Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī, and his Mystical Thought
Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī: A Study of Some Aspects of His Mystical Thought

by

Sobhi Mina Botros

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S.M. Botros
Abstract

Name: Sobhi Mina Botros
Title: Abu al-'Abbas al-Mursi: A Study of Some Aspects of his Mystical Thought.
Department: Institute of Islamic Studies
Degree: Master of Arts

Although Abu al-'Abbas al-Mursi occupied a prominent position in Egypt as a great mystic of the seventh century A.H. (13th cent. A.D.), and although he still lives on in the minds of people as a saint and a worker of miracles, no attempt has, up till now, been made to analyze his mystical thought. Hence this study which attempts to present some aspects of this saint's concepts, to analyze them, and either to trace them, whenever possible, to their origins in the writings of preceding mystics, or to point out their originality.

As far as the place of Abu al-'Abbas al-Mursi in the general division of mysticism into schools of thought is concerned, this study shows that he may safely be considered as a faithful follower of the classical trend that chose to adhere to the Qur'an and the Islamic traditional ways and rules, rather than risk condemnation for any wayward extremism.
Abstract

Nom : Sobhi Mina Botros

Titre : Abû al-'Abbâs al-Mursî: Une étude de quelques aspects de sa pensée mystique

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Bien qu'Abû al-'Abbâs al-Mursî ait occupé une position prédominante en Égypte comme grand mystique du VIIe siècle A.H. (XIIIe siècle après J.C.), et bien qu'il vive encore dans la pensée du peuple comme un saint et un faiseur de miracles, aucun essai n'a été fait, jusqu'à présent, dans le but d'analyser ses pensées mystiques. D'où cette étude qui essaie de présenter quelques aspects des concepts de ce saint, de les analyser, de retracer, autant que possible, leur origine dans les écrits des mystiques passés, et de montrer leur originalité.

Quant à la place qu'Abû al-'Abbâs al-Mursî occupe dans la division générale de mysticisme des écoles de pensée, cette étude montre qu'il est sauf de le considérer comme un disciple fidèle du trait classique qui a choisi d'adhérer au Qur'ân et aux voies et règles islamiques traditionnelles, plutôt que de risquer d'être condamné pour quelqu'extrémisme capricieux.
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I. INTRODUCTION

The choice of Abu al-'Abbas al-Mursi as the topic of this thesis was not a haphazard one on the part of the writer but was rather the outcome of personal curiosity. Being Egyptian by birth, and having spent most of my life in Alexandria, where Abu al-'Abbas became a great mystic master, I could not help hearing the shaykh's name mentioned and spoken about reverently by many people of different levels of education and background. Moreover, the anniversary (mawlid) of Abu al-'Abbas was, and still is, celebrated with such pomp and fanfare, and with so many people attending, that I felt intrigued by the power and influence that the shaykh still exercised even after the passage of some seven centuries since he passed away. Although I am a follower of the Christian faith, the spiritual and mystical halo surrounding Abu al-'Abbas, and the shaykh's miraculous interventions and acts, even after his death, aroused my curiosity even more. Hence this attempt at acquiring an understanding of this great man, which is by no means comprehensive nor complete, at least as far as his thoughts are concerned. However, since an analytical discussion of the mystical ideas and concepts of Abu al-'Abbas has never been done before, and since a full inclusion of all this saint's thoughts might require hundreds of pages to accommodate, I tended to make this thesis representative and coherent rather than comprehensive and inconsistent.

The study of Abu al-'Abbas, and of even some of his mystical thought, was not an easy one, for the shaykh himself did not write any books, following in this attitude the steps of his predecessor Abu al-Hasan al-
Shadhili(1) who used to say, "My books are my companions."(2) Moreover, some of the manuscripts that I know existed in Egypt and contained references to Abu al-'Abbas were impossible to get hold of when I tried to consult them for the simple, but frustrating, reason that they were all put away in a safe place for fear of having them damaged in one way or another as a result of the state of war between Egypt and Israel.

However, I found in the book Latā'if al-Minan fī Manāqib al-Shaykh Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī wa Shaykhīhi al-Shadhili, by Tāj al-Dīn ibn 'Atā' Allah al-Sakandari,(3) ample material to form a reasonably clear idea about Abu al-'Abbās, and to be able to present him to the reader in an academically organized fashion. The importance of this primary source arises from the fact that the author, Ibn 'Atā' Allah, was one of the two leading disciples of Abu al-'Abbās al-Mursī, the other being Yaqūt al-Habashi (known also as al-'Arshī after God's throne: 'arsh)(4) who was at the same time Abu al-'Abbās's son-in-law. If we add to this the fact that, after the death of Abu al-'Abbās, Ibn 'Atā' Allah became the disciple of Yaqūt al-Habashi, we may conclude that the material included in the book Latā'if al-Minan may be considered as doubly authentic, for Ibn 'Atā' Allah must have had a good opportunity not only to listen to Abu al-'Abbās himself, but also to have the thoughts of the shaykh probably repeated, reviewed, and may be discussed and clarified by Yaqūt al-Habashi. (See diagram on page 4)

Another important point that should be mentioned about Ibn 'Atā' Allah is that he was not just an ignorant disciple who followed and believed in Abu al-'Abbās blindly. On the contrary, he was a man of wide fame and knowledge, a jurisprudent (faqīh) well-versed in Islamic exoteric sciences ('ulūm al-zāhir), who had been full of doubts about
the Sufi ways in general and about Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī in particular. However, when he decided to keep an open mind and go see the shaykh, he was so influenced by the shaykh’s words that he turned into one of his closest disciples. (5)

In spite of the close relationship between Abū al-‘Abbās and Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh, the latter’s Lata‘if al-Minan, may be considered an honest and objective report of the views of Abū al-‘Abbās for the reason that the author did not try in any way to overglorify his shaykh nor to ascribe to him anything that was not witnessed to by himself or/and by other eminent people. Sometimes, however, Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh adopted an apologetic attitude when a view of Abū al-‘Abbās was in direct contrast to the common Sufī belief. A good example of this is what he offered by way of justification for his shaykh’s, and al-Shādhilī’s, attitude towards wearing rich clothes, drinking cold water, and eating delicious food, saying that there was no harm in doing that so long as it was coupled with thankfulness to God. (6)

On the whole, I felt that the book of Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh could be taken as an acceptable and reliable source for the thoughts of Abū al-‘Abbās, especially as it was recognised as such by important people on the Sufi path as well as by others academically interested in the Shādhilī school of thought.

Another important primary source that helped bring out and clarify the ideas and attitudes of Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī is Durrat al-A‘rār wa Tuhfat al-Abrār by Muhammad ibn Abī al-Qāsim al-Humayrī, known as ibn al-Sabbāgh, who lived in the first part of the eighth century A.H. (14th cent. A.D.) (7) and about whom no real information could be gleaned. I took this book as a complementary one to Lata‘if al-Minan since it deals mainly with Abū al-Hasan al-Shādhilī and mentions Abū al-‘Abbās, in a
separate chapter, as the most important disciple, and later the successor and heir, of al-Shādhili. This book differs from Lata'if al-Minan in one important point that I found valuable to my study: While the author of Lata'if al-Minan got his material and information directly from Abū al-'Abbās al-Murrā, Ibn al-Sabbāgh obtained his from Abū al-'Aṣā'im ʿAḍām ibn Sultan, (8) the disciple and servant of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhili, and from Abū ʿAbd-Allāh Muḥammad, known as Sharaf al-Dīn, the son of Yaḥyā al-Habashi. (9) The different sources of these two books (see diagram below) helped me compare the reports of the two authors and ascertain the genuineness of the material included.

The other books that I used as sources of information about Abū al-'Abbās are all secondary ones which drew, for their material, mainly upon the two above-mentioned primary sources. These secondary sources are all mentioned in the bibliography, but only some of them are referred to in the footnotes, for the simple reason that they only contained quotations from the two primary sources with no significant or critical
additions. Those books referred to may be classified into four categories:


The first category includes books that were written by actual Sūfīs whose practical experience on the path, and whose personal contacts with practicing adherents to the Shādhīlī school of thought, make their writings, despite their being only a second hand report, a personally verified support to the authenticity of their material.

The second category includes books that deal mainly with the life and thought of Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī. The most important of these books is undoubtedly Ḥasan al-Sandūbī's Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī wa Masjīduhu al-Jāmī bi-al-Tskandariyyah, published in 1944. Although the parts of the book that contain material about Abū al-'Abbās are mere reproductions of their counterparts in Lata'if al-Minān without any attempt at studying, explaining, or analyzing them, yet this book has aspects that the two others in this category do not share. First, it uses for references fifty books including Lata'if al-Minān but excluding Durrat al-Asrār wa Tuhfat al-Abrār. Second, and of greater importance, it researches every single name of all the people and locations it includes in it, which aspect was of great value to the study undertaken in this thesis. As for the two other books, i.e. al-Imām Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī (published in 1965 A.D.) by Ahmad Husayn al-Disyāwī, and al-'Arīf bi-Allāh Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī (published in 1972 A.D.) by Dr. 'Abd-al-Halīm Māḥmūd, it is enough to say that, aside from their attempts at giving a general idea to the reader about Sūfīsm, the material they contain is a direct, though selective
copy of the same contained in Latā'if al-Minan. Therefore, the three
books in this category did not help in any way towards the analytical
study of the mystical thought of Abū al-'Abbās that appears in this
thesis.

The third category includes three books that contain a comparative
study of different schools of mystical thought. One of these books in
particular, namely al-Adab al-Sūfī fī Mir Ĥ al-Qarn al-Sābī al-Hijrī
by Dr. 'Alī Sāfī Husayn (published in 1964 A.D.) was of value to this thesis
in that the author compared, though briefly, the attitudes of the Sūfī
masters in Egypt in the seventh century A.H. (13th cent. A.D.) towards
certain mystical concepts, such as the dual existence of man versus God,
the unity or oneness of existence (wahdat al-wujūd), the special cloak
of the shaykh (khirqah)....etc. The most important of these masters, who
were contemporaries of Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī, are 'Umar ibn al-Fārid(10)
(d. 632 A.H. - 1234 A.D.), al-Sayyid al-Badāwī(11) (d. 675 A.H. - 1276 A.D.),
and Ibrāhīm al-Dimṣūqī(12) (d. 676 A.H. - 1277 A.D.). However, in spite of
the fact that some of the thoughts of Abū al-'Abbās are included in these
books, yet again they are not analyzed or even traced back to previous
or contemporary masters.

The fourth, and last, of the categories is the one that includes
books written by Western scholars. These books deal with Sūfī concepts
and orders and have given me some insight as regards certain points in
my study, especially when comparison of attitudes was undertaken. This
may be seen in the chapter of this paper which is devoted to some of
the mystical concepts of Abū al-'Abbās, and where several references are
FOOTNOTES

1- 'Alī ibn 'Abd-Allāh ibn 'Abd-al-Jabbar ibn Tamīm ibn Hurmuz ibn Hātim ibn Qasīr ibn Yusuf ibn Yūsuf ibn Ward ibn Bāṭnāl ibn Idrīs Muhammad ibn 'Īsā ibn Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn 'Alī ibn Abī Talib (c. 593-656 A.H. - c. 1196-1258 A.D.) is known as al-Shādhiḥ after the village of Shādhilah in Ifrīqiyyah. Another story told about his title is that the shaykh asked God why He called him al-Shādhilah, and received the divine answer that the title means al-Shādhidh li (exceptionally or especially for Me), meaning that he was singled out for God's service and love. He was born at the village of Ghumrah in the far west and travelled far and wide until he came to settle down in Egypt where he founded the Shādhilah Tariqah (way, path, school of thought). He died in 656 A.H. (1258 A.D.) while on his way to Makkah for the holy pilgrimage, and was buried at Rumaytharah on the Red Sea coast in the desert of 'Aydāb in Upper Egypt. (Durrat: pp. 23 following; Lata'īf: pp. 53 following; Sha'rānī: part 2 pp. 4 following)

2- Lata'īf: p. 3

3- Taj-al-Dūn Abū al-'Abbās Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd-al-Karīm ibn 'Āthār Allāh al-Judhāmi al-Sakandarī (d. 707 or 709 A.H. - 1307 or 1309 A.D.) was the devout disciple of Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī and the propagator of his teachings both through discoursing to his own disciples and by writing Lata'īf al-Minan in which he included the mystical utterings and thoughts of Abū al-'Abbās. He wrote several mystical books and poems most of which exist in print. The best known of these, aside from Lata'īf al-Minan, are al-Hikam al-'Atā'yyah, al-Taqwīr fi Isqāt at-Tadbīr, Taj al-'Arūs al-Hāwī li-Taḥdīb al-Nufūs, al-Marqā ila al-Quds al-Abqā, and al-Tuhfah. When he died he was buried at al-Qarāfah al-Sughrā (the small cemetery) at the mountain of al-Muqattam on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt. (Sha'rānī: part 2 p. 19; Lata'īf: pp. hā' - wāw; Sandūbī: pp. 103 following)
4- Yaqūt ibn 'Abd-Allāh al-Habashi (born in al-Habashiyya = Abyssinia),
known also as al-'Arshī after God's throne ('arsh) (d. 707 or 732 A.H. -
1307 or 1331 A.D.) was the disciple and son-in-law of Abū al-'Abbās
al-Mursī. The latter had predicted his birth and, later on, when Yaqūt
came to be his disciple, he married him to his daughter Bahjah. Yaqūt
died in Alexandria and his grave still stands in the mosque that carries
his name right beside that of his shaykh Abū al-'Abbās.
(Sha'rih: part 2 pp. 18-19 & Sandūbī: pp. 114-115)

5- See here p. 23

6- Latā'if: 145

7- Durrat: pp. 4, 211

8- Abū al-'Azmām Mādī ibn Sultan (d. 718 A.H. - 1318 A.D.) was the
disciple and servant of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shadhīlī whom he accompanied
to reside permanently in Egypt after leaving Tunis. He was one of the
group who were with al-Shadhīlī when the latter died and was buried at
Humaytharah in the desert of 'Aydhab. Following this, he stayed with
Abū al-'Abbās until the latter died and then returned to Tunis. He was
the brother of Abū 'Abd-Allāh Muhammad ibn Sultan the famous saint
(walī) in Tunis (died several years before his brother Mādī).
(Latā'if: p. 72 & Durrat: pp. 22, 31, 179-180, 203)

9- Durrat: p. 22

10- 'Usār ibn Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Rushd ibn 'All ibn al-Farid (known
as Abū Hafs, and also as Abū al-Qāsim) (576 or 566 or 556-632 A.H. -
1180 or 1170 or 1160-1234 A.D.) was one of the greatest Ṣūfī poets
in Egypt and was called king of lovers (Ṣultān al-muhībin and Sultan
al-'Ashiqūn). He died at the mosque of al-Asfar and was buried at al-
Qarāfah (the cemetery) on the side of the mountain of al-Muqattam on
the outskirts of Cairo.
(al-Adab: pp. 91-116)

11- Ahmad ibn 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Husaynī Abū al-'Abbās al-Badawi
(596-675 A.H. - 1199-1276 A.D.) was born at Fās in al-Maghrib. His
father took the whole family and moved to Makkah in 603 A.H. (1206
A.D.) after hearing a divine voice in sleep telling him to do that.
Ahmad visited Iraq and Syria, went back to Makkah, and in obedience to a divine voice that repeatedly told him to go to Tantah (known now as Tanta) in lower Egypt, he went there in 634 A.H. (1236 A.D.) and spent his first twelve years on the roof of the house of a shaykh called ibn Shahît. Many people joined his path (tariq) which was, and still is, known as al-Ahmadiyyah after his name, or al-Sutûhiyyah after the roof (sûq) of ibn Shahît’s house. Among his most famous followers and admirers was al-Walî al-Zâhir Bîbars. Every year, up to the present, a great anniversary celebration (mawlid) and a market (sûq) are held in Tanta where thousands of people come from all over Egypt to participate in the celebration and to get the shaykh’s blessing.

12- Ibrâhîm ibn Abî al-Majd ibn Quraysh ibn Muhammed (633-676 A.H. - 1235-1277 A.D.) goes back in his family tree to al-Husayn ibn 'Alî ibn Abî Talîb. He was a great saint (wallî) at Desûq, his home town, in Lower Egypt. He wrote a big book, called al-Jawâhir, and several poems that are very difficult to understand although some judge that they denote a tendency towards unity or oneness of existence (wahdat al-wujûd).

(Shrâfî: part 1 pp. 143-158 & al-A’lām: part 1 p. 54)
11. INTRODUCING ABU AL-'ABBAS AL-MURSI

(616-686 A.H. - 1219-1287 A.D.)

Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Ahmad ibn 'Umar ibn 'Alī al-Khassrajī al-Ansārī al-Mursī was born in 616 A.H. (1219 A.D.) at Mursiyah in Andalusia (al-Andalus) where his father, 'Umar ibn 'Alī, was a merchant. It is believed that the family tree of Abū al-'Abbās went back to Qays ibn Sa'd, who was the ruler (amīr) of Egypt for 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib, and still back to one of the Prophet's companions (sahābī), Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah al-Ansārī, (2) who was the master of al-Khassraj at the time of Muhammad the Prophet. Abū al-'Abbās had an elder brother, Abū 'Abd-Allāh Jemāl al-Dīn Muhammad, and the two used to help their father in his trade which required a lot of travelling around.

When Abū al-'Abbās was still a boy, it seems that he showed early religious and spiritual tendencies which later developed to make him the great pole (qutb) that he came to be. Ibn 'Atāʾ Allāh reports that he once heard the shaykh say that, as a boy, he was with his tutor (mu'addib) writing on a slate when a man approached him and said, "A Šūfi does not blacken whiteness." The boy Abū al-'Abbās retorted, "It is not as you claim; rather, he does not blacken the whiteness of pages (sahīf, sing. sahīfah = i.e. one's pure life) with the blackness of sins." (3) Aside from manifesting these tendencies, Abū al-'Abbās had, for a tutor, a saintly person who seems to have taken every opportunity to lead his pupil on the right path to God. Abū al-'Abbās referred to this type of education and guidance by recounting this illustrative story: Once, while still a small boy, Abū al-'Abbās went to see a phantom show close to his house. The next morning, when he made his
appearance before his tutor, the latter received him with words of criticism that he recited in verse form: "O watcher of phantom images in wonderment, you are yourself the phantom, were you to see."(4)

At the age of twenty four (640 A.H. - 1242 A.D.), Abū al-'Abbās accompanied his father, along with the rest of the family, on a trip by sea with the intention of performing the holy pilgrimage. Unfortunately, while sailing close to the coast of Būna, a storm blew and their ship sank taking down with it most of the passengers aboard. Abū al-'Abbās and his elder brother were the only members of their family to make their escape. The two headed for Tunis where they resided for some time.(5)

The story of the first meeting between Abū al-'Abbās and Abū al-Hasan al-Shādhili, as given by Abū al-'Abbās himself,(6) sounds interesting and was obviously meant to reveal the mystical talents of the two, and to show that Abū al-'Abbās had long been destined to occupy the all-important position of pole after al-Shādhili. The story tells of someone who invited Abū al-'Abbās to accompany him to see al-Shādhili who, at the time, had his residence in a small mosque (Zāviyah) on the mountain of Zaghwan.(7) Although Abū al-'Abbās had already heard about the great shaykh, he nevertheless decided to consult God first before he paid him any visit. That same night, he dreamt in his sleep that he climbed to the top of a mountain where he saw a man sitting there clad in a green cloak with someone on his right and another on his left. When Abū al-'Abbās looked up at the man, the latter said, "I found the successor of this time (khalīfat al-samān)," upon which Abū al-'Abbās woke up from his sleep. The next morning, after the morning prayer, Abū al-'Abbās, who must have taken his dream to signify God's permission for him to proceed, went with the man who had previously invited him to
visit al-Shādhili. On arriving there, Abū al-'Abbās was surprised to see everything as he had seen it in his dream, and he even heard al-Shādhili addressing him in the same words, i.e. "I found the successor of this time." When Abū al-'Abbās gave his name and lineage at a question from al-Shādhili, the latter said, "You were lifted up to me (rufita li = i.e. you were revealed to me) ten years ago."

The circumstances under which al-Shādhili and Abū al-'Abbās moved from Tunis to Egypt, seem to have been related to two interesting incidents, one of which resulted in al-Shādhili making a trip to Egypt before his first meeting with Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī, and the other saw the final move of the two shaykhs to Egypt to reside there permanently. As far as the first visit to Egypt was concerned, it seems that there was a certain judge (qādi)' in Tunis called Abū al-Qāsim ibn al-Barrā' who, driven jealous by the reputation and success of al-Shādhili, complained to the monarch, Sultān Abū al-Zakariyyā', that a man from the village of Shādhilah (i.e. Abū al-Hasan al-Shādhili), who was a thief of donkeys, was claiming to be of honorable descent, was receiving lots of people, and was thus creating trouble in the country. Upon hearing this, the Sultān summoned the shaykh, had him tested by a number of learned and religious people, and finally acquitted him after making sure that he was a great saint. However, the judge went on with his conspiratorial schemes against al-Shādhili until the latter decided to go to Alexandria, Egypt, going from there to perform the holy pilgrimage. Later on, he returned to Tunis, where he and Abū al-'Abbās had their first meeting, about which al-Shādhili said, "Nothing brought me back to Tunis except this young man.(8)

The other incident that prompted the second and final move to
Egypt was in the form of a visitation that al-Shâdhili said he had, in which Muhammad the Prophet seems to have appeared to him in sleep telling him to go to Egypt. (9) In compliance, al-Shâdhili, Abû al-'Abbâs, and several others, undertook the trip, finally to enter Alexandria from the west at 'Amûd al-Sawârî. (10) There al-Shâdhili took up for permanent residence one of the towers on the wall of Alexandria (11) while Abû al-'Abbâs, presumably following the instructions of his shaykh, went to live in Cairo. However, it is said that he used to go to Alexandria every night to attend the gatherings of al-Shâdhili and to return the same night to Cairo. (12)

In 656 A.H. (1258 A.D.), al-Shâdhili and Abû al-'Abbâs, accompanied by others, went on their last trip together to perform the holy pilgrimage. It seems that al-Shâdhili knew beforehand that he was going to die on the way, for he asked his companions to take along with them a pickaxe and a shovel so as to be able to bury whoever died during the trip. Since he had never made that request before, it was taken by the others to be an indication of his approaching end. (13) While the group were on their way across the desert of 'Aydâb, (14) al-Shâdhili was taken seriously ill, and finally died, at the small town of Humaytharâh (15) where his companions buried him. (16) However, before the shaykh died, he had a private conversation with Abû al-'Abbâs, following which he told his companions that Abû al-'Abbâs was to succeed him after his death, and that he was one of God's gates (abwâb, sing. bâb). (17)

After the death of al-Shâdhili, Abû al-'Abbâs's reputation went far and wide, especially in Alexandria which he took up for permanent residence. Every summer, he used to go to Cairo where he discoursed and taught at the mosque of al-Hâkim. (18) Moreover, he kept the tradition,
set by al-Shādhilī, of going from time to time to the mosque of
'Amr ibn al-‘Ās at al-Fustāṭ (19) where his discourses were mostly
attended by the learned Muslims ('Ulamā', sing. 'Alim). (20)

Abū al-‘Abbās died in Alexandria in the year 686 A.H. (1287
A.D.) (684 or 685 A.H. - 1285 or 1286 A.D. according to ibn al-
Sabbāgh (21) and was buried outside the gate of the sea (Bāb al-
Bahr) (22) close to the dome of (Qubbat) al-Maghāwī. (23) Although
his tomb was well known to the people, many of whom visited it for
blessing, no construction was raised on it till the year 706 A.H.
(1306 A.D.) when Zayn al-Dīn al-Qattān, the leading merchant of
Alexandria, visited it and had a tomb, a dome, and a mosque con-
structed on the site. The story goes (24) that al-Qattān had con-
tracted alopecia (dā' al-tha'lab) which caused the loss of his beard
and eyebrows. As a result, he felt so degraded that he sought the
medical advice of almost every doctor in Egypt, but to no avail.
At last, having heard about the tomb of Abū al-‘Abbās, he visited
it several times and repeatedly applied dust from it to his face.
Miraculously, the story says, his beard and eyebrows started growing
again. In grateful acknowledgement, the merchant had the constructions
on the shaykh's tomb erected.
FOOTNOTES

1-a Tringham: p. 49, & Sandûbî: p. 41
1-b Mursiyah (Murcia), one of the larger towns in Eastern Andalusia; was also known at that time as Mīr al-Andalus.
(al-Istakandariyyah: p. 457)

2-Se'd ibn 'Ubadah ibn Harithah al-Khazrajî, known as Abu Thabit, was one of the Prophet's companions in al-Madinah. He belonged to the nobility both in Jāhiliyyah (pre-Islamic period in Arabia) and in Islam. He was the master of al-Khazraj, and after the death of the Prophet he refused to declare allegiance to Abu Bakr. Then, when later 'Umar ibn al-Khattâb reprimanded him for this, he left Arabia for al-Shām where he died in 14 A.H. (635 A.D.).
(al-A'lam: part 3 p. 135)

3-'Latî'if: p. 79, & Sandûbî: p. 41
4- 'Latî'if: p. 79, & Sandûbî: pp. 41-42
5- Sandûbî: pp. 42-43
6- 'Latî'if: p. 58, & Sandûbî: p. 43

7-Jabal (the mountain of) Zaghwān lies about thirty miles southwest of Tunis.

8- Durrât: pp. 28-32
9- Durrât: p. 32

10- 'Latî'if: p. 58, Durrât: p. 135, & Sandûbî: p. 45

'Asmûd (the pillar of) al-Sawârî, so called because of its size and height, was one of about four hundred similar pillars that surrounded and supported a temple and a porch in the southern part of Alexandria outside the southern gate known as Bab al-Sidrah. In the reign of Salah al-Din al-Ayyûbî, the other pillars were removed and thrown into the sea as blocking obstacles in the way of enemy ships.

11- Durrât: p. 34
12- 'Latî'if: p. 85, Sha'înî: part 2 p. 13, & Karamat: part 1 p. 521
13- Durrat: p. 179, 181

14 & 15- Humaytharah was a small town lying in the desert of 'Aydhāb on the Red Sea Coast in Upper Egypt. Through the desert itself lay the route that the Muslim pilgrims followed for about two hundred years (c. 450-660 A.H. -1058 -1261 A.D.) from Qūs on the River Nile to the coast of the Red Sea. The journey through this desert used to take the pilgrims seventeen days to accomplish and it was a time of great suffering for them, for the desert was extremely hot and entirely barren and waterless.

(al-Khutāt: part 1 p. 327)


17- Durrat: p. 180

18- The mosque of (Masjid) al-Hākim was built by al-Hākim bi-Amr Allah Abū ʿAlī Mansūr at a place called al-Miqass on the bank of the River Nile. It was renovated some time after the year 770 A.H. (1368 A.D.) by Shams al-Dīn 'Abd-Allah al-Miqassī, minister of King al-Ashraf Sha'ban ibn Husayn ibn Muhammad ibn Qalāwūn. As a result, the mosque came to be known by its other name, i.e. the mosque (Jāmi’) al-Miqassī after the minister.


19- The mosque of (Jāmi’) 'Amr ibn al-‘Ās was built in the year 21 A.H. (641 A.D.) at the newly established city of al-Fustāt. It was the first mosque to be built in Egypt after the Arab invasion and was known as al-Jāmi’ al-Atiq (the ancient mosque), Taj al-Jawāmi’ (the crown of mosques), and Jāmi’ 'Amr ibn al-‘Ās. This mosque was built in accordance with a directive received from 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb requiring that a mosque be built for all the tribes to meet in and perform the Friday prayer together.

(al-Khutāt: part 4 pp. 4-5)

20- Durrat: p. 188 & Sandūbī: p. 49

22- Bab al-Bahr (the gate of the sea) was the northern gate in the wall surrounding Alexandria and it overlooked the sea at the eastern harbour. Outside this gate, which was also known as Bab Ashtum and Bab al-Silsilah, lay the cemetery known as Naqarat al-Minawayn (the cemetery of the two harbours) where Abu al-'Abbâs al-Mursî was buried. (al-Iskandariyyah: pp. 160, 425, 433, 451)

23- Durrat: p. 193 & Sandûbî: p. 50

24- Durrat: p. 194 & Sandûbî: p. 116
11. THE AUTHENTICITY OF ABU AL-'ABBAS AL MURSTY

The attempt to prove the authenticity of Abu al-'Abbās al-Mursī as a pole should be pointed out, from the very outset, to be a difficult one, for it will be based, as is the case with any other pole of some fame and public acceptance, upon what the pole himself claims to be, and what other people, including his followers and may be his shaykh, say about him. Therefore, it is up to the reader himself to form his own judgement about the validity of what the next few paragraphs include, although it is my duty, as the writer of this paper, to point out that Abu al-'Abbās still enjoys the reputation of a miracle-worker despite the passage of several centuries after his death, which statement is merely my own opinion, having lived most of my life in the city of Alexandria where the shaykh lived, practised, died, and was buried.

One of the most important people who witnessed to the true saintship and poleship of Abu al-'Abbās was undoubtedly his shaykh, Abu al-Hasan al-Shādhillī, who chose him, or rather was inspired to choose him, as his successor. The reference to 'inspiration', which might give rise to the surmise that the choice of Abu al-'Abbās was a matter of divine will, is based upon the story of the first meeting that took place between the two shaykhs. Al-Mursī claimed that his meeting with al-Shādhillī took place after he had received divine permission through a dream to go ahead with the meeting. He also claimed that as soon as al-Shādhillī saw him, he said that he found in Abu al-'Abbās 'the successor of this time' (khalīf aš-šamān) and that he had been revealed to al-Shādhillī ten years previously. The whole story, which could actually have happened as told, seems to have been intended to emphasize the
authenticity of Abū al-‘Abbās and the soundness of al-Shādhili’s choice of a successor.

Another symbolical story, that might have been meant to serve the same purpose, was told by a man called Khalīl, a saint who lived, died, and was buried at a place called Nashīl al-Qanātir. (2) According to this man, al-Shādhili once entered his house, performed his ablutions before going to pray, and then took down Khalīl’s bow, which was hanging on the wall, and strung it thrice. When Khalīl asked him who his successor was, al-Shādhili answered that he was the one who would come into the house, perform his ablutions in the same way followed by al-Shādhili, and string the same bow thrice. Later on, the shaykh’s companions entered Khalīl’s house but none of them did what al-Shādhili said that one of them would do, until Abū al-‘Abbās finally went in, performed his ablutions in the same manner as al-Shādhili, lifted his eyes to where the bow was hanging, asked Khalīl to hand it to him, strung it thrice, and said that the promise or prediction (wa’d) of the shaykh had been fulfilled.

Aside from these two stories, Abū al-Hasan al-Shādhili used to praise Abū al-‘Abbās for his holiness and his spiritual powers. He considered him to be the best of his companions, making his opinion clear to everyone by allowing Abū al-‘Abbās to meet with and teach the people at the mosque of al-‘Atṭārīn (3) in the same city, Alexandria, where he himself taught. (4) Moreover, the impression about Abū al-‘Abbās that al-Shādhili wanted to make on everybody’s mind, received continuous amplification from the shaykh’s words to Abū al-‘Abbās and to his other companions as well. Thus, for example, he told Zākī al-Dīn
al-Avisani that a bedouin might go to Abu al-'Abbas and urinate on his legs at the beginning of the day, but then, by the end of the same day, Abu al-'Abbas would have taken him to God, for Abu al-'Abbas was the perfect man (al-rajul al-kamil) to whom God had revealed all the saints past and present, and who had what all the saints had and more.

Before proceeding to a review of the opinions of other eminent people about the authenticity of Abu al-'Abbas, it may be in order to stop here for a while to point out an important implication that the above attitude of al-Shadhili might give rise to in the minds of the readers of this thesis: Was al-Shadhili trying to make it clear that it was Abu al-'Abbas who was the one to succeed him and that he was allowing of no competition? And if so, who was the competitor? The answer to these questions is not easy to come up with, for no direct or even indirect reference is made to this point. However, it may be worthwhile to point out that there was a certain jurisprudent said to be called Makin al-Din al-Asmar, who resided in Egypt and who joined the companions of Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili on the latter's arrival there. This man, who claimed to be indebted only to Muhammad the Prophet, and not to any shaykh, for his spiritual education, was once with Ibn 'Ata Allah. The latter started talking about Abu al-'Abbas quoting many of the shaykh's words to the astonishment of Makin al-Din who ended up saying that in truth he did not know Abu al-'Abbas. Ibn 'Ata Allah took the jurisprudent's denial to mean an admittance of the greatness of the shaykh and that the man was saying that he did not know the actual greatness of Abu al-'Abbas. However, the same denial may be taken at its face value to mean that the man, who was actually one of the esteemed companions of al-Shadhili,
and who must have known Abū al-'Abbās, resented the reputation of the shaykh and, may be, the prospect of his becoming al-Shādhili's successor.

Many eminent people, especially in the field of mysticism, referred to Abū al-'Abbās as the pole, a man of knowledge, and the real successor of al-Shādhili. They related, in proof of their opinion, many stories that showed the holiness of Abū al-'Abbās and his outstanding miraculous powers. One of these people, Abū 'Abd-Allāh ibn Sulṭān, a saint in Tūnis and the brother of Mādi ibn Sulṭān,(10) recounts that he had two small jars full of honey that he wanted to send to Abū al-'Abbās in Alexandria. He sealed them, wrote on them that they were for Abū al-'Abbās, and dropped them into the sea of Tūnis, whence they reached their destination in a miraculous manner told by Yaqūt al-Habashi. (11) The latter said that he and others were with Abū al-'Abbās one day, when the latter asked them to accompany him to the sea at a place called al-Silsilah(12) in Alexandria. When they arrived there, the shaykh dipped his hand into the water and pulled out the two jars sent over from Tūnis.(13)

Another miraculous story was told by Najm al-Dīn al-Isfahānī,(14) a resident of Makkah, who was told while in Persia, that he would meet the pole in Egypt. On his way to Egypt, he was intercepted by a group of Tartars who took him prisoner, accused him of being a spy, tied him up, and then sat there discussing with each other whether to kill him or not. Al-Isfahānī spent the night miserably, not because he was afraid of death but because he had left his country harbouring the hope that he would meet with the man who would give him knowledge of God, only to find that his goal would not be attained after all. While
these thoughts were passing back and forth in his mind, he saw a man, with a thick beard and apparent dignity, come to him in the manner of a hawk attacking its prey. The man untied him saying, "Get up, O 'Abd-Allāh, I am the one you are seeking." Afterwards, when al-Isfahānī reached Egypt and went to see Abū al-'Abbās he recognised him as the man who had untied and saved him. (15)

Some Shaykh in Egypt, called Muhammad al-Sarraj, told Ibn 'Atā' Allāh the following story about his meeting with Abū al-'Abbās: The shaykh was one night sleeping when he had a dream in which he heard someone tell him to leave Alexandria by a certain gate, Bab al-Sidrah (16) and to proceed to the first orchard that lay on the left side of the road. There he would find a group of people, one of whom would be sitting under the tallest palm-tree. The mysterious voice in the dream also mentioned something about a mosque with a circle in it, saying that whoever got into it would be safe. The next morning, al-Sarraj left Alexandria by the designated gate, found the orchard on the left side of the road and entered it to find a number of people sitting in a circle. He looked around in search of the tallest palm-tree when one of the people addressed him saying that all the trees were tall. It was Abū al-'Abbās al-Nurṣī. When al-Sarraj greeted him and sat down, Abū al-'Abbās told him about his dream and interpreted it, saying that he himself was the mosque mentioned by the mysterious voice, that the circle meant his companions, and that whoever entered the circle and accepted their conditions would be safe. The shaykh then ended by saying that he would pay al-Sarraj a visit that night.
When the latter offered to wait for him at the door of his house or to leave it open for him to enter, Abū al-'Abbās refused asking him to keep the door locked adding that still he would be able to enter. At home that night, al-Sarrāj waited for the arrival of Abū al-'Abbās wondering the while how and whence he would come in. The suspense grew so much that he could not stand it anymore. Thus he left the house, went to the small mosque of Ribāt al-Wāṣīṭi, ascended the minaret, and, while praying there, he suddenly saw Abū al-'Abbās come towards him, floating in the air. The shaykh said, "O Muhammad, did you think that by coming here you would conceal your place from me?" To which al-Sarrāj answered, "O master, I only came here because I could not stand it and I was frightened." (18)

The above sample stories about Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī may find amplification in what Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh says concerning his own first doubts about the shaykh and his consequent belief in him. Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh recounts that, before meeting Abū al-'Abbās, he had been one of those who disbelieved and even opposed the shaykh, not on account of anything that the latter had said or done, but only because Abū al-'Abbās, and others like him, claimed things that the exoteric religious law (sāhib al-sharī') denied. However, thinking to himself that a man of truth (sāhib al-ḥaqiq) should possess attributes that spoke for his truthfulness, he decided to go see Abū al-'Abbās. He did; and when he heard Abū al-'Abbās discourse on different topics, his mind became so dazzled and enthralled by his words, that he came to believe that the shaykh actually drew upon a godly sea (bahr ilāhī) of knowledge. (19)
A lot was said about the holiness and miraculous powers of Abū al-ʿAbbās, but what may be of interest is to note that the shaykh himself was not modest in giving voice to what he himself thought he was. Judging from his references to his spiritual status, he obviously had a firm belief that he was invested with poleship(20) and all the spiritual powers it entailed. Thus, he said several times that he had never been veiled from God and His Prophet(21) and that he had not shaken hands with anyone but the Prophet of God.(22) After al-Šādhillī's death, Abū al-ʿAbbās said that he was the only one alive to have the knowledge (ʿilm) possessed by his predecessor,(23) that if the learned men (ʿulāmāʾ sing. ʿalim) of Iraq and Syria knew what lay under his beard, they would come to it crawling on their bellies (wujūh, sing. waḏh)(24) and that all the miracles were at his disposal or, as he referred to it, under his carpet (sajjādah).(25)
FOOTNOTES

1- See here pp. 11-12

2- Latā'if: p. 71

3- Jāmiʿ (the mosque of) al-ʿAttārīn (the apothecaries) was first built on the site of the church of Athanasios after the Arab invasion of Egypt. It took its name from the adjoining market known as Suq al-ʿAttārīn (the market of the apothecaries). By the beginning of the Fatimid reign it had become old and shabby. Then in 479 A.H. (1086 A.D.) it was repaired by Abū al-Najm Badr ibn ʿAbd-Allāh al-Jasālī, Amīr al-Juyūsh (leader of the armies) for al-Khalīfah al-Mustansir. Since then it came to carry its other name, al-Jāmiʿ al-Juyūshī, besides its original one. This mosque lost its prestige when al-khuṭbah (the sermon) and al-Jumʿah (the Friday prayer) were stopped in it during the reign of the sumūr Ayubids up to the time of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn al-Munṣūr Qalāwūn who returned them to it. (Al-Iṣkandariyyāh: pp. 101,190-191,220-222)

4- Durrat: p. 182

5- Zakī al-Dīn Abū Ṣaqr ʿArrūm ibn Ḥabīb ibn Yāsīn al-Rābīʿī al-ʿĀwānī al-Iṣkandari (620-691 A.H. - 1223-1291 A.D.) was a faqīḥ (jurisprudent) born in Aswan in Upper Egypt. He came to Alexandria, became a companion of al-Shādhili and married his daughter. At al-Shādhili's death he stayed with Abū al-ʿAbbās. (Ṣanāʿī: p. 57)

6- Latāʿif: p/ 70 

7- Latāʿif: p. 70

8- Latāʿif: p. 67

9- Latāʿif: pp. 74-75

10- See here: footnote 8 p. 8

11- See here: footnote 4 p. 8

12- Al-Silsilah (the chain) was an actual heavy chain that was used to close the entrance to the western harbour of Alexandria,
thus giving the name of Bahr al-Silsilah (the sea of the chain) to that harbour. However, popular tradition had the same name applied to the eastern harbour of Alexandria as well.

(Al-Iskandariyyah: p. 452)

13- Latif: p. 72, Durrat: pp. 185-186

14- Naja al-Din 'Abd-Allah ibn Muhammad al-Isfahani was a resident of Makkah. Later he became one of the companions of al-Shadhili and of Abu al-'Abbás after the death of the first.

(Nafahat: pp. 575 following, Sanduq: p. 115)

15- Latif: p. 73, Karanat: part 1 p. 521


16- Bab al-Sidrah (the gate of the cedar tree) was one of four gates in the wall surrounding Alexandria. It was the southern one and was known by several other names such as Bab al-Shajarah (the gate of the tree), Bab al-'Amud (the gate of the pillar) after 'Amud al-Sawari that lay just outside it, and Bab al-Buhar (the gate of the spices) after the caravans that used to pass through it carrying spices among other things.

(Al-Iskandariyyah: pp. 58, 160, 425, 444, 448)

17- Ribat al-Wasiti was set up by Shihab al-Din Abu 'Ali Mansur ibn Abu al-Futuh Nasr Abu al-Fadl al-Wasiti (d. 672 A.H. - 1273 Ad.) and was a place for meeting and worship. It lies now, as a small snawiyah, to the east of the mosque of Abu al-'Abbás al-Nursi.

(Al-Iskandariyyah: pp. 480-481)

18- Latif: p. 82


20- See here Chapter V. Sec. 2 pp. 65 following.

21- Latif: p. 71, Durrat: p. 189

Karanat: part 1 p. 520

22- Latif: p. 71


24- Latif: p. 77, Sha'ari: part 2 p. 13

25- Latif: p. 159, Sha'ari: part 2 p. 18
IV. THE SPIRITUAL EDUCATION OF ABŪ AL-‘ABBĀS AL-MUṣTARF

Abū al-‘Abbās al-Muṣtārfa might have been born to be the kind of holy man witnessed to by several other holy men, yet he also owed a lot to his shaykh, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhili, who seems not to have let a chance go by without revealing to him some Godly wisdom. Abū al-‘Abbās himself had such a profound feeling of gratitude and respect for his shaykh that he almost always referred his teachings and sayings to him without attributing anything to himself. When once someone made a remark about it, Abū al-‘Abbās answered that it was in his power to say that God or His Prophet or he himself had said this or that, but he always ignored himself and referred to his shaykh out of politeness. (1) He even went so far as to attribute his own eloquence to his claim that he was given al-Shādhili’s tongue. (2) Although this attitude on the part of Abū al-‘Abbās might be interpreted as an expression of sincere gratitude, yet it could also be seen as an attempt on his part at setting an example for his companions and disciples to follow. However, judging from the words of Abū al-‘Abbās himself, as reported by Ibn ‘Atī‘ Allāh, there is no doubt that al-Shādhili contributed much to his spiritual education as evidenced by the following sample lessons that the shaykh taught his disciple.

One Friday eve, the twenty-seventh of the month of Ramadān, al-Shādhili and Abū al-‘Abbās went to a mosque at al-Qayrawān where they spent the Night of the Decree (laylat al-qadr). In the morning, al-Shādhili told Abū al-‘Abbās that he had seen the Prophet who told him to cleanse his clothes from impurities (damās) so
that he might receive God's aid (madad) with every breath.

Inquiring what the Prophet meant by 'his clothes', al-Shādhili was told that God had bestowed upon him five robes (khila', sing. khil'ah): the robe of love (mahabbah), the robe of gnosis (ma'rifah), the robe of unification (tawhid), the robe of faith (Imān), and the robe of surrender and resignation (islām). The Prophet then went on to explain that he who loved God, despised and was ready to give away everything; that he who knew God belittled everything; that he who professed the oneness of (wahhada) God did not make Him partner to anything; that he who believed in God was safe from everything; and that he who surrendered himself to God rarely disobeyed Him, but if he did disobey Him he would apologize and God would accept his apology. Al-Shādhili, as well as Abū al-'Abbās who was listening to him, thus understood what God meant by the Qur'anic verse: and cleanse your clothes (we thiyābaka fa-tahhir: 74/al-Muddathir/4). (3)

Another lesson that Abū al-'Abbās learnt from his shaykh took place while the two were on their way to Alexandria in 642 A.H. (1244 A.D.). Feeling a severe tightness (dīq) that he could not bear, Abū al-'Abbās went to al-Shādhili who, sensing what his disciple was suffering, said, 'O Ahmad, God created Adam with His own hand, ordered His angels to kneel before him, lodged him in His paradise, then finally brought him down to earth, not to degrade (yunqis) him in any way, but to complete and perfect (yukammel) him. Even before Adam's creation God had already brought him down to earth when He said that He would have a viceroy on earth (Innā jā'īlun fi al-ardi khalīfatan: 2/al-Baqarah/30). Since God did not say that the viceroy would
be in the sky or in paradise, then Adam's descent to earth was one of dignity (karāmah) and not of degradation (ihānah). When Adam was still in paradise, he worshipped God only by identification (ta'rīf); therefore God brought him down to earth to worship Him through imposition (taklīf), and when the two forms of worship ('ubūdiyyah) were fulfilled in him, he deserved to be a viceroy (khalīfah). In your case, you too, having a share from Adam, had your beginning in the sky of the spirit (al-rūḥ) in the paradise of identification (ta'rīf), and then you were brought down to the earth of the soul (al-nafs) to worship God through imposition (taklīf). When the two forms of worship and slavery ('ubūdiyyah) are fulfilled in you, you will then deserve to be a viceroy or successor (khalīfah).  

One of the lessons that Abū al-'Abbās learnt from his shaykh may be considered an important directive since it set their attitude towards a pole's attire, an attitude that differed from many other Muslim mystics. This lesson resulted from a desire that Abū al-'Abbās once had of eating rough food and wearing rough clothes. When al-Shādhili knew of it, he told Abū al-'Abbās to know God, and then to be what he liked to be. Moreover, al-Shādhili's view was that wearing rough clothes would be an attempt on the wearer's part to make his secret and path in life known to everyone, which constituted some form of dishonesty and untruthfulness. In keeping with the same trend of thought, al-Shādhili used to ask Abū al-'Abbās to cool the water before drinking it, for if he thanked God after drinking warm water, he would be doing so with aversion, while, if he thanked God after drinking cool water, every organ in him would be responding with thankfulness to God.
Abū al-'Abbās received his last lesson in 656 A.H. (1258 A.D.) just before al-Shādhilli died. The two, who were accompanied by several others, were on their way to perform the holy pilgrimage. At a small town called Akhdím(7), al-Shādhilli told Abū al-'Abbās about a dream that he had. It seems that the sheikh dreamed that he was sailing on board a nail-less boat (julbah(8)) when a storm blew and they were about to sink. Al-Shādhilli then went to the side of the boat and addressed the sea saying that if it had been ordered to hear and obey him then the grace (minnah) would be God’s, but if it had been ordered otherwise, then the verdict (al-hukm) would also be God’s. Having uttered these words, the sheikh heard the sea say, “Obedience, obedience (al-tá‘ah).”

After relating this dream to Abū al-'Abbās, the group travelled until they reached the desert of ‘Aydhab(9) where al-Shādhilli died. Following the burial of the sheikh, Abū al-'Abbās and the others resumed their journey eventually to board a nail-less boat (julbah). While in mid-sea, a storm blew and the boat was about to sink. Remembering the lesson he learnt from al-Shādhilli, Abū al-'Abbās addressed the sea as his sheikh had done in his dream with the result that the sea quieted down.(10)

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, al-Shādhilli's lessons and guidance to his disciple, and later his successor, Abū al-'Abbās, seem to have contributed much towards the preparation and education of the latter. However, there was another element that must have played an equally important role in the formation of Abū al-'Abbās's thought. This was in the form of specific books which, as explained below, were of special importance to al-Shādhilli and Abū al-'Abbās.

One of the most important of these books seems to have been
Khatm al-awlīyāʾ (The seal of saints) by al-Tirmidhī. The reason why this book is taken to be of special significance may be found in the opinion of al-Shādhilī and Abū al-Abbās about the author of the book and also in the circumstances in which the book was mentioned. The two shaykhs had a high opinion of al-Tirmidhī whom they glorified and whose words met with their full acceptance, and the book itself was often read and discussed in al-Shādhilī's gatherings. The circumstances that accompanied the mention of the book seem also to have been intended to emphasize the spiritual value of the book, and to relate it to the spirituality of Abū al-Abbās. The story goes that one of al-Shādhilī's companions, a certain Abū al-Hasan al-Jarīrī, was with the shaykh and others in Alexandria when Khatm al-awlīyāʾ was being read to all those present. Al-Jarīrī looked around and noticed that there was someone there who had neither been with the rest of them when they had been on their way up to the meeting, nor had he been with al-Shādhilī when they arrived. Therefore, he turned to his neighbour who answered his inquiry about the man that there was no one there other than the usual group who were all known to al-Jarīrī. Realizing that his neighbour did not actually see the man in question, al-Jarīrī waited until the gathering dispersed and went with his inquiry to al-Shādhilī who answered that it was Abū al-Abbās who came every night to attend the discussions and returned the same night to Cairo. The inference that might be drawn from this story is that Abū al-Abbās attended the meetings either in spirit, or in some other miraculous form, and that the book of al-Tirmidhī might have been of special spiritual significance to him.

The other book of importance to be mentioned, again because of
the circumstances surrounding it, is Kitāb al-Nawāqif by al-
Niffarī.\(^{14}\) It seems that al-Shādhillī was once in Cairo at the
residence of a certain al-Zakī al-Sarrāj and someone was reading
to them al-Niffarī's book. When Abū al-'Abbās arrived al-Shādhillī
invited him to join in the discussion saying, "Speak, my son,
speak, and you will never stop afterwards!" Abū al-'Abbās says
that at that moment he was given the tongue of the shaykh.\(^{15}\)

A third book that must have been of some influence on Abū
al-'Abbās is Qur al-Qulūb by al-Makkī,\(^{16}\) for the shaykh used to
say, quoting al-Shādhillī, that there was nourishment (qūt) in the
book and that people acquired light (mūr) from it.\(^{17}\)

The three books mentioned above were not the only ones that
Abū al-'Abbās read or referred to, but from the way they were
tied with certain happenings or given special attention, one may
assume that they were of special significance to the shaykh and
of some influence on his thought. Aside from that, reference should
be made to a certain book, i.e. al-Ri'īya by al-Ḥārith al-Muhāsibī\(^{18}\)
which Abū al-'Abbās said could be summarized in two points: the
first is to worship God with knowledge (îlm), and the second
never to be satisfied with oneself. He even went so far as not to
allow Ibn 'Atā' Allāh to re-read the book.\(^{19}\) The reason why Abū
al-'Abbās adopted this attitude is not clear as he offered no
explanation or justification to Ibn 'Atā' Allāh for withholding his
permission. However, one or two references made by him to al-Ḥārith
al-Muhāsibī, might indicate that Abū al-'Abbās did not hold a high
opinion of him. For example, when someone tried to test him by
offering him some food to eat, he turned away from it saying that
while al-Ḥārith had in his finger one vein that moved when he
stretched out his hand for suspicious food, he himself had sixty veins that moved in the same circumstances: (20) That one vein of al-Muhāsibī’s, according to Abū al-‘Abbās, was necessary for him, for he had to have some way that indicated to him what was right and wrong as he was not completely purified from the soul (nafs) and worldly desires and tendencies (hawa), (21) and thus could not be taken as an example (qudwah) to be followed by the people. (22)
FOOTNOTES

1- Latā'if: p. 68
2- Latā'if: p. 67
& See here p. 32
3- Latā'if: p. 56
Rawd: p. 302
& Nafahat: p. 568
4- Latā'if: p. 62

5- See here pp. 72-73
6- Latā'if: p. 145

7- Akhālī or Ikhdīn is one of the oldest towns of Upper Egypt. It was once famous for its constructions and for the magic practices of its people. At present it is known only as Akhālī, has lost almost all its past fame and glory, and has become just a small town of no special importance.
(Al-Khutat: part 1 pp. 386-387)

8- Al-Julbah was a sailing boat that was constructed of boards of wood tied together with twine from the fibres of coconut trees. No nails were used in its construction and it constituted a great hazard to the passengers on board.
(Al-Khutat: part 1 p. 328)

9- 'Aydhab is the name given to the desert that lies in Upper Egypt between the River Nile and the Red Sea. Through this desert lay the route that the Muslim pilgrims followed for about two hundred years (c. 450-660 A.H. = 1058-1261 A.D.) from Qus on the River Nile to the coast of the Red Sea. The journey through this desert used to take the pilgrims seventeen days to accomplish and it was a time of great suffering for them for the desert was extremely hot and entirely barren and waterless.
(Al-Khutat: part 1 p. 327)

10- Latā'if: p. 59

11- 'Abd 'Abd-Allāh Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Buthr al-Mirmidhi (d. 285 or 318 or 320 A.H. 868 or 898 or 930 or 932 A.D.)
was a great šūṭī shaykh in Khurāsān. He was exiled from Tirmidh because of his attitude towards wilāyah (sainthood) and muḥarrām (prophecy). He wrote many books including those on traditions.


12- Lāṭāʾif: p. 77


14- Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Jabār al-Niffarī (4th cent. A.H. – 11th cent. A.D.) was one of the great šūṭī masters. He is best known as the author of the book of Al-Mawqīf (stations).

(Shaʾrānī: part 1 pp. 175–176, Al-Kawākib: part 2 p. 53)


16- Abu Tālib Muhammad ibn ʿAlī ibn ʿAtiyyah al-Ḥarīthī al-Makki (d. 386 A.H. – 996 A.D.) was an ascetic and a faqīh (jurisprudent). He travelled from his home in al-Jabal and got his fame in Makkah.

(Al-Aʿlām: part 7 pp. 159–160)

17- Lāṭāʾif: p. 77

18- Abu ʿAbd-Allāh al-Ḥarīth ibn Asad al-Mubāsibī (d. 243 A.H. – 857 A.D.) was a great šūṭī who was born in Basrah and died in Baghdad. His father left him a large sum of money which he refused even to touch and died a poor man. One of his greatest books is Kitāb al-Riʿāyah li-Huquq Allāh.


19- Lāṭāʾif: p. 159, Shaʾrānī: part 2 p. 18


Al-Mahāsin: p. 36, Naḥshat: p. 572

Karamat: part 1 p. 521

21- Lāṭāʾif: pp. 135–136

22- Lāṭāʾif: p. 136, Shaʾrānī: part 2 p. 15
V. SOME ASPECTS OF ABū AL-'ABBĀS AL- örgüt'S MYSTICAL THOUGHT

I. Saints and Sainthood
   (Awliyā' and wilāyah)

The concept of sainthood (wilāyah) in Sufi thought has been discussed and theorized upon by many well-known mystics of different nationalities. All of them confer upon the Muslim saints supernatural powers and ascribe to them a variety of miracles which fall, according to Ignas Goldsiher quoting Muslim hagiologists, in twenty categories that include finding lost objects, producing the change of the four seasons in the span of a small hour, changing gold to blood, controlling wild animals and riding on lions, having the earth fold up for them, having animals, plants, and stones speak to them, and having the ability to take on various shapes, to speak many languages, to fly in the air, and to move mountains. At the head of these categories, the same sources also claim, these saints have the power to bring the dead back to life. (1)

Before reviewing the ideas of Abū al-'Abbās al- örgüt about saints and sainthood, it may be of interest to repeat here what Goldsiher says, that although saints are mentioned in several places of the Qurʾān as preferred by God to all others, yet nothing indicates that they are any mightier than the other Muslims while they are still amongst the living. (2) Even Muhammad, the Prophet and the most perfect human being, was as human, as
weak, as mortal, and as full of passion as other men, to the extent that he worked no miracles, had no influence on nature, and did not know what is hidden (al-ghayb), and when asked to work miracles he had but one answer: "Am I anything but a man, an envoy?"(3)

The question naturally arises as to what actually produced this drastic change of attitude of Muslims towards their saints. According to Goldscheider, there was such an insurmountable barrier separating God from man in early Islam,(4) that believers needed mediators between them and the omnipotent Godhead.(5) However, these mediators, i.e. saints, could not be workers of miracles without the highest mediator of all, i.e. Muhammad, possessing even greater supernatural powers. Hence, the doctrine of prophecy (mubuwah) in Islam was developed and the Prophet was placed above the crowd of saints.(6) Many miracles were attributed to him after his death, and even during his life he was claimed to have had knowledge of what is hidden (al-ghayb),(7) in spite of the Prophet's repeated denial of this.(8)

Whatever the reason why prophecy (mubuwah) and sainthood (wilayah) came to be doctrines in Islamic thought and belief, the fact remains that they have become so well-established, especially among Muslim mystics, that their validity is far less, if at all, discussed than the relationship that presumably and necessarily exists between them. It may be relevant at this point to refer to al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi's concept and explanation of prophecy and sainthood, since his book Khatm 'al-Awliya' was one of the main text books used by Abu al-'Abbâs al-Mursî and his
predecessor Abū al-Hasan al-Shāhili as a reference and means of education and guidance for their followers. The two Shāhili shaykhs, according to Ibn 'Atāʾ Allah, extolled al-Tirmidhī and held his words in great esteem. (9)

To al-Tirmidhī, prophecy is the knowledge ('ilm) of uplifting the veil and knowing the secrets of what is hidden (al-ghayb); it is the penetrating insight, functioning by God's all-encompassing light, into concealed things; (10) it is the speech (kalām) that separates from God inspirationally (wahyan) carrying with it a spirit (ruḥ) from God, and in this sense becomes imperative to be believed in, for its rejection is a rejection of God's words, and he who does so is a heretic. (11) However, the prophecy of Muhammad, according to the shaykh, is different from that of the preceding prophets in that God amassed all the parts of prophecy for Muhammad, made his heart a container for it, and stamped it with His seal. (12)

As for sainthood, al-Tirmidhī differentiates between it and prophecy by stating that in the first case God controls the saint's words (hadīth) which represent whatever is revealed of God's knowledge to that particular saint. A saint may be given one third of the prophecy or one half of it, and whoever rejects the words of a saint is not considered a heretic, as in the case of rejecting the Prophet's speech, but he may fail in life and his rejection may bring disaster to him. (13)

Abū al-'Abbās and his disciple Ibn 'Atāʾ Allah seem to have kept closely and faithfully to the concepts of al-Tirmidhī about prophecy and sainthood in that the first is complete and fits the
source of the second which is only a fraction of prophecy. Therefore, we find Abū al-'Abbās and Ibn 'Atī' Allah saying that the light of sainthood has its actual source in, and reflects, the light of prophecy, which they also call the Muhammadan reality (al-haqīqah al-Muhammadīyyah). In the same manner as the sun's light is always shining, whether directly by day or by being reflected by the moon at night, the saints' light is continuous and permanent as a result of the permanence of Muhammad's light. (14)

These saints may be considered as the heirs, in part, of the Prophet after whose death God willed it that they should follow so that His message might spread everywhere on earth. (15) However, the difference between the Prophet and the saints is that the first called upon the people with insight into the whole message or mission (al-risālah al-kāmilah), while the latters call upon the people according to the special (i.e. limited, fractional) insight of the individual saint. (16) A more often quoted analogy about the relationship, in part, between prophecy and sainthood is the one used by Ibn 'Atī' Allah, quoting Abū Yazīd al-Bistānī, that sainthood is like a drop trickling from a full skin of honey, the latter being or representing prophecy. (17)

It may be in order at this point to refer to the concept of sainthood as seen by Abū al-'Abbās and his predecessor Abū al-Hasan al-Shādhilī before we proceed to a review of the attainment of sainthood, the different levels of saints, and their relation to God, to the world in general, and to the other believers. According to al-Shādhilī, perfect sainthood means that the saint loves God and loves for God, which means that his heart is under
the control of no authority, power, or will except that of God. (18) In this sense, such a saint does not hate or fear death but actually welcomes it, for it simply means meeting the One he loves. Death may then be considered as the most suitable test for the verification of the truthfulness of a saint who, when death is offered to him, may accept it or reject it thus revealing the truth about his sainthood. Al-Shādhilī basess his opinion upon the Qur'anic verse that says: "Qul ya ayyubā alladhīna hadū in sa'amum annakum swliyā'u li-Allāhi min dūnī al-nāzi fatamannaw al-nuwta in kuntum sādiqīn (62/al-Jum'ah/6)." (19)

Although the above-mentioned test may enable common believers to reveal the presence of a saint among them, yet the nature of sainthood remains a secret that God alone knows. Ibn 'Atā'Allāh explains this by saying that our temporal world is not a worthy place for the revelation of such a secret. Therefore, as clouds are necessary for the sun, as a veil is necessary for beauty, as a treasure has to be buried, and as a secret has to be shielded, so is it necessary that sainthood be in concealment (ghayban). However, the revelation of this secret is only postponed by God to the time when people are in the other world (al-dār al-āshirah), which He considers to be worthy of His own manifestation and where He will lift that veil of concealment and secrecy. (20)

The attainment of sainthood, to almost all Sufi masters, seems in its essence to be God's work in spite of the fact that certain qualifications and exertions are required on the saints' part to make them apt and ready to receive God's gift. According
to al-Nifari, God addressed him saying, "...if I transformed you into a saintly slave..." (21) which means that it is actually God who makes one a saint. In a more explicit way, al-Tirmidhi points out that no matter what type (22) the saint belongs to, it is God who makes him one, (23) and even if the believer exerts himself in God's ways in order to attain a level of sainthood he will never be able to do so and will have to admit his complete inability and confusion before God interferes and makes him a saint. (24) Abu-Hamid al-Ghazali, in referring to the sufi ways, also says that, although man may do his utmost to purify himself and his heart, yet he may only attain a state of readiness to receive God's mercy (rahmah) which he will have to wait for until God ordains he receive it or not. (25)

In keeping with this same trend of thought we find Ibn 'Ata Allah and his shaykh supporting the view that it is in fact God that makes one a saint. They state that in some cases, saints have to tread a long path of self preparation, which includes withdrawal from the people, remaining with God, concealing their deeds (a'mal) and states (ahwal), establishing their asceticism (suhd), and preserving the soundness of their heart, in order to achieve annihilation (fanã') and to allow confirmation (yaqin) to take hold. Following this preparatory spiritual journey that is taken to make ready for the reception of sainthood, God steps in, returns his saints to 'abiding' or a firm spiritual existence (baqa') and charges them with sciences ('ulum sing. 'ilma), knowledge or forms of gnosis (ma'arif sing. ma'rifah), and facts (haqã'iq sing. haqiqah). (26)
Becoming a saint, in the final analysis, is therefore a step that only God wills and takes. However, there are two methods that God resorts to in taking this step: one is that He waits until His prospective saint has covered the long arduous path mentioned above before He takes him to Him to confer upon him the gift of sainthood, and the other is that He takes the believer, of His own will and choice, directly to Him without waiting until he has prepared himself for the receipt of sainthood. In this sense, we may say that there are two types of sainthood and naturally two types of saints whom al-Tirmidhi sometimes calls saints of God's truth (awliyā' haqq Allāh) and saints of God (awliyā' Allāh), (27) and sometimes the guided one (al-muhtadī) (28) or diligent (al-mujtahid), (29) and the directly taken (al-mujtabā) (30) or attracted (al-majdhūb). (31) Al-Tirmidhi differentiates between the two types by explaining how a regenerated or diligent saint has to tread a difficult path of hardships, temptations, pitfalls, distractions, and false moves (32) only to find in the end that he is still unable to fight off his negative attributes. At this point his confusion becomes so great that he turns to God in desperation seeking His help which he receives by the grace of God. (33) As for the other type of saint, the taken or attracted one, al-Tirmidhi says that, as still a common believer ('abd), he is a man of good attributes, good character, and a clear mind, and is selected and protected (mahrūsan 'alayhi) by God. When the time comes for such a man to become a saint, his heart is taken up to God, then returned, only to remain for ever in God's hold (qabidah) and God's custody (hirāsah). (34)
Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī refers to the same two types of saints by saying, "God has worshippers whose deeds (aflat sing. fi'il) He annihilated with His own, whose attributes (awasf sing. wasf) He annihilated with His own, and whose quiddity or essence (dhat) He annihilated with His own; and He made them bearers of such of His secrets as the common saints (awliyā') are unable to hear. Those are the ones who sank into the sea of quiddity (dhat) and the current of attributes (sifāt sing. sifah)."(35) Thus the shaykh distinguishes between what we may call select saints, or the elite, who may attain the highest level of sainthood, and the other, or common, saints who do not rise to the elite's level and who are actually 'unable to hear' or bear God's secrets. Ibn 'Ata' Allāh explains his shaykh's views in this connection in detail, and in doing so he refers to the two types or levels of sainthood as the small sainthood (wilāyah sughrā) and the great sainthood (wilāyah kubrā), the sainthood of faith (al-īmān) and the sainthood of confirmation (al-iqān), the sainthood of the truthful (al-zādiqīn) and the sainthood of the faithful (al-ziddiqīn), the sainthood of proof and evidence (dālīl wa kurbān) and the sainthood of witnessing and seeing (shuhūd wa 'ayān), the sainthood of those treading the path or travellers (sālikīn) and the sainthood of those taken directly to God (majdhūbīn). These different names given by Ibn 'Ata' Allāh to the two types of sainthood, though they are expressive in themselves, are further explained and clarified in such detail that it is necessary to refer to them one by one, or rather pair by pair, instead of summarising them all together.
The first two words that Ibn 'Ata' Allāh uses to qualify sainthood, i.e., little (ṣuḥrā) and great (khubrā), speak for themselves and denote the difference in level between the two types of saints. The first sainthood is of those who befriend God (wālī yatawalla Allāh) and who are included in the Qur'anic verse: "wa man yatawalla Allāha wa rasūlahu wa alladhīna āmanū fa-inna hisba Allāhi humu al-ghālibūn (5/al-Mā'idah/56)." The second is of those whom God befriends (wālī yatawallāhu Allāh) and who are included in the verse: "Wa huwa yatawallā al-ṣālihīna (7/al-ʿArāf/196)." It may be of interest to note here that al-Tirmidhī uses the same word 'befriend' (waliya) when referring to the saints of the top level of sainthood: "He (God) befriends this type of saints," and that al-Qushayrī interprets the word in two ways to give it the same meanings referred to by Ibn 'Ata' Allāh.

The second designation of Ibn 'Ata' Allāh in referring to the two types of sainthood, i.e., sainthood of faith (al-ʿIman) and of confirmation (al-ʿIqān), is elaborated upon by comparing faith, which is an emergence from darkness to light, with confirmation (yaqīn), which is higher than faith in that it is the establishment of God's knowledge (istiqār al-ʿilm) in the heart. Another important difference between faith and confirmation as shown by Ibn 'Ata' Allāh is that the first may be accompanied by inattentiveness (ghaflah) while the second is free from it for the simple reason that a saint in a state of confirmation is completely resigned to, and dependent on God: "wa man yatawakkal 'alā Allāhi fa-huwa hasbuhu (65/al-Taalûq/3)."

The sainthood of the truthful (al-ṣiddiqīn) and of the faithful (al-sidqāqīn) differ in that a saint of the first type seeks...
God's rewards by working and acting for Him with sincerity and truthfulness, while a saint of the second type seeks nothing but God through annihilation (fanā') from everything other than God and abiding or remaining (baqā') in everything by God. However, it is not enough to achieve annihilation only; for this may be achieved by those who are still treading the path (sālikīn) and are still on the first levels of sainthood. Ibn 'Atī' Allah clarifies this point further by referring to Ābū al-Hasan al-Shādhili who elucidated the difference by saying that the beginners, i.e. saints of the first type, are those who obey God in everything by forsaking everything, with the result that God obeys them in everything by manifesting Himself to them without everything, so that they see Him closer to themselves than everything. On the other hand, the great way (tariq khubrā) belongs to the second type of saints who obey God in everything by partaking of everything and perceiving God's will in everything, with the result that God obeys them in everything by manifesting Himself to them in everything, so that they see Him as if He were in everything. In this sense, the first saints become annihilated (yafnūn) from everything, therefore they see nothing with God, while the latter remain (yabqūn) in everything, and so they see God in everything. Al-Shādhili concludes that the second type of sainthood is more complete (ṣamīm) than the first, for God has not created the Kingdom (al-mamlakah) except that He may be seen in it, and that is why He who shuts himself off (ghāb) from the created world absents himself from God (al-Baqū) in it. However, says al-Shādhili, God does not want one to see the created things as such or for themselves, but to see the Creator as He
manifests Himself in them.\(^{(40)}\)

The reason why Ibn 'Ata' Allah uses the fourth set of words, i.e. proof and evidence (\(dalīl\) wa \(burhān\)), and witnessing and seeing (\(shuhūd\) wa \(‘ayn\)) to differentiate between the two types of sainthood, actually arises from his argument presented in the preceding paragraph. He says that not seeing God in everything does not mean that He does not manifest Himself in everything, but rather that those who look do not have the ability to penetrate through everything to see Him there. Actually God is manifest in everything, which includes even that which may seem to conceal Him, with the obvious assumption that no veil whatsoever exists to hide God from man.\(^{(41)}\) This assumption is easily comparable to the words of al-Niffarī: ".....I saw all eyes gazing fixedly upon His face, seeing Him in everything whereby He was veiled..."\(^{(42)}\)

However, the enormity of God's manifestation\(^{(43)}\) and the forcible compulsion (qabāra’iyah) of His light prevent the sight of His worshippers from seeing Him, for great proximity (qurb) makes one unable to see the proximity. This, according to Abū al-Hasan al-Shadhili, is analogous to the smell of musk which grows stronger the closer one draws to its source, and which is not smelt any more when one enters the house where the musk is,\(^{(44)}\)

Abū al-'Abbās explains the same point in a verse that symbolically says: "She (Laylā) did not become concealed except when she lifted her veil; O wonder that manifestation is concealment."\(^{(45)}\)

The point about not seeing or seeing God in everything forms, as mentioned before, the basis of distinction between the saints of proof and evidence (\(dalīl\) wa \(burhān\)) whom Ibn 'Ata' Allah calls
the people of consideration and deliberation (ahl al-istibâr),
and those of witnessing and seeing (ashuhûd wa 'ayân) whom he calls
the people of perception and insight (ahl al-istibsâr). Ibn 'Atâ'
Allâh says that these two types of saints are respectively included
in the two Qur'anic verses: Sa-murîhim ðaytina fi al-ârâqi wa fi
anfusihim hattâ yatabayyana lahum annahu al-haqq (41/Fussilat/53),
and: Quli-Allâhu thumma dharhum fi khawihim yâl'âbûna (6/al-An'âm/91). (46) The first type is that of a saint who seeks God in the
created things (ka'înât), going from one evidence to another and
treading the long path of arduous search in his holy quest. On the
other hand, a saint of the second type does not follow the same
long route, but it taken directly to God from Whom he receives
his knowledge. Thus the first saint may be called a traveller
or path-treader (sâlik) and the other the taken or attracted
(majdhûb), which terms are the reason why Ibn 'Atâ' Allâh uses
his last designation for the two levels of sainthood, i.e. the
sainthood of those treading the path and of those taken directly
to God. (47) Abû al-'Abbâs offers, in his own way, a clarification
of the difference that exists between the two saints through
giving two interpretations of the tradition: He who knows him-
self knows his God. According to him, it means that he who knows
his soul or self (nafs) with its humility, helplessness, and
poverty, gets to know God with His glory, ability, and richness,
which interpretation may mean that since the soul is a created
thing, then this proves that created things may well lead a
traveller (sâlik) to God. The same tradition, says Abû al-'Abbâs,
may also be interpreted in another way, that he who knows his
soul (nafs) shows, by so knowing, that he has already known God,
which means that knowing God precedes knowing the soul (48) and
that the saint who is given this kind of knowledge, through being taken directly to God, does not need any evidence or proof since seeing God is proof enough. (49)

Before proceeding any further with our review of the thoughts of Abū al-'Abbās about saints and sainthood, it may be in order at this stage to include some clarification of two points raised in the previous paragraph. The first of these is about the knowledge the saint receives in one way or another depending upon the type of saint he is. In expounding his views on this subject, Abū al-'Abbās does not make it clear whether he believes that created things (kā'īnāt) in themselves can actually lead to a knowledge of God or not, although this is vaguely implied in his first interpretation of the previously cited tradition. However, we may reasonably say that since his predecessor is not of that belief he himself may have meant the same thing al-Shādhīlī speaks about when he wonders how one can define God by using what is known (al-ma'ārīf) when what is known came to be known through Him, and how one can define Him by something when His existence preceded everything. (50) This is almost similar to what al-Niffārī says when speaking about the same point: "Letter cannot inform of itself: How then should it tell of Me (God)?" (51) and: "....Can I be apprehended in that which I have produced?" (52) However, al-Shādhīlī admits that sometimes created things may lead one to God, in which case it is God Himself who confers upon them this gift and ascribes to them this function, (53) from which we may assume that the shaykh means that it is actually God who tells about Himself. More explicitly put, we find al-Niffārī saying: "I am He that informs of Himself to whomsoever He wills." (54) Although al-Shādhīlī and Abū al-'Abbās do not use
specific terms to refer to this type of knowledge or to the other type, mentioned before, where the saint gets direct knowledge from seeing God, yet they seem to be referring to the two terms used by al-Harithi al-Makkī who distinguishes between getting acquainted with God (ta'ārif) and identifying God (ta'arruf). These two terms were also used by Junayd, as quoted by Kalabādhī, to refer, by using the first, to the knowledge of the common believers, who get to know God through His favour which makes them able to recognize Him as the Creator of everything, and, by using the second, to refer to the knowledge of the elite (khawāss) to whom God identifies Himself and who are then given knowledge of everything through their acquired knowledge of God. Al-Niffarī refers also to the second type of knowledge in a concise way saying: "Stay before Me, and thou shalt see knowledge and the way of knowledge." The other point that needs clarification is that about the one who treads the path (sālik) and the other who is transported directly to God (majdhub). The difference between the two, which actually lies in the way they get their knowledge, has been explained before and may be summarized by quoting these words of al-Niffarī: "If thou callest Me, I will come to thee; and if I call to thee, thou wilt come to Me." Ibn 'Atā' Allāh, speaking for his Shaykh, says that the second saint, i.e. the majdhub, does not have the gradually acquired knowledge which the first one, i.e. the sālik, gets by treading the long path to God, since he is transported directly to God where he gets direct knowledge by witnessing Him. This kind of direct knowledge may thus be considered won or gained (kasbiyyah), while that of the path-treader may be called acquired or obtained (muktasabah). It
may be argued here, as some sūfīs did, that the path-treader has more knowledge of, and is more experienced in, whatever relates to the long holy path (tariq) than the other saint who is not familiar with the path on account of his direct transportation to God, and consequently that the taken or attracted saint is not as suitable a guide for the common believers and disciples as the path-treader. (61) Ibn 'Atî Allâh rejects this argument on the basis that the attracted saint actually knows the path very well, for, although he is made to travel it in no time, the whole trip is revealed to him, and that the only difference between him and the path-treader is that the first is spared the troubles and difficulties undertaken by the second on the path and the long time required to tread it. (62) In a way, this seems to be similar to al-Tirmidhî's opinions about the two types of saints, for he admits that the attracted one does not suffer the difficulties of the path as the path-treader. (63) However, after the act of attraction (jadhbah) comes a period of time during which God takes over the teaching and education of the saint until he has acquired the highest level of knowledge. (64) This may not be clearly indicative on the part of al-Tirmidhî whether he believes that the attracted saint knows the path and, consequently, is able to guide the disciples, but this point becomes clear when we find the shaykh saying: The attracted one is attracted in every station (mawtân) on his way to God, and is informed of these stations and made acquainted with them. (65) This obviously means that the attracted saint knows, or is made to know, every step of the path although he does not actually tread it on his own, for the attraction (jadhbah) that al-Tirmidhî
speaks about becomes in fact a series of attractions transporting the saint from one station to another until he reaches God. In the shaykh's own words: God takes over his (the saint's) transportation, in a moment, from kingdom to kingdom (mulk) up to the Owner of the kingdom. (66)

Now that some form of coherent thought has been established as to the nature of saintliness, its attainment, its two different types, and its dependence upon God's will, we may proceed to the clarification of the questions of the necessity of having saints in this world, of their relationship with it, and again of the role played by God in all this.

Ibn 'Ata' Allah says that after the death of the Prophet God willed it that others should follow so that God's message might be spread everywhere. These others are the saints who inherit and follow the steps of the Prophet, and whose lights are continuous and permanent as a result of the permanence of the light of Muhammad. Thus, the world, according to Abu al-'Abbás, is never void of saints - a fact admitted by al-Tirmidhi - and their number is always constant. To prove this, Abu al-'Abbás quotes this Qur'anic verse: Wāʾ... (67) and interprets the word 'ayatin (from 'ayah = verse or miracle) to mean saint, thus giving the quoted verse the meaning that a saint is always replaced by another who may be the same, or even better than, the first. (68)

The presence of saints in the world, according to Abu al-'Abbás, is of utmost importance both to the world and to the people in it. For instance, if there was a decrease even of one saint, in their number, the sky would not rain and the earth would not grow
plants.\(^{(69)}\) On the other hand, if the times became corrupt, this would not be as a result of a decrease in the number of saints, but rather the corrupt times would lead to the concealment of saints despite their actual existence. The people's mindlessness of God and His ways would make them undeserving of having the saints unveiled to them.\(^{(70)}\) However, the basic function of the saints is to lead, guide, and help the people in a way that \(\text{Abū al-'Abbās conceives of in the light of the Qur'anic verse: }\) "Qul īhādhinā sabūlī ad'ū ilā Allāhī \('\text{alā baṣīratīn anā wa sam ittaba'ānī}' (12/Yūsuf/108). He explains that the way (sabūl) of the saints is by insight \('\text{alā baṣīratīn}', which means that they use their insight to select a way suitable for each of their followers\(^{(71)}\) and not just adopt one standard way for all. In doing so, \(\text{Abū al-'Abbās says, they will be following the example set by the Prophet who had for his companions various counsels (wasiyyā sing. wasiyyah) that differed according to the way of each. Thus, for example, he told Bilāl\(^{(72)}\) to go ahead and spend and never to fear that God might decrease His gifts to him, while to another, who wanted to give away all his money, the Prophet said that it would be better to leave his heirs rich than to leave them dependent upon others.\(^{(73)}\)

In order to enable the saints to perform their functions in a proper way, God takes a few steps which will be discussed in the following paragraphs and which begin by God revealing His chosen saint to the people. The saint then, according to Ibn \('\text{Atū}' Allāh, is clothed in majesty (jalālah) and splendour (bahā'). The purpose of the first is to inspire, into the hearts of the people, that sort of awe (haybah) that is referred to in the
Prophet's words: I (God) have supported his path with fear (OR: I (the saint) have been supported with fear). (74) This inspired awe makes the people polite and obedient to the saint's instructions and prohibitions. An example of this majesty and awe is given by Ibn 'Atâ' Allah who refers to his shaykh Abû al-'Abbâs saying that no one sat with him except that one's heart became overcome with fear. (75) As for the purpose of clothing the saint in splendour (bahâ'), it is to beautify him in the people's hearts which will then be inspired with love for the saint. The natural outcome of this is that they will follow the saint, come to love God, and eventually to be loved by Him. (76) This majestic and splendid appearance of the saint is referred to by al-Tirmidhî who describes it as having the splendour of closeness to God (bahâ' al-qurbah), the light of majesty (nûr al-jalâlah), the awe of eminence (haybat al-kibriyyâ'), and the affability of dignity (uns al-waqâr). He says that anyone looking at such a saint and at the marks of God's sovereignty impressed upon him will remember God. (77)

The act of revealing God's saint to the people is purely God's and not the saint's, and it has to be accompanied, according to Abû al-'Abbâs, with God's permission for the saint to speak so that the latter's words may come out to find the people ready to listen to their sweet and acceptable sound. If, however, the saint is not permitted to speak, he will find himself uttering words whose lights are eclipsed. Therefore, the two saints, the permitted and the unpermitted, may speak about one and the same thing, but the former's words are accepted while the latter's are rejected. (78) Al-Tirmidhî offers an explanation concerning
the people's acceptance of the saint's words by saying that it arises from that tranquil confidence (sakinah) that separates from God with His speech and dwells in the heart making it confi-"de in the words uttered by the saint. (79) As for al-Niffarî, he speaks of God's order or permission upon which the gnostic ('arif) or saint starts preaching to the people: ".....If He commands you to instruct the servants, instruct them........." (80) and: "When thou attainest the limit of knowledge, it is incumbent on thee to speak of it; but wait for my permission concerning it, that thou mayest speak of Me, and relate concerning Me, and that thou mayest be one of My ambassadors." and: "If thou speakest of knowledge, and relateth concerning it, and art an ambassador of knowledge; then knowledge occurs to thee, and thou canst not reject knowledge, because it occurs to thee as one of whom thou didst speak, and with one of whose tongues thou didst relate." (81)

Having revealed His chosen saints to the people and given them permission to speak, God does not leave them on their own, but He actually stands there behind them to support them in everything they do. His support takes on different forms which al-Niffarî summarizes in this way: "If I appoint thee My lieutenant, I will set thee before Me, and place My self-subsistence behind (and I shall be beyond the self-subsistence), and My sovereignty will be on thy right hand (and I beyond the sovereign), and My choice on thy left hand (and I beyond the choice), and My light in thine eyes (and I beyond the light), and My tongue on thy tongue (and I beyond the tongue)...." (82)
means that God invests such saints with all sorts of Godly powers backed by God Himself. Al-Tirmidhî also speaks of God's support of His saints saying that they become invested with the sovereignty (sultan) of God that defeats those who resist them, with inspiration (ilham) and insight (firâsah), and with the ability to work miracles (âyât sing. âyah). All the tongues, except those of the envious, join in their praise, and whoever harms them is struck (yagra') and meets a bad end (sû' al-khatimah = goes to hell). (83) God's saints, according to al-Tirmidhî, are guarded by the lights of impeccability and immunity (anwar al-'ismah) that burn away all the negative sides and tendencies of their soul (nafs), (84) for God takes it upon Himself to guard (yahrus) them. (85)

In keeping with the above thoughts, Abu al-'Abbâs, as quoted by Ibn 'Abî' Allâh, speaks of the same kind of support that God affords His saints. He says that the lights of God's saints are not affected by corrupt times, for they are not with or for the times (awqât sing. waqît), but with and for God, the Keeper of the time (mu'âqît). (86) Actually, their lights are made stronger and brighter by the darkness of the times, in the same way as the light of the stars is made brighter by the darkness of the night, but with the important difference that starlight fades and guides only to the world while the saints' heartlight never fades and guides to God. (87) Ibn 'Abî' Allâh, supporting this view by quoting the words of an unidentified mystic, likens God's saints to those angels appointed by God to look after the eternal fire; although they are actually in the fire, they are not affected by it. (88)
God, who holds His saints in high esteem, does not only make them unaffected by the mutable times, but he also protects (yasūn) and supports them (yantasir lahu) when He reveals them to the people of the world, a fact that Abu al-'Abbās proves by referring to the Prophet's words: He who bears enmity to any of My (God's) saints declares war upon Me (OR: I (God) declare war upon him), (89) and: When I (God) love him I become his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot on which he walks; when he asks Me, I give, and when he takes refuge in Me, I give him refuge. (90) Abu al-'Abbās says that this is so because the saint surrenders himself completely to God and finds sufficiency only in Him and in no one else, including himself, in keeping with God's words: Wa man yatawakkal 'alā Allāhi fa-huwa hasbuhu (65/al-Talāq/3). (91) In this respect, the saint becomes similar to a cub in the cave of a lioness: Would the lioness leave her offspring to whoever wants to kill it? (92) Abu al-'Abbās quotes several Qur'anic verses that speak of God's protection (siyānah) and support (intisar) of His saints: Wa kāna ḥaqqaq 'alaynā nasru al-mu'minīnā (10/al-Rūm/47); Allāhu waliyyu alladhīna āmanū (2/al-Baqarah/257); Inna Allāha yudāfī 'u 'an-i-alladhīna āmanū (22/al-Hajj/38). The shaykh also refers to the Prophet who said, pointing to a woman breast-feeding her baby, that God is more merciful to His believing slave than that woman is to her son, and says that it is this mercy (raḥmah) that God's support (intisar) of His saints springs from. (93)

In spite of the afore-mentioned protection and support, it happens sometimes that an injustice or harm befalls one of God's
saints, in which case, according to Abū al-'Abbās, God metes out His punishment to the wrong-doer. This punishment may be immediate, taking the form of cruelty in the wrong-doer's heart, glassiness of his eye, lack of obedience, committing of sins, or waning of his energy, or it may be postponed since the duration of the world, in God's view, is short, and also because the world is considered by God to be a place unworthy of His punishment of His enemies, in the same way as it is not a worthy place for rewarding His loved ones. (94) Al-Tirmidhī mentions in a brief way what happens to those who harm God's saints by saying that they are struck (yasra') by God, which action may be considered similar to the immediate punishment of Abū al-'Abbās, and also meet a bad end (sunū' al-khātinah), which may be equivalent to Abū al-'Abbās's postponed punishment. (95)

God's reaction to wrongs done to His saints is not the only one that the wrong-doer has to face, for the wronged saint also reacts but in a certain way that befits the class or level of sainthood he belongs to. In this respect, saints may be classified into four categories according to their reaction to injustices. (96)

The first category includes those who curse and invoke evil upon their wrong-doers because what is committed against them removes their joy and compels them to complain. That this invocation is not rejected by God is evidenced by the Prophet's words: Beware of the invocation of the oppressed, for between it and God there is no veil. (97) These saints rely upon their spiritual energy (himmah) in appealing to God to punish whoever hurts them, and since that energy is sincere, God responds immediately, for He knows that
these saints may become impatient if His vengeance is delayed. (98)

The second category of saints includes those who, when wronged, appeal to God for support and invoke His vengeance upon the wrong-doers, but since they know that God knows the secret but conceals it, they refer the matter to Him in secret following God's words in the Qur'ān: ʿalam Allāhi fa-huwa hasbuhu (65/ al-Talāq/3). Ibn 'Atū Allāh illustrates this point by relating the story of a woman whose sole means of sustenance was the eggs of a chicken that she had. When a thief stole her chicken, she did not curse or invoke evil upon him, but silently referred the matter to God. The thief slew the chicken and plucked its feathers only to find, to his dismay, that they grew all over his face. He tried to remove them but could not, and neither could anyone else he sought help from, until a Jewish rabbi told him that his only possible remedy lay in making the woman curse him verbally and invoke evil upon him. The thief then sent someone to the woman to ask her questions and arouse her anger, which was done so irritably that the woman cursed the thief publicly. At once the feathers fell from the thief's face. The rabbi, who was approached for an explanation, said that at first the woman had referred the matter to God who sided with and supported her, but when she cursed the thief she sided with herself with the result that the feathers fell off from the thief's face. (99)

The third category includes those who, when wronged, do not curse or invoke evil nor do they appeal to God for retribution. Their attitude is to leave everything up to God who is their sole choice. However, the highest of all are those who fall into the fourth category which is the level of the true and merciful saints
(ṣiddiqīn ruḥāmā). They are those who forgive and have mercy on their wrong-doers, and even invoke upon them a blessing which is fulfilled. Al-Shādhillī tells the story of Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, the Khurasānī ascetic, who was asked by a soldier the direction to a populated locality (al-ʿumrān), and who, in answer, pointed to the cemetery. The soldier, thinking that Ibrāhīm was making fun of him, gave him such a blow that Ibrāhīm’s head split open. However, the latter bowed down and invited the soldier to strike again saying that his head often disobeyed God. When the soldier later realised that it was the famous ascetic he had struck, he bent down, kissed his feet and asked for forgiveness. In answer, Ibrāhīm said that even at the time when the soldier lifted his hand to strike the first blow, he himself was asking God to forgive him. Ibrāhīm realised that God would recompense him and punish the other, therefore he felt ashamed that he should get good from the soldier, while the latter should only get evil from him.
2- Goldziher: p. 259
   & Mich. Personality: pp. 79-80
   Qor'ān: 7/ al-Isrā'/93
4- Goldziher: p. 255
5- Goldziher: p. 259
6- Goldziher: p. 259
7- Goldziher: pp. 259-261
8- Goldziher: p. 256, Qor'ān: 7/ al- Ārāf/ 187, 188
9- Lātā'īf: p. 77
10- Khatm: p. 342
11- Khatm: p. 346
12- Khatm: pp. 340-341
13- Khatm: pp. 346-347
15- Lātā'īf: p. 13
16- Lātā'īf: p. 14
   Mich. Personality: p. 85, Quḥayrī: p. 276
18- Lātā'īf: p. 37
20- Lātā'īf: p. 35
21- Nawāqīf: p. 100 (Arabic Sec.) & p. 99 (English Sec.)
22- See here p. 42
23- Khatm: p. 360
24- Khatm: pp. 110, 133-135, 332, 408
26- Latā'if: p. 42
27- Khatm: p. 117
28- Khatm: p. 407
29- Khatm: p. 415
30- Khatm: p. 406
31- Khatm: pp. 407, 416
33- Khatm: pp. 133-135
34- Khatm: pp. 416-417
36- Latā'if: pp. 25-26
37- Khatm: p. 389
38- Qusayyī: pp. 200-201, 276
39- Latā'if: pp. 25-30
40- Latā'if: p. 30
41- Latā'if: p. 32
42- Mawaqif: p. 76 (Arabic Sec.) & p. 82 (English Sec.)
43- Latā'if: p. 32, Sha'rānī: part 2 p. 8
44- Latā'if: p. 32, Durrat: p. 166
45- Latā'if: p. 32, Durrat: p. 137
46- Latā'if: pp. 31-32
47- Kalābādī: cf. p. 167 where the two terms seeker (murīd) and sought (murād) are used to express the same meaning expressed here.
48- Latā'if: pp. 33-34, Sha'rānī: part 2 p. 12
49- Latā'if: p. 33
50- Latā'if: p. 32
51- Mawahiq: p. 60 (Arabic Sec.) & p. 70 (English Sec.)
52- Mawahiq: p. 151 (Arabic Sec.) & p. 136 (English Sec.)
53- Latif: p. 33
54- Mawahiq: p. 60 (Arabic Sec.) & p. 70 (English Sec.)
55- Qut: part 1 pp. 184-185
56- Kalabadh: p. 79
57- Mawahiq: p. 217 (Arabic Sec.) & p. 184 (English Sec.)
58- See here p. 42 following
59- Mawahiq: p. 105 (Arabic Sec.) & p. 103 (English Sec.)
60- Latif: p. 33
61- See Najm al-Din al-Kubra as quoted in the annex of Khatm p. 474 that the education of disciples and shaykh-dom may only be undertaken by the one who has trodden the path and not by the attracted (majdhub).
62- Latif: p. 140
64- Khatm: pp. 407, 409, 410, 415
65- Khatm: p. 416
66- Khatm: pp. 332-333
67- Khatm: pp. 360-361, 456
68- Latif: p. 16
69- See Hujwir as quoted in the annex of Khatm p. 464: that the blessing resulting from the saints' presence in the world together with the purity of their life lead to rain falling from the sky, plants growing from the earth,...... etc.
70- Latif: p. 16
71- Latif: p. 13 , Sha'ran: part 2 p. 16
72- Abu 'Abd-Allah Bilal ibn Rabbah al-Habashi (d. 20 A.H. - 640 A.D.) was a slave bought and then freed by Abu Bakr. He was the first adhdhin (= one who summons people to prayer by chanting certain formulae) and treasurer for the Prophet. (Al-Kawakib: part 1 p. 49 , Al-A'lam: part 2 p. 49)
73- Lata'if: p. 13
74- Tradition: Tome 6, p. 460
75- Lata'if: p. 163
76- Lata'if: pp. 35-36
77- Khatm: p. 457
78- Lata'if: p. 42, Sha'rānī: part 2 p. 12
79- Khatm: pp. 347, 350
80- Mawāqif: p. 99 (Arabic Sec.), p. 98 (English Sec.)
81- Mawāqif: p. 218 (Arabic Sec.), pp. 184-185 (English Sec.)
82- Mawāqif: p. 8 (Arabic Sec.), p. 32 (English Sec.)
83- Khatm: p. 361
84- Khatm: p. 329
85- Khatm: p. 417
86- Lata'if: p. 18
87- Lata'if: p. 18, Sha'rānī: part 2 p. 12
88- Lata'if: p. 19
89- Tradition: Tome 1, p. 44
90- Tradition: Tome 1, p. 406
91- Lata'if: p. 19-20
92- Lata'if: p. 21, Sha'rānī: part 2 p. 12
93- Lata'if: pp. 20-21
94- Lata'if: p. 21
95- Khatm: p. 361
96- Lata'if: p. 96
97- Tradition: Tome 1, p. 424 & Tome 7, p. 298
98- Lata'if: p. 98
99- Lata'if: pp. 98-99
100- Abū Ishaq Ibrāhīm ibn Adham ibn Mansūr al-Tamīmī al-Balkhī
(d. 161 or 162 A.H. – 777 or 778 A.D. ) was the son of wealthy kings at Balkh in Khurāsān. He gave up his wealth and worldly position after hearing a divine voice reprimanding him on his way of life and became a famous ascetic.


101- The story given in Qushayrī p. 13 differs in some details.

102- Latā'if: p. 99
2. The Pole and Poleship
(Qutb and Qutbaniyyah)

This section of chapter five, that deals with the pole (qutb) and poleship (Qutbaniyyah), is not independent of the previous one about saints and sainthood. Actually the two are interrelated, for it is necessary to understand the concept of sainthood in order to grasp the full significance of poleship in Sufi thought in general and to Abu al-'Abbās al-Mursī in particular. However, since the pole is considered to be a saint of a higher level than those mentioned previously, and since it is generally believed that only one pole may exist at any given time, it becomes appropriate to devote a separate section to a discussion of this Sufi concept.

Nicholson, in his book, The Mystics of Islam, refers to the pole or shaykh as "a holy man of ripe experience and profound knowledge whose least word is absolute law to his disciples. (1) Although this definition tells only of the political position of the pole, yet it leads the way to the other and more important question of how this all-important man comes to hold such an important position from a spiritual or mystical point of view. Again a reference to Nicholson's words in the same book clarifies this point. He says that a pole begins his mystical journey (i.e. towards poleship) with gnosis that leads to passing away or annihilation (fanā'). This is succeeded by abiding (baqū'), which is the station of perfect manhood and poleship, and where the pole "becomes the centre of the spiritual universe, so that
every point and limit reached by individual human beings is equally distant from his station.......He has the right to guide others to God.......and he is a blessing to those who invoke his aid, because he comprehends the innate capacities of all mankind.......He is the horizon of every mystical station and transcends the furthest range of experience known to each grade of seekers."(2) What is implied in these words is that annihilation (fanā') is not the end of the spiritual journey but it has to be followed by abiding (baqā') for the pole to attain poleship which is referred to as perfect manhood or perfection within the human limits. Annihilation, which is "a process wherein the soul is stripped of all its desires, affections, and interests, so that in ceasing to will for itself it becomes an object of the Divine will,"(3) is in fact a negative, but necessary, stage that precedes the positive one of abiding or life in God. The latter, and final stage, where poleship is attained, "is positive and active in the sense that he who has reached it not only manifests the Divine attributes and actions in himself to others, but maintains a personal relationship to the God with whom he is one and who nevertheless transcends him."(4)

Although al-Tirmidhī does not use the word pole (qutb) when referring to the top saint referred to in the previous paragraphs, we may assume, with reservation, that he means almost the same thing by his 'seal of saints' (khāṭīb al-sāliyāt)"(5) This latter, to al-Tirmidhī, is an attracted one (majdhūb) and not a traveller or path-treader (ṣālik), and his sainthood carries the seal of God in the same way as Muhammad's prophecy is stamped with God's
seal. He is the leader (imām) of all saints who need his mediation (sharī'ah) in the same way as prophets need the mediation of Muhammad.(6) He is the one who is entrusted with a record of all saints and a knowledge of the latter's stations and levels,(7) besides having the veil lifted for him off the stations of prophets, their ranks, gifts, and characteristics.(8) In spite of the implication which arises from this argument, especially from the comparison between this saint and Muhammad the Prophet, that there may be one and only one of his type, al-Tirmidhī does not say clearly whether sainthood of this magnitude may recur at different times or that it happens only once at all times as, for example, is stated most emphatically by someone like Muhī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī.(9) However, reference is due to al-Tirmidhī's explanation of the two Arabic words "khātam" and "khātim", which he uses in connection with prophecy and prophets, the first to mean "the last of", which meaning he rejects, and the second "the one who stamps or seals", which he supports,(10) although this reference may only serve to clarify the position occupied by such a high level saint and not to indicate the assumption of a seal of saints. Another reference is also due to al-Tirmidhī's words, as quoted in the Annex of his Khatam al-Awliya', at the end of which he refers to this leader (imām) of saints as God's ONE on earth (huwa wāhidu Allāhi fi 'ardhihī).(11) In spite of the obvious implication here about a possible seal of saints, al-Tirmidhī does not specify whether that leader of saints is just one at all times or one at a certain time.

Before proceeding to a review of the ideas of Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī about the pole and poleship in general, and his own pole-
ship in particular, one point of clarification about the seal or the last of saints is in order here. Abū al-'Abbās makes it very clear that he does not share the opinion that there can be one, and he makes his point by offering his own interpretation of this Qur'anic verse: Mā nansakh min āyatin aw nunṣiḥā nā'ti ḥ-khayrin minḥā aw mishlihā (2/Al-Baqara/106). He interprets the word āyah to mean saint (wāli), thus saying that a saint is always replaced by another who may be the same as, or better than, the first. (12) Several assumptions may be drawn from this interpretation, such as, for example, that the world is never void of saints, or that Abū al-'Abbās himself is not less in sainthood, or may even be better, than his predecessor Abū al-Hasan al-Shādhili. However, what concerns the point in question is that this interpretation is a clear evidence of the shaykh's rejection of the idea that there could be, at one time, a saint who could be considered as the seal of saints in the same way as Muhammad was the seal of prophets.

The concept of poleship, as the highest level of sainthood, seems to be the same to Abū al-'Abbās as to almost all the other ṣufī shaykhs. However, it may be of interest to note here that Abū al-'Abbās differed from his shaykh Abū al-Hasan al-Shādhili on a point that pertains to the judgement of a certain action on the part of a saint and whether this action denotes the top level of sainthood, i.e. perfection itself (ḥayn al-kamāl), or just a lower level that may lead to the highest one. The point and action in question occur in the story, related before, of Ibrāhīm ibn Adham and the soldier who hit him. (13) Al-Shādhili
sees in the attitude of ibn Adham, when he forgave the soldier, a manifestation of perfection itself, but Abū al-'Abbās sees it only as the attitude of one who had only attained a level of saintliness and was still on his way to perfection. He clarifies his point by recounting the story of Sa'd, one of the Prophet's ten companions, who was falsely accused by a woman of taking possession of something from her orchard. Sa'd addressed himself to God requesting that He blind the woman and kill her if she was a liar. Consequently the woman lost her eyesight and later, while she was walking in her orchard, she fell into a well and lost her life. Abū al-'Abbās explains that when Sa'd invoked God's retribution upon the woman, he did not do it because she wronged him personally but because she wronged one of the Prophet's companions, i.e. a saint of God. In other words, Sa'd was not seeking his own rights but God's, for, according to Abū al-'Abbās, when a saint is fully purified and developed, and is set by God in control over the people, he becomes God's sword that exacts God's rights.

The attitudes of the two Shādhilī shaykhs may represent more than a slight difference of opinion, for the story of ibn Adham may be taken as a manifestation of annihilation to self (fanā') where God acts in place of the saint and which is negative in its essence, while that of Sa'd may be seen as a manifestation of abiding in God (baqā') where the saint acts for God and which is positive and active.

At this point, an illustrative reference to al-Niffārī is in order: "If I (God) appoint thee my lieutenant, I will make thy wrath a part of my wrath: thou wilt not be merciful towards any fellow-man, nor incline towards any
congener."(16) and: ".....If thou art not angry when I (God) am angry, thou art not mine, nor I thine."(17)

About the point, which al-Tirmidhi raises, that the pole is one of those transported directly to God (majdhub) and not a path-treader (salik), no indication is there in the words of Abu al-'Abbás that he shares the same opinion. Conversely, we find him saying that a pole may get his knowledge and education from his predecessor who recognizes him as his spiritual successor (khalīfah), as in his own case with al-Shādhili. However, he also says that it happens sometimes that God transports (yajdhib) one of his servants ('abd) to Him or brings him together with the Prophet Muhammad, in which case the transported pole is not indebted to any shaykh for his knowledge or poleship but only to God Himself or to His Prophet. (18) Therefore, in the opinion of Abu al-'Abbás, a pole is selected by God from any rank of mystics whether they be path-treaders or directly transported. In spite of this difference of opinion, we find al-Shādhili, Abu al-'Abbás, and al-Tirmidhi sharing the same attitude towards the period of waiting, that is devoted to the pole's final education, before the actual attainment of poleship. Al-Tirmidhi refers to this period as the one following the act of attraction (jadhbah) and says that during it God takes over the education of His saint who ends up by reaching the highest level of saintliness; (19) As for al-Shādhili and Abu al-'Abbás, their view is manifested through an incident that took place between them when the first was pole and the latter still a follower: Al-Shādhili asked Abu al-'Abbás how old he was at the time, and when the latter answered that he was thirty years of
al-Shādhili said that he would have to wait ten years more, i.e. until he was forty, to inherit the state of absolute faith (ṣiddiqiyāh, i.e. poleship) after him. The waiting period in this incident was set to cover ten years and to end at the age of forty following the example of Muhammad who attained the state of prophecy (nubuwwah) at that age. This reference to the similarity between the Prophet's attainment of prophecy and the pole's attainment of poleship is also made by al-Tirmidhī(21) who mentions that Muhammad's period of waiting, that God devoted to his accomplishment and education before the Prophet attained the state of prophecy (nubuwwah), was ten years.(22)

Having discussed the nature and the attainment of poleship, there remains a few points of interest that should be mentioned. According to Abū al-'Abbās and al-Shādhili, the pole does not have to belong to a certain nationality or family in order to become one. Thus Abū al-'Abbās says: "Our path (ṭarīqah) is attributed neither to the orientals (mašāriqah) nor to the occidentals (maghāribah) but to one from one up to al-Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭalib who was the first of poles."(23) These words of the shaykh have two important aspects that should be stressed: one is that poleship started with al-Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭalib, and the other is that it is purely a matter of spiritual inheritance which means that anyone is eligible to become a pole. The reason why al-Hasan was taken to be the first pole is explained by Dr. 'Ali Ṣayf Husayn as stemming from the idea that since al-Hasan relinquished the Caliphate, that was considered to be the exoteric succession or leadership (al-khilāfah al-ṣāhirah), he was awarded the esoteric leadership.
(al-khilāfah al-batinah) or poleship. (24) As for the spiritual inheritance of poleship, that has nothing to do with specific nations or families, a clear example of it may be found in the fact that there was no relationship between Abū al-Abbās and his predecessor beyond that of pole and disciple. Another evidence is given in the following symbolical story that Ibn 'Atā' Allāh says was related to him by an unidentified friend: A man of knowledge and goodness saw as if he were in the small cemetery (al-qarāfah al-sughra) (25) where people were assembled and looking up at the sky. Then he heard someone say that Abū al-Hasan al-Shādhili was coming down from the sky and that Abū al-Abbās was making ready for his shaykh's descent upon him. He looked up to see al-Shādhili, who was clothed in white, descend upon Abū al-Abbās and disappear into him through the latter's head. The man then woke up. (26)

The spiritual inheritance of poleship as conceived by Abū al-Abbās and al-Shādhili carries with it an aspect in which the two shaykhs differed from many other sūfis. This aspect, which concerns the pole's cloak (khirqa), is set out clearly in an episode about al-Sayyid Ahmad al-Badawi, (27) a contemporary of Abū al-Abbās al-Mursī. It is said that al-Badawi's poleship cloak was the one handed down from one shaykh to another going back in its origin to the Prophet Muhammad who had originally received it 'from' Paradise (min al-Jannah). (28) This significant claim shows that the pole, besides inheriting his spiritual poleship from a previous one, identifies himself by putting on some article of clothing that no other person but a pole may have
on. This attitude was not adopted by the two Shadhili poles who had no poleship cloak to hand down to their successors and who actually dressed themselves well and beautifully in direct contrast to many other Sufis whose attitude in this connection is very explicitly presented by al-Makki in his Gût al-Qulûb. (29) Abû al-Hasan al-Shadhili summarized his view in very few words that he used by way of response and advice to Abû al-'Abbâs al-Mursî, who had gone to his harboring in his heart the thought that he would eat rough food and dress in rough clothes. Al-Shadhili said, "O Abû al-'Abbâs, know God and be whatever you wish." (30) A further, and more significant clarification of this point of view may be found in the following stories told by Abû al-'Abbâs and reported by Ibn 'Ata' Allah:

Once a poor man (faqîr, i.e. sufî, mystic, saint) went to see Abû al-Hasan al-Shadhili and, finding him dressed in rich and soft clothes, said that a slave of God could not be clad in that kind of dress. In answer, al-Shadhili felt the roughness of the man's clothes and said that they only served to indicate the man's need for the people while al-Shadhili's own clothes made it clear to everyone that he was not in need of anything from them. Ibn 'Ata' Allah explains that one's dress should not reveal one's secret, otherwise one's spiritual path would not be genuine but only a matter of pretence. (31)

The second story sees Abû al-'Abbâs going to al-Maghrib where he was sent by al-Shadhili to meet a saint (walî) there. When he arrived there, Abû al-'Abbâs was surprised to find that the saint in question resided in a majestic house and was dressed in the
finest of clothes. His surprise was doubled at the words of the saint who, albeit so richly housed and clad, requested Abū al-‘Abbās to return to his master al-Shādhilī and to ask him how long the latter would be preoccupied with the world, and when his desire for it would stop. However, the mystery was cleared when al-Shādhilī wept on hearing the saint’s words admitting that he was not completely free from worldly desires. He further explained to Abū al-‘Abbās that God had washed the saint’s heart from the world which He placed into the saint’s hand and on his outward appearance. (32)

A last point of interest about the pole is what Nicholson refers to as the pole maintaining “a personal relationship to the God with whom he is one.” (33) This constant and personal relationship may be summarized in the few yet significant words of al-Tirmidhī who says: that the pole remains in the hold (qabdah) of God, (34) where we may naturally assume that God addresses His saint directly or allows him to see Him, although this address and seeing Him may be, as they most probably are, only acts of divine inspiration or visitation. It may also happen, when the pole is in God’s hold, that he meets and actually sees the Prophet or God’s angels, and exchanges words with them. A good example of this relationship and contact is the whole book of al-Mawaqif by al-Hiffarī who bases all his arguments upon a direct address from God to him. Another example is the references and stories given in al-Tirmidhī’s Khata al-sāliyā about seeing, speaking with, and, in one case, even kissing the hand of the Prophet. (35) Abū al-‘Abbās and al-Shādhilī were not different in this connection.
Thus the first says that he has never shaken hands with anyone except with the Prophet, and that he has never been veiled from God and His Prophet. Al-Shādhilī himself testifies to Ābu al- 'Abbās's latter claim saying that since Ābu al-'Abbās penetrated (nafaḍha) to God he was never veiled from Him, and even if he sought the veil he would not find it. (36) The best illustrations about this direct relationship are given by al-Shādhilī who refers to his own meetings with the Prophet (37) and, more importantly, to his receiving direct answers from God Himself in response to his questions, claiming that these answers came to him by way of a mysterious voice (hatīf) that spoke to him in both wakefulness and sleep. (38)
FOOTNOTES

1- Nich. Mystics: p. 32
2- Nich. Mystics: pp. 164-165
4- Nich. Personality: p. 26
5- Khatm: pp. 342,421
6- Khatm: pp. 421-422
7- Khatm: annex: p. 458
8- Khatm: p. 368
9- Khatm: annex: p. 479
10- Khatm: pp. 341-342
11- Khatm: annex: pp. 457-458
12- Latā'if: p. 16
13- See here p. 59
14- Latā'if: pp. 99-101
15- Latā'if: p. 25 & See here pp. 65-66
16- Kawsīf: p. 8 (Arabic Sec.), p. 32 (English Sec.)
17- Kawsīf: p. 165 (Arabic Sec.), p. 146 (English Sec.)
18- Latā'if: p. 67, Sha’rānī: part 2 p. 13
19- See here p. 50
20- Durrat: p. 182
21- Khatm: pp. 360, 407-412, 415
22- Khatm: pp. 410, 411
23- Latā'if: pp. 67,75,77
24- Al-Adabı; pp. 35, 43-44 (quoting al-Suyūṭī in Ta’īd al-ḥaqīqah al-‘aliyyah p. 70, a Dūr al-Kutub (Cairo, Egypt) manuscript No 3016 Tasawwuf wa akhlāq dīnīyyah.)
25- Al-Qarafah al-sughrâ (the small cemetery) was one of two cemeteries in Cairo, the other being al-Qarafah al-kubra (the large, big, or major cemetery). The first was situated on the side of the mountain of al-Muqattam on the outskirts of Cairo while the second lay in East Cairo next to the residential area. (Al-Khuṭat: part 4 p. 317)
26- Latâ'īf: pp. 81–82
27- See here footnote No 11 pp. 8–9
29- Qât: part 1 pp. 520–534, 527
30- Latâ'īf: p. 145
31- Latâ'īf: p. 145, Sha'râni: part 2 p. 16
32- Latâ'īf: pp. 164–165
33- Nich. Personality: p. 26
34- Khatm: pp. 416–417
35- Khatm: pp. 16, 25, 28
36- Latâ'īf: p. 71
38- Durrât: pp. 28, 146, 165, 166, 174, 175, Latâ'īf: p. 63 & Sha'râni: part 2 pp. 6, 7
Having discussed, in the previous two sections of this chapter, saints and saintliness, and poles and poleship, it may be appropriate at this stage to state that it is only obvious that all the prophets and messengers of God were ordained to be in the world for one purpose which was to guide people to God. They did not exist in the world for their own good but for the good and guidance of the people. Hence, it follows only naturally that those people called saints and poles have two duties to perform: one towards themselves as human beings, and another towards their fellow men in their capacity of successors of, but not equals to, the prophets. These two duties have been pointed out, in passing, in the previous section as the achievement of annihilation (fanā') or a state of passivity and negativity where God takes complete control of his saint, an achievement that fulfills the saint's duty towards himself, and then passing on to the second stage of abiding (baqī') or a state of positivity where the saint acts towards the people while at the same time maintaining his personal relationship with God with whom he has become one. This second attitude or duty of the saint establishes some form of relationship between the saint and the seeker (murīd), which relationship is the topic of discussion in the next few paragraphs.

One of the most important questions to be asked, before going into certain aspects of the above-mentioned relationship, is whether it is mandatory or even commendable for a seeker to attach himself to a pole for guidance, and whether a seeker can-
not tread the path all by himself. It seems that most sufis are of the opinion that no seeker can venture on the path without the guidance of a pole whom he must obey unconditionally. Al-Qushayri\(^1\) expresses this view most emphatically saying that a seeker has to have the guidance of a pole, otherwise he will never succeed, or worse still, he will only have the devil for a guide. Abu al-' Abbas al-Mursi seems to have differed from this general attitude in one aspect, for although he must have believed in the importance of the pole's guidance to a seeker on the path, since at least he himself had previously been guided by al-Shadhili, yet he held the opinion that sometimes a servant of God is transported directly to Him or brought together with the Prophet Muhammad,\(^2\) in which case such a person is not exactly a path-treader and is not in need of a spiritual guide, for God Himself has taken over his guidance.

One of the traditions adhered to by most poles, before any relationship is established between a pole and a certain seeker, and before a pole takes any step towards accepting a seeker among his followers and setting him on the path he is to follow to be with God, is that the seeker has to prove himself to be a good Muslim by being well-versed in, and a true adherent to, the Qur'an (al-kitab) and to the traditional Islamic rules (al-sunnah). Al-Niffati points out the importance of this as one of God's requirements of His believers, by saying that in order to avoid God's punishment one has to "Lay hold on the Sunna in thy theory and practice,..."\(^3\) Al-Makki also emphasizes the same point by condemning the sufis who stray from the path (yaashtah) and adopt...
views that go beyond the Qur'an and the Islamic rules, (4) and by referring to the commendable attitude of the gnostic, "arifun, sing. "arif) who asserted that they never accepted thoughts inspired by their hearts until they were supported by evidence drawn from the Qur'an and the traditional rules. As for al-Quhâyri, it would be useless to refer to a certain page or quotation in his Risālah to show that he was a supporter of the same viewpoint, but it is enough to say that in his review of all those arif masters he included in his book, he repeatedly stressed their adherence to the Qur'an and the Islamic rules (al-kitāb wa- al-sunnah).

Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī kept faithfully to the same tradition-al way of adhering to the principles of Islam and, aside from his well known competence in exoteric sciences stemming from al-Qur'an and the traditional Islamic rules (al-sunnah), (6) he never left any doubt in the minds of his followers as to this fact. The following two examples are given to illustrate this attitude and to show how Abū al-'Abbās demonstrated his principles in practice.

Najm-al-Dīn 'Abd-Allāh al-Isfahānī, (7) a gnostic of Makka, once told Ibn 'Atā' Allāh that before leaving for Alexandria he was instructed by his own shaykh that, in case he met the pole there, he should not pray with the latter behind him. Therefore, when he met Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī and it was time for the evening prayer, Najm al-Dīn noticed that if he prayed where he was he would have the pole behind him, for he would have his back to Abū al-'Abbās in order to set himself in the right direction for prayer (al-qiblah). Remembering his shaykh's instructions, he turned around
facing the pole, and was about to start praying when Abū al-
'Abbās stopped him saying, "No, God does not approve of anything
that goes against al-sunnah." (8)

The second illustrative story is given by Ibn 'Atā' Allāh
quoting a certain Sulaymān ibn al-Bākhis who recounts that once
he invited Abū al-'Abbās to his place and, while the two were
eating water melon, Sulaymān asked Abū al-'Abbās about a much
talked about man who travelled around followed by large multitudes of people carrying banners but who did not attend the Friday
prayer. At the mention of this man, Abū al-'Abbās became upset,
stopped eating, and said that if he had known that Sulaymān
would speak about such a person he would not have accepted his
invitation, for he considered him a performer of objectionable
non-Islamic acts (min āhl al-bida'). (9)

Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī had a certain code that he always
followed in dealing with those who sought his guidance on the
path. He believed that a seeker who came to see him, did so with
his eagerness aflame. Therefore he never asked him to wait nor
delayed their meeting for any reason, for he was of the opinion
that this would only lead to the seeker's flame of eagerness
becoming extinguished. (10) Moreover, he never insisted that his
followers, once he accepted them as such, stay away from any
other shaykh. Conversely, he gave them the freedom to seek the
company of others if they so wished, quoting in so doing his
predecessor al-Shādhilī who used to say to his followers, "Keep
my company, and I do not forbid you to keep the company of others.
If you find a source sweeter than mine, seek it." (11)
Aside from meeting his seekers without delay, and not imposing his sole company upon them, Abu al-'Abbās never asked a newly admitted seeker, nor even an old one, to give up his worldly occupation in order to join those on the path. His attitude was to let the seeker be, and then when the lights of grace (al-minnahn) filtered into his heart, he would give up the world of his own free will. (12) In his own words, as quoted by Ibn 'Ata Allah, "When we accompany a merchant, we do not tell him to give up his trade and join us, or a craftsman, we do not tell him to give up his craft and join us, or a seeker of knowledge, we do not tell him to give up what he seeks and join us. We accept everyone as God has made him pursue, and whatever has been destined for him through us, will come to him. The Prophet's companions (al-sahabah, sing. sahaba or sahib) accompanied him, and yet he never told a merchant to give up his trade nor a craftsman to give up his craft, but he approved of their worldly occupations (asābah, sing. sabab) ordering them to fear God in their pursuit." (13) Ibn 'Ata Allah relates his own experience with Abu al-'Abbās in this connection saying that he went to the latter harbouring in his heart the thought that the only way to reach God was for him to give up worldly matters and the pursuit of esoteric knowledge. However, and even before he revealed his intention to the shaykh, Abu al-'Abbās started telling him the story of a certain teacher called Ibn Nashi of Qus. (14) Ibn Nashi told Abu al-'Abbās, after accompanying him for some time and tasting a little of the path, that he thought of giving up his work so that he might devote all his time to the shaykh's
company. Abu al-'Abbās objected and told the man to go on doing what God had made him do. He explained that the way of the truthful did not lie in abandoning anything until God Himself had ordained it. When Ibn 'Atā' Allāh heard these words, he left the shaykh feeling content with the work God had made him pursue. (15)
FOOTNOTES.

1- Quhsayri: p. 315
2- Latä'if: p. 67, Sha'rání: part 2 p. 13
3- Mushqif: p. 22 (Arabic Sec.); p. 42 (English Sec.)
4- Qūt: pp. 297-298
5- Qūt: p. 335
6- Latä'if: p. 88
7- See here footnote No 14 p. 26
8- Latä'if: p. 74
9- Latä'if: p. 75
10- Latä'if: p. 104, Sha'rání: part 2 p. 14
11- Latä'if: p. 104, Sha'rání: part 2 p. 14
   & Durrat: p. 143
12- Latä'if: p. 104
13- Latä'if: p. 83
14- Qūs is one of the oldest towns in Upper Egypt and, at one time, it was considered to be one of the greatest in the area. Muslim pilgrims used to stop at Qūs before crossing the desert of 'Aydāb on their way to the Red Sea coast. (Al-Khutat: part 1 pp. 327, 381)
15- Latä'if: p. 81
VI. CONCLUSION

Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī, it is reasonably safe to say, was a ṣūfī master of definite sincerity, authenticity, and renown. Although it is difficult to refer him to any specific school of thought, if it is at all feasible to divide ṣūfīsm into distinct schools, yet it may well be possible, academically speaking, to consider him as a 'classical' ṣūfī who followed in the steps of the majority of his predecessors on the path. Like them, he did not go to any objectionable extremes either in his beliefs, his teachings, or his mode of life, but adhered faithfully to the Qurʾān (al-Kitāb) and the Islamic traditional rules and ways (al-sunnah).

However, Abū al-‘Abbās and his shaykh before him differed from many preceding ṣūfī masters on several points that make of the Shadhili path a distinct one among the ṣūfī groups. For example, the two shaykhs did not make it mandatory upon any seeker (murīd) to have a shaykh as his guide, for they believed that God Himself might inspire a seeker in a direct way or bring him together with His Prophet, in which case the seeker would not be indebted to any master for his knowledge but only to God and the Prophet. (1) Another example is that the two Shadhilī poles were not supporters of the ṣūfī cloak (khirqah) nor of wearing rough clothes. On the contrary, they were usually well-dressed, for they believed that rough clothes, or the like, would only serve to attract the attention of the people and to indicate some need for them. (2)
One of the points that could make Abū al-'Abbās stand out by himself in the field is that about the difference between the soul (nafs) and the spirit (rūḥ). This point was not referred to by the shaykh in a clear-cut way but was expressed in a long poem\(^{(3)}\) that, despite being the longest and most important piece of composition by Abū al-'Abbās, did not receive its due attention as regards explanation, analysis, and interpretation either in the primary or the secondary sources that referred in any way to Abū al-'Abbās. Even the book by Dr. 'Alī Sāfī Ḥusayn which is devoted to Sufi literature in the seventh century A.H. in Egypt, and which includes studies of many Sufi poems and prose writings, does not attempt any detailed analysis of the poem in spite of its repeated reference to it.\(^{(4)}\) The reason for this inexplicable avoidance could have been the implication, which might be drawn from the poem, that the soul (nafs) may be considered to be higher than the spirit (rūḥ). This inferred concept had never been held by any shaykh before Abū al-'Abbās and, since its importance in this light is of value to this paper about the Shādhilī shaykh, a summary of the poem and what it implies is given in the following paragraphs.

The first four lines of the poem are a summary of certain points that must have been included in a question posed by an inquirer to Abū al-'Abbās. These points are: how the soul (nafs) and man's physical body (badan) have come to associate with each other; how the soul has become attached to worldly things (al-ḥāsin); how it has grown to be accustomed to the presence of its filth (adān or dāran) to the extent that it complains of rottenness ('atan); how it has become so degraded although it has the
knowledge ('ilm) to distinguish between bad (qubh) and good (hasan); what its motives are that make it naturally lean towards, and fall into, the darkness of grief driven by its own lust (shahwah); and what the truth is about its origin (ma'dihi) since its description cannot point to an idol (wathān).

After summing up the points of inquiry, Abū al-'Abbās tells his inquirer that he will answer him using sciences ('ulūm) the pursuers of which are very few, and advises him not to be misled or deceived by those who are not well versed in them (line 6). These sciences have landmarks or signs (shawāhid sing. shawāhid) that are not concealed from one who is heading for the Truth (al-Haqq; i.e. God) for they are all facts (haqā'iq sing. haqīqah), stem and branch (line 7). They are sciences that cannot be reached or comprehended by the powers of comprehension or intelligence (line 8), but only by that all encompassing divine light before which all intellects become still (khamad) and all people become drowsy (al-wasan) (line 9). Abū al-'Abbās goes on to say that he will give an explanation, for the matter has been revealed to him, although there is a limit set to what he must divulge (line 10). He advises the inquirer to take the knowledge of the subject as it really is and not let the image (sūrah) in this world veil him (line 11).

The soul (nafs), according to Abū al-'Abbās, is a secret or mystery that no intellect, limited by delusions (awhām sing. wāhām) and filth (daran), can encompass (line 12). However, it came into existence in the world ordained to it, and people got acquainted with it as it resided in them (line 13), so that it
might be said that the slaves ('abīd sing. 'abd, i.e. believer) are in the state ordained for them before creation (khalq) and tribulations (mīhān sing. mīnah) (line 14). The soul (nafs) is always on the descent in its worlds like Adam who had an Eve at the back of his head (fī qaran), i.e. to tempt him (line 15). As for the spirit (rūḥ), it is always on the ascent to its different stops (maʿārij sing. miʿrāj) where it receives knowledge and grace (line 16). Its equivalent in the elevated heights (al-ʿulā) is the mirror of its origin (maʿdīn), and its fine nature and attributes (al-taʿāf sing. latīfah) are like a secret in what is revealed ('alan, i.e. the visible creation) (line 17). It is an olive (zaytūnah) whose oil is light (mūr) for whoever drinks it, and its guidance extends into both the one (al-kāwn) and the many (al-kāyn) (line 18).

Abū al-ʿAbbās then closes the poem saying to his inquirer that he (i.e. man in general) is actually everything (al-kull) in a clear meaning (maʿnā), however, light (al-mūr) hides this meaning as water is hidden in milk, with the result that (line 19) the believer becomes veiled in the glory (ʿizz) of his Owner (i.e. God) whose forms of knowledge (maʿārif sing. maʿrifah) have become difficult to comprehend through the passage of time (line 20).

The points that Abū al-ʿAbbās refers to in this poem, together with the explanation he offers, give rise to a few concrete ideas as well as to much speculation. According to him, nothing about the soul and the spirit can be comprehended through the intellect (ʿaql), but only with the help of a divine light may
one be able to understand. He who gets that light, as Abu al-'Abbās did, is not entirely free to reveal all the knowledge he gets, for there is a limit set upon him making him reveal only part of that knowledge. It is difficult for the ordinary man to comprehend what is revealed to him by one who knows, for there is always the visible image (ṣūrah) that acts as a veil, and unless he penetrates through the veil or receives that knowledge as it truly is, he will never be able to understand.

An ordinary man may wonder that the soul has such a potential as lust (shahwah) and that it always leans towards what is bad although it has the knowledge to distinguish between good and bad. Abu al-'Abbās offers a very interesting parallel in Adam as representing the soul, and Eve as representing lust (shahwah). To understand his point we have to refer to that lesson, about the descent of Adam to this world, which he got from his shaykh Abu al-Hasan al-Shādhilī. According to the latter, Adam, who was created by God's hand, before whom the angels prostrated themselves, and who inhabited God's paradise for five hundred years, was brought down to earth not to be degraded in any way but to be completed, for he had been worshipping God in paradise by identification (ta'rīf) and then was made to go down to earth to worship Him by imposition (taklīf). Thus when Adam practised the two forms of slavery and worship ('ubūdiyyah) he became worthy of being God's viceregal (khalīfah). The obvious conclusion that one may draw from the parallelism between the soul and Adam, is that the first was brought down to earth, which in the soul's case would be in man's physical body (badan), not as
a punishment but for the purpose of achieving completion by worshipping God through imposition (taklīf). Like Adam, the soul has its Eve in the form of lust (shahwah), and also has the knowledge to distinguish between good and bad. However, there is always present an important inferred promise that the soul may become the equivalent of a viceroy (khalīfah) of God, which in a sense places it, if on the right path, on a higher level than the spirit. The reason why one may come to the last conclusion is that the spirit, according to Abū al-'Abbās, is not exposed to the same test as the soul but, on the contrary, is set on a continually ascending path on which it is the recipient of revelation or identification (ta'rīf) and graces (minān sing. minnah). To go back to the parallelism between the soul and Adam, we find that Adam had already received God's grace and identification in paradise before his descent to earth for completion through imposition (taklīf). Likewise, the soul must have received the same before its descent into man's physical body (badan) and there remains for it to worship God by imposition (taklīf) in order to achieve what might be considered a level equivalent to a viceroy (khalīfah) that was meant for Adam. Thus, in a sense, it is higher than the spirit which is still on the road to identification (ta'rīf) with no Eve to tempt it and nothing to divert it from its set route.

One last point that should be mentioned about Abū al-'Abbās, before this conclusion is brought to an end, is that about existence (wujūd) and non-existence or nonentity ('adām). The importance of this point arises from the implication of what the shaykh, his predecessor al-Shāhidī, and his disciple Ibn 'Atū Allāh
say about it in an attempt to explain a controversial concept. However, what concerns us in this conclusion is to point out how Abū al-'Abbās stayed cleverly out of a problem that might have led him away from the strict line of adherence to the Qur'ān and the traditional Islamic ways (al-kitāb wa al-sunnah) which he kept fast to all his life.

Abū al-'Abbās says that man came into existence after being non-existent, and will become non-existent after being existent, which means that man is actually a nonentity ('adam) since non-existence lies at both his extremities. Ibn 'Atā' Allāh explains this concept and amplifies it by saying that true existence (al-wujūd al-haqq) belongs only to God. As for all else, they have the existence ordained for them by God, and therefore, since they get their existence from someone else, they have the attribute of nonentity ('adam) in them. Al-Shādhilī speaks also of the same thing saying that the existence of man, and of all else other than God, is like dust (habā') or shadow (zill), which has no real existence of its own.

When we combine the statements of the three Shādhilī Sufis we come up with the definite concept that God is the only One with real existence, while all else have only an illusory one. In other words, nothing really exists but God. As for the relationship between God on one hand and the created rest on the other hand, it could be visualized as that between the caster of the shadow and the shadow itself: in a sense they are the same, while in another sense they are not. This ambiguity seems to have had a special meaning to Abū al-'Abbās who referred to it as a secret or mystery that he could never explain.
lines of poetry were recited to him:

"And if He (God) appears to you, then know that you are not He; no, and neither are you anyone else.

"Two things (i.e. God and man) are they, and they do not unite, but here there is a secret that our scope cannot fathom." (9)
FOOTNOTES.

1- See here p. 79
2- See here pp. 29, 72-73
3- Lata'if: pp. 167-168
4- Al-Adab: pp. 234, 236, 284, 421-423
5- See here pp. 28-29
   & Lata'if: p. 62
6- Lata'if: p. 143 , Sha'ranī: part 2 p. 16
7- Lata'if: pp. 143-144 , Sha'ranī: part 2 p. 16
8- Lata'if: p. 144
9- Lata'if: pp. 170-171
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