Chapter 2

Scholastic Sufism of the Alexandrian Shādhiliyya

1 The Egyptian Context

[Al-Wāsiṭī] performed the greater pilgrimage and joined a circle of [Shāfiʿi jurists] in Mecca. For a period of time he lived in some of the Sufi convents (khawāniq) in Cairo, where he [also] associated with circles of jurists. However, his heart was not reassured by anything of the modern [Sufi] groups (al-ṭawāʾif) [he found there]. He joined the Shādhiliyya group in Alexandria and found that they had what he was looking for, pertaining to gleams of experiential knowledge (maʿrifa), divine love (maḥabba), and a method for the spiritual path (sulūk). Hence, he acquired that from them and benefited from them, and followed their way and their guidance.1

Thus Ibn Rajab sums up a significant part of al-Wāsiṭī’s life, which covers the moment he decided to leave Iraq to the years he spent in Egypt. I say significant because his experiences in Egypt would leave a lasting impression on him and strongly influence the writings he would later produce in Damascus. Both his association with the Alexandrian Shādhiliyya, the ṭāʾifa named after the Moroccan Sufi Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), and his time spent in Cairene Sufi convents, were essential components in the final shaping of his interpretation of Sufism. The current chapter is dedicated to his Alexandrian era, which we will again study through his autobiography and other relevant primary sources. Before we can do so, there are two issues regarding our source material that we must briefly address.

First, contrary to Ibn Rajab’s account, al-Wāsiṭī’s autobiography tells us that he actually joined the Shādhiliyya in Alexandria before he tried his luck in Sufi convents, with no mention of these being Cairene, or of Cairo at all for that matter. We can nevertheless assume that his account of the time he lived in Sufi convents concerns the period he spent in Cairo as related by Ibn Rajab above. In the following pages we will naturally follow the chronology provided by al-Wāsiṭī himself in his autobiography, and start with his description of the Shādhiliyya. We will turn to his Cairene days in the next chapter.

1 Ibn Rajab, Dhayl, vol. 4, p. 381.
Second, the sources reveal practically nothing about the dates of al-Wāsiṭī’s travels, so that it is impossible to say exactly how long he stayed where. Although our Iraqi Sufi himself makes no mention at all of Mecca, he may very well have stayed there for a considerable time. As we have seen, he left Iraq around 683/1284, and most likely entered Alexandria somewhere after 686/1287, the year in which Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Mursī died.2 When al-Wāsiṭī made his switch from Alexandria to Cairo is also impossible to say, but we can make an approximate estimation of the year he left Cairo. In his Mukhtaṣar sīrat rasūl Allāh he states that he traveled for almost fifteen years, searching for the most sound pathway to God, until he finally found it in Damascus.3 Calculating from the approximate date he left Iraq, we can thus estimate that he was in Damascus around the year 698/1299. This is supported by al-Dhahabi’s Tārīkh wherein we find that al-Wāsiṭī once met with the Sufi Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan Ibn Hūd, whom we know lived in Damascus, where he passed away in 699/1300.4 Hence, our Iraqi Sufi would had to have entered the Syrian capital some time before that.

With this estimated timespan we now commence with al-Wāsiṭī’s Alexandrian years. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part will provide contextual background to early Mamluk Alexandria, a city that is far too often neglected in the study of Sufism. The second part makes up the bulk of this chapter and focuses specifically on al-Wāsiṭī’s account of the Shādhiliyya. The latter section will not only help us understand al-Wāsiṭī’s own formulation of Sufism as studied in part 2 of this book, but also provide new details on the early Shādhiliyya.

1.1 Stagnation and War

Named after the Macedonian king Alexander the Great, the city of Alexandria (al-Iskandariyya in Arabic) had become part of the early Muslim empire under the second caliph, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. Almost seven centuries later, when al-Wāsiṭī reached the city, it was part of the Baḥrī Mamluk domains, which roughly encompassed what is today Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine, and also controlled the Hijaz. In spite of Alexandria’s relative prosperity in comparison with previous centuries, it was at that time in the process of losing its significance as a regional political and administrative center. It may,

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1. Since al-Mursī had been the Shādhili shaykh of Alexandria, and everything indicates that al-Wāsiṭī only got to meet al-Mursī’s pupils, but never the shaykh himself, he probably entered Alexandria only after his passing.

3. Al-Wāsiṭī, Mukhtaṣar sīrat rasūl Allāh, Manuscript in Leiden University: Or. 482, f.2b.

4. Al-Dhahabi, Tārīkh, vol. 52, p. 401. Ibn al-ʿImād, Shadharāt, vol. 7, p. 780. On Ibn Hūd, see for instance: Kraemer, “The Andalusian Mystic,” pp. 59–73.
then, come as somewhat of a surprise that during this very period of economic and institutional stagnation, the city was at the same time transforming into one of the most important centers of Sufism in Egypt. Since an understanding of this transformation will be of relevance to the current chapter, we will go through several historical developments that were at the heart of this matter, and thereby simultaneously provide the necessary context to al-Wāsiṭī’s time among the Shādhiliyya.

Our Iraqi Sufi’s journey into Mamluk lands probably went via the pilgrimage route from Baghdad to Mecca, and from Mecca to Alexandria, between which he may have passed through Cairo for the first time as well. Reaching Alexandria by land must have been an impressive sight. It is related that the white, massive walls that surrounded its old center made it appear as a bright shining city. Outside the walls there were several suburbs and graveyards to be found. Barren desert was not far away, but there was also fertile land around

5 For the pilgrimage routes, see: William C. Brice, *An Historical Atlas of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), p. 22.
Alexandria, most notably to its south near Lake Maryūṭ, where one would find agricultural areas and recreational gardens. The city’s southern gate, the Bāb al-Sidra, served as the main entrance through which travelers from Fustāṭ (Old Cairo) would enter. Inside the walls was the political center near the western gate, the Bāb al-Akhḍar. Commerce and industry was concentrated along the Mahajja avenue, which ran from the eastern gate, the Bāb al-Rashid, to the city center. As we shall see, al-Wāsiṭī would probably have spent most of his time outside the walls in the northern quarter of Alexandria, which started from the sea gate, the Bāb al-Baḥr, to the city’s northern extremity. There were ports on both sides of this quarter, with the western one catering to Muslim ships, and the eastern one to non-Muslim ships. Needless to say, as Alexandria’s landing place for traders and merchants from many corners of the world, this was a multiethnic and multireligious environment. Organized in kinds of guilds, groups of merchants had their own warehouses, or funduqs, from where they ran their businesses. And business was good indeed. The merchants of Alexandria accumulated a great deal of wealth, to the extent that some families became true merchant dynasties.

Now, one would expect that the city itself prospered tremendously under the booming business of these international traders. This, however, was not the case. As a gateway between the Middle East, the northern Mediterranean, and the Islamic occident, Alexandria was indeed of vital importance to the trade of Egypt. But that was precisely the problem; because Fustāṭ had been transformed into the major marketplace of Egypt in this epoch, the country’s maritime cities came to function as stops on the road to the center. Already from the Ayyubid period onwards, Alexandria’s own interests were subjugated to those of the sultanate, so that its sole role became that of Egypt’s major port city. As such, local interests were not only regarded as inferior to those of the sultanate, but even as potentially harmful to the prosperity of the capital.

Through their respective studies of the Geniza documents, both Abram L. Udovitch and Miriam Frenkel have provided exceptionally valuable

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6 Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “Topographie d’Alexandrie médiévale,” in Alexandrie médiévale 2, ed. Christian Décobert (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 2010), p. 114.
7 Miriam Frenkel, “Medieval Alexandria: Life in a Port City,” al-Masāq: Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean, 261, (2014): pp. 9–20, and p. 27. For a map of Alexandria that shows the locations of the several names mentioned here, see p. 77.
8 Subhi Labib, R. Guest & C. Edmund Bosworth, “Alexandria (al-Iskandariyya; in El, al-Iskandariyya),” in Historic Cities of the Islamic World, ed. C. Edmund Bosworth (Leiden/Boston: E.J. Brill, 2007), pp. 19–20, and Christian Décobert, “Alexandrie au xiiie siècle: Une nouvelle topographie,” in Alexandrie médiévale 1, ed. Christian Décobert and Jean-Yves Empereur (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1998), p. 76.
9 Décobert, “Alexandrie au xiiie siècle,” pp. 78–79, and Labib et al. “Alexandria,” p. 20.
contributions to our knowledge of this development that started around the middle of the fifth/eleventh century. Udovitch’s reading of the Geniza has revealed that important transactions would take place in Cairo rather than Alexandria, so that the latter city served as a point of entry and departure, but not exchange. Prices were apparently higher in Alexandria as well, while commodities from Cairo appear to have generally been regarded as being of a higher quality, to the extent that one Alexandrian wrote about his city that: “nothing is worthwhile buying here.” While Frenkel corroborates this image, she argues that it would be unjust to subsequently view Alexandria as a peripheral city. Instead she opts to view it as a “gateway city,” a term she borrows from urban geographers. In contrast to central cities, she explains, gateway cities develop between areas of production on a site of transportational significance. They are characterized by long-distance trade and are dependent on central cities for their products.

Besides having transformed into a gateway city under pressure of the Ayyubid economic policy, the Alexandria al-Wāsiṭī saw had been deeply affected by another event of the preceding two centuries: the Crusades. Its location at the Mediterranean Sea made it one of the main maritime entrances into the Muslim world from Europe, and thus strategically important as a frontier city (thaghr) to both the Ayyubid sultans and their Mamluk successors. Famous in the West as Saladin, the first Ayyubid ruler Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (r. 570–589/1174–1193) visited the city several times and put in considerable effort to strengthen its fortifications against the European Crusaders. He had already dealt with two Crusader sieges at Alexandria before his ascension to the throne, and was thus bent on reconstructing its walls and towers, something which would continue well into the Baḥrī Mamluk era. With his eyes on an invasion from Europe, he also invested in the city’s religious resources, such as Sufi convents, madrasas, and mosques, in order to unify his kingdom under the banner of

10 The Cairo Geniza is a repository with centuries-old documents that were found in an old Cairene synagogue in the previous century. Because the variety of its religious and secular texts may contain the name(s) of God, it was stored so as to be preserved from desecration, cf. Abraham L. Udovitch, “Alexandria in the 11th and 12th Centuries. Letters and Documents of the Cairo Geniza Merchants: an Interim Balance Sheet,” in Alexandrie médiévale 2, ed. Christian Décobert (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 2013), p. 99.
11 Ibid. p. 101.
12 Frenkel, “Medieval Alexandria,” p. 34.
13 Martina Müller-Wiener, Eine Stadtgeschichte Alexandrias von 564/1169 bis in die Mitte des 9./15. Jahrhunderts: Verwaltung und innerstädtische Organisationsformen (Berlin: Schwarz, 1992), p. 2.
Sunni Islam.\textsuperscript{14} Despite Şalâh al-Dîn’s measures, instability soon increased after his passing, as the Ayyubid dynasty was not only facing foes from outside, but was also dealing with internal strife.\textsuperscript{15}

Although the Mamluk sultans likewise had their fair share of internal conflicts, and Egypt and Syria were under almost constant threat from both Crusader and Mongol invaders, the second half of the seventh/thirteenth century was a somewhat more stable period for Alexandria. The Mamluk sultan al-Malik al-Żâhir Rukn al-Dîn Baybars I (r. 658–676/1260–1277) was a brilliant strategist who, like Şalâh al-Dîn, effectively employed religion as a means to stabilize his realm. For instance, in 661/1262 he forbade taverns, wine presses, and hashish, and cleared the city of prostitutes.\textsuperscript{16} He thereby displayed his role as the upholder of proper religious morality and the protector of Islam, and simultaneously emphasized the city’s religious character. In 671/1272 there were new rumors of another imminent Christian attack on Alexandria which proved false in the end, but nevertheless motivated Baybars to provide it with extra reinforcements.\textsuperscript{17}

When al-Wāsiṭī entered the city, it was relatively peaceful under the rule of Sultan al-Malik al-Manṣūr Sayf al-Dîn Qalāwûn (r. 678–689/1279–1290). The latter understood very well that wars could not be won without revenues. Since the sultanate lacked its own commercial fleet, he sought to increase trade by making Alexandria attractive for European merchants. Alexandria thus remained the most important port of Egypt, as the place where Christian merchants from across the Mediterranean traded and ran their own funduqs, and where embassies of European powers arrived and embarked, and treatises with them were made.\textsuperscript{18} Christian merchants were well received and the city’s governor was instructed to provide their funduqs with protection at all times, in particular on Fridays when Alexandria’s Muslim population gathered for the jumu’a prayer. Qalāwûn, in turn, received taxes from them which, among other things, enabled him to invest in the Mamluk army.\textsuperscript{19} The favorable effects of Qalāwûn’s trade policy on Alexandria were felt well after his passing. For

\textsuperscript{14} Müller-Wiener, \textit{Eine Stadtgeschichte Alexandrias}, p. 17 and p. 263; Hofer, \textit{The Popularisation of Sufism}, p. 40.

\textsuperscript{15} Décobert, \textit{“Alexandrie au xiiie siècle,”} pp. 72–74.

\textsuperscript{16} Peter Thorau, \textit{The lion of Egypt: Sultan Baybars I and the Near East in the thirteenth century} (London: Longman, 1992), p. 196.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. p. 224.

\textsuperscript{18} European merchants would come from such places as Genoa, Venice, Pisa, Ragusa, Provence, and Catalonia. See for instance: Labib et al. \textit{“Alexandria,”} p. 18.

\textsuperscript{19} Linda S. Northrup, \textit{From slave to sultan: the career of al-Manṣūr Qalāwûn and the consolidation of Mamluk rule in Egypt and Syria} (678-689 A.H./1279-1290 A.D.) (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998), pp. 282–294.
instance, when the Nile was low in 694/1295 and pestilence and famine broke out in Egypt, Alexandria benefited from the grains it was able to import from across the Mediterranean, which was owed to the sultan’s good relations with Frankish lands. Yet, we must note that in the same year Sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir Nāṣir al-Dīn Muhammad (1st r. 693–694/1294–1295) sent his highest-ranking emir to Alexandria to deal with Frankish piracy around the coast. This shows that while al-Wāsiṭī certainly lived in a more or less stable Alexandria, the whole of the seventh/thirteenth century can nonetheless be characterized by continuous vigilance towards the possibility of Frankish raids or attacks.

1.2 Egypt’s Sufi Capital?

We have thus far seen that seventh-/thirteenth-century Alexandria saw a change in its economical and institutional functioning. In both instances this was connected to a larger scheme of developments in Egypt. Intertwined with this was another important development that can help us understand why al-Wāsiṭī may have been drawn to Alexandria. The current section will demonstrate that the religious landscape of the maritime city in his time had transformed considerably to the point that it was one of Egypt’s main Sufi centers, and perhaps for a certain period even its Sufi capital, thereby overshadowing Cairo.

Sufism already played an important role in the religious policy of the Ayyubids and continued to do so under the Mamluks. Besides the many examples that we have of sultans and emirs who, seemingly driven by genuine spiritual concerns, attached themselves to Sufi shaykhs or displayed deep reverence for pious figures, we can also discern a political dimension to their involvement with Sufism. In the context of Alexandria this can be seen for the first time under Šalāḥ al-Dīn who, as mentioned earlier, invested in the city’s religious resources as part of his agenda to propagate Sunni Islam as the Ayyubid

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20 Peter M. Holt, Early Mamluk diplomacy (1260–1290): treaties of Baybars and Qalâwûn with Christian rulers (Leiden: Brill, 1995), p. 28.
21 Donald P. Little, An introduction to Mamlûk historiography: an analysis of Arabic annalistic and biographical sources for the reign of al-Malik an-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalâ’în (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1970), p. 4.
22 Many scholars have pointed to the relations between officials and Sufis, see for instance: Geoffroy, Le Soufisme, p. 123–127; Müller-Wiener, Eine Stadtgeschichte Alexandrias, p. 24; Décobert, “Alexandrie au xiiie siècle,” p. 83 and p. 93; Alexander D. Knysj, Ibn ʻArabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 51; see also the references of Hofer concerning the spiritual concern of the Ayyubids and Mamluks, in: The Popularisation of Sufism, pp. 49–50, and 59.
ideology. One of these investments was the establishment and sponsoring of khānqāhs (sing. khānqāh, pl. khawāniq), the Persian word for Sufi convents. Both the Ayyubids and the Mamluks were favorably disposed towards organized Sufi groups and utilized the convents they sponsored to spread a sharīʿa-based spirituality that anchored Sufism in Sunni scripturalism. One would thus find that, besides the science of taṣawwuf, Islamic law would be taught at these khānqāhs.23

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23 Geoffroy, Le Soufisme, pp. 166–167; Éric Geoffroy, “Les milieux de la mystique musulmane à Alexandrie aux XIIe et XIVe siècles,” in Alexandrie médiévale 2, ed. Christian Décobert
At the same time, the Mongol conquest and the Reconquista in al-Andalus brought to Egypt an influx of foreigners from the east and the west of the Muslim world, among whom many were affiliated with Sufi shaykhs from their native lands, or were even themselves considered as spiritual masters. While this was certainly not Egypt’s earliest contact with Sufism, this did introduce new and different manifestations of the Sufi path. In Iraq, the emergence of the first true Sufi orders that traced their origins to a particular shaykh with a particular method was already a known phenomenon, as we have seen with the Rifaiyya in al-Wasiiti’s birthplace, for instance. However, it is not exactly clear when this trend started to take root in Egyptian soil. It may very well have been the importation of Iraqi Sufism that came with immigrants hailing from the still recently fallen eastern caliphate that instigated the rapid rise of distinct Sufi orders in Egypt from roughly the second half of the seventh/thirteenth century onwards. A good example of this is found in the Iraqi Rifai shaykh Abû al-Fath al-Wasiiti (d. ca. 632/1234), who settled in Alexandria to spread the Rifai order.

However, most newcomers to Alexandria did not come from the fallen caliphate, but from the Maghrib and al-Andalus. For centuries Alexandria had already been an important stop on the hajj pilgrimage route for Muslims coming from the west, some of whom would end up settling in the city. It is very well possible that its position as a frontier city during the Crusades also attracted especially western Sufis, driven by a pious sense of duty to defend the faith in jihâd against the Franks. This would certainly not have been an alien sentiment to the great numbers that were forced to flee from the Reconquista. It is thus claimed, for instance, that the Moroccan shaykh Abû al-Hasan al-Shadhili, who had settled in Alexandria in 642/1244, fought alongside his disciples during the 648/1250 battle of Manṣūra against the Crusaders. Besides

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(Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 2010), p. 170; Décobert, “Alexandrie au xiiie siècle,” pp. 83-84; Hofer, The Popularisation of Sufism, p. 41; Th. Emil Homerin, “Saving Muslim Souls: The Khânqâh and the Sufi Duty in Mamluk Lands,” MSR III (1999): p. 66.

24 Hofer, The Popularisation of Sufism, p. 250.
25 Th. Emil Homerin, “Sufis and their Detractors in Mamluk Egypt,” in: Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics, ed. Frederick de Jong & Bernd Radtke (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1999), p. 246, where the author also refers us to a list of Egyptian Sufis presented in Jalâl al-Dîn ‘Abd al-Rahmân b. Abî Bakr al-Suyûtî, Husn al-muhâdara fi târîkh Miṣr wa-al-Qâhira, ed. Muḥammad Abû al-Fâdîl Ibrâhîm (Cairo: Dâr ihyâ’ al-kutub al-‘arabiyya, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 511–530.
26 Geoffroy, “Les milieux,” p. 169.
27 Geoffroy states that it is related that even as al-Shadhili was nearly blind, he participated in the battle of Manṣūra. However, the two earliest biographies dedicated to the shaykh,
holy war, many North African and Andalusi seekers of the spiritual path were undoubtedly attracted to Alexandria because of the renowned masters of the western Sufi tradition that lived there. The school of the legendary Andalusi Sufi sage Abû Madyan Shu’ayb (d. 594/1198) entered Alexandria with the coming of his disciple, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Jazūlī (d. 595/1198), who spent the remainder of his life there.28 The well-known Risāla of Ṣafī al-Dīn Ibn Abī al-Manṣūr (d. 682/1283) provides biographical entries for eight of al-Jazūlī’s disciples he met in Alexandria, all of whom he considered masters in their own right.29 While he must not have met al-Jazūlī’s most famous pupil, Abū Muhammad Śahīb b. Yanṣarān al-Mājīrī (d. 631/1234), we know that he too stayed in Alexandria for twenty years and had a considerable following.30

The influence that these historical circumstances had on Alexandria’s religious sphere was visible on multiple levels. When it came to jurisprudence, the strong presence of Muslims from the west ensured the dominance of the Mālikī school, although there was also a visible Shāfi‘ī community. In theology, adherents of both madhhabs ascribed mostly to the Ash‘arī school.31 With regard to the science of taṣawwuf, we find that Alexandria’s Sufis were able to successfully form networks around numerous authoritative spiritual masters; and thanks to the government’s favorable stance towards Sufism, several of these shaykhs were well facilitated to spread their teachings. The above-mentioned Rifā‘ī shaykh al-Wāsiṭī was thus able to teach the Sufi way from Alexandria,

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28 Geoffroy, “Les milieux,” p. 171.
29 La risāla de Ṣafī al-Dīn Ibn Abī al-Manṣūr Ibn Ţāfir: biographies des maîtres spirituels connus par un cheikh égyptien du VIIe-XIIIe siècle, ed. & trans. Denis Gril (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire, 1986), pp. 99b–102b.
30 On al-Jazūlī, see Abû Ya‘qūb Yusuf al-Ṭūbih, al-Tashawwuf ilā rijāl al-taṣawwuf wa-akhbār Abî al-ʿAbbās al-Sabtī, ed. Aḥamd al-Tawfīq (Rabat: Manshūrāt kuliyyat al-ādāb, 1997), p.327. Al-Mājīrī was still alive when al-Ṭūbih (d. 617/1220) wrote the latter work, and is described by him as one of the greatest shaykhs of his time; see al-Tashawwuf, p. 41. On al-Mājīrī, see also: Khayr al-Ṭūbih al-Ziriklī, al-ʿIlām: qāmūs tarājim li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-al-nisas’ min al-ʿarab wa-al-mustaʿribīn wa-al-mustashriqīn (Beirut: Dār al-ʿilm al-malāyīn, 2002), vol. 3, p. 199.
31 Labib et al. “Alexandria,” p. 17.
dria's grand mosque, Jāmiʿ al-ʿAṭṭārīn, as was al-Shādhilī and his successor, Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Mursī, after him. Furthermore, the sultanate provided al-Jazūlī as well as al-Shādhilī with housing in towers of the city's northern walls, and the latter even appears to have been granted space in the citadel (qalʿa) to use as his Sufi convent. There are in fact many more examples of Sufi shaykhs who were in some way honored by Ayyubid and Mamluk officials. Al-Jazūlī's disciple Wajīh al-Dīn Ibn ʿAwf was the imam of Alexandria's main mosque and was visited by the Ayyubid sultan Ǧalāl al-Dīn. The famous Alexandrian Sufi Abū al-Qāsim al-Qabbārī (d. 662/1264) became so widely noted as a pious man that he was visited by the Mamluk sultan Baybars I and several Mamluk notables. All of this tells us that by the middle of the seventh/thirteenth century Alexandria had not only become a safe haven for Sufis, but in fact one of the most important – if not the most important – centers of Sufism in Egypt.

Another aspect of this development that we must touch upon briefly here is the change in Alexandria's sacred topography through the establishments of independent convents. Although by no means clear-cut, the period under consideration appears to have known something of a distinction between the "state-sponsored" khānqāh type convent and the self-sufficient ribāṭ or zāwiya type convent. We can thus observe that while the khānqāhs were certainly put to use by the city's Sufis, there were also several shaykhs who were able to start their own convents without any help or interference from the sultanate. The majority of these convents were located in Alexandria's northern quarter, just outside the city walls near the Bāb al-Baḥr. This is where one could find the ribāṭs of the Shādhilī Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Mursī, the Rifāʿī al-Wāsiṭī, and the convent of Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shāṭibī, the successor of the Alexandrian Sufi master

32 On the history of this mosque in Alexandria, see Behrens-Abouseif, “Topographie,” pp. 121–122. On Sufis teaching in the mosque, see: Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Kitāb Durrat al-asrār, p. 147; Geoffroy, “Les milieux,” p. 177.
33 Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Durrat al-asrār, p. 14 and p. 147.
34 Ibn Abī al-Manṣūr, La risāla, p. 102b.
35 Décobert, “Alexandrie au xiiie siècle,” p. 84.
36 It is noteworthy to point to the fact that out of the 155 Sufi authorities named by Ǧašī al-Dīn in his Risāla, at least 30 were from Alexandria or were based there for a considerable time. I owe this observation to Décobert, “Alexandrie au xiiie siècle,” p. 84, where he refers to Ibn Abī al-Manṣūr, La risāla, pp. 98–110.
37 Geoffroy, Le Soufisme, pp. 168–171, and Décobert, “Alexandrie au xiiie siècle,” p. 93; Hofer, The Popularisation of Sufism, p. 52. It must be noted that the classical sources are not always clear when it comes to both the terms used to refer to religious institutions and the roles allotted to them. On this, see also: Jonathan Porter Berkey, The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 48–50.
Ahmad Abū al-‘Abbās al-Ra’s (d. 615/1218). In many cases such enterprises would be financed with the help of a wealthy Alexandrian merchant who attached himself to a spiritual master. This was, for example, what enabled the construction of the mosque over al-Mursī’s grave in 706/1308, which was financed by one Zayn al-Dīn, who also paid for its muezzin, imam, and caretaker. It can thus be said that Alexandria’s trend of Sufism not only flourished intellectually through the presence of spiritual authorities and their massive following, but also in terms of topography. Christian Décobert has contended

38 There were other ribāṭs in Alexandria as well, such as that of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Aṣā’irī, that of al-Jazūlī, which was in the city’s wall near Kom el-Dikka, that of Ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥakkārī (d. 683/1284), and a khānqāh of Būlīk al-Muḥṣinī, founded by Sufis from the east, see: Décobert, “Alexandrie au xiie siècle,” pp. 85–87, and Ibn Abī al-Manṣūr, La risāla, p. 104b.

39 Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Durrat al-asrār, p. 157; for the date, see: Décobert, “Alexandrie au xiie siècle,” p. 85.
that this development in the field of Sufism owed much to Alexandria's marginalization which, as we have seen, was due to its economic stagnation and the constant Frankish threat. This, he believes, allowed for the establishment of convents as autonomous religious enterprises that were able to play a significant role on a local level. There thus appears to have been a link between the city's administrative decline and the emergence of a new form of religiosity. In other words, Alexandria's shift away from being a city known for trade actually facilitated its transformation into a city known for piety.40

This milieu provided exceptionally fertile grounds for the Shādhiliyya with its Maghribi roots to lay the foundations that would enable it to grow into one of the most influential Sufi orders of Islamic history. It was naturally not hard for Alexandria's considerable population of Muslims of western origin to embrace the path of the Maghribi shaykh al-Shādhili and his Andalusi successor, al-Mursī, so that the Shādhiliyya easily incorporated the school of Abū Madyan, which since its establishment had taken a prominent place among the city's Sufis.41 From the middle of the seventh/thirteenth century onwards the Shādhili ṭāʾifa spread rapidly across Egypt and beyond through the effort of its shaykhs, thus attracting spiritual seekers towards Alexandria from all over the Muslim world. At least until roughly the turn of the century, the time around which Tāj al-Dīn Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309) started preaching the Shādhili way from al-Azhar's pulpit in Cairo, Alexandria remained the home-base of the Shādhiliyya.42 The importance of Alexandria not only as a center of Sufism, but as the main center of the Shādhiliyya, is an important observation for us, as this may very well have played a decisive role in al-Wāsiṭī's choice to head for the maritime city. As the stronghold of the early Shādhilis, it would not have been difficult for a seeker on the Sufi path to end up in their convent in the city's northern quarter. With that in mind, we now return to the account of his journey, which will tell us firsthand what he encountered among them.

2 Enter the Shādhiliyya of Alexandria

The somewhat concise section in al-Wāsiṭī's autobiography on the Shādhili Sufis he accompanied may at first sight appear to reveal very little about their teachings and practices. It is nevertheless exactly in his brevity that we may distinguish what were, at least according to his observation, some of the

40 Décobert, “Alexandrie au xiiie siècle,” pp. 95–96.
41 Geoffroy, “Les milieux,” p. 172.
42 Ibid. p. 178.
prominent characteristics of Shādhili doctrine as preached in Alexandria somewhere during the final fifteen years of the seventh/thirteenth century.

As has been done in chapter 1, we will again aim to historicize and expound upon al-Wāṣītī's account through an in-depth study of other primary sources that make mention of the early Shādhiliyya. The most notable of these are listed below:

- The majority of the published works of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī, the first shaykh to write books on Sufism according to the Shādhili way. These are: his Kitāb al-ḥikam, a collection of spiritual aphorisms written before 686/1287, when al-Mursī was still alive; Kitāb al-tanwīr fī isqāṭ al-tadbīr, finished in 695/1296 according to Brockelmann, and perhaps his clearest elucidation of Shādhili doctrine; Laṭāʾif al-minan fī manāqib al-Shaykh Abī al-Abbās al-Mursī wa-shaykhihi al-Shādhili Abī al-Ḥasan, a biographical work concerned mostly with his own shaykh, al-Mursī, but also with al-Shādhili. It must have been composed after Kitāb al-tanwīr, from which it quotes; ʿUnwān al-tawfīq fī ādāb al-ṭarīq, a commentary on a poem about the Sufi way by Abū Madyan; Miṣfāh al-falāḥ wa-miṣbāḥ al-arwāḥ fī dhikr Allāh al-Karīm al-Fattāḥ, a small volume concerned with the remembrance of God; and al-Qaṣd al-mujarrad fī maʿrifat al-ism al-mufrad, about the divine names and attributes of God and their purpose in the spiritual way. I must point out that some scholars have doubted Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s authorship of the latter two works. However, since I have found that both works have overlapping passages, and both appear to be consistent with his other writings, I see no reason to doubt their authenticity. Finally, there are also let-

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43 According to Victor Danner, Ibn ‘Aṭāʾillāh’s Ṣūfī Aphorisms (Kitāb al-Ḥikam) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), p. 15.
44 Carl Brockelmann, Geschichte der arabischen litteratur (Leiden: Brill, 1996), vol. 2, p. 143.
45 Al-Iskandarī, Laṭāʾif al-minan, p. 135.
46 For doubts concerning their authenticity, see for instance: al-Ziriklī, al-Aʿlām, vol. 1, p. 222 (he only mentions Miṣfāh), and Hofer, The Popularisation of Sufism, p. 130–131. The latter’s arguments are that both works contain no references to Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s shaykhs, that they are not consistent with his style or the content of his other known writings, and that early biographies do not mention them. As for the first argument, Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s Hikam also contains no references to his shaykhs but is known to be authentic. As for the second argument, it is striking that both al-Qaṣd and Miṣfāh have an almost identical description of the types of dhikr that can be done; compare al-Qaṣd al-mujarrad fī maʿrifat al-ism al-mufrad, ed. Khālid Muhammad Khamīs (Cairo: Maktabat al-khānjī, 2008), p. 72 with Miṣfāh al-falāḥ wa-miṣbāḥ al-arwāḥ: fī dhikr Allāh al-karīm al-fattāḥ, ed. Muhammad Abd al-Salam Ibrāhim (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2005), pp. 30–33. Furthermore, there seems to be an overlap between al-Qaṣd, p. 46 and Laṭāʾif al-minan, pp. 137–138, and between al-Qaṣd, p. 48 and the Hikam, see: Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh (m. 709/1309) et la naissance de la confrérie šādilite / Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh (709/1309) wa-nashʿat al-ṭarīqa al-Shādhiliyya, ed. &
ters by Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh and by anonymous pupils of his which have been consulted.

- Kitāb Durrat al-asrār wa-tuḥfat al-ābrār by the Tunisian Shādhilī Sufi Muḥammad b. Abī al-Qāsim Ibn al-Šabbāgh (d. 720/1320). After Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s Laṭāʾif al-minan, this is the earliest biography of al-Shādhilī. It also contains a chapter with sayings of other Shādhilī affiliates.

- Zīnat al-nawāẓir wa-tuḥfat al-khawāṭir by Jamāl al-Dīn Rāfiʿ b. Muḥammad b. Shāfiʿ al-Šumaydī (d. 718/1319). This is a collection of discourses that Rāfiʿ heard directly from Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh during his classes on Sufism in Cairo.47

- I have also made abundant use of biographical dictionaries of the ṭabaqāt-genre, which need not all be mentioned here. Of particular importance have been three authors who were known to have been in contact with Shādhilī affiliates: ‘Afīf al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh b. Asʿad al-Yāfiʿī (d. 768/1367), whose profound respect for the Shādhilīyya is evident;48 Sirāj al-Dīn ‘Umar Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/1402), who was invested with the Shādhilī Sufi cloak (khīrqa) by Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s brother, Sharaf al-Dīn Abū al-Barakāt Muḥammad;49 and ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī (d. 973/1565), who was sympathetic to the Shādhilīyya.50

In line with the structure of chapter 1, I have again identified three general themes to systematically study al-Wāsiṭī’s account. We will start by scrutinizing what can be said of the Shādhilī ṭāʾifa in al-Wāsiṭī’s epoch in terms of its

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47 Jamāl al-Dīn Rāfiʿ b. Muḥammad b. Shāfiʿ al-Šumaydī, Zīnat al-nawāẓir wa-tuḥfat al-khawāṭir, ed. Yusuf Ahmad (Beirut: Kitāb nāshīrūn, 2013), p. 31.

48 Al-Yāfiʿī repeatedly praises al-Shādhilī and his affiliates in his Mirʿāt and refers to them as shaykhs whose status as friends of God is undisputed; see for instance: vol. 2, p. 13 where he calls al-Shādhilī a qutb, and vol. 3, p. 142 where he recognizes his friendship with God.

49 This occurred in Alexandria, see: Sirāj al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar Ibn al-Mulaqqin, Ṭabaqāt al-awliyāʾ, ed. Nūr al-Dīn Sharībah (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1994), p. 501.

50 As observed by Winter, Society and Religion, p. 72.
network and formation as a distinct order; the second theme will be the Sufi doctrine that was prevalent among its followers; the final section will examine the success of the Shādhilīs and how this relates to the decision of our Iraqi Sufi to ultimately distance himself from them.

2.1 The Network of the Early Shādhiliyya

I have mentioned earlier that while the Rifāʿiyya could already rightfully be called a Sufi order during al-Wāsiṭī’s lifetime, it is not exactly clear when in the Egyptian Mamluk context Sufi groups became distinct orders, set up around the person and teachings of a particular shaykh. And even when we can clearly speak of a Sufi order proper, its exact moment of conception is in most cases difficult to ascertain, as the eponymous founder in all likelihood did not actually set it up himself. Rather, what became a Sufi order was likely construed by later followers who began to define the borders of their identity and behavior as a Sufi group, which they then traced back this eponymous shaykh. It is this gap in our understanding of medieval Sufism that has recently triggered Nathan Hofer to legitimately question what he calls the “institutionalization” of the early Shādhiliyya.51

Hofer argues that it is not until the early eight/fourteenth century that we find the first traces of al-Shādhilī’s identity and method as the focal point for a group of Sufis to trace their authority back to. This, he holds, indicates that it must have taken nearly fifty years after the death of its eponymous founder before an actual institutionalized ṭāʾifa crystalized.52 He views Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandari’s hagiography Laṭāʾif al-minan as a crucial basis from which Shādhili Sufism as a distinct identity was construed:

By providing his readers with a narrative model for their devotions and doctrines, al-Iskandari formulated the contours of what it meant to follow al-Shādhilī and be a Shādhilī Sufi. Once a coherent model was in place, the subsequent formalisation of that model – what I call the ‘institutionalised identity’ of al-Shādhilī – became possible as Sufis began to narrate and embody the doctrines and practices implicit in the model.53

51 Hofer, The Popularisation of Sufism, pp. 16–18, where he defines institutations as (1) social (generated and preserved through relations in a group); (2) normative (constraining and enabling the group’s behavior); (3) performative (the learned behaviours linked to a specific language of a group); (4) objective (for the group’s members); and (5) dynamic (and thus subject to change).
52 Ibid. pp. 111–112.
53 Ibid. p. 113.
By disseminating an idealized version of al-Shādhilī’s life, doctrine, and praxis, Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh was, in a sense, the architect of this institutionalized Shādhili identity. Hofer suspects that, in doing so, Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh simultaneously cemented his own career as the new leader of the Shādhili ṭāʾifa. He would thus have written Laṭāʾif al-minan for two reasons: first, to legitimize the role of his own master, al-Mursī, as the spiritual successor to al-Shādhili; and, second, to legitimize his own role as the spiritual successor of al-Mursī and spokesperson of the Shādhiliyya after him.\(^{54}\)

The implication of Hofer’s theory is that when al-Wāsiṭī entered a master–disciple relationship of ṣuḥba under one of al-Mursī’s students not long after 686/1287, he did not in fact become part of a distinct Sufi ṭāʾifa with its own distinct doctrine. Because, as we shall see, al-Wāsiṭī’s autobiography gives the impression that this notion is incorrect, I have gone through the rich source material on the Shādhiliyya discussed above to see whether his account can be substantiated. The fruits of this labor are presented in the current section. I will argue that, at least in the final fifteen years of the seventh/thirteenth century, there was already a network of shaykhs that formed a distinct Sufi group, whose identity was inseparably linked to the person of al-Shādhili via al-Mursi and which could justly be called a Sufi ṭāʾifa.

Al-Wāsiṭī makes it very clear that what he found in Alexandria was a ṭāʾifa that identified itself with the name of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhili. When we return to where we left off in the previous chapter with the account of his journey, expressing his grief at the several disappointments he experienced in Iraq, he goes on to write: “But God (T) was kind to me, for I met a group (ṭāʾifa) in Alexandria who recognized my goal and my search, so that I found a little bit of intimacy (baʿḍ al-uns) among them.”\(^{55}\)

Interestingly, his autobiography does not once state the name of this ṭāʾifa, nor of any of its members. It could be that he did so out of reverence for them, and in particular for his own shaykh in the Shādhili way, as his account does go on to denounce certain issues that he found problematic in their approach to Sufism. Perhaps he felt uncomfortable attaching the names of people he still greatly respected to his criticism. We can nevertheless be sure that he is referring to the Shādhiliyya when he speaks of this Alexandrian ṭāʾifa, not only thanks to Ibn Rajab’s entry quoted at the beginning of the present chapter, but also because al-Wāsiṭī himself explicitly affirms that he was involved with them in two other works. After describing his time among the Baghdadi Sufis in his Qāʿida fī āsnaf al-ta⁠ʾalluh, he says that he subsequently “turned to the

\(^{54}\) Ibid. pp. 113–114.

\(^{55}\) Al-Wāsiṭī, Riḥla, pp. 33.
way (\textit{ṭarīq}) of the Shādhiliyya."\textsuperscript{56} And in a letter to one shaykh Aḥmad al-Maghribī we find him refuting the notion that a spiritual taste (\textit{dhawq}) or unveiling (\textit{kashf}) is by definition authentic, a view that was apparently upheld by the Shādhilīs: “I have only heard this statement or something similar to it from the group (\textit{ṭāʾifa}) of the shaykh, the knower (\textit{ārif}), Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī.”\textsuperscript{57}

What can be said about this \textit{ṭāʾifa} based on other primary sources? Granted, it is difficult to say much about the early Shādhiliyya, first, because there is hardly any material from its own adherents that predates the works of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh and, second, because biographical sources often make no mention at all of Sufi affiliation – and when they do, the information is often very meagre. The modern-day image of the early \textit{ṭāʾifa} is that the line of its shaykhs started with al-Shādhilī, followed by al-Mursī, and that Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh was its third spiritual leader. This image neglects that while Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh certainly played a crucial role in the \textit{ṭāʾifa} as one of its most significant representatives in Cairo and the first of its shaykhs to compose works on Sufism, there were several other disciples of al-Mursī who were probably just as important in advertising the Shādhili way. A noteworthy indication of this is found in a poem by al-Yāfiʿī, wherein he eulogizes a hundred Sufi shaykhs and reserves several verses for Shādhili affiliates. After praising al-Shādhili and al-Mursī, he continues as follows:

Through [the guidance of al-Mursī] al-Iṣbahānī became the star (\textit{naJim}) of their\textsuperscript{58} sky,
And the moon of their guidance – their sword is a helper for those who possess little.
And esteemed was the servant Yāqūt, the ruby (\textit{yāqūt}) around their neck,
By being firm upon the excellence of the spiritual way (\textit{sulūk}).
And to Ibn ‘Aṭā’ they granted the banner of divine friendship (\textit{wilāya}),
And for illness [they granted him] a cure that dispels corruption
With which Dāwūd was treated, until this servant was cured,
And thus became a remedy for the calamity of disobedience.
And Marjānī, who was adorned with the pearls (\textit{marjān}) of their ocean,
Dressed in garment embellished with the most splendid subtleties.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{56} Al-Wāsiṭī, \textit{Qāʿida fī aṣnāf al-ta⁠ʾalluh}, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{57} Al-Wāsiṭī, \textit{Risālatuhu ilā al-shaykh Aḥmad al-Maghribī}, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{58} I have translated the suffix “\textit{hā}” recurring throughout the quoted verses as “their.” It must be noted that since al-Yāfiʿī does not present us with the complete poem, it is not possible to establish what he is referring to.
\textsuperscript{59} Al-Yāfiʿī, \textit{Mīrāt}, vol. 4, p 175.
Composed by a scholar who was a contemporary to several of the masters who are named, this poem is significant in that it attests to the existence of a network of shaykhs who during their respective lifetimes must have all enjoyed a position of authority. It will be useful to have a closer look at their background, and to add several other figures who are mentioned in the sources as Shādhili affiliates in order to see what can be said about the way they were related to one another.

The first verse quoted from al-Yāfiʿī’s poem is clearly a reference to the person who was al-Wāsīṭī’s own Shādhili shaykh in Alexandria: the Persian Najm al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Iṣbahānī (or Iṣfahānī). The most important source on him is al-Yāfiʿī, who had met him in Mecca and describes him as having been a handsome man with a long beard and an awe-inspiring appearance. Born in 643/1245 in current-day Iran, Najm al-Dīn probably lived in Shiraz for some time, where he accompanied a Sufi guide by the name of Abū ‘Ali Barghash al-Shirāzī. It may have been this shaykh who told him to go to Egypt, where he would meet the spiritual axis (quṭb) of his time. A hagiographic tale describes that Najm al-Dīn was captured by bandits (or Mongols, in another version) during his journey to Egypt, but was able to escape after he was freed by a shaykh who miraculously appeared to him when he recited a poem about his hazardous situation. Once Najm al-Dīn arrived in Alexandria and was directed towards al-Mursī by some of his followers, he discovered that it was in fact al-Mursī who had freed him from his captivity. From that moment on he remained a pupil of al-Mursī until his shaykh’s passing in 686/1287. Several years before the turn of the century, Najm al-Dīn left Alexandria for good to spend the remainder of his life in Mecca, where he became the main representative of the Shādhiliyya. He seems to have enjoyed some status there as

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60 Al-Dhahabi, Tārikh, vol. 48, p. 274, note that the editions of al-Dhahabī’s Dhayl, p. 236 and al-ʿAskalānī’s al-Durar al-Kāmina, vol. 3, p. 86 both erroneously state that Najm al-Dīn accompanied (ṣaḥība) al-Wāsīṭī.
61 Al-Yāfiʿī, Mīrāt, vol. 4, p. 198.
62 Al-Ṣumaydī, Zīnat al-nawāẓir, p. 107.
63 Al-Yāfiʿī, Mīrāt, vol. 4, p. 198, and al-Iskandārī, Laṭāʾif al-minān, p. 69. Note that Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh relates a completely different story: he states that, in search of the quṭb, Najm al-Dīn took a boat that broke down and was miraculously saved from the water by al-Mursī; see: Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Durrat al-asrār, p. 157.
64 Najm al-Dīn must already have been in Mecca several years before 699/1299, since that is the year Abū Muhammad al-Marjānī passed away in Tunis, and he is said to have met with him in the sanctuary, see: Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Durrat al-asrār, p. 157. See also: al-Ṣafadī, al-Wāfi, vol. 17, pp. 321–322; Al-Yāfiʿī, Mīrāt, vol. 4, p. 199; al-Iskandārī, Laṭāʾif al-minān, p. 68; al-ʿAskalānī, al-Durar al-kāmina, vol. 3, p. 86; al-Dhahabī, Tārikh, vol. 48, p. 274; Ibn al-Mulaqqīn, Ṭabaqāt al-awliyāʾ, p. 459.
a spiritual master, as it is said that all the great shaykhs who arrived in the holy city would meet with him. Although the sources make no mention of him having had disciples, the fact that al-Wāsiṭī took him as his master suggests that he was already a full-fledged shaykh of tarbiya, able to teach the Sufi way well before he left Alexandria for the holy precinct.

The next verse in al-Yāfiʿī’s poem refers to Yāqūt b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥabashi (d. 732/1331), who like Najm al-Dīn had been a disciple of al-Mursī. Very little is known of him, but it is certain that he became the foremost Shādhili shaykh in Alexandria after the passing of his master. He must therefore have had a considerable following, although few examples are mentioned in biographical literature. Among them we find Ḥasan (or Ḥusayn) al-Khabbāz (d. 791/1389) and Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn al-Labbān (d. 749/1348). It is not known whether these two disciples knew one another, but they certainly had several things in common. Both were Shāfiʿīs, both married one of Yāqūt’s daughters, and both represented the Shādhiliyya in Cairo. The former, al-Khabbāz, established a convent of his own in the city’s vicinity and is mentioned as having invested disciples with the Shādhili Sufi cloak (khirqa) on the authority of his shaykh, Yāqūt.

The second disciple, the Shāfiʿī jurist Ibn al-Labbān, reportedly taught the Shādhili way from the Cairene Mosque of ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ.

The next two verses in al-Yāfiʿī’s poem are reserved for Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh and his most celebrated disciple, the Mālikī jurist Sharaf al-Dīn Dāwūd Ibn Bākhilā (or

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65 Al-Yāfiʿī, Miḥrāt, vol. 4, p. 198; al-Ṣafadī calls him “the shaykh of the holy precinct (al-ḥaram),” cf. al-Wāfi, vol. 17, p. 321.
66 While Yāqūt is mentioned in many biographical dictionaries, the entries on him are all meager. Al-Dhahabi refers to him as “the renunciant of Alexandria (zāhid al-Iskandariyya),” cf. al-Dhahabi, al-Ibar, vol. 4, p. 93. His fame in Alexandria is also attested to by Ibn Baṭṭūta, who was initiated by him, cf. Riḥla, vol. 1, p. 187. As for the entries on Yāqūt, see: Ibn al-Mulaqqin, Ṭabaqāt al-awliyāʾ, pp. 478-479; al-Yāfiʿī, Miḥrāt, vol. 4, p. 213; Taqi al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī, al-Sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-ʿArīf wa-ar-Ẓāhir, vol. 9, p. 295.
67 Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsiʿ (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmīyya, 1997), vol. 3, pp. 161–162; al-Suyūṭī, Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara, vol. 1, p. 525; Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Ṭabāqāt al-kubrā, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAlīm Khān (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmīyya, 1986), vol. 3, pp. 52–54; Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Ṭabāqāt al-kubrā, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAlīm Khān (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmīyya, 1986), vol. 3, pp. 52–54; Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Ṭabāqāt al-kubrā, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAlīm Khān (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmīyya, 1986), vol. 3, pp. 52–54.
Mākhilā) al-Iskandari (d. 733/1332). Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, a native Alexandrian, had already migrated to Cairo while al-Mursī was still alive, and would eventually become the primary representative of the Shādhiliyya there. It is noteworthy that, according to al-Sha’rānī, Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh became the pupil (tālīmīdh) of Yāqūt once al-Mursī had passed away, which suggests that it was Yāqūt who was considered the main shaykh of the ṭā’ifa after al-Mursī, and not Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh. It is likely that Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh traveled regularly through Egypt as both al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī had done before him, probably to spread the Shādhili way and stay in touch with the several Shādhili fractions that were stationed in other cities. He would surely have passed by Alexandria during such trips which, together with his correspondence via letters, preserved his link with the Shādhili capital. As Alexandrian disciples of al-Mursī, there is no doubt that Yāqūt, Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, and Najm al-Dīn knew one another. Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh viewed his two colleagues as knowers of God, and his own pupil, the aforementioned Rāfi’, relates that both Yāqūt and Najm al-Dīn testified that Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh is a quṭb. As for Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s student Ibn Bākhilā, while his role as a shaykh in the ṭā’ifa remains unclear due to a scarcity of biographical information, we do know that he lived and died in Alexandria as a contemporary of Yāqūt.

Most pupils of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh would naturally have lived in Cairo, however. Noteworthy are two Cairene disciples who also appear to have been connected in some way to important Shādhili figures of Alexandria. The first, Rāfi’, would

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69 Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh was already in Cairo in 684/1285, as attested to by a poem he sent from there to Makīn al-Dīn al-Asmar in Alexandria, see: Tāj al-Dīn Ahmad Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandari, *Min kalām sayyidī al-muṣannif wa-inshādihi wa-qasā’idihi*, MS. Or. 329(2), Leiden University, fol. 68b.

70 Al-Sha’rānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 41.

71 For Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s correspondence with Alexandria, see his *Tartīb al-sulūk, wa-yalīhā Risāla fi adab al-ʿilm*, ed. Khalīd Zahrī (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2006), p. 45; see also footnote 69. According to al-Ghunaymī, he sent the letter contained therein in 694/1295, cf. al-Ghunaymī, Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, p. 101. For Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s travels, see the letter by one of his pupils: Anon, *Risāla li-baʿḍ fuqarā’ sayyidī al-shaykh Tāj al-Dīn Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh raḍī Allāh ‘anhu*, MS. Or. 329(7b), Leiden University, fol. 94b-95a; here we find mention of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh having travelled to Alexandria and Damiette in 707/1307. See also: al-Iskandari, *Laṭāʾif al-minan*, p. 148, where we find that he may have met with Sultan al-Malik al-Mansūr ʿUṣūs al-Dīn Lājīn in Alexandria, which means that he must have visited the city before 698/1299, the year in which the sultan died.

72 Al-Iskandari, *Laṭāʾif al-minan*, pp. 75-76, and al-Ṣumayyid, *Zinat al-nawāziir*, p. 22.

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73 Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyāʾ*, pp. 577–578; Muhammad b. Muhammad Makhlūf, *Shajarat al-nūr al-zakīyya fi ṭabaqāt al-Mālikīyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Majīd Khayālī (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2003), vol. 1, p. 293; al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, vol. 2, p. 226; ʿIsmāʿīl Pāshā al-Baghdādī al-Bābānī, *Hadiyyat al-ʿārifīn: asmāʾ al-muʾallīfīn wa-ṭā’ūr al-muṣannīfīn* (Istanbul: Wikālat al-Maʿārif, 1951), vol. 1, pp. 360–361.
surely have entered the Shādhili network when he studied Qur’anic recitation under the Shāfi‘ī jurist Makīn al-Dīn al-Asmar al-Lakhmī (d. 692/1293), a direct disciple of al-Shādhili. Although I found no mention of him having met Yāqūt or Najm al-Dīn, he was clearly aware of their position in the Shādhiliyya when he states about them that “there is no doubt about their friendship [with God] (wilāya) and the greatness of their rank (sha⁠ʾn).” Besides Rāfī’, we find that Ibn ’Aṭā‘ Allāh’s disciple Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-ʿAbbās Ḩāmid Ibn Maylaq (or Malyaq) (d. 749/1349) must have been in contact with shaykh Yāqūt as well.

The final verse of al-Yāfiʿī’s poem refers to ʿAbd Allāh Abū Muḥammad al-Marjānī (d. 699/1299), a Mālikī jurist and Sufi shaykh who lived in Alexandria and Cairo and eventually moved to Tunis, where he passed away. The fact that Ibn ’Aṭā‘ Allāh and Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh both quote from him attests to his connection with the Shādhiliyya, although its exact nature remains unclear. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh relates that al-Marjānī met with Najm al-Dīn when he was in Mecca, which shows once more that there was contact between shaykhs who were in some way associated with the Shādhili network, even if there was a considerable geographical distance between them.

There are a few other shaykhs not mentioned in the poem that deserve to be added to the current list for the sake of our knowledge of the Shādhili network. First is the son of al-Shādhili, Shihāb al-Dīn Ḥāmid Ibn Abī al-Ḥasan, who appears to have made a name for himself as a Shādhili master in Alexandria. A letter that he wrote to a disciple of his in Giza, southwest of Cairo, proves that he had followers outside of Alexandria as well. That he also had a bond with al-Mursī is affirmed in a poem by the latter in praise of Shihāb al-Dīn,
FIGURE 10 Diagram of the Shādhilī network. Compiled by the author. Below the name of each individual is the date of his passing, followed by the city/cities in which he was primarily stationed, followed by his madhhab-affiliation, if known.
quoted by Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh.80 Furthermore, the Sufi shaykh Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muhammad al-Murshidi (d. 737/1337) had been a disciple of al-Mursī and also seems to have known Najm al-Dīn. He eventually started his own convent east of Alexandria, in a village currently known as Munyat al-Murshid.81 The Alexandrian Shāḥī jurist Zaki al-Dīn Abū Bakr Ibn ‘Arrām al-Aswānī (d. 691/1292) had been a disciple of al-Shādhilī and married one of his daughters. According to Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh’s <i>Laṭāʾif al-minan</i>, he also personally knew al-Mursī.82 The fact that both his sons, Bahāʾ al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn ‘Arrām al-Aswānī (d. 720/1320) and ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Arrām al-Aswānī (d. 721/1321), subsequently became disciples of al-Mursī may indicate that there was already an awareness of a Shādhili ‘Sufi genealogy’ during their lifetimes. It can hardly be a coincidence that we have here two sons who followed the successor of their father’s shaykh in <i>taṣawwuf</i>.83 Finally, we find that the otherwise unknown Mālikī jurist Khalīfa Ibn ‘Atiyya (d. 735/1335) is mentioned as a disciple of al-Mursī, too.84

In spite of the several blanks in our picture of the network of Shādhilī affiliates, the above enumeration enables us to make a diagram (as depicted on page 92) based on which several relevant observations can be made. First, almost all the individuals we have identified as affiliates of the Shādhiliyya were connected to each other by being part of the Shādhilī chain of <i>ṣuḥba</i>, which signifies their master–disciple relationship with one of the shaykhs in the <i>tāʾifa</i>’s network. Second, the diagram shows that there does not appear to have been one clear-cut leader of the Shādhiliyya after al-Mursī. Instead, we find that each city with a Shādhili community could have one or even several local shaykhs, who each had disciples of their own. Alexandria in particular had several shaykhs who were apparently authorized to train their own pupils in the Shādhili way. This, of course, is not strange in view of the fact that the <i>tāʾifa</i> was rapidly gaining followers with the rise of its popularity, which is also reflected in the sudden shift away from Alexandria after the death of al-Mursī. Where the majority of the first and second generation Shādhilīs were, at least initially, naturally based in Alexandria, the home-base of al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī, it is seen that many of the <i>tāʾifa</i>’s major figures of the generation after that were

80 Ibn al-Sabbāgh, <i>Durrat al-asrār</i>, pp. 155–156.
81 Al-Yāfiʿī, <i>Mirāt</i>, for al-Mursī being his shaykh: vol. 4, p. 221, for his connection to Najm al-Dīn: vol. 4, p. 198. See also: al-Suyūṭī, <i>Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara</i>, vol. 1, p. 525; al-Ṣafadī, <i>al-Wāfī</i>, vol. 3, pp. 294–295.
82 Al-Iskandarī, <i>Laṭāʾif al-minan</i>, pp. 65 and 84.
83 For Abū Bakr, see: Ibn al-Mulaqqin, <i>Ṭabaqāt al-awliyāʾ</i>, p. 485; for Aḥmad, see: al-Ṣafadī, <i>al-Wāfī</i>, vol. 6, p. 168, and Ibn al-Mulaqqin, <i>Ṭabaqāt al-awliyāʾ</i>, p. 514; for ‘Abd Allāh, see: al-Ṣafadī, <i>al-Wāfī</i>, vol. 17, p. 50.
84 Ibn al-Mulaqqin, <i>Ṭabaqāt al-awliyāʾ</i>, p. 552.
based in Cairo. Third, we have seen indications in our sources that several shaykhs of the generations after al-Mursī were in contact with each other, surely on the basis of their affiliation with the Shādhiliyya. There was correspondence via letters and some shaykhs would travel through Egypt to visit other Shādhili fractions. Some of the affiliates, such as al-Marjānī and al-Murshidi, seemingly operated independently of the ṭāʾifa, but may have still maintained a connection of some sort with its shaykhs. Last but certainly not least, what is particularly striking is that the diagram shows very clearly that every chain of affiliates from al-Wāsiṭī’s generation goes back exclusively to al-Mursī, who can thus be seen as the common link in the ṭāʾifa. It is this final observation that will be of great significance to our further study of al-Wāsiṭī’s account below.

We have thus far seen that al-Wāsiṭī obviously viewed the Shādhiliyya as a Sufi ṭāʾifa. As such, I have tried to give an overview of what the network of this ṭāʾifa looked like based on other primary sources. While the observations we have thus far made provide some grounds to assume that there indeed existed a network of Shādhili affiliates in Egypt and beyond that operated as a distinct Sufi group at the time of al-Wāsiṭī’s initiation by Najm al-Dīn, the issue is not yet settled. It will therefore be useful to explore whether there existed something of a common Sufi doctrine within this network of shaykhs. If the teachings al-Wāsiṭī relates from Najm al-Dīn correspond to what is found in the earliest Shādhili writings, most notably those of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, this would be a strong indication that a distinct Sufi doctrine existed among the Shādhilis, the common link of which would have been al-Mursī, in whom all lines of ṣuḥba come together. This would then mean that it is possible to locate the point at which the Shādhiliyya existed as a distinct Sufi ṭāʾifa as early as al-Mursī. I will come back to this in the conclusion to the section that now follows, in which we will examine what can be said about the teachings of the Shādhiliyya at the time of our Iraqi Sufi’s stay in Alexandria.

2.2 The Doctrine of the Early Shādhiliyya

The difficulty with al-Wāsiṭī’s description of the Shādhilis in his autobiography is that it comes across in itself as an insignificant sequence of spiritual qualities he claims to have witnessed among them. It is only after careful consideration and comparison with other writings of al-Wāsiṭī that one will find that several passages actually contain references to the Sufi doctrine that he identified as characteristic of the ṭāʾifa. He says, for instance:

One of them considers his own self-direction (tadbīr) and choice (ikhti-yār) to be among the greatest sins, so that he happily welcomes his Lord’s choice and trusts in it, relying on whatever his Lord has designated in His
pre-eternity (fi azalihi) according to His divine wisdom and mercy. This comes to the point that it seems as if this one is in the presence of his Lord, seeing Him with the vision of his heart (yarâhu ʿiyān au bi-qalbihi). The signs of [God’s] majesty, love, and magnificence shine on his face and he submits to His decree (hukm). I found such signs among them and in their movements, their stillness, and the fluctuations of their hearts (taqallubât).  

As I have pointed out before, al-Wâsiṭī’s autobiography makes no mention of names in the section on the Shâdhiliyya. Nonetheless, we can almost be certain that the above quote is actually a direct description of Najm al-Dîn, his own Shâdhili mentor in Alexandria. In Qâ’ida fi al-tajrîd he provides us with the only explicit reference to his shaykh’s teachings that I have come across in his writings, and it clearly overlaps with the above quote:

Shaykh Najm al-Dîn – may God renew his blessing – told me some words that summarize the beginnings and the endings [of the spiritual way], which I only understood after fifteen years. I thus came to know that he never held back any good council from me. He said: “Your reflection on what has passed and your attempt to direct (tadbîruka) what is to come distract you from the state you are in at the moment (al-hâl fi al-waqt). This requires [that you] perfect piety (taqwâ) in your inward being and become aware of your passing thoughts (khawâṭir) out of shame before God (T), which is the beginning of the path of those who are drawn near [to Him] (al-muqarrabîn).”

He also told me something that comes down to the following: “God was and there was nothing with Him (kâna Allâh wa-mâ shayʾ maʿahu), so it is necessary for man that his heart becomes absent in the meaning [of these words].”

We find a very similar portrayal of Shâdhili teachings in al-Wâsiṭī’s Qâ’ida fi aṣnâf al-taʾalluh, where he states that it is characteristic of the order to commence with the spiritual path by renouncing one’s choice (ikhtiyâr) and desire (irâda), and attaching oneself to al-Shâdhili: “Then will the ecstatic (wâjid) find a spiritual taste (dhawq) through the divine attribute of antiquity (sifat al-qidam), since God was and there was nothing with Him, so that he is about to become veiled from all that is not [God] of created things.”

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85 Al-Wâsiṭī, Riḥla, p. 34.
86 Al-Wâsiṭī, Qâ’ida fi al-tajrîd, p. 256
87 Al-Wâsiṭī, Qâ’ida fi aṣnâf al-taʾalluh, p. 151.
What is especially noticeable about the way al-Wāsiṭī summarizes Shādhilī doctrine in these citations is how it seems to be a very condensed form of several core teachings found in the earliest Shādhilī writings, most notably those of Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh. It is, therefore, first and foremost through Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh that we can appreciate the true significance of al-Wāsiṭī’s remarks here.

The first thing that we may recognize as a distinct aspect of Shādhilī doctrine is the stress that is laid on desisting from any claim to self-direction (tadbīr), choice (ikhtiyār), or desire (irāda or shahwa), since it is ultimately God who controls all things. Now, it can be no coincidence that Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh starts his Ḥikam with several aphorisms that all deal with this in some way:

[1] One of the signs of relying on one’s own deeds is the loss of hope when a downfall occurs. ... [3] Preceding intentions cannot pierce the walls of predestined decrees (aqdār). [4] Free yourself from self-direction (tadbīr), for that which Someone Else has carried out on your behalf you must not yourself undertake to do. [5] Your striving for what has already been guaranteed to you, and your neglectfulness of what is demanded of you, are a proof that your spiritual insight (baṣīra) is clouded.

As the title indicates, this is also the main concern of Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh’s Kitāb al-tanwīr fi isqāṭ al-tadbīr, which we may render as ‘the Book of Illumination through the Elimination of Self-Direction.’ In its introduction, Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh states that whoever seeks to arrive unto God (al-wuṣūl ilā Allāh) must necessarily purify himself of having self-direction. It is worthwhile noting that Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh and Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh relate very similar words from al-Shādhilī, the kernel of which is that living in this world with the assumption that you are the one directing your acts is one of the things that will cut you off from arrival (wuṣla). The gravity of this matter is such that Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh states in his Kitāb al-tanwīr that the truest miracle (karāma) of the friend of God is when he lives by tafwīḍ, which is to entrust all affairs to God, since human beings cannot have any influence on the divine decree. Besides several other writings of Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh that expound such teachings, it appears from Rāfiʿ’s notes that he actively advocated this during his teaching sessions on Sufism as

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88 I follow Nwyia’s critical edition and numbering of the aphorisms; see: al-Iskandari, Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh (m. 729/1329) et la naissance, pp. 84–85. I have relied on Danner, Ibn ‘Aṭāʾillāh’s Šaṭī Aphorisms, pp. 23–24 for the translation, which I have slightly altered.
89 Al-Iskandari, Kitāb al-tanwīr, p. 4.
90 Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Durrat al-asrār, p. 102; al-Iskandari, Ḭaṭāʾif al-minan, p. 135.
91 Al-Iskandari, Kitāb al-tanwīr, p. 27.
well. It is thus clear that it must have been an essential principle in the doctrine of the early Shadhiliyya to strive to eliminate one's self-direction, choice, and desire.

Although not completely straightforward, al-Wasiti provides us with what appears to be the primary foundation on which this principle was built in his above-cited descriptions of Shadhili doctrine. In all three of them we can find reference being made to God’s pre-eternity, such as the words he says were taught to him by Najm al-Din: “God was and there was nothing with Him (kāna Allāh wa-mā shay’ ma’ahu).” It is striking that these exact same words are found in the thirty-fourth aphorism of Ibn ‘Ata’ Allāh’s Ḥikam, which has added: “... and He is now as He was.” This saying is actually based on a canonical ḥadith that is found in al-Bukhari’s al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ, according to which the Prophet Muhammad said: “God was and there was nothing before Him...” Its significance to the principle of rejecting one’s self-direction and choice becomes clear from Ibn ‘Ata’ Allāh’s following explanation found in Kitāb al-tanwir:

You should know that God was there for you before you were there for yourself. Now in the same way as He directed (mudabbin) [your affairs] before you existed when there was nothing of your self-direction (tadbīr) [to compete] with Him, thus He (ST) directs [your affairs] after you have come into existence. So be to Him as you were to Him [in pre-eternity], and He will be to you as He was to you [in pre-eternity].

Since God in the sovereignty of His lordship (rububiyya) has already directed all affairs in pre-eternity, the Sufi must fully grasp that creatures hold no power or control over anything and that they are all completely dependent on Him.

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92 See for instance al-Ṣumaydī, Zīnat al-nawāẓir, pp. 252–256, 270, 444, 464, and 499. The significance of tadbīr and ikhtiyār in Rāfi’i’s book was already noted by Denis Gril in his “L’enseignement d’Ibn ‘Ata’ Allāh Al-Skandari, d’après le témoignage de son disciple Rāfi’ Ibn Shafi’,” in Une voie soufie dans le monde: la Shadhiliyya, ed. Éric Geoffroy (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2005), pp. 98-99. For other references in Ibn ‘Ata’ Allāh’s writings, see his Tartib al-suluk, wa-yalihā Risāla fī adab al-ʿilm, ed. Khālid Zahri (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ilmiyya, 2006), p. 57, and his Laṭāʾif al-minan, for example pp. 24 and 91.

93 Al-Skandari, Ibn ‘Ata’ Allāh (m. 709/1309) et la naissance, p. 103.

94 Muhammad b. Ismā’īl al-Bukhārī, al-Jāmiʿ al-musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ al-mukhtaṣar min umūr Rasūl Allāh (ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi wa-sallam) wa-sunan ihī wa-ayyāmihī, ed. Muhammad Zuhayr b. Nāṣir al-Nāṣir (Beirut: Dār Ŧawq al-najāh, 2001), vol. 4, p. 125, and also vol. 9, p. 421.

95 Al-Skandari, Kitāb al-tanwir, p. 14.

96 Ibid. p. 18.
This principle revolves around the realization of an essential dichotomy between Lord (rabb) and servant (ʿabd), or between lordship (rubūbiyya) and servitude (ʿubūdiyya), which the early Shādhiliyya considered the way to reach the station of servitude (maqām al-ʿubūdiyya). Its prominence in their doctrine is reflected in the very definition of Sufism itself as attributed to al-Shādhili by Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh: “Sufism is to train the carnal soul (nafs) to be in accordance with servitude, and to return it to the principles of lordship (aḥkām al-rubūbiyya).” Several references to this dichotomy can be found in Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh’s Hikam as well. In the 100th aphorism, for instance, he states that it is in carrying out one’s servitude that the majesty of God’s lordship manifests. In Kitāb al-tanwīr he explains that the Prophet Muḥammad therefore chose servitude when he was made to choose between becoming a servant prophet (nabī ʿabd) or a king prophet (nabī malik). For Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh, this is also the definitive proof that servitude is the most noble of spiritual stations.

Against this background we may understand what is implied by the earlier-quoted statement al-Wāsiṭī related from one of the Shādhilis (in all likelihood Najm al-Dīn himself) that self-direction and choice are among the greatest sins. Similar statements can in fact be found in several Shādhili works. Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh phrases it in almost identical words, and Rāfiʿ attributes it to al-Shādhili as follows: “Beware of self-direction and choice, for they are worse than offenses and sins.” For the early Shādhilis, the idea behind this notion is that if the servant lays claim to self-direction he is in fact competing with his Lord’s decrees. He thereby makes himself an associate with God’s lordship (shirk bi-al-rubūbiyya), which Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh also refers to as an inward form of idolatry. Therefore, according to the Shādhiliyya, it is only by cleansing the heart of attributing lordship to other things besides God that the servant becomes fit to be in His divine presence.

Another seemingly distinct part of Shādhili doctrine to which al-Wāsiṭī alludes three times in his autobiography is the role of God’s divine names (asmāʾ) and attributes (ṣifāt). In his first mention of these terms he merely states that he found the Shādhilis discussing experiential knowledge (maʿrifa) of the

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97 Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Durrat al-asrār, p. 90.
98 Al-Iskandari, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh (m. 709/1309) et la naissance, p. 129, and for the other references, pp. 121, 137, and 153.
99 Al-Iskandari, Kitāb al-tanwīr, p. 25.
100 Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh makes a similar statement in Kitāb al-tanwīr, p. 27. For al-Shādhili’s quote, see: al-Ṣumaydī, Zinat al-nawāẓir, p. 287.
101 Al-Iskandari, Kitāb al-tanwīr, pp. 11 and 13; al-Iskandari, Laṭāʾif al-minan, pp. 88–89 and 142.
102 Al-Iskandari, Miftāḥ al-falāh, p. 37.
divine names and attributes. The second instance provides some more detail and explains that “they enter the presence of the divine names (ḥadārāt al-asmāʾ) and achieve spiritual realization (tahāqqaqū) through something from that. The reality of a divine name or attribute is granted to them and they thereby become intimately acquainted with God (ʿAJ).”

In the third instance, he describes that when they have emptied their hearts of all things other than God, they become filled with His love and the unveiling (kashf) of His names and attributes. While this suggests that the divine names and attributes fulfilled a role in the early ṭāʾifa, Al-Wāsiṭī’s allusions do not fully convey their significance.

When we turn to Shādhilī sources, we find that their relevance to the spiritual way is a rather complex issue that will require some elaboration here. According to Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, al-Shādhilī differentiated between the attributes of servitude, which belong solely to human beings, and the attributes of lordship, which belong solely to God. The Sufi must realize his own attributes while perceiving those of God. This principle can also be found in the 117th aphorism of the Ḥikam, which states: “Be connected to the attributes of His lordship and realize the attributes of your servitude.”

For instance, the Sufi should realize that he is weak (ḍaʿīf) while God is the Strong (al-qawiyy), that he is lowly (dhalīl) while God is the Almighty (al-ʿaẓīz), that he is needy (faqīr) while God is the Self-Sufficient (al-ghanī). In other words, for the Shādhilis it is through the divine names and attributes that one journeys deeper into the fundamental dichotomy of ʿubūdiyya and rubūbiyya.

The end of that journey, however, is a still deeper realization that people’s existence as newly created, temporal beings is like non-existence in view of God’s existence in pre-eternity. Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh hints at this principle in a letter he sent to Alexandria, where he discusses whether it is better for the Sufi to be in a state of neediness (faqr) or a state of sufficiency (ghinā). He concludes that, ultimately, neediness is more perfect because it is an attribute of

103 Al-Wāsiṭī, Rihla, pp. 33–34.
104 Ibid. p. 34.
105 Al-Iskandarī, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh (m. 709/1309) et la naissance, p. 137, also hinted at in the 112th aphorism, p. 73.
106 Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Durrat al-asrār, p. 72.
107 Ibid.
servitude, whereas sufficiency is an attribute of lordship. The true meaning of neediness, he explains, only manifests by fully realizing God’s pre-eternity:

The reality of neediness is to be after you have come into existence as you were before your existence, that is, just as [God] directed [your affairs] for you before your existence, without you having any saying in the matter. So be to Him as you were to Him, He will be to you as He was to you. Yet, the reality of neediness is only sound by being absent from it, for otherwise you will [still] be in a state of sufficiency by means of your neediness.

The last sentence alludes to the station of annihilation (fanāʾ) wherein man’s attributes become annihilated in God’s attributes so that he loses awareness of all that pertains to the created realm. For awareness of one’s own neediness would imply that a created, temporal attribute is still present together with the pre-eternal Creator. This process is also referred to in the 122th aphorism of the Ḥikam, where it is stated that “when [God] wants to make you arrive unto Him, He covers your attribute with His attribute and hides your quality with His quality.” Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh quotes a like-minded statement from al-Shādhili:

Just as your vile names can be obliterated by your excellent names, thus your [human] names can be obliterated through [God’s] divine names, and your [human] attributes through His divine attributes, for nothing of the temporal being (al-ḥādith) will remain when he is connected to the Pre-Eternal (al-qadīm). … When you call upon Him by His sublime name and pay heed to His sublime attributes existing in His essence, all of your names will be obliterated and your existence will have disappeared. You will have become effaced, having no existence whatsoever. This is the locus of annihilation, and of subsistence (baqāʾ) after annihilation.

That is not to say that a human being and God unite and become one, or that God incarnates in him. Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh clarifies that the servant can be adorned by God’s names and attributes to the extent that it becomes conceivable that he is described by their good qualities and becomes “lordly” (rabbāniyyān).

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108 Al-Iskandarī, Tartīb al-sulūk, p. 58.
109 Ibid. p. 57.
110 Al-Iskandarī, Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh (m. 709/1309) et la naissance, pp. 137–139. A similar saying is quoted from al-Mursī, cf. al-Iskandarī, Latāʾif al-minan, p. 26.
111 Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Durrat al-asrār, p. 132.
– though not in the sense that he becomes like God, but rather that he is near to his Lord by his spiritual station (maqām).\textsuperscript{112}

From being unconscious of the created realm in \textit{fanāʾ}, Shādhilī doctrine turns to the classical Junaydian model wherein perfection is only reached by returning to the creation with the profound consciousness that God is constantly governing it, perceiving that He is always manifest in all created things, which thence become as mirrors for His perfect attributes.\textsuperscript{113} This is the station referred to in the above quote of al-Shādhilī as subsistence (\textit{baqāʾ}), which is where the veil of self-direction is said to have fallen and the Sufi witnesses that everything is in the hands of God.\textsuperscript{114}

There is one final aspect of Shādhilī doctrine of which we can find hints in al-Wāsiṭī’s autobiography. He characterizes the Shādhilīs twice by the word \textit{injidhāb} to signify that they are drawn near unto God.\textsuperscript{115} In another passage he uses the word \textit{jadhb}, which comes from the same Arabic root-letters. He says: “The spiritual states that [the Shādhilīs] have are penetrating, distinguished insights (muṭālaʿāt) that cause the attraction of their spirits (jadhb al-arwāḥ) unto the domains of divine proximity (mawāṭin al-qurb).”\textsuperscript{116} Now, al-Wāsiṭī’s use of these terms is significant for us in view of the distinction that is made in several Shādhilī sources between two ways to arrive unto God: that of the \textit{sālik} and that of the \textit{majdhūb}. The former is the traveler on the spiritual path, who struggles through the necessary states and stations to earn his friendship with God. The latter reaches this status unintentionally when he is suddenly overtaken by spiritual attraction (\textit{jadhb}) from God by which he is drawn unto Him. Rāfi’ relates the following explanation of this distinction from Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh:

The likeness of the \textit{sālik} is that of someone who digs for water, bit by bit, until he feels exhausted – but it is after exertion that it gushes forth to him. The likeness of the \textit{majdhūb} is that of someone who desires water, and for whom a cloud [suddenly] rains so that he takes from it what he needs without any exertion.\textsuperscript{117}

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{112} Tāj al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī, \textit{al-Qaṣd al-mujarrad fī maʿrifat al-ism al-mufrad}, ed. Khalīl Muḥammad Khamīs (Cairo: Maktabat al-khānjī, 2008), p. 48.
    \item \textsuperscript{113} This process is elaborated upon in al-Iskandarī, \textit{Laṭāʾif al-minan}, pp. 30–33; God’s manifestation in the creation is also mentioned in the 15th aphorism, cf. Al-Iskandari, \textit{Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh (m. 709/1309) et la naissance}, p. 91.
    \item \textsuperscript{114} Al-Iskandarī, \textit{Kitāb al-tanwīr}, p. 55.
    \item \textsuperscript{115} Al-Wāsiṭī, \textit{Riḥla}, pp. 33 and 49.
    \item \textsuperscript{116} Ibid. p. 50.
    \item \textsuperscript{117} Al-Ṣuwaydī, \textit{Zīnat al-nawāẓir}, p. 272.
\end{itemize}
In *Laṭāʾif al-minan*, both paths to God’s friendship are said to be described in the Qur’an, with the verse “whoso makes God his friend (wa-man yatawalla Allāh)” [Q. 5:56] being interpreted as a reference to the *sālik*, and “He [God] takes care of the righteous (wa-huwa yatawallā al-ṣāliḥīn)” [Q. 7:196] being interpreted as a reference to the *majdhūb*. Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh maintains that the *majdhūb* has a higher degree of friendship with God because, contrary to the *sālik*, he achieves the station of arrival right away and then continues to abide by the precepts of the spiritual way.\(^{118}\)

If we now return to the initial question posed in the preceding section, whether there already existed a distinct Shāhilī *ṭāʾifa* when al-Wāsiṭī entered Alexandria, the above study provides solid ground to argue that this was very likely the case. We have seen that all the major characteristics by which our Iraqi Sufi describes the Alexandrian Shādhilīs can also be found expounded upon in early Shādhili writings, most notably, but certainly not exclusively, those of Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh. While the fact that Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh was the first Shādhili shaykh to compose books on Sufism ensured that his legacy as a master of the *ṭāʾifa* was preserved in history, this does not mean that its formation must therefore necessarily be placed with him. We must bear in mind that, originally, the teachings of the Shādhiliyya would primarily have been transmitted orally, which was likely a central aspect of the disciple’s *ṣuḥba*-relationship with his Sufi master. Hence, it is related that when al-Shādhili was asked why he never wrote any books, he responded that his pupils are his books, a principle al-Mursī is also said to have lived by.\(^{120}\) Since we have noted that the common link between Najm al-Dīn (the source for al-Wāsiṭī’s account of Shādhili doctrine) and Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh was al-Mursī, we may then conclude that there was already a distinct doctrine and method that was transmitted orally within the latter’s circle of disciples. Moreover, when we take into account that al-Mursī was the common link for the entire network of the Egyptian Shādhilīs that followed after him, the notion that a common doctrine existed among them that can be traced back to him becomes very plausible. All this, I would argue, points to the existence of a distinct *ṭāʾifa* well before the turn of the century, perhaps already under al-Mursī. I would even say that we should not disregard the possibility that it already originated under al-Shādhili himself, although, admittedly, that will in all likelihood remain an unsolvable mystery.

\(^{118}\) Al-Iskandarī, *Laṭāʾif al-minan*, p. 27. Throughout the current study I have mostly relied on A.J. Arberry’s translation of the Qur’an, though in several cases with slight alterations.

\(^{119}\) Ibid. p. 129.

\(^{120}\) Ibid. p. 6.
2.3 *The Success of the Šādhiliyya*

Now that we have identified the Alexandrian Šādhilīs al-Wāsiṭī joined as a distinct Sufi ṭāʾifa with its own particular doctrine, we close his account of them with several observations that will explain to us, first, why he was initially attracted to their method in Sufism, and, second, why he eventually distanced himself from them. As with the Rifāʿiyya, I will argue that his views on the Šādhiliyya can tell us something about the normative religiosity that dominated the context in which the ṭāʾifa thrived.

The first thing that is clear from al-Wāsiṭī’s autobiography is that he had never seen Sufis like those of the Šādhiliyya before. In fact, of all the Sufi groups he accompanied during his lifetime, they were without a doubt the closest thing to what true Sufism should embody in his vision. He tells us in his autobiography: “By God, I felt intense joy with them and my heart found rest with them and their method (*ṭarīq*), because I perceived with them something that is the highest degree that can be attained and the utmost limit that can be desired!”¹²¹ Moreover, one gets the impression from his choice of words that the Šādhilī shaykhs he met must have been highly charismatic figures. At one point, he even likens them to angels:

Truly – and God knows better the reality of the way I perceived them – I likened them to the angels who are in the presence of God surrounding His Throne, even if they do not resemble them in every respect. Do not deem this strange, for their hearts are amidst the host of God’s friends (*awliyāʾ*) surrounding the Throne, so that during most of their spiritual states their character (*ṭibāʿ*) is transformed from that of a human being into that of an angel. This unique trait (*khusūṣīyya*) that they have cannot be denied and only they are able to achieve it.¹²²

For al-Wāsiṭī, it must have been Najm al-Dīn in particular who inspired him, not just during his time in Alexandria, but also afterwards as he continued his journey in search of the pathway to God. He reveres him as a ‘knower of God’ (*al-ʿārif*) in his autobiography,¹²³ and concludes in his *Qāʿida fī al-tajrīd* that

he (R) summarized for me everything that the seeker [of God] needs during the beginnings and the endings [of the spiritual way], such as vigilant awareness (*murāqaba*), experiential knowledge (*maʿrifa*), annihilation

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¹²¹ Al-Wāsiṭī, *Riḥla*, pp. 33–34.
¹²² Ibid. p. 50.
¹²³ Ibid. p. 24.
fanāʾ), love (maḥabba), and detachment (tajrīd) – although I only understood this after a period of time.124

This shows that Najm al-Dīn had a considerable influence on his understanding of the Sufi path, a fact that we will be reminded of in part 2 of our study.

Al-Wāsiṭī’s deep admiration for the Shādhiliyya was for the greater part grounded in what we may identify as the ṭā’īfa’s soberness, which manifested in its scholastic and practical approach to Sufism. It is in fact exactly on the basis of this soberness that several scholars have sought to explain the success of the early Shādhiliyya. Both Éric Geoffroy and Nathan Hofer view their sober Sufism as a product of the Malāmaṭī tradition, the Nishapuri way of blame, which emphasized the importance of keeping one’s piety private. Moreover, Geoffroy contends that the Shādhiliyya was able to spread so quickly because its doctrine was formulated in words that were easily accessible to all kinds of people. He also argues that it was thanks to the “orthodoxy” of the early Shādhili masters that the ṭā’īfa was easily accepted by Egypt’s ‘ulamā’.125 A similar line of argumentation is adopted by Hofer, who states that the practical way of the Shādhiliyya created social space for many different strands of people to participate in Sufism. In his reading of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s Laṭā’if al-minan, he recognizes an effort to underline the Sunni credentials of the ṭā’īfa’s eponymous founder, al-Shādhili, by constructing his image as a scholar and a jurist.126 He argues that, by doing so, Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh aimed to secure the ṭā’īfa’s legitimacy within the domain of Sunni Islam – an approach we have also observed in the portrayal of al-Rifā’ī by his followers in the previous chapter. As we will now see, the sober character of the Shādhilīs is more or less confirmed by al-Wāsiṭī.

This is first and foremost illustrated by our Iraqi Sufi in terms of their close observance of Islamic law. In his autobiography he writes that he “found them the most strict of people in honoring the revealed law (ṣarīʿa), the commands and prohibitions.”127 The scholastic background of the early Shādhili masters is also attested to in several biographical sources. Al-Yāfī relates that besides Najm al-Dīn’s knowledge of Sufism, he was also learned in Shāfiʿī jurispru-

124 Al-Wāsiṭī, Qāʿida fī al-tajrīd, p. 257.
125 Éric Geoffroy, “Entre ésotérisme et exotérisme: les Shâdhilis, passeurs de sens (Égypte – xixe – xve siècles),” in Une voie soufie dans le monde: la Shâdhiliyya, ed. Éric Geoffroy (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2005), pp. 117–118. See also by the same author, Le Soufisme, pp. 490–491, where he argues that the order’s balance between ṣarīʿa and ḥaqīqa was at the heart of its success.
126 Hofer, The Popularisation of Sufism, pp. 140–141 and 160.
127 Al-Wāsiṭī, Rīḥla, p. 34.
This may very well have played some role in his relationship with al-Wāsiṭī, who would himself still have followed the same madhhab when he was under his spiritual guidance. Furthermore, as we have already seen in the diagram above, practically all the notable members of the early tā'īfa were to some degree trained in either the Mālikī or the Shāfiʿī school. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh stresses that the close observance of religious law by following one of the legal schools was actually promoted by al-Shādhili himself.129

With an approach to Sufism that aimed to be grounded in scholastic Islam, there are indications that early Shādhili shaykhs may have occasionally been critical of Sufis who, in their eyes, did not sufficiently observe the boundaries of law and theology. A good example is the criticism towards the Rifāʿīyya al-Wāsiṭī reports from Najm al-Dīn, who would have said that “nothing corrupts this religion like two groups: the Ahmadiyya when it comes to women and the Ḥarīriyya when it comes to young boys.”130 Although the evidence for an actual Shādhili–Rifāʿī rivalry is scarce, Geoffroy too has noticed that the two Sufi groups appear to have been quite incompatible and did not always go well together.131 According to Geoffroy, the critical attitude towards Sufis who were in some way regarded as transgressing the proper bounds of religious law can be viewed as characteristic of the early Shādhiliyya and was continued by later generations.132

Here we must make note that some of the later Shādhili shaykhs took a somewhat new direction that al-Wāsiṭī would not have been appreciative of. I am referring here to the growing influence of what many scholars have labelled ‘the Akbarian school of Sufism,’ which appears to have entered the Shādhili ṭāʾifa somewhere after the turn of the seventh/thirteenth century.133

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128 According to al-Yāfiʿī, Najm al-Dīn occupied himself with many religious sciences (ʿulūm) and his book in jurisprudence (fiqh) was al-Ghazālī’s Wajīz, see: Mirāt, vol. 4, p. 198; see also: al-ʿAsqalānī, al-Durar al-kāmina, vol. 3, p. 86.

129 Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Durrat al-asrār, p. 34.

130 Al-Wāsiṭī, Riḥla, p. 24. The Ahmadiyya is, as noted in the previous chapter, one of the names by which the Rifāʿī ṭāʾifa was known. The Ḥarīriyya was a branch of the Rifāʿīyya from Damascus, founded by ʿAli b. Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ḥarīrī al-Marwarī (d. 645/1147), cf. Louis Massignon, “Ḥarīriyya,” in EI2: vol. 3, p. 222.

131 Geoffroy gives an example in Le Soufisme, pp. 278–279, and also in “Les milieux,” pp. 175–176.

132 Geoffroy, Le Soufisme, p. 178.

133 This trend among the Shādhiliyya has been studied in some detail by Geoffroy in “Entre éso térisme,” pp. 125–128 and Le Soufisme, pp. 221–222 and 391–392. He observes the increasing influence of Sufis such as Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, and Ibn Sabʿīn from the end of the seventh/thirteenth century onwards, and concludes that the Shādhiliyya played an important role in helping the advocates of ‘wahda’ rise from all-round denial to relative acceptance. He contends that it were in fact Shādhili shaykhs who became the foremost
Branded by its opponents as ‘monists’ (ittiḥādiyya), the Akbarian school is mostly known for the unity of being/existence (waḥdat al-wujūd). It is closely connected to the doctrine of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), famously known as ‘al-shaykh al-akbar’ (the greatest master) from which the school derives its name. The latter’s teachings were spread and expounded upon by his followers, such as his foremost disciple Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), and the latter’s pupil ‘Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. 690/1291). These figures and several others were increasingly incorporated by later Shādhilis, a development that may have instigated some debate surrounding the legitimacy of the Shādhili ṭāʾifa in view of what some considered as its apparent incorporation of monistic teachings. I do not doubt that this, at least partially, motivated the Egyptian polymath and Shādhili Sufi Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) to prove that the early Shādhili masters had nothing to do with the doctrine of divine indwelling (ḥulūl) and unification (ittiḥād).134 It is worthwhile noting that both he and Ibn Taymiyya relate a severe condemnation aimed at monistic Sufis that is attributed to al-Mursī, who would have held that “they are unbelievers (kuffār), because they believe that the creation is the same as the Creator.”135 In Ibn Taymiyya’s version, this remark is even supposed to have been directed

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134 Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, Taʿyid al-ḥaqīqa al-ʿaliyya wa-tashyīd al-tariqa al-Shādhiliyya, ed. Āṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī (Beirut: Dār al-kutub alʿilmiyya, 2006), pp. 54–55; note that al al-Suyūṭī also defended Ibn ‘Arabī’s followers that he was in that sense incorporated into the Akbarian school by both its followers and its detractors, cf. Homerin, “Sufis and their Detractors,” pp. 228–229.

135 Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, al-Ḥāwī li-al-fatāwā (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2004) vol. 2, p. 162, and Ibn Taymiyya’s Ḥaqiqat maddhab al-ittiḥādiyyin, MF, vol. 2, p. 245. I believe al-Suyūṭī actually cites from this work by Ibn Taymiyya, although he does not give the same title.
specifically at the Akbarian master al-Tilimsânî and his following. As for al-Wâsiṭî’s account, since his autobiography tells us that he was only introduced to the Akbarian school (which he termed ‘al-ittiḥādiyya’) in Cairo, we can assume that he found no evident traces of its doctrine when he was in Alexandria. That there was indeed a distance between the early Shâdhiliyya and the followers of Ibn ‘Arabî was also the impression of the late scholar of Sufism Paul Nwyia, who based himself on Ibn ‘Aṭâ’ Allâh’s writings.136 We can thus say that, in all likelihood, distinct Akbarian teachings were still completely absent from the ṭâʾifa as al-Wâsiṭî witnessed it, and were in all likelihood introduced only after Ibn ‘Aṭâ’ Allâh’s time.

Besides its scholastic and critical character, the Sufism of the Shâdhiliyya must have also appealed to al-Wâsiṭî on a practical level. As several scholars have already noted, early Shâdhilî shaykhs did not demand of their pupils that they wear a particular dress. This contrasted with many other Sufi groups in Alexandria, especially those with roots in the west, such as the followers of Abû Madyan, who wore the so-called patched Sufi cloak (muraqqa’a) to exhibit their renunciant lifestyle.137 Many such groups would also hold samâ’ gatherings, a practice that was not undisputed among Muslim jurists as we have seen in chapter 1.138 This, too, was not done by the early Shâdhiliyya, as attested to not only by the fact that al-Wâsiṭî makes no mention of it in his

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136 See Nwyia’s introduction in: al-Iskandari, Ibn ‘Aṭâ’ Allâh (m. 709/1309) et la naissance, pp. 25–26; I owe this reference to Alexander Knysz, Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 80–81.

137 Ibn ‘Aṭâ’ Allâh states that the Shâdhili way does not promote renunciant clothing because that would draw attention to oneself and give the impression that one is in need of people’s donations, whereas the Sufi should only be in need of God, cf. al-Iskandari, Laṭâ’if al-minan, p. 134. The wearing of patched cloaks appears to have been practiced in the school of Abû Madyan, proof for which is found in Vincent J. Cornell, The Way of Abû Madyan: Doctrinal and Poetic Works of Abû Madyan Shu’ayb ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Anṣârî (c. 509/1115-16-594/1198) (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1996), pp. 96–67, and al-Tâdîlî, al-Tashawwuf, p. 439, where we find that the followers of al-Mâghirî wore them.

138 The Rifâ’î shaykh Abû al-Fatḥ al-Wâsiṭî would certainly have organized samâ’ gatherings, given the importance of the ritual in his tâ’ifa. It is related that the Sufi master al-Shâṭibî practiced samâ’, as it was this way of his own master, Abû al-‘Abbâs al-Ra’s, cf. Ibn Abî al-Manṣûr, La risâla, p. 108. The samâ’ was likely also performed in the Alexandrian community of Sufis with origins in the west, since we find that it was part of Abû Madyan’s method, although with some caution, as noted by Cornell, The Way of Abû Madyan, pp. 34–35. It must be mentioned that not all Sufis from the west were in favor of the ritual, an example of which is Ibn ‘Arabî, who hailed from Murcia, cf. William C. Chittick, The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-‘Arabî’s Cosmology (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 383, and also: Claude Addas, Quest for the Red Sulphur: The life of Ibn ‘Arabî, trans. Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), pp. 163 and 272.
account of the ṭāʾifa, but also explicitly by several Shādhilī sources. Both Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh and Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh relate that samāʾ was not done by al-Shādhili, and al-Suyūṭī also confirms that it was not part of his method (ṭarīq). And thanks to Rāfiʿ we know that it had still not integrated into the Shādhili method of Sufism under Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh, who is cited on the issue as follows:

It is not proper for you to attend the samāʾ in this age. That is because the samāʾ of the early [Sufis] was done to give rest to their spirits (nufūs), since the process of spiritual disciplining (al-riyāḍa) is a fire that is extinguished through the samāʾ. But the folk of this age attend the samāʾ because they’re sick from eating too much food and being overly satiated, so that [the samaʾ] strengthens their worldly desire. Sometimes, their carnal souls and desires are also stimulated because they listen to a beautiful voice. Now if you would say that al-Junayd, Sarrī, and others like them attended the samāʾ, then we would say to you: Indeed, but they would eat food and subsequently fast, whereas you will eat and not fast.

Finally, the Shādhilī way was also sober in that it did not require from its followers that they renounce the world and live in poverty. On the contrary, the order’s second shaykh, al-Mursī, is quoted as having emphasized the importance of having a means of subsistence (sabab), and Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ Allāh’s Kitāb al-tanwūr contains several passages that elucidate how the practice of Sufism can be combined with making one’s daily livelihood.

In view of al-Wāsiṭī’s critical attitude towards what he perceived as a lack of regard for religious law among many Sufis and the acceptance of innovated rituals such as samāʾ gatherings, his stay among the Alexandrian Shādhiliyya must have seemed as if he had finally reached the destination of his journey, if only for a time. The way he explains it himself, he eventually traded Alexandria for Cairo because he became increasingly dissatisfied with his newfound Sufi companions for two particular reasons.

One of these may be identified as the first clear-cut instance where he displays his conviction that the traditionalist creed is the only correct creed. Although we have seen in chapter 1 that he appears to have denounced Ashʿarism in favor of traditionalism in Baghdad already, it is only in the conclusion to his account of Alexandria that we find it formulated unambiguously for the first

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139 Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Durrat al-asrār, p. 104; al-Iskandarī, Laṭāʾif al-minan, p. 61; al-Suyūṭī, Tūrīd, p. 73.
140 Al-Ṣumaydī, Zīnat al-nawāẓir, pp. 284–285.
141 Al-Iskandarī, Laṭāʾif al-minan, p. 97; and by the same author, Kitāb al-tanwūr, pp. 51–55 and 60–117.
time. While we should be open to the possibility that his theological criticism of the Shâdhiliyya was formulated only later on during his Damascene years, he ascribes it such a central role in his autobiographical writings that it may very well reflect what had been his true sentiment. The Riḥla describes his theological disagreement with the Alexandrian Sufis as one of the primary reasons behind his departure from them:

Then I thoroughly examined the foundation of this uppermost level (dhirwa) that [the Shâdhilīs] have, in order to see on what it is based in terms of the articles and principles of faith (al-‘aqāʾid wa-al-uṣūl). I found them to be a people who are not conscious of the Sunna, nor the era of the Prophet, the lives of his Companions, or [their] morality (akhlāq). I also found that they believe in something of the tenets of the Jahmiyya (lit. taḥahum); and although I did not find them openly declaring beliefs that strip God of His attributes (taʿṭīl), they are nevertheless inclined to refrain from judgment [about them] (wuqūf). Indeed, I do not doubt that they deny some of the divine attributes (ṣifāt), or refrain from judgment about them, as is the school of the speculative theologians (mutakallimīn).142 Because of that I found that they are overshadowed by a darkness and that there is a disease in the lights of their faces.143

His claim of having detected elements of the Jahmiyya among his Alexandrian shaykhs is a common ploy used by traditionalists to equate followers of the Ashʿarī school with a doctrine that is widely regarded as heretical among the majority of Sunni scholars, including the Ashʿarīs themselves.144 He takes it a

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142 The use of the term ‘wuqūf’ in the context of theology is explained by Ibn Taymiyya in his al-Fatwā al-ḥamawiyya al-kubrā as follows: He differentiates between two groups who both differ in the way that they abide by the principle of wuqūf with regard to God’s divine names and attributes: (1) A group that consists mostly of jurists (fuqahāʾ), who are said to profess that it is possible that the apparent (ẓāhir) meaning is intended by any particular attribute of God in a way that befits His loftiness (jalāl), while remaining open to the possibility of it not being intended as such. (2) The second group are the speculative theologians who are said to profess that they refrain (yamsikūn) from all of this, and do not go beyond the recitation (tīlīwa) of the Qur’an or the reading (qirāʾa) of the ḥadīth, thus turning away from their meanings with heart and tongue, cf. Ibn Taymiyya, MF. vol. 5, pp. 116–117.

143 Al-Wāsiṭī, Riḥla, p. 35.

144 Ibn Taymiyya does this quite often; see for instance his Bayān talbis al-Jahmiyya fi taʾsīs bidaʾiḥim al-kalāmiyya, ed. Yahyā b. Muḥammad al-Hunaydī et al (Riyad: Majmaʿ al-malik Fahd, 2005), vol. 1, p. 8, where he states that the Bayān talbis is a refutation of the Ashʿarī theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, whom he refers to as one of the pseudo-Jahmi theologians (al-muṭajahhima al-mutakallimīn).
step further in his *Qāʿida fī al-tajrīd*, where he seems to be implying that Ashʿarī *kalām* was an integral part of Shādhili doctrine. After citing the earlier advice of Najm al-Dīn regarding the need to become absent in the meaning of the words “God was and there was nothing with Him,” which we have identified as a reference to God’s pre-eternity, al-Wāsiṭī remarks:

This is the key to intimate knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of God and knowledge of His existence according to the method of the speculative theologians (*ahl al-kalām*). However, according to the method of the *Ahl al-Sunna*, the key to intimate knowledge is knowledge of God’s aboveness (*fawqīyya*) in a way that befits His majesty, and not in a way that it is taken as one of the attributes of created beings.\(^{145}\)

That is, in al-Wāsiṭī’s vision of Sufism, the sound way to become intimately acquainted with God is built on the affirmation that He is above His creation, in accordance with the traditionalists (referred to here as the *Ahl al-Sunna*), whereas the way of the Shādhilis is built on a deep realization of God’s pre-eternity, in accordance with the Ashʿarī *kalām*-scholars.

There are two important claims made by al-Wāsiṭī here: first, that the issue of pre-eternity is particular to the *mutakallimūn* (by which he undoubtedly means the adherents of the Ashʿarī school); second, that there was a distinct presence of Ashʿarī *kalām* in the early Shādhilīyya. Based on other primary sources, we can find that both claims actually have a historical basis.

Regarding the centrality of God’s pre-eternity, there are many examples of works by followers of the Ashʿarī school where we find mention being made of the notion that God existed in pre-eternity and that “He is now as He was.” One of the earliest instances is found in the epistle on Sufism (*al-Risāla*) by the Ashʿarī Sufi al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), in a citation from Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Fūrak (d. 330/941), his teacher in theology and one of the early leading Ashʿarī theologians.\(^{146}\) Other examples of important Ashʿarīs who refer to this in their creeds are al-Ghazālī and ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām (d. 660/1261).\(^{147}\)

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\(^{145}\) Al-Wāsiṭī, *Qāʿida fī al-tajrīd*, p. 256.

\(^{146}\) Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Hūzān al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd & Maḥmūd b. al-Sharīf (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 24–25. I owe this reference to Gibril Fouad Haddad’s *The Refutation of Him [Ibn Taymiyya] Who Attributes Direction to Allāh* (*al-Raddu ʿalā Man Qāla bil-Jiha*) (Birmingham: AQSA Publications, 2008), p. 165–169.

\(^{147}\) For the former see: Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-maʿrifa, 2011), vol. 1, p. 90. See also: al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿiya*, vol. 6, p. 232. For the latter, see: ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Sulami, “Al-Mulḥa fī iʿtiqād ahl al-ḥaqq,” in *Rasāʾil fī al-tawḥīd*, ed. Iyād Khālid al-Ṭabbāʿ (Beirut: Dār al-fikr...
It is also explicitly formulated as the creedal position of Ibn Taymiyya's contemporary and Ashʿarī opponent, the qāḍī Ahmad Ibn Jahbal al-Kilābī (d. 733/1333). Upon mentioning God’s pre-eternity, he writes: “He was without place – He created place and regulated time – and He is now as He was: this is the school (madhhab) of the Ahl al-Sunna and the creed of the shaykhs of the spiritual path (mashāyikh al-ṭariq).”

It is surely no coincidence that, just as we have found al-Wāsiṭī do above, Ibn Taymiyya too connects this phrase to the theology of the Jahmiyya. He is surely addressing the Ashʿarīs when discussing words very similar to those we have just quoted from Ibn Jahbal:

Such words were spoken by some of the later Jahmī speculative theologians, and this was subsequently learned from them by those who reached the extremity of the tenets of the Jahmiyya (al-tajahhum) – which is stripping God of His attributes (taʿṭīl) and apostacy – although the former would say: “God was, without place and without time, and He is now as He was,” while the latter say: “God was and there was nothing with Him, and He is now as He was.”

Ibn Taymiyya then goes on to explain the importance of this phrase in view of the kalāmī argument against the literal interpretation of several attributes by which God describes Himself in the holy texts, such as His sitting (istiwāʾ) on the Throne and His descent (nuzūl) to the lowest sphere of the heavens. He comments on this, saying that “[the Ashʿarīs] maintain that [God] was not sitting on the Throne in pre-eternity (al-azal); and since He is now as He was, He will not be upon the Throne [in a literal sense], for that would require [that He underwent] something of a transformation and change.” This shows that the issue of pre-eternity was of particular importance to the Ashʿarī argumentation that God exists beyond time and space, so that the literal value of statements describing Him sitting on a Throne or existing in aboveness cannot possibly be affirmed.
As for the distinct presence of Ashʿarism in the early Shādhilī way of Sufism, this is exemplified most clearly when we look at Izālat al-shubuhāt ‘an al-āyāt wa-al-ahādīth al-mutashābihāt, a treatise by Yāqūt’s pupil Ibn al-Labbān. Its aim is to refute what he labels the literalism of the traditionalists, whom he accuses of ascribing anthropomorphism (taskbih) and corporeality (taʃsīm) to God. In accordance with a group of the later Ashʿarī scholars he argues for the necessity to apply a metaphorical interpretation (ta’wil) of the so-called mutashābihāt, the ambiguous verses from the Qur’an. He occasionally combines his argumentations with a discussion from the viewpoint of Sufism.152

This work may very well be the most clear-cut example of how Shādhilī Sufism was intermingled with Ashʿarī theology, which manifests, above all, in the chapter on God’s aboveness. Mentioned several times in the Qur’an in such verses as: “They fear their Lord above them (min fawqihim)” [Q. 16:50], Ibn al-Labbān argues that the literal meaning cannot possibly be intended when the word ‘fawqa’ is used, since God is free from being bound by direction. But only those endowed with spiritual insight, who have mastered their hearts (arbāb al-baʃāʾir wa-al-qulūb), can truly comprehend that God’s fawqiyya is a highness that is essential to Him rather than one that is relative, he says, for the latter variety is specific to the created world, as either highness in a physical sense or in rank. It is here where Ibn al-Labbān delves deeper into the matter, using clear elements of Shādhilī Sufism. He explains that the manifestation (tajallī) of the light of God’s unity through the highness of His fawqiyya comes from God’s attribute of omnipotence (qahr). Its veil (ḥijāb) is pure servitude (‘ubūdiyya), which he bases on the verse “He [God] is the Omnipotent over His servants (wa-huwa al-qāhir fawqa ʿibādihi)” [Q. 6:18].153 Ibn al-Labbān then elaborates upon this as follows:

If you desire to realize that [God’s] aboveness is not a spatial aboveness (fawqiyya makāniyya), but that it is rather essential aboveness (al-fawqiyya al-ḥaqīqiyya) by the omnipotence of [His] lordship in view of [mankind’s] servitude (qahr al-rubūbiyya li-al-ʿubūdiyya), then reflect on the fact that He was and there was nothing with Him. He is not delimited by His creation of the heavens in an upwards direction (ʿuluw), nor by His creation of the earth in a downwards direction (nuzūl), nor by His

152 Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn al-Labbān, Izālat al-shubuhāt ‘an al-āyāt wa-al-ahādīth al-mutashābihāt, ed. Ayman ʿAbd al-Jābir al-Buḥayrī and ʿAmr Muṣṭafā al-Wardānī (Cairo: Dār al-bayān al-ʿArabī, 2002), pp. 31–35.

153 Ibid. p. 98 (underlining my own).
creation of the Throne upon which He sits. On the contrary, the entire quantity of created things springs from the manifestation (tajallī) of His divine names and attributes, without physical contact with Him, and without being relative to Him in terms of aboveness, underness, or any other direction. He (T) says: “Magnify the Name of your Lord, the Most High (al-aʿlā), Who created and shaped” [Q. 87:1–2]. Here, He is described as ‘the Most High,’ a status by which He is distinguished from the creation, which indicates that His Highness was established before the creation.154

Ibn al-Labbān thus leans on the notion that God existed in pre-eternity before there even was space and time, so that His aboveness can never be spatial. To get around the literal meaning he applies the Shādhili dichotomy of rubūbiyya and ʿubūdiyya by holding that God’s pre-eternal fawqīyya concerns His essential omnipotence over His servants.

While I have not come across any other Shādhili treatise that is of such a theological, kalāmī nature as that of Ibn al-Labbān, there are several more indications that Ashʿarism was inherent to the ṭāʾifa. It is highly likely, for instance, that al-Wāsiṭī’s shaykh Najm al-Dīn was also an adherent of the kalām school. Al-Yāfī, himself a staunch Ashʿarī, hints at this where he relates that the renowned Shāfiʿī Ashʿarī master Ibn Daqīq al-Īd (d. 792/1392) once expressed his amazement at the deviation (shudhūd) he found in the creed of al-Jīlānī regarding the divine attributes, to which Najm al-Dīn replied that the famous Ḥanbali Sufi had revoked his traditionalist beliefs at the end of his life.155 Besides Najm al-Dīn, al-Yāfī explicitly names al-Shādhili as one of the great knowers of God (ʿārifīn) who followed the school of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī.156 Other known examples of Ashʿarī Shādhili shaykhs are al-Mursī, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Al-ḥallah, and the latter’s pupils, Ibn Bākhilā and Taqī al-Dīn ʿAlī al-Subkī (d. 756/1355).157 Furthermore, many of the scholarly authorities mentioned in the

154 Ibid. p. 99.
155 Al-Yāfī, Mirāt, vol. 3, pp. 272–273. For Ibn Daqīq’s Ashʿarism, see: Taqī al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Qushayrī Ibn Daqīq al-Īd, Aqidat al-imām Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Daqīq al-Īd, ed. Nizār al-Ḥammādī (Tunis: Dār al-imām Ibn ʿArafa, 2012), pp. 22–30, where he discusses God’s names and attributes.
156 Al-Yāfī, Mirāt, vol. 2, p. 228.
157 See: al-Iskandarī, Latāʾif al-mīnan, p. 83, where al-Mursī is mentioned as having studied al-Juwaynī’s Irshād. For Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh, see his Miftāḥ al-falāh, p. 37, where he stresses the importance of having a sound creed (aqīda) that is in accordance with “the school of those who are on the truth (madhhab ahl al-haqiq).” That he is actually speaking of the speculative theologians becomes clear on p. 40, where he states that it is the mutakallimūn who protect the declaration of divine unity against innovators (mubtadiʿa). Although Ibn
sources as having been on close terms with the Shādhiliyya were also Ashʿarīs, such as the above-mentioned Ibn Daqīq and his distinguished teacher in jurisprudence, Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām; also the renowned muṭakallim, qāḍī Shams al-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad al-ʿĪsahānī (d. 688/1289), and the Mālikī jurist, famous for his book *al-Madkhal*, Muḥammad Ibn ʿl-Ḥājj al-ʿAbdarī (d. 737/1336).

In conclusion to the above observations, I would argue that while the presence of Ashʿarī doctrine among the Shādhilīs was one of al-Wāsiṭī’s main reasons for leaving Alexandria, it is precisely in their adherence to the kalām school that we find a significant reason for their success in Alexandria – and perhaps even Egypt in general – that has mostly been overlooked in studies of the early ʿāṭīfā. By no means am I claiming that scholars have been unjust in laying emphasis on the Shādhiliyya’s sober, *ṣharṭ*’a-minded Sufism to explain

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158 On Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, see: al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿīyya*, vol. 8, pp. 218–238, and also: ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Sulaimī, *Tafsīr al-qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ibrāhīm al-Wahhi (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1996), vol. 1, pp. 486–487 for the Ashʿarī position on of God’s sitting on the Throne, and vol. 2, p. 193 on *fawqīyā*.

159 Al-ʿĪsahānī took lessons in Sufism from al-Mursī according to al-Iskandarī, *Laṭāʾif al-minan*, p. 72. For his Ashʿarī background, see: al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿīyya*, vol. 8, pp. 10–102.

160 Ibn al-Ḥājj’s relation to the Shādhiliyya is attested to by al-Iskandarī, *Laṭāʾif al-minan*, p. 52, and whenever Ibn al-Ḥājj cites al-Ṣāḥibī, he calls him ʿmy master, the venerable shaykh (sayyidy al-shaykh al-jalīl),” words of respect he only appears to use for scholars he was affiliated with in some way, such as his own shaykh, al-Marjānī, whom he cites throughout *al-Madkhal*; see: Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥājj al-ʿAbdarī, al-Madkhal (Cairo: Maktabat dār al-turāth, date unknown), vol. 2, p. 189 and vol. 4, p. 29. Furthermore, his Ashʿarism is attested to in *al-Madkhal*, vol. 2, pp. 147–153, where he devotes several pages to the refutation of anthropomorphism. He cites the Mālikī authority Ibn Rushd al-Jadd (d. 520/1126) on p. 148, who was known to have promoted the Ashʿarī creed in al-Andalus to counter literalism; see: Delfijina Serrano Ruano, “Ibn Rushd al-Jadd (d. 520/1126),” in *Islamic Legal Thought: A Compendium of Muslim Jurists*, ed. Oussama Arabi, David S. Powers and Susan A. Spectorsky (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 310–314.

The relation between the Shādhiliyya and Ashʿarism has been noted before, see for instance Kamran Karimullah’s dissertation on the Shādhili shaykh Ahmad Zarquq (d. 899/1493): *Ahmad Zarquq and the Ashʿarite School* (dissertation M.A. McGill University, 2007), p. 31, where he notes that: “Zarquq strongly identified the Shādhili path with *kalām*: the formal principles of theology are related to the principles of the particular *ṣūfism* of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhili.”
its successful expansion. However, the theological dimension of the context in which they thrived is equally deserving of attention. As noted in this chapter’s first section, Alexandria was dominated by Shāfiʿīs and Mālikis, the majority of whom adhered to the Ashʿarī creed. It is, then, not difficult to imagine that, with its scholastic Sufism grounded in Ashʿarī theology, combined with its attention for jurisprudence and a seemingly critical stance towards ecstatic Sufis, the Shādhilī way was easily embraced by the learned class of early Mamluk Alexandria. In addition, the ṭāʾifa’s charismatic Shaykhs were able to rapidly earn their place among the city’s Sufi audience as well by laying claim to the western spiritual tradition. That way, the large population of Alexandrians with a Maghribi or Andalusi background could easily relate to Shādhilī Sufism. With all this in mind, one could say that the early order fit in neatly with the local normative religiosity of early Mamluk Alexandria, and that this undoubtedly contributed to its rapid growth in this context. However, for our Iraqi Sufi, who presents himself to us as having been a self-proclaimed traditionalist at that time, the distinct presence of Ashʿarī theology was naturally not to his liking.

Now, as I have pointed out earlier, there was yet another reason for al-Wāsiṭī’s separation from the Shādhilīs. Apart from his conviction that some of their theological beliefs were incorrect, their focus on the ṭāʾifa’s charismatic spiritual leaders also deeply troubled him. He tells us, for instance, that they would refer to al-Shādhili by such terms as ‘the spiritual axis’ (al-quaṭb) and ‘the helper’ (al-ghawth), the use of which is indeed attested to in works of early Shādhili authors. That such reverence bothered him is not surprising in consideration of the previously discussed criticism he had leveled against a similar attitude towards Sufi Shaykhs among the Rifāʾīs. When it came to the Shādhilīs, however, the biggest issue for him was the essential role that the Shaykhs played in their own spiritual experiences. In his autobiography he writes:

I also found that they acquire the above-mentioned states that they have from their Shaykhs. Hence, they only mention their Shaykhs without relying on ḥadīth for these [states], even though there is no contradiction between them. Yet, their substance comes from the breaths (anfās) of their Shaykhs, it is to them that their hearts are directed, and to them that they turn concerning their states. They depend on their [Shaykhs’] spiritual unveiling (kashf), while only knowing their Lord with respect to His

162 Al-Wāsiṭī, Qāʿida fī aṣnāf al-taʾalluh, p. 151; al-Iskandārī, Laṭāʾif al-minan, al-Shādhilī is called the quaṭb on p. 51 and al-Mursī on p. 76; Ibn al-Ṣabbagh calls al-Shādhili the ghawth and the quaṭb in Durrat al-asrār, p. 3.
antiquity and pre-eternity (qidamuhu wa-azaliyyatuhu), since He was and there was nothing with Him.\(^{163}\)

We may note that what he viewed as excessive devotion to the shaykh in the Rifā’iyya and the Shādhiliyya was most likely the mainstream position among Sufi groups in general in this epoch. There appears to have existed something of a consensus that the shaykh as a spiritual guide was essential to the novice’s journey on the Sufi path. The Shādhiliyya was indeed no exception to that rule. This is exemplified most clearly by Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s ‘Unwān al-tawfiq, which states that the Sufi seeker is required to find the spiritual axis (quṭb) of his age, as it is only through him that he may be guided unto God’s proximity.\(^{164}\) Then, when he actually finds the axis by the grace of God, he must work hard in his service and keep him informed of his spiritual states, because the shaykh is like his spiritual physician.\(^{165}\) In Miftāḥ al-falāh Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh even relates that some Sufis are of the opinion that the disciple should imagine that his shaykh is before him when performing his remembrance of God (dhikr):

During the dhikr, [the novice] should seek the help of the shaykh’s spiritual power (himma) with his heart or his consciousness [sic], believing that in doing so he is actually seeking the help of the Prophet (Ṣ), since [the shaykh] is his representative (nā’ib).\(^{166}\)

Thus, as scholastic and sober as the ūṭā’ifa’s Sufi doctrine was, al-Wāsiṭī had evidently developed his very own ideal image of Sufism that he could no longer consolidate with that of his Shādhilī masters. Their reliance on Ashʿarī theology and devotion to their shaykhs were, in his view, serious obstructions on the pure, unadulterated journey towards God. He nevertheless felt a sense of debt to them, which he expresses poetically in the final sentence of his account of Alexandria:

But in spite of this I found something with them – and what a thing indeed! As it is said:

For the likes of Laylā a man may kill himself
Even if I’d completely renounce her!\(^{167}\)

\(^{163}\) Al-Wāsiṭī, Riḥla, p. 35.

\(^{164}\) Tāj al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī, ‘Unwān al-tawfiq fi ādāb al-ṭarīq, ed. Khālid Zahrī (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmīyya, 2004), pp. 53–54; this is also alluded to in: al-Iskandarī, Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh (m. 709/1309) et la naissance, p. 149.

\(^{165}\) Al-Iskandarı, Latā‘if al-minan, p. 114, and by the same author, Miftāḥ al-falāh, p. 36.

\(^{166}\) Al-Iskandarı, Miftāḥ al-falāh, p. 21.

\(^{167}\) Al-Wāsiṭī, Riḥla, p. 35.
It is not mentioned why he subsequently chose to move to Cairo instead. Since the Shādhiliyya appear to have dominated Alexandria’s Sufi scene one can imagine that he may have hoped to once again make a fresh start, this time in the capital of Egypt. However, what he found there among the Sufis was many times more loathsome to him than what he had found among the Shādhiliyya, and would finally push him away from Egypt for good.