From Ethiopian Slave to Egyptian Sufi Master? Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī in Mamluk and Ottoman Sources

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Introduction (With a Plan of the Article)

This article focuses on quite an original saintly figure from the early Mamluk times, that is still highly reputed in Egyptian Sufi circles nowadays, especially in the city of Alexandria: Shaykh Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī (d. 732/1332). He is traditionally described as an « Ethiopian slave » (ʿabd ḥabashī) who entered the *ṭarīqa Shādhiliyya* under the guidance of Shaykh Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287) and became a most revered Sufi master in his own right. Nevertheless, both his life and teachings are difficult to reconstruct. Contrary to great Sufi writer Shaykh Ibn ʿAṭaʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309), who was Yāqūt's fellow disciple of al-Mursī and probably his competitor for spiritual authority on the Shādhilī network after al-Mursī's death, Yāqūt did not leave any written work. Moreover, information on Yāqūt which can be gleaned from currently available sources appear to be fragmentary, somewhat inconsistent, and quite often embellished for hagiographic purposes. All this conjured to keep Yāqūt's historical figure largely unexplored, to such an extent that he has not been the object of any scholarly monograph until now.

The present article will provide a comparative analysis of different bio-hagiographic traditions on Yāqūt found in Mamluk and Ottoman Egyptian sources. In doing this, far from pretending to write the "true story" of Yāqūt, we shall focus more on "deconstructing representations" rather than "reconstructing facts". This, in order to cast some light on the process of making of the Shaykh's image as a Sufi saint and on the formation of "historical self-representations" in the early Shādhiliyya, as well as to get some fresh insights into social representations on slavery and phenotypic diversity that were circulating in Medieval Egypt[2].

[2] In the present article, only representations concerning non-military slavery are focused. As is well known, studies on military slaves (mamlūk-s) in Medieval Islam, and especially on the military servile aristocracy of the Mamluks who

Plan of the Article

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ruled Egypt from 1250 to 1517, are now countless, and it would be impossible to provide even a general bibliography here. For a comprehensive critical approach to this issue, see Loiseau 2014.

1. Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī as a Sufi Saint : The Current Hagiographic Image and Its Complex Historical Making.

Shaykh Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī, also called al-ʿArshī (d. 732/1332)[3] was one of the most revered figures of the tarīqa Shādhiliyya in his time. His « memory » is still present in nowadays Alexandria, both in Sufi circles and the urban space. Shaykh Yāqūt's shrine stands along that of his famous master Shaykh Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287) - the first successor (khalīfa) of the tarīqa's eponymous master Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258) - in the monumental area called Maydān al-Masājid (« Place of The Mosques »), that is the living heart of Shādhilī Sufism in Alexandria until now.

Current hagiographic narratives on Yāqūt reflect the Shaykh's image as it crystallized in Ottoman Egypt, in the wake of great Sufi authors ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī (m. 973/1565) [4] and ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Munāwī (m. 1030/1622)[5]. In such framework, Shaykh Yāqūt is usually represented as a most powerful saint, maybe even « The Pole of his time » (quṭb al-zamān) - i.e. the supreme head of the hidden hierarchy of saints governing the world[6] - who joined deep knowledge of divine things and profound kindness towards all created beings. Yāqūt's « heart » being continually absorbed in the realm of God's Throne (al-ʿarsh, hence his sobriquet al-ʿArshī), his « body » was always acting in the visible world, be it for spiritual direction of his disciples, moral correction of his contemporaries, or « intercession » in favor of those who called for him (including animals, see below). In such narratives, Shaykh Yāqūt advocates for priority of ethical distinctions over ethnic and social ones, his motto being that « The Sufi (al-faqīr; literally: "the poor [in God]") must honor people according to their compliance with religious duties, not according to their clothes»[7]. On the these grounds, he rebukes those notables who think that he enjoys too much honor for being a « Black slave » (ʿabd aswad)[8].

Also, Yāqūt is often presented as the favorite disciple of Shaykh al-Mursī, to such an extent that the latter wanted him to marry his daughter[9] and to be his successor at the head of the tariqa

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[3] According to almost all of the available sources, Yāqūt died in 732/1332. Only two sources (al-Shaʿrānī and Muḥī al-Dīn al-Ṭuʿmī) provide different datations : 707/1307 and 785/1385 respectively. However, both these datations are to be discarded, as they would be incompatible with all other known biographical information concerning Yāqūt. On the date proposed by al-Shaʿrānī, in particular, see below; on that proposed by al-Ṭuʿmī, see Ahmet Murat Ozel 2014, p. 6-7.

[4] Shaʿrānī 2005, p. 40-41.

[5] Munāwī [1994], p. 71-73.

[6] As an example, see the biographical notice on Yāqūt in Māzīdī 2017 (p. 251), or the follwoing online biography of the Shaykh published in a website consecrated to Sufi biographies: http://sofya.arab.st/t17-topic. Last access: December, 17th, 2017. Both texts do heavily rely on al-Shaʿrānī and al-Munāwī's narratives.

[7]« […]ʿalā al-faqīr an yuʿaẓẓima al-nās bi-ḥasab dīni-him, lā bi-ḥasab thiyābi-him», Munāwī [1994], p. 71; repeated verbatim in http://sofya.arab.st/t17-topic

[8]The expression is in Munāwī [1994], p. 72; it is repeated verbatim in http://sofya.arab.st/t17-topic

Shādhiliyya[10]. In this capacity, Yāqūt would even become the spiritual master of the great Shaykh Ibn ʿĀṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī after al-Mursī's death[11].

However, all of this information is far from being unanimously attested in sources. Indeed, most of the elements of Yāqūt's portrait which are found in the Ottoman sources and that have since become part and parcel of the hagiographic vulgata on the Shaykh, are surprisingly absent, as far as we have been able to judge, from earlier written sources. More precisely, one would say that at some point in Ottoman times a full-fledged bio-hagiographical narrative on Yāqūt, mostly based on the works by al-Shaʿrānī and al-Munāwī, was superimposed on the fragmentary and somewhat inconsistent traditions scattered through the earlier sources. In other words, in the "stratification" of Yāqūt's hagiography, the Ottoman layer seemingly covered the gaps and contradictions of the earliest layers, somehow like a wallpaper being applied on an old wall to cover its cracks and fissures.

This major problem has not been analyzed in-depth until now, and the very figure of Yāqūt has seemingly not aroused any special interest among scholars until very recent times. Indeed, he was paid only little attention in the now "classical" works on the early Shādhiliyya, such as Taftāzānī 1969 and Nwyia 1972. In particular, Taftāzānī briefly evokes Yāqūt as one of the greatest Sufi masters in Alexandria at the time, but he attributes Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī with a virtually exclusive influence on the making of the Shādhiliyya, to such an extent that he does not even mention any competition for the Shādhilī « heritage »[12]. In principle, Taftāzānī admits that « all the Shādhilī ways which are in Egypt nowadays trace their origins back either to our Shaykh al-Sakandarī (=Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh) or to Shaykh Yāqūt al-ʿArshī, disciple of al-Mursī »[13], but he adds that most of the spiritual lineages connected to Yāqūt do actually go back to Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh. In particular, according to Taftazānī, Yāqūt's well-known disciple Shihāb Ibn al-Maylaq had been also Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's disciple, « hence it would be possible to say that (ultimately) all the ways of the Shādhilīyya trace their origins back to our Shaykh al-Sakandarī (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh) »[14].

On the other hand, Jean-Claude Garcin, in a well-known study on al-Suyūṭī's *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara,* describes Yāqūt as being al-Mursī's (favorite) disciple and provides two Shadhilī *silsila*-s stemming from Yāqūt (one through Ibn Habar and one through Ibn Maylaq)[15]. Thus, in line with his sources

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[9] See Munāwī [1994], p. 73; http://sofya.arab.st/t17-topic

[10] See Munāwī [1994], p. 73; the information is repeated in http://sofya.arab.st/t17-topic

[11] See Shaʿrānī 2005, p. 40-41; Munāwī [1994], p. 72-73; http://sofya.arab.st/t17-topic

[12] Abū l-Wafā al-Taftāzānī (d. 1994), probably the most important Arabic scholar on the early Shādhiliyya, only briefly mentioned Yaqūt in a monograph on Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh : see Taftāzānī 1969, p. 60-63.

[13] *Jamīʿ al-ṭuruq al-Shādhiliyya al-mawjūda al-ān bi-Miṣr tarjiʿ bi-l-nasab immā ilā shaykhi-nā al-Sakandarī aw ilā al-shaykh Yāqūt al-ʿArshī tilmīdh al-Mursī.* Ibid., p. 60.

[14] *Wa-min hunā yumkin al-qawl bi-anna jamīʿ ṭuruq al-Shādhiliyya tarjiʿ bi-l-sanad ilā shaykhi-nā (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allah) al-Sakandarī.* Ibid., p. 61.

[15] See Garcin 1967, p. 82 n.2.

(al-Suyūṭī himself and al-Shaʿranī) Garcin seemingly gives Yāqūt the most prominent role in the nascent Shādhiliyya. However, he too does not make any explicit mention of possible rivalry between Yāqūt and Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh.

It is only in much more recent times that possible competition between the two shaykhs for al-Shādhilī's « spiritual heritage » after al-Mursī's death has been taken into account : following some ground-breaking indications by Vincent Cornell[16], this issue has been briefly dealt with by some other prominent scholars, such as Éric Geoffroy[17] and Richard McGregor[18], and it has become a focal point in Nathan Hofer's current researches on the social construction of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt[19].

However, traditional « non-conflictual » narratives on the origins of the Shādhiliyya are still influential on contemporary scholarship. This seems to be the case, in particular, with a recent work by Ahmet Murat Ozel (Ozel 2014), providing a detailed survey of the main sources on Yāqūt but not taking their contradictions into account[20].

For all of the above mentioned reasons, the present study will be based first on analysis of the different information provided by several sources, spanning from Yāqūt's contemporaries up to al-Shaʿrānī and al-Munāwī, in order to appreciate continuity and discontinuity in the historical making of the Shaykh's image.

2. The « Mamluk Layer » : Fragments from Competing Narratives

2.1. Yāqūt in the Eyes of His Companions: Conflicting Narratives and the Struggle for al-Shādhilī's Heritage.

Mentions of Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī in early hagiographical and mystical literature produced in the Shadhilī milieu are quite rare and they do not provide any detail about the Shaykh's biography. Nevertheless, such mentions do carry valuable, though mostly implicit, information about the formative period of the Shadhiliyya and the role that Shaykh Yāqūt probably played in it.

In particular, it is worth noting that Yāqūt is evoked in quite different terms in the two most ancient biographies of the eponymous master Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, namely the *Kitāb Laṭāʾif al-minan* by

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[16] See Cornell 1998, p. 150-154.
[17] See Geoffroy 2002, p. 173, 178.
[18] See McGregor 2004, p. 29-33, p. 172 n.8, p. 175 n.36.
[19] See Hofer 2013, especially p. 398-399; Hofer 2015, esp. Ch. 4, Ch. 5. I'm gratefully indebted to the author for allowing me to read a substantial part of this work when it was still under preparation.
[20] See Ozel 2014.

Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309) and the *Durrat al-Asrār* by Muḥammad Ibn Abī l-Qāsim al-Ḥimyārī, better known as Ibn al-Ṣabbagh (d. 724/1324 or 733/1333).

Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh explicitly mentions Yāqūt only once and in a rather unfavourable light, in the framework of an anecdote meant to warn readers against the traps of one's ego (*nafs*) on the Sufi path. On the one hand, he qualifies Yāqūt as a « knower of God » (*ʿārif bi-llāh)* - thus acknowledging the high spiritual rank the latter reached in his adulthood. On the other hand, the anecdote itself concerns the time of Yāqūt's spiritual apprenticeship, and presents him as an arrogant young disciple, being so confident in his own inner inspiration that Shaykh al-Mursī bitterly reprimands him for acting like « an ignorant novice » (*min jahalat al-murīdīn*)[21].

On the contrary, Ibn al-Ṣabbagh consistently refers to Yāqūt with such respectful expressions as « our master » (*shaykhu-nā*) and « our lord the righteous master » (*sayydunā al-shaykh al-ṣāliḥ*)[22], and portrays him as Shaykh al-Mursī's closest disciple[23]. Also, according to Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Shaykh al-Mursī had a close relationships with Yāqūt's Tunisian masters, the brothers Muḥammad (d. after 701/1301) and Māḍī Ibn Sultān (d. 718/1318) al-Masrūqī[24], who were among the greatest disciples of al-Shādhilī in Ifriqiyyā[25].

Such difference in the authors' attitudes towards Yāqūt is probably to be explained with the competition that seemingly broke out for the Shāḏilī spiritual heritage after the death of Shaykh al-Mursī (d. 686/1287)[26]. This competition seemingly led to the formation of two « collateral lines » of spiritual authority in Egypt, one of them evolving around Ibn ʿĀṭāʾ Allāh (seemingly prevailing in Cairo and Southern Egypt) and the other one evolving around Yāqūt al-Ḥabašī (based in Alexandria), whereas a third « collateral line » developed in Tunis, under the authority of the Masrūqī brothers[27].

In this framework, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's and Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh's biographies of al-Shādhilī might be seen as two conflicting versions on the origins of the Shādhiliyya. On the one hand, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh, by means of several allusions skilfully scattered along his book, presents himself as the true « heir » of

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[21] Ibn ʿAṭāʿ Allāh 1999, p. 100.
[22] Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh 1887 p. 3.
[23] See Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh 1887, p. 147, 148.
[24] See Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh 1887, p. 150, p. 172.
[25] On the Masrūqi brothers, see Cornell, 1998, p. 152-153. On the Ifriqiyyan line of the Shādhiliyya, see Amri 2013, especially p. 15-19.
[26] On this point, see Hofer 2013, esp. p. 398-399 ; Hofer 2015, *passim* ; Cornell 1998, p. 150-154 ; Geoffroy 2002 p. 173, 178.
[27] «Upon al-Mursī's death in 1286, there was no clear leader of the nascent group. (…) There were at least three "collateral lines," as Jürgen Paul terms them, of groups tracing their authority to al-Shādhilī». Hofer, 2015, p. 60. According to Hofer (Ibid.), historical and hagiographic works written by Shādhilī authors in the subsequent centuries aimed at operating what he calls a "teleological reordering" of these collateral lines, in order to merge all of them into *one* narrative on the origins of the tariqa. In his opinion, the final result of such process is best exemplified in a work produced in the twentieth century: the *Jāmiʿ al-karāmāt al-ʿaliyya fī ṭabaqāt al-sādat al-shādhiliyya* by the Moroccan Sufi jurist al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Kūhin al-Fāsī (d. after 1928), who «combines all the Egyptian and North African groups into a coherent work of *Ṭabaqāt* historiography ». Hofer, 2015, p. 60.

al-Mursī and then of al-Shādhilī. In doing this, he implicitly claims for spiritual authority on the Shādhilī network and for the sublime rank of « Pole » of his time (quṭb al-zamān)[28], i.e. the universal head of the hidden hierarchy of saints. Such claim is all the more interesting to historians, inasmuch as Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh, in the Laṭāʾif al-minan, theorizes that saints (« friends of God », awliyāʾ Allāh) are the only true « knowers » (ʿulamāʾ): therefore, according to a well-known hadīth, they are the only true « heirs of the Prophets » and are thus entitled to guide the entire Muslim community by ensuring proper understanding of « inward » and « outward » dimensions of the divine Law[29].

On the other hand, the « North African » Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, probably writing his Durrat al-asrār soon after the year 718/1318[30] - meaning a few years after Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's death (709/309)- draws a completely different picture of the Shādhiliyya[31]. In particular, he emphasizes the high spiritual rank of the Tunisian line of al-Shādhilī's disciples and describes intense contacts between this group and « Egyptian » masters al-Mursī and Yāqūt, whereas he mentions Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh only once. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh is thus presenting a multipolar view of the nascent Shādhilī community as a network whose two main hubs, Tunis and Alexandria, enjoy equal spiritual authority. Such picture is totally opposed to Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's Egypto-centric view of the Shādhiliya as a group coherently organised around the spiritual lineage al-Shādhilī > al-Mursī > Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh himself[32].

For his part, Yāqūt did not leave any written work: in line with the example of both al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī, he did only rely on oral and living transmission of his teachings. As a consequence, Yāqūt was gradually written out of the competition for discursive control on the nascent Shādhilī community. Such competition ended, probably in a few decades, in favor of Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's line, whose narrative seemingly overcame the « Tunisian » one and thus turned into what may be seen as a Shādhilī « official » historiography[33] . Nonetheless, some echos of alternative historical memories concerning Yāqūt might have made themselves heard well into the Ottoman times, as is suggested by several elements found in al-Shaʿrānī's works (see below).

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[28] For an analysis of the « auto-hagiographic » strategies Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh adopts in the writing of his Laṭāʾif al-minan, see Cecere 2013, p. 63-93.

[29] See Ibn ʿAṭāʿ Allāh 1999, p. 31-35.

[30] On this terminus post quem, see Amri 2013, p. 14.

[31] Nathan Hofer convincingly describes Ibn al-Ṣabbagh's work as « a North African answer to the version of events presented by (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh) al-Iskandarī ». See Hofer 2015, ch. 5.

[32] Although Ibn ʿAṭāʿ Allāh does actually mention the main companions of al-Shādhilī in Tunis (included the Masrūqī brothers and Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Masrūqī's son ʿAbd al-Dāʾim Ibn Sulṭān), he has no doubt on the preeminence of the "Egyptian" branch over the "Tunisian" one. In his view, al-Shādhilī's spiritual heritage does only befall to Shaykh al-Mursī. As a consequence, even the few Ibn ʿAṭāʿ Allāh's references to the Tunisian Shādhilī masters are probably meant to confirm the latters' acknowledgement of al-Mursī's authority. See, in particular, Ibn ʿAṭāʿ Allāh 1999, p. 88, p. 93.

[33] As Hofer points out, «By authoring a particular narrative construction about al-Mursī and, by extension, al-Shādhilī, al-Iskandarī positioned himself, in effect if not in fact, as the authoritative center of the nascent textual community. Al-Ḥabashī, despite being al-Mursī's favored student, authored no such narrative and is almost entirely absent from the tradition's subsequent history.», Hofer 2015, ch. 5.

Moreover, the existence of a very early *conflit de mémoires* among different Shāḏilī circles on the relationships between Yāqut and Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh is also proved by a recently discovered text, emanating from Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's immediate entourage: the *Zīnat al-nawāẓir wa-tuḥfat al-khawāṭir*[34] by some Rāfiʿ b. Muḥammad Ibn Shāfiʿ (fl. 710s/1310s). The author presents his work as a collection of notes from the "Sufi lectures" held by Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh in Cairo during the last year of his life, 709/1309. In his introduction, Rāfīʿ goes as far as to say that Ibn ʿĀṭāʾ Allāh was recognised as the « Pole/Axis (*quṭb*) of his time » even by Shaykh Yaqūt. That sounds as quite a controversial statement, in the light of the aforementioned competition between Yāqūt and Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh for spiritual authority on the Shādhiliyya. Indeed, endorsing Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh as the « Pole of the time » was tantamount to recognising him as al-Mursī's and al-Shādhilī's heir (both these masters being unanimously described, in the Shādhilī traditions, as the Poles of their respective times). Therefore, Rāfiʿs statement might be seen as an early attempt to efface the traces of the aforementioned competition, thus paving the way for unanimous recognition of Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's spiritual lineage as *the only* chain of transmission of the Shādhilī heritage.

Nevertheless, as we shall see below, a completely different version on the relationships between the two masters is provided by al-Shaʿrānī, well into the Xth/XVIth century. In his greatest collection of Sufi hagiographies, usually known as *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā,* al-Shaʿrānī portrays Yāqūt, implicitly but transparently, as the Pole of the time, and states that Yāqūt was Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's master after Shaykh al-Mursī's death. Unfortunately, at the present state of our research we have not been able to find out any possible written source for al-Shaʿrānī's representation of the relationships between Yāqūt and Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh. However, it seems quite plausible that al-Shaʿrānī was drawing such information from older traditions (be they written or oral) rather than "inventing" it from scratch. Therefore, one may argue that a *conflit de mémoires* on Yāqūt's and Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's respective roles was still going on in early Ottoman Egypt, at least in some Shādhilī circles, although the pro-Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh narratives had long become mainstream.

2.2. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa on Shaykh Yāqūt's sanctity

Beyond early Shādhilī literature, a main source of information on Shaykh Yāqūt is the *Riḥla* by Ibn Baṭṭūta[35]. The great traveler, who was deeply interested in Sufism[36], mentions Yāqūt al-Ḥabasī as one of the righteous men (*al-ṣāliḥin*) he met with in Alexandria in 726/1326[37]. This is *per se* a most

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[34] See Gril 2005, pp. 93-106; a critical edition of the *Zīnat al-nawāẓir* is provided in Rāfiʿ 2013.
[35] See Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987, p. 42-43.
[36] Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's personal interest in Sufism is indicated not only by his many reports of visits to saints and masters, whose miracles and spiritual virtues he willingly mentions, but also by some passages showing the author's deep familiarity with Sufi practices and technical terminology : see, e.g., his description of the practice called *tazyīq* (a rare technical term) in Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987, p. 42. On this point, see Cecere 2016.

relevant piece of information, as it discards al-Shaʿrānī's chronological indication on Yāqūt's death, 707/1307, thus corroborating the indication provided by most of the other sources, that is 732/1332. Also, Ibn Baṭṭūṭā's laudatory description of Yāqūt speaks volumes about the spiritual rank the latter was ascribed by his contemporaries:

> (Yāqūt was) one of the most distinguished men (of God) (*min afrād al-rijāl*)[38]. He was the disciple *(tilmīdh)* of Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī, who was, in his turn, the disciple (*tilmīdh*) of the great saint (*walī Allāh*, lit.: "friend of God") [...] Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, who was endowed with the (most) glorious favors/miracles (*karāmāt*) and reached the (most) elevated spiritual stations[39].

In addition, Ibn Baṭṭūṭā credits Yāqūt with the transmission, *via* al-Mursī, of two important anecdotes on al-Shādhilī's miracles, one of them concerning al-Shādhilī's most famous prayer : the "Litany of the Sea" (*Ḥizb al-Baḥr*), which the traveler quotes in its entirety from Yāqūt[40]. In such context, the word *tilmīdh* ("pupil"), which Ibn Baṭṭūta uses to describe Yāqūt's relation to al-Mursī, is probably to be understood in the specific sense of "successor" (*khalīfa*) rather than simply as "disciple", also because the author uses the same word (*tilmīdh*) to describe al-Mursī's relation to al-Shādhiilī. The sequence al-Shādhilī > al-Mursī > Yāqūt might thus be read as a chain of transmission of the *Shādhilī* spiritual heritage. Be that as it may, Ibn Baṭṭūta clearly depicts Yāqūt as the most eminent Shādhilī master in Alexandria. This seems to indicate that the latter's disciples were somehow predominant on Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's ones in the first phase of the history of the Shadhiliyya, at the very least in the city of Alexandria[41].

2.3. *Yāqūt's First Mentions in Biographical Dictionaries and in Chronicles*

The earliest mention of Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī in a biographical dictionary is most probably the brief obituary that is found in the first Appendix (*dhayl*) of *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* by al-Dhahabī (d. 348/1347), under the year 732/1332:

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[37] Ibn Baṭṭūta arrived at Alexandria on April, 5th, 1326: «On the first day of the month of Jumādā al-Awwal (of the year 726 AH) we reached the town of Alexandria, may God protect it (*waṣalnā fī awwal jumādā l-ūlā (fī sana 726) ilā madīnat al-Iskandariyya ḥarasa-hā Allāh*)», Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987, p. 39.

[38] Ibid., p. 42. The expression *afrād al-riǧāl* alludes to a most elevated spiritual degree, no matter whether Ibn Baṭṭūta used the term in a general sense or in the specific meaning it was given by Ibn ʿĀrabī. On the value of *afrād al-rijāl* as a specific category of saints in Ibn ʿArābī's doctrinal system, see Chodkiewicz 1993, esp. p. 137-138.

[39] Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987, p. 42-43.

[40] Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987, p. 43-ff. The full text of the *Ḥizb al-Baḥr* is also transmitted in Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's *Laṭāʾif al-minan*. See Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 1999, p. 199-201.

[41] It is also worth noting that, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh having died as early as 709/1309, his alleged successor in Alexandria, Shaykh Dāwūd Ibn Bākhilā (or Mākhilā; d. 729-733/1329-1333), is not mentioned at all by Ibn Baṭṭūta. According to some traditions, however, Ibn Bākhilā would have been Yāqūt's (and not Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's) direct disciple after al-Mursī's death. On this last point, see McGregor 2004, p. 33. On Ibn Bākhilā as Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's disciple, see Geoffroy 2002, p. 178-179. For Ibn Bākhilā's teachings and personality, see McGregor 2000, p. 33-49.

> "The ascetic (*zāhid*) of Alexandria, Shaykh al-Ḥabashī al-Shādhilī, companion (*ṣāḥib*) of Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī, died in his eighties"[42].

A few years later, Yāqūt is devoted a longer and more laudative notice in the *Mirʾāt al-jinān* ("The Mirror of the Gardens [i.e.of Paradise]") by Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh al-Yāfiʿī (d. 767/1368), "a chronicle of Muslim history from the coming of Islam to al-Yāfiʿī's own day"[43]. The author was a Yemeni scholar who entered the Shāḏilīyya under the guidance of Shaykh Najm al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī[44], one of the most renowned disciples of al-Mursī, and eventually acted as a major link between the Sunnī Sufi network of the Shādhiliyya and the Shīʿī Sufi network of the Niʿmatullāhiyya[45]. In his historical work, probably completed in Mecca around 750/1350[46], al-Yāfiʿī calls Yāqūt a "great saint (lit: God's friend; *walī Allāh kabīr)*" and "a knower of God (*ʿārif bi-llāh)*". He credits Yāqūt with "numerous miracles" (*al-karāmāt al-ʿadīda*) and "sublime spiritual stations and inspirations", as well as with "(mystical) states compliant with the Sunna" (*al-aḥwāl al-sunniyya*)[47]. Such witness is all the more interesting, if one takes into account that, as a highly respected member of the Shāḏilī network, al-Yāfiʿī was probably well acquainted with a wide range of historiographic traditions circulating within the tariqa at the time.

2.4. Yāqūt As a Controversial Master? Some Problematics Witnesses

2.4.1. Yāqūt as an Object of "Idolatry" ? A Puzzling Court Case in Mamluk Cairo (The Affaire Ibn al-Labbān According to Mūsā al-Yūsufī)

Concerning Yāqūt's spiritual following, a most interesting piece of information is found in a source hitherto completely neglected by researchers on the shaykh, the *Nuzhat al-nāẓir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir* by Mūsā al-Yūsūfī (d. 759/1358). This is an annalistic chronicle of the lifetime of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (1285-1341). Although the only extant fragment of this work starts from the events of the year 733 AH, thus covering a lapse of time subsequent to the probable date of Yāqūt's death (732/1332), the Shaykh is however evoked in connection to a theological-juridical misadventure occurring to his disciple Shams al-Dīn Ibn al-Labbān (d. 737/1337 or 749/1349). An influential Ṣūfī master on his own right, helding much attended sermons and sessions of Qurʾanic commentaries in mosques in Fusṭāṭ (*Miṣr*), Ibn al-Labbān would have gone too far (*yataghālā*) in his praise of his master Yāqūt. This came to the point that in 733/1333 a lawsuit was filed against Ibn Labbān before the *qāḍī al-quḍāt*, on charges of extolling (*yuʿẓim)*

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[42] Dhahabī 1985, p. 93.
[43] Feerner & Laffan 2005, p. 186.
[44] On this Sufi master of Persian origin, who was a disciple of al-Mursī in Egypt and eventually died in Mecca in 721/1321, see Gril 2005, p. 94.
[45] On this point, see Danner 1973, p. 8, n. 1, quoting Aubin 1956, p. 293.
[46] On the datation, see Feerner & Laffan 2005, p. 186.
[47] See Yāfiʿī 1997, vol. 4, p. 213.

Shaykh Yāqūt even above one of Muḥammad's Companions and of stating that "prostration before an idol" (*al-sujūd li-l-ṣanam*) was not a reprehensible act (*laysa bi-makrūh*). The court found that Ibn al-Labbān and some other Ṣūfī shaykhs, allegedly sharing his ideas, were "speaking without knowledge", and the issue was reported to the Sultan. Finally, the defendants were enjoined to repent and prevented from public preaching[48]. This anecdote is interesting for more than one reason. First, the very fact that Yāqūt is mentioned only as an object of the controversy and is not given any active role in it, not even as a witness or a mediator in favor of his disciple, seemingly confirms that the Shaykh had already died at the time. This provides further, though indirect, evidence for the plausibility of 732/1332 as Yāqūt's death date. Second, this is the earliest known mention of Ibn al-Labbān as a disciple of Yāqūt, an indication that is confirmed by later biographical sources on Ibn al-Labbān. Even more interesting, however, are questions about the gist of this judiciary controversy. What was the real object of the charges against Ibn al-Labbān? What were the plaintiffs referring to with "prostration before an idol"? Were such alleged deviations somehow connected to actual Yāqūt's teachings? At the present state of our research, it is impossible to answer such questions. However, one point is to be remarked. Mūsā al-Yūsufī clearly attributes Ibn al-Labbān with an "ecstatic" rather than a "rational" approach to sanctity. Should this approach somehow reflect Yāqūt's teachings, this would perhaps allow for reading the Yāqūt versus Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh competition for the Shāḏilī heritage in terms of a confrontation between two ideal-types of sanctity. In fact, one would be tempted to see Yāqūt as the champion of an idea of sanctity relying almost exclusively on mystical illumination, whereas Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh advocates in his works for a deep connection between such esoteric, illuminative knowledge (which remains the real basis for sanctity also in his view) and the exoteric sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-ẓāhira*) acquired through rational learning.

2.4.2. Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī as a Rejected Master? The Case of ʿImād al-Dīn al-Wāsiṭī

Ibn Labbān's trial might even shed new light on the complex relationships between Shaykh Yāqūt and his former disciple ʿImād al-Dīn al-Wāsiṭī (d. 711/1311). This restless religious thinker was initiated into the Shādhiliyya by Yāqūt and followed him for a while, but he soon rejected some elements characterizing Sufism as practiced in « brotherhoods » (*ṭuruq ṣūfiyya*) of the time[49]. So, al-Wāsiṭī left the Shādhiliyya and became a disciple of the Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). The latter was a fierce adversary of the « reproachable innovations » that, in his view, *ṭuruq* had introduced in Muslim piety, whereas he professed great admiration for those early Sufi

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[48] Yūsufī 1986, p. 338-340 (Yāqūt's name is mentioned at p. 339).
[49] On Shaykh al-Wāsiṭī, see Geoffroy 1995, pp. 83-101.

masters, such as al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 285/910), whose Sufism he saw as purely ethical and totally exempt from philosophical and theosophical « contaminations » allegedly affecting later Sufism[50].

In this framework, al-Wāsiṭī (whom Ibn Taymiyya exalted as « the Junayd of his time»[51]) fiercely criticized the master-centered model of the *ṭarīqa ṣūfiyya*, which saw one's submissio to a living *shaykh* as the only way for seeking spiritual refinement. To this, al-Wāsiṭī opposed the ideal of a « Muhammadian Way » (*al-ṭarīqa al-muḥammadiyya*), meaning one's personal «way» of spiritual refinement only based in direct imitation of Prophet Muḥammad[52]. In this framework, Ibn al-Labbān's alleged veneration for Shaykh Yāqūt, if actually grounded on the latter's teachings, might provide us with some indications on possible immediate reasons for al-Wāsiṭī's divorce from Shaykh Yāqūt. All this might contribute to a better understanding of polemical interactions between the Shādhiliyya and the current of Ibn Taymiyya, beyond the well-known disputation between Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh and Ibn Taymiyya himself which took place in 707/1308[53].

2.4.3. Shaykh Yāqūt From a « Taymiyyan » Perspective : The affaire Ibn al-Labbān according to Ibn Kathīr

The relevance of the *affaire* Ibn al-Labbān for the image of Yāqūt in Taymiyyan milieus is confirmed by the very fact that the historian Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) makes this episode the real focus of Yāqūt's biographical notice in his *Kitāb al-Bidāya wa-l-Nihāya*, which is worth quoting *in extenso*:

> Shaykh Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī, Shādhilī, who lived in Alexandria (*Iskandarānī*). He reached the age of eighty years, and had followers and companions (*atibbāʿ wa-aṣḥāb*), among them the Shāfiʿī jurist (*faqīh*) Shams al-dīn Ibn al-Labbān. The latter was magnifying him [Yāqūt] and lavishly praising him (*kāna yuʿẓimu-hu wa-yuṭrī-hi)*, and he was even attributed (*yunsab*) some exaggerations (*mubālaghāt)*. God knows best whether such allegations were true or false[54].

Though suspending his judgement on the issue by the pious formula "Allāh knows best", Ibn Kathīr is somehow connecting Yāqūt's image to possibly unorthodox views and practices. In particular, the charges of "exaggerations" (*mubālaġāt)* referred to in the text might imply that Ibn al-Labbān gave Yāqūt (or that Yāqūt himself claimed for) a degree of sanctity that sounded unacceptable to

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[50] In the wake of George Makdisi's groundbreaking studies in the 1970s, scholars have almost completely abandoned now the idea of a stern opposition to Sufism on the part of Ibn Taymiyya and/or the Hanbali school as a whole, and a much better understanding has been reached on this issue in the last years. For an updated and refined analysis of the « state of the art », see Yaman 2010, p. 37-56. For Makdisi's positions, see in particular, Makdisi 1973 and 1974.
[51] See Surkheel 2006.
[52] See Geoffroy 1995, p. 92-93, p. 95. The broader and much debated issue of the origins and the many different historical meanings of the notion of *ṭarīqa muḥammadiyya* falls out of the scope of the present research. Here we confine ourselves to the meaning that this notion apparently has in al-Wāsiṭī.
[53] On the public confrontation between al-Iskandarī and Ibn Taymiyya, see now Hofer 2015, p. 109-117.
[54] Ibn Kathīr 2010 vol. 16, p. 246.

righteous believers. All this comes as no surprise: though belonging to the Shāfiʿī *madhhab* (the same as Ibn al-Labbān's), Ibn Kathīr was in fact a great admirer of Ibn Taymiyya and he probably shared most of the latter's criticism against the *ṭuruq ṣūfiyya*.

2.5. Ibn al-Mulaqqin's Biography of Yāqūt: the Emersion of the Slavery Dimension.

If Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī's spiritual authority within the Shādhilī network is clearly witnessed by the sources we dealt with until now (with the partial exception of his probable competitor Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh), none of those authors mentioned Yāqūt's condition of enslavement, that later on became a major dimension of the saint's image. In fact, the first reference to this dimension is found in a collection of Sufi hagiographies composed in the last part of the VIII/XIV century, the *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyāʾ* by Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/ 1401). The notice consecrated to Yāqūt in this work is worth quoting *in extenso*:

> Shaykh Yāqūt b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥabashī al-Shādhilī, disciple (*tilmīdh*) of Shyakh Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī. He died in year 732 (AH). Many people (*khalq kathīr*) benefitted from him (i.e. were spiritually educated by him), among them Shaykh Shams al-dīn Muḥammad Ibn al-Labbān. [Yāqūt] reached the age of eighty years approximately. Abū l-ʿAbbās [al-Mursī] used to say [about him]: "He is the pigeon-blood ruby!" (*hādhā huwa al-yāqūt al-bahramānī*).
> [Yāqūt was a slave and] he was freed by a woman know as "the wife of al-Sharīfī" (*iʿtaqat-hu imraʾa tuʿraf bi-zawjat al-Sharīfī*). [Then] he asked Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī for permission to follow him. After some reflection, the shaykh replied: "I have found your name [written] among the companions of my companion Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī, in the second generation (*ṭabaqa*) [of my followers]". And when al-Mursī made the pilgrimage and came [where Yāqūt was], Yāqūt joined him (*fa-lammā ḥajja wa-qadima ṣaḥiba-hu*). And (Shaykh) al-Makīn al-Asmar said [about Yāqūt]: "I saw the light of sanctity (*nūr al-walāya*) on him" [55].

Indeed, several elements in this narration call for attention:

(1). Ibn al-Mulaqqin is seemingly the first author providing a *nasab* for Shaykh Yāqūt: he calls him "Ibn ʿAbd Allāh", an indication which was eventually repeated by some later sources. However, this was most probably a fictive genealogy, as we shall discuss below (See Section 3.3);

(2). Ibn al-Mulaqqin's indication that Yāqūt was emancipated by « a woman known as the wife of al-Sharīfī » is apparently the earliest explicit reference to Shaykh Yāqūt's experience of enslavement.

(3). The allusion to « a woman known as the wife of al-Sharīfī » may provide a valuable insight into some Ṣūfī networks which seemingly paid special attention to conversion and spiritual education of slaves in Egypt at the time. On the one hand, the expression "the wife of al-Sharīfī" does not allow *per se* any clear identification either of the concerned lady or her husband. On the other hand, the husband's *nisba* al-Sharīfī might be linked to a *ṣaʿīdī* (Upper Egyptian) Ṣūfī milieu that is evoked in Ṣafī al-Dīn's *Risāla* in the frame of the impressive narrative on Shaykh Mufarrij (d. 648/1250)[56];

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[55] Ibn al-Mulaqqin 1986, p. 478-479.

The latter was an "Ethiopian slave" (*'abd ḥabashī,* whatever the adjective may actually mean)[57] who was suddenly turned into a Muslim saint by God's attraction (*jadhb*)[58] and whose saintly status was first acknowledged by the Upper Egyptian Shaykh Ḥasan Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh from Qūṣ (d. 612/1215-1216)[59]. A *shaykh* called Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Sharīfī[60] is mentioned in this story among the followers of Shaykh Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Tanjī (d. 612/1215-1216)[61], who was in connection, in his turn, with the spiritual master of Shaykh Ḥasan Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, the most-revered Upper Egyptian saint ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qināʾī (d. 592/1196)[62]. So, this Shaykh al-Sharīfī was somehow in contact with the network of Shaykh Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh from Qūṣ. For chronological reasons, the "wife of al-Sharīfī" mentioned by Ibn al-Mulaqqin was probably not the wife of *this* al-Sharīfī. Nevertheless, that lady might have been married to a younger member of the Sharīfī family, thus being part of the same Sufi environment.

In addition, it is worth noting that al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī frequently visited to Qūṣ, especially when travelling on the *ḥajj*, and that a Shādhilī network soon developed in the region, as is suggested, among other things, by the presence there of Persian *shaykh* Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (m. 688/1290), who probably was a disciple of al-Mursī[63]. All this might have allowed for contacts between the disciples of Abū l-Ḥasan al Shādhilī and those of Abū l-Ḥasan Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh.

(4). The allusion to a meeting between Yāqūt and Shaykh al-Shādhilī sounds puzzling, as the latter died in 656/1258, when Yāqūt was probably not older than six or seven (being described as an octogenarian in 732/1332, Yāqūt should have been born around 650/1252). On the one hand, children enslavement being a common practice at the time, one may not exclude that Yāqūt was brought to Egypt when still a child. On the other hand, the solution to this puzzle is probably to be found in the domain of hagiography rather than in that of "fact history". Hagiographically speaking, indeed, at least two explanations could be given for this chronological difficulty: either Yāqūt was attributed with a very early spiritual vocation (a quite common element in hagiographical literature),

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[56] A bio-bibliographical note on him is provided in Gril 1986, p. 230-231 (French section).

[57] On the meaning of this and other ethnic names related to Africa, see below, Section 3.4.

[58] See Gril 1986, p. 60-62 (Arabic section) / 154-157 (French section).

[59] See Gril 1986, p. 217 (French section).

[60] See Gril 1986, p. 64 (Arabic section) / 159 (French section). Ṣafī al-Dīn says that he himself befriended Shaykh Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Sharīfī in Cairo, and even took care of his family after the latter's death, but unfortunately he does not specify either Sharīfī's birthdate or death date. Nevertheless, this shaykh must have been a contemporary of Shaykh Mufarrij, and he should have been « old » enough to join Shaykh al-Ṭanjī by the year 612/1215, that is the latter's death date. It is also worth noting that, according to Ṣafī al-Dīn, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Sharīfī would have even married Shaykh al-Ṭanjī's daughter.

[61] See Gril 1986, p. (Arabic section) / 157-158 (French section); bio-bilbliographical note Ibid., p. 211 (French section).

[62] See Gril 1986, p. 207   (French section).

[63] On al-Shādhilī's and al-Mursī's visits to Qūṣ, and on the circle of their followers in the city, see Ibn ʿAṭaʾ Allāh 1999, *passim*. Shaykh Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (m. 688/1290) was a Shāfiʿī faqīh, a Sufi master (probably a disciple of al-Mursī) and a philosopher at once, and he was appointed *qāḍī* in Qūṣ in the third quarter of seventh/thirteenth century. On him, see Cecere 2013, p. 80-82. On the importance of the Shādhiliyya in Mamluk Qūṣ, see Jean-Claude Garcin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute Égypte médiévale : Qūṣ,* Cairo : IFAO, 1976, p. 314-318.

thus meeting al-Shādhilī (by physical or purely spiritual means) when he was still a child, or Yāqūt's meeting with Shaykh al-Shādhilī was supposed to have occurred beyond the veil of the latter's physical death. This second option would be quite plausible, hagiographically speaking, because interaction between the living and the dead (especially saints) is a topos in Sufi literature. In this case, such praeter-natural dialogue between the living would-be-disciple (Yāqūt) and the deceased Shaykh (al-Shādhilī) might easily be imagined as taking place at the latter's tomb in Humaytharā. In Sufi traditions, a saint's tomb is in fact a favorite place for meeting its "owner", as is also shown also by later narratives on Yāqūt's dialogue with Shaykh al-Badawī at the latter's tomb in Ṭanṭā (see below, Section 4.1).

(5). Although Ibn al-Mulaqqin does not say where Yāqūt's emancipation took place, several elements in this account do suggest that this anecdote was located in Upper Egypt. In addition to the elements discussed above (see point 3), it is worth noting that Yāqūt's request of association to Shaykh al-Mursī is related to the context of pilgrimage (*ḥajj)*, that both he and al-Shādhilī used to perform through the Red Sea route, going from Cairo southward to the Upper Egyptian port of Aydhab (close to Humaytharā, where al-Shādhilī died and was buried). By the way, this was also the main route for slave import from Ethiopia into Egypt at the time[64]. In such framework, it would make sense to imagine an Upper Egyptian location for the first period that Yāqūt spent in Egypt.

(6) Albeit all this reconstruction is largely based on speculation at the present state of our research, this may however, at the very least, stimulate further studies on the Shādhiliyya presence in Upper Egypt, as well as on possible existence of an (Upper) Egyptian Sufi network particularly sensitive to spiritual destiny of slaves.

(7). Al-Mursī's alleged description of his disciple as « the pigeon-blood ruby » (*al-yāqūt al-bahramānī*) is quite an important element from the viewpoint of the making of Yāqūt's saintly status. In Medieval Arabic sources, the mineral *yāqūt* was ascribed exceptional medical properties (such as repelling pestilence vapours or preventing epilepsy) and great talismanic powers. In particular, it would "attract divine favors" on the wearer and gain him "reverence among people and high regard by kings"[65]. All these characteristics being quite appropriate for a saint, the meaning of al-Mursī's metaphor is quite transparent. Moreover, by comparing his disciple to the specific variety *yāqūt bahrāmanī* (i.e. the finest variety of this precious mineral), al-Mursī was placing him in the highest rank among saints, thus probably endorsing him as the future « Pole of the time » (*quṭb al-zamān*).

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[64] See, for instance, Perry 2014, p. 24-36.
[65] See Hijjawi-Qaddumi, "Yāḳūt", EI², XI, 262-263.

(8). However, Ibn al-Mulaqqin's most important contribution in the process of Yāqūt's "sanctity building" is probably the sentence attributed to Shaykh Makīn al-Dīn al-Asmar : "I saw the light of sanctity (*nūr al-walāya*) on him". The exact interpretation of the notion of *nūr al-walāya* falling out of the scope of the present research, here it is worth noting that Makīn al-Dīn al-Asmar was a well-renowned Shādhili Sufi master and Malikī jurist (*faqīh*). In particular, he is described in many sources as one of the closest companions of both al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī, and he was also highly appreciated by Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh himself (see below). Attributing full recognition of Yāqūt's saintly status to such a revered figure was thus a crucial operation in the building of a Shādhilī collective memory. In particular, in the light of the respectful attitude that Ibn al-Mulaqqin also shows to Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh, reference to al-Makīn's endorsement of Yāqūt seems to express a "conciliatory" tendency on the issue of the Shādhilī spiritual heritage.

(9) Ibn al-Mulaqqin's report on Shaykh Makīn al-Dīn al-Asmar as acknowledging Yāqūt's sanctity is also interesting, in our opinion, from a sociological viewpoint. Shaykh Makīn al-Dīn was in fact a dark-skinned person, as is suggested by his sobriquet *al-asmar* (lit.: "The Brown") and confirmed by a meaningful passage of Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's *Laṭāʾif al-minan*, where Shaykh Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī is reported as saying: "His (Makīn al-Dīn's) color (*lawn*) is brown (*asmar*), his heart (*qalb*) is white (*abyaḍ*)" [66]. In Medieval Egyptian context, the term *asmar*, indicating a lighter shade of darkness than *aswad* (Black), commonly applied to those populations (e.g. the Nubians) who were perceived as lighter-complexioned sub-groupings of the broad category of Sūdān ("Blacks"; see below). The category of Sūdān did also include Ethiopians, and all of these populations were the main "reservoir" of (mostly non-military) slaves in Medieval Egypt. In this framework, the fact that an *asmar* shaykh is reported as endorsing a *ḥabashī* slave as a saint might be of some significance in terms of social representations on ethnicity, slavery and phenotypic diversity [67].

2.6. Shaykh Yāqūt in Ninth/Fifteenth Century Sources

During the ninth/fifteenth century Shaykh Yāqūt was the object of some laudative mentions in several historical works and biographical collections. Generally speaking, these notices are quite short and do not seem to provide any substantial contribution to the development of the Shaykh's hagiographic image. However, some elements are worth mentioning:

(1) Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) provides a favorable albeit brief and stereotyped obituary of Yāqūt in his *Kitāb al-sulūk*[68]. In this same work, he also mentions Shaykh Yāqūt in the obituary of

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[66] Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 1999, p. 122.
[67] Sufi attitudes on this issue have not been systematically studied yet. Some interesting remarks are provided by Bilal Orfali and Nada Saab in the introduction to their critical edition of al-Sirjānī's *Kitāb al-Bayāḍ wa-l-Sawād*. However, the "white" and "black" referred to in the book's title are not related to skin color or other outward physical appearances of human beings but to metaphorical meanings whose interpretation is still problematic; see Orfali & Saab 2012, 11-16.

in his disciple Ibn al-Labbān. There, al-Maqrīzī briefly reports the latter's judiciary misadventure (see above) and provides one of the earliest mentions of Yāqūt's sobriquet *al-ʿArshī* [69].

(2) Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449) quotes a witness according to which Yāqūt used to present himself as « the one, among all created beings, who knew best (the meaning of) 'There is no god but God' (*lā ilāh illā Allāh*) »[70]. However, the author does not provide any commentary on such statement, so it is not clear whether he intended to confirm Yāqūt's high spiritual rank or to accuse him of reproachable haughtiness.

(3) Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) draws a short but quite laudative portrait of Yāqūt as a saint, and states that « people used to address him for prayers and blessings (*wa-kāna yuqṣad lil-duʿāʾ wa-l-tabarruk*)[71] ».

(4) Ibn Iyās (d. 930/1523) credits Yāqūt with several « miracles breaking the usual course of things (*karāmāt khāriqa*) ». He also states that Yāqūt was « an Ethiopian slave (*ʿabd ḥabashī*) »[72]. This is actually one of the very few mentions of the Shaykh's enslavement that we have found in sources earlier than al-Munāwī.

3. What Mamluk Sources Do Not Tell Us About Yāqūt

3. 1. Yāqūt "Before Shaykh Yāqūt": A Neglected Dimension

Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī's status as one of al-Mursī's disciples (even, maybe, his favorite one) and a most influential Shādhilī shaykh in his own right is clearly witnessed by the earliest sources we analyzed in this paper. On the contrary, none of those sources provide any information about Yāqūt's life before his becoming a Sufi. In particular, Yāqūt's enslavement is not mentioned by any author previous Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/1401). In the same vein, the early sources do not show any special interest in Yāqūt's geographic and ethnic origin. Strictly speaking, nobody before Ibn Iyās (d. 930/1523) provides an explicit qualification of Yāqūt as an "Ethiopian slave" (*ʿabd ḥabashī)*. In the light of the great importance that these elements of the Shaykh's biography will be given in the works by al-Shaʿrānī and al-Munāwī and in the ensuing hagiographic narratives from Ottoman times till nowadays, such silence in most of the Mamluk sources seems puzzling.

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[68] Maqrīzī 1942, p. 335.
[69] Ibid., p. 408.
[70] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī presents this sentence as a quotation from Ibn Qāḍī Ṣafad, but I have not been able to find the relevant passage until now. See ʿAsqalānī 1930-1931, vol. III, p. 408.
[71] Suyūṭī 1904, p. 250.
[72] Ibn Iyās 1975, vol. 1, section 1, p. 462.

However, this does not probably call into question the now traditional image of Yāqūt as a former "slave" of "Ethiopian" origin. In particular, the silence of the earliest sources on such relevant issues may be explained by more than one reason. First of all, most of these earliest authors were part of the Shādhilī network and were thus more interested in defining Yāqūt's position and spiritual authority within the network rather than in reconstructing his "material" biography. As for other sources, such as Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, a major reason for not providing information on the Shayk's origin and his enslavement might have been that such information could be be easily inferred from the Shaykh's name "Yāqūt" and his *nisba* "al-Ḥabashī", as we shall endeavor to show in the following paragraph.

3.2. "Yāqūt" as a Slave Name.

The word *yāqūt*, designating the precious mineral « corundum » in all its varieties (from red, that is ruby, to yellow, blue, and green)[73], was seemingly employed as a typical name for slaves in the Islamicate world in the Middle Ages. Generally speaking, enslaved persons were usually renamed by their masters, in order to mark the process of deracination and de-personalization implied by enslavement. Such practice being observed "almost universally" (Orlando Patterson)[74], slave names tended to follow recurrent patterns according to different cultural and religious contexts[75]. If the "slave onomasticon" in the Islamicate world is still a largely unexplored field of research, the use of "Yāqūt" as a slave name is well documented for Mamluk Egypt, as David Ayalon pointed out in his now classical study on "The Eunuchs in the Mamluks Sultanate", where he also analyzed the most common name patterns applied to eunuchs, often designating luxury items or physical or moral qualities[76]. Far beyond eunuchs, however, similar names patterns applied to virtually all sorts of slaves at the time, as is suggested in a recent study by Craig Perry, based on slave documents from the Cairo Genizah:

> Slave names reveal patterns that fit into a tripartite typology. In the first category are slaves with names that conveyed socio-economic status and well-being. As a case in point, the most frequently attested slave name in the Genizah corpus is Success (*Tawfīq*). […] A second category of slave names encompasses myriad variations on the themes of luxury and sensuality. […]. While these names are most commonly given to female slaves, male slaves also bear

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[73] See Hijjawi-Qaddumi, "Yāḳūt", *EI²,* XI, 262-263.

[74] "(Changing one's name is) almost universally a symbolic act of stripping a person of his ((her)) former identity ((…)). The slave's former name died with his ((her)) self". Patterson 1982, p. 54-55. For an anthropological analysis of the name change as a "major feature" of the "ritual of enslavement", and for an overall survey of slave renaming practices in diferent geo-historical contexts, see *Ibid*., p. 54-58.

[75] For persistence of such practice in eighteenth-nineteenth century Egypt, some interesting information is provided by Terence Walz: "Slaves tended to be named after scents, fruits of flowers, jewels, animals or Qur'anic personalities, or were given names suggesting a happy or pleasing servile disposition or an alluring physical appearance." Walz 1985, p. 137-160 (here, p. 141-142). On typical slave appellations in Ethiopia and their social significance, see Tibelu 1995, p. 61-62.

[76] See Ayalon 1977 (repr. 1989), p. 275-279

names of luxury items such as Pearl (*Durrī*) and Turquoise (*Fayrūz*). A third category of slave names is distinguished by its emphasis on personal qualities that had cultural resonance and prestige[77].

The name "Yāqūt", though not explicitly mentioned by Perry, does perfectly fit into the category of "luxury items" names.

Also, evidence for the use of "Yāqūt" as a slave name in Medieval Islamicate world outside Mamluk Egypt is provided by such famous historical figures as the calligrapher Yāqūt al-Muʿtaṣimī (ca. 618-698/1221-1298) and the "geographer" Yāqūt al-Rūmī (d. 626/1229), the author of *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, both of them being slaves. The former was, more precisely, a eunuch of the last ʿAbbasid Caliph al-Mustaʿṣim bi-llāh (hence his *nisba* al-Mustaʿsimī)[78]. As Yāqūt al-Rūmī (also known as al-Ḥamawī), he was enslaved when a child and brought from the Byzantine territories to Baghdād, where he was in the service of a merchant, al-ʿAskar al-Ḥamawī (hence his additional *nisba*) [79]. Another namesake that is worth mentioning here is al-Maqrīzī's slave Abū l-Durr Yāqūt[80], whose name evokes two "luxury items" at once, i.e. "pearl" (*durr*) and "corundum" (*yāqūt)*.

3.3. The Erasure of Genealogy.

Further evidence for Shaykh Yāqūt's former servile status is provided by the lack of any genealogical marker (such as patronymics) in the earliest sources[81]. As for the *nasab* Ibn ʿAbd Allāh (lit.: "son of ʿAbd Allāh"), which Yāqūt is given in some comparatively late sources (from Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī onwards), this would hardly be considered as a real indication on the Shaykh's genealogy. Rather, it has to be seen as the usual "formula" adopted in fictive genealogies of freed slaves, based in the notion that every human being is ultimately a "servant of God" (*ʿabd Allāh*) and thus "a son of a servant of God" (*ibn ʿabd Allāh*)[82]. Such practice usually marked the freed slave's social reemersion as a "person", in a context where genealogy kept being important across the centuries[83]. As W. J. Sersen points out in his survey of slave proverbs in Medieval Arabic sources, genealogical considerations were often shaping presumptions on one's morality and respectability[84].

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[77] Perry 2014, p. 75-77.

[78] See Canby, « Yāqūt al-Muʿtaṣimī », EI[2], XI, 263-264.

[79] See Gilliot, « Yāqūt al-Rūmī », EI[2], XI, 264-265.

[80] See Bauden 2014, p. 167.

[81] « Slave names conspicuously lack any kind of genealogical patronymic […]. The lack of this information speaks volumes about the predicament of slaves as "natally alienated" beings - persons who have been removed from the natural kin and social networks that had previously ordered their lives », Perry 2014, p. 77.

[82] It is also worth noting that *ibn ʿabd Allāh* was the (real) nasab of Prophet Muḥammad, actually the first man who "converted" to Islam, which was probably a strong additional reason behind the choice of such formula as a favorite fictive genealogy for converted *liberti*. I am gratefully indebted to Professor Julien Loiseau for this remark.

[83] On persistence of adoption of fictive genealogies until well into the nineteenth century, see Walz 1985, p. 142.

[84] Sersen 1985, p 92-105.

The lack of known and honorable "genealogies" was one of the main reasons behind stereotypes on slaves' alleged inclination toward immorality. In many a proverb, then, slaves are depicted as greedy, base, untrustworthy and they are said to be haughty if given the chance. Accordingly, masters are recommended to treat them with contempt or disdain: "Dear to a slave is the one who overworks him", says the VI/XII century writer al-Maydānī [85]. Especially, masters were recommended not to educate slaves, as this would be either impossible or counter-productive: "The worst [use of] money is the education of slaves"[86].

As Sersen points out, these views are at odds with most of the ḥadīth-s concerning slavery, such as those stating that "slaves are the brothers of the Muslims" and "that they must be treated well"[87]. Such discrepancy is only one of the many expressions of the underlying tension between "ethnic" and "ethical" understandings of the religious message which might be observed in Arabic and Islamic literature throughout the Middle Ages. This tension is especially exemplified by the century-long debate on reasons and implications of phenotypic diversity among human beings, that is briefly outlined below (see Section 5).

3.4. Yāqūt as al-Ḥabashī: (Really) "Ethiopian" or (Simply) "Dark-complexioned"?

In all of the sources analyzed in this paper (including the Ottoman ones), Shaykh Yāqūt is consistently called "al-Ḥabashī", an adjective whose basic meaning was connected "to the land and people of Ethiopia, and at times to the adjoining areas of the Horn of Africa"[88]. However, one might wonder whether the term *al-Ḥabashī,* in this case, was used with this specific meaning or with a more general one. Several terms connected to "Africa", in fact, were affected by wide semantic fluctuations in medieval Arabic sources.

Generally speaking, inhabitants of Sub-Saharan Africa were usually divided into four main ethnic groups, each of them associated to specific regions (*bilād*). Namely: the Zanj, on the eastern coast of Africa from south of Zaylaʿ or Mogadishu to Sofala (*Ṣufālat al-Zanj*); the Nūba, in the Nile Valley from the first cataract to the merging point of Blue and White Nile; the Sūdān, from west of Dunqula towards the Atlantic coast and the unknown southernmost Africa; the Ḥabasha, whose country was usually "located" on the Ethiopian plateau and the coastal area on the Red Sea.

In spite of this basic division, however, the relevant terms were often given broader meanings. In particular, the word *Sūdān* (lit.: "Blacks") was commonly used as a comprehensive label for all African populations and, in connection with some widespread traditions on the descendants of

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[85] Sersen 1985, p. 99.
[86] Sersen 1985, p. 100.
[87] Sersen 1985, p. 98, n. 77 and n. 78.
[88] See Ullendorff and others, "Ḥabash, Ḥabasha." *EI*[2.]

Noah, it even applied to the whole category of the "sons of Ḥām (b. Nūḥ)", thus including Ḥabasha, Copts, Berbers, Nabateans and even some Indian populations[89]. In a similar vein, the term *Ḥabasha* "applied to a vast area of uncertain limits, sometimes supposed to extend all the way between East and West Africa"[90]. Moreover, the regions referred to as *Bilād al-Sūdān* and/or *Bilād al-Ḥabasha* being the main "reservoirs" of slaves for medieval Islamicate world, both terms *Sūdānī* and *Ḥabashī* could be used indistinctly as synonymous to "(African) slave" (a trace of this situation is found in the use of the word *Ḥabashī* as a general term for "slave" in pre-modern India)[91].

According to some scholars, this tendency to semantic fluctuation would have been so widespread that the concerned terms would have lost any precise ethnic or geographical meaning. In particular, Emeri Van Donzel, relying on Gernot Rotter's pioneering studies on the position of "Blacks" in Medieval Arab-Muslim societies, argued that "*Ḥabash* only very rarely indicates a real Ethiopian" and that "it does not seem useful to distinguish between *Ḥabash* and *Sūdān*" in medieval Arabic sources[92].

However, considerations on the semantic instability of such terms as *Ḥabashī* and *Bilād al-Ḥabasha* would not justify, in our opinion, any radical skepticism about traditional indications on Yāqūt's ethnic and geographic origin. In fact, the extensive meaning of the word *Ḥabash(a)* seemingly remained only an additional one, and it never replaced the original specific meaning connected to the Ethiopian region. As far as writers contemporary to Shaykh Yāqūt are concerned, both extensive and specific uses of these terms are attested. On the one hand, Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī (d. 749/1349) refers *Ḥabasha* and related words to a wide range of Muslim, Christian and Animist populations stretching from historic Ethiopia to southern Egyptian borders[93]. On the other hand, Shams al-Dīn al-Ṣūfī al-Dimashqī (d. 727/1327) applies these terms only to non-Muslim populations of the Ethiopian regions (including both Christian and "pagan" states)[94].

It would then seem correct to state that, the aforementioned tendency to semantic fluctuation notwithstanding, the basic meaning of *Ḥabasha* and related words kept being anchored to the "original" region, especially for writers who lived in areas and times characterized by constant commercial and political exchange with "Ethiopia".

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[89] See Muhammad 1985, p. 48.
[90] See Moraes Farias 1985, p. 36.
[91] See "Habashi", EI².
[92] See Van Donzel 1989, p. 113-119; Rotter 1967.
[93] Shihāb al-Dīn Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Faḍl Allāh al-Qurashī al-ʿAwadī al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār,* MS. BNF 5867, fol. 3 r., quoted in French translation in Cuoq 1975, p. 257. Al-ʿUmarī wrote this work between 742/1342 and 749/1349, meaning a few years after Shaykh Yāqūt's death.
[94] Shams al-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Abī Ṭālib al-Anṣārī al-Ṣūfī al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbāt al-Dahr fī ʿajāʾib al-barr wa-l-baḥr*, ed. by F. Mehren, *Cosmographie de Chems ed-din Abou Abdallah el-Dimichqi*, Saint Petersbourg, 1866, and transl. by the same as *Manuel de Cosmographie du Moyen Âge*, Copenhagen, 1874, Ch. IX, p. 267-268; quoted in French translation in Cuoq 1975, p. 240-247 (here, 247).

Indeed, this was seemingly the case with Mamluk and Ottoman Egypt. If the difference between such terms as *aswad* ("Black") and *asmar* ("Brown") clearly refers to phenotypic distinctions, also some geo-ethnic expressions such as *Nūbī* and *Ḥabashī* are clearly used as distinctive terms in some relevant sources, for instance in slave documents from the Cairo Genizah studied by Perry[95]. Conversely, it is only in much later sources, such as nineteenth century slave documents from Cairo Islamic courts *(maḥākim sharʿiyya)* studied by Terence Walz, that the term *ḥabashī* appears to be used with a merely phenotypic connotation, as opposed to both *aswad* and *asmar* in a triadic system of adjectives indicating slaves' outward appearances[96]. For these reasons, one may argue that at the time of Yāqūt the word *Ḥabashī* was still indicating, at least in most cases, an actual "Ethiopian" origin.

3.5. Hypothesis on Yāqūt's Original Religious Identity

All sources we were able to access are completely silent on Yāqūt's life "before he *became* Yāqūt", meaning before his enslavement and probable renaming. As a consequence, no information is provided on Yāqūt's religious identity before his conversion to Islam. However, some general considerations suggest that he probably was an animist, in Islamic terms a *majūs*. In fact, due to limitations theoretically imposed by the Islamic Law on the enslavement of *dhimmī*-s living in Muslim Ethiopian principalities (except in case of war prisoners), as well as to Muslim merchants' evident interest in keeping good relations with rulers of Christian Ethiopian kingdom, it was mostly "animist" Ethiopians that were imported as slaves into the Islamicate world. As Taddesse Tamrat shows in his famous study on Church and State in medieval Ethiopia, Christian political (and, at times, even religious) authorities were ready to collaborate with Muslim slave traders (on condition that the "selling goods" be not Christian) also in periods of harsh political and even military confrontation with neighbouring Muslim states[97]. With special regard to Shaykh Yāqūt's lifetime, it is worth noting that, despite the intense process of Christian *reconquista* led by Solomonid Ethiopian king ʿAmda Ṣyon (r. 1314-1344), "Muslim merchants carried on their relationships with Egypt, Yemen and Iraq", included in slave trade, "in the name" of this Christian king "and to his profit"[98].

On the other hand, trade of Christian slaves is however attested in both Ethiopian and Arabic Medieval sources, be it with local ("illegal") cooperation or as a consequence of capture of war prisoners[99].

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[95] See Perry 2014, p. 24 and n. 16.
[96] Walz clearly opposes nineteenth century customs to "earlier times", thus implying that the situation he describes in the following passage does not apply to the times which are relevant to our research. See Walz 1985, p. 140.
[97] The relevant passage from Tamrat is quoted in Van Donzel 1989, p. 116-117.
[98] Van Donzel 1989, p. 116.

For these reasons, no conclusive statement can be made on Yāqūt's original religion, although the "Animistic hypothesis" remains the most plausible one.

4. The Ottoman Layer: The Final Making of Shaykh Yāqūt's Image.

4.1. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī and the Foundations of Yāqūt's Hagiographic Vulgata

In the first decades of the Ottoman domination in Egypt, the Egyptian Sufi writer ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī (d. 973/1565) provided a full-fledged bio-hagiographic narrative on Yāqūt, which deeply influenced the "making" of Yāqūt's historical and hagiographic image in following centuries. In his *Ṭabaqāt kubrā*, in particular, al-Shaʿrānī presents "Sīdī Yāqūt al-ʿAršī" as "an *imām* in knowledge of divine things (*al-maʿārif*), God-worshipping and ascetic (*ʿābid zāhid*)" and "one of the loftiest (*ajall*) men among those who were initiated by Shaykh Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī". Furthermore, he provides some biographic and hagiographical details meant to show that Yāqūt was predestined to become a great saint under the guidance of Shaykh al-Mursī. On the very day that Yāqūt was born in "the country of the Abyssinians/Ethiopians *(bilād al-Ḥabasha),* Shaykh al-Mursī, while being in Alexandria, foretold Yāqūt's eventual association to the Shādhiliyya:

> (On that day), Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī made an *ʿaṣīda* (a thick sweet paste with butter or honey) for him [Yāqūt], although it was summer in Alexandria. So, he was told (by his disciples): "Indeed, the *ʿaṣīda* is only for winter!", but he replied : "This is the *ʿaṣīda* for your brother Yāqūt, who was born in the country of the Abyssinians (today), and will come to you (one day). And things went (exactly) as he (Shaykh al-Mursī) had foretold[100].

Shaykh Yāqūt's divine election is specially confirmed by his charismatic power of intercession, as shown by two anecdotes that have since become part and parcel of Yāqūt's hagiography.

In the fist anecdote, the Shaykh intercedes (*shafaʿa*) in favor of his disciple Ibn al-Labbān before the (deceased) Shaykh Aḥmad al-Badawī :

> (Shaykh Yāqūt) was the one who interceded (*shafaʿa*) in favor of Shaykh Shams al-dīn Ibn al-Labbān, when the latter had made unfavorable statements (*ankara*) on Sīdī Aḥmad al-Badawī [...] and (al-Badawī) had deprived him (Ibn al-Labbān) of his science (*ʿilm*) and his spiritual state (*ḥāl*). This happened after Ibn al-Labbān had asked for mediation (*tawassala*) from all the saints of his time (*jamīʿ awliyāʾ ʿaṣri-hi*) but Sīdī Aḥmad al-Badawī had not accepted their intercession (*shifāʿa*) for Ibn al-Labbān. Then, (Shaykh Yāqūt) went from Alexandria to Sīdī Aḥmad (meaning, to his shrine, which is in Ṭantā), and asked him to change his feelings towards Ibn al-Labbān (from bad) into good and to return his spiritual state back to him. (Sīdī Aḥmad) answered Yāqūt and returned Ibn al-Labbān his state[101].

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[99] See Van Donzel 1989, p. 116, p. 117.
[100] Shaʿrānī 2005, vol. 2, p. 40-41.
[101] Shaʿrānī 2005, vol. 2, p. 40.

The second anecdote is meant to show that Shaykh Yāqūt "used to intercede (*kāna yashfaʿu)* even in favor of animals (*fī l-ḥayawānāt*)":

> Once, a dove (*yamāma*) came to him and perched on his shoulder, while he was sitting in the circle of the "poors (in God)" (*fuqarāʾ*, i.e. the Sufis). She whispered something into his ear, and he told her: "In God's name, we (*plurale maiestatis*) will send one of the poor in God with you". But she objected : "No one except you would suffice to me". Then, he (immediately) mounted on his female-mule (*baghla*) and rode from Alexandria to Old Cairo (*Miṣr al-ʿatīqa*) without stopping until he reached the mosque of ʿAmr (Ibn al-ʿĀṣ). (Then), he told (those who were there): "Let me meet with muezzin So-and-So (*Fulān al-muʾadhdhin*)". They sent the muezzin (to him). The Shaykh […] told him: "This dove informed me in Alexandria that you kill (*tudhabbiḥ*) her young birds (*firākh*) every time she hatches in the minaret". The muezzin replied: "She told the truth. I killed them more than once". And the shaykh said: "Don't do it anymore". The muezzin replied: "I repented to God the Most High". Then the shaykh […] went back to Alexandria[102].

Both anecdotes are instrumental to depict Yāqūt (implicitly but quite transparently, for a Sufi-oriented readership) as the spiritual « Pole » of his time (*quṭb al-zamān*). In particular, al-Shaʿrānī stresses the exclusive power of intercession that Yāqūt is given by God. The dove does not want anyone to intercede for her but the Shaykh, as she knows that nobody else's intervention would be effective ("No one except you would suffice to me"). In a similar vein, the deceased Shaykh Aḥmad al-Badawī accepts Yāqūt's intercession in favor of Ibn al-Labbān after rejecting all other living saints of the time[103]. All this suggests that Yāqūt was acting as the « Universal Reliever » (*al-ghawth al-kullī*), i.e. that he was in condition to protect (and to intercede for) every created beings. In most Sufi traditions, among which the Shādhiliyya, this was precisely one of the main prerogatives of the "Pole of the time" (*quṭb al-zamān*). Al-Shaʿrānī's explanations for Yāqūt's sobriquet *al-ʿArshī* (roughly "the Man of the Throne") are part of the same hagiographic strategy, as they imply Yāqūt's direct experience of the realm of God's throne (*al-ʿarsh*), that is another prerogative of the *quṭb al-zamān* in Sufi (and especially Shādhilī) literature:

> He was called *al-ʿArshī* because his heart (*qalb*) was constantly beneath (*taḥta*) God's throne (*al-ʿarsh*), while his body (*jasad*) only was on Earth. It is also said that (he was given that nickname) because he was listening to the call for prayer (*adhān*) of the Angels Bearing the Throne of God (*ḥamalat al-ʿarsh*)" [104].

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[102] Shaʿrānī 2005, vol. 2, p. 41.
[103] By stating that Shaykh Yāqūt was invoked only when all other saints had been rejected by Sīdī Aḥmad, al-Shaʿrānī is actually drawing a parallelism with the famous "ḥadīth on intercession" (*ḥadīt al-shifāʿa*), where Prophet Muḥammad is described as interceding for humankind on the Day of Reckoning, after that intercession of all other Prophets has been rejected/proven useless. This *ḥadīth* apparently enjoyed an important place in the teachings of the Shādhiliyya, and Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh provided a rich commentary on it in his *Laṭāʾif al-minan* (see Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 1999, p. 29-30). Therefore, al-Shaʿrānī's supposed audience must have found not difficult to grasp the underlying meaning of such reference: as Muḥammad's superiority over all other Prophets is proved by his being the only accepted intercessor on the Day of Reckoning, so Yāqūt's being the only accepted intercessor in this "praeternatural quarrel" proves his superiority over "all other saints of his time". This confirms that al-Shaʿrānī considered Yāqūt as the *quṭb* of his time.
[104] Shaʿrānī 2005, vol. 2, p. 41.

In this light, al-Shaʿrānī's indication that Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's was Yāqūt's disciple (*tilmīdh*) after al-Mursī's death seemingly confirms that the author considered Yāqūt as the true "heir" of al-Mursī[105].

For all these reasons, al-Shaʿrānī's narrative marked a turning-point in the process of the Yāqūt's "sanctity-building", by laying the foundations of a full-fledged hagiographic picture of the Shaykh. As most elements of al-Shaʿrānī's narrative are not found in any of the earlier sources we could access until now, one may wonder where could he take them from. Needless to say, answering such a question would be impossible at the present state of our research. Nevertheless, one may easily argue that al-Shāʿrānī, who associated himself with various Sufi groups[106], might have access to some earlier traditions which were still circulating, in oral or written form, in some Shādhilī circles at his time. In particular, it is possible that al-Shaʿrānī's "personal contacts with the shaykhs of the Wafāʾiyya order and family"[107] might have provided him some Wafāʾī traditions enhancing Yāqūt's rank above that of Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh. In fact, some spiritual lineages of the Wafāʾiyya did connect the ṭarīqa's eponymous master, Shaykh Muḥammad Wafāʾ (d. 765/1363), to Shaykh Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī (instead of Shaykh Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh) *via* Shaykh Dāwūd Ibn Bākhilā (or Mākhilā; d. 733/1333)[108].

In this framework, even al-Shaʿrānī's flagrant "mistake" in dating Yāqūt's death to 707/1307 might be regarded as an indication that he was probably relying on different sources than those currently known to us. Be that as it may, al-Shaʿrānī's narrative on Yāqūt did actually pave the way for the emersion (or the reemersion) of a "pro-Yāqūt" narrative on the origins of the Shādhiliyya, concurrent to the dominating pro-Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh narrative.

4.2. ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Munāwī and the "Social Turn" in Yāqūt's Hagiography.

A few decades after al-Shaʿrānī, it was another Egyptian Sufi writer, ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1622)[109] who provided a major contribution to the development of Shaykh Yāqūt's hagiographic « vulgata »[110]. In his collection of Sufi biographies, *al-Kawākib al-durriyya,* al-Munāwī relies on al-Shaʿrānī's account but he enriches it with several other anecdotes, most of which are not found in any of the earlier sources we accessed until now. In doing this, al-Munāwī

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[105] Shaʿrānī provides this information in his (surprisingly short) biography of Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh: the latter would have been "a disciple of Shaykh Yāqūt […] and of Shaykh al-Mursī before him (*tilmīdh al-shaykh Yāqūt […] wa-qabla-hu tilmīdh al-shaykh Abī l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī)*". Shaʿrānī 2005, vol. 2, p. 41.

[106] See: McGregor 2004, p. 71-72; Garcin 1970, pp. 159-168.

[107] McGregor 2004, p. 72.

[108] On conflicting traditions describing Ibn Bākhilā's as Yāqūt's and/or Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's disciple, see McGregor 2004, p. 70-71, p. 176, n. 4.

[109] Munāwī [1994], p. 71-73.

[110] Munāwī [1994], p. 71-73.

actually draws the two main guidelines along which Yāqūt's portrait eventually evolved in the following centuries:

(1). Al-Munāwī insists upon Yāqūt's divine election, even more explicitly than al-Shaʿrānī had done. He squarely presents Yāqūt as the "loftiest disciple (*ajall talāmīdh*)" of al-Mursī, and he directly attributes Yāqūt's nickname *al-ʿArshī* to Shaykh al-Mursī's initiative [111].

Also, al-Munāwī repeats al-Shaʿrānī's narrative on al-Mursī's miraculous information on Yāqūt's birth almost *verbatim*, but he introduces a slight but quite meaningful change in it. In al-Munāwī's version, Shaykh al-Mursī, when speaking to his disciples about their future fellow Yāqūt, refers to him as "my son" (*waladī*), instead of "your brother" (*akhī-kum*) as it was in al-Shaʿrānī's account: "This is the *ʿaṣīda* of my son (*waladī*) Yāqūt"[112]. Such shift seems clearly meant to position Yāqūt as al-Mursī's favorite disciple and his legitimate spiritual heir. This is confirmed by the information on Yāqūt acting as Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's spiritual master, that al-Mursī also repeats from al-Shaʿrānī[113].

In addition to all this, al-Munāwī reports a most interesting piece of information, which I have not found either in al-Shaʿrānī or in earlier sources, and which has eventually become part and parcel of Yāqūt's hagiography:

> Yāqūt got married to Shaykh al-Mursī's daughter, at the latter's request (*wa-tazawwaja ibnat shaykhi-hi al-Mursī bi-suʾāli-hi*)[114].

Al-Munāwī describes this marital relationship as a purely spiritual one, based on Yāqūt's extreme respect towards his master:

> She lived with him for eighteen years, and he never (sexually) approached her, out of deference *(ḥayāʾ)* towards her father. He separated from her only because of death, and she was still virgin (*bikr*) (when she died)[115].

Such respectful attitude is also witnessed by an anecdote in which Yāqūt gives precedence to his wife over a socially prominent guest, in line with Sufi perceptions of proper relationships between spiritual and socio-political authorities:

> Once one of the "greats" (*al-akābir*) entered Yāqūt's place while he was talking to his wife and he did not want to interrupt her. Then he said (to his visitor): "(She is) my shaykhs' daughter (*bint shaykhī*), excuse me !"[116].

(2). Al-Munāwī focuses his narrative on Yāqūt's condition as a former slave, thus turning this into a key element in the evolution of Yāqūt's hagiographical portrait. First of all, al-Munāwī reports a

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[111] Ibid., p. 72.
[112] Ibid., p. 71.
[113] Ibid., p. 73.
[114] Ibid., p. 73. This information is not found either in al-Shaʿrānī or in earlier sources we dealt with. However, this is repeated in the biography published online: "His shaykh Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī married him (Yāqūt) to his daughter (*zawwaja-hu shaykh-hu Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī min ibnati-hi)"* http://sofya.arab.st/t17-topic
[115] Munāwī [1994], p. 73.
[116] Ibid., p. 73.

completely different version than Ibn al-Mulaqqin's on Yāqūt's association to al-Mursī. This new narrative directly links Yāqūt's enslavement to his predestination to become the shaykh's spiritual heir:

> A merchant (*tājir*) had purchased him [Yāqūt] with some (other) slaves [in Ethiopia]. While approaching Alexandria, the sea began to be rough and the ship was on the verge of sinking. So, his (Yāqūt's) owner vowed (*nadhara*) that, if he escaped (this danger), he would donate Yāqūt to al-Mursī. After entering the city of Alexandria, however, the owner found that Yāqūt had a skin infection (*ḥikka*). So he brought the shaykh (al-Mursī) another slave, but (the shaykh) rejected him, and said: "The slave whom I had chosen (*ʿayyantu-hu*) for (us) the poors in God (*al-fuqarāʾ*) is not this one". So, the owner brought Yāqūt before him, saying: "I had avoided to bring him for no other reason than what you are seeing! [i.e.,Yāqūt's infection]". (al-Mursī) replied: "This is the one whom (God's) Power (*al-qudra*) has promised to us! (*hādhā alladhī waʿadat-nā ʿalay-hi al-qudra*)" [117].

Such an anecdote absorbs even Yāqūt's enslavement into the sphere of "miracle". Needles to say, this narrative pattern appears to be a trope. It may have been inspired not only by some general models as that the Qurʾanic stories concerning Jonah (Yūnus), but also, and more meaningfully, by the figure of the eponymous master of the Shādhiliyya. In fact, one of the earliest and most famous miracles attributed to Shaykh Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī was his intervention to calm down a tempest that was about to cause his boat to make shipwreck, while he was traveling for the pilgrimage. According to pious traditions attested both in Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh[118] and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (the latter, as we said above, quoting Shaykh Yāqūt)[119], it was precisely on that occasion that the famous *Ḥizb al-Baḥr* ("Litany of the Sea" or "Litany of the Nile river", the word *baḥr* designating any large water mass) had been recited for the first time. So, since a very early age, followers of the Shadhiliyya attributed the Litany with a talismanic power and used to recite it when boarding a ship. Therefore, such narrative situation would sound particularly fit for supporting the idea that the concerned figure was "predestined" to become a Shādhilī Sufi saint.

Moreover, al-Munāwī tells some anecdotes which appear directly connected to social representations on slaves and on relative value of ethics and genealogy. On two occasions, Yāqūt, the slave-turned-into-saint, is confronted to a *sharīf* (a descendant of the Prophet) who has gone astray from his forefathers' values. In the first episode, a *sharīf* wearing shabby clothes (*thiyāb raththa*) burns with indignation at seeing Yāqūt clothed in fine and expensive garments (*thiyāb ʿāliyya ghāliyya*). The Prophet's descendant harshly attacks the shaykh for what he feels as an intolerable inversion of "proper" social order based on ethnic and genealogical standards. Yāqūt, however, turns the *sharīf*'s arguments against him, by presenting one's ethics as the touchstone for one's real "genealogical belonging":

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[117] Ibid., p. 72.
[118] In *Laṭāʾif al-minan.* See Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 1999, p. 199-201.
[119] See Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987, p. 43-ff.

(Yāqūt) said: "Maybe you have followed the way (*minhaj*) of my forefathers (*abā'iyyā*), so they considered you as one of them and transmitted you their (low) rank. And I (on the contrary) followed the way of your forefathers (*minhaj abā'i-ka*), so they considered me as one of them and transmitted me their (high) rank" [120].

In listening to such words, the *sharīf* "broke into tears (*bakā*) and asked for Yāqūt's pardon" [121].

Also in the second anecdote, Yāqūt leads an arrogant *sharīf* to recognize the priority of ethics versus genealogy:

> A *sharīf* went to visit Yāqūt and saw that people were kissing the shaykh's feet whereas they did not even pay attention to him [albeit he was a descendant of the Prophet]. So, he was upset in his soul for this. But Yāqūt told him: Verily, my trotters (*kawāri'*)[122], if they were cut off, would not be worth two dirhams on the market. But I have followed the pure way of your ancestors (*ṭarīq salafi-ka al-ṭāhir*), so I acquired their honor (*sharaf*). You, on the contrary, contradicted your ancestors' morals (*khālafta salafa-ka fī akhlāqi-him)* and indulged into vices (*radhā'il*), so you became despicable (*uhinta*). Then (at such words), the *sharīf* became silent, as he did not find anything to answer[123].

Even more impressive, however, is Yāqūt's alleged confrontation with a Mamluk Sultan called Ḥasan[124]:

> Sulṭān Ḥasan came from Fusṭāṭ (*Miṣr*) to visit (*ziyāra*) him (Yāqūt), but when he saw him, he thought to himself (*khaṭara 'inda-hu*): "A Black slave ('*abd aswad*), has been given so much (honor)!?". Then, when (the Sultan) approached (the Shaykh), the latter hit him seven times on his head, and told him: - O, Ḥasan! *Verily, he is but a slave on whom We bestowed favors (Inna huwa illā 'abd an'amnā 'alay-hi*[125]). And [after this episode] the Sultan lived [only] seven months[126].

In this anecdote, Yāqūt is able to read into the Sultan's thoughts by means of mystical disclosure, a faculty that Sufi masters are often ascribed. Therefore, he chooses a Qur'anic quotation in order to remind the Sultan that every human being is ultimately only a "slave" of God and that whatever one enjoys in one's life, included life itself, is nothing else than a favor from God. (Moreover, as this anecdote concerns a Mamluk Sultan, one might not exclude that such quotation would imply a specific allusion to the Sultan's condition as a former slave).

Once again, then, al-Munāwī presents Yāqūt as opposing religious ethics to social stereotypes, in line with the general principle he ascribes to the shaykh:

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[120] Ibid., p. 72.
[121] Ibid., p. 71.
[122] The word *kawāri'* (sing. *kāri'*) may apply both to human and animal feet; in particular, in Egypt it also indicates a traditional street food "prepared of sheep's trotters" (Wehr, p. 821), which is most seemingly the metaphorical reference behind the shaykh's usage of the word in this passage.
[123] Munāwī [1994], p. 72.
[124] The identification of this figure is not easy. In principle, it cannot be Sultan Ḥasan Ibn al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, as he died in 762/1361, that is long after Yāqūt's death. Nevertheless, one has to take into account that such anachronistic reference would not be impossible in hagiographic texts.
[125] Qur., 43 : 59.
[126] Munāwī [1994], p. 72.

Yāqūt used to say: "The Sufi (*al-faqīr*, lit.: "the poors [in God]") must honor people according to their religion (*dīn*), not according to their clothes"[127].

Sociological and hagiographical motifs are then interwoven in al-Munāwī's narrative on Shaykh Yāqūt al-Ḥabashi. By turning Yāqūt's enslavement in the first step of the latter's path to spiritual mastership, al-Munāwī clearly fits his narrative into a well-established literary topos, that finds his first model in the Biblical and Qur'anic stories of Joseph[128]. This literary motif may be called "the happy enslavement topos"[129] and it informs several Islamic narratives in which one's enslavement is presented as the way that God chooses to lead him/her to embrace the "religion of truth". Thus, al-Munāwī also dialogues with social representations on slavery and blackness circulating in Egyptian society in his own time. In this framework, some texts concerning "Ethiopians" are worth evoking in the following paragraphs, in order to draw a proper background for better understanding the sociological dimension of al-Munāwī's narrative on Yāqūt.

5. On Color and Slavery in Medieval Islam: The Hamitic Vs. Climatic Hypothesis

As William Sersen pointed out in his study on slave proverbs (see above), in spite of the potentially universalistic nature of the Islamic message, ethnic and social cleavages actually played an important role in shaping ideological representations and social practices in the Islamicate world across the centuries. In addition, the religious divide itself produced new social and geo-political cleavages and related sets of stereotyped representations, which were meant to provide justifications for dissymmetric power relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

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[127] *Wa-min kalāmi-hi: ʿala al-faqīr an yuʿẓim al-nās bi-ḥasab dīni-him wa-lā bi-ḥasab thiyābi-him.* Munāwī [1994], p.72.

[128] On this point, see in particular: Haarmann 1998, p.55-84; Yosef 2012, p. 55-69; Loiseau 2014, p. 138.

[129] An early example is found in *Kitāb ʿAjā'ib al-Hind,* probably dating to fourth/tenth century. As the story goes, in the year 310 AH, in "the country of the Zanj who eat (other) human beings" (*bilād al-Zanj alladhīna ya'kulūna al-nās*), a local king is kidnapped and enslaved by some trickerous Arab merchants whom he had kindly welcomed. The enslaved king is sold first in Oman, then in Baghdād. There he converts to Islam and flies to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*). There, he joins a caravan to Egypt, whence he finds his way back to his country by following the river Nile. After a series of vicissitudes – among which being enslaved again, even by some other Blacks (*qawm min al-Sūdān*) – the king comes home and recovers his power, then spreading Islam among his population. Eventually, the same merchants accidentally land to the king's country once again. Contrary to their expectations, the king does not take revenge on them, for he recognizes them as the "means" of God's grace: "And I am now happy and joyful (*faraḥ wa-masrūr*) for what God bestowed (*manna*) upon me and my kingdom (*dawlatī*), meaning islam, (pure) faith, and knowledge of the prayer, the fast and the pilgrimage as well as of the the licit and illicit (*al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām*). Indeed, I got what nobody had got (before me) in the country of Zanj. And thus I pardoned you [the merchants] because you were the means (*al-sabab*) of my coming to pure religion (lit.: of purity of my religion "salāḥ dīnī"). *Kitāb ʿAjā'ib al-Hind* in Van Der Lith & M. Devic 1883-1886, p. 50-60.

In this framework, it is worth mentioning that a debate went on among Islamic scholars for centuries, concerning the origins of ethnic differences and their possible religious, moral and even intellectual implications, including the allegedly natural "enslavibility" of dark-complexioned people. In spite of the wide variety of positions which can be gleaned in different authors, two fundamental attitudes may be outlined: 1) the so-called "Hamitic hypothesis" related Blackness to Noah's curse on his son Ḥām and the latter's progeny; 2) the "climatic hypothesis", on the contrary, considered human complexions as dependant on climatic conditions, an saw Blackness as the result of the extremely hot weather which characterizes the regions inhabited by the *Sūdān*.

The Hamitic hypothesis, which seems to have been mainstream in Medieval Islamic culture, was grounded on some peculiar interpretations of a famous episode in the Bible (*Bereshit,* 9, 18-27) concerning Noah's curse on his son Ham and the latter's son Canaan:

> **18** And the sons of Noah, that went forth from the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth; and Ham is the father of Canaan. **19** These three were the sons of Noah, and of these was the whole earth overspread. **20** And Noah the husbandman began, and planted a vineyard. **21** And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. **22** And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. **23** And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. **24** And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his youngest son had done unto him. **25** And he said: Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. **26** And he said: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be their servant. **27** God enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be their servant[130].

Although Noah's curse in the Bible concerns only Canaan (without any mention of other sons of Ḥām's) and does not imply any kind of physical change either in Ḥām or his son(s), some late Jewish and early Christian interpretations, that were eventually largely accepted in Islamic culture, extended that curse to the whole of Ḥām's progeny, including Cush and his alleged descendants: the Sūdān[131]. In this framework, Noah's curse was often seen in Medieval Islamic culture as the explanation for both the Sūdān's dark complexions and their allegedly natural, or better said, divinely ordered, "enslavability". Quite an early expression of the Hamitic hypothesis was found, according to third/ninth century Baghdad intellectual Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), in first century Arab writer Wahb b. Munabbih (d. before 110/728):

> Ḥām, son of Noah (Nūḥ) was a white man, handsome in his face and his complexion. God changed Ḥām's color following the curse (on him) by his father Noah. Ḥām left (his father), followed by his sons […] They gave origin to the Sūdān. […] Ḥām had generated Kūsh, Kanʿān, and Fūṭ. The latter […] settled in Hind and Sind, that his posterity populated. As for

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[130] *The Hebrew Bible in English according to the JPS 1917 Edition*, Genesis 9 : 18-27, http://www.mechon-mamre.org/e/et/et0109.htm). Last accessed on September, 5th, 2018.
[131] For an updated comprehensive approach to different theories on the origins and development of such traditions, see Goldenberg 2003.

> Kush and Kanʿan, the following races of Sūdān descended from them: Nūba, Zandj, Fuzān (ou Ḳarān), Zaghāwa, Ḥabasha, Ḳibt (Copts) and Barbar[132].

In third/ninth century, the Hamitic hypothesis was overtly rejected by the great writer al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869). In his *Fahkr al-Sūdān ʿalā al-Baydān* ("The Boasts of the Dark-Skinned Ones over the Light-Skinned Ones"), al-Jāḥiẓ provides a full-fledged naturalistic explanation of differences in skin color and physical complexion among populations, which he attributes to the peculiarities of locality, such as water, soil and the proximity and intensity of the sun[133].

In the following centuries, however, the Hamitic hypothesis apparently remained mainstream, although the "climatic" one was supported by some important intellectuals, such as the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn al-Jawzī (d. ca. 597/1200), who also emphasized that differences among Muslims only depend on their morals and not on their outward appearances[134], and the "proto-sociologist" Ibn Khaldūn (d.808/1406), who worked out a more complex climatic theory than al-Jāḥiẓ[135].

6. The "Ethiopian exception"

6.1. Complex Views on "Ethiopians" in Late Mamluk and Ottoman Times

As far as non-Muslim "Ethiopians" (*Ḥabasha*) were specially concerned, various ethnic, social and religious factors interplayed in producing different and sometimes conflicting representations in Muslim "collective imagery". On the one hand, the image of the *Ḥabasha* benefitted from well-known traditions on mostly favorable attitudes that their ancient countrymen would have shown to Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions, both in Mecca and Medina (conversion of Bilāl and some other Ethiopian slaves) and in *Bilād al-Ḥabasha* itself, especially for stories about the Negus's friendly welcome and protection of Muslim "refugees" in 614-615 and his alleged conversion to Islam[136]. On the other hand, the *Ḥabasha* were also considered to be a sub-grouping of "Blacks" (*Sūdān*) and their image was thus affected by derogatory stereotypes concerning this broader category. In case of *Ḥabasha* slaves, moreover, their social image was also deeply influenced by such negative presumptions as those expressed in the slave proverbs that we examined above. In some writers, such tension between positive and negative representations resulted in what may be called an "exceptionalist" attitude, meaning that Ethiopians were credited

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[132] Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-maʿārif*, quoted in Cuoq 1975, p. 41. On Wahb b. Munabbih, see Miquel 1967, p. 30, n. 5; *EI¹*, IV, 1142.
[133] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Fakhr al-Sūdān*, ed. 1964, p. 177, quoted and transl. In Muhammad 1985, p. 48-49.
[134] See Muhammad 1985, p. 52-56.
[135] See Cuoq 1975, p. 358-360.
[136] See Cuoq 1981, p. 23-35; Muhammad 1985, p. 61; Ullendorff, "Djabart." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition.*

with an exceptional standing among dark-skinned people, but in the framework of a general preference for light-skinned people over all other human groups. This was the case, in particular, with some authors from ninth/fourteenth and tenth/sixteenth century, such as Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, Ibn ʿAbd al-Bāqī and ʿAlī Ibn Muṣṭafā. Their works do provide us with valuable indications for better contextualizing al-Munāwī's narrative on Yāqūt as an Ethiopian slave.

6.2. Al-Suyūṭī and The Extolling of Ethiopians: an "Exceptionalist" Attitude?

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī was quite a prolific writer in different religious sciences. Although his short biography of Yāqūt does not contain any reference to slaves and/or "Blacks", al-Suyūṭī's ideas on such issues are expressed in several works, some of which are specially dealing with dark-skinned people[137]. Needless to say, proper appreciation of these ideas would require in-depth analysis of al-Suyūṭī's wide and varied a literary production[138]. However, some elements in his works seem to show what may be called an "exceptionalist" attitude towards "Ethiopians". In his *Rafʿ sha'n al-ḥubshān* ("The Extolling of Ethiopians"), in particular, al-Suyūṭī's praises the merits that God bestowed on *Ḥabasha* and enhances some outstanding Ethiopian figures in Muslim history, but this does not imply any idea of equality among different ethnic groups. On the contrary, al-Suyūṭī opens his book stating that differences among populations depend on God's preference for some of them ("Praise be to Allah Who preferred some people to others"[139]) and he explicitly supports the Hamitic hypothesis:

> As for what Ibn al-Jawzī denied [meaning that Noah's curse on Ham caused his descendants to become "black"], Ibn Jarīr (al-Ṭabarī) published it in his History […] on the authority of Ibn Isḥāq[140].

6.3. Ibn ʿAbd al-Bāqī : Populations' Disparity as God's Eternal Decree

Roughly a century after al-Suyūṭī, a clear-cut "exceptionalist" attitude is expressed in a work "on the Good Qualities of the Ethiopians", written in 991/1583-1584 by the jurist Ibn ʿAbd al-Bāqī al-Bukhārī al-Makkī. This treatise, "providing evidence of the merits of the melancholy and the cheerful Ethiopians, the slave-girls […] and the male servants, who themselves are the eminent

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[137] On this point, see Muhammad 1985, p. 57-58.

[138] An interesting research on this issue has been presented by Yoshuaa Van Patel (*Al-Suyūṭī On the Relative Value of Skin Color*) in the 2014 Congress of the School of Mamluk Studies in Venice (http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/SMS_conference-2014_program.pdf). Unfortunately, the paper had not been published yet while I wrote the present article.

[139] See Muhammad 1985, p. 58

[140] Suyūṭī, *Rafʿ sha'n al-ḥubshān,* quoted in English translation by Hunwick & Troutt Powell 2002, p. 41. In a completely different kind of work, the *Nuzhat al-ʿUmr,* al-Suyūṭī states his preference for light-skinned persons in even harsher terms. However, the nature of this book (a compilation of verses of different poets on praise and satire of women of different complexions) is such that no "serious" indication may seemigly be drawn from it, works of this kind being conceived of as pure literary "divertissements" in the cultivated *milieu*-s of the time. On this point, see Muhammad 1985, p. 59-60.

amongst the servants" is dedicated to the Sharif (governor) of Makka, Abū al-Naṣr Ḥusayn Ibn Barakāt, because "most of his slaves (ʿabīd), eunuchs (khadam) and attendants (mulāzimūn) are honorable Ethiopians". The first lines of the book are worth quoting:

> Praise be to Allāh who created man from a clay of moulded mud and preferred some of them to others. The disparity between them was like the distance between the sky and the earth. Each group [however] praises and pleases [Allāh]. […] He made them servants and masters, rulers and ruled. Allāh distinguished some of the descendants of Noah […] with prophethood and mastership (khilāfa) and He predestined (kataba) servitude (ʿubūdiyya) and slavery (istirqāq) for some of them until the Day of Resurrection. So there is no amendment nor recension to His decree. But He blessed some of the servants (mawālī) with distinction by which they became masters (mawālī). He distinguished a group of Ethiopians with grace (saʿāda), leadership (siyāda) and faith – like Luqmān the Sage, Bilāl, Shuqrān, al-Najāshī, Mihjaʿ[141] and others who believed (in Him) and adhered (to Islam)[142].

Within such theoretical framework, the author's praise of some exceptional individuals or groups distinguished by God with special graces from among the vast mass of the populations predestined to servitude and slavery, is nothing but a confirmation of such divinely ordered social organization.

6.4. ʿAlī Ibn Muṣṭafā: Exceptionalism and Social Mobility

Such "exceptionalist" representations as those we mentioned right above were playing a complex social function. On the one hand, they provided "servants" with ideological justifications for the discriminations they suffered, thus making them more ready to accept their purported "destiny" in the context of an allegedly divinely-ordered unbalance of powers between different human groups. On the other hand, those representations also stimulated "servants" to actively participate in the unequal social fabric, by providing them with some models of acceptable "social mobility" inside the established order. In this framework, narratives on exceptional individuals from among the "predestined servants" were working as "success stories" in which one's (material and/or spiritual) emancipation was achieved by way of full compliance with the established social and religious rules. At times, a "success story" of this kind could even concern to the very dedicacee of the book: at the end of tenth/sixteenth century, for instance, ʿAlī Ibn Muṣṭafā dedicates his Mir'at al-Ḥubush fī l-uṣūl ("Mirroring of the Ethiopians in the [Religious] Sources") to the "the most generous of them [the Ethiopians] in the service of Constantinople" meaning "His Eminence Muṣṭafā Aghā b. ʿAbd al-Manār[143] who is honored with service to the greatest of the Ottomans: […] the Sultan of Sultans […] Aḥmad Khān"[144].

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[141] Luqmān, mentioned in the Qurān, is traditionally described as an Ethiopian contemporary to Prophet David; some authors mention him as a prophet. Shuqrān and Mihjaʿ were servants/clients (mawālī) of the Prophet Muḥammad and ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb respectively, and both fought at the battle of Badr. See Muhammad 1985, p. 61, p. 72, n. 69.

[142] Ibn ʿAbd al-Bāqī al-Bukhārī al-Makkī, al-Ṭirāz al-manqūsh fī maḥāsin al-ḥubush, ms. Baghdad, Khazā'in Kutub al-Awqāf, N°. 3031, fols 1a-3b, quoted in English translation in Muhammad 1985, p. 60-61.

[143] This was al-Hajj Mustafa Agha, the Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman harem under Sultan Ahmed I. See Hathaway 2018, ch. 5 and Tezcan 2007.

7. Al-Munāwī's Attitude on Ethiopians: Between Exceptionalism and Moral Equality?

As we saw before (Section 4.2), al-Munāwī's narrative on Yāqūt may certainly be classified as a "slave success story", especially because of the intimate connection al-Munāwī establishes between Yāqūt's enslavement and his predestination to become Shaykh al-Mursī's disciple and a Sufi master in his own right. Nevertheless, some elements of this narrative, such as the attitudes Yāqūt is attributed in his confrontations with the sharīfs and the Sulṭan, induce us to further elaborate on al-Munāwī's ideas on "blackness" and "slavery". Indeed, such elements suggest that al-Munāwī was contesting widespread derogatory representations of "Blacks" and advocating for priority of ethics over ethnic, genealogical and social distinctions. In this framework, al-Munāwī seems to consider the slave-master relationship as an essentially "pedagogical" one, focused on the slave's spiritual and religious education. In fact, he stresses al-Mursī's engagement in educating Yāqūt since the very beginning of their relationship:

> The shaykh educated (*rabbā*) him (Yāqūt) and initiated him to the Way (*sallaka-hu)*, then he authorized him (*adhana-hu*) to provide spiritual education to others (*tarbiyya*)[145].

By such description, al-Munāwī does not only show how the master-slave relationship between al-Mursī and Yāqūt gradually evolved into a shaykh-disciple one, but he also implicitly criticizes widespread assumptions against slave education (such as those mentioned by Sersen: see above, Section 3.3) .

In this light, even al-Munāwī's account on Yāqūt's marriage with al-Mursī's daughter might carry a "sociological" meaning. In fact, emancipated slaves were not infrequently married to their ex-owner's daughters[146], in order to mark their "affiliation" to the family. Therefore, in attributing Shaykh al-Mursī with the decision to marry his daughter to Yāqūt, the author does not only reinforce the latter's legitimization as al-Mursī's spiritual heir, but he also implicitly depicts al-Mursī's relationship to Yāqūt as an "ideal" master-slave relationship.

Indeed, the two dimensions of al-Mursī's mastership on Yāqūt (meaning the "social" one and the "spiritual" one) tend to overlap in al-Munāwī's narrative. In other words, focusing on Yāqūt's enslavement, al-Munāwī was not merely valorizing a hitherto neglected dimension of the shaykh's

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[144] ʿAlī Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Mirʾat al-Ḥubush fī l-uṣūl*, Ms. London, British Museum, Department of Oriental Books and Manuscripts, Or. 11226, fols. 1a-4b, quoted in English translation by Muhammad 1985, p. 63-65. Tezcan 2007 focuses on the works by ʿAlī Ibn Muṣṭafā (also known as Mullah Ali) as key sources on "The Politics of Race in the Early 17th-Century Ottoman Empire".

[145] Munāwī [1994], p. 72.

[146] Munāwī [1994], p. 72.

biography. Rather, he was both providing his contemporaries with a "successful enslavement story" (working as a model for proper pedagogical master-slave relationships) and stating his own viewpoint on the relative value of genealogy and morals in "making" the true honorable person.

8. Changes in Yāqūt's Images In Mamluk and Ottoman Sources: Some (Non)-Conclusive Remarks.

The present survey of Mamluk and early Ottoman Egyptian sources on Shaykh Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī, ranging from Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allah (d. 709/1309) and Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh (fl. 720/1320) to al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1622), shows that the process of Yāqūt's "sanctity building" was far from being uncontested, due to both internal competition for spiritual leadership within the Sādhilī network and external criticism from anti-Ṣūfī or at least anti-Shādhlī circles. Such tensions resulted in different and competing narratives about Yāqūt's spiritual rank and maybe even about his religio-juridical "orthodoxy". Of course, only part of these conflicting narratives can be reconstructed on the grounds of the documents available nowadays, and this should make us all the more cautious on possible historical meaning of such differences. For instance, what may appear, at first glance, as mere "innovation" by a certain author with regard to earlier narratives known to us, might actually reflect older traditions no longer available (or still unknown) to us.

With these epistemological precautions in mind, it seems however possible to divide the sources analyzed in this paper into three main groups, according to their attitudes towards Yāqūt:

(1) properly "hagiographic" descriptions: Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, Ibn Baṭṭūta, al-Yāfiʿ, Ibn al-Mulaqqin, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Iyās, al-Shaʿrānī and al-Munāwī;

(2) "problematic" and/or unfavorable attitudes: the witnesses emanating from Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allah and his immediate entourage, as well as the reports on the "affaire Ibn al-Labbān" provided by Mūsā al-Yūsufī and by Ibn Kathīr;

(3) somehow "neutral" sources, providing "biographical" rather than "hagiographic" information on Yāqūt, such as al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī.

Beyond this division, a major cleavage is to be observed in the source "stratigraphy" between the fragmentary information scattered in texts pertaining to the Mamluk layer and the full-fledged bio-hagiographic narratives provided in the Ottoman layer. Namely, in al-Shaʿrānī's and al-Munāwī's accounts, which have shaped the "mainstream" hagiographic image of Shaykh Yāqūt until now.

In this framework, al-Munāwī's focus on Yāqūt's condition as a "(Black) Ethiopian slave", which since became part and parcel of the Shaykh's hagiographic vulgata, also provides us with

some most interesting insights into social representations on slavery and phenotypic diversity circulating in Medieval Egypt.

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