

Article

Jews and Judaism in the Poetry and Prose of the Persian Sufi Abū Saʿīd-i Abū l-Ḥayr (967–1049 CE): An Approach to the Religious Other in Medieval Islamic Society

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Abstract: This article is a case study of an early Persian Sufi Abū Saʿīd-i Abū l-Ḥayr (357–440H/967–1049 CE) within the wider question of the approach to the religious other in the multi-religious society of medieval Islam. In his poetry and the tales ascribed to him, Abū Saʿīd was one of the first Muslim mystics to have conveyed empathy and even admiration towards Jews, frequently portrayed negatively in early Sufi texts. Simultaneously, he also expresses fundamental enmity towards them and a traditional missionary desire to convert them to Islam. This apparent ambivalence, revealing a complexity that straddles tolerance and intolerance, is set in a broader context of Sufi attitudes toward religious diversity, and a cursory survey is presented of conceptions of the transcendental unity of religions in Sufi writings in Arabic or Persian. The author posits that Abū Saʿīd's duality may mirror a personal religious journey or an intentional concealment of his convictions in order to escape reproof.

Keywords: Judaism; medieval Islam; Sufism; interfaith relations; religious pluralism; medieval Iran; Persian poetry; Arabic poetry



Academic Editors: Fahimah Ulfat
and Asher J. Mattern

Received: 5 February 2025

Revised: 19 March 2025

Accepted: 25 March 2025

Published: 8 April 2025

Citation: Fenton, Paul B. 2025. Jews and Judaism in the Poetry and Prose of the Persian Sufi Abū Saʿīd-i Abū l-Ḥayr (967–1049 CE): An Approach to the Religious Other in Medieval Islamic Society. *Religions* 16: 476. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16040476>

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1. Introduction

Among the early Sufi masters, Abū Saʿīd-i Abū l-Ḥayr (357–440H/967–1049 CE) is considered one of the major figures whose poetry and legends remain popular to this day among Persian readers.¹ He also proves to be a significant example for the intriguing question of the approach to the religious other in medieval Islamic society, for he is one of the first Muslim mystics to have taken account of the Jews. Indeed, quite atypically, he adopted a positive attitude towards them and, as will be seen at the end of this essay, expressed what is probably the most candid statement ever formulated by a Muslim about Jews. By and large, the latter were portrayed in the early Sufi sources in a negative light. A notable exception—albeit with some reservations to be discussed anon—is to be found in an anecdote related about an early Muslim ascetic, Abū Dahr Yazīd b. Abi Ṣumayd (d. 824), who belonged to the proto-Sufi group known as the *bakkāʿūn* ‘the Weepers’. He was a model of piety in a constant state of mourning. It is related that a Jewess who empathized with his piety used to weep with him. One night, he offered the following prayer:

“O Mighty God, out of compassion for me does this Jewish woman weep even though her religious creed is different from that of mine. O God, I seek mercy from you alone!”²

This early anecdote is something of an archetypal model of what can be found in later Sufi writings including the tales of Abū Saʿīd. When considered objectively, this anecdote

is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, it expresses a certain admiration for the Jewess who transcended the religious difference separating her from Abū Dahr. However, on the other hand, the latter declares that he is in no need of her compassion since, it is understood, his quality as a Muslim affords him God's direct mercy.

Before entering into how this same ambivalence is played out in regard to Abū Sa'īd, let us first acquaint ourselves briefly with his biography. Having received his first instruction in his native Mayhana, a small town situated in Ḥurāsān, Abū Sa'īd later completed his Islamic studies in Merv. He was subsequently introduced to Sufism in Sarakhs before returning to Mayhana, where, at first, he led an ascetic and reclusive existence. He spent his time in solitary meditation and practised severe mortifications. Moving to Nīšāpūr, he was invested with the Sufi frock (*ḥirqa*) by none other than 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 1021), author of the famous *Ṭabaqāt al-sūfiyya*. Later, in Nīšāpūr, where he was to spend most of his life, Abū Sa'īd befriended Abū l-Qāsim al-Quṣayrī (d. 1074), author of the celebrated *Risāla*. It is here that his recluse mode of life changed as he turned towards the service of the poor. He would throw joyous festivities involving singing and dancing for the numerous followers who gathered around him. News of his extravagant manners even reached faraway Cordova, where the theologian Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) strongly condemned him in the following terms: "I have heard said that there is a man in Nīšāpūr who belongs to the Sufis whose name is Abū Sa'īd Abū l-Ḥayr who, at times, dons a woolen frock, and, at others, a silk tunic which, for males, is prohibited. At times, he performs a thousand prostrations a day, and, at others, a whole day goes by without him accomplishing a single obligatory or surerogatory prayer. This is pure impiety. May God preserve us from such misguidance".³

Abū Sa'īd's antinomian conduct aroused opposition, not to say hostility, but he was to overcome these, thanks, it is said, to his gift of clairvoyance. He is presumed to be the author of a great number of quatrains (*rubā'iyāt*), whose popularity has not abated even among contemporary readers,⁴ though historians agree that very few can definitely be ascribed to him. In addition to these poems, the analyst has at his disposal a large number of memorable aphorisms and tales relating to the saint that were collected by his great-grandson Muḥammad Ibn al-Munawwar about 150 years after his death. They form a voluminous biography written in Persian entitled *Asrār al-tawḥīd* ('*Mysteries of Unification*'), which is almost the first example in Persian literature of a separate work devoted to the life of an individual saint.⁵ Despite its vivacity and the authentic ring of its narrative, its historicity is questionable, and it is to be valued rather as a hagiographic testimonial than a factual record. Indeed, the biography and *Dīwān* together form a rich repository of religious ideas that can be put to profitable use in painting a faithful portrait of Sufi attitudes of that period for the theme chosen for our investigation. To be sure, it matters little whether the inter-religious encounters related below actually took place, for their importance resides both in the very fact that they could be attributed to a Sufi *ṣayḥ* and in the various attitudes towards Jews that they portray. The analysis of these attitudes can be informative about Muslim conceptions of the religious other.

The Persian original of the *Asrār* has been published several times⁶ and has been translated into Arabic⁷ as well as French.⁸ Interestingly, in his review of the latter translation, my teacher Georges Vajda drew a parallel between the tales of the Ḥurasanian mystic and the legends of Israel Ba'al Šem Tōb (1698–1760), founder of Central European Ḥasidism.⁹ To my mind, a comparison of the *Asrār* with the tales and teachings of his great-grandson R. Naḥman of Brazlav (1772–1810), is even more apposite. Though the distance in time and space, as well as the difference in the religious persuasion of these two charismatic figures, preclude the possibility of direct influence, they share some striking common features. These include the practice of seclusion and the visitation of holy tombs, the obligation to

be joyful,¹⁰ the importance of music and dancing,¹¹ and hand-clapping as a devotional exercise intended to dispel lust and negative thoughts.¹² These ritual commonalities in religious behaviour would form the matter of an interesting comparative study. The latter would not be as incongruous as it would seem at first sight, when it is borne in mind that both Sufism and Hasidism ultimately derive from scriptural traditions which themselves hold much in common.¹³

The first scholarly inquiry into Abū Saʿīd's life and mystical doctrines was undertaken by the British Orientalist Reynold A. Nicholson (1868–1945), but the fullest study to date is that by Fritz Meier (1912–1998), whose magisterial presentation of Abū Saʿīd's doctrine against the background of general Sufism navigates between legend and reality.¹⁴ Despite the breadth of their studies, neither Nicholson nor Meier broached the subject of Abū Saʿīd's stance on religious diversity, even though numerous references are made to Jews and Christians in his quatrains and anecdotes. Since we are dealing with a hagiographical genre, the first question that begs to be asked is whether Abū Saʿīd's alleged encounters and direct interaction with Jews are at all plausible. Are they perhaps purely fictitious and contrived as a literary ploy whose purpose is to prompt a specific response within the intragroup discourse? As will be seen, the desired response is invariably the exaltation of Islam.

As far as I know, no precise information is available concerning the presence of Jews in the small town of Mayhana in the 11th century or even thereafter. However, the presence of both Rabbanite and Karaite Jews is well attested in the pre-Mongol period in Ḥurāsān generally, where the Rabbanites seemed to have been in the majority. This can be assumed from a heated dispute that raged in Baghdad in the years 909–916 between the Exilarch ʿUqba and the Gaʿōn (Rector) of the Rabbanite Academy of Pumpeditha over the important revenues perceived from the Jewish communities in Ḥurāsān.¹⁵ The latter provided financial support for the Babylonian academy, under whose jurisdiction (*rāšūt*) they fell, in exchange for religious guidance.

When the Arab geographer Muḥammad al-Maqdisī (d. 1000) passed through the region in 980, he found “many Jews but few Christians in Ḥurāsān”.¹⁶ The significance of their number was even known in distant al-Andalus, where the Jewish poet and thinker Moses Ibn ʿEzra (ca 1055–1135) reports in the name of an anonymous informer that “of the Persian speaking Jews in our times there are about 40,000 in Ġazna according to the rolls of the poll-tax (*ḡizya*) imposed upon them, and a similar number in the other localities of Ḥurāsān”.¹⁷ The Cairo Genizah has also preserved pieces of evidence regarding the Jews of Ḥurāsān and their contacts with Egypt and the Holy Land.¹⁸ Similarly, the recently discovered, so-called Afghan Genizah contains the remains of some family archives from Ḥurāsān dating from the 10th to the 12th century.

Now Nīšābūr, where our mystic spent most of his career, was virtually the capital of central and northern Iran and was an important intellectual and commercial centre. Around 1000 CE,¹⁹ al-Ḥākim al-Naysabūrī writes about two villages in the vicinity of Nīšāpūr entirely populated by Jews that were annexed into the city,²⁰ while in approximately 1170, the Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela refers to Nīšāpūr's Jewish population. In fact, most of Abū Saʿīd's tales dealing with Jews take place in Nīšāpūr. Hence, despite their hagiographical nature, there is no call to cast doubt on the plausibility of their occurrence. Indeed, these anecdotes hold an historical interest for the annals of the Jews in Persia, for they provide tangible evidence of a Jewish presence in this city in the 11th century. Furthermore, they allow us a glimpse into their complex interaction with the religiously diverse setting they inhabited.

The first impression that emerges from a perusal of the material is that Abū Saʿīd's attitude towards what we call today religious pluralism is rather ambivalent. Let us begin

our investigation with an interesting quote from the end of chapter I of the *Asrār*, in which he openly makes this extraordinary declaration about the concordance of all religions:

و درین معنی تحقیق نیکو بشنو، کی چون آن تحقیق تمام ادراک کنی، هیچ شبهت نماند کی همه پیران و همه صوفیان حقیقی یکی اند که بهیچ صفت ایشان را دوی نیست بدانک اتفاق همه ادیان و مذاهیست و به نزدیک عقلا محقق کی معبود و مقصود جل جلاله یکی است واحد من کل وجه است کی البته دوی را آنجا مجال نیست، و اگر در رونده یاراه اختلافی هست، چون به مقصد رسند اختلاف برخاست و همه بوحدت بدل شد، کی تا هیچ چیز از صفات بشریت رونده باقیست هنوز به مقصد نرسیده است و تلون حالت رونده را در راه پدید آید، چون به مطلوب و مقصود رسید از آن همه باوی هیچ چیز نماند و همه وحدت مجرد گردد.

In relation to this archetypal meaning (*ma'nā*), hearken to this felicitous fact, so that you fully grasp its truth beyond all doubt: All spiritual masters and all true Sufis become one, for in their attributes there cannot be duality. Know that for men of discernment the concordance of all religions and all faiths (*madāhib*)²¹ is an established concept, for the transcendent object [both] of worship and the quest, is one. God is unique in every sense and duality is absolutely impossible in respect of Him. If, in regard to the wayfarer and the path which leads to Him, there be divergence, it will be resolved upon reaching the goal when all discrepancy will be transformed into unity. For as long as the wayfarer retains a residue of his human attributes, he will be unable to attain the goal, and will experience vacillation (*talawwun*)²² in his states along the path. But upon reaching his goal and his aim, there will no longer appear in him a remnant of his human attributes but they will have passed away into absolute oneness.²³

However, on the other hand, this declaration of the universal unity of religion is sharply contradicted a few pages later in the following chapter of the *Asrār*, and indeed, throughout the work, by the Ṣayḥ's systematic missionary urge to convert to Islam the devotees of the Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian faiths. This, to my mind, is in itself a form of intolerance and makes Abū Sa'īd's stance towards Jews, and, for that matter also towards Christians, something of a paradox. Some may argue that, as a modern concept, the term 'tolerance' is inapplicable to the medieval context. I believe this is a fallacy, for the lack of a term does not necessarily imply the inexistence of a related practice or behaviour. Thus, as *ḍimmi*-s, Jews were approximately "tolerated" at various places and at various times, with greater or lesser degrees of freedom. In the attitudes towards Jews ascribed to him, Abū Sa'īd wavers so widely between a prodigious empathy and an outright intolerance that one is justified in asking whether they do all actually stem from one and the same person. It is not impossible, however, that he could have adopted contradictory stances at different times and in different circumstances. Similar fluctuations can be observed with other Sufi saints, as will be shown below.

An analogous ambivalence is displayed in his *rubā'iyāt*, this time towards the very tenets and practices of exoteric Islam itself, in an attitude that can be qualified as outrightly antinomian. According to Abū Sa'īd's mystical theology, the gnostic who, through love, has arrived at an intuition of the Divine can forgo the precepts of formal religion, be it Islam or Judaism, as expressed in the following quatrain:

آنرا که قضا ز خیل عشاق نوشت، آزار در مسجد ست و فارغ ز کشت
دیوانه عشق را، چه هجران چه وصال از خوش گذشته را، چه دوزخ چه بهشت

From mosque or synagogue²⁴ they are free

Whom fate enlists for love-mad chivalry;

For victims rapt beyond the bourne of self,

Aloof, anear, both heaven and hell agree.²⁵

The conception of a transcendental unity of religions is also echoed in the same collection of *Rubā'iyāt* in which the following distich is to be found:

رفتم بکلیسای ترسا و یهود دیدم همه بایداد تو در گفت و شنود
بایداد وصال تو بتخانه نشدم تسبیح یتان زمزمه ذکر تو بود

Having attended the Christians' chapel and that of the Jews,
I observed that all are evoking Thee in utterance and audition.
The idol-temple's quest is for union with Thee.

The chanting of praises to the idols I found was Thy remembrance.²⁶

Such sentiments expressed in Sufi poetry, which could aptly be qualified as “transno-mian”, were conducive to a certain tolerance or, if preferred, inclusiveness towards the ‘People of the Book’. As far as I know, this sort of openness was first expressed in the Islamic context by the Sufi martyr al-Hallāḡ (executed in 922), who declared:

Furthermore, know that Judaism, Christianity and other faiths are different cog-nomens and various denominations: but the goal of these beliefs does neither change nor vary.

He then went on to recite the following verses:

I considered the faiths and endeavoured to understand them.
I found them to be comparable to a single trunk with multiple branches.
Never ask of your fellow to adopt such and such a belief;
That would impede every solid comprehension.
Rather ask of him a Base which expresses for him
All elevated significations: he will then understand.²⁷

A similar attitude was also upheld by another Sufi martyr, the Persian ‘Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī (1098–1131), and would later be taken up by other Persian mystics such as Rūzbihān Baqlī (1128–1209), Rūmī (1207–1273), Šabistārī (d. ca 1340), Ḥāfiẓ (1325–1390), and Muḥammad Šīrīn Maḡrabī (1345–1408).²⁸

It is interesting, and indeed mystifying, that almost simultaneously, at the two opposite and distinct extremities of the Islamic world, one can observe in both its Persian and Arabic Sufi traditions, a tendency to rise above formal religion in an effort to embrace a model of universal monotheism. As illustrations, we can firstly recall the sentiments magnificently encapsuled by Ibn ‘Arabī’s (1165–1240) famous verses presumably written when still in Al-Andalus:

My heart has become capable of every form:
A pasture for gazelles and a cloister for monks,
A temple of idols and the Ka’ba for the circling pilgrim,
The tablets of the Torah, and the book of the Qur’an.
My creed is the religion of Love:
Wherever its caravan turns, that is my belief and my faith.²⁹

لقد صار قلبي قابلا كل صورة فمرعى لغزلان ودير لرهبان
وبيت لاثوان وكعبة طائف والواح توراة ومصحف قرآن
ادين بدين الحب انى توجهت ركاتبها فالحب ديني وايماني

In essence, this way leads to the idea that belonging to a specific confession is irrelevant in regard to transcendent Truth to which the devotee must wend his path. Such a conviction is manifest in the following verse by ‘Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī (1098–1131):

Until the image of our Beloved is in the idol-temple,

Reason admits 'tis an absolute error to circle the Ka'ba.
 If the Ka'ba is deprived of His perfume, it is but a synagogue.
 And, if in the synagogue we sense
 the fragrance of union with Him,
 The synagogue is our Ka'ba.³⁰

در بتکده تا خیال معشوقه ماست رفتن بطواف کعبه از عین خطاست
 گر کعبه از بوی ندارد، کنش است با بوی وصال او، کنش کعبه ماست

The irrelevance of a formal religious denomination is also the theme of the famous verse by the great Persian poet Ġalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207–1273):

What is to be done, O Muslims? For I do not recognize myself.
 I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Magian, nor Muslim,
 I am not of the East, nor of the West,
 Nor of the land, nor of the sea [...]
 My place is the Placeless, my trace is the Traceless;
 'Tis neither body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of the Beloved.
 I have expelled duality, for I have seen that the two worlds are one.³¹

چه تدبیر ای مسلمان که من خوردا نمیدانم
 نه ترسا نه یهودم من نه گیرم نه مسلمانم
 نه شرقیم نه غربیم نه بریم نه بحریم

....

مکانم لا مکان باشد نشانم بی نشان باشد
 نه تن باشد نه جان باشد که من از جان جانانم
 دویی از خود بدر کردم یکی دیدم دو عالمرا

In the following century, Šabistārī explains in his exposition of the symbols of Sufi poetry that, once the mystic achieves the level of the Supreme Identity, then the veils of exoteric religion fall and religious differences disappear:

'I' and 'Thou' are the *barzah* between them;
 When this veil is lifted up from before Thee,
 There remains not the bond of sects and creeds.
 All the rules of *šarī'ah* are from your ego,
 Since it is bound to your soul and body.
 When I and You remain not in the midst
 What is Ka'ba, what is synagogue, what is monastery?³²

In this cursory survey of the Sufi conception of the transcendental unity of religions, one can also include the great Persian poet Ḥāfiz, as illustrated in the following *ġazal* "Blame not the depraved":

همه کس طالب یارند، چه هشیار و چه مست
 همه جا خانه عشق است چه مسجد چه کنشت

Everyone, sober or drunk, seeks the Beloved.
 Every place, be it mosque or synagogue, is the house of love.³³

Lastly, the Sufi's transcendence of religious creeds is also expressed in the *ghazal*-s of Muḥammad Šīrīn Maḡrabī, whose poetry was inspired by Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine: ³⁴

تویی مطلوب و مقصودم تویی معبود و مسجودم
اگر در مسجد اقصی و گر در دیر رهبانم

Thou art my aim and intention,
Thou art my object of worship and adoration,
Be I in the furthestmost mosque (al-Aqṣa)
or in the monastery of monks.³⁵

Or again in the following verse:

از خانقاه و صومعه و مدرسه رستیم در کوی مغان با می معشوق نشستیم
در خدمت ترسا بچه ز نار ببستیم و تسبیح به یک سوی فکندیم
در مصطبها خرقه ناموس دریدیم

We abandoned the Sufi lodge, the synagogue,³⁶ and the school,³⁷
For in the Magian's precinct we settled with our beloved.
We cast aside the prayer rug and the rosary,
And girded the cincture in devotion of the Christian lad,³⁸
In the taverns, we rent the Sufi robe of repute.³⁹

Nonetheless, in stark contrast to the universal spirit exuded by the foregoing poems, one can also find verses by the very same authors that, quite to the contrary, express a harsh intolerance of Jews. Thus, one is disenchanted by the negative stereotypes Rumi also employs to portray Jews in his *Mathnawī*⁴⁰ that are also present in Ḥāfiẓ's poetry, at least according to his commentators.⁴¹ These occurrences could suggest that the positive poems of the sort quoted above were to be understood in a figurative sense. To be sure, in the Persian Sufi tradition, such poems are sometimes subjected to a symbolic allegorization, whereby the 'synagogue', for example, represents devotion to God. The 'church', the 'cloister', the 'monastery', and even the 'idolatrous temple' can refer to Islam or the abode of the Sufi ascetic.⁴² The 'Christian monk' and 'priest', as well as the Jewish 'priest' (*kuhin*), are perceived as symbols of the 'temple of rectitude (*iṣlāḥ*)', and the 'refuge from sin'.⁴³ Whether these were the original meanings of these poems and anecdotes intended by their authors or whether this was a literary device invented by the exegetical tradition as a cover-up for their daring utterances is a moot question. Similarly, some of Ibn 'Arabī's verses, which seem, on the surface, to express the same kind of universal religious unity, undergo a complete reinterpretation in his own commentary on his *Dīwān*. They disappointingly assume a different meaning in which this dimension is totally defused. Thus, in his explanation of the oft-quoted poem in which he professes his religion of love and describes how his 'heart is capable of being a cloister for monks, a temple for idols, the tablets of the Torah', Ibn 'Arabī says the following:

"A cloister for monks (*dayr al-ruhbān*)", for just as the [lovers of God] are compared to monks on account of their monastic rule [entirely dedicated to God], so too the heart is equated with a "cloister" since the latter is the monks' abode and their place [of worship].

"A temple of idols", I say that the heart has the form of an "idol temple" (*bayt al-awṭān*) since it is inhabited by the Essential Realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) which mankind requires and through which God is worshipped. Therefore, these [Realities] are named "idols".

“**Ka’ba**”, furthermore, because the supernal spirits encircle his heart, the latter is called the “**Ka’ba**”, which embodies the said spirits [...].

“**The tablets of the Torah**”, having obtained the Mosaic and Hebraic sciences, the individual’s heart becomes a “**tablet**” [upon which the Realities are inscribed].

“**The book of the Qur’an**”, however, when he inherits the Muhammadan perfect knowledge, he transforms the [Realities] into a “**book**” and elevates them to the status of the “**Quran**”. [...]

“**My creed is the religion of Love... that is my faith**”, signifies that there is no religion higher than that founded upon love and the desire for Him whom I worship in [love] and who mysteriously ordained it. This is the [exclusive] privilege of the devotees of the Muḥammadan type for Muḥammad surpassed the other prophets and was endowed with the station of love in its entirety, while, simultaneously, possessing the qualities of being a chosen one, a confident, and an intimate friend, not to mention other stations recognized as belonging to the prophets. Along with these, he added that God accorded him a supplementary favour, that of having taken him as a beloved (in addition to *ḥabīb* i.e., in a [relationship] of lover and Beloved. I [Ibn ‘Arabī] inherited from him in accordance with his path.

It is clear then that for Ibn ‘Arabī, the religion of love is Islam, and all those who do not follow its path profess an inferior creed.

Returning now to Abū Sa’īd’s *Asrār al-tawḥīd*, we too come across strikingly different attitudes towards Jews. A fair number of encounters with Jews and Christians reported in this collection of tales are mainly concerned with Abū Sa’īd’s miraculous successes in converting them to Islam. Interestingly, Muslim sources testify to Ḥurāsān’s having been an active centre of Muslim proselytism at his time. Abū Ishāq b. Maḥmašādī (d. 993), the head of the Sufi-type, ascetic Karrāmiyya sect centred in Nīšābūr in the second half of the 10th century, was said to have converted some 5000 Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians to Islam,⁴⁴ and it is related of Abū Sa’īd himself that when ‘he was in Nīšābūr, numerous Jews and Christians were converted to Islam through his intermediary.’⁴⁵

Now the conversion of Jews by Sufi masters is a widespread *topos* in Sufi hagiography that often follows stereotypical and polemical patterns.⁴⁶ By and large, the circumstances of the conversion reveal a complete indifference of the *ṣayḥ* and his audience to the actual tenets of the Jew’s faith, which, generally, are either ignored or perceived in terms of the Islamic conceptions of Judaism. It should be underlined that this attitude can be construed, essentially, as an expression of intolerance, if not one of negation, insofar as the conversion of a Jew amounts to his elimination. Furthermore, in order to amplify the triumph of Islam and enhance its victory, the targets for conversion are invariably either rabbis, elderly sages or, as in our first anecdote, devout members of their faith.

In most cases, conversion is prompted by one of three causes; it is either brought about through the compelling charisma of the *ṣayḥ* or by his exemplary piety or ethical conduct, or consequent to a miracle or an act of clairvoyance performed by him. Never does it result from considered conviction, theological reasoning, nor any real instruction in the religion of Islam. The most typical Sufi model of proselytism is that accomplished through the supernatural. Supposedly endowed with wondrous gifts (*karāmāt*), the Sufi master, through the performance of a miracle, succeeds in convincing the *ḍimmī*-s who witness the occurrence to adopt the Muslim faith. This outcome is meant to demonstrate the error of the *ḍimmī* and the superiority of Islam, following the example of Muḥammad, whose victory over the Jews of Arabia was proof of the truthfulness of his message.

By way of illustration, here are a few random examples culled mainly from the Persianate region. The longanimity of Malik b. Dinār (d. 745), the son of a Persian slave, impresses his Jewish neighbour to the point where he converts.⁴⁷ Through his charisma, Fudayl b. 'Iyyād (d. 803), a proto-Sufi from Central Asia, converts a Jew from Abivard.⁴⁸ A miracle involving a flameproof garment wrought by Ibrāhīm al-Āğurrī (9th c.) of Baghdad brings about the conversion of his Jewish debtor.⁴⁹ A vision of angels attending the funeral of Sahl Tustarī (d. 896) from Šustar in Iran induces an elderly Jew to embrace Islam.⁵⁰ The miracles of Ibrāhīm al-Ḥawāṣṣ (d. 903) induce his fellow traveller, a Jewish ascetic, to accept the Islamic faith,⁵¹ and his clairvoyance convinces a young Jew of the truth of Islam.⁵² A rabbi becomes Muslim after encountering Ġalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), who asks him if Islam is superior to his religion.⁵³

The classical *topos* of the conversion of *ḍimmī*-s occasioned by some prodigious act on the part of the Muslim saint is encountered in the *Asrār al-taẓẓih* in the following tale:

It once occurred that when our *šayḥ* was in Nīšābūr he was strolling in the company of a group of Sufis. It was the Jewish Sabbath and they happened upon a Jew who was on his way to the synagogue. He was clothed in a shawl⁵⁴ and handsome garments. He espied the *šayḥ* from afar advancing with his group. Now Allah afforded the Jew insight (*baṣīra*) such that he perceived the *šayḥ*'s eminence and his own dejection and fled from the *šayḥ*'s presence on account of his immense abasement. The *šayḥ* walked behind the Jew and remained in his pursuit until the latter came to a mountain and, finding no issue, was obliged to halt. The *šayḥ* caught up with him and placing his blessed hand upon his forehead, he recited:

Of the coldness of the air, a shepherd has not to lament,
If to solitude and nightly roaming he does consent.⁵⁵

Then he added: O wretched one, may God speed thee! How farest thou without Him and how wilt thou fare?

After the *šayḥ* had uttered this and turned back, the Jew put forth a cry and started to run after him shouting: "I testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muḥammad is His apostle". When he reached the *šayḥ*, he fell to his feet and returned with him to the convent (*ḥānqāh*) and became one of his adepts.⁵⁶

This account calls for some comment. The conversion is the result of three elements emanating from the Abū Sa'īd. Firstly, the Jew's consciousness of his own lowliness is presumed to result from Abū Sa'īd's eminence and the honour given to him by his Muslim entourage. This honour, however, does not prevent the master from pursuing the Jew, whose mind he has read. The words of the poem, which express the isolation of the wandering Jew, who suffers the constraints of his condition, are, to be honest, hardly an appropriate proselyting argument. Paradoxically, isolation and itinerancy figure amongst the virtues of the Sufi path. But in the case of the Jew, the latter is devoid of God's company. It is noteworthy too that the conversion occurs in the least favourable circumstances in which a Jew would be receptive to conversion. It is the holy day of the sabbath, the Jew is on his way to the synagogue for his religious worship, and he is enshrouded in his prayer shawl. The Jew's abasement in relation to the Muslim is conveyed by the Jew's lowly self-conception, which is the cause of his flight, despite the fact that he is decked out in his sabbath finery. Islam's superiority is thus supremely illustrated by this negation of Judaism and the demonstration of its spiritual inferiority.

For the sake of comparison, let us note that a similar occurrence is reported in the case of Christians, as illustrated in the following episode, which also takes place in Nīšābūr, and provides a convenient parallel, this time in the context of a church:

It is related that the *šayḥ* was travelling one day through Nīšābūr mounted upon his steed when he arrived at the portal of a church. It so happened that that day was a Sunday and the Christians were gathered at the church.

The Sufis asked the *šayḥ* to enter so that the [Christians] could see him.⁵⁷ Thereupon the *šayḥ* dismounted and entered the church, whereupon the Christians approached him and showed him much honour by respectfully standing before him in an air of reverence. The *šayḥ* was accompanied by some Qur'an chanters and one of them asked the *šayḥ* if he would allow them to recite some verses. The *šayḥ* gave his consent and when they chanted part of the liturgy all the [Christians] were overcome with enthrallment⁵⁸ and began to weep. Thereupon the *šayḥ* arose and exited. One [of his disciples] remarked to him: 'Had the *šayḥ* made the least sign to them, they all would have undone their cinctures (*zunnār*), to which the *šayḥ* replied: 'It was not we who bound them with it, so it is not for us to undo it!''⁵⁹

We notice firstly that the present tale and the foregoing one share some common denominators. Here too, the quasi-conversion takes place in unlikely circumstances—this time on a Christian holy day and, to boot, actually within a church. Muslim superiority is illustrated by the fact that the Christian worshippers are deeply overcome by the presence of the *šayḥ* and the recital of the Qur'an and were virtually on the brink of conversion, a step which would have been symbolized by the act of rending their *zunnār*-s. However, this does not take place and is justified by Abū Sa'īd's words 'It was not we who bound them with it, so it is not for us to undo it!'

This anecdote is somewhat ambiguous due to the two possible readings of this concluding sentence, which is either an expression of tolerance or, on the contrary, of disdain. The binding of the *zunnār* was either an act of God, in which case it was not of their choice, or an act of man, in which case it was the choice of the Christians to remain Christians much in the same vein as the above quoted quip according to which it is not for a shepherd to complain about the coldness of the air for it was his choice to become a shepherd. Following the first interpretation, Abū Sa'īd is open to religious diversity, which is Divinely willed. On the other hand, it is conceivable that Abū Sa'īd was saying, 'since the Christians are responsible for their own error, let them remain in their misguided state'. It is noteworthy that our Sufi master does not question the humiliating and discriminatory nature of the *zunnār*, the 'cord of infidelity' which Jews and Christians are condemned to wear under Islam. Moreover, the affirmation 'it was not we who bound them with it, so it is not for us to undo it!' intimates that the Christians themselves are responsible for the wearing of this distinctive sign. Now, it is Islam that imposed it upon the *ḍimmi*-s for more than a millennium in the framework of the degrading legislation of the *ḍimma*, from which they could only be delivered by conversion.

Now the cincture or *zunnār* is a frequent symbol in Persian prose and poetry. As the 'cord of negation', it is the distinctive sign imposed upon *ḍimmi*-s and Zoroastrians by the Pact of Umar as a humiliating mark of their infidelity, error, and blindness in not recognizing the prophecy of Muḥammad.⁶⁰ It is often contraposed with a Muslim ritual artifact, as in the following verse by Ḥāfīz, which, on the contrary, calls for the sublimation of religious differences:

راسر بخشش جانان طریق لطف و احسان بود
اگر تسبیح می فرمود اگر زنار می آورد

Whatever the beloved bestowed was all through grace and kindness,

Whether praying with a *tasbīḥ* ('string of prayer beads') or donning a Christian girdle.⁶¹

Other anecdotes, on the other hand, depict Abū Saʿīd too as accepting religious diversity. Insofar as this dichotomy might be a true reflection of his character, it could be explained by the two phases of his spiritual development mentioned above. In his ascetic period, he may have been initially of an intolerant nature, but later, in his ‘service to others’, he may have been more tolerant of members of other religions. This account contrasts strikingly with the following anecdote.

The Master related that a certain person had told ‘Abdallah b. Mubārak⁶² that he was instrumental in converting a Jew to Islam and “that he had rent his cincture”. He replied: “Thou hast rent his cincture, but what hast thou done with thine own cincture?”⁶³

Here, the *zunnār* has resigned its meaning of infidelity and has assumed a mystical significance symbolizing the casting aside of the obstacles that impede the individual from attaining ‘oneness’.⁶⁴

The following anecdote also has to do with the special garments worn by *ḍimmi*-s. Furthermore, it is an illustration of a conversion brought about by the *ṣayh*’s gift of clairvoyance, which, by the way, also renders him superior in degree to the exoteric cleric involved in the tale.

It is related that when the Master was in Nīšābūr, numerous Jews and Christians were converted to Islam on his account. Many became Muslims too through the Imams of Nīšābūr and especially through Muḥammad al-Ġuwaynī, who was the *ṣayh* in that period, and a companion with whom Abū Saʿīd had studied.⁶⁵ Now, [al-Ġuwaynī] had in his employ a Jewish intendant to whom, for some time, he had proposed conversion to Islam, without success. One day, the *ṣayh* said to him that if he embraced Islam he would bequeath to him a third of his wealth, to which the Jew replied that he would never sell his faith for any worldly benefit. On a second and third occasion the *ṣayh* insisted promising him even half of his wealth. However, he still received the same reply, such that Abū Muḥammad al-Ġuwaynī despaired of the [Jew’s] fate. Now it so happened that one day he passed through the lane of the carpet-beaters⁶⁶ in the company of his intendant. Abū Saʿīd was preaching in an assembly that day in which al-Ġuwaynī joined. The Jewish intendant said to himself “Seeing that they are gathering in such crowds to listen to him, I will also attend the assembly and hear what this man has to say and discover the secret of his success with the people. Since I am wearing no apparent [garment] there is nothing that would make the *ṣayh* think that I am a Jew”. So, he followed al-Ġuwaynī into the gathering, and seated himself discreetly behind a stone.⁶⁷ No sooner had the Master began his address, than he turned towards the stone behind which the intendant was seated and exclaimed “O Jew come out from behind that stone”⁶⁸ and the Jew could not refrain from obeying him. He rose impassively and approached the Master who said to him to speak up. ‘What am I to say?’, replied the Jew, to whom the *ṣayh* replied:

I was an idolator⁶⁹ and have now turned Muslim,

I was remiss in my faithfulness,

And am henceforth an obedient servant’.

The Jew repeated the verse, whereupon the Master told him to go to Imam al-Ġuwaynī to be instructed in Islam. “Tell him that you did not know that a bequest was subject to a time limit, and that when the term has elapsed there is no obligation to give either a third or a half. Indeed, Abū Muḥammad [al-Ġuwaynī] came back on his proposal.”⁷⁰

We learn incidentally from this passage—if indeed it has any historical foundation—that a Jew could be in the employment of an eminent Muslim dignitary such as al-Ġuwaynī.

Lastly, we would like to present one of Abū Saʿīd's Arabic poems, included in his predominantly Persian *Asrār*. To my knowledge, this poem is the most explicit and most assertive expression of empathy towards Jews and Judaism ever uttered by a Muslim writer. Through the love of God, the author has come to love the Jewish people—though not in the name of humanity but through a genuine spiritual attraction to their worship and their legal precepts to a point where he has become a fusion of Judaism and Islam, guided simultaneously by both the Torah and the Qurʾān. Indeed, were it not for the fear of persecution, he would have embraced the Jewish creed:

أحببت أولاد اليهود بأسرهم	لأجلك حتى كنت أن تهودا
أصلي فأزوي قبلتي متعمدا	لقليلكم فأشهد صلاتي لتشهدا
وإني لأهدي في صلاتي بحبكم	بتورية موسى ثم فرقان أحمدا
ولولا مقال الكاشحين وبغضهم	لعبدت يوم السبت فيمن تعبدا
وكان دخول النار في الحب هيناً	إذا كان من نهواه في الحب مسعدا

For Thy sake, I love the entire Jewish people,

To a point where I nearly turned Jew!

When I pray, I turn from my own *qibla*, towards your [Jewish] direction of prayer,

And I take my prayer as witness, so it may thus testify.

Through love of you, I am guided in my devotions by Moses' Torah and Ah-mad's Code.⁷¹

Were it not for the words of denigrators and their rancour,

I would have worshipped [God] on the Sabbath day,

In the company of those who then adore Him.

With love, entrance into hell will be so pleasurable,

If only the Beloved were inclined to make us happy in love.⁷²

2. Conclusions

The foregoing case study of Abū Saʿīd provides some insight into the complexity of early relations between Muslims and Jews as they existed in Central Asia and, more specifically, into the Sufi perception of the religious other. The ambivalence noted in connection with Abū Saʿīd's personal position, oscillating between extreme forms of tolerance and intolerance, induces a doubt that such blatantly contradictory attitudes could have emanated from one and the same individual and may in fact reflect the opinion of the real author of the tale or verse, as the case may be. On the other hand, such contradictions may perhaps mirror Abū Saʿīd's own spiritual evolution, which in itself was paradoxical, though a similar oscillatory posture was observed in the case of Ġalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. A third rather more remote possibility, but nonetheless worthy of consideration, is that our Sufi authors purposely varied their discourse so as to disguise their true message in order to avoid all-out disapprobation. Abū Saʿīd's novelty is that he evinces positive attitudes to Jews, which, though rare among Sufis, is not altogether unique. However, as we have seen, on one occasion in his poetry, our Ḥurasanian mystic conveys boundless empathy for Jews and their religion.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ See (Böwering n.d., pp. 377–80; Ballanfat 2012, pp. 245–89; O'Malley 2019, pp. 5–31).
- ² Quoted by Muḥammad Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*, vol. 8, Leiden: Brill, 1905, p. 206
- ³ Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣāl fī l-mīlāl*, Cairo, 1321H, IV, p. 188.
- ⁴ The popular edition *Dīwān Abū (!) Sa'īd Abū l-Khayr*, ed. R. Javaš Akbari, Teheran: Našr Muḥammad, 1349 Š. was available to me.
- ⁵ I have used the edition by V. Zhukovskii, reprinted as Muḥammad Ibn al-Munawwar, *Asrār al-tawḥīd fī maqāmāt al-šayḥ Abī Sa'īd*, by A. Bahmanyār, Tehran, 1314 Š./1935. An edition by Ḍ. Šafā' has gone through two reprints, in 1348 Š./1961 and 1354 Š./1975, neither of which is fully satisfactory. A selection of legends with a useful introduction was published by A. Bahmanyār, Tehran, 1320 Š./1945.
- ⁶ For manuscripts, see (Monzavi 1984, p. 1028), and (Meier 1976, p. 20, n. 4 (see *infra*, n. 10)).
- ⁷ A complete Arabic translation by E. 'A. Qandīl was published in Cairo in 1966, while that of 'Abd al-Karīm Su'ūd, Damascus, 1999, contains a limited selection.
- ⁸ With the title Mohammad Ebn E. Monawwar, *Les Étapes Mystiques du Shaykh Abū Sa'īd*, Traduction du persan et notes par Mohammad Agha, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, (Coll. Unesco d'oeuvres représentatives, série persane), 1974.
- ⁹ (Vajda 1976, pp. 198–99).
- ¹⁰ (Meier 1976, pp. 138–40).
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, ch. 11, pp. 196–281, esp. pp. 226–29.
- ¹² On hand-clapping and dancing, cf. *Asrār*, (*supra*, n. 5), p. 269, Nicholson (*infra*, n. 14), p. 58, and *Liqqūṭey Moharan I*, Jerusalem: Menorah Press, 1936, fols. 53b–55a, ch. 41, 44, 45, 46; II, fols. 22b–23a, ch. 23 and 25. On dancing in Ḥasidism, see my article (Fenton 1999, pp. 67–85). Historically, there seems to have been an influence of the Sufi *Manāqib* genre on the development of the Jewish *Šibhey* genre, which emerged in Kabbalistic circles in the Holy Land and began with the *Šibhey ha-Ari*, praises in honour of Isaac Luria (1534–1572).
- ¹³ I have discussed at length elsewhere the possible influences of Sufism upon Ḥasidism. See, for example, my (Fenton 2019, pp. 193–226).
- ¹⁴ (Nicholson 1921, pp. 1–76) and (Meier 1976, *supra*, n. 10). On pp. 36–7, Meier ascribes to Abū Sa'īd *Maqāmāt-i arba'in*, the Persian text of which was edited by M. Dāmādī, *Ma'āref-e eslāmī* 12, (1971), pp. 58–62; Engl. transl. Seyyed Hosein Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1979, ch. 5: 'The spiritual states in Sufism', pp. 77–83. This succinct description of the forty stages of the spiritual way seems to date from a later period and resembles the *Čehel maqām-i šūfiya*, attributed tentatively to Mir 'Alī Hamadānī (d. 1385).
- ¹⁵ (Friedlander 1905, p. 756). See also (Fischel 1945, pp. 29–50, esp. p. 33).
- ¹⁶ Al-Mokaddasi, *Descriptio imperii moslemici (Ahsan al-taqasim)*, Lugdunum, 1906, p. 323.
- ¹⁷ Moses Ibn 'Ezra, *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wal-mudākara*, ed. A. S. Halkin, Jerusalem: Meqisey nirdamim, 1975, p. 50. Similar but somewhat higher figures are advanced by Benjamin of Tudela, *Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, ed. M. N. Adler, London: OUP, 1907, p. 54 (Heb.)/58 (Eng.).
- ¹⁸ Notably, three Judeo-Arabic letters sent around 1080 by a merchant named Isaac b. Simḥah al-Naysābūrī (al-Nīšāpūrī) from Alexandria concerning different commodities (silk, pearls, and spices) and sea transport. See (Gil 2004, p. 529).
- ¹⁹ Benjamin of Tudela, *Op. cit.*, p. 54.
- ²⁰ Gil, *Op. cit.*, pp. 529–30.
- ²¹ Although *maḍhab* usually holds an intra-Islamic meaning and refers to one of the four legal schools, in Sufism, it includes the teachings of other religions.
- ²² *Talawwun* or *talwīn* is a Sufi technical term signifying 'change from one state to another along the Way' and contrasts with *tamkīn* 'steadfastness', which characterizes the ultimate stage of the Way, when personal attributes are annihilated. See 'Alī al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, tr. R. Nicholson, London: Luzac, 1911, p. 373.
- ²³ *Asrār*, Persian text, pp. 54–55; Arabic, pp. 66–7.
- ²⁴ In his rhymed translation, *The Rubāiyat of Abū Sa'īd bin Ab'il-Khair*, translated into English verse by D. C. Datta, Jaipur: International Library, 1971, p. 4, poem 24, Datta renders *kaništ* as 'idol-temple'. Elsewhere, it is sometimes translated as 'church'. However, the Persian word derives from the Jewish Aramaic *kenīšta*, which primarily designates a synagogue. This connotation is all the more likely if indeed this poem originated from Ḥurāsān since, as mentioned above, Jews outnumbered the Christians there.
- ²⁵ *Dīwān*, (*supra*, n. 4), p. 38. Cf. Datta, *Op. cit.*, p. 26, poem 153. On this daring antinomian motif, sometimes called 'sacred infidelity' (*kufr-i ḥaqīqī*), see further *infra*, n. 28. It is interesting that this conception dovetails with a verse by a later Judaeo-Sufi

Persian poet Darvīš-i Sabzavārī (active in 1535), whose *dīwān* I am currently preparing for publication. See Saint-Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Studies, ms. B 89, fol. 85a, *ġazal* no 134:

The heart of the ascetic has cast out obedience from the prayer-mat (*saġġādeh*),
And adopted as its *mihṛāb* the charm of your eyebrows.

افکند ز سجاده ی طاعت، دل زاهد
محراب ز طاق خم ابروی شما کرد

26 *Dīwān*, p. 56. Datta poem 153 p. 26, translates

To thee are turned all eyes from East to West;
The synagogue, the church and temple's quest
Is all for Thee; by union's thought when urged
In all shrines I found Thy holy rest.

Of course, the term 'thought' or, preferably, 'remembrance' (*dīkr*) could refer here to the devotional exercise peculiar to the Sufis. (Massignon and Kraus 1957, p. 133, no 45); Arabic text, pp. 69–70, cited in (Fenton 2001, pp. 101–27).

27 See, on these notions, (Lewisohn 1992, pp. 379–406), and (Lewisohn 1995).

28 Muhyī d-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Tarġumān al-ašwāq*, Beirut: Dār Sādir, 1966, pp. 43–4.

29 ʿAyn al-Qudāt Hamadānī, *Tamhidāt*, ed. Afif Osseiran, Tehran, 1962, no 2, p. 25. This verse was later ascribed to Rūmī, *Kulliyāt Šams-i Tabrizī*, ed. B. Faruzanfar and A. Dashti, II, Tehran: Chachkhaneh Danishgah, 1337Š, *rubāʿiyāt*, no 39, p. 669.

30 R. Nicholson, *Selected Poems from the Dīwānī Shamsi Tabriz*, Cambridge: CUP, 1952, no XXXI, pp. 125–127. Manuscripts exist of Persian Sufi poetry and prose transcribed into Hebrew characters for use by Jews, notably the compositions of Bābā Ṭāhir ʿUryān (11th c.), Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (ca 1145–1221), Rūmī (d. 1273), Faḥr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī (1213–1289), Šabistārī (d. ca 1340), Ḥwāḡu Kirmānī (1281–ca1352), Ḥāfiẓ (d. 1390), Muḥammad Šīrīn Maġrabī (1349–1408), Šāh Niʿmat Allāh Walī (d. 1431), and Ġāmī (1414–1492). See further (Motamedi and Poursadeqi 2014, pp. 77–109) and (Farridnejad 2021, pp. 515–534.)

32 Šabistārī, *Gulšān-i rāz: The Mystic Rose Garden*, ed. Whinfield, London: Trübner, 1880, pp. 88–89, 92, verses 931–936, and 973–975. A copy of this work transcribed into Hebrew characters is preserved in Jerusalem, National Library of Israel, ms 401083.1. Interestingly, the above mentioned Judaeo-Sufi Persian poet Darvīš-i Sabzavārī wrote the following verse in a similar vein, in his *dīwān* (*supra*, n. 25), fol. 64a, *ġazal* no 85:

جان برآمد ز تنم قد هوس پیشینه
روزم از عشق چنان میگذرد، نتوانم
که کنم فرق از شنبه، چون بود آدینه؟

On account of a primordial passion,
My soul has abandoned my clay.
So absorbed in love is my day,
That I cannot make a differentiation,
Twixt Sabbath and Friday (i.e., between Judaism and Islam).

As far as I know, these verses are unique and have no parallel in the poetry of Eastern Jewry. Strangely, the nearest to such sentiments expressing a common faith to the three monotheistic religions is to be found in the mystical poem *ʿeḥad yaḥīd ū-meyūḥad* by the 15th-century rabbi of Prague, Avigdor Caro, who was influenced by the Qabbalah of the *Sefer ha-ʿiyyūn*:

אֶחָד יְחִיד וּמְיֻחָד אֵל נִדְרָשׁ לְבָר לִקְבֹּ שׁוֹאֵל
אֵד טוֹב אֱלֹהִים לִישְׁרָאֵל הַלְלוּהָ
בּוֹרָא כֹּל מְמַשׁ מִתְהוּ אִם יֵשׁ פּוֹעֵל כְּמַעֲשֵׂהוּ
מִי הוּא זֶה וְאֵיזֶה הַלְלוּהָ
דְּרָכָיו מְשַׁפֵּט אֵל אֲמוּנָה הַלְלוּהָ

One, Unique and Unified God, goal of every seeker, pure of heart,
Truly God is good to Israel. Halleluya!
Creator of all reality from naught.

"Who and where is he who would presume to enact such a thing?" Halleluya!

O Jew, Christian and Muslim, comprehend that God has no form,

A God of faithfulness whose ways are just. Halleluya!

33 Ḥāfiẓ, *Divān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. Parvīz Nātil Khānlari, I, *ġazaliyāt*, Tehran: al-Maktaba al-adabiya, 1359 Š., no 78, p. 172.

34 On this author, see L. Lewisohn, *A Critical edition of the Divan of Maghrebi: with an introduction into his life, literary school and mystical poetry*, PhD Thesis, SOAS, 1988, 2 vols. and *Idem*, (Lewisohn 1988, pp. 30–35) and (Martini 2021, pp. 121–170). It is

noteworthy that at least two manuscripts are known of his *Dīvān* copied into Hebrew characters: Jerusalem, National Library, Ms Heb 8⁰3126 and another in my own private collection.

Dīvān-i Muḥammad Shīrīn Maghribī, ed. L. Lewisohn, Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1993, p. 251, poem no 121, verses 4–5.

Ṣawma'a. For the latter as 'synagogue', see Ḥāfiz, *Dīvān*, tr. H. Wilberforce Clarke, p. 52, n. 3.

Madrassa. Alternatively, since the lodge symbolizes Islam and the cloister Christianity, perhaps *madrassa* refers to the synagogue.

An allusion to the famous tale about ṣayḥ Ṣan'ān related in 'Attār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, ed. S. Gawharin, Tehran, 1963, vv. 1385–1387. See also Ṣabistārī, *Gulshān-i rāz*, ed. cit., p. 92, vv. 970–972, and *The Dīvān-i Ḥāfiz*, tr. H. Wilberforce Clarke, London: Octagon Press, 1974, no 69, pp. 169–70.

Dīvān-i Muḥammad Shīrīn, p. 255, poem no. 123, verses 1–3. See also p. 253, poem no 122, verses 5–6.

For example, in the two polemical accounts of the Jewish kings, *The Mathnawī of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī*, tr. R. Nicholson, Cambridge: E. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1926, Book I, verses 323ff, p. 21ff, and verses 739 ff, p. 42ff., verse 3448, p. 188, v. 3966–3974, p. 215; Book II, verses 1402, p. 293, v. 3016, p. 377, also refer disparagingly to the Jews.

Ḥāfiz, *Dīvān*, tr. H. Wilberforce Clarke, p. 52 and 564.

See, for example, the metaphorical explanation of Christianity as presented by Ṣabistārī, *Gulshān-i rāz*, verses 931–936, and 973–975, ed. Whinfield, pp. 88–89, 92.

See, for example, Ḥāfiz, *Dīvān*, tr. H. Wilberforce Clarke, no 12, p. 52, and no 79, p. 185.

(Massignon 1954, p. 272, n. 2).

See *infra* the text referenced in note 63.

See, for example, (Küçükhusayin 2019, pp. 143–52).

Farīd al-Dīn al-'Attār (d. 1230), *Tadhkiratu 'l-awliya*, ed. R. A. Nicholson, London: Luzac, 1905, p. 44.

Idem, p. 76.

Al-Quṣayrī (d. 1073), *Risāla*, ed. A. Mahmud and M. Ṣarīf, Cairo, 1966, vol. 2, pp. 686–87 and Abū Nu'aym al-Isfahānī, *Hilyat al-awliya'*, ed. Cairo, 1932, vol. 10, p. 223.

Al-'Attār, *Tadhkirat*, p. 268. See also *idem*, *Ilahi-name*, ch. 17.11, ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul, 1940, pp. 282–84; Engl. transl. J. A. Boyle, *The Ilaha Nama or Book of God*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 261–63.

Al-Isfahānī, *Hilyat al-awliya'*, 10, p. 330.

Al-Quṣayrī, *Risāla* 2, p. 490. On clairvoyance, see *idem*, 2, pp. 492–93.

Aḥmad Aflāki, *Manāqib al-'Arifīn*, tr. Cl. Huart, *Les Saints des derviches tourneurs*, Paris: E. Leroux, vol. II, 1922, p. 9, anecdote 352. Further examples are given in P. Fenton, *Deux traités de mystique juive*, Lagrasse: Verdier, 1987, pp. 16–7, note 8.

ṭaylasān, possibly a reference to the Jewish prayer shawl (Hebrew: *ṭālīth*).

I.e., he cannot complain about the lowliness of his religion if he accepts its disadvantages.

Asrār, Persian text, p. 141, Arabic text, p.155.

They obviously expected that the spiritual appearance of the master would have an effect on the worshippers. On the contemplation of the Master's countenance, see (Fenton 2019, pp. 193–226).

Lit. 'inebriation' (*naṣwa*).

Mohammed Ebn E. Munawwar, *Les étapes mystiques du shaykh Abū Sā'id*, *Op. cit.*, p. 215.

See (Tritton n.d., pp. 571–72) [A. S. Tritton].

Ḥāfiz, *ḡazal* no 146. See also *ed. cit.*, no 78.

'Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak (118–181/736–797) was a scholar of Islamic law, who, as a major *ḥadīth* transmitter, earned the title of "commander of the faithful" in the *ḥadīth*. In addition, he wrote on piety and was subsequently considered by many mystics as one of the earliest figures of Sufism. On him see (Salem 2016).

Asrār, Persian text, pp. 269–70, Arabic text, p. 290.

Dīvān, ed. cit., p. 170. See also Bistāmī quoted *apud* 'Attār, *Tadhkirat*, p. 48 and Ḥāfiz, ed. cit., no 78, p. 184, where the girdle symbolizes infidelity or blasphemy (*kofr*): Since my heart-holder's tress commands me 'gird thy cincture'. Begone, O Master, your mantle is unlawful. See also Ṣabistārī, *Gulshān-i rāz*, ed. cit., pp. 85–8, question 15, lines 885–930 and lines 971.

He is of course Abū l-Ma'ālī 'Abd al-Malik al-Ḡuwaynī (1028–1085), the famous Aṣ'arite theologian known as Imām al-ḥaramayn. We hear of a 'convent of the carpet-beaters' (?) (*Ḥānaqāh-i 'adani-kōbān*) in Nīšāpūr, said to have been founded by [Abū] 'Alī Ṭarsūsī, who may have been Abū Sa'id's father-in-law; Cf. Nicholson, *op. cit.*, p. 27 and Meier, *op. cit.*, p. 423.

Supposedly, as the intendant of a Muslim dignitary, he was exempt from the discriminatory badge and distinctive yellow garments the Jews of Persia were required to wear at the time.

The use of the word 'stone' naturally calls to mind the infamous anti-Jewish *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayra: 'The stone behind which a Jew will be hiding will say: "O Muslim! There is a Jew hiding behind me, so kill him!"', Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīh*, Book 56, *ḥadīth*-s 138 and 139, 2925–2926. Of sorts, the Jew is here put to death by his conversion.

There is some discussion in Muslim jurisdiction whether Jews are to be considered as idolators on account of their supposed worship of 'Ezra. See on this question (Lazarus-Yafeh 1992, ch. III, pp. 50–74).

⁷⁰ *Asrār*, Persian text, pp. 142–43, Arabic text, pp. 155–57.

⁷¹ I.e., the Qur'ān.

⁷² *Asrār*, Persian text, p. 342. For further positive views about Jews expressed by Sufis, see also (Fenton 2006, pp. 124–25) [on Abu l-Ḥasan al-Šādīlī (d. 1258), 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qināwī (d. 1196) and 'Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (1219–1291)], p. 135 [on al-Ḥasan ibn Hud (1235–1299)], and p. 134 [on 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Ša'rānī (1492–1565)]. See also al-Ša'rānī, *al-Baḥr al-mawrūd*, ed. M. A. Al-Jadir, Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 2011, p. 142, no 108 on the protection due to *ḍimmi*-s, but see also *idem*, p. 67, no 25, where al-Ša'rānī prohibits his adepts from being treated by Jewish physicians. On the exceptional attitude of 'Abd al-Karīm al-ġilī (1365–1409), see my contribution (Fenton 2025, pp. 389–436).

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