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Narrative Pattern and Genre in
Hagiographic Life Writing:
Comparative Perspectives from
Asia to Europe



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Islam

Constructing the Friends of God. Sadīd al-Dīn Ġaznawī's *Maqāmāt-i Žinda-pīl* (with some remarks on Ibn Munawwar's *Asrār al-tawḥīd*)

by
Jürgen Paul

Muslim hagiographic writings can be used in different ways in historical research, for the history of Sufism, to be sure, and for the history or biography for individual figures, but also for the history of religious thought at large, and even for social history.¹ In this paper, I will try to focus on narrative structures, and to link these to the fundamental purpose of hagiographic writing in Islam, that is, to keep the charisma of its heroes alive. For this, I have selected an early Persian monograph which stands here together with another one, nearly contemporary, from eastern Iran in the late 12th century. The last part of the article is an essay in “close reading” of one miracle story.

Persian hagiography can be divided into different sub-genres. The texts under study belong to the *acta*-type (*maqāmāt*) as distinct from the *dicta*-type (*malfūzāt*)². The place of reported sayings is comparatively low in both

¹ Examples of the more religiously oriented type are too frequent to be mentioned here (some of them are quoted below). Social history: I have myself discussed this problem in my “Hagiographische Texte als historische Quelle”, in *Saeculum* 41,1 (1990), 17–43.

² For an overview over Persian hagiographic literature, see Jürgen Paul, “Hagiographic Literature”, in *Encyclopedia Iranica* vol. XI, 536b–539b, New York 2003. A very readable introduction into early Sufi thought and practice is Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism. The formative period*, Edinburgh 2007. Karamustafa also gives an introductory state-of-the-art bibliography including Persian and Arabic hagiography. The texts used are the following: Sadīd al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Gaznawī, *Maqāmāt-i Žinda-pīl*, ed. H. Moayyad, Tehran 1340/1961, together with the English translation: *The Colossal Elephant and his Spiritual Feats, Shaykh Aḥmad-e Jām: The Life and Legend of a Popular Sufi Saint of Twelfth Century Iran*, tr. Heshmat Moayyad and Franklin Lewis, Costa Mesa 2007. – Muḥammad Ibn Munawwar, *Asrār al-tawḥīd fī maqāmāt*

books, very low in Ġaznawī, much higher, but still low, in Ibn Munawwar. Further, they are monographs, books devoted to only one man as distinct from the *ṭabaqāt* type, a kind of hagio-biographic dictionary modeled on the biographic dictionaries of Muslim scholars³. The texts moreover were written directly in Persian, they are not translations (from Arabic) as is the case with other texts extant from the same period. They stem from roughly the same region, namely the eastern Iranian province of Ĥurāsān, and were written approximately at the same time, the mid- and later 12th century; Ġaznawī does not reflect the situation after 1153 when the Seljuqid sultanate in eastern Iran broke down – Ibn Munawwar does⁴. The temporal distance from the reported events is however much greater in Ibn Munawwar, he was a fifth-generation descendant of Abū Sa‘īd, whereas Ġaznawī was an immediate follower of Aḥmad-i Ġām and can be said to have written from first-hand experience. Both texts can be surmised to come from a similar context, the shrine of the hero and saint to whom they are devoted. The respective shrine complexes, however, had different fates: whereas the shrine of Aḥmad-i Ġām flourished to the extent that today, the town where it is situated is named after it – Turbat-i Ġām (in Iran, next to the borders with Afghanistan and Turkmenistan) – and the hereditary lineage of shaikhs living at the shrine was very influential

al-šaiḥ Abī Sa‘īd, ed. Ḍabiḥallāh Šafā, Tehran 1332/1953, together with the French translation: Mohammad Ebn E. Monawwar, *Les étapes mystiques du shaykh Abu Sa‘īd*, tr. Mohammad Aghena, Paris (UNESCO) 1974, and the English one, *The Secrets of God’s Mystical Oneness*, tr. John O’Kane, Costa Mesa 1992. Unless stated otherwise, all references are to the Persian originals. For practical reasons, references to the sources are left in the main body of the text.

³ *Ṭabaqāt* means “classes”, “layers” or “generations”; the *ṭabaqāt* system in Persian and Arabic biographic dictionaries means that the entries are arranged according to “generations” (originally “generations after the Prophet”), the alphabetical order is a later principle.

⁴ For a short biography of Šaiḥ Aḥmad-i Ġām, see Heshmat Moayyad, “Aḥmad-e Ġām”, in *Encyclopedia Iranica* vol. I, 648a–649a, London 1985, and Fritz Meier, “Zur Biographie Aḥmad-i Ġām’s und zur Quellenkunde von Ġāmī’s Nafaḥātu’l-uns”, in *ZDMG* 97 (1943), 47–67 (reprinted in E. Glassen and G. Schubert [eds], *Bausteine. Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Islamwissenschaft von Fritz Meier*, vol. I, Istanbul 1992, 157–177). This article gives important arguments for the dating of Ġaznawī’s work; after careful consideration, Meier opts for a rather late date, around 1200, but on the basis of earlier notes which the author must have compiled starting in the 1150s; p. 55–6. – For Abū Sa‘īd, the classical study is Fritz Meier, *Abū Sa‘īd-i Abū l-Ḥayr (357–440/967–1049). Wirklichkeit und Legende*. Tehran and Liège, 1976. A shorter note, also on the composition of Ibn Munawwar’s work: Gerhard Böwering, “Abū Sa‘īd Faẓlallāh b. Abī l-Kayr”, in *Encyclopedia Iranica* vol. I, 377a–380a, London 1985.

for a long time, with a peak during the 14th and 15th centuries⁵, and is noted even today, the shrine of Abū Saʿīd-i Abū l-Ḥair at Maihana (today Meana in Turkmenistan) did not fare so well, and indeed Ibn Munawwar wrote in an attempt to revive it; this attempt was only moderately successful⁶.

The structure of both books is also comparable. Both begin with an introduction in which the authors also say why they started writing. In both cases, stories of miracles form the main body of the text. Ġaznawī also has a short chapter on miracles as a problem in theology where he makes a distinction, well known in Islam, between miracles worked by prophets (*muʿǧizāt*) and miracles worked by Friends of God (*karāmāt*)⁷; such a chapter can be found in many hagiographic books but is absent in Ibn Munawwar. Ġaznawī lets another short chapter on the particular virtues of the hagiography's hero follow; one of these is his force in *karāmāt*.

In both texts, there is no real timeline. Narrated time is organised in a kind of beginning-maturity-end pattern (which corresponds to distinct sections in the books), and this is quite typical of the hagiographic monograph in general: the beginnings of the shaykh and his end form separate sections, whereas the mature period in the middle is not structured in time. Maturity sets in at age 40 (following the example of the Prophet)⁸, and both shaykhs are reported to have started their public career at around this age – but this clearly is a topos and in-depth scrutiny has shown for Abū Saʿīd that his period in Nīšāpūr started later⁹. Overall, no systematic sequence of anecdotes can be detected, and therefore hagiographic writings can only with great dif-

⁵ The lineage of shaykhs active at the shrine is well attested in the collection of letters compiled by a 15th-century descendant of Aḥmad-i Ġām: Yūsuf-i Ahl, *Farāʿid-i Ġiyāṭī*, 2 vols published, ed. Heshmat Moayyad, Tehran 1977 and 1979. Apart from that, the influence of the family can be measured by frequent references in Timurid-era sources. See Jürgen Paul, “The Khwājagān at Herat during Shāhrukh’s reign”. – In: İlker Evrim Binbaş, Nurten Kılıç-Schubel (eds.): *Horizons of the World: Festschrift for İsenbike Togan*. İstanbul 2011, 217–250.

⁶ Fritz Meier, *Abū Saʿīd*, 407–9. Even if Abū Saʿīd was highly revered in eastern Iran and Transoxiana and is frequently quoted e.g. in 15th-century Naqšbandī writings, his shrine does not seem to have enjoyed the same degree of celebrity as the one at Turbat-i Ġām. The attempts made by Ġaznawī and later authors to integrate Aḥmad into the spiritual lineage of Abū Saʿīd were meant to supplant this lineage and were perhaps easier to promote in the absence of a vigorous shrine at Maihana; see Fritz Meier, *Abū Saʿīd*, 427–9.

⁷ Richard Gramlich, *Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes*, Freiburg (Br.) 1987.

⁸ According to Muslim tradition, the Prophet began receiving revelations at around age 40.

⁹ Fritz Meier, *Abū Saʿīd*, 52–9.

faculty be used to reconstruct the “outer” life of their heroes. Time is rather organised in spatial terms, in phrases like: “This was when the shaykh was in Nišāpūr” (very frequent in Ibn Munawwar) or “This was when the shaykh was in Herat” (as in the example from Ġaznawī). Therefore it is no surprise that the books have virtually no dates. The reason is that the books are not “biographies”, they do not tell the life of their heroes, not even the inner life¹⁰. The inner progress certainly is a topic, but only for the first section or sections of the text. Later sections show a perfect Sufi master who no longer stands in need of spiritual development. Likewise, where the teachings are a major subject (there is a *dicta* section in Ibn Munawwar), there is no evolution in them. All the sayings, anecdotes and miracle reports stand in immediate relation to the task the author has set before himself, to keep the memory of the hero’s charismatic powers alive.

The texts under study stand at the origin of this literary genre¹¹. Hagiographic monographs are known to have been written in Persian from around 1100 onward. *Ṭabaqāt* works are earlier, the first specifically Sufi books date from the early 11th century (Sulamī 936–1021¹²; Abū Nuʿaim d. 1038¹³), the first Persian version stems from ʿAbdallāh-i Anšārī (1006–1089)¹⁴. Apart from the two works under study, there are two more monographs from the pre-Mongol period, both written first in Arabic and extant in much later (post-Mongol) Persian translations: the Lives of Ibn Ishāq al-Kāzarūnī (written originally in Arabic before 1109)¹⁵ and of Ibn Ḥafif (written shortly after the master’s death which occurred in 982, but extant only in an early 14th century Persian translation)¹⁶. There is a precursor for the *Asrār al-tawḥīd* called *Ḥālāt*

¹⁰ Hamid Algar, “The Naqshbandi Order: a preliminary survey of its history and significance”, in: *Studia Islamica* 1976, 123–152, puts it like this: “It should in general be remembered that the whole purpose of the genre of *manāqib*, of hagiography, is to transmit to a believing and pious audience matters of practical spiritual value; the specifically ‘human’ – the whole stuff of modern biography – is trivial and profoundly uninteresting from a traditional viewpoint”, p. 134.

¹¹ Jürgen Paul, “Au début du genre hagiographique dans le Khorassan”, in Denise Aigle (ed.), *Saints orientaux*. Paris 1995, 15–38.

¹² Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn Šuraiba, Cairo 1969.

¹³ Abū Nuʿaim Aḥmad al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-auliāʾ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyāʾ*, 10 vols, Beirut 1967

¹⁴ ʿAbdallāh-i Anšārī, *Ṭabaqāt-i ṣūfiyya*, ed. S. Maulāʾī, Tehran 1362/1983.

¹⁵ Fritz Meier, *Die Vita des Scheich Abū Ishāq al-Kāzarūnī : in der persischen Bearbeitung von Maḥmūd b. ʿUṭmān*. Leipzig & Istanbul 1948.

¹⁶ Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Dailamī, *Sīrat-i Ibn-i Ḥafif*, ed. Annemarie Schimmel, Ankara 1955. See also Florian Sobieroj, *Ibn Ḥafif al-Širāzī und seine Schrift zur Novizenerziehung (Kitāb al-iqtiṣād) : biographische Studien, Edition und Übersetzung*. Stuttgart 1998.

wa suḥanān-i šaiḥ Abū Saʿīd, equally written by a descendant some time before the better-known *Asrār*¹⁷. The perspective on Sufi masters which emerges from such monographs is quite different from earlier writings of the *ṭabaqāt* type; they are much more related to social life, their focus is on the action of their hero much more than on his teachings. The creation of this new literary genre may be linked to a changed role of Sufis in society; it is no coincidence that at least three out of the four early hagiographic monographs are closely linked to the establishment of a shrine cult and, by the same token, to the establishment of a hereditary lineage of shaykhs active at these shrines (there is a shrine of Ibn Ḥafīf at Šīrāz, but it does not seem to have been a centre for a hereditary lineage of descendants in the pre-Mongol period).

The hagiographic monograph serves among other goals to constitute the followers and believers of this particular shaykh into a distinct group, and is meant to perpetuate the reputation of the eponymous founder over the generations. In this, it is functionally close to the shrine itself, and also to the ritual and spiritual markers of the group in question including treatises in sufi theory, devotional practice, particular garments, headgear and so forth. Its audience is more or less coterminous with the followers, believers and occasional clients of the shrine cult, something which Ġaznawī himself acknowledges (see below).

True Believers, Deniers and other groups

Ġaznawī's section on Quran and *ḥadīṭ* deserves special attention. The author starts with the statement that everything you do must rest on these foundations. Therefore he goes through the textual evidence before starting his narrative, and he gives his conclusion right away: the existence of Friends of God, their ability or rather gift to work miracles is described in the revelation, and there is no reason to make an exception for troubled times such as those he was living in. He counters the objection that miracles are not possible in his day by quoting the prophet Muḥammad: "There will always be 40 men in my community whose faith (*yaqīn*) is as strong as Ibrāhīm's"¹⁸, and certainly the Prophet knew better than the self-seeking scholars with their prejudices (*ṣāḥib-i ḡaraḍ*). Another saying ascribed to the Prophet tells the Muslims that

¹⁷ Fritz Meier, *Abū Saʿīd*, 19–20.

¹⁸ This tradition does not seem to be listed in Wensinck, *Concordance de la tradition musulmane*, Leiden 1936–1969.

those who cling to the Sunna of the Prophet when the community is in disorder (*'inda fasād ummatī*) earn enormous rewards in the afterlife¹⁹. In such times, he continues to quote the Prophet, nine out of ten will deny the Truth (*yunkiru l-ḥaqq*, it must be added that *al-ḥaqq* – the Truth – is a common expression for God in Sufi writings) and only the True Believers do not fall into error (Ġaznawī, p. 17f). Apparently, Ġaznawī saw his times as such times of *fasād* when the overwhelming majority of Muslims would go astray, would become Deniers of the Truth. – This is going to be one of the main motives of the entire book, the difference between True Believers (*mu'min wa-mu'mina*) and Deniers (*munkir*). Ibn Munawwar also uses the same distinction, only he does not make the reference to the Prophet. He states that on account of the seemingly easy life of Abū Sa'īd, people found it difficult to accept him as a spiritual guide and were inclined to deny him any such quality; in so doing, they fell into *zandaqa*, unbelief, because “everybody who denies the Truth is an unbeliever” (*har ki ḥaqq-rā munkir buwad zindīq buwad*, Asrār p. 41). Both texts therefore introduce a division into the community of Muslims: Whosoever denies the existence and spiritual powers of the Friends of God is an unbeliever. The Friends of God and their believing followers are the True Believers. Their opposite are the Deniers, *munkirān*, who are one out of several groups standing in contrast to the True Believers. A substantial part of the miracle narratives in both sources are stories in which deniers experience True Faith, this experience makes them repent (*tauba*). The stories insist on the ability or charismatic gift of the hero to arrange things in a way that such experiences will occur. This is a subject implied in miracle narratives in general: even if the Friend of God does not make a show out of his capacity or gift to work miracles and therefore many miracles are not performed in public, those we have in the account certainly were public, and were therefore directed more or less immediately at a more or less believing audience. The setting of many miracle stories in both Ġaznawī and Ibn Munawwar are the public teaching assemblies (*maḡlis*) which both Aḥmad-i Ġām and Abū Sa'īd held regularly, others are set *en route* when the shaykh was travelling, and he never travelled alone, and so forth: miracles in no small measure were a public affair. This public character of miracles is an important point. It is not only the persons who in a way profit from the miracle (e.g. the sick who experience a miraculous cure) who can bear witness to the charismatic gifts

¹⁹ This tradition apparently is not listed in Wensinck, either; there are several tradition attributing the *fasād ummatī* to certain groups of Quraiš, *Concordance* vol. V, 144b.

and powers of the shaykh, but there are dozens and hundreds of witnesses whose testimony can be used. The multitude of witnesses certainly serves to enhance the presence of the shaykh in his absence or even after his death. Other groups who stand in opposition to the True Believers are non-Muslims; in both books, there are several stories involving Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians. Not all of the stories end with the conversion of these people to Islam, but some of them do. The texts convey the impression that non-Muslim communities were an altogether “normal” feature of urban life, and besides, that in the 11th and 12th centuries, Zoroastrians still formed a substantial body of the population in a number of villages or rural districts. Other religious groups are not explicitly mentioned if one does not take the Ismā‘īlīs as a particular group – they evidently are hostile and plan to kill the hero of the True Believers and the sultan who is under their protection²⁰. Turkish emirs and generally the highest representatives of political and military power are sometimes under the spiritual protection of the hero of the hagiographic book (in both cases). In particular, this applies for the Seljuqid sultan Sanğar b. Malikšāh in Ġaznawī²¹. Ibn Munawwar reports a well-known story in which the early Seljuqid rulers Tuğril and Čağrı come to visit the shaykh who then foretells them their future (Asrār, 170–1). In the view of the hagiographic authors, shaykhs and sultans hold equal ranks, and indeed no king could be successful without a shaykh’s protection or blessing; the true kings are the shaykhs. This view gained wide acceptance in the post-Mongol period but is clearly present even in 12th-century books such as the two works under study.

²⁰ The Ismā‘īlīs (or Seveners) are a particular group within Shiite Islam. One of their branches had succeeded in establishing a network of fortresses with centres at Alamūt in northwestern Iran, Girdkūh towards the east of the Elburz mountains, and a cluster of fortresses in the eastern province of Quhistān (south of Ĥurāsān). Militant Sunni Muslims thought that it was a religious duty to fight them in *ğihād*. On the other hand, they had made themselves a reputation by their killing of individual rulers and other leading figures, including the Grand Vizier Nizām al-Mulk in 1092. For a short version of their history, see Marshall Hodgson, “The Ismā‘īlī State”, in *Cambridge History of Iran* vol. V, *The Seljuq and Mongol Periods*, Cambridge 1968, 422–482.

²¹ The last sultan of the Great Seljuqs and the last Seljuqid ruler in Ĥurāsān, Sanğar reigned for next to 60 years (if one includes his period as subordinate sultan) until his death in 1157. For a brief biography, see Clifford Edmund Bosworth, “Sandjar”, in *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. IX, 15a–17a, Leiden 1995.

Lower-ranking emirs are mostly hostile; this includes *iqṭāʿ*-holders and tax collectors²². The Iranian rural notables (known under titles such as *raʿīs* and *mihtar*) are divided; some of them are True Believers, some of them Deniers²³. The established scholars are the paradigmatic Deniers. Three arguments for their denial of charismatic figures are on record. First, they fear that they may lose their clientèle. Second, they think that nobody can know God's secrets and that men who claim that they do must be impostors. The third argument is that either the Sufi path as a whole or some specific Sufi activities have no basis in the textual foundations of Islam. Most of the stories about Deniers involve scholars: in Ibn Munawwar, this includes the most famous figures who were contemporaries of Abū Saʿīd. In Ġaznawī, the quoted scholars are of a more provincial format. Scholars are the target in the story discussed in the example (see below). Renunciants of the old school – that is, men who do not engage in mystical and spiritual exercises but are virtuous in ascetic endeavours – also appear, they are called *muddaʿī* “those who challenge or make a claim”, and they are among the Deniers. Other Deniers come from a more modest background, there are several craftsmen in this role, among them a maker of sickles and a hairdresser. Rival Sufi masters must also be mentioned. In Ġaznawī, the rival is Mawdūd-i Čišṭī (d. 1133, one of the spiritual ancestors of the later Čišṭiyya brotherhood)²⁴, and the confrontation took place in the region of Herat, far away from Aḥmad's chase; Čišṭ, today Ḥwāğāčīšt, is about 100 km upstream from Herat on the Harīrūd. This confrontation involved armed followers in great numbers, but at the end, violence was avoided, and Čišṭī submitted (p. 70–4); Aḥmad then was in a position to act as his guide, telling him that he had to study (possibly the shariatic sciences). – Ibn Munawwar, too, has an instance of territorial thinking: Abū Saʿīd respectfully asked whether he was permitted to enter Ṭūs when on his way from Maihana to Nišāpūr (p. 14). It is well known that later on, shrines tended to become territorially defined, with each shrine having its own catchment area. Most delimitations are marked in the sense that no transition zone

²² This evidently is not the place to engage in a discussion of the *iqṭāʿ*. This was, roughly speaking, a grant of tax emoluments of a smaller or larger territory to an official, in most cases, but not exclusively, a military, in return for service. See Ann K.S. Lambton, “Eqṭāʿ”, in *Encyclopædia Iranica* vol. VIII, 520b–533a, Costa Mesa 1998.

²³ Rural notables (or rural lords) have not received their due of scholarly attention as yet. See Jürgen Paul, “Where did the *dihqāns* go?”, forthcoming in *Eurasian Studies* 11 (2013).

²⁴ See Gerhard Böwering, “Češṭiyya”, in *Encyclopædia Iranica* vol. V, 333b–339a, Costa Mesa 1992.

is visible. People are either within one group or within the other. There are only a very limited number of exceptions. One of these is the famous Nīšāpūrī Sufi Qušairī who has a quite important role in Ibn Munawwar: he is the one who represents earlier Sufi currents and is therefore time and again shown as a novice, as a person whose spiritual station in no way compares to what Abū Saʿīd could claim²⁵. He is in every respect inferior to Abū Saʿīd, just as Čištī was to Aḥmad, but it is not *ʿilm* in which he is lacking in the first place, but the qualities essential in a spiritual guide.

The rigidity of delimitations also comes to the fore in the attitude towards ordinary Muslims and their pastimes. Here, we should forget about the widespread idea that Sufis are more “tolerant” than other Sunni Muslims: the type of Islam Aḥmad-i Ğām stands for is very strict²⁶; the author praises him for the incredible number of people who repented at his hand, but also for having broken so many Zoroastrian wine jars and destroyed so many musical instruments. Strict adherence to the prophetic Sunna is self-evident, and some of the features remind one that in eastern Iran, early religious virtuosity in Sunni Islam had representatives such as ʿAbdallāh b. Mubārak²⁷. It also has to be mentioned that in both cases, the authors give extensive information about how Abū Saʿīd and Aḥmad studied the shariatic sciences (as a necessary but preparatory stage to their later life as Sufi masters), and Ibn Munawwar in particular makes a point of quoting his hero in Arabic. As for Aḥmad, Ğaznawī sometimes seems to aim at a position which was quite current later on: you can do without such study; but in this case, the writings of Aḥmad-i Ğām are there to prove that he was a thoroughly learned man. Ğaznawī explains the learned character of these writings by pointing to a su-

²⁵ Abū l-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qušairī (986–1072), a central figure in the history of Sufism in Ḥurāsān and beyond. His *Risāla* has become a cornerstone of Sufi teaching. See Heinz Halm, “Kušayrī”, in *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. V, 526a–527a, Leiden 1986.

²⁶ It is hard not to share Fritz Meier’s feeling “daß der unvoreingenommene Leser den Wunsch nicht unterdrücken kann, die Händelsucht des Scheichs einmal durch Entzug des Charismas gestraft zu sehen”, “Zur Biographie”, p. 54. Needless to say – nothing of the sort ever happens.

²⁷ ʿAbdallāh b. Mubārak (716–797), a central figure in the development of Sunni Islam, known for his militancy and at the same time for his importance in the transmission of Prophetic traditions. See Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* vol. II, 551–5. For the context of early Sunni militancy, see Deborah G. Tor, *Violent Order: Religious Warfare, Chivalry, and the ʿAyyār Phenomenon in the Medieval Islamic World*, Würzburg 2007.

pernatural origin of such learning (*‘ilm min ladunī*, p. 14). The hagiographic books therefore stipulate the superiority of their heroes over other relevant groupings in religion and politics. In religion, they claim an authority for the Friends of God which outranks the ulama; within politics, they claim that sultans cannot do without protection from the Friends of God. Regarding the ulama, the main argument is that the Friends of God dispose of ways to immediately experience God’s Truth. The narrative outcome of this claim is the miracle report in which regularly deniers and sceptics are confounded, either because they repent or else because they are punished. Renunciants (*zuhhād, mudda‘iyān*) sometimes challenge the Friends of God, but in the ensuing contests, they lose and are ridiculed.

Audience

Ġaznawī gives more details about the audience for which he wrote his work. In a remarkable section (*faṣl* 3, p. 12–13), he tells how he had started writing down what he saw and heard in Aḥmad’s service. After a while, he says, he went back to Ġazna where he originally came from and where he had left family, friends and colleagues, and began to speak about his life in Ḥurāsān. He had expected to find open ears, astonishment and later belief, but nothing of the sort happened. His audience responded by sceptical questions and comments. Back in Aḥmad’s service, the shaykh of course noticed that his new disciple had changed and no longer wrote down stories and sayings. He left it at that, however. But after another trip to Ġazna, the author himself thought that he was worse than the sceptics and deniers because he had seen, and thousands with him, and still he was led into doubt by those who had not seen. When he asked the shaykh again why there were people who did not believe, Aḥmad gave the salomonic answer that they had not been given belief, and he added: “Even you would not believe if you did not see every day, and I myself would not be much better. As a consequence, one must not reproach them their unbelief”. Ġaznawī then lists a number of events where Aḥmad’s charismatic gifts were quite evident, in particular stories involving sultans and emirs – not because of the prominent actors, but because there had been thousands of witnesses, in some cases close to ten thousand. And still, he says, there are those who say that all this are mere stories and fairy tales (*afsāna*). No wonder! The Prophets themselves fared no better with the miracles they worked. And therefore, he concludes, “we are writing in order to increase

the belief of the believers, the knowing ones and those of pure intent so that they²⁸ do not lose hope in God's grace" (p. 13). Briefly, he confesses that he is preaching to the converted, without much hope to convince Deniers of the truth he is telling. There is a reason for that. As stated above, *inkār*, "denying", is overcome regularly by a personal experience which the shaykh is able to produce or to provoke thanks to his charismatic gifts, and this seems to be the only way how Deniers can become True Believers. The author himself has been through such experiences. His own story is the first miracle account in the book. He tells it twice, in an extended version at the beginning and in a short version a bit later. He was on his way to Mecca together with some friends and colleagues, and the company heard many stories about a shaykh who was active at a location not far from the route the caravan was following. Ġaznawī decided that he should go and test the man. Testing, *imtiḥān*²⁹, is one of the favourite intentions of Deniers when they come to see a shaykh. He therefore went there, and found the place rather crowded. One of the visitors had brought a melon, and the shaykh ordered a servant to cut it up and give everyone present a slice. The author thought that even if there had been ten melons, it would not be enough – but of course the one melon was enough (miracle type: increase)³⁰. Then he thought that if the shaykh really had charismatic gifts (and had "sight", *ṣāhib-i dīd*), he would now give the last slice to him. Immediately, the shaykh called him by name and gave him the slice (miracle type: *firāsa*, "clearsightedness")³¹. As a result of all this, the author experienced an extatic state and fell down on his knees in front of the shaykh, in other words he repented. I am not going to insist on the spiritual teaching in this story (the main point is that the shaykh calls Ġaznawī by name without having seen him before; he thus makes a kind of new individuation possible, addressing the inward person *bāṭin* rather than the outward one, and this call provokes the spiritual state), but I want to make some remarks on the narrative preconditions evident here and throughout the book .

²⁸ Reading *na-bāšand* for *na-bāšid*.

²⁹ Gramlich, *Wunder*, does not have a discussion of *imtiḥān*, but there is a very useful summary of "denying" argumentation under the heading "Die Gegner und ihre Widerlegung" (opponents and how they can be refuted), 98–110.

³⁰ Gramlich, *Wunder*, does not have a special type for this ("Mehrungswunder"), the corresponding stories come under "Versorgung" (nourishing, providing essential things), 322–337.

³¹ Gramlich discusses *firāsa* under "Hellsehen", and this particular type would be an example for "Fremde erkennen" (recognize strangers), 152–3.

Ġaznawī puts it like this: the eye is truthful, but the ear is lying (p. 24). A direct experience of the charismatic gifts of which the shaykh disposes no longer was possible when Ġaznawī was writing, that is, after Aḥmad's death: the charismatic gifts are not extinct, they are present at the grave or at the shrine, but the deceased shaykh does not use them in the same way he did when he was walking on earth. The experiences therefore have to be re-enacted and remembered second hand, in a narrative, over a distance in time and space or both. Miracle stories are attempts to re-vivify the charisma, to recall it into a living presence. But these attempts never can be completely successful as Ġaznawī himself knew very well: when he had tried his hand at emulation in his home town, he had to admit at the end that he failed. Hearsay is no substitute for direct eyewitness experience. Charisma can be inherited, and it is also present in the shrine, but not in the same intensity as in the living person, and stories told at the shrine are in a way keeping the spirit alive, but only to a certain extent. Direct and personal experience is what matters. Ġaznawī is convinced that nothing short of that will have any effect on people. Even for sympathisers and followers, such experience has to be repeated, and if the shaykh does not show his charismatic gifts on a regular basis, people will think that he has lost them. Therefore, the quality of a True Believer is a kind of exalted status, True Believers are bound to relapse into a spiritually inferior category if they no longer are under the immediate influence of personal experience. Charisma is perishable, and so is its influence. The hagiographic books under study try to capture this problem in several ways. First, they have recourse to the habitual procedures of asserting authority in medieval Islam. For many stories, transmitters are identified; Ġaznawī claims to have been an eye-witness to most of the stories; a number of stories are transmitted on the authority of the shaykh himself. Ibn Munawwar who had a much greater time span to cover between the narrated events and the moment of narration, uses the well-known device of the *riwāya*³² which here appears as an uninterrupted chain of transmitters which goes back to an eye-witness. In these chains, the descendants of shaykh Abū Sa'īd play a prominent role (not at least because Ibn Munawwar was himself descended from the shaykh). This chain, however, is no guarantee for us for having the stories and sayings even roughly in an "authentic" fashion because the oral

³² The chain of transmitters modeled on the one which was used to link sayings and reports to the Prophet. In the medieval scholarly world, a *riwāya* was an academically controlled device to ensure the stability of the transmitted traditions, see Stefan Leder, "Riwāya", in *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. VIII, 545b–547b, Leiden 1995.

transmission here is not the same as the “scientific” *riwāya* which belongs to the madrasa, not to the Sufi *ḥānaqāh* or the shrine. The anecdotal form, called *ḥikāyat* or *dāstān*, can be linked to the earlier *ḥabar* of authoritative texts in a number of sciences in medieval Islamic culture and seems to mimic it³³. Hagiographic writing echoes an oral tradition with its *Sitz im Leben* at the shrine; descendants of the shaykh buried at the shrine (or other professionals) narrate such stories to the visitors even today. The complex movement of such stories between oral and written forms has been described by Devin DeWeese³⁴. During this process, the well-known phenomena of hagiographic literature emerge, above all the topical stories with all their set pieces. Moreover, the problem of hearsay is integrated into the books themselves and to a certain extent into the biographies of the heroes. In both books, the heroes claim to have gone through a long period of extreme renunciation and mortification, of true virtuosity in ascetic exercises. But their audiences have not witnessed that: in both biographies, there is a spatial change between the early and the mature period of the hero’s life. The extreme ascetic exercises are set in the wilderness or in remote rural places, and the mature shaykhs then were active in a capital city (Abū Sa‘īd) or in a densely settled agricultural region with occasional trips to urban spaces (Aḥmad). Moreover, both have given up renunciation in their mature life, Abū Sa‘īd even in a programmatic way. Their audiences therefore have to accept the stories they hear about the shaykh’s achievements as renunciants more or less unquestioned; in both cases, this gives rise to an occasional show-down pitting the shaykh against a challenger. (Reports of *čilla* contests, Ġaznawī p. 55, Ibn Munawwar p. 136; a *čilla* is a forty-day seclusion exercise). In such contests, the hearsay reports are confirmed, and to doubt the veracity of such reports is a particular form of *inkār*.

The rest of the article is devoted to the presentation and discussion of one miracle story taken from Ġaznawī. It is typical in some ways: stories involv-

³³ *Ḥabar*, pl. *aḥbār*, is a term used for the Prophetic tradition, but also for the small individual reports in early historiography. It has been studied *inter alia* by Stefan Leder in: *Das Korpus al-Ḥaiṭam Ibn ‘Adī (st. 207/822): Herkunft, Überlieferung, Gestalt früher Texte der aḥbār-Literatur*. Frankfurt/Main 1991.

³⁴ Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and native religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and conversion to Islam in historical and epic tradition*. University Park PA 1994.

ing transsubstantiation are very frequent in this book, to the point that they may be considered as one of its characteristic features. Moreover, it is a story about Deniers, even if the term itself does not appear. And it offers a good background for demonstrating some of the levels on which a hagiographic text can (and perhaps should) be read; there are certainly more than the ones I could capture, and of course not all of these readings apply for all miracle stories in early Persian hagiography. The “social history” reading is out of the question in this particular case since it cannot well be applied to individual stories. Instead, I have tried to capture in a nutshell some of the points which seem to me to go with the True Believer – Denier controversy.

Ġaznawī p. 78, story no. 29³⁵

*How pearls were transformed into liquid water and later solidified again
(Dāstān-i āb gaštan-i murwārid wa dū bāra mun‘aqad šudan-i ān)*

1

Another is the story about how pearls were transformed into liquid water and then again became solid. This happened as follows: Qāḍī Abū l-Faḍl Yaḥyā-yi Harawī, Imām Ḥāhīr al-Dīn Ziyād and Faḥr al-Dīn ‘Alī Haiṣum came into the ḥānaqāh of Šaiḥ ‘Abdallāh-i Anšārī in Herat (God sanctify his precious soul). They talked about the Unity of God and the Gnostic knowledge of God (*ma‘rifat-i ḥaqq*).

2

Then the following sentence came to the Šaiḥ al-Islām’s blessed lips: “You are saying these words in imitation (*taqlid*), and how can an imitator say anything in verification (*taḥqīq*)?” They were very much taken aback by this, and they replied: “Everyone out of our number has thousand arguments (*dalīl*, textual foundations) for the existence of the Creator by heart, Glory to Him, if you now declare us to be imitators, who then in your eyes would be a Verificator (*muḥaqqiq*)?” The Šaiḥ al-Islām said: “Even if everyone knew ten thousand such arguments, you would still be imitators”. They said: “For such a statement we need more cogent proof than what you have offered so far.”

³⁵ The translation is my own. I have given paragraph numbers to the steps in which the narrative evolves; the numbers of course are not part of the text.

3.1

He said: "Quite so."

3.2

Then he told a servant: "Bring three pearls and a basin." The servant brought the pearls and the basin. Then he [Aḥmad] said: "Give me the pearls and put the basin there".

3.3

Then he asked the imams: "What do you say, what is the origin of these pearls?" They answered: "Spring raindrops which have fallen into the mother-of-pearl and then God in the perfection of His power has decided in His free volition to let them become pearl."

3.4

Then the Šaiḥ al-islām threw the pearls into the basin and said: "Everyone who bends his head over this basin in the intent of verification [of God's Unity] and says Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm will transform all three pearls into water so that they flow into each other by the power of God, praise to Him."

3.5

The imams said: "Say that, now." The Šaiḥ al-islām said: "First you say it, and when after that it will be my turn, I'll say it."

3.6

Then all three imams said it, the pearls however stayed as they had been.

3.7

When after that they put the basin before the Šaiḥ al-islām, an extatic condition appeared on him, he bent his face over the basin and said: "Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm". By the power of God, praise to Him, all three pearls became water and flowed into each other and became part of the water in the basin.

3.8

Then the Šaiḥ al-islām said: “Uskun bi-*iqn* illāh ta‘ālā” [Become firm, God permitting], and a single pearl solidified [out of the water] by God’s command, praise to Him. It was not pierced.

4

All of them were confused, they shouted and extatic states became apparent. The imams [after that] believed the Šaiḥ al-islām and said: “All you say is pure belief and verification, and there is nothing more to say about the miracle which appeared before our eyes”.

5

And God knows best.

Comment

This is a lively narrative, the action is driven by direct speech. This is very typical for both books and reminds one of the closeness of hagiographic writing to oral literature. The persons are a typical gathering of scholars who meet the shaykh. The scene is set in a place which is not the shaykh’s own ground, but in a large city where Aḥmad-i Ğām did not come as frequently as he came to Nišāpūr. The scholars seem to be well-known to the original audience, they are not introduced³⁶. One of the reasons why direct speech is so prominent in hagiographic narratives is related to the nature of Sufi experience. For Sufis whose ultimate aim is the personal experience of God’s nearness and love, a reported speech mode is out of the question since it would take away the immediacy. As stated above, witnessing by the bodily and the spiritual eye is all that counts, and since this no longer can be achieved after

³⁶ There is one Ziyād b. Ilyās Abū l-Ma‘ālī Ḍahīr al-Dīn who was a disciple of al-Bazdawī (d. 1089), a famous Hanafi scholar; the name and the date could fit, the person in question is however strongly linked to the Ferghana Valley; Ibn Abī l-Wafā‘, *al-Ġawāhīr al-muḍī‘a fī ṭabaqāt al-ḥanafīya*, Haidarabad/D., 1332, 245 no. 627. And there is one Yaḥyā b. Šā‘id b. Saiyār al-Harawī who appears in the biography (*tarğama*) of a member of the Sam‘ānī clan who died in 510; here again, the dates would fit at least approximately. See Tāğ al-Dīn al-Subkī, *K. ṭabaqāt al-šāfi‘īya al-kubrā*, ed. ‘Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, n.d. n.y., vol. VII, 9–10. I have no suggestion about the third imam, and it is by no means sure that the persons in Ğaznawī are to be identified with those in the biographical dictionaries.

the death of the shaykh, the narrative tries to be as close to eye witness as possible. The question of whether the shaykh really said this (*verbatim*) is never asked. The story is dramatised, by the use of direct speech, but also by implied gestures (such as the order to the servant “Put the basin *there*”). In all, it is possible to read the story as a script for theatre or cinema. The scene is clearly set, in a location famous enough to be known even in Ġām. The beginning and the end are both distinctly marked: the beginning by the imams entering the scene, and the end by the closing formula “God knows best”. There also is a movement towards a climax which occurs in part 4, when the imams repent after experiencing a state heretofore unknown to them. The story evolves as follows:

- 1 Scholars enter the ḥānaqāh, prattling away as is their habit
- 2 Shaykh intervenes, a first verbal altercation follows
- 3 Main act of the drama : contest
 - 3.1 Shaykh accepts to give proof
 - 3.2 This is not going to be verbal: Props brought
 - 3.3 Verbal explanation and introduction: What is a pearl?
 - 3.4 Fixing the rules of the contest
 - 3.5 Who begins? Politeness, but also preparation for climax
 - 3.6 Expected results: Scholars fail
 - 3.7 Expected results, cont’d: Shaykh succeeds (but is not himself at that moment)
 - 3.8 Extra: performance doubled (= Shaykh is a top performer)
- 4 Final act and climax: Scholars are confused, experience a *ḥāl*, repent (*tauba*)
- 5 Conclusion or coda: God knows best.

Stories in Muslim hagiography often can be read on several levels. The first one here is that the shaykh is able to work a miracle by transforming pearls into water, and more importantly, back again, water into pearls. This kind of miracle which involves some kind of transsubstantiation is very frequent in Ġaznawī³⁷. There are instances where the gift to transform one substance into another one is used as a means to prove, confirm and corroborate Aḥmad’s status as a Friend of God (“Beglaubigungswunder”), sometimes even per-

³⁷ Gramlich, *Wunder*, has a rubric for miracles involving transsubstantiation (“Naturverwandlung”, and in particular the first part: Various matter into gold and precious stones), 268–270.

formed on demand. This level of the narrative addresses the crowd at the shrine, it is for the pious if perhaps ignorant people who just believe without asking further questions. The next level is about the superiority of Sufis over scholars, and therefore about the confounding of *munkirān*. What is denied in *munkir* thinking is a whole set of qualities. Deniers do not think that Friends of God with their well-known charismatic gifts exist, or if they have existed at some point in the history of Islam, they do not exist any longer. Further, Deniers do not think that God communicates directly with men, at least not since the end of prophecy, and prophecy ended with Muḥammad. The end of prophecy also is the end of revelation. Last but not least, Deniers do not think that God's innermost essence can be known. It is in this innermost essence that God keeps His secrets. Therefore, men cannot participate in such knowledge, e.g. they cannot know the thoughts of men (only God knows men's hearts), and also, men cannot know what God plans to do next, and therefore, the future is unknown. Sufis hold a very different position on all these points³⁸. The last level in Sufi narratives is a teaching about the mystical path. On this level, the narrator addresses his co-disciples and possibly future generations of Sufis, and it is this inner meaning which often is at the core of the hagiographic narrative. Sometimes it comes out into the open (e.g. when the narrator gives the key to the narrative in a verse following the story itself³⁹), but most of the time, this level has to be inferred from the story itself, and in particular from the terms and terminology which the Sufi shaykh uses in it. This terminology throughout is replete with *double-entendre* which is not made explicit; one could imagine the more spiritually advanced audience enjoying just this play with different technical meanings of a given term. The dialogue therefore is constructed so that this play becomes possible; at this level and in such a context, it is not important at all whether these were the shaykh's *ipsissima verba*.

The story is about a contest, and the question behind the contest is that the persons in the story want to find out who out of them has the right to call himself a *muḥaqqiq*. There are (at least) two understandings of this term pre-

³⁸ For the *munkir* position, see Gramlich, *Wunder*, 98–110. – For a short introduction into some of the basic tenets of Māturīdī speculative theology, see Hans Daiber, *The Islamic Concept of Belief in the 4th/10th Century*, Tokyo 1995, in particular the introduction; Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand*, Leiden 1997; Lutz Berger, *Islamische Theologie*, Wien 2010.

³⁹ No such cases on record in the source under study, but frequent in other works of Persian hagiography, e.g. Ibn Bazzāz, *Ṣafwat al-ṣafā*, ed. Gulāmriḏā Ṭabāṭabā'i Maḡd, Tabrīz 1994.

sent in the text. On the one hand, a *muḥaqqiq* is the opposite of a *muqallid*. A *muqallid* – this term I have translated as “imitator” – is somebody in Islamic law who is unable to find solutions for upcoming problems himself but has to entrust them to a more learned person, and in speculative theology, the term is used similarly⁴⁰. Normally, the persons who find solutions for legal problems are called *muḡtahid*, “somebody who is able to deduct a solution for a given problem from a given set of texts and cases using a well-defined set of rules”⁴¹, but since we are not looking at Islamic law in the story, but at speculative theology, a *muḥaqqiq* could be somebody who can tell the truth or decide which one out of a given set of speculative arguments is true. In this case, the problem which the scholars debate is the Unity and Uniqueness of God (*tauḥīd*), probably (although this is not stated) together with the well-known problem of God’s attributes and names of which there are many. This is what I take to be implied in the phrase that they were also debating *maʿrifat al-ḥaqq*, “knowledge of the Truth”, this is Gnostic knowledge for a Sufi, but could be the question of what can be known and said about God which is a problem in speculative theology. It is this kind of speculative theology which has come to the conclusion that knowledge of God’s secrets is impossible; for Sufis, therefore, this kind of speculative theology is a paradigmatic way of *munkir* thinking. For a Sufi, on the other hand, a *muḥaqqiq* is not a scholar. According to a later manual of Sufi terminology, a *muḥaqqiq* or *mutaḥaqqiq* is someone “who witnesses Him Most High in every particular thing without specifying it”, and the action of such a vision (*taḥaqquq*) is explained as follows: “This is the vision of God (*al-ḥaqq*) in the images of His names which are manifest in the (visible) objects”, and a particular type of *mutaḥaqqiq* is “somebody who witnesses a single Truth within all objects, and sees that every object has an absolute aspect and an aspect which is limited by all kinds of specifications. And who sees this sight by immediate personal experience (*dauq*) is a *mutaḥaqqiq* [in this understanding]”⁴². Put a bit more simply, when using the term *muḥaqqiq*, Aḥmad-i Ğām in this story refers to a personal experience of the sameness of substance of any kind of material objects when referring to God’s power; material objects thus are different only in

⁴⁰ See Daiber, *Islamic concept*, 15: for some, *taqlid* is a way to religious knowledge.

⁴¹ This is a short explanation I’d suggest for the term. On *iḡtihād* and the position of the *muḡtahid*, see D.B. Macdonald, “Iḡtihād ii”, in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. III, 1026b–1027a, Leiden 1971; for a more recent position see Wael Hallaq, “Was the Gate of *Iḡtihād* Closed?”, in *IJMES* 16,1 (1984), 3–41.

⁴² Kamāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Qāšānī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*, Cairo 1981, 76 and 156.

their accidental attributes (such as solidity or liquidity). As stated before, the story is about a contest. Both the scholars and the shaykh try to do the same thing, the scholars fail, the shaykh succeeds: they try to transform pearls into water, or rather, since the subject behind the miracle must be God, they try to invoke God's power to transform pearls into water at just this time and place, and at their request. The contest thus goes to show who out of the participants is closer to God so that his requests are granted (so that he is a *mustağāb al-da'wa*), one of the most important claims the Friends of God could make. Contests are often shown in hagiographic narratives. This is quite natural since the Sufis at that point (12th century) still had to fight for general recognition. They had to prove firstly that their action and teaching was according to the sharia (no doubt about that with Aḥmad-i Ğām, but the question is discussed sometimes in relationship with Abū Sa'īd). But they were not satisfied with that. They felt that they (and not the scholars) were the true heirs of the Prophet, and indeed the True Believers. In the story, the shaykh claims that the scholars have no particular achievements to their name, and that they all fall into an inferior category, that they are "imitators". He implies of course that he is not, something the scholars are not slow to find out. Therefore, it is Aḥmad who opens the confrontation. In other stories, it is the Denier who calls for a contest (as in a contest of 40-days seclusion) or who calls for a confirmation (a kind of "sign", *Zeichenwunder*) to prove Aḥmad's charismatic gifts. This is the "testing" (*imtiḥān*) narrative which the author reports also for himself. In the example, the contest itself is then provoked by the scholars who want more proof. They are not explicitly *munkir*, but their approach is the same: they do not think that direct divine action is possible in our day, and therefore the best you can do and the nearest you can come to God is to have as many texts present by heart as possible. The *munkir* approach therefore is bookish, it does not take personal experience into account. The shaykh seems well-prepared. In all hagiographic contest and testing narratives, the shaykh accepts the test without hesitation, here and now. This again may be due to the "immediacy" postulate which is a standard feature of Sufi superiority. Everything is in place, how could it be otherwise? But in this particular story, it is the shaykh who chooses the setting and the material, the props needed for the demonstration, this is not always the case – in other stories, it is the opponent who has the choice of weapons. His setting is well chosen: Since the test is an outcome of a debate surrounding the divine attributes and names, he opts for a transsubstantiation miracle. For a person who is a *muḥaqqiq* in the Sufi understanding and who therefore sees an equal

link between matter (in all forms) and God, transsubstantiation is no difficult thing. More particularly to the point is Aḥmad's initial question about the origins of pearls: there, the scholars themselves have to admit, according to medieval knowledge, that pearls originate out of a transsubstantiation and that God has decided, out of His free volition, to change the substance of the raindrops into pearl, and that therefore, at some earlier point, the pearls had been water. Moreover, miracles are also called *ḥawāriq al-ʿāda* in Muslim hagiographic writing, habit-breaking events. Let us remember that there are no natural laws in a thoroughly medieval Muslim understanding, but only God's habits; if God decides for once that water is not going to stay water but to become pearl, then there will be pearl. So at the outset of the contest, the scholars admit that they themselves accept transsubstantiation (with God as subject) in their worldview. The outcome is not really surprising, but it is clear that the narrator uses suspense in his dramatisation. This is visible in the passage where the shaykh and the scholars have to find out who has to begin. Politeness of course would make one take the second or last position, but in the story, the drama requires that the shaykh comes at the end. The whole point of the story would be spoiled if it were otherwise. Not only does the shaykh fulfil the stipulated conditions for proof of his status as a *muḥaqqiq*. He also lets a greater, unpierced pearl re-emerge out of the water at the end. This needs comments. First (on the first level of reading, meant for the pious but maybe ignorant audience) the shaykh gives an extra performance. For this audience as well, it could be remarked that in the many transsubstantiation miracles in the book, always a worthless object is transformed into a precious one, as e.g. dust into gold. It would not fit into this pattern if the transsubstantiation would be the other way round, so that in this case, precious pearls would be transformed into trivial water and then left in that state. The process therefore is reverted, and this also could have a spiritual meaning. On a spiritual level, the pearls disappearing into the water could stand for the *fanāʾ*, the disintegration of Self into the divine Being. It is therefore not coincidental that the shaykh asks for *three* pearls to be brought: the manifestations of God's Being in the material world are manifold and numerous, but they all dissolve into the same substance from which they originated⁴³. Then, in a stage which lies beyond *fanāʾ*, the station of *baqāʾ* can be

⁴³ I was asked at the meeting whether there might be Christian ideas behind this play of Three and One. I do not think so; the area where the text originated never was massively Christian (even if Christian communities are attested and are mentioned in the book itself). At any rate, the question is not to trace "influences", but to find

attained in which the mystic enjoys continuous presence and closeness to God⁴⁴. This may be behind the newly materialised pearl. It is a symbol for God's lasting presence, and therefore it is only *one* pearl which reappears in the second transsubstantiation. The pearl also is not pierced; on the first level (for the uninitiated audience) this shows that the whole thing is not a trick but that indeed the new pearl had not been there before and is not identical to any of the old pearls. On another level, the unpierced pearl of course is a symbol of God's Unicity, and its not being pierced could then refer to the incapability of the human mind to analyse God's Being in any form. This Being can only be experienced, but not analysed.

out how hagiographic narratives were fashioned and how they functioned in a given setting.

⁴⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill 1975, in particular 142ff.