



Hamza Malik.- *The Grey Falcon: The Life and Teaching of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 251p.

Hamza Malik's *The Grey Falcon* has set out to probe into an account of the life and teaching of the twelfth century pious scholar and preacher, Sufi of Baghdad and the founder of the largest Sufi order in the world today, the Qādiriyya, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (1077-1166). For many Muslims, Jīlānī is not just a historical personality but rather a figure of living importance whose spirit continues to provide emotional and spiritual nourishment to his disciples and to those who seek and need it. He is known by a variety of names and titles including, *Sultān al-Awliyā* (King of the Saints), the *ghawth al-a'zam* (the Greatest Help), and the *pīr-i dast-gīr* (the saint who keeps one's hand for support), *Muḥiyyiddīn* (Reviver of the Faith), and *Bāz al-Ashhab* (The Grey Falcon) or sometimes *Bāz Allāh al-Ashhab*.

The crux of this study is catalyzed by the discrepancy between how Jīlānī on the one hand is admired all over the Muslim world along with the vast spread of "his order," and on the other hand how the person of Jīlānī is understood in Western academic scholarship. Jīlānī may be studied, amongst other means, through the biographies and hagiographies that have been written about him, as well as through his own works. However, Malik postulates that there seems to have already been too much attention given to the hagiographies and biographies with a resulting lack of attention given to his works. This study therefore aims to attempt to rectify that by analyzing his works.

The question of whether Jīlānī was a Sufi, or simply a scholar appropriated by later Sufis as has been sometimes suggested, is explored through an in-depth analysis of his most and recognized popular works, specifically *al-Ghunya li-Ṭālibī Ṭarīq al-Ḥaqq*, *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*, and *Faṭḥ al-Rabbānī*, as a first category. Malik undertakes also a survey which takes into account a set of works which is associated with Jīlānī from biographies and hagiographies to commentaries on his texts. This second category includes great many a work in traditional Muslim languages, and very few in Western languages, all of which are of course modern. Malik identifies and presents Jīlānī's general teaching, Sufi thought and theological stance, and furthermore aims

at portraying his character and personality, as might be established solely from the works analyzed.

Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī was born in 470/1077 and died in 561/1166. Notwithstanding he was born in the village of Nīf, which is situated in an area to the northeast of Iraq and south of the Caspian known as Gīlān, he moved to Baghdad during his teenage years and was to spend the rest of his life there. Around the time of his arrival in Baghdad, or even before, ‘Abd al-Qādir became drawn to ascetical and mystical endeavours and for this reason seems to have become attached to the locally known *sufi* Hammād al-Dabbās (d. 525/1131) for a while. Upon completing his formal studies, he spent a number of years in spiritual retreats.

To understand Jīlānī’s thought and writings, Malik first explores the social, political and educational milieu that Jīlānī entered into and became a part of. The political situation between 400/1000 and 500/1200 was one of great changes in the Muslim lands, especially for Baghdad and the surrounding country. It saw the rise to power of the Seljuks (446-596/1055-1200), with a patchy period, oscillating between stability and then a return to instability as had been the case during the end of the Buwayhid period (334-446/945-1055).

Baghdad was ethnically composed of Arabs, Persians, Turks and Kurds, and there were, aside from the Muslim majority population, Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians. In such a milieu there is an investigation into the various groups and sects (Sunni and Shī‘ī) that were present in Baghdad – the Zaydīs, the Ismā‘īlīs, the Imāmiyya, the Mu‘tazilīs, the Ash‘arīs, the Ḥanafīs, the Shāfi‘īs, the Ḥanbalīs, the ‘Ayyārūn – and into their activities. Meanwhile, between 400/1000 and the Mongol devastation of Baghdad in 656/1258, many few educational institutions emerged such as cathedral-mosque (the *jāmi‘*), mosque-college (the *masjid*) and lawcollege (the *madrasa*).

After bringing into sharper focus an overview of the political and social atmosphere in Baghdad leading up to and during the life of Jīlānī, Hamza Malik accentuates a biographical account of Jīlānī’s life in as much detail as possible. Jīlānī’s full name is Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir Ibn Abī Šāliḥ al-Jīlānī. His life is roughly divided into two general phases. The first of his youth and education, of finding himself and gaining a good grounding in the spiritual aspect of Islam, and the second of teaching, giving sermons to large crowds and guiding new adherents on the spiritual Sufi path. The first phase

amounts to roughly the first forty or fifty years of his life, while the second phase amounts to the remainder of his life, again a forty to fifty year period.

To examine Jīlānī's thought as a whole means looking at him as a Ḥanbalī as well as a Sufī if he can be rightly rendered as such. The term Ḥanbalī can be used to refer to a school of theology as well as a school of jurisprudence and sometimes in popular idiom as a school of morality too. By the twelfth century, all four Sunni schools of law were generally accepted as equally valid according to their own methodologies, and so all four were considered orthodox. Jīlānī was known to be a Ḥanbalī in jurisprudence and this could not have caused any controversy. Malik has singled out five issues that are discussed by most writers on theology and that cover some of the major points. They are heavily debated between the different sects during this period, and gauging Jīlānī's standpoint on these topics will hopefully help identify his theological perspective. They are the attributes of God, the status of the *Qur'ān*, faith, human actions (*Af'āl al-'Ibād*) and the Caliphate.

Using Ibn Baṭṭa and Ash'arī as a gauge, it has been shown that on each of these doctrinal issues there has been fitness between what Jīlānī wrote and what these authors who preceded him wrote. Jīlānī's views appear to be in agreement with other Ḥanbalīs that precede him. Still, there are some interesting differences that exist with regard to the presentation of these three works.

The second part of Jīlānī's theology pivots on names and nomenclature; that is, the names and occurrences of persons and groups whom Jīlānī refers to in his theology section of the *Ghunya*. The names that are evaluated here are persons other than the companions of the Prophet and names that merely appear in a chain of transmission (*isnād*) for any given *ḥadīth*. They are persons from whom Jīlānī is taking an opinion, rather than just a report. Fourteen different persons are mentioned, and five of them more than once. Jīlānī viewed the opinions of the *Ḥadīth* scholars as an unrivalled authority, with Ibn Ḥanbal standing out as the leader of a prestigious pack in this regard and the one most relied upon.

After looking at the theology of Jīlānī, Hamza Malik broaches on understanding his thought as a complete system, and thus in the course of attempting to set down this system, the theology just enumerated must be reconsidered and put in its proper place and given its appropriate significance with a more focus on al-Jīlānī's *al-Ghunya li-Ṭālibī Ṭarīq al-Ḥaqq*. Jīlānī is a devotee of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, who is mentioned 46 times more than

double the amount of the next most frequently mentioned person. This is not only because of his prominence as the founder and originator of the school of law named after him and which Jīlānī adhered to, or as a traditionist, or as a theologian he was considered a great saint by many that came after him, and a person who many of the Sufis regarded as a role model of piety and asceticism. As an “austere Hanbali,” Jīlānī in *al-Ghunya* constantly shows an amazing knowledge of differing opinions from different schools. He regularly relates the opinions of the other three jurists, Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik and Shāfī. In *al-Ghunya*, Jīlānī reveals an “ocean of knowledge” in Qur’ānic exegesis (*tafsir*), Arabic language and Islamic law (*fiqh*), *inter alia*.

Malik highlights the Sufi path of Jīlānī as extracted from his works. The author looks at some elementary aspects such as the basic understanding of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) as something that involves a permanent change of character and state, on both a personal and social plane. He also explores Jīlānī’s standpoint regarding the prerequisites to the Sufi path and its foundations. These rudiments are: (1) the strict adherence to the *Qur’ān* and *sunna*, and this can be achieved through two very essential principles, the first being *sidq* or truthfulness and the second *ijtihād*; and (2) the importance of a Shaykh.

Hamza Malik offers us a thorough analysis of Jīlānī’s main foundations of his Sufi path or “method” (*ṭarīqa*). Jīlānī mentions seven *khiṣāl* (virtues or characteristics) which are *mujāhada* (struggle against the base desires and impulses) of the *nafs*, *tawakkul* (complete and absolute reliance upon God), *ḥusn al-khulq* (having good character and behaviour), *shukr* (gratefulness), *ṣabr* (patience), *riḍā* (contentment) and *ṣidq* (truthfulness). Hamza Malik ends his study by illustrating the personality and character of Jīlānī, as culled from his three works. The author relies on material produced during his lifetime and from individuals that personally witnessed the events and comments that are recorded. Malik finds occasional comments upon Jīlānī’s physical actions and the situational condition, which are given to us by the scribes taking note of his speech.

Malik’s *The Grey Falcon: The Life and Teaching of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī* is an invaluable attempt to provide a meticulous analysis and study of some of the works of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. There are many further tracks of research that need to be sought in order for us to be able to fully appreciate the importance, influence and impact that Jīlānī had on the history of Sufism and on Muslim society and culture after him. Interestingly enough, this spiritual guide and pious scholar’s legacy needs to be deeply unearthed. The issue of the Qādirī order is also something that can be considered again

and in more depth than has been done previously. This order as the mantle of spiritual inheritance was passed down through his sons and aspirants into different corners of the Islamic world. Notwithstanding Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī never set his feet in the Maghreb in general, and in Morocco in particular, his influence on Sufi issues was immense as an eponymous *Zawiya* was built in Morocco and Algeria under his name “the Qādirī *Zawiya*,” which greatly influenced other orders, and it has a lot of aspirants (*murīdin*) and disciples.

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