Al-Junayd

The Sufi Master of Baghdad

Arin Salamah-Qudsi

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'In this book, Arin Salamah-Qudsi takes on a major challenge. Returning to the personality and work of Junayd is not an easy task. There are several reasons for this. One might think that, first of all, it has already been done, and that Ali Hassan Abdel-Kader's pioneering work of 1962 already delivers the essence of this master's doctrine to the English-speaking public. The second objection might be the diffuse and omnipresent nature of the reference to Junayd in Sufi literature as a whole. How can we isolate this author in this vast corpus without, in the end, repeating it in its entirety? Arin Salamah-Qudsi's book ventures in this direction and, basically, wants to answer the central question posed by the figure of Junayd: why did the mystical tradition see in him, from his death, the true 'master of this order', *sayyid hādhihi al-ṭā'ifa*? Roger Deladrière, in his 1983 French monograph, had already taken up the Junayd case, and had refined the questioning and methodology needed to answer this question, twenty years after Abdel-Kader's book. He notes that in this appellation, the terminology used is that of the tribal bond, which implies a series of rights and duties between the group leader (the *sayyid*) and the group (the *ṭā'ifa*). In the minds of his contemporaries, Junayd's death marked the end of the golden age of Islamic spirituality and ushered in a new, more difficult period of transmission and codification of the Islamic heritage. In this sense, Junayd's contribution was immediately seen in its complexity, in its doctrinal and stylistic comprehensiveness. But how can we trace the reasons for such an appreciation? He was undoubtedly a charismatic man who impressed both his friends and his opponents. A complex personality, rich in knowledge, capable of leading a humble life and at the same time impressing a crowd of followers. But beyond his character, and his network of epistolary correspondence, finely studied and presented by Arin Salamah-Qudsi, there is also a unique environment, that of the Baghdad of his time, which undoubtedly encouraged the emergence of 'autonomous forms' of spiritual thought, as Joseph van Ess noted when he included Junayd in his overall history of Islamic theology. Although he was part of the debates and questions of his time, Junayd proposed a new, unique formulation that left its mark on the history of Islam forever. He is therefore one of those personalities who mark a before and an after. This book allows the reader to rediscover his work, otherwise scattered in a considerable mass of quotations or small autonomous treatises, and to get closer to the mysteries and paradoxes to which Junayd knew how to respond, in a language capable of veiling and revealing the secrets of existence and the human soul'.

—Francesco Chiabotti *Professor for Islamic Studies, INALCO (Paris)*

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In loving memory of my beloved father, Shawkat Salamah, whose quiet strength and unwavering love continue to guide me.
To my dear mother, Amīna, for her endless and loving support.
To my beloved family: my husband Salam and my children, Hasan, Duna and Amir, for enduring the long hours I spent in the company of Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd, a captivating maker of Islamic civilization.

Were intellect a man, it would take the form of Junayd (Sheikh Abū Jaʿfar al-Ḥaddād) (Jāmī, Nafaḥāt al-uns, 80)

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This monograph seeks to present a full and updated portrait of Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910), a towering figure in the history of Islamic piety and thought. Many Sufi orders (sing. *ṭarīqa*) throughout the centuries of Islam traced their chains of authority (*salāsil*, sing. *silsila*) through Junayd. It is not an exaggeration to state that Junayd's outstanding character and life reflect the whole cultural environment of Islam during one of its most substantial periods whose impacts on the history of Islam are still felt today.

A long time has passed since Ali Hassan Abdel-Kader published his English translation of the main writings of Junayd alongside a significant introduction to that edition (1962). Almost twenty years later, Roger Deladrière published his French anthology of Junayd's works. Both editions of Abdel-Kader and Deladrière are key in presenting Junayd and his *oeuvre* to Western readers. The works of Josef van Ess, David Ludwig Martin, Elsayed M. H. Omran and Shams C. Inati examine different aspects of Junayd's teachings. The interest in Junayd's character in Arabic scholarship takes the form of many editions of his logia, short epistles, letters and fragments of letters. Apart from the introductions dedicated to Junayd's life and teachings in these editions, no comprehensive study of Junayd has been tackled in Arabic. Articles published on Junayd in Western scholarship focus intensively on the concepts that form his system of thought. Some of these articles contribute to deepen our understanding

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of Junayd's strongly rooted idealized image in mediaeval Islamic history while others analyse Junayd's long-term impact on Sufi development.

The current monograph will examine the character of Junayd as both an architect of a powerful and influential Sufi mainstream as well as a charismatic and pragmatic personality. His sophisticated relationships within Sufi circles and poignant role in the broader circle of Islamic piety greatly impacted the development of Islamic thought in general and Sufi thought in particular.

Besides constructing a balanced portrait of Junayd, this monograph will also examine Junayd's legacy in order to flesh out some of the particular socio-religious and historical settings of the third/ninth century Sufi piety of Iraq.

Junayd is one of, if not the most, theologically creative Sufi masters. At the basis of this monograph lies the assumption that Junayd has two different agendas and aspects of his life. The first is a cosmological-mystical agenda where his character as a mature man of letters and unrivalled thinker is best manifested. The other was a didactical-practical agenda where his teachings on Sufi ethics and morality are demonstrated. Junayd is conscious of the necessity for a collective Sufi discourse which is addressed both to and on behalf of a group of Sufis privileged with a deep realization of God's oneness. This realization constantly triggers memories from the Day of the Covenant that make their lives unique and isolate them from ordinary people. These are the elect to whom Junayd dedicates the lion's share of his writings. In his references to the elect, Junayd's two agendas, the cosmological and the didactical-practical, occasionally intersect. Besides sharing the pre-temporal state of unity with God, the souls of the elect share the qualification to cosmologically reconnect with that state during their temporal lives. At these two points of time, the souls are privileged with a deep-rooted collective identity, ethos and morality, and they are, above all, perfectly aware of responsibilities arising from their supreme position.

This book was written in a way that fits two kinds of readers: scholars and specialists, from the one side, and undergraduate students and non-specialists who are interested to know more about Islamic thought and spirituality, on the other. In order to introduce and create interest in the lifework and achievements of Junayd, the discussions in the book are designed to be self-contained and accessible for the average intelligent reader. Choosing this writing style for a book dedicated to Junayd was extremely difficult. Unlike other contemporary heroes of Islamic thought

including scholars, authors, philosophers and theologians, Junayd had not composed any systematic or comprehensive work. In order to introduce Junayd's life and work, we needed to rely primarily on his own treatises, *Rasāʾil*, that were collected a long time after his death by one of Ibn ʿArabī's (d. 638/1240) disciples, Ibn Sawdakīn (d. 646/1248), or to rely on the earliest Sufi textbook and the closest one to Junayd's time, the Book of Glimmers (*Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*) of Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī (d. 378/988). The most prominent authorities on whom Sarrāj relies in his work are Junayd himself, who is mentioned in almost every single page and Junayd's close disciples, Jaʿfar al-Khuldī (d. 348/959) and Ibn al-Aʿrābī (d. 341/952). It is clear, nonetheless, that Junayd's voice is best demonstrated in his own writings rather than in the works of later authors who transmitted and interpreted them. Junayd's writings are very difficult and many are also enigmatic and vague. Uncovering the very constituents of Junayd's beliefs and theories requires a sophisticated process of tracing his voice, rhetoric and language usages across his sayings and writings and make different kinds of comparisons with other writing styles of his Sufi and non-Sufi contemporaries.

While Junayd was perhaps the most creative thinker of Sufism's formative period, he was paradoxically portrayed as an outstanding orthodox theologian and prominent master of reconciliation whose sober mode of piety stands in complete contrast to that of al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (executed 309/922) and other Sufi personalities whose teachings revolve around passion, intoxication and extinction. This is a problematic assumption since the image of Junayd that rises from his own writings differs from his moderate and reconciling image; this stems from how later authors interpreted his sayings.

The process of reconstructing Junayd's worldviews is arduous since one needs to carefully contemplate his own terse and enigmatic treatises in addition to the large body of sayings scattered throughout a massive number of sources. If the task of understanding Junayd's ambiguous cosmological-gnostic themes is by itself challenging, the task of turning this kind of understanding into a readable text which is intended for a non-specialist audience is herculean.

Delving into Junayd's secret ideas and reaching the fundamental basis of his Sufi theology will be done using two different methods. The first analyses Junayd's frequent use of similar rhetoric structures, linguistic techniques and metaphors while relating similar themes in his treatises. What is seemingly incomprehensible will give rise to overall themes and

interpretation. The second follows the different motifs used by Junayd in his treatises and letters. Some of those also appear in his sayings and witticisms. In order to make the discussion here self-contained, I will translate the most illustrative textual proof taken from Junayd's works to illustrate his themes and voice.

The main corpus of this monograph is Junayd's *oeuvre*: his treatises; letters of correspondence; introductions of letters; extant passages of non-extant original letters; body of sayings; witticism; anecdotes; pieces of Sufi commentary on ecstatic utterances (*shaṭaḥāt*); pieces of counsel (*waṣāyā*); intimate conversations (*munājayāt*); sermons; prayers; and poetry attributed to him and preserved by later authors, in both Sufi and non-Sufi domains. The earliest systematic Sufi textbooks appeared in the Islamic landscape during the fourth/tenth century and an increasing number of textbooks were produced during the subsequent centuries not only in Arabic but also in Persian, Turkish and Urdu. Junayd's sayings remained the most quoted and highlighted in this abundant writing tradition, and many sayings were fabricated and attributed to him by later authors as a legitimizing instrument for their own worldviews and perspectives. Our primary sources include the major Sufi sources of Sufism's formative period. The works of al-Sarrāj, al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990), Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), al-Khargūshī (d. 407/1016?), al-Hujwīrī al-Jullābī (d. c. 465/1072), Khawāja ʿAbd Allāh Anṣārī (d. 481/1088) and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492) are the most important.

In addition to the Sufi sources, non-Sufi Arabic works of belles-lettres, *adab* compilations, originating in the early fourth/tenth centuries, such as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's (d. 463/1071) renowned historiography, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, and al-Tanūkhī's (d. 384/994) *adab* collections are salient in reconstructing Junayd's image based on the closest extant sources to his own time. Later types of *adab* compilations, anthologies, general biographies and manuals like those of Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), Ibn al-ʿImād al-Ḥanbalī (d. 1089/1679), Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 654/1256) and many others are also cross-checked with the Sufi sources to reconstruct a balanced portrait of Junayd and his lifework.

The Outline of This Work

The book is divided into seven chapters, including the current Introduction, and an epilogue:

1. Chapter 2, 'Junayd's Biography and Image From the Classical to the Pre-modern Era', provides a short account of Junayd's life, character, his masters and associates in Baghdad, and his image in the biographies from the fourth/tenth century to the pre-modern era.
2. Chapter 3, 'The Historical and Intellectual Environment of the Third/Ninth Century Iraq', traces the historical and intellectual developments that occurred in the central Islamic landscape during the second/eight and third/ninth centuries that laid the foundations for the broad context in which Junayd grew up, taught and acted. In parallel to the political disquiet, the decline of the Abbasid caliphate and the rise of the Shi'a threat with its especially fertile intellectual ferment resulting in diverse religious and theological trends are also discussed.
3. Chapter 4, 'Junayd's Relationships Within and Outside the Sufi Community', investigates Junayd's network of relationships and politics in the Sufi community and within the broader Islamic context. Different groups generated the intellectual surroundings in which Junayd grew up: the 'proto-Sufis', who preceded the Sufis of Baghdad, did not carry the Sufi title but demonstrated some Sufi religious characteristics; the 'anti-Sufis' whose major representative was Ghulām Khalīl; the 'quarrelling Sufis', who were themselves members of Junayd's circle while disagreeing with him on certain themes and practices; the 'non-Baghdadi mystics'; and the group of jurists and men of authority. Junayd's involvement in the inquisition (*miḥna*) of Baghdadi Sufis is of special interest.
4. Chapter 5, 'Junayd's Foundational Concepts', discusses Junayd's concepts underlying his system of thought.
5. Chapter 6, 'Junayd's Writings: His Letters of Correspondence', opens with an overview of Junayd's *oeuvre* and then focuses on Junayd's heritage of letters. Besides examining the major themes of his letters, an overview of the rhetoric and styles of these interesting documents is also provided.

6. Chapter 7, 'Junayd's Treatises, Sayings, Poetry and Commentary on *Shaṭaḥāt*', investigates other constituents of Junayd's *oeuvre* focusing on both thematic and rhetorical features to help reconstruct Junayd's role as an influential architect of Islamic thought and Sufi piety.
7. An epilogue entitled 'Junayd's Modern Image in Media and Cyberspace' briefly refers to what remains from Junayd's thought today and his presence in the agendas and activities of the widespread *ṭarīqa*-based Sufi groups as well as other worldwide organizations.
8. A list of the works cited in this book as well as an account of the various available editions of Junayd's *Rasā'il* (both letters and treatises), a further bibliography of the major works in Arabic, English and other European languages that relate to Junayd, and a short-annotated list of works that will help readers further study the life and work of Junayd.

Translations of quotations from primary sources that appear throughout the work are mine unless otherwise stated.

I hope these chapters contribute to the knowledge of scholars of religion, advanced students in Islamic studies and mediaeval Muslim culture, and historians and researchers in the history of ideas. I do hope, further, that my insights on Junayd and his work will be of interest for people working in a wider spectrum of fields like the sociology or psychology of religion.

CHAPTER 2

Junayd's Biography and Image From the Classical to the Premodern Era

Junayd's Life

Al-Junayd ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Junayd, Abū al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī was born in Baghdad sometime around 220/835. He was also known as 'al-Khazzāz' due to his being a silk merchant or as 'al-Qawārīrī' and 'al-Zajjāj' due to his father's work with glass vials. Junayd had a store (*ḥānūt*) in Baghdad (Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 156). We know that his ancestors had moved for reasons unknown to Baghdad from Nihāwand (or Nahāwand) in northeastern Persia. Junayd spent most of his life in Baghdad and, unlike many of his Sufi contemporaries, who embraced the custom of travelling from place to place, Junayd never left the city except for a pilgrimage. He died in 298/911 about seventy-eight years old and was buried in the Shūnīziyya tomb and mosque in Baghdad.[1]

References to Junayd's family members are rare in the sources. Apart from the references to Junayd's father's profession, we know that his father died when Junayd was quite young, leading to Junayd's adoption by his maternal uncle, Sarī al-Saqaṭī (d. 253/867), the well-known Baghdad renunciant-Sufi who would later become Junayd's master on the Sufi path. Prior to his adoption by Saqaṭī, he lived with his mother close to Saqaṭī's

[1] There is some confusion in the early sources concerning the date of al-Junayd's death. Al-Sulamī, in *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, cites the year 297 AH. Both al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī mention 298 AH. Ibn al-Jawzī, in his biographical work *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, refers to both 297 and 298 AH.

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house. There is a possibility that Junayd's mother was a weaver of cloth. In the biographical accounts of Sarī al-Saqaṭī, a reference is made to his sister who worked in spinning and supporting her pious brother. We are uncertain if this was Junayd's mother or another sister of Saqaṭī (Khargūshī, *Tahdhīb*, 367).

Junayd had a maternal cousin who was also known as a pious renunciant, Ibrāhīm ibn Sarī al-Saqaṭī (Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya*, 10:118; Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyāʾ*, 165). Junayd's relationship with this cousin is not reported. A short reference to another maternal cousin, Sarī's daughter, is provided by Qushayrī (Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 114). Based on non-Sufi biographies, we know that Junayd had very close relationships with one of his wealthier paternal uncles, even to the extent of inviting others, including al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), a later influential master of Junayd, to eat with him at his uncle's house. In Junayd's words, 'my paternal uncle's house was more spacious than ours, and it could include food of superior quality none of which our house could provide' (Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿiyya*, 2:276).

It is not true that 'no information exists to show whether or not Junayd had a wife and children' (Abdel-Kader, *Life*, 49). Though the sources are silent with regard to Junayd's marital life, some fragments and short anecdotes scattered throughout Sufi and non-Sufi sources point to his married status. According to one episode, Junayd was sitting in the company of his wife when Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/946), a rigorous renunciant and passionate Sufi with ecstatic and even insane behaviour, interrupted the couple. When the woman wanted to cover her head for modesty's sake in front of a stranger, her husband, Junayd, asked her to calm down and remain seated since Shiblī, at that moment, would not have been able to identify her. When Shiblī started to cry, Junayd knew that Shiblī's sanity had returned, whereupon Junayd asked his wife to cover her head (Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 258). It is more than likely that the anecdote is not historically authentic; however, it implies at the very least that during the time of its authors, renowned Sufis led normal marital lives while still guiding disciples along the Sufi path. Another reference was made to Abū Bakr who was the *khatan* (one's wife's father or brother, or one's daughter's husband) of Junayd. (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, 16:562). One brief reference was made to Junayd's son or sons. The Arabic word that appears there is *walad* (singular) but might also be *wuld* (plural) (Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʾāt al-zamān*, 16:367).

It is clear then that Junayd grew up in a family where many of its members, particularly those on his mother's side, were pious and he was exposed at a very early age to ascetic-mystical piety.

Junayd's Masters and Teachers

The quest for education in mediaeval Islam had mainly to do with the broad concept of *ʿilm* (science). Islamic law and hadith are the most important aspects of this key concept. Sufis during Junayd's time were part and parcel of the broad environment of Islamic piety and its primary demand of acquiring religious sciences including *Qurʾān* exegesis, hadith, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology (*kalām*), as well as devotional morality and conduct. Junayd began his education by studying hadith and law through classes with Iraqi scholars. While a norm of his day, and affirmed many times by Junayd in his writings, this later became a hallmark of Iraqi Sufi piety in general—the necessity to ground one's journey in Sufism with a firm knowledge of law and hadith.

In Baghdad, Junayd first learned jurisprudence with Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 224/839) of Herāt who moved to Baghdad and was known as a philologist, a hadith scholar and a Shāfiʿī jurisprudent. His second teacher of jurisprudence, Abū Thawr Ibrāhīm ibn Khālid al-Kalbī al-Baghdādī (d. 240/854 according to al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 2:80–83) was the most influential authority of jurisprudence on Junayd. Although Junayd never expressed much interest in transmitting hadith, he did benefit from this close association with Abū Thawr; it is the reason that Junayd was excluded from the accusations of heresy directed to other Baghdadi Sufis of his time. Some authors have claimed that Junayd used to conceal himself behind jurisprudence (*tasattara bi-l-fiqh*) and his scholarly relationships with Abū Thawr (Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 537; al-Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab al-īmān*, 5:144). Other, anti-Sufi authors went so far as to assert that in order to avoid persecution, Junayd claimed not to be a Sufi at all but merely a student of jurisprudence under Abū Thawr (Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs*, 155).[2] This latter claim remains unproven. Indeed, Junayd would have had to deny being a Sufi at the very same time his Sufi fellows in Baghdad were boldly defending themselves against Ghulām Khalīl's accusations of heresy. Junayd was seen as the 'elder brother' who, according to the anti-Sufi perspective, occasionally failed to protect his

[2] See also Melchert, *Formation*, 85.