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The Identity, Life and Works of the Alchemist Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s*

Identidad, vida y obra del alquimista Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s

Regula Forster

University of Tübingen

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4391-7217>

Juliane Müller

University of Tübingen

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3356-3147>

Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s is the author of a famous collection of alchemical poems entitled *Shudhūr al-dhahab* (The Splinters of Gold). In addition to *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, he authored several other works, including a commentary on *Shudhūr*, which is discussed here at some length for the first time, and strophic poetry on alchemy. The attribution of other works to him seems to be incorrect, and this applies especially to two works on magic. This contribution focusses on our findings on the identity of Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s and on his life, challenging the identification of the alchemist Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s with a Mālikī religious scholar known as Ibn al-Naqirāt. Based both on manuscripts and on bio-bibliographical literature, we argue that from an early period, two different people, both from sixth/twelfth century Morocco, have been

Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s es el autor de una colección famosa de poemas alquímicos titulada *Šudūr al-dhahab* (Las Esquirlas de Oro). Además de *Šudūr al-dhahab* compuso otras obras — en particular un comentario de las *Šudūr* que está descrito aquí por primera vez más detalladamente — así como poesía estrófica sobre alquimia. La atribución que se suele hacer de algunas obras a Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s parece incorrecta, sobre todo en lo que se refiere a dos obras concretas sobre magia. Esta contribución enfoca nuestros hallazgos sobre la identidad de Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s y su vida, desafiando la identificación del alquimista Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s con un erudito religioso Mālikī conocido como Ibn al-Naqirāt. Basado tanto en los manuscritos como en la literatura bio-bibliográfica, suponemos que dos personas diferentes,

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fused into one. Considering all sources, we also suggest that Ibn Arfa' Ra's might have left the Islamic west and have written at least some of his works in the east, more specifically in Egypt, thereby explaining the broad reception of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* throughout the Islamic world, particularly in the Mashriq.

Key words: Alchemy; Ibn Arfa' Ra's; Ibn al-Naqirāt; sixth/twelfth century; Morocco; al-Andalus; Almohads; *Shudhūr al-dhahab*; manuscript studies.

ambas del Marruecos del siglo VI/XII, probablemente han sido fusionadas en una en un período bastante temprano. Considerando todas las fuentes, sugerimos también que Ibn Arfa' Ra's pueda haber dejado el Occidente Islámico y haber escrito por lo menos algunas de sus obras en Oriente, más específicamente en Egipto, lo que explicaría la recepción amplia de *Šudūr al-dahab* en todo el Mundo Islámico y especialmente en el Máchreq.

Palabras clave: Alquimia; Ibn Arfa' Ra's; Ibn al-Naqirāt; siglo VI/XII; Marruecos; al-Andalus; Almohades; *Šudūr al-dahab*; manuscritos.

Ibn Arfa' Ra's¹ is the author of a famous collection of alchemical poems, a *dīwān*, entitled *Shudhūr al-dhahab* (The Splinters of Gold). In the usual biographical sources, such as al-Zirikī's *al-A'lām* or the *Biblioteca de al-Andalus*,² the following information is typically presented: Coming from an Andalusī family, he lived in Almohad Morocco and died in or around 593/1197. He was a preacher at the Qarawīyyīn mosque in Fez, a specialist in variant readings of the Qur'ān (*qirā'āt*), had an *ijāza* for teaching *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, and transmitted *hadīth*. In addition, he wrote works on alchemy and magic. However, this 'traditional' account has its flaws, and a re-evaluation of Ibn Arfa' Ra's's identity seems to be due.

In the following contribution, we will present several new findings on his life and works. We suggest that there has been a mix-up in the biography of Ibn Arfa' Ra's and that he was wrongly identified with a different scholar. We furthermore urge scholars to consider whether Ibn Arfa' Ra's could have left the Islamic west and have written at least some of his works in the east, more specifically in Egypt, therewith explaining his broad reception throughout the Islamic world, and especially in the Mashriq.

¹ The meaning as well as the grammar of his name poses some problems. In relation to the meaning, Ullmann has suggested the name be translated as "the son of the one who held his head very high" (Ullmann, *Natur- und Geheimpwissenschaften*, p. 231, n. 5), while Todd suggests an ironic turn as he translates: "lit. 'son of the tallest head,' i.e. 'lofty's son'" (Todd, "Alchemical Poetry", 119). Ullmann (ibid.) has rightly remarked that the name should be read with accusative of specification (*ra'san*) which is not how it is usually written. According to Ullmann, the form Ibn Arfa' Ra'sahū is also unacceptable, as the accusative of specification must be undetermined. In any case, it might be a family name, see below, section 3.3.

² Al-Zirikī, *al-A'lām*, vol. 5, p. 62; Calvo Labarta, "Ibn Arfa' Ra'sahu".

1. Works

Ibn Arfa' Ra's is credited with the authorship of several works on alchemy and magic. The following is an overview and evaluation of these works.

1.1. *Shudhūr al-dhahab*

His *opus magnum* is *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, a collection of more than forty poems and circa 1400 verses. As is usual for a *dīwān*, the poems are ordered according to their rhyming letters, and every letter of the alphabet is present with at least one poem. Lahouari Ghazzali has recently edited the *dīwān*,³ and Svetlana Dolgusheva (Berlin) is currently preparing a full-fledged critical edition with German translation. *Shudhūr al-dhahab* is highly praised in the bio-bibliographical literature,⁴ and has been the object of commentary at least thirteen times.⁵ In addition, there is a *takhmīs* version⁶ of *Shudhūr*, and the *dīwān* was the model for a Turkish collection of alchemical poems.⁷ *Shudhūr* is extant in nearly one hundred manuscripts, dating to a time between the eighth/fourteenth⁸ and the fourteenth/twentieth⁹ centuries. While many younger

³ Ghazzālī, *Shudhūr*.

⁴ For example by al-Kutubī, *Fawāt*, vol. 2, pp. 181-184; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, vol. 22, pp. 260-264; al-Maqqarī, *Analectes*, vol. 2, p. 410.

⁵ Besides Ibn Arfa' Ra's's auto-commentary on *Shudhūr*, the earliest commentaries are by Aḥmad b. Qaraṭāyā al-Irbilī (d. 655/1257), al-Sīmāwī (fl. mid-seventh/thirteenth century) and anonymous authors (*Sharḥ abyāt al-ma'ānī*, before 706/1307; *al-Dā'ira al-hindiyya*, prior to al-Jildakī's first commentary). There are five commentaries by al-Jildakī (written in a period from before 737/1337 to after 742-743/1342), as well as a commentary by al-Iznīqī (known as al-Mu'allif al-jadīd, fl. ninth/fifteenth century), and other, mostly anonymous, undated shorter commentaries.

⁶ By Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Qudsī (fl. seventh/fourteenth century, cf. Schippers, "al-Anṣārī"), later copied by Jalāl al-Naqqāsh in 810/1408 (cf. Wehr, *Verzeichnis*, pp. 23-24). On *takhmīs* as literary form see Kennedy, "Takhmīs".

⁷ *Dīwān-i hikmet*, written before c 1000/c 1600, cf. Artun, *Hearts*, esp. p. 36.

⁸ Most manuscripts are not dated; of those dated the oldest is Tinduf, Zāwiyat Sīdī Bel'amash, 31 (29 Jumādā I 704/28 Dec 1304). Other eighth/fourteenth century manuscripts are Oslo, Nasjonalbiblioteket, Ms. fol. 4313:8 (dated 731/1331); Manchester, John Rylands, 809 (Mingana no 338) (c 750/1350); Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Sbat 144 (eighth/fourteenth century).

⁹ These include (dated manuscripts only): Karachi, University Library, 19994 (dated 1340/1921); Princeton, Princeton University Library, Garrett, MS. 1090Y (1327/1909); Qom, al-Ma'had al-'ālī li-l-'ulūm wa-l-thaqāfa al-islāmiyya (formerly Kitābkhāna-yi Markaz-i muṭāla'āt wa-taḥqīqāt-i islāmī), no 281/6 (dated 1345/1926-1927).

manuscripts stem from the west of the Islamic world,¹⁰ none of the older manuscripts is in Maghribī script. This could mean that the text was, at least in an earlier period, primarily read in the Islamic east.

1.2. *Ḥall mushkilāt al-Shudhūr*

Ibn Arfaʿ Raʿs's second well-known work is a commentary on *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, usually entitled *Ḥall mushkilāt al-Shudhūr*, although other titles are found in the manuscripts (*Sharḥ Shudhūr al-dhahab*, *Sharḥ mushkilāt Shudhūr al-dhahab*, *Ḥall al-mushkilāt al-shudhūriyya*, and *Kitāb Laṭīf fī ḥall rumūz al-tathlīth*).¹¹ Twenty-nine manuscripts are known, of which we had access to twenty-six. All of these are relatively late: they mostly date to the tenth-twelfth/sixteenth-eighteenth centuries, and some as late as the early fourteenth/late nineteenth century.¹² Ullmann has suggested that there are two differently entitled recensions of this commentary, each presenting a different order of the text material.¹³ All the manuscripts we had access to, however, present the commentary text in a consistent order, although some of them are quite fragmented, which might have misled Ullmann to his assumption. While Ibn Arfaʿ Raʿs mentions that this is a short commentary and that he had planned to write a second, longer one,¹⁴ we have not found any evidence that he ever did.

¹⁰ Maghribī manuscripts include: Chinguetti, Maktabat Ahl Ḥabat, 546 (or 547); Rabat, Bibliothèque nationale du Royaume du Maroc, 103d (catalogue no 477) (dated 1267/1851); 2468 (1460d); 2469 (1495d); Rabat, Bibliothèque Royale (al-Khizāna al-Ḥasaniyya), 1035/Majmūʿ; 1109 (dated 1303/1885); 1116; 1520; 2252 (dated 1232/1817); 5326; 7384; Tunis, Bibliothèque nationale de Tunisie, 4558 (dated 1303/1885-1886); 4644/1 (dated 1246/1830-1831). Some of the manuscripts in the Royal Library in Rabat seem to come from the collection of Moulay al-Ḥasan I (Moroccan sultan, r. 1290-1311/1873-1894) who was a keen adept of alchemy (cf. Aït Salah Semlali, *Histoire*, esp. pp. 73, 308; Salmon, "Note").

¹¹ A critical edition of this commentary will be published soon: Ibn Arfaʿ Raʿs, 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī, *Kitāb Ḥall mushkilāt al-Shudhūr, Riwayāt Abī l-Qāsim Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Anṣārī* (The Unraveling of the Difficult Verses of *The Splinters [of Gold]*), In the Transmission of Abū l-Qāsim Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Anṣārī), ed. J. Müller, forthcoming.

¹² Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabt., Lbg. 96 gives the year 728/1327 in the colophon (fol. 106r). Ahlwardt, however, states that the colophon is by a later hand, "not correct" and dates the manuscript to c 1050/1640 (Ahlwardt, *Verzeichniss*, vol. 3, p. 535 [no 4182]).

¹³ Ullmann, *Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, p. 232.

¹⁴ *Ḥall*, London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 51r.

Ḥall mushkilāt al-Shudhūr is a very eclectic commentary: Ibn Arfa' Ra's usually comments only on selected verses. It was the object of an abbreviation (although it is a 'short' commentary already) in *Fī Sharḥ ba'd al-abyāt min Kitāb Ḥall al-mushkilāt* by 'Alī b. Mas'ūd al-Ḥā'irī al-Rushtāqī (probably thirteenth/nineteenth century).¹⁵ Another abbreviation of *Ḥall* is extant only in a one-page fragment, entitled *al-Wasm al-wasīm 'an al-ḥajar al-karīm*.¹⁶ This is a title the bibliographer al-Baghdādī (Īsmā'īl Paşa Bağdātli) gives for a work by Ibn Arfa' Ra's himself.¹⁷ However, the fragment now found suggests a later authorship.

At some point, we were tempted to question Ibn Arfa' Ra's's authorship of *Ḥall*, as al-Jildakī (fl. mid-eighth/fourteenth century) never cites it, although he obviously had an extensive knowledge of the Arabic alchemical tradition, as shown by his frequent citations of numerous texts on alchemy. However, we have found at least one passage in al-Sīmāwī's (fl. mid-seventh/thirteenth century) commentary to *Shudhūr* where he seems to be citing *Ḥall*. Al-Sīmāwī explains, when commenting upon the expression "a grove of neither-nor" (*min lā wa-lā aykan*) in a verse of the poem on *ḥā'*, that this designation was borrowed from the quranic "olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west" (*zaytūnatin lā sharqiyyatin wa-lā-gharbiyyatin*, Q 24:35), and that the author of *Shudhūr* had mentioned in "the commentary" that this was the olive tree (*qad dhakara fī l-sharḥ annahā shajarat al-zaytūn*) in connection with a verse of the poem on *ṭā'*.¹⁸ Indeed, the author of *Ḥall* cites the same quranic verse when explaining this verse on *ṭā'* and states,

¹⁵ Brockelmann, *GAL*, S I, 908 gives his name as 'Alī b. Mas'ūd al-Khayrī al-Rushtakī. The text is extant in two manuscripts: Rabat, Bibliothèque Royale (al-Khizāna al-Ḥasanīyya), 189 (late thirteenth/nineteenth century); Tehran, Markaz-i Dā'irat ul-ma'ārif-i bu-zurg-i islāmī, 17/5 (dated 1264/1847-1848). It was printed as a lithograph in Mumbai in 1298/1881, an edition sometimes mistakenly identified as being *Shudhūr al-dhahab* itself. A copy of the lithograph edition was owned by the New York Public Library in the early twentieth century (Pratt, "List", p. 17), but seems not to be among its collection any longer (personal communications by Matthew J. Boylan, Senior Reference Librarian, December 2014). The only copy we had access to, is held by the India Office Library (now part of the British Library, London). Another untitled short version from the seventeenth century is extant in Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, Ar. 4052, fols. 22r-27v (cf. Ullmann, *Katalog*, vol. 1, pp. 43-44).

¹⁶ Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, Lbg. 96, fol. 106v.

¹⁷ Al-Baghdādī, *Īqdāḥ*, vol. 2, p. 705; al-Baghdādī, *Hadiyya*, vol. 1, p. 694.

¹⁸ Al-Sīmāwī, *Sharḥ al-Shudhūr*, Mashhad, Āstān-i quds-i Raḍawī, 5767, fol. 168r.

referring to his verse: “With this tree, I mean the olive tree” (*a ‘nī bi-hādhīhī l-shajara al-zaytūna*).¹⁹ Al-Sīmāwī’s authorship of this commentary on *Shudhūr* should also be questioned, since not all manuscripts name him as the author and some attribute the text to one ‘Abd Allāh (al-Umawī or Jalabī) instead.²⁰ However, we think that this is an authentic text by al-Sīmāwī and that the name ‘Abd Allāh in some manuscripts is derived from his *kunya* Abū ‘Abd Allāh. Likewise, the *nisba* al-Umawī might be a corruption of al-Sīmāwī. The following considerations support this assumption: Al-Sīmāwī himself informs in his *Kitāb al-Aqālīm al-sab‘a* that he had composed a commentary on *Shudhūr al-dhahab*. At that time, he had commented upon the *dīwān* as far as the poem on ‘ayn and intended to complete the commentary on the remaining poems, if God would grant him “leisure and life”.²¹ In the manuscripts of the commentary, the poems of *Shudhūr* are explained as far as the last poem on *yā’*, but it is striking that the poems on the letters of the latter half of the alphabet are only treated very briefly, as if the author wanted to finish his commentary quickly. This matches quite well with al-Sīmāwī’s statement in *Kitāb al-Aqālīm al-sab‘a*. In the same work, al-Sīmāwī also states that the inner meaning of the words of the author of *Shudhūr* is clear to whomever examines them “with the eye of initiation” (*bi-‘ayn al-ḥaqīqa*), and that he had provided this meaning in his commentary.²² The same wording appears in the manuscripts of the commentary, where the commentator writes with regard to the author of *Shudhūr*: “I saw the meanings of his words

¹⁹ *Hall*, London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 23r.

²⁰ The author is given as “Abū l-Qāsim Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Sīmāwī, al-ma‘rūf bi-l-‘Irāqī” in Mashhad, Āstān-i quds-i Raḍawī, 5767 (copied in 1278/1862 from a manuscript dated 833/1430); as “Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Sīmāwī” in Cairo, Dār al-kutub, Taymūr, Ṭabī‘iyyāt 72 and Islamabad, al-Jāmi‘a al-Islāmiyya, Maktabat Ḥamīdullāh, 3808; as “‘Abd Allāh” in Hyderabad, Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute (former Ḥāfiyya Library), Kīmiyā 21 (dated 1082/1671-2); as “‘Abd Allāh al-Umawī” in Alexandria, Baladiyyat al-Iskandariyya, 283 (dated 987/1580); and as “‘Abd Allāh Jalabī” in Rampur, Raza Library, 4165 and 4166 (the latter copied in 1250/1834 in Shahjahanpur, Northern India, from a manuscript dated 993/1585). In Hyderabad, OMLRI, Kīmiyā 20, and Riyadh, Maktabat al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, 675, no name of the author is given.

²¹ Holmyard, “Abū l-Qāsim al-‘Irāqī”, p. 412.

²² According to Holmyard (“Abū l-Qāsim al-‘Irāqī”, p. 413), *ḥaqīqa* is here not meant as “truth”, but in the mystical sense of “initiation”.

with the eye of initiation” (*ra'aytu ma 'ānī alfāzihī bi- 'ayn al-ḥaqīqa*).²³ We therefore consider al-Sīmāwī to be the author of this commentary on *Shudhūr*. As a consequence, it provides evidence for the text of *Hall* being an authentic commentary by Ibn Arfa' Ra's.

In addition, the text of *Hall* shows an intimate knowledge not only of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, but also of Ibn Arfa' Ra's's much less known alchemical *muwashshah* poetry.²⁴ As *Hall mushkilāt al-Shudhūr* presents a dialogue between the author himself and his pupil Abū l-Qāsim,²⁵ we cannot exclude the possibility that the pupil present in the dialogue setting wrote *Hall* rather than the master, but it seems to contain what was generally accepted as Ibn Arfa' Ra's's own ideas.

1.3. *Muwashshah* ṣan'awī

In addition to his *dīwān*, Ibn Arfa' Ra's composed at least one poem in strophic form (i.e. a *muwashshah*) on alchemy. This poem is extant in several manuscripts, sometimes in a volume also containing *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, sometimes bound with other works on alchemy.²⁶ At least one reader has doubted Ibn Arfa' Ra's's authorship: there is a remark in a Gotha manuscript by a reader indicating that the style of the poem was not consistent with that of Ibn Arfa' Ra's, neither as a poet nor a prose writer, and that al-Jildakī had not mentioned the poem.²⁷ While al-Jildakī indeed does not mention this poem, he cites another *mukhammas* poem he attributes to *ṣāḥib al-Shudhūr* (the author of 'The Splinters') in his *Miṣbāḥ*.²⁸

Ibn Arfa' Ra's would therefore have used the *muwashshah* form at least once, perhaps more, but none of these poems has ever become a part of his *dīwān*, as *muwashshah* poems were not usually inserted into *dīwān* collections.²⁹ By composing *muwashshah* poetry, Ibn Arfa' Ra's

²³ Mashhad, Āstān-i quds-i Raḍawī, 5767, fol. 3v.

²⁴ Cf. London, British Library, Or 11592, fols. 16r and 20r.

²⁵ See below, section 3.3.

²⁶ See Forster, "Alchemical stanzaic poetry".

²⁷ Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Ms. orient. A 1289, fol. 60r.

²⁸ Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Or. 1274, fol. 33v-35r.

²⁹ Alvarez, "muwashshah", p. 563. — That the strophic poetry is not part of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* is also explicitly stated by al-Jildakī, who introduces the *mukhammas* as being "not in his *dīwān*" (Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Or. 1274, fol. 33v).

may have continued a family tradition, if indeed he was a descendent of the Toledan court poet Muḥammad b. Arfaʿ Raʿs(ah).³⁰

1.4. Further prose works

In addition, several prose works have been attributed to Ibn Arfaʿ Raʿs. A short text entitled *Fī tarkīb al-iksīr al-ḥayawānī al-insānī*³¹ is, similarly to *Ḥall*, addressed to Ibn Arfaʿ Raʿs's pupil Abū l-Qāsim.³² This is not an extract from *Ḥall*, but rather, a practical alchemical manual. Ibn Arfaʿ Raʿs himself, in at least one version of his *Ḥall*, refers to a book of his own entitled *al-Taysīr fī manāfi khawāṣṣ al-iksīr al-ṣaghīr wa-l-kabīr*.³³ This could be *Fī tarkīb al-iksīr al-ḥayawānī al-insānī* as extant in the Tehran manuscript. Finally, two short treatises are attributed to Ibn Arfaʿ Raʿs, a *Risāla fī l-kīmiyā*,³⁴ and a treatise entitled *Tartīb al-iksīr*, which we have not been able to access.³⁵ Further inquiry into the authorship of these texts needs to be undertaken.

1.5. Spurious works

Brockelmann seems to have been the first to mention *al-Ṭibb al-ruḥānī bi-l-Qurʾān al-raḥmānī* as a work by Ibn Arfaʿ Raʿs.³⁶ However, this text which is, despite its title, not a work on medicine, but on magic, is clearly posterior to Ibn Arfaʿ Raʿs, as it is based on Ps-al-Būnī's *Shams al-maʿārif* (written between 670/1272 and the late eighth/fourteenth century³⁷) and Ibn Sabʿīn (d. 668 or 669/1269-1271).³⁸

³⁰ See below, section 3.3.

³¹ Extant in Tehran, Malik, 3119, fol. 91-94.

³² See below section 3.3.

³³ St Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, B 1047/1 (Rosen no. 201), fol. 20v.

³⁴ Extant in Cairo, Dār al-kutub, 763, fol. 37v-41r.

³⁵ Formerly Bagdad, Khizānat Qāsim Muḥammad al-Rajab (current location unknown); see <<http://kohepocu.cchs.csic.es/flipbooks/12/#p=26>> [28 June 2018] and ʿAwwād, "Fihrist", 182 (no 146/2).

³⁶ Brockelmann, *GAL*, G I, p. 496. Three manuscripts are known to us: Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, Ar. 4491, fols. 1-23 (fragment); London, Institute of Ismaili Studies, Hamdani Collection, Ms. 1657 [Handlist 194], fols. 85-152; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 2643.

³⁷ Coulon, *Magie*, p. 229.

There is a second work on magic attributed to Ibn Arfa' Ra's, *al-Jihāt fī 'ilm at-tawajjuhāt*.³⁹ This is a commentary upon a magical poem by one Thābit b. Sulaymān. The work focuses on the names and letters as means to subdue the spirits. The author of *al-Jihāt* seems to consider magic as more important and more efficient in providing riches than alchemy, which leads Braun and Forster to argue that this is not an authentic work by Ibn Arfa' Ra's.⁴⁰

Yet another attribution is to be found in the catalogue of the manuscripts of Alexandria University. Here, a commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's (d. 632/1235) famous wine poem is attributed, tentatively, to Ibn Arfa' Ra's.⁴¹ Similarly, in a manuscript of Ibn Arfa' Ra's's *Ḥall*, a verse by Ibn al-Fāriḍ has been inserted into the main text.⁴² As Ibn al-Fāriḍ was born in 576/1181, it is difficult to imagine Ibn Arfa' Ra's could have included a verse by Ibn al-Fāriḍ into his own work, or commented on the wine song. This would only be feasible if we were to date Ibn Arfa' Ra's several years later, i.e. to the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century, which seems unlikely given that al-Sīmāwī (fl. middle of the seventh/thirteenth century) in his turn commented on *Shudhūr al-dhahab*.

2. Identity of Ibn Arfa' Ra's

The author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* is a somewhat elusive figure.⁴³ He is usually said to have been 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Anṣārī, known as Ibn Arfa'

³⁸ Coulon, *Magie*, pp. 259-260; Braun, "Healing, Letter Magic, and the Qur'ān". Cf. section 3.1 on the lifetime of Ibn Arfa' Ra's.

³⁹ Cairo, Dār al-kutub, 63 (incomplete); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 3253 (Supplément 1578); Princeton, Princeton University Library, Garrett, MS. 41. Cf. Ullmann, *Natur- und Geheimpwissenschaften*, 232.

⁴⁰ Braun and Forster, "Alchemist und Magier?"

⁴¹ Zaydān, *Fihris*, vol. 2, p. 30. The manuscript in question is Alexandria, Jāmi'at al-Iskandariyya, Max Meyerhof 137 (dated 1133/1720). We had no access to this manuscript. The attribution might be due to the fact that the manuscript also contains a copy of Ibn Arfa' Ra's's *Ḥall*.

⁴² St Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, B 1047/1, fol. 108r:

ولي [فلي] بعد أوطاني سكنون إلى الفلا وبالوحش أنسي إذ من الإنس وحشني

This verse is part of the preface (*dībāja*) of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān* (ed. Scattolin, p. 7).

⁴³ Cf. Ullmann, *Natur- und Geheimpwissenschaften*, p. 231.

Ra's. Sometimes, he is identified with a religious scholar called Ibn al-Naqirāt (or Ibn al-Niqirāt etc., the vowels of the name being unclear).⁴⁴ Riḍwān Masāḥ, however, in his entry on Ibn al-Naqirāt in *Dā'irat ul-ma'ārif-i buzurḡ-i islāmī* called him a double-faced figure, and ended his entry questioning whether the alchemist and the religious scholar should be seen as one and the same person, or as wrongly identified by the authors of the bio-bibliographical dictionaries.⁴⁵ In what follows, we try to show which references may refer to whom, and whether the alchemist and the religious scholar are likely to have been the same person.

2.1. Ibn Arfa' Ra's: Name and occupations in alchemical manuscripts

The author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* is named differently depending on the sources consulted. The following table gives his name as presented in dated (or convincingly datable) manuscripts of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* in chronological order up to the time of Ḥājjī Khalīfa (d. 1067/1657) (Table 1).⁴⁶

Table 1
Name of Ibn Arfa' Ra's as given in manuscripts of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*

Commonly used name	Honorific	<i>kunya</i>	<i>ism</i>	<i>nasab</i>	<i>nisbas</i>	Source
			'Alī	b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. 'Alī	al-Anṣārī	Tinduf, Zāwiyat Sīdī Bel'amash, 31, title page and fol. 1v (dated 704/1304)
	Burhān al-Dīn		'Alī	b. Mūsā	al-Andalusī al-Anṣārī	Oslo, Nasjonalbibl. Ms. fol. 4313:8, verso of title page (dated 731/1331)
	Burhān al-Dīn	Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. 'Alī	al-Anṣārī (title) al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī (fol. 1v)	Manchester, John Rylands, 809, title page and fol. 1v (ca. 750/1350)

⁴⁴ For the sake of readability, we have chosen to call him Ibn al-Naqirāt, unless the text consulted explicitly gives a different reading. This, however, does not mean that this reading is more plausible than any other is.

⁴⁵ Masāḥ, "Ibn Naqarāt", p. 58.

⁴⁶ We have chosen Ḥājjī Khalīfa's year of death as the limit as it seems likely that copyists after him would refer to his *Kashf* in order to identify an author.

Commonly used name	Honorific	<i>kunya</i>	<i>ism</i>	<i>nasab</i>	<i>nisbas</i>	Source
	Shams al-Dīn (fol. 17r)	Abū l-Ḥasan (fol. 17v)	'Alī	b. Mūsā	al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī	Rome, Vaticana, Sbath 144, fol. 17r and 17v (8 th /14 th cent.)
	Burhān al-Dīn	Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. 'Alī	al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī	Istanbul, Topkapı, A 1718, fol. 2v (dated 853/1449-1450)
Ibn Arfa' Ra's (title page only)		Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā	al-Anṣārī (title page only) al-Andalusī	Istanbul, Millet, 2823, title page and fol. 1v (dated 871/1467)
Ibn Arfa' Ra's			'Alī	b. Mūsā [b.] Abī l-Q[āsim]	al-Maghribī	Leipzig, UB, Ms. Or. 358, fol. 1r (dated 875/1470)
	Burhān al-Dīn	Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. 'Alī	al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī	Istanbul, Topkapı, A 2572, fol. 1r (dated 880/1475)
		Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā b. al-Qāsim	al-Anṣārī al-Maghribī	Istanbul, Köprülü, Fazil Ahmet 1295, fol. 1v and 53r (dated 926/1519-1520)
Ibn Arfa' Ra's	Burhān al-Dīn	Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. 'Alī	al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī al-Majrīṭī	Riyadh, KSU, 3571, title page and fol. 1v (ca. 10 th /16 th cent.)
Ibn Arfa' Ra's	Burhān al-Dīn	Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. 'Alī	al-Andalusī al-Majrīṭī	Cairo, Dār al-kutub, 177, fol. 1v (dated 997/1588-1589)
	Burhān al-Dīn		'Alī	b. Mūsā	al-Andalusī	Kabul, Ārshīf-i millī, 167 (dated 1010/1601)
	Burhān al-Dīn	Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Abī l-Qāsim b. 'Alī	al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī	St Petersburg, Inst. Oriental MSS, B88, fol. 1v (dated 1054/1644)
Ibn Arfa' Ra's			'Alī	b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf (on title page) b. Mūsā b. ['Alī] (deleted) Abī l-Qāsim (on fol. 1v)	al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī al-Jaylātī [sic] al-Maghribī	Riyadh, Maktabat al-Malik 'Abd al-'Azīz, 681, title page and fol. 1v (dated 1057/1647)
		Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim	al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī	Geneva, Bibl. de Genève, Ms. O. 33, fol. 2r (dated 1063/1652)

All manuscripts agree on his *ism* (‘Alī) and — with one exception — patronym (b. Mūsā). Further elements of the *nasab* are almost in unison b. Abī l-Qāsim b. ‘Alī. The only notable exception is the eleventh/seventeenth century manuscript Riyadh, Maktabat al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-‘Āmma, 681, that gives, at least on the title page, a very different *nasab* (b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf). Many manuscripts add a *kunya* (Abū l-Ḥasan), some the honorific Burhān al-Dīn (in one case Shams al-Dīn). *Nisbas* tend to be al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī, with some exceptions: al-Maghribī is given three times, while al-Majrīṭī only occurs twice and in relatively late manuscripts, which seems to imply a confusion with the alleged author of *Picatrix*, Maslama al-Majrīṭī.⁴⁷ It is noteworthy, that the prominent and somewhat unusual *laqab* Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s is to be found only in a third of these manuscripts (five out of fifteen) and not in the oldest ones. The author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* seems not to have been called by this name by scribes and copyists, but rather by different elements of his name.

In addition to manuscripts of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, we have also checked manuscripts of the other works by Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, again limiting ourselves to dated (or convincingly datable) manuscripts up to the time of Ḥājji Khalīfa. These, however, are only three manuscripts of *Ḥall*, dating to the tenth-eleventh/sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. While the oldest⁴⁸ and the most recent⁴⁹ agree on calling the author Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Andalusī, the most recent gives a different form of the name on the title page (fol. 1r), adding the honorifics Burhān al-Dīn Zayn al-Mulk and the fuller *nasab* b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. ‘Alī b. Rāfi‘ Ra’s. The chronologically second manuscript uses the honorific Burhān al-Dīn and then gives the name as ‘Alī b. Mūsā b. Arfa‘ Ra’s.⁵⁰ As in the manuscripts of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, scribes of *Ḥall* seem not to have considered the name Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s as essential and have only occasionally used it in the main text. The *nisba* remains very general, referring to al-Andalus, and not to a specific city.

⁴⁷ The real author of *Picatrix* is not the astronomer al-Majrīṭī, but a *ḥadīth* scholar called Maslama al-Qurtūbī, cf. Forster, “Alchemy”, p. 20.

⁴⁸ Jerusalem, National Library, Yahuda, Ar. 250 (written before 925/1519) title page and fol. 64v.

⁴⁹ Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabt., Lbg. 96 (Ahlw. 4182) (written c 1050/1640, see above note 12), fol. 1r and 1v.

⁵⁰ Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabt., We. 88 (Ahlw. 4181) (written c 1000/1591), fol. 1v.

If we look at early commentaries on *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, a similar picture may be discerned (Table 2).⁵¹

Table 2
Name of Ibn Arfa' Ra's as given in commentaries on *Shudhūr al-dhahab*

Commonly used name	Honorific	<i>kunya</i>	<i>ism</i>	<i>nasab</i>	<i>nisbas</i>	Source
	Zayn al-Dīn		'Alī	b. Mūsā b. 'Alī	al-Andalusī al-Anṣārī	Aḥmad b. Qarāṭāyā (d. 655/1257), <i>Sharḥ Dīwān al-shaykh</i> [...] (Tehran, Majlis, 1559 Sinā, fol. 1v, dated 1018/1609-1610)
Ibn Arfa' Ra's	Burhān al-Dīn		'Alī	b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim	al-Andalusī	al-Sīmāwī (mid 7 th /13 th cent.), <i>Sharḥ Dīwān Shudhūr al-dhahab</i> (Mashhad, Āstān-i quds-i Raḍawī, 5767, fol. 1v, dated 833/1430 and 1278/1861)
?	Burhān al-Dīn	?	'Alī (?)	b. Mūsā (?)	?	Anonymous (before 706/1306), <i>Sharḥ Abyāt al-ma'ānī li-dīwān Shudhūr al-dhahab</i> (London, British Library, Add 22756, fol. 1v, dated 706/1306) ⁵²
	Burhān al-Dīn	Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā	al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī	Anonymous (prior to the commentaries by al-Jildakī), <i>al-Dā'ira al-hindiyya</i> ⁵³ (Cairo, Dār al-kutub, 128, no foliation, not dated)

⁵¹ We give, where possible, the form of the oldest manuscript we have been able to see.

⁵² This name is incomplete, since the line in the manuscript is almost illegible due to erasure of the ink and damage of the paper.

⁵³ Also entitled *al-Durr al-manthūr fī Sharḥ ṣadr Dīwān al-Shudhūr*. This work is cited by al-Jildakī in his *Natā'ij al-fikr fī l-kashf 'an aḥwāl al-ḥajar* (Istanbul, Topkapı, A 2111, fol. 30r).

Commonly used name	Honorific	<i>kunya</i>	<i>ism</i>	<i>nasab</i>	<i>nisbas</i>	Source
		Abū l-Ḥasan	‘Alī	b. Mūsā b. al-Qāsim b. ‘Alī	al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī al-Majrītī	al-Jildakī (mid 8 th /14 th cent.), <i>Maṭāli‘ al-budūr fī sharḥ ṣadr dīwān al-Shudhūr</i> (Istanbul, Topkapı, A 2111, fol. 85v, written before 843/1439)
Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s	Burhān al-Dīn	Abū l-Ḥasan	‘Alī	b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. ‘Alī	al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī	al-Jildakī, <i>al-Badr al-munīr fī ma‘rifat asrār al-iksīr</i> (St Petersburg, Inst. Oriental MSS, B 1066, fol. 1v, dated 1055/1645-1646)
Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s	Burhān al-Dīn	Abū l-Ḥasan	‘Alī	b. Abī l-Qāsim	al-Andalusī al-Anṣārī	al-Jildakī, <i>al-Durr al-manthūr fī sharḥ ṣadr dīwān al-Shudhūr</i> (Istanbul, Topkapı, A 2111, fol. 44r, written before 843/1439)
	Burhān al-Dīn		‘Alī	b. Abī l-Qāsim b. Arfa‘ Ra’s	al-Andalusī al-Anṣārī	al-Jildakī, <i>Ghāyat al-surūr fī sharḥ dīwān al-Shudhūr</i> (Leipzig, UB, 836, fol. 1v, dated 941/1535)

The commentaries have the same combination of *kunya*, *ism*, and *nasab*, and the same *nisbas*. As in the manuscripts of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, the honorific is mostly given as Burhān al-Dīn, save for the commentator Aḥmad b. Qaraṭāyā, who calls him Zayn al-Dīn. With respect to the *nisbas*, there is one exception in which the author is called al-Majrītī. Al-Jildakī, however, seems to correct this in his later commentaries, where he no longer uses the *nisba* al-Majrītī.⁵⁴ This also be-

⁵⁴ Al-Jildakī seems to have written his commentaries on *Shudhūr al-dhahab* in the order presented in table 2.

comes evident in other works by al-Jildakī: in his *Kitāb Sharḥ Risālat Bīyūn*, i.e. his second commentary on *Risālat Bīyūn al-Barhamī* (written 744-746/1343-1346), al-Jildakī uses the *nisba* al-Gharnāṭī,⁵⁵ and in what is probably his latest work, *al-Miṣbāḥ fī 'ilm al-miftāḥ*, he calls Ibn Arfa' Ra's simply Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shudhūrī,⁵⁶ stressing his connection with his *dīwān* rather than with any place of origin. Both al-Sīmāwī and al-Jildakī in his later commentaries do use the *laqab* Ibn Arfa' Ra's, in contrast to most copyists of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*. Al-Jildakī also uses this *laqab* in his relatively early work *Anwār al-durar fī ḍāḥ al-ḥajar* (written probably before 737/1336-1337),⁵⁷ so he seems to have been familiar with it. However, he could have known the *laqab* from al-Sīmāwī, whose commentary he cites in his works.

2.2. Ibn al-Naqirāt

Following the obvious starting point of looking into alchemical manuscripts, we looked at sources about a very different type of scholar. Ibn al-Naqirāt seems to have been a legal scholar, a specialist in variant readings of the Qur'ān, a teacher of *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, and *khaṭīb* in Fez. The following table (Table 3) presents the sources on this scholar that do not contain any indication of alchemical activities.

The earliest source is Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240), if indeed the name as given in the edition is a misspelling, which seems likely enough.⁵⁸ Ibn al-'Arabī speaks of this person, Ibn al-Biqrān or probably Ibn al-Naqirāt, as someone whom he has met in person, and says that he was, unbeknownst to the world, a Sufī, but openly a master of *qirā'āt* and *ḥadīth*. Ibn al-'Arabī does not mention any poetic or alchemical activity, nor that this Sufi had been *khaṭīb* in Fez. Al-Dhahabī

⁵⁵ London, British Library, Or 11608, fol. 35r.

⁵⁶ Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Or. 1274, fol. 8r.

⁵⁷ *Anwār al-durar*, Tehran, Malik, 3427, p. 95. In *Kashf al-asrār li-l-afḥām fī sharḥ qaṣīdat 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Tammām*, written in 737/1336-1337 in Damascus, al-Jildakī states that he had composed *Anwār al-durar* earlier while in Alexandria (Hyderabad, Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Center, Kīmiyā' 53, fol. 1v and 22v).

⁵⁸ The misreading would but concern the dots on the initial *bā'* or *nūn*, and the width of the final letter, i.e. *nūn* for *tā'*. A misspelling is, for example, taken for granted by Calvo Labarta, "Ibn Arfa' Ra'sahu", p. 333.

provides similar information, and the account from Ibn Khaldūn's autobiography seems to be in keeping too. Only in al-Marrākushī's *Dhayl* do we encounter Ibn al-Naḡirāt as not only a specialist of *qirā'āt* and *ḥadīth*, but also as someone interested in poetry. Interestingly, al-Marrākushī seems to be unclear about the *nasab* of Ibn al-Naḡirāt. He gives first the longer *nasab* not usually found in the alchemical sources, and then adds after *wa-yuqāl* ("and he is said to be") the *nasab* well known for the alchemist. However, al-Marrākushī in no way hints at an interest in the occult sciences.

Table 3
Name and field of expertise of Ibn al-Naḡirāt

Commonly used name	<i>kunya</i>	<i>ism</i>	<i>nasab</i>	<i>nisbas</i>	Further information	Source
Ibn al-Biqrān (Baqrān?)		'Alī	b. Mūsā		contemporary lived in Fez Sufī (in secret) specialist of <i>qirā'āt</i> and <i>ḥadīth</i>	Ibn al-'Arabī, <i>Rūḥ al-Quds</i> , p. 82 (d. 638/1240)
Ibn al-Naḡirāt	Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā b. 'Alī b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf or: b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. 'Alī	al-Anṣārī al-Sālimī	from Jaén lived in Fez <i>khaṭīb</i> at the Qarawīyyīn pious, ascetic Qur'ān reciter, specialist in <i>qirā'āt</i> and <i>ḥadīth</i> well-versed in poetry b. 515, alive in 595	al-Marrākushī, <i>al-Dhayl</i> , vol. 5i, pp. 412-413 (d. 703/1303-1304)
al-Naḡirāt	Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā b. 'Alī b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad	al-Anṣārī al-Shāṭibī al-Jayyānī	lived in Fez pious specialist in <i>qirā'āt</i> d. in the 590ies	al-Dhahabī, <i>Ma'rifa</i> , vol. 2, pp. 479-489 (d. 748/1348)
Ibn al-Naḡirāt	Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā		an expert on <i>al-Muwatta'</i>	Ibn Khaldūn, <i>Riḥla</i> , p. 241 (probably written in 807/1405)

2.3. Identifications of the two scholars

From as early as *Kitāb al-Takmila li-Kitāb al-Ṣila* by the historian Ibn al-Abbār (d. 658/1260), this Ibn al-Naḡirāt has been called the — alleged — author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* (Table 4).⁵⁹

Table 4
Bio-bibliographical and historiographical sources on Ibn al-Naḡirāt
and/or Ibn Arfa' Ra's

Commonly used name	identification	<i>kunya</i>	<i>ism</i>	<i>nasab</i>	<i>nisbas</i>	Further information	Source
Ibn al-Naḡirāt	alleged author of <i>Shudhūr al-dhahab</i>	Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā b. 'Alī b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf	al-Anṣārī al-Sālimī al-Jayyānī	lived in Fez <i>khaṭīb</i> specialist in <i>qirā'āt</i> taught <i>al-Muwatta'</i> ascetic (according to al-Tujībī) ⁶⁰ b. 515, alive in 593	Ibn al-Abbār, <i>al-Takmila</i> , ed. Codera, vol. 2, p. 674 ⁶¹ (d. 658/1260)
Ibn al-Naḡirāt	alleged author of <i>Shudhūr al-dhahab</i>	Abū l-Ḥasan	'Alī	b. Mūsā b. 'Alī b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf	al-Anṣārī al-Sālimī al-Jayyānī	lived in Fez <i>khaṭīb</i> specialist in <i>qirā'āt</i> transmitter of <i>al-Muwatta'</i> and of ḥadīth ascetic, pious b. 515, alive until 593	al-Dhahabī, <i>al-Mustamlah</i> , pp. 319-320 (d. 748/1348)

⁵⁹ The biographical account on the author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* found in these works, namely his being an Andalusian, settled in Fez, *khaṭīb* there, and a lifetime in the sixth/twelfth century, is taken up in several modern works, especially by Kaḥḥāla, *Mu'jam*, vol. 7, pp. 249-250; al-Ziriklī, *al-A'lām*, vol. 5, p. 26; and Schippers, "al-Anṣārī". None of them, however, mention any legal specialisation or any concern with ḥadīth or *qirā'āt*.

⁶⁰ Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Alī al-Tujībī, known as Ibn al-Adīb (d. 610/1213), author of several works on his *shaykhs* and his travels, cf. <http://kohepocu.cchs.csic.es/flipbooks/14/#p=65> and <http://kohepocu.cchs.csic.es/flipbooks/14/#p=67> [15 June 2018] and De la Puente, "Ibn al-Adīb". Only one of his works, *Barnāmaj riwāyātihī l-aṣghar*, seems to be extant. It does not provide any reference to Ibn al-Naḡirāt (cf. Pocklington, "Ibn al-Adīb", p. 112; we have not been able to get hold of the edition by al-Ḥasan Id Sa'īd, [Rabat] 2011). Ibn al-Abbār seems to be referring to one of these works.

⁶¹ The text in the newer Beirut edition is quite different; here, he is said to have been alive at around 593, to have been preacher at the Qarawiyyīn, and after his *nasab* is added: "and he is said to be 'Alī b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. 'Alī" (Ibn al-Abbār, *al-Takmila*, ed. al-Hirās, vol. 3, p. 219).

Commonly used name	identification	<i>kunya</i>	<i>ism</i>	<i>nasab</i>	<i>nisbas</i>	Further information	Source
	<i>ṣāhib Shudhūr al-dhahab</i>	Abū l-Ḥasan	‘Alī	b. Mūsā b. ‘Alī b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf	al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī al-Jayyānī	lived in Fez <i>khaṭīb</i> praise for his poetry	al-Kutubī, <i>Fawāʾ</i> , vol. 2, pp. 181-184 (d. 764/1363)
Ibn al-Naqrāt	<i>ṣāhib Shudhūr al-dhahab</i>	Abū l-Ḥasan	‘Alī	b. Mūsā b. ‘Alī b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf	al-Anṣārī al-Sālimī al-Andalusī al-Jayyānī	lived in Fez <i>khaṭīb</i> praise of <i>Shudhūr</i> , compares him with al-Mutanabbī d. 593	al-Ṣafadī, <i>al-Wāfi</i> , vol. 22, pp. 260-264 (d. 764/1363)
Ibn al-Mughayribī	author of alphabetically ordered, incomprehensible poems on alchemy						Ibn Khaldūn, <i>Muqadimma</i> , vol. 2, p. 311 (written in 807-808/1405-1406)
Ibn Naqirāt	author of <i>Shudhūr al-dhahab</i> (according to Ibn al-Abbār)	Abū l-Ḥasan	‘Alī	b. Mūsā b. ‘Alī	al-Anṣārī al-Sāfi al-Jayyānī	lived in Fez <i>khaṭīb</i> specialist in <i>qirā’āt</i> , studied in Egypt ascetic (according to al-Dhahabī) b. 515, lived until 593	Ibn al-Jazarī, <i>Ghāya</i> , vol. 1, pp. 581-582 (d. 833/1429)
Ibn al-Naqrāt	author of <i>Shudhūr al-dhahab</i> (according to what one says, <i>fi mā yuqāl</i>)		‘Alī	b. Mūsā		taught <i>al-Muwaṭṭa’</i>	Ibn Ḥajar, <i>Lisān</i> , vol. 4, p. 265 (d. 852/1449)
El Mugairibi	author of an alchemical work in verses, commented upon by a Mamluk from Damascus					from Ebetteea (or from Granada?) ⁶²	Leo Africanus, <i>Cosmographia</i> , p. 316 (written ca 1526)

⁶² The first form is given in the new critical edition of Leo’s work. In the commonly used print by Ramusio, Granada is given (Leo Africanus, “La descrittione”, part III, p. 45). Ebetteea should probably be read Ebetteca, which would be a rendering of the Latin name of the province Baetica, roughly referring to what is today Andalusia (cf. Rauchenberger, *Johannes Leo*, p. 274 and n. 1329). We owe this identification to Maribel Fierro and Fernando Rodríguez Mediano (Madrid), whom we cannot thank enough. We also wish to thank Mònica Colominas Aparicio (Berlin) for her help in identifying this place.

Commonly used name	identification	<i>kunya</i>	<i>ism</i>	<i>nasab</i>	<i>nisbas</i>	Further information	Source
Ibn al-Naqirāt	alleged author of <i>Shudhūr al-dhahab</i>		‘Alī	b. Mūsā b. ‘Alī b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf or: b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. ‘Alī	al-Anṣārī al-Sālimī	from Jaén lived in Fez <i>khaṭīb</i> at the Qarawiyyīn specialist in <i>qirā’āt</i> faible for poetry ascetic, pious (according to al-Tujībī) b. 515, alive in 593	Ibn al-Qāḍī al-Miknāsī, <i>Jadhwa</i> , pp. 481-482 (d. 1025/1616)
		Abū l-Ḥasan	‘Alī	b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf	al-Anṣārī al-Jayyānī	lived in Fez <i>khaṭīb</i> guide to eloquence for the Andalusians praised as poet and alchemist d. 593	al-Maqqarī, <i>Analectes</i> , vol 2, p. 410 (d. 1041/1632)
		Abū l-Ḥasan	‘Alī	b. Mūsā	al-Andalusī	<i>al-ḥakīm</i> (= alchemist?) d. 500	Ḥājī Khalīfa, <i>Kashf</i> , vol. 2, col. 1029 (d. 1067/1657)
Ibn Arfa' Ra's		Abū l-Ḥasan	‘Alī	b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf	al-Anṣārī	lived in Fez <i>khaṭīb</i> praised as poet and alchemist d. 594	Ibn al-'Imād, <i>Shadharāt al-dhahab</i> , vol. 6, p. 519 (d. 1089/1679)
Ibn Arfa' Ra's		Abū l-Ḥasan	‘Alī	b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. ‘Alī	al-Anṣārī al-Jayyānī	<i>al-ḥakīm</i> (= alchemist?) d. 593	al-Baghdādī, <i>Īdāh</i> , vol. 2, p. 705 (d. 1920)
Ibn Arfa' Ra's		Abū l-Ḥasan	‘Alī	b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. ‘Alī b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf	al-Anṣārī al-Jayyānī al-Andalusī	<i>al-ḥakīm</i> (= alchemist?) lived in Fez d. 500, according to al-Kutubī: d. 593	al-Baghdādī, <i>Hadiyya</i> , vol. 1, p. 694 (d. 1920)

Ibn al-Naqirāt's authorship of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* seems to have been disputed from the very beginning. In the earliest work, Ibn al-Abbār's *Kitāb al-Takmila*, the entry reads, "To him (i.e. Ibn al-Naqirāt) is attributed (*wa-ilyahi yunsab*) the (book) called 'The Splinters of Gold on Alchemy'"'.⁶³ The uncertainty of the attribution continued, as most

⁶³ Ibn al-Abbār, *al-Takmila*, ed. Codera, vol. 2, p. 674; Ibn al-Abbār, *al-Takmila*, ed. al-Hirās, vol. 3, p. 219.

biographers (with the exception of al-Ṣafadī) only called Ibn al-Naqirāt the alleged author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*.

There is, however, a discernible difference of *nasab* between Ibn al-Naqirāt and Ibn Arfaʿ Raʿs: the *nasab* of the alchemist seems to have been b. Mūsā b. Abī l-Qāsim b. ʿAlī, while Ibn al-Naqirāt's was b. Mūsā b. ʿAlī b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf. These *nasabs* are reconcilable, as the dropping of a grandfather's name is quite common. However, it seems noteworthy that none of the early alchemical sources ever gives the *nasab* commonly found in the entries on Ibn al-Naqirāt, specialist in *qirāʿāt* and *khaṭīb* in Fez. It is striking that Ibn Arfaʿ Raʿs is called *khaṭīb* of Fez only when he gets the *nasab* that should perhaps be only associated with Ibn al-Naqirāt. Ibn al-Qāḍī al-Miknāsī, notably a biographer from the Islamic west, seems to have been unsure about the correct *nasab*, and indicates both forms. It is only in the twentieth century, that al-Baghdādī gives, again, the form usually encountered in the manuscripts of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*.

A similar picture is present in the form of the *nisba*. All alchemical manuscripts use al-Anṣārī and al-Andalusī. Sometimes, there are references to Granada and Madrid, which might be stemming from confusing Ibn Arfaʿ Raʿs with the author of *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* and *Rutbat al-ḥakīm*. Ibn al-Abbār and all later bio-bibliographical works refer to specific and clearly distinct towns in al-Andalus, especially Jaén (al-Jayyānī) and Medinaceli (al-Sālimī). This could be seen as a hint of uncertainty about the person in question, but could also be due to the difference of genre. Interestingly, Ibn Khaldūn and Leo Africanus, who are not writing strictly bio-bibliographical works, give only the *nisba* 'the little Moroccan' or the *nasab* 'the son of the little Moroccan'. While seeking to establish an author's home from a *nisba* remains problematic, these could at least be indications that the person might have left the Maghreb, where these *nisbas* make much less sense than in other regions.

None of the bio-bibliographical works ever mention an honorific (Burhān al-Dīn, Shams al-Dīn or Zayn al-Dīn), although it is very prominent in manuscripts of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, as well as in the commentaries. Strangely enough, the *laqab* Ibn Arfaʿ Raʿs is never mentioned as an alternative to Ibn al-Naqirāt.

As for Ibn Khaldūn, it is noteworthy that he seems not to make any connection between the alchemist Ibn al-Mughayribī he mentions in

his *Muqaddima* and the Ibn al-Naqirāt from his *Rihla*. This is easily explained if they are two different persons. If, however, he was referring the same person, we suggest two possible explanations for this disassociation: either, Ibn Khaldūn really did not know that these were indeed one and the same person; or, as a stout opponent of the 'occult' sciences,⁶⁴ who might not have liked the idea of a teacher of *al-Muwatta'* being an alchemist, he wanted to disassociate them.

2.4. Conclusions

The identification of the author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* remains problematic. Whilst alchemical manuscript sources more or less in unison insist on one Burhān al-Dīn Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Mūsa b. Abī l-Qāsim al-Andalusī al-Anṣārī, and occasionally —especially later— add Ibn Arfa' Ra's as *laqab*, the bio-bibliographical and historiographical sources present a far less clear picture. Beginning with Ibn al-Abbār —probably some two generations after the alchemist— they consider a certain Ibn al-Naqirāt as the author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*.

The different *nasab* and *nisbas*, along with the fact that Ibn al-Naqirāt is never alluded to as Ibn Arfa' Ra's, might indicate that these are two different scholars. While these differences may not be conclusive, the testimonies of Ibn Khaldūn and Ibn al-'Arabī also seem to support the hypothesis of an inappropriate identification. Ibn al-'Arabī knows Ibn al-Naqirāt, but does not attribute any alchemical poetry to him, which, given his own interest in the art, seems strange.⁶⁵ Rather, he calls him a Sufī. Ibn Khaldūn knows both persons, Ibn al-Naqirāt and the author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, and mentions them, but does not identify them.

If there was indeed only one person, we could argue that he was divided into two different people in the typical trend of 'de-Almohadisation',⁶⁶ an attempt to re-establish the clear borders between the sciences — religious scholarship here, alchemy there. Yet, what seems

⁶⁴ See for example Asatrian, "Ibn Khaldūn".

⁶⁵ Ibn al-'Arabī often uses alchemical images to describe the mystical experience, cf. Addas, *Quest*.

⁶⁶ Fierro, "The Almohads", p. 86.

to have happened in the sources considered here is not a splitting up of one person, but rather the opposite: *Shudhūr al-dhahab* was, as early as Ibn al-Abbār, attributed to a well-known scholar, Ibn al-Naqirāt, instead of being attributed to yet another ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī.

When we consider all the arguments, the identification of Ibn al-Naqirāt with Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s to be one person might be possible, but the case is not very convincing. Rather, we advocate trusting the manuscript evidence, according to which the author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* was one ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī, but not the *khaṭīb* of Fez, Ibn al-Naqirāt. The identification of both in the bio-bibliographical tradition might stem from an erroneous assumption by Ibn al-Abbār that hitherto remained virtually unquestioned. However, further research in the question seems necessary.

3. Life

3.1. Lifetime

If there was an incorrect conflation of Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s and Ibn al-Naqirāt, we must also re-evaluate the life dates of the alchemist. Again, Ibn al-Abbār is the oldest source: he indicates that Ibn al-Naqirāt, alleged author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, was born in the year 515/1121-1122 and states that he was still alive in 593/1196-1197. Al-Maqqarī (d. 1041/1632) simply gives us the latter year as the year of death of the alchemist, whilst al-Marrākushī (d. 703/1303-1304), although keeping the year of birth of Ibn al-Naqirāt, gives 595/1198-1199 as the year he was still alive.⁶⁷ All this evidence is inconclusive at best.

Even if there has been a conflation of Ibn al-Naqirāt and Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s, it seems likely that Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s lived in the sixth/twelfth century. He probably lived some two generations before the middle of the seventh/thirteenth century, as Ibn al-Abbār knew him only via al-Tujībī,

⁶⁷ Al-Marrākushī, *Dhayl*, vol. 5i, pp. 412-413. The year 500/1106-1107 that is mentioned first by Ḥājjī Khalīfa (*Kashf*, vol. 2, col. 1029) seems to refer to the Toletan court poet, as already remarked by Schippers, “al-Anṣārī”.

and the *amīr* Rukn al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Qaraṭāyā al-Irbilī commented on his *Shudhūr al-dhahab between 635/1238 and 655/1257*.⁶⁸

Further evidence is difficult to find. No definite *terminus post quem* can be drawn from the works of Ibn Arfa' Ra's as he mostly cites older authorities such as Hermes and Zosimus. In *Hall*, he mentions once a *Kitāb Tafrīq al-adyān*, which has been identified by one scribe as being a *Kitāb tafarruq al-adyān wa-l-milal wa-niḥal*, and which may in turn be either Ibn Ḥazm's (d. 456/1064) *Kitāb al-Fiṣal* or al-Shahrastānī's (d. 548/1153) *Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal*.⁶⁹ The content of the citation, however, does not fit either reference. Rather, Ibn Arfa' Ra's seems to be citing here *Kitāb Bayān tafrīq al-adyān*, a work on alchemy as the true religion attributed to Zosimus of Panopolis.⁷⁰

Furthermore, he cites *Akhbār al-zamān ('Ajā'ib al-buldān)* by the historiographer al-Mas'ūdī (d. 346/957),⁷¹ and a work he calls *al-Nawādir*, by one al-Ṭabarī.⁷² This latter work could be *Nawādir al-mu'jizāt* attributed to the Shī'ite scholar Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Rustam al-Ṭabarī, who died either in the first half of the fourth/tenth century or perhaps only a century later.⁷³ However, since we have not been able to trace down the passage in question in the modern edition of *Nawādir al-mu'jizāt*, the reference could be to a completely different text.⁷⁴

In some manuscripts of Ibn Arfa' Ra's's own commentary *Hall mushkilāt Shudhūr al-dhahab*, the alchemist al-Ṭughrā'ī (d. 515/1121)

⁶⁸ Cf. Tehran, Majlis, 1559 Sinā, fol. 1v (dated 1018/1609-1610); Ibn al-Sha'ār, *Qalā'id al-jumān*, vol. 1, pp. 268-269; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi*, vol. 7, p. 296.

⁶⁹ End of the commentary on the second poem on *tā'* (London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 27r).

⁷⁰ Sezgin, *GAS*, vol. 4, p. 76; Hallum, *Zosimus*, esp. pp. 100, 111-112, 197, 411-412.

⁷¹ *Hall*, London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 42v.

⁷² *Hall*, London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 25r. In the same passage, Ibn Arfa' Ra's mentions yet another work entitled *Nawādir*, whose author, one Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Shīrāzī (or in another manuscript: al-Rāzī) we have not been able to identify. Neither the title nor the name match any of the known historical figures, although the *ḥadīth* scholar Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Idrīs (195-277/810 or 811-890) would be a candidate. However, no work of that title is attributed to him, cf. Gilliot "Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī".

⁷³ This is not the famous historian and exegete, although the names are very similar. — The earlier date is given by Sezgin, *GAS*, vol. 1, p. 540. The later date has been argued for by al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 8, pp. 241-247. However, attribution to al-Ṭabarī has been disputed, as *Nawādir al-mu'jizāt* contains passages in which a much younger scholar is cited, i.e. by Ibn Najjār al-Baghdādī (d. 643/1246). Cf. Anṣārī, "Nawādir".

⁷⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*.

is mentioned.⁷⁵ Clearly, however, the two passages in question are later interpolations (an *isnād* of alchemists including the name of al-Jildakī and a citation from al-Sīmāwī's commentary on the *Shudhūr*). Al-Ṭughrā'ī's lifetime therefore cannot be considered a *terminus post quem*. Still, it is likely that Ibn Arfa' Ra's lived after al-Ṭughrā'ī for two further reasons: 1) al-Ṭughrā'ī never cites Ibn Arfa' Ra's, which he would probably have done had he been a predecessor, 2) the alchemist Bel Mughūsh al-Maghribī (tenth/sixteenth century) adduces an *isnād* for the transmission of alchemy in which Ibn Arfa' Ra's is put after al-Ṭughrā'ī.⁷⁶

A remark found in a Berlin manuscript of *Ḥall* suggests a lifetime earlier than the sixth/twelfth century.⁷⁷ On the title page, the copyist notes that the author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* had fled from al-Ḥākim (probably the Fāṭimid caliph, r. 386-411/996-1021), went to Ibn Mufrij al-Ṭā'ī⁷⁸ and later to Diyarbakir. A later owner of the manuscript added the remark that Ibn Arfa' Ra's went to the court of the 'Uqaylids in Iraq, a dynasty that ruled between c 380/990 and 564/1169.⁷⁹ This information would put the author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* to the fifth/eleventh instead of the sixth/twelfth century. We should not take this legendary tale at face value. Rather, it seems to be a remake of the life of al-Wazīr al-Maghribī, who fled from al-Ḥākim, led a revolution of the Ṭā'īs and later went to Iraq.⁸⁰ Still, it is an interesting testimony to the uncertainty surrounding the dates of Ibn Arfa' Ra's's lifetime.

Similarly, the attribution of a commentary by Ibn Arfa' Ra's upon Ibn al-Fāriḍ's wine poem (see above section 1.5) seems to be improbable. If this commentary were authentic, we would need to date Ibn Arfa' Ra's to a somewhat later period, i.e. the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century.

Taking all of this evidence into account, it still seems likely that Ibn Arfa' Ra's lived in the second half of the sixth/twelfth century.

⁷⁵ E.g. Rabat, Bibliothèque Royale (al-Khizāna al-Ḥasaniyya), 978, fol. 40r and 115r.

⁷⁶ Bel Mughūsh al-Maghribī, *Risāla fī l-Ṣan'a al-ilāhiyya*, St Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, B 1066, fol. 104r. Cf. Holmyard, "Abu' l-Qāsim al-'Irāqī", p. 407; Ullmann, *Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften*, p. 246.

⁷⁷ Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, We. 88.

⁷⁸ On the family see Slane, *Ibn Khallikan*, vol. 1, p. 407, note 7.

⁷⁹ Bosworth, *New Islamic dynasties*, pp. 91-92.

⁸⁰ The family had no connection to the Maghreb, but the ancestor had been head of the *dīwān al-Maghrib*; see Smoor, "al-Maghribī"; on al-Wazīr al-Maghribī himself also Bosworth, "al-Maghribī".

3.2. Place of Origin and Life

Ibn al-Naqirāt and Ibn Arfa' Ra's share some of their *nisbas*, but not all. Both seem to be associated with the Anṣār, a prominent connection for families in the Islamic west.⁸¹ In addition, both are often called al-Andalusī, referring to someone originally from Islamic Spain, but who then left it to settle somewhere else (in the case of Ibn al-Naqirāt: Morocco or more specifically Fez). While Ibn al-Naqirāt gets other *nisbas* referring to specific Andalusian towns (al-Sālimī, al-Jayyānī, etc.), Ibn Arfa' Ra's, at least in the manuscript sources, is usually only al-Andalusī al-Anṣārī (cf. tables 1 and 2). While we can probably discard the *nisba* al-Majrīfī sometimes applied to Ibn Arfa' Ra's,⁸² he may have had a family link to Granada.⁸³ Any link to Jaén or Medinaceli seems only to refer to Ibn al-Naqirāt.

Leo Africanus attests to a name linking Ibn Arfa' Ra's with Morocco, calling him “El Mugairibi”, along with Ibn Khaldūn, who mentions him as Ibn al-Mughayribī. Such a name is already found in the eighth/fourteenth century, when he is called Ibn al-Maghribī in a praise poem by the Andalusī mystic and poet Ibn Ṣafwān (d. 763/1363).⁸⁴ The *nisba* al-Maghribī also appears in two manuscripts of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* dating to the ninth/fifteenth and eleventh/seventeenth century. The information that the alchemist Ibn Arfa' Ra's should have been *khatīb* in Fez, seems to go back to Ibn al-Abbār, and may therefore not refer to Ibn Arfa' Ra's, but to Ibn al-Naqirāt. In the (older) manuscripts of both *Shudhūr al-dhahab* and of commentaries on *Shudhūr*, we have found no indication of any connection with the city of Fez.

Generally speaking, *nisbas* relating to a place only make sense if the person bearing the name were to have left those places. The *nisba* al-Andalusī therefore, would usually have been used for someone who had

⁸¹ Cf. Fierro, “La nisba”.

⁸² See above section 2.1.

⁸³ See notes 55 and 62.

⁸⁴ Cited in the *Shudhūr* manuscript Rabat, Bibliothèque Royale (al-Khizāna al-Ḥasaniyya), 1109, fol. 1r (dated 1303/1885). — Velázquez Basanta, “Ibn Ṣafwān”, does not mention the poem (in *ṭawīl*, on *-rā'*) among Ibn Ṣafwān's extant works, although his well-known interest in alchemy makes the attribution of the poem quite acceptable. — The same *nasab*, Ibn al-Maghribī, is given in a late manuscript of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, i.e. Tunis, Bibliothèque nationale de Tunisie, 4558, fol. 1v (dated 1303/1885-1886).

settled outside al-Andalus, for example in Morocco (as Ibn al-Naqirāt certainly did). Whilst we can imagine that the *nasab* used by Ibn Khaldūn, Ibn al-Mughayribī, could also apply to someone actually living in Morocco, as it mostly seems to be mocking the size of the person in question,⁸⁵ all the other appellations encountered make more sense for someone not actually resident in Morocco. As for Leo Africanus, it is especially noteworthy that he writes that the alchemists of Fez read a work by El Mugairibi, but does not mention that this author had been, himself, a resident of Fez. This is an *argumentum e silentio*, but it leaves one somewhat uneasy about the place of residence of Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s.

That Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s was of western origin, and probably lived in the Maghreb for quite some time (or perhaps all his life) can be deduced from his works. The language of *Hall* itself suggests his western origin, as the word *hawma* is used to designate a quarter of a city.⁸⁶ This meaning is not to be found in the dictionary by Lane,⁸⁷ but it is given as Tunisian usage by Wehr,⁸⁸ as Algerian by Biberstein Kazimirski,⁸⁹ and with reference to western sources by Dozy.⁹⁰

In *Hall*, Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s also compares the alchemical substance of the „female spirit“ (*al-rūḥ al-unthā*) that acts cruelly on her “husband” to the spirit of the women of Segovia. This might refer to stories about the combative intervention of the women of this Castillian town during the Reconquista of the castle of Segovia.⁹¹ This reference emphasises the author’s knowledge of — or perhaps connection with — the Islamic west. However, in two texts, Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s alludes to a story of one Ibn ‘Abūd, who is said to have executed alchemical experiments at the court of sultan ‘Izz al-Dīn (or ‘Izz al-Dawla) b. Qāsim in Cordoba.⁹² Not only would “sultan” be a strange title in the Islamic west, but in addition, this ‘Izz al-Dīn is not identifiable. Here, it seems, the “west-

⁸⁵ According to al-Maqqarī, *Azhār*, vol. 5, p. 9 al-Mughayribī was used a pejorative by Ibn Taymiyya when criticising al-Qādī ‘Iyād (cf. al-Fāsī, “Ghalā”). We owe these references to Maribel Fierro.

⁸⁶ *Hall*, London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 58v.

⁸⁷ Lane, *Lexicon*, book 1, p. 678.

⁸⁸ Wehr, *Dictionary*, p. 255.

⁸⁹ Biberstein Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire*, vol. 1, p. 521.

⁹⁰ Dozy, *Supplément*, vol. 1, 342.

⁹¹ *Hall*, London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 5r.

⁹² *Fī tarkīb al-iksīr al-ḥayawānī al-insānī* (Tehran, Malik, 3119, p. 93) and *Hall* (London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 14r).

ern” connection is only faked, not real. However, neither was Ibn Arfa' Ra's's knowledge of the east of the Islamic world very sound. This becomes clear when he speaks, in *Hall*, of Azerbaijan as being a city (*madīna*) rather than a region.⁹³ Still, there are certain indications that he might have had more than just a travelling experience of the east.⁹⁴ At the end of his commentary, he mentions that he has wandered in east and west (*al-mashāriq wa-l-maghārib*).⁹⁵ There are also two references connecting Ibn Arfa' Ra's with Alexandria, traditional eastern arrival point for travellers from the west: In the only manuscript of *Fī tarkīb al-iksīr al-ḥayawānī al-insānī*, there is a reference to a stay in Alexandria, as the author claims to have performed a certain alchemical experiment while in that city (*fa'altu hādhā wa-anā fī l-Iskandariyya*).⁹⁶ And in one manuscript of *Hall*, the incipit runs as follows:

This is a commentary on the *Dīwān al-Shudhūr* by its author, the *shaykh*, the learned imam, the real scholar, the mufti of Mecca and Medina, Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Abī l-Qāsim Mūsā b. 'Alī b. Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Khalaf al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī, known as Ibn Arfa' Ra's, which he dictated upon the request of his disciple, the *shaykh* Abū l-Qāsim Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī at the port of Alexandria (may God the Sublime have mercy upon them).⁹⁷

The copyist seems to have taken some pains to fuse the two *nasabs* otherwise found for Ibn Arfa' Ra's and Ibn al-Naqirāt into one. This reference to Alexandria might be due to his intimate knowledge of the life and works of the *qirā'āt* specialist, who actually is said to have travelled to Egypt.⁹⁸ Another hint at Ibn Arfa' Ra's's connection to Egypt might be seen in his using the Nile river as an alchemical metaphor in *Shudhūr al-dhahab*, when advising to marry “the Nile with the Sea” (*wa-zāwij hunāka l-nīla bi-l-baḥri*).⁹⁹

⁹³ *Hall*, London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 25v.

⁹⁴ If the reference to al-Ṭabarī's *Nawādir* discussed above (section 3.1) is to the Shī'ite *Nawādir al-mu'jizāt*, this would be another hint to an eastern connection.

⁹⁵ *Hall*, London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 77v.

⁹⁶ Tehran, Malik, 3119, p. 93.

⁹⁷ Bethesda, National Library of Medicine, A 65, fol. [7v] (1123/1711-1712):
فهذا شرح ديوان الشذور لمصنّفه الشيخ الامام العالم العلامة مفتى الحرمين ابي الحسن علي بن ابي القاسم موسى بن علي بن موسى بن محمد بن خلف الأنصاري الأندلسي المشتهر بابن أرفع رأس الذي أملاه بسؤال تلميذه الشيخ أبي القاسم محمد بن عبد الله الأنصاري بئخر اسكندرية (sic) رحمهما الله تعالى.

⁹⁸ Ibn al-Jazarī, *Ghāya*, vol. 1, p. 581.

⁹⁹ Poem on *kāf*, v. 26 (ed. Ghazzālī, *Shudhūr*, p. 243).

An even more express connection to an eastern life may be found, as mentioned above (section 3.1, p. 396), in a Berlin manuscript: Ibn Arfa' Ra's is presented as a descendant of the Persian king Yazdgird, who lived in Egypt, fled from al-Ḥākim and settled in Diyarbakir.¹⁰⁰ Although this story seems to have been copied from the life of al-Wazīr al-Maghribī, it is interesting that it (re-)constructs an 'eastern' life for Ibn Arfa' Ra's.

Given this evidence, we can be reasonably sure that Ibn Arfa' Ra's was of western origin, probably from an Andalusī family settled in Morocco, and that he spent a long period of his life in the west. We see no clear indication, however, of his having had links to the city of Fez. Finally, we do think it likely that he should have left the Maghreb at some point of his life. This could have been a simple *riḥla*, typical for Andalusīs, landing in Alexandria and returning to his native Maghreb later on, or he could have left for good, as did so many other scholars in Almohad times.¹⁰¹ A stay in the east would account for his works having been copied in the east from very early on. While old western manuscripts are relatively scarce,¹⁰² it is still interesting that even in the fourteenth/nineteenth century, *Shudhūr* manuscripts were brought to Morocco from the east.¹⁰³ This might indicate that the text's main reception area was in the east, which would be more easily explicable if its author at least visited the Mashriq at some point. It is also striking that of all known commentaries on *Shudhur al-dhahab* whose authors could be identified, none have been written in the west.¹⁰⁴ In fact, Ibn Arfa' Ra's's *dīwān* had been circulating in the east as early as the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century, since it had already been commented upon in Baghdad between 635/1238 and 655/1257 by Aḥmad b. Qaraṭāyā al-Irbilī (cf. note 68).

¹⁰⁰ Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, We. 88, fly leaf (front) (written c 1000/1591?).

¹⁰¹ Cf. Fierro, "The Almohads", p. 85. The Almohads were active patrons especially of philosophy and also of Sufism, but at the same time, made many Jews and Christian leave (Fierro, "Revolución"; Forcada, "Síntesis"; Stroumsa, "Philosophes"; Viguera Molins, "Almohads"). In addition, many Sufis left the Almohad realm, especially those with esoteric interests (see Gardiner, "Forbidden Knowledge", esp. p. 89).

¹⁰² A notable exception is the unique copy of Ibn Ṭufayl's *Urjūza fī l-ṭibb* (see Forster, "Tradition and Innovation").

¹⁰³ See Braun and Forster, "The Alchemist's Work"

¹⁰⁴ Cf. section 1.1, note 5.

3.3. Family, teachers, and pupils

Ibn Arfa' Ra's may have come from a family of that name. He could be related to Muḥammad b. Arfa' Ra's(ah) (or b. Rāfi' Ra's), an author of *muwashshah* poetry (fl. middle of the fifth/eleventh century), active at the court of Ma'mūn b. Dhī l-Nūn (r. 429-468/1037-1075) in Toledo.¹⁰⁵ This Muḥammad would be the alchemist's great-great-grandfather or great-great-granduncle.

Ibn Arfa' Ra's must have had at least one son, called Aḥmad,¹⁰⁶ and a grandson called 'Alī, as his great-grandson Abū l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Mūsā b. Arfa' Ra's al-Andalusī seems to have commented on some of the verses of *Shudhūr al-dhahab*.¹⁰⁷ The interest in alchemy seems to have continued or have been revived in the family.

Although Ibn Arfa' Ra's implies in his *Shudhūr* that he spent thirty years of his life studying alchemy,¹⁰⁸ he does not say much about his teachers. While al-Jildakī calls him (like himself) a pupil of Jābir b. Ḥayyān,¹⁰⁹ Ibn Arfa' Ra's observes, that all of Jābir's methods were deceptive (*ṭuruq Jābir b. Ḥayyān kulluhā muḍilla*).¹¹⁰ We only know of one of Ibn Arfa' Ra's's real-life teachers in alchemy, a certain imam Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Qurtubī.¹¹¹ As yet, we have not been able to identify

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqadimma*, vol. 2, pp. 425-426; cf. Hartmann, *Strophengedicht*, pp. 26-27; Ait Salah Semlali, *Histoire*, p. 156; Marín, "Familias", pp. 238-239.

¹⁰⁶ His *kunya* would suggest a second son called Ḥasan, but we have no other indication of his existence.

¹⁰⁷ This information is given by Holmyard ("Abu' l-Qāsim al-'Irāqī", pp. 406-407) with reference to an early twelfth/eighteenth century manuscript in Maghribī script then in possession of A. G. Ellis (cf. Arberry, Catalogue, part 3, p. 6). We have reason to think that this manuscript was later sold in India, but have not been able to trace it down.

¹⁰⁸ "Since I learned it [i.e. the art of alchemy], I have dedicated myself exclusively to it /for thirty years, and I am still performing [i.e. the alchemical work]" (شغلت بها عن غيرها مد) (علمتها ثلاثين حولاً لا أزال مدبراً), *Shudhūr al-dhahab, poem on rā'*, v. 8 (Istanbul, Istanbul, Topkapı, A 1718, fol. 16v; with a slightly different reading in the edition of Ghazzālī, *Shudhūr*, p. 150). A similar allusion is to be found in *Hall*, where Ibn Arfa' Ra's compares the time he has spent "in search of this science ('ilm) and studying this art (*sinā'a*)" with Saturn's orbital period (*dawra zuḥaliyya*), which is nearly thirty years. (*Hall*, London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 57r).

¹⁰⁹ Al-Jildakī, *Kitāb al-Burhān fī (asrār) 'ilm al-mīzān*, Cairo, Dār al-kutub, 35 [tabī'a], pp. 38-39.

¹¹⁰ *Hall*, London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 28v.

¹¹¹ Ait Salah Semlali, *Histoire*, p. 158 and n. 330. We have not been able to ascertain in which work this citation may be found. — Many teachers of Ibn al-Naḡirāt in *hadīth* etc. are known (see Calvo Labarta, "Ibn Arfa' Ra'sahu", p. 333), but these are not relevant here.

this person. The *nisba* seems to reinforce Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s’s ‘western’ connections.

Of Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s’s pupils in alchemy, two are known by name:¹¹² one Abū l-Qāsim, who is his interlocutor in *Hall* and in *Fī tarkīb al-iksīr*, and one Abū Ja‘far, twice addressed in *Shudhūr al-dhahab*.¹¹³ At the beginning of *Hall*, Abū l-Qāsim’s name is given as Abū l-Qāsim Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī.¹¹⁴ He therefore shares Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s’s *nisba*, al-Anṣārī. This indicates he belonged to the same ‘Arab’ ancestry, and was perhaps a distant relative. In some manuscripts of *Hall*, Abū l-Qāsim is not only called Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s’s pupil (*tilmīdh*), but also his friend (*ṣāhib*), heir (*wārith*) and son-in-law (*ṣihr*).¹¹⁵

With respect to the other pupil, Abū Ja‘far, al-Jildakī seems to be our only source. In *Natā’ij al-fikr*, he explains that the only disciple of Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s whose name is found in *Shudhūr al-dhahab* was a *khaṭīb* in Alexandria and that Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s had composed *Shudhūr* for him.¹¹⁶ That his pupil was a *khaṭīb* is noteworthy, as this is the occupation usually found in bio-bibliographical sources for Ibn al-Naqirāt and hence for Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s himself. This could therefore be a kind of remake of this traditional account. Al-Jildakī however, never refers to Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s being a *khaṭīb* and might not have known about it. In any case, the linkage to Alexandria is striking, as it seems to be in accordance with at least some manuscript evidence.¹¹⁷ Yet, al-Jildakī, in his later commentary *Ghāyat al-surūr*, mentions that Abū Ja‘far was a well-known person in the Maghreb, which seems at odds with him being a *khaṭīb* in Alexandria.¹¹⁸ The Andalusī connection is furthered later in the same work, where al-Jildakī calls Abū Ja‘far Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’s’s pupil and an Andalusī *wazīr*, but the addressee only of the poem on *qāf*.¹¹⁹ None of this makes identification any easier.

¹¹² Many more pupils of Ibn al-Naqirāt in the field of *ḥadīth* are known (see Calvo Labarta, “Ibn Arfa‘ Ra’sahu”, p. 333).

¹¹³ Poem on *īā*, verse 44; poem on *qāf*, verse 62 (ed. Ghazzālī, *Shudhūr*, pp. 194 and 239).

¹¹⁴ *Hall*, London, British Library, Or 11592, fol. 1v.

¹¹⁵ Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Şehit Ali Paşa, 1811, fol. 1v; Jerusalem, National Library, Yahuda, Ar. 250, fol. 64r (written before 925/1519).

¹¹⁶ Istanbul, Topkapı, A 2111, fol. 34r (written before 843/1439).

¹¹⁷ See above section 3.2.

¹¹⁸ Al-Jildakī, *Ghāyat al-surūr* (Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, 836, fol. 69v [dated 941/1535]).

¹¹⁹ Al-Jildakī, *Ghāyat al-surūr* (Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, 836, fol. 90v).

4. Conclusion

The identification of Ibn Arfa' Ra's and Ibn al-Naqirāt is probably due to the attribution of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* to Ibn al-Naqirāt by Ibn al-Abbār in the seventh/thirteenth century. His attribution was taken up by many authors of later bio-bibliographical dictionaries, and from there, reached modern secondary literature, even though no such identification may be found in the alchemical works themselves for a long time. Indeed, taking all the evidence into account, the identification of Ibn al-Naqirāt and Ibn Arfa' Ra's, whilst possible, is not compelling. We have argued that we should trust the manuscript evidence. Thus, given the difference of *nasab* and *nisbas* of the author of *Shudhūr al-dhahab* in comparison with Ibn al-Naqirāt, and accounting for the testimonies of Ibn Khaldūn and Leo Africanus, an identity of the two scholars would seem unlikely, although further study of the question is required.

In addition, it seems that Ibn Arfa' Ra's the alchemist, although coming from an Andalusī family and having lived in Morocco, may have left the Islamic west at some point of his life. This would be in congruence with manuscript evidence suggesting that he dictated his commentary *Hall mushkilāt Shudhūr al-dhahab* in Alexandria, and it would also explain why his *dīwān* was initially read mostly in the Mashriq, as the manuscript evidence seems to suggest.

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