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ʿAyn al-Quḍāt on Chivalry

Mohammed Rustom
College of the Humanities, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada
mohammed.rustom@carleton.ca

Abstract

This article investigates the multi-dimensional presence of the important Persian Sufi concept of *jawānmardī* or chivalry in the writings of the famous 6th/12th century metaphysician, martyr, and mystic ʿAyn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 525/1131). The article begins by situating *jawānmardī* vis-à-vis its Arabic Sufi equivalent of *futuwwa*. Both of them convey a wide range of spiritual perfections ranging from wisdom and detachment to justice and pure generosity. Moreover, the article explores the specifically Persian emphasis on *jawānmardī* as an embodiment of the ideal type of lover of God. It will consequently be shown how, in the writings of such an influential figure as ʿAyn al-Quḍāt, *jawānmardī* is most prominently featured in three distinctive modes: an aspirational ideal, a realised concept, and the key to unlock the mystery of one of the greatest chevaliers, namely Iblīs.

Keywords

ʿAyn al-Quḍāt – *futuwwa* – Iblīs – *jawānmardī* – love – Persian Sufi literature – self-sacrifice

الخلاصة

يبحث هذا المقال الأبعاد المختلفة للمفهوم الصوفي الفارسي الهام أو جوانمردي (تعني الفتوة) في كتابات المتكلم الشهيد الصوفي الشهير عين القضاة همداني (ت. 525/1131). يبدأ المقال بوضع جوانمردي في مقابل معادلها العربي الصوفي الفتوة، وكلاهما يعبر عن مجموعة واسعة من الكماليات الروحية بدءًا من الحكمة والانفصال

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إلى العدالة والكرم الخالص. وندرس كذلك التركيز الفارسي الخاص على مفهوم جوانمردي بوصفه تجسيدا لذلك النوع المثالي من المحب لله تعالى. وبناءً على ذلك، سنوضح كيف أن مفهوم جوانمردي، في كتابات شخصية مؤثرة مثل عين القضاة، تبرز في ثلاثة أنماط رئيسة: مثال الطموح المرجو، ومفهوم محقق، ومفتاح لفهم أحد أعظم الفتيان، وهو إبليس.

الكلمات المفتاحية

عين القضاة – فتوة – إبليس – جوانمردي – حب – الأدب الصوفي الفارسي – التضحية بالنفس

•••

صد هزاران جان خدا کرده پدید چه جوانمردی بود کآن را ندید

Hundreds of thousands of spirits did God put into the clear,
But the one who cannot see this, how is he a chevalier?

RŪMĪ 1925–1940, 2:893[1]

⁘

1 Entrance

Our epigraph from the *Mathnawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) draws on a stock Sufi image, that of the chevalier or *jawānmard*. This Persian term is identical to the Arabic *fatā*, which can be translated as "young man" or "chivalrous youth." The latter derives from ones of its plurals, *fitya*, mentioned in Qur'ān 18:13 (Nasr et al. 2015, 733–734) and which is also the basis of the key Arabic Sufi expression *futuwwa*. The Persian equivalent of *futuwwa* is *jawānmardī* (chivalry), the complex history of which has been thoroughly documented by Lloyd Ridgeon (2010 and 2011, 1–21) and its theoretical underpinnings extensively investigated by Cyrus Zargar (2017, chapter 8; see also Mahjub 1999).

Jawānmardī denotes such ethical perfections as pure generosity, the control of one's sexual appetite, self-sacrifice, patience, and mercy. It also implies a

1 Lit., "Hundreds of thousands of spirits did God manifest openly / But what kind of chivalry is it, if this one cannot see?" All translations from Sufi texts are my own, whereas those from the Qur'ān are taken and occasionally modified from Nasr et al. 2015.

kind of manliness (*muruwwa*) and spiritual bravery on the one hand (Zargar 2017, 221), and complete detached action on the other (Nasr 2007, 87–89). The prototype of the chevalier is of course ʿAlī, about whom the Prophet said, "There is no chivalrous youth other than ʿAlī" (Mahjub 1999, 554). ʿAlī is legendary for the manner in which his everyday interactions were punctuated by sagacity, moral uprightness, and a lack of self-interest (see Sajjadi 2011 and Shah-Kazemi 2006). His spiritual valour is on full display in the famous story, so beautifully retold in the *Mathnawī*, wherein his opponent in battle spits at him just as ʿAlī is about to kill him. With the possibility of personal animosity now introduced into the equation, ʿAlī withdraws and then explains to his puzzled enemy that he only acts for the sake of God, and not for his own sake (see Nasr 2007, 87–88).

This story also sheds light on the epigraph since it points up how the true *jawānmard* or chevalier always sees God behind the illusion of the myriad forms and even emotions which are constitutive of our earthly lives: ʿAlī could never act for himself precisely because all that he wishes to see, feel, and act for is God. In Persianate Sufism the chivalry of ʿAlī and others became a major referent in the 5th/11th century, particularly as seen in the teachings of the Sufi master Abū l-Ḥasan Kharaqānī (d. 425/1033), who placed a premium on the spiritual nature of *jawānmardī* (Ridgeon 2010: 46–51). Then, in the 6th/12th century, *jawānmardī* was increasingly defined vis-à-vis the doctrines and practices of the Persian school of passionate love (*madhhab-i ʿishq*) (for which, see Lewisohn 2015, 152–173). It consequently came to denote, as William Chittick observes, "the ideal lover of God" (Chittick 2013, xxii).

Among the Persian Sufi authors of this time period, none devoted as much attention to *jawānmardī* as the profound mystic-philosopher ʿAyn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 525/1131) (for his life and thought, see Rustom, forthcoming [a]). The concept of chivalry is like the lifeblood that animates the entire body of his writings. This is perhaps best evidenced with reference to three foci in particular: the manner in which ʿAyn al-Quḍāt frames chivalry as an aspirational ideal for his students, alludes to and even demonstrates his own realised state of chivalry, and recounts a most perfect example of chivalry as embodied in Iblīs's tragic life of love and loss.

2 Aspiration

As a Sufi master, legal judge, and scholar of scholastic theology ʿAyn al-Quḍāt had a wide variety of students who would come knocking at this door. His many written responses to his inquirers' questions have been preserved in the

form of nearly 160 letters, which are collectively referred to as the *Nāma-hā* (see introduction in Rustom, forthcoming [a]). In many of these letters, our author turns his attention to his own spiritual disciples in particular, offering them a good deal of advice on how to live an inner life that is punctuated by the constant remembrance of God and the preparation for death (Rustom, forthcoming [a], chapter 2). One of the hallmarks of chivalry is generosity, and for ʿAyn al-Quḍāt the best display of it is by way of charity (*ṣadaqa*) (Rustom 2018, 65). One typical statement from his letters shall suffice:

> Every day, set aside some of your own wealth, and give it away for the sake of God. Knowing that it is for the sake of God, set aside however much you wish.
>
> ʿAyn al-Quḍāt 1998, 1:114

ʿAyn al-Quḍāt often addresses any given student as a *javānmard*, using the exclamatory Persian expression *jawānmardā* or "O chevalier!"

> O chevalier! The science of inheritance [*mīrāth*] is wayfaring [*sulūk*], not the inheritance from mother and father.
>
> ʿAyn al-Quḍāt 1998, 1:225

> You say, "Can I perceive knowledge of God through the proof of the intellect?" O chevalier! The one who cannot know Him, how can he get there with the intellect? Nobody knows Him, and one does not reach the reality of faith until he sees all people as gathered in the Essence of God. What you know is not recognition [*maʿrifat*] of God. So have etiquette!
>
> ʿAyn al-Quḍāt 1998, 1:92–93

> Hypocrites are one thing, and lovers quite another! To which group do you belong? *Wavering between this* [*and that*]*, being neither for one group nor for the other* [Q 4:143]. O chevalier! If you fear the sultan more than you fear the Master, then you are still a hypocrite!
>
> ʿAyn al-Quḍāt 1998, 1:46–47[2]

> O chevalier! The Qur'ān has been sent to people in as many as a thousand veils. If the majesty of the dot of the *bā'* of the *basmala* were to come upon the Throne or the heavens and the earth, they would be crushed and melted immediately. *Had We made this Qur'ān descend upon a mountain,*

2 For ʿAyn al-Quḍāt's critique of worldly leaders, see Rustom 2018 and Safi 2006, 182ff.

> *you would have seen it humbled, rent asunder by the fear of God* [Q 59:21] also has this meaning.
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1994, 173

In calling his students chevaliers, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt is conforming to a practice common among some of the major Persian Sufi authors contemporaneous with him (see Chittick 2013, passim). These masters would refer to their audience as chevaliers in order to call their attention to realising their potential as lovers of God, which, like *futuwwa*, would also entail their coming to embody "perfect virtue, wisdom, generosity, kindness, and compassion" (Chittick 2013, xxii).

In other contexts, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt uses a synonym for chevaliers, namely *mardān* or "men."

> If you come out of your self before death, you will see everything. But if not, then at its proper time—at the time of death—you will know: "*Now We have removed from you your cover; so today your sight is piercing!*" [Q 50:22]. One must be of the quality of ʿAlī so that he can say, "Were the cover lifted, I would not increase in certainty."[3] Unveiling [*kashf*] comes about through sandal-service [*khidmat-i kafshī*][4] to the men, not through service at the court of the sultan!
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1998, 2:388–389

> The men know with certainty that the most important and most obligatory of obligations is the recognition of God and His qualities.
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1998, 2:254

ʿAyn al-Quḍāt of course does not understand these "men" as males per se, and at any rate he expresses great admiration for the spiritual accomplishments of some of the major female Sufi figures who came before him (ʿAyn al-Quḍāt 1962a, 25).[5] When speaking of the men, he wants to contrast them with those whom he calls *nā-mardān*, that is, non-men or wimps. These wimps are best characterised as being bound by their habitual attachment[6] to this world and their own sense of selfhood:

3 This saying is less commonly ascribed to other early Sufi figures. See, for example, Sarrāj 1914, 70.

4 For ʿAyn al-Quḍāt's teachings on sandal-service, see Rustom, forthcoming [a], chapter 2.

5 Fine examples of realised Sufi women in classical and contemporary Sufism can be found in Geoffroy 2020, chapters 7–9 and Sargut 2018.

6 For ʿAyn al-Quḍāt's critique of habit (*ʿādat*), see Rustom, forthcoming [a], chapters 6 and 10.

> You have been content with false habit! The path of men who tear the idols of habit to pieces is one thing, and the path of effeminates, wimps, and false claimants who take the idols of habit as their objects of worship is quite another!
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1998, 1:225

The wimps are wimps precisely because they do not have the spiritual virility to pursue the life of single-minded devotion to and love for the divine. They are bound by the idols of their own habits and serve these idols rather than God. Since they are unfit to walk the path of love, they receive another designation of blame which again stands in stark contrast to chivalry, namely faint-heartedness (*bad-dilī*): "O friend! You are a self-lover, but trading cannot be done with faint-heartedness!" (ʿAyn al-Quḍāt 1998, 1:123).

3 Realisation

While ʿAyn al-Quḍāt wishes to alert his audience to the ideals of chivalry, he also provides them with many hands-on examples of what a chevalier is supposed to know, do, and say. How does he do this? By citing himself as a case in point:

> Alas! Whoever wants to hear of the divine mysteries without an intermediary, say, "Hear it from ʿAyn al-Quḍāt."
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1994, 300

> O chevalier! That which I know, you will never know!
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1998, 3:279

> O chevalier! 80,000 worlds have been created, and the lowest of all of the worlds is the world of bodies. These other worlds are not bodies at all. By the majesty and worth of the Beginningless, I have had a vision many times about how bodies should be in existence. People have come from another path, and you are knocking at another door!
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1998, 1:88

> O dear friend! On the path to God, I have seen it all.... Without doubt, you do not know because you have not arrived. I know, because I have arrived.
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1998, 2:25

In other instances, we can read between the lines and see chivalry on full display in ʿAyn al-Quḍāt's life and writings. We know, for example, that when he was unjustly charged and then sentenced to death for external causes that were purely political in nature (see Safi 2006, chapter 6), he welcomed his fate with open arms (Rustom 2018, 55–56 and 67–68). As has been shown elsewhere (Rustom 2018), the subterfuge involved in bringing ʿAyn al-Quḍāt to his death explains only one dimension of a much more complex set of circumstances and causes related to his demise.

The other cause was a directly vertical one, which ʿAyn al-Quḍāt himself identified with what is known as the divine jealousy (*ghayrat*). This jealousy does not allow for the disclosure of the secret of God's lordship (*sirr-i rubūbiyya*) except that the one revealing it pay for it with his life (see Rustom 2018). The sage of Hamadan was perfectly aware of the consequences of his revealing the secret of God's lordship, which he discusses at great length in his writings, particularly in his magnum opus the *Tamhīdāt* ("Paving the Path") (see Rustom, forthcoming [a], chapter 10). Like a bona fide chevalier, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt must speak about the true nature of God's oneness and the reality of faith (*īmān*) and unbelief (*kufr*), regardless of the consequences:

> Alas! What boldness I have to speak these words which cannot be contained in this world or that world! But I shall speak, come what may!
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1994, 209

> Although on account of this discussion my blood will be spilt, I have no care and I shall speak, come what may!
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1994, 266

> You think that being killed on the path of God comes as an affliction or is an affliction? No, in our path being killed is life! What do you say? Does one not love to give his life?!
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1994, 235

ʿAyn al-Quḍāt naturally never refers to himself as a chevalier. Only three persons are given that honour in his writings. The first of them is none other than the great Sufi martyr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), whose famous ecstatic utterance "I am the Real!" (see Sells 1996, 277) is itself proof of his chivalry:

> O chevalier! In the grasp of the recogniser [*ʿārif*], the seven heavens and the earth are paltry. If he should say "I am the Real!," excuse him!
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1998, 1:113

> When a madman says that a drop in the ocean is to be called the ocean itself, it is just like when that chevalier said, "I am the Real!" He too should be excused!
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1994, 340

4 Iblīs

The other two chevaliers in ʿAyn Al-Quḍāt's writings are the Prophet Muḥammad and Iblīs. This is a point that our author cites as originating from al-Ḥallāj's *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn* (partially translated in Sells 1996, 272–280), and which he discusses on two separate occasions. The most detailed of them is as follows:

> Al-Ḥallāj said, "Chivalry [*futuwwa*] is not fitting, except for Aḥmad and Iblīs."[7] Alas! What do you hear? He said, "Chivalry is appropriate for two persons: Aḥmad and Iblīs." "Chevalier" and "arrived man" pertain to these two. The others are nothing but children on the path!
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1994, 223

In his writings the sage of Hamadan devotes much of his attention to the person and reality of the Prophet (see Rustom 2017). When it comes to his chivalry, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt explicates it in all but name with reference to many aspects of his worldview, particularly his metaphysics of light, cosmology, epistemology, aesthetic theory, and doctrine of divine Self-love (see Rustom, forthcoming [a], passim).

The chivalry of Iblīs is much less obvious, which is one of the reasons why ʿAyn al-Quḍāt develops his Satanology from so many different angles. Before moving in that direction, some comments are in order concerning the Sufi defence of Iblīs. It is based in the first instance on a reading of such Qurʾānic verses as 2:34 (et passim), wherein God asks the angels to prostrate to Adam. Iblīs, who at this point in the Qurʾānic narrative is not yet "Satan" and who in Qurʾān 18:50 is referred to as being among the Jinn, refuses to comply. Iblīs is then shunned from the divine Presence and becomes an enemy of God (see Lory 2018).

Needless to say, Sufis such as al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Quḍāt's own Sufi master Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 520/1126) saw Iblīs' refusal to bow to anyone other than

7 Cf. Sells 1996, 273. For Aḥmad as one of the Prophet's honorific names, see Nasr et al. 2015, 1366.

God as an expression of the highest form of monotheism and love for God. ʿAyn al-Quḍāt also enters into this conversation and develops the *tawḥid-i Iblīs* (monotheism of Iblīs) motif in greater detail, and with more ingenuity and creativity, than any other author in the Islamic tradition. For example, he brings the figure of Iblīs to bear on his philosophical and theological views, demonstrating how Iblīs' person and function are inextricably related to his theodicy and doctrine of human agency (Rustom, 2020). But when it comes to the question of Iblīs' chivalry, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt maintains that it can best be seen in light of his tragic story, which is one of perfection, love, and even comfort for those who are familiar with its details:

> O chevalier! If *unto Moses God spoke directly* [4:164] is perfection, then Iblīs is of this perfection!
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1998, 1:96

> O chevalier! That place where Iblīs is, you do not have a way to it. So how can you get to this country?
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1998, 1:97

> There is only one of my friends who can listen to a part of his tale. So who would dare tell it, and who would dare hear it?!
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1998, 2:417

> If someone in existence knew to listen to the story of Iblīs, especially its mysteries, his story would be extremely dear to him.
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1998, 2:416

Because Iblīs refused to bow to anyone other than God, his love for his Beloved was pure and uncontaminated. In a different context, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt explains what this type of love is with reference to the attraction of iron to a magnet:

> If the iron is pure, the magnet will entirely attract the iron towards itself, with nothing to divert the iron's pursuit of the magnet. But if the iron is mixed with some gold, silver, or the like, this will compromise its attraction towards the magnet. Likewise, whenever the iron is not contaminated by something else, its fully actualised pursuit after the magnet will ensue. It is then that finding—namely the iron's arrival at the magnet—will necessarily occur.
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1962b, 33

Iblīs' love was like pure iron, which meant that it could not but become attracted to the Magnet. This type of utter attraction toward and pure love for the divine is indeed the very stuff of *jawānmardī*.

Another aspect of Iblīs' chivalry is his complete lack of concern for the consequences of his love. He loves God, regardless of what that will entail. If it means that people will hate him forever, so be it. And if it means that he will have to suffer for his love[8] even at the hands of his Beloved, so be it:

> Iblīs chose separation from the Beloved over prostration to someone else. How excellent was his perfection of love! *The gaze swerved not, nor did it transgress* [53:17].
>
> ʿAyn al-Quḍāt 1998, 1:96

> How fine was his aspiration! He said, "I am ready for endless pain, so give me the eternal mercilessness that is my due!"
>
> ʿAyn al-Quḍāt 1998, 2:187

> "Do as You wish. Whatever You do, I am contented with that. If others flee from Your curse, Your curse for me is an embroidered robe, and a crown upon my head."
>
> ʿAyn al-Quḍāt 1998, 2:187

ʿAyn al-Qudat has much to say about how Iblīs' attendant separation from God's Presence is in fact a distinctive honour conferred upon him. In the first instance, he relates Iblīs to God's jealousy when he admiringly refers to him as a "victim of the Empire's jealousy" (ʿAyn al-Quḍāt 1998, 2:416). He also tells us that some of his own teachers used to refer to Iblīs with such titles of distinction as the "Master of masters" and "Leader of the abandoned ones" (ʿAyn al-Quḍāt 1998, 1:97).

Iblīs' abandonment was a necessary consequence of his being implicated in a much more intricate cosmic plan (see Rustom 2020). He could not but be abandoned, since without his being characterised as a dark, distant, and misguiding force, the opposite of these, namely light, proximity, and guidance would not obtain. Iblīs is therefore a perfect chevalier who displays nothing less than the greatest type of self-sacrifice. He gives up his own self-interest

8 For ʿAyn al-Quḍāt's teachings on the intimate relationship between love and suffering, see Rustom, forthcoming [b].

and the usual human longing to be with God in place of abandonment from the Presence of God, and this purely for the sake of others.

> According to the reality of the matter, he took the path of proximity in distance.
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1998, 1:315

> Until Iblīs was cursed, God's beauty was never displayed to His lovers. Until a bad eye was cast, one could not arrive at perfection itself.
>
> ʿAYN AL-QUḌĀT 1998, 1:415

5 Exit

Before bringing this article to a close, it would be good to take stock of our findings. We had the opportunity to situate the Persianate understandings of *jawānmardī* or chivalry amid the constellation of meanings in the universe of its Arabic Sufi equivalent, that of *futuwwa*. Both terms naturally share the same points of reference and senses of meaning. At the same time, *jawānmardī* also came to refer to the ideal lover of God from the 6th/12th century onward, largely due to the influence of the Persian school of passionate love.

Of all of the members of this school, none has approached the notion of chivalry in as multi-dimensional a manner as has ʿAyn al-Quḍāt. He urges his students to become chevaliers and also shows them that chivalry is not simply an ideal. Rather, it is an attainable reality, and one which he inhabits. For those who wish to come to realise chivalry as ʿAyn al-Quḍāt has, he calls their attention to the story of Iblīs, whose tale of love and self-sacrifice gives them a perfect window into what a life of chivalry entails and is all about.

True *jawānmardī* or chivalry can and should be learned from the greats of the past, be they the Prophet, ʿAlī, al-Ḥallāj, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt, or Iblīs. Their lives and teachings point the way to chivalry's true qualities, the most important of which is the love of God for God's sake alone. And as ʿAyn al-Quḍāt also reminds us, chivalry is ultimately to be realised inside one's self. In a time like ours where the cult of the self has such an unprecedented following, the sage of Hamadan's teachings on chivalry are all the more compelling. To this effect, he encourages his readers to ask themselves three simple questions, the answers to which will tell them whether or not they are real chevaliers: "Now, look inside yourself—is love for this world predominant, or love for Paradise, or love for God?" (ʿAyn al-Quḍāt 1998, 1:65).

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