

logo not found or type unknown

Title Anṣārī's Munājāt / Minlib Dallh  
MIDÉO : Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales du Caire  
Contained in / Direction : Georges Shehata Anawati, (puis) Régis Morelon, (puis)  
Emilio Platti, (puis) Emmanuel Pisani, (puis) Dennis Halft  
Volume 30 (2014)  
pages 213-228  
URL <https://ideo.diamondrda.org/manifestation/190281>

## ANŞĀRĪ'S *MUNĀJĀT*

by

Minlib DALLH o.p.

Loyola University New Orleans

In the agony suffered for you,  
the wounded find the scent of balm:  
The memory of you consoles the souls of lovers.  
Thousands in every corner, seeking glimpses of you,  
Cry out like Moses, "Lord, show me yourself!"  
I see thousands of lovers lost in a desert of grief,  
Wandering aimlessly and saying hopefully  
"O God! O God!"  
I see breasts scorched by the burning separation from you;  
I see eyes weeping in love's agony.  
Dancing down the lane of blame and censure,  
your lovers cry out, "Poverty is my source of price!"  
Pīr-i Anşārī has quaffed the wine of longing:  
Like Majnūn he wanders drunk and perplexed  
through the world.<sup>1</sup>

Thanks to Henri Laoust (d.1983), Georges Makdisi (d. 2002), Joseph N. Bell and Thomas Michel<sup>2</sup>, to name but the most prominent Hanbalisans, most scholars of the

- 
1. DANNER, Victor & THACKSTON, M. Wheeler, *Ibn 'Aṭā' illāh, The Book of Wisdom and Kwanja 'Abdullah Anşārī, Intimate Conversations*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 182.
  2. MAKDISI, George, "Hanbalite Islam" in *Studies on Islam*, ed. and tr. Merlin L. Swartz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 216-264; "The Hanbalite School of Sufism" in *Actas do IV Congresso de Estudos Arabes e Islamicos*, 1968, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971) 71-84; and LAOUST, Henry, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taqi-l-Din Aḥmad b. Taymiyya* (Cairo: IFAO, 1939); MICHEL, Thomas,



mystical dimensions of Islam would agree with Annemarie Schimmel's statement: "The traditional idea that Ḥanbalīte rigorism and mystical emotion are mutually exclusive can no longer be maintained — not only was Anṣārī an energetic representative of this school, but 'Abdu'l Qādir Jilānī (d. 1166), the founder of the most widespread mystical fraternity, also belonged to this madhhab."<sup>3</sup> The article will prove that the complex and intricate relationship between Sufism and Ḥanbalism is best appreciated in the literary and spiritual legacy of famous Ḥanbalī Sufis.<sup>4</sup> This study focuses on Abdullāh Anṣārī's (d. 1089) *Munājāt*, one of the most moving and beloved collections of intimate conversations with God in both the Persian and Arabic speaking worlds. Serge de Beaurecueil (d. 2005), the foremost scholar of Anṣārī in any western language, wrote eloquent commentaries on what he named, *Cris du coeur*.<sup>5</sup> This paper starts with a biographical sketch of Anṣārī, and then demonstrates that the thorny authenticity questions surrounding the manuscripts did not in any way diminish the popularity of the *Munājāt* because the literary and spiritual acumen are more important than our modern fixation on reliable authorship.

#### A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

The celebrated Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī 'Abdullāh Abū Ismā'īl al-Anṣārī Ibn Muḥammad Abū Maṣṣūr was born in Herāt on May 4, 1006. Most of Anṣārī's biographers rely on the following major sources: al-Dhahabī's (d. 1348) *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, (The biographies of the Great and Prominent People); Ibn Rajab al-Baghdādī's (d. 1393) *Dhayl 'alā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila* (Appendices to the Generations of Ḥanbalītes);

---

*A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity* (Ann Arbor: Caravan Books, 1985), BELL, J. Norment, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1979).

3. SCHIMMEL, Annemarie, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 89.
4. See Shaikh 'ABD AL-QADIR AL-JILANI. *Revelations of the Unseen (Futuh al-Ghaib)*. Trans. Muhtar Holland (Houston: Al-Baz Publishing, 1992, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Fort Lauderdale: Al-Baz Publishing, 1998); and *Sufficient Provision for Seekers of the Path of Truth (Al-Ghunya li-Talibi Tariq al-Haqq)*, (in 5 vols.) Trans. Muhtar Holland. (Hollywood, FL: Al-Baz Publishing, 1997); IBN TAYMIYYA, *al-ṣūfiyyah wa al-fuqarā* trans. Th. E. Homerin, *Arabic* (22), 1985, 219-242; IBN QAYYIM AL-JAWZIYA, *Mādarīj al-sālikīn*; MAKDISI, George, "L'Isnad initiatique de Muwaffaq al-Din Ibn Qudama" in *L'Herne: Mission* (Paris: l'Herne, 1970), 89-96.
5. For Ansari's biography, DE BEAURECUEIL, Serge, *Khwādja 'Abdullah Anṣārī, (396-481 H./ 1006-1089), mystique hanbalite* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1965) and two abridged biographies: *Anṣārī: Cris du Coeur* (Paris: Sindbad, 1988); and *Chemin de Dieu* (Paris: Sindbad: 1985).



and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's (d. 1492) *Nafahāt al-Uns* (The Breezes of Intimacy).<sup>6</sup> According to Jawid A. Mojaddedi:

The earliest biography of Anşārī is found in Muḥammad b. Abī Ya'lā's (d. 1133) *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*. Ibn Abī Ya'lā introduces Anşārī, in his brief (15 lines) biography, as the leader of the Sunnites (*ahl al-sunna*) in Herāt, who is known by the title Shaykh al-Islam, and is called Khaṭīb al-'ajam (the orator of the Persian), on account of the depth of his knowledge, his eloquence and his eminence.<sup>7</sup>

De Beaurecueil's biography entitled, *Khwādja 'Abdullah Anşārī* remains the best reference for most western scholars. Anşārī, also known as the Pīr -e ṭarīqat or the Pīr of Herāt, lived in a totally Persian-speaking milieu of Herāt and Khurāsān, but books attributed to him are both in Persian (his mother tongue) and in Arabic (the *lingua franca* of the empire).<sup>8</sup> His life under both the Ghaznavid and the Saljūq dynasties was intellectually fertile and tumultuous. Anşārī was and still is *par excellence* "the spiritual master of Herāt."<sup>9</sup> His tomb in Garzagah is venerated to this day.

Descended from the *Anşār* (helpers), the Pīr of Herāt's genealogy traces him back to the people of Yathrib, who welcomed and helped the Prophet of Islam after his *hijra* in 622. According to tradition, his ancestor Abū Ayyūb took charge of the Prophet's journey and was known among the Anşār as the "companion in charge of the camel saddle" (*sāhib al-raḥl*).<sup>10</sup> It is believed that Abū Ayyūb's son, Abū Maṣūūr al-Anşārī, had settled in Herāt with the conquering armies of Islam in the seventh century during the Caliphate of 'Uthmān (d. 656).<sup>11</sup> A. G. Ravān Farhādī proposes the following genealogy:

'Abdullāh Abū Ismā'īl Anşārī, son of  
Muḥammad Abū Maṣūūr Anşārī, son of  
'Alī Abū Ma'ad Anşārī, son of

6. DE BEAURECUEIL, Serge, *Khwādja 'Abdullah Anşārī, (396-481 H./ 1006-1089), mystique ḥanbalite* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1965), 15-17; See also 'Abd al- Ghafūr Ravān Farhādī, *'Abdullāh Anşārī of Herāt*, (Richmond: Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996); ANGHA, Nahid, *An Annotated Translation and Examination of the Essential Mystical Teachings in 'Abdullāh Anşārī's (396 - 481/1006-1089) Ṣad maydān (The Hundred Fields)* unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Exeter, December, 2006, 12. In her dissertation, Angha mentions other Persian contemporary sources dealing with the master's biography, such as Qāsim Anşārī's translation of *Ṣad maydān*; Mullā'i's *Majmu'a -yi*.
7. MOJADDEDI, Jawid A, *The Biographical Tradition in Ṣūfism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from Sulamī to Jāmī*. (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 200), 69; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 15.
8. The Pīr of Herāt's most famous Persian book is the *Munājāt*, and the *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* is his revered Arabic book.
9. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Khwādja*, 19.
10. ANGHA, *An Annotated*, "childhood," 25-29; "Youth and Education" 29-20; "Teachers" 30-35; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 23; Danner and Thackston, *Ibn 'Aṭā' illāh*, 4-5.
11. SCHIMMEL, Annemarie, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 89; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin de Dieu* (Paris: Sindbad, 1997), 15; Farhādī, *'Abdullāh*, 4.



Aḥmad Anṣārī, son of  
 ‘Alī Anṣārī, son of  
 Ja‘far Anṣārī, son of  
 Maṣṣūr Anṣārī, son of  
 Abū Maṣṣūr Anṣārī, son of  
 Abū Ayyūb Khālīd ibn Zayd al-Khazrajī al-Najjarī al-Azdī.<sup>12</sup>

Schimmel, de Beaucueuil and Farhādī agree that Anṣārī’s father, Muḥammad Abū Maṣṣūr (d. 1039), who was a shopkeeper in Herāt at the time of his son’s birth, had been a Sufi himself in his youth in Balkh.<sup>13</sup> Thackston confirms that “‘Abdullāh inherited a tendency toward Ṣūfism, the ‘inner’ or spiritual aspect of Islam, from his father, Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad, who had been trained in the way of abstinence and renunciation of worldly affairs by an ascetic in Balkh.”<sup>14</sup> At the very tender age of four, Anṣārī started learning the Qur’ān, and a few years later ḥadīth instruction was added. His father made a deliberate choice to entrust his son to two esteemed traditionists, qādī Abū Maṣṣūr Azdī (d. 1019) and the remarkable ḥāfiẓ Abū-l Faḍl Jārūdī (d. 1023). In addition to Abū Maṣṣūr’s determination to provide the most orthodox religious education to his son, he sought to extend his curriculum to Persian and Arabic literature. Anṣārī was a precocious student, he learned fast and memorized many passages of the Qur’ān, ḥadīths and poems to the point that by the age of fourteen he started writing prose and poetry.<sup>15</sup> Anṣārī’s most significant teachers were Shaykh Abū ‘Abdallāh Taqī Sijistānī (d. c.1025), a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī and the illiterate Shaykh ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad Abū ‘l- Ḥasan Kharaqānī (d. 1033).

First, Taqī Sijistānī won the young Anṣārī’s respect and reverence for his Ḥanbalīsm and versatility in spiritual matters. Taqī remarks, “O ‘Abdullāh Bā Maṣṣūr! Praise be to God! What a light God has put in your heart!”<sup>16</sup> From Taqī, Anṣārī acquired a visceral attachment to Ḥanbalīte theology and spirituality, and also an aversion for honors, and a life-long suspicion of and indifference toward the rich and powerful. Later, he paid tribute to his teacher in these words, “He [Taqī] was my master and teacher in Ḥanbalīte creed. Had I never met him, I would never have come to know the belief of the Ḥanbalītes.”<sup>17</sup> In one of his poems, Anṣārī insists, “I am a Ḥanbalī, while living and dying. This is my testament, O brothers.”<sup>18</sup> Makdisi asserts:

12. FARHĀDĪ, *‘Abdullāh*, 4.

13. SCHIMMEL, *Mystical*, 89; De Beaucueuil, *Chemin*. 26

14. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 168.

15. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Chemin*, 14.

16. FARHĀDĪ, *‘Abdullāh*, 7.

17. JĀMĪ, *Nafahāt*, translation by Thackston in Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 169.

18. Quoted in FARHĀDĪ, *‘Abdullāh*, 6.



This Harawī (al-Anşārī al-Harawī) was a Ḥanbalī; so Ḥanbalī was he that he declared that his last will and testament would be to exhort all Muslims to become Ḥanbalīs. Harawī had lived his whole Ṣūfī life and died a Ḥanbalī when Ghazzālī had not yet come to Baghdād; in fact had not as yet turned seriously to Ṣūfism.<sup>19</sup>

De Beaurecueil reminds us that Ḥanbalīsm for Anşārī was strictly theological and not juridical. The Pīr of Herāt was unyielding in his attachment to the letter of the Qur'ān and the Sunna, but often enough, Anşārī adopted Shāfi'ī solutions in jurisprudence.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in the preface to his English translation of the *Ṣad maydān*, Munir Aḥmad Mughal states, "Khwāja 'Abdullāh followed the school of Imām Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal in matter of *Aṣl* (fundamental) and Imām Shāfi'ī in matter of *furū'* (branches)."<sup>21</sup>

Second, Anşārī had the good fortune of meeting the Ṣūfī Shaykh Kharaqānī in Nīshāpūr after his second unsuccessful attempt to perform the Ḥajj.<sup>22</sup> Tradition had it that while in Nīshāpūr, Anşārī ran into the famous Ṣūfī Abū Sa'īd Abū'l-Khayr (d. 1049) who informed him about Kharaqānī.<sup>23</sup> In *Kharaqānī: Paroles d'un Soufi*, Christiane Tortel remarks that Kharaqānī was hailed as a supreme master and a *Quṭb* of his time in spiritual matters. He was listed in the spiritual and mystical genealogy of those who bear the divine light. Though illiterate, he was unparalleled in mystical matters, and distinguished himself by the power of his ecstatic utterances. Sultans and established Ṣūfī masters sought his counsel and spiritual wisdom. Most of his utterances were bold statement in which the humility of the masters collided with God's majesty and glory.<sup>24</sup> During Anşārī's visit with Kharaqānī, the Shaykh mesmerized the young man to the point that he declared after all, "Had I never met Kharaqānī, I would never have known the Divine Reality. He mixed, constantly, this and That, namely, the self and the Reality."<sup>25</sup> Kharaqānī was not a scholar or theorizer of spiritual life but he was a Ṣūfī without guile. The elderly and illiterate Shaykh would have the deepest impact on Anşārī's mystical journey. Schimmel reports, "This enthusiastic

19. MAKDISI, *Religion, Law and Learning in Classical Islam* (London: Ashgate Variorum, 1991), 120.

20. DE BEAURECUEIL, *khwādja*, 43.

21. *Ṣad maydān: The Hundred Fields*, trans. Munir Aḥmad Mughal (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1983), 18.

22. NICHOLSON. *Studies in the Islamic Mysticism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 42-44; ANGHA, *An Annotated*, 35-39.

23. ANGHA, *An Annotated*, 35.

24. *Kharaqānī: Paroles d'un Sufi*, trans. Christiane Tortel (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 7-13 (all translations are mine unless otherwise indicated).

25. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Chemin*, 20; *Cris du coeur*, 14. The meeting between Anşārī and Kharaqānī is similar to the fateful encounter centuries later between Jalāl al-dīn Rūmī (d. 1273) and Shams al-dīn Tabrīzī.



and demanding master [Kharaqānī] caused a spiritual change in ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī, with the result that Anṣārī began to write his commentary on the Koran, which was, unhappily, never finished.”<sup>26</sup> Kharaqānī read Anṣārī’s innermost thought and answered his spoken and unspoken fundamental questions. “He not only deterred Anṣārī from trying to go on pilgrimage by making him realize that ‘God was as likely to be in Khurāsān as in Ḥijāz’ but also instructed him to start training his own disciples.”<sup>27</sup> Taqī al-Sijistānī and Kharaqānī had the most enduring impact on Anṣārī, the first made him a Ḥanbalī and the second a Ṣūfī.

From Kharaqānī, Anṣārī learned that to be a Ṣūfī does not consist of outward appearances:

One does not become a Ṣūfī by virtue of one’s patched frock and prayer mat; one does not become a Ṣūfī by adopting the customs and manners of the Ṣūfis; a Ṣūfī is that which is not!... A Ṣūfī is a day that has no need of the sun, a night that has no need of the moon and the stars, a ‘not-being’ that has no being.<sup>28</sup>

Anṣārī viewed Ṣūfism as “something that neither harms the soles of the feet nor leaves a trail of dust behind.”<sup>29</sup> For him a Ṣūfī perfects him/herself through actions of genuine humility and frees her/himself from the pitfalls of pride. At the age of twenty seven, Anṣārī took on teaching responsibilities after being schooled by different teachers in Herāt and Nīshāpūr. Hence, the first trip to Nīshāpūr (1026) after the death of his childhood teachers, and the two failed attempts to go to Ḥajj (1032 and 1033) gave him the opportunity to meet key traditionist Ṣūfis, but also ḥadīth and Qur’ān scholars. These study trips crystallized his skills, and the encounter with Kharaqānī offered the spiritual impetuosity he needed in life. Soon enough, his lectures were attended by senior Ṣūfis and learned folks of Herāt and its surroundings.<sup>30</sup> Anṣārī was an erudite orator and a bold preacher. He lectured at the Ṣūfī lodges and in the mosques. There, he triumphed before his audiences. He exerted his utmost talents in full consciousness. As an orator and a preacher, Anṣārī was perfectly at home with himself.

Anṣārī was a staunch Ḥanbalī and dead set against any ‘heretical innovations.’ He engaged in polemical debates against rationalist theologians, namely, the scholastic Ash’rites. His book *Dhamm al-Kalām* is an anti-scholastic polemical treatise composed

26. SCHIMMEL, *Mystical*, 90.

27. KARAMUSTAFA, Ahmet T., *Ṣūfism: The Formative period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 94. Kharaqānī’s counsel is reminiscence of al-Ḥallāj’s (and many other Ṣūfī masters) concept of the spiritual Ḥajj.

28. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh* 172.

29. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh*, 172.

30. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Cris du coeur*, 15.



almost exclusively of hadiths, Qur'anic verses and authoritarian citations with long chains of transmission (*isnād*). He sought to prove wrong all those who rely on methods of rational philosophy in matter of faith and creed, such as the Jahmites, the Ash'rites and Mu'taziltes. In *Kitab al-arab'īn fi dali'il al-tawhīd*, "he collects forty hadiths in order to prove the reality of God's corporeal attributes."<sup>31</sup>

As a result, he suffered trials, exile and imprisonment at the hands of his rivals. His literalist reading of the Qur'ān led to accusations of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*). Indeed, in 1064, while Nizām al-Mulk was passing through Herāt, Anşārī was summoned before the vizier to answer to various accusations put forward by Shāfi'ī and Ḥanafī jurists.<sup>32</sup> According to de Beaurecueil and Farhādī, Anşārī was challenged to engage in theological debate with his opponents. Called upon by the vizier to answer specific questions, Anşārī replied, "I do not discuss matters other than what I have in my left and right sleeves." And the vizier asked, "so what do have in your sleeves?" Anşārī replied, "In my right sleeve, the Book of God, and in my left, the Sunna of the Messenger of God."<sup>33</sup> The vizier dismissed him without any blame.

Throughout his life, Anşārī had to confront rationalist schools of thought about key theological issues: God's essence and attributes, the created or uncreated nature of the Qur'ān, literal or metaphoric hermeneutic of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth, predestination, human agency and free will. As a belligerent Ḥanbalī, he was convinced that the teaching of the prophetic tradition could not remain neutral. He opposed directly what he considered vain discussions, and above all, a sacrilegious intrusion of reason where the Qur'ānic revelations had settled the matter. He advocated a literal reading of the text and submission to its letter even though humans could not explain the modality (the why and how). He attacked the Ash'arīs and Mu'tazilīs publicly and sparked a serious conflict against them.<sup>34</sup> Thackston remarks:

Anşārī's strick Ḥanbalite adherence to the letter of Islamic law and custom and fastidious attention to ritual detail in no way excluded and in many ways actually complemented the inner, or spiritual, path of Islam known as Sufism. By meditating on the words of the Koran and the Customs of the Prophet, the Sufis discovered within themselves a personal deity with whom they could have direct and immediate contact through gnosis, or knowledge, that depended in no way on the rational function of the intellect but rather on the intuitive function of the heart.<sup>35</sup>

31. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Atā'illāh*, 171, see an abridged translation in DE BEAURECUEIL, *Khawādjā*, 198- 203.

32. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Atā'illāh*, 170.

33. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Chemin*, 29; Farhādī, *'Abdullāh*, 9.

34. FARHĀDĪ, *'Abdullāh*, 8; DE BEAURECUEIL, *Chemin*, 25.

35. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Atā'illāh*, 173.



There is a consensus on the Pīr of Herāt's legacy. "His biographers are unanimous in praising his piety, the breadth of his knowledge in all branches of the religious sciences, and the indomitable fervor of his devotion to the Qur'ān and the Sunna, and the school of Ibn Ḥanbal, which led him to be accused by his enemies of bigoted fanaticism and anthropomorphism."<sup>36</sup> Anṣārī was a gifted and erudite mystic<sup>37</sup> but also aggressive and belligerent against his opponents in theology. He was "one of the outstanding figures in Khurāsān in 11<sup>th</sup> century: commentator of the Qur'ān, traditionist, polemicist, and spiritual master, known for his oratory and poetic talents in Arabic and Persian."<sup>38</sup> Three times he was exiled, twice imprisoned, suffered political unrest and theological upheavals, but through them all, Anṣārī remained true and unyielding to his Ḥanbalīte theology and spirituality. His life was stormy because he remained a ferocious and tenacious Ḥanbalī. However, he did experience periods of peace and honor. Indeed, in 1070, the 'Abbāsīd Caliph al-Qā'im (d. 1075) invested Anṣārī with a robe of honor and granted him the title of *Shaykh al-Islam*. Later, in 1082, the Caliph al-Muqtadī (d. 1094) sent a sumptuous robe of honor to the beloved master of Herāt. The *munājāt* is the fruit of such life story, but before examining the text, let us turn to a persistent problem.

#### THE MUNĀJĀT OR *CRIS DU COEUR*

There is no better introduction to the *Munājāt* than de Beaucueil's own observation:

The '*Munājāt*,' these violent, passionate and at times bitter outbursts of what is in and upon one's heart, contain prayers, counsels, and personal reflections. Very popular, this '*cris du coeur*' went beyond Sufi circles to nourish the prayer life of believers of all walks of life. ...

Written in *saj'* style — a rhymed prose — this '*cris du coeur*' try to convey the indescribable: a spiritual experience.<sup>39</sup>

According to Farhādī, *Munājāt* mean "intimate and confidential conversations," or "intimate invocations to God," or "sincere and opened-hearted prayers."<sup>40</sup> Thackston speaks of "intimate conversations with someone,"<sup>41</sup> and Annabel Keeler prefers

36. DE BEAURECUEIL, EI<sup>2</sup> 515.

37. KARAMUSTAFA, Ahmet T., *Ṣūfism*, 94; DE BEAURECUEIL, *Khawādjā*, 28; *Knowledge of God in Classical Ṣūfism*, trans. John Renard (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 294; DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Atā' illāh*, 165.

38. See de Beaucueil's article "Abdullāh Anṣārī" in *Encyclopedia Iranica*.

39. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Cris du cœur*, 161.

40. FARHĀDĪ, *Abdullāh*, 115.

41. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Atā' illāh*, 175.



“intimate prayer and communing with God.”<sup>42</sup> The aphorisms and sayings in the *Munājāt* constitute a passionate and yet private and familiar monologue with God.<sup>43</sup> Thackston affirms that, “The language is sometime humble and sometime reproachful, the speaker assumes the familiar position vis à vis God that a faithful servant of long tenure might assume in speaking to his master.”<sup>44</sup> For example, “O God, if you chastise me for my sins, I’ll chastise you for your clemency because your clemency is greater than my sin.”<sup>45</sup> It is de Beaurecueil, however, who captures best the spirit of these intimate conversations. He remarks that ‘*confidence*’ is too polished and ‘*oraison*’ too reminiscent of prayer; he prefers *cris du coeur*. He confesses, “their often violent, heartfelt, and bitter pitch, suggested the title *Cris du coeur*.”<sup>46</sup> These intimate conversations with God are the Pīr of Herāt’s spiritual and poetic chef-d’œuvre. They have maintained an unprecedented level of popularity among rich and poor, Ṣūfīs and ordinary believers, and have served as lyrics for songs and a cash crop for many calligraphers and scribes throughout the centuries. In addition writes Thackston:

Well aware of the pitfall of pride in one’s accomplishments on the Sufi path, Khwāja ‘Abdullah is glad for his human frailty and awareness of his disobedience to God’s law, for it is that very awareness that brings him to his knees in repentance. The reader of the *Munājāt* will notice that the two concepts of ‘obedience’ (*tā’a*) and ‘disobedience’ (*mā’siya*) are stressed throughout.<sup>47</sup>

In Herāt the *Munājāt* were as popular as the Qur’ān itself.

If *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil* are famous for their mnemonic and didactic acumen, the *Munājāt* are celebrated for their literary beauty and striking spiritual wisdom. These aphorisms and sayings are the fruit of deep spiritual experiences and mystical inclinations. Schimmel, in her preface to Danner’s and Thackston’s respective translations of *Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh’s Hikam* and Anṣārī’s *Munājāt*, writes:

“... the brevity of both *Hikam* and *Munājāt* proves the immense self-control of the mystics who were able to condense their deepest feelings and their loftiest experiences in small, gemlike, perfectly polished sayings.”<sup>48</sup>

These “gemlike, perfectly polished sayings” were used as prayers for their artistic quality, their exquisite wisdom and the spiritual comfort they bestow on wayfarers.

42. KEELER, Annabel, *Ṣūfī Hermeneutics. The Qur’ān Commentary of Rashīd al Dīn Maybudī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 249.

43. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 175.

44. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 175.

45. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 194.

46. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Cris*, 28.

47. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 173.

48. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, xiv.



De Beaurecueil sees a connection between the language of the text and the intensity and depth of its message. He writes, “in these *Munājāt*, — prayers and observations in rhymed prose — the music of the language meets the depth of contemplation.”<sup>49</sup>

In its Persian artful rhyming prose and rhythmic quatrains, the *Munājāt* speak of the wisdom of a searching and at times disheartened and yet hopeful mystic. Readers meet a Ṣūfī shaykh “who pours out his feelings in the presence of the Lord like little sighs, for the rhythm of these prayers is like breathing in its constant change of contraction and expansion.”<sup>50</sup> These intimate prayers became the companion of many wayfarers in and out of seasons. De Beaurecueil agrees with Schimmel that the *Munājāt*, “... offer a perfect code of life: complete trust in God, deep faith in His grace and awareness of His justice, and an insight into His mysterious working through the contrasting manifestation of this created world.”<sup>51</sup> These luminous aphorisms bring together superb poetic skills and transcend time, culture and even language.

#### TEXTUAL HISTORY

More than any other work attributed to the master, the textual history of the *Munājāt* is problematic. There is no or little textual continuity between the master’s original text and the edited copies known to scholars today.<sup>52</sup> Thackston summarizes best the situation: “It is probably safe to say that no two printed versions of the *Munājāt* agree with regard to the material included. Some are significantly longer; others markedly whittled-down. The most inclusive version the translator has seen is the Teheran lithograph, which seems to comprise many sentences taken from Ansari’s corpus at large.”<sup>53</sup> These collections challenge seriously our modern understanding of authorship as noted earlier. The popularity of the *Munājāt* was a mixed blessing. On the one hand the text is found in superb calligraphic and ornamented manuscripts, and these popular and commercial pamphlets are scattered all over both the

49. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Khwādja*, 120.

50. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, xiii.

51. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, xiv.

52. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Cris*, 26.

53. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn ‘Atā’ illāh*, 178. In addition to de Beaurecueil’s French translation, *Cris du coeur*, there are the following English ones: *The Invocations of Sheikh ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt, A.D. 1005 – 1090*, trans. Sardar Sir Jogendra Singh (London: John Murray, 1959); ARBERRY, Arthur, “Anṣārī’s Prayers and Councils,” *Islamic Culture*, no. 10, 369-389; *Munājāt: The Intimate Prayers of Khwāja ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī*, trans. Lawrence Morris & Rustam Sarfeh (New York: Khanegha and Maktab of Maleknia Naserishah, 1975).



Persian and Arab worlds. But on the other hand, their popularity led to multiple editions and corrections by successive scribes and calligraphers.

In the introduction to his translation of the *Munājāt*, Thackston observes that if one judges by content alone, irrespectively of style, some part of the book as we know it today cannot be ascribed to Anšārī but to elements common to later mystical thought.<sup>54</sup> On the basis of the surviving manuscripts of *Šad maydān* and the *Ṭabaqāt al-Šūfiyya*, de Beaurecueil concludes that the master dictated and taught in Herāti. Anšārī's *Munājāt* share with a few other famous works daunting authenticity problems. For example, the so-called 'wandering quatrains' of 'Umar Khayyām are probably the most famous case in point.<sup>55</sup> The multiplicity of copies and manuscripts makes it almost impossible to trace the original text. Speaking about the *Munājāt*, Thackston remarks that:

The language in which Anšārī wrote and dictated, as we know from the oldest surviving manuscripts of his corpus, was the dialect form of Persian current in the eleventh century Herāt. The dialectal peculiarities, however, have been normalized by successive copyists and redactors, who, typical of premodern litterateurs on the Perso-Arabic tradition, did not hesitate to make corrections, and emendations, not to speak of additions, in accordance with their personal taste. The result is a collection of prose sentences, characteristically rhymed, the ascription of which to the Pīr of Herāt rests on a certain historical basis but to which later accretions have adhered.<sup>56</sup>

Bo Utas describes in detail the difficulty of ascertaining the continuity in the textual tradition of the *Munājāt* in his article and notes that in the case of Anšārī, the question of authorship is even more complicated. He concludes: "Generally there is only partial, or no, continuity to hold on to in the bewildering mass of material. These texts have, no doubt, grown and changed incessantly during the centuries."<sup>57</sup> De Beaurecueil echoes Bo Utas's concern and explains further his methodological approach to maintaining continuity in the textual tradition of the *Munājāt*:

If in the Arab speaking world, Anšārī owes his popularity to the *Sad maydān*, the *Munājāt* made him famous in the Persian world. Over centuries of circulation, the *Munajat* have often changed skin tone and also snowballed ... In order to avoid the pitfall of presenting beautiful but inauthentic collection, we chose some passages from the *Ṭabaqāt*. The style and thought patterns are difficult, but they describe admirably the

54. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Aṭā' illāh*, 175.

55. FITZGERALD, Edward, *Rubā'iyāt of Omar Khayyam*, (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1899) and DE BRUIJN, J. T. P., *Of Piety and Poetry. The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Hakīm Sana'i of Ghazna*. (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 113-118. Many classical mystical writings attributed to seminal Šūfī masters share a similar problem of authenticity.

56. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Aṭā' illāh*, 175; de Beaurecueil, *Khawādja*, 175.

57. UTAS, Bo, "The *Munājāt*..." 84-85. Bo Utas, Thackston and de Beaurecueil agree that the *Munājāt* have been printed and edited many times and under different titles.



temperament, thought, and talent of the master. Neither literature nor prettiness, but rather a religious experience which is couched in rhythm, rhymes, and images in successive waves, and in more personal manner than in didactic manuals. It is there one must go to 'meet' Anṣārī.<sup>58</sup>

The *Munājāt* as we know it today has been added to and subtracted from by various copyists who, fortunately, did improve the texts. These various scribes cleared frequent archaic words, phrases, idioms and expressions from the early compositions which had made some passages difficult for readers to understand in regard "to phonetics, morphology and semantics."<sup>59</sup> As Thackston observes, "if we were to edit out all that is obviously (and subtlety) not the words of Khwāja 'Abdullāh, we would lose much of value and beauty."<sup>60</sup> Also, if we abandon anachronism in terms of authorship and realize that in oral culture memorization is thought to be more reliable than writing, modern readers might avoid sterile criticism of the textual authenticity of the *Munājāt*. Hence, it would be wise to recognize a certain authenticity to most of the manuscripts, even the later ones, and not to dismiss them all at once.

Nonetheless, the changes in the textual tradition are minor compared to the damage resulting from the translation from Persian to European languages as many translators bemoaned. The rhymed prose of these intimate conversations is the main reason for their great popularity in the Persian speaking world, and as Farhādī puts it, "The esthetic and psychological effects of such assonance are, unfortunately, lost in translation."<sup>61</sup> Both Thackston and de Beaucueuil lament the impossibility of translating the *saj'* literary<sup>62</sup> style and many peculiar Persian idiomatic expressions into English or French. Thackston writes:

Anṣārī's sentences appear to be the essence of stylistic simplicity, yet masked by the brevity and conciseness of expression is a considerable amount of subtle rhetorical play. The parallelism and internal rhyme characteristic of so many of the prose sentences are devices impossible to recapture in translation. Extensive use is made of the rhetorical device known as *tarsī*, where the sequence of vowels in two or more parallel lines is exactly the same, with only the consonants varying.<sup>63</sup>

In the *Munājāt*, the master takes *saj'*, a common literary device, to an unprecedented level. Angha believes that Anṣārī borrows the simplicity of the Sāmānids' literary style along with the complexity of the Ghaznavids and Saljūks approach. The master tends

58. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Khwādja*, 287; DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Atā' illāh*, 175

59. FARHĀDĪ, *'Abdullāh*, 116.

60. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Atā' illāh*, 178.

61. FARHĀDĪ, *'Abdullāh*, 115.

62. See the masterful paper of STEWART, Devin J., "Saj' in the 'Qur'ān': Prosody and Structure," *Journal of the Arabic Literature*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Sep., 1990), 101-139.

63. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Atā' illāh*, 176.



to avoid unnecessary repetition of words and verbs in his rhymed prose. According to Angha, these mystical texts were collected at a time when the Ghaznavids and later the Seljuks favored and encouraged the development of mystical writing.<sup>64</sup> Most of Anşārī's treatises are built in the same format, following the literary style of *saj'*. Angha defines the style:

*Saj'* rhyming and rhythmic prose, is a literary style between poetry and prose. It does not entirely follow the restricted technique of poetry nor does it follow the free style of prose. It includes rhythm, its phrases usually consist of three to four words, phrases have similar beats, and certain words or letters are repeated in every phrase.<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, the *saj'* literary style in the *Munājāt* is designed to captivate readers' attention and bring them to a still point. According to Thackston, "The use of internal rhyme at pausal point, a device known as *saj'*, encountered throughout the Qur'ān and common in Arabic and Persian literary style, gives these sentences an extraordinary rhythmical fluidity and cadence."<sup>66</sup> Novices and students on the spiritual path are invited to linger on each line or phrase in order to understand and grasp the undergirding ideas. Even though the phrases are short, and seem simple and concise, the underlying message is complex and sometimes difficult to follow. The master's use of rhyme and rhythm awakens in the reader the esoteric understanding of the spiritual stages and stations. As a literary masterpiece, the *Munājāt* have stood the test of time and inspired many other mystics because of the depth of the message. These intimate conversations indicate Anşārī's astute choice of words, masterful use of rhythm and rhyme and unparalleled mystical insights.

#### SPIRITUAL ACUMEN

In his French translation based on earlier manuscripts and not on commercial pamphlets, de Beaurecueil notes that, "More than a thinker, Anşārī proceeds like a painter and a musician at the same time: by successive strokes as the melody unfolds."<sup>67</sup> The images used by the master are related to the following major themes: journey, light, water, vegetation, fire, commerce and gain, life and death, suffering and illness, joy

64. ANGHA, *An Annotated*, 58. According to the author, the Saljūk vizier Nizām al-Mulk's endowment of schools and scholarships to teachers produced a profusion of spiritual writings, such as, *Nūr al-'ulūm* by Abū Ḥasan Kharāqānī, *Kashf al-mahjūb* by Ḥujwīrī; *Asrār al-tawhīd* by Muḥammad ibn Munawwar; Qushayrī's *Risāla*, Anşārī's *Ṣad maydān*.

65. Angha, *An Annotated*, 61.

66. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Atā' illāh*, 176.

67. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Cris*, 29.



and feast, the Royal Court, food and drink, justice, war, and lamentation and tears.<sup>68</sup> Let us examine three significant themes. First, the journey is the most important theme of the masters' teachings. The wayfarers are on a spiritual journey and their true rewards are divine friendship and companionship. God becomes their advisor and guide, the only one who can lead the seeker on the straight path. The path is narrow, riddle with ambushes and pitfalls and often enough the wayfarer gets lost in the desert, valleys, hills and mountains.<sup>69</sup> Light is the second important theme. On the journey, God's self is the light of wayfarers. This pre-eternal light is source of knowledge and shines like the sun and the Sufi becomes the ray. Finally, the theme of suffering and illness hold an important place in the *Munājāt*. The wayfarer suffers from all kinds of human limitations but for Anṣārī the recompense surpasses all pain and sufferings. He writes, "In the agony suffered for you, the wounded find the scent of balm: the memory of you consoles the souls of the lovers." And, "We rejoice in the grief that comes from loving you: we flourish in the plunder of your tribulations."<sup>70</sup> In addition, there are other less important and isolated themes or images used sporadically by the master, such as, guilt, breath, smell, and touch.<sup>71</sup> The master's thought focuses on searching for and finding God, the divine decree and its consequences, the love of God, the memory of God, and the friends of God.

All over this artful Persian prose, the question, "who am I?" is repeated many times and functions as a leitmotiv.<sup>72</sup> Thackston agrees, "Throughout the *Munājāt* the reader will find allusion to and expansions of the Arabic dictum, *man 'arafa nafsahu fa-qad 'arafa rabbahu* [Who knows himself (sic) knows his (sic) Lord,] echoing the ancient Delphic gnosis' auton ["Know thyself"!]."<sup>73</sup> These images and themes anchor the master's teachings in a constant effort to describe for his disciples the subtle and yet powerful intimate relationship between God and the wayfarers. Anṣārī's thought in the *Munājāt* is in perfect agreement with his other didactic and spiritual manuals. Here, the tone of the conversation is intimate, sometime austere, and sometime sober. The master speaks freely and his fierce temperament comes through. He instills in the very structure of his writing a theology.

O God

The rose of Heaven is a thorn in the feet of mystics.  
What cares he for Heaven who is searching for you?

68. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Cris*, 25-41.

69. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Cris*, 30.

70. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Atā' illāh*, 183 and 195.

71. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Cris*, 41-42.

72. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Cris*, 43-63.

73. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Atā' illāh*, 172.



To converse with your friends is like cool water on the soul.  
To converse with other than them is torment to the soul.<sup>74</sup>

The text is built on a repetitive opening phrase: "O God!" This aphorism is a kind of questioning vocative which seeks to initiate and appropriate an intimate relation with the divine. Unlike, Thackston's translation in which all the quatrains start with "O God!" de Beaurecueil breaks the monotony with: O Lord, O King, O You. This is perhaps an indication that Anṣārī is trying to safeguard the dialectic tension between God's nearness and distant. Ḥanbalī are particularly adamant about the radical separation between the divine and the human. They reject any belief or practice which seemed to undermine the basic God — human distinction. Any attempt to confuse the two is utterly unacceptable. Also, the repetitive You (*Tu* and *Toi*) helps anchor redundancy, paradox and association of opposite terms and images. De Beaurecueil takes seriously these paradoxes and oppositions because they are the best representatives of the master's insightful sayings.<sup>75</sup> For example:

O God! People indicate how near You are, but You are loftier than that. People think how far You are, but You are much closer than the soul. You are found (*mawjūd*) in the spirit of Your champions, (for) You are present (*ḥāḍir*) in the hearts of those who mention Your Name.<sup>76</sup>

More explicitly, in the following excerpt the paradoxical language reaches its climax:

How could I have known that the mother of joy is sorrow, and that under every misfortune a thousand treasures are hiding? How could I have known that the desire is the bringer of Union, and that beneath the cloud of Munificence despair is impossible? How could I have known that the Possessor of Majesty is so comforting toward (His) devotees, and that the friends (of God) are so much favored by him? How could I have known that what I am searching for is in the midst of the soul, and that the honor of Your Union is for me an opening and a victory?<sup>77</sup>

O God,  
You commanded us to obey you  
And then prevented us from doing so.  
You forbade us to disobey you  
And then made us disobedient.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, Anṣārī's *Munājāt* celebrates the glory of God but seems to suggest the annihilation of the wayfarer as the ultimate goal. A close reading of the text shows

74. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Atā' illāh*, 191

75. DE BEAURECUEIL "La souffrance, mère de la joie?", *La Vie Spirituelle*, no. 697, (décembre 1991): 485-497.

76. FARHĀDĪ, 'Abdullāh, 120-121. DE BEAURECUEIL, *Cris*, 72, no. 13.

77. FARHĀDĪ, 'Abdullāh, 125. The French translation is found in DE BEAURECUEIL, *Cris*, no. 28, 78

78. DANNER & THACKSTON, *Ibn 'Atā' illāh*, 186.



that each passage is structured in the dialectic of the divine (You) and the human (I). God and God's servant are a sort of metaphor for each other. In fact, the servant is defined and qualified according to God's commands and human status before their Lord is fully realized. Fortunately, the wisdom and spiritual insights of the *Munājāt* seem to have managed to transcend obvious translation loss and give to non-Persian readers a compelling view of the Pīr-e ṭāriqat. The following excerpts are tangible examples of these flashes of grace or gemlike spiritual jewels from the master. The *Munājāt* are a successful attempt to put into words the ineffable encounter and conversation with the divine. A few samples of these luminous gems of spiritual wisdom help make our point:

O God,  
 By Your primordial (pre-eternal) Compassion,  
 You sowed the seeds of guidance;  
 By sending prophets as messengers,  
 You irrigated those seeds;  
 By Your assistance and bounty, You grew them (and)  
 By Your regard, You enable them to bear fruit.

O God,  
 It is suitable that You protect them from the hot sandstorm  
 Of (Your) coercion (*qahr*)  
 And that You nurture the seeds sown by Your pre-eternal  
 Bounty  
 With Your eternal care.<sup>79</sup>

Anṣārī's *Munājāt* belong to the best heritage of Ḥanbalī Sufism. The images, themes and above all the thought patterns are in perfect accord with his spiritual manuals and Qur'ānic commentaries. In addition, his spirituality of strict adherence to the literal reading of the Qur'ān and the Sunna enabled him to reach a deeper understanding (*fiqh*) of the divine path. In the *Munājāt*, God's majesty and beauty blend almost perfectly.

79. FARHĀDĪ, 'Abdullāh, 122.