

Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology

Edited by
LEJLA DEMIRI
and SAMUELA PAGANI

Sapientia Islamica

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Mohr Siebeck

Sapientia Islamica

Studies in Islamic Theology,
Philosophy and Mysticism

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Early Modern Trends in Islamic Theology

ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī
and His Network of Scholarship
(Studies and Texts)

Edited by

Lejla Demiri and
Samuela Pagani

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ISBN 978-3-16-156668-4 / eISBN 978-3-16-156669-1
DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-156669-1

ISSN 2625-672X / eISSN 2625-6738 (Sapientia Islamica)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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The book was typeset by Martin Fischer in Tübingen using Minion typeface, printed on non-aging paper by Gulde Druck in Tübingen, and bound by Buchbinderei Spinner in Ottersweier.

Printed in Germany.

Acknowledgments

The first seeds of this volume were planted at the three-day international conference dedicated to the study of ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī’s legacy, held at the Centre for Islamic Theology, Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, on 4–6 September 2014. We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to Prof. Dr. Bernd Engler, the Rector of the University, and Prof. Dr. Erdal Toprakyan, the executive director of the Centre, for their support in hosting this important event. We are also grateful to the team of colleagues and student assistants who kindly agreed to offer their help in organising this enriching conference. Our warm thanks go to the scholars who shared their expertise, insight and erudition with us at this gathering, and also agreed to contribute to this volume. Last but not least, we thank our two very generous sponsors, the Postgraduate Programme Islamic Theology of the Mercator-Stiftung, and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, without whose confidence and support this initiative would not have become a reality.

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Note on Transliteration and Dates

The transliteration of Arabic names follows that of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam THREE (EI3)*. For the transliteration of Ottoman Turkish names, modern Turkish orthography is used. Some names appear in their Arabic and Turkish forms (e.g. Muḥammad and Mehmed). If the individual is from the Arabic-speaking territories of the Ottoman Empire, the Arabic transliteration is used, but if he is from the Turkish-speaking territories, the Turkish transliteration is preferred. In some exceptional cases, both transliterations are used, depending on the context (e.g. Khādīmī and Hādīmī; Mişrī and Mīsrī). Technical terms in Arabic are all italicised except for terms that have become common in English (e.g. Hadith, Islam, Kaaba, imam, mufti, sufi, Sunni, Shi'i). The *tā' marbūṭa* (آ-/ة) is rendered as 'a' (e.g. *sūra*), or as 'at' when the word is in the construct state (*iḍāfa*) (e.g. *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*). Double dates are used in reference to the Islamic (A.H.) and Common Era (C.E.) calendars (e.g. 716/1316).

Introduction

‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī and the Intellectual and Religious History of the 17th–18th-Century World of Islam

Lejla Demiri and Samuela Pagani

‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (1050/1641–1143/1731) is one of the major scholars of 17th–18th-century Ottoman Syria. His rich literary output reflects the multifaceted dimensions of Islamic culture. He was an established religious scholar who wrote on the whole range of Islamic religious disciplines (jurisprudence, theology, mysticism, prophetic tradition and Qur’anic exegesis), a sufi thinker who explored the Akbarian theory of the Unity of Being, and a man of letters well known for his poetry and travelogues. The catalogue of his works and of their extant manuscript copies, compiled by Bakri Aladdin in his PhD dissertation, includes two-hundred-and-eighty titles,¹ of which only about sixty have been published to date.² Some of his best known books were printed between the 1860s and the 1880s in Istanbul and in Cairo,³ a sign that his writings, like those of other sufi scholars of the Ottoman period, were read well into the 19th century. Yet, in the 20th-century Arab world, notwithstanding the enduring

¹ Bakri Aladdin, *‘Abdalḡanī an-Nābulusī (1143/1731). Œuvre, vie et doctrine*, PhD diss., University of Paris-Sorbonne, 1985, 2 volumes, vol. 1, pp. 47–238.

² Bakri Aladdin counted 33 published works in his 1985 dissertation (see Aladdin, *‘Abdalḡanī an-Nābulusī*, vol. 1, p. 274). Samer Akkach, in his bibliographies updated to 2008 and 2010, lists 55 published works; see Samer Akkach, *Letters of a Sufi Scholar. The Correspondence of ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (1641–1731)*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, pp. 365–78; Samer Akkach, *Intimate Invocations. Al-Ghazzī’s Biography of ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (1641–1731)*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, pp. 636–40. A few new editions have been published in the meantime, including *Tahqīq al-intiṣār fi ittifāq al-Ash‘arī wa-l-Māturīdī ‘alā khalq al-ikhṭiyār*, ed. Edward Badeen, in *Sunnitische Theologie in osmanischer Zeit*, Istanbul: Orient-Institut, 2008, pp. 81–132; *Burhān al-thubūt fi tabri’at Hārūt wa-Mārūt*, ed. ‘Umar Aḡmad Zakariyyā, Beirut: Dār al-Bashā’ir al-Islāmiyya, 2008; *Khuṭab al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī al-musammā al-Majālis al-shāmiyya fi l-mawā’iz al-rūmiyya*, ed. Hiba al-Māliḡ, Damascus: Dār Nūr al-Ṣabāḡ, 2011.

³ Namely, the commentaries on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Bezels of Wisdom*, Birgivi’s *al-Tarīqa al-muḡammadiyya* and Ibn al-Fāriḡ’s *Dīwān*, his own *Dīwān* and his poems in praise of the Prophet, besides his work on agriculture and his manual on dream interpretation, which remains popular until today.

interest that is attested by the large monograph by the Egyptian scholar ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā’ (d. 1984),⁴ Nābulusī’s legacy was eclipsed by the ascendance of reformist and modernist currents which, despite their differences, shared a negative view of the Ottoman past. In 20th-century Western scholarship, on the other hand, it was considered normal to label the 16th–18th centuries an age of ‘stagnation’ and ‘decline’, in which Nābulusī represented, at best, an ‘exception’.⁵

Serious scholarly engagement with Nābulusī only began when new approaches to Islamic intellectual and social history challenged the theory of decline. The first monograph on Nābulusī to emerge in a Western language, the above-mentioned dissertation by Bakri Aladdin, reflects important historiographical advances in these two fields of research. In the area of intellectual history, Aladdin’s major source of reference is Henry Corbin (d. 1978), to whose memory he dedicated his dissertation. Corbin widened the concept of Islamic philosophy to encompass the mystical and theosophical currents that flourished in the later Middle Ages and whose vitality has continued up to the modern period. In his new synthesis of the history of Islamic philosophy, Corbin drew attention to the post-Ibn ‘Arabī development of the metaphysics of sufism, pointing to the significance of Nābulusī’s contribution.⁶ In the field of social and economic history, Aladdin benefited from the studies of André Raymond and other specialists in the Ottoman Arab world, who rejected the theory of decline, demonstrating that in Syria and Egypt the first half of the 18th century had been a period of urban development and commercial expansion.⁷ At the core of Aladdin’s dissertation stands his study of Nābulusī’s sufi metaphysics, which was subsequently published in a modified form as an introduction to the pub-

⁴ ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā’, *al-Taṣawwuf al-islāmī bayna l-aṣāla wa-l-iqtibās fi ‘aṣr al-Nābulusī*, Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1987.

⁵ See H. A. R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*, vol. 1: *Islamic Society in the Eighteenth Century*, London: Oxford University Press, 1960, part 2, pp. 163–4. The same view appears to be followed by Michael Winter, who opens his article with the following words: ‘It is commonly known that during the Ottoman period Islamic thought in the Arab lands was in a state of stagnation. Little original writing was done, though numerous commentaries, compendia and manuals were produced. One of the names that stand out in the period is that of ‘Abd al-Ġanī ibn Ismā‘īl al-Nābulusī.’ See his ‘A Polemical Treatise by ‘Abd al-Ġanī al-Nābulusī against a Turkish Scholar on the Religious Status of the Ḍimmīs’, *Arabica*, 35 (1988), pp. 92–103, at p. 92.

⁶ See Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. Liadain Sherrard, London: Kegan Paul and Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1993, pp. 312–3 (original edition: Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1986; the second part of this volume first appeared in 1974; see id. ‘La philosophie islamique depuis la mort d’Averroës jusqu’à nos jours’, in *Histoire de la philosophie*, ed. Yvon Belaval, Paris: Gallimard, 1974, vol. 3, pp. 1066–188).

⁷ See Aladdin, *Abdalḡanī an-Nābulusī*, vol. 2, p. 23.

lication of Nābulusī's main work on the subject.⁸ The second comprehensive monograph on Nābulusī is Barbara von Schlegell's dissertation.⁹ Von Schlegell treated Nābulusī's concept of sainthood as a key to understanding his worldview and his social role. This work shed light on the historical significance of Nābulusī's polemical writings, showing that he, like other sufi scholars in the Ottoman world, reacted against the puritanical reform agenda of the Kadızâdeli movement.¹⁰ Von Schlegell's approach reflects the increasing interest of academic research in the 1980s and the 1990s in the social and political dimensions of the history of sufism. Michel Chodkiewicz's study of Ibn 'Arabī's theory of sainthood, considering hagiology as a crucial link between the intellectual and social dimensions of religious life, mystical philosophy and the cult of the saints, provided an important methodological direction.¹¹ A number of studies on the sufi brotherhoods of the 18th–19th centuries also emerged, drawing attention to their social and political activism, and pointing to the indigenous roots of modern movements of renewal and reform.¹²

This new focus in research was accompanied by an intense debate on whether the 18th-century sufi 'renewal' implied the 'purification' of sufism from popular cults and the rejection of Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysical doctrines, as suggested by Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), who identified these two attitudes as distinctive features of what he called 'neo-sufism'.¹³ Von Schlegell stressed that Nābulusī, notwithstanding his social involvement, did not fit in this 'neo-sufi' paradigm. She pointed to the significance of the figure of Nābulusī for the reassessment of the historiographical interpretation of 18th-century sufism.¹⁴ Although well known to specialists, neither Aladdin's nor von Schlegell's dissertation has been published. The only two monographs on Nābulusī published in Western languages are those by Eliz-

⁸ See the editor's introduction in Nābulusī, *al-Wujūd al-ḥaqq wa-l-khiṭāb al-ṣīdīq*, ed. Bakri Aladdin, Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1995, editor's introduction, pp. 9–82.

⁹ Barbara Rosenow von Schlegell, *Sufism in the Ottoman Arab World. Shaykh 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731)*, PhD diss., University of California, 1997.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹¹ Michel Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints. Prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn Arabī*, Paris: Gallimard, 1986.

¹² See for instance Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll (eds.), *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987; Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein (eds.), *Les Voies d'Allah. Les ordres mystiques dans le monde musulman des origines à aujourd'hui*, Paris: Fayard, 1996.

¹³ See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, London: Doubleday, 1966, p. 195; see also Mujiburrahman, "Fazlur Rahman's Critiques of Sufism", in *El Sufismo y las Normas del Islam. Trabajos del IV Congreso Internacional de Estudios Jurídicos Islámicos. Derecho y Sufismo*, ed. Alfonso Carmona, Murcia: Editora Regional de Murcia, 2006, pp. 421–44.

¹⁴ See von Schlegell, *Sufism in the Ottoman Arab World*, pp. 16–22.

abeth Sirriyeh¹⁵ and Samer Akkach.¹⁶ Sirriyeh, like von Schlegell, focussed on Nābulusī's sufism, but with a more marked interest in its aesthetic and literary dimensions, as expressed in Nābulusī's dreams and visions. Sirriyeh also gave particular importance to Nābulusī's self-perception as a 'friend of God', in her analysis of his active defence of sufi ethics and beliefs as a vital part of Islamic faith.¹⁷ Akkach, in contrast, introduced a new perspective in the study of Nābulusī, examining those aspects of his worldview that could be compared to emerging trends in early modern Europe. Shifting towards a 'view from without', in his approach to Nābulusī's thought,¹⁸ Akkach engaged with the important debate on the roots of modernity in the Arab-Ottoman world.¹⁹

The different approaches of these four monographs are indicative of the wide range of historiographical and methodological questions faced by students of Nābulusī. Apart from these essential references, the relevant bibliography has expanded considerably over the last three decades. 'Nābulusian studies' is now a subgroup in the increasing scholarly output on 17th–18th-century Islamic culture, encompassing multiple research interests and approaches. Offering a comprehensive analysis of Nābulusī's writings, the chapters collected here reflect this diversity. The present volume is primarily the outcome of the international conference dedicated to the study of 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī's legacy, held at the Centre for Islamic Theology, Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen (4–6 September 2014) – the first significant academic gathering concentrated on this magisterial figure. The conference brought together more than twenty scholars specialising in Islamic mysticism, theology and jurisprudence, Ottoman studies, and the social and cultural history of the Middle East. This diversity of research interests and approaches brought about a fruitful interdisciplinary dialogue whose results are visible in the present volume. This introduction is intended to show how the studies presented here relate to the current trends in research on the 17th–18th-century intellectual world of Islam.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus. 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, 1641–1731*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005.

¹⁶ Samer Akkach, *'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī. Islam and the Enlightenment*, Oxford: OneWorld, 2007.

¹⁷ See Sirriyeh, *Sufi Visionary*, pp. 133–8.

¹⁸ See Akkach, *'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī*, pp. 45–128.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 3.

Studying Nābulusī's œuvre and persona

An appreciation of Nābulusī in his complex intellectual milieu requires a thorough analysis from different angles, in terms of both disciplines and concepts. The fields of learning to which he contributed are currently the object of distinct specialisations in Islamic studies, and by consequence the collaboration of specialists is necessary. An in-depth analysis of concepts is also needed, in order to grasp the underlying unity of Nābulusī's œuvre and persona. The multifaceted nature of his legacy invites us to reflect on the connections between mysticism and law, theory and practice, and tradition and modernity, instead of regarding these notions as mutually contradictory or detached from one another, as both Muslim and Western discourses on Islam often do. The need for a critical reappraisal of these categories is felt both in religious studies and in the social history of culture, and should be met by drawing on the resources of both approaches. In this book, this objective is pursued by giving equal attention to Nābulusī's scholarship in both 'esoteric' and 'exoteric' disciplines. Nābulusī's output on the latter has been so far under-studied. The chapters presented here on his *fiqh* and *kalām* aim to fill this gap, paving the way for further research on *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*.

Astrid Meier's chapter on his legal thought shows that recovering the 'exoteric' Nābulusī will shed light on the social background of his scholarly work and on the role of sufism in the juridical tradition to which he belonged. This perspective is complementary to the view of sufism as an integral part of Islamic tradition. As Lejla Demiri remarks, in his search for a balance between the 'outward' and the 'inward', Nābulusī is consciously demonstrating continuity with Ghazzālī's legacy. In line with the Ghazzālian path, reflection on the relationship between 'reason' and 'unveiling' has a central role for Nābulusī, as proven by both Jawad Qureshi's and Steven Steyer's chapters on his works on *kalām*, and Bakri Aladdin's and Denis Gril's chapters on his sufi metaphysics. Nābulusī gives primacy to the letter of revelation over rationalist interpretations, to individual experience over dogmatic formulas, and to the personal relationship between God and man over ontological distance between them, without rejecting *kalām*, the rational discourse on God.

Nābulusī's theology and metaphysics are strictly connected to his ethical and political ideas, since spirituality has a key role not only in the individual's religious experience, but also in shaping human relationships. Several aspects of Nābulusī's attitudes to ethics and politics are investigated in this volume (Jonathan Allen, Katharina Ivanyi, Samuela Pagani and Nir Shafir). At the same time, attention is given to the role of personal relationships in

shaping Nābulusī's thought (John Voll) and his perception of the land in which he lived (Steve Tamari and Samir Mahmoud). Nābulusī's inclusiveness of the religious 'Other', both Muslim and non-Muslim, his valorisation of intention versus collectively enforced moral standards, and his outspoken criticism of the injustices of political power have much to say to the contemporary world. These discourses are nourished by his creative link with a traditional religious culture whose openness and diversity may often appear surprising to modern observers.

Defining Nābulusī's time

The problems and themes that run through the chapters will be presented here in order to clarify the coherence of the volume. A preliminary question arises as to how to define Nābulusī's time. While 'decline' is by now unacceptable as a descriptive term to characterise the Ottoman period in the Arabic-speaking territories, the elaboration of alternative interpretive frameworks is still in progress. The term 'early modernity', which we have adopted in this volume is not a neutral concept, despite its wide currency in academic usage. As Stefan Reichmuth explains, it is tied to a revision of the idea of 'progress' in post-World War II European historiography and to a comparative approach in the study of Islamic cultural and social history. Moreover, this approach may either focus on commonalities in transformation processes that affected Europe and the Middle East in the framework of their connected histories, or look for independent variants of 'modernity' before the globalisation of the European model in the colonial era.²⁰

Transfer of concepts and questions between different civilisational spheres may be a perilous enterprise. A case in point is the appropriateness of applying the notion of 'Enlightenment' to 18th-century Islamic intellectual trends. In the 1990s, Reinhard Schulze argued in favour of this possibility, with particular attention to the case of Nābulusī.²¹ The proposal prompted a number of negative reactions.²² Yet, as Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen has recently observed, Schulze's initial idea, although de-

²⁰ Stefan Reichmuth, "Die Frühe Neuzeit als kulturübergreifendes Konzept. Die islamische Welt", unpublished paper, delivered at the 48. *Deutscher Historikertag an der Humboldt-Universität, Berlin, 28.09.-01.10.2010* (panel: "Historische Epochengrenzen und Periodisierungssysteme im globalen Vergleich").

²¹ See Reinhard Schulze, "Das islamische achtzehnte Jahrhundert. Versuch einer historiographischen Kritik", *Die Welt des Islams*, 30 (1990), pp. 140–59, at pp. 151–3; id., "Was ist die islamische Aufklärung?", *Die Welt des Islams*, 36 (1996), pp. 276–325, at pp. 303–4.

²² See, for instance, Gottfried Hagen and Tilman Seidensticker, "Reinhard Schulzes Hypothese einer islamischen Aufklärung. Kritik einer historiographischen Kritik", *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 148/1 (1998), pp. 83–110.

batable, proves with hindsight to have been extremely fecund, because it has stimulated the profound historiographical renewal of the last three decades.²³ In this volume, a reflection on this problem is provided by Samer Akkach, who himself uses the notion of ‘Enlightenment’ in his assessment of Nābulusī’s significance for the intellectual setting of his times. In his chapter, Akkach highlights, on the one hand, the risks of projections and undue conflation between different epistemologies and concepts, while on the other insisting on the importance of adopting a comparative approach to Islamic intellectual history, in order to understand the transition into the modern world. Akkach notes, however, that the comparative perspective is concerned not only with commonalities, but also with differences. A major difference between early modern European and Islamic concepts of knowledge emerges from the fact that the heliocentric cosmology – albeit known to limited circles – had no impact on Ottoman intellectual life. Akkach concludes that this lack of interest should not be read as a symptom of ‘decline’, in contrast to a widespread view of the history of science as a ‘competitive pursuit’ towards a single goal.

Social implications of Nābulusī’s scholarship

As Reichmuth has observed, the ambivalent character of early European modernisation, which simultaneously favoured both emancipatory and authoritarian trends, is particularly apparent in the Islamic world.²⁴ The early modern Ottoman world, in particular, witnessed on the one hand the emergence of new expressions of individuality, the formation of a public sphere, and the expansion of literacy, while on the other, it experienced the rationalisation of state administration, the institutionalisation of religious learning and the stricter definition of right belief and collective religious identities. Nābulusī’s works constitute an important resource for studying this transformation, since they reflect the tensions that these contrasting developments engendered in the social and intellectual life of the Ottoman territories. This is primarily visible in Nābulusī’s involvement in the debates that polarised Ottoman society during the 17th century. The controversies revolved around the lawfulness of old and new social practices and of sufi doctrines and rituals. The Kadızâdeli movement, named after Mehmed Kadızâde (d. 1045/1635), a student of Birgivi Mehmed Efendi (or Birgili, d. 981/1573), was at the forefront of the rigorist camp, while the

²³ Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, “‘A la poursuite de la réforme’. Renouveau et débats historiographiques de l’histoire religieuse et intellectuelle de l’islam (XV^e–XXI^e siècles)”, *Annales, histoire, sciences sociales* (forthcoming).

²⁴ Reichmuth, “Die Frühe Neuzeit”, p. 8.

opposing camp was championed in the mid-17th century by the shaykhs of established sufi orders, particularly the Khalwatiyya. These controversies are usually described as a conflict between sufis and anti-sufis, but Derin Terzioğlu's recent research suggests reading these debates as expressions of a wider conflict over the definition of the Sunna, which involved Ottoman Islam in the framework of changing relationships between religion, state and society.²⁵ From this perspective, the chapters of Katharina Ivanyi and Jonathan Allen examine the commentary that Nābulusī wrote on Birgivi's *al-Ṭariqa al-muḥammadiyya*, the reference book of the Kadizādelis.

Katharina Ivanyi focuses on the question of 'innovation' (*bid'a*), particularly regarding the legal status of coffee and tobacco, clarifying the wider political and legal implications of Nābulusī's defence of these commodities. Ivanyi makes three important points. First, she underlines the fact that Nābulusī's opponents were not simply anti-sufi 'fanatics', but higher authorities of the state. With his opposition to state-enforced measures against smoking, Nābulusī was in fact arguing against the authority of the sultan to impose a specific interpretation of the religious law on his subjects. Second, notwithstanding their opposition to 'innovations', Birgivi and his followers were not strictly speaking 'traditionalists', but representatives of the rationalist theological trends that were in the ascendancy in 17th-century Ottoman madrasas, though some of Birgivi's followers were also influenced by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). Third, state-enforced prohibitions based on the jurists' *ijtihād* and rationalist deductions narrowed the space for jurisprudential pluralism (*ikhtilāf*) within the Ḥanafī school. Nābulusī aimed to check this tendency, arguing in favour of the principle of 'original licitness' (*ibāḥa aṣliyya*), according to which all things are permitted unless there is specific textual evidence to the contrary.

Jonathan Allen's chapter examines Nābulusī's discourse on the Sunna, showing how he neutralised the use of Birgivi's book as a tool in a 'programme of confessional disciplining and enforcement', creatively appropriating a contested textual tradition. For Nābulusī, following the Sunna meant internalising the model of the Prophet, rather than imposing on society a 'one size fits all' standard of behaviour. Moreover, the uninterrupted presence of the 'friends of God' proved that moral perfection was not confined to the days of the *salaf*, thereby encouraging a more lenient attitude towards changes in social practice, instead of denouncing them as signs of the 'corruption of times'. Both Ivanyi and Allen draw attention to the fact that Nābulusī boldly refused the proposal of his correspondent in

²⁵ Derin Terzioğlu, "How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnitization. A Historiographical Discussion", *Turcica*, 44 (2012–3), pp. 301–38; id., "Where *İlm-i Ḥāl* Meets Catechism. Islamic Manuals of Religious Instruction in the Ottoman Empire in the Age of Confessionalization", *Past & Present*, 220/1 (2013), pp. 79–114.

Istanbul to omit from his commentary his controversial position on the lawfulness of smoking.

Nābulusī's preoccupation with keeping as broad as possible the space for discourse in the public sphere is further addressed by Samuela Pagani in her presentation of Nābulusī's treatise on the Khalwatī sufi poet Niyâzî-i Mîsrî (d. 1105/1693), which examines the latter's teaching on the prophetic status of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Niyâzî-i Mîsrî, as has been pointed out by Terzioğlu, differed from mainstream sufi opponents of the Kadızâdelis, with his open criticism of Ottoman policies and the apocalyptic overtones of his oppositional discourse, most clearly visible in his preaching on Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.²⁶ Nābulusī did not consider Niyâzî's provocative teaching to warrant an accusation of unbelief. Instead, he strongly supported the legitimacy of its public disclosure. The circulation of Nābulusī's writings in the Ottoman realm and his influence on the public debates that had divided Ottoman society is abundantly evidenced in the recently edited collection of his letters.²⁷ Nābulusī's critique of Ottoman policies and militant puritan trends was shared by Rumi scholars, both on the margins, by such as Niyâzî, and within the establishment.

Erdal Toprakçayan's chapter in this volume documents Nābulusī's favourable reception by the Ottoman religious establishment of the late 18th century, proving that, notwithstanding state patronage of the Kadızâdeli movement at various points in the 17th century, interest in Ibn 'Arabî and in his Syrian disciple was present within the Ottoman religious elite. Toprakçayan focuses on a significant case study, showing that Nābulusī occupied an important place in the personal chains of transmission of the Ottoman Şeyhülislam Mustafa Âşir Efendi (d. 1219/1804), who read and collected Nābulusī's writings, describing him as the 'spiritual pole of his age'.

Social dimensions of Nābulusī's scholarly activity are also assessed by John Voll through the lens of his scholarly networks. Voll, who has shown in his numerous publications the importance of networks in the study of 18th-century Islam, takes here as a case study Nābulusī's connection to a prominent Damascene Ḥanbalî scholar with whom he shared a number of students and teachers. This case simultaneously illustrates Nābulusī's close

²⁶ Derin Terzioğlu, *Sufi and Dissident in the Ottoman Empire. Niyâzî-i Mîsrî (1618–1694)*, PhD diss., Harvard University, 1999.

²⁷ This collection of letters was published in the same year by both Akkach and Aladdin; see 'Abd al-Ghanî al-Nābulusî, *Wasâ'il al-tahqîq wa-rasâ'il al-tawfîq*, ed. Samer Akkach, in *Letters of a Sufi Scholar. The Correspondence of 'Abd al-Ghanî al-Nābulusî (1641–1731)*, Leiden: Brill, 2010; 'Abd al-Ghanî al-Nābulusî, *Murâsalât al-Nābulusî. Wasâ'il al-tahqîq wa-rasâ'il al-tawfîq*, ed. Bakri Aladdin, Damascus: Dâr al-Ninawâ, 2010.

connection to the Ḥanbalī milieu in Damascus and that milieu's openness to sufism. Nābulusī's colleague and friend Abū l-Mawāhib al-Ḥanbalī (d. 1126/1714) was in fact a sufi, initiated into the Khalwatī path. In Damascus, the Ḥanbalīs were concentrated in the suburb of al-Ṣāliḥiyya, where the mosque of the Ḥanābila and that of Ibn 'Arabī were – and still are – a short distance from each other and where Nābulusī established himself in 1118/1707. This social and geographical proximity is paralleled by Nābulusī's theological affinities with Ḥanbalī traditionalism. Voll explains that networks connect scholars of different affiliations, providing informal settings for intellectual exchange and social interaction. He points out that religious intellectuals like Nābulusī were not simply defined by their affiliation to institutions, sufi paths and schools of law, but were part of an intellectual milieu whose very diversity helped to shape their thought, as is confirmed by the weaving together of multiple legal and theological strands in Nābulusī's work. Borrowing a phrase from Muhsin al-Musawi, Voll calls this intellectual world an 'Islamic republic of letters'. This formula reminds us of the centrality of *adab* in Nābulusī's world. His role as an *adīb*, uncovered in this volume, is a key to understanding his use of language and his mastery of the extremely rich rhetorical resources of Arabic.²⁸

Nābulusī the adīb-mu'addib

Playful poetical exchanges had an important role in urban sociability in public spaces such as gardens and coffeehouses,²⁹ but *adab* was also a means for expressing social estrangement and melancholy. The melancholic aspect of Nābulusī's persona was dealt with by Ralf Elger in his contribution at the Tübingen conference (2014), and can be compared to the same author's studies on other contemporary *udabā'*.³⁰ *Adab* in its broader meaning, covering simultaneously belles lettres, manners and the pedagogy of the self, is, however, not absent from this volume in so far as one of its underlying themes is the connection between ethics and spirituality. As has been shown by a series of conferences coordinated in the past few years by Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, the relationship between

²⁸ See Pierre Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician or The Schemer's Skimmer. A Handbook of Late Arabic badī' Drawn from 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī's Nafahāt al-azhār 'alā nasamāt al-ashār*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998.

²⁹ James Grehan, "Smoking and 'Early Modern' Sociability. The Great Tobacco Debate in the Ottoman Middle East (Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries)", *American Historical Review*, 111/5 (2006), pp. 1352–77.

³⁰ See Ralf Elger, *Glaube, Skepsis, Poesie. Arabische Istanbul-Reisende im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, Würzburg: Ergon, 2011.

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