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ject index, the ordering of the chapters is not arbitrary. Ritter has arranged them in such a way so as to incrementally introduce the reader, step by step, to Attar's views on central mystical themes, from the simpler to the more complex. Although the interrelation of the chapters is not always easily discernable on the surface, it is still there, hidden beyond the foreground. In a loose sense, the order also corresponds to the mystic's ascent to God. Thus the first 22 chapters deal with questions about one's relation to the world; the next five chapters address the question of love in all its aspects; while the final three chapters deal with the human being's "extinction" in God. Ritter was able to disentangle and reassemble Attar's stories according to this scheme so easily because of the nature of the frame-story, which consists of mini-stories embedded within a larger, overarching narrative.

The book also comes with a very comprehensive bibliography and analytic index, which, when combined, runs 274 pages. Although O'Kane has made a few additions to both, they are essentially the same as the 1955 edition. In O'Kane's translation of the German he has crosschecked Ritter's translations of the primary sources with the more recent ones of Richard Gramlich. This has certainly contributed towards the accuracy of the English version. All in all, this is a very comprehensive, and for the most part, accurate study of one Persian Islam's greatest mystics.

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Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam

Kristin Zahra Sands

London and New York: Routledge, 2005. v-viii + 196 p.

This work is the first book-length study dedicated to the vast corpus of Muslim mystical commentaries upon Islam's primary sacred text. That it has taken such a long time for a book on Sufi Qur'anic exegesis to appear is not a surprise. The Sufi scriptural exegetical tradition is extremely rich and vast, spanning well over a thousand years. There are also a host of methodological problems connected with any exposition of Sufi Qur'an commentaries, not for the least reason that the mystical hermeneuts of Islam, like those of other religious traditions, were primarily commenting upon scripture based on the gradual unfolding of their own spiritual itineraries. Insofar as such topics as esoteric scriptural commentaries are amenable to being studied by the contemporary researcher, a number of questions come up with respect to how one should go about tackling and then presenting the material. Should one begin with the earliest discussions on the nature of the Qur'an and its esoteric interpretation, and then focus on several thematic examples of how Sufi esoteric exegesis was carried out throughout the centuries? Or should one major theme in Qur'anic exegesis be selected, and the many esoteric and exoteric commentaries in the Islamic tradition be juxtaposed with one another? The first method ensures a good overview of the Sufi hermeneutical perspective and its different thematic expressions throughout the centuries. The second method zeros in on a specific theme, and then shows how this theme was developed by the Sufis and non-Sufis, pointing up the differences between Sufi and non-Sufi approaches to the Qur'an. Both methods would reveal

the interpretive genius of the Sufi Qur'an commentators, yet each one highlights different aspects of the rich legacy of mystical exegesis in Islam. The first approach portrays how the Sufi hermeneutical tradition developed in relation to itself, whereas the second approach shows how it developed in relation to the exoteric Qur'anic exegetical tradition. Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam surprisingly manages to synthesize both approaches, and does an excellent job in doing so.

The book is divided into two parts: hermeneutics (Part 1) and commentary (Part 2). The section on hermeneutics is divided into five chapters: "The Qur'an as the ocean of all knowledge," "The Qur'anic text and ambiguity: verse 3:7," "Uncovering meaning: knowledge and spiritual practice," "Methods of interpretation" and "Attacking and defending Sufi Qur'anic interpretation." The section on commentary is divided into the following four chapters: "Sufi commentators of the Qur'an," "Qur'anic verses 18:60-62: the story of Musa and al-Khadir," "Qur'anic verses on Maryam," and "Qur'an 24:35 (The Light Verse)." The book is accompanied by many useful notes and a good bibliography. It is also appended with a descriptive list of the main non-Sufi Qur'an commentators, a glossary of technical terms to be found in Sufi and non-Sufi Qur'anic exegesis, and indices of the Qur'anic passages and Prophetic traditions found throughout the study.

Apart from outlining the different methods of Qur'anic interpretation articulated by some key Sufis (Sarraj, Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi, Nisaburi, Kashani and Simnani), Sands' study highlights some of the earliest Muslim discussions on the depth of the Qur'an. Ibn Mas'ud, the famous companion of the Prophet Muhammad known for his intellectual acumen and piety, is reported to have said that the Qur'an has four aspects or "senses": the outward/exoteric, the limit/legal, the hidden/esoteric and the look-out point/transcendent perspective. This early saying concerning the Qur'an's four senses, which appears in several different versions but all of which convey similar meanings, is often attributed to either Imam 'Ali or Ja'far al-Sadiq, two very influential early Muslim figures. Since the saying of the Qur'an's four senses was attributed to such eminent early Muslim personalities, both Sufi and non-Sufi commentators upon the Qur'an sought to explain what was meant by it. Sands does a fine job in bringing out some of the earliest discussions in Qur'anic exegetical literature concerning this saying. She first highlights the views of the non-Sufi and very influential historian and Qur'an commentator, Al-Tabari, contrasting his understanding of this saying with its interpretation by one of the earliest Sufi Qur'an commentators, Sahl al-Tustari. This method works very well, since it points up the distinction between Sufi and non-Sufi exegetical methods.

Perhaps the single most important aspect of the book is its examination of a crucial issue in the history of Qur'anic interpretation: the question of the "ambiguous" and "clear" verses referred to in Q 3:7. The Qur'anic passage speaks of the verses of the Qur'an as either being "clear" or "ambiguous." Depending on how one reads the Arabic, the meanings of the ambiguous verses may be understood as being only known to God, or they may be understood as being known to God and "the firmly rooted in knowledge." The non-Sufi exegetes often understood it in the former sense, whereas the Sufis understood it in the latter sense. But some important early Muslim doxographical reports clearly state that the "ambiguous" verses are to be understood with reference to the "clear" verses. Thus, a number of non-Sufi exegetes held the opinion that the ambiguous verses in the Qur'an need to be interpreted in light of the clear verses, therefore dispelling any possibilities of incorrect interpretation. Yet this would

entail a further complication, and Sands hits the nail on the head when she cites the Muslim theologian and Qur'an commentator, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. As Razi observes, any interpretation of the ambiguous verses in light of the clear ones raises a serious methodological problem: one school of thought's clear verses may be another school's ambiguous verses and vice versa. But the Sufis did not run into this difficulty, because they generally did not seek to interpret the ambiguous verses in light of what they deemed to be the clear verses. They understood the distinction between the clear and ambiguous verses with respect to the different grades of knowers. The clear verses outline the rules and regulations for the guidance of the Muslim community, and are therefore for the general body of believers. But the unclear or ambiguous verses are for the spiritual elite because God provides them with the keys to its meanings. This in no way means that the Sufis saw themselves as somehow above the Law. Indeed, they could only reach the inward by virtue of their immersion in the outward.

The creative ways in which the Sufis commented upon specific passages of scripture is highlighted in chapters 7 to 9 of this study. We learn of the Sufi interpretations of Q 18:60–82, which relates the story of Moses and his meeting with the mysterious figure identified by the Sufi tradition as Khidr; the Qur'anic portrayal of the Virgin Mary; and the famous verse of Light, to be found at Q 24:35. Again, Sands juxtaposes non-Sufi interpretations of each of these themes with Sufi ones. What the reader walks away with from reading these chapters is that the Sufi commentators' intellectual dispositions and temperaments did not hinder their expositions of the inner meanings of the Qur'an, but actually enhanced them. Sufis such as 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani, a prominent member of the school of Ibn 'Arabi, were able to explain the esoteric symbolism of the significance of the story of Moses and Khidr, for example, with respect to their own highly developed mystical anthropologies and cosmologies. Yet Sufi commentators belonging to different intellectual and spiritual persuasions, such as Rashid al-Din Maybudi, were no less profound in their different explanations of the same verses of the Qur'an. The Muslim mystics' esoteric interpretations highlighted in this book were the result of their direct encounter with the Truth as such. This encounter left an indelible mark upon their being—marks which were coloured by each Sufis' own intellectual makeup and, therefore, "mode" of reception of the Divine.

Academic literature dedicated to Islamic mystical texts, figures and institutions have proliferated over the past several decades. Readers interested in learning about the main trends of Sufism have before them many excellent translations of traditional Sufi texts, as well as a number of meaningful studies dedicated to various aspects of the Sufi tradition. Kristin Zahra Sands' *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam* is certainly one of these meaningful studies. On account of its clarity, exemplary textual fidelity and sound translations from the Arabic and Persian, this monograph will serve as an effective basis for further inquiries into Sufi Qur'anic exegesis. It is, therefore, a welcome contribution to the growing literature on Islamic mysticism.

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