

FROM *ḤUBB* TO *‘ISHQ*: THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOVE IN EARLY SUFISM

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1 INTRODUCTION

Love has been an integral component of Sufism from the second century AH until today. Scholars such as Louis Massignon,¹ Helmut Ritter,² Annemarie Schimmel,³ William Chittick,⁴ and Carl Ernst⁵ have provided in-depth accounts of the teachings on love in both the early and middle Islamic periods. Most recently, Benyamin Abrahamov has chronicled the teachings on love in the works of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)

¹ The teachings of various Sufis on love are examined by Massignon in both *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj: Mystic and Martyr in Islam*, trans. Herbert Mason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) and *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, trans. Benjamin Clark (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

² Helmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, trans. John O’Kane (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003).

³ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975); id., ‘Eros-Heavenly and not so Heavenly in Ṣūfī Life and Thought’ in Afaf L. S. Marsot (ed.), *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam* (Malibu: Undena Publications Ltd., 1979); id., *Liebe zu dem Einen: Texte aus der mystischen Tradition des indischen Islam* (Zurich: Benziger Verlag, 1987).

⁴ William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rūmī* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983).

⁵ Carl Ernst, ‘The Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism, from Rābi’a to Ruzbihān’ in *Classical Persian Sufism: from its Origins to Rūmī*, L. Lewisohn (ed.) (London and New York: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), 435–55; id., ‘Ruzbihān Baqlī on Love as Essential Desire’ A. Giese and J. C. Burgel (eds.) in *God is Beautiful and He Loves Beauty: Festschrift in Honour of Annemarie Schimmel* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), 181–89.

and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dabbāgh (d. 696/1296).⁶ In his introduction, Abrahamov suggests possible sources for Sufi love theory in the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Greek philosophical tradition. Some have claimed that its origins lie in the teachings of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765),⁷ while other scholars have alluded to its putative origins in the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*.⁸

Despite extensive discussions of love in Sufism, there has been no detailed examination of the precise manner in which the teachings on love from the early Sufi tradition (spanning the second to fifth Islamic centuries) influenced later developments. In the early period, the majority of teachings on love are contained in poems and brief statements that focus upon the human love for God, wherein there is always a duality between the human lover and the Divine Beloved. But in the early sixth/twelfth century love comes to be discussed as the Divine Essence beyond all duality. This marks the beginning of what some scholars have called ‘the path of love’ or ‘the school of love’. This ‘school’ is not a direct succession of Sufi initiates marked by a definitive spiritual genealogy like the Sufi orders (*ṭuruq*; sing. *ṭarīqa*), rather it is a trend within Sufi thought in which all aspects of creation and spiritual aspiration are presented in an imaginal language fired by love. As Seyyed Omid Safi

⁶ Binyamin Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of al-Ghazālī and al-Dabbāgh* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

⁷ John B. Taylor claims that ‘The continuing evidence and experience of God’s Guidance and Love could illuminate the Ṣūfi’s mind, empower his will, and satisfy his soul. Among the first in the Muslim tradition to apprehend this was Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq.’ ‘Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, Spiritual Forebear of the Sūfīs’ (*Islamic Culture*, 40. 2 (April, 1966), 112. But Taylor’s claim is based upon the sayings attributed to Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq in Sufi *tafsīrs*, sayings whose provenance has yet to be authenticated and is called into doubt by Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, 138–42, and Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1943–49), Suppl., i. 194.

Similar traditions cannot be found in the material attributed to Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq in Shi‘i *tafsīrs* and traditions. When Shi‘i traditions do discuss love, it is usually in the context of a dichotomy of love and hate (*ḥubb wa buḥḍ*) that reflects the state of contention early Shi‘is felt themselves to suffer relative to the non-Shi‘i community and their state oppressors in particular. For the connections between the Shi‘i Imams and Sufi teachings, see Kāmil Muṣṭafā al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila bayna al-taṣawwuf wa-l-tashayyū‘* (Baghdad: Maṭba‘at al-Zahrā’, 1963).

⁸ For the origins of Sufi teachings and terminology in the Qur’ān see Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, 34–6, 94–8; and Martin Lings, ‘The Koranic Origins of Sufism’, *Sufi: A Journal of Sufism*, 18 (Spring, 1993), 5–9.

observes: 'The Path of Love may be described as a loosely affiliated group of Ṣūfī mystics and poets who throughout the centuries have propagated a highly nuanced teaching focused on passionate love (*'ishq*).'⁹

This manner of envisioning love differs from that of the early Sufi tradition. Nonetheless, many Sufi texts reveal an ongoing debate about the nature of love—one that often lies between lines and underneath the immediate text. It is centred upon the use of the Arabic word *'ishq*—often translated as 'passionate love' or 'excessive love'—and the more accepted words *ḥubb* and *maḥabba*, both of which derive from the Arabic root, *ḥ-b-b*, and are found in the Qur'ān and the sayings of the Prophet. *'Ishq*, however, has no such textual precedents, save one saying attributed to the Prophet, whose authenticity is a subject of debate: 'Who loves (*'ashīqa*), is restrained and conceals his love, then dies, is a martyr.'¹⁰ *'Ishq* came to be a central theme for the most important figures of the Persian Sufi tradition, such as Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. 617/1220) and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 627/1273). This mode of expression comes to dominate Persian Sufi literature right up to our own day, such that one will find many a Turkish and Iranian Sufi repeating the words of 'Aṭṭār—*lā ilāha illā 'ishq*—*No god but Love*.

To trace the early development of Sufi love theory, this paper will lay the foundation by contrasting the teachings of love in the later Sufi tradition with those of the earlier period. Then it will provide a detailed examination of the treatment of love in early Sufi texts, revealing an underlying debate regarding the nature of love and the use of the term *'ishq*. Although discussions of love in the philosophical and belletristic

⁹ Seyyed Omid Safi, 'The Path of Ṣūfī Love in Iran and India' in Pirzade Zia Inayat Khan (ed.), *A Pearl in Wine: Essays on the Life, Music, and Sufism of Hazrat Inayat Khan* (New Lebanon, NY: Omega Publications, 2001), 224.

¹⁰ 'Man *'ashīqa fa-'affa fa-katamahu fa-māta fa-huwa shahīd.*' Ibn Dā'ūd, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Abī Sulaymān, *al-Niṣṣ al-auwal min Kitāb al-Zabrah*, (ed. A. R. Nykl in collaboration with Ibrāhīm Tūqān, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), 66; Ibn al-Jawzī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Alī, *Dhamm al-hawā* (ed. Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Wāḥid, Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1381/1962), 326–29. Ibn al-Jawzī relates ten different versions that vary mostly in the chain of transmission.

For the debate regarding the authenticity of this *ḥadīth* see Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (New York: New York University Press, 1972), 105–15.

Another *ḥadīth qudsī* regarding *'ishq* is said to be transmitted from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in Abū Nu'aym Aḥmad b. 'Abdallāh al-Iṣfahānī's *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'* (ed. Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Atā, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997), vi. 177. But as noted by Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, its attribution to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, let alone to the Prophet, is weak at best.

literary traditions cross-fertilized with those in the Sufi tradition, a full comparison of these teachings is beyond the scope of this study.

The first Sufi text in which a full metaphysics of love is expressed is the masterful *Sawānīḥ* of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 517/1126 or 520/1111), the younger brother of the famous Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). Whereas Abū Ḥāmid had a distinguished career in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*kalām*), and came to be recognized as one of the most influential thinkers in Islamic history, Aḥmad devoted himself to the Sufi path, focusing all of his efforts upon the purification of the heart through spiritual realization. Written in Persian in the year 508/1114, the *Sawānīḥ* presents all of reality as an unfolding of love (*‘ishq*) through the complex interrelations of loveliness (*‘āshiqī*) and belovedness (*ma‘shūqī*), both of which are said to be derived from love and ultimately return to this eternal point of origin.¹¹ All phases of the descent of creation and the spiritual ascent of the human being are thus seen as phases of love. Like Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, previous Sufis, such as Shaqīq Balkhī (d. 194/810), Abū l-Ḥasan al-Daylamī (d. late fourth/tenth century), Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/966) and others, had envisaged the spiritual path as degrees of love. But in his *Sawānīḥ*, Aḥmad al-Ghazālī makes a revolutionary move in Sufi thought by placing love at the centre of metaphysics. The poetry of such famous Sufi figures as Rābī‘a al-‘Adawiyya (d. 185/801–2) and Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 243/857 or 245/859) may appear to indicate a centrality of love similar to that expressed by Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, but as will be demonstrated below, such authors emphasize a human love for God which is absolute, not a love which is the Absolute Itself—and this is the crux of the matter. This paper will thus examine the process whereby the discussions of love in early Sufism flower into a full metaphysics of love in the sixth Islamic century.

The aforementioned Rābī‘a al-‘Adawiyya is often recognized as the first to speak of love as being due to God alone.¹² She expressed this realization in short poems such as these oft cited verses:

O Beloved of hearts, I have none like unto Thee,
Therefore have pity this day on the sinner

¹¹ For an examination of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s teachings see Nasrollah Pourjavady, *Sulṭān-i Ṭarīqāt* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Āgāh, 1358 HS); id., *Sawānīḥ: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits, The Oldest Persian Sufi Treatise on Love* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); and Joseph Lumbard, ‘Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 517/1123 or 520/1126) and the Metaphysics of Love’ (Yale University PhD thesis, 2003).

¹² Margaret Smith, *Rābī‘a the Mystic and Her Fellow Saints in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928; repr., Cambridge: Oneworld, 1994); Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 55.

Who comes to Thee.

O my Hope and my Rest and my Delight,
The heart can love none other than Thee.¹³

And,

Two loves I give Thee, love that yearns,
And love because Thy due is love.
My yearning my remembrance turns
To Thee, nor lets it from Thee rove.¹⁴

The sentiment that God alone is worthy of love is echoed throughout the literature of early Sufism. Figures such as the famous Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/945), who was known for his teachings on love,¹⁵ spoke of love (*maḥabba*) as ‘a fire in the heart, consuming all save the will of the Beloved’,¹⁶ or as that which ‘erases all that is other than God from the heart’,¹⁷ and thus considered mystical love as an intense desire centring one’s spiritual aspiration (*himma*) on God alone and cutting one off from all that is other than the Divine. In contrast, Aḥmad al-Ghazālī made ‘*ishq*’ the center of an intellectual discourse on the nature of reality and the stages of the Sufi path, discussing all aspects of creation and of spiritual wayfaring in terms of ‘*ishq*’. Whereas previous Sufis, such as the famous al-Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), recognized love as a Divine attribute and, in turn, one of the highest human attributes, or like Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), author of *Kitāb al-Lumʿ* (*The Book of Illumination*), one of the most important early Sufi handbooks, as a particular state or station on the path of spiritual wayfaring, Aḥmad al-Ghazālī saw it as the Divine Essence Itself. Though previous accounts express the need for unconditional love for God alone and can be interpreted to present the path of spiritual wayfaring as degrees of love, they do not express the subtle metaphysics of love found in the *Sawāniḥ* and later writings of the Persian Sufi tradition.

¹³ Smith, *Rābiʿa the Mystic*, 55.

¹⁴ Martin Lings, *Ṣūfī Poetry* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2004), 4.

¹⁵ For a list of Shiblī’s many sayings on love see Richard Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 1995), i. 654–5.

¹⁶ Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fī ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf* (Beirut: Dār al-Khayr, 1413/1993), 324. English trans., Barbara von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1990). I have retranslated all the passages cited in this paper in order to maintain consistency in the technical vocabulary translated throughout the article, but have followed Professor Von Schlegell’s translation in many other respects.

¹⁷ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 321.

As will be demonstrated below, the ideas most similar to those of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī are found in accounts of al-Ḥallāj's teachings on love transmitted by Abū-l-Ḥasan al-Daylamī in his *ʿAṭf al-alif al-maʿlūf ʿalā l-lām al-maʿtūf* ('The inclination of the intimate alif to the lām towards which it inclines') and are alluded to in other early Sufi texts. But before addressing the various discussions of love that preceded Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, we must briefly survey his teachings on love. These can be divided into two aspects: the ontological and the soteriological relationship with God, or the path of descent and the path of ascent. The ontological relationship is summed up by the well known *ḥadīth qudsī* which is cited in Aḥmad al-Ghazālī's *al-Tajrīd fī kalimat al-tawḥīd* and has been inserted into some later manuscripts of the *Sawānīḥ*: 'I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known, therefore I created creation in order that I would be known.'¹⁸ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī sees love as the essence of God and the substance from which all else is woven. From this perspective, every existent thing is a self-disclosure (*tajallī*) of the Divine; everything is what he refers to in the *Sawānīḥ* as 'a glance from loveliness (*kirishmeh-i ḥusn*)'. As he writes:

The secret face of everything is the point of its connection, and a sign hidden in creation (*ṣanʿ*), and beauty is the brand of creation. The secret of the face is that face that faces love. So long as one does not see the secret of the face, he will never see the sign of creation and beauty. The face is the beauty of 'and the face of your Lord remains' [55:27]. Other than it, there is no face, for 'all that is upon it fades' [55:26]¹⁹

¹⁸ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *al-Tajrīd fī kalimat al-tawḥīd* (Cairo: Sharikat Maktaba wa Maṭbaʿ Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1386/1967), 41; German trans., Richard Gramlich, *Das Wort des Einheitsbekenntnisses* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983), 30. This is a famous *ḥadīth qudsī* which is often cited in Sufi texts, but which does not appear in any of the canonical collections. It is also cited at the beginning of *Baḥr al-maḥabba fī asrār al-muwadda fī tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf*, which is attributed to Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (Bombay: n. p., 1984), 2.

¹⁹ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Sawānīḥ*, ed. Nasrollah Pourjavady (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bunyād va Farshang-i Īrān, 1359/1980), 15; ed. Ḥamīd Rabbānī in *Ganjīnah-i ʿIrfān* (Tehran: Ganjīnah, 1973), 166; ed. Helmut Ritter (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Dānīshgāhi, 1368sh/1989), 28. English translation, Nasrollah Pourjavady, *Sawānīḥ: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits, The Oldest Persian Ṣūfī Treatise on Love* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 33.

The critical edition by Pourjavady is based upon that of Ritter and supplemented by additional manuscripts that predate those upon which Ritter relied. Though five editions were published between those of Ritter and Pourjavady, none surpassed Ritter's. The edition of Pourjavady can in some ways be seen as a supplement to Ritter's, as he admittedly builds upon Ritter's

This ontological relationship, however, is not the focus of the *Sawānīḥ*, nor of any of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī's writings or sermons. He does not write as a theologian, theosophist, philosopher or Sufi theoretician. Rather, he is first and foremost a spiritual guide. From his perspective, it is not so important where and how things have come into being, what is important to know is that for the spiritual wayfarer 'his being and attributes are themselves the provision of the (spiritual) path.'²⁰ As such, Aḥmad al-Ghazālī always focuses upon the path of wayfaring by which the lover—the spiritual adept or seeker—ascends through the beloved—the God of beliefs—to be annihilated in the ocean of Love—the Divine Essence.

The soteriological relationship is expressed in the Qur'ānic verse 5. 54, 'He loves them and they love Him', which al-Ghazālī mentions several times in his sermons, cites in his *Dāstān-i murghān* 'Treatise of the birds' and *al-Tajrīd fī kalimat al-tawḥīd*, and with which he begins his *Sawānīḥ*. As love is the true essence of all creation, the realization of love is neither an emotion nor a sentiment, but the natural response of one's being to God, and its locus is the heart: 'The function of the heart is being a lover. So long as there is no love, it has no function. When it becomes a lover its affair will also become ready. Therefore, it is certain that the heart has been created for love and being a lover and knows nothing else.'²¹ In the *Sawānīḥ*, he presents the spiritual path as a subtle interplay of love in which the spiritual seeker is a lover who comes to realize his true identity as a locus for the beloved's love of himself. Here the Sufi path is envisaged as degrees of love wherein one ultimately transcends the duality of lover and beloved to arrive at the pure essence of Love Itself. The beloved is not the Absolute, as in the poetry and prose of the previous Sufis, rather the beloved is here considered to be the God of beliefs that serves as a locus of spiritual aspiration for one travelling the

extant apparatus. Rabbānī's edition does not provide a critical apparatus, but in several instances Rabbānī provides readings that make more sense than those of Pourjavady or Ritter. For this study I will therefore rely upon the editions of Pourjavady, Ritter, and Rabbānī. They will be cited in this order and the discrepancies in the paragraph order will be noted by placing the paragraph number in parenthesis after each citation. In order to maintain consistency in technical vocabulary, all translations are my own, except when the page numbers for Pourjavady's translation are in bold. In re-rendering the *Sawānīḥ*, I am indebted to Pourjavady's translation for guidance.

²⁰ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Sawānīḥ*, ed. Pourjavady, 32, (trans., 54) (39); ed. Ritter, 60 (39); ed. Rabbānī, 181 (38).

²¹ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Sawānīḥ*, ed. Pourjavady, 45 (48), (trans., 62); ed. Ritter, 73 (44); ed. Rabbānī, 189 (53).

path, but must be transcended in order to advance to the Divine Essence from which both the lover and the beloved are derived. As Shaykh al-Ghazālī writes: ‘... the derivation of the lover and the beloved is from Love. When the accidentalities of derivations arise, the affair is again dissolved in the oneness of its reality.’²²

In the beginning of the spiritual path, the wayfarer must be severed from all of creation such that he becomes a true lover, desiring none but the beloved and having intimacy with him alone. According to al-Ghazālī, the desire for just one hair of creation will prevent him from fully realizing his identity as lover. At the culmination of this stage, the lover comes to see the loveliness of the beloved in all things, for he realizes the inner face of beauty which is turned towards the beloved, rather than the outer face of ugliness turned towards creation. When the lover’s love is pure, the beloved needs the lover, for the reflection of the beloved’s loveliness (*ḥusn*) in the gaze of the lover is the only means by which the beloved can take nourishment from his own beauty. Through the full reflection of the beloved’s beauty, the lover becomes more the beloved than the beloved himself and union (*wiṣāl*) is established between them. The lover thus becomes the beloved and all the lover’s need (*niyāz*) is transformed into *nāz*—the coquetry of one who feigns disdain for the lover. Here the duality of lover and beloved has been bridged and the covetousness of being a lover is abandoned such that the spiritual wayfarer is immersed in the essence of Love and no longer deluded by love for an object. As Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī (d. 688/1289) writes in his *Lamā‘āt* (*Flashes*): ‘Love is a fire which when it falls in the heart burns all that it finds therein, to the extent that the form of the beloved is also wiped from the heart.’²³ This is the stage which al-Ghazālī refers to as complete detachment (*tajrīd*) in the singularity (*tafrīd*) of Love. But from the point of view of Love Itself, ‘the lover and the beloved are both other, just like strangers,’²⁴ and have always been so; for they are necessarily marked by the stain of duality.

²² Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Sawānīh*, ed. Pourjavady, 10 (trans., 27) (4); ed. Ritter, 18 (4); ed. Rabbānī, 161 (3).

²³ Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, *Lamā‘āt*, (ed. Muḥammad Khāqavī, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mullā, 1371 SH), 119; English trans. by W. C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Fakhr ad-Dīn ‘Irāqī: Divine Flashes* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 117. (My translation.)

²⁴ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Sawānīh*, ed. Pourjavady, 10 (trans., 26) (4); ed. Ritter, 17 (4); ed. Rabbānī, 161 (3).

2 LOVE IN SUFI LITERATURE BEFORE THE SIXTH/TWELFTH CENTURY

As with many developments in intellectual history, all the steps that may have preceded the expressions of love found in the *Sawānīḥ* and the later Sufi tradition cannot be traced. Within the Islamic tradition, love is addressed in all fields of knowledge, from belletristic literature to philosophy, theology and even law. It must be remembered that the Sufi teachings examined herein are just one dimension of an extensive intellectual tradition. Sayings regarding love are attributed to almost all the early figures associated with the Sufi tradition. Among those figures who are said to have taught about love in later generations, such as Jaʿfar al-Šādiq, Abū Saʿīd b. Abī l-Khayr (d. 440/1021) and ʿAbdallāh Anšārī of Herat (d. 481/1089), the manuscript tradition calls into question the veracity of many of the sayings attributed to them. To some extent this can also be said for sayings attributed to earlier Sufis by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) and others. But these sayings were attributed and recorded before the time of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, whereas those sayings attributed to Abū Saʿīd and Anšārī were recorded after the *Sawānīḥ*. The sayings found in the works of al-Sarrāj, al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī and others are thus part of the textual tradition preceding the *Sawānīḥ* and serve to illuminate the discussion of love that preceded Aḥmad al-Ghazālī.

The *Asrār-i tawḥīd* which records the life and sayings of Abū Saʿīd, was compiled by his grandson Muḥammad Ibn al-Munawwar (d. 598–9/1202) many years after his death.²⁵ The manuscript tradition of Anšārī's most love-oriented text, the *Munājāt* ('Intimate discourses'), does not begin until more than one hundred years after his death and the discrepancy between manuscripts is so extensive as to make a true critical edition practically impossible. His Qurʾān commentary *Kashf al-asrār* ('The unveiling of secrets') is more the work of his pupil

²⁵ Muḥammad ibn al-Munawwar (d. 598–9/1202), *Asrār al-tawḥīd fī maqāmāt al-shaykh Abī Saʿīd*, (ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Shāfiʿī Kādkānī, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Āgāh, 1366 SH; repr., 1376 SH); English trans. by John O'Kane, *The Secrets of God's Mystical Oneness [Asrār al-Tawḥīd]* (Costa Mesa and New York: Mazda Press and Bibliotheca Persica, 1992).

Nasrollah Pourjavady argues that some of the statements in *Asrār al-tawḥīd* appear to be conscious of discussions not prevalent at the time of Abū Saʿīd, thus making this a very unreliable source for studying historical developments of ideas in the fifth/eleventh century. Pourjavady, *Ruʿyat-i māh dar āsmān* (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Dānishgāhi, 1375 SH/1996), 238.

Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybūdī (d. 520/1126) and his *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* ('Generations of the Ṣūfīs') was compiled posthumously from the notes of many students.²⁶ His four works on the spiritual stations, *Sad madyān* ('Hundred grounds'), *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* ('The stations of the wayfarers'), *Ilal al-maqāmāt* ('The flaws of the stages') and *Maqūlāt va andarzhā* ('Sayings and advice'), are also compiled from student notes, but may be closer to representing his own thought, as they are said to have been collected in the form in which they were recited. Nonetheless, none of these manuscript traditions begin prior to the *Sawānih* and cannot therefore be counted as precedents. The text that seems most representative of Anṣārī's teaching is the *Sad madyān*. This does end by stating that all the hundred grounds which are the hundred stations of the path are absorbed in love, which then has three stations: uprightness, intoxication and annihilation.²⁷ But the text does not offer a theory of love or extensive teachings regarding it. Given the complications in authenticating most of their statements, I will not incorporate the teachings on *maḥabba* or *ishq* attributed to Abū Sa'īd or Anṣārī in this study. The reports about their teachings may indicate that there was an extensive oral Sufi tradition regarding *ishq* prior to the *Sawānih*, but the later compilation dates of the manuscripts that contain their teachings make it difficult to draw any historical conclusions from them. As will be demonstrated in the following analysis, many allusions in the written tradition before al-Ghazālī also indicate an extensive oral tradition, the full extent of which is impossible to measure.

2.1 *Shaqīq Balkhī*²⁸

Among the earliest extended discussions of love in Sufi texts is a treatise attributed to Shaqīq Balkhī entitled *Adab al-'ibādāt* ('The comportment

²⁶ For details on the manner in which these texts were compiled see A. G. Ravan Farhadi, 'Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herat (1006–1089): An Early Sufi Master (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1996); id., 'The Hundred Grounds of 'Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herat', in Leonard Lewisohn (ed.) *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rūmī*, 381–99. As Farhadi observes, "Anṣārī is considered a great writer and yet he almost never wrote." 'Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herat, 19.

²⁷ Ravan-Farhadi, 'The Hundred Grounds of 'Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herat', 399.

²⁸ After repenting from a lavish life in his youth, Balkhī travelled widely for knowledge in Iran, Iraq, Arabia, Syria and Egypt. He settled in the region of Khurasan where he had many students. He is recognized as one of the first to bring the practice of asceticism to this region, is known for his asceticism and his

of Worshippers').²⁹ Balkhī lists four way-stations (*manāzil*), which he presents in ascending order: *zuhd* (asceticism), *khawf* (fear), *shawq* (desire) and *maḥabba* (love). In the way-station of *zuhd* the adept has limited his food to two meals a day in which only a third of his stomach is filled, leaving the other two thirds for breath [of the Merciful], glorification and reading the Qur'ān. One accomplished in this no longer seeks the world and has no need for anything from it, save the exigencies of life: 'This is a beautiful, good and virtuous way-station' (Balkhī, *Adab al-ibādāt*, 18). *Khawf* is said to be connected to *zuhd* just as the spirit is connected to the body and 'the light of fear is the light of *zuhd*' (ibid, 19). 'The principle of fear is to remember death until one is softened, until one fears God as if he sees Him' (ibid). The one who has practiced this for forty days has the light of *khawf* upon his face, he does not stray and is not negligent, 'he is perpetually crying, supplicating much and sleeping little' (ibid, 20). He never wearies of invoking or thanking God. This for Balkhī is the way-station that is deemed great by the common people, as they do not know other than it. The third way-station is desire for entry into paradise, the principle of which is contemplating the blessing of heaven. When one has persisted in this for forty days, 'the light of desire dominates his heart and makes him forget the fear which was in his heart' (ibid). He has intense love and is perpetually doing what is good.

For Shaqīq Balkhī, the highest and noblest way-station is that of love, which is for those whose hearts God has strengthened with sincere certainty, who are purified of sins and free from flaws. The light of love overcomes the heart without being separated from the light of *zuhd*, *khawf* and *shawq*. The heart forgets the desire and fear that was in it and is filled with love and desire for God. The principle of this way-station is that 'the heart loves what God loves and hates what God hates, until nothing is more beloved to him than God and those who please Him' (ibid). When one has purified his intention, he is then

emphasis on *tawakkul* (trust) and is said to be among the first to discuss the spiritual states. Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* (ed. Nūr al-Dīn Sharība, Cairo: Maṭba'āt al-Madanī, 1987), 61–6; Shams al-Dīn Abū 'Abdallāh M. b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-ālam al-nubalā'* (ed. Shu'ayb Arna'ūt et al., Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1996) ix. 313–6; Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, *Nafāḥāt al-uns min ḥadārāt al-qudṣ* (ed. Maḥmūd 'Ābidī, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ittilā'āt, 1380 SH), 46–7; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), ii. 545–9; Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums*, ii. 13–62.

²⁹ Shaqīq Balkhī, *Adab al-ibādāt*, in P. Nwyia (ed.) *Trois oeuvres inédites de mystiques musulmans* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1982), 17–22.

the beloved, the munificent (*karīm*), the one brought near and refined. He listens only to what God loves, and because of God's love for him, whosoever hears him or sees him loves him; for 'the light of love for God is the strongest and highest of the lights of servitude' (ibid, 21.) In Balkhī's own summary he says of those who love: 'Their hearts are attached to their Lord, enjoying intimate discourse with Him when they are alone with Him, submitting their hearts to what they hope from His mercy and kindness—and He is the one who conquers their hearts' (ibid, 22).

Though Shaqīq Balkhī makes love the supreme spiritual way-station, this treatise shows little of the all-encompassing view of love presented by Aḥmad al-Ghazālī. The ontological element is not present, as it is not a treatise that touches upon cosmogony or ontology, but only on spiritual wayfaring. In this respect it also falls well short of the total emphasis on love in the works of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī and the later Persian tradition, for even in the highest stages of love, the *duality* between lover and Beloved is firmly maintained. Thus he does not take love to the level wherein the essence of all is a love from which both the Lord (the Beloved) and the servant (the lover) are derived.

2.2 *al-Daylamī*—ʿAṭf al-alif

The most important text for understanding the many theories of love in the early medieval period is Abū l-Ḥasan al-Daylamī's aforementioned *ʿAṭf al-alif al-ma'lūf ʿalā l-lām al-ma'tūf*. Al-Daylamī transmits many important theories of love from Sufis, philosophers, theologians, and *adībs*, ranging from the concept that love is an attribute pertaining to the Divine essence to the belief that it is a malady of the heart akin to intoxication or stupefaction. Among the most important contributions of this work is that it provides exposure to the controversies regarding the understanding of love in this period. As al-Daylamī writes in the introduction:

We have found love to be the most renowned and highest state among both the commoners and the elite, the ignorant and the knowledgeable, the noble and the lowly, the esteemed and the abased. For this reason its obscurity has increased, its falsification has been magnified, and corruption of it has appeared among its people through the adulteration of those who adulterate, the excess of those who enter into it, and the falsification of those who lay claim to it. So its truth has been hidden in its falsity, its beauty in its ugliness, and its reality in its metaphor (*majāz*), until the one cannot be distinguished from the other.³⁰

³⁰ Abū-l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Daylamī, *ʿAṭf al-alif al-ma'lūf ʿalā l-lām al-ma'tūf: Livre de l'inclinaison de l'alif uni sur le lām incliné* (ed. J. C. Vadet,

He also reveals an underlying controversy regarding the term most central to the Persian Sufi love tradition, *‘ishq*. This is directly exposed when al-Daylamī discusses the theologians (*mutakallimūn*) who, by his account, have almost nothing positive to say about love and are given to considering *‘ishq* as an affliction of the soul and a malady of the heart that is to be avoided.³¹ As Lois Anita Giffen has demonstrated, for many generations the term *‘ishq* was a source of great debate among the *udabā’*, the *fuqahā’*, and the *‘ulamā’*.³² Though no strict definitions were agreed upon, it was regarded by many as a state of passionate love, or as a raw physical lust to be tamed and avoided at all costs. Many had serious misgivings about the use of this term and the second half of Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Dhamm al-hawā* (‘The condemnation of lust’) is entirely about the evils of *‘ishq* and the fate of those who succumb to it. But for all those who opposed it, there were also scholars such as Muḥammad b. Dā’ūd al-İṣfahānī (d. 297/910) who admonished them for failing to understand the tender nature of those susceptible to the storms of true love.³³

The effect the condemnation of the use of this term had is evident when al-Daylamī feels the need to cite an accepted authority before employing the term himself:

We begin by mentioning the permissibility of [claiming] *‘ishq* for God and from God and the difference of our Shaykhs regarding that, so that one who hears this word from us will not condemn [it] and reject it when he comes upon it in its appropriate context, due to its unfamiliarity, because our Shaykhs do not employ it in their discourse but rarely or in isolated incidents.³⁴

Cairo: L’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1962), 2. English trans. by Joseph Norment Bell and Hasan Mahmoud Abdul Latif al-Shafie, *A Treatise on Mystical Oneness* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005). The English translation was published after this article was prepared. I have since checked all translations against those of Bell and al-Shafie, but have kept my own translations in order to maintain consistency in the translation of technical Sufi terms throughout the article.

³¹ Al-Daylamī, *‘Atf al-alif*, 151.

³² Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (New York: New York University Press, 1972).

³³ *Ibid.*, 10. For the most comprehensive discussion of various positions regarding *‘ishq* available in Western academic literature see chapter II, section 3. Also see Massignon, *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj*, i. 340–58.

³⁴ Al-Daylamī, *‘Atf al-alif*, 5.

He then alludes to a division among the Shaykhs regarding love and mentions those who have agreed that it is permissible to employ the term *‘ishq*:

Among those who permit [the use of it] are Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī, Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd, Ḥusayn b. Maṣūr al-Ḥallāj and others. As for our Shaykh, Abū ‘Abdallāh b. al-Khafif, he rejected this for some time until he came upon a treatise by Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd concerning *‘ishq*, in which the meaning of *‘ishq*, its derivation and its quiddity (*mābiyya*) were mentioned. He then retreated from his rejection, professed it, permitted it and wrote a treatise about it.³⁵

By citing al-Biṣṭāmī, al-Junayd and al-Ḥallāj as proponents of the term *‘ishq*, al-Daylamī is making a strong case for its legitimacy, as these are three of the most renowned figures of early Sufism. Through the process of canonization, al-Junayd came to be respected as ‘the Peacock of the Sufis’ and the Shaykh of Shaykhs. Little information is provided that would let us know exactly what the treatise attributed to him by al-Daylamī may have contained, save one saying: ‘Al-Junayd said, *‘ishq* is taken from the verb ‘he loved’ (*‘ashīqa*) and it is the top of the mountain and its peak. Because of this, it must be said that so-and-so loved (*‘ashīqa*) when love increases, is aroused and rises until it attains to its peak and reaches its reality.’³⁶ In presenting *‘ishq* as what is attained when love reaches its highest degree, this citation foreshadows a position which we will encounter again when discussing the treatment of love in Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī’s *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*.

2.2.1 *al-Daylamī’s view of love.* While al-Daylamī’s text offers many avenues for studying teachings on love, two are of central concern for identifying precedents to the teachings of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ghazālī and the later Persian tradition, those of al-Ḥallāj, who is the most featured figure of the text, and those of al-Daylamī himself. In al-Daylamī’s most extensive presentation of his own views, he presents an eleven-step path of love which culminates in *‘ishq*. In the beginning of the discussion he writes:

Love has names derived from its levels and degrees that vary in expression, while the reality is one. Through its steady increase, its names differ. They are altogether ten stations and in the eleventh they culminate in *‘ishq*, which is the very limit (*al-ghāya*). So when one reaches it, the name *maḥabba* falls away from it and it is called by other names.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid, 5.

³⁶ Ibid, 18.

³⁷ Ibid, 20.

The ten stations before *‘ishq* are concord (*ulfa*), intimacy (*uns*), affection (*wadd* or *mawadda*), love (*maḥabba*), comity (*khilla*), ardour (*sha’af*), zeal (*shaghaf*), devotion (*istihtār*), infatuation (*walah*) and rapture (*haymān*).³⁸ Like al-Junayd and perhaps his own Shaykh Ibn al-Khafif (d. 371/982), al-Daylamī sees *‘ishq* as the highest degree of love. As al-Daylamī expresses it: ‘It is the boiling of love (*ḥubb*) until it pours over its outer and inner extremities . . . As for its reality (*ma’nā*), it is that one’s share (*ḥazz*) departs from everything except his beloved (*ma’shūq*) until he forgets his love (*‘ishq*) because of his beloved.’³⁹ This means that one has surrendered all that one has—his share—and all that one is to the beloved.

The full attainment of love is described by al-Daylamī later in the twenty-first chapter, ‘Regarding the Limit of the Perfection of Love,’ wherein love at its highest level is considered to be one and the same as gnosis (*ma’rifā*):

Know that love is an attribute belonging to the lover, so long as it remains valid to attribute it to him. When it is no longer valid to attribute it to him, he [the lover] is transported from it to something other than it. Then when he is transported from it, a name is derived for him from that to which he is transported, and a quality [is derived] from the state engendered for him. The past state is subsumed in the future state. Then he is called drunk, overwhelmed, uprooted or subsumed. Such is the case when he is transposed from love to love—meaning when he attains to the limit of annihilation through it, for it and in it.

When upon attainment he is transported to the locus of gnosis, he is not overcome by it, nor uprooted or intoxicated by it, rather the attribution of love is subsumed in the attribution of gnosis, so he is a gnostic lover. His locus will rise from this level until what has passed is pulverized in what he [now] sees. He tastes a type of it unlike this [previous] type. He is among those upon whom love descends after gnosis, and love becomes for him a station after it was a state. This is a very noble station according to the people of gnosis, and to this the people [i.e. the Sufis] allude.⁴⁰

³⁸ As demonstrated by Giffen, such outlines of the stages of love are common in the secular love tradition. But I have found no direct parallels with al-Daylamī’s stages of love.

³⁹ Al-Daylamī, *‘Atf al-alif*, 24.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 111.

Al-Daylamī only refers to Sumnūn al-Muḥibb—the lover⁴¹ (d. 298/910) as one who has reached this station. He is cautious to note that the transformation of intellect that occurs is not one of bewilderment (*dahsha*), but one of realization in witnessing:

Know that the lovers among the people of nature (*tabī'a*) attain to the loss of reason, bewilderment and estrangement (*tawahḥush*). This leads from and through these [states] to destruction and death. But the state of the divine among them is not like that. The state of their attainment is either to unification (*ittiḥād*) with the Beloved, which is perpetual life, or to the station of unity (*tawḥīd*), which is arriving at the Beloved and witnessing [divine] visions (*shawāhid*) through the Beloved Witness until it is as if He is the reality of everything, everything is of Him, through Him, for Him and from Him, and He is in everything, encompassing everything, for everything, through everything, and from everything. And it is as if he is through nothing, for nothing, from nothing, of nothing, in nothing, and no thing. So understand all that if you desire gnosis of the states of those who love Him, so that you will not err in witnessing and will not bear witness to repudiation (*juhūd*), lest you be counted among those who lie and make false claims.⁴²

2.2.2 *al-Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj*. Although love is here presented as the highest degree of spiritual attainment, it is only considered in relation to the states and stations of the spiritual wayfarer. But when discussing the teachings of al-Ḥallāj, al-Daylamī enters into a discussion of love's ontological status and cosmogonic function. He introduces al-Ḥallāj when discussing the views of Empedocles and Heraclitus, who he says maintain that 'the love of this world is from the effects of this principal love (*al-maḥabba al-aṣliyya*) which was the first thing produced from the Real, from which issued all that is in

⁴¹ Abū-l-Ḥasan Sumnūn b. Ḥamza al-Muḥibb al-Kadhḥāb, a contemporary of al-Junayd in Baghdad who, like al-Junayd, was a disciple of both Sarī al-Saqāṭī and Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Qaṣṣāb al-Baghdādī. He is a famous example of the early 'ecstatic school' of Sufism. He was known for extreme forms of devotion and for his public sermons on love, which are said to have stirred not only humans, but all objects, be they living or inanimate. Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 196–8; Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, 100–1; Abū Nu'aym Aḥmad b. 'Abdallāh al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'*, (ed. Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir Ata, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997), x. 329–30; Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Sūfis*, 164–5; *Muslims Saints and Mystics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 239–40.

⁴² Al-Daylamī, *ʿAtf al-alif*, pp. 111–12.

the worlds—the lower and the upper, the Divine and the natural'.⁴³ He then notes that none of the Sufi Shaykhs claim this except al-Ḥallāj who says:

In what does not cease, the Real is one in Itself through Itself without 'anything mentioned',⁴⁴ until It manifest figures, forms, spirits, knowledge and gnosis. Then the address⁴⁵ came to comprise ruler, ruled (*al-mulk wa-l-mālik wa-l-mamlūk*) and determined the act, the agent and what is acted upon. So the Real was contemplating Itself through Itself in Its pre-temporality in totality and not manifest.

All that is known/determined from knowledge, power, love (*maḥabba*), 'ishq, wisdom, greatness, beauty, magnificence and the rest of what It described Itself by—compassion, mercy, holiness, spirits and the rest of the attributes—were a form in Its Essence that are Its Essence. Then the Real turned from perfection toward what was in It from the attribute of 'ishq; and this attribute was a form in Its essence that *was Its Essence*.⁴⁶ [Emphasis added]

Al-Ḥallāj then describes the manner in which the Real interacted with the attribute of 'ishq in pre-temporality, addressing it through all the other attributes, and then proceeds to do the same with each of the other attributes. This, however, is an extremely allusive discussion from which few definite philosophical or metaphysical positions can be derived. The most important aspect of the discussion is what is revealed in the passage above, i.e., 'ishq is for al-Ḥallāj an attribute that pertains to God's Essence. As such, 'In its essence 'ishq has attributes that comprise many realities (*ma'ānī*)'.⁴⁷ Like all the other qualities and attributes of the Essence it has an important cosmogonic function in that it is through addressing the attributes pertaining to the Essence that the Real begins to engender the created order. Nonetheless, al-Ḥallāj

⁴³ Ibid, 25.

⁴⁴ Allusion to Qur'ān 76. 1: 'Has there come unto mankind a moment of time when there was not anything mentioned?'

⁴⁵ This is an allusion to the belief that all things are created through the Divine Word. For an extended discussion of Islamic beliefs regarding creation through the Divine Word see Harry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

⁴⁶ Ibid, 26. This appears to be the first instance of this preserved in any Sufi text. According to Louis Massignon this same passage is found in Ruzbihān Baqlī's *Mantiq al-asrār*, ML ms., fol. 56^b, in which 'ishq is replaced by *maḥabba*; Massignon, *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj*, iii. 102.

⁴⁷ Al-Daylamī, 'Atf al-alif, 27.

attributes a centrality to *‘ishq* that is far beyond that of any other attribute:

‘Ishq is a fire, the light of a first fire.⁴⁸ In pre-temporality it was coloured by every colour and appearing in every attribute. Its essence flamed through its [own] essence, and its attributes sparkled through its [own] attributes. It is [fully] verified, crossing not but from pre-temporality to post-temporality. Its source is He-ness, and it is completely beyond I-ness. The non-manifest of what is manifest from its essence is the reality of existence; and the manifest of what is not manifest from its attributes is the form that is complete through concealment that proclaims universality through completion.⁴⁹

As al-Daylamī observes: ‘The difference between him and the claim of the first philosophers is that the first philosophers make love a thing produced (*mubda’*), and he makes it something pertaining to the [Divine] Essence.’⁵⁰ This move is of great importance for identifying sources from which Aḥmad al-Ghazālī and the later Sufi tradition may have drawn, or figures by whom he may have been influenced. As will be seen in this survey of teachings on love, there is nothing that resembles this position in Sufi literature until the treatment of *‘ishq* in the *Sawāniḥ* two centuries after the death of al-Ḥallāj. Indeed, al-Daylamī claims that al-Ḥallāj is unique among Sufi Shaykhs in maintaining this position:

Al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr [al-Ḥallāj] is separate from the rest of the Shaykhs in this claim. He is separate in that *he indicated that love is an attribute among the attributes of the Essence in all respects and wherever it is manifest*. As for Shaykhs other than him, they have indicated the unification (*ittiḥād*) of the lover and the Beloved in a state where love attains to the annihilation of the whole of the lover in the Beloved, without claiming that the Divine nature (*lāhūt*) [is incarnated in] the human nature (*nāsūt*) [Emphasis added]⁵¹

Other than al-Ḥallāj, al-Daylamī does not provide enough information to transmit the teachings on love from any individual except himself. We can, however, infer that his own position is quite close to that of his spiritual master Ibn al-Khafif. Al-Daylamī’s own position is that love (*maḥabba*) is a Divine attribute that pertains to the oneness

⁴⁸ This could also be read, ‘*Ishq* is the fire of the light of the first fire.’

⁴⁹ Ibid, 44.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 28.

⁵¹ Ibid, 44. *Al-Nāhūt* is the level of reality pertaining to the world of forms and gross bodies. *Al-Lāhūt* is the level where the Divine discloses Its perfect attributes to Itself within Itself. *Al-Lāhūt* is often considered to be the level of the first Divine determination after the undetermined Divine Essence.

(*aḥadiyya*)—a degree of Divinity usually considered to be directly below the Divine Essence (*al-dhāt al-ilāhiyya*):

As for the root of *maḥabba*, it is that God does not cease to be qualified by love, and it is an attribute abiding with Him. In what does not cease, He is looking at Himself to Himself through Himself, just as He is finding Himself for Himself through Himself. Likewise, He loved Himself through Himself for Himself. Here, the lover, the Beloved and love are one thing with no division in it, because it is the reality of oneness (*‘ayn al-aḥadiyya*) and there is not a thing and a thing in oneness [i.e. there is no duality].⁵²

From al-Daylamī’s perspective, God issues the attributes that make up creation from His own attributes and love is the first of these attributes. But for al-Daylamī love is not an attribute pertaining to the Essence (*al-dhāt*), rather it pertains to God’s actions, for according to him the attributes pertaining to the Divine Essence and the Divine Names cannot be known, whereas the attributes pertaining to the Divine Acts can be known.⁵³ But in so far as love is the first of the Divine attributes to issue from pre-temporality into temporality (*ḥadath*), ‘it was divided into three: lover, beloved and love, and they are from a single source’, and ‘they are manifest in every intelligible, imagined and sensed thing.’⁵⁴ The main difference between al-Ḥallāj and al-Daylamī is that for the latter love is an attribute pertaining to acts rather than the essence, and the manifestations of love are connected to their root in this essence though distinct from it, whereas for al-Ḥallāj *‘ishq* pertains directly to the essence ‘wherever it (*‘ishq*) is manifest.’ Indeed, many famous verses of al-Ḥallāj’s poetry appear to support this same position:

I am the one who yearns, and the one who yearns is I.
We are two spirits in one body.

Since the time we made the pact of yearning,
Examples have been struck for people through us.

So if you see me . . . you see Him,
And if you see Him, you see us.⁵⁵

And,

I saw my Lord with the eye of my heart.
I said who are You, He said you.

⁵² Ibid, 36–7.

⁵³ Ibid, 20.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 36.

⁵⁵ Al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, *Diwān al-Ḥallāj* (ed. Sa‘dī Ḍannāwī, Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1998), 65.

My inmost being points to You, until
I cease to be and You remain.

You are my life and the depth of my heart;
Wherever I am, there You are.⁵⁶

2.3 *Other Sufis of the Early Middle Period*

To further examine teachings on love, sayings from many Sufis, such as Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 295/908), Rābīʿa al-ʿAdawiyya, Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī, Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 261/875) and Abū Bakr al-Shiblī could be cited, for, as demonstrated by Abū-l-Ḥasan al-Daylamī, it was a central theme of early Sufi discourse. But as these sayings have been transmitted through a select group of texts that were readily available to Aḥmad al-Ghazālī and his peers, our main focus will be upon the presentation of love in the central texts of early Sufism. Rather than being objective presentations of Sufi teachings, texts such as al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*, al-Sarrāj's *Kitāb al-Lumʿa*, al-Kalābādhi's (d. 380/990 or 385/995) *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf* and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī's many contributions can be seen as calculated arguments for the orthodoxy of Sufism and of certain mystical teachings. For proponents of Sufism could often encounter many challenges from other political and religious authorities.⁵⁷

It is important to bear the opposition to some Sufi ideas in mind when examining theories of love, for as al-Daylamī revealed, it was a topic of much debate. The censure of discussions on love, to which al-Daylamī alludes, may have in some way curtailed discussions of love, especially when employing the term *ʿishq*, such that those who represented an attitude towards love like that of al-Ḥallāj were not sanctioned in the central textual tradition, though they may have persisted in an oral tradition and in texts that are no longer extant, such as the aforementioned treatises attributed to Junayd and Ibn al-Khafif. As will become evident in the discussion to follow, the central texts of Sufism in the early middle period provide many allusions to teachings on *ʿishq* which are not well preserved. The evidence of a continuing oral tradition does not resurface in the extant textual tradition until the beginning of the sixth Islamic century, when it found form in the writing of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī and his contemporaries, Ḥakīm Sanāʿī (d. 525/1131) and

⁵⁶ Ibid, 31.

⁵⁷ For examinations of the opposition to Sufism in the early period see Massignon, *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj*, i. chs. 5 & 6; and Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke (eds.) *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999).

Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Sam‘ānī (d. 526/1132). Identifying all of the individuals who may have been proponents of these nuanced teachings regarding ‘*ishq* and the possible reasons for suppressing them are beyond the scope of this study. The following discussion is only intended to demonstrate that although the understanding of love in the textual tradition of early Sufism is quite different from that of the Persian Sufi love tradition which began in the early sixth/twelfth century, it nonetheless alludes to the presence of ideas similar to those which arose in later centuries.

In three central handbooks of Sufism written in Arabic which precede al-Ghazālī, i.e., al-Sarrāj’s *Kitāb al-Lumā‘*, al-Kalābādhī’s *Kitāb at-Ta‘arruf* and al-Qushayrī’s *Risāla*, there is no positive discussion of ‘*ishq*, only of *maḥabba*. Each author devotes one chapter to *maḥabba*, that of al-Qushayrī being the most extensive, while that of al-Sarrāj, in keeping with the character of the book, is the most systematic. The remainder of this essay will examine these texts and those of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 380/990), ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān al-Hujwīrī (d. 465/1073 or 469/1077) and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī in chronological order, as these are the texts prior to Aḥmad al-Ghazālī which most shaped the Sufi tradition for generations to come.

2.4 *al-Sarrāj*—*Kitāb al-Lumā‘*

Al-Sarrāj places *maḥabba* as the third state (*ḥāl*) among eleven. Within this state he recognizes three levels of *maḥabba*: the first is that of the general public (*maḥabba al-‘awāmm*), wherein one loves the Beloved through praise. It is the ‘devotion of the hearts praising the Beloved, preferring to follow Him and to be in agreement with Him.’⁵⁸ The second level is the love of ‘the truthful’ (*al-ṣādiqūn*) and ‘the verifiers’ (*al-muḥaqqiqūn*). It is ‘born of considering God’s richness, magnanimity, greatness, knowledge and power.’ Al-Sarrāj says it is the stage characterized by al-Nūrī as ‘the rending of covers and the uncovering of secrets’.⁵⁹ At this stage the desires, the attributes and the needs of the lover are eradicated in the face of the Beloved. The third level of love is that of ‘the sincere’ (*al-ṣiddiqūn*) and the Gnostics. It is ‘born from considering their gnosis of the pre-temporality (*qadīm*) of the love of God without secondary causes. Likewise, He loves them with no secondary cause (*‘illa*),⁶⁰ i.e. with no intermediary. Regarding this state, al-Sarrāj quotes Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī: ‘The pure love (*ḥubb*) of God, in which there

⁵⁸ Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Tūsī, *Kitāb al-Lumā‘*, (eds. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Ṭāhā ‘Abd al-Bāqī Surūr, Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥādithiyya, 1970), 87.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

is no turbidity is when love (*maḥabba*) falls from the heart and the limbs until there is no *maḥabba* and all things are through God and to God—that is the one who loves God.”⁶¹ At this level, one ceases to be a lover through himself; for, as al-Junayd is reported to have said:

[It is] when the qualities of the Beloved come as a replacement for the qualities of the lover. This is in accord with the meaning of His saying: ‘... until I love him; for when I love him, I am his eye with which he sees, his hearing with which he hears and his hand with which he strikes.’⁶²

These statements from Dhū l-Nūn and al-Junayd could be seen as allusions to the final station of love, already discussed by al-Daylamī, which is beyond annihilation and wherein gnosis is attained. But in his discussion of love al-Sarrāj does not draw out any such implications in the words of those whom he cites. In fact no teachings from any single figure are cited extensively enough to develop a full theory of love.

To understand the place of love among other states and stations, we must view it in the full context of al-Sarrāj’s treatment. For al-Sarrāj, a state is vaguely defined as ‘the station of a servant before God, regarding what is fixed in him by way of acts of worship, acts of (spiritual) endeavor, spiritual exercises and devotion to God.’⁶³ The seven stations he lists are repentance, scrupulousness, asceticism, poverty, patience, trust in God and contentment, each of which is a necessary condition for the following station. Unlike stations, states do not come through struggle and devotion, rather, ‘The state is an occurrence (*nāzila*) which descends into the hearts, yet does not remain.’⁶⁴ Nonetheless, for al-Sarrāj, states can be above stations, for ‘contentment is the last station after which follow the states of the Lord of hearts, perusing those things unseen, refining the secrets for the purity of remembrances and the

⁶¹ Ibid, 88.

⁶² Ibid; the last line is another version of a famous *ḥadīth qudsī*, known as *Ḥadīth al-nawāfil* (the *ḥadīth* of supererogatory prayers): ‘God has said: “Who shows enmity toward my friend, I am at war with him. My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved to me than obligatory religious duties, and My servant ceases not to draw near unto Me with supererogatory devotions (*nawāfil*) until I love him; and when I love him, I am the hearing with which he hears, the sight with which he sees, the hand with which he grasps and the foot upon which he walks.” Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Riqāq*, 38. The version quoted here is the end of the version cited by ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān al-Jullabī al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, (ed. Valintin Zhukofski, Tehran: Kitābkhāneh-yi Ṭahūrī, 1383 SH), 393.

⁶³ Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumá’*, 65.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 66.

realities of states'.⁶⁵ As with stations, each state must be followed by the subsequent state. The states treated by al-Sarrāj are watchfulness, nearness, love, fear, hope, desire, intimacy, serenity, witnessing and certainty. Love is thus the state that follows nearness and must be followed by fear. As the remainder of *Kitāb al-Lumā'* deals with other issues, not returning to an ascending scheme, it appears that al-Sarrāj presents a seventeen-step path beginning with repentance and ending with certainty, in which love is the tenth degree. Thus the place of love is one among other degrees of spiritual wayfaring. It is nowhere near the expression of love found in al-Ḥallāj and al-Daylamī, nor the *Sawāniḥ*, where love is the alpha and omega of existence and of wayfaring. Nonetheless, the sayings attributed to Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī and al-Junayd in which all things are 'through God and to God' allude to teachings on love in which love encompasses all things.

2.5 *Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī*

Another important text for early Sufi teachings is the famous *Qūt al-qulūb fī mu'āmalāt al-maḥbūb wa waṣf tariq al-murīd ilā maqām al-tawḥīd* ('The nourishment of hearts regarding acts towards the beloved and the description of the path of the seeker to the station of unity') by an erstwhile student of al-Sarrāj, Abū Ṭālib Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Makkī (d. 386/996).⁶⁶ Like Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, some parts of which are modelled upon it, *Qūt al-qulūb* employs extensive citations from Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* to establish the orthodoxy of

⁶⁵ Ibid, 81.

⁶⁶ A native of the Persian province of Jibāl, al-Makkī first studied Sufism in Makka with Abū Sa'īd al-A'rābī (d. 341/952), who had been a companion of al-Nūrī and al-Junayd in Baghdad. Al-Makkī then travelled to Baghdad where he studied with al-Sarrāj. From there he went to Baṣra where he joined the Sālīmiyya movement which developed around the teachings of Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) and was continued by Abū l-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Sālim (d. 356/967), the son of Sahl al-Tustarī's lifelong companion Muḥammad b. Sālim (al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 427). Scholars disagree as to whether or not al-Makkī had direct contact with the younger Ibn al-Sālim. For a discussion of the different views and their support in the primary sources see Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'ānic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl al-Tustarī* (d. 283/896) (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 25–6. As has been observed by Louis Massignon, Bernd Radtke and Gerhard Böwering, al-Makkī's *Qūt al-qulūb* represents the teachings of the Sālīmiyya movement (Massignon—[B. Radtke], *EI²* art., viii, 993–4, 'Sālīmiyyah'; Böwering, *Mystical Vision*, 26.) Al-Makkī often refers to Abū l-Ḥasan as 'our Shaykh' and to Sahl al-Tustarī as 'our Imām'. But as he cites Sufis of many predilections, his writings are not limited to the teachings of the Sālīmiyya.

its content. As A. J. Arberry observes: 'The pattern of the *Qūt al-qulūb* is a little reminiscent of the standard manuals of religious jurisprudence, with its minute discussion of the ritual practices of Islam which are, however, treated from the mystical standpoint.'⁶⁷ Compared to the texts of Balkhī, al-Sarrāj and especially al-Daylamī, it is the jurisprudential nature of this treatise that prevails, it being focused more on the practical ('*amalī*') aspects of the spiritual path than on the intellectual ('*aqlī*') ones.⁶⁸

The intellectual discussions include al-Makkī's treatment of love. In the thirty-second book, he presents love as the ninth and last station (*maqām*) among the stations of certainty. The stations, in ascending order, are *tawba* (repentance), *ṣabr* (patience), *shukr* (thankfulness), *rajā'* (hope), *khawf* (fear), *zuhd* (asceticism), *tawakkul* (trust), *riḍā* (contentment) and *maḥabba* (love). But despite the exalted position attributed to love, there is no aspect of al-Makkī's discussion that even begins to approach the depth of those treatments provided by al-Ḥallāj and al-Daylamī, let alone Aḥmad al-Ghazālī's treatment in the *Sawānīḥ*.

Al-Makkī takes a position regarding love alluded to in some parts of al-Daylamī's '*Atf al-alif*', equating the state of loving God with that of having faith in God: 'Everyone who has faith in God loves God. But his love is according to his faith, the unveiling of witnessing Him and the self-disclosure of the Beloved',⁶⁹ for as God says: 'Those who have faith are more intense in love for God' (Qur'ān 2. 165). Here love corresponds to the faculty of the heart (*qalb*), which has both an inner cavity and an outer cavity. The outer cavity is the locus of Islam, which for al-Makkī corresponds to the term *fu'ād*. The inner cavity is the source of the outer cavity and it is the heart itself (*al-qalb*), which is the locus of faith. Al-Makkī claims that many love God with part of the heart, while others

⁶⁷ A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: an Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950; repr., 1969), 68.

⁶⁸ If it is the practical aspect of Sufism which is the focus of the *Qūt al-qulūb*, the intellectual aspect is more prevalent in al-Makkī's later treatise, '*Ilm al-qulūb*' ('Knowledge of the Hearts'). As Gerhard Böwering (*Mystical Vision*, 27) observes: 'Large passages of this text are marked as a definitely esoteric, enthusiastic Sufism, and stand in obvious contrast to the sober disciplined Sufism described in the *Qūt al-qulūb*'. Despite an extensive chapter entitled 'The Attribute of Sincerity and Degrees of the Sincere at Heart' and a shorter section entitled 'Sayings Regarding Love', '*Ilm al-qulūb* provides little insight into Sufi teachings on love, being more focused, as the title suggests, on knowledge, gnosis, and wisdom (*ḥikma*).

⁶⁹ Abū Ṭālib Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Atiyya al-Ḥārithī al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb fī mu'āmalāt al-maḥbūb wa-waṣf ṭarīq al-murīd ilā maqām al-tawḥīd* (ed. Bāsīl 'Uyūn al-Sūd, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1417/1997), ii. 83.

love Him with the entire heart. When one loves with the entire heart, faith has entered the inner region of the heart (*bāṭin al-qalb*): ‘He prefers God to all his caprices (*ahwāʾ*), and the one who loves Him predominates over the caprice of the servant until the love of God becomes what the servant loves in everything. Then he is a true lover of God.’⁷⁰ At its highest level, this love is the completion of *tawḥīd*: ‘When *tawḥīd* is complete, love is complete.’⁷¹

Although al-Makkī sees love as the highest of all stations and sees pure love as the fullness of faith and the completion of *tawḥīd*, his treatment of love is still far removed from that of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī and the later love tradition. In terms of al-Ghazālī’s presentation, al-Makkī’s remains on the level of the lover (*āshiq*) who yearns for the beloved (*maʿshūq*), for in every phase of al-Makkī’s description, there remains a *duality* between lover and the beloved. Such a difference is enough to make it apparent that this concept of love most likely had no influence upon al-Ghazālī. Indeed, it seems as if the two are speaking of entirely different things. While al-Ghazālī sees the whole path as degrees of love like al-Daylamī, and the whole of creation as degrees of love like al-Ḥallāj, al-Makkī sees the path as degrees and stations of certainty (*yaqīn*), love being the foremost among these stages.

2.6 *al-Kalābādhī*—Kitāb al-Taʿarruf

Like al-Makkī’s *Qūt al-qulūb*, Abu Bakr b. Muḥammad al-Kalābādhī’s *Kitāb al-Taʿarruf li-madhbhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* is designed to defend the orthodoxy of Sufism. As A. J. Arberry observes, al-Kalābādhī intended ‘to bridge the chasm between orthodox theology and Sufism which the execution of al-Ḥallāj had greatly widened; and this explains why, in his chapters treating doctrinal beliefs of the Sufis, he quotes verbally from the creed *al-Fiqh al-akbar II*, falsely ascribed to Abū Ḥanīfa.’⁷² In doing so he gives the impression that most major Sufi figures were of the same intellectual disposition as Abū Ḥanīfa and of Ashʿarī *kalām* in general.⁷³ As Alexander Knysh observes, this sets al-Kalābādhī apart from al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī who were staunch adherents of a Shafīʿi/Ashʿarī theological position.⁷⁴ This may result from the fact that al-Kalābādhī was centred in Bukhara, further east than any of the other authors examined here. Despite the fact that he was far from what came

⁷⁰ Ibid, 85.

⁷¹ Ibid, 86.

⁷² Arberry, art. ‘Kalābādhī’, *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, 210.

⁷³ Arberry, *Sufism*, 69.

⁷⁴ Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short Introduction* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 123.

to be the main line of Sufi traditions in Baghdad and Khurasan, he demonstrates excellent knowledge of both traditions and draws most of his citations from them. He thus falls within the same tradition as al-Sarrāj and al-Qushayrī, though his treatise is more reliant upon al-Ḥallāj who, however, remains anonymous throughout. Despite this emphasis upon the sayings attributed to al-Ḥallāj, there is nothing even remotely akin to the teachings on *‘ishq* attributed to him by al-Daylamī.

Al-Kalābādhī's treatment of *maḥabba* is the least extensive and most ambiguous of those examined here; only nine sayings and three short poems are cited. Unlike al-Sarrāj, he does not make a clear distinction between states and stations. The spiritual qualities listed by al-Kalābādhī are not given a particular hierarchical relation as they are in the *Kitāb al-Lum‘a*. The chapter on love comes after 'union' (*wiṣāl*) and before 'disengaging and isolation', but does not seem to have any particular relation to either. It is therefore difficult to define the relationship between love and the other spiritual degrees of which al-Kalābādhī writes. He discusses states and stations in the thirty-first chapter, entitled 'The Sciences of the Sufis, the Sciences of States'. In a gloss on the saying of another Sufi he writes that the Sufi is one who 'expresses his station and articulates the knowledge of his state'.⁷⁵ From this it appears that the state and station are not viewed by al-Kalābādhī as separate stages or categories. The most that he says of them is that 'for every station there is a science and for every state there is an allusion'.⁷⁶ It would thus appear that for al-Kalābādhī love is both a state and a station, to which corresponds a certain knowledge and about which certain allusions can be given. Among the few citations on love which al-Kalābādhī transmits, there are allusions to views of love as a delight and as an inclination; al-Junayd states that 'love is the inclination of the heart' and Sa‘īd b. Yazīd Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Nibājī⁷⁷ states, 'Love is a delight in the created and a consumption in the Creator'. Al-Kalābādhī explains: 'The meaning of consumption is that no share remains for you, there is no cause for

⁷⁵ Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Kalābādhī, *al-Ta‘arruf li-madhbhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* (ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1413/1993), 106; English trans. A. J. Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Ṣūfīs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; repr., Lahore: Ashraf Press, 1966), 97. I have checked my translation against that of Arberry, but I have kept my own translations in order to maintain consistency.

⁷⁶ Al-Kalābādhī, *al-Ta‘arruf*, 101; Arberry, *Doctrine*, 85 (my translation).

⁷⁷ Abū ‘Abdallāh Sa‘īd b. Yurid al-Nibājī is a little known Sufi for whom no exact dates are recorded: al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, ix. 586.

your love and you do not abide through a cause.⁷⁸ As will be seen, delight and inclination are central to the teachings of love provided in the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*. Nonetheless, al-Kalābādhī's treatment of love has had little perceptible influence on the later Sufi tradition.

2.7 *al-Qushayrī's* Risāla

In the works of al-Makkī, al-Sarrāj and al-Kalābādhī, the only word used for love is *maḥabba*, but with al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* and al-Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* the word *'ishq* is re-introduced into the discussion of love, albeit in a negative fashion. The most extensive treatment of love among the three classical Arabic Sufi handbooks is that provided by al-Qushayrī, who makes a clear distinction between states and stations akin to that of al-Sarrāj, yet does not list states as degrees after stations. Rather, he provides a list of forty-nine states and stations, beginning with repentance (*tawba*) and ending with audition (*samā'*). Among these love is the forty-sixth subject treated, immediately preceded by 'gnosis of God' and followed only by desire (*shawq*), preserving the hearts of Shaykhs and *samā'*, though this does not appear to be a hierarchical arrangement.

Al-Qushayrī is most inclined to the perspective that sees love as an expression for God's desire to draw His servant near unto Him. But it is man's love for God that dominates this chapter. It is described as both inclination to God and destruction (*istihlāk*) in God, but for al-Qushayrī: 'It is better to describe the lover as being destroyed in the Beloved than as inclining [to Him].'⁷⁹ As with most sections of the *Risāla*, the bulk of what is said about love has no specific orientation. Al-Qushayrī indicates that all the statements herein transmitted are provisional, for 'love is not described through a description. It is not defined by anything more clearly [than love], nor by anything closer to understanding than love.'⁸⁰ In some citations, love is described as a state that obliterates all that is other. Al-Junayd states: 'It is the entering of the attributes of the Beloved in place of the attributes of the lover, and completely forgetting the attributes of himself and sensing through them.' By this, explains

⁷⁸ Kalābādhī, 128; Arberry, *Doctrine*, 85. This could also be read as: 'love does not abide through a cause.' In rendering this citation as it appears in the body of the text, I am following the *Sharḥ-i Ta'arruf li-madhab-i taṣawwuf* of Ismā'īl b. Muḥammad Mustamlī (d. 434/1042–3), (ed. Muḥammad Rawshan, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Asātir, 1363 SH/ 1984), iv. 1400.

⁷⁹ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 319; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 328.

⁸⁰ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 319; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 330. A similar saying is attributed to Sumnun al-Muḥibb by al-Daylamī, *Atf al-alif*, 13.

al-Qushayrī, 'he alluded to the overpowering of the remembrance of the Beloved until nothing predominates over the heart of the lover other than the remembrance of the attributes of the Beloved'.⁸¹ This theme is also taken up by Muḥammad b. Sa'īd Abū 'Abdallāh al-Qurashī: 'The reality of love is that you give all of yourself to whom you love, so that nothing from you remains for you.'⁸² And Abū Bakr al-Shiblī states: 'Love is called love because it erases (*yambū*) what is other than the Beloved.'⁸³

Other sayings express a less extreme degree of love. Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Kattānī (d. 322/934)⁸⁴ is quoted as saying: 'Love is preference for the Beloved.'⁸⁵ Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf b. Hamadān al-Sūsī⁸⁶ is reported to have said: 'The reality of love is that the servant forget his share from God and forget what he needs from Him.'⁸⁷ Muḥammad b. Faḍl (d. 319/931) says: 'Love is the falling away of all love from the heart, save the love of the Beloved (*al-Ḥabīb*).'⁸⁸ In a saying which is echoed by many Sufis: 'It is said, "Love is a fire in the heart which burns all that is other than what the Beloved seeks (*murād al-maḥbūb*)".'⁸⁹ It is also presented as the counterbalance of fear, a position in which one most often finds hope (*rajā'*) in Sufi literature: 'Whoever is given something of love and is not given something of fear like it is mistaken.'⁹⁰ Perhaps the closest any of these saying comes to expressing the teachings of love attributed to al-Hallāj and found later in the *Sawāniḥ* is from a figure in Aḥmad al-Ghazālī's spiritual heritage, Sarī al-Saqāṭī (d. 253/867), the uncle and erstwhile teacher of al-Junayd: 'Love between two is not pure until one says to the other "Oh I" (*yā ana*).'⁹¹

⁸¹ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 321; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 330.

⁸² Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 321; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 330.

⁸³ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 321; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 330.

⁸⁴ Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Ja'far al-Baghdādī al-Kattānī, a native of Baghdad and a companion of al-Junayd, al-Nūrī and Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz. He later travelled to Makka where he died in 322/934. Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-Uns*, 181; Abū Nu'aym al-Isfahānī, *Hilya*, x. 365–6.

⁸⁵ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 322; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 332.

⁸⁶ A native of Ubulluh, a small village four farsangs from Basra, he was a teacher of Abū Ya'qūb al-Nahrajūrī who was later a companion of al-Junayd; he most likely lived in the second half of the third-century AH; Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-Uns*, 131.

⁸⁷ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 322; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 332.

⁸⁸ Al-Qushayrī, 323; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 333.

⁸⁹ Al-Qushayrī, 324; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 334.

⁹⁰ Al-Qushayrī, 325; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 336.

⁹¹ Al-Qushayrī, 324; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 334.

Al-Qushayrī relates a story in which a group of *shuyūkh* in Makka are discussing love and al-Junayd was asked to speak:

His eyes wept then he said: ‘A servant going from his self attached to the remembrance of his Lord, undertaking to observe His rights, looking at Him with his heart. The fires of His He-ness (*huwīyyatibi*) burn his heart, and the purity of his drink is from the cup of His affection and the Magnificent (*al-Jabbār*) is unveiled for him from the curtains of His unseen realities. So if he talks it is through God, if he pronounces it is from God, if he moves it is through the command of God, and if he rests it is with God. So he is through God, to God and with God.’⁹²

Though these citations offer many different perspectives on love, and sayings such as those attributed to Sarī al-Saqatī and al-Junayd may be taken as allusion to the fullness of love expressed by al-Ḥallāj and later in the *Sawāniḥ*, all this offers little guidance in finding a possible source for Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s teachings on love. Such sayings appear to confirm al-Daylamī’s claim that al-Ḥallāj is unique among Sufi Shaykhs in his view of *‘ishq* as an attribute of the Divine Essence. Nonetheless, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya* is of central importance for examining the history of the term *‘ishq*. Al-Qushayrī writes that he heard his Shaykh Abū ‘Alī al-Daqqāq say:

‘Ishq is exceeding the limit in love (*maḥabba*), and the Real is not described as exceeding the limit, so He is not described by *‘ishq*. If all the loves of man were joined together in one person, that would not reach the measure [of love] due to God. So let it not be said that a servant has exceeded the limit in the love of God. The Real is not described as if He loves (*ya’shaqu*), nor the servant in relation to God [as if he loves]. So *‘ishq* is negated and there is no way to describe the Real by it—neither from the Real toward the servant, nor from the servant toward the Real.’⁹³

This passage demonstrates that although few sayings regarding *‘ishq* are preserved from the early Sufi communities, there must have been some who held that *‘ishq* is distinct from *maḥabba* and that it is permissible to say that man can have *‘ishq* for God and that God has *‘ishq* for man. Otherwise there would be no reason for Abū ‘Alī al-Daqqāq to refute such positions. Together, the three positions al-Daqqāq refutes provide three of the main ingredients for the teachings on *‘ishq* expressed by al-Ḥallāj and, in a slightly different form, in the

⁹² Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 327; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 339. The last line is an allusion to the famous *Ḥadīth al-nawāfil*, Bukhari, *Kitāb al-Riqāq*, 38. See above, n. 62.

⁹³ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 321–2; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 330–1.

later love tradition: God, the Real can be described by *‘ishq*; humans have *‘ishq* for God; God has *‘ishq* for humans. Though it is difficult, if not impossible, to know who, other than al-Ḥallāj, may have advocated such a position, this short refutation of the term *‘ishq* may indicate the presence of an oral tradition which has not been fully preserved.

2.8 *al-Hujwīrī’s Kashf al-Maḥjūb*

‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān al-Hujwīrī’s (d. 465/1073 or 469/1077)⁹⁴ *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* (‘The unveiling of the veiled’) is the first Sufi handbook written in Persian.⁹⁵ Unlike al-Qushayrī, al-Kalābādhī and al-Sarrāj, al-Hujwīrī tends to be more open about expressing his own position. His treatment of love is no exception. For al-Hujwīrī, love (*maḥabba*) is of two kinds: (1) the love of the like for the like, as between a man and a woman, and (2) ‘the love of one who is unlike the object of his love and who seeks to become intimately attached to an attribute of that object, e.g. hearing without speech or seeing without eye’,⁹⁶ the latter being the love of God. Those who love God are further divided into two kinds: (1) those who love the Benefactor due to His beneficence, and (2) ‘those who are so enraptured by love that they reckon all favours as a veil.’ For al-Hujwīrī, ‘The latter way is the more exalted of the two’.⁹⁷

Though al-Hujwīrī’s own opinion regarding love falls short of the all-encompassing nature of love found in the later Persian tradition, he mentions Shaykh Sumnūn al-Muḥibb, whom al-Daylamī had regarded as one of the few to have reached the fullness of love as a ‘gnostic lover’.

⁹⁴ Al-Hujwīrī was a Persian Sufi from the area of Ghazna in present-day Afghanistan. He studied Sufism under Abū l-Faḍl al-Khuttalī, through whom he is linked to the circle of al-Shiblī and al-Junayd in Baghdad (Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 133). He also travelled to Iraq where he studied with many other Sufi *shuyūkh* who are mentioned throughout the treatise.

⁹⁵ *Kashf al-maḥjūb* is the earliest Sufi handbook in Persian. The earliest extant treatise on Sufism in Persian is the *Sharḥ-i Ta’arruf li-madḥhab-i taṣawwuf* by Abū Ibrāhīm Ismā‘īl b. Muḥammad Mustamlī (d. 1042–3).

⁹⁶ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, 397; English trans., R. A. Nicholson, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb of al-Hujwīrī: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism* (London: Luzac & Co., 1911; repr. 1976), 308. In some citations I have followed Nicholson’s translation closely, others I have retranslated to maintain consistency in the rendering of technical terms. Nonetheless, I am indebted to Nicholson for guidance in those passages that I have chosen to retranslate.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 398; Nicholson, *Kashf*, 308.

In a passage which is tremendously important for understanding the veiled nature of Sufi language, Hujwīrī reports of Sumnūn:

He asserts that love is the foundation and principle of the way to God, that all states and stations are stages of love, and that every stage and abode in which the seeker may be admits of destruction, except the abode of love, which is not destructible in any circumstances so long as the way itself remains in existence. All the other Shaykhs agree with him in this matter, but since the term 'love' (*maḥabba*) is current and well known, and they wish the doctrine of Divine love to remain hidden, instead of calling it love they gave it the name 'purity' (*ṣafwat*), and the lover they call 'Sufi'; or they use 'poverty' to denote the renunciation of the lover's personal will in his affirmation of the Beloved's will, and they called the lover 'poor' (*faqīr*).⁹⁸

Whereas in *Qūt al-qulūb* al-Makkī expressed the view that love is the highest station (*maqām*), here for the first time we find an account which concurs with al-Daylamī's belief that love comprises all the states and stations of the spiritual path. But there is still no expression of the supreme all-encompassing love alluded to by al-Ḥallāj and found in the later Persian tradition. Nonetheless, as with the passage from al-Daqqāq in the *Risāla* of al-Qushayrī, this alludes to another of the key ingredients in Aḥmad al-Ghazālī's view of love. It is significant that al-Hujwīrī tells us that the Shaykhs 'wish the doctrine of Divine Love to remain hidden'. This indicates that none of the texts of early Sufism have fully expressed the understanding of love as it existed among certain components of the early Sufi community, thus alluding, as did al-Daqqāq, to an oral tradition that has not been fully preserved.

Something similar to the view attributed to Sumnūn al-Muḥibb is expressed in al-Hujwīrī's analysis of a passage attributed to al-Qushayrī:

Master Abū-l-Qāsim Qushayrī says: 'Love is the effacement of the lover's attributes and the establishment of the Beloved's essence,' i.e. since the Beloved is subsistent (*bāqī*) and the lover is annihilated (*fānī*) the jealousy of the love requires that the lover should make the subsistence of the Beloved absolute by negating himself, and he cannot negate his own attributes except by affirming the essence of the Beloved. No lover can stand by his attributes, for in that case he would not need the Beloved's beauty; but when he knows that his life depends on the Beloved's beauty, he necessarily seeks to annihilate his own attributes, which veil him from the Beloved...⁹⁹

Like al-Qushayrī, al-Hujwīrī also provides an extensive discussion of love, in which there is debate regarding the use of the term '*ishq*.

⁹⁸ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, 398; Nicholson, *Kashf*, 308.

⁹⁹ Al-Hujwīrī, 401–2; Nicholson, *Kashf*, 311.

Here al-Hujwīrī makes explicit the controversy that was implicit with Abū ‘Alī al-Daqqāq:

Concerning *‘ishq* the Shaykhs say many things. A contingent among this group holds that *‘ishq* for the Real is permissible, but that it is not permissible to hold that there is *‘ishq* from the Real. They say that *‘ishq* is the attribute of one debarred from his beloved, man is debarred from God, but God is not debarred from man. It is therefore permissible to say that man has *‘ishq* for Him, but from Him to man it is not permissible.¹⁰⁰

But he also mentions the view expressed by al-Daqqāq that since *‘ishq* implies a passing beyond limits it cannot apply to man’s love of God either. A later group maintains that *‘ishq* refers to love of the essence but that since the essence cannot be realized, *‘ishq* is not an appropriate term: ‘They also say that *‘ishq* only arises through observing form and that *maḥabba* may arise through hearing, so that vision of the Real cannot arise since nobody can see Him in the world.’¹⁰¹ So according to this group no one may experience *‘ishq* for God, for it pertains to the essence, whereas *maḥabba* pertains to the attributes and actions that can be perceived in this world.

This debate regarding the use of the two terms reveals that there must have been other groups or individuals maintaining both that man has *‘ishq* for God, not only in His attributes, but also in His essence and that God has *‘ishq* for man. Otherwise, al-Hujwīrī would not feel the need to refute these positions. What is important here is not so much the difference in technical terminology, as the debate that appears to underlie the use of these terms. This is not simply a philological debate. It is more importantly a philosophical and epistemological debate regarding man’s ability to witness the Divine and know the Divine Essence. Shades of this debate were seen in al-Daylamī’s presentation of al-Ḥallāj’s position that *‘ishq* is an attribute pertaining to the Divine Essence. As we will see, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ghazālī and Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī clearly believe that one can experience the Divine Essence, but that such knowledge in no way pertains to the senses or to the mental faculties, rather it is achieved through *baṣīra*, the insight of the heart. As Aḥmad al-Ghazālī writes at the end of the *Sawānīḥ*: ‘The eyes of the intellect have been blocked from perceiving the quiddity and reality of the spirit, and the spirit is the shell of love. So since knowledge has no way to the shell, how can it have a path to the jewel concealed within the shell?’¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Al-Hujwīrī, 400; Nicholson, *Kashf*, 310 (my translation).

¹⁰¹ Al-Hujwīrī, 401; Nicholson, *Kashf*, 310 (my translation).

¹⁰² Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Sawānīḥ*, ed. Pourjavady, 55 (trans., p. 80); ed. Ritter, 75–6; ed. Rabbānī, 199.

In his sermons such insight is referred to as gnosis (*maʿrifa*). He believes the ability to grasp this with the human mind was beyond even the Prophet: ‘Whenever the Messenger of God was carried to the ocean of knowledge it would flow forth, but when he was cast into the ocean of gnosis he said, “I do not realize, I only worship (*lā adri innamā aʿbudu*)”.’¹⁰³

Unlike the texts of al-Makkī, al-Sarrāj, al-Kalābādhī and al-Qushayrī, with al-Hujwīrī’s treatment of love, the reader is unexpectedly cast into the centre of an intense debate, not just about the use of particular technical terms, but about the nature of man’s knowledge of God, the extent to which the spiritual aspirant can travel, and how much of these teachings should be revealed. Aḥmad al-Ghazālī and others in the Persian school of love firmly maintain that one can ‘perceive’ or to use their term, ‘taste’ the Divine Essence which for them is *ʿishq* itself, and that the spiritual aspirant can travel completely beyond the duality of lover and Beloved. As such, his *Sawāniḥ* marks an important juncture in the Sufi tradition where many of these teachings on the metaphysics of love are for the first time fully expressed. The allusions to such positions by al-Qushayrī and al-Hujwīrī indicate that this marks a point where particular oral teachings become a part of the written tradition, though in a form largely inaccessible to one who is not steeped in the language of *Taṣawwuf*. That such teachings existed but were not fully recorded is further illustrated by the fact that many of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s teachings on love are alluded to in his brother’s treatment of love in the *Iḥyāʾ*.

2.9 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī—Kitāb al-Maḥabba

The *Kitāb al-Maḥabba wa-l-shawq wa-l-uns wa-l-riḍā* (‘The book of love, desire, and contentment’) of the *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* is the longest treatment of love among those surveyed here. As mentioned before, it brings elements of several previous texts together into one coherent treatment of love. For Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī:

Love for God is the ultimate aim among the stations and the highest summit among the degrees, for there is no station beyond the perception (*idrāk*) of love except that it is a fruit from among its fruits and a consequence of its effects, such as desire (*shawq*), intimacy (*uns*), contentment (*riḍā*) and their sisters. And there is no station before love, except that it is a prelude to it, such as repentance (*tauba*), patience (*ṣabr*), asceticism (*zuhd*) and the like.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Majālis-i Aḥmad Ghazālī*, (ed. and Persian trans. by Aḥmad Mujāhid, Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1385 SH/1998), 61.

¹⁰⁴ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1419/1998), iv. 257.

As with al-Hujwīrī and al-Qushayrī, there is an allusion to an ongoing debate regarding the nature of love, but here it centres upon the term *maḥabba*. Al-Ghazālī states that some scholars claim love is impossible except between the like and the like, and comments: ‘When they deny love, they deny intimacy, desire, the delight of intimate discourse [with God] (*munājāt*), and all the other effects and consequences of love. The veil must be lifted from this matter.’¹⁰⁵ He then divides his treatment into seventeen clarifications (*bayyināt*), most of which centre on the nature of man’s love for God, and some of which treat God’s love for man, which is in truth the source of man’s love for God. Here we will first examine the discussion of man’s love for God which Imām Abū Ḥāmid divides into five types. Then we will examine the nature of *‘ishq* which he believes to be beyond *maḥabba*. We will conclude by briefly examining his treatment of God’s love for man.

2.9.1 Man’s Love for God. While Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī begins this book with the treatment of the foundation of love in the Qur’ān and the *ḥadīth*, it is clear that his discussion of love, as with that of the Sufi tradition preceding him, is not derived directly from these sources. These sources always emphasize worship (*‘ibāda*), but the attitude of the proponent of love is, as expressed by Yaḥyā b. Mu‘idh al-Rāzī (d. 258/872), ‘That the weight of a single grain of love is more beloved to me than worshipping seventy years without love.’¹⁰⁶

In the first clarification, Abū Ḥāmid sets the tone for a discussion which focuses little upon worship and much upon realizing a direct relationship with God: ‘Know that what is sought from this section is not unveiled except through recognition (*ma‘rifa*) of love itself, then recognition of its conditions and causes (*asbāb*), then after that examination (*naẓar*) of the verification of its reality (*ma‘nā*) in the truth of God.’¹⁰⁷ For Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī love must necessarily follow upon knowledge and perception because only that which is known and perceived can be loved, and ‘everything in which there is delight and ease in the perception of it is beloved unto the perceiver.’ ‘Thus love is an expression of the inclination or disposition to a thing in which there is delight.’¹⁰⁸ This definition is very close to that attributed to al-Junayd in al-Kalābādhī’s *Kitāb al-Ta‘arruf*: ‘Love (*maḥabba*) is the inclination of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, iv. 257.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 259; al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 326; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 337.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, iv. 259.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

the heart.¹⁰⁹ But having defined love in this way, al-Ghazālī then makes a move like that attributed to al-Junayd by al-Daylamī stating that ‘if that inclination is firm and strong it is called *‘ishq*.’¹¹⁰ As we will see, this sets the stage for an emphatically positive treatment of the term *‘ishq* which places it above *maḥabba* and equates it with the highest level of spiritual realization.¹¹¹

As Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī writes throughout the *Iḥyā’* and in many other works, perception (*idrāk*) is divided into two major categories: outward (*ẓāhiri*) and inward (*bāṭimī*). The outward pertains to the five senses and the inward is a sixth sense, what is known as the intellect (*‘aql*), light, or the heart and is far stronger:

Inner vision is stronger than outward sight, and the heart is more intense in perceiving than the eye. The beauty of meanings perceived through the intellect is greater than the beauty of forms manifest to eyesight, and there is no doubt that the delight of the heart with what it perceives among the noble divine affairs that are too sublime to be perceived by the senses is more complete and more profound. So the inclination of the sound nature and the healthy intellect to it is stronger, and there is no meaning to love except the inclination to that in the perception of which there is delight . . . So no one denies the love of God save he for whom being held back in the degree of beasts has disabled him, for he will not surpass the perception of the senses at all. (al Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, iv. 260)

Here we see Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī combining and building upon ideas previously stated, i.e., that love is inclination and delight. But he is more emphatic, arguing, ‘There is no meaning to love except the inclination to that in the perception of which there is delight.’ He then lists five kinds of love which he believes comprise all modes of human love: (1) the love of man for himself, his perfection (*kamāl*) and his subsistence; (2) his love for whoever does good (*al-muḥsin*) to him because it supports his own completion and subsistence; (3) his love for one who does good out of appreciation for the good he does; (4) his love for all that is beautiful in its essence (*fī dhātihī*); and (5) his love for one with whom he has a hidden inner relationship. But for Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (*ibid*, 263) the only one who is truly worthy of any form of

¹⁰⁹ Al-Kalābādhi, *Ta’arruf*, 128.

¹¹⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, iv. 259.

¹¹¹ Some parallels to this view of *‘ishq* can be found in the secular love tradition. For example, in his *Risāla fī l-‘ishq* al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868-9) defines *‘ishq* as that which exceeds *ḥubb* (Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs*, 85). But the possible connections between the Sufi discussion of love and those of the secular love tradition are beyond the scope of this study.

love is God: 'Whoever loves what is other than God, not because of its relationship to Him, that is due to his ignorance and his lack of knowledge of God.' He thus argues that 'according to the people of insight, there is in reality no beloved except God and none worthy of love but Him.' So each of the five types of love is in fact love for God and is only complete in so far as it is realized as such.

As for the love of self:

This requires the utmost love for God. Whoever knows himself and knows his Lord knows for certain that he has no existence from his own essence and that the existence of his essence and the persistence of and perfection of his existence is only from God, for God and through God; for He is the Originator who gives him existence, the one who makes him subsist and the one who perfects his existence by creating the attributes of perfection, creating the effects which lead to it, and creating the guidance in the application of the effects. Otherwise, there would be no existence for the servant from his essence as concerns his essence; rather, he would be sheer obliteration and pure non-existence if not for the grace of God upon him through existentiation In sum, there is nothing in existence for Him abiding through itself, except the Abiding, the Living, Who is abiding in His Essence. All that is other than Him is abiding through Him. So if the gnostic loves his essence and the existence of his essence pours forth from other than him, he must necessarily love the one who pours forth his existence, who makes him persist. If he knows Him to be a Creator, an Existentiator, an Originator, a Subsister and an Abider through Himself, then he does not love Him, that is due to his ignorance of himself and his Lord, for love is a fruit of knowledge . . . (ibid, 263)

This passage goes a step beyond the discussion of love in al-Hujwīrī towards the fullness of love in which lover and Beloved emanate, or derive as Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ghazālī expresses it, from Love itself. Logically the four other types of love flow from this first love, for in understanding that one must love God because one's existence flows from Him and all that exists subsists through Him, one will necessarily realize that what is loved is loved for that in it which subsists through God.

As regards the love of one who does good (*al-muḥsin*) for one's self because it completes one's perfection and subsistence, Imām al-Ghazālī follows his argument that God is the only perfecter and the only one who makes things subsist through to its logical conclusion, saying (ibid, 264): 'The only one who does good is God,' and that 'doing good is only conceived for man metaphorically.' Thus loving another for the good he does for one's self ' . . . requires in its essence that one love none but God; for if he recognizes with the truth of recognition, then he knows that the one who does good to him is God alone.' The love for the one

who does what is good simply for the good he does follows this same argument:

And this too requires the love of God; rather, it requires that one love no one other than Him at all except in so far as he is attached to Him through a cause. For God is the One who does good to all, the One who blesses all types of creatures. (ibid, 265)

This benevolence comes through bringing them into existence, perfecting them, comforting and blessing them and beautifying them with those things that are beyond their needs (ibid). For both the love of one who does what is good for oneself and the love of one who does what is good in itself, it must be remembered that:

He is the Creator of beauty, the Creator of the one who does good, the Creator of doing good, and the Creator of the causes (*asbāb*) of doing good. For this reason, love for what is other than Him is also sheer ignorance. Whoever knows that will for this reason love none other than God. (ibid)

The fourth kind of love discussed by Imām Abū Ḥāmid—love for something beautiful for the beauty it possesses in itself—is love for God because (ibid, 261) ‘the beauty of everything is in the perfection that befits it, perfection belongs to God alone, and nothing other than Him has perfection except by virtue of what God has given it’ (ibid, 266). As was made clear in the discussion of the love of one’s self, God is the only one who is perfect and the only one who makes perfect. Thus all beauty is in fact God Himself; for as the Prophet has said, ‘God is beautiful and He loves beauty,’¹¹² and the Absolute Beauty is the only beauty that has no partner to it in beauty, all beauty emanating from or being derived from it. So all love of beauty is love of the Absolute Beauty. This love is stronger than love for one who does what is good, for doing good (*iḥsān*) increases and decreases (Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, iv. 267), whereas what is beautiful pertains directly to God in His absolute perfection.

The fifth kind of love—for one with whom one has a hidden inner relationship—is the most exalted and illusive. Imām al-Ghazālī states that it is an inner reality and does not provide a full account, declaring (ibid): ‘It is permitted to record some of it in books and some of it is not permitted to be recorded, but is left under the cover of dust until the wayfarers on the path stumble upon it.’ That about which one can write is the servant’s ‘taking on the lordly character traits,’ comprised in the Divine attributes, by drawing close to his Lord. That which should

¹¹² *Hadīth Nabawī*, Muslim: *Kitāb al-īmān*, 147; Ibn Māja: *Kitāb al-Duʿāʾ*; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, iv. 133.

be 'left under the cover of dust' is alluded to in the Qur'ānic verses 17. 75: 'They ask you about the Spirit. Say, "The Spirit is from the command of my Lord" '; and 15. 29 and 38. 72: 'So when I established him and breathed into him from My Spirit . . .'. It is not to be spoken of, for it is in regard to this that the errors of 'incarnationists' have arisen (ibid, 268). But as we will see, when devoid of exaggerations, this appears to be the type of love wherein *ḥubb* or *maḥabba* is transformed into *ishq*.

For Imām Abū Ḥāmid, it is of the utmost importance that one realizes love of God in all of these modes because true salvation lies in love for God:

Know that the happiest of mankind in the hereafter are those who are strongest in love for God; for the meaning of the hereafter is reaching God and realizing the happiness of meeting Him. What is greater for the lover than the blessing when he reaches his Beloved after prolonged desire? He attains to witnessing for eternal eternity with no arouser or obfuscator, no overseer or competitor, with no fear or cutting off, except that this blessing is in accord with the strength of his love. So whenever the love increases the delight increases. (ibid, 275–6)

2.9.2 Attaining to 'Ishq. In discussing the five phases of love, Imām Abū Ḥāmid uses the word *ḥubb* and *maḥabba*. But for him, the highest level of delight and thus of love is *ishq*, though few are able to attain this: 'As for the strength of love and its overpowering until it attains to the infatuation called *ishq*, most are separated from that' (ibid, 276). This infatuation is reached by two means:

The first of them is cutting off the attachments of this world and expelling the love of what is other than God from the heart. For the heart is like a container, it cannot hold vinegar, for example, so long as water is not expelled from it: 'God did not make for man two hearts in his breast.' [33. 4]. The perfection of love is in loving God with all of one's heart. (ibid)

When discussing the second means, Imām Abū Ḥāmid identifies love with gnosis. This is a move which was first seen with al-Daylamī, but which was not repeated by any after him and even opposed by some. As al-Qushayrī writes:

Sumnūn [al-Muḥibb] gave precedence to love (*maḥabba*) over gnosis, but most give precedence to gnosis over love. According to the verifiers, love is destruction in delight and gnosis is witnessing in bewilderment (*dabsha*) and annihilation in awe (*hayba*).¹¹³

¹¹³ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 327; Von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*, 338.

But for Imām Abū Ḥāmid gnosis and love are one and the same:

The second effect for the strength of love is the strength of gnosis of God and its expanding and overpowering the heart, and that is after purifying the heart of all its preoccupations with the world and its attachments. Then from this seed is born the tree of gnosis and love. That is the good word of which God has struck an example when He says: ‘God strikes the example of a good word, like a good tree whose root is firm and whose branches are in the sky’ [13. 24] (Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, iv. 276).

He goes on to say (ibid, 277): ‘Whenever this gnosis is attained, love follows it necessarily.’

Considering the issues raised in al-Hujwīrī’s refutation of certain positions regarding *‘ishq* which are not available in the textual tradition, it appears that Imām Abū Ḥāmid is also taking a stance on issues which were actively debated in the oral tradition. That discussions of love which are not recorded took place is suggested when he declares that the fifth form of love is (ibid, 276) ‘left under the cover of dust until the wayfarers stumble upon it’. That which is not recorded is according to Abū Ḥāmid the knowledge of God in Himself, for that is a higher path, and ‘the higher path is witnessing the Real beyond all creation. It is concealed and discussion of it is beyond the understanding of most men, so there is no benefit in seeking it in books’ (ibid, 277).

Regarding these debates, it is clear that unlike al-Hujwīrī and Abū ‘Alī al-Daqqāq, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī maintains that man can have *‘ishq* for God, that God has *‘ishq* for man, and that through *‘ishq* man can know God in His very Essence, not only His attributes and actions. To know God in Himself is what he calls the higher path. He gives the reader some indication of what the higher path entails when contrasting it to the lower path:

Those who reach this level are divided into the strong, whose first gnosis is of God, then through Him they know His acts, and the weak, whose first gnosis is of the acts, then they ascend from that to the Agent. To the first there is an allusion through His word: ‘Does not your Lord suffice? Verily He is a witness over everything’ [41. 54], and through His word: ‘God bears witness that there is no god but Him’ [3. 18] . . . To the second there is allusion in His word: ‘We will show them Our signs on the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real’ [41. 53. . .] This path is the lower according to most and it is more widespread among the wayfarers. (ibid)

Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī decides to leave the details of this higher path aside, but in the *Sawāniḥ* Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ghazālī goes directly for the higher path. Nonetheless, of all the teachings on love between the time of al-Ḥallāj and the appearance of the *Sawāniḥ*, the *Iḥyā’* provides

the clearest example of an attitude toward love similar to that expressed in the *Sawānīh* and later Persian writings. For the first time since the few passages attributed to al-Ḥallāj by al-Daylamī over a century before, there appears a thoroughly positive treatment of *ishq* and an expression of the belief that in its highest degree it is tied to gnosis, not only of God's acts and attributes, but of the Divine Essence in and of Itself.

2.9.3 God's Love for Man. In concluding this examination of Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's understanding of love, we must briefly discuss God's love for man. The Imām distinguishes the love of the servant for the Creator from that of the Creator for the servant. The love of the servant is for that from which it derives greater perfection, 'And this is impossible for God, for every perfection, beauty, wonder and magnificence is possible in the truth of the Divinity' (ibid, 286). The love of God for man is thus in fact God's inclination toward Himself. In one of the most important passages of the *Iḥyā'*, he indicates that all love is ultimately God's love for Himself:

None has a view of Him in so far as he is other than Him, rather, one's view is of His Essence and His acts only, and there is nothing in existence but His Essence and His acts. Therefore when the verse, 'He loves them and they love Him' (5. 54) was read to him, Shaykh Abū Sa'īd al-Mihānī (d. 440/1048–9)¹¹⁴ said: 'He loves them truly, for there is nothing in love except Himself,' meaning that He is the entirety and that there is nothing in existence except Him.¹¹⁵

Viewed in this light, every love, every inclination and every delight is for God and from God. The five stages of man's love for God are thus five ways in which God loves Himself through the love of His servants for Him.

3 CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, there is little that can be done to determine exactly who the Sufi teachers were that shared the understanding of love alluded to by

¹¹⁴ Abū Sa'īd Faḍl b. Abī l-Khayr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Mihānī al-Ṣūfī—a Sufi shaykh in Khurasan known for asceticism, practicing seclusion and performing miracles. He is said to have sat with al-Sulamī, and it is reported that Imām al-Ḥarāmī al-Juwaynī transmitted reports from him. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, xvii. 622; Tāj al-Dīn Abū Naṣr 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. 'Alī al-Subkī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-kubrā* (Cairo: 'Īsā-l-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964–76), v. 306.

¹¹⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, iv. 286.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī in the *Iḥyā'* and expressed by Aḥmad al-Ghazālī in the *Sawāniḥ*. In light of the texts available to us, al-Daylamī's claim that al-Ḥallāj was unique among the *shuyūkh* in maintaining that *'ishq* is an attribute pertaining to the Divine Essence and that every manifestation of it is directly connected to that Essence appears to be accurate. But it may be that he was unique in openly proclaiming teachings that others felt were best left unsaid. This is evident in the writings of al-Qushayrī, al-Hujwīrī and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. The first two allude to the pressures to criticize such teachings because of their unorthodox nature. But al-Hujwīrī also tells us that 'the Shaykhs wish the doctrine of Divine Love to remain hidden',¹¹⁶ thus alluding to the fact that even those who agree with the teachings of al-Ḥallāj see no benefit in exposing treasures to the uninitiated that might only befuddle their intellects. It is most likely in this vein that Imām Abū Ḥāmid tells us that the discussion of *'ishq* is 'left underneath the cover of dust until the wayfarers of the path stumble upon it'.¹¹⁷ This indicates that one must attain to a certain degree of spiritual maturity before one is able to properly understand the nature of love and especially that of *'ishq*. Read in this light, statements such as that of Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq which criticize the use of the word *'ishq* may in fact be meant to dissuade novices from speculating on teachings meant only for the advanced. Evidently Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ghazālī felt differently about exposing such teachings. As he writes in the beginning of the *Sawāniḥ*:

Sometimes an earthen vessel or a glass bead is put in the hand of a novice so that he can become a master artisan; but sometimes a precious, shining pearl which the master's hand of knowledge does not dare touch, let alone pierce, is put into his ignorant hand to pierce.¹¹⁸

This means that sometimes the most sublime truths can, and perhaps even should, be exposed to spiritual novices so that their treasures may be mined.

Given the paucity of textual evidence, efforts to uncover the reasons for limiting discussion of *'ishq* would draw us more into the realm of conjecture than analysis. It is, however, clear that in the *Sawāniḥ* Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ghazālī chose to put to paper that which others had been reticent to write. This choice was a watershed event in Sufi history, the impact of which continues to be felt in our own day.

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¹¹⁶ Hujwīrī, *Kashf*, 398; Nicholson, 308.

¹¹⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, iv. 267.

¹¹⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Sawāniḥ*, ed. Pourjavady, p. 4 (1) (trans., 18); ed. Ritter, 5 (1); ed. Rabbānī, 156 (introduction).