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Introduction

The intellectual climate

The twelfth century (sixth century of the *hijra*) could be described as a period of both consolidation and creativity in the history of Islamic thought. It began with the writing of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī's great synthesis of religious knowledge, the *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, and ended with the development of a new school of philosophy, the *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* or 'Philosophy of illumination' by Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), and the regeneration of speculative theology by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209). This was also a particularly creative period for Islamic mysticism. Although in the history of Sufism, the sixth/twelfth century might appear to have been overshadowed by the many famous names of the preceding century, such as Sulamī, Qushayrī, Anṣārī and Abū Saʿīd b. Abi'l-Khayr (d. 440/1049), and dwarfed by the two mystical giants of the following century, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) and Muḥyi'l-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), it could nonetheless boast challenging and imaginative figures such as ʿAyn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 525/1131) and Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1209), as well as great mystic poets such as Sanāʾī (d. 525/1131) and Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. before 617/1220). It was, moreover, an important formative period in the history of Sufism, for it saw simultaneously the evolution of the mystical doctrines of love and of a new literary language for their expression. These momentous developments were to have a profound and enduring impact on Sufism and its literature throughout the Persian-speaking world and beyond.

Such fresh departures in thought and literature were no doubt made possible by the processes of stabilisation, systematisation and synthesis

that had gone before. During the course of the fifth/eleventh century, first the Ghaznavids and then the Saljuqs had gradually re-established Sunni rule over most of the Iranian plateau, capturing the lands of western Iran from the long-standing Buyid dynasty, the holy cities in the Hijaz from the Fatimids, and extending their empire as far as Syria and Anatolia. Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), vizier first to the Saljuq sultan Alp Arslān and then to his young son Malik Shāh, took further steps to bolster the Sunni cause by setting up a chain of madrasas which specialised in the teaching of his preferred school of Shāfiʿī law. Apart from strengthening the Shāfiʿī school, the establishment of these madrasas in Baghdad, Nishapur, Herat, Merv and other important cities of the Saljuq empire helped to defuse some of the factional tension that had arisen following the systematic persecution of Shāfiʿīs and Ashʿarīs by Niẓām al-Mulk's predecessor as vizier, Abū Naṣr al-Kundurī (d. 457/1065).[1]

Though the Niẓāmiyya madrasas were by no means the first institutions of their kind, they were apparently the first to have been conceived of as a chain with a more or less standardised curriculum.[2] Each of the Niẓāmiyya madrasas also had the advantage of a generous endowment (*waqf*) which provided not only stipends for the teachers but also scholarships for the students, who resided at the academy for a number of years. Graduates of the Niẓāmiyya had enhanced status and were able to find prominent positions in society as Shāfiʿī *qāḍī*s, *faqīh*s, imams and so on.[3] Makdisi has argued that Ashʿarī theology was not, as previously supposed, a part of the *official* curriculum of the Niẓāmiyya, and this would certainly have been in keeping with the astute diplomacy of Niẓām al-Mulk.[4] Nevertheless, the vizier did to some degree attempt to promote the Ashʿarī school of theology by patronising scholars who were either proponents of, or strongly associated with, Ashʿarism, such as ʿAbd al-Malik al-Juwaynī, known as Imām al-Ḥaramayn (d. 478/1085), and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111).[5] Moreover, it is hard to imagine that some impromptu discussion of, if not instruction in, theology did not take place in these educational establishments,[6] and since most (though not all) Shāfiʿīs followed al-Ashʿarī in theology, the promotion of Shāfiʿism already served to advance the cause of Ashʿarism.[7] In any case, Niẓām al-Mulk's intention in founding these madrasas was not to exacerbate theological tensions within the Sunni fold, but more likely to train up a body of well-grounded religious scholars who could effectively argue against the

propaganda of the Ismailis[8] and of the charismatic Karrāmiyya, who were still active in Khorasan.[9]

By the end of the first quarter of the sixth/twelfth century, the religious climate might appear to have become more stable and settled. The military hold of the Ismailis had, in Iran at least, become confined to pockets in the mountain regions of the Alburz, Alamut, Quhistan and territories close to the Caspian sea, while the Karrāmiyya, having long since lost their hold on the important city of Nishapur, had moved the centre of their activities to the mountainous region of Ghur. Yet vigorous and at times violent competition between different Muslim sects and schools of thought continued throughout the century.[10] If anything, the strengthening of the Shāfiʿī/Ashʿarī position and the influential writings of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī served to stimulate intellectual activity among ideological rivals, who sought to consolidate and promote their own beliefs, as well as making appraisals or critiques of others in works of various kinds.

The notable output of Sunni and Shiʿi heresiographical works during the sixth/twelfth century demonstrates a sharp awareness of this polemical background.[11] In the field of Qur'anic exegesis, the same century witnessed the composition of two important Shiʿi commentaries on the Qur'an, the Arabic *Majmaʿ al-bayān* of Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153),[12] and the Persian *Rawḍ al-jinān* of Abu'l-Futūḥ Rāzī (d. mid-sixth/twelfth century);[13] an influential Muʿtazilī commentary by Abu'l-Qāsim al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144);[14] and a philosophically-oriented and Ismaili-influenced commentary by the theologian Abu'l-Fatḥ al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153).[15] We shall see that by writing his commentary in Persian, Maybudī was trying to promote a traditionalist form of Shāfiʿī Sufism that was anti-Ashʿarī, anti-Muʿtazilī, and certainly anti-philosophy. For it is another complexity of this period that while Ghazzālī strongly criticised aspects of philosophy in a number of his works, most notably in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, he was not entirely against philosophy, and his ideas and methodology reveal the influence of both philosophy and logic.[16] This may well have paved the way for later Ashʿarī theologians to adopt a more open approach not only to logic but also to philosophy, despite Ghazzālī's condemnation of the latter.[17] It is arguable that it also encouraged Sufis of the sixth/twelfth century to draw more freely on the philosophical tradition, though this may simply have been another of the possibilities that were opened up with the greater emancipation of Sufism.[18]

The patronage of Niẓām al-Mulk and the writings of Ghazzālī contributed to an enhancement of the status of Sufism during the late fifth/eleventh and early sixth/twelfth centuries. However, these two figures cannot be given the entire credit for this shift, as the process had been gradually taking place for more than a century.[19] Between the late fourth/tenth and mid-fifth/eleventh centuries, several Sufi scholars had set about documenting the teachings of Sufism and recording the lives and sayings of great mystics. These compilations, which took the form of Sufi 'manuals'[20] and biographical dictionaries or *Ṭabaqāt* works,[21] served not only to systematise and expound the doctrines of Sufism, but also to demonstrate the legitimacy of Sufism. Clearly, at this time there continued to be those among the ulema who disapproved of aspects of Sufi doctrine, but now matters were being made worse by the actions of antinomians and others, claiming to be Sufis, who were giving Sufism a bad name.[22] The works that these Sufi scholars produced were valuable in a number of ways: they preserved in writing for posterity a great deal of early Sufi lore that had hitherto mainly been transmitted through the oral tradition; they defined the parameters of Sufism, both assisting the Sufis' own self-knowledge and clarifying what Sufism was and was not for others; they stimulated the theoretical disciplines within Sufism; and (in Khorasan) they established Sufism as the mainstream over and against competing mystical and ascetic traditions.[23] For all these reasons they must certainly also have added to the credibility of Sufism, though it is doubtful that they could ever win over the most exoterically-inclined religious scholars.

By the middle of the fifth/eleventh century, it appears that the situation of Sufism within society was already changing, and Sufis were beginning to take on a more influential role both with those in power and with the populace.[24] Anecdotes in the histories of this period and in hagiographical literature indicate that celebrated mystics of the time were held in respect, and even in awe, by the Turkish sultans.[25] At the same time, charismatic Sufis like Abū Saʿīd b. Abi'l-Khayr were attracting increasingly large numbers of followers from all walks of life. On the other hand, there were the more 'conservative' Sufis, such as Qushayrī, who had standing among the ulema, and who were therefore part of that class of bureaucrats and religious scholars upon whom the Saljuq rulers depended.[26] By virtue of their religious authority, these Sufi members of the scholarly elite could also wield influence with the people, especially in the cities.[27]

Another aspect of the growing prominence of Sufism during the fifth/eleventh century was the development of the Sufi 'lodge' or *khānaqāh*. It had long been customary for Sufis to gather at a certain place to imbibe the teachings of their shaykh or *pīr*. When this was simply a case of listening to a talk or sermon, such gatherings might take place in a circle in the mosque, but when they involved Sufi ceremonies such as 'spiritual concert' (*samāʿ*), they were more likely to be held at the shaykh's home or, after his death, at a shrine close to his tomb. As places where Sufis could stay, either when in retreat or when travelling, such gathering places were known as *ribāṭ*s and *duwayra*s or, increasingly from the late fourth/tenth century on, as *khānaqāh*s. By the mid-fifth/eleventh century, it appears that in Khorasan the institution was becoming more formalised, and Abū Saʿīd is reported to have drawn up a code of rules for people in the *khānaqāh*.[28] This institutionalisation of the *khānaqāh* was no doubt associated with the growing popular appeal of Sufism and the changing role of shaykhs and *pīr*s in relation to their disciples, which appears to have been taking place in Khorasan around the same time.[29] Shaykhs such as Abū Saʿīd, and later Aḥmad Jām (d. 536/1141), were becoming more 'paternalistic', more directly involved in the day-to-day supervision of the spiritual lives of their disciples and their overall well-being.[30] Disciples, for their part, were expected to bind themselves loyally to one shaykh, rather than going from one to another in search of knowledge, as had previously been the custom.[31] The ever-growing circle of devoted followers around such figures not only attracted patronage from the wealthy and powerful, among them several of the Saljuq administrators,[32] but also accrued considerable sums from smaller donations given daily by the people of the bazaar.[33] Thus the shaykh had the additional power and responsibility of disposing wealth to the needy, not to mention offering hospitality to large numbers of followers.[34] One indication of the establishment of these institutions, and the growing respectability of Sufism during the latter part of the fifth/eleventh century, was the building and endowment of several *khānaqāh*s in different cities by Saljuq officials – Niẓām al-Mulk himself endowed at least one.[35] Toward the end of the century, *khānaqāh*s were sufficiently established and powerful as an institution for Ghazzālī to be asked to issue a fatwa concerning the administration of endowments in them.[36]

In fact, by the time Ghazzālī began to write his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, Su-

fism already featured more prominently in Muslim society. *Khānaqāh*s founded by the ruling powers stood as sacred buildings alongside mosques,[37] and Sufi doctrine was being taught as part of the curriculum in several madrasas.[38] Ghazzālī's significant contribution was to provide a sound intellectual basis for the new, still fragile emancipation of Sufism, which had thus far been fostered by a favourable social and political climate. In his *Iḥyā'* and in other works, such as the *Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, Ghazzālī argues unequivocally for the intellectual superiority of mystical knowledge. Moreover, it appears that the *Iḥyā'* and Ghazzālī's Persian work the *Kīmiyā-yi saʿādat* were not written *exclusively* for the ulema or for a Sufi elite, but, as Hodgson has observed, 'for a private person, concerned for his own life or charged with the spiritual direction of others.'[39] In the *Iḥyā'*, Ghazzālī discusses all the Shari'a laws that are obligatory for each individual as well as almost every aspect of religious life, explaining its intellectual significance, its moral and social benefit, and how it can become a means for the purification of the soul, if not for spiritual realisation. In this work, as well as in others, Ghazzālī explicitly speaks of a threefold hierarchy of knowledge in society: the commonalty (*ʿāmm*), that is, those who believe in the truths of religion without questioning; the elite (*khāṣṣ*), who learn reasons for their beliefs (by whom he is implying the religious scholars and especially speculative theologians); and finally the elite of the elite (*khāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*), those who directly experience religious truth, namely Sufis. Hodgson has observed that for Ghazzālī, this hierarchy of knowledge also implied a moral function, such that each of the classes could teach the one below it and act as an example for it. It follows by implication that those who are lower in the hierarchy should be receptive to the knowledge of those in the class above, and that therefore 'the Sharʿī men of religion had the responsibility to receive Sufi inspiration so far as they could, and to spread the inward spirit of religion and not merely the outward doctrines, among the populace generally.' This point leads Hodgson to observe: 'Thus the high evaluation of Sufi experience as a vindication of truth had social consequences which Ghazzālī did not quite dare spell out but which he himself provided a living example of.'[40] Ghazzālī's achievement, therefore, was to have placed the spiritual and intellectual disciplines of Sufism firmly among the traditional sciences of Islam. Certainly, after him Sufism was no longer preoccupied with defending its right to existence.[41]

At the opening of the sixth/twelfth century then, the stage was set for a new and creative phase in the history of Sufism. It was during this period that the doctrines of love mysticism, which had been growing ever more prevalent during the last decades of the fifth/eleventh century, began to be fully developed and articulated. A decisive moment in this development came when Abū Ḥāmid's younger brother Aḥmad Ghazzālī (d. 520/1126) wrote his seminal treatise on love, the *Sawāniḥ*.[42] This work was important because it added an intellectual dimension to love mysticism, for it showed love to be not merely a state or a station, or an emotional yearning of the servant for his or her Lord, but a complete spiritual way, with its own metaphysic. The *Sawāniḥ* was composed in Persian, and it was Persian that became the natural and preferred language for the expression of the doctrines of love. Love mysticism, in turn, gave Persian literature a new lease of life. The love lyric (*ghazal*) gained new depths as poets ambiguously serenaded and eulogised a human/divine beloved/Beloved – this ambiguity itself being an allusion to the profound analogical, for some Sufis existential, connection between human and divine love. Even before the *ghazal*, the quatrain or *rubāʿī*, an indigenous Persian genre, had been appropriated for love mysticism. The *rubāʿī* had the added advantage of being easily incorporated into sermons and passages of prose. Persian prose itself, which had hitherto tended to be plain and functional in character, was now transformed into an artistic medium, becoming all but poetry with its use of metaphor, assonance, rhythm and rhyme. It was in the prose and poetry of this period that the metaphorical language of love mysticism became fully established, and the now familiar themes and images of the tavern and wine drinking, gambling, the ball and polo-stick, and every detail of the beloved's physiognomy became invested with symbolic meaning. These metaphors would become standard for all love-mystical literature in centuries to come.[43]

But this should be seen as a formative era in Persian Sufism not only in terms of its literary language; all of the doctrines and aspects of mystical love that were expounded in Sufi works of prose and poetry during this period can be found echoed and re-echoed in the masterpieces of later Persian poets. These include the coquetry of the Beloved; the pain of separation and the joy of union; the need to be 'cooked' by love's suffering; the moth and the candle symbolising sacrifice in the fire of love; and so on.[44]

At the same time that the doctrines of love mysticism were gaining ground in eastern Iran, Sufism was, as we have seen, increasingly reaching out to society at large; again, Persian had its role to play as a more suitable language than Arabic to address the more universal audience in Iranian lands. One aspect of this phenomenon in mystical literature is the increased use of story-telling as a popular and appealing mode of communication. Stories had always been used by preachers, of course, and were no doubt already part of the oral tradition of Sufism. Now, in addition to exemplary anecdotes about saints, parables and even animal fables were also finding their way into Sufi written works of all kinds.[45] It is probably no coincidence that during this same century, the epic *mathnawī* with its sequences of inter-related tales became established as a didactic genre of mystical poetry. The mystical *mathnawī*s of Sanāʾī, at the beginning of the sixth/twelfth century, and of ʿAṭṭār at the end, were to pave the way for Rūmī's great *mathnawī* in the century that followed.

It was in this stimulating and creative climate, then, that Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī composed his commentary on the Qur'an. We shall find that many of these currents, the themes and doctrines of mystical love in their most artistic expression, together with the moral and theological concerns of the day, flow through the pages of the *Kashf al-asrār*.

The state of Qur'anic hermeneutics

By the time Maybudī began to compose the *Kashf al-asrār* in 520/1126, Qur'anic hermeneutics were, like most other Islamic sciences, in a state of maturity.[46] Over two centuries earlier Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), in his commentary the *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, had not only amassed a vast number of exegetical traditions, the comments of the Prophet, the Companions and the Followers, together with their chains of transmission, he had also developed his own criteria for evaluating the different opinions on each verse, the variant readings and the arguments of the philologists and grammarians.[47]

For commentators who came after him, Ṭabarī's work was an invaluable source, although by no means the only one; there were other commentaries such as those of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) and Ibn Qutayba (d. 274/887), and compilations of comments attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās (d.

68/687), Mujāhid (d. between 100/718 and 102/722) and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778).[48] Moreover hadith collections of Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 261/875) and Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) had chapters devoted to those hadiths which commented upon the Qur'an. Other sources for these commentators included the compilations of the stories of the prophets, the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* of Kisā'ī (dates not known), Ibn Bishr (d. 206/821) and others; works on various aspects of lexicography and grammar, on variant readings, and on other specialized areas of exegesis, such as abrogating and abrogated verses (*al-nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh*), aspects of meaning and analogues (*wujūh wa naẓā'ir*), *majāz al-Qur'ān*, *aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, *gharīb al-Qur'ān* and so on.[49] Later exegetes would also have the benefit of further developments in the sciences of hadith in order to make their own assessments of traditions according to the content and soundness of their chains of transmission (*isnād*), and in the field of Qur'anic sciences many new works would be added on specialized topics of exegesis.

However, it was not just as a source of exegetical traditions that Ṭabarī's *Jāmiʿ al-bayān* was important; it could also be said that it laid the foundations for the development of a genre of verse-by-verse commentary on the Qur'an which treated, to a greater or lesser extent, all the conventional aspects of exegesis: the circumstances of Revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), abrogating and abrogated verses (*al-nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh*), variant readings (*qirā'āt*), stories of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*), clear and ambiguous verses (*al-muḥkam wa'l-mutashābih*), questions of lexicography and grammar, and matters of law. This genre became the most widely accepted format for Qur'anic exegesis, for it could be adapted according to the sectarian or theological persuasion of the commentator.[50] It might be based entirely on received tradition, that is traditional material that has been handed down (*tafsīr bi'l-ma'thūr*), or it might involve much more of the reasoned opinion of the author (*tafsīr bi'l-ra'y*), or a combination of the two. Furthermore, greater emphasis might be placed upon one discipline; for example Zamakhsharī, whose influential commentary was mentioned earlier, greatly developed the use of grammatical and lexicographical arguments in his Muʿtazilī commentary, *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl*.

Meanwhile mystical exegesis had, from about the third/ninth century onwards, separated itself from the mainstream of exoteric commentary. This may have been due to the fact that Ṭabarī had set a precedent by choosing to exclude esoteric and allegorical exegesis altogether from the

Jāmiʿ al-bayān, because, as Gilliot has suggested, his interest was essentially that of a *faqīh*.[51] On the other hand, mystical exegesis may have had a separate existence quite naturally because it demanded a different approach and was intended for a more specialised audience of people who were to some extent involved in mysticism.[52] Whilst accepting the outer meanings of the Qur'an, Sufi commentators held that the scripture also has inner meanings that pertain to, and can shed light on, spiritual states and realities. They defined this process of eliciting the inner meanings from the Qur'an as *istinbāṭ* (lit. drawing up water from a well).[53] The earliest surviving Sufi commentary on the Qur'an is the *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* of Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896).[54] However, the *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr* of the fifth/eleventh century Sufi Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) includes esoteric comments attributed to other early mystics, such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), Ibn ʿAṭāʾ al-Adamī (d. 309/922)[55] and Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (309/922). Sulamī compiled this commentary, along with its supplement, the *Ziyādāt ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*, from the oral tradition as well as from written sources.[56]

Qur'anic commentary was not only to be found in *tafsīr* works. It often appeared in religious works of a more general nature, such as Ghazzālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*. In Sufi works, esoteric interpretation was often implied when a Qur'anic verse was quoted to endorse some mystical teaching, while some Sufi manuals included sections on the esoteric exegesis of the Qur'an.[57]

Thus when Maybudī began to write the *Kashf al-asrār*, he had a wealth of existing exegetical material on which to draw. He also had a genre in which to work; that is, he would adhere to certain norms by including those aspects which would be expected to appear in any major commentary on the Qur'an. However, in writing the *Kashf al-asrār* he was to take an unusual step by bringing together the exoteric and esoteric exegesis of the Qur'an in one work.[58] Moreover, he chose to compose his commentary in Persian, and here he may also have been breaking new ground; at least, we so far have no extant evidence of a complete mystical commentary on the Qur'an written in Persian before the sixth/twelfth century.

The time was clearly ripe for such an enterprise, for by now Persian *tafsīr* writing had also reached a certain maturity. Whereas the earliest known Persian commentary on the Qur'an, the so-called translation of

Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* commissioned by the Samanids in the late third/ninth century, consisted of little more than a translation of the verses and storytelling, Persian *tafsīr*s written in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries show distinct development regarding the level of intellectual content, the extent of scholarly material and the number of Arabic quotations included.[59] Therefore, although a commentary written in Persian clearly took Qur'anic interpretation and made it accessible to a much wider public, rather than the preserve of an Arabic literary elite, it cannot be said that Persian *tafsīr*s were solely aimed at the uneducated masses. The range of 'audience' for which Persian *tafsīr*s were intended is indicated by the late fifth/eleventh century exegete Isfarāyinī, who, in the introduction to his commentary the *Tāj al-tarājim*, writes that 'the community (*ummat*) have unanimously agreed that the exegesis of the Qur'an should be read out in Persian, both at scholarly gatherings and from the *minbar*, at assemblies where everyone, the [scholarly] elite (*khāṣṣ*) and common people (*'āmm*), religious and wordly alike, is present'.[60]

Maybudī, too, appears to have intended his commentary for a wide public. In the introduction to the *Kashf al-asrār*, he states that he will write his commentary in such a way as to make it easy for those 'involved in this field'.[61] Yet the rhetorical style and scope of the content of his commentary (discussed in chapters two and three) suggest that he did not intend it exclusively for students of Qur'anic exegesis, but for a wider audience of varying intellectual ability. Moreover, the prose style of the mystical sections of the *Kashf al-asrār* is far more accessible than, for example, that of Qushayrī's *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, which is written in a concise elliptical style probably more suited to adepts of the Sufi path. It appears that Maybudī's mystical commentary was intended both for those who had been initiated into the practice of Sufism and for those who, though not themselves intitiated into the mystical path, were not antagonistic towards it.

This was an age when Sufism was more actively moving out into the community, particularly in Khorasan; a period when 'new-style' shaykhs (to use Jürgen Paul's expression) were playing a more prominent and influential role in the life of the community, attracting followers and patronage, often at the expense of traditional Sufis and the ulema.[62] These Sufi shaykhs were more accessible than their predecessors. No longer viewed as intellectually aloof, they were ready to go out and preach their doctrines

to people in the Persian language.[63] It was also a time when preachers were known to encourage and patronise the recitation of Persian mystical and ascetic poetry, which may even have been recited alongside their sermons to enhance their popular appeal.[64]

Clearly, this was a favourable and auspicious climate for writing a mystical *tafsīr* in Persian. However, we shall see that there may also have been aesthetic reasons for Maybudī's choice of the Persian language for his commentary: it would give him more scope for the free and poetic expression of themes associated with the doctrines of love.

The author

Until the 1950s, there was some confusion as to the authorship of the *Kashf al-asrār*. Ḥājjī Khalīfa and subsequently Charles Storey attributed the commentary to Taftazānī (b. 722/1322)[65] and, because the work was based on a Qur'anic commentary by ʿAbd Allāh Anṣārī which has otherwise been lost, some manuscripts bear the title 'Anṣārī's Tafsīr'.[66] Indeed, the present printed edition is subtitled '*Maʿrūf bi-tafsīr-i Khwāja ʿAbd Allāh al-Anṣārī*'. It was Ali Asghar Hekmat who, in preparing the published edition, examined several manuscripts and finally established that the author of the work was Abu'l-Faḍl Aḥmad b. Abī Saʿd b. Aḥmad b. Mihrīzad al-Maybudī, otherwise known as Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī.[67]

About Maybudī's life we have no information except the date of his beginning to write the *Kashf al-asrār*: 520/1126.[68] Since the commentary is likely to be the work of a man in his mature years it can be surmised that he was born some time in the second half of the fifth/eleventh century and died in the first half of the sixth/twelfth century. It has been suggested that his father was Jamāl al-Islām Abū Saʿd b. Aḥmad b. Mihrīzad, who died in 480/1087.[69] According to the histories of Yazd,[70] Jamāl al-Islām was descended from Anūshirvān the Just. One of his ancestors (perhaps a Zoroastrian) had embraced Islam after a dream in which he saw the Prophet. He later became a disciple of Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. 166/783), leaving his position at court to take up a life of asceticism, poverty and devotion. We are told that Jamāl al-Islām was blessed with spiritual gifts from an early age. Whilst still a child he, too, had a miraculous dream of the Prophet, as a result of which[71] he became a *ḥāfiẓ* of the Qur'an and a

master in all the religious sciences. Later, he outshone in scholarly debate some of the great ulema of his time, including Imām al-Ḥaramayn.[72] He is said to have 'devoted himself to guiding people on the highway of mysticism (*ʿirfān*)' and to have 'brought those straying in the sea of disobedience back to follow the Shariʿa.' Whoever followed his guidance was 'led to the shore of salvation and found prosperity in the two worlds'.[73] Jamāl al-Islām's tomb, built together with a *khānaqāh* in 748/1347, is reputed to have been the site of a number of miracles, and continued to be visited until Safavid times. His children are described as having been virtuous ascetics,[74] while his descendants are said to have been mostly virtuous and learned, and 'honoured by sultans'.[75] Among his descendants, the most celebrated seem to have been Saʿīd Ghiyāth al-Dīn ʿAlī Munshī[76] and Shihāb al-Dīn Muḥammad.[77] Of his direct descendants the only one mentioned by name is a son, Shihāb al-Dīn ʿAlī, who is described as having been 'an eminent man of religion and author of a number of works' of which one is named *Sharḥ al-ḥāwī*.[78] While no other direct descendant of Jamāl al-Dīn is named in the histories, Iraj Afshar has found the gravestone of another son, Saʿīd Muwaffaq al-Dīn Abī Jaʿfar b. Abī Saʿd b. Aḥmad b. Mihrīzad, and of a grand-daughter, the daughter of our commentator, named Fāṭima bint al-Imām Saʿīd Rashīd al-Dīn Abi'l-Faḍl b. Abī Saʿd b. Aḥmad Mihrīzad.[79]

The correspondence between the *kunya*s in these names and the name of our author seems to confirm that the latter was indeed the son of Jamāl al-Islām, and that in all likelihood he was born in the region of Yazd. The *nisba* al-Maybudī, referring to the small town of Maybud, some fifty kilometres north-west of Yazd, does not appear in the histories or on the gravestones, but since the grave of Fāṭima bint Rashīd al-Dīn is situated in the Friday mosque of Maybud, a connection with this location might be assumed.[80]

The lives of Jamāl al-Islām and his sons would have spanned the greater part of the Saljuq dynasty (429/1038-582/1186). From 433/1056 onwards, Yazd was governed by the Kākūyids, a dynasty of Daylami origin. The Kākūyids had ruled independently in parts of Western Persia during the first part of the fifth/eleventh century and then became faithful vassals to the Saljuqs, to whom they were also linked by marriage.[81] According to Bosworth, the Kākūyid governors of Yazd 'did much to beautify the town and to make it a centre of intellectual life, and under them and their

epigoni, the Atabegs, Yazd enjoyed one of its most flourishing periods'.[82] After the death of Malik Shāh in 485/1092, Western Iran and Iraq underwent a period of instability as his sons Maḥmūd, Barkyārūq and Muḥammad fought out their battles for succession.[83] Yet however much the region may have been affected by this period of internecine strife, Yazd, it seems, continued to enjoy the patronage of the Kākūyids under Garshāsp b. Abī Manṣūr (d. 536/1141). During his forty-year lordship of Yazd, Manṣūr built a Friday mosque, a structure known as a Jamāʿat khāna-yi ʿAlī, a library and several qanats.[84]

In any case, Rashīd al-Dīn would have grown up before this period of upheaval. On the basis of his father's biography, we may assume that he was raised in an atmosphere of Islamic learning and mysticism. It is probable that, having completed his early education in Maybud or Yazd, he would have travelled to more established centres of learning to increase his knowledge of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and hadith, as was the custom for young scholars. This search for knowledge might have taken him to Baghdad or Damascus in the West, or to Nishapur, Balkh, Merv or Herat in the East.[85] At some point during these scholarly travels he must have become acquainted with the teachings of ʿAbd Allāh Anṣārī of Herat.

It is not known whether or not Maybudī ever met Khwāja ʿAbd Allāh in person, but the constant reference to him as *Pīr-i Ṭarīqat* (the Master of the Way) and the prominence given to his sayings in the *Kashf al-asrār* indicate that he regarded Anṣārī as his spiritual master. In the introduction to the *Kashf al-asrār*, he states that he had 'read' or 'studied' (*ṭālaʿtu*) the *tafsīr* of ʿAbd Allāh Anṣārī; the fact that many of the sayings of Anṣārī are preceded by the words '*Pīr-i ṭarīqat guft*' (the Master of the Way said) probably signifies no more than that Anṣārī's *tafsīr* was delivered orally and written down by disciples. Although no mention of Maybudī's presence in Herat has yet been found in any of the histories or *ṭabaqāt* works, it is possible that he went there and spent some time in the circle of Anṣārī's followers at the *khānaqāh* by his tomb at Gāzurgāh, imbibing the *Anṣāriyyāt* tradition there.

This notwithstanding, there is some evidence to suggest that Maybudī may have spent a period of his life somewhere in Khorasan. First of all, some features of Khorasani dialect appear particularly in *Nawbat*s I and II of the *Kashf al-asrār*;[86] second, quotations from the works of Qushayrī and Aḥmad Ghazzālī, and the poetry of Sanāʾī, appear in the *Nawbat* III

sections;[87] and third, Maybudī produced an adaptation of the *Kitāb al-fuṣūl*, a work composed by another native of Herat (discussed on p. 18). Lastly, most surviving manuscripts of the *Kashf al-asrār* were found in the region of Khorasan and present-day Afghanistan.[88] Apart from the presence of Anṣārī and his heritage in Herat, there would have been other factors to attract Maybudī to Eastern Iran. In Khorasan the late fifth/eleventh and early sixth/twelfth centuries saw both a development and crystallization of the Sufi doctrines of love, and an evolution of the Persian literary language for the expression of mystical experience. Each of these developments is much in evidence in the mystical sections of the *Kashf al-asrār*. In the absence of further biographical data, the story of Maybudī's life must, sadly, remain in the realm of conjecture. However, considerable information about his beliefs, learning and interests may be gleaned from the content of the *Kashf al-asrār*.

In jurisprudence Maybudī evidently followed the Shāfiʿī school in *fiqh*, for, when explaining a point of law, he invariably refers to al-Shāfiʿī's opinion on the matter, and, if he discusses the views of the other imams, he will usually present al-Shāfiʿī's position first. His particular reverence for ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib is said to be further evidence that he was a follower of al-Shāfiʿī.[89] It is probable that he, like his father, was a *ḥāfiẓ* of the Qur'an, for he shows great facility in using the Qur'an to comment upon the Qur'an.[90] We may assume that he was a traditionist (*muḥaddith*) both from his extensive use of hadith in the *Kashf al-asrār* and from the fact that he informs us of his own *Arbaʿīn,* a collection of forty hadiths with commentary.[91] The number of authorities referred to in his work, his knowledge of Arabic, his eloquent use of Persian prose and his numerous citations of Persian and Arabic poetry all attest to his erudition.

If Maybudī was a Shāfiʿī in jurisprudence (*fiqh*), it should not therefore be assumed that he was an Ashʿarī in the fundamentals of religious belief (*uṣūl al-dīn*). Although by the twelfth century Ashʿarism had been widely adopted by Shāfiʿīs, it was not universally so. Maybudī was not an Ashʿarī, a fact that is indicated by his outright rejection of speculative theology (*kalām*) and those who practise it (*mutakallimūn*),[92] and confirmed by his direct condemnation of the Ashʿarīs on two occasions in the *Kashf al-asrār*. In his commentary on those who 'wrangle concerning the Revelations of Allah' (Q. 40:56), he names Ashʿarīs along with Jahmīs, philosophers and *Ṭabāʿiʾiyān*[93] as innovators and deniers of the divine

attributes (*munkirān-i ṣifāt-i Ḥaqq*).[94] Elsewhere he criticises them for their belief that the Qur'an is uncreated, but only in essence:

> The Ashʿarīs said that [all] letters, whether they be in the Qur'an or not, are created; that [what is implied by] 'the speech of God' is its meaning; and that it subsists in His essence (*qā'im ba-dhāt-i ū*), without letters or sounds. But this is not the belief of the *ahl-i sunnat wa jamāʿat* who have clear proof against this [view] in verses of the Qur'an and in the Hadith.[95]

The belief that the Qur'an was uncreated not only in meaning, but in its sounds when recited and in its letters when written, is a dogma that has been particularly associated with the Ḥanbalī school.[96] Maybudī also championed other Ḥanbalī doctrines, such as the insistence upon the *istithnā'* — that is, if the words 'I am a believer' are said they must be followed by the words 'if God wills'[97] – and above all, the doctrine that the anthropomorphic expressions in the Qur'an, such as 'He mounted (or established Himself on) the Throne' (*istawā ʿala'l-ʿarsh*),[98] and 'hand(s)' of God,[99] should be accepted literally as they are according God's intended meaning, without subjecting them to metaphorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*). This doctrine is included in the Qādirī Creed (*al-Iʿtiqād al-Qādirī*), issued by the Ḥanbalī caliph al-Qādir in 433/1041, which states: 'He is on the Throne because He so wills it and not like human beings to rest on it,' and 'only those attributes should be ascribed to Him which He himself has ascribed or those which His prophets have ascribed to Him', and 'every one of the attributes of His being which He has ascribed is an attribute of His being which man should not overlook.'[100] Maybudī is clearly following this doctrine when, concerning the 'hand' of God in Q. 5:64, he insists that it is

> a hand of attribute (*yad-i ṣifat*), a hand of essence (*yad-i dhāt*),[101] the outward meaning of which [should be] accepted, (*ẓāhir-i ān padhīrufta*), the inner meaning surrendered [to God], (*bāṭin taslīm karda*) and its reality unapprehended (*ḥaqīqat dar nayāfta*), [so that one] desists from the way of [asking] how (*rāh-i chigūnagī*), the exertion [of reason] (*taṣarruf*) and metaphorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*).[102]

Attempting to cover himself against the imputation of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), Maybudī goes on to explain that 'to be the same in name (*hamnām*) is not to be the same in kind (*hamsān*)'. This position, he claims, avoids the two extremes of *tashbīh* on the one hand and *taʿṭīl* (denial of the divine attributes) on the other.[103]

Given his espousal of these Ḥanbalī doctrines, we might be tempted to conclude that Maybudī had followed Anṣārī's recommendation that one should be a Shāfiʿī in law, a Ḥanbalī in theology and live the way of life of a Sufi.[104] However, Maybudī never claims any formal allegiance to the Ḥanbalī school, consistently maintaining his theological position to be that of the *ahl-i sunnat* or the *ahl-i sunnat wa jamāʿat* (people of the tradition and the community). Moreover, Maybudī quotes the words of al-Shāfiʿī as much as those of Ibn Ḥanbal in support of these doctrines.[105] Had Maybudī been a committed Ḥanbalī, one might have expected to find in the *Kashf al-asrār* a great deal more polemic against the Ashʿarīs; he must, after all, have been aware of the fierce antagonism between the two schools, which had resulted in several riots in Baghdad during the fifth/eleventh century,[106] and of Ashʿarī attempts to have Anṣārī indicted for heresy.[107] Furthermore, Maybudī makes use of precisely the kind of reasoned analogy (*qiyās*) to which Ḥanbalīs like Barbahārī (d. 329/941) and Ibn Baṭṭa (d. 387/997) objected in the writings of al-Ashʿarī. For example, in arguing the doctrine that the destiny of each person, whether he will be a believer or an unbeliever, good or bad, is pre-ordained by God, he compares God to the potter who makes some clay into bowls and some into pots.[108] As Allard explains, the Ḥanbalī objection to this kind of analogy is that to compare the qualities of God to human qualities is 'to establish an analogical rapport between the creature and God'.[109] Maybudī also argues for the doctrine of 'acquisition' (*kasb*) which became particularly associated with the Ashʿarī school.[110] All that can be said with certainty, therefore, is that our author was a Shāfiʿī who counted himself one of the *ahl-i sunnat wa jamāʿat*.[111]

Even so, if Maybudī was not, like Anṣārī, a Ḥanbalī in theology, he was very much Anṣārī's disciple in combining an uncompromising traditionalism with Sufism.[112] The following saying, quoted from Anṣārī in the *Kashf al-asrār*, summarises Maybudī's own position:

> My faith is what is heard (*samʿī*) [i.e. Revelation]; my law is what is reported (*khabarī*) [i.e. from the Prophet]; and my gnosis (*maʿrifat*) is what is found (*yāftanī*). I affirm as true what is reported; I bring to realisation what is found, and I follow what is heard; by the agent of reason (*ʿaql*), the evidence of creation, the guidance of [divine] light; by the indication of Revelation and the message of the Prophet, on condition of submission.[113]

It will be seen that traditionalist and mystical doctrines are integrally linked in Maybudī's commentary on the Qur'an.

His works

Kitāb-i arbaʿīn

In his mystical commentary of verse 41 of *Sūrat al-Raʿd* (Thunder, Q. 13), Maybudī quotes a long hadith of the Prophet, and then adds that he has explained the significance of this hadith at length in the *Kitāb-i arbaʿīn*.[114] Sarwar Mawlāʾī has suggested that the *Arbaʿīn* mentioned here may have been composed by Anṣārī rather than Maybudī, since Maybudī might in this context have been quoting Anṣārī.[115] However, this seems unlikely for two reasons. First, the passage in question is not preceded by the words '*Pīr-i ṭarīqat guft*' – Maybudī attributes this interpretation in a general manner to the 'people of allusion (*ahl-i ishārat*)' and 'masters of gnosis (*arbāb-i maʿrifat*)' – and, given the respect with which Maybudī regarded his master, he would surely have named Anṣārī had he been the author of the work. Second, neither the hadith in question, nor the mystical significance Maybudī has attached to it, appear to conform to the subject matter of Anṣārī's *Arbaʿīn*.[116] Moreover, the *arbaʿīn*, a collection of forty hadiths, often with commentary, was a popular genre for traditionists, and it is quite possible that both Maybudī and Anṣārī compiled one. In any case, no manuscript of an *arbaʿīn* by Maybudī has yet come to light.

Kitāb al-fuṣūl

Apart from the *Kashf al-asrār*, the only extant work which bears Maybudī's name is the *Kitāb al-fuṣūl*, a short treatise which has apparently survived in only one manuscript. Comprised of an introduction and six chapters, this treatise discusses the virtues of various officials of state and religion, starting with sultans and ending with scholars and *qāḍī*s.[117] According to the colophon, the work was originally composed by Abu'l-Qāsim Yūsuf b. al-Ḥusayn b. Yūsuf al-Harawī, and was 'adapted' in Persian (*istakhrajahu*) by Shaykh al-Imām al-Ḥāfiẓ Rashīd al-Dīn Abu'l-Faḍl al-Maybudī. The colophon also informs us that the manuscript was copied in the year 719/1319 by one Ḥusayn b. al-Qāḍī ʿAlī from a manuscript written in Maybudī's hand. The style of the *Fuṣūl* bears some resemblence to the third *nawbat* of the *Kashf al-asrār*, since it includes passages of rhyming prose (*sajʿ*) and poetry, both in Persian and in Arabic.

Kashf al-asrār

Qur'anic commentaries range in length from the comprehensive, such as the monumental *Jāmiʿ al-bayān* of Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), to the more condensed, such as the *Anwār al-tanzīl* of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar al-Bayḍāwī (d. 716/1316) or the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1459) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505). The *Kashf al-asrār* falls midway between these two extremes, being comparable in length to the *Tafsīr al-tibyān* of Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī (d. *c.* 460/1067), but shorter than the *Tafsīr al-kabīr* of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210). Among Persian commentaries it is one of the most extensive, being second only in length to the Shi'i commentary of Abu'l-Futūḥ Rāzī (d. mid-sixth/twelfth century).[118]

In his introduction to the *Kashf al-asrār*, Maybudī explains the unique ternary structure of his commentary. He proposes that the Qur'an should be divided into sessions (*majlis-hā*). Within each *majlis* the discourse will be further sub-divided into three 'turns' (*nawbat*s). The first *nawbat* will consist of the 'literal Persian (*fārsī-yi ẓāhir*), intended to convey the meaning of the verses as succinctly as possible'. The second *nawbat*, will be the *tafsīr*, and will include: 'facets of meaning (*wujūh-i maʿānī*), the canonically accepted readings (*qirā'āt-i mashhūr*), circumstance[s] of Revelation (*sabab-i-nuzūl*), exposition of rulings (*bayān-i aḥkām*), relevant hadiths and traditions (*akhbār wa āthār*), wonders (*nawādir*) which relate to the verses, aspects [of meaning] and analogues (*wujūh wa naẓā'ir*) and so on'. The third *nawbat* will comprise 'the allegories of mystics (*rumūz-i ʿārifān*), the allusions of Sufis (*ishārāt-i ṣūfiyān*), and the subtle "associations" of preachers (*laṭā'if-i mudhakkirān*)'.[119]

The second and third *nawbat*s of Maybudī's commentary are distinguished not only by their content but also by their literary style. *Nawbat* II presents a simple, fluent and unadorned style of prose, whereas *Nawbat* III boasts a far more artistic style, rich in metaphor and embellished with metred and rhyming prose, and numerous verses of love poetry. Another difference is that the second *nawbat* tends to have a greater Arabic content than the third; that is to say, Persian is most consistently used in the *Nawbat* III sections of the *Kashf al-asrār*. I have estimated that the proportion of Arabic in the exoteric (*Nawbat* II) sections of the *Kashf al-asrār* steadily increases during the course of the commentary, from an average of 5 per cent in the first two volumes to around 80 per cent in the last two.[120] In

the *Nawbat* III sections, on the other hand, the amount of Arabic remains consistently around five per cent, but never more than 10 per cent throughout the ten volumes of the work. We might infer, therefore, that it was the *Nawbat* III sections in particular that Maybudī intended to be more universally accessible, and therefore that it was the combination of traditionalist and mystical doctrine which he presents in the third *nawbat* that he was especially concerned to disseminate. That the esoteric commentary had precedence over the exoteric commentary is, moreover, indicated by the way the verses that make up each of the sessions (*majālis*) are selected. As was stated earlier, each session usually comprises between three and fifty verses. Although Maybudī comments on all these verses in the *Nawbat* II sections, in the *Nawbat* III sections he only provides commentary for a small number of verses, sometimes as few as two or three.[121] Yet he almost always begins his mystical commentary with the first verse of each session. This suggests that it was the mystical rather than the exoteric commentary which guided the selection of verses for each session.

The sources of Maybudī's Qur'an commentary

In the introduction to the *Kashf al-asrār*, Maybudī states that he has based his commentary on the *tafsīr* of Khwāja ʿAbd Allāh Anṣārī. He explains that he had read this commentary, and finding it, despite its eloquence and depth of meaning, to be too short, decided to expand it.[122] Passages directly ascribed to Anṣārī in the *Kashf al-asrār* are preceded by the words '*Pīr-i ṭarīqat guft*', or more formally with his *laqab* (honorific title) '*Shaykh al-Islām Khwāja ʿAbd Allāh Anṣārī guft*', and are almost entirely located in the third *nawbat*, that is the mystical sections of the *Kashf al-asrār*. This would appear to endorse de Beaurecueil's view, on the basis of Ibn Rajab, that a major part of Anṣārī's now no longer extant commentary on the Qur'an was esoteric.[123]

According to Kutubī, Anṣārī began to hold sessions in which he commented on the Qur'an in the year 436/1044, when he returned to Herat after his first period of exile.[124] Then in the following year, he began for a second time to hold sessions in which he commented on the Qur'an (*aftataḥa'l-qur'ān yufassirahu thāniyan fī majālis al-tadhkīr*). At this time, it is related, Anṣārī's commentary was mainly concerned with legal matters (*al-qawl fi'l-sharʿ*), until he reached the words 'Those who believe are stauncher in their love for Allah' (Q. 2:165). Then he began to dedicate

the sessions to the '[esoteric] truth' [of the Qur'an] (*aftataḥa tajrīd al-majālis fi'l-ḥaqīqa*), spending a long period of his life on this one verse.[125] Similarly, he devoted 360 sessions to Q. 21:101, 'Those for whom kindness has been decreed from Us'. We are told that he was expounding the 'hidden secrets' of each of the divine names as part of his commentary on Q. 32:17, 'No soul knows what is kept for them of joy', and had reached *al-Mumīt* (the One Who causes to die) when he was again exiled in the year 480/1088. On his return, he did not resume his commentary on the divine names, but instead changed his method of interpretation, moving more swiftly through the Qur'an so that he commented on ten verses each session. However he had only reached Q. 38:67-8 when he died in 481/1089. Thus, in this second commentary, or second series of sessions for his interpretation of the Qur'an (de Beaurecueil speaks of a second commentary, but it is not clear from Kutubī's statement whether or not in the first year of sessions he completed a commentary on the Qur'an), Anṣārī would have covered more than two-thirds of the Qur'an, of which his commentary on Q. 1:165 to 32:17 appears to have been extensive and esoteric.

To what extent did Maybudī draw upon such a work by Anṣārī? A close examination of quotations directly attributed to Anṣārī reveals that this material mostly comprises *munājāt* (intimate communings with God), aphorisms and short theological sermons, with little material that could strictly be defined as exegetical.[126] These passages aside, it is difficult to ascertain how much of the *Kashf al-asrār* has been drawn from Anṣārī's original *tafsīr*, because throughout the mystical commentary Maybudī has emulated his master's characteristic style of rhyming and metred prose.

What is certain is that Maybudī drew on a great many other works, both exegetical and otherwise, in the compilation of the *Kashf al-asrār*, although, like other writers, he often omitted to acknowledge his sources.

An exhaustive analysis of Maybudī's sources would go beyond the scope of this study; only the most important will be mentioned here. For the *Nawbat* II sections of his commentary he evidently drew on a great number of exegetical works, including the Qur'anic commentaries of Ṭabarī (d. 311/933),[127] Ibn Qutayba (d. 274/887),[128] Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767),[129] Mujāhid (d. between 100/718 and 102/722),[130] and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778).[131] For the *Nawbat* III sections, he again drew on numerous sources. For example, he cites esoteric comments from Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), though Böwering notes that most of these com-

ments may be traced to the *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* of Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/998), the *Qūt al-qulūb* of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 437/1045), and the *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* of Abū Nūʿaym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038).[132] He also includes numerous comments from the *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr* of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, particularly in the names of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ al-Adamī and Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (d. after 320/932). However, it is worth noting that Maybudī occasionally places the comments of these masters in a different Qur'anic context.[133] Interpretations from Sulamī's commentary are sometimes quoted in the original Arabic and sometimes rendered in Persian, and they may appear in a form which differs from existing published editions.[134] Above all, however, Maybudī drew on the *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* of Qushayrī, from which he derived a great number of ideas and comments.[135] In some instances, for example in his commentary on *Sūrat Yūsuf*, comments taken from the *Laṭāʾif* even outnumber quotations attributed to Anṣārī. Interpretations taken from the *Laṭāʾif* are sometimes quoted word for word in Arabic, and at other times rendered in Persian, where they often undergo some development and elaboration. Interestingly, Maybudī never once cites either the *Laṭāʾif* or its author by name. Could this be because of Qushayrī's well-known allegiance to the Ashʿarī school?

Non-exegetical Sufi works that were almost certainly used by Maybudī for his *Nawbat* III commentary include Makkī's *Qūt al-qulūb*,[136] Aḥmad Ghazzālī's *Sawāniḥ*,[137] Anṣārī's *Ṣad maydān*,[138] and a work attributed to al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. late third/ninth century), entitled *Bayān al-farq bayn al-ṣadr waʾl-qalb waʾl-fuʾād waʾl-lubb*.[139] However, it is likely that he would have made use of other important Sufi works such as the *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* of Sarrāj and *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* of Abū Nuʿaym;[140] Qushayrī's *Risāla*, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* and *Kīmiyā-yi saʿādat*,[141] and the *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ* of Aḥmad Samʿānī (d. 543/1148).[142] In addition to these written sources, Maybudī undoubtedly included in his mystical commentary an abundance of material from the oral tradition.

Apart from the writings and teachings of Anṣārī, the two works which appear to have been most influential on Maybudī's mystical commentary are Qushayrī's *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, with respect to ideas in the interpretation of the verses, and Aḥmad Ghazzālī's *Sawāniḥ*, from the point of view of doctrine and mode of expression.[143]