MAPPING THE TRAJECTORY
OF TARIQA ALAWIYYA IN THE 13TH-17TH CENTURY:
The Tension between Expansion and Preservation

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Abstract: This study delves into the intellectual history of *Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya*, tracing its development from early Alid piety to an Akbarian gnostic tradition, ultimately converging into a revivalist paradigm during the late 16th century. The transformative journey involves a reinterpretation and reformulation of the foundational Akbarian doctrines, strategically tailored to enhance accessibility for both the Ba ʿAlawi community and the broader Muslim society. The focal point of this study is the textual formation of prominent Ba ʿAlawi scholars of the third *ṭabaqa*, who played a pivotal role in reshaping the Tariqa's trajectory. While their efforts demonstrably amplified the Tariqa's influence and reach, they also ignited concerns among some Ba ʿAlawi scholars about the potential dilution of the movement's unique genealogical configuration. This tension between expansion and preservation gave rise to a parallel restorative movement within the Tariqa, operating concurrently with the reformative movement. This research employs a desk research methodology, drawing upon both textual and contextual data, to examine the intellectual articulations and internal dynamics within the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya. Through the writings of its saintly and scholarly figures, the study investigates how discourse functioned as a tool for negotiating power and reveals the dialogical nature of various canonical texts.

Keywords: Akbarian Tradition; Muhammadan Light; Tariqa Alawiyya; Salaf; Revivalism.

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Introduction

Ba 'Alawi historians concur that the migration of Aḥmad b. Īsā the Emigrant (873-956) from Basra, despite economic prosperity, was motivated by a pursuit of tranquility and a proactive effort to shield their families from the political turmoil induced by continuous military rebellion against the Abbasids. Ahmad's choice of Hadhramaut was even reported to avoid the Abbasid tentacles reach.[1] While certain hagiographical accounts suggest spiritual guidance in Ahmad's geographical choice through a veridical dream, the imperative remains to analyze his migration as a concerted effort to secure tranquility for his family amidst the turbulent political climate.

In tandem with the extensive body of literature produced by Ba 'Alawis themselves concerning their history, recent decades have witnessed a consistent upsurge in scholarly investigations into *the Bā 'Alawī Sāda* (singular: Sayyid) and their expansive diasporic networks across East Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Indian Ocean. A plethora of historical and anthropological studies has emerged, delving into the realms of the social and political history of this socioreligious elite since the nineteenth century.[2]

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[1] 'Abd al-Qādir b. Aḥmad al-'Aydarūs, *al-Nūr al-Sāfir 'an Akhbār al-Qarn al-'Āshir* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2001); Ḥātim b. Muḥammad b. 'Alawī Āl Shaykhān al-Jufrī, *al-Sāda Āl 'Alawī al-'Uraydiyyūn al-Ḥusayniyyūn: Uṣuluhum, Ansābuhum, A'lāmuhum, Ṭarīqatuhum* (Ribat: Dār al-Aman, 2017); Saqqāf b. 'Alī al-Kāf, *Dirāsa fī Nasab al-Sāda Banī 'Alawī: Dhurriyat al-Imām al-Muhājir Aḥmad b. 'Īsā* (n.p.: Maṭābi' al-Mukhtār al-Islāmī, 1989); Yūsuf b. Ismāīl al-Nabhānī, *al-Sharaf al-Mu'abbad li-Āl Muḥammad* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 2007); 'Alī b. Muḥsin al-Saqqāf, *al-Istizāda min Akhbār al-Sāda* (n.p.: Self-published, 2009); Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Shāṭirī, *Adwār al-Tarīkh al-Ḥaḍramī* (Kuwait: 'Ālam al-Ma'rifa, 1983); Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Shāṭirī, *Ṣirāṭ al-Salaf min Banī 'Alawī al-Ḥusayniyyin* (Beirut: Dār al-Hāwī, n.d.); 'Alawī b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Balfaqīh, *Min A'qāb al-Biḍ'ah al-Muḥammadiyya al-Ṭāhira* (Hadhramaut: Dār al-Muhājir, 1994); Muḥammad Dhiyā' Shahāb and 'Abd Allah b. Nūḥ, *al-Imām al-Muhājir Aḥmad bin 'Īsā bin Muḥammad bin 'Alī bin al-'Arīḍī Ja'far al-Ṣādiq: Mālah wa li-Naslih wa li-Aimma min Aslāfih min al-Faḍāil wa al-Ma'āthir* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1980).

[2] Ismail Fajrie Alatas, "Securing Their Place: The Ba'alawi, Prophetic Piety and the Islamic Resurgence in Indonesia" (Master's Theses—National University of Singapore, 2009); Ismail Fajrie Alatas, "Becoming Indonesians: The Bā 'Alawī in the Interstices of the Nation," *Die Welt Des Islams* 51, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 45–108, https://doi.org/10.1163/157006011X556120; Ismail Fajrie Alatas, "The Poetics of Pilgrimage: Assembling Contemporary Indonesian Pilgrimage to Ḥaḍramawt, Yemen," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 3 (2016): 607–35; Ismail

Numerous scholars have dedicated their efforts to studying various aspects of the *Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya*, offering valuable insights into its dynamics.[3] Further enriching the Hadhrami literature, some researchers have conducted thorough anthropological investigations into the expansive diasporic network of the Tariqa.[4] Additionally, there has been a stream of studies on contemporary iterations of the Tariqa, exploring its adaptation to the democratic space in Indonesia.[5] However, of particular relevance to the present study are recent

Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?: Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2021); Anne Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa, 1860-1925* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003); Linda Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire: Hadhramawt, Emigration, and the Indian Ocean, 1880S-1930s* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002); Ulrike Freitag, "Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhramaut: Reforming the Homeland," in *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhramaut* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Ulrike Freitag and W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars, and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean: 3* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Frode F. Jacobsen, *Hadrami Arabs in Present-Day Indonesia: An Indonesia-Oriented Group with an Arab Signature* (London: Routledge, 2009); R. B. Serjeant, "Haram and Hawtah, the Sacred Enclave in Arabia," *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam* (1999), 167; R. B. Serjeant, *The Saiyids of Hadramawt. An Inaugural Lecture Delivered on 5 June 1956* (University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1957).

[3] Syed Farid Alatas, "The Tariqat al-ʿAlawiyyah and the Emergence of the Shiʾi School in Indonesia and Malaysia," SSRN Scholarly Paper (New York: Rochester, 1999). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2650596. J. Spencer Trimingham et. al., *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)

[4] Alatas, "Securing Their Place"; Alatas, "Becoming Indonesians"; Alatas, "The Poetics of Pilgrimage"; Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?*; Ismail Fajrie Alatas and Martin Slama, "Rethinking Diasporic Returns: Ḥaḍramī Trajectories in Indonesia's Religio-Political Field," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde/Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 178, no. 4 (2022): 410–39, https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-bja10046; Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*; Engseng Ho, "Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 2 (2004): 200, https://doi.org/10.1017/S001041750400012X.

[5] Fatimah Husein, "Preserving and Transmitting the Teachings of the Thariqah ʿAlawiyyah: Diasporic Ba ʿAlawi Female Preachers in Contemporary Indonesia," *The Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies* 4, no. 2 (2021): 165–87, https://doi.org/10.26443/jiows.v4i2.82; Syamsul Rijal, "Habaib, Markets and Traditional Islamic Authority: The Rise of Arab Preachers in Contemporary Indonesia," (PhD Thesis--The Australian National University, 2017. https://doi.org/10.25911/5d5140ffbed64.

investigations into pre-*Ḥaddādian* Akbarian nuances within the Tariqa by Edaibat.[6]

However, this scholarly stream has left a gap in understanding the motivations guiding Ba 'Alawi Sayyids, particularly during their formative phase, to adopt the Akbarian tradition of patrician gnosticism and its impact on their mission to safeguard the family. Therefore, this present study aims to locate Ba 'Alawi doctrines, traditions, and practices within canonical texts, crucial for preserving their lineal heritage. It will survey the evolutionary trajectory of their religious orientation and the socio-political factors driving this trajectory, from initial Alid piety to the Akbarian mysticism in the 13th century, culminating in the early 17th-century revivalist paradigm, aligning with their original mission.[7]

Addressing the literature gap, this study posits that the Ba 'Alawi immigrants' initial strategy of obscuration, framed within a "culture of ambiguity" theorized by Bauer,[8] and facilitated by the Akbarian tradition, was further solidified by their commitment to omitting textual dissemination in favor of oral transmission. This strategy has sparked ongoing debates among leading Ba 'Alawi scholars concerning the inaugural entourage's sectarian orientation, fostering dynamics among subsequent generations and rendering the Tariqa a malleable and modular Sufi path. It proved to be a masterstroke for navigating the new territory marked by chaotic inter and intratribal political cleavages and geopolitical power play. By the fifteenth century, it became evident that Ba 'Alawi saintly figures had erected the *Ṭarīqa 'Alawiyya* (interchangeably referred to as the Tariqa or the Alawi Way) into a complex institutionalized canon of saints, texts, rituals, special places, and genealogies.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, the Tariqa experienced a critical transformation. Seeking to broaden its reach beyond the

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[6] Omar Edaibat, "The Akbarian Tradition in Hadhramawt: The Intellectual Legacy of Shaykh Abu Bakr B. Salim," in *Islamic Thought and the Art of Translation: Texts and Studies in Honor of William C. Chittick and Sachiko Murata*, ed. Mohammed Rustom, William C. Chittick, and Sachiko Murata (Leiden: Brill, 2022); Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999).

[7] Chiara and Michael Formichi (eds.), *Shi'ism in South East Asia: Alid Piety and Sectarian Constructions* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

[8] Thomas Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity: An Alternative History of Islam*, trans. Hinrich Biesterfeldt and Tricia Tunstall (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

"family path", as some scholars rightly characterized,[9] the Tariqa embarked on a journey of expansion, effectively opening its doors to the wider world. This shift, understandably, sparked a unique internal tension. The drive for expansion, it seems, clashed with the desire to preserve the Tariqa's unique genealogy. However, instead of hindering progress, this tension proved generative. The need to reconcile expansion with preservation fueled a dynamic process of internal discourse and dialog. This interplay of forces ultimately served to strengthen the Tariqa, not only in its reach but also in its ability to maintain its distinctive character. This balance between inclusivity and exclusivity propelled the Tariqa to become one of the most popular and unique spiritual movements in the region, garnering significant influence across Southern Arabia, East Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Indian Ocean Rim.

This paper commences by presenting the *ṭabaqāt* of Ba 'Alawi luminaries as a vantage point for understanding its historical landscape. The second section delves into the corpus of formative texts within the *ṭabaqāt* to palpate its discursive tradition. The third section reviews canonical texts on Ba 'Alawi genealogy, spotlighting influential works by 'Abd al-Qādir al-'Aydarūs and Muḥammad al-Shillī. Subsequently, the study explores the foundational doctrine of the Muhammadan light and its imaginative representation within the Tariqa. The succeeding section elaborates on the intersection of religion and genealogy, gleaned from the seminal work of 'Aydarūs al-Ḥabshī. The subsequent section examines the central role of the Salaf as the gaze looking after and watching over the contemporary Ba 'Alawi community. Finally, the last section analyzes how saintly Salaf safeguard their descendants from moral disorientation and lineal dilution amid fragmented authorities, modernity, increasing diaspora, and secular conditioning

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[9] Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, *Some Aspects of Sufism: As Understood and Practised among the Malays*, Second impression with improvements by Ta'dib International (Kuala Lumpur: Ta'dib International Sdn Bhd, 2020), 36; Trimingham et al., *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 3.

Ṭabaqāt of Ba 'Alawi Saintly Figures

Drawing on the genre of *ṭabaqāt*,[10] al-Saqqāf proposes four *ṭabaqāt* of Ba 'Alawi luminaries representing four distinct stages of their social, political, and, particularly, intellectual history.[11] Remarkably, there is consensus between two of the most celebrated yet controversial contemporary Ba 'Alawi scholars, al-Saqqāf and al-Shāṭirī, in endorsing this quadruple classification. However, Al-Shāṭirī chooses to substitute *ṭabaqa* (level) with *dawr* (role).

The first *ṭabaqa* commenced with Aḥmad the Emigrant (873-956) as the head (*nāqib*) of the Hadhrami Sayyids,[12] extending until the era of the First Jurist, Muḥammad b. 'Alī. This period, according to al-Saqqāf, was characterized by obscuration (*maḥw al-rusūm*), isolationism (*khumūl*), and cultural ambiguity, either resulting from their strategic choice of engagement in strict asceticism, internal lack of intellectualism, or due to imperial scrutiny and an unfriendly environment. Regardless of the reasons, their history remains a subject of debates to the present day, with al-Shāṭirī claiming they were mujtahid of the first grade, while al-Saqqāf argues they exhibited low intellectual activity with a high penchant for spiritual perfection. Nevertheless, it is evident that this strategy of obscurantism paved the way for the projection of a moderate religious landscape in subsequent generations. This period marked the introduction of Sufism for the first time in Hadhramaut's history, coupled with the promotion of Ash'arite theology and Shāfi'ī jurisprudence.[13]

The strategic obscurantism, enveloped in the mysticism of infinity rather than personality,[14] reached its pinnacle during the era of Muḥammad b. 'Alī (1178–1232), widely acclaimed as the First Jurist (*al-Faqīh al-Muqaddam*). Positioned within the transitional phase between the first and second *ṭabaqa*, his symbolic act of breaking the

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[10] *Ṭabaqāt* represents a genre within Islamic biographical literature, organized according to the chronological progression of centuries in which notable individuals lived. Each century or generation is denoted as a *ṭabaqa*, with the plural form being *ṭabaqāt*.

[11] 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Ubayd Allah al-Saqqāf, *Mu'jam Buldān Ḥaḍramawt* (Saudi Arabia: Maktabat al-Irshād, 2002), 506–11.

[12] For more in-depth exploration of this topic, please consult Bernheimer's work, "51 The *Niqāba*, the Headship of the 'Alid Family." (Bernheimer, 2013).

[13] al-Shāṭirī, *Adwār al-Tārīkh al-Ḥaḍramī*, 163.

[14] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 5.

sword marked a turning point in the trajectory of the Tariqa. This decision shielded the Ba 'Alawi from potential entanglement in intertribal conflicts, enabling succeeding Ba 'Alawi generations to mediate and oversee *hawṭa* as a sacrosanct enclave.[15] It is for this commitment that within the Tariqa hierarchy, he was heralded as the inaugural shaykh in its fullest sense.

The First Jurist was reputedly converted to Akbarian Sufism due to a contact with the renowned African Shaykh, Abū Madyān b. Abī al-Ḥasan,[16] the mentor of Ibn 'Arabī, via his emissary in Southern Arabia. This connection led to the investiture of the First Jurist with the *khirqa*, marking a turning point in his life and the life of the emerging Ba 'Alawi community. Following this conversion, he propagated the Alawi/Akbarian Sufism, which was revered by the Rasulid dynasty of that era, across Hadhramaut. In this role, he emerged as a highly impactful unifying figure for the community and the Hadhramis at large.[17]

Al-Saqqāf suggested that the adoption of isolationism by the first *ṭabaqa* could be attributed to psychosocial factors such as their reluctance to engage in tribal rivalries that might compromise their saliency or tarnish their perceived nobility. More significantly, he contends that this choice was influenced by political factors, driven by their apprehension of the imperial gaze of the Abbasid apparatus and the conflicts among tribal dynasties. He underscores that if their isolationism alone drew suspicion and strict supervision from the state apparatus, the prospect of them becoming visible in that era would most likely escalate the challenges they would have faced under the watchful eyes of the authorities. This explains why intellectual activism among the Ba 'Alawi commenced in the later phases of the

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[15] Serjeant, "Haram and Hawtah, the Sacred Enclave in Arabia."

[16] G. Marçais, "Abu Madyan", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, I:137b. Encyclopaedia of Islam (Leiden: Brill, n.d.).

[17] 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Mashhūr, *Shams al-Ẓahīra*, ed. Muḥammad Ḍiyā' Shahāb (Jeddah: 'Ālam al-Ma'rifa, 1984), 77–78; al-Shāṭirī, *Adwār al-Tārīkh al-Ḥaḍramī*, 253–55. For more detailed account on the influence of Akbarian tradition within the Alawi Way, see Omar Edaibat, "The Akbarian Tradition in Hadhramawt: The Intellectual Legacy of Shaykh Abū Bakr b. Sālim," in *Islamic Thought and the Art of Translation: Texts and Studies in Honor of William C. Chittick and Sachiko Murata*, edited by Mohammed Rustom (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 225–59. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004529038_013 and Edaibat, "The Bā 'Alawī Sāda of the Hadhramaut Valley: An Intellectual and Social History from Tenth-Century Origins till the Late-Sixteenth Century," 2022.

second *ṭabaqa*, as the socio-political climate became more conducive for such endeavors.[18] In contrast to al-Saqqāf's assumption, this study posits that isolationism under the guise of the Akbarian tradition was a strategic choice to pursue the mission of preserving the Prophetic heirs, and it proved successful in that attempt.

The second *ṭabaqa* spanned from the era of the First Jurist to approximately the time of 'Abd Allah al-'Aydarūs (1408-1461), a generation of saintly figures described by Ibn Battuta as "more like angels than human beings".[19] This phase is notably characterized by the profound infusion of gnosticism and Akbarian tradition into the Alawi Way. Al-Saqqāf observed that the saintly figures of this era immerse themselves in devotional acts, adhere to rigorous spiritual discipline, and navigate the intricate Sufi path of self-cultivation—an endeavor challenging for the general populace to even fathom unless witnessed firsthand. In the words of al-Saqqāf, "These noblemen embody the description Ibn Battuta provided in his Rihla as 'more like angels than humans'. Noteworthy among them are Muḥammad b. 'Alī Mawlā al-Dawīla (1305-1368) and his son 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Saqqāf (1338-1416), who adorned a Sufi-type hat known as *khūdha* or *quba*'."[20]

The third *ṭabaqa* begin from the time of Abu Bakr al-'Adanī b. 'Abd Allah al-'Aydarūs (1447–1508), a saintly figure whose grave destruction prompted Ho's anthropological exploration[21], extending until the 19th AD/13th AH century. This period marked a convergence of internal and external sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors that eventually led to a dramatic shift in the Tariqa from its earlier exclusivist Sufi order to a more visible, accessible, and revivalist paradigm.[22] According to al-Shāṭirī, this epoch marks the emergence of the now-famous honorific title *ḥabīb* (the beloved) for Ba 'Alawi saintly figures. Despite being perceived as intellectually and spiritually less profound than the second *ṭabaqa*, al-Shāṭirī acknowledges that they introduced several public personalities and prolific authors, the

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[18] al-Saqqāf, *Muʻjam Buldān Ḥaḍramawt*, 433–35.

[19] al-Saqqāf, *al-Istizāda min Akhbār al-Sāda*, 59.

[20] al-Saqqāf, *Muʻjam Buldān Ḥaḍramawt*, 509–10.

[21] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, 6-17.

[22] al-Shāṭirī, *Ṣirāṭ al-Salaf min Banī 'Alawī*, 17-18.

most notable among them is 'Abd Allah b. 'Alawī al-Ḥaddād (1634-1720).[23]

In consonance with al-Shāṭirī's observations, al-Saqqāf noted a decline in the overall moral superiority and religious authority of the Ba 'Alawi of this *ṭabaqa*, despite their extraordinary surge in intellectual productivity and discursive activity. This decline could be attributed not only to the general economic deterioration of the Ba 'Alawi families, faced with the challenges of a growing population and geographical dispersion as registered by al-Shāṭirī, but also to the allure of a more promising life beyond Tarim, the spiritual homeland of the Ba 'Alawi, as al-Saqqāf posited.

The allure, al-Saqqāf reckoned, manifested prominently in the extraordinary rise to popularity and accumulation of wealth experienced by those who migrated outside of Tarim. A notable case is that of al-'Adanī, particularly upon his arrival in Aden in 1484. During this period, Aden flourished as a burgeoning port, facilitating transregional trade between Europe and Asia. Interestingly, this era of commercial prosperity coincided with an augmented demand for religious visibility, potentially contributing to a discernible decline in spiritual substance and a relaxation of moral scrupulousness. For al-Saqqāf, even though al-'Adanī was celebrated as a saintly figure hailed as a *quṭb* (axial saint), he faced criticism from other Ba Alawi shaykhly figures for initiating a trajectory of diaspora and heightened public visibility, thereby exposing the community to the risk of fragmentation and disorientation.[24]

The fourth *ṭabaqa*, spanning from the second half of the 19th century to the present, is universally acknowledged by both al-Saqqāf and al-Shāṭirī as the most decadent epoch in the trajectory of Ba 'Alawi history. They affirmed this decadence, even as the Ba 'Alawi diasporic network expanded across the African continent, the Indian Ocean rim, and the Malay Archipelago. This situation persists despite, or perhaps because of, the endeavors by saintly figures of the third *ṭabaqa* to reconfigure the Tariqa into a more revivalist paradigm. The unintended consequences of this endeavor included the over-exposure to popular culture, modernity, dynamic power structures, and secular conditioning.

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[23] Ibid., 44.

[24] al-Saqqāf, *al-Istizāda min Akhbār al-Sāda*, 71.

In concluding his examination of the fourfold structure, al-Shāṭirī likened Ba 'Alawi history to a construction project advancing through various stages, each imposing progressively lesser demands. The diminishing strength, depth, and determination observed in subsequent generations, notably within the diaspora, can be attributed to the evolving challenges they encountered. Al-Shāṭirī's analysis implies that the earlier Salaf, navigating a more delicate environment, demonstrated exceptional strength and resilience in their unwavering commitment to self-cultivation, coupled with intelligent, visionary, and strategic thinking.[25]

The Dynamics of the Canonical Texts

Examining the transformative shifts within the Alawi Way requires delving into the discourses woven into the canonical texts authored by Ba 'Alawi luminaries. This analysis reveals a distinct contrast between the writings of earlier and later generations. The second *ṭabaqa* produced enigmatic texts steeped in contemplative gnosticism, reminiscent of the style embraced by Akbarian authors. In stark contrast, the third *ṭabaqa*, particularly during the post-Ḥaddādian periods that began in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, shifted towards a more accessible and standardized approach. Their contributions, encompassing genealogical, biographical, hagiographical, and ethical works, were marked by a focus on consistent and realizable Prophetic teachings. This change in discourse reflects a conscious effort to expand the Tariqa's appeal and facilitate its transmission to a wider audience beyond the confines of the Ba 'Alawi family lineage.

A cursory examination of the titles of works unveils the distinctive intellectual milieu of the second, third, and fourth *ṭabaqāt*. A compelling instance is found in 'Abd Allah al-'Aydarūs (1408-1461)'s succinct yet renowned work, *al-Kibrīt al-Aḥmar wa al-Iksīr al-Akbar* (The Red Sulphur and the Great Elixir). This work serves as an elucidation of patrician mystical ideas widely embraced by Akbarian Sufis. Following this, the work of 'Alī b. Abū Bakr (1415-1490), renowned as the Drunken (*al-Sakrān*) due to his frequent state of spiritual insobriety, includes *al-Barqa al-Mashīqa* (The Lightning Bolt), and Shaykh Abū Bakr b. Sālim's (1513-1584) highly esoteric *Miʿrāj al-*

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[25] al-Shāṭirī, *Ṣirāṭ al-Salaf min Banī 'Alawī al-Ḥusayniyyin*.

Arwāḥ (The Ascension of the Spirits). The latter involves theosophical contemplations reminiscent of Akbarian mysticism.

In the first part of the third *ṭabaqa*, a compendium of genealogical and standardized ethical texts emerged. Works such as 'Abd al-Qādir al-'Aydarūs's (1570-1628) *al-Nūr al-Sāfir* (The Travelling Light), Muḥammad al-Shillī (1621-1682)'s *al-Mashra' al-Rawiy* (The Irrigating Fount), and 'Abd Allah al-Ḥaddād's (1634-1720) *Risālat al-Mu'āwana* (The Book of Assistance), *Risālat Adāb Sulūk al-Murīd*' (The Book of Ethical Requirements for the Wayfaring Aspirant), *al-Naṣāiḥ al-Dīniyya wa al-Waṣāyā al-Īmāniyya* (Religious Counsel and Credal Advice), and Muḥammad b. Sumayṭ (1689-1758)'s *al-Wasīla al-Mu'aẓẓama* (The Greatest Intercessor) about the devotional act of *tawassul* (intercession) were produced during this period. However, gnostic literature also flourished during this *ṭabaqa*, exemplified by the mystical poetry collection titled *al-Rashafāt* (the Splashes of the Perfect People) by 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abd Allah Balfaqīh (1678-1748).

In the latter part of the third *ṭabaqa*, noteworthy contributions include 'Aydarūs al-Ḥibshī (1822-1896)'s formative text on *isnād* entitled *'Iqd al-Yawāqīṭ* (Pack of Chrysolites) and his student Ali b. Muḥammad al-Ḥabshī (1839-1913)'s most popular ode to the Prophet, *Simṭ al-Durar* (Thread of the Pearls). Transitioning to the fourth *ṭabaqa*, Zayn b. Sumayṭ's *al-Manhaj al-Sawī* (The Straight Method) stands out as the most popular work within this period.

Delving into the content reveals al-'Aydarūs's emphasis on four ascetic attributes for the Tariqa aspirants: 'minimal eating (*qillat al-ṭa'ām*), minimal speaking (*qillat al-kalām*), minimal sleeping (*qillat al-manām*), and avoidance of crowds (*i'tizāl al-anām*)'.[26] In contrast, Ibn Sumayṭ propagated an idea linking movement (*ḥaraka*) with blessings (*baraka*). He states: "With movement comes the power of blessing; with shaking, the fruits will fall; with looking, the horizons will be wide opened; with preparation, provisions will be achieved, and with spiritual struggle, spiritual vision will be attained…with intention, results will be reached, by walking the trail, the destination will be reached, and willpower is the seal of success."[27]

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[26] 'Abd Allah b. Abī Bakr al-'Aydarūs, *al-Kibrīt al-Aḥmar wa al-Iksīr al-Akbar*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Sulṭān (Cairo: Dār Jawāmi' al-Kalim, 2002), 7.

[27] Zayn b. Ibrāhīm b. Sumayṭ, *al-Manhaj al-Sawī fī Sharḥ Uṣūl Ṭarīqat al-Sāda Āl Bā 'Alawī* (Oman: Dār al-'Ilm wa al-Da'wa, 2005), 58.

These textual dynamics delineate evolutionary trajectory in the Tariqa, with al-Ḥaddād at the vanguard of this movement.[28] As a prolific author, al-Ḥaddād emerges as the foremost reviver (*mujaddid*) over the last three centuries. His era marks a new phase in the evolution of the Tariqa, specifically, and South Arabian Sufism, in general, foreseeing the impending challenges of colonial modernity and responding to the internal threat of Wahhabism, embodied by the emergence of Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792) in the Arabian Peninsula during his lifetime.[29] In contrast to his predecessors, al-Ḥaddād often conveyed his ideas through evocative sentences, aiming to resonate with the sentiments of his untrained readers.[30] He steered his followers toward a spiritual path that celebrated voluntarism and activism.[31]

What prompted al-Ḥaddād's initiative, according to Alatas, was his keen awareness of the enduring chaotic state of affairs in Hadhramaut. He diagnosed this chaos as a consequence of the failure of the Islamic curricula to provide an accessible normative code capable of structuring everyday life and shaping inter- and intratribal sociality. He lamented the prevalent ignorance that led to the proliferation of *bidʿa* (innovation) and *muḥdathāt* (novelties). Expressing dissatisfaction with the exclusivist orientation of the Tariqa, al-Ḥaddād criticized its divisive role in creating the elect (*khawāṣ*) and the commoners (*ʿawām*), with the latter succumbing to moral degeneracy.[32]

From a Sufi perspective, a factor motivating al-Ḥaddād's departure from Akbarian gnosticism was his concern about the potential for transmogrification of the state of bewilderment (*ḥayra*) among the Ba ʿAlawis into antinomianism. Without proper guidance from shaykhly figures, this state, especially in the context of the diaspora and exposure to colonial and secular influences, could lead to the misinterpretation of ecstatic utterances (*shaṭaḥāt*) as rejections

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[28] Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?*, 65-71.

[29] Edaibat, "The Ba Alawi Sada of the Hadhramaut Valley," 14.

[30] ʿAbd Allah b. ʿAlwī al-Ḥaddād, *al-Nafāis al-ʿUluwiyya fī al-Masāil al-Ṣūfiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥawī, 1993), 176; ʿAbd Allah b. ʿAlwī al-Ḥaddād, *al-Durr al-Manẓūm* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥawī, 1994), 49–50.

[31] al-Mashhūr, *Shams al-Ẓahīra*, 77-78; al-Shāṭirī, *Adwār al-Tarīkh al-Ḥaḍramī*, 253–55.

[32] Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?*, 65–66.

of Sharia law.[33] This, in turn, could exacerbate internal polarization and provoke public persecution, a threat that loomed large during al-Ḥaddād's time.[34]

Codifying the Genealogy

Around the same century, coinciding with the Tariqa's reformative project, a significant intellectual movement unfolded among the third *ṭabaqa* of Ba 'Alawi scholars. This movement likely emerged as a response to concerns that the modularization of the Tariqa might disrupt its genealogical configuration, facing malicious infiltrations from competing Sufi hierarchies. This movement, according to Ho, was a deliberate effort to anchor the Tariqa's genealogy firmly. Its aim was to safeguard against the risk of its potential submergence amid the global exposure and transformations of the era.[35]

'Abd al-Qādir al-'Aydarūs and Muḥammad al-Shillī stand as exemplary pioneers in this field. Despite crafting their formative texts in distant locales, these luminaries maintained a connection with the homeland and ancestral heritage—a facet that will be further explored in this study. Within the pages of these texts, a vivid tableau unfolds, illustrating the historical narrative of the Tariqa's inception. In his work, *al-Nūr al-Sāfir*, al-'Aydarūs weaves genealogy with mystical and esoteric themes, particularly concerning the Muhammadan light.[36] This light is conceptualized within the ontological idea of the Prophetic emanation, a topic that will be discussed in the next section.

The second noteworthy text, *al-Mashra' al-Rawiy*, was penned in the late seventeenth century by Shillī (d. 1682). Born in Tarim as a Hadhrami Sayyid, al-Shillī embarked on a journey to India before establishing himself in Mecca. This significant work synthesizes the diasporic narratives of "The Travelling Light" and the local Tarimi stories found in *al-Jawhar al-Shaffāf fī Manāqib wa Karāmāt al-Sāda al-Ashrāf* (The Transparent Essence, Recounting the Marvels of the Sayyids of Tarim) by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Khaṭīb (1305-1451), a Ba

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[33] 'Abd Allah b. 'Alawī al-Ḥaddād, *al-Fuṣūl al-'Amaliyya wa al-Uṣūl al-Ḥikamiyya*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥāwī, 1998), 47.

[34] al-Shāṭirī, *Adwār al-Tarīkh al-Ḥaḍramī*; Serjeant, *The Saiyids of Hadramawt*.

[35] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, 117.

[36] Ibid., 116.

'Alawi genealogist, providing an interesting amalgamation. Within *al-Mashra'*, the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean, stretching from Ethiopia to Sumatra, is transformed into a frontier for missionary settlement by the Hadrami Sayyids, laden with religious significance derived from Prophetic genealogy. The genealogy, intricately woven and supported by Prophetic traditions (ḥadīth), establishes a sophisticated connection between individuals and their religious lineage.

Diverging from the inclusive approach of *al-Nūr*, where individuals of diverse origins play roles, *al-Mashra'* adopts an exclusive focus on the Sayyids, akin to that of *al-Jawhar*. Ho characterizes al-Shillī's work as a reinforcement of Ba 'Alawi genealogy, transitioning from *al-Jawhar*'s figural and hagiographical account to a more literal and legal presentation.[37] This selective lens perchance reflects a conscious effort to fortify the Ba 'Alawi genealogical structure against potential dilution, coinciding with the period when al-Haddad produced a massive corpus in his attempt to unbind and deliver the Tariqa to the wider world.

Through this complementary movement, the third *ṭabaqa* of Ba 'Alawi ushered in a new phase in the evolution of the Tariqa. Their endeavors aimed to disseminate the Tariqa while propping its genealogy. To succeed in this strategy, they reinvigorate the notion of the Muhammadan light (*Nūr Muḥammad*) ingrained in the Tariqa from its inception. While the Muhammadan light finds various expressions in different Sufi traditions, within the Tariqa, it assumes a salient feature. This concept constitutes the very essence upon which the Alawi Way was established, serving as the primordial relic around which it consistently revolves and withstands any disruptive moments.

Presencing the Muhammadan Light

The Muhammadan light is articulated in various terms within the Tariqa, encompassing the Muhammadan reality (*ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*), Muhammadan presence (*ḥaḍra Muḥammadiyya*), Muhammadan trace (*qadam Muḥammadi*), and the most exalted, concealed Divine Name (*Ism A'ẓam*), among others. This concept has permeated the Tariqa complex since its inception, serving as a major

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[37] Ibid., 117.

theme that endures transitions across eras and geographic locations. While Sufi reverence for Muhammad's perfection already exceeds conventional norms, within the Alawi Way, this reverence takes on a whole new level.[38]

During the second *ṭabaqa*, under the guidance of the First Jurist, a devotion to Prophet Muhammad became the foundational constitution of the Tariqa. However, this devotion takes on a whole new level when reinforced with the practice of what Ho called as "Presencing" (*ḥaḍrat al-Saqqāf*) introduced by Abdurrahman al-Saqqāf (1338-1416) whom al-Khaṭīb extensively recounted in his book. During his life, the influence of Akbarian gnosticism reached its apex in Southern Arabia.[39] In this context, Muhammad emerges as the all-encompassing figural being, nourished by the supremely sacred emanation of divine grace (*al-fayḍ al-aqdas*). Within this worldview, Muhammad assumes the role of a microcosm representing, or reflecting, the macrocosm—he is, in essence, the mirror fashioned by God to behold Himself,[40] as succinctly characterized by Söderblom as "an aspect of God's activity."[41]

Regarding its ontological and cosmological aspects, the author of *al-Nūr* articulated a narrative that "when God willed to create, He unveiled the Muhammadan reality from His pre-eternal lights under the *Aḥadiyyat* realm…He existed even when his father, Adam, was still between the spirit and body, making him the supreme father (*al-abb al-akbar*) of all human beings.". In another hadith, the Prophet said: "I was a Prophet when Adam was still between water and clay."[42] In a more popular Hadith, the Prophet said: "I am the first of the prophets to have been created and the last to have been sent," and "the first thing Allah created was your Prophet's light."[43]

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[38] al-'Aydarūs, *al-Kibrīt al-Aḥmar*; 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Ḥabshī, *Simṭ al-Durar* (n.p.: 2001); 'Aydarūs b. 'Umar al-Ḥabshī, *'Iqd al-Yawaqīt al-Jawhariyya wa Simṭ al-'Ayn al-Dhahabiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Abū Bakr Bādhīb (Tarim: Dār al-'Ilm wa al-Da'wa, 2009).

[39] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, 43–44.

[40] Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Pr, 1985), 123–43.

[41] Nathan Söderblom, *The Living God: Basal Forms of Personal Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 23–29.

[42] al-'Aydarūs, *al-Nūr al-Sāfir 'an Akhbār al-Qarn al- 'Āshir*, 18–22.

[43] al-Ḥabshī, *Simṭ al-Durar*.

Profound adoration for the Prophet Muhammad permeates the Ba 'Alawi worldview, where luminaries from each *ṭabaqa* contribute to a discourse blending meta- and trans-historical dimensions. From the second *ṭabaqa*, Shaykh Abubakar b. Salim played a significant role in advancing the metaphysical aspect of the discourse. In *Mi'rāj al-Arwāḥ*, he dedicates passages to articulate Muhammad as the supreme father (*al-abb al-akbar*). He states, "Muhammad is the father of the spirits (*abb al-arwāḥ*), whereas Adam was the father of the shades or shadows (*abb al-ashbāḥ*)". As the supreme father, he is seen as eternally present, bestowing his blessings upon his community, especially his descendants. Consequently, the Sayyids are carrying the power of his blessing (*baraka*).[44] This concept further extends to the symbolic act of donning the Sufi *khirqa*, at times interpreted as inspired by the mantle (*kisā*) in which the Prophet had enshrouded his family members. As a result, those who adorned the Sufi *khirqa* were deemed "members of the Prophet's family" in a mystical sense, enveloping their existential being in the luminous legacy of Prophet Muhammad.[45]

Moreover, the concept of communion with the Prophet is a recurring theme. Ba 'Alawi saintly figures frequently recount their sensory experiences of dream-like encounters with the Prophet, documented in numerous hagiographical accounts, often recited during the *ḥawl* (annual commemoration of deceased luminaries). A widely circulated narrative in their hagiographies affirms that during *mawlid* rituals or at the deathbed, the Prophet himself, or via the saintly Salaf, is believed to manifest and be present to connect with his descendants.[46]

As we delve into the canonical texts, it becomes apparent that the Muhammadan light has given rise to a distinct perspective on being a Ba 'Alawi. This perspective fosters a dynamic interplay between the revealed religion (*dīn*) and the genetic element (*ṭīn*), simultaneously recalibrating notions of prestige (*ḥasab*) and lineage (*nasab*). Beyond theoretical constructs, this concept actively molds their perception, experiences, habits, and practices. Narratives emphasizing the omnipresence of the Muhammadan light are deeply ingrained from a young age. Daily rituals, including the recitation of

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[44] Sālim, *Mi'rāj al-Arwāḥ wa al-Manhaj al-Waḍḍāḥ*, 17.
[45] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 222–23.
[46] Buxton, *Imams of The Valley*, 9-41.

the *fātiḥa*, *ṣalawāt*, *wird* (plural *awrād*, vocal invocation), and other devotional acts, serve as continuous reaffirmations of the connection to this charismatic source. The fixation of such devotion finds a touching outlet in the celebration of mawlid, an event that, in the words of Rudolf Otto, transcends into the realm of "the wholly other".[47]

In the pursuit of weaving this ineffable notion into the very fabric of popular imagination, 'Alī al-Ḥabshī (or al-Ḥibshī) (1839-1913) of the late third *ṭabaqa* composed the ode *Simṭ al-Durar* (the Thread of the Pearls). This ode embarks on a profound poetic odyssey, describing the trans-historical journey of the Muhammadan light, tracing its luminous path through pure and prophetic ancestry. Patrilineally, it traverses from the rib of Adam through the successive Prophets until it culminates in Abdullah, the father. Matrimonially, it winds its way from the womb of Eve until it reaches Amina, the mother. This ode was one of the most recited texts in the incessant popular *Mawlid* celebrations.

The celebration of the *Mawlid*, therefore, has transcended its conventional role, transforming into a sacred space for the reenactment of metaphysical light within the tangible and sensory experiences of the Ba 'Alawi community and their aspirant follower. In contrast to the customary confinement of *Mawlid* ceremonies to the month of Rabiul Awwal, the Tariqa institutionalizes an extended celebration of the *Mawlid*. The introduction of the practice of "Presencing" (*ḥaḍrat al-Saqqāf*) during the second *ṭabaqa* entrenching the *Mawlid* into the sensory and emotional experiences of the celebrating audiences. Al-Saqqāf crafted litanies (*rātib al-Saqqāf*) specifically for the presencing. Innovatively, he incorporated musical instruments, such as flutes and tambourines, enchanting the ambiance and evoking a deeper auditory sensation, thereby transforming the *Mawlid* into emotionally charged event.[48]

Furthermore, during the standing position while reciting liturgical adoration in a loud tone, individuals at the gathering fervently call on the Prophet with his glorious titles, instructed to connect with his trans-historical presence. To amplify the experience, hosts typically station young or well-dressed individuals to encircle

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[47] Yoshitsugu Sawai, *Rudolf Otto and the Foundation of the History of Religions* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

[48] al-Shāṭirī, *Adwār al-Tārīkh al-Ḥaḍramī*, 263–64.

and disperse perfume, alongside burning oud, creating an olfactory ambiance that evokes the presence of the Prophet, as his body and sweat were believed to emanate a fragrant sensation. This practice continues year-round, intertwining with other Islamic rituals. Compulsory from a young age, attendance at *Mawlid* ceremonies entails numerous young participants committing passages from various *Mawlid* texts to memory, with *Simṭ al-Durar* being a frequently recited example. This memorization becomes an enduring aspect of their living religion, serving as a foundational element that stabilizes their sense of belonging to the community.

Intersecting Genealogy with Theology

To explain the interconnectedness between *dīn* and *ṭīn*, or alternatively, *ḥasab* and *nasab*, 'Aydarūs al-Hibshi, a distinguished figure acknowledged as the master of *isnād* (*shaykh al-isnād*), cites numerous oral traditions from the saintly Salaf. This interplay constitutes the foundation of the Tariqa, dedicated to preserving the family's adherence to their root. He then quoted his teacher, Abdullah Bāsawdān (1764- 1850), a non-Ba 'Alawi author of the Tariqa, who asserted that this interconnection is uniquely incarnated in the Tariqa, where Sufism converges with Prophetic lineage (*biḍ'a nabawiyya*).[49]

In view of this interconnection, 'Aydarūs sought to prevent any misappropriation by constructing a compelling argument. He contended that genuine descendency or lineal belonging (*intisāb*) to the Prophet could only be attained through the complete embodiment of his worship of Allah and the practice of piety. He posited that there was no alternative path to attach to the Prophet except through these actions. For him, authentic lineage to the Prophet was reserved for those who had attained *taḥqīq* (a term widely reiterated by Ba 'Alawi saintly figures), and the gracious blessings (*alṭāf*) of descending from him would be bestowed upon those who have succeeded in sincere gratitude.

'Aydarūs contended that evaluating a Ba 'Alawi should hinge on the level of compliance with the prerequisites of being a Sayyid. He emphasized that Sayyidhood (*siyāda*) was not merely a claim or recognition but an achievement through intention and action, in accordance with the exemplary conduct of the Salaf. To make his

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[49] al-Ḥabshī, *'Iqd al-Yawāqīt al-Jawhariyya*, 191.

point, he referred to widely circulated genealogical texts, *al-Mashra'*, *al-Nūr*, *al- 'Iqd al-Nabawī* (the Prophetic Pact), and *al-Barqa al-Mashīqa*.[50]

On the prerequisites of Sayyidhood, 'Aydarūs invoked the insights of the Ba 'Alawi shaykhly figure and Mufti of Medina, Aḥmad Jamāl al-Layl. Jamal outlined nine fundamental elements of Sayyidhood for anyone claiming filiation to the true and real Sayyid, the Prophet. Emphasizing the imperative reverence for this noble lineage, he stresses the necessity for claimants to fortify their willpower in preserving its sanctity (*ḥurma*).

According to Jamal, the pinnacle of Sayyidhood lies in the mastery of Sharia knowledge—an enduring characteristic of the Salaf intricately woven into their genetic elements (*'anāṣir*). This knowledge, he contends, as if referring to Platonic Ideas, is innate in their elements, making it instinctive for them to excel in this domain. Jamal argues that Ba 'Alawi's genetic elements inherently instill a desire for acquiring Sharia, positing that any individual lacking this quality stands on the precipice of dissonance.[51]

The second is pure hearts. The third is the avoidance of all wrongdoings, underlining that for the descendants of the Prophet, transgressions bear even weightier consequences than for others. For Jamāl, Sayyids bear the greatest responsibility in honoring their esteemed lineage by upholding the sanctity of the Prophet. They are duty-bound to prevent any possibility of public censure, underlining that the individual best suited for "*muruwah*"—which encompasses unwavering commitment to the honor of the clan—is the one who possesses Prophetic filiation (*bunuwwat al-nubuwwa*).[52]

The fourth is refraining from boasting about their lineage, as the greatest indignity can befall an individual blessed with genealogical attachment to the most noble and honorable of servants when they tarnish this divine grace through false pride. The fifth imperative is political neutrality, entailing avoidance of entanglements with profane ambitions or worldly authorities (*wilāyāt dunyāwiyya*). This aligns with the Prophet's statement, "We are the household chosen by Allah for the hereafter over this worldly life."

The sixth involves emulating the path of the Salaf, who exemplify humbleness, patience, and resilience in the face of

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[50] Ibid., 192-194.
[51] Ibid., 196.
[52] Ibid., 196-197.

mistreatment from others. The seventh is interacting with the community of the Prophet with the highest moral virtues, including presenting a cheerful countenance, promoting peace, engaging in charitable acts, avoiding ostentation, and maintaining the best thoughts and positive outlook toward them. The eighth entails a commitment to asceticism and the renunciation of worldly pleasures and wealth. And, lastly, the ninth is refraining from envying the worldly possessions, properties, or pleasures that Allah has bestowed upon others.[53]

The Centrality of The Salaf

In order to stabilize the Tariqa, the Ba 'Alawi scholars and authors have centralized the position of the Salaf. While the Salaf typically pertains to the initial three generations of Muslims in the broader Islamic tradition, in the Tariqa, the Salaf mainly or exclusively includes the revered Ba 'Alawi saintly and shaykhly ancestors. They are regarded as the agentive intermediaries to the Prophetic source. Positioned at the core of the tradition, the Salaf serve to maintain later generations within the same religious conditioning and experience, ensuring continuity through various doctrines, discourses, acts, and practices. These practices have many different aspects, each of which deserves specific exploration.

The Salaf can be compared to the concept of an ultimate source of value, which originates from the Prophet and extends through the Salaf to their descendants. Any reproduction of this value is bound to be inferior, as it can never match the original. Replicas always depend on relics, like satellites orbiting their sources, constantly pointing back to those primary origins. The creation of replicas of the relics implies the formation of a memory framework in which decline is a key factor, shaping the course of time as a process of deterioration. As time passes, the admiration for the ancestors increases.[54]

Far from being merely symbolic, the Salaf exert a tangible historical force that reanimates through the bodies of aspirants, students in *ribāṭ*, residents of *ḥawṭa*s, pilgrims, participants in gatherings like *mawlid*s, reciters of the *fātiḥa*, practitioners of *tahlīl*, observants of the haul, enthusiasts of liturgies, and readers of hagiographies and genealogies. But most importantly, the lives of the

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[53] Ibid., 198-200.
[54] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, 45.

Salaf are deeply ingrained in the underpinning Ba ʿAlawi ethos of filial piety (*birr al-wālidayn*) and familial bonding (*ṣilat al-raḥim*).[55] All these practices fortify the triangular relationship among the saintly Salafs, their descendants, and wider aspirant communities, with the Muhammadan light illuminating this hierarchical structure. Within it, the Salafs not only persist but thrive, their lives intricately interwoven with the living through genealogies and diasporic movements.[56]

The emphasis on adhering to the Salaf gained greater significance as the Ba ʿAlawis dispersed into wider geographies beyond the Hadhramaut region. This dispersion compelled them to maintain an even stronger sense of belonging to their ancestral roots. These roots not only trace back to their lineal patriarch but also embody the Muhammadan reality. In this respect, the Muhammadan reality is not just an idea and metaphor but a tangible presence, an identity necessary when traveling and away from home. This is particularly crucial as the passing of the Prophet becomes more distant in the past.

In *ʿIqd al-Yawāqīt*, ʿAydarūs identify "our exalted Salaf" exclusively for the Ba ʿAlawis. This application of the concept of Salaf is unique within the Tariqa.[57] Despite this, Aydarūs preemptively clarified: "This stance isn't displays of self-aggrandizement, but sincere expression of the Divine blessings bestowed upon them. It aligns with the Quranic instruction, where Allah enjoined the Prophet to proclaim the blessings he received." Perhaps in an attempt to explain the status of Ali in the ancestral pyramid, he argued that Ali being the progenitor of the Prophet's descendants and the root of their family tree, once described himself as "...I'm the diacritical mark in the word *bā* of the *Bismillāh*, I'm the aspect of Allah that you ignore, I'm the Chair, I'm the Pen, I'm the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfuẓ*)."[58] For him, Ali was the perfect human being (*insān kāmil*) of his era and inherited the mantle of sainthood (*walāya*) from the final Prophethood.[59]

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[55] ʿAbd Allah b. ʿAlwī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥaddād, *Risālat al-Muʿāwana wa al-Muẓāhara wa al-Muʾāzara* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥāwī, 1994); ʿAbd Allah b. ʿAlwī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥaddād, *Risālat Adāb Sulūk al-Murīd* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥāwī, 1994).

[56] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, 328.

[57] al-Ḥabshī, *ʿIqd al-Yawāqīt al-Jawhariyya*, 137.

[58] Ibid., 148.

[59] Ibid.

The Salaf as The Gaze

In 'Aydarūs's era, the Ba 'Alawi community found itself perched on the precipice of its fourth and final phase of decline. Stepping into the role of *shaykh al-isnād*, he wholeheartedly committed himself to amplifying the reformative momentum initiated by his predecessors, while also in preservative mode. With a focus on cannonizing *isnād* and *silsila* of the Tariqa, he continuously propelled forward, envisioning the Salaf as the vigilant Panoptes. By adopting this perspective, he gained the upper hand to conduct a discerning analysis of the social and cultural landscape, spanning both his immediate surroundings and the broader diasporic Ba 'Alawi communities.

Addressing contemporary issues, 'Aydarūs navigated the challenges inherent in his dual roles as a social critic and *shaykh al-isnād*. This undertaking was particularly formidable, given the evident disapproval of his critical views within the Ba 'Alawi community. Al-Saqqāf reported an assassination attempt on his life, orchestrated by elements within the Ba 'Alawi community in Tarim, collaborating with non-Ba 'Alawi factions employing magical practices. Yet, upon uncovering the plot, 'Aydarūs's swift act of pardon accentuated his unwavering commitment to forgiveness in the face of adversity, garnering him universal acclaim.

'Aydarūs's social critiques reach into the examination of the misappropriation of Sayyidhood, as detailed in the preceding section. He observes how influential figures leverage their elevated positions to enforce societal customs in cultural events and the daily lives of impoverished individuals, constructing these acts as mandated by Sharia. Particularly striking is his reproach of those inheriting religious roles from saintly forebears, fostering a cult-like adherence to ancestors while, in reality, falling conspicuously short in terms of knowledge, morality, generosity, and nobility. This incisive evaluation echoes al-Ḥaddād's lamentation, as per Alatas, against the *manṣab*, the lords of sacrosanct enclave (*hawṭa*).[60]

'Aydarūs asserted that al-Ḥaddād's purposeful prohibition on his immediate disciples from delving into gnostic Sufi texts authored by eminent figures like Ibn 'Arabī was a strategic move in the direction of making the Salaf as compass. The underlying rationale for such restrictions was to preempt *iftitān*, induction of the state of

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[60] Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?*, 83.

impotence (*ma'jaza*), the potential distortion and discord that could arise, particularly among individuals who had not yet reached the requisite level of direct experience with metaphysical realities.[61]

Aydarūs delves into the nuanced topic of diaspora, specifically addressing the critical issue of individuals distancing themselves from their homeland. He lambasted those who choose to migrate, leaving their children uneducated and neglected in the pursuit of wealth accumulation. Citing 'Umar al-Saqqāf, 'Aydarūs assessed that many Ba 'Alawis have forsaken the virtuous paths of the Salaf, a deviation that will inevitably lead to regret. Umar then focuses on Jawa, characterizing those who migrate there while leaving their families in Hadhramaut as succumbing to worldly temptations. According to him, these individuals fail to find contentment even in basic necessities, such as food and clothing, and other desires. This insightful commentary serves as a sinister reminder of the critical importance of maintaining a connection to one's homeland and highlights the perilous consequences associated with deviating from the principles and way of life upheld by the Salaf.[62]

'Ayadrūs then cites a statement by Mufti of Hadhramaut, 'Abd Allah b. Yaḥyā (1794-1849), who emphasizes that "There (in those lands they migrated to), they entirely forsake the practices of the Salaf, neglecting the original mission of Ahmad the Emigrant. His mission was to safeguard his lineage, a heritage that had been lost in those foreign lands, up to the point that several individuals among them were oblivious to their lineal roots..." Ibn Yaḥyā criticizes Ba 'Alawis who intentionally assimilated their way of life with the locals in every aspect, and this assimilation continued through their descendants. He regretted the importation of vibrant garments and lavish furniture from Java by specific individuals, tempting numerous Tarimis to adopt these items and, as a result, compromising their modest lifestyle.

Nevertheless, 'Ayadrūs promptly acknowledged that not all individuals migrating from their homeland did so with purely worldly intentions. Some migrated to settle debts, facilitate education and learning, support their families, reunite with relatives, and undertake other acts that draw them closer to God. To illustrate this point, he cited poems composed by Aḥmad b. Sumayṭ about seeking provisions

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[61] al-Ḥabshī, *'Iqd al-Yawaqit al-Jawhariyya*, 156.
[62] Ibid., 163.

in a manner that pleases Allah. In one of the verses, Ibn Sumayṭ specifically encouraged seeking provision to strengthen familial bonds (ṣilat al-raḥim). However, 'Aydarūs bemoaned once again that, despite their prosperity, many individuals have become tightfisted and reluctant to spend their wealth on charities.[63]

Moreover, 'Aydarūs vehemently criticizes the disheartening trend of Sayyids adopting the lifestyle of military soldiers and carrying weapons, a departure from the Salaf code of conduct that strictly prohibits Ba Alawi from such behavior. He attributes this change in behavior to the passing of the Salaf and the subsequent loss of their noble example. Without the Salaf as role models, al-Habshi believes that later generations have lost their way, lacking figures to emulate and be ashamed of when engaging in actions that compromise their honor.[64]

As the 19th century progressed, a period marked by accelerated migration due to the construction of the Suez Canal and the introduction of steamboats, Ba 'Alawi scholars began to pay closer attention to issues of identity assimilation and took measures to restrict inter-group marriages. They did so by adhering to the doctrine of kafā'a. Within this framework, they argued that prophetic lineage held the highest rank, transcending considerations of Arab or local origins and guiding the selection of spouses based on shared religion and common descent. This doctrine represented another normative effort aimed at preserving genealogical integrity and averting insensible assimilation.

Within kafā'a system, Ba 'Alawi men are permitted to marry women from different social groups, as their offspring inherit the father's lineage. In contrast, a sharīfa (or female Sayyid) is only allowed to marry a man from their own group, practicing endogamy exclusively. In this context, the Sada group primarily functions as a wife taker, not a wife giver. The superiority of the Sada, therefore, lies in their role as wife-takers.[65]

By the 20th century, the issue of kafā'a evolved into a comprehensive jurisprudential debate following a series of prominent

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[63] Ibid., 168-170.
[64] Ibid., 169.
[65] Istiqomah, "The Hadrami Arabs of Ambon: An Ethnographic Study of Diasporic Identity Construction in Everyday Life Practices" (PhD Thesis--University of Groningen, 2020), 107-154. https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.108467449.

marriages between *sharīfa* and non-Sayyid men in the diaspora, which gained substantial attention and resulted in public condemnations by the well-known Hadhrami figures such as 'Umar al-'Attas. Al-'Attas, a Hadrami scholar based in Sumatra, issued a fatwa that restrict the suitability or eligibility of a spouse for a *sharīfa*.[66] In his view, maintaining such suitability in matrimony is a religious duty.[67] It is crucial to note that the concept of *kafā'a* is not confined to Ba 'Alawi Hadhramis alone. Non-Ba 'Alawi Hadhramis also adhere to this system, primarily based on the tribal stratification explored by various scholars.[68]

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, this paper has illuminated that the Tariqa is a dynamic and adaptable system, encompassing an institutionalized canon of saints, texts, rituals, special places, and genealogies. It undergoes a transformative evolution from early Alid piety to a patrician mysticism deeply rooted in the Ba 'Alawi history, extending from Hadhramaut and beyond. Beginning in the 16th century, a cohort of Ba 'Alawi saintly figures, notably al-Ḥaddād, assumed a pivotal role in reinterpreting the Tariqa. Their objective was to reform and reorganize the tumultuous socio-political landscape of that era. This reform aimed to reconfigure, reinterpret, and reformulate the Tariqa Alawiyya into a standardized text applicable in any time and space. Concurrently, another movement led by scholarly Ba 'Alawi figures sought to preserve the Ba 'Alawi lineal heritage, anticipating diasporic expansion and assimilation observed in host countries. Both of these movements are not mutually exclusive but rather coexist to reinforce and reconstitute Sufism and the Shafi'i school of Fiqh.

The impetus behind this reform was twofold: the escalating migration of the community to foreign lands, a challenge foreseen by Ba 'Alawi saintly figures for future generations if the Alawi Way remained unaltered, and a more immediate factor—the chaotic

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[66] Ho, *The Graves of Tarim*, 173.

[67] Ibid., 174-181.

[68] A. S. Bujra, "Political Conflict and Stratification in Ḥaḍramaut: I," *Middle Eastern Studies* 3, no. 4 (1967): 355–75; Istiqomah, "The Hadrami Arabs of Ambon"; R. B. Serjeant, "Recent Marriage Legislation from *al-Mukallā* with Notes on Marriage Customs," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25, no. 3 (1962): 472–98, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X00069470; Shelagh Weir, *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2009).

situation in Hadhramaut during the 16th and 17th centuries. Another potential catalyst for this movement was the colonial penetration and the rise of Wahhabism, which dismantled the Ashraf dynasty in the Arabian Peninsula. Like all Tariqas, the Alawi Way bears the imprint of its unique history but remains adaptable, absorbing the distinctive way of life of a shaykh or murshid who shaped the community in its new environment. This adaptability, in contrast to the relatively fixed nature of Sharia and schools of Fiqh, renders Tariqa iterations, exemplified by the Alawi Way, more responsive to local contexts and open to periodic adjustments.

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