

VERTICAL PILGRIMAGE AND INTERIOR LANDSCAPE IN THE VISIONARY DIARY OF RŪZBIHĀN BAQLĪ (D. 1209)¹

From the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, the *ḥajj* pilgrimage to Mecca has stood as one of the distinctive practices of the Islamic tradition. The *ḥajj* rituals were in effect preserved by the Prophet from the pagan period, but revalorized through their narrative connection with the Prophets Abraham and Ishmael. In the Muslim mystical tradition, the principal ritual practices of Islam have in general received a tremendous emphasis, often accompanied by an interiorization and meditative evaluation, designed to bring out the inner meaning of ritual. This is certainly true of pilgrimage as it is of prayer, fasting, alms, and profession of faith, to name only the five main ritual duties.² Travelling to Mecca for the pilgrimage month, whether performed only once or for long residence, has been commonly practiced by many Sufis. Until the triumph of Wahhābī fundamentalism in the Saudi Arabian regime established in the 1920s, Mecca was one of the great centers of Sufism in the Muslim world.³

Despite the recognition of the importance of *ḥajj* in Sufism, certain Sufis have given expression to experiences that cast the visit to the House of God in Mecca in a wholly different light, in which it becomes relatively devalued. In the surprising utterances of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 874), the Kaʿba like any other created thing is totally devaluated in comparison with the overwhelming reality of God. This takes the form of stories that show, not the pilgrim circumambulating the Kaʿba, but the Kaʿba circling around the perfect saint in tribute to his holiness. As he described it, "I was circumambulating the house (the Kaʿba) seeking Him, but when I was united with Him, I saw the house circumambulating me."⁴ Similar stories have been told of others, such as the Persian master Abū Saʿīd ibn Abī al-Khayr (d. 1049).⁵ Sometimes this miraculous apparition

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at a conference on "Holy Land Pilgrimage" at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, in February, 1996.

² On the symbolic significance of the *ḥajj* among early Sufis, with numerous examples, see Abū Naṣr ʿAbdallah b. ʿAlī al-Sarrāj al-Tūsī, *The Kitāb al-Lumaʿ fi ʿI-Taṣawwuf*, ed. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, "E. J. W. Gibb Memorial" Series, vol. XXII (London, 1914; reprinted., London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1963), 166-74.

³ For a discussion of tensions between Sufism and fundamentalism, see my *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997).

⁴ ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Shaṭaḥāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, Part One, *Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī*, Dirāsāt Islāmiyya 9 (Cairo: Maktaba al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1949), 77.

⁵ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 242.

of the Ka'ba was simply a convenience for the saint's performance of *hajj*. According to a fourteenth-century Indian source, "Whenever Khwājah Maudūd Chishtī was overpowered by the desire to visit the Ka'bah, angels were ordered to bring the Ka'bah and place it before him. The Khwājah circumambulated the Ka'bah and performed the prescribed prayers. The Ka'bah was then taken away."⁶ One even finds non-Muslim figures, such as Gurū Nānak and certain Indian yogis, having the experience of taking the pilgrim's road to Mecca, and then finding that the Ka'ba has come to meet them halfway; in these cases the symbolism has more to do with relativizing Islam as one religion among many, than with the elucidation of the inner sense of the pilgrimage for Muslims.⁷

But in other cases the tension with the primacy of ritual was clear. The trial and execution of al-Ḥallāj (d. 922) was not in fact based on the famous saying attributed to him, "I am the Truth," but followed upon a judgment of heresy for his alleged recommendation that one could perform a substitute *hajj* by setting up a model of the Ka'ba in one's house.⁸ To be sure, there were those who, like the Qarmaṭīs, made the interior significance of rituals such as the *hajj* entirely displace its external practice. It was on the basis of this form of extreme iconoclasm that they sacked Mecca in 929 and seized the famous black stone, in the hope of destroying the pilgrimage ritual; the stone was only restored after ten years, for a huge ransom, when the Qarmaṭīs realized that their raid did nothing to deter the faithful.

Sufis in general did not go this far. While many Sufis such as Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240) recorded some of their most profound experiences taking place in the vicinity of the Ka'ba, for others the very spatiality of the pilgrimage center made it something to relativize. It is perhaps for this reason that Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624) maintained that his experience revealed that the "reality of Muḥammad" (*ḥaqīqat-i Muḥammadi*) would, at the millennium, ascend and unite with the "reality of the Ka'ba."⁹ This formulation

⁶ M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1967), 121, quoting *Siyar al-auliya'*, 42.

⁷ For Gurū Nānak, see W. H. McLeod, *Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of the Janam-Sākhis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 71-72. On yogis, see Kaykhusraw Isfandiyyār [attr.], *Dabistān-i madhāhib*, ed. Raḥīm Riḍā-zāda Malik, *Adabiyāt-i Dasātīrī*, 1 (2 vols., Tehran: Kitābkhāna-i Ṭuḥūrī, 1362/1983), I: 147 (referring to the yogi Akamnāth); cf. *The Dabistān or School of Manners*, trans. David Shea and Anthony Troyer, reprint ed. abridged by A. V. Williams Jackson (Washington: M. Walter Dunne, 1901), 235.

⁸ See my *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, SUNY Series in Islam (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 69, 106-7, 110. The Dhikris of Baluchistan erected their own Ka'ba which is the object of their pilgrimage during the pilgrimage month of Dhū al-Ḥijja; see Mujeeb, *Indian Muslims*, 13.

⁹ Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971), 14-15.

simultaneously saves the sanctity of the Kaʿba as sacred space, while affording an opening for a higher mystical experience that would be personally inaugurated by Sirhindī himself, in his role of “renewer of the second millennium.”¹⁰

Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273) gave expression to the mystical devaluation of the pilgrimage in a memorable Persian *ghazal*.

You people gone on pilgrimage—where do you go? Where do you go?
 The beloved is right here—come back! Come back!
 Your beloved is your neighbor from the house next door;
 what fancy drives you heedless to the desert?
 If you see the formless form of the beloved,
 you will be the fellow pilgrim, the very Kaʿba, and the spouse.
 A hundred times you’ve gone by this road to that house;
 just once get out of this house and onto the roof!
 If your goal is to see that house of the spirit,
 first polish up the face of your mirror.
 By donning pilgrim garb (*ihrām*) you escaped from that house,
 so come all the way out of the robe of dignity.
 That house is subtle, do not tell of its signs,
 but give a sign of the lord of that house.
 Where was the bouquet of roses when you saw that garden?
 Where is the pearl of the soul, if you are separate from that ocean?
 Still, may your troubles be your very treasure.
 Too bad you’re the curtain that conceals your treasure!
 Tear away the veil from the pavilion of secrets,
 then know yourself: you’re a sultan, not a slave.
 You are a treasure hidden in this heap of dirt;
 come forth again, like a crescent moon from the black cloud.
 You, the emperor of the world, the pride of Tabriz, display
 all the shapes of marvel, for you are the spirit’s quickener.¹¹

Here Rūmī’s emphasis is on mystical self-knowledge, compared to which the physical performance of the pilgrimage ritual is unimportant. Still, for Rūmī this devaluation of the pilgrimage is rhetorical. He does not reject or criticize the pilgrimage except in a metaphorical way, to direct the reader’s attention to the inner mystical experience. It is the direct encounter with the divine beloved, the master of the Kaʿba, that is the real goal; the house of the Kaʿba is only a sign to that end. He uses the familiar Sufi repertory of the symbols of transcendence to convey the sense of going

¹⁰ Further on Sirhindī see Marcia Hermansen, “Citing the Sights at the Holy Sights: Visionary Pilgrimage Narratives of Pre-Modern South Asian Sufis,” in *Islamic Studies in America: Fazlur Rahman*, ed. Earle Waugh and Frederick M. Denny (Scholars Press, 1997).

¹¹ Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī, *Ghazaliyyāt-i Shams-i Tabrizi*, ed. Manṣūr Mushfiq (Tehran: Bungāh-i Matbuʿāt Ṣafi-ʿAlishā, 1338/1960), 269-70.

beyond convention, yet in this poem he still retains the pilgrim's garb (*iḥrām*) as a symbol for transcending the physicality of the world ("this house"). In this respect Rūmī continued a tradition, shared by other authors such as the Ismā'īlī poet and philosopher Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. 1088), who interpreted the various actions and stages of the *ḥajj* pilgrimage as emblems for the process of purification of the soul.¹² Despite this symbolic emphasis, Nāṣir-i Khusraw himself performed the *ḥajj* pilgrimage four times.¹³ Tension between inner experience and the external forms of ritual was a typical feature of Sufi language, but it by no means amounted to rejection of ritual as such. Rather, ritual provided the templates and structures in terms of which inner experience could be articulated.

To the examples given above, which are all fairly well known in Islamic thought, I would like to add the perspective on pilgrimage as given by a Persian Sufi who is only now beginning to be better understood: this is Rūzbihān Baqlī of Shīrāz (d. 1209), one of the most imaginative and powerful stylists in early Sufi literature.¹⁴ In a series of striking mystical texts in Arabic and Persian, he has presented his experiences in a highly reflective language that stresses the need to see God in a visible form, even as it insists that God is beyond form. The key term for Rūzbihān is vision, which can occur either through unveiling (*kashf*) or "clothing with divinity" (*iltibās*); either the divine reality is revealed to sight by unveiling, or else it manifests itself by clothing itself in visible attributes.¹⁵ It is particularly in Rūzbihān's visionary diary *The Unveiling of Secrets* that he displays this supple language for describing inner experience, using the most vivid visual imagery.¹⁶

As far as the aesthetics of space are concerned, Rūzbihān's inner world is largely structured by ascension imagery, modeled on the ascension of the Prophet Muḥammad as mystically interpreted by Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī.¹⁷ The human soul is also depicted as a bird that flies up to heaven, like a hawk returning to the wrist of the falconer, or like a nightingale returning to the garden. This upward motion of the soul is matched by the birdlike descent of angels, or by the descent of God, comparable to the *simurgh*

¹² Nasir-i Khusraw, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, trans. Peter Lamborn Wilson and Gholam Reza Aavani (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), 81-82.

¹³ *Nāṣer-e Khosraw's Book of Travels (Safarnāma)*, trans W. M. Thackston, Jr., Persian Heritage Series, no. 36 (New York: Biblioteca Persica, 1986), 121.

¹⁴ See my *Rūzbihān Baqlī: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism*, Curzon Sufi Series, 4 (London: Curzon Press, 1996).

¹⁵ *Rūzbihān Baqlī*, 42-52.

¹⁶ Ruzbihan Baqli, *The Unveiling of Secrets: Diary of a Sufi Master*, trans. Carl W. Ernst (Chapel Hill NC: Parvardigar Press, 1997). Quotations from this text are cited below by section numbers (marked by §).

¹⁷ *Rūzbihān Baqlī*, 108-16.

flying down to earth.¹⁸ While Rūzbihān retains the language of the *hajj* pilgrimage, and the Kaʿba appears prominently in certain of his visions, the force of ascension imagery is so strong in his thinking that it recasts the journey to Mecca into the vertical dimension. The interior landscape dominates and gives meaning to external space.

Rūzbihān's use of spatial imagery can be illustrated by a vision that he records, focusing on the constellation of the Little Bear near the celestial north pole (a deliberate allusion to the "pole" [*qutb*], the head of the hierarchy of the saints). Here is how he describes the experience that follows upon God's manifestation from the "windows" of the polar constellation:

I passed with my conscience through the regions of the created, and my spirit ascended to the heavens. I saw in every heaven the angels of God most high, but I passed them by until I reached the presence. I saw that his creations, the angels, were greater than his creatures on earth; they were performing prayer, witnessing the nearness of the Truth, with voices thundering his praise. Then I rose up to the world of shining light to ask about it, and I was told that this world is called the throne. I trembled through an atmosphere without dimension, until I reached the doors of eternity. There I saw deserts and oceans; I was being annihilated, I was bewildered, vanishing, astonished, not knowing from where the Truth appeared, for there was no where or whence (§20).

This is a narrative of an ascension, with all the classic elements of passing through the heavens, seeing the angels, and reaching the throne of God. It is, far from being a unique event, part of a long tradition of ascension literature with roots going back the ancient near east.¹⁹ Yet for Rūzbihān it is also a landscape "without dimension," with "no where or whence," which he clearly recognizes as non-spatial even as he must use spatial imagery to describe it.

Ascent to the divine presence, like certain anthropomorphic scriptural passages, creates a paradoxical tension with respect to the transcendence of space predicated of God in most monotheistic theologies. J. P. Guillaume has commented on the paradoxical character of the original ascension of Muḥammad in its use of vision to suggest the transcendence of space.

There is something like a third term between the irrepressible and spontaneous need to represent the sacred, and the prohibition against doing so for fear of violating the divine transcendence, by degrading it to the level of sensible reality; the representation of the thing im-

¹⁸ See my "The Symbolism of Birds and Flight in the Writings of Rūzbihān Baqli," in *The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi, 1992), 353-66; also in *Sufi* 11 (Autumn 1991): 5-12.

¹⁹ Ioan Petru Culianu, "Ascension," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, I: 435-41.

plies at the same time its non-representability. Here, the compromise is not just an accommodation dictated by considerations of pure opportunity; it opens up into the vision of a radically new space, splendid and bewildering. On this vision rests one of the most powerfully original esthetic effects of the text.²⁰

The same may be said of the visions of Rūzbihān, but in his case the ascension functioned as a resource available at any moment rather than as an unrepeated paradigmatic event.

An extended passage describing Rūzbihān's visions of the Ka'ba (discussed below) affords an opportunity to amplify the mystical interpretations of pilgrimage. When juxtaposed with the interior landscapes of Rūzbihān's visions, and the ascensional structure that characterizes the majority of his experiences, the visions of Mecca take on an unexpected significance. For Rūzbihān, the "unveilings" that are the subject of his book are intense visions of forms in various localities. He sees God in the most beautiful of human forms, descending daily to Rūzbihān's *ribāṭ* or hospice; he sees Muḥammad and all the prophets and angels in heavenly gardens; and he sees many of the great early Sufi shaykhs, who appear to him in confirmation of his authority. The dramatic tone and visual power of these accounts coincides with a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between symbol and transcendence. Bodily form and landscape are not obstacles to the search for the divine; they are the medium for its manifestation. Place takes on its significance through the visionary process, whether it is a known location such as Mecca or an infinite ocean or desert removed far from ordinary life.

Visions can thus take place in many different "locations," though Rūzbihān might agree that their true place is in what he calls the angelic realm (*malakāt*). While some of his accounts concern visions of the gardens of paradise, and others occur right in the home and hospice of Rūzbihān, the majority take place in landscapes far removed from humanity and its urban environment. Oceans of unlimited extent, filled with surging waves, indicate the powerful psychic forces unleashed in visions. A good example is the following:

I was seeking God most high in the hidden world. The more I sought him, the more intrusion there was from existence and from certain imaginings. I sought God's aid for that, and he made me comprehend his grace, and he expelled my conscience from the regions of exist-

²⁰ J.P. Guillaume, "Le texte sous le texte: les sources du *Livre de l'Échelle* et le thème du *mīrāj* dans l'imaginaire islamique," in Gisèle Besson and Michèle Brossard-Dandré, ed. and trans., *Le livre de l'échelle de Mahomet: Liber Scale Machometi*, Lettres Gothiques (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1991), 48.

ence. I reached the ocean of love, which was vaster than the world. I swam across that until I reached the ocean of knowledge, and I swam across that. Then I reached the ocean of mystical knowledge, and I swam across that, until I reached the ocean of oneness. I swam across that until I reached the ocean of unknowing and magnificence, and I swam across that until I reached the ocean of attributes. Then I reached the ocean of essence, and I was astonished that I lost the reality of the Truth. I settled down for some time. He appeared to me in majesty and beauty. All that I saw was related to his majesty as a drop is to the ocean (§79).

Here the ocean serves as the best available metaphor for transcending space, one that can be traversed repeatedly to convey the transition to new levels. Sometimes he sees himself swimming and diving into the ocean's depths to retrieve divine knowledge, but at other times he is overwhelmed by the waves, drowning in their power.

Then he hid from me and made me enter oceans like air, which had no dimensions. The might of the Truth encompassed me. I saw myself in these oceans like a drop, with no left or right, no before or behind, no up or down. I saw nothing but glory upon glory, power upon power, majesty upon majesty, might upon might, greatness upon greatness, eternity upon eternity, post-eternity upon post-eternity. Then he said from the wombs of the hidden, "This is endless eternity and eternal divine presence" (§110).

Initiatic visions show Rūzbihān drinking an ocean, or receiving a glass from an ocean of wine. Altogether the ocean signifies the vast reservoir of spirit that reveals itself in waves of ecstasies.

The oceans in turn are ringed by vast mountains, among which must be counted Mount Sinai, the source of revelation, and Mount Qāf, the Olympus of Persian mythology. It is from the mountain that God, or Moses, or a Sufi master, or a combination of all three, descends, bringing revelation. The mountain is the region of divine inaccessibility; sometimes Rūzbihān is the only one to be invited there.

I saw the Truth (glory be to him) on a holy mountain, and he made me approach. The mountain was high, and the Truth had me sit near him, and repeatedly gave me to drink of the wines of intimacy. He graced me in a form that I cannot tell to any of God's creatures. He was unveiled, and the lights of his beautiful attributes appeared from him. The Sufis were on the foothill of that mountain, unable to ascend the mountain. The Truth (glory be to him) called that mountain Mount Greatness (§162).

The mountains are the greatest and most enduring of earthly things; when God manifests his power to them, they shatter and melt away.

Beyond the oceans and the mountains Rūzbihān finds endless deserts, which signify the emptiness of annihilation. This symbolism was common in the writings of al-Ḥallāj, who spoke of “the desert (*mafāza*) of the knowledge of reality.”²¹ The desert likewise serves in the symbolic recitals of the Illuminationist philosopher Suhrawardī as the location for the movement of the soul towards transcendence.²² The desert near Pasa was the scene of Rūzbihān’s earliest unveilings. He seeks God in “the hidden deserts above the seven heavens” (§15), because the desert is where God may be found. Rūzbihān emphasizes the transcendental nature of this landscape, linking the desert with the unseen or hidden realm (*ghayb*). “He manifested himself to me in the deserts of the hidden, and he pointed to himself, saying, ‘I am yours’” (§77). There are no distractions in the desert. All is empty, leaving only the possibility of encounter with the one that is sought. When Rūzbihān speaks of meditation, he describes it as follows: “The nets of concentration were flung over the deserts of the hidden to trap the birds of the lights of might and the angelic realm” (§169). If the desert is not the site of a rendezvous with God, it will be the place of annihilation of the soul. “In the river bed of pre-eternity there are deserts and wastelands in which dwell the snakes of wrath. If one of them opened its mouth, none of creation or time would escape” (§87).

The Meccan visions (§50-53) belong to the first portion of *The Unveiling of Secrets*, which may be described as a retrospective autobiography written by Rūzbihān in 577/1181-2 at the age of fifty-five. These visions occupy a prominent position in the initiatic sequences that make up the first portion of the book. In the second portion, which is something like a diary maintained for the next eight years, there is just one additional short vision of Mecca (§205). The primary sequence began, oddly for Rūzbihān, with what is clearly a dream, from which he then awakened (the vast majority of his accounts are of waking visions). In the dream he saw a manifestation of the Ka’ba as light. This rather straightforward dream was followed by an extended meditation that took on some of the attributes of a vision. This time he saw the Prophet and his companions in the Ka’ba, and the Prophet gave an unusual confirmation of Rūzbihān’s spiritual status. Rūzbihān was led to doubt the vision’s veracity, however, by the unusual circumstance that this vision was taking place while he was in the bath after getting up from bed. After seeking God’s forgiveness for this doubt that had arisen from his carnal soul, Rūzbihān found that his certainty was restored. He then proceeded to have a really spectacular vi-

²¹ Ḥallāj, *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*, ed. Paul Nwyia, Mélanges de l’Université Saint-Joseph, 47 (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1972), II:8; cf. also III:1, III:3, IV:1.

²² Shihāboddīn Yahyā Sohrawardī Shaykh al-Ishrāq, *L’Archange empourpré, Quinze traités et récits mystiques*, trans. Henry Corbin (Paris: Fayard, 1976), 215, n. 7, and index, s.v. “désert.”

sion, in which he saw the Prophet and the archangels near the Kaʿba, calling his name and inviting him to join them in a Sufi dance. Rūzbihān then calmed down for a while, until another ecstasy seized him, and he had another vision of the Meccan sanctuary. Beneath the sand-strewn floor of the sanctuary a door appeared, guarded by the prophet Ismāʿīl (Ishmael) and the angel Riḍwān (who is in charge of paradise); Rūzbihān entered through the door into a vast heavenly garden filled with all the prophets, the angels, and the faithful. It was a veritable infinity.

§50. A Dream of the Kaʿba of Light

I saw what a dreamer sees, as though I were in the sacred enclosure of God most high [in Mecca], and a light unlike the lights of the world was in the center of the mosque. I saw the Kaʿba in the midst of that light, with garments of special light upon it. I never saw the like of it. The brilliance of that light was like the brilliance of the throne. I wondered at the beauty of the house, and the radiance of the mosque. Then I awoke and stood for ablutions, and I entered the bath.

§51. A Vision of Mecca in the Bath

I recalled what I saw in the dream, and I rejoiced in it intensely. I was thinking about the degree of the dream, and what things it could bring forth. It was as though I saw while awake many of the Prophet's companions in the sacred mosque, as though they were separating and joining together. I saw among them the Messenger of God (peace be upon him), as though he were a perfumed sphere of white light. He was taller than his companions, and he wore a garment of wool, with a hat on his head. He had the most beautiful kind of tresses, and his face was like the laughing sun. His aspects were more beautiful than crimson light. He summoned me as he stood behind the [well of] Zamzam, as though he were calling me from far away. He said, "You are the best of my people." I became proud because of what he said, and I wept intensely. After that my state quietened. My carnal self refused to believe me in these unveilings, because I saw them while I was still in the bath. Then I sought forgiveness in my conscience from God from the speech of my carnal self. God most high increased me in certainty, until my heart became strengthened in that which was revealed to me. So my carnal soul fled, as this is customary with this sign.

§52. Ecstasies in the Kaʿba

I stood up after that to shout, and ecstasy overcame me. I saw as though I were in the sacred mosque, and I saw the Prophet, and it was as though he was in a state of ecstasy. He was turning around near the Black Stone, to the left of the Kaʿba, and Gabriel was standing by the pillar near the gate of al-Ṣafāʾ. Michael was also standing near Gabriel, and Seraphiel was near them both, and a group of an-

gels was standing on the floor of the mosque. I approached the Prophet in a state of astonishment. The Prophet turned toward me and called me by my name. Gabriel called out to me, saying, "Rūzbihān!" He was in ecstasy, and he called out to me again. Michael called out to me, and he also called me by my name. Seraphiel called me by name, and called out to me, saying, "Rūzbihān!" Gabriel was entering ecstasy, Seraphiel was entering ecstasy, and Michael was entering ecstasy. Every one of them left their places to be near the Prophet. I saw the Ka'ba as though it was leaving its place to be near them, and it danced with them. God most high manifested himself to them, and I among them was going into ecstasy and then settling down.

§53. Paradise within the Mosque of Mecca

After that I was veiled for an hour, and I settled down from my ecstasy and the state in which I had been until dawn approached. Then ecstasy seized me, and a man was unveiled to me in the center of the mosque of the sanctuary, as though he were moving sand from the center of the mosque to one side, until a door appeared beneath the sand. That door was opened; he entered the door, and I entered after him. I saw one other man standing behind the door. The first man was Ishmael [son of Abraham and builder of the Ka'ba], and the other was Riḍwān [guardian angel of paradise]. When I entered the door, I saw the garden of paradise and everything in it, its trees, streams, and lights innumerable. In it I saw Muḥammad, Adam, and all the prophets, saints, martyrs, and angels. I saw there a great crowd of the believers. I saw a world such that, if the heavens and earth were thrown into it, no one would find them, because of its greatness and extent. In that world I saw nothing I had seen in this world except light upon light, brilliance upon brilliance, glory upon glory, and kingdom upon kingdom.

The other separate vision of the Ka'ba from the later part of the diary contains an account of Rūzbihān in the sanctuary witnessing God appearing from the interior of the Ka'ba, with the prophets, the angels, and the throne itself circumambulating around it.

Time passed, and I saw the Most High, above the ladders of the world of the throne, and above the throne. I saw him in the world of pre-eternity in the form of isolation. Then time passed, and he called me near, and I answered him repeatedly. Then I saw myself in the sanctuary of the Ka'ba, and the Truth (glory be to him) manifested himself in the interior of the Ka'ba in the form of beauty, glory, and majesty. The Prophet was there with the prophets and the angels, turning around the Ka'ba. I saw the throne as though it descended and walked around the Ka'ba. I found from the Truth that which I found, and I heard what I heard; I cannot reveal these secrets, for they are from the sciences of the unknown, which issue from the

chosen attributes and chosen actions. They are only known to knowers of God who have drunk the oceans of oneness and have known the Truth by the impressions of unknowings, and the sanctification of attributes and the essence beyond the thoughts of the hearts of humanity, from the throne to the earth. God transcends every imagining that is incommensurate with his power (§205).

Although divine transcendence logically defies any spatial relationship, the powerful image of God revealing himself in the Ka'ba, with the throne of God performing circumambulation of the Ka'ba, conveys how such a physical location can act as the site of a theophany. It only remains for Rūzbihān to emphasize that in reality God is "beyond the thoughts of the hearts of humanity."

Like many other Sufis, however, Rūzbihān necessarily places the Ka'ba into a relationship with his mystical experiences. The Ka'ba itself, however, does not have any intrinsic significance apart from those experiences. This is similar to Ibn 'Arabī's observation that places take on special characteristics because of the spiritual concentration expended there by the saints and prophets.²³ In this sense, pilgrimage centers like Mecca are sacred because the holy men have been there; it is not an arbitrary sacredness that draws the holy men. If the Ka'ba can be a means of access to God, well and good, but if other avenues permit the encounter to take place, they will become the locations of vision. Rūzbihān was overwhelmed in his *ribāṭ* by visitations from God every day, as the following account explains:

My mind recalled the story of Moses. I saw him seek nearness to the Truth (glory be to him), his vision of him, and certain lofty stations and noble miracles, as is handed down in traditions. My thoughts vanished, and I said, "God, you transcend relationship with creatures. You gave to Moses these miracles and these stations, and you chose him for perfection. What is the relationship between you and him, in terms of nearness? I too am from the sons of Adam; what have you given to me?" And he manifested himself to me in the form of majesty and beauty, and said to me, "Moses came to me, but I came to you seventy thousand times between the time you lay down and the time you woke up. Each time I removed the veil from your face while you were sleeping, and I awaited your awaking." When I heard that, I was swallowed by crashing waves of the oceans of oneness (§152).

Although beginning with a complaint, this dialogue shifts into an intimate revelation of divine love, which banishes the official standard of prophecy into irrelevance. Under these circumstances, it is evident that the fixed

²³ See *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, 72, quoting Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), I: 98-99.

sacredness of Mecca is susceptible to a great deal of variation when juxtaposed to powerful inner visions.

Of what significance, then, are the objective structures of the pilgrimage ritual in Mecca? There is no doubt that pilgrimage itself becomes relativized in the mind of a mystic like Rūzbihān, particularly in comparison with the vertical pilgrimage of ascension. How significant, after all, is the journey to the House of God, when one can actually visit (or be visited by) God? What is the importance of earthly space in comparison with the interior landscape of transcendence? Clearly there is a difference between ordinary pilgrimage and mystical experience. This does not, however, abolish pilgrimage or its significance. Rūzbihān indeed made the pilgrimage to Mecca twice, according to his biographers. If Ibn 'Arabī's account is to be believed, it was in Mecca that Rūzbihān fell in love with a dancer and gave up his position as a shaykh, until God restored him from his folly and the woman became a disciple.²⁴ While on pilgrimage to Mecca, Rūzbihān recited ecstatic verses in Nayrāzā dialect while hanging onto the door handle of the Ka'ba, so that pilgrims swore that he caused the Ka'ba to move.²⁵ After he spent seven days meditating and fasting by the Ka'ba, God addressed him as follows, seven times: "Rūzbihān! Chief of the Poles of the world! Your existence is the pride of hidden past centuries, of future centuries, and of the present!" And a shower of red rose petals cascaded upon him from the Black Stone.²⁶ Later hagiographies portray him not only advising his disciples on their own pilgrimages, but also miraculously appearing with water to lost pilgrims in the desert.²⁷ Pilgrims to Rūzbihān's tomb in Shiraz experienced dreams of the Ka'ba there, and they pointed to an implicit connection between the two holy sites.²⁸ The pilgrimage to Mecca has become, because of its very physicality, one of the foremost metaphors to convey the mystical experience of direct contact with God, beyond all spatial imagination--and that is surely the strongest testimony that Sufis could give to the power of a fundamental religious ritual.

*University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, North Carolina*

CARL W. ERNST



²⁴ *Rūzbihān Baqlī*, 3-4.

²⁵ Muḥammad Taqā Dānish-puzhāh, ed., *Rūzbihān nāma*, Silsila-i Intishārāt-i Anjuman-i āthār-i Millā, 60 (Tehran: Anjuman-i āthār-i Millā, 1347/1969), 113.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 220-21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.