

**Univerzita Karlova**

**Filozofická fakulta**

KATEDRA BLÍZKÉHO VÝCHODU

# **Bakalářská práce**

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**Pojetí „sunnitské ortodoxie” prizmatem dvou současných  
autorit šádhilíjského súfíjského řádu**

The concept of "Sunni orthodoxy" through the prism of two  
contemporary Shadhili Sufi authorities

Praha 2023

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### ***Acknowledgement***

*I want to express my gratitude to my dear and respected teachers, especially to my supervisor Mgr. Pavel Ťupek, Ph.D., for their support, kindness, patience and valuable advice. Likewise, I wish to thank my beloved mother and father, my wife and the rest of my family and friends for their ongoing patience, kindness, generosity and support.*

*Prague, 22 December 2023*

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně, že jsem řádně citoval všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

V Praze, dne 22. prosince 2023

Kristián Dembický

**Klíčová slova (česky)**

*islám; sunnitská ortodoxie; teologické školy; právní školy; súfijské řády; islámské vědy; teologie; právo; sufismus; šejch 'Alí Džumu 'a; šejch 'Abd al-Qádir al-Ḥusajn*

**Klíčová slova (anglicky):**

*Islam; Sunnī orthodoxy; Schools of Theology; Schools of Law; Ṣūfī Orders; Islamic Sciences; Theology; Law; Sufism; Shaykh Ali Gomaa; Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn*

## **Abstrakt**

*Tato práce se zabývá definováním „sunnitské ortodoxie” (arabsky Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Džamā‘a) u dvou současných autorit šādhilijského súfijského řádu, jednoho z nejvýznamnějších súfijských řádů v muslimském světě. Důraz je kladen na analýzu jejich chápání islámské teologie, práva a sufismu. Prvním z těchto učenců je šejch ‘Alí Džumu‘a, bývalý velký muftí Egypta. Druhým učencem je jeho žák, šejch ‘Abd al-Qádir al-Ḥusajn. Práce sestává ze tří kapitol. První kapitola se zabývá obecnou historií a učením šādhilijského súfijského řádu. Druhá kapitola popisuje a analyzuje definování a chápání „sunnitské ortodoxie” šejcha ‘Alího Džumu‘y. Třetí kapitola popisuje a analyzuje definování a chápání „sunnitské ortodoxie” šejcha ‘Abd al-Qádira al-Ḥusajna. Metodologicky je práce postavena na analýze a interpretaci významných středověkých i současných šādhilijských děl, včetně záznamů přednášek, kázání, rozhovorů apod. Interakce s relevantní odbornou literaturou je rovněž důležitou součástí této práce.*

## **Abstract**

*This thesis discusses the defining of “Sunnī orthodoxy” (The Arabic term is Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a.) of two contemporary authorities of the Shādhilī Ṣūfī Order, one of the most important Ṣūfī orders in the Muslim world. Special attention is given to the analysis of their understanding of Islamic Theology, Law and Sufism. The first scholar is Shaykh Ali Gomaa, the previous Grand Mufti of Egypt. The second scholar is his student, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn. The thesis consists of three chapters. The first chapter discusses the history and teachings of the Shādhilī Ṣūfī Order in general. The second chapter describes and analyses the defining and understanding of the “Sunnī orthodoxy” of Shaykh Ali Gomaa. The third chapter describes and analyses the defining and understanding of “Sunnī orthodoxy” of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn. The thesis is methodologically based on analysis and interpretation of important mediaeval and contemporary Shādhilī works, including recorded lectures, sermons, interviews etc. Interaction with pertinent academic literature also forms a crucial component of the research.*



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## Introduction

### General introduction

The main topic of this thesis is how two contemporary Sunnī scholars, who belong to the Shādhilī Ṣūfī Order, define and understand the “Sunnī orthodoxy” (The Arabic equivalent is *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*).

As for the Shādhilī Order, it is one of the most famous, widespread and influential Ṣūfī orders in the Muslim world. Several important Sunnī scholars across history belonged to this order, among them were for example ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulamī,<sup>1</sup> al-Suyūṭī<sup>2</sup> or Aḥmad Zarrūq.<sup>3</sup> Even today, many famous and influential Sunnī scholars belong to this order. Among the most famous ones in the Arab world are Shaykh Ali Gomaa, the previous Grand Mufti of Egypt and one of the most prominent contemporary scholars of al-Azhar, and his student Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn. Thus, it is clear that to study this order, and the two scholars in particular, is a meaningful endeavour.

The discourse surrounding "Sunnī orthodoxy" (*Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*), essentially addressing the correct and authentic interpretation of Sunnī Islam, has persisted among Sunnī Muslims since the early centuries of Islam. This discourse holds paramount significance for Sunnī Muslims, as it is intricately connected to the fundamental question of identifying true followers of Prophet Muḥammad. At its core, the discussion extends to matters of disbelief (*kufīr*),<sup>4</sup> leading to the consequential issue of excommunication (*takfīr*)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> He was a famous and prominent jurist and theologian. Died in the year 1262 CE. For more information see: Chaumont, E., “al-Sulamī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_7148](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7148)>

<sup>2</sup> One of the most famous mediaeval Muslim scholars, a prolific writer, jurist, theologian, historian etc. He died in the year 1505 CE. For more information see: Geoffroy, E., “al-Suyūṭī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_1130](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1130)>

<sup>3</sup> A famous Mālikī jurist, theologian and a master of the Shādhilī Order. He died in the year 1494 CE. For more information see: Kugle, Scott, “Zarrūq, Aḥmad”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Devin J. Stewart. Consulted online on 18 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_24033](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_24033)>

<sup>4</sup> Certain beliefs are considered to be forms of disbelief by virtually all mainstream Sunnī Muslim groups. Having such beliefs may be tantamount to the person having left Islam and being no longer a Muslim. For more information see: Adang, Camilla, “Belief and Unbelief”, in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, General Editor: Johanna Pink, University of Freiburg. Consulted online on 14 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922\\_q3\\_EQCOM\\_00025](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00025)>

<sup>5</sup> This term means excommunication, declaring a Muslim to have left the fold of Islam, and no longer being a Muslim. For more information see: Ed, and Hunwick, J.O., “Takfīr”, in: *Encyclopaedia of*



or the declaration of apostasy, which then, in some cases, could lead up to a death penalty for the apostate, under some interpretations of Islamic Law. The determination of whether an individual qualifies as an orthodox Sunnī Muslim is, therefore, a matter of profound importance in the worldly context. From the perspective of Muslims, it is inexorably tied to considerations of salvation or damnation in the Hereafter. As such, the delineation of what constitutes the authentic and true (orthodox) form of Sunnism has remained a central theme in scholarly dialogues among Sunnī Muslims, involving theologians, jurists, and even Ṣūfīs. These debates endure into contemporary times, underscoring the ongoing complexity and relevance of this discourse.<sup>6</sup>

This thesis presents the definitions and understanding of “Sunnī orthodoxy” of two important Sunnī scholars, who belong to the Shādhilī Order.<sup>7</sup>

### Thesis Objectives

The primary objective of this thesis is to address the research question: "How do contemporary Shādhilī scholars, specifically Shaykh Ali Gomaa and his student Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn, define the term 'Sunnī orthodoxy' (*Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*)?" The key secondary goals include providing an overview of the history and teachings of the Shādhilī Order in general, as well as acquainting the reader with the lives and works of the two scholars—Shaykh Ali Gomaa and Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn—and conducting a comparative analysis of their definitions and understandings of "Sunnī orthodoxy." Another consequential secondary objective of the thesis is to delineate the ideas that Shaykh Ali Gomaa and Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn disapprove of and refute.

### Methodology

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*Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 14 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_1154](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1154)>

<sup>6</sup> As for the contemporary academic reflections of these debates among Muslims, see for example: Khan, A. (2023) *Heresy and the formation of medieval islamic orthodoxy: The making of sunnism, from the eighth to the eleventh centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., or Simon, U. and Langer, R., (2008). ‘The dynamics of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy. dealing with divergence in Muslim discourses and islamic studies’, *Die Welt des Islams*, 48(3/4), pp. 273–288.

<sup>7</sup> It is important to clarify that I merely describe and analyse and ultimately convey the definitions and understandings of these two scholars, my aim is not to judge them and say whether they are correct or incorrect etc. Likewise, it is not a goal of this thesis to present and discuss the various other definitions of “Sunnī orthodoxy”.

This thesis primarily employs the methods of analysis and interpretation, drawing from authoritative medieval and contemporary Shādhilī literature, as well as recorded lectures, sermons, interviews, and other relevant sources. Special emphasis is placed on the analysis of the perspectives on Islamic Theology, Law, and Sufism of the two scholars under study. Interaction with pertinent academic literature also forms a crucial component of the research. The comparative method is applied to analyze and compare not only the definitions and understanding of "Sunnī orthodoxy," but also the various other positions held by the two scholars under study.

### Contents and structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured with an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion.

The first chapter provides an exploration of the history, teachings, significant works, and notable figures within the Shādhilī Order.

In the second chapter, the focus shifts to an examination of Shaykh Ali Gomaa's life and contributions. Subsequently, it delves into his definition and comprehension of "Sunnī orthodoxy," and the theological, legal, and Ṣūfī dimensions of Islam.

The third chapter initiates with an exploration of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn's life and accomplishments. It then delves into his definition and understanding of "Sunnī orthodoxy," focusing also on the same three aspects of Theology, Law, and Sufism.

The conclusion consolidates the findings of the thesis, addressing the research question and presenting a comparative analysis of Shaykh Ali Gomaa's and Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn's definitions and understanding of "Sunnī orthodoxy."

### State of the art

Concerning the current state of research of the Shādhilī Order, a substantial body of literature has been written.

One of the standard studies on the origins and the early history of the Shādhilī Order is the article by Mackeen *The Rise of al-Shādhilī*.<sup>8</sup> Touati provided a brief biography of the founder of the order, with a special focus on his travels, and also provided a useful overview of the current state of the art.<sup>9</sup> Another study that deals with the early period is *Realm of the Saint* by Cornell. In this work, he mostly focused on one particular later branch of the order, known as al-Jazūlīyya, and focused mostly on the history of the order in Morocco.<sup>10</sup> Hofer presented how the order spread in Mamluk Egypt.<sup>11</sup> Cecere also wrote an article about one of the early masters of the order.<sup>12</sup> Kropáček provided a general historical and geographical overview of the order in the Czech language.<sup>13</sup>

As for the study of the teachings of the Shādhilī Order, according to Mackeen, the earliest attempts were made by Miguel Asín Palacios. The former says the following about the research the latter: “For the history of Sufism in Spain, our best sources are the profound and scholarly writings of Miguel Asín Palacios, who, despite his Christian predilection, appears to be the only author to have dealt with the doctrinal origins of the Shādhilī school and its later members. He does not, however, adequately acquaint us with facts of history. The bibliography furnished by him does not show that he had access to all the relevant source material for the purpose.”<sup>14</sup> In his article dedicated to al-Shādhilī, Mackeen himself provided some information regarding the Shādhilī teachings and spirituality. Cornell presented some of the Jazūlī teachings, the roots of which are in the Shādhilīyya, in his work. Research of some spiritual practices of the Shādhilīyya was also provided by McGregor in his article, where he mostly dealt with the importance of litanies for the order.<sup>15</sup> However, his study was concerned only with one particular branch of the Shādhilīyya in Tunisia, and although in general, it provides some useful information – such

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<sup>8</sup> Mackeen, A.M.M., (1971). ‘The Rise of al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 91(4), pp. 477–486. doi:10.2307/598444.

<sup>9</sup> Touati, S. (2018) ‘The Wanderings of Abū Al-Ḥasan Al-Šāḍilī (d. 1258) According to Ibn “‘Atā” Allāh’s *Laṭā’if al-minan* and Ibn Al-Šabbāg’s *Durrat al-asrār*’, *Romano-Arabica*, (18), pp. 227–238.

<sup>10</sup> Cornell, V.J., (1998). *Realm of the saint: Power and authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

<sup>11</sup> Hofer, N., (2015). *Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt*. Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Cecere, G., (2019). ‘From Ethiopian slave to Egyptian ṣūfī master? Yāqūt al-ḥabashī in Mamluk and Ottoman sources’, *Northeast African Studies*, 19(1), pp. 85–138.

<sup>13</sup> Kropáček, L., (2008). *Súfismus: dějiny islámské mystiky*. Praha: Vyšehrad. pp. 238-140

<sup>14</sup> Mackeen, M., (1971). ‘The early history of Sufism in the Maghrib prior to Al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 91(3), pp. 400. doi:10.2307/600258.

<sup>15</sup> McGregor, R.J., (1997). ‘A Sufī legacy in Tunis: Prayer and the Shadhiliyya’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 29(2), pp. 255–277.

as clarification of some crucial terminology – it misses some very important and famous litanies such as *al-Wird al-‘Āmm* as well as *al-Ṣalāt al-Mashīshīyya* and *al-Ṣalāt al-Yāqūtīyya*. Maybe it is so because these litanies may not be common in the particular branch that he studied. The article also suffers from terminological inconsistency and inaccuracy, which may be demonstrated by the following statement: “The larger *ḥaḍrah*, on Thursday night, is highlighted by the recitation of the *aḥzāb* rather than the *dhikr*.”<sup>16</sup> It is well-established that the term *dhikr*<sup>17</sup> in Ṣūfī terminology, especially within the Shādhilī tradition, is a broad concept encompassing various forms of worship, with its antonym being *ghafla* (heedlessness). Consequently, both *ḥaḍra* and *aḥzāb* can be designated as *dhikr*, introducing ambiguity regarding the author's intended meaning. In my assessment, Honerkamp has delivered the most exemplary academic presentation of Shādhilī teachings in the English language.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequently, numerous studies focus on distinguished scholars affiliated with this order. Notably, there exists a monograph dedicated to Aḥmad Zarrūq,<sup>19</sup> along with an article specifically addressing one of his seminal works, “Qawā‘id al-Taṣawwuf.”<sup>20</sup> Additionally, a separate monograph is dedicated to the scholarly contributions of al-Suyūfī.<sup>21</sup>

Stetkevych has conducted an analysis of the *Burda*, one of the most famous poems in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad. This poem is a work by al-Būṣīrī,<sup>22</sup> who is considered perhaps the most renowned poets associated with the Shādhilī tradition.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 268

<sup>17</sup> Meaning remembrance of God. It can take form of the Islamic ritual prayer, supplication, invocations of the Names of God etc. For some more information see: Gardet, L., “*Dhikr*”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0162](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0162)>

<sup>18</sup> Honerkamp, K., *A biography of abū l-Hasan Al-Shādhilī* - [themathesontrust.org](http://themathesontrust.org). Available at: [https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili\\_bio.pdf](https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili_bio.pdf) (Accessed: 08 November 2023).

<sup>19</sup> Kugle, S.A., (2006). *Rebel between spirit and law: Ahmad Zarruq, Sainthood, and authority in Islam*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>20</sup> GHULAM, S.-U.-R. (2010) ‘Juridical Sufism: Zarrūq’s Application of the “Qawā‘id” Genre’, *Islamic Studies*, 49(3), pp. 341–356.

<sup>21</sup> Ghersetti, A., (ed.) (2016). *Al-Suyūfī, a Polymath of the Mamlūk period: Proceedings of the Themed Day of the first conference of the school of Mamlūk Studies (ca’ Foscari University, Venice, June 23, 2014)*. Brill.

<sup>22</sup> He was a novice of the second grandmaster of the Shādhilīyya. Died in the year 1294 CE. For more information see: Homerin, Th. Emil, “al-Būṣīrī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Devin J. Stewart. Consulted online on 21 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_23124](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23124)>

<sup>23</sup> Stetkevych, S.P. (2007) ‘From Sīrah to qaṣīdah: Poetics and polemics in Al-Būṣīrī’s Qaṣīdat al-Burdah (mantle ode)’, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 38(1), pp. 1–52. doi:10.1163/157006407780997983.

Regarding the secondary sources on Shaykh Ali Gomaa, he has been mentioned in countless books and articles for a variety of reasons, however, only a very small number of them has been dedicated exclusively or largely to him. Among those dedicated works, they singularly emphasize one aspect of Shaykh's persona: his involvement in Egyptian political events since 2011, particularly his ties with the military and the current Sisi government. These sources offer scant information about the Shaykh's life or his broader understanding of Islam. Instead, they concentrate solely on his fatwas and positions related to the political landscape in Egypt during the specified period. Adding to that, they are quite flawed as will be discussed in the chapter about Shaykh Ali Gomaa, where a discussion of his role in some of the political events in Egypt in the specified period is included. Among the articles are those by Warren<sup>24</sup> and Muzakkir,<sup>25</sup> as well as a section in the Ph.D. thesis of the latter.<sup>26</sup> The main secondary sources I relied upon in the chapter about Shaykh Ali Gomaa are his official website,<sup>27</sup> and his biography which is included in a collection of one hundred of his fatwas in English.<sup>28</sup> Regarding broader context of contemporary religious authority in Egypt, especially within al-Azhar, one can examine the research conducted by Bano.<sup>29</sup>

Concerning the contemporary academic study of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn, there is a notable absence of prior research or references in both English and Arabic. To my knowledge, the only secondary sources are the articles on *Everybodywiki*<sup>30</sup> and *Islamic*

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<sup>24</sup> Warren, D.H., (2017). ‘Cleansing the nation of the “Dogs of Hell”’: ‘Ali Jum‘a’s nationalist legal reasoning in support of the 2013 Egyptian coup and its bloody aftermath’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 49(3), pp. 457–477.

<sup>25</sup> Muzakkir, Muhamad Rofiq. “Understanding the Discourse of ‘Alī Jum‘ah on the Military Coup During the Arab Spring in Egypt.” *Ilahiyat Studies* 10, no. 2 (2019): 229-263. <https://doi.org/10.12730/13091719.2019.102.196>

<sup>26</sup> Muzakkir, M.R., (2022). *Tradition and Modernity in the Ulama’s Discourse on Usurpation of Power*. Dissertation. Arizona State University, pp. 199-206

<sup>27</sup> أ.د. علي جمعة، أ.د. علي السيرة الذاتية، Available at: <https://www.draligomaa.com/index.php/%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A9> (Accessed: 26 November 2023).

<sup>28</sup> Gomaa, A., (2011). *Responding from the tradition*. Louisville, Ky. Fons Vitae.

<sup>29</sup> Bano, M., (ed.) (2018). *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change*. Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>30</sup> عبد القادر محمد الحسين - *EverybodyWiki Bios & Wiki*. Available at: [https://ar.everybodywiki.com/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1\\_%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86](https://ar.everybodywiki.com/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1_%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86) (Accessed: 11 December 2023).

heritage.<sup>31</sup> However, both of them fail to provide relevant references to primary sources for the information they share. Even though their information mostly corresponds with what I have reached through my study of the primary sources, I chose not to rely on them for their lack of academic reliability. Therefore, I have based my research on him and his opinions exclusively on the primary sources, which will be discussed below in the section discussing the primary sources used in this thesis. As Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn is originally from Syria, and much of his life and scholarship is connected to the Syrian scholarly tradition, one might want to review the general context of contemporary Syrian scholastic tradition, especially in Damascus, in the work of Pierret.<sup>32</sup>

For elucidation of certain specialized terminology employed within this thesis, as well as for further biographical insights pertaining to referenced individuals, I have principally directed the reader to consult the *Encyclopedia of Islam* and the *Encyclopedia of the Quran*.

This thesis presupposes a foundational acquaintance with Islam, necessitating a rudimentary comprehension of widely recognized terms such as the *Qur’ān*, *Ḥadīth*, or *Islam*. Notwithstanding, explicit definitions of these terms are not provided within the confines of this thesis, but they are easily accessible elsewhere.

### Identifying the knowledge gap

Research into the definitions of orthodoxy and heresy within contemporary Shādhilīyya has been undertaken by Francesco Piraino, particularly focusing on the branch known as Shādhilīyya-Darqāwīyya-‘Alawīyya.<sup>33</sup> Piraino's study is specifically centred on the “sub-branch“ led by Khaled Bentounes.<sup>34</sup> However, this research is full of the author’s subjectivities and biases, and entirely ignores the history of the Shādhilī Order as a whole. For instance, he portrays the ‘Alawīyya (as a whole without even differentiating between its various branches) as essentially perennialist. Even if the one particular branch of the

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<sup>31</sup> منصة حفظ التراث الإسلامي | عبد القادر الحسين الشامي منصة حفظ التراث الإسلامي: عبد القادر الحسين الشامي. Available at: <https://www.islamic-heritage.com/sheikh/133> (Accessed: 11 December 2023).

<sup>32</sup> Pierret, T., “Prophetic rituals in modern Syria: Defending the “old orthodoxy” with the ulama in it.“ *The presence of the prophet in early modern and contemporary islam*. Available at: <https://hal.science/hal-02553756/document> (Accessed: 01 November 2023).

<sup>33</sup> Piraino, F., and Sedgwick, M.J., (eds.) (2019). *Global sufism: Boundaries, structures and politics*. London: Hurst & Company. pp. 75-89

<sup>34</sup> He is active in the public space in France, was born in the year 1949 CE. See: *Site officiel du Cheikh Bentounes: Biographie cheikhbentounes*. Available at: <https://www.cheikh-bentounes.com/copie-de-le-cheikh-bio-longue> (Accessed: 21 December 2023).

‘Alawīyya, which he studied, was indeed perennialist, his research is flawed for not clarifying that other ‘Alawī branches are not perennialist, and which would undoubtedly consider the perennialist doctrines, as he described them, to be forms of *kufir* (disbelief). For instance, Piraino says the following: “God, in ‘Alawi metaphysics, represents the absolute alterity upon whom it is impossible to impose anthropomorphic attributes. This absoluteness relativises everything: evil and good, paradise and hell, even existence.”<sup>35</sup> This kind of relativism is rejected by the Shādhilī heirs of Shaykh al-‘Alawī<sup>36</sup> that I have studied. It can be demonstrated through the words of a direct student of Shaykh al-‘Alawī, Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hāshimī al-Tilimsānī,<sup>37</sup> who was the master of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Īsā,<sup>38</sup> the master of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn. We have some old recordings of speeches of Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hāshimī al-Tilimsānī; in one of them he describes Islam through the “Gabrielian paradigm”<sup>39</sup> and quotes the verse of the Qur’ān which says “The true religion with God is Islam.” (3:19) and clearly says that if one does not believe in the existence of God, they are a *kāfir* (disbeliever).<sup>40</sup> This same understanding was preached by his student Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Īsā<sup>41</sup> and now it is preached by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn.<sup>42</sup>

The research that was conducted so far on the topic of defining orthodoxy and heresy within contemporary Shadhilīyya has been so far only very limited, partial,

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 86

<sup>36</sup> He was a famous Shādhilī Shaykh of the twentieth century from Algeria. He died in the year 1934 CE. For more information see: Geoffroy, Eric, “Aḥmad b. ‘Aliwa”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krāmer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Devin J. Stewart. Consulted online on 18 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_23662](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23662)>

<sup>37</sup> He was a famous scholar and Shādhilī Shaykh from Algeria, who migrated to Syria and became a teacher of a number of prominent Damascene scholars of the second half of 20th century CE. He died in the year 1961 CE. For more information see: al-Mudir (2023) *Bio: Sh Muhammad al-Hashimi, Damas Cultural Society*. Available at: <https://damas.nur.nu/8895/bionotes/bio-sh-muhammad-al-hashimi> (Accessed: 21 December 2023).

<sup>38</sup> He was a prominent Syrian scholar and Shādhilī Shaykh of the second half of the twentieth century CE. He died in the year 1991 CE. For more information see: *Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘isa Sunni Publications*. Available at: <https://sunnipubs.com/pages/shaykh-abd-al-qadir-isa> (Accessed: 21 December 2023).

<sup>39</sup> This concept says that the religion of Islam is essentially composed of three dimensions: Theological, Legal and Spiritual. The term was coined, presented and explained by Spevack: Spevack, A., (2014). *The Archetypal Sunnī Scholar*. State University of New York Press.

<sup>40</sup> سؤال وجواب مع العارف بالله الشيخ محمد الهاشمي رضي الله عنه *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=LwrvTIqvhbw&list=PLK1KAqnpRZ2R3fHQXHlQpl6Q UzFvx6DzQ&index=1> (Accessed: 07 December 2023).

<sup>41</sup> قصتي مع شيخنا العارف بالله عبد القادر عيسى رضي الله عنه *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V25ESjTk0ic> (Accessed: 07 December 2023).

<sup>42</sup> طارق السودان ونجاة أهل الكفران! *YouTube*. Available at: [https://youtu.be/aKGRrZCjmqY?si=DwrV\\_K6HHdbEJitM](https://youtu.be/aKGRrZCjmqY?si=DwrV_K6HHdbEJitM) (Accessed: 07 December 2023).

incomplete, and in some cases, as indicated, biased and flawed. I hope that my thesis will present a meaningful contribution to the current academic discussion.

### Discussion of the primary sources used in this thesis

The volume of primary sources available on the Shādhilī Order is extensive, and it is evident that my examination has covered only a fraction of them. Additionally, certain sources prove to be less pertinent to the focus of this thesis. In the first chapter, I have predominantly relied on English translations of writings by renowned and authoritative classical Shādhilī scholars. Notably, my reliance extends to the English translation of significant biographies, such as *Laṭā'if al-Minan*, documenting the lives of the order's founder and his principal successor. This particular translation is attributed to Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh al-Iskandarī, acknowledged as the "third master of the order."<sup>43</sup>

Another example may be the translation of the commentary of Aḥmad Zarrūq on the *Litany of the Sea* of the founder of the order, which I used when explaining the teachings of the order.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, I incorporated various Arabic originals in my research, such as the work *Salwat al-Anfās*,<sup>45</sup> by the renowned Moroccan scholar Muḥammad ibn Ja'far al-Kattānī.<sup>46</sup> I have also used some works that were written originally in English by contemporary Shādhilī scholars who sometimes write in English, such as *Sea without Shore*, by Shaykh Nuh Keller, on which I relied heavily when explaining the spiritual teachings and practices of the order.<sup>47</sup>

In the second chapter, I relied on three main primary sources. Firstly, Shaykh's own words which are easily available online in huge numbers of recorded speeches, sermons,

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<sup>43</sup> al-Iskandarī, Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh., (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.

<sup>44</sup> Zarruq, S.A., (2013). *Sidi Ahmad Zarruq's commentary on Shaykh al-Shadhili's Hizb al-Bahr*. Visions Of Reality Books.

<sup>45</sup> al-Kattānī, M. ibn J., (2005). *Salwat al-Anfās wa Muḥādathat al-Akyās bi man Uqbira min al-'Ulamā' wa al-Ṣulahā' bi Fās*. Rabat.

<sup>46</sup> He was a famous 19th century Mālikī jurist, theologian and historian. For more information see: Rodríguez Mediano, F. (1992) *Santos Arrebatados: Algunos ejemplos de Maydub en la salwat al-Anfas de Muhammad al-Kattani*, DIGITAL.CSIC. Available at: <https://digital.csic.es/handle/10261/20411> (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

<sup>47</sup> Keller, N.H.M., (2011). *Sea without shore: A manual of the sufi path*. Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications.



interviews etc., especially on his official YouTube channel.<sup>48</sup> Secondly, a collection of his fatwas in the book *Responding from the Tradition*,<sup>49</sup> and a book on Theology the Shaykh wrote, known as *Aqīdat Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*.<sup>50</sup> Thirdly, the testimonies of 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, and thus knows the Shaykh very well, and is a unique source of information about him. He has recorded a series of speeches, where he talks about his experiences with the Shaykh.<sup>51</sup>

In the third chapter, I relied exclusively on two sources. The first source is his two books, one is about Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī,<sup>52</sup> and the second one is his commentary on the famous didactic theological poem *al-Kharīda al-Bahīyya*.<sup>53</sup> The second source is the official YouTube channel of the Shaykh, which currently features nearly 5000 posted videos. From this channel, I selected specific playlists, individual recorded speeches, and lectures that are pertinent to the objectives of this thesis.<sup>54</sup> The autobiography of the Shaykh,<sup>55</sup> and the related playlists,<sup>56</sup> are a treasury of information about contemporary Syrian Islamic scholarship, as well as a unique and valuable multifaceted testimony to the tragic history of Syria in the last many decades. It may prove very interesting and beneficial to anyone studying contemporary Syria.

It is pertinent to acknowledge that I have, for a duration exceeding six years, immersed myself as a novice within the Shādhilī Order. My affiliation lies with the branch headed by Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, a lineage distinct from those of Shaykh Ali Gomaa and Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn. Throughout this period, I have been blessed

<sup>48</sup> *dr. Ali Gomaa. YouTube.* Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/@DrAliGomaa> (Accessed: 03 November 2023).

<sup>49</sup> Gomaa, A., (2011). *Responding from the tradition*. Louisville, Ky. Fons Vitae.

<sup>50</sup> Gomaa, A., (2011). *Aqīdat Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*. Cairo: Dār al-Muqattam li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘.

<sup>51</sup> شيخنا مفتي الديار المصرية . *YouTube.* Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUrykJsZUIys5eJg6UI9GFH3zqxdPAr> (Accessed: 03 November 2023).

<sup>52</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī was one of the most influential Islamic theologians of all time. Died in the year 936 CE. See: al-Ḥusayn, ‘Abd al-Qādir., (2020). *Imām Ahl al-Ḥaqq al-Shaykh al-Mujaddid Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī*. Dār al-Fātiḥ li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘.

<sup>53</sup> al-Ḥusayn, ‘Abd al-Qādir., (2018). *Al-Zubda al-Hanīyya fī Sharḥ al-Kharīda al-Bahīyya*. Dār al-Bayrūtī.

<sup>54</sup> الدكتور عبد القادر الحسين *dr. Abdulkader Al Housien. YouTube.* Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/@dr.abdulkaderalhouzien> (Accessed: 03 November 2023).

<sup>55</sup> *عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ السيرة الذاتية \_ النشأة الأولى YouTube.* Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCCcCo1d10&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=18](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCCcCo1d10&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=18) (Accessed: 06 December 2023).

<sup>56</sup> العلماء والصالحون الذين أخذت عنهم *YouTube.* Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUrykJsZUjhxUzDes5Ud7Q2hanQ2bgT> (Accessed: 03 November 2023).

a number of times to meet with Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi and other eminent contemporary classical Sunnī scholars, deriving considerable benefit from their wealth of knowledge and sagacity.

I was also fortunate to personally visit Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn once, and I maintain continuous correspondence with him ever since, regarding him as one of my most esteemed teachers. Throughout these six years, my academic endeavors have extended across classical Islamic sciences, with a particular focus on classical Sunnī Theology, Law, and Sufism, under the guidance of my teachers from among the classical Sunnī scholars, predominantly from Syria, Mauritania, and Morocco.

This period has afforded me the unique opportunity to witness firsthand the vibrant existence of the Shādhilī Order, its spirituality, and intellectual milieu. Furthermore, I have been privileged to engage with novices and masters of other Ṣūfī orders as well, particularly the Rifā‘ī and Naqshbandī orders, for whom I hold nothing but gratitude, respect, and love. Despite my acknowledged shortcomings in both understanding and practice, these six years have bestowed upon me a certain level of insight into the Shādhilī tradition, and Sufism and classical Sunnī Islam more broadly. It is essential to highlight these aspects here, offering the reader a hint into my background.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that notwithstanding my personal convictions and affiliation with the Shādhilī Order, I have earnestly endeavored to uphold academic objectivity throughout this thesis.

### Transcription of Arabic

In my transliteration method, I follow these conventions:  $\bar{ا}$  = a,  $\bar{اِ}$  = i,  $\bar{اُ}$  = u,  $ب$  = b,  $ت$  = t,  $ث$  = th,  $ج$  = j,  $ح$  = ḥ,  $خ$  = kh,  $د$  = d,  $ذ$  = dh,  $ر$  = r,  $ز$  = z,  $س$  = s,  $ش$  = sh,  $ص$  = ṣ,  $ض$  = ḍ,  $ط$  = t,  $ظ$  = ḏ,  $ع$  = ‘,  $غ$  = gh,  $ف$  = f,  $ك$  = k,  $ق$  = q,  $ل$  = l,  $م$  = m,  $ن$  = n,  $و$  = w,  $ه$  = h,  $ي$  = y,  $ة$  = a or at (in the case of genitive construction),  $ء$  = ’

For the transliteration of short vowels, I use: a, i, u

For the transliteration of prolonged vowels, I use ā, ī, ū.

In cases where a person's name is commonly transliterated in a specific way and has become widely accepted or even endorsed by the individual, such as Shaykh Ali Gomaa or Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, I adhere to the established transliteration, even if it differs from my general method.

Similarly, when quoting a work that uses a specific transliteration, even if I find it flawed, I maintain consistency and do not alter it.

### The quotation style

Regarding my citation style, I have opted for the Harvard citation style due to its simplicity, clarity, and suitability for quoting diverse sources in different languages. The primary objective of employing quotes is to ensure the source's identifiability and verifiability. Given the dynamic nature of online content, it is crucial that sources can be verified, especially regarding when a particular source was quoted. To facilitate clarity and verification, I have invested significant effort in ensuring the accuracy of my quotes. For creating my citations, I utilized the website "Create Harvard, APA & MLA Citations Cite This For Me," a service provided by Chegg. The website link is as follows: <https://www.citethisforme.com/> (Accessed: 19 July 2023).

# 1 The Shādhilī Sūfī Order

## 1.1 *Sufism in the Maghrib and in Egypt prior to al-Shādhilī*

As elaborated in the forthcoming subchapters, the Shādhilī Order originated in the Maghrib and subsequently established its primary stronghold in Egypt. Consequently, it is crucial to examine the prevailing state of Sufism in these two regions before the advent of the Shādhilī Order.

The context into which the Shādhilī Order was born in the Maghrib was for some time rather unexplored by Western academia. As Mohamed Mackeen aptly puts it: “Our knowledge of the early history of Sufism in the Maghrib, to judge from the extant studies on the subject, contains gaps unavoidable in the present state of research.”<sup>57</sup> Mohamed Mackeen himself tried to fill this gap in his article titled *The Early History of Sufism in the Maghrib before al-Shādhilī*,<sup>58</sup> and indeed his article provides a useful overview of both the history of Sufism in the Maghrib, as well as of the Western academic research of this subject. Much more extensive and deeper research on this subject was then provided by Vincent Cornell in his work *Realm of the Saint*. Both of them point to the various imperfections<sup>59</sup> of the old French orientalist colonial research of Sufism in the Maghrib. As Cornell clarifies: “First, the continued reliance on colonial-era studies has allowed certain paradigms to outlive their usefulness, thus distorting the image of North African Islam among European and North American scholars.”<sup>60</sup> Cornell seems to have mapped the pre-Shādhilī period of Maghribī Sufism well, and based on his research we can see that there were four main trends present before the arrival of the “mainstream” and famous “international” Sūfī orders. The first was the local rural Sufism of the *Ribāṭs*, the second was the Ghazalian Sufism, which was mostly present in the urban areas, thirdly, there were the local orders – such as the Ṣanhājīyya – and finally, there was the way of Abū Madyan, which synthesised these other three forms and became one of the most dominant forms of

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<sup>57</sup> Mackeen, A.M.M., (1971). ‘The Rise of al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 91(4), p. 477. doi:10.2307/598444

<sup>58</sup> Mackeen, M., (1971). ‘The early history of Sufism in the Maghrib prior to al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 91(3), pp. 398–408. doi:10.2307/600258.

<sup>59</sup> Although Mackeen also seems to appreciate some of their research.

<sup>60</sup> Cornell, V.J., (1998). *Realm of the saint: Power and authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Austin: University of Texas Press, p. ix.

Maghribī Sufism. To this milieu then arrived the “mainstream” and “international” Ṣūfī orders, and at the head of this arrival was the Shādhilīyya.<sup>61</sup>

As for the situation in Egypt concerning Sufism before al-Shādhilī and after his mission, the most extensive research on this topic within Western academia was done by Nathan Hofer. As he documented, there were many Ṣūfī lodges (*zāwiya*, *ribāt*, *khānqā*) in Egypt before the arrival and spread of the teachings of al-Shādhilī. He has also clarified that there were strong bonds between the various Ṣūfī lodges and the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk states.<sup>62</sup>

## 1.2 *Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī and his life*

The narrative of the Shādhilī Order unfolds in the 13th century and is intricately connected with its eponymous figure, Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī or, simply, al-Shādhilī. Vincent Cornell says in *Realm of the Saint*: “Despite his importance as the founder of a major Sufi order, Abū’l-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī has still not been studied in adequate detail.”<sup>63</sup> Cornell also mentioned that there are conflicting reports about his life and that there are two major primary sources about his life, namely Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh al-Iskandarī’s<sup>64</sup> *Kitāb Laṭā’if al-Minan fī Manāqib Abī al-‘Abbās al-Mursī wa Shaykhihi Abī al-Ḥasan*<sup>65</sup> and Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh’s<sup>66</sup> *Durrat al-Asrār*,<sup>67</sup> which according to him is more

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. pp. 123-146

<sup>62</sup> Hofer, N., (2015). *Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt*. Edinburgh University Press. pp. 1-102

<sup>63</sup> Cornell, V.J., (1998). *Realm of the saint: Power and authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 147

<sup>64</sup> One of the main students of the main student of Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. He was a scholar from Alexandria, became one of the most important personalities of the order. Died in the year 1309 CE. For more information see: Brockelmann, C., “Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition (1913-1936)*, Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Consulted online on 18 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X\\_ei\\_SIM\\_2954](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei_SIM_2954)>

<sup>65</sup> This work was masterfully translated into English by Nancy Roberts as *The Subtle Blessings in the Saintly Lives of Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī & his master Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī*.

<sup>66</sup> A Muslim scholar from North Africa who became affiliated with the Shādhilī order, and is best known for his biography of the founder of the order. Lived in the 13th century CE. For more information see: Ibn Al-Sabbagh., (1993). *The mystical teachings of al-Shadhili: Including his life, prayers, letters, and followers*. Elmer H. Douglas. Edited by I.M. Abu-Rabi<sup>e</sup>. Translated by E.H. Douglas. State University of New York Press, pp. 9-10

<sup>67</sup> Mackeen also primarily points only to these two sources: Mackeen, A.M.M., (1971). ‘The Rise of al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 91(4), p. 478. doi:10.2307/598444

reliable,<sup>68</sup> because *Laṭā'if al-Minan* was written as “an apologia” with its primary purpose being legitimization of the new leadership of his successor al-Mursī and that Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī appears in the work “more as a trope than as a living saint”.<sup>69</sup> Firstly, it is important to mention that there are other important primary sources – a number of them were mentioned by the famous and prominent Moroccan scholar Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far al-Kattānī in the biography of Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī which he included in his work *Salwat al-Anfās*.<sup>70</sup> Other primary sources were listed by Kenneth Honerkamp in his article about one<sup>71</sup> of these sources which he “re-discovered”.<sup>72</sup> Secondly, I do not share the view of Cornell that al-Shādhilī appears in the work “more as a trope than as a living saint”. Later in this chapter, a story from *Laṭā'if al-Minan* will be mentioned to demonstrate the reason behind my disagreement.

Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad, was born in the year 1196 in what is now Morocco. His main spiritual guide was ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh.<sup>73</sup> Some of the Western academics, such as Palacios or Rinn, claimed that ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh was a student of Abū Madyan. However, Mackeen argues that this claim lacks support from primary sources.<sup>74</sup> According to the *silsila* of Shaykh al-‘Alawī provided by Martin Lings, Abū Madyan was one of the two masters of the master of ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh.<sup>75</sup> The teachings of Ibn Mashīsh were briefly discussed by Mackeen, who suggests that there is some difference between his teachings and the teachings of al-Shādhilī, however, that is quite inaccurate, and the harmonious relationship and connectedness of their teachings was well demonstrated by Honerkamp and can be summarised as complete and absolute dedication and turning to God alone at all states.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Mackeen, however, refers to *Laṭā'if al-Minan* as “reliable” and does not make any such distinctions between the two sources and rather seems to consider *Laṭā'if al-Minan* to be more reliable.

<sup>69</sup> Cornell, V.J., (1998). *Realm of the saint: Power and authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 147

<sup>70</sup> al-Kattānī, M. ibn J. (2005) *Salwat al-Anfās wa Muḥādathat al-Akyās bi man Uqbira min al-‘Ulamā’ wa al-Ṣulahā’ bi Fās*. Rabat, pp. 83-85

<sup>71</sup> *Manāqib Abī al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī* by ‘Abd al-Nūr al-‘Imrānī

<sup>72</sup> Honerkamp, K., *A biography of Abū l-Hasan Al-Shādhilī - themathesontrust.org*. Available at: [https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili\\_bio.pdf](https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili_bio.pdf) (Accessed: 08 November 2023).

<sup>73</sup> Mackeen, A.M.M., (1971). ‘The Rise of al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 91(4), p. 483. doi:10.2307/598444

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 480

<sup>75</sup> Lings, M. and al-‘ Alawī, A. (2012) *A Sufi saint of the twentieth century: Shaikh Aḥmad al-‘Alawī: His Spiritual Heritage and legacy*. Cambridge: Islamic texts Society. p. 231

<sup>76</sup> Honerkamp, K., *A biography of abū l-Hasan Al-Shādhilī - themathesontrust.org*. Available at: [https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili\\_bio.pdf](https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili_bio.pdf) (Accessed: 08 November 2023). pp. 5-7

In the *Laṭā'if al-Minan* it is stated that before his spiritual journey, al-Shādhilī mastered some of the Islamic sciences<sup>77</sup> to a level where he could engage in scholarly discussions.<sup>78</sup> The truthfulness of this statement is proven by the fact that al-Shādhilī gained followers from the scholarly elite of the time. It would be very hard to believe that scholars like ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām would become his followers had he not been a scholarly personality.

His appellation *al-Shādhilī* is derived from a town in Tunisia known as *Shādhila*,<sup>79</sup> where he initially emerged as a teacher.<sup>80</sup> In Tunisia, he gained a following and some of his followers remained there even after his departure to Egypt.<sup>81</sup> In Egypt, his following grew and Egypt became the main stronghold of the Shādhiliyya as it was also in Egypt where the two most famous successors of al-Shādhilī lived and taught. As attested to by Mackeen: “The real birthplace of the Shādhiliyya was certainly Egypt.”<sup>82</sup>

Al-Shādhilī travelled extensively,<sup>83</sup> going all over North Africa to the Middle East and Arabia where he went on his pilgrimage.<sup>84</sup> It was mentioned by al-Sha‘rānī that he performed 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

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<sup>77</sup> Such as jurisprudence or the sciences of classical Arabic.

<sup>78</sup> al-Iskandarī, Ibn ‘Aṭāillah., (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. 89

<sup>79</sup> Honerkamp has identified the exact location according to Touati: Touati, S. (2018) ‘The Wanderings of Abū Al-Ḥasan Al-Šādīlī (d. 1258) According to Ibn “Aṭā” Allāh’s Laṭā’if al-minan and Ibn Al-Šabbāg’s Durrat al-asrār’, *Romano-Arabica*, (18), p. 234

<sup>80</sup> al-Iskandarī, Ibn ‘Aṭāillah., (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. 89

<sup>81</sup> Mackeen, A.M.M., (1971). ‘The Rise of al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 91(4), p. 484. doi:10.2307/598444

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p. 485

<sup>83</sup> Samia Touati has written a whole paper dedicated to the travels of al-Shādhilī: Touati, S. (2018) ‘The Wanderings of Abū Al-Ḥasan Al-Šādīlī (d. 1258) According to Ibn “Aṭā” Allāh’s Laṭā’if al-minan and Ibn Al-Šabbāg’s Durrat al-asrār’, *Romano-Arabica*, (18), pp. 227–238.

<sup>84</sup> al-Iskandarī, Ibn ‘Aṭāillah., (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, pp. 89-116.

concealed his desire to learn alchemy from the Shaykh, however, the Shaykh read his thoughts, and told him that his alchemy is piety.<sup>85</sup>

Some highly influential individuals were counted among his followers, including notable figures from the Ḥafṣid court, among whom was even the brother of the Ḥafṣid Sultan.<sup>86</sup> However, Touati mentioned that al-Shādhilī was also persecuted by the chief judge of Tunis and was tested by the fuqahā' and kept in the Sultan's palace before being released.<sup>87</sup>

He also fought in at least one battle – the famous battle of Manṣūra.<sup>88</sup> The details of his visit to Manṣūra and the fact that he had already lost his eyesight at that time were among others 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*.<sup>89</sup> Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh al-Iskandarī recounted the presence of al-Shādhilī at the military camp on the eve of the battle in the chapter detailing al-Shādhilī's life, as documented in "Laṭā'if al-Minan." Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh 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-Qushayrīyya* and engaging in a scholarly discussion. When asked to speak, Al-Shādhilī responded with humility. Despite persistent encouragement, he maintained silence for an entire hour. Following this period, he “spoke of marvellous secrets and magnificent sciences.” After the speech, 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn 'Abd al-Salām stood up, exited the tent, and remarked: “Listen to these extraordinary words, which arise out of nearness to God!”<sup>90</sup>

There are many other hagiographic stories about al-Shādhilī and his piety, bravery, knowledge and gnosis, miracles etc. in the primary sources.

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<sup>85</sup> Al-Kūhin, M., 2016. *Tabaqat Al-Shādhilīyya Al-Kubra Biographies of Prominent Shādhilīs*. 1st ed. Visions of Reality Books, pp. 29-63

<sup>86</sup> Cornell, V.J., (1998). *Realm of the saint: Power and authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 150

<sup>87</sup> Touati, S. (2018) 'The Wanderings of Abū Al-Ḥasan Al-Šādīlī (d. 1258) According to Ibn "Aṭā" Allāh's Laṭā'if al-minan and Ibn Al-Šabbāg's Durrat al-asrār', *Romano-Arabica*, (18), p. 234

<sup>88</sup> The battle took place in the year 1250 CE., and the result was a victory of the Muslims over the Crusader armies.

<sup>89</sup> ص. 171 - كتاب مناهج المفسرين - تفسير الإمام أبو الحسن الشاذلي رضي الله عنه - المكتبة الشاملة كتاب مناهج المفسرين Available at: <https://shamela.ws/book/38093/160#p1> (Accessed: 24 June 2023).

<sup>90</sup> al-Iskandarī, Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh., (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, pp. 90-91.



He did not write any books, nevertheless, many of his sayings and litanies were transmitted by his students.<sup>91</sup> Many of these sayings and litanies attributed to him are narrated in the primary sources which are discussed in this chapter. It is recorded that he said: “My companions are my books.” However, the assertion that he did not author any books was questioned by Samia Touati.<sup>92</sup> I incline to think that in reality he indeed did not write any *books* as narrated by Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh, however, he did write *letters*, as proven by the fact that Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh dedicated a whole chapter of his work to the letters of al-Shādhilī.<sup>93</sup> This was further proved by the research of Honerkamp.<sup>94</sup> The fact that al-Shādhilī wrote letters (correspondence) was also proven by Mackeen: “Those who stayed back in Tunis when their leader journeyed to Egypt maintained their allegiance to him having formed themselves into a compact body. Two of their prominent representatives were Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ṣaqqālī and ‘Abd Allāh b. Salāmah al-Ḥabībī. The former was the chief spokesman to whom al-Shādhilī addressed his correspondence from Alexandria, while the latter looked after the interests of the members in the village of Masrūqīn.”<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, al-Shādhilī almost certainly also allowed his students to take notes and write his statements down, and that is what Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh indicated by his words which seem contradictory to Touati. The possibility of there being more such written words of al-Shādhilī is also indicated by Honerkamp.<sup>96</sup> However, some of the other things which were mentioned by Touati deserve further research as she mentioned several other works which were supposedly written or dictated by al-Shādhilī.<sup>97</sup> I suppose that if he had written any books, they would have been well-known and mentioned by his earliest biographers, who

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<sup>91</sup> 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 Shādhilīyya Aḥmad Zarrūq wrote more than one commentary, one of which has been translated into English: Zarrūq, S.A., (2013). *Sidi Ahmad Zarruq’s commentary on Shaykh al-Shadhili’s Hizb al-Bahr*. Visions Of Reality Books.

<sup>92</sup> Touati, S. (2018) ‘The Wanderings of Abū Al-Ḥasan Al-Ṣāḍilī (d. 1258) According to Ibn “Aṭā” Allāh’s Laṭā’if al-minan and Ibn Al-Ṣabbāḡ’s Durrat al-asrār’, *Romano-Arabica*, (18), pp. 228-229

<sup>93</sup> Ibn Al-Sabbagh., (1993). *The mystical teachings of al-Shadhili: Including his life, prayers, letters, and followers*. Elmer H. Douglas. Edited by I.M. Abu-Rabi’. Translated by E.H. Douglas. State University of New York Press, pp. 41-56

<sup>94</sup> Honerkamp, K., *A biography of Abū l-Hasan Al-Shādhilī - themathesontrust.org*. Available at: [https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili\\_bio.pdf](https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili_bio.pdf) (Accessed: 08 November 2023), p. 13

<sup>95</sup> Mackeen, A.M.M., (1971). ‘The Rise of al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 91(4), p. 484. doi:10.2307/598444

<sup>96</sup> Honerkamp, K., *A biography of Abū l-Hasan Al-Shādhilī - themathesontrust.org*. Available at: [https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili\\_bio.pdf](https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili_bio.pdf) (Accessed: 08 November 2023), p. 13

<sup>97</sup> Touati, S. (2018) ‘The Wanderings of Abū Al-Ḥasan Al-Ṣāḍilī (d. 1258) According to Ibn “Aṭā” Allāh’s Laṭā’if al-minan and Ibn Al-Ṣabbāḡ’s Durrat al-asrār’, *Romano-Arabica*, (18), pp. 228-229

were direct students of some of his closest, prominent, and famous disciples. It was common in the Middle Ages to attribute books to individuals who did not write them.

Al-Shādhilī had many followers among the scholarly elite of the time, some of the most notable being: ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, Ibn Daqīq al-‘Īd,<sup>98</sup> al-Mundhirī,<sup>99</sup> Ibn al-Ḥājib<sup>100</sup> or Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ.<sup>101</sup> It was narrated that these scholars would visit his lessons in the Kāmilīyya Madrasa in Cairo,<sup>102</sup> where he would teach the Tafsīr of Ibn ‘Aṭīyya<sup>103</sup> and the *Shifā’* of Qāḍī ‘Iyād.<sup>104</sup>

We can summarise the life of the Shaykh as being full of study, worship, travels and teaching. He was venerated by his followers and it remains to be so up until today. Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī passed away in the year 1258, while on a journey, in the locality known as Ḥumaythirah, ‘Aydhāb desert, in southern Egypt by the Red Sea.<sup>105</sup>

### 1.3 History and Importance of the Shādhilī Order

After the death of al-Shādhilī, the next successor of his was Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī. After the death of al-Mursī, there appear to be at least two major successors of his. The most famous one is undoubtedly the author of *Laṭā’if al-Minan* Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh al-

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<sup>98</sup> He was a prominent jurist, judge and theologian. He was a master of both the Mālikī and Shāfi‘ī schools of Law. He died in the year 1302 CE. For more information see: الإمام ابن دقيق العيد | ح 34# | مصر | مصر | علي جمعة | أ.د. علي جمعة YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ja8k4\\_QchkY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ja8k4_QchkY) (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

<sup>99</sup> A famous jurist and expert on Ḥadīth literature. Died in the year 1258 CE. See: Jackson, S.A. (1996) *Islamic law and the state: The constitutional jurisprudence of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī*. Leiden: E.J. Brill. p. 11

<sup>100</sup> A famous jurist and expert on sciences of the Arabic language. Died in the year 1249 CE. For more information see: Fleisch, H., “Ibn al-Ḥāḍjib”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0324](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0324)>

<sup>101</sup> One of the most well-known experts on the Ḥadīth literature. Died in the year 1245 CE. For more information see: Robson, J., “Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_3353](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3353)>

<sup>102</sup> Al-Kūhin, M., 2016. *Tabaqat Al-Shādhilīyya Al-Kubra Biographies of Prominent Shādhilīs*. 1st ed. Visions of Reality Books, p. 59

<sup>103</sup> Famous commentator on the Qur’ān, died in the year 1152 CE. See: (14-2-1-1) *Altafsir.com*. Available at: <https://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=14&tSoraNo=1&tAyahNo=1&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1> (Accessed: 21 December 2023).

<sup>104</sup> He was a prominent jurist, theologian and historian from Ceuta. Died in the year 1149 CE. See: ‘Iyad, Q., (2011). *Muhammad Messenger of Allah*. Translated by A. Bewley. Diwan Press.

<sup>105</sup> al-Iskandarī, Ibn ‘Aṭāillāh., (2005). *The Subtle Blessings in the Sainly 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. 100

Iskandarī.<sup>106</sup> The second one was Yāqūt al-‘Arshī al-Ḥabashī as clarified by Hellyer in his article on this topic,<sup>107</sup> as well as by Cecere, who, however, appears to be too keen to rush into speculations about a conflict or a competition and a power-struggle between the two successors of al-Mursī.<sup>108</sup> The fact that there were at least two major successors of al-Mursī was omitted by both Mackeen in his article and Cornell in *Realm of the Saint*, however, Cornell discussed a possibility of there being another early branching among the early Shādhilīyya, namely between the Egyptian and Tunisian Shādhilīs. The research of Honerkamp seems to confirm the fact that there was some difference and mutual independence between the Tunisian and Egyptian branches of the early Shādhilīyya.<sup>109</sup> However, Cornell goes so far as to say that “Had Zarrūq not been forced to relocate from his native city of Fez to Cairo, even he might not have learned Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh’s doctrines.” However, he somehow contradicts his own words on this point, since he also clarifies the fact that the famous and highly influential works of Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh al-Iskandarī were already present in Morocco since at least a hundred years before the time of Zarrūq.<sup>110</sup> This claim is further invalidated by the extensive research of Honerkamp concerning the personality of Ibn ‘Abbād al-Rundī, who, according to Honerkamp, was a key figure in spreading the Shādhilī teachings in Fez and also the best representative of both the Egyptian and the Tunisian branches of the early Shādhilīyya and one of the earliest commentators on the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh al-Iskandarī.<sup>111</sup>

As already mentioned, Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī travelled widely and thus, the order has been spread all over the Muslim world and has many different “branches”. Some of these chains of masters and their students continue up until today, while other

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<sup>106</sup> Mackeen, A.M.M., (1971). ‘The Rise of al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 91(4), pp. 485-486. doi:10.2307/598444

<sup>107</sup> Hellyer, 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).

<sup>108</sup> Cecere, G., (2019). ‘From Ethiopian slave to Egyptian ṣūfī master? Yāqūt al-ḥabashī in Mamluk and Ottoman sources’, *Northeast African Studies*, 19(1), pp. 85–138.

<sup>109</sup> Honerkamp, K., *A biography of abū l-Hasan Al-Shādhilī - themathesontrust.org*. Available at: [https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili\\_bio.pdf](https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili_bio.pdf) (Accessed: 08 November 2023), pp. 13-14

<sup>110</sup> Cornell, V.J., (1998). *Realm of the saint: Power and authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 151-154

<sup>111</sup> Honerkamp, K., *A biography of abū l-Hasan Al-Shādhilī - themathesontrust.org*. Available at: [https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili\\_bio.pdf](https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili_bio.pdf) (Accessed: 08 November 2023), pp. 13-14

chains might have died out. To see one such chain, one may refer to the book about Shaykh al-‘Alawī by Martin Lings,<sup>112</sup> or to the *Realm of the Saint*.<sup>113</sup>

What needs to be understood here, is that some of the masters of the following generations of the Shādhilī Order became very influential and prominent and developed their teaching methods and wrote very influential texts etc., and in a way developed their orders. Thus, we can see the names of such orders being composed of several names, each name belonging to a master who brought about some significant innovation or renovation to the path. Such as: Ṭarīqa<sup>114</sup> Shādhilīyya–Jazūlīyya<sup>115</sup> or Ṭarīqa Shādhilīyya–Darqāwīyya–Hāshimīyya.<sup>116</sup> As a very typical example of this, we may mention the *Jazūlīyya*, which has its roots in the Shādhilīyya but became “an independent” order by itself.<sup>117</sup>

From the beginning of the order's history there were strong connections between the Shādhilī Order and the ulama, as explained by Cornell: “In Tunis, marriages between the sons and daughters of Shādhilī Sufis and the children of prominent ulama were so common that the leading scholars of the city soon came from the same families as the Shādhilī Sufis.”<sup>118</sup> Cornell further explained the depth of connection between the Shādhilīyya and the ulama of that time: “This new status was confirmed a half-century later when Shādhilī Sufis took teaching positions at the Jāmi‘ az-Zaytūna mosque-university. According to the Moroccan historian Muḥammad al-Manūnī, the identification of the Shādhilīyya with this prestigious centre of learning was crucial in establishing the order in other centres of Islamic scholarship in the Maghrib, such as Tlemcen and Fez.”<sup>119</sup>

The order, with all of its various branches, has become most widespread in the Maghrib and Egypt, but it has also spread to the Levant, what is today Turkey and

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<sup>112</sup> Parts of the chain of Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi are the same as the one mentioned by M. Lings. The *silsila* 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

<sup>113</sup> Cornell, V.J., (1998). *Realm of the saint: Power and authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Austin: University of Texas Press, p.172

<sup>114</sup> Meaning “an order” or “a path” or “a way”

<sup>115</sup> Jazūlīyya – attributed to Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Jazūlī, the author of *Dalā’il al-Khayrāt*.

<sup>116</sup> Darqāwīyya – attributed to Shaykh Muḥammad al-‘Arabī al-Darqāwī. Hāshimīyya – attributed to Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hāshimī al-Tilimsānī, the student of Shaykh Ahmad al-‘Alawī.

<sup>117</sup> Extensive research of this order was done by Cornell in his work *Realm of the saint*.

<sup>118</sup> Cornell, V.J., (1998). *Realm of the saint: Power and authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Austin: University of Texas Press. p. 151

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. p. 152

Indonesia, and elsewhere in the Muslim world.<sup>120</sup> As Cornell said: “Apart from the Qādiriyya and Naqshbāndiyya Sufi orders, it is hard to find any other ṭarīqa that was to have such a widespread influence. By the end of the fourteenth century C.E., the network of the Shādhiliyya zawāya extended from Iran to the Atlantic Ocean. In modern times, Shādhilī Sufis can be found in Europe, America, and Southeast Asia as well.”<sup>121</sup> 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.

As for the societal state of the Shādhilīyya, it is clear that at its beginnings the order was primarily found in the upper classes of society. As described by Cornell: “Almost without exception, the Shādhilī Sufis who appear in the biographies of the later Marinid period are ulama, courtiers, or sharifs. In the rare cases where one finds an exception to this rule, the person in question is most likely to be a skilled craftsperson or a purveyor of luxury goods.”<sup>122</sup> However, this mostly upper-class following was soon expanded by the following from the general masses thanks to the work of Imām Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Jazūlī.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, according to Ostránský, Shādhilīyya has been mostly an order of city-dwellers.<sup>124</sup>

Kropáček mentioned that the Shādhilī shaykhs fought against the European colonists, notably against the Portuguese and the French, on several occasions in history.<sup>125</sup>

#### 1.4 Some of the famous Shādhilī works

Aside from the already discussed primary sources on the life of the founder, we find among the most famous and influential works of the order the following works: *al-Ḥikam al-‘Aṭā’īyya*, *Dalā’il al-Khayrāt* and *Qaṣīdat al-Burda*. These works are also widely studied and used by other Ṣūfī orders.

The *Ḥikam*, written by Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh al-Iskandarī, are a central text of the Shādhilī Order. The work contains 264 aphorisms, wisdoms or maxims which deal with the spiritual path, metaphysical principles etc. Many commentaries were written on it – among the

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<sup>120</sup> Kropáček, L., (2008). *Súfismus: dějiny islámské mystiky*. Praha: Vyšehrad, pp. 238-240

<sup>121</sup> Cornell, V.J., (1998). *Realm of the saint: Power and authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Austin: University of Texas Press. pp. 146-147

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. p. 154

<sup>123</sup> As documented by Cornell in *Realm of the saint*.

<sup>124</sup> Ostránský, B., (2009). *Malá encyklopedie islámu a muslimské společnosti*. Praha: Libri, p. 192

<sup>125</sup> Kropáček, L., (2008). *Súfismus: dějiny islámské mystiky*. Praha: Vyšehrad, p. 240

classical and most authoritative commentators are al-Rundī,<sup>126</sup> Aḥmad Zarrūq,<sup>127</sup> and Ibn ‘Ajībah.<sup>128</sup> These scholars are undoubtedly among the most important codifiers, systematizers and theoreticians of the order. Aside from their commentaries on the *Ḥikam*, they authored many other important works, for example, the famous work of Zarrūq *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf* is quite influential as well.<sup>129</sup> However, in my judgment, the *Ḥikam* are like “the constitution” of the Shādhilī teachings, or at least of those branches that I have studied. The importance of the work of Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh al-Iskandarī was summarised well by Mackeen: “Al-Suyūṭī, al-Subkī, Ibn Farḥūn and others aptly regard him as the principal theorist and spokesman of the Shādhilīyyah (*al-mutakallim al-shādhilī*).”<sup>130</sup>

*Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*, written by Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Jazūlī,<sup>131</sup> is a prayer book of various forms of salutations and sending of blessings upon the Prophet Muḥammad. It is usually 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. It is said to increase the reciter's love and connection with God and with the Prophet Muḥammad. It also includes some verses of the Qur'ān, the 99 Names of God, or a collection of names of the Prophet, to give just a few examples. Over a hundred scholarly commentaries were written on it. It was the most widespread book in the Muslim world after the Qur'ān. According to Shaykh Ali Gomaa, out of the 20 million Arabic Islamic manuscripts, 2 million are manuscripts of *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*.<sup>132</sup> The Ottomans established a special position known as “*shaykh al-dalā'il*” in every major city in the Empire, including Madina and Makka. In Madina, in the Mosque of the Prophet, the names of the Prophet as they were recorded in the *Dalā'il*, are engraved on the walls around al-Rawḍa – some of them, however, were removed during the twentieth century by the local authorities.<sup>133</sup> The work was translated

<sup>126</sup> Al-Rundī, M. ibn ‘Abbād., (2021). *Al-Tanbīh Sharḥ al-Ḥikam al-'Aṭā'iyya*. Dār al-Taqwā.

<sup>127</sup> Zarrūq, A., (2021). *Sharḥ Ḥikam Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh al-Sakandarī*. Dār al-Rashād al-Ḥadīthah.

<sup>128</sup> Ibn ‘Ajībah, A., (2015). *Al-Futūḥāt al-Quddūsiyya fī Sharḥ al-Muqaddimah al-Ājurrūmīyya*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīyya. p. 3

<sup>129</sup> An article was authored about this work: GHULAM, S.-U.-R. (2010) ‘Juridical Sufism: Zarrūq’s Application of the “Qawā'id” Genre’, *Islamic Studies*, 49(3), pp. 341–356.

<sup>130</sup> Mackeen, A.M.M., (1971). ‘The Rise of al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 91(4), p. 485. doi:10.2307/598444.

<sup>131</sup> He was a scholar, jurist and then a master of the Shādhilī Order. He died in the year 1465 CE. For more information see the work of Cornell: Cornell, V.J., (1998). *Realm of the saint: Power and authority in Moroccan Sufism*. Austin: University of Texas Press. pp. 155-195

<sup>132</sup> صيغة الصلاة على النبي ﷺ بمئة ألف في دلائل الخيرات؟، وكيفية قرائتها و أحوال الصالحين عند قرائتها *YouTube*. Available at: [https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=oDEYIN2Yvfk&pp=ygU02KfZhNi02YrYriDYudmE2Yog2KzZhdi52Kkg2K\\_ZhNin2KbZhCDYp9mE2K7Zitix2KfYqg%3D%3D](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=oDEYIN2Yvfk&pp=ygU02KfZhNi02YrYriDYudmE2Yog2KzZhdi52Kkg2K_ZhNin2KbZhCDYp9mE2K7Zitix2KfYqg%3D%3D) (Accessed: 22 November 2023).

<sup>133</sup> al-Yaqoubi, S.M., (2023). *Introduction to Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*. Signatora. pp. 12-20

into English at the very least twice – the second translation, which has now come out, is by Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, who also wrote a work of about 8000 pages about the isnāds of *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*.<sup>134</sup>

*Qaṣīdat al-Burda* of al-Būṣīrī<sup>135</sup> is a poem in praise of the Prophet. It is said to be the most widely memorised poem in the world. The poem is divided into ten parts, celebrating the Prophet Muḥammad, his being, his birth and life, his character, his Jihād, his miracles, and the Qur'ān, and it also has a section on some basics of Taṣawwuf. 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, which is manifested in the fact that many scholarly commentaries were written on this work by several famous and important classical scholars, such as al-Zarkashī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, al-Ḥaytamī, al-Qaṣṭalānī, Zakarīyā al-Anṣārī and others. Ibn Khaldūn brought a golden copy of the *Burda* as a gift from the Sultan of Egypt to Tamerlane.<sup>136</sup> It was translated into English a few times, I have read the translations of Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad and that of Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, who has also created a documentary<sup>137</sup> about this poem.<sup>138</sup>

### 1.5 Some of the essential teachings of the Shādhilī Order

One of the central and most well-known Shādhilī teachings 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 dress shows people around him that he does not need them and that he is only in need of Allāh. A contemporary example of these teachings was narrated by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn 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 – which is also a manifestation of

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<sup>134</sup> The work is called *Mafāṭih al-Barakāt fī Asānīd Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*.

<sup>135</sup> The original name of the poem is *al-Kawākib al-Dhurriyya fī Madḥ Khayr al-Barīyya* – Which may be translated as “*The Celestial Lights in the Praise of the Best of Creation*”.

<sup>136</sup> Yusuf, H., (2002). *The Burda of al-Busiri*. Sandala. p. vii

<sup>137</sup> *Introducing the burda of al-Busiri* (2006) YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o\\_dOTPWN2-s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_dOTPWN2-s) (Accessed: 01 July 2023).

<sup>138</sup> One can also examine the research of this poem by Stetkevych: Stetkevych, S.P. (2007) ‘From Sīrah to qaṣīdah: Poetics and polemics in Al-Būṣīrī’s Qaṣīdat al-Burdah (mantle ode)’, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 38(1), pp. 1–52. doi:10.1163/157006407780997983.

other central teachings of the Shādhilīyya, they are humility (*tawāḍuʿ*) and service (*khidma*).<sup>139</sup>

Another example of the Shādhilī principle “Let the world be in your hand, and not in your heart.” 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<sup>140</sup>: “He remembered meeting Sheikh al-‘Alawi in 1932 on his visit to Damascus after hajj. Sheikh al-‘Alawi had sat in the Shamiyya Mosque after sunset to give a lesson, and the young weaver 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 Illah... I said to myself: “This sheikh can wear any kind of socks he likes.”’<sup>141</sup>

An essential aspect of the Shādhilī instruction which must not be forgotten or underestimated is studying works about the Prophet Muḥammad. For example, among the books studied in the Shādhilī Order is the famous work *Kitāb al-Shifā’ bi Ta’rīf Ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā* of Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ. Likewise, the famous *Shamāil* work of al-Tirmidhī<sup>142</sup> is very often studied.<sup>143</sup> The importance of *Dalā’il al-Khayrāt* and *Qaṣīdat al-Burda* for the Shādhilīyya cannot be stressed enough. Knowledge and love of the Prophet and his character and life and struggle to follow the Sunna are central pillars of the Shādhilī Order.

The Shādhilī scholars stress the necessity of first and foremost fulfilling the famous obligations commanded by the Sharī‘a. Once that is established, the next thing that follows is following and practising the *Sunan*, the main Prophetic practices, such as the strongly recommended prayers which are attached to the obligatory prayers, praying *tahajjud*<sup>144</sup> or fasting regularly following the established Prophetic teachings. They also stress the

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<sup>139</sup> As he mentioned in this video: صوفية اليوم لماذا يتوسعون في الملابس والقصور خلافا لسلفهم الطاهر [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUTqvcSkCCQ&t=13s). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUTqvcSkCCQ&t=13s> (Accessed: 04 July 2023).

<sup>140</sup> Prominent Shādhilī master from Damascus, student of Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hāshimī al-Tilimsānī. He is also a direct teacher of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn, as well as Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi. Died in the year 2004 CE. For more information see: Keller, N.H.M., (2011). in *Sea without shore: A manual of the sufi path*. Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, p. 3-29

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. pp. 12–13

<sup>142</sup> The author of one of the six famous works of Ḥadīth, died in the year 892 CE. For more information see: Juynboll, G.H.A., “al-Tirmidhī”, in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 21 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_7569](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7569)>

<sup>143</sup> *Shama’il al-Tirmidhi (chapter 1) Shaykh Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi 1/13 YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOFn7SVsIVo&list=PLC1F95F56E025432B> (Accessed: 22 November 2023).

<sup>144</sup> The night prayer



importance of keeping the company of the righteous Muslims or that one should recite at least some of the famous Prophetic invocations – especially those of the morning and the evening, the *Adhkār al-Ṣabāḥ wa al-Masāʾ*,<sup>145</sup> be it separately from a book like *Kitāb al-Adhkār* of Imām al-Nawawī,<sup>146</sup> or in a collection like the one collected by Imām Aḥmad Zarrūq in *al-Wadhīfa al-Zarrūqīyya*.

This rootedness of the Shādhilī teachings in the Revelation and the Islamic sciences was portrayed well by Honerkamp: “Many of the narratives are representative of the speculative discourse that has always marked the Shādhilīya tradition. Discourses on the nature of knowledge (*maʿrifa*) and sainthood, complemented with Quranic exegeses and hadith commentary, have always been important elements of the teachings of Shaykh Abū l-Hasan. Much of the discourse is marked by a propensity to categorize and classify following traditional Islamic legal thought, to which Shaykh Abū l-Hasan, as a figure well established in the erudition of his times, was no stranger.”<sup>147</sup> Probably the most famous proponent of this form of so-called “juridical Sufism” within the Shādhilīyya is Zarrūq, about whom Kugle says: “Be a jurist first then a Sufi; don't be a Sufi first then a jurist.” This argument is present, in some form, in almost every page that Zarrūq wrote... Zarrūq's injunction was not just a matter of paying lip service to the rhetoric of law to pursue spiritual experience free of public scrutiny and juridical condemnation.”<sup>148</sup>

The last distinguishing aspect of the Shādhilī teachings I wish to discuss here is the connection between Taṣawwuf – both its theory and practice – and classical Sunnī scholastic Theology, an aspect to which Honerkamp alluded in the last quotation above. It is perfectly demonstrated in the teachings 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-ʿArabī's<sup>149</sup> *Futuhat*, which he read consecutively in this lesson for seventeen years. Then he would read from a

<sup>145</sup> Zarrūq, S.A., (2013). *Sidi Ahmad Zarrūq's commentary on Shaykh al-Shadhili's Hizb al-Bahr*. Visions Of Reality Books. pp. 94-124

<sup>146</sup> Prominent Shāfiʿī jurist and Ḥadīth expert, died in the year 1277-8 CE. For more information see: an-Nawawī and Waley, M.I., (2016). *The Book of Remembrances: Kitāb al-Adhkār*. London: Turath Publishing. pp. 21-24

<sup>147</sup> Honerkamp, K., *A biography of abū l-Hasan Al-Shādhilī - themathesontrust.org.*, p. 8  
Available at: [https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili\\_bio.pdf](https://www.themathesontrust.org/papers/islam/honerkamp-shadhili_bio.pdf)  
(Accessed: 08 November 2023).

<sup>148</sup> Kugle, S.A., (2006). *Rebel between spirit and law: Ahmad Zarrūq, Sainthood, and authority in Islam*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p. 130

<sup>149</sup> He refers to the famous scholar and mystic Ibn al-ʿArabī, who died in the year 1240 CE. For more information see: Ateş, A., “Ibn al-ʿArabī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 21 December 2023 <[https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0316](https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0316)>

work of Ash‘ari theology such as Sheikh al-Hashimi’s<sup>150</sup> *Miftah al-janna*, Ibrahim al-Bajuri’s<sup>151</sup> *Hashiya* on the *Matn* of Sanusi,<sup>152</sup> 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<sup>153</sup> *Hayat al-Sahaba* 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 (Sahaba).<sup>154</sup>

### 1.6 Some of the foundational litanies and practices of the Shādhilī Order

The single most foundational litany of the order is the General Litany, or *al-Wird al-‘Āmm* or *al-Asās* (The foundation), which consists of saying one hundred times “astaghfiru Allāh” (I seek forgiveness of Allāh.), then one hundred times sending of peace and blessings upon the Prophet and then one hundred times “lā ilāha illā Allāh” (There is no deity other than Allāh.)<sup>155</sup>

Then, there are other litanies which are recommended at various stages of the path, one of them is the *Hizb al-Baḥr*, which is generally recited once a day, generally after the ‘Aṣr prayer. Famously, Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī said about this litany: “Had the people of Baghdad had it, the city would not have fallen to the Mongols.”<sup>156</sup>

Then, there are many other litanies and invocations narrated in the Shādhilī Order, and various branches recite some of them, while they may not recite other ones, so I am

<sup>150</sup> Here he most likely refers to Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hāshimī al-Tilimsānī.

<sup>151</sup> He refers to the famous recent Azharī scholar, prominent theologian and jurist, died in the year 1860 CE. For more information see: Spevack, A., (2014). *The Archetypal Sunnī Scholar*. State University of New York Press. pp. 7-18

<sup>152</sup> He was a prominent and influential Ash‘arī theologian, died in the year 1490 CE. For more information refer to: Foudah, S., and al-Sanūsī, Y., (2013). *A Refined Explanation of The Sanusi Creed: The Foundational Proofs*. Translated by Suraqah Abdul Aziz. Rotterdam: Sunni publications. pp. 27-33

<sup>153</sup> He refers to Yūsuf Kandahlawī, the famous Indian scholar, who died in the year 1965 CE. For more information see: Kandehevī, Muhammed Yūsuf *TDV İslām Ansiklopedisi*. Available at: <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/kandehlevi-muhammed-yusuf> (Accessed: 21 December 2023).

<sup>154</sup> Keller, N.H.M., (2011). in *Sea without shore: A manual of the sufi path*. Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, p. 22

<sup>155</sup> As explained by Shaykh Ali Goma in this lecture: *طريقنا إلى الله | ح 7 | الأوراد | أد علي جمعة* YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qU5gQZW3h58> (Accessed: 21 December 2023).

<sup>156</sup> Zarruq, S.A., (2013). *Sidi Ahmad Zarruq’s commentary on Shaykh al-Shadhili’s Hizb al-Bahr*. Visions Of Reality Books. p. xxxviii

not going to mention all of them as they are quite numerous<sup>157</sup> and I am probably not even aware of all of them, however, I will mention just two more which is *al-Ṣalāt al-Mashīshīyya* and *al-Ṣalāt al-Yāqūtīyya*. 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 which has been mentioned above – 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, begin to grow and bring spiritual fruition. *Al-Ṣalāt al-Mashīshīyya* is often recited by scholars. Among those scholars who used to recite this litany were 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 Khalīl* and *al-Kharīdat al-Bahīyya*, Imām al-Dardīr.<sup>158</sup> Mackeen says about it the following: “...a sublime prayer on the Prophet who is depicted as the ultimate cause of the cosmic system. This work won enormous fame in the Muslim world and produced numerous commentaries on it. It was in the time brought over to the Shādhiliyyah and remains today in its later redaction, the backbone of its rituals especially in the Darqāwiyyah branch of the order. The Reality of Muḥammad (*al-ḥaqīqah al-muḥammadiyyah*), this salāt claims, is the absolute secret (*al-sirr al-jāmi* ‘) and the supreme veil (*al-ḥijāb al-a‘zam*) that stands between God and Man.”<sup>159</sup>

Regarding the recitation of the various litanies of the Shādhilīyya McGregor points out the fact that they carry both devotional and experiential spiritual dimensions and even a significant social dimension.<sup>160</sup> To that, I must add that they also have a very significant educational aspect, for they contain lots of especially theological, metaphysical and spiritual information as clarified by Imām Aḥmad Zarrūq in his commentary on *Ḥizb al-Bahr*.<sup>161</sup> McGregor summarises the key importance of litanies for the order: “Recitation of

<sup>157</sup> Many of them were listed by McGregor: McGregor, R.J., (1997). ‘A Sufi legacy in Tunis: Prayer and the Shadhiliyya’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 29(2), p. 269

<sup>158</sup> 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](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IebFHqz_Aas&feature=youtu.be) (Accessed: 09 July 2023).

<sup>159</sup> Mackeen, A.M.M., (1971). ‘The Rise of al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 91(4), p. 480. doi:10.2307/598444

<sup>160</sup> McGregor, R.J., (1997). ‘A Sufi legacy in Tunis: Prayer and the Shadhiliyya’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 29(2), p. 271

<sup>161</sup> Zarrūq, S.A., (2013). *Sidi Ahmad Zarruq’s commentary on Shaykh al-Shadhili’s Hizb al-Bahr*. Visions Of Reality Books. pp. 43-88

the prayers of al-Shadhili allows the individual to reassert his devotion to the saint—to reconnect with his spiritual guide. On one level, the individual is part of the group structure, but on another, he remains a single devoted follower (*murīd*) of the great Shaykh. It is largely through the *aḥzāb* that this contact is re-established. They are the “message” of the *ṭarīqa*, in the sense that to participate fully and experience them is to experience the spiritual truth of the saint.”<sup>162</sup>

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 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.”<sup>163</sup>

There are also some collective spiritual gatherings in the Shādhilī Order, 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 Order is the *Ḥaḍra*, which is a practice where people stand next to each other,<sup>164</sup> 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 and they sing some Ṣūfī poetry. This movement and recitation typically goes on for a few tens of minutes and often leads some of the present people into states of ecstasy.<sup>165</sup> A description of a Tunisian Shādhilī *Ḥaḍra* was provided by McGregor in his paper.<sup>166</sup> This practice is attacked by the adherents to the Salafī/Wahhābī<sup>167</sup>

<sup>162</sup> McGregor, R.J., (1997). ‘A Sufi legacy in Tunis: Prayer and the Shadhiliyya’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 29(2), pp. 271-272

<sup>163</sup> Keller, N.H.M. (2011) in *Sea without shore: A manual of the sufi path*. Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, pp. 22-23

<sup>164</sup> 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.

<sup>165</sup> 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: *حضرة مع سيدي الشيخ عبد الرحمن الشاغوري رضي الله تبارك وتعالى عنه مع سيدي الأستاذ منير العقلة: YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=dJMduSPL1yA&t=100s> (Accessed: 04 July 2023).

<sup>166</sup> McGregor, R.J., (1997). ‘A Sufi legacy in Tunis: Prayer and the Shadhiliyya’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 29(2), pp. 268-269

movement<sup>168</sup> and at the same time there are various<sup>169</sup> answers, defending the practice, produced by the other side.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> A stream within Sunnism based on the teachings of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb from Najd. The mainstream form of Sunnism in KSA. Among the typical things for this stream of Sunnism is their rejection of the veneration of saints and their generally negative opinion of Sufism as well as a literalistic approach to the Revelation. For more information see: Margoliouth, D. S., “Wahhābīya”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition* (1913-1936), Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Consulted online on 18 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X\\_ei1\\_SIM\\_5938](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei1_SIM_5938)>

<sup>168</sup> 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/en/answers/143924> (Accessed: 03 July 2023).

<sup>169</sup> 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 Hadrah. Available at: <http://thehadrah.essentialislam.co.uk/> (Accessed: 03 July 2023).

<sup>170</sup> 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).

## 2 Shaykh Ali Gomaa

### 2.1 *Life and Work of Shaykh Ali Gomaa*

In *Responding From The Tradition* the following is stated: “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.<sup>171</sup> 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 (*usul 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 Sheikh Abdullah ibn Siddiq al-Ghumari,<sup>172</sup> who considered Sheikh Ali to be one of his most accomplished students.”<sup>173</sup> It has to be stressed that what most likely formed the Shaykh even 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”.<sup>174</sup> Likewise, the Shaykh has been given many scholarly authorizations from many other prominent scholars from various countries, among them for example, Shaykh

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<sup>171</sup> 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 Sufism, 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 ‘Ashir for example, some of these sciences like theology, legal methodology and Sufism are actually included in the text itself.

<sup>172</sup> He was a famous and prominent Moroccan scholar, Ḥadīth expert and Shādhilī Shaykh, died in the year 1993 CE. For more information see: al-Suyūfī, J. and ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī al-Ḥasanī, ‘Abdullāh., (2014). *The Sublime Truths of the Shādhilī Path*. Translated by K. Williams. Translated by K. Williams. Visions Of Reality Books. p. xiv

<sup>173</sup> Gomaa, S., 2011. *Responding from the tradition*. Louisville, Ky.: Fons Vitae, p. 17.

<sup>174</sup> As mentioned in this lecture by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn who witnessed it himself: *اللقاء الأول - الجمعة مع شيخنا الإمام علي جمعة - 2 قصتي مع شيخنا الإمام علي جمعة - YouTube*. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=9mpeXSnk2KA&list=PLUr-ykJKsZUIys5eJg6UI9GFH3zqxDPAr&index=2&pp=iAQB> (Accessed: 06 July 2023).

Muḥammad al-‘Alawī al-Mālikī, Shaykh Yāsīn al-Fadānī or Shaykh ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ḥalabī.<sup>175</sup>

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.<sup>176</sup> 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 in 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<sup>177</sup> and the sciences of Ḥadīth.<sup>178</sup>

Shaykh Ali Gomaa wrote or edited about one hundred books<sup>179</sup> and a large number of articles and also took part in more than a hundred conferences and congresses.<sup>180</sup> He has been a member of many different prominent Islamic organisations such as the Body of Senior Scholars of al-Azhar,<sup>181</sup> the Board of Fatwa of al-Azhar,<sup>182</sup> the Council of Islamic Research of al-Azhar,<sup>183</sup> the Council of Islamic Law,<sup>184</sup> the Council of Islamic Law of India<sup>185</sup> etc.<sup>186</sup> He was also given many different awards,<sup>187</sup> including some given to him

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<sup>175</sup> الزيارة الأكثر تأثيرا 3 قصتي مع شيخنا الإمام علي جمعة - YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DzDkl-ZumAs&list=PLUrykJsZUIys5eJg6UI9GFH3zqxdPAR&index=3> (Accessed: 26 November 2023).

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> The science of Islamic Legal Theory. For more information see: Schacht, Joseph, “Uṣūl”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition (1913-1936)*, Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Consulted online on 19 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X\\_ei1\\_SIM\\_5909](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei1_SIM_5909)>

<sup>178</sup> علوم الحوزة الأزهرية - 4 قصتي مع شيخنا الإمام علي جمعة - YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s\\_5BVTOi0oE&list=PLUrykJsZUIys5eJg6UI9GFH3zqxdPAR&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_5BVTOi0oE&list=PLUrykJsZUIys5eJg6UI9GFH3zqxdPAR&index=6) (Accessed: 26 November 2023).

<sup>179</sup> Many of his books are freely available on the Shaykh's official website: أ.د. علي جمعة كتب Available at: <https://www.draligomaa.com/index.php/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A9%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8> (Accessed: 26 November 2023).

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> *Hay'at Kibār al-‘Ulamā' bi al-Azhar al-Sharīf*

<sup>182</sup> *Lajnat al-Fatwā bi al-Azhar al-Sharīf*

<sup>183</sup> *Majma' al-Buḥūth al-Islāmīyya bi al-Azhar al-Sharīf*

<sup>184</sup> *Majma' al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*

<sup>185</sup> *Mu'tamar al-Fiqh al-Islāmī bi al-Hind*

<sup>186</sup> أ.د. علي جمعة، أ.د. علي السيرة الذاتية Available at: <https://www.draligomaa.com/index.php/%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A9> (Accessed: 26 November 2023).

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

by heads of state like King Abdullah of Jordan or Mahmud Abbas of Palestine.<sup>188</sup> 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 is in the hundreds. Many of them are available to be seen online on his official YouTube channel.<sup>189</sup>

From 2003 until 2013 Shaykh Ali Gomaa held the office of the Grand Muftī of Egypt.<sup>190</sup> This position made him one of the most influential people in Egypt and placed him at the centre of political processes in the country. It is important to mention that the Shaykh initiated important reforms of the Dār al-Iftā':<sup>191</sup> "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."<sup>192</sup> A number of his fatwas have been criticised by both those who like him,<sup>193</sup> as well as those who dislike him.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> 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).

<sup>189</sup> *dr Ali Gomaa YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/@DrAliGomaa/playlists> (Accessed: 06 July 2023).

<sup>190</sup> أ.د. علي جمعة، أ.د. علي السيرة الذاتية *Available at: https://www.draligomaa.com/index.php/%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A9* (Accessed: 26 November 2023).

<sup>191</sup> Dār al-Iftā' al-Miṣrīyya is the highest fatwa-issuing governmental institution in Egypt, it is headed by the Grand Mufti of Egypt. For more information see: *Who are we Dar al-Ifta*. Available at: <https://www.dar-alifta.org/en/about> (Accessed: 21 December 2023).

<sup>192</sup> Gomaa, S., 2011. *Responding from the tradition*. Louisville, Ky.: Fons Vitae, p. 18.

<sup>193</sup> 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=ygVP2KfZhNi02YrYriDYudmE2Yog2KzZhdi52Kkg2Ygg2KfZhNmC2LHYttin2YjZiiDYudio2K8g2KfZhNmC2KfYr9ixINin2YTYrdiz2YrZhg%3D%3D> (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

<sup>194</sup> Muzakkir, Muhamad Rofiq. "Understanding the Discourse of 'Alī Jum'ah on the Military Coup During the Arab Spring in Egypt." *Ilahiyat Studies* 10, no. 2 (2019): 229-263. <https://doi.org/10.12730/13091719.2019.102.196>



The Shaykh played an active role during the turmoil that took place in Egypt between the years 2011, beginning with the fall of Mubārak, followed by the events of the fall of Mursī in 2013, and the aftermath of these events. As is well-known he has been a supporter of the army and the military coup of ‘Abd al-Fattāh al-Sīsī and thus has gained many very dedicated enemies, especially from the Muslim Brotherhood and the rest of the opposition to the current political establishment of Egypt.<sup>195</sup> The only thing I wish to discuss here is that one thing has been unjustly attributed to the Shaykh. He has been accused by the Muslim Brotherhood and even by some uncritical academics – Such as Muhamad Rofiq Muzakkir<sup>196</sup> who simply transmits the claims of the Muslim Brotherhood without any attempt to verify them – of encouraging the army to engage in killings of civilian protesters. On the 18th of August 2013, Shaykh Ali Gomaa gave a more than thirty minutes speech to a hall full of army officers, among them also ‘Abd al-Fattāh al-Sīsī.<sup>197</sup> 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 were to go and kill the protesters.<sup>198</sup> Then they also came up with another montage and interpretations of the video and connected it to the 14th August incident of Rābi‘a, and claimed that the Shaykh incited the army to go and kill the protesters or that he “made their blood permissible” etc. That is an absolute slander and nonsense since the speech took place four days after the events of 14th August!<sup>199</sup> 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 and armed protesters in general, and about those at Sinai specifically,<sup>200</sup> and not about peaceful unarmed protesters. That is also how he later explained these events.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Muzakkir, M.R., (2022). *Tradition and Modernity in the Ulama’s Discourse on Usurpation of Power*. Dissertation. Arizona State University. p. 201

<sup>197</sup> *YouTube*. اضرب في المليان .. كلمة د. علي جمعة كاملة بدون اجتزاء 37 دقيقة. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlpNFbQQ4Vo> (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

<sup>198</sup> *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).

<sup>199</sup> As may be seen at the beginning of the video which I quoted in one of the previous footnotes.

<sup>200</sup> Watanabe, L. *Sinai Peninsula – from Buffer Zone to Battlefield, CSS Analyses in Security Policy*. Available at: <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse168-EN.pdf>.

<sup>201</sup> *YouTube*. يقال أنك أبحت دماء المتظاهرين وطالبت الجيش المصري بذلك فقلت لهم ‘اضرب في المليان’ أ.د/ علي جمعة. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=dNprN6ddA8Y> (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

On the 5th of August 2016, there was a failed assassination attempt on Shaykh Ali Gomaa.<sup>202</sup>

For several years Shaykh Ali Gomaa has been the head of the Religious Affairs Committee of the Egyptian parliament.<sup>203</sup> This is one of the very obvious and significant differences between Shaykh Ali Gomaa and ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn, who said that his way is to stay away from politics and people of politics, and he even expressed his sadness over the fact that Shaykh Ali Gomaa was appointed as the Grand Mufti of Egypt.<sup>204</sup>

## 2.2 *Shaykh Ali Gomaa’s understanding of Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā’a*

One of the best sources that contain Shaykh Ali Gomaa's understanding of the term *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā’a* are the speeches he gave at the 2016 International Conference on Sunnī Islam in Grozny.<sup>205</sup> Thus, I shall explain his definition and understanding of this term through the following description and analyses of those two speeches.

In his first speech, he mentioned a brief history of how the Islamic holy texts and the body of various Islamic sciences were transmitted through history by Islamic scholars and that the vast majority of Muslims throughout history have been following the Islam of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā’a*. He then stressed the central importance of the Ḥadīth of Jibrīl to this understanding of Islam and explained that the three dimensions of this Ḥadīth – Islam, Īmān and Iḥsān – were then in the scholastic tradition Sunnī Islam interpreted and expounded and explained within the three central respective sciences of Theology (*‘Aqīda*), Law (*Fiqh*) and Sufism (*Taṣawwuf*) and that the main schools of these sciences were named after their eponyms. Thus, in Theology the central schools of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā’a* are attributed to Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī<sup>206</sup> and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī. Here,

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<sup>202</sup> *Egypt’s former Grand Mufti survives assassination attempt* | Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-violence-mufti-idUSKCN10G19P> (Accessed: 14 December 2023).

<sup>203</sup> *Mostaqbal Watan Party maintains leading posts within ...* - Ahrām Online. Available at: <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/509506.aspx> (Accessed: 14 December 2023).

<sup>204</sup> شيخنا الدكتور علي جمعة.. كلمة قيل أن نبدأ | YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=MBQD5uRo8u4&list=PLUrykJsZUIys5eJg6UI9GFH3zqxdPAr> (Accessed: 26 November 2023).

<sup>205</sup> This conference's goal was to clarify the term *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā’a*: Vatchagaev, M. (2016) *Chechnya hosts International Islamic Conference, Jamestown*. Available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/chechnya-hosts-international-islamic-conference/> (Accessed: 14 December 2023).

<sup>206</sup> One of the most famous and influential mediaeval Muslim theologians. Died 944 CE. For more information see: Macdonald, D. B., “Māturīdī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition (1913-1936)*,

he mentioned that the vast majority of theological questions are agreed upon between these two schools, except for eight points in which they accepted that they do differ, thus accepting inner plurality. Then, in the dimension of Law, he mentioned that most of Fiqh is agreed upon among all the scholars and that differences exist in about one-fourth of the legal questions among the major jurists (*mujtahidūn*) of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*, who, according to him, number over 85 individuals. Here, he said that these jurists stressed not only a correct understanding of the texts but also of the lived reality to which these texts are being applied. At this point, he mentioned that the various “Islamic” terrorist groups do not possess this ability to soundly understand both the texts and reality and that *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a* does not engage in takfīr of other Muslims, except for cases that are “obvious” and where the excommunicated individuals leave the fold of Islam. Furthermore, he stressed that *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a* does accept inner plurality, whether in Theology, Law or Sufism and to demonstrate this point or perhaps to give it a “taste” he recited several verses from *Qaṣīdat al-Burda*.<sup>207</sup> Then, he mentioned several eschatological Ḥadīths and identified these various terrorist groups as *Khawārij*<sup>208</sup> and as the *Kilāb ahl al-nār* (dogs of the people of Hell).<sup>209</sup> He finished his speech by stressing the importance of sound traditional learning and by stressing that al-Azhar is a bastion of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a* and by prayers for the success of their efforts.<sup>210</sup>

In his second speech, he drew several distinctions between the Salafī/Wahhābī interpretation of Sunnī Islam<sup>211</sup> and between the interpretation of Sunnī Islam which he endorses and which he refers to as *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*. Thus, he excluded the

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Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Consulted online on 17 December 2023  
<[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X\\_ei1\\_SIM\\_4608](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei1_SIM_4608)>

<sup>207</sup> Verses 11-13 of the third part: *Qasida Al Burda - chapter 3*. Available at: <https://www.qasidaburda.com/chapters.php?chapter=3> (Accessed: 01 December 2023).

<sup>208</sup> The word may be translated as “renegades.” Here he refers to the group which was mentioned in the Ḥadīths that describe them as the “dogs of the people of Hell.” Based on these narrations they are a group of Muslims who have an incorrect and extremist understanding of the religion and cause lots of harm to the Muslims through their actions. Based on this interpretation, they reappear again and again throughout history. The first time they appeared was shortly after the death of the Prophet. For more information on this group see: Vida, G. Levi Della, “*Khārijites*”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition (1913-1936)*, Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Consulted online on 18 December 2023  
<[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X\\_ei1\\_COM\\_0134](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei1_COM_0134)>

<sup>209</sup> This term was misunderstood and incorrectly interpreted by Warren as meaning that he does *takfīr* of them: Warren, D.H., (2017). ‘Cleansing the nation of the “Dogs of Hell”’: ‘Ali Jum‘a’s nationalist legal reasoning in support of the 2013 Egyptian coup and its bloody aftermath’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 49(3), pp. 457–477.

<sup>210</sup> كلمة أ د علي جمعة في الجلسة الافتتاحية لمؤتمر من أهل السنة والجماعة *YouTube*. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=wFk\\_MAKGywc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=wFk_MAKGywc) (Accessed: 03 November 2023).

<sup>211</sup> He refers to the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya offensively as *al-Nābita*, which could be translated as “weed.” That is clearly understood for example from this sermon as well as countless others: النائبة والبدع | الشيخ علي جمعة *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0E3hxXzY8E> (Accessed: 30 November 2023).

Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya from the fold of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*. The first distinction he drew is that *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* endorses plurality, while the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya does not, and this led them to start doing *takfīr*. Then he mentioned several other points, among them the following: 1. The Salafis/Wahhābīs pick and choose in the tradition what suits their ideology and “desire”. 2. They are literalistic and lack proper scholastic methodology. 3. They follow their imagination and do not understand the reality. 4. They are ignorant of the Arabic language and of the Islamic legal maxims and goals. 5. They do not possess a sound chain of transmission.<sup>212</sup> Then, he identified the Ash‘arī school with *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* and said that everything that the Ash‘arī school<sup>213</sup> says is a sound presentation of what is contained in the Qur‘ān and the Sunna. Then he mentioned that the majority of the Umma up until today follows this understanding of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* and refuses the Salafī/Wahhābī interpretation of Sunnī Islam. Furthermore, he accused the Salafī/Wahhābī interpretation of Sunnī Islam as being a source of distortion of the picture of Islam in the minds of people around the world, as well as a source of violence and a source of fear in the world – referring to the various Salafī-Jihādī militant groups.<sup>214</sup> Finally, he mentioned that the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya have much bigger financial resources to spread their version of Islam and that they got into the world of media before them and he finished his speech with a prayer, seeking God's help for *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* against the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya.<sup>215</sup>

When we look at Shaykh Ali Gomaa's definition of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* as presented at the conference in Grozny, we can see that it is a complex definition and that it is composed of four main aspects.

Firstly, he connects the definition of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* to the famous Ḥadīth of Jibrīl with its three dimensions. Thus, followers of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* are those Sunnī Muslims who follow the traditional schools of Theology, namely the Ash‘arī and the Māturīdī schools, and the traditional schools of Law. Interestingly enough, he did not directly mention or stress the endorsement or practice of Sufism as a pillar of

<sup>212</sup> *Isnād* – He means scholarly chain of transmission in the Islamic sciences in general.

<sup>213</sup> As I explain in the third chapter, when scholars like Shaykh Ali Gomaa mention the Ash‘arī school, the actually include the Māturīdī school under the heading of the Ash‘arī school.

<sup>214</sup> Here he means groups like ISIS and other such militant groups.

<sup>215</sup> علي جمعة على محاضرة الحبيب علي الجفري في نهاية مؤتمر الشيشان *YouTube*. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=db1vyihLVjU&pp=ygVI2KfZhNi02YrYriDYudmE2Yog2KzZhdi52Kkg2YXZhiDZh9mFINij2YfZhCDYp9mE2LPZhtipINmIIIn2YTYrNmF2KfYudip> (Accessed: 03 November 2023).

orthodoxy, although he did mention Sufism as an Islamic science that deals with the pillar of Iḥsān, thus alluding to its importance, however, to him the orthodoxy is primarily and mainly judged through Theology and Law.

The second aspect of his understanding and defining of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* is connected to the previous aspect and could be termed “scholasticism”. What I mean by this term here is that to Shaykh Ali Gomaa a distinguishing quality of the scholars of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* is not only their adherence to the theological and legal schools, but also their classical scholastic methodology in general – not only in Theology or Law, but even in sciences of Ḥadīth, the sciences of Arabic language, classical logic etc. It appears to me that to him this traditional vast and deep interdisciplinary learning and understanding of the classical Sunnī scholastic tradition is in itself a distinguishing quality and part of his defining of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*.

The third aspect of Shaykh Ali Gomaa's defining of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* is his insistence that the scholars of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* accept and respect the above-mentioned inner intellectual plurality (*ikhṭilāfāt*)<sup>216</sup> that exists in the traditional Islamic sciences. Part of this is also the fact that he stresses that *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* does not engage (As he clarifies, they do, but only rarely and only in quite obvious and clearly defined circumstances.) in *takfīr* of Muslims.

The fourth aspect of his definition of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* is his showing of contrast between *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* and the terrorist groups, and the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya in general. Thus, he points to differences between *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* and these other groups, and this “contrasting” and delineating the borders between *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* and these other Sunnī groups,<sup>217</sup> and his expulsion of these groups from the fold of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*, is a pillar of his definition of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*. (It is important to note here that he also refutes and rejects the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>218</sup> However, he does not do *takfīr* of the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya or

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<sup>216</sup> Differences of opinions between scholars in various Islamic sciences.

<sup>217</sup> Who themselves claim to be *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*...

<sup>218</sup> #علي\_جمعة : لهذا وصفت #الإخوان بالخوارج وهذا رأيي في قتل المعتصمين #  
YouTube. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=xrvKWj-alJY&t=89s&pp=ygUv2KfZhNin2K7ZiNin2YYg2KfZhNmF2LPZhNmF2YjZhiDYudmE2Yog2KzZhdi52Kk%3D> (Accessed: 03 November 2023).

the Muslim Brotherhood, even their militant manifestations, instead, he describes them as innovators<sup>219</sup> and sinners, but still Muslims.<sup>220</sup>)

### 2.3 *Shaykh Ali Gomaa's Understanding of Islamic Theology*

The general understanding of the Islamic Theology of Shaykh Ali Gomaa has already been partly explained in the previous subchapter and it is very clear. As for theological orthodoxy in Islam in general, and Sunnī Islam in particular, as has been explained, the Shaykh sees it in the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī schools of Theology.

We may add that also in Theology within Sunnism, he puts into contrast *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* and the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya. Thus, to him, Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya are theologically not part of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*, and he stands in strong opposition to them and their theological methodology. He disagrees with a number of their core distinguishing beliefs, such as their understanding of some of the Divine Attributes, where he considers them to be anthropomorphists. At the same time, it should be noted that he does say that on many points there is an agreement between *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* and the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya – especially in *al-Sam‘īyāt/al-Ghaybīyyāt*.<sup>221</sup>

As for his Theology, there is no doubt in my mind that the Shaykh is an adherent to the Ash‘arī School of Theology. That can be further proven by a number of his books and lectures. For that purpose, I analysed his book on Theology called *‘Aqīdat Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘a*. It seems to me that the work is a typical Ash‘arī theological text that is based on the three parts paradigm of the classical Ash‘arī Theology.<sup>222</sup> The main distinguishing quality of this work is that before the three main parts, there is a rather lengthy introduction into general theological theory, terminology, absolute basics of logic and also several subchapters dedicated to some spiritual matters like *Dhikr*, sin and repentance etc. The second thing that is specific to this work was explained by Shaykh in

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<sup>219</sup> *YouTube*. .. أناسا يدعون مذهب السلف الصالح لكنهم ينتقدون الإمام الشافعي ويرفضون المذهبية ، فمن هم السلف Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKweOzX\\_am0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKweOzX_am0) (Accessed: 01 December 2023).

<sup>220</sup> *YouTube*. ... ما الفرق بين الصهيونية واليهودية ؟ و بين الفصائل المقاومة وبعض الأفكار التي تنتمي إليها Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57w3CYvv-Mw> (Accessed: 01 December 2023).

<sup>221</sup> He shared these theological stances of his in the following interview, in which he explains the differences between the Ash‘arī school and the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya: *والله أعلم | فضيلة د. علي جمعة يوضح الفرق بين الأشعرية والسلفية | حلقة كاملة* *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=xkasM9yfsLU> (Accessed: 03 November 2023).

<sup>222</sup> The same three parts paradigm can be seen in the theological work, which will be discussed in the next chapter for example. The same paradigm can be seen in almost any famous book of Ash‘arī Theology.

the introduction, where he said that among his goals in this work is to make the science of Theology accessible to the general unspecialised readers and also to connect Theology with spirituality.<sup>223</sup> (This is another example of one of the characteristics of the Shādhilīyya explained in the previous chapter.) As for the three main theological chapters of the work, they are the following:

The first is *al-Ilāhīyyāt* – Theology that explains the attributes of God in the typical Ash‘arī way, explaining what is necessary for God, what is possible for God and what is impossible with respect to God, adding some extra subchapters dedicated to the Names of God (*Asmā’ Allāh al-Ḥusnā*) and a few other theological questions like the question of free will etc.<sup>224</sup>

The second is *al-Nubuwwāt* – Prophetology, again on the typical paradigm of the Ash‘arī school, discussing the things that are necessary for Prophets, things that are possible for them, and things that are impossible with respect to them, as well as discussing the Theology of Revelation, miracles etc., adding some extra subchapters dedicated only to the Prophet Muḥammad and his family, companions, the act of sending blessings upon him etc.<sup>225</sup>

Finally, the third one is *al-Sam‘īyāt/al-Ghaybīyyāt* – The part of Theology that deals with various theological questions like Eschatology, Angelology and Demonology etc.<sup>226</sup>

#### **2.4 Shaykh Ali Gomaa’s Understanding of Islamic Law**

Adding to what has already been mentioned about the Shaykh's understanding of Islamic Law, the Shaykh's understanding is essentially connected to the traditional established legal schools and methodologies. For example, he mentioned in one of his lectures, that there were approximately 20 legal schools in Islamic history and that of those only eight survive up until today and that of those, the vast majority of Muslims follow the four famous Sunnī schools of Law.<sup>227</sup> So, for the Shaykh, the Sunnī legal orthodoxy of

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<sup>223</sup> Gomaa, A., (2011). *Aqīdat Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*. Cairo: Dār al-Muqattam li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘. pp. 5-6

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. 43-128

<sup>225</sup> Ibid. 129-172

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. 173-197

<sup>227</sup> *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjJvdmKssM> (Accessed: 03 December 2023).

today is found primarily in these four schools of Law – the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanbalī. However, to do justice to Shaykh's legal thought, it has to be mentioned that his position is yet a little more nuanced and more complex than just that. Aside from the obvious – the four schools – he also acknowledges the other historical – and now extinct – Sunnī schools, such as the schools of al-Awzā‘ī,<sup>228</sup> Layth ibn Sa‘d,<sup>229</sup> Sufyān al-Thawrī<sup>230</sup> etc. He even acknowledges the existence of the non-Sunnī Islamic schools of Law. The following quote summarises and further clarifies Shaykh's legal thinking, he wrote it when he was the Grand Mufti of Egypt and the head of *Dār al-Iftā' al-Miṣrīyya*: “Dar al-Ifta’ al-Misriyah follows a well-defined methodology in issuing fatwas. The methodology seeks to transmit the four well-known Sunni schools of jurisprudence (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi‘i, and Hanbali) while acknowledging the other schools that Muslims follow in different parts of the world (Ja‘fari, Zaydi, Ibadi, and Zahiri<sup>231</sup>) and considering them. In addition, Dar al-Ifta’ often widens the scope of the evidence upon which it relies to include the schools of major *mujtahids* like al-Awza‘i, al-Tabari,<sup>232</sup> al-Layth ibn Sa‘d, and others from over eighty *mujtahids* throughout Muslim history. These schools' opinions are taken into account and may even be given priority of consideration according to the strength of their evidence, the need for their perspective, the purpose of the greater good, or to fulfil the goals of the Shari‘ah.”<sup>233</sup> Thus, it is obvious that the Shaykh is not among those who strictly insist on following one particular Sunnī school only, and as he acknowledges the chaotic and ever-changing nature of the modern world, he sees that in Islamic Law there needs to be and that there indeed is, a great level of flexibility within the various schools of

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<sup>228</sup> One of the most prominent early theologians and jurists, died in the year 774 CE. For more information see: Judd, Steven C., “al-Awzā‘ī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Devin J. Stewart. Consulted online on 22 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_23196](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23196)>

<sup>229</sup> One of the most prominent early theologians and jurists, died in the year 791 CE. For more information see: Merad, A., “al-Layth b. Sa‘d”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 22 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_4656](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4656)>

<sup>230</sup> One of the most prominent early theologians and jurists, died in the year 778 CE. For more information see: Raddatz, H.P., “Sufyān al-Thawrī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 22 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_7130](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7130)>

<sup>231</sup> Referring to the famous school of “literalists“ which flourished in al-Andalus. For more information see: Turki, Abdel-Magid, “al-Zāhiriyya”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 22 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_8086](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8086)>

<sup>232</sup> Here he refers to the famous exegete of the Qur‘ān, theologian and jurist, who died in the year 923 CE. For more information see: Bosworth, C.E., “al-Tabarī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 22 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_1133](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1133)>

<sup>233</sup> Gomaa, A., (2011). *Responding from the tradition*. Louisville, Ky. Fons Vitae. p. 22



jurisprudence, and that the jurists are tasked with finding the most appropriate valid legal solutions to the new problems that appear, and that these solutions may not be necessarily found in one's own school, or not even among the four major Sunnī schools of today, but maybe possibly found among the opinions of someone like al-Awzā'ī or al-Ṭabarī.<sup>234</sup>

It is very important to note that the Shaykh holds the position that “The common Muslim does not have a school of Law, and his school of Law is the school of Law of his muftī.” At the same time, he insists that the common Muslim must be very careful in his choice of a muftī. He also holds that people who do have Madhhabs and have to study them properly are the students of sacred knowledge (*ṭalabat al-‘ilm*) and the scholars.<sup>235</sup>

He also strongly rejects the notion of *al-lāmadhabīyya*, that is the rejection of the concept of following the famous established schools of Law, and he sees it as one of the reasons why groups like ISIS spread and do what they do.<sup>236</sup>

It comes as no surprise that he also criticises and in many aspects rejects the jurisprudence of the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya, and sees them as the source of various societal ills as well as of the “Salafī-Jihādī” groups like ISIS etc. For example, he criticises their ways of clothing, which, according to him, contradict the common practice of the majority of the society. Through the criticism of their clothing, he points to a deeper problem, which he further explains as “literalistic formalism void of deeper understanding and insight.”<sup>237</sup> Another example of his legal criticism of the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya is his accusation that they deeply misunderstand the concept of religious innovation (*bid‘a*)<sup>238</sup> and that they proclaim as reprehensible and unacceptable religious innovations many things that are in reality not reprehensible innovations, such as creating new litanies of *dhikr*.<sup>239</sup>

It should be noted that the Shaykh is among those scholars who say that the lived physical reality affects the legal rulings, and that part of the process of giving a fatwa has

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<sup>234</sup> *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpDPQi221OA> (Accessed: 03 November 2023). *والله أعلم | الحلقة الكاملة 7 مارس 2015 | حقيقة المذاهب .. وحكم انكار المذاهب #234*

<sup>235</sup> *YouTube*. Available at: [https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=IK-Qe\\_LofsM&pp=ygUv2KfZhNi52KfZhdMkINmE2Kcg2YXYsNmH2Kgg2YTZhyDYudmE2Yog2KzZhd52Kk%3D](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=IK-Qe_LofsM&pp=ygUv2KfZhNi52KfZhdMkINmE2Kcg2YXYsNmH2Kgg2YTZhyDYudmE2Yog2KzZhd52Kk%3D) (Accessed: 03 December 2023). *هل يجوز للمسلم أن ينتقل من مذهب إلى مذهب آخر؟ | أ.د. علي جمعة #235*

<sup>236</sup> *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpDPQi221OA> (Accessed: 03 November 2023). *والله أعلم | الحلقة الكاملة 7 مارس 2015 | حقيقة المذاهب .. وحكم انكار المذاهب #236*

<sup>237</sup> *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YQIvNvWFzc> (Accessed: 03 November 2023). *د. علي جمعة يرد على أبرز دعاوى السلفية .. وحكم مخالفة واقع المجتمع | حلقة كاملة #237*

<sup>238</sup> For more information about this concept see: Robson, J., “Bid‘a”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_1393](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1393)>

<sup>239</sup> As he clarified in this sermon: *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0E3hxXzY8E> (Accessed: 30 November 2023). *النايئة والبدع | الشيخ علي جمعة #239*

to be a deep understanding of the reality that surrounds the question.<sup>240</sup> Thus, the Law for him, is, at least to some extent, a “living” thing, a living tradition. 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.<sup>241</sup>

## 2.5 *Shaykh Ali Gomaa’s understanding of Sufism*

The following is the Shaykh's definition of Sufism: “Sufism is a system of spiritual growth and the acquisition of good character. It leads Muslims to the 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.' 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 to 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.”<sup>242</sup> Thus, for the Shaykh, Sufism is an integral part of the religion of Islam and also one of the essential classical Islamic sciences.

During his studies, there were three main influences on his formation as a Ṣūfī, as far as I can see. The first one was his 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. It was also he who introduced him to his murshid Shaykh ‘Abdullah ibn Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī.<sup>243</sup> The second influence was the general study of Sufism as a science – the works of Imām al-

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<sup>240</sup> Gomaa, A., (2011). *Responding from the tradition*. Louisville, Ky. Fons Vitae. pp. 20-24

<sup>241</sup> 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).

<sup>242</sup> Gomaa, S., 2011. *Responding from the tradition*. Louisville, Ky.: Fons Vitae, p. 307

<sup>243</sup> 3 قصتي مع شيخنا الإمام علي جمعة \_ الزيارة الأكثر تأثيرا *YouTube*. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=DzDkl-ZumAs&list=PLUrykJsZUIys5eJg6UI9GFH3zqxDPAr&index=3&pp=iAQB> (Accessed: 13 July 2023).

Ghazzālī<sup>244</sup> or Imām al-Qushayrī<sup>245</sup> – which are commonly taught at al-Azhar so he undoubtedly encountered these circles during his many years of study at al-Azhar. The last influence was the study and training under the Shādhilī master Shaykh ‘Abdullah ibn Siddīq al-Ghumārī.

Generally speaking, the Shaykh appears to be a typical Shādhilī master. He is a scholar of the classical Islamic sciences and a person with a deep relationship with the Prophet. Likewise, the Shaykh has his edition of the *Dalā’il*.<sup>246</sup> It was narrated by ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn that the Shaykh used to nurture the love for the Prophet in his students a lot and that he even stopped teaching the famous book of Tafsīr of al-Zamakhsharī<sup>247</sup> *al-Kashshāf* after awhile with words “This suffices us.” since the author had some “bad *adab*” with the Prophet. The Shaykh also used to teach the *Shifā’* of Aḥmad Zarrūq.<sup>248</sup> Likewise, the Shaykh often holds celebrations of the birth of the Prophet.<sup>249</sup>

Shaykh Ali Gomaa was a host in many shows about Sufism.<sup>250</sup> Likewise, he has been teaching Sufism in the scholarly settings at al-Azhar and elsewhere. What is important to note here is that a lot of his teaching was teaching Sufism as an Islamic science in general, even for the masses, and was not always based on the Shādhilī texts.

<sup>244</sup> The famous and prominent theologian, jurist and Ṣūfī who died in the year 1111 CE. For more information see: Watt, W. Montgomery, “al-Ghazzālī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 22 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0233](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0233)>

<sup>245</sup> The prominent theologian, jurist and Ṣūfī, who died in the year 1072 CE. For more information see: Halm, H., “al-Qūshayrī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 22 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0548](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0548)>

<sup>246</sup> الطريقة الصديقية الشاذلية، دلائل الخيرات وشوارق الأنوار في ذكر الصلاة على النبي المختار. Available at: <https://siddiqiya.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A9/%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8/item/217-%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B0%D9%83%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1> (Accessed: 26 November 2023).

<sup>247</sup> The famous linguist and exegete who died in the year 1143 CE. For more information see: C.H.M. Versteegh, “al-Zamakhsharī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 22 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_8108](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8108)>

<sup>248</sup> قصتي مع شيخنا الإمام علي جمعة - 4 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s\\_5BVT0i0oE&list=PLUrykJsZUiy5SeJg6UI9GFH3zqxdPAr&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_5BVT0i0oE&list=PLUrykJsZUiy5SeJg6UI9GFH3zqxdPAr&index=6) (Accessed: 12 July 2023).

<sup>249</sup> An example may be seen here: قراءة مولد العزب احتفالاً بالمولد النبوي الشريف 1441 هـ | أ.د علي جمعة | مسجد فاصل YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pMg\\_eo28lk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pMg_eo28lk) (Accessed: 13 July 2023).

<sup>250</sup> Many of them are available online on his official youtube channel: أ.د علي جمعة dr Ali Gomaa. YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/@DrAliGomaa> (Accessed: 03 November 2023).

Thus, we can see the Shaykh teaching for example the work of Imām al-Ghazzālī<sup>251</sup> or Imām al-Qushayrī.<sup>252</sup> What I wish to point out here, is that we may want to draw a line between the teachings of the Shaykh which happen within his teaching of Sufism as an Islamic science in general, and between his teaching of and instruction in the Shādhilī way.<sup>253</sup> At the same time, it is obvious that the two do mix in the teaching of the Shaykh.

A very significant point in the Shaykh's understanding of Sufism 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.<sup>254</sup> What the Shaykh always mentions when he talks about this subject is that all of the various types of spiritual experiences – according to him 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, the Shaykh also says here that one must not be blinded and deluded by these experiences.<sup>255</sup>

The Shaykh also talks about love and the fact that one should go through the spiritual journey with and through love as that will make things much easier for him.<sup>256</sup>

Then the Shaykh describes the spiritual path as being based on *Takhliya* and *Tahliya*. The *Takhliya* is the process of purification of the human being from all that is bad, and *Tahliya* is the process of acquisition of all that is good.<sup>257</sup>

Lastly, the Shaykh also often talks about “the three books of God” and the importance of reading, pondering and contemplating the meanings and realities of these books (*fīkr*). The first book is *Kitāb Allāh al-Manzūr*, which is the world, the world that is

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<sup>251</sup> *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjY8cCBjMhs&list=PLxQnfwkf6ksjMevu7RqyAJhNN7d7D41ax> (Accessed: 03 December 2023).

<sup>252</sup> *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWfcT3ocE6A&list=PLxQnfwkf6kshnf1LnvDPfd1-h-uaFMynx> (Accessed: 03 December 2023).

<sup>253</sup> Some of which is also public at the same time, examples may be seen here: *الصديقية الشاذلية Alsiddiqiya Alshazoliyah YouTube*. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/@Siddiqiya/playlists> (Accessed: 03 December 2023).

<sup>254</sup> This is in contrast with other people, who are commonly described as Ṣūfīs, who give much more weight to the spiritual experiences.

<sup>255</sup> *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HujD1kk7r-c> (Accessed: 14 July 2023).

<sup>256</sup> *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=hfRjIpEMvok> (Accessed: 14 July 2023).

<sup>257</sup> *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3eLRegekdxE&list=PLxQnfwkf6ksjXlhKO4XyKovOhpUD3ML3F&index=11> (Accessed: 03 December 2023).

seen, the cosmos, the creation of God. The second one is *Kitāb Allāh al-Maṣṭūr*, which is the Qur'ān. The last one is *Kitāb Allāh al-Maḡdūr*, and that is the human being.<sup>258</sup>

It comes as no surprise that also in the realm of Sufism Shaykh Ali Gomaa distances himself and his understanding of orthodox Sunnism from the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya. In one of the educational programmes he took part in, he says that Sufism is one of the central Islamic sciences, in fact one of the most important Islamic sciences, and that the rejection of Sufism is very dangerous and problematic.<sup>259</sup> By that, he indirectly attacks primarily the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya, who are well-known for their negative attitudes towards Sufism.<sup>260</sup>

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that Shaykh Ali Gomaa is a formidable scholar, theologian, jurist, Ṣūfī, and a figure unafraid to confront his adversaries while supporting those he deems worthy, thereby garnering both friends and foes. His definition of “Sunnī orthodoxy” is rooted in a commitment to renowned theological and legal Sunnī schools, while also embodying what can be termed as scholasticism. In the upcoming chapter, I will delve into the life, work, scholarship, and definition of “Sunnī orthodoxy” by his renowned student, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn.

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<sup>258</sup> *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=JuXfYqZuuXU> (Accessed: 14 July 2023).

<sup>259</sup> *YouTube*. Available at: [https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=qs\\_SQtxfHzs&pp=ygUn2KfZhtmD2KfYsSDYp9mE2KrYtdml2Yeg2LnZhNmKINis2YXYudip](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=qs_SQtxfHzs&pp=ygUn2KfZhtmD2KfYsSDYp9mE2KrYtdml2Yeg2LnZhNmKINis2YXYudip) (Accessed: 21 December 2023).

<sup>260</sup> See for example the following short speech of the famous and prominent Salafī-Wahhābī scholar Ibn al-‘Uthaymīn about Sufism, where he strongly attacks Sufism and proclaims it to be an innovated and dangerous matter that in some cases contains, in his view, even things that are tantamount to *kufīr* (disbelief): *YouTube*. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=zDhr65fhU6M&pp=ygUd2KfZhmNi52KvZitmF2YrZhiDYp9mE2KrYtdmI2YE%3D> (Accessed: 21 December 2023).

### 3 Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn

#### 3.1 Life and work of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn was born in 1971 in Syria to a religious family, his father was a teacher of the Qur’ān and Islamic sciences. His lineage goes back to Banū Tamīm and to the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad. He studied the foundations of the Islamic sciences with his father. He finished his primary and secondary education in the city of Mayādīn. His spiritual master was the Shādhilī master Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Īsā. The father of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn named him “‘Abd al-Qādir” after Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Īsā. Then he moved to Damascus and studied at the University of Damascus at the Faculty of Sharī‘a. In Damascus he studied especially with the famous Syrian scholar Shaykh Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ḥalabī, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Farfūr, Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn ‘Itr, Shaykh Wahba al-Zuḥaylī, the Shādhilī master Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Shāghūrī and others.<sup>261</sup>

Moreover, he was granted a scholarship at the Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia.<sup>262</sup> There he studied for at least four years with many of the local Salafī/Wahhābī scholars like ‘Abdullāh Ghunaymān or ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-‘Abbād. Altogether he mentioned that each year he had 25 different teachers at the Islamic University, thus he studied with at least a hundred of the local scholars.<sup>263</sup> Aside from them, he also studied with some of the non-Salafī/Wahhābī scholars in Ḥijāz, such as Shaykh Sa’d al-Dīn Murād, Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Alawī al-Mālīkī, Shaykh Muḥammad Zakarīya al-Bukhārī and others.<sup>264</sup>

After his studies at the Islamic University in Medina, the Shaykh moved back to Damascus, where he entered The Advanced Studies Programme (*al-Dirāsāt al-‘Ulyā*) at

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<sup>261</sup> The Shaykh has an entire playlist of speeches on his Youtube channel, where he talks about a number of his teachers and his studies and experiences with them: *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUr-ykJksZUjhxUzDes5Ud7Q2hanQ2bgT> (Accessed: 03 November 2023).

<sup>262</sup> *عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ السيرة الذاتية - النشأة الأولى* *YouTube*. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCCCcCo1d10&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=18](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCCCcCo1d10&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=18) (Accessed: 06 December 2023).

<sup>263</sup> *عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ (من دمشق إلى المدينة المنورة* *YouTube*. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eGacMUNMrQ&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=18](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eGacMUNMrQ&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=18) (Accessed: 08 December 2023).

<sup>264</sup> *عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ السيرة الذاتية - النشأة الأولى* *YouTube*. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCCCcCo1d10&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=18](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCCCcCo1d10&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=18) (Accessed: 06 December 2023).

the University of Damascus at the Faculty of Sharī‘a, the Department of Islamic Law and its Methodologies. There he continued his studies with the aforementioned scholars. He also started teaching at the Faculty of Sharī‘a of the University of Damascus. Then he was given a scholarship to go to study either to Iran or to Egypt and he chose to go to Egypt.<sup>265</sup>

In Egypt, he studied at Cairo University at the Faculty of Dār al-‘Ulūm. During his time in Egypt, he also studied with and accompanied Shaykh Ali Gomaa daily for six years.<sup>266</sup> Aside from Shaykh Ali Gomaa, he also studied with several other famous Egyptian scholars such as Shaykh Muṣṭafā ‘Imrān. At one point Shaykh Ali Gomaa asked Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn to start teaching at al-Azhar, thus, he began teaching classical Sunnī Theology and Ḥanafī jurisprudence and Legal Theory at al-Azhar. During those six years of studies in Egypt, he finished his Masters degree<sup>267</sup> and his PhD.<sup>268</sup> His master's thesis is about Islamic rulings related to the protection of the environment and his doctoral thesis is about the criteria and principles of acceptance and rejection of interpretations of the Qur‘ān.

Upon finishing his Ph.D. in Egypt he had to move back to Syria, where he returned to teaching at the Faculty of Sharī‘a of the University of Damascus. Likewise, he started teaching at the prestigious Damascene Islamic Institute *Ma‘had al-Fath al-Islāmī*.<sup>269</sup>

After teaching for some time he was forced to enter the obligatory military service in the Syrian army. Because of his degree, he became an officer with a higher military rank. In his autobiography, he described various incidents when people in the army were being humiliated and harmed in different ways by some of the higher-ranking officers. He

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<sup>265</sup> (عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ السيرة الذاتية (المرحلة الدمشقية الثانية الدراسات العليا 3 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3Uj\\_XYQOe8&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=16](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3Uj_XYQOe8&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=16) (Accessed: 08 December 2023).

<sup>266</sup> (الدكتور عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ الرحلة المصرية (ضيق ميم مصر 4 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIlgju3c9qg&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=9](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIlgju3c9qg&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=9) (Accessed: 09 December 2023).

<sup>267</sup> (عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ مصر في عصر الصاد 5 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuNvw1IU-Q0&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=15](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuNvw1IU-Q0&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=15) (Accessed: 09 December 2023).

<sup>268</sup> (عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ مصر في رضاء الرء 6 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iK8IUjxV3J0&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=14](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iK8IUjxV3J0&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=14) (Accessed: 09 December 2023).

<sup>269</sup> (عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ العودة إلى دمشق والتدريس في كلية الشريعة 7 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95zheh6dlug&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=9](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95zheh6dlug&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=9) (Accessed: 09 December 2023).

also described the widespread secular and even aggressively anti-religious nature of the Syrian army.<sup>270</sup>

After his military service, the Shaykh continued teaching at the Faculty of Sharī'a of the University of Damascus. He also started teaching at the Faculty of Arts of al-Furat University.<sup>271</sup> He stayed in Syria from the beginning of the Revolution of 2011 until he learned that he was wanted by the Syrian security forces,<sup>272</sup> and thus had to emigrate to Turkey,<sup>273</sup> where he was given a post to start teaching at Yalova University.<sup>274</sup>

In Turkey Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn started teaching at Yalova University and taught there for six years.<sup>275</sup> Afterwards, he taught at several traditional madrasas, after which he dedicated himself to private teaching and scholarship<sup>276</sup> and his extensive online activities – right now his YouTube channel has over one hundred thousand followers and he has published almost five thousand videos on a wide range of theological, legal, spiritual, historical, linguistic, political and other issues. One of the main characteristics of his YouTube activities is his perpetual attacks on Salafism/Wahhābism.<sup>277</sup>

Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn wrote a number of books, some of them already published and some remain so far unpublished.<sup>278</sup> Among the published ones are the following: *Ma'āyir al-Qabūl wa al-Radd li Tafsīr al-Naṣṣ al-Qur'ānī*,<sup>279</sup> *Tarjumān al-*

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<sup>270</sup> عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ الخدمة العسكرية في الجيش العربي السوري 8 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmoL-2cNaIs&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=13](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmoL-2cNaIs&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=13) (Accessed: 09 December 2023).

<sup>271</sup> عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ ما بعد العسكرية وقبل الثورة 9 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hp0UNBuALo8&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=12](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hp0UNBuALo8&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=12) (Accessed: 09 December 2023).

<sup>272</sup> عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ في وسط المعمة 12 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TC\\_fGXfcS8&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TC_fGXfcS8&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=6) (Accessed: 09 December 2023).

<sup>273</sup> عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ خارج نظام الأسد وتحت الجيش الحر 13 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hlgq3zeMtkg&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=7](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hlgq3zeMtkg&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=7) (Accessed: 09 December 2023).

<sup>274</sup> عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ في وسط المعمة 12 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TC\\_fGXfcS8&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TC_fGXfcS8&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=6) (Accessed: 09 December 2023).

<sup>275</sup> عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ رحلة تركيا والأردن والاستقرار في جامعة يالوا بتركيا 14 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-30OJM3Ys0&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-30OJM3Ys0&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=5) (Accessed: 09 December 2023).

<sup>276</sup> عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ تجربتي في المدارس الأهلية الشرعية 17 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9CJJ5MZ4es&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9CJJ5MZ4es&list=PLUrykJsZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=2) (Accessed: 09 December 2023).

<sup>277</sup> الدكتور عبد القادر الحسين dr. Abdulkader Al Housien. YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/@dr.abdulkaderalhousien> (Accessed: 03 November 2023).

<sup>278</sup> كتب الدكتور عبد القادر الحسين YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=DFo2JVsuFok> (Accessed: 10 December 2023).

<sup>279</sup> *The Criteria of Acceptance or Rejection of Interpretations of The Quranic Text*



*Qur'ān*,<sup>280</sup> *Shaykh al-Mufasssīrīn*,<sup>281</sup> *Imām Ahl al-Ḥaqq al-Shaykh al-Mujaddid Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī*,<sup>282</sup> *Al-Zubda al-Hanīyya fī Sharḥ al-Kharīda al-Bahīyya*,<sup>283</sup> *al-Risāla al-Indūnīsīyya fī Ahammi Mushkilāt al-Firqa al-Wahhābīyya*<sup>284</sup> and others. Among the unpublished are the following: *Ḥimāyat al-Bī‘a fī al-Sharī‘a al-Islāmīyya*.<sup>285</sup>

### 3.2 *Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn’s understanding of Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*

When I searched for the Shaykh's definition and understanding of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*, I found two major sources, namely his book *Imām Ahl al-Ḥaqq al-Shaykh al-Mujaddid Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī*, and many of his recorded speeches available on his YouTube channel.

In the book *Imām Ahl al-Ḥaqq al-Shaykh al-Mujaddid Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī*, the Shaykh identifies *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* with the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī schools of Theology. He explains that although he mostly uses just the term “*Ash‘arīyya*” or “*Ahl al-Sunna al-Ash‘arīyya*” or “*Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a al-Ash‘arīyya*”, he does not exclude the Māturīdī school: “Some of the noble followers of the Māturīdī school expressed their pity and asked me to write about their own Imām, Imām of Guidance al-Māturīdī, may God be pleased with him, so I promised to do so if the circumstances allow me, with the knowledge that the word '*Ash‘arīyya*', when pronounced in general in contrast with other groups, includes in its meaning the Māturīdīyya as well; and that is so because the differences between these two groups, which together form the wings of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*, are negligible.”<sup>286</sup> He further clarifies his position: “Most of the scholars of Theology and Speculative Theology from *Ahl al-Sunna* are followers of al-Ash‘arī, and so are the exegetes of the Qur'ān. The commentators of the books of Sunnah and the scholars of Ḥadīth as well, not to mention the scholars of Legal Theory and the scholars of the Arabic language. As for the pious and the people of the spiritual path, there the matter is

<sup>280</sup> *The Exegete of The Qur'ān* – a small book about Ibn ‘Abbās.

<sup>281</sup> *The Shaykh of The Exegetes* – a small book about Imām al-Ṭabarī and his methodology in his famous books of Tafsīr

<sup>282</sup> *The Imām of The People of Truth, The Shaykh and Renewer, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī*

<sup>283</sup> *The Pleasant Essence in The Explanation of The Radiant Pearl* – a commentary on the famous didactic theological poem of Imām al-Dardīr

<sup>284</sup> *The Indonesian Epistle on The Main Deviances of The Wahhābī Sect*

<sup>285</sup> *The Protection of The Environment in Islamic Law*

<sup>286</sup> al-Ḥusayn, ‘Abd al-Qādir., (2020). *Imām Ahl al-Ḥaqq al-Shaykh al-Mujaddid Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī*. Dār al-Fātih li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘. p. 8

absolutely clear as well...”<sup>287</sup> However, he does not exclude the non-Ash‘arī/Māturīdī scholars from *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*. As he explained, the scholars of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* who were before the two, or some of those who came after them but did not endorse their Theology, did not differ from the Ash‘arī/Māturīdī school in any of the major important theological questions. Furthermore, he says that the reason why all of the “theological orthodoxy” of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* are attributed to al-Ash‘arī is that what al-Ash‘arī (and al-Māturīdī) did is that he clarified and codified the principles and foundations and advocated the Theology of the companions of the Prophet and their followers.<sup>288</sup>

The second major source, through which I am now going to describe and analyse Shaykh's definition and understanding of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*, is one of his recorded speeches, in which he defined and explained the term *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* in detail.<sup>289</sup>

He began by explaining that the word “Sunna” in the term refers to the following of the way of the Prophet Muḥammad. Then he explained that the word “Jamā‘a” was taken from several Ḥadīths, which talk about the importance of following “the majority”. He further clarified that the term “Jamā‘a” also refers to the *ijmā‘* (consensus) in the Sharī‘a. He then continued to talk about the fact that during the Prophet's life things were clear and that the Prophet guided his companions and taught them how to derive rulings of the Sharī‘a.

Then, after the death of the Prophet, the differences and war between the companions happened and the Shaykh said that the cause was that they made *ijtihād*<sup>290</sup> and that they came to different conclusions and that those of them who were right “have two rewards” and those who were mistaken “have just one reward”.<sup>291</sup>

The problem, he said, began in the second and third generations of Muslims, where mistakes started to occur both in the transmission and in the understanding of the pure and entirely correct Islam of the Prophet. In these first generations, the division into different

<sup>287</sup> Ibid. p. 18

<sup>288</sup> Ibid. pp. 42-43

<sup>289</sup> من هم أهل السنة والجماعة؟ وما دلالة هذا المصطلح ومن الأشعرية والماتريدية *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=Uff9Dxg0w14&t=1s> (Accessed: 10 December 2023).

<sup>290</sup> The broadest meaning of this term is “legal reasoning” or “process of derivation of the rulings of the Sharī‘a from the Revelation.” For more information see: Schacht, J. and MacDonald, D.B., “*Idjtiḥād*”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 14 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0351](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0351)>

<sup>291</sup> Referring to the famous Ḥadīth.

groups started and the remaining companions of the Prophet, who were still alive and their companions came to be known as “*al-Jamā‘a*” or “*al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*”. He further clarified that at that time the differences were not very significant, but that over time they became more and more significant. Thus, he mentioned the inception of the *Shī‘a* and the *Khawārij*.<sup>292</sup>

Then, he explained that the *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* rely on the Qur‘ān, on the Sunna of the Prophet, and understand these sources through the Arabic language of the eloquent Arabs from the time of the Revelation, and through the methods of derivation that were taught by the Prophet.

Then he mentioned that there are three streams of the religion, as in the Ḥadīth of Jibrīl.

He elucidated that the primary aspect is *Īmān*, and the field that subsequently specialized in examining this facet of the religion became known as ‘*Ilm al-Kalām* or ‘*Ilm al-‘Aqīda* (Theology). He continued by specifying that the predominant theological schools are those of *al-Ash‘arī* and *al-Māturīdī*. He also mentioned that before them, the theological school of *Mu‘tazila*<sup>293</sup> did some useful service to Islam, however, they got some things wrong and became misguided from the correct *Sunnī* Theology. Likewise, he mentioned that there has been a group of *Ḥanbalīs*, who did not become *Mujassima* (anthropomorphists),<sup>294</sup> and also did not ascribe to the *Ash‘arī/Māturīdī* school, but still they remain part of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* and he said that they are close to the *Ash‘arī/Māturīdī* school.

The second stream or dimension of the religion is Islam and the science that then specialised in studying this part of the religion came to be known as *Fiqh* (Islamic Law) and the dominant orthodox schools of Islamic Law became the *Ḥanafī*, *Mālikī*, *Shāfi‘ī* and *Ḥanbalī*. He mentioned that there were also other legal schools, but that these schools became the dominant ones.

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<sup>292</sup> He obviously sees them as heretical groups, but still Muslim, groups.

<sup>293</sup> The *Mu‘tazilites* were rational theologians, who extensively used logic in explanation of the Revelation. They are considered a heretical group by the other groups within Sunnism. For more information see: Nyberg, H. S., “*al-Mu‘tazila*”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition (1913-1936)*, Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Consulted online on 19 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X\\_ei1\\_SIM\\_4952](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei1_SIM_4952)>

<sup>294</sup> He means by this term the anthropomorphists who ascribe body parts to God. He clearly identifies the *Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya* with the anthropomorphists as will be explained further in the subchapter about his understanding of Theology. For more information about anthropomorphism see: Holtzman, Livnat, “*Anthropomorphism*”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Devin J. Stewart. Consulted online on 22 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_23759](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23759)>

The last stream or dimension is the dimension of Iḥsān and the science that then specialised in its study came to be known as *al-Tazkiya* (the spiritual purification), *al-Sulūk* (the spiritual wayfaring), *al-Zuhd* (the asceticism), or the dominant name *al-Taṣawwuf* (Sufism). He mentioned that there have been numerous schools of Sufism and that even some major Mu‘tazilī or Mujassimī figures are considered Ṣūfīs. Here, he said that the pure and orthodox school of Taṣawwuf came to be known as “the school of al-Junayd”.<sup>295</sup>

Then, he said that all of the major classical Islamic educational institutions all over the Muslim world follow these established schools of Theology, Law and Sufism and that this paradigm of following the schools of Theology, Law and Sufism has been endorsed by the vast majority of Muslim scholars, whether they were exegetes, commentators on the books of Sunna, or the jurists.

The Shaykh stated that the criterion of whether one is from *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* or not is judged through these three aspects. Thus, for someone to be considered a follower of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* he must follow one of the four schools of Law, one of the orthodox schools of Theology and the correct form of orthodox Sufism.

After clarifying all these matters, he then turned in his speech to the people who did not endorse this understanding of the “Sunnī orthodoxy” and tradition in general and asked them some rhetorical questions, for example: “Can you show me a chain of transmission (*al-isnād*) in the recitations of the Qur‘ān (*al-qirā‘āt*), that does not have someone who belongs to one of these schools?”. He stressed that such a chain of transmission does not exist. Likewise, he said that all of the classical commentaries on the famous collection of al-Bukhārī were written by either Ash‘arīs or Māturīdīs. He also asked another rhetorical question: “If they are not *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*, then who is?”.

He finished his speech by explaining that among the distinguishing qualities of this group (*Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* as he defines them) is moderation. He demonstrated the issue of extremism and terrorism, asking how it is that we do not find any terrorists belonging to this group. He also mentioned some other examples, showing that *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* always stands in the middle between two extremes. For instance, he mentioned the question of whether the Qur‘ān is created or not and said that the Mu‘tazilī

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<sup>295</sup> He refers to al-Junayd al-Baghdādī, the famous prominent Ṣūfī who died in the year 910 CE. For more information see: Arberry, A.J., “al-Djunayd”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 19 December 2023 <[dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_2117](https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2117)>

position that “it is created, period” is one extreme, and the position of the anthropomorphists that “it is uncreated, period” is another extreme, and that the nuanced orthodox Sunnī position stands in the middle.<sup>296</sup>

Thus, the Shaykh's definition and understanding of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* is very clear. It essentially stands on the adherence to those schools of Theology, Law and Sufism, which the Shaykh defines as orthodox. Added to that is the concept of moderation, which the Shaykh believes to be among the distinguishing qualities of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*.

What has to be added is that the Shaykh dedicates a lot of effort and time to showing the difference between *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* and the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya. It can be shown on several of his YouTube playlists, dedicated almost exclusively to the refutation of the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya, among them are the following:

1. “*Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘a* and the misguided groups” – The vast majority of videos in this playlist are dedicated to refutations of Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya.<sup>297</sup>
2. “Comparison between *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* and the Wahhābī group.”<sup>298</sup>
3. “Why have I left the Wahhābīyya?” – This playlist, which has over three hundred episodes, contains stories of people who were followers of the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya and left it. Each episode is a story of one such individual, who sent a message with his story to the Shaykh. Each episode includes first the reading of the story the person sent, and then the Shaykh comments on it.<sup>299</sup>

The Shaykh sees the differences between *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* and the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya both on the level of methodology and on the level of particulars. He

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<sup>296</sup> Here he refers to the concept of moderation in the religion (*waṣaṭīyya*), where the Muslims are supposed to not to go into extremes in general. For more information on this concept and its opposite (extremism) see: Badry, Roswitha, “*Taṭarruf*”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_7443](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7443)>

<sup>297</sup> أهل السنة والجماعة والفرق الضالة *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?app=desktop&list=PLUr-ykJksZUgtnnSTfIClZdbQpvIWceWe> (Accessed: 10 December 2023).

<sup>298</sup> مقارنة بين أهل السنة والجماعة وبين الفرقة الوهابية *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?app=desktop&list=PLUr-ykJksZUhfUdzD3e4iHlt9rvEfTBPX> (Accessed: 03 November 2023).

<sup>299</sup> لماذا تركت الوهابية؟! لاستباحة الكذب على المخالف *YouTube*. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJAIB\\_-aT6A&list=PLUr-ykJksZUiENBsSK-LD2bsxjWtCFt7D](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJAIB_-aT6A&list=PLUr-ykJksZUiENBsSK-LD2bsxjWtCFt7D) (Accessed: 10 December 2023).

refutes them on theological matters, legal matters, matters related to Sufism, and also on a variety of other issues.<sup>300</sup>

The Shaykh does not consider the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya to be part of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*. It appears to me that one of the main reasons why he spends so much time and energy on refuting them is that they consider themselves to be *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*, and generally see the Ash'arī/Māturīdī school as heretical, often attack Sufism etc. There are many videos online where various people, belonging to the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya, refute and attack the Shaykh in various ways. At least one person has already done *takfīr* of him.<sup>301</sup>

Even though the Shaykh's opposition to the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya is firm and clear, it has to be mentioned that he also sometimes does mention some positive things about them (Although these cases are overall very rare...). For instance, when he was narrating his studies at the Islamic University in Medina, he mentioned that the local curricula are very strong – although as he clarified the curricula were designed by al-Azhar – and that it is positive that they study books of the famous scholars of the past like Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī or al-Nawawī, and that he liked the fact that some of the local Salafī/Wahhābī scholars have humility, while their students seemed very rude to him. He also liked the fact that each year students of the Islamic University had to write a thesis, thus being actively taught academic writing from the beginning of their studies.<sup>302</sup>

### 3.3 *Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn's understanding of Islamic Theology*

As for some of the specifics of the Theology of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn, we may safely say that he is a typical mainstream Ash'arī scholar and that one of his main theological focuses is the refutation of those who oppose the Ash'arī/Māturīdī school, and the transmission of the mainstream relied upon positions of these schools, especially the Ash'arī school. For this thesis, I have analysed his aforementioned work *Al-Zubda al-*

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<sup>300</sup> بايجاز الوهابية الفرق بدع YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=ze3NbG4I3Ug> (Accessed: 10 December 2023).

<sup>301</sup> The video can be seen here: عبد القادر مرتد وهذا السبب *Abdul-Qader Husein is Murtadd (apostate)* YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAtL-WX4IV4> (Accessed: 10 December 2023).

<sup>302</sup> (من دمشق إلى المدينة المنورة) 2 YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eGacMUNMrQ&list=PLUr-ykJKsZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=18](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eGacMUNMrQ&list=PLUr-ykJKsZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=18) (Accessed: 08 December 2023).

*Hanīyya fī Sharḥ al-Kharīda al-Bahīyya* and the only distinguishing qualities of this book that I found were two:

Firstly, in his commentary, he engages some of the groups that he considers misguided, most notably the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya. Thus, for example, he refutes their division of Tawḥīd into the three categories of *al-Ulūhīyya*, *al-Rubūbīyya* and *al-Asmā' wa al-Ṣifāt*, calling it an innovation (*bid'a*).<sup>303</sup> Another example is his refutation of the belief of many of the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya that God is in a direction (*jiha*).<sup>304</sup>

Secondly, he engaged in a rather lengthy commentary on the spiritual parts of the poem.<sup>305</sup> Thus confirming the aforementioned characteristic of the Shādhilī scholars in connecting Theology to Taṣawwuf – that is confirmed even by his choice of this particular work because the poem itself contains some connections between Theology and Taṣawwuf. He says: “After a human has purified their theological convictions about God and His Messengers, upon them be peace, and about His religion, based on the understanding of Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a, free of any innovations, then one must take that intellectual knowledge into fruition, and let it become a light and spiritual growth in his heart on the spiritual way to God Almighty, and to the presence of the King of Kings, glorified be His glory.”<sup>306</sup>

One of the most important theological criticisms the Shaykh directs towards the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya is that they are anthropomorphists (*Mujassima*). He explains in one of his speeches that they are anthropomorphists, because they take the various verses of the Qur'ān and the various Ḥadīths that contain mentions of things like “hand“ (*yad*) or “leg“ (*sāq*) or “eye“ (*‘ayn*) etc. with respect to God, literally. He further clarifies that they ignore the context in which these texts came, and thus gravely misunderstand them, and ascribe to God body parts. He gives the following example: There are some texts of the Revelation that the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya understand to say that “God is in the heavens,” while they also understand other texts to say that “heavens are on His right,” and yet other texts seem to them to say that “heavens are on God's finger.” He clarifies that this type of (mis)understanding of Revelation leads them to believe things that are logically impossible

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<sup>303</sup> al-Husayn, ‘Abd al-Qādir., (2018). *Al-Zubda al-Hanīyya fī Sharḥ al-Kharīda al-Bahīyya*. Dār al-Bayrūtī. pp. 9-13

<sup>304</sup> Ibid. pp. 66-71

<sup>305</sup> Ibid. pp. 166-182

<sup>306</sup> Ibid. p. 166

and contradictory to each other, and which can lead a person up to atheism, which to him is a huge problem and tragedy and a proof of their misguidance.<sup>307</sup>

### 3.4 *Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn’s understanding of Islamic Law*

Adding to what has been already mentioned about Shaykh's understanding of Islamic Law, and what is self-evident based on it, we may add that he differentiates between two types of approaches or “mindsets” to orthodox Islamic Law:

He clarifies that the first one is the mindset of those who engage in extensive legal reasoning (*ijtihādāt*), looking for the underlying conditions of the legal rulings etc. This mindset is most typical of the Ḥanafī school, and to a lesser degree it is found in the Mālikī and Shāfi‘ī schools, and it is least common in the Ḥanbalī school.

The second approach, he says, which is commonly found in the Ḥanbalī school, and is most extreme in the Zāhirī school of Ibn Ḥazm,<sup>308</sup> is the approach of sticking to the outward meanings (*zāhir*) of the texts. The Shaykh goes as far as to say that the extremely literalistic approach of Ibn Ḥazm was not transmitted from the companions of the Prophet.<sup>309</sup> It appears to me that the Shaykh might be actually really questioning the legal orthodoxy of the Zāhirī school.

The Shaykh also holds the position that “The common person has no school of Law, and his school of Law is the school of Law of his muftī.” However, he explains this statement in a nuanced way. He says that what it means is that the commoner is to find a Shaykh, a knowledgeable person, who follows one of the four Sunnī schools of Law, and who will teach him and answer his questions. He further clarifies that the commoner should study at least one basic text of Islamic Law to know how to correctly perform his religious duties. As for the decision of whom to follow, he clarifies that the commoner should take into consideration two major factors. Firstly, the place where one lives and the most widespread legal school in his locality. Thus, according to the Shaykh, for instance, if

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<sup>307</sup> كيف سقط الروابية في التجسيم وهم يتوهمون الاتباع للكتاب والسنة [YouTube](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=JJDnkksaYKI&t=13s&pp=ygU82KrYrNiz2YrZhSDYp9mE2YjZh9in2KjZi tipINi52KjYryDYp9mE2YLYp9iv2LEg2KfZhNit2LPZitmG). Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=JJDnkksaYKI&t=13s&pp=ygU82KrYrNiz2YrZhSDYp9mE2YjZh9in2KjZi tipINi52KjYryDYp9mE2YLYp9iv2LEg2KfZhNit2LPZitmG> (Accessed: 21 December 2023).

<sup>308</sup> A famous Andalusian historian, theologian, poet and a jurist, who died in the year 1064. He was a major proponent of the Zāhirī school of Law. He was noted for his rejection of analogical legal reasoning in Islamic Law. For more information about him see: Arnaldez, R., “Ibn Ḥazm”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0325](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0325)>

<sup>309</sup> المذهب الفقهي ما هو؟ وهل يعارض اتباع الكتاب والسنة [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2POkUbWZug). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2POkUbWZug> (Accessed: 10 December 2023).



someone lives in a country that follows almost exclusively the Ḥanafī school, then one should follow the Ḥanafī school and not another one. The second consideration is the presence of teachers, meaning that one should follow the school that is the most accessible to them. So this second consideration is in reality connected to the first one, as in most cases if one lives in a country that almost exclusively follows one school, they will not have difficulty finding a knowledgeable teacher belonging to that school. The Shaykh says one should avoid creating *fitna* or division between the Muslims because of legal questions that differ between the four schools, and he gives an example of saying “āmīn” aloud in localities that are almost exclusively Ḥanafī, and where no one says “āmīn” aloud in the obligatory communal prayers. He also clarifies that in some countries, such as Syria or Egypt, where numerous schools of Law are present, it is acceptable for one to freely choose and follow any one of them.<sup>310</sup>

It is important to note that it is also in the realm of Law that the Shaykh attacks the Salafiyya/Wahhābīyya.

One of his main criticisms is that they are extremely ignorant in the Islamic Legal Theory (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*) and therefore in Islamic Law in general. In reality, he even satirizes and ridicules them in this regard, and says that he finds amusement in listening to some of their fatwas. In one of his speeches, he describes one such fatwa by the famous Salafi/Wahhābī scholar Muṣṭafā al-‘Adawī, who once answered a questioner’s question whether it is permissible to learn the science of Legal Theory, by saying that it is, but just a little bit, so that the questioner does not get too distracted from studying the Qur’ān and Sunna. In this video-recorded speech, Shaykh may be seen genuinely amused. After his amusement fades away, he explains that this mindset is ridiculous, because the science of Legal Theory is one of the most important sciences for understanding of the Qur’ān and Sunna, and that it is not possible to correctly understand the Revelation without it. He further says that Ibn al-‘Uthaymīn supposedly said that in order to engage in *ijtihād*, it is sufficient to study the famous work of Legal Theory *al-Waraqāt* by al-Juwaynī.<sup>311</sup> The Shaykh then says that this claim is preposterous and that *al-Waraqāt* is a basic text for beginner students who never previously studied Legal Theory, and he goes as far as to say

<sup>310</sup> ما العامي YouTube. Available at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=irKmtVQEEBQ&pp=ygVC2KfZhNi02YrYriDYudio2K8g2KfZhNmC2KfYr9ixINin2YTYrdiz2YrZhiDZhdiw2YfYqCDYp9mE2LnYp9mF2Yog> (Accessed: 10 December 2023).

<sup>311</sup> A famous mediaeval theologian and jurist, the main teacher of al-Ghazzālī. He died in the year 1085 CE. For more information see: Brockelmann, C., “al-Djuwainī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition (1913-1936)*, Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Consulted online on 19 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X\\_ei\\_SIM\\_2136](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei_SIM_2136)>

that the level, at which his students begin their study of Legal Theory, is at the same time the top level and the furthest limit of the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya in the science of Legal Theory.<sup>312</sup>

### 3.5 *Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn’s understanding of Sufism*

It has to be stressed that the Shaykh says that the domain of Taṣawwuf and the Ṣūfīs is the spiritual path, the rectification of one's character, and how one can reach the station of sincere dedication to God. The Shaykh does not accept things from the Ṣūfīs, even if they were considered among the greatest of saints by some if they contradict the relied-upon positions of the theological or legal schools. To him, they do not necessarily have authority in these domains. Thus, he stresses that each of the sciences has its relied upon sources, masters, methodologies etc. and that those have to be referred to each of the respective sciences. In other words, one takes their Theology from the major relied-upon authorities of the theological schools, their Law from the relied-upon authorities of the legal schools, and their Taṣawwuf from the relied-upon authorities of the schools or orders of Taṣawwuf. For the Shaykh, it is a matter of specialisation. An exceptional case, to him, is someone who joins between the mastery of these various sciences, such as Imām al-Ghazzālī, who joined between being a major Shāfi‘ī jurist, major Ash‘arī theologian and a major Ṣūfī master.<sup>313</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the Shaykh has dedicated many of his lectures and speeches to clarifying a variety of things related to Sufism and Ṣūfīs. He has an entire playlist of such lectures and speeches on his YouTube channel; it has over a hundred videos.<sup>314</sup> Most notably he has been focusing on explaining and defending some of the well-known things that are commonly attributed to Sufism and Ṣūfīs (and for which they are being attacked by the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya as well as some other groups), such as the legal status of celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad,<sup>315</sup> the legal status of the

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<sup>312</sup> فتوى صاعقة حارقة خارقة لمصطفى العدوي في حكم تعلم أصول الفقه *YouTube*. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=MFUavURVT\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=MFUavURVT_U) (Accessed: 21 December 2023).

<sup>313</sup> ذم ابن العربي للتأويل والجيلاني للأشاعرة وهل للصوفية مذهب عقدي يخالف المتكلمين *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1VelQnIu7k> (Accessed: 10 December 2023).

<sup>314</sup> ماذا عن التصوف *YouTube*. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUrykJsZUjt1yV4F97UGybEX\\_5BAlkq](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUrykJsZUjt1yV4F97UGybEX_5BAlkq) (Accessed: 10 December 2023).

<sup>315</sup> حكم الاحتفال بالمولد النبوي الشريف والرد على عبد العزيز الطريفي *YouTube*. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_juxQcbOAhk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_juxQcbOAhk) (Accessed: 10 December 2023).

Ṣūfī dancing and singing,<sup>316</sup> the legal status of beseeching God through the Prophet Muḥammad (*tawassul*),<sup>317</sup> the seeking of intercession or help from the Prophet Muḥammad (*istighātha*)<sup>318</sup> etc. It has to be stressed here that the Shaykh's explanations of these various topics are very methodological and his reasoning is always grounded in the various Islamic sciences, especially in Islamic Law, Legal Theory, Theology and the sciences of Ḥadīth. Thus, his answers may be very convincing to many people who take the Islamic tradition seriously and study the traditional Islamic sciences.

In his polemics with the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya, the Shaykh sometimes even uses as arguments the words of some of the scholars who are generally considered to be authorities among the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya. For example, when explaining the question of *spiritual insight/Divine inspiration (Firāṣa/Kashf)*,<sup>319</sup> he used as one of his arguments the words of Ibn al-Qayyim<sup>320</sup> from his book *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, from the *Chapter of Firāṣa*, where he narrated that his teacher Ibn Taymīyya<sup>321</sup> saw written in the *Preserved Tablet (al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz)* that an army he was part of will prevail in an upcoming battle. Furthermore, according to the Shaykh, Ibn al-Qayyim further states that if he wanted, he could write whole volumes of such miraculous events that happened to him with his teacher Ibn Taymīyya.<sup>322</sup>

However, aside from the answers to these controversial topics, the Shaykh also teaches Taṣawwuf publicly in the classical way, where he reads a text, explains it, and comments on it.<sup>323</sup>

<sup>316</sup> [YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dNyCpYTSz4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dNyCpYTSz4) (Accessed: 10 December 2023).  
وإنشادهم الصوفية حضرات حكم

<sup>317</sup> [YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7214B49vp50](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7214B49vp50) (Accessed: 10 December 2023).  
! حكم التوسل بالميت وهل يختلف عن الحي

<sup>318</sup> [YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gk3XDuD\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gk3XDuD_Y) (Accessed: 10 December 2023).  
الاستغاثة بسيد المرسلين عليه الصلاة والسلام سنة فكيف تكون شركا؟! من عجائب الوهابية

<sup>319</sup> Like when a saint or pious Muslim is given some knowledge of the unseen, such as future events etc.

<sup>320</sup> A famous mediaeval Muslim scholar, widely considered to be among the most important Sunnī scholars by the Salafīs/Wahhābīs. For more information see: Laoust, H., "Ibn Qayyim al-Djawiyya", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 14 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_3242](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3242)>

<sup>321</sup> A famous mediaeval Muslim scholar, widely considered to be among the most important Sunnī scholars by the Salafīs/Wahhābīs. For more information see: Ben Cheneb, Moh., "Ibn Taimīya", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition (1913-1936)*, Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Consulted online on 14 December 2023 <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X\\_eil\\_SIM\\_3075](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X_eil_SIM_3075)>

<sup>322</sup> [YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ak22St08dac](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ak22St08dac) (Accessed: 10 December 2023).  
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<sup>323</sup> For example in this playlist of his recorded classes he teaches one of the works of Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh al-Iskandarī: *علم التصوف، التوبة والمحاسبة تاج العروس بث مباشر* [YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL...](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL...)

As for some of the specifics of the Shaykh's own spiritual principles, we may point to the fact that he stresses the importance of staying away from personally engaging in politics and from inner attachment to money, to the level that he said that "Politics and money are two causes for corruption of every pious person." He nevertheless says that it is acceptable for a person to have wealth outwardly, however, the outward wealth must not enter his heart and he must not have any inner attachment to it.<sup>324</sup> Of course, this is not something exclusive to the Shaykh and in reality, I once heard him saying that staying away from politics was among the principles of his spiritual guide Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir 'Īsā, however, it appears to me that it is something quite essential for the Shaykh's personal spiritual principles since I have heard him mention it several times.

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[https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=0\\_sWsa70Y2c&list=PLUr-ykJksZUGk-Kzb4407WiPNzVs0f5RS](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=0_sWsa70Y2c&list=PLUr-ykJksZUGk-Kzb4407WiPNzVs0f5RS) (Accessed: 10 December 2023).

<sup>324</sup> عبد القادر الحسين من هو؟ تجربتي في المدارس الأهلية الشرعية 17 *YouTube*. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9CJJ5MZ4es&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP\\_vsR\\_I1y6DAop&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9CJJ5MZ4es&list=PLUr-ykJksZUjtOMbcdaP_vsR_I1y6DAop&index=2) (Accessed: 09 December 2023).

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer the research question “How do the contemporary Shādhilī scholars, specifically Shaykh Ali Gomaa and his student Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Husayn, define the term 'Sunnī orthodoxy' (*Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*)?” Additionally, it sought to acquaint the reader with the history and teachings of the Shādhilī Order, provide insights into the lives and works of the two scholars, and ultimately compare their respective definitions and understandings of orthodoxy, with special focus on the dimensions of Theology, Law and Sufism. The response to the research question is detailed in the second and third chapters of this thesis.

In the inaugural chapter, I have shown that the Shādhilī Order is an order that has been followed by many famous and influential Sunnī scholars of the past, as well as present. I have also discussed its brief history and some of its foundational teachings, practices and some of the most authoritative personalities and relied upon works of the order. The Shādhilī Order, in those branches that I have studied, is an order that takes pride in being “orthodox”, meaning being identified with *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘a* and not being associated with any deviations or heresies, whether in Theology, Law or Sufism. The order takes pride in counting among its ranks illustrious Sunnī scholars from the past, such as ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Salām and al-Suyūfī. At the same time, there is no doubt that some people, who do not understand the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘a* in the same way as the scholars of this order, will see the order as being heretical, for some of those people consider even the mere association with Sufism to be an indication of some form of heresy.

In the second chapter, I delved into the life and contributions of Shaykh Ali Gomaa, focusing on his interpretation of "Sunnī orthodoxy." The Shaykh, despite his considerable scholarly accomplishments, has faced opposition and criticism for aligning himself with the current Egyptian government.

His definition of orthodoxy rests on four key pillars.

The first pillar involves adherence to established Sunnī schools of Theology, specifically the Ash‘arī and the Māturīdī, as well as traditional schools of Sunnī Law, which he asserts were numerous throughout history. Notably, the Shaykh places relatively less emphasis on Sufism in the context of defining orthodoxy.

The second pillar, termed "scholasticism," underscores a commitment to traditional scholastic methods inherent in classical Islamic sciences.

The third pillar emphasises Shaykh's insistence that scholars of "Sunnī orthodoxy" embrace and endorse internal intellectual plurality (*ikhṭilāfāt*) within the orthodoxy. They are also expected to tolerate significant differences with other Islamic sects, refraining from excommunications except in rare cases. The fourth pillar involves the Shaykh highlighting distinctions between *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a* and other Sunnī groups, particularly the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya, and especially the militant Salafī-Jihādī groups. The Shaykh rejects the claim of these groups to be considered *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*.

In the third chapter, I have discussed the life and work of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn, as well as his definition and understanding of "Sunnī orthodoxy". The Shaykh, who boasts numerous scholarly achievements, is notably active in the realm of social media. His definition of "Sunnī orthodoxy" is intricately tied to the "Gabrielian paradigm" and revolves around its three dimensions: Theology, Law, and Sufism. It is through these dimensions that an individual's orthodoxy or unorthodoxy is evaluated.

According to Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn, theological orthodoxy is exclusively associated with the Ash'arī, Māturīdī, or non-anthropomorphist Ḥanbalī schools of Theology.

Legal orthodoxy, on the other hand, is identified by adherence to the four renowned Sunnī schools of law, namely the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi'ī, and Ḥanbalī.

In terms of Ṣūfī orthodoxy, the Shaykh aligns it with the teachings of al-Junayd. He emphasizes that a distinctive quality of orthodoxy is moderation, with adherents adopting "middle positions" on various theological and legal questions.

When comparing the two definitions, several commonalities and distinctions become apparent. In terms of shared elements in their definitions, both Shaykh Ali Gomaa and Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn define orthodoxy by referencing theological and legal schools. Additionally, they both exclude the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya from the realm of orthodoxy.

However, notable distinctions emerge between their perspectives. Shaykh Ali Gomaa's definition does not emphasize Sufism as a crucial element in defining orthodoxy. Instead, he places significant importance on the acceptance of inner plurality and scholasticism. In contrast, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn considers Sufism to be an

essential aspect of orthodoxy. Furthermore, it seems that he may not give as much weight to the acceptance of inner plurality and scholasticism compared to Shaykh Ali Gomaa.

When examining the theological perspectives of the two scholars overall, it can be asserted that they share a common understanding of Sunnī Theology. In the sources explored in this thesis, no significant differences have been identified between the two scholars in their theological views. While it is acknowledged that there could potentially be nuanced distinctions, the assumption is that any variations would not be substantial, given their shared adherence to the same school and methodologies. Both of them also theologially refute the Salafiyya/Wahhābīyya and consider them to be anthropomorphists.

In the understanding of Islamic Law of the two scholars in general, we can say that it is here where there are the most significant differences between them. Even though they are a teacher and a student, and follow the same legal schools in general, we can say safely that Shaykh Ali Gomaa is more accepting when it comes to differences in Islamic Law within Sunnism and even within other Islamic groups. Compared to Shaykh Ali Gomaa, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn is much more strictly staying within the borders delineated by the mainstream relied upon positions of the four schools, while the “spectrum of acceptance” of Shaykh Ali Gomaa is much broader. We should, however, not confuse his tolerance of, or interest in non-Sunnī or modern Sunnī opinions with complete acceptance and endorsement. In the end, there is no doubt that Shaykh Ali Gomaa is a Sunnī jurist, firmly grounded in the Sunnī legal tradition. However, his vast learning and scholarship, intellectual openness, and subsequent level of scholarly independence have led him to adopt some positions that are criticised even by his student Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn, who disagrees with him on a number of his fatwas and says that most of these fatwas were also given by al-Qaraḏāwī before Shaykh Ali Gomaa.<sup>325</sup> Both Shaykh Ali Gomaa and Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn also engage in legal refutations of the Salafiyya/Wahhābīyya. In the case of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn we have also seen his criticism of the literalism of the Zāhirī school.

Concerning their understanding of Sufism, both scholars belong to the Shādhilī Order, albeit in different branches. Shaykh Ali Gomaa is associated with the Shādhilīyya–Darqāwīyya–Ṣiddīqīyya, having Shaykh ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī as his

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<sup>325</sup> And he criticises al-Qaraḏāwī more severely: الفتاوى الشاذة لشيخنا الإمام علي جمعة والشيخ القرضاوي في الميزان *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU7V5W1axG8> (Accessed: 12 December 2023).

spiritual master.<sup>326</sup> On the other hand, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn is affiliated with the Shādhilīyya–Darqāwīyya–Hāshimīyya, with Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Īsā as his spiritual guide. At the same time, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn greatly respects Shaykh Ali Gomaa as his teacher, and also took from him his spiritual path, and thus also became part of the Ṣiddīqīyya branch of the Shādhilī Order, although he remains primarily affiliated with the Shādhilīyya–Darqāwīyya–Hāshimīyya. In general, their understanding of Sufism seems to be very similar. The main difference that I have found between them in their understanding of Sufism is that Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn strictly rejects engaging in politics, while Shaykh Ali Gomaa does not, and currently even serves in the Egyptian parliament. Additionally, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn has engaged in scholarly criticism of both Shaykh ‘Abdullāh ibn al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī<sup>327</sup> and Shaykh Ali Gomaa. This intellectual liberty and plurality within the Shādhilī Order are noteworthy. Both of them also refute the Salafīyya/Wahhābīyya on the issue of Sufism and matters related to it.

Future research endeavours may benefit from a detailed exploration of specific topics within the context of the Shādhilīyya. Some noteworthy areas include an in-depth analysis of Shaykh Ali Gomaa's legal thought, an examination of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥusayn's understanding and criticism of Salafism/Wahhābism, and a study of other prominent contemporary Shādhilī scholars such as Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi or Shaykh Nuh Keller.

Additionally, researchers could explore a comparative study between modern Shādhilī scholarship and its medieval counterpart, shedding light on potential evolutions or continuities. Another intriguing avenue involves the investigation and documentation of the various branches within the contemporary Shādhilī Order. Each of these topics holds considerable significance and presents abundant opportunities for future academic exploration and inquiry within the realm of Shādhilīyya studies.

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<sup>326</sup> سُنَدُ الطَّرِيقَةِ الصَّدِيقِيَّةِ الشَّاذَلِيَّةِ: أَدْعَى عَلِي جَمْعَةً *YouTube*. Available at: <https://youtu.be/scdOWqpGuX8?si=EZuEKyC22coSHQgc> (Accessed: 12 December 2023).

<sup>327</sup> الغماريان في الميزان *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CY5CzjB8lsI> (Accessed: 12 December 2023).



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