

The Role of the Letters of Sheikh Abd al-Salam al-Asmar in Explaining the Tucked and Distorted Sayings in His Writings

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Abstract

This research aims to study the letters of Sheikh Abdel Salam Al-Asmar to his companions, students, and followers, and to compare them with the sayings and mythical stories attributed to him. The study seeks to ascertain whether these sayings and stories are genuinely from Sheikh Abdel Salam Al-Asmar, or if they have been altered and falsely attributed to him in his writings. In this study, the researcher employs a descriptive analytical approach when discussing the Sheikh's letters, and utilizes a critical comparative analytical approach for examining some of the Sheikh's statements in his letters and comparing them to what is attributed to him. This study consists of an introduction, a discussion of the Sheikh's letters, and an analysis of the role of these letters in clarifying the falsely attributed and altered sayings in the Sheikh's works. The study arrived at the following conclusions:

- 1- The character of Sheikh Abdel Salam Al-Asmar has been distorted by his enemies, opponents, and some of his followers.
- 2- The letters of Sheikh Abdel Salam Al-Asmar clarified his correct views and ideas, which refute all the false mythical sayings and stories attributed to him. His advice and admonitions are in line with the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet, peace be upon him.

Keywords: Abdel Salam Al-Asmar, Letters, Falsified, Altered, Mythical Stories

Introduction

Sheikh Abdel Salam bin Saleem Al-Fayturi Al-Tarabulsi, also known as Al-Asmar, who was born in the city of Zliten in western Libya in the year 880 AH and passed away in the year 981 (Al-Zawi, 2004), AH is among the most prominent Sufi sheikhs in matters of education and moral

conduct in the 10th Hijri century. His outreach and reformative approach paid attention to all societal levels. He used various means for his Da'wah (Islamic propagation) like writing books, teaching, preaching, and exhortation. One of the most significant of these means was correspondence (letters), which had a profound impact on spreading the message and guiding people to the Lord of the worlds.

Some scholars and researchers have shown interest in collecting and authenticating these letters, presenting them to us in their current form for study and research. Sheikh Karim El-Din Al-Bermuni¹ collected these letters in his book "Rawdat al-Azhar wa Minyat al-Sadat al-Abrar fi Manaqib Sahib al-Tar."² Later, Dr. Mustafa Rabia authenticated these letters in his doctoral thesis titled "Al-Asmar Zawiya and Its Doctrinal and Spiritual Influence in the 10th Hijri Century," which he submitted to Mohammed V University in Morocco to earn his Ph.D. in Islamic Studies. He then printed and published them under the title "Al-Asmar's Letters to His Followers."

Upon examining these letters written by Sheikh Abdel Salam Al-Asmar to his companions, students, and followers, one notices several distinctive features. These letters clarify the Sheikh's knowledge and understanding of religious matters and the insights Allah granted him into the texts of the Quran and Hadith. This stands in contrast to some of the distorted books that transmit poems, sayings, and mythical stories, attributing them falsely to Sheikh Abdel Salam Al-Asmar.

Importance of the Research

The importance of the research lies in the following:

- 1- Sheikh Abdel Salam al-Asmar is considered one of the important religious figures who played a significant role in the path of calling people to Allah, in Libya during the tenth Hijri century. The character of Sheikh Abdel Salam al-Asmar has been distorted by attributing false statements and mythical stories to him. This research aims to clarify such attributed poems, statements, and stories, analyze them, and investigate whether they actually came from Sheikh Abdel Salam al-Asmar, or if they are distorted and inserted statements in his works.
- 2- Sheikh Abdel Salam al-Asmar relied on letters for communication with his companions, students, and followers. He would send them letters containing his guidance, advice, sermons, and admonitions. These letters carried his correct ideas and opinions. Through them, we can determine his correct methodology and assess what has been attributed to him in terms of poems, statements, and stories.

The First Section: The Letters of Sheikh Abdel Salam Al-Asmar

Introduction

Advocacy through correspondence (letters) is one of the most important means of calling to God Almighty. It indicates goodwill towards the recipient and is more likely to be accepted. Unlike debate, which can be accompanied by anger and clamor, letters are personal to the recipient, who reads them with contemplation and deliberation. There is no room for

¹ Abdel Karim bin Nasser al-Din al-Bermouni, a scholar in Maliki jurisprudence, from Misrata. He studied jurisprudence there and in Egypt, and then moved to Mecca. He has several written works, including a commentary on 'Mukhtasar Khalil,' and 'Rawdat al-Azhar' on the virtues of his teacher, Abdel Salam bin Suleim. (Al-Zarkali, 1980)

² 'Rawdat al-Azhar' is considered one of the most important sources that deals with the life of Sheikh Abdel Salam al-Asmar. Bermouni traced the impact of Sheikh Abdel Salam, researched those who lived during his time, and reported about him. (Al-Baramuni, n.d.)

argument or dispute because the recipient is reading something fixed, with no scope for objection. Letters may be more influential for some people being invited to the faith. Sheikh Abdel Salam al-Asmar took great interest in letters, recognizing their importance in influencing people. He wrote many letters that call for noble morals and virtues in deeds, sending them to his companions and students everywhere.

First Subsection: The Letters.

First: Definition of Letters.

1- Linguistic Definition: The term "letters" is the plural of "letter," and the root of the word is (رسل), which in Arabic means 'to send forth' or 'to extend. (Ibn Faris, 1979)

2- Technical Definition: "Letters" are the plural of "letter," and they refer to matters that the writer organizes. These can include the narration of an event from an enemy or hunting, praise or criticism, comparison between two things, or other topics that follow this pattern. (Al-Qalqashandi, 1919)

Another definition says: "It is addressing the absent with the pen".(Al-Hashimi, 2010,1,44)

Second: Types of Letters.

The most famous types of letters are two: official letters and fraternal letters.(Al-Shayeb, 2003)

- The first type is the official or governmental letters: These are issued by official state entities. (Al-Shanti, 2001)
- The second type is the fraternal or private letters: These are exchanged between relatives and friends and may include warnings, threats, recommendations, rebukes, condolences, congratulations, expressions of longing, or similar matters that illustrate the special relationships between individuals. (Al-Shanti, 2001)

Thirdly: The Importance of Letters in Calling to Allah the Almighty.

The letter is the means used by the caller to convey the invitation to those being invited. It is among the most important and oldest proselytizing methods used by prophets and messengers. For example, the Quran mentions that the Prophet Solomon (peace be upon him) sent a letter to the Queen of Sheba inviting her to the monotheism of Allah. The verse in the Quran says, "Go with this letter of mine and deliver it to them, then leave them and see what [answer] they return" [Al-Naml: 28]. Al-Qurtubi says, "This verse serves as evidence for sending letters to the polytheists to inform them of the invitation, and to call them to Islam" (Al-Qurtubi, 1964,13,191)

Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used letters to convey his message. He sent letters to kings and princes, inviting them to Islam. Anas bin Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that "the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) wrote to Khosrow, Caesar, and the Negus, as well as to every tyrant, inviting them to Allah the Almighty". (Al-Naysaburi, 1991,3,1379,1774)

Fourthly: Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar's Use of Letters.

Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar's efforts in proselytizing were not limited to speeches, teaching, and authoring books. He went beyond that to write and send letters to his friends and students in various Islamic cities. Sheikh Karim Al-Din Al-Bermoni preserved eleven of these letters in his book "Rawdat Al-Azhar." Bermoni also referred to many other letters included

in his other book "Al-Diwan in the Virtues of Najl Sulaym bin Amran," which is among the lost books (Rabia, 2003)

Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar was keen on sending letters that contained advice, recommendations, sermons, guidelines, and judgments. These letters served as a means through which he guided his friends and students both within and outside the country. For instance, he sent a letter to Sheikh Ahmed bin Abdul Hamid Al-Yerbu'i in the city of Al-Zawiya Al-Gharbiya³, and a letter to Abdul Rahman bin Abdul Mu'min Al-Fazzani.(Rabia, 2003,125) He also sent many letters to his friends and students outside the country to neighboring countries, such as the letter he sent to Sheikh Ahmed Ibn Aqit in Timbuktu⁴, West Africa, and to his acquaintances in Tunisia and Sous Al-Aqsa⁵.

Sheikh Abdul Salam also directed some of his letters to specific individuals, like his letter to Sheikh Abu Ishaq Ibrahim Al-Awsaji. He also addressed some of his letters to a large group or a specific segment of people, issuing them with phrases like, "To the brothers who have entered our path... and everyone in Tripoli and its villages and its territories" or "This is my advice to you, which is: Praise be to Allah, and prayers and peace upon our Master Muhammad and his family and companions. Know that, may Allah have mercy on you. (Rabia, 2003,149,213,232)

Fifthly: Examples of Letters by Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar.

Upon reflection on the letters of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar, it becomes apparent that he relied on them to direct his advice, sermons, and guidance to his students, friends, and followers in Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and the city of Timbuktu in Mali, West Africa. His style in these letters is straightforward, easy to understand, free from verbal complications and contrived rhetorical flourishes. He rarely strays from grammatical rules and sentence structure. Despite the diversity and variance in the phrasing of his letters, most of them follow a particular style that can be considered a general characteristic of most of his letters. The introduction usually tends to be brief and simple, often starting with:

"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, and may Allah's blessings and peace be upon our Master Muhammad, the noble Prophet, and upon his family and companions. From the humble servant of Allah, Abdul Salam bin Saleem Al-Fitouri Al-Tarabulsi to... Now then... etc.(Rabia, 2003,73)

Within the structure of the letter, he addresses topics that are the purpose of the letter. They are generally a mix of science, literature, Sufism, language, names of people and places, sects, and denominations. All of this points to his encyclopedic knowledge and the diversity of his interests, all presented in a smooth style and clear language that contains no ambiguity or confusion. His letters often include references and quotations from the Holy Quran, the Hadith, Arabic poetry, Sufi wisdom, and their sayings, which enhances the richness and splendor of his writings. (Rabia, 2003)

The conclusion of the letter usually resembles the introduction in its brevity and simplicity. Sometimes it is limited to a single prayerful sentence like: "And our last prayer is that all praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds." At other times, he uses the conclusion to address what

³ Known as "Al-Zawiya," or "Zawiya of Oulad Sinan," it was significant in the 6th Hijri century. It was a gathering point for Arabs and their market, where they brought their goods for buying and selling. It was distinguished in terms of wealth, culture, development, and education, as well as social life. (Al-Zawi, 1968)

⁴ Timbuktu is considered one of the major cities in the Republic of Mali and was a center for Islamic studies.(Atris, 2001)

⁵ Ancient Arab geographers used the term "Sous" to refer to the entire Moroccan territory from Tangier to the Sahara. They also divided it into two parts: Lower Sous extending from Tangier to the foothills of the Middle Atlas, and Upper Sous which includes all regions of central and southern Morocco.(Rabia, 2003,283)

might have been overlooked in the main body of the letter, saying things like: "In conclusion of the advice, know that the origin of all happiness and worship, the key to all ends and intentions, the basis for all interactions and communications, and the beginning of all spiritual unveilings and affections is strong certainty. It is the ultimate goal and perfection of faith, and it is attained through Divine generosity without any prior inclination or calculation from the servant... etc". (Rabia, 2003,75)

The Second Section: Explanation of the General Content of the Letters

The letters of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar cover a range of diverse topics that reveal the intellectual nature of the Sheikh and what distinguishes him in terms of knowledge and understanding of various sciences. The content of these letters includes topics that call for good manners and character, and encourages the pursuit of knowledge and learning. They also touch on topics in jurisprudence, theology, language, Sufism, and societal issues and challenges. The Sheikh addressed these topics in clear language and an accessible style, often quoting extensively from the Quran, Hadith, and scholarly sayings.

Firstly: The Call to Good Manners and Virtuous Character

Sheikh Abdul Salam was keen in his letters to guide his followers and students toward good manners and character with Allah the Almighty and His Messenger, peace be upon him, as well as with all people. He says: "You should maintain good manners with Allah, His Messenger, your mentors, and all creatures, whether righteous or wicked" (Rabia, 2003,290) Furthermore, the Sheikh believes that "good manners are all knowledge"(Rabia, 2003,313) and detailed some aspects of good manners, such as the etiquettes of travel and dealing with people. He advises: "Keep up with the remembrances of travel, what is said during boarding and disembarking, and entering a town, among other remembrances. Maintain a pure heart, a generous spirit, have mercy on every Muslim, and uphold good companionship and conduct with whoever you accompany. Work as hard for their needs as you do for your own and strive to bring joy to their hearts and guide them to what benefits them in this life and the Hereafter" (Rabia, 2003,257)

Similarly, he advises his followers to avoid distasteful manners, stating: "Brothers, guard your hearts from reprehensible thoughts and purify them from distasteful, unlucky character traits, and keep all your limbs from sins and wrongdoings. "(Rabia, 2003,268,84) Thus, the call for good manners and virtuous character is at the heart of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar's letters.

Secondly: Encouragement Towards Learning

Among the important topics covered in Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar's letters is the call to acquire knowledge and learn. He stated in his letter to his followers in Timbuktu: "Acquiring knowledge is an individual obligation, based on what one needs for his religion; a communal obligation, which goes beyond one's needs to benefit others; recommended, which is deepening one's understanding of jurisprudence and heart-knowledge; and prohibited, such as the knowledge of philosophy, sorcery, astrology, geomancy, divining by casting lots, visiting the The Fortune Teller and so forth". (Rabia, 2003,237)

He further advises, "I urge you to zealously seek beneficial knowledge through reading, study, and discussion, for religious knowledge is the best thing that one can attain in high ranks" (Rabia, 2003,236)

The Sheikh also took great interest in specific fields of study, such as urging the memorization of the Holy Quran and its thoughtful recitation and mastery. He advises, "I recommend you memorize the Quran and recite it frequently, if you can memorize it, as this is part of the noble tradition. Let your reading be accompanied by contemplation, intonation, and understanding of its meanings" (Rabia, 2003,238)

He was also interested in the sciences of the Arabic language, advising his followers in Timbuktu to learn Arabic grammar, stating: "Learn grammar, for it embellishes speech, beautifies logic, and strengthens the tongue. It is the most noble of sciences, and acquiring it enhances one's understanding and virtue, elevates him among scholars, and perfects one's expression and poetry."(Rabia, 2003,232)

Thirdly: Monotheism (Tawhid)

Among the topics Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar was concerned with is monotheism (Tawhid), although he only dealt with some of the fundamental principles of this science. He discussed this subject in his letter to Rashid bin Yahya Al-Muhjoub, incorporating the book "Al-Muqaddimat" by Imam Muhammad bin Yusuf Al-Sanusi⁶. These introductions serve as a preliminary entry to what Imam Al-Sanusi wrote about the science of Tawhid, and include eight introductions on subjects such as judgments, doctrines, types of associationism (Shirk), roots of disbelief and heresy, existents, possibilities, eternal attributes, and the trustworthiness of the messengers. He also discussed the topic of Tawhid in his letter to his followers in Gharyan, covering some issues related to Tawhid such as reasoning, inference, knowledge, the attributes of Allah Almighty, Islam, and faith. (Rabia, 2003)

Fourth: Jurisprudence (Fiqh)

Sheikh Abdul Salam's letters dealt with a variety of jurisprudential issues, including the issue of tobacco smoking. In a letter directed to his companions in Timbuktu, Central Africa, Sheikh Abdul Salam warned them against smoking, stating: "Beware of inhaling smoke into the mouth and nose; it is from a tree with an unpleasant smell..." (Rabia, 2003,240)(and explained the reasons for its prohibition.(Rabia, 2003)

Among the jurisprudential issues discussed in the letters is "kissing the hand," where the Sheikh lays the groundwork for answering this question, stating that "the greeting of the Arabs is a handshake." He emphasizes that handshakes: "bring affection and dispel awkwardness" (Rabia, 2003,224) and then gets to the crux of the matter, stating it's a disputed issue. Imam Malik, when asked about it, said that "leaving it is more beloved to me," and Sheikh Abdul Salam clarifies that this indicates its disapproval but not prohibition(Rabia, 2003,226) and that there is no harm in kissing the hand of religious scholars. (Rabia, 2003)

Fifth: Calling for the Establishment of Religious Obligations

The Sheikh's letters address a variety of religious obligations, advising his companions and students to observe them diligently and perfectly. Among these is the importance of maintaining the five daily prayers. The Sheikh states: "You should be diligent in maintaining the five prayers, as they are the pillar of the religion. They are to the religion what the head is to the body. The essence of diligence is to have your heart present and humble during them.

⁶ He was a leading scholar and ascetic of Tlemcen in his era, knowledgeable in exegesis (Tafsir), Hadith, and the science of monotheism (Tawhid). He was born in Tlemcen in the year 832 Hijri and raised there. He passed away in the same city in the year 895 Hijri at the age of sixty-three. He has a collection of works, among them: "The Creed of the People of Monotheism," also known as "The Minor Creed," "The Intermediate Creed," and "Introductions to Monotheism.".(Nuwayhid, 1980)

It is unbecoming for a person praying to physically be before his Lord while his heart is preoccupied with worldly matters" He also says: "Know, may God have mercy on you, that the prayer is not valid unless you know its obligations, nullifiers, and its recommended acts; and it's not complete unless you know what is desirable and what is discouraged"(Rabia, 2003,256)

The Sheikh also spoke about the obligation of paying Zakat, saying: "If you possess wealth that requires Zakat, you should give it willingly, happily, and place it where God has specified, like to the poor and the needy. Do not seek praise from them or anyone else, and act only for the sake of God. Indeed, God only accepts deeds that are performed sincerely for His sake"(Rabia, 2003,256)

Among the religious obligations discussed in the letters are fasting and pilgrimage. He says: "Know that there are great benefits in fasting, including that prayers are answered, and blessings descend from the heavens... etc." (Rabia, 2003, 177) And he says: "You should purify your intentions and aim to perform the pilgrimage to the Sacred House of God, fulfilling its rituals and honoring its sanctities and symbols, and visiting the grave of the Prophet, peace be upon him. You should have no other motive or gain in your journey except this and the praiseworthy objectives that come with it. Beware: do not mix these noble intentions with the desire for leisure or engagement in trade" (citation needed)in your journey, and be cautious not to mix these noble intentions with the desire for leisure or trade"(Rabia, 2003,134)

Sixth: Sufism.

The letters also contained topics related to Sufism. Among them was his letter to his companions in Sousse, where Sheikh Abdul Salam explains that a "Murid" disciple⁷ must have a spiritual guide (Sheikh) who leads him to goodness and righteousness. Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar quotes Sheikh Ahmed Al-Zurouq, saying, "There must be a sincere Sheikh or a virtuous brother on the path of knowledge " (Rabia, 2003,256) (He also says, "The disciple needs the companionship of the Sheikhs, and to be disciplined in their manners, and to follow their commands and prohibitions, because if his actions are not in accordance with the will of another, he cannot move away from his desires, even if he reaches every limit in self-discipline and striving. This is due to the density of the veils over his soul." (Rabia, 2003,314)

Sheikh Abdul Salam believes that the Sheikh is not qualified for guidance and upbringing unless he fulfills five conditions: "Correct knowledge, clear taste, high ambition, satisfactory condition, and penetrating insight." (Rabia, 2003,314) He also spoke about the disciple's manners with his brothers and with the rest of the people, summed up in two matters: fairness and advice, "With fairness, assistance and agreement occur, and with advice, compliance and acceptance are achieved." (Rabia, 2003,117)

Seventh: Social Issues.

The letters of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar included a set of societal issues and problems. He directed a series of advice and solutions for the problems that appeared in society, including the disease of the plague. Sheikh Abdul Salam showed great concern for this disease in his letter to his companions in the city of Tunis. He discussed the difference between the plague and the epidemic, how to treat stings, and ways to prevent it. He says, "It is said to be an ulcer

⁷ For the Sufis, the term "Murid" refers to someone who has relinquished their own will. In "Al-Risala al-Qushayriyya," the term 'will' among them means to renounce all but God in the journey towards the perfection of monotheism. (Al-Barkati, 2003,202)

that emerges with the flame of the armpit and elsewhere in the body, and what surrounds it either darkens, greens, or reddens." He also says, "The plague is a tumor in the numerical organs; its occurrence is from a toxic substance, as is the belief of doctors " (Rabia, 2003,260) Among the social issues addressed by the letters is the reluctance of men to marry. Many Sufi men preferred to stay away from married life and to evade its burdens and responsibilities. Sheikh Abdul Salam sent his directions and advice to his companions and students, explaining to them the virtue of marriage and encouraging them to it. (Rabia, 2003)

The Second Topic: The Role of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar's Letters in Clarifying Distorted and Fabricated Statements in His Works.

The First Requirement: Works of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar

First: The Books of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar

Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar was interested in writing books due to their strong impact in inviting, persuading, and guiding people. The book helps in conveying the message in a clear and serious manner; it prepares the author for the ability to analyze, discuss, and persuade, as well as assists him in spreading the message widely.

Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar paid great attention to authorship and wrote a series of works, including: A Brief Message on Islamic Creed and its Principles (Rabia, 2003,52), and he has a will that encourages the pursuit of knowledge and increasing worship, and being occupied with what is beneficial for this world and the hereafter (Al-Sharif, 1999,163) He has books like " Al-'Uzma fi Al-Tahdith bil-Na'ma," " Al-Anwar al-Sunniya," "The Holy Gift," " Al-Tuhfa al-Qudsiya " named " Nasiha al-Murid," and " Nasa'ih al-Taqrīb " which includes four pieces of advice, and " Al-Nasiha al-Sughra." All of these promote good and forbid evil, and contain many guidelines for noble actions and virtuous words. (Al-Zawi, 2004) They also include his thoughts and the essence of his Sufi experience, as well as his interaction with the natural and social environment. (Rabia, 2003)

He has a series of (Hizb, Wird, and Wazifa) which are the most widespread among his followers, as they are considered the cornerstone in his Asmari-Arusi method. (Rabia, 2003)

It is worth mentioning here that the works of Sheikh Abdul Salam were subjected to theft and destruction after the killing of his son Imran⁸. Sheikh Tahir Al-Zawi says that in Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar's corner, " there is a great library containing more than five hundred volumes in various sciences, and among these volumes were the works of the Sheikh and his books, all of which were looted in the strife in which his son, Sheikh Imran, was killed in the year 995 Hijri⁹." (Al-Zawi, 1968,166)

Secondly: The distortion of the works of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar.

⁸ He is Imran bin Abdul Salam Al-Asmar, who was among the practicing scholars and devout ascetics. He was famous for his generosity and gained reputation after his father. His enemies envied him, and Yahya Al-Zarhouni openly opposed him and killed him in the year 995 Hijri, in the marketplace of the town of Oulad Ghayth. Al-Zarhouni looted the Sheikh's Zawiya (spiritual retreat), taking all of its valuable books, supplies, and wealth. (Al-Sharif, 1999)

⁹ Historian Taysir bin Musa, the author of the book "The Arab Libyan Society in the Ottoman Era," discussed the period during which the works of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar were lost. He says that the Sheikh was highly knowledgeable and well-versed in Islamic jurisprudence. It is mentioned that he had numerous works in various religious sciences, remembrances, daily devotions, and poems. However, most, if not all, of these works were destroyed during a raid carried out by Arab tribes, instigated by sheikhs who opposed him, on Al-Asmar's Zawiya (spiritual retreat) in Zliten after his death. During this raid, the caretaker of the Zawiya, his son and disciple Sheikh Imran, was killed. The attackers burned the Zawiya and everything in it, including books and manuscripts. It is said that there were 500 manuscripts and volumes, carrying the Sheikh's thoughts, sayings, sermons, remembrances, and virtues. (Ibn Musa, 1988,86-87)

In addition to Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar's books being subject to theft and damage, they were also exposed to distortion and defamation by his enemies and opponents. Distortion and deception are age-old issues that the morally weak have insisted on incorporating into scholars' works with the aim of discrediting them and tarnishing their methodology and image before people. They inserted into their books deviant thoughts and bad expressions for which God gave no authority.

1- Distortion and deception against scholars.

Examples of these scholars who were subject to slander and falsification during the time of Sheikh Abdul Salam include Sheikh Abdul Wahab Al-Shaarani¹⁰. Historian Abdul Hai Al-Hanbali mentioned in his book 'Shadharaat al-Dhahab' that Shaarani's works were exposed to distortion and defamation. He says, 'Various groups envied him and slandered him with words that outwardly contradict religious law, with deviant beliefs and issues that contradict consensus, and they confronted him with judgments, slanders, and accused him of all sorts of major crimes. God let them down, and God made him prevail over them'.(Al-Hanbali, 1986,10.546)

Similarly, Alī ibn Abī Tālib was not spared from this slander and distortion. It was falsely claimed that he wrote the book 'Nahj al-Balagha'. Imam Dhahabi says, "Whoever reads his book Nahj al-Balagha can be certain that it is a lie attributed to the Commander of the Faithful Ali, may God be pleased with him. It contains explicit insults and belittlement against the two masters: Abu Bakr and Umar, may God be pleased with them. There are contradictions, frivolous matters, and expressions in it that anyone familiar with the nature of the Qurashi companions and others who came after them can confirm that most of the book is false" (Mizan Al-I'tidal Fi Naqd Al-Rijal, 1963,3,124)

"Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya also states: 'Most of the speeches in this book are fabricated against Ali'. (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1986,7,86)

Therefore, the issues of deception, distortion, and slander are age-old problems that scholars' books have not been spared from, as misguiders have tried to tarnish their images by attributing false statements to them.

2- Distortion and Deception Against Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar.

When we look at what has reached us from the works of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar, we find that there are some statements that could not have come from a learned jurist like Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar, who was a student of a select group of scholars. Such statements could not even come from any Muslim individual, given their contradictions to Islamic law. His works have been subjected to distortion and deception at the hands of his opponents, who have been keen to tarnish his image and undermine people's trust in him. They have fabricated incidents and stories into his books (Rabia, 2003)

This distortion and deception were not limited to his opponents alone; some of his followers and devotees also contributed to this deception and distortion. This was done by exaggerating the miracles and supernatural deeds attributed to the Sheikh, which neither reason nor religion accepts. On this matter, several historians who have written biographies of Sheikh

¹⁰ Abdul Wahab bin Ahmed bin Ali Al-Hanafi, attributed to Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiya, Al-Sha'rani, Abu Muhammad: He was among the scholars of the Sufis. Born in 1493 CE in Qalqashanda (in Egypt) and raised in Saqiyah Abi Sha'ra (one of the villages in Al-Minufiyah), to which his nisba (attributive name) belongs: (Al-Sha'rani, also said Al-Sha'rawi). He passed away in Cairo in 1565 CE.(Al-Zarkali, 1980)

Abdul Salam Al-Asmar have clarified the reality of what his works have been subjected to in terms of distortion and slander.

Historian Taysir bin Musa pointed to this matter and clarified the reality of what some followers of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar have done in terms of distortion. He says, "Many miracles and supernatural deeds were attributed to him, promoted by his followers and devotees, and exaggerated to the point of causing harm to him. After the loss of the main resources containing his works and sayings, these people began narrating what they heard about him in their own style and according to their own understanding, which was aligned with the level of knowledge and expertise of the narrator. Thus, we find that there are significant differences in the level of scientific, religious, and linguistic construction." (Ibn Musa, 1988,86-87)

Sheikh Tahir Al-Zawi says, "After his death, he was afflicted with people from the general populace who described him in ways he was not and attributed to him what he did not say. They composed vernacular poems that offend the ear and corrupt taste, falsely and slanderously attributing them to him. They included nonsense that would not be uttered by the most ignorant, let alone a distinguished scholar like Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar". (Al-Zawi, 2004, 224-225)

Sheikh Tayyib Al-Tahir Al-Misrati believes it is necessary to review what is attributed to Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar. He says, "What some of his followers narrate of miracles and supernatural occurrences must be subjected to the rules of Islamic law, and to the criteria for acceptance or rejection, and the verification or denial of the narration, as is scientifically and historically known." (Al-Musrati, 2009, 647)

Sheikh Tahir Al-Zawi says: "These poems are transferred from those who do not carefully consider the truth, nor distinguish between the worthless talk and its meaningful part. They published them in books that led the general public astray and used them as a weapon against anyone who tried to guide them or explain to them what is appropriate for the stature of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar" (Al-Zawi, 2004,225)

Examples of these distorted books that Tahir Al-Zawi referred to include the book "Safinat al-Buhur" which contains many poems attributed to Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar and his followers. Upon reviewing this book, several issues arise, indicating its inaccuracy:

1. The absence of mentioning the name of the person who compiled the poems of the Sheikh and the name of the scribe who copied them leaves these poems with an unknown source. (Al-Asmar, n.d.) This is contrary to the letters of Sheikh Abdul Salam, which come from a known source. The compiler of the letters is Sheikh Karim al-Din al-Baramoni. As for the copyist of the letters, more than one person has copied them. The first copy belongs to the family of Abu Zubeidah, copied by: Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Ali bin Ahmad al-Hamlawi al-Jaza'iri, and it was copied in the year 1321 AH with a total of 500 pages. The second copy belongs to the Center for the Study of the Libyan Jihad in Tripoli, copied by: Muhammad bin Abdul Salam bin Muhammad bin Abdul Daim al-Izdawi, originally from Brahimi Dar, and it was copied in the year 1185 AH with a total of 390 pages. The third copy belongs to the National Library in Tunisia. This copy does not have the name of the copyist nor the date it was copied; it is only eight pages long. This copy was not relied upon by Dr. Mustafa Rabea in the verification of the letters; he relied mainly on the first copy from the family of Abu Zubeidah and used the copy from the Center for the Study of the Libyan Jihad as an auxiliary text. (Rabia, 2003)

2. When reading the book, one cannot distinguish between the poems attributed to Sheikh Abdul Salam and those attributed to his followers. They are not clearly titled, misleading the reader into thinking all the poems are authored by Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar.
3. Most of these poems are written in colloquial Libyan dialect and in a clumsy style. Historian Taysir bin Musa says: "We find some distinguished by eloquent words and strong meaning, others are weak and do not conform to known poetic meter, and a third group is in simple colloquial language." (Ibn Musa, 1988,87)

The content of these poems contradicts the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet, peace be upon him. Among these false poems attributed to Sheikh Abdul Salam are the following lines (Al-Asmar, n.d.13):

أنا سري ظاهر ومفهوم أرقيت للرب وأسجدت بين يديه
والعرش والكرسي وكل علوم وأنظرت اللوح وأقرت اللي فيه¹¹

Such shallow verses could not have come from a scholar and jurist like Sheikh Abdul Salam al-Asmar, who used to advise his companions and students towards asceticism, humility, and not to be deceived by self-pride. The Sheikh told his followers in al-Aqsa: "Know that the true ascetic, when praised or hears compliments from people, shrinks greatly in humility and is ashamed before God for being praised in a manner that he does not testify for himself." (Rabia, 2003,370)

This is the reality of what the works of Sheikh Abdul Salam al-Asmar have been subjected to in terms of forgery, distortion, and insertion. This happened either through his enemies who tried to distance him from their spheres of influence by slandering and lying about him, or through his followers who exaggerated their love for the Sheikh. They attributed to him stories and poems he never said, and miracles and supernatural acts he never performed. They did this to highlight the high status and virtues of the Sheikh. Therefore, not everything attributed to him in his works can be considered authentic, as they have been subject to campaigns of distortion, insertion, and disfigurement. Such poor verses would not come from a scholar like Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar, who urged his companions and students towards asceticism, humility, and not to be self-deluded.

Second Requirement: The Importance of Letters in Clarifying Distorted and Fabricated Statements in the Works of Sheikh Abdel Salam

Firstly: The Importance of Letters in Clarifying Distorted and Fabricated Statements

The letters of Sheikh Abdel Salam Al-Asmar are among the most important aspects of his advocacy work. From his legacy, only a few works have reached us, most of which have been subject to distortion and fabrication, except for a collection of letters that he sent to his associates, followers, and disciples. These have been preserved and protected from the campaigns of distortion and fabrication that his works (Rabia, 2003) have been subjected to, due to several key factors:

- 1- They were sent to specific individuals or groups, which helped in preserving them with the recipient.

¹¹ The meaning of the poetry is : "I am a secret, manifest, and elevated understanding, I bowed down to the Lord and prostrated before Him, And the Throne and the Chair and all the knowledge, I looked at the Tablet and read what is in it."

- 2- They were sent to different places outside the country and were not circulated within the Sheikh's environment and surroundings, and were not stored in the Zawiya library¹² that was looted and burned. (Rabia, 2003)
- 3- The interest of Sheikh Karim al-Din al-Barmoni, a student of Sheikh Abdel Salam Al-Asmar, in collecting and preserving the Sheikh's works. He tracked the Sheikh's works and researched those who lived during his time. Al-Barmoni says, "I traveled to the city of Tripoli in the west and its villages, then to Tunisia and its regions, searching for those who lived during the time of the Sheikh from among his living associates so that we can narrate from them, until I collected what Allah made easy and began writing" (Al-Baramuni, n.d.3) Was a reason to be preserved.

The letters of Sheikh Abdel Salam are considered some of the most important preserved works. Dr. Mustafa Rabiea says, "As for the academic status of these letters, they are undoubtedly considered historical, social, and literary sources that are not inferior to other sources, but rather surpass them because they are signed and dated" (Rabia, 2003,73)

They elucidate the correct jurisprudential, doctrinal, and advocacy opinions that the Sheikh operated by and invited his associates and students to. The letters contain a set of topics that call for advice, clarification, and explanation, and command good and forbid evil. They clarify what distinguishes the Sheikh in terms of knowledge and understanding of the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger, peace be upon him, and refute the false stories and superstitions that are inserted into his works. (Al-Musrati, 2009)

Secondly: Examples of distorted and fabricated statements in the works of Sheikh Abdel Salam Al-Asmar.

1- What is mentioned in the book (Al-Wasiyya Al-Kubra)¹³:

Sheikh Abdel Salam says, "When a calamity befalls you ... turn in my direction and say, 'O Allah and O Messenger of Allah,' and call me 'O Abdel Salam and O righteous servants of Allah,' for Allah will soon alleviate what has befallen you and will make the truth clearly visible to you. Say this loudly if the calamity is severe, and softly if it is not." (Al-Asmar, 1976,55)

Such statements do not come from a knowledgeable jurist like Sheikh Abdel Salam, as they contradict Islamic doctrine. They would not come from any rational person, as it is illogical to think that raising or lowering one's voice is a measure for God's assistance to man. Had these words been from the Sheikh, he would have advised it in his letters to his companions, disciples, and followers. However, the content of the letters contains numerous examples that deny such statements. These letters prohibit innovative supplications not reported from the Prophet, and call for turning solely to Allah for supplication and reliance on Him for relief from difficulties, and prohibit asking people. Among these examples:

¹² It is a corner within the pillars of the mosque, designated for worship. Over time, it took on a new form as a place where scholarly study sessions are held. Sufis have adopted it as a place to hold their remembrance circles (dhikr sessions). (Qasim, 1999,132-134)

¹³ "The Major Will (Al-Wasiyya Al-Kubra) and the Minor Will (Al-Wasiyya Al-Sughra) are fundamentally directed towards those who wish to affiliate with the Arusiyya Sufi Order. In these two wills, Sheikh Abdel Salam Al-Asmar covers a variety of issues, starting with the fundamentals of belief and its foundations, and repentance and its conditions. He also addresses some prevailing social phenomena of his time. Subsequently, he elaborates on the concept of remembrance (dhikr), its conditions and etiquettes, as well as the rules and foundations of the Arusiyya Sufi Order, its duties, divisions, daily recitations (awrad), and a chain of its spiritual guides, providing brief biographies of its most prominent figures. However, interwoven among these issues, we find forged texts inserted between the lines to tarnish the image of Sheikh Abdel Salam Al-Asmar (Rabia, 2003)

First Evidence: What is mentioned in Sheikh Abdel Salam's letter to his companions in the city of Gharyan, where he warns against innovative Duaa . The Sheikh says, "... do not Duaa with an innovative Duaa . Indeed, the Imam of our Shadhili chain said: Whoever make duaa with a duaa that was not made by the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, is an innovator. So, Duaa with the duaa reported from the Prophet ..." (Rabia, 2003,204)

Second Evidence: What is mentioned in Sheikh Abdel Salam Al-Asmar's letter to his companions in the city of Zawiya, where he encourages them to ask only Allah and to turn to Him for relief from difficulties, and not man. The Sheikh says, "And know: Allah fulfills needs, answers Duaa, and relieves difficulties. " (Rabia, 2003,169)

Third Evidence: What is mentioned in the Sheikh's letter to his companions in Tunisia, where he advises himself and his companions to turn to Allah and abandon everything else. The Sheikh says, "For I advise myself and you: to fear Allah, the Lord of all lords and the Causer of all causes, who has no god but Him, no one worthy of worship but Him, and no one truly existent and sought after but Him. The fortunate is he who relies on Him, entrusts all his matters to Him, and submits himself, disavowing his own power and strength, sincerely in his desire, and his request for what He has. The wretched and deprived is he who turns away from the remembrance of his Lord, follows his desires, and prefers his worldly life over his Hereafter. " (Rabia, 2003,255)

The Fourth evidence: What came in Sheikh's letter to his companions in Tunisia, where he advised them to completely rely on Allah and not turn to people. He says, "Rely on trusting Allah, and have assurance in His guarantee, and feel at ease with His sufficiency. Seek His help in everything and rely on Him in all situations, and let go of all needs into the generosity and grace of Him. Do not hope for what is in the hands of people. " (Rabia, 2003,256)

What is written in the book (Al-Anwar Al-Sunniya): The publisher of the book claims that Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar says: "I am Abdul Salam, nicknamed Al-Asmar, my cannon is everlasting, my bow is taut, I am the one who saves and breaks, and by God, the sun does not rise until it greets me and informs me about what's happening within it."¹⁴" (Rabia, 2003,56)

Such speech cannot come from a sane Muslim. If we compare this speech with the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet, it would not be upright; the same goes if we compare it to reason. How could the sun greet a human and inform him of what's happening within it?

If we look into the content of the letters, we find that Sheikh Abdul Salam advises his companions and followers to take the initiative in forgiving and overlooking, not to get angry, to be humble and not arrogant, and to forgo reliance on one's own power. This is contrary to what is written in the book (Al-Anwar Al-Sunniya), which shows the Sheikh as arrogant, proud of his strength.

Many evidences in the letters indicate that those sayings are not from Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar, but they are false attributions to him. Among those evidences:

First Witness: What came in the letter to Muhammad Al-Shadhli, where the Sheikh advised him to be humble and not arrogant. He says, "I advise you: to be humble, and leave arrogance outwardly, and remove it from your heart; for the humble is elevated, and the arrogant is lowered by Allah and His Messenger. " (Rabia, 2003,135)

¹⁴ Dr. Mostafa Rabaa says that this book is: 'Filled with false claims and baseless nonsense, the proponent of which is either a heretic with no standing in Islam, or a madman devoid of reason. Far be it for Al-Asmar to be either. (Rabia, 2003,56)

Second Witness: What came in his letter to Abdel Rahim Al-Fazani, where he advised him not to use violence and power and to encourage forgiveness and tolerance. He says, "And if someone harms you by action or words or insults you or mentions you with evil from people, do not counter him with the same. Either forgive him without holding grudges, and that is from the sincerity of the truthful, or entrust his matter to God and be content with His support for you. " (Rabia, 2003,128)

Third Witness: What came in the letter to Rashed Al-Mahjoubi, where the Sheikh advised him to forsake his own power and strength and turn to Allah's power and strength. He says, "You should forsake your own power and ability and turn to God's power and ability constantly. Whenever you feel constrained or tight or uncomfortable, say: 'There is no power and no strength except through Allah, the Most High, the Magnificent'"(Rabia, 2003,146)

The letters of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar have contained many themes that clarify his true approach, which refutes the false stories attributed to him and shows his status as a Sufi scholar. By examining the contents of the Sheikh's letters, it becomes clear to us that whoever wrote these letters could not have made such false statements.

Conclusion

Research Results

Among the most important findings that the researcher has arrived at are the following: The character of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar has been distorted by his enemies and opponents, as well as some of his followers, who have attributed to him sayings, poems, and mythical stories that did not come from him. This was done by inserting them into his works. The letters of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar to his companions and students are among his most important scientific legacies, as they have been preserved from aspects of infiltration, distortion, and tampering.

The letters of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar have clarified his correct opinions and ideas, which refute all that is falsely attributed to him in terms of sayings and fabricated mythical stories. His advice, recommendations, and admonitions are in accordance with the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet, peace be upon him.

The letters of Sheikh Abdul Salam are distinguished by the accuracy of their expressions and the clarity of their terms. They are free from ambiguous expressions and verbal complications. The Sheikh adopted simplicity and ease in expression so that the intended meaning can be easily understood and grasped.

The scientific contribution of the study

This study contributes to the clarification of the preaching personality of Sheikh Abdul Salam Al-Asmar, and in clarifying his method that he relied on through his letters to his followers and disciples. This method shows us his approach that is consistent with the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet, peace be upon him. This approach refutes all the false statements, poems, and mythical stories attributed to the Sheikh and mentioned in his works.

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