

Univerzita Karlova

Filozofická fakulta

KATEDRA BLÍZKÉHO VÝCHODU

Bakalářská práce

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Šādhilijský súfijský řád jako integrální součást klasické sunnitské ortodoxie

Shādhilī Ṣūfī Order as an integral part of Classical Sunnī
Orthodoxy

Praha 2023

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Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to all of my dear and respected teachers, especially to my supervisor doc. PhDr. Bronislav Ostřanský, PhD., for their support, kindness, patience and valuable advice. Likewise, I wish to thank my beloved mother and father, as well as my wife and the rest of my family and friends for their ongoing patience, kindness, generosity and support.

Prague, 27 July 2023

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V Praze, dne 28. července 2023

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Klíčová slova (česky)

islám, klasická sunnitská ortodoxie, teologické školy, právní školy, súfijské řády, islámské vědy, teologie, právo, sufismus, historie, apologetika

Klíčová slova (anglicky):

Islam, Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy, Schools of Theology, Schools of Law, Sufi Orders, Islamic Sciences, Theology, Law, Sufism, History, Apologetics

Abstrakt:

Tato práce se zabývá sebe prezentací šádhilíjského súfíjského řádu a také definuje klíčové termíny jako „klasická sunnitská ortodoxie“ či „súfismus“. Šádhilíjský súfíjský řád je jedním z nejrozšířenějších a nejvlivnějších súfíjských řádů na světě a mezi jeho následovníky vidíme řadu velmi vlivných učenců klasické sunnitské ortodoxie, která byla a je dominantní formou sunnitského islámu napříč historií. Metodologicky je práce postavena na analýze, komparaci a interpretaci nashromážděných pramenů a relevantní odborné literatury. Hypotéza této práce říká, že šádhilíjské učenci prezentují svůj řád jako integrální součást klasické sunnitské ortodoxie. Tato hypotéza byla verifikována skrze analýzu, komparaci a interpretaci relevantních děl dvou významných šádhilíjských učenců, jimiž jsou imám al-Sujúṭī a šejch Ali Gomaa, a do značné míry byla potvrzena jako pravdivá. Tato práce mimo jiné také popisuje význam klasických islámských náboženských věd – jako je teologie, právo, súfismus atd. – a jejich propojenost.

Abstract:

This thesis studies the self-presentation of the Shādhilī Ṣūfī Order and also defines key terms as “Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy” or “Sufism.” The Shādhilī Ṣūfī Order is one of the most widespread and influential Ṣūfī Orders in the world, and among the followers of this order are many very influential scholars of the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy, which is the dominant form of Sunnī Islām throughout history. Methodologically, the thesis is built on analysis, comparison and interpretation of the collected primary and secondary sources. The hypothesis of this work says that the Shādhilī scholars present their order as an integral part of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy. This hypothesis was verified through analysis, comparison and interpretation of relevant works of two important Shādhilī scholars – Imām al-Suyūṭī and Shaykh Ali Gomaa – and it was largely proven to be correct. This thesis also discusses the importance and interconnectedness of the classical Islamic religious sciences – such as Theology, Law, Sufism etc.

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1 Introduction

The Shādhilī Ṣūfī Order is one of the oldest and most widespread Ṣūfī orders in the world today. It originated in Morocco and spread all over the world – today its communities and followers may be found even in the US, Canada, Singapore, Japan and many European countries. The order is known as the order of knowledge and scholars – throughout history, the order was followed by many very famous and influential classical Sunnī scholars. Among the most famous and influential representatives from the past is Imām al-Suyūfī and among the most famous and influential representatives of today is Shaykh Ali Gomaa. This thesis discusses the history, teachings and importance of the Shādhilī Ṣūfī Order and the two aforementioned representatives and their presentation of this order towards the “outside world.” Aside from focusing on the Shādhilī Ṣūfī Order and its representation of itself, this thesis also discusses the terms “Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy” and “Sufism,” as these two terms are the larger context in which the Shādhilī Ṣūfī Order exists, and it is essential to understand these two terms before understanding what is the Shādhilī Ṣūfī order and its importance throughout history up until today.

There are several reasons behind my decision to research and write about the Shādhilī Order. Firstly, based on my study of Islām and the Muslim world over the last eight years, I came to the conclusion that the Shādhilī Order is one of the most famous and one of the most influential of the famous Ṣūfī orders – therefore, given the fact that Sufism is one of the main discussion within Islamic studies and given the importance of Islām in life of approximately every fourth human on the planet, I believe that it is a topics worthy of proper research. Secondly, some six years ago I became a student and novice of Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, joining a branch of the Shādhilī Order myself – thus I gained a lot of new information and understanding of this order that may be otherwise inaccessible to an outsider. That brings us to the “insider problem.” Can someone who is a member of a religion or say a community, write about it in an objective way? Can they engage in the academic study of it? I believe they can and so do many other researchers. The reality is that everyone has certain beliefs/convictions and certain opinions and certain ways of thinking, whether anyone likes it or not. Thus, we can ask the counterquestion – Can someone who is *not* an insider write about a religion or say a community? Can they really understand it deeply and

properly without being an insider?¹ Does being an insider necessarily mean that one will be unobjective? Does being an outsider mean one will be necessarily objective? I think that the answer is *no* in both cases. Someone can be an insider and look at his community or set of beliefs in an objective way and someone may be an outsider and yet look at a community or set of beliefs he studies in an unobjective way. And the other way around. For example, if an atheistic orientalist says that Muslims believe that the Prophet is buried in Madinah, it is equally true as when this same statement is stated by a Christian or Jewish or Hindu orientalist or if it is stated by a classical Sunnī scholar from al-Azhar. Thus, what matters is what one says and whether it is true and objective or not – and not what they believe.

I have tried my best to be as objective as possible, in light of my personal conviction that Islamology should be primarily descriptive and very careful when engaging in analysis and even more careful when engaging in interpretation.² Furthermore, my thesis is a result of theoretical research done only through working with sources like books, lectures etc., it is not anthropological field research. Thus, if I happen to sometimes mention some of my personal experiences, it is merely to illustrate and show some real specific examples from “the real world,” to make the text more engaging and make the topics discussed easier to understand for the reader.

That brings us to my methodology. The first step after deciding what to write about was to collect as many relevant sources as reasonably possible and study them – through a process of careful analysis, comparison and interpretation. That led me to a process of conceptualisation of the key discussions present in the sources. Then I formed a hypothesis. After that, I looked at how to prove or disprove the hypothesis. After that, there was another process of collecting more sources relevant to the hypothesis and again studying those sources in order to find out whether the hypothesis is correct or not, and to what extent it is true or false. Then, in the process of writing this thesis, which was partly simultaneous with the process of my study and research, I tried to show, demonstrate and prove the results of my research. I have tried to be very careful when engaging in interpretation and I tried my

¹ For example, I read one thesis about another Ṣūfī order, written by an outsider who tried to gain information and do research of the order from the position of an outsider. I happen to also know people from that particular order, and know some things about the order in theory, and as an insider of another order I had a quite good understanding of the inner dynamics that may exist in such a community. Therefore, at some points of reading the thesis, I wanted to laugh and at others I wanted to cry, as I saw how clearcut misunderstandings this researcher had, and how deluded some of his interpretations of the seen phenomena were.

² That is because of the sometimes dark history of what is known as Orientalism and what is now referred to generally as Islamic studies or Islamology. Also look at the previous note to understand why I believe that islamologists should be very careful when engaging in interpretation.

best to base my interpretation only on facts and things that logically or else stem from the sources or my analysis of the sources.

Regarding my choice of sources, I do have access and I can work with the primary sources related to the subject of my thesis. Therefore, I have been primarily and mostly relying on primary sources as I believe that if someone has access to and can work with primary sources, it would be of very little use to them and others if they were to chase secondary sources instead of spending their valuable time and energy on working with the real material – that is the primary sources. Some people say that by not focusing on secondary sources, one can be researching something that was already researched before. To that, I say that by the second round of independent research, the first round of research may be proven either confirmed or invalidated.

I had a very clear idea about the topics I needed to research and how to research them, and to do that I had to work mostly with primary sources, because otherwise, I doubt that it would be possible to truly research these topics and bring at least some little contribution. What I certainly did not want to do is to create yet another undergraduate thesis that will be a result of mere recycling of secondary sources and which will bring no new findings, ideas or approaches. However, some secondary sources were used as well – those include several relevant academic works and some articles from encyclopaedias.

The sources I have chosen are mostly translations of works of famous, influential and authoritative classical Sunnī scholars, as well as several Arabic originals of such works. Some of the works I used are also English originals written by contemporary classical Sunnī scholars. Regarding the internet sources, I have used many video or sound recordings of relevant lectures, classes or videos of influential classical Sunnī scholars of today.

Here we get to the hypothesis, main goals and the actual content of this thesis. The hypothesis says that the Shādhilī scholars present their order as an integral part of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy. Due to the limited length of the thesis, there are just two main scholars on whom the hypothesis is tested, namely Imām al-Suyūṭī and Shaykh Ali Gomaa. The other goals of this thesis are obvious – it is necessary to discuss the key terms and subjects, such as what is “Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy” or “Sufism” or what is the “Shādhilī Order” and who was Imām al-Suyūṭī or who is Shaykh Ali Gomaa and how are all these subjects interconnected and related.

The chapter about Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy discusses what is meant by this term and how orthodoxy has been defined in the past and today and what are some of the

distinguishing characteristics of it. The second chapter discusses what is Sufism and what Sufism is not. The third chapter discusses what is the Shādhilī Order, its brief history, some of the key personalities and works of this order and some of the central teachings of this order. The fourth chapter discusses who was Imām al-Suyūṭī, his life, his scholarship and legacy and his presentation of the Shādhilī Order. The fifth chapter discusses who Shaykh Ali Gomaa is, his life and legacy and his presentation of the Shādhilī Order.

A lot has been written about Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy, Sufism as well as the Shādhilī Order and some people have written even about Imām al-Suyūṭī or Shaykh Ali Gomaa.³ However, I am unaware of anyone ever discussing all those topics in one place and discussing their interconnectedness, and I am also unaware of anyone ever writing about the self-presentation of the Shādhilī Order. That is also where I see the possible contribution of this thesis, as it is important and interesting to explore the connection between these topics and to see how some of the main figures of such an order presented it in the past and how they present it today.

An important thing to note is that this thesis does require the reader to either have some foundational prior knowledge of Islām and the Muslim world or to check some words that they might not know, for there are various terms that are going to be mentioned but are not going to be explained – such as “Ḥadīth” or “ulema” etc.

As for my quotation style, I have chosen the quotation style, Harvard, as I personally find it very simple and clear and also very suitable when quoting a variety of sources in different languages. The sole purpose of quotes is that the source be clearly identifiable and verifiable. In the case of quotes from the ever-changing world of the internet, it is also essential that it would be possible to verify when a source was quoted. Nevertheless, I have spent a considerable amount of time trying my best to make sure that my quotes are clear, identifiable and verifiable. I have used the following website to create my quotes: *Create Harvard, APA & MLA Citations Cite This For Me, a Chegg service*. Available at: <https://www.citethisforme.com/> (Accessed: 19 July 2023).

Regarding my way of transliteration, it is as follows: أ = a, إ = i, أُ = u, ب = b, ت = t, ث = th, ج = j, ح = h, خ = kh, د = d, ذ = dh, ر = r, ز = z, س = s, ش = sh, ص = s, ض = d, ط = t, ظ = z, ع = ‘, غ = gh, ف = f, ك = k, ق = q, ل = l, م = m, ن = n, و = w, ه = h, ي = y, ة = ah, ء = ‘

Regarding the transliteration of prolonged vocals I have used the following: ā, ī, ū

³ Therefore, I had to make some very difficult decisions as to which relevant sources and discussions include or not include in my research and this thesis.

Furthermore, in some cases where there is a certain transliteration of a name commonly used in the English language – such as in the case of the battle of Mansurah (which would, according to my transliteration, be transliterated as *Manṣūrah*) or Ali Gomaa – I am sticking to the commonly used transliteration. Likewise, if there is a person who transliterates their name in a certain way – such as Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi – I stick to how they themselves transliterate it. Likewise, if I quote a translated work where they use certain transliteration – even if I think it is flawed – I stick to it and obviously do not change it.

Here I wish to stress the fact that the chapters of this thesis are interconnected and it is rather essential to grasp each one of them before moving on to the next as each one is grounded in the previous ones. The discussed subjects are in reality incredibly lengthy and complicated and a huge amount of approaches to them exist. I have tried to present a coherent and wholesome discussion of these subjects and show their interconnectedness, which I believe to be essential. I have tried my best to show the reader the key characteristics of the discussed subjects. Some passages of this thesis are rather illustrative and are meant to make the understanding of the discussed subjects easier and more clear or show the interconnectedness of the discussed subjects. Therefore, if the reader happens to see for instance a note that is seemingly not directly related to the subject discussion, I urge the reader to stop and ponder deeper, for in reality it is related to the subject, or it is meant to draw the reader's attention to the aforementioned interconnectedness of all of the discussed subjects. I hope I have managed to present the discussions of the key subjects and their interconnectedness in a comprehensive and benefitting way, and I hope that the reader will primarily judge my thesis as a whole.

2 Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy

2.1 Definition of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy

What I refer to as Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy⁴ is the body of orthodox Sunnī scholars (ulema) and their orthodox works throughout the history of Sunnī Islām, beginning with the generation of the Saḥābah up until today. As it is not the topic of this thesis to analyse the complicated and complex historical development of the Orthodoxy,⁵ let me just specify what is here meant by “Orthodoxy” and what this Orthodoxy consists of. This specification, which is a result of the historical development of the Sunnī scholarly tradition, is as follows: The Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy, as it has been described previously in the general definition, since approximately 15th century of the common era, is characterised by the fact that those ulema who adhere to it, are followers of the Ash‘arī or Māturīdī⁶ or Ḥanbalī schools of Theology, one of the four schools of jurisprudence, namely the Mālikī, Ḥanafī, Shāfi‘ī or Ḥanbalī⁷ and they also adhere to some form of orthodox Sufism. Indeed, there were many other Sunnī schools of Law, but they all “died out” because they simply did not have enough adherents.⁸

It is important to draw a distinction here between the Ḥanbalī/Atharī scholars who are from the Mufawwiḍah, and also reject the other famous non-Sunnī heresies, like the Mu‘tazila etc. – typical examples are Ḥanbalīs like Imām Ibn al-Jawzī – and between those who are not. Even though those of the Mufawwiḍah among the Ḥanbalīs may have disagreed

⁴ In Arabic the term used for what I mean by the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy is “*Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*.”

⁵ And for sake of clarity and simplicity, which is required here for moving on to the main topics.

⁶ In the pre-Ash‘arī/Māturīdī time, and even after those schools became dominant, there obviously were theologically orthodox Sunnī scholars who were not Ash‘arī or Māturīdī, and sometimes they are referred to as “Atharī” or Ḥanbalī. These scholars are characterised by mostly following the method of *Tafwīd* – the theological method of interpretation of the ambiguous parts of the Revelation. Some call this school the *Mufawwiḍah* – “those who do Tafwīd.” It is important to remember that the method of Tafwīd is still present and valid method even in the two dominant schools – namely Ash‘arī or Māturīdī.

⁷ For those interested in more details on how the schools of Law and Theology developed, I strongly recommend the following two works, both of which are however only introductions to the respective topics: For the development of jurisprudence I recommend the very useful short treatise by Dr Timothy Winter of Cambridge called “Understanding the four Madhhabs” and for the development of the schools of Theology I recommend the brilliant book titled “Ahl al-Sunna: The Ash‘arīs” by Shaykh Hamad Sinan and Shaykh Fawzi al-‘Anjari, which had been skilfully translated into the English language by Abdul Aziz Suraqah. Number of other works on those topics can be found in the bibliography of this thesis.

⁸ Like for example the legal school of Imām al-Ṭabarī, the famous interpreter of the Qur‘ān and historian. Or the school of Imām al-Awzā‘ī or Imām al-Layth ibn Sa‘d and others.

with the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī schools on some points, they generally were and are still considered to be part of Orthodoxy. While the Theology of those Ḥanbalīs, whose Theology was considered to be anthropomorphic, was rejected both by the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī schools as well as the Ḥanbalī/Atharī Mufawwiḍah – an example of that may be the famous work of Imām Ibn al-Jawzī called *Daf‘ Shubah al-Tashbīh*. Also, it is important to note that this original and orthodox Ḥanbalism/Atharism is different from the modern Wahhabī/Salafī Theology, which actually rejects the concept of Tafwīḍ. But of course, some of the *Mufawwiḍah* might consider themselves to be the Orthodoxy only and may reject the claim that the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī schools are the main representatives of the Orthodoxy. Likewise, the Ḥanbalīs whose Theology was considered to be anthropomorphic, as well as the Wahhabī/Salafī movements, certainly see themselves as the Orthodoxy. However, that seems to me to be historically quite obviously not true. Therefore, when I use the term “Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy” I do not mean the Ḥanbalīs whose Theology was considered to be anthropomorphic by the majority of Sunnī scholars, and I also do not include under this term the Wahhabī/Salafī movements.

Another really important thing to understand is that the three sciences also form a hierarchy. What I have seen on countless occasions is that the classical Sunnī scholars⁹ always stress the importance of Theology. They say that Theology is the first and the most important discipline that one has to study. That can be seen in countless introductory texts (*mutūn*),¹⁰ where they always begin with Theology and often explicitly state that the first obligation of a Muslim is to know the foundations of Theology. This is well-known. Then comes Fiqh and after Fiqh comes Taṣawwuf. In the same way that these sciences have their hierarchy in the manner in which one studies Islām, they also form the hierarchy in how the orthodoxy of an individual is being judged. First comes Theology, then comes the Law and then comes Taṣawwuf. So, theological orthodoxy is the most important factor, the second most important factor is their orthodoxy in Law and the orthodoxy in Taṣawwuf comes last.¹¹

What is essential to understand here, is that for someone to be part of Orthodoxy as a whole, one must fulfil all of the three foundational conditions – they must be a follower of orthodox Theology, Law and Sufism. So, for example, if one is orthodox in Law and Sufism, but is a Mu‘tazilī, such a person is not a follower of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy as a whole.

⁹ The same is true regarding the Salafī/Wahhābī scholars.

¹⁰ Have a look for example at the *Matn Ibn ‘Ashir* or *al-Qayrawānīyyah* in the Mālikī Madhhab or the book *al-Maqāsid* of Imām al-Nawawī in the Shāfi‘ī Madhhab.

¹¹ But is still part of it, for reasons that will be further demonstrated later on in this thesis.

Those orthodox Sunnī scholars are then further characterised by what professor Aaron Spevack calls in his work “*The Archetypal Sunnī Scholar, Law, Theology, and Mysticism in the Synthesis of al-Bājūrī*”¹², an excellent work for deepening one’s understanding of how Classical Sunnī Islām works, “the Gabrielian paradigm”. He says in the introduction: “A renewed interest in post-ninth/fifteenth-century scholars is crucial for our understanding of the various stages of development in the Islamic tradition, as well as the multiple currents in the Islamic world today, including the traditionalist, Salafī, Wahhābī, modernist, and others. In addition to arguing the normativity of the Gabrielian paradigm, with its emphasis on a balanced interrelation of Law, Theology, and Sufism, and an accepted range of consensus and scholarly disagreement in each science, this work further explores the normativity and popularity of the rational sciences (syllogistic logic and kalām in particular) in Law and Theology between the seventh/thirteenth and thirteenth/nineteenth centuries. In particular, the role of the Ash‘arī school in the *madrasa* (Islamic colleges) and the *madhhabs* (schools of Law) will be explored to address the still popular theory that “rationalist” theologians were viewed as heterodox by the majority of Sunnī jurists. Furthermore, I pay significant attention to the normativity and centrality of Sufism in the life and studies of pre-modern Muslim scholars.”^{13 14}

The “Gabrielian paradigm” refers to the famous Ḥadīth of Jibrīl in which the Prophet Muḥammad is being asked by a man, who is later identified by the Prophet as Angel Jibrīl,¹⁵ about the definitions of what Islām, Īmān and Ihsān are. In the answers¹⁶ of the Prophet the Sunnī scholars identified the foundations of the whole religion of Islām, to the extent that

¹² This work of professor Spevack is filled with gems. For instance professor Spevack’s criticism of Orientalism, which he offers us in this work, though not too lengthy, is very precise, accurate and shows his deep insight into the Sunnī Scholastic tradition and into Orientalism and Colonialism and Modernism in the Muslim world as well. He manages to clearly refute some of the, unfortunately even in western academia still wide-spread misconceptions about the Sunnī tradition, such as the theory of intellectual decline, the heterodoxy of speculative Theology (‘Ilm al-kalām) or the heterodoxy of Sufism.

¹³ Spevack, A., 2014. *The Archetypal Sunnī Scholar*. State University of New York Press, Albany, p.5.

¹⁴ A small note on the use of the word *Madhhab* by professor Spevack: He uses the word here only in the context of Schools of Law, and many people often think that the word *Madhhab* is only used as terminus technicus when we talk about the schools of Islamic Law. However, the reality is that this word has more meanings and is commonly used also in the context of Schools (Madhhabs) of Islamic Theology or Arabic language etc.. The word can mean a School, but it can also sometimes mean “an opinion”. And so we find for example that in the Ash‘arī Madhhab there is a debate about the *Madhhab al-Salaf* or the School (or method or methodology) of the earlier generations of Scholars and *Madhhab al-Khalaf* or the School of the later generations, I have already alluded to this discussion in the previous notes about schools of Theology.

¹⁵ In English the name Jibrīl is sometimes translated as Gabriel.

¹⁶ Anyone can easily find the Ḥadīth online or in many different books, it is one of the most famous Ḥadīths in general, and so for the sake of brevity I am not going to quote it here.

this Ḥadīth is referred to by the scholars as *Umm al-Sunnah*, or “Mother of the Sunnah”, similarly to the first chapter of the Qur’ān is referred to as *Umm al-Kitāb* or “Mother of the Book”. That is because it encompasses all of the aspects of the religion itself.¹⁷

2.2 The dimension of Islām

The dimension of Islām is the dimension of the religious practices, which aside from the five major pillars of Islām, by extension includes the *ḥalāl and ḥarām*, and all other forms of worship that are related to the human body. The Qur’ān and Sunnah give us much more information about each one of these five pillars (as well as information about many other forms of worship that are related to the human body¹⁸) and so the ulema have put all of this information together, organised it and based upon and through their various methodologies explained it, and the result of this huge intellectual, juristic struggle of theirs, are the various Schools of Islamic Law (*Fiqh*). Because of the reality of the different methodologies (*Uṣūl*) of the ulema, many different conclusions have been reached throughout history in the various schools of Islamic Law. Sometimes even the scholars within the same school have reached different conclusions within the school itself, which shows the depth and vastness of the Sunnī juristic legacy. Of course, some of the opinions (*Aqwāl*) that the scholars have given over the centuries, are considered by the majority of scholars of the given school to be correct and orthodox, while others are considered to be weak (*Da‘īf*) either in transmission or meaning, and sometimes some of the opinions in a school are even considered to be false (*Bāṭil*).

Similarly, different opinions of varying normativity have been produced even in the exegesis of the Qur’ān, the sciences of the Arabic language, Islamic logic and the other classical Islamic sciences. The differences of opinions among the scholars in the various classical Islamic sciences are known as *Ikhtilāfāt* and are generally considered by the Sunnī ulema themselves to be something positive, enriching, and even very useful, as it allows to find suitable answers and solutions to the always changing realities of the world around us. This reality of *Ikhtilāfāt* and the generally positive approach of the ulema towards it can be considered one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy.

¹⁷ The Arabic word for “religion” that is used in this very Ḥadīth, and in general as well, is “Dīn”. ¹⁸ Whether it is from the *‘ibādāt* (or personal worship of God, whether this is by doing certain acts or by refraining from doing other acts), or *mu‘āmalāt* (that part of the Law that relates to the relationships and contracts and interactions between human beings).

It might be interesting to point out that the orthodox Sunnī tradition has never been entirely closed to other non-Sunnī Schools of thought. It is a well-documented reality in the books of Ḥadīth sciences (*'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*) that among the narrators in the chains of transmissions of Imām al-Bukhārī were Shī'īs, Mu'tazilites, or Khawārij. This reality has been mentioned, for example, by the great contemporary Ḥadīth master, and my respected teacher, Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi during a programme in the UK where the entire *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* was recited by the Shaykh within two weeks.¹⁹ Furthermore, at this programme, the Shaykh presented his new edition of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*.²⁰ This new edition is very unique because it is based upon the most authentic edition of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, called *al-Nuskhah al-Ṣulṭānīyyah*, the official edition of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, which was ordered by the Ottoman Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥamīd II. It was done by tens of the greatest experts on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* in the Ottoman Empire and based on the most authentic manuscripts.²¹ Only one thousand copies of this new "Sultan's edition" were made, and Shaykh al-Yaqoubi owns one of those copies, so this new edition is a copy of the original Sulṭānī edition. It is a masterful and amazing edition which is a must for experts or students of the Ḥadīth sciences in general, and the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* in particular. Likewise, another example of this is the Tafsīr of the famous Mu'tazilī scholar, Imām al-Zamakhsharī which is a Tafsīr that is studied and benefited from in the Sunnī tradition up until today.²²

2.3 The dimension of Īmān

The dimension of Īmān is the dimension of beliefs, where the Qur'ān and the Sunnah give more information about each of the six pillars of belief and detail many other theological realities. So, the ulema have again gathered all of this information together, organised it and

¹⁹ The part of the lecture where the Shaykh mentions the reality of the narrators of Imām al-Bukhārī can be seen in this short video: *Imam Bukhari wrote Alaihi Salam after names of Ahlul bayt- Shaykh Muhammad Al Yaqoubi* (2020) *YouTube*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fvx7A7BB_vc (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

²⁰ I was personally blessed to attend the event and get a copy of the new edition.

²¹ It is possible to purchase the book online: *Signatora Publishing*. Available at: <https://signatora.com/> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

²² As was noted at the beginning of this recorder Tafsīr class taught by my respected and dear teacher Shaykh Dr Aḥmad al-Fāḍil al-Rifā'ī, who is a great grandson of the famous Ṣūfī Master Aḥmad al-Rifā'ī: الأول - الدرر الشيخ أحمد الفاضل - *YouTube*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=Sw13ey6JwVo&list=PLSfhlQ01CKZz_3f2FoAqATv1X06NA-_ut&index=1 (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

explained it, and the result of their struggle are the Schools of Islamic Theology.²³ And again, some of these schools became known as the Orthodox ones, while others became known as being heterodox. Likewise, a vast variety of opinions was produced over the centuries of scholarship within these various schools and those opinions have been (and continuously are) studied, commented upon, sometimes accepted, sometimes rejected etc. by the ulema.

How the Schools of Sunnī Law and Theology function is very sophisticated and fascinating. However, as they are not the main topic of this thesis, I am not going to delve into any more details and even what I have mentioned up until now, is but a general introduction, which is meant to merely illustrate what Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy is, rather than to offer a precise description of these subtle realities of Islamic scholastic tradition.²⁴

2.4 The dimension of *Iḥsān*

Finally, the dimension of *Iḥsān* is the dimension, or realm, of Islamic spirituality or Sufism. Again we find lots of additional information in the Qur'ān and Sunnah that can be understood to be part of this dimension, and again we see the ulema over the centuries collecting all of this information, discussing it, organising it, explaining it etc.,²⁵ and the result of their struggle is the truly rich Islamic spiritual tradition of Sufism or *Taṣawwuf*. And again a huge amount of opinions has been produced by the scholars of this science – some of them being widely accepted and considered to be orthodox, while others being rejected or controversial etc. So what exactly is Sufism or *Taṣawwuf*? The answer is not a simple one, as there has been so much written on this subject over its more than a thousand years-long history. Much has been written by both Muslims and non-Muslims, and it is indeed quite difficult to grasp, however, I shall present my understanding of this reality in the next chapter.

²³ There are various terms used for Theology in Arabic. Among them is *‘Ilm al-Kalām*, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, *‘Ilm al-‘Aqā'idah*, *‘Ilm al-Tawḥīd* and others.

²⁴ However, for anyone interested in more details and further proper primary sources on the way in which the Sunnī Schools of Theology and Law function, I recommend the reader to have a look at the Bibliography of this thesis, for many very useful sources are available there.

²⁵ Adding to that their own (not just) spiritual experiences, which they have mentioned and discussed in their works, and which certainly play an important part in this science – as much of what the scholars of this science talk about is related to the lived reality of the practitioner of Islām in general and of this science in particular and cannot be truly fully understood, as they say, without “tasting it”. As they say “*Man dhāqa ‘arafa.*” or “The one who has tasted it, knows.”. Imām al-Ghazzālī mentions this fact that what the Ṣūfīs talk about needs to be tried/tested/tasted, in his famous spiritual auto-biography *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* or *The Deliverer from Error*.

2.5 Classical and contemporary definitions of Orthodoxy

Among the most authoritative works from the classical Sunnī scholarly tradition that demonstrate my understanding and definition of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy is the famous compendium of biographies of the scholars from the Shāfi‘ī Madhhab, known as *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyyah al-Kubrā* of Imām Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī. In this work, he says: “I know that all of the Mālikīyyah are Ashā‘irah without an exception, and the majority of the Shāfi‘īyyah are Ashā‘irah as well, except for those of them who had been affected by the Theology of tajsīm²⁶ or by Mu‘tazila, about whom God does not care. And the Ḥanafīyyah, most of them are Ashā‘irah, I mean that they hold the theological positions of al-Ash‘arī, except for those of them who had been affected by the Mu‘tazila. And as for the Ḥanābilah, most of the early prominent ones were Ashā‘irah, and none of them has left the Theology of al-Ash‘arī, except for those who were influenced by the anthropomorphists. And among the followers of this group (the anthropomorphists), we find more Ḥanbalīs, than followers of any other group.”²⁷ It is very important to mention here a few things about these different schools and how the scholars of the past and the present are being ascribed to some of these schools. For example, how can Imām Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī attribute the whole body of the theologically orthodox Ḥanafīyyah to the Ashā‘irah, even though we know that many of them were Māturīdīyyah? And why doesn't he just say that they are Ḥanafīyyah, meaning followers of Imām Abū Ḥanīfa in Theology, since Imām Abū Ḥanīfa was primarily a theologian for a long period of his life? He can do that because in reality there is very little to often no difference at all between the two schools (Ashā‘irah and Māturīdīyyah) and between the two schools and Imām Abū Ḥanīfa as well. The reason why he mentions here the Ashā‘irah and not Māturīdīyyah or Imām Abū Ḥanīfa is that basically the Ash‘arī school is more famous and more dominant in the Muslim world in the field of Theology and so it has become sort of a habit to connect the theological orthodoxy primarily with the Ashā‘irah.²⁸ As Dr Said Foudah mentioned, if we were to make a mathematical equation, we could say that Ashā‘irah =

²⁶ Tajsīm linguistically means ascribing someone/something with a body. Terminologically in classical Sunnī Theology, the word means anthropomorphism.

²⁷ 3:377, available online here: نور, 2021. *Download book Grand layers Shaafa is pdf*. [online] Noor-book.com. Available at: <<https://www.noor-book.com/en/ebook-%D8%B7%D8%A8%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B9%D9%8A%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%8A--pdf>> [Accessed 18 December 2021].

²⁸ The difference between Ashā‘irah and Māturīdīyyah is well explained and summarised in the following short video of Dr Said Foudah, who is a very well-respected and famous expert on classical Sunnī Theology: الشيخ سعيد فودة - الخلاف بين الأشاعرة والماتريدية - *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=GekcyCj1fzQ> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

Māturīdīyyah = Theology of Imām Abū Ḥanīfa. Also similarly, for example, the Fiqh of Imām Abū Ḥanīfa comes largely from other scholars who came before him, his teachers, their teachers etc., however, it is not customarily attributed to them, but to Imām Abū Ḥanīfa.

To mention a contemporary definition of the orthodoxy, let me quote Dr Said Foudah, who says: “Ahl al-Sunnah are Ashā‘irah and Māturīdīyyah and whoever has the same Theology as them, even if they were not attributed to them.”²⁹ An explanation of this definition has been already mentioned above.

A very similar definition to that of Dr Said Foudah and that which I have penned above has been given by the current rector of al-Azhar University, Professor Ahmed el-Tayeb³⁰ at the international conference on Sunnī Orthodoxy in Grozny in 2016.³¹

Another thing which is typical for Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy is that it is taught in its various manifestations or forms around the world in the traditional madrasa systems and the major and most famous institutions of Islamic learning in the Muslim world – such as al-Azhar in Egypt, or al-Qarawīyīn in Morocco, or al-Zaytūna in Tunisia, or the Umayyad mosques of Syria etc. Likewise, the traditional Orthodoxy had been followed by most, if not all, of the major Sunnī states and dynasties throughout history, probably the most iconic example being the Ottomans, who were famously followers of the Ḥanafī Madhhab in Law, the Māturīdī Madhhab in Theology, and had a Shaykh, meaning a Ṣūfī Shaykh, who would be their spiritual guide. Similarly, we have a living example of this reality up until this day in the Kingdom of Morocco, which officially³² adheres to and teaches in some of its institutions the Mālīkī Madhhab in Law, the Ash‘arī Madhhab in Theology and the classical Sunnī Taṣawwuf.³³

²⁹ The quote is from the following lecture: أصول الدين شرح العقيدة الطحاوية في أصول الدين | الأستاذ سعيد 03 فودة | بتاريخ 3-3-2018 *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=zbn4kcVYpgw&list=PL5LKI-Bd1p4TGmRBxYER2X9fz3Xi5pOHQ&index=3> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

³⁰ It can be seen in this video: من هم أهل السنة والجماعة 1 ... فضيلة الأمام الأكبر شيخ الأزهر *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=nn-zK7aOCaE> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

³¹ En.wikipedia.org. 2022. *2016 international conference on Sunni Islam in Grozny - Wikipedia*. [online] Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_international_conference_on_Sunni_Islam_in_Grozny [Accessed 6 January 2022].

³² Its Ministry of religious affairs to be precise.

³³ As can be easily understood from the contents of the official website of the Moroccan Ministry of Religious Affairs, for example: كتاب: السيرة النبوية للسنة الثانية من التعليم الإعدادي العتيق - وزارة الأوقاف والشؤون الإسلامية - الرئيسية. Available at: <https://habous.gov.ma/2012-01-26-16-14-59/2679-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B0%D9%87%D8%A8->

3 Sufism as an integral part of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy

3.1 Misconceptions regarding Sufism

In today's world, whether among Muslims or non-Muslims, it is common to encounter people who have many misconceptions regarding Sufism. Some see it as not being part of Islām at all, others as being probably something related to Islām or maybe even part of it, but perhaps a little bit distinct from it, or maybe being a “moderate interpretation” of it, or maybe being a stream within it etc. Many people have so deeply engraved prejudices towards Islām (but not towards Sufisms) that they consider Sufism something other than Islām – maybe it has originated from or was influenced by Islām, but in their minds, it cannot be seen as being Islām, or even part of it, because of how ugly and horrible they believe Islām to be, while what they think that Sufism is nice, interesting etc.³⁴ Different groups of people hold these various opinions for a variety of different reasons. Even in academia, one can still encounter some of these and other similar notions regarding Islām and Sufism. There is indeed still a lot of confusion regarding this issue, and so I wish to explain and demonstrate in this chapter what Sufism is, and what is the relationship between Sufism and Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy.

3.2 Taṣawwuf and Sufism

Firstly, I think that it is very useful to differentiate between the Arabic term *Taṣawwuf*³⁵ and the Orientalist-coined term Sufism.³⁶ I think that these two terms can be, and often even are,

[%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A8.html](#) (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

³⁴ I have personally met and heard people with some of these various opinions regarding Sufism and Islām.

³⁵ For those interested in knowing about the linguistic reality of this word, refer to the chapter of this name in the famous work of Imām al-Qushayrī “*al-Risālah al-Qushayrīyyah fī ‘Ilm al-Taṣawwuf*”, which has an excellent English translation by Professor D. Knysh, known as “Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism”. This work (whether preferably the original, or even the translation) is a truly authoritative text, which really gives one a solid understanding of what Taṣawwuf truly means in the classical Islamic tradition. And it is certainly not a forgotten text. In fact, it is still being taught in the Muslim world up until today. I myself have heard Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi on numerous occasions mentioning this work and he also used to teach this work in Damascus as I have heard him mentioning. Likewise, there are available lectures online of Shaykh Ali Gomaa where he teaches this book: [الرسالة القشيرية | أد علي جمعة YouTube](#). Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLxQnfwkf6kshnf1LnvDPfd1-h-uaFMynx> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

³⁶ What is known as Sufism in the West is mostly referred to in the Sunnī scholastic tradition as al-Taṣawwuf, although other names are also used by the Muslims, for example *al-Sulūk* or *al-Tazkiyah*.

being used as synonymous.³⁷ However, I think that it is better and more proper and accurate to draw a line between the two terms. The term “Sufism” is broader and can cover a variety of things. Some of them are identical to the meanings that are contained in and under the Arabic term *Taşawwuf*, whereas some of them might not even fall under the category of Islām. In other words, some things are by some people called Sufism, that are un-Islamic and outside of Islām according to any major Islamic³⁸ stream (whether Sunnī, Shī‘ī or ‘Ibādī) – or to say the least, they are very problematic and un-orthodox.³⁹

3.3 Definitions of *Taşawwuf*

To mention a classical definition of *Taşawwuf*, let me quote from the *Qushayrīyyah*. It is the very first definition given to this science in this work: “I heard Muhammad b. Ahmad Yahya al-Sufi say: I heard ‘Abdallah b. ‘Ali al-Tamimi say: “Someone asked Abu Muhammad al-Jurayri about Sufism: 'It means assuming every sublime moral character trait and giving up every lowly one.’”⁴⁰ I mentioned the whole quote including the chain of narrators for the sake of authenticity of experience. The *Qushayrīyyah* is full of such chains.

Based on my reading of the books of *Taşawwuf*,⁴¹ both classical and contemporary, and based on my studies with some of the *Şūfis* themselves,⁴² I would define *Taşawwuf* as being one of the Classical Islamic sciences,⁴³ with its goals and main contents being the “purification of the heart”,⁴⁴ the “rectification and perfection of human character”⁴⁵ and the

³⁷ Even by the English-speaking *Şūfis* themselves.

³⁸ And orthodox in its respective tradition – i.e orthodox Sunnism, Shiism or Ibadism.

³⁹ Some such examples are some of the characters of Western esotericism or perennialism, who called themselves *Şūfis*, or were branded as such by others, and who said things that clearly contradict the most foundational Islamic tenets of faith on which all Muslims – from any of the major streams – agree upon.

⁴⁰ Knysh, A., 2007. *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism*. 1st ed. Reading: Garnet Publishing Limited, p.289.

⁴¹ As well as books about Sufism.

⁴² Most of them come from the *Shādhilī* Order, but some of them also come from the *Rifā‘ī*, *Naqshbandī* and *Qādirī* orders, and they are from a variety of countries from the Middle East and Africa.

⁴³ In Arabic they are known as *al-‘Ulūm al-Shar‘īyyah*. Those include the Islamic Theology, sciences of Islamic Law, the *Ḥadīth* sciences, the sciences of the Quran, sciences of the Arabic language etc.

⁴⁴ From what the *Şūfis* call “the diseases of the heart” (*Amrāḍ al-Qalb*), such as envy, anger, greed etc. To learn more about this topic see for example Shaykh Hamza Yusuf's well-known book “Purification of the Heart” or the CD set with the same name.

⁴⁵ By adorning it with the attributes of beauty such as patience, kindness, generosity, sincerity, truthfulness, humility, mercy, wisdom, courage, temperance, justice etc.

guidance on the spiritual path to sainthood,⁴⁶ as well as the explanation of some aspects of Islamic metaphysics.⁴⁷

When you ponder over the Islamic sciences and their roles, it becomes clear that the role of Taṣawwuf is one similar to Fiqh, just in a different dimension. Let me explain. The classical Sunnī ulema talk about two types of rulings (*Aḥkām*) in the Sharī‘ah: *al-Aḥkām al-‘Amalīyyah* and *al-Aḥkām al-Nazarīyyah*. The first type, *al-Aḥkām al-‘Amalīyyah*, are those rulings that pertain to the actions, meaning physical actions, of an individual or group of individuals, and examples of those rulings may be the prayer, the almsgiving, fasting, the rulings of different types of transactions etc. The second type, *al-Aḥkām al-Nazarīyyah*, are those rulings that pertain for example to the beliefs of people. So for example the Sharī‘ah commands one to believe in the existence of the Angels or the Jinn, Heaven and Hell etc.⁴⁸ The Sharī‘ah is contained in the Revelation, which in the case of Revelation which was given to Prophet Muḥammad means the Qur‘ān and the Sunnah. The Islamic sciences serve as an instrumental apparatus to explain the Revelation, to explain the Sharī‘ah. The role of Theology is to explain that part of the Revelation/Sharī‘ah which is related to the beliefs and convictions of people, while the role of Fiqh is to explain that part of the Revelation/Sharī‘ah that relates to the actions of the body limbs. The role of Taṣawwuf is then to explain that part of the Revelation/Sharī‘ah that relates to the state of the human heart and character, as the Ṣūfīs say. So, for example, there is the famous Ḥadīth about arrogance which says that no one who has even a mustard seed's amount of arrogance in their heart will enter Paradise. This Ḥadīth proves that the Sharī‘ah forbids people to have arrogance in their hearts, however, we do not generally find any mention of this Ḥadīth in the books of Theology or Law. It is discussed in the books of Taṣawwuf.⁴⁹ Thus, the fact that Taṣawwuf is an integral part of the corpus of classical Islamic sciences is undeniable.

⁴⁶ By explaining things related to the subtle “spiritual etiquettes” of the Ṣūfī way, some related to the Creator, some to the creation – to see what exactly do I mean see the chapter about the Shādhilī Order of this thesis. Furthermore, by explaining the traps and tricks of the Devil, or teaching the novice how to interact with and understand a variety of spiritual experiences etc. By sainthood I mean the Arabic term “*al-Wilāyah*”.

⁴⁷ As is evident for example in the quote from the *Iḥyā’* in this fatwa: SeekersGuidance. 2021. *Is Doubtful Contamination or a Small Amount of Contamination Excused?*. [online] Available at: <<https://seekersguidance.org/answers/hanafi-fiqh/is-doubtful-contamination-or-a-small-amount-of-contamination-excused/>> [Accessed 27 December 2021].

⁴⁸ Some explanation of these terms is offered for example in this lecture of Dr Said Foudah: أهل السنة | بتاريخ 17-2-2018 والجماعة شرح الطحاوية في أصول الدين 01 | الأستاذ سعيد فودة | بتاريخ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5O9SQq8JII&list=PL5LKI-Bd1p4TGmRBxYER2X9fz3Xi5pOHQ&index=1> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

⁴⁹ Yusuf, H., 2012. *Purification of the heart*: Sandala, p.110.

Some people refer to Sufism/Taşawwuf as Islamic mysticism⁵⁰ which is, I think, inaccurate and simplified and can be (and often is) misleading. What is known in the Western world as “mysticism”⁵¹ and what can be included under this term, is only a part of what can be understood under both terms Sufism and Taşawwuf, which I hope has been made clear in my above-mentioned explanations of these terms.

3.4 Historical categorization of Taşawwuf

The history of how Taşawwuf emerged and developed is very useful for this thesis. In this brief historical overview, I am using the categorization by Shaykh Ali Gomaa⁵² as the basis, and I will add some comments to it. There are three types⁵³ of Taşawwuf.

The first one is *al-Taşawwuf al-Salaḫī* or the Taşawwuf of the first three generations of Muslims. This type of Taşawwuf is characterised by what is known as *al-Zuhd*, or asceticism⁵⁴ and the typical representatives of this type/era of Taşawwuf are people like the four Imāms⁵⁵ or Ḥasan al-Başrī.

The second type of Taşawwuf is *al-Taşawwuf al-Sunnī*, or the Sunnī Taşawwuf or perhaps we could use my favourite word “classical” and call it “Classical Taşawwuf”. The typical representatives of this type/era/school of Taşawwuf are people like Imām al-Ghazzālī, Imām Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, Imām al-Qushayrī and their respective encyclopaedic

⁵⁰ En.wikipedia.org. 2021. *Sufism - Wikipedia*. [online] Available at: <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sufism>> [Accessed 21 December 2021].

⁵¹ Encyclopedia Britannica. 2021. *mysticism | Definition, History, Examples, & Facts*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/mysticism>> [Accessed 27 December 2021].

⁵² It can be found online for example here: *المدارس الثلاثة للتصوف | أ.د علي جمعة YouTube*. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=SFVuAK8cp38>> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

⁵³ There are also at the same time three historical periods in which those respective types of Taşawwuf emerged but did not necessarily become the dominant or the only type of Taşawwuf present.

⁵⁴ Check the *Qushayrīyyah* to see some useful definitions of this term or the video which I used as a quote for the explanation of these three types of Taşawwuf. An interesting and important note here is that al-Zuhd does not necessarily imply material poverty as it is generally understood in the Western world. The classical conception of asceticism in classical Sunnī scholastic tradition is that it is primarily a state of “the heart and mind”, it is an inner state, where the material means are “in our hands and not in our hearts”, and so we see people like Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, Imām Mālik or later Imām al-Shādhilī wearing beautiful clothes etc. This understanding of asceticism is very typical for the Shādhilī tradition.

⁵⁵ For example Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal wrote his famous work *Kitāb al-Zuhd*. In his *Dīwān* Imām al-Shāfi‘ī advises people to be both *Faqīh* and *Ṣūfī*, Imām Abū Ḥanīfah is part of the chains of transmissions of the earliest Ṣūfis, Imām Mālik said his famous words that whoever does not study/practice Taşawwuf while studying the Law is a sinner etc. For sources see the chapter on “The Integral Place of Taşawwuf in Islam” in the book “The Defense of the Sunnah: An Analysis of the Theory and Practices of Taşawwuf (Sufism)”, available online here: Hounslowmasjid.co.uk. 2021. [online] Available at: <https://hounslowmasjid.co.uk/assets/download/159_In%20the%20Defence%20of%20the%20Sunnah.pdf> [Accessed 27 December 2021].

works and methodologies and also people like Imām ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī⁵⁶ or Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī with their respective methodologies or ways. Imām ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, among many other Ṣūfī masters⁵⁷ of that era,⁵⁸ are the “founders” of what is now known as the Ṣūfī Ṭarīqas,⁵⁹ or orders.⁶⁰

The third and final type of Taṣawwuf is called *al-Taṣawwuf al-Falsafī*, or the philosophical Taṣawwuf and this type of Taṣawwuf is most typically represented by people like Ibn al-‘Arabī⁶¹ or Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qunawī and its typical characteristic is that it talks a lot about metaphysics etc. This last type of Taṣawwuf has never been the mainstream one as far as I can see and it has always been under attack from those who see in it some heterodoxy, however, there have also always been specialised ulema who studied and taught these books and that is the case up until today.⁶²

In conclusion, it seems that the Ṣūfī Ṭarīqas of the second type of Taṣawwuf have been the dominant form of Taṣawwuf in the Muslim world for the past many centuries, although the other types have never disappeared and could be and still can be found among some Muslims.⁶³

3.5 “Ghazalian” paradigm as a sign of orthodoxy

I wish to add a note regarding the “Gabrielian paradigm”. Although Professor Spevack has chosen to demonstrate its reality on Imām al-Bājūrī, which he does for identifiable and from

⁵⁶ I have also seen his name being spelled “al-Jaylānī”.

⁵⁷ Such as al-Rifā‘ī, al-Chishtī, al-Rūmī, Naqshband etc.

⁵⁸ Al-Jīlānī died 1166 CE and al-Shādhilī 1258 CE, while al-Ghazzālī died 1111 CE and al-Qushayrī and al-Makkī died even before al-Ghazzālī. I think that for sake of greater clarity of the matter, we could subcategorize the era of “classical Taṣawwuf” or *al-Taṣawwuf al-Sunnī* into two periods: The early, which would include the authors of the encyclopaedias of Taṣawwuf, and the late, which would include the “founders” of the classical Ṣūfī orders.

⁵⁹ The Arabic plural is *Ṭuruq*, the singular is *Ṭarīqah*.

⁶⁰ The word “Ṭarīqah” in Arabic means primarily “a path”, however in the context of Taṣawwuf it can also be translated/understood as “methodology” or “school” (similar to Madhhab...) or indeed as “an order” as well.

⁶¹ A deeper discussion about Ibn al-‘Arabī is included in the chapter about Imām al-Suyūfī.

⁶² Among the recent scholars who taught Ibn al-‘Arabī was for example the famous Damascene scholar and Ṣūfī, master of the Shādhilīyyah, teacher of Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi or Shaykh Nuh Keller, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Shāghūrī. One can listen to some of his recorded classes, where he teaches probably the most famous work of Ibn al-‘Arabī *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyyah*, here: [العارف يا الشاغوري-شرح الفتوحات المكية: YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?app=desktop&list=PLup4-Cr_ZFtHOv2c7smtZvH7LEiTm4B8). Available at: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?app=desktop&list=PLup4-Cr_ZFtHOv2c7smtZvH7LEiTm4B8 (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

⁶³ For example the great works of the authors of the encyclopaedias of Taṣawwuf, as I have mentioned previously, have never ceased to be studied among the ulema and their students. Likewise, I think that the Taṣawwuf of the first generations has never disappeared and there have always been Ṣūfīs who were ascetics (both inwardly and outwardly) and people of very intense worship and religious scrutiny etc. Even I myself have been fortunate to meet such people, especially among my teachers from Mauritania.

my perspective completely valid reasons⁶⁴, we do find even more iconic examples of this paradigm in the past. I would like to borrow here the terminology of Professor Spevack and slightly modify it and talk about the “Ghazalian“ paradigm. The reason behind that is the fact that Imām al-Ghazzālī is a truly iconic example of the “Gabrielian paradigm” and he is certainly also a much more famous and influential personality.

Imām al-Ghazzālī, who is known in the Sunnī tradition as *Hujjatu-l-Islām*,⁶⁵ or “the proof of Islām”, is certainly also a proof of the validity of the concept of Gabrielian paradigm and he is certainly a proof of all of the realities that were mentioned above in the quote of professor Spevack regarding the normativity of rational sciences⁶⁶ and Taṣawwuf and the “balanced interrelation of Law, Theology, and Sufism”. When we look at the works and life of Imām al-Ghazzālī, we see those realities all over us. He was among the most important and influential jurists of the Shāfi‘īyyah.⁶⁷ He was one of the most important and influential Ash‘arī theologians. He was one of the most important and influential Islamic logicians and scholars of juristic methodology.⁶⁸ And finally, he is probably the most famous or one of the most famous Ṣūfīs of all time. Just read or at least look at his famous opus magnum *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*. This work and its history are one of the main proofs of his “proofhood” and of all that I have written about Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy, Sufism and the Imām himself so far. The structure of the book, as ordered into four parts, is based on how classical jurisprudential manuals of Shāfi‘īyyah are ordered. The structure of the chapters shows how natural it was for him to order his words into logical categories, and give logical structure to his speech, even when he was talking about spirituality. The work was written during his famous, many years-long spiritual seclusion and journey that transformed him, and yet still the work is not at all something that people commonly imagine a Ṣūfī text to be (in terms of talking about love, spiritual or mystical experiences, asceticism etc.). Each chapter begins

⁶⁴ I believe he did so for the sake of continuing and enriching the discussion between past and present, modernity and tradition etc.

⁶⁵ It can be seen for example in the following class on the creed of Imām al-Taḥāwī which was taught by Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, who is an expert on the life and works of the at the Imām: *Episode 1 | the Islamic creed - according to Imam Tahawi's book YouTube*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=EhsrVqKigRk&list=PLgcTs9YAg99_h3Qe165hUG1yHkLRytGRt (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

⁶⁶ They are the Islamic peripatetic logic, the Islamic Jurisprudence (Uṣūl al-Fiqh), and the dialectical or speculative and rational Theology (‘Ilm al-Kalām).

⁶⁷ For example in the previously quoted video of Shaykh Ali Gomaa, the Shaykh explains the great importance of the works of Imām al-Ghazzālī in the Shāfi‘ī Madhhab.

⁶⁸ For example his famous books *Mi‘yār al-‘Ilm* and *al-Mustasfā* are clear proofs of professor Spevack's statement regarding the normativity of rational sciences.

with a set of quotes from the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth literature, statements of the important Sunnī figures from the first generations of Muslims and at the same time, after mentioning these transmitted texts, the Imām mentions the rational arguments or explanations related to what he has mentioned. The book does not contain only what we imagine or know Sufism to be, it also contains lots of Theology, Islamic Law (Fiqh) and a variety of other sciences are manifested in it and they flow through it, complete each other and create the complex reality of the “Ghazalian“ paradigm. And that is among the clear proofs of the statement about the “balanced interrelation of Law, Theology, and Sufism” being a typical characteristic of the classical (archetypal) Sunnī scholars.

And indeed when we study the lives of both pre-modern and contemporary classical scholars, we find this paradigm over and over again. I cannot think of any name of any famous and important orthodox Sunnī scholar, whose scholarly work would not follow this paradigm.

Aside from al-Ghazzālī, we can see many other prominent ulema of the Shāfi‘ī Madhhab as following the same scholarly paradigm. Typical examples would be people like ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, al-Nawawī,⁶⁹ or al-Suyūṭī. Just read some of their works or their biographies and lists of the works which they authored.⁷⁰

Even earlier than al-Ghazzālī we see the Gabrielian paradigm as being true for people like Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, who is a very important figure in the Mālikī Madhhab. His famous work *al-Risālah al-Qayrawānīyyah*⁷¹ is evident proof of the validity of the concept of the Gabrielian paradigm, as the first part is dedicated to Theology, the second part to Law, and the third part to Taṣawwuf. Another typical example of great and important Mālikī scholars who perfectly fit the Gabrielian paradigm would be people like Aḥmad al-Dardīr and his most famous student Ibrāhīm al-Dasūqī, whose works⁷² together form a spine of the late Mālikī Madhhab.

⁶⁹ Dr Nūr al-Dīn ‘Itr wrote a very nice and concise biography of al-Nawawī in his new edition of the following book: al-Nawawī, Y., 2019. *Irshād Ṭulāb al-Ḥaqāiq fī Ma‘rifat Sunan Khayr al-Khalāiq*. 1st ed. Dar al-Minhaj.

⁷⁰ For example read the Sublime Truths of the Shādhilī Path by al-Suyūṭī or the famous primer called “*al-Maqāṣid*” of al-Nawawī, which has been translated into English by Shaykh Nuh Keller. Likewise, I would recommend reading the *Wird*, or litany, of al-Nawawī. It is beyond any doubt that both of these scholars were Ash‘arīs, Shāfi‘īs and Ṣūfīs.

⁷¹ There is an English translation available here: Muwatta.com. 2021. [online] Available at: <http://www.muwatta.com/ebooks/english/risala_ibn_abi_zayd_salutations.pdf> [Accessed 30 December 2021].

⁷² Concretely the *Sharḥ al-Ṣaghīr* and *Sharḥ al-Kabīr* of Aḥmad al-Dardīr and the famous *Ḥāshiyah* (explanatory notes/commentary) of al-Dasūqī on the *Sharḥ al-Kabīr* of Aḥmad al-Dardīr.

Also in the Ḥanafī Madhhab, we find many examples of some of the most influential ulema of the school falling under the Gabrielian paradigm. Very iconic examples can be seen in Imām ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulūsī or Mulla ‘Alī al-Qārī.

Finally to mention an example of a scholar falling under the paradigm even from the Ḥanbalī Madhhab, let us mention ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī,⁷³ Ibn Quddāmah al-Maqdisī or Ibn al-Jawzī.

In reality, even the four Imāms themselves fall under the Gabrielian paradigm, as they also were theologians, and jurists, as is well-known, and they were adherents to the orthodox Taṣawwuf of the first generations of Muslims.

⁷³ It is well-known that he was a Ḥanbalī.

4 The Shādhilī Ṭarīqah

4.1 Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī and his life

The story of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah begins in the 13th. ct. CE. with a man who is known shortly as Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī or just al-Shādhilī. He was from the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad and was born and raised in today's Morocco. His appellation *al-Shādhilī* is derived from a town in Tunisia known as *Shādhila*, where – according to Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh al-Iskandarī⁷⁴ in his famous work *Kitāb Laṭā’if al-Minan fī Manāqib Abī al-‘Abbās al-Mursī wa Shaykhihi Abī al-Ḥasan*⁷⁵ – he first appeared as a teacher. His most famous and important teacher was ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh.⁷⁶ At the beginning of the chapter on his life in *Laṭā’if al-Minan* it is stated by Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh that before he went on to dedicate himself to the spiritual journey, he mastered some of the outward sciences⁷⁷ to a level where he could engage in scholarly discussions. He travelled extensively, going all over North Africa to the Middle East and Arabia where he went on his pilgrimage.

It was mentioned by Imām al-Sha‘rānī that he performed the Ḥajj several times. Al-Sha‘rānī further narrates that he also had enemies who attacked him and harmed him, labelled him as a heretic and even complained to the then Sultan of Egypt about him etc. However, the Moroccan ruler at the time sent a letter to the Sultan of Egypt in which he defended al-Shādhilī. Al-Sha‘rānī also narrated a story in which al-Shādhilī turned large amounts of lead into gold and had it sent to the Sultan. Later on, the Sultan met with al-Shādhilī and during the meeting, as al-Sha‘rānī says, the Sultan concealed his desire to learn alchemy from the Shaykh, however, the Shaykh read his thoughts, and told him that his alchemy is piety.⁷⁸ This point summarises a good part of the Shādhilī teachings, as shall be later elaborated on in this chapter.

⁷⁴ One of the main students of the main student of Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī.

⁷⁵ This work was, as far as I can tell, masterfully translated into the English language by Nancy Roberts as “The Subtle Blessings in the Saintly Lives of Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī & his master Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī”. This work is a must for anyone studying the history and reality of the Shādhilīyah in the English language. It is also a must for anyone interested in Sufism in general.

⁷⁶ His tomb in Morocco is a place visited by people from all over the world. I recommend having a look at the pictures of it, as I believe they convey some of the atmosphere of that place. And as they say “*al-Makānu bi al-Makān*” – “The place is by its inhabitant.”

⁷⁷ Like jurisprudence or sciences of classical Arabic etc.

⁷⁸ Al-Kūhin, M., 2016. *Tabaqat Al-Shādhilīyya Al-Kubra Biographies of Prominent Shādhilīs*. 1st ed. Visions of Reality Books, p.29., p.63

During his travels, he met many people and gained many students. He had many followers among the scholarly elite of the time, the most notable of them being the following famous scholars: ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, Ibn Daqīq al-‘Īd, al-Mundhirī, Ibn al-Ḥājj and Ibn Ṣalāh. He also met with many other famous individuals, for instance with Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qunawī. There are many stories about al-Shādhilī and his piety, bravery, people's veneration of him, his miracles etc. Indeed *Laṭā’if al-Minan* depicts al-Shādhilī as a “pole” or “axiom” (Quṭb), meaning the greatest and highest of saints in the given age.

He also fought in at least one battle – the famous battle of Mansurah. To mention at least one of the lengthier popular stories that are narrated about his life in the public space of today, there is a story I have read several times regarding the battle of Mansurah and the participation of al-Shādhilī in it. One narration of the story, which circulates in the “international, English-speaking Ṣūfī community” goes as follows: ‘Towards the end of his life Imam Abu al-Hassan al-Shadhili al-Hassani began to lose his eyesight but it didn’t prevent him from fighting in the front line of the battle of Mansurah when the crusader forces under King Louis IX of France invaded Egypt. On the day of the battle, Imam al-Shadhili mounted his horse and held one sword in his right hand and another in his left and rode into battle. When asked later, given his deteriorating eyesight, how could he have ridden into battle and so honourably acquitted himself on the battlefield, he simply pointed to his heart and said, “If the eye of the heart sees clearly, what is the need for my eyes.”’⁷⁹ The summary of the story is mentioned in the English Wikipedia article about al-Shādhilī.⁸⁰ The fact that he went to Mansurah and that he had already lost his eyesight at that time, was also mentioned by the Azharī scholar Munī‘ ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, the son of the late president of al-Azhar ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, in his work *Manāhij al-Mufasssirīn*.⁸¹ Regardless of whether the aforementioned story is true or not, the fact that al-Shādhilī was present at the military camp the night before the battle was narrated by Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh al-Iskandarī in *Laṭā’if al-Minan* in the chapter about al-Shādhilī's life. Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh narrates that al-Shādhilī was present with a group of scholars, among whom was the famous scholar ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām and that they were reading the famous work *al-Qushayrīyyah*. Some people might

⁷⁹ Facebook. Available at: <https://m.facebook.com/saqib.iqbalofficial/photos/a.10152552701617841/10156694450402841/?type=3> (Accessed: 25 May 2023).

⁸⁰ *Al-Shadhili* (2023) Wikipedia. Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Shadhili> (Accessed: 09 June 2023).

⁸¹ ص171 - كتاب مناهج المفسرين - تفسير الإمام أبو الحسن الشاذلي رضى الله عنه - المكتبة الشاملة كتاب مناهج المفسرين Available at: <https://shamela.ws/book/38093/160#p1> (Accessed: 24 June 2023).

wonder why they were reading such a work. Why work on spirituality before a battle? This has to do with the nowadays often forgotten aspect of Taṣawwuf which is its connection to Jihād⁸² and the spiritual aspect of even the armed fighting, which is present in the teachings of the Prophet.

As we know the Prophet prayed for his enemies and he did so even on the battlefield, during the battle of Uḥud after his face was harmed in battle.⁸³ Likewise, the Prophet was asked to supplicate against the disbelievers, whereupon he replied that he was not sent as a curse, but rather as a mercy.⁸⁴ As Shaykh Faraz Rabbani mentioned, among the reasons why there is so much information on fighting in the Sīrah literature,⁸⁵ in particular, is that it is in a war when the characters and conducts of people are most tested.⁸⁶ Then, as is well-known, the Muslims believe that by fighting in valid Jihād or by dying in it as martyrs, they shall attain great rewards from God, so essentially even the armed Jihād is a type of worship, as is the prayer, fasting, giving in charity, pilgrimage, etc.⁸⁷ Those realities were well-known to those scholars present that night before the battle of Mansurah. We should mention here that according to Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh in *Laṭā’if al-Minan*, al-Shādhilī was asked to speak after the speeches of other scholars that night, to which he replied by humility, and after being further urged to speak, he remained silent for an hour, after which he gave a magnificent speech, after which ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām left the tent and highly praised the words of al-Shādhilī.

⁸² As it is well-known from the famous Ḥadīth, there is greater and lesser Jihād. The lesser being the armed one, and the greater being the struggle against one's unchained desires, the satans etc. Adding to that, I really like the categorization of Jihād into the four categories, as presented by Ibn Rushd al-Jadd in his famous *Muqaddimah*: 1. Jihād of the heart, 2. Jihād of the tongue – which includes things like defending or teaching Islām etc. (There is the famous Ḥadīth which says that the greatest Jihād is to say a word of truth to an oppressive ruler.), 3. Jihād of the hand – which includes things like working to earn one's livelihood etc., 4. Jihād of the sword – which includes both the personal legitimate self-defence, as well as collective resistance in the case when the Muslim lands are invaded, as well as a war that is led by a valid Muslim government against a valid enemy, such as when Jordan fought against ISIS.

ص420 - كتاب صحيح ابن حبان التقاسيم والأنواع - ذكر ما يجب على المرء الدعاء كتاب صحيح ابن حبان: التقاسيم والأنواع ⁸³ Available at: <https://shamela.ws/book/537/7269> (Accessed: 24 June 2023).

ص2006 - كتاب صحيح مسلم ت عبد الباقي - باب النهي عن لعن الدواب وغيرها - المكتبة كتاب صحيح مسلم - ت عبد الباقي ⁸⁴ الشاملة. Available at: <https://shamela.ws/book/1727/6548> (Accessed: 24 June 2023).

⁸⁵ The prophetic biography

⁸⁶ He mentioned these points in this lecture: *On war & beheading how Isis manipulates Hadiths* Shaykh Faraz Rabbani (2016) *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8govcOcg9WY> (Accessed: 24 June 2023).

⁸⁷ We must not forget that some of the most famous Muslim warriors throughout history were followers of Classical Sunnī Islām and therefore also Ṣūfīs. Let's remember for example Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, Muḥammad al-Fāṭih and from more recent times for example ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jazāirī or Imām Shāmil.

Thus, we can easily summarise the life of the Shaykh as being full of study, worship, the spiritual, as well as physical, journeying and teaching. He did not write any books, however, as Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī once said: “My students are my books.” His students have narrated from him many of his sayings and litanies.⁸⁸ He was undoubtedly loved and greatly venerated by his followers and it remains to be so up until today. He and his teachings are the source, the spring of the Shādhilīyyah. Many great scholars all over the ages have expressed their respect for him and his way, many have considered him to be a saint. He is likewise, as is well-known, widely respected by the other Ṣūfī Ṭarīqas as well as Ṣūfīs who do not ascribe themselves to any specific Ṣūfī order. I was also quite surprised by how little negative criticism of him or his Ṭarīqah there is – except for a few Wahhābī websites. He passed away while on his way to Ḥajj, in the locality known as Ḥumaythirah, ‘Aydhāb desert, in southern Egypt by the Red Sea. His grave has since become a place that is being visited by many people from all over the world.

4.2 The genealogy of Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī

During my studies of the history of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah, I came across an interesting point, which is the genealogy of Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. I was surprised to find out that there are several different narrations of his genealogy. In this subchapter I shall mention and discuss some of them, as I do not want this part of my research to be wasted, and because it is a relevant discussion, which shows us the seriousness, scrupulousness and fair historiographical objectivity of the Muslim scholars who have studied the Shādhilī history. Likewise, I am going to mention here several important works and scholarly personalities which demonstrate the standing of Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī within classical Sunnī scholarship. Furthermore, I shall demonstrate here the fact that according to some prominent Muslim historians, Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī is also a descendant of the founder of Fes, which is a very important point, because it adds religious, spiritual, cultural and even

⁸⁸ Probably the most famous litany of his is the famous Litany of the Sea – Ḥizb al-Baḥr – on which the famous Mālikī scholar and master of the Shādhilīyyah Aḥmad Zarrūq wrote more than one commentary, one of which has been translated into English and is quoted in the bibliography of this work. It should be noted here that the litanies, as Aḥmad Zarrūq mentioned, are not just prayers and devotional texts, they are at the same time teaching texts – practically teaching one Theology, spirituality etc. The quoted commentary of Imām Aḥmad Zarrūq is a very nice example of how different Islamic sciences can all be employed in one place as in his commentary he expounds upon various theological, legal, spiritual as well as linguistic realities that are present in the litany, masterfully combining between them and thus, beautifully showing how Theology, Law and Taṣawwuf are interconnected and how to join between them in the spiritual practice.

political legitimacy, authority and prominence to the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah in Morocco as well as in the rest of the Muslim world.⁸⁹

His full name, as narrated by Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh al-Iskandarī in *Laṭā’if al-Minan*, goes as follows: Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Ibn ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbār Ibn Tamīm Ibn Hirmiz Ibn Ḥātim Ibn Quṣayy Ibn Yūsuf Ibn Yūsha‘ Ibn Ward Ibn Baṭṭāl Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn ‘Īsā Ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib.

A slightly different narration can be found in *Durrat al-Asrār wa Tuhfat al-Abrār* of Ibn al-Sabbagh. The difference is in the father of Ibn Baṭṭāl, whose father, according to al-Sabbagh, was Idrīs and not Aḥmad, as mentioned in *Laṭā’if al-Minan*, then the rest of the chain is the same.

Then there is a different narration in the English translation of the *Ṭabaqāt al-Shādhilīyyah al-Kubrā*. It goes like this: Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Shādhilī al-Ḥasanī b. ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Tamīm b. Hurmuz b. Ḥātim b. Quṣayy b. Yūsuf b. Yūsha‘ b. Wird b. Baṭṭāl b. ‘Alī b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā b. Idrīs b. ‘Abdullāh b. al-Ḥasan II. b. Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Abū Ṭālib.⁹⁰ This narration is the first out of several mentioned in this work, and this particular one has no source mentioned in the work, however, al-Kūhin says that this is “indeed the sound lineage of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī according to one view”. Then, a few pages later, he mentioned a second view, which as he reports, was taken from al-Shabalanjī’s work *Nūr al-Aḥsār fī Manāqib Āl Bayt al-Mukhtār*, where he said that Ibn ‘Ayyād reported al-Shādhilī’s lineage from the book *al-Laṭīfah al-Marḍīyyah fī Sharḥ Du‘ā al-Shādhilīyyah* by Sharaf al-Dīn Abū Sulaymān al-Iskandarī in the following way: Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Shādhilī b. ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Tamīm b. Hurmuz b. Ḥātim b. Quṣayy b. Yūsuf b. Yūsha‘ b. Wird b. Baṭṭāl b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Abū Ṭālib. This version has two significant differences from the first one mentioned by al-Kūhin – the first is that after Baṭṭāl one person is missing and then after ‘Īsā there is one name different and two people missing. What al-Kūhin mentions afterwards is that there was no offspring to any male child of al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib whose name was Muḥammad and that the only children of al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī

⁸⁹ Because Morocco, and Fes in particular, has been one of the leading centres of Islamic learning in the Muslim world.

⁹⁰ Al-Kūhin, M, 2016. *Ṭabaqat Al-Shādhilīyya Al-Kubra Biographies of Prominent Shādhilīs*. 1st ed. Visions of Reality Books, p.25.

b. Abī Ṭālib who did begot children were al-Ḥasan (II.)⁹¹ and Zayd al-Ablaj. After that, he mentions another option for the ending of the genealogical chain which goes as follows: Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan II. b. al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

Al-Kūhin then also mentions that the famous Muslim traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited al-Shādhilīs grave and that he also conveyed yet another variant of his genealogy. The work quotes his famous work *Travels*:⁹² “*Shaykh Yāqūt al-‘Arshī informed me from his own guide, Shaykh Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī that Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī would perform ḥajj every year... I visited his grave. It was topped by a dome on which his lineage back to al-Ḥusayn was engraved, thus, in accordance with a copy I have kept.*”⁹³ Therefore, as al-Kūhin points out, this lineage also differs from the aforementioned genealogies in his work (and also from the one in *Laṭāif al-Minan*).⁹⁴

However, then al-Kūhin mentioned yet another version of the genealogy, but this time with a critical review of the famous Moroccan Muslim scholar Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far al-Kattānī. The Kattānī family is a famous and influential scholarly family from Morocco, from the progeny of the famous founder of the city of Fes, Idrīs II. al-Azhar, which means that they are from the shurafā', the progeny of the Prophet Muḥammad.⁹⁵ For example, the son of Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far al-Kattānī, shaykh Muḥammad al-Makkī al-Kattānī⁹⁶ was among the early teachers of Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi.⁹⁷ The work of al-Kūhin quotes al-Kattānī's famous historiographical work *Salwah al-Anfās wa Muḥādathah al-Akyās bi*

⁹¹ Al-Kūhin mentions his short biography in his footnotes – He records that he was the treasurer of his grandfather's (‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib) charitable assets as well as an authorised agent of his father, the fifth khalīfah al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

⁹² The Arabic original is titled: *Tuḥfah al-Nuzzār fī Gharā'ib al-Amṣār wa ‘Ajā'ib al-Asfār*, which is commonly translated into English as *A Masterpiece to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travelling*. However, the work is commonly referred to in Arabic as *al-Riḥlah* and in English it is referred to shortly as *Travels*.

⁹³ Al-Kūhin, M., 2016. *Tabaqat Al-Shādhilīyya Al-Kubra Biographies of Prominent Shādhilīs*. 1st ed. Visions of Reality Books, p.73.

⁹⁴ It seems to me that this narration does not have much strength to it.

⁹⁵ The article at wikipedia gives a little glance into their heritage: *Muhammad ibn Ja'far al-Kattani* (2023) *Wikipedia*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muhammad_ibn_Ja%27far_al-Kattani (Accessed: 04 June 2023).

⁹⁶ There is a beautiful story which is famous among the scholars of Damascus and it shows the fame of Shaykh Muḥammad al-Makkī al-Kattānī in Damascus. It can be heard here: قصة من عجائب بركات المولد الشريف السيد سجادة الكتاني مكي *YouTube*. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=kkSegHHGJFQ&pp=ygUt2KfZhNi02YrYriDZhdit2YXYryDYp9mE2YXZg9mKINin2YTZg9iq2KfZhtmK> (Accessed: 07 June 2023).

⁹⁷ As testified to by this video where Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi recites his isnāds of the famous Ḥadīth of mercy, or *Ḥadīth al-Raḥmah: Isnad hadith al-Rahma | Sh. Muhammad al-Yaqoubi* (2012) *YouTube*. Available at: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=DK9q4S_3XtU&pp=ygUnU2hheWtoIE11aGFtbWFKIGFsLVlhcW91Ymkg aGFkaXRoiHJhaG1h (Accessed: 05 June 2023).

man Uqbira min al-‘Ulamā’ wa al-Ṣulahā’ bi Fās,⁹⁸ where al-Kattānī included a biography, which contains a review of the genealogy of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. It is the third biography of this work after the introductions, the two preceding biographies are those of the son⁹⁹ of the founder of Fes and that of his father, Idrīs II. al-Azhar. This shows the prominence of al-Shādhilī among classical Sunnī scholars of Morocco.¹⁰⁰ What Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far al-Kattānī mentions is that al-Shādhilī was in reality a descendant of ‘Umar ibn Idrīs II. al-Azhar and that this *taḥqīq*, or scholarly review, comes, according to al-Kattānī, from three different sources: Ustādh al-Qaṣṣār, Imām al-Aqṣarā’ī and before them from the grandson of al-Shādhilī – Taqī al-Dīn Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad al-Iskandarī who mentioned it in his work *Nubdhah al-Mukhtaṣar al-Mufīdah*. Al-Kattānī says that the narration in *Laṭā’if al-Minan* is flawed as it traces the lineage through Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, which, he says, cannot be true, because according to Ibn Ḥazm, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib had no male heirs. He then says that the confirmed and authentic lineage is: “Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Tamīm b. Hurmuz b. Ḥātīm b. Quṣayy b. Yūsuf – though some say Thaqīf instead of Yūsuf – b. Yūsha‘ b. Wird b. ‘Alī, whose patronymic was Abū Ṭālib – though Baṭṭāl is also mentioned in lieu of ‘Alī – b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā – whose patronymic was Abū al-‘Aysh – b. Yaḥyā b. Idrīs III. b. ‘Umar al-Makhḥādī – as a noun of ascription to his place of residence by the ford in the outskirts of Tangiers – b. Idrīs II. b. Idrīs I.¹⁰¹ b. ‘Abd al-Kāmil b. al-Ḥasan II. b. al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Abū Ṭālib.”¹⁰²

⁹⁸ There is a revised and beautiful version of this work with a very useful modern academic introduction by doctor Muḥammad Ḥamzah ibn Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Kattānī, which is available online. The work itself is an imposing compendium of biographies of hundreds of famous scholars, saints, rulers and pious who lived in the Moroccan city of Fes. It is a very resourceful work for anyone who studies classical Sunnī scholarship, classical Sunnī Theology, Law or Sufism, Moroccan and classical Arab history and genealogy, Arabic language and poetry or even just Moroccan culture. There are also three very interesting introductions in this work – it is a common thing in works of classical ulema to have numerous introductions – that deal among other things with some of the legal questions pertaining to the practice of visiting graves of the pious in Islām, as well as the concept of *tabarruk* etc. A little personal note here – I myself accidentally came across the shrine of Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far ibn Idrīs al-Kattānī while visiting the city of Fes.

⁹⁹ Namely ‘Umar ibn Idrīs II.

¹⁰⁰ What might be interesting to add here is that al-Kattānī wrote a short biography of the main spiritual master of al-Shādhilī, namely ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh, at the beginning of his introduction, meaning even before writing about Idrīs II. al-Azhar or al-Shādhilī. I am inclined to think that these subtleties are also not random and that they do carry certain meanings – however I will abstain from any specific speculations.

¹⁰¹ A very nice genealogy tree of Idrīs I., which confirms the mentioned genealogy by al-Kattānī can be seen here: *Idris I of Morocco Wikipedia*. Available at: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idris_I_of_Morocco (Accessed: 26 June 2023).

¹⁰² Al-Kūhin, M., 2016. *Tabaqat Al-Shādhilīyya Al-Kubra Biographies of Prominent Shādhilīs*. 1st ed. Visions of Reality Books, p.75.

I am not able to reconcile these different narrations for a lack of sources and knowledge of classical Arab genealogy.¹⁰³ But it might be an interesting quest for somebody who has the needed knowledge and sources. However, based on the evidence I can see, I see the most credibility in the two following narrations. First is the narration in *Laṭā'if al-Minan*, as it is one of the earliest if not the earliest source about al-Shādhilī's life which we have and the deep, firsthand and very close and intense intellectual and spiritual connection which Ibn 'Aṭāillāh had with his teachers, I think, gives to his words regarding his beloved teachers a lot of credibility – especially when we realise the fact that he himself was a scholar of the outward sciences before he went on to the spiritual journey.¹⁰⁴ The second narration is the narration given by the grandson of al-Shādhilī as narrated by Muḥammad ibn Ja'far al-Kattānī in *Salwah al-Anfās* – and I am inclined to think that this one will be the correct one. The taḥqīq, which was mentioned by al-Kattānī, seems to my unlearned eye to be quite strong and verifiable. However, as I said, I am unable to pass a definitive judgement on this matter and thus, I leave this question open and hope that in the future I will be able to find out the truth about this matter, or maybe I will conclude that there are different narrations and opinions, and that complete certainty is not reachable in this matter.

4.3 History of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah

As already mentioned, Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī travelled widely and had many followers, and many students and those students then had their students and they had their students and so on. Thus the Ṭarīqah has been spread all over the Muslim world. Some of these chains of masters and their students (who themselves became masters and took their students and so on) continue up until today, while other chains might have died out. To trace all of them down is a quest absolutely beyond the limits of this work. Therefore, we will have to suffice by mentioning one such chain only, just to give an actual real and living example. Thus, for illustration, here follows the chain (*silsilah*)¹⁰⁵ of my teacher Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi: “Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi – Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Yaqoubi – Shaykh Ismā'īl al-Yaqoubi – Shaykh Muḥammad al-Mubārak – Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib – Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd – Shaykh Muḥammad bin Ḥamza Zāfir – Shaykh

¹⁰³ I think it might be of interest to some that there is an entire science of genealogy in the corpus of classical Islamic sciences, it is commonly known as *ʿIlm al-Ansāb*.

¹⁰⁴ That is also why my narration of his life relies mostly on the *Laṭā'if* of Ibn 'Aṭāillāh al-Iskandarī.

¹⁰⁵ Taken from private teaching materials that are available to the English-speaking novices of the Shaykh.

al-‘Arabī al-Dirqāwī – Shaykh ‘Alī al-Ḥasanī – Shaykh al-‘Arabī ibn Aḥmad – Shaykh Aḥmad ibn ‘Abdillāh – Shaykh Qāsim al-Khaṣṣāsī – Shaykh Muḥammad bin ‘Abdillāh – Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Ārifī – Shaykh Yūsuf al-Fāsī – Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Majdhūb – Shaykh ‘Alī as-Ṣanhājī – Shaykh Ibrāhīm Fahhām – Shaykh Aḥmad Zarrūq al-Fāsī – Shaykh Aḥmad ibn ‘Uqbah – Shaykh Yaḥyā al-Qādirī – Shaykh ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad Wafā – Shaykh Muḥammad Wafā – Shaykh Dāwūd al-Bākhilī – Shaykh Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh al-Iskandarī – Shaykh Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī – Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī – Shaykh ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh – Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Madanī – Shaykh Tuqayy al-Dīn al-Fuqayyar – Shaykh Fakhr al-Dīn – Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī – Shaykh Muḥammad Tāj al-Dīn – Shaykh Shams al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad – Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī – Shaykh Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm – Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim al-Marwānī – Shaykh Abū Muḥammad Sa‘īd – Shaykh Sa‘ad – Shaykh Abū Muḥammad Fatḥ al-Sa‘ūd – Shaykh al-Ghazwāni – Shaykh Abū Muḥammad Jābir ibn ‘Abdillāh – Imām al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī – Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib – The Prophet Muḥammad”¹⁰⁶

There is an innumerable amount of such chains within all of the Ṣūfī Ṭarīqas, however, let's mention that another such chain in the English language (with a much better design than mine) may be seen in the book about Shaykh al-‘Alawī by Martin Lings.¹⁰⁷

It is important to mention the fact that some of the later students of the later generations of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah became themselves very influential and prominent and developed their own teaching methods and wrote very influential texts etc.¹⁰⁸ based on the situation they found themselves in.¹⁰⁹ In a sense, they developed their own Ṭarīqas or branches of the original one. As Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Īsā used to say: “The reality of the

¹⁰⁶ This *silsilah* (chain) is quite long and I once heard Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi mentioning that there is a difference between *isnād* and *silsilah* in that shorter *isnād* is generally speaking better than a long one, while a long *silsilah* is better than a short one, as more people in the *silsilah* mean more blessings.

¹⁰⁷ Parts of the chain of Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi are the same as the one mentioned by M. Lings. The *silsilah* mentioned by M. Lings is very useful as it shows the various branches (like when one master has numerous major students) and not only one line: Lings, M. and al-‘Alawī, A. (2012) *A Sufi saint of the twentieth century: Shaikh Ahmad al-‘Alawī: His Spiritual Heritage and legacy*. Cambridge: Islamic texts Society. p. 231

¹⁰⁸ Thus we can see that the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah has many branches throughout the centuries up until today and I shall mention just some of the most famous ones, as to mention all of them would be beyond the limits of this work as well as beyond what my limited sources allow me to research. Likewise, I will mention just some of the scholars of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah and generally just briefly and without getting deeper into their biographies etc. as that would again be beyond the scope of this thesis.

¹⁰⁹ What I mean here is that we can see different aspects of the Shādhilī teachings being emphasised by different Shādhilī masters at different times and places. We can see that even today in different branches of the Shādhilīyyah. They still share some foundational characteristics, however they sometimes differ in the point of emphasis and they may also differ in some particulars.

order depends on its master.”¹¹⁰ Thus, we can see the names of such Ṭarīqas being composed of several names, such as Ṭarīqa Shādhilīyyah–Jazūlīyyah¹¹¹ or Ṭarīqah Shādhilīyyah–Darqāwīyyah–Hāshimīyyah.¹¹² We could mention many such names.

However, in today's age, we can see various people belonging to the same nominal Ṭarīqa, ascribing themselves and following the teachings of the same major masters of the past, and yet following a different living master at the time. For example, the famous American scholar and Ṣūfī Shaykh Nuh Ha Mim Keller¹¹³ took his path from the famous Syrian scholar, Ṣūfī master and poet Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Shāghūrī, who took the path from Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hāshimī al-Tilimsānī. At the same time, for example, my teacher Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn took his path from the famous Syrian scholar and Ṣūfī master Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Īsā who also took the path from Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hāshimī al-Tilimsānī.¹¹⁴ So we can see that both Shaykh Nuh Ha Mim Keller and Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn are followers of the Ṭarīqah Shādhilīyyah–Darqāwīyyah–Hāshimīyyah, even though they had different teachers.¹¹⁵

Another case is when there is a master who took from several masters but bases his path officially on one of those masters only – such an example may be Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, who, although a student of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Shāghūrī, bases his order on the silsilah which was already mentioned and which does not include Shaykh al-Shāghūrī

¹¹⁰ As mentioned by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn in this lecture: قصتي مع شيخنا العارف با عبد القادر عيسى رضي الله عنه / YouTube. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=V25ESjTk0ic&list=PLUr-yKsZUjhxUzDes5Ud7Q2hanQ2bgT&index=11> (Accessed: 26 June 2023).

¹¹¹ Jazūlīyyah – attributed to Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Jazūlī, the author of *Dalāil al-Khayrāt*.

¹¹² Darqāwīyyah – attributed to Shaykh Muḥammad al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī. Hāshimīyyah – attributed to Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hāshimī al-Tilimsānī, the student of Shaykh Aḥmad al-‘Alawī.

¹¹³ Shaykh Nuh Keller translated at least two important classical works into English, he also wrote several books on Islām and Sufism and recently his translation of the Qur’ān has been published – it is called *The Quran Beheld*. One of the most notable students of Shaykh Nuh Keller is Shaykh Faraz Rabbani, the founder of *Seekersguidance.org* – which I believe to be the best platform for online learning of classical Sunnī Islām and the scope and quality of this project are quite impressive.

¹¹⁴ It is worth noting here that also Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Yaqoubi took the path from Shaykh al-Tilimsānī. Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Yaqoubi however took the Shādhilī Path also from at least one other master.

¹¹⁵ As I have already mentioned, this obvious fact that the masters have numerous students, who then sometimes also become masters and initiate new students, is something that has been present literally from the beginning of Islām. And this paradigm of how ideas or beliefs or practices spread and develop over time is something obvious and universal in human history. For example in the case of succession within the early Shādhilīyyah most chains from Shaykh Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī go through Shaykh Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh al-Iskandarī, however, some of the *silsilas* have there Shaykh Yāqut al-‘Arsh al-Ḥabashī, the freed slave and son in law of Shaykh Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī, instead of Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh. There is fascinating article written on this topic by Dr Hellyer: Hellyer, S.Dr.H.A. (2022) *Shaykh Yaqut al-‘arsh al-Habashi: A successor of Shaykh Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi, SeekersGuidance*. Available at: <https://seekersguidance.org/articles/al-qutb-sidi-shaykh-abu-al-durr-yaqut-b-abdullah-al-arsh-al-habashi-shaykh-of-the-shadhuliyya/> (Accessed: 27 June 2023).

and Shaykh al-Hāshimī and Shaykh al-‘Alawī,¹¹⁶ but goes back to Shaykh al-Darqāwī through Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Yaqoubi and Shaykh Ismā‘īl al-Yaqoubi and so on.¹¹⁷

An example of another branch is the Ṭarīqah Shādhilīyyah–Darqāwīyyah–Ṣiddīqīyyah of Shaykh Ali Gomaa. As is known Shaykh Ali Gomaa took the path from his teacher, the famous Moroccan scholar Shaykh ‘Abdullah ibn al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī.¹¹⁸

We should also say that all of these masters refer to their orders generally simply as “Ṭarīqah Shādhilīyyah” as that is the foundation and the main source of their paths. At the same time, in the more extended naming of their orders, they all mention the *Darqāwīyyah* and that is because of, as far as I understand, the prominence of Shaykh Muḥammad al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī,¹¹⁹ who is known to have done a *tajdīd* or renewal of the order and thus he became a sort of milestone in the history of the Shādhilīyyah.¹²⁰ His role is then similar to the role of Imām al-Shādhilī himself, in that he also became a milestone in the history of the Ṣūfīs as did before him Imām ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī.

4.4 Differences between Ṣūfī orders

Another important fact is that often some of the truly well-known and scholarly figures possess an *ijāzah*¹²¹ in several Ṣūfī orders, and so they may be authorised for example in the

¹¹⁶ It is however necessary to note here that the Shaykh has certainly been influenced and benefitted from the legacy of these scholars. Also it may be interesting to note here that Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi met with and took the path also directly from a student of Shaykh al-‘Alawī, namely Shaykh ‘Alī al-Budilmī, as he mentioned in this very useful interview about Shaykh al-‘Alawī: *Shaykh Ahmad al-Alawi* - الشيخ أحمد بن مصطفى العلوي المستغاني *YouTube*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJkh_I-gC8 (Accessed: 03 July 2023).

¹¹⁷ They are the father and grandfather of Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi. The family traces their lineage back to the founder of Fes Idrīs II. al-Azhar. Shaykh Ibrāhīm was a famous scholar in Syria, was a muftī in both Mālikī and Ḥanafī schools and an Imām of the Umawī mosque in Damascus and a prolific poet. (I myself won one competition of reciting Arabic poetry, reciting a poem of Shaykh Ibrāhīm, in which he praised Ḥassān al-Thābit.) A useful Moroccan documentary in Arabic is available about him and his life: الشيخ إبراهيم اليعقوبي الحسني الإدريسي رحمه الله *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=aAf1FfiQmZk> (Accessed: 27 June 2023).

¹¹⁸ As explained by Shaykh Ali Gomaa in this video: معنى اسم الطريقة الصديقية الشاذلية و سند فضيلة الشيخ علي جمعة *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ja8ttJ47dK0> (Accessed: 26 June 2023).

¹¹⁹ His letters were translated into English and are available: Darqawi, M. al-A. ibn A. (2005) *The darqawi way: Letters from the Shaykh to the Fuqara*, Amazon. Available at: <https://www.amazon.com/Darqawi-Way-Letters-Shaykh/dp/0906512069> (Accessed: 27 June 2023).

¹²⁰ As explained by Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi in this video from a series about Shaykh Muḥammad al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī, at the newly established Moroccan Ṣūfī educational channel: الحلقة الاولى - برنامج الرحلة الى الله *YouTube*. Available at: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=vflnAtoZngs&list=PLRETqqNqa6GgUmMMcWwO8baaYE_EpwWIR&index=2&pp=iAQB (Accessed: 26 June 2023).

¹²¹ *Ijāzah* basically means an authorization. In all of the Islamic sciences, the *ijāzah* may be of various types. There are some *ijāzas* that are very weighty – an example may be if someone was given an *ijāzah* by a prominent authority in many sciences, who would testify that the individual personally studied with them such

Shādhilī Ṭarīqah as well as the Qādirī Ṭarīqah or the Rifā‘ī Ṭarīqah or the Naqshbandī Ṭarīqah etc. at the same time. These authorizations may sometimes be given to them just for *barakah*,¹²² even though they did not go through any real training and deeper study of the other order and its texts, while sometimes it may be given to them because they have indeed studied the other order deeply, or even undergone some training in it, or accompanied some masters or senior members of the other order, and thus this authorization may be a real one, where they can now accept novices into this other order and give them directions based on it. But generally, as far as I have seen, most masters, even if they do possess real authorizations in other orders, spread and take or initiate novices into one of the orders only, the one they follow “the most”.

As for the differences between the orders, especially the ones led by knowledgeable orthodox individuals, they have rather small differences between them. We may call them “formal” or “methodological” differences, but the essence or substance is very much the same. For example, even though a Naqshandī Shaykh from Iran, who teaches *Masnāwī* in Fārsī and initiates novices into the silent dhikr of the heart of the Naqshbandīyyah, will use these methods that differ from say a Shādhilī Shaykh from al-Azhar, who instead of *Masnāwī* teaches the *Hikam of Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh* in classical Arabic, and instead of silent dhikr of the heart gives the novice a dhikr he shall recite aloud, in the end, these varying teaching methods and practices have commonalities and ultimately they have the same goals of making the novice's character free of its blemishes and his heart and mind reliant on God, humbled before God, thankful to God, sincerely turned towards God and ultimately loving God.

Likewise, there are certain classical Ṣūfī works that are more or less studied and relied upon by many (if not all) of the orthodox Ṭarīqas.¹²³ An interesting contemporary example is Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Ihsā‘ī, whom I know from his students as a Shaykh of the Qādirīyyah, and yet then I learned that he considered Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Īsā, a prominent

and such works and that they thereby authorise them to teach these works. But then there are general ijāzas, which are generally given without much effort on the side of the student, and they are given for *barakah* and as an encouragement for the student to go and work hard.

¹²² *Barakah* is a big word in classical Arabic and can mean various things, however the best translation to English is “blessings”. The word is used a lot in Ṣūfī discourses. It basically means “an increase in goodness”. As my dear teacher Shaykh Aḥmad al-Fāḍil explained to me, it is “A secret of God which God places into times, places, people and things and makes from a little a lot.” Thus we see some people, even though their lives were short, they created lots of things with a lasting and large impact – an example may be someone like Imām al-Nawawī or Imām al-Ghazzālī.

¹²³ Such as the early Ṣūfī works like *al-Qushayrīyyah* or the Ṣūfī works of Imām al-Ghazzālī like the *Iḥyā’* or *Ayyuhā al-Walad*.

Shādhilī figure, to be his Shaykh, and one of his last wishes was to be buried next to him.¹²⁴ Likewise, I sent one friend of mine to Shaykh al-Ihsā'ī to seek his help, which he got, and one of the things that the Shaykh prescribed for him, was to recite *Ḥizb al-Baḥr*, which is a Shādhilī litany.¹²⁵

4.5 Famous Shādhilī works

Some of the famous Shādhilī works are also widely studied and used outside of the Ṭarīqah itself and are often used by other Ṣūfī Ṭarīqas or even by Ṣūfīs who do not nominally belong to any Ṣūfī order.¹²⁶ Such works include the following: *Ḥizb al-Baḥr*, *al-Ḥikam al-‘Aṭāyyah*, *Dalāil al-Khayrāt* and *Qaṣīdah al-Burdah*.

The *Ḥikam* are an essential and central teaching text of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah. In the English language, the *Ḥikam* are referred to as aphorisms or wisdoms. There is at least one translation into English. The work contains 264 aphorisms, wisdoms or maxims which deal with the spiritual path, metaphysical principles and so forth. Many commentaries were written on this work – among the classical ones are several written by Imām Aḥmad Zarrūq, another by Imām al-Rundī (this commentary was translated into English), by Imām Ibn ‘Ajībah or recently by Shaykh Ramadan al-Bouti. Nowadays many explanations of this work are available online in the form of recorded lectures of various scholars from around the world – I know of at least three famous Azharī scholars whose lectures on the *Ḥikam* are available online.¹²⁷ This work is sometimes also attacked by the adherents to Salafism/Wahhābism for containing things that they deem to be of various types and levels of falsehood.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ I visited their grave in Istanbul, they are indeed buried next to each other. Their graves are in a beautiful cemetery which can be found by the grave of the companion of the Prophet, Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, the locality is known as Eyyup Sultan.

¹²⁵ The friend gave me a little booklet which was given to him and produced by the Shaykh. It contained a number of litanies, among them *Ḥizb al-Baḥr* and *Ḥizb* of Imām al-Nawawī.

¹²⁶ An example of such a person is Shaykh Hamza Yusuḥ, who although studied with many famous Ṣūfī scholars, including Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, never nominally entered any Ṭarīqah, as far as I know. However, his book *Purification of the Heart* contains translations from works of Imām Aḥmad Zarrūq and he also produced a CD set named Path to God, which is a recorded series of lectures where he teaches the work of Imām Aḥmad Zarrūq *Kitāb al-I‘ānah* or *The Book of Assistance*. He was given an authorization to teach this work from Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, after studying the work with him.

¹²⁷ For example see this playlist: شرح الحكم العطائية بمسجد السلطان حسن - د. محمد مهنا *YouTube*. Available at: <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqHNppJ4B0Z3d6U5Ii88GWmYO2iooieB> (Accessed: 01 July 2023).

¹²⁸ لماذا يحذر الشخص من كتاب الحكم العطائية ؟ الشيخ مصطفى العدوي *YouTube*. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=BwdLq4niePM&pp=ygUo2KfZhNit2YPZhSDYp9mE2LnYt9in2KbZitipINin2YTYrtmF2YrYsw%3D%3D> (Accessed: 01 July 2023).

Dalāil al-Khayrāt is a very famous work, a prayer book of various forms of salutations and sending of blessings upon the Prophet Muḥammad. It is divided into seven parts, such that one can read a part every day of the week. It is a devotional book that is read as a form of worship, as a form of drawing closer to God and the Prophet. It is said to increase the reciter's love and connection with the Prophet Muḥammad. There are different variants of this book with various extensions written by later scholars as well as by ordinary people. There are thousands of editions. It often includes introductions which mention some of the benefits of the practice of sending salutations and blessings upon the Prophet, as well as instructions as to how to recite the book etc. It also includes some verses of the Qur'ān, Prophetic invocations, the 99 Names of God, a collection of names of the Prophet etc. The Ottomans established a special position known as “*Shaykh al-Dalāil*” in every major city. So there was an official gathering of recitation of this work in every major city in the Empire – including the holy sanctuaries of Madinah and Makkah. It was translated into English at the very least twice – the second translation, which has now come out, is by Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, who also (during the Covid times) wrote a work of about 8000 pages about the isnāds of *Dalāil al-Khayrāt* in Arabic.¹²⁹ These days¹³⁰ Shaykh al-Yaqoubi travels around the UK on a tour, presenting his translation and teaching the work.¹³¹ The Shaykh wrote another work of about 700 pages about the *Dalāil* itself.¹³² He devoted so much time to this work, for as he mentioned yesterday¹³³ at one of his gatherings in the UK, the Ummah has not devoted so much attention to any other book after the Qur'ān. Furthermore, he mentioned that there are about 100 commentaries written on the *Dalāil*.¹³⁴ The Shaykh also stressed the fact that *Dalāil al-Khayrāt* is a teaching text, practically

¹²⁹ The work is called *Mafātīḥ al-Barakāt fī Asānīd Dalāil al-Khayrāt*.

¹³⁰ Beginning of July 2023.

¹³¹ I myself have been fortunate to see some of these gatherings and the Shaykh's lectures online – some of what I have mentioned here so far comes from these lectures of his, which however are not yet online and maybe won't be – they were live streamed. But hopefully they will come out and they would then be most likely available at the official Youtube channel of Shaykh al-Yaqoubi.

¹³² Based on what the Shaykh has presented, I am completely convinced that no one has ever done as deep and as extensive research of this work as him. Regretfully right now I am unaware of the name of this work.

¹³³ 4th July 2023

¹³⁴ And some recorded lectures explaining this book are now also available online, for example there is this playlist of explanation of this book by Shaykh Yosri Gabr from al-Azhar: شرح كتاب دلالات الخيرات - المجلس | الأول | أ.د. يسري جبر *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHxA--ukckU&list=PLEkQk5xrP-tlAzcbIpuqjdFICW-knvTIR> (Accessed: 01 July 2023).

teaching the reciter some Theology, *Shamā'il*,¹³⁵ Law, Taṣawwuf, Arabic etc. There is also one whole website dedicated to *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* and it is quite useful.¹³⁶ The work is often attacked by adherents to Salafism/Wahhābism for containing things that they deem to be *shirk*, *bid'ah* etc.¹³⁷ However, those attacks are then generally, or as in my experience always, noticed by the proponents of the attacked work, and they produce further re-refutations.¹³⁸

It seems to me that *Qaṣīdah al-Burdah* of al-Būṣīrī¹³⁹ is probably the most influential of the above-mentioned Shādhilī works – although *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* might be on the same level or maybe even more influential as it is certainly even more widespread than the *Burdah*. The poem is said to be the most widely memorised poem in the world. It is recited in many different styles, many of which are available to be seen online.¹⁴⁰ It has been translated into English a few times, I have read the translations of Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad, which is available in a beautiful hardcover version done in Turkey, and that of Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, who has also created a documentary¹⁴¹ about this poem and his translation is available in a CD set which contains a beautiful Moroccan rendition of this work.¹⁴² The poem is divided into ten parts, celebrating the Prophet Muḥammad, his being, his birth and life, his character, his Jihād, his miracles, the Qur'ān, and it also has a section on some basics of Taṣawwuf. It

¹³⁵ A science of the Prophetic characteristics – both inward and outward. What is studied in this science is how the Prophet looked, how he behaved in a variety of situations with a variety of people, how he used to walk, eat, smile, talk etc.

¹³⁶ *Dala'il al Khayrat Monday Dalail Al Khayrat - Part 1*. Available at: <https://www.dalailalkhayrat.com/parts.php?part=1> (Accessed: 01 July 2023).

¹³⁷ For example this person, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Dimashqīyyah, is very active in recording huge amounts of refutations of a variety of things and people – and he then often is refuted back by them or by others, to which he then sometimes answers with further refutations etc. Recently he even did takfīr of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn. These “religious youtube wars” of today are quite fascinating phenomena which deserve further academic study. To see Dimashqīyyah's attack on *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*, see the following video of his: دلائل الخيرات أم الأعيب الساحرات - إبحروا هذا الكتاب *YouTube*. Available at: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=UEiAGuPGtPw&pp=ygUm2K_ZhNin2KbZhCDYp9mE2K7Zitix2KfyqiDYp9mE2LnYr9ml2Yo%3D (Accessed: 01 July 2023).

¹³⁸ For example here is a direct response of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn to the video quoted in the previous footnote: رد على أحد مرتزقة الوهابية - دلائل الخيرات أم الأعيب الساحرات *YouTube*. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=LC51SFpLu7I> (Accessed: 01 July 2023).

¹³⁹ The original name of the poem is *al-Kawākib al-Dhurrīyyah fī Madḥ Khayr al-Barīyyah* – Which may be translated as “*The Celestial Lights in the Praise of the Best of Creation*”.

¹⁴⁰ There is a website dedicated to this work as well and it is also quite useful: *Qasida Al Burda*. Available at: <https://www.qasidaburda.com/> (Accessed: 01 July 2023).

¹⁴¹ *Introducing the burda of al-Busiri* (2006) *YouTube*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_dOTPWN2-s (Accessed: 01 July 2023).

¹⁴² It is interesting to see for example the difference between the Syrian and Moroccan recitation styles of this poem. I remember that when I heard one of my teachers from Mauritania, a student of Shaykh Murābit al-Ḥājj, reciting the work by the grave of Ḥamzah, the uncle of the Prophet, in Madinah, the African roots of his recitation were indeed touching and beautiful.

seems to me that we can say that from a certain perspective, it is not just a devotional poem, but it may be seen also as a teaching text or a text that contains some theological information. Like in the case of *Dalāil al-Khayrāt*, also this work is being attacked by the adherents to Wahhābsm/Salafism for containing things that they see as *shirk*.¹⁴³ At the same time, many *shurūḥ*, or scholarly commentaries, were written on this work by many famous classical scholars, such as al-Zarkashī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, al-Ḥaytamī, al-Qaṣṭalānī, Zakarīyā al-Anṣārī and others.¹⁴⁴ Some people like Muḥammad al-Dido are coming up with new explanations of some of the criticised parts of this work, contradicting the classical commentaries, and trying to reconcile between the poem and the Salafī/Wahhābī criticism.¹⁴⁵ This work and what happens in the scholarly discussions around it certainly deserve much more academic attention. As Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad, or Dr Timothy Winter, mentioned in the above-mentioned documentary, there is a whole field of study known as “Burdah Studies”.

4.6 The spread and importance of the *Shādhilī Ṭarīqah*

Based on my research, I would say that the Ṭarīqah, with all of its branches, is most widespread in Morocco, then the rest of North Africa, and it gained special prominence among the scholarly elites in Egypt – many famous Azharī scholars were, and still are, Shādhilīs. Then, the Ṭarīqah is also found in Arabia, the Levant as well as Turkey and in the Far East like in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Singapore. The Ṭarīqah has millions of followers worldwide.¹⁴⁶ Especially today, with the age of globalisation and the internet, we are not exaggerating if we say that the order has spread all over the world. Nowadays we are

¹⁴³ ما حكم قراءة قصيدة البردة للإمام البوصيري؟ #فتاوى الفوزان *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=TSeuPBX5vpQ> (Accessed: 01 July 2023).

¹⁴⁴ البوصيري البردة قصيدة *Wikipedia*. Available at: [https://ar.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A9_\(%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A\)](https://ar.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A9_(%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A)) (Accessed: 01 July 2023).

¹⁴⁵ هل تشمل قصيدة البردة في مدحه صلى الله عليه وسلم على أمور مناقضة للتوحيد؟ فضيلة الشيخ الددو يجيب *YouTube*. Available at: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=7Cr9UtzvN9M&pp=ygUT2KfZhNio2LHYr9ipINiv2K_ZiA%3D%3D (Accessed: 01 July 2023).

¹⁴⁶ This is an estimate of Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi. I am unaware of any real statistics on this matter, but his estimate seems very reasonable.

witnessing a significant spread of the order in many parts of the world, such as the UK,¹⁴⁷ Singapore and Indonesia.

Likewise, as already mentioned, the order has its visible imprint through works like *Dalāil al-Khayrāt* or *al-Burdah*¹⁴⁸ on many famous and important scholars,¹⁴⁹ other Ṣūfī orders and also on huge numbers of ordinary Muslims all over the Muslim world, who do not necessarily belong to any order, but still are often familiar with works like *Dalāil al-Khayrāt* or some of its famous forms of sending of blessings on the Prophet with its famous tunes, without even being aware of the fact that these are Shādhilī works.

Aside from the fact that there are significant numbers of followers in some countries, it appears that the order is very typical in having members who are often very influential and who, even if they do not bring many new novices into the order, still exercise significant influence over many people and often they exercise influence over very influential people and thus, they may not have necessarily huge direct following in terms of quantity, but they very often do have what we may term as “quality following”. And through their “delegated influence” (influence over other influential people) or the influence through their famous works, they often exercise quite a lot of influence.

Some of the most influential followers of this order were already mentioned in the subchapter about Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. There is a separate chapter dedicated to one of the most important and influential Shādhilīs ever, Imām al-Suyūfī. Then, also Imām Aḥmad Zarrūq and Imām al-Subkī have been mentioned, and just to add one more important name, let us mention Imām al-Qarāfī. Each one of these famous scholars would deserve a separate chapter to demonstrate their importance, however, it has already been done in many other works and various encyclopaedias. These scholars are some of the most influential Ash‘arī theologians, some of the most prominent and influential scholars of the Shāfī‘ī and Mālikī schools of Law and the number of followers of those schools and the number of states that have followed these schools are also well-known. We also see some of the most prominent and influential scholars of Ḥadīth and the Quranic sciences as well as Islamic

¹⁴⁷ There are a number of Shādhilī zāwiyas in the UK and the communities are growing. For example Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqubi has thousands of novices in the UK and often visits the country for extended periods of time and goes for a series of lectures and talks all over the country – that is also where I became his student some six years ago.

¹⁴⁸ These two works in particular really in a way revolutionised the way most Muslims live their relationship with the Prophet and also certainly influenced their beliefs about him.

¹⁴⁹ For example, virtually all my teachers recite this work or recommend reading it or at the very least have a positive attitude towards it, whether they are from Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Pakistan, Morocco or Mauritania, irrespective of to which Ṭarīqa they belong to.

legal methodology, the science of *Taṣawwuf*, the sciences of the Arabic language, history etc. The fact that such prominent scholars were part of the *Shādhilī Ṭarīqah* is by itself a source of authority and legitimacy of this order for many common Muslims, as well as at least some of the scholars. Furthermore, it erases any possible doubts from the minds of many common Muslims, as well as some Muslim scholars, that there could be any unorthodoxy present in the *Shādhilī* beliefs or practices. For the common Muslims as well as for some of the scholars, the fact that these prominent theologians, jurists and others followed this path means that the path must be sound and free of unorthodox beliefs or practices because otherwise these scholars would simply not have followed it, and instead, they would have rebuked it as they had rebuked so many different things throughout their lives.

The *Shādhilī* influence extends to the world of today – let me mention as an example a comparison between a famous Muslim Instagrammer, who has hundreds of thousands of followers, and Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, who has just about twenty thousand followers on Instagram, but it was him speaking at the White House or the UN or in the presence of rulers of some countries etc.¹⁵⁰

These scholars and their works are without any doubt proof that the *Shādhilī Ṭarīqah* has been indeed very influential within the *Sunnī* scholastic tradition, which also means that it has had its share in shaping the Muslim world as a whole, since the schools of Theology and Law and the Islamic sciences and scholars, in general, have been an integral part and one of the most influential elements in shaping the Muslim world, and it continues to be so.

Based on my readings and personal experiences with the *Shādhilīyyah*, I would say that the *Shādhilīs* are often “at the right place at the right time doing the right things” – from the perspective that their actions often produce some very impactful works, individuals, connections, institutions etc. At the same time, what they do, often puts them in positions of danger, and they are then in the opposite situation of being “at the wrong place at the wrong time”.¹⁵¹ However, that is certainly not how the *Shādhilīs* themselves see it, as one of the

¹⁵⁰ This is something very troubling in this age, especially among the younger generations of today, who are now teenagers – there has happened an epistemological shift, where people now judge the importance or relevance or authority of people by their numbers of followers or numbers of videos and views etc. This phenomenon of this epistemological shift is often seen in older individuals as well, as it often happens without people even noticing it. It is something seen in many disciplines, but for me I see it a lot in the Muslim communities all over the world. The social media and the internet in general has led to even bigger confusion among the Muslims as to who really has real authority in the religion to teach it, give fatwas, guide people etc.

¹⁵¹ Such as when, for example, people were attacking Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, or when Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi had to flee from Syria because of the dangers posed to him by the Asad's regime or when Shaykh Ali Gomaa was almost murdered etc.

core convictions of all of the Shādhilīyyah is to have a good opinion of God and see even the calamities of life not just as tests, but as opportunities and even blessings, which if harvested correctly, take one closer to God, erase their sins and increase their ranks.

4.7 Essential teachings of the Shādhilī Path

In this subchapter, I shall explain some of the foundational practices and teachings and methods of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah, as I have been exposed to them in my readings and my studying with and listening to some of the Shādhilī scholars. I am not presenting here the teaching of one single Shaykh and one particular branch only, rather I will be trying to give a general overview of the major things that run through all of those various manifestations of the Shādhilīyyah, and I shall also point out some of the differences between the various branches.

The roots and very foundations of this path are found in the works of Imām Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh al-Iskandarī and his narration of the teachings of Imām Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī and Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. The teachings were then further expanded and explained by the later Shādhilī scholars. Among the most important ones stands out Imām Aḥmad Zarrūq and his works – especially the commentaries on the *Ḥikam* and his famous work *Qawā‘id al-Taṣawwuf*. These scholars and their works are the methodological foundations and the pillars and the main sources of this path.

Aside from teaching the works of these Shādhilī masters, there are some other famous scholars¹⁵² to whom the individual Shaykhs of this order, within its various branches, refer. Among the scholars who are often quoted by the Shādhilī scholars (when teaching Taṣawwuf), one can often hear the following names: Abū Madyan,¹⁵³ al-Junayd, al-Jīlānī, al-Ghazzālī, al-Qushayrī, al-Sha‘rānī, Ibn ‘Ajībah or Ibn al-‘Arabī.

Regarding the texts that are studied in the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah, let me just add that it is also very common that some of the later scholars rely a lot on works written by their immediate teachers and sometimes they themselves author new works and use them to teach their students. For example in the Ṭarīqah of Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqubi, one of the important aspects is reading and studying and reciting¹⁵⁴ the poems of the Shaykh or those written by his father, Shaykh Ibrāhīm.

¹⁵² Some of them are from outside of this particular Ṭarīqah.

¹⁵³ His famous poem “*Adab al-Ṭarīq*” is an oft-recited and studied poem in the Shādhilī circles.

¹⁵⁴ Often collectively at the gatherings of dhikr.

Also, it is important to stress that a lot of teaching in Ṣūfī circles happens in general through the oral narration of the teacher, which might be within his commentary of a text, or sometimes simply a speech given at an occasion.

Another essential aspect of the Shādhilī instruction is studying works that contain information about the Prophet Muḥammad. A work that is very often studied in the Shādhilī circles of learning, is the famous work *Kitāb al-Shifā' bi Ta'rīf Ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā* of Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ. This work used to be taught by the founder himself. Likewise, the famous *Shamāil* work of al-Tirmidhī is very often studied. *Dalāil al-Khayrāt* and *Qaṣīdah al-Burdah* are also often mentioned and studied among the Shādhilīs. There are many other works of *Shamāil*¹⁵⁵ and *Sīrah* which are studied.

Knowledge and love of the Prophet and his character and life is a central part of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah. It is a key fact that the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah is often referred to as “the Ṭarīqah of knowledge and scholars”. This is self-evident, based on the names of the Shādhilī scholars who have been mentioned so far. What is more, there is no Shādhilī Shaykh today (to my knowledge) who would not be himself a scholar of Theology, Law or other Islamic sciences; no Shādhilī Shaykh who would not insist that his novices must study the *Fard al-'Ayn*,¹⁵⁶ or the personally obligatory knowledge of Theology, Law etc. All the Shādhilī scholars I know emphasise the necessity of following the orthodox Sunnī schools of Theology and Law and do not ascribe infallibility or some kind of immediate Divine authority to the spiritual guides that would allow them to breach the relied-upon conclusions of the schools of Theology and Law. Thus, the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah has been known within Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy as an order followed by many famous and prominent scholars and as being an orthodox order that does not stray from the relied-upon positions of the theological and legal schools, and whose Ṭaṣawwuf was pure and free of controversies.

¹⁵⁵ For example Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi authored a work in *Shamāil* called *Shamāil al-Ḥabīb al-Muṣṭafā*. He also wrote more than one collection of names of the Prophet Muḥammad and he has collected several thousands of names of the Prophet, which is more than any other scholar before him – for example, as I have mentioned, Imām al-Jazūlī wrote a collection of names of the Prophet, and others did as well. For example Imām al-Jazūlī collected in the *Dalāil* about 700 names of the Prophet. The Shaykh has also written huge amounts of poetry about the Prophet and I believe we can expect more of his works coming out soon – they are being published one by one by the publishing house Signatora. I believe it was last year that the book of poetry about the Prophet, called *Moroccan Revelations*, was published.

¹⁵⁶ For a masterful and complete explanation of this concept, see *Kitāb al-'Ilm* (The Book of Knowledge) of Imām al-Ghazzālī in his magnum opus *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. To summarise, the concept *Fard al-'Ayn* means the knowledge that is obligatory for the individual to know. It is the basics of Theology – or even more than basics if one has some doubts or many questions in mind etc. – and then the rules of worship and human relationships that pertain to him. So, for example, if he can pray, he must know the rules of prayer. If he can fast or pay zakat, he must know the rules related to these acts etc. While if he is, for example, unable to fast, due to poor health or he is too poor to pay Zakat, then he does not have to know these rules and so on.

Another important aspect of the Shādhilī teachings is what may be summarised in their saying “Let the world be in your hand and not in your heart.” This may be shown in a variety of examples, however, let me present it on the question of clothing. We know that Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī wore luxurious clothes. When he was asked about it, he said that his clothes show people around him that he does not need them and that he is only in need of Allāh. This same approach has been adopted by virtually all the Shādhilī masters of today that I know of. For example, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn has narrated about his master, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Īsā that he used to wear the best of clothes, go to the best of hairdressers and use perfumes during the day, but then at night he could be seen cleaning the toilets of a mosque.¹⁵⁷ Another example of this may be seen in the book *Sea Without Shore* by Shaykh Nuh Ha Mim Keller, where he narrates a story about his master, Shaykh al-Shāghūrī: “He remembered meeting Sheikh al-‘Alawi in 1932 on his visit to Damascus after the hajj. Sheikh al-‘Alawi had sat in the Shamiyya Mosque after sunset to give a lesson, and the young weaver¹⁵⁸ had looked askance at the sheikh's socks, which were French, not of the plain-spun local manufacture. Sheikh ‘Abd al-Rahman told us: 'I thought: “Look at those socks. This man is supposed to be a sheikh?”’ Then he began to speak on the aphorism of Sidi Ibn ‘Ata Allah... I said to myself: “This sheikh can wear any kind of socks he likes.””¹⁵⁹

Another example of detachment and a different relationship to the material world may be shown in a beautiful story which was also narrated by Shaykh Nuh Ha Mim Keller in his book *Sea Without Shore*: “...I watched for a moment as he stopped to buy some apples from a cart in front of the mosque. He took the plastic bag from the seller and filled it with the worst apples he could find—nicked, bruised, and worm-holed—which he chose as carefully as most people choose good ones, then paid for and with a smile shook hands with the man before we went up the hill to the sheikh's home... When I reflected on his strange “shopping” I realized that it had been to save the apple man from having to throw any out. This incident summed up the sheikh's personality and life, which was based on *futuwwa* or putting others ahead of oneself.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ As he mentioned in this video: صوفية اليوم لماذا يتوسعون في الملابس والقصور خلفا لسلفهم الطاهر *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=FUTqvcSkCCQ&t=13s> (Accessed: 04 July 2023).

¹⁵⁸ Shaykh al-Shāghūrī was among other things also a weaver. He was also a unionist.

¹⁵⁹ Keller, N.H.M. (2011) in *Sea Without Shore: A manual of the sufi path*. Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, pp. 12–13.

¹⁶⁰ Keller, N.H.M. (2011) in *Sea Without Shore: A manual of the sufi path*. Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, pp. 3–4.

Before proceeding to the spiritual practices of the order, I want to mention another key point of the Shādhilī teachings. It is something I have seen again and again both in the classical Shādhilī works and among the contemporary Shādhilī masters. It is the connection between Taṣawwuf – both its theory and practice – and the classical Sunnī Theology. To demonstrate this, let me quote about the teaching of Shaykh al-Shāghūrī: “His main lesson of the week took place after the dawn prayer on Fridays in his own home high on the side of Mount of Qasiyun above Damascus. He would begin with Ibn al-‘Arabi’s *Futuhat*, which he read consecutively in this lesson for seventeen years. Then he would read from a work of Ash‘ari Theology such as Sheikh al-Hashimi’s *Miftah al-janna*, Ibrahim al-Bajuri’s *Hashiya* on the *Matn* of Sanusi, or one of the other books which he finished from beginning to end over the years at this lesson. He regarded experiential ontology as the core of mysticism, and even in his poetry would use, as Sheikh al-Hashimi had in his teaching before him, the nomenclature of rational Theology to express the ultimate truths of Sufi experience. Then he would conclude the lesson with a few pages from Kandahlawi’s *Hayat al-Ṣaḥābah* to emphasize that a true Sufi must gauge his spiritual path by those educated by the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace), the prophetic Companions (*Ṣaḥābah*).” This passage is crucial as it shows what was already mentioned regarding the theological orthodoxy of the Shādhilī teachings. All the Shādhilī scholars I know say that the spiritual experience may never overrule rulings of the Sacred Law or the conclusions of the classical Sunnī Theology. Rather, they say that any spiritual experience that would indicate that one is supposed to do something or believe something that is at odds with the Sacred Law, one is to reinterpret or completely disregard the experience and follow the Sacred Law.¹⁶¹ Likewise, the Shādhilī scholars have been known to be able to interpret and explain some of the ambiguous or strange statements of some of the Ṣūfīs in a way that is plausible and makes their statements in line with the orthodox Sunnī Theology and Law.¹⁶² At the same time, they have been known to harshly criticise and reject any statements that were not open to such reinterpretation.

¹⁶¹ This point shall be shown in detail in the chapter about Shaykh Ali Gomaa.

¹⁶² For example Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn has many lectures on his Youtube channel where he explains such problematic statements. The same is true of Shaykh Ali Gomaa. But this has been the case since the old times. We can see such instances narrated in *Laṭā’if al-Minan* (p. 112-113), where Shaykh Makīn al-Dīn al-Asmar is recorded to have said the following: “For forty years I found it difficult to understand the matter of the Sufi path without finding anyone to speak [with me] about it and remove the difficulties with which it presented me, until Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan appeared and clarified everything which I had found difficulty to understand.”

4.8 Foundational litanies and practices of the Shādhilī Path

Regarding the special litanies and spiritual practices of the order, I have to say that first and foremost all the Shādhilī scholars, that I know of, stress the necessity of first and foremost fulfilling the obligations of the Sharī‘ah and staying away from the prohibited things. Once that is established, the next thing that follows is the *Sunan*, the main Prophetic practices, especially the main recommended prayers which are attached to the obligatory prayers, praying *tahajjud*¹⁶³ etc.

Likewise, one is recommended to do other known recommended things like fasting regularly in accordance with the established Prophetic teachings, reciting a juz of the Qur‘ān every day etc. They also stress the importance of following the Sunnah in general in things like smiling at people, constantly keeping oneself in the state of ritual purity etc.¹⁶⁴ Then they all say one should recite at least some of the Prophetic invocations.¹⁶⁵

The most foundational and important litany of the Ṭarīqah is the *General Litany*, or *Wird al-‘Ām* or *al-Asās* (The foundation), which consists of saying one hundred times “astaghfirullāh” (I seek forgiveness of Allāh.), then one hundred times sending of peace and blessings upon the Prophet and then one hundred times “lā ilāha illa-llāh” (There is no deity other than Allāh.). Different branches have different specific formulas for the three stages of this litany. For example, the *Wird al-‘Ām* as I have received it in the path of Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi has a specific formula of the sending of peace and blessings upon the Prophet, and each of the three parts/stages of the litany starts with a recitation of a relevant verse of the Qur‘ān. While, for instance, I have heard several times Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn saying that one may say a more lengthy formula of the “lā ilāha illaLlāh”. Regardless of these differences, this is the foundational litany of the path in general and in it, is also summarised the path itself.

The path consists of three stages. The first is the stage of purification of the heart and character from the bad qualities one may have – like envy, greed, rancour, anger, impatience, heedlessness, obliviousness to blessings, unthankfulness, arrogance, cowardice, ostentation, insincerity etc. This stage is manifested in the first stage of the litany, in the seeking of

¹⁶³ The night prayer. There are long scholarly discussions about this prayer and the definition of its time, which I am not going to get into here.

¹⁶⁴ This is one of the reasons why studying the *Shamāil* is so common – it is the means of knowing the Sunan of the Prophet and thereupon following them.

¹⁶⁵ Especially those of the morning and the evening – *Adhkār al-Ṣabāḥ wa al-Masā’* – be it separately from a book like *Kitāb al-Adhkār* of Imām al-Nawawī, or in a collection like the one collected by Imām Aḥmad Zarrūq.

forgiveness and in turning to God for help and repenting to Him. The second stage is the stage of attaining good qualities, of which the Prophet is the best example, qualities like patience, kindness, generosity, sincerity, humility, dedication, responsibility, courage, truthfulness etc. This stage is manifested in the second stage of the litany, in the sending of blessings and peace upon the Prophet. The last stage of the spiritual path, which may properly start once one has purified himself from the bad qualities and has attained the good qualities,¹⁶⁶ is the stage of turning to God fully and starting to achieve the higher spiritual ranks of deep reliance on God, being truly pleased with the Divine Decree, being fully sincerely turned and dedicated towards God in all states, witnessing the Oneness of God in everything etc. This stage is manifested in the third part of the litany. The litany is recited aloud every morning and every evening once. Each stage of the litany manifests one of the stages of the spiritual path and realises this process in the novice. It is also a teaching litany. By recitation and pondering over the meanings contained in it, the novice gains insight into the spiritual path, into himself and realises the meaning of the spiritual path and the repetition imprints those meanings into him. Thus, the seeking of forgiveness, especially when it is combined with sincere turning to God and repenting therein from one's sins, has purgatory effects and also increases one's awareness of the sins and his shortcomings and gives him the space to repent, purifies him and also increases his long-term dislike of the sin. The sending of blessings and peace upon the Prophet, especially when coupled with pondering over his character and being, instils in one the love for the Prophet, the wish to be like him, increases one's love towards those good qualities and imprints them little by little into him. In the last part of the litany, especially when combined with sincere turning to God and sincere pondering over the foundational theological truths of Islām, one again gets little by little those meanings imprinted into himself etc. Those are just some of the benefits and realities of the litany, some theory related to it, but there is much more that could be said about the litany and its meanings and effects, but for the sake of brevity I will abstain from prolonging this passage further and I will just add that there are also special spiritual etiquettes related to this litany, where one is for example encouraged to wear a beautiful robe before the recitation, be in a state of purity, wear perfume, have a special place designated in the house for worship where one recites the litanies, one should be facing the *qiblah*, one

¹⁶⁶ Although the three stages often interconnect to some extent and one may be to some extent going through all three processes at once.

may also burn some frankincense before the recitation etc. Following all those etiquettes increases the effects of the litany.

Then, there are other litanies which are recommended at various stages of the path, one of them is the aforementioned *Hizb al-Bahr*, which is generally recited once a day, generally after the ‘Asr prayer. Famously, Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī said about this litany that “Had the people of Baghdad had it, the city would not have fallen to the Mongols.”. This litany is recited by all of the branches of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah that I know of.

There are many other litanies and invocations narrated in the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah, and various branches recite some of them, while they may not recite others. As they are quite numerous, I will mention just two more which are *al-Ṣalāh al-Mashīshīyyah* and *al-Ṣalāh al-Yāqūṭīyyah*. Both of these litanies are forms of sending blessings upon the Prophet Muḥammad and are very famous. Both contain very profound theological meanings and again follow the pattern of Shādhilī litanies – they are teaching the reciter theological realities and through the melodious recitation those meanings get imprinted and planted into the reciter, and then if further nourished, they begin to grow and bring fruition. *Al-Ṣalāh al-Mashīshīyyah* is often recited by scholars. Among those scholars who used to recite this litany was the prominent Mālikī jurist and one of the most important late authorities of the Mālikī Madhhab, the judge and prominent theologian and Ṣūfī, the author of the famous commentary on *Mukhtaṣar* of Khalīl and *al-Kharīdah al-Bahīyyah*, Imām al-Dardīr.¹⁶⁷

Another essential part of the universal Shādhilī devotional practices is the daily or weekly recitation of *Dalāil al-Khayrāt* as well as the regular recitation of *al-Qaṣīdah al-Burdah*.

Then, one is always encouraged to carry a *subḥah* or *tasbīh*, the prayer beads, and engage in various forms of remembrance of God throughout the day, outside of the prescribed obligatory and recommended prayers and other recommended aforementioned devotional practices.

To show at least one living example of the spiritual practice of a real Shādhilī master, let me quote the following passage about Shaykh al-Shāghūrī from the *Sea Without Shore*: “His daily *wirds* or litanies of dhikr, besides the Koran and the sunna dhikrs that Muslims

¹⁶⁷ As was mentioned in this video by the prominent Azharī Mālikī scholar Aḥmad Ṭāhā Rayān, who says in the video that he himself reads it regularly as well: كرامة شهدها الإمام أحمد الدردير ببركة الصلاة على رسول الله بطريفة الشيخ عبد السلام بن مشيش *YouTube*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IebFHqz_Aas&feature=youtu.be (Accessed: 09 July 2023).

say throughout the day, were four: the *Wird al-'Amm* or General Litany of the tariqa; Abul Hasan al-Shadhili's *Hizb al-Bahr*; the *Wadhifa* or Abu Mawahib al-Tunisi's and Dhafir al-Madani's interlineal prayer upon Ibn Mashish's famous Blessing on the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace); and the *Wird al-Khass* or Special Litany of the Supreme Name "Allah," which he recited at night."¹⁶⁸

Like in other Ṭarīqas, also in the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah, there is the practice of *khalwah*, seclusion, where the novice has to stay secluded from other people and activities for a specific time, prescribed for him by the shaykh, where he then has to fulfil a certain spiritual quest, typically through remembrance of God.

There are many other spiritual quests that one may be given on the path by one's spiritual guide. Most typically these quests consist of reciting specific formulas of remembrance of God with a specified number or specified time – like reciting a certain Name of God for a certain amount of time every day or reciting it for a certain number of times every day etc. In the past, some people were commanded by their guides to sell all their properties and give them to charity, or they were commanded to become toilet cleaners¹⁶⁹ etc. Nowadays such things are extremely rare if they even do ever happen – I have never heard of such stories in this age. However, among the spiritual quests may be various things – for example, the last main quest I got from my spiritual guide, Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, was to complete my university studies.

There are also some collective spiritual gatherings within the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah, such as regular, generally weekly, gatherings of remembrance of God, where various litanies or poems are collectively loudly recited. One rather typical practice of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah is the *ḥaḍrah*, which is a practice where people stand next to each other,¹⁷⁰ holding each other's hands, typically in a square or a circle, and while saying "Allāh, Allāh" aloud, they move in a swinging way, sometimes less and sometimes more intensely, while there is also a band of singers present who sing some Ṣūfī poetry. This movement and recitation typically go on for a few tens of minutes and often lead some of the people present into states of ecstasy.¹⁷¹ This

¹⁶⁸ Keller, N.H.M. (2011) in *Sea Without Shore: A manual of the sufi path*. Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, pp. 22-23

¹⁶⁹ To break their egos and make them humble.

¹⁷⁰ Obviously the gatherings of men and women are separated. At least by men being in the men's section of a mosque or the designated space and women being in the area designated for them in the given place.

¹⁷¹ The following video shows a *ḥaḍrah* in Damascus, led by Shaykh al-Shāghūrī, and it is very useful to see it, if one wants to understand this practice deeper, as it shows all kinds of individuals participating, some of whom are at some points clearly in a state of ecstasy, while others seem much more sober etc: *حضرة مع سيدي*

practice is obviously attacked by the adherents to the Salafī/Wahhābī movement¹⁷² and at the same time there are various¹⁷³ answers defending the practice produced by the other side.¹⁷⁴

4.9 The concept of Adab

The last thing that I see as crucial to be discussed here is the concept of *Adab* or etiquette.¹⁷⁵ This term may be used in various ways and mean various things in the Ṣūfī terminology. The first and most obvious meaning is the visible outward etiquette, which is discussed even in the books of Fiqh. It includes things like being in a state of ritual purity, using perfumes, having good breath, not eating foods that may cause one's breath to smell bad, wearing nice and clean clothes etc. Then there is a more subtle reality of Adab which has to do with the way one should behave in general. Some of those things are based on the Sunnah directly, while other things are deduced from the Qur'ān and the Sunnah and other things may sometimes also have an element of taking into consideration the local customs.

So, for example, in Mauritania, it is very common that everything takes place on the ground. That is where you sit to study, eat etc. Therefore, it is all right that one puts even a book of knowledge on the ground. While in Syria, to put a book of knowledge on the ground would be seen as a very “bad adab” – there a book is supposed to always be in elevated areas like on a table or a bookshelf. Like Western etiquette, also the Ṣūfī etiquette describes many different situations as well as dress codes. One can see that different Ṣūfī orders have different dress codes, for example. These dress codes often indicate something about the nature of the order. For example, the dress code in the Ṭarīqah of Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi is generally between two possibilities, either wearing the traditional Moroccan

YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=dJMduSPL1yA&t=100s> (Accessed: 04 July 2023).

¹⁷² As may be seen in this fatwa on this famous Salafī/Wahhābī website: Is there any proven hadeeth to suggest that the Sahaabah danced, that is quoted as evidence for dancing in dhikr circles? Islam Question & Answer. Available at: <https://islamqa.info/amp/en/answers/143924> (Accessed: 03 July 2023).

¹⁷³ See for example this fatwa by Mufti Wajid Iqbal, a senior student of Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi: The permissibility of the inspiring practice of remembering Allah Essential Islam | The Permissibility of the Hadrāh. Available at: <http://thehadrah.essentialislam.co.uk/> (Accessed: 03 July 2023).

¹⁷⁴ Another comprehensive answer from the side of those who support this practice was given by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn: *حكم حضرات الصوفية وإنشادهم* *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=4dNyCpYTSz4> (Accessed: 04 July 2023).

¹⁷⁵ When I write *Adab* I mean the discipline or science, while by *adab* I mean the “etiquette” of an individual.

*jallābah*¹⁷⁶ or some kind of elegant western suit or suit-like dress code for men, and a pious Muslim dress code for women. Likewise, the Adab describes how one is supposed to behave in certain situations. For example, one is supposed to kiss the hand of the Shaykh when one has the opportunity and is physically close enough to the Shaykh. Likewise, one is supposed to walk on the right side of and slightly behind the Shaykh while walking with him. There are many books written on this discipline.¹⁷⁷ Some parts of Adab deal with one's speech – when to speak and how to speak, when not to speak, what to speak about and what not to speak about. Knowledge of this discipline may be obtained from books or experientially by being in a classical Muslim community and observing them, or by asking the right people the right questions that pertain to Adab. Much of Adab is something that all Ṣūfī orders, and classical Sunnī Muslims in general, agree upon, with some local differences here and there. Some scholars ascribe to Adab lots of importance and focus on it a lot, while others are more relaxed or lax when it comes to it. However, for example in the Ṭarīqah of Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, Adab is one of the central concepts and lots of focus is given to it by the Shaykh. Many spiritual benefits are ascribed to having good adab – and that is not something random or arbitrary, because a good part of Adab is about showing and realising humility, generosity, as well as outward following of the Sunnah, and these are central pillars of the spiritual path. Generally speaking, those who have good adab are more likely to get closer to the scholars and be able to interact with them more and be given more attention and care. The opposite is true as well. Then, they say that “*The outward adab is indicative of the inward adab.*”, the inward adab being the inward state of the person. Thus, if one is showing humility and veneration to one's master, it likely means that he is truly humble towards him in his heart as well. And if he is humble in front of a scholar and venerates him, he is likely to have humility and veneration also towards the Prophet and if he has humility and veneration for the Prophet, he likely has it towards God as well. Thus, it can be seen that seemingly insignificant (to some people “cultural”) things, like kissing a hand of a scholar, can in reality have, are supposed to have, and often do have, very profound realities behind them.

The concept of inward adab and especially adab with God is a central theme of the *Hikam* and it deals with both how one is supposed to think and understand certain things on

¹⁷⁶ A long robe with a long, big hood attached to it.

¹⁷⁷ For example the book *Tadhkirah al-Sāmi' wa al-Mutakallim fī Adab al-‘Ālim wa al-Muta‘allim* or *al-Ādāb al-Marḍīyyah li Sālik Ṭarīq al-Ṣūfiyyah* of al-Būzīdī.

the spiritual path, as well as what they are supposed to do in this regard. Let's look at an example of an ill person. The outward adab with God is that one does not complain to God – saying things like “Why me?” or “Why again?” – rather, one follows the Sunnah of God in the creation, which is the fact that God creates things in a certain way,¹⁷⁸ and one also follows the Sunnah of the Prophet which tells him to go and seek a doctor or take some medicine etc. Furthermore, the Sunnah also tells him to turn to God in prayer and seek a cure from God. The inward adab with God in this situation is that one turns to God with love, trust, reliance, humility, obedience, patience, thankfulness for all the innumerable remaining blessings, and with contentment with the Decree of God and the knowledge that even the difficulty itself is good for him, for it is a test through which he can get closer to God. Furthermore, he knows that the difficulty is good for him because he was informed by God in the Revelation given to the Prophet, that if he remains truly patient while tested, God will remove his sins etc

4.10 An order or a path?

I wish to conclude with a very important point which is the fact that the word “order” is sometimes misleading to people, especially people who are originally from Christian countries and have some background knowledge of Catholicism. There is a difference between the meaning of order in Catholicism and Classical Sunnī Islām. For example, in Catholicism, an order can mean things like the Teutonic Order,¹⁷⁹ which was an order that had very strong symbolism, had very clearly defined goals – even political – and even possessed lands and wealth, had its “headquarters”, its “Grand Master” and for some time was even governing a state. I did not find any such thing during my studies of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah. On one level, one can find a branch of the Shādhilīyyah that has its master, it may possess some properties and wealth, have its headquarters, maybe even have some political agenda,¹⁸⁰ and perhaps even some specific symbolism etc., but then another branch of the

¹⁷⁸ Here I am referring to the theological question of causality. The classical Sunnī theologians hold that things by themselves have no intrinsic causality or any causality by themselves whatsoever. Thus, fire does not burn. Rather, when there is a fire created by God, it is the Sunnah or Way of God that God creates burning therein at the same time. Antibiotics do not cure – it is the Sunnah of God that when one takes antibiotics, God therein directly creates all the things that lead to cure. God creates the cure directly. Thus, what is customarily understood by people as causality, is in reality just a correlation. This reality may be summed up by the maxim which says that “Everything that exists besides God is the direct creation of God.”

¹⁷⁹ *Teutonic Order* (2023) *Wikipedia*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teutonic_Order (Accessed: 15 July 2023).

¹⁸⁰ I did not find anything like that in reality, so it is just a hypothetical point.

Shādhilīyyah has another master and maybe has no properties and no headquarters and no wealth and is even strictly apolitical etc. And adding to that, there is no one Grand Master of the Shādhilīyyah, who would be seen by all Shādhilī masters and all Shādhilīyyah branches as the one Grand Master, like the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order for example. There is simply no such thing, that is not how the Ṣūfī Ṭarīqas work in general. There are many branches of the Naqshbandī Ṭarīqa, for example, but there is no one Grand Master of the Naqshbandīyyah, whom all Naqshbandīs all over the world would consider as their main spiritual leader. There is the Naqshbandī order, with its famous masters of the past, to whom all of the individual branches refer, but there is never one single leader of all of the Naqshbandīs – rather, there are many individual masters of the individual branches. And that is, as far as I can see, the case with all of the major orthodox Ṣūfī orders.

Another thing is the size of the orders. As mentioned, the Teutonic Order, for example, was a centralised institution with one singular Grand Master and central leadership for all of the members of this order, for the order as a whole and it had thousands of members. While in the case of the Ṣūfī orders, there may be an order that has just a few members, literally just a few individuals. If a Ṣūfī is permitted to take on his own new students and novices, there may be a point where he literally has just one single novice, for example. Another difference is that for example, the Shādhilīyyah of today has millions of “members”¹⁸¹ worldwide. However, they belong to many different branches of the Shādhilīyyah and thus many of the branches may have just a few thousand members for example. I even doubt that the individual masters all know each other.

Furthermore, the order rarely is the only important religious factor or source of religious knowledge for the follower of an order. There is no “Shādhilī Fiqh” or “Shādhilī Theology”. There can be a teacher of Law who follows the Shādhilī Path, and that may have some influence on him, such as mentioning some of the Shādhilī masters as examples for the explanation of the rulings, but in the end, the actual Law will be taken from books written by the jurists of the four schools who may be followers of other orders or not even followers of any specific order. Therefore, the order is not and cannot be “the only” religious authority in the life of a Sunnī Muslim.

¹⁸¹ Even this word is not very accurate as it would imply that there is some kind of “membership”, like a membership in a golf club, where one is a part of a list of members, has a “membership card” etc., while I never saw anything like that in the context of Ṣūfī orders. Thus, the word “follower” is probably most accurate as it may include both very serious novices who are close to the given master, as well as normal novices who are not particularly active or particularly hard working.

Thus, we need to realise the fact that the Shādhilīyyah as a whole, shares certain characteristics and that their main shared goals are the goals of Taṣawwuf as a science, but that on the practical level, now I mean especially the political level, there are differences between the Shādhilī masters and the Shādhilī Order, as well as the other orders, are not centralised and institutionally united and also the Shādhilī teachings are all about Taṣawwuf and not about Fiqh, for example.

Therefore, even if we see that there have been many famous and very influential scholars of the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy, who were followers of the Shādhilī Path, we cannot say that the reason behind that is some kind of conspiracy-like secretive element of the Shādhilī Order as there is no evidence of that. Many prominent figures of the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy were Shādhilīs not because the order would be seeking out such people and trying to “infiltrate” the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy and have some kind of secret meeting and secret political agendas and long-term power projection etc., but rather the reason why many famous orthodox scholars became followers of this order is the simple reality that the teachings of this path/order are orthodox – not contradicting the Revelation. Furthermore, the Shādhilī metaphysics does not contradict the relied-upon positions of the schools of Theology and their practices do not contradict the relied-upon positions of the schools of jurisprudence. That is I believe why many of these scholars became Shādhilīs and remained to be Shādhilīs. As far as I can see, it is not the case that they would first become Shādhilīs and then go and “infiltrate” the schools of Theology and Law – it is the other way around. Such an example may be seen even in one of the three main masters and the main codifier of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah, Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh al-Iskandarī, who was originally a scholar of the outward sciences, but then went through a process of transformation of which I will quote just a part here. He narrates in *Laṭā’if al-Minan* the following story about himself: “Before becoming the Shaykh's disciple I denied that he had anything distinctive to offer and I objected to his message, though not on account of anything I had heard him say or which he was reported to have said or done. Then one day I got into an argument with one of his followers. I said to the man, 'the only people I trust are those who profess outward knowledge. These people, on the other hand, make great claims which are refuted by the straightforward meaning of Islamic Law.' After I, too, had become the shaykh's follower, this same man asked me, 'Do you know what the shaykh said to me on the day when you and I got into an argument?' 'No,' I replied. He said 'I went in to see him and the first thing he said to me was, “People like that are like rocks: The ones that miss you are better than the

ones that hit you!” I knew then that the shaykh had been granted supernatural knowledge of what transpired between us that day. And believe me: I followed the shaykh for twelve years, and contrary to the things which he has been quoted as saying by those who wished to do him harm, never once did I hear him say anything which would be denied by the outward sciences.”¹⁸² Thus, I think that the fact that some famous Shādhilī personalities have been very influential is not a product of some intrigues and power projection of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah, but rather it is a product of the fact that the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah with its orthodoxy became a Ṭarīqah of choice for many orthodox scholars who happened to be influential or authored influential works in variety of sciences etc.

Furthermore, the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah as a whole is not some kind of centralised institution, like the Teutonic Order for example, but rather it is a spiritual methodology/path. Thus, I am inclined to see the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah more as a school of spiritual and metaphysical thought.

Finally, the Teutonic Order got its power and influence through a variety of political and economic efforts and it worked as a centralised institution to achieve its long-term goals etc. That simply cannot be said about the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah, as far as I can say, since it did not achieve its position through centralised and institutional, political and economic efforts, but rather its teachings became famous and popular and among the classical Sunnī scholars. And if the Shādhilī scholars ever talk about politics or political activism etc., then these decisions they make are again never centralised and adopted by everybody – as has been already mentioned – and they base their political goals and decisions on the goals of the Sharī‘ah as a whole and a key part here is then played by the Law (Fiqh and Uṣūl al-Fiqh), rather than by Taṣawwuf – even though Taṣawwuf, as well as Theology, may play their part in this process as well, but it will certainly be smaller than the role of the Law when making decisions related to politics.

¹⁸² al-Iskandarī, I. ‘Aṭāillāh (2005) *The Subtle Blessings in the Saintly Lives of Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī & his master Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī* Nancy Roberts. Translated by N. Roberts. Louisville, US: Fons Vitae. p. 146-147.

5 Imām al-Suyūṭī

Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī is without any doubt one of the most famous and one of the most influential classical Sunnī scholars in Islamic history. It is also well known and it is well attested to, that he was a Shādhilī. Thus, for these simple reasons, I chose to dedicate a part of my research and this chapter to him.

5.1 Life and work of Imām al-Suyūṭī

He was born in Cairo in 1445 CE.¹⁸³ His father was a judge and a teacher of Shāfi‘ī jurisprudence. His father started to educate him and direct him to study the Islamic sciences. Thus, he took him to Imām Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, who gave him an ijāzah and prayed for him. However, his father passed away while al-Suyūṭī was still a child and thus, he was then raised as an orphan in Cairo by a friend of his father, the famous scholar and one of the main teachers of al-Suyūṭī, Imām Ibn al-Humām. That certainly had a massive effect on al-Suyūṭī’s life as being in the care of such a person automatically meant being surrounded by knowledge, worship, scholars etc. Ibn al-Humām certainly was not his only teacher, as some sources say that he studied with up to 150 scholars and according to Shaykh Ali Gomaa,¹⁸⁴ he had about 50 female teachers.¹⁸⁵ Many of his teachers were the foremost masters of the given sciences he studied with them. Among them was Taqī al-Dīn al-Shamānī, Sirāj al-Dīn Bulqīnī or Sharaf al-Dīn al-Munāwī. He was very gifted and thus managed to memorise the Qur’ān at a very young age and memorised many works of Fiqh, Uṣūl al-Fiqh as well as other sciences – for example, the *Alfyyah* of Ibn Mālik. It is well known that he was Ash‘arī in Theology, Shāfi‘ī in jurisprudence and Shādhilī in terms of the spiritual path. Thus, also a typical example of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy and the Ghazalian paradigm.

¹⁸³ Most of the information I am mentioning here comes from the Imām's biography in the following book which will be further quoted later in this chapter: al-Suyūṭī, J. al-Dīn and ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī al-Ḥasanī, ‘Abdullāh., (2014). *The Sublime Truths of the Shādhilī Path*. Khalid Williams. Translated by K. Williams. Visions Of Reality Books.

¹⁸⁴ Several other pieces of information about Imām al-Suyūṭī, that I am mentioning here, come from the following lecture of Shaykh Ali Gomaa about the Imām: *الإمام جلال الدين السيوطي | ح 38# | مصر أرض الصالحين* | *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHdtFXxmeTo&feature=youtu.be> (Accessed: 16 July 2023).

¹⁸⁵ The reality that during the Middle Ages there were innumerable amounts of female scholars in the Muslim world is not very well known, but should be highlighted in the struggles to decrease Islamophobia and hatred towards Islām and Muslims in the non-Muslim, especially western countries. This reality was covered in lots of depth by Dr Akram Nadwi who authored a multi-volume encyclopaedia of female Hadīth scholars, where he collected thousands of them and their biographies. The work is called *al-Wafā' fī Asmā' al-Nisā'*.

He started to teach when he was very young, probably even before reaching the age of 18. He taught Shāfi‘ī jurisprudence, Ḥadīth and also started to give fatwas. He travelled to gain knowledge in other parts of Egypt, Morocco, Damascus, Hijaz, and Yemen, and some sources say that even to India.¹⁸⁶ He was not just a scholar, but among other things was also a physician. It is said in his biography in the book which contains an English translation of his famous work *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī*: “It is clear from as-Suyuti's writing that his knowledge of medicine was not merely academic, but based on sound practice and experience, and it is equally clear from what he says that the art of medicine and the gift of healing is not merely the result of experimentation and good luck, but rather a divinely revealed science whose results are ultimately and essentially the outcome of the mercy and the decree of Allah...”¹⁸⁷ By the age of 27, he authored at least one work – most likely more – his famous six-volume encyclopaedia in the sciences of the Arabic language, known as *al-Muzhir fī ‘Ulūm al-Lughah wa Anwā‘ihā*. That led him to be awarded a prominent position in the Maḥmūdīyyah library, which got him access to huge amounts of works and probably gave an important stimulus to his scholarly growth. When he reached the age of 40, he decided to seclude himself and dedicate himself to his scholarship. Thus, he secluded himself in the Garden of al-Miqyas on a side of the river Nile. He wrote a book even regarding his seclusion called *al-Tanfīs fī al-I’tidhār ‘an Tark al-Iftā’ wa al-Tadrīs*, where he explained his reasons for the seclusion – he saw that for him to seclude himself and dedicate his time and energy to writing will be more beneficial than if he was to teach.

During his scholarly seclusion, he wrote most of his works. There are different opinions about how many works he authored – some of them say that about 600, while others say that the number goes up to about 1000. Some of his works are encyclopaedias, while others are just short epistles and treatises. He wrote probably in all of the Islamic sciences.

Several of his works became so influential in the given fields that it is hard to find or imagine any serious scholar or student of Islamic sciences¹⁸⁸ who does not study these most famous and influential works of Imām al-Suyūṭī. In the sciences of the Qur’ān, he wrote *al-*

¹⁸⁶ *Al-Suyuti* (2023) *Wikipedia*. Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Suyuti> (Accessed: 16 July 2023).

¹⁸⁷ As-Suyūṭī, J. and Thomson, A., (1994). *As-Suyuti's medicine of the Prophet*. London: Ta-Ha Publishers.

¹⁸⁸ Whether they follow the same understanding of Islām as al-Suyūṭī, namely Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy, or whether they follow some other understanding, such as the Salafī/Wahhābī movement. As was mentioned by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn in the following lecture about the Imām: الروائية مع الحافظ السيوطي... خبز الشعير! *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWaMGd30RQw> (Accessed: 16 July 2023).

Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān. In the Quranic exegeses he wrote a well-known and studied encyclopaedic work on textual exegesis of the Qur'ān called *al-Dur al-Manthūr fī Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*. He also wrote half of one of the most famous and probably the most widespread books of Tafsīr known as *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*.¹⁸⁹ In the sciences of Ḥadīth he wrote the famous work *Tadrīb al-Rāwī fī Sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawawī*. Then he also collected huge amounts of Ḥadīths in one massive collection known as *al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr*.¹⁹⁰ He also wrote another massive collection of Ḥadīths known as *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr*. In Fiqh, he has the famous and influential work *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā'ir*. Then, in the sciences of the Arabic language he wrote the work *al-Muzhir fī 'Ulūm al-Lughah wa Anwā'ihā* which was already mentioned earlier. Finally, he also has a famous work in history known as *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'*.

Some of the books of Imām al-Suyūṭī were written as refutations of certain ideas or other books written by other scholars. For instance, there were some attacks on the famous mystical poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ and Imām al-Suyūṭī wanted to defend him, so he authored a book in his defence called *al-Radd 'alā al-Mu'āriḍ li Ibn al-Fāriḍ*. Another example is a book which attacks Ibn al-'Arabī called *Tanbīh al-Ghabī ilā Takfīr Ibn al-'Arabī*.¹⁹¹ Imām al-Suyūṭī sought to defend Ibn al-'Arabī and thus authored a work called *Tanbīh al-Ghabī bi Tabriah Ibn al-'Arabī*.¹⁹²

The relationship of the Shādhilīyyah towards Ibn al-'Arabī, in general, is, as far as I can see, predominantly positive.¹⁹³ As I have already mentioned Imām al-Suyūṭī wrote a whole work defending Ibn al-'Arabī. Likewise, I have already mentioned that Shaykh al-Shāghūri used to teach *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyyah*. Also, Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi always refers to Ibn al-'Arabī as “Shaykh al-Akbar” and it is well known that he loves him and venerates him and also has revised and published Ibn al-'Arabī's litany called *Ḥizb al-Dawr al-A'lā*. The same is true about Shaykh Ali Gomaa who also is known to respect Ibn al-'Arabī. However, some of the Shādhilī ulema also often say that these books – like some of the works of Ibn al-'Arabī – must not be read by people who are not specialised in this field, because if one does not know deeply the Ṣūfī terminology and does not fulfil other

¹⁸⁹ The second half was written by Imām Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī.

¹⁹⁰ The work was not finished by him, but was finished by an Indian scholar al-Muttaqī al-Hindī.

¹⁹¹ We could translate it as *The warning of the foolish in declaring the apostasy of Ibn al-'Arabī*.

¹⁹² This might be translated as *The warning of the foolish in declaring the innocence of Ibn al-'Arabī*.

¹⁹³ Although it should be remembered that some scholars, who undoubtedly belong to Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy, did criticise and attack Ibn al-'Arabī. However, the Shādhilīyyah mostly see Ibn al-'Arabī as one of the greatest saints and have a number of arguments to defend him from the attacks that are well-known.

prerequisites, they could easily misunderstand the texts. To be precise, they say for example the famous phrase “Our books are forbidden for others.”¹⁹⁴

The many works the Imām wrote caused some people to call him a thief and say that he stole things from previous scholars and attributed those works to himself and that he did not understand what he was writing about etc. However, as far as I have seen, that is false. Let me give you two examples. The first is the claim that he stole *al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* from Imām al-Zarkashī, who wrote the famous work *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*. These two works were studied in detail by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn, who concluded that the claim is false and that even though Imām al-Suyūṭī did benefit from the *Burhān*, he in no way just copied it, rather he came up with many new things and he did mention the fact that one of his sources was the *Burhān*.¹⁹⁵ The second example is the aforementioned book *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazāir*. It was said that Imām al-Suyūṭī stole the work from Imām Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī who wrote a work on the same topic with the same name and in the same school of jurisprudence. However, as was mentioned by Shaykh Ali Gomaa in the aforementioned programme about Imām al-Suyūṭī, that is also false as the Imām again clearly came up with new things in the field. Finally, this issue and this attack on the Imām was present even during his life and he reacted – and the reader may by now expect how – by writing a book called *al-Fāriq bayna al-Muallif wa al-Sāriq*, where he clarified his position on this matter. My personal experience with the writing of Imām al-Suyūṭī comes mostly from his book about the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah which will be quoted below. Based on what I saw in this book, I can say that there is no doubt that the Imām sometimes comes even with quite lengthy quotes from other works, but he always mentions the source and the author. Thus, my experience with the work which I studied¹⁹⁶ confirms what was mentioned by Shaykh Ali Gomaa and Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn.

The last thing I wish to mention about the Imām is his relationship to politics and rulers, as it is part of the general topic of the relationship of Shādhilī scholars with politics, which shall be discussed in more detail in the next chapter about Shaykh Ali Gomaa. Long story short, the Imām used to be visited by princes and wealthy Muslims who offered him

¹⁹⁴ As can be heard in this video of Shaykh Ali Gomaa: ما الموقف الصحيح عند أهل السنة تجاه الشيخ الأكبر ابن عربي | أ.د. علي جمعة *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=A0IU0s03-Y8> (Accessed: 18 July 2023).

¹⁹⁵ As he mentioned in this lecture and elsewhere: دفاعا عن شيخ الإسلام السيوطي رضي الله عنه وأرضاه: *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=oVgHHHgw0Sc> (Accessed: 16 July 2023).

¹⁹⁶ Although just from a translation.

gifts, but he would refuse them. He was also requested several times by the sultan, but he also refused and as was his habit he wrote an epistle about this topic of not visiting the rulers, which he named *Mā Rawāhu al-Aṣāṭīn fī 'Adam al-Majī' ilā al-Salāṭīn*.

He passed away in Cairo in the year 1505 CE.

5.2 Imām al-Suyūṭī and the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah

Imām al-Suyūṭī wrote one whole book about the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah, it is called *Ta'yīd al-Ḥaqīqah al-'Alīyyah wa Tashyīd al-Ṭarīqah al-Shādhilīyyah* and it was translated into the English language as *The Sublime Truths of the Shādhilī Path*. Thus, most of my research on how Imām al-Suyūṭī presents the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah is based on this English translation of the Imām's work. I do not deny that it is a deficiency that I did not get and work with the original of this work – However, the English translation is very good and very clear and I am familiar with the terminology used by the translator and I am also well aware of at least some of the original terminology, so I therefore think that my reliance on the translation, especially given the fact that even this work is written in English, is not too big of deficiency.

First of all, let me quote the Imām's following introductory speech on *Taṣawwuf* which clarifies a lot and also confirms what has been mentioned here regarding *Taṣawwuf* so far: “Know – may Allah give grace to you and to us – that the science of Sufism [*taṣawwuf*] is an inherently noble and exalted science. The guiding imams of Islam, both of old and of recent times, have always carried its torch, honoured its standing, venerated its followers and had faith in its masters; for they are the Friends of Allah and the chosen elect of His servants after the prophets and messengers. Yet there have always been those who have infiltrated it and disguised themselves as such masters when in truth they are nothing of the kind; they have spoken with neither knowledge nor realisation [*taḥqīq*], and thus gone astray and led others astray along with them. Some of them adopt only the name, and use it to amass the ephemeral baubles of this world; others have fallen short of realisation and spoken of 'indwelling' and the like; and the result of this has been the besmirching of the reputation of all who profess Sufism. The genuine among them have pointed this out, and made it clear that these evil matters are but inventions of these imposters; and for my part?

I have written this treatise and entitled it *A Defence of Exalted Truth, and a Buttressing of the Shādhilī Path*.”¹⁹⁷

In reality, we could suffice with this introductory speech of the Imām since it clearly shows us two things.

The first thing is that according to him Taṣawwuf is an Islamic science and the masters of this science are not just orthodox Sunnī Muslims, but the best of humankind after the Prophets. He further demonstrates this in the book by mentioning and explaining many Ḥadīths and quoting statements and discussions of many scholars on the topics of Taṣawwuf – among them Imām al-Shāfi‘ī, Imām Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, Imām Ibn Ṣalāḥ, Imām ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, Imām al-Sijistānī, Imām al-Ghazzālī, Imām Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh al-Iskandarī, Imām al-Nawawī, Imām al-Qushayrī, Imām Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī and many others. He also mentioned some technical terminology of Taṣawwuf, a creed of the Ṣūfīs with a theological commentary¹⁹⁸ and he also included two lengthy warnings from the misguided (unorthodox) Ṣūfīs – one of Imām al-Ghazzālī and one of his own. What is meant by the “misguided Ṣūfīs” is when some of the Ṣūfīs do things that are defined as misguided. Such as when they just adopt the Ṣūfī etiquettes, language, appearances and the general “Ṣūfī culture”,¹⁹⁹ but do not engage in much serious worship and do not truly struggle to purify themselves from their inner flaws, do not struggle to get rid of their sins etc.

The second obvious thing the introductory speech of Imām al-Suyūṭī shows us is that he wrote this book to show this on the example of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah from which follows the necessary conclusion that he deems the Shādhilī masters to be from the masters of the science of Taṣawwuf and thus also being among the best of humankind after the Prophets. Thus, in reality, he does not only regard the Shādhilīs to be part of the Orthodoxy, but he also ascribes to them an even higher position.

Imām al-Suyūṭī’s presentation of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah as being part of the Orthodoxy is then seen again when he mentioned several quotes from the commentary of Imām Ibn ‘Abbād on *al-Ḥikam* and from *Laṭā’if al-Minan*, including the following one: “Shaykh Abū al-‘Abbās was asked about a famous man who did not attend the Friday prayer. His mood

¹⁹⁷ al-Suyūṭī, J. al-Dīn and ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī al-Ḥasanī, ‘Abdullāh., (2014). *The Sublime Truths of the Shādhilī Path*. Khalid Williams. Translated by K. Williams. Visions Of Reality Books. p. 1.

¹⁹⁸ And the discussion among other things clearly shows that the Imām is an Ash‘arī theologian...¹⁹⁹ Things like listening to recitation and singing of mystical poems, dancing, wearing certain clothes etc.

darkened, and he said: 'Do you sit in the presence of saints, and speak about heretical innovators?'"²⁰⁰

He then further stresses the orthodoxy of Taṣawwuf in the following words: "If you have understood the passages of the imams we have quoted above, you will recognize that Sufism is itself a noble science, centred on adherence to the Sunna, rejection of heretical innovation, disavowal of the lower soul and its desires and habits, and submission to Allah, contentment with his decree, the seeking of his love, and disregard for everything but Him."²⁰¹

He then further demonstrates the orthodoxy of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah by saying: "Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī would also be visited by scholars, such as Sulṭān al-‘Ulamā' Shaykh ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām and Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn ibn Daqīq al-‘Īd. It is well known that Ibn Daqīq al-‘Īd was fiercely critical of the proponents of 'union with God.' Had he seen any trace of it in al-Shādhilī's teachings, he would have been the first to criticise him for it. Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh says in *Laṭā'if al-Minan*: 'I heard Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn ibn Daqīq al-‘Īd say: 'I have never encountered anyone who knows Allah better than Shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī...'"²⁰² Then he moved on to mention a very similar argument, mentioning the fact that Shaykh Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī used to be visited by the great scholar Imām al-Aṣfahānī and he says that had there been any unorthodoxy in the teaching of Shaykh Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī, Imām al-Aṣfahānī would "not get anywhere near him."

The last quote I want to mention to demonstrate Imām al-Suyūṭī's position on the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah is the following: "Now if the Shādhilī Order had even a trace of impropriety to it, al-Subkī would not have praised it, nor would his son, nor would the other scholars of his time or those who followed them. Alien elements have entered some of the Ṣūfī paths, but the path which is firm, heresy-free and in conformity to the Sacred Law is that of al-Junayd and his followers. Ibn al-Subkī says in *Jam‘ al-Jawāmi‘* that the path of Shaykh al-Junayd and his companions is a straight path; now of the latter generations, the path of the Shādhilīs is the path of al-Junayd, for as those who contemplate the transmitted sayings of al-Shādhilī and the books of Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn will see, it is centred on the Qur'an and Sunna

²⁰⁰ al-Suyūṭī, J. al-Dīn and ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī al-Ḥasanī, ‘Abdullāh., (2014). *The Sublime Truths of the Shādhilī Path*. Khalid Williams. Translated by K. Williams. Visions Of Reality Books. p. 76.

²⁰¹ Ibid. p. 78.

²⁰² Ibid. p. 97.

and in conformity to the Law, free of the taint of anything out of balance with the Sacred Law.”²⁰³

Thus, in the case of Imām al-Suyūṭī, we have seen the fact that he clearly and explicitly portrays the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah as an orthodox order and he depicts the Shādhilīs as spiritual masters of some of the foremost scholars of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy – and these two things combined are tantamount to him saying that “The Shādhilī Ṭarīqah is an integral part of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy,” and as was already mentioned, he even positions them among “the best of humanity after the Prophets.”

²⁰³ Ibid. p. 99.

6 Shaykh Ali Gomaa

6.1 *The life and legacy of Shaykh Ali Gomaa*

The reason I have chosen to study the personality of Shaykh Ali Gomaa is also simple. He is one of the most prominent, famous and influential Muslim scholars at al-Azhar and therefore in the whole of the Muslim world today. And he is a Shādhilī. Therefore, when I decided to study the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah and how the Shādhilīs themselves present their order, including its present forms, it became obvious to me that to look into what Shaykh Ali Gomaa has to say, is of the utmost importance. One of the reasons why I believe that it was the right choice is that Shaykh Ali Gomaa talks about all of the major fields of study that I am myself interested in when it comes to studying the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah – he is a theologian, a jurist, a Ṣūfī and a formidable scholar in general, in any Islamic science I can think of. Likewise, he is not only a scholar but also a muftī who held major official posts, now he is even a politician. And as such, as one of the most famous scholars in the Muslim world and also one of the most famous Shādhilīs I think that he is one of the best and most interesting examples of a major Shādhilī personality of today.

My study of his personality and opinions has been largely relying on three main sources – his own words which are easily available online in huge numbers of lectures and videos, a collection of his fatwas in the book *Responding from the Tradition*, and the testimony about him which has been narrated by his close student Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn, who studied with the Shaykh daily for six years at al-Azhar as well as privately – Shaykh Ali Gomaa was his PhD supervisor and one of the main teachers of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn, who is himself a well-known scholar and academic, and as he says and as is obvious from many of his videos about Shaykh Ali Gomaa, he does not belong to those who blindly love the Shaykh, nor to those who blindly hate him. Thus, he clearly states his differences with Shaykh Ali Gomaa, criticises him for certain things, but at the same time agrees with him on other points, does love him as a person and teacher, and defends him if he believes that the Shaykh is right about something and is being attacked unjustly.

Let me quote the following extract from the biography of the Shaykh which is included in the book *Responding from the Tradition*: “Born in the Egyptian town Bani Suwaif in 1952, Sheikh Ali Gomaa began studying the Islamic sciences at an early age. Although he did not attend a religious school as a child, by the time he graduated from high school Sheikh Ali had studied the six canonical *hadith* collections as well as Maliki

jurisprudence.²⁰⁴ After receiving a degree in commerce from ‘Ayn Shams University, Sheikh Ali enrolled in al-Azhar University where he completed a B.A., followed by a M.A. and a PhD in the Methodologies of Islamic Jurisprudence (Uṣūl al-Fiqh). Sheikh Ali excelled academically both at the university and in sessions with prominent scholars outside of the university setting. Among his teachers was the Moroccan *hadith* scholar and Sufi Shaykh ‘Abdullah ibn al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī, who considered Sheikh Ali to be one of his most accomplished students.”²⁰⁵ After the Shaykh finished his studies at al-Azhar he remained present there as a professor, teaching a variety of Islamic sciences to both the students of al-Azhar as well as to students from the outside, supervising PhD. students from a variety of universities etc. As attested to by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn, Shaykh Ali Gomaa focused a lot on the quality of studying and works produced rather than the quantity. He also focuses a lot on engraving into his students a deep interdisciplinary understanding of the studied disciplines and topics. So, for example, he used to teach books of Ḥadīth along with Uṣūl al-Fiqh and the sciences of Ḥadīth.²⁰⁶

Adding to his biography, the Shaykh is known to be from a very rich family, therefore his studies of Islām were not a result of his not being able to find something else to do,²⁰⁷ or due to being forced to do so by his parents. Shaykh Ali Gomaa went to study the Islamic sciences on purpose and by his own choice. Likewise, it was narrated by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn in his lectures about Shaykh Ali Gomaa, that the Shaykh owns several (four or five or maybe more) flats, which serve him just as his libraries.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ I would add here that there is therefore no doubt that by then he must have studied also some of the sciences of the Arabic language, Theology, legal methodology, some Taṣawwuf, basics of sciences of Ḥadīth as well as some of the Quranic sciences, the Sīrah etc. for without it one simply cannot really access the books of Ḥadīth and because that is how it works in the traditional Sunnī scholastic setting and because all of these sciences are interconnected to begin with – and because for example in some of the basic foundational texts of the Mālikī Madhhab, like Ibn ‘Āshir for example, some of these sciences like Theology, legal methodology and Taṣawwuf are actually included in the text itself.

²⁰⁵ This book is very useful in many different ways as it contains fatwas related to all kinds of legal, theological, spiritual as well as for instance historical or ethical matters: Gomaa, S., 2011. *Responding from the Tradition*. Louisville, Ky: Fons Vitae, p. 17.

²⁰⁶ Those three disciplines are deeply interconnected.

²⁰⁷ I have heard many times several prominent classical Sunnī scholars of today saying, that it is a widespread phenomena in the Muslim world, that the most intelligent, talented and successful children either go by themselves – or are forced to go by their families – to study things like Law, Medicine, Engineering etc., and only the much less talented, intelligent or successful individuals go to study the religion. Which obviously is, according to them, a catastrophe with deep negative impact on the Muslim world, and they struggle a lot to change this.

²⁰⁸ I also heard this information from another teacher of mine, who knows the Shaykh personally as well, and he added to this that the daily wurd of the Shaykh is eight hours of reading.

Likewise, it should be noted that the Shaykh is a ḥāfiẓ of the Qur'ān and that he has been teaching, preaching and delivering the Friday sermons in some of the famous mosques of Cairo. It has to be stressed that what most likely formed the Shaykh more than his official studies at al-Azhar, were his private studies with his teachers. The level which he has reached in terms of the classical Sunnī scholarship may be summed up by the event, where Shaykh 'Abdullāh ibn al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī was asked: "Whom do you appoint as your successor in knowledge?" He said "Ali Gomaa".²⁰⁹ Likewise, the Shaykh has been given many other scholarly authorizations from many prominent scholars from various countries, among them, for example, Shaykh Muḥammad al-'Alawī al-Mālīkī, Shaykh Yāsīn al-Fadānī or Shaykh 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ḥalabī.

He wrote or edited up to one hundred books and a large number of articles and been a member of many different prominent Islamic organisations such as: The body of senior scholars of al-Azhar,²¹⁰ Board of Fatwa of al-Azhar,²¹¹ Council of Islamic Research of al-Azhar,²¹² Council of Islamic Law,²¹³ Council of Islamic Law of India²¹⁴ etc.²¹⁵ He was also given many different awards, including some given to him by heads of state like King Abdullah of Jordan or Mahmud Abbas of Palestine.²¹⁶ He was a guest or lecturer at tens of TV or online shows, and the number of his recorded lectures or episodes of the shows he took part in numbers thousands. Many of them are available online on his official YouTube channel.²¹⁷ The Shaykh had many opportunities to get very prominent and very well-paid positions during his life, but he turned down many of them, to focus on his work at al-Azhar, where he initiated a scholarly revival and a process of strengthening the position of the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy.

²⁰⁹ As mentioned in this lecture by Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn who witnessed it himself: *قصتي مع شيخنا الإمام علي جمعة - اللقاء الأول* YouTube. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=9mpeXSnk2KA&list=PLUrykJsZUIys5eJg6UI9GFH3zqxdPAr&index=2&pp=iAQB> (Accessed: 06 July 2023).

²¹⁰ *Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulamā' bi al-Azhar al-Sharīf*

²¹¹ *Lajnah al-Fatwā bi al-Azhar al-Sharīf*

²¹² *Majma' al-Buḥūth al-Islāmīyyah bi al-Azhar al-Sharīf*

²¹³ *Majma' al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*

²¹⁴ *Mu'tamar al-Fiqh al-Islāmī bi al-Hind*

²¹⁵ *الزيارة الأكثر تأثيرا - القصتي مع شيخنا الإمام علي جمعة* YouTube. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=DzDkl-ZumAs&list=PLUrykJsZUIys5eJg6UI9GFH3zqxdPAr&index=3> (Accessed: 06 July 2023).

²¹⁶ As mentioned in this documentary about the Shaykh's life: *الجانب الشخصي من حياة أ.د علي جمعة | عن قرب* YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=kuHfJneYdEk> (Accessed: 07 July 2023).

²¹⁷ *dr Ali Gomaa* YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/@DrAliGomaa/playlists> (Accessed: 06 July 2023).

As is well known and documented, the Shaykh is Ash‘arī, Shāfi‘ī and Shādhilī.²¹⁸ Thus, a typical representative of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy,²¹⁹ which he had been actively – and it seems to me that quite successfully – teaching and promoting his whole life in Egypt and the rest of the world, and so have been his students and people of his circle.²²⁰ What Shaykh Ali Gomaa and his close students have been trying to do is to defend and (re)popularise the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy among the Muslim masses in Egypt, as well as in other countries.²²¹ That has been necessarily connected to a “war” with the Salafis/Wahhābīs, whose ideas became widespread in Egypt, especially during the second half of the twentieth century with the rise of the Salafi/Wahhābī TV channels and also thanks to the “pact” between the Salafis/Wahhābīs²²² and the Muslim Brotherhood. Shaykh Ali Gomaa and his students have been known to be in staunch opposition to both groups. However, both groups have been present at al-Azhar for decades. At the same time, there have been other groups with differing views²²³ at al-Azhar since the time of Muhammad Abduh or even before that. Likewise, al-Azhar, or more precisely the classical Sunnī scholars of al-Azhar, have been “under attack” since the days of the French and then later British occupation of Egypt. However, these scholars were never completely removed from al-Azhar and also the way of the scholars of al-Azhar from before the occupations and the emergence of the unorthodox groups was also never forgotten by the adherents to Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy. And so what Shaykh Ali Gomaa and his circle have been trying to do – and it again seems to me that quite successfully – is to return al-Azhar to its former²²⁴ direction that is primarily and firmly grounded in the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy.²²⁵ At the same time, I have to mention that Shaykh Ali Gomaa generally speaks of people like

²¹⁸ Although these are the main schools he follows, it has to be noted that he has vast knowledge and erudition in other theological, legal and Ṣūfī schools as well.

²¹⁹ And of the Ghazalian paradigm.

²²⁰ People like Shaykh Yosri Gabr or Shaykh Usamah al-Azhari.

²²¹ The reason I mention other countries is that the Shaykh and his students have had people coming to them from the whole of Muslim world and studying with them.

²²² They were often in his circle, many of whom – for instance Shaykh ‘Imād ‘Iffat – eventually became followers of the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy as a result of their studies under the Shaykh. This was mentioned by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn in the following video: *سر الهجمة الوهابية على الشيخ علي جمعة* *YouTube*. Available at: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=_J80V0pdfxc&pp=ygVP2KfZhNi02YrYriDYudio2K8g2KfZhNmC2KfYr9ixINin2YTYrdiz2YrZhiDYudmE2Yog2KzZhdi52Kkg2Ygg2KfZhNmI2YfYp9io2YrYqQ%3D%3D (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

²²³ Such as the hardline modernists or reformists.

²²⁴ Classical Sunnī and pre-reformist, pre-modernist...

²²⁵ I am not talking here about the official stance of al-Azhar – that has been clear and based on the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy almost always. I am talking about the practical reality of al-Azhar and the people associated with it – be they teachers, students, graduates...

Muhammad Abduh with lots of intellectual respect. He tries to integrate the classical Sunnī scholarly heritage and some of the realities of the modern world which he believes to be positive. At the same time, the Shaykh and his circle are rejecting anything that they see as being in an unrectifiable opposition to Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy. They reject any changing of things in the religion which they believe to be fixed and not subject to any change. Thus, they for example reject many of the Western secular ideas and trends – both on the political and societal levels. At the same time, they are also firmly against the political activism and struggle for power of the Muslim Brotherhood.

From 2003 until 2013 Shaykh Ali Gomaa held the office of the Grand Muftī of Egypt. This position made him one of the most influential people in Egypt and placed him at the centre of political processes in the country. However, what is important is that the Shaykh initiated important reforms which were nicely summed up in the following quote: “Since taking this position he has revolutionized the process of issuing fatwas in Egypt: Sheikh Ali transformed Dar al-Ifta from an institution that was the extension of one individual (the Grand Mufti) to a modern institution with a fatwa council and a system of checks and balances. Sheikh Ali has also added a technological aspect to the institution by developing a sophisticated website and call centre through which people may request fatwas even if they are unable to come in person. During his years as Grand Mufti, Sheikh Ali has overseen the issuance of many important fatwas that strive to show Islam's ongoing relevance to people of the 21st century. The corresponding methodology is characterized by a profound respect for tradition that is balanced by the recognition of its shortcomings, and illuminated by an understanding of the specific needs of the times in which we live.”²²⁶ A number of his fatwas have been criticised for a variety of reasons by both the adherents to Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy and adherents of other groups.²²⁷ What is important however to mention is that the criticism of some of his fatwas by the other scholars of the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy was never as severe as in the case of other internationally famous scholars – such as Shaykh al-Qaraḍāwī for example.²²⁸ Shaykh Ali Gomaa has a deep understanding of the modern

²²⁶ Gomaa, S., 2011. *Responding from the Tradition*. Louisville, Ky: Fons Vitae, p. 18.

²²⁷ Discussing them here is not related to the topic of this thesis.

²²⁸ As explained in some detail by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn in the following video: الفتاوى الميزان الشاذة لشيخنا الإمام علي جمعة والشيخ القرضاوي في الميزان *YouTube*. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=FU7V5W1axG8&pp=ygVP2KfZhNi02YrYriDYudmE2Yog2KzZhdi52Kkg2Ygg2KfZhNmC2LHYttin2YjiiDYudio2K8g2KfZhNmC2KfYr9ixINin2YTYrdiz2YrZhg%3D%3D> (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

world²²⁹ and he has been paying lots of attention to the study of history, philosophy and other humanities as well as the natural sciences.²³⁰ The Shaykh is among those scholars who say that the reality affects the legal rulings, and that part of the process of giving a fatwa has to be a deep understanding of the reality that surrounds the question. This may be demonstrated for example in his stance towards female circumcision – Aside from his argument that there is no real evidence in the Sacred Law that would make this practice obligatory or even recommended, his main argument for the prohibition of the practice is the fact that the medical experts say that the practice is harmful.²³¹

Since 2021 Shaykh Ali Gomaa has been a member of the Egyptian parliament.²³²

The last thing I do want to briefly discuss here is the famous speech Shaykh gave to the Egyptian army in 2013. The discussion is very lengthy, so I am not going to get into its details, but I will just mention the summary of the whole story.

As is well known, in 2013 Egypt was in turmoil. First of all, one of the things to which much attention is not being paid by those who talk about those events and the role of Shaykh Ali Gomaa in it is the fact that since 2011 Egypt was experiencing serious security crises at Sinai,²³³ where multiple armed terrorist groups were operating and attacking both military and civilian targets. Likewise, a large number of terrorist attacks all over Egypt took place.²³⁴ Likewise, since the revolution in 2011, the country had been in political turmoil. During June and July 2013, there were massive protests against the Muslim Brotherhood

²²⁹ Including things like the general culture formed by movies etc. This may be demonstrated on what was mentioned by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn in his memories from his studies with the Shaykh, where he said that once, just before the communal prayer at al-Azhar, the Shaykh was talking openly with some of the present people about what happened in a TV show yesterday. Which was shocking for Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir, for the scholarly environment in Syria is much more puritan: *قصتي مع شيخنا الدكتور علي جمعة - إحياء الأزهر الشريف* 5 *YouTube*. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=9kjgiMy4uGQ&list=PLUrykJsZUIys5eJg6UI9GFH3zqxdPAr&index=4> (Accessed: 11 July 2023).

²³⁰ The Shaykh is known to be reading scientific journals for example.

²³¹ His fatwa, where after a lengthy discussion he reaches the conclusion that it is forbidden, may be found in the book *Responding from the Tradition*, which was quoted above. Furthermore, the Shaykh mentioned this position and summarised the discussion surrounding it, in his speech in the Egyptian parliament: *رد فضيلة أ د علي جمعة على معالي النائب أحمد حمدي نائب حزب النور حول مسألة الختان* *YouTube*. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=wVfXWH3nnBc> (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

²³² To demonstrate some of the differences that exist between various Shādhilī masters, it is worth noting here, that for example Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Īsā had a key condition for his novices in his path that they must not get into politics and he himself was staying far away from it. Similar approach was adopted by other famous Šūfīs, such as Said al-Nursi who famously said “I seek refuge in Allah from the Satan and politics.”

²³³ *Sinai insurgency* (2023) *Wikipedia*. Available at: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinai_insurgency (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

²³⁴ *Timeline of terrorism in Egypt (2013–present)* (2023) *Wikipedia*. Available at: [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_terrorism_in_Egypt_\(2013%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_terrorism_in_Egypt_(2013%E2%80%93present)) (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

President Morsi. At the same time, there were big pro-Morsi demonstrations. At that time the 2013 coup d'état ended the presidency of Morsi. On the 18th of August 2013, Shaykh Ali Gomaa gave a more than thirty minutes long speech in which he said many things to a hall full of leading army officers, among them also Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.²³⁵ But some people, apparently the Muslim Brotherhood, had cut out of it a few minutes/seconds and interpreted his words to mean that he said to the officers that they are to go and kill the protesters.²³⁶ Then they also came up with further montage and interpretations of the video and connected it to the 14th August incident of Rabaa and claimed that the Shaykh incited the army to go and kill the protesters or that he “made their blood permissible” etc.²³⁷ That is absolute slander and nonsense since the speech took place four days later. Furthermore, the Shaykh clearly said in the speech that the army is to attack back, if they are attacked – not to go and start violence against peaceful protesters. Furthermore, he was talking about the terrorists in general, and about those at Sinai specifically, and not about peaceful protesters. That is also how he later explained these events.²³⁸ What needs to be mentioned here in conclusion is that the Shaykh comes out of the classical Sunnī principle which says that “An oppressive ruler is better than civil war.”. Anyone who studies the state in which Egypt was back then must conclude that a civil war and chaos similar to that in Libya or Syria was an option – and the words of the Shaykh have to be looked at in this context.²³⁹

On the 5th of August 2016, there was a failed assassination attempt on Shaykh Ali Gomaa.

6.2 Shaykh Ali Gomaa and the *Shādhilī Ṭarīqah*

First of all, let us mention a definition of Taṣawwuf by Shaykh Ali Gomaa: “Sufism is a system of spiritual growth and the acquisition of good character. It leads Muslims to the

²³⁵ *YouTube*. اضرب في المليون .. كلمة د. علي جمعة كاملة بدون اجتزاء 37 دقيقة Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlpNFbQQ4Vo> (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

²³⁶ *YouTube*. علي جمعة ولماذا أمر بقتل المسلمين؟! د محمد الصغير Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=ZUGsneTWPjo> (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

²³⁷ The same claims were repeated even by some western media and even by some lazy academics who did not bother to check all the simple facts or maybe followed a certain agenda: *Ali Gomaa Wikipedia*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali_Gomaa (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

²³⁸ *YouTube*. يقال أنك أبحت دماء المتظاهرين وطالبت الجيش المصري بذلك فقلت لهم ‘اضرب في المليون’ أ.د/ علي جمعة Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=dNprN6ddA8Y> (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

²³⁹ It is worth noting here that there are countless attacks on the Shaykh from many different directions. The internet is overflowing with all kinds of “refutations” of him and the phenomena of people taking his words absolutely obviously and demonstrably out of context and mixing them with their own interpretations and ideas etc. is very common.

level of excellence (ihsan) that the Messenger of God (s) described as, 'To worship God as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He surely sees you.' (IBN HANBAL, *Musnad Imam Ahmad*, 1:27; AL-BUKHARI, *Sahih Bukhari*, 1:27; and AL-NAYSABURI, *Sahih Muslim*, 1:37.) Therefore, Sufism is a program of growth concerned with purifying the soul of all the diseases that prevent one from reaching God, and it seeks to rectify the crookedness of the human soul as it relates to God, to others, and one's self. The Sufi order (*tariqa*) is the school that takes care of this self-purification and rectification, and the Sufi Sheikh is the master who provides the necessary training for the seeker.”²⁴⁰ Adding to this one can recheck the chapter about Taṣawwuf in this thesis where I mentioned the summary of the history of Taṣawwuf as presented by Shaykh Ali Gomaa.

Shaykh Ali Gomaa also stresses the fact that even some of the most prominent scholars of the first generations, such as Imām Abū Ḥanīfah or Imām Mālik, were very rich and thus their Taṣawwuf, according to the Shaykh, may be summed up by the statement, which is often mentioned by the Shādhilīs, as has been already mentioned, which says that “The world should be in your hands and not in your heart.” Thus, here the Shaykh is drawing a line between the Taṣawwuf of the “founders” of the Orthodox schools and the Shādhilīyyah. However, at the same time, the Shaykh clearly says that al-Shādhilī belongs to the second type/era of Taṣawwuf, which is al-Taṣawwuf al-Sunnī and the Shaykh said that al-Shādhilī first travelled the Ṣūfī path on the school of Imām al-Ghazzālī, which the Shaykh characterised by its insistence that the master of an order must be a scholar and not only a pious individual.²⁴¹

It is worth noting here that during his studies there were three main influences on his formation as a Ṣūfī, as far as I can see. The first one was Shaykh Aḥmad Mursī al-Naqshbandī, whom the Shaykh accompanied for a long time and said that he influenced him profoundly. As his name shows, he was a Naqshbandī master, and an Azharī scholar as well.²⁴² The second influence was the general study of Taṣawwuf as a science – the works of Imām al-Ghazzālī etc. Then, the last influence was study and training under the Shādhilī master Shaykh ‘Abdullah ibn al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī.

²⁴⁰ Gomaa, S., 2011. *Responding from the Tradition*. Louisville, Ky: Fons Vitae, p.307.

²⁴¹ *المدارس الثلاثة للتصوف | أ.د. علي جمعة* *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=SFVuAK8cp38> (Accessed: 10 July 2023).

²⁴² This fact was mentioned by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn in the following lecture: *قصتي مع 3 شيخنا الإمام علي جمعة - الزيارة الأكثر تأثيرا* *YouTube*. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=DzDkl-ZumAs&list=PLUr-ykJKsZUIys5eJg6UI9GFH3zqxdPAr&index=3&pp=iAQB> (Accessed: 13 July 2023).

Nevertheless, generally speaking, the Shaykh is a typical Shādhilī master. He is a scholar of the Islamic sciences, a follower of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy and a person with a deep relationship with the Prophet. That can be seen in the Shaykh obviously as on many public occasions,²⁴³ when he speaks about the Prophet, he is often just about to start crying. Especially when he recites some verses of the *Burdah*, which he does often.²⁴⁴ I have also heard from one of my teachers, who knows the Shaykh personally and is close to numerous famous Ṣūfī scholars of today, that it is narrated in these circles that Shaykh Ali Gomaa has seen the Prophet while awake.²⁴⁵ Likewise, the Shaykh has his own edition of the *Dalāil*.²⁴⁶ It was narrated by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn that the Shaykh used to nurture love for the Prophet in his students a lot and that he even stopped teaching the famous book of Tafsīr of al-Zamakhsharī *al-Kashshāf* after awhile with words “This suffices us.” because the author had some bad adab with the Prophet. The Shaykh also used to teach the *Shifā’* of Qāḍī ‘Iyyāq.²⁴⁷ Likewise, the Shaykh often holds celebrations of the birth of the Prophet.²⁴⁸

Shaykh Ali Gomaa was a host in many shows about Taṣawwuf. Likewise, he has been teaching Taṣawwuf in the scholarly settings at al-Azhar and elsewhere. What is important to note here is that a lot of his teaching had to do with teaching Taṣawwuf as an Islamic science in general, even for the masses, and was not always based on the Shādhilī texts. Thus, we can see the Shaykh teaching for example the work of Imām al-Ghazzālī or Imām al-Qushayrī.²⁴⁹ Which is, as was mentioned before, a normal thing for Shādhilī scholars to do. However, what I am trying to point out here, is that we may want to draw a line between the teaching of the Shaykh which happens within his teaching of Taṣawwuf as

²⁴³ For example this video shows the Shaykh in the most emotional moment I have ever seen him in: شاهد كيف مدح الدكتور على جمعة سيدنا ومولانا النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم: *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BG5hrLsL15U> (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

²⁴⁴ Furthermore, he says that the *Burdah* contains the most perfect verse of poetry in praise of the Prophet: أحسن بيت في مديح سيدنا رسول الله ﷺ: أ.د علي جمعة: *YouTube*. Available at: <https://youtu.be/QjFhkezK4ak> (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

²⁴⁵ Which is seen in these circles as a sign of a very high spiritual station.

²⁴⁶ In the following video the Shaykh mentioned that there are about twenty million classical Arabic manuscripts today in the world and two millions of them are copies of the *Dalāil*: صيغة الصلاة على النبي ﷺ بمئة: *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=oDEYIN2Yvfk> (Accessed: 13 July 2023).

²⁴⁷ 4 - قصتي مع شيخنا الإمام علي جمعة - علوم الحوزة الأزهرية: *YouTube*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=s_5BVTOi0oE&list=PLUr-ykJKsZUIys5eJg6UI9GFH3zqxdPAr&index=6 (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

²⁴⁸ An example may be seen here: قراءة مولد العزب احتفالاً بالمولد النبوي الشريف 1441هـ | أ.د علي جمعة | مسجد فاضل: *YouTube*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pMg_eo28lk (Accessed: 13 July 2023).

²⁴⁹ According to ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn he even taught a Naqshbandī text *Rashahāt ‘Ayn al-Ḥayāh* at al-Azhar.

an Islamic science in general, and between his teaching of and instruction in the Shādhilī way.²⁵⁰ At the same time, it is obvious that the two do mix in the teaching of the Shaykh.²⁵¹

Regarding some of the specifics of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah Shaykh Ali Gomaa says that the path is bound by the Book and the Sunnah²⁵² and that its foundation is in dhikr and fikr.²⁵³

A very significant point is what the Shaykh often stresses, namely the fact that the orthodox Ṣūfīs have a consensus that the Sharī‘ah is given preference over spiritual experiences. This point cannot be stressed enough, because I believe that this is one of the main differences between the orthodox²⁵⁴ and unorthodox²⁵⁵ Ṣūfīs. What the Shaykh always mentions when he talks about this thing is that all of the various types of spiritual experiences – there are about twenty of them, they include things like mystical dreams, visions, inspirations, signs etc. – are not a sign that one has reached the goal of the spiritual path, rather one has been blessed by God by this experience and one is supposed to react with an increase of thankfulness and obedience to God. Furthermore, Shaykh also says here that one must not be blinded and deluded by these experiences.²⁵⁶

Then the Shaykh also further describes the Shādhilī Path as being based on *takhliyah* and *taḥliyah*. The *takhliyah* and *taḥliyah* is what I have described in the subchapter about the Shādhilī spiritual teachings and practices in the previous chapter when I described the *General Litany* and its three stages. The *takhliyah* is the process of purification of the human being from all that is bad and *taḥliyah* is the process of acquisition of all that is good.

Lastly, the Shaykh also often talks about “the three books of God” and the importance of reading and pondering the meanings and realities of these books. The first one is *Kitāb Allāh al-Manẓūr*, which is the world, the world that is seen, the cosmos, the creation of God. The second one is *Kitāb Allāh al-Maṣṭūr*, which is the Qur‘ān. Then the last one is *Kitāb Allāh al-Maḥdūr*, and that is the human being.²⁵⁷ Then, the Shaykh also talks about love and

²⁵⁰ Some of which are also public at the same time.

²⁵¹ As they do in the teaching of the other famous Shādhilīs that I have mentioned here so far.

²⁵² The first one to say this was al-Junayd al-Baghdādī.

²⁵³ I think the most accurate translation of this word in this specific context is “contemplation”.

²⁵⁴ Those who follow Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy.

²⁵⁵ Those who do not follow Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy or do not follow it fully.

²⁵⁶ ما الإشرافات ؟ وما موقف المرید منها ؟ | أ.د. علي جمعة *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HujD1kk7r-c> (Accessed: 14 July 2023).

²⁵⁷ منهج الطريقة الشاذلية في الوصول إلى الله ومنهج طريقة الإمام الغزالي *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=JuXtYqZuuXU> (Accessed: 14 July 2023).

the fact that one should go through the spiritual journey with and through love as that will make things much easier for them.²⁵⁸

After analysing all the materials that I have collected and managed to study, I am concluding that I did not find any explicit statement from the Shaykh where he would say something like “The Shādhilī Ṭarīqah is an integral part of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy.” or “The Shādhilī Ṭarīqah is at the heart of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy.” etc. I have not found any such explicit statement. However, there are many occasions where the Shaykh says for example “Our path is bound by the Book and the Sunnah.”, and that is an explicit statement that is meant to communicate that the Ṭarīqah is orthodox – meaning on the right path, on the path of the leading pious orthodox Sunnī scholars, on the same path as was the path of the Companions of the Prophet. Likewise, the Shaykh was a host at numerous shows about famous scholars and pious Muslims of Egypt²⁵⁹ and there, when talking about the Shādhilī personalities, he sometimes does mention that they were Shādhilīs, however, he does not focus on that point a lot and does not go much beyond just mentioning it as a piece of information. However, he does mention it and these scholars are commonly known to be orthodox, and thus, there is an unexplicit message that says that the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah is a part of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy.

²⁵⁸ ادخل من باب الحب | أ.د. علي جمعة *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=hfRjIpEMvok> (Accessed: 14 July 2023).

²⁵⁹ In my bibliography are quoted two such programmes – مصر أرض الصالحين and مصر أرض المجددين

7 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have tried to present the results of my research of the five key subjects – namely the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy, Sufism, the Shādhilī Order, Imām al-Suyūṭī and Shaykh Ali Gomaa, and their interconnectedness – and to prove or disprove the hypothesis.

In the chapter about Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy, I have discussed what Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy is, and what it is not, and I have tried to present some of the key characteristics of it. The historical reality and a key characteristic of the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy for the past six centuries has been the fact that the adherents to it follow the famous classical Sunnī schools of Theology²⁶⁰ and Law²⁶¹ and practise some form of orthodox Taṣawwuf. Another key characteristic of this Orthodoxy is their insistence that the Revelation has to be understood through the methodology formed by the corpus of classical Islamic sciences (*al-‘Ulūm al-Shar‘īyyah*). Next key characteristic of this Orthodoxy is the fact that this has been the professed understanding of Islām at some of the most famous and influential classical Islamic educational institutions, such as al-Qarawīyyūn in Fes, al-Zaytūnah in Tunis, al-Azhar in Egypt, the Umayyad mosques of Syria etc. The last key characteristic I mentioned is the fact that this was the professed and officially taught and applied understanding of Islām in some famous Sunnī states, such as the Umayyad or Abbasid caliphates, the Mamluk Sultanate or the Ottoman Empire.

In the chapter about Sufism, I differentiated between “Sufism,” as a term primarily coined by the Orientalists, which may include both things that are orthodox and entirely unorthodox from the perspective of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy, and between Taṣawwuf as a classical Islamic science that has been studied and practised in various forms since the time of the first generations of Muslims up until today. Brief historical and typological categorization of Taṣawwuf was also discussed in this chapter. I then discussed and demonstrated the fact that the science of Taṣawwuf has always been part of the corpus of classical Islamic sciences and was studied and practised and written about by some of the most famous and influential classical Sunnī scholars, beginning with “the four Imāms,” and having some of the most famous representatives in personalities like Imām al-Ghazzālī. In this chapter as well as in the previous and the following one, I tried to show the interconnectedness of the three foundational sciences of Theology, Law and Taṣawwuf and

²⁶⁰ Namely the Ash‘arī or Māturīdī or orthodox Ḥanbalī/Atharī.

²⁶¹ Namely the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanbalī.

I demonstrated it on the personality of Imām al-Ghazzālī as he was one of the most influential Sunnī theologians, jurists and Ṣūfīs of all time. Professor Aaron Spevack called this “the Gabrielian paradigm” – pointing to the origin of those three foundational sciences being put together in the famous Ḥadīth of Jibrīl. I borrowed this term, and modified it to “the Ghazalian paradigm,” as Imām al-Ghazzālī seems to be one of the most typical and famous scholarly representatives of this paradigm.

In the next chapter, I discussed the history and teachings and importance of the Shādhilī Order. The Shādhilī Order has been followed by many famous and very influential classical Sunnī scholars,²⁶² who have written many works that likewise have become very influential, such as *Qaṣīdah al-Burdah*, *al-Ḥikam al-‘Aṭāyyah* or *Dalāil al-Khayrāt*. Among the key characteristics of the Shādhilī Path is their insistence on the acquisition of the foundational obligatory knowledge of Theology and Law by their novices. Another characteristic is their strong attachment to the personality of the Prophet Muḥammad, which is manifested in their many works which praise him and educate people about him. Likewise, one of the main characteristics of this path is their statement that “The material world should be in your hand and not in your heart.” Another key characteristic of this path is the interconnectedness of Theology and Taṣawwuf (and Law) in their teachings. I have also explained the difference between the concept of “order” as it is understood in the Catholic context – I used the Teutonic Order as an example – and how it is understood in the context of classical Sunnī Islām. I pointed out the differences, where for example in the case of the Teutonic Order we see that the order is centralised, and has its Grand Master, headquarters, possessions etc., while in the case of the Shādhilī Order, we see that there are many individual and independent branches with their masters and that they may even not necessarily know each other. Likewise, the Shādhilī Order has no single Grand Master whom all the branches would recognize as their “supreme master,” it has no main headquarters, the various independent individual branches do not have shared wealth, are not centralised etc. Thus, I think that in the English language, we may differentiate between the word “order” – which would be any of the individual branches – and the word “path” – which would be all of the branches as a whole, since what connects them are the teachings of the greatest Shādhilī masters of the past, and not some kind of shared institutionalised structure.²⁶³ As

²⁶² People like Imām ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, Imām Ibn Ṣalāḥ, Imām Ibn al-Ḥājjib, Imām Ibn Daqīq al-‘Īd, Imām al-Qarāfī or Imām Aḥmad Zarrūq.

²⁶³ Thus, if we were to use this differentiation between an order and a path, when we would say “the Shādhilī Path” we would mean the Shādhilīyyah as a whole, we would be referring to all of the branches 80

far as I can see there is no such structure, and that is why we can observe that the various branches of the Shādhilī Path have differences between themselves and are not in some kind of institutionalised union and do not have some stipulated shared political or economical goals, shared power-projection etc. This is in clear contrast with the Teutonic Order which even governed and acted as a state for some time.

In the chapter about Imām al-Suyūṭī, I discussed his life and legacy, some of his most famous works and their importance up until today. It is well attested to, and even the analysed work of his proves that he was a typical representative of the Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy and of the Ghazalian paradigm, as he was one of the most influential Shāfi‘ī jurists, an Ash‘arī theologian and a Ṣūfī of the Shādhilī Path. He was a polymath, wrote virtually in every Islamic science, and many of his works are very famous and are widely studied in Islamic educational institutions all over the Muslim world.²⁶⁴ I then discussed his presentation of the Shādhilī Path. The hypothesis of this thesis states that the Shādhilī scholars present their order as “an integral part of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy.” The Imām wrote a whole book on this topic, thus I analysed and interpreted his presentation of the Shādhilī Path in this work. In the case of Imām al-Suyūṭī, my hypothesis proved to be largely correct as in this work he clearly portrayed the Shādhilī Path as an orthodox path with many prominent classical Sunnī scholars being its followers. Furthermore, in his introduction, he also mentioned that Taṣawwuf as an Islamic science is a noble science and that the masters of this science are the best of humankind after the Prophets. He obviously considers the Shādhilī masters to be masters of Taṣawwuf and thus, he places the Shādhilī masters on the highest rank he possibly can. Even though he did not use the explicit words “The Shādhilī Order is an integral part of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy,” the synthesis of all of what he said about the Shādhilī Path indeed conveys a meaning that is equal to it and even goes beyond that.

In the last chapter, I discussed the life and legacy of Shaykh Ali Gomaa and his presentation of the Shādhilī Path. Shaykh Ali Gomaa is one of the most famous and influential classical Sunnī scholars of today. Likewise, he is an influential Ash‘arī theologian, jurist and Ṣūfī master, thus he is another typical example of the validity of the Ghazalian paradigm. He has been one of the most prominent scholars at al-Azhar in the past many decades and there he initiated a scholarly revival, successfully trying to strengthen the

together, the general methodology and the shared key characteristics and to the main masters of the past and the present and their works. While when we would say “the Shādhilī Order” we would be referring to one specific branch or to the order of one specific master.

²⁶⁴ And even in countries where Muslims form just a minority.

position of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy at al-Azhar. At the same time, it seems that he has been trying to find a balance between the heritage of classical Sunnī scholarship and the modern world. For ten years he served as the Grand Mufti of Egypt and during this time he reformed the Dār al-Iftā' into a modern institution. He authored many books, articles, fatwas and also was a guest on many TV shows and was a host in many popular Islamic educational programmes on TV as well as online. He is in staunch opposition to the Salafī/Wahhābī movements as well as the Muslim Brotherhood. While being loved by many, he is also hated by many, and the proof of that is the great number of attacks on his personality online, as well as an assassination attempt on his life. Currently, he serves as a member of the Egyptian parliament. In the case of Shaykh Ali Gomaa, my hypothesis was tested through analysis, comparison and interpretation of a number of his public appearances on some TV shows and online, where he spoke about some famous Shādhilī personalities and Taṣawwuf in general. In his case, my hypothesis was proven largely correct as well, as he also presents the Shādhilī Path as an orthodox path, but when he presents the famous scholars who were followers of the Shādhilī Path, he does not focus on this aspect much, sometimes just mentions it briefly as a piece of information – however, that by itself together with his presentation of the path as an orthodox path, does send the unexplicit message that the Shādhilī Path is a part of Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy. Thus, compared to Imām al-Suyūṭī, although his presentation of the Shādhilī Path is less intense, in reality, he says almost the same thing.

I hope that this thesis has made a contribution in discussing and clarifying the key terms used in this thesis, in reaffirming the validity of the Gabrielian paradigm, in offering the differentiation between the terms “Taṣawwuf” and “Sufism,” and in the offer to differentiate between the words “path” and “order” when talking about the Shādhilīyyah in particular and the rest of the Ṣūfī orders in general.

Future research on the key subjects of this thesis requires that researchers look deeper into the relevant writings of classical Sunnī scholars.

Finally, I hope that this thesis may be of use for future research as well as for anyone who may be interested in the Shādhilīyyah, Sufism or Classical Sunnī Orthodoxy.

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