A Study of the Theological Dimensions of *Qawāᶜid al-Taṣawwuf*

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Abstract

The mediaeval North African scholar Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493) expertly melded Sufism with theology and jurisprudence. His familiarity with the three systems of thought led him to devise Sufi adages on the model of legal and theological maxims. A conviction that right belief and correct practice were the basic conditions for becoming a Sufi further impelled Zarrūq to formulate a number of legal and theological rules applicable within the sphere of Sufism. As an Ashᶜarī theologian, Zarrūq stated certain theological precepts that he then interpreted in the Sufi context. My paper aims to evaluate the theological dimensions of *Qawāᶜid al-Taṣawwuf*, with special attention to its author's integrative discourse on theology and Sufism.

Keywords: Zarrūq, Theology, Sufism, North African Islam, the Shādhilīyah.

Ṣūfism and theology are different disciplines and developed as independent disciplines. However there is much common ground between them. The writings of early Ṣūfīs such as al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), Ibn al-Khafīf al-Shīrāzī (d. 371/982) who was also student of Abū al-Ḥasan Ashᶜarī (d. 324/936), the Ashᶜarī Ṣūfī al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), and the traditionalist Ṣūfī ᶜAbd Allāh al-Anṣārī (d. 481/1089) contained valuable material in this respect. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) tried to integrate Ṣūfism with other disciplines of Islamic studies. Being a theologian, he interpreted the Ṣūfī way in the light of Ahsᶜarī school of thought. Ayman Shihadeh writes:

> "Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) develops his pioneering and hugely influential synthesis contextualising and, to an extent, combining Ṣūfism and theology at the stereological, epistemological and metaphysical levels.
> Within this synthesis, Ashᶜarī *kalām* is accommodated as an intellectual system that is ultimately inferior to a higher mystical theology relating to the Ṣūfī path, which he discusses, for instance, in *Mishkāt al-Anwār* and *al-Kutub al-Maḍnūn bihā ᶜalā Ghayr Ahlihā.*" [1]

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By and large, the Ashᶜarī theological system provided the foundation of the Sunnī school of thought. Mālikīs and Shāfiᶜīs accepted this notion warmly. However Ḥanbalīs remained reluctant to use the methodology of rational argument. They rejected Ashᶜarīs on some issue, even though they often indulged in it. On the other hand Ḥanafīs accepted a more rationalistic doctrine of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), who whilst similar to Ashᶜarī on many points.[2]

Zarrūq's Ṣūfī synthesis was not the only appropriation of the *qawāᶜid* from the jurists, but also from the principles of theology. Interestingly, Ḥasan al-Shāfiᶜī counted *Qawāᶜid al-Taṣawwuf* amongst the sources of theological *qawāᶜid*. He writes: "I should not forget the book *Qawāᶜid al-Taṣawwuf* of al-Shaykh Abū al-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Zarrūq which deals with this topic or ones related and overlapping between Ṣūfism and theology and includes many theological principles."[3]

A reasonable portion of the theological *qawāᶜid* is presented in the books of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. The best example in this respect is the book *al-Qawāᶜid al-Fiqhīyah* of Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370). The seventh section of this book is on *al-Qawāᶜid al-Kalāmīyah*. He summarised Islamic theological discourse into five *Qawāᶜid*:

1- Happiness and misfortune are not interchangeable with each other, or, that is to say, the evaluation of deeds rests upon the last action, in contrary to the position of the Muᶜtazilites. (*al-saᶜādah wa-al-shaqāwah lā yatabaddālān, aw, al-iᶜtibār fī al-aᶜmāl bil-khawātīm khilāfan lil-Muᶜtazilah*)

2- Legality/ legitimacy and illegality, purification/ purity and impurity and all rules of sacred law are not from the attributes of the essences. These are the attributes of the law, determined by the law maker. (*al-ḥall wa-al-ḥurmah, wa-al-ṭahārah wa-al-najāsah, wa-sāʾir al-maᶜānī al-sharīᶜah laysat min ṣifāt al-aᶜyān wa-innamā hiya ṣifāt ḥukmīyah min iᶜtibār al-shāriᶜ*)

3- The cause precedes the effect in time according to some and it coterminous for others. (*al-ᶜillat tasbiq al-maᶜlūl zamānan ᶜinda al-baᶜḍ, wa-tuqārinhu ᶜind al-ākhirīn*)

4- The thing indicated by "me" is the specified form/structure denoting is that body that subsists through the spirit [as] the reality of man. (*al-mashār ilyhi "bi-ānā" al-haykal al-makhṣūṣ wa-yaᶜnī bihi hadhā al-badan al-mutaqawwim bil-rūḥ ḥaqīqat al-insān*)

5- The beauty or repugnance of an attribution (*ṣifah*) is based on the ruling of the sacred law, not determined through reason, in opposition to the Muᶜtazilites. (*waṣf al-ḥusn wal-qubḥ sharᶜī lā ᶜaqlī khilāf lil-Muᶜtazillah*)[4]

The theological *qawāᶜid* can be traced back from the books of *Qawāᶜid al-Fiqh* as Ḥasan al-Shāfiᶜī analyzed some books of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and searched for the theological *qawāᶜid* particular from these books: *al-Qawāᶜid al-Fiqhīyah* of ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb al-Subkī, *al-Furūq* of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 684/1258), *al-Qawāᶜid al-Ṣughrā* by ᶜIzz al-Dīn b. ᶜAbd Salām al-Qāsimī al-Shāfiᶜī (d. 660/1261), *Qawānīn al-Aḥkām al-Sharīᶜah wa-Masāʾil al-Furūᶜ al-Fiqhīyah* by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Jizzī al-Mālikī (d. 741/1340) in which the author devoted 10th chapter of his book to

the theological rules.[5] Moreover Ḥasan al-Shāfiʿī cited the works of Ibn Taymīyah (d. 728/1327), al-Yamanī al-Nazzār Muḥammad b. Ibrahīm al-Wazīr (d. 840/1436) and some other works of contemporary scholars. He also composed some valuable theological *qawāʿid*.[6]

Zarrūq was an Ashʿarī, and this can be observed in his *Qawāʿid*. He was also influenced by al-Ghazālī in some theological aspects, composing a commentary: *Sharḥ ʿAqīdah al-Imām al-Ghazālī* to elaborate upon the theological views of al-Ghazālī.[7] Khushaim notes that there is great similarities between Zarrūq and al-Ghazālī: both are Ashʿarites and jurists and try to harmonise and integrate Ṣūfism with jurisprudence and theology.[8] Similarly, Zarrūq's approach on the issue of impermissibility of revolt against the ruler is analogous to al-Ghazālī's approach on the issue. As Fez at the time of Zarrūq was in turmoil. The Portuguese were attacking the coastal areas of the country, and simultaneously a revolt was taking place against Sulṭān ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Marīnī (d. 869/1465) which broke up the Marīnīd dynasty and disrupted the political system. Bearing in mind this context, Zarrūq places emphasis on safeguarding and preserving the system and the public good. He emphasizes that everything which disturbs the system and destroys the public good is impermissible. He argues that "The protection of the system is obligatory and consideration of public good is essential. Therefore, Muslims have achieved consensus on the impermissibility of mutiny/revolt (*khurūj*) against the leader (*imām*) by words or deeds." Zarrūq further rejects strongly the activities against the just ruler. He cites many *aḥādīth* on this topic, and disapproves of the Sufi *jihādī* movements indirectly, writing: "The group, meaning Sufis, are the greatest in their escape from what does not concern them."[9]

Zarrūq's notion on the impermissibility of the revolt against the just *imām* resembles with Muḥammad al-Ghazālī's political attitude who stigmatised any revolt against the ruler. Al-Ghazālī legitimised the rule of the Abbasid caliph in order to save the caliphate on both political and theological grounds from the danger of Ismāʿīlīs and Bāṭinīs. The Fatimid rule was quite strong in fifth/eleventh century in Cairo and at the same time, the Bāṭinī movement was spreading throughout the Middle East. Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), vizier in the reigns of the Seljuk Sulṭāns Alp-Arsalān (1063-1072) and Malik-Shāh (1072-1092), and a close friend of al-Ghazālī was killed by a bāṭinī assassin.[10] In contrast to al-Ghazālī, Zarrūq witnessed the distraction of the Marind dynasty by the Sharīfian revolt in ninth/fifteenth century. It was the time when the state needed more stability to resist against the assaults of Spaniards and Portuguese on the costal areas of Morocco. In this context, Zarrūq showed a quite Ghazālian attitude regarding the revolt against the ruler. It can be observed that soon after the disintegration of the rule of ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Marīnī in 869/1465, the most important costal areas came under the control of foreign forces.[11]

In the Sufi context, Zarrūq argues that the Shādhilīyah are theologian by temperament.[12] He appreciates them and believes that they tried to embellish belief

(*īmān*) with certainty (*īqān*) to a certain degree from whence one can apprehend reality directly without confusion. This is the shortest way to reach the goal. He cites the saying of Ibn ᶜAṭāʾ Allāh (d.709/1309): "Do not take the invocations except those that strengthen the soul to bear His love." He explains that the details of this order can be found in the books of Ibn ᶜAṭāʾ Allāh and his followers.[13] Zarrūq is very careful in the interpretation of theological matters. He writes: "It is not permissible to accept any ambiguous or vague ideas in the matters of faith and one should not accept these ideas without discussing them."[14]

Zarrūq explains some theological principles and interprets them and sometimes draws entirely different conclusions than those presented in theological context. Some theological maxims from *Qawāᶜid* are presented here to illustrate this.

Infallibility of the Prophets:

The infallibility (ᶜiṣmah) of the Prophet is an authentic and established belief according to Ashᶜarī school of thought and it is limited to the prophets only. Everyone other than prophets is fallible and there is a possibility of him falling into errors which is not condemned. However, God may protect the pious people from errors by His blessing, and thus they remain protected (*maḥfūẓ*).[15] Zarrūq writes: "Infallibility only exists in prophets. Therefore, it is necessary to observe the predominant quality of a man in his states, not each of them separately. If righteousness predominates then that element is preferred over all else; and if something else prevails in him, then that element is preferred over all else, and if both characteristics are equal, then he should be evaluated and judged very carefully. If there is the possibility of interpreting his ambiguous actions then that should be interpreted accordingly. Al-Junayd (d. 297/910) was asked: "Can a gnostic commit adultery (*zinā*)? He remained silent for a moment and then said: "The commandments of God must be carried out."[16] Ibn ᶜAṭāʾ Allāh said: "Would he have been asked in another way: "Does the spiritual effort of a gnostic connect himself to anything other than God?" He would have replied: "No."[17] Zarrūq writes: "Because the mark of his knowledge is his relationship with God. When that is broken, he will lose his knowledge."[18] On the basis of the rule of infallibility, Zarrūq validates the authority of a Sufi master though he may commit a matter of grave sin because no human being can purify himself from all kind of sins. Therefore, the adherence to a Sufi master is conditioned with his submission to the ruling of Qurʾān and *Sunnah*.

Intercession (*Shafāᶜah*):

Intercession (*shafāᶜah*) before God is an authentic belief according to Ashᶜarī theology.[19] Zarrūq believes in the reality of intercession. He writes that nobody can intercede before God except by His permission. It has been ordered to find out the means of reaching Him. It has been said: "There is no god except God." Some said: "[this means] obedience and submission to the Prophet of God." Some said: "[this means] submission in general and the means of seeking God through the good deeds of a man such as the People of the Cave. Each of them sought Him through the best of their deeds."[20] Another means of seeking Him is through the

intercession of pious people, such as ᶜUmar's prayer for rain beseeching the intercession of al-ᶜAbbās.[21] In the Prophetic tradition, one is persuaded to pray for his brother always. The Prophet said to ᶜUmar when he was going to perform the ᶜumrah pilgrimage: "Oh my brother! Include us in your prayers."[22] This is for exemplary purpose as he himself (peace and blessing be upon him) is the source of all means of reaching God, and the origin of all virtuous deeds and pre-eminences. It has been narrated by Mālik (d. 179/785): "Do not make creation a means to reach God, and it has been added: "Except for the Prophet of God." This is similar to what Abū Bakr Ibn al-ᶜArabī (d. 543/1148) said about visiting graves: "No grave should be visited for the sake of blessing except his (peace be upon him) grave.[23]

Miracles:

Zarrūq believes in the reality of the miracles of prophets (*muᶜjizah*) and miracles of pious people (*karāmāt* pl. of *karāmah*)). He considered that the saints are the successors of the prophets and *karāmāt* of the saints are the evidence of the *muᶜjizāt* of the prophets.[24] According to Zarrūq, it is not necessary for the people who have ability to do supernatural wonders to be in a high state of faith. Therefore, their actions should be evaluated and if their righteousness is recognized according to the scale of the sacred law and religious teaching, then their supernatural wonders are considered *karāmāt* otherwise these are either trickery (*istidrāj*) or magic (*siḥr*). If some thing objectionable appears from the person whose eminent status has been established, and according to sacred law there is no permissibility for this kind of action, then he should be treated according to the rule of law, because its realities do not change and rules are established upon the essences. Thus the law should be implemented on him as it applies in this situation. However the rule of interpretation which is permissible in some cases is described in the story of Mūsā and Khiḍr and the latter clarified the types of cases upon his departure."[25]

The manifestation of miracles is not necessary to be a saint. That depends upon their respective spiritual stations. Some Ṣūfīs choose to disclose their miracles whilst others keep them secret. Zarrūq writes: "It is correct for a group of Ṣūfīs to manifest miracles and it is also proven [correct] to keep them secret, such as the action of   al-Shaykh Abū ᶜAbbās (d. 686/1287-88) in manifestation and Ibn Abī Jamrah (d. 695-1296) in keeping them secret. For this reason, some students of Ibn Abī Jamrah said: "Their paths are different." When the *shaykh* came to know these remarks, he said: "By God, our paths are not different at all, in actual fact he is expanded by knowledge and I am constrained by meticulous piety." This is the most important thing to note regarding this topic.[26]

According to Zarrūq, there are three types of Ṣūfīs. Some of them are dominated by wealth through God, so miracles are manifested by them and their tongues speak claims boastfully and ceaselessly. They speak truthfully through Truth, and for Truth, and in Truth, such as Abū Muḥammad ᶜAbd al-Qādir (d. 561/1166), Abū Yaᶜzā (d. 572/1172) and many latter Shādhilī Ṣūfīs. Poverty toward God prevails in some of them. Thus their tongues are dull and controlled by

devotion such as Ibn Abī Jamrah and others. Some people possess numerous stations and they are the most perfect because these are the states of the Prophet (peace and blessing upon him). He fed one thousand people from one measure (ṣāʿ) and fastened a stone to his stomach.[27] Thus, Zarrūq believes the validity of miracles of Sufis but he argued that Sufism is not conditioned by miracles.

Taklīf Mā lā Yuṭāq:

According to Ashʿarīs, liability to do that which is beyond one's capability to bear (taklīf mā lā yutāq) is possible but it is from the blessing of God that He never places greater responsibility on anyone than they can bear.[28] Confessing the validity of this rule, Zarrūq writes: "Liability for that which is beyond one's capability is possible in theory, but it has not been revealed thus in the sacred law. 'God does not charge any body except with what has granted him'.[29] All believers are ordered to seek permissible earnings, thus its existence and availabilities are possible everywhere, for all people, and in all ages because of the general nature of this principle and because the earth is never vacant of saints and pious people whose earnings are lawful. God does not make us liable for what is in His knowledge, but He makes us liable for what we know and whence we know [it]. Hence if one who does not know about his unlawful earnings and has no doubt thrown on them through a clear sign, there is no reason to believe it unlawful or doubtful. But it has been said: "Wealth is like water. God created the wealth lawful, as he created the water lawful and it does not become impure (najas) except by that which changes it, and wealth also falls under this same ruling."[30] Zarrūq states the rule of liability according to which God does not make any one liable to do that is beyond one's capability to bear. On the basis of that, Zarrūq argues that one should seek means of earning and living according to permissible way and this is what to be required for being a Sufi. Through linking the theological issue with practice, he urges the disciple to work hard in order to seek permissible means of earning.

Zarrūq considered Sufism an integral part of Islam, claiming that to discard it would signify a rejection of a full third of Islam. He rendered the concept of integral Islam particularly attractive by using the Qawāʿid genre. Explaining Sufism through the Qawāʿid genre was an innovative idea which attracted many scholars and rational minds. Although Zarrūq did not produce innovative theological concepts, remaining an adherent of the Ashʿarī school of thought, his systematic effort to synthesize theology with Sufi devotion produced a new method for the study of various overlapping Islamic subjects under a single rubric. Through his attempts to unite the devotional branch of Islamic learning with more traditional Islamic sciences, Zarrūq at once defended the orthodoxy of Sufism and breathed new life into its belief and practice.

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