

Mawlana Al-Sheikh Mohammed Al-Khalyly

(1817–1899)

Qasr Al-Sheikh Al-Khalyly, the Qleibo manor until 1922.



The room jutting out into the courtyard is Mawlana's mausoleum.

By Ali Qleibo

The theological spiritual stature of Mawlana Al-Sheikh Mohammed towered over the religious scene in Jerusalem in the eighteenth century. He was duly buried in the lower courtyard of Al-Aqsa Mosque in full view of the Dome of the Rock: an honor that is most befitting a Holy Man of his standing.

A scion of the Sharif lineage, Mawlana Mohammed bin Mohammed bin Sharaf al-Din Al-Khalyly hails from a family of jurists and theologians. The honorific title of his great grandfather, Sharaf al-Din, indicates his elevated position as imam of Al-Aqsa Mosque in the sixteenth century. The spiritual power, intellectual insights, and authority of Al-Sheikh Al-Khalyly owes as much to his training in jurisprudence at Al-Azhar as to his initial Sufi training in the Qadiri tradition in Syria and later in the Khalwati tariqa.

Gnostic, charismatic, erudite, and a staunch defender of Sufism, he issued a famous fatwa in Cairo to the effect that stripping Islam of Sufism would undermine its structural coherence. He attained a level of spiritual ascension wherein *makshuf annahu al-hijab*, (“the veil has been removed”), i.e., he could see beyond the veil of truth. During one of his *ziyarat* to Jerusalem, he was certified by Al-Sheikh Abd-al-Ghany al-Nabulsi as a great scholar of Palestine.

Elevated to such eminence, Mawlana Al-Sheikh Mohammed meditated in the room he had built on top of a cave, previously used as his *khilweh* (meditation room), on the upper platform northwest of the Dome of the Rock. In his chamber, in Al-Madrasa al-Baladiyyah, where he was later buried, he met his followers, jurists, and dignitaries. He was visited by every scholar and man of great stature during their *ziyarat* to Jerusalem. From their accounts, we glimpse his perspicuity, mental acuity, and great scholarship.

Al-Khalyly is the name of one of the major tribal subdivisions that trace their origin to Al-Sahabi Tamim al-Dari al-Lakhmi al-Qahtani. As a merchant who led his tribe's caravan, Tamim had met Prophet Mohammed, converted to Islam, kept the prophet's company (*sahabi*), and become one of the few who memorized the Qur'an (thereby acquiring the title of *Hafiz*). Tamim also participated in the final written codification of Al-Qur'an, after which he returned to his hometown, Beit Jibrin, in Palestine. Before his conversion, he served as the bishop of St. Anne's Cathedral in Beit Jibrin. Earlier, his tribe was entrusted with the honor of keeping the light in Abraham's tomb in Hebron that served as an Edomite sanctuary at the time, hence the epithet Al-Dary. In due time, Al-Tamimi tribes spread throughout the Muslim world, forming various fragmentary sub-tribes such as Al-Khalyly, to whom I trace my own lineage. Hence, my name in Jerusalem's Muslim archival social registry reads Mohammad Ali Hussein Ali Abdulrazzaq Yehia Al-Khalyly Al-Tamimi (nicknamed: Qleibo)

In the early eighteenth century, Mawlana Al-Sheikh Al-Khalyly as a sharif of great culture and wealth, towered at the top of the social pyramid of Jerusalem's religious aristocratic elite. Patrician families vied to establish alliances with him through marriage with one of his three daughters and two sons. Thus, his progeny played a major role in fostering, confirming, and defining the character and social history of Jerusalem. His descendants, through seven generations of intermarriage, weave through Jerusalem's social fabric and have imparted the city with its distinctive Muslim values and aesthetics that govern the manners of social conduct, child rearing, cuisine, and love of learning. His five children have become the progenitors of a substantive cross section of Jerusalemite society. Their offspring encompass Jerusalem's

leading patrician families, namely: Al-Alami, Al-Husseini, Nusbah, Nashashibi, Fityani, Abu Sou'ud, Mu'aqet, Qleibo (Al-Khalyly), Imam, Turjuman, Dijani, and Al-Khalidi.

Al-Sheikh Mohammed has bequeathed his progeny an expansive endowment of palaces, sesame oil presses, and innumerable shops in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Hebron. A worldly intellectual, his collection of books that he painstakingly collected and cherished was endowed for public usage. A rigorous jurist, his extant published edicts (*fatawi*) address the existential questions of the period. An enlightened scholar, his edicts in relation to abortion, the position and role of women, and the marriage of minors remain pioneering precursors of women's rights. His oeuvres represent a mirror image of the cultural paradigm of the eighteenth century.

Mawlana has bequeathed Jerusalem a corpus of literature, a few manuscripts of which have survived the vicissitudes of time as they lay abandoned in boxes, victim to lackadaisical indifference. The fate of his books, erstwhile one of Jerusalem's treasures, is symptomatic of the demise of Sufism in Jerusalem and the current crisis of Al-Quds under occupation where his castle outside Herod's Gate, our family manor, was confiscated by the British in 1922 to house and exhibit Palestinian antiquities. Recently his summer residence and the adjoining grounds in Jerusalem's Al-Baq'a quarter came to the foreground when his heirs contested the American Embassy's plans to build its new offices on our family property.



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