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Two important mistakes in paraphrase words of mysticism sheikhs

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Introduction

Sufis and the disciples of the great masters committed their sayings and teachings to writing, compiled them, and organized them according to a thematic structure. In fact, the disciples and followers of the great Sufi masters of the third century AH kept the Sufi movement alive in their own lives by recalling the words and teachings of their masters and transmitting them orally from one generation to the next until the middle of the fourth century AH. From the middle of the fourth century onward, however, a significant transformation took place in Sufism: the teachings of earlier masters began to be systematically recorded and preserved in written form. This marked the first systematic scholarly approach to mysticism and Sufism; more precisely, it may be regarded as the emergence of Sufism as a distinct field of knowledge.

In this process, the failure to observe scholarly principles, together with carelessness in transmitting the sayings of Sufi masters, allowed numerous errors to enter the early sources of Sufism and subsequently paved the way for these inaccuracies to be reproduced in the works of later authors. In this article, through a qualitative examination of the principal sources of Sufism, we seek to identify and correct some of these errors. The importance of this investigation lies in demonstrating that many of the major foundational texts of Sufism contain considerable inaccuracies in the attribution of sayings. Awareness of these inaccuracies can be valuable for scholars and researchers consulting these texts.

The central question of this study is therefore: Are the individuals identified as the speakers of sayings transmitted in the scholarly and foundational texts of Sufism correctly identified? And, where errors in attribution do occur, what methods or mechanisms of transmission gave rise to them?

Research finding

۱. Attribution of a Saying to the Transmitter Rather Than to the Original Speaker

One of the two major errors in the transmission of the sayings of Sufi masters is the attribution of a saying to its transmitter rather than to the person who originally

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uttered it. In such cases, the roles of speaker and transmitter have effectively been reversed: a person who merely transmitted a saying from someone else is presented as its speaker, while the name of the original speaker is subsequently omitted.

The origins of this error can be traced to the decision by authors of scholarly works on Sufism to omit the chains of transmission (*asānīd*). Only a limited number of sources—including *Ḥilyat al-Awliyāʾ*, al-Sulamī's *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*, and, in some cases, al-Sarrāj's *al-Lumaʿ*—continued to follow the hadith tradition of explicitly identifying transmitters.

The omission of chains of transmission had become common by the time works such as al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* were composed. Evidence for this can be found in works such as Sīrjānī's *Bayāḍ va-Savād*, composed in the fifth century AH, as well as an anonymous treatise from the same period that Dr. Pūrjavādī has titled *ʿIlm al-Taṣawwuf*. All of these works lack chains of transmission.

The significance of this issue lies in the fact that including a chain of transmission required the author to exercise greater care in recording the names of individuals. Once the *isnād* was omitted, however, errors in identifying and recording the names of speakers became more frequent, particularly in later sources, where scholarly precision in transmitting sayings had declined in comparison with earlier works. It appears that the reason for omitting transmitters was that the authors of such works considered the inclusion of chains of transmission unnecessary, cumbersome, and even time-consuming, regarding the saying itself and its meaning as the essential elements.

۲. Visual and Auditory Errors in the Attribution of Sayings

There is a long-established tradition in which one person would read a text aloud or recite material from memory—in other words, *imlāʾ* (dictation)—while another person, or a group of people, would write it down. The title *mustamlī*, borne by many individuals, reflects the prevalence of this practice in earlier periods, particularly among hadith scholars and, indeed, among Sufis. The best-known example is al-Mustamlī al-Bukhārī, the commentator on the *Taʿarruf*.

The practice of *imlāʾ* could potentially double the likelihood of error, since two individuals were involved in the process. If, for any reason, the person dictating misread, misperceived, or misremembered a word, the scribe would inevitably reproduce the error. Conversely, even if the person dictating read the word correctly, an error could still enter the text if the scribe misheard it. Handwriting itself was another important factor contributing to errors that found their way into different manuscript copies of Arabic and Persian texts. Numerous words can undergo a complete change in meaning simply through the alteration or displacement of a single dot.

Thus, it was sufficient for a scribe, while copying a saying or an anecdote from another manuscript, to record the speaker's name incorrectly because of fatigue, inattention, or inadequate literacy. Such an error could then be perpetuated and repeated by numerous subsequent scribes and even by later authors.

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Conclusion

A close examination of the sayings transmitted in Sufi sources, together with careful scrutiny of the individuals identified as their speakers, reveals two major types of error in attributing sayings to Sufi masters.

The first is the interchange of the transmitter and the speaker. In other words, an individual who originally transmitted a saying from someone else is identified as its speaker in subsequent texts. This error generally has two causes: (۱) the omission of the chain of transmitters that had been provided in the earlier sources, and (۲) the greater renown of the transmitter compared with that of the original speaker.

The second type of error resulted from visual and auditory similarities between the names of certain Sufi masters. Combined with ordinary human error, such similarities led to the misattribution of a number of sayings. One possible source of this type of error can be traced to the tradition of *imlā'* (dictation). Since this process involved two individuals, an error on the part of either the person dictating or the person recording the text could introduce inaccuracies into the written transmission.

These two factors, compounded by the limited literacy and insufficient knowledge of some authors and scribes, resulted in many Sufi sayings being incorrectly attributed to individuals other than their original speakers.

Keywords: mysticism, words of sheikhs, narrator, speaker, to ascribe.