

# A Biography of Abû l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî

## Dating from the Fourteenth Century

Kenneth Honerkamp

The greater part of what we know of the life and teachings of Abû l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî (654/1258), founder of the Shâdhilî Sufi Order is drawn from two primary biographical works. *Latâif al-minan*<sup>1</sup> by Ibn ‘Atâ’ Allâh of Alexandria (709/1287) and *Durrat al-asrâr wa tuhfatu al-abrâr*<sup>2</sup> by Ibn Muhammad b. Abû al-Qâsim al-Himyarî, known as Ibn al-Sabbâgh (fl. 720/1320).<sup>3</sup> Later biographies tend to be works of compilation drawn from these two primary sources.<sup>4</sup> It was therefore with intense interest that I encountered the reference by Paul Nwyia in *Ibn ‘Abbâd de Ronda* to another primary source on the life of Abû l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî located in the Qarawîyîn Library of Fez, Morocco.<sup>5</sup> I was in Fez at the time, doing research for the critical edition of the *Major Collection of the Letters (al-Rasâ’il al-kubrâ)*<sup>6</sup> of Ibn ‘Abbâd of Ronda and was able to acquire a copy of this precious manuscript.<sup>7</sup> The following article is a brief introduction to this manuscript.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Published numerous times in Cairo. This work has recently been translated into French under the title, *La Sagesse des maîtres soufis* by E. Geoffroy (1998).

<sup>2</sup> Published in Tunis in 1887. Another edition that is extremely flawed has recently been published in Cairo. This work has also been translated into English under the title *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shadhili*, by E. Douglas (1993).

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad al-‘Arabî b. Yusûf al-Fâsî cites Abd al-Nûr’s *Manâqib of Imâm al-Shâdhilî* in conjunction with *Latâif al-minan* and *Durrat al-asrâr* in his *Mirât al-mahâsin min akhbâr al-shaykh Abî al-Mahâsin*, 2003, p. 258.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to exclude the existence of other primary sources such as *Risâlat Safî al-Dîn ibn Abî al-Mansûr ibn Zâfir*, ed. and trans. D. Gril, 1986, p. 78, *Zînat al-nawâzir wa tuhfatu al-khawâtir* by the disciple of Ibn ‘Atâ’ Allâh, Râfi‘ Ibn Shâfi‘ (presented by D. Gril in Alexandria at the conference: *La Voie Soufie des Shâdhilîs*) or Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Tabaqât al-awlîyâ’*, 1973, p. 458-459. These works, however, tend to entail brief biographical entries that lack detail. The other works of the Order, such as the *Hikam*, and *al-Tanwîr fî isqât al-tadbîr*, Ibn ‘Ayyâd, *Mafâkhir al-‘ilîya* also provide insights into the teachings of the early Order, but are more doctrinal than biographical.

<sup>5</sup> P. Nwyia, 1961, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Forthcoming from Dar el-Machreq, Beirut, in 2004.

<sup>7</sup> I owe a great debt of gratitude to my friend, Dr. Ezzidine Kharchafi, of the Center for Andalusian Studies and Research in Chefchaouan, Morocco for sending me a photocopy of the manuscript. I had initially worked from a handwritten copy of the original.

<sup>8</sup> I have completed an annotated critical edition of the text that will appear soon in the *Annales Islamologiques* de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale (IFAO, Cairo).

## The Manuscript

Number: Qarawîyîn ms. 492/4 (12 pages, fol. 59r - 72v)<sup>9</sup>

Microfilm: number: 1462

Title: *Taqyîd fî tarjamat ahwâl al-shaykh Abî l-Hasan ‘Alî bin ‘Abd Allah al-shahîr bi l-Shâdhilî* (*The Record of the Biography and Spiritual States of Abû l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî*)<sup>10</sup>

Author: Abû Muhammad ‘Abd an-Nûr al-‘Imrânî (b. 685/1286)

Description: Each page is 21 cm x 26 cm of thirty lines per page, approximately twelve words a line with a wide margin. It was written in Maghribi script with colored section headings on poor quality paper. The copyist is Muhammad b. Muhammad b. al-Raffâs al-Husayn. The manuscript is undated, but paper, style, and the fact that the compilation was bequeathed to the library as a religious endowment (*tahbîs*) by Sultan Mulay ‘Abd Allâh in 1156/1743-44 indicate that it was written some time before the 18th century, most probably in the 16th or 17th centuries.

This manuscript is in lamentable condition. Damage from humidity has caused the ink to spread across most pages and the margins, badly worm-eaten, have been reduced in binding. All this has made the editing of this manuscript a difficult task; certain passages are in fact unreadable, as the facsimile of the first page will attest. The Tunisian edition of *Durrat al-asrâr*, where parallel narratives occurred, was most helpful in filling in some of the damaged portions. To date I have found no mention of this manuscript in the bibliographies of manuscript collections that I have accessed.<sup>11</sup>

## The Author

‘Abd al-Nûr al-‘Imrânî is cited in many of the biographies dealing with the scholars of Fez.<sup>12</sup> He was influential in introducing the teachings of Sufism and particularly those of the Shâdhilî Order within the circles of the jurists (*fuqahâ’*) of fourteenth century Merinid Fez. We are fortunate to have the accounts of two people who knew him personally, his student Yahyâ al-Sarrâj (d. 803/1401)<sup>13</sup> and Ibn al-Sakkâk (d. 818/1415).<sup>14</sup> These accounts by those who knew him portray ‘Abd al-Nûr as a central figure within both the circles of the scholars and those of the aspirants to the path of Sufism (*fuqarâ’*). It is of note that both Yahyâ and Ibn al-Sakkâk were also closely associated with Ibn ‘Abbâd of Ronda (1332/1390)<sup>15</sup> as friends

---

<sup>9</sup> *Fahrasat makhtûât Khizânat al-Qarawîyîn*, ed. Muhammad al-‘Âbid al-Fâsî, 1979, 1/459.

<sup>10</sup> This is more a description of the manuscript made by the editor of the catalog than an actual title. I will refer to the manuscript in this paper as *Manâqib Abî al-Hasan al-Shâdhilî*.

<sup>11</sup> I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Nelly Amri of the University of Manouba, Tunis. She consulted the Bibliothèque Nationale de Tunis for a second copy of this manuscript but found nothing.

<sup>12</sup> *Jadhwat al-iqtibâs*, Rabat, 1974, p. 448; *Kifâyat al-muhtâj*, ed. Muhammad Mutî‘, Rabat, 2000, 1/304; *Salwat al-anfâs*, ed. Muhammad b. Ja‘far al-Kittânî, lithograph Fez, 3/305.

<sup>13</sup> Yahyâ b. Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Hasan al-Sarrâj al-Nafzî al-Himiyirî al-Fâsî: *Jadhwat al-iqtibâs*, 539; *Kifâyat al-muhtâj*, 2/273; *Salwat al-anfâs*, 2/143-144.

<sup>14</sup> *Jadhwat al-iqtibâs*, 238; *Nayl al-Ibjihâj*, 284; *Kitâyat al-muhtâj*, 1/118-19; *Salwat al-anfâs*, 2/144-46.

<sup>15</sup> See note 3 of “Ibn ‘Abbâd, modèle de la Shâdhiliyya” in the present volume for biographical sources for Ibn

and disciples.<sup>16</sup> ‘Abd al-Nûr had instructed Ibn ‘Abbâd in Arabic grammar and *al-Muwattâ’*, and it is most likely that he had been instrumental in introducing Ibn ‘Abbâd to the teachings of Abû l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî through the *Manâqib*. Yahyâ writes of ‘Abd al-Nûr:

“He was our venerated mentor (*shaykhunâ*), a man of the lineage of the Prophet. He was a judge and a teacher, a distinguished scholar and one who gave the Friday sermon. He had an integral knowledge of *fiqh*, and among the foremost of the people of sound judgement [in civil affairs] (*ahl al-shûrâ*). His pen was more eloquent than his tongue. He bore a commitment to the path of Sufism (*tarîqat al-qawm*), and a love of those affiliated to it. He was easily moved to tears and had a great love for people committed to a life of piety.”<sup>17</sup>

Ibn al-Sakkâk is the first Moroccan author to mention by name the *tarîqa* Shâdhilîya in Morocco, he was also the first to ascribe the appellation of *shâdhilî* to Ibn ‘Abbâd. His book, *Kitâb al-Asâlib*,<sup>18</sup> is an exposition of the essential principle, as Ibn al-Sakkâk perceived it, of Islamic spirituality: the abandonment of all claims to strength or personal capability (*atabarri min al-hawl wa al-quwwa*). In the sixth and last of his *asâlib* (fol. 107r.-129v.) he affirms the centrality of this principle to the teachings of the *tarîqa* Shâdhilîya. In this chapter he cites the works and saying of venerable masters of the *shâdhilî* path, among them we find ‘Abd al-Nûr al-‘Imrânî mentioned.

“Among the last to compose [a work] on the excellence of the master [Abû l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî] and who collected a portion of his teachings on the divine realities (*haqâ’iq*) was the discerning scholar (*al-‘âlim al-muhaqqaq*) Sayyidî ‘Abd al-Nûr—leader of the aspirants on the path (*ra’îs al-fuqarâ’*), foremost among the people of legal judgement (*muqaddam arbâb al-futyâ*), established in the way of [Imâm] Mâlik.... Let anyone who wishes to ascertain something of the lofty station of this spiritual pole (*qutb*) [Abû l-Hasan] ... study the book compiled by that discerning scholar [‘Abd al-Nûr].”<sup>19</sup>

We can ascertain from the above passages that ‘Abd al-Nûr’s erudition went beyond the domain of *fiqh*. His interests in Sufism would bring him in 745/1345, at the age of sixty, to travel to Tunis to seek out the disciples of Abû l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî. There he met and narrated extensively from Abû al-‘Abbâs Ahmad al-Jâmî, who had frequented a number of direct disciples Abû l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî. From al-Jâmî he collected the stories, sayings and *ahzâb* (litanies) of the *Tarîqa* and brought them back to Fez in his work: *Manâqib Abî al-Hasan al-Shâdhilî*.

---

‘Abbâd.

<sup>16</sup> Yahyâ was the recipient of the greater portion of the correspondence that comprises the two collections of the letters of Ibn ‘Abbâb, the greater and the lesser, it was at the request of Yahyâ that Ibn ‘Abbâd wrote the commentary of the *Hikam* of Ibn ‘Atâ’ Allâh.

<sup>17</sup> *Kifâyat al-muhtâj* from the *Fahrasat Yahyâ al-Sarrâj*, p. 304.

<sup>18</sup> *Uslûb min-al-kalâm ‘alâ lâ hawla wa-la quwwata illa billâh* (known as *Kitâb al-Asâlib*) Ms. Escorial no. 384/3, 914/1508, fol. 59 r-133v. See Nwiya, 1961, p. 16-22 for an overview of this work.

<sup>19</sup> *Kitâb al-Asâlib*, fol. 108 r.

## The Text: *Manâqib Abî l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî*

The *Manâqib* begins in the traditional manner with a short preamble in which the author cites his name, gives praise to God and asks for blessing upon the Prophet. He then sets down the reason for writing the book: his intention to narrate the accounts of the spiritual states of Abû l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî that he had gathered during his sojourn in Tunis from those who had known the disciples of Abû l-Hasan himself.

The major narrator of these accounts is Abû al-‘Abbâs Ahmad al-Murâdî, known as al-Jâmî who, although he had not been a direct disciple of al-Shâdhilî, had frequented the early disciples. Abû al-‘Abbâs narrates from Abû ‘Abd-Allah [Muhammad] Ibn Sultân and his brother Abû al-‘Azâ’im Mâdî b. Sultân (718/1318).<sup>20</sup> Other disciples of Abû l-Hasan mentioned in the narratives are Abû Muhammad ‘Abd Allâh al-Habîbî,<sup>21</sup> his first disciple in Tunis, and Abû ‘Abd Allâh al-Qazdîrî. The majority of the narratives are however from Abû ‘Abd-Allah Ibn Sultân. ‘Abd al-Nûr affirms his source, in the style of the *faqîh*, stating that, “When I ascribe a narration directly to Abû l-Hasan, without mention of a chain (*sanad*), it is as I have heard it from Abû al-‘Abbâs who has narrated it to me from Sayyidî Abû ‘Abd Allâh b. Sultân (*Manâqib* fol. 59r).

In his introduction ‘Abd al-Nûr affords us a precious insight into the process of collecting the narratives and his commitment to transmitting the accounts he was receiving in as accurate a manner as possible. This passage also shows that the disciples in Tunis had written records of the early teachings of Abû l-Hasan. ‘Abd al-Nûr writes:

“He [Abû al-‘Abbâs] would dictate to me during numerous sessions (*majâlis*) those reports which were pertinent to the topics we were discussing. Then God inspired me to write it down. So he would dictate to me after each discourse. Such it was that at times I would reread his recitation to him after having written it down, verifying it [with him]. Praise to God. (*Manâqib* fol. 60v)”

## Index of Chapters<sup>22</sup>

Chapter One: His lineage, his early instruction and initiation by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Salâm

---

<sup>20</sup> Abû al-‘Azâ’im Mâdî b. Sultân is mentioned in the first chapter of *Durrat al-asrâr* eleven times, he was among the first and most dedicated disciples of Abû l-Hasan. Ibn al-Sabbâgh draws on him extensively for the early biographical accounts of al-Shâdhilî. Mâdî b. Sultân was 116 years old when he died in Tunis, *Durrat al-asrâr*, p. 176.

<sup>21</sup> His full name was [Abû Muhammad] ‘Abd Allâh b. [Salâma] al-Habîbî, *Durrat al-asrâr*, 8. al-Habîbî appears in the *Rasâ’il al-Kubrâ*, litho. Fez, 33 in which Ibn ‘Abbâd relates a vision of Abû l-Hasan from the *Manâqib*.

<sup>22</sup> *Durrat al-asrâr* has five chapters. 1) His noble lineage and his initiation by Ibn Mashîsh; 2) Extracts of his letters; 3) His litanies and supplications, his invocations and personal prayers; 4) His visions, teachings treating Sufism, divine reality (*haqîqa*) and advice to his disciples; 5) His death and his spiritual heir Abû al-‘Abbâs al-Mursî.

Ibn Mashîsh (d. 622/1225) on Mount ‘Alam and some of the sayings of Ibn Mashîsh. (fol. 60v- 61v)

Chapter Two: His arrival in Ifriqîya and some of the miracles that occurred there and accounts of his elevated states related to his blindness. (fol. 61v- 63r)

Chapter Three: His teachings testifying to his exalted station. (fol. 63v - 68v)

Chapter Four: Extracts from his letters to his disciples. (fol. 68v- 71v)

Chapter Five: His litanies, invocations and supplications. (fol. 71v- 72v)

Chapter Six: The virtues of his companions. (incomplete)<sup>23</sup>

A Summary Analysis of the Contents of the *Manâqib*

The *Manâqib of Imâm al-Shâdhilî* is an orderly arrangement of narrative traditions collected by ‘Abd al-Nûr in Tunis in 745/1345. These traditions include the miracles, visions, intimate discourses with God and teachings of Abû al-Hasan al-Shâdhilî. These narrative traditions, from a variety of perspectives, impart authenticity to the nascent Shâdhilî order of Tunis and testify to the stature of the founder of the order within the hierarchy of Islamic spirituality. They emphasize, on the one hand, the divine favors bestowed upon Imâm al-Shâdhilî in the form of visions of the Prophet and intimate discourse with God, while affirming the order’s spiritual and intellectual continuity with the themes of traditional Sufism.

Chapter one (fol. 60v- 61v – sections 1-7)<sup>24</sup> deals with the origins of the Shâdhilî order from the initial indecision of Abû l-Hasan as an aspirant of the path to his meeting with Shaykh ‘Abd al-Salâm Ibn Mashîsh. As a youth Abû l-Hasan was hesitating between living the life of an ascetic in the wilderness in order to give himself up totally to worship and invocation, or to return to the towns and settlements to be in the company of the scholars and the righteous. When he heard of a saintly man living in seclusion on Mount ‘Alam in the North of Morocco he hastened to meet him and his life changed. Even as he approached the cave of Ibn Mashîsh he heard from within,

“O God, there are people who ask You to give them power over your creatures, and You give them that. But I, O God, beg You to turn Your creatures from me so that I may have no refuge except in You. (60v; *Durrat al-asrâr*, 7/11)”<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> The author did not in fact complete this initial arrangement of the chapters. Chapter Five contains only one litany, Chapter Six: “The virtues of his companions,” is but a title heading and was never completed.

<sup>24</sup> I have separated the text into seventy-one sections of unequal length in accordance with specific narrative traditions or subject matter. The nature of the text lends itself well to this treatment and facilitates an analysis of the text making a comparison of the narrations of the *Manâqib* with the other biographies of Abû l-Hasan; *Durrat al-asrâr* and *Latâ’if al-minan* an easier task.

<sup>25</sup> See *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shâdhilî*, p. 18. In my translations of narratives from the *Manâqib* that are

The next morning, when he greeted his teacher to be, he asked him of his state (*kayf al-hâl*), to which Ibn Mashîsh responded,

“I complain unto God about the coolness of contentment and submission (*bard al-ridâ wa al-taslîm*) just as you complain unto Him about the heat of self-direction and choice (*harr al-tadbîr wa al-ikhtiyâr*). (60v)”<sup>26</sup>

When Abû l-Hasan asked how the master could complain of the “coolness of contentment and submission, the shaykh replied, “Because, I fear that their sweetness will distract me from God.” These seminal teachings of Ibn Mashîsh would, through Abû l-Hasan, become the foundational precepts of the Shâdhilî path. The emphasis on the transformation of consciousness to inward and outward God-centeredness, contentment with God in all states, and the inner withdrawal from creation in prosperity and adversity are all prefigured in the discourses narrated in this chapter of the *Manâqib*.

In this chapter Ibn Mashîsh foretells his student’s eventual move to North Africa (*Ifrîqîya*) where he will become known by the name of al-Shâdhilî and the eminent spiritual station he will eventually inherit from Ibn Mashîsh himself. Abû l-Hasan relates that in a dream, he saw his master standing near the Divine Throne, when he tells him this in the morning Ibn Mashîsh replies, “O ‘Alî, it was not me you saw, it was the station you will inherit from me.” The parting words of advice and admonition that Ibn Mashîsh gives his disciple before he departs for Tunis serve as a fitting end to this first chapter of the *Manâqib*.<sup>27</sup>

“O ‘Alî, God is God, and men are men. Keep your tongue from mentioning them and your heart from imitating their ways. Be assiduous in the fulfillment of the mandatory practices of the religion and protect your bodily members from forbidden things. In you the role of sainthood will have reached fruition. Only admonish others to the degree that is obligatory upon you. And say, “O God, give me repose from their mention [of me] and from any obstacles arising from them. Deliver me from their evil. Let Your bounty suffice me from [having to seek] their bounty, and protect me among them by Your special grace. Verily, You have power over all things.” (60v; *Durrat al-asrâr*

---

also cited in *Durrat al-asrâr* I will follow the folio reference from the *Manâqib* with the page and line from the Tunisian edition. In order to facilitate access to more extensive English translations of these citations, I will cite referents from *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shâdhilî*. All translations in this chapter, however, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

<sup>26</sup> See *La Sagesse des Maîtres Soufis* for the translation of this passage, p. 102-103.

<sup>27</sup> These two passages reflect the five principles that Ahmed Zarrûq (846/1442- 899/1494) would eventually formulate as the foundations of the Shâdhilî Order in his *The Principles of the Path and the Foundations of the Truth (Usûl al-tarîqah wa usus al-haqîqah)*

1. Godwariness inwardly and outwardly
2. Accordance with *sunna* in speech and deed
3. Withdrawal from creation, in prosperity and adversity
4. Contentment with God in scarcity and plenty
5. Turning to God in joy and sorrow

Ibn ‘Ayyâd, *al-Mafâkhir al-‘iliyya*, Caire, 1315/1898, p. 94-96.

5/15 )”<sup>28</sup>

### Ibn Mashîsh also said

“O ‘Alî, flee from men’s benevolence more than you flee from their malevolence. Because their benevolence will afflict your heart, while their evil will only afflict your body, and it is better that the body be afflicted than the heart. (60v; *Durrat al-asrâr* 94/10)”<sup>29</sup>

Chapter Two (fol. 61v- 63v – sections 8-38) treats the arrival of Abû l-Hasan in Tunis. Two themes are central to this chapter: the visions, intimate discourses, and miracles of the Shaykh and the affirmation and definition of his role as a spiritual master and as the *Qutb*. The greater part of these visions are of the Prophet, who orders him down from Mount Zaghwân to take up his role as a teacher among the people, and who provides him, through intimate discourse, with the counsel and insights that illuminate his teachings with prophetic light. In all, this chapter includes twenty narratives treating visions of angels, the Divine Throne, the mysterious Khidr, other prophets, and the Companions, such as ‘Umar and Abû Bakr al-Siddîq. Throughout these narratives the role of Abû l-Hasan within the spiritual hierarchy of sainthood (*walâya*) is touched upon again and again. One long narrative treats the fifteen signs by which one may recognize the Pole (*qutb*)<sup>30</sup> another, reminiscent of the *Mi‘râj*, introduces Abû l-Hasan’s vision of the Highest Heaven (*‘Illyûn*) and his direct discourse with God.<sup>31</sup> In another, when asked of his own spiritual master he responded:

“For a long time I was attached to the Shaykh Abû Muhammad ibn Mashîsh, but now I am swimming in ten seas: five of the descendants of Adam and five of angelic beings (*rûhânîyîn*). The descendants of Adam are the Prophet, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him, and the four Caliphs after him; the spiritual beings are Jibrîl, Mikâ‘il, Isrâfîl, ‘Azrâ‘îl, and the Spirit. (62r; *Durrat al-asrâr* 111/13)”<sup>32</sup>

### He also related

“When God rent the veil [of manifestation] from me, I said, “O God, veil Yourself from me as You have veiled Yourself from Your creation.” To which God replied, “If you asked me in the manner Moses, My spokesman (*kalîmî*), asked me, or like Jesus, My spirit (*rûhî*), asked or Muhammad, My attribute (*sifatî*), I would not veil Myself from you; rather ask Me to strengthen you.” So I asked Him to strengthen me, and now by God, were He to be veiled from me for the blink of an eye I would die.” (62r)

---

<sup>28</sup> My thanks to Michael Fitzgerald, I have drawn extensively on his translations of the about sections from his, as yet unpublished critical edition and translation of, *Ibn ‘Ajîba’s Commentary of the Taslîya of Ibn Mashîsh* . Also see *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shadhili*, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shadhili*, p. 137.

<sup>30</sup> This passage has been translated in both *La Sagesse des Maîtres*, p. 106, and in *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shadhili*, p. 108.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.161.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157. See also E. Geoffroy, 1998, p. 89.

He also related that, “The animals in the wilderness derive sustenance from me, the fish in the sea derive sustenance from me and the French derive substance from me.” (62r)

Concerning his companions he said:

“Khadir said to me, “O ‘Alî I will be there for your companions after you.”  
To which I replied, “No, I will be there for my companions, both the living and the dead.” (63r)

He also related of his role as a spiritual master:

“Whoever desires the exalted ranks of this world and the next (*dârayn*), let them retire with me for two breaths (*nafasayn*), and whoever retires with me for two breaths, I will grant protection in both worlds.” (62v)

He also said of his role with his companions:

“Anyone of my companions who has not reach his [destined] spiritual station I will bring him there.” (63r)

Of his companions to come he said:

“I have companions born of men and women that have not yet been created, their spirits (*arwâhuhum*) have already made the pact with me (*bâya‘nî*).” (63r)

Chapter two concludes with a warning as to the deceptive nature of the ego-self (*nafs*) and an admonition to be ever vigilant over one’s thoughts, inclinations, and inner attitudes. This final narration, presented as an intimate discourse: “It was said to me (*qîla lî*),” concisely delineates the two-fold response to the flawed nature of the *nafs* which has long been associated with the methodology of the Shâdhilîya path. Give the *nafs* no respite; either outwardly or inwardly. Outwardly restrain it within the bounds of the Qur’ân and Sunna; inwardly, do not be distracted, remain focused upon divine unity (*mushâhada tawhîdiyya*). Shaykh Abû l-Hasan concluded the narrative saying:

“Arm yourself with ritual purification, fasting, prayer, *dhikr*, reciting the Qur’ân and renouncing all claims to strength and power and you will be safe. Should you be overwhelmed, take faith as your fortress, and if you are overcome surrender the affair to God. Remain steadfast with divine unity (*tawhîd*), faith, and the love of God. Drown the mundane world in the ocean of *Tawhîd* before it drowns you. (63r; *Durrat al-asrâr* 121/18)”<sup>33</sup>

Chapter Three (fol. 63v- 68r – sections 39-68) is the longest chapter in the *Manâqib*. It entails an eclectic array of topics ranging from advice and counsel for initiates and the nature of the path and journeying (*sulûk*) itself, to short aphorisms. Many of the narratives are representative of the speculative discourse that has always marked the Shâdhilîya tradition. Discourses on the nature of knowledge (*ma‘rifa*) and sainthood, complimented with Quranic

---

<sup>33</sup> For full translation of this narrative see *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shadhili*, p.171-172.



exegeses and hadith commentary, have always been important elements of the teachings of Shaykh Abû I-Hasan. Much of the discourse is marked by a propensity to categorize and classify in accordance with traditional Islamic legal thought, to which Shaykh Abû I-Hasan, as a figure well established in the erudition of his times, was no stranger. In the first narrative of this chapter the Shaykh discusses the four-fold nature of the path to God and the spiritual typology of each aspirant upon these paths along with the degree upon which each is founded and fruit of each of the four. He states:

“The most direct path to God is founded upon four things. He who accomplishes them [all] is one of the true mystics, well-versed in the secrets of reality (*siddiqîn muhaqqiqîn*). He who accomplishes three of them is one of the friends of God (*walî*) who have been drawn near to Him. He who accomplishes two of them is one of the firmly believing martyrs (*shuhadâ'*). He who accomplishes one of them is one of the upright servants of God.

The first of these four is remembrance (*dhikr*), the degree (*bisât*)<sup>34</sup> of which is righteous works, and the fruit of which is illumination. The second is meditation (*tafakkur*), the degree of which is perseverance, and the fruit of which is knowledge (*'ilm*). The third is spiritual poverty (*faqr*) the degree of which is thankfulness, and the fruit of which is an increase in it. The fourth is love (*hubb*), the degree of which is disdain for the world and those of it, and the fruit of which is union with the beloved. (63v; *Durrat al-asrâr* 71/13)”<sup>35</sup>

This chapter systematically treats the nature of knowledge from the belief in the oneness of God of the commonality, to *al-ma'rifa al-'uzmâ* in which the attributes of the “knower” attains equality with those of his “known.” The longest discourse in the *Manâqib* appears in this chapter and elucidates the inherent relationship between the spiritual states of the aspirants and the degrees of knowledge of God they have attained.

- Four categories of knowledge (*ma'rifa*) (65r)

Knowledge of the commonality (*al-'awâmm*)

Knowledge of the elect (*al-khawâss*)

Knowledge of the elect among the elect (*khawâss al-khawâss*)

Supreme knowledge (*al-ma'rifa al-'uzmâ*)

This chapter also includes a long discussion of the degrees of knowledge of the scholars, ascetics and the elect (65v-66v; *Durrat al-asrâr* 132-36)<sup>36</sup>

Central to this systematic treatment of knowledge, its degrees and states, was how the various degrees of knowledge resonated within the scheme of the journey to God itself. The heart of this chapter is thus a systematic discussion of the nature of the journey to God and the

---

<sup>34</sup> Shaykh al-Shâdhilî employs the word *bisât* frequently, the word refers to a carpet or a mat that one sits upon. Within the framework of his teachings however, the word is a metaphor for a degree, station or stable state, as when he refers to the *bisât al-murâqaba* or the state of meditation. I have thus translated *bisât* as degree.

<sup>35</sup> Translation, E. Douglas, with some variants, *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shadhili*, p. 109.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186-191.

typologies of the journeyers, whether devotees (*'ibâd*), ascetics (*zuhhâd*), scholars, veracious ones (*siqiqqîn*), or friends of God (*awliyâ'*). These discussions contextualize and portray the spiritual journey as a multi-faceted hierarchy of varying paths and journeyers that intrinsically mirror to the multi-faceted nature of divine reality itself. Among the discourses dealing with the path to God are the following:

- The four principles of the path (63v; *Durrat al-asrâr* 79/16 – 80/13) <sup>37</sup>
- The four paths to God: (64r)
  - The path of the righteous (*sâlihîn*)
  - The path of the scholars (*'ulamâ'*)
  - The path of the friends of God (*awliyâ'*)
  - The path of the veracious ones (*siqiqqîn*)
- The four types of aspirants, their foundations (*usûl*) and states: (64r)
  - Devotees (*'ibâd*)
  - Ascetics (*zuhhâd*,)
  - Friends of God (*awliyâ'*)
  - Veracious ones (*siddîqîn*)

*Walâya* as the fruit of the path to God corresponds to the highest degree of experiential knowledge of God, *ma'rifa*. The *walî* as a journeyer and a vehicle of *ma'rifa* exemplified the highest aspirations of the path for other journeyers. The *walî*, as an exemplar and spiritual master, was thus central to the process of the actualization of the knowledge of God. In effect the *exemplar* was the goal of the aspirant and the seal of authenticity of the path itself, for by their very comportment they reflected essential unity on the individual level with all saints, on the one hand, and with the inherent unity of Divine Reality on the other. *Walâya* was a central concept to the teachings of the Shâdhilîya from the earliest times it is thus no surprise to find that the *Manâqib* offers new insights into the place of the *walî* within the spiritual hierarchy of Islamic mysticism and his role within Islamic society. On the subject of *walî* and the portion people share in him (*huzûz al-khalq 'alâ al-walî*) Shaykh al-Shâdhilî said;

“People hold a share (*hazz*) in the *walî* in four things. For the commonality it is the presence of blessings (*baraka*); the portion of the elect among the commonality - the devotees and ascetics - is the revealing of miracles; the portion of the scholars is [exegetic] mastery and eloquence in Qur'ânic verses; and the portion of the friends of God from him is governance of the spiritual surroundings through unveiling (*al-ishrâf bi-l-kashf 'alâ al-ihâtâ*) - meaning that he speaks of fundamental and ultimate truths (*al-awwalyât wa al-akhiriyât*).”

He then continues his narrative with further elucidation of the state of the *walî* saying:

“Why do you ponder [the state of] the *walî*? If you say, “The outer aspect [of things] gives clear indication,” I would say, “It is greater [than you imagine], the dust or even the least of his words on traditional views of divine unity (*tawhîd*) would suffice you. The Law outwardly conceals him. If you ask him of subtleties of journeying (*raqâ’iq*), he will efface them for you with subtleties of divine realities (*daqâ’iq*). If you ask him of people (*al-khalq*), he will efface them for you in Divine Truth (*al-Haqq*) and cause you to turn from them in disdain.” (64v-65r)

Complimentary to the systematic treatment of the greater part of narratives in this chapter are the many aphorisms (*hikam*) that accent the themes or topics of the narratives in a more direct and intuitive manner. I will cite here a several of the *hikam* of Shaykh al-Shâdhilî.

Regarding experiential knowledge he said, “Knowledge derived from evidence (*dalîl*) and logical proof (*burhân*) is the knowledge of the blind. Knowledge of the prophets and *siddiqûn* is the knowledge of witnessing (*shuhûd*) and true vision (*’iyân*). God Most Exalted has said: The heart did not give the lie to what it saw. Do you then cast doubt on what it saw?” [*Sûrat al-Najm*, 11]. (67v)

He also related concerning the knowledge of the *inner secret* (*al-sirr*), “One who does not see everything from his inner secret (*sirr*) as a delusion (*sarâb*), deception and confusion are their dwelling place.” (67v)

He said of the certainty of the veracious believer, “The certainty of the veracious believer would only increase were all those who dwelled on the earth to belie him; and were they to affirm him in the truth he would only become more soundly established.” (68r)

He also said, “I lost all hope of benefiting myself (*nafsi*) by my own means, how can I not lose hope of receiving benefit from others? I anticipate God’s benefits for others, shall I not anticipate it for myself?” (67v; *Durrat al-asrâr*, 93/13)<sup>38</sup>

He also said, “If others call out to Him from the carpet (*bisât*) of obedience, [you should] call out to Him from the carpet of disobedience.” (67v)

To conclude this over view of Chapter Three I will cite a narration that does not appear in the other collections that I am familiar with. In this narrative Shaykh al-Shâdhilî discusses the four universes and the reciprocal manner in which they resonate within manifestation. Shaykh Abû I-Hasan said:

“The universes are four in number: solid bodies (*ajsâm kathîfa*), the universe of subtle bodies (*ajsâm latîfa*), the universe of translucent spirits (*arwâh shaffîfa*), and the universe of mysterious secrets (*asrâr gharîba*). When the solid bodies are isolated unto themselves they form the inanimate world, solid and subtle bodies when brought together with translucent spirits result in human beings, and when these three with the mysterious secrets are mingled

---

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.118.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

they become a prophet or a *siddîq*. If it is a prophet he is given command of the community (*al-umma*) and if he is a friend of God (*al-walî*) he is given command over spiritual secrets (*al-asrâr*)." (67v)

Chapter Four (fol. 68v- 71v) contains extracts of three letters written by Shaykh al-Shâdhilî to his disciples. The two longest letters, one to Abû Yahyâ al-Mahjûb (Jamîl al-Habîbî) (D.A. 25-26) and the other to Letter to Abû l-Hasan ‘Alî Ibn Makhlûf (D.A. 29-38), appear in *Durrat al-asrâr* and have appeared in translation.<sup>39</sup> The second letter (68v) to the best of my knowledge has not appeared in print. It treats *walâya* and the attributes of the *awliyâ*, "If you see them from the point of view of human beings you see human attributes; if you see them from the point of view of the Truth (*al-Haqq*) you see the attributes of God and his magnificence." These three letters treat in a more discursive manner the general the themes dealt with in Chapter Three.

Chapter Five (fol. 71v- 72v) is the final chapter of the *Manâqib*. At the beginning of the chapter ‘Abd al-Nûr informs us that he intends to narrate the litanies, invocations and supplications of Shaykh Abû l-Hasan as dictated to him by Abû al-‘Abbâs al-Jâmî. It appears, however, that this chapter was not completed for it consists of but one short litany.<sup>40</sup> The litany ‘Abd al-Nûr cites entitled the *Hizb al-Kabîr*, however, is problematic. Ibn Sabbâgh cites the same *hizb* as a short preamble to the *Hizb al-Kabîr* (D.A 41-44). This preamble is also known as the *Hizb al-Âyât*.<sup>41</sup> ‘Abd al-Halîm Mahmûd has clarified this apparent case of "mistaken identity" by noting that this *hizb* may have been recited as a preamble by Abû l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî when time permitted, otherwise the recitation of the *Hizb al-Kabîr* began from verse 111 from *Surat al-Tawba*.<sup>42</sup> ‘Abd al-Nûr must have been aware of this, for despite the abbreviated form of the *Hizb* in the *Manâqib* we know that he was considered a key figure in the chain of transmission of the complete *Hizb al-Kabîr* within the *shâdhilî* circles of Fez.

Several works of the early Shâdhilîya of Fez make mention of ‘Abd al-Nûr as a transmitter of the *Hizb al-Kabîr*. Muhammad al-‘Arabî b. Yûsuf al-Fâsî (d. 1052/1643) mentions the existence of three chains of transmission of the *Hizb* in Fez: those of ‘Abd al-Nûr, Ibn Sabbâgh and that of Ibn ‘Abbâd which he relates was the most prevalent in Fez.<sup>43</sup> Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-Fâsî (d. 1134 /1722) in his *Fahrâsa*<sup>44</sup> mentions a narrative

---

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 41-42 and p. 46-65.

<sup>40</sup> It is also possible that this manuscript is incomplete, the colophon at the end of the manuscript (fol. 72v) however indicates that the scribe was also under the impression that this was the end of the composition.

<sup>41</sup> Abd al-Halîm Mahmûd, *al-Madrâsa al-shâdhilîya al-hadîtha*, Cairo, n.d p. 184-190.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184. The *Hizb Kabîr* was also known as *Hizb idhâ jâ’aka*.

<sup>43</sup> *Mir’ât al-mahâsin*, ed. al-Sharîf M. H. al-Kittâni, Casablanca, 2003, p. 134.

<sup>44</sup> *Al-Minah al-bâdîya fî al-asâlîb al-‘âlîya*, Ms. cited by P. Nwyia, 1961, p. 54.

chain that connects Ibn ‘Abbâd to the textual tradition of Imâm al-Shâdhilî through ‘Abd al-Nûr, Abû al-‘Abbâs al-Jâmî, Abû and ‘Abd Allâh b. Sultân; this is the chain of the *Manâqib*.

## The Critical Edition

In my critical edition of the *The Manâqib Abî al-Hasan al-Shâdhilî* I separated the text into seventy-one sections of unequal length in accordance with specific narrative traditions or subject matter. The nature of the text lends itself well to this treatment and facilitates an analysis of the text and the comparison of the citations of the *Manâqib* with the other biographies of Abû l-Hasan; *Durrat al-asrâr* and *Latâ’if al-minan* an easier task. Ibn al-Sabbâgh had had direct access to the disciples of Shaykh Shâdhilî in Tunis, particularly Mâdî b. Sultân. ‘Abd al-Nûr, twenty to twenty five years after Ibn Sabbâgh, however, had access to a representative of the order who was a disciple of Abû ‘Abd Allâh b. Sultan and his brother Mâdî b. Sultân. The two texts are therefore quite similar and tend to parallel each other in many ways. Ibn Sabbâgh, however, had not exhausted the Tunisian tradition of the Shâdhilîya. In the *Manâqib* we have a wealth of new material and a key to a more in-depth understanding of the Tunisian branch of the early Shâdhilîya. Of the seventy-one sections of the *Manâqib* there are thirty-four narrations and one letter that do not occur in either *Durrat al-asrâr* or the *Latâ’if al-minan*.<sup>45</sup> In the eventual critical Arabic edition of the *Manâqib* I will note the parallel narratives from *Durrat al-asrâr* where I am aware of similarity. It should be held in mind, however, that even in the parallel narratives important variants often occur, at times serving as interpretation, clarification or of linguistic interest.

## Conclusion

A cursory overview of the *Manâqib* of ‘Abd al-Nûr al-‘Imranî and subsequent references to it from traditional Moroccan sources have led me to the following conclusions regarding the text and the manner in which it has augmented our knowledge of the Shâdhilîya Order.

- 1) The text provides 34 previously unpublished narratives and one letter of Abû l-Hasan al-Shâdhilî.
- 2) The similarities between this text with that of Ibn Sabbâgh, composed independently some 25 years earlier, indicate the existence of an integral written tradition of the Tunisian branch of the Shâdhilîya.
- 3) The specific chain of transmission of the *Manâqib* allows us to identify a portion of

---

<sup>45</sup> There is little in the *Manâqib* that parallels *Latâ’if al-minan*.

the citations of Ibn Sabbâgh as belonging to the Tunisian branch of the order. Ibn Sabbâgh, after the biographical citations of the first chapter does not usually ascribe his citations to specific narrators.

4) There are references in later works to ‘Abd al-Nûr and the *Manâqib* that confirm an early link between Fez and the Tunisian branch of the Shâdhilîya.<sup>46</sup>

5) Ibn ‘Abbâd appears to have played an axial role between Tunisian and Egyptian Shâdhilî Orders. He was a student of ‘Abd al-Nûr on the one hand and the person who popularized the works of Ibn ‘Atâ’Allâh in Fez on the other. Thus Ibn ‘Abbâd became the figure who best exemplified *shâdhilî* teachings in both its traditions. Ahmed Zarrûq said of Ibn ‘Abbâd that, “The substance (*zubda*) of its teachings are found in the letters [The Lesser and Greater Collections] and his commentary on the *Hikam*.”<sup>47</sup>

## Bibliography

Al-Fâsî Muhammad al-‘Arabî b. Yusûf, 2003, *Mir‘ât al-mahâsin*, ed. al-Sharîf M. H. al-Kittâni, Casablanca, p. 134.

Cornell V., 1998, *Realm of the Saint*, Austin.

Douglas E., 1993, *The Mystical Teachings of al-Shadhili*, New York.

Fitzgerald M., 1983, *Ibn ‘Ajîba’s Commentary of the Taslîya of Ibn Mashîsh*, Marrakesh, Morocco.

Geoffroy E., 1998, *La Sagesse des maîtres soufis*, Paris.

Gril D. (ed. and trans.), 1986, *Risâlat Saif al-Dîn ibn Abî al-Mansûr ibn Zâfir*, Cairo.

Ibn ‘Ayyâd, 1315/1898, *al-Mafâkhir al-‘iliyya*, Cairo.

Nwyia P., 1961, *Ibn ‘Abbâd de Ronda*, Beirut.

---

<sup>46</sup> V. Cornell confirms this link from an early time between Tunis, Fez and Tlemcen in *Realm of the Saint*, Austin, 1998, p. 153-154.

<sup>47</sup> A. Zarrûq, *Uddat al-murîd al-Sâdiq*, Rabat, Ministry of Islamic Affairs, 1998, p. 432.