

# Introduction

## Aim and Scope of the Study

Sufism is frequently described as having two main branches: moderate (or “sober”), and ecstatic (or “drunken”), which on the surface seem to be mutually exclusive categories. The original Arabic term meaning “drunkenness” or “intoxication” (*sukr*) is often rendered as “ecstasy” (*wajd*) in English scholarly usage, and “intoxicated Sufis” are usually referred to as “ecstatics.” This usage is justified, and based on the Sufi conception of drunkenness, which sees an intrinsic connection between intoxication and ecstasy, as the most famous Sufi theoretician Qushayrī put it: “Drunkenness is exclusive to those who experience ecstasy.”<sup>1</sup> The sober-drunken dichotomy as distinguishing between two rival groups was formulated originally by Hujwārī (d. ca. 1074) and was adopted both by Sufi and Western authors.<sup>2</sup> However, in the first Sufi manuals these terms describe states of mind, or forms of behavior rather than opposing mystical trends. Sobriety and intoxication are alternate states that complement and mutually support each other, while ecstasy is a possible but not a necessary manifestation of spiritual drunkenness. Intoxicated ecstasy, which is a distinctive feature of Sufism, may induce bizarre forms of behavior unacceptable for the broader religious community. In fact, ever since the formative period of Sufism, one of its distinguishing marks from mainstream religiosity was its unconventionality finding expression in the activity of such eccentric figures as Ḥallāj and Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, who promptly gained the attention of the masses and scandalized the religious authorities. The history of Sufism abounds in such extraordinary personalities, some of them (temporarily, at least) expurgated from



































