

Sainthood and the law:
The influence of mysticism in eighteenth century pedagogy of
the *fuqahā'* *

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Abstract

Using certificates of scholarly achievement (*ijāzāt*), it is argued that ideas and practices usually associated with Islamic mysticism (*taṣawwuf*) were widespread among the religious elite in eighteenth century Egypt. Writings about Sufism were a common part of the curriculum of scholars of the law and individuals revered as saints feature prominently in chains of transmission of authority in subjects such as *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. Most importantly, pedagogical practices common to religious scholars of this period reflect epistemological elements that cut across philosophical works and ritual traditions that come out of Islam's mystical tradition.

Key Words: Sufism – Education – *ijāza* – *ḥadīth* – Egypt

In the biography of the Shādhilī *waliyy* 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-'Aḥfī (d. 1172/1758),¹ the prominent Egyptian scholar 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥasan al-Jabartī (d. 1240/1825) describes the activities that he witnessed at the *mawlid* held for the subject of his biography:

Then they created a festival (*mawsim*) and holiday (*ʿīd*) for him every year. They invite to it people from lands East and West. They pitch many tents and pavilions and slaughterhouses and coffee shops. A great world of people gathers for it. They include a mixture of elites and common people, peasants and craftsmen, peddlers of games, dancing girls, prostitutes, showmen with performing monkeys and snake charmers. They fill the desert and the gardens. They defile the tombs and set fires on them. They dump filth, urinate and defecate, fornicate, play and dance. They beat the drums and playing whistles day and night. The jurists and scholars join in, setting up tents for themselves as well. And they become an example for the highest

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1 He was also initiated into the Bakriyya brotherhood (*tarīqa*), but became the head of his own derivative branch of the Shādhiliyya, the 'Aḥfiyya.

princes and merchants and the general public, without speaking against it. Indeed, they believe that this is an act of piety (*qurba*, lit: proximity) and worship. And if it weren't so, the 'ulamā' would have renounced it, rather than participating. God is responsible for all of them.²

Public festivals (*mawāsim*) in honor of a particular saint (*waliyy*) such as that described here were an important component of the ritual practice, as well as the social and economic presence of the Sufi brotherhoods in Egyptian society. Jabartī's representation follows the style and content of a long tradition of criticism, on legal grounds, of the distasteful activities and general carnival atmosphere of festivals surrounding the visitation or praise of Islamic saints, or *awliyā'*. The disparagement of festivals on legal grounds has sometimes been taken as evidence of a rift between the scholars of the law, the *fuqahā'*, and the Sufis, or *fuqarā'*.³ Based on this apparent tension between practice associated with Sufism, and the letter of the law, Gellner proposes a theory of two conflicting tiers of religious culture in Egypt. The first is the Great Tradition, which is urban and scholarly, while the other includes Shiism and Sufism, which are rural and based on charismatic authority.⁴ Similarly, Trimmingham observes a general "enmity legalists have always borne toward Sufism,"⁵ just as he views Sufism as "a reaction against the external rationalization of Islam in law and systematic theology."⁶ However, even in Jabartī's critical description of the *mawlid*, he emphasizes repeatedly that all different segments of society attended, even the 'ulamā' who (he seems to feel) should have known better, suggesting that such practices were by no means simply a rural or lower class phenomenon. This is also supported by studies showing that much of the total literary output in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was in various genres of Sufi literature.⁷ Still, the division between *fuqahā'* and *fuqarā'* is often treated as the most basic division in religious culture in Egypt in this period.

An analysis of the information contained in *ijāzāt*, which are documents used for recording the transmission of knowledge from one teacher to another through multiple generations, has much to add to existing studies that challenge this generally accepted division in Egyptian religious culture. I will argue that the *ijāza* of Aḥmad b. Muṣṭafā al-Iskandarī al-Ṣabbāgh (d. 1162/1748) gives a sense of the kind of religious knowledge that was valued in the Egyptian scholarly culture in his day. Indeed, his collection of transmissions of authority, referred to as a *fihris* (index), comes to be used for reference by later generations of scholars. According to the biographical collection of Kattānī, Ṣabbāgh appears to be best known for this collection of *asānīd* (chains of transmission).

2 al-JABARTĪ (2003), 2: 364-5.

3 See, for example, MOREH 2009.

4 GELLNER 1983 as summarized by REEVES 1995: 308.

5 TRIMMINGHAM 1998: 1.

6 *Ibid.*: 1-2.

7 J. Heyworth-Dunne speculates that by the end of the eighteenth century in Egypt, nearly all scholars were Sufis, and nearly all *khulafā'* in the Sufi milieu were scholars, in *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt* (HEYWORTH-DUNNE 1938: 10-11). According to this analysis, Sufi poetry was the main literary output at this time.

He has collected in [his book] many narrations from among the *asānīd* [chains of transmission] for books of *ḥadīth* [reports] and *tafsīr* [exegesis] and readings of the Qurʾān, and enchaind *aḥādīth*⁸ and works of *fiqh* [jurisprudence] and *taṣawwuf* [Sufism] and prayers and lines for the transmission of the *ṭuruq al-qawm* [the Sufi brotherhoods],⁹ including the handshake, holding hands, use of the rosary, inculcation of *dhikr* [rituals of remembrance] and being dressed in the robes of the brotherhood, among others.¹⁰

Many of the key discursive features of the *ijāza* of Ṣabbāgh that are highlighted here can be generalized to the other eighteenth century catalogue *ijāzāt* in the sample available through the library of al-Azhar University in Cairo and the manuscript collection of the Egyptian National Library.

Analysis of this collection of *ijāzāt* shows that Sufism was integrated into the total curriculum of a scholar of this period in a variety of ways. First, works about the practice, history and theology of Sufism were studied along with what Ṣabbāgh refers to as *al-ʿulūm al-sharʿiyya*,¹¹ that is, those sciences that supported the derivation of legal decisions. Furthermore, there is not a clear distinction between teachers of these two kinds of religious knowledge. Accomplished scholars seemed to have expertise in both *taṣawwuf* and *al-ʿulūm al-sharʿiyya* and certify students in both types of learning. Most importantly, a discursive analysis of the *isnād* as text-rituals suggests that many transmissions in the *ijāza* of Ṣabbāgh that appear to be intended for the verification of authentic transmission of reports, or the accurate mastery of conceptual material, in fact attest to the physical proximity of the student to the sanctified bodies of the *awliyāʾ*. It will be argued that the value of such text-rituals is rooted in the concept of religious authority as *walāya*. Specifically, certain types of transmissions in the field of *ḥadīth* studies are valued because they attest to the recipient's proximity (*qurba* or *walāya*) to the sources of divine guidance and blessing through the institutions of *ṣuḥba* (companionship) that was the foundation of the master disciple relationship in Sufism, and the concept of *baraka* (blessing) transmitted through physical contact with a saint or *waliyy*. This suggests that what could be called a "mystical epistemology" was not limited to pedagogical practices for the mastery of Sufism, but was seen as the basis for all religious knowledge and authority in eighteenth century Egypt. This further suggests that the division of the religious elite into *fuqahāʾ*

8 Enchaind *aḥādīth* are reports transmitted with an action, as is discussed in greater detail below.

9 The term *ṭarīqa* can refer to a "devotional path," as in VOLL 2002: 368. These transmissions denote initiation into an exclusive initiatory organization by which the legacy of a particular teacher is carried on through *khulafāʾ*, administrative representatives responsible not only for carrying on the teachings and practice of the founder, but also for managing any endowments and properties left behind by the saint. See REEVES 1990: 58.

10 "فهرسته كبرى جامعة لمرويات كثيرة من أسانيد الكتب الحديثية والتفسيرية والقراءات والمسلسلات وكتب الفقه والتصوف" . والأحزاب وأسانيد طرق القوم من مصافحة ومشابكة ومناولة السبحة وتلقين الذكر وإلباس الخرقة وغير ذلك" . From the travel writing of Zabādī, as quoted in al-KATTĀNĪ 1982, 2: 141. His biography can also be found in MAKHLŪF 1970: 338 and in JABARTĪ (2003), 2: 283.

11 Ṣabbāgh uses the term *al-ʿulūm al-sharʿiyya* to refer to "tawḥīd (theology), *tafsīr* (exegesis), *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, and [its] injunctions (*farāʾid*) among others", in "Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh": 15.

(jurists) and *fuqarā'* (mystics) in this period is best seen as one of emphasis and not of absolute category.

Characteristics, varieties and functions of *ijāzāt*

Subjects that were taught in the mosque, and later in the *madrasa*, *ribāṭ zāwiya* and *khānqāh*¹² included *tafsīr* (exegesis), *qirā'a* (variant readings of the Qur'ān), *ḥadīth* (the sayings, decisions and behaviors of the Prophet and his companions), *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal theory and methodology), *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *uṣūl al-dīn* (the foundations of the faith, including theological creeds).¹³ What these sciences had in common was their fundamental importance to the derivation of *sharī'a* law-as-*fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence. For this reason they are hereafter referred to as the *sharī* sciences. These sciences have traditionally been distinguished from the study of Sufī philosophy (*ilm al-taṣawwuf*) just as they have been distinguished from the “rational” sciences¹⁴ as well as the occult sciences.¹⁵ By the eighteenth century an accomplished scholar was expected to have mastered a distinguishable canon of texts in these *sharī* sciences, all of which supported in one way or another his ability to engage in discourses producing and applying human “understanding” (*fiqh*) of God's *sharī'a*. Hereafter, *ijāzāt* in which such works figure most prominently are referred to as “legalist” *ijāzāt*, to distinguish them from the *uḥūd* (sg. *ahd*), which, though similar in form, were issued to initiate new members into the administrative hierarchy of the Sufi brotherhoods.

The term *ijāza* was initially a shortened version of the term *ijāzat al-samā'a* “certification of audition,” or simply *samā'a*, the earliest form of *ijāza*.¹⁶ *Samā'āt* initially took the form of a brief written notice appended to, or in the cover of, a book as a record of those who had given and attended auditions of the material in the book. *Samā'āt* attested both to certify the presence of attendees to an audition and to guarantee the manuscript itself as a version of the text accepted by the leading authorities in the generations that used it.¹⁷ *Samā'āt* are also found in the margins of Sufī texts up to the modern period as notes in

12 The term *madrasa* simply means a place of study, whereas *ribāṭ zāwiya* and *khānqāh* are all different names for Sufi lodges. These different places are discussed in detail below in chapter 3.

13 MAKDISI 1981: 79. This group of sciences is also referred to simply as the “Islamic sciences”. Ancillary sciences included Arabic language, grammar, lexicography, morphology, metrics, rhyme, prosody, tribal history and genealogy. The *ribāṭ* from early on taught Sufism through the study of *ḥadīth*, and eventually, by the sixteenth century have combined the study of Sufism with law. Ibid.: 10.

14 Sometimes called “foreign” sciences, including logic, philosophy, mathematics and the natural sciences, especially medicine and physics were taught separately in libraries and hospitals.

15 Occult sciences included alchemy, or transforming matter into gold (*al-kīmīyā'*), creating talismans and charms, natural magic (*al-sīmīyā'*), and the art of magic potions. In the eighteenth century, these were considered to be an acceptable subject of inquiry in the Islamic sciences. Not only did respected scholars write on these topics, but sometimes they would be involved in practicing them. Services such as the production of charms were generally learned outside of the academic context through apprenticeship. See HEYWORTH-DUNNE 1938: 12-23.

16 IDRIZ 2007: 87.

17 MACKAY 1971.

the margins or inside the pages of the very copy of the manuscript that has been studied or read.¹⁸ *Samā'āt* were valued by teachers for the *posthumous* prestige they would gain by the future accomplishments of very young attendees of an audition. *Samā'āt* are thus unique historical documents, identifying at once the material object of the manuscript in reference to multiple generations of teachers and students, and these to each other. An example is in figure 1, a page from a collection of *isnād* (chains of transmission) by the shaykh al-Sharunbābilī. On that page are three separate *ijāzāt al-samā'a*, written in the hands of three different individuals who studied the text.¹⁹

The legalist *ijāzāt* that will be the focus of this analysis are “text independent,”²⁰ because they were produced as free-standing documents, rather than being written into the copy of the work to which they refer, as were the *samā'āt*. They are similar to a contemporary academic diploma²¹ in that they grant a general credential rather than the reading of single work. The most common form of text independent *ijāza* is the *ijāza 'amma* (general certification), such as that in figure 2.²² In the general *ijāza*, a teacher grants the recipient the right to transmit to future students all of the works for which the teacher himself has received certification from his teachers.²³

General *ijāzāt* are often written in the hand of the recipient, and are validated by the personal seal of the teacher granting the certificate. Most of the eighteenth and nineteenth century general *ijāzāt* in the holdings of Egyptian libraries appear to focus on works in the *shar'ī* sciences. However, historically *ijāzāt* have also been granted for the mastery of poetry and the practice of medicine. Some in the *shar'ī* sciences give an explicit permission to teach (*ijāzat al-tadrīs*) or to issue legal counsels (*ijāzat iftā*).²⁴

General *ijāzāt*, while similar in appearance to a modern diploma, differ significantly in their social function. First, they are a documentation of a personal rather than institutional relationship. That is, the *ijāza* is granted by an individual teacher rather than an institution. Because the general *ijāza* is a certification for the entire repertoire of the teacher and all of his teachers, the prestige of a given *ijāza* differs completely depending on who is granting it, rather than being linked to a standardized degree of achievement, analogous to today's

18 For an example, see MCKAY's analysis of one such *ijāza*, *ibid.*: 1-81.

19 For more on *samā'a* and *qirā'a*, see MAKDISI 1981: 140-152.

20 In the terminology of SCHMIDTKE 2006: 96.

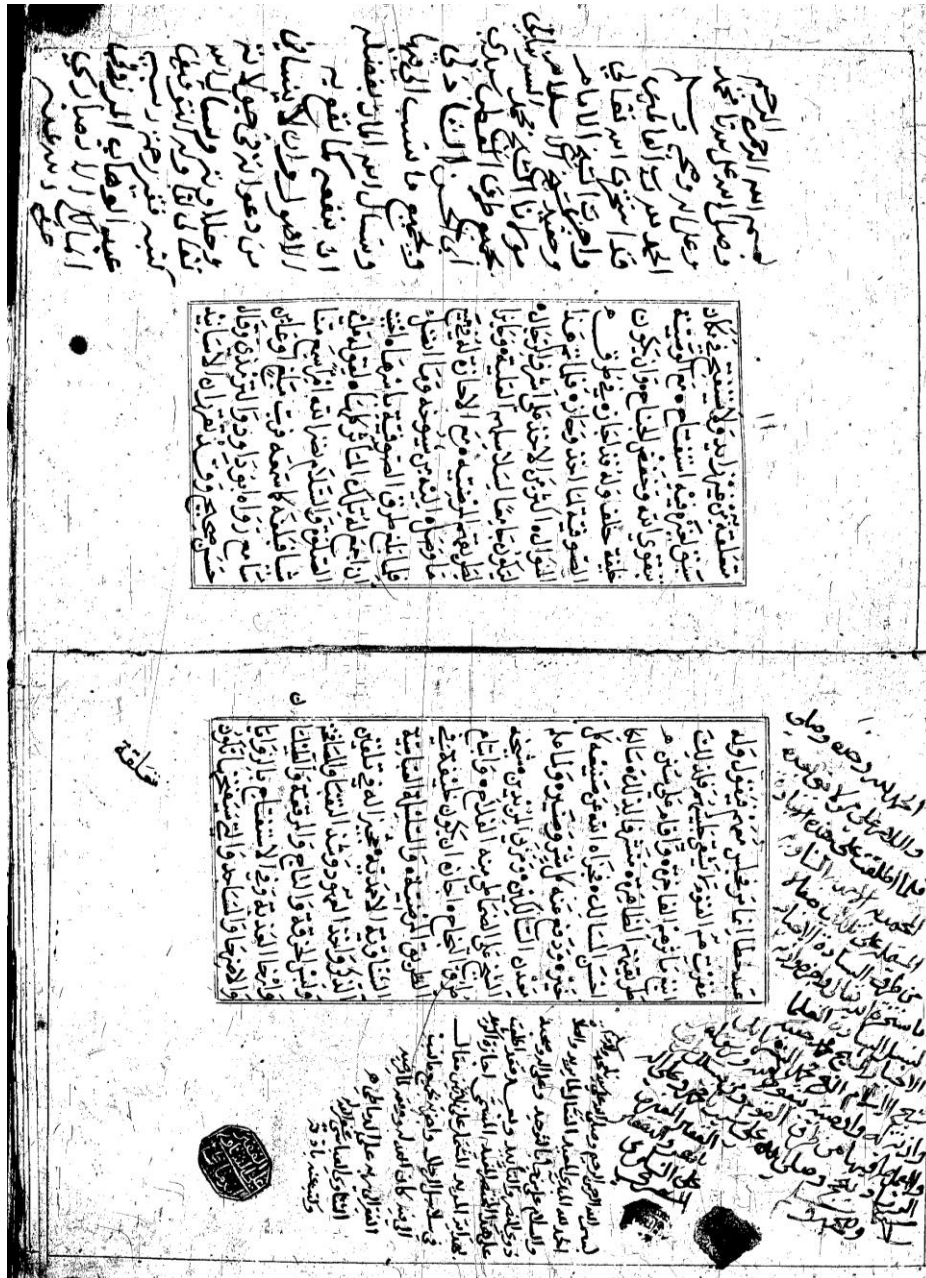
21 Makdisi suggests that the *ijāza* in the Islamic educational tradition was the precursor to the Western *licentia docendi*, and in turn the precursor to the modern diploma, in MAKDISI 1981: 276.

22 Other examples from the Azhar library of this type include “Ijāzat al-Sayyid Ḥusayn Ḥilmī b. Muḥammad Šibghat Allāh al-Naqshbandī min al-Sayyid ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd b. Khalīl Surrī al-Istanbūlī” (Cairo: Azhar Manuscripts, *Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth* 391/33048); “Ijāzat Sunbul al-Maḥalātī min Muḥammad b. Sa‘īd b. Muḥammad Sunbul al-Maḥalātī,” (Cairo: Azhar Manuscripts, *Majāmi‘* 633/3468); “Ijāza min Ismā‘īl ‘Uthmān al-Anṣārī to Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥāmid al-Makkī” (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub Manuscripts, *Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth* 438), and “Ijāzat ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. ‘Abd al-Khāliq al-Anṣārī” (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub Manuscripts, *Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth* 440).

23 Zabīdī in his *Mu‘jam* uses the term *ijāza ḥāfila* to refer to this type of certification, see REICHMUTH 2009: 156.

24 IDRIZ 2007: 92. – See also al-AHWĀNĪ 1955.

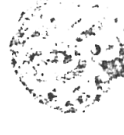
Figure 1: "The *ijāza* of Sharunbābili"²⁵



25 Cairo: Dār al-Kutub Manuscripts, Ṭaṣawwuf Ṭaymūr.

Figure 2: A general *ijāza*²⁶

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 أَحْمَدُ لِلَّهِ الشُّكْرُ وَأَحْمَدُ وَغَافِرُ خَطَايَا الْعَمَلِ وَعَظِيمُ الْعِزَّةِ وَالْمَجْدِ
 وَالصَّلَاةِ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَاصْحَابِهِ الْأَعْلَامِ وَبَعْدُ
 فَقَدْ سَأَلَنِي أَخُو الرَّسَدِ وَالْفَلَاحِ وَرَبِّيبُ اجْدِ وَالنَّجَاحِ الْمُؤَيِّدُ الْفَاضِلُ
 الْمَجْلِبُ بِفِرَائِدِ الْفَوَاضِلِ وَالْفَضَائِلِ الْفَوَاضِلِ عَلَى الْمَعَانِي وَالذِّقَائِقِ
 وَالْمِبَادِرِ إِلَى فِهْمِ الْعُلُومِ عَلَى وَجْهِهَا وَأَحْقَائِقِ مِنْ حَفِظَتِهَا الْبَيِّنَاتِ
 بِنَفْسِ التَّحْفِ الْأَرِيْبِ الشَّيْخِ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ خَلْفًا أَنْ اجْتَمَعَتْ بِمَاتَمِ
 لِي دَرَايَتُهُ وَتَجَوُّزِي رِوَايَتُهُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ رِسَالَةَ الْعِلْمِ الْمَحْقَقِ
 الشَّيْخِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ سَالِمِ الْبَصْرِيِّ الْكَبِيِّ رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى مِنْ ذَلِكَ
 نَبَّهْتُ سَيِّدَ الْمُحَقِّقِينَ وَتَاجَ الْمَدَقِّقِينَ اسْتَاذَنَا جَمَالَ الدِّينِ الشَّيْخِ
 عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الشُّرْقَاوِيِّ فَاجْتَمَعَتْ لِي ذَلِكَ امْتِنَانًا لِأَمْرِهِ وَأَسْعَا فَاذْرَعْتَهُ
 وَنَفَيْتُهُ وَقُلْتُ قَدْ اجْتَمَعَتْ بِكَ بِذَلِكَ بِسْرَطِ التَّثْبُوتِ وَخَفِضِ الْجَنَاحِ
 وَأَوْصِيكَ بِتَقْوَى اللَّهِ تَعَالَى فَانْهَارَ رَأْسُ الْأَمْرِ وَإِنَّا لَنَسْتَأْنِسُ
 مِنَ الدَّعَا خُصُوصًا بِحَسَنِ الْاِحْتِنَامِ وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ
 وَصَحْبِهِ الْبَرَّةِ الْكِرَامِ قَالَهُ بَعْدَهُ وَرَقْمَهُ بِعَلْمِهِ عَطِيَّةُ الْقَمَاشِيِّ وَلِدِ الْمَرْحُومِ
 إِلَى اللَّهِ تَعَالَى أَحْمَدُ ابْنُ أَبِي إِسْحَاقَ الدَّمِيَاطِيِّ الْأَنْبَاطِيِّ الْأَشْعَرِيِّ
 غَفَرَ اللَّهُ لَهُمَا وَلِلْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ آمِينَ آمِينَ
 فِي غَدَةِ جُمَادِي الْآخِرَةِ عَشْرَةَ أَشْهُنَ وَتَسْعِيْنَ وَمِائَتَيْنِ وَالْفَتْحِ خَلَّتْ مِنْ
 الْهَجْرَةِ النَّبَوِيَّةِ عَلَى صَاحِبِهَا أَفْضَلُ الصَّلَاةِ وَأَرْكَبِي التَّحِيَّةِ وَاللَّامِ



26 "The *ijāza* of Aḥmad al-Qumāsh," 1292/1875 (Cairo: Azhar Manuscripts, Majāmi' 1957/93).

Bachelor, Master or Doctoral degrees. The value of a given *ijāza* is also contingent on the quality of the relationship between the grantor and the recipient. This is suggested by the common inclusion of a description of the situation in which the *ijāza* was granted. Usually it is framed as a response to a request by the recipient with the phrase “*sa’alanī fa-ajaztuhū*” (he asked me [for it] so I gave him my permission).

Second, it differs from a diploma in that the granting of an *ijāza* does not require that the grantor examine the recipient in the works included. Details in the texts of eighteenth century *ijāzāt* regarding the specifics of when and where study took place make it clear that it was not uncommon for a recipient to receive a general *ijāza* allowing them to transmit hundreds of works after only studying a fraction of one of the works in the list. This suggests that general *ijāzāt* attest more to the personal confidence of the grantor in the potential of the recipient than to the recipient’s performance in any standard examination process. In this sense, the general *ijāza* is more analogous to a letter of recommendation than to a modern diploma. That the *ijāza* often attests to future potential can also be seen in the formula of closing the text of the *ijāza* with some general advice from the grantor to the recipient.

In the sample considered here, it is almost always simply that he be pious and obedient to God. In some cases the teacher puts a condition in his permission with the formula: “*ajaztuhū bi-sharṭ...*”, that is, “I certified him on the condition that (he be pious and obedient)”. Another formula is “I hope for him” that he be pious. The inclusion of such conditions further indicates that the document is not necessarily issued at the end of a course of study, but as a form of permission, based on his recognition of the apparent acceptability of the personal qualities of the recipient. In some cases, the only personal characteristic required from a recipient was an acceptable genealogy, as some *ijāzāt* were issued to the unborn offspring of an accomplished scholar. For this reason, in what follows *ijāza* will sometimes be rendered as “blessing,” and the above condition as “I give him my blessing on the condition that he be pious.”

A second type of text-independent *ijāza*, hereafter referred to as a “catalogue *ijāza*,” is a sort of autobiobibliography,²⁷ sometimes called a *fihris*²⁸ (a term which can be translated as both catalogue or bibliography) or a *mu’jam*.²⁹ In such *ijāzāt*, the scholar composes an entire book listing as many as hundreds of works studied in a variety of disciplines.³⁰ Because the catalogue *ijāza* represents a good section of the student’s total curriculum, it is more analogous to a modern academic transcript than to a diploma. Some catalogue *ijāza* manuscripts exist as a few pages in a *majmū’a* (a notebook containing several, often unrelated writings), but in eighteenth century Egypt, the catalogue *ijāzā* becomes a genre of its own, published as a bound volume meant to be circulated, studied and transmitted as

27 SCHMIDTKE 2006: 97.

28 KATTĀNĪ refers to the document catalogued in the al-Azhar University library as “*Ijāzat al-shaykh al-Iskandarānī al-Ṣabbāgh*” as the *fihris* of Ṣabbāgh.

29 Some authors use the terms *ijāza* and *mu’jam* interchangeably, but generally speaking, a *mu’jam* would be arranged by the names of teachers, rather than by subjects taught. See AHWĀNĪ 1955.

30 “*Ijāzat al-shaykh Aḥmad al-Jawharī li-Muṣṭafā al-Damanhūrī*” (Cairo: Azhar Manuscripts, *Mujāmi’* 1957/93); “*Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh*”; “*Ijāzat al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Bahansī*” (Cairo: Azhar Manuscripts, *Muṣṭalaḥ al-Ḥadīth* 390/33048).

a whole.³¹ The transmission of such works resulted in the production of catalogue *ijāzāt* in which other catalogues are nested, such as in the *ijāza* given to the Shaykh al-Barāwī, which includes the full text of several smaller catalogue *ijāzāt*, one of which was granted to the teacher (Talmasānī) of the teacher (Kankashī) of the recipient's teacher (Malawī).³² Thus a whole section of *isnād* in Barāwī's *ijāza* actually belongs to a teacher three generations removed from the author. Typically, the handwriting is simple, with tight lines, on a non-decorative page, as in figure 3.

In such collections, works of *ḥadīth* have a particularly prominent place, but transmissions of works in other Islamic sciences and even in non-religious fields are included. In the catalogue *ijāza*, it is typical to abbreviate a large collection of less distinguished transmissions of the same material by certain formulae, including the phrase “*akhadhtuhu ‘an ‘iddat ashyākh, minhum...*” (I studied this with several *shuyūkh*, among them is...) or, “*arwī ‘an jamā‘a minhum...*” (I relate this on the authority of a group [of scholars], among them is...).³³

It is typical for the document itself to be penned by the recipient of the *ijāza* and not the teacher. In the *ijāza* of Ṣabbāgh, he mentions for one transmission that his teacher “certified me by his own hand.”³⁴ The fact that this detail was worthy of mention suggests that it was a rare honor. Schmidtke sees this habit as evidence that the goal of the production of the *ijāza* was more to honor the teacher and his accomplishments than to attest to the credentials of the student receiving it.³⁵ A common element to all of these types of *ijāzāt*, and which distinguishes it from any analogous Western document of achievement, are the *isnād*, or chains of transmission.

Chains of transmission

The collection and study of *asnād* (sg. *sanad*) is a component of many genres of historical writing in the Islamic tradition, besides certificates of transmission. The word *sanad* means a “support” and in the context of these documents, they are supports for a given piece of information, for a person, or for a written document. The *asānīd* in the *ijāza* of Ṣabbāgh take the form of chains of transmission of authority from scholar to scholar, and from generation to generation, as in the following example taken from the catalogue *ijāza*:

31 The analysis of such works is undertaken as part of the science of *takhrīj*, or the analysis of textual variants and ways of transmission. REICHMUTH 2009: 51.

32 “Ijāzat al-Malawī al-Kabīr lil-shaykh al-Barāwī” (Cairo: Azhar Manuscripts, *Muṣṭalaḥ* 398/14482).

33 *Ibid.*: 2.

34 “Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh”: 4.

35 SCHMIDTKE 2006: 100-101.

Figure 3: A catalogue *ijāza* with a *ḥadīth musalsal bi'l-awwaliyya*³⁶

استاذي المذكور "سائر مولفاته كما اجازته بذلك الامام البايع عن العارف صلح التتاه
احمد الباقيني عن والده عن الشهاب احمد بن محمد الرمي عن شيخ الاسلام زكريا الانصاري عن
شيخ السنة ابي الفضل احمد بن علي الكخاني عن ابي هرون عبد الرحمن بن الحافظ الذي
عن ابي نصر الشيرازي عن الامام مولفه رحمه الله ورحمنا به ائمة واهل الحكم
للإمام تاج الدين احمد بن محمد بن عبد الكرم ابن عطاء الله رحمه الله فقد اخذته
عن خلق كثير والله لجله والهيبة واجازني في ذلك وشرحه الاستاذ عبد الله النهري عن جده
البايع عن ابي عبد الروف المناوي في الشيخ سالم السنهوري عن ابي العنبر الغيطي
عن شيخ الاسلام زكريا الانصاري عن ابي عبد الرحمن بن الفرات عن ابي الجاه عبد
الوهاب بن علي الساسي عن والده ابي علي بن عبد القادر الساسي عن الامام مولفه
رحمنا الله به واما شرح الملاح والفرج والزيادة للإمام الاخير
للإمام الاديب شرف الدين محمد بن عبد بن عماد المصري فاخذه عن عدة اشياخ حضور
علمهم في الدين العام واجازني في علمهم باولسرها وتبقيده مولفاته وكذلك اجازني في
الشيخ عبد الله النهري عن الامام البايع عن الشيخ سليمان بن عبد اللطيم البايع عن سيدي
عبد روف المناوي وسالم السنهوري عن ابي العنبر الغيطي عن القاضي زكريا الانصاري
عن ابي اسحاق الصالح والصلاح ابي عبد الله محمد بن محمد بن الحسن الشاذلي عن ابي الحسن
عن جابر الهاشمي عن مولفه رحمه الله ائمة واهل الحكم والامام الحافظ
ابي الفضل محمد بن احمد بن روف اللطيم في تلمذ الامام ابن عوف وشارح حقه العلاء
خليل بن اسحاق المالكاني واجازني في سائر تفاسيرها وتبقيده الرشد سيدي عبد الله
النهري عن شيخه البايع عن احمد بن خليل الساسي وسالم السنهوري عن ابي العنبر
عن القاضي زكريا بن التقي محمد بن محمد بن عبد الرحمن بن زهرة عن المولف
رحمنا الله واهل بيته افضل الفرج وهي المسماة بالمتفرجة للإمام ابي الفضل
يوسف بن محمد بن يوسف عرق بان الحجي رحمه الله تعالى فرويتها عن عدة من
الفضلاء وكذا شرحها شيخ الاسلام وغيره منهم استاذي عبد الله النهري عن البايع
عن سليمان بن عبد السلام وسالم السنهوري عن ابي العنبر عن شيخ الاسلام
الداكبر زكريا بن ابي الفضل المرعشي عن ابي هرون عبد الرحمن بن الحافظ الذي
عن الحافظ ابي عبد الله بن رشد لضم الراعي محمد بن احمد بن عثمان بن علي بن مفرح
تسديد الراعي الصنهاجي عن ابي البايع عن عبد الله بن يحيى بن محمد بن الغمام عن
ابي عبد الله بن محمد بن عبد الطيب بن الرناج عن الامام المولف ائمة الله عليه
والعلمان ائمة واهل الحديث المسلسل بالاولوية فترويه عن عدة اشياخ
منهم سلع عبد الله النهري وهو اول حديث سمعته منه في بعينه عمدة المشرف
وهو اول حديث سمعته من شيخه البايع وهو عن الشهاب احمد بن محمد بن السليبي
عن ابي يوسف بن محمد بن الاسلام زكريا الانصاري عن ابي ابراهيم بن علي بن احمد
القلقي عن ابي عبد الله الشهاب احمد بن ابي تميم المقدسي عن ابي عبد الله محمد بن

36 "Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh": 11.

أجازني الإمام عبد الله البصري المذكور بصحيح الإمام البخاري أيضا عن شيخه العلامة المحقق منلا إبراهيم بن الحسن الكوراني ثم الكردي المدني عن عبد الصالح الغمري عبد الله بن منلا سعد الله اللاهوري نزيل المدينة المنورة على ساكنها أفضل الصلاة والسلام عن الشيخ قطب الدين محمد بن أحمد النهرواني عن والده علاء الدين أحمد بن محمد النهرواني عن المحافظ نور الدين أبي الفتوح الطاووسي عن الشيخ المعمر بابا يوسف الهروي عن الشيخ المعمر محمد بن شاذيخت الفرغاني عن الشيخ المعمر أبي لقمان يحيى بن عمار بن عقيل بن شاهان الختلافي عن الفريري عن الإمام البخاري رضي الله عنه³⁷

I got an *ijāza* from the aforementioned Imām ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī in the Sound [*ḥadīth*] of The Imām al-Bukhārī on [the authority of] his shaykh, the esteemed *muḥaqqiq* Manalā Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥasan al-Kūrānī al-Kurdī al-Madanī on [the authority of] ‘Abd al-Ṣāliḥ al-Ghamrī, ‘Abd Allāh al-Manalā Sa’d Allāh al-Aḥūrī, as a guest in his home in Madīna, peace and blessings upon him, on [the authority of] the shaykh Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Nahrawānī on [the authority of] his father ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Nahrawānī on [the authority of] al-Ḥāfiẓ Nūr al-Dīn, Abū ‘l-Futūḥ al-Ṭā’ūsī on [the authority of] the long-lived shaykh Bābā Yūsuf al-Harawī on [the authority of] the long-lived shaykh Muḥammad b. Shādhīyakht al-Farghānī on [the authority of] the long-lived shaykh Abū Luqmān Yahyā b. ‘Umār b. ‘Aqīl b. Shāhān al-Khitlānī on [the authority of] al-Farbarī on [the authority of] the Imām al-Bukhārī, may God be pleased with him.

Different techniques for verification of the soundness of chains of transmission, and thereby of the piece of information transmitted on its authority, have developed into separate disciplines and genres throughout Islamic history. A sound chain requires not only that the name of each transmitter of a given piece of information be mentioned, but that each transmitter be a person of demonstrated character and moral standing such that he is unlikely to be a fabricator. This requirement led to the science of *‘ilm al-rijāl*, or “knowing the men”³⁸ who are transmitting, and the literary genre of the biographical lexicon. Works in this field were also used to check whether it was chronologically and geographically possible for the two men (or women in some cases) in each link to have met each other and exchanged the information in question.

Verifying transmission is thus the original and apparent function of recording *isnād*. Generations of scholars have commented on its importance, and their views are included in the text of some *ijāzāt* in the form of aphorisms similar to those that decorate the text of the *‘ahd*. A common theme is the function of the *isnād* in protecting well-intentioned scholars from learning and transmitting incorrect information. Ṣabbāgh quotes the Imām al-Shāfi‘ī for the analogy, “collecting knowledge without *isnād* is like collecting wood not knowing that there is a snake in it.”³⁹ He emphasizes its importance as a means of verifying scriptural support of arguments regarding issues of contestation (*ikhtilāf*): “the *sanad* is a weapon of the believer, and without a weapon how will you fight?”⁴⁰ At the same time,

37 “Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh”: 6-7.

38 SIDDIQI 1996: 138.

39 “Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh”: 2.

40 *Ibid*.

“support” for opinions maintains doctrinal consistency or consensus, as in the statement: “*isnād* is part of the faith, without it, everyone would say what he likes.”⁴¹

Despite the emphasis on the role of the *isnād* as a tool for verification and accurate transmission of a conceptual, verbal material (what is “said”), many transmissions that include *isnād* cannot be explained as fulfilling this purpose. Their value can only be understood with reference to prevailing axiomatic conceptions of the nature of sanctity (*walāya*).

Mysticism, Sufism and *walāya*

Taşawwuf, transliterated as Sufism, is sometimes translated as “Islamic mysticism,” by analogy to parallel practices and beliefs within other major religious traditions. Some scholars of Islam have questioned the usefulness of mysticism as a concept for the study of Islamic belief and practice as an historical phenomenon, because it contributes to a tendency to reify *taşawwuf* and read it outside its sociopolitical and historical context.⁴² It will be useful, for the purposes of this study, to use the term “Sufi” (a term which has proven to be equally problematic for different reasons⁴³) only to denote those practices, institutions and individuals that are explicitly associated with *al-ṭuruq al-ṣūfiyya*, or the Sufi brotherhoods in Egypt. The term “mysticism” will be used to denote the epistemology (that is, a set of ideas about reality, and about the ways through which that reality can be known) that underpinned practice within the Sufi milieu. In its most basic sense, this mystical epistemology can be summarized as the belief that absolute reality (*ḥaqīqa*) is divine, and that it is possible to have a direct experience of that divinity.⁴⁴ This most basic and abstract belief forms the foundation for a variety of practices undertaken by the devout with the intention of bringing themselves into a state in which an experience of this Reality is possible. In the literature on *taşawwuf*, those engaged in these practices are described with various metaphors of a journey, as *sālikīn* (voyagers) *yaslukūn al-ṭarīq* (traveling the narrow path) toward that Reality, that is, toward God.

The state of “being close,” or “drawing close” to this Reality is referred to as *walāya*, and people who are viewed as having a place of privileged proximity to God are referred to as *awliyāʾ* (sg. *waliyy*). The term *waliyy* is often rendered into English as “saint” by analogy to Christian saints, because of some common features, including the role of the *awliyāʾ* as exemplary models, teachers, intercessors and means to divine power, miracle-workers, ascetics, and sources of divine wisdom.⁴⁵ An important difference is that, in the absence of any process of canonization in the Islamic tradition, *walāya* has a relative and

41 *Ibid.*

42 In this way, Sufism has sometimes been lumped in with a universalist “spirituality,” as argued by SAFI 2000. Ahmet T. Karamustafa makes a similar observation in KARAMUSTAFI 2007: vii-viii.

43 A concise discussion can be found in BIN RAMLI 2010: 1299-1315. For a critical look at the development of the term in the nineteenth century, see ERNST 1997: esp. 18-23.

44 TRIMINGHAM 1998: 1.

45 For a discussion of similarities across saintly traditions, see HAWLEY (ed.) 1987.

progressive quality. A similar observation can be made about the use of the term *taṣawwuf* (in the sense of “becoming *ṣūfī*”), which is a set of practices, as opposed to a state of being *ṣūfī*.⁴⁶ In manuals contemporaneous with the *ijāza* of Ṣabbāgh, the terms *waliyy* or *ṣūfī* are used to honor someone who is understood to have reached some state of proximity or purity.⁴⁷ What is striking in descriptions of practices that promised spiritual progress along this path to God, and in the documents that attest to religious authority, is the primacy of place given to physical intimacy with the sanctified bodies of the *awliyā’ Allāh*, those viewed as particularly close to God, his “friends.” More important than any concept, ruling or report that could be learned from an esteemed teacher was the time spent *bayn yadayhi*, between his hands.⁴⁸

Walāya in legalist *ijāzāt*

The *ijāzāt* provide ample evidence that studies and practices associated with the veneration of the bodies of the *awliyā’* discussed in the previous chapter were a fundamental element of the training of any religious scholar. Works of mystical theology as well as Sufi prayers (*kutub al-qawm*) and initiation into the brotherhoods (*tarīqat al-qawm*)⁴⁹ are included in the *ijāza* of Ṣabbāgh and others along with works on mystical practice and theology. An entire section of the *ijāza* of Ṣabbāgh is devoted to works in the field of *taṣawwuf*.

In the chains of transmission for works in all fields of the *sharī* sciences, prominent teachers are referred to with titles attesting to their knowledge of mysteries (*ma‘ārif*) and their sanctity or *walāya*. The text of the catalogue *ijāza* of Malawī includes the work of *‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif* by Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawārdī (d. 632/1234)⁵⁰ which he studies with a scholar whom he identifies as *al-‘ārif* (one having knowledge of mysteries), and who he states passed his secrets onto him. Such works are as common components in catalogue *ijāzāt* as are popular works of *tafsīr* and *fiqh*, suggesting that they were a standard part of the curriculum of any student seeking to establish himself as a religious authority, or *‘ālim*. Honorifics reserved for holders of mystical knowledge, including *al-‘ārif* and *al-quṭb* (a position in the hierarchy of the *awliyā’*) are tagged onto names of scholars in a variety of

46 The term *ṣūfī* may derive from *ṣūf* (wool) because of the association of wool with asceticism. Muslim ascetics are referred to as *ṣūfī* in sources dating to as early as the second Islamic century. The appellation was widespread by the middle of the third Islamic century (see ARBERRY 1950: 35. Across time and geography, those engaged in *taṣawwuf* have emphasized etymologies that place certain beliefs and practices at the center, while deemphasizing others. For example, the association of *ṣūfī* with *ṣafwa* emphasizes a view of a *ṣūfī* as among God’s elect. Etymologies linking the term to *ṣafā’* (purification) emphasize the importance of practices believed to lead to the “purification of the heart” (*taṣfiyat al-qalb*). ERNST 1997: 22-23.

47 In his *‘Iqd al-jawāhir al-thamīn fī ‘l-dhikr wa-ṭuruq al-ilbās wa‘l-talqīn* (ed. KOÇAK 1986: 1-150), Zabīdī refers to several individuals as “*al-shaykh al-ṣūfī*.” Some examples include his teacher Muzjājī (*ibid.*: 56), and another, Mawqārī: الشيخ الصوفي الصالح الذاکر (*ibid.*: 57) and Marzūqī (*ibid.*: 70), and al-Sammān as الشيخ الصوفي المسلمك القدوة (*ibid.*: 71).

48 NIMIS 2013.

49 *Ibid.*: 6.

50 “Ijāzat al-Malawī al-Kabīr lil-shaykh al-Barāwī” (Cairo: Azhar Manuscripts, *Muṣṭalah* 398/14482): 9.

fields. Formulaic blessings following the names of some transmitters amount to a recognition of their status as *awliyā'*. An example is Ṣabbāgh's use of the phrase "*qaddasa 'llāhu sirrahū*" (God bless his secret), after mentioning the name of his teacher in Mālikī *fiqh*.⁵¹ This is a blessing typically tagged onto a name as recognition of *walāya*. Honorifics (*alqāb*) that indicate the *ṭarīqa* affiliation of a given individual are as prevalent as those attesting to their geographic origins or the school of *sunni fiqh* in which they were trained. One *ijāza* refers to its recipient as "Aḥmad Nuwayr-jād from Akhmīm, Ash'arī in creed, Mālikī by school, Khalwatī by brotherhood."⁵² Similarly, a teacher is referred to as "Shāfi'ī in terms of his school of jurisprudence and Rifā'ī in terms of his brotherhood."⁵³ Thus, the catalogue *ijāzāt* serve as a record of the importance of the knowledge associated with *taṣawwuf* in the curriculum of an advanced scholar or *'ālim*.

It would be possible to argue that such works are included in a normal pedagogy, without it necessarily following that the student was practicing *taṣawwuf*, or that he was a member of a brotherhood. However, transmissions for these works closely mirror the lines of esoteric initiation into the formalized organizations that base their practice on these texts (the *ṭuruq al-ṣūfiyya*). For example, Ṣabbāgh receives the *Ḥikam* (wisdom literature, or aphorisms) of the early Shādhilī *khalīfa* Ibn 'Atā' Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309)⁵⁴ through a line⁵⁵ nearly identical to the one through which Zabīdī mentions having taken the Shādhilī *silsila* of *ṣuḥba* in his *Iqd al-jawāhir al-thamīn*:

[It is through] companionship of al-Sayyid 'Umar b. Aḥmad b. 'Aqīl, just as he was the companion of 'Abd Allāh b. Sālim al-Baṣrī, just as he was the companion of Shams al-Dīn al-Bābilī, just as he was the companion of Sālim al-Sanhūrī, just as he was the companion of Al-Najm al-Ghayṭī, just as he was the companion of Shaykh al-Islām Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī, just as he was the companion of Al-'Izz 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. al-Furāt, just as he was the companion of Al-Tāj 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Subkī, just as he was the companion of 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Kāfi 'l-Subkī, just as he was the companion of Abū 'l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Umar al-Mursī, just as he was the companion of the *imām* of the *ṭarīqa*.⁵⁶

51 "Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh": 4.

52 أحمد نوير جاد الاخميمي بلدا الاشعري عقيدة المالكي مذهبها الخلوئي طريقة . From "Ijāza min Aḥmad Nuwayr-jād al-Akhmīmī al-Mālikī ilā Muḥammad al-Jarjāwī al-shahīr bi'l-Marāghī" (Dār KM, *Muṣṭalah* 439).

53 "Shāfi'ī madhhaban wa-rifā'ī ṭarīqatan", from "Ijāzat al-Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān" (Cairo: Azhar Manuscripts, *Majāmi'*): 145.

54 Ibn 'Atā' Allāh al-Iskandarī was the third *khalīfa* of the Shādhilī brotherhood, who systematized its doctrines and recorded the biographies of its founder, and the first *khalīfa*, Abū 'l-'Abbās al-Mursī. He wrote the first Shādhilī treatise on *dhikr*, called *The Key to Success (Miftāḥ al-falāḥ)*.

55 "As for the *Ḥikam* of Tāj al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm b. 'Atā' Allāh (God bless him), I took it from many, praise and gratitude to God, and I was granted *ijāza* in it and its commentary by 'Abd Allāh b. Sālim al-Baṣrī on the authority of his shaykh al-Bābilī on the authority of 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Mināwī and the Shaykh Sālim al-Sanhūrī on the authority of al-Najm al-Ghayṭī on the authority of Shaykh al-Islām Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī on the authority of Abū 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. al-Furāt on the authority of al-Tāj 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. 'Alī al-Subkī on the authority of Taḥīyy al-Dīn 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Kāfi 'l-Subkī (his father) on the authority of The *imām* and author, God have mercy on him."

56 al-Zabīdī, *Iqd al-jawāhir*, in KOÇAK 1986: 89-90.

The only difference, besides the gap between their generations, is that in Zabīdī's *silsila* of initiation, Subkī is linked to the first *khalīfa* of the brotherhood, Abū 'l-'Abbās al-Mursī. Šabbāgh's *sanad* for the *Hikam* goes back to its author, who was both a student of Mursī himself and a Shādhilī *khalīfa*. The important point here is that this popular work of Sufi thought was passed not just from teachers to students, but from initiating *shuyūkh* to *murīdīn* whose inclusion in the brotherhood was accomplished explicitly through a process of companionship and emulation. This suggests that this and other texts of *taṣawwuf* described in the *ijāza* may not have been studied in their abstraction, but may indicate scholarly lines through which he may have undertaken a deeper and more integrated process of esoteric initiation.

Hadīth

On first viewing the catalogue *ijāza* of Šabbāgh, it is clear that much of the information recorded in it does not serve the primary function of attesting to the mastery of intellectual material. This is particularly true of transmissions of *ḥadīth*, which make up the vast majority of the *asnād* in the collection. In the eighteenth century, *ḥadīth* and mysticism were commonly studied together.⁵⁷ Voll argues that this is a new trend in the eighteenth century, based on the fact that Muḥammad al-Bābilī, the teacher of 'Abd Allāh b. Sālim al-Bašrī was not affiliated with a *ṭarīqa* whereas Bašrī and his students clearly link the two religious functions. The connection between *ḥadīth* study and *taṣawwuf* appears to have an historical precedent. Dickinson argues that the collection of *asnād* in the field of *ḥadīth* had long since ceased to serve its original function, which was to verify the *matn* or text of a given report by attesting to the soundness of each individual or relationship in the chain by which it was transmitted.⁵⁸

The sense of this shift in the purpose of the study of *ḥadīth* is expressed in the *ijāza* of an eighteenth century scholar who views the importance of *isnād* in his day as having long since become more devotional than educational. According to him, *asnād* are not necessary to confirm the veracity of reports, the *asnād* of which "are so well known that they need not be recorded, and cannot be disputed."⁵⁹ Rather, the recording of *asnād* in the field of *ḥadīth* functioned as a text-ritual. That is, it is the act of collecting these *asnād*, by sitting in physical proximity (*qurba*) to an esteemed teacher with his permission and blessing that is valued more than the information thus collected. The concept of the *isnād* as a means of proximity is indicated in the introduction to the *ijāza* of Šabbāgh. He quotes Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī⁶⁰ as having said that the "*asnād* bring us closer to God." The links in the chain leading back through time suggest that this proximity moves through generations of teachers and

57 VOLL 2002: 367, and REICHMUTH 2009: 97.

58 DICKINSON 2002.

59 al-BAHRĀNĪ (d. 1186/1772) as cited in SCHMIDTKE 2006: 104, fn. 24.

60 Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī (d. 413/1022) spent most of his career in Baghdād, but played an important role in making al-Najaf an important Shī'ī center. Šabbāgh refers to him as the Imām al-Ṭūsī, as he served as head of the *Ithnā 'ashariyya*, or Twelver Shī'ī scholars.

students to the Prophet. For this reason, Ṣabbāgh cites another authority as having said that “the *asnād* in religion are one of the ways that lead to our master [the Prophet].”⁶¹

Qurba in enchained *aḥādīth*

The bulk of a student’s learning in the field of *ḥadīth* was through the “Sound” (*Ṣaḥīḥ*) collections,⁶² which were transmitted as a whole. The chains of transmission for these works went only back to the author of the collection, with those of Bukhārī and Muslim being favored. However, transmissions labeled as *aḥādīth musalsala* (“enchained” *ḥadīth*) are presented as individuals reports with extensive *isnād* reaching all the way back to the Prophet himself. Shahrazūrī (d. 643/1245) defines this genre of *ḥadīth* as including transmissions characterized by the “common adherence [of each transmitter in the chain] one after another, to a single state or condition.”⁶³ That is, the state or action of the transmitter was repeated by each individual in the chain as they learned or “took” (*akhadha*) the *ḥadīth*. In the following example, the student describes his teacher’s acquisition of a *ḥadīth* transmitted while cutting the nails on Friday.

اخبرنا الشيخ احمد الحديثي الامام بجامع الولي العارف بالله تعالى سيدي احمد الزاهد بالحديث المسلسل بقص الاظفار يوم الخميس ورواية بقص اظفاره يوم الخميس قال اخبرنا الشيخ الامام العالم العلامة احمد بن محمد العجمي ورواية بقص اظفاره يوم الخميس قال اخبرنا الشيخ الامام العلامة الشيخ ابراهيم اللقاني ورواية بقص اظفاره يوم الخميس قال اخبرنا الشيخ الامام العلامة الشيخ سالم السنهوري ورايته يقص اظفاره يوم الخميس عن شيخه وهكذا بالسند المتصل إلى انس بن مالك رضي الله عنه وكل منهم يقول رايت شيخي يقص اظفاره يوم الخميس عن انس بن مالك قال رايت النبي صلي الله عليه وسلم يقص اظفاره يوم الخميس انتهى⁶⁴

The shaykh Aḥmad al-Ḥadithīnī, the Imām in the mosque of the saint possessed of intuitive knowledge (*ʿarif*), Sīdī Aḥmad al-Zāhid, told us of the *ḥadīth musalsala* with cutting the nails on Friday, by recitation while cutting his nails on Friday. He said, the shaykh, the learned and esteemed Imām Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-ʿAjamī, told me, by recitation while he was cutting his nails on Friday, he said, the shaykh, the learned and esteemed Imām Ibrāhīm al-Laḡānī, told me, by recitation while he was cutting his nails on Friday, he said, the shaykh, the learned and esteemed Imām the Shaykh Sālīm al-Sanhūrī, told me, by recitation while he was cutting his nails on Friday, on the authority of his shaykh, and so on with a *sanad* that continues to

61 “Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh”: 1.

62 The “Sound Six” collections of *aḥādīth* are viewed as a canon, in that between the six all sound *aḥādīth* are assumed to have been preserved. These include the favored collections of Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and Muslim (d. 261/875), along with Abū Dāwūd (d. 261/875), Ibn Māja (d. 273/886), al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) and al-Nasāʾī (d. 303/915).

63 Al-SHAHRAZŪRĪ (trans. DICKINSON 2005): 197.

64 “Ijāzat al-Malawī al-Kabīr lil-shaykh al-Barāwī” (Cairo: Azhar Manuscripts, *Muṣṭalaḥ* 398/14482): 9.

Anas b. Mālik, may God be pleased with him, with each of them saying I saw my shaykh cutting his nails on Friday on the authority of Anas b. Mālik who said: I saw the Prophet, God's praises and protection upon him, cutting his nails on Friday, the end.

This particular *ḥadīth* involves only an action, but many of the *aḥādīth* of this type also include a phrase spoken, along with a description of the transmitter's state while uttering it, such as in the *ḥadīth al-subḥa* (the *ḥadīth* of the rosary), in which each student asks, "why do you have the rosary in your hand" and each teacher responds, "this is something sacred that we learned to do in the beginning and we will not quit it until the end."⁶⁵

Records of scholarly transmission such as the enchainéd *ḥadīth* are better conceived as "text-rituals" than as academic credentials. That is, such records are valued not because they are proof of a student's having mastered a body of verbal or conceptual material, but for the mysterious blessing conferred by the act of memorizing or recording *that record* in and of itself. This view is supported by the fact that there is no apparent legal content to these *aḥādīth* that is not already present in the sound collections, each of which Ṣabbāgh has studied, according to his *ijāza*, yet considerable pains were taken in recording them. Such text-rituals provide useful insight into the concept of authority and the appropriate mechanisms for its transmission shared by Ṣabbāgh and his contemporaries. While Ṣabbāgh probably understood these *aḥādīth* to represent an historical truth, for the purpose of this study, questions of the historicity of these reports are immaterial. Rather, reading such carefully preserved interaction as text-rituals allows them to speak to an historical view of sanctity and religious authority.

By evoking an image of being in the company of the master during private moments such as grooming, as with cutting the nails, or solitary prayer, as with the rosary, the *ḥadīth musalsal* of cutting the nails implies a moment of intimacy with the body of the shaykh giving the *ḥadīth*. Other enchainéd *aḥādīth* include the transmission of acts of friendship and affection, such as holding hands, an embrace or a smile.⁶⁶

The meticulous recording of this and similar interactions enshrines it as a moment of ritual importance despite the absence of any conceptual or verbal content. The preservation of these transmissions is evidence that great importance was placed on proximity (*qurba*) in the form of physical intimacy with the teaching shaykh as a basis for religious authority in Ṣabbāgh's scholarly milieu. The importance of physical intimacy in teacher-student relationships is expressed in writings that were popular in eighteenth century Egypt,⁶⁷ including *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn* of Abū 'l-Najīb Suhrawardī.⁶⁸ In it, he states that praxis,

65 "Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh": 16.

66 SHAHRAZŪRĪ (2005): 197.

67 Probably the earliest work describing the practice of companionship was *Ādāb al-ṣuḥba* by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), a scholar from Nīshāpūr who wrote multiple works on Sufi practice, and Shāfi'ī *fiqh*, see HANIF 2002: 501-2.

68 'Abd al-Qāhir b. 'Abd Allāh al-Suhrawardī (d. 563/1168) is also known as Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Abū 'l-Najīb (not to be confused with his nephew, Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ al-Suhrawardī [d. 632/1234], author of *Awārif al-ma'ārif* who developed the Suhrawardī *ṭarīqa* after his uncle's death in 563/1168). Born in a Kurdish area of present-day northern Iran, he traveled to Baghdād as a child to study *fiqh*, and eventually taught at the Nizāmiyya there, then later followed the Sufi path under the guidance of

or embodied knowledge of the *way* to behave, must be acquired through constant companionship (*ṣuḥba* or *lāzima*) and emulation of the shaykh. Physical intimacy allows the student to master the cognitive knowledge (*ʿilm*) of his teacher, but also become a living vehicle of a non-verbal knowledge embodied in practice, referring to the *ḥadīth*: “knowledge (meaning *ʿilm*) calls out to praxis (meaning *ʿamal*), but if the latter does not respond, knowledge will go away.”⁶⁹ Suhrawardī advises the student to observe and emulate his master’s habits in hygiene, the performance of rituals, dress and the practice of austerity.

The concept of *sunna* itself is based on the belief that the habits, gestures and even tastes and preferences of the body of the Prophet were a form of revelation containing important moral content complementary to the Qur’anic speech. As it was articulated in a Sufi *ijāza* from the eighteenth century, God is “the Reality towards which the ancient *sunna* points.”⁷⁰ Suhrawardī views the *akhlāq* (character, disposition, or nature) contained in the bodies of the *awliyā’* as both part of God’s revelation and the means to reaching Him, by making a clear connection between the *akhlāq* of the masters and the *sunna* of the Prophet:

The characters (*akhlāq*) of the masters have been polished through their perfection in modeling themselves after the Messenger of God, peace and blessings upon him. They are the most successful of people in revivifying his *sunna*, in all that he commanded and commissioned, censured and enjoined.⁷¹

In the *ḥadīth* of the rosary, as in other *musalsalāt*, the relationship between the words in and the action that accompanies it are symmetrical. That is, the words pertain to the action performed in each transmission. This symmetry in the *ḥadīth* points toward the role of these reports as verbal transmission of praxis, describing the actions of the messenger that accompanied the message of the Qur’ān. Just as the actions of the Prophet are seen as an embodied interpretation of the Qur’ān, each shaykh who is heir to that praxis is the vessel for that embodied tradition. Enchained *ahādīth* like that of the rosary are transmissions of both the verbal description of the practice and, simultaneously, the embodied version of that practice.

Every catalogue *ijāza* in this sample contains a particular enchained *ḥadīth* called “*al-silsila bi’l-awwaliyya*” meaning “the chain of firsts.”⁷² In it, each link in the chain mentions that the *ḥadīth* was the first one taught to a given student by a given teacher. This *ḥadīth*

Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, see TRIMINGHAM 1998: 34. His *Kitāb ādāb al-murīdīn* is one of the earliest manuals of Sufi devotion. According to HOFFMAN 1995: 23, it was still popular in Egypt into the 1980’s.

69 AL-SUHRAWARDĪ (trans. MILSON 1975): 41-42.

70 الحقیقیة التي أشارت عليها السنة السنية, from “The *ijāza* of ‘Abd al-Karīm b. A. al-Sharābātī” (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub Manuscripts, 1586 *Taṣawwuf Ṭal’at* / 692 *Majāmi’ Ṭal’at*).

71 SUHRAWARDĪ, *Ādāb al-Murīdīn*, 380, as cited in MALAMUD 1996: 93. Similarly the goal of summoning visions of the Prophet through meditations is understood as “the mystical intensification of the traditional conformity to the *sunna* of the Prophet which involves replacing the authority of the written word by a living experience.” RADTKE 1996: 126.

72 VOLL 2002: 362.

records a ritual that initiates a teacher-student relationship of intimacy, as opposed to learning through more public lectures, which reportedly could include hundreds or even thousands of attendees. The intimacy is implied by the teacher's purposeful transmission of the first *ḥadīth* that he took from his teacher in honor of the beginning of his period of study with that particular student. Again, the existence of the "chain of firsts" in a given collection does not guarantee that a relationship of fellowship actually existed between each of the links in the chain, but the painstaking records of such transmissions tell of the importance of this one-on-one relationship of intimacy in defining the total religious authority of a student of the *sharī* sciences.⁷³

The importance of mysticism for the organization of authority is explicit in the inclusion of initiation into a *ṭarīqa* as a typical enchainment *ḥadīth* in the repertoire of the catalogue *ijāza*. In the following example, the tradition of initiation by being dressed in the *khirqā* (robe) of the order is called "the *ḥadīth* of being dressed in the robes of the brotherhood":

وأما حديث لبس الخرقه فقد البستها من يد استاذي سيدي عبد الله البصري وقد البستها له العلامة محمد بن سليمان المغربي وهو لبسها عن شيخه أبي عثمان الجرايري... وهو عن الإمام حسن البصري وهو من يد الإمام الأوحى على ابن أبي طالب كرم الله وجهه ورضي الله عنه وهو لبسها من يد المصطفى صلى الله عليه وسلم.⁷⁴

As for the *ḥadīth* of wearing the *khirqah* [robes of the brotherhood], I was dressed in them by my master ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣṭī, and he was dressed in them by the esteemed Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Maghribī. He was dressed in them by [the authority of] his shaykh Abū ‘Uthmān al-Jarā’irī ... And he by [the authority of] the Imām Ḥasan al-Baṣṭī, and he by the hand of the only Imām ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, may God bless his face and be pleased with him, and he wore it from the hand of the chosen one, peace and blessings be upon him.

The enchainment *aḥādīth* have a very similar purpose to being dressed in the *khirqā*. They are the basis of a religious authority based on the location of an individual in a complex of genealogies, not just of learning, but of companionship and quasi-familial closeness. Thus, *ḥadīth* studies, which has typically been seen as the archetypical transmitted science and the bedrock of Sunni jurisprudence, functions here also as a means of asserting the physical connection to the founders of the faith and to God Himself usually associated with Islamic mysticism.

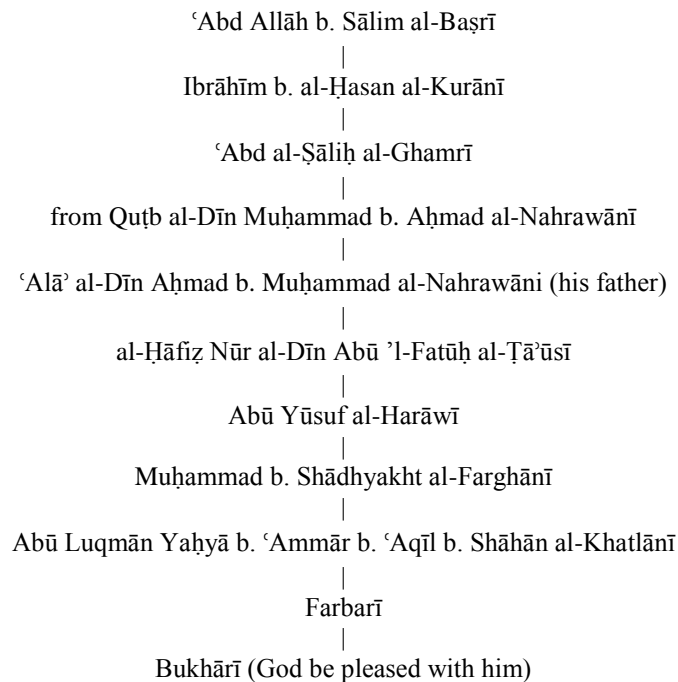
73 The famous scholar Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī records many individuals in his *Muḥjam* (his collection of biographies of contacts) only for having taken from them *al-ḥadīth al-musalsal bi'l-awwalyyya*. See REICHMUTH 2009: 155.

74 "Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh": 14 (the ellipsis indicate where twenty five names are excluded from the chain for the sake of brevity).

Chronological *qurba*: the “blessing” (*baraka*) of elevated *isnād*

Ṣabbāgh does not always explain why he chose to include one teacher’s *sanad* over that of another, except that the teacher whose *sanad* is included in “*min ajlihim*”, meaning, “one of the best of them.” While the rest are omitted “for the sake of brevity,”⁷⁵ he clearly viewed his teacher ‘Abd Allāh b. Sālim al-Baṣrī (d. 1134/1722)⁷⁶ as his most important teacher in that aspect of his religious life that the *ijāza* is meant to manifest. The *asnād* that Ṣabbāgh attributes to Baṣrī are greater in number than *asnād* originating with other teachers (representing about 60% of the total *asnād* in the work). They also tower over the other citations in the care that is given to their recording. They are more formal in format, including every transmitter and going all the way back to the author of the work, as can be seen in figure 4.

Figure 4: Ṣabbāgh’s most elevated chain to the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī⁷⁷



⁷⁵ *Ibid.*: 10.

⁷⁶ Al-Baṣrī lived in Mecca in the early eighteenth century, and though he was not widely published, he was an extremely popular teacher. The biographer Murādī lists him in the biographies of at least thirty individuals. See VOLL 2002: 358.

⁷⁷ “*Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh*”: 6-7.

They also appear more prestigious for the same reason. However, the years that Ṣabbāgh studied with Baṣrī were only two (from 1126-7/1714-15). Also, most of the works that he reports having studied with Baṣrī were ones he had already read extensively with several other teachers, as indicated by the phrase, “I took it from [studied it with] several teachers, among them are...”⁷⁸ Furthermore, Ṣabbāgh in some cases mentions that he only studied a fraction of the works for which he mentions receiving Baṣrī’s blessing (*ijāza*). For example, though he studied only the first quarter of a certain work of theology with the famous teacher, he received an *ijāza* for the rest of it as well as for another related work.⁷⁹ Ṣabbāgh also distinguishes his study of a work of *tafsīr* with another teacher, Muḥammad Zaytūna al-Tūnisī (*al-baṣīr bi-qalbiḥī*), “*darāyatan*,”⁸⁰ meaning “for understanding.” This suggests that many of the transmissions recorded by Ṣabbāgh have as their goal something other than understanding.

Understanding why Baṣrī is his most prominently featured teacher gives insight into the purpose of transmissions that do not promote “understanding,” and into the culture of religious authority in which it was produced. One factor that gave the audition of a given *ḥadīth* value was the “elevation” of the *isnād* collected by the reciter. “Elevated” or “high” *asānīd* are those by which the *ḥadīth* has been transmitted through the least number of people. Al-Baṣrī had distinguished himself by his extensive knowledge of the so-called “highest” *isnād* available in the study of *ḥadīth*. He published a book on the topic entitled “Aids in Understanding the Elevation of *isnād*.”⁸¹ Thus, the reason to sit with ‘Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī in Mecca was not to get a clear meaning of the content, but to collect the certifications of his close connection to prominent authors, and to the Prophet himself. Al-Baṣrī was not the only *muhaddith* to make a career out of the collection of the high chains of transmission. Most of the *asnād* that Ṣabbāgh took from al-Baṣrī come through his teacher, the Egyptian shaykh Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Bābilī (d. 1078/1668), who was known as among the most elevated Egyptian collectors of *ḥadīth* in the seventeenth century. He was trained in Shāfi‘ī *fiqh*, but was best known because of the book of his transmissions published by his student Maghribī.⁸²

Thanks to the chains that he acquired during his time with Baṣrī, Ṣabbāgh could boast his location in a generation just following a venerated master from long ago. This logic can be seen in Ṣabbāgh’s comment on one of his transmissions for the *Saḥīḥ ḥadīth* of Bukhārī:

78 ... أخذته عن عدة أشياخ منهم . This phrase is used several times in “Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh”, such as on pages 4, 7, 9, 10, 11 (twice), 12,15, 16, 19, 34 and 37.

79 The work is entitled *Ma‘ālim al-tanzīl* by al-Ḥusnī b. Mas‘ūd al-Baghāwī, “*riwāyatan*” from ‘Abd Allāh b. Sālim al-Baṣrī (*ibid.*: 4). He also studied fractions of *al-Wasīṭ* by Abū ‘l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Wāḥidī, and the *tafsīr* of al-Rāzī with the same teacher in Mecca.

80 *Ibid.*: 4.

81 VOLL 2002: 359.

82 REICHMUTH 2009: 51.

فبينى وبين البخاري من هذا الطريق عشرة ولله الحمد والمنة فايذة أعلا أسانيد الحافظ بن حجر أن بينه وبين البخاري سبعة تقدم السين وأعلا أسانيد الإمام السيوطي أن بينه وبين البخاري ثمانية⁸³

So by this chain there are ten between Bukhārī and me, God be praised for this benefit. By the highest chains of al-Ḥāfiẓ b. Ḥajar,⁸⁴ between him and Bukhārī are seven [steps in the chain], and by the highest chains of Suyūfī,⁸⁵ between him and al-Bukhārī are eight.

The measurement of time in lifespans assimilated by Ṣabbāgh has an early provenance, as the first generations of Muslims were classified by their proximity to the Prophet in generations *ṣahāba*, *tābi'ūn*, *tābi' tābi'īn*, etc. The value placed on short chains has also been brought as an explanation for the theme in hagiography of miraculously long lives.⁸⁶ Furthermore, because of his acquisition of the high *isnād* that Baṣrī taught, Ṣabbāgh becomes for later generations what Suyūfī was to him. One student notes after recording a particularly elevated *sanad*, “there is between me and Ṣabbāgh only three links, and that is as close as any of our oldest *shuyūkh*.”⁸⁷ This closeness, in turn, is understood by Ṣabbāgh as evidence of his blessing. He writes: “God gives the short chains of transmission (*'uluww al-isnād*) to whoever he wishes.”⁸⁸ Thus, while the transmitted knowledge itself can be acquired through the hard work and perseverance it takes to put it to memory, the most elevated *isnād*, like *walāya* itself, carries the prestige of a manifestation of God’s grace.

The idea that knowledge of universal Truth or Reality (*ḥaqīqa*) is a blessing bestowed by God, as opposed to something earned through the efforts of students of religion is a common theme that runs through writings of mystical philosophy that were popular in eighteenth century Egypt. Al-Ḥākim al-Tirmidhī (d. between 295/905 and 300/910) contrasts pious people who attempt to understand the revelations through their rational faculties with those who are *majdhūb* or “drawn” to God by His generosity.⁸⁹ According to Tirmidhī, the student of *fiqh* may, through striving, eventually win the favor of God and be granted *qurba* out of His compassion (*raḥma*), but sees he who is *majdhūb* to God as *waliyy allāh ḥaqq^{am}* (the true friend of God), and more holy than the former.⁹⁰ In either case, proximity to the sources of divine guidance (*qurba*) is represented as a kind of blessing, contingent on the divine will.

Elsewhere, the collection of *asānīd* is described as having as its purpose *tabarruk*, or the granting of *baraka*, which is another form of blessing related to God’s favor and grace.

83 “Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh”: 6-7.

84 Al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1448)

85 Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī (d. 849/1445)

86 BASHIR 2011: 5.

87 KATTĀNĪ 1982, 2: 262 (entry 653).

88 “Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh”: 4.

89 ‘Alī Sālim ‘AMMĀR, *Kitāb Abū ‘l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī*, 24, as cited in al-NAJJĀR 1983: 26.

90 See MCGREGOR 2004:12-13. Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī also articulates these two forms of *walāya* into a theoretical hierarchy. One who is pulled (*majdhūb*) toward God by His will is in a “greater” mode of *walāya* (*walāya kubrā*), and the one who wins God’s generosity through striving is in the “lesser” mode (*walāya ṣuḥrā*), in *Latā’if al-minan*, as discussed *ibid.*: 38.

For example, the recipient of an eighteenth century Iranian *ijāza* explains the devotional purpose of the *ijāza* as a continuation of the tradition of the earlier scholars who did it “seeking good fortune and blessing.”⁹¹ In his treatise *Luqaṭ al-Marjān*, Zabīdī includes a *ḥadīth bi'l-awwāliyya* from a non-human (*jinn*) companion of the Prophet, in order to take blessing (*tabarruk*) from it.⁹² The concept of *baraka* is most commonly associated with rituals of visitation (*ziyāra*) of tombs of the saints or *awliyā'*. In the context of *ziyāra*, *baraka* is the spiritual power of the *waliyy* which can be transmitted through physical proximity (*qurba*) to ordinary people simply by touching the body of the saint or even something that he touched or that belonged to him.⁹³ After his death, visitors to the tombs of the *awliyā'* understand that they can receive the blessing of the *waliyy* by approaching or touching his tomb. The physical nature of *baraka*, as something “contagious”⁹⁴ is described by Kugle in his analysis of visitors to a tomb of a Shādhilī *waliyy* in Tunisia. Visitors understood foods including olive oil left in a bowl on the tomb as absorbing the *baraka* of the *waliyy*, infusing it, just as the chili peppers soaking in the oil were meant to do, and passing it on to the bodies of visitors to the shrine.⁹⁵ It is in this sense that Dickenson can meaningfully call the *ḥadīth* “a special kind of relic,” in that they “bring individuals into a closer relationship with the sacred power of the Prophet.”⁹⁶

This highness of *isnād*, and the closeness to God that it affords, are sometimes represented as more important than the understanding of the content of a given *ḥadīth*. For example, one *ijāza* places this view in the mouth of al-Ṭūsī:⁹⁷

وقال الإمام الطوسي، قرب الاسانيد قرب إلى الله سبحانه وتعالى وإذا حصل الضبط بما في الرواية، فلا يضر نقص المعرفة والدراية، ولا يقدح ذلك في المأخوذ عنه قرب حامل تفقهه إلى من هو أفقه منه⁹⁸

The imām al-Ṭūsī said: The closeness of the *asānīd* is closeness to God, Praised and Almighty. If precision is achieved in the narration [of the *isnād*], then what is lacking in knowledge or understanding [of the transmitter] does no harm, and does not impair what is taken [on his authority], proximity being that which brings understanding [even] to one more knowledgeable.

It is in this context that it is possible to understand how Ṣabbāgh could write proudly of one of his auditions: “and I was the smallest among them, in both age and understanding.”⁹⁹ This detail expresses the value that he places on being present as a child with

91 SCHMIDTKE 2006: 104.

92 REICHMUTH 2009: 94.

93 HOFFMAN 1995: 95.

94 REEVES 1990: 38.

95 KUGLE 2007: 99.

96 DICKINSON 2002: 481 and 484.

97 See fn. 60, above.

98 “Ijāzat ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Aḥmad al-Sharābātī” (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub Manuscripts, 1586 *Taṣawwuf Ṭal’at* / 692 *Majāmi’ Ṭal’at*), cf. above, fn. 69.

99 “Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh”: 15.

an aged master. What Ṣabbāgh did not gain from this audition in understanding, he made up for by placing himself chronologically closer to the source of the authority of the teacher. His pride in his tender age and lack of knowledge can be understood in the peculiar chronology of generations, in which time is measured by the elastic yardstick of human lifetimes rather than by years.

The interest in highness of *isnād* seems to have extended beyond *ḥadīth* studies to other genres of learning, developing into a general pedagogical principle. MacKay finds evidence for the same phenomenon centuries earlier in the literary genre. In his analysis of the *samā'āt* (certificates of audition) collected in an early literary manuscript, he observes that one of the scholars who had given auditions of this text, named Abū 'l-Mu'mar, appeared to be increasingly sought after for *ijāzāt* later in his life, to the point that the majority of the *ijāzāt* he awarded were given shortly before his death, when old age would likely have made him less effective as a teacher of content.¹⁰⁰ On the other side of the spectrum, children as young as two years old were given an *ijāza* for audition, although they would have clearly been too young to grasp the meaning of the text. This phenomenon of elderly readers and infantile attendees suggests that the ultimate goal of this type of audition was to place oneself in the most elevated, that is, the shortest *sanad*.¹⁰¹

The value of recurrence (*tawātur*)

Besides the *qurba* of closeness in generation as a source of *baraka*, common phrases point to the view that coming into contact with a great teacher is a blessing, however superficial the relationship. This is expressed in one *ijāza* as: “he took something from the ocean of his knowledge.”¹⁰² Ṣabbāgh's collection of *isnād* projects his authority in part through the sheer *number* of chains of transmission from famous teachers included in his catalogue *ijāza*, adding to the value of the collection of transmissions as a whole. That attaining the same knowledge through multiple chains made it more reliable is familiar from the epistemological paradigm of *ḥadīth* studies. Hallaq describes this concept of knowing through repetition in *ḥadīth* criticism, in terms of ideas about probability and certainty among scholars of *ḥadīth*:

When a person hears a *ḥadīth* narrated by one transmitter, he is presumed to have gained only probable knowledge of its contents, and thus of its authenticity. To reach conclusive knowledge, the *ḥadīth* must be heard by this person a sufficient number of times, and each time it must be narrated by a different transmitter. Four or fewer instances of hearing such a *ḥadīth* were deemed insufficient to constitute a *tawatur* transmission, since, the jurists argued, the *qadi* in a court of law must

100 MACKAY 1971: 12.

101 MacKay finds that individuals who received al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* as small children can also be found among the names in lists of later auditions given by younger authorities. He sees this as further evidence that earlier auditions were attended solely to achieve a short *sanad*, while they actually learned the text at later auditions as adults. MACKAY 1971: 25.

102 استخرج من بحار علومه “Ijāzat al-Malawī al-Kabīr lil-shaykh al-Barāwī”, 9.

deliberate on the testimony of four witnesses (as well as investigate their moral rectitude) before he renders his verdict... it is the moment at which a person realizes that he is completely certain of the contents of a reported *hadith* which determines the number of transmissions required for that particular instance of transmission, not the other way round; the number may be decided only when immediate and conclusive knowledge has been reached.¹⁰³

While Hallaq's discussion describes a cognitive experience of certainty, interactions with relics and shrines in the Sufi milieu involved a similar logic of familiarity through repetition. Like regular visits to touch a shrine or relic, each interaction with a teacher-*waliyy* was an opportunity to come in contact with the *baraka* associated with previous generations of holy people. Quite separate from the amount that was learned through each of these interactions was the additional value attached to the quality of the collection as a whole, the total range of teachers with whom the student had come in contact. This can be understood as an expression of a total process of drawing closer to the sources of divine guidance and blessing.

Many transmissions recorded in the catalogue *ijāza* of Ṣabbāgh function as text-rituals. They share a common emphasis on physical proximity as the mechanism for the transmission of authority by emphasizing physical intimacy with the body of the shaykh in a one-on-one relationship, or chronological closeness to important figures measured in lifespans (*uluww al-sanad*), as well as the cumulative benefit of contact with multiple teachers. Because of the presence of the *awliyā'* as teachers, and works in *ilm al-taṣawwuf* as a part of the total curriculum, it is reasonable to conclude that the *sharḥ* sciences were studied in an intellectual milieu deeply influenced by teachings in the field of *taṣawwuf*. Because parallel ideas about physical intimacy implicit in pedagogical practices reflected in legalist *ijāzāt* like that of Ṣabbāgh are articulated in works of philosophical Sufism, it is reasonable to hypothesize that pedagogical principles of legal study may well have been rooted, whether explicitly or implicitly in what could be called a mystical epistemology. That is, such practices can be read as the realization in *habitus* of conceptions of *walāya* (sanctity) usually associated with the Sufi milieu, by which proximity to the bodies of holy people translates into religious authority.

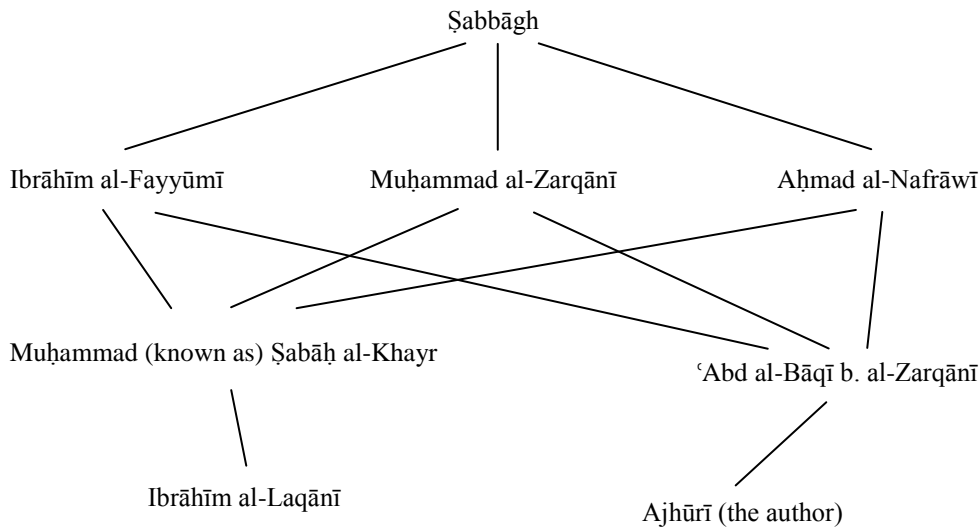
Ṣuḥba in the study of *fiqh*

While the bulk of the transmissions in the *ijāza* of Ṣabbāgh are of *ḥadīth* that functioned more as relics, there are also indications of the context for conceptual teaching and learning. In a few *asnād* at the beginning of his *ijāza*, Ṣabbāgh records his study of Mālikī *fiqh* with the shaykh Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā al-Fayyūmī (d. 1137/1724), who was then rector of al-Azhar University in Cairo. According to his biography published by the Egyptian Dār

103 HALLAQ 1999: 78-9, based on his reading of the *Kitāb tamhīd al-awā'il wa-talkhīs al-dalā'il* of the Mālikī scholar and *qāḍī* Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 402/1013), the *sharḥ* of the Ḥanafī Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī (d. 1016/1607), *al-Udda fī uṣūl al-fiqh* of Abū Ya'lā Muḥammad b. al-Farrā' (d. 458/1066), and *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-ahkām* by the Ḥanbalī Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233).

al-Iftā', al-Fayyūmī was known for his work in *ḥadīth*, linguistics and morphology, and for his reputation as a talented and dedicated teacher.¹⁰⁴ Many of the *asānīd* for works Ṣabbāgh mentions having studied with al-Fayyūmī are truncated. In his transmission for Mālik's *Muwatta'*, the *sanad* through al-Fayyūmī, rather than ending at the author himself, only reaches back five generations. Other transmissions are cluttered with overlapping teachers and credentials (figure 5).¹⁰⁵ Some of Ṣabbāgh's transmissions through al-Fayyūmī are

Figure 5: Ṣabbāgh's *sanad* for the theological creed of Ajhūrī



The *asnād* include multiple teachers whose credentials overlap.

indistinct, mentioning years of study of *fiqh* and *‘aqā’id* (theological creeds) without mentioning any particular works, much less including *isnād*. Where the sections of the *ijāza* that attest to Ṣabbāgh's accomplishments in the field of *ḥadīth* express a swift linear progression back in time through multiple centuries, the section describing his study in the field of *fiqh* expresses multiple long-term, overlapping, horizontal relationships. Thus, the transmissions passed on to Ṣabbāgh from al-Fayyūmī grant him neither a shorter distance in generations from the Prophet (*uluww al-sanad*), nor do they attest to a physical

104 al-Fayyūmī studied *ḥadīth* with Yaḥyā al-Shahāwī, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Wāṭī, ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Ajhūrī (Ṣabbāgh also studied with him), Ibrāhīm al-Barmāwī (the second Rector of al-Azhar), and Muḥammad al-Sharunbābilī (a prodigious collector of *ṭuruq*). His students include Muḥammad b. ‘Isā Yūsuf al-Dumyāṭī al-Shāfī‘ī, Ṣālih ‘Alī al-Fayyūmī al-Mālikī (he was the head of the *riwā’a* for the students from al-Fayyūm at al-Azhar), and one of his fellows (ظهرت نجافته و نياحته) was ‘Alī b. A. b. Makram Allāh al-Ṣa‘īdī al-Mālikī (Aḥmad al-Dardīr studied *fiqh* with him). JABARTĪ (2003): 283.

105 “Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh”: 4.

connection to the Prophet or a prominent *waliyy* through an unbroken chain of personal contact, as in the enchainéd *ḥadīth*.

However, he indicates in passing that his studies with al-Fayyūmī were in fact considerably more rigorous. For the legal sciences, Ṣabbāgh mentions having gone over several works completely as many as twenty five to thirty times with al-Fayyūmī:

فلقد حضرت عنده مختصر العلامة خليل نحو خمسة وعشرين ختمة والعلامة التتاي على الرسالة نحو الثلاثين ختمة وشرح الشيخ عبد الباقي على خمس مرات وللشرح العشماوية كذلك مع تسميحه والقرأة بين يديه والمبأة عنده للمطالعة والتكلم ما نرجوا ثوابه إن شاء الله تعالى بمنه وكرمه¹⁰⁶

I studied with him the *Mukhtaṣar* of Khalīl¹⁰⁷ around twenty five times completely, and [the summary of] the *Risāla* [of Shāfi‘ī] by the erudite Tatāy around thirty times, the commentary on ‘Abd al-Bāqī ‘Alī five times. [I studied] the commentary of ‘Ashmāwī as well, by audition and reading, between his hands, dwelling with him, in order to learn from him, and converse with him. How we hope for his reward, God willing, by His gifts and noble generosity.

Ṣabbāgh’s description of his studies with al-Fayyūmī express another form of closeness: the proximity of *ṣuḥba*, or constant companionship. Ṣabbāgh refers to their relationship as *lāzima*, a synonym of *ṣuḥba* also meaning constant companionship.¹⁰⁸ He writes, “I was his constant companion (*lāzamtuhū*) for a long time at the Azhar mosque, which was built in remembrance of God.”¹⁰⁹ Ṣabbāgh’s companionship of al-Fayyūmī included living with him in his home, “dwelling with him, in order to learn from him, and converse with him. How we hope for his reward, God willing, by his gifts and noble generosity.”¹¹⁰ Other details support the view that Ṣabbāgh enjoyed a particularly close relationship to al-Fayyūmī. Ṣabbāgh singles out his certification of one transmission from al-Fayyūmī as having been granted in the teacher’s own writing:

وقد أجازني كذلك اجازة عامة كتبها لي بخطه من اجازة شيخ الإسلام محمد الخراشي حرفاً بحرف سنة اثنين وعشرين و مائة والف.¹¹¹

And he also certified me with a general *ijāza* in his handwriting from the *ijāza* of Shaykh al-Islām Muḥammad al-Kharāshī¹¹² letter by letter in the year eleven hundred and twenty-three [AH, i.e., 1711 CE].¹¹³

106 *Ibid.*: 3.

107 Probably the *Mukhtaṣar* of the Mālikī scholar Khalīl b. Ishāq b. Mūsā al-Jundī (d. 767/1366).

108 MAKDISI 1981: 167 defines the fellow as both an advanced student who had completed his basic course in the *sharī* sciences, and as a constant companion of his master. Other terms used to denote the same relationship include *lāzama* and *ittaba‘a*.

109 “Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh”: 3. فقد لازمته اللازمة الطويلة في الجامع الأزهر المعمور بذكر الله تعالى

110 *Ibid.*: 3. بين يديه والمبأة عنده للمطالعة والتكلم ما نرجوا ثوابه إن شاء الله تعالى بمنه وكرمه

111 *Ibid.*: 15.

The inclusion of these details about his relationship with al-Fayyūmī suggest that something akin to the ethic of constant companionship described by Suhrawardī was also considered to be an important component of the study of *fiqh*. Makdisi has argued that *ṣuḥba*¹¹⁴ has long existed as a mechanism for the disciplined study of the *sharʿ* sciences, especially for the most advanced levels of study.¹¹⁵ To him, companionship is a fundamental component of Islamic learning that dates back to the time of the Prophet, in that the early authorities on the faith were ranked into classes based on their proximity to him. Those who knew the Prophet in his lifetime, and were able to directly witness and emulate his *sunna* (habits, decisions and sayings) were labeled *ṣāhib* (companions), whereas those in following generations were *tābiʿūn* (followers).¹¹⁶

Ṣabbāgh's reverence of his teacher as a *waliyy* is expressed earlier in the text when he invokes the blessing "God bless his secret,"¹¹⁷ a common phrase following the name of a *waliyy*, acknowledging his esoteric knowledge. Besides being his teacher of *fiqh*, was al-Fayyūmī also his guide in a parallel and simultaneous training in *taṣawwuf*? From the documentary evidence available, there is no conclusive answer to this question. His biography published by the Dār al-Iftā' makes no mention of al-Fayyūmī having practiced *taṣawwuf*, having any *ṭarīqa* affiliation, nor being known for the publication of any works on *taṣawwuf*. Yet Ṣabbāgh identifies al-Fayyūmī as being affiliated with the Wafā'ī brotherhood:

112 Muḥammad al-Kharāshī (d. 1101/1690) was the first shaykh of al-Azhar. Khurāshī claimed the same *sanad* that appeared multiple times through Bābilī: Ibrāhīm al-Laḳānī from Sālim al-Sanhūrī from al-Najam al-Ghayṭī, from Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī from al-Ḥāfīz b. Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, with the rest of the *sanad* to al-Bukhārī, as well as through Aḥūrī. According to Dār al-Iftā', he became the first person to carry the title of shaykh of al-Azhar in 1090/1679. Fayyūmī studied the *Risāla* of Abū ʿAbd Allāh b. Zayd al-Qayrawānī with him.

113 "Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh": 3.

114 MAKDISI 1981 translates *ṣuḥba* as "fellowship", making an analogy to graduate fellows at modern universities. This work is most controversial for having claimed that the origin of many elements of Western academic institutions came from the organization of learning in classical Islamic scholarly culture. The question of the relationship between Islamic and European institutions of learning has been taken up more recently by BECKWITH 2012: especially pages 37-49.

115 MAKDISI 1981: 167. According to Makdisi, it was only in the close relationship of *ṣuḥba* that students were allowed to learn about matters of debate in substantive rulings (*khilāf*). Students at the higher levels competed to make their own arguments, and developed commentaries (*ta'liqa*) based on the lectures of their teachers. Thus, higher education, according to Makdisi, is marked not only by the subject matter (*khilāf*, or the application of *fiqh* theory to issues on which there was no communal consensus), but by the close relationship of *ṣuḥba* between the master and his disciple – *ibid.*: 114. He views *ṣuḥba* as the institution that explains how this "haphazard" system of education was able to produce such prolific and erudite scholars in the early period, before the emergence of more formalized institutions of learning – *ibid.*: 128.

116 *Ibid.*: 129.

117 قدس الله سره . "Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh": 3.

شيخ وأستاذي وذو الفضل على العلامة المرحوم الشيخ إبراهيم ابن الشيخ موسى الفيومي المنشاوي
بلدا الوفاي طريقة رحمه الله تعالى¹¹⁸

My shaykh and my teacher of merit, the erudite, deceased Shaykh Ibrāhīm b. al-Shaykh Mūsā al-Fayyūmī, Minshāwī in origin, Wafāī in brotherhood, May God have mercy on him.

Ṣabbāgh may not only have been one of al-Fayyūmī’s favored students in Mālikī *fiqh*, but also simultaneously benefitted from him in a relationship of a *khalīfa* (representative of the founder of a brotherhood) to his *murīd* (initiate, that is “desiring” to be initiated into a brotherhood).

Makdisi argues that the logic of the so-called “foreign” sciences¹¹⁹ formed the basis for the scholastic method that determined the very way of organizing knowledge in the *sharī* sciences. That is, dialectic, articulated in the Islamic tradition as *jadāl* (disputation) and *riyāsa* (the concept of a “leading” scholar), was the basis for the organization of Islamic law and legal study.¹²⁰ Even when these ancillary sciences were not themselves the *object* of study, the epistemology of philosophy still played a part in the curriculum by informing the pedagogical principles that organized the study of the *sharī* sciences. Whatever the status of the so-called foreign sciences among scholars of *fiqh*, the important point for this study is Makdisi’s argument that it is possible for beliefs about the nature of knowledge and authority to continue to be reproduced through cultures of practice, even by those who oppose those beliefs in principle. Ancient philosophy continued to inform Islamic scholarly culture as beliefs about the nature of knowledge and its acquisition and manifestation that seemed so obvious to insiders that they were rarely articulated.

Bourdieu refers to such beliefs as *doxa*,¹²¹ because they are unarticulated but immanent in practice. Unlike idealized representations found in *fiqh*, *doxa* are taught and learned without ever being articulated through their literal incorporation, or embodiment through the emulation of practices that Bourdieu refers to as *habitus*. Just so, mysticism as an epistemology organized relationships between scholars into a pedagogy that valued physical proximity. This value is reflected in themes and metaphors familiar from the Sufi milieu that resonate through documents even where there is no direct reference to concepts articulated in works of mystical philosophy. The view of knowledge of Reality (*ḥaqīqa*) as located in the sanctified bodies of the *awliyā*’ is observed not only in the field of *taṣawwuf* but also in institutions for the study of *fiqh*.

While there is no conclusive evidence that al-Fayyūmī’s relationship to Ṣabbāgh was that of a *khalīfa* to his initiate, what does seem clear is that to Ṣabbāgh, proximity to

118 “Ijāzat al-Ṣabbāgh”: 3.

119 Makdisi argues that although the foreign sciences continued to form the basis for pedagogical practices, they were marginalized over time until they were eventually excluded almost completely from the curriculum of the madrasa. This view has been disputed by many scholars including BRENTJES 1997: especially 8-9, but is taken up strongly by others, see for example HUFF 2003: 89-118.

120 MAKDISI 1981: 105-110.

121 BOURDIEU 1977: 27.

sanctified bodies was such an important part of the process of learning in the *sharī* sciences that he interacted with scholars like al-Fayyūmī, who designated themselves as *fuqahā*, as if they were sanctified bodies.

Conclusion

The practice of *taṣawwuf*, and the type of authority such practices confer, are sometimes seen as belonging to a popular type of Islam, as opposed to that of the “Great Tradition,” the latter being the product of a complex set of analytical methods for verifying authentic transmission of the founding texts of the faith and extrapolating these into a diverse but unified legal and moral code. By extension of this theory of a divide between popular mysticism and a scholarly orthodoxy, the tolerance shown by elite scholars at major institutions such as al-Azhar University in Cairo toward mystical practices has sometimes been explained as a strategy for appeasing the less-educated majority of the population.¹²²

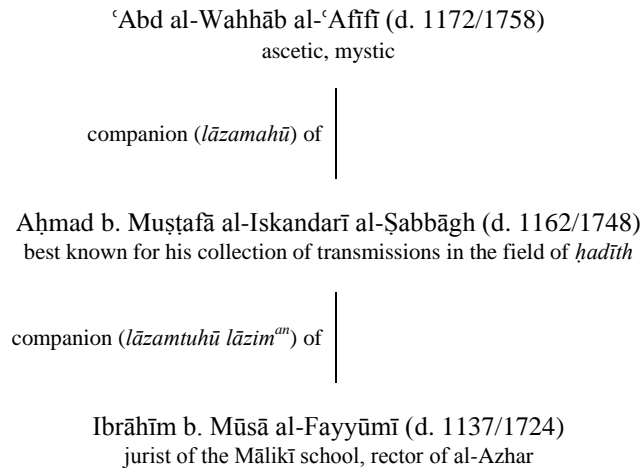
It will be useful to conclude by returning to the biography of the shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-‘Afīfī, who was honored by the questionable festivities described above. According to his biography by Jabartī, ‘Afīfī was a companion (*lāzamaḥū*) of Ṣabbāgh, author of the *fihris ijāza*, and studied with Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī. ‘Afīfī was initiated into the Khalwatiyya brotherhood by Muṣṭafā Kamāl al-Dīn al-Bakrī and into the Shādhiliyya brotherhood by Aḥmad al-Tawwātī.¹²³ Despite his companionship of these religious elites he is described by Jabartī as having been a great ascetic who recoiled from the visits of princes in his honor, preferring seclusion, and *ziyāra* (visitation) of shrines. He gained a popular following during his lifetime, and after his death, his children built a shrine for him for the purpose of *ziyāra*, which many of the leading ‘*ulamā*’ and *awliyā*’ and *muḥaddithūn* visited from all over the country, until finally, the infamous *mawsim* (festival) was established for him.¹²⁴

This could be considered a short line of *ṣuḥba* (figure 6), beginning with the ascetic *waliyy* ‘Afīfī, taught by Ṣabbāgh, who was best remembered for his collection of *asnād* in *ḥadīth* from the shaykh al-Baṣrī, and continuing to the teacher of whom he was the companion, the shaykh al-Fayyūmī, a specialist in Mālikī *fiqh* and rector of al-Azhar. That this chain of companionship includes the “popular” dervish, a *muḥaddith* and a Mālikī who rose to the position of rector of al-Azhar suggests the degree to which *walāya* was integrated into the scholarly culture of elites in this period. This integration further supports the conclusion that authority was cultivated not only through cognitive mastery of the rules of *fiqh*, but also through *walāya*, that is, proximity to the sources of divine blessing and guidance. For this reason, students like Ṣabbāgh strived to cultivate physical proximity to the sanctified bodies of their teachers, even as they learned texts from Islam’s Great Tradition of *ḥadīth* and legal reasoning.

122 As, for example, in Rudolf Peters’ fascinating analysis of a “fundamentalist” activity at al-Azhar in 1711, see PETERS 1987: 101.

123 JABARTĪ (2003), 2: 364-5. – See also DE JONG 1978: 25.

124 JABARTĪ (2003), 2: 364-5.

Figure 6: Reconstructed line of *ṣuḥba* for ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-‘Aḥfīf

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