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Book Review

Scott Kugle, *Hajj to the Heart: Sufi Journeys across the Indian Ocean*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. Pp. 324. Free. (EPUB)

In the final year of his life, the South Asian Sufi saint ʻAli Muttaqi experienced episodic fits that led to "poetic ecstasies and feelings of cosmic, oceanic unity," according to his biographer, Scott Kugle (178). During one fit ʻAli Muttaqi asked his successor, ʻAbd al-Wahhab, to recite a Persian couplet regularly performed as a Sufi devotional song. Hearing the words overwhelmed ʻAli Muttaqi and he requested to hear the song again. He "responded with expressions of loving ecstasy and heaved passionate sighs," according to an early biographer (178). ʻAli Muttaqi then recited his own couplet, which drew on Gujarati wedding traditions to present the poet metaphorically as a bride offering himself to the divine beloved. It was common for South Asian saints to recite such poetry in trances of union with the absolute essence. But this outpouring of emotion was a complete reversal of ʻAli Muttaqi's lifelong teachings, as Kugle demonstrates in *Hajj to the Heart: Sufi Journeys across the Indian Ocean*.

Kugle, an Emory University professor, has written extensively on Islam, particularly on Sufism and South Asian Islam. In this book, he explores the theology and career of Shaykh ʻAlī ibn Husām al-Dīn ibn ʻAbd al-Mālik ibn Qādī Khān al-Hindī al-Muttaqī (1480-1567). Kugle defines Sufism as "Islamic mysticism," which he explains as "love of the absolute" that "seeks spiritual insight and direct experience of God" (15) As Kugle persuasively shows, ʻAli Muttaqi initiated a reform movement that challenges common perceptions of Sufis as non-doctrinaire, ecumenical, and apolitical. ʻAli Muttaqi was no retiring contemplative. His life was deeply shaped by his role as adviser to the sultan of Gujarat, who built a navy to guard against the Portuguese seaborne threat but was ultimately overthrown by another new South Asian invader, the land-based Mughal military. The community ʻAli Muttaqi formed contributed significantly to shaping Sufism, which "was the center of intellectual and political life" in the early Mughal period" according to Kugle (9-10).

Kugle makes clear that the ecstatic experience of God that characterized the last year of ʻAli Muttaqi's life was a complete aberration. Far from embracing the broad spirituality that for centuries encouraged Hindus to join Muslims in worship at *dargahs*, or Sufi tombs, he severely criticized experience for failing to serve as an appropriate guide to the spiritual life. For him, the heart of Islamic faith was not emotion but knowledge. Scholarship and ethical conduct were true devotion. He emphasized the centrality of mastering the sacred Quran, *shari'a*, or Islamic jurisprudence, and the *hadith*, or utterances of Muhammad. Indeed, ʻAli Muttaqi and his disciples became experts in *hadith* studies, the arcane discipline of determining the authenticity of Muhammad's putative oral statements by carefully tracing their provenance.

In his careful attention to theology, ʻAli Muttaqi was also highly critical of two South Asian Islamic movements of his time, both outgrowths of Sufism. First was the Shattari Order, a Central Asian Sufi "Path of Ardent Lovers" that entered India in the late 15th century and advocated yoga as complementary to Sufi devotion. ʻAli Muttaqi criticized the lead Shattari proponent for, among other things, teaching openly about divine immanence, instead of reserving such esoteric teachings for disciples committed to *shari'a*. He also attacked the Mahdawi movement. Though most familiar from Twelver Shiism, belief in a millennial messianic figure was historically common to both Sunni and Shia traditions, albeit in different forms, and throughout Islamic history many have claimed (or have been claimed by their disciples) to be the Mahdi. Indeed, in one late-life ecstatic moment, ʻAli Muttaqi proclaimed, "I am the Mahdi of the End of Time" (180). But for much of his career, he disparaged the contemporary South Asian Mahdawi movement as irresponsible, self-authenticating, and ungrounded in Islamic scripture and tradition. He even called for a *fatwa,* or judicial ruling*,* against Mahdawi leaders that might have led to their punishment.

Hajj to the Heart is essentially an intellectual and theological biography of ʻAli Muttaqi and his three primary disciples. Kugle's subtitle indicates his placement of these Sufis' lives in the context of the Indian Ocean, as they shuttled across the "maritime zone" (7) of their South Asian homeland and the Islamic heartland of Arabia that shaped their lives and theology. Apart from this geographic framing, the book rarely interacts explicitly with a larger historiography. Kugle does explain in the introduction that his emphasis on Sufi ethics and conduct counters Nile Green's focus on Sufism as political and social power, and A. Azfar Moin's characterization of Sufism as a form of bargaining with supernatural forces.

Much of the text is given over to summarizing ʻAli Muttaqi's beliefs and arguments. Given the complexity of his theological worldview, this requires Kugle to wade into some very esoteric debates. Readers, especially non-specialists in Islam, may find themselves wishing for more explicit framing of the significance of these debates. Kugle also frequently quotes from his sources at length. Several chapters contain a dozen or more block quotes, some a page in length. This extensive quoting likely reflects

Kugle's desire to introduce readers to the rare, often unpublished Arabic, Persian, and Urdu manuscripts he examined. Still, more analysis of these texts and explanation of their import would be welcome.

Hajj to the Heart is a dense text. Instructors could not assign it in a world history or world religion survey course, but it could be useful in upper division or graduate courses. It might be particularly helpful in specialized courses on the early modern period, Mughal India, the Indian Ocean, or Islam. The book has much to recommend it. Kugle compellingly reveals the complexities and nuances of Sufism, and of Islam more broadly. In his conclusion, he notes that 'Ali Muttaqi's reform of Sufism had a profoundly unintended consequence: it fueled two modern groups he would have repudiated, the Wahhabi and Deobandi movements. Both fundamentalist movements have given rise to violent groups that have attacked those whose innovations they consider pernicious to Islam. Ironically, Sufism has been a central target. But Kugle concludes with the hope that readers "who imagine making a journey toward God" will draw a more productive lesson from 'Ali Muttaqi's teachings than these intolerant successors have: "it is only in bringing knowledge, contentment, and care to the hearts of those around us that we find the way, through twisted paths and stormy seas, to the heart that is in each of us" (241).

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