

the more effective approach would have been to at least acknowledge that future solutions may not be born out of the instruments and understandings that emerged in the same century that created this conflict. Regardless, this book is a thought-provoking must-read that will generate much-needed critical discussion and debate, forcing all interested parties to think creatively and in more concrete terms.

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## Sufi Warrior Saints: Stories of Sufi Jihad from Muslim Hagiography

**Harry S. Neale (London: I. B. Tauris, 2022). Pp. 182. \$100.91 hardcover, \$39.85 paper. ISBN: 9780755643370**

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This book is a sequel to the author's earlier monograph *Jihad in Premodern Sufi Writings* (2017; hereafter *JPSW*). It elaborates and amplifies the themes adumbrated in that earlier book, using Sufi hagiographic writings. Although the author recognizes the fictional and mythic nature of this literary genre, he is convinced that "historical record accords with some elements of hagiography" and "analysis of historical evidence helps to corroborate a hagiographic anecdote or story" (7). So, is the notion of "Sufis as warriors a trope or reality?" (8–9). Neale's new book provides an answer to this major question, while addressing a host of related ones already touched on in *JPSW*. His goal is to dispel Western "misconceptions" about Sufism, especially the notion that it is inherently pacifistic and tolerant of other religions (2, 5–6; cf. *JPSW*, 8–9, 16–27). This issue is not new, of course, and has already been examined in numerous earlier studies, including those of my late colleague Michael Bonner (1952–2019), especially in his *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War* (1996) and *Jihad in Islamic History* (2006). Surprisingly, the latter work is not mentioned in Neale's bibliography.

This is not to say that Neale has nothing new to bring to the table. His main contribution to the history of jihad in this and the previous book is his thorough knowledge of Sufi hagiography from vastly different geographical areas and historical epochs. After discussing the "ascetic warriors and proto-Sufis" of the 8th and 9th centuries fighting against the Byzantine Christians and pagan Turks, he examines the attitudes to military jihad of such seminal Sufi teachers as al-Bistami, al-Kazaruni (both from Iran), and al-Junayd of Baghdad, who lived in the 9th to 11th centuries. The rest of the book follows the same geographical-chronological framework in covering the events and figures active in the Middle East, the Maghrib, and the Indian subcontinent from the 12th through the 17th centuries. After introducing several common definitions of jihad in medieval Muslim theological and juridical literature, Neale focuses on what he considers its recognizably Sufi aspects: the inner jihad against one's lower self and its passions; the outer jihad against the enemies of the faith; and the jihad of speaking a just word to a tyrant (x, 22). Emphasizing the inseparability and interconnections of all these types of jihad, Neale richly illustrates them with "readable accounts about Sufi *mujahids*" (20). His biographical-chronological method of presentation, Neale argues, is "true to the cultural tradition" that he wants to share with his readers. It was used, among others, by the foremost Sufi hagiographer of all times, Farid al-Din 'Attar (d. ca 1220) in his Memorial of God's Friends (*Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*). This author recounts the hagiographies of God's Sufi friends (*awliyā'*) in



chronological order to convey to his readers major Sufi precepts, values, and practices. For ‘Attar, as for Neale, the personalities and actions of the *awliyāʾ* embody not just Sufi teachings and practices, but also “the essential truths of the faith” (20). On the theoretical level, Neale describes the hagiographical narratives he has translated as an essential part of “sacred history that provides a religious tradition with a structure . . . and gives spiritual meaning to contemporary events” (21). This type of storytelling, he argues, connects “the present to the past [to help us] make sense of our place in the world.” As such, it has universal appeal (22).

Based on these theoretical premises, Neale furnishes his translations of Arabic and Persian hagiographies, contextualizing them and supplying commentary when necessary. His conclusions reiterate and build on those of his previous book (*JPSW*, 133–36):

- Contrary to Orientalist and popular stereotypes, which misleadingly depict Sufism as “a tradition of poetry, music and dance” par excellence (2, 113), Sufis engaged in both external and internal jihad and considered them equally meritorious.
- Defining Sufism as ethereal mysticism or esotericism concerned primarily “with mystical closeness with to God” is an error, because Sufis played many social, political and military roles (2, 9–11, 116). In general, the tenets of a sophisticated (and recondite) theoretical mysticism were incomprehensible to the overwhelming majority of ordinary believers, including admirers of Sufi *awliyāʾ* (unlike the popular hagiographic narratives translated by Neale).
- Sufi hagiographies were and still are an effective tool for teaching not just Sufi precepts, but also essential Muslim practices and doctrines.
- Sufi understanding and practice of jihad were rooted in the biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad and his close companions, who waged war against various enemies of the faith at the dawn of Islam.
- Hagiographies of Sufi mujahideen intricately combined elements of the Prophet’s *sīra*, stories of earlier prophets, and Sufi values and concepts.
- Jihad’s focus on the otherworldly rewards and purity of intention at the expense of material considerations (booty) sets it apart from military raids for booty (*ghazw*), although the two are still closely related.

Neale also mentions (tantalizingly) the continuity between premodern and modern (anti-colonial) Sufi jihads (116), but never elaborates on it, essentially asking the reader to take his word for it. Overall, this reviewer finds Neale’s conclusions helpful, if predictable, especially for specialists on Sufism. Neale is certainly right to argue that “the anecdotes of God’s [Sufi] friends tell us much about how premodern Muslims learned the fundamental beliefs of their faith and experienced its sacred history” (117). I would, however, take issue with his claim that mysticism and esoteric knowledge had little appeal to rank and file followers of premodern Sufi *awliyāʾ*, who were enthralled by their miracles, not by their recondite esoteric teachings, such as Ibn al-‘Arabi’s “unity of being” (*wahdat al-wujūd*). I would argue that, on the contrary, mystical concepts and claims to the superior, esoteric knowledge of God and his creation actually added to the social stature and charisma of God’s friends in the eyes of the commoners. Sufi shaykhs, like the Shi‘i imams and their representatives, managed to translate their esoteric knowledge of divine mysteries into a powerful social and political force (as detailed in my *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism*, 2017). This minor disagreement apart, however, Harry Neale’s *Sufi Warrior Saints* fulfills its stated purpose to provide a readable and entertaining account of Sufi attitudes to and practices of jihad. Based on a wealth of primary Arabic and Persian hagiographic sources carefully selected and translated by the author, this book will serve as a useful educational tool in courses on Islam and comparative religions.