al-SHA°RĀNĪ

^cAbdulwahhāb b. Aḥmad (b. 1491- d. 1565)

LIFE

Sh. was one of the most distinguished and prolific writers in 10th/16th century Egypt, who produced works on a variety of subjects such as mystical, legal, and theological matters, as well as the history of Sufism in Egypt. Sh.'s voluminous literary output, somewhat paradoxically, obscures our view of his personality. His biographers drew heavily on his writings and 'Abdurra'ūf al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621), a disciple of Sh., wrote a short and disappointing biography of his master, even though his work on the lives of Sufis is more helpful in that it provides information about the decades after Sh.'s death and sheds light on his rivalry with Karīmaddīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥalwatī (d. 986/1578), the most important Sufi shaykh in Cairo after Sh.'s death.² An important biography was written in 1109/1697 by Muḥammad Muḥyiddīn al-Malījī, a member of Sh.'s *ṭarīqa* who was initiated into the order by a descendant of Sh. Al-Malījī adds details about persons and events not known from other sources, including Sh.'s physical description. The author quotes Sh.'s manuscripts and relies on 'Abdurraḥmān, Sh.'s son.³

Sh. wrote a lengthy, interesting, but not entirely reliable, autobiography, entitled Latā'if al-minan, in which he relates among other things the many miracles that happened to him. ⁴ According to a passage in the book, one of his ancestors was Mūsā Abū ^cImrān, a son of the sultan of Tlemsen. Mūsā preferred Sufism to worldly power and became a disciple of Abū Madyan (d. 594/1197) who is considered the spiritual master of the Shādiliyya order. Mūsā's grandson Ahmad (d. 828/1424) moved to the village Sāqiyat Abū al-Sha^cra in the Minūfiyya province; hence the *nisba* al-Sha^crānī. Ahmad's son and Sh.'s grandfather Nūraddīn ^cAlī (d. 891/1486) is presented by Sh. as a model of purity and piety. He studied at al-Azhar and unlike his illiterate father he became a scholar. He was was a follower of Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Matbūlī (d. ca. 877/ 1472), an uncouth and opinionated mystic to whom later Sh. dedicated his long treatise of ethics, al-Ahlāq al-matbūliyya. Al-Matbūlī was also the mentor of cAlī al-Hawwās al-Burullusī, an illiterate illuminati mystic, who was to become Sh.'s chief Sufi instructor. ^cAlī al-Sha^crānī had a zāwiya (Sufi convent) in Sāqiyat Abū al-Sha^cra through which he maintained his contacts from Cairo with the countryside. This pattern of rural contact from an urban $z\bar{a}wiya$ was typical of the family's activity for a long time.

Sh. had less to tell about his father Shihābaddīn Aḥmad whose biography he did not include in his *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* among the Sufis, since he was a scholar but not a Sufi. Like his father ^cAlī, he studied the various disciplines with the outstanding ^c*ulamā* of Cairo, but remained firmly rooted in the family s native village. Shihābad-

dīn earned his livelihood in agriculture, and occasionally served as a witness-clerk, registering the *fellāhs*' taxes. He died in 907/1501. Sh. was then about ten years old. After Aḥmad's death, Sh.'s older brother ^cAbdulqādir cared for him. When Sh. reached maturity, his brother took him to the hajj for the first time.

In 911/1505 Sh. was brought to Cairo by a certain government official, who gave him a sum of money for reasons that are not traceable. In Cairo, he settled in the al-Gamrī mosque at the northern entrance to the city and remained there for seventeen years. The founder of that mosque was Muḥammad b. ^cUmar al-Ġamrī, a Sufi shaykh who had been active in Cairo and the adjacent countryside. Sh. was a friend of his grandson, Abulḥasan al-Ġamrī (d. 939/1532-33). The young Sh. spent his time in study, prayer and ascetic exercises. Amīnaddīn al-Najjār al-Dimyātī, the imam of the mosque, initiated Sh. into the religious milieu of Cairo. Through Amīnaddīn, Sh. became acquainted with several leading Sufis.

Sh.'s increasing popularity aroused the jealousy of a group of his comrades, and he had to leave the mosque. He moved to Madrasat Umm Hond in Hatt Bayna al-Sūrayni, where he found peace. Powerful emirs participated in his $mahy\bar{a}$ prayer sessions, a newly established custom of praying all Friday night long in honor of the Prophet. He attained recognition and economic success after a certain qadi had established for him a large $z\bar{a}wiya$, generously supported by charitable endowments $(awq\bar{a}f)$, where Sh. lived with his family. The $z\bar{a}wiya$ provided food for as many as 200 people a day, most of them temporary residents. It was also a place for study and devotion.

Owing to his charismatic personality, meek character, and also thanks to his broad education and readable style, Sh. had many friends and admirers. Among his teachers and friends, he mentions many men of the ruling class, the greatest scholars of Cairo (of all the *madāhib*, legal schools, not just his own Shāfi^cī one) and especially many Sufi shaykhs. Among his early teachers in *figh*, Sh. mentions Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī (d. 926/1520), a famous scholar and judge, who educated in his long life generations of *'ulamā'*. Sh. also had (unnamed) enemies at al-Azhar college-mosque. He writes that he was maliciously accused of claiming ijtihād mutlaq, the claim to make independent rulings in Islamic law without following the recognized authorities of early Islam. He also had a Sufi rival named Karīmaddīn, head of the Halwatī Sufi order that was at the time unorthodox. Typically, Sh. only hints to that rivalry, but a later biographer gives the details of the quarrel that was not only based on personal jealousies, but also on a different understanding of Sufism: Sh. accused Karīmaddīn of being careless with regard to the rules of the shari and the latter regarded Sh. as a faqīh, that is, a jurisconsult, rather than a true mystic. After Sh.'s death the $z\bar{a}wiya$ deteriorated. cAbdurraḥīm, his only son, was less devoted and did not possess his father's talents for religious leadership. The Sha^crānīya order, however, survived into the 19th century.

WORKS

In his writings Sh. showed a strong social awareness, and sympathy with the weak segments of society, especially women and the poor. He opposed injustice, and he and his Sufi comrades tried to spread normative Islam especially in the villages, where there were no scholars or institutions to fulfill that task.

As a meek Sufi, he expressed the need to obey the rulers and to respect them. He praised Süleymān I (926-74/1520-66), and even calls him "the visible pole" (al-Qutb al- $z\bar{a}hir$), a Sufi expression of adoration. On the other hand, he criticizes "the unjust ones" (al-zalama), unnamed members of the ruling class. Ever cautious, he refrains from any open attack on the Ottoman occupation of Egypt. Yet there are a few hints that reveal his dissatisfaction: in a religious text he introduces a cryptic remark that somehow knowledge disappeared from Egypt at the beginning of the year 923/1517, exactly when the Ottomans occupied the land. More than once he refers negatively to the $q\bar{a}n\bar{u}n$, the Ottoman administrative law that was applied to Egypt and was regarded by many as un-Islamic. As other contemporary historians, Sh. notes the diminishing role of Arabic-speaking judges, in favor of Turkish speakers.

① Lawāqiḥ al-anwār fī ṭabaqāt al-sāda al-aḥyār or al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā

Also known as the "Great *tabaqāt*," this work was completed in 952/1545 and consists of 430 biographies. It starts with the four *Rāshidūn*, i.e., the 'rightly guided caliphs,' and ends in Sh.'s own days. The older biographies are not original and often contain only sayings attributed to the Sufis. The part of the work where Sh. writes about those Sufis who lived from the second part of the 9th/15th century is especially interesting for historians. The lives of these Sufis, some of whom had been the direct or indirect teachers of himself or his colleagues, were a part of Sh.'s own tradition.

The popularity of the book resulted in several editions, none of which is actually a critical edition of all the existing manuscripts. The most recent is by ^cAbdurraḥmān Ḥudā Maḥmūd (Cairo, 1992). The editor declares that this edition is based on manuscripts at al-Azhar library and compared to the Būlāq edition of 1292/1875, but does not mention the manuscripts he used. J.-Cl. Garcin prepared an excellent index of the *Tabaqāt* (1966).

2 al-Tabaqāt al-suģrā

In 961/1554, Sh. wrote a supplement ($\underline{D}ayl$) to his first biographical dictionary. The supplement which is also known as the "Small $tabaq\bar{a}t$ " comprises 106 biographies, beginning with that of the famous scholar Jalāladdīn al-Suyūtī (d. 911/1505). The work is divided into four parts: 1. Biographies of those who taught him Sufism. 2. Those whom he met personally, did not learn from directly, but whom he may have consulted occasionally. 3. "Ulamā" who belonged to other madhabs, besides his own Shāfi°ī. 4. Mostly "ulamā" who were alive when he was writing the supplement, arranged by madhab.

Sh. does not strictly adhere to his division. For example, in Part 1, he writes a short biography of Jalāladdīn al-Suyūṭī who died when Sh. was only fourteen years old and had just arrived in Cairo, too young to be al-Suyūṭī's disciple. Yet, the *Ṭaba-qāt al-ṣuġrā* includes important information about distinguished Sufis, which does not appear in other sources. Sh. provides information about the early founders of the Sufi family-ṭarīqa of the Bakrī al-Ṣiddīqī, which was prominent in the religious life of Egypt until the 20th century.

The only edition (1970) seems to be based on the same manuscript that Garcin used for his index (Cairo, Dar al-kutub, Ta'rīh 513).

③ Lawāqiḥ al-anwār al-qudsiyya fī manāqib al-culamā' wa-l-ṣūfiyya or al-Ṭabaqāt al-wusṭā

Sh. finished his third collection of *ṭabaqāt* which is known as "the Middle *ṭabaqāt*" in 965/1557. This unpublished collection is divided into three parts: 1. Early Sufis and *culamā* whom he did not know personally, up to his grandfather cAlī. 2. Sufis whom he knew from the beginning of the 10th century. 3. Other *culamā*. *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-wusṭā* was meant to add anecdotes and new themes that Sh. felt he had omitted in the first collection.

Sh. often states that he writes for the moral edification of his readers. Notoriously careless with his dates and sometimes with the facts, 10 Sh.'s writing is sometimes naïve. With the miraculous ever-present in his writing, he tells many anecdotes of uncertain historical worth. Yet, as J.- Cl. Garcin correctly notes, there is life in the $tabaq\bar{a}t$. The anecdotes provide a credible picture of the religious (particularly the Sufi) milieu in Cairo in the second half of the 9th/15th century and during the first decades of Ottoman rule. The networks and Sufi relationships become clear, as well as the attitudes of orthodox Sufis. Sh. also includes several biographies of $majd\bar{u}bs$, or $mal\bar{a}mat\bar{\imath}s$, namely "distracted ones", weird and sometimes ignorant illuminati who were roaming the streets of Cairo. In their appearance and behavior they were far from the ideal of saintly men, and Sh. obviously did not approve of them. Nonetheless, they were believed to be endowed with supernatural powers, and some of them were considered to be "natural saints."

Sh. was and still is a popular writer thanks to his readable style and humanistic approach. It is no wonder that many of the manuscripts of his works survived, including several autographs. Most of them are kept in Cairo, and Garcin primarily relied on *Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya*, the Egyptian National Library. Yet as we learn from Carl Brockelmann's *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, many manuscripts can be found in libraries outside Egypt. ¹²

Sh. has several other works on Sufism and other religious topics.

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2 al-Tabaqāt al-suģrā

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3 Lawāqiḥ al-anwār al-qudsiyya fī manāqib al-^culamā' wa-l-ṣūfiyya or al-Ṭabaqāt al-wustā

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¹ Al- Munāwī, *Tarjamat al-Shayh ^cAbd al-Wahhāb al-Sha^crānī*, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, 10112.

² Idem, *al-Kawākib al-durriyya fī tarājim al-sāda al-ṣūfiyya*, New Haven, Yale University Beineke Manuscript Library, Ms. A-1151.

³ Al-Malījī's work was published in 1350/1932 in Cairo by Safar al-Sha^cranī.

⁴ Al-Sha^crānī, *Laṭā'if al-minan* (Cairo, 1357/1939).

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⁷ *Ibidem*, 244-245.

⁸ Al-Sha^crānī, *al-Tabaqāt al-sugrā* (Cairo, 1390/1970), 81.

⁹ Al-Sha^crānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-ṣuġrā*, 50-52, 78-80.

¹⁰ See Muḥammad Najm al-Dīn al-Gazzī, *Al-Kawākib al-sā'ira fī a'yān al-mi'a al-'āshira*, ed. Jibrā' īl Sulaymān Jabbūr (Beirut, 1945), vol. 1, 35, 121.

¹¹ J.-Cl. Garcin, "Index des *ṭabaqāt* de Sha^crānī (pour la fin du IXe et le debut du Xe S.H)," *Annales Islamologiques*, 6 (Cairo, 1966), 33.

¹² See Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* vol. 1 (1898), 442, 493; vol. 2 (1949), 336-338; Supplement 2 (1938), 464-467.