

# Ashkan Bahrani

## Curriculum Vitae

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### Education

- Ph.D. in Religious Studies: Critical Studies in Asian, Islamic and Jewish Traditions, Vanderbilt University, Graduate Department of Religion, Nashville, Tennessee, USA (May 2023)
- M.A. in Religious Studies, Vanderbilt University (December 2017)
- M.A. in Islamic Philosophy and Kalām (September 2009), Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran (M.A. Dissertation honored with “Excellent” Degree with overall performance ranked first (20/ 20), GPA (19.5/20)
- B. A. in Law (2006), Shiraz University, Faculty of Law and Political Sciences

### *The Violence of the Enchanted Souls: A Genealogical Approach to Sufi Debates in*

### *Premodern Iran (9<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> cent)*

This is an investigation of the genealogy of the concept of ‘Sufism’ in modern Iranian studies, focusing on the case of Sufi debates in premodern Greater Iran. The portraits of Sufism, in general, and Iranian Sufism, in particular, have been drawn in a remarkably monolithic way, and the discourse of Sufism has been represented as a normativized and quasi-canonized set of ideas in which significant players had broadly agreed upon a fixed core despite their regional, temporal divergences on accidental components of their intellectual constellations and ritual activities. In the dissertation, I argue that the silence on the issue of Sufi debates and conflicts is fostered by two major resources, modern and premodern. At the modern level, the idea of Sufism has been reformulated and reproduced in the second half of the nineteenth century as an element of world religions discourse which is foundationally unitive and monologizing. Likewise, at the premodern level, the idea of Sufism, both as a way of thought and a form of life, was formulated through the authority of Sufi manuals that aimed to represent the Sufi intellectual and ritual apparatus as an integral body.

### Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Richard McGregor (Chair), Dr. Anand Taneja, Dr. Ellen Armour, Dr. Karen Ng,

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<sup>1</sup> Last Update: June 8, 2025

## Academic Appointments

- Assistant Professor of Religion and History, Al-Akhawayn University in Ifrane (September 1st, 2024-Present)
- Postdoctoral research fellow, School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies, Monash University (September 2022-August 2024)
- Metempsychosis: an Interreligious History project coordinator (February 2023-Present)
- Research Assistant, Department of History, Vanderbilt University (Summer 2020-Summer 2022)
- Research Assistant, Department of Religious Studies, Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont (2019-2020)
- Teaching Assistant and Language Tutor, Graduate Department of Religion, Vanderbilt University (2014-June 2022)
- Visiting Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, Sewanee the University of the South, Sewanee, TN (January 2018- June 2018)

## Research Interests:

- Critical Theories of Religion
- History of premodern Sufism
- Study of ‘World Religions’ in the modern Academy
- Persian and Arabic Sufi Literature

## Publications

### A. Monographs and Editions

· *‘Umar al-Suhrawardī: Studies, Editions, Translations* (English, Arabic, and Persian), with Aydogan Kars (Brill: December 2021)

· *The Mirrors of Nothingness (Āyenehāie Nīstī): Apophatic Theology in the Works of Mawlānā Rūmī and Meister Eckhart* (in Persian), (Tehran: ‘Elm Publication, 2011) (celebrated as the best Book of the Season in the field of Mysticism in winter, 2011; and nominated as the best book of the year 2010- 2011).

### B. Articles Published in Peer-Reviewed Journals (English)

- Guest Editor of a Special Issue for the Journal for the Academic Study of Religion (JASR) titled: “The Afterlife and Reincarnation Across Religious Traditions,” Vol. 38, no. 2 (August 2025) (*forthcoming*)
- “Four Epistles of Sahlagī: Newly Recovered Sources on Early Sufism, Theology, and Traditionism,” (with Aydogan Kars), *Studia Islamica* (Brill), vol. 120 (2025) (*forthcoming*)

- “Knowledge and Causality in Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Book of Giving*, and the Buddhist Notion of Dependent Origination” (with Aydogan Kars), *Journal of Religions*, Special Issue on “Sufi Thought in the Light of Ibn Arabi: The Akbarian Tradition up to the Present,” Issue 9, Vol. 13 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090768>
- “A Sufi Master without a Hospice: Abdolkarim Soroush between Sufism and Mysticism” (with Aydogan Kars), *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion (JASR)*, 33.2 (2020), 166-84. <https://journals.equinoxpub.com/JASR/issue/current>

### C. Articles (as author/ Persian) [selected]

- “A Critical Investigation on the Approach of Murtada Mutahhari towards Islamic Mysticism” *Iran Namag*, Toronto, Ontario (Spring 2016).
- “Anti-Mysticism Vs. Experientialism: The encounter between two major viewpoints on Mysticism and mystical experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> century” in *Javidan Kherad (Sophia Perennis. The Iranian Institute of Philosophy)*, Winter 2010 (in Collaboration with Ghassem Kakaie).

### D. Translations: Books and Articles (English into Persian)

- Rashid Khalidi’s *One Hundred Years War on Palestine* (2020: Profile Books), London Nogaam Publication: <https://nogaam.com/book/2448/> (September 2024)
- *From Sufism to Irfan: Reflections on the evolution of the Iranian Spiritual Discourse from the Safavid era to the Pahlavis (Az Tasawwuf ta Irfān: Ta’ammulāti dar Guftmān-i Ma’navī-i Irān az Ahd-i Safavī ta Pahlavī)*, Revised and annotated Translation of Ata Anzali’s ‘Mysticism’ in Iran: *The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept* (2017: The University of South Carolina Press) (Published by Arma Publications, Iran, August 2024)
- Veronique Mottier’s *Sexuality: A Very Short Introduction* (2008: Oxford University Press), London Nogaam Publication <https://nogaam.com/book/2438/> (September 2023).
- *Sufism, The Formative Period* by Ahmet T. Karamustafa (Edinburgh University Press, 2007). Trans. Ashkan Bahrani. Qom: Mofid University Press (2016).
- *What are we doing when we pray? On Prayer and the Nature of Faith* by Vincent Brummer (Ashgate 2008). Trans. Ashkan Bahrani and Masoud Rahbari, Ed. Ghasem Kakaie. Tehran: Hermes Publication (2013).
- “Elements of Neo-Traditional Sufism in Iran” by Matthis van den Bos (Sufism and the ‘Modern’ in Islam, I.B. Tauris 2007), published in Persian in <https://www.naqdedini.org/140212-12>, April 2024.

- “The Naysayers: Walter Benjamin, Theodore Adorno, and the Critique of Pop Culture” by Alex Ross (*The New Yorker*, September 2014), published in Persian in <https://meidaan.com/archive/75039>, Fall 2020.
- “Minorities vs. Majorities” by Emma Goldman (*Anarchism and Other Essays*), published in Persian in *Negahe Nou*, no. 126, Summer 2020.
- “The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation” by Emma Goldman (*Anarchism and Other Essays*), published in Persian in <https://meidaan.com/archive/71265> (under a pseudonym), Summer 2020.
- “Origins of Anatolian Sufism” By Ahmet Karamustafa, *Iran Namag*, Winter 2016.
- “I and thou in a fluid world: Beyond “Islam Versus the West” by Omid Safi in *Voices of Islam* Volume 1-5, Praeger, 2007 (published in Chashmandāz-e Irān Bimonthly Journal, 93, September & October 2015).
- “Islamic Modernism” by Omid Safi in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2005 (published in *Chashmandāz-e Irān* Bimonthly Journal, 86, September & October 2014).

#### **E. Book Reviews**

- Review of Vernon Schubel’s *Teaching Humanity: An Alternative Introduction to Islam* (JASR, 2024)
- Review of Mohammed Rustom (ed.), *Islamic Thought and the Art of Translation* (JMIAS, 2024)

#### **Conference and Seminar Presentations [selected]**

- “Reincarnation as a theory of immortality among Muslims, a minority report,” Religious Studies Network (Seminars on Death, the Afterlife, and Reincarnation) at Monash, Melbourne Australia, October 2023.  
<https://youtu.be/-yBgGJqHtPs?si=0uEF6lhTv6yA5RfO>
- “Demarcating Sufi Communities in Medieval India: Jamali’s *Lives of the Recognizers*,” Medieval & Renaissance Studies at Monash, Melbourne Australia, August 2023.
- “Occidentalism and Sufism: the Life and Works of M. Baqir Bawanati (d. 1893),” Sufi Studies Network of Australia, July 2023.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TyVE523zE8&t=1605s>
- “Sufi lives untamed: Reconsidering Sufi Hagiographies in Medieval Persia, An Archaeology” presented at Plenary Seminar, From Life to Afterlives: Creative Re-presentation in the Premodern World at Sewanee Medieval Colloquium (April 2019).
- “Decolonizing Persufilia: Academic Violence in the Study of Iranian Sufism in North America” presented at American Academy of Religion Southeastern Regional Meeting, Greenville, NC (March 2019).

- “Beyond Literary theory and Oriental Orientalism: A Critique of the Boundaries of Literary Approach towards the Study of Mediaeval Sufism” presented at Sewanee Medieval Colloquium (March 2017).
- “Hujwiri’s contributions to the Normativization of Baghdad Sufism and Formation of Sufi orders” presented at SECSOR Conference, Atlanta, GA (March 2016).
- “A brief survey of Sufi rituals in the labors of Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī,” presented at the ASPS 2015 Biennial Conference, Istanbul, TR (September 2015).

### **Research in Progress**

- *The Book of Persuasion elucidating the apparently Easy, yet Unimitable by Ibn al-Arabi*, critical Arabic edition, English translation, and study (with Aydogan Kars);
- *In Defense of Sufism: A Critical Edition and English Translation of Shah Muḥammad Darabi’s Miraj al-Kamal* (with Ata Anzali);
- English Translation of Attar’s *Book of Affliction* (with commentaries); project approved by Paulist Press for progression in the Classics of Western Spirituality series (in collaboration with Kenneth Avery and Milad Milani). Draft is scheduled to be submitted to Paulist Press by 2025.

### **Teaching Experience**

#### **Fall 2024-Present: Religion and History**

##### **Al-Akhawayn University, School of Humanities and Social Science**

- Comparative Religion
- Religion in International Affairs
- History of Arab World
- Global Islam in the Contemporary World

#### **Fall 2018- 2022: Persian Tutoring Service:**

##### **Vanderbilt University, College of Arts and Science**

- Persian for Reading Knowledge Elementary, Part I and II
- Persian for Reading Knowledge Advanced, Part I, II, and III

#### **Spring 2018: Adjunct Lecturer**

##### **Sewanee the University of the South, Department of Religious Studies**

- Studying Islam in the West: Muslim Civilizations and Cultures
- Special Topics: Islamic Mysticism

## **2015- 2021: Graduate Teaching Associate**

### **Vanderbilt University, Graduate Department of Religion**

- Introduction to Islam (Dr. Richard McGregor)
- Zen Buddhism (Dr. Bryan Lowe)
- Religions of Tibet and the Himalaya (Dr. Katarina Turpeinen)
- Hebrew Bible (Dr. Herbert Marbury)
- New Testament (Dr. Fernando Segovia)
- Arabic Tutoring Service (Dr. Bushra Hamad and Dr. Issam Eido)

### **Awards and Fellowships**

- The best book of the season in the field of Mysticism in winter, 2011 for *Ayenehaie Nisti (Mirrors of Nothingness)*
- Nominated as the best book of the year 2010- 2011 for *Ayenehaie Nisti (Mirrors of Nothingness)*
- The best book of Iranian Seminaries in 2014, for the Persian Translation of *What Are We Doing When We Pray*
- Nominated as the Book of the year 2013-2014 for the Persian Translation of *What Are We Doing When We Pray*.
- Tuition Scholarship and Departmental Stipend, Vanderbilt Graduate Department of Religion, Vanderbilt University (2014-2019).
- International Institute of Islamic Thought Summer Program (USD 1000).
- Summer Research Grant, Graduate Department of Religion, Vanderbilt University (USD 1000).

**Languages:** Command of English, Native command of Persian; command of classical Arabic; reading knowledge of French, limited reading knowledge of German.

### **Non-Academic Professional Working Experience**

- Bibliographer at the Divinity Library at Vanderbilt University in Critical Studies of World Religions and Islamic Studies (2015- May 2021).
- Voluntary service as Persian Interpreter at Catholic Charities Refugees and Immigration Services, Nashville, TN.