

# *Tarfiq* versus *Tazyiq*. On a Rare Sufi Term in Ibn Baṭṭūṭā and Jewish-Muslim Interactions in Medieval Egypt

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## *Abstract:*

The present paper focuses on two variant readings (*tarfiq* vs. *tazyiq*) of a rare Sufi term employed by Ibn Baṭṭūṭā (d. 1377) in his famous travelogue (*Rihla*) to describe the “head between knees” Sufi practice. Indeed, evidence in support of the reading *tazyiq* was found by Paul Fenton (1990) in a thirteenth-century Judeo-Arabic text emanating from the Egyptian Jewish Sufi circle of Avraham Maimonides (d. 1237). However, specialists of Ibn Baṭṭūṭā have not taken full advantage from Fenton’s finding until now. In this framework, the present paper has two main objectives: (1) reconsidering the *tarfiq* vs. *tazyiq* dilemma on the historical background of textual studies on the *Rihla* and supporting Fenton’s choice in favor of *tazyiq*; (2) interpreting Ibn Baṭṭūṭā’s references to this Sufi posture, in the light of Jewish and Islamic mystical literature, and of the socio-religious context of Medieval Egypt, with special focus on the Islamic Sufi group of the Shādhiliyya and their attitudes towards Jews and Judaism.

*Keywords:* Jewish-Muslim Relationships, Medieval Egypt, Sufi Technical Terminology, Textual Studies on *Rihlat* Ibn Baṭṭūṭā

## 1. Introduction\*

Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Baṭṭūṭā (703/1304-779/1377), probably the most famous traveller in the history of Arabic literature, was deeply interested in Sufism, i.e. the multifaceted complex of spiritual and social doctrines and practices that in Islamic tradition is named *taṣawwuf* and in the West is conventionally described as ‘Islamic mysticism’.<sup>1</sup>

\* I wish to express my deep gratitude to Prof. Fenton for reviewing my article and sending me some most valuable commentaries that I published entirely in a footnote at the end of par. 2.4.

<sup>1</sup> This definition is now challenged by several scholars, contesting the ‘mystical’ nature of Sufism and/or the ‘transferability’ of the very notion of ‘mysticism’ to Islamic contexts.

In informing ‘his’ writer Ibn Juzayy (d. 758/1357) on his twenty-five-year-long ‘travel’ (*riḥla*) around the world, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa represents himself as a great visitor of living and dead saints, collecting miraculous and moralizing stories about them and joining them and/or their followers in Sufi ceremonies. In particular, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa also claims he received the ‘Sufi robe’ (*khirqat al-taṣawwuf*) from a shaykh of the *ṭarīqa* ‘way’ Rifā‘iyya in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

This ‘mystical dimension’ of the book, though remarked by many scholars both in the West and in the Arab world,<sup>3</sup> has not been the object of systematic investigation until now.

However, the *Riḥla* is with no doubt a most valuable source for the history of Sufi figures, practices and institutions – including Sufi technical terms (*iṣṭilāḥāt ṣūfiyya*) – all over the Islamic world in the second quarter of eight/fourteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

In particular, in a section of the book concerning some of the righteous people (*al-ṣāliḥīn*) he met with in Alexandria in the year 726/1326,<sup>5</sup> Ibn Baṭṭūṭa describes a special Sufi posture, consisting in putting one’s head ‘between (lit. ‘upon’) one’s knees’, and he labels it by so rare a word that this gave rise to two variants in manuscripts: *tarfiq* vs. *tazyiq*.

Both terms having long appeared to be *hapax-es* in Sufi vocabulary, scholars have greatly hesitated between the two options, and they are still hesitating nowadays (see below).

An excellent presentation of these positions is in Hofer (2015: 3-7). Though appreciating the heuristic value of such critics, in this paper I however do refer to Sufism as ‘Islamic mysticism’, in line with the approach of many Western and Arab scholars as well. Excellent arguments in favor of such approach are provided by Sara Sviri’s in the following text: “I do not wish to invent a neologism to replace ‘mysticism’ neither do I see much point in substituting it with ‘spirituality’, ‘piety’, ‘devotion’ and similar alternatives. True: both Arabic and Hebrew lack a home-grown term for this discipline - and scholars of (so-called) mystical texts and phenomena in these fields are, no doubt, aware of this. It should also be noted that modern Arabic has borrowed the term *tasawwuf* in rendering what in European languages is named mysticism. But regardless of its genealogy and derivation, and in spite of its terminological shortcomings, I consider mysticism a useful term for pointing to certain human attitudes *vis-a-vis* the sacred and the extraordinary. [...] Therefore, I shall assume the understanding that mysticism is a current within religions and cultures associated with voluntary efforts aimed at gaining an intensified experience of the sacred,” Sviri (2012: 19-20).

<sup>2</sup> See Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1987a: 80).

<sup>3</sup> In particular, some important remarks on this subject are found in a work by Ross E. Dunn (Dunn 1986, 23-25) and in Talāl Ḥarb’s edition of the *Riḥla* (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987a: 17, 20).

<sup>4</sup> The detailed Indexes provided by Talāl Ḥarb in his edition of the *Riḥla* (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987a) show the impressive number of *shaykh*-s, shrines, tombs, and of Sufi lodges (*zāwiya*-s, *khānqā*-s, *ribāṭ*-s) visited by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, as well as the high number of Sufi technical terms used by him.

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Baṭṭūṭa arrived at Alexandria “on the first day of (the month of) Jumādā al-Ulā [726 AH]”, that is April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1326. See Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1987a: 39).

Indeed, virtually conclusive evidence in support of one of the two variants (namely, *tazyīq*) was provided by Paul Fenton in the early 1990s, in the framework of his comparative studies on the ‘head between knees’ posture in Jewish and Islamic Sufi literature.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, specialists of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa do not seem to have taken full advantage from Fenton’s finding until now, probably because most scholars in Islamic studies have little propensity to cross the ‘disciplinary boundaries’ with Judeo-Arabic studies.

The present paper has two main objectives. Firstly, it reconsiders the *tarfiq* vs. *tazyīq* dilemma on the background of a short ‘history’ of textual studies on the *Rihla* and of Fenton’s ‘extra-textual’ evidence in favor of *tazyīq*. Secondly, this paper takes the reading *tazyīq* as a starting point for inquiring into the historical meanings of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s reference to the concerned Sufi posture, with special focus on some Sufi networks in Late Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Egypt and their possible attitudes towards Jews and Judaism.

## 2. *The tarfiq versus tazyīq dilemma: an historical perspective*

### 2.1 *Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s ‘Travel’ through time: The complex ‘making’ of a text*

The *Rihlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭa* was one of the first monuments of Arabic literature to arouse scholarly interest in the West. The *editio princeps* of the complete work, including a French translation alongside, was published by Charles Defrémery and Beniamino Raffaello Sanguinetti as early as 1853.<sup>7</sup> However, several sections of the text had been studied by pioneering orientalists (such as Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, Ludwig Gotthard Kosegarten, Johan Ludwig Burckhardt) since the beginnings of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, two partial translations (one into English and one into Portuguese), both based on abridged Arabic versions of the *Rihla*, had been published, respectively, by Samuel Lee in 1829<sup>9</sup> and by José Santo Antonio de Moura in 1840.<sup>10</sup> Also, in the decade 1843-1852, that is immediately before the publication of the *editio princeps*, several portions of the ‘original’ longer version, based on different manuscripts, had been translated into French by such scholars as William de Slane, Édouard Dulaurier, Auguste Cherbonneau and Charles Defrémery himself.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Fenton (1990, 1992, and 1994).

<sup>7</sup> See Defrémery and Sanguinetti (1853).

<sup>8</sup> See Defrémery and Sanguinetti (1853, I: XIII-XV).

<sup>9</sup> See Lee (1829); also Defrémery and Sanguinetti (1853, I: XVI-XVII).

<sup>10</sup> See Moura (1840); also Defrémery and Sanguinetti (1853, I: XVII-XVIII).

<sup>11</sup> For all of these works, see Defrémery and Sanguinetti (1853, I: XVI).

The edition by Defrémery and Sanguinetti was based on collation of manuscripts N° 907 to 911 of the *Fonds supplémentaire arabe* (*Suppl. ar.*) of the Bibliothèque Impériale in Paris (now, Ar. 2287 to 2291 of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France).<sup>12</sup>

One of these witnesses, *Suppl. ar.* 907 (now Ar. 2291), dated to the month of Safar 757 H / February-March 1356 CE and had already been identified by de Slane (1843: 184) as an autograph written by Ibn Juzayy under Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's dictation. Unfortunately, however, it lacked all of the first section of the book. As for the other witnesses, they all were much more recent than the autograph, and only two of them carried virtually the whole of the text.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, Defrémery and Sanguinetti simply mentioned the existence of two other manuscripts of the *Rihla*, which had been studied by other scholars, but which they had not been able to see. These were, namely, a manuscript from the library of Algerian scholar Sī Ḥammūna Ibn Lafghūn in Constantine, dated 1160 H/1747 CE, that had been used by Auguste Cherbonneau, and a manuscript belonging to Spanish Orientalist Pascual de Gayangos (1809-1897), that had been largely used by Rheinart Dozy.<sup>14</sup>

On these grounds, far from adopting a Lachmannian approach (that would have implied, among other things, an attempt to reconstruct possible genealogical relationships between witnesses), the editors followed traditional methods of 'Humanistic' text edition: The autograph being incomplete, they chose what they considered to be the "most complete and most correct" of the other witnesses as their main reference, though collating it with the other copies when possible, and substituting it with the autograph for the sections covered by the latter.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The manuscript are described in Defrémery and Sanguinetti (1853 I: XX-XXV), whereas de Slane (1883-1895: 811) provides their current classifications. Some remarks on each of the five manuscripts are also found in de Slane (1883-1895: 401).

<sup>13</sup> *Suppl. ar.* 908 (now Ar. 2290) was incomplete and dated to 1134 AH/1721 CE; *Suppl. ar.* 909 (now Ar. 2287), carried the 'sub-title' *Tuhfat al-nuzzār fi gharā'ib al-amṣār wa-'a-jā'ib al-asfār*, which de Slane considered to be "apocryphal" (de Slane 1883-1895 : 401) and that was however accepted by Defrémery and Sanguinetti (1853) and all subsequent scholars; *Suppl. ar.* 910 (now Ar. 2289) dated to 1180 H/ 1766 CE and it was "the most complete and correct" for Defrémery and Sanguinetti (1853, I: XXIV); *Suppl. ar.* 911 (now Ar. 2288) was affected by some lacunas, and its date was uncertain: the editors inclined to see it as ancient, whereas de Slane (1883-1895 : 401) dated it to the seventeenth century CE.

<sup>14</sup> See Defrémery and Sanguinetti (1853, I: XXV-XXVI).

<sup>15</sup> "De tous les manuscrits que nous avons eu à notre disposition, le n. 910 est, sans contredit, le plus complet et le plus correct. C'est celui que nous avons pris, le plus souvent, comme base de notre édition, pour toute la première partie, nous nous réservant de lui substituer le n. 907, c'est-à-dire l'autographe, quand nous arriverons au second livre. Nous l'avons collationné soigneusement avec les trois autres, mais nous n'avons introduit dans le texte les leçons de ces manuscrits, que quand elles nous sont parues plus correctes ou plus complètes". Defrémery and Sanguinetti (1853, I: XXIV).

In doing this, the editors were both keeping on with traditional methods, and somehow anticipating what Romance philologist Joseph Bédier (1864-1938) eventually theorized as the method of the ‘good manuscript’ (*bon manuscrit*).<sup>16</sup>

All this means that Defrémery and Sanguinetti made their choices between variant readings mostly according to their personal discernment (*iudicium*).

Also, due to the publisher’s policies, they were not allowed to record all the variants found in the manuscripts they had at hand: only a very few ones, considered to be of special importance, were published, in a separate section at the end of each volume.<sup>17</sup>

However, the edition by Defrémery and Sanguinetti has been the main reference for studies on the *Rihla* until now, although some other manuscripts have been used, over time, for revising special points of the text, as it was the case with Gibb (1958) and Tresso (2008).

For these reasons, in the present paper the edition by Defrémery and Sanguinetti has been taken as the starting point for a short ‘history’ of what might be called ‘the *tarfiq* vs. *tazyiq* dilemma’.

## 2.2 *Tarfiq* or *tazyiq*? The emergence of the textual problem

In the edition of the *Rihla* by Defrémery and Sanguinetti, the word adopted for ‘putting one’s head between knees’ in the passage on Shaykh Khalifa is *al-tarfiq* (Arabic script الترفيق, where ال is the definiteness article *al*: ‘the’). The relevant passage reads as follows:

Among them [i.e., the pious men Ibn Baṭṭūta met in Alexandria, see above], there was the *imām*, learned in Islamic sciences (*‘ālim*), ascetic (*zāhid*), submissive (to God; *khāshi‘*) and scrupulous (*wari‘*) Khalifa, [whom God used to make] the receiver of mystical unveilings (*ṣāhib al-mukāshafāt*).<sup>18</sup> A miracle (*karāma*) occurring to him: A

<sup>16</sup> On Lachmann’s and Bédier’s methods, respectively, see Timpanaro and Most (2005); Bédier (1970).

<sup>17</sup> See Defrémery and Sanguinetti (1853, I: XXIV-XXV).

<sup>18</sup> All of these adjectives are most likely used here in a Sufi technical meaning. In particular, *zāhid* should be understood in the light of traditional Sufi interpretations of *zuhd* (‘asceticism’) as an inward attitude rather than an outward practice: it means ‘having the world in one’s hands, not in one’s heart’, disregarding the concerned person’s ‘material’ conditions. Indeed, Sufis do use the same words *zāhid* and *zuhd* also when referring to ‘exterior’ forms of ‘asceticism’, but with a polemic nuance that is evidently not present here. In the same vein, the term *khāshi‘* (‘humble, submissive’) alludes to one’s inward attitude towards God. As for the term *wari‘* (lit.: ‘scrupulous’), it refers to the technical notion of *wara‘* as “scrupulousness in discerning between the permitted and the prohibited” (Knysh 2000: 357). For this reason, I preferred to provide a ‘literal’ translation for this term, along with a ‘technical’ explanation, rather than following the

reliable person (*ba'd al-thiqāt*) among his companions (*aṣḥāb*) gave me the following information: "Shaykh Khalifa, saw the Messenger of God (*rasūl Allāh*, i.e. Prophet Muḥammad) - God's peace and blessing upon him! - in a dream (*fī l-naʿwm*). The latter told him: 'O Khalifa, visit us!'. So, he (Khalifa) traveled to the Noble city of Medina (*al-madīnat al-sharīfā*) and arrived at the Glorious Mosque (*al-masjid al-karīm*, containing Muḥammad's grave). He entered the mosque from the Gate of Peace (*Bāb al-salām*) and saluted (*ḥayyā*) the mosque, then gave the word of peace (*sallama 'alā*) to the Messenger of God [...]. Then, he sat down leaning against a column of the mosque and he put his head between (lit. 'upon') his knees (*waḍā'a ra'sa-hu 'alā rukbatay-hi*). This (posture) is called *al-tarfiq* among those who practice Sufism (*al-mutaṣawwifā*). When he raised his head, he found (before him) four loaves of bread, some jugs with milk (*laban*), and a plate with dates (*tamr*). He and his companions ate (from this). Then, he went back to Alexandria, and he did not make the pilgrimage that year".

(Defrémery and Sanguinetti 1853: 36-37)

Although the word *tarfiq* must have been a *hapax* for Defrémery and Sanguinetti (see below), they did not mention any variant for it and they adopted the same term, transliterated as *at-terfik*, in their French translation. All this indicates that they probably found no alternative reading in the manuscripts they had at hand. In this respect, it is worth noting that the autograph of Ibn Juzayy (*Suppl. ar.* 907) was of no use here, as it did not contain the relevant section of the book. Moreover, no alternative was available, seemingly, even in previously published translations of the *Rihla*: The relevant passage was absent from both Lee's and Moura's versions, based on abridged Arabic texts, whereas Cherbonneau adopted the word *et-terfiq*,<sup>19</sup> which indicates that also his source, i.e. the aforementioned manuscript of Constantine, must have read *al-tarfiq*.

On the other hand, Rheinart Dozy, who had shown his interest in the *Rihla* since early 1840s, relied on the manuscript of Gayangos,<sup>20</sup> which Defrémery and Sanguinetti had never seen (and which however, though judging

'mainstream' translation 'chaste' (see, for instance, Defrémery and Sanguinetti 1853: 36; Gibb 1958: 39) as such term would evoke a different set of meanings than those actually referred to by the Islamic notion of *warā'*. As for the phrase *ṣāḥib al-mukāshafāt*, it is worth noting that every mystical experience (in this case, *mukāshafa*: 'unveiling, direct witnessing of God', Knysh 2000: 356) is understood to happen only on God's initiative, the saint only being a 'passive agent'. Therefore, the word *ṣāḥib* here could not mean 'author' or 'maker' unless with reference to the merely apparent (and deceptive) level of 'second causes'. Accordingly, I translated this term as 'receiver', in order to make the underlying reasoning immediately evident for 'non-Sufi' readers.

<sup>19</sup> See Cherbonneau (1852, I: 153-154).

<sup>20</sup> Dozy specially relied upon the Gayangos manuscript when compiling his dictionary of Arabic clothes (where the manuscript is quoted in some sixty entries): "M. de Gayangos a eu la bonté de me prêter plusieurs de ses manuscrits, et l'on verra que c'est surtout l'excellent exemplaire des Voyages d'Ibn-Batoutah, que possède ce savant, qui m'a été d'une fort grande utilité. Sous plusieurs rapports, c'est un ouvrage de premier ordre". Dozy (1845: VII).

it only from some Dozy's mentions, they inclined to consider as "far from being always correct").<sup>21</sup> Indeed, it was precisely thanks to this manuscript that Dozy, in his famous *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, was able to provide an alternative to *tarfiq* in the relevant passage of the *Rihla*. In the entry devoted to the root RFQ, Dozy records the word *tarfiq* in quite skeptical terms:

Chez les Soufis, appuyer la tête sur les genoux, Bat. [= *Rihlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭa*] I, 37; mais je crois qu'il faut lire تزبيق [*tazyiq*], avec le man[uscrit] de M. de Gayangos, voyez sous زيقي II.

(Dozy 1881, I: 584)

In the entry ZYQ, he argues in favor of the variant *tazyiq* basing on comparison with another *locus criticus* he found in the book:

ZYQ (...) II [form]. Dans l'éd. de Bat. I, 37, on lit que الترفيق est un terme technique des Soufis qui signifie appuyer la tête sur les genoux. Dans le man[uscrit] de Gayangos (6v<sup>o</sup>), c'est التزييق et je crois que cette leçon est la véritable, car plus loin (9v<sup>o</sup>) on rencontre encore trois fois le verbe زيق [zayyaqa], suivi des mots "et releva la tête". L'édition [de Defrémery & Sanguinetti], p. 64, a زَعَق [za' aqa] "il poussa un cri", mais l'action d'appuyer la tête sur les genoux convient mieux à l'ensemble du récit, et un copiste aurait changé difficilement le verbe زَعَق, qui est fort connu, en زيق. On conçoit fort bien, au contraire, qu'ayant oublié l'explication donnée par l'auteur, quelques pages auparavant, du terme technique التزييق, il n'ait pas compris le verbe زيق et qu'il ait substitué زَعَق.

(Dozy 1881, I: 619)

This second passage of the *Rihla* mentioned by Dozy deserves close consideration. It concerns a miracle attributed to thirteenth century Shaykh Jamāl al-dīn al-Sāwī (fl. 1220s),<sup>22</sup> whose shrine Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited in Damietta, and whom he described as the founder of the Qalandars (*Qarandariyya*), an 'unruly' Sufi group of Eastern origin whose followers were known for such unconventional habits as shaving off their beards.<sup>23</sup>

In Defrémery and Sanguinetti, the verb under discussion reads *za' aqa* ("he cried"): the relevant passage goes as follows:

It is said that when he (Shaykh Jamāl al-dīn al-Sāwī) came to the city of Damietta he used to stay permanently (*lazīma*) in the cemetery (*maqbara*). In Damietta there was a qādī known as Ibn al-'Amīd. One day, this qādī went out (of the town) for

<sup>21</sup> See Defrémery and Sanguinetti (1853 I: XXVI).

<sup>22</sup> On Jamāl al-Dīn al-Sāwī, see Gibb (1958: 39, fn. 60); Papas (2015: 21-24).

<sup>23</sup> The group being in deed much more ancient than Ibn Baṭṭūṭa believed, the Persian Shaykh al-Sāwī was not their 'founder' but probably one of the first Qalandars who moved to Egypt. On this group, see Yazici, *Ḳalandariyya*.

the funeral of one of the notables, and saw Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn [al-Sāwī] in the cemetery. He said to him: “You are the innovating (*mubtadi*)<sup>24</sup> shaykh”. He replied: “And you are the ignorant qādī (*al-qādī al-jāhil*). You are riding on your mule among the tombs, although you (should) know that dead persons deserve the same respect (*ḥurma*) as the living ones”. The qādī said to him: “Worse than this is your shaving off your beard”. “Are you referring to me?”, said the shaykh; then he cried (*zā‘aqa*) and raised his head, and he had a magnificent black beard. The qādī and those who were with him were astonished, and he [respectfully] dismounted from his mule before the shaykh. The shaykh cried a second time and he had a fine white beard. Then he cried a third time, then he raised his head, and he had no beard at all, just as he was in his prior condition. The qādī kissed his hand (*qabbala yada-hu*), and became his disciple (*talammadha la-hu*).

(Defrémercy and Sanguinetti 1853, I: 63-64)

In this version, the action by which al-Sāwī prepares himself to perform the miracle (or, to be more accurate in a Sufi perspective, to ‘receive’ it from God) is described as a combination of the shaykh’s crying (*zā‘aqa*) and raising his head.

In Dozy’s opinion, however, such description would be less plausible than the one provided by the manuscript of Gayangos. There, the concerned verb reads *zayyaqa*, a word that Dozy interprets as ‘bowing one’s head to the knees’, in accordance with the meaning that the corresponding verbal noun *tazyiq* is given in the same manuscript of Gayangos (in the aforementioned passage concerning Shaykh Khalifa).

The resulting change in the representation of Shaykh al-Sawī’s action is shown by Gibb’s version of the relevant passage, based on Dozy’s amendment:

“Is it to me that you refer?” said the *shaykh*; then bowing his head to his knees he raised it again and lo! he had a magnificent black beard. The qādī was astonished, as were all those who were in his company, and he dismounted from his mule [as a mark of respect] to him. The shaykh then bowed his head a second time and lo! he had a fine white beard. Then he bowed his head a third time, and when he raised it again, he had no beard, just as he appeared to begin with.

(Gibb 1958: 23)

Needless to say, interpreting *zayyaqa* as ‘bowing one’s head to the knees’ in this passage would imply that, in turn, only the reading *tazyiq* (infinitive noun from *zayyaqa*) should be accepted for designating such practice in the passage on Shaykh Khalifa. Therefore, the two readings provided by Gayangos manuscript in the respective *loci critici* (i.e., *tazyiq* instead of *tarfiq*, and

<sup>24</sup> The term designates someone allegedly bringing forth a ‘blameful innovation’ (*bid’a*), that is a practice or doctrine not clearly supported by traditional Islamic jurisprudence. In this case, the supposed *bid’a* is the habit of shaving off one’s beard.

*zayyaqa* instead of *za‘‘aqa*) would corroborate each other in ‘producing’ a consistent set of meanings.

However, Dozy’s arguments were likely but not irrefutable. As for the *tazyiq* versus *tarfiq* issue, in particular, Dozy could not provide either lexicographic or codicological evidence. In fact, no parallel use of any of the concerned terms had been found in Sufi sources, and no study had been made on genealogical relationships between the available manuscripts of the *Rihla*, which might have provided a somewhat ‘objective’ basis for comparative analysis of text variants for the sections not ‘covered’ by Ibn Juzayy’s autograph.

Indeed, in choosing *tazyiq* instead of *tarfiq* in the passage on Shaykh Khalifa, Dozy could provide no better argument than internal parallelism with the reading *zayyaqa* that he had found in the passage concerning Shaykh al-Sāwī.

This implied two main flaws. On the codicological level, Dozy’s preference for *zayyaqa* over *za‘‘aqa* was ultimately based on the criterion of *lectio difficilior* (see Dozy 1881, I: 619), which is indeed a highly subjective argument. On the semantic level, the very interpretation of *zayyaqa* as ‘bowing one’s head to the knees’ was somehow grounded on the acceptance of *tazyiq* as the proper reading for the term designating such posture in the passage on Shaykh Khalifa. That would be, somehow, a kind of circular reasoning.

In such conditions, the choice between the variants under discussion remained a matter of scholars’ personal taste and discernment. As a consequence, each of the options has found its own supporters until very recent times.

Gibb (1958: 23) chose *tazyiq* with the following justification: “The text [i.e., the edition by Defrémery and Sanguinetti] has *al-tarfiq*, which has been corrected by Dozy, *Suppl. aux dictionnaires arabes*, s.v.”. On the other hand, Tresso (2008: 22) opted for *tarfiq*, though mentioning the variant *tazyiq* in a footnote. As for the passage concerning Shaykh al-Sāwī, both Gibb (1958: 39) and Tresso (2008: 35) chose *zayyaqa*, based on Dozy’s arguments.

Arab scholars, too, divided on those variants. As an example, the edition by Talāl Ḥarb, published in Beirut in the year 1987, has *tazyiq* in the passage concerning Shaykh Khalifa (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987a: 42), whereas the edition by Muḥammad al-‘Aryān and Muṣṭafā al-Qaṣṣās, also published in Beirut in 1987, has *tarfiq* (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987b: 42). In the passage on Shaykh al-Sāwī, however, both editions have *za‘‘aqa* (see Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987a: 52; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987b: 53). Unfortunately, none of these two Arabic editions makes any mention of the respectively discarded variants.

### 2.3 A choice difficult to explain for

The aforementioned entries in Dozy’s *Supplement* let apart, it seems that neither Western nor Arab scholars provided any detailed discussion on the variants at stake. However, on the grounds of known historical and lexicographic sources, it is possible to make some speculations on the reasons that

might have pushed different scribes and scholars to choose *tazyīq* or *tarfiq* respectively.

### 2.3.1 Possible reasons behind the choice of *tazyīq*

The word *tazyīq* (II form verbal noun from the root ZYQ) was considered a *hapax* before 1990 (i.e., before Fenton published his finding), at least with regard to Sufi technical ‘vocabulary’.

Indeed, an important group of meanings connected to the root ZYQ might have had an ‘intuitive’ connection with the practice described by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, or at least with the bodily part mainly involved in the concerned movement, that is the neck: in fact, the word *zīq* means, among other things, the hem of a garment, that is “the part, of a shirt, that surrounds the neck” (Lane 1863: 1278).<sup>25</sup>

Maybe this etymological connection had a share in Dozy’s preference for *tazyīq* over *tarfiq*, but anyhow he does not mention such an argument in the brief commentaries provided in the relevant entries of his *Supplément* (see Dozy 1881, I: 584, and I: 619).

For the sake of completeness, it may also be worth noting that a recent lexicographic source for Modern Egyptian Arabic does actually record the II form verb *zayyaqa*, but with the meaning of “(a door’s) creaking” (Hinds and Badawi 1986: 389). Such connection between the root ZYQ and the idea of a strident and disturbing sound was already attested in nineteenth century lexicons. In particular, al-Bustānī (1987: 387) noted that the word *zīq* was used “among the illiterate (‘*amma*)” – i.e., in ‘colloquial’ Arabic, ‘*amma*’ – to designate “the sound of a door’s opening” (*sawī faḥ al-bāb*). In Dozy (1881, I: 619), this same meaning of *zīq* is recorded (“Le cri d’une porte qui tourne sur ses gonds”), along with that of “rat’s squeaking” that Dozy found in *One Thousand and One Nights* (“Le cri du rat, de même que *mia-mia-ou* est le cri du chat”). In a similar vein, the term *zayyāq* (formed as a “profession-name” from the root ZYQ) designated someone ‘strumming’ a musical instrument (“*racleur*, mauvais jouer de violon,” Dozy 1881 I: 619).

Indeed, all these meanings are quite far from the one that Dozy attributed to *zayyaqa* (i.e. the reading found in Gayangos manuscript) in the anecdote on Shaykh Khalīfa.

Nonetheless, such meanings have a strong semantic affinity with the reading found in the manuscripts used by Defrémery and Sanguinetti, that is the verb *za‘aqa*, ‘to cry’.

<sup>25</sup> Lane actually drew such definition from the *Lisān al-‘arab* by the Medieval lexicographer Ibn Manẓūr (b. 630/1232, d. 711/1311): “*zīq*” *al-qamīṣi mā aḥaṭa bi l-‘unuq*” = “the *zīq* of a shirt (*qamīṣ*) is what [i.e., the part which] surrounds the neck”. Ibn Manẓūr (1883-1891: 1901).

In this light, it may be not unlikely that a copyist not expert in Sufi terminology might have understood *zayyaqa* as a colloquial term for ‘crying’ and therefore substituted it with what he considered to be its ‘literary’ equivalent *za‘‘aqa*.

### 2.3.2 Possible reasons behind the choice of *tarfiq*

On the one hand, the structure of *tarfiq* is morphologically justifiable as a II form *maṣḍar* (infinitive verbal noun) from the root RFQ.

On the other hand, the word as such is seemingly not attested either in medieval texts or Arabic dictionaries. Also, the semantic link between the root’s basic meanings (mostly connected to the ideas of ‘tenderness’ and/or ‘companionship’), and the ‘head between knees’ posture is not obvious.

However, according to classic dictionaries, the only known use of the II form verb from RFQ is precisely connected to the notion of ‘elbows/knees’: the idiomatic phrase *muraffaqat al-shāt* (مرفقة الشاة) usually designates a sheep or a goat having the fore legs white to the elbows (see Kazimirski 1860: 900), and Lane (1863: 1125-1126) indicates *tarzīq* “as the inf(itive) noun of the verb” implied in such phrase.

Therefore, this otherwise unattested II form of RFQ might be connected to much more common words from the same root, such as the noun *mirfaq*, ‘elbow’ (or/i.e. ‘a beast’s knee’) and the VIII form verb *irtafaqa*, usually said of someone ‘leaning on his/her elbows’ (see Lane 1863: 1126). Such connection might perhaps have mislead some scribes unaware of Sufi terminology into reading *tarfiq* instead of *tazyiq*.

Otherwise, in the light of frequent semantic affinities between II and IV forms of a same root, one might speculate that *raffaqal tarfiq* (II form) was used as synonymous to *arfaqal irfāq* (IV form) in the sense of ‘binding’ or ‘attaching’ something to something else (see the passive participle *murfaq*, ‘attachment’). In fact, in the posture under discussion the worshiper does ‘attach’ his bodily parts tightly together.

*In fine*, a third semantic dimension of the root RFQ might also be taken into account. As the I form verb *rafaqa* means, among other things, ‘providing help’, one might speculate that *raffaqa* (II) could have been used with the ‘causative’ meaning which is typical of the second form. So, with special reference to the concerned Sufi posture, which in both anecdotes of the *Rihla* is followed by God’s miraculous help towards the concerned shaykh, the word *tarfiq* might have meant ‘causing (God’s) help’, that is to say, in the self-denying Sufi perspective, ‘invoking God’s help with proper practices and an adequate inner attitude’.

Be that as it may, all of these speculations might be relevant only to the ‘historical’ problem of understanding possible reasons why different scribes and scholars over time opted for one or another of these variants.

As for the textual-critical problem of choosing the ‘proper’ variant, instead, a conclusive indication is provided by Paul Fenton’s finding discussed in the following paragraph.

#### 2.4 *A decisive discovery ... in a Judeo-Arabic text*

In an article published in 1990, specialist of Jewish and Muslim mystics Paul Fenton showed that the word *tazyīq* (or *tazayyuq*, according to different possible vocalizations of the script תזייק) was used as Sufi technical term in a Judeo-Arabic commentary on the Haftarat,<sup>26</sup> and with roughly the same meaning as in Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s *Rihla*.<sup>27</sup>

The anonymous author of this commentary was convincingly identified by Fenton with Egyptian Rabbi Ḥanan’el ben Shēmū’el (fl. around 1215 CE),<sup>28</sup> who was the father-in-law of Rabbi Avraham Maimonides (d. 1237) and followed him on the path of the so-called ‘Jewish Sufis’, an original pietist movement that has attracted a growing deal of scholarly interest in the last decades.<sup>29</sup>

In this light, the relevant passage is all the more interesting, as the Jewish author evokes the Muslim Sufi ‘head between knees’ practice in connection to the biblical narrative on Prophet Elijah’s bowing to the Lord on Mount Carmel:

And Elijah went up to the top of the Carmel, and he bowed himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees

(1 Kings 18: 42)

The Jewish author’s commentary goes as follows:

The verse “and he bowed himself” signifies that “he threw his person” [...] upon the ground in gratitude to God for that which He had wrought for Israel and destruction of God’s enemies, and to implore of Him that the rain fall. [...]. Thereafter Elijah seated himself and put his face between his knees, intending thereby to turn away his attention from all creation and devote his meditation solely to his present pursuit. The nations [= the Sufis, as Fenton explains] have taken this practice over from us and have adopted it and adorned themselves with it [i.e., claim they originated this practice]. They call this *tazayyuq*, i.e. the concealing of one’s face in the collar, i.e. the hem of one’s garment. (Judeo-Arabic Commentary to the Haftarat, translated in Fenton 1990: 49)

<sup>26</sup> This Commentary is preserved in British Museum manuscripts Or.2583 and Or. 2584. See Fenton (1990: 36).

<sup>27</sup> See Fenton (1990: 48).

<sup>28</sup> See Fenton (1990: 27-32).

<sup>29</sup> On this movement, see in particular Fenton (1981, 1987, 1991 and 1998). See also Loubet (2000, 2006); Hofer (2013, 2015); Russ-Fishbane (2013). For an overall introduction to relationships between Judaism and Sufism, see Fenton (2003).

On the one hand, this passage provides a most significant sample of the 'historiographic' paradigm produced by 'Jewish Sufis': in order to legitimize their 'Islamic-style' practices, they presented Muslim Sufis as the (unaware) continuators of practices of Jewish origin, which had been established by the prophets of Israel but had eventually fallen into oblivion and which, accordingly, Jews had now to restore by taking them back from Muslims.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, this passage is also crucial for the '*tarfiq* vs. *tazyiq*' dilemma' in Ibn Baṭṭūta. In fact, it shows that one of these two terms (namely, *tazyiq*) was actually used in Sufi technical language, and it even suggests an ethimological explanation for it, in connection to the word *ziq* ('collar, neckband of a garment').

Fenton's finding, therefore, provides a most valuable 'concrete' argument for preferring *tazyiq* over *tarfiq* in the passage concerning Shaykh Khalifa and,

<sup>30</sup> On this issue, I am gratefully indebted to Prof. Fenton for sending me the following comments, which provide most-updated information on his studies as well as most valuable suggestions for further research:

"It is quite possible that tazayyūq, 'the hiding of one's face in the hem of one's garment' during the Elijah posture is indeed of Jewish origin. It is an integral part of the Elijah discipline as indicated in I Kings 19:13 'And it came to pass when Elijah heard [the voice], he covered his face with his mantle.' This position is to be enacted every day in the morning prayer during tahanun (supplicatory prayer) in Qabbalistic ritual, according to which this was the teaching of Maimonides: 'During the 'falling on one's face' he should place his head between the knees facing the ground, as explained by Maimonides.' (Hayyim Vital, Sha'ar ha-kawwanōt, I, Jerusalem, 1988, p. 333a). However, Maimonides's formulation (Code, hilkhōt tefillah, V: 13) is rather vague and neither he nor his son Abraham specifically mention the Elijah posture. On the other hand, Moses Cordovero, Tefillah le-Mosheh, Premsyil, 1892, fol. 112a, as before him Maharil, Hilkhōt tefillah, in fine, mentioned the 'concealing of one's face' or 'eyes' during tahanun. Furthermore, I have found an early Qabbalistic source, a text by Ibn Siyyah, which mentions the Elijah posture as part of a discipline leading to contemplative vision: 'The Wise men of the Qabbalah ascend by an exalted way which leads upward and enter the flame of fire through the work of the Chariot, through a short but wide path, splendid and goodly through the mystery of the Orchard (Pardes). The latter is known to them and consists in attaining a state of physical divestment (le-hitbōded) by a method known to us in this science entailing the bowing of the head like a reed between the knees until one's physical perception is nullified by reason of the absence of one's senses. Thereupon the individual will perceive the supernal and eternal lights in a clear vision. It behoves his master to stand by him the first time so that one's hand remain firm and directs his senses to his aim to avoid his falling into error from that which meets his gaze.' Joseph b. Abraham Ibn Siyyah, Even ha-Shoham, Jerusalem, INL Ms. 80, fol. 1b-2a. (It is worth noting that this text is close in nature to the text attributed to Ibn 'Atā' Allāh in Miḥṣāḥ al-falāh). [For more on Ibn Siyyah's text, see Fenton (1992) and (1994)]. On the point of a possible 'Judeo-Sufi' interaction, I also think that one cannot dismiss a possible Christian mediation. The Elijah posture was also practiced by the monks of the Egyptian desert. It is worthwhile to search whether they also adopted 'the hiding of the face'. If so, they might have influenced the Sufis. There are many anecdotes in Sufi literature of contacts between monks and Sufi hermits, and even of visits to monasteries". (Paul Fenton, personal communication, July 2016).

by way of consequence, also for preferring *zayyaqa* over *za' aqa* in the passage concerning Shaykh al-Sāwī.

Conversely, comparison with Ibn Baṭṭūta's text might provide an indication for preferring the vocalization *tazyīq* over *tazayyuq* in Rav Hanan'el's commentary, as well as in other Jewish Sufi texts that were presented by Paul Fenton in his later studies on this practice.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. *The 'head between knees' practice and Jewish-Muslim interactions in Medieval Egypt*

The present section of this paper aims at investigating some possible historical implications of the use of words *tazyīq* and *zayyaqa* in the *Rihla*, in the light of the specific 'socio-religious' contexts in which these terms are evoked.

#### 3.1 *Ibn Baṭṭūta's references to Shaykh al-Sāwī and Shaykh Khalīfa*

Ibn Baṭṭūta's reference to the Qalandari Shaykh al-Sāwī is particularly interesting for chronological reasons. This master, in fact, lived roughly in the same epoch as Rav Hanan'el, that is the supposed author of the aforementioned Judeo-Arabic text. Therefore, although there is no 'positive' evidence of any contact between the Jewish mystic and the Qalandar shaykh, Ibn Baṭṭūta's anecdote proves however that *tazyīq* was actually practiced by some Muslim Sufis at the time of first Jewish Sufis. This, in turn, corroborates the assertion, made in the Judeo-Arabic text, that 'Non-Jews' (lit.: 'the Nations') were practicing this ritual, although it does not provide any indication on the ritual's actual origin.

However, also Ibn Baṭṭūta's reference to Shaykh Khalīfa might prove quite interesting in a Jewish-Muslim interaction perspective.

This shaykh, as suggested by Gibb (1958: 39), has most probably to be identified with Khalīfa Ibn 'Aṭīyya al-Iskandarānī (d. 734/1333 or 735/1335). This was a Mālikī jurist renowned for his piety and was the object of a laudative obituary in the *Durar al-Kāmina* by Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449).

There, Khalīfa is described as "a pious man and a jurist" (*al-rajul al-ṣāliḥ al-faqīh*), who followed the Mālikī *madhhab* and studied under such scholars

<sup>31</sup> The form *tazayyuq* is in Fenton (1990, 2013), the form *tazyīq* in Fenton (1992). Indeed, the word *tazayyuq* is not uncommon in classic lexicographic sources, but with definitely 'non-Sufi' meanings: it is mostly used as the verbal noun of V form verb *tazayyaqa(t)*, designating the act adorning oneself, and specially said of a woman. "A woman *tazayyaqat* - [infinitive :] *tazayyuq* - when she adorns herself and gets (well) dressed and applies *kohl* on her eyes (*tazayyaqat al-mar'a tazayyuq<sup>m</sup> idhā tazayannat wa-talabbasat wa-ktahalat*)". Ibn Manzūr (1883-1891: 1901).

as al-‘Izz al-Harrānī, Ibn Khaṭīb al-Mazza and Quṭb al-dīn al-Qaṣṭallānī, and then acted as a reputed teacher in Alexandria until he died (“on the fourteenth day of the month of Rabī‘ al-Awwal 734”, i.e. November, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1333).<sup>32</sup>

In point of fact, such description does only focus on the juridical dimension of Khālifa’s biography and does not provide any indication on his Sufi connections.

However, an implicit indication in this sense is the mention of Quṭb al-dīn al-Qaṣṭallānī, a jurist that is known, from other sources, for his Sufi propensities. In particular, Quṭb al-dīn would have been a great admirer of Shaykh Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), the eponymous master of the *ṭarīqa* Shādhiliyya.<sup>33</sup> This was a Sufi group which coalesced in mid-thirteenth century Egypt around the aforementioned al-Shādhilī and his first ‘successor’ (*khalīfa*) Abū l-‘Abbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287), and which soon became very influential all over the Sunni Islamicate world.<sup>34</sup>

Even more important, the ‘mystical dimension’ of Shaykh Khalīfa Ibn ‘Aṭīyya is clearly focused on in a more ancient account hitherto neglected by scholars, that is the entry he is devoted in the hagiographic collection *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyā’* (“The Classes of Saints”) by Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/1401). There, Khalīfa is described as an ascetic devotee (*al-zāhid al-‘ābid*), who followed several spiritual masters (*ṣahība jamā‘a<sup>tan</sup>*) and then became a prominent figure of the Shādhiliyya.<sup>35</sup>

According to Ibn al-Mulaqqin’s report, Shaykh Khalīfa would have been held in high esteem by both Shaykh al-Mursī and the latter’s most famous disciple Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309). In particular, Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh would have even acknowledged Khalīfa as his own spiritual heir, by saying to him the typical Sufi endorsement phrase: “You are me” (*anta anā*).<sup>36</sup>

On the one hand, such endorsement by Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh would imply that Shaykh Khalīfa would have been given an extremely high rank in the Shādhilī network, or at least in its Egyptian branch. In fact, both al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī having left no written legacy, it was precisely Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh who set the guidelines for the group’s further development, especially thanks to a highly reputed literary production. This included the famous *Kitāb Laṭā’if al-minan*, i.e. the first biography of al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī, in which Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh skilfully presented himself as these masters’ spiritual heir<sup>37</sup> (however,

<sup>32</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (1929-1930, II: 94).

<sup>33</sup> See Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh (1999a: 75).

<sup>34</sup> Among the many sources on the Shādhiliyya, see in particular Nwyia (1972); Geofroy (2002), and (2005); Hofer (2013); Cecere (2013b).

<sup>35</sup> Ibn al-Mulaqqin (1986: 552). There, the date of Shaykh Khalīfa’s death is indicated as “14 of the month of Dhū l-ḥijja of the year 735”, i.e. August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1335.

<sup>36</sup> Ibn al-Mulaqqin (1986: 552).

<sup>37</sup> On Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh’s sophisticated ‘auto-hagiographic’ strategies, see Cecere (2013b: 66-79).

such claim was far from being uncontested, as Vincent Cornell and, more recently, Nathan Hofer have shown).<sup>38</sup>

On the other hand, the whole of Ibn al-Mulaqqin's report on Shaykh Khalīfa is quite problematic, as the latter's affiliation to the Shādhiliyya is seemingly not confirmed by any other source.

In particular, Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh does not even mention Shaykh Khalīfa either in his *Latā'if al-minan* or in any other of his works. Quite interestingly, Shaykh Khalīfa is also absent, as far I have been able to judge, from the second greatest biography of al-Shādhili, the *Durrat al-asrār* by Maghrebi master Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh (d. after 718/1318), that was, as Nathan Hofer (2015) convincingly argues, "a North African answer to the version of events presented by al-Iskandarī" and was meant to support other masters' claims to the Shādhili spiritual heritage.

However, all this is not necessarily conclusive evidence against the accuracy of Ibn al-Mulaqqin's report, as both Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's and Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh's 'historical' works were somehow instrumental to their respective authors' 'agendas', and both proved to be highly selective in their references to events and personalities. For instance, the renowned Shaykh Yāqūt al-Habashī (d. 732/1332), who was probably Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's main 'competitor' for the Shādhili spiritual heritage, is mentioned only once (and rather unfavorably) in Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's *Latā'if al-minan*; conversely, the same Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh is evoked only once, and just as a source of information, in Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh's *Durrat al-asrār*.<sup>39</sup>

In such conditions, the only thing that may be said is that Khalīfa's alleged connections with the Shādhiliyya, and especially with Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, deserve further investigation.

### 3.2 *The 'head between knees' in the rituals of the Shādhiliyya*

The issue of Shaykh Khalīfa's alleged connections with the Shādhiliyya seems quite relevant to comparative studies on *tazyīq* and Jewish-Muslim Sufi interactions in Medieval Egypt. In fact, as Elisha Russ-Fishbane (2013: 311-312) has pointed out, it is precisely in the technical literature of the Shadhiliyya, namely in the *Miftāh al-falāh* traditionally attributed to Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh,<sup>40</sup> that the 'head between knees' posture is explicitly associated to an Islamic Sufi *dhikr* ritual.<sup>41</sup> The relevant passage goes as follows:

<sup>38</sup> See Cornell (1998: 150-154); Hofer (2013, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> On this issue, see Hofer (2015), and Cecere (forthcoming).

<sup>40</sup> This attribution, though challenged by Fritz Meier 1950, is still accepted by the great majority of scholars and by all followers of the Shādhiliyya. See Russ-Fishbane (2013: 328, n. 11).

<sup>41</sup> *Dhikr* being a collective or individual practice consisting, in short, in the repetition of some formulas based on one or more names of God, each Sufi group developed their own 'distinctive' rituals of *dhikr* over time, with special sets of movements and formulas.

Let's mention now the (proper) way of sitting (*hay'at al-julūs*) for *dhikr*. We say: It is a requirement of (spiritual) etiquette (*min al-adab*) that one sit before his master (*sayyid*) in a humble and submissive manner (*julūs dhalīl khādi'*) and remain seated with the attitude of someone who is conscious of his (ontological) poverty (*muftaqir*) and (therefore) is abased (*mutawādi'*), and that he put his head (*ra's*) between his knees (*bayna rukbatay-hi*) and close his eyes to all sensory perception (*al-mahsūsāt*). Through this manner of sitting (*jilsa*), his heart will become concentrated and will be purified from all kind of turbidity (*akdār*), so the lights (*anwār*), the flashes (*lawā'ih*) and the secrets (*asrār*) will (be allowed to) reach it.<sup>42</sup>

(Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, 1999b: 43)

Although no technical name is provided for such posture in the passage quoted above, this description fits well with those provided for *tazyiq* in both Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's *Rihla* and the Judeo-Arabic commentary on the Haftarat.

Quite interestingly, according to a much later Islamic source, namely Shaykh Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Sanūsī (d. 1859), such *dhikr* ritual was still practiced in the Shādhiliyya well into the nineteenth century, and its origin was attributed to the eponymous master of the group.<sup>43</sup>

This ritual seemingly characterized the Shādhiliyya over time, whereas most of other groups adopted more 'dynamic' forms of *dhikr*, which were based on ritualized movements of the head towards 'symbolic' directions in the space (e.g. highwards or downwards) and were probably connected to Hindu technical influences affecting Sufi rituals from seventh/thirteenth century onwards.<sup>44</sup>

Although the *Miftāh al-falāh* itself does already present some forms of such 'Indian-style' *dhikr* rituals,<sup>45</sup> the fact that the 'head between knees' posture was not abandoned by Shādhilī followers across the centuries proves that they somehow considered it as a 'marker' of the group.

This must have depended, of course, on that it was traced back to the eponymous master al-Shādhilī or at least to the supposed author of *Miftāh al-falāh*, Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī.

<sup>42</sup> *Wa-l-nadhkur al-ār' hay'at al-julūs lil-dhikr fa-naqūl: min al-adab an yajlis' bayna yaday sayyidi-hi julūs dhalīl khādi', wa-yaq ud' quūd muftaqir mutawādi' wa-a n yaj' al' ra'sa-hu bayna rukbatay-hi, wa-an yasudd' an al-mahsūsāt aynay-hi. Fa-bi-hādhilī l-jilsa yajtami' u al-qalb(w), wa-yataṣaffā min al-akdār, wa-tā'ti-hi al-anwār wa-l-lawā'ih wa-l-asrār.* Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh (1999b: 43).

<sup>43</sup> See Fenton (1992: 420-421).

<sup>44</sup> Among the main Medieval Islamic sources on Hindu mystical doctrines and techniques, were the 'Indological' works of al-Birūnī (d. 440/1048) and the *Hawd al-Ḥayāt*, i.e. the Arabic version of a Persian work dating to seventh/thirteenth century that was allegedly the translation of a book written by a Brahmin from Assam after he converted to Islam. As an example of Islamic perceptions of some Sufi rituals as being of Hindu origin, it is worth noting that the aforementioned Shaykh al-Sanūsī explicitly compared the *dhikr* of the *ṭariqa* 'Ishqiyya to some practices of the *Yogi*-s (*al-jawjiyya*). See Bannerth (1974: 73).

<sup>45</sup> On this point, see Fenton (1992: 421); Bannerth (1974: 71-73).

However, one may wonder where did these masters take this practice from. Did al-Shādhilī bring this ritual with him from Maghreb, or did he ‘discover’ it when in Egypt, where it was already practiced at the time - at least by the Qalandars in Damietta and by the Jewish Sufis of Avraham Maimonides in Cairo?

In the latter case, did the early masters of the Shādhiliyya borrow this practice from the Qalandars or from other Muslim Sufi groups? Or may one go so far as to surmise that the Shādhiliyya might have taken such practice from some Jewish Sufis?

At the present state of this research, any speculation on this subject would be too daring. Nonetheless, a few preliminary remarks might already be made here, in order to set the guidelines for further research on this issue.

### 3.3 Paul Fenton on the ‘head between knees’ in Jewish rabbinic and mystical literature

With regard to the first origin of the ‘head between knees’ practice, Fenton (1990) has convincingly argued that it was first adopted in Jewish religious culture on the grounds of the ‘model’ provided by the Biblical text on Prophet Elijah’s bowing to the Lord on Mount Carmel (*Kings* 1: 18: 42, see above).

Also, Fenton (1992) showed that such text was the object of many different interpretations in both rabbinic and mystical literature, some of which are especially worth mentioning in a Jewish-Muslim comparative perspective:

(a) In a Talmudic text, Rabbi Ḥanina ben Dosa, “a charismatic figure associated to the second-century [CE] circle of the mystic pietists” (Fenton

1992: 415) resorts to the ‘head between knees’ posture for invoking a miracle from God (the healing of a sick boy);<sup>46</sup>

(b) In a properly mystical text, the *Heykhalôt Zutrati*, traditionally ascribed to second century CE master Rabbi ‘Aqiba,<sup>47</sup> such posture is associated with fasting and seclusion, as part and parcel of the rituals preparing to the ‘evocation of the Name’ (of God).<sup>48</sup> There is a striking similitude between those practices and some rituals that will eventually become crucial in Islamic Sufism, such as *dhikr* (‘mentioning’ of God’s name/names), supererogatory fasting (*ṣawm/ṣiyām*) and *khalwa* (‘spiritual retreat/seclusion’);

(c) In X-XI century Baghdad, the ritual ascribed to Rabbi ‘Aqiba underwent an important semantic change, seemingly on the initiative of the chief of the ‘Baby-

<sup>46</sup> See TB *Berakhot*, 35a, quoted in Fenton (1992: 415-416).

<sup>47</sup> The text’s actual authorship, however, has long been debated. See Fenton (1992: 416-417).

<sup>48</sup> “Rabbi ‘Aqiba a dit: ‘Quiconque cherche à répéter cet enseignement (*mishna*) et d’annoncer explicitement le Nom, s’assevera en jeûne durant quarante jours. Il doit placer sa tête entre ses genoux jusqu’à ce le jeûne ait prise sur lui”. *Heykhalôt Zutrati*, quoted and translated in Fenton (1992: 416).

lonian' Academy, the rationalist Rabbi Hai Ga'ôn (939-1038 CE). Hai interpreted the Talmudic narration of the Four Sages ascending to the Heavenly Garden (*TB Hagigah*, 14b) as an allegory of a purely inner experience, taking place in the human conscience and not in the 'heavenly palaces'. In this framework, he evoked the practice described in the *Heykhalôt Zutrati* (though not explicitly mentioning that text), but presented it as a way to prepare the devotee to perceive the heavenly palaces in his soul ("as if he were seeing them by his own eyes"),<sup>49</sup> whereas in the original source it was preliminary to the evocation of the Divine Name.

### 3.4 Seeking the 'head between knees' practice in Islamic literature

#### 3.4.1 References to Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī

With regard to the presence of the 'head between knees' theme in Islamic sources, it is worth mentioning that this posture is evoked, as Fenton (1992: 419) showed, in two stories concerning the great and controversial ninth-century Persian mystic Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/875) which were reported in the *Tadhkiratu l-awliyā'* ('Memoirs of the Saints') by thirteenth century Sufi author Farīd ud-dīn 'Aṭṭār.

In the first anecdote, al-Bisṭāmī is described as 'putting his head on his knees' in relation to a special spiritual state (*ḥāl*) in which he might perform miracles for other people's sake.

In the second anecdote, a connection is clearly established between the master's 'journey' into God's presence and the fact that he had "hidden his head in his neckband" (by the way, such description of al-Bisṭāmī's action does strikingly correspond to the etymological explanation provided for *tazyiq* in the aforementioned Judeo-Arabic commentary on the Haftarat).

Fenton (1992: 419) also remarks that al-Bisṭāmī is traditionally attributed a complex and controversial description of a heavenly ascension. If most scholars of Islamic Sufism consider the relevant narrative as "closely patterned on Muḥammad's *mi'rāj* experience" (Knysh 2000: 69-70), Fenton argues instead that supposed al-Bisṭāmī's account would rather be reminiscent of the journeys to the heavenly palaces described in the Jewish mystical literature of the Merkaba. This would corroborate Fenton's view on the "fertilizing role" that Jewish mystics would have played towards Islamic mystics, especially in Mesopotamia.

<sup>49</sup> "Nombre de nos sages considéraient que l'individu, doté de certaines vertus décrites dans les sources, désireux de contempler le Char céleste et de percevoir les palais (*heykhalôt*) des anges célestes, devait observer certaines prescriptions. Il doit jeûner pendant un certain nombre de jours, *placer sa tête entre ses genoux* et proférer tout bas des hymnes prescrits et des cantiques dont les textes nous sont connus par la tradition. De cette manière, par introspection, il perçoit à l'intérieur de lui-même les sept palais comme s'il les voyait de se propres yeux". Rabbi Hai Ga'ôn, quoted and translated in Fenton (1992: 417-418).

In a similar vein, Fenton (1992: 419ff.) argues that Hai's reference to Jewish sages teaching the 'head between knees' practice might indicate a continuity of such tradition in Jewish spiritual circles over time, maybe until the very days of Hai himself. Accordingly, such practice should be seen as a Jewish practice which passed into Islamic Sufism and not the other way round.

Be that as it may, the existence of late Sufi traditions connecting such posture to Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī deserves careful consideration.

In fact, through allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of his most problematic utterances, al-Bisṭāmī's figure was soon integrated in the 'normalizing' narrative on the origins of Sufism produced by Shaykh Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910) and other masters of the so-called 'Sufism of sobriety',<sup>50</sup> so that some later Sufi groups even inclined to see him as one of their forerunners.

As far as the Shādhiliyya is specially concerned, it is worth noting that, according to Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh (1999a: 152), Shaykh al-Mursī proclaimed al-Bisṭāmī's full compliance with the prescriptions of the Islamic Law (*marāsim al-sharī'a*) and the rules of spiritual etiquette (*al-adab*), and even provided a full-fledged 'allegorical' justification of one of al-Bisṭāmī's most controversial statements.

#### 3.4.2 *The 'head between knees' posture in al-Qushayrī's Risāla*

Mentions of the "head between knees" posture may however be located, too, in much more ancient Islamic sources than Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh or 'Aṭṭār.

In particular, for now I have found two of such mentions in the most-reputed *Risāla* by fifth/eleventh-century Sufi master al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), that was one of the main 'reference books' for the 'Sufism of sobriety' and that, according to Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, was specially appreciated by the early Shādhilī masters.<sup>51</sup>

All the more interestingly, al-Qushayrī evokes the concerned posture in connection with some of the greatest saintly figures in Sufi imagery. In one of these two anecdotes, he attributes al-Junayd al-Baghdādī the description of "a group of people with their heads on their knees, engrossed in contemplation" in the Shuniziyya Mosque at Baghdad.<sup>52</sup> In the other anecdote, it is even the 'legendary' Prophet al-Khādir that evokes a meeting with an anonymous saint practicing this posture in Medina and being constantly in God's presence.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> See Knysh (2000: 71).

<sup>51</sup> See in particular Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh (1999a: 76).

<sup>52</sup> See al-Qushayri (2007: 397).

<sup>53</sup> See al-Qushayri (2007: 374). On this crucial figure in Islamic mysticism, see Wensinck, *al-Khādir/al-Khiḍr*. For interpretations of al-Khādir/Khiḍr as a Muslim 'avatar' of the Jewish Prophet Elijah, see in particular Meri (1999).

### 3.4.3 *The association with dhikr*

Last but definitely not least, the association between the ‘head between knees’ and the evocation of the Divine Name which characterized some Jewish mystical traditions (see above) is also found in Islamic Sufi traditions, as exemplified by the aforementioned description of a dhikr ritual of the Shādhiliyya in the *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ* (see above par. 3.2).

### 4. *The ‘head between knees’ in Jewish and Muslim Egyptian Sufi circles: Parallelism or interaction?*

If it seems now clearly established that the ‘head between knees’ practice was present in both Jewish and Islamic Sufi environments in Late Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Egypt, it would however be too daring, in the present state of this research, to speculate on the possible meaning of this ‘simultaneous’ presence.

In particular, no clear indication has been found, until now, on whether this was simply the effect of ‘parallel’ historical developments in the respective traditions or if both groups were somehow mutually influencing in keeping on such practice.

In this respect, a specific difficulty is to be remarked concerning Islamic Sufi literature. In fact, whereas Jewish sources provide some explicit mentions of contacts with Muslim Sufis, and further evidence in this sense is found in some of the Cairo Genizah documents,<sup>54</sup> Muslim Sufis are apparently silent about Jewish Sufis.

As a general rule, mentions of interactions with Jews in Islamic Sufi literature are mostly apologetic and stereotyped anecdotes on Jews converting to Islam following a miracle and/or an extraordinary display of generosity by a certain *shaykh*.<sup>55</sup>

In this framework, however, it is worth noting that a partly different attitude is found precisely in the Shādhiliyya, at least according to Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh. Although the latter often resorts to traditional polemic arguments against Judaism and Jews, he also reports an anecdote on the eponymous master al-Shādhilī and a Jewish ophthalmologist (*yahūdī kaḥḥāl*) which seemingly has no apologetic meaning at all. In this story, al-Shādhilī is attributed a confident and respectful attitude towards the Jewish doctor: the *shaykh* asks the *kaḥḥāl* to heal “someone who was with him” (i.e., probably, one of his disciples), and goes so far as to generously support the doctor in solving a ‘bureaucratic’ problem with the Mamluk medical administration. Albeit all this might be in line with the common ‘format’ of conversion stories, the outcome of this story is however totally

<sup>54</sup> See, in particular, Fenton (1986); Zsom (2015).

<sup>55</sup> For narrative patterns of conversion stories, see in particular Geoffroy (1995:70 and *passim*). On the issue of Sufi attitudes towards Jews and Christians, see Herrera (2015); Scattolin (2005); El-Leiythi (2006).

unexpected: the Jewish doctor shows his gratitude and admiration for the Muslim shaykh's generosity, but no mention is made of any conversion.<sup>56</sup>

If this would be, of course, too little evidence for attributing Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh a special degree of 'interreligious openness' that would sound quite anachronistic, the importance of such anecdote in terms of interreligious contact situations should however not be overlooked (as first pointed out in Fenton 2006: 124).

In a similar vein, it is also worth noting that, as Dora Zsom (2013) convincingly argued, Jewish influence might be seen behind a typical Shādhili practice: the *ḥizb al-dā'ira* (lit. "The Litany of the Circle"), combining "a magical invocation and the figurative representation of a circle" (Zsom 2013: 275). This was traditionally attributed to the eponymous master al-Shādhilī, and it is seemingly to be connected with Midrashic stories about Moses fighting against death.

### 5. Conclusion

The elements provided in the present paper show that the 'head between knees' practice had an important 'history' in Jewish and Islamic traditions as well and that it was present in both Muslim and Jewish Sufi circles in the specific context of Late Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Egypt.

In particular, this practice seems to have been specially relevant in the tradition of the Shādhiliyya, an Islamic Sufi group whose early masters apparently had a certain degree of interaction with some Jewish environments (although no mention of Jewish *Sufis* has been found in Shādhili sources until now).

If these scattered remarks do not provide conclusive evidence of direct interaction between the Shādhiliyya or other Muslim Sufis and Jewish Sufis in Mamluk times, they however indicate that further research in this direction might greatly contribute to better understanding Jewish-Muslim relationships in Medieval Egyptian society.

For the time being, I do hope that the present paper has provided some convincing arguments in favor of the readings *tazyīq* and *zayyaqa* in the relevant passages of the *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūta*, and that it has also shown how relevant this seemingly hairsplitting issue of textual criticism might be for both social and religious history of Medieval Egypt.

<sup>56</sup> Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, *Laṭā'if al-minan*, 178. For an extended commentary on this story, see Cecere (2013a: 5-7).

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