

Sainthood and Revelatory Discourse

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Prophecy in Islam is the authoritative mode of revelation and the Prophets are the messengers of that revelation. The chain of Prophets and the phenomenon of Prophecy came to an end with Muhammad and the Qur'anic revelation. In spite of this fundamental doctrine of Islam, as the religion grew and spread, parts of the new community felt the need for continuing guidance. This need led to the various forms of seeking after knowledge. 'Philosophy in Islam' is a phenomenon whereby different groups of seekers after knowledge claim to gain knowledge apart from Prophecy. This phenomenon includes two broad categories of seekers after knowledge: Philosophers (Arab Philosophers and Ismii'ilis) and Mystics (Sufis and Saints). Mystics, in contrast to Philosophers, emphasise the heart as the faculty where their imagination (*khayal*) directly reflects the knowledge of God. Mystics express this knowledge through their discourse (*baydn*). Mystics see themselves as succeeding the Prophets and their discourse as the substitute to Prophecy. Unlike Philosophers, Mystics place themselves in the mainstream of Islam. In this context, the central problem Mystics deal with concerns the authority of their discourses.

The focus of this study is on the examination of this problem particularly in Malidawiyya, a living sect of Islam. Mahdawiyya, like Islamic Mysticism, defines itself in relation to mainstream Islam. The Mahdawlīs aspiring to become Saints, therefore need an understanding of the bases for the **authority of the baydn**. This study shows that the understanding of the bases for the bayan's authority is provided by Malidawiyya at three levels. Firstly, the *baydn*'s authority is argued in **relation to the Qur'An**, when it is claimed that the Saints' bayan forms the phase of revelation succeeding the Qur'ān. Secondly, the *baydn*'s authority is argued in relation to the Prophet and Prophecy, when it is claimed that the Saints and Sainthood succeed the Prophet and Prophecy. Thirdly, the *baydn*'s authority is argued in relation to God, when it is claimed that the Saints enjoy a unique sort of intimacy with God. This means that the Saints' *khayal* immediately and directly reflects the knowledge of God; and when this knowledge is expressed through the *baydn*, it is deemed by the followers to be revelatory.