

The *Wali* (plural. *auliya*) is fully treated by Goldziher in Vol. II of his *Muhammedanische Studien* (pp. 287-295). The word is used in the Koran in the sense of "friend of God". The title was given to the Prophet and even to God himself in the list of ninety-nine names. It is almost a synonym of the Hebrew *goel*, redeemer, so writes Goldziher. Today the word signifies a Moslem saint. Not only, as Hudjwiri says, "has he influence with God, he can bind and loosen, but he also has the gift of miracles (*karamāt*). He can transform himself (*tatawwur*), transport himself to a distance, speak diverse tongues, revive the dead, exercise levitation." Hudjwiri even goes so far as to say that the *auliya* govern the universe, bring rain from heaven and influence the tide of battle (Encyc. of Islam, *Wali*, by Carra de Vaux). Goldziher mentions instances of all these spiritual powers on the part of the *wali*, under twenty categories, in such saints as Ahmad-al-Bedawi of Tanta, Ibrahim-al-Dasuki and several others in North Africa and the Near East. "As in Roman Catholic worship, saints are patrons of towns, villages, trades and corporations". While living, the *wali* blesses, intercedes, heals and helps. When dead, his grave becomes a shrine that often rivals Mecca in its annual pilgrimage. Goldziher states (p. 290) that "soon in the circles of saint worship the *walis* received higher rank than the prophets." The orthodox theologians naturally opposed this teaching but saint-cult waxed stronger down the centuries. Even oaths were sworn *by the saints*, as by Allah (p. 339); intercession and forgiveness were sought at their shrine (p. 309), the reliques of the saints worked miracles (p. 356); and most astonishing of all, this saint-worship, by the dogma of *Ijmā'*, finally received the stamp of approval even of Al-Ghazali in orthodox Islam (p. 368-377). So everywhere, from Morocco to China, from Turkey to Capetown, it is the *wali*, alive or dead, who exercises such priestly functions between Allah and the Moslem laity, of whom *ninety per cent are illiterate*. (Lammens, *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions*, p. 222). "Every Moslem village, nearly, has its patron saint; every country has its national saints; every province of

life has its own human rulers *who are intermediate between the Creator and common mortals*" (Hurgronje, *Mohammedanism*, p. 79).

8. *Sharîfs and Seyyids*. From the first century of Islam, there arose a special veneration for the descendants of the Prophet (*Ahl-al-bayt*), Surah 33: 33). To be able to show kinship with the Prophet was an important claim to *Sharf*; and this made one a member of a spiritual aristocracy.<sup>20</sup> The word *Seyyid* was an alternative term for the same genealogical honor. 'Ali was called "Sayyid of this world and the next" (Encyc. of Islam, *Sharîf*, by Van Arendonk). Later on, the terms were applied not only to the descendants of Hasan and Husain, but to all who could claim even indirectly to be of the *Ahl-al-bayt*. Special religious officials (*naqîb*) were appointed by the Abbasids to keep registers of this nobility. The chief *Naqîb* had other religious duties and honors; this is true even today. The *Sharîfs* wore green turbans or badges and distinctive dress, because green was the color of the garments of paradise (Koran 18: 30; 76: 21). In Persia and India they also wear distinctive dress. "The sharing in the *şadaqa* is forbidden them." That is, they are immune from payment. A *sharîf* should marry only a *sharîfa*. None of the descendants of the Prophet will suffer the punishment of hell; they *all* are included in the *âl-Mohammed* who receive a benediction in daily prayer; and it is expressly laid down that one should treat them with the same distinction as a governor, and give them anything they wish, even a daughter in marriage without dowry (Van Arendonk, quoting from al-Sha'rānî). It is simply impossible to read of the religious prestige of this class of hereditary saints and deny that they are "priests" among the common people.

Hurgronje traces their origin and growth (*Mohammedanism*, pp. 93, 94). They ruled Morocco for nearly a thousand years, and Mekka for centuries. "In practice it may be said that the Achenese fear the *sayyid* more than the Creator. This is due to his believing that Allah reserves his

<sup>20</sup> Cf. George Percy Badger, *History of the Imams and Seyyids of Oman by Salih Ibn Razik from A.D. 661-1856*. Translated with introduction and notes (London, 1871).

punishments for the hereafter and is illimitably merciful in the enforcement of his law against the faithful, whereas the curse of the *sayyids* takes effect here below without any hope of mercy. No Achenese will readily so much as lift a finger against a *sayyid*; one who would dare to take a *sayyid's* life would not hesitate to cut his father's throat."<sup>21</sup>

Genealogical tables can be manipulated and extended. Today there must be tens of thousands of *Sharîfs* and *Seyyids* in the world of Islam. A perfect, up-to-date illustration is given (1943) by Major R. A. B. Hamilton from Aden, Arabia: "We next come to the holy classes. The first of these are the Sharîfs and Seyyids, the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. They live in settlements and elect among themselves in each family a head-man. They have great influence in the community, but it varies, of course, with the amount of their riches. Most Seyyids—the only Sharîfs are those in Beihan—do not bear arms and take no part in tribal warfare. They are peacemakers, and derive considerable income as such, and as dispensers of the Sharia or holy law of Islam. They are treated with veneration and respect and, after death, are frequently treated as saints. They marry tribeswomen and the daughters of Chiefs, and many own land and are given tithes of other land by ancient right."

"The other holy class is that of the descendants of the saints, for so they claim to be. Almost every village in the territory has its saints' tomb, a white rectangular building with one or more domes. Each shrine is maintained by public subscription, in the form of tolls on travellers and gifts to reinforce prayers. Many shrines also own land or receive tithes from land. They are guarded by families who use the title *Sheikh* and who claim descent from the original saint. The best description for these families is that of 'Holy Sheikh'! In most cases the saint is considered a miracle worker, and this power may descend upon the Holy Sheikhs as well. This fact in itself is sufficient to give the Holy

<sup>21</sup> Hurgronje, *The Achenese*, p. 158. There are over three score references to the functions and spiritual powers (*baraka*) of the *Sharîfs* in Westermarck's *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*.

Sheikhs considerable influence, and they inspire respect and fear. I would stress the question of fear, for it is important. The buried saint, and, to a certain degree, his supposed descendants are credited with the power of doing bodily and personal harm, such as depriving of sanity, striking with blindness, destruction of crops and the like. They are, in effect, witch-doctors, and are feared more than are the Seyyids, since they are considered to be dangerous men."<sup>22</sup>

Are such pedigreed-saints in Sumatra and Arabia and everywhere, who are so holy that they inspire fear, and so powerful that they exact tithes (Melchisedek), not "priests" in every ordinary sense of the word? (Cf. Gen. 14: 18; Heb. 7: 1).

And Harold Ingrams remarks (*Arabia and the Isles*, London, 1943, p. 177): "Before the Seiyids came in to Hadhramaut the Sheikhs were the principal *ecclesiastical* influence, and they probably took the place of an earlier hierarchy formed by the *priesthood* of the old religion. Nowadays they take precedence after the Seiyids, but they have much the same privileges." The italics are ours and call attention to the use of such terms by one who knows Arabia and Islam thoroughly and practically.

In every Moslem land there are these saints, *walis* and *sayyids*, with shrines and tombs. "In Persia a visitor to a shrine will kiss the lock of the door and put his forehead to other parts of the building", wrote Miss Holliday. "He gives salaams to the saint and speaks of him *as if he were alive*. Tablets containing prayers to the saint are hung on the walls; if the pilgrim can read, he reads these audibly; if not, someone else will read them to him. They burn votive lights. They ask permission to enter or leave the shrine of the saint. In common life they are always calling on the saints for help and blessing. Akin to this are the superstitions connected with their *holy living men and their families of which I have seen most among the 'Ali Illahis who consider their sheikhs as mediators between them and God, and of a race set apart.*"

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<sup>22</sup> *The Social Organization of the Tribes of the Aden Protectorate* in the Royal Asiatic Society Journal, May, 1943.

We omit the detailed mention of the strange periodic appearance in the history of Islam of religious leaders who arrogated *still greater* powers and authority in things spiritual than all the classes mentioned. The *Mahdis* of both Shiah and Sunni Islam are striking examples. So also is the Agha Khan, spiritual head of the Khojas of India, who poses as an *avatar* or incarnation and receives enormous tribute (THE MOSLEM WORLD xx: 407). The Babi-Behai movement, whatever else it be, was undoubtedly the exaltation of the Bab and his successors above the laity. The Ahmadiya Movement, with its new Messiahs both at Qadian and Lahore, is based, not upon the parity of all believers before Allah, but upon *soi-disant* high-priests and prophets of a new Islamic dispensation. All of these spiritual leaders came from Islam and claim to be Moslems.

Thus in life and in death these *mahdis*, *seyyids*, *'auliyā*, *imāms*, *faqîrs*, *pîrs*, *ahungs*, *mullahs*, etc., exercise a ministry of intercession and authority in religion, constitute a special class and have spiritual prestige above the laity.

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In conclusion, this is not a strife about words, but correction of a too common misunderstanding, sometimes due to an attempt at idealizing Islam. Islam was from the outset a military, totalitarian church-state. "In the main, then", says Margoliouth, "the original Moslem system was to make its adherents soldier-priests, i.e., to combine the sacerdotal with the warrior caste."<sup>23</sup> An Indian missionary writes: "While it is true that Islam's priests and clergy have not been consecrated or ordained in the spiritual succession of the founder, none the less they are authorized, appointed or set apart to perform the same or similar functions in a way or manner peculiar to Islam. Since, therefore, these recognized religious functionaries perform the same duties as the priests and clergy of the Church . . . we may well hold that the old formula that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other, holds here as well as in mathematics!"

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<sup>23</sup> *Mohammedanism*, pp. 76-79.