Aspects of Prophetic Piety in the Early Modern Period

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Stefan Reichmuth

Aspects of Prophetic Piety in the Early Modern Period

Prophetic piety and its socio-political and individual dimensions in the early modern period

Shortly after 1400, the polymath Majd al-Dîn al-Fîrûzâbâdî (d. 1414), at that time chief qadi of the Rasûlid state in Yemen, finished the revised *version* of his Arabic lexicon, the *Qâmûs al-mubît*. He had augmented its introduction by an important passage in praise of Arabic (Reichmuth, 2009: 239ff.). The highly ornate praise evokes some rich natural scenery as an image of the beneficial and delightful qualities of that language. It conveys a firm hope for its future, as it is protected by its relation to the Koran and to the power (*dawla*) of the Prophet. Quite obviously, this *dawlat al-nabî* does not refer to any specific polity, and certainly not to the Abbasid caliphs in Cairo, who by then had lost power to the Mamluk rulers. The author highlights the central role of the Prophet for the Arabic language, both as a model of eloquence and culture and as a founder of its eternal message.

Fîrûzâbâdî's evocation of the Prophet as guardian and protector of the realm of the Arabic language and culture illustrates the focus of Muslim piety of his time on the Prophet and on his continuing presence as a source of blessing and inspiration for the believers, in a period in which the Islamic world was losing much of its political and cultural coherence. This focus had been gaining in prominence for obvious reasons since the 13th century and was to shape Muslim religious culture in many regions and with increasing intensity for the whole of the early modern period. The individual and collective attachment to the Prophet, which found its expression in religious practice, discourse and institutional settings and which comes out in a wide range of literary genres like prayer, poetry, juridical and Sufi treatises, in the arts and even in the political sphere, can conveniently be placed under the common label of "Prophetic piety". This attachment was very often extended to the reputed descendants of the Prophet (*Sharîfs* or *Sayyids*) who enjoyed particular respect and veneration in many regions of the Muslim world. As Prophetic piety appears to have been so pervasive for the whole period from the fifteenth to the early nineteenth century the concept may help to bridge the sharp dichotomy of Sufi and anti-Sufi strands of Islamic doctrine and practice that

still holds sway over the cultural historiography of these times; and it might open the way for a more balanced and differentiated picture of the dynamics and regional interconnections of Muslim culture. First and foremost it can be seen as an important link between the political and communal sphere and the life of the individual.

The following overview of important fields of Prophetic piety in the early modern period will of necessity remain sketchy and in many respects hypothetical. It attempts to take the eschatological dimension of the person of the Prophet into adequate account as it made itself felt in political movements as well as in religious doctrine, Sufi thought, and in the horizon of individual consciousness and expectation.

***Sharîfs* and Sufis in eschatological alliance (15th/16th centuries): State formation in Iran and Morocco**

It is well known that the 15th and 16th centuries were a period of tense eschatological expectations, both in Europe and in the Muslim world. A first promising attempt to provide a comparative framework for such a “millenarian conjunction” and its local and transregional context in the 16th century was made by Sanjay Subrahmanyam (2001).¹ Several Muslim regions witnessed a rise of militant Sufi movements in alliance with or even led by families claiming Prophetic descent and proclaiming the imminent rule of a *Mahdî* or of another salvation figure. Their struggles would draw on popular support against powerful oppressors or intruders, who were often regarded as infidels who had to be fought. Two of the most successful movements of this kind, which led to the establishment of Sharîfian dynasties in Iran and Morocco, deserve discussion here, as they created polities which profoundly shaped their respective regions far beyond their own duration and show the interplay between popular Sufism and leaders of reputed Prophetic descent in an exemplary manner.

Iran

The story of the rise of the Safavids from a Sufi order with Sunni background to a militant movement with an extremist Shiite followership, whose leaders at some point came to claim Prophetic descent and had already declared for Twelver Shiism when they founded an empire in 1501, has often been told (e.g. Minorsky, 1940-1942; Mazzaoui, 1972; Arjomand, 1984; Jackson, Lockhart, 1986; Halm, 1988: 98-124; Roemer, 2003; Babayan, 2003; Abisaab, 2004; Marimoto, 2010). Other Sufi movements which emerged in Iran since the late 8th/14th century, like the Hurûfiyya, the Nûrbakhshiyya and the Musha‘sha‘iyya shared the claims of their leaders of Prophetic descent, and also an intense

1. See also Bayly 2004, 47f.

commitment to ‘Alī and his descendants that was widely regarded as heterodox by mainstream Twelver Shiites. These movements, too, lived on eschatological expectations, and all of their founders claimed the status of a *Mahdī* and Imam for themselves.

The rise of the Safavids was similarly coloured by extraordinary claims and expectations, which are expressed with particular clarity in the poems of their master Ismā‘īl (1499-1524), who as a boy of twelve years took over the leadership of the movement. Stressing his Prophetic descent, he also presented himself as the rightly guided Imam and *Mahdī*, and as a reincarnation of ‘Alī and the Twelve Imams, finally even professing divine status. His charisma was reinforced by a remarkable chain of victories, especially after he had become Shāh in 1501. It was finally broken by the Ottoman sultan Selīm I, who fiercely reacted to the increasing Safavid advance and propaganda in Eastern Anatolia and squarely defeated the Safavid army at Chaldiran in 1514.

Ismā‘īl’s retreat from active leadership of his army after this defeat reinforced his shift away from the extremist beliefs of his adherents towards official Twelver Shiism, which had been already underway since 1501. Stress was now laid on the Shāh’s descent from the Prophet and from ‘Alī, combined with a claim to supreme religious authority over the Shia, as the only legitimate deputy of the Hidden Imam. This claim was also extended to the whole Muslim *umma*.

Under Ismā‘īl’s successors, the earlier connections with Shiite extremist groups were discarded, and their rebellions suppressed. As the Safavid state created its own religious and scholarly institution the spiritual claims of the rulers were increasingly contested by the religious scholars who finally succeeded to secure supreme religious authority for themselves in the course of the 17th century. The scholar families who were acknowledged as descendants of the Prophet in Iran came to hold leading positions within the religious establishment of the Safavid Empire (Salati, 1999). Even if the religious authority of the rulers clearly diminished in the course of their declining power, their creation of an enduring framework for the Iranian state continues to be reckoned as their major achievement. The challenge of the rise of the Safavids and their religious policies to the Sunni world, especially to the Ottomans, is easily underestimated. The Ottoman sultans reacted by claiming the championship of Sunni Islam. They adopted the guardianship of the Holy Cities after the conquest of Egypt in 1517, and the caliphal title which equally became part of the official Ottoman protocol. The significance of the Safavid Empire for the prestige of the descendants of the Prophet in other parts of the Muslim world still remains to be assessed.

Morocco

Although emerging in a Sunni context, the establishment of Sharīfian rule in 16th-century Morocco, well documented and described for its political and economic as well as religious dimensions, followed a strikingly similar pattern

(Abun-Nasr, 1987: 206-228; Beck, 1989; Cornell, 1998; Sebti, 1986; Ferhat, 1999; García-Arenal, 1990; 2009; Mouline, 2009). Here, too, the decline of the Marinid sultanate and its inability to prevent the occupation of important coastal towns by the Portuguese since 1415, had led to the emergence of a number of Sufi centres in different parts of the country, which were often linked to the tombs of saints with reputed descent from the earlier Hasanid dynasty of the Idrîsids, who had ruled Fez between 789 and 926. A reflection of this growing interest in the Sharîfian past was the “discovery” of the hitherto forgotten tomb of Idrîs II (793-828) in Fez in the year 1437, by which the prestige of this town, as the Marinid capital and with its many Sharîfian families, was greatly enhanced. The Sufi brotherhoods of this period took full part in the struggle against the Portuguese who by then had established a solid presence at the Mediterranean as well as at the Atlantic coast. Sufi centres were also involved in the struggles of the local Berber groups against the Arabs who frequently cooperated with the Portuguese. They strongly propagated *jihâd* against the enemies of Islam, and their activities were often backed by Mahdist claims of leaders who belonged to Sharîfian families themselves.

The rise of the most influential and successful Sufi leader in 15th-century Morocco, Muhammad b. Sulaymân al-Jazûlî (d. 869/1465) and of his branch of the Shâdhiliyya which spread from its base in Southern Morocco to other parts of the country and was instrumental in bringing the Sa’dian *Sharîfs* to power, has been the object of important studies, especially those of Mercedes García-Arenal (1990), Vincent Cornell (1998) and Nabil Mouline (2009). The eschatological expectations prevailing in Morocco in the 15th century, and the peculiar religious claims, doctrines and practices which aimed to establish the closest possible connections of the Sufi leader and his adherents with the Prophet himself, are clearly described in their works. Jazûlî laid much stress on his descent from the Prophet as well as on his spiritual closeness to him, which found expression in reported divine addresses (*muhâdathât*) and conversations (*mukâlamât*) in which he claimed to have heard the Prophet declaring him to be the *Mahdî* (Cornell, 1998: 186f.). His benedictions of the Prophet, the *Dalâ’il al-khayrât*, spread far beyond the Maghreb and became the most popular prayer book in the Muslim world². A later head of the Jazûliyya, ‘Abdallâh al-Ghazawânî (d. 1528) (Cornell, 1998: 196-229), was one of the major patrons of the Sa’dian *Sharîfs* in southern Morocco, supporting them as *jihâd* leaders, backing their military advances in the south and also their expansion to the north. The Jazûliyya thus became a crucial force in the establishment of Sharîfian rule in Morocco.

The rise of the Sa’dians as super-tribal *jihâd* leaders was strongly shaped by Mahdist expectations, which come out in the title of their first leader, Muhammad *al-Mahdî al-Qâ’im bi-amri llâh* (The Caretaker of God’s Command) (1511-1517) and also that of one of his sons, Muhammad Shaykh

2. See Abid in this volume.

al-Mahdī (governor of Sus 1517-39, sultan 1539-1557). They were able to stabilize the precarious position of Morocco between the expanding Spanish and Ottoman empires. By his great victory against the Portuguese invading army at Alcazar (near Fas) in 1578, the young sultan Ahmad al-Mansūr (1578-1603) placed his country as an important player in the sphere of imperial politics. With his ruthless but successful centralization of power, his far-sighted economic and military development, his flamboyant court and his wide imperial ambitions both in Subsaharan Africa and even in the New World (which he hoped to pursue in a close alliance with Britain), his reign is styled by García-Arenal as “the beginnings of Modern Morocco.”

Ahmad al-Mansūr equally took full part in the international “millennial conjuncture” of his time, creating a messianic role for himself as a Renewer and *Mahdī* at the turn of the first Islamic Millennium, and even challenging the caliphal claims of the Ottomans. His ambassador to Istanbul presented his lord in the account of his embassy (1589-90) as the rightful candidate for a universal caliphate (García-Arenal, 2009: 130f; Mouline, 2009). Ahmad al-Mansūr’s famous conquest of the West African empire of Songhay (in present-day Mali) in the millennial year 1591 was equally justified by him in eschatological terms as heralding the universal rule of an imam of Prophetic descent. Even if his state and his dynasty virtually collapsed after his sudden death in 1603, his reign provided a model for later Sharīfian rulers of Morocco.

Sharīfian social and communal spaces

The two examples of Sharīfian polities founded in the early modern period in Iran and Morocco, can be augmented by a number of others. The rule of the *Sharīfs* of Mecca as an Ottoman vassal was confirmed by sultan Selīm I after his conquest of Egypt in 1517. The Zaydī Imams in the Yemen were even able in protracted military campaigns to expel the Ottomans from the country and to establish their own hegemony over the Northern and Southern Yemen since the early 17th century. They also exerted a strong influence in the Hijaz and claimed a caliphal position, which posed a serious challenge to the Ottomans in this period (Haykel, 2003: 25-75; Klaric, 2007; Ince, 2014: 96-128). In the 17th century the Chingizid rulers of Bukhara also acquired a Sharīfian descent by marriage, and the office of the head (*naqīb*) of the *Sharīfs* also included essential ceremonial as well as military functions (McChesney, 1991: 74, 253; De Weese, 1995: 612-634).

But the rise of *Sharīfs* and *Sayyids* to regional prominence in the early modern period had in many regions far more social and cultural dimensions (Scarcia Amoretti, Bottini, 1999; Reichmuth, 2009; Mayeur-Jaouen, 2013; Marimoto, 2004, 2012, 2014). It included the establishment of communal elite groups in urban as well as rural settings, and of diaspora communities, which combined religious and commercial activities, like the *Sayyid* families of Hadramawt in the Indian Ocean (Freitag, Clarence-Smith, 1997; Pouwels, 2000; Peskes, 2005; 2013) or the descendants of the Sayyid Ata clan of

Bukharan origin among the Tatars of Siberia (Bustanov 2011). Timbuktu (in present-day Mali) also saw the rise of the Sharifs (locally called *shurfa*) to local prominence and considerable military power in the early modern period (Saad, 1983: 123-124, 212). Apart from a city like Fez in Morocco, which for centuries had taken pride in her Sharifian patriciate (Sanseverino, 2014), Sharifian elite groups equally rose to prominence in the Ottoman provincial cities of the Ottoman Empire, a development which has been amply documented for Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem and Cairo (Abu-Manneh, 1986; Winter, 1992: 185-198; Ze'evi, 1996: 73-85; Canbakal, 2005; Kiliç, 2006). The expansion of the influence of immigrant *Sayyids* in rural and nomadic areas is well attested in other parts of Asia and Africa, e.g. for provincial towns and rural areas in Northern India and Bengal in the period of the decentralisation of the Mughal Empire, and also for the establishment of rural Islamic centres in the Fünj kingdom of the Northern Sudan (Eaton, 1987; Reichmuth, 2009: 4-6; Crawford, 1955: 180-182; Holt, 1967).

A fusion of learning and Sufism became common for many Sharifian families and formed a kind of patrimony that was transmitted over several generations. This patrimony was combined with travelling activities, often through Sharifian family networks that might link regions as distant as the Middle East, East Africa, South and South East Asia. Perhaps the best documented case are the descendants of the Bâ 'Alawî Sayyid 'Abdallâh al-'Aydârûs (d. 1461) from Hadramawt, whose activities in Yemen and Hijaz, Egypt as well as in Mughal India and in the Malayan Archipelago are attested by the wide range of their scholarly and Sufi writings (Peskes, 2005, 2013). Many of the newly emerging Sufi brotherhoods of the 18th and early 19th century, some of which have been active until now, were similarly founded by Sharifian scholars.

Veneration and love for the Prophet and his descendants are often presented as a religious duty, and as a major gateway to paradise (e.g. Sabbân, 1948: 5). Several Muslim regions and cities were profoundly shaped by the presence of Sharifian families of long standing, and by their tombs. The sacred landscape, that they created became a crucial element of communal identity, as already mentioned for Morocco and Fez since the 15th century. In Cairo, the focus for this was provided by a large number of tombs and mosques related to relics of female as well as male descendants of the Prophet, many of which had already been erected under the Fatimids. Another strong Sharifian element was provided by the most prominent Sufi brotherhoods whose leading families were often also of recognized Prophetic descent. Literary activity was especially concentrated on the leaders of the Wafâ'iyya who had established their *tariqa* (brotherhood) during the Mamluk period and traced themselves back to 'Alî b. Abî Tâlib. The poetry written by the founder, his descendants and other adherents of the brotherhood developed patterns of lofty praise for the Wafâ'î shaykhs that made striking use of spiritual claims otherwise known from Shia doctrines. It is still in dispute whether this reflects a persisting heritage of Fatimid undercurrents or is due to the conscious cultivation of a Sufi

language of literary overstatement (MacGregor, 2010: 91-99; Jamâl al-Dîn, 1997). It appears to be particularly marked in the poetry of 18th century Cairo (e.g. Shubrâwî, 1900).

Love for the Sharîfs was also expressed in a collection of biographies of the Prophet and his descendants who were connected with Egypt, especially those who came to be buried in Cairo. This was the *Is‘âf al-râghibîn* (“Compliance with the Desirers”) written by Muhammad b. ‘Alî al-Sabbân (d. 1206/1792). His book also includes lengthy sections on the description of the visual appearance of the Prophet (the so-called *hilya*) and on the *Mahdî* (Sabbân, 1948: 46-65, 145-161), a topic which seems to have met with a heightened interest of his readership as the 12th/18th century was approaching its end. The sacred Sharîfian space of Cairo also extends to the Imam al-Shâfi‘î, himself a maternal descendant of the Prophet, with his famous tomb at the Qarâfa cemetery (Sabbân, 1948: 251-273).

As we have seen, the historical significance of the Sharîfs in the early modern period encompassed a large number of political, social and cultural fields, from rulers of empires and regional states to maritime diasporas and small-scale communities. Their presence and the respect and veneration they enjoyed both in urban, rural and even nomad milieus, can be felt throughout in many regions. It might therefore not be far-fetched to term this period a “Sharîfian Age”, in which the Sharîfs provided some local as well as trans-regional sense of coherence, and sometimes religious and even political leadership after the end of the universal Islamic state, and before the expected end of the world.

Hadith as a moral resource and a medium of connection with the Prophet

The history of Hadith scholarship after its culmination in the fourteenth and fifteenth century (especially in Egypt, Syria and the Hijaz) has yet to be written. It is widely accepted that starting in the late 11th/17th century there was a marked shift towards a general interest in the Prophetic traditions with their chains of transmissions, and also in the textual philology of the canonical collections, which continued throughout the 12th/18th century and even spread to those Muslim regions where it had not played any significant role before. The Hijaz and Medina in particular can be identified for this period as a centre of Hadith scholarship with a far-reaching influence on other regions of the Muslim world (Maghreb, India, and others)³.

Several trends in Islamic scholarship and religiosity might be related to this shifting focus and for the rising interest in the Hadith. One was related to the persisting discussions on the sources of Islamic law, on the differences of the Sunni legal schools and also on the conflicts and contradictions between

3. See the overview in Ince, 2014: 291-293; and the critical remarks on the state of this question by El-Rouayheb, 2015, 163-165).

Sunni and Shia legal doctrines. Controversy on this issue was fed by the official Hanafî predominance in the Ottoman Empire and also to a lesser extent, in Mughal India (for the influential scholar 'Alî al-Qârî (d. 1606) in Mecca and his arguments for the superiority and final victory of the Hanafî school over its opponents, Franke 2008). The challenge to the other legal schools (*madhhab pl. madhâhib*) was considerable, especially in places where several of them were represented in the local mosques as well as in the educational and legal institutions.

A clearly more critical challenge to the Sunni legal and theological landscape were the Zaydî scholars coming to the Hijaz from the Yemen, where the Zaydî imams had expelled the Ottomans and had established their independence from the empire. As the rulers also had to find some way to accommodate the Shâfi'î population of their expanding state, some Zaydî scholars attempted to draw closer to Sunni positions but on their part criticized the Sunni legal schools and their refusal to recognize others who also built their legal opinions on the Koran and on sound Prophetic traditions⁴. Discussion with them was taken up in the 17th century by Sunni scholars like Ahmad al-Qushâshî (d. 1661) and Ibrâhîm al-Kûrânî (d. 1690) in Medina. It first came to focus on a basic theological difference, which constituted a major stumbling block for the Sunni recognition of the Zaydîs. That was the question of God's creation of human acts and human voluntary action, where the mainstream of the Ash'arite and Mâturîdite tradition differed markedly from the Mu'tazilite doctrines held by the Zaydiyya. Qushâshî and Kûrânî attempted to find a new solution by reviving Ash'arite positions which left more room for human agency (especially that of the late Juwaynî, the teacher of Ghazâlî), and by fusing them with Sufi concepts derived from Ibn 'Arabî's theosophy (Ince, 2014: 127-128; El-Rouayheb, 2015: 294-311, 322-324). But the challenge to the *madhâhib* persisted, and the discussions about independent legal judgement (*ijtihâd*) *vis-à-vis* the weight of the consensus of the legal schools gained in intensity (for the central figure in these discussions, the Yemeni scholar Muhammad al-Amîr al-San'ânî, d. 1769, and his contacts in the Hijaz, Haykel, 2003; Ince, 2014: 116-118). A school of scholars emerged among the students of Qushâshî and Kûrânî in the Hijaz, often from India, who combined Hadith and legal studies and gave more weight to Hadith in their legal reasoning (for these scholars, Abû l-Hasan al-Sindî al-Kabîr (d. 1726), Muhammad Hayât al-Sindî (d. 1750) and Abû l-Hasan al-Sindî al-Saghîr (d. 1773) and their students (Ince, 2014: 293-295). They had a large number of students from different parts of the Muslim world, and became famous for their critique of the uncritical adherence to legal school opinion. This growing focus on Prophetic tradition also went along with a revival of Hadith philology and of lexicography (Reichmuth, 2009: 28-34, et passim).

4. On this Ince, 2014: 117-129; see also Haykel, 2003, on the attempts of the Yemeni Imams to extend their authority over the Hijaz.

Devotional attachment to the Prophetic tradition increased in Ottoman religious moralism, as expressed in the writings of the Hanafî scholar Mehmed Birgivî (d. 1573) (Ivanyi, 2012), who aimed at a reform of the individual self in the Sufi tradition of Muhâsibî and Ghazâlî. In his major book, *al-Tarîqa al-muhammadiyya* (“The Muhammadan Path”) he also relied strongly on Hadith. Birgivî was at the same time highly critical of popular Sufi practice. His writings became highly influential all over the Ottoman Empire for the following centuries. They stood in fierce opposition to another influential pious trend that was equally built on strong efforts to draw closer to the Prophet and his tradition but strove by Sufi practice to achieve a closer spiritual connection with the transcendent “Prophetic reality” (*al-haqîqa al-muhammadiyya*), in the framework of Ibn ‘Arabî’s Sufi cosmology (see further below).

Hadith scholarship itself also had its own devotional elements. Transmission from a prominent teacher or transmitter normally started with the famous “Hadith Transmitted First” (*al-hadîth al-musalsal bi-l-awwaliyya*), also called the “Hadith of Mercy” (*hadîth al-rahma*), which stresses God’s mercy and the importance of being kind to everybody. This tradition claims for each members of its chain of transmitters (*isnâd*) that it is the first Hadith that he heard from his authority and thus provided a suitable initiation into pious and scholarly exchange (Reichmuth, 1999: 74-75; Kattânî, 1982: I, 85-94). It also stimulated the effort to collect the shortest available chains for this Hadith and thus secure the closest possible connection with the Prophet.

Other *musalsal* traditions – with a specific condition connected with the act of transmission itself – were reputedly transmitted since the early days of Islam with a handshake (*musâfaha*), with a crossing of fingers (*mushâbaka*), with certain phrases or prayers, or with certain times or locations, or specific names of the transmitters (e.g. only those called Muhammad) etc. This kind of ceremonial Hadith transmission, still to be more closely studied for its historical roots and significance, was apparently very popular in the 18th century, when the Meccan scholar Muhammad b. ‘Aqîla (d. 1737) and after him Murtadâ al-Zabîdî (d. 1791) gathered a large number of them in special collections (Reichmuth, 2009: 135; Simonds, 1993).

It can be observed that the transmission of Prophetic traditions and Sufi chains of this period became largely homologous. Sometimes the same series of transmitters shows up in these chains, indicating a fusion of Hadith scholarship with Sufi orientation and practice, which seems to have been quite typical for the 17th and 18th century. It had become important in Sufi circles to clarify and collect the chains of transmission which linked the different brotherhoods to their founders and finally to the Prophet. Apparently starting from the 15th century, the chains for the garments (*khîraq*), the recitation formulas (*dhikr*, pl. *adhkâr*) and other practices were collected from different oral and written sources for the sake of blessing and for summary transmission. The largest and most influential of such collections were provided by Ahmad al-Qushâshî (d. 1661), Hasan al-‘Ujaymî (d. 1702),

Murtadâ al-Zabîdî (d. 1791) and Muhammad b.‘Alî al-Sanûsî (d. 1859). Their importance for the merger of Sufi tradition and practice in the early modern and modern periods has still to be fully assessed (Reichmuth, 2017). In any case Prophetic Hadith had become the most important model for the legitimization of the highly diversified Sufi traditions of the Muslim world. In the writings of Murtadâ al-Zabîdî the scope has been widened into an encyclopedic endeavour to provide historical grounding and legitimization for Muslim culture at his time on the basis of the Prophetic tradition (Reichmuth, 2002, 2009: xi-xx).

Imitatio of the Prophet – Individual and Collective

Personal attachment to the Prophet, and to his way of life which was enshrined in the Islamic normative tradition, as always been an essential part of Islamic religious life. This was enhanced since the later Middle Ages by the emergence of a rich poetry in praise of the Prophet, which celebrated the universal divine blessings which he had made accessible for mankind, and his perfect human qualities as a human being. These poems also often expressed the longing to visit the Prophet and his tomb in Medina and encouraged the believer to approach him for his intercession (*shafâ’a*) at Judgment Day (Schimmel, 1981: 155-191; Dirnîqa, 2003). The most famous examples of this praise poetry were the two poems of Muhammad al-Bûsîrî (d. 1294), the *Burda* and the *Hamziyya*, which in the course of the early modern period were frequently amplified and commented upon and also translated in other languages⁵. Another collection by the Moroccan author ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-Fâzâzî (d. 1230), widely known as *al-‘Isrînîyât*, has remained especially famous for its expression of longing for Medina. To this day it is highly popular in West Africa where it is frequently recited in special celebrations (Raji, 1982).

The highly emotional and personalized style of this poetry strongly invites the individual Muslim to join in the expressed emotions of admiration, love and longing, and in the hope for salvation through the personal attachment to the Prophet. His protection can be strongly hoped for by those who love him and attach themselves to him, as he is “the most faithful of mankind in honouring his covenants” (*wa-huwa awfâ l-khalqî bi-l-dhimami*). This formula, a quotation from Bûsîrî’s *Burda* was even used by Murtadâ al-Zabîdî for his own personal seal (Reichmuth, 2009: 4; Pinkney Stetkevych, 2010: 251, v. 146)!

Mirza Ghâlib (d. 1869), the famous Indian poet of Delhi who was notorious for his rather licentious life style and his neglect of most of the Islamic duties, nevertheless clung to the belief in God and in the love for the Prophet

5. See Abid and Chih in this volume.

and his family, as reported by the poet Hâlî, one of his friends and disciples (Russell, 2012: 44):

From all the duties of worship and the enjoined practices of Islam he took only two – a belief that God is one and is immanent in all things, and a love for the Prophet and his family. And this alone he considered sufficient for salvation.

Devotional attachment also found its expression in prayer collections focusing on the benediction of the Prophet (*tasliya*), with Jazûlî's *Dalâ'il al-khayrât* certainly being the most widespread and popular one (Cornell, 1998: 170-180, 184, 211-213; Witkam, 2002; Abid 2011b). Basically a collection of lengthy litanies of benedictions of the Prophet, that evoke his position in the cosmos both as God's first creation and as a bringer of His light and mercy to the whole world, it also includes pictures of the two Harams in Mecca and Medina, and of the tomb of the Prophet and the two first caliphs in the Medinan mosque (Abid 2011a). The execution of these rare pictorial elements in the canon of Muslim piety often came to reflect the changing styles and tastes of the times in which the copies were made. They convey the longing for pilgrimage and for the visit of the Prophet that, as we have seen, also pervades the praise poetry. The huge success of the *Dalâ'il* and their manuscripts from different times and regions document the far-reaching impact of the pattern of Prophetic piety which the book conveyed to believers virtually in all parts of the Muslim world.

Other pictorial and calligraphic elements which expressed the pious attachment to the Prophet were created by Ottoman artists in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The most successful one was the so-called *Hilye-i sherîf* (Schimmel, 1981: 30-33; Uzun, 1998; Taşkale, Gündüz, 2006), a description of the Prophet taken from a Hadith reported by 'Alî, combined with Koranic verses and elements like the names of the four caliphs or the Ten Companions who were promised Paradise. This pattern, which evokes the bodily image and the perfect character of the Prophet and thus gains an iconic function, was, as it seems, first created by the famous Ottoman calligrapher Hâfiz 'Osmân (d. 1698). It was imitated with many variations by countless Ottoman calligraphers and is at present available even as poster. As in the case of the *Dalâ'il*, pictures of the Harams were often added. Some samples from the 18th century show the *Hilye* written into the picture of a rose, the popular devotional symbol of the Prophet (Kunt, Valencia, Çagman, 2008: 120-121; Schimmel, 1981, 128). The various representations of the *Hilye-i Şerîf* go as far as one could possibly go at their time in bringing the visual image of the Prophet to the mind of the pious believer.

In the context of the Jazûliyya in the Maghreb and also among other Sufis in Egypt and further East, the frequent benediction (*tasliya*) of the Prophet had become a regular practice of prayer and meditation (Meier, 2002, 2005). It was supposed to elevate the believer by its constant use to the sphere of the transcendent "Prophetic reality" and to lead him into the living presence of the Prophet himself, which sometimes might include visions of him when

sleeping or awake. This practice which was outlined already in the writings of several authors of the 15th century and further elaborated in the following periods came to constitute the basic element of the “Muhammadan Path”, (*tariqa muhammadiyya*) which came to be established as a Sufi path with its own chains of affiliation in the encyclopedic collections of Sufi brotherhoods since the 17th century⁶. The term itself seems to occur for the first time in the writings of Ahmad al-Wâsitî (d. 1311), a Syrian Sufi of the 13th/early 14th century, and then with al-Ghazawânî, already mentioned above as leader of the Jazûliyya in the 16th century.

The discussion of the *tasliya* practice and its mystical dimensions can equally be found with authors like Sakhâwî (d. 1497) and especially with al-Sha‘rânî (d. 1565), who strongly recommends it in his *Lawâqih al-anwâr* as a gateway to the Divine Presence (*hadrat Allâh*) and to an encounter with the Prophet in the intermediary sphere of the Barzakh (*suhba barzakhiyya*) (Sha‘rânî, 1973: 281-287). A similar recommendation for times without a qualified Sufi teacher was made by ‘Abd al-Haqq al-Dihlawî (d. 1642) the famous Qâdirî and Traditionist from Delhi, with reference to the Shâdhiliyya, whose crucial influence in this respect can thus be attested even for India (Tahânawî 1862: 860-861). The later Sufi chains of the *tariqa muhammadiyya* include Sufi scholars in the Hijaz, like Ahmad al-Qushâshî (d. 1661) and ‘Abdallâh al-Mirghanî (d. 1792), and several others which reach back to al-Sha‘rânî and his own masters, and also to Maghribi shaykhs and scholars of the 17th century. A certain diversification and an attempt at a fresh intake of direct Sufi experience can be recognized in the later collections of Sufi chains which were already mentioned above. The individual quest for a connection with the Prophet was also to lead to claims of authority and leadership in some of the later Sufi movements⁷.

The Indian development of a *tariqa muhammadiyya* in 18th Century Delhi, by the Naqshbandî Sufis Muhammad Nâsir ‘Andalîb (d. 1758) and his son Khwâja Mîr Dard (d. 1785) in Delhi (Schimmel, 1976; Ziad, 2008; Khodamoradi, 2014), was apparently independent from the Shâdhiliyya tradition described above. As they belonged to the *Naqshbandiyya mujaddidiyya* founded by Ahmad Sirhindî (d. 1624)⁸, their thought was to a large extent shaped by Sirhindî’s Sufi cosmology and his doctrine of the ascent of the Sufi towards the sphere of the Prophetic reality and his ensuing descent back to the world, where he would then act as a perfect manifestation of the Prophetic qualities and provide guidance to the believers. For Mîr Dard, the mystical ascent would give access to the knowledge of the Prophet himself,

6. For the *tariqa muhammadiyya* in the Arab world, e.g. Sanûsî, 1990: 7-26; Radtke, 1996: 114-127, with further reference; Cornell, 1998: 196-229; Hoffman, 1999: 351-369; Sedgwick, 2005: 27-49; Pagani, 2009: 41-46; Reichmuth, 2010: 396; 2017: 90-94; for the Indian context see below.

7. For the Tijâniyya Abun-Nasr 2000a, 2000b.

8. See on him Friedmann, 2000; Buehler, 2012.

a sphere which he called the “Divine Muhammadan Knowledge” (*‘ilm ilâhî muhammadi*) and which would encompass all rational, transmitted and intuitive knowledge. This would make him a caliph (*Khalîfa*) who was entitled to authentic interpretation of the Prophetic message, a gift essentially reserved for the descendants of the Prophet.

The “Universal Muhammadan Path” (*tarîqa muhammadiyya jâmi‘a*), which Mîr Dard laid out in his writings, centered on his father, ‘Andalîb, himself a great Sufi scholar and poet of Sharîfian descent. He declared him to be the authentic representative of the Prophet and the Imam of this time, who initiated a new age for Islam. The Path established by him would also include the Shiites. Apart from these eschatological claims and speculations he offered a striking vision of the individual self after its ascent to the level of the Prophetic reality. It then took on many of the Divine names, with “ego” (*anâ*, pers. *man*) as the most powerful one, in a superior and mediating distance from body and soul. This “ego” on its descent to the lower levels of existence had by now become the representative of God and the Prophet.

The increased emotional and cognitive orientation of the individual towards the Prophet, which we have outlined here, also came to have consequences for the Muslim communities and their religious as well as political life, as they fed into eschatological expectations of religious renewal and reform.

Conclusion: imitation of the prophet and political mobilization

The figure of the Renewer (*mujaddid*), who according to Prophetic Tradition will be sent to the Muslim community at the turn of every Islamic century in order to renew the Sunna of the Prophet, came up time and again in the early modern period and attained particular importance in the religious and political movements of the 18th and early 19th centuries. In all of them, the individual and collective imitation of the Prophet was an important element of social and political mobilization (van Donzel, 1993; Friedmann, 2000; Franke, 2008: 158-160)⁹.

For the early Wahhâbî movement in Arabia, Islam, which had been corrupted and turned into general unbelief in the course of Muslim history, was now coming back as a stranger to mankind, in fulfillment of the Divine plan, and Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhâb’s career reflected and refigured the experience of the Prophet himself and his community (Peskes, 1993; Riexinger, 2015). The Indian *tarîqa muhammadiyya* movement of the early 19th century under the spiritual and military leadership of Sayyid Ahmad Shahîd (d.1830) equally claimed to follow this Prophetic path, and was for its part apparently also driven by Mahdist expectations (Gaborieau, 2010).

9. The literature on *Mujaddids* and on *Tajdid* movements in different times and regions has been growing and would deserve a more comprehensive study.

The *jihâd* movement in the northern regions of present-day Nigeria, which was initiated in the late 18th century by the Fulani Sufi scholar ‘Uthmân b. Fodiye (d. 1817) (Last, 1977, 1987; Hiskett, 1963) and by other members of his family and their students, led to the foundation of the Sokoto caliphate. It was shaped by a similar combination of religious claims to a renewal on the path of the Prophetic Sunna, and of eschatological expectations that were connected in many parts of the Muslim world with the turn of the 12th Islamic century (1200/1786).

As he looked back on his successful career, ‘Uthmân b. Fodiye summarized and clarified his own role in a Hausa poem to his adherents who were regarding him as the *Mahdî*. Describing his person and his endeavour as perfect imitations of the Prophetic model, he sees his own person as combining the qualities of a Commander of the Faithful and Imam. Although he denies being the *Mahdî* himself, he insists on the fact that he fulfills the qualifications for this rank and acts like him as the Renewer of the Sunna. He finally presents himself as the harbinger of the *Mahdî*. In other poems by authors of the Sokoto *jihâd* he is also qualified as *mujaddid*, a term which has remained in common use for him. He thus answered to all the expectations which the imitation of the Prophet had to offer for a dedicated religio-political leader (Adeleye, 1966; Newman, 1980: 132-136).

This famous Hausa poem, titled “The qualities of the Shaykh” (*Sifofin shehu*) may aptly conclude our argument at this point, as it shows the close connection of the individual and collective attachment to the Prophet with political eschatology, which had become such an important factor of social mobilisation – sometimes even of state formation – in the Muslim world at the end of the 18th century.

Stefan REICHMUTH
Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany
stefan.reichmuth@rub.de

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Aspects of Prophetic Piety in the Early Modern Period

The article reviews the Muslims' commitment to their Prophet and their views on his continuing presence as a source of blessing, inspiration and eschatological expectation. It came to shape Muslim religious culture in many regions, and with increasing intensity, over the whole of the early modern period. Attachment to the Prophet was extended to his descendants, who after the vanishing of the universal caliphate came to enjoy particular respect in the Muslim world. Prophetic piety with its doctrinal, literary, socio-cultural and political expressions still remains insufficiently explored for the early modern period, for which the hermeneutics of continuity and transformation are yet to be balanced out. The article offers an overview of central aspects of this field.

Keywords: commitment to the Prophet, eschatology, prophetic piety, continuous presence.

Aspects de la piété prophétique à l'époque moderne

Sont ici étudiées la dévotion des musulmans envers leur Prophète et leurs vues concernant sa présence continue en tant que source de bienfait, d'inspiration et d'attente eschatologique, lesquelles ont façonné la culture religieuse tout au long de l'ère moderne. L'attachement envers le Prophète a été étendu à ses descendants qui, après la disparition du califat islamique universel, ont joui d'un respect particulier dans le monde islamique. La piété prophétique, avec ses différents moyens d'expression doctrinaux, littéraires, socioculturels et politiques, reste un domaine trop peu examiné pour la période moderne, dans le cadre de laquelle l'herméneutique de la continuité et celle de la transformation doivent encore être équilibrées; les aspects centraux de ce domaine sont abordés.

Mots-clés: attachement au Prophète, eschatologie, piété prophétique, présence continue.

Aspectos de la piedad profética en la época moderna

Se estudian aquí la devoción de los musulmanes hacia su Profeta y sus perspectivas respecto de su presencia continua en tanto que fuente de bienestar, de inspiración y de esperanza de salvación, que formatearon la cultura religiosa a lo largo de la era moderna. El apego al Profeta se extendió hacia sus descendientes, que después de la desaparición del califato islámico universal gozaron de un respeto particular en el mundo islámico. La piedad profética, con sus diferentes medios de expresión doctrinales, literarios, socioculturales y políticos, sigue siendo un ámbito muy poco examinado para el período moderno, en el marco de la cual la hermenéutica de la continuidad y la de la transformación deben ser aún equilibradas. Se abordarán aquí los aspectos centrales de este espacio.

Palabras clave: apego al Profeta, escatología, piedad profética, presencia continua.