The long list of books given in the Bibliography at the end of the book as well as the books cited in the notes are ample proof of the hard labour of the translator in garnering relevant information from various sources.

The original book being in Persian, the translator has adopted the system of Persian pronunciation while transcribing the Persian names and terms.

In short, the translator deserves our best appreciation and accolade for his successful performance of such a colossal job. It is hoped that this translation will serve as a means for introducing the basic principles and teachings of Sufism that have rendered valuable service in bringing the believers of various religions closer and in eliminating parochial prejudices and estrangements.

Ali Raza Naqvi


The work under review, originally written in Russian in 1999, is a survey of the topic of sainthood in South Asian Islam. It consists of eight chapters, starting with an overview of “the Indian tomb,” and then continuing with monographic treatments of major figures including ‘Ali Hujwîrî (d. 469/1077), Mu‘în al-Dîn Chishtî (d. 633/1236), Bābā Farîd Gânjî Shakkar (d. 633/1236), Niẓâm al-Dîn Awliyā’ (d. 728/1328), and Bahā’ al-Dîn Zakariyyâ (d. 665/1276); the last two chapters treat warrior saints and mendicant saints.

This study retains in its English revision a distinctively Russian approach to Islamic studies that is inseparable from Orientalism. Throughout this study, a paradoxical combination of scientific condescension and personal appreciation remains an unresolved problem. The result is a perspective on South Asian Sufism that is unreflective and unintegrated into modern scholarly discourses on the study of religion. Like the many colonial sources quoted at face value throughout this work, it has the flavour of a gazetteer, containing an ambivalent combination of supercilious condemnation of superstition and a nonetheless positive aesthetic appreciation. In particular, this work avoids any engagement with the substantial critical literature on sainthood as a category in Islamic studies, to its detriment.¹

¹ See, for example Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan*
What is one to make of the author’s assumption that “any society with a
traditional type of culture and a retarded [sic] type of consciousness . . . . was
wholly determined by religious consciousness”? (p. 2). This unfalsifiable
presupposition underlies many of the observations proffered by the author,
despite the fact that political treatises (e.g., Baranī) written during the Delhi
Sultanate make it clear that the critical institution of Persian kingship has
nothing to do with Islam, except insofar as it provides a protective structure
for Islamic practice. The uncritical use of terms such as “syncretism,”
preposing the dilution of pure religious essences, is another characteristic
move repeated at many junctures. Here the author perpetuates the dominant
Soviet-style approach that separates an uncorrupted textual Islam from the
debased manifestations of popular religion. The author further assumes that
the postulated domination of Muslim life by the shari‘ah makes the existence
of secular or non-religious aspects of life impossible. The fact that such a pure
textual Islam is nowhere to be found in history does not seem to require any
consideration in this approach, which is remarkably untouched by the last
decades of social-scientific study of religion in Europe and America.

An even more egregious assertion explicitly found throughout this work
is the notion that somehow it is the “wild growth” and “chaotic diversity” of
South Asian Islam that has uniquely led to such unfortunately heterodox
phenomena as reverence for saints, whereas any global or comparative study
of the history of Islamic civilization reveals that sainthood is an omnipresent
characteristic of Muslim religious life, which is always inflected in terms of
local lineages and cultural traditions. The highly questionable notion of a
deviant popular form of Islam is moreover firmly tied to a class bias against
“the lower strata of society.” Thus ziyārat pilgrimage to the tombs of saints
“came into being under the manifest influence of local religious beliefs in the
countries conquered by the Arabs” (p. 17), a questionable notion that is only
made possible by the Soviet penchant for seeing “survivals” of pre-Islamic

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Sufism (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998).

2 In general on this topic see, Devin DeWeese, “Islam and the Legacy of Sovietology: A Review
330.

3 For a contrasting approach, see the volume, Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious
Identities in Islamicate South Asia, eds. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville, FL:

4 Valerie J. Hoffman, Sufism, mystics, and saints in modern Egypt (Columbia, SC: University of
South Carolina Press, 1995); Katherine Pratt Ewing, Arguing Sainthood: Modernity,
Psychoanalysis, and Islam (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Scott Alan Kugle,
Ahmad Zarruq, Rebel between Spirit and Law: Sainthood and Authority in Islam (Bloomington:
Indiana University Press, 2006).
practice everywhere. The heavy-handed detection of such “cultural strata” substitutes for analysis of the actual attitudes of religious actors, which are evidently irrelevant in the face of Orientalist deductions. This study consequently contains so many dubious assumptions, questionable conclusions, and outright factual errors that readers should be cautioned to consider it of doubtful value.

This is a pity, because the author has an undoubtedly strong personal attraction to some of the great cultural productions of South Asian Muslims, particularly in the field of Urdu literature. Yet the remorseless habit of reading religious texts in positivistic terms leads to unfortunate results, such as when we are told that Muʿin al-Dīn Chishti placed “the task of propagation of Islam above all else, [being] intolerant of followers of other faiths and merciless to opponents” (p. 63). Likewise there is a tendency to read poetry naively as a reflection of social reality (p. 83). The bleak portrayal of Indian Muslim saints as simultaneously proselytizing zealots and as corrupters of textual Islam is only leavened by the author’s quotation of verses of poetry and by vivid and surprisingly touching personal accounts of visits to many of these supposedly heterodox shrines. It is hard to make these divergent approaches fit together, and one can only suppose that the dominant paradigm of Soviet Orientalism coexists uneasily here with a more direct and personal appreciation of the saintly traditions of South Asian Islam.

Carl W. Ernst

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A number of books had been written on the prose and poems of Malay sufi poets and poetics in the past, but V. I. Braginsky’s ... And Sails the Boat Downstream: Malay Sufi Poems of the Boat (2007) is the first major work that provides an in depth study of the subject. This remarkable work on the philological, religious and literary study of Malay Sufi symbolism focuses on only two poems on the sea and ship symbolism, namely the Rencong Poem of the Boat (Syair Perahu 1) and another Poem of Boat which was wrongly ascribed to Hamzah Fansuri (Syair Perahu 2). But a third poem, Poems of the