

# Shaping Community through Biographical Collections from South Arabia: A Comparison of Two *Ṭabaqāt*-works

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This article investigates and compares the origins, intentions and contents of two biographical collections from South Arabia. The first, *al-Sulūk fī ṭabaqāt al-‘ulamā’ wa-l-mulūk*, was written by al-Janadī, who held important legal and administrative positions for the Rasūlid court during the first part of the 8th/14th century. This collection mainly emerges from an earlier Yemeni historiographical work, which described the lives of religious figures in South Arabia in the Islamic period, but sees new entries being added from the author’s own research and time. It encompasses both the lives of learned men and of political dignitaries and overall aimed to induce readers to remember and imitate the exemplary lives found in the history of al-Janadī’s beloved Yemen. The second collection, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ ahl al-ṣidq wa-l-ikhlāṣ*, was composed by al-Sharjī, a 9th/15th-century legal scholar who was motivated by his visitations of the graves of Sufis in Yemen as well as by the observation that these individuals had been left out of previous collections describing the Sufis in other parts of the Islamic world. As a result, he utilised the earlier Yemeni biographical collections, including al-Janadī’s, to put together a representation of the lives of the Sufis of South Arabia. Towards the end of this article there is a detailed comparison made between the alternative biographies of the same man found in the two collections, thus illustrating the differences apparent in the respective foci of these two historians.

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## **Introduction**

Collections of biographies composed at different times and in different languages were usually designed to remind the contemporaries of the author about the exemplary behaviour and positive characteristics of the people described. The author presented them as role models, encouraging contemporaries to emulate them and imitate their actions. Biographies also often belong to an exhortative genre of literature. Consequently, in many cases, collections of biographies deal with memory. But at the same time the persons an author introduces in

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biographical collections share some common traits: they may be exemplars of virtue, paragons of justice, pious followers of the right belief or just members of the same vocational group. The common and usually positively described traits of the persons included renders them a circumscribed or a defined community in the eyes of the authors of many biographical collections.

To give an example from Syria in late antiquity: Theodoretos (who lived around 393-458), bishop of Kyrrhos<sup>1</sup>, wrote a collection of biographies that he gave the title »God-loving History or Ascetic Community«, in which he described the pious and ascetic lives of 30 saintly men (ten of them still alive in his time) living in the northwest of Syria, among them Symeon Stylites.<sup>2</sup> In the introduction to his collection, he declares in highly rhetorical language that his book is meant as a »remedy repelling evil« and »an aid to memory«.<sup>3</sup> It is the memory (*mnēmē*) of the »God-loving men« of the northwest of Syria in the author's time, where one of the centres was the still impressive memorial pilgrimage complex of Symeon Stylites (now called Qal'at Sim'an). These »God-loving men«, fierce ascetics, are the community forming the core of Theodoretos' collection of biographies, presented by him as holy men with characteristics »worthy of possessing and worthy of love« or, indeed, worthy of imitation.<sup>4</sup> The examples from South Arabia which are discussed in this article certainly concern similar groups of holy men and undoubtedly share the aim of aiding memory and encouraging imitation.

An early influential figure in the tradition of medieval biographical collections in South Arabia or Yemen<sup>5</sup> was Ibn Samura (born 547/1152, date of death unknown).<sup>6</sup> His biographical collection, called *Ṭabaqāt fuqahā' al-Yaman* (Generations of the Legal Specialists of Yemen), begins in the time of the prophet Muḥammad and ends with the year 583/1187.<sup>7</sup> As discussed in the introduction to the volume, *ṭabaqāt* (sing. *ṭabaqa*) as a biographical genre comprise ranks or classes of people who are enumerated according to the connections between them, such as teacher-pupil relations. Twice, Ibn Samura characterises his work as an abridgement (*mukhtaṣar*), suggesting that he had originally composed a more detailed version of the work, which is not preserved.<sup>8</sup>

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- 1 Situated in the very northwest of Syria, near the Turkish border, it is now called Kūrus and lies near modern Nabī Hūrī.
  - 2 Theodoretos, *Philótheos Historia*, ed. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen; mostly referred to as »Historia Religiosa« or »Religious History«.
  - 3 Theodoretos, *Philótheos Historia*, 1, ed. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 126-127.
  - 4 Theodoretos, *Philótheos Historia*, 1, ed. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, 124-127.
  - 5 The southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula was already called Yemen in early Islamic times. The name has the connotations of »the right side«, »the south« and »lucky«, or »felix« in Latin and »εὐδαίμων« in Greek. This region, the »Arabia Felix« of antiquity, the geographical parameters of which fluctuated over the centuries, is in the following understood as Yemen, without equating it to the modern nation-state.
  - 6 The last year mentioned in Ibn Samura's work is 587/1191 (Ibn Samura, *Ṭabaqāt fuqahā'*, ed. Sayyid, 189). It concerns the death of a certain learned man not mentioned at the end of the book.
  - 7 Ibn Samura, *Ṭabaqāt fuqahā'*, ed. Sayyid, 239, 245, 246.
  - 8 Ibn Samura, *Ṭabaqāt fuqahā'*, ed. Sayyid, 1, 142.

Ibn Samura lived at a restless time in the history of Yemen.<sup>9</sup> This period saw the troubles caused by the Banū Mahdī or the Mahdids and the arrival of the first representative of the Ayyūbids (the family of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, the Saladin of the European Crusaders) in Zabid in the Tihama of Yemen on 7 Shawwāl 569/11 May 1174. The somewhat earlier spread of the Ismaʿīliyya, a Shiʿī branch of Islam that follows a living imam, and, in the north, the emergence of the Zaydiyya, also a Shiʿī branch of Islam that follows the fifth imam, named Zayd (lived 80-122/695-740), further contributed to the political and religious unrest of the time. Ibn Samura included a kind of autobiography in the preface to his book that mainly concerns his education and the roots of his family.<sup>10</sup> He does not tell us *expressis verbis* why he wrote his *ṭabaqāt*; perhaps the restlessness of the times contributed to his motivations. His main concern was obviously to show the establishment and spread of the Sunni-Shafīʿī school of law (*madhhab*) in Yemen. At least to a certain degree, the adherents of this school were the intended audience of the author; they were the community he had in mind when he carefully documented the teacher-pupil relations constituting the *ṭabaqāt*. At the same time, he recorded the diffusion of the Sunni-Shafīʿī school of law, reaching back in time to the beginnings of Islam and connecting it with the present.

Two of the successors of Ibn Samura will be presented and compared in this article. Both lived at the time of the Rasūlids (626-858/1229-1454), the dynasty that followed the Ayyūbids, and the still later Ṭāhirids (858-923/1454-1517).<sup>11</sup> Both authors died in Zabid on the coastal plain of the Red Sea, having spent at least some years living and teaching there. The different aims which the authors pursued in their biographical works will be highlighted below and the different communities they wrote for described. The effect that their divergent aims had on the structure of the collections and on the single biographies will be shown by comparing the authors' respective biographies of the same individual.

#### *Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Yūsuf b. Ya'qūb al-Janadī*

The first and older author is Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Yūsuf b. Ya'qūb al-Janadī. Around ninety years after his death, al-Janadī was characterised by his biographer al-Khazrajī as mainly an expert in law (*faqīh*) and as a historian.<sup>12</sup> His hometown was al-Janad, then an important town not far north-east of Ta'izz. He was judge (*qāḍī*) in Mawza', a Tihama-town near the Red Sea, and held the position of a market-inspector with policing functions (*muḥtasib*) at the important harbour-town of Aden.<sup>13</sup> From 715/1315 onwards, he held the same office in the administrative, economic and scientific centre of Zabid, which also served nearly every year as one of the two locations of the Rasūlid court: Zabid during the winter months and Ta'izz in the summer. Al-Janadī's functions and places of residence suggest that he held an

9 A valuable account of the developments of this time and later centuries in the Yemeni Tihama (the coastal plain on the Red Sea) is provided in De Pierrepont, *Espaces*.

10 Ibn Samura, *Ṭabaqāt fuqahā'*, ed. Sayyid, 1-4.

11 The year 923/1517 marks the beginning of the first Ottoman occupation of southern Arabia.

12 al-Khazrajī, *al-Iqd*, ed. al-'Abbadī *et al.*, 4: 2097-2098.

13 al-Janadī, *al-Sulūk*, ed. al-Akwa', 2: 396-397: al-Janadī did not include an autobiography, but he provides many autobiographical remarks throughout his work.

influential position in Rasūlid politics at the time of al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad Dāwud (r. 696-721/1296-1322) and al-Malik al-Mujāhid 'Alī (r. 721-764/1322-1363). In tandem with carrying out his public functions, al-Janadī was also teaching. Al-Khazrajī had no information about the date of al-Janadī's death, but since the latter's work, discussed below, breaks off early in its account of the Islamic year 730/January-February 1330, al-Khazrajī supposed that al-Janadī died suddenly in that year. The usual date given for his death, 732/1332, seems to be little more than a guess.

The full title of al-Janadī's book is *al-Sulūk fī ṭabaqāt al-'ulamā' wa-l-mulūk* (*The Threads of the Generations of Learned Men and Kings*).<sup>14</sup> It is a large *ṭabaqāt* work, in which the author cited and reworked biographies from, among others, Ibn Samura and al-Rāzī's (d. 460/1068) *Tārīkh Madīnat Ṣan'ā'* (*History of Ṣanaa*), while adding new and more recent ones.<sup>15</sup> It took the author years to write his book; from references in the text one can deduce that he worked on the collection mainly between ca. 719/1319 and 730/1330.<sup>16</sup> Al-Janadī tried to place the different individuals in their historical and political context not only by mentioning historical events in the course of each biography but also by including long historical sections. These would play a similar exemplary role for later historians as the biographies played for later biographers. Al-Janadī explained the method used by him in his work, at the same time revealing one of his main motives for writing:<sup>17</sup>

I am – praised be God! – one of [the inhabitants of Yemen] by birth and home. Added to that is the love of one's homeland, known to the public and recognised by the distinguished ... At that time<sup>18</sup> I wanted to write a book to collect in it most of [Yemen's] learned men and to mention all that is established of [a single] one's circumstances together with his birth, good traits and death, after having combined with that a reminder of those I believe it would be worth keeping in mind and an advantage to obey. I depended on that by coming close to the reminder and by hoping for assistance from God. Then it came to my mind to [not only] name the learned men ('ulamā') but to present together with them the dignitaries (*a'yān*), and I would speak about what is worthwhile of their circumstances. Then I attached to that a section of reports on the rulers<sup>19</sup>, from which I made a condensed version (*mukhtaṣar*). With that, I wanted the book to join the reports of the two factions and the heads of the two houses.<sup>20</sup> I shall begin with the learned men because of God the exalted's saying: »... and the angels and those who are endowed with knowledge.«<sup>21</sup>

14 For al-Janadī's work, his motives and the organising principles of his work, see also Vallet, *Historiographie Rasūlide*, 49-53.

15 al-Rāzī, *Tārīkh*, ed. al-'Amrī.

16 Usually al-Janadī writes something like: »... exists until our time which is the year XX«, cf. e.g., al-Janadī, *al-Sulūk*, ed. al-Akwa', 1:124 (year 722), 1:329 (719), 1:343 (724), 1:350 (723), 1:359 (723), 1:391 (723), 2:260 (723), 2:443 (728), 2:444 (725), 2:445 (723), 2:447 (723), 2:449 (723), 2:457 (726), 2:476 (724), 2:555 (729). The dates show that the author had periods of more intensive writing (e.g. in the year 723), and that he inserted certain passages retrospectively.

17 al-Janadī, *al-Sulūk*, ed. al-Akwa', 1:62.

18 Meaning that when al-Janadī became aware of his love for the homeland (*ḥubb al-waṭan*) he felt the urge to write his book.

19 Al-Janadī is referring here to the historical part of his work.

20 The two factions (*fariqayn*) and the two houses (*dārayn*) are obviously the way al-Janadī describes two parts of the elite of his society, the learned men or the men of the pen (*'ulamā'*) and the dignitaries or the politicians (*a'yān*).

21 Qur'an 3:18, modified from transl. Asad.

Al-Janadī's motive for writing *al-Sulūk* was, on first sight, the surprisingly modern and in a certain sense pre-nationalist thought of love for his homeland (*ḥubb al-waṭan*). The author briefly informs us of the data that he wishes to include in each biography and at the same time of their structure. Then he explains why he deemed it necessary to add condensed historical sections, which was a new feature, at least in South Arabia, and was introduced there by al-Janadī himself. The remaining structure of the *ṭabaqāt*-part of the work is similar to that of Ibn Samura's. Al-Janadī frequently cited Ibn Samura but strove to be more detailed than the earlier author. As already observed in the case of Ibn Samura, al-Janadī's book was often used by later authors. The account of al-Janadī that al-Khazrajī gives in his own biographical collection, for instance, includes the following tribute:<sup>22</sup>

If not for [al-Janadī's activities of] collecting, examining and investigating, I would not have embarked on the writing of this, my book, and I would not have found the right way to anything of it [...] He was the one who emboldened me to [do] that and showed me the way to what is there.

In his preface, al-Janadī anticipated the accusation that his undertaking was of no use and declared:<sup>23</sup>

One who is ignorant or pretends to be ignorant would ask: what are the beneficial results from the mention of those I shall present and the telling of the stories of those I have in mind? Firstly, I would greet them politely and then [state] that there are two benefits. One I mentioned in the beginning, namely what the Qur'ān says for the prophets and their communities (*umam*), the bygone periods and who follows them; and the second is that when someone later on takes an interest in the report of the distinguished men before him or hears how they got ready and approached this interest in knowledge and the quest for it, his soul will yearn to imitate them<sup>24</sup> and he will take their way and will realise their high esteem and adornment.

Furthermore, al-Janadī argues here that the benefit of reading or hearing the biographies of famous and distinguished people lies to a great extent in the encouragement they offer to imitate these people. His main sources, al-Janadī says, were the books authored by Ibn Samura and al-Rāzī. In the latter's history, the lives of some of the most famous early Islamic inhabitants of the town Sanaa are depicted.

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22 al-Khazrajī, *al-Iqd*, ed. al-'Abbādī *et al.*, 4:2097; he adds the following rhyming lines: »In times of peace, he is my teacher and imam, in times of war my shield and sword (*ḥusām*)«.

23 al-Janadī, *al-Sulūk*, ed. al-Akwa', 1:65-66.

24 Compare with the quote from Theodoretos on p. [2].

Regarding the methods he used for gathering and presenting his data, al-Janadī writes:<sup>25</sup>

I took what I shall set forth from its most likely locations and travelled from al-Janad, searching for this, to far-away regions. Then, together with the naming of one of the learned men (*'ulamā'*), the mention of one of the dignitaries (*a'yān*) was presented. So, I produced in his account what satisfies the soul and what eliminates uncertainty as far as possible. Together with that the goals reach different ones. Whoever wants a history of the learned men (*'ulamā'*) also wants the regents (*mulūk*) and also wants the dignitaries (*a'yān*) and a summary (*mukhtaṣar*), according to my ability.

Therefore, al-Janadī not only used written sources to compose his remarkable collection but also travelled around Yemen to gather data for his work, to visit graves and to interview people at the different locations where he stayed.<sup>26</sup>

*Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Sharjī al-Zabīdī*

In his collection of biographies called *al-Ḍaw' al-lāmi' fī a'yān al-qarn al-tāsi'* (The Shining Light concerning the Dignitaries of the Ninth Century), the Egyptian biographer, hadith-specialist and younger contemporary of al-Sharjī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī (lived 831-902/1427-1497), characterised al-Sharjī as a hadith-specialist (*muḥaddith*), man of letters (*adīb*), poet and follower of the Ḥanafī school of law.<sup>27</sup> Al-Sharjī was born on the night of Friday the 22nd day of Ramaḍān in the year 812 (27 January 1410) in Zabid. Together with his brother, al-Sharjī was instructed by famous teachers of his time, some of whom were followers of the Shafī'i school of law. With one of his later teachers, the *shaykh* Abū l-Qāsim al-'Usluqī, the author made the pilgrimage to the holy places of Mecca and Medina in the year 835/1431-32.<sup>28</sup> Later he taught in Zabid and is still recorded in this role in the year 887/1482-83. One of the works of al-Sharjī quoted by al-Sakhāwī is the biographical collection called *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ ahl al-ṣidq wa-l-ikhhlāṣ* (The Generations of People of Distinction and Sincere Devotion). Alongside this work, al-Sakhāwī mentions an abridgement of *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī composed by al-Sharjī.<sup>29</sup> Al-Sharjī used different opportunities to visit the graves of famous Sufis. On the pilgrimage to Mecca in the year 835/1431-2, al-Sharjī passed through Ḥalī<sup>30</sup> and visited there the grave of the famous 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ṭawāshī.<sup>31</sup> Ten years later, in 855/1451, the author visited the grave of Yaḥyā b. Abī al-Khayr al-'Imrānī in Dhī al-Sufal not far from Ta'izz.<sup>32</sup> He died on 11 Rabī' II 893/24 March 1488 in his hometown of Zabid.

25 al-Janadī, *al-Sulūk*, ed. al-Akwa', 1:68-69.

26 e.g., al-Janadī, *al-Sulūk*, ed. al-Akwa', 1:385.

27 al-Sakhāwī, *al-Daw'*, 1:214-215.

28 The information concerning his instruction by al-'Usluqī and the joint pilgrimage is contained in his biography of the latter in his *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*; al-Sharjī, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 400-402.

29 Al-Bukhārī was an author who lived 194-256/810-870 and wrote one of the most influential collections of hadith. Al-Sharjī also authored a compendium of anecdotes, poems and funny stories called *Nuzhat al-aḥbāb* (Entertainment of Sweethearts), a work which possibly earned him the characterisation as *adīb* by al-Sakhāwī.

30 A settlement and harbour on the eastern border of the Red Sea north of Jazan, today in Saudi Arabia. As was usual for many pilgrims coming from Yemen, the author took the boat northwards in the direction of Mecca.

31 Al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 201.

32 Al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 365.



In spite of its title, al-Sharjī's *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ* is not structured like a classical *ṭabaqāt*-work, where the biographies are ordered in a temporal sequence, each generation of pupils and teachers providing the opportunity to introduce separations into chapters or classes, i.e. *ṭabaqāt*; Ibn Samura's work is a good example of this. Al-Sharjī ordered his biographies simply – and contrary to the original sense of *ṭabaqāt* – alphabetically. In his preface he justified his procedure with the assertion that this arrangement facilitates reading and use.<sup>33</sup>

»Know, my brother, that I composed this book according to the letters of the alphabet in order to make it easy to deal with, and I followed the method of the historians (*mu'arrikhūn*) in the arrangement of the names one after the other, for example, in letting Ibrāhīm precede Aḥmad ...«. As a source, the author preferred al-Janadī's *al-Sulūk*, followed by works of Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh al-Yāfi'ī (lived 698-768/1298-1367), a famous Yemeni Sufi who spent the greater part of his life in Mecca, and Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥusayn al-Ahdal (d. 855/1451). Al-Ahdal's main source was also al-Janadī, of whose book he made an updated *mukhtaṣar*, which was completed in the year 867/1463.<sup>34</sup>

Al-Sharjī begins his preface with four examples from outside of Yemen, four writers who presented biographies of the Sufi »friends of God« (*awliyā*). Having observed that these authors named no Yemeni at all, he states that this shortcoming provided the motive for the writing of his own biographical lexicon:<sup>35</sup>

I saw a number of books mentioning friends of God (*awliyā*) the most high and enumerating their virtues (*faḍā'il*), their miracles (*karāmāt*) and their exploits (*manāqib*), for example, the book *The Epistle* by *imām* Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī,<sup>36</sup> the book of *The Experts* by *shaykh* Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhruwardī,<sup>37</sup> the *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya* by *shaykh* Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī,<sup>38</sup> the *Exploits of the Faithful* by Ibn Khamīs<sup>39</sup> and others. Not one of them I saw turned his attention to the mention of an inhabitant of Yemen from among the truthful Sufi masters (*sāda*) and the practising and ascetic learned men. On the contrary, they mention [only] inhabitants of Syria, Iraq, North Africa<sup>40</sup> and so on. For somebody who has no knowledge about the actual circumstances in that blessed region (*al-iqlīm al-mubārak*, i.e. Yemen), this could possibly instil the wrong impression that nobody who is worthy of mention and nobody who is distinguished by the qualities of the friends of God (*awliyā*) lived there. This happens

33 al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 40.

34 al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 423.

35 al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 35.

36 Abū l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin al-Qushayrī al-Naysabūrī al-Shāfi'ī (376-465/986-1072) wrote a *risāla* that is usually called *al-risāla al-Qushayriyya fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf* (Qushayrī's epistle on Sufism). The first part of it consists of short biographies of famous Sufis.

37 Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar b. Muḥammad al-Suhruwardī (539-632/1143/44-1233/34), a Sufi author, wrote *al-'awārif wa-l-ma'ārif* (Experts and Knowledge).

38 Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī (325-412/937-1020/21) wrote *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*.

39 Muḥammad b. Naṣr b. Khamīs (466-552/1072-1157) wrote *Manāqib al-abrār wa-maḥāsīn al-aḥyār* (Exploits of the faithful and merits of the excellent ones); see Ibn Khamīs, *Manāqib*, ed. al-Jādir.

40 Al-Shām, al-'Irāq and al-Maghrib respectively correspond to Syria in the older sense, the modern Iraq – possibly including Persia – and North Africa.

despite the major part of the inhabitants of the Yemen being people of true faith, heedful and gentle hearts, evident probity and intrinsic honesty, attesting the word of the prophet – God bless him and grant him salvation: »The inhabitants of the Yemen are of most gentle and most agreeable hearts. The faith is Yemeni, and the wisdom is Yemeni«,<sup>41</sup> and other traditions of that kind where [the prophet] – God bless him and grant him salvation – is an authority about the virtues [of the Yemenis] in general. Just imagine how many men among them are men of theoretical and practical knowledge, of letters and of *aḥwāl*.<sup>42</sup>

There is a tradition about the *imām*, the learned about God, Aḥmad b. Mūsā b. ʿUjayl, that he was asked about the friends of God (*awliyāʾ*) that are mentioned in the books, and there was cited a person from Egypt, a person from Balkh and others, but a person from the Yemen was not named. He – God have mercy on him – said, »This is rather because of their great number, because they are groups after groups.«

Having set out his reason, the neglect of South Arabian candidates worthy of biographies in the collections from other regions of the Islamic world, the author outlines who, in his expectation, should be the audience of his biographical collection:<sup>43</sup>

In any case, the authors of Syria (al-Shām) and Iraq do not mention them (i.e. the Yemeni pious men, *awliyāʾ*) because of the distance to them and they do not realise their existence. Since this is as it is, I want to compose a book which I assign especially to the mention of the *awliyāʾ* among the inhabitants of Yemen to demonstrate in it their circumstances (*aḥwāl*), sayings, virtues and miracles (*karāmāt*).

Al-Sharjī's main intention was, therefore, to present examples of saintly men from Yemen to demonstrate that there lived as many, if not more, exemplary virtuous people there as in other Islamic regions. This stated purpose puts the work in the same »pre-nationalist« bracket as the undertaking of al-Janadī, who gave his »*ḥubb al-waṭan*« as a reason for writing. At the same time, al-Sharjī's book bears witness to the age-old South Arabian need for appreciation and acclaim and is but one of many expressions of perceived neglect and discrimination by the rest of the Islamic world.<sup>44</sup> In order to pursue his goal, al-Sharjī centred on the lives and miracles of Sufi people from Yemen, especially from the Tihama.<sup>45</sup> He extracted biographies from his predecessors, whom he named in his preface and elsewhere (mostly al-Janadī and al-Yāfīʿī). Al-Sharjī usually shortened the biographies written by them, as the forthcoming example shows, because details of the lives of the saintly individuals were less important to him than reports of miracles worked by God through his friends (*awliyāʾ*), the holy men,

41 hadith: compare, for example, in the above mentioned *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī, nr 4388.

42 Sg. *ḥāl*: denotes the special states that Sufis endeavour to attain.

43 al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 36.

44 Whole books, like ʿUbayd b. Shariyya's *Akhbār al-Yaman* (History of the Yemen) (ʿUbayd, *Akhbār*, ed. Krenkow, 323-499), already seem to more or less serve this purpose, while other instances of these tendencies can be found in: al-Hamdānī, *Kitāb al-iklīl al-juzʾ al-awwal*, ed. Löfgren, 3-4; al-Hamdānī, *Kitāb al-iklīl al-juzʾ al-thāmin*, ed. al-Akwaʿ, 213; al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿArab*, ed. al-Akwaʿ, 230.

45 Al-Sharjī sometimes explicitly mentions the miracles as a cause for including certain persons in his collection of biographies, e.g.: al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 157, 347.



showing them to be distinguished by God. The signs of God (*āyāt Allāh*) form his main interest in his Sufi-centred book, along with information on the graves of the holy men for the purpose of pilgrimage (*ziyāra*, »visit«). According to the author, he composed his book mainly for people outside of Yemen. This would account for his explanation of words of South Arabian origin, whether actual or reputed. For example, al-Sharjī elucidates the word *sirdāb* (meaning, »a subterranean structure, for the summer [...] or a narrow place into which one enters [...] a cellar or subterranean vault, in which anything is put to be kept cool...«), describing it as a term used by Yemenis. In fact, the word is originally Persian.<sup>46</sup>

### ***The Structures of the Biographies***

#### ***The Structure of al-Janadī's biographies***

The structure of the individual biographies in al-Janadī's collection is quite variable, more so than with al-Sharjī. Certainly, miracles were less important for al-Janadī than for al-Sharjī. On the other hand, historical events that influenced the decisions of the people described are mentioned more frequently by al-Janadī. The importance that the author attaches to these historical events is in keeping with the urge he felt to include standalone historical sections in his biographical collection.

1) **Geographical introduction** (sections 1-2 in the following table): in his *ṭabaqāt*, al-Janadī sub-divided his different classes according to geography and, as a result, introduced each biography with some topographical details, naming and describing the site of the villages where a person lived, was born or died.

2) **Explanation of the name** (section 4): in many cases, al-Janadī described the genealogical origin of the relevant person.

3) **Intellectual career, teachers** (sections 6-9): Al-Janadī enumerated the subject's teachers, the places where he was educated and, occasionally, the books he studied under the guidance of his teachers.

4) **Šūfī networks, pupils and migrations** (sections 10-20): historical events were included by al-Janadī here, together with the mention of pupils. The locations to which the person had to travel and the people who hosted him were also named.

5) **Praise of the subject and the highlighting of his achievements** (section 22): other biographers like al-Sharjī tended to insert such sections of praise at a much earlier point in their biographies.

6) **Death and burial** (section 23-24): the place of burial is important, because it was and, in places, still is a destination of pilgrimage, where one could go to receive a share of the dead person's *baraka* or blessing and his intercession with God.

7) **Progeny, successors, marital status, asceticism, the location of successors** (sections 25-27 and 33): the networks of teachers and learned men were often maintained by successors of the saintly persons. They, mostly sons or, more rarely, daughters of the dead, served the pilgrims and maintained the burial places.

8) **Anecdotes** (section 28-32): al-Janadī strove to write »complete« biographies, i.e. he usually presented all the material he could find. He makes only occasional mention of miracles.

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46 Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1347c; Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:647b. The word is explained by al-Sharjī at *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 94.

### *The structure of al-Sharjī's biographies*

In his endeavour to confine himself to content adapted to his specific aims, al-Sharjī used a simple and recurring structure for his biographies with only a few variations. As he repeatedly emphasises, his most important aim by far was to report the miracles performed by the holy and usually Sufi men. In contrast to Ibn Samura or al-Janadī, for example, details concerning the lives of the subjects and their teachers and pupils remain rather in the background. The standard structure of the biographies of al-Sharjī consists of:

- 1) **Description using conventional hagiographic formulae** (see the following example, section 5): these conventional formulaic adjectives and participles include, for example, important *shaykh*, expert or educator. A whole set existed for ready use, and they were used to characterise and idealise the subjects of the biographies. Al-Sharjī was not alone in using them: they were applied in a very similar, nearly interchangeable way in many of the *ṭabaqāt* works throughout the Arabic-speaking world.
- 2) **Mention of asceticism and seclusion** (here in section 34 at the end of the biography): an ascetic style of life frequently adds to a saintly life but is not obligatory. It is typically evoked by repeated references to spiritual exercise, solitariness or seclusion. Celibacy is also possible, as in our example, but is not as highly valued and frequent as in Christian societies.
- 3) **Occasional mention of teachers and Sufi networks** (see sections 16-22): reference to the teachers of the relevant person may follow, as well as to the friends and people he met. With these intellectual lineages (which can be used as indicators of intellectual networks) al-Sharjī aims to give special Sufi genealogies of initiation in Yemen.
- 4) **Occasional enumeration of disciples** (section 20 mentioned above, and section 27): the next step is the naming of the disciples of the relevant person. The diachronic dimension of the Sufi-network stretching back into the past is thus complemented by one reaching into the future. This establishes a Sufi community over time, a community of remembrance and at the same time a community of expectation.
- 5) **Reports on *karāmāt* and *āyāt*** (miracles and signs given by God) and other anecdotes (sections 28-33): this is the most important issue for al-Sharjī. The »people of distinction and sincere devotion« that are the subject of the author's biographies are predominantly Sufi personalities, and *karāmāt* and *āyāt* (and sometimes *mukāshifāt* or revealings) are *topoi* connected with and important for Sufis. For those authors who were not Sufis, miracles had a far less important place in the biographies.
- 6) **Death** (section 34): the date and place of death is usually given by the author. As mentioned above, the great importance of the place of the burial stemmed from the custom of pilgrimage (*ziyāra*) to get *baraka* or blessing and to pray, a practice which was abhorred and fought against by other Islamic denominations like the Zaydiyya. In other words: the practice of visiting graves (*ziyāra*) was used for the construction of boundaries between groups.
- 7) **Occasional mention of progeny, successors** (also section 34): often sons (rarely daughters or wives) take the place of their fathers as saintly persons, guaranteeing that the memory of the holy man lingers on. Kinship and marriage can be important for keeping up a saintly lineage over time, and genealogies of kinship can, through marriage, arise out of genealogies of learning. The locations of the successors of holy men can become important pilgrim destinations.
- 8) **Concluding formulae** (section 34, last sentence): These formulae have an even more un-specific and conventional character than the beginning of a biography, e.g. »God may be of help through them (sc. the holy men)« or *amīn* (a word which corresponds closely in its use and in its etymology to the »amen« used in Christian contexts).

*Case-Study: Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Sibā’ī’s Biographies by al-Janadī and al-Sharjī*

As an example of how biographies written with different intentions can vary and to compare the use a later author makes of a biography written by an earlier one, here follows a biography of one and the same person, called al-Sibā’ī. The text written by al-Janadī, on the left-hand side, is contrasted with the version reworked by al-Sharjī, on the right-hand side.

	Al-Janadī’s text <sup>47</sup>	Al-Sharjī’s text <sup>48</sup>
1	Then from among the regions whose inhabitants became known for jurisprudence ( <i>fiqh</i> ) [is] the region of Ḥajja: <sup>49</sup>	
2	There is a village known as al-Mikhlāfa, <sup>50</sup> from which a group of outstanding jurists came forth.	
3	The first of them whom we confirmed was ‘Alī b. Mas‘ūd b. ‘Alī b. ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Muḥarrām b. Aḥmad al-Sibā’ī, then al-Kuthbī, then al-Qudamī.	Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Mas‘ūd b. ‘Alī b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Sibā’ī,
4	al-Sibā’ī is a <i>nisba</i> <sup>51</sup> from his grandfather whose name was al-Sibā’ī, and to him a group are traced back to those who are called Banū al-Sibā’ī. Al-Kuthbī is another grandfather.	a <i>nisba</i> belonging to a group of Hamdān who are called Banū al-Sibā’ī.
5		The mentioned was a jurist, a learned and a practical one, famous for the excellence of his knowledge and the abundance of his veneration and piousness.
6	His first occupation was in the previously mentioned Ḥarāz, <sup>52</sup> where he read the seven ways of reciting and was partly instructed in jurisprudence.	

47 al-Janadī, *al-Sulūk*, ed. al-Akwa’, 2: 319-321.

48 Cf. al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 220-221.

49 Ḥajja, a highland city at around 1800m altitude, is today the capital of an eponymous district in Yemen, lying ca. 130 km north-west of Sanaa.

50 According to the Yemeni editor al-Akwa’, this village lay south of Ḥajja. He equates it with al-Hamdānī’s al-Mikhlafa, which is a market for people from the highlands and the Tihāma on the western rim of the highlands.

51 A *nisba* is a name indicating a person’s origin. In this case, it relates to a location, but in other cases it relates to a tribal affiliation or a place in a genealogy (e.g. of the prophet).

52 A mountainous region between the Yemeni capital and al-Ḥudayda, a Red Sea harbour of today.

7	Then he returned to his hometown and went to the jurist Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Nuzayl <sup>53</sup> to Jabal Tays. <sup>54</sup> He is the one whom Ibn Samura mentioned <sup>55</sup> among the companions of the shaykh Yaḥyā b. Abī al-Khayr, <sup>56</sup> whom I also mentioned.	
8	Before him he recited the <i>muhadhdhab</i> . <sup>57</sup>	
9	Then he came to the previously mentioned town of Jabā <sup>58</sup> and studied the <i>bayyān</i> <sup>59</sup> with the jurist Abū Bakr, and he studied with Abū Bakr al-Ḥajūrī <sup>60</sup> who will be mentioned.	
10	Then he returned to al-Mikhlāfa, where he served as the head and taught.	
11	When the imam ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥamza <sup>61</sup> appeared and achieved supremacy in the region of the settlement, this jurist left with all his students, who were some 60, and went to the Tihama.	
12	He passed by a place in the regions of al-Mahjam <sup>62</sup> which is known as Bayt Khalifa, and there was in those days the <i>shaykh</i> ‘Imrān b. Qubḥ, the <i>shaykh</i> of the Qarābulis <sup>63</sup> at that time.	His residence was at first in al-Mikhlāfa in the region of the mountains of the town al-Mahjam.

53 For a very brief mention, see Ibn Samura, *Ṭabaqāt fuqahā’ al-Yaman*, ed. Sayyid, 198, where Jabal Tays is also given as his dwelling place; cf. also: al-Janādī, *al-Sulūk*, ed. al-Akwa’, 1:344-345.

54 Jabal Tays lies north-west of Sanaa.

55 cf. Ibn Samura, *Ṭabaqāt fuqahā’ al-Yaman*, ed. Sayyid, 198.

56 A very famous teacher of the time, Yaḥyā b. Abī l-Khayr, received a whole *faṣl* or section in Ibn Samura’s work; Ibn Samura, *Ṭabaqāt fuqahā’ al-Yaman*, ed. Sayyid, 174-184.

57 *al-Muhadhdhab fī al-fiqh* (The Refinement in Jurisprudence); al-Shirāzī, *al-Muhadhdhab*, ed. al-Zuḥaylī. This basic text was used for instruction, especially in the Sunnī regions in Yemen, and was written by Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Shirāzī (b. 393/1003 in Firūzābād near Shirāz, died 476/1083 in Baghdad), who is also the author of a biographical collection which Ibn Samura used as his model.

58 The location of this town is unclear; if it was written Jaba’, it would be a town west of Ta’izz.

59 *al-Bayyān fī madhhab al-Shāfi’ī* (The Explanation of the School of al-Shāfi’ī) was written by Yaḥyā b. Abī al-Khayr b. Sālim al-‘Imrānī al-Yamanī (b. 489/1096 in Maṣna’at Sayr near Aden, d. 3 April 1163 in Dhū al-Sufāl); al-‘Imrānī, *al-Bayyān*, ed. al-Nūrī. He was one of the most important learned men among the early Sunnī-Shafī’īs in Yemen, if one follows Ibn Samura. His *Bayyān* was and still is a basic book of instruction.

60 Not mentioned by Ibn Samura.

61 This Zaydī imam reigned from 585/1187 until his death in 614/1217.

62 al-Mahjam in Tihāma.

63 Instead of ‘Imrān b. Qubḥ, one should read ‘Imrān b. Qubay’. They were a family of shaykhs in Wadi Surdud; De Pierrepont, *Espaces*, 1:418.

13	He had taken up quarters there in a kind of camp. The <i>shaykh</i> entertained him and all his companions as guests for three days. Then he asked him to stick to him and to teach in his village. He complied with this request and stayed with him for a number of years.	
14	This was in the year 718. <sup>64</sup>	
15	When ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥamza had died and the power of the Zaydiyya decreased, the jurist returned to his town.	
16	He stayed there for a span of time during which the previously mentioned <i>shaykh</i> Abū al-Ghayth b. Jamīl <sup>65</sup> came and built a <i>ribāṭ</i> <sup>66</sup> there.	There came to him the <i>shaykh</i> Abū al-Ghayth b. Jamīl and built at his place a <i>ribāṭ</i> .
17	They both stayed helping each other for a time.	They both stayed in friendship and mutual help for the true belief ( <i>ḥaqq</i> ),
18	Then, when Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn <sup>67</sup> appeared and the power ( <i>shawka</i> ) <sup>68</sup> of the Zaydiyya became stronger, they both left the town and returned to the Tihama, where the jurist ‘Amr already stayed.	until Imam Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn appeared, the <i>imām</i> of the Zaydiyya, and their power ( <i>shawka</i> ) became stronger. So, they went down to the Tihama.
19	The <i>shaykh</i> Abū al-Ghayth settled with the jurist ‘Aṭā’ who was previously mentioned,	The <i>shaykh</i> Abū al-Ghayth stayed to live at [the place of] the jurist of ‘Aṭā’, as will be reported in his biography, God willing. <sup>69</sup>
20	and the jurist settled with his pupil ‘Amr and stayed with him until he died.	‘Alī b. Mas‘ūd stayed to live with the jurist ‘Amr al-Sibā‘ī, <sup>70</sup> because he was his pupil, as will be mentioned in the biography of the jurist ‘Amr. <sup>71</sup>
21		The jurist ‘Amr had bought a place in the region of Bayt Ḥusayn and took his abode there.

64 The death of ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥamza occurred on 18 Muḥarram 614/27 April 1217, but the year 718 begins a hundred years later on: 4 March 1318. This incorrect date may be attributable to a reading error on the part of a copyist.

65 On this individual, see De Pierrepont, *Espaces*, 1:397-409.

66 A biography of Abū al-Ghayth b. Jamīl, called Shams al-Shumūs (»Sun of the suns«), appears in al-Sharjī; *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 406-410. He died in the year 651/1253 in Bayt ‘Aṭā’. A *ribāṭ* is a convent of Sufi adepts. For Bayt ‘Aṭā’, see De Pierrepont, *Espaces*, 1:406-408.

67 Imam al-Mahdī Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn, who reigned 646-656/1248-1258.

68 The author uses a metaphor: *shawka* literally means »thorn, spike«.

69 See his biography in al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 406-410; according to this account, the jurist was Aḥmad b. ‘Aṭā’. The village in Wadi Surdud was named Bayt ‘Aṭā’ (after the father of Aḥmad), who has no biography in al-Sharjī; *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 407.

70 In all probability, this is Abū Muḥammad ‘Amr b. ‘Alī b. ‘Amr b. Muḥammad b. ‘Amr b. Sa’d b. Ja’far b. ‘Abbās al-Tibā‘ī; cf. al-Sharjī (*Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 247-248); Sibā‘ī can be mistaken for Tibā‘ī palaeographically (or the other way round).

71 Cf. al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 247.

22	This jurist was a big imam with many disciplines, and the jurisprudence was broadly disseminated by him in the region of Ḥajja and in other regions, and widespread groups studied jurisprudence with him.	Then the jurist 'Alī b. Mas'ūd settled down and spread the knowledge.
23	His death occurred around the year 610 and 650. <sup>72</sup>	
24	The <i>shaykh</i> Abū al-Ghayth b. Jamīl arrived at [the place of] his pupil, the jurist 'Amr, to console him and those of his people who were present.	
25	He had given the jurist 'Amr a daughter of his brother in marriage,	
26	but he himself did not get married before he died. He was questioned because of that, and he said: »It would distract me from knowledge!« or whichever way he would put it.	
27	His study-circle brought together 30 students of jurisprudence, most of them poor and with alms.	So, he became famous in these regions, and his circle [of study] united around 200 men who were taught, the greater part of them men of poverty <sup>73</sup> and piety.
28	It is related that a crisis occurred which led to great suffering [of starvation].	It is transmitted that a severe crisis occurred in a certain year, which led to great suffering [of starvation].
29	Some inhabitants of the village were aware of that, but in his village there was not enough food to send to all of them.	One day one of the inhabitants of the village sent a loaf of bread as food to one of their men because they had seen his need.
30	So, they sent a loaf of bread to one of them. [That person] offered this to a companion, then this other one offered it to another one, until it came back to the one who gave it in the beginning.	But that man offered it to a companion from the group believing that he would fulfil his wishes from another place. But that man offered it to another companion, and they continued that until the loaf came back to the one into whose hand it had fallen the first time.
31	He came with it to the jurist and told him the story.	He came with it to the jurist and told him the story.

72 This unusually long period for a date of a death begins 22 May 1213 and ends 13 March 1252.

73 »dhū faqr«; cf. faqir (»poor«), a term especially for Sufi adepts at that time.



32	He was amazed and said: »Praised be God who gave among my companions the peculiarity ( <i>ṣifa</i> ) of the people of the bench <sup>74</sup> ( <i>aṣḥāb al-ṣuffa</i> ) and of the helpers ( <i>anṣār</i> ) of our prophet Muḥammad – God bless him and grant him salvation – when he, the supreme, said: ›They give preference over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot.« <sup>75</sup> Then he drew together his students and distributed the chunks between them according to their number.	He was amazed about that and said: »Praised be God who gave among my companions one of the peculiarities of the companions of the messenger of God – God bless him and grant him salvation – about whom God said: ›They give preference over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot.« Then he drew together his students and distributed the loaf among them.
33	It can be ascribed to his asceticism that he never collected a <i>dīnār</i> or a <i>dirham</i> .	What was narrated about his asceticism is that he did not collect a <i>dīnār</i> or a <i>dirham</i> .
34		His death was in the year 650 and something. The <i>shaykh</i> Abū al-Ghayth came to console because of him, and the jurist ‘Amr followed him [as his successor], because he had no offspring. He never married a woman. He was asked his reason for that and said: »It distracts me from knowledge!« God, the supreme, have mercy on him, <i>āmin</i> .

In accordance with their distinct needs, al-Janadī and al-Sharjī arranged their biographies differently. This divergence is already apparent at the start of their respective biographies of ‘Alī al-Sibā’ī. Because al-Sharjī arranged his collection alphabetically, the name precedes, whereas al-Janadī arranged the *ṭabaqāt* of the learned men in chronological order. As in the case of ‘Alī al-Sibā’ī, al-Janadī might further subdivide the people within one *ṭabaqa* according to geographical sub-categories.<sup>76</sup> Al-Sharjī, on the other hand, believed that the alphabetical arrangement made his book easier to use.<sup>77</sup>

74 For the »people of the bench« and the helpers of the prophet, see further down.

75 Quotation from Qur’ān 59:9.

76 In our case, al-Janadī writes of the region of Ḥajja, and in that region of the village al-Mikhlāfa, which was a village famous for its learned men and therefore a centre of learning at the time of al-Janadī. From al-Mikhlāfa alone, al-Janadī writes about eleven persons. But for the village mentioned before al-Mikhlāfa called al-Ghuṣn (whose location the Yemeni editor does not know), he reports on just one learned man. The next region al-Janadī proceeds to in his description is al-Mahjam on the coastal plain of the Red Sea, west of Ḥajja.

77 al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 40.

The *nisba* al-Sibā'ī is explained differently by the two authors. For al-Sharjī, it leads to a group of the federation of Hamdān<sup>78</sup>, which is possible: a group with this name lives just south of Sa'da in the north of the country. Al-Sharjī may have found al-Janadī's version implausible: the latter speaks of a grandfather (or ancestor) of the *faqīh* who is said to have had the name al-Sibā'ī. Al-Janadī adds two other *nisbas*, of which one, al-Qudamī<sup>79</sup>, would also point to the north of the country.

The next passage is to be found only in al-Sharjī and contains conventional formulaic and rhetorically embellished material, here with a popular metathetical play on the roots 'l-m/'-m-l. Formulae like those used here appear at a comparable place in almost every biography in al-Sharjī's collection.

Al-Sharjī obviously had al-Janadī's text in front of him when he wrote this biography and, by the way, many others: in the course of his collection he quotes al-Janadī 91 times. But al-Janadī's remarks about the youth and early career of 'Alī al-Sibā'ī were not interesting enough for al-Sharjī, who skips them. Al-Janadī was interested in the relations between the learned men and focused on the teaching genealogies of his subjects.

Citing Ibn Samura,<sup>80</sup> al-Janadī mentions two famous books which Shafī'ī pupils had to learn: *al-Muhadhdhab* (by al-Shirāzī, Ibn Samura's model) and *al-Bayyān* (written/collected by Yaḥyā b. Abī al-Khayr al-'Imrānī, a contemporary of Ibn Samura).<sup>81</sup> Both books are not mentioned by al-Sharjī: this divergence between al-Janadī and al-Sharjī again points to the different objectives of the two authors.

Al-Sharjī erred in relation to the locality of the *faqīh*'s youth, as will be seen below. While al-Mikhlāfa was near Ḥajja (northwest of Sanaa) according to al-Janadī, al-Sharjī placed the village in the mountains near the Tihama-town of al-Mahjam. Al-Sharjī confused al-Mikhlāfa near Ḥajja with Bayt Khalifa, which lies near al-Mahjam,<sup>82</sup> to where 'Alī al-Sibā'ī migrated from al-Mikhlāfa (we are not told why in this case). There, he met a *shaykh*, a certain Qarābili. After an initial offer to stay for three days, which was the traditional length of a period of hospitality, the *shaykh* invited him to remain and teach in Bayt Khalifa. This is again not referred to by al-Sharjī, who shows little interest in extended descriptions of biographical developments and scientific careers. A date cited by al-Janadī cannot be right: 718/1318 is too late by slightly more than 100 years. Indeed, the reign of the Zaydī Imam al-Manṣūr 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥamza, whose accession along with the strengthening of the Zaydiyya had led 'Alī al-Sibā'ī to leave his village near Ḥajja, spanned the period from 583/1187 until his death on 18 Muharram 614/27 April 1217. After the death of this imam and the waning of Zaydī power, the *faqīh* returned to his village. Another famous *shaykh*, Abū al-Ghayth b. Jamīl, then came to the *faqīh*.

78 See the beginning of al-Sharjī's biography above (and al-Hamdānī, *Kitāb al-iklīl al-kitāb al-'āshir*, ed. al-Khaṭīb, 228) for a high-ranking group in the Hamdān genealogies, Sibā' (or Subā') b. Dha'fān.

79 The genealogy of Qudam b. Qādīm can be found in al-Hamdānī, *Kitāb al-iklīl al-kitāb al-'āshir*, ed. al-Khaṭīb, 102.

80 Ibn Samura, *Ṭabaqāt fuqahā' al-Yaman*, ed. Sayyid, 198.

81 See al-Shirāzī, *al-Muhadhdhab*, ed. al-Zuhayli; al-'Imrānī, *al-Bayyān*, ed. al-Nūrī.

82 Both names use the same root kh-l-f, a fact that could have facilitated the confusion.

Once the power of the Zaydiyya became stronger again under the imam al-Mahdī Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn (r. 646-656/1248-1258, the date of his death), both the *faqīh* ‘Alī al-Sibā’ī and Abū al-Ghayth b. Jamīl left the village again to return to the Tihama. There Abū al-Ghayth b. Jamīl settled with the *faqīh* Aḥmad b. ‘Aṭā’, the son of the founder of the village Bayt ‘Aṭā’ (holy men appear repeatedly as founders of villages, e.g. modern Bayt al-Faqīh). For this *faqīh*, al-Janadī has a biography, but al-Sharjī does not.<sup>83</sup> The *faqīh* ‘Alī al-Sibā’ī settled with the *faqīh* ‘Amr, one of his pupils. This is obviously of interest to al-Sharjī, who provides slightly more detail than al-Janadī, giving the host’s *nisba*, namely ‘Amr al-Sibā’ī. His biography can be found in al-Sharjī’s collection,<sup>84</sup> where he is called al-Tibā’ī instead of al-Sibā’ī, a misreading which is easy to explain paleographically.

After reporting the death of ‘Alī al-Sibā’ī, al-Janadī provides further biographical details. The reason the subject gives for having never married – that marriage would have diverted him from knowledge – can be seen as another sign of his saintliness. While marriage was not usually a problem for saintly Muslims, there are some cases of celibacy among holy men.

The end of the biography shows a rather balanced picture, although al-Sharjī writes of 200 students instead of just 30. He also mentions that the greater part of them were »*dhū faqr*«, with which Sufis could be meant; this would fit in with al-Sharjī’s endeavour to mainly include Sufi holy men or present holy men as Sufis.

The story that follows in both works is not a typical Sufi miracle story but rather an anecdote used on other occasions by different authors. It was designed to portray the temperance and selflessness of these Sufi circles. The crisis was obviously a famine.

In al-Janadī’s text, a reference to »the people of the bench (*ṣuffa*)« follows, an allusion to a place in the mosque of Medina where the poor people used to pray and to live on a bench in the mosque at the time of the prophet Muḥammad. Sufis regarded these people as the first Sufis and an embodiment of the ideal of poverty, and their behaviour is quasi-sanctified by a quotation from the Qur’ān. Al-Janadī’s version certainly is the *versio* or *lectio difficilior*, whereas al-Sharjī typically omits any reference to the people of the *ṣuffa*, instead speaking of companions of the prophet (the helpers) and thus avoiding the potential need for complicated and lengthy explanations. Al-Janadī’s play on words between *ṣifa* (description; peculiarity) and *ṣuffa* (bench) (in written form both are practically the same in Arabic) is lost in the process.

That the saintly man did not touch money, al-Janadī ascribes to his asceticism (*zuhd*). In Al-Sharjī’s book there follows a typical ending of a biography, with only an approximate date of death given. Because the manner of succession is attributed to ‘Alī al-Sibā’ī’s childless status, al-Sharjī adds here the anecdote concerning the subject’s reluctance to marry. The biography ends with common phrases.

83 al-Janadī, *al-Sulūk*, ed. al-Akwa’, 1: 406-410.

84 al-Sharjī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ*, ed. al-Ḥibshī, 274- 278.

### *Conclusion*

Both authors of the biographies presented here were motivated by a desire to do something for their homeland (*waṭan*). Al-Janadī was ultimately stimulated by his love of the homeland (*ḥubb al-waṭan*), as he himself formulated in a positive way. His main purpose seems to have been to induce readers of his work to remember and to imitate the exemplary men whose lives he presented. The »God-loving community« of al-Janadī consists of saintly men, teachers and judges who lived in the Sunni southwest of the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, the main community the author wrote his book for was that of his Yemeni contemporaries, while he also wished to reach and enlighten an audience outside of South Arabia.

Al-Sharjī formulated his own intentions rather negatively: Yemenis were not included in any earlier biographical collection from outside of Yemen (as examples he names the collections of al-Qushayrī, al-Suhruwardī, al-Sulamī and Ibn Khamīs). Therefore, al-Sharjī wanted to show that there were Yemenis in great numbers who were equally worthy of mention in biographical dictionaries dealing with Sufis but had hitherto been neglected outside of Yemen. The communities al-Sharjī had in mind when writing his book were those of Sufis living in the Sunni regions of Yemen before his time. Therefore, for him, miracles were of great importance. He saw them as the distinguishing feature of the Sufis. His target audience comprised people uninformed about the accomplishments of Yemeni Sufis inside Yemen and especially outside of it.

Both authors extracted their material from two sources. Firstly, they drew on earlier compilations, transforming and editing the biographies according to their special aims. This was al-Sharjī's principal means but certainly not his only one. The second source of material derived from interviewing informants. Al-Janadī mentions travels in the course of which he visited the graves of saints and questioned people, often relatives of the saintly man. One can certainly confirm what Bray says about Arabic biographies in general: they were, »at least in part, the result of compilation from earlier sources as well as of information-seeking from living informants where possible.«<sup>85</sup>

South Arabian biographical collections like the ones studied here were aimed at building and maintaining different communities, ranging from that of the Sunnis-Shafi'is in Yemen to the Sufi community in and outside the region to Southern Arabians as a whole. Inside South Arabia in al-Janadī's time, this could mean taking the side of the Rasūlids politically. Al-Janadī at least, if one considers his positions and his closeness to the Rasūlid court, certainly understood his task of writing a biographical collection in this sense. Maintaining and reinforcing the boundaries of and between groups, South Arabian biographical collections clearly had a role in shaping the identities of the communities in question.

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85 Bray, *Literary Approaches*, 244.

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### Abbreviations

*al-Sulūk: al-Sulūk fī ṭabaqāt al-‘ulamā’ wa-l-mulūk*

*Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ: Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ ahl al-ṣīdq wa-l-ikhhlās*

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