Hajj to the Heart

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‘Ali Muttaqi’s Exile

Total pandemonium broke out at the port when news of the battle spread. The prime minister, Asaf Khan, commandeered every boat in the harbor sheltered between the Gujarati mainland and the fortified island of Diu. His officers hustled palanquins bearing the ladies of the palace, the women of the house (zenana) onto boats, followed by chests of treasure and royal furnishings—whatever riches could be carried from Ahmedabad. Asaf Khan lowered the huge iron chain that hung from a tower, called Pani Kotha, on the island to a tower on the mainland, a defense over the water at the entrance to the harbor. The escape route was clear for the ships to leave, as soon as his command might be given.

Beyond the island’s fortress walls, the Arabian Sea shimmered listlessly, dull in the off-season when winds lagged. In the opposite direction, the view east along the coast toward the capital and countryside was full of commotion. Carts of refugees rushed along the roads toward the port but were repulsed by royal guards under command to keep the docks clear of commoners. Black smoke, like unseasonable storm clouds, filled the horizon to the south, rising from the flaming pitch-soaked wood of Gujarat’s naval fleet in the Gulf of Cambay; hundreds of ships burned. Beyond the smoke-filled horizon, a black storm of vultures and kites picked over the dead soldiers of the decimated Gujarat army that lay along the road toward Malwa and Delhi.

While crowds of refugees blocked the roads leading to Diu, a lone barque slipped into the harbor from the South. Alarms were raised and guards rushed to the dock to intercept it. As guards lowered their spears and aimed their bunduqs, a shaykh stood at the gunwale of the small boat as it nudged
against the dock. The guards hesitated. The shaykh slipped a ring of carnelian inscribed with Arabic off his finger; he handed it to their commander and asked him to deliver it to the prime minister. A few minutes later, Asaf Khan himself rushed over to embrace the shaykh, ordering guards to escort his ragged party ashore. Shaykh ʿAli Muttaqi, along with his family and followers, starved and parched by the chaotic rush from Ahmedabad, were finally safe. The shaykh surveyed the port, glancing west toward Arabia, and then asked the prime minister for the latest news.

The sultan of Gujarat, Bahadur Shah, had miscalculated badly. His success in conquering Malwa had gone to his head. He had occupied its capital at Mandu and boasted of next taking Delhi, but this incited its Mughal ruler, Humayun, to invade Gujarat preemptively. As the two mighty armies clashed, Bahadur Shah lost his nerve and fled the army camp at night for the safety of his fortress at Champaner, citing the need to secure the treasury. At dawn, news of his flight spread through both armies, causing Gujarati morale to collapse and provoking a Mughal charge. Defeated in battle, Bahadur Shah abandoned his fortress on the borderlands and fell back to the Gulf of Cambay, citing the need to protect his royal family and capital. At the port of Khambhat, two rivers meet—the Mahi flowing from Baroda and Sabarmati flowing from Ahmedabad—and join the wide gulf that opens onto the Arabian Sea. There Bahadur Shah had built a proud fleet—hundreds of warships—to protect his trade routes and ward off Portuguese marauders. Fearing that Humayun’s army would advance to confiscate his ships, he ordered his remaining soldiers to torch the fleet that he had built at great cost to the royal treasury and the kingdom’s merchants and peasants. As Bahadur Shah watched them burn, the prime minister ordered all that remained of the sultan of Gujarat’s family and wealth loaded onto the few ships that were left at Diu, the legacy of six generations of the Muzaffar-Shahi dynasty ruling the richest province of South Asia. He now paced the dock, waiting for enough news to make a decision.

Before the prime minister could finish his account, a riot of cheers and jeers arose from the crowd, which parted for a cavalry contingent that galloped onto the docks holding high the crimson parasol of the sultan, now smeared with mud and dust. Bahadur Shah rode directly to his prime minister and then noticed Shaykh ʿAli Muttaqi. He dismounted and quietly urged his minister to continue preparing the ships while he conferred with the shaykh.

In private in a room of Diu’s fort, the sultan broke down before the shaykh. He said, “I am the divinely appointed and legitimate ruler, but see what disaster has befallen me!” He unleashed a torrent of regret and sorrow, blaming
himself and his conduct—"I have been disobedient and arrogant! Now the Muslims under my rule are caught in grave tribulations and face terrible trials because of me." He sat with the shaykh until late in the night, recounting all the catastrophes that occurred while continuously offering his repentance and detailing his faults, begging for absolution and spiritual support.

While the sultan sobbed and raved, the shaykh sat on the balls of his feet, in exactly the same position he was in when the sultan had approached him. Shaykh ʿAli Muttaqi remained silent as a stone, refusing to look at the sultan. He was so still, it was as if he were not breathing. When Sultan Bahadur Shah finally lapsed into silence, Shaykh ʿAli Muttaqi rose and, without a word, walked slowly toward the dock where he boarded the last ship to leave the harbor.

Though dramatized in this retelling, this narrative about the docks of Diu is conveyed by ʿAbd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dihlawi in his biography of ʿAli Muttaqi, “Provision of the Pious” (Zād al-Muttaqīn). He heard it from the son of a companion of ʿAli Muttaqi who accompanied the shaykh on the fateful flight from Ahmedabad and attended him during the sultan’s unsuccessful audience. This narrative poignantly portrays ʿAli Muttaqi as an exile rather than a routine pilgrim as he sailed toward Mecca. The Qurʾan urges those who struggle with pilgrimage and exile to take heart and deepen their faith. Those who have faith, are exiled, and then struggle for the sake of God—as well as those who give them shelter and aid—are the true believers. For them is forgiveness and provision most generous (Qurʾan 8:74). ʿAli Muttaqi traveled far to train himself in the discipline of “dying to self-will” and along the way discovered a new model of Sufi authority that he felt was authentic. Armed with this new training and perspective, he settled in Gujarat to exercise his authority. But all too soon, he was forced to pack his bags again and to embark on a much longer and arduous voyage into exile. Yet he turned adversity into advantage through his skill.

This chapter is a satchel full of skills—skills in hadith scholarship and Sufi insight. These pious skills were highly portable and deeply respected wherever displayed in the Indian Ocean world that ʿAli Muttaqi inhabited. With them, he found ample shelter and aid, and in exile in Arabia, he was able to rebuild his authority, deepen its roots, and extend its scope. Before his crises and exile, ʿAli Muttaqi was drawn into the circle of political forces in Gujarat. Sultan Bahadur Shah was ruling in an age of prosperity and expansion that was, nonetheless, fragile.
Pilgrimage: Empowering Exile in Mecca

To understand ‘Ali Muttaqi’s loss in exile fully, we need to consider Gujarat during the reign of Sultan Bahadur in detail. ‘Ali Muttaqi saw the sultanate of Gujarat as his natural arena of activity and respected the Gujarati sultans’ long tradition of patronizing religious scholars and paying respect to those who upheld the *shariʿa*. Like most Sufis in Ahmedabad, he loyally supported the independence of Gujarat against any threat, whether by land or by sea.

On land, the sultans of Gujarat traditionally rivaled the sultans of Malwa, their neighbors inland to the east. Sultan Bahadur Shah (ruled 1527–35) ably handled Malwa and its smaller neighbor to the south, Khandesh, through a combination of military victories and strategic marriages. But the very year he took the throne, a new threat appeared from the north—the Mughals under Babur (ruled in South Asia 1526–30) and his son Humāyūn (ruled 1530–40). ‘Ali Muttaqi saw the Mughals as barbarian invaders from Central Asia, the bastard sons of Timur; in his eyes, they had no dynastic, legal, or religious legitimacy, though they wrested power from the previous rulers of Delhi.

Since becoming sultan in 1527, Bahadur Shah spent most of his energy competing with the Mughals. Upon Babur’s death in 1530, Bahadur Shah seized the opportunity to conquer the fortresses of Mandu and Chittor (Chittōrgāṙh), which had acted as buffer zones between the two polities. He also accepted refugees from Delhi: Afghans from the collapsing Lodi dynasty and dissident Mughal princes like Babur’s son-in-law Muḥammad Zamān Mīrzā. These military and diplomatic maneuvers caused Humayun to suspect that Gujarat plotted to advance north. He organized a preemptive invasion in 1534. Bahadur Shah and his ministers turned to ‘Ali Muttaqi to bless their actions and policies, but he was critical of the sultan’s military ambition.

This was a highly personal issue for ‘Ali Muttaqi because Bahadur Shah had retreated from Mandu in the face of the Mughals. As they conquered Mandu, ‘Ali Muttaqi’s former home and residence of his mother and other extended family, they razed the city and massacred its inhabitants to discourage resistance in Gujarat, a policy that followed their Mongol heritage. While ‘Ali Muttaqi arranged the affairs of his wife and companions in the port of Diu, he assumed from reports and rumors that his mother and family had been butchered in Mandu.

In this hasty retreat from the Mughal threat, Bahadur Shah torched his own newly built navy. This illustrates how precariously he faced danger from both land and sea, for he had built the fleet to stave off Portuguese marauders who were threatening his ports. The Portuguese menace was not new; Bahadur
Flight of Bahadur Shah during Humayun’s Campaign in Gujarat in 1535, a miniature painting by Dharmdas in Lahore, circa 1590. (Nasli and Alice Heeramanec Collection, Museum Associates Purchase M.78.9.6, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.)
Shah’s ancestors had strategized to control ports and sea trade routes. The farthest extent of their coastal authority was the southern island port of Mahim (Mahīm) (now part of Bombay), where the Sufi scholar ʿAlī Mahīmī (or Mahāʾīmī, d. 1431) had served as a judge in the Gujarati administration. Sultan Ahmad Shah I had arranged his son’s marriage with the daughter of the ruler of Mahim, and in this way the sultans kept close control of other port cities. When the Bahmani sultans of the Deccan threatened to take Mahim in 1431, Sultan Ahmad countered their attempts with daring naval and army maneuvers. After the Bahmani sultanate broke up, the Bijapur sultans administered the Konkan coast; in 1494, a Bijapur officer seized ports at Mahim, Dabul, and Chawl to set up a pirate state. The next sultan of Gujarat, Mahmud Begra, sent the same land and sea assault, but a storm wrecked the ships on the shore, where the Bijapur officer’s men imprisoned the admiral and slaughtered the Gujarati sailors. Diplomatic pressure induced Bijapur to execute its rogue officer and to release the admiral, who returned laden with rich gifts to pacify the sultan of Gujarat.

In 1498, the balance of land and sea power shifted, altering South Asian politics forever. The Portuguese admiral Vasco de Gama landed on the Malabar
coast of South India and established port-forts, which anchored the Portuguese net of sea-control from ports in Aden and Hormuz, at the mouths of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. From here, the Portuguese cut off trade from Egypt and Arabia through to the Indian coastline from Kerala to Gujarat. They were so effective that the Mamluk sultan of Egypt combined naval forces with the sultan of Gujarat, Mahmud Begra, to drive off the Portuguese. In 1509, the Portuguese defeated the combined Muslim fleet off the coast of Diu (the chief port of Gujarat in the sixteenth century, along with Surat). This naval defeat ended effective cooperation between Gujarat and the Mamluks, whose naval commitment was “feeble.” The Portuguese sacked and burned Goa with a violence that stunned Mahmud Begra, so he decided to pursue an independent diplomatic course. He freed Portuguese prisoners and acknowledged Goa as theirs to keep them from encroaching farther north toward Gujarat. His successor, Muzaffar Shah II, pursued a similar policy. The Portuguese desired another port farther north and applied diplomatically to build a fortress at Diu. Now just a sleepy town attached to the Gujarat coast by bridges, Diu was then an island and harbor well protected and lucrative, about a two-week sail from the coasts of East Africa and Arabia. The Portuguese officer in South Asia, interpreter, and travel writer named Duarte Barbosa (d. 1521) described the strategic position of this port that the Portuguese knew as Dīū-ye Bandar-e Rūmī or “Diu the Port of the Turks,” referring to the Turkic ethnicity of the sultans of Gujarat:

There is a promontory[,] and joining close to it is a small island, which contains a very large and fine town. . . . It has a very good harbor and is a port of much trade in merchandise, and of much shipping from Malabar, Batica [modern Karwar port in Karnataka], Goa, Dabul and Chawl. The people of Diu sail to Aden, Mecca, Zayla, Barbara and Mogadishu and Barawa [all ports in Somalia], Mombasa and Hormuz, and to all parts of the kingdom [of Gujarat]. . . . This town gives such a large sum of money as revenue to the king for the loading and unloading of such rich goods that it is a subject of marvel and amazement. . . . The king keeps a Moorish governor in this place . . . [who] makes much artillery and has many rowing barges, very well arranged . . . and has had constructed in the port a very strong and fine bulwark in which he has very good artillery with many lombards [cannons], and he always keeps with him many men-at-arms to whom he pays very good appointment.

Considering its strategic importance and the competence of its governor, Mālik Ayāz, it is not surprising that Muzaffar Shah II denied the Portuguese
their request to build their own fort on the island. Not used to being refused, the Portuguese raided Diu but were repelled in 1520, while Malik Ayaz tried to cement an alliance with the expanding Ottomans, who were pressing to conquer the Mamluks in Egypt and take over the trade from the Red Sea through the Indian Ocean. This tense situation prevailed as Bahadur Shah became the new sultan.

Bahadur Shah did not consider the Portuguese to be a dangerous enemy, as his ancestors had. He ignored their previous policy out of greed to control more land while encouraging the Ottoman ruler Sulayman the Magnificent (ruled 1520–66) to wage naval war against the Portuguese. He welcomed an Ottoman naval contingent, just in time to repulse a Portuguese attack on Diu in 1531, in what is heralded as “the first transoceanic victory in Ottoman history.” But the victory was pyrrhic for Bahadur Shah, who relied on the Ottoman naval force, whom he later hired as mercenaries of Gujarat and who proved to have flexible loyalties. Bahadur Shah was obsessed with expanding Gujarat’s continental boundaries; his success in conquering Malwa and Khandesh caused him to overreach by dominating the kingdom of Ahmednagar (Aḥmadnagar) to the south and challenging Mughal rule in the north. This provoked the Mughal ruler Humayun and pushed rulers in the Deccan to ally with the Mughals against Gujarat.

Bahadur Shah behaved arrogantly toward neighboring sultans and misjudged the Mughal imperium, expecting its ruler to behave like one sultan among many rather than as a burgeoning emperor who could depose rival sultans. When Bahadur Shah was besieging the fortress of Champaner to subdue its Rajput ruler, he wrote to Humayun urging him to gallantly delay invading Gujarat while its sultan was “fighting infidels.” Humayun ignored this request, seeing no difference between Rajput infidels and Sunni Muslim rivals: all opponents needed to be subdued systematically in his growing imperium. When he was a young prince, Bahadur Shah had been present with the Lodi army when the Mughals defeated it in 1526. He should have known that the Mughals were not like the ethnic Afghan rulers in South Asia, who were content to rule a regional sultanate surrounded by many other sultans considered equals. Rather, the Mughals had imperial ambitions linked to their Timurid legacy and competed imitatively with the Safavid Empire in Iran. From the opposite perspective, the first Mughal ruler described Bahadur Shah as a renegade prince before he claimed his throne and a “bloodthirsty and audacious young man” in his personal account titled the Babur Nama. Babur lived for only a few years in South Asia and left his eldest son, Humayun, to consolidate Mughal rule.
In 1535, Humayun defeated Bahadur Shah at Mandsaur (Mañdsawr, a town in Malwa, midway between Ahmedabad and Delhi) and then again at Mandu (the capital of Malwa, recently conquered by Gujarat). Bahadur Shah abandoned his chief defense in the fort of Champaner, thus losing ten years of revenue wealth from Gujarat. His only hope was to instigate insurrection behind the Mughal lines. He sent secret correspondence to the Afghan commander, Shēr Shâh Sūri, offering military and monetary aid if he would march from Bihar (Bihār), take Delhi, and quickly attack the Mughals.

In the face of the Mughal invasion, Gujarat’s pious and able prime minister, Asaf Khan, abandoned the capital; he rushed to Diu to load the royal family and treasury on a fleet of ten ships. They also carried a contingent of 2,000 Yemeni, Turkic, and Ethiopian guards, as well as lesser nobles like Qayṣar Khān and Shams Khān. The sailing season was over, but the desperate refugees prepared to venture out to sea anyway. Then Bahadur Shah burst into the port, having given up defending the capital. In his final audience with ʿAli Muttaqi, Bahadur Shah petitioned consolation but received none. The Sufi scholar boarded a ship and headed away from Gujarat, toward a life of exile, and the sultan was left to fend for himself.

Hadith: Exploring the Heart of the Shariʿa

ʿAli Muttaqi left no record of his desperate voyage out of Gujarat, stating only that he arrived in Mecca and settled in a strange land. However strange, it was a land that held promise for him. For in making the pilgrimage and circumambulating the Kaʿba, he was ritually circling the center of the world. He actively turned exile into the acquisition of authority through additional Sufi training and connection with new lineages. He undertook further scholarly training that would be highly respected back in South Asia. In Mecca, he found the resources to reconstruct his shattered world.

During that long off-season voyage, ʿAli Muttaqi pondered the loss of his home, family, and country. Mughal forces had razed the city of his mother. Bahadur Shah’s capital was under Mughal control, and his army lay scattered in retreat. As the coast of Gujarat disappeared behind him, ʿAli Muttaqi assumed that his former patron, Bahadur Shah, had been dethroned and soon would be killed. He had considered Gujarat to be the natural arena for his newly found authenticity as a saint, bolstered by popular and royal recognition. Now all that lay in ruins behind him.

ʿAli Muttaqi did not intend to settle permanently in Mecca but instead considered this a chance to consolidate his training in hadith studies. While still
Humayun Routing Bahadur Shah and His Army at Champaner Fort in 1535, a miniature painting by Farrukh Chela in 1603–4. (Akbar Nama, vol. 1, folio 61, British Library Or.12988.)
in Gujarat, he had developed a keen interest in hadith studies but had been unable to find a worthy teacher. In his youth, he had witnessed many hadith scholars from Egypt, the Hijaz, and Yemen settling in South Asia to teach. The florescence of small, independent courts in the Deccan in addition to Gujarat fueled this trend.

In Gujarat, ʿAli Muttaqi had met the hadith scholar Wajīh al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Suwayda (d. 1504), who had emigrated from Egypt to Ahmedabad. The sultan of Gujarat gave him the title “Mālik al-Muḥaddithīn,” the king of hadith experts. Those hadith scholars with credentials from respected circles—like those of Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani—enjoyed high social standing. This king of hadith scholars in Gujarat arrived by 1492, and from him ʿAli Muttaqi learned of the circles of rigorous hadith studies that drew students from all corners of the Islamic world to Arabia. ʿAli Muttaqi’s flight to the ritual heart of the Islamic world was thus also a journey to the scholarly center of hadith studies. When he arrived in Mecca, he joined the scholarly circle of Abūl-Ḥasan al-Bakrī (d. 1546). ʿAli Muttaqi became close friends with him and his son Muhammad Abū al-Makārim al-Bakrī (d. 1585). They secured for ʿAli Muttaqi a place among the most renowned scholars in what is called “the era of consolidation and analysis” of hadith in the late Sunni tradition. Solidifying in the fourteenth century—during Mamluk rule in Egypt and the sultanate of Delhi in South Asia—this tradition was characterized by a new stability and creativity as scholars integrated allegiance to Sufi orders into their loyalty to a school of law. Within this tradition, the fifteenth century witnessed a renaissance of hadith scholarship, beginning with al-ʿAsqalani.

As a notable Sufi and scholar, Abūl-Ḥasan al-Bakrī introduced ʿAli Muttaqi into the circle of the great jurist and hadith scholar with Sufi attachments Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī (d. 1566). ʿAli Muttaqi joined as a student but quickly showed himself to be an emerging master. Al-Haythamī referred to ʿAli Muttaqi as an equal while interpreting obtuse phrases in hadith reports, saying that ʿAli Muttaqi was actually his teacher rather than his student, as it outwardly appeared. When ʿAli Muttaqi entered the gathering, al-Haythamī would rise from the seat from which he taught and greet the younger ʿAli Muttaqi as his peer.

Under the watchful eye of al-Haythamī, ʿAli Muttaqi honed his skills in hadith compilation and interpretation. He began his lifelong project of reworking the collections of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505). ʿAli Muttaqi undertook to combine al-Suyuti’s “The Comprehensive Collection” (Jamʿ al-Jawāmiʿ, also called al-Jāmiʿ al-Kabīr) and “The Small Collection” (al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaghīr). Most importantly, he sought to reorganize the whole collection by gathering the
reports under a topical rubric related to their content and meaning. ʿAli Muttaqi selected these rubrics from the topics of legal manuals to encourage jurists to consult the reports on which to base their legal decisions. In contrast, al-Suyuti—like many previous hadith scholars—ordered the reports in his collections by alphabetical index following the initial letter of the first word in the report. This system made using the compilation dependent on accurate prior memorization of the report’s content, which was a considerable limitation. His colleagues greeted ʿAli Muttaqi’s exacting work of reordering and interpreting the hadith reports with great accolades. Abuʾl-Ḥasan al-Bakri said, “Al-Suyuti has earned the gratitude of the whole world [for his hadith collection], yet ʿAli Muttaqi has topped him, earning the gratitude of al-Suyuti himself [for refining that collection].”

ʿAli Muttaqi also produced smaller and less systematic compilations of hadith reports, some based some on the works of al-Suyuti, while others drew from the works of different masters. He continued the tradition of selecting forty hadith reports that he found especially moving to circulate in one slim volume with Persian commentary. ʿAli Muttaqi contributed to the technical study of hadith interpretation with an abridgment of a text on uncommon terms and strange locutions in hadith reports. He drew from his vast knowledge of Prophetic reports to address specialized subjects. He collected reports pertaining to the virtues of the Prophet. And he compiled collections about the personality of the Mahdi, as the fourth satchel documents in detail.

He found this new community in Mecca alienating at first. Al-Bakri’s circle of students drank coffee, a recent innovation. At first, ʿAli Muttaqi recoiled from drinking coffee, suspecting that its stimulating qualities made it harām, like intoxicants. Yet al-Bakri cajoled him into drinking it since all-night dhikr had become tightly associated with energizing coffee. This custom was recorded and defended by a Sufi scholar in Ahmedabad who was born of a Yemeni father and Gujarati mother, the venerable ʿAbd al-Qādir al-ʿAydarūsī (1570–1627, also named Abū Bakr Muḥyī al-Dīn). His book al-Nūr al-Sāfir ʿan Akhbār al-Qarn al-ʿĀshir (”The Light Unveiled, with Events of the Tenth Century Regaled”) is one of the earliest works to record ʿAli Muttaqi’s biography; it includes Arabic poems in praise of coffee, noting that a veritable fatwa war raged over whether the beverage was licit. As a Sufi and merchant, al-Aydarusi quoted jurists and doctors about the medical benefits and legality of coffee, along with Sufi poems in praise of its salubrious effects.

It was relatively easy for ʿAli Muttaqi to adjust to coffee as a minor innovation, but it was far harder for him to confront how these notable scholars
amassed wealth and social status. He admired their scholarship and was indebted to them for giving him access to teachers, but ‘Ali Muttaqi openly criticized their luxurious lifestyle. He reprimanded Muhammad al-Bakri, the son of his friend and teacher, for building a rich mansion, saying, “If his own father had never acted so ostentatiously, why should the son?” The Ottoman administration gave generous stipends to scholars and Sufis in Mecca, a policy to justify their adoption of the title “Protectors of the Two Holy Cities” after 1517. Many religious leaders grew wealthy by supporting their protectorate. Although the Ottoman governor at Mecca allotted a stipend to ‘Ali Muttaqi, he did not accept it for his personal use and refused to allow his closest disciples to use the funds. Rather, he accepted the money to distribute among his followers who were studying law or hadith and had no aspiration to follow Sufism.

In addition to hadith studies, ‘Ali Muttaqi also received new Sufi training in Mecca. Abu’l-Hasan al-Bakri introduced ‘Ali Muttaqi to an Egyptian Sufi master, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī. Most likely, he was the son of Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (d. 1497), the prolific Egyptian jurist and hadith scholar who belonged to the Shadhili Order and frequented Mecca; he wrote an account of hadith scholars of his era (al-Ḍawʾ al-Lāmiʿ li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsiʿ, or “Lighting Up the Memory of Scholars in the Tenth Century”) and a biography of his hadith teacher al-ʿAsqalani. Despite the fame of his ancestor, Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Sakhawi is obscure; even ‘Abd al-Haqq, who tried to collect all information about ‘Ali Muttaqi, knew little about him, perhaps because al-Sakhawi did not live in Mecca and ‘Ali Muttaqi took initiation while he was there for the Hajj. ‘Ali Muttaqi did not need a master to offer him spiritual guidance and Sufi discipline, for he had already received this for two years under Husam al-Dīn Muttaqi. Rather, the valuable gift he received from al-Sakhawi was his lineages: the Qadiri, Shadhili, and Madyani Orders fused together in an initiation that we can call “the triple tariqa.” ‘Ali Muttaqi’s disciples preserved the record of his lineages, reproduced in appendix B.

Husam al-Dīn Muttaqi had not given ‘Ali Muttaqi a firm pedigree in an institutional lineage, but al-Sakhawi compensated for that shortcoming. Prominent in the lineage that al-Sakhawi granted to ‘Ali Muttaqi is the figure of Shaykh Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 1494). He was a reform-oriented Sufi, jurist, and social critic who opposed a popular revolution in Morocco against the Marinid dynasty in 1465. Exiled from Fez, Zarruq went on the Hajj and then pursued theological and legal studies in Cairo, where he studied with the elder al-Sakhawi. He took initiation with a reform-minded Sufi, Shaykh Aḥmad
ibn ‘Uqbā al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 1490), in Cairo. Under al-Hadrami’s influence, Zarruq fused Sufism with Islamic law to avoid ritual extravagance and charismatic authoritarianism, teaching to “be a jurist first, then a Sufi; don’t be a Sufi first, then a jurist.”37 His Sufi master ordered Zarruq to return to Morocco to spread reformist ideals, but he was ostracized. Abandoning his homeland, Zarruq traveled across North Africa to teach jurisprudence, initiate disciples, and write texts until he finally settled in Misrāta, a key trading town in Tarabulus (Ṭarābulus, now Tripolitania), on the coastal region of western Libya, while his network of students and disciples spread through Egypt and Arabia.

ʿAli Muttaqi’s life mirrored Zarruq’s life in profound ways. As he joined the Sufi circle of Abu’l-Ḥasan al-Bakri, ʿAli Muttaqi read the devotional text favored by him, “The Book of Wisdom Sayings” (Kitāb al-Ḥikam) by Ibn ʿAṭāʾallāh al-Iskandarī, the Sufi jurist of the Shadhili Order (d. 1310 in Cairo), with its many interpretations, including those by Zarruq. This was the beginning of ʿAli Muttaqi’s intense engagement with the ideas, writings, and spirituality of Zarruq, whose persona guided him to fuse scriptural studies with Sufi training.

ʿAli Muttaqi plunged into this elite circle of reform-oriented Sufis concentrated in Cairo and Mecca, hadith scholars and jurists who also pursued Sufi training with vigor. In this atmosphere, he was able to combine hadith studies and Sufi devotion in ways that were impossible in Gujarat. By combining them, he sought to transform both. Here, he found a Sufi community that upheld the ideal of the scholar-saint. This ideal gave expression to the inner conviction that ʿAli Muttaqi had been cultivating ever since he had rejected his Chishti heritage.

ʿAli Muttaqi was a powerful force in these scholarly circles, whose leading figures acknowledged him as a saint who embodied their ideals. ʿAli Muttaqi demonstrated his burgeoning authority as a scholar-saint by silently persuading al-Haythami, his apparent superior and teacher in hadith settings, to become his disciple through a Sufi initiation.38 This was an astounding feat, since al-Haythami was a stern man who was outspoken against most activities associated with Sufis, as reflected in his work titled “Refraining the Riffraff from Forbidden Frivolities and Musical Sessions.”39 At the initiation, ʿAli Muttaqi gave his teacher a signature “death satchel” in front of thousands of his hadith students to symbolize his entrance into the community and his relationship with ʿAli Muttaqi as his saintly guide. This event was a crowning achievement for ʿAli Muttaqi since it embodied his ideal of saintly authenticity, bringing divergent methods of scholarship and spiritual insight together. His relationship with al-Haythami symbolized the attainment of this goal and
illustrated the model he desired for his future community of followers. This was the heart of his Hajj, which had begun in exile and despair.

In Mecca, ʿAli Muttaqī blurred distinctions between scholarship and Sufi devotion; he strove to integrate the pursuit of religious knowledge with one’s intellect and the burnishing of religious insight with one’s heart. He considered every action that benefited one’s self (or better, that benefited others) to be dhikr. He would prepare special black ink for his students as a form of dhikr. His relating hadith reports to others was the highest kind of dhikr. He saw the authenticity of his own sainthood wrapped up in his scholarly teaching and writing, which he held up as the highest proof of his spiritual authority.

He expressed this ideal repeatedly in his compositions but perhaps nowhere as clearly as in the short treatise titled “The Ultimate Perfection, on the Best of all Meritorious Action.” Here, he argues that teaching and learning are the most highly rewarded devotional acts.

This treatise could also be rightfully called “The Most Beneficial Labor, on the Virtue of Teaching and Learning.” People will gain different levels of blessing in the next life according to their different virtuous actions performed in this world. The most virtuous actions are those that give benefit to others even after the actor has died. . . . Of all these actions, imparting knowledge to others is the most virtuous action. Spreading knowledge has the widest benefit and the longest lasting usefulness, when compared to building water channels, planting date palms, founding a mosque or a fortress, or granting an institution a copy of the Qurʾan. Knowledge is the cause of revitalizing the shariʿa and rectifying people’s souls. If one builds a fortress or plants a tree or digs a water channel, surely this construction will eventually grow old and decay after his death. In contrast, knowledge never fades, and once taught, it never dies away. Teaching knowledge is even loftier than dying as a martyr in defense of Islam. . . . Learning and scholarship include many different activities, which are all means to the same end. One may teach full-time, lend books, or give them as charity. Even helping a single student to acquire paper, pen, and ink is helping to spread knowledge and partakes in its virtuous reward. However, the one activity which is essential and upon which all the others rest is teaching basic literacy to children. The one who imparts basic literacy has a share in all the further benefits of learning that the child might reap, including what he might later teach to others.
According to this analysis, the greatest blessing ʿAli Muttaqī could give himself and others was to spread knowledge of the *shariʿa*: his special kind of knowledge was hadith, and his mission was to make reports accessible to jurists, Sufis, and rulers. To his last day, he continued to revise and compile hadith, as his supreme form of *dhikr* and moderate form of asceticism. He recorded a story “about a Sufi who left the company of other Sufis and began to sit with the scholars and their students. Someone observed this change of behavior and asked him why he had left the company of other Sufis and preferred the company of those engaged in learning. He answered, ‘Because the Sufis consign themselves to drowning in absorption with the divine, while the scholar reaches out his hand to pull up the drowning man and save him!’” Although veiled, this story is autobiographical: it shows the underlying rationale that ʿAli Muttaqī discovered for his total change of life since rejecting his Chishti community in Burhanpur. He upheld his new authority as a master teacher of hadith as the proof of his authentic sainthood, in contrast to those “ignorant ones among the Sufis” who claimed to carry out devotions or follow a saint without authenticating their actions with scriptural knowledge. He alleged that other Sufi communities did not teach knowledge, and he denounced those who did not see learning as a method of cultivating spiritual insight. Some went so far as to prohibit their followers from learning the religious disciplines “as if they were the enemies of scholars, and of knowledge itself, claiming that it is injurious to their faith.”

ʿAli Muttaqī engaged these Sufi communities in the style of argument that became his hallmark. He investigated what hadith reports or traditional sayings they relied on and then reinterpreted them to counter their arguments. He followed this with an illustrative analogy drawn in the simple lines of caricature.

Perhaps these Sufis who praise ignorance and shun learning base their rationale on the saying of the masters that “knowledge is the greatest veil of God.” However, in their ignorance, they don’t realize that the intention behind this saying is to send them on a mission of acquiring knowledge! Knowledge is a veil for those who endeavor to attain it while they brag and boast of their attainment and all the worldly trifles it brings them. In reality, those who claim to love God and the Prophet but refuse to pursue knowledge are like a person afflicted with passionate love for a sweetheart to such an extent that he is helpless without his beloved. Imagine that this man was informed that his sweetheart was behind a
high wall, and that the only way to reach his beloved was to climb the wall. Imagine that upon hearing this news, he says, “This wall is a veil, an obstacle between my beloved and me, so I’ll turn my back on it and reject it!” Upon hearing this logic, all the people around him would tell him that he is an idiot. He should clearly work to climb the wall to reach his lover, rather than turn his back on the wall altogether. Those who desist from acquiring religious knowledge are all idiots like this man. Sufi masters have said that “knowledge is the greatest veil of God” since such painstaking effort is required to master it.45

This conscious effort to blur the popular distinction between Sufi worship and scholarly effort became a pillar of his teachings. It reflected his sense of authenticity as a saint, bolstered by his newly found affiliations in Mecca.

Integrity: Training Disciples and Reforming Genres

His success in Mecca made ʿAli Muttaqi feel that he had transformed losses of exile into gains of authority. He gained expertise in the scriptural field of hadith and gained initiation into a community that fused three Sufi orders. Most importantly, he gained an ambitious circle of colleagues who, along with ʿAli Muttaqi himself, aspired to reintegrate the study of religious disciplines with the internal work of spiritual refinement. Outside the environment of ecstatic devotion and existential philosophy that dominated South Asia, ʿAli Muttaqi was able to articulate an alternative and carefully delineated mode of sainthood.

ʿAli Muttaqi aimed to reform Sufism by highlighting principles that undergirded its institutions while de-emphasizing its outward ritual practices. This approach was parallel to his work in hadith studies. He applied the methods of hadith scholarship to Sufi training while insisting that Sufi devotion be fused with training in the scholarly disciplines, like hadith studies. In this way, he singled out knowledge as the pivot that brought together and balanced disciples and disciplines in his reform program.

As mentioned above, ʿAli Muttaqi’s lifelong project in hadith studies was to edit al-Suyuti’s mammoth collection of Prophetic reports, single out the operative principle in each report, and then group reports together that embodied the same principle. He transmitted all such reports together under one rubric, taken from the field of jurisprudence. He sought to identify the legal and moral principle within the text of each report. He designed this project to facilitate the practical use of hadith reports, above and beyond the literal
memorization and personal transmission of reports as a sort of ritualized blessing.

Similarly, ʿAli Muttaqi tried to find the principles behind every form of Sufi devotion. Inspired by Zarruq’s juridical reform of Sufism, his project was implicitly critical of the inherited forms of Sufi devotion. In laying out the principles to be safeguarded, ʿAli Muttaqi necessarily charted the distance between those principles and the practices of his contemporaries. This operation took its most extreme form in ‘Ali Muttaqi’s experiments with the “death of self-will,” as detailed in the first satchel. These experiences confirmed for him his own authenticity as a saint who had undergone Sufi training and successfully embodied its highest ideals. He highlighted the death of self-will as the founding principle of Sufi practice, the principle from which all forms of worship and ascetic discipline ultimately derived. From that vantage point, he could evaluate whether any form of devotion led to this central experience, actually or only rhetorically, directly or merely metaphorically. He judged that Sufis should avoid or limit those devotional practices that only indirectly led to selflessness. They should also avoid or vocally denounce those persons who claimed to be saints but did not embody this principle of the “death of self-will.”

As previously illustrated, ʿAli Muttaqi experimented with these methods of self-denial before he arrived in Mecca. But it was in Mecca that he became acquainted with Shaykh Zarruq and his small epistle on the death of self-will. ʿAli Muttaqi preserved that Arabic text, titled “Traveling the Path of Spiritual Cultivation with No Reliable Fellow Companion,” analyzed here from the only known manuscript of this work, which is preserved in Gujarat. The digital edition of this book provides a full translation in appendix C.

Zarruq wrote his epistle to benefit those who had not found a spiritual guide to show the way or a sincere companion to give sound advice. Sufi masters described the path of traveling toward God in countless books in different ways, saying, “The paths to God are as numerous as the variety of beings in creation.” It is bewildering to examine the variety of good deeds, from the very Islamic ritual recitation of “No god but God” to the very universal offering of help to one’s neighbor. Zarruq argued that all good deeds and Sufi practices could be distilled into a single principle: to give one’s life for God. In accord with the Arabic proverb “Whoever marries a beauty has to pay the dowry,” those who want to be intimate with God must abandon their own egos: “You should desist planning and choosing for yourself to earn eternal repose with God and a life without anxiety and care.”

This short epistle illustrates a spiritual paradox about human will. Even
the resolve to let one’s self-will die involves willpower. The very term used by Zarruq (and ‘Ali Muttaqi after him), *al-mawt al-ikhtiyārī*, captures this ambivalence. It could be translated in two ways, each valid and each contradictory: the “death of self-will,” or a “self-willed death.” To make sense of such a paradoxical phrase requires a wider perspective, taking into view how sainthood came to be seen as a state of being-close-to-death.

In the Islamic tradition, this paradox comes into play when religious specialists struggle to embody and display for others a state of being-close-to-death. Those who favored music and poetry displayed this being-close-to-death in the drama of ecstasy, involuntary motion, and trance. Those who placed their faith in Sufis saw being initiated by a master as the necessary gesture of surrender that rhymes with death. However, these metaphoric solutions to the problem of reaching the threshold of death did not satisfy ‘Ali Muttaqi. He was characteristically more direct, even blunt. If being-close-to-death was the necessary passage for self-transformation, then one must push the self to the brink of death.

One of the many commentaries that ‘Ali Muttaqi wrote upon the texts of Zarruq was on his epistle about the death of self-will. Titled “My Lord’s Guidance in a Spiritual Guide’s Absence,” ‘Ali Muttaqi’s commentary was written three-quarters of a century after Zarruq’s death. It is analyzed here from rare Arabic manuscripts in Ahmedabad and Cairo. The digital edition of this book provides a full translation in appendix D.

‘Ali Muttaqi begins his commentary with a statement from Zarruq’s teacher, al-Hadrami: “Spiritual training is no longer valid in the sense commonly understood, and all that’s left is benefiting from the shaykh’s own aspiration and state. You should follow the scripture *[kitab]* and the example of the Prophet *[sunna]*, no more and no less.” ‘Ali Muttaqi reinforces this message by citing a hadith report: “Those who are ascetically abstinent in this world, God teaches them without study and guides them without teachers, giving them spiritual insight to remove their blindness.” Thus, learning without study and being guided without teachers happens when one refuses to rely on one’s self-will and volition. To this point, the Prophet Muhammad taught, “Die before you die” and “Consider yourself among those in their graves.” ‘Ali Muttaqi’s commentary couches Zarruq’s radical ideas in the framework of tradition; he compares them to hadith and rephrases them in rhyming Arabic aphorisms. For example, he writes that the death of self-will is “the elixir of willful volition in the alchemy of blissful salvation.” ‘Ali Muttaqi turns also to popular analogies and parables to make his point. The death of self-will is like an alchemical elixir that transforms anything it touches from base metal to gold:
“The will to die to one’s self-will is one among the goals of will itself. Yet it is, like an elixir, an object that transforms other objects. If the elixir is dribbled upon a piece of brass, it transmutes the metal into purest gold, raising its value exponentially from what it was before. . . . The person who has died to self-will is like a spiritual alchemist whose wise use of an elixir transports him effortlessly to the fulfillment of whatever he had desired.” Moving from analogy to parable, he echoes the story of the Prophet Job (Ayyūb). After quoting an Arabic aphorism—“purity dwells in the hearts of those who dwell on trash heaps”—ʿAli Muttaqi asks his reader to consider a paradoxical story. “If a person ends up on a stinking, rotten trash heap and wants to get free of the stench, he or she has two choices. The first choice is to climb down off the trash heap, wash out one’s clothes and bathe, and then consider oneself clean. That is relatively easy. The second choice is much harder and requires intense effort. One could stay right there, dwelling on the trash heap, and cure its overwhelming stench with a powerfully fragrant perfume. The only fragrance powerful enough is that emitted by the death of self-will.”

By the end of his brief text, ʿAli Muttaqi not only comments upon this text but also mines the sources of Zarruq’s inspiration. Zarruq had made his career writing commentaries on “The Book of Wisdom Sayings” of Ibn ʿAta’allah al-Iskandari. Following Zarruq, ʿAli Muttaqi made the genre of the wisdom sayings or aphorisms (Ar. ḥikam, singular ḥikma) the centerpiece of his teaching method. Wisdom sayings condense deep insight into few words and also blur the distinction between different genres of devotional literature. ʿAli Muttaqi used them to fuse Qur’anic verses, hadith sayings, and Sufi maxims in order to communicate advice and insight to his followers. He also used them to explicate the principles that underlie Sufi rituals and technical terminology in order to refresh and revive Sufi practice.

To honor Zarruq’s admiration for aphorisms, ʿAli Muttaqi composed his own and spiced his commentary with them:

Death is the only store in which shop both rich and poor.

The greatest of miracles bequeathed is rising to walk though you’re deceased.

A virtuous quality that’s of the highest worth is to have died while still walking the face of the earth.

The only way taking a life is not a crime is sacrificing your spirit before the body’s appointed time.
The only killing that leads to life beyond end or start is giving up one’s soul before the body falls apart.

The way to gain advantage and protect against other people is to abandon all the qualities that typify other people.

ʿAli Muttaqi knew that human reason is crafty and that fear drives us to reason away death in any way possible. How to cut through the distraction of routine common sense and hold our attention on the reality of imminent death, so that we no longer fear but actually welcome it? Only language that is honed and crafted to distill a message into its most condensed and rhythmic form can fulfill this function.

Thus, ʿAli Muttaqi argues through aphorism, parable, and analogy that the essence of Sufism is to give up one’s egoistic volition in loving surrender to God’s creative will. He praises Sufi masters who help their disciples internalize this insight. He encourages readers to find a principled master whose personality is in accord with both their own disposition and the shariʿa, for that will ensure that this insight gets conveyed directly and deeply. Beneath this framework of respect for tradition, ʿAli Muttaqi’s epistle is written specifically for those who do not have a spiritual guide. He quotes with approval Zarruq’s vivid description of how one must enact death, not just through Sufi initiations or musical trances but through the very limbs of one’s body. This method turns the will against the body itself, denying its most basic urges and habitual motions, like eating, drinking, sleeping, standing, even moving. This is a total erasure of bodily habitus that one has learned since birth. ʿAli Muttaqi tries to address this apparent paradox of how the will can overpower the body, leading in a contradictory motion to the death, not of the body, but of the will that began the operation.

ʿAli Muttaqi also wrote another small treatise on the subject, titled “Reminders of Death for Gradually Passing Away.” In it, he uses the image of alchemy to describe the “paradox of intention” through which the greatest aims can be achieved only by abandoning the will to achieve them. The process cannot be an achievement of the ego; it must come as a gift from above. This process means opening a space in the human personality for the workings of a transcendent force that Sufis call “divine solicitousness” (ʿināyat allāh). ʿAli Muttaqi hoped that as Sufi saints-in-the-making experienced the social power of their role, they would abandon the ambition and self-will that drove them to take on Sufi discipline in the first place. If self-will persisted within a person who bore the socially prestigious distinction of being a saint, it could
lead to abuses of power like fostering sectarian movements, bidding for political power, or indulging in personal aggrandizement through the garb of piety.

The expression “the death of self-will” is purely negative. Similarly, this immediate reduction of Sufi training down to the experience of “dying before death” is a negative analysis, declaring what the ultimate experience is not rather than describing how one could achieve such an experience. To balance this, ʿAli Muttaqi also built a method of training disciples to open them up to this ineffable experience: the death of self-will. Just as those who are dead to their own will act in full accord with the Prophetic example of the shariʿa, so a method of spiritual training that aims to evoke this death of self-will must be limited by and vitalized through the shariʿa itself.

To achieve this end, ʿAli Muttaqi insisted that all his disciples first acquire thorough training in religious learning in its linguistic, scriptural, and legal aspects. He argued that Sufi affiliations were a vehicle for the pursuit of knowledge in all its dimensions. He stressed the priority of outer knowledge first, which would lead to the pursuit of inner knowledge.

There are two kinds of knowledge: inner knowledge and outer knowledge. Each has its own distinct starting points and its own ultimate goals. Inner knowledge is also called ethics [akhlaq]. . . . Each kind of knowledge further divides into two categories: that knowledge which is essential and obligatory for each individual, and that knowledge which is obligatory for the community as a whole but not for each individual. In the dimension of inner knowledge, what is essential is what makes one’s outer actions sound and efficacious. The rest consists of details and elaborations on the subtle points of Sufi practice that should be left to specialists in the community and are certainly not required for every individual. A person should first endeavor to acquire what is essential of outer knowledge and only then get what is essential of inner knowledge. Without this essential inner knowledge, hypocrisy and pride may adulterate a person’s outer knowledge.52

Unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not see studying religious disciplines as basic training, as a first step that was necessary but separate from the real training of Sufi devotion. Rather, he saw it as integral training. Studying the religious disciplines was not just a first step before spiritual training; it was already spiritual training in its very essence. However, ʿAli Muttaqi felt that only a saintly teacher like himself could bring out these dimensions in Islamic learning. His teaching method was effective: many of his leading
disciples admitted that they came to him originally only for external training in hadith. It would take up to a year before the student realized that his spiritual training had already begun, without his having ever intended to become “a Sufi.”

In this way, ʿAli Muttaqi fused scholarly training with Sufi training. His home in Mecca was both a madrasa and a khanqah in one building. He intentionally “disguised” his Sufi training in the form of scholarly teaching. He was trying not only to limit who could claim Sufi training but also to insinuate Sufi training into would-be jurists and hadith scholars, such as his disciples Muhammad ibn Tahir Patani and the brothers ʿAbdallah Sindhi and Rahmatallah Sindhi. He tried to balance the acquisition of religious knowledge (which was a form of social prestige and power) with virtue and selflessness, without which it could not lead to social justice. To illustrate this ideal fusion, he quoted one of the principles of Zarruq: “One who follows the Sufi path while neglecting jurisprudence is a heretic, while one who learns jurisprudence while neglecting the Sufi path commits transgression. However, one who combines both has attained realization of the Truth.” ʿAli Muttaqi explained this principle (based upon a saying by Anas ibn Mālik, a companion of Muhammad who relayed many hadith reports): “The first is a heretic because he believes in a good thing that nonetheless negates the wisdom of revelation and the legal rulings derived from it. The second is corrupted because his knowledge eclipses the inward orientation that prevents him from rebelling against God and alienates him from virtues upon which religious actions must be based in order to be purely for God. The realization of the third is because he is upright in Truth, adhering to the essence of the True One.”

ʿAli Muttaqi insisted that his disciples first become his students for several years, in order to establish this firm basis of legal rectitude.

When his students made the transition to becoming disciples, their explicitly Sufi training began. Then ʿAli Muttaqi would introduce them to the texts of Zarruq, whose writings elucidated the operative principles of Sufism (qawāʾid al-tašawwuf). He positioned Zarruq’s texts as the ideological linchpin that held together scriptural learning and Sufi practice. This reduced the whole medieval elaboration of Sufi devotion to an elegant but irrelevant set of rituals, and he recommended that the sincere disciple should avoid attachment to them. In a short but incisive text, ʿAli Muttaqi tried to construct an authentic lineage for his tempered style of Sufi devotion, titled “The Tightest Bond of Forefathers and Descendants on How to Be a Sufi as Derived Directly from the Qur’an, the Prophet’s Example, and Our Pious Ancestors.” He demonstrated how scripture provides the basic vocabulary for Sufi practice and
how the Prophetic hadith specify its essential forms. In the final section of this work, he extracted the sayings of the pious ancestors, *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, that support Sufi practices. Strategically, he included Zarruq as a “pious ancestor,” even though he was only two generations senior to ʿAli Muttaqi. In this way, he projected Zarruq as a legitimate figure rooted in a tradition that cut through medieval accretions and revived that style of Sufi practice that derived directly from scripture and the Prophet’s actions. In the end, he condensed the tradition even more tightly by eclipsing mention of Zarruq and delving right to the practice that he saw as the essence of being a Sufi: “I have displayed for you all these various definitions of being a Sufi and all the ideas of who is a Sufi, in all their different kinds and types. However, if you ask me what is the best way to achieve this station, I would answer: simply the death of self-will. I have written a treatise on this process, which you should read to understand it and practice it yourself.”55

For the benefit of his disciples, ʿAli Muttaqi also authored teaching texts based on Zarruq’s “Uṣūlī approach” to Sufi practice. Usuli scholarship began in jurisprudence, as medieval reaction to diversification of decisions by various legal schools. Usuli scholars endeavored to explain the legal principles by which decisions were formulated and to check that all decisions were based on firm scriptural roots.56 Zarruq adopted the terms “root” or authentic source (Ar. *aṣl*, plural *uṣūl*) and “principle” or systematic rule (Ar. *qāʿida*, plural *qawāʿid*). He borrowed these terms from juridical scholarship and applied them to Sufi practice to articulate the principles of spiritual cultivation under the guidance of a saint just as jurists explicated the principles of jurisprudence. This involved a bold but delicate extension of Usuli scholarship into the field of Sufi practice. Zarruq hoped that his “Principles of Being a Sufi” would guide the outer actions of Sufis which fell under the jurisdiction of law and legal sanction, just as “The Book of Wisdom Sayings” of Ibn ʿAta’allah had come to guide their inner lives.57 His principles would both limit their actions and link them to “root” behaviors sanctified by scripture and Prophetic example.

ʿAli Muttaqi wrote many books to make Zarruq’s intricate texts more accessible. These are not commentaries but rather condensations of the original works intended to popularize their content. ʿAli Muttaqi saw his own reform program in such continuity with Zarruq’s “Usuli approach” that he did not need commentaries on Zarruq’s texts but had rather integrated them into his own ideas. He reworked Zarruq’s two basic texts, “The Principles of Being a Sufi”58 and “The Foundations of the Path,”59 for use among his disciples: these two texts together neatly pruned the Sufi tradition of all the wild growth
that over the last few centuries had obscured its main trunk and roots and
inhibited the production of its fruit. ʿAli Muttaqi wrote of the bewildering
multiplicity of devotional methods, such that “all the Sufis are on a single
path, but they are different depending on their states and stages. It is as if
they drink from the same water, but get nourishment from different types of
food.”60 He saw Zarruq’s texts as channels that protected that one source of
water and ensured its purity.

In addition to reworking texts by Zarruq, ʿAli Muttaqi also wrote his own
version of the principles of being a Sufi. These efforts were modest: he felt that
this genre did not need expansion through creative elaboration but rather
demanded only internalization and implementation. ʿAli Muttaqi’s constant
emphasis on practice could extend to almost anti-intellectual extremes. He
felt that the composition of Sufi texts had already gone too far, and he himself
wrote only for specific purposes: to limit which books might be in circulation
among disciples, to limit the very need for books, and to reintegrate those
ideas that had gained independence through Sufi books back into their appro-
priate setting enmeshed in the religious disciplines. He wrote his own work
on “essential principles” as a reminder to his disciples, not as a fully concep-
tualized text. “The Provision of the Seekers” is such a reminder, in which ʿAli
Muttaqi reduces Sufi devotion to five basic principles: doing constant dhikr,
opposing the selfish ego, refusing to depend upon the world, relying abso-
lutely upon God, and staying satisfied with whatever one has at the moment.61
He weaves all these principles around two key terms: cautious abstinence
(waraʿ) and renunciant reliance upon God (tawakkul). All these principles,
he stressed, are best apprehended and applied through intense study of the
Prophet’s life and, consequently, the hadith corpus.

The vast reservoir of hadith reports contains the Prophet’s example of
worship and daily activities; they include his legal transactions, virtues,
stories, encouragement, and warning. Whoever embodies all these differ-
ent facets of the Prophet’s example can be said to follow the Prophet in
word, deed, and spiritual state. The essence of hadith studies and its pri-
mary aim is just this: to follow the Prophet’s example. One achieves this by
embracing poverty and minimizing one’s dependence on the world, know-
ing that these choices show love for God. For the love of God has a concrete
sign—that is the love of the Prophet himself and following his example.62

ʿAli Muttaqi tried to fuse scriptural learning with spiritual training, for both
were required to love and follow the Prophet. This was a project to implement
the warning of Zarruq and his teachers that classical Sufi training was no
longer valid and all that remained in the present age was firm adherence to scripture and the Prophet’s example. The spiritual guide must conceal Sufi training within this form, and Sufi aspirants would progress in insight only through the guide’s attention and concentration that flowed to them through scriptural and legal studies.

ʿAli Muttaqi’s position with regard to Sufi training was conveyed most forcefully to his closest disciple, whom he chose to be his successor (khalīfa), ʿAbd al-Wahhab Muttaqi. In turn, he preserved their position for posterity when he wrote,

In former times, Sufi masters were absolute guides. They established the bond between the master and his disciples on the master’s absolute authority. They would place a disciple in isolation, then feed and nourish him according to a strict regime that would benefit him. The master would endeavor to help the disciple with full concentration; he would give each disciple a special litany to recite as dhikr, and provide each with special rituals to perform according to the disciple’s personal spiritual state. The disciple would not come out of isolation except for obligatory congregational prayers or bodily necessities. All the time, the disciple would stare at his feet while sitting in a corner, never looking right nor left. Other than his litany, the disciple would utter nothing. Once or twice a day, the master would check on his disciple to ask about his states, thoughts, desires, or visions, and to make further demands according to the disciple’s own needs. The master might change his diet and intake of water, or set limits to his thought pattern or behaviors. In this way, the master would prudently cure each disciple’s spiritual diseases and personal weaknesses. Some disciples would take a year in isolation, some only six months or less. The disciple would emerge from isolation as a perfected and actualized master himself. This is what “spiritual training in the reality of the term” means. This was the old way of training disciples, which these days has become invalid.63

ʿAbd al-Wahhab Muttaqi contrasted the old method of training and the new method of the Muttaqi community in the triple tariqa. The assertion that the old ways had passed away was a foundation of their reformist ideology; they assumed that a newer, subtler method now needed implementation.

ʿAli Muttaqi and his community believed that the personal attention of the master to the individual state of each disciple had created a bewildering array of rituals, exercises, and litanies. Masters had provided these as skillful means to achieving the death of self-will, yet all these means were ancillary
to the shari’a. Disciples mistook these tools for the foundational principles and adhered to them with partisan fervor to such an extent that Sufis not only were jealously partisan to their own lineage or sub-lineage but also dismissed those jurists and scholars who did not pay deference to those rituals in which the Sufis placed so much hope and pride. The result was a cleavage between different religious specialists and subsequent loss of devotional intensity and ethical insight in all quarters. ʿAbd al-Wahhab Muttaqi continued to explain the new method of training.

In contrast, training by “the master’s attention and concentration” is still possible. This means that the master can focus his lofty aspiration and spiritual state upon the disciple [without discrete rituals]. Nowadays, the master outwardly teaches the rulings of the shari’a and the comportment of the Sufi path, while inwardly fixing upon the disciple’s progress his own powerful and intense spiritual concentration. With his actions, words, or spiritual state, the master guides the disciple and tries to lead him to perfection. In this way, too, after some time the disciple may feel the effect of the master’s presence; the illumination and purity of the master’s spiritual state begin to seep into the disciple and affect him indirectly. This is the method of “benefiting by aspiration and spiritual state.” This type of training remains possible in the present era. All the masters of today agree that disciples should be set upon the Sufi path by this method. Yet even this method remains rare today.64

This new method involved paring away all the outward rituals of Sufi initiation and training. There would be no shaving of the head, no dramatic display of submission in taking allegiance to a master, no change of dress or occupation, and no long period of isolated meditation or ascetic rigor. Instead, the master endeavored simply to teach the commandments of the shari’a and to specify the virtues necessary to live up to them, weaving spiritual insight and personal transformation into this scholarly training.

The best illustration of these somewhat abstract distinctions is the life story of ʿAbd al-Wahhab. In the beginning of their relationship, ʿAbd al-Wahhab had no inkling that his teacher had singled him out as a disciple. In his perception, ʿAli Muttaqi took him on as an assistant because of his strong calligraphic hand, and they spent time copying books and editing the master’s hadith compilations while discussing scriptural studies. ʿAbd al-Wahhab recounted his early days.

ʿAli Muttaqi’s method of training a disciple was not to remove him abruptly from the style of life that he was currently leading. He would instead leave
him exactly in the condition in which he first found him. The master himself would remain engaged with the disciple from within his own conscience, working on the disciple, examining him to find just the right way to train him. He would continue to keep his attention firmly focused upon him for some time, until, without the disciple knowing it by any sense, the disciple found that he had reached a place where he had never ever been before! . . . I had been in the service of ʿAli Muttaqi [as a student and a scribe] for two years before I was ever aware that the master was turning his spiritual attention to me. During this time, he never mentioned any litanies that I should recite as dhikr and never assigned me any spiritual exercises or ascetic disciplines or periods of isolation. He mentioned nothing openly related to Sufi practices: he would just keep me busy with the work that we were engaged in together. We spent most of our time copying books and writing out his own texts. Such was the power of the master’s concentration that he had me participate in his work while he took on the work of working spiritually upon me! Only after two years, it became evident to me that I no longer inhabited the same condition that I had once been in. I had arrived at a new place altogether, a place I had never even imagined before.65

This method of tempered Sufi training consisted of an arrival with no dramatic departure and a transformation through grasping basic principles rather than through submission to laborious ritual. ʿAli Muttaqi had described his own “unimagined arrival” at a state free of selfish cares without having willed himself to arrive there: “Very slowly and gradually, with the helping care of an actualized master, and with his companionship, blessings, and spiritual aspiration, the disciple finds that he himself has (as if by himself) emerged from the dark murk of his former mean life. He has taken on the virtuous qualities [of the master and of the Prophet]. This method of training disciples is most direct, easiest, and kindest. This was the method of my own master [Husam al-Din Muttaqi].”66 Because it did not make use of anything outside scripture and the shariʿa built upon scripture, ʿAli Muttaqi felt that this new method of Sufi training was safe from the dangers of ego, social rivalry, and partisanship. Only Sufi training of this type could encourage a rapprochement between religious authorities who looked to the outward form of scriptural dictates and those who looked toward the inward experience that scripture might inspire.

If Sufis strove to embody humane virtues, their most glowing example was in the Prophet Muhammad, so a method of Sufi training that relied upon hadith studies would be the most direct path to gaining illumination from the
Prophet’s virtuous qualities. ‘Ali Muttaqi himself thought of his reformed Sufi training as the “most direct, easiest, and kindest” route to attaining closeness with the Prophet, and through the Prophet to the divine source of prophecy itself. Before Sufis could aspire to become saints, he asserted, they must become scholars in hadith.

Although ‘Ali Muttaqi elevated the mastery of hadith to be the primary condition for Sufi training, he did not reject Sufi texts but rather made the genre of the wisdom sayings the centerpiece of his teaching method. ‘Ali Muttaqi tried to wean his disciples away from extensive prose works and offered them instead a diet of wisdom sayings that he had filtered, examined, and carefully crafted. As the intellectual content of Sufi training, he taught “The Book of Wisdom Sayings” by Ibn ‘Ata’allah al-Iskandari. He relied on the commentaries of Zarruq (who penned about twenty commentaries on the slim text over his lifetime) and was especially fond of the fifteenth commentary. The pithy and abstract style of wisdom sayings was in perfect accord with ‘Ali Muttaqi’s reform program. Wisdom sayings were independent of the biography of a particular saint (unlike maktūbāt, or letters written by a Sufi master) and not beholden to parochial concerns of a given community (unlike malfūzāt, or recorded oral discourses of a master). Wisdom sayings had the rhythm and rhyme of poetry but eliminated the emotional exuberance and appeal to passion that poetry inspired. They elicited a response of cogitation and silent meditation rather than demanding to be sung or set to music. In these ways, they were an important means of limiting and pruning Sufi devotion while preserving a way to talk about “progress” along the path of spiritual refinement.

‘Ali Muttaqi rewrote Zarruq’s fifteenth commentary on “The Book of Wisdom Sayings” by organizing both the aphorisms and the subsidiary commentary according to legal and ethical topics in order to integrate their spiritual advice with the concerns of jurisprudence. This topical reordering reveals a certain ideological program. He started with those wisdom sayings that deal with inner attitudes and with customary rituals that were obligatory and common to all Muslims. Only then did he mention specifically Sufi rituals and practices, addressing the spiritual states that constituted the main topic in most Sufi manuals. He began with chapters on seeking knowledge, then repentance, then sincerity; this list follows the three main topics of Zarruq’s own compositions. ‘Ali Muttaqi reordered the aphorisms of “The Book of Wisdom Sayings” to make them amplify his reformist agenda, not in the obvious medium of commentary but in the subtle forms of listing and categorizing.

The genre of wisdom sayings is a very Arabic genre. With their rhythm spanning the fields of prose and poetry (like the saj medium in literary Arabic),
wisdom sayings resonate with the cadence of the Qur’an. Their power is very hard to recreate in another language, since this resonance would be absent. Yet ʿAli Muttaqi intended to popularize this genre beyond the confines of the Arabic-speaking world; he wanted even South Asians, with their love of Persian metaphysical poetry, to switch allegiance to the hikam as the purest vehicle to communicate Sufi ideals. He attempted to integrate the very Arabic hikam into the types of texts quoted by Persian and Indian Sufis. For example, in his notebook of quotations, “The Precious Jewels,” he juxtaposed wisdom sayings by Ibn ʿAtaʾallah with quotes from the most beloved of Persian Sufi poets like Saʿdī Shīrāzī (d. 1291) and ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī (d. 1088). While in the circle of his disciples, he advocated exclusive attention to the wisdom sayings, for the wider reading audience of Sufis who did not necessarily agree with his reform project he was satisfied with simply drawing equivalencies between the hikam and Persian poetry.

Not content simply to expand the readership of the wisdom sayings, ʿAli Muttaqi strove to expand the genre itself by composing his own hikam in Arabic. His wisdom sayings that extol the virtues of the “death of self-will” conform most closely to the inimitable style of Ibn ʿAtaʾallah. Wisdom sayings were the perfect vehicle to capture the paradoxes inherent in that enterprise, and he liberally spiced his two treatises about the experience of self-willed death with them.

More surprising are ʿAli Muttaqi’s experiments with this genre. He composed a number of proverbs in the style of the hikam, in which the first line states a problem or issue, and the second line responds with a scriptural quotation from the Qur’an or hadith that answers the first line, illustrates it, or contradicts it. Whereas Ibn ʿAtaʾallah composed his wisdom sayings through the medium of Sufi terminology, and while Zarruq expressed rules and principles in the form of wisdom sayings through the medium of juridical language, ʿAli Muttaqi wrote his through the medium of scriptural phrases. ʿAli Muttaqi felt that each passing generation that composed wisdom sayings pared a little more off the outer rind of Sufi practice and penetrated a little further into the inner source of spiritual insight. For ʿAli Muttaqi, there was no need to become distracted by either Sufi terminology or legal definitions. He sought to link his wisdom sayings directly to the source of revelation, getting at the intimate connection between the Prophet and the words revealed to him.

ʿAli Muttaqi wrote two texts in this style, “Divine Gifts from on High” and “The Wisdom of Spiritual Insight,” and his method of composition is evident when these texts are placed side by side. At first, he extracted phrases from scriptural sources that suggested principles for guidance along the path of personal transformation. It is as if he were trying to illustrate that the Qur’an
and reports about the Prophet provided all the necessary principles for Sufi training. The experience of Sufis and saints confirmed these principles by putting them into practice. There would be no need, therefore, to venerate the person of a saintly guide, since everything the saint experienced or taught was already presented as guidance in scripture. Examples of this first step in his composition include these two maxims: “Incessant recollection of death collapses your self and makes you oblivious to its desires,” and “The rational one prepares for death before it descends, so seek and you will find.”

ʿAli Muttaqi specifies that only those who already know scripture well enough to recognize the full verse or report from which the phrasing comes can taste the true spiritual delight of these pithy extractions. The reader must be accomplished in scriptural interpretation to appreciate fully how the non-scriptural wording resonates with the scriptural phraseology. Out of modesty, he wanted to add few words of his own to what he saw as the brilliant words of scripture. His works in this mode also expressed his ideology of fusing the Sufi quest for illumination with the scholarly quest for scriptural understanding.

These high demands on the audience must have severely limited who could read his *hikam* and derive any wisdom from them. ʿAli Muttaqi therefore re-worked the whole collection, expanding the scriptural guidance into a denser clothing of prose, further structured by rhyme. The total collection reached over 800 sayings in “The Wisdom of Spiritual Insight.” He organized them into chapters to encourage disciples to read them as they would a manual of Sufi guidance. In the margin, he included the full verse or hadith report that the aphorism tries to magnify, in order to open his wisdom sayings to a wider audience. He also introduced the whole collection with a discussion of the word “wisdom” (ḥikma) in its multivalent meanings. It means wisdom in the general sense, especially the wisdom inherent in God’s having destined events as they happen. Yet it also means human ingenuity in expressing this wisdom in sayings or teachings. Furthermore, ʿAli Muttaqi brings out a deeper meaning, in that ḥikma also means the underlying principle behind an event. In this way, he illustrates how the genre of wisdom sayings is a tool in his search for principles of Sufi practice.

Wisdom is a great gift that lifts away sorrow and trouble;  
Whoever is granted wisdom has been granted a great benefit.

The saints from horizon to horizon are hidden in tissues of humanity just like us;  
What kind of Prophet is this who eats and walks through markets just like us?
The hearts of saints ascend though their bodies rest tranquil;  
Do you look to the mountains and think their masses inert?69

ʿAli Muttaqi’s admiration for Ibn ʿAtaʾallah went beyond his skillful use of the wisdom sayings. He found Ibn ʿAtaʾallah’s text “The Book of Illumination on Desisting from Selfish Calculation” irreplaceable as a tool to teach his disciples how to rely upon God in all situations.70 In this brief book, Ibn ʿAtaʾallah had described in discursive prose the meanings that he had previously encapsulated in his more enigmatic and evocative wisdom sayings. He explained how to rely absolutely upon God to provide for one’s needs, to make one’s decisions, and to sustain one’s whole life. His emphasis on leaving aside the ego’s propensity to plot and plan expressed more moderately ʿAli Muttaqi’s exhortation to struggle toward the “death of self-will.” For this reason, he taught the text in his reformed Sufi method and also translated it into Persian for a wider audience.71

In another short tract, “The Red Sulfur of the Greater Spiritual Alchemy,” ʿAli Muttaqi connected his own expression of “death of self-will” to Ibn ʿAtaʾallah’s expression of “desisting from selfish calculation.”72 ʿAli Muttaqi illustrated the six beliefs that lead a person to depend upon God alone (as first presented by Ibn ʿAtaʾallah) by comparing them to the six aromatic roots of alchemy (Ar. ʿaqāqīr, singular ʿaqāq). These six medicinal herbs are the constituent elements of the legendary “red sulfur” that can magically transform lead into gold. Similarly, the six beliefs that direct one to reliance upon God (tawakkul) transform the soul through a psychological death, from being bridled with passion to being a perfect instrument for divine will. Such a spiritual death will guide one to perfect inward contentment and the greatest reward, just as material alchemy reputedly leads to outer riches and worldly comfort.

Most authors compared the mythical “red sulfur” to the person of a realized saint, yet ʿAli Muttaqi evoked this image in a very different way. He wrote about the constituent elements that make the “red sulfur” efficacious. These are the six principles that lead one to develop a spirituality that would allow one to embody the ideals of sainthood. He refused to reify the person of the saint and resolved instead to distill from that person, through his reformist chemistry, the necessary principles that would result in his becoming so spiritually potent. This search for principles that undergirded Sufi training and that could limit its expressions was the central motif of ʿAli Muttaqi’s project of reform.

In Mecca, ʿAli Muttaqi operated at the center of a new circle of Sufi scholars who fused hadith studies with Sufi discipline to make an integral whole. This fusion constituted a project of reform internal to Sufi communities. Through
it, ‘Ali Muttaqi tried to reshape the role of the Muslim saint, to limit who could claim to be a saint, and to define what would be such a saint’s overt social signs. He engaged in this difficult internal reform in hopes that revitalized Muslim saints would reform society as a whole. In this way, reform within the Sufi community would spread more widely into social and political fields.

Withdrawal: Martyrdom between Land and Sea

This chapter has unpacked ‘Ali Muttaqi’s satchel full of skills in Sufism and hadith studies. These he perfected while living in exile in Mecca; through them he turned a terrible loss to his advantage. As he sailed away from a Gujarat devastated by Mughal attack, he assumed that its sultan, Bahadur Shah, was doomed. Yet uprisings against the Mughal garrison prevented Humayun from collecting taxes or co-opting the government. Mughal forces quickly retreated north, fearing that the Afghan chief Sher Shah Suri (ruled 1538–45 as sultan of Delhi) would invade Delhi from his stronghold in Bihar.73 The Mughals abandoned Gujarat after plundering its treasury. Bahadur Shah survived. Nobles, merchants, and peasants rallied around him, the symbol of a resiliently independent Gujarat.

Heading into exile, ‘Ali Muttaqi withdrew his spiritual protection from Bahadur Shah’s reign. In his arrogance, Bahadur Shah failed to heed advice from his spiritual counselor, relying on the Portuguese and their artillery instead. After recovering from Mughal devastation, Bahadur Shah allowed the Portuguese to fortify the port at Bassien in 1534 in exchange for promises of military aid. A year later, he granted them the right to build a fort at Diu. Bahadur Shah then agreed that all ships bound from Gujarat had to call at Portuguese forts to pay for a protection certificate (cartaz) and that Gujarat would not build warships or trade with Deccan kingdoms in horses or arms in what became an interregional maritime “protection racket.”74 Gujarat thus abandoned profitable relations with other Islamic kingdoms like Bijapur, whose major port at Goa had been conquered by the Portuguese in 1510.75

‘Ali Muttaqi had been critical of Bahadur Shah’s reliance on the Portuguese to support his ailing campaign against the Mughals, for it was foolish for a sultan of Gujarat to abandon the seaways while invading the limitless continental expanse. When the Portuguese reneged on promises of aid, Bahadur Shah had built a fleet to drive them off the Gujarati coast but subsequently torched his ships while retreating before the forces of Humayun. He pursued this desperate policy even though Humayun did not chase Bahadur Shah to Diu from Kambhat (Kambhāt; Ar. Kambāyat; Eng. Cambay), where the
ships were docked, but rather stayed inland at Champaner to secure the fort’s treasury.

At Diu, ʿAli Muttaqi refused to console the defeated Bahadur Shah, once his patron and friend. His refusal implies a criticism of the sultan’s negligence in depending upon the Portuguese and giving them footholds on the Gujarat coast. ʿAli Muttaqi never encountered the Portuguese personally, but the European invaders were present in political, military, travel, and trade relations at this time. Some of ʿAli Muttaqi’s fellow Sufis fell prey to Portuguese piracy.76 ʿAli Muttaqi saw Bahadur Shah’s capitulation to be a betrayal of Muslims, because the Hajj routes were threatened by Portuguese crusading naval policy, which combined capturing trade routes with terrorizing Muslim pilgrims and targeting Muslim holy sites. The flotilla that carried ʿAli Muttaqi to Mecca, along with the prime minister, Asaf Khan, and the royal family and treasury, was lucky to have arrived without being plundered.77

With such virulently anti-Muslim instincts driving Portuguese trade relations and political alliances, Bahadur Shah’s policy of negotiation and cooperation with the Portuguese was short-sighted. ʿAli Muttaqi, like most jurists and scholars, upheld the view that the sultan’s legitimacy rested on protecting Muslims’ safety and ability to fulfill religious obligations free of threat. Portuguese crusading and piracy morphed quickly into colonial domination, threatening the livelihood and religious freedom of Muslims in Gujarat and beyond. Farther south along the coast, in Malabar, another Sufi scholar, Makhdūm Zayn al-Dīn Maʿbarī (d. 1583), mirrored ʿAli Muttaqi’s life experience. He lived in Calicut (Kozhikōde), which, like Gujarat, thrived on trade with Arabia. Calicut bore the brunt of Vasco da Gama’s incursions. The Portuguese built coastal forts farther north, in Gujarat, because they were driven off by the zamorin of Calicut, a Hindu ruler with close Arab allies. Zayn al-Dīn’s book *Tuḥfat al-Mujāhidīn fī baʿd Akhbār al-Burṭughāliyīn* (“Gift for Holy Warriors, about Reports Pertaining to Portuguese Foreigners”) is dedicated to the sultan of Bijapur, who he hoped would come to the defense of Muslim merchants along the coast after the Portuguese wrested Goa from Bijapur’s control.78 This book is a history of Malabar’s Muslim community (the earliest history of that South Asian region, ironically written in Arabic) and an indictment of Portuguese piracy and colonialism. ʿAli Muttaqi never wrote explicitly about the Portuguese, but the two Sufi scholars were part of the same network. The two probably met in Mecca, for Zayn al-Dīn, like ʿAli Muttaqi, was a student of the hadith scholar in Mecca Ibn Hajar al-Haythami.

The personal connection between these two Sufi scholars from Gujarat and Malabar mirrors actual military coordination of their era. Malabar’s corsairs
joined with the Ottoman fleets and navy of Gujarat in 1538 in an organized attack on the Portuguese, termed “an enormous transoceanic coalition, linking Istanbul with allies across the entire breadth of the Indian ocean from Shihir and Gujarat to Calicut and Sumatra.” This grand alliance fell apart at Diu when, on the verge of victory in besieging the Portuguese island fortress, the Ottoman and Gujarat forces descended into squabbling and distrust. By that time, Bahadur Shah had recently died, but his lack of commitment to repelling the Portuguese doomed this promising alliance. The opinions of the younger, more explicit Zayn al-Din from Malabar reflect those of the older ʿAli Muttaqi, whose assessment of the Portuguese remained implicit in his withdrawal of support for Bahadur Shah.

The naïveté of Bahadur Shah’s policy with the Portuguese had ended his life. The commander of the fort at Diu, Nuno da Cunha (d. 1539), assassinated Bahadur Shah, along with many of his ministers, during a parley at sea in 1537. Bahadur Shah sank into the sea, his head crushed flat by a Portuguese oar or skewered with a boarding pike. He died as he lived, trapped between land and sea, not knowing in which direction his true enemies lurked. A poetic phrase that serves as a chronogram records the date: Sulṭān al-bār shahīd al-bahr, or “Ruler on land, martyr at sea.” ʿAli Muttaqi was not alone in blaming Bahadur Shah for his defeat and ruin of Gujarat. The worldly chronicler Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Makkī al-Āsafī Ulūghkhānī—in his history of Gujarat zealously titled “Victory for One Who Loves Muzaffar and His Family”—expressed the ambivalence that all Gujarati loyalists must have felt as Bahadur Shah vacillated between announcing jihad against the Portuguese and beseeching military aid from them. The historian Ulūghkhānī assessed him either as a hero for his rhetoric who was granted by God the noble death of a martyr, or as a fool for trusting the Portuguese who deserved the death he received by their treachery.

By the time Bahadur Shah was killed, ʿAli Muttaqi was living in exile and reconstituting his life through new skills. Bahadur Shah had ruled for ten years and died at thirty-one years old. His body was never recovered from the sea’s grip for an honorable burial under the soil. This “martyrdom” was not mourned by ʿAli Muttaqi. He had already withdrawn his support and hoped to invest his potent guidance in Bahadur Shah’s successor. Despite his exile in Mecca, ʿAli Muttaqi perpetuated his connection to Gujarat in expectation that his Sufi reforms could create efficacious saints to act as the sound foundation for a revitalized state after the catastrophe of Humayun’s Mughal invasion. After Bahadur Shah’s death, ʿAli Muttaqi returned to Gujarat twice in order to project himself as just such a scholar-saint who could sustain the sultanate of
The Death of Sultan Bahadur Shah of Gujarat in 1537, a miniature painting by Lal in 1603–4. (Akbar Nama, vol. 1, folio 66, British Library Or.12988.)
Gujarat. What began as a reform internal to a Sufi order spread outward into a delimitation of who could be an authentic saint, then to what that saint’s role in society should be, and then to the furthest limit of how such a saint could be the catalyst for a revitalized Islamic society. Sultan Bahadur Shah’s disaster led to new opportunity for ‘Ali Muttaqi to put his principles into action in an overseas mission, as will be revealed in the next chapter.