

Supporting the Poor (Nasrt al-Faqir) for Refuting Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir by Mohamed Ben Youcef al-Senoussi (d. 895 AH) — A Functional/Analytical Reading of the Refutation of the Opponent

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Abstract:

This article aims to introduce readers to the Sufi thought of Imam Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Senussi (d. 895 AH), as presented in his manuscript *The Support of the Spiritual Traveller. In Refutation of Abu al-Hasan al-Saghi*. In his response to an opponent who denies and rejects Sufism, we observe precision of reasoning, depth and firmness of argumentation, and rigour of methodology in establishing and defending the path of spiritual wayfaring. We also observe his disciplined approach, which combines rational disputation (science/rational proof), demonstrative exposition, and recourse to scriptural sources (consideration of the transmitted principles).

Al-Senussi based his rebuttals on firm foundations, such as clarifying the subject matter of the dispute, unveiling alleged contradictions, removing arbitrary judgements and relying on principles of rational enquiry that do not undermine certainty.

His position was not detached from the spirit of Sunni Sufism, which harmonises scholarly formulation with spiritual purification. He warns against sterile argumentation that yields only hostility and holds that the purpose of disputation is not domination but the manifestation of truth, while adhering to the etiquette of dialogue and the well-regulated rules of disputation.

Keywords: Al-Senoussi, Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir, Sufism, Dispute/Difference.

Introduction

Reconsidering the Maghrebi Sufi heritage, and the Algerian Sufi heritage in particular, is an urgent necessity, especially within the Sunni context, which unites rational and transmitted foundations in deriving truths and grasping subtle points. Engaging with manuscripts of refutations and disputations — unique sources that preserve an important intellectual and cultural legacy — helps us to understand how scholars dealt with intellectual and religious controversies, as well as their methods of disputation and argumentation. This helps researchers to comprehend the development of rigorous scholarly argumentative discourse, in accordance with the methodology adopted by scholars in constructing proofs and refuting objections.

Before us are two manuscripts: the first, by Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir al-Maknasi, is titled *The Refutation of the Sufi Ascetics, the People of Innovation, and the Inventions in Islam According to the Four Legal Schools*. The author, may God have mercy on him, was a contemporary of Imam al-Senussī. The second manuscript is considered one of the most important references in Sunni Sufism: *The Defence of the Sufi Ascetic: In Refutation of Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir by Mohamed Ben Youcef al-Senoussi*. It

contains the Imam's responses to Shaykh Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir, which were intended to dispel doubts and incorrect interpretations that had been raised regarding Sufism.

The importance of the manuscript Refuting Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir lies in its addressing of the intellectual conflict between two approaches: the Athari (textual/literalist) approach and the continuous Sunni Sufi approach that persists to this day. Despite the abundance of evidence and proliferation of texts deployed in various cultural, social and religious contexts contexts that have revealed the weakness of objections raised against Sunni Sufism — there are still those who stir up commotion from time to time. This is primarily due to a fundamental historical difference between literal interpretation of texts and reliance on spiritual and experiential modes grounded in the upright religion. Accordingly, refuting Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir is a cornerstone in tackling this problem because it provides a critical framework for understanding the interpretation of Islamic heritage, namely that it is not beyond criticism and revision. This framework integrates knowledge, reason, and spiritual experience, thereby enriching intellectual and religious discourse within the Islamic context.

The approach adopted in this study

In this study, we adopted a functional reading of the manuscript as a comparative critical method. This was undertaken in order to move beyond a purely literal, surface-level reading of the text. This approach also enables us to understand the motives behind Imam al-Senuoussī's arguments and the methods he used to identify the locus of dispute, as well as to remove the illusory contradiction between creed and Sunni Sufism.

Furthermore, this approach helps us to understand the social and cultural context in which the manuscript was produced and how this is reflected in the formulation of the refutations and evidence presented within it. Consequently, it supports the derivation of approaches that can be applied in contemporary intellectual dialogue to deal with disputes between intellectual currents.

Aim of the Article

The article addresses the following problem(s)/question(s):

What were the foundations on which Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir based his critique of the Sufis?

How did Imam al-Senuoussi use rational and traditional rhetorical and argumentative tools to refute those who deny Sunnī Sufism?

Does the manuscript Nasrat al-Faqir rise to the level of an ideal exemplar that can be drawn upon when dealing with contemporary intellectual disputes?

First Section: Imam al-Senuoussi and Shaykh Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir

Imam al-Senuoussi, may God have mercy on him, was known as Abu Abd Allah Mohamed ben Youcef ibn Omar ibn Shu'ayb al-Senuoussi al-Hasani. He became known by reference to a tribe in the Maghrib (Tlemcen) through the epithet al-Senuoussi. 'Al-Hasani' refers to al-Hasan ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib on the side of his paternal grandmother. This information is provided by his student al-Malali in his work "The Tlemcenian Authorship". He was described as a scholar, a righteous figure and an ascetic of Tlemcen¹.

He was an Imam al-Maaquli, a jurist, a traditionist and a mathematician-jurist, as well as the author of creeds whose like none of the later scholars produced. Among his works are: The Completion of the

¹ See: Ibn meriem al-Madiyouni el telemceni, *The Orchard: On the Remembrance of the Scholars and Saints of Tlemcen*, al-Th'alabiyya Press, 1908 CE, p. 237/ and Ahmad Baba al-Tinbukti, *Obtaining Rejoicing Through Embroidering Brocade*., Dar al-Katib, Tripoli – Libya, 2nd ed., 2000 CE, p. 568.

Perfection of the Completion for the commentary on Muslim, and he also wrote a preface to logic and its explanation, as well as a Commentary on the Isagoge in logic. He also wrote a commentary on al-Hufi's Abridgment, a commentary on al-Habak's Poem on the Astrolabe, and other works, including praiseworthy compositions².

He grew into a blessed, virtuous and righteous person. According to his student al-Malali, he received initiation and learning from a group of distinguished, blessed scholars with a divine orientation. From the Imam — the learned scholar, saintly ascetic and sincere adviser Ibrahim al-Tazi — he received the cloak of initiation and was taught; he was also given the *khirqā* and related from his shaykhs. It is said that the latter put saliva in his mouth and imparted certain matters to him. He was a sign of knowledge, guidance, righteousness, conduct, asceticism, scrupulousness, piety and vigilant restraint.

His student al-Malali compiled a major work on his conditions, biography and benefits, comprising roughly sixteen large-format booklets. He died on Sunday the 18th of Jumada al-akhirah in the year 595/895 AH. People smelled musk in the air after his death; may God have mercy on him³.

As for al-Maknasi, researchers encounter considerable difficulty identifying Abū al-Hasan al-Saghir al-Maknasi in biographical dictionaries, *tabaqat* works (generational compendia) and historical accounts. This is because these works refer to Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir as al-Zuwayli, al-Zarwili, or al-Zarwali: a Maliki jurist and judge of Fez who was a memoriser, accomplished, long-lived, and the author of a commentary on Al-Mudawwanah, who died in 719 AH at nearly one hundred and twenty years of age⁴.

Furthermore, some early copyists made a mistake⁵, which subsequent researchers and editors then repeated by attributing the book *The Refutation of the Poor* to al-Zuwayli⁶, just as 'Awad Abd Allah al-Mu'taq did in his edition of *Epistle on the Condemnation of Innovation*, which he claimed to have attributed to the jurist judge based on the occurrence of this name in the manuscript.

However, in contrast, the name of Abu al-Ḥasan al-saghir al-Maknasi, along with his book ("Refuting the Ascetics/Poor"), was included in the great research work entitled *The Historical Evidence for the Works of the Maliki School*. In that study, the researcher established that he was a contemporary of al-Senoussi in the ninth century—not the jurist who died in the eighth century⁷.

I could not find a biographical entry for Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir al-Maknasi, nor under the name he appears under in al-Senoussi's manuscript (al-Susi). This constitutes a methodological problem due to the absence of scholarly documentation, making it impossible to verify the author's methodology and the extent of their mastery of the sciences. Consequently, citing his statements is a futile gamble that

²- Ibn al-Qadi al-Maknasi, *The Pearl of the Bridal Canopy regarding the Names of Notable Men*", ed. by Muhammad al-Ahmadi Abu al-Nur: Dar al-Turath (Cairo) – al-Maktaba al-Atiqa (Tunis), 1st ed., 1971 CE, vol. 2, p. 142.

³- Sre: Ahmad Baba al-Tinbukti, *Obtaining Rejoicing Through Embroidering Brocade*, the previous reference, pp. 568–570.

⁴- They look at: Ibn Qunfudh, *al-Wafayat*, 4th ed., 1983 CE, p. 342 / Ibn al-Qadi al-Maknasi, *The Pearl of the Bridal Canopy regarding the Names of Notable Men*, the previous reference – vol. 3, p. 243 / Ibn nacereddine al-Dimashqi, *Tawdih al-MushTabih*, 1st ed., 1993 CE, vol. 5, p. 428.

⁵- See: *Dictionary of Moroccan Scholars*, Moroccan Association for Authorship, Translation and Publishing, Vol. 14, 1989, pp. 4651–4652.

⁶- See also: Abd al-Rahim al-Lawi, 'Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir, a contemporary of al-Sanusi (d. 895 AH)', *Muhammadia League of Scholars website*, 'Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir [a contemporary of al-Sanusi (d. 895 AH)]' – *Muhammadia League of Scholars Portal*

⁷- See: Muhammad al-Alami, *The Historical Guide to Maliki Works*, Centre for Research and Studies in Maliki Jurisprudence, *Muhammadia Association of Scholars*, no date, p. 439.

produces intellectual chaos and misleads successive generations. The content remains in doubt as to whether it belongs to him or has been attributed to an imaginary figure. Had al-Senussī not asked scholars of his own time about Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaghīr al-Maknāsī, and had they not replied that they knew him, the treatise would not have had any standing or importance.

Nevertheless, we can infer features of his personality based on the descriptions Imam al-Senussī provides in “The Refutation of al-Saghīr”, whether the epithets are those issued by al-Senussī himself or the scholars he consulted⁸. This has raised doubts among some researchers concerning the attribution of the manuscript to Imam al-Senussī. These doubts include:

- Claiming knowledge of the outward sciences while waging war against the inward sciences.
- Speaking in incomprehensible or cryptic utterances and drawing ‘proofs’ from sudden flashes or omens.
- Uttering words without verification.
- A frivolous/deficient jurist who is veiled from realities and subtleties.
- Folly, a lack of reason and a preoccupation with the affairs and faults of Muslims.

Dullness and hypocrisy.

Manuscript: ‘The Reply to the Poor and the People of Innovated Heresies in Islam from the Four Schools of Law’

Regarding the letter of Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaghīr, Mustafa Bahou⁹ commended it, concluding that it is one of the earliest Maghrebi works dedicated to refuting the Sufis and the innovations they introduced, as he describes them. Bahou also indicated that the letter reveals an early stage of the controversy surrounding Sufism in the Moroccan environment¹⁰. He further stated that he has edited the text, which is currently in the process of being published¹¹. According to Bahou, the author divided his treatise into a preface and two main chapters. The first chapter deals with the regulation of certain legal and religious issues, as well as warning against the dangers of deviation and heresy. It warns against departing from the fundamentals of creed and the Sunnah. Meanwhile, the second chapter criticises and refutes the Sufis’ statements, highlighting what the author perceives as doctrinal or behavioural contradictions in their speech.

However, readers of the manuscript may not agree with Bahou’s assessment. This is because the manuscript contains many absolutist statements and generalisations, as well as ‘rejected’ hadiths — or hadiths with no basis — used by Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaghīr as evidence. Some of these statements can be cited verbatim from his treatise, noting that some are excerpted from a longer hadith, whereas most are cited without an authority (or chain of transmission).

⁸- See: Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Sanusi, *Nasrat al-Faqīr fi al-Rad ‘ala Abi al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaghīr*, King Saud University Library (Manuscripts Department), no. 7221. Copyist: al-Qalī al-Marīnī. Date of copying: 1274 AH. 11 folios, medium-sized Maghribī script. See also: Abu al-ʿAbbās Zarruq al-Fasī, ed. *Sayyid Yusuf Ahmad*, Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyah, 2010, vol. 2, pp. 458–460.

⁹- I have found no translation of his work other than his full name: Abu Sufyan Mustafa Bahou al-Slawī al-Maghribī, who is a contemporary scholar.

¹⁰- I have not come across a copy of it

¹¹- Mustafa Bahou, “Scholars of Morocco and Their Resistance to Innovations, Sufism, Grave-Worship, and Seasonal Festivals,” *Al-Sabeel Newspaper*, Vol. 1, 2007, p. 89

“No man raises his voice in song, or in a concentrated form of singing, except that two devils make him fall silent by striking his chest.¹²”

‘Iblis was the first to compose and the first to sing.¹³’

- ‘I forbade two foolish sounds: the sound of a lewd woman and the sound of a singer who makes himself heard.¹⁴’

- ‘He forbade the sound of the drum, the tambourine and wind instruments.¹⁵’

He also relied on many statements from jurists of the three legal schools and excerpted remarks attributed to the Mālikīs.

‘Likewise, the writings of the Shafi’is, the Hanafis and the Hanbalis — may God be pleased with them.’ Their works are filled with the censure of the people of audition. Likewise are the writings of Malik and his followers. Any later scholars who did so have erred and are not to be followed.¹⁶”

The manuscript also characterises the Sufis as follows:

‘a group that departed from the community and took audition and ecstatic utterance as merchandise (...). The late scholars only permitted audition out of a love of play, and so their evil spread beyond themselves; they are the ones who urge the common people to ecstatic utterance...¹⁷”

Thus, it becomes clear that Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir leaned towards strictness in absolutely prohibiting audition and reciting the Qur’an in congregation, as well as exaggerating by citing rejected or baseless reports.

Chapter Two: The Manuscript ‘Nasrat al-Faqir’ and its Historical Context

The account of the manuscript begins with the arrival of the letter from Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir in Tlemcen. The scholar al-Senoussi (may God have mercy on him) came across the letter and found deviant statements and misunderstandings in it, including disparagement of the people of the Path. Al-

¹²- Musnad al-Harith ibn Abi Usama, Vol. 2, p. 843 / Musnad al-Ruwani, Vol. 2, p. 277 / Al-Mu’jam al-Kabir, al-Tabarani, Vol. 8, p. 204 / Majma’ al-Zawaid, Nur al-Din al-Haythami, Vol. 8, p. 120 / Jami’ al-Ahadith, al-Suyuti, Vol. 17, p. 55 / Its ruling: Al-Zayla’i said in his commentary on the hadiths of Al-Kashaf: “It was narrated by Ibn ‘Adi in Al-Kamil (Al-Kamil fi Da’if al-Rijal), and he attributed it to Al-Harith ibn Nabhan, and there are others in it as well.” Al-Albani said in The Prohibition of Musical Instruments: “I said: I had previously cited it because of them in Al-Sahihah under no. 2922, but then it became clear to me that one of them was severely weak, so I refrained from authenticating it.” And he said in Al-Silsilah Al-Da’ifah: “I said: This is a very weak chain of transmission; its weakness lies with Ali ibn Yazid, who is Al-Alahani (...) and the hadith scholars have unanimously agreed to criticize him and disregard him.”

¹³- Al-‘Iraqi said in his commentary on the hadiths of Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din, p. 757: “I found no source for it in the hadith of Jabir...,” and Murtada al-Zubaydi followed him in his commentary on the hadiths of Ihya, vol. 3, p. 1331, saying: “I said: And so mentioned his student, al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar, in his commentary on the hadiths of the adhkar...; I found no source for it nor any mention of it... Ibn al-Subki said: I found no chain of transmission for it.” Al-Albani said in Al-Silsilah al-Da’eefah: It has no basis.

¹⁴- Ibn Hazm rejected it in Al-Rasail and said: “We know of no chain for it, and this is nothing.” I have not come across this wording in the books of hadith.

¹⁵- Al-Khatib narrated it in The History of Baghdad, using his own wording. Al-Ajri narrated it in The Prohibition of Dice and Chess, as did Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi in Kanz al-‘Ummal and Al-Suyuti in Al-Jami’ al-Saghir and Al-Fath al-Kabir. ‘Abd al-Raouf al-Manawi wrote the following in Fayd al-Qadir: ‘This is a weak hadith...’ Al-Albani said: ‘Very weak.’

¹⁶- Al-Makanasi, Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir, Al-Rad ‘ala al-Fuqara’ wa Ahl al-Bid‘ah al-Mudhatathah fi al-Islam, Manuscript No. 105/4, King Abdulaziz Al Saud Foundation, Casablanca,

http://www.fondation.org.ma/web/affichage_numerics/319/17

¹⁷- Ibid

Senoussi therefore burned those pages, kept a copy for himself and sought the opinion of scholars in Tlemcen. They confirmed that these views were corrupt¹⁸.

Al-Senoussi then mentions that he had previously held favourable views of ‘Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir’, believing him to be among the people of knowledge and spiritual insight. This belief stemmed from the fact that al-Senoussi had read a commentary on Muhammad ibn Abi Zayd’s treatise for him. However, through this incident, al-Senoussi discovered that Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir was merely a partisan critic of outward matters. He did not possess knowledge of the inward (spiritual) dimension, nor did he understand the subtleties of spiritual realities. Consequently, al-Senoussi resolved to refute him and reject his accusations against Sufism and its followers¹⁹.

In turn, Dr. Said Aliwan²⁰ argued that the letter titled ‘The Aid of the Sufi: In Refutation of Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir’, is not by al-Senoussi. Instead, he claimed that it was fabricated by a wayward Sufi and attributed to al-Senoussi to increase its value and circulation. He supported this view with several reasons, including the following:²¹

1. Al-Malali, who was a student of al-Senoussi, did not mention this treatise among al-Senoussi’s works, even though he recorded precise details of al-Senoussi’s life.
2. He also did not mention the incident which allegedly prompted al-Senoussi to write the book.
3. Al-Senoussi did not refer to ‘Nasrat al-Faqir’ and made no mention of the story in his writings.
4. Biographers of al-Senoussi, such as al-Tanbakti, al-Hafnawi and Ibn Maryam, did not mention this treatise at all.
5. Al-Senoussi emphasised that the faith of the imitator was invalid. How, then, can the letter say: ‘Believe and do not criticise’ in the sense intended by the quotation?
6. In the letter, al-Senoussi states that he met Zurquq and asked him about Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir. Zurquq denied this, claiming it was ignorance of inward knowledge and of matters practised by the Sufis, such as ecstatic utterance²². Yet in Zurquq’s works, we find him denying these very matters.
7. Zurquq could not have met al-Senoussi in 846 AH because that was the year he was born.
8. The book contains obscene and offensive expressions which do not align with the character of al-Senoussi (may God have mercy on him).

For our part, we examined the reasons provided by Dr. Aliwan, and it became clear to us that there are logically plausible explanations. We then asked: Was the entire letter fabricated and falsely attributed to al-Senoussi, or was it distorted through additions, omissions and alterations by copyists?

Undoubtedly, a thorough examination of the manuscript would remove ambiguity and answer this question. However, before examining and analysing the manuscript, we will present possible responses to the objections raised by Dr. Aliwan above. We therefore conclude:

Firstly, it is true that al-Malali did not mention the treatise *Nasrat al-Faqir* under this exact title. However, he did state that al-Malali wrote that al-Senoussi (may God have mercy on him) would ‘write answers to questions put to him on most occasions’. Some of these answers could reasonably be considered part of his body of work because of their importance and independence. Among what he

¹⁸- Muhammad ibn Youcef al-Senoussi, *Nasrat al-Faqir*.

¹⁹- Ibid

²⁰- Professor at Prince Abdelkader University, Constantine; researcher in logic.

²¹- Taken from: As'id Aliwan, Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Sanusi and his commentary on his abridgment of logic, *Dar al-Kitab al-Thaqafi*, 2009, pp. 126-129.

²²- Al-Sanusi did not mention that Zurquq denounced those who rejected the ecstatic utterances in his writings.

wrote were teachings, counsel, letters and treatises in which questions were raised...²³” This suggests that al-Senoussi could have written a letter or treatise such as Nasrat al-Faqir.

Secondly, it is not possible to definitively state that al-Senoussi did not refer to or allude to the incident or the letter, because some of his books remain in manuscript archives and have not been preserved or made available. Likewise, it is not sound to rule out attributing the letter to him merely because he does not mention it in any of the books currently in circulation.

Thirdly, it is true that al-Tanbakti and Ibn Maryam did not include the treatise in al-Senoussi’s list of works. This may be due to their lack of access to the manuscript. However, the treatise is referenced in the works of subsequent historians, including Hajji Khalifa (d. 1068 AH) in *Kashf al-Zunun*, and Ismail Basha al-Babani al-Baghdadi (d. 1393 AH), who cited it in *The Clarification of the Hidden and The Gift of the Gnostics*. Similarly, Muhammad ibn Jafar al-Kattani (d. 1345 AH) mentions it in *The Solace of the Souls*, as does Khayr al-Din al-Zirikli (d. 1410 AH) in *al-Alam*, among others.

Fourthly, Dr Aliwan mentioned that al-Senoussi included the phrase “Believe and do not criticise” in his refutation of Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir. According to Dr. Aliwan, this is inconsistent with al-Senoussi’s position on the invalidity of the faith of the imitator. This is indeed true if the saying is taken in the sphere of creed. However, in the manuscript, al-Senoussi explicitly emphasised the distinction between creed and criticism in a section entitled: ‘Chapter on Belief and Criticism’.

He clarified that this phrase is well known in the context of criticising the path of the saints, disputing the authority of the pure friends of God (‘Allies’ or ‘The Pure Ones’), rejecting miraculous gifts, and describing them as deniable or forbidden. It appears in many compilations, including: *The Provision of the Truthful Disciple* and *The Principles of Sufism* by Abu al-Abbas al-Zurquq — whose wording is completed by ‘and do not become tranquil/certain about what belongs to anyone’, and similar formulations. Similarly, it resembles the statement attributed to al-Junayd (may God have mercy on him): ‘Faith in our way is wilāyah.’²⁴

Therefore, when al-Senoussi included it, he intended nothing other than to establish the truth of wilayah and karamah (spiritual favour). For he said:

‘The Sufi path is entirely built upon submission and affirmation, just as the foundation of creed is built upon inquiry and verification.’ Thus, the basic principle for them is good opinion and submission until the knower of God becomes apparent; after that, excuses are made on his behalf...²⁵”

Fifthly, his meeting with Zurquq (may God have mercy on him) in the year of his birth is open to the possibility of a transcription error or mistake, as Dr Aliwan suggested. Furthermore, Al-Senoussi does not state that he asked Zurquq to review what he had written in his refutation of Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir; he only says that he asked Zurquq about Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir. Therefore, we cannot conclude what Zurquq knew or believed regarding the content of the letter. To claim that Zurquq approved of al-Senoussi’s ‘fabrications’ and innovations — those that Zurquq himself would have rejected — requires evidence that is not available. This is one side of the matter.

²³- Muhammad ibn Ahmad Baghli, *The Works of Imam al-Sanusi on Divine Gifts*, Heritage Site, *The Works of Imam Sidi Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Sanusi* according to his student al-Malali - Mirath

²⁴- See: Abu al-Abbas Zarruq al-Fasi, *Uddat al-Murid al-Sadiq*, Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2007, p. 98 / *Qawa'id al-Tasawwuf*, *Kitab Nashirun* - Beirut, vol. 2, p. 51

²⁵- Al-Sanusi, *Nusrat al-Faqir*

Conversely, there is no evidence that Al-Senoussi established or defended these innovations in his treatise. He does not suggest that he condones wrongdoing in any way. So where does Dr Aliwan obtain this claim?

In fact, Al-Senoussi concludes his treatise with the following statement:

‘The first thing the truthful person pays attention to is following the Sunnah of the Messenger of God — peace and blessings be upon him — and imitating his Companions. They witness the right guidance that comes from him and avoid forbidden innovation, blame and sins.’ One does not enter the path of remembrance except after knowing the person to be remembered and their attributes, both majestic and beautiful...²⁶”

We will present his statements in the next chapter, God willing, at which point it will become clear whether or not he defended forbidden things.

Sixthly, as for the harsh accusations and severe allegations that a virtuous, learned and pious teacher-scholar like al-Senoussi could not possibly utter, these are not offensive in the way that Dr ‘Alīwān seemed to assume²⁷. Examples include foolishness and a lack of sound judgement, arrogance, and a preoccupation with the reputation of Muslims, and an inward lack of rectitude. Yet, when we read al-Sanusi’s works, we find this critical, rebuking style. Indeed, we read him issuing strict reprimands, particularly against ‘the scholars of this world’, as he calls them.

Moreover, al-Senoussi addresses the disparagement of Abu al-Hasan al-Ṣaghīr, his outspokenness and his accusation that all Sufis are a deviant party that practises forms of shirk (associating partners with God), commits deniable wrongdoing and departs from the community. He also accuses them of being hypocritical and distracted, playing around and taking the Devil and the Jews as examples, while adducing invalid reports.

We therefore judge it most likely that the treatise is attributed to Imam al-Sanusi (may God have mercy on him), based on the interpretive indications set out above and our conclusion from comparing the two manuscripts that he refutes the objector and dismantles his arguments, one by one, exactly as he does in the treatise.

Chapter Three: Imam al-Senoussi’s Method of Refuting Abu al-Hasan al-Saghīr

First: Clarifying the Focus of the Dispute

1. Imam al-Senoussi (may God have mercy on him) begins his treatise by emphasising the seriousness of neglecting zeal for God and the path leading to Him, due to obstacles and individuals who lie in wait²⁸. These individuals claim knowledge of the outward and deny knowledge of the inward, rejecting the truth and its causes, yet they strengthen themselves by relying on anomalous reports in legal opinions²⁹.³⁰

²⁶- Same source

²⁷- We mention examples of these texts in the section on his methodology below.

²⁸- Biographical works mention that al-Sanusi, may God have mercy on him, learned esoteric knowledge from his sheikh, al-Tazi al-Wahrani, who taught him the truth and the path. They attribute to him the attainment of sainthood, and he bestowed upon him the Sufi cloak, placed it in his mouth, and narrated many things from him. His student, al-Malali, said: "He was unique in the esoteric sciences. In esoteric knowledge, he is the axis and the sun of its morning. Whoever hears his words on it knows that he has been absorbed in the absence of God Almighty and has been granted access to the mines of His secrets and the rising of His lights." See: Ibn Maryam, al-Bustan fi Dhikr al-'Ulama' wa al-Awliya' bi Tilimsan, p. 237, previous reference.

²⁹- We have shown how Abu al-Hasan al-Saghīr al-Maknasi used unreliable narrations as evidence.

³⁰- Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Sanusi, Nusrat al-Faqir fi al-Radd 'ala Abi al-Hasan al-Saghīr

He also makes a similar statement in his commentary on Sahih al-Bukhari, saying:

‘So what if these Imams (may God be pleased with them) were to see our time, which we have witnessed? May God grant help, and to Him is complaint. There is no power nor strength except by God.’ It is the end of the ninth century, when the Antichrist will emerge and the sun will rise from the west, along with other major signs. Although their era contained what it contained, there was still the appearance of practising scholars and genuine saints. Consequently, the wretched seeker of the Hereafter would find someone to follow in words and deeds, and someone to support his determination and enhance his spiritual state. But our difficult, bleak time has revealed only those who block the path to God. If anyone among them seeks knowledge or religion from someone else, they are misguided unless God guides them; they take their own desires to be their god. If he refrains from social mixing, however, his religion and reason are secure, yet his mind is seized by devils who instruct him in what they intend, out of ignorance of what is meant. To God we belong, and to Him we return. How can salvation be attained by meeting these two conditions?’³¹

2. He then relates a consensus among those with outward and inward knowledge that: The Shari’ah without true realisation, and true realisation without the Shari’ah, is heresy³².

This consensus essentially begins with rational people and ends with scholars, jurists and God-knowing practitioners and workers, who all agree that religion is both Shari’ah and haqiqah³³.

3. Al-Senoussi explains how Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir issued sweeping judgements against the Sufis without qualification — judgements that do not befit a jurist — saying:

‘These papers came into my hands in which he objected to the people of the Path and called them innovators. He did not restrict his statement to anything, speaking with great boldness and uttering accusations without restraint...’³⁴

4. Finally, al-Senoussi establishes that the real dispute is not about the correctness of Sufism and its reality — that matter is already settled, since Sufism is the third pillar of the exalted Shari’ah, namely excellence. Rather, the dispute concerns understanding the inward, the subtleties of the spiritual path and the methods of walking towards God, which are grounded in a principle within the Shari’ah and are not innovations in words or deeds.

Second: Exposing Moral Contradiction and Binding the Opponent with Their Own Reasoning

Al-Senoussi clarifies that there is a moral inconsistency in those who criticise the Sufi and Dhikr communities. They show excessive zeal in attacking and slandering them while ignoring an essential part of the prohibitions, namely the outwardly apparent major sins and clearly evident wrongs. These prohibitions include drinking alcohol, committing adultery or fornication, disobeying one’s parents, wrongfully consuming the wealth of orphans, giving false testimony, practising usury and accepting bribes.

³¹- Mohamed ibn Youcef al-Senoussi, 'Supporting the Poor: A Response to Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir', Commentary on Sahih al-Bukhari, Dar al-Wai' Publishing and Distribution, 1st ed., 2012, vol. 1, p. 234.

³²- Ibid. I said: May God have mercy on him. He established this belief in his commentary on the Algerian poem Al-Manhaj al-Sadiq fi Sharh Kifaya al-Mureed (ed.). Mustafa Marzouki, Dar al-Huda, Ain M'lila, Algeria. Chapter on Sufism, pp. 466–467.

³³- His student al-Mallali mentioned that he combined Sharia and truth perfectly. See: Ibn Maryam, al-Bustan, op. cit., p. 239

³⁴- El Senoussi, Nasrat al-Faqir.

This approach strengthens al-Sanusi's religious and juristic rebuttal. It shows that these critics, many of whom are scholars tied to the courts of rulers, may commit haram acts such as taking bribes, while the Sufis keep themselves away from such prohibitions precisely because they are distant from the paths of governance, power and authority³⁵.

Al-Senoussi further compels the opponent using their own logic. He says, "If you had understood what God commanded you to do, you would have been busy criticising yourselves, your households, and those who seek refuge in you."

Thus, he obliges them to begin with themselves and rectify their character before attacking the people of Sufism. He supports this with a report from a valid hadith, which is narrated in full, in which the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) says:

'All of the Muslim is forbidden to the Muslim: his blood, his wealth, and his honour.'³⁶

2. The use of rebuke and severe reproach

Al-Senoussi (may God have mercy on him) combined the style of rebuking and forcefully reproaching the addressee, together with refuting his statements with rational arguments, with the style of admonitory encouragement grounded in textual evidence. For example, he uses interrogation to deny, supported by legal proof. He says:

"O foolish one, O dull-witted one! Have you not heard the Almighty say: 'And the active ones will be active'? The Messenger of God (peace be upon him) said: "Dogs of Hell snatch the flesh away from the bones"³⁷.

He also says:

"O deceived one! Have you not heard the saying of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him): 'From the good Islam of a person is that he abandons what does not concern him'."³⁸

He supports his argument with the Prophet's statement:

"More of my hypocrites are its reciters (its readers)."³⁹

In the same vein, and as part of the style of admonition and deterrence, he says:

'It has been reported that speaking ill of the honour and rights of Muslims brings about a bad end and punishment. So, if this objection reaches you, accept the truth, understand it, take it in and ask Shaykh Taqi al-Din al-Maknasi⁴⁰ to consider it for you. Bear witness to your repentance, for you are under God's wrath for having allied yourself with His allies. Repent to God...'⁴¹

The Imam al-Senoussi used this style extensively in his works. For example, in his commentary on Sahih al-Bukhari, he writes:

³⁵- El Senoussi, Nasrat al-Faqir.

³⁶- Narrated by Muslim and al-Bukhari from Abu Hurayra, may Allah be pleased with him.

³⁷- Al-Ghazali mentioned it in *Ihya' al-Ulum al-Din*, and al-Zubaidi said in his commentary on it in vol. 5, p. 'The Iraqi said: "It is as the author said. Ibn al-Mubarak narrated it in full in his book *Ziyad al-Zuhd*, and there is a man in the chain of narration. Ibn al-Jawzi narrated it in his book *al-Mawdu'at*." It is also in Ibn al-Jawzi's *Mawdu'at* in vol. 3.

³⁸- It was narrated by Ahmad, at-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, al-Tabarani and al-Munajjid in *Encouragement and Deterrence*. His ruling: There are many ways to prove it, and it is correct for others.

³⁹- It is mentioned in the '*Masail Ahmad*' by his son Abu al-Fadl Salih, in the '*the great history*' by al-Bukhari, and was narrated by al-Tabarani in the '*Al-Kabir*' and al-Bayhaqi in the '*Al-Shu'ab*'. Its many chains make it a sahih hadith.

⁴⁰- I could not find a translation.

⁴¹- See: el senoussi, Nasrat al-Fakir.

“I said: Look, O heedless one, and take warning from the consequences of loving this world and its leadership—how matters ended for their people in dreadful circumstances. Refuge is sought with God from that evil, and from being deprived of faith, even though the truth was established for them and their recognition was confirmed. So what, then, is the condition of the ignorant person afflicted with its love? If you admonish him, he is like a dead man wandering about, overflowing with intoxication. All of this is a powerful warning to the scholar who is drawn to the world and to some aspect of its leadership, who is content with his false sense of security regarding its dangers, relying on his knowledge—alas, how extreme is his folly! It is as though he has never seen or heard of the conditions of his contemporaries among the people of the world, whose knowledge has ultimately reached them, and likewise those before them right from the beginning of time: how the love of this world has intoxicated and distracted them from their interests in the Hereafter. They are as though deprived of reason, caring nothing about their actions, and they do not awaken until death, unless God, Glorified and Exalted, grants repentance to whomever He wills⁴².

Third: clarifying the meaning of newly introduced innovation.

Al-Senoussi (may God have mercy on him) indicated that the inference of the person who cites the hadith ‘Newly introduced matters are an innovation’⁴³ as evidence to condemn and reject Sufis is not correct. This is because, although the hadith is general in wording, it is specifically intended, given that:

“Newly introduced matters are shared by people of outward and inward...” Some of these matters were introduced during the time of the Companions (may God be pleased with them), who approved of them, just as the learned scholars, jurists and Successors did. Have you not heard the saying of our Master, the Messenger of God (peace be upon him): ‘Hold fast to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the rightly guided caliphs after me; cling to it with your molars’?⁴⁴ And he (peace be upon him) said: ‘My Companions are like stars; by whichever of them you take guidance, you will be guided.’⁴⁵

He also cited Umar ibn al-Khattab, who said the following about night prayers in Ramadan:

“What a good innovation this is!”⁴⁶

Newly introduced matters among the people of outward practice include devoting oneself to the science of grammar, memorising rare or unfamiliar terms, writing and codifying the principles of jurisprudence, drawing arguments through particular legal issues, beautifying and ornamenting copies of the Qur’an, expanding one’s dwelling and clothing, and indulging in pleasurable foods and drinks. So why, he asks, do you not reject all of that and repeat it, just as you reject the innovations of the people of the heart — innovations that lead to God, guide to Him and involve associating with Him in remembrance?

Then he cited God’s eternal speech:

‘I sit with the one who remembers Me.’

⁴²- el senoussi, , Shurouh al-Bukhari, 2:200.

⁴³- It was narrated by Ibn Majah, Ibn Batta in al-Ibana, al-Dailami in al-Firdaws, and Ibn Taymiyyah, who said that it is mawquf on Ibn Masaoud.

⁴⁴- It was narrated by Abu Dawud in a lengthy hadith, al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, and Ahmad, who said that it is hasan sahih.

⁴⁵- It was narrated by al-Daqiqi in al-Mu’talaq wa al-Mu’talaq al-Mu’talaq and by Ibn al-Mulaqqin in al-Ghayat al-Mā’ūnah. It is considered by the muhakkin to be of the level of hasan or mawquf.

⁴⁶- Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani narrated it in al-Taljis al-Habir and said that its isnad is good.

He explained that remembering God — beginning with the Fātiḥah after prayers, mentioning Him in congregation and speaking about the subtleties of Sufism — is based on hadiths and reports. He added that all of these are extra acts of good by which one draws near to God the Exalted⁴⁷.

Thus, Al-Senoussi clarified that not all innovations are misguided, and that they fall into different categories — this is the view held by scholars⁴⁸. In his treatise, he cited the statements of ‘Izz al-Dīn ibn Abd al-Salam in al-Qawa‘id and concurred with al-‘Abbī’s commentary on Sahih Muslim. Regarding the hadith, al-Abbi said:

“Every innovation is misguidance.”

It is general wording with a restricted meaning, because innovation is divided according to the categories of Shari’ah:

- Obligatory — such as arranging proofs according to the method of the theologians in refuting atheists;
- Recommended — such as composing works and building schools and Sufi lodges;
- forbidden and disliked — these are clearly known.
- Permissible — such as taking it easy and trying different foods.

Support for this can be found in the saying of Omar (may God be pleased with him): “What a good innovation this is!”⁴⁹

He also mentioned examples of forbidden and denounced innovations, such as the doctrines of the Qadariyyah, the Jabbariyyah, the Murji’ah and the anthropomorphists. He expanded upon this in his book al-Manhaj as-Sadid, in the commentary on the Algerian poem⁵⁰.

Then, in a tone of reproach, he concluded:

‘What village could be better than this innovation? What good could be greater than it? You, O dull, self-styled ‘jurist’, have only been heedless because heedlessness has taken over your heart and made you feel at ease with God’s remembrance. God — Glorified and Exalted be He — said: ‘The Shaytan has taken hold of them and made them forget the remembrance of God.’ And He said: ‘And whoever turns away from the remembrance of the Most Merciful, We appoint for him a Shaytan who becomes his companion.’

Sidi Ahmad ibn Ata Allah (may God have mercy on him) said in Miftah al-Falah: ‘Beware of opposing the people of “There is no god but God”—for they have general guardianship from God; they are God’s friends. Even if they err and commit sins as great as the earth, they do not associate anything with God, and God will forgive them.’

If this is established, then gatherings for dhikr, the recitation of the Qur’an, and spending time with the poor and the righteous — together with kissing them, rejoicing in their company, visiting them, receiving blessings from them, and so on — are all commendable innovations. recommended. Indeed, they may even be obligatory with respect to the heedless person who benefits from them^{51, 52}

The Imam supported this with evidence, including:

⁴⁷- See al-Sanusi, Nasrat al-Faqir.

⁴⁸- Izz al-Din ibn Abd al-Salam, The Rules of Judgments Regarding the Interests of Mankind, Maktaba al-Kawliyat al-Azhariyya, Cairo, 1991, vol. 2, p. 204.

⁴⁹- Al-Abi and El Senoussi, Sharh al-Jami’ al-Sahih, Kitab al-Jumu’a, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, Lebanon, 2008, vol. 3, p. 235.

⁵⁰- El Senoussi, "The Sound Approach in Explaining the Sufficiency of the Aspirant". Source cited, p. 455.

⁵¹- Found in Miftah al-Falah wa Musab al-Arwah, Ibn Atta al-Sanhaji, 1st ed., al-Saada Press, Cairo, p. 35.

⁵²- See al-Sanusi, Nasrat al-Faqir.

1. A group gathering in the houses of God:

“No people gather in one of the houses of God to recite and study the Book of God among themselves, except that mercy envelops them, tranquility descends upon them, the angels surround them and God mentions them among those who are with Him.⁵³”

2. Raising the voice in dhikr after the obligatory prayer:

“Raising the voice in dhikr when people leave after the obligatory prayer was common in the time of the Prophet. Ibn Abbas said, ‘When they left, I knew it would be because of that’ (i.e. because of their dhikr).⁵⁴”

3. Visiting a brother for the sake of God:

“A man set out to visit his brother for the sake of God in another village. God, Exalted is He, stationed an angel along his path. When the man passed, the angel asked, ‘Where are you going?’

He replied, ‘I want so-and-so.’ The angel asked, ‘Is it because of kinship?’ ‘No,’ he replied.

‘Is it because of a favour he has done for you that you wish to repay?’ he asked.

‘No,’ he replied.

‘Then why are you visiting him?’ he asked.

‘Because I love him for God, Exalted is He.’ The angel said, ‘I am God’s messenger to you. God loves you because you love Him.’⁵⁵”

4. Seeking blessings from the effects of the righteous:

He explained that seeking blessings from the traces/effects of the righteous is based on seeking blessings from what the Prophet ﷺ wore, touched or was associated with, in line with what both the Salaf and the Khalaf agreed upon with regard to seeking blessings from his prayer place, such as the Noble Sanctuary (al-Rawdah al-Mukarramah), and entering the cave that he ﷺ entered. This also includes washing his cloak for the sick and distributing it, along with his other personal effects. For example, he gave his cloak to Abu Talha to be divided among the people, he gave his waist-wrapper to be used for shrouding, he placed two green palm twigs on the grave, and he gave his shirt to a companion⁵⁶.

Fourth topic: Drawing on al-Senussi’s approach to refuting opponents and applying it to our contemporary reality.

Imam Al-Senoussi was renowned for his robust and rigorous scholarly methodology when refuting opponents. He combined intellectual precision with scriptural evidence. This method can be emulated in the contemporary world through three main pillars:

1) Intellectual and scriptural grounding: Al-Senoussi relied on rational proof grounded in the rules of logic while remaining firmly committed to scriptural texts. This combination enabled him to provide comprehensive clarifications and achieve persuasion. This is an effective and influential scholarly approach to refuting opponents because its strength lies in weighing and selecting a position and its supporting evidence.

⁵³- Narrated by Muslim, Ibn Majah, Abu Dawud, and Ahmad. It is authentic.

⁵⁴- Al-Bukhari, Chapter on Remembrance After Prayer. Muslim with a slight difference. It is authentic.

⁵⁵- Reported by Muslim and Ahmad. Its chain of narration is authentic according to Muslim's criteria.

⁵⁶- See al-Sanusi, Nasrat al-Faqir.

Furthermore, it is one of the most powerful forms of persuasion since it is based on rational principles and divine revelation texts conveying absolute truth. Combining the two produces a robust discourse that can withstand doubts and objections.

In light of the spread of irrational thinking and the dominance of technological development, it is necessary to employ this balanced and disciplined method in order to establish the soundness of religious claims and convince opponents. Its effectiveness is evident in its ability to influence and direct. It also represents a revival of the methodology of earlier scholars. Prominent scholars such as al-Juwayni, al-Baqillani, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and al-Sannusi used logic to understand doctrines and refute opponents. This highlights the importance of continuing in their footsteps by grounding religious issues.

2) Firmness and Resolution in Clarifying the Truth

Al-senoussi did not limit himself to generalised refutations. Instead, he distinguished between opponents based on their intellectual backgrounds and the extent to which they had deviated from the truth — from strict fanatics to careless and negligent people who fall into excess. He therefore used different styles of proof and persuasion with students of truth, adopting a stern stance towards people of personal desire and using rebuke and reproach.

Although reprimand may appear negative from a communication standpoint, it can serve as a beneficial and influential tool when used wisely and in appropriate contexts. This requires ensuring that the underlying intention is benevolent towards the opponent, urging them to reflect and adopt a corrective position, particularly if they are using fallacious methods or misleading tactics. Such an approach is used multiple times in the Qur'an to awaken minds, raise awareness and stimulate reflection.

Additionally, this approach breaks human obstinacy and arrogance by forcing individuals to confront realities or accept differences of opinion that they previously refused to acknowledge.

3) Combining Steadfastness with Renewal

Despite his firm adherence to foundations (uṣūl), Al-Ṣannūsī (may God have mercy on him) was open to the past. He strove to present Islamic Sufi thought in a language suited to his own era. This is clearly evident in the real-world examples he presents in his works. This approach can be emulated today in renewing religious discourse: the invariants of creed are preserved while being presented in a contemporary style that takes into account the challenges of modernity and new technologies.

Conclusion:

After this brief exposition, we can draw the following conclusions:

- Determining the identity of Abu al-Hasan al-Saghir al-Maknasi was challenging due to name overlaps with other figures. This resulted in the common error of attributing the manuscript 'Refutation of the Sufis/Faqirs' to al-Zuwayli al-Maknasi instead of al-Saghir al-Maknasi. This difficulty highlights the importance of rigorous historical verification and careful scholarly scrutiny of manuscripts.

- I compared al-Maknasi's manuscript with al-Senoussi's treatise to provide annotations clarifying the meanings in both. It became evident that al-Senoussi did indeed respond to the objector, which supports the account of his reception of al-Maknasi's message.

It seems to us that the treatise was not forged or fabricated under the name of Al-Senoussi, but rather that he is its author and editor. This is based on the guidance he probably received regarding Dr 'Aliwan's objections, as well as the close correspondence between the style of Al-Senoussi in this treatise and his style in his other works.

- Al-Senoussi did not base his refutations solely on rational or transmitted argumentation. Rather, he employed logic and rational foundations alongside shar‘ī principles, giving his responses greater force in dismantling doubts and addressing objections directed at Sufism.
- Al-Senoussi (may God have mercy on him) demonstrated that Sufism is not merely a spiritual experience, but a discipline founded upon shar‘ī, cognitive, methodological and experiential (spiritual) bases, combining purification with conduct, practice and engagement within society.
- Al-Senoussi’s aim was not futile, empty polemics. Rather, his purpose was to defend the truth while warning against making arbitrary judgements, blind partisanship or being led by desire, as this does not produce beneficial scholarly outcomes.
- Al-Senoussi’s approach to refuting opponents can be applied to discussions today, whether intellectual or religious, by adhering to logical proofs, clarifying issues in a scholarly manner and avoiding emotionally driven controversies.

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