

Muhammad Sami

A Theological Translation of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*: Rereading Jāmī's *al-Durra al-Fākhira*

‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī’s (d. 898/1492) *al-Durra al-Fākhira* was commissioned by Mehmet II as an arbitration between the three claimants of truth in his times: peripatetic philosophers (*al-falāsifa*), speculative theologians (*al-mutakallimūn*), and the Sufis (*al-ṣūfiyya*). Being the Sufi that he is, Jāmī penned a text wherein the Sufis’ positions on eleven metaphysical questions purportedly emerge superior to those of their adversaries. That the text is commissioned as an arbitration is an established fact, but whether Jāmī envisioned it as such should not, as I shall argue, be taken for granted.

In this paper, I suggest that the *Durra* is best read as a translation of *waḥdat al-wujūd* into a theological language, wherein the fundamental tenets of Sunni theology are given a Sufi flavour, which allows an adherence to Sunni doctrines without sacrificing all that *falsafa* has to offer. The ‘superiority’ of the views advocated in the *Durra* emerges as it offers several resolutions to the tensions existing between *falsafa* and *kalam*, by changing the fundamental metaphysics and ontology based on which the debates take place.

My suggestion that Jāmī had something other than mere arbitration in mind is supported by Jāmī’s reluctance to write the text except in a certain style. Upon the completion of six of its eleven questions, he offers Mehmet II a draft of the work, asking him whether the text meets his expectations lest he proceeds in a manner that does not meet the Sultans’ desired outcome (and thus be a waste of time). Granted Mehmet II’s conviction that Jāmī was the most capable scholar of his age, one is justified in thinking that it is the text’s form rather than the quality of its arguments that Jāmī was unsure whether it was satisfactory to the Sultan.

This reading is supported by the language of the *Durra*, which is not always one of arbitration. On multiple questions, Jāmī is content with contrasting the Sufi views to those of *falsafa* and *kalam*, without arguing against them, which precludes a purely arbitrational reading. By focusing on the pertinent questions of divine simplicity and divine unity, I show that Jāmī is implicitly drawing on implications of *waḥdat al-wujūd* to offer a profound interpretation of the divine attributes that maintains both the ‘orthodoxy’ of the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophical depth of the *falāsifa*.



Muhammad Sami

University of Oxford

Muhammad Sami is a Departmental Lecturer at Oxford University's Faculty of Theology and Religion. His DPhil dissertation, recently submitted to Oxford University, examined the metaphysical Sufi principles underpinning Jāmī's engagement with philosophy. He holds an MSt in the Study of Religions from the University of Oxford and an MA in Philosophy from the American University in Cairo.