
Most of the works that constitute the earliest Sufi corpus of the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries have been lost in their original forms, leaving large gaps in the source material available to contemporary scholars carrying out research in the field. Many Sufi concepts can only be examined in the works of later authors, such as al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), al-Kalbāḏdi (d. 380/990), al-Makki (d. 386/996), Abū Nuʿaym (d. 430/1039), al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074), and al-Hujwīrī (d. ca. 465/1072). Orfali and Saab’s edition of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Sīrjānī’s 5th/11th century collection of early Sufi sayings, Kitāb al-bayāḍ wa-l-sawād min kbaṣāʾīš ḥikam al-ʿibād fi naʿī al-murīḍ wa-l-murād, is one of the sources in this category that can be used to reflect and reconstruct the earliest treatments of Sufi concepts and figures.

Little is known about al-Sīrjānī’s life and works. His nisba indicates that he was from Sīrjān, the largest city of Kirmān province. His name is recorded by two of his contemporaries: ‘Alī ibn ʿUthmān al-Hujwīrī and ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1089). They write that al-Sīrjānī was one of the sheikhs of Kirmān.

In his brief introduction to his Kitāb al-bayāḍ wa-l-sawād, al-Sīrjānī states that in this work he would like to present a collection of wise sayings and anecdotes of the Sufis. These Sufis have adhered to the Qurʾān exoterically and esoterically, in mind and heart. They have followed the Prophetic practice in speech and action as well as in good manners and morality. Al-Sīrjānī arranges his quotations according to their subject matter, without providing the names of their transmitters (asānīd).

The work consists of seventy-three chapters (bāb) and many of the chapters are divided into further subdivisions (fašl). The chapters cover a wide range of topics on the theoretical and practical aspects of Sufism. Many chapters include two main parts: First, the idea of the subject matter is introduced. Then, those who put this idea into prac-
tice are mentioned (e.g., maˈrifah-ˈārif, īmān-mūˈmin, ˈaqīl-ˈuqālā, waraˈ-mutawarrī, zubd-zāḥid, faqr-fuqārā, taqwā-muttaqī, and tawakkul-mutawakkīl). The chapter headings include the following: On ˈḥikma; On the spiritual strivings of the Sufis, their moral conduct and mystical states; On the establishment of the name taṣawwuf; On the essence of Sufism and the purity of the Sufis; On their understanding of gnosis (maˈrifā) and the reality of the gnostic (ˈārif); On faith (imān) and the virtue of the believer (muˈmin); On belittling this world and the unawareness of this-worldly people; On the mention of intellect (ˈaqīl) and the virtues of those who possess it; On repentance (tawba) and the endeavor of the repentant; On moral scrupulousness (waraˈ) and the merits of those who possess it; On asceticism (zubd) and the nearness of the ascetic (to God); On poverty (faqr) and the honor of the poor; On chivalry (fuṣūwu) and the generosity of those who practice it; On the affirmation of the Sufi states (alwāfāl) and stations (maqāmāt); and On miscellaneous questions.

Most chapters open with Qurˈānic statements. These are followed by Sufi commentaries, which are primarily adopted from Abū ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Sulamiʾs (d. 412/1021) Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr. Many chapters also contain Prophetic traditions, wise sayings, and verses of poetry. For instance, in the chapter on wisdom (ˈḥikma), al-Sīrjānī begins his elucidations with the Qurˈānic verses 2:269 and 2:212: “He (God) gives ˈḥikma to whomever He wants, and whoever is given ˈḥikma has been given much good” and “He (God) provides whomever He will without reckoning.” Al-Sīrjānī continues his remarks through citations from the Prophet Muḥammad: “ˈḤikma is the stray camel of the believer (dāllat al-muˈmin); he takes it wherever he finds it” and “Whoever becomes an ascetic toward this world God settles ˈḥikma in his heart and makes his tongue speak through it.” Then, he presents quotations on the subject of ˈḥikma from earlier authoritative Islamic figures in general and Sufi figures in particular. Among these figures are ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Dhū l-Nūn al-Misrī, ʿUṯayl ibn ʿIyāḍ, Abū Bakr al-Warrāq, Abū Saʿīd al-Khārīz, and Yahyā ibn Muʿādh. Al-Sīrjānī also cites lines of poetry that address ˈḥikma in his treatment of the concept.

Although al-Sīrjānī does not explicitly name all of the sources that he uses in Kitāb al-bayāq wa-l-sawād, his quotations from al-Sarrāj’s al-Lumaʾ ʾfī l-taṣawwuf indicate that the structure and content of al-
Luma’s influenced al-Sîrjânî’s work. Occasionally, al-Sîrjânî refers to his primary source as al-Sarrāj. However, many other times, he does not do so. Al-Sîrjânî’s omission of transmission chains might be a result of the influence of al-Sarrāj’s style on the author in this respect. In his introduction, al-Sarrāj states that he has omitted the names of the transmitters from most of his quotations. After al-Luma’, al-Sulami’s Ḥaqā’iq al-tafsîr seems to be the second main source used by al-Sîrjânî, particularly in the case of Sufi Qur’ân commentaries. Al-Sulami’s Taḥaqqât al-ṣūfiyya was likely also a source for al-Sîrjânî for the statements of earlier Sufis. It seems that al-Sîrjânî quotes only from written sources. He never says “so-and-so said such-and-such to me.” In this respect, Kitâb al-bayâd wa-l-sawād differs from al-Luma’ and al-Qushayrî’s al-Risâla, for especially in the latter case, al-Qushayrî frequently refers to the oral statements of his teacher and father-in-law Abû ‘Alî al-Daqqāq (d. 405/1015).

If we move beyond the work itself to the edition under review here, it is notable that we have seen two recent editions of al-Sîrjânî’s Kitâb al-bayâd wa-l-sawâd. These two editions were apparently produced independently. In addition to Orfali and Saab, al-Sîrjânî’s work has been edited by Mohsen Pourmokhtar and published by the Iranian Institute of Philosophy & Research Unit Intellectual History of Islamicate World of the Freie Universität Berlin (Tehran, 2011). Although Orfali and Saab mention Pourmokhtar’s studies on Kitâb al-Bayâd wa-l-sawâd, they do not refer to his complete edition of the work. Orfali and Saab’s edition is based on three manuscripts: Landberg 64 (Yale University), Āyat Allâh Mar‘ashi Najâfî 117, and British Library Board Or. 12632. Additionally, Pourmokhtar uses Malek Library (Tehran) 4251. Orfali and Saab’s edition aims at presenting an authoritative text of the work.

The editors provide lists of Qur’ânic verses and Prophetic statements cited in Kitâb al-bayâd wa-l-sawâd and indices of geographical names, proper names, poems, and technical terms. They document in footnotes major variations between the manuscripts and add meters in parentheses for the verses of poetry.

Although this edition is not an annotated edition of Kitâb al-Bayâd wa-l-sawâd, the reader would like to see a certain degree of annotation in the edition. For instance, s/he would like to see the addresses of the ḥadîth narrations in the primary ḥadîth collections and be able to identify and cross-reference al-Sîrjânî’s primary...
sources throughout his quotations, at least in the case of written sources that are easily available to us today, such as al-Sarrāj’s al-Luma‘ and al-Sulami’s Ḥaqā‘iq al-tafsīr. The scholarly level of this edition could have been enhanced through such annotations.

In the introduction in English, the editors provide information about al-Sirjānī and Kitāb al-bayād wa-l-sawād, and they discuss the work’s construction and content. However, throughout this section, their translations from the work are of a quite loose and incomplete character. Particularly in the case of the chapter headings, the editors provide their personal interpretations of the headings rather than the actual translations. For instance, chapter ten is translated as “Disregard for this world and its people” (bāb taṣghīr al-dunyā wa-ghaflat ahlih). Chapter eleven is translated as “The human mind and its achievements,” although the actual wording reads, “On belittling this world and the unawareness of this-worldly people” (bāb ḏbikr al-‘aql wa-manāqīb al-‘uqalā‘). Chapter thirteen is translated as “Abstinence and self-denial,” whereas the original text reads, “On moral scrupulousness and the merit of those who possess it” (bāb al-wara‘ wa-karāmat al-mutawarri‘). Chapter twenty-two is translated as “The Sufi idea of time and mystical moments,” although the original phrase reads, “On what has been said about the moment and keeping it” (bāb mā qīla fī l-waqt wa-hifzīb). Chapter thirty is translated as “False claims and their insignificance,” whereas the actual wording reads, “On disclosing pretentiousness and the insignificance of pretentious people in the eyes of the men of the Truth” (bāb al-kashīf ‘an al-da‘wā‘ wa-qillat khhāṣr ablihi‘ ‘inda abl al-ḥaqiq). In addition, chapter fifty-six is translated as “Satisfaction and being content with God,” although the original text reads, “On satisfaction and the rank of the person who is satisfied” (bāb al-ridā‘ wa-darajat al-rāḍī).

In any case, al-Sirjānī’s Kitāb al-bayād wa-l-sawād is an invaluable source for the study of Sufism, and we feel fortunate to have this critical edition in front of us with the comprehensive indices that it includes. This edition will certainly provide a foundation for further studies in the field and is a welcome contribution to the growing literature on early Sufi texts.

Hikmet Yaman

Marmara University, Istanbul-Turkey