

2.2.2.2.2.1 The Significance of 'Abbādān

Massignon regarded 'Abd al-Wāhid b. Zayd as the one who founded the "agglomération cénobitique" in 'Abbādān.<sup>1</sup> This fact is not as well documented as has been claimed since.<sup>2</sup> It is certain that 'Abd al-Wāhid did visit 'Abbādān, but it is quite impossible to determine the extent to which he may have influenced the organisation of the place. Ibn Taymiyya described events rather more prosaically: according to him some of 'Abd al-Wāhid's pupils built the first "hut" (*duwayra*) there for Sufis.<sup>3</sup> This may not have been a "convent", much less an "agglomération cénobitique",<sup>4</sup> but the initiative soon found followers. In a few verses Abū l-'Atāhiya invoked God's blessing for 'Abbādān and those who had settled there.<sup>5</sup> It seems that there were many Qadarites among them; the Mu'tazila would later have a foothold there.<sup>6</sup> When the predestinarians began to spread, a man who had built a "house" (*dār*) – a simple hostel for Sufis? – there at his own expense threatened to have it pulled down again.<sup>7</sup> Later, people such as Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī, Bishr al-Ḥāfi, Sarī al-Saqāfi or Sahl al-Tustarī used it as a temporary retreat.<sup>8</sup>

To us, the most important question is what could compel Basran ascetics to go to 'Abbādān. They might have been leaving urban life behind, as the adjective "cénobitique" indicates, but there seems to have been a more pressing motive. 'Abbādān was situated on an island in the Persian Gulf, framed by the Shatt al-Arab to the west, the Kārūn (Dujayl) to the north and the Bahmanshūr to the east, a day and a half's journey from Basra. It was the last settlement before the open sea, of importance to shipping as it was possible to travel further upriver on either side; Iṣṭakhri reports wooden lighthouses on the bank of the canal opposite the town.<sup>9</sup> Early on, a small garrison had been established

1 *Essai*<sup>2</sup> 214.

2 Cf. e.g. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 31.

3 Meier, *Abū Sa'īd* 304; in general Rubinacci in *AIUON* 10/1961/37ff.

4 *Duwayra* is more probably the diminutive form of *dār* rather than *dayr* (Meier, *ibid.*, n. 70). Homerin translates as "cloister" all the same" (*Arabica* 32/1985/223).

5 *Dīvān*, ed. Fayṣal 313 no. 321.

6 See ch. C 7.1 below.

7 Jāhiz, *Bukhalā'* 209, pu. ff.; cf. also ch. C 2.3. below.

8 Böwering, *Mystical Vision of Existence* 47f.

9 For further details cf. Elwell-Sutton in: *Elran* I 51ff. s. v. *Ābādān*; Kaywānī in: *GIE* I 20ff.; Ṣāliḥ al-'Alī, *Khīṭaṭ al-Baṣra* 220ff.; Krawulsky, *Iran* 460. The island is not surrounded by sea any more nowadays, but situated ca. 50 km from the coast of the Persian Gulf; the delta of the