

РОССИЙСКАЯ
АКАДЕМИЯ НАУК

Институт востоковедения
Санкт-Петербургский филиал

Выпускается
под руководством Отделения
историко-филологических наук

ПИСЬМЕННЫЕ ПАМЯТНИКИ ВОСТОКА

2⁽⁵⁾
осень — зима
2006

Журнал основан в 2004 году
Выходит 2 раза в год

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«Наука»
Издательская фирма
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M.G. Romanov

The Term *ṣūfī*: Spiritualizing Simple Words*

Every scholarly book that deals with Islamic mysticism contains at least some details on the etymologies of the term *ṣūfī* and its derivatives.¹ The origin of this term was a matter of debates among the scholars of Sufism in the West from the very inception of Sufi studies until it has become widely accepted that it is derived from the Arabic word for “wool,” *ṣūf*, i.e. a woolen garment that was commonly worn by ascetics in the Middle East. While the Sufis themselves are not interested in the academic studies of the etymology of their denomination, they nevertheless have taken great pains to explain its meaning. Major Sufi authorities of the late 4th/5th–10th/11th centuries, who endeavored to systemize and assert the legitimacy of the Sufi tradition and who claimed to possess the knowledge of the true realities of Islamic faith (*ḥaqāʾiq*), found it hard to accept this quite prosaic name, all the more so since it was most likely given to them by outsiders. That is not to say that all medieval Sufi authors rejected the idea that their name, *ṣūfīyya*, takes its origin in the practice of wearing woolen garments. However, almost all of them (except Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī) sought to endow this mundane name with a more subtle and spiritual meaning in order to bring it in line with the complexity of their esoteric teaching. Besides, many Muslims considered this name to be an innovation (*muḥdath*), so Sufis had to make every effort to prove its antiquity.

Sufi *shaykhs* offered many different etymologies of this name. In many cases they had to reluctantly acknowledge that some etymologies were not sustainable linguistically. Nevertheless they kept coming up with possible derivative of the roots *ṣ-f-f*, *ṣ-f-w* and *ṣ-w-f*, the number of which seems to have been limited only by the imagination of a given Sufi master or by his desire to address other subjects pertaining to the “science of Sufism.”

The Sufi sources I have used for this article are as follows:² *Kitāb al-lumaʿ fī-l-taṣawwuf* by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), *Kitāb al-taʿarruf li-madḥḥab ahl al-taṣawwuf* by Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990 or 385/995), *Qūt al-qulūb* by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/966), *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* by Abū Nuʾaym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1038), *al-Risāla al-qushayriyya fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf* by ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), *Kashf al-mahjūb* by ʿAlī b. ʿUthmān al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī (d. 465/1073 or 469/1077).³ Some other

* I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Marion Katz and Prof. Alexander Knysh for their valuable suggestions, remarks and help with polishing this piece. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the 26th Annual Session of St. Petersburg Arabists (St. Petersburg, Institute for Oriental Studies, March, 2004).

¹ For example, Schimmel A. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1975 (first published). P. 14–16; Baldick J. *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*. N.Y.–London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1992. P. 3; Knysh A. *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*. Leiden–Boston–Köln: Brill, 1999. P. 6.

² About these principal Sufi sources and their authors, see Knysh A. *Islamic Mysticism*. P. 116–140 (Chapter VI. The Systematization of the Sufi Tradition).

³ Some works, which should be included into this list, have no etymological surveys on the word *ṣūfī*, they are *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīyya* by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) and *Manāzil al-sāʾirīn* by al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1089).

works contain interesting etymological surveys, so I also used them: *al-Burhān al-mu'ayyid* by Aḥmad al-Rifā'ī (d. 578/1182), *Awārif al-ma'ārif* by Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) and *Talbīs Iblīs* by the famous critic of Sufism Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201). This is hardly an exhaustive list, however; other works, for example, *Ṣafwat al-taṣawwuf* by Ibn Ṭāhir al-Muqaddasī al-Qaysarānī (d. 507/1113) have been unavailable to me.

Although these sources do not repeat each other, there is some affinity among them. Occasionally, authors avail themselves of the same elements in building up their arguments, for instance, the same *ḥadīths*, definitions, and, at times, a very similar wording, etc. So, I have found it rather convenient to arrange them in several groups. Firstly, such grouping will help me to avoid repetitions, and, secondly, the same elements may imply that later authorities consulted works of their predecessors and borrowed some material from them, so, if my assumption is correct, these groupings help to identify the dependence of such authors on the work of their predecessors.

[i]

I will start with Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), who, in his “Book of the Essentials in Sufism” (*Kitāb al-luma' fī 'l-taṣawwuf*),⁴ explains that the name of his community (*tā'ifa*) is derived from the woolen garment since it is difficult to characterize mystics by the name of their discipline (*'ilm*) in the same way as, say, jurists (pl. *fuqahā'*), whose name is derived from the names of their science (*'ilm*) — jurisprudence (*fiqh*), or traditionalists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*), whose name is determined from their attachment to the prophetic traditions (*al-ḥadīth*). Likewise, it is impossible to relate Sufis to a certain kind of “state” (*ḥāl*), as in the case of the ascetics (pl. *zuhhād*), whose name is derived from their asceticism (*zuhd*). Not so with the Sufis, who are the mine (*al-ma'dan*) of all praiseworthy sciences, states and stations. Usage of the appellations derived from these sciences, states or stations, would have inevitably led to confusion, according to al-Sarrāj. So, the name *ṣūfī* is employed for the sake of clarity and convenience.

On the other hand, according to al-Sarrāj, the practice of wearing wool includes all praiseworthy sciences, states and stations, as it was a custom of the prophets and a distinctive sign of the friends of God. Moreover, al-Sarrāj continues, this name is similar to the appellation of the companions of the prophet 'Īsā (Jesus), *al-ḥawāriyyūn*, who, in spite of having been characterized by exalted sciences, deeds and states, were named so after their habit of wearing snow-white garments.

In an answer to the question why the word *ṣūfī* was never applied to any of Muḥammad's companions al-Sarrāj argues that, at the time of the Prophet and his Companions, companionship (*suḥba*) was the most important feature. Likewise, at the time of the Successors, what mattered was their successorship. Only later did the other features (*zuhd*, *nusk*, *ibāda*) of these pious individuals come to the foreground. Al-Sarrāj also argues that it was not an innovation (*muḥdath*) introduced by “the people of Baghdād,”⁵ for there were proofs that this name had existed long before. Thus, he mentioned reports from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who knew a group of Prophet's Companions given to the wearing of wool. Moreover, once encircling al-Ka'ba, al-Ḥasan encountered a *ṣūfī*, that is, a pious man wearing wool. In a similar vein, Sufyān [al-Thawrī] is reported to have said that only thanks to Abū Hāshim al-Ṣūfī was he able to perceive the subtle dangers of hypocrisy.⁶ As another proof, al-Sarrāj referred to a book, which contained narratives about Mecca (*akhbār makka*). According to that book, in the pre-Islamic times some devotees clad in wool (sing. *rajul ṣūfī*)

⁴ Nicholson R. A. (ed.). *The Kitāb al-luma' fī 'l-taṣawwuf* of Abū Naṣr... al-Sarrāj al-Tūsī. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1914. P. 30–31 (Arabic text), cf. P. 7–8 (English text).

⁵ Or, maybe, Sufis of Baghdād? (*al-baghdādiyyūn*).

⁶ *law lā abū hāshim al-ṣūfī mā 'araftu daqīqat-'l-riyā'.*

performed pilgrimage to the House [of God] (*al-bayt*).⁷ What more evidence do we need to prove this name's antiquity?⁸

While al-Sarrāj argues that this name was not introduced by the Baghdādīs, the opposite is implied by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī in his three-volume *magnum opus*, “The Nourishment for the Hearts” (*Qūt al-qulūb*). Here he uses the word *ṣūfī* some 60 times and applies it exclusively to the mystics of Baghdād. Although he was a mystic himself,⁹ he does not seem to be concerned with this term at all, since he apparently did not identify himself as a *ṣūfī*. Nevertheless, later sources, both Sufi and non-Sufi, identify al-Makkī as a Sufi master.¹⁰

After mentioning the four common versions of the etymology of the word *ṣūfī* — from “purity,” from “the front row,” from “the people of the Bench” and from “the habit of wearing wool,” Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990 or 385/995), the author of “Introduction to the Sufi Doctrine” (*Kitāb al-ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*), tries to explain why these versions have prevailed.¹¹

He argues that those who link Sufis to “the Bench” or to “wool” refer to the outward aspect of their condition. In the same way, they are sometimes called “strangers” (pl. *ghurabā'*) or “travelers” (pl. *sayyāhūn*) due to their endless wonderings, or “paupers” (pl. *fuqarā'*) on account of their poverty,¹² etc.¹³ Such names refer to their “outward conditions” (pl. *aḥwāl*), which are, however, the same under which “the people of the Bench” lived. To support his statement, al-Kalābādhī cites two reports (*ḥadīth*) with no *isnāds*, according to which, homeless and devoid of any possessions, “the people of the Bench” often fainted from hunger, so that the Bedouins supposed them to be mad (pl. *majānīn*), especially since their woolen garments gave off an odour similar to that of the sheep caught in the rain (*rīḥ al-ḍa'n idhā aṣābahu al-maṭar*). All this seemed disgusting to some of the Prophet's contemporaries, but not to the Prophet himself, for wool is the preferred garb of the prophets and saints. He himself used to wear wool and ride a donkey. According to Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, the Prophet once witnessed seventy barefooted prophets: clad in woolen garments (pl. *'abā*), they passed by the rock at al-Rawḥā', heading for the Ancient House (*al-bayt al-'atīq*, i.e. al-Ka'ba). Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī related that 'Īsā (Jesus) used to wear wool (*al-sha'ar*) and possessed nothing. He also knew of seventy of those who fought at Badr (*al-bad-riyyūn*), whose clothes consisted only of wool. Thus, it was due to their similarity with “the people of the Bench” that the Sufis were called *ṣuffiyya* and *ṣūfiyya*.¹⁴

Building on his earlier argument, al-Kalābādhī explains the etymology of the term by conflating the two notions, i.e. the Sufis are called “Sufis” because they resemble “the people of the Bench” in their piety and devotion, including their habit of “wearing wool.” However, these are but outward aspects. He then proceeds to explain the inward aspects of

⁷ Cf. arguments of Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī, Aḥmad al-Rifā'ī and Ibn al-Jawzī (below).

⁸ Later, some of these arguments were utilized by Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234).

⁹ He associated himself with Sālīmiyya, a Baṣran mystical school, and his treatise is considered to be an apology of its doctrines and practices. See: *Knysh*. Islamic Mysticism. P. 121–122.

¹⁰ E.g., Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) criticizes him on the pages of his *Talbīs Iblīs* along with other Sufi authorities; see: *Ibn al-Jawzī*. Talbīs Iblīs. Ed. Hānī al-Ḥajj. al-Qāhira [N.d.]. P. 212–214, where he lists Sufi sources, on which he is going to concentrate his critique.

¹¹ *al-Kalābādhī*. Kitāb al-ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf. P. 21–26 (in: Kalābādī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad. *Kitāb-i ta'arruf* (matn wa tarjama) / Ba kūshish-i duktūr-i Muḥammad-Jawād-i Shar'at. [Tīhrān:] Intishārāt-i asāfīr, 1371/1992 (Chap-i awwal), Arabic text: P. 19–168).

¹² “A Sufi is the one who neither possesses nor is possessed” — a maxim, favored by many Sufi authors.

¹³ Thus, “some [Persian-speaking] people” (*ahl al-diyār*) refer to them as to “cavemen,” or “cavers” (pers. *shikaftiyya*) because they may take refuge in caves, while the Syrians advert to them as to “the starvers” (*jū'iyya*). Cf. a similar passage by al-Suhrawardī, where, in case of *shikaftiyya*, he speaks of Khurāsānīs.

¹⁴ In Arberry's translation it is given as *ṣuffiyya ṣūfiyya*, i.e. sort of “the Sufis of the Bench,” which might be a misprint; see The Doctrine of the Sufis [*Kitāb al-ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*]. Translated from Arabic of Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī by Arthur John Arberry. New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2nd reprinted edition, 2000. P. 3.

the term by employing three interrelated notions: when men shun the abode of deceit and abstain from it, as “the people of Bench” did, God would purify (*ṣaffā*) their innermost selves (sing. *sirr*) and illuminate (*nawwara*) their hearts,¹⁵ which is also true of “the people of the Bench.” With their innermost selves (souls) purified, hearts illuminated and breast dilated, they begin to see things that others are incapable of seeing. Thus, Ḥāritha, whose heart was illuminated (*munawwar al-qalb*), beheld the throne of his Lord (*‘arsh rabbihi*) as well as the inhabitants of Paradise and Hell. The semi-legendary ascetic Uways al-Qaranī greeted a person by name without ever having seen him before, because his spirit recognized the spirit of that man, and so on. According to al-Kalābādhī, one whose qualities (sing. *ṣifa*) are “the purity of his innermost part” (*ṣafwat sirrihi*), “cleanness of his heart” (*ṭahārat qalbihi*) and “illumination of his breast” (*nūr ṣadrihi*) is certain to occupy “the front rank” (*al-ṣaff al-awwal*).¹⁶

He concludes that “all these qualities and all the meanings contained in these terms are united in the names and nick-names of these people: these expressions are exact and these derivations approach the truth. Even though these names may vary outwardly, the meanings behind them are identical.”¹⁷

After providing this complex explanation of the term *ṣūfī*, al-Kalābādhī turns to etymologies in the strict sense of the word, which are brief but curious all the same. If this term is derived from “the purity” (*ṣafā*) or “the choice” (*ṣafwa*), then the correct form would be *ṣafawiyya*. If it is derived from “the rank” or “the Bench”, then it would be *ṣaffiyya* or *ṣuf-ḥiyya* respectively. Al-Kalābādhī suggests that, “after being passed from tongue to tongue,” the letter *wāw* was somehow transposed to the position before the letter *fā*, thus the word became *ṣūfiyya*. The derivation from the word “wool” (*ṣūf*) is correct linguistically (*min ḥaythu ‘l-lughā*). Finally, the word *ṣūfī* may be a shortened passive form of the verb *ṣāfā* in the past tense, *ṣūfiya*, meaning “he was befriended [by God].” This last interpretation seems to be peculiar only to al-Kalābādhī. After concluding his etymological deliberations, he provides some definitions of the words “Sufi” and “Sufism,” quoting famous mystics of the past. Some are interesting due to their play on words. Thus, according to Abū ‘Alī al-Rūdh-bārī “a Sufi is the one who wears the wool over the purity, ... and follows the way of the chosen one (i.e. Muḥammad).”¹⁸ According to Yūsuf b. al-Ḥusayn, “there is in every community a chosen band... and if there be any such in this community, they are the *Sufis*.”¹⁹

In a chapter devoted to the term *ṣūfī* in his “Gifts of Divine Knowledge” (*‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif*),²⁰ Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) seems to have drawn upon the corresponding section of al-Kalābādhī’s *Kitāb al-ta‘arruf*. However, this famous Sufi master carefully reshuffles the elements from *Kitāb al-ta‘arruf*, and ends up with an entirely different argument.²¹ Thus, he foregrounds the “woolen garment” version, emphasizing the similarity between the Sufis and the prophets and the pious individuals of the past who were given to wearing woolen garments.

¹⁵ Hence another appellation, *nūriyya*.

¹⁶ Delivering this complex idea, al-Kalābādhī makes his narration coherent and authoritative alternating his words with two Qur’anic verses (9.109; 24.37) and words of the Prophet, Ḥāritha, Abū Bakr al-Siddīq, ‘Umar (appellation to his words), Uways al-Qaranī and some others.

¹⁷ In Arberry’s translation; p. 5.

¹⁸ *al-ṣūfi... man labasa al-suf ‘alā-‘l-ṣafā... wa-salaka minhāj al-muṣṭafā.*

¹⁹ *li-kulli umma ṣafwa... fa-‘in yakun minhum fī hādhihi-‘l-umma fa-hum al-ṣūfiyya.*

²⁰ The sixth chapter, entitled “About their appellation with this name” (*Fī dhikr tasmiyyatihim bi-hādhih ‘l-ism*), is devoted entirely to this term (*al-Suhrawardī, Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar. ‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif*. Eds. al-imām al-duktur ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, al-duktur Maḥmūd b. al-Sharīf. Vol. 1. al-Qāhira: Dār al-ma‘ārif [N.d.]. P. 144–147).

²¹ However, judging from complete chains of transmitters (*isnād*) of the cited reports (*ḥadīth*), al-Suhrawardī’s argument might have been borrowed from Ibn Tāhir al-Muqaddasī’s work, very likely from his *Ṣafwat al-taṣawwuf*. Unfortunately, this work was unavailable to me to check this assumption.

Al-Suhrawardī begins his discussion with a *ḥadīth* from Anas b. Mālik, who said that the Prophet used to respond to requests from the servants [of God], to ride a donkey and to wear wool.²² The Sufis had chosen this kind of garment because “it is most suitable [for them]” (*li-kawnihi arfaq*) and because of its being the garment of the prophets. To illustrate the point, al-Suhrawardī gives slightly different versions of the examples found in al-Kalābādhī’s work. They are put in a different order and are meant to advocate a different idea.

Thus, al-Suhrawardī argues that the Sufis choose to wear wool because they have abandoned the amenities of this life, because they are content with the bare minimum of food and clothes, because they occupy themselves with the hereafter and with service to their Lord. Thus, by putting on wool, they, as it were, “put on” themselves all the hardships of pious life. This is correct etymologically, since *taṣawwafa* means “to put on wool,” whereas *taqammasa* means “to put on a shirt.”

Possibly quoting al-Sarrāj, al-Suhrawardī states that, as “the mine of the true realities of the faith,” (*ma’dan al-ḥaqā’iq*) the Sufis are characterized by so many fine qualities and states that to relate them to their habit of wearing wool has turned out to be the most appropriate way of referring to them.

There is also another reason why their name is attributed to this kind of garment, for it proclaims their deliberate abstinence from the amenities of this life to which “the carnal soul” (*nafs*) is attracted. This harsh garment is deemed to mortify the flesh and to prevent the temptations of the carnal soul. This usage applies primarily to the beginners on the Sufi path (*arbāb al-bidāyāt*). In general, referring to the mystics as Sufis due to their habit of wearing wool is the most appropriate way to emphasize their “modesty” (*tawāḍu’*). By embracing “anonymity” (*khumūl*), “modesty” (*tawāḍu’*), “humility” (*inkisār*) and the like, they have become like “discarded pieces of wool” (sing. *al-ṣūfa al-marmiyya*), of which no one takes notice and which no one bothers to pick up. Hence, some say that the name *ṣūfi* is related to *ṣūfa*,²³ which is linguistically correct. For instance, a person from the town of al-Kūfa is referred to as *kūfī*. Besides, as al-Suhrawardī never tires of emphasizing, this kind of garment has never ceased to be the choice of the righteous (*ṣāliḥūn*), the ascetics (*zuhhād*), “the frugal” (*mutaqashshifūn*), and the devotees (*‘ubbād*). Thus, according to a *ḥadīth*, when God confronted Mūsā (Moses), the latter was wearing a gown of wool, trousers of wool, a cover (*kisā’*) of wool with the woolen sleeves, and the sandals made of the hide of the donkey that was not ritually slaughtered.²⁴

Al-Suhrawardī then proceeds to discuss other points of view regarding the origination of the term. Thus, if it were to derive from the phrase *al-ṣaff al-awwal*, “the front row,” the name would be *ṣafawī*. However, some say that such a pronunciation was difficult, so it came to be pronounced *ṣūfī*.²⁵ The derivation from *ṣuffa*, “[the people] of the Bench,” is not feasible linguistically, but its meaning is true, since the state of the Sufis resembles that of “the people of the Bench.”²⁶ Like them, the Sufis live together in peace for the sake of God and in God; homeless and lonely, “the people of the Bench” were living in the mosque of the Prophet; imitating them, the Sufis gather in their cloisters (pl. *rubūṭ*, *zawāyā*), and like “the people of the Bench” before them, they keep vigil at night, worshipping God and reciting the Qur’ān.

Interestingly, al-Suhrawardī focuses attention on how “the people of the Bench” were treated by the Prophet, implying that his fellow Sufis deserve a similar treatment. Thus, he cites three Qur’ānic verses, which, he insists, were revealed in their defense (2:273; 6:52

²² al-Kalābādhī gives a version of this *ḥadīth*, raised to Abū Mūsā al-Ash’arī.

²³ Cf. Ibn al-Jawzī’s interpretations below.

²⁴ *na’lāhu min jild ḥimār ghayr dhakī*; judging from *isnād*, this report might have been taken from Ibn Ṭāhir al-Muqaddasī’s work as well.

²⁵ *fa-’stathqala dhālika wa-ju’ila ṣūfiyyan*.

²⁶ *li-’anna-l-ṣūfiyya yushākilu ḥaluhum ḥāla ulā’ika*.

and 80:1–2). The verses 80:1–2 were revealed as a reproach to the Prophet himself for mistreating one of them.²⁷ After that the Prophet treated them with respect and care: he used to shake their hands without disdain and encouraged wealthy people (*ahl al-jida wa-l-sa'a*) to feed them. When “the people of the Bench” complained to the Prophet that they were sick of eating dates, out of sympathy and solidarity he ate only dates and drank only water for two months. Being aware of their poverty,²⁸ sincere striving and the goodness of their hearts, the Prophet promised that those, who would remain content “with the state [they are] in” (*bi-mā huwa fīhi*), will be among his companions (*min rufaḳā'ihī*) on the Day of Resurrection.²⁹

Like al-Sarrāj, al-Suhrawardī seeks to prove that the word *ṣūfī* is not a novelty. In so doing he makes use of the same examples as his predecessor, with the exception of that from pre-Islamic times.

[ii]

In a small chapter of his “Epistle on Sufi Science” (*al-Risāla al-qushayriyya fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf*)³⁰ al-Qushayrī addresses the etymology of the term *taṣawwuf*. In the beginning, he states that purity (*ṣafā'*) is “praiseworthy in every language,” while its opposite, impurity (*kudūra*), is reproachable. According to one report, the Prophet once came out to his followers with a “changed countenance” (*mutaghayyir^a-l-lawn*) and said: “The purity of this world is gone, only its impurity (*kadar*) persists; nowadays death is a gift for every Muslim” (cf. al-Hujwīrī). Due to that statement, the word “purity” became predominant in the Sufi community (*tā'ifa*). Each of its members came to be referred to as *ṣūfī*, and the community (*jamā'a*) as *ṣūfiyya*. Al-Qushayrī acknowledges that this is a nickname (*laqab*) of sorts and moreover one that is tenuous etymologically. Nonetheless, those who assert that the name should be traced to the word “wool” (*ṣūf*) are not right. At least, this is debatable, since the Sufi community is not distinguished exclusively by the habit of wearing woolen garments.³¹ Other etymologies, i.e. from “the people of the Bench” (*ahl al-ṣuffa*), “purity” (*ṣafā'*), “[the people of] the front row” (*al-ṣaff al-awwal*) are also incorrect linguistically, but they at least convey the correct meaning, namely, that the hearts of the Sufis occupy the first row before God. Al-Qushayrī's etymological survey³² is definitely the shortest of those discussed in this paper. Although he acknowledges their linguistic incorrectness, al-Qushayrī seems to have given preference to the etymologies from “purity” and “the front row.”

Somewhat uncomfortable with his etymological disquisitions, he then focuses on the meaning of *taṣawwuf*, by quoting numerous dicta of famous Sufi *shaykhs* of the past. Among their definitions five associate Sufism with “purity” in the broad meaning of this word: [1] al-Junayd al-Baghdādī said that “the Sufi is like the earth: all kinds of abominable

²⁷ “His words (he frowned and turned away that the blind man came to him [80:1–2]), God — above all He is! — revealed about Ibn Umm Maktūm, who was from the people of the Bench, and the Prophet — may the prayers and peace of God be upon him! — was reproached because of him” (*wa nazala fī 'bn umm maktūm qaw-lahu tā'ālā* ‘*abasa wa-tawallā an jā'ahu 'l-a'mā*) *wa-kāna min ahl al-ṣuffa fa-ūtiba 'l-nabī ṣallā llāhu 'alayhi wa-sallama li-ajlihi*); al-Suhrawardī. 'Awārif. P. 146.

²⁸ Emphasizing their poverty, al-Suhrawardī mentions that, according to Abū Hurayra, “seventy of those from the people of the Bench, who fought at Badr” (*sab'ūna badriyy^m min ahl al-ṣuffa*), used to have only “one dress” each (*thawb wāhid*), which barely reached their knees, so that during prayer they had to be cautious not to reveal their nakedness; this practice of having only “one dress” was criticized by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) as a form of defiant and, hence, asocial behavior, see: *Ibn al-Jawzī*. Talbīs Iblīs. P. 268–269.

²⁹ He then mentions that in Khurāsān a group of them is called *shikaftiyya*, and in Syria, *jū'iyya*, i.e. explanations, which one finds in al-Kalābādī's *Kitāb al-ta'arruf* (see above).

³⁰ *al-Qushayrī*, Abū-'l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm. *al-Risāla al-qushayriyya fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf*. 1st ed., Bayrūt: Dār ihya al-turāth al-'arabī, 1419/1998. P. 355–360.

³¹ *wa-lakin al-qawm lam yakhtassū bi-lubs al-ṣūf*.

³² It is cited entirely by al-Maqrīzī (*al-Maqrīzī*. *al-Mawā'iz wa-l-i'tibār*. P. 1176 / al-Warraḳ; <http://www.alwaraq.com>).

things are cast onto it, but from it comes nothing but that which is beautiful”;³³ [2] al-Kinānī said that “Sufism is ‘moral character’ and the one, who has excelled you in ‘moral character,’ has excelled you in ‘purity’”;³⁴ [3] he also said that Sufism is “the purity of nearness after the impurity of distance”;³⁵ [4] Abū Turāb al-Nakhshabī said that “nothing can make the Sufi impure, but through him everything becomes pure”;³⁶ [5] “it is said that the Sufi never changes, but if he does, he can never become impure.”³⁷

In his famous “Unveiling of That Which is Hidden” (*Kashf al-mahjūb*)³⁸ the Persian author ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī (d. 465/1073 or 469/1077) mentions the “woolen garment,” “front row” and “people of the Bench” etymologies. However, he selects only one of them, which he believes to be in line with the subtleties of Sufi teachings. Predictably, he derives Sufism from “purity,” its most essential characteristic.

One may assume that al-Hujwīrī follows al-Qushayrī: he starts with the same phrases as the author of *al-Risāla*, i.e. that “purity” (*ṣafā*) is always praiseworthy and that the Apostle of God once said that “purity (*ṣafw*) of this world is gone, leaving behind nothing but impurity (*kadar*). Inspired by this statement, the Sufis have purged their morals and conduct from all natural taints, thus laying exclusive claim to purity. Purity is characteristic of the lovers [of God], who are “suns without a cloud.” It is also characteristic of “the veracious” (sing. *ṣiddīq*), of which the greatest one was Abū Bakr, the first caliph and the *imām* of the mystical Path. To prove Abū Bakr’s absolute purity and veracity, he cites a report according to which Abū Bakr consoled those who were deeply upset by the Prophet’s death, by saying that though Muḥammad is dead, his Lord “is living and dieth not.” In saying so, al-Hujwīrī argues, Abū Bakr contemplated the Prophet with the eye of truth. Only those who are free of any impurity are able to see through the cover of changes and witness God, “the Creator of all change.” In dealing with purity and ways to attain it, al-Hujwīrī focuses on the sense of the name, not its etymology. Although impurity is an intrinsic attribute of human nature, God may purify the heart of his faithful human lover by illuminating it: “the one, who is purified by Love is pure, and the one who is purified by the Beloved (i.e. God) is *ṣūfi*.”³⁹ Hence, “the name has no derivation that would meet etymological requirements,” for Sufism is too exalted to be derived from anything except “purity” (*ṣafā*).

Al-Hujwīrī has his own view of this matter and uses three allegorically interpreted *ḥadīths* (without *isnāds*)⁴⁰ to convey it. However, this seems to be the very case, of which Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), a prominent Baghdādī preacher who was very proud of his descent from Abū Bakr al-Ṣiqqīq, would have said that al-Hujwīrī’s analogy was too far-fetched (*innahu qad ab’ada fi-l-qiyās*).

[iii]

In the introductory part of his monumental hagiographical collection of biographies, entitled “The Adornment of the Saints or Classes of the Pure” (*Ḥilyat al-awliyā’ aw Ṭabaqāt*

³³ *al-ṣūfi ka-l-ard yutrah ‘alayhā kullu qabīh wa-lā yakhruj minhā illā kullu malīh.*

³⁴ *al-taṣawwuf khuluq fa-man zāda ‘alayka fi-l-khuluq fa-qad zāda ‘alayka fi-l-ṣafā.*

³⁵ *ṣafwat al-qurb ba’da kudūrat al-bu’d.*

³⁶ *al-ṣūfi lā yukaddiruhu shay’ wa-yaṣfu bihi kull shay’.*

³⁷ *wa-yuqālu al-ṣūfi lā yataghayyaru fa-in taghayyara lā yatakaddara.*

³⁸ The *Kashf al-mahjūb*. The oldest Persian treatise on Sufism by ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī. Translated by Reynold A. Nicholson. Leyden: E.J. Brill / London: Luzac & Co., 1911. P. 30–35.

³⁹ *man ṣaffāhu al-ḥubb fa-huwa ṣāf’ wa-man ṣaffāhu al-ḥabib fa-huwa ṣūfiyy’.*

⁴⁰ Besides, he starts his narration with an anachronistic tradition, according to which the Prophet have said: “He that hears the voice of Ṣūfis (*ahl al-taṣawwuf*) and does not say Amen to their prayer is inscribed before God among the heedless.”

al-asfiyā'),⁴¹ Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1038) offers his explanations of the origins of the name. Having stated that all derivations from roots other than *ṣ-w-f* are of those that require an allegorical interpretation (*isharāt*), Abū Nu'aym confines himself to four "woolen" etymologies,⁴² of which three were never invoked by the other great systematizers of the Sufi tradition.

His first thesis derives the name "Sufi" from *ṣūfāna*, "a short downy [leguminous] plant." In his view, the Sufis were content exclusively with this kind of food and abstained from all other things that God created for the benefit of mankind. This etymology makes Sufis not simply strict monotheists, but also "mononutritionists," as it were. The second etymology is built around the word "Šūfa," an ancient Arabian tribe, which protected al-Ka'ba and was in charge of the *hajj* ceremony in the pre-Islamic times. On this view, the Sufi (here, *mutaṣawwif*) is like the members of this tribe in his devotion to God. The third etymology invokes *ṣūf* or *ṣūfat al-qafā*, the downy hair upon the back of the neck. According to this theory, the Sufi's *ṣūfat al-qafā* is always "inclined" towards the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*, i.e. God) and turned away from all created beings (*al-khalq*). Finally, the fourth explanation derives the name from *ṣūf*, "wool shorn from sheep"; the reason being that clothes of their choice were made of wool, because, firstly, humans (*al-ādamiyyūn*) have no difficulties in manufacturing them, and, secondly, woolen garments subdue "wayward souls" (*al-nufūs al-shārida*) by drawing humiliation (*madhallā*) and contempt (*mahāna*) upon themselves. As a result, wearers of wool become accustomed to contentment (*qinā'a*) and sufficiency (*bulgha*).⁴³

Every version offered by Abū Nu'aym is supported by *ḥadīths* which are related to the subject only indirectly. Abū Nu'aym's attempt to associate the Sufis with a pre-Islamic tribe seems quite interesting, firstly, because of its character — allegorical and historical, and, secondly, because it has found its further development in two other works, one by a Sufi, and another by a critic of Sufism.

Aḥmad al-Rifā'ī (d. 578/1182), the eponymous founder of the Rifā'iyya brotherhood, seems to have been the only Sufi author who traced the origin of the word *ṣūfi* exclusively to [al-]Šūfa, a nickname of al-Ghawth b. Murr. In his book "The Supporting Proof" (*al-Burhān al-mu'ayyid*),⁴⁴ he argues that many Sufis (*fuqarā'*) are not aware of the true reason for their name. He then provides the following narrative. There was a tribe from Muḍar,⁴⁵ called banū-'l-Šūfa. The forefather of this tribe was al-Ghawth b. Murr b. Ad b. Tābikha al-Rabīṭ. It is reported that all sons of his mother before him had died, so she vowed that if he lived she would bind a piece of wool (*ṣūfa*) to his head and thereby make him bound (that is, devote him) to al-Ka'ba,⁴⁶ so that he would become a servant of the Sanctuary. She did as she promised and since that time all descendants of al-Ghawth b. Murr came to be known as Šūfa. They possessed the exclusive right to initiate the pilgrimage ceremony. When God revealed *islām* to this world, they became Muslims and continued to worship God and some

⁴¹ *al-Iṣbahānī, Abū Nu'aym. Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*. 4th ed. 10 Vols. Bayrūt: Dār al-kitāb al-'arabī, 1405 A.H., Vol. I. P. 17–21, in *al-Maktaba al-alfiyya li-'l-sunna al-nabawiyya*, Ver. 1.5 (Publisher: al-Turath, Jordan).

⁴² Cf. the entry *Ṣ-W-F* (words *ṣūf*, *ṣūfa*, *ṣūfāna* and *ṣūfi*), in: *Lane E. W. Arabic-English Lexicon / CD-Rom Edition* by Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation & Tradigital. Cairo, 2003.

⁴³ Then, Abū Nu'aym refers his reader to his "Book [on] Wearing Wool" (*Kitāb lubs al-ṣūf*), which he devoted entirely to the description of this devotional practice, and which may still be extant.

⁴⁴ *al-Rifā'ī, Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Thābit. al-Burhān al-mu'ayyid*. 1st ed. Bayrūt: Dār al-kitāb al-nafis, 1408 A.H. P. 27–28; this book is a series of "his admonitions and enlightenments" (*irshāduhu wa-anwāruhu*), which were written down in his *ribāṭ* in Umm 'Ubayda in 556 A.H. by one of his pupils, Sharaf al-dīn b. 'Abd al-Samī' al-Hāshimī al-Wāsiṭī, as his name goes in the source (Abū-'l-Faṭḥ al-Wāsiṭī (d. 632/1234), his principal student?).

⁴⁵ Together with Rabī'a, the two largest combinations of tribes in ancient Northern Arabia. See: *Kindermann H. Rabī'a and Muḍar // Encyclopaedia of Islam*. CD-Rom Edition.

⁴⁶ *taḥ'aluhu rabīṭ al-ka'ba*; hence, al-Rabīṭ, his another nickname.

of them even transmitted Prophetic reports.⁴⁷ Those, who associated themselves with them, were called *ṣūfis*. They were wearing wool, like *banū-l-Ṣūfa*, and, therefore, were related to them and called *ṣūfis*. Although there are alternative etymologies of this name (*ṣafāʾ*, *muṣāfāt*), they are correct only in their meaning, but not tenable linguistically.

Further elaboration of this “tribal” version of the name “Sufi” is found in “Devil’s Delusions” (*Talbīs Iblīs*)⁴⁸ by the famous critic of Sufism Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201). In his narration we find another explanation of why al-Ghawth b. Murr was nicknamed *Ṣūfa*. Already after being “bound to al-Ka’ba” by his mother, he was overcome by heat and fell down. At that moment his mother was passing by, and, on seeing the miserable state of her son — he was lying on the ground in the state of collapse — commented: “This boy of mine is no better than a piece of wool.” After that he was nicknamed “*Ṣūfa*.”

Being well acquainted with the principal Sufi works, Ibn al-Jawzī considered only five versions, four of which he must have borrowed from Abū Nu’aym’s “Adornment of the Saints.”⁴⁹ Ibn al-Jawzī rejected three versions, including that of “the people of the Bench,” which, as we remember, was favored by many Sufis. Stating the linguistic incorrectness of the latter, Ibn al-Jawzī also argues that even allegorically this derivation is false, since the “the weak of the Muslims” (*du’afāʾ al-muslimīn*) lived in the Prophet’s mosque out of need and would gladly abandon it had God bestowed some property upon them. Thus, their attitude to poverty was different from that of the Sufis, who practiced poverty voluntarily.

Although Ibn al-Jawzī admits the possibility of the term’s derivation from *ṣūf*,⁵⁰ he regards its derivation from al-Ghawth b. Murr’s nickname to be the only correct one. Unlike Aḥmad al-Rifāʿī who did not bother to support his etymologies with any references, Ibn al-Jawzī’s argument relies on fully documented reports transmitted through two highly authoritative scholars. As elsewhere in his book,⁵¹ Ibn al-Jawzī provides what might be con-

⁴⁷ According to Ibn Sa’d, however, their fate was eventually sad: they were routed by joint forces of Quraysh, Kināna and Qudā’a, after they refused to submit al-Ka’ba to their leader, Quṣayy, who claimed that they have more rights for being in charge of all matters of the Sanctuary (*fa-qālū naḥnu ulā bi-hādha minkum fa-nākarūhum fa-qtatalū qitāʾan shadīdan hattā ‘n hazamat ṣūfa*). See Ibn Sa’d. *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*. 6 Vols. Bayrūt: Dār Ṣādir [N.p., N.d.], Vol. I. P. 68.

⁴⁸ Partially, this book was translated by D. S. Margoliouth and had been published continuously in: *Islamic Culture: The Devil’s Delusion* by Ibn al-Jawzī. Transl. Margoliouth D. S. // IC 9 (1935). P. 121, 187–308, 377–399, 533–577; IC 10 (1936). P. 20–39, 169–192, 339–368, 633–647; IC 11 (1937). P. 267–273, 382–392, 529–533; IC 12 (1938). P. 109–118, 235–240, 352–364, 447–458; IC 19 (1945). P. 69–81, 171–188, 272–289, 376–383; IC 20 (1946). P. 58–71, 181–190, 297–310, 408–422; IC 21 (1947). P. 73–79, 174–183, 394–402; IC 22 (1948). P. 75–86; in the 1990s this series of articles was collected and published under one cover: *Devil’s Delusion*. Margoliouth D. S. // *Encyclopaedic Survey of Islamic Culture*. Vol. 1: *Islamic Theology*. Ed. Mohamed Taher. Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1997. P. 155–266. Note: [Islamic view. Previously published article, revised & edited.]; whether the translation was revised and completed, remains unknown to me. For translation of the section in question see: *Islamic Culture*, July 1936. P. 352–354.

⁴⁹ It is well known that Ibn al-Jawzī composed an abridgement of his predecessor’s hagiographic work, entitled “The Description of the Choicest Ones” (*Ṣifāt al-ṣafwa*; some refer to it as *Ṣafwat al-ṣafwa*); he rearranged the material in what he considered to be a more readable manner and stripped it off of all, in his opinion, forged reports as well as of almost all terms *ṣūfī*, *ṣūfiyya*, *taṣawwuf* and the like, with only few exceptions, which he uses in negative sense.

⁵⁰ Only a possibility, though. Judging from his critique of the Sufi dress code, a more common outfit of a Sufi for him — a native Baghdādī, who only thrice left his beloved city — was patched cloaks (sing. *muraqqā’a*, *khirqa*) and “sarongs”, or “waist-wrappers” (sing. *fūṭa*), for more space he allotted for describing Sufis’ excesses in wearing these kinds of clothes. In any case, wearing patched cloaks, waist-wrappers and woolen garments he condemned as “a deed of infamy” (*shuhra* — *faire de l’épate?*), which are not permissible for believers, who should be mindful of the common good of the Islamic community. Besides, Ibn al-Jawzī proves that this practice was condemned by many pious Muslims of the past, providing a whole array of full-*isnāded* *ḥadīths* with words of the Prophet (2 *ḥadīths*), al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (3), Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (3), [al-]Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād (1), ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (1), Sufyān al-Thawrī (2) and others (*Ibn al-Jawzī*. *Talbīs Iblīs*. P. 252–257).

⁵¹ He uses this method of argumentation throughout his book; most striking examples, however, are the first four chapters, which are analyzed in one of my previous articles: *Romanov M. Khadīs v sisteme argumentatsii Ibn*

sidered the perfect argument of a traditionalist (*muḥaddith*) both in form and in meaning: he cites *ḥadīth* reports⁵² to prove his point of view (*iḥtajja bihā*) and then furnishes more reports to provide explanatory details (*i'tabara bihā*). Thus, he gives two reports through 'Abd al-Ghanī b. Sa'īd al-Ḥāfiẓ (d. 409/1018–9) and three explanatory reports through and from al-Zubayr b. Bakkār (d. 256/870),⁵³ the renowned expert on pre-Islamic Meccan antiquities. Stripped off the chains of transmitters (*isnād*) and put together, the body (*matn*) of the reports clearly illustrates the author's statement.

* * *

Sufi *shaykhs* showed great ingenuity in explaining why woolen garments had become symbols of piety. Their favored explanation was based on the parallelism between the Sufis and the prophets of old. It is somewhat strange that great Sufi authorities never referred to the version based on al-Ghawth b. Murr's nickname, which could have served their apologetic agendas very well indeed. It may have been convincing not only to their fellow Sufis but to non-Sufi, *ḥadīth*-minded Islamic scholars as well.

The linguistically correct "wool etymology" seems to have its roots deep in the history of pre-Islamic Arabia, where wool was somehow connected with worship of God. Judging from accounts about al-Ghawth b. Murr, the act of wearing wool (or attaching a woolen stripe to the neck?) symbolized consecration to the service of the Lord of al-Ka'ba and, at the same time, voluntary self-abnegation.⁵⁴ People seem to have had mixed feelings towards such consecrated individuals. On the one hand, they were not held in high esteem as illustrated by the comment of al-Ghawth b. Murr's mother and a report by al-Zubayr b. Bakkār. According to the latter, the members of the Ṣūfā community were sort of "ragamuffins" (*bi-manzilat al-ṣūf*) — short and tall, black and red, and coming from different tribes.⁵⁵ On the other hand, those, who were wearing wool enjoyed the status of the untouchables. An interesting detail can be found in Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr*, where he refers to the words of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and "some others," who reported that if a murderer in pre-Islamic Arabia entered the Sacred Territory with a woolen stripe (*ṣūfa*) attached to his neck, he was safe from the rage of the son of the victim while he remained there.⁵⁶ Thus, the woolen stripe indicated that its owner was under the protection of the Lord of al-Ka'ba.

Although chapters dealing with the origin of the term *ṣūfī* are rather short and are not immediately related to the complexities of Sufi teachings, they give an interesting insight into the peculiarities of their authors' argumentative strategies. There is not much uniformity among these Sufi *shaykhs* cited in this paper when it comes to the origin of their name. Their arguments, different as they may appear at first sight, are paradigmatically very similar. They were a fruit of their imagination (or perhaps their mystical experiences). Even if they use the same pieces of information, they present them each in his own way. As a re-

al-Dzhaui (um. v 597/1201 g.) (po materialam *Talbis Iblis* / "Nauscheniya Dyavola") // Sotsial'naya evolyutsiya i politicheskaya kul'tura obschestv Vostoka, Moscow, 2006, in print [The *Ḥadīth* in Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1201) System of Argumentation (based on his *Talbis Iblis* / "Devil's Delusions"), forthcoming in Social Evolution and Political Culture of Oriental Societies, Moscow, 2006]; for preliminary results of my research of the traditionalists' epistemological and argumentative paradigm, see my: Paradigma nauki o *khadisakh* ('ilm'ulum al-*ḥadīth*) // Oriens / Vostok, No. 5, 2004. P. 5–11, in Russian; [The Paradigm of the Science of the *Ḥadīth* ('ilm'ulum al-*ḥadīth*) // Oriens/Vostok, issue 5, 2004. P. 5–11; available online at <http://islamica.orientalstudies.ru>].

⁵² Here I use term "*ḥadīth* report" for any piece of information given with the chain of transmitters, no matter what kind of information it contains.

⁵³ See Hopkins J. F. P. Ibn al-Zubayr // Encyclopaedia of Islam. CD-Rom Edition.

⁵⁴ Cf. *al-ṣūfa al-marmiyya* of al-Suhrawardī.

⁵⁵ *innahum bi-manzilat al-ṣūf fī him al-qaṣīr wa-'l-ṭawīl wa-'l-aswad wa-'l-aḥmar laysū min qabīla wāḥida*; see: *Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq al-Fākihī*. Akhbār Makka. 2nd ed. Bayrūt, 1414 A.H. P. 203.

⁵⁶ *kāna 'l-raḥul yaqtulu fa-yada'u fi 'unqihi ṣūfa' wa-yadkhulu 'l-haram fa-yalqāhu ibn al-maqtūl fa-lā yahīju ḥattā yakhrūju*; see: Ibn Kathīr. *Tafsīr* [al-Qur'ān al-'azīm]. 4 Vols. Bayrūt: Dār al-fikr, 1401 A.H., Vol. I. P. 385.

sult, we end up with different arguments and more or less different ideas and opinions. Even when they admit falsity of certain versions, they do not necessarily discard them out of hand. Rather, they readily have recourse to allegorical interpretations which allow them to bring their data in line with their different agendas. By figuratively interpreting admittedly false derivations, they deliberately enhance the complexity of the word or term in question, amalgamating its disparate meanings into one complex construct. For example, the following may be gathered from Abū Nu‘aym’s etymological excursus: by living on short downy plants (*ṣūfāna*), by wearing wool (*ṣūf*) [to gain control over their carnal souls], and by imitating the worshipers of the pre-Islamic sanctuary (Ṣūfa), the Sufis have devoted themselves to God so single-mindedly, that even the downy hair of their necks incline towards God (*ṣūf al-qafā*).

Another common feature in the explanations provided by the Sufi authors discussed above is that for them (and, most likely, for the Sufis in general) a single phrase or even a single word might be sufficient to construct a rather complex and polysemantic explanation. Thus, in their discourse, a phrase — either a Qur’ānic verse (sing. *āya*) or a prophetic report (sing. *ḥadīth*) — becomes a starting point for allegoric speculations, in the course of which they may depart considerably from what was their original point.

To conclude, it appears that the derivation of the name “Sufi” from al-Ghawth b. Murr’s nickname was ignored by Sufi writers, because it presupposes different epistemological premises, namely those peculiar to traditionalists, and, quite possibly, different educational background and worldview. Delving into the minutia of Arabian antiquities was too “exoteric” (*zāhir*) a routine to inspire “esoterically” minded Sufis.⁵⁷ That is why we find a fully developed version of this story only in Ibn al-Jawzī’s treatise, whose strong traditionalist (*muḥaddīth*) background compelled him to construct a meticulously documented argument, which can be characterized as “quantitative-and-qualitative *ḥadīth* array,” or “representative *ḥadīth* sample.” In this argument, chains of transmitters (sing. *isnād*) and the narrative itself (sing. *matn*) are equally significant and so is the order in which the reports are cited by the author.

Резюме

М.Г. Романов

Термин *ṣūfīy*: одухотворяя простые слова

Этимология термина *ṣūfīy* была предметом споров практически с самого начала исследования суфизма, пока исследователи не пришли к согласию, что этот термин — производная от арабского слова *ṣūf*, «шерсть», т.е. «шерстяные одежды», которые обычно носили аскеты на Ближнем Востоке. Для самих суфиев этимологические изыскания не представляли особого интереса, однако такое толкование было слишком приземленным по сравнению со всеми составляющими их мистического учения. Возможно поэтому практически каждый суфийский автор брался за истолкование сути названия, которое закрепилось за их общиной. Этим толкованиям — в которых, к тому же, достаточно ярко отражаются особенности суфийской эпистемологии — и посвящена данная статья.

⁵⁷ At the same time, they discharged their imagination most fully, giving definitions to Sufism. One may easily find hundreds, if not thousands, of them. In one of his numerous articles, professor R. A. Nicholson provides 78 of these, so to speak, results of imagination exercising; see, *Nicholson R. A Historical Inquiry Concerning the Origin and Development of Sufism // Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1906. P. 303–348.