

A Sufi Mirror: Shaykh Alwan al-Hamawi's (d. 1530) Advice for the Ottoman Ruler¹

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Ottoman Sultan Selim I's (r. 1512–1520) defeat of the Mamluk Sultanate in 1516–1517 was a watershed moment in the history of the Middle East.² The conquest and annexation of the central Islamic lands was transformative for both the Ottoman Empire and the many peoples newly subjected to rule from Istanbul. Sound victory on the battlefield did not, however, presage the easy establishment of Ottoman power on the ground. Contemporary observers in places like Egypt and Syria sensed opportunity in the effort of Ottoman agents, beginning with Selim himself, to refashion Mamluk realms. But they also noted many difficulties and frequently revealed a deep-seated anxiety about the transition unfolding before their eyes. Sufis, with their extensive personal networks and contact with people of all classes, were especially well-positioned witnesses. Some did more than watch. They diagnosed the problems besetting their homeland and offered direct advice to those in power.³

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- 1 I want to thank John Curry, Abdul-Karim Rafeq, and Kristof D'hulster for helpful advice on an earlier version of this chapter. All lingering flaws are mine.
 - 2 For an important study of Selim and his "mythification," see H. Erdem Çıpa, *The Making of Selim: Succession, Legitimacy, and Memory in the Early Modern Ottoman World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).
 - 3 For an introduction to Sufism in this context, see Éric Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie sous les derniers Mamelouks et les premiers Ottomans: orientations spirituelles et enjeux culturels*

One such observer was Ali b. Atiyya al-Hiti, known as Shaykh Alwan (d. 1530), an influential mystic and scholar from Hamah, Syria.⁴ Generally regarded for his Sufi writings (and his association with the legendary Moroccan mystic Ali b. Maymun [d. 1511]),⁵ Alwan also commented on what he perceived to be the many social ills infecting his world. In this vein, he penned a fascinating advice treatise for Sultan Selim: *al-Nasa'ih al-muhimma li-al-muluk wa-al-a'imma* (Important advice for rulers and imams).⁶ In this treatise, Alwan catalogs the

(Damascus: Institut Français d'Études Arabes de Damas, 1995); Michael Winter, inter alia, "Sufism in the Mamluk Empire (and in Early Ottoman Egypt and Syria) as a Focus for Religious, Intellectual, and Social Networks," in *Everything is on the Move: The Mamluk Empire as a Node in (Trans-)Regional Networks*, ed. Stephan Conermann (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2014), 145–164; Jonathan P. Allen, "Self, Space, Society, and Saint in the Well-Protected Domains: A History of Ottoman Saints and Sainthood, 1500–1780" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2019); Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 125–136, 154–161, 174–176; John J. Curry and Erik S. Ohlander, eds., *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200–1800* (New York: Routledge, 2012); John Curry, *The Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire: The Rise of the Halveti Order, 1350–1750* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

- 4 For Shaykh Alwan's biography, see Radi al-Din Muhammad b. Ibrahim Ibn al-Hanbali (d. 1563), *Durr al-habab fi tarikh a'yan Halab*, 2 vols., ed. Mahmud al-Fakhuri and Yahya Abbara (Damascus: Wizarat al-Thaqafa, 1973), vol. 1, part 2: 961–978; Najm al-Din Muhammad al-Ghazzi (d. 1651), *al-Kawakib al-sa'ira bi-a'yan al-mi'a al-'ashira*, 3 vols., ed. Jibra'il Sulayman Jabbur (Beirut: Dar al-Afaq al-Jadida, [repr.] 1979), 2: 206–213; Ahmad b. Mustafa Tashkubrizada (d. 1561), *al-Shaqa'iq al-nu 'maniyya fi 'ulama' al-dawla al-'uthmaniyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 1975), 212; David Larsen, s.v. "al-Hamawi, 'Alwan," *EP*³ (2016), 5: 71–73; Nashwa al-Alwani, "al-Shaykh 'Ali b. 'Atiyya al-Hiti al-Hamawi al-Shafi' i al-Husayni, 873–936 H., al-mulaqqab bi-'Alwan: fikruhu al-islahi wa-al-ijtima'i," *al-Basa'ir* 26 (1994): 7–73; Ali b. Atiyya al-Hiti al-Hamawi [Shaykh Alwan], *al-Nasa'ih al-muhimma li-al-muluk wa al-a'imma*, ed. Nashwa al-Alwani (Damascus: Dar al-Maktabi, 2000), 13–18; Matthew Wiley Simonds, "'Ali b. Maymun: An Early 16th Century Sufi Saint and Critic of the 'Ulama'" with an edition of 'Alwan al-Hamawi's *Mujli al-huzn 'an al-mahzun fi manaqib al-shaykh al-sayyid al-sharif Abi al-Hasan 'Ali b. Maymun*" (PhD diss., University of California, 1998), 171–174, 223–233; Geoffroy, *Le soufisme*, 33–34, 220–221, passim; Ahmad al-Sabuni, *Tarikh Hamah*, 2nd ed. (Hamah: al-Matba'a al-Ahliyya, 1956), 160–161.
- 5 On Ali b. Maymun, see Ibn al-Hanbali, *Durr al-habab*, vol. 1, part 2: 951–960; al-Ghazzi, *al-Kawakib al-sa'ira*, 1: 271–278; Tashkubrizada, *al-Shaqa'iq al-nu 'maniyya*, 212; Simonds, "'Ali b. Maymun,'" Michael Winter, "Sheikh 'Ali Ibn Maymun and Syrian Sufism in the Sixteenth Century," *Israel Oriental Studies* 7 (1977): 281–308; J. Spencer Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, repr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 89–90; C. Brockelmann, s.v. "'Ali b. Maymun," *EP*².
- 6 Nashwa al-Alwani's good critical edition, cited above, will be used here. It draws on four manuscripts, including an undated autograph, held at the al-Asad National Library in Damascus. Abdullah S. Zaid produced a serviceable English translation—"Important Counsels to Kings and Imams" (MA diss., Portland State University, 1977)—using two manuscript copies, including one kept at Princeton University, but the translations in this article are mine.

numerous “abominations” (*munkarat*) now rampant in the wake of Selim’s conquests—from offenses against public morality, like prostitution and alcohol consumption, to derogations of a just political order, such as soldiers’ abuse of peasants and unlawful taxation. Alwan seeks rectification through the sultan’s attentiveness to genuine ‘*ulama*’ and the determined application of Islamic law. He also imagines a personally pious leader in control of his own excesses and not just those of his servants and subjects. Alwan’s ideal ruler, then, combines a *shar’i* ethic with qualities sought in traditional kingly advice literature and traits valued in Sufi thought. He also demonstrates the manner in which a Sufi, otherwise aloof from politics, might seek to influence those claiming sovereignty and aid the restoration of order to a dangerously disordered world.⁷

Shaykh Alwan was an ordinary mosque preacher in Hamah until he fell under the influence of Ali b. Maymun during the latter’s second sojourn in the Levant, which began in the late 1490s. From the charismatic Ibn Maymun, Alwan learned the principles of Sufism and joined the Shadhili order (*tariqa*). Michael Winter has argued that the Shadhilis of Syria, following Ibn Maymun’s example, were more “austere and puritan” than their better known brethren in Egypt and North Africa.⁸ Yet, Winter adds that Ibn Maymun and his followers were keen to advocate for a general Sufi orthodoxy in conformity with the Sunna (*al-tariqa al-Muhammadiyya* or *tariq al-qawm*) rather than for a particular sectarian tendency.⁹ Nonetheless, over time, Alwan attracted followers and established

7 Abdul-Karim Rafeq, among the first to study Alwan’s *al-Nasa’ih*, considered the shaykh a member of the Syrian ‘*ulema*’ who exemplified that group’s “assertiveness” in the face of Ottoman power—see his, “The Syrian ‘*Ulama*’, Ottoman Law, and Islamic *Shari’a*,” *Turcica* 26 (1994): 27–28; idem, “Hamah fi matla’ al-hukm al-’uthmani: nasa’ih li-al-sultan wa iltizam bi-al-shari’a wa ta’ayush sukkani,” in *Nahr al-hayah fi takrim Nazim Kallas 1925–1994 bi-munasabat murur ‘aqdayn ‘ala wafatih*, ed. Muhammad Muhaffil, Khayriyya Qasimiyya, and ‘Abd al-Karim Rafiq (Damascus: Wizarat al-’Ilam, 2014), 79–105, esp. 81–86, 104–105. Rafeq examined yet another manuscript copy held at the Asad Library, different from those referenced by al-Alwani and Zaid. See also, Stefan Leder, “Sultanic Rule in the Mirror of Medieval Political Literature,” in *Global Medieval: Mirrors for Princes Reconsidered*, ed. Regula Forster and Nequín Yavari (Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2015), 98, 107–108; Mohannad al-Mubaidin, “How the Mamluk Historians Welcomed the Ottomans,” *World Applied Sciences Journal* 30 (2014): 1925–1931, esp. 1925–1926; Geoffroy, *Le soufisme*, 121.

8 Winter, “Sheikh ‘Ali Ibn Maymun,” 293. According to Winter, Syrian Sufis at this time lacked the social power held by their Egyptian counterparts, who could influence the authorities and exclude rivals to a much greater extent. In this way, the Syrian scene was more receptive to Sufi newcomers like Ibn Maymun.

9 Winter, “Sheikh ‘Ali Ibn Maymun,” 293–294, 306–307. A concern, on the part of Sufi leaders, to resist the deviant, antinomian practices of self-styled ascetics is reflected in much Sufi writing of the Mamluk period. The key divide was not between Sufis and jurists, who were often aligned, but between “learned Sufis” and “eccentric fakirs”—Yehoshua Frenkel, “*Mutasawwifa* Versus *Fuqara*’: Notes Concerning Sufi Discourse in Mamluk Syria,” in *El*

his own *tariqa*, the Alwaniyya, which long outlived him.¹⁰ He continued many of Ibn Maymun's spiritual practices, including the requirement that acolytes share their questions and problems in public sessions (*shakwa al-khawatir*), allowing their shaykh to expound on the issues raised.

Alwan frequently visited Aleppo, where he was counted among the city's most prominent Sufis. But otherwise, he did not travel widely and appears to have eschewed close personal association with those in power. He was, however, well-connected to the political landscape of early Ottoman Syria through his deputies and companions. One deputy, Umar al-Iskaf (d. 1544), was an illiterate shoe-maker who departed Hamah for Damascus where he gathered a sizeable following of commoners and elites (despite criticism of his lack of learning).¹¹ Another close associate, Ali al-Kizawani (d. 1548), was a controversial fellow disciple of Ibn Maymun. Al-Kizawani attracted a large number of adherents in Aleppo and the patronage of the city's chief judge—until, that is, al-Kizawani was implicated in an uprising that resulted in the brutal murder of the city's imperial tax registrar.¹² Alwan was further tied to regional judicial hierarchies by marriage: one of his daughters married a deputy judge of Hamah, another married into a line of Aleppo's chief judges.¹³ While it is not known if Alwan's *al-Nasa'ih al-muhimma* ever reached the sultan personally,¹⁴ the shaykh clearly held a network, and an audience, that assured wide dissemination of his ideas.

Sufismo y las normas del Islam, ed. Alfonso Carmona (Murcia: Editora Regional de Murcia, 2006), 307. Frenkel identifies Alwan as an "orthodox Sufi master" (303ff.).

- 10 The order's initiatic chain (*silsila*) was transmitted at least into the eighteenth century, and Alwan's tomb in Hamah was still being visited in the 1950s—Simonds, "Ali b. Maymun," 230, 233; al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 18; Jean Gaulmier, "Pèlerinages populaires à Hama," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 1 (1931): 143–145. In Aleppo, the Alwaniyya was taken over by the Khalwati order near the end of the sixteenth century—Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 266. See also, Allen, "Self, Space, Society," 90–148.
- 11 al-Ghazzi, *al-Kawakib al-sa'ira*, 2: 229–233. One of his supporters was the Ottoman governor of Damascus, Isa Pasha b. Ibrahim (d. 1543), who regularly attended his *zawiya*—al-Ghazzi, *al-Kawakib al-sa'ira*, 2: 235–236; Ibn al-Hanbali, *Durr al-habab*, vol. 1, part 2: 1056–1060.
- 12 Ibn al-Hanbali, *Durr al-habab*, vol. 1, part 2: 906–915; al-Ghazzi, *al-Kawakib al-sa'ira*, 2: 201–203; Timothy J. Fitzgerald, "Murder in Aleppo: Ottoman Conquest and the Struggle for Justice in the Early Sixteenth Century," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 27 (2016): 176–215, esp. 191–192.
- 13 Mahmud b. Ali al-Turkmani and Husayn b. Umar Ibn al-Nusaybi, respectively—see Ibn al-Hanbali, *Durr al-habab*, vol. 2, part 1: 445–446, vol. 1, part 2: 561–570; al-Ghazzi, *al-Kawakib al-sa'ira*, 3: 205, 145.
- 14 A preface to the autograph indicates its arrival in the "imperial libraries" (*al-khaza'in al-khudawandikariyya*), al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 7, 31.

While campaigning in the Arab lands, Sultan Selim visited sacred sites and holy persons, who sometimes, it was said, foretold or facilitated his victories.¹⁵ Alwan met Selim during the latter's movements through Syria. According to Nashwa al-Alwani, the shaykh initially viewed the Ottoman conqueror as a liberator of the people from Mamluk oppression, and the two struck up a brief friendship. In return for Alwan's support and prayers, Selim granted the Sufi ample lands endowed (as *waqf*) for his descendants. But, as the dust of war settled and a just order failed to take hold, the honeymoon ended. The shaykh, never one to keep quiet, was moved to offer stern advice in a tractate.¹⁶ Still, deference lingers: *al-Nasa'ih al-muhimma* is not eager to call out the ruler by name. While evidence suggests that the manuscript was composed for Sultan Selim, Alwan followed the convention of the genre and cast his advice obliquely, preferring general terms for the sovereign (at turns the *imam*, *sultan*, *malik*, *khudawandikar*, or *wali al-amr*).¹⁷ Moreover, his preface points to a wide mandate. He says he wrote at the insistence of friends who wanted others to benefit from "what God made known in the Book and the Sunna." Alwan conceded and drafted his commentary—with divine sanction, he claims—for the good of all (*'umum al-naf' biha li-al-khass wa-al-'amm*).¹⁸

Al-Nasa'ih al-muhimma is a strident litany of the dreadful defects that have, in Alwan's view, come to characterize his society. He loosely organizes his grievances, and sundry prescriptions, around the exegesis of three well-known Qur'anic verses (22:41, 16:90, 12:101). These verses collectively emphasize the need for those who exercise sovereignty (*mulk*) to rule with justice and beneficence—by establishing prayer (*salat*) and charity (*zakat*), enjoining right and forbidding wrong, and living in fearful preparation for the Hereafter.¹⁹ But *al-Nasa'ih al-muhimma* is more eclectic than systematic in its form, themes, and sources. It draws heavily on Qur'an and hadith, which suits the author's moralistic aims and demonstrates his jurisprudential bona fides. Yet, it also

15 Çıpa, *The Making of Selim*, 230–233.

16 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 29–31; cf. Sabrina Sohbi, "Réprobation des croyances et pratiques des chrétiens et des juifs à travers deux poèmes du cheikh 'Alwan al-Hamawi (début du X^e/XV^e siècle)," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 64 (2012): 401. For a taste of Alwan's politically charged poetry, see al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 22–23. For a rich comparison, see Kristof D'hulster's study of Damascene scholar Ibn Sultan's (d. 1544) "literary offering" to Selim: "Caught Between Aspiration and Anxiety, Praise and Exhortation: An Arabic Literary Offering to Ottoman Sultan Selim," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 44 (2013): 181–239.

17 Alwan implies a rough equivalence among these terms (al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 128, 162, 163); sometimes a title is preceded by "our master" (*mawlana*) (172, e.g.); "caliph" (*khalifa*) is seldom used (159, e.g.).

18 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 121–122.

19 Ibid., 122.

draws from the deep well of *adab* like other texts of its kind, invoking aphorisms and stories of past monarchs worthy of emulation—including ancient kings like David and Solomon and the Rightly-guided Caliphs. Through it all runs Alwan's conviction that he is living in perverse times desperately needing reform. Some problems can be traced to the Mamluks—the “tyrant-sultans” (*al-salatin al-ja'ira*) of recent memory²⁰—while others are pinned on Syria's new masters, the Ottomans.

Many of Alwan's concerns relate to issues of public morality, where offenses are legion. To combat such conditions, he exhorts, Islam's pillars should be upheld and its punishments (*hudud*) strictly applied. Offenses include the neglect of prayer, which the shaykh wants enforced on pain of death or humiliation, and adultery and sodomy, which are “plainly manifest in this time.”²¹ Alwan harps with particular intensity on the consumption of alcohol, inveighing against wine as the “mother of evils” (*umm al-khaba'ith*).²² He argues that, contrary to conventional wisdom, all the major religions, including Judaism and Christianity, forbid alcohol.²³ And he pleads that if it must be consumed by soldiers and notables, they do so discreetly, in private.²⁴ Alwan laments that some Muslim countries have sunk so low as to tax wine and prostitution, tacitly endorsing immorality and corrupting the treasury with ill-gotten gains. He implores the sultan to end such “repulsive innovation” (*bida' shani'a*).²⁵ On the debated topic of men wearing gold and silk, Alwan insists that men should not imitate women and the safest path is to avoid a practice that risks God's wrath.²⁶ With life marked to the finest detail by virtue and vice—especially vice—little escapes the shaykh's scrutiny.²⁷

A still larger category of concern involves the many abuses—physical and fiscal—perpetrated by government agents. And it is here that the ruler is most

20 Ibid., 142.

21 Ibid., 126–128, 138, 166–167.

22 Ibid., 140–141, 148, 149, 169ff., 200.

23 Ibid., 171–172. For more on Alwan's view of non-Muslims, see Sohbi, “Réprobation des croyances,” 385–414.

24 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 141.

25 Ibid., 138–140, 188; Marion Holmes Katz, “The Hadd Penalty for Zina: Symbol or Deterrent? Texts from the Early Sixteenth Century,” in *The Lineaments of Islam: Studies in Honor of Fred McGraw Donner*, ed. Paul M. Cobb (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 366–368, 375.

26 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 148, 149–151.

27 For a discussion of Alwan's forceful critique of immoral gender mixing, which runs through a number of his major works, see Marion Holmes Katz, *Women in the Mosque: A History of Legal Thought and Social Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 160–166. The topic surfaces in *al-Nasa'ih*, where, for example, Alwan urges the sultan to regulate women's presence in mosques and other public gatherings (179).

directly implicated. He is the delegating authority. In this area, Alwan rails against the crude and impious manner in which the death penalty is carried out, the solicitation and beating of young boys, the oppressive quartering of soldiers in homes and the requisitioning of animals and supplies.²⁸ He condemns the customary victory celebrations imposed on hapless subjects.²⁹ And he decries the mafia-like protection fees (*himaya*, *hawta*) demanded by governors of villagers and peasants.³⁰ Here, Alwan explicitly criticizes the Ottoman continuation of a Mamluk abuse: though God had removed these unjust exactions, Ottoman officials “have followed the example of that despotic gang; this hurts the needy and poor in the country, which leads them to plead for help against the oppression as they had in the first place.”³¹ The Ottomans doubled their offense in contriving new taxes on estates and marriage contracts, measures that drew widespread censure.³²

This last denunciation connects with another leitmotif in *al-Nasa'ih al-muhimma*: the defense of the poor and powerless. Their vulnerability, and the need for the ruler's attentive protection, is a common refrain. He should not favor the privileged at their expense.³³ The treatise's introduction cites the Prophetic *sunna*'s mandate to “support the oppressed, strengthen the weak, relieve the anxious, and mend the broken.”³⁴ Elsewhere, Alwan submits, in appealing to the sultan's solicitude, that the prayers of the downtrodden are most efficacious. He should want the masses praying for his prosperity by seeking their approval and governing evenhandedly.³⁵ God helps the just ruler overawe his subjects and makes them affectionate toward him.³⁶ And in all matters, Alwan finds the path

28 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 129, 136–137, 143, 145, 151–152, 165, 176.

29 Ibid., 146ff.

30 Ibid., 152–154; cf. 141–143, 188.

31 Ibid., 153.

32 Ibid., 177–178. See also, Rafeq, “The Syrian ‘*Ulama*’,” 9–32; Fitzgerald, “Murder in Aleppo,” 190; Amy Singer, “Marriages and Misdemeanors: A Record of *resm-i ‘arus ve bad-i hava*,” in *Law and Society in Islam*, ed. Devin J. Stewart, Baber Johansen, and Amy Singer (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996), 113–152. On the Ottoman preference for fines (“fiscalizing” criminal punishment), see Leslie Peirce, *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 118, 331ff., 359.

33 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 166, 168, 169, *passim*.

34 Ibid., 121.

35 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 175–177, *passim*. The many lowly and outcast, with their prayers as “arrows,” are the “army” that will propel the sultan to victory. This emphasis on the just treatment of the poor is echoed in a later Sufi tract on ethics written by the Khalwati Muhyi-yi Gülşeni (d. 1606) for Sultan Murad III (r. 1574–1595)—John Curry, “‘The Meeting of the Two Sultans:’ Three Sufi Mystics Negotiate with the Court of Murad III,” in *Sufism and Society*, 233.

36 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 141.

to order and equity in the rule of law, be it divine command (*shari'a*) or the sultan's noble edicts (*marasim sharifa*).³⁷

In Alwan's many admonitions, one detects standard strains of Muslim piety. One also senses the usual fare of kingly advice literature (the "mirror for princes" genre).³⁸ The call to protect the weak and establish justice echoes this tradition. As does Alwan's repeated call to reliance on only the most trustworthy counselors and agents and his supplemental discourse on bribery and gifts.³⁹ Yet *al-Nasa'ih al-muhimma*, with its themes of antimaterialism, the corruption of power, and life's transience, also bears a Sufi stamp.⁴⁰ In sketching stories of the Rightly-guided Caliphs, Alwan notes their charity, their mixing with the poor, their modest food, dwellings and garments, and their tireless focus on the afterlife. These model Imams, then, appear as model ascetics as well.⁴¹ Alwan extends this analogy in urging the ruler to tend to personal devotion, and to "see to what reforms himself first, and then to what reforms his subjects."⁴² Moreover, the ruler must apprehend the real meaning of sovereignty: "I do not mean

37 Ibid., 161, *passim*.

38 This is a wide and diverse field of writing and perhaps not one "genre." It includes, for example, works on ethics (*akhlak*) that, like Alwan's treatise, underline the importance of personal virtue. For a general introduction, see L. Marlow, s.v. "Advice and Advice Literature," *EF* 3 1 (2007), 34–58; Linda T. Darling, "Mirrors for Princes in Europe and the Middle East: A Case of Historiographical Incommensurability," in *East Meets West in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Transcultural Experiences in the Premodern World*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 223–242; Nequín Yavari, *Advice for the Sultan: Prophetic Voices and Secular Politics in Medieval Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Forster and Yavari, eds., *Global Medieval*.

39 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 123–126, 129, 153–154, 164, 192–195.

40 For other examples of Sufi advice writing, see Abd al-Wahhab ibn Ahmad ibn Ali al-Sha' rani (d. 1565), *Advice for Callow Jurists and Gullible Mendicants on Befriending Emirs*, trans. Adam Sabra (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); Alexandre Papas, "Islamic Brotherhoods in Sixteenth-Century Central Asia: The Dervish, the Sultan, and the Sufi Mirror for Princes," in *Faith's Boundaries: Laity and Clergy in Early Modern Confraternities*, ed. Nicholas Terpstra, Adriano Prospero, and Stefania Pastore (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 209–231; Chad G. Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran: New Perspectives on Jami's Salaman va Absal* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); A. C. S. Peacock, "Advice for the Sultans of Rum: The 'Mirror for Princes' of Early Thirteenth-Century Anatolia," in *Turkish Language, Literature, and History: Travelers' Tales, Sultans, and Scholars since the Eighth Century*, ed. Bill Hickman and Gary Leiser (New York: Routledge, 2016), 276–307, esp. 289–295; cf. Reuben Levy, trans., *A Mirror for Princes: The Qabus Nama by Kai Ka'us Ibn Iskandar Prince of Gurgan* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1951), 239ff.; Yusuf Khass Hajib (fl. 11th Cent.), *Wisdom of Royal Glory (Kutadgu Bilig): A Turko-Islamic Mirror for Princes*, trans. Robert Dankoff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 17–27.

41 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 185–189, 196–201. Alwan is especially impressed by Umar ibn al-Khattab (r. 634–644). He admires the caliph's combination of strength, justice, and humility—and miracles (199).

42 Ibid., 164.

sovereignty as in authority and conquering lands and people, rather I intend by it control of the self and desire (*al-mulk li-al-nafs wa-al-hawa*).” Genuine possession is self-possession, and “the real king is the one to whom God grants the power to control himself and his appetite.”⁴³ An Aristotelian call for the ruler to restrain his passions (and cleave to the mean) is a common exhortation in medieval advice literature. It is found in classics such as Ibn al-Muqaffa’s (d. c. 756) *al-Adab al-kabir*, Nizam al-Mulk’s (d. 1092) *Siyar al-muluk* or *Siyasatname*, and al-Ghazali’s (d. 1111) *al-Tibr al-masbuk fi nasihat al-muluk*.⁴⁴ But its repetition by Alwan and connection with ancillary themes suggest an ascetic discipline. The shaykh, moreover, betrays a stereotypical world-hating view in scrutinizing humankind’s basest impulses (vanity, lust, and the like). It is also noteworthy that he does not pose “wisdom” or “reason” as meaningful checks on the king’s appetites, as did many of his predecessors. The answer, again, rests with personal piety and the unwavering implementation of God’s law. With these predilections, one might sense the long shadow of al-Ghazali, for good reason: upon accepting Alwan as a follower, Ibn Maymun reportedly told him to read the luminary’s *Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din*.⁴⁵ Alwan also appears to have kept al-Ghazali’s *al-Tibr al-masbuk* close at hand.⁴⁶ And, like al-Ghazali, if on a much smaller scale, some of Alwan’s followers considered him the centennial “renewer” (*mujaddid*) of religion.⁴⁷

Alwan’s *mélange* of ideas, then, do not fall neatly in one category. In their multiplicity, they reflect both the man and his times. While many of his grievances appear derivative and formulaic, other evidence corroborates his laments. It is known that late Mamluk and early Ottoman Aleppo and Damascus were rough towns, and life in the countryside was likewise precarious. In 1533–1534 (or 1521), for example, the people of Aleppo sent a formal petition

43 Ibid., 184, cf. 123, 185, 191–192. There is a play on the word *nafs*, which means both “self” and “carnal soul” in Sufi usage.

44 Abd Allah Ibn al-Muqaffa, *al-Adab al-kabir* in *Athar Ibn al-Muqaffa*, ed. Umar Abu al-Nasr (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayah, 1966), 277–314; Hubert Darke, trans., *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings: The Siyar al-Muluk or Siyasat-nama of Nizam al-Mulk*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978); F. R. C. Bagley, trans., *Ghazali’s Book of Counsel for Kings (Nasihat al-Muluk)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); Yavari, *Advice for the Sultan*, 22. It is also a prominent theme in two other eleventh-century mirrors, cited above: Kai Ka’us’s *Qabus Nama* and Yusuf Khass Hajib’s *Kutadgu Bilig*—the latter warns the king to “treat your carnal soul as a dangerous enemy” and to “strive to overcome passion with intellect” (213, 215).

45 al-Ghazzi, *al-Kawakib al-sa’ira*, 2: 206; Winter, “Sheikh ‘Ali Ibn Maymun,” 295.

46 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa’ih*, 32–35.

47 Ibn al-Hanbali, *Durr al-habab*, vol. 1, part 2: 964–965; cf. Nashwa al-Alwani, “al-Shaykh ‘Ali,” 15–16; Geoffroy, *Le soufisme*, 490.

to the Ottoman grand vizier, which complained desperately of many of the same abuses exposed by Alwan, especially those tied to marauding soldiers.⁴⁸ The petitioners concluded that they would sooner be wiped off the face of the earth than suffer further depredation.⁴⁹ The people of sixteenth-century Hamah met similar torments.⁵⁰ Clearly, the shaykh was not alone in seeing his world as rife with vice and violence, and in locating responsibility (and hope) with the sultan's government.

Al-Nasa'ih al-muhimma also stretches beyond its immediate context, particularly in consideration of its genre. As a political advice tract that quotes the "Circle of Justice"⁵¹ and marshals the example of ancient monarchs, it strikes a primordial note. Yet in speaking truth to power and specifying abuses and remedies, it also adumbrates an Ottoman reformism that intensified across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—and is represented in the *nasihatname* literature of Lutfi Pasha (d. c. 1563), Kınalızade Ali Çelebi (d. 1572), Mustafa Ali (d. 1600), and others.⁵² It does not concern itself with the inner workings

48 Muhammad Adnan Bakhit, "Aleppo and the Ottoman Military in the 16th Century (Two Case Studies)," *al-Abhath* 27 (1978/1979): 27–30, 35–38; Faysal al-Kandari, "Mazlama ahali Halab ila al-sadr al-a'zam fi 'ahd al-Sultan Sulayman al-Qanuni," *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Bilad al-Sham during the Ottoman Era: Damascus, 26–30 September 2005* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2009), 93–112. Both studies examine the same undated petition (Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi no. 5565) and reproduce its Arabic text in full. Bakhit argues it was written in 1533–1534; al-Kandari proposes the year 1521.

49 Bakhit, "Aleppo and the Ottoman Military," 37. For more on Aleppo in this period, see my "Rituals of Possession, Methods of Control, and the Monopoly of Violence: The Ottoman Conquest of Aleppo in Comparative Perspective," in *The Mamluk-Ottoman Transition: Continuity and Change in Egypt and Bilad al-Sham in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Gül Şen (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2017), 249–273.

50 al-Sabuni, *Tarikh Hamah*, 81–85. Al-Sabuni's "declinist" portrayal of Ottoman rule as marked by whim, theft, torture, and impoverishment should be balanced against more layered socio-economic analyses—see, for example, Abdul-Karim Rafeq, "Mazahir iqtisadiyya wa-ijtima'iyya min liwa' Hamah, 942–943 / 1535–1536," *Dirasat Tarikhiyya* 10, nos. 31–32 (1989): 17–66; idem, "Hamah fi matla' al-hukm al-'uthmani," 86–105. Leslie Peirce's rigorous study of contemporary Aintab (*Morality Tales*) reveals a range of comparable conditions as well.

51 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 173—on the topic in general, see Linda T. Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2013).

52 Çıpa, *The Making of Selim*, 176–209; Orhan Keskintaş, *Adalet, Ahlâk, ve Nizam: Osmanlı Siyasetnameleri* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017); Marinos Sariyannis, "The Princely Virtues as Presented in Ottoman Political and Moral Literature," *Turcica* 43 (2011): 121–144; Kenan İnan, "Remembering the Good Old Days: The Ottoman *Nasihatname* [Advice Letters] Literature of the 17th Century," in *Institutional Change and Stability: Conflicts, Transitions and Social Values*, ed. Andreas Gémes, Florencia Peyrou, and Ioannis Xydopoulos (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2009), 111–127; Douglas A. Howard, "Genre and Myth in the Ottoman Advice for Kings Literature," in *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, ed.

of the palace in Istanbul (court ceremonial, spies, etc.). Nor is it especially theoretical. *Al-Nasa'ih al-muhimma* is more a bottom-up or people's litany of palpable grievances and practical advice, such as one might expect from a provincial notable.⁵³ Yet Alwan's intervention spoke to the age at large in another way that was more abstract. He wrote for an empire that was increasingly keen on co-opting Sufi ideas, persons, and resources for state-building. A major inventory of Bayezid II's (r. 1481–1512) palace library has revealed Sufism as the "largest single classification."⁵⁴ Sultan Selim's iconic commissioning of a shrine complex in Damascus for the legendary Sufi Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240) occurred in Alwan's backyard.⁵⁵ Ottoman rulers, in other words, including Selim's son Süleyman (r. 1520–1566), wanted mystical—and even messianic—forms of authority for themselves.⁵⁶ *Al-Nasa'ih al-muhimma* asks for just this kind of multivalent, fused, and sacral legitimacy in a ruler who succeeds the prophets and follows "the Book and Sunna, in word and deed, and the Law, Way, and Reality (*shari'a wa tariqa wa haqiqa*) as much as possible."⁵⁷ Thus the text, like

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- Virginia H. Aksan and Daniel Goffman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 137–166; Ahmet Uğur, *Osmanlı Siyaset-Nâmeleri* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, [repr.] 2001); Cemal Kafadar, "The Myth of the Golden Age: Ottoman Historical Consciousness in the Post-Süleymânic Era," in *Süleymân the Second and His Time*, ed. Halil İnalcık and Cemal Kafadar (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1993), 37–48; Pál Fodor, "State and Society, Crisis and Reform, in 15th–17th-Century Ottoman Mirror for Princes," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 40 (1986): 217–240; Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541–1600)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).
- 53 Alwan, given his formation as a sermonizer, might also be considered a precursor of the seventeenth-century "preacher-political advisor" identified by S. Aslıhan Gürbüz, "Teachers of the Public, Advisors to the Sultan: Preachers and the Rise of a Political Public Sphere in Early Modern Istanbul (1600–1675)" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2016).
- 54 Cemal Kafadar and Ahmet Karamustafa, "Books on Sufism, Lives of Saints, Ethics, and Sermons," in *Treasures of Knowledge: An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3–1503/4), Volume I: Essays*, ed. Gülru Necipoğlu, Cemal Kafadar, and Cornell H. Fleischer (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 439–507 (quote on p. 439); see also, in the same volume, Hüseyin Yılmaz, "Books on Ethics and Politics: The Art of Governing the Self and Others at the Ottoman Court," 509–526. Yılmaz concludes that the library shows "the sway of Sufism on Ottoman thought appears to have not only continued but further solidified at this time" (518).
- 55 Zeynep Yürekli, "Writing Down the Feats and Setting up the Scene: Hagiographers and Architectural Patrons in the Age of Empires," in *Sufism and Society*, 104–106; Çıpa, *The Making of Selim*, 231–233; Geoffroy, *Le soufisme*, 459–460.
- 56 Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Çıpa, *The Making of Selim*, 210–250; Green, *Sufism*, 128, 132–136; Geoffroy, *Le soufisme*, 128–135, 511.
- 57 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 123, cf. 132; Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*, 189.

most of significance, drifts in deep intellectual currents while swirling in smaller contextual eddies.

Its character also circles back to its author in more personal ways. Like his teacher, Ibn Maymun, Alwan plunged selectively into earthly politics. His writings, such as we have them, addressed many of the standard concerns Sufis held in his day. He wrote mystical poetry, a commentary on the Prophet's Ascension, and a ranging book on miracles and the lives of saints.⁵⁸ Yet, he also composed homiletic *fiqh* works, including an essay on the perils of gazing at strange women (and beardless youth), which shows the strident moralism of *al-Nasa'ih al-muhimma* was not exceptional.⁵⁹ The treatise, given the flexibility of the genre, likely appealed to Alwan, now on in years, as a way to indulge his established zeal for social criticism, that is, the curmudgeon in him. Certainly, the shaykh's unsettled times warranted guidance of all kinds—and as a “jurist-saint” who combined prowess in the legal and spiritual spheres,⁶⁰ Alwan saw himself as the man for the moment.

Then again, in a more charitable vein, there is also an introspective subtext. The extended meditation on mortality and the agonies of death that finishes the work suggests Alwan could have been contemplating his own demise, and not merely stoking fear in others.⁶¹ One might even detect feelings of isolation and melancholy. With the tectonic shifting of the early sixteenth-century Middle East, psychological unease must have been common. Writing, as ever,

58 The last item is *Nasamat al-ashar fi manaqib wa-karamat al-awliya' al-akhyar*, ed. Ahmad al-Mazidi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2001); it reflects the “conduct of the Sufi adept” (*adab al-murid*) genre—Larsen, “al-Hamawi,” 73.

59 al-Hamawi, *'Ara'is al-ghurar wa-ghara'is al-fikar fi ahkam al-nazar*, ed. Muhammad al-Murad (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1990). On the question of looking at beardless boys, Alwan adopted the most restrictive position, arguing for categorical prohibition (as opposed to permissibility in the absence of lust). This was the minority opinion on the matter in the Shafi'i legal school to which Alwan belonged. Such views led the towering Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d. 1731), two centuries later, to criticize Alwan's unwarranted cynicism—see Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 40, 49, 112–115. Indeed, a number of Alwan's works reveal his penchant for social commentary. The powers that be, the people of Hamah, non-Muslims, and even fellow Sufis took turns under his lens. See also, Nashwa al-Alwani, “al-Shaykh 'Ali;” Katz, *Women in the Mosque*, 160–166; Sohbi, “Réprobation des croyances;” Frenkel, “*Mutasawwifa Versus Fuqara'*,” 303ff.; Geoffroy, *Le soufisme*, 160–163, 397, 402. Al-Alwani has identified over forty titles in his corpus; for an annotated list, see, al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 18–28—cf. Larsen, “al-Hamawi,” 72–73; Khayr al-Din al-Zirikli, *al-A'lam: qamus tarajim*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li-al-Milayin, [repr.] 2002), 4: 312–313.

60 Allen, “Self, Space, Society,” 118, 126.

61 al-Hamawi, *al-Nasa'ih*, 201ff. In a grim finish, Alwan describes the ruler all alone in a dark grave awaiting final judgment, when only a record of justice can protect him from the scorching sun (205–206). An intense rhetorical focus on death is characteristic of al-Ghazali's work, too.

was a way to cope.⁶² “Personal literature” in particular, as Cemal Kafadar once observed, was often linked to times like these.⁶³ Whatever the motive, *al-Nasa’ih al-muhimma* is a remarkable testament to the sprawling mind of a Sufi leader who was deeply attached to his faith and his Syrian homeland (*al-Sham*),⁶⁴ and who yearned for the improvement of both. Shaykh Alwan has not escaped the attention of modern scholars, especially since the publication of a few of his writings in critical edition. But, for those who examine this pivotal period—and who wish to continue “extending the horizons and traditional boundaries of Ottoman studies”⁶⁵—there is still more we can learn from him.

62 Astrid Meier, “Perceptions of a New Era? Historical Writing in Early Ottoman Damascus,” *Arabica* 51 (2004): 430ff.

63 Cemal Kafadar, “Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth Century Istanbul and First-Person Narratives in Ottoman Literature,” *Studia Islamica* 69 (1989): 125–126, 149.

64 Despite the moral decay, Alwan was grateful to be in Syria. He wrote about the land’s “merits/virtues,” connecting with popular *fada’il al-Sham* traditions. He digresses on the topic in *al-Nasa’ih* (169–171). See also, his *Al-Sham: a ‘rasuha wa-fada’il suknaha*, ed. Nashwa Alwani (Damascus: Maktabat al-Ghazzali, 1997). For context, see Ghalib Anabsi, “Popular Beliefs as Reflected in ‘Merits of Palestine and Syria’ (*Fada’il al-Sham*) Literature: Pilgrimage Ceremonies and Customs in the Mamluk and Ottoman Periods,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19 (2008): 59–70; Zayde Antrim, “Place and Belonging in Medieval Syria, 6th/12th to 8th/14th Centuries” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2005); Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

65 Kafadar, “Self and Others,” 149.

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