Materialism: Movement Matters*, eds. Joerg Rieger and Edward Waggoner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1–23; Catherine Keller and Mary-Jane Rubenstein, "Introduction: Tangled Matters," in *Entangled Worlds: Religion, Science, and New Materialisms*, ed. Catherine Keller and Mary-Jane Rubenstein (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 1- 18; Ulrike Tikvah Kissman and Joost van Loon, eds. *Discussing New Materialism: Methodological Implications for the Study of Materialities*. (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2019); Beatriz Revelles, Waltraud Ernst, and Monika Rogowska-Stangret, eds., *Feminist New Materialisms: Activating Ethico-Politics Through Genealogies in Social Sciences* – Special Issue of *Social Sciences* (Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2020); Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013). Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2012).

47. Sonia Hazard, "Two Ways of Thinking About New Materialism," *Material Religion* 15, no. 5 (2019): 629–31.

48. Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*.

49. Michael Muhammad Knight, *Muhammad's Body: Baraka Networks and the Prophetic Assemblage* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

50. Richard McGregor, *Islam and the Devotional Object: Seeing Religion in Egpt and Syria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

51. Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī, *al-Waḥīd fī sulūk ahl al-tawḥīd* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Markazīya li-l-Makhṭūṭāt al-Islāmīya. MS #3182), 1:30a.

52. On the institutionalization of Sufism, see Hofer, *The Popularisation of Sufism*,

14–23.

53. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2000), 2:278–304.

54. *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1967), 105–6.

55. al-Suhrawardī, ʿ*Awārif al-maʿārif*, 190-208 (chs. 26–28).

56. Chodkiewicz, "Les Quatre Morts," 43.

57. Ibn al-ʿArabī, "al-Khalwa al-muṭlaqa," 447.

58. Böwering, "Kubrā's Treatise," 27–28; M. Molé, "Traités mineurs de Najm al-Dīn Kubrā," *Annales islamologiques* 4 (1963): 25; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Khalwa al-muṭlaqa*, 447; Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God*, 120; Ibn-ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī, *Miftāḥ Al-Falāḥ Wa-Miṣbāḥ al-Arwāḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Abd-as-Salām Ibrāhīm (Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmīya, 2001), 38.

59. Most texts do not make this explicit. Rather, in separate discussions Sufi authors write of perfuming the place of dhikr, and then commend khalwa as a site of dhikr elsewhere. However, the perfuming of the cell is made explicit in the *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ*, 21 (where he says it is for the benefit of angels and *jinn* who accompany the Sufi in the cell), as well as in a late text by Aḥmad ibn Idrīs (d. 1837), *Nubdha fī ṣifat dukhūl al-khalwa*, which draws on many of these earlier texts; see Radtke, O'Fahey, and O'Kane, "Two Sufi Treatises," 166.

60. Al-Suhrawardī, ʿAwārif al-maʿārif, 203; Waley, "ʿAziz al-Din Nasafi," 7; al-Iskandarī, *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ*, 21.

61. Ibn al-ʿArabī, "al-Khalwa al-muṭlaqa," 437-9.

62. Böwering, "Kubrā's Treatise," 287.

63. Ibn al-ʿArabī, "al-Khalwa al-muṭlaqa," 442–45.

64. al-Suhrawardī, ʿ*Awārif al-maʿārif*, 205 and 208.

65. Ibn-al-ʿArabī, "Risālat al-anwār," in *Majmūʿat rasāʾil Ibn Al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Mahajja al-Bayḍāʾ, 2003), 1:252.

66. Dāya Rāzī, *Manārāt al-sāʾirīn*, 407–9.

67. Al-Qūṣī, *al-Waḥīd fī sulūk ahl al-tawḥīd*, 1:153a.

68. Aḥmad al-Ṣayyād, *al-Maʿārif al-Muḥammadīya fī l-waẓāʾif al-aḥmadīya* (Damascus: Dār al-Farqad, 2011), 475.

69. Böwering, "Kubrā's Treatise, 28.

70. al-Suhrawardī, ʿ*Awārif al-maʿārif*, 204.

71. al-Ṣayyād, *al-Maʿārif al-Muḥammadīya*, 475.

72. Waley, "ʿAziz al-Din Nasafi," 6–7.

73. al-Suhrawardī, ʿAwārif al-maʿārif, 203.

74. Böwering, "Kubrā's Treatise," p. 277-8; Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Khalwa al-muṭlaqa, p. 448 (face the qibla); al-Iskandarī, Miftāḥ al-falāḥ, 21.

75. Waley, "ʿAziz Al-Din Nasafi," 8.

76. For more on this particular notion, see El Shamsy, "Returning to God;" and Elisha Russ-Fishbane, "Physical Embodiment and Spiritual Rapture in Thirteenth-Century Sufi Mysticism," in Les mystiques juives, chrétiennes et musulmanes dans l'Égypte médiévale. Interculturalités et contextes historiques, eds. Giuseppe Cecere, Mireille Loubet, and Samuela Pagani (Cairo: Institut Française d'Archéologie Oriental du Caire, 2013), 305–332.

77. El Shamsy, "Returning to God."

78. Waley, "ʿAziz al-Din Nasafi," 8.

79. Al-Iskandarī, Miftāḥ al-falāḥ, 26–30.

80. Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Khalwa al-muṭlaqa, 450–54.

81. El Shamsy, "Returning to God."

82. Al-Suhrawardī, ʿAwārif al-maʿārif, 202.

83. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī, Laṭāʾif al-minan wa-l-akhlāq fī wujūb al-taḥadduth bi-niʿmat Allāh ʿalā l-iṭlāq : al-Maʿrūf bi-l-minan al-kubrā (Damascus: Dār Al-Taqwaʾ, 2004), 101.

84. Bruno Latour famously described actants like al-Shaʿrānī's rope as "delegated nonhuman characters," in "Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts," in Shaping Technology/Building Society, eds. Wiebe Bijker and John Law (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992): 225–58.

85. al-Qūṣī, al-Waḥīd fī sulūk ahl al-tawḥīd, 1:30a.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid., 1:47a.

88. Fowles, "People without Things," 29.

89. Bryan Turner, Weber and Islam: A Critical Study (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 41.

90. Ibid., 42. Of course, as Turner points out, Weber did not have a problem taking seriously the motivations and explanations of Calvinists who would describe their actions in terms of their relationship with a distant and predetermining God. Or, likewise, he took seriously the different kinds of social action produced by an ascetic

orientation (transcendent deity) versus a mystical orientation (immanent deity).

91. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1992), 180.

92. Edward Badeen, ed., *Zwei mystische Schriften des ʿAmmār al-Bidlīsī Bahǧat al-ṭāʾifat wa ṣawm al-qalb* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 1999), 43.

93. Badeen, *Zwei mystische Schriften*, 73.

94. Molé, "Traités mineurs de Najm al-Dīn Kubrā," 25.

95. Eyad Abuali, "Words Clothed in Light: Dhikr (Recollection), Colour and Synaesthesia in Early Kubrawi Sufism," *Iran* 58, no. 2 (2019): 1–14,

96. The first to speak of using dhikr and khalwa to polish the heart (as far as I know) was Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *Fawāʾiḥ al-jamāl wa-fawātiḥ al-jalāl*, ed. Fritz Meier (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlang, 1957). It is also mentioned by Simnānī (Elias, *The Throne Carrier*, 119), al-Iskandarī, *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ*, 35, and by Ibn Nūḥ, *al-Waḥīd*, 1:30a.

97. Gavin Flood, *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4.

98. Kubrā *Fawāʾiḥ al-jamāl*, 10–11.

99. Ibid., 21–22.

100. al-Suhrawardī, ʿ*Awārif al-maʿārif*, 201.

101. al-Ṣayyād, *al-Maʿārif al-Muḥammadīya*, 479–80.

102. al-Suhrawardī, ʿ*Awārif al-maʿārif*, 200.

103. Ibn al-ʿArabī, "al-Khalwa al-muṭlaqa," 450.

104. Marcia Hermansen, "Dreams and Dreaming in Islam," in *Dreams: A Reader on Religious, Cultural, and Psychological Dimensions of Dreaming*, ed. Kelly Bulkeley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 90–91. Hermansen also draws attention to a similar distinction made by Ibn al-ʿArabī; see William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 404n24.

105. Ibn Nūḥ, *al-Waḥīd*, 113a.

106. Kubrā *Fawāʾiḥ al-jamāl*, 15–16.

107. Ibid., 27

108. Ibid., 84

109. al-Suhrawardī, ʿAwārif al-maʿārif, 207.

110. Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, 3:186.

111. Ibn al-ʿArabī, "al-Khalwa al-muṭlaqa," 433 and 438. Elsewhere, Ibn al-ʿArabī, "Risālat al-anwār," 1:272, and al-Iskandarī, *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ*, 36, likewise insist that one must first train oneself to be alone by avoiding all people before engaging in khalwa.

112. Al-Qūṣī, *al-Waḥīd*, 1:70a ff.

113. The text of the "Risālat al-anwār" published in the *Rasāʾil* of Ibn al-ʿArabī (see above, n. 66) seems to me to be defective here. So, for this particular section, I follow the text published in ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī's commentary, *al-Isfār ʿan risālat al-anwār fimā yatajallā li-ahl al-dhikr min al-anwār*, ed. ʿĀṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 2004), 182-183. There is an excellent English translation of the text as well as selections from al-Jīlī's commentary by Rabia Terri Harris, *Journey of the Lord of Power: A Sufi Manual on Retreat by Muhyiddin ibn ʿArabi* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1981).

114. Ibn al-ʿArabī, "Riṣālat al-anwār", 1:283; al-Jīlī, *al-Isfār*, 184.

115. Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.), 3:225-229.

116. Badeen, Zwei mystische Schriften, 61.

117. Meier, *Fawāʾiḥ al-jamāl*, 59-60.

118. On this theme of death see Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, *al-Uṣūl al-ʿashara*, in Molé, "Traités mineurs de Najm al-Dīn Kubrā," 17, 21; Cyrus Ali Zargar, "The Ten Principles: Theoretical Implications of Volitional Death in Najm al-Dīn Kubrā's *al-Uṣūl al-ʿAshara* (A Study and Translation): The Ten Principles." *The Muslim World* 103, no. 1 (January 2013): 107–30; al-Isfarāyinī, *Fī kayfiyat al-taslīk wa-l-ijlās fī l-khalwa*, apud Nûruddîn Abdurrahmân-I Isfarâyinî, *Le Révélateur des mystères: Kâshif al-Asrâr*, ed. and transl. Hermann Landolt (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1986), 123; Waley, "'Aziz al-Din Nasafi," 8.

119. Al-Qūṣī, *al-Waḥīd*, 1:70a.

120. Ibid, 70a–70b.

121. Ibn-al-ʿArabī, "Risālat al-anwār," 1:272.

122. This is one of the so-called "eight rules of Junayd." Najm al-Dīn Kubrā was almost certainly the author of these eight (sometimes ten) rules, as they appear nowhere before this point. Further, the sayings attributed to al-Junayd in earlier sources reveal a decidedly communalist bent. See Bernd Radtke, "The Eight Rules of Junayd: A General Overview of the Genesis and Development of Islamic Dervish Orders" in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Essays in Honour of Hermann Landolt*, ed. Todd Lawson (London: I. B. Taurus, 2005), 490-502, esp. 492.

123. Böwering, "Kubrā's Treatise, 287.

124. al-Suhrawardī, ʿAwārif al-maʿārif, 198–99.

125. Ibn-al-ʿArabī, "Risālat al-anwār," 1:271.

126. al-Jīlī, al-Isfār, 94.

127. Waley, "ʿAziz al-Din Nasafi," 6.

128. Elias, The Throne Carrier, 122.

129. Devin Deweese, "Ahmed Yasavi in the Work of Burhan al-Din Qilich," Asiatische Studien 66, no. 3 (2014): 837–879.

130. al-Suhrawardī, ʿAwārif al-maʿārif, 203.

131. Ibn al-ʿArabī, "al-Khalwa al-muṭlaqa," 447–8.

132. al-Ṣayyād, al-Maʿārif al-Muḥammadīya, 478.

133. al-Munāwī, al-Kawākib, 3:229.

134. Jean-Louis Triaud, "Khalwa and the Career of Sainthood: An Interpretative Essay," in Charisma and Brotherhood in African Islam, eds. Donal Cruise O'Brien and Christian Coulon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 53–66.

135. Al-Qūṣī, al-Waḥīd, 1:105b. See also the accounts in al-Udfuwī, al-Ṭāliʿ, p. 743, and Ṣafi l-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr in Gril, Risāla, p. 49. Ṣafi al-Dīn's account is pretty straightforward, noting merely that Ibn Shāfiʿ "will inherit the maqām" of Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh.

136. Above the khalwa cells are the living quarters for the Sufis, which are indicated by the windows on the second and third floors around the courtyard. For more on this khanqah, see Leonor Fernandes, "The Foundation of Baybars al-Jashankir: Its waqf, History, and Architecture," in Muqarnas 4 (1987): 21–42. On the nature of state-sponsored Sufism in Mamlūk Egypt, see Nathan Hofer, The Popularisation of Sufism, 35-60.

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