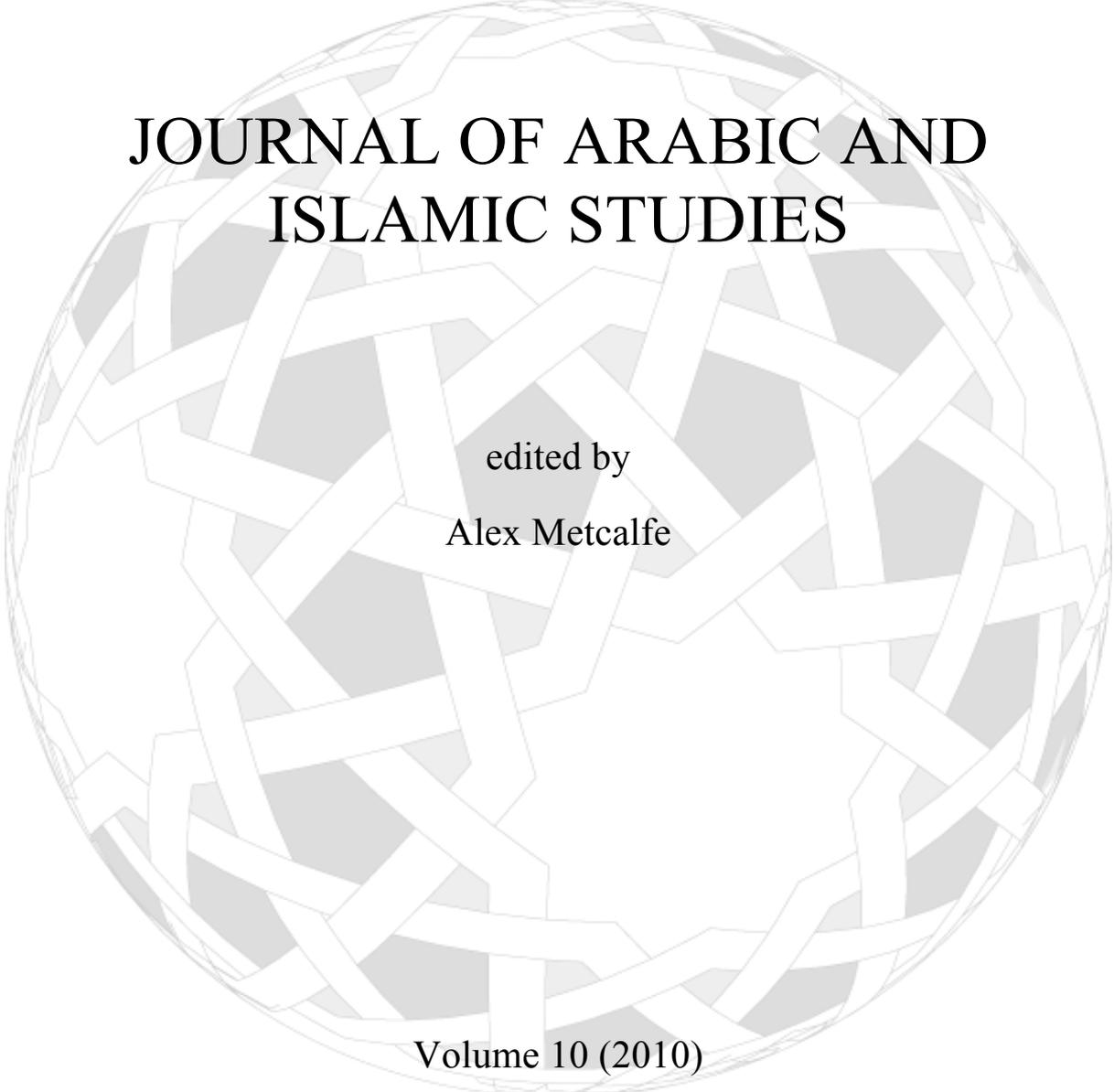


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CONTENTS

Ajami scripts in the Senegalese speech community.....	1
<i>Fallou Ngom</i>	
<i>Wilāyat al-faqīh</i> and Hizbullah’s relations with Iran.....	24
<i>Joseph Alagha</i>	
The ‘Pharaoh’ anecdote in pre-modern Arabic historiography.....	45
<i>Konrad Hirschler</i>	
‘Like the wick of the lamp, like the silkworm they are’: stupid schoolteachers in Classical Arabic literary sources.....	75
<i>Antonella Ghersetti</i>	
Redefining identity through code choice in <i>Al-Ḥubb fī ’l-manfā</i> by Bahā° Tāhir.....	101
<i>Reem Bassiouney</i>	
The notion <i>weapon</i> in arabic idioms: characterization of persons and objects.....	119
<i>Ludmila Torlakova</i>	

AJAMI SCRIPTS IN THE SENEGALESE SPEECH COMMUNITY

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Wolofal (from *Wolof*: Wolof language or ethnic group and ‘-al’: causative morpheme) is an Ajami writing (a generic term commonly used to refer to non-Arabic languages written with Arabic scripts) used to transliterate Wolof in Senegal. It results from the early Islamization of the major Muslim ethnic groups in the country, especially the Pulaar, the Wolof and the Mandinka. Although Senegal is considered to be a French-speaking country, ironically over 50% of the Senegalese people are thought to be illiterate in French. French literacy is restricted to the minority educated group mostly found in urban areas. Because the literacy rate in French is very small in the country, especially among older people, Wolofal remains a major means of written communication among people who are illiterate in French and who have attended Qur’ānic schools. It is used by these people to write letters, run their informal businesses and read religious poems and writings. This paper is based upon fieldwork conducted in Senegal in the summer of 2004. It discusses the orthographic system of Wolofal (compared to Arabic) and provides a sociolinguistic profile of communities in which it serves as major means of written communication.¹

1. Introduction

I traveled to Senegal in the summer of 2004 to collect historical and cultural texts and religious poems and to take digital images of Wolof, Pulaar and Mandinka Ajami manuscripts used in major Senegalese Muslim communities. My goal was to collect as many texts and digital images as possible of these types of Ajami writings and to visit communities where they are typically used. Although people were initially apprehensive about my interest, when they understood my respect for the

¹ This work is based upon insights from fieldwork trips in Senegal made possible by a 2004–5 ACLS/SSRC/NEH postdoctoral fellowship and the support of WARA (the West African Research Association). The views, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of these organizations. I am most grateful to Dr. Jennifer Yanco, WARA’s U.S. Director, for nurturing my initial steps in Ajami linguistics and to Professor Herman Bell, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, for numerous useful suggestions.

local Ajami users and the scholars whose works contain significant knowledge of their communities, most of them shared with me their texts and the knowledge they contain, and in some cases allowed me to take digital pictures.

I also sought to study the linguistic variations in Ajami writings and the possibility of standardizing and modernizing them across the country, and ultimately across Africa. I was particularly impressed by the work of Serigne Moussa Ka,² one of the most prolific Wolofal writers, and the influence of his work among the Muridiyya Sufi religious brotherhood. I have not visited all religious and rural towns in the country, and it is likely that there are more scholars whose works in Wolof, Pulaar or Mandinka are still unknown outside their communities.

Although education (in French) is said to be compulsory for all children, the Senegalese *Direction de la Prévision et de la Statistique* indicates that the majority of the Senegalese people (63.4%) can neither read nor write in any language. It also indicates that the illiteracy rate is higher in rural parts of the country where it is estimated at about 77% for people over 15 years (1997, 31). However, these statistics and those provided by UNESCO do not reflect the actual literacy rate in Wolofal and Ajami systems used for other local languages such as Pulaar and Mandinka, particularly in rural and religious centers across the country.

This statistical misrepresentation of Wolofal and other Ajami users is likely due to the fact that 'literacy' is often tacitly construed in Senegal as involving people who can read and write French or are able to use other Latin-based alphabets for local languages. Because Wolofal does not fall in this categorization, its users are often mistakenly considered to be illiterates who need to learn French or the Latin-based system designed for Wolof. These perceptions miss the fact that, although the overwhelming majority of Wolofal users do not speak French or use the Wolof Latin-based alphabet in their daily communications, they have learned the Arabic writing system through the *daaras* (local name commonly used to refer to Qur'ānic schools in the country) and use it effectively for their written communication needs.

² Since relatively well known or famous West Africans with names originally from Arabic or African languages, or both, are generally most easily recognized by French or English representations of their names, no attempt has been made in the main body of this article, as opposed to transcribed passages, to transliterate scientifically their names. Because there is at times variation in such names, they are generally cited here in the form in which they seem most often to appear on the Internet.

Today, although there are Wolof speakers with advanced competence in Arabic in Senegal owing to their study of Arabic language, culture and civilization, as well as esoteric Qur'ānic sciences, those who use Wolofal but do not speak Arabic actually comprise the majority of the Senegalese Muslims. The fact that Wolofal writings are found across the country for various purposes (on road signs, in telephone booths, on walls, in commercial centers, in announcements, to name only a few) is indicative of the important number of its users in Senegal today.

2. Background

Senegal is the westernmost point of Africa. The population of the country is estimated (July 2009) to be about 13,711,597 according to the Central Intelligence Agency's *World Factbook*. The religious composition of the country is about 94% Muslim, 5% Christian (mostly Roman Catholic), and 1% following indigenous beliefs. The country is divided into 14 administrative regions: Dakar, Diourbel, Fatick, Kaffrine, Kaolack, Kédougou, Kolda, Louga, Matam, Saint-Louis, Sédhiou, Tambacounda, Thiès, and Ziguinchor. Several ethnic groups are found in the country. The major ethnic groups are the Wolof (who comprise about 43.3% of the population), the Pulaar (about 23.8%), the Sereer (about 14.7%), the Jóola (about 3.7%), the Mandinka (about 3%), the Soninke (about 1.1%), and the Europeans and Lebanese (about 1%). Other ethnic groups from neighboring countries comprise about 9.4% of the population.³

As a former French colony, Senegal uses French as its official language. Beside French, the most prominent languages in the country are Wolof, Pulaar, Sereer, Mandinka, Jóola and Soninke. The government recognizes these languages as the six national languages of the country, Wolof being the first and most widely spoken lingua franca (spoken by over 80% of the population). It belongs to the West Atlantic branch of the Niger-Congo phylum and is also spoken in the neighboring countries of The Gambia, Mauritania, Mali and Guinea Bissau. Although the six languages are recognized by the government as national languages and have been codified using a Latin-based alphabet, there are many minority ethnic groups across the nation with languages not codified, especially in the former region of Casamance, which is located in the

³ Cf. the CIA's *World Factbook* (23 April 2009; <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>), the Internet site of Senegal's Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie (4 January 2010; <http://www.ansd.sn/>), and similar recent sources.

southern part of the country (between The Gambia and the Republic of Guinea Bissau) and which corresponds to the present regions of Ziguinchor, Kolda, and Sédhiou.

The use of the Arabic script to write African languages has a long tradition in Muslim communities in Africa, dating back to the historical Islamic centers of learning such as those found in the former Mali Empire. According to July (1992, 55), a center of learning comparable to a medieval university developed around the Sankore Mosque in Timbuktu, Mali, which thus served both as a place of learning and a place of worship.

Osaë, Nwabara, and Odunsi (1973, 18) argue that students and teachers came from abroad as well as from all parts of the Sudan. Remarking that the Arabs called the land south of the Sahara ‘the land of the Blacks’ or ‘*Bilād-as-Sūdān*’, they argue that, historically, the broad belt of savanna located between the Sahara Desert and the tropical forest and between the Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea was termed the Sudan. Today, this area roughly covers all or part of Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Northern Nigeria, Chad, and the Sudan (Osaë, Nwabara, and Odunsi 1973, 13).

Moreover, the important number of libraries found in Timbuktu was attested by the Arab known as Leo Africanus, who visited western Sudan in 1510 (Imperato 1989, 22). Hargreaves (1967, 25) points out that more profit was made from the sale of books than from any other commercial activity there. The newly discovered 10th-/16th-century Ajami manuscript on Niger and Kel Tamagheg history dating from the 1500s (Gutelius 2000, 6) attests to the historical literary traditions and widespread use of Ajami in Muslim communities across Africa. The discovery provides additional evidence against those who mistakenly argue that West African written literature only started with the arrival of Europeans.

Today, similar Ajami manuscripts are used among the Swahili, Hausa, Fulani (Pulaar), Mandinka, and Wolof people across Africa, to name only these. The early conversion of these ethnic groups to Islam exposed them to the Arabic script through Qurʾānic schools. The establishment of these schools in African societies enabled Africans to master Arabic orthography very early on and thus to use modified versions of the script to write their own languages. Since the 11th century an extensive body of religious, historical and cultural literature has been produced in these Ajami scripts across Africa.

The high percentage of Muslims in Senegal (well over 90% of the population) results from the early Islamization of the northern part of the

country. It dates back to the Islamization of West Africa between the 11th and 16th centuries. According to Gellar (1995), northern Senegal's long involvement in the Trans-Saharan trade exposed it to Islamic currents from North Africa. The people inhabiting the banks of the Senegal River were among the first in West Africa to embrace Islam. Gellar argues that Senegal's geography brought its people into close contact with North Africa and the West, and made Senegal a crossroad where the black African, Islamic and European civilizations met, clashed and blended.

Gellar claims that during the 11th century War Jabi, the Pulaar ruler of the Tekrur empire (which involved the entire northern region of Saint-Louis and Matam, Senegal), came under the influence of Muslim traders and missionaries from North Africa. The great majority of the Pulaar from the region of Saint-Louis followed War Jabi's example. Consequently, the Pulaar became the first major Senegalese ethnic group to embrace Islam en masse (Gellar 1995, 2–3). Gellar (1995, 3) argues that from Tekrur spread the Almoravid movement, which swept through Morocco and Spain during the last third of the 11th century. Over the years Tekrur became a training ground for Muslim clerics and missionaries operating throughout modern Senegal and West Africa (Gellar 1995, 3). Thus, by the 14th century, Qur'anic schools were established in Senegal, and most Senegalese Muslims were already able to use the Arabic script to write their own languages (Diop 1989). As a result, because the overwhelming majority of the Senegalese Muslims speak Wolof (the major lingua franca), the use of Ajami scripts to write the language is pervasive in rural and religious areas today.

3. Religious Brotherhoods and Ajami Literature in the Wolof Speech Community

The Senegalese constitution clearly states that the country is a secular state, and the government ensures that freedom of worship for all religions and faiths in the country is protected. Today most Senegalese Muslims belong to one of three Sufi brotherhoods: the Tijaniyya (which comprises two smaller brotherhoods: the Niassènes and the Layènes), the Qadiriyya (locally: Qadriyya), and the Muridiyya (often spelled Mouridiyya). These religious brotherhoods are structured around a religious leader who is typically a descendant of the founder of the brotherhood. The two largest groups are the Tijaniyya (based in the city of Tivaouane, in the region of Thiès), and the Murids (Mourides), based in their holy city Touba, in the region of Diourbel.

The Senegalese Tijaniyya brotherhood was created by al-Hajj Umar

Tall (a Pulaar clerical warrior) in the 19th century. The brotherhood was founded in the Algerian oasis Abi Samghun in 1196/1781–82 by Aḥmad al-Tijānī, some five years after going on the Pilgrimage and a prolonged stay in the East (EI², 10: 463b; cf. Gellar 1995, 7). The Tijaniyya religious order spread in the country in the 19th century through the work of the religious leader al-Hajj Malik (Malick) Sy (1855–1922), who settled in Tivaouane, where he founded a mosque and an Islamic school. Later, the brotherhood was expanded to other regions of the country by the establishment of new branches (commonly referred to as *zāwiya*), in particular that in Kaolack led by Abdoulaye Niassè (1844–1922). This branch is known today as Niassène in Senegal (named after the founder Abdoulaye Niassè). Despite the modern influences attested in the city of Tivaouane today (such as rap graffiti painted on the walls by the ‘wannabe American’ youngsters), the city is still regarded as an important place for Qurʾānic and Islamic education in Senegal. Thus the Tijaniyya brotherhood has contributed importantly to the Wolof people’s exposure to Islamic teachings and the Arabic script.

The other group, the Layène brotherhood, consists mostly of the Lébou ethnic group. The Lébou constitute a relatively small fisherman group related to the Wolof and considered to be the first inhabitants of the present department of Rufisque. The brotherhood was founded by Seydina Limamou Laye (1845–1909), a member of the community. The brotherhood believes that the long awaited appearance of the Mahdi (Arabic: *al-mahdī*, ‘the God-guided one’) and Issa Rohou Laye (ʿĪsā Rūḥu llāhi = Jesus Christ) occurred in Senegal at the end of the 19th century. Members of the brotherhood believe that Seydina Limamou Laye is the Mahdi (the long awaited guide to come in the last days) to lead the world. They believe that his coming was predicted in old Islamic documents and that he will bring good news and divine blessing to the world. After his death, his son Seydina Issa Rohou Laye, who is believed to be the incarnation of Jesus Christ, continued his teachings. The half black, half white face in the picture on the next page, which is found in their community, illustrates the beliefs that the disciples associate with their religious leader Seydina Issa Rohou Laye as the embodiment of Jesus Christ, and their perception of him.

Another key feature that characterizes this brotherhood is the fact that the founder and most of the disciples have given up their Lébou last names to adopt the divine name Allah (Arabic: Allāhi, God, genitive case) pronounced as ‘Laye’ in the Layène community. For this reason, members of the Layène brotherhood can today easily be identified in

Senegal because of the last name 'Laye' they share. However, although some Wolof Ajami literature is found in the brotherhood, the quantity is relatively limited. This is due to the fact that the number of the members of the brotherhood is relatively small, and the brotherhood does not have an established tradition of Qur'ānic education or a significant number of people with the ability to use the Arabic script.



Figure 1. Seydina Issa Rohou Laye, 'Jesus Christ Reincarnated.'
Yoff-Dakar, Senegal. © Copyright 2004 by Fallou Ngom

The Qadiris and the Mourides have also contributed to the spreading of Qur'ānic schools and the Arabic writing system in the country. The Qadiriyya brotherhood, at least the original movement, was founded in the 12th century in Baghdad by °Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (470/1077–78–561/1166; the *nisba* is sometimes given as al-Jīlī and is often written al-Jīlālī in the Maghrib). A branch was established in Senegal by the Mauritanian shaykh Bounaama Kounta. Later, his son Shaykh Bou Kounta (1840–1914) established an important branch of the brotherhood in Niassane, Senegal. Although it is the oldest religious brotherhood in the country, it has a limited number of followers compared to other brotherhoods. Traditionally, this brotherhood was limited to people who live along the Senegal River, particularly among the Moors. The brotherhood has two other branches, commonly known as the Fadiliyya and the Sidiyya, based in Mauritania. Because of the strong connection that the Tijanis and the Qadiris share with North Africa and the Arab world and the significant number of members highly educated in Qur'ānic studies and the Arabic language, most of their literature is written in Arabic

rather than in Ajami. However, while the overwhelming literary production of these brotherhoods is in Arabic, there is evidence of the existence of Wolof and Pulaar Ajami literature written by some disciples.

The Muridiyya brotherhood was founded by Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké (1853–1927), who was born in Mbacké-Baol, Senegal. He established his religious brotherhood in Touba. Today, Touba is said to have the biggest mosque in West Africa. Besides the basic precepts of Islam that it shares with other brotherhoods and its special relationship with the Qadiriyya brotherhood (Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba was a member of this brotherhood before creating the Muridiyya religious order), the Muridiyya brotherhood emphasizes the importance of work, which it considers to be one of the greatest forms of worship. Today, it is the most popular religious brotherhood in the country, especially among younger people. This is likely due to the fact that the Murids assert an African identity often not underscored in other brotherhoods. As such, it has produced an African brand of sub-Saharan Islam that takes into account the cultural traditions of Wolof society (in which it originated). Like the founders of other religious brotherhoods in the country, the founder of the Muridiyya brotherhood wrote his religious poems and essays primarily in Arabic. This reflects the fact that as Islam expanded eastward and westward into new lands, Muslim scholars used Arabic as their lingua franca (Chtatou 1992, 16).

The use of the Arabic script to write Wolof in the Murid community was primarily developed by the first disciples (such as Serigne Moussa Ka) to write about their leader and his life experiences and to disseminate his teachings to other Wolof members of the community, who were familiar with his message written in Arabic, but did not necessarily speak or read the language. Disciples such as such Moussa Ka had a strong mastery of Arabic orthography, which they learned through their advanced Qurʾānic education. Consequently, their Wolofal manuscripts contrast with that of Wolofal writers with less Qurʾānic education. This difference in Qurʾānic education is well captured by Hunwick's (2003–4, 63) distinction between the 'learned' (Serigne Moussa Ka) and the 'literate' (the other disciples).

Unlike the Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya brotherhoods, where the emphasis was put on educating their disciples in Qurʾānic learning and Arabic language (due to their close relationship with the Arab world and North Africa), the Murid community put the emphasis on Qurʾānic education and the teachings of the brotherhood conveyed in Wolof (the first language of most members of the brotherhood). Thus, the use of Arabic script to write Wolof became an effective instrument for educating

disciples about the tenets, beliefs, and practices of the Muridiyya brotherhood. For this reason, it contrasts with other brotherhoods in terms of literary and cultural practices. Here is a picture of a Baye Fall, that is, a follower of Shaykh Ibrahima Fall, one of the first and most prominent disciples of the Muridiyya order, who was known for his hard work for the benefit of the brotherhood. He is considered to be the embodiment of work, which as previously remarked, is viewed as one of the greatest forms of worship in the Muridiyya order.



Figure 2. A Baye Fall Disciple of the Muridiyya Brotherhood.
Ziguinchor, Senegal. © Copyright 2004 by Fallou Ngom.

The fact that Wolof people comprise the most important part of the Muridiyya brotherhood and that the brotherhood has not sought to fully assimilate to Arabic language and culture but has been able to adapt the teachings of Islam to the African way of life has contributed to the rapid development of Wolof Ajami literature in the Murid community compared to other brotherhoods. Thus, although there are Ajami texts from other brotherhoods, their number is limited compared to the extensive Murid Wolofal literature found across Senegal today.

4. The Use of Wolofal in the Wolof Speech Community

Wolof has a very rich oral tradition and many authors also use it in their writings. Some of the literature is recorded using the Latin alphabet. For instance, the New Testament was published in the Latin script in 1987.

However, Latin script writings are less widespread in the country because of 1) the high illiteracy rate in French and other Latin-based writing systems, 2) the initial resistance of the Wolof people to enroll their children in the French schools which they perceived as a way of assimilation to the European Christian culture and way of life, and 3) the already existing use of the Arabic script to write African languages prior to the arrival of the French colonizers. However, as in many parts of Africa during colonization, colonial powers opposed the use of Arabic-based scripts and imposed Latin-based alphabets in order to prevent the spread of the Arabic language in the colonized countries (Chtatou 1992, 7). Consequently, most of the research conducted by the colonial powers focused on the teaching of their own languages and Latin-based alphabets for African languages.

Although no significant academic research has been conducted on Wolofal, it is a fact that it is used by most Wolof speakers illiterate in French, especially in religious towns and rural parts of the countryside primarily inhabited by Wolof speakers. Thus, although the use of French and the Latin-based script for African languages has increased, the traditional use of Wolofal as a literary language and as a language of written communication has also become more widespread in the country.

Today, although the Wolof language has been codified since the 1970s using the Latin orthography, the population that uses Wolofal is significantly greater than the number of people educated in French and those trained to use the current standard Wolof orthography. This is partly because children typically attend Qurʾānic schools prior to going to the public schools, where French is the primary language of instruction.

4.1. The Relationship between the Arabic Script and Wolofal

Because of the limited number of people fluent in Arabic, the Arabic language has never been used as a major medium of communication in the daily life of most Senegalese people. Its use was and still is restricted primarily to religious spheres. For this reason, classical Arabic is respected and is granted a somewhat *holy* status, as it is the language of the Qurʾān, the holy book of over 90% of the Senegalese population. In contrast to the prestige of Arabic, Wolofal does not necessarily carry such a holy status as it is used for both religious and secular purposes. Its religious functions typically consist of religious songs glorifying God and praising the prophet Muhammad and the founders of the brotherhoods, or the translation of some Arabic literature (written by the founder or disciples of the brotherhood) into Wolofal. These types of writings are found in religious and non-religious settings in both urban and rural

areas in the country today.

The secular usage of Wolofal is found as well in both religious and non-religious settings. For instance, it is used to give directions on road signs, to write historical essays, biographies, songs, eulogies, poems, announcements and advertisements, to give instructions, to keep records, to write letters and to take notes, to name only these. Although Wolofal is not formally taught in Qur'ānic schools, its usage is clearly fostered in in these institutions, where users are initially exposed to Arabic orthography. These schools exhibit the basic structure of the Qur'ānic education system, as rightly pointed out by Lasisi (1995).

Education in Muslim societies typically consists of three levels. The first level, the only compulsory level, can begin for a child as young as three or four. At this level, the Qur'ān is introduced in Arabic and students learn how to observe the daily prayers, study the life of the prophet Muhammad as well as the lives of other prophets, and learn various aspects of Islam (Lasisi 1995, 14). It is at this level that children normally begin memorization of the Qur'ān, at about the age of six (Hunwick 2003–4, 63). They advance to the next level at their own rate of learning or may choose not to continue (Lasisi 1995, 14).

Lasisi (1995, 14) argues that the second level of Islamic education typically consists of learning the meaning of the Qur'ān in the local language. Very often it is only the students who wish to become teachers themselves who reach this level. At this stage, students begin receiving instruction in Islamic divination, medicine, and astrology.

The last level can go on for a lifetime. It is at this level that students often become specialized. Students may seek special knowledge in the sayings and deeds of the prophet Muhammad (*ḥadīth*), or in areas of Islamic jurisprudence, or mysticism. At this level students usually travel great distances to study with renowned scholars (Lasisi 1995, 14).

Typically, students in Qur'ānic schools recite their lessons aloud until the teacher is satisfied. They also write passages of the Qur'ān on a wooden slate with a special pen and locally made black ink (Jalloh 1997, 57). Today, in the countryside and religious towns, Qur'ānic schools operating in this manner, commonly referred to as *daaras*, are the primary educational institutions through which Wolofal users are initially exposed to the Arabic script and Ajami writings.

While it is true that most students in these schools usually leave after completing the first level, that is, after being taught some verses of the Qur'ān (typically through recitation and rote memorization) and basic Islamic precepts often reflecting the point of view of their school's religious order, they are nevertheless exposed to both the Arabic script

and its modified version so as to be able to write messages, take notes and keep their personal records in their own languages by the time they leave the school. Nowadays, market places in urban centers are filled with street vendors and small shop owners who come from these schools. These people use the Ajami writing system to write letters and to run their businesses.

In Wolofal, some letters of the Arabic alphabet learned in Qur^ānic schools are modified to write Wolof sounds that do not exist in Arabic. The modifications typically consist of the addition of new diacritical signs to some Arabic letters. The following section examines the similarities and differences between Wolofal and Arabic orthography.

4.2. Arabic and Wolofal Consonants and their Corresponding IPA Symbols

The Arabic alphabet has 28 letters, of which two are semi-vowels, *wāw* (و) and *yā'* (ي), and one, *ʿalif* (ا), behaves much like the semi-vowels, but has no consonantal value on its own. The number of letters rises to 29 if the glottal stop *hamza* (ء) is included. Depending on its position in the word, it can be carried by the semi-vowels or *ʿalif*, or occur alone. The following table shows the basic consonantal system of Arabic, its orthography, and its letters borrowed by Wolofal writers.

Phonetic Sounds	Arabic Orthography	Wolofal Orthography
1. [ʔ], [a:]	ا	ا
2. [b]	ب	ب
3. [t]	ت	ت
4. [θ]	ث	X
5. [dʒ], [j]	ج	ج
6. [h]	ح	ح
7. [x]	خ	خ
8. [d]	د	د
9. [ð]	ذ	X
10. [r]	ر	ر
11. [z]	ز	X
12. [s]	س	س
13. [ʃ]	ش	X
14. [s ^ʕ]	ص	X
15. [d ^ʕ]	ط	X
16. [t ^ʕ]	ظ	X
17. [z ^ʕ]	ظ	X
18. [ʕ]	ع	X

19. [y]	غ	X
20. [f]	ف، ب	ف، ب
21. [q]	ق، ق	ق، ق
22. [k]	ك	ك
23. [l]	ل	ل
24. [m]	م	م
25. [n]	ن	ن
26. [h]	ه	ه
27. [w], [u:]	و	و
28. [j], [i:]	ي	ي
29. [ʔ]	ء	ء ⁴

X in the Wolofal column indicates letters not typically borrowed by Wolofal users. However, these letters may be used in Arabic loanwords found in Wolofal texts or in Wolof words that are influenced by the Arabic language. Such usages are also typical of Wolofal writers with some Arabic language competence learned through their advanced studies of the Qurʾān. As rightly pointed out by Hunwick (2003–4, 64), in the traditional method of learning the Qurʾān in West Africa, only advanced students of the Qurʾān learned all the complex rules of Arabic orthography. The table shows that Wolofal has borrowed about 18 letters from Arabic. The Arabic letters that are borrowed and mostly used by Wolofal users typically correspond to the sound units that already exist in Wolof, and those not regularly borrowed correspond to sound segments that do not exist in Wolof. Letters lose their tails when combined with other letters both in Arabic and Wolofal. To lengthen Arabic consonants, the sign *shadda* (ّ) is placed on the consonant. Wolofal users also make use of the *shadda* to write Wolof geminate consonants.

With respect to the Wolofal use of the letters ب، ف، ق in 20 and 21, often referred to as the Maghribi *fāʾ* and *qāf* to distinguish them from ف، ق، the Eastern (Mashriqi) *fāʾ* and *qāf*, both the Maghribi and Eastern letters are regularly attested in the Wolofal literature. It is worth noting that the whole style of Wolofal writings can either be Maghribi (Kufic inspired) or Naskhi (Eastern, cursive) depending on the author's background.⁵ While the use of the Maghribi style in Wolofal texts is

⁴ Learned usage.

⁵ Cf. on the Maghribi script, see van den Boogert 1989, 30–31, summarizing the arguments of O. Houdas in 'Essai sur l'écriture maghrébine', in *Nouveaux mélanges orientaux*, II^e série, vol. XIX, Publications de l'École des Langues Orientales Vivantes (Paris, 1886).

likely due to the relative proximity of North Africa, the use of the Naskhi style may be due to its clarity and its frequent occurrence in the correspondence and literary production of educated Muslims. Beside these variations found in Wolofal texts, Wolofal users have made some innovations to write Wolof sound units that do not exist in Arabic. The following table provides a summary of the Wolof short consonants. I have not included Wolof geminate consonants, because they do not often pose problems for Wolofal users (as they use the *shadda* to indicate consonantal length).

4.3. Wolof Short Consonants

Stops:	p	t		k		(?)
	b	d		g	q	
Prenasals:	mp	nt	nj	nk		
	mb	nd	nč	ng	nq	
Nasals:	m	n	ñ	ŋ		
Affricates:			č			
			ǰ			
Fricatives:	f	s			x	h
Lateral:		l				
Trill:		r				
Glides:	w		j			

The consonants in frames are those that do not exist in Arabic, and therefore need new Wolofal letters to write them. In order to do so, Wolofal users tend to add three dots on top of their closest Arabic counterparts. Although in most Wolofal texts the three dots are placed above the consonants, in some the dots are placed below the consonants. The three dots used on top of the Arabic consonants (which normally do not have such dots) are referred to as ‘tomb’ in Wolof. The letters used in the table below are based upon the Wolofal texts I collected during my fieldwork. The following letters are the most common Wolofal letters used to write Wolof consonants that do not exist in Arabic.

Wolof Phonemes with No Arabic Counterparts	Wolofal Letters Used for These Phonemes
1. p	ٲ
2. g	ك ك غ
3. ñ	خ ج ني
4. ŋ	ك ك غ

5. č	ج ج
6. mp	ب ب
7. nt	نت ت
8. nǰ	ج ج
9. nk	ك ك
10. mb	ب ب
11. nd	د, د, د
12. nč	ج ج
13. ng	غ غ
14. nq	ف ف

While the use of the three dots on the Arabic [b] ب to write the Wolof consonant [p] is relatively consistent in most Wolofal texts, the writing of other consonants (particularly prenasal consonants) exhibits considerable variation as the table shows. For instance, the Wolofal letters (ج ج, ك ك, ن ت) for [p], [g], and [ñ], respectively, are commonly attested in Wolofal writings, however, Wolofal literature also contains many instances where the same letters are used for the prenasal consonants [mp], [ng], and [nǰ], respectively. The table above shows the variations attested in the Wolofal texts I have collected. This table is not meant to be exhaustive. It only represents the variations found in my data.

These variations require Wolofal readers to be familiar with the whole gamut of possible letters used to write Wolof consonants that do not exist in Arabic. This usage of one Wolofal letter for multiple consonants is due to the fact that 1) people are not formally taught the standard form of Wolofal, and 2) idiolectal and dialectal features of writers are commonly found in Wolofal manuscripts. For these reasons, in order to be able to read and understand Wolofal texts, one needs not only to be acquainted with the writings of the author, but also with the author's dialectal and idiolectal patterns. The following section examines the use of vowels in Arabic and Wolofal.

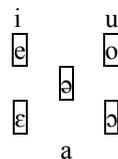
4.4. Arabic and Wolofal Vowels and Their Corresponding IPA Symbols

Arabic only has three vowels, whereas Wolof has seven. The following table shows the basic vowel system of Arabic, its orthography and its signs borrowed by Wolofal users.

Phonetic Sounds	Arabic Orthography	Wolofal Orthography
[i]/[i:]	Line under a consonant: Example: سـ [si] / سي [si:]	Borrowed

[a]/[a:]	Line on a consonant: Example: سَ [sa] / سَا [sa:]	Borrowed
[u]/[u:]	A small و or د on a consonant: Example: سُ (su) / سُو [su:]	Borrowed
[aw]	Line on a consonant plus و : Example: سَوُ [saw]	Borrowed
[aj]	Line on a consonant plus ي : Example: سَيُ [saj]	Borrowed

What is shown by this table is certainly well known to most of the readers of this journal, but I should like to summarize for those not familiar with Arabic a few things necessary to the understanding of the remainder of this article. Arabic has three short vowels [i, u, a] which are placed on top of or under the consonants. The vowel [i] is referred to as *kasra* and is represented by a short line under the consonant as in سِ [si]. The vowel [a] is referred to as *fatha* and is represented by a short line on top of the consonant as in سَ [sa]. The vowel [u] is referred to as *ḍamma* and is represented by the sign ُ or a small superscript د written on top of a consonant as in سُ [su]. Typically, Arabic vowels are lengthened when they are accompanied by the semi-vowels (ي, و) and the letter ّ, as shown above. Diphthongs are generally represented by a combination of a vowel with a semi-vowel bearing a *sukūn* (a small circle put on top of the semi-vowel), as illustrated in the words [saw] and [dañuj] in figure 3 below. Vowel diacritics are not commonly used in contemporary Arabic as they can be predicted by native speakers. They are mostly used in poetry, the Qurʾān and Arabic books designed for children or foreign learners. The absence of a vowel is indicated by the use of the *sukūn*. It is a small circle put on top of the consonant as in سْ [s]. Wolofal has borrowed all these Arabic features. However Wolof has seven vowels to represent, as illustrated by the following diagram of the Wolof vowel system.



In order to write Wolof vowels which do not exist in Arabic, most Wolofal writers use the Arabic *kasra* to write all the Wolof front vowels [i, e, ɛ], the *ḍamma* to write all the back vowels, and *fatha* to write the

vowels [a] and [ə]. The vowels [ɔ] and [o] are also written with the *damma* and a dot placed inside it in some Wolofal texts. While most Wolofal texts use these Arabic vowels, some Wolofal texts also use a dot below a consonant to indicate the vowels [e] and [ɛ]. The table below provides a summary of the writing of vowels in Wolofal.

Arabic Vowels	Wolofal
<i>Kasra</i> [i] is used to write	i, e, ɛ
<i>Damma</i> [u] is used to write	u, o, ɔ
<i>Fatha</i> [a] is used to write	a, ə

Similar to the variations discussed earlier with respect to consonants, these vocalic variations require Wolofal readers to be familiar with the range of possible Arabic vowels used to write Wolof vowels. The following section provides visual images of Wolofal writings with variations comparable to those discussed above.

5. Analysis of Sample Wolofal Texts

I had long been aware of the religious use of Ajami scripts in areas beyond the spheres of influence of European languages in Senegambia. However, I was stunned by its widespread secular use as illustrated by the Wolofal texts in figures 3, 4, and 5 at the end.

Figure 3 was found in a secluded place in the city of Diourbel where people would sometimes urinate, if they did not have immediate access to a bathroom. The targeted audience is clearly the Wolofal users who comprise the majority of the population of that area. The picture exhibits some of the variations discussed earlier. For instance, the *kasra* is used to write the two Wolof vowels [e] and [i] as illustrated by the words [tere] ‘prohibited’ and [fi] ‘here’ in the picture. The following picture exhibits analogous variations.

The picture in figure 4 was found in Touba, the major religious city of the Muridiyya brotherhood. It was found at the entrance of a local commercial center. The targeted audience is the local customers who are Wolofal literates and who comprise the overwhelming majority of the population of the city. This Wolofal text consists only of French and Arabic loanwords. These words are loanwords that entered into the Wolof speech community a long time ago. Consequently, most Wolofal users know their meanings, although they may not speak French or Arabic. The borrowed standard French words ‘centre commercial’ [sɑ̃tr-komɛʁsjal] (commercial center) and ‘original’ [ɔʁiʒinal] are written in Wolofal as they are pronounced by Wolofal users who are largely illiterate in French. The fact that the French words are written as [sɑ̃tr-
komɛʁsjal] and [ɔʁiʒinal] is a clear indication of the influence of the French words on the Wolofal writing system.

komɛ[ʃja:l] and [ori[ʃina:l] in Wolofal is due to the linguistic influence of Wolof, a language which does not have nasal vowels and the consonants [ʁ] and [ʒ], and does not accept consonant clusters such as [tr]. The use of the non-standard pronunciation of the French words suggests that the writer is likely not to have been educated in French.

Compared to the French loans, the Arabic loanwords on the picture are less influenced by the Wolof linguistic system because they have retained their original Arabic features. For example, the consonants ط and ش (in the Arabic structure [maʃʃabu ʃʃifa:ʔi] ‘Search for Remedy’), which do not exist in Wolof, are still maintained in the Wolofal text. This suggests that the author is influenced by Arabic. The fact that the س in كُمْرَسِيَال has no vocalization indicates that the writer is also avoiding putting a *sukūn* in a place not acceptable in the Arabic language. This further indicates that the writer has some mastery of Arabic grammar. With respect to the vowels used in figure 4, the text exhibits some variations. For example, the *damma* is used for both [o] and [u] and the *kasra* is used as [ɛ] and [i].

Similarly, the Wolofal text in figure 5 exhibits extensive orthographic variations. As indicated earlier, Arabic loans written by Wolofal authors with some Arabic education tend to keep some or all their initial orthographic features as illustrated by the Arabic structures [assala:mu ʃalajkuḡ wa rahmatu lʃʃa:hi] in line 1, [aʃʃajxu lxadi:m] in line 2, and [in ʃa:ʔa lʃʃa:hu] in line 7. The Arabic structure [aʃʃajxu lxadi:m], which literally means the ‘Servant Shaykh’, from (*khadīm al-rasūl*, the servant of the Prophet), is an epithet used for Ahmadou Bamba (the founder of the Muridiyya brotherhood). In line 6, the French word [ʒujijɛ] ‘Juillet’ (July) is written as [sulje:] (the way it is typically pronounced by Wolof speakers with no education in French, who comprise the overwhelming majority of Wolofal users).

With respect to vowels used in this text, the variation is consistent with the patterns discussed earlier in Figure 4. The *damma* is shown in Figure 5 to refer to the Wolof vowels [o], [ɔ] and [u], the *kasra* is used to write the Wolof vowels [i], [e] and [ɛ], and the *fatha* for the Wolof vowels [a] and [ə] throughout the text. The text also contains two instances where a dot below a consonant is used to refer to the Wolof vowel [ɛ]: in the words [sulje:] in line 6 and [ʃɔte:] in line 7. It is interesting to note an additional variation with respect to the use of this dot. In the Wolofal word corresponding to [sulje:] in line 6, the dot occurs below the *kasra* already under the ي, while in the Wolofal word corresponding to [ʃɔte:] the *kasra* is not used below the consonant ت. The

use of the dot below the *kasra* is consistent with the Arabic diacritical sign adopted for the Wolof vowel [ɛ] written as ‘é’ in the Latin-based alphabet (Chtatou 1992, 40). Finally, the schwa in the last word in line 8 is mistakenly written with *damma* rather than the *fatha* used throughout the text. While the use of the *shadda* ّ on the consonants to indicate geminates is fairly consistent in the text, the writing of the consonants exhibit variations similar to those observed with the vowels.

For instance, the prenasal [mb] in line 2 is written with ب , whereas it is written with بّ in line 3. Again, the consonant [p] in line 8 is also written with پ . Similarly, the consonant [ñ] in lines 3, 5, and 8 is written with ج , and the consonant [ç] in lines 3, 5, and 7 is written thrice with چ and once with چّ . The consonant [g] in lines 4 and 6 is also written with گ and گ , respectively. Moreover, the Maghribi [f] ف is also used in lines 5 and 7. Although these variations in the Wolofal literature are well-understood and tacitly accepted among users, they have made Wolofal manuscripts difficult to read and comprehend by people outside the community.

In this respect, the standardization of Wolofal is a crucial step toward eliminating these variations and modernizing the system in a way that it can be used as an effective means to teach Wolofal users the modern skills they need to be active participants in the development of the country and be successful in the 21st century. It is worth noting that some initial efforts have been made to standardize Wolofal since the 1980s. The Senegalese government in collaboration with UNESCO and ISESCO developed standard Arabic alphabets for Wolof and Pulaar in 1987 (Chatou 1992, 36–48). By 1992, ISESCO produced the first Afro-Arabic keyboard and typewriter (Chtatou 1992, 62–63). However, since then the standard Wolofal orthography has not been employed among Wolofal users due to the lack of funding for opening actual schools or pilot schools in the countryside, where the new standard alphabet could be used to teach mathematics, geography, sciences, and the like. Because of the cultural and historical connection that people have with Wolofal in rural parts of the country, the scope of its usage, and the pride associated with it in rural communities, opening secular modern Wolofal classes both in rural and also urban areas of Senegal would undoubtedly be successful. This could potentially be more effective than the current use of the Latin-based standard Wolof alphabet (quite foreign to learners) in adult literacy programs throughout the country today.

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the Senegalese government and some non-governmental organizations today to raise the literacy rate in

Wolof and other local languages in the country, Wolofal and other similar forms of writing (used across the country by the overwhelming majority of the French-illiterate Muslims) are still not taken into account in the literacy programs, and the extensive body of literature written in them is still unknown or at least not studied in academic circles in Senegal or abroad.

Conclusion

Given the scope of usage of Wolofal and other similar Ajami scripts across Africa (in Senegal, The Gambia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, to name just these), and given the linguistic, cultural, religious, and political challenges of the 21st century, it would of great benefit to the world that such systems be rigorously studied by scholars, that university courses based on the literary traditions of these societies be offered to uncover the extensive knowledge still buried in their Ajami manuscripts and that the secular use of the modernized and standardized forms of these writing systems be supported by both governments and non-governmental organizations.

Finally, the creation of modern schools using the modernized and standardized Ajami scripts of Berber, Pulaar, Wolof, Mandinka, Hausa, Swahili, Zarma, Songhay, and the like, could be a giant step toward the linguistic integration of Africa, since it would revitalize a common historical heritage and appeal to cultural and linguistic relationships that have existed between Muslim communities across Africa for centuries. The creation of such schools could also help provide a modern 21st century curriculum to be used in African Qur^ʿānic schools for the teaching of such subjects as science, mathematics, geography, and history, thereby exposing students to the world outside their communities and to knowledge that is generally limited or unavailable in typical Qur^ʿānic schools.



كُفِسَو	تَرِ	دَحْيُ
[ku fi saw]	[tere]	[dañuj]
(Someone here urinate)	(Prohibited)	(It is)

Figure 3. Wolofal Instruction: 'Urinating Prohibited at this Place.' Diourbel, Senegal. © Copyright 2004 by Fallou Ngom

	كُومِرْسِيَالْ سَنَنْزُ [kometersja:l] [santar] (Commercial Center)
	الشِّفَاءِ مَطْلَبُ Ara: [maṭlabu] [[ʃifa:ʔi] (Arabic name: Maṭlabu l-Shifā'i)
	أَرِسِنَالْ [orisina:l] (Original)
	a 150M. ←[at 150 meters ←]

Figure 4. Wolofal Sign with French and Arabic Words. Touba, Senegal.
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	<p>IPA Transcription of Wolofal Text with English Translation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Arabic: [assala:mu ʕalajkum wa rahmatu lʔa:hi] (<i>Peace be upon you and God's Mercy</i>) 2. [je:n mbakki jullit ji «da:raj aʔajxu lxadi:m»] (<i>You Muslim brothers in 'al-Shaykh al-Khadim's house'</i>) 3. [ni nekk karce «lajen» ci mbakké, ño: le:n di] (<i>who are in the 'Layeen' district in Mbacké, we are</i>) 4. [ɲgal da:ɓ lisa:m burɲ bu nuj amal-] (<i>informing you about the Islamic meeting organized</i>) 5. [dibe:r, ña:r fukki fan ak benna,⁶ ci we:ru] (<i>on Sunday, 21st day, in the month of</i>) 6. [«rakka:ti ɲammu» tɔllɔk 11 / sulje: / 2004] (<i>'Rakkasti Gammu'⁷ corresponding to July 11, 2004</i>) 7. [bu fukki waxtu jɔte: ci suba. in fa:ʔa lʔa:hu] (<i>at 10 o'clock in the morning. God willing</i>) 8. [ɲuj sakku se:n te:wa:j je:n ñeppa⁶] (<i>We are asking for the presence of all of you.</i>)
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Figure 5. Meeting Announcement in Wolofal found on a Wall, Mbacké, Senegal. © Copyright 2004 by Fallou Ngom.

⁶ This word is generally pronounced with final geminates and written in the Latin script without the final schwa. However, in Wolofal such final geminates often carry a vowel.

⁷ Third month of the Wolof lunar calendar, literally 'sibling of the sibling of Gammu', *Gammu* being the celebration of the prophet Muḥammad's birthday, which occurs in the first month of the Islamic calendar.

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WILĀYAT AL-FAQĪH AND HIZBULLAH'S RELATIONS WITH IRAN

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Hizbullah in Lebanon has succeeded in employing Imām Khūmaynī's theory of *wilāyat al-faqīh* ('the guardianship of the jurist') as a cornerstone in its politico-religious ideology from 1978, molding, interpreting and adapting the original theory to suit Lebanese social and political conditions. In order to negotiate successive changes in the political system, Hizbullah has shifted its ideology to become a key player affecting the dynamic changes taking place in the Lebanese public sphere. However, it is assumed in many circles that Hizbullah is the proxy of Syria and Iran. Concentrating on the presumed Iranian influence, this article argues that Hizbullah has instead pursued an independent course of action in its attempt to influence the political system of Lebanon.

Introduction

Most political commentators regard Iran along with its 'brain child', the Lebanese resistance movement Hizbullah, as having militant revolutionary tendencies. Many would argue that these do not conform to the international community's standards of democratic values that govern civil society. But how should the complex relationships between Hizbullah and Iran be understood? Is Hizbullah an Iranian party operating in Lebanon? Or is it a militant Lebanese party supported by Iran, which has to obey it and be its tool of foreign policy?

Hizbullah has been able to modify its identity from its origins as an Islamic movement of social and political protest (1978–1985), to a full-pledged social movement (1985–1991), to a parliamentary political party (1992 to the present). It has tried to preserve its Islamic identity and at the same time work within the confines of the Lebanese political system. On these grounds, the Party recognized the Lebanese state. In spite of being perceived as having a political and strategic partnership with Syria,¹ and a strategic and ideological alliance with Iran,² Hizbullah is

¹ 'We emphasize the need to adhere to the distinguished relations between Lebanon and Syria as a common political, security, and economic need, dictated by the interests of the two countries and two peoples, by the imperatives of geopolitics and the requirements for Lebanese stability and facing common challenges. We also call for an end to all the negative sentiment that have marred bilateral ties in the past few years and urge these relations to return to

arguably not merely an instrument of policy in Syrian and Iranian hands. Rather, the Party has pursued an independent course of decision making in conformity with the specificities (*khūṣūṣiyyāt*) of the Lebanese political equation, until it succeeded in May 2008 in obtaining veto power in the Cabinet, the Council of Ministers (the main executive body of the country), thus controlling the political system to a greater extent. After its defeat in the June 2009 legislative elections, it backtracked and contented itself with participation with two ministers in a power-sharing cabinet, waiving its earlier gain of veto power for the sake of consensual democracy, as it revealed in its 2009 Manifesto.

After three decades of the ‘victory’ of the Islamic Revolution in Iran it is worth returning to the question of how Imām Khūmaynī’s initial theory of *wilāyat al-faqīh* (‘the guardianship of the jurisprudent’ or ‘jurisconsult’) has developed in the political thought of the Lebanese Hizbullah, particularly within the framework of molding and interpreting the original theory to make it adaptable to the Lebanese social and political conditions. In the 1980s, Hizbullah regarded *wilāyat al-faqīh*, as defined by Khūmaynī, as its true Islamic cultural identity and adopted it in its original formulation under the motto of ‘The Islamic Revolution in Lebanon’. Hizbullah recognized Khūmaynī as the official *marjaʿ al-taqlīd* (religious–legal authority of emulation) of the Islamic Republic and as the first *faqīh* (jurisprudent, jurisconsult) after *al-ghayba al-kubrā* (‘the Great Occultation’), and in contemporary history, to assume the title of the deputy of Imām al-Mahdī and to establish an Islamic state. As such, Hizbullah followed the religious authority of Iran and paid homage and allegiance to Khūmaynī as the political and religious leader of the *Umma*, and abided by his *wilāyat al-faqīh* as a major pillar in its

their normal status as soon as possible.’ For this, see Hizbullah’s 30 November 2009 Manifesto, Chapter II: ‘Lebanon’, Section 5: ‘Lebanon and the Arab Ties.’ *Al-Intiqād* (4 December 2009), 5, www.alintiqad.com/uploaded/mag/intiqad.html [accessed 1 January 2010].

² ‘Hizbullah considers Iran as a central state in the Muslim world, since, through its revolution, it ousted the Shah’s regime and its American–‘Israeli’ projects. Iran is also the state that supported the resistance movements in the Middle East, and stood with courage and determination at the side of the Arab and Islamic causes and especially the Palestinian one...The response to such actions should be co-operation, brotherhood, and a centre of awakening and strategic weight, as well as a model for independence and liberty that supports the Arab-Islamic project. Iran should be viewed as a power that boosts the strength and might of the people of our region. Ibid., Chapter II, Section 6: ‘Lebanon and Islamic Relations.’ *Al-Intiqād* (4 December 2009), 6.

politico-religious ideology. Hizbullah clarified that, from a religious and ideological stance, it regarded Khūmaynī with high esteem. Indeed, after his death, the same allegiance and respect was accorded to Khāmināʾī, his officially chosen successor. In the Lebanese context, Hizbullah based its argument on demographic realities (for example, that the Muslims constitute the majority of the population) and proposed that Lebanon becomes part of a wider Islamic state. Hizbullah's cadres argued for the necessity of establishing an Islamic order, stressing that social change must begin from the top by changing the political system and annihilating the ruling elite through a top-down revolutionary process.

With the end of fifteen-year Civil War in 1990, Hizbullah's post-Ṭāʾif discourse continues to portray a different image of its buttressing of civil society and democratic processes that encourage more social and political integration, rather than violence. Although the liberalization process in Iran might have affected Hizbullah's policies, it does not appear to have done so at the expense of Hizbullah's autonomy of decision-making or their place in specifically Lebanese contexts. So, is the Lebanese political structure forcing Hizbullah to take decisions that are not popular to the rank, file and leaders? Is the Lebanese public sphere dictating a new strategy on Hizbullah, or is it transnational influences from Iran, or a mix of both?

At the beginning of the 1990s, Hizbullah portrayed a post-Islamist phase moving from exclusion to inclusion through interpreting the doctrine of *wilāyat al-faqīh* in such a way that allows the Party to maintain authority in the Lebanese sectarian–confessional system, apparently without compromising its doctrinal foundations. Employing a bottom-up Islamization strategy⁴, the Party stressed that it ideologically defends the establishment of an Islamic state, but that as a political program this is not practical because of the confessional and sectarian nature of Lebanon, on the one hand, and opposition by the majority of the Lebanese, both Christians and Muslims, on the other. In other words, Hizbullah shelved its political ideology and practised a 'down to earth' political program in an endeavor to reach out to the largest possible sector of the Lebanese populace. This resulted in a dramatic change in

³ The Ṭāʾif Agreement, Lebanon's new 1990 constitution, is a 'bill of rights' or a blueprint for national reconciliation and reform aimed towards a more equitable political system for all sectarian–confessional groups.

⁴ It has been aptly argued that post-Islamism is bottom-up Islamization in disguise. For this, see Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (New York: Routledge 2007), 343–48.

Hizbullah's involvement in the Lebanese political system as it is. It not only participated in the parliamentary and municipal elections, but also, in 2005, joined the Cabinet.

In order to question the alleged 'democratic character' of political Shī'ism and the 'authoritarian nature' of political Sunnīsm a telling anecdote is first discussion. This is followed by examination of Khūmaynī's 1988 religious edict (*fatwā*), which suggests an authoritarian nature of *wilāyat al-faqīh*. Based on these insights, the article is then divided into three sections demonstrating how Hizbullah employed the *wilāyat al-faqīh* doctrine in Lebanon as a cornerstone in its politico-religious ideology from 1978 to the present, arguing to the contrary of some that the Party pursued an independent course of action in its attempt to control the Lebanese political system.

Michel Foucault in Karbalā'

23 April 2003 coincided with the fortieth day in the commemoration of the 'martyrdom' of Imām Ḥusayn at Karbalā' in 61AH/680AD. It was the first time in more than thirty-five years that Iraqi Shī'ites were free to participate in the pilgrimage to the holy city of Karbalā'. A sea of people estimated to be at least a million celebrated the occasion. Ritual is indeed a construction of the sacred:⁵ the barefooted pilgrims beat their chests, slashed their scalps with swords, and whipped themselves with chains. They were not alone: Michel Foucault was also there.⁶

Foucault's reading of the Islamic Revolution is noteworthy since he saw in it a spiritual-esoteric dimension embedded in the heart of the political realm, in the sense that spiritualism takes from politics an eventuality or a place in which to ferment. It seems that Foucault judged rather hastily his reading and vision of the Revolution when he made the analogy between democracy and Shī'ism, on the one hand, and Sunnīsm and tyranny, on the other. Not only that, Foucault considered that there are safeguards militating against the Shī'ite '*ulamā'*'—the leaders of the theoretic republic—from transforming it into tyranny. However, these bones of contention should not prevent the reader from seeing Foucault's new vision at the time: namely, his innovation of the concept of 'political spiritualism.'

According to Foucault, this is based on the premise that the esoteric

⁵ J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁶ In 1978, Foucault reported on the Iranian Revolution by writing articles for *La Corriere della Sera*.

dimension of the Revolution would, in the end, outweigh its exoteric aspect, especially since the ‘holy commemorative dimension’ and ‘political opposition’ are intertwined. Foucault not only considered Shī‘ism to be an ideological tool used by revolutionaries against the authority⁷, but also to be rooted in resistance and opposition to power and tyranny as such. He contended that Shī‘ism contains a political stance different from any other because it is based on the desire of the self to be completely ‘different from what it is now’.⁸ Foucault’s religious discourse gives room for humanistic ambitions since these ambitions are not only economical or nationalistic, but also based on a metaphysical dimension. This explains, across Shī‘ite history, the transformation of mobilization to a political force, which became a model for an ‘extreme desire’ in social and organic solidarity, in the Durkheimian sense. The Islamic Revolution afforded fundamental importance to the Foucaultian problematic, even if it later on took a different twist to his original expectations.

But what can be expected today from the Karbalā³ populace? Could there be any materialization of either the esoteric dimension or ‘political spiritualism?’ On this occasion, Sayyid Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh, Hizbullah’s Secretary General, argued, ‘The US wants us to witness only defeat’, insinuating that the Karbalā³ populace would mark a ‘spirited resistance’ to American presence in Iraq.⁹ It is most likely that the aforementioned statement could be construed along the lines of Foucault’s notions. Not surprisingly every year, Naṣr Allāh’s ‘*Āshūrā*’ discourse makes reference to the esoteric dimension, especially spiritualism. In January 2009, he invoked what remains of God on earth: ‘*yā baqiyya min Allāh ‘alā l-ard.*’

The interpretation of wilāyat al-faqīh: Khūmaynī’s 1988 fatwā

During Khūmaynī’s final days, there appeared an emerging problem vis-à-vis the prerogatives of the jurist (al-waliyy al-faqīh)¹⁰. Sayyid ‘Alī Khāminā‘ī, the president of the Islamic Republic at the time and the current faqīh, declared in his Friday speech of 31 December 1988 his

⁷ Authority is power that has been institutionalized and is recognized by the people over whom it is exercised.

⁸ Georg Stauth, *Revolution in Spiritless Times: An Essay on the Inquiries of Michel Foucault on the Iranian Revolution*. (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 1991).

⁹ See Naṣr Allāh’s speech delivered in South Beirut in order to mark the fortieth day anniversary following the death of Imām Ḥusayn.

¹⁰ Henceforth, *al-waliyy al-faqīh* will be referred to as *faqīh*.

condemnation of the expanded prerogatives of the Minister of Labor, thus indirectly criticizing the theory of absolute *wilāya* (*al-wilāya al-muṭlaqa*) or the comprehensive authority of the *faqīh*.¹¹ Khāminā³ī claimed instead that this was something separate from the function of the state. He added that it is still unclear, even to those who were supposed to preach it, let alone to rule according to it. The incident outraged Khūmaynī and prompted him to write a letter aimed at clarifying and defending his theory, thus introducing new prerogatives pertaining to the space of authority to which the *faqīh* is entitled.

Among other things, in his *fatwā* Khūmaynī stressed that ‘it is incumbent upon me to clarify that government branches from the Prophet’s absolute *wilāya* and is one of the primary injunctions of Islam, thus it takes precedence over all secondary ordinances, even over prayer, pilgrimage, and fasting...the government can one-sidedly annul any *sharī‘ī* [religious] treaties conducted with the populace, if it considers it in opposition to the interests [*maṣāliḥ*, sing. *maṣlaḥa*] of the *Umma* or Islam. Further, the government could thwart any religious or non-religious practice if it regards it as detrimental to the interests of Islam or if it deems it so’.¹²

Therefore, Khūmaynī stipulated that the *maṣlaḥa* of the Islamic order, or its agencies, gains priority over any other principle in social and political affairs. As such, Khūmaynī developed the theory of absolute *wilāya* in a way that could perfectly serve his political ends through giving the *faqīh* absolute political and religious power. Khūmaynī’s innovation was to transform the *wilāyat al-faqīh* unequivocally and cogently into a system of political administration. Thus, Khūmaynī in his capacity as the *faqīh* and *marja‘ al-taqlīd*, blended Imāmate with *wilāya* and *marja‘iyya* (religious authority), which is a precedent in Shī‘īte politico-religious ideology. This is of vital importance since in Shī‘īte jurisprudence ‘the ruler’s injunction abrogates the jurist’s *fatwā*’ (*ḥukum al-ḥākim yanquḍ fatwā l-mujtahid*), if the *maṣlaḥa* of the Islamic order requires such a course of action.¹³ Thus, Khūmaynī believed in, and practised, absolute *wilāya*. And so, it seems that Khūmaynī’s 1988 *fatwā* qualified Foucault’s claim of democratic aspects and lack of tyranny in political Shī‘īsm.

¹¹ 10 *Jumādā l-Awwal* 1409 AH.

¹² See Khūmaynī’s letter to Khāminā³ī concerning the latter’s Friday speech on the absoluteness of *wilāyat al-faqīh*. Published in Farsi in *Kayhān* 13223, 16 *Jumādā l-Awwal* 1409/ 6 January 1989.

¹³ Personal interview with Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Mūsawī, 12 July 2004.

First stage (1978–1985): wilāyat al-faqīh

Khūmaynī's *wilāyat al-faqīh* was successfully imported to Lebanon, serving as a blueprint of a progressive Islamic state that was closely emulated by Hizbullah in its constituencies. Illustrating the vital importance given to becoming a member of 'Ummat Hizbullah', a Hizbullah cadre source reported to me, on condition of anonymity, that a person, who tried to join the Party but failed three times the process of screening (*ta'fīr*) that Hizbullah's prospective members undergo, came with a bomb and blew his recruiting officer to pieces. Another member told me that as practice of indoctrination and as a baptism/initiation ceremony, new Hizbullah recruits had to repeatedly state: 'If the Jurisprudent tells you to kill yourself, then you do it' (*idhā qāla laka al-waliyy al-faqīh 'an 'uqtul nafsak, fa-'alayka dhālik*). This not only illustrates indoctrination, but also the total obedience to the *faqīh*.¹⁴

In the early 1980s, Khūmaynī instructed Khāminā'ī, who was at the time Deputy Minister of Defense, to take full responsibility of the Lebanese Hizbullah. Since then, Khāminā'ī became Hizbullah's patron figure. That is why, since its inception, Hizbullah, based on a religious and ideological stance, fully abides by the ideas and opinions of Khūmaynī as communicated by Khāminā'ī. During that period, the religious and ideological bonds between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Lebanon could be examined from the following declarations by Hizbullah and Iranian officials. Shaykh Ḥasan Ṭrād: 'Iran and Lebanon are one people in one country'; Sayyid Ibrāhīm Amīn al-Sayyid: 'We do not say that we are part of Iran, we are Iran in Lebanon and Lebanon in Iran'; 'Alī Akbar Muḥtashamī: 'We are going to support Lebanon politically and militarily as we buttress one of our own Iranian districts'; Shaykh Ḥasan Surūr: 'We declare to the whole world that the Islamic Republic of Iran is our mother, religion, *Ka'ba*, and our veins'.¹⁵

Second Stage (1985–1991): wilāyat al-faqīh

In stages one and two, Hizbullah argued that during the early phase of its formation, it needed a unifying politico-religious ideology, rather than an elaborate political program. So Hizbullah based itself on *wilāyat al-faqīh* and regarded Khūmaynī as the jurisconsult of *all* Muslims.¹⁶ In stage one, Hizbullah was, ideologically, completely dependent on

¹⁴ Personal interviews with N. Mahdī and S. 'Abd Allāh on 21 and 25 October 2004 respectively.

¹⁵ *Al-'Ahd* 8 (21 *Dhū l-Qida* 1404/ 17 August 1984), p. 6.

¹⁶ Naṣr Allāh, *NBN*, 21 July 2002.

Khūmaynī. In stage two this dependency witnessed some leeway in the sense that Hizbullah did not blindly follow the Iranian regime. Rather, it had some specificity (*khūṣūṣiyya*), since in his capacity as the Supreme Leader (*Raḥbar*) he was endowed with the sole right to determine the legitimacy (i.e. valid authority) of Hizbullah. Khūmaynī highlighted certain precepts within which Hizbullah could move freely. However, he left their implementation to the Party's discretion. Thus, although Hizbullah was ideologically dependent on the Iranian regime, it had some room to maneuver in its decisions pertaining to some cases in Lebanese domestic issues. Even though the multiplicity of *marja*^cs among the Shī^cites continued after Khūmaynī's death, in Hizbullah's case the issue of *marja*^c*iyya* has been determined on the doctrinal–ideological basis of following the official *marja*^c *al-taqlīd*, who is recognized by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Thus, Hizbullah's religious authority was, still is, and will continue to be the Iranian *faqīh*. This made the transition after Khūmaynī's death smoother in the end of the second stage and the beginning of the third stage.

Islamic state in relation to wilāyat al-faqīh (stages I and II)

In the first and second stages (1978–1991), Hizbullah considered that the Qur^ʿān is the constitution of the Muslim *Umma*, and Islam is both a religious and a governmental order (*dīn wa-dawla*). Hizbullah enjoined the Muslims to strive, using all legitimate means, in order to implement the Islamic order, wherever they are.¹⁷

In stages one and two, Hizbullah considered the Lebanese political system, which is dominated by the political Maronites,¹⁸ as a *jāhili* (pre-

¹⁷ See for instance, °Alī al-Kūranī, *Ṭarīqat Hizbullah fī l-°amal al-Islāmī [Hizbullah's Method of Islamic Mobilization]* (Tehran, Maktab al-I[°]lām al-Islāmī: al-Mū[°]assa al-°Ālamiyya, 1985). Also, Muḥammad Za[°]aytir, *Nazra °alā tarḥ al-Jumhūrīyya al-Islamiyya fī Lubnān [An Outlook at the Proposal of the Islamic Republic in Lebanon]* (Beirut: al-Wikāla al-sharqiyya li-l-tawzī[°], 1988).

¹⁸ The National Pact of 1943, which is an oral agreement not drafted in the 1926 Constitution, stipulated that the Prime Minister (PM) be Sunnī Muslim, the Speaker Shī^cite, and the following Maronites: The President of the Republic; the Commander of the Army; the Governor of the Central Bank (BDL); and the Head of the Labor Unions (GLC). However, article 95 of Section 6 of the 1943 Constitution—which was amended by a constitutional law issued on 9 November 1943—gave some hope for the Shī^cites of a fairer representation in the future: ‘Temporarily and from the stance of justice and national reconciliation, the sects are represented in a just manner in public employment and in the formation of the Council of Ministers, without harming

Islamic pagan) system. Hizbullah applied this classification to any non-Islamic system, be it patriotic, democratic, or nationalistic, even if governed by Muslims.¹⁹ In other words, in the first and second stages, Hizbullah pursued the establishment of an Islamic state respectively from the perspective of religious and political ideology. Religious ideology, as Hizbullah's leading cadres argued, was to instate God's sovereignty and divine governance on earth through *ḥākimiyya* and the execution of God's law by instituting an Islamic order as a *taklīf sharʿī* (religious and legal obligation).²⁰ As a political ideology, Hizbullah did not want to impose the Islamic order by force unless an overwhelming majority of the Lebanese voted in its favor through a referendum. This should be taken with caution since Hizbullah's rhetoric, in stages one and two, was different from what it was doing in reality, in the sense of being actively engaged in preparing the ground for the establishment of an Islamic order, at least in its constituencies.

Third Stage (1992 to the present): wilāyat al-faqīh

1992 was a pivotal year for Hizbullah's evolving identity. The Party faced a challenge in deciding whether to participate in the parliamentary elections or not. Hizbullah's twelve-member committee took a positive decision after much heated internal debate and discussions²¹, followed by Iranian arbitration (*tahkīm*). Since the *faqīh* is the one who determines 'legitimacy' (even in practical political matters), Khāmināʾī had to intercede and grant legitimacy for participation.²² This caused a considerable schism in Hizbullah because Ṣubḥī al-Ṭufayyīlī, Hizbullah's

state interest.' Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology*, 23.

¹⁹ Muḥammad Zaʿaytir, *Al-Mashrūʿ al-Mārūnī fī Lubnān: judhūruhu wa-taṭawūrātuhu [The Maronite Project in Lebanon: Roots and Development]*. Beirut: al-Wikāla al-sharqiyya li-l-tawzīʿ, 1986. This work is banned in Lebanon.

²⁰ One should bear in mind that the concepts of *jāhiliyya* and *ḥākimiyya* constitute a common denominator among many Islamic movements, and, as such, are not exclusively a Hizbullah notion.

²¹ Based on interviews and fieldwork observations by the author, it could be fairly stated that the majority of Hizbullah's cadres consider disagreements in religious and political opinions and viewpoints of the leaders to be a phenomenon that represents a healthy, 'democratic' atmosphere. However, strict obedience and discipline prevents disagreements from festering into discord, al-Ṭufayyīlī's case being an exception.

²² Since *wilāyat al-faqīh* was being applied in a multi-confessional, multi-religious society.

first secretary general, contested the decision and pursued a confrontational stance with both the Party and the Lebanese state.²³

By interpreting the doctrine of *wilāyat al-faqīh* in a new light, the committee recommended that participation in the elections is a beneficiary necessity, which is in harmony with Hizbullah's holistic vision that favors meeting the expectations of the people by serving their socio-economic and political interests. It added that Hizbullah's greater *jihād* and dedication to addressing the plight of the people does not contradict its priority of smaller military *jihād* for the sake of liberation of occupied land. As such, participating in the elections leads to the achievement of good political results, and is also regarded as a leading step towards interaction with others. By this, Hizbullah presents a novel experience in the *infitāh* ('opening up') of a young Islamic party. The committee stressed that this participation is in accordance with the Lebanese specificities as well as the nature of the proposed elections, which allow for a considerable margin of freedom of choice. In short, the committee concluded that the sum total of the pros (*maṣāliḥ*) outweighs the cons (*mafasid*) by far. That is why participation in the parliament is worthwhile since it is viewed as one of the ways of influencing change and making Hizbullah's voice heard, not only domestically, but also regionally and internationally through the platforms made available to the members of parliament.²⁴ Thus, it seems that Hizbullah was forced by the political circumstances, the Tā'if Agreement, Lebanon's new 1990 constitution, and the end of the Civil War, to change to a new phase in its history by propagating a matter of fact political program and by co-opting with the Lebanese system.

*Hizbullah's decision-making and finances: NGOs and civil institutions*²⁵
A further shift occurred in the interpretation of the authority of the *faqīh*

²³ Al-Ṭufayyilī held a high post in the leadership of Hizbullah in the early 1980s. But he later created a minor dissent in the party for reasons that, apparently, were social but, in fact, were for control of the Ba'lbakk region. Al-Ṭufayyilī today represents that category of Hizbullah which still upholds the Iranian revolutionary ideology of the 1980s.

²⁴ Na'im Qāsim, *Hizbullah: Al-Minhāj, Al-Tajriba, Al-Mustaqbal* [*Hizbullah: The Curriculum, the Experience, the Future*] (Beirut: Dār al-hādī, 2002), 267–73.

²⁵ For a detailed account of Hizbullah's social services, see Joseph Alagha and Myriam Catusse, 'Les services sociaux de Hezbollah: Effort de guerre, ethos religieux et ressources politiques', in *Le Hezbollah: État des lieux*, ed. Sabrina Mervin (Paris: Actes Sud, 2008), 117–40.

in the third stage when Hizbullah argued that it did not consider the regime in the Islamic Republic of Iran as the jurisconsult of all Muslims, and in consequence, not all Islamic movements have to abide by the orders and directives of the *faqīh* or the regime.²⁶ Another shift occurred, when, in May 1995, Khāminā³ī appointed Naṣr Allāh, and Shaykh Muḥammad Yazbik, head of the Religious–Judicial Council, as his religious deputies (*wakīlayn shar^ciyyan*) in Lebanon. This move granted Hizbullah special prerogatives and delegated responsibilities (*taklīf shar^cī*) that reflect a great independence in practical performance. Thus, Hizbullah consolidated its financial resources since the religious tax of one-fifth (*khums*) imposed on those Lebanese Shī^cītes who follow Khāminā³ī as their authority of emulation (*marja^c*), as well as their alms (*zakāt*) and religious (*shar^cī*) monies have poured directly into Hizbullah coffers instead of being channeled through Iran, as had been the case. Even before 1995, these revenues had allowed Hizbullah to fund an efficient network of NGOs and social welfare institutions that are open to the public, irrespective of communal origin. These include: The Martyr’s Association, The Association of the Wounded, The Association of Lebanese Prisoners²⁷, The Islamic Resistance Support Association, The Institution of the Good Loan, The Association of Islamic Health, The Institution of Construction and Development, The Association of the Relief Committees of Imām Khūmaynī, and The Association of Islamic Pedagogy and Education. All were established during the period 1982–1991. In addition, Hizbullah boasts its own media and research institutions. Its weekly mouthpiece *al-^cAhd*, established in 1984, was renamed *al-Intiqād*²⁸ in 2001; it founded *Baqiyyat Allāh* Journal in

²⁶ Naṣr Allāh, *NBN*, 4 August 2002.

²⁷ For information in English, Arabic, Hebrew, and French on the Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails see www.samirkuntar.org [accessed 1 January 2010], which was officially launched on 19 April 2007.

²⁸ *Al-Intiqād* is Hizbullah’s official mouthpiece and weekly newspaper. It was established on June 18, 1984 as *al-^cAhd*, but changed its name and orientation in 2001, thus conveying a ‘secular’ image by dropping the Quranic substantiation (Q. 5:56), on the right side, and removing the portrait of Khūmaynī and Khāminā³ī, on the left side. The last issue of *al-^cAhd* was number 896, dated 6 April 2001 or 12 *Muharram* 1422 AH; the first issue of *al-Intiqād* was number 897, dated 20 April 2001 or 26 *Muharram* 1422 AH. The last hard-copy issue of *al-Intiqād* was number 1267, dated 30 May 2008. Since number 1268 dated 6 June 2008 *Al-Intiqād* was only available electronically and initially published bi-weekly on Fridays and Tuesdays until it settled as a Friday weekly once more. See www.alintiqad.com [accessed 1 January 2010]

1991 in the aim of inculcating Islamic values and culture. Its think-tank, the Consultative Centre for Studies and Documentation (CCSD), and its *al-Nour* satellite radio station were both founded in 1988. The flagship *al-Manār* TV,²⁹ the only satellite channel belonging to an Islamist movement in the Middle East, had eighteen million subscribers in 2009.³⁰

The interpretation of authority took another shift after the Syrian withdrawal in April 2005. In conformity with its policy to change when circumstances change, Hizbullah seems to switch from Iranian to local authority when it suited its purposes. Although the watershed decision to participate in the Lebanese Cabinet ideologically requires the *sharʿī* judgment and legitimacy of the *faqīh*, Hizbullah set a precedent by apparently securing legitimacy from Shaykh ʿAfīf al-Nābulṣī³¹—the ‘Head of the Association of Shīʿīte Religious Scholars of Mount ʿĀmil’ (*Raʾīs hayʾat ʿulamāʾ Jabal ʿĀmil*)³² in south Lebanon—and not

²⁹ *Al-Manār* literally means ‘The Lighthouse’. It is probably named after the journal of Lebanese reformist Shaykh Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā’s (1865–1935), which circulated from Indonesia to Morocco without interruption for thirty-seven years (1898–1935). It was an influential platform for the Muslims to express their ideas on modernity and modernism in the form of *fatwās*. Indeed, *al-Manār* was a treasure trove of Islamic subjects where almost every problem of modernity was discussed. As such, it was the most influential instrument of modern change. Hizbullah’s *al-Manār* aspires to achieve the same standing.

³⁰ This number reflects legitimate cable subscribers. It is estimated that at least eight million watched *al-Manār* through pirated techniques.

³¹ Nābulṣī is not a Hizbullah member, rather a local influential cleric revered by the Party. In 1982, he was one of the participants in the ‘Conference of the Oppressed’ presided by Khūmaynī. It worth mentioning that after the five Shīʿīte ministers—including the two from Hizbullah—suspended their membership in the Lebanese Cabinet for seven weeks as of 12 December 2005, Nābulṣī, not Naṣr Allāh, issued a *fatwā* barring any other Shīʿīte from joining the Cabinet in their absence. See Lebanese daily newspapers of 21 December 2005.

³² *Jabal ʿĀmil*—the stronghold of Shīʿīsm in Lebanon and an important Shīʿīte center of higher learning—has an important moral significance being the birth place of imminent *ḥadīth* scholar, al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1104 AH/1692 AD), who compiled the canonical volumes of Shīʿīte *ḥadīth*. See Al-Shaykh Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa [Shīʿīte Rituals]* (Beirut: Mūʿassat al-ḥulūl, bayt ihyāʾ al-turāth, 1993). For a closer look at the instrumental role of the *Jabal ʿĀmil ʿulamāʾ* in converting the majority of the Iranians from Sunnīsm to Shīʿīsm at the outset of the Safavid period, see Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah’s Ideology*, 20ff.

Khāminā'ī, which indicates more independence in decision-making. Thus, Hizbullah heeds Lebanese religious authority in addition to the Iranian one. Therefore, Hizbullah's participation in the Lebanese Cabinet has been relegated to an administrative matter on which Hizbullah's leadership is capable of taking an independent decision. Instantly, Hizbullah joined the Cabinet with two ministers and proliferated in Lebanese state institutions and administrative structure just before the conservative Iranian president, Mahmud Aḥmadī Nejad, and his government were sworn to power in Iran. This led to increased Lebanonization that is more in line with the specificities of Lebanese society, rather than blind adherence to Iran. And so, Hizbullah moved from complete ideological dependency on Khūmaynī in the first stage to less dependency after his death in the second stage. Finally, in the third stage, Hizbullah gained more independence in decision-making, not only in practical political issues, but also in military and doctrinal issues, to the extent that it seems as if Hizbullah exercised almost independent decision-making, at least in some cases. Even in military matters, Hizbullah does not always heed Iranian orders if they do not serve its overall interest (*maṣlahā*). Two cases in point that illustrate this trend are Sharon's April 2002 West Bank counterterrorism offensive, and Barak's 'Operation Cast Lead' in Gaza between December 2008 and January 2009. Iran strongly urged Hizbullah to open the northern front across the Lebanese-Israeli border in order to release pressure on the Palestinians, but Hizbullah adamantly refused because such a move is considered detrimental to its national interest.³³ This trend continued after Aḥmadī

³³ In order to preserve the clam with Israel, Hizbullah neither hesitates to apprehend Palestinian fighters or al-Qaeda affiliated militants who attempt to target northern Israel with rockets, nor to stop anyone attempting to attack Israel, even by force. Also Hizbullah informs UNIFIL and the Lebanese Army of any rocket it discovers set to be fired at Israel, so that it could be defused immediately. On these grounds, Ṣubḥī al-Ṭufayyī mocked Hizbullah for protecting the borders of Israel and criticized Iran for serving the interests of the US, as he contended. See Thā'ir 'Abbās's interview with Ṣubḥī al-Ṭufayyī in *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ* 9067 (25 September 2003). Interestingly, Hizbullah has erected two pillars (like the one in *Minā*, Saudi Arabia where Muslims perform the symbolic, ritual stoning of Satan during the *hajj*) near the Fatima Gate bordering Israel for the ritual stoning of the 'Little Satan' (Israel) and the 'Great Satan' (US), so that people will not throw rocks at the Israeli soldiers across the border. In order to preserve the status quo ante, Hizbullah does even tolerate the throwing of rocks across the border. It is also noteworthy that Hizbullah's 2009 Manifesto makes no mention of the ideological concepts of the 'Little

Nejad won a second term in the controversial June 2009 presidential elections.

Although Hizbullah was inspired by the Islamic Revolution, it operates like any ordinary political party functioning within a non-Islamic state and a multi-religious confessional and sectarian state. While the Iranian Hizbullah was instrumental in building a state, the Lebanese Hizbullah cannot go beyond being a political party operating within the Lebanese public sphere. That is why, for instance, in the parliamentary elections, Hizbullah reached out and allied itself with secular parties and former enemies on the Lebanese scene, like any political party that accommodated its protest by negotiations and bargaining, making compromises on some doctrinal aspects.

By engaging in a pluralistic process, Hizbullah moved from cooptation to contestation, and finally to exercising empowerment (*tamkīn*). Hizbullah's participation in electoral politics could be regarded as co-opton. The Party's gradual integration in the Lebanese public sphere falls under contestation. Hizbullah's ascendancy to the political scene becoming a nationalistic political party could be viewed from the stance of empowerment.

Lebanonization³⁴ or infitāh

In the first two stages, Hizbullah viewed its mission to liberate Lebanon from the control of political Maronism and the Lebanese sectarian-confessional political system based upon 'situational laws'—(*al-qawānīn al-waḍ'īyya*), that is to say, positive (man-made) laws and legislations such as state constitutions—and establish instead Islamic Sharī'a law, which could only be instated by *ḥākimiyya* through a pure and uncompromising Islamic order. Hizbullah argued that abiding by *al-qawānīn al-waḍ'īyya* instead of Islamic Sharī'a is entirely prohibited both from a religious and political ideological perspective. In stage one, under the influence of Khūmaynī, Hizbullah argued that abiding by *al-qawānīn al-waḍ'īyya* instead of Islamic Sharī'a, is totally un-Islamic.³⁵ In stage two, in line with Khūmayni, Hizbullah argued that abiding by *al-qawānīn al-waḍ'īyya* instead of Islamic Sharī'a, is the second out of

Satan' and the 'Great Satan'.

³⁴ According to Hizbullah's discourse, Lebanonization refers to the party's integration in the Lebanese public sphere, including the political system and state structures.

³⁵ *Al-Ḥarakāt al-Islāmiyya fī Lubnān [Islamic Movements in Lebanon]* (Beirut: Al-Shirā', 1984), 323–36.

four ways in which colonialism seeks to distort Islam.³⁶

The major shift in the third stage is that Hizbullah became satisfied with *al-qawānīn al-waḍʿiyya* and even contributed to their legislation through its members of parliament. Hizbullah stressed that although the Qurʾān, Sunna, and the Sharīʿa are the sources and bases of legislation, some issues in life could be referred to other sources. This stands in direct contrast to Hizbullah's interpretation of *wilāyat al-faqīh* in the first two stages. Hizbullah argued that the Sharīʿa, as a socially constructed phenomenon, is flexible and can account for all the complexities of modern life. The shift that happened in the third stage could be attributed to the transformation of Iranian politics after the death of Khūmaynī as well as to a change in Hizbullah's own internal dynamics. For instance, there was a clear alteration in the Iranian stance from Khūmaynī's 1986 *fatwā*—which stipulated that the Lebanese system is illegitimate and criminal and Khāmināʾī's argument for the necessity of the Muslims to rule Lebanon since they comprise the majority of the population³⁷—to Khāmināʾī's 1992 ruling in favor of participation in the parliamentary elections, which Hizbullah interpreted as its unequivocal right to proliferate in the Lebanese political system as a whole, including state institutions and administration. As mentioned, Hizbullah made compromises on some doctrinal issues by allying itself, in the legislative and municipal elections, on the same election slate, with ideological enemies, like any political party that accommodated its protest by negotiations and bargaining with a wide spectrum of groups across the Lebanese myriad. Thus, Hizbullah compromised its ideology in such a way as to interpret its authority by shelving its demand for the founding an Islamic state, which might seem contradictory to the tenets of *wilāyat al-faqīh*.

Stage three: application of the progressive nature of Shīʿite jurisprudence

Lebanon is our country and the country of our fathers and forefathers; it is also the country of our children and grandchildren and all future

³⁶ Imām Khūmaynī, *Al-Ḥukūma Al-Islāmiyya [Islamic Government]* (Tehran: The Institute of Coordinating and Publishing Imām Khūmaynī's Heritage, 1996), 60ff.

³⁷ Tawfīq al-Madīnī, *Amal wa-Hizbu 'llāh fī-Halabat al-Mujabahāt al-Maḥaliyya wal-Iqlīmiyya [Amal and Hizbullah in the Arena of Domestic and Regional Struggles]* (Damascus: Al-Ahlī, 1999), 162–63; Waddāḥ Sharāra, *Dawlat Hizbullah: Lubnān Mujtamaʿan Islāmiyyan [The State of Hizbullah: Lebanon as an Islamic Society]*. Fourth edition (Beirut: Al-Nahār, 2006), 342.

generations. We want it sovereign, free, independent, strong and unified... we reject partition and federalism.³⁸

Bearing in mind that there are multiple paths of modernity available to the emerging Muslim public sphere leading to the creation of a new civil society where Islamic values can be created and injected into new senses of a public space that is ‘discursive, performative and participative,’³⁹ Naṣr Allāh clarified that Hizbullah benefits from its jurisprudential vision which believes in the doctrine of *wilāyat al-faqīh* that gives it the legitimacy of having a political program in a multi-cultural, multi-religious country that is characterized by pluralist groupings and forces, without encroaching upon its doctrinal-ideological, Islamic convictions.⁴⁰ In May 2008, after the Hizbullah-led opposition gained veto power in the Lebanese Cabinet, Naṣr Allāh reiterated, ‘I am honored to be a member in the party of *wilāyat al-faqīh*. The just, knowledgeable, wise, courageous, righteous, honest, and faithful *faqīh*... *Wilāyat al-faqīh* tells us [i.e. Hizbullah] that Lebanon is a multi-confessional, multi-religious (*mutanawwiʿ, mutaʿadid*) country that you have to preserve and uphold’.⁴¹ With this unshakable commitment to *wilāyat al-faqīh*, Hizbullah reformulated what it meant by an Islamic state by making a categorical distinction between the *al-fīkr al-siyāsī* (political ideology) that it maintained and *al-barnāmaj al-siyāsī* (political program) that it promoted. From an ideological perspective, Hizbullah is committed to an Islamic state, and it will not be dropped as a legal abstraction. However, Hizbullah’s political program has to take into account the political status quo and the overall functioning of the Lebanese political system. Hizbullah characterizes the Lebanese political situation as a complicated mould of sectarian and confessional particulars that prohibit the establishment of an Islamic state, not only from a practical perspective, but also from a doctrinal one. Hizbullah’s political ideology stipulates that an Islamic state should be established on solid foundations having full legitimacy and sovereignty from the people. Since the general will of the Lebanese people is against the

³⁸ Hizbullah’s 30 November 2009 Manifesto, Chapter II: ‘Lebanon’, Section 1: ‘The Homeland.’ *Al-Intiqād* (4 December 2009), 4.

³⁹ Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, eds. *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 2.

⁴⁰ Naṣr Allāh as cited by Ḥasan ʿIzz al-Dīn, ‘How is Hizbullah looked upon and how does it introduce itself?’, *Al-Safīr*, 12 November 2001.

⁴¹ *Al-Intiqād* 1267, 30 May 2008.

establishment of an Islamic state, then it is not plausible to establish one.⁴² On 30 November 2009, Hizbullah revealed its new political platform/Manifesto, which mentioned neither the Islamic state nor referred to *wilāyat al-faqīh*. In an answer to a question Naṣr Allāh affirmed that there is no contradiction between belief in *wilāyat al-faqīh*, on the one hand, and the establishment of a strong, institutionalized Lebanese state, on the other. On the contrary, *wilāyat al-faqīh* sanctioned and allowed the Party's integration into the political system. In addition, in line with the Vatican's position and the Papal Guidance, Naṣr Allāh added that Hizbullah believes that Lebanon is a blessing and a message that accomplished great historical achievements. He reiterated Imām Mūsā al-Ṣadr's⁴³ stance that 'Lebanon is the definitive nation to all its citizens (*Lubnān waṭan nihā'i li-jamī' abnā'ihī*)', which is in conformity with the Lebanese constitution.⁴⁴

Thus, Hizbullah shifted its position by its acceptance of, and engagement in, the democratic process under a sectarian–confessional, political and administrative system. More dramatically, Hizbullah's political program modified its demand from the abolition of political sectarianism, to the adoption of the political Maronite discourse, which stresses the abolition of political sectarianism in the mentality, before eradicating it in the texts.⁴⁵ In line with the Tā'if Agreement, its earlier

⁴² Naṣr Allāh, *Al-Jazeera* TV, 24 September 1998; Qasim, *Hizbullah: Al-Manhaj...*, 38; and MP Alī Fayyād, as cited in Fadeel M. Abun-Nasr, *Hizbullah: Ḥaqā'iq wa-Ab'ād [Hizbullah: Facts and Dimensions]* (Beirut: World Book Publishing, 2003), 127.

⁴³ Mūsā al-Ṣadr, one of Hizbullah's ideologues, was a charismatic and distinguished leader, who mobilized the Lebanese Shī'ites in the 1960s and 1970s and was able to channel their grievances into political participation. Al-Ṣadr never called for an Islamic state, rather for equality and social justice among the various denominations within the Lebanese multi-confessional system.

⁴⁴ Naṣr Allāh's press conference was broadcasted live on *Al-Manār* TV, 30 November 2009 at 1:30 GMT.

⁴⁵ Naṣr Allāh's 2001 call for the abolition of political sectarianism in the mentality, before abolishing it in the texts (10 July 2001 Speech; *al-Safīr* 11 July 2001) bears a striking resemblance to the Maronite bishops' declaration that cautioned that deleting political sectarianism from legal texts before wiping it out from Lebanese people's mentality—through an efficient education of coexistence and mutual respect—is hazardous (*Daily Star*, 5 February 2004). See Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology*, 160.

election programs, and the Speaker of the parliament recent call,⁴⁶ Hizbullah's 2009 Manifesto, called for the establishment of the 'National Body for the Abolishment of Political Sectarianism' since sectarianism is perceived as a threat to consensual democracy and national coexistence.⁴⁷ Although Naṣr Allāh deemed the sectarian system as a tribal system, he clarified:

'Let us be realistic. The abolition of political sectarianism is one of the most difficult issues and cannot be accomplished overnight...no body can dictate how to abolish it in a sentence or two. Rather, if after years of debate, ranging from five to thirty years, we find out that political sectarianism cannot be abolished, then let us be bold enough to say that what we agreed upon in the Tā'if cannot be realized.'

Naṣr Allāh reiterated that in order to come to such a conclusion the Lebanese need to found the 'National Body' in order to initiate the debate in a constructive manner.⁴⁸ Basing itself on its demographic strength, Hizbullah called for reducing the voting age from 21 to 18 and changing the electoral system to proportional representation, which the Party believed would give the 18 ethno-confessional communities more equitable representation.⁴⁹

As a political remuneration for its acclaimed 'divine victory' in the July 2006 war with Israel,⁵⁰ Hizbullah asked for the formation of a

⁴⁶ Few days before Hizbullah revealed its Manifesto, Nabīh Berrī launched his suggestion.

⁴⁷ Idem., Chapter II: 'Lebanon', Section 3: 'The State and the Political System', *Al-Intiqād* (4 December 2009), 4–5.

⁴⁸ Idem. Naṣr Allāh's press conference, 30 November 2009, was broadcast live on *Al-Manār* TV, 30 November 2009 at 1:30 GMT.

⁴⁹ *Al-Safīr* and *al-Nahār* (15 June 2005); Shaykh Ja'far Ḥasan °Atrīsī, *Hizbullah: Al-Khiyār Al-aṣ'ab wa-ḍamānat al-waṭan al-kubrā* [*Hizbullah: The Difficult Choice and Lebanon's Greatest Guarantee*] (Beirut: Dār al-maḥajja al-baydā°, 2005), 435–39; *Hizbullah: Al-Muqāwama wa-l-tahrīr* [*Hizbullah: Resistance and Liberation*] (Beirut, Editio International, 2006), xi, 200–206. (A thirteen volume encyclopedia on the Party).

⁵⁰ The thirty-four-day war, from July 12 to August 14 2006, between Israel and Hizbullah led to the death of around 1,200 Lebanese, one-third of whom were children under the age of twelve; the wounded and handicapped are estimated at 4,000; more than one million were displaced, around \$15 billion in material damage and loss of revenues was caused. According to Israeli media sources, more than two-thirds (118) of the 159 Israeli dead were soldiers. *Daily Star* and *AFP*. See http://www.dailystar.com.lb/July_War06.asp [accessed 5

national unity Cabinet, where the Party and its Christian allies, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), wield the one-third veto power, thus attempting to dominate the national political arena, after wielding power over the Legislature and the Presidency. The tug of war between the Hizbullah-led opposition (called the ‘March 8 Group’), on the one hand, and the Lebanese Cabinet and its supporters (‘March 14 Trend’), on the other, led to a bitter polarization, which plunged Lebanon into 537 days of stalemate and political deadlock, from 1 December 2006 to 21 May 2008. The political agreement of 21 May—known as the ‘Doha Accord’ between ‘March 14’ and ‘March 8’, brokered by the Arab League—granted Hizbullah veto power in the next national unity, thirty-member Cabinet⁵¹ by a margin of eleven ministers, while ‘March 14’ acquired sixteen ministers and the President three. Hizbullah ended its sit-in in Downtown Beirut and dismantled its tent city. After six months of vacuum in the seat of the presidency, something unprecedented in Lebanese history, the consensus president Army Commander, Michael Sulaymān was elected on 25 May by 118 votes out of 127 members of parliament. On the next day, Hizbullah celebrated the eighth anniversary of the nearly complete Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon through a fiery speech delivered by Naṣr Allāh, who stressed that Hizbullah abides by the Tāʾif Agreement and will honor the Doha Accord to the letter. That is to say, that it would participate in the political system *as it is*.⁵² Naṣr Allāh’s stance remained the same after the fiasco of March 8 to become the majority in the June 2009 legislative elections.⁵³ One day after the elections, the Party’s leader conceded defeat, called for a burying of the hatchet, congratulated and extended a hand to the victorious March 14 ruling coalition to form a national unity government, and stressed that bygones are bygones. This culminated in the formation of a national unity cabinet on 9 November 2009, based on the previously agreed power-sharing formula: fifteen seats for March 14; five for the centralist

September 2006].

⁵¹ Formed on 11 July 2008. According to the deal of power-sharing, Hizbullah was supposed to obtain three ministerial seats, but it waived two to its allies the FPM, thus making a considerable concession.

⁵² The National Pact of 1943 remained intact after Lebanon’s 1990 Constitution and the 2008 Doha Accord.

⁵³ By the concession of international observers and election watchdogs, the June 7, 2009 elections were the most successful elections after the end of the Civil War in 1990, unprecedentedly held on one day without any bloodshed or serious feuds.

coalition of the president; and ten for March 8. Thus, contrary to its military power and demographic strength, in an endeavor to uphold consensual democracy, it contented itself with two ministers.

Conclusions

By heavy reliance on a strict application of Khūmaynī's *wilāyat al-faqīh* in the 1980s, 'Hizbullah – The Islamic Revolution in Lebanon' emerged as a strong internal organization with limited following. Ṣubḥī al-Ṭufayyī's firm, uncompromising political discourse and his repeated references to the establishment of an Islamic state, which is unprecedented in Lebanese political discourse, backfired domestically alienating the Party from other political and social movements, and from the Lebanese public sphere to a great extent. Thus, Hizbullah's policies were counterproductive leading to the failure of integration in Lebanese political life, especially after the Party's initial vehement criticisms to the Tā'if Agreement.

Since the end of the Civil War in 1990, Hizbullah has been confronting major developments in Lebanon: prominently, the emergence of a pluralistic public sphere and increasing openness toward other communities, political parties, and interest groups in the Lebanese myriad. By a new interpretation of *wilāyat al-faqīh*, Hizbullah has altered its discourse, priorities, and overall political outlook. The mixed confessional space in Lebanon led Hizbullah to move from marginalization to *infītāh*, by which the Party became a major player in the Lebanese public sphere participating in the parliamentary and municipal elections, and even obtaining veto power in Prime Minister's Sanyūra Cabinet of 2008–9. In short, since the early 1990s, Hizbullah started promoting its Islamic identity and agenda by following a pragmatic political program, mainly to allay the fears of Christians and other Muslims who were opposed to the Islamic state. In the meantime, Hizbullah remained faithful to its Shī'ite constituency by employing a bottom-up Islamization process by working within the Lebanese state's political and administrative structures, while, at the same time establishing Islamic institutions within civic society.

And so, in the third stage, Hizbullah faced the problem of reconciling its political ideology with political reality. Thus, the Party shifted from a *jihādī* outlook to a more flexible Sharī'a perspective. Hizbullah portrayed a distinguished expediency in its political program in an attempt to reconcile, as much as possible, among its principles, aims, and political ideology, on the one hand, and the circumstances and its objective capabilities, on the other hand, by heavy reliance on the

jurisprudential concepts of necessity, vices, and interests as a kind of Islamic *prima facie* duty. This is how Hizbullah's pragmatism was conducive in forging a marriage of convenience between political ideology and political reality, to the extent of pursuing a policy of *infītāh* as sanctioned by its political program.

Thus, the logic of operating within the bounds of the Lebanese state prevailed over the logic of the revolution. The Party justifies and legitimizes its political program by resorting to Quranic and jurisprudential bases. Significantly, the Shī'ite politico-religious heritage conferred upon Hizbullah all the authenticity it needed in order to derive from it a political program based on flexibility and pragmatism. Thus, relying on the progressive nature of Shī'ite jurisprudence, Hizbullah remolded, constructed, and interpreted its authority in such a way to render legitimacy to its participation in a pluralist polity based upon a quota system and patronage. And so, by heavy reliance on Shī'ite jurisprudence, especially the concept of *maṣlaḥa*, Hizbullah was able to change as circumstances themselves changed, through its pragmatic interpretation and metamorphosis of *wilāyat al-faqīh*, which proved to be flexible, capable of functioning in a multi-confessional, multi-religious society such as Lebanon, and not only in, more or less, monolithic Iran where the overwhelming majority of the population are Twelver Shī'ites.

THE 'PHARAOH' ANECDOTE IN PRE-MODERN ARABIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

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This article examines the development of the pharaoh as a literary figure in Arabic historiography between the third/ninth and the ninth/fifteenth centuries. The first aim is to reflect upon the changing narrative structure of such anecdotes in texts ranging from the universal chronicle of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) to the regional chronicle of al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442). The article's second concern is to evaluate the plurality of meanings that emerged from these changes. This discussion is then linked to detailed consideration of the authors' social contexts, with particular focus on that of al-Maqrīzī. The nexus between literary approach and social history that is proposed here offers a deeper understanding of the function of narrative resources that moved from text to text. Not only was this a salient feature of Arabic historiography, but also it allows us to reconsider the repeated appearance of such elements beyond describing them as simply 'borrowing' or 'copying'. Indeed, the discussion concludes that authors skilfully drew from a pool of narrative devices and artfully established intertextual allusions across both time and genres.

This study is situated within the stream of scholarship that has integrated literary concerns with the study of historiography over recent decades.¹ This includes early representatives of an explicit move towards literary approaches in studying Arabic historical texts, such as that of Fāhndrich, who asks how authors ascribed meaning via shaping of the text, most specifically by the interplay between 'factual' and 'illustrative' material.² The most far-reaching writings in this stream of scholarship

¹ This article developed out of an informal presentation at the Arabic Texts Seminar (Pembroke College, Oxford, May 2008) and a paper given at the workshop *Arabic Pasts: Histories and Historiography* (SOAS, London, September 2008). I would like to thank those present for their remarks; Gerald Hawting (SOAS) for commenting on an early draft version; the anonymous *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* reviewers, and Matthias Determann (SOAS) for their remarks on the final version.

² H. Fāhndrich, 'The Wafayāt al-A^ʿyān of Ibn Khallikān: A New Approach', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 93 (1973), 432–45; H. Fāhndrich, 'Compromising the Caliph. Analysis of Several Versions of an Anecdote About Abū Dulāma and al-Manṣūr', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 8

have been a series of publications by al-Azmeh in the 1980s, who read universal chronicles and biographical dictionaries primarily as literary texts.³ The last decade has witnessed the publication of studies that are less programmatic than al-Azmeh's, but rather apply literary approaches to concrete examples, such as for example, Leder's reflections on the interplay of factual and fictional elements in the early Arabic tradition.⁴ Of particular relevance for the following discussion are el-Hibri's study of °Abbāsīd historical writing and Shoshan's discussion of al-Ṭabarī's work. Both authors are, irrespective of different underlying approaches, concerned mainly with narrative means that are employed and the meanings that are ascribed to the narratives.⁵

(1977), 36–47. For a critique of his approach and a reading of biographical dictionaries that is informed by R. Barthes' reflections, see F. Malti-Douglas, 'Dreams, the Blind, and the Semiotics of the Biographical Notice', *Studia Islamica*, 51 (1980), 137–62.

³ A. Al-Azmeh, *Al-Kitāba al-ta'rikhīya wa-l-ma'rifā al-ta'rikhīya* (Beirut, 1983); A. Al-Azmeh, 'L'annalistique entre l'histoire et le pouvoir: une conception de l'histoire sous-jacente aux chroniques, biographies et gestes dans l'aire culturelle arabo-islamique', in *Histoire et Diversité des Cultures*, ed. UNESCO (Paris, 1984), 95–116; A. Al-Azmeh, 'Histoire et Narration dans l'Historiographie Arabe', *Annales*, 41 (1986), 411–31.

⁴ S. Leder, 'The Literary Use of the Khabar: A Basic Form of Historical Writing', in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. Cameron and L. I. Conrad (Princeton, 1992), 277–315; *ibid.* (ed.), *Story-Telling in the Framework of Non-Fictional Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden, 1998); *ibid.* (2005): 'The Use of Composite Form in the Making of the Islamic Historical Tradition', in *On Fiction and adab in Medieval Literature*, ed. P. Kennedy (Wiesbaden, 2005), 125–148.

⁵ T. El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography. Harun al-Rashid and the Narrative of the 'Abbasid Caliphate* (Cambridge and New York, 1999). B. Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing Tabari's History* (Leiden, 2004). An earlier example of the influence of the literary turn is al-Qaddūrī, °A./al-H. al-Mujāhid, 'Ṣurat al-Sūdān fī-l-khiṭāb al-Maghribī khilāl al-qarn XVI: Numūdhaj Manāhil al-ṣafā° fī ma°āthir mawālīnā al-shurafā° li-°Abd al-°Azīz al-Fashtālī', in *Histoire et linguistique. Texte et niveau d'interprétation*, ed. A. Sebti (Rabat, 1992), 27–35. The earliest author who engaged with Hayden White's approach in the field of Middle Eastern history was M. R. Waldman, 'The Otherwise Unnoteworthy Year 711: A Reply to Hayden White', *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (1981), 784–92. For the increased role of 'meaning' in historical studies see U. Daniel, 'Clio unter Kulturschock. Zu den aktuellen Debatten der Geschichtswissenschaft', in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 48 (1997), 195–218 and 259–78. For a discussion of how al-

However, scholarship on Arabic historiography that is influenced by the literary turn has one decisive shortcoming, and that is the second point of departure in this study, namely the tendency to disregard social contexts in which the texts were produced. Of those studies that are inspired by approaches drawn from literary studies, one gains only a weak impression about who was producing these texts for whom – somewhat following the linguistic turn's celebrated 'il n'y a rien hors du texte'.⁶ This is problematic as it is obviously a difficult endeavour to read meaning into a text when this is not underpinned by a consideration of the milieu of production and—ideally—milieus of receptions. The study of the reception of texts is an admittedly difficult task, but the milieu of production, on the contrary, is much more accessible and has increasingly come into focus. Shatzmiller, for example, is the prime example of those who have sought to establish carefully argued links between developments in the wider society and changes to historical writing. She shows how historical writing at the Merinid court of the eighth/fourteenth century developed as a break from the preceding Almohad tradition, for instance with regard to the formation of Morocco as an independent political unit.⁷ The seminal study within the social history approach is Khalidi's *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*. Despite serious shortcomings in his work, this study represents a substantial reorientation within the field.⁸ He defines four epistemological 'canopies' that are, in turn, closely linked to social, political and economic developments which took place in respective societal environments. In the same vein, individual authors are contextualised with regard to their particular position in society. Nevertheless, in the same sense that the literary turn has given crucial

Mas'ūdī turned in his chronicle 'the raw material of history [...] into something meaningful', see J. S. Meisami, 'Mas'ūdī and the Reign of al-Amīn: Narrative and Meaning in Medieval Muslim Historiography', in *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Literature*, ed. P. F. Kennedy (Wiesbaden, 2005), 149–176.

⁶ J. Derrida, *La dissemination* (Paris, 1972), 42.

⁷ M. Shatzmiller, *L'Historiographie Mérinide. Ibn Khaldun et ses contemporains* (Leiden, 1982).

⁸ T. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge, 1994). The fundamental problems are that he disregards considerable parts of the secondary literature and abstains from discussing what he understands by the term 'historical thought'. For a detailed critique of his work, see S. Conermann, 'Einige allgemeine Überlegungen zum vormodernen "Historischen Denken" der Araber', *Orientalische Literaturzeitung*, 93 (1998) 141–157.

insights from its perspective, but has not taken the social context of the texts' production into consideration, a study such as Khalidi's is as informative about social contexts as much as it is disregarding the texts themselves. Thus, to some degree, the two most important trends in the study of Arabic historiography have been developing in certain isolation from one another.⁹ This article aims to bridge the gap between these two approaches. I employed the proposed combination of literary approaches and social history in a previous publication that analysed two seventh-/thirteenth-century texts and that linked the ways their authors employed narrative devices to their social contexts.¹⁰ The present discussion takes a different perspective as it analyses the role of one specific narrative element, the figure of the pharaoh, in a variety of texts written over a period of more than five centuries. The ensuing problem is that the appearance of this element cannot be set within the larger narrative structure of the respective works. However, the possibility to trace the course of this element's travel between different texts that were produced in various regions and periods allows insights into changing ascriptions of meaning that are lost when focusing on particular works. The specific literary device chosen here, allusions to the pharaoh in the form of metaphors or similes, is of no greater importance than other devices that can be found in the texts. However, as the following discussion will show, references to the pharaoh are particularly helpful in order to study literary structure and social context in pre-modern Arabic historiography.

The pharaoh in Arabic historiography

The considerable role which references to the pharaonic past played in the medieval Muslim period has been studied in depth. Haarmann especially worked on late medieval, mainly Muslim, views of pharaonic Egypt. Such studies show that the pharaonic past, despite the unequivocally negative depiction of the pharaoh in the Qur'ān and in *ḥadīth*, was often perceived positively.¹¹ This was, for example, visible

⁹ One of the exceptions is O. Weintritt, *Formen spätmittelalterlicher islamischer Geschichtsdarstellung. Untersuchungen zu al-Nuwairī al-Iskandarānīs Kitāb al-ilmān und verwandten zeitgenössischen Texten* (Beirut, 1992), who succeeds in striking the most convincing balance between social context and text.

¹⁰ K. Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography: Authors as Actors* (London, 2006).

¹¹ The field of theology also shared the diversity of perceptions as visible in the debate over the question whether the Pharaoh had died as a Muslim or not.

in treatises that defended pharaonica and criticised those who tried to destroy them. In addition, places associated with this period played an important role as holy sites where Muslims and Christians sought intercession, and pharaonic material was used as spolia in mosques in order to take possession of their spiritual powers.¹²

On this debate, see E. Ormsby, 'The Faith of the Pharaoh: A Disputed Question in Islamic Theory', *Studia Islamica*, 98/99 (2004), 5–28. That this debate was not limited to the scholarly realm is visible by an incident in eighth/fourteenth-century Damascus. Here, a tailor named Ḥasan was arrested because he had answered the question in the affirmative. After three days and some lashing this 'ignorant commoner' repented and admitted to the falsity of his beliefs. See Ismā'īl b. °Umar Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) *Al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya fī-l-ta'rīkh*, eds. °Alī N. Aṭwī et al., 14 vols. (Beirut, 1988), XIV, 286–7 and 289.

¹² Haarmann's most important publications on this issue include, 'Die Sphinx. Synkretistische Volksreligiosität im spätmittelalterlichen islamischen Ägypten', *Saeculum*, 29 (1978), 367–84; 'Der Schatz im Haupte des Götzen', in *Die islamische Welt zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Festschrift für Hans Robert Roemer zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. U. Haarmann and P. Bachmann (Wiesbaden/Beirut, 1979), 198–221; 'Regional Sentiment in Medieval Islamic Egypt', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 43/1 (1980), 55–66; 'Heilszeichen im Heidentum – Muhammad-Statuen aus vorislamischer Zeit', *Welt des Islams*, 28 (1988), 210–24; 'Das pharaonische Ägypten bei islamischen Autoren des Mittelalters', in *Zum Bild Ägyptens im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, ed. E. Hornung (Fribourg and Göttingen, 1990), 29–58; 'In Quest of the Spectacular: Noble and Learned Visitors to the Pyramids Around 1200AD', in: *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams*, ed. W. B. Hallaq and D. P. Little (Leiden, 1991) 57–67; 'Medieval Muslim Perceptions of Pharaonic Egypt', in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, ed. A. Loprieno (Leiden, 1996) 605–27; Muḥammad b. °Abd al-°Azīz al-Idrīsī, (d. 649/1251) *Anwār °ulwīy al-ajrām fī-l-kashf °an asrār al-ahrām* (Lights of the Translunar Bodies: On Uncovering the Secrets of the Pyramids), ed. U. Haarmann (Beirut 1991).

Some translations of medieval Arabic texts on the pyramids into German can be found in P. Franke, 'Orte verborgenen Wissens: Die ägyptischen Pyramiden aus Sicht der mittelalterlichen Araber', in *Vom Nil an die Saale: Festschrift für Arafā Mustafā*, ed. A. Drost-Abgarjan et al., (Halle, 2008), 93–111. O. El-Daly, *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium. Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings*, (London, 2005) is interested in the factual material that can be derived from Arabic sources. D. Gril, 'Le personnage coranique de Pharaon après l'interprétation d'Ibn °Arabī', *Annales Islamologiques*, 14 (1978), 37–57 deals with the role of the pharaoh in mystical Quranic exegesis. Cf. also M. Cook, 'Pharaonic History in Medieval Egypt', *Studia Islamica*, 57 (1983), 67–103 and

References to pre-Islamic rulers and events played an important role in pre-modern Arabic historiography. The pharaoh, as much as figures such as the Biblical prophets or Alexander the Great, had a number of different functions in these texts.¹³ The respective anecdotes were underpinned by a plurality of meanings similar to the diversity of meanings in treatises on the pharaonic past or the spiritual use of pharaonica. The pharaoh appeared, for example, in statements that dispraised Egypt, that is to say, as a kind of anti-*faḍā'il* material: governors sent to Egypt wonder how the pharaoh could have been proud to rule such poor lands and a Basrian underlines that while the Egyptians have turned into pharaohs, the inhabitants of his hometown Basra have remained humble believers, although they have to gain their living in harsh conditions.¹⁴

The second function of the pharaoh anecdote was its role as a boundary marker between respective insider and outsider groups. By drawing on the negative characteristics of the pharaonic figure, authors assimilated the distant 'Otherness' of ancient Egypt to the more immediate Otherness of groups contemporary to them.¹⁵ Typical examples of this are the Latin crusaders and the Fatimids in Sunni texts. The term 'pharaoh' was applied to the crusaders in general,¹⁶ but sometimes specific individuals were designated in this way. John of Brienne (d. 1237), the regent of Queen Yolande of the Kingdom of

C. Cannuyer, 'L'intérêt pour l'Égypte pharaonique à l'époque fatimide. Etude sur *L'abrégé des merveilles (Mukhtaṣar al-ʿajā'ib)*', in *L'Égypte fatimide: son art et son histoire. Actes du colloque organisé à Paris, mai 1998*, ed. M. Barrucand (Paris, 1999), 483–96.

¹³ On this, see R. Mottahedeh, 'Some Islamic Views of the Pre-Islamic Past', *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, (1994) 117–26 and more specifically H. Yücesoy, 'Ancient Imperial Heritage and Islamic Universal Historiography: Al-Dīnawarī's Secular Perspective', *Journal of Global History*, 2 (2007), 135–55.

¹⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, X, 316; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), *Siyar al-aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 25 vols, eds. Shuʿayb al-Arnāʾūṭ et al., (Beirut, 1981–8), IV, 89/90.

¹⁵ It has been recently argued that the Quranic pharaoh was less an Egyptian and more a Mesopotamian figure, see A. Silverstein, 'The Qur'anic Pharaoh', forthcoming. However, in the texts under consideration here, the pharaoh had already been clearly placed in Egypt.

¹⁶ Mūsā b. Muḥammad Al-Yūnīnī (d. 726/1326), *Dhayl mirʾāt al-zamān*, 4 vols., ed. n.n., (Hyderabad, 1954–61), IV, 243 quoting from a letter after the fall of Crusader al-Marqab/Margat in 684/1285.

Jerusalem in Acre, for instance, is called the ‘Pharaoh of °Akkā’.¹⁷ In fictional letters, the crusaders are depicted as using the term themselves, such as Richard I of England in his negotiations with Saladin for a truce during the Third Crusade. Here, he is cited as having stated that he does not want to be the pharaoh who rules the earth and destroys his own people, as much as Saladin certainly would not want to be the pharaoh of his people.¹⁸ The *locus classicus* for the link between crusaders and the pharaoh was Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa’s death in 1190 by drowning in the river Göksu in Anatolia, which was inevitably linked to the pharaoh’s drowning in the Red Sea while pursuing Moses.¹⁹

The second Other of Sunni authors, the Fatimids, were assimilated in the same vein to the ancient Egyptian period. Here, two narrative formulae are employed to establish the link. On the one hand, we have Saladin—Yūsuf b. Ayyūb Ṣalāh al-Dīn—who confronted the Fatimid caliph in Egypt just as the Quranic Yūsuf/Joseph had done with the pharaoh.²⁰ Indeed, panegyric poetry replays this theme over and over again. On the other hand, we have the fifth/eleventh-century Fatimid caliph, al-Ḥākim, who is described as the worst ruler in Egypt since the pharaoh, especially as he supposedly claimed, just as the pharaoh had, divine status.²¹ Akin to this function of the pharaoh as a boundary

¹⁷ Aḥmad b. °Alī Al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), *Kitāb al-sulūk li-ma°rifat duwal al-mulūk*, 4 vols., eds. M. Muṣṭafā al-Ziyāda et al., (Cairo, 1934–73), I, 209.

¹⁸ Yūsuf b. Rāfi° Ibn Shaddād, (d. 632/1234), *Al-Nawādir al-sulṭāniya wa-l-maḥāsīn al-Yūsufiyya*, ed. J. al-Shayyāl (Cairo, 1964), 219.

¹⁹ For example °Abd al-Rahmān b. Ismā°l Abū Shāma (d. 665/1267), *Kitāb al-rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn al-Nūrīya wa-al-Ṣalāḥīya*, 5 vols., ed. Ibrāhīm al-Zībaq (Beirut, 1997), IV, 193; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), *Ta°rīkh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-a°lām*, 52 vols., ed. °U.°Abd al-Salām Tadmurī, (Beirut, 1987–2000), vol. 581–90, 61; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XII, 363.

²⁰ For example, Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XII, 283. Ibn Shaddād, *Nawādir*, 44 (taken over by Abū Shāma, *Rawḍatayn*, II, 148–53 and Muḥammad b. Sālim Ibn Wāṣil (d. 697/1298), *Mufarrij al-kurūb fī akhbār banī Ayyūb*, 6 vols., eds. J. al-Shayyāl, Ḥ. al-Rabī° and S. °Ashūr, vols. 1–5, (Cairo 1953–77), vol. 6 ed. °U. Tadmurī, (Beirut, 2004), I, 185–8), merely compares Saladin’s coming to Egypt with the Quranic Yūsuf, but does not mention the Pharaoh explicitly. This restraint is closer to the original text as the Qur°ān does not explicitly mention the Pharaoh in the Yūsuf *sūra*, but merely refers to a king (‘*malik*’), on this, see A. Silverstein, ‘The Qur’anic Pharaoh’ (forthcoming).

²¹ For example, Abū Bakr b. °Abd Allāh Ibn al-Dawādārī (fl. 736/1335), *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmi° al-ghurar*, 9 vols., eds. H. Römer et al., (Cairo et al.,

marker for the present is his role in constructing the pre-Islamic *Jāhiliyya* as the inversion of the Islamic period. Here we find descriptions of those fighting the developing Islamic community, such as °Amr b. Hishām Abū Jahl, who was killed in the battle of Badr, as the ‘pharaoh of this community’.²²

The third function of the pharaoh was his role as the standard metaphor and simile in order to criticise the unjust and haughty ruler or leading official. This phenomenon was so widespread that it does not require a detailed discussion in the framework of the present study. Among those described to be the pharaoh (or like the pharaoh) were the usual suspects: the Umayyad dynasty, the rule of which is compared to the pharaohs’ rule in Egypt;²³ specific Umayyad caliphs, such as Mu°āwiya (d. 60/680), who acted towards the Prophet’s family just as the pharaoh had acted towards the Children of Israel;²⁴ and al-Walīd II (d. 126/744), who was worse to his people than the pharaoh had been to his subjects.²⁵ Alongside these, we find other historical figures, such as the ‘rival’ caliph, °Abd Allāh Ibn Zubayr (d. 73/692), who even did to the Prophet’s family that which ‘the pharaoh had never done to the noble sons of the Children of Israel’;²⁶ the third/ninth-century °Abbāsīd rebel general Ṣāliḥ b. Waṣīf (d. 256/869), who is addressed by the populace as

1960–94), VI, 259 and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara*, 2 vols in one, ed. n.n. (Cairo, 1327/1909), II, 13. On the depiction of al-Ḥākim in Mamlūk historiography, see N. Haider, ‘On Lunatics and Loving Sons: A Textual Study of the Mamlūk Treatment of al-Ḥākim’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 18 (2008), 109–39.

²² °Abd al-Raḥmān b. °Alī Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), *Al-Muntaẓam fī ta’rīkh al-mulūk wa-l-umam*, 18 vols, eds. Muṣṭafā °A. °Aṭā/Muḥammad °A. °Aṭā (Beirut, 1992), III, 19ff.

²³ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, III, 143: °Ā’isha comments on fact the that an Umayyad contender was allowed to compete with one of the Prophet’s companions for the Caliphate with the words that this is God’s will who even allowed the pharaohs to rule for 400 years in Egypt. Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, 13 vols, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl al-°Aṭṭār (Beirut, 1998), VII, 134 and °Alī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233), *Al-Kāmil fī-l-ta’rīkh*, ed. C. J. Tornberg (Beirut, 1965–7, reprint of 1851–71 edition with corrections and new pagination), IV, 266/7: Muṣ°ab b. al-Zubayr (d. 72/691) points to Syria when mentioning the pharaoh in a sermon that he preached in Basra.

²⁴ Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz*, IV, 64. The speaker is Arwā bt. al-Ḥārith.

²⁵ Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, V, 371.

²⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, ed. al-°Aṭṭār, VII, 131.

‘O Pharaoh’;²⁷ Ibn al-Alqamī, the *wazīr* who supposedly facilitated the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 656/1258 and who will suffer the same agony as the pharaoh in the Hereafter;²⁸ and the eponym of the wicked Mamlūk administrator, the eighth/fourteenth-century officer, Shams al-Dīn al-Nashw, who is described as the ‘pharaoh’ in poems celebrating his dismissal.²⁹

However, it is worth underlining that the pharaoh could also appear in anecdotes with a satirical character, potentially undermining the image of the haughty and unjust ruler or official. The Umayyad governor al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī (d. 95/714), for example, is linked to this classical negative image of the pharaoh by an account that involves a female Kharijite prisoner. When this prisoner is brought to court, his advisors urge him to execute her. Thereupon, she comments that even the pharaoh’s advisors were more pious than al-Ḥajjāj’s men as they had at least advised the ruler to spare Moses.³⁰ The same story appears also in a slightly reworked fashion that refrains from merely reproducing the classical use of the pharaoh as the principal metaphor for the haughty and unjust official. In this version, al-Ḥajjāj is so delighted by the prisoner’s answer that he breaks into laughter and releases her.³¹ A similar pattern is found in another group of anecdotes that has al-Ḥajjāj in the same historical context, i.e. in the year 83/702 after suppressing the Kharijite rebellion in Iraq. Here, al-Ḥajjāj requires all Kharijite prisoners to choose between confessing their previous unbelief or face execution. When a further prisoner is brought to him, al-Ḥajjāj states that he will probably not testify against himself. The prisoner answers that, on the contrary, he is the most unbelieving person on earth, even more of an unbeliever than the pharaoh – an answer that earns him his release by

²⁷ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī (d. 911/1505), *Taʾrīkh al-khulafāʾ*, ed. M. Abū Faḍl Ibrāhīm, (Cairo, 1976), 577/8.

²⁸ Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz*, VIII, 36.

²⁹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II, 479. On al-Nashw, see A. Levanoni, ‘The Al-Nashw Episode: A Case Study of “Moral Economy”’, *Mamlūk Studies Review*, 9/1 (2005), 207–219.

³⁰ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940), *Al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 9 vols, eds. Muḥammad Muḥammad Qumayḥa et al., 3rd edn (Beirut, 1983), I, 55; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Khallikān, (d. 681/1282), *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-abnāʾ al-zamān*, 8 vols, ed. I. ʿAbbās, (Beirut, 1968–72; repr. Beirut 1994), II, 37.

³¹ Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *Iqd*, II, 48.

the delighted governor.³² Thus, in both cases the construction of the stereotypical image of the unjust official is fractured by the satirical element and the subsequent forbearance of the governor.

The 'speak to him gently' anecdote

Besides the anecdotes that mainly served to criticise office holders, there exists a stream of pharaoh anecdotes that characterise rulers and officials in more complex and contradictory ways. The most salient of these is the 'speak to him gently' anecdote. This appears in two different versions that will be called in the following 'original' and 'secondary'. The original version runs thus: a religious man (generally an ascetic) meets a ruler; the religious man admonishes the ruler in harsh words, and the ruler rebukes the religious man with reference to the Quranic verse 20:44 'speak to him gently, perhaps he will take heed or show fear'. With these words, which were God's advice to Moses and Aaron when He sent them to the pharaoh, the ruler mirrors the improper behaviour of the religious man. The religious man repents as he understands that even the pharaoh had the right to be addressed in a gentle manner and the ruler forgives him. It is in al-Ṭabarī's chronicle that we find the archetype of this original version where al-Rashīd is the ruler and the religious man an ascetic who remains anonymous. The original version continued to be transmitted in subsequent works, either with reference to al-Rashīd or to other rulers, most importantly, al-Ma'mūn. The anecdote was also changed in other regards, for instance the ascetic was identified with a name or replaced by a scholar, but its narrative structure was substantially unchanged.

The secondary version, in contrast, considerably alters the narrative pattern of the anecdote. Such changes include minor modifications, for example that the religious man and the ruler do not meet in person, but via written correspondence. However, these changes include also amendments that touch upon the central message of the anecdote, for example that it is not the religious man, but the ruler who has to repent. Such secondary versions gained in importance in texts that were written in the Middle Period (c. 1000 to 1500AD). Occasionally, the link to the original version seems to be weak, but all of these versions have two characteristics in common: the Quranic verse 20:44 is the crucial element, and a religious man confronts a ruler or official.

³² Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, eds. °Aṭā/°Aṭā, VI, 246 and al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. al-°Aṭṭār, VII, 303.

The rulers and officials that are inserted into the two versions stretch from the above-mentioned ‘rival’ caliph, Ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73/692) via the °Abbāsid Caliphs Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 193/809) and al-Maʿmūn (d. 218/833) to the seventh/thirteenth-century Rasūlid ruler of Yemen al-Malik al-Muʿazzam Yūsuf (r. 647/1250–694/1295), the Mamlūk Sultān Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (r. with interruptions 693/1293–741/1341) and the early eighth/fourteenth-century Mamlūk officer Quṭlūbak al-Manṣūrī (d. 716/1316-7). We find the ‘speak to him gently’ anecdote in its different versions in a number of works (universal chronicles, local chronicles, biographical dictionaries, and *adab* works), such as al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 310/923) *Taʾrīkh*, Ibn °Abd Rabbih’s (d. 328/940) *al-°Iqd al-farīd*, Ibn al-Jawzī’s (d. 597/1200) *al-Muntaẓam*, al-Yāfiʿī’s (d. 768/1367) *Mirʾāt al-jinān*, al-Maqrīzī’s (d. 845/1442) *al-Sulūk* and Ibn Ḥajar’s (d. 852/1449) *al-Durar*.³³

The ‘original’ al-Rashīd/al-Maʿmūn version

Al-Ṭabarī’s archetype is not only the earliest, but also the most detailed and elaborated variant that we have of the original version. His anecdote, which has al-Rashīd as the ruler, introduces the central element, the comparison with the Quranic pharaoh, in considerable length:

A certain person has mentioned that he was with al-Rashīd at al-Raqqa after he had set out from Baghdad. He went out hunting with al-Rashīd one day, when an ascetic appeared before him and addressed him, ‘O Hārūn, fear God!’ The caliph said to [the official] Ibrāhīm b. °Uthmān b. Nahīk, ‘Take this man with you, until I get back.’ When he returned, he called for his midday meal. Then he gave orders for the man to be fed with the choices of his food. When he had eaten and drunk, he summoned him and said, ‘O fellow, treat me fairly when you deliver your sermons and make your intercessions!’ The man replied, ‘That is the least which is due to you.’ The caliph said, ‘Then tell me, who is more evil and wicked, me or the pharaoh?’ The ascetic replied, ‘Without doubt the pharaoh, because he said ‘I am your Lord, the Most High,’ [Qurʾān, 79:24] and ‘I know no god

³³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, ed. al-°Aṭṭār, V, 129; Ibn °Abd Rabbih, *°Iqd*, I, 54/5; II, 235/6; III, 110; °Abd al-Raḥmān b. °Alī Ibn al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam fī tawārīkh al-mulūk wa-l-umam*, 13 vols, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut, 1995–6), V, 370; °Abd Allāh b. Asʿad al-Yāfiʿī (d. 768/1367), *Mirʾāt al-jinān wa-°ibrat al-yaqẓān*, 4 vols, ed. Khalīl al-Manṣūr (Beirut, 1997), II, 55; al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II/1, 135/6; Aḥmad b. °Alī Ibn Ḥajar al-°Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), *Al-Durar al-kāmīna fī aʿyān al-miʾa al-thāmina*, 5 vols., ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Jād al-Ḥaqq (Cairo, 1966–67), III, 337/8.

for you except myself'.³⁴ [Qur'ān, 28:38] The Caliph said, 'You have spoken truly; now tell me, who is better, you yourself or Moses, son of 'Imrān?' He replied, 'Moses is the one who spoke with God and was his chosen one, whom He took as his protégé and upon whom he relied for delivering His inspired revelations, and He singled him out to speak with Him out of all His creation.' The caliph said, 'You have spoken truly; are you not aware that when He sent Moses and his brother to Pharaoh, He said to them, 'Speak to him gently, perhaps he will take heed or show fear' [Qur'ān, 20:44]. The Quranic commentators have mentioned that He ordered the two of them to call the pharaoh by his patronymic [i.e. his *kunya*], this (daring move) being done when pharaoh was in his status of arrogance and overweening pride, as you have well known. Yet you come to me at a moment when I am in this position of which you are aware! I fulfil the greater part of the prescriptions which God has imposed upon me as obligatory, and I worship none but Him. I obey the most important of the limits against transgression laid down by God, His commands and His prohibitions. But you have harangued me with the most violent and unseemly words, and the roughest and foulest of speech; you have not been schooled in the practice of God's praiseworthy discipline nor have you adopted the good qualities of the righteous ones! So what has been making you feel confident that I shall not come down heavily upon you? If this last is in fact the case, you will have laid yourself open to what was a quite unnecessary risk!' The ascetic replied, 'I have made a mistake, O Commander of the Faithful, and I ask your pardon.' He replied, 'God has already pardoned you,' and ordered him to be given twenty thousand dirhams. However, the ascetic refused to accept them and said, 'I don't need the money at all, I am an ascetic who wanders round.' [The general] Harthama spoke to him and looked at him askance, 'You boorish fellow, are you hurling back the Commander of the Faithful's present in his face?' But al-Rashīd said, 'Leave him alone,' and then told the ascetic, 'We didn't offer you the money because you are in need of it, but simply because it is our custom that no one who is neither one of the caliph's entourage nor one of his enemies ever addresses him without the caliph giving him a present and rewarding him. So accept what proportion you like of our gift, and spend it how you please!' The man took two thousand dirhams from the

³⁴ C. E. Bosworth, *The History of al-Tabari. The 'Abbasid Caliphate in Equilibrium*, 40 vols (New York, 1989), XXX, 324 misreads this passage as: 'The caliph said, 'Tell me now, am I an evil and most wicked person, or a pharaoh?' The ascetic replied, 'Nay, a pharaoh'. The caliph quoted, 'I am your Lord the Most High', and the man responded, 'I am your Lord, the Most High' [Qur'ān, 79:24] and 'I know no god for you except myself'.'

sum of money and divided it out among the doorkeepers and those present at the court.³⁵

Before discussing variants of this original version, it has to be underlined that the ‘speak to him gently’ anecdote is closely linked to another anecdote that plays a salient role in the historiography of the early ʿAbbāsīd caliphate, namely the ‘scholar meets ruler’ stories. The initial setting of these ‘scholar meets ruler’ anecdotes is similar: the scholar encounters also a ruler and admonishes him. The difference is that in these anecdotes the ruler breaks into tears, a courtier rebukes the scholar, the scholar ignores him, intensifies his preaching, and finally the unsettled ruler offers a gift that is inevitably rejected by the scholar.

It has been shown that this ‘scholar meets ruler’ anecdote was one of the standard items in Abbāsīd historiography in order to idealise al-Rashīd as the model of Islamic rulership – especially in later medieval Islamic political theory that saw the caliph’s main role as being restricted to leading the community in the religious rituals and defending it in times of war. Al-Rashīd’s reign was the preferred place of remembrance for the ascription of later mainstream positions as it preceded the period of civil war and the *miḥna* under his successors. In this sense, his rule served as a point of convergence in order to rebut, for example, pro-Muʿtazilite positions.³⁶ The ‘scholar meets ruler’ anecdote was functional in underlining that the exemplary ruler showed deference to the principles agreed upon by the scholarly elite and admired spiritual figures of high status.

One variant of these anecdotes also includes a reference to the pharaoh. When al-Rashīd encounters the ascetic Fuḍayl b. ʿIyād (d. 187/803) during one of his nocturnal tours of Baghdad, Ibn ʿIyād admonishes him and warns of the Day of Judgement. Al-Rashīd bursts into tears and in the end says to his *wazīr* in desperation, ‘He has not made you Hāmān [the pharaoh’s counsellor in the Qurʾān] without making me pharaoh’.³⁷ The ‘scholar meets ruler’ anecdote is closely linked to the issue of commanding right and forbidding wrong, that is the individual’s duty to intervene when another is acting wrongly. Cook has shown in his monograph on this issue that the pharaoh is one of the

³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, ed. al-ʿAṭṭār, X, 129; translation based on Bosworth (1989), 324/5.

³⁶ El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, 19–31.

³⁷ (Attributed to) Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), *Tibr al-masbūk fī naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, ed. M. Aḥmad Damaj (Beirut, 1987), 120–2.

figures that reoccurs in discussions in this regard. Sufyān al-Thawrī, ‘a compulsive forbider of wrong’, for instance compares in a confrontation the *wazīr* of the Caliph al-Manṣūr (d. 158/775) to the pharaoh. In the same sense, in views attributed to Mālik b. Anas (whom we will encounter in the following again) on the question of forbidding wrong references to the pharaonic example are included.³⁸

In contrast to the ‘scholar meets ruler’ anecdote, the ‘speak to him gently’ anecdotes reverse this pattern of interaction and ends with the religious man repenting and the ruler having the upper hand in moral terms. However, the interaction between ruler and ascetic in this anecdote—and most importantly the final repentance of the ascetic—should not be seen as a counterpart to the ‘scholar meets ruler’ narratives in which the ruler repents, but rather the two anecdotes complement each other. The ‘speak to him gently’ narrative was primarily used to show that the right for criticising the ruler and for commanding right and forbidding wrong was reserved to those who were qualified: the religious scholars and outstanding pious men. In contrast, other disapproving religious observers, such as the anonymous ascetic in al-Ṭabarī’s archetypal version, were not entitled to this right. Non-scholars had to abide by the caliph’s rule and accept his leadership; the ruler had the right and the duty to show such persons their limits.³⁹ This line of thought is expressed by al-Rashīd’s words to the ascetic, ‘you have not been schooled in the practice of God’s praiseworthy discipline nor have you adopted the good qualities of the righteous ones!’ That is to say, an explicit statement that the ascetic’s criticism of the ruler is not inappropriate per se, but because it is raised by somebody who is not entitled to do so. Concomitantly, the individual who scolds the ruler in the ‘scholar meets ruler’ anecdotes is always a qualified scholar.

As the ‘speak to him gently’ anecdote with al-Rashīd touched upon this central issue, that is the religious men’s entitlement to criticise the ruler, it is not surprising that it reappeared in other Arabic historiographical and *adab* texts. The interesting aspect of these variations of the original versions are the changes that were made to the anecdote’s form and meaning. These changes can be discussed by taking into consideration a typical example from both historiography and *adab* literature. Two important texts in which the original version was taken up and reworked are Ibn al-Jawzī’s universal chronicle and Ibn ʿAbd

³⁸ M. Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, 2000) 65 and 358–60.

³⁹ El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, 30-31.

Rabbih's *adab* work. Although they were authored within different fields of knowledge, it is apparent that these two texts were underpinned by the same narrative strategies that are typical for the process of transmitting the 'speak to him gently' anecdote. First, authors increasingly tended to summarise the anecdote. Generally, they only mentioned the Quranic citation without going into more detail. Once the framework of the anecdote had become established with the original version, later authors arguably saw no further need to go into the same depth. Second, authors tended to rework the factual material. On the one hand, factual elements, such as the geographical setting, al-Raqqā, and the name of the official, Ibrāhīm b. Nahīk could simply disappear. On the other hand, such material could be significantly altered, for example by replacing al-Rashīd with al-Ma'mūn, and by turning the ascetic into a scholar. Finally, the meaning of the anecdote began to be reinterpreted as the central issue of al-Ṭabarī's version, the right to criticise the ruler, diminishes in importance. In other words, authors were engaged in a process of summarising the text, reworking the factual material, and reinterpreting the meaning while staying faithful to the outline of the original version. In Ibn al-Jawzī's universal chronicle we find the following account:

One day an ascetic came to Hārūn al-Rashīd and said, 'O Hārūn, fear God!' Hārūn al-Rashīd withdrew with him and said, 'O fellow, treat me fairly. Who is more evil, me or the pharaoh?' The ascetic replied, 'Without doubt the pharaoh.' Hārūn al-Rashīd continued, 'Then who is better, you yourself or Moses?' He replied, 'Without doubt Moses.' Hārūn al-Rashīd said, 'Are you not aware that when He sent Moses and his brother to him [i.e. the pharaoh], He said to them, 'Speak to him gently', but you have harangued me with the most violent and unseemly words, you have not been schooled in the practice of God's praiseworthy discipline nor have you adopted the good qualities of the righteous ones!' The ascetic replied, 'I ask God for forgiveness.' He replied, 'God has already pardoned you' and ordered him to be given twenty thousand dirhams. However, the ascetic refused to accept it. These are the right manners.⁴⁰

Compared to al-Ṭabarī's version, the anecdote here is significantly summarised and several elements have disappeared, such as the original setting that had the ruler on the hunt near al-Raqqā, the timing after the midday meal and the role of other persons such as the above-mentioned Ibrāhīm b. °Uthmān b. Nahīk and Harthama. In addition, the author

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, ed. Zakkār, V, 370.

introduces the Quranic citation rather briefly and gives less prominence to the exchange between the ascetic and al-Rashīd. Most importantly, the central message of the pharaonic reference is now different. While the framework is still the confrontation between the ruler and religious men, the inappropriate behaviour of the ascetic does not play such a key role anymore. On the contrary, Ibn al-Jawzī explicitly decides to intervene in the narrative with his final comment in order to praise the ascetic for refusing to take the caliph's money. This shifts the focus of the anecdote away from the issue of legitimate criticism towards another classical question in Islamic scholarship, namely how religious scholars and ascetics should frame their relationships with rulers. By excluding the final element of the original version that had the ascetic taking some of the ruler's money, Ibn al-Jawzī clearly expressed his vision of 'the right manners', i.e. the distance between the religious man and the worldly ruler.

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih included two versions of the anecdote into his *adab*-encyclopaedia. The first is a very condensed version of the original anecdote that is of no great concern for the discussion.⁴¹ However, his second version is of interest as it shows how the original structure of the anecdote could be reworked more substantially:

Al-Ḥārith b. Miskīn called upon al-Maʿmūn who asked him about some matter. Al-Ḥārith responded, 'I say about that what Mālik b. Anas said to your father Hārūn al-Rashīd' and cited his words. Al-Maʿmūn was not pleased with his reply and said, 'You responded in a stupid way and so did Mālik.' On this al-Ḥārith b. Miskīn responded, 'Then the one who listened, O Commander of the Faithful, is more stupid than the two who responded in a stupid way.' The colour of al-Maʿmūn's face changed and al-Ḥārith b. Miskīn rose and left. He regretted later what he had said. As soon as he was home an envoy of al-Maʿmūn came. Al-Ḥārith expected the worst, put on his shroud and attended upon al-Maʿmūn. Al-Maʿmūn asked him to come close, stared at him and said, 'O You, God had ordered somebody better than you to employ gentle words to somebody worse than me when He ordered the Prophet Moses to go to the pharaoh, 'Speak to him gently, perhaps he will take heed or show fear'. Al-Ḥārith responded, 'O Commander of the Faithful, I admit my sin and ask the lord for

⁴¹ Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *ʿIqd*, III, 110: 'A man said to al-Rashīd, 'O commander of the Faithful! I want to admonish you with a sermon that contains some rudeness, so endure it!' Al-Rashīd said, 'Nay, God ordered somebody better than you to employ gentle words to somebody more wicked than me. He said to His Prophet Moses when he sent him to the pharaoh, 'Speak to him gently, perhaps he will take heed or show fear.''

forgiveness.’ Al-Maʿmūn replied, ‘May God forgive you, leave if you want’.⁴²

The first two of the aforesaid narrative strategies, summarising the text and reworking the factual material, are clearly apparent, especially with the change from al-Rashīd to al-Maʿmūn. Of greater interest is the third strategy, the reinterpretation of the anecdote’s meaning. The author set this anecdote into his section on ‘The sultān’s forbearance with people of religion and virtue on their being audacious with him’ which is part of the *Kitāb al-Sultān* (Book of Governance). The aim of this section is to praise rulers for their forbearance, here al-Maʿmūn’s forbearance vis-à-vis al-Hārith who was exiled or imprisoned in other anecdotes that show confrontations between al-Maʿmūn and him.⁴³ In this sense the anecdote’s meaning was changed from an emphasis on the entitlement of outstanding religious men to address the ruler in harsh terms, to a focus on an exemplary trait of rulership: forbearance. The question is not so much whether or under which conditions the ruler might be criticised, but rather the way the ruler should deal with his subjects.

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih changed the story in other regards that were arguably caused by his decision to insert al-Maʿmūn as protagonist. The appearance of the scholar, not an ascetic, can also be read as a reference to al-Maʿmūn’s somewhat strained relations with religious scholars, especially within the framework of the *miḥna*. This turbulent relation perhaps also explains the ruler’s rude behaviour in the anecdote, especially the use of the term ‘stupid’ (*laqad tayyasta*). The explicit comparison to al-Rashīd that the scholar introduces in the very beginning of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s version is hereby substantiated. In contrast to al-Rashīd’s calm and composed reaction, al-Maʿmūn appears in the beginning uncontrolled in his interaction with a scholar – and fails even to offer a gift in the end. Ibn al-Jawzī, on the contrary, did not delve into the issues surrounding the *miḥna*, and consequently saw no need to exchange the ascetic with a scholar.

It was quite crucial for Ibn al-Jawzī that the religious man was an ascetic. His main concern was to express his deeply held conviction that one should keep one’s distance from the rulers. To this end, the ascetic was much more appropriate a figure than the religious scholar of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih. The question arises: why did Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih decide to include the anecdote in the first place – a decision that

⁴² Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *ʿIqd*, I, 54/5.

⁴³ See, for example, al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, XII, 56.

is noteworthy in itself as many other authors of historical and *adab* works did not report it? The preceding discussion has shown that factuality was a secondary concern for these authors who considerably summarised the text, and significantly changed the factual material. Rather, it can be argued that the authors included the anecdote primarily because they could express, with the reworked versions, concerns that were of relevance to their outlooks, namely the acceptable closeness of scholars to rulers and characteristics of good rulership. Consequently, they changed al-Ṭabarī's 'speak to him gently' anecdote with regard to its form and with regard to its meaning. In the next section, the discussion will turn to authors who decided to include the anecdote in its secondary version. The argument of this section will be extended in the sense that it will explore how far both the act of inclusion and the narrative strategies can be understood within the 'social logic'⁴⁴ of the specific text.

Secondary versions of 'speak to him gently' anecdotes: beyond al-Rashīd and al-Ma'mūn

In the 'secondary' versions, which gained in importance during the Middle Period, the authors changed central features of the anecdote to such a degree that it became hardly recognisable. The only common features that remained were the 'speak to him gently' element as well as the question of the relationship between a scholar/religious man on the one hand, and a ruler/official on the other. Although the secondary versions seem at times quite remote from the original version, the authors underlined that they considered their variant to be connected with it.

This is, for example, apparent in the chronicle of al-Yāfi'ī (d. 768/1367) who inserted into the anecdote the seventh/thirteenth-century Yemeni chief judge and the Yemeni Rasūlid ruler (r. 647/1250–694/1295) as the two main protagonists. The link to the original version seems, at first glance, weak:

The great scholar, the reputed friend of God, leader of the two groups, venue of the two ways Ismā'īl b. Muḥammad al-Ḥaḍramī—may God bless his soul—wrote to the ruler of Yemen, [Yūsuf] al-Malik al-Muẓaffar on a

⁴⁴ The term is borrowed from G. Spiegel who employs it in order to describe the combination of narrative analysis and social context. See, G. M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text. The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore and London, 1997).

potsherd,⁴⁵ ‘O Yūsuf!’ Thereupon al-Muẓaffar wrote to him and scolded him, ‘God sent somebody better than you to somebody more wicked than me.’ According to a [further] line of transmission [it is reported that the ruler wrote], ‘Imagine that you would be Moses—and you are not Moses—and that I would be the pharaoh – and I am not the pharaoh. God said, ‘Speak to him gently!’⁴⁶

Due to the faint resemblance with the original al-Rashīd version, the author explicitly introduced the link to it in the preceding lines. Here, he cited the original report, although with some considerable changes and additions in the factual detail:

Al-Aṣmaʿī [d. 213/828] reported, ‘While al-Rashīd and I were in Makka, al-ʿUmarī⁴⁷ confronted him and said, ‘O Commander of the Faithful! I would like to address you with rude words. Endure it for the sake of God, to whom belong power and majesty.’ Al-Rashīd replied, ‘I will not endure it! By God, God had sent somebody who was better than you to somebody who was more wicked than me and said, ‘Speak to him gently.’ I [al-Yāfiʿī] said, ‘What resembles this report is that what is well known in the Yemen among the scholars and the commoners [on the above exchange between the chief judge and the ruler].’

Thus, al-Yāfiʿī clearly understood his ‘potsherd’ anecdote as a variation of the original ‘speak to him gently’ report. In order to smooth the chronological and factual displacement of the narrative pattern, he relocated the original version with Hārūn al-Rashīd by locating it in the Ḥijāz, which was obviously of more relevance for his Yemeni chronicle than Syrian al-Raḡqa. The author not only had the protagonists meeting at Mecca, but he also identified the anonymous ascetic as al-ʿUmarī, a well-known saintly figure who dwelled in the Ḥijāz.

Al-Yāfiʿī’s text is not only of relevance in order to prove that the primary and secondary versions—despite the discrepancies—are variants of one and the same anecdote, and to show that the reworking of the factual material continued also in this later period. Rather, the factual and chronological displacement is again accompanied by a

⁴⁵ The original ‘*saqīfat khazaf*’ in the edition is a misreading of *shaqaf khazaf* as it is also given in the second report of this event in al-Yāfiʿī, *Mirʿāt*, IV, 35.

⁴⁶ Al-Yāfiʿī, *Mirʿāt*, II, 55

⁴⁷ ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-ʿUmarī (d. 182/798 or 184/800), a noted ascetic and descendant of the Umayyad caliph, ʿUmar I. On him cf. al-Ṭabarī, tr. Bosworth (1989), XXX, 316, n. 1060.

reinterpretation of the anecdote's meaning. In al-Yāfi'ī's version neither the scholars' right to address the ruler, nor the ruler's forbearance play any further role. The religious man, Ismā'īl al-Ḥaḍramī, is reduced in both of his versions, the reworked original anecdote and the 'potsherd' anecdote, to a marginal role. Both versions end with the ruler's rebuke and the religious man's loss of agency to such a degree that he cannot even express his repentance. This description of the scholars' submission to the ruler reappears with more clarity when al-Yāfi'ī narrates the 'potsherd' anecdote a second time in the framework of al-Ḥaḍramī's obituary. Here, the author links the anecdote to a report that the ruler had nominated al-Ḥaḍramī to a judgeship. Al-Ḥaḍramī was initially unwilling to take up the post, which al-Yāfi'ī wearily commented with the words, 'But he was the sultān and what the sultān ordered happened'.⁴⁸ In place of offering a normative message, the author took the decision to employ the anecdote as an example of what he perceived to be a situation where the scholars had submitted to the ruler.

A decisive break in the meaning that was ascribed to this anecdote occurred in the first half of the ninth/fifteenth century. At this point the anecdote's original message was practically inverted: rather than showing the ruler's right to fend off illegitimate criticisms, and discussing characteristics of exemplary rule, it was turned into a narrative pattern that allowed criticism of office holders. This reworking occurs in the works of two near-contemporary historians in the late Mamlūk period: the biographical dictionary of Ibn Ḥajar al-°Asqalānī and the chronicle of al-Maqrīzī. Ibn Ḥajar al-°Asqalānī's reshaped the anecdote with the scholar Ibn Taymīya (d. 728/1328) and the high-ranking Mamlūk officer Quṭlūbak al-Manṣurī (d. 716/1316–7) as new actors. Here, Ibn Taymīya attended to Quṭlūbak who was renowned for his dishonest conduct in commercial affairs and had again failed to satisfy a trader's claim:

It is said that one day Ibn Taymīya came to him [Quṭlūbak] with a trader in order to intercede for the later so that his claim would be fulfilled. Quṭlūbak said to him, 'When I see the officer at the door of the *faqīr*, [I know that] the officer is blessed and the *faqīr* is blessed. However, when I see the *faqīr* at the door of the officer, [I know that] the officer is doomed and the *faqīr* is doomed.' Ibn Taymīya said to him, 'The pharaoh was worse than you and Moses better than me. Nevertheless, Moses came to his door everyday

⁴⁸ Al-Yāfi'ī, *Mir'āt*, IV, 35.

to enjoin him to belief and I enjoin you to pay this man's debts.' Quṭlūbak could not, but obey his order and fulfil the man's claim.⁴⁹

The two main characteristics of the secondary version are still apparent in this narrative: the encounter is between a religious scholar and a representative of political might. Besides which, Ibn Taymīya employs the formula 'worse than you better than me' that featured prominently in the original anecdote and the other secondary versions. However, of more relevance is Ibn Ḥajar's drastic alteration of the anecdote's meaning. The right to invoke the pharaonic element was now given to the scholar, whereas it had always been the ruler in the preceding versions who had introduced this reference. In contrast to al-Yāfi'ī, it is here the scholar who has a considerable agency, while the official's role remains passive. It is not the scholar who repents in the end, but the official has to give in and to implicitly acknowledge his misbehaviour. Thus, Ibn Ḥajar moves the anecdote much closer to the 'scholar meets ruler' stories that stood originally only in a complementary relationship to the 'speak to him gently' anecdote: in his version the official, not the religious man, admits his misbehaviour because his religious man represented those who are entitled to criticise.

The version of Ibn Ḥajar's contemporary al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) exemplifies the changes to the anecdote and its reinterpretation in this period in a more profiled and nuanced way. Al-Maqrīzī's version of the 'speak to him gently' anecdote is found in *al-Sulūk*, his history of Egypt and Syria. The setting is now the year 714/1314. A group of Copts who were worshipping at the Mu'allaqa church in Fustāṭ had run short of candles, so they borrowed some from the nearby °Amr ibn al-°Āṣ mosque. This misappropriation of Muslim candles led to protests under the leadership of the Shāfi'ī jurist Nūr al-Dīn al-Bakrī.⁵⁰ Subsequently, al-Bakrī demanded an audience with the Sulṭān Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn as the loan of the candles had been

⁴⁹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, III, 337/8.

⁵⁰ Nūr al-Dīn °Alī b. Ya°qūb b. Jibrīl al-Bakrī, d. 724/1324. On him, see Aḥmad b. °Abd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333), *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, 33 vols, (Cairo, 1923–2002), XXXIII, 77; al-Dhahabī, *Ta°rīkh*, vols 701–46, 216; Khalīl b. Aybak al-°Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363), *A°yān al-°aṣr wa-a°wān al-naṣr*, 4 vols, ed. F. Aḥmad al-Bakkūr (Beirut 1998), III, 1293/4; al-°Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi bi-al-wafayāt*, 30 vols, ed. Hellmut Ritter et al., (Istanbul et al. 1931–97), XXII, 331/2; °Abd al-Wahhāb b. °Alī al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'īya al-kubrā*, 10 vols., eds. M. Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī/°Abd al-Fattāḥ M. al-Ḥilw (Cairo, 1964–76), X, 370/1; Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, III, 214/5.

authorised by two of his high-ranking officials, who were recent Coptic converts to Islam. This audience was attended by the four chief judges and high-ranking officers:

Then Nūr al-Dīn al-Bakrī addressed the sultān [Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn] in coarse and rough language until the sultān became furious when al-Bakrī said, ‘The best deed is truthful speech in the presence of a tyrannical sultān. You appointed the newly converted Copts and you gave them authority over your State and the Muslims. You illegally diminished the Muslims’ possessions and their benefits.’ And [he added] more [words] in this regard. The sultān replied, ‘Woe to you, am I tyrannical?’ Al-Bakrī said, ‘Yes! You gave the Copts control over the Muslims and strengthened their religion.’ At these words, the sultān could not restrain himself and took the sword intending to hit him, but the officer Ṭughay⁵¹ grabbed his hand. The sultān turned to the [Mālikī] chief judge Zayn al-Dīn b. Makhlūf and exclaimed, ‘O judge, can he dare to be so audacious with me? What am I supposed to do with him? Tell me!’ Ibn Makhlūf answered, ‘He did not say anything that can be disapproved of and nothing has to be done against him as he merely transmitted a sound *ḥadīth*.’ The sultān screamed at him, ‘Leave me!’ Ibn Makhlūf immediately got up and left. Ṣadr al-Dīn b. al-Muraḥḥil—who was present—addressed the Shāfi‘ī chief judge, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Jamā‘a, ‘O lord, this man was audacious with the sultān, but God the exalted ordered Moses and his brother when he sent them to the pharaoh, ‘Speak to him gently, perhaps he will take heed or show fear.’” Ibn Jamā‘a told the sultān, ‘He was audacious and our lord the sultān can only show his forgiveness.’ The sultān grew even more furious, rose from his chair and [again] intended to hit al-Bakrī with his sword. Ṭughay, Arghūn and the other officers rushed on him and waited until he regained his countenance. The sultān ordered al-Bakrī’s tongue to be cut off; al-Bakrī was brought to al-Raḥba and thrown to the ground. Ṭughay advised him to plead for pardon so al-Bakrī started to shout, ‘By God’s Prophet!’ He repeated it several times until the officers had pity with him. Ṭughay told the officers to intercede with the sultān in favour of al-Bakrī. They all went to the sultān and pleaded for al-Bakrī until the sultān decreed his release and his banishment from Egypt. The amīr Aydumur al-Khaṭīrī criticised al-Bakrī for initially having been so bold in addressing the sultān, but subsequently abasing himself. Al-Bakrī was attacked because his stance

⁵¹ Sayf al-Dīn al-Nāṣirī (d. 718/1318) was one of the most influential officers during the reign of Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn until he fell into disgrace towards the end of the latter’s reign. See, for example, A. Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History: The Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn (1310–1341)*, (Leiden, 1995), 57/8.

[of commanding the Right and forbidding the Wrong] was not sincere towards God.⁵²

This description of the confrontation at court was included into a number of Mamlūk and Ottoman chronicles and biographical dictionaries that reported the ‘candle scandal’.⁵³ However, many other authors preferred to exclude the confrontation between ruler and scholar from their narratives.⁵⁴ In addition, those versions that do mention the confrontation at court show among themselves considerable differences in the narrative structure and points of detail. For instance, some include direct speech as an element of dramatisation while others employ mostly indirect speech⁵⁵ and most texts agree that Ṣadr al-Dīn b. al-Muraḥḥil was present and played a central role, while some authors do not mention him at all.⁵⁶

Al-Maqrīzī drew on this diverse material and gave the anecdote a unique form. The most remarkable feature is that al-Maqrīzī was the only author who included the ‘speak to him gently’ element into the ‘candle

⁵² Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, II/1, 135/6.

⁵³ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, XXXII, 212–14; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, IV, 277/8 and XXII, 331/2; al-Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, III, 1293/4; Muḥammad b. Shākir al-Kutubī (d. 764/1363), *Fawāt al-wafayāt wa-l-dhayl ‘alayhā*, 5 vols, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās, (Beirut, 1973–4), IV, 26; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, X, 370/1; ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. al-Ḥasan al-Asnawī (d. 772/1370), *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īya*, 2 vols., ed. ‘Abd Allāh Jubūrī, (Baghdad, 1970–1), I, 289; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XIV, 72/3; Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, III, 214/5; Abū Bakr b. Aḥmad Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba (d. 851/1448), *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īya*, 4 vols, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Alīm Khān (Beirut, 1987), I, 275/6; Shams al-Dīn Dāwūdī (d. 945/1538), *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn*, 2 vols, ed. ‘Alī M. ‘Umar (Cairo, 1972), I, 438; ‘Abd al-Ḥayy b. Aḥmad Ibn al-‘Imād (d. 1089 /1679), *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahab*, 10 vols, eds. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Arnā‘ūṭ and Maḥmūd al-Arnā‘ūṭ, (Beirut, 1986), VIII, 115.

⁵⁴ For example: Ismā‘īl b. ‘Alī Abū l-Fidā’ (d. 732/1331), *Al-Mukhtaṣar fī akhbār al-bashar*, 4 vols, ed. n.n., (Cairo, 1907); Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz*; al-Mufaḍḍal b. Abī l-Faḍā’il (fl. 8/14th century.), *Al-Nahj al-sadīd wa-al-durr al-farīd fī mā ba‘d ta’rīkh Ibn al-‘Amīd*, edited as: Moufazzal Ibn Abil-Faza’il, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks*, *Patrologia orientalis* 20/1, ed. E. Blochet, (Paris, 1928); Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470), *Al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhira*, 16 vols, eds. Fahīm M. Shaltūt et al. (Cairo, 1929–72).

⁵⁵ Such as, for example, al-Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, III, 1293/4; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, XXII, 331/2 and IV, 264–84.

⁵⁶ Most importantly, al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, XXXII, 212–14, whose report on the events is the longest.

scandal' report. This decision is to some degree characteristic of al-Maqrīzī's style and his tendency to refashion many episodes of the early Mamlūk period. This can be described as factual unreliability,⁵⁷ but it is here rather understood as a sign of the authorial agency al-Maqrīzī disposed of – an authorial agency that enabled him to make characteristic decisions on what to include and how to include it. With the inclusion of the 'speak to him gently' element, he implicitly linked the confrontation at court to the well-established tradition of the pharaonic narrative element in ruler–scholar confrontations.

In order to understand the logic of al-Maqrīzī's peculiar way of narrating the pharaoh element, it is necessary to examine in more detail two further modifications that distinguished his version from earlier and contemporary versions of the 'candle' anecdote. First, al-Maqrīzī was relatively restrained in criticising al-Bakrī's behaviour. Other authors underlined that al-Bakrī 'commanded the right and forbade the wrong' without any authorisation or stated that al-Bakrī inappropriately attacked his opponent in the affair claiming that he 'behaves provocatively towards the State, disregards it and despises it'.⁵⁸ Al-Maqrīzī obliterated most of these passages and saw no need to criticise al-Bakrī in these terms. Rather, al-Maqrīzī—uniquely so—stands out with his final citation that blames al-Bakrī not for being too audacious, but rather for finally abasing himself to the sultān. In the same vein, he criticised al-Bakrī not for commanding the right and forbidding the wrong without authorisation, but instead for being insincere in its application. In this way al-Maqrīzī represented al-Bakrī not as the trouble maker he is in other versions, but rather as an upright scholar whose shortcomings were that he finally gave in and that he was not sufficiently consistent in his practice. Secondly, al-Maqrīzī has the sultān acting very much like the tyrant he denies to be. Hereby, he renders the scene more dramatic: the sultān twice intends to summarily execute the scholar with his sword; he screams and he kicks out the inconvenient scholar— all narrative elements absent in earlier versions.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ R. Amitai, 'Al-Maqrīzī as a Historian of the Early Mamluk Sultanate (or: Is al-Maqrīzī an Unrecognised Historiographical Villain?)', *Mamlūk Studies Review*, 7/2 (2003), 99–118.

⁵⁸ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, XXXII, 212–14.

⁵⁹ Al-Maqrīzī's contemporary, Ibn Ḥajar has these elements as well in his *Durar*, III, 214/5 and they increasingly appear in following works, such as Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt*, I, 438. Thus, it seems that these elements originated in al-Maqrīzī's period, although it is unclear whether he himself invented them. Their

Thus, al-Maqrīzī expressed his sympathy for al-Bakrī's audaciousness and his initial steadfastness by substantially rearranging the previous narratives and taking characteristic decisions on including and excluding material that fitted his outlook. It is against this background that his inclusion of the 'speak to him gently' element can be seen. Due to the continuing availability of the original al-Rashīd version, both in al-Ṭabarī's chronicle and in later texts, as well as the availability of the secondary versions, a literate audience was aware of this element. However, al-Maqrīzī did not just reproduce the original version in a different setting, but changed it substantially in order to adopt it to his outlook. The inclusion of the 'speak to him gently' element did not serve anymore, as it had served in the original version and its variants, as an element that invoked questions concerning issues such as the relationship between the rulers and religious men and the characteristics of (good) rulership. The main point for al-Maqrīzī was instead to scathe the military, political, and scholarly elite by invoking and reworking a well-known precedent. The main function of the 'speak to him gently' element now served primarily as a reminder of how dramatically things had changed and deteriorated since the Golden Age of Hārūn al-Rashīd.

Al-Maqrīzī showed this change first and foremost by the fact that the crucial Quranic verse had to be introduced by a scholar, Ibn al-Muraḥḥil.⁶⁰ In the original version (and the other primary and secondary versions), on the contrary, it had been the exemplary ruler himself, for example Hārūn al-Rashīd, who had referred to the verse. It was only Ibn Ḥajar who introduced a similar change in exactly the same period. However, al-Maqrīzī's changes were farther reaching than Ibn Ḥajar's as even this attempt to calm the ruler is doomed: the sultān grows only angrier at the scholar's attempt to wriggle his way out of the conflict. The wise ruler of the distant past has given place to the tyrannical ruler of the present who is not willing or able to understand the scholars' attempt to give him the upper hand in moral terms.

increasing importance is also visible in a manuscript of Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba's biographical dictionary, in which somebody added on the margins additional information on the story (Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ṭabaqāt*, II, 274, n. 15).

⁶⁰ Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. °Umar b. Makkī Ibn al-Wakīl/Ibn al-Muraḥḥil, (d. 716/1316). On him, see al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, XXXII, 249; al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. 701–746, 146/7; al-Kutubī, *Fawāt*, IV, 13–26; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, IV, 264–284; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, IX, 253–267; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XIV, 82/3; Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, IV, 234–41; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba, *Ṭabaqāt*, II, 233–4.

With these changes the crucial issue of the original version is reinterpreted. In the original, the reprimand of the Quranic verse had been aimed at those who were not entitled to criticise the ruler, namely the ascetic, and had implicitly given outstanding religious men the right to do so. In other words, the religious elite was depicted as having the right and the capacity to stand up against the ruler. Al-Maqrīzī certainly agreed that the scholarly elite of the Mamlūk empire had the right to confront the political and military elite. However, in his narrative the scholarly elite had lost the capacity to do so due to their internal divisions. It is the scholar Ibn al-Muraḥḥil who applies the verse to al-Bakrī in order to criticise him, and the chief judge Ibn Jamā'a supports him.⁶¹ Only the Mālikī judge Ibn Makhlūf intervenes in favour of al-Bakrī, but finds no support among the other scholars.⁶² This is expressed even more clearly by the decisive role that al-Maqrīzī ascribed to the military officers—not the scholars—who intervened and interceded with the sultān in order to save al-Bakrī.

Al-Maqrīzī's version gives the overall impression that the scholars are, due to their internal divisions and their closeness to the ruling elite, devoid of any capacity to intervene. This is an element that is also nearly unique to al-Maqrīzī compared to the other versions of the 'candle' anecdote where the decisive intercession in favour of al-Bakrī was generally undertaken by the scholar Ibn al-Muraḥḥil.⁶³ In these versions Ibn al-Muraḥḥil was initially not present at court – only al-Maqrīzī introduced him in the beginning of his version in order to have him citing the 'pharaoh' element. The other authors mentioned instead that Ibn al-Muraḥḥil came later to court after he had heard about the ruler's harsh verdict and asked the ruler in tears for pardon. In this way al-

⁶¹ Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Sa'ad Allāh Badr al-Dīn (d. 733/1333). On him, see al-Dhahabī, *Ta'riḥ*, vols 701–46, 289–91; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, II, 18–20; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XIV, 171; Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, III, 367–9.

⁶² 'Alī b. Makhlūf b. Nāhiḍ al-Nuwayrī al-Mālikī (d. 718/1318). Al-Mālikī was chief judge from 685/1286 to 718/1318. On him, see al-Dhahabī, *Ta'riḥ*, vols 701–46, 159; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, XXII, 189/90; al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, III, 1267/8; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XIV, 93; Ibn Ḥajar, *Durar*, III, 202.

⁶³ Only al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, XXXII, 212–14 does not mention Ibn al-Muraḥḥil at all. On Ibn al-Muraḥḥil's intercession, cf. al-Kutubī, *Fawāt*, IV, 26; al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, III, 1293/4; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, XXII, 331/2 and IV, 264–284; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, X, 370/1. Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XIV, 72/3, briefly refers in his summary version of the events to the officers who interceded in favour of al-Bakrī.

Maqrīzī ascribed the agency for interceding with the ruler to the military elite, and wrote Ibn al-Muraḥḥil out of the final scene. In addition, he depicts Ibn al-Muraḥḥil as taking a stance against the ‘upright’ al-Bakrī. Al-Maqrīzī’s decision to rework Ibn al-Muraḥḥil’s role was based on the latter’s close relationship to the ruling elite during different stages of his career.⁶⁴

With this anecdote, al-Maqrīzī expressed his perception of Mamlūk society that he had started to see in increasingly negative terms, after his early career had come to an end with the execution of his Mamlūk friend and patron Faṭḥ Allāh in 816/1413.⁶⁵ After this, he gradually withdrew from public life and devoted himself to the composition of his main works, among them *al-Sulūk*, from which the above-cited passage is taken. He expressed in these works his increasingly distanced position vis-à-vis the military, political and social elite. The structure and the critical tone of his works reflect his ill-feelings towards what he perceived to be the corrupt political system of his time. He combined this with sympathy for groups that opposed and actively challenged the wrong-doings of power holders of their day. Most noteworthy, his oeuvre shows his positive attitude towards groups such as the *Zāhirī madhhab* and the Alids. His positive depiction of these groups was not rooted in any covert adherence to their religious and legal interpretations, but in his admiration of their ‘militant’ spirit. During the Mamlūk era, the term ‘Zāhirī’, for instance, referred less to those adhering to the legal tenants of this school, but more to certain politico-religious concepts that caused revolt or *fitna*.⁶⁶ Initially, al-Maqrīzī had pursued the normal career within Mamlūk society although he shared with many

⁶⁴ On his close relationship with the viceroy al-Afram and the sultān, see S. A. Jackson, ‘Ibn Taymiyyah on Trial in Damascus’, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 39/1 (1994), 46–7. Ibn al-Muraḥḥil was also intimately involved in the conflicts between the Sultān Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn and his rival al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Baybars.

⁶⁵ On his career, see A. F. Broadbridge, ‘Academic Rivalry and the Patronage System in Fifteenth-Century Egypt: Al-^cAynī, al-Maqrīzī, and Ibn Ḥajar al-^cAsqalānī,’ *Mamlūk Studies Review*, 3 (1999), 85–107.

⁶⁶ On the fourteenth-century ‘Zahiri’ revolt in Damascus that was not linked to legal doctrine but to the issue of legitimate political power, see L. Wiederhold, ‘Legal-Religious Elite, Temporal Authority, and the Caliphate in Mamluk Society: Conclusions Drawn from the Examination of a “Zahiri Revolt” in Damascus in 1386’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 31 (1999), 203–35.

contemporaries a somewhat distanced stance towards the Mamlūk elite. What differentiated al-Maqrīzī from other scholars were these sympathies for groups that commanded the right and forbid the wrong.⁶⁷

Al-Maqrīzī's reshaping of the anecdote points to one of the more important issues during the Mamlūk period, the role of religious scholars in political dynamics. The versions of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih and Ibn al-Jawzī with al-Rashīd and al-Maʿmūn as the rulers approached the same issue in the widest sense by asking who had the right to criticise the ruler and how the latter ought to react to inappropriate criticism. However, al-Maqrīzī's version raises a different issue, namely the degree to which scholars had the right to impose on the political–military elite its norms with regard to concrete fields of policy, not merely in the sense of a general admonishment. This was a key issue during the period in which the anecdote is set, due to the manifold conflicts between State authorities and Ibn Taymīya. Indeed, it is certainly not by chance that Ibn Ḥajar's contemporary version of the anecdote had Ibn Taymīya as its protagonist on the scholarly side. The sultān had released Ibn Taymīya from his second prison spell in Egypt five years prior to the 'candle scandal', and the scholar returned subsequently to Syria only to become embroiled in another prolonged conflict with the authorities some years later. Most of the individuals who were mentioned in the framework of the 'candle scandal' were in one way or the other also involved in the Ibn Taymīya conflict.⁶⁸ In this sense, al-Maqrīzī's re-narration of the court confrontation in the framework of the 'candle scandal', and especially the fusion of this event with the 'speak to him gently' anecdote, can be read as a highly topical comment on one of the central issues during the period in which the anecdote was placed. The peculiar way in which al-Maqrīzī employed the 'speak to him gently' anecdote can be read in conjunction with his peculiar perception of society. His

⁶⁷ N. Rabbat, 'Who Was al-Maqrīzī? A Biographical Sketch', *Mamlūk Studies Review*, 7/2 (2003), 1–19.

⁶⁸ Al-Bakrī was renown for his sharp criticism of Ibn Taymīya (cf. al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh*, vols 701–46, 216; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, 62). Ibn al-Murāḥḥil/Ibn al-Wakīl was not on particular good terms with Ibn Taymīya and often engaged in public disputations with him (cf. Jackson (1994), 46/7; al-Kutubī, *Fawāt*, IV, 14; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, IX, 253–267; Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, XIV, 82/3. Ibn Makhlūf was held responsible for the 705/1305 *miḥna* against Ibn Taymīya. See, D. P. Little, 'The Historical and Historiographical Significance of the Detention of Ibn Taymiyya', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 4/3 (1973), 311–27, (p. 324).

narrative strategy allowed him to express his critical view of the Mamlūk elite and, more importantly, of the scholarly elite who in his eyes did not fulfil their role as guardians of society.

Conclusion

The discussion of the ‘speak to him gently’ anecdote has shown how narrative devices travelled across genres, periods, and regions. This process was not one of simply ‘borrowing’, but draws attention to the degree of textual agency that authors of pre-modern historiographical texts disposed of and made use of. They took wide-ranging liberties in adapting the anecdote into their respective narratives and in reworking it in the process. Crucial elements of the anecdote, such as the protagonists, the place, and the chronological setting were easily exchanged, without obliterating the reference to the ‘original’ version. The combination of literary approaches with a consideration of the social context in which the respective version was produced has allowed us to understand better the metamorphosis of narrative structures that were employed to frame the anecdote and of the changing layers of meaning that were assigned to it. By reworking the factual elements the authors were able to ascribe to the anecdote, meanings that ranged from issues such as the right to criticise the ruler, via the relationship between scholars and rulers and the ruler’s forbearance to the failure of the scholarly community to stand up against unjust rulers.

The historical–literary journey of the pharaoh figure did not stop with al-Maqrīzī’s text in the late Middle Ages. In subsequent periods, it remained an important device that was employed in Arabic historical narratives.⁶⁹ The importance of this element until the present—not only in historiography, but in a multitude of genres—shows the narrative flexibility that is inherent to such devices. As much as the figure of the pharaoh gained a multitude of meanings in the pre-modern period, it has been subject to new readings, such as nationalistic interpretations, in the modern era.⁷⁰ Further studies of these devices will certainly underline the

⁶⁹ See, for example, A. Geier, *Von den Pharaonen zu den Khediven: Ägyptische Geschichte nach den Hiṭaṭ des ʿAlī Mubārak*, (Frankfurt, 1998), 50–1.

⁷⁰ On modern interpretations of the pharaoh, see A. Douglas and F. Malt-Douglas, ‘Film and Pharaonism: Shādī ʿAbd al-Salām’s *Eloquent Peasant*’, in *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Literature*, ed. I. J. Boullata and T. DeYoung (Fayetteville, 1997), 193–205; D. M. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I* (Berkeley, 2002); M. Haarmann, ‘Das moderne Ägypten und seine pharaonische Vergangenheit’ (unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Freiburg, 1991).

continuous tradition of Arabic historiography across periods and regions. However, the study of this continuity is not an end by itself. Rather, it is of relevance because of the ways it highlights the breaks, shifts, and changes in the significance that such elements held in their respective contexts. It is in this sense that reflections on narrativity and social context, that is to say, on the 'social logic' of the text, render historiographical texts a rich source for the study of the societies with which we are concerned.

‘LIKE THE WICK OF THE LAMP, LIKE THE SILKWORM THEY ARE’: STUPID SCHOOLTEACHERS IN CLASSICAL ARABIC LITERARY SOURCES¹

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The alleged stupidity of schoolteachers was a common topos in *adab* literature of the Abbasid period as well as in later sources. Indeed, ‘the stupid schoolteacher’ was a stereotype much like ‘the dull person’, ‘the smart sponger’ and ‘the ridiculous bedouin’. Frequent references to such images indicate that the intended audience revelled in this kind of literary device. This article examines diverse ways of reading and interpreting the *adab* sources which deal as much in fantasy as reality. Indeed, while the standard stereotypes of schoolteachers are varied, amusing and predominantly negative, they are not always as they at first appear.

‘Like the wick of the lamp, like the silkworm they are’: these are the words traditionally ascribed to the wise caliph, al-Maʿmūn, when speaking of schoolteachers.² The quotation, from a royal authority, is related by Ibn al-Ġawzī (d. 597/1201) in his book *Aḥbār al-ḥamqā wa-l-muġaffalīn* (Tales of The Stupid and Simple-Minded), just at the beginning of a chapter specifically devoted to simple-minded schoolteachers (*al-muġaffalūn min al-muʿallimīn*). That schoolteachers were incorrigibly fatuous was certainly a common perception, widespread in *adab* literature of the ʿAbbāsīd period and in later sources too. Indeed, the question of their stupidity, or rather, the stereotype of ‘the stupid schoolteacher’ was a topos which several classical and post-classical writers were fond of using, along with others such as ‘the dull person’, ‘the smart sponger’ and ‘the ridiculous bedouin’.³ Frequent references in

¹ This article has emerged from a research seminar given at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Chicago (30 May 2008). I would like to thank Sebastian Günther of Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen and Alex Metcalfe of Lancaster University for their careful reading of this article and for their valuable remarks.

² Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 134.

³ On the stereotype of ‘the dull person’ see A. al-Ḥaṣḥūṣī, *al-Ḥumq*; on ‘the smart sponger’ see A. Ghersetti, ‘À la recherche de nourriture’. The image of the bedouin in medieval Arabic literature has been carefully analysed by Joseph Sadan, “‘An Admirable and Ridiculous Hero’”: Some Notes on the Bedouin in

the sources to these indicate that the intended audience enjoyed these kinds of literary topoi and stereotypes, and had fun in reading or listening to the stories connected to them. Being literary topics, these images should not be taken at face value – they do not necessarily reflect historical reality and at best, reflect it only to a certain extent. This must be carefully considered when reading and interpreting *adab* sources where we are in the realm of representation more than of actuality.

In what ways were schoolteachers supposed to have behaved to have merited such a reputation in literature and seemingly in common opinion too? Why was their stupidity considered as some inherent characteristic? Before answering this, we must first examine the role of the *mu'allim*, what he was supposed to be teaching as well as the notion of 'stupidity' in classical sources.⁴ In the medieval period, the term *ta'lim* (a less common equivalent is *ta'dīb*) referred to instruction at a basic level, and in this sense it is opposed to *tadrīs*, which referred to the teaching of religious law. Hence, *mu'allim* (and less frequently *mu'addib*) is the term employed for primary-school instructors who were basically Qur'ānic teachers. Apart from the Qur'ān, other subjects were often taught in elementary teaching, such as numeracy, poetry, grammar and philology. Ibn Ḥaldūn (d. 808/1406) briefly illustrates the *curricula* of elementary education in the Arab world at his time and stresses its differences according to geographical regions.⁵ Considering the conservative character of teaching in the medieval Arab world, we can take for granted that his statement has a certain validity for earlier periods too. The Qur'ān was, of course, at the core of teaching in primary schools. However, while Maghribi education almost exclusively centred on it, Andalusian pedagogy focused more on reading, writing and on poetry, thus developing linguistic and literary skills using the Qur'ān as a point of departure. In Ifrīqiya, there was a combined instruction of Qur'ān, the *ḥadīth* as well as some simple scientific notions.⁶ In the East

Medieval Arabic Belles Lettres, on a Chapter of *Adab* by al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, and on a Literary Model in which Admiration and Mockery Coexist', *Poetics Today* 10 (1989), 471–492.

⁴ For a brief survey on traditional schools (*kuttāb*) and elementary school teachers see G. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, 19, 83 and W. Kadi, 'Education in Islam', 7.

⁵ Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 594–596 (*The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3, 301–303, chapter 6, section 38).

⁶ The cultural tradition in Ifrīqiyā was also marked by a keen interest in education. The first treatises showing a remarkable concern for pedagogy were

too, children had a mixed curriculum. Primary schoolteachers there were supposed to be able to instruct their pupils in the religious sciences – namely to have them learn the sacred text by heart, as well as in grammar and mathematics, even if only at an elementary level.⁷

In spite of the high esteem that the Prophet showed towards education and teachers,⁸ in later times the *mu'allim* did not enjoy general respect. In law, the oath of schoolteachers has only partial validity⁹ and, if we believe literary sources, the famous judge Ibn Šubruma (d. 144/761), one of the emblematic personalities at the beginning of Islam,¹⁰ did not accept the testimony of schoolmasters.¹¹ The contempt showed towards primary-school teaching is clearly illustrated in the story reported on the authority of al-Ġāhiz: when a Qurayshī once noticed a child studying the *Kitāb* of Sībawayh 'he could not help exclaiming: 'Bah! This is the science of schoolteachers and the pride of beggars'.¹² Al-Rāgib al-Iṣfahānī (fl. fourth/tenth century) dedicates a section of his anthology *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabā'* (Conversations of the Men of Letters) to the notion that teaching is considered a shortcoming for people of excellence (*ḍamm al-tā'dīb wa-kawnuhu naqṣan li-ḍawī l-faḍl*) (which, in any case, comes immediately after a section claiming the contrary – *ḥamd al-*

produced by authors such as Ibn Ṣaḥnūn (d. 255/868–9), Ibn Abī Zayd (d. 386/996) and al-Qābisī (403/1012). See C. Bouyahia, *La Vie littéraire*, 260–265.

⁷ For a list of the subjects covered, see S. Günther, 'Advice', 117ff. Apparently, the range of topics to be taught in traditional education had not widened in more recent times – the *mu'addib al-atfāl* is defined as the 'ṣayḥ of the primary traditional school (*kuttāb*) who teaches children the letters of alphabet...the reading of the Qur'ān, writing and some mathematics'. This quotation is taken from a dictionary of traditional crafts in Damascus drawn up at the end of the nineteenth century. It also gives an idea of the wage system still in use – teachers usually received payments from the parents of their pupils. The greater the *kuttāb* was, the richer (and happier) the teacher was. See S. al-Qasimiy, *Dictionnaire*, 407–408.

⁸ See e.g. the *ḥadīṭ*, '*Ḥayru man mašā 'alā l-arḍi al-mu'allimūna*', quoted by Ibn al-Uḥuwwa (d. 729/1329), *Ma'ālim*, 170. The *ḥadīṭ* is not present in the canonical collections.

⁹ A. Mez, *Renaissance*, 185 from Ibn Qutayba.

¹⁰ See J. Cl. Vadet, 'Ibn Šubruma' in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd edition), 3: 938.

¹¹ Al-Ābī (d. 421/1030), *Naṭr*, vol. 5, 326; Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 134, on the authority of al-Ġāhiz.

¹² I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, 1: 105.

ta'dīb).¹³ Among the evidence he cites, there is this effective poetic verse: 'It is enough as a defect for a man to be qualified as schoolmaster, even if he is excellent!' (*kafā l-mar'a naqṣan an yuqāla bi-annahū mu'allimu ṣibiyānin wa-in kāna fādīlan*).¹⁴ The same Ibn al-Muqaffa^c apparently considered it a loss of dignity for a noble person to become a schoolmaster at the end of his life.¹⁵ 'Teachers and eunuchs are of the same rank' (as well as slave-traders and the devil who are also of the same rank), is a saying ascribed to the caliph al-Walīd, but the rationale of this warranted no explanation in our source.¹⁶ The general lack of prestige of this professional category is also attested in Ibn Ḥaldūn, who claimed that in his day teaching was nothing more than 'a craft and serves to make a living [...] it is a far cry from the pride of group feeling', adding that, 'teachers are weak, indigent and rootless'.¹⁷ He also explains that men in government were too proud to do any teaching, and that was why teaching came to be an occupation restricted to individuals deemed weak (*al-mustaḍ'afīn*).¹⁸ He claimed that, 'at the beginning of Islam and during the Umayyad and °Abbāsīd dynasties, teaching was something different. Scholarship in general was not a craft in that period'.¹⁹ Nevertheless, although he gives the impression that he somewhat idealised such ancient times, the textual evidence of other literary sources (belletristic or scientific) tells us that, even in the °Abbāsīd period, *mu'allimūn* were generally despised or, at least, they were not ranked at the top of the social scale.²⁰ The testimony of Ibn Ḥawqāl (d. second half of the fourth/tenth century) is particularly illuminating in this respect. This famous geographer shows a total contempt for schoolmasters for whom theirs was 'the most miserable

¹³ Al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, 1: 52–53.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1: 53.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1: 52–53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1: 459. This has perhaps to do with intellectual faculties. See pp. 92–3 below.

¹⁷ Ibn Ḥaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 33 (*The Muqaddimah*, 1: 59).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33 (*The Muqaddimah*, 1: 60). The argument offered by Ibn Ḥaldūn is that in ancient times the high dignity of teaching was based on the close link between fighting to propagate Islam and the teaching of its foundations. Once Islam was firmly established and new laws evolved, this link became ever more loose. Thus, teaching was no longer practised by the strongest (i.e. warriors or rulers), but only by weaker people.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33; (*The Muqaddimah*, 1: 59).

²⁰ See A. Dietrich, 'Éducation', 97.

position, the most humble profession, the meanest occupation'.²¹ Since the most ancient times, he explains, the most stupid and those who did not dare to fight devoted themselves to this profession, which, out of their stupidity, they considered honourable.²²

Schoolteachers, along with other professions, were routinely the subject of prejudicial remarks. As al-Tawhīdī (d. 414/1023) claimed, schoolteachers, grammarians and chancery scribes—in spite of the difference of their ranks—were equal in stupidity.²³ Curiously enough, the three categories have (or should have) a thorough knowledge of language and honed linguistic skills in common. Furthermore, if by definition, weavers and cuppers were idiots, slave-traders and goldsmiths were liars, tailors were pious,²⁴ grammarians were pedantic,²⁵ teachers were, above all, stupid.²⁶

But what was stupidity in the classical Arab world? In lexicographical works stupidity, *ḥumq*, is usually defined as 'the stagnation of intellect', or its absence. A more problematic, but much more stimulating, definition of stupidity is that put forward in *adab* literature by al-Ġāhiz (d. 255/868–9, see *infra*) and fully formulated by the famous Iraqi writer Ibn al-Ġawzī in the work he dedicated to foolish people: '*ḥumq* is the choice of the wrong means and of the wrong way to achieve the right

²¹ *Aḥṣas manzila, awḍa' ḥirfa wa-asqaṭ ṣanī'a*: Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-ard*, 127 (*Configuration*, 125–126). Many passages of the chapter devoted to Sicily actually consists of an acid criticism of the intelligence, culture and ethics of its inhabitants and in particular of its schoolteachers, with a wealth of first-hand (but largely anecdotal) information about their stupidity (see for e.g. 127–130; *Configuration*, 126–130). Ibn Ḥawqal also states (129) that in his (lost) *Kitāb Ṣiqillīyya* he reported all the stories he knew about the Sicilian *mu'allimūn* and their foolishness.

²² Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-ard*, 126–127 (*Configuration*, 125).

²³ *Imtā'*, 1: 96.

²⁴ See e.g. al-Ibšīhī (d. 850/1446), *Mustaṭraf*, 1: 129–131.

²⁵ Al-Ibšīhī, *Mustaṭraf*, 1: 518–519; a more prudish version of the anecdote at 519 in Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 116.

²⁶ For categories of workers generally considered stupid see al-Ḥaṣḥūṣī, *Ḥumq*, 93ff.; 95–98 for schoolteachers in particular. Another common allegation was pederasty: al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥādarāt*, 1: 54–55 has a section on *liwāt al-mu'allimīn*; the fact that a chapter on pederasty is extant in the *Risālat al-mu'allimīn* of al-Ġāhiz, even if it seems to be an interpolation, demonstrates that the allegation of pederasty was common for schoolmasters.

purpose'.²⁷ And actually the bulk of the narrative on stupid schoolteachers turns on this very notion. All in all, cases of stupidity understood as a deficiency of the intellect or as a lack of logical abilities is quite rare.²⁸ Most of the stories featuring stupid schoolteachers involve a distorted relationship between knowledge and appropriate behaviour.

It is worth noting that the charge of stupidity is a very serious one, since it was often defined as part of one's innate character—'a chronic disease that has no remedy'²⁹—something so incurable and irreparable that even miracles cannot rectify it.³⁰ Thus, Jesus himself must admit that he was able to revive dead and cure leprosy, but he was not able to cure foolishness.³¹ As an innate characteristic, it manifests itself through a number of physical traits such as a small head; a long beard (often a typical trait of schoolteachers³²); a short neck; protruding eyes and such like.³³ If these signs, based on the medical and physiognomical theories of the Greek world, are purely physical, there are also clear signs pertaining to behaviour. Stupid people are vain and loquacious; they speak out of turn; they meddle in what does not concern them. They can be recognised by careful observation, and consequently they can and should be avoided because they are harmful.³⁴ Moreover, they must also be avoided because stupidity was potentially contagious, as reported by al-Nīsābūrī (d. 406/1015): 'stay away from the vicinity of stupid people

²⁷ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 13 (see also p. 95 below). The same idea is also found in an Indian literary source: the section on foolish people (taranga 61–65 *Mugdhakatha*) from the *Kathasaritsagara* (The Ocean of Stories) of Somadeva (eleventh century CE) has some examples of this. The same for these forms of foolishness consisting in taking words at their face values.

²⁸ One instance in al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 333, where a schoolteacher is not able to calculate the difference of age between him and his brother.

²⁹ Al-Nīsābūrī, 'Uqalā', 68.

³⁰ Al-Ḥaṣḥūṣī *Ḥumq*, devotes a whole chapter to this topic (127ff).

³¹ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 14; al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, 1: 15. For other sources, see A. Ghersetti 'Paradigmi', 87 n. 26.

³² See e.g. al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, 1: 55; al-Fanḡadīhī (d. 584/1188), *Ma'ānī*, fol. 235b–236a; al-Šarīšī (d. 620/1223), *Šarḥ*, 3: 366.

³³ On the topic see A. Ghersetti, 'Firāsa'.

³⁴ A. Ghersetti, 'Paradigmi'; al-Nīsābūrī, dedicates a full chapter of his book 'Uqalā' *al-maḡānīn* (Intelligent Madmen) to this topic: 'To avoid the stupid and its companionship', 67–71.

since by being their neighbour you might become like them'.³⁵ This is a noteworthy point. Both the idea that stupidity can be transmitted and the notion that foolishness can result from, or be comparable to, a process of consumption, are tightly bound to the stereotype of stupid schoolteachers, as we shall later see. A vivid image found in *adab* literature compares foolish people with worn-out clothes: neither foolish people nor worn-out clothes can be redeemed: every time they are fixed in one respect, they are torn in another.³⁶ After all, it is an image consistent with the notion of consumption that the words of al-Ma'mūn previously quoted suggest: both the wick of the lamp and the silkworm undergo a process of gradual reduction (even if we know that in the case of the silkworm it is transformation and not consumption).

The considerable interest among medieval men of letters for the figure of the stupid schoolmaster is easily understood if we observe how this stereotype lay at the intersection of two main themes of *adab* culture: intellect and knowledge, both of which are represented by their negative counterparts – stupidity and ignorance. In the *Aḥbār al-ḥamqā wa-l-muḡaffalīn* of Ibn al-Ġawzī, the summa of materials on foolish people, the notion of stupidity and its different manifestations are widely illustrated by a considerable number of anecdotes. More significantly, it is precisely in this work that both the substantial themes of intelligence and knowledge meet.³⁷ Indeed, the whole book is based on this thematic link.³⁸ Fourteen out of twenty-four chapters containing anecdotes in the *Aḥbār al-ḥamqā* involve idiots whose professional activity is closely related to different branches of knowledge: *ḥadīth* transmitters, grammarians, judges, chancery officers, Qur'ān reciters, preachers and so forth.³⁹ If *adab* literature contains several stories in which scholars and men of science are represented as irreparably stupid, schoolteachers are by far the class of men of science in which stupidity dominates, to the point that they are considered idiots by definition. Nevertheless, Ibn al-Ġawzī shows a more nuanced attitude towards them and defines them as

³⁵ Al-Nīsāburī, *Uqalā*, 68.

³⁶ Ibid., 68 and *passim*.

³⁷ Al-Ḥaṣḥūṣī (*Humq*, 35–46) puts forward the theory that in *adab* literature there are three levels of stupidity, and that the first, the cognitive one, is very similar to *ḡahl* (ignorance).

³⁸ K. Zakharia stresses this thematic connection in her article 'Le Savoir et ses dupes dans les *Histoires des idiots et des sots* d'Ibn al-Ġawzī', *BEO* 47 (1995), 217–233.

³⁹ See K. Zakharia, 'Savoir', 229–230.

muğaffalūn, which means simple minded or gullible rather than stupid. As we shall see, in the end he seems to implicitly justify their intellectual deficiencies.

That schoolmasters are considered stupid by definition is a fact we can ascertain with ease simply by considering the wide range of proverbs and aphorisms on this topic. Schoolmasters very quickly become feeble minded, and they are well known for their foolishness and mental deficiency (*yahrafu fī amadin yasīrin yattasimu bi-ḥumqin ṣahīrin wa-yataqallabu bi-‘aqlin ṣaḡīrin*), as stated by Abū Zayd al-Sārūḡī in the 46th *maqāma* of al-Ḥarīrī (m. 516/1122), *al-Ḥalabiyya*.⁴⁰ The chapter on the *mu‘allimūn* in the *Aḥbār al-ḥamqā* of Ibn al-Ġawzī opens with the assumption that foolishness of schoolteachers ‘is a matter which hardly escapes, and we see constant’.⁴¹ Other statements aim in the same direction: ‘God assists [people] against the insolent and ungrateful behaviour of youngsters with the stupidity of schoolmasters’;⁴² ‘you are a tall schoolteacher with the longest beard: our Lord is enough for us and the best defence’;⁴³ and ‘if you are a copyist, you are debarred from the means of subsistence, and to be stupid you need only to be a schoolteacher’;⁴⁴ and so on. The most representative proverb in this connection is perhaps the incisive saying, ‘more stupid than a schoolteacher’ (*aḥmaq min mu‘allim kuttāb*),⁴⁵ with the variant, ‘as stupid as a schoolmaster’.⁴⁶ This prejudice was so widespread that Ibn Ḥawqal severely criticised the people of Sicily, who held schoolteachers in high esteem, in these terms: ‘out of their short discernment, their scarce knowledge and absolute lack of intelligence, all the Sicilians consider this category (i.e. schoolteachers) as their most notable men, their élite...’.⁴⁷ Obviously, even thinking well of the *mu‘allimūn* was itself a sign of stupidity, something that only people affected by unsound

⁴⁰ Al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 384.

⁴¹ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 134.

⁴² Al-Bayhaqī (early 4/10th century), *Maḥāsin*, 580; al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, 1: 55.

⁴³ Al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, 1: 55. A long beard is considered the main sign of stupidity (A. Gherseti, ‘Paradigm’, 90).

⁴⁴ Al-Bayhaqī, *Maḥāsin*, 580.

⁴⁵ *Bayān*, part 1, 139.

⁴⁶ A. Mez, *Renaissance*, 185.

⁴⁷ Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-ard*, 127 (*Configuration*, 126).

intellect (as seemingly Sicilians are in the author's opinion) can do.⁴⁸

Sometimes stupidity is so strongly associated with teachers as to be a genetic inheritance, for example in the case of the schoolteacher, the son of a schoolteacher, who replied when somebody asked why he was so stupid that, 'If I weren't so stupid, I'd be a bastard!' (*law lam akun aḥmaqa kuntu walada zinan*).⁴⁹ The acid test of this strong association is that in al-Ḥarīrī's *al-Maqāma al-Ḥalabiyya*, teaching is plainly defined as 'the profession of the inane (*ḥirfat al-ḥamqā*).⁵⁰

But how does stupidity manifest itself in the case of schoolteachers and of what does it consist? Inappropriate behaviour, ignorance, gullibility, immorality, defects in intellectual faculties, skewed logic: all these cases are represented in the stories featuring stupid *mu'allimūn*. In narratives, the stupidity of schoolteachers is multi-faceted indeed, but in most cases it relates to a distorted relationship with knowledge. It can be a glaring deficiency in the most elementary notions of mathematics as happened in the case of the *mu'allim* Abū Ġa'far of Ḥims: 'A woman asked him, "If four *raṭl* of dates cost one *dirham*, how many will I have

⁴⁸ The foolishness of Sicilians was considered the consequence of an excessive consumption of onions which negatively inhibited the sense faculties and thus impaired the reasoning abilities of the brain (*ḥaṣṣyat al-baṣal iḥdāṭ fasād fī-l-dimāg*, Ibn Ḥawqal, *Ṣūrat al-arḍ* 124; *Configuration*, 123). Translating Ibn Ḥawqal, A. Mez (*Renaissance*, 185) puts it in these terms "The daily consumption of onions has made the Sicilians weak-minded with the result that they see things otherwise than they are. As an illustration they regards [*sic*] the school-masters of whom there are more than 300, as the noblest and the most important members of their community and out of them make confidants [*sic*] and choose assessors in their courts. But we all know how cribbed and confined is the understanding of the schoolmasters and how light-headed they are!". Although suggestive, this is far from being faithful to the Arabic text of the *Kitāb ṣūrat al-arḍ*: the passage is a summary of remarks that can be found in Kramers' edition at 124 (on the effect of eating onions on the mental faculties), 126 (on the great number of teachers) and 127 (on their contemptible status). These passages from the year 973, however, appear in a specific historical context in the wake of great victories against the Byzantines (which were not followed up) and the departure of soldiers to Egypt with the Fatimids. Ibn Ḥawqal claimed that school-teaching was a type of 'reserved occupation', attracting those wishing to shirk the call-up for the *ḡihād* since they were exempt from fighting.

⁴⁹ Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), *Uyūn*, 1.2: 64; al-Fanḡadīhī, *Ma'ānī*, fol. 236^a; for the hereditary character of stupidity, see al-Ḥaṣḥūṣī, *Humq*, 83ff.

⁵⁰ Al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 383.

for a *dāniq* and a half?” He remained pensive for a long while. Then he put his hands under the hem of his garment and began to count on the fingers. In the end he brought his hands out, joined them and exclaimed, “A lump as big as this one!”⁵¹

Worse still, it could be crass ignorance of the rules of recitation of the Qurʾān. For example, making pauses when they are not allowed⁵² or making wrong readings of Quranic verses,⁵³ even worse when the teacher tries to justify his mistake.⁵⁴ Stupidity could also include commenting and replying to citations from the Qurʾān as if they were normal speech addressed to the teacher himself. This basically hints at the incompetence of the teachers to recognise the quotations, but it could also be taken as a sign of their inability to place matters in their correct context or, even worse, of their attitude to tinker with the sacred text.⁵⁵ This last possibility is not the most remote, and relates to allegations of their dubious ethical qualities which can be found elsewhere too. Among several instances of this inability to deal with Quranic quotations, the following is particularly illustrative:

A teacher of Medina was excessive in beating and insulting the children for which they reproached him. One day—relates the anonymous source—he asked me to take a seat with him and to see how he behaved. I sat down near to him and all of a sudden a child exclaimed ‘O master! ‘Upon thee shall rest the curse, till the Day of Doom!’⁵⁶ Thereupon, he replied, ‘And upon you and your parents!’⁵⁷

Clearly the teacher did not recognize the quotation or, even worse, if he had identified it correctly, he misses the point of the sacred text and interpreted it as a statement performed in the frame of ‘normal’ communication.

Another example of this behaviour, going beyond the limits of the

⁵¹ Al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 327–328.

⁵² Al-Bayhaqī, *Mahāsin*, 579.

⁵³ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 134, 135, 136; Al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 331; Ibn Ḥamdūn (d. 562/1166), *Tadkira*, 3: 285.

⁵⁴ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 134; al-Fanġadīhī, *Maʿānī*, fol. 236^a; al-Šarīšī, *Šarḥ*, 3: 365.

⁵⁵ Al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 329, 330, 331–332; Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 136, 137; al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, 1: 54; al-Šarīšī, *Šarḥ*, 3: 364–365; Ibn Ḥamdūn, *Tadkira*, 3: 285–286 n. 848, 849, 850–853.

⁵⁶ Qurʾān 15: 35, transl. Arberry.

⁵⁷ al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 329 (similar anecdotes at 330); al-Šarīšī, *Šarḥ*, 3: 365; a shorter version in al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, 1: 54.

respect due to the sacred text, and even verging on obscenity, is that of the *mu'allim* who, instead of correcting the wrong reading of his pupil, takes it at face value and explodes with an insulting exclamation. The story goes thus: one of the pupils says *innī urīdu an ankihaka* ('I want to get married with you'), instead of the correct *innī urīdu an unkihaka...* ('I desire to marry thee [to one of these my two daughters]').⁵⁸ The schoolteacher's witty retort is immediate: 'Get married with that shameless mother of yours!' (*inkih ummaka l-fā'ila*).⁵⁹

Giving insulting or even obscene answers is another trait of the foolishness of schoolteachers. They also are a peculiar side of that inappropriate conduct in their duties which is so often reproached to our *mu'allimūn* and which constitutes a consistent expression of *humq*.⁶⁰ There are teachers who coarsely abuse their pupils as a means of keeping them quiet⁶¹ or when they give the wrong answer.⁶² But there are also lascivious schoolmasters who do not hesitate to propose sexual intercourse to their pupils' mothers, or even to have sex with them in front of their children, or to boast adulterous relations.⁶³ This is no doubt a serious perceived shortcoming in their ethics, and it questions their dignity. This issue is likewise raised by their opportunism and servility, as shown in their disposition towards the rich and powerful. We read that a schoolteacher had the habit of having the offspring of well-off families sit in the shade, and the offspring of poor people in the sun, saying: 'Oh you people of Paradise, spit on the Hell dwellers!'⁶⁴

Otherwise, stupidity can appear as inappropriate behaviour in general or, more precisely, the kind of gap between theory and practice, between what the situation requires and what is actually done that—as we have seen earlier—is one of the definitions of foolishness in *adab* literature. In

⁵⁸ Qur'ān 28:27, transl. Arberry.

⁵⁹ Al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 330 and 332; al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, 1: 54.

⁶⁰ In lexicography, stupidity also consists of 'putting things in the wrong place' (see A. Ghersetti, 'Paradigmi', 85).

⁶¹ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Hamqā*, 135.

⁶² Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Hamqā*, 137; al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, 1: 54; al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 331, 332.

⁶³ Al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 331, 332, 333; al-Ibšīhī, *Mustaṭraf*, 2: 520.

⁶⁴ Al-Zamaḥṣarī (d. 538/1144), *Rabī'*, 1: 522. A longer version is found in al-Šarišī, *Šarḥ*, 3: 366. Shade and sun were a sensible topic in connection with teaching and actually several *ḥadīṭ* concern the position the teacher should avoid when teaching: the edge of the shade, or the place between sun and shade, is the place where Satan sits (see C. Melchert, 'Etiquette', 41; see also 44).

the following anecdote, we see al-Ġāḥiẓ, much to his disappointment, telling the following story:

I passed by, he says, a schoolmaster whom I found very knowledgeable. Some days later, passing to say hello to him, I found him lying on the floor like a dead man while the pupils were praying around him. I was deeply distressed, but when they finished praying, he stood up. 'What's that?' I exclaimed. And he replied 'I was teaching them the funeral prayer'.⁶⁵

Interesting in relation to this is the story of the schoolteacher of a village in the countryside who, seeking to free a calf whose head was stuck in a well, first kills the calf by slitting its throat and then breaks the well by beating it with a stone.⁶⁶ This serves as a clear example of the *adab* definition of foolishness: the purpose was right (to free the calf), but the means chosen to achieve it were wrong.

Inappropriate behaviour can also take shape as childish conduct. This happens, for instance, in the story of the *mu^callim* of Basra who refuses to address directly one of his pupils and asks another to speak to him in his place.⁶⁷ Sometimes foolish behaviour is closely connected with food, and this perhaps hints at the low salaries teachers received, as in the case of the schoolteacher accused by one of his pupils to steal his breakfast⁶⁸ or of another that was found crying out of despair because the boys stole his bread.⁶⁹ Schoolteachers can so be equal to their pupils in their way of acting, and show a childish attitude that is inconsistent with the dignity their position requires. For instance, they can have recourse to tricks to oblige children to accomplish their school duties. The following tale tells the case of a particularly zealous schoolteacher who gives chase to his lazy pupil: al-Ġāḥiẓ was passing by some ruins when he caught sight of a schoolteacher barking like a dog. When a boy came out from a house, the teacher slapped him and insulted him. So al-Ġāḥiẓ asked the teacher to explain that odd situation, and he replied:

This boy is a bad fellow: he hates being educated, runs away and hides himself in this house and does not want to come out. But he has the habit of playing with a

⁶⁵ R. Basset, *Mille et un contes*, 2: 95 from *Nuzhat al-udabā'*; Ch. Pellat, *Milieu*, 61.

⁶⁶ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Hamqā*, 137; Ibn Ḥamdūn, *Taḍkira*, 3: 284; other stories in al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 327; Ibn Ḥamdūn, *Taḍkira*, 3: 284 n. 843.

⁶⁷ Ibn Ḥamdūn, *Taḍkira*, 3: 284 n. 842; al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 326; al-Šarīšī, *Šarh*, 3: 366.

⁶⁸ Al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 327.

⁶⁹ Al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 327; Ibn Ḥamdūn, *Taḍkira*, 3: 285 n. 846; Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Hamqā*, 137.

dog, and when he hears my voice he thinks it's the dog barking. Then he comes out and I seize him.⁷⁰

This is an unconventional way of convincing students to attend classes, and by no means a rude educational practice, but this story also vouches for the strong commitment of teachers to their mission and can also be taken as a demonstration of their attachment to the salary families paid for the education of their offspring.⁷¹

A similar kind of childish, odd behaviour (which eventually turns out to be successful) is that of a colleague of the barking schoolteacher. Al-Ġāhiz is again the authority to whom the sources attribute this anecdote. One day he passed by a *mu^callim* kitted out with a short and a long stick, a polo mallet, a ball, a drum and a trumpet. When this one was asked 'What's that?' he explained: 'I have to deal with very young riffraff and when I ask one of them to read his tablet, he whistles to me breaking wind; then I strike him with the short stick and he hesitates, and when I strike him with the long one he flees from me. Then I put the ball onto the polo mallet, I beat it and I split it, and all the children stand up and come towards me with their tablets. At that moment I hung the drum up to my neck, I put the trumpet into my mouth and I start playing the drum and the trumpet. When the people of the alley hear this, they rush to me and save me from them'.⁷² One cannot help thinking that such a show must have offered a good reason to conjure up commonplace ideas of the stupid schoolteacher. Indeed, the equipment used, typical of infantile games, also testifies to an infantile regression so often ascribed to primary-school teachers and which is considered the main cause of their stupidity.

Of course, if we consider this kind of behaviour and the lack of concern *mu^callimūn* showed for the dignity expected from those in such positions, it is not surprising to see that many of the stories concerning stupid schoolteachers focus on the irreverent behaviour their pupils had

⁷⁰ Al-Ibšihī, *Mustaṭraf*, 2: 520; French translation R. Basset, *Mille et un contes*, 1: 265, n. 153, with other sources; Ch. Pellat, *Milieu*, 61; Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 135 with some slight variants – the teacher is hidden behind a curtain, in a royal palace, and he is on all fours.

⁷¹ The question of the teacher's responsibility for a student's attendance was closely related to the question of his salary. See, for example, what the Šāfi'ī jurist Ibn Ḥaġar al-Haytamī (d. 974/1567), even if in a later period, says in this connection (S. A. Jackson, 'Discipline', 21–23).

⁷² Al-Ibšihī, *Mustaṭraf*, 1: 519–520.

towards them: teachers are slapped and beaten;⁷³ their beards are pulled out;⁷⁴ their eyes are gouged with a cane;⁷⁵ their food is stolen.⁷⁶ This is probably a kind of ideal revenge that reflected a real habit of inflicting corporal punishment on students who were often beaten with sticks or scourges,⁷⁷ figuratively represented in the anecdote featuring al-Ġāhiz's surprise to see a teacher without his usual stick.⁷⁸ The disturbing thing with this kind of anecdote where, on the contrary, the *mu'allim* is beaten, is that it often accepts and even justifies the abuses, for instance, by claiming that he is in debt to the boy who is slapping him, or that he will complain to his pupil's father the following day, or even that he had placed a bet with his pupils and lost. The irreverent behaviour children had towards their teachers was seemingly so common as to raise the concerns of a poor *mu'allim* who, fearing to be battered to blindness by the children who wrestle with one another in the alley, preferred to remain all alone in the *kuttāb*.⁷⁹ If in literary sources pupils did not hesitate to be disrespectful towards their teachers, it was perhaps also because some of them had not the slightest idea about their own self-

⁷³ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 136: al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 330.

⁷⁴ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 137.

⁷⁵ Al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 327; Ibn Ḥamdūn, *Taḍkira*, 3: 284, n. 844.

⁷⁶ See above notes 66 and 67.

⁷⁷ Corporal punishments were so common that they had to be carefully regulated: no more than three cane strokes were allowed by the Ifrīqiyan Ibn Ṣahnūn, the author of a manual for schoolteachers who dedicates a whole chapter to this subject (French translation by G. Lecomte, pp. 81, 92, 103; some anecdotes at 81; on the utility of corporal punishments 87). The concern with abuse is also reflected in *ḥisba* manuals and legal treatises. For *ḥisba* manuals, see for instance Ibn al-Uḥuwwa, Engl. transl. by R. Levy 60; Arabic text 171 ('[boy] must be beaten for bad manners, insulting speech and other breaches of law'. However, 'beating must not be done with a stick thick enough to break bones, nor thin enough to harm the body, but with a medium one. A scourge with a wide thong should be used and the aim should be at the rump, thighs and lower parts of the feet, for in these places no disease or injury is to be feared'). For legal treatises, see Ibn Ḥaġar al-Haytamī's *Taqrīr al-maqāl*, in S. A. Jackson, 'Discipline', 25–28.

⁷⁸ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 135. Slaps were also part and parcel of the treatment (see e.g. al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 329), and seemingly children were beaten to prevent them from doing wrong (Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 135–136).

⁷⁹ Al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 328, (with an anonymous protagonist); cf. Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 136 and al-Ibšihī, *Mustaṭraf*, 1: 520. French transl. R. Basset, *Mille et un contes*, 1: 263, both with al-Ġāhiz as protagonist.

respect and the decorum they were supposed to show. Al-Tanūhī (d. 384/994) gives first-hand evidence in this regard when in his *Niṣwār al-muḥāḍara* (The Table-Talk of a Mesopotamian Judge) he relates the story of a *mu^callim* who, without restraint, insults his pupils that are heaping curses on one another.⁸⁰

Another facet of teachers' stupidity was gullibility. This shows itself in anecdotes featuring the poor *mu^callim* mocked by his pupils, as in the following story. Ibn al-Ġawzī relates that 'a boy proposed to the children "What about setting the *ṣayḥ* free today?" The children accepted and he said: "Let's go and tell him he's unwell". A child then went to him and exclaimed "I see that you are very feeble: I think you're going to run a temperature. You'd be better go home and have a rest". Hereupon, the teacher asked another child: "Your fellow says I'm sick..." and that one replied "He's right by God, and this is clear to everybody here! Ask them and they'll tell you!" The schoolmaster asked them and they testified it was true, so he told them "Go home today, and come tomorrow!"⁸¹

Gullibility is also at the core of the most famous anecdotes of the series (a rather late one, since—as far as we know—it first occurs in *al-Mustaṭraf* of al-Ibšīhī), which portrays al-Ġāḥiẓ as very doubtful about the real intellectual nature of schoolteachers. 'I myself—he says—wrote a treatise on anecdotes concerning schoolteachers and their carelessness (*taġafful*), but afterwards I changed my mind and decided to rip it up'. He explains that he happened to meet a *mu^callim* in Medina who was so accomplished in all the branches of learning that his determination to tear apart his *risāla* was strengthened yet further. But one day there was a catastrophe: the teacher was absent from his *kuttāb*, and having been informed that he was off because of a death, al-Ġāḥiẓ decided to go and see him at his house. When he inquired about the identity of the dead (his son, his father, his brother, his wife...) the *mu^callim* gave this astonishing answer: 'My beloved'. But, much to our surprise (and to al-Ġāḥiẓ's surprise as well) we discover that the poor simpleton has never met nor even seen his beloved: he simply heard a passer-by reciting some verses praising the beauty of a certain Umm ʿAmr, and he fell in love with her. And when the same passerby recited some verses announcing her departure, he understood that she was dead, left his *kuttāb* disconsolate and remained at home. Hearing all this, al-Ġāḥiẓ exclaimed: 'Oh man, I wrote a book about your stories, you schoolteachers, and

⁸⁰ *Niṣwār*, 3: 148.

⁸¹ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Hamqā*, 135; for other stories see also 136–137 and al-Ābī, *Naṭr*, 5: 329, 331.

when I met you I decided to tear it apart. But now, I'm more than ever resolved to keep it, and furthermore I'll begin just with you'.⁸²

This story enjoyed remarkable success as its several occurrences testify, since we also find it, with some slight variations, in *The Thousand and One Nights* in both the Būlāq and Beirut editions.⁸³ In this latter version, al-Ġāḥiẓ is replaced by an anonymous 'outstanding man' (*ba^cd al-fuḍalā^o*), and the sciences (*qirā^oāt*, *naḥw*, *ši^cr*, *luġa*), knowledge of which was considered necessary for a teacher, are accurately listed – itself of importance for the history of education. But the most relevant variation of *The Thousand and One Nights* version is the explicit admission of the mental deficiency of schoolmasters: 'Intelligent people all agree on the mental deficiency of teachers of primary school', boldly says the anonymous source relating the anecdote. This statement then leaves no room for doubt: by general consensus, *mu^callimūn* are most definitely idiots.⁸⁴ Incidentally, among the droll stories on idiot *mu^callimūn* that are found in *The Thousand and One Nights*, the anecdote which immediately follows this one relates how a schoolteacher emasculated himself having incorrectly evaluated the usefulness of his testicles. Needless to say, this one has been curiously neglected in the expurgated Beirut edition of the Jesuits.⁸⁵

Al-Ġāḥiẓ is present in many of the anecdotes we have mentioned, but, and this must be stressed, only in later sources. The several anecdotes linked to al-Ġāḥiẓ which Ibn al-Ġawzī includes in his *Aḥbār al-ḥamqā* do not actually show any connection with the famous ^cAbbasid writer when quoted in earlier works. Thus, we can safely maintain that the attribution to al-Ġāḥiẓ of the bulk of anecdotes about ridiculous teachers is a somewhat late phenomenon dating from the sixth/twelfth century. This could well be the consequence of the fame of his *Kitāb al-mu^callimīn*.

⁸² Al-Ibšīḥī, *Mustaṭraf*, 1: 520–521; French transl. R. Basset, *Mille et un contes*, 1: 415–417 quoted by Ch. Pellat, *Milieu*, 60–61; Ibn Ḥiġġa, *Tamarāt*, 402–403.

⁸³ *Alf layla*, ed. al-^cAdawī, 1: 583–584; *Alf layla*, ed. Beirut, 3: 78–79. See also V. Chauvin, *Bibliographie*, 6: 136.

⁸⁴ That is exactly what Ibn Ḥawqal stated, even more emphatically, some centuries earlier: *wa-bi-iġmā^ci minhum wa-min kulli insānin anna l-mu^callima aḥmaqu maḥkūmun ^calayhi bi-l-naqṣi wa-l-ġahli wa-l-ḥiffati wa-qillati al-^caql*. (*Šūrat al-arḍ*, 127; *Configuration*, 126).

⁸⁵ The catalogue of stories on the schoolteachers in the *Thousand and One Nights* is found in V. Chauvin, *Bibliographie*, 6: 136–138, nn. 287–292.

The following story illustrates al-Ġāḥiẓ's reputation as the author of such a treatise: 'They say that a schoolteacher went to al-Ġāḥiẓ and asked him if he was the author of the *Kitāb al-muʿallimīn* in which he had blamed them. When he answered in the affirmative, the man continued: 'And you mentioned in it that a teacher went to a fisherman and asked him what he was fishing for, fresh or salty game?' 'Yes, that's right', replied al-Ġāḥiẓ. The man thereupon exclaimed: 'That fellow was an idiot! Had he been intelligent, he would have stayed and seen, and he would have known if what was coming out was fresh or salty'.⁸⁶

However, as in the anecdote we quoted previously, in which al-Ġāḥiẓ himself features presenting his famous *risāla* as a stern criticism of stupid schoolteachers, this story shows a distortion of both the real contents of his treatise and his opinions as well. We are clearly in the realm of representation, if not of fancy. The attribution to al-Ġāḥiẓ of the anecdotes where he plays the role of protagonist, the pretension that they were taken from his *risāla* on schoolteachers and, last but not least, the allegation that he was in the end deeply convinced of the stupidity of schoolteachers, are not supported by textual evidence. In the 1950s Ch. Pellat wondered if the attribution of all these anecdotes to al-Ġāḥiẓ was a legend, and noticed that his *risāla* contained none of the stories later quoted on his authority. He even forwarded the hypothesis that there were two drafts of the same treatise.⁸⁷ A few decades later some of the doubts have found an answer, and since then two critical editions of the *Kitāb al-muʿallimīn* have been published, one by ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn⁸⁸ and the other by Ibrāhīm Ġirīs.⁸⁹ The extant text of the *risāla*, unfortunately very fragmentary, bears no trace of the amusing anecdotes on stupid schoolmasters which the tradition ascribes to al-Ġāḥiẓ, and which were supposed to exist in his work. Furthermore, the opinion that he had a negative attitude towards this category of people, an opinion

⁸⁶ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Hamqā*, 136.

⁸⁷ 'On doit se demander si l'attribution à Ġāḥiẓ de toutes ces anecdotes ne contient pas un fond de vérité ou si, au contraire, elle relève de la pure légende' (Ch. Pellat, *Milieu*, 61) and 'Il semble bien que la *risāla* sur les *muʿallimūn* ne contienne rien de ce que les auteurs d'ouvrages d'*adab* nous laissent espérer. Y a-t-il deux rédactions de cette *risāla*? Où les auteurs ont-ils puisé les anecdotes qu'ils reproduisent? Un écrivain postérieur a-t-il attribué à Ġāḥiẓ une *risāla* de sa composition? Autant de questions qui restent pour l'instant sans réponse' (Ch. Pellat, *Milieu*, 62).

⁸⁸ In *Rasāʾil al-Ġāḥiẓ*, part 3, 27–51.

⁸⁹ In *Kitābān li-l-Ġāḥiẓ*, 58–87.

widely spread in ancient sources (e.g. Ibn al-Ğawzī, al-Šarīšī, al-Ibšīhī,) and in modern scholarship as well, turns out to be wrong.⁹⁰ Even the hypothetical existence of a treatise on the blame of schoolteachers, a *Risāla fī ǧamm al-mu^callimīn*, has not been proved up to now.

Surprisingly, if we compare it with the image conveyed by the anecdotes we have analysed, the *Kitāb al-mu^callimīn* is far from a celebration of the commonplace notion of the ‘idiot teacher’. On the contrary, it ‘deals, from a literary–philosophical point of view, with questions of learning and teaching at the more advanced levels’,⁹¹ and thus constitutes a manifest praise of the role of schoolmasters in society.⁹² The epistle of al-Ğāhiz had a wide renown among literati, as we have seen. Several anecdotes circulating in *adab* literature feature the genial writer, hinting at his *risāla*, and commenting on its validity and contents. But this is part and parcel of the process of representation so typical of *adab* literature, and does not necessarily correspond to a factual report. For sure, if al-Ğāhiz mentioned the common observation of the stupidity of schoolteachers, it was merely to dismantle it, as it already had been in the *Kitāb al-bayān wa-l-tabyīn* (The Book of Clear and Eloquent Exposition). The pages he dedicates to the topic in this work open with the quotation of the saying *aḥmaqu min mu^callimi kuttāb* (‘more stupid than a schoolteacher’), that al-Ğāhiz qualifies as ‘popular’ (*min amṭāl al-^camma*). This is followed by a famous line of poetry ascribed to Šiqlāb al-Mu^callim:

How can you hope to find intelligence and sensibility in / those who go back and forth with women and children.⁹³

Precisely the same idea was widespread in other *adab* works. For instance, as we find it in an anonymous verse quoted by one of al-Ğāhiz’s epigones, al-Bayhaqī, but this time set in a dubitative tone:

Do those who always go back and forth with / women and children acquire intelligence?⁹⁴

Stupidity then seems to be a deficiency which is not innate in the nature of men, but can be contracted by associating with some categories of

⁹⁰ For a discussion of this, see I. Ğirīs, *Muqaddima*, in *Kitābān*, 29–30.

⁹¹ S. Günther, ‘Be masters’, 371–372.

⁹² Summary and partial translation of this treatise in S. Günther, ‘Advice’, 114–125.

⁹³ *Bayān*, part 1, 139; Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn*, 1.2: 64; al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, 1: 55; al-Zamaḥṣarī, *Rabī^c*, 1: 517.

⁹⁴ Al-Bayhaqī, *Mahāsin*, 580.

people who are foolish by nature, namely women and children. This is testified by the advice of wise men that al-Ġāḥiẓ quotes in connection with the proverb mentioned above. A wise man, he says, told that ‘you are never to ask a schoolteacher for advice, a sheep herder or somebody who associates with women’.⁹⁵ Obviously, being in contact with children, sheep and women has a bad effect on the intellectual faculties of men.

Nevertheless, there is seemingly a hierarchy in foolishness: ‘the intellect of one hundred schoolmasters is equivalent to the intellect of a woman, that of one hundred women is equivalent to that of a weaver, that of one hundred weavers is equivalent to that of an eunuch and that of one hundred eunuchs is equivalent to that of a child’. The sources consulted attribute this saying to al-Ġāḥiẓ, but of course there is no such statement in al-Ġāḥiẓ’s works on schoolmasters.⁹⁶ It is perhaps worth stressing that, in this case, the lowest rung of the social ladder belongs to schoolteachers – even if women come immediately after. But it is more usually women who have this honour. The same ‘wise’ man mentioned earlier goes on to explain how, ‘You must never let the mother of your son beat him, since he is more intelligent than her, even if she’s elder’.⁹⁷ This superstition about feminine intelligence dies hard if a later author, Ibn al-Ġawzī, attributes to women the lowest position in the hierarchy of intelligent people. In his *Aḥbār al-aḍkiyā*⁹ (Tales of The Sagacious) he divides people into ranks, ordered from top to bottom: women are placed in the penultimate chapter, just after children and the insane, but thankfully before animals. In any case, the kind of acquired stupidity deriving from mixing with the weaker sex must not worry men too much. The caliph al-Maʿmūn again has something to tell us: if men are affected by flippancy (*ruʿūna*) because of their habitual visiting of women, it is enough for them to stop associating with them and to associate with real men (*fuḥūl al-riġāl*) to put an end to this flaw.⁹⁸

These are the commonplace views al-Ġāḥiẓ had to deal with; but, as always, he was not ready to accept clichés. Indeed, immediately after

⁹⁵ Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *Bayān*, part 1, 139.

⁹⁶ Al-Fanġadīhī, *Maʿānī*, fol. 236^a; al-Šarīšī, *Šarḥ*, 3: 364. A variant, quoted in both sources is that ‘the intellect of two perfect women is equivalent to that of a man; that of four eunuchs is equivalent to that of a woman; that of forty weavers is equivalent to that of an eunuch; and that of forty schoolteachers is equivalent to that of a weaver’.

⁹⁷ *Bayān*, part 1, 139.

⁹⁸ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Hamqā*, 15.

these quotations, he begins to deconstruct them. The first category he tackles is that of shepherds: people cannot claim on good grounds that shepherds are foolish, since many prophets practised precisely this job. This is, of course, a good reason to refute their imagined stupidity.⁹⁹ Then he passes to schoolteachers, and demonstrates why it is completely unreasonable to consider them idiots. There are two categories of masters, says al-Ġāhiz: those who ascended from the education of common people's offspring to educating the elite's offspring, and those who ascended from educating these to educating royal offspring, who were themselves candidates for the future caliphate.¹⁰⁰ Among them are such personalities as al-Kisāʿī and Quṭrub, both famous and revered grammarians. Incidentally, al-Ġāhiz himself was appointed by al-Mutawakkil as tutor of his sons, 'but, on seeing me—he relates—he disliked my looks and dismissed me with a present of ten thousand dirhams'.¹⁰¹ Not such a bad an experience, one might think. But how could these people, al-Ġāhiz goes on to say, be reasonably called stupid (*hamqā*)? This is inconceivable, for them and for those who are staying on the lower rungs as well, such as the primary school (*kuttāb*) teachers living in the countryside villages. Al-Ġāhiz continues to offer numerous concrete examples of revered scholars and literati who were also teachers, such as Ibn al-Muqaffa^c and ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib. Even the redoubtable governor al-Ḥaġġāġ b. Yūsuf worked as *muʿallim*, and his father as well, both in al-Tāʿif. Interestingly, this same argument—that is, to have been a schoolteacher—is used by his denigrators to belittle al-Ḥaġġāġ.¹⁰² But al-Ġāhiz goes beyond this and adds his personal experience to the long list of historical cases. Among his associates in Basra he knew no one more acquainted with the sciences and more eloquent than two schoolteachers called Abū l-Wazīr and Abū ʿAdnān, both of whom figured among his first childhood memories.¹⁰³ Unfortunately, we must point out that the third category mentioned in the proverb quoted earlier—'you are never to ask a schoolteacher for advice, a shepherd or somebody who associates with women' i.e. 'those who

⁹⁹ *Bayān*, part 1, 139.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 139 (the passage is reported also by al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, 1: 55). Some of the most famous 'royal' schoolteachers are presented in A. Dietrich, 'Éducation'; as the author underlines, the tutors were mostly philologists and transmitters, but there were also poets and musicians.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafāyāt*, 2: 405; A. Dietrich, 'Éducation', 95 n. 3.

¹⁰² A. Dietrich, 'Éducation', 97.

¹⁰³ *Bayān*, part 1, 140–141.

associate with women’—is not taken into consideration and, in fact, there is no refutation of the stupidity of women.

In this respect, another proverb comes to our rescue, partially reassuring us about the misogyny of the classical Muslim world. This time, stupidity is considered as an intrinsic feature of weavers, spinners (of yarn), and again, of schoolteachers (*al-ḥumqu fī-l-ḥākati wa-l-mu^callimīna wa-l-ġazzālīn*). However, women who are so often mentioned in this vein, are ignored. While al-Ġāḥiẓ hastens to deny this statement for schoolteachers, as we have seen earlier, he takes a different position towards the other two categories that are considered far less than stupid. If one defines stupidity, as al-Ġāḥiẓ does, in terms of the slippage between thoughts and actions (the foolish person is the one who thinks well but acts wrongly, or ‘who speaks well and correctly, then makes a monstrous mistake’)¹⁰⁴, then weavers and spinners are beyond even stupidity, since they are neither able to act well, nor to speak well. If this is the view taken by al-Ġāḥiẓ in *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, the perusal of the extant passages of his *Kitāb al-mu^callimīn*—where the popular saying ‘more stupid than a schoolteacher’ is not even mentioned—does indeed confirm his attitude towards primary-school teachers: the topic of foolishness is not dealt with, and the stereotype of the stupid schoolteacher is even not hinted at.

It is clear from what precedes, that this cliché, apparently so widely accepted by the wider population, was resolutely rejected in the case of al-Ġāḥiẓ, who vouched for the excellence of the *mu^callimūn*. In a later source, the *Aḥbār al-ḥamqā* of Ibn al-Ġawzī, the same stereotype, if not rejected, is somehow mitigated and even justified. Let us reconsider al-Ma^ʿmūn’s speech related at the beginning of the chapter on schoolmasters from which we have taken the sentence that opened this article. The wise caliph precisely says:

What do you think of someone who polishes our intelligences with his good manners (*adab*), and whose intelligence becomes rusty because of our ignorance, who honours us with his assured knowledge and whom we disdain with our frivolity, who stimulates our minds with his useful lessons, consumes his mind with our errors, does not give up resisting our ignorance with his science, our carelessness with his vigilance, our deficiency with his perfection until we are immersed in his praiseworthy qualities and he sinks into our blameworthy qualities and whenever we have the maximum of profit, he has the maximum of stupidity, whenever we are adorned with the more venerable manners, becomes completely idle. Since we forever deprive him the good manners he had acquired, and acquire them without him, and enter into him

¹⁰⁴ *Bayān*, part 1, 140. For this concept see A. Ghersetti, ‘Paradigmi’.

our innate natural dispositions that he acquires alone without us. All his life long he makes us acquire intelligence, while he acquires our ignorance: that's why he's like the wick of the lamp and like the silkworm.¹⁰⁵

How can we best evaluate this, a true praise of the function and role of schoolteachers? Here stupidity of teachers appears as the result of a process of consumption, a kind of wear and tear, or a type of contagion rather than an innate defect and incurable illness.¹⁰⁶ Actually, Ibn al-Ğawzī through the quotation of al-Ma'mūn's words again takes the explanation that al-Ğāhiz had hinted at, and in the end justifies the *mu'allimūn*: if teachers are stupid, they are not stupid by nature. On the contrary, they become stupid because of the intimate association with children who, on the contrary, do seem to be stupid by nature.¹⁰⁷ Or, still better, they slowly lose their intelligence, wearing it out in the service of their pupils: a sacrifice that ultimately consecrates schoolmasters as missionaries, or indeed, as martyrs of education. Observable here is the huge gulf between this and the perfect idiots that the literary tradition portrays. Not perhaps a great compliment for their pupils, but a great recognition of the poor and much maligned *mu'allim*.

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¹⁰⁵ Ibn al-Ğawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 134.

¹⁰⁶ In the same vein is the commentary al-Fanğadhī makes on the final words of the 46th *maqāma* of al-Ḥarīrī. He clarifies the passage saying that the intellect of schoolteachers becomes as small as that of children, quoting also the following verse: 'a child, equal to his teachers in ugliness/and his teachers, equal to children in intellect' (*Ma°ānī*, fol. 236b).

¹⁰⁷ Ibn al-Ğawzī, *Ḥamqā*, 134.

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REDEFINING IDENTITY THROUGH CODE CHOICE IN *AL-HUBB FĪ 'L-MANFĀ* BY BAHĀ' ṬĀHIR

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This study examines the use of language and code choice in a modern Egyptian novel, *al-Ḥubb fī 'l-manfā* (Love in Exile) by Bahā' Ṭāhir (b. 1935). The study concentrates on the diglossic situation that prevails in the entire Arabic-speaking world, i.e. a situation in which there are two language varieties: a 'High' variety (standard Arabic) and a 'Low' one (vernacular dialects), each with a different function. The study will concentrate on the language varieties, or 'codes', used by the writer to depict dialogues between the different protagonists in the novel. The question posed is whether the dialogues in this, as well as in other novels published in Egypt and the Arab world, reflect realistic linguistic choices on the part of the protagonists, or whether this literature projects a different reality with different rules and language choices. If the latter case is true then language may be viewed as a tool to redefine reality and project different identities. It is argued that the choice of standard or vernacular has a discourse function, well as a creative one. This case study furthers our understanding of code choice in dialogue in the Arabic literature of Egypt, and of the Arab world in general.

Introduction

This study examines the use of standard Arabic (SA) and Egyptian colloquial Arabic (ECA) in the novel *al-Ḥubb fī 'l-manfā* (Love in Exile) by Bahā' Ṭāhir.¹ The study poses the question of why writers in Egypt in particular and in the Arab world in general use SA in dialogue, or even why they alternate their usage of SA and colloquial. If literature, as Eid (2003) posits, is supposed to reflect reality outside the stories, then one would expect most if not all dialogues to be in colloquial.

The study argues that the writer uses code choice and code switching between Standard Arabic (SA) and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) in dialogues as a literary device which does not reflect reality but re-defines and reconstructs a different identity for the protagonist with different people in his life, ranging from a waiter he befriends to his children. This re-constructed reality and identity can be explained according to the

¹ B. Ṭāhir, *al-Ḥubb fī 'l-manfā* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1995); translated into English by Farouk Abdel Wahab as *Love in Exile*, (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2001)

concept of indexicality as applied by Woolard to cases of code-switching (2004).

The study starts by defining the phenomenon of diglossia in the Arab world and gives an overview of previous studies that concentrated on the use of SA and ECA in literature. The concept of indexicality will also be discussed as well as that of identity. Then the dialogues in the novel will be analysed with code choice in mind. Finally, the contributions of this study to our understanding of the dynamics of code-switching in literature will be highlighted with reference to a different modern Egyptian novel in which the same linguistic techniques are used in dialogues.

Diglossia in Egypt and the Arab world

The twenty countries in which Arabic is an official language have been described as 'diglossic' speech communities, that is to say those in which two language varieties exist side by side. The official language is Standard Arabic, but there is usually a prestigious vernacular that is spoken in each country. Ferguson's definition of diglossia (1959) has been frequently examined, criticised and cited. However, although his definition may be considered dated now, its validity is unquestionable, in spite of its limitations. Boussofara-Omar (2006: 631) contends that Ferguson's 'predictions' about the distribution and access of SA and the vernaculars are 'insightful'. Since this study will rely on the concept of indexicality for analysing the dialogues, Ferguson's distribution of functions of SA and the vernaculars must be stated. This will become clear below.

According to Ferguson, diglossia is a different situation from one where there are merely different dialects within a speech community. In diglossic communities there is a highly valued H(igh) variety which is learned in schools and is not used for ordinary conversations. The L(ow) variety is the one used in conversations. Most importantly, Ferguson claims that the crucial test for diglossia is that the language varieties in question must be functionally allocated within the community concerned (Fasold 1995: 35).

Ferguson proceeds by exemplifying situations in which only H is appropriate and others in which only L is appropriate (1972: 236). According to him, the following are situations in which H is appropriate: sermons in a church or mosque, speeches in parliament, political speeches, personal letters, university lectures, news broadcasts, newspaper editorials, news stories, captions on pictures, and in poetry. He also gives situations in which L is the 'only' variety used:

Instructions to servants, waiters, workmen and clerks, Conversation with family, friends and colleagues, radio soap opera, caption on political cartoon and folk literature. Thus, according to this definition one would expect informal conversations, for instance, between family and friends or with a waiter to be in ECA. However, the situation in Arab countries is more complicated than Ferguson suspected. The neat distinction that he makes between SA and ECA does not always apply to real life situations, nor does it apply to novels and other literary work as will be discussed below. The diglossic situation in Egypt and other parts of the Arab world may create what Holes (2004) calls ‘sociolinguistic tension’ but may be also a tool in the hand of writers to use in order to leave the utmost effect possible on their readers. Note the following extract from the novel *Qismat al-ghuramā*² (The Debtor’s Share) by Yūsuf al-Qa‘īd:

Mustafa is still Mustafa. He did not change. He still has two tongues in his mouth, two hearts in his chest. A tongue that speaks for him and a tongue that speaks against him. A heart that speaks for him and a heart that speaks against him. When he speaks sincerely his words are in colloquial. A colloquial that was the only variety he knew and used in narration before. But once he starts speaking what they dictate to him, then he speaks in the language of books, and his words become comic!
(2004: 140).

This extract reflects the tension and ambivalent feelings Egyptians have towards both SA and ECA. Perhaps it also reflects the tension that exists in all Arab countries in which people speak a language at home and learn a different one in school, write in one language and express their feelings in another, memorise poetry in one language and sing songs in another. Whether doing this is practical or not is a moot point. However, as a linguist one knows that whenever one has more than one language or variety at his disposal it is indeed a good thing. Muhra, Muṣṭafā’s ex-wife summarises the dilemma of the Arab world neatly when she says that Muṣṭafā still has ‘two tongues in his mouth, two hearts in his chest’. Again, despite all the subsequent criticism of Ferguson’s theory, his proposal that there are two poles, an H and an L, is still valid, although they both formally and functionally overlap, perhaps more than Ferguson suspected or was ready to admit.² Mejdell (1999: 226) posits that the H-L division still has validity.

² I assume that the overlap between H and L existed even at the time when Ferguson wrote his article (1959), since Arabic—like any other language—is

Studies on diglossia in literature

Studies that concentrate specifically on dialogues from a linguistic perspective are far and wide in between. Arab writers dealt with the diglossic situation differently and reflected in their language use both their political and social stand as well as the identity of their protagonists. One form of language often associated with the Egyptian playwright Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm in his plays was widely referred to as ‘third language’ (Somekh 1981: 74). This language was supposed to conform to the syntactic rules of SA and avoid lexical and morphological choices which are either saliently vernacular, or saliently SA (Cachia 1992: 414). This third language would then enable the play to be performed in more than one Arab country without any modification. Ḥakīm discovered early on that use of dialect may hinder his plays from being performed in other Arab countries. (Somekh 1998; Holes 2004; for a general discussion of diglossia in literature see Cachia 1976).

As far as novels and short stories are concerned, the writer Yūsuf Idrīs, who claimed that he is mainly interested in depicting a realistic and concrete picture of Egyptian society in both plot and language, used both ECA and SA in his dialogues. His use of SA in dialogues was usually to juxtapose specific characters with others in his work (Holes 2004:305). For example, he used SA to satirise authority figures as he did in the 1957 work, *Jumhūrīyat Farahāt* (Farahat’s Republic) in which a policeman in a poor quarter of Cairo takes a statement from an illiterate young woman, and asks his questions in SA. The woman does not understand what he says. In *al-Laḥẓah al-ḥarījah* (The Critical Moment), written in 1956, Idrīs makes his Egyptian characters speak in ECA and his British ones, who are supposed to speak in English, speak SA. Thus SA is used instead of English in that case. Using the vernacular in dialogues is not only restricted to Egypt but is a phenomenon in the whole Arab world. The Iraqi writer °Abd al-Malik Nūrī is a case in point (Somekh 1998).

As mentioned earlier, the use of vernacular in literature is more than just a construction of an identity of a protagonist, it also reflects the attitude, political affiliations, and ideologies of an author, as is the case of Yūsuf Idrīs whose use of colloquial is to express his sympathy for the socialist system advocated by Nasser (cf. Holes 2004). An author who refused to use the colloquial in his dialogues and indeed narration is the

dynamic, rather than static and unchanging. For a discussion of linguistic variation and change in Arabic, see Walters (1996).

Egyptian Nobel prize winner, Naguib Mahfouz. Mahfouz says about the diglossic situation in Egypt in a letter to Luwīs °Awad: 'Language duality is not a problem but an innate ability. It is an accurate reflection of a duality that exists in all of us, a duality between our mundane daily life and our spiritual one' (Mahfouz 2006: 100).

It appears from this letter that for Mahfouz, literature is confined to the domain of spirituality and that SA is therefore the appropriate vehicle for it. However, Mahfouz's later style shows 'underlying dialectal structure and rhythm' (Holes 2004:309). Somekh (1998) calls Mahfouz's style in dialogues 'colloquialised *fushā*', which is described as sentences that appear as SA but with inner features of dialects added to it. Such features may be lexical in nature as when an ECA proverb for example is translated into SA. This 'colloquialised *fushā*' is characteristic of the work of both Naguib Mahfouz and °Abd al-Rahman Munif. However, when illiterates in Mahfouz's novels speak in SA, this according to Holes (2004: 309) 'requires a suspension of disbelief.' Thus, Mahfouz does not try to depict reality in his dialogues at least linguistic reality. This is the case with most writers, as we have seen. And yet, the choice of code clearly serves a purpose, as this study will show.

Diglossia in literature has been examined by a number of linguists. For example, Abdel-Malek conducted a study on the influence of diglossia on the novels of Yūsuf al-Sibā°ī. According to him (1972: 141), the development of the genre 'novel' in Arabic literature in the early twentieth century resulted in considerable tension between H (SA) and L (ECA), and in response to that tension a new linguistic style appeared in Arabic prose literature (developed by Yūsuf al-Sibā°ī and others). Abdel-Malek's idea of a mixed written style is similar to the idea of 'Educated Spoken Arabic' (ESA) (cf. El-Hassan 1980), although he specifies no clear rules to define this style. Rosenbaum (2000) studies the occurrence of a mixed style SA and ECA in texts written by Egyptians, a phenomenon which seems to be gaining in popularity. He states that a mixed written style, involving clear shifts between H (SA) and L (ECA), breaks the 'rules, old and new, of writing in Arabic, but does not encounter any serious opposition in Egyptian culture, probably because Egyptian readers have been accustomed to seeing ECA forms in print already for decades' (Rosenbaum 2000: 86).

Eid (2003) analysed the narration and dialogues of eight short stories of Egyptian female writers. Eid contends that dialogue, which is expected to reflect the reality outside the stories is not necessarily in ECA. However, she also referred to the phenomenon of colloquialised *fushā*, without using the term. She noticed that in writing in general there

is no marking of short vowels, which means that there are no phonological differences between both varieties, SA and ECA. She concludes that in both narration and dialogue the line between SA and ECA is blurred due to the ambiguity of both clear syntactic markers and vowels. Eid also acknowledged cases of switching between ECA and SA in dialogues. Eid (2003) acknowledged that writers use both SA and ECA in their dialogues, some times with a discourse function, as when Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt used SA for internal dialogues and ECA for external dialogues, thus highlighting that there are two separate worlds, an internal one and an external one

It is noteworthy, however, that most of the studies done on the language of dialogues have their own limitations to some extent. First, the phenomenon of third language and that of colloquialised *fuṣḥā* have not been studied systematically, in a manner that would allow rules and patterns to be inferred, whether structural rules, morphological rules or lexical ones. There is a need for a study that attempts to highlight common recurrent patterns of using SA/ECA in dialogues whether in relation to one author or different ones. In addition, few studies have tried to relate the identity of the protagonists to their code choice. One needs more studies that apply linguistic theories to literature and examine how these could help deepen our understanding of language use in literature. This study tries to do so, though on a small scale.

The concept of indexicality; A different perspective

Woolard (2004), when analysing code switching in general, developed the concept of indexicality. Indexicality is a relation of associations through which utterances are understood. For example, if a specific code or form of language presupposes a 'certain social context, then use of that form may create the perception of such context where it did not exist before' (Woolard 2004: 88). If a code is associated with the authority of courtrooms and this code is then used in a different context, then it will denote authority. The language of the speaker would then be considered an authoritative language (Silverstein 1996: 267). Although Woolard does not refer specifically to diglossia in his discussion of indexicality, if one assumes that code switching is not limited to switching between different languages but includes switching between different varieties of the same language, then one could understand diglossic switching in terms of indexicality. SA is associated with authority, formality, detachment, abstractness and all the situations discussed by Ferguson. ECA is associated with family, friends, intimacy, informality and concreteness. Thus if the novelist intentionally makes his protagonist

speak in SA with some people and ECA with others s/he may be laying claims to all the associations of SA or ECA as will be clear in the analysis below.

Identity and code choice

Identity in language is defined by Lakoff (2006: 142) as ‘a continual work in progress, constructed and altered by the totality of life experience. While much of the work in support of this belief concentrates on the larger aspects of identity—especially gender, ethnicity, and sexual preferences—in fact, human identity involves many other categories. Identity is constructed in complex ways, more or less consciously and overtly.’ Lakoff points to the variability of identity at different stages of one’s life and in different contexts. One’s identity is made up of more than one part; a mother can also be a professor, a wife, an administrator, a politician, a friend, an Egyptian, a Muslim, an Arab, and so forth.

As Lakoff says, an individual is both a member of a ‘cohesive and coherent group’ as well as an individual (2006: 142). Bastos and Oliveira (2006: 188) emphasise the fact that identity is both ‘fixed’ and ‘continuous,’ in the sense that individuals perceive themselves differently in various situations or contexts. Identity is also manifested through language use, as is the case in the data analysed.

Another term used by McConnell-Ginet (2004), which also refers to one’s identity is ‘subject positioning’. McConnell-Ginet states that as we talk to one another we are adopting particular subject positions, teacher, pupil, friend...etc. We are also assigning positions to the others with whom we are talking. For example, ‘we may condescend or defer to them, express solidarity with them or claim distance from them, and so on’ (2004: 139). Gumperz (1982) emphasises the relationship between change of code and change of role.

According to Gumperz, people may mark a change in the role they are playing, or the aspect of their identity they are appealing to, by using a different code. Goffman (1981), in a different study, defines the individual as a speaker who plays different roles and who uses code choice to show the new role s/he plays. Although all the above studies differ in nature, they all seem to imply that there is a causal relation between changing one’s role and changing one’s code.

Choice of role is often associated with an illocutionary aim, which is the thing that determines the speaker’s role in a speech or a conversation at a particular point within it. The speaker’s aim may, for example, be to give advice or to give an opinion. He may wish to explain something, or

make a show of his anger or happiness. The speaker will usually choose a linguistic code in order to convey his aim. In my data this means essentially whether he chooses to do so using ECA or SA.

Analysis

Having set the framework for analysis, let me now consider the concrete example of dialogues in *al-Hubb fī 'l-manfā* by Bahā° Tāhir. The novel examines the life of a journalist who works as correspondent for an Egyptian newspaper in a European country. Throughout the novel, the protagonist is taking stock of his life and achievements, and suffers from frustration caused by his exile as well as a sense of uselessness. We then realise that the journalist has been sent to the European country to be ostracised from the media arena in Egypt. A middle-aged divorcee, the journalist is a symbol of a generation that has been suppressed and oppressed throughout in Egypt and outside. Note that the author himself lived in Switzerland for a while.

(1)

كنت قاهرياً، طردته مدينته للغربة في الشمال... قيدني عملي؟!.. أي كذب!.. لم أكن أعمل شيئاً في الحقيقة. كنت مراسلاً لصحيفة في القاهرة لا يهتمها أن أرسلها. ربما يهتمها بالذات ألا أرسلها. (1995: 1)

I was a Cairene whose city had expelled me to exile in the North ... tied by work? What a lie. I wasn't doing anything, really. I was a correspondent for a newspaper in Cairo that didn't care if I corresponded with it; perhaps it was keen that I did not correspond.

(2001: 1)

The journalist is the narrator of the novel and though he dies at the end, the death comes as a release from all the defeats and disturbances he had to endure. In the end he says:³

(2)

لم أكن متعباً. كنت أنزلق في بحر هاديء.. تحملني على ظهري موجة ناعمة و صوت ناي عذب.
و قلت لنفسي: أهذه هي النهاية؟ ما أجملها! و كان الصوت يأتي من بعيد. و كان الصوت يكرر يا سيد.. يا سيد!.. و لكنه راح يخفت و راح صوت الناي يعلو.
و كانت الموجة تحملني بعيداً.

³ See the study by Bassiouney (2006), which examines monologues, as opposed to dialogues. In monologues the speaker has more freedom to use ECA or SA - or both together.

تترجرج في بطن و تهدهدي.. الناي يصحبنى بنغمته الشجية الطويلة الى السلام و الى
السكينة. (1995: 254)

I wasn't tired. I was sliding into a calm sea, carried on my back by a soft wave and the melody of a pleasant flute.

I said to myself, 'is this the end? How beautiful!'

The voice was coming from far away, saying, 'sir, sir!' but it kept getting lower as the sound of the flute kept rising.

The wave was carrying me away.

It was undulating slowly and rocking me. The flute was accompanying me, with its long, plaintive melody, to peace and tranquillity.

(2001: 277)

What is of interest to us here is the code used by the author/protagonist. The narration is all given in SA. However, conversations are what are essential for this study. While it is expected, although not always preserved, that narration should be in SA, conversations that reflect real life should be in ECA. Conversations in Egypt between family, friends, colleagues and even an employee and his/her employer are basically in ECA (see Ferguson above). Also conversations in different contexts that include home; visiting friends, making love to wife or girlfriend are in ECA. There are instances when an employee has to use SA as part of his work, if for example the employee is a lawyer and the context is a courtroom. Although there is no clear cut surveys that show exactly the percentage of SA and ECA usage, one can depend on a different kind of medium of comparison. Conversations in soap operas in Egypt are in ECA. Thus a conversation between a husband and a wife is in ECA. A conversation between two friends at any age is in ECA. A conversation between a waiter and a customer is in ECA. Again, except in limited contexts conversations tend to be in ECA and sometimes in ECA with insertions from SA. Soap operas are supposed to reflect reality and yet they are not written. Literature, especially the novel, is in most cases a reflection of reality and a mirror of social, political and personal problems. In *al-Hubb fī 'l-manfā*, the protagonist, as was said earlier, is a symbol of his generation and the political frustrations and oppressions around him whether from his own country, Egypt, or from other countries.

The protagonist has a number of conversations with different people that are related to him. He has numerous conversations with his foreign young girlfriend, whom he claims would repeat Arabic words like a

parrot. She does not speak any Arabic, but possibly German or French. His communication with her is reflected in the novel in SA.

This is, in fact, not surprising. The girl interacts with him in a foreign language and he the protagonist/author, is translating this interaction into SA. Translation is usually into the standard language and not the colloquial one. Thus, it comes as no surprise that he uses SA. However, when the author interacts with his only male Egyptian friend in the novel, who is the same age as him and who suffers very similar problems, he also does so in SA. Note the following example in which the main protagonist is speaking to his Egyptian friend.

(3)

قلت: اذن على اي شيء تلومها؟
أخذ يحك جبينه بيده ثم قال: هل قلت أنا اني ألومها؟ كل ما قلته اني أحبها.
و سكت مرة أخرى قبل أن يقول: أنا عائد الآن من عندها ... من البدء ... لم أكن
استطيع ان اقاوم ... كرت سنوات عمري كله و تلخصت الحياه كلها في شيء واحد. اني
اريد هذه الجميلة لي. أريدها هنا و أريدها الآن ...
ثم ماذا ماذا حدث؟ ...
لم يحدث شيء.
كيف؟

-قلت لك لم يحدث شيء! لا تسألني كيفز كانت تمسك بيدي و نحن في التاكسي.
تقبض عليها و تنشج ... و كانت هي تلهث مغمضة العينين و تحاول التخلص من ثيابها
و هي بين ذراعي و تقول بهمس متوتر: نعم، نعم، قبلني هكذا، هكذا هيا.
(1995: 104-5)

'So what are you blaming her for?', I said. He began to rub his forehead with his hand and said, 'Did I say that I blame her? All I said is that I love her.'

He fell silent again before saying, 'I've just come back from her house ... from the beginning ... I couldn't help it. The years of my entire life surged and all life was epitomised in one thing: I want this beautiful woman for myself. I want her here and I want her now'

- Then what? What happened?

- Nothing happened.

- How?

- I told you nothing happened. Don't ask me how. She was holding my hand in the cab, gripping it convulsively. I kissed her face and every inch of her and she was panting, her eyes closed, trying to get out of her clothes while in my arms, whispering tensely, 'yes, kiss me like that, like that, come on.'

(2001:112-3)

In the above example, the friend is explaining his inability to perform sexually with a girl that he really wants. The subject is very intimate and definitely one does not expect this interaction to take place in real life in SA. But the author/protagonist does not use any ECA at all. He is in fact laying claims to some of the indexes of SA, such as detachment and formality.

Meanwhile, in another interaction between the protagonist and a young Egyptian waiter who eventually turns to fanaticism, the author/protagonist also uses SA for the interaction. Note the following example:

(4)
سألت يوسف: و لكن ما علاقة الامير بذلك؟
الأمير افهمني اشياء كثيرة يا استاذ، اشياء كانت غائبة عني ... (1995: 224)

‘What does the prince have to do with it?’, I asked Yusuf.

- Prince Hamid explained many things, *ustaz*, things that were not clear to me.

(2001: 248)

When interacting with foreigners in general SA is always used. In fact, when interacting with a corrupt Arab prince, the whole interaction is also in SA.

(5)
ضغط على يدي و هو يقول: حمدا لله على السلامة. كنت مشغولاً عليك ... (1995: 160)

The prince repeated as he looked at me, ‘Thank God you are well. I was actually worried about you, but Yūsuf was constantly reassuring me.’

(2001:170)

One would expect that the whole novel is, in fact, in SA and that is why conversations are also in SA. Given that there are a number of famous prolific authors who choose to use SA only for writing as a ‘political statement’, one would indeed expect this from Bahā’ Ṭāhir. However, what is really of interest is that this is not true.

SA here is used as a detachment device by the author to reflect the feelings of exile and nostalgia that dominate the novel. The protagonist, in fact, fails to establish any sound and happy relation with any of the characters except both his children. There is not one single instance in the novel when the protagonist seemed to belong anywhere. He neither

belongs to the European country in which he resides nor to Egypt. His relation with the young European girl is doomed to failure. His friend ultimately disappears. The young Egyptian waiter turns into a fanatic. The Arab prince manipulates him to the utmost and stands for everything he hates and fights against.

The following are some of the interactions he has with his children:

(6)

- ألو يا بابا؟
- أيوه يا حبيبتي ... ازيك يا هنادي؟
- هلكانة من المذاكرة، و الدنيا حرّ جدا
- معلمش شدي حيلك يا هنادي هانت ... الإمتحان الاسبوع الجاي، مش كدة؟
- أيوة. إدعي لي يا بابا ...
- جانتني صوت خالد عميقا ووقورا و هو يقول بالفصحى:
- السلام عليكم
- و عليكم السلام يا خالد ... إزيك يا ابني؟
- الحمد لله يا بابا ... و انت ازاي صحتك؟ كويس ان شاء الله؟ (1995: 88)

-Hello Dad?

- Yes, love. How are you, Hanadi?

- Studying is killing me. It's very hot here.

- It's okay. Hang in there, Hanadi. The exams are next week, right?

- Yes. Pray for me, Dad.

Khalid's voice was deep and dignified as he said in formal Arabic,

- Peace be upon you.

- ... and you too, Khalid. How are you, son?

- I am fine, thank God. And you, how's your health? I hope its fine, God willing.

(2001: 96)

It is only his children that touch his heart in irrevocable ways. In a scream of hope and agony, the protagonist as a father and a man asks his daughter in ECA never to change, to always remain as innocent and as loving of life.

(7)

- خلاص يا هنادي. انا فهمت خالد انك تخرجي و تروحي النادي وقت ما انت عابزة.
- لكن طبعا لازم تاخدي اذن ماما ...
- بس كدة ... انت تأمر ... باي باي ...
- استني دقيقة يا هنادي
- أيوه يا بابا

- باقول ايه يا هنادي 'سكت لحظة ثم قلت' ارجوك يا هنادي.. خليك زي ما انت و اوعي تتغيري. (1995: 188)

- Okay Hanadi, I told Khalid that you can go out and can go to the club whenever you want, but of course you have to get your mom's permission

- Is that all? That's so easy, bye bye

- Wait a minute, Hanadi.

- Yes, Daddy?

- Tell you what, Hanadi. I paused for a moment then added: Please, Hanadi, stay as you are. Don't change. (2001:206-7)

Note the following explanation that comes from his son concerning banning his sister from going to the club:

(8)

- يا بابا اصل النادي فيه مساخر و فيه شباب فاسدين و انا ...
- اي حنة في الدنيا فيها ناس فاسدين و فيها ناس كويسين. سيبها تتعلم بنفسها و تحمي روحها ...
- اذا كنت انا الراجل بطلت اروح النادي. هي تروح؟ حضرتك حتدلعه زي ماما و تسمع كلامها اول ما تنزل لها دمعنين؟ (1995: 187)

'- Well, father, immoral things take place at the club and there are bad young men and...

- There are bad people and good people every place on earth. Let her learn on her own and protect herself ...

- If I, a man, have stopped going to the club, how can you expect me to let her go? Are you going to spoil her just as mom does and every time she sheds two tears? (2001: 206)

The explanation is in ECA, although the protagonist perceives that his son is also drifting away from him. His agony is escalated in the past conversation with his daughter, which as was said, comes in ECA. He lays claims to all the indexes of ECA including feelings of intimacy and/or harmony that are not present frequently in the novel. It is precisely because of his unhappiness and agony that he dies happily at the end.

The concept of indexicality can help clarify the use of code-switching and code-choice in this novel. As was established, the protagonist does not just use one code throughout the novel. This implies that the use of the other code is to juxtapose his feelings and attitudes. When he uses SA in dialogues which realistically speaking should be in ECA, he calls

upon the associations of SA in different contexts. SA is associated with formality and even detachment in the case of the protagonist. SA is used to translate foreign languages as when his girlfriend uses SA, which is supposed to be a foreign language. When SA is then used to depict the conversation between the protagonist and his close Egyptian friend it still denotes foreignness in the part of the protagonist. He is a stranger to himself as well as to his closest friends. The same code is used for two different contexts, but with the same indexes. On the other hand, the use of ECA is associated with informality and intimacy and both of these indexes are called upon when he converses with his children. The strangeness prevalent in the whole text is lifted from these short dialogues that are only phone calls and never face to face meetings. Thus, although his children are far in terms of physical distance they are intimate psychologically to his heart. He is also detached physically from his inner self and can only reach it by bridging a physical distance as he does in the case of phoning his children.

Indexicality is also related directly to projection of identity in the part of the protagonist. Going back to the concept of subject positions as developed by McConnell-Ginet (2004), the protagonist adopts a particular subject position with all people around him except his own children. This subject position is that of a formal distant acquaintance, even with his girlfriend. This subject position is expressed through the indexes of SA. Throughout most of the novel the protagonist has a problem in achieving reconciliation with his inner self. His last plea to his daughter which comes in ECA, and which entreats her never to change, is in fact a plea to his soul to reach for him and not to remain elusive and detached, despite his physical existence in a foreign land. His identity is—to use the terms of Bastos and Oliviera (2006:142)—both fixed and continuous. It is fixed ‘somewhere else’ away from his physical ethnographic existence, but it is also continuous because he remains until his death searching for his release of inner estrangement.

A broader view of code choice in dialogues: implications for further research

Using the diglossic situation as a linguistic tool to construct the identity of protagonists is a phenomenon worth investigation. Although this study concentrates on one novel, the phenomenon is prevalent in other novels. In the classic Egyptian novel, *al-Watad* (The Tent Peg), by Khayrī Shalabī (1986), we have a powerful rural illiterate mother who holds the family together, even though the husband is alive, he is never in the forefront; decisions are taken mainly by the mother. The mother’s

power is reflected through her language choice. Since in literature a writer can redefine reality with impunity, in the last chapter of the novel the uneducated peasant mother, Fatima, speaks in SA. The children reply to her in ECA, although we know that this could not have happened in reality. Because it would be almost impossible for an uneducated, peasant mother on her deathbed to start speaking pure SA, Egyptian readers also take this use of SA to be indicative of the power mothers have. Similarly, the son's reply is always in ECA since he does not have any power over the mother. Note the following example in which the eldest son tries to placate the mother by telling her not to take what his young brother said seriously:

(9)
-صلي على النبي يا حاجة بقى ... سيبك منه هو يعني الكلام عليه جمر ك؟

Invoke God's blessing on the Prophet, *ḥājja*, please do not think of what he said. He is just saying nonsense. His words do not count.

The elder son tries to calm his mother by asking her to invoke God's blessing on the Prophet and not to take heed of what her younger son said in moments of anger. He speaks in ECA. By asking her to pray to the Prophet he takes the initiative in the reconciliation that the mother seems to refuse by replying in SA.

The mother then starts telling her children her life story and her achievements; all this is done in SA.

(10)
-لقد دخلت هذه الدار وهي مجرد جدران..كانوا لا يوافقون على زواج أبيكم مني..و كنت وحيدة أبوى ... و لم أكن فلاحه ... فزرعتهما أشجاراً و خضروات..و قال جدكم لأبيكم كيف تتزوج بنت أرملة لا عائلة لها؟

I had come to your grandfather's house when it was just walls. They did not approve my marriage to your father. I was an only child and I was no peasant then. Since then, I have planted trees and vegetables. Your grandfather then asked your father how he can marry a mere widow with no family.

The mother calls upon the authoritative indexes of SA. Her language choice reflects her identity, which is that of a dominant authoritative figure. Code choice may, then, be used to encode solidarity or intimacy. That this is so is made quite explicit in another recent Egyptian novel, *Kitāb al-Rin* 'The book of Rin' by Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī. In this semi-autobiography, an old man embarks on a journey around Egypt in search

of his identity; code-switching occurs only once in the whole novel, and only once does the narrator use ECA rather than SA. This happens when the protagonist is faced with the ancient Egyptian statue of Senedjemibra in a museum. He then comments that this statue, to him, represents a long lasting friendship, familiarity and mutual affection. In fact, this is the first time in the novel we witness the protagonist/writer expressing these feelings towards anyone, whether alive or dead. He only feels solidarity with the ancient Egyptian statue. He then describes the colours of the statue vividly and comments that the colours were very fresh as if painted the day before. When he feels affinity with the statue he also finds his true self, as a result the word 'Ren', which means 'name' in ancient Egyptian, acquires meaning and life.

Conclusion

Despite the assertions by some linguists that the diglossic situation in the Arab world creates an uneasy relation with the self (cf. Haeri 2003), this study shows that diglossia can in fact function as a stylistic tool in the hand of authors. Arab authors may choose to redefine and reinvent reality, rather than reflect real patterns of language use, while still lending expression to sincere feelings and hopes. As a writer and an Egyptian, Bahā' Ṭāhir knows his tools well: living and writing in a diglossic community, in which authors and readers have several linguistic varieties at their disposal, Ṭāhir uses both to the utmost.

On the one hand, he employs diglossia to project the use of foreign languages, or to convey a sense of linguistic estrangement or 'otherness'. On the other hand, the language of his dialogues is cleverly crafted to model in detail the conflicting identities of an Egyptian in exile. For example, we have seen that by drawing on the indexical values of the respective codes, the author manages to encode varying degrees of intimacy between his protagonists in his dialogues. Ṭāhir is not alone in employing this device: other authors, too, routinely weave cues suggestive of closeness and intimacy between parent and child, or man and wife directly into their dialogues.

Associations with particular codes are not fixed, however: as I have shown in the example of the powerful mother in Shalabī's novel, a 'high' code (SA) does not necessarily project intimacy, but may also be indicative of the power balance between protagonists: In the example above, the son's subjugation to his mother's power is formally expressed in his use of ECA. The old Egyptian man in search of self addresses all people around him in SA and only the ancient Egyptian statue is addressed in ECA. It is also clear, therefore, that Egyptian authors do not

necessarily use one code or another throughout their dialogues but that a certain degree of variation between SA and ECA is not only acceptable, and perhaps expected.

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THE NOTION *WEAPON* IN ARABIC IDIOMS CHARACTERIZATION OF PERSONS AND OBJECTS

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The present study is a sequel to an investigation published in volume 8 (2008) of this Journal that discussed a group of Arabic idioms that have as at least one of their components a word denoting a weapon and that describe situations or behavior. Here weaponry idioms denoting characteristics and features of people and objects are examined in order to understand their semantic structure and motivation. Since the majority of the idioms studied have been collected from dictionaries, an attempt is made to present an assessment of their current use in Modern Standard Arabic based on Internet sources.

Arabic phraseology constitutes a substantial area of investigation that can lead in multiple directions. Studying different types of phrasemes – or idioms in a broad sense¹ – can help see how the world of the Arabs has been and is conceptualized through the language. In this paper I take up a different group of weaponry idioms from those considered in my previous article in this Journal.² The expressions I will present still have as one of their components a word denoting a weapon, but the meaning of the whole collocation is to express characteristics, features or qualities of people or objects, as opposed to those of situations or behavior. My overall goal, again, is to look at the part played by this particular group of idioms, and by extension other idioms, in the Arabic language's ability to expand itself by expressing figuratively a wider range of meanings. Furthermore, I wish to show how the new concept created from the literal meanings of the words of an expression is accompanied by many connotations and thus becomes more vivid and expressive.

Methodologically and theoretically I apply the same principals as in my first contribution. These principals are based on recent research in the

¹ It should be understood from the outset that the collocations I am here referring to as 'idioms' fall in some cases more properly into the broader category of 'phrasemes'.

² Ludmila Torlakova, 'The Notion *Weapon* in Arabic Idioms', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 8 (2008): 125–41.

field of phraseology in different European and non-European languages. While not neglecting traditional approaches, they draw particularly on the field of cognitive linguistics. As Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij puts it:

A cognitively based theory of idiom semantics would allow us to address all kinds of knowledge evoked by the concepts which are encoded in the lexical structure of the idiom, and it would not be necessary to restrict oneself to the literal meanings of the idiom constituents as the relevant source of motivating links.³

This study will stress primarily the semantics of the weaponry idioms considered and the motivational links between their literal and actual, phraseological meanings. An attempt will be made to summarize the connotations that accompany the new meanings acquired, based either on dictionary sources or on contemporary Internet usage. For reasons of space it will not be possible to exemplify all extensions of the meaning of an idiom, and some idioms will receive only brief attention. The variety of formal structures used in weaponry idioms will also be illustrated, and within a semantic category idioms will be presented according to syntactic structure. In order to facilitate comprehension of certain sections of this article, it will be convenient to review some essential postulates of phraseological theory that I rely on.

Phrasemes are collocations of two or more words that function as units of the lexicon of a language and whose meaning cannot be readily or fully deduced from the meanings of the constituent words.⁴ Idioms are phrasemes that demonstrate these characteristics in a stronger way than other types of fixed, lexicalized collocations, which is why they are considered particularly interesting objects for research. They do not form a homogeneous and uniform category of expressions, but rather an assemblage of clusters with greater or lesser 'idiomatic' meaning.

In the idioms presented here, which have been collected from different

³ Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij, 'Cognitive and Psycholinguistic Aspects of Phraseology', in *Phraseologie: Ein internationales Handbuch der zeitgenössischen Forschung = Praseology: An International Handbook of Contemporary Research*, ed. Harald Burger, Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij, Peter Kühn and Neal R. Norrick (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 2:791a.

⁴ Cf. Harald Bürger, Annelies Buhofer and Ambros Sialm, eds., *Handbuch der Phraseologie* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1982), 1; Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij and Elisabeth Piirainen, *Figurative Language: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), 31; and Kristel Proost, 'Paradigmatic Relations of Phrasemes', in Burger et al., eds., *Phraseologie*, 1:110a.

sources⁵ and which stem from different periods, the concept of weapon is used to build another concept on a higher cognitive level. The majority of weaponry idioms investigated here are based on images that are created by the lexical structure of the expression using known and essential qualities of a given weapon – whether it is the sharpness of the blade of a sword in ‘on the edge of a sword’ or the equal and regular shape of the feathers of arrows in ‘as similar as a feather of an arrow to a feather of an arrow’. Furthermore, the image is the basis for additional development of the meaning. Thus in the case of weaponry idioms given aspects, qualities and characteristics of the weapon or a part of it, which is a constituent of the expression, acquire new, more abstract and generalized meaning by moving from one frame or script to another ‘with the help of a restricted set of conceptual operations’.⁶ The new phrase expresses a whole spectrum of connotations that the equivalent single word or literal expression does not possess.

Such classes of idioms, in conformity with Dmitrij Dobrovol’skij and Elisabeth Piirainen’s theory, and using their terminology are ‘iconically motivated’. This type of motivation, according to them, is based on ‘similarity (in a wide sense)’ between the actual phraseological meaning and the literal reading of the expression creating the idiom.⁷ Idioms whose motivation is based on image form the largest group not only of weaponry idioms, but of idioms in general. It is important to emphasize as well that the meaning of iconically motivated idioms can be explained and understood ‘only if all parts of the image structure are taken into account’.⁸ This means that the semantic analysis should include not only analysis on the level of superordinate, general cognitive models but also on the level of concrete concepts and specific characteristics for every single idiom. Utilizing such analysis requires turning to different catego-

⁵ al-Maydānī, *Majma‘ al-‘amthāl*; al-‘Askarī, *Jamharat al-‘amthāl*; Ḥamza b. al-Ḥasan al-Iṣfahānī, *Sawā‘ir al-‘amthāl ‘alā ‘af‘al*; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Mustaṣṣā fī ‘amthāl al-‘arab*; ‘Abu al-Maḥāsīn al-‘Abdarī al-Shaybī, *Timthāl al-‘amthāl*; ‘Aḥmad Taymūr, *Kitāb al-kināyāt al-‘āmmiyya*; *al-Munjid*; Mahmoud E. Sieny, Mokhtar A. Hussein and Sayyed A. A. Al-Doush, *A Contextual Dictionary of Idioms*; Muḥammad M. Dāwūd, *Mu‘jam al-ta‘bīr al-iṣṭilāhī fī l-‘arabiyya al-mu‘āṣira*; Arabic-Russian, Arabic-English dictionaries; V. D. Ushakov, *Frazeologija Korana* (Phraseology of the Koran; summary in English), Moscow: ‘Vostochnaia Literatura’ RAN, 1996.

⁶ Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen, *Figurative Language*, 164.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

ries of knowledge. Only then can some broader conclusions be drawn.

Besides being iconically motivated, the weaponry idioms included in this study can be motivated by the use of the word denoting a weapon in its meaning as a symbol (as in ‘The pen is mightier than the sword’⁹). The motivation can also be a combination of both – based on the image created by the literal reading of the expression and on the symbolic meaning of a word. These types of motivation of the meaning of idioms, along with other elements of the semantic and syntactic structures, will be taken into consideration here in dealing with Arabic weaponry idioms denoting characteristics of persons and objects.

The idioms in the present study are separated into two semantic fields on the basis of their general meaning: (1) idioms expressing characteristics or qualities of persons and (2) idioms expressing characteristics of objects. Within these two groups they are arranged according to their syntactic structure.

IDIOMS EXPRESSING CHARACTERISTICS OR QUALITIES OF PERSONS

1. *Idioms with Genitive Construct (ʾiḍāfa) Structure*

- (1) *ṭawīlu l-nijādi* – tall, tall of stature (lit., with a long sword belt; connotations include: strong, brave, skillful at warfare)

The pagan poetess al-Khansā⁹, who later converted to Islam and is counted among the Companions of the Prophet, used this idiom together with the rhyming expression *raftu l-ʿimādi* – having a big and high tent (lit., with a high tent pole; connotations include: a leader, a prominent and respected person)¹⁰ in an elegy in which she mourns the death of her

⁹ The ancient idea, in this particular form, was put in the mouth of Cardinal Richelieu by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in his play *Richelieu; Or the Conspiracy*, act 2, scene 2 [New York: Harper, 1839], 52). See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_pen_is_mightier_than_the_sword (accessed March 5, 2010). Cf. the opposite notion expressed in the opening and succeeding lines of ʾAbū Tammām’s celebrated ode on the conquest of Amorium by the caliph al-Muʿtaṣim in 223/838 at a date earlier than predicted possible by the Byzantine astrologers: *al-sayfu ʾaṣḍaqu ʾanbāʾan mina l-kutubī // fī ḥaddihī l-ḥaddu bayna l-jiddi wa-l-laʿibī* (The sword brings truer news than [the astrologers’] books; // in its edge is the boundary between gravity and play). Cf., e.g., ʾAbū Tammām, *Dīwān ʾAbī Tammām bi-sharḥ al-Khaṭīb al-Tabrīzī*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbduh ʿAzzām (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1964–), 1:40.

¹⁰ Al-Mubarrad, commenting on the elegy, considers both expressions to

brother Ṣakhr. Together the two expressions praise Ṣakhr as a brave and prominent tribal leader. The two idioms are still quite often cited together,¹¹ and in this particular case it is obvious how used together they are still closely related to an early literary source. Thus it is possible to discuss their ‘intertextuality’¹² and the significance of cultural knowledge for understanding them. In *ṭawīlu l-nijādi* it is possible to see a blending of metonymy and metaphor – the long sword belt in the frame of ‘physical stature’ serves to replace height. Being tall in the popular understanding of warfare is often connected with strength, ability, skill, bravery and experience as a warrior. The meaning of the idiom is thus metaphorically explained by the association of physical stature, and more precisely height, with the concept of a brave, skillful warrior.

(2) *shāḳku l-silāhi*¹³ – bristling with arms, armed to the teeth (lit., fully armed; connotations include: threatening, irritated)

This idiom has a transparent and clearly motivated meaning. The literal reading of the idiom presents the image of a person fully equipped for combat or war. Combat is the source frame for the metaphorical expression of irritation, agitation, or menace. Bearing a full array of arms constitutes a warning or a demonstration of strength, perhaps in order to obtain something by force or in order to intimidate an enemy, thus avoiding actual combat.¹⁴

mean ‘tall’. *Al-Kāmil*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo; Maṭbaʿat Nahḍat Miṣr, n.d.), 3:49–50.

¹¹ Google (December 5, 2009) found 15800 cases of the first idiom and 15200 of the second; Yahoo (December 5, 2009) found 1310 cases of the first and 1150 of the second. The examples showed that they most often still tend to be used together. The numbers should be taken only as indications of relative popularity. It must be noted that when the number of occurrences reported of an idiom is quite large, particularly when it is in the thousands, neither Google nor Yahoo actually retrieve more than a fraction of the reported number. In the case of an idiom with somewhat over 4000 reported occurrences (*ʿaʿṭi l-qawsa bāriyahā*), Yahoo retrieved 1000 (March 13, 2010). Cf. n. 41 below. Moreover numbers may vary wildly from day to day. Google reported 385000 cases of *ʿadaqqu mina l-sayfi* on October 25, 2009, but found only 34 on March 14, 2010.

¹² Dobrovolskij and Piirainen, *Figurative Language*, 230–37.

¹³ Google (October 29, 2009) found 1890 cases; Yahoo (October 29, 2009) found 216 cases.

¹⁴ Cf. Saad Abdullah Sowayan, *Nabati Poetry: The Oral Poetry of Arabia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 38–39.

- (3) *ja^cbatu ʾakhbārin/l-ʾakhbāri*¹⁵ – a local gossip, full of news (lit., quiver for news; connotations include: worth watching or listening to, interesting, offering a great variety of news)

This idiom can be used for objects or things as well as persons, as numerous examples describing AlJazeera.Net show.¹⁵ It is related to the idiom (*ʾakhrāja mā fī ja^cbatihī*), which was discussed in my previous article on weaponry idioms, and which is widely used in political discourse for describing the behavior of politicians. Both idioms are well suited to perform their communicative and pragmatic functions. A quiver can be perceived as a container of many fascinating and dangerous things.

- (4) *ṣulbu/ṣalibu l-qanāti*¹⁶ – tough, with a strong will (lit., with a sturdy lance; connotations include: strength of character, determination, ability to resist, endurance)

This idiom should be seen in connection with idioms (7) and (8) below, whose literal meanings depict the opposite image and conceptualize the opposite idea – a weak, twisted lance means frailty and inability to function or resist. Conversely, the sturdy lance is metaphorically reinterpreted and a new meaning is assigned. The actual phraseological meaning of the idiom expresses positive qualities concentrated in the semantic field of the will to withstand and to fight. In order to understand these meanings, common knowledge about warfare and the characteristics and uses of weapons, along with, in particular, the positive metonymic significance of the lance, has to be activated. Idioms such as *shadīdu l-ʿaṣā* (with a harsh stick) have correspondingly negative meanings.¹⁷ The meanings of *ṣulbu/ṣalibu l-qanāti* are also connected with the concept of ‘warrior’ with all its elements or ‘slots’,¹⁸ such as mastering

¹⁵ Google (October 27, 2009) found 11900/21 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 826/11 cases. Almost all uses of the idiom come from the name of a ‘script’ that allows access to all kinds of news broadcast by AlJazeera.Net.

¹⁶ Google (October 27, 2009) found 6200 cases; Yahoo (October 29, 2009) found 913 cases.

¹⁷ Cf. Mahmoud E. Sieny, Mokhtar A. Hussein and Sayyed A. A. Al-Doush, *A Contextual Dictionary of Idioms: Arabic-Arabic* (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1996), 69.

¹⁸ ‘Slot’ is an element in a frame (knowledge structure or specific cognitive structure) or a scenario component. See Anatolij Baranov and Dmitrij Dobrovol’skij, ‘Cognitive Modeling of Actual Meaning in the Field of Phraseology’, *Journal of Pragmatics* 25 (1996): 411–14.

different weapons, maintaining them in good condition and the ability and determination to use them.

2. Genitive Construct Preceded by a Preposition

- (5) *‘alā sinni l-rumḥi*¹⁹ – very famous, having a good reputation (lit., on the tip of a lance; connotations include: brave, wise, well known and exposed)

Recent Internet sources show that this idiom is quite often used to describe objects and that the expression’s literal meaning is exploited heavily, although it is used in a metaphorical context. The non-traditional meanings are more likely to include ‘to show/display’, ‘to approach/be near’, ‘to proclaim loud and clear’. Both the traditional dictionary meaning and the modern meanings seem in great part, to be related to the way objects such as prey, booty and severed heads have often been displayed on the tip of a lance. Consider some examples:

*wa-yu^clinu [ḥannā] mīna fī ‘aḥadi ḥiwārātihi ‘anā kātibun wāqi^ciyyun rūmāntikī’ qabla ‘an yuḏīfa ‘anā wāqi^ciyyun ‘alā sinni l-rumḥi wa-fī wāqi^ciyyatī tajidu l-ramza wa-l-^uuṣṭūra.*²⁰ (In one of his dialogues [Ḥannā] Mīna says: ‘I am a romantic, realistic writer,’ before adding, ‘I am realistic to the extreme/a well known realist, but in my realism you will find symbolism and myth.’)

*ḥīna ḥānati l-sā^catu kāna l-mawtu ‘alā sinni l-rumḥi wa-lam yakun hunāka khiyār.*²¹ (When the time came, death was on the tip of the lance [near/obvious] and there was no other choice.)

*‘anā wasaḥī, ‘u^clinuhā ‘alā sinni l-rumḥ, wa-lā yuḏirrunī qtirābī min 8 wa-14 ‘ādhāra li-^uannanī wasaḥī.*²² (I am in the center [politically], I proclaim it loud and clear, and my close position to [what happened on] the 8th and 14th of March does not hurt me, because I am a centrist.)

- (6) *‘alā ḥaddi l-sayfī*²³ – in a difficult and dangerous situation (lit., on the edge of a sword; connotations include: risky, perilous)

This idiom occupies a ‘middle position’ between describing figuratively

¹⁹ Google (October 18, 2009) found 8190 cases; Yahoo (October 18, 2009) found 115 cases.

²⁰ <http://www.al-akhbar.com/ar/node/85349> (accessed October 30, 2009).

²¹ <http://www.minfo.gov.ps/Docs/safir3.asp> (accessed October 30, 2009).

²² <http://www.al-akhbar.com/ar/node/135646> (accessed January 10, 2010).

²³ Google (October 28, 2009) found 65200 cases; Yahoo (October 28, 2009) found 2240 cases.

the state of a person who is in a difficult, dangerous, even potentially deadly situation, and the situation itself. Moreover, examples like *al-raḡṣu ʿalā ḥaddi l-sayfi*²⁴ (dancing on the edge of a sword) and *al-taʿāmulu maʿa ṣaddām ka-l-mashyi ʿalā ḥaddi l-sayf*²⁵ (Dealing with Ṣaddām is [dangerous], like walking on the edge of a sword) also describe behavior. The idiom is extensively used, not least in photo and caricature captions,²⁶ since it offers a wide range of possible interpretations that are interconnected and allude directly to the literal meaning of the expression and the image it presents. Different, well known features of the sword are used in the process of metaphorisation of the expression as a whole. As Veronika Teliia expresses it, the meanings of idioms are diffuse,²⁷ and different aspects are realized in different contexts. The sword is thin, fine, sharp, dangerous and deadly: thus anything related to it can be risky, perilous or harmful. The mental image produced by a literal reading of the expression shows the absurdity of the situation and the extremely hazardous exposure of one trying to stand on the edge of a sword. Thus the source scenario or frame, when it is being used to conceptualize the target frame offers several directions of activating ‘relevant conceptual material’.²⁸ This is confirmed in practice by the use of the idiom in similar but different discourses.

3. *Neither–Nor Expressions*

(7) *lā li-l-sayfi wa-lā li-l-dayfi*²⁹ – good for nothing, not suited for

²⁴ <http://www.elaph.com/AsdaElaph/2004/10/15677.htm?sectionarchive=AsdaElaph> (accessed October 13, 2009).

²⁵ <http://www.alarabiya.net/programs/2005/07/10/14778.html> (accessed October 13, 2009).

²⁶ <http://www.alraimedia.com/Alrai/Article.aspx?id=119238> (accessed October 28, 2009); <http://www.marebpress.net/gallery.php?do=pic&pid=84> (accessed October 28, 2009).

²⁷ Veronika N. Teliia, *Russkaia frazeologija: semanticheskii, pragmaticeskii i lingvokul'turologicheskii aspekty* (Moscow: Iazyki Russkoi Kul'tury, 1996), 86. This idea can be compared with the principle that A. Langlotz calls ‘literal-scene manipulation’ (see below, p. 131).

²⁸ Dobrovol'skij, ‘Cognitive and Psycholinguistic Aspects of Phraseology’, 792b.

²⁹ Google (October 18, 2009) found 568 cases; Yahoo (October 18, 2009) found 68 cases. This idiom is often used together with one or two similar expressions that intensify and stress its meaning. For example: *wa-lā li-ʿatharātin min ʿatharāti l-zamāni* (nor for any of the mistakes of life) and/or *wa-lā li-ghadarāti l-zamāni* (nor for the caprices of fate). Cf., e.g., <http://>

one's job or duties (lit., neither for the sword nor for the guest; connotations include: weak, stupid, comical, not capable of doing anything right)

I consider the motivation of this idiom to be both symbolical, based on the symbolic function of its components, and iconical, that is, based on the image it projects. The use of the sword as a symbol³⁰ is common in both European and Middle Eastern cultures. A sword in the hand of a warrior is a symbol for highly valued personal qualities – bravery and courage, fearlessness and skill in warfare. The sword, indeed, provides a diverse range of connotations in a variety of contexts. Not only did skilled warriors have a special position in medieval society, the art of making a good sword was also highly respected. The second component in (7), the guest, as a single concept and related to the more general concepts of hospitality and generosity, which are among the most highly esteemed values of Arab society from pre-Islamic times to the present,³¹ has traditionally played a significant role in the ethical system of an Arab culture that developed in the harsh environment of the desert. Thus the literal meaning of the expression ‘neither for the sword nor for the guest’ triggers a whole spectrum of related images and interpretations based on cultural knowledge, experience and conventions. When the two concepts of the *sword* and the *guest*, each loaded with its symbolic and pictorial, iconic meanings, are set over against each other in a negative expression, a wide area for interpretation, supposition and conjecture is created. Considerable room for personal evaluation and judgment remains. Taken together, these things contribute to the rich expressiveness of the idiom, as well as to its pragmatic and communicative functions in different discourses.

Idiom (7) and those following in this section belong to a group of idioms that share the syntactic structure of two or more parallel negations. This cluster constitutes a readily identifiable phraseological

alghad.com/index.php?article=8717 (accessed February 21, 2010); http://syria-court.com/newstoprint.php?sy_seq=5445 (accessed February 22, 2010).

³⁰ See http://www.templ.net/english/texts-sword_symbol_of_power.php (accessed January 10, 2010); http://www.scootermydaisyheads.com/fine_art/symbol_dictionary/sword.html#Vollman (accessed January 10, 2010).

³¹ The pre-Islamic knight Ḥātim al-Ṭāʿī, who lived in the later half of the sixth century A.D., was considered the paradigm of this virtue, a fact reflected in idioms such as *ʾajwadu min Ḥātimin* and *ʾakramu min Ḥātimin* (both meaning ‘more generous than Ḥātim’). On him see C. van Arendonk, *ET*², 3:274b–275a, s.v. ‘Ḥātim al-Ṭāʿī’.

model.³² The syntactic pattern works together in a special and complex way with the inner form of the idiom and its actual meaning. The negative particle *lā* (or the verb *laysa*) is used before a prepositional phrase or a nominal or verbal sentence. The phrases after the negation usually express opposite or mutually exclusive notions, and thus through the disparity conveyed by *neither–nor* emerges the actual meaning of the idiom. It is in most cases predictable in its general semantic frame, but the exact meaning or its function in context has to be verified through contextual examples. Dictionaries of *ʿamthāl* (‘proverbs’, including idioms) of different Arabic dialects, as well as Internet sources, show that this phraseological model with all its potential is still productive, not only in Modern Standard Arabic but also in dialects.³³ Examples from Classical Arabic persist in MSA as well:

*lā fī l-ʿīri wa-lā fī l-nafīri*³⁴ – not good at one’s profession, good for nothing, does not know what to do (lit., neither among the camels, nor among the people)

lā yusminu wa-lā yughnī min jūʿin – useless, of little value (lit., something that does not feed and does not free from hunger, or as rendered by Pickthall in his translation of the Koran, ‘Which doth not nourish nor release from hunger.’³⁵)

Regarding the use of this structure in Arabic dialects, Anis Freyha, for example, gives twelve pure examples of the structure from Lebanese.³⁶

³² Valerii M. Mokienko, *Slavianskaia frazeologija* (Moscow: Vysshiaia Shkola, 1980), 40–75. Charles Fillmore, Paul Kay and Mary O’Connor advocate the notion of ‘lexically open idioms’, which is close to the idea of phraseological model, since a given syntactic pattern accommodates particular semantic and pragmatic properties. ‘Regularity and Idiomaticity in Grammatical Constructions: The Case of *Let Alone*’, *Language* 64 (1988): 505.

³³ Anīs Furayḥa, *A Dictionary of Modern Lebanese Proverbs: Arabic-English* (Beirut: Librairie de Liban, 1995), 552–68. See also <http://www.fosta.net/amthalshabia/allam.htm> (accessed October 28, 2009).

³⁴ Google (October 20, 2009) found 806 cases; Yahoo (October 20, 2009) found 1950 cases.

³⁵ 88:7. *The Meaning of the Glorious Qurʾān*, trans. Muhammad M. Pickthall (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Masri, Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, n.d.), 804. Google (October 28, 2009) found 214000 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 17600 cases.

³⁶ Furayḥa, *A Dictionary of Modern Lebanese Proverbs*, 552–55. There are

The following two examples are from Egyptian.³⁷

lā ṭabla wa-lā ṭār – neither fish nor fowl (lit., neither a drum nor a tambourine)

lā rāḥ wa-lā geh – of no significance (lit., [he] neither left nor came)

4. Idioms with Sentence Structure

(8) *lānat qanātuḥu*³⁸ – to grow weaker, to become frail, weak (lit., his lance weakened, softened; connotations include: no longer able to fight, with a broken will)

(9) *i^cwajjat qanātuḥu*³⁹ – to grow old (lit., his lance became twisted, crooked, bent)

These two idioms present almost the same image with a subtle difference in the literal meaning resulting from the use of two different verbs. It is possible to assume, however, that they remain in the same cognitive frame, though it is hard to prove this, since idiom (9) remained a dictionary item and is not used in modern discourse. Idiom (8), on the other hand, is used in MSA and allows us to define through the contexts we find it in its precise meaning and connotations. Both idioms are expressive and pictorial because their actual meanings emerge in the shift from the domain of weapons, and more specifically the *lance*, to the target domain, the evocative characterization of a person who is weak, old and unable to resist or fight any more. Consider this example:

wa-ft̄ kulli marratin yazunnūna ʾanna l-shaʿba al-filasṭīniyya lānat qanātuḥ, kāna yahubbu min jadīd. (And every time they think that the Palestinian people have become weaker, they rise again.)⁴⁰

numerous other examples of the structure used as part of a longer idiom (cf. *ibid.*, 627, no. 3514; Nizār ʾAbāza, *al-ʾAmthāl al-shāmiyya* [Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2008], 214–15).

³⁷ Mohammad El-Batal, *A Dictionary of Idioms: Egyptian Arabic–English* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban; Cairo: Egyptian International Publishing Company, Longman, 2000), 94.

³⁸ Google (October 27, 2009) found 2030 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 186 cases.

³⁹ Google (October 27, 2009) found 4 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 6 cases.

⁴⁰ <http://www.elaph.com/AsdaElaph/2004/11/21978.htm?sectionarchive=AsdaElaph> (accessed October 15, 2009).

In order to be useful and efficient as a weapon for defense and attack the lance has to be straight and sturdy. When it becomes weak or bent it is useless. Only idiom (8), referring to wear over time, is in common use. It is indeed also often used with a negative particle (e.g., *mā lānat qanātuhu*),⁴¹ thus acquiring the opposite meaning and strongly positive connotations.

(10) *ʿaʿti l-qawsa bāriyahā*⁴² – rely on those who know their profession, always ask an expert (lit., give the bow to its shaper [trimmer]; connotations include: to do the right thing, to be wise and clever, and to trust professionals)

(11) *ʿakhadha l-qawsa bārīhā*⁴³ – the right, deserving, competent person has taken charge (lit., the bow's shaper has taken it; connotations include: a good final solution has been achieved, things have settled down, the matter is in the right hands)

Idioms (10) and (11) are similar in that they both exploit the image of the bow in the hands of a skilled professional. They do not belong entirely to the semantic field of characteristics and features of persons, however, but are on the border between this and the semantic field of behavior. Both are mentioned in all major medieval collections of *ʿamthāl* and are currently used widely in a number of discourses varying from football to politics, though (11) is much less common. It is interesting that idiom (10) in particular survived and gained wide acceptance, despite the 'old' frame or setting of the literal meaning of the phrase. It can be taken as a good example of how successful the cognitive process of metaphORIZATION has been, the end result being a vivid and expressive idiom appropriate to a wide range of circumstances in modern discourse. The target domain is making sure that one entrusts important matters to someone who knows how to handle them, finding the right man. The source domain is weapons and their production or repair.

⁴¹ See, for instance, the interesting use of (8) in the official announcement of the death of the Syrian president Hafez al-Asad. <http://www.addustour.com/ViewArchiveTopic.aspx?ac=\ArabicAndInter\2000\06\arab102.html> (accessed October 28, 2009). Also in different contexts – Palestinian resistance and religious discourse: see n. 40, and <http://www.zanbaq.com/forums/index.php?topic=1090.0>.

⁴² Google (October 27, 2009) found 136000 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 3510 cases.

⁴³ Google (October 31, 2009) found 2770 cases; Yahoo (31 October 31, 2009) found 61 cases.

This process of the adaptation of an idiom to the concrete context in which it is used is quite similar to what Andreas Langlotz calls ‘literal-scene manipulation’, something he defines as an operation that ‘triggers a contextually motivated adaptation of the idiomatic meaning by adapting the literal scene for the purpose of coding the target conceptualization efficiently.’⁴⁴ Consider some examples:

*fi l-intikhābāt . . . ʾaʿti l-qawsa bāriyahā.*⁴⁵ (During the elections . . . choose the right person/s.)

yaqūlūna fi l-mathal ʾaʿti l-qawsa bāriyahā wa-ʾanā ʾaqūlu ʿindama targhabu fi l-istifādati min mawāḍiʿa qtiṣādiyya wa-maqālātin wa-buḥūthin wa-taḥālīla qtiṣādiyya, ʿalayka bi-qirāʾati l-riyādi l-iqtiṣādiyya. (They say in the proverb, ‘Give the bow to its shaper,’ and I say, ‘When you wish to benefit from economic topics and economic articles, studies and analyses, you must read *al-Riyād al-iqtiṣādiyya* [economic section of the daily newspaper *al-Riyād*].’)⁴⁶

Similar uses, mainly in titles, appear in articles on such subjects as sports, journalism, finances and health.

The following two idioms describe behavior that indicates certain characteristics and features of the subject/s.

- (12) *jaʿala l-zujja quddāma l-sināni*⁴⁷ – to do things backwards (lit., he put the [pointed iron] butt of the spear before the head; connotations include: to conduct oneself in an unintelligent way, not to be able to apprehend the real situation)
- (13) *ramaw ʿan qawsin wāḥidatin*⁴⁸ – they were united, in agreement (lit., they shot from one bow; connotations include: managing to do a difficult job together, demonstrating cooperativeness)

Neither (12) or (13) is used in Modern Standard Arabic, as Internet

⁴⁴ Andreas Langlotz, *Idiomatic Creativity: A Cognitive Linguistic Model of Idiom-Representation and Idiom-Variation in English* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006), 207.

⁴⁵ <http://www.14october.com/news.aspx?newsid=bc35233f-60d4-4e53-b669-48b75bea183d> (accessed October 28, 2009).

⁴⁶ <http://www.alriyadh.com/2010/01/09/article488096.html> (accessed February 2, 2010).

⁴⁷ Google (September 15, 2009) found 3 cases; Yahoo (October 15, 2009) found 2 cases.

⁴⁸ Google (October 27, 2009) found 6 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 1 case.

searches show, despite the fact that they are included in all major medieval collections of *ʿamthāl* and despite the similarity of (12), for example, to a very useful European idiom, in its English form ‘to put the cart before the horse’.

- (14) *jāʿa ka-ʿanna ʿaynayhi fī rumḥayni*⁴⁹ – very frightened or very angry (lit., he came as if his eyes were on two spears; connotations include: unpredictable, ready to fight)

This idiom is listed in al-Maydānī’s collection of proverbs, but no examples in context are to be found, so it is not easy to guess possible connotations or interpretations. Al-Maydānī explains this expression as being based on the metaphor ‘the flashing of one’s eyes, as a spearhead flashes’. The image built by the literal reading of the expression is quite vivid, and the comparative structure contributes to the transparency of the idiom’s meaning. Nevertheless it remained a dictionary item.

- (15) *ʿindahū l-sirru bi-l-miqlāʿi*⁵⁰ – who cannot keep a secret (lit., a secret with him is as if it were in a sling; connotations include: not to be confided in, unreliable, untrustworthy)

- (16) *huwa ʿawthaqu saḥmin fī kinānati*⁵¹ – he is my best helper, assistant (lit., he is the most dependable arrow in my quiver; connotations include: reliable, trustworthy, good friend)

Idioms (15) and (16) remain only dictionary items today. The images created by the literal meanings of the constituents are interesting and comprehensible. The metaphors are vivid and could offer a variety of interpretations and connotations if used in different contexts. But most likely because of the use of a rare word or an image picturing a little known situation, idioms (12) to (16), unlike many others, have not been reinvented in Modern Standard Arabic.

The next two expressions employ the comparative pattern *ʿafʿalu min*. In the first case the comparative is followed by a genitive construct and in the second by a noun + prepositional phrase. Collocations based on the *ʿafʿalu min* pattern and their semantic structure will be discussed in

⁴⁹ Google (February 22, 2010) found 6 cases; Yahoo (February 22, 2010) found 4 cases.

⁵⁰ Google (October 29, 2009) found 6 cases; Yahoo (October 29, 2009) found 1 case.

⁵¹ Google (November 1, 2009) found 6 cases; Yahoo (November 1, 2009) found 7 cases.

detail under the field of characteristics and features of objects, the subject of the following section.

(17) *ʾaṭwalu min zilli l-rumḥi*⁵² – tall and thin (lit., taller than the shadow of a lance)

(18) *ʾaḍyaʿu min ghimdin bi-ghayri naṣlin*⁵³ – wretched, miserable (lit. more wretched, more miserable than a sheath without a sword)

Both idioms, for reasons unclear, remain only dictionary items.

IDIOMS EXPRESSING CHARACTERISTICS OF OBJECTS

1. Comparative Idioms with the Pattern *ʾafʿalu min*

In this semantic field a significant number of the weaponry idioms under study exploit the comparative pattern *ʾafʿalu min*. They can be defined as fixed, conventionalized or lexicalized similes that have gradually moved into the realm of phrasemes.⁵⁴ But it should be noted that not all of them properly belong to the core category of idioms. Rather they fall into a continuum of idiomatic, less-idiomatic and almost non-idiomatic similes. Such expressions approach 1700 in number⁵⁵ in medieval collections of *ʾamthāl* that include *ʾafʿalu min* expressions. In addition, there are a number of dictionaries, meticulously put together by medieval compilers, comprising only similes of this type.⁵⁶ Among the great number of *ʾafʿalu min* similes that have as a constituent at least one word for

⁵² Google (October 27, 2009) found 10 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 22 cases.

⁵³ Google (October 27, 2009) found 0 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 0 cases.

⁵⁴ This question deserves a separate study like the ones done for French (Armand G. Nazarian, *Obraznye sravneniia frantsuzskogo iazyka: Frazzeologizmy* [Moscow: Nauka, 1965]) and Russian (Vasilii Ogol'tsev, *Ustoichivye sravneniia v sisteme russkoi frazeologii* [Leningrad: Izd-vo LGU, 1978]).

⁵⁵ ʾAmanī Sulaymān Dāwūd, *al-ʾAmthāl al-ʿarabiyya al-qadīma: Dirāsa ʾuslūbiyya, sardiyya, ḥaḍāriyya* (Beirut: Al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2009), 179.

⁵⁶ Rudolf Sellheim, *EF*², 6:821a–24b, s.v. ‘Mathal’. Qaṭāmish, *al-ʾAmthāl al-ʿarabiyya*, 39–122. Examples are ʾAbu ʿAli al-Qālī, *ʾAfʿalu min kadhā*, ed. ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Kurdī (Damascus: Dār Saʿd al-Dīn, 2000), and Ḥamza b. al-Ḥasan al-Iṣfahānī, *Sawāʾir al-ʾamthāl ʿalā ʾafʿal*, ed. Fahmī Saʿd (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1988). The text of al-Iṣfahānī’s *Sawāʾir* is in fact the same as that of his *al-Dhurra al-fākhira fī l-ʾamthāl*, ed. Quṣayy al-Ḥusayn (Beirut: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, 2003).

a weapon or object related to a weapon, I have found 17 that most likely characterize objects, in addition to the two mentioned above, (17) and (18), which characterize persons. Similes mentioning instruments that can be used as a weapon but are not primarily intended as such (stick, shears) have been excluded.

The weaponry vocabulary of these expressions is limited to well known medieval weapons or their parts or related objects – sword, blade, spearhead, bow and arrow. Like the other types of idioms with a constituent weaponry word, these similes exploit essential, familiar functions or characteristics of weapons – penetrating, piercing, fine, thin, sharp, sturdy, long. The meaning of the expressions is direct and tangible. In most cases it is easy to understand what kind of attribute is meant and why it can be ascribed to a potential subject (object or person) (comparandum,⁵⁷ *mushabbah*), which is not expressed when they are listed in collections.

- (1) *ʿamḍā mina l-sayfi/min sayfin*⁵⁸ – razor-sharp, keen-edged (lit., sharper than a sword)
- (2) *ʿamḍā min sinānin*⁵⁹ – sharp as a needle, sharp-pointed, piercing (lit., sharper, more rapidly piercing than a spearhead)
- (3) *ʿamḍā min naṣlin*⁶⁰ – sharp as a needle, sharp-pointed, piercing

⁵⁷ Given some variation in the use of I. A. Richards' terms for the main parts of a simile (topic, tenor, ground and vehicle), I make use of the Latin terms comparandum, comparatum, and tertium comparationis. These are unambiguous and match precisely the Arabic terms *mushabbah*, *mushabbah bihi* and *wajh al-shabah*. An overview of comparatives in general is given by Leiv Egil Breivik, 'On Comparatives in English and Other Languages', in Toril Swan, Endre Mørck and Olav Jansen Westvik, eds., *Language Change and Language Structure: Older Germanic Languages in a Comparative Perspective* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 51–73.

⁵⁸ Google (October 25, 2009) found 153000/87400 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 2390/220 cases. Of the variant without the definite article there were many repetitions and instances where *sayf* is the first member of a construct.

⁵⁹ Google (October 25, 2009) found 4310 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 169 cases. The use of this expression is very similar to the previous one.

⁶⁰ Google (October 25, 2009) found 770 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 13 cases. Many of the cases have a definite noun after *naṣl*.

(lit., sharper than the tip of a knife or sword, sharper than a sword)

- (4) *ʔamḏā mina l-sahmi/min sahmin*⁶¹ – sharp-pointed, piercing (lit., sharper, more rapidly piercing than an arrow)
- (5) *ʔaṣradu mina l-sahmi*⁶² – sharp-pointed, piercing (lit., more deeply piercing than an arrow)
- (6) *ʔamkhaṭu min sahmin*⁶³ – sharp-pointed, piercing (lit., more deeply piercing than an arrow)
- (7) *ʔamraqu min sahmin*⁶⁴ – sharp-pointed, piercing (lit., more rapidly piercing than an arrow)
- (8) *ʔadaqqu min ḥaddi l-sayfi*⁶⁵ – extremely fine, finer, thin (lit., finer, sharper than the edge of a sword)
- (9) *ʔadaqqu mina l-sayfi*⁶⁶ – extremely fine, finer, thin (lit., finer, sharper than a sword)
- (10) *ʔadaqqu min ḥaddi l-shafrati*⁶⁷ – extremely fine, finer, thin (lit., finer, sharper than the edge of a blade/knife)
- (11) *ʔaqaddu mina l-shafrati/min shafratin*⁶⁸ – extremely sharp (lit., more cutting than a blade/knife)
- (12) *ʔaraqqu min ḥaddi l-sayfi*⁶⁹ – exceptionally fine, thin (lit., thin-

⁶¹ Google (October 25, 2009) found 3740/1050 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 39/6 cases.

⁶² Google (October 25, 2009) found 92 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 13 cases.

⁶³ Google (October 25, 2009) found 3 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 6 cases.

⁶⁴ Google (October 25, 2009) found 7 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 10 cases.

⁶⁵ Google (October 25, 2009) found 563 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 52 cases.

⁶⁶ Google (October 25, 2009) found 385000 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 249 cases.

⁶⁷ Google (October 25, 2009) found 7 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 4 cases.

⁶⁸ Google (March 13, 2010) found 0/3 cases, all links to the same dictionary; Yahoo (March 13, 2010) found 0/3 cases, all dictionary items, including 2 links to the same source.

⁶⁹ Google (October 31, 2009) found 9 cases; Yahoo (October 31, 2009)

ner, finer than the edge of a sword)

- (13) *ʿasraʿu mina l-sahmi/min saḥmin*⁷⁰ – faster than an arrow/a bullet, (lit., faster than an arrow)
- (14) *ʿadyaḡu min zujġin*⁷¹ – very narrow/slim (lit., slimmer than an arrowhead/spearhead)
- (15) *ʿadyaḡu min ẓilli l-rumġi*⁷² – very narrow/slim (lit., slimmer than the shadow of a lance)
- (16) *ʿakhaffu mina l-jummāġi*⁷³ – exceptionally light (lit., lighter than an arrow without a head [used by boys to play or to train])
- (17) *ʿashaddu quwaysin saḡman*⁷⁴ – the best choice (lit., the best bow [for shooting] arrows)

Here, despite the limited number of weaponry similes, it is possible to notice an interesting characteristic of these expressions. They are predominantly grouped in clusters⁷⁵ of variants or elaborations on one and the same concept, which is communicated by the meaning of the adjective in the comparative form. In the case of the similes in such clusters the comparative adjectives are essentially synonymous and the words denoting weapons are few, representing the ones most used. Most likely this grouping in clusters results from the fact that the medieval compilers were gathering all established similes in circulation, whether in spoken usage, oral poetry or written texts. Their purpose was to preserve the treasure of curious, witty and eloquent expressions that re-

found 14 cases.

⁷⁰ Google (October 31, 2009) found 7210/5490 cases; Yahoo (October 31, 2009) found 238/193 cases.

⁷¹ Google (October 27, 2009) found 10 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 11 cases.

⁷² Google (October 27, 2009) found 8 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 15 cases.

⁷³ Google (October 27, 2009) found 0 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 0 cases.

⁷⁴ Google (October 27, 2009) found 0 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 0 cases.

⁷⁵ ʿAmānī Dawūd (*ʿAmthāl*, 189) gives a count of the largest clusters, for example, similes with *ʿasraʿu min* (faster than) come to 47 items, those with *ʿahmaḡu min* (stupider than) come to 44 items and those with *ʿahwanu min* (more insignificant than) come to 31. My personal counts are very similar.

flected directly and truthfully long experience with harsh desert life and tribal wars.

For some similes is difficult to know how and in what context they have been used. The dictionaries do not always give examples of usage, and sometimes only a piece of poetry is cited to exemplify their figurative use. But the very fact that these similes are included in almost all medieval *ʿamthāl* dictionaries suggests that many have obviously been employed in different types of discourse. An impressive number are used today, as Internet searches demonstrate, for a wide variety of pragmatic purposes. Some examples are:

al-sayfu ʿamḏā? ʿami l-sukhriyya? (Which is sharper, the sword or ridicule?) – title of an article that begins thus: *yadūru l-qawlu ʿahyānan ʿinna l-kalimata ʿamḏā mina l-sayf* (It is sometimes said that the word is sharper than a sword), and concludes thus: *ʿanna l-sukhriyya, fī l-qawli ʿawi l-kitābati, hiya fiʿlan il-ʿashaddu dhakāʿan wa-l-ʿamḏā mina l-sayf*⁷⁶ (Ridicule in oral communication or in writing is in fact wittier and sharper than a sword).

*wāqifun ʿalā širāṭin ʿadaqqa mina l-sayf*⁷⁷ (standing on a path finer than [the blade of] a sword)

*fa-kam min jurḥin wa-ʿalamin wa-kalimatin yakūnu waqʿuhā ʿashadda min waqʿi l-sayfi wa-khtirāquhā li-l-qalbi ʿasraʿa mina l-sahm*⁷⁸ (How many wounds, pains, and words strike harder than a sword and penetrate the heart faster than an arrow).

Some expressions in use on the pattern *ʿafʿalu min* have been ‘rediscovered’, while others are recent coinages. New cases appear in modern collections of colloquial *ʿamthāl*. Many also emerge in lists of *ʿamthāl* and sayings that appear on the Internet, and numerous examples in the present study come from such lists. They gain wide popularity through various Internet channels, for example, chatting rooms (*muntadayāt*).⁷⁹ A number of the above seventeen similes are popular

⁷⁶ <http://www.jamaliya.com/new/show.php?sub=4114> (accessed October 31, 2009).

⁷⁷ <http://www.fiqhforum.com/articles.aspx?cid=2&acid=338&aid=5442> (accessed October 31, 2009).

⁷⁸ <http://www.umluj.com/vb/showthread.php?t=12470> (accessed November 1, 2009).

⁷⁹ For example, several sites and chatting rooms used as a greeting for the beginning of Ramadan 1430 A.H. a ‘poem’ in which several ‘old’ and ‘new’ similes are put together. Cf. <http://alnumair.net/vb/showthread.php?t=111>; <http://www.3kalam.com/vb/members/11661-3.html>; <http://www.hdrmut.net/vb/>

and often used, most likely because of their easily recognized form and their expressiveness. The images, moreover, are easy to understand and easily applicable to different target domains.

The noun or the phrase which (in transcription) is on the right side, that is, the comparatum, is considered by the language community as the exemplification of or standard for certain features, qualities or characteristics. But in these similes the tertium comparationis is almost consistently an adjective in the comparative form, as in, ‘sharper than a razor’ rather than ‘(as) sharp as a razor’, and the standard is in fact surpassed, which lends great vividness to the idiom and generates a significant emotional effect.⁸⁰ The intention is not only to make a comparison or give an evaluation, but also to intensify or exaggerate the feature ascribed to the comparandum.⁸¹ Moreover, the weapon component adds strength and intensity, because words like *sword* and *arrow* have strong symbolic meaning attached to them.

Authors of collections of *ʿamthāl* were aware of the particular characteristics of these similes and grouped them in separate lists and occa-

t277914.html (all accessed October 31, 2009; only the first and last still available May 1, 2010). The poem, which occurs in a number of versions, reads on these two sites as follows:

تهنئه أزكى من العود الكمبودي (Greetings more fragrant than Cambodian oud)
 وأحر من شطة قودي (Hotter than Goody chili sauce)
 أدق من السيف (Finer than [the edge of] a sword)
 وأحلى من الكيف (Sweeter than being high/in high spirits)
 وأمتع من المطر (More delightful than rain)
 وأسمن من أمير قطر (Fatter than the Emir of Qatar)
 تهنئه أنعم من الحرير (Greetings softer than silk)
 وأوسع من مكتبة جرير (More spacious than Jarir Bookstore)

(‘Cambodian oud’ – agarwood, source of an expensive scent; ‘Goody’ – brand name of sauces and other food products; ‘Jarir Bookstore’ – large chain of superstores operating in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.)

⁸⁰ Cf. Anna Wierzbicka’s arguments concerning the extreme intensity of lexicalized similes that express the tertium comparationis with an adjective, and particularly those containing an adjective in the comparative form (‘Srvanenie – gradastia – metafora’, in Nina D. Arutiunova, ed., *Teoriia metafory* [Moscow: ‘Progress’, 1990], 139).

⁸¹ *ʿAmānī Dāwūd* expresses this particular effect of *ʿafʿalu min* similes, remarking that ‘they are made not only to compare, but to shock the receiver, to surprise him in order to awake in his soul contemplation, admiration and amazement’ (*ʿAmthāl*, 183).

sionally devoted separate works to them.⁸² For example, the author of one of the largest and best known collections of *ʿamthāl*, ʿAbū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, calls them *ʿamthāl maḍrūba fī l-tanāhī wa-l-mubālagha* (proverbs/similes coined to attain an extreme degree of exaggeration), and it is with this heading that he introduces his lists of *ʿafʿalu min* expressions for each letter. This intensification or exaggeration, it should be noted, is inherent in such Arabic similes, since they cannot be re-expressed idiomatically on the lower level of intensity ‘(as) sharp as a razor’.

2. Idioms with Adjectival Phrase Structure

- (1) *silāḥun ʿabyaḍu*⁸³/*ʿasliḥatun bayḍāʿu*⁸⁴ – cold weapon/s, cold steel (lit., white weapon/s)

This is a common expression that should not be considered a true idiom anymore, since it is the established term for weapons that do not ‘involve fire or explosions’.⁸⁵ It may be assumed that the adjective ‘white’ is used to suggest not the color but the shiny, well polished metal surface of the weapons.⁸⁶

- (2) *sihāmun ṭāʿishatun*⁸⁷ – false claims, lies, falsities, slander (lit., stray arrows; connotations include: bad intentions, irritating and false assertions, ungrounded accusations)

This idiom is connected with an idiom in the semantic field of behavior discussed in my previous article, *ṭāsha sahmuhu*⁸⁸ – to be on the wrong track, bark up the wrong tree, be unsuccessful, fail (lit., his arrow missed the mark). The active participle of the verb *ṭāsha* (to miss the mark, to stray) is used as an attribute of *sihām* to express metaphorically false, ungrounded claims meant to hurt or damage. The image created by the

⁸² See n. 56 above.

⁸³ Google (October 30, 2009) found 59800 cases; Yahoo (October 30, 2009) found 14000 cases.

⁸⁴ Google (October 30, 2009) found 43000 cases; Yahoo (October 30, 2009) found 11700 cases.

⁸⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_weapon (accessed February 20, 2010).

⁸⁶ Cf. Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 4th ed. (Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1979), s.v. ‘ʿabyaḍ’.

⁸⁷ Google (October 30, 2009) found 3040 cases; Yahoo (October 30, 2009) found 681 cases.

⁸⁸ ‘The Notion *Weapon* in Arabic Idioms’, 135, 137. Google (December 18, 2008) found 303 cases of *ṭāsha sahmuhu* and 164 of the variant *ṭāshat sihāmuḥu*.

literal meanings of the words, arrows being meant to disable or kill, is quite graphic.

- (3) *silāḥun dhū ḥaddayni*⁸⁹ – a two-edged sword (lit., a weapon with two edges; connotations include: the necessity of bearing in mind both the positive and negative sides of means or measures, the dangers of a specific means)

Idiom (3) appears only in modern collections,⁹⁰ not in the old ones. It is widely used because its actual meaning conceptualizes, not only the risky nature of a weapon with two sharp edges, but also the hazardous aspect of many means and measures that can easily prove more harmful than useful. This makes the idiom with its connotations or extensions useful in numerous different discourses. The idiom seems most likely to be of biblical origin, although the primary biblical meaning does not appear to be that of a weapon that might turn back against its wielder.⁹¹ While the concept of a two-edged weapon, of a treacherous issue, must have existed in Arabic, I suspect this idiom is a translation from English or French (both languages have versions in which the biblical ‘sword’ is replaced by ‘weapon’: ‘a two edged weapon’, ‘une arme à deux tranchants’). However it may not be possible totally to exclude an Arabic biblical origin.

- (4) *ḥadhwa l-qudhhati bi-l-qudhhati*⁹² – identical, deceptively alike (lit., as similar as a feather of an arrow to a feather of an arrow; connotations include: difficult to tell apart, undistinguishable, following/imitating someone)

In order to understand the meaning of idiom (4), background knowledge about arrows needs to be activated, namely, that for arrows to be effec-

⁸⁹ Google (October 31, 2009) found 260000 cases; Yahoo (October 31, 2009) found 114000 cases.

⁹⁰ Cf., e.g., Muḥammad Dāwūd, *Muʿjam al-taʿbīr al-iṣṭilāḥī* (al-Qāhira: Dār Gharīb li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2003), 310; Sieny et. al., *A Contextual Dictionary of Idioms*, 66.

⁹¹ See ‘A Two-Edged Sword’, http://www.gracecathedral.org/enrichment/brush_excerpts/brush_20050913.shtml (accessed February 13.02.2010), where ‘really, really sharp’ is cited as the original biblical meaning of, e.g., the Hebrew (Proverbs 5:4) and Greek (Hebrews 4:12) for ‘two-edged’. Cf. a number of other biblical passages.

⁹² Google (October 31, 2009) found 1550000 cases; Yahoo (October 31, 2009) found 16400 cases.

tive weapons they have to be made with extreme care and skill, which includes the precision with which the feathers are cut and placed to improve stability, accuracy and trajectory. This old idiom, which pictures something that for most people at present means little, is extremely popular today. Among the explanations is the popularity of a slightly misquoted *ḥadīth* of the Prophet about the Jews and Christians in which the idiom, apparently erroneously, occurs, as well as the various uses the *ḥadīth* is put to and the many Internet discussions surrounding it.⁹³ An example in which the idiom is not used in a religious context is: *lā yazālu l-sūqu yasīru °alā nasqi l-tahlīli l-fannī ḥadhwa l-quhdhati bi-l-quhdha* (The market continues to move *precisely* as the technical analysis predicts).⁹⁴

ONLINE CONCLUSION

Having presented weaponry idioms belonging to the semantic fields of characteristics, features and qualities of persons and objects, and having discussed their motivation, it is important to summarize some of the aspects shared with the weaponry idioms considered in the previous article and to point out some specific traits of the present group.

The constituent words denote familiar medieval weapons or their parts. In this group of idioms, again, basic, well known qualities and

⁹³ The *ḥadīth*, as cited by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), followed by Muḥammad b. °Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792) and subsequently popular in Salafī circles, has the following text: *la-tatba°unna sanana man kāna qablakum ḥadhwa l-quhdhati bi-l-quhdha, ḥattā law dakhalū juhra ḍabbin la-dakhaltumūh. qālū: yā rasūla llāh, al-yahūdu wa-l-naṣārā? qāl: fa-man?* (‘Indeed you follow the custom of those who went before you as the feather of an arrow resembles the feather of an arrow, so that if they had gone into the hole of a lizard, you would go into it too.’ They [the Prophet’s Companions] said: ‘O Messenger of God, the Jews and the Christians?’ He said: ‘Who else?’) See Muḥammad b. °Alī al-Ṣawma°ī al-Bayḍānī, ‘°Irshād al-mu°lim °ilā °anna lafzat “ḥadhwa l-quhdha bi-l-quhdha” laysat fī l-Būkhārī wa-Muslim’, <http://www.sahab.net/forums/showthread.php?p=726474> (accessed February 13, 2010). °Abū Hājar Muḥammad al-Sa°īd b. Basyūnī Zaghlūl, who had an enormous collection of *ḥadīth* works at his disposition, lists no example of a *ḥadīth* beginning with *la-tatba°unna* containing the idiom *ḥadhwa l-quhdhati bi-l-quhdhati* (*Mawsū°at °aṭraf al-ḥadīth al-nabawī al-sharīf*, 1st ed., 11. vols. [Beirut: °Ālam al-Turāth, 1419/1989], 6:568b–69a). I have not consulted the 4-volume *Supplement (al-Dhayl)* to this work (Medina: Maktabat al-Ghurabā° al-°Athariyya, 1994).

⁹⁴ <http://9i2.net/vb/showthread.php?t=15032> (accessed November 6, 2009).

applications of weapons are used to express figuratively new, more intricate and abstract concepts. This is how weaponry idioms contribute to the means that Arabic, like other languages, can use to expand itself and to express subtler meanings and connotations. On the one hand, the actual phraseological meaning of the idioms studied is based on the metaphoric or metonymic reinterpretation of the literal reading of the source collocation, or on a blending of the two. On the other hand, many of the idioms utilize the symbolic meaning of the medieval weapons, which is still clearly recognizable. It should be repeated that, in my opinion, the idioms studied here are to some extent more vivid and expressive than other idioms that do not have as a constituent a word denoting a weapon. Weaponry idioms exploit the inherent fear of and respect for weapons. Particularly interesting are the idioms/similes on the *ʿafʿalu min* pattern based on exceeding a certain standard, and thus exaggerating some given quality. They are generally elaborations on qualities of the sword, spearhead and arrow, such as sharp-pointed, piercing, cutting, razor-sharp, extremely fine and rapid.

Most of the idioms containing a word denoting a weapon have a transparent, readily recognizable meaning, though idioms with rare, archaic words are often exceptions. Still, in order to grasp the actual meaning of an idiom denoting particular features or characteristics of people and objects, one or more levels of knowledge have to be activated. The weaponry idioms addressed here, by and large, do not seem to be ‘culturally bound’ or ‘culturally specific’. Both the weapons and their qualities are well known across many different cultures and thus do not pose any difficulty for non-Arabic speakers. However, information about other constituents of certain idioms may occasionally need culture-specific amplification.⁹⁵

Idioms expressing characteristics or qualities of persons, including weaponry idioms, can be categorized from a semantic point of view into two groups, those with positive meaning and those with negative meaning. Some weaponry idioms (not so many) have positive meaning, denoting metaphorically positive features such as strength of character, persistence, physical strength, professional ability and cooperation.

ṣulbu/ṣalibu l-qanāti – tough, with a strong will (lit., with a sturdy lance)

tawīlu l-nijādi – tall, tall of stature (lit., with a long sword belt)

⁹⁵ See my remarks above (p. 127) on the concept of *guest* in the idiom *lā li-l-sayfi wa-lā li-l-dayfi*.

ʔakhadha l-qawsa bārīhā – the right, deserving, competent person has taken charge (lit., the bow's shaper has taken it)

ramaw ʿan qawsin wāhidatin – they were united, in agreement (lit., they shot from one bow)

Other idioms collected here have negative meaning or can be used in negative contexts expressing negative qualities and characteristics of human beings (normal for the system of idioms in every language). But by condemning unacceptable or repulsive features of character, they advocate those that are good and praiseworthy according to the standards of Arab society. Here are some examples:

jaʿala l-zujja quddāma l-sināni – to do things backwards (lit., he put the [pointed iron] butt of the spear before the head)

ʿindahū l-sirru bi-l-miqlāʿi – who cannot keep a secret (lit., a secret with him is as if it were in a sling)

lānat qanātuhu – to grow weaker, to become frail, weak (lit., his lance weakened, softened)

ʔadyaʿu min ghimdīm bi-ghayri naṣlin – wretched, miserable (lit. more wretched, more miserable than a sheath without a sword)

lā li-l-sayfi wa-lā li-l-dayfi – good for nothing, not suited for one's job or duties (lit., neither for the sword, nor for the guest)

Regarding idioms referring primarily to characteristics or qualities of objects, it is seldom possible to detect any similar division into positive and negative traits. Examples of exceptions, the first generally positive and the second negative, are:

ʔasraʿu mina l-sahmi/min sahmin – faster than an arrow/a bullet, (lit., faster than an arrow)

silāḥun dhū ḥaddayni – a two-edged sword (lit., a weapon with two edges)

Weaponry idioms denoting characteristics and features of persons and objects are used in a wide range of discourses no longer connected with the situation that produced the idiom. However, the context often exploits the literal meaning of the source expression, since such idioms are generally transparent and clearly motivated. As with the weaponry idioms studied in my earlier article, it has to be remarked that most of the

idioms investigated here can be interpreted iconically and symbolically. The iconic motivation is based on ‘the relation between the literal and figurative readings (both of the whole word string and of the single constituents or parts of the constituents)’.⁹⁶ The symbolic motivation is based on the same semantic features, but it is related to ‘only one single constituent (or more precisely, the concept standing behind it)’.⁹⁷ For example:

ʔaʕi l-qawsa bāriyahā – rely on those who know their profession, always ask an expert (lit., give the bow to its shaper)

ʕalā ḥaddi l-sayfi – in a difficult and dangerous situation (lit., on the edge of a sword)

ḥadhwa l-qudhhati bi-l-qudhhati – identical, deceptively alike (lit., as similar as a feather of an arrow to a feather of an arrow)

Symbolic motivation is particularly evident in idioms such as the following:

sihāmun ṭāʔishatun – false claims, lies, falsities, slander (lit., stray arrows)

ʔamḍā mina l-sayfi/min sayfin – razor-sharp, keen-edged (lit., sharper than a sword)

lā li-l-sayfi wa-lā li-l-ḍayfi – good for nothing, not suited for one’s job or duties (lit., neither for the sword, nor for the guest)

It is standard, as with other languages, to approach Arabic idioms primarily as examples of figurative expressions and to investigate the metaphors (or metonymies) that lie behind them. According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, our ordinary conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical and ‘we typically conceptualize the nonphysical in terms of the physical.’⁹⁸ Employing this thesis, it is possible to recognize that in many weaponry idioms the notion of weapon or knowledge of physical experience with weapons stands behind the nonphysical, less clearly delineated image expressed (e.g., *ʔadaqqu min ḥaddi l-sayfi* – lit., finer than the edge of a sword). On the other hand, some idioms in this group and their meanings suggest that they derive from a concep-

⁹⁶ Dobrovolskij and Piirainen, *Figurative Language*, 90.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁹⁸ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 3, 59.

tual construction rather than a concept based on actual experience (e.g., *‘alā ḥaddi l-sayfi* – lit., on the edge of a sword).⁹⁹ Clearly the first type is predominant with weaponry idioms describing persons and objects, as opposed to those describing situations and behavior, which were the subject of the previous article.

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⁹⁹ Cf. Dobrovol’skij, ‘Cognitive and Psycholinguistic Aspects of Phraseology’, 792b.