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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## INTRODUCTION

THE 'JUNAYD OF THE WEST' AND THE WORLD OF MAGHRIBI SUFISM  
IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY AD.

'And to Madyan (Midian) We sent their brother Shu'ayb, who said: "Oh my people, worship God! You have no other god but Him. A clear sign has come to you from your Lord, so give just measure and weight, do not withhold from people that which is their due, and do not commit perversions upon the Earth after it has been set right. That is best for you if you are believers.

"And do not sit beside every road, uttering threats, hindering from the Path of God those who believe in Him, and seeking in it something that is deviant. Remember instead how you were small in number and He increased you, and think deeply about the end of those who were perverse.

"If there is a faction among you who believes in that with which I have been sent, and a faction who does not believe, then keep patient until God decides between us, for He is the best to judge."

"The leaders, the arrogant ones among his people said: "Oh Shu'ayb! We shall surely drive you out of our city, along with those who believe as you do, unless you return to the ways of our religion."

"He said: "What? Even though we detest it? We should indeed invent a lie against God if we returned to your ways after God has rescued us from them. Nor could we return to them unless God Our Lord so wills. Our Lord encompasses everything with His Knowledge. In God we have put our complete trust. Oh Lord, decide in truth between us and our people, for You are the best to decide!"

"The leaders, those who rejected the Truth among his people, said: "If you follow Shu'ayb you will surely be ruined!"

"But the earthquake took them without warning and they found themselves prostrate in their homes. Those who rejected Shu'ayb were as if they had never flourished—those who rejected Shu'ayb were the ones who were ruined!

"So Shu'ayb left them, saying: "Oh my people, I have conveyed to you my

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Lord's messages and have given you good counsel. How, then, shall I feel remorse for a people who refuse to believe?"<sup>1</sup>

### THE CAREER OF ABŪ MADYAN

The man who was to become the most influential figure of the developmental period of North African Sufism, Abū Madyan Shu'ayb ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Anṣārī, who was called by later biographers the 'Shaykh of Shaykhs, Imam of the Ascetics and the Pious, Lord of the Gnostics, and Exemplar of the Seekers,'<sup>2</sup> and who remains known to posterity as 'Abū Madyan the Nurturer' (*al-Ghawth*), entered the world in inauspicious circumstances. Born around the year 509/1115-16 at the fortress of Cantillana in the region of Seville (Ishbīliya) in Muslim Spain, the future shaykh was orphaned early in life by the unexpected death of his father and suffered cruel treatment and exploitation at the hands of his elder brothers. Fortunately, Abū Madyan's own account of the often difficult, formative period of his intellectual development is available to the modern student of Sufism via the efforts of a near contemporary, the Moroccan biographer Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf ibn Yaḥyā at-Tādīlī (d. 627/1229-30), who reproduced many of the shaykh's autobiographical comments in his *Kitāb at-tashawwuf ilā rijāl at-taṣawwuf*, written a short time after the latter's death:

I was an orphan in al-Andalus. My brothers made me a shepherd for their flocks, but whenever I saw someone praying or reciting [the Qur'ān], it pleased me. I would come near to him and found a sadness in my soul because I had not memorized anything from the Qur'ān and did not know how to pray. So I resolved to run away in order to learn how to read and pray.

I ran away, but my brother caught up with me, spear in hand, and said, 'By God, if you do not return I will kill you!' So I returned and remained for a short time. Then I strengthened my resolve to flee by night. I slipped away at night and took another road [from that which I had originally followed]. My brother [again] caught up with me after sunrise. He drew his sword against me and said, 'By God, I will kill you and be rid of you!' Then he raised his sword over me in order to strike me. I parried him with a piece of wood that was in my hand and his

1. Qur'ān, VII (*al-A'rāf*), 85-93. Translation by the present author.

2. Muḥammad ibn Ja'far ibn Idrīs al-Kattānī (d. 1355/1926), *Salwat al-anfās wa muḥādathāt al-akhyās bi man uqbirā min al-'ulamā' wa ṣ-ṣulahā' bi Fās* (Fez: Lithograph, 1318/1900), (1), p. 364.

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sword broke and flew into pieces. When he saw [what had happened] he said to me, 'Oh my brother, go wherever you wish'.<sup>3</sup>

Upon leaving the region of Seville, the young Abū Madyan traveled south for three or four days, until he reached a hillock near the sea, upon which he found a tent. An old man (*shaykh*), wearing nothing except what was necessary to cover his nakedness, emerged from the tent and walked toward him. Thinking that the younger man was a captive who had fled from a Christian raiding party, he asked Abū Madyan about his situation. When told of the young man's desire to learn the fundamentals of Islam, the shaykh allowed him to remain in his company for a few days.

Then he took a rope, tied a nail to its end, threw it into the sea, and pulled out a fish, which he cooked so that I could eat it. I stayed with him for three days, and whenever I was hungry he would throw that rope and nail into the sea and pull out a fish. Then he would cook it and I would eat it. After [three days had passed] he said to me, 'I see that you covet honor (*amr*). Return to the city, for God is not [properly] worshipped except with knowledge.'<sup>4</sup>

Heeding his ascetic companion's advice, Abū Madyan returned to Seville, from whence he proceeded to Jérez (Sharīsh) and Algeciras (al-Jazīra al-Khadrā'). From Algeciras he crossed the Straits of Gibraltar to Tangier (Ṭanja) and went from there to Ceuta (Sabta), where he labored for a time in the employ of local fishermen. Impatient to gain the knowledge he so earnestly desired, with the little money he had earned Abū Madyan next traveled to Marrakesh (Marrākush), then the rapidly growing capital of the Almoravid state. Founded in the second third of the fifth/eleventh century by 'Abdallāh ibn Yāsīn (d. 451/1059), an exoteric religious reformer who was

3. Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf at-Tādīlī (d. 627/1229-30), *Kitāb at-tashammuf ilā rijāl at-tashammuf*, Ahmed Toufiq, ed. (Rabat: Université Mohammed V, Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 1984), p. 320. Parallels with scenes and incidents from the lives of several prophets recur throughout the accounts of Abū Madyan's life. Note in this story that the shaykh, like all Islamic prophets, was originally a shepherd. Note also the apparent congruence of effect between Abū Madyan's 'piece of wood' (*ūd*) and Moses' staff. A number of later biographers have strongly implied that Abū Madyan himself was aware of and freely utilized such symbolism. In one account reported by at-Tādīlī, the shaykh was visited at his zāwiya in Bijāya by a Berber disciple, Abū 'Imrān Mūsā ibn Idrāsen al-Ḥallāj, who complained of being persecuted in Fez. To this Abū Madyan replied: 'My name is Shu'ayb and you are safe. Moses (Mūsā) was not safe until he met Shu'ayb.' (Ibid., p. 331.) This account also appears to indicate that Abū Madyan equated the Prophet Shu'ayb of the Qur'ān with the priest of the people of Midian who befriended Moses and took him in out of the wilderness. Biblical scholars are in dispute over whether the man's actual name was Jethro, Reuel, or Hobab.

4. Ibid., p. 322.

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influenced by the social and ethical doctrines of North African and eastern Iranian Sufism, the *Dawla al-Murābiṭiyya* had ruled the western part of North Africa and Islamic Spain for over fifty years by relying heavily on an alliance of Mālikī legal scholars and veiled Ṣanhāja Berber tribesmen from the Sahara desert, who formed the nucleus of the Almoravid military garrisons stationed in most major cities. To supplement these Berber contingents, which were spread quite thinly throughout the vast expanse of the western Maghrib, the Almoravid rulers often hired additional Andalusian troops, both Christian and Muslim, who, for reasons of internal security, were most commonly assigned garrison duties in Morocco, far from their Iberian homelands.

Upon arriving in Marrakesh, Abū Madyan was recruited by these mercenaries and drafted into the regiment of Andalusians that was charged with defending the Almoravid capital. The shaykh apparently suffered further exploitation during the period of his military service, for he mentions that other, more experienced soldiers would regularly steal his wages, leaving him only a little with which to provide for his needs. Finally, someone said to him, 'If you want to devote yourself to religion, go to the city of Fez (Fās).'

So I turned toward [Fez] and attached myself to its mosque-university (the famous *Jāmi' al-Qarawiyyīn*), where I learned to make the ablution and the prayer and sat in the study circles of legists and hadith specialists. I retained nothing of their words, however, until I sat at the feet of a shaykh whose words were retained firmly within my heart. I asked whom he was and was told, 'Abu'l-Ḥasan [Alī] ibn Ḥirzihim'. [I went to this shaykh] and told him that I could memorize only what I had learned from him alone and he said to me, 'These [others] speak with parts of their tongues, but their words are not worthy [even] to call the prayer. Since I seek [only] God with my words, they come from the heart and enter the heart.'<sup>5</sup>

Abū Madyan attached himself to the study circle and *zāwiya* of 'Alī ibn Ḥirzihim<sup>6</sup> (d. 559/1162) for a number of years, where he was required to read and memorize the *Kitāb ar-ri'āya li ḥuqūq Allāh* of the famous Sufi of Baghdad, Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), and the *Ihyā' 'ulūm*

5. Ibid., p. 320.

6. 'Alī ibn Ḥirzihim is the famous Moroccan shaykh 'Sīdī Ḥarāzīm' who was considered the patron of Fez until the 'rediscovery' of the tomb of Idris II in the ninth/fifteenth century. His tomb remains venerated in the Bāb Futūḥ cemetery outside of the present walls of Fez.

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*ad-dīn* of the Sufi and Ash‘arī theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), which he would later make obligatory for his own disciples. The twelfth/eighteenth-century Algerian biographer Ibn Maryam tells us that Abū Madyan was especially fond of al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’*—so much so, in fact, that he would spend hours reading it in seclusion and often used the book as a source for religious advice and in answering the objections put to him by exoteric scholars who were critical of his doctrines.<sup>7</sup>

During the period in which he was attached to the Ibn Ḥirzihim zāwiya, Abū Madyan also attended the study circle of Abu’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Khalaf ibn Ghālib al-Qurashī (d. 568/1172–73), one of the foremost disciples of the Andalusian Sufi master Abu’l-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn al-‘Arīf (d. 536/1141) and principal teacher in Morocco of the *Sunan*, or collection of hadith compiled by Abū ‘Īsā at-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892–93).<sup>8</sup> To aid in his memorization of the traditions contained in this large work, the shaykh lived for a time in seclusion amid the ruins of an abandoned mosque on the outskirts of Fez. The account left by Abū Madyan of one of his experiences while staying among these ruins reflects, even in this early period of his life, how much the shaykh was influenced by the method of ascetic scrupulousness advocated in the writings of the eastern Sufi al-Muḥāsibī—an attitude which was eventually to become a cornerstone of Abū Madyan’s own concept of Islamic chivalry, or *futuwwa*:

While staying in Fez I used to take a verse from the Qur’ān and a hadith and go to an empty place on the edge of the cultivated land. When I had fully understood [and memorized] the verse and the hadith, I would return to Fez, learn another verse and hadith, and do the same with them. The place on Jabal ‘Imrānā where I secluded myself was ruined, and out of all its buildings only the *maqṣūra* [a protective screen placed before the mihrab] of the mosque remained. While I sat there [in thought and contemplation] a gazelle would come up to me. I do not know whether it used to come to the people who had lived in that place and when they left continued to visit it, or whether it came to me in particular. When I went to that place it would come to me, sniff me from my head to my toes, and then lie down in front of me.

7. Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn Maryam, *al-Bustān fi dhikr al-awliyā’ wa’l-‘ulamā’ bi Tilimsān* (Algiers: al-Maṭba‘a ath-Tha‘ālabiyya, 1326/1908), p. 108.

8. Abu’l-‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Khaṭīb Ibn Qunfudh al-Qusantīnī (d. 810/1407–8), *Uns al-faqīr wa ‘izz al-ḥaqīr* (Rabat: al-Markaz al-Jāmi‘ī li’l-Baḥṭh al-‘Ilmī, 1965), p. 14. Abu’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Ghālib is buried at al-Qaṣr al-Kabīr (El Ksar El Kebir) in northwestern Morocco, where he is regarded as the patron saint of that city and is presently known as ‘Sīdī ‘Alī Bū Ghālib’. Ibn al-‘Arīf, now called ‘Sīdī Bel ‘Arīf’, is buried in Marrakesh.