# S̲h̲ayk̲h̲ Muḥammad Hās̲h̲im al-Bag̲h̲dādī (d. 1415/1995)

# His Mystical Personality and Ṣūfī Doctrine

## Abstract

This study’s main focus is modern Palestinian Ṣūfīsm in the twentieth century and its revival, aiming to present some significant information and fill a lacuna in this field of research. Existing literature dedicates almost no attention to *Al-Tarīka Al-Qadirīyya* – the Qadirī order of Palestine – and the Ṣūfī teachings of Shaykh Muḥammad Hās̲h̲im Al-Baghdādī, who headed the order in Jerusalem from 1935, and probably until his death in 1995. The study will explore Al-Baghdādī’s mystical personality; analyze his Ṣūfī teachings as reflected in his books, and particularly *Dustūr al-Wilāya wa-Marāqi al-ʿInāya* and *Sharḥ Ṣiyagh al-Ṣalawāt ‘alā Sayd al-Sādāt*; reveal continuance and transformations in his views; and evaluate his religious, social, and cultural contribution to the Muslim population in Israel and in Palestine.

The goal of this study is twofold: to trace Al-Baghdādī’s mystical personality, while also presenting a historical-philological analysis of his Ṣūfī teachings. Both will be done by in-depth reading of his books, as well as testimonies and interviews of *Al-Muridūn* – his followers. Al-Baghdādī was not only a Ṣūfī theoretic thinker, but also a mystic, who documented his mystical experiences in a reach, implicit language. The study will also include a comparison between Al-Baghdādī and one of his sources of inspiration, Al-Shaykh Al-Akbar – the Great Shaykh Ibn Al-Arabī (d. 1240/638). Ibn Al-Arabī is considered to be the greatest Ṣūfī Shaykh of all times, whose mark on Ṣūfīsm is evident until today. I will try to find out whether Al-Baghdādī followed Al-Arabī’s path, or paved his own.

Furthermore, I will discuss the mutual influences between these two realms – Al-Baghdādī’s mystical personality and his Ṣūfī teachings, exploring the ways in which his Ṣūfī-spiritual teaching was affected and shaped by his mystical personality.

## My research questions are thus:

1. The traits of Al-Baghdādī’s mystical personality.

2. Analysis of his Ṣūfī teachings based on *Dustūr al-Wilāya wa-Marāqi al-ʿInāya* and *Sharḥ Ṣiyagh al-Ṣalawāt ‘alā Sayd al-Sādāt*.

3. Al-Baghdādī’s Ṣūfī-spiritual teachings as shaped by his personality.

4. Assessing the influence of Ibn Al-Arabī.

## Research method

The core of my thesis is a historical-philological analysis of Al-Baghdādī’s written works. Those are discussed in comparison with other Ṣūfī works, to highlight his unique ideas and original contribution. For that, I used varied sources: the Qur’an, Sunni and Ṣūfī Qur’an interpretations, the Hadith, classical Ṣūfī literature, historical literature and doctrine works. All of them appear in the bibliography.

In addition, I used other secondary sources from the field of mystical experience research in religious science, to try and understand the uniqueness of Al-Baghdādī’s mystical personality and Ṣūfī teachings.

Beyond written sources, I found it necessary to interview key members of the Qadirī order – Al-Baghdādī’s followers and students from Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Israel. These interviews further assisted in tracing a comprehensive picture of Al-Baghdādī’s mystical personality and Ṣūfī teachings. Finally, I also used electronic information from internet website that discuss the Qadirī order and particularly Al-Baghdādī.

## This study is important for three main aspects:

First, the study offers a contribution to the research of Palestinian religious activity during the British Mandate – one of the most neglected realms in the research of modern Islam. Shaykh Al-Baghdādī, a significant religious figure for the Arabs of Palestine during the British Mandate and later, has not even a single valuable and comprehensive study dedicated to him, his mystical experiences, and his oral heritage, which is still preserved by his followers.

Second, the study offers a discussion of the term Jihād, which has been a key principle in Ṣūfī thought for generations: Since the early days of Ṣūfīsm, it scholars talked of a unique combination between internal-spiritual and external-belligerent Jihād. It is my conclusion that Al-Baghdādīs personality represents a combination between Ṣūfīsm and political activism, which was reflected in his active participation in the violent events of 1936-1939 (or the Great Arab Revolt, as it is described in Arab literature), and the battles in Jerusalem during the 1948 War.

And third and most importantly, beyond exploring Al-Baghdādī’s theoretical teachings based on the historical-philological methodology, the study offers another layer of the relation between his mystical personality and Ṣūfī doctrine, in order to trace the unique mystical-psychological traits of this extraordinary figure, as foundation of his theoretical thought, believing that the theoretical formalism is not merely textual, but was also achieved through mystical experiences.

## Al-Baghdādī’s biography

Shaykh Muḥammad Hās̲h̲im Al-Baghdādī was born in 1905 in Jerusalem, where he received his primary and secondary education. Together with Shaykh ʿIzz al-Dīn al-Qassām (d. 1935), a key figure in Palestinian nationality, whose death led to the Great Arab Revolt, Al-Baghdādī received the *Ijāzah* (his permission to join the *Qadirīyya*) from the Mauritian *Muḥadith*, Muḥammad Ḥabīb Allāh al-S̲h̲inqīṭī (d. 1944). Al-S̲h̲inqīṭī was the one who appointed Al-Baghdādī head of the *Qādiriyya* Order in Jerusalem.

After actively participating in the Great Arab Revolt (1936-1939), Al-Baghdādī left Jerusalem in the year 1937 for Damascus in Syria. There he studied Qurʾān and Hadith with some Shaykhs. During this period, he maintained contact with the *Qādiriyya* Order in Jerusalem, and authored his *Dīwān* (poem collection) in the year 1939.

In 1944, Al-Baghdādī returned from Syria and settled in Jerusalem. He worked as a shoemaker and even owned a small shoe workshop in al-Tūr village. Al-Baghdādī and his family fought in the 1948 War, and he even lost his cousin, Yūsuf, during the great attack on Yamīn Moshe neighborhood in Jerusalem. From the late 1960s and until 1990, he served as a *Māʾd̲h̲ūn* (marriage officiant), and as the *Imām* in Salmān al-Fārisī’s Mosque in Al-Tūr village. Over the course of his life, Al-Baghdādī made several pilgrimages to Mecca. He died in Jerusalem in 1995.

Al-Baghdādī’s spiritual career as a Ṣūfī Shaykh developed between 1944-1995. His works, which were mostly authored by him, reflect his Ṣūfī heritage and express, for the most part, his mystical biography, which lists his mystical experiences that were mentioned in his books as well as his oral heritage: *Dustūr al-Wilāya wa-Marāqi al-ʿInāya* (1961); *Sharḥ Ṣiyagh al-Ṣalawāt ‘alā Sayd al-Sādāt* (1968); *Al-Dur al-Maknūn fī Sharh Fawātih Suwar al-Qur’ān al-Masūn* (1977); *Al-Tibyān aw al-Durar fī ʿIṣmat Abī al-Bas̲h̲ar* and *Al-Nafaḥāt al-Qudsiyya fī al-Ṣalāt ʿalā Khayr al-Bariyya*, both undated.

A prominent part of his Ṣūfī heritage is his tendency to reinforce classical Ṣūfī tradition: Al-Baghdādī follows the system of spiritual stages that every Ṣūfī must go through to reach the proximity of Allah in the spiritual realms. The terms describing this journey are *al-Maqāmāt* (stations) and *al-Aḥwāl* (situations). The teaching of *al-Maqāmāt* and *al-Aḥwāl* is presented by Al-Baghdādī in his book *Dustūr al-Wilāya*, where he added value to it by maintaining a number of rules. The biography of his mystical experiences – which I have gathered from his books and from interviews I conducted with his students – is presented here for the first time. It reveals a fascinating image: A Shaykh who underwent an unconventional mentorship, that is, a mystical mentorship, through encounters with the souls of his spiritual teachers: Al-K̲h̲iḍr, Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ, Aḥmad Al-Badawī, and ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ḏj̲īlānī. He met the soul of the Prophet Muḥammad in his daydreams, and during that encounter was dubbed *al-Quṭb al-Ghawth* (the succor pole).

His mystical personality reached its spiritual zenith in his mystical experience of *Miʿrāj* ("heavenly journey"). In his book *Sharḥ Ṣiyagh al-Ṣalawāt,* Al-Baghdādī tells us that his soul reached *al-ʿArs̲h̲* (the Holy Throne), where he observed the angel entrusted with the task of guarding the Quran. In describing his *Miʿrāj* experience, Al-Baghdādī tells us he saw *al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr,* (the heavenly *Qaʿba*), and the angels surrounded him. At the end of his experience, Al-Baghdadi tells us he was given a throne of white light, symbolizing his position as the highest ranked *Walāya* (friends of Allah). Another aspect of his complex personality is his undertaking a spiritual *Jihād*—having already undertaken belligerent *Jihād* in his youth.

## The current study is composed of five chapters, which are:

**The first chapter** discusses Al-Baghdādī’s pedigree as part of Prophet Muhammad's family, of which he believed himself to be a descendant. The chapter explores Al-Baghdādī’s life in Jerusalem; his appointment as the head of the *Qādiriyya* Order in Jerusalem in 1935, following his mentorship by two teachers: Al-Sarghīnī al-S̲h̲inqīṭī; and his move to Syria in 1937 to study with Islam Studies experts in Damascus.

As for his literary career, the chapter studies Al-Baghdādī’s writings, which reflect his Ṣūfī heritage, as well as the book *Al-Wird al-Qādirī,* which we will prove to have been not written by Al-Baghdādī, but rather by Shaykh al-S̲h̲inqīṭī, Al-Baghdādī only making a few changes in it. The chapter reviews the history and principle ideas of the *Qādiriyya* Order.

This chapter also includes a literary review of Palestinian Ṣūfism. In her important book, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: Ṣūfīs and the Dissemination of Islam in Medieval Palestine*, Dafna Efrat reviews Ṣūfī practices, social relations, and the connection between Ṣūfīs and the community. Efrat’s book does not focus on Ṣūfism’s spiritual aspects, or the theological heritage of key Ṣūfī figures in Medieval Palestine.

De Jong, in his comprehensive paper “The Ṣūfī Orders in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Palestine” for some reason omits mention of the *Qādiriyya* Order led by Al-Baghdādī, even though it was published in 1983, at the height of Al-Baghdādī’s career, and before his death in 1995.

The Jordanian scholar Wafāʾ al-Sawāfṭa writes about the *S̲h̲ād̲h̲ilī-Yas̲h̲ruṭī* order and its founder, Shaykh ̕Alī Al-Yashrutī. Al-Sawāfṭa never mentions Al-Baghdādī as a key figure in Palestinian Ṣūfism.

The scholar ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Zuʿbī has written two studies: the first focuses on *Al-Khalwatiyya Al-Jāmi’a Al-Raḥmāniyya* Order in Palestine and in Israel. His second study, which was also his Ph.D. dissertation, focuses on the Ṣūfī activity and the religious life of Muslims in eighteenth century Jerusalem. Zuʿbī describes the foundations of Ṣūfī life in eighteenth century Jerusalem, offering a significant contribution to our understanding of Ṣūfī life in Jerusalem in the pre-Al-Baghdādī era.

## Al-Baghdādī’s figure attracted the attention of a number of scholars:

Ḥusayn al-Darāwīs̲h̲ wrote a short biography of Al-Baghdādī entitled *Al-Wajīz fī Sīrat S̲h̲ayk̲h̲ina al-’Azīz: Al-Shaykh Muḥammad Hāshim Al-Baghdādi*̄, which only includes a brief mention of his mystical biography. A review of the book suggests that he did not make extensive use of Al-Baghdādī’s writings.

ʿUmar al-Ṣāliḥī, Al-Darāwīs̲h̲’s student, wrote his MA dissertation about the *Qādiriyya* Order in Palestine in the twentieth century, and about Al-Baghdādī himself, and published it as a book in 2001. Al-Ṣāliḥī does not analyze Al-Baghdādī’s mystical personality, and his book contains many errors regarding Al-Baghdādī’s Ṣūfī thought—the result of a superficial study of his writings.

Muḥammad Abū Al-Rub wrote his MA thesis about the *Qādiriyya* and *Khalwatiyya* Orders in the vicinity of Jenin in the West Bank. Despite its methodical and thorough nature, his research never presumes to explore Al-Baghdādī’s mystical personality. Abū Al-Rub does dedicate a sub-section to Al-Baghdādī’s spiritual thought, which mainly discusses Al-Baghdādī’s life and Ṣūfī thought from a *Sharīʿa* perspective, but without mentioning modern relevant literature.

Mashhūr al-Ḥabbāzī’s paper is primarily based on Al-Darāwīsh book and al-Ṣāliḥī’s work, and does not mention Al-Baghdādī’s printed and published works.

Besides the aforementioned studies, we should also mention ʿIṣām K̲h̲aṭīb’s study, which mentions Al-Baghdādī only briefly. K̲h̲aṭīb writes about the Ṣūfī arena of the *Qādiriyya* Order in the Galilee after Al-Baghdādī’s death.

The chapter ends with the conclusion that there is currently no comprehensive, updated study about Shaykh Muḥammad Hās̲h̲im Al-Baghdādī, based on a thorough investigation and exploration of all his testimonies, as they appear in his writings.

\*\*\*

**The second chapter** follows Al-Baghdādī’s mystical biography, focusing on the following issues:

1. The significance of mentoring and the importance of spiritual guidance in Ṣūfī pedagogy based on Al-Baghdādī’s *Dustūr Al-Wilāya*, and the story of Al-Baghdādī’s mentoring by Ḥāj Ṣāliḥ Al-Sarghīnī.
2. The meaning of *Siyaḥa* (spiritual journey) and *Jadhb* (mystical attraction) according to Al-Baghdādī, and his spiritual journey to the Shaykh *al-Majdhūb* ʿĀlī S̲h̲beyr in the city of K̲h̲ān Yūnus, and the Shaykh *al-Majdhūb* ʿĀlī Manṣūr from the village of Abū Kbīr.
3. Al-Baghdādī’s mentoring by mystical figures like Al-K̲h̲iḍr, Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ, Aḥmad Al-Badawī, and ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ḏj̲īlānī.
4. Al-Baghdādī’s contribution to the understanding of the Prophet Muḥammad’s role in the day of Judgment according to Muslim tradition – the hell-fire correction. We will also review his vision of the Prophet Muḥammad, which is described by Al-Baghdādī in his books *Dustūr Al-Wilāya* and *Dīwān Bughyat Al-ʿAshiqīn*.

This chapter suggests that Al-Baghdādī reached spiritual perfection and became a special Ṣūfī Shaykh not by adopting a lifestyle of frequent strenuous exercises and continuous spiritual efforts. Al-Baghdādī’s spiritual perfection was the product of unconventional mentoring as reported in his writings. By encountering the souls of his spiritual mentors, he was able to climb the *Walāya*’s hierarchy.

\*\*\*

**The third chapter** offers a review of the semantic field of the term *Jihād*, discussing the dispute between *Ḥadīth* scholars concerning the *Ḥadīth* of “returning from the Lesser *Jihād* to the Greater *Jihād*.” It also offers a Modern-Western discussion concerning the tendency to view Ṣūfism as a pacifist movement, and the contemporary Muslim attempts to reject this notion and to emphasize belligerent aspect of *Jihād* in Ṣūfism Additionally, it presents Al-Baghdādī’s position concerning Greater *Jihād* as reflected in his book *Dustūr Al-Wilāya*. The chapter follows Al-Baghdādī’s acts of *Jihād*, based on the understanding of the complexity of Lesser *Jihād*. The chapter suggests that while many studies have been written about inner-spiritual *Jihād*, there is no comprehensive study about belligerent *Jihād* in Ṣūfism. The chapter is intended to fill some lacuna in the study of militant *Jihād* in modern Ṣūfism, focusing on Al-Baghdādī as an example.

\*\*\*

**The fourth chapter** analyzes Al-Baghdādī’s approach to the *S̲h̲arīʿa*, and particularly the the *Qurʾān* and the *Sunnah*. The chapter focuses on Al-Baghdādī’s attempt to emphasize the orthodox aspect of Ṣūfism, his tolerant approach to S̲h̲aṭaḥāt (ecstatic utterances), and his intolerance toward critics of Ṣūfīsm. The chapter explores problematic issues in the Islamic dogma, which were discussed by Al-Baghdadi in his books. His approach to these issues reflect one of his unique traits, as described by his followers: His vast knowledge of Tafsir (Qur’an interpretation), which is an important knowledge field for any ‘Alem (a person who knows, or gains knowledge). Al-Baghdadi invested most of his efforts in proving that Adam had ‘*Isma* – i.e., was incapable of making mistakes.

\*\*\*

**The fifth and final chapter** follows Shaykh Al-Baghdādī’s *Miʿrāj* (ascension) experience using a philological, historical and comparative analysis. Shaykh Al-Baghdādī’s *Miʿrāj* experience will be discussed while conducting a historical and phenomenological comparison with the idea in Islam at large, particularly in Ṣūfism.

 Al-Baghdādī’s *Miʿrāj* experience teaches us that he considered himself as one of Prophet Muhammad’s heirs. He was granted a divine gift when his soul ascended to Heaven, watched the angels, reached the holy throne, and was given a number of gifts: He was crowned as *al-Quṭb al- G̲h̲awt̲h̲* (the redeeming axis) – the leader of the *Awliyāʾ* (friends of God), and was given the capability of *Istinbāṭ* (to extract meanings of the Qurʾānic verses). This experience took him through the last phase of his spiritual perfection: *Iṣlāḥ* (amendment) and *Ikmāl Al-ʿAql* (perfection of the mind), and he became what Ṣūfīs describe as *Al-Insān al-Kāmil* (the Perfect Man).

\*\*\*

## Research conclusions:

1. there is currently no comprehensive, updated study about Shaykh Muḥammad Hās̲h̲im Al-Baghdādī, based on a thorough investigation and exploration of all his testimonies, as they appear in his writings.
2. Al-Baghdādī reached spiritual perfection and became a special Ṣūfī Shaykh not by adopting a lifestyle of frequent strenuous exercises and continuous spiritual efforts. Al-Baghdādī’s spiritual perfection was the product of unconventional mentoring as reported in his writings. By encountering the souls of his spiritual mentors, he was able to climb the *Walāya*’s hierarchy, until he was crowned as *al-Quṭb al- G̲h̲awt̲h̲* (the redeeming axis), the greatest righteous person of his generation.
3. The study explores Al-Baghdadi’s strategies when dealing with Qur’an interpretation issues. According to his own testimony, as well as his followers’, he was given the gift of *Istinbāṭ* and vast knowledge in *Tafsir*, an important knowledge field for an *‘Alem*.
4. The study shoes that Ṣūfīsm is characterized by a combination of internal-spiritual with external-belligerent Jihād, against the common perception of Western academic literature. Al-Baghdadi’s own words and actions, as well as those of other Ṣūfīs, reflect the importance of belligerent Jihād in Ṣūfīsm. Al-Baghdadi’s Ṣūfīsm, which he preached for 50 years, supported belligerent Jihād alongside the spiritual one. It must be mentioned, however, that this issue is yet to be explored fully, and my conclusions is thus partial and indecisive.
5. Al-Baghdadi’s descriptions of his Mi’raj as well as other mystical experiences suggest that he was motivated to tell these stories by the desire to enhance his reputation among his followers.

In conclusion, this study is a significant chapter in the study of Palestinian Ṣūfism in the twentieth century, demonstrating the lacuna in the field. Out of a long list of studies dedicated to the various branches of Ṣūfism, only a handful of works are dedicated to Palestinian Ṣūfism. The writings of S̲h̲ayk̲h̲ Muḥammad Hās̲h̲im al-Bag̲h̲dādī, leader of the *Qādiriyya* Order in Palestine and in Israel, suggest that he was greatest *Walī* of our time. The study also traces Al-Baghdādī’s unique Ṣūfī positions, which were affected by his mystical endeavors.