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## SHAYKH MUSTAPHA KAMAL AL DIN AL BAKRI – A SUFI REFORMER IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY EGYPT

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The eighteenth century witnessed the widespread development of Islamic renewal and reform trends. The religious-political movements that emerged included, among others, the Wahabiya in Arabia, the Padri in Sumatra and the Jihads in North and West Africa. Sufi *turuq* (fraternities) took an active part in many of these movements. One of these was the Khalwatiya, which had originated in the fourteenth century in Persia. In the eighteenth century this order underwent a revival initiated by Mustafa Kamal al Din al Bakri (1688–1748).

Branches of the Khalwatiya had been established in Cairo as early as the first half of the sixteenth century. Two influential ones were the Ghulshaniya (named after Ibrahim al Ghulshani, d. 1534) and the Dimardashiya (named after

Muhammad al Dimardash, d. 1525). Both were Khalwati *shuyukh* (pl. of *shaykh*) of Persian origin, and parts of their liturgies were in Persian and Turkish. This explains why their followings mainly comprised members of the higher classes of the same origin, including soldiers and officers of the Turkish garrison in Cairo, and why these orders held little appeal for ordinary Egyptians. There is no evidence that they had any significant number of adherents outside Cairo.<sup>1</sup> Matters changed, however, with the arrival in Cairo from Jerusalem of Mustafa al Bakri in 1718.

Al Bakri was already famous when he arrived in Cairo, and he was welcomed by a large crowd of local *ulama* (Muslim scholars). It was on that occasion that al Bakri first met Muhammad Salim al Hifni, who was then a poor young

teacher who earned his living by copying textbooks. It is most likely that al Hifni was already acquainted with the Khalwatiya, since he had spent time in the *zawiya* of Shahin al Khalwati, who came from Persia in the second half of the fifteenth century to become one of the first *shuyukh* of the order in Egypt. Sources report that the two men immediately formed a spiritual bond (*irtibat qalbi*), and al Bakri accepted al Hifni's oath of allegiance (*Ahd*).<sup>2</sup>

Although authorized by al Bakri to initiate novices and teach the Khalwati *dhikr* (the Sufi ritual of physical movements), al Hifni did not succeed in doing so for the next sixteen years, during which he seemed more concerned with teaching in various Cairo mosques. He was considered a popular teacher, and hundreds attended

his courses. In 1736, however, al Hifni visited al Bakri in Jerusalem. For four intensive months, he was gradually initiated into the different stages the *murid* (disciple) must undergo in order to reach perfection (*kamal*). He was also taught the seven secret names (*al asma al saba*). Al Bakri invested him with the special Sufi dress (*hirqa*) and with "the crown of mystical knowledge" (*taj al jrfan*) and proclaimed him his chief *khalifa* (successor).<sup>3</sup> Upon his return to Cairo, al Hifni propagated the Khalwatiya with such intensity that he succeeded in admitting thousands to the order. For the first time since the arrival in Cairo of Shaykh Shahin al Khalwati, the order was headed by an Egyptian native.

The Khalwatiya spread like wildfire under al Hifni, within a few years winning adherents among the common people in Cairo, in the provincial towns and in thousands of villages along the Nile valley, and becoming the leading order in Egypt. It was al Hifni who completed the process of reform and revival that al Bakri had begun, by bringing the Khalwatiya into full identification with the *sharia* (the canon law of Islam), so that the order became the Muslim orthodoxy in Egypt.<sup>4</sup> Time and again al Hifni recalled al Bakri's guidance in this respect, according to which Sufism without the *sharia* was atheism (*Al Haqiqqa bedun sharia – zindaka*).<sup>5</sup> The successful fusion between the Khalwatiya and the *sharia* was symbolized by the 1757 appointment of al Hifni to the highest post in the religious hierarchy of Egypt: *Shaykh Mashaykh al Azhar* (Rector of Al Azhar). For seventy years after him (1767–1838), nine Khalwati

*shuyukh* occupied this position. No wonder that the historian al Jabarti described the Khalwatiya as "the best Sufi order" (*khayr al turuq*).<sup>6</sup>

But the influence of these *shuyukh* extended much further than Cairo's Al Azhar. They not only taught their students from all over the Muslim world the Islamic sciences. They also inculcated them with Sufism and initiated them into their *tariqa*. Thus, these graduates returned to their native countries not only as freshly baked *ulama* but also as carriers of a dual message: to spread Islam among their people and to propagate their masters' Sufi *tariqa* – the Khalwatiya of Al Bakri's school.

A good example of al Bakri's influence is to be found in Morocco. The country was ruled in this period by two reformist-oriented sultans: Sidi Muhammad b. Abd Allah (1757–1790) and his son Mawlay Sulayman (1792–1822). Both had been strongly influenced by reformed Khalwati *shuyukh* in Egypt. The link was formed through the leading *ulama* of Fez, who passed through Cairo on their way to Mecca to make the Haj. Some of them studied for varying periods in the college of Al Azhar with such Khalwati *shuyukh* as Salim al Hifni (d. 1768), Ahmad al Dardir (d. 1786) and Mahmud al Kurdi (d. 1780).<sup>7</sup> Upon their return to the Maghrib they carried with them Khalwati ideas of reform and revival. Through these *ulama*, the sultans became acquainted with the Cairo *shuyukh*, with some of whom they maintained a vivid exchange of ideas. Sidi Muhammad, for instance, corresponded with Ahmad al Dardir and sought his advice on various religious issues. In 1784 he sent al Dardir a generous grant, which enabled the

*shaykh* to perform the Haj and build his own *zawiya* (prayer niche; later: Sufi hostel-mosque) in Cairo. The same sultan later sent the Khalwati *ulama* of Egypt copies of his reformatory instructions to the *qadis* of his country, inviting their comments on the documents.<sup>8</sup>

There had been direct connections between Maghribi scholars and reformed Khalwati *shuyukh* in Cairo even before the period of Sidi Muhammad and his son. The first link was made by Abd al Rahman al Azhari (d. 1793), who, as a student at Al Azhar, was initiated into the Khalwatiya by al Hifni.<sup>9</sup> Upon his return to Algeria in 1769, he began disseminating the Khalwatiya there and quickly gained a large following, particularly in his native region of Kabiliya. The order later became known as the Rahmaniya.

It was al Azhari who, in 1773, initiated Sidi Ahmad al Tijani (d. 1815) into the Khalwatiya. Al Tijani visited Cairo in 1773 on his way to perform the Haj. On his way home from Mecca he was re-initiated into the Khalwatiya by Mahmud al Kurdi and was given an *ijaza* (license) to propagate the order in his native country. For eight years after his return to the Maghrib, al Tijani initiated disciples into the Khalwatiya.<sup>10</sup> Then, in 1782, he declared himself the head of a new *tariqa*, though the Tijaniya, as it became known, retained many basic elements of its mother order, the Khalwatiya. One of these was the requirement of exclusive adherence to the *tariqa*. This unique feature had already been advocated by al Bakri in the Khalwatiya sixty years earlier.

Al Hifni considered himself a disciple of al Bakri, to whom he attributed all his accomplishments.

He often remarked that all his knowledge came from his *shaykh*. According to al Jabarti, himself a student of al Hifni, it was al Bakri who erected the pillars of the reformed Khalwatiya (*ashada arkan hadhihi al tariqa*).<sup>11</sup> Who, then, was al Bakri, and what were the reforms that he introduced into the Khalwatiya which enabled his *khalifa*, al Hifni, to lead it to become the most important Sufi order in Egypt?

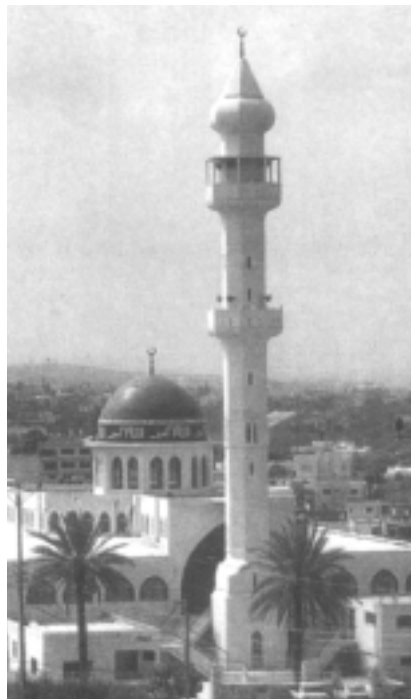
Mustafa ibn Kamal al Din al Bakri was born in Damascus in 1688. In his youth he was admitted into several Sufi orders. His *shaykh* in the Khalwatiya was Abd al Latif al Halabi, a disciple of the founder of the Qarabashiya branch, Shaykh Ali al Qarabashi (d. 1685). A year before his death in 1708, al Halabi appointed al Bakri, then 21, as his sole successor and authorized him to initiate new adherents into his order. From that time onward, al Bakri made many journeys throughout the Ottoman Empire in order to disseminate the Khalwatiya. He visited Istanbul twice and Iraq once, made the Haj to Mecca four times and visited Egypt three times before finally settling down in Cairo in 1748, a year before his death.<sup>12</sup>

In 1710, at the age of 23, al Bakri made his first pilgrimage to the holy places in Jerusalem, where he stayed for four months, recruiting new adherents to the Khalwatiya and spreading the order throughout the Holy Land, as he recounted in his travel diary.<sup>13</sup> Later, for some forty years, he made Jerusalem the main center of his activities, his influence radiating from there to the neighboring countries. His activities revolved around a *zawiya*. In Jerusalem he wrote over two

hundred works. He also introduced a series of reforms into the litanies and practices of the order.

Al Bakri's reforms rested on the foundations of the Qarabashi branch of the Khalwatiya, which spread in the seventeenth century from Thrace (Tur Aish) into Syria, first to Aleppo and later to Damascus. Al Bakri inherited the elements of the order from his *shaykh*, al Halabi, including the following classic, unique features:<sup>14</sup>

- (a) Its leaders were simultaneously *ulama* and Sufi *shuyukh* (*ilm* and *amal*); that is, they were knowledgeable both in Islamic sciences and in Sufi practices.
- (b) The Khalwati *shaykh* was known for his deep religious zeal and strong conviction of the righteousness of his path (*tariqa*), as well as for his charisma and dominating personality.



The great *zawiya* of the Khalwatiya order in Baka al Gharbiya.

(c) The order demanded that very close ties be maintained between the *murid* (disciple) and his *shaykh* (*al rabta al qalbiya*). The latter supervised his pupils' conduct at all times (*Muraqaba*).

Among the requirements of the order are:

- (a) Participation in communal *dhikr* exercises and weekly evening guidance sessions (*hadra*).
- (b) Assistance in the communal readings of the *wird al Sattar*, the most important litany of the Khalwatiya, composed by Yahia al Shirwani (1464), one of the earliest *shuyukh* of the order.
- (c) In addition to requiring long periods of retreat (*khalwa*), the order demands the observance of silence (*samt*) and vigil (*sahar*) and participation in communal prayer vigils (*wird al Sahar*).

Scholars such as F. de Jong, a foremost author on Sufi *turuq* in Egypt, have cast doubt on the revivalism introduced by al Bakri,<sup>15</sup> but our sources clearly document his reforms. Shaykh Hassan al Husseini, the Hanafi Mufti of Jerusalem, who was a major disciple of al Bakri, refers to his master as a "*mujadid* (reformer) to his contemporaries and compatriots."<sup>16</sup>

Contrary to previously established practices in Sufi orders, al Bakri's major aim was to consolidate and centralize the order's practices and to introduce reforms that reflected complete identification with Muslim orthodoxy. Thus, although he himself had been initiated into several *turuq* in his youth, he forbade his followers to belong to orders other than the Khalwatiya. Since simultaneous adherence to several orders had previously been

common, this was surely no minor innovation in the world of medieval Islamic Sufism, and it was therefore not easily implemented. Al Bakri had long arguments over this issue with two of his major disciples in Egypt, al Hifni and Mahmud al Kurdi (d. 1780), both his own *khulafa*, Al Hifni eventually gave up his allegiance to the Shadhiliya order, while al Kurdi was given permission to retain certain elements of Shaykh al Qusayri's *awrad* (supplementary prayer texts specific to each order).

Al Bakri also abolished the wild displays of ecstasy that had formerly characterized *dhikr* performances in the Khalwatiya. Other aspects of his reforms included the following:

(a) Al Bakri introduced changes in the text of the *wird al Sattar*. He instructed his followers never to recite the *wird* in private, but only in a congregation and under the guidance of a *shaykh*. The reason for this reform, as al Bakri himself explained, was to enhance the supervision of the *shaykh* over his disciples. Al Bakri was extremely conscious of maintaining the balance between popular Sufism and strict adherence to the *sharia*.

(b) Al Bakri favored the loud *dhikr* (*al jahri* or *lisani*) over the inward or quiet *dhikr* (*al khafi* or *al qalbi*). Although his own writings testify that participants sometimes fainted during *dhikr* performances over which he presided in Jerusalem, there is no evidence that he ever permitted singing and music to accompany these performances.<sup>17</sup>

(c) Visits to tombs were always a feature of popular Sufism. Here,

too, al Bakri carefully avoided contravening *sharia* rulings that prohibited the demonstrative aspects of this cult, such as kissing the tombstone, lighting candles next to it and other idolatrous-looking practices. Thus, al Bakri regularly visited tombs during his time in Jerusalem, but he avoided tombs of saints, restricting himself scrupulously to those of prophets and patriarchs. He was always careful not to address prayers to the tomb dweller but rather to ask Allah alone to have mercy on the soul of the departed.

(d) Voll and Levtzion have cited the return to moderate Sufism as advocated by al Ghazali and the rejection of the extremism espoused, for example, by Ibn al Arabi as a distinctive aspect of eighteenth-century renewal and reform.<sup>18</sup> Already in the seventeenth century, the Khalwatiya



Shaykh Alif Ibn Husni al-Din al-Qasimi, *shaykh* of the Khalwati *zawiya* in Baka al Gharbiya.

had advocated the type of Sufism taught in the tenth century by al Junei'd ibn Muhammed (d. Baghdad 910), a major disciple of al Harith al Muhasibi (d. 857), leader of the "Baghdad school" of Sufism. Al Bakri not only strongly urged his followers to follow in the footsteps of al Junei'd and his moderate "path of sobriety, seeking to reconcile the *sharia* with Sufi truth (*Haqiqa*),"<sup>19</sup> but he also showed increased interest in al Ghazali. Excerpts from al Ghazali's *Ihya* were interspersed in some of the *awrad* that he composed, and he wrote a commentary on a poem attributed to al Ghazali.<sup>20</sup>

The sources are extremely vague regarding the origins of al Bakri's reforms. However, they mention several cases in which al Bakri sought the guidance of the spiritual head of his order, Shaykh Hassan ibn Ali al Qarabashi, before instituting reforms. For example, before he introduced changes into the traditional text of the *wird al sahar* litany, he sent a copy of the planned text to the *shaykh* at Erdine and asked for his approval. In order to overcome opposition to some of his reforms, al Bakri was careful to assure his disciples that they derived from the basic principles of the Khalwatiya and to emphasize that all his reforms were based on the Damascus Khalwati *tariqa* (*Khalwatiyat al Sham*).<sup>21</sup> Thus, in regulating the mode of the *dhikr* exercises, al Bakri based himself on a religious verdict (*fatwa*) of another of his Damascus teachers, Abd al Ghani al Nabulsi (d. 1143), a well-known Naqshabandi *shaykh* and author of several travel journals

(*rahlāt*), who had approved the introduction of loud *dhikr* into Sufi practices.

It was these reforms of al Bakri, as disseminated by al Hifni, that brought the reformed Khalwatiya in Egypt to its peak in the eighteenth century. Al Bakri's complete identification with the *sharia* was doubtless the decisive factor in enabling the Khalwati *shuyukh* to dominate the highest position in Egypt's Muslim hierarchy for close to a hundred years. In numerous sermons to his disciples, al Bakri emphasized that "his way" was the way of the *sharia*, declaring that "whoever does not understand this is simply short of mind" (*qusur fi aqlihi*). For him, Sufism and orthodoxy were inseparable (*huma multaziman*).

In conclusion, we should note that the Khalwatiya as reformed by al Bakri is one of the few Sufi orders to have survived the upheavals of modernity and anti-Sufi trends in the Arab world. Moreover, it has witnessed a comeback in Jordan, in Israeli Arab villages and in the Palestinian West Bank, where scores of *zawaya* have opened. A major *zawiya* linked with the Rahmaniya branch of the Khalwatiya was established in Baka al Gharbiya, in the Israeli "Little Triangle" area, followed in 1989 by the opening of a Higher College of *Sharia* Studies, offering courses in Islamic studies and Sufism and preparing hundreds of male and female students for the teaching profession.<sup>22</sup>

1. G. Weigert, 'The Khalwatiya in Egypt in the Eighteenth Century,' *Bulletin of the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo*, No. 9 (1994), pp. 17–20.
2. Jabarti (al) Abd al-Rahman, *Aja'eb el Athar fi'l tarajim wa'l Akhbar*, Cairo 1297 H., I, p. 289.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 295–302.
4. Weigert, "The Khalwatiya" (above, note 1).
5. Bakri (al) Mustapha Kamal al Din, *Majmu' Awarad*, Cairo 1324 H., p. 150.
6. Jabarti (above, note 2), I, p. 166.
7. For more on this topic see N. Levtzion and G. Weigert, 'Religious Reform in the Eighteenth Century,' *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 19 (volume honoring P. Shinar), Jerusalem 1995, pp. 173–197.
8. Jabarti (above, note 2), II, p. 148.
9. Levtzion and Weigert, "Religious Reform" (above, note 7).
10. On al Tijani see D.S. Margoliouth, *Encyclopedia of Islam* (shorter edition), s.v. *Tijaniya*, p. 594.
11. G. Weigert, *The Khalwatiya in Egypt in the Eighteenth Century: A Nucleus for Islamic Revival*, Ph.D. Dissertation, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1989 (in Hebrew, English summary). For a reconstruction of the line of Khalwati *shuyukh* al Azhar in the eighteenth century see pp. 140–142.
12. Muradi (al) Muhammad Khalil, *Silk al Durrar fi a'yan al Qarn al thani ashur*, Cairo 1291–1301 H., IV, p. 161.
13. Al Bakri, *Al Khamra al Hissiya fi al Rihla al Qudsiya* (The intoxication of the senses during a journey to Holy Jerusalem), ms, Damascus 1122 H. A copy of the manuscript of this diary was discovered by the Jerusalem researcher Fahmi al Ansari in the famous al Khalidi family library in the Old City of Jerusalem.
14. Muradi, *Silk al Durrar* (above, note 12), *loc. cit.*; Jabarti (above, note 2), I, pp. 294–295; al Bakri, *Majmu'* (above, note 5), p. 147.
15. F. de Jong, "Mustafa Kamal al Din al Bakri (1688–1749): Revival and Reform of the Khalwatiya Tradition?" in N. Levtzion and J.O. Voll (eds.), *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, Syracuse, N.Y., 1987, pp. 117–132.
16. Hussayni (al) Hassan, *Tarajim ahil al Quds fi'l qarn al Thani ashur*, Amman 1985, p. 158.
17. Baytar (al) Abd al Razaq, *Khaliyat al Beshr fi Tarikh al qarn al Thalith ashur*, Damascus 1383, p. 98.
18. Muhammad Hussein Makhoulouf, *Awarad al Sadah al Khalwatiya*, Cairo 1308 H., p. 34.
29. R.A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Cambridge 1941, p. 392.
20. Al Bakri, *Majmu'* (above, note 5), p. 156.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 175 and 187.
22. Afif Ibn Husni al Din al Qasmi, *Adwa ala al Tariqa al Khalwatiya*, Baka al Gharbiya, Israel, 1997.