

Several of the most famous prayers in the Islamic tradition come from the great Moroccan Sufi founder Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 1258). One of his most popular prayers is entitled *Ḥizb al-baḥr*, the “litany of the sea,” and is meant to provide protection for sailors, among other uses. A frame story that appears in some sources describes the context of the prayer’s composition, as al-Shādhilī was attempting to make the pilgrimage and facing strong contrary winds on his journey up the Nile (a large river can also be called *baḥr* in Arabic). As the boat sat at anchor, this prayer was revealed to al-Shādhilī and the winds changed, leading to the conversion of the boat’s Christian captain. I will discuss the depiction of the sea (and other waterways) in *Ḥizb al-baḥr* and its numerous commentaries, to determine what the prayer can tell us about the place of the sea at the center of the medieval Mediterranean world. While asking God for helpful winds and safe travels, the prayer quickly veers into more transcendental topics, invoking prophets to whom the natural world was subjected and depicting the sea as a metaphor for all obstacles that may obstruct the believer in this life and the next. This prayer shows how valuable, yet how untrustworthy, the Mediterranean could be for those who lived on its shores.