

“He Would Bite Them Really Heavily”. *Madjdihūb* Saints in Maḥmūd Maqdīsh’s *Nuzhat al-Anḏār*

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Introduction

The following article is based upon the work *Nuzhat al-anḏār fī ‘adjā’ib at-tawāriḫ wa-l-akhbār* by Tunisian historian Maḥmūd Maqdīsh (AD 1742-1813).² This work by Maqdīsh is a history of the Tunisian coastal town Sfax, and as such it includes a part entitled *Fī dhikr ba‘d ahl al-khayr wa-ṣ-ṣalāh min al-‘ulamā’ wa-l-awliyā’ al-mutaqaddimīn bi-Ṣafāqus wa-waṭanihā*. As can be inferred from its title, this part aims at providing biographical/hagiographical information³ on Sfax-based pious and righteous people as well as on legal scholars and saints. Among the individuals to whom Maqdīsh pays attention are eight so-called *madjdihūb*-saints (pl. *madjādhib*): Muḥammad ‘Abbās; ‘Amar Kammūn; Sha‘bān Zayn ad-dīn; Abū ‘Abdallah Muḥammad al-Misaddī; Abū l-Fawz Sa‘īd Ḥarīz; Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Djarāya⁴; Abū Maghāra⁵; and Abū l-‘Abbās Aḥmad at-Tādjūrī, three of whom Maqdīsh states to have known⁶ (Ḥarīz, Abū Maghāra, and at-Tādjūrī). The following article understands itself as an approximation to the narratives that Maqdīsh provides on these individuals. Focussing upon their “strange”, “odd”, “nonconformant” and “transgressive” behaviour as it surfaces in the narratives, it seeks to take a look at how this “strange” behaviour expresses meanings that are paradigmatically associated with “saint-

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² Born into a prominent family, the scholar, teacher, and writer Maḥmūd Maqdīsh received his education first at Sfax, then at the Zitouna-Mosque in Tunis. Because of lack of money, he then moved to the *zāwiya* of Sīdī Brāhīm al-Djumanī on Djerba. Maqdīsh furthermore studied at the Azhar in Cairo. He died in Qayrawān. For details cf. Maḥmūd Maqdīsh: *Nuzhat al-anḏār fī ‘adjā’ib at-tawāriḫ wa-l-akhbār*. Ed. ‘Alī az-Zawārī & Muḥammad Maḥfūz. 2 Volumes. Bayrūt: Dār al-gharb al-islāmī, AD 1988; vol. 1, pp. 13-15.

³ Cf. the term *tarādjīm* (sg. *tarājama*) “biographies” employed by Maqdīsh.

⁴ Al-Djarāya is said to have been a student (*tilmīdh*) of Ḥarīz; cf. Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anḏār*, vol. 2, p. 460.

⁵ Abū Maghāra moved to Djerba at some point in his life.

⁶ Cf. formulations such as: *min madjādhib ahl Ṣafaqus mimman adraknāhum; mimman ra‘aynāhu wa-‘arafnāhu min madjādhib al-waqt*.

hood". Particular attention thereby will be paid to instances where the strange behaviour of these individuals expresses that they were the possessors of a different kind of knowledge that set them apart from their fellow men and women. Finally, this article asks what socio-religious functions these individuals fulfilled.⁷

If the following article examines the material provided by Maqdish, it thereby does not aim at a full reconstruction and presentation of the lives of the individual saints.⁸ Its starting point rather is that the consulted material consists in texts about saints of a *particular kind* (i.e. *madjdhub*-saints), i.e. these texts in fact recount the lives of concrete individuals, but in doing so they have something to say about a *particular paradigm of sainthood*.⁹

The paradigm of *madjdhub*-sainthood

At the beginning, it is essential to stress that sainthood by definition gravitates towards the notion of *proximity to God*. Yet this proximity does not always manifest itself in the same way, i.e. there are different "paradigms" of sainthood. The so-called *madjdhub*-sainthood is one of these paradigms.

⁷ It will be important to put to the use of a better understanding of the here studied material the findings provided by Nelly Amri in her important study "L'homme de la terrasse" (cf. Nelly Amri: "L'Homme de la terrasse", in: *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, tome 220, n°. 4 (2003), pp. 487-526). Unfortunately, this lies beyond the scope of the article at hand.

⁸ I want to stress that the material is way too abundant to allow for anything but a *selective* treatment in the frame of this article.

⁹ For scientific studies which take up the topic of the *madjdhub* see e.g. Sergey A. Ivanov: *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*. Oxford [et al.]: Oxford University Press, 2008; John Ralph Willis: *Studies in West African Islamic History: the Cultivators of Islam*. London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1979 (Studies in West African Islamic History, Vol. 1); Azyumardi Azra, Kees van Dijk & Nico J. G. Kaptein: *Varieties of religious authority: changes and challenges in 20th century Indonesian Islam*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010; Richard McGregor, Adam Abdelhamid Sabra, Mireille Loubet: *Le développement du soufisme en Egypte à l'époque mamelouke*. Edition bilingue français-anglais. Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2006; Hermann Landolt, Todd Lawson, Institute of Ismaili Studies: *Reason and inspiration in Islam: theology, philosophy and mysticism in Muslim thought: essays in honour of Hermann Landolt*. London & New York: I.B.Tauris, 2005; Josef W. Meri: *The cult of saints among Muslims and Jews in medieval Syria*. Oxford [et al.]: Oxford University Press, 2002; Vincent J. Cornell: *Voices of Islam: Voices of the spirit*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007 (Voices of Islam, Vol. 2); John Renard: *Knowledge of God in classical Sufism: foundations of Islamic mystical theology*. Mahwah (New Jersey): Paulist Press, 2004; Arvind Sharma: *Women saints in world religions*. Albany: State of New York Press, 2000; Richard Pine: *Creativity, madness and civilisation*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.

Thus *madjdhub*-saints are certainly close to God, but they are so in a particular way. The central trait of *madjdhub*-sainthood thereby is well reflected by the term *madjdhub* itself: grammatically speaking, the term *madjdhub* is the passive participle of the Arabic verb *djadhaba/yadjdhibu* “to draw”, “to pull”, or “to attract”, i.e. an individual characterised as *madjdhub* is somehow “drawn” or “attracted”.¹⁰ More specifically, the term designates an individual “drawn close to God” or “enraptured”, i.e. the *madjdhub* represents a markedly *passive* paradigm of Muslim sainthood.

Evidently, this paradigm of *madjdhub*-sainthood would not have existed sociologically speaking, had not certain individuals been categorised this way. Of course, this categorisation has to rest on something; it has to refer to something “out there” to make any sense and be meaningful, i.e. a given individual must act and behave in a characteristic way to be recognised and categorised as a *madjdhub* – if individuals were *randomly* categorised as *madjdhub* the categorisation indeed would be meaningless. So what about the *madjdhub*-saints? What did people encounter “out there” when they had to do with them or saw them?

In the material provided by Maqdīsh one finds some narrative elements that more or less explicitly point to individuals who literally went through phases where they were “drawn” against their will and “enraptured”: “He (i.e. Harīz) loved to visit the righteous, living or dead, and he journeyed together with the people to visit the coastline-saints, and if they staged a *samāʿ*, then a ‘state’ and ecstasy would ‘take him’ until he finally could not contain himself anymore and have his feelings under his control.”¹¹ Or: “He (i.e. Abū Maghāra) often recited the words of the *ʿarifun bi-llāh* and thereby fell into ecstatic states [...]”¹²

Yet one needs to go further, for it seems that many individuals categorised as *madjdhub*-saints were not just fellows who were “enraptured” from time to time: their behaviour was *transgressive* in many respects.

One may refer to Frederick M. Denny at this point who while duly emphasising “how very wide a range there is in Islam for exhibiting piety”¹³ once stressed that “common run-of-the-mill piety is not the same as saintliness in the sense in which saints exude a special quality, a power, sometimes regardless of observance and nonobservance of the normal forms of

¹⁰ Cf. Frederick M. Denny: “God’s Friends:’ The Sanctity of Persons in Islam”, in: Richard Kieckhefer & George Doherty Bond: *Sainthood: its manifestations in world religions*. Berkeley - Los Angeles - Oxford: University of California Press, 1990; p. 72.

¹¹ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 455.

¹² Cf. Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 465.

¹³ Cf. Denny *Sanctity*, p. 72.

piety and morality.”¹⁴ This brings one much closer to what many people must have been confronted with in the case of the *madjdhub*-saints: the *madjdhub*-saints acted in somewhat “weird”, “strange”, “nonconformant”, and “abnormal” ways, and this seems to be an important factor as regards their categorisation as *madjdhub*-saints. In fact, with their nonobservance of the Law and morality many were not exactly the champions of what Houari Touati has called the “piété exigeante de ulémas.”¹⁵ Rather on the contrary, they as a rule “[...] rise up empty of any thought of religious prescriptions, command and prohibition, lawful and unlawful, or any of the ruling of the Sharia.”¹⁶ It has often been emphasised in the scientific literature that *madjdhub*-saints regularly “[...] showed [...] a taste for shamelessness, and a propensity for heretical pronouncements; and most displayed an inversion of social values [...]”¹⁷, and that “[...] they lived beyond the pale, violating all social conventions [...]”¹⁸ With their often more or less thorough violation of the normal social rules, many of them seem to have been some sort of “insoucieux profanateurs” who “violent les espaces sacrés, *hurm*-s, des mosquées et des appartements des femmes sans faire cas des interdits religieux et sexuels qui structurent l’espace sociale de la ville.”¹⁹ As will be shown below, this general leaning holds true for the *madjdhub*-saints portrayed by Maqdish as well, even if they appear to be rather “soft” versions of this paradigm of sainthood when compared to other cases. As a matter of fact, it is important to underline that generally speaking, one should not expect to find only the exceptionally “radical stuff” in their case. Many narratives about individuals categorised as *madjdhub*-saints suggest that they often simply acted in ways that caused their fellow men to wonder about them – and be it that they for the time being just did not know what the behaviour of the *madjdhub*-saints actually communicated; or why they had just said what they said. In any case, it seems that virtually everything about the *madjdhub*-saints gravitates towards the general impression of “strangeness” or “weirdness”; everything seems to fit together in this respect.

¹⁴ Cf. Denny *Sanctity*, p. 72.

¹⁵ Cf. Houari Touati: *Entre Dieu et les hommes. Lettrés, saints et sorciers au Maghreb* (17^e siècle). Paris: Editions de l’Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1994; p. 249.

¹⁶ Sachiko Murata: *The Tao of Islam: a sourcebook on gender relationships in Islamic thought*. Albany: State of New York Press, 1992; p. 112.

¹⁷ Michael Dols: *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992; pp. 412-413.

¹⁸ Ahmet T. Karamustafa: *Sufism: the formative period*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007; p. 151.

¹⁹ Touati *Entre Dieu*; p. 134.

But this “strangeness” is not just strangeness – it expresses something else and is associated with wider meanings. After all, one is talking about *saints*.

It is important to bear in mind at this point that the relation between acting “strangely” and “sainthood” is rather arbitrary (and accordingly has been rejected by some people). Thus if one recognises such individuals as *saints* (e.g. through writing a hagiographical text), these “strange” behaviours *necessarily* must be treated as if their relation with “sainthood” was *not* arbitrary at all. This requires for them to be *structurally related to religion qua symbol system* – otherwise their behaviour would be *nothing but strange*. This is what the narratives provided by Maqdish do, i.e. they connect several examples of “strange” or “nonconformant” behaviour that belong to the context of *human behaviour* with the notion of “sainthood” that belongs to a *religious or metaphysical* context.

It seems that using the theoretical and methodological framework provided by structuralism as a conceptual tool (among others) is quite helpful when it comes to elucidating how the ways in which the *madjdhub*-saints acted were seen to be an expression of particular religious ideas – and this for the following reason: When Maqdish offers texts *about “saints” (of a particular kind) or “sainthood”*, this implies that they “gravitate” by definition towards a certain concept or idea; a religious conviction. But “sainthood” is not just a one-word affair. On the contrary, it is related to a myriad of other ideas and concepts (closeness to God, miracles, etc.), i.e. dealing with “sainthood” is tantamount to dealing with “clusters of meanings conceived simultaneously.”²⁰ (We only have to think of everything that comes to our minds when we are asked to speak about sainthood.) Yet as a matter of fact, nothing can actually be *said* about sainthood and sainthood cannot be *expressed* literary unless in syntactical or narrative chains²¹, and it is precisely such syntactical or narrative chains that make up the hagiographical part of the material provided by Maqdish. The bulk of what he says – however differently this actually may be expressed – communicates exactly one thing: “This is a saint!” It seems that as against a purely philological treatment of narrative chains (*syntagmatic mode*), a structuralist outlook allows not to lose sight of the “clusters of meaning simultaneously conceived” (*paradigmatic mode*) that are actually expressed by these syntactic or narrative chains. This is important insofar, as it helps to focus upon that the single narrative chains and their elements are *structurally* related instead of seeing them as certainly interesting, but structurally unrelated bodies of text.

²⁰ Cf. Jeppe Sinding Jensen: “Structure”, in: Willi Braun & Russell T. McCutcheon (eds.): *Guide to the Study of Religion*. London & New York: Continuum, 2000; pp. 314-333; p. 321.

²¹ Cf. Jensen “Structure”; p. 321.

The here considered paradigm of *maḍḍhūb*-sainthood is a paradigmatic “cluster of meanings” in itself, and as such it likewise cannot be expressed but in narrative chains. Given that the impression of “strangeness” and “weirdness” is so characteristic of *maḍḍhūb*-sainthood, one may surmise that “strangeness” and “weirdness” accordingly will play a significant role in the expression of the *maḍḍhūb*-style proximity to God; that their “strangeness” (etc.) will be present when it comes to expressing central elements of the repertoire of meanings associated with the term *maḍḍhūb* (such as their being individuals “out of the world” (hors du monde)²² who not only renounce material goods, but also human rationality whereas this renouncement is not to be regarded as an expression of their *will*²³; their being *passive*²⁴ as against the *sālik* or “striding one” who is *active*²⁵; their having states and a knowledge that cannot be *earned* by the individual believer, but that are *bestowed* on them by God²⁶; their being chosen (*muṣṭafā*) by God; etc.)

At the end of this introduction it is important to underline that it certainly is impossible to comprehend the here considered narratives without elucidating how they merge the lived and the imagined world in one system of symbolical forms (as Clifford Geertz once said in respect of ritual).²⁷ Yet it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the individual *maḍḍhūb*-

²² Cf. Yazid Ben Hounet: “Analyse anthropologique d’un saint maghrébin: Sīd Ah-mād Mājdūb ou ‘l’individu hors du monde’”, in: *Insaniyat: Revue algérienne d’anthropologie et des sciences sociales*, N° 21, Vol. 7/3 (2003), pp. 61-85; p. 62.

²³ Ben Hounet *Mājdūb*; p. 69.

²⁴ It is worthwhile emphasising that several lexemes which express that a given individual has fallen victim to the machinations of the demons are *passive* participles like the lexeme *maḍḍhūb* (cf. e.g. the lexemes *markūb*, *maṣrūʿ*, or *maḍḍnūn*). Given that the proponents of a “legalistic” piety strongly emphasise that being a believer requires being *active* (cf. active participles such as *ʿābid*, *zāhid*, *sālik*, *murīd*, *muḥibb*, *muḍḍtahid*, *muḥāḍḍir*, etc.), this maybe helps to comprehend why some of them regarded the status of the *maḍḍhūb*-saints as somewhat suspect and dubious. It is as if the source that actually had caused the odd behaviour of the *maḍḍhūb*-saints remained a matter of concern for some people: Who or what was actually behind this behaviour?

²⁵ *El*² s.v. *maḍḍhūb*.

²⁶ Cf. Hassan Rachik: “Imitation ou admiration? Essai sur la sainteté anti-exemplaire du *maḍḍūb*”, in: Mohammed Kerrou (dir.): *L’autorité des saints: Perspectives historiques et socio-anthropologiques en Méditerranée occidentale*. Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1998, p. 107: “Le *maḍḍūb* reçoit, dans le divers ranges, toutes sortes de bienfaits et de grâces *sans aucun effort ni fatigue de sa part*.” My emphasis. For a critique of Rachik see Ben Hounet *Mājdūb*.

²⁷ Cf. Clifford Geertz: *Dichte Beschreibung. Beiträge zum Verstehen kultureller Systeme*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, p. 1987; p. 78.

saints and those who defended this paradigm of sainthood – and its concrete manifestations – did not live in a world of “pure meaning.” *Neither* should it be forgotten that the *madjdhub*-saints lived in a very real world with all this entailed such as loss, natural disasters, disease, poverty, political rivalries,²⁸ oppression, or war (etc.), and it is safe to assume that they could fulfil certain functions, or become the goal of several projections (i.e. when many people set their hopes in them (or maybe feared them), then because they were convinced that these individuals had a unique relation to God and that God acted and communicated through them in a way that only they could embody). *Nor* is one well advised to ignore that the paradigm of *madjdhub*-sainthood inevitably was caught in the relations of power that reigned in the religious field. The fact that *madjdhub*-saints figure among the individuals portrayed by Maḥmūd Maqdīsh certainly allows to state that the administration of and the commerce with the sacred were not monopolised by the legal scholars in 17th and 18th century AD Sfax, i.e. they were not congruent with the demanding form of piety characteristic of the latter.²⁹ Speaking with Houari Touati, the sacred spilled over the legal institution: “[...] le sacré déborde de part et d’autre l’institution légale.”³⁰ As holds true for the rest of the Maghreb at the time, the religious field was relatively open, i.e. it could accommodate diverse agents who were believed to enjoy some special relation with the world of *al-ghayb* (i.e. the “invisible”): “[...] son champ (i.e. the field of *al-ghayb*) demeure obstinément ouvert. L’accès aux sources divines y est vraiment démocratique. Aucun véritable obstacle institutionnel ou formel ne vient obstruer le parcours des candidats à la sainteté.”³¹

²⁸ Although it leads beyond the scope of the article at hand, it is an interesting question whether anti-Ibāḍī sentiments or Mālikī-Ibāḍī rivalries were projected upon some of the here considered *madjdhub*-saints. There is at least one passage on Abū Maghāra that points into such a direction (cf. e.g. Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, pp. 464-465). Maqdīsh even claims that some Ibāḍīs from the Wahbiyya built a *qubba* for Abū Maghāra in the light of the efficacy of his *baraka*. Cf. Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 467. As has been said, Abū Maghāra moved to Djerba at some point in his life, i.e. into the immediate environment of the Ibāḍīs. For the Wahbiyya see Muḥammad al-Marīmi: *Ibāḍiyyat ḡazirat Ġirba khilāl al-‘aṣr al-ḥadīth*. Tūnis: Kulliyyat al-ādāb wa-l-funūn wa-l-insāniyyāt bi-Manūba & Dār al-djanūb li-n-naṣhr, 2005).

²⁹ I do not wish to imply, of course, that legal scholars are some sort of “natural enemies” of *madjdhub* sainthood (cf. below). Many of them were very open as regards different forms of religious experience.

³⁰ Cf. Touati *Entre Dieu*, p. 133.

³¹ Cf. Touati *Entre Dieu*, p. 133. In case of the here considered individuals, such an absence of institutional or formal obstacles is corroborated by that none of them seems to have received any formal religious education. On the contrary, systematic and formal theological knowledge must have been rather limited in their

But even if diverse agents – among them the *madjdhub*-saints – could be accommodated within the religious field and structurally related to the religion symbol system, this does not imply that the particular expression of this relation was *withdrawn from critique*, for, evidently, according to one's position in the religious field and one's notion of belief, one does not necessarily have to regard *any* such relation as legitimate. Thus at times, the paradigm of *madjdhub*-sainthood certainly had to stand its ground within the religious field. Not only are there hints about people who allegedly “feigned” to be *madjdhub*-saints (cf. the lexemes *taşannuʿ* and *talbis*),³² but – which is much more important – one also finds evidence for the fact that *madjdhub*-saints sometimes were contested by agents in the religious field who upheld a conception of the “proximity to God” radically different from what they saw in the *madjdhub*-saints. For such agents, individual *madjdhub*-saints either were “mad” or “possessed”. In either case, according to such critics, their behaviour did not express “proximity to God”, but rather its opposite. By the way of example, Touati writes about the attitude of the Algerian legal scholar ʿAbd al-Karim Lafgūn towards a *madjdhub* who lived in Lafgūn's hometown Constantine: “Aux yeux de pointilleux docteur, l'homme est un fou, il n'y a pas de doute.”³³ According to Lafgūn, the infringements of the Law of this individual made that it was “loin de la Présence divine et en dehors du cercle de la sainteté et de la proximité [divine]”.³⁴

It is obvious, though, that the concrete expression of *madjdhub*-sainthood – i.e. their “weird” or “nonconformant” behavior – in many instances could be associated with important religious ideas so well and so stringently that their behaviour not only gained in legitimacy, but that they often truly *were* shining embodiments of very substantial thoughts.³⁵ In fact, they often “[...] were tolerated, even admired, especially on account of

case. The case of Abū Maghāra is illustrative in this respect: “He then started to learn the letters (of the alphabet) until he was experienced in them (*tamarrana ʿalayhā*) and (somehow) figured out how to write (*istakhradja l-khatt*) in very much the same way as children do, (and) without there being anyone who would have called upon him to do so – rather it was (some sort of) a divine drive (?) (*bal sawq ilāhī*).” (Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, pp. 462-463). This passage suggests that no one really cared for Abū Maghāra – he taught *himself* how to write, and obviously he used to jot down what meant something to him in rather random fashion. This contrasts sharply and in every respect with the systematical acquisition of religious knowledge on the part of the legal scholars whose educational careers Maqdīsh details in his work – in their case, teachers, books studied, positions occupied (etc.) are meticulously detailed.

³² Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 454.

³³ Touati *Entre Dieu*, p. 135.

³⁴ Touati *Entre Dieu*, p. 135.

³⁵ Cf. also Amri *L'Homme de la terrasse*, pp. 503-505.

their total disregard for this world and their readiness to admonish their fellow citizens, particularly the wealthy and the powerful, against negligence of the hereafter.”³⁶ A good example in this respect is the *madjdhub* Ḥarīz. (“Outwardly”) Ḥarīz was certainly “weird”: “[H]e had not evolved from the way children behave (*lam yantaqil ‘an akhlāqi ṣ-ṣibyān*). He was neither able to change his dirty clothes nor remove the dirt which clung to him, but his sister took care of all of his needs as if she was taking care of a child’s needs.” Yet obviously this “weirdness” expresses something more substantial: “And maybe both women and men from among the charitable people (*ahl al-khayr*) would [...] wash his feet or remove the thorns from them, for he never wore sandals; and they would comb his hair, for he neither wore a cap (*qalansuwa*). And whomever he (i.e. Ḥarīz) asked to remove some piece of thorn from his feet, rejoiced in that *even if he (i.e. the person who removes the thorn) belonged to those of rank (dhawū al-aqdār) [...]*.”³⁷ The great interest of the latter remark stems from that it almost immediately reminds of Victor Turner’s theoretical concept of *anti-structure* or *communitas*.³⁸ Manifestly, an element of the “weird” behaviour displayed by Ḥarīz – i.e. walking barefoot – here opens up something like a breach of *anti-structure* or *communitas*. The fact that “even those of rank” (*dhawū al-aqdār*) considered themselves lucky when they were able to remove a thorn from the (dirty) feet of this *madjdhub*-saint implies that *the presence of Ḥarīz entails an inversion or suspension of the social hierarchies and positions*. This well fits Maqdīsh’s remark that Ḥarīz “[...] treated exactly alike the old and the young; the free and the slaves; men and women; the rich and the poor and those who were close to him (or: his relatives) and those who were not (*al-qarīb wa-l-ba‘īd*)”³⁹ – here society in fact is “pictured as a *communitas* of free and equal comrades [...]”.⁴⁰ Thus the “weird” and “nonconformant” quality of Ḥarīz’s behaviour expresses that he did not form part of the “normal” social games of rank: he did not strive for a favourable structural position – and that associates him with the more general notion that closeness to God requires *estrangement* from this world; requires *abandoning* (the trumps of) this world. The narrative chain constructs Ḥarīz as an individual who realises and brings to light a most central conviction of the Islamic religion: *all are equal* in the sense that all creation is “poor” and in “profound needi-

³⁶ Karamustafa *Sufism*, p. 151.

³⁷ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 456; my emphasis.

³⁸ Cf. Victor Turner: *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors. Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1975. For a definition of *communitas* see (e.g.) p. 237.

³⁹ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 455.

⁴⁰ Turner *Fields*, p. 238.

ness”,⁴¹ and there is only *one* Lord. And it is to Him alone that respect and devotion has to be paid – and *not* to the socially powerful. Thus, it is precisely the somewhat “weird” and socially completely irreverent behaviour of Ḥarīz that brings out a central religious conviction: Ḥarīz is like a small island of something much bigger and substantial, and by doing what he does, he subverts the social games that make forget this “higher” religious truth.⁴²

In the following pages, the focus will be on several narrative chains provided by Maḥmūd Maqḍīsh where the – by definition – weird” and “non-conformant” behaviour of the *maḍjdhūb*-saints expresses that they are the possessors of *a different kind of knowledge* which bestowed upon them what Amri has termed a “terrible power”.⁴³ This requires to first turn to the *maḍjdhūb*-saints as “strange fellows.”

The *maḍjdhūb* as a strange fellow

As has been said, it seems that the categorisation – and thus recognition – of an individual as a *maḍjdhūb* first and foremost rested upon the precondition that the individual in question was perceived as a more or less *strange fellow* who displayed forms of behaviour that according to the social categories of perception were conspicuously *weird*, *strange*, and *abnormal*. This perception of “strangeness” holds true for the *maḍjdhūb* described by Maqḍīsh as well. To begin with, they obviously went through moments or spans of times during which they were “enraptured.”⁴⁴ By the way of example, ‘Amar Kammūn “became like out of his wits (*walhān*)” in one situation; Al-Djarāyā once “was like disturbed and agitated (*ka-l-walhān*) and he was talking with words that no one could understand, and his mouth was covered with foam like a camel in rut.”⁴⁵ Apart from such moments or spans of time, it seems that their physical appearance and behaviour more generally speaking were somewhat “odd” and “weird”. To give a few examples: At-Tādjūrī on his

⁴¹ Cf. Jon Hoover: *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*. Leiden et al.: Brill, 2007; p. 29.

⁴² It is worthwhile stressing that, on their part, “those of rank” who remove the thorns from Ḥarīz’s feet, engage in a behaviour that implies (temporal) estrangement from the world of *structure* (in Turner’s sense). Thus, socially speaking, they step out of who they “are” – and they are doing what Victor Turner considered to be most important in respect of ritual: they are “passing across a threshold or frontier” Cf. Ronald L. Grimes: “Ritual”, in: Willi Braun & Russell T. McCutcheon: *Guide to the Study of Religion*. London & New York: Continuum, 2009 (reprint); pp. 259-270; p. 264.

⁴³ Cf. Amri *L’Homme de la terrasse*, p. 500.

⁴⁴ For Ḥarīz and Abū Maghāra see above.

⁴⁵ Maqḍīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 460.

part was “bareheaded (*makshūf ar-ra’s*) and did not wear shoes (*ḥāfi ar-riḍjl*),⁴⁶ and often he “wore nothing but a bathhouse-towel” (*kathīran mā yattaziru wa-yataraddā bi-fūṭ al-ḥammām*);⁴⁷ sometimes he “shaved all the hair of his head, his chin and his moustache until not a single hair remained on them.”⁴⁸ To walk barefoot is underlined by Maqdīsh in respect of other *madjdhub*-saints as well. Thus al-Djarāya “walked without sandals”. Yet he was very cleanly: “He – may God have mercy on him! – was likeable (*khafif ar-rūḥ ‘alā an-nafs*); with few provisions (*khafif al-ma’ūna*) and handsome. Upon him was an additional light, and he was very cleanly. He walked without sandals, but nothing of the dirt from the streets clung to his feet, and if this rarely happened, he hastened to wash it off in an attempt to preserve the properness of his outer appearance, and likewise he was preserving the properness of his interior.”⁴⁹ Ḥarīz also “never wore sandals.”⁵⁰ At-Tādjūrī is said to have spent much of his time on the roofs of the bathhouses and their ovens.⁵¹ Abū Maghāra did not hesitate to walk into the market more or less naked wearing nothing but a cloth covering his private parts, and it is mentioned that filth and lice clung to him.⁵² Itch, lice, and ants are also mentioned in respect of at-Tādjūrī.⁵³ Abū Maghāra furthermore lived in a cave, which he had dug for himself in the graveyard (which explains his name).⁵⁴ Ḥarīz obviously went into the homes of people whom he loved without asking for their permission: “He had some special beloved ones (*aḥibba makḥṣūṣūn*), who went to see him and whose houses he entered, regardless if they were at home or nor (lit. if they were absent or present).”⁵⁵ Evidently, he even “entered the bed” of another man.⁵⁶ Ḥarīz furthermore was known for striking (*yaḍribuhū ḍarba aw ḍarbatayn aw thalāthan*) and even biting (*wad-ya’aḍḍuhū ‘aḍḍan shadidan*) some people (cf. below).⁵⁷ Obviously, some of the *madjdhub*-saints furthermore had a penchant for wandering around at night. Thus, we read about Ḥarīz: “He (further) was the ‘inspector of the town’ (*ṣāhib dark al-balad*), and sometimes someone got up at night and found him patrolling on top of the city walls or standing be-

⁴⁶ Cf. Rachik *Imitation*, p. 109.

⁴⁷ For *madjdhub* who wore nothing at all cf. Rachik *Imitation*, p. 110.

⁴⁸ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 468.

⁴⁹ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 461.

⁵⁰ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 456.

⁵¹ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 468.

⁵² Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 463.

⁵³ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 470.

⁵⁴ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 463.

⁵⁵ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 455.

⁵⁶ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, pp. 459-460 (cf. also below).

⁵⁷ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 455.

tween two of its merlons [...].”⁵⁸ Abnormal (*khāridj* ‘*an al-mu‘tād*) behaviour also surfaces in relation with eating habits. Thus, at-Tād̲jūrī is said to have had some rather odd habits in this respect, and a man acquainted with him tells: “Whenever he stayed at my place, he did not eat a thing from the delicious food; and maybe he spent some ten days or more without eating or drinking and did not move from the spot; [...] and sometimes he ate and drank abnormally much.”⁵⁹ At-Tād̲jūrī also made a strange impression by the way he walked: “[...] maybe he walked like a man in chains (*mashā kamashy al-muqayyad*) and did not say a single word.”⁶⁰ In two cases, a certain strangeness furthermore is suggested insofar, as the respective individuals are portrayed as having no sexual interest in women. Thus, about Ḥarīz is stated: “[H]e was one of those by whose hand and tongue the Muslims were not hurt (*li-annahū mimman salima l-muslimūna min yadihi wa-lisānihi*)⁶¹ and he abstained from the property and the women who belonged to the people (*zahida fīmā fī aydi n-nāsi min mālin wa-ḥarīmin*) – women and stones meant the same to him, for he was chaste and there was no lust in either his penis or his eye or his hand or his heart and he looked at a beautiful woman the same way he looked at an ugly one, not making any difference between them except by virtue of *ṭā‘a* ‘obedience’⁶² [...]”⁶³ The information given about al-Misaddī points into a similar direction: “His family married him, but he refused; thus, they contracted (a marriage) (*‘aqadū*), celebrated the wedding and made the bride spend the night with him (*bayyatū ma‘ahū z-zawḍja*). But he did not touch her (lit. turn to her) despite her best efforts to seduce him (*ma‘a kathrat al-murāwada minhā lahū*); after that she returned to her family.”⁶⁴

A recurring topic furthermore is the way the *madjādhib* used to speak – if they spoke at all. Thus, Abū Maghāra in one instance is said to have “spoke[n] more ever more ungrammatical stuff” (*zāda fī l-kalām laghwan*).⁶⁵ Abū Maghāra also used to scream in the market (*ṣarakha fī l-aswāq*) from

⁵⁸ Maqḍīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 457.

⁵⁹ Maqḍīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 468.

⁶⁰ Maqḍīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 468.

⁶¹ This is an allusion to the famous *ḥadīth*: “*al-muslim man salima l-muslimūna min lisānihi wa-yadihi* [...]” Cf. e.g. al-Bukhārī: *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-īmān*, Chapter 4, No. 10. For this reason, Ḥarīz could easily enter the homes of those whom he loved “without permission”: “nonconformant” and “transgressive” behaviour expresses or makes visible *religious quality* here (cf. the *ḥadīth*).

⁶² A religiously most virtuous behaviour, to be sure.

⁶³ Maqḍīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, pp. 456-457.

⁶⁴ Maqḍīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 454.

⁶⁵ Maqḍīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, pp. 463-464.

time to time.⁶⁶ In respect of Ḥarīz, too, articulation problems are mentioned: “He (already) grew up as a *madjdhub* and with a ‘tied tongue’ due to a ‘natural knot (in his tongue)’ (*ma‘qūl al-lisān bi-‘uqdat ṭabrī‘a*).”⁶⁷ Similarly, Maqdīsh states about al-Misaddī that “he had a tied tongue (*ma‘qūl al-lisān*) and spoke only very little and in a very vague way (*ghayr wāḍiḥ ad-dalāla*), and he was only understood by those who were constantly around him (*yafhamuhū man lāzamahū*).”⁶⁸ Al-Djarāya at a certain time in his life obviously had a “sealed mouth and only talked in gestures (*lā yatakallam illā ramzan*).”⁶⁹ On the other hand, some *madjdhub*-saints sometimes obviously said things, but no one knew *why* they had actually said them, i.e. they uttered sentences or single words that totally lacked (or seemed to lack) context. Other incidences also have a markedly strange flavour about them. Thus, in case of at-Tādjūrī, it is explicitly stated that he was in a really strange situation in regards to ants (*wa-sha’n an-naml ma‘ahū gharīb*): “They (i.e. the ants) kept gathering all over his body until it (lit. his body) became black and nothing of it (lit. his body) remained visible.”⁷⁰ Even if the above given overlook is far from exhaustive, it nevertheless allows to state that there is good evidence for that most of the *madjdhub*-saints described by Maqdīsh were individuals who left the overall impression of being somewhat “strange” and “odd”.

In the sense of a side remark it can be stated that there are some hints at that the *madjdhub*-saints – as the “strange fellows” they were – from time to time obviously attracted mean or cruel behaviour on the part of their social environment, i.e. sometimes a position of social *weakness* flashes up in the texts, and their strangeness appears as some sort of *stigma*. Maybe the most telling evidence for this are two remarks by Maqdīsh about the suffering such individuals underwent on the part of the local children. Thus, he writes about Ḥarīz that “he used to play with the children of the Muslims – even if they hurt him (*wa-law ādhawhu*) [...]”⁷¹ Another passage is more explicit in this respect: “Shaykh Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Ghurāb, a

⁶⁶ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 463.

⁶⁷ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 454. As regards Ḥarīz, it is essential to underline, though, that his articulation problems are said to have *disappeared* during spans of time that might be characterised as *liminal*: “Occasionally, he utters something at the time before daybreak, or in the middle of the night on the town wall, and during *khalawāt* (i.e. phases of seclusion); then he speaks like the ‘*ārifūn bi-llāh* in a language that is flawless (*lafz faṣīḥ*) with neither a ‘knot’ in it nor an accent.” Cf. Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, pp. 454-455.

⁶⁸ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, pp. 453-454.

⁶⁹ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 461.

⁷⁰ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 470.

⁷¹ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 456.

disciple of shaykh an-Nūrī said: ‘When I came to Egypt, I encountered a pious man *at whom the children were throwing stones and whom they insulted – and who underwent the most horrendous suffering because of them.*’ He said: ‘I stood there and could not believe my eyes, and I said (to myself): ‘What the children of the Maghrib do to the people of God (*ahl Allāh*), the children of the Mashriq do to the friends of God (*awliyā’ Allāh*).’⁷² Yet, not only children seem to have hurt such individuals from time to time. At least this is suggested by a (rather inconsistent) remark by Maqdīsh on Ḥarīz: “He – may God have mercy on him – had a good character and was *dear to everyone* (*muḥabbab ‘inda ḍjamī an-nās*), and so he endured the hurts of the people (lit. ‘their hurts’; *ādhīyyatahum*) and met them with forgiveness (*yaqbaluhā bi-‘afw wa-ṣafh*).”⁷³ This seems to reflect that such individuals socially speaking must have been weak – despite the praise of their saintly rank (cf. below).

On the other hand, the texts provide evidence for what in fact must have been the warm and loving relationships that some of the *madjdhūb* maintained with selected people. A good example is the friendship of shaykh Sidi Ṭayyib aṣh-Sharafī and al-Djarāya.⁷⁴ Reference to such loving relationships also is made in the case of Ḥarīz, and probably it is not a coincidence at all that Ḥarīz entered the homes of those who *loved* him and *believed in him* (i.e. who believed that he was a saint; *muḥibbūhu wa-mu‘taqidūhu*) “without asking for permission” (*min ghayr isti’dhān*)⁷⁵, and maybe it should be assumed that not *everyone* was willing to accept this behaviour, but that it actually required some dose of benevolence and connivance. This would be an indirect hint at that his position was not entirely untroubled (and it has been stated above that he endured the “hurts” of the people).

Unfortunately, it is not clear with respect of all of the individuals described by Maqdīsh when they actually started their “careers” as *madjdhūb*-saints. As to ‘Amar Kammūn, Maqdīsh recounts the following narrative:

“He – may God have mercy on him – originally was a butcher, who found it hard to make a living (?) (*kāna [...] raḍjulan ḍjazzāran ḍāqat ‘alayhi l-ḥiyal*). Thus, when springtime came and the people took off for visiting the ‘people of good’ along the coastline (*li-ziyārat ahl al-khayr bi-s-sāḥil*), he went with them to escape the tightness of his situation (*ḍiq al-hāl*). When they reached Djamāl, he found sweet lemons [sic] and took along with him fifty (of them). (And at the time) Shaykh Sidi ‘Āmir al-Mazūghī had a sick daughter who was craving for sweet lemons, and the people (he entrusted with that

⁷² Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 449; my emphasis.

⁷³ Cf. Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 455.

⁷⁴ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, pp. 461-462.

⁷⁵ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 456.

task) (lit. they) were unable to find such, although they were trying their best (*ma‘a shiddat at-talab*). When he (= ‘Amar Kammūn) arrived at Sīdī ‘Āmir’s *zāwiya*, this came to his ears, and so he gave all the lemons he had to the shaykh (= Sīdī ‘Āmir). The shaykh said to him: ‘You have attained all the *baraka*’ (*nilta djamī‘ al-baraka*), took him with him into his place of seclusion (*khalwa*) and put his breast into his mouth (*alqamahū thadyahū*).⁷⁶ And he only raised his head again when he had been drawn through the *himma* of the shaykh (*wa-qad indjadhaba bi-himmat aṣh-shaykh*) and had become like out of his wits/ passionately in love (*walhān*) and roamed about far and wide to visit the righteous (and this) for two years.”⁷⁷

With regard to al-Djarāya the following beginning of his “career” as a *madjdhub* is told:

“When he was boy, he used to go fishing together with his father (lit. he belonged to the fishermen together with his father). His mother said: ‘Once, he went out fishing as usual together with his father in the *Djazirat al-kanā‘is* in the sea west of the town. When they got off (the boat), the *shaykh* got off with them, and they started to spread out the nets in order to catch the fish (*fa-sharā‘ū fi naṣb al-‘amal li-akhdh as-samak*). When they were in the middle of the work, the *shaykh* suddenly penetrated into waters deeper than those from which they were catching the fish (*dakhal [...] muladididjan fi ludidjat al-bahr akthar min al-qadr alladhī ya’khuḍhūna minhu s-samak*). His father had the impression that a ‘man from the sea’ received him (*talaqqāhu radjul min al-bahr*). When he (i.e. al-Djarāya) returned after that, he came in a state that was totally different from the state in which he had been when he left (for the deeper waters) – he was like disturbed and agitated (*ka-l-walhān*) and he was talking with words that no one could understand, and his mouth was covered with foam like a camel in rut.”⁷⁸

As to Ḥarīz, it is stated that he already “grew up as a *madjdhub*” (*nasha‘a madjdhuban*)⁷⁹. Al-Misaddī on his part was born into a privileged social background (*min dār aṣḥāb dunyā ‘arīḍa*) which he evidently turned down at

⁷⁶ A highly interesting remark, insofar as it provides an example for a saint taking over an “effeminate role” (Kugle); for “breast-feeding” in the context of male saints cf. Scott Kugle: *Sufis & Saints’ Bodies. Mysticism, Corporeality & Sacred Power in Islam*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007; p. 121.

⁷⁷ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 450.

⁷⁸ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 460.

⁷⁹ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 454.

some point in his life (*fa-aʿraḍa ʿanhā*) and from which he retained nothing but three items of clothing.⁸⁰

The strange fellow as a saint

Insofar as the focus is on their “strange” and “weird” behaviour, the *maḍjdhūb*-saints of course shared plenty of characteristics with the “mad” and the “mentally deranged”. As Michael Dols writes, “[t]he exculpating designation of madness was frequently given to religious ecstasies and, conversely, holiness was often attributed to the insane.”⁸¹ In fact, the lexeme *maḍjdhūb* may also designate a “maniac”, “lunatic”, “madman” or “idiot”.⁸² Sometimes, the nearness of the *maḍjdhūb*-saints and “madness” becomes explicit as in the case of the female Moroccan saint Lalla ʿAwīsh: “That there is a connotation of weirdness connected to the *majdhūb* is confirmed in Lalla ʿAwīsh’s case by one group of visitors to her sanctuary of whom it is said that the saint is particularly fond because she feels connected to them: people who suffer from mental illnesses or psychosomatic disorders.”⁸³ Their legal status also belonged to the characteristics which some of the *maḍjdhūb*-saints shared with the mentally deranged. Thus, Maqḍīsh writes that e.g. Ḥarīz “was banned from disposing over money⁸⁴ (lit. *kāna... mamnūʿan mina t-tadbīr wa-t-taṣarruf*)”⁸⁵ (i.e. he was not *mukallaḥ* “legally capable”). Yet, regardless of such similarities, the *maḍjdhūb* were regarded as *saints* – not by *all*, though – and not simply as “mentally deranged”. As a matter of fact, when Maqḍīsh speaks about the “strange” behaviour of some of the *maḍjdhūb*-saints and links it with a repertoire of elements⁸⁶ associated with sainthood, he sometimes explicitly suggests that the individual in question was an even *high-ranking* saint. Thus, he writes in respect of Ḥarīz: “What is intended (here) is to inform that he (in fact) was one of the *awliyāʾ*”

⁸⁰ Maqḍīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 453.

⁸¹ Dols *Madman*, p. 388.

⁸² Wehr s. r. *ḍj-dh-b*, p. 116; cf. also Wahrmund, p. 119: “halbverrückt”; for a narrative which associates *indjdhāb* and *ḍjunūn* “madness” see also Maqḍīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 354. The narrative is about Sīdī Saʿīd b. Maṣṣūr al-Wahīshī who in a Qayrawān street obviously once recited Qurʾānic verses in a rather excentric fashion (*ʿalā ḡhayr waḍjhihā*) what made a man exclaim: “This lunatic thus smashes the word of God!” (*hādhā l-maḍjdhūb ha-kadhā yukassiru kalām Allāh*). Unsurprisingly, this exclamation was answered with a highly original remark on the part of the saint.

⁸³ Manuela Marín & Randi Deguilhem: *Writing the feminine: women in Arab sources*. London & New York: I.B.Tauris, 2002, p. 210.

⁸⁴ It must be emphasised, though, that Ḥarīz had family (a sister is mentioned) – and an “income” (see below); cf. Maqḍīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 456.

⁸⁵ Maqḍīsh *Nuzat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 456.

⁸⁶ Cf. Jensen *Structure*; p. 321.

Allāh al-muqarrabūn [...]; this is beyond doubt for us, whereas we don't know if he belonged to the *awtād*, the *abdāl*, the *nuqabā'* or the *nuḍjabā'*, even if the marks of the *aqṭāb* were shining on him – i.e. he was alternating between being close and being distant and between being sobering up and being drawn to God (*ṣāḥin madjdhub*) in addition to other marks; and he had lots of *karāmāt* which have been 'successively' narrated by the people (*mutawātira 'inda n-nāsi tawāturan ma'nawiyyan*), for each and everyone witnessed some things from him which broke the normal course of things (*umūr khawāriq li-l-'āda*).⁸⁷

But what then separates the strangeness and weirdness so characteristic of many of them from the strangeness and weirdness of those who were not regarded as saints? Answering this question requires turning to the (paradigmatic) “clusters of meaning” mentioned in the introduction. What can be said about their (syntagmatic) expression? In the following, a number of relevant elements shall be presented.

Bringing together the lived and the imagined world

As has been said, the connection made between all sorts of “strange” or “nonconformant” behavior – such as screaming in the market, going half-naked, hitting someone, or biting someone – and “sainthood” is rather arbitrary. Per se, such behaviours are not a sign for sainthood, for evidently sainthood as a notion, on the one hand, and an incidence (or object) in the outer world (such as screaming in the market), on the other hand, do not belong to the same context.⁸⁸ The notion of “sainthood” belongs to a *meta-physical* context, whereas the notion of “strange fellow” belongs to the context of *human behaviour*. Thus the “weird” or “nonconformant” behaviour of the *madjdhub*-saints can only be indicative of their sainthood, if sainthood actually is “brought into the game”, i.e. if their behaviour is being structurally related to the above-mentioned “clusters of meanings”. As has been said already, this cannot be achieved without *narrative chains* that connect the different contexts. These narratives are indispensable, for if they apparently only *describe* the saintly character of such individuals, they actually *make* and *produce* it – without them, an individual would not exist as a saint *socio-*

⁸⁷ Cf. Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol 2, p. 458; my emphasis. As to the terms *awtād*, *abdāl*, *nuḍjabā'* (etc.) cf. Michel Chodkiewicz: *Seal of the Saints. Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī*. Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993; p. 103 ff.

⁸⁸ Cf. Edmund Leach: *Kultur und Kommunikation. Zur Logik symbolischer Zusammenhänge*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978; pp. 51-52. It is worthwhile considering that those religious experts which regarded the *madjdhub* not as saints, but simply as “mentally deranged” – objectively speaking – rejected this arbitrary relation.

logically speaking (i.e. be recognised as a saint: people must have something to tell about a saint). These narrative chains express elements from the above-mentioned “clusters of meanings” associated with sainthood. Taken together, they corroborate that the individual in question is a saint, and they make that the “strange” behaviour of the *maḍjdḥūb*-saints and several “strange” situations points to something else: *instead of being “just strange” (etc.), they are the place and the moment where the imagined world alights*. Perhaps this is expressed in its most condensed form in an – all but naïve⁸⁹ – passing remark that Maqdīsh makes about Ḥariz: “Looking at him made one think of God” (*ru’yatuhū tuḍḥkiru llāh*).⁹⁰

Karāmāt and ishārāt

As has been stated at the beginning of this article, sainthood by definition is about proximity to God. It has been part of the Muslim *doxa* for centuries that the saints’ proximity to God becomes palpable in their *karāmāt* “miracles” (sg. *karāma*) or their so-called *ishārāt* “hints” or “signals (sg. *ishāra*).⁹¹ To put it less technically, specific occurrences “proved” that the saints were the possessors of a different kind of knowledge and of different kinds of powers that might be described as “paranormal” – and certainly out of the reach of those who were not saints.⁹² Against this backdrop, it does not

⁸⁹ Significantly, this is a clear allusion to the exegetical material in respect of the term *awliyā’ Allāh* as can be illustrated by the following *ḥadīth*: “A man said: ‘Messenger of God, who (precisely) are the *awliyā’*?’ He said: ‘Those at whose sight one is reminded of God’ (*alladhīna idhā ru’ū dhukira llāh*).” Cf. Ibn Kathīr: *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm*. Vol. 1-7. Aṭ-ṭab’a ar-rābi’a. Bayrūt: Dār al-Andalus, 1982; vol. 3, pp. 512-513. See also Nelly Amri: *La Sainte de Tunis. Présentation et traduction de l’hagiographie de ‘Āisha al-Mannūbiyya*. Arles: Actes Sud, 2008, p. 16: “[L]es *awliyā’* sont ceux dont la simple vue est une invite à se remémorer Dieu à son cœur”. See also Lorenz Matthias Nigst: *Legitime Nähe. Ibn Taymiyas theoretisches Konstrukt von den awliyā’ Allāh*. PhD thesis, Vienna 2011, p. 352.

⁹⁰ Cf. Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 456.

⁹¹ Grammatically speaking, *ishāra* is the *nomen verbi* of the Arabic verb *ashāra/yushīru* “to point to”; “to indicate”, “to make a signal” (etc.).

⁹² Accordingly, the absence of *karāmāt* “miracles” often raised doubts as to whether a given individual actually was a saint. In there here studied material, there is one passage that well corroborates the importance of miracles for a successful – i.e. recognised – social existence as a saint: When Maqdīsh writes about the *maḍjdḥūb* Muḥammad ‘Abbās, he points to that some people obviously did not regard Muḥammad ‘Abbās as a saint – significantly, the absence of miracles on his part thereby seems to have played a considerable role. Apart from being a poignant critique of religious pedantry and self-righteousness, the passage suggests that these “non-believing” people are “taught a lesson” through some sort

come as a surprise that an important share of the narratives regarding the *madjdhub*-saints portrayed by Maqdish concerns their *karāmāt* and their *ishārāt*, i.e. many of the narrative chains he provides point to the saintly status of a given individual by telling about the occurrence of incidences of a “paranormal” (and in any case: surprising) character. The general importance Maqdish grants to the *karāmāt* thereby is well reflected by that he gives a general introduction about sainthood and *karāmāt* “miracles” at the beginning of the part of the *Nuzhat al-anzār* under consideration here. It is worthwhile underlining the reason he gives for why it is important to clarify “the truth and the possibility of the *karāmāt*” (*ḥaqīqat al-karāma wa-djawāzuhā*): he states that *not* to have any insight in this matter is tantamount to running the risk of treating the saints with *disrespect* which may result in *damage*.⁹³

of miracle (of bilocation): (Maqdish *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, pp. 448-449; my emphasis).

⁹³ Maqdish *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 231. At least in one instance, Maqdish uses the notion that *damage* is likely to befall those who do not meet the saints with due respect or even show them their hatred to corroborate the saintly character of the individual in question. The respective passage that concerns the beginning of the *madjdhub*-career of al-Djarāya, partly has been presented further above. As has been seen, something happened to al-Djarāya while he was fishing together with his father and another companion, and al-Djarāya ended up “being like disturbed and agitated (*ka-l-walhān*); and he was talking with words that no one could understand and his mouth was covered with foam—like a camel in rut.” Maqdish states that the companion said to al-Djarāya commenting on his altered state: “What’s up with you? You’re roaring and behaving like a stupid”, and that he “*he showed his hatred and anger about the shaykh*.” Exactly at this moment, the hatred of this man leads to his being damaged: “*At this point, the mast smashed on his head, what made him experience great fear and made him take back what he had said (a moment ago), and he asked God forgiveness and repented.*” Maqdish *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 460; my emphasis. Significantly, “strange” and “odd” behaviour is located at the centre of this incidence of “punishment” and “damage”. Evidently, the narrative chain makes that this “strange” behaviour points to something else here, i.e. the moment it is connected with the notion that saints may inflict damage upon others, it expresses al-Djarāya’s sainthood and proximity to God. In this context, it furthermore should be referred to the famous *ḥadīth qudsī* which states that God “declares war on him who is the enemy of one of His *awliyā*” (cf. *man ‘ādā li waliyyan adhantuhū bi-l-ḥarb*, and which belongs to the common stock of the Islamic discourse on sainthood. Could it be that Maqdish implicitly alludes to this *ḥadīth* here? For the *ḥadīth* see e.g. Nelly Amri-Salameh: “Sainteté et situations de conflit en ifriqiya « médiévale »”, in: *Villes et territoires au Maghreb: Itinéraire d’une recherche = Cahiers de l’IRMC*, N°1 (2000), p. 31. Amri-Salameh has pointed out that this *ḥadīth* often has been used for legitimising

A different kind of powers, and a different kind of knowledge

If an important share of the narratives provided by Maqdīsh indeed articulates that the *majdihūb*-saints were the *possessors of either different powers⁹⁴ or a different kind of knowledge* that surface in the context of the *karāmāt* or *ishārāt* (whereby this article mainly shall focus upon the latter),⁹⁵ then of course those narrative chains in which this different kind of knowledge is connected with the “strange”, “odd”, or “nonconformant” behaviour of the *majdihūb*-saints are of particular interest. If they, generally speaking, *knew more than the rest* – and certainly more than *they could have known if they would have been like the rest* –, then the cardinal trait of their extraordinary knowledge best emerges when it is kept in mind that two of Maqdīsh’s narrative chains insinuate that the individuals in question *knew when they were going to die*. What makes this so relevant is that it leads to the Qur’ānic notion of *al-ghayb* (i.e. that which is “hidden”). The Qur’ān repeatedly states that God alone knows *al-ghayb*, and that (= Q 72:26-27): “[...] He does not reveal His secrets to any, except to him whom He chooses as a messenger [...]”. Mostly there is no further specification as to what is meant by this term. But there is at least one exception, that is Q 31:34: “Surely God is He with Whom is the knowledge of the hour, and He sends down the rain and He knows what is in the wombs; and no one knows what he shall earn on the morrow; and no one knows in what land he shall die; surely God is Knowing, Aware.” The five points mentioned in this verse are, according to

malediction (*ad-du‘ā ‘alā*) within Sufism. For the *ḥadīth* see also Nigst *Legitime Nähe*, pp. 253-255.

⁹⁴ Mention may be made of such things as bilocation or the ability of the saints to cover immense distances in a span of time that is way too short to lie within normal human reach. As regards this ability to cover immense distances, he e.g. writes: “Ḥarīz (lit. he) (further) belonged to the *ahl al-khutwa* ‘people of (grand) pace’ (i.e. he was renown for ‘miraculous transportations’) who someone had seen him with his own eyes on the (Mount) ‘Arafa (in the surroundings of Mecca): a Maghribī saw him (i.e. Ḥarīz) coming along his way in Sfax, and he (i.e. the Maghribī) who was from the far West said, ‘This shaykh (over there), is he from here?’, and someone of those attendant said, ‘Yes!’ He said, ‘We have seen him on Mount ‘Arafa!’” (Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 457.) In a similar direction maybe also points the following remark “He (i.e. Ḥarīz) (furthermore) was the ‘inspector of the town’ (*ṣāhib dark al-balad*), and sometimes some people would get up at night and find him patrolling on top of the city walls or standing between two of its merlons, and *sometimes he was seen outside of the town although he always woke up in his house.*” (Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 457.)

⁹⁵ For a narrative (in this case about a Malāmātī) that connects *nonconformant* behaviour with a *miracle* that certainly transforms the nonconformant behaviour into an expression of something else (i.e. closeness to God) see Dols *Madman*, pp. 412-413.

a famous Prophetic tradition, the so-called *mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (cf. also Q 6:59).⁹⁶ These five points manifestly refer to the knowledge of *future events*. Evidently, knowledge about one’s own death figures among the things that elude – “normal” – human knowledge. Thus does the fact that the two individuals knew about the hour of their death suggest that they had partial access to the knowledge of *al-ghayb*? This indeed would be plausible (one may refer to Houari Touati again who stressed that “[...] son (i.e. *al-ghayb*) champ demeure obstinément ouvert.”). One can assume that narrative chains about knowledge of such a kind in fact *do insinuate an exceptional proximity to God*, for they conspicuously underline that the individuals in question were “non-normal” and “set apart” from the rest of the mortals in important respects.⁹⁷ The two *madjdhub*-saints in respect of whom Maqdish suggests that they knew the hour of their death are Ḥarīz and al-Djarāya. In the following, only the narrative chain about Ḥarīz is taken up.⁹⁸ Significantly, the same narrative chain that suggests that Ḥarīz knew when he was going to die, also tells about a rather “odd” kind of behaviour that surfaces in an “unorthodox” form of treatment on the part of Ḥarīz: the narrative chain provides the testimony of a man who loved Ḥarīz and believed in him and who during a plague epidemic in AD 1785 was worried that Ḥarīz did not visit him in his home like he used to do when that man was in good health. Yet Ḥarīz reappeared several times, and “[...] on the third day he entered the bed together with me and clasped my leg (*qarana riḍḍī*) and put it between his legs; he span his hands around my throat (*adāra yadayhi bi-‘unuqī*) and writhed on me in such a way that I feared to give up the ghost; and a state (*ḥāl*) took possession of him and I thought that my death (*al-adjal*) had come. Suddenly, the sweat started to pour forth and he did not set me free (*lan yursilnī*) until I fell asleep – at this point he left me, and I did not notice that he had done so. When I woke up again, I felt I was on the way to recovery (lit. *aḥsastu bi-mabādi’ al-‘āfiya*). He came again on the

⁹⁶ Cf. e.g. Bukhārī *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* No. 4778; 4697; 7379.

⁹⁷ In the sense of a side remark it shall be mentioned that there is evidence that knowledge of the hour of one’s own death sometimes was explicitly understood to be a sign of sainthood. One may refer to a narrative in al-Ibshīhī’s *Mustaṭraf* here. The narrative recounts the experiences that a corpse washer had with a young lad who knew when he was going to die (and actually organised the corpse washer himself). The colourful narrative sums up the cardinal point with the following words of the corpse washer: “God be praised! This is one of God’s friends (*ḥādḥā walī min awliyā’ Allāh*), since he knew when he was going to die! (*ḥaythu ‘arafa waqta wafātihī [...]*.” [Shihāb ad-dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Abū l-Faṭḥ] al-Ibshīhī: *Al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaṭraf*. 2 Volumes. Al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-djumhuriyya al-‘arabiyya, s. a.; Vol. 1, p. 149.

⁹⁸ For al-Djarāya see Maqdish *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 462.

next day and did the same once more. On the third day, he entered my bed and pointed to the wash water (?) (*ghisl*) and the shroud with his hand. I said: 'Am I going to die now?', he made a sign that (said) 'No, but I am!' I said: 'May God restore you to health! We ask God to make last our relishing with your health!' There he made a sign (that said) that his time had come (lit. *ashāra bi-anna l-adjal qad farigha*), and I had to promise him that I would take care of washing him and putting his corpse into the shroud."⁹⁹

The passage outlined above allows for highlighting what seems to be the common denominator of comparable narrative chains given by Maqdīsh: *all of them refer to a knowledge of "things hidden" – whereby "hidden" may be referring to either past, present, or future events, all of which cannot be known under normal circumstances (cf. the notion of al-ghayb).* Thus if the narrative chains provided by Maqdīsh again and again describe "weird" or "nonconformant" behaviour on the part of the *maḍdhūb*-saints, they at the same time suggest that the latter were the addressees and possessors of a knowledge of "things hidden", and the carriers of respective insights bestowed upon them by God.

This clearly surfaces in the context of the so-called *ishārāt* "hints", too. As has been said, much of the material contained in the biographies given by Maqdīsh consists in accounts of such *ishārāt*, i.e., rather small incidences of a "non-normal" character. It thereby seems that, in many instances, the social recognition of these incidences as *ishārāt* "signs" rested on an interpretation *ex post*, i.e., the people by and by came to understand what these "hints" were all about.¹⁰⁰ Thus in respect of e.g. Abū Maghāra Maqdīsh in-

⁹⁹ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, pp. 459-460.

¹⁰⁰ Such interpretations *ex post* are also clearly visible in a passage by Scott Kugle: "Like 'Ali al-Sanhaji and other *maḍdhūb* personalities, Abu Rawayin would often depart from accepted custom and even social intelligibility as he would 'babble in some nonsense language.' Like them, he would acquire great wealth in gifts and then give it all away before nightfall. In addition, he practiced spiritual extortion against the rich or against rulers by saying, 'Quickly, buy from me your fortune and you won't come to ruin!' If they paid, he would say, 'You are safe.' But if they refused, he would pronounce, 'You are cut off' or 'You are killed,' *and shortly that would happen.* In times of political uncertainty and upheaval, such threats from a 'holy madman' gained extra potency. The 'emptied' personality of the *maḍdhūb* became a veritable barometer for political and military changes. He was a known proponent of jihad against the Iberians but would confound those who observed him by shouting out one day, 'I favor the Portuguese!' and the next day, 'I favor the Muslims!' This behavior disturbed the public who thought that he was, on some days, favoring the enemy and cursing the Muslims' own troops. *However, it became apparent that 'his favor' reflected who was winning in the wars at that particular time: it did not reflect his rational choice of whom to favor but reflected*

forms: “He had many *ishārāt* ‘signs’, among them is that when he filled (a vessel) with water and spilled it on the ground, the people took this as a good omen for that rain was going to fall. When he spilled much water, much rain was going to fall; and when he spilled just a bit of water, then the rainfalls were going to be scant;¹⁰¹ and when he screamed in the market, then this indicated that a misfortune was about to befall the Muslims. This has been experienced several times – and it always turned out to be right (*djurrība mirāran fa-ṣaḥḥa*). His *ishārāt* were rife with *ghalath* – with no-one understanding them expect those who were acquainted with him, and sometimes, *they were not understood at all until after that at which he had hinted, had come true.*”¹⁰² Abū Maghāra certainly acts in a “strange” way here, but he *does more than that*; his “strange” behaviour points to something else; it expresses that God has bestowed upon him a different kind of (“hidden”) knowledge that concerns *future events* such as rainfall, misfortune (etc.) – and this in turn expresses his proximity to God.

Such a knowledge of *future events* also clearly surfaces in respect of Ḥarīz about who Maqdīsh writes: “When the plague arrived in Tunisia in the year AH 1199, someone said: ‘I got up deep at night and I was mistaken in time (*ḡarranī l-waqt*), and so I left and didn’t encounter anyone in the streets. And while I was wandering around, I suddenly heard the voice of a man who was in deep distress and sighing and who exclaimed (lit. said): ‘Oh (what misfortune will befall you) you, my town! Oh (what misfortune will befall you) you, my believing brothers!’ [...] Thus I drew a little bit nearer to him and found out that it was the shaykh (i.e. Ḥarīz). And soon after that, the plague (*aṭ-ṭā’ūn al-djāriḥ*) arrived and carried off the good and righteous people. Thus, he was distressed about that, for he was one of

instead divine destiny that granted either victory or defeat to the Muslims day by day.” (Kugle *Sufis*, p. 106; my emphasis).

Cf. also the following incidence at the centre of which is Abū Maghāra: “One of the strangest things that happened is that the Banū Djallūd got the leadership over Djerba and were busy cutting off the important Sunnis and ousted this shaykh from the island, sat him in a boat and ordered him to be shipped to Sfax against his will. Our shaykh Abū Ishāq Sidi Ibrāhim b. Muḥammad al-Djumanī heard about that, and so he sent someone who brought him back from the sea; he left the boat and went straight to the market shouting: ‘I will not leave Djerba, but the Banū Djallūd, *they* will leave.’ Only after a few days an order of the Amir arrived with deposing them, and they were ousted from the island against their will and never returned; and their vestiges, yes even their offspring was cut off—and we take our refuge in God from being exposed to the wrath of God’s friends (*awṭiyā’ Allāh*).” Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anṣār*, vol. 2, p. 467.

¹⁰¹ It deserves to be underlined that “rainfall” is associated with the notion of *al-ghayb* (cf. above).

¹⁰² Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anṣār*, vol. 2, p. 463; my emphasis.

those whom God created with a natural propensity for wishing that only the best would happen to the Muslims (*mimman djabalahū llāhu ‘alā ḥubbi l-khayri li-l-muslimin*).¹⁰³

Yet it is worthwhile underlining that knowledge of a different – and superior – kind not only surfaces in respect of epidemics and the like, but also in respect of the *moral and religious conduct of the people*. A good example is provided by narratives that focus on Ḥarīz’s habit of beating or biting *some* of his contemporaries. Again knowledge about things “hidden” – in this case *past events* – is involved: “He never showed anger except about those who had done something prohibited secretly (*illā li-man waqa’a minhu manhī ‘anhu sirran*) – and those he would land a painful one, or two or three; or maybe he would bite them really heavily, and those who had perpetrated an act of dis-obedience against God would understand (that). And those of them (lit. he), whom God gave success would repent.”¹⁰⁴ It is obvious that a most “weird” behaviour – biting one’s fellow men is “weird” – substantially gains in legitimacy here, for it effectively targets those who had perpetrated acts of *disobedience*, i.e., Ḥarīz is constructed as an individual that in important respects *aids God’s legislative will* and contributes to that the people comply with His Law. This quite well fits Sharma’s remark that the *madjdhub*-saints often “serve as God’s spies and policemen on the earth.”¹⁰⁵ In the sense of a side remark, it can be stated that this sort of beating has been registered by foreigners as well – as e.g. can be concluded from the work *Voyage d’un captif*: “Les Santons sont des espèces de Saints, il en est d’assez singuliers, on les voit souvent se promener par les rues, couverts de vieux haillons, & un bâton à la main dont ils frappent ceux qu’ils rencontrent. Les Mahométans se croient très heureux lorsqu’ils reçoivent cette faveur.”¹⁰⁶

The socio-religious functions of the *madjdhub*-saints

The material contained in Maḥmūd Maqdīsh’s *Nuzhat al-anzār* suggests that some of the *madjdhib* were intimately connected with the need of the people to *cope with uncertainty* – draught, disease, problems at the time of childbirth, or missing persons are among the circumstances in respect of which they seem to have fulfilled a certain function¹⁰⁷ – sometimes not to

¹⁰³ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 457.

¹⁰⁴ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 455.

¹⁰⁵ Sharma *Women saints*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁶ *Voyage dans les états barbaresques de Maroc, Alger, Tunis et Tripoly; ou lettres d’Un des Captifs qui viennent d’être rachetés par M.M. les Chanoines réguliers de la Sainte-Trinité; suivies D’une Notice sur leur rachat, & du Catalogue de leur noms*. A Paris, chez Guillot, librairie de Monsieur, rue Saint-Jacques, vis-à-vis celle des Mathurins. M. D C C L X X V; pp. 77-78; my emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Also Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, pp. 449-450.

their liking, though: Abū Maghāra *feared* that crowds flocked to him.¹⁰⁸ Again, this is particularly obvious in the case of Ḥariz: “Some of the truthful women mentioned that if a delivery turned out to be very complicated and if the family of the woman (who was giving birth) was about to lose the hope that she would survive whereas God wished her rescue, (then) *this shaykh entered – and sometimes the woman was saved merely by his entering* (the house), and sometimes he put his hand on the woman and then God rescued her (lit. *fa-yuḥsinu llāhu khalāṣahā*). Thus, his entering (a house) was a sign of well-being (*‘alāma ‘alā s-salāma*).”¹⁰⁹ The above-mentioned and widely held conviction that the *madjdhub*-saints were the possessors and recipients of knowledge of “things hidden” well fits this socio-religious function. As Amri states: “[...] cette capacité, en ce temps de crise, de tourments, d’insécurité, où l’idée de la peur était très présente, a dû frapper intensément les imaginations et marquer les cœurs.”¹¹⁰ How much Ḥariz seems to have been associated with the notion of having a *pre-knowledge of future events*, clearly surfaces in the following passage as well, which takes up the fact of his notorious articulation problems and gives the particular “weirdness” that stems from them still another explanation:

“(And as regards) the ‘knot’ in his tongue when it came to talking (it) was (due to) a (special) providence from God, because he – may God have mercy on him – was one of those whom God had placed at the gates of *mukāshafa* ‘unveiling’, and the people from everywhere were seeking him out to inquire about what was going to happen in the future (*al-umūr qabl zuhūrihā lahum*). And since he told everyone the truth, this implied that the news maybe were such as to hurt the people, and this is when his tongue was tied – as a mercy from God to the people. And sometimes he brought the good news of something, which was to bring joy (to the people) through an *ishāra*. Sometimes he brought the good news that someone who had been away on a journey had just returned, and then he said: ‘He has come! He has come!’, while he kept silent about calamities. Thus, he brought good news to the families of those who were away on a journey and to the families of the sick, whose wellbeing and recovery God had foreordained. And if a woman had complications while giving birth and he dropped in on her, this would indicate that she was going to be perfectly fine (*dalla ‘alā khalāṣihā ‘alā aḥsan ḥāl*). And the glad tidings he brought never were wrong – if he uttered them of his own will; if (on the contrary) he was prompted,

¹⁰⁸ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anṣār*, vol. 2, p. 465.

¹⁰⁹ Maqdīsh *Nuzhat al-anṣār*, vol. 2, p. 455.

¹¹⁰ Amri *L’Homme de la terrasse*, p. 500.

or much pressure put on him, then what he said was of no avail at all.¹¹¹ For, if God gives a (lit. the) saint an insight into something, then God makes him express it, if He wills to spread *good news* through him (*in arāda llāh al-biṣhāra bihī*) – without there being any need for asking and pressing; and if He does not will that, then not. Thus, you are not going to take (anything) from a saint except for that what he gives you without any (prior) arrangement (*mā lāqāka bihī min ḡhayr muwā‘ada*).¹¹²

Thus – so the narrative suggests – the truthfulness by which Ḥarīz was characterised would have entailed the necessity to tell the people all sorts of “bad news”, too. In case he knew about the coming of some sort of mischief, God impaired him to speak – to the effect that he informed the people exclusively about *joyful* and *good* things that were about to happen in their personal lives. This overall association of Ḥarīz with goodness and likeability is furthermore corroborated by some sort of “division of labour” in the religious field (and obviously a lack of mutual sympathy): whereas Ḥarīz evoked the notion of joy and goodness, his fellow *maḏjdhūb* at-Tādjūrī apparently evoked the notion of *calamity* and *danger*, and when *he* appeared, the people were convinced that something *horrible* was about to happen:

“He (i.e. at-Tādjūrī) was the exact opposite (*kāna ‘alā didd min*) of Sīdī Sa‘īd Ḥarīz, i.e. if *he* came to a place, then this indicated that something unpleasant and abhorred (*makrūh*) was going to happen – such as an event of death or a disease and the like. Thus he was standing at the door of *nidhāra* ‘warning’ and ‘terror’, whereas *shaykh* Ḥarīz was standing at the door of *biṣhāra* ‘glad tidings’. He often spent a long time on the roofs of the bath-houses and their ovens (*kāna kathīran mā yulāzimu saqā‘if al-ḥammāmāt wa-mustawqīdātihā*), and one day Sīdī Sa‘īd Ḥarīz dropped in on him and landed him a painful one (*ḏarabahū ḏarban waḏjī‘an*). There *shaykh* at-Tādjūrī took a huge stone and hurled it at him saying: ‘You are in *baṣṭ* ‘dilatation’ and wearing velvet, whereas I am in this state here, and you even make it even

¹¹¹ Maḏdīsh makes a very similar statement about Abū Maghāra: “[...] it has to be said that he (i.e. Abū Maghāra) was not fond at all of visits to his place out of fear of crowds flocking to him, because if God unveiled to him something relating to the state of someone and when God employed him in letting this person (lit. him) know that, then he (himself) called on this person and signalled him (that which he knew) without (the need) that the person who had something to inquire about would have to approach him (actively); and if God did not unveil something to him or employed him (in letting a person know that), then there was no sense at all in asking him.” Maḏdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 465.

¹¹² Maḏdīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 455.

worse’ (?) (*wa-tazīdu ‘alayya*) – and this because *shaykh* at-Tād̲jūrī mostly was in *qabḍ* ‘contraction’ and *asqām* ‘sufferings’.”¹¹³

How much (at least some of) the *maḍjdhub*-saints were connected with the need of the people to cope with very down-to-earth problems such as diseases or loss (etc.) further is corroborated by that Ḥarīz is linked explicitly with the religious practice of making and fulfilling vows (*nudhūr*, sg. *na-dhr*).¹¹⁴ Obviously, he was rather well-off due to such vows: “[H]e earned a livelihood from the *nudhūr* ‘votive offerings’, which originated from severe illnesses, complicated deliveries, or missing travellers [...]” Maqdish explicitly states that “[d]uring his entire life, his (i.e. Ḥarīz’s) family was well off due to his *baraka* (*wa-ahluhū fī sa‘ati rizqin bi-barakatihī*).”¹¹⁵

The symbolic value of “nonconformant” behaviour

As regards the connection of “strange” or “nonconformant” behaviour and the notion of a greater proximity to God that manifests itself in the form of the *karāmāt*, it is worthwhile emphasising that further paradigmatic associations seem to be at work here. This becomes more obvious if one bears in mind that the lexeme *karāma* pertains to the semantic field of “generosity”, “honour”, “to bestow honours” (etc.). It also means “token of honour”, “standing”, “esteem”, and the like. It is worthwhile bearing this in mind, for it in fact shows that the *karāmāt* emphatically are some sort of *gift* – and since not *everyone* receives this gift, they tell something about the privileged position of the recipient vis-à-vis the giver of the gift (i.e. God). Or to put it more plainly, the *karāmāt* are extremely *valuable symbolically speaking*. I deem it essential to underline that this represents an important distinction between the *karāmāt* and the *aḍjr* “reward” that the people will receive for their good deeds and their fulfilment of the ritual obligations in the hereafter. As is well known, the lexeme *aḍjr* is derived from the same root as the lexeme *uḍjra* “wage”. Thus semantically speaking one does not have to do with the notion of lavish gift giving here, but with an – almost “pedantic” (but just) – *accounting* (cf. *ḥasīb*; *yawm al-ḥisāb* etc.). The *aḍjr* is as universal as the *karāmāt* are exclusive.

The here studied material contains a fascinating passage in which “nonconformant” behaviour is explicitly made to express proximity to God. What

¹¹³ Maqdish *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 468.

¹¹⁴ For the thematic of vows cf. Gebhard Fartacek: “Kullnā miṭl ba‘ḍ! Heilige Orte, ethnische Grenzen und die Bewältigung alltäglicher Probleme in Syrien”, in: *Anthropos*, no. 106 (2011), pp. 3-19; pp. 10-12; cf. also Niels Henrik Olesen: *Culte des Saints et Pèlerinages chez Ibn Taymiyya*. Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1991; pp. 173-183.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Maqdish *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 456.

makes the passage so fascinating and relevant with respect to the focus of interest of this article is that it conjures up the notion of “generosity”, “honour”, and “standing” that pertains to the semantic field of *karāma*. The passage concerns Ḥarīz and Maqḍīsh writes: “Once I dropped in on him in Ramaḍān while he was eating, and I took a mouthful (with my hand) and showed my intention to eat it. There he signalled (*ashāra*) that ‘No (you’re not allowed to eat)!’ I said to him: ‘God be praised, it is forbidden for us (to eat), but allowed to you (*ḥarām ‘alaynā wa-ḥalāl laka*)?’ He signalled that ‘Yes (this indeed was the case)!’ There I knew that (God) had chosen him (*iṣṭafāhu*) to (be in) His presence (*li-ḥaḍratihī*), had distinguished him with His *karāma*, and had distracted him from having command over his limbs (i.e. his body) so as to fulfil his ritual obligations (*wa-adhhalahū ‘an ḍabṭ ḍjawāriḥihī li-l-‘ibāda*) [...]”¹¹⁶

It does not have to be underlined that it forms part of *islām* to fast in Ramaḍān. As a matter of fact, fasting in Ramaḍān belongs to the *‘ibādāt* “ritual obligations”, i.e. those things that an individual *actively* has to fulfil qua *‘abd* “servant” or “slave” and which have been laid down as obligations by God’s legislative (*dīnī*) will and denote the “spiritual relationship between Allah and humankind.”¹¹⁷ Somewhat blatantly speaking, in the context of Ramaḍān the opposition between “fasting” and “eating” expresses the opposition between “good Muslim” and “bad Muslim” (or “non-Muslim”). Thus in respect of fasting as a part of the *‘ibādāt*, the following relations apply: “active” : “passive” = “fasting” : “eating” = “close to God” : “not close to God” = “good Muslim” : “bad Muslim”. Yet obviously the above given narrative chain concerning Ḥarīz effects an important transformation insofar as the opposition between “eating” versus “fasting” here expresses the opposition between “chosen” and “not-chosen”. Evidently, “being chosen” is something *passive* (and thus well fits within the paradigm of *maḍjdhūb*-sainthood). Maqḍīsh explicitly suggests that Ḥarīz’ special proximity to God produced a shift from *‘ibāda* to *ḥaḍra* “presence” and *karāma*. Thus as against the context of *‘ibāda*, in the context of *karāma* the following relations apply: “passive” : “active” = “eating” : “fasting” = “chosen” : “not-chosen” = “close to God” : “not (that) close to God” – to name but these. Thus the narrative chain suggests the following: “active” : “passive” = “fasting” : “eating” = “not chosen” : “chosen” = “*‘ibāda*” : “*karāma*”. This implies that here a specimen of “nonconformant” behaviour (eating in Ramaḍān) completely *inverts* the (symbolical) value of the practice of fasting

¹¹⁶ Maqḍīsh *Nuzhat al-anzār*, vol. 2, p. 459. Maqḍīsh furthermore refers to the phrase *kullun muyassar li-mā khuliqa lahū* in this context. This phrase belongs to a *ḥadīth*, cf. e.g. al-Bukhārī *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 6, Book 60, No. 474.

¹¹⁷ Cf. David Waines: *An Introduction to Islam*. Second Edition. Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2003; p. 65.

in Ramaḍān. Not to fast in Ramaḍān does not express that an individual is a “bad Muslim” here – rather it expresses that this individual is an even “better Muslim” (so to say), and that the individual in question is even *closer* to God. For Ḥarīz, the category of *ḥarām* is meaningless. This of course does not imply any disrespect for the *‘ibādāt*. It merely expresses a *favourable position*: if queuing is the universal code of conduct, then the fact of *not* queuing communicates something.

Maqdīsh provides another narrative chain that corroborates the symbolic value of “nonconformant” behaviour. Again, it expresses central notions that are paradigmatically associated with the paradigm of *madjdhub*-sainthood such as “passivity” or “bestowed knowledge”. Again, it seems that a specimen of “nonconformant” behaviour is *particularly apt* to conjure up the notion of a kind of knowledge that is beyond the reach of (*active*) human effort and that is “hidden” for those who have not been granted it (*passively*). Again, the narrative chain effects a *radical transformation* of the “nonconformant” behaviour: it ceases to be a specimen of “deviance”, and instead expresses proximity to God and a distinguished position:

“It is told that when he (i.e. Shaykh Aḥmad ash-Sharafi) was young and studying (*awāna ta’allumihī l-‘ilm*), he used to drop in on the righteous and *madjdhub* Shaykh Sīdī Muḥammad ‘Abbās [...] while the latter was in his gardens which were adjacent to his (i.e. ash-Sharafi’s) (home) (*wa-huwa bi-djīnānīhī al-mudjāwir lahū*). Once he encountered Shaykh ‘Abbās smoking (*fa-wadjada sh-shaykh yashrabu d-dukhān*); when he had approached him, the latter offered him tobacco and told him to smoke it. He refused to do so, for he saw ‘outwardly’ (*fī ḡ-ḡāhir*) that this was tobacco. Thus out of abstaining from what is unlawful (*tawarru’an*), he avoided it because of the contradiction that lay therein with (the opinions of) the Imāms (*li-mā waqa’a fīhī min ikhtilāf al-a’imma*). When he returned to his father, he told him about what had happened to him at the *shaykh*’s. But his father thought well of the righteous people (*kāna wāliduhū ḥasan al-‘tiqād fī ahl al-khayr*), and especially so for the *shaykh* was his neighbour, and he used to see his states. Thus he said to him: ‘My son, if he offers you (tobacco) once more, take from him and do what he commands you, and maybe God grants you success (*yafṭaḥu ‘alayka*)! For the *shaykh* smokes it as tobacco in an outward sense, and only God knows about his inward state (*mā huwa ‘alayhi fī bāṭin al-amr*) – because the states of the *awliyā*’ are hidden from the ‘people of the outward’ (*ahl az-ḡāhir*).’ His (i.e. the father’s) words made a profound impression on his heart and he inclined towards the good and strived for the knowledge bestowed by God (*maylan li-l-khayr wa-ṭam’an fī l-‘ulūm al-mawhūba*) – like it has been said: ‘I saw that knowledge is of two kinds // bestowed and acquired, And the one acquired is of no use // without the bestowed

one; Likewise the sun is of no use // if the eyesight has been taken away.’ Thus when he met with Shaykh ‘Abbās again and the latter offered him the pipe, he seized the opportunity when he saw that something of the shaykh’s saliva had remained on the pipe (lit. *ālat aṣh-shurb*). He swallowed it up eagerly and with righteous intention (*bi-himma wa-niyya ṣāliha*) following his father’s advice; and when he smoked, the shaykh said to him: ‘More!’ Thus he smoked more; he said: ‘More!’ Thus he smoked more. He repeated that three times and then said: ‘There is *baraka* in it.’ The shaykh said: ‘There is *baraka* in it’ and repeated that three times. And from that moment on, the fountains of knowledge sprang from him with what breaks the normal course of things (*khāriqa li-l-‘āda*) [...].”¹¹⁸

In the above-given narrative chain, the young man first sticks to the following set of relations: “smoking” : “non-smoking” = “bad Muslim” : “good Muslim” = “contradicting the opinion of the religious authorities” : “conforming to the opinion religious authorities”. Obviously, this is inverted in significant respects, insofar as the relation between “non-smoking” : “smoking” eventually expresses the relation between “acquired knowledge” : “bestowed knowledge” = “active” : “passive” = “*ẓāhir*” : “*bāṭin*”. Before anything else, the narrative explicitly plays out the distinction between “acquired” / “earned” and “bestowed” knowledge and this way reflects a major distinction known from within the Islamic tradition.¹¹⁹ The above-given narrative about Muḥammad ‘Abbās skilfully broaches these two categories, insofar as it speaks about two kinds of knowledge – one “active” and one “passive” – and even smoothly *integrates* them: after all, the continuation¹²⁰ of the narrative informs about that the boy excelled in the field of *acquired* knowledge *after* he had (metonymically) “taken in” the *bestowed* kind of knowledge which seems to “belong” to the *baraka* of Muḥammad ‘Abbās. The future excellence of the boy furthermore clearly is connoted with the notion of “miracle” – it is said that the boy was excellent to an extent that this was nothing but a “break of the normal course of things”, i.e. something *khāriq li-l-‘āda* “paranormal”. And this “miracle” has been *caused* by that the boy (metonymically) has “taken in” the *baraka* of the saint (according to the *pars pro toto* relation of the saint and his saliva). In light of the focus of the article at hand, it is significant that the narrative chain makes that the “nonconformance” of the behaviour of Muḥammad ‘Abbās expresses something else: the notion of a different and bestowed kind of knowledge that

¹¹⁸ Maqdiṣh *Nuzhat al-anẓār*, vol. 2, pp. 395-396.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Denny *Sanctity*, p. 71. It is worthwhile remembering that the Prophet Muḥammad *himself* is the example *par excellence* for a knowledge that is *bestowed* (as is well reflected by such terms as *muṣṭafā* “chosen”, a *passive* participle).

¹²⁰ Not translated above.

lies beyond the reach of human effort as well as the notion that some individuals are close to God because God somehow has chosen them. It should be added that the narrative given above furthermore highlights other important elements of what may be termed the “religious perspective” (Clifford Geertz).¹²¹ If one analyses the relations between the individuals that appear in the narrative with an “actantial”¹²² outlook in mind, it becomes obvious that the young *Sharafī* is “successful” precisely then, when he *accepts* the offer of the saint; when he *submits* to him and “lets go”. It is pretty obvious that the saint’s part consists in pure *giving* and *offering* (although one may doubt that the saint is *active* here) – it is the young man whose attitude changes and who accepts the saint’s offer after first opposing it. It lies beyond the scope of the article at hand to embark upon a further reaching analysis of the narrative, yet it can be stressed that the notion of *submission* (to an authority) that is of paramount importance within the religious perspective is well manifest within the narrative. In any case, that which is more “real” (the “real reality” in the sense of Geertz) sides with the “*nonconformant*” here: “dead” knowledge is not enough.

Conclusion

In his work *Nuzhat al-anzār*, Maḥmūd Maqdīsh also provides narratives about so-called *madhdjūb*-saints. As *fellow men* their behaviour is “transgressive”, “weird”, “strange”, and “odd”. As *saints* they are close to God. The narratives provided by Maqdīsh show how their “weird” behaviour expresses a wealth of notions that are paradigmatically associated with (*madjdhub*-) sainthood: what might appear to be mere “weirdness” in the first instance, turns out to be the moment and the place where another (“imagined”) world alights. There is good evidence that their “odd” behaviour often is presented to be something like a means to realise and bring to light what really counts in terms of religion, and this not only helps to understand why many people could detect considerable religious rank in these individuals, but furthermore holds responsible for that there is considerable tension between *madjdhub*-sainthood and “legalistic” forms of piety. It furthermore is obvious that the *madjdhub*-saints were thought to know “things hidden” which explains their importance in the context of the need of the people to cope with uncertainty.

¹²¹ Cf. Clifford Geertz: *Dichte Beschreibung. Beiträge zum Verstehen kultureller Systeme*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987; p. 77.

¹²² Cf. Christian R. Davis: “Structural Analysis of Jesus’ Parables: A Conservative Approach”, in: *Grace Theological Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1988), pp. 191-204.