

**Tales of God's Friends:
Islamic Hagiography in Translation**

John Renard, ed.

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California Press, 2009. 413 pages.*

Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation, an anthology that honors Sufis from every corner of the Muslim world, provides an easily accessible overview of Sufism's history and the particularities of individual Sufi experiences that helped spread Islam throughout the world. A valuable contribution to the contemporary literature of Sufi studies, this volume also offers an excellent overview of the Sufi path and philosophy as well as classic texts of Islamic mysticism. The wide-ranging and eclectic collection of

sources is a particular strength, and manuscripts have been edited with references to several authors who knew the life history of these Sufis.

The book contains twenty illustrations; a preface; six parts (divided into twenty-seven chapters); an appendix and a glossary; notes about the contributors; an index of names; an index of concepts, themes, places, and book titles; and a Qur'an index. The editor claims that it is the first truly global English-language anthology of Islamic hagiography, both historically and geographically – it is translated from seventeen languages of origin, with the help of two dozen Islamic scholars specializing in broad spectrum of languages (pp. xi-xiv).

The introduction, “Islamic Hagiography: Sources and Contexts,” gives a complete picture of the theme and methodology used to produce this sensitive and delicate treatise. Four filters, namely, geography, culture, chronology, language, and literature, are employed to understand this anthology. The book's twenty texts and twenty illustrations represent a variety of literary forms, functions, and hermeneutical presuppositions (pp.1-12).

Part 1, “The Arab Middle East and North Africa,” consists of a hagiographical anthology of “Abu Bakr” (John Renard), “Tamimi's Eyewitness Account of Abu Ya'za Yallanur” (Kenneth Honerkamp), “‘Abd Allah ibn As'ad al-Yafi'i's Defense of Saintly Marvels” (Erik S. Ohlander), and “The Wafa'iyah of Cairo” (Richard McGregor). Part 2, “Iran and Afghanistan,” deals with medieval and contemporary Sufi orders: “Junayd in the ‘Hilyat al-awliya’ and the ‘Nafhat al-uns’” (Jawid Mojaddedi), “Sa'di's Earthly Vision of Sainthood in the ‘Bustan’ and the ‘Gulistan’” (Fatemeh Keshavarz), “Ostad Elahi and Hajji Ni'mat: Master and Disciple, Father and Son” (James W. Morris), and “A Miracle of an Afghan Friend of God, the Mulla of Hadda” (David Edwards).

Part 3, “Turkey and Central Asia,” presents several medieval mystics: “Three Tales from the Central Asian ‘Book of Hakim Ata’” (Devin DeWeese), “Sari Saltik Becomes a Friend of God” (Ahmet T. Karamustafa), “Sari Ismail: The Beloved Disciple of Haci Bektas Veli” (Vernon James Schubel and Nurten Kilic-Schubel), and “Yunus Emre Seeks His Share: Traditional and Modern Accounts” (Mark Soileau). Part 4, “Africa: West and East,” consists of hagiographical panegyric poems: “Shaykh al-Hajj Abbass Sall: In Praise of the Tijaniya Order” (Bachir Diagne), “Imitating the Life of the Prophet: Nana Asma'u and Usman dan Fodiyo” (Beverly B. Mack), “Job's Wife in the Swahili ‘Epic of Job’” (J. W. T. Allen), and “The Death of Shaykh Uways of Somalia” (Scott Reese).

Part 5, "South Asia," focuses on "A Tazkira for the Times: Saving Islam in Post-Partition Punjab" (Anna Bigelow), "Tales of Renewal: Ahmad Sirhindi, Reformer of the Second Millennium" (Arthur Buehler), "Sufi Poetry of the Indus Valley: Khwaja Ghulam Farid" (Jamal J. Elias), "The Isma'ili Pir Sadr ad-Din" (Ali S. Asani), "An Indo-Persian Guide to Sufi Shrine Visitation" (Carl W. Ernst), "Sufi Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: The Worldly and Spiritual Journeys of Khwaja Hasan Nizami" (Marcia Hermansen), "Bonbibì, Protectress of the Forest" (Sufia Mendez Uddin), and "The Tales of Manik Pir: Protector of Cows in Bengal" (Tony K. Stewart). Part 6, "Southeast and East Asia," contains hagiographical selections of pre-modern and modern Muslim communities in Brunei, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, and China: "The Malay Story of Muhammad al-Hanafiya" (Lode F. Brakel), "Sunan Ampel of the Javanese Wali Songo" (Anna M. Gade), and "Lan Zixi's 'Epitaphs of the Real Humans'" (Sachiko Murata).

One problem with such hagiographies is the amount of repetition, especially about Sufism's core concepts, principles, and its history in practice. A relatively minor criticism is that probably not enough attention is paid to the transliteration of names and places. In addition, the editor does not point out that Sufism's general picture, the arguments advanced by its practitioners, and those arguments' underlying interpretations are all contested; rather, he presents all of them, without any critical perspective, as unproblematic truth. As a result, those hoping for any critical treatment will be disappointed.

Overall, the book is both well translated and well structured by the editor. John Renard provides an insight into Islamic mysticism, identifies a range of Sufi concepts, and shows that new Sufi concepts could coexist alongside older ones. Those seeking an overview of Sufi terminology, themes, and concepts as they emerged in this anthology will find much of value here, especially historians and practitioners.

This hagiographical collection presents an understanding of Islam as a religion of peace. The texts are also important for students, historians, and practitioners of Sufism and for philosophers interested in the development of the Sufi philosophy of mind and psychology. Given the growing interest in Sufism, this book is a welcome addition. I recommend this majestic piece of Islamic hagiography to anyone interested in Sufi thought and philosophy of mind more generally, for it is a valuable reference volume and an excellent text to use in advanced classes of Sufi philosophy.

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