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The Merchant of Art

An Egyptian Hilali Oral Epic Poet
in Performance

by Susan Slyomovics

University of California Press



Frontispiece. ḤAwaḍallah ḤAbd al-Jalīl ḤAlī, the merchant of art

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An Egyptian Hilali Oral Epic Poet
in Performance

by Susan Slyomovics

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To my mother, VERA HOLLANDER SLYOMOVICS

To my mother, VERA HOLLANDER SLYOMOVICS

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INTRODUCTION

Moving northward from the Arabian peninsula in the eighth and ninth centuries, the Banū Hilāl tribe of Bedouin Arabs (henceforth referred to as Bani Hilal or Hilali) traversed the Levant, then moved westward across the Sinai peninsula and eventually settled in Egypt. In the tenth century the Fāṭimid ruler of Egypt, al-ʿAzīz Ibn al-Muʿizz, deported much of the tribe to the southern region of Upper Egypt, known as the Ṣaʿīd. In A.D. 1045-46, when the ruler of the Tunisian littoral (*Ifriqiyya*), al-Muʿizz Ibn Bādīs, switched allegiance from Cairo to the ʿAbbāsīd Caliph in Baghdad, the Egyptian Fāṭimid leaders sought vengeance by unleashing the Bedouin tribes of Egypt against North Africa. This particular version of African history owes much to the fourteenth-century chronicler, Ibn Khaldūn,¹ who compared the arrival of the Bani Hilal to the arrival of a “cloud of locusts” invading the Maghreb.² In this study, I am not concerned with the role of the Arabian Bedouins, either in the Islamicization or the conquest of the Maghreb or the ways these twin processes have been discussed both by medieval and modern historiographers of Islam. Instead this study focuses on popular perceptions of Arab history as they are expressed by folk epic poets and storytellers who narrate the adventures of the Bani Hilal tribe and their long journey from Arabia to Tunis.

The history of the Bani Hilal tribe is enshrined within a cycle of tales known throughout the Arabic-speaking world as *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, the epic, saga, biography, romance of the Bani Hilal tribe. The epic exists in various literary forms: books and manuscripts, both handwritten and published;³ written texts redacted from oral sources; and tape-recorded material.⁴ It continues to be narrated and sung in marketplaces, cafes, and villages up to the present day. Though I will refer to scholarly works concerning the printed versions, and also to manuscripts and texts redacted from oral sources of the epic of the Bani Hilal, in this study I focus on the life and artistry of an illiterate, professional Egyptian poet and musician of Upper Egypt, a man by the name of ʿAwaḍallah ʿAbd aj-Jalīl ʿAli of the village of Najʿ al-Ḥajis, Aswan Governorate. ʿAwaḍallah regularly sings and narrates his lengthy version of the Hilali tales in colloquial Ṣaʿīdi Arabic. This book is concerned

with only one of ʿAwaḍallah’s performances.

On the evening of March 10, 1983, a group of Upper Egyptian men, augmented by my presence, a foreign, female folklorist, were entertained by a performance given by the epic poet, ʿAwaḍallah. In the second section, entitled “Performance Text,” I provide a redaction, with explanatory notes and description of that evening’s narrative. However, in order to understand the events of the March 10, 1983 performance, it is necessary first to introduce the reader to the surrounding circumstances that play a part in the narration of specific episodes of the Hilali tales: the role of the professional Hilali poet (*šāʿir*) as a social outcast in village society, the constituency of the poet’s audience and patrons, the improvisatory nature of the poet’s performance, the exchanges of insults between poet and audience, ʿAwaḍallah’s understanding of Arab history in general and the history of the Hilali tribe in particular, and the nature and content of the particular tale ʿAwaḍallah narrated for us. On that evening ʿAwaḍallah chose to present a rendition of the story of ʿĀmir Khafāji, a tale about the Hilali hero, Abu Zayd, and his rescue of the royal family of Iraq from their enemy oppressors, the Jews of Khorasan.

Earlier research and descriptions of oral Hilali epic material began with Ibn Khaldūn, the medieval Tunisian historian who created not only the historical stereotype of the Bedouin Hilali marauder and sacker of cities, but who also described their literary presence in a series of texts.⁵ Ibn Khaldūn wrote down early North African Bedouin versions in the vernacular language. Later forms of the epic and accounts of epic performances were compiled by the team of French scholars who came to Egypt with Napoleon and his invading armies; they assembled drawings, musical notations, and descriptions of contemporary musicians and artists. In the early years of the nineteenth century, Edward Lane, an Englishman long resident in Cairo and conversant in Arabic, described the Hilali poets, “the Aboo-Zeydeeyeh” (the name deriving from the subject of the recitation).⁶ Both the Frenchman M. Villoteau and the Englishman Lane reported two phenomena from their respective times that remain true even today: first, that a professional epic poet recites only and is identified with a single epic; second, that though recitations sometimes take place in public cafes, wealthy listeners, who do not frequent such places, often commission recitations at home:

Les lieux où se rendent le plus habituellement les improvisateurs et les *mohaddetyn*, sont les cafés, parce que là ils sont toujours sûrs d’avoir un

nombreux auditoire, également disposé à les encourager et à récompenser leur talent. Les gens riches, ne fréquentant point les cafés, font venir chez eux ces rhapsodes, comme ils font venir les musiciens et les danseuses pour les amuser, le plus souvent à l'occasion de certaines réjouissances domestiques, comme à la naissance d'un enfant, le jour d'un mariage ou pour fêter les personnes qu'ils reçoivent chez eux.⁷

It is such an occasion, a recitation commissioned to honor Jamāl Zaki ad-Dīn al-Hajāji by his wealthy host, ʿAbd al-Ghafūr ʿAbd aj-Jalīl, in the private home of ʿAbd al-Ghafūr's father, that is both the social setting for the Hilali epic poet ʿAwaḍallah and also the ethnographic and descriptive backdrop of this study.

Egyptian scholars, Western travelers, and Orientalists have often chronicled the public recitations that take place during pilgrimages and fairs or in the urban cafes of Egypt.⁸ However, the characteristics of a private rendition of an epic segment in the context of an intimate, familial setting yields a very different, entertainment. The kind of interaction between poet and audience that occurs in a private performance does not occur in the public sphere, even when the same tale is recited. For example, when ʿAwaḍallah recites in public his favorite episode of the epic, namely, the story of ʿĀmir Khafāji, he chooses to reduce his punning techniques and poetic insulting interpolations in favor of greater clarity in the story line. For the sake of the larger, amorphous, unidentifiable listener, the poet eliminates confusing, multiple meanings, interruptions, and personal references. In private, however, ʿAwaḍallah readily names and intends personally to address, often to insult, individual members of his audience. In public, by contrast, he addresses an unnamed, hence not-to-be-mocked, mass of people.

Such considerations of the complex literary and social relations between performer and audience necessarily lead me to consider the effect of my presence—a Western female ethnographer whose very attendance inevitably ruptures the traditional atmosphere of a male poet singing to a Ṣaʿīdi male audience—on the performance occasion. In the chapter entitled “The Poet and the Ethnographer,” I have tried to account for the specific effects of my presence on the events I witnessed. My conclusions are based in part on anthropological theories regarding participant observation, in part on a series of informal interviews carried out for a year. I discuss the ways I was accommodated to the role of both listener and patron of the epic. This experience itself serves as ethnographic data. I discuss this experience in order

to make a larger claim about the nature of audience response to the particular episode, the story of ʿĀmir Khafāji, which was narrated by ʿAwaḍallah. I try to show how, and understand why, parallel moves govern the ways the audience adapted to my presence and the ways in which ʿAwaḍallah transformed the content of the tale.

Studies of professional poets and storytellers have concentrated primarily on redactions of tale and text, or they have devoted themselves to assembling biographical information, or they have restricted themselves to descriptions of the poet’s world view.⁹ In this study I want to consider the recitation in the context of a dramatic performance in which all participants, poet and audience—including ethnographer—have roles to play. I draw upon a good many theories regarding the nature of oral poetic composition, improvisation, and manipulation of oral-formulaic phrases.¹⁰ I am also much influenced by performance-centered folklore theories, that is, the ethnography of social discourse.¹¹

¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿIbār wa dīwān al-mubtadaʾ wa-al-khabar*, trans. W. MacGuckin de Slane, *Histoire des Berbères et des dynasties musulmanes de l’Afrique septentrionale*, 4 vols. (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1925-26); see also H. R. Idris, “Hilāl,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1971 ed.

² Historians have recently reevaluated the role of the Hilali Bedouins, i.e., whether the invading tribes are characterized as either devastators of North Africa or carriers of Islamicization. See Jacques Berque, “De nouveau sur les Banī Hilāl?” *Studia Islamica* 36 (1972): 99-111 and his “Problèmes de la connaissance au temps de Ibn Khaldoun,” *Cahiers du laboratoire de sociologie de la connaissance* 1 (1967):35-70; and Michael Brett, “Ibn Khaldun and the Invasion of Ifriqiya by the Banu Hilal, 5th century A.H./11th century A.D.,” *Actes du Colloque International sur Ibn Khaldoun*, June 21-26, 1978 (Algiers: Société Nationale d’Edition et Diffusion, 1982).

³ A catalog and synopsis of the plot can be found in Wilhelm Ahlwardt, “Verzeichniss der arabischen Handschriften,” in *Die Handschriften-verzeichnisse der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, Vol. 8, Book 19 (Berlin: A. Asher, 1896), Cat. no. 9261, pp. 246-52, and updates with relevant bibliographies in Micheline Galley, “Manuscrits et documents relatifs à la geste hilalienne dans les bibliothèques anglaises,” *Littérature orale arabo-berbère*, Bulletin 12 (1981), pp. 183-92; and in Abderrahman Ayoub, “A propos des manuscrits de la geste des Banū Hilāl conservés à Berlin,” *Association internationale d’étude des civilisations méditerranéennes. Actes du IIIème congrès*, ed. Micheline Galley. (Algiers: SNED, 1978), pp. 347-63 and in A. Ayoub, “Sīrat Banī Hilāl: Note à propos de quelques manuscrits conservés à Berlin-Ouest,” unpublished manuscript.

⁴ For partial bibliographies and a critical evaluation, see Bridget Connelly, “The Oral-Formulaic

tradition of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*." Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1974; and her "The Structure of Four Banī Hilāl Tales: Prolegomena to the Study of *Sīra* Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 4 (1973): 18-47. For a discussion of an elicited Hilali recitation of Upper Egyptian poets taped in Cairo under studio conditions, see her "Three Egyptian Rebab Poets," *Edebiyât*, in press; Giovanni Canova, "Gli studi sull'epica popolare araba," *Oriente moderno* 57:5-6 (1977): 211-26; and his *Egitto 1: Epica*, I Suoni, Musica di Tradizione Orale 5, (Milan, 1980); two articles in *Association internationale d'étude des civilisations méditerranéennes, Actes du IIIème congrès*, (Algiers: SNED, 1978), by Lucienne Saada, "Documents sonores tunisiens concernant la geste des Banū Hilāl," pp. 364-75, and by Claude Breteau et al., and Arlette Roth, "Témoignages de la longue marche hilalienne." For a critique of collecting and transcription methods, see my "Approaches to Transcription and Translation of Oral Epic Performance," *The Arab Folk Epic*, Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Arab Folk Epic. Association of Mediterranean Studies and Cairo University, Jan. 2-7, 1985 (Cairo: GEBO, in press).

⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon, 1958), especially vol. 3, and Abderrahman Ayoub, "Approches de la poésie bédouine hilalienne chez Ibn Khaldoun," *Actes du Colloque International sur Ibn Khaldoun*, June 21-26, 1978 (Algiers: SNED, 1982), pp. 321-45.

⁶ M. Villoteau, "De l'état actuel de l'art musical en Egypte," in *Description de l'Egypte (Etat Moderne)*, (Paris: Imprimerie de C. L. F. Panckoucke, 1826), vol. 14, pp. 228-31; and Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, (London: Ward, Lock, n.d.).

⁷ Villoteau, "De l'état actuel," p. 232.

⁸ Henri Habib Ayrout, *The Egyptian Peasant*, trans. John Alden Williams (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), pp. 101-3; Winifred Blackman, *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt*, (London: George C. Harrap, 1927), p. 266 (photograph); Charles Didier, *Les nuits du Caire* (Paris: Hachette, 1860); Tāhā Ḥusayn, *al-Ayyām*, 3 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Maḥārif, n.d.); Antoine Barthélemy Clot, *Aperçu général de l'Egypte* (Bruxelles: Meline, Cans, 1840); Abderrahman Abnoudy, *La geste hilalienne*, trans. Tahar Guiga (Cairo: GEBO, 1978); Richard Critchfield, *Shahhat: An Egyptian* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1978); and Aḥmad Rushdī Ṣālīḥ, *Funūn al-'adab al-shaḥbī* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1956), 2:63-91.

⁹ See the issue of *Cahiers de littérature orale* 11 (1982) devoted to "conteurs," which also contains a bibliography by Brunhilde Biebuyck, pp. 195-214. For material specifically concerned with storytellers of the Middle East, see my "Arabic Folk Literature and Political Expression," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 8:2 (1986): 178-185; Dov Noy, *Yefet Schwili Erzählt: Hundertneunundsechzig jemenitische Volkserzählungen aufgezeichnet in Israel, 1957-1960* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1963), about a Yemenite Jewish storyteller; Kenneth Brown and A. Lakhassi, "Everyman's Disaster: The Earthquake of Agadir—A Berber (Tashelhit) Poem," *Maghreb Review* 6 (1981); Sayyid Ḥāmid Ḥurreiz, "The Use of Folk Poetry in Political and Social Protest by the Shukriyya," *Directions in Sudanese Linguistics and Folklore* 4 (1975): 123-131; and articles on Hilali poets by scholars such as Abnoudy, Ayoub, Canova, Connelly, Galley, and Ḥawwās, whose studies are cited in various chapters of this study.

¹⁰ For example, see the seminal work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord, summarized in the latter's

The Singer of Tales (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960); and John Miles Foley, *A Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research: An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography* (Boston, Mass.: Garland, 1985). For material on Arabic texts, see Michael Zwettler, "Classical Arabic Poetry between Folk and Oral Tradition," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 96 (1976): 198-212, and his *The Oral Traditions of Classical Arabic Poetry: Its Character and Implications* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978).

¹¹ A selected bibliography includes, e.g., Ojo E. Arewa and Alan Dundes, "Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore," *American Anthropologist* 66 (1964): 70-85; Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1977); Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth Goldstein, *Folklore: Performance and Communication* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975); Elizabeth Fine, *The Folklore Text: From Performance to Print* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Robert Georges, "Feedback and Response in Storytelling," *Western Folklore* 38 (1979): 104-110; Michael Herzfeld, "An Indigenous Theory of Meaning and Its Elicitation in Performative Context," *Semiotica* 34 (1981): 113-141; Dell Hymes, *"In Vain I Tried to Tell You": Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); and Dennis Tedlock, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

THE POET OUTCAST

It is often said that a social outcast is created by and necessary to the community because he not only defines social boundaries but also serves as a focus for group feelings. In Upper Egypt, the poet is coded as such an outcast, but he is also the artistic bearer of his group's cultural history. In this peculiar case of the outcast, the various ways in which social status is usually assigned, for example, lineage, descent from the Prophet Muḥammad, tribal nomenclature, means of livelihood, are supplemented by additional concerns. In this chapter, I first describe prevailing attitudes toward the poet and then describe the way these attitudes affect both the audience's response to an epic performance and the poet's performance itself.

In 1983, when I did my fieldwork in Upper Egypt (the Ṣaʿīd), the poet ʿAwaḍallah ʿAbd aj-Jalīl ʿAli gave his age as sixty-three. His friends, however, insisted that ʿAwaḍallah was much older, and my repeated attempts to decipher the tattered and faded identification card, the *biṭāga šaxṣiyya*, issued to all Egyptian citizens, were unsuccessful. Even if the I.D. card had been readable, it would not have settled the question of age. In times past, no one put correct information on their official papers, or so I was told. ʿAwaḍallah says that he was born in the hamlet of Najʿ al-Ḥajis, in the *markaz* or district of Edfu, which is in the *muḥāfaẓa*, or governorate, of Aswan, Egypt's southernmost province.

ʿAwaḍallah's full name, as is customary among Egyptians, consists of his own first name, ʿAwaḍallah, followed by his father's name, ʿAbd aj-Jalīl, and then his grandfather's, ʿAli. ʿAwaḍallah can recite his genealogy back ten generations to an earlier ʿAwaḍallah. He is thus ʿAwaḍallah, son of ʿAbd aj-Jalīl, son of ʿAli, son of Ḥasan, son of Maḥmūd, son of Aḥmad, son of Ṭāhir, son of ʿAli, son of Muḥammad, son of Ḥasan, son of ʿAwaḍallah. The family arrived in Egypt in the late nineteenth century, having migrated down the Nile River from Kushtamna, a town in Nubia, Sudan, to Najʿ al-Ḥajis. The reason for this migration, ʿAwaḍallah says, is that his ancestor, Ḥasan, had murdered a

fellow villager and was obliged to flee Sudan into Egypt.

ʿAwaḍallah's father and grandfather were illiterate poets who sang the Hilali *sīra* (the word *sīra* being variously translated into English as saga, tale, epic, legend, history, biography). When ʿAwaḍallah was seven, his father began preparing him for the profession of poet. The father would say a line of the *sīra* and beat young ʿAwaḍallah with a stick until the boy repeated the line correctly. ʿAwaḍallah was more adept than his older brother, and his father designated him to be the one who would accompany him in recitation. ʿAwaḍallah accompanied his father until the age of fourteen.

ʿAwaḍallah has his own explanation for why he was chosen over his brother. He says that the epic cycle, which records the history of the Arabs, goes from father back to grandfather (*sīrat ilʿarab di min ʿab li jidd*). In times past, when his ancestors' minds were like jewels (*muxxhum jōhar*), this principle of primogeniture would have governed the transmission of history. A decline has clearly set in, however, as is shown by his older brother's inabilities, and the transmission of history is therefore jeopardized. ʿAwaḍallah sees himself as more traditional than his elder brother Muḥammad, but the very fact that he, rather than his brother, was chosen is itself an interruption in the chain of historical transmission, and ʿAwaḍallah finds this troubling. The future is yet more worrisome. None of ʿAwaḍallah's six sons has continued the family's poetic heritage. The two eldest boys, Muṣṭafa, a fellaḥ, and ʿAli, a worker in a nearby phosphate company, are illiterate and not only have no interest in but actually disdain the profession of poet. The other sons, ʿAbd al-Faraj, a soldier, ʿAbd an-Nabi, a fellaḥ, and Saʿīd and Badawī, both in the army, can read and write but also have no interest. ʿAwaḍallah also has two married daughters, Saʿīda and Baxīta, both illiterate, neither, of course, as women, fit for the profession.

Until he was fourteen, ʿAwaḍallah sang with his father, wandering at peasants' doors in times when a short poem might bring a few pennies. It used to be a custom to distribute, before the owner harvested for himself, gifts of grain to the poor and to poets and musicians. Older villagers, who can recite by heart sections of the Hilali tales, recall learning them from ʿAwaḍallah or from other itinerant poets. These poets entertained the harvest workers in the fields during rest breaks and received as payment the first fruits of the harvest. Before the completion of the Aswan High Dam in 1966-67 halted the Nile's annual flooding, there were regularly three annual harvests: the fall (*nīli*), winter (*ṣitāwi*), and summer (*ṣēfi*). These harvests provided fixed occasions

for storytelling sessions, and the poets and their families came to rely on these food-gathering opportunities. The Aswan High Dam has been blamed by Upper Egyptians for many problems currently afflicting Egypt: rural migration to urban centers, soil impoverishment, reliance on expensive imported fertilizers, a rising water-table, westernization, and the emancipation of women. To this list °Awaḍallah adds the loss of leisure time, the time between harvests and during the high flood, when the fellah enjoyed the art of storytelling and music.

At the age of fourteen, °Awaḍallah struck out on his own and became, in his own words, not just a poet but also a devil (°*afrīt*) among the women. He often stressed this erotic dimension. Since much of °Awaḍallah's youthful artistic activities led him to solicit money from peasants in their homes, he operated in the women's domain while the men were at their fields. °Awaḍallah says that his love songs gained him more than money. When °Awaḍallah was eighteen, his father married him off to his father's brother's daughter (*bint °amm*). At the time, °Awaḍallah loved another woman, Amīna, but he acquiesced to custom and parental authority.

In April 1983, °Awaḍallah and Jamāl Zaki, my colleague from Luxor, Upper Egypt, were both my guests in Cairo, and there °Awaḍallah told us the story of Amīna, whom he characterized as the only woman he had ever loved. The story emerged in response to a photograph of my mother taken when she was eighteen which was placed next to °Awaḍallah's bed. °Awaḍallah found himself very moved by the picture, which, he said, resembled his beloved Amīna. She had died several years earlier and °Awaḍallah still continued to visit her grave. Amīna was a good, virtuous Arab woman (*šēxat il°arab*), with eyes like a gazelle. To express his feelings, °Awaḍallah sang for me a long love song, whose refrain Jamāl echoed: "the lover weeps all night long" (*il°āšig yibki ṭūl illēl*). °Awaḍallah went to sleep holding the photograph. The next day he claimed that he had passed a sleepless night. He said that there were demons, or °*afarīt*, in the room, and fearing the bedroom demons, he insisted on sleeping in the living room for the remainder of his visit to Cairo. He refused thereafter to discuss Amīna again. A colleague to whom I confided this story suggested that °Awaḍallah was perhaps indirectly declaring his affection for me since I resemble my mother. (This seems quite plausible. Using this very verse, °Awaḍallah formulated a particularly telling indirect insult against a member of the audience during a performance; see my discussion of this oblique insult in the performance text.)

As ʿAwaḍallah relates his life history, several important events stand out. First, there is his marriage to his wife Bahiyya, at a time when they were so poor they owned only a box and a bed. Then, in 1954, his house burned down, and his neighbors aided in the reconstruction of a mud brick house, which ʿAwaḍallah still inhabits. From the late fifties to the mid-sixties, ʿAwaḍallah worked as a stonemason (*ḥajjār*) at the phosphate company in Sibaʿiyya, ten kilometers to the north. He was paid 35 gīrsh, or fifty cents, a day. He was a favorite of his fellow workers because he sang poems and songs to distract them from their difficult tasks. When his younger sons completed their education in the larger district town of Edfu, ʿAwaḍallah quit his stonemason job and became a petty trader, attending the local weekly markets with his wife as partner. Friends sold him produce on credit, and he repaid them when he was able. At the village market of Najʿ al-Ḥajis, he sold local produce in season, such as watermelons, Jew’s mallow, and okra, and used the profits to buy straw mats and baskets woven by Nubians. These he would then sell in the more distant market towns of Daraw (forty kilometers south, on Tuesdays), Edfu (thirty kilometers south, on Wednesdays), and Esna (thirty kilometers north, on Saturdays).

All these activities are subordinate in ʿAwaḍallah’s own mind to his profession as a poet. It is as a poet that he understands his own identity, and this is also how he is identified by the community. ʿAwaḍallah introduces himself in a rich and complex phrase as “a merchant of art” (*tājir ilfann*): a merchant and trader, an artist, and a purveyor of art, all compacted together in the same grammatical construction. ʿAwaḍallah will improvise a poem, organized around this phrase, at the marketplace, in cafes, whenever introductions are being made. During my year in his company, I heard thousands of variants of this poem that ʿAwaḍallah uses to introduce and advertise himself. The following example is what he improvised upon meeting me. Though I had him repeat it to be taped, it was slightly altered by the time I located my tape recorder fifteen minutes later. In order to convey the puns uttered orally into written form, the key punned words and their English translation have been capitalized.

?ana tājir ilfann ʿind ilgōl

NAWĀḤĪĀ

I am a merchant of art for speech, { IN OUR REGION
OUR LAMENTS
COME TO US

nizil dam^c cēni cala -ḥbāb NAWĀḤĪNA

tears for my eyes descend for beloved ones, OUR LAMENTS,

?ana ?abāt sahrān min firgit ilxillān NAWĀḤĪNA

I spend sleepless nights for dear friends' parting from OUR REGIONS,

?amāna ṭabīb ya tāji cindina wi -lḤAGG

I plead with you healer, O you who come among us, I swear by TRUTH,¹

dawāk masbūt lam zayyu fi cilab wala ḤAGG

there is no sure medicine like it in a box or JAR,

cāwiz li jada^c zēn yifham ma^cna -lḤAGG

I want for myself a fine young fellow knowing TRUTH's meaning,

?anā ?agul-lak ilḤAGG yōm cīd jītu NAWĀḤĪNA

I tell you the TRUTH—a festive day when you came in OUR REGIONS.

ya ṣāyig ilfann, mirattib ilfann WAḤDĀNA [*aside*] WAḤDI ?ANA

O jeweler of art, versifier of art AMONG US [*aside*] I AM THE ONLY ONE,

ya ṣāyig ilfann cind ilfann WAḤDĀNA

O jeweler of art, when it comes to art AMONG US,

?aškur rabbi mawjūd huwwa -lḤAGG WĀḤDANA[N]

I thank my Lord Who is present, He is { TRUTH, UNIQUE
AMONG US

?amāna ya cēni cāla -lfirga wi -lḤABĀYIB

I plead, O my dear, about partings and LOVED ONES,

jarḥ makrān juwwa -jjōf wa ḤABĀYIB²

a suppurating wound deep in my guts and PUSTULES

cāwiz ilḤABĀYIB ?āti -lyōm WAḤDĀNA

I'll have DEAR ONES today come AMONG US.

Though cAwaḍallah works as a middleman in produce and baskets, he continues to perform at pilgrimages (mainly singing poems in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad) or, more commonly, at various celebrations where he is paid by a patron to recite portions of the Hilali epic (the end of the month-long fast of Ramaḍān, a wedding, or the annual workers party at the sugar factory in Edfu). Until 1975, cAwaḍallah was also a regular entertainer at a cafe in Edfu. When the owner died, however, the new proprietor replaced cAwaḍallah with a troupe of local musicians. cAwaḍallah complains that audiences accustomed to loud, rowdy music and noise are no longer capable of the hushed attentiveness required to comprehend the unfolding of the complicated plot of the Hilali epic.

cAwaḍallah is the son and grandson of professional Hilali epic singers. He recites a separate tale that explains how his family acquired their art. This tale closely resembles the story of how the angel Gabriel first came to the Prophet Muḥammad in seventh century Mecca and began the series of revelations on which the new religion of Islam was founded. The parallels between the family tale recited by cAwaḍallah and the well-known holy story, which cAwaḍallah himself never spoke of to me, enforce several ironies that point up the peculiarities of the epic poet in Upper Egyptian society.

According to Ibn Hisham in his *Life of Muhammad*, which is one of the chief Arabic biographies, Muḥammad, prior to his revelation, used to withdraw to a cave in the hill of Hirā', to the north-west of Mecca, and one day

in the month of Ramaḍān in which God willed concerning him what he willed of His grace, the apostle set forth to Hirā' as was his wont, and his

family with him. When it was the night on which God honored him with his mission and showed mercy on His servants thereby, Gabriel brought him the command of God. ‘He came to me,’ said the apostle of God, ‘while I was asleep, with a coverlet of brocade whereon was some writing, and said, “Read!” (*Iqra*)’ I said, “What shall I read?” He pressed me with it so tightly that I thought it was death; then he let me go and said, “Read!” I said, “What shall I read?” He pressed me with it again so that I thought it was death; then he let me go and said “Read!” I said, “What shall I read?” He pressed me with it the third time so that I thought it was death and said “Read!” I said, “What then shall I read?”—and this I said only to deliver myself from him lest he should do the same to me again. He said:

“Read in the name of thy Lord who created,
Who created man of blood coagulated
Read! Thy Lord is most beneficent,
Who taught by the pen,
Taught that which they knew not unto men.”
(Koran, Sura 96:1-5)

So I read it and he departed from me. And I awoke from my sleep, and it was as though these words were written on my heart.³

This story, known to all Muslims, is echoed in the tale of how ʿAwaḍallah’s grandfather acquired his art. According to ʿAwaḍallah, his grandfather ʿAli, while wandering in the mountains, came upon a book in the desert. That night, sleeping in a cave, a certain al-Khiḍr came to ʿAli in a dream, saying: *Igra?*, ‘read’ or ‘recite,’ because he was illiterate. ʿAli answered, “I cannot.” Again, al-Khiḍr commanded him, *Igra?* and again ʿAli replied, “I cannot.” Yet a third time, al-Khiḍr said, *Igra?* and this time to his surprise ʿAli could read what was written in the book, and he began to recite. This book was called *sīrat ilʿarab*, the epic or saga of the Arabs. ʿAli memorized this book and taught his son ʿAbd aj-Jalīl, who taught his son, ʿAwaḍallah. After memorizing the book, ʿAli lost the ability to read and also the book.⁴

al-Khiḍr, literally “the green man,” who figures in the tale of ʿAli’s revelation, is a familiar personage. In the Koran he appears briefly as an unnamed messenger and adviser to Moses (Sura 18:60-82). In Egyptian folk culture, al-Khiḍr is a human being who achieved immortality, a bestower of

wishes,⁵ and a teacher of magic and mystical arts. He can also be the master who initiates aspiring Sufi mystics in the absence of a known human guide.⁶ So too, he is the master of Abu Zayd, the Hilali epic hero, repudiated by father and tribe. al-Khiḍr is the person who instructs the infant Abu Zayd to perform superhuman feats of combat and also how to disguise himself. Persian Sufi saints, Arab epic heroes, and Upper Egyptian poets are all alike in that they do not derive their abilities from a mundane source. Instead, they all turn to the personage of al-Khiḍr, who stands as a messenger or teacher, as the first link in a chain of transmitted knowledge (*'isnād*), from whom their tradition and power derive. al-Khiḍr functions as a mediating figure between the divine world and the secular. The role of al-Khiḍr thus parallels in specific ways, structurally and thematically, the role of the angel Gabriel, God's messenger, in the life of Muḥammad.⁷ The narratives of these two stories are homologous in many obvious ways. For this reason, however, the differences between them are especially striking. It is an important and stressed element in the Muḥammad story that the Prophet initially fears that his visions, were he to pronounce them publicly, would be mistaken for the language of either an inspired soothsayer (*kāhin*) or the poet (*šā'ir*). For Muḥammad this would be a profound public humiliation:

Now none of God's creatures were more hateful to me than an [ecstatic] poet or a man possessed: I could not even look at them. I thought, woe is me, poet or possessed—never shall Quraysh say this of me! I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down that I may kill myself and gain rest.⁸

In contrast, ^cAwaḍallah sees his grandfather's revelation as a divine gift, and this despite the fact that the community in which he lives, faithful to the social values reflected in the Muḥammad story, continues to denigrate the person or persona of the poet. ^cAwaḍallah's etiological narrative of literary inspiration thus appropriates Islam's foundation story, but does so in order to beget what Muḥammad in that story loathes, namely, a line of poets (*šū'ara*) and a poetic history of the Arabs in rhymed verse. The conflict between ^cAli's story and the canonical Muḥammad story replicates the peculiarly conflicted relation of ^cAwaḍallah as a poet to the society in which he lives.

^cAwaḍallah is not alone in his belief that the epic he recites reports the true history of the Arabs. This is a belief that much of his audience shares with him.

For example, Ḥājj Sayyid Jōda Murshid, of the village of Ḍab^ciyya, south of Luxor, became enraged when I told him that some scholars consider these tales superstitions (*xurafāt*) or legends (*?ustūra*). Ḥājj Sayyid, a prosperous landowner of sixty-five, could still recite by heart his version of the story of ^cĀmir Khafāji, the King of Iraq, which he had learned thirty-five years earlier from the Hilali poet, Shamandi Tawfīq, a gypsy.⁹ He and his companions repeatedly assured me that the Hilali epic was the true (*saḥīḥ*, *ḥagīg*) story of the Arabs, and the goals of my research, as far as he was concerned, the soul of my research, should be to present the historical facts to foreigners as recorded in the epic. Nevertheless, after thus praising the epic and after reciting for me an hour-and-a-half segment of the epic, he also asserted that he himself rarely tells such stories because it would be altogether unfitting for him in this way to identify himself with gypsies. Ḥājj Sayyid asserts with real conviction that all poets are gypsies (*maṣlūb*, *ḥalab*) and that if a man is a poet, so too is he a gypsy. This conflation or confusion of tribal-racial identification with affective value judgment is perfectly apparent and appropriate to Ḥājj Sayyid.

The association of poet and gypsy is a commonplace in Upper Egypt.¹⁰ Most of the younger inhabitants of ^cAwaḍallah's village believe he is a gypsy (*?aṣlu maṣlūb*) because he is a poet. Asked to explain this they cite a colloquial phrase: 'Whoever beats upon the drum lacks honor and good lineage' (*?illi yuḍrub ^ca -ṭṭār ma ^candūš aṣl*). Asked for further explanation, they wrote down for me a classical Arabic proverb in ornate script misvocalized as follows: "? izā kān rabbu -ddār bi -dduff ḍāriban faṣīmatu ?ahlu -ddār kulluhimi -rraḡṣu," that is, "if the master of the house beats the drum, then a characteristic of the household is to dance." By answering my questions with a proverb phrased in classical Arabic, as opposed to colloquial Ṣa^cīdi or Upper Egyptian Arabic, they intended to support their claim to a traditional wisdom, *ḥikma*,¹¹ the mere reference to which was supposed to close the conversation. Whenever I broached this subject, the relation of poet to gypsy, this strategy of conventional closure was regularly employed.

Gypsies hold a special place in Egyptian culture, and there are several attributes that specifically link them to the figure of the poet. Like many Egyptians, the men of Naj^c al-Ḥajis divide gypsies into three categories by name and profession.¹² The *maṣalīb* (sing. *maṣlūb*) were the best of a bad lot (*? aḥsan ilwiḥṣīn*). They were famed for their straw baskets (*magadīf*) and their abilities as musicians, drummers, and poets.¹³ The *nawar* (sing. *nūri*) earned their living by prostituting their womenfolk. The *ḥalab* were blacksmiths, who

supplied the Arab warriors with their weapons. The *ḥalab*, however, never themselves engaged in warfare. In the most general terms, therefore, the gypsy, both by blood and profession, could never possess what ʿAbd al-Jalīl and his friends in Najd al-Ḥajis called *ʿaṣl*, (adjectival form *ʿaṣīl*). The notion of *ʿaṣl*, which joins together honor and nobility of character (*rājil karīm*) with good, literally “clean,” lineage (*nasab naḍīf*) was frequently invoked as a virtue lacking among poets.

The presence or absence of the category *ʿaṣl* leads to yet finer distinctions regarding the social status of the poets who perform the Hilali epic. ʿAbd as-Salām Ḥamid Khalīfa, eighty-three years old (though family and friends say seventy-three), is a reciter (*rāwī*), not a poet (*šāʿir*), of Hilali tales in the marketplace of Luxor. For this reason, he will never use musical instruments while reciting because, he says, they are for gypsies, beggars, and descendants of the Hilali tribe, and he is a man of *ʿaṣīl*. Furthermore, he reminds his listeners that in the epic itself, it was only because the hero’s mother, Khaḍra Sharīfa, is kin to the Prophet Muḥammad that a branch of the upstart Bedouin Hilal tribe could even claim highborn pedigree: “because of the source thousands are honored” (*l- ajl ʿēn tukram ʿalf*).

Within the outcast category, ʿAbd as-Salām, along with other Upper Egyptians, also includes those who claim descent from the Bani Hilal tribe in Egypt. In the eighth century large numbers of the tribe migrated to Egypt, and in the tenth century, the Fāṭimid ruler deported them to the southern regions, to Upper Egypt.¹⁴ During my research in Upper Egypt I was cautioned never to ask someone if they were Hilali or, as the tribe is more commonly called, Jamasa. They are despised as marriage partners and looked down upon socially, though many have prospered from the tourist trade in Luxor.¹⁵ To explain their base status and tribal name, Jamasa, I was frequently told variants of the following story: When the Prophet Muḥammad was engaged in battling the nonbelievers in the early days of Islam, he summoned the warrior Abu Zayd, the Hilali, the eponymous progenitor of the Hilali (Jamasa) tribe, to fight with the soldiers of Islam. Abu Zayd arrived much too late to help them; in fact, he arrived in the evening, in Arabic *jā’ masā’an*, and, thus, he and his offspring were forever called “Jamasa,” or “he came in the evening.”¹⁶

Though ʿAbd as-Salām and his family despise professional poets and musicians, nonetheless, he and his family, vendors of bean and vegetable sandwiches in the souk, also sell folk musical instruments next to their food stand. No one looks down upon ʿAbd as-Salām for selling these instruments.

Who you are—blood, descent, family—cannot be demeaned by what you do. A merchant of objects is not despised as is a “merchant of art.”

Another set of judgments current among Upper Egyptian enthusiasts of the epic does not concern itself with the poet’s lineage but distinguishes tellers as either *šācīr* or *rāwi*. A *šācīr*, or poet, accompanies his song with a musical instrument, performs for money, finds his art as his principal means of income, comes from a family and a line of folk artists, often gypsies, and, most importantly, never owns land. In contrast, a *rāwi*, or storyteller/narrator, should not accept payment, will have another source of income, never uses musical instruments (he possesses *?aṣl*), and may recite in rhymed verse or more commonly in prose. Whether a *rāwi* possesses *?aṣl* or not will depend on a variety of factors.

Once while I was recording ^cAwaḍallah in his home, an elderly cousin arrived, interrupted a taping session, and demanded that we stop immediately. Such activities, he said, impugned family honor (*cēb kabīr*) and the neighbors would think the less of them. It should be noted that ^cAwaḍallah’s street was inhabited mainly by his relatives, and for this reason, the sense of neighborhood shame was thought to be all the stronger. A strong sense of being of the village, and yet outside it, is reflected in the location of ^cAwaḍallah’s street and home.¹⁷

The village of Naj^c al-Ḥajis is strung along the main north-south highway for a distance of approximately eight kilometers. The village and its agricultural lands, which are situated on the east bank of the Nile River, are bound on the west by the Nile and on the east by the highway. Thus, the Nile River, the highway, the railroad, and the cultivated lands form parallel lines on a north-south axis. Prosperous homes and landowners cluster along both sides of the highway close to the flowering, planted countryside. ^cAwaḍallah, however, lives one kilometer inland and to the east of the highway and three kilometers east of the Nile. This is a sandy, dusty region forming the beginning of the Arabian or Eastern Desert that stretches another 150 kilometers east to the Red Sea. ^cAwaḍallah thus dwells along the easternmost habitable boundary of the village as shown in [figure 1](#).

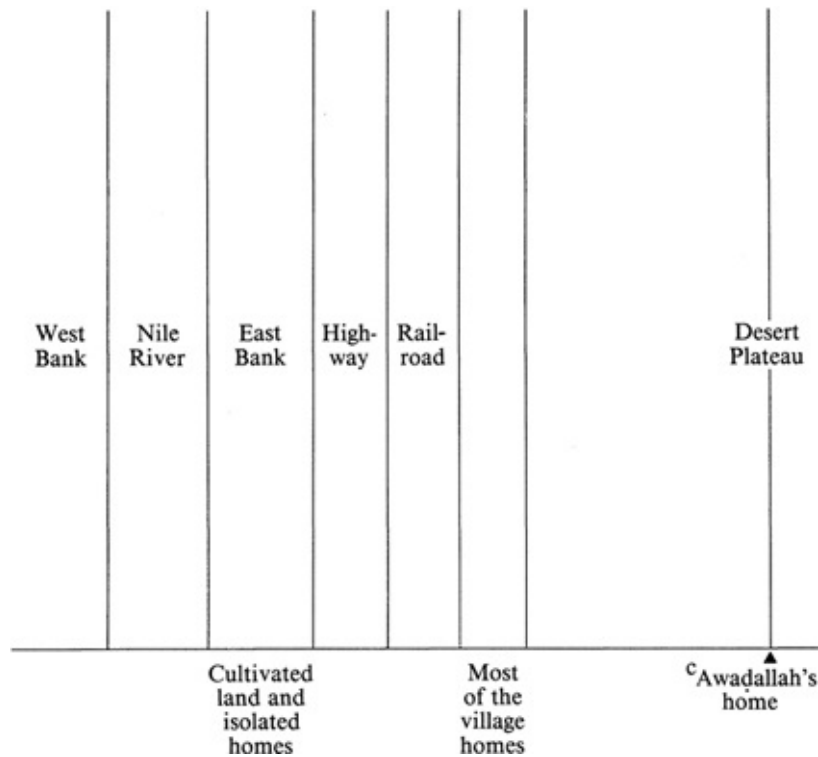


Figure 1. ʿAwaḍallah's home

A quite different definition of the terms *šāʿir*, or poet, versus *rāwi*, or storyteller, was provided by ʿAbd aj-Jalīl Zaki, a frequent host of ʿAwaḍallah's performances. He believed a *šāʿir* is a creative artist in the classical Arabic language, whereas a *rāwi* merely memorizes colloquial verse. ʿAbd aj-Jalīl is a holder of a *licence* (the French term is normal) in Arabic literature from Minya University, awarded to him as an external student. ʿAbd aj-Jalīl here voices an attitude of many educated, literate Egyptians who typically prize the language and written literature of classical Arabic and disdain vernacular, oral literature.¹⁸ ʿAbd aj-Jalīl chose as an example of a genuine Arab *šāʿir* the eleventh-century poet al-Hamadhānī, nicknamed the “wonder of the age.” It is an interesting choice since the classical works by al-Hamadhānī have been analyzed as sophisticated, self-conscious anti-heroic picaresque narratives, which work by inverting and parodying the heroic *sīra* or epic genre in Arabic literature.¹⁹

The issue of ʿAwaḍallah's true descent was eventually settled by ʿAbd aj-Jalīl's father ten months after I began my study in the village. He consulted a village elder, the eighty-five-year-old Shaykh Ibrahīm ʿAbd al-Halīm, who declared with the authority of age and memory that ʿAwaḍallah belonged to the

Jaʿfar tribe. The Jaʿfari tribe in Egypt inhabit the area between Aswan, the provincial capital of Egypt’s southern province, and Kom Ombo, a town 200 miles to the north.²⁰ When I was first introduced to ʿAwaḍallah, he recited many generations of male ancestors, all of whom were from the line of Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiḡ, or Jaʿfar, “the trustworthy.” Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiḡ, in ʿAwaḍallah’s words, was one of the *Ansār*, ‘the helpers’ or ‘faithful of Medina,’ the term given to Muḥammad’s adherents found in Medina. Though Jaʿfar lived after Muḥammad, from A.H. 50 to A.H. 148/A.D. 700 to A.D. 765, ʿAwaḍallah assigns to Jaʿfar the role of an Ansari, namely, a person upon whom nobility is conferred, not by an arbitrary blood affinity with the founder of Islam, but rather by a religious affirmation at an historically propitious moment. However, in contrast to ʿAwaḍallah’s account and according to orthodox Islamic historiographers, Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiḡ was not an Ansari unrelated to Muḥammad but instead the grandson of the grandson of the Prophet; therefore, ʿAwaḍallah could claim legitimately noble descent, the way the other members of the Jaʿfar tribe do.²¹

General Features Peculiar to the Status of the Poet

1. What one says, as far as its truth is concerned, is not affected by who one is, whether gypsy, poet or beggar. ʿAwaḍallah’s story is respected; ʿAwaḍallah is not. This is contrary to everyday experience where the weight of a man’s words depends upon his status within the community. (E.g., my pleasant introduction to my two main hosts in ʿAwaḍallah’s village was effected by Jamāl Zaki of the town of Luxor; he belonged to the important Ḥajāji clan, descendants and caretakers of the Luxor shrine of the saint Sīdi Abūl-Ḥajāj, and thus was a *sharīf*, a descendant of Muḥammad. Jamāl was introduced always as one of the Ḥajājiyyin of Luxor.)

2. According to the perception of the audience, the teller and his tale are not creatively and dynamically intertwined, and this even though many in the audience acknowledge stylistic changes in a poet’s recitation (*?uslūbu mitḡayyar*). Certainly, individual variations, playful elaborations, and musical virtuosity are appreciated and sought out by both patrons and listeners. However, since the epic and its plot lines are known to all, the poet, as he is seen by his listeners, is thought only to hand on a familiar, monolithic history, perhaps embellishing it as it momentarily rests within his possession. The audience believes that the corpus is memorized (*ḥifẓ*) because its content is familiar. The poet is supposed only to ring nuanced changes upon the familiar

by means of the punning artistry of Upper Egypt. The poet himself believes that he sings a revealed memorized cycle (*ḥifẓu min abū*). To an outsider, however, witnessing many performances, which often relate the same episode, each recitation is a unique, improvised oral composition upon an inherited tradition. Though the general frame-story is more or less constant, the narrative is by no means stable. Both the audience and the poet see the poet as the bearer of tradition, not as an individual creative artist. In this way, it appears that listeners are able to enjoy the exploits of the tales' heroes and heroines, exploits that might otherwise be diminished by the low esteem in which the poet who reports them is held.

3. There is an important social and artistic distinction between words recited and words sung to music. Ḥājj Sayyid, the landowning farmer, claims that reciting tales in public does not befit his status. °Abd as-Salām, the narrator in the Luxor marketplace, said that reciting for pleasure, so long as there was no financial reward, is permissible, but playing music while reciting is shameful (°ēb). °Awaḍallah, the professional singer, distinguishes between playing the drum (*ṭār*) and playing the *rabāba*, the one-stringed violin. For °Awaḍallah, the *ṭār* is artistically significant, whereas the *rabāba* is frivolous and unworthy of serious subject matter, such as the *sīra* of the Bani Hilal tribe. °Awaḍallah looks down on professional Hilali poets who accompany themselves on the *rabāba*.

4. The poet's sole weapon against his low status and for the necessity of earning his living by obsequious flattery is a form of artistic revenge that allows him both indirectly to praise and insult his patron. By means of puns the poet characteristically manages to convey the opposite of what he seems to say at the literal level. The audience knows full well that this occurs. The poet's patrons, his Upper Egyptian audience, conduct social exchanges among themselves in a similar manner. So too when dealing with superiors, local government officials, Cairo bureaucrats, and policemen from the north who administer the south, they characteristically employ the indirect, evasive, or innocuous statement that verges, and is recognized as so verging, on the insulting. The colloquial poet, and °Awaḍallah in particular, excels at the art of praising while denigrating. And it is part of the audience's pleasure, consciously noted by the audience, to enjoy what they explicitly deny they enjoy.



Plate 1. ʿAwaḍallah on the *tār* during an “elicited” recording session
(Microphone: SONY electret condenser microphone ECM989)

¹ According to Pierre Cachia, a poet should produce three puns on a word. Therefore, a reading of this line is also ‘I swear by the pilgrimage.’

² Punning on the word ḤABĀYIB, meaning either ‘pimples,’ ‘pustules,’ or ‘loved ones,’ is discussed by S. A. Bonebakker, *Some Early Definitions of the Tawriya and Ṣafadī’s “Fadd al-Xitām ʿan at-Tawriya wa-’l-Istixdām”* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1966), p. 71. Bonebakker points to a seventh-century Arab poet who engages in similar wordplay, see also his n. 8, p. 71.

³ Ibn Hisham, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. A. Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 105-6. The word *Iqra’* pronounced in Upper Egyptian dialect, *Igra?* can be translated either “read” or “recite.” This ambiguity contributes to the continuing debate whether Muḥammad was literate: he could either “read” or, being illiterate, he was obliged to “recite.”

⁴ The Upper Egyptian Hilali poet, Nādi ʿUsmān, from Luxor district, Qina Governorate, interviewed by Giovanni Canova, insisted that the act of taking a book in one’s hands is a sign that one cannot be considered a poet (*šāʿir*); see Giovanni Canova, “Il poeta epico nella tradizione araba: nota e testimonianze,” *Quaderni di studi arabi* 1 (1983): 102. In contrast, the literate Tunisian storyteller who provided the corpus of oral texts in Cathryn Anita Baker’s collection, was the village schoolteacher who had brought back a printed edition of the epic from Syria or Lebanon, see Cathryn Anita Baker, “The Hilali Saga in the Tunisian South,” Ph.D. diss. Indiana University, 1978, pt. 1, p. 147.

⁵ Hasan El-Shamy, *Folktales of Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), tale no. 21, pp. 128-31; tale no. 23, pp. 137-39.

⁶ A Persian hagiography, *Tadhkīrat al-awlīya*, says of a certain young man, Muḥammad Ibn ʿAlī al-Tarmīdhī, who, forbidden by his mother to abandon her and go off to study, meets al-Khiḍr in a graveyard and is trained by him to be a Sufi mystic: “Then I realized he was Khezr and that I had attained this felicity because I pleased my mother” (p. 244). Also, Abū Bakr Warrāq experiences a similar visit and instruction; see Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, tr. A.J. Arberry (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).

⁷ Abderrahman Abnoudy, “al-Sīra al-shaʿbiyya bayn al-shāʿir wa-al-rāwī,” *The Arab Folk Epic*, Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Arab Epic, Association of Mediterranean Studies and Cairo University, Jan. 2-7, 1985 (Cairo: GEBO, in press). Abnoudy quotes two oral epic poets, a southerner, Ḥājj aḍ-Ḍūwi (1914-79) from Qina Governorate, and a northerner, Mabruk aj-Jōhari, Nuwayga, Kafr Shaykh Governorate, who see their poetic gifts as divinely inspired.

⁸ Ibn Hisham, *Life of Muhammad*, p. 106.

⁹ The Folklore Archives, Cairo, kindly made available to me a short selection of Shamandi taped in 1967. A variant also appears in a two-volume record set by Tiberiu Alexandru, *The Folk Music of Egypt* (Cairo: Ministry of Culture, Sono Cairo, 1967.)

¹⁰ Nabil Sobhi Hanna, *Ghagar of Sett Guiranha: A Study of a Gypsy Community in Egypt*, Cairo Papers in Social Science, vol. 5, monograph 1 (Cairo: American University Press, 1982), pp. 31-32.

¹¹ Robert Barakat, *A Contextual Study of Arabic Proverbs*, Folklore Fellows Communications, 96 (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1980), pp. 42-43. Phrasing the proverb in classical Arabic creates a juncture in the conversational context otherwise conducted in colloquial Arabic. Classical Arabic proverbs demand sophistication and learning on the part of the speaker. It was a subtle compliment to me, the listener, to assume that I could understand and read the proverb. It should be noted that my *šilla*, or close peer companions, were a group of literate males in their thirties, whose material circumstances were comfortable, addressing themselves to a foreign female, literate in Arabic, in a village where the majority of females of my age group were illiterate and preoccupied with children and household tasks. Concerning the importance of proverbs in conversation, Laura Nader advises “young anthropologists prepar[ing] for fieldwork in the Arab Middle East, ... that they become familiar with and memorize a selection of proverbs”; see Laura Nader, “From Anguish to Exultation,” in *Women in the Field*, ed. Peggy Golde (Chicago: Aldine, 1970), p. 110.

¹² Enno Littmann, *Zigeuner-Arabisch, Wortschatz und Grammatik der arabischen Bestandteile in den morgenländischen Zigeunersprachen*, (Bonn-Leipzig: Kurt Schroeder Verlag, 1920), pp. 2-4; and Capt. Newbold, “The Gypsies of Egypt,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 16 (1856):285-312.

¹³ The word *maslūb* is velarized to *maṣlūb* in Upper Egyptian dialect. Literate Egyptians preferred the term *sayāyda*, or the people of the Egyptian saint al-Sayyid Aḥmad al-Badawi. For this saint’s role in

Egyptian folklore, see Hasan El-Shamy, "The Story of El-Sayyid Ahmad El-Badawi with Fatma Bint-Birry: An Introduction," *Folklore Forum* 10:(1) (Spring 1977): 1-13.

¹⁴ See H. R. Idris, "Hilāl," *Encyclopedia of Islām*, 1971 ed., pp. 385-87.

¹⁵ The horror in which marriage to a Jamasa is held can be illustrated by a family's reaction to their son's desire to wed one of this tribe. This event takes place in the village of Kom Lohlah, on the west bank of the Nile, opposite the town of Luxor. Richard Critchfield, an American journalist, who spent two years in this village, narrates the following story:

The real objection was that Suniya belonged to the despised Jamasa tribe, the traditional watercarriers of Upper Egypt. The Jamasa, thirteen hundred years before had come late to a gathering called by the Prophet Muhammad. According to Upper Egyptian belief, he had condemned them so harshly, that, ever since, their descendants had suffered discrimination and social ostracism from orthodox Muslims along the Upper Nile. Her son's marriage to a Jamasa was unthinkable to Ommuhammad. When Shahhat declared his intentions, she threw up her hands and cried, "No no my son! Suniya is from a bad family. The Jamasas publicly scorned the holy Prophet. They are crafty and dishonest. How could we hold up our heads? Ommuhammad had nothing against Suniya herself and indeed was fond of her ... One of the village ghaffirs, or constables, a man named Salem, had married a Jamasa. Salem was a direct descendant of their hamlet's namesake, Lohlah, yet he and his family were virtual outcasts ... Neither the Jamasa nor the other villagers had much to do with them. Richard Critchfield, *Shahhat: An Egyptian*, (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1978), pp. 24-25.

¹⁶ There are no Arabic genealogical sources that attest to the actual historical existence of Abu Zayd or of this tale of the downfall of the Bani Hilal tribe. Their social position and reticence about their Bani Hilal ancestry among Upper Egyptians is in marked contrast to the inhabitants of southern Tunisia, who proudly informed visiting foreign anthropologists of their Hilali Bedouin blood; see J. Duvigneaud, *Change at Shebika* (New York: Pantheon, 1970) and Baker, "Hilali Saga," pt. 1, p. 20, n. 1: "... most people of the Tunisian south traced their origins either to the invading Arab tribes of Hilāl and Sulaym ... Both storyteller and audience tended in general to identify sympathetically with the Arab Hilalis in the story. In Manzil Bū Zayyān, e.g., I was told: 'Now you're in Hilali country!'"

¹⁷ Hanna, *Ghagar*, p. 19: "Perhaps the most isolated group are dancers or artists. These individuals prefer privacy and dwell in very isolated places. Even if they happen to live near other villagers, there are well-defined boundaries in their relationships with the wider community."

¹⁸ Canova, "Gli studi." *Oriente moderno*, 57: 5-6 (1977). pp. 211-226.

¹⁹ See James Monroe, *The Art of Badī^c az-Zamān al-Hamadhānī as Picaresque Narrative* (Beirut: American University, 1983).

²⁰ Harold A. MacMichael, *The History of the Arabs in the Sudan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), vol. 1.

²¹ Hamed Ammar, *Growing Up in an Egyptian Village* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), p.

45.

THE POET AND THE ETHNOGRAPHER

The arrival of the Occidental adventurer in the Arab Orient is a familiar event or topos in Western literary history, one that has gathered around itself a sufficient number of narrative paradigms and conventions to justify our speaking, at a certain order of generality, of a genre of such literature. No doubt this genre is itself a sub-genre of a yet larger literary type—quest narrative, for example, or adventure story or pastoral romance. Even so, given the charged relationship of the West to its idea of Arabia, thinking only, for example, of the significance of the Crusades to the Western literary imagination, it seems right to identify, as a literary phenomenon with its own weight and specificity, the story of the Westerner's discovery and experience of the Arab world. As a story of discovery, however, as a story of the West's encounter with its exotic Other, the story tends readily to turn into a narrative of self-discovery.¹ Even when their authors avoid the first person, even when their authors seem to strive for purely descriptive objectivity, it remains the case that these stories characteristically focus on the subjectivity of a Western protagonist. Such introspective focus is all the more evident in the first person texts produced by the many Western travelers, Orientalists, colonialists, military conquerors, anthropologists, and archaeologists who have voyaged to and through the Arab Orient. The authors of these texts seem continually, almost obsessively, to recount, to interpret, and to assess the psychological significance of their personal experience of Arabia.

For what follows, I am particularly concerned with accounts and narrations that focus and dwell on protocols governing the erotic relations of West and East. More specifically, I am concerned with certain literary conventions regarding the meeting of the Western female with the Arab male. Initially, this is an important issue for me because, directly and indirectly, these

conventions speak to and thematize the conditions of my professional life in Egypt. I am a Western female reporting on my ethnographic research in a small village situated 650 kilometers up the Nile from Cairo. I am fairly certain that both my original fieldwork experience and my subsequent understanding of this fieldwork were, to some considerable extent, influenced by my readings in Western Orientalist literature. While I do not believe that my experiences in Egypt were altogether determined by the influence of this literature, neither do I believe that I can altogether discount its effective force.²

The issue is additionally important to me, however, because modern Arabic literature has also developed a series of conventional narratives with which to represent the meeting of Occident and Orient. In these narratives the Arab man's encounter with the West is often symbolically figured through his encounter with a Western woman.³ It seems to me that my meetings with Arab men were powerfully marked, in a good many ways, by specific literary paradigms developed in contemporary Arabic literature, and, yet, more striking, it seems to me that this was the case even when the Arab men I met were ignorant of this written literature. For this reason, however, it is especially significant that quite a different set of literary protocols appeared to structure, if not govern, my relationship with the Upper Egyptian oral epic poet, ʿAwaḍallah ʿAbd al-Jalīl ʿAlī.

In what follows I want to suggest that it is not only ʿAwaḍallah's status as an outsider in his village, his role as the outcast artist, but also his unique relationship to the oral epic tradition that accounts for the ways in which my relations with ʿAwaḍallah differed in kind from my relations with other Egyptian men. More specifically, I want to suggest that the peculiarity of my relationship with ʿAwaḍallah, the relation of a Western female researcher to an Egyptian male poet, can best be understood in terms of the literary and linguistic tension that obtains between literary or classical Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) on the one hand and colloquial Egyptian Arabic (*ʿammiyya*) on the other. These two literatures and languages—for classical and colloquial Arabic are deemed diglossic by linguists—⁴ articulate the theme of East meets West in contrasting ways. Writers of literary or classical Arabic, appropriating the form of the Western novel, thematize the death, destruction, and abandonment of the Western female. In the literature produced in classical Arabic, an Arab man characteristically journeys to the West and meets a Western female. Often the sexual liaison between the Arab male and the Western female ends in the Western female's death by murder or suicide or by her abandonment when the

Arab man returns to his homeland.⁵ In contrast, colloquial language poets, reciting the Hilali saga, emphasize an epic viewpoint. In the epic, the hero characteristically conquers his male counterpart, whereupon the vanquished females of the hero's opponents succumb to Arabdom. ʿAwaḍallah, the outcast epic poet who sings of the hero Abu Zayd, also disguised as an outcast epic poet, thought of himself as such an epic hero. I want to suggest that this identification with the hero of the Hilali saga accounts, at least in part, for ʿAwaḍallah's idiosyncratic relation to me, the Western female ethnographer.

I was first introduced to ʿAwaḍallah ʿAbd aj-Jalīl ʿAli, Hilali epic poet and singer, and Jamāl Zaki ad-Dīn al-Ḥajāji, lexicographer and researcher in Luxor, by Elizabeth Wickett, a Canadian folklorist resident in Egypt. On my initial visit to ʿAwaḍallah's village, in January 1983, I was escorted by her and two male Egyptian Egyptologists employed in archaeological excavations in the area. At this first meeting ʿAwaḍallah greeted us with a welcoming poem advertising himself (a variant of his text is redacted in [chapter 2](#)). We had some discussion, during which I explained my interest in tape-recording his performance of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*. ʿAwaḍallah agreed to participate in a series of elicited recording sessions. The plan was to tape the entire Hilali epic from beginning to end. ʿAwaḍallah also agreed to inform me of any of his performances that might be commissioned by others; providing I could secure the host's permission, I would attend and tape-record these other performances. ʿAwaḍallah had never before sung the entire epic. When performing, he would characteristically recite isolated episodes which were regularly requested by the audience. For example, the conquest of Tunis (*futūḥ tūnis*) and the story of ʿĀmir Khafājī were exceptionally popular. In contrast, other sections, such as the one dealing with the magical birth of the hero, were uninteresting, ʿAwaḍallah said, to his patrons, and so, though he knew the sections, they were never, or only rarely, performed.⁶

For me, the major purpose of my project was to produce a text of a performance. I was not primarily concerned with producing a recording of the entire epic. I wanted to end up with a written transcription of an evening's entertainment, one that included the voiced reaction of the audience to ʿAwaḍallah's recitation. My intention was to transliterate this recorded performance first into Arabic linguistically transcribed and then, having established a written text, produce an English translation. In addition, I intended to append to the text, in the form of notes, ʿAwaḍallah's glosses on and the

audience's varying interpretations of the performance. I planned to gather these in a series of interviews. The performance text would thus faithfully report the full context of the occasion, that is, not only ʿAwaḍallah's performances but the audience's reaction to them. The scholarly apparatus of my commentary would attempt to interpret the data in the light of all the participants' understanding of the occasion. In this way, I hoped to combine my interests as a folklorist and philologist. The scholarly apparatus also allowed me the opportunity to include subsequent revisions of the initial text, as these variants and emendations were suggested by ʿAwaḍallah. In this way there would be no need for me to restrict my comments to a single text, nor would the final redaction be purely my own. Quite the contrary, I hoped to produce, a "co-authored" text,⁷ the multiplicity of which—its variants, its authorship by myself and ʿAwaḍallah—would offer the reader a more faithful sense of the socio-cultural reality of the Hilali saga than would a more stable, but artificially frozen, univocal transcription.

My companion during much of my time with ʿAwaḍallah was Jamāl Zaki ad-Dīn al-Ḥajāji, of Luxor, an electrical engineer employed by the Ministry of Housing (Luxor branch), who supplemented his inadequate civil servant's salary by renting a cigarette shop on Station Street, located on the opposite side of the main square and facing the railroad station. Jamāl had collected and taped Hilali epic performances, women's funerary laments, and Ṣaʿīdi joke-telling sessions, and he had also been working on a dictionary of the Luxor dialect of Upper Egypt, which was to include glosses in classical Arabic.⁸ Whenever I met with ʿAwaḍallah, with one important exception, I was accompanied by another Egyptian male, whether archaeologist, lexicographer, or a member of the educated elite of ʿAwaḍallah's village.⁹

At a certain point, soon after my arrival, as part of my own instruction in the local dialect, I began translating Jamāl's dictionary into English. All our conversations were conducted in Arabic, and our work took place outside Jamāl's shop, between two cafes. Except for me, the company was entirely male. My job was to transfer entries from Jamāl's long sheets of foolscap to individual cards, then to add any proverbs or formulaic phrases evoked by the word. I had my seat in the shop, in summer protected by an ice cream freezer, between the two cafes, the one on my right reserved for the Nubian clientele of Luxor, the one on my left reserved for employees of the railroad line. I watched the illegal traffic in cigarettes (government shortages created contraband) and aphrodisiacs smuggled from Sudan (a British vial called

“Stud” for spraying the male genitals cost fourteen Egyptian pounds).

So too I was allowed to witness the various arguments that would periodically erupt in the cafes, as well as the complicated negotiations with which these arguments were, equally periodically, resolved. I was privy to the complex exchange among the men of cigarettes and payment for beverages consumed at either of the two cafes. After a while, I thought that I was assimilated, if only partially, to this atmosphere. However, my one attempt to participate in this exclusively male world, to participate in an active way, ended in failure.

One evening I tried to reciprocate financially a year’s worth of my cafe consumption of tea, coffee, milk cinnamon drink, chamomile, and *karkadē* (hibiscus flower herb tea). During a rare moment when no one was around, I paid my friends’ cafe bill. A short while later, when the evening’s host found out—and I had no idea who he was—the host roared for the waiter and began publicly to berate him for taking my money. The host made the waiter return my money; he then very publicly paid the bill. As the host left the cafe in a very emotional state, he informed me that I was a guest and added, as his parting comment, “*?inta rājil*” (‘you are a man’). The remark puzzled me, and I received various interpretations. Most of the remaining group of men maintained that he had meant to compliment me. I was often addressed in the second person masculine form of the language, *?inta*, especially when I was being complimented. Jamāl explained to me that it was considered disgraceful (*cēb*) publicly to flatter a woman. For example, he said, a man flirting with a passing woman will generally use the masculine form *?inta jamīl*, ‘you’ (masc.) ‘are handsome’ (masc.), instead of the corresponding correct feminine form, *?inti jamīla*. In this way, should anyone object, presumably an offended relation, the speaker could innocently point to his use of the masculine forms.

A reversed form of behavior that confirmed this attitude was reported by an American male researcher, Richard Critchfield. In the Upper Egyptian village where he resided, Critchfield was frequently the object of male sexual approaches. Jamāl’s brother and Critchfield’s interpreter, Nubi, then explained to Critchfield that to treat a man as a woman by making sexually suggestive remarks was the way the village men asserted their own masculine superiority over the Western male by treating him as a lesser, that is, a female.¹⁰

In Luxor, Jamāl and I were known for our translation activities and were joined by a core group of educated males who debated lexical definitions (for an example of such a debate see n. 115 to line 115 of the performance text

concerning the meaning of *rāyig idḍuḥa*). We also helped various people by translating their private documents. Many people would bring us their paperwork. These included Egyptians employed in the foreign-owned hotels of Luxor who were asked to sign contracts written in an incomprehensible English, tourists who had strayed outside permissible visiting areas and who needed their official papers translated into Arabic, Egyptians who wanted to write love letters to foreign women, and, correspondingly Egyptians who received love letters from foreigners.

Most of my research, whether attending epic performances or working on the dictionary, took place late in the evening. My memories of southern Egypt are filled with the wide-awake hours of the night and the clarity of darkness in the desert, followed by the listless dreaminess of sun-blinded days spent watching the dust and the Nile's eddies while waiting the cool of the evening, which would bring renewed social activity. In ᵀAwaḍallah's village, and in the town of Luxor, I belonged to everybody's round of evening entertainment and talk: the atmosphere was male, public, and somewhat theatrical. Ramaḍān, the holy month in which one fasts during daylight and celebrates at night, was my favorite time of the year. During Ramaḍān, village life most conformed to my work schedule; this was all the more the case in 1983 when Ramadan fell during the hottest season of the year, June, with its 110-degree temperatures.

I had begun my year of research in Upper Egypt after completing two years (1979-81) studying the Arabic language, literature, and folklore at the American University in Cairo. Jamāl helped "interpret" from the dialect of Upper Egypt into my Cairene Arabic. The people of the village could generally understand me, but I had difficulty at first understanding their Ṣaᵀīdi dialect. Despite my flawed Arabic, however, all were very complimentary about my mastery of the language. Here ᵀAwaḍallah's response was quite different. ᵀAwaḍallah was quite willing to call me 'clever' (*ṣaṭra*), but nonetheless he insisted that my tongue was thick (*lisān taḡīl*), a reference, I assumed, to my American accent. The point was important to ᵀAwaḍallah, or so I assumed by his response to a joke I later made. ᵀAwaḍallah was missing many teeth, a circumstance that gave the impression of his pronouncing a pharyngeal voiceless fricative ḥ instead of a pharyngeal voiced fricative ᵀayn. I therefore insisted that our tongues were equally thick. ᵀAwaḍallah laughed at this, but he never again criticized my speech.

My companions in ᵀAwaḍallah's village of Najᵀ al-Ḥajis were two former colleagues of Jamāl, ᵀAbd al-Ghafūr ᵀAbd aj-Jalīl and ᵀAbd aj-Jalīl Zaki, both

educated and from well-connected families in the village. One of these three, sometimes all, would always accompany me to ʿAwaḍallah’s home; all three told me that I was forbidden ever to sleep overnight there. Much as they respected ʿAwaḍallah, they considered poets to be outcasts, unreliable, and sexually dangerous for women. They told me I would necessarily lose their protection should I transgress certain social boundaries.

A photograph I took of my closest friends emphasizes their relationship to each other (see [plate 3](#)). Standing before my camera, Jamāl, ʿAbd al-Ghafūr, and ʿAbd aj-Jalīl immediately assumed the pose that I called “the Egyptian soccer club” stance: arms interlocking around one another’s shoulders, heads inclined toward the center as if they were celebrating the team’s winning trophy. I had seen many groups of Egyptian men similarly posed, and it seemed that I caused even more such group photographs every time I raised my camera. The stylized team spirit of a soccer team, frozen in its corporeal closeness, evoked for me the distinctive qualities of a male Egyptian peer group. Jamāl, ʿAbd aj-Jalīl, and ʿAbd al-Ghafūr were all three literate, educated, of good family (all descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad), government employees (*muwazzafīn*), easily switching between Western-style clothing and the traditional long *jalabiyya* robe of Egypt. It was this familiarity that led them so readily to compose themselves before my camera as a team, one in respect to which ʿAwaḍallah was pointedly apart. In the photo, ʿAwaḍallah is off to the side, the poet outcast carrying his drum and staff, by age and social status relegated to a place behind the other three. His clothing also set him apart: ʿAwaḍallah always wore a turban, and he had never owned a watch or socks, the latter symbols for me of male sartorial modernity in Egypt.

With one major exception, one or more of the three, if not Jamāl, then ʿAbd al-Ghafūr or ʿAbd aj-Jalīl, would always be present when I met with ʿAwaḍallah during visits, recitations, and performances. The latter were especially charged occasions. Epic poetry and performances are considered male social activities. There was, therefore, I believe, always a tension attached to my presence at these performances. My three friends organized their relationship to me, a Western female researcher, and also to ʿAwaḍallah, the local artist and outcast, so as to mediate and to accommodate the novel strangeness generated by the meeting of a foreign outsider, myself, and an indigenous outsider, ʿAwaḍallah.¹¹

One particular strategy, one adopted also by village patrons who commissioned the performances given by ʿAwaḍallah, was to create for me a

fluid identity as “honorary” male.¹² As in the cafe in Luxor, this gave me an ambiguous role, one whose limits and advantages were always tested by my behavior. The rules governing my behavior as honorary male were arbitrary yet exhilarating. I sat in the company of men in the diwan, then afterwards I was passed through a large wooden door, which would close upon the women’s section. There, I would thank the women for the feast and hospitality. Often I was asked to photograph the women, but at the same time, I was forbidden from showing the pictures to other men of the village or to any other male. I would regularly meet men’s wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters, but I was never introduced to the wives of my three closest friends, just as none of them would see one another’s spouses. Sometimes the rules governing my behavior would change. For example, though I was allowed to attend performances of the epic, I was forbidden to attend dirty joke-telling sessions and hashish-smoking convocations. Eventually, in the interests of scholarly research, my tape recorder, but not my person, was allowed to attend the former.

ʿAwaḍallah had a different way of relating to the honorary male, a point brought out by the fact that he allowed me to attend his recitations. In Najʿ al-Ḥajis, women are not allowed to sit in the diwans, the public reception area of the home, to be entertained by the poet. Though some poets are willing to sing in the presence of women, ʿAwaḍallah refuses to do so. His feelings about the relationship between the Arab woman and epic poetry are quite severe. For him the epic is serious history, unfit for frivolous female ears. Women are, for ʿAwaḍallah, *naʿnāʿ*, literally ‘a sprig of mint,’ as opposed to his rhymed opposite category *maʿna*, that is, everything that is meaningful and important.

ʿAwaḍallah finds precedent and authority for his position in the story of ʿĀmir Khafāji. In this episode, ʿAwaḍallah narrates how female sexual passion leads the king’s daughter to invade the men’s meetings. In lines 117-22 and 235-55 of the performance text, ʿAwaḍallah sings of the poet and epic hero Abu Zayd, who demands to know of the king of Iraq why the king’s daughter is present in the Arab councils, and the king reproaches his daughter for creating a scandal among the tribes. Early on in the narrative ʿAwaḍallah explains to the audience that the king’s daughter’s passion for the hero’s nephew causes her to lose all sense of propriety. But the outrage of her entrance into a political meeting is analogous to the outrage that would be involved in a woman’s attendance at a poetry meeting.¹³

But it is not only in the poetic text that ʿAwaḍallah expressed how much he disapproved of women’s being linked with epic and poetry. On two occasions

he told me how he had stopped a major performance, his annual recitation at the workers party of the Edfu sugar factory, when the director's wife dared to join the listeners, how he had refused to resume until she left. cAwaḍallah told me this story in Cairo, after he, Jamāl, and I returned from a visit to the weekly Friday religious singing at a cafe behind the Ḥusayn Mosque. cAwaḍallah had sat in stern, disapproving silence as he watched the women swaying and chanting to the praise-songs. And yet for all the strength of his feelings about the issue, cAwaḍallah nevertheless allowed me, a woman, to listen to him sing in the villages. Several times I asked him whether my being female mattered as far as as my attending epic performances and assuming the financial obligations of a host or patron of a recitation were concerned. I was frequently told that being a woman should not concern me (*mayihimmikš*), that I was not from the village or even the country (*?inti miš min ilbalad*), and that I was a guest who would soon return to my own country. In the meantime, everyone approved of my project, the recording of the history of the Arabs in verse, and proceeded to help, control, and steer my activities to the appropriate poets.

And yet, though invited and encouraged to participate in this way, still, my status as a woman disguised as an honorary male was always raising problematic questions that no one knew quite how to resolve. Even my customary attire, which conveyed several conflicting dress codes, was understood in terms of this issue. Attitudes toward my ensemble were deduced from chance remarks by passers-by, clothing exchanges suggested by friends, and explicit denunciations uttered by closest friends. I always wore jeans and blue Adidas sneakers, both items of clothing worn by adolescent males in the larger towns and big cities of Egypt, a style locally referred to as *zamālkawiyya*, or like a resident of Zamālik, Cairo's posh westernized district. The jeans hid my legs, and over them, as though to hide the full expanse of jeans, I wore a long blue skirt, but a skirt made of the light blue cotton used for men's long summer robes (*jalabiyya*). Usually I wore three layers of cotton shirts, and I always bound my hair up in a kerchief of colored flowers worn by unmarried fellah girls. In summer I put a straw hat with a brim over the flowered kerchief, though these hats sold to tourists were, I was told, intended only for donkeys. In winter I wrapped myself in the long Ṣaḥīdi gray scarf (*šāl*) which formed the winter turban and cloak of the Upper Egyptian male (eventually cAwaḍallah would ask for it as a gift.) My long beige winter coat, acquired in the United States, resembled their army coats. Finally, my brown horn-rimmed glasses, coded serious female academic in the United States,

were the kind worn only by men in Egypt. The Luxor optician pleaded with me for months to exchange them for the teardrop-shaped and rhinestone-embedded model sported by Egypt's most famous female singing star, Umm Kulthūm. All that I was dressed in signaled male, adolescent male, or unmarried female, or even animal, but nothing was appropriate for my age, a married woman capable of having children.¹⁴

Using Luxor as my residential base, I taped and interviewed many poets and reciters. I traveled both sides of the banks of the Nile, as far north of Luxor on the left bank as Nagāda and Gamūla (approximately 60 kilometers), and as far south as ʿAwaḍallah's village 130 kilometers upriver from Luxor. I consider ʿAwaḍallah to be the finest poet, entertainer, and musician of them all. Moreover, given my interest in what specific philological peculiarities meant to the audience, ʿAwaḍallah was particularly valuable for my research, for he not only was able and willing to discuss my recorded tapes, but also, unlike any other poet or reciter I encountered in my research, ʿAwaḍallah had a fairly worked-out theory and set of terms with which to describe the poetics of puns. To my surprise, even making allowances for the degree of hashish intoxication of the performer and audience, many of the poets used memorized formulaic phrases, whose meaning they could not interpret. This was never the case, or never the admitted case, with ʿAwaḍallah, and he never gave a garbled recitation of the epic, except for the one occasion, fearing that my own work would be ruined, ʿAwaḍallah deliberately attempted to confuse an American colleague of mine working on similar material.

At the beginning, when I taped ʿAwaḍallah's version of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, he teasingly spun out sessions by playing only a half hour a day and by scheduling sessions only once a week. Jamāl, worried at the expense of trips and gifts, concocted a scheme whereby ʿAwaḍallah was to be informed that the American University in Cairo had heard of my slow progress and that a letter had arrived stating that unless matters improved immediately, I was to leave Upper Egypt and return, in failure, to Cairo. I was a willing accomplice to this plan, and ʿAbd aj-Jalīl and ʿAbd al-Ghafūr confirmed the falsehood to ʿAwaḍallah. The ruse was successful. ʿAwaḍallah completed an "elicited" version of the entire epic in six weeks, from March to mid-April 1983.

What began as unfair coercion changed to devoted protectiveness of my interests. I have already mentioned the incident in which ʿAwaḍallah recited an incomprehensible, garbled version of a section to my American colleague; so too ʿAwaḍallah refused to record for an Egyptian folklorist. Another time,

while in Cairo, ʿAwaḍallah would watch from the balcony of my apartment for any visitors; on one poignant occasion, when he spied an unwelcome arrival, he came to me holding my Oxford English-Arabic dictionary, believing that it contained crucial information for my dissertation, so that I might hide it. For all his concern, however, ʿAwaḍallah never fully sympathized with the scope of my research. His interests lay in the performance of the epic, not in theories, and in this particular epic, not the genre of epics. In vain did I describe the Parry-Lord theory of oral-formulaic composition, namely, that as a true epic poet, each of his performances was different, unique, and improvised for the occasion. I told him that the version of the Hilali epic he recited for me could never be exactly repeated to anyone else and that therefore he was free to record for everyone else.

But ʿAwaḍallah could not accept such a theory. That his text was stable went without saying: he had memorized the epic from his father and he did not transform it. When ʿAwaḍallah completed reciting the epic for me, he gestured to the pile of cassettes and said: “There’s your thesis and doctorate.” He could not understand that these records of a performance were but the beginning of my work. Only in Cairo, when the three of us sat down to transcribe the tapes and began the process of interpreting each word of the text did ʿAwaḍallah begin to realize the kind of commentary that would be part of the edition, that the actual tapes were the beginning of the dissertation, not the dissertation itself. Only at this point did ʿAwaḍallah realize that he could now sing for other researchers. This also ended my responsibility for putting ʿAwaḍallah’s livelihood into jeopardy, for now ʿAwaḍallah knew that I was writing a book about him and that I was not interested in marketing his tapes.

I have many happy memories of ʿAwaḍallah, Jamāl, and myself touring Cairo, a city of which I was more a native than they. Southerners, especially poor ones from Upper Egypt, are not always welcome in the more westernized quarters of Cairo. Jamāl wore Western dress, but ʿAwaḍallah never. We visited the mosques of Al-Azhār and Ḥusayn, and attended movies at the French Cultural Center, where the director inquired with great politeness about my elderly *jalabiyya*-clad escort, who insisted on employing the carpet as a repository for his spat tobacco juice. ʿAwaḍallah was not familiar with Western-style toilet seats and chains and at first believed Jamāl when he said that ʿAwaḍallah should run out after pulling the chain lest he drown. ʿAwaḍallah told us that running water from a faucet had come to his hamlet in 1981 and electricity only in 1980. ʿAwaḍallah had never used a telephone

before, and he had to be reminded to signal his presence to a caller with “hello.” He confessed that he still didn’t understand how his voice could come out of a cassette recorder, but then neither do I.

It was in Cairo that a decisive event occurred between us. Perhaps it was because Cairo was foreign to both of us and we were far from village control and neighbors’ eyes. In Cairo, the situation was reversed. Jamāl and ʿAwaḍallah were my guests, and I controlled food, transportation, and entertainment. Both Jamāl and ʿAwaḍallah stayed with me in my apartment. Neither would have considered visiting me alone in Cairo, and each thought of the other as a chaperone. Similarly, when ʿAbd al-Ghafūr visited me in Cairo, he always brought along younger nephews and cousins. Jamāl continued in his role as mediator by sleeping in the central living room, while I occupied a bedroom off to the right, and ʿAwaḍallah slept in the bedroom on the left. After the first night of recounting his love story and suffering nightmares from the memories, ʿAwaḍallah slept in the living room and Jamāl in the left bedroom. The previous few weeks ʿAwaḍallah had begun to be very attentive to me, searching for opportunities to be alone, to talk and to touch me, in the manner that males use to signal sexual interest to females. At the same time ʿAwaḍallah asked to be shown how to write his name. For the first time, he said, he held a pencil and practiced writing his name in Arabic, a sample I reproduce in [figure 2](#).

The image shows a handwritten signature in Arabic script. The signature is written in black ink on a white background. It consists of two parts: a larger, more complex word on the left and a smaller, simpler word on the right. The first word appears to be 'ʿAwaḍallah' and the second word appears to be 'ʿAwaḍallah'.

Figure 2. ʿAwaḍallah’s Handwriting

Perhaps there was no connection between ʿAwaḍallah’s introduction to literacy, his discovery of his signature, and his sudden boldness, but that very night ʿAwaḍallah, for the first time, explicitly broached a sexual relationship with me. This was the only time the two of us were alone together in the Cairo apartment, and ʿAwaḍallah took the occasion to embrace me and to ask me to sleep with him. He accepted my refusal when I said I was an honest woman (*sitt muxliṣa*) and that I could not behave in such a way. Thereafter, ʿAwaḍallah continued to treat me affectionately, and he remained gracious and kind always, whether teaching me the drum or improving my pronunciation. But I

understood that ʿAwaḍallah did not and never would accept the fiction of the “honorary male,” according to which my status (foreign, monied, and literate) was able to supersede my gender. And though ʿAwaḍallah did not seem to mind the rebuff, he never again asked me about writing.

Thereafter, the problem was what our relationship was to be. The issue came out in the love songs ʿAwaḍallah addressed to me, which he interspersed during the private “elicited” recording sessions. An example of ʿAwaḍallah improvising a quatrain to me occurs in the episode entitled “The Story of Ḥanḍal.” This story has thematic relevance to our relationship. In the epic episode, the evil king Ḥanḍal has abducted and enslaved ninety fair Hilali maidens while their men are away defending the sacred precincts of Mecca. The hero Abu Zayd, in his customary disguise as a wandering epic poet, journeys to where the Hilali women are imprisoned. Abu Zayd asks of Jāz, the leader of the women, that she quench his thirst from the heavy waterskins that they carry. He has traveled three days, and his spittle is dry.¹⁵ ʿAwaḍallah then improvises the following quatrain:

ṣayyaḥ ya ṭār ya -bu -lfann
Shout out O drum, O master of art

w- adi -lḡalb rabba ḥabāyib
and here is the heart nurturing loved ones,

ʿala nās tidrak li -lfann
to people aware of art,¹⁶

ya sōsō ya ?aʿazz ilḥabāyib
O Susan, O dearest of loved ones.

The meaning is clear. I, unlike Jāz, was careful to keep ʿAwaḍallah well supplied with coffee, tea, cigarettes, and food. In the above quatrain, ʿAwaḍallah poetically thanks me for furnishing him with a fresh glass of water. Unlike myself, audiences were familiar with the charged relationship between Abu Zayd and Jāz. Jāz, Abu Zayd’s father’s brother’s daughter (*bint ʿamm*), was the preferred marriage partner for Abu Zayd. However, she was also entitled to one-third of a voice in the Arab assemblies. According to

ʿAwaḍallah—and this story was confirmed by all other Upper Egyptian poets I interviewed—they spent only one night together. Abu Zayd could not stay married—if in fact they were married—the poets insisted, to a woman who sat with men and spoke up at men’s meetings. On another occasion ʿAwaḍallah was able to compliment me in a discussion about the personalities of the Hilali epic. A favorite game played by audiences was to identify characters within the epic with local village or larger national and political figures. When we asked ʿAwaḍallah to participate, he identified Jāz with his wife Bahiyya, Jamāl with the second great Hilali hero, Diyāb Ibn Ghānim, and me with Nāʿisat al-Ajfan, one of Abu Zayd’s three wives and, ʿAwaḍallah said, his greatest love. Her name translates as “languorous eyelids.”¹⁷

ʿAwaḍallah continued to discuss matters of sexual interest to us both. Alone of all the Upper Egyptian males that I spoke with, ʿAwaḍallah did not wholeheartedly support the widespread practice of female clitorrectomy as a means of containing women’s uncontrollable sexual desire. He had heard, he said to me, that Western women were not circumcised. I answered that the practice was forbidden and considered a crime in my country. ʿAwaḍallah said, “Yes, and wasn’t that the ‘sweetest’ (*ʿaḥla*) part of a woman.” On one occasion, when ʿAwaḍallah was explaining to me the complicated punning in the epic, I asked him if he saw everything in terms of multiple meaning. He said that, of course, any word could be punned. I asked him about my name, “Susan,” which he pronounced, *sōwsōw*. He said it meant to him *saw*ʼ*saw*, the word “together” doubled in colloquial Arabic to express the intensive sense of “the two of us together.”

During my last week in Upper Egypt, November 1983, I went searching for ʿAwaḍallah in his village to say good-bye. His wife Bahiyya, nicknamed behind her back *ilʿagrab* (‘the scorpion’), was furious with ʿAwaḍallah because he had not returned home in several days. Neighbors told me that ʿAwaḍallah had always demanded sex from his wife every night but that now she refused his demands. The women felt that his wife was old, had borne him eight children, and had the right to rest. Jamāl related to me that the men thought once every few weeks, say Thursday evening, was sufficient, and that at ʿAwaḍallah’s age even that might be too much. ʿAwaḍallah’s behavior confirmed for many the untrustworthy sexuality of the poet.

ʿAwaḍallah and I said our farewells later in the week in the town of Luxor, the major tourist site in Upper Egypt. We dined at an inexpensive cafe frequented by young European backpackers and were entertained by Western

pop music. ^cAwaḍallah particularly enjoyed a song from the early sixties whose lyrics were:

I'd like to thank the guy who wrote the song
that made my baby fall in love with me.
Who put the bomp in the bompabompabomp?
Who put the ram in the ramalamadingdong?
Who put the bop in the bopshabopshabop?
Who put the dip in the dipdadipdadip?
Who was that man?
I'd like to shake his hand
He made my baby fall in love with me.¹⁸

“Was this song Sudanese?” he asked. “No,” I said, “American, from my country.” “What did the words mean?” I said it was a love song. He told me that the most important thing were the words and the meaning, not the music. He insisted on this point: “Remember, stay with the meaning” (*xallīk ca -lmacna*, see line 923 of the performance text).



Plate 2. Jamāl and ^cAwaḍallah at the Luxor train station



Plate 3. Left to right: ^ĀAbd aj-Jalīl, Jamāl, ^ĀAbd al-Ghafūr, and ^ĀAwaḍallah.
Photographed March 3, 1983, Naj^Ā al-Ḥajis, Aswan.

¹ E.g., see Lady Lucie Duff-Gordon, *Letters from Egypt* (London: R. Brimlet Johnson, 1902); and Gustave Flaubert, *Flaubert in Egypt*, trans. Francis Steegmuller (London: Bodley Head, 1972). Western women have thrilled to the exploits of other western women in the Arab world and written about them, as in Lesley Branch, *The Wilder Shores of Love* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954).

² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

³ Mary Layoun, “The Non-Western Novel: Ideology and the Genre as Immigrant,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1985, esp. pp. 68-135, on the Egyptian novel *Qindīl Umm Hāshim*, by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī. Layoun sees the theme of East versus West in this novel as secondary to a more basic opposition of “an Egyptian bourgeois intellectual caught between class loyalties—to the peasantry from which he emerged and to the new bourgeoisie of which he is becoming a part” (p. 92).

⁴ Charles Ferguson, “Diglossia,” *Word* 15 (1959):325-40; and Joshua Blau, *The Beginnings of the Arabic Diglossia: A Study of the Origins of Neoarabic*, Afroasiatic Linguistics, vol. 4, issue 4 (Malibu, Ca.: Undena Publications, 1977).

⁵ Some examples are aṭ-Ṭayyib Ṣālīḥ, *Mawsim al-hijra ‘ilā al-shamāl* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1969); Sulaymān Fayyāḍ, *Aṣwāt*, *Silsilat al-qīṣṣa wa-al-masraḥiyya* 12 (Baghdad: n.p., 1972); Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma^Āarif, 1944); and Bahā’ Ṭāhir, *Bi-l-’amsi ḥalamtu biki* (Cairo: GEBO, 1984).

⁶ For a survey of the notion of “immanent epic,” i.e., orally performed epics that exist in the mind and memories of both performers and their audiences, see Carol Clover, “The Long Prose Poem,” *Arkiv för*

nordisk filologi, in press.

⁷ James Clifford, *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt and the Melanesian World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

⁸ Jamāl's brother, Nūbi, spoke English, and had been employed by Richard Critchfield as an Arabic-English translator; see Richard Critchfield, *Shahhat; An Egyptian* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1974), pp. 261-62, including a photograph, p. 261, and his *Villages* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1981), p. vii.

⁹ Richard Price, in *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 18, notes that he was always accompanied by a kinsman of the historian, the former providing rhetorically the necessary answers to the historian-speaker.

¹⁰ Critchfield, *Villages*, p. 241.

¹¹ Anthropologists have described the role of successive mediators and interlocutors involved in the research process, e.g. Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). However, in Rabinow's description intercession brought about a sexual encounter, whereas in my case, as a female, the opposite purpose was intended.

¹² Hanna Papanek describes similar experiences in "The Woman Field Worker in a Purdah Society," *Human Organization* 23(2) (1964); 160-63.

¹³ ^CAwaḍallah's sense of social transgression at the presence of females is also conveyed by his explanation of the two Arabic words he uses in the performance text to express 'disgrace, dishonor' and 'shame,' namely, ^Cār and ^Cēb. The latter, ^Cēb, refers to incidents in the epic tale when a younger man is offered water before an older one, or when empty, stupid words are exchanged (*kalām fāriġ*). ^CAwaḍallah said that a situation involving ^Cēb can be forgiven, usually by a verbal apology. Not so, however, with a case of ^Cār. For ^CAwaḍallah, a woman sitting among the men in the male assemblies is an instance of ^Cār. According to ^CAwaḍallah, women agree with this formulation and consider their presence among men to be an instance of ^Cār (*issiti ti^Ctabaru ^Cār*). When the king's daughter is captured by the leader of the Jews in war, as ^CAwaḍallah recounts it, both the daughter and the epic hero try to rouse the king to war by invoking ^Cār, lest the king abandon his own daughter to the enemy (see lines 688-96). For a review and analysis of the term ^Cār, see Kenneth Brown, "The 'Curse' of Westermarck," in *Edward Westermarck: Essays on His Life and Works*, ed. Timothy Stroup, *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 34 (1982):219-59.

¹⁴ There have been several notable examples of western females who have chosen to dress as Arab men; see i.e., the photographs of Lady Anne Blunt in full male Arabian attire, circa 1890, in The Earl of Lytton, *Wilfred Scawen Blunt: A Memoir by His Grandson* (London: MacDonald, 1961) p. 65; and also of Isabelle Eberhardt in 1904 dressed in a man's North African burnous and turban, in Cecily Mackworth, *The Destiny of Isabelle Eberhardt: A Biography* (New York: Ecco Press, 1975), p. 81. It is noteworthy that few questioned my attire and also that no one questioned my ethnic identity. I was usually addressed either by my first name, pronounced *suzān* or *sūsū*, or sometimes, ironically, by the title *duktūra* ('doctor'). The anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker, who conducted her research on black and white

race relations in Mississippi, reported a similar fieldwork experience in *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), pp. 62-3, 103, 145.

15 “The Story of Ḥaṇḍal,” taped March 13, 1983, Luxor. Copy deposited in Folklore Archives, Folklore Institute, Cairo.

16 In keeping with poet’s punning prowess, Pierre Cachia suggests alternate readings for the second and third line of the quatrain:

and here is the heart forming blisters (see n. 2, [chapter 1](#))

to people aware of two friends (*ilfēn*)

17 It should be noted that the mention of a woman’s name is not complimentary in a public setting. When ḤAwaḍallah uttered the mother’s name of a member of the audience, as will be shown in the performance text, lines 789-805, he evoked a violent response. ḤAwaḍallah reserved his love songs for me, where I was named, for the elicited private recording sessions.

18 Barry Mann, “Who Put the Bomp?” Lyrics by J. Goffin, Screen Gems, EMI Music, Paramount, 1961. I am grateful to Elaine Williams of Modesto, Ca., who provided me with the lyrics and reference.

THE HISTORY OF THE ARABS ACCORDING TO ʿAWAḌALLAH

The history of the Arabs (*sīrat ilʿarab*), as it is told and narrated in conversations by Hilali poets and reciters, precedes, in time and space, the recited or sung poetic renditions of the Bani Hilal epic. When ʿAwaḌallah performs the epic of the Bani Hilal, he begins with the magic birth of the hero, Abu Zayd, the first son born of a marriage between Rizg, the Hilali Bedouin chieftain, and Khaḍra Sharīfa, daughter of the Sharif of Mecca. There is, however, a good deal of material, relating to events that occur prior to the birth of Abu Zayd, knowledge of which the epic simply presupposes. Genealogies and ancestries of the warring groups—for example, of the Hilali Bedouins or their opponents, the confederation of Tunisian tribes—form a necessary historical backdrop to the events within the epic, but this earlier history is not sung in poetic form. ʿAwaḌallah assumes that his audience has a general sense of this material, though occasionally, during performance pauses, he will provide particular, amplifying details.

The Hilali epic in Upper Egypt and ʿAwaḌallah’s version of Hilali history in particular show certain narrative and historical features peculiar to Upper Egypt. First and most important, the Upper Egyptian version, which recounts the Hilali invasion of North Africa (*Ifriqiyya*), is perceived by the poets as a war between Arabs and Arabs. In contrast, North African oral sources pit the Arab Hilali invader against the Berber (non-Arab) defender; the Tunisian versions thereby emphasize a different central theme, namely, the arabicization of the North African Berber tribes. The opposition between Upper Egyptians’ and North Africans’ perceptions of the role of the Hilalis in their respective ancestral history yields opposing attitudes toward the person of the Hilalis themselves: in Tunisia, to identify oneself as a Hilali descendant is a source of pride, whereas in Egypt, to be a Hilali, or Jamasa, tribesman is to belong to an

outcast tribe. In Upper Egypt, the distaste felt by the Egyptian peasant for Hilali ancestry might possibly be related to the outcast status of the professional epic poets who sing the Hilali exploits. In any event, the correlation of fratricidal epic conflict, with debased Hilali lineage, on the one hand, and with the low status of epic poets, on the other, is uniquely Upper Egyptian. This correlation is significant for what follows, for I am concerned with the way the historical worldview of an Egyptian epic poet is related to the popular perception of Arab history articulated by the poet's audiences.

ʿAwaḍallah's audiences do not always support his vision of Arab history. Neither do official histories, whether authored by Arabs or Westerners. Though there exists an inevitable divergence between history written down by historiographers and "folk" history orally transmitted, there are also disputes among the folk as to just which "history" Upper Egyptians owe their allegiances. ʿAwaḍallah presents a history that identifies the saga of the Hilali Bedouin with the history of all the Arabs. Many members of his audience, while enjoying the poetic artistry of ʿAwaḍallah's performances, reject any notion of an outcast tribe, the Hilali or Jamasa, representing Arab heroism.

In [chapter 1](#), I tried to show that while the person of the epic poet is generally not respected, nevertheless, what he recites as a poet is given tremendous respect. This is true, but only partially so, because many listeners actively identify with the anti-Hilali forces defending Tunis. My impression is that the class and lineage of the listener determines his attitudes for or against the actions of the Hilali Bedouins. For example, ʿAbd al-Ghafūr, descendant of the holy Shaykh an-Najjār in ʿAwaḍallah's village, sympathizes with the Zanāta who defend their Tunisian homeland against the invading Hilali nomad marauders. Doing so, ʿAbd al-Ghafūr applauds the sedentary farmer, not the destructive Arab raiders. Another example concerns the inhabitants of the village of Maṭʿana, on the west bank of the Nile, who trace their descent from the Arabs and Berbers who moved in the reverse direction of the Hilalis, that is, from North Africa in the west to Upper Egypt in the east. During performances of the epic, listeners from this village excoriate Abu Zayd and cheer Khalīfa Zanāti, their ancestor.

In this chapter, I begin with the genealogies of the Arabs, as told to me by ʿAwaḍallah, in order to document ʿAwaḍallah's historical perception that fratricidal warfare is the basic source of conflict in *his* Hilali epic. It should be noted that except for a few cases of attested historical figures,¹ these genealogies are largely imaginary. According to ʿAwaḍallah, the story of the

Arabs in history begins with the Prophet Muḥammad and his cousin, later his son-in-law, the Imām ʿAlī, husband to the Prophet’s daughter, Fātima Zuhra. The offspring of this union between ʿAlī and Fātima yields, on a political level, the prophetic lineage of the hereditary sharifs, rulers of Mecca and, on a kinship level, two female cousins, named Khaḍra Sharīfa and Shamma, who marry respectively Rizg and Sirḥān of the Bedouin Hilali tribes in the Arabian peninsula. The marriage of the two women to the two Hilali cousins brings to a branch of the Hilali tribes a rare and important birthright, the privilege of claiming direct descent from the Prophet Muḥammad as shown in [figure 3](#).

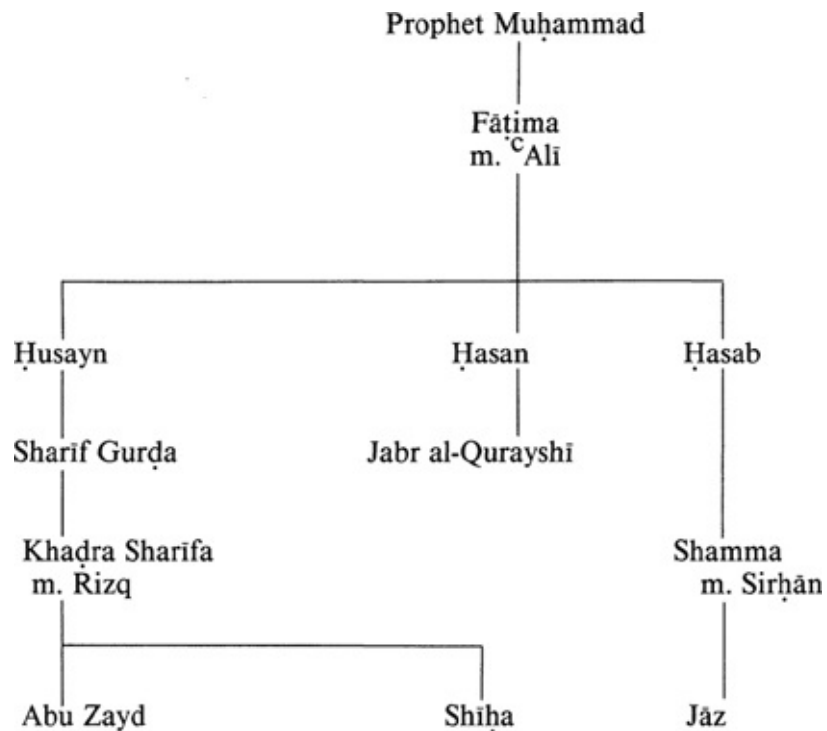


Figure 3. Hilali Descent from the Prophet

Sirḥān is the second great leader of the Hilali Arabs. He is the crucial genealogical link between those members within the larger Hilali tribal alliances descended from the Prophet Muḥammad and those who are merely pure Bedouin Arab. Sirḥān not only connects these two lineages; he also spans two generations of warriors. On the one hand, by age, he is Abu Zayd’s father’s cousin and contemporary; on the other hand, he weds Abu Zayd’s sister. ʿAwaḍallah relates that Sirḥān, before his marriages to women of the Muhammadan line, fathered children through a liaison with a servant (*xaddam*). This servant was sometimes described to me by ʿAwaḍallah as a

white slave (sing. *ʿabd*, pl. *ʿabīd*) but, more frequently, as a Jewess, a daughter of the Jew Dāhdūm. ʿAwaḍallah maintains that in the modern era the descendants of the Hilali Sirḥān and his unnamed Jewish mistress, currently occupy the thrones of the Hashemite kingdom and the monarchy of Saudi Arabia. For ʿAwaḍallah, the house of Ibn Saud and King Hussein of Jordan are thus Hilali Arab, though without the bloodlines that can be traced to the Prophet Muḥammad as shown in [figure 4](#).

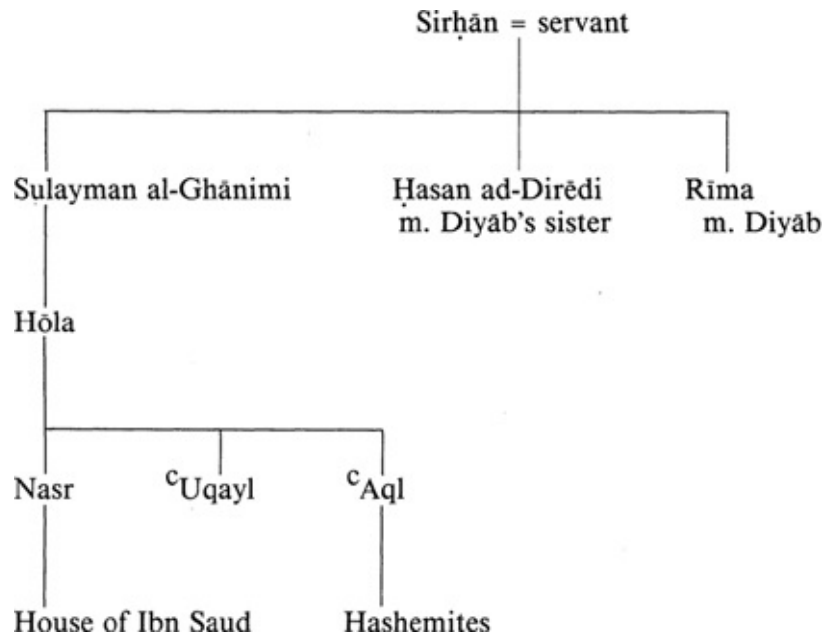


Figure 4. The House of Sirḥān

The epic story of the Bani Hilal tribes begins to be sung and narrated by ʿAwaḍallah only when these tribes intermarry with the line of the Prophet Muḥammad, a time when the Arabs burst upon world history with the revelation of the Prophet’s message. Nonetheless, the Bani Hilal Bedouin tribes possess an oral history of their own, one not recorded in the epic itself but preserved mainly in the memories and imagination of the illiterate Hilali poets.

ʿAwaḍallah traces the origins of the Bani Hilal tribes in Arabia to three brothers, named Riyāḥ, Ghayth, and ʿĀmir.² Each of the three brothers is the founding ancestor of a major tribe. Riyāḥ is the ancestor of the tribe (*qawm*) Badūra and its members as shown in [figure 5](#).

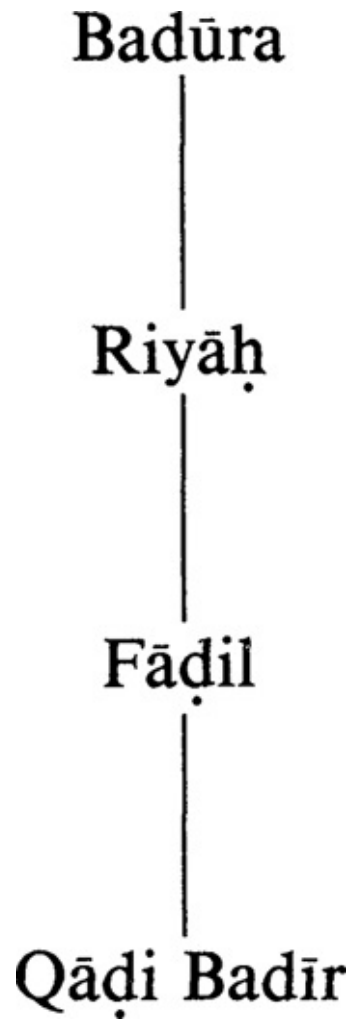


Figure 5. Badūra Tribe

The second brother, Ghayth, produces the tribe of Zaḥlān,³ one of whose descendants becomes one of the three wives of the hero Abu Zayd as shown in [figure 6](#).

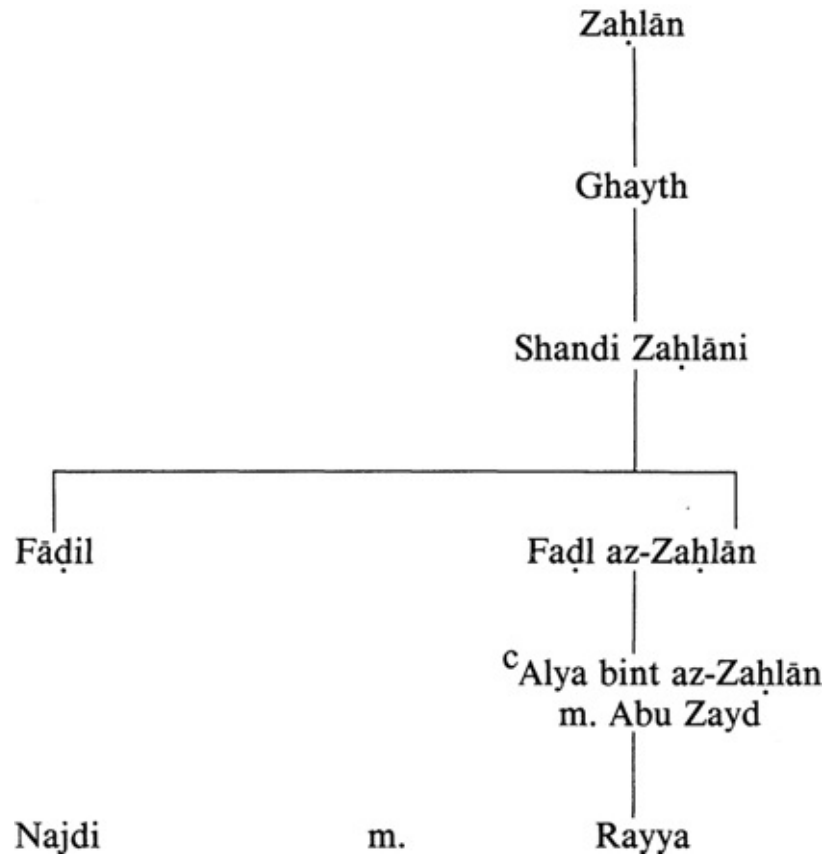


Figure 6. Zahlān Tribe

The third brother, cĀmir, is the Bedouin Hilali ancestor of the clan of Dirēdi and of its two most famous heroes, Abu Zayd the Hilali and his uncle (also brother-in-law) Sirḥān:

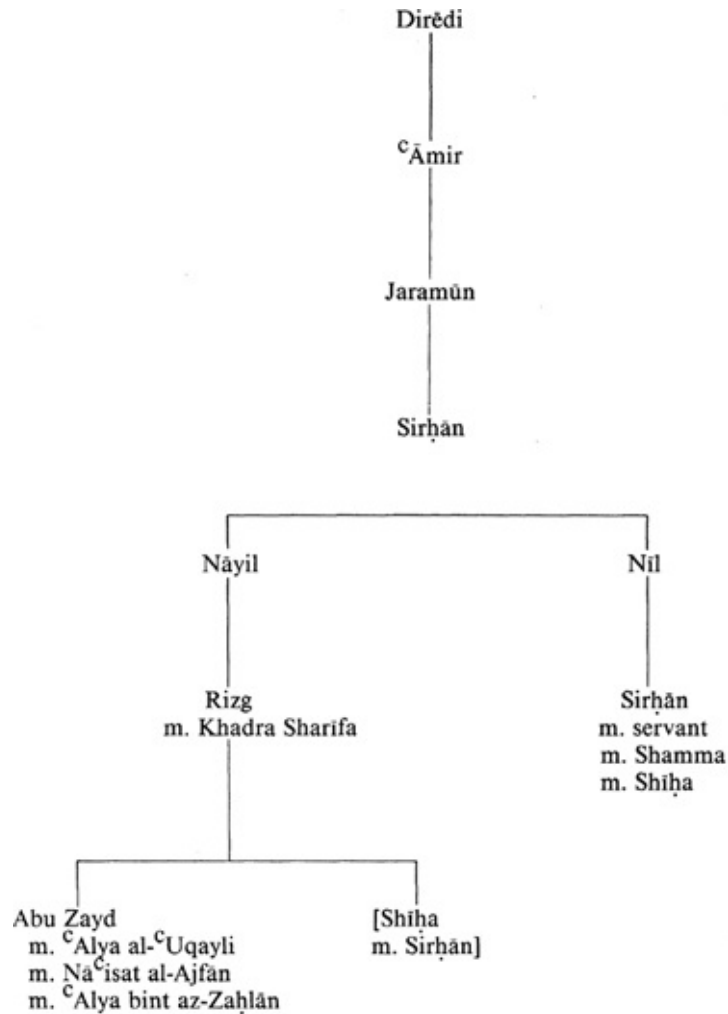


Figure 7. Genealogy of Abu Zayd

Abu Zayd marries three times, each time to the daughters of Arab leaders. For °Awaḍallah, Abu Zayd and the story of his loves do not constitute the main body of the epic of the Bani Hilal. °Awaḍallah recites three love stories separate from the epic cycle. They are the love story of °Azīza and Yūnis, the two most famous lovers within the epic; the love story of Abu Zayd and Nā°isat al-Ajfan; and the love story of Abu Zayd and °Alya al-°Uqayli.⁴ Abu Zayd's three marriages are as follows:

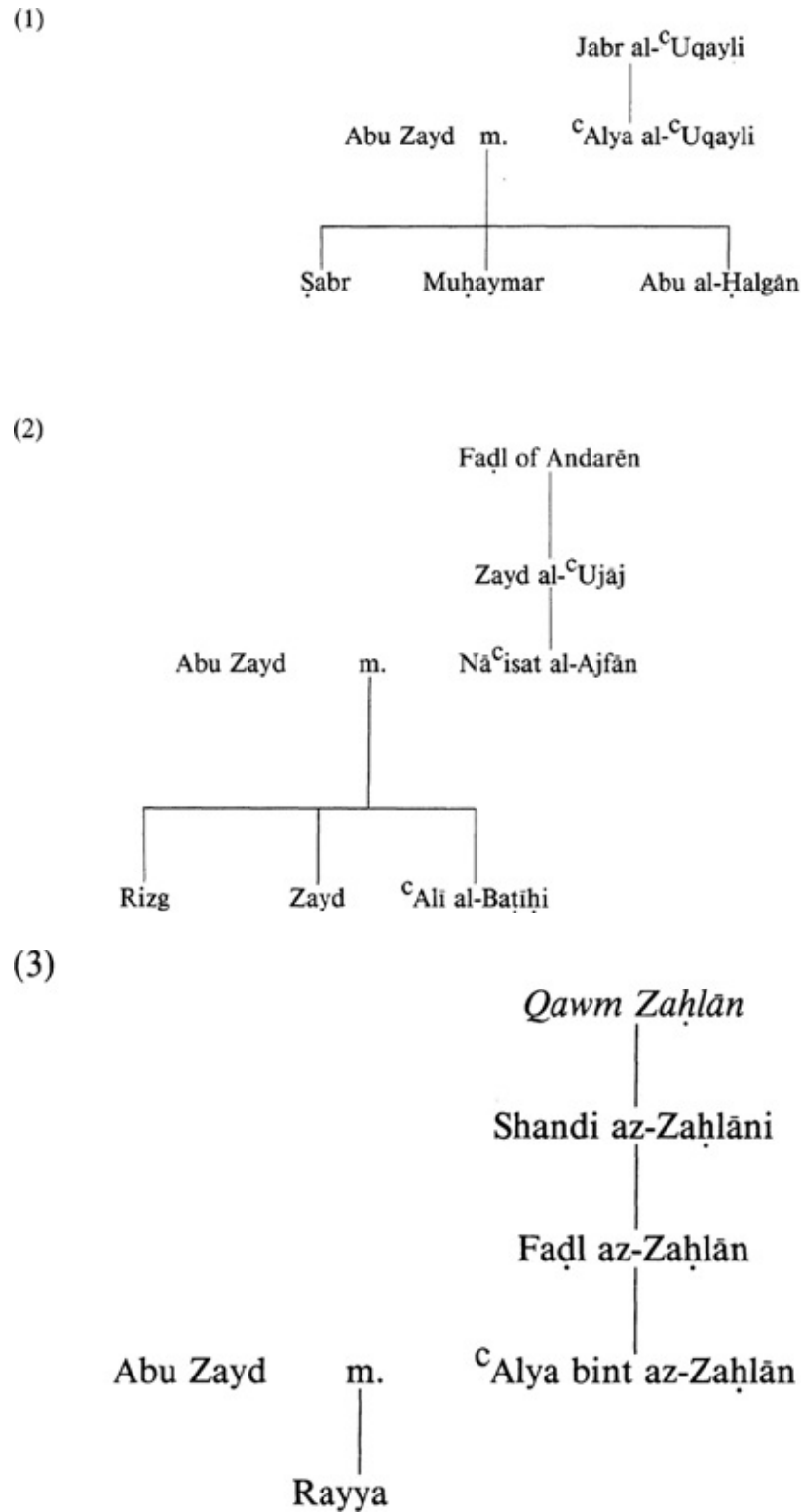
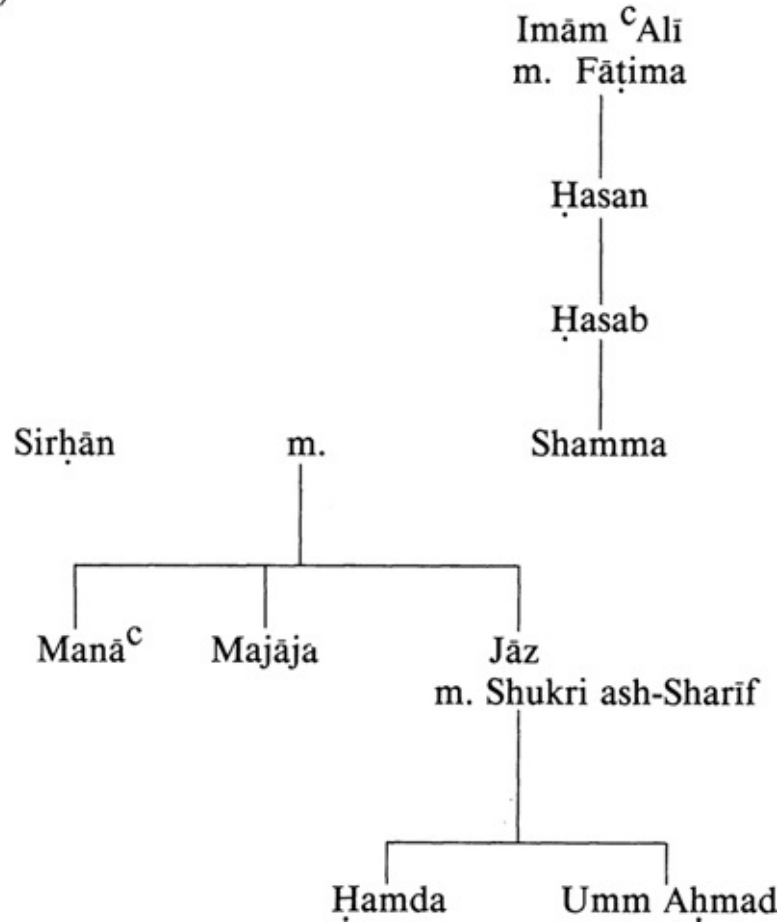


Figure 8. Abu Zayd's Three Marriages

Sirḥān, Abu Zayd's uncle, and later his brother-in-law, marries three

times. The first liaison is with a Jewish servant (see figure 4); the second wife, Shamma, belongs to the Prophet's family; and a third marriage is to Shīḥa, Abu Zayd's only sister:

(1)



(2)

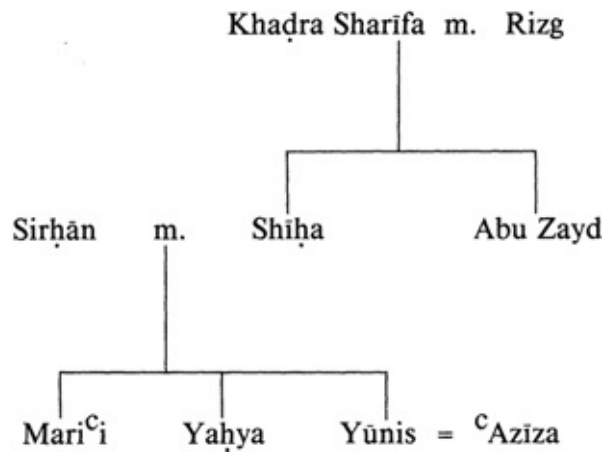


Figure 9. Sirḥān's Marriages

The three sons of Shīha and Sirhān, who are called Marci, Yaḥya, and Yūnis, accompany their maternal uncle, the hero Abu Zayd, on his scouting trip from Arabia to Tunis. These four personages, Abu Zayd and his three nephews, are the principal characters of the episode that is related in this performance text.

The three clans that make up the Bani Hilal confederation, Badūra, Dirēdi, and Zaḥlān, are joined by a fourth Bedouin tribe of the Arabian peninsula, namely, the Zughba.⁵ Together, these four Arabian tribes journey westward to attack Tunis. In Tunis, they are opposed by the four tribes that comprise the Tunisian alliance: 1) Zanāta, 2) Waḥīdi, 3) Banī Tūbba^c, and 4) Ḥimariyya tribe. According to ^cAwaḍallah, one of the four tribes of the Bani Hilal confederation, the Zughba, and one of the four tribes of the opposing Tunisian alliance, Ḥimariyya, share the same eponymous ancestor, Ḥanyār or Ḥimyār. In early times, before the Prophet, the Ḥimyār split into two factions: on the one hand, the Zughba, who remained in Arabia; on the other, the Ḥimyār, who migrated westward to Saḡiyat al-Ḥamra, which ^cAwaḍallah locates in Morocco near Marrakesh, Fez, and Meknes (*fās wa-maknas*). Saḡiyat al-Ḥamra is, in fact, in present-day southern Morocco.⁶ The eastern Arabian branch of Ḥimyār that intermarried with the Hilalis can be traced in the following manner:

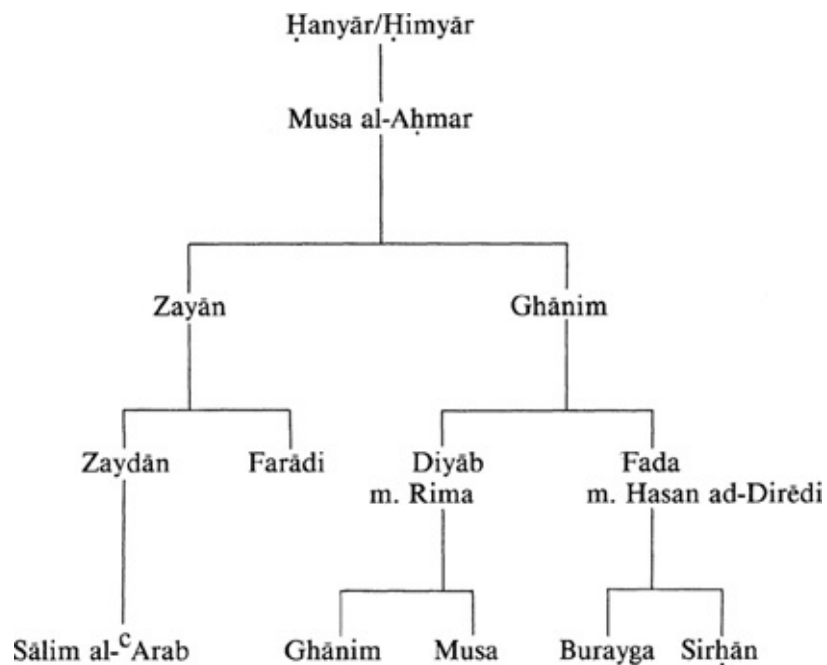


Figure 10. The Eastern Ḥimyār

Thus the eastern branch of the Ḥimyār, the Zughba tribe, becomes an ally of the Bani Hilal by a series of marriages, in which brother and sister, Diyāb

and Fadā, marry, respectively, the daughter, Rīma, and the son, Ḥasan ad-Dirēdi, of the union between a major leader of the Bani Hilal tribe, Sirḥān, and his concubine. The Zughba, therefore, though allies and relations of the Hilali, cannot claim descent from the Prophet. Rather, like the present-day house of Ibn Saud and the Hashemite line in Jordan, they trace their ancestry to Sirḥān's first Jewish mistress as opposed to his second and third wives, both of whom participate in the noble line of the Prophet. It is this tribe, the Zughba, who are related to their enemy opposite in Tunis.

Thus, the theme of fratricidal warfare is initially represented, for ʿAwaḍallah, by the Zughba, who are engaged in war with their split-off western branch, that is, their brother tribe, the Ḥimyār. It is, therefore, entirely appropriate that the eastern Arabian Ḥimyār branch, the Zughba, should also produce the second leader of the Hilali tribes, Diyāb son of Ghānim, instigator of the greatest internal strife among the Hilali Arabs.⁷ For ʿAwaḍallah, the motif of rival brothers continues even after the Hilali-Zughba confederation has defeated their brother tribes in Tunis. In the Part III of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl* Diyāb and Abu Zayd, the two co-conquerors of the west, become rivals for the sultanate of Tunis. In the divisive civil war that ensues, Diyāb destroys almost an entire generation of his own people, but he is eventually captured and publicly hanged by a son of Abu Zayd. In discussions of Hilali history ʿAwaḍallah drew explicit parallels between Diyāb and the career of Gamāl ʿAbd al-Nasser, president of Egypt from 1953 to 1970. ʿAwaḍallah considers Nasser to be a great heroic leader of the Arab people, who became too powerful, who killed and imprisoned too many people, and who promoted, in his final days, Arab disunity.

ʿAwaḍallah also enumerates the western branch of the Ḥimyār, who constitute the four related tribes that defend Tunis. All the four western tribes are directly related to their eastern enemy opponents, the Zughba, and hence are also related by marriage to the Bani Hilal:

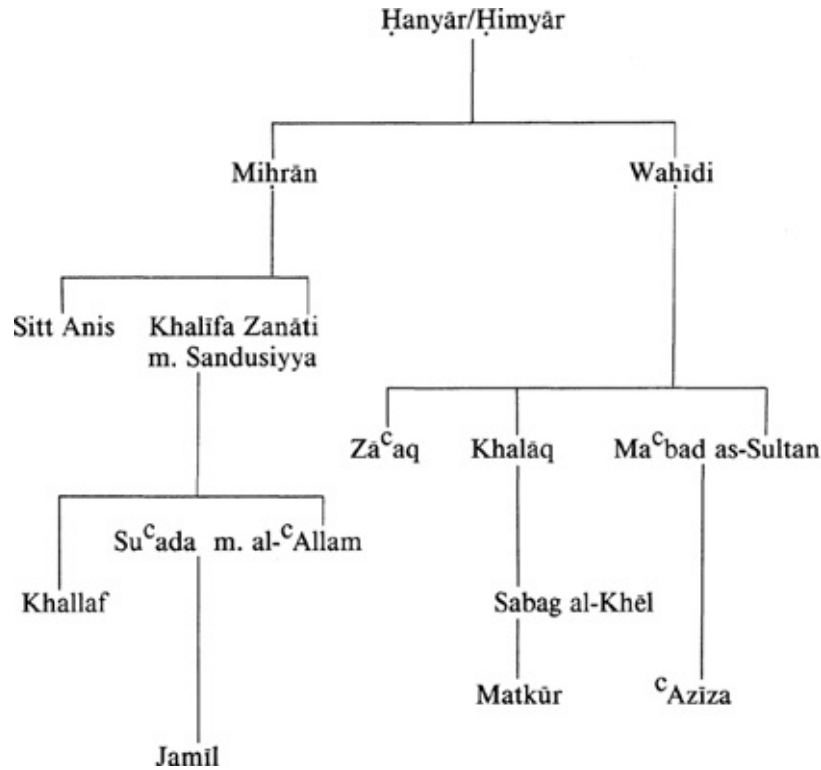


Figure 11. The Western Ḥimyār

Ḥawaḍallah’s version of Arab history is a story of fratricidal warfare, of brother against brother, of cousin against cousin, of eastern Arab against western Arab, and of Arabian opposing Tunisian. When I pointed out that many people thought the Zanāta and their allies were Christians or Berbers,⁸ Ḥawaḍallah insisted that the history of all the Arabs at all times has been distinguished by a lack of unity, which continues to plague the Arabs even to this day. The notion of the fratricidal nature of the Hilali wars was also corroborated by another Hilali reciter (*rāwi*), Ḥabd as-Salām Ḥāmid Khalīfa, an illiterate bean-seller in the marketplace of Luxor, in a series of interviews conducted in March and April 1983. Ḥabd as-Salām Ḥāmid understood the Hilali conquest of Tunisia as Arab vanquishing brother Arab, all of whom are ultimately related in the early days in ancient Arabia. Ḥabd as-Salām told me a more simplified genealogy that joined western Tunisians with eastern Arabians:

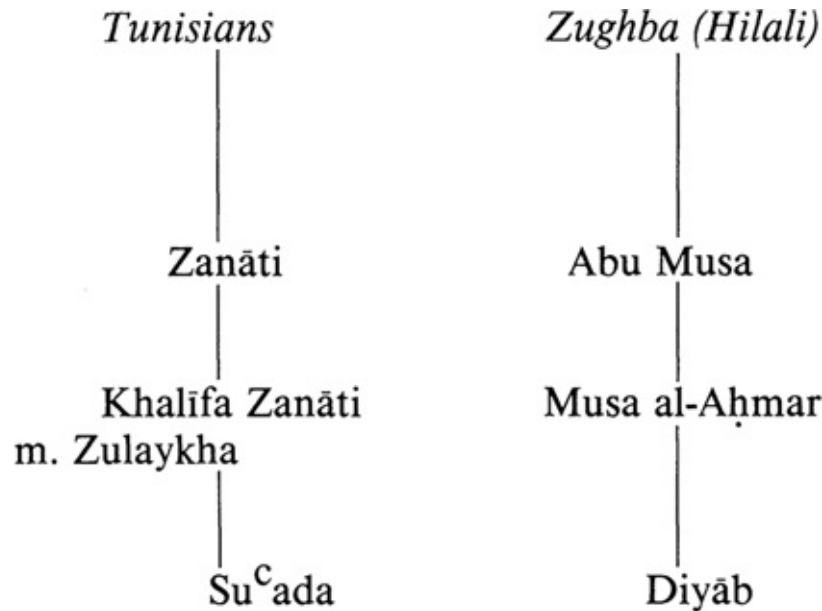


Figure 12. A Simplified Genealogy

A secondary aspect, but one that is emphasized by ʿAwaḍallah, is that the eastern and western branches of the Ḥimyār do not possess any lineage traceable back to the Prophet Muḥammad; when they intermarry with the Hilali, they are paired only with an offshoot, who also cannot claim noble blood. The teller of Hilali tales in the Luxor market, ʿAbd as-Salām, carries this point even further: the Hilali Bedouins themselves are disreputable, rapacious nomads, whose only redeeming feature is the hero Abu Zayd’s claim to noble blood through his mother, Khaḍra Sharīfa, a direct descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad.

These two Upper Egyptian poets offer a contrasting vision of the Bani Hilal invasion based on fratricidal rivalry, one that Tunisian versions reject completely. In the oral texts collected in Tunisia, the Zanāta are believed to be Berber tribes who defend their homeland from the eastern Arabo-Muslim invaders.⁹ In Upper Egyptian versions, the sense of an enemy other, non-Arab and alien, is displaced back in historical time. Upper Egyptian poets declare that during the Hilali wars of conquest, Arab battles Arab. (For ʿAwaḍallah, however, the pre-Islamic era, before the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad, is designated, whether in Tunisia or Mecca, to be Jewish.) In contrast, the Tunisian versions oppose a non-Arab Berber ruler of Tunis who combats the invading Hilali Bedouin Arab tribes.

ʿAwaḍallah is not familiar with the Berbers. He believes that the original

inhabitants of the Tunisian littoral were non-Arabs, by which he refers specifically to Jews. One day when we were together in the town of Luxor during the tourist season, ʿAwaḍallah told me the history of Tunis. As he began, a group of tourists passed us in the street. ʿAwaḍallah asked me their country of origin, and I replied that they were French (*fransawiyyin*). He said he knew about the French and proceeded to relate this knowledge to the story of the seven kings of Tunis. ʿAwaḍallah’s story goes as follows. There have been seven kings of Tunis from the beginning of time until the present day. The original rulers of Tunis were Jews, and they were the first four kings. They were named Zaʿfaran, Ḥadīdi, Dashūr, and Kiwān. The last Jewish king, Kiwān, was overthrown by a man named Jabr al-Qurayshi (see [figure 3](#)), a Muslim, belonging to the lineage and the army of the Prophet Muḥammad.¹⁰ Jabr al-Qurayshi, in turn, was defeated by Khalīfa Zanāti, the great antihero of the epic and the opponent of the Bani Hilal tribes. Khalīfa Zanāti is in his turn also defeated. He is succeeded by a Bani Hilal king, who conquers the Zanāta tribes in Part III of the epic. The last Arab kings to rule Tunis were Hilali, but internal fighting and lack of unity among the Arabs enabled the French to take over and rule Tunis. Such a sad state of political rule continued until this century, when a Muslim Arab descendant of the Hilali re-established an Arab state. According to ʿAwaḍallah, the name of this Hilali descendant is Habib Bourguiba, president of Tunisia, who, in 1956, led his country’s successful fight against French colonialism.¹¹

The above information, told to me by ʿAwaḍallah, concerning the historical background, the genealogies, and the kinship relations among the Hilalis and the Tunisians, is not recited or sung, but rather discussed with and explained to the audiences during breaks in the performance. The actual epic recitation, accompanied by a musical instrument—in ʿAwaḍallah’s case, a large Nubian drum—only begins with the story of the marriage between Rizg the Hilali and Khaḍra Sharīfa, daughter of the Sharif of Mecca. In what follows, I summarize ʿAwaḍallah’s version of the Bani Hilal epic. This summary is based upon approximately thirty-five hours of elicited recording sessions.

ʿAwaḍallah’s version of the recited Hilali cycle consists of three distinct parts: 1) the birth of the hero Abu Zayd (*milād abu zēd*); 2) the scouting or reconnaissance mission (*irriyāda*); and 3) the westward migration (*ittagrība*). ʿAwaḍallah begins the first part, the birth of the hero, with the words of the father of the epic hero, who is called Rizg the Hilali, son of Nāyil. Rizg, a leader of the Bedouin Hilali tribe in the Arabian peninsula, wishes to wed. His

valiant horsemen and companions suggest Khaḍra Sharīfa, who is the daughter of the Sharif, the hereditary ruler of Mecca, and a lineal descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad. The Hilali journey from their home territory of Najd to Mecca and are welcomed by Sharif Gurda of Mecca. He agrees to give his daughter Khaḍra in marriage to Rizg, bestows upon her a sumptuous dowry, and predicts that their son will be a brave warrior.

Rizg and Khaḍra marry, and a daughter, Shīḥa, is born. After eleven years of barrenness, Khaḍra descends with ninety maidens to the river. She sees a powerful and victorious black bird scattering all the other birds from the river. She makes a wish for a son exactly like that powerful black bird so that the son might one day rule over Tunis. Nine months later she bears a black infant son, the hero Abu Zayd. Her husband, Rizg, repudiates both mother and son, and the tribe gathers to allocate the possessions she will take back with her to her father's home. Rizg chooses a servant to cast his javelin. He declares that all the wealth and possessions that fall under the javelin's toss must go to Khaḍra so that Abu Zayd will find sanctuary among distant Arab tribes. A magical savior, called al-Khiḍr, the "green man" of the desert, descends from the heavens and causes the javelin throw to encompass not only half the wealth of Rizg, but also half the wealth of the Hilali chief Sirḥān. Because the way lies through the hostile enemy territory of the Zaḥlān tribe, the Hilali tribe are unable to provide Khaḍra and her infant with an escort from Najd to her home in Mecca. Khaḍra and her son are abandoned in the desert where they are immediately attacked by a nomadic plundering tribe, the ʿAṭwān Arabs. Again, al-Khiḍr, this time in the shape of a lion, attacks and disperses their enemies. He carries off the infant Abu Zayd, names him *barakāt* ('blessings'), and instructs him in the magic arts.

Abu Zayd and his mother, Khaḍra, are welcomed by the Emir of the Zaḥlān tribes and are granted his protection. Abu Zayd grows up among the Zaḥlān and begins Koranic school (*kuttāb*). He excels in Koran study, reading, and writing. One day when the Koran teacher (*faqi*) tries to beat him, Abu Zayd fights and kills him. At this time his mother chooses to tell him their history. Abu Zayd, though still a child, now becomes the feared teacher in the school. It is at this point in the story, according to ʿAwaḍallah, that Abu Zayd embarks upon his career of warfare and killing.

Abu Zayd first engages in battle against the ʿAṭwān Arabs, who are menacing his tribal protectors, the Zaḥlān, just as they had threatened mother and child alone in the desert many years earlier. Abu Zayd kills the leader of

the ʿAṭwān Arabs, and they retreat to the land of the Emir Jāyil. The Emir Jāyil possesses a magic gold belt (*mantiga*), capable of summoning a protective genie when Abu Zayd arrives to attack Jāyil. Abu Zayd calls upon his mentor and protector, al-Khiḍr, who captures the genie, thereby allowing Abu Zayd to kill Jāyil and to seize the magic belt in regular combat. Abu Zayd kills Jāyil and together with his adopted Zaḥlān tribe rides toward the Hilali Arabs.

An emissary sent from the defeated Arabs of Jāyil arrives at the Hilali camp to give news of the strength of the Zaḥlān and their mighty warrior, a young and ignorant black slave. The Hilali leader, Sirḥān, prepares for war with the Zaḥlān tribe, meets with their leaders, and learns about Abu Zayd. Abu Zayd enters the Hilali encampment and defeats one of the Hilali fighters, Ghānim, thereby causing Sirḥān to declare that only the Hilali's best warrior, Rizg, can combat Abu Zayd. The Hilalis send for Rizg, who has been in self-imposed exile since the day he cast out his wife, Khaḍra, and his son, Abu Zayd. Rizg and Abu Zayd, father and son, engage in combat while Khaḍra rejoices in Abu Zayd's hoped-for victory. On the other hand, Shīḥa recognizes her brother Abu Zayd and reveals his identity to their father.¹² Rizg sends for a pomegranate from the gardens, and Abu Zayd in the heat of battle captures the pomegranate with his sword, dismounts, and is welcomed back among the Arab Hilali. Thus ends the birth sequence of the epic hero, which, according to ʿAwaḍallah, begins with the marriage of Khaḍra Sharīfa to Rizg the Hilali and ends with Abu Zayd's reconciliation with his father and tribe.

In the first part of the three cycles of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, ʿAwaḍallah also includes Abu Zayd's heroic exploits against the two enemies of his people. These episodes are recounted in "The Story of Khaṭfa the Jew" and "The Story of Ḥanḍal." The story of Khaṭfa the Jew begins in Mecca, where Abu Zayd's maternal grandfather, Sharif Gurda, welcomes the Jews, who are disguised as Muslim merchants. The Jews leave three large boxes in the Holy Sanctuary of Mecca, and after three days, when Sharif Gurda goes to pray, he finds the Jews' horses stabled in the mosque. The Jews have claimed Mecca as their ancestral home, land of their forefathers. Sharif Gurda sends his son, Ḥusayn, to bring Abu Zayd from distant Najd. Meanwhile, Abu Zayd has been dreaming of a Hilali journey to Mecca. The dream causes Abu Zayd to set off for the mountains where he encounters his uncle Ḥusayn who does not recognize him. Ḥusayn threatens Abu Zayd, whereupon Abu Zayd flees. The two meet again in Najd Hilal, and Ḥusayn is angered that a black slave counsels the Arabs. Ḥusayn departs, believing that the Hilalis are tricking him. Abu Zayd calls

upon God to bring rain in order to stop Ḥusayn. Abu Zayd conducts Ḥusayn to Husayn's sister, Khaḍra Sharīfa, who explains to Ḥusayn that her black son is the result of wishing upon a black bird.

Ḥusayn accepts Abu Zayd, and the Hilalis and their famous fighters, Diyāb, Zaydān, and the Qādi Badīr proceed to Mecca, leaving the older generation, Rizg, Sirḥān, and the women behind in the camp. When they reach Mecca, Sharif Gurda ignores Abu Zayd, deeming him a mere black slave. The Hilalis explain his noble lineage, and Sharif Gurda sets him a test to prove his descent from the Prophet Muḥammad before he will recognize Abu Zayd as his grandson. Only a true sharif of the house of Muḥammad will be able to open the great gates of Mecca. Ninety Bedouin Hilali horsemen try and fail. Then Ḥasan ad-Dirēdi, a sharif, opens the great gates. Abu Zayd also opens them, enters the sacred precincts, prays to be the greatest warrior, and then goes to sleep.

Meanwhile, Sharif Gurḍa invites the Jews to join battle, and they capture and imprison the Hilali horsemen. Abu Zayd's servant, Abu al-Gumṣān, hurries to fetch Abu Zayd from his prayers and his sleep. Abu Zayd fights Khaṭfa the Jew for three days, kills him, as well as the Jew's cousin, the Emir Magar. Then Abu Zayd disguises himself as Khaṭfa the Jew and proceeds to the dungeons where the ninety Hilali horsemen are imprisoned. He visits each of them in turn, Ḥasan ad-Dirēdi, Diyāb, Qādi Badīr, and Zaydān, in order to threaten and insult them. Everyone, except the young Zaydān, is cowed by Abu Zayd disguised as a Jew, and they are all willing to sell out their lands and women. Zaydān tries to fight back, but the frightening aspect of Abu Zayd's visage causes him to swoon. Abu Zayd, proud of Zaydān's bravery, reveals himself and sets the Hilalis free.

Abu Zayd returns to Mecca and within the walls of the sacred Haram hears a voice and dreams that the Hilali in Najd Hilal have been attacked by Ḥanḍal, an Arab ruler. Abu Zayd dreams that Ḥanḍal has killed Sirḥān, wounded Rizg, seized the Hilali women, and caused Ġhānim to flee to the mountains. With his servant and his *rababa*, the musical instrument of epic singers, Abu Zayd departs to combat Ḥanḍal. In the mountains, he meets his mother, Khaḍra Sharīfa, disguised as a white slave, tending her wounded husband Rizg. She does not recognize her son, and he lies to her, saying that Abu Zayd has been killed by Khaṭfa the Jew. Abu Zayd rejoices at her weeping, and only then does she recognize her son's laughter. Abu Zayd calls upon his protector, al-Khiḍr, then spits on his father's wound and cures it.

After receiving his parents' blessings, Abu Zayd travels seven days and seven nights to reach Ḥanḍal's orchards. He encounters the Hilali maidens dressed in sackcloth and carrying heavy waterskins. He asks each of the Hilali heroines, Jāz, Naʿsa, and Rayya, who is his daughter, if they are *jamasiyya*. They angrily deny it and provide him with their true Hilali lineage.¹³ Rayya also notes that her father, Abu Zayd, often disguises himself as an old black poet. Abu Zayd enters Ḥanḍal's diwan. Ḥanḍal also fears that the old black slave might be Abu Zayd in his well-known disguise of an epic poet. Ḥanḍal commands Abu Zayd to play music so that the Hilali maidens will dance. Fearing insult to his women by a public display of dance, Abu Zayd tells Ḥanḍal that the Hilali women should first be bathed and perfumed. Dressed in their beautiful attire and scented, the Hilali women arrive to the diwan. Ḥanḍal commands them to dance, and they, in turn, demand the right to swords and combat. Ḥanḍal strikes down Rayya, and Abu Zayd speaks to his daughter and the other women in the secret language of the Najd; he urges them to dance.

Ḥanḍal, drunk and inflamed by the sight of the women dancing, joins the dancers. Abu Zayd takes the opportunity to smash Ḥanḍal to the ground during the dance, but he claims that this was an accident. Ḥanḍal's daughter, ʿAjāja, sees through Abu Zayd's disguise because she is a geomancer and diviner. Abu Zayd is imprisoned. At the same time, Ḥanḍal sends a black slave, Jōhar, to Najd Hilal to ascertain Abu Zayd's whereabouts. The slave journeys seven days and seven nights. When he arrives, he proclaims himself a prince of Sunnar whose kingdom, menaced by the Jews, seeks Abu Zayd's help. The Hilali leaders inform him that Abu Zayd has gone to Ḥanḍal to rescue the Hilali women. Jōhar returns in three days, and demands marriage with Jāz, Naʿsa, and Rayya, Abu Zayd's women, as his reward after Ḥanḍal executes Abu Zayd. In prison, Abu Zayd calls upon al-Khiḍr, his protector. al-Khiḍr tells Abu Zayd that he must drop his disguise, reveal himself, and by his own abilities shackle the slave; only on these conditions will al-Khiḍr give further aid to Abu Zayd. al-Khiḍr causes ʿAjāja, Ḥanḍal's daughter, to be afflicted with a fever, and she declares that the sole cure is to bring Abu Zayd a tray of food in prison. She sends for her black slave, Jōhar, who declares his passion for her, and she promises him nights of love after he completes the errand. Abu Zayd tries to promote kinship with the black slave and is able thereby to seize Jōhar's hand and imprison the slave in his place. Abu Zayd disguises himself as Jōhar—a black slave poet replacing a black slave—and kills the ninety Arab horseman of Ḥanḍal.

Thereupon, Ḥanḍal runs to his prison, grabs his slave Jōhar, and executes him, not knowing whether he is in fact Abu Zayd or his own slave. Jāz, approaches the body and she declares that Abu Zayd is recognizable by his gap-toothed smile. Then they rejoice that Abu Zayd is still alive. The Hilali women, still hostages of Ḥanḍal, walk in his orchards and come upon Abu Zayd. They urge him to flee with them. Instead, Abu Zayd grabs another slave and sends him with one letter to Ḥanḍal, inviting him to combat, and with a second letter to Najd Hilal; this second letter announces Abu Zayd's death. In Najd Hilal the tribe weeps, and Zaydān urges them all to rescue their women, who are still held hostage by Ḥanḍal. The Hilalis travel to Ḥanḍal's lands, battle against him, and retreat in defeat. Then Khaḍra Sharīfa, Abu Zayd's mother, mounted and armed, is determined to revenge her son. At the sight of his mother lamenting and preparing for war, Abu Zayd comes forth and kills Ḥanḍal. °Ajāja, Ḥanḍal's daughter, asks Abu Zayd's protection. As punishment he gives her to another slave, Abu Sufyān, and she comes under the protection of the house of Sultan Ḥasan ad-Dirēdi. The story of Ḥanḍal brings to a conclusion Part I of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*.

Part II of the epic, entitled *irriyāda*, 'the reconnaissance or scouting trip,' begins in Tunis where the Sultan Ma°ad desires to marry his daughter °Azīza. He consults the learned scholars of Tunis, who declare that such a marriage is forbidden. Angered, the Sultan throws out the Muslim judges and vows that no man will ever marry his daughter, °Azīza. He builds her a beautiful palace and imprisons her within it. To keep her company, she is brought a female servant, Mayy, formerly belonging to the Hilali tribe in Arabia. Mayy amuses °Azīza with the tales and exploits of the Hilali Arabs. She describes each character, dwelling longest on the handsome and brave Yūnis. °Azīza falls in love with him and desires that he be brought to Tunis. Mayy formulates a plan. She suggests that °Azīza send Jabr al-Qurayshi, a leader overthrown by the current ruler of Tunis, Khalīfa Zanāti, east to Najd Hilal. In this fashion, Abu Zayd will be brought to Tunis to revenge °Azīza against the sultans of Tunis. °Azīza gives Jabr al-Qurayshi gold pieces for a game of draughts (*sīja*). She instructs him to play this game with the Hilalis and to tell them that the west is weak, Tunis easily vanquished, and gold pieces abundant.

Jabr travels from Tunis in the west to the Arabian peninsula in the east, passing through Ghadāmis, Nīna, the kingdom belonging to Māḍi, on to Migdām, then Upper Egypt, the city of Rawwām and its king Rawēmi, through Iraq, ruled by the king °Āmir Khafāji, then on to the land of the Aghas, then

Mecca, and finally Najd Hilal. All the rulers along the way decline to join in any fight against the powerful sultans of Tunis and their leader Khalīfa Zanāti. In Arabia, Jabr al-Qurayshi is welcomed by the Sultan Ḥasan and they play the game of *sīja*. Instead of the customary wooden board and pebble pieces, Jabr brings out beautifully wrought gold pieces, saying that in his country such gold is plentiful. He describes the wealth and abundance of Tunis the verdant, a bountiful watered orchard easily conquered. Ḥasan summons the Hilali, Badūra, Zaḥlān, Zughba, Shadib, ʿAgl, and ʿUgēl tribes to plan a united move westward. Jāz disputes this decision and relates the history of Tunis. She says Tunis was founded by a Jewish king, al-Bardawīli, who was in turn succeeded by Zaghrāfan and Kiwān, two Jewish kings overthrown by the leaders of the Prophet Muḥammad’s house. After these noble rulers came the Zanāta with their leaders, Khalīfa, Maʿbad (father of ʿAzīza), and the Prince Madkūr. Jāz predicts that they will be destroyed if the whole tribe ventures forth; instead, she suggests they first send a scouting party westward. She names Abu Zayd as leader of this party, and he chooses his sister’s three sons, Yaḥya, Marʿi, and Yūnis, to accompany him. Shīḥa, their mother and Abu Zayd’s sister, gives them Shamma’s necklace to take with them. While traveling through the mountains, Abu Zayd sees three birds accompanying a large black bird. He sees all the birds flying to Tunis, but only the large black bird returns. Then Abu Zayd, a geomancer, reads the sands. He sees Yaḥya dead under a tree slain by servants, Marʿi bitten by a serpent and dying, and Yūnis a prisoner of ʿAzīza. Though the futures of his three nephews are foreordained, they decide to continue westward.

The first stopping place on their march westward is the city of Arwām, which belongs to the Sultan Ruwwām. Again Abu Zayd assumes his disguise of a wandering epic poet. In the city, Abu Zayd and his three nephews meet a sorrowing, weeping woman, who calls loudly for Abu Zayd to save her. She tells Abu Zayd her sad story. Ruwēmi, her husband, has only one daughter, named Futna. One day he bought a black slave, Riḥān, in the marketplace, and he became very fond of this slave. It happened that the slave saw Futna at the door of the bath, fell in love with her, and asked the sultan, his master, for her hand in marriage. Abu Zayd hears the mother’s story and then visits the beautiful Futna. Abu Zayd instructs Futna to choose himself, a black poet, as her proxy (*wakil*) for her forthcoming nuptials. Abu Zayd, in his disguise as a poet, conceals his spear and javelin on his person and enters the diwan. Futna declares to the judge that Abu Zayd is her *wakil*. The judge curses her and

maligns Abu Zayd's ancestry. When the judge unsheathes his sword, Abu Zayd seizes him, reminding him that coercion is against the Revealed Law of the Shari'ca. The black slave, Rihān, arrives for his wedding, and Abu Zayd reminds him that they are both purchased slaves. Abu Zayd cuts off the arm of the judge, the arm that holds the pen. His three nephews urge him to continue westward to Tunis, but Abu Zayd declares he will not abandon the wretched. Abu Zayd kills the black slave and frees the beautiful Futna. Then he and his nephews continue their journey westward to Tunis. Their next adventure takes place in Iraq and is the subject of the performance text I transcribed and translated. In this episode cAwaḍallah recites the story of cĀmir Khafāji, king of Iraq, and how he overcame his enemy with the help of Abu Zayd and his three nephews.

¹ Cathryn Anita Baker, in "The Hilali Saga in the Tunisian South," Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1978, pt. 1, p. 65, constructs an imaginary genealogy based upon Martin Hartmann's information from a written Beirut edition; see his "Die Beni-Hilal-Geschichten," *Zeitschrift für afrikanische und ozeanische Studien* (Berlin) 3 (1898):292.

² Medieval Arab genealogists consider the Bani Hilal tribe to be northern Arabs (c*adnān*) descended from an eponymous ancestor Hilal; see al-Qalqashandī, Aḥmad Ibn cAlī, *Nihāyat al-*Carab* fī ma*Carifai* 'ansāb al-*Carab**, (Cairo: al-Sharika al-*Carabiyya* li-l-tibāc, 1959), pp. 434-44; Ibn Hazm, cAlī Ibn Aḥmad, *Jamharat ansāb al-*Carab**, ed. Lévi-Provençal (Cairo: n.p., 1948), pp. 261-62; Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitab al-*Cibār** (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1967), vol. 2, pp. 463ff.; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Bayān wa-al-*iCrāb**, ed. M. Abdin (Cairo: cĀlim al-kutub, 1961), p. 28. A simplified genealogy is thus: cAdnān → Mudar → Qays cAylan → cĀmir → Hilāl → his three main descendants: Aṭbag, Riyāḥ, and Zuḡba. A summary is provided in cAbd al-Ḥamīd Yūnis, *al-Hilāliyya fī al-ta'rīkh wa-al-'adab al- sha*C*bī*, 2 ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma*C*rifa, 1968), p. 21.

³ cAwaḍallah's pronunciation of the tribe of Zaḥlān alternated with Zuḥlān or Zaḥālīn.

⁴ The love story of cAlya al-cUqayli and Abu Zayd is one of the few sections of the epic (from a printed Cairo lithograph dated 1865) to be translated into English, by Wilfred Scawen Blunt and Lady Anne Blunt, "The Stealing of the Mare, an Arabian Epic of the Tenth Century," in his *Poetical Works* (London: Macmillan, 1914), pp. 129-217. See Alexander G. Ellis, *Catalogue of Arabic Books in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1967), vol. 1, p. 112.

⁵ Medieval Arab historians consider the Zughba to be a Hilali tribe (see n. 2). cAwaḍallah places the Zughba alongside the southern Arabs. cAwaḍallah thereby retains the earliest major division of the Arabian tribes, northerners (c*adnān*) as opposed to southerners (*qaḥtān*), a division that still exists in Upper Egypt.

⁶ It is interesting to note that cAwaḍallah's history of the Ḥimyār tribe corresponds to their history as it

is related in a south Arabian epic, in which the Ḥimyarites are considered to be the conquerors and founders of North Africa (*Ifriqiyya*); see Alfred von Kremer, *Über die südarabische Sage* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1866). This epic, like ʿAwaḍallah’s, also speaks of the alliance of Ḥimyār and Zanāta in Tunisia.

⁷ Diyāb is one of the rare historically attested figures in the Hilali epic; see Ibn Khaldūn, *Les Berbères*, vol. 1, p. 38.

⁸ The vehemence of ʿAwaḍallah’s disagreement with this idea might also be traced to my mistaken use of the word *barbarī* for ‘Berber.’ In Upper Egyptian Arabic, *barbar* signifies Nubian or black.

⁹ A list of oral sources is given in Claude Breteau et al., “Témoignages de la longue marche hilalienne,” *Association internationale d’étude des civilisations méditerranéennes: Actes du IIIème congrès* (Algiers: SNED, 1978). Historians place the Hilali invasion within the context of the arabicization of the Berbers of North Africa. The Arab defeat of the Berbers is summarized by medieval Arab historians in the article by H. R. Idris, “Haydaran,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1971 ed.; see also Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿibār*, vol. 6, p. 15.

¹⁰ Cathryn Baker quotes a Tunisian storyteller (*rāwī*) who supports the right of the Hilalis to graze their livestock on Berber lands: “This property belongs to Quraysh, and the Quraysh are our forebears”; pt. 2. p. 600.

¹¹ The incorporation of modern historical and political developments of the Middle East into the Bani Hilal epic has been reported by Abderrahman Ayoub, “The Hilali Epic: Material and Memory,” *Revue d’histoire maghrébine* 35-36 (1984): 189-217. Ayoub recorded Libyan versions, in which ʿUmar Mukhtār, the Libyan national hero who waged guerrilla warfare against the Italian colonialist rule, rides and fights alongside the Hilali warriors. Palestinian versions recorded in Jordanian refugee camps tell of Abu Zayd, the Palestinian freedom fighter, wielding the *klashen* (the arabicization of the Russian machine-gun the Kalishnikov), instead of the lance.

¹² Edward Lane summarizes a printed edition of the Hilali epic circulating in Cairo in the early nineteenth century in *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: Ward, Lock, n.d.), p. 367. This version has the mother, not the daughter, preventing Abu Zayd from murdering his father.

¹³ To be called a *jamasiyya*, or a woman of the Jamasa tribe, is an insult in Upper Egypt. In fact the Jamasa are descendants of the Hilalis; however, in Egypt, as opposed to other Arab and Muslim countries, Hilali descent is a matter not of pride but, rather, something to be kept secret (see [Chapter 1](#)).

THE STORY OF ʿAMIR KHAFĀJI: VERSIONS AND VARIANTS

The Egyptian versions of “The Story of ʿĀmir Khafāji,” a story that recounts how Abu Zayd rescues the king’s daughter, resembles the plot of many folktales that consist of a hero, a female to be rescued, and a villain.¹ For the purpose of analyzing the motifs and features of the story of ʿĀmir Khafāji, I consider ʿAwaḍallah’s rendition to be the basic version. The four other texts summarized below by other Egyptian storytellers are designated variants of ʿAwaḍallah’s version.

Although folktales end with a marriage between the princess and the hero (the last of Propp’s thirty-one “functions”),² in the Bani Hilāl epic cycle, the hero Abu Zayd does not marry the Princess Dawāba. Neither does the princess within the Bani Hilāl epic desire to marry the hero. Instead, the father of the princess, the King of Iraq, ʿĀmir Khafāji, becomes enamored of the Hilali women, and the tale ends when the king, wishing to wed a daughter of the hero Abu Zayd (other variants speak of a daughter of the Hilali co-hero, Diyāb), decides to join the Hilali tribes as they head westward. This difference affects the general narrative progress of the epic. In a folktale, the story characteristically ends when the hero marries a princess and the story can promise that the couple will live happily ever after. In the Bani Hilal saga, however, in order for the epic plot to continue, it is necessary to stave off the customary and definitive folktale closure of wedded bliss. Accordingly, the epic develops the ways in which the father of the princess, not the daughter herself, must be enticed onward into further adventures. For the most part, the hero’s women are the motivating narrative lure.³ ʿAwaḍallah explains that because of ʿĀmir Khafāji’s love for Laḥya, Diyāb’s daughter and a Hilali maiden, ʿĀmir Khafāji abandoned his homeland of Iraq. Similarly, according to a printed edition of the story, it is because ʿĀmir Khafāji favored Waṭfa,

another daughter of Diyāb, that he was moved to leave his homeland.⁴ (Tunisian accounts tell only of a son of ʿĀmir Khafāji who followed the Hilali westward because he loved a Hilali woman Jāz; see below).

Epic tales with male protagonists are more often told by male than female informants. This was surely the case with all the versions of the tale that I collected, since they were all derived from male storytellers. The epic of the Bani Hilal is considered to be true history told by men to male audiences; the presence of women is often specifically excluded. It is possible, therefore, that in other contexts the story might be told by women to women, but there is very little evidence of such hypothetical female performances.⁵

There is another important point, perhaps related to the fact that all the narrators of the tale are men. In this tale the central protagonist is the father, the parent-king, not the daughter-heroine. In the story the hero rescues the princess not in order to carry *her* off but instead to carry off the king by exchanging a new woman, of the hero's family, for the abducted daughter. The hero thereby "marries," so to speak, the father by assigning him tribal affiliation through a promised marriage into the hero's own family. It is in this context, I argue, that the father-daughter incest explicitly framing the middle section of the epic acquires its psychological significance. My claim is that the tale is designed to resolve problematic tensions relating to a strong, but unspoken, taboo on father-daughter incest. The story shows the way the father is freed of his incestuous longings for his daughter when he gives over his daughter, his homeland, his settled, urban existence, in exchange for the Hilali nomadic tribal migration. In an unusual reversal, therefore, the central figure in the folktale is neither the son nor the daughter, but the parents of both.⁶ The Egyptian versions of the tale represent this plot pattern as a successful solution to the problematic tensions associated with father-daughter incest. In the Tunisian versions, however, where there is no equivalent of ʿĀmir Khafāji rescuing the princess, the tensions associated with the incest taboo seem unresolved: ʿĀmir Khafāji dies, betrayed, without even acquiring one Hilali princess.

In what follows, I summarize ʿAwaḍallah's performance text and his understanding of certain specific features of the tale, such as the relationship between the father (king or sultan) and his princess daughter, the role of the Jew as the villain, and the role of the hero-rescuer Abu Zayd.

1. Summary of the performance text of *ʿAwaḍallah ʿAbd aj-Jalīl ʿAli*. (For full text, see chapter 5: Performance Text.)

After the opening poem of praise to the Prophet Muḥammad (lines 1-13), *ʿAwaḍallah* begins the story of *ʿĀmir Khafāji* by introducing the hero Abu Zayd and his three nephews, Yaḥya, Marʿi, and Yūnis, all of whom are traveling westward to Tunis (lines 14-24). The four dismount in the courtyard of King *ʿĀmir Khafāji* of Iraq (lines 25-36). The king's daughter, Dawāba, while looking down from her window upon the four Hilali horsemen, falls in love with one of the nephews, the handsome Yūnis (lines 37-44). Dawāba asks the four strange men their tribal affiliation, and they reply that they are wandering poets and praise-singers (lines 45-59). She invites them in and offers them hospitality (lines 60-74).

A black slave arrives and quenches the thirst of Abu Zayd's nephews, before serving Abu Zayd. The black slave considers Abu Zayd a slave, like himself (lines 75-84). Abu Zayd stares so angrily at the slave that the latter drops his serving tray and runs to Dawāba to inform her that the angel of death, disguised as an epic poet playing the *rabāba*, is now among them and will destroy her father's house (lines 85-104). Dawāba reproaches the slave for serving the young masters before their elderly slave (lines 105-8). Dawāba serves them all a feast (lines 109-16). Abu Zayd angrily questions the presence of a woman at the men's meal (lines 117-22). Dawāba then speaks to Abu Zayd of the plight of her father, King *ʿĀmir Khafāji* of Iraq, and his long war with non-Arabs (*ʿajam*).⁷ Abu Zayd is roused to battle (lines 123-30). Abu Zayd's nephew, Yūnis, questions Abu Zayd's enthusiasm for battle, and Abu Zayd replies that they must not abandon *ʿĀmir*, whose assistance will be helpful upon their return (lines 131-38).

ʿĀmir arrives, greets the three nephews before greeting Abu Zayd (lines 139-64). When it is Abu Zayd's turn to greet *ʿĀmir*, he grips *ʿĀmir*'s hand so strongly that *ʿĀmir*'s finger's are paralyzed (lines 165-72). *ʿĀmir* declares that Abu Zayd, the black slave, is neither a slave nor a poet, but a destroyer of dwellings (lines 173-81). Yūnis reassures *ʿĀmir*, who then serves Abu Zayd coffee. *ʿĀmir* sends a crier to gather the clans for a poetic performance (lines 182-99). The Arabs gather in *ʿĀmir*'s palace, a meal is set forth, and prayers are recited (lines 200-18). Abu Zayd, disguised as a poet, entertains *ʿĀmir Khafāji* and his guests (lines 219-34). Dawāba, *ʿĀmir*'s daughter, descends among the Arabs, and her father demands the reason for her scandalous

presence among the men (lines 235-55). After asking her father's permission to speak, Dawāba suggests that if the black slave poet sings so beautifully, surely his handsome master Yūnis must be the greater poet, and, therefore, Yūnis should be encouraged to recite odes (lines 256-64).

Yūnis speaks in the secret Najdi language to his Uncle Abu Zayd and complains that since he is not a poet, Abu Zayd has once again brought trouble upon them all (lines 265-69). Abu Zayd rebukes Yūnis, announces to his nephews that they must be prepared to help those in distress, and demonstrates to cĀmir his poetic prowess by singing until dawn (lines 270-97). A black slave approaches with a letter. Abu Zayd invokes their common black slave ancestry and demands news (lines 298-311). When the slave informs Abu Zayd that he comes from al-Tash al-Khorasani, Abu Zayd asks to see the letter (lines 312-15). The black slave inquires how a slave is capable of reading, while Abu Zayd continues to pester the black slave as they both enter cĀmir's diwan (lines 316-25). cĀmir weeps when he reads the letter (lines 326-36) and blames Abu Zayd for his misfortunes (lines 337-50). cĀmir is surprised that Abu Zayd knows how to read, and Abu Zayd explains that he is schooled in the Koran, also a healer, a preacher, a horseman, and a poet (lines 351-60). In his letter to cĀmir, al-Tash al-Khorasani demands a tribute of ninety she-camels, ninety he-camels, ninety horses, ninety portions of flour and henna, ninety lances and spears, ninety fair maidens, and, lastly, Dawāba, cĀmir's daughter. If none of the tribute is forthcoming, al-Tash al-Khorasani will destroy Iraq (lines 361-89).

Abu Zayd orders his nephew to fetch paper and pen and he composes an insolent reply. Abu Zayd refuses all the demands of the Jew, al-Tash al-Khorasani (lines 390-432). Abu Zayd forces a reluctant cĀmir to sign this letter (lines 433-45). Abu Zayd calls to the black slave to convey the letter. The slave behaves insolently to Abu Zayd, who then smashes him with his fist (lines 446-471). The slave asks Abu Zayd for a sign to convince al-Tash al-Khorasani. Abu Zayd slices off the nose and ears of the black slave and sends him on his mission (lines 472-89). When the slave arrives, al-Tash al-Khorasani demands evidence of cĀmir's tribute. The slave points to his mutilated features and describes Abu Zayd to the Jew as a mighty black slave (lines 490-511). The Jew gathers his warriors (lines 512-26). The Jew's sister, Sanyūra, a geomancer, divines the true identity of cĀmir's mighty black slave. She tells her brother it is Abu Zayd and his three nephews heading toward Tunis. She is not believed (lines 538-50). The Jew rebukes his sister, asking

why Abu Zayd would leave his lands in Najd and travel to Iraq (lines 554-64). The Jew's sister repeats that all is foreordained (lines 565-68). The Jews surround cĀmir's city (lines 569-74). When cĀmir emerges to pray, he sees the black hats of his enemies encircling his city wall. He runs to Abu Zayd and blames him for bringing the Jews upon Iraq (lines 575-81). Abu Zayd urges cĀmir either to fight the Jews or to give them his daughter Dawāba, lest they destroy his land (lines 590-606). cĀmir decides to fight to preserve his honor (lines 607-14). Lines 615-20 are cAwadallah's poem. cĀmir's war drums gather the Arabs, and he declares war with the Jews (lines 621-43).

In the meantime Abu Zayd mounts an old worn-out horse and informs cĀmir that he intends to visit al-Tash al-Khorasani, who perhaps pays poets better than cĀmir (lines 644-56). cĀmir begs him to stay and promises Abu Zayd clothing upon his return from war (lines 657-60). The Jew and cĀmir meet. The Jew demands his tribute. cĀmir refuses because the Jew's demands now include his own daughter (lines 661-73). The two warriors battle (lines 674-83). The Jew wounds cĀmir and captures cĀmir's daughter (lines 684-87). Dawāba tells her father they would be dishonored should he abandon her to the Jews (lines 688-96). Again cĀmir is roused to battle and recaptures his daughter (697-712). cĀmir returns home wounded (lines 714-18). Lines 719-29 are cAwadallah's poem. Abu Zayd decides to look after the wounded cĀmir despite Abu Zayd's nephews' protests (lines 730-47). Abu Zayd changes his appearance to an old man. Taking his *rabāba* and book of tricks, he approaches cĀmir's gatekeeper (lines 748-49). Abu Zayd demands to see cĀmir, but the gatekeeper refuses, saying cĀmir is too ill to be visited (lines 760-76). Abu Zayd grips the gatekeeper's hand so violently that he is immediately admitted to the castle (lines 777-87). Abu Zayd climbs the castle steps, all the while composing poetry. cĀmir hears him and sends for him (lines 788-810). Abu Zayd blames cĀmir for feigning illness and for not treating the visiting poets with appropriate hospitality (lines 811-17). cĀmir bemoans his wounds (lines 818-23). Abu Zayd orders Dawāba to prepare coffee, into which he puts a narcotic and then gives the medicinal coffee to cĀmir (lines 824-34).

cĀmir appears to have died from the medicine, and Abu Zayd informs Dawāba of her father's demise (lines 835-52). Dawāba laments her father's death and tears off her clothes (lines 853-70). Abu Zayd covers Dawāba with his cloak (lines 871-74). Abu Zayd calls upon a magical helper to bring his box of medicines from Arabia to Iraq (lines 875-95). Though Abu Zayd washes cĀmir's wounds, he must call upon his mentor, al-Khidr, to spit on

ʿĀmir’s wound, and only then can Abu Zayd cure ʿĀmir by washing (lines 896-911). ʿĀmir awakes, believing Abu Zayd to be inhuman. He grants Abu Zayd any wish (lines 912-20). Abu Zayd demands Dawāba (lines 921-23). ʿĀmir tells Abu Zayd that he fears the Jew will seize her (lines 924-26). Dawāba agrees to accompany the black slave poet, whom she believes is the hero Abu Zayd (lines 927-40). Abu Zayd promises to guard her, and ʿĀmir sends for his groom to show Abu Zayd his stable of horses (lines 941-46). No horse pleases Abu Zayd until he discovers ʿĀmir’s horse (lines 947-65). The gatekeeper mocks Abu Zayd and warns him that ʿĀmir’s horse is wild and not to be ridden (lines 966-80). Abu Zayd sends the groom running to ʿĀmir to demand the horse (lines 981-85). Abu Zayd breaks down the stable door with his bare hands, smashes the horse, and mounts it seated backwards (lines 986-1003). The Arabs mock Abu Zayd’s prowess as a horseman and warrior (lines 1004-11). ʿĀmir orders the horses saddled for Abu Zayd and three more mounts for his nephews (lines 1012-27). Abu Zayd orders Dawāba to be brought, and she arrives followed by ninety fair maidens (lines 1028-48). The maidens ask her where she is going and she replies that she will sing for the Arab warriors in battle (lines 1049-64). Abu Zayd mounts his horse, speaking to it to rouse it to battle. He orders Dawāba to saddle up (lines 1065-90). Dawāba is mounted on her camel (lines 1091-1102).

Yūnis volunteers to guard Dawāba during the battle, and Marʿi is willing to die for her in war (lines 1103-15). Abu Zayd reveals his identity to Dawāba and commands her to sing (lines 1116-21). She sings, and her thoughts are with Yūnis (lines 1122-29). Then the Jew approaches Abu Zayd and asks him if he is the emissary who brings tribute from ʿĀmir and whether he has indeed killed ʿĀmir (lines 1130-37). Abu Zayd declares that he intends to kill the Jew (lines 1138-47). Lines 1148-51, ʿAwaḍallah inserts a poem in order to take a cigarette break. Lines 1152-57 are a praise-song, *madīḥ*. Abu Zayd and the Jew do battle (lines 1158-1228). With his sword Abu Zayd cuts off the head of the Jew (lines 1229-38). The Jew’s sister, Sanyūra, comes to revenge her brother’s death (lines 1239-43). Abu Zayd sends Marʿi to fight her, but Sanyūra possesses a magic cap that enables her to become invisible (lines 1244-51). Neither is Yaḥya successful in defeating her (lines 1252-55). Abu Zayd calls upon his mentor, al-Khiḍr, who snatches away Sanyūra’s cap (lines 1256-62). Sanyūra becomes visible. Marʿi grabs her from the horse, and Yaḥya chops up her corpse (lines 1263-69). Abu Zayd asks his nephews to protect Dawāba while he returns to ʿĀmir (lines 1270-77). Abu Zayd encounters ʿĀmir

mounted upon his horse. ʿĀmir insults him and asks if Abu Zayd’s masters are dead (lines 1278-92). Abu Zayd lies to ʿĀmir and tells him they were killed by the Jews and that Dawāba, his daughter, is their prisoner (lines 1293-1306). ʿĀmir calls for his sword and prepares to rescue her (lines 1307-15). While ʿĀmir and Abu Zayd are speaking, Dawāba arrives, singing about the courageous Hilali horsemen (lines 1316-26). ʿĀmir inquires about the result of their battle with al-Tash al-Khorasani (lines 1327-32). The story ends with Dawāba explaining to her father that it is indeed the hero Abu Zayd and his three nephews who have rescued her and that they are scouting to Tunis (lines 1333-47).

As can be seen from the above summary, the tales that constitute the middle section of the Bani Hilal epic are generally organized around the theme of the hero Abu Zayd rescuing various princesses from evil enemies—Jews, black slaves, even supernatural figures—who wish to carry off and wed a king’s daughter. According to the epic narrative that ʿAwaḍallah unfolds, the reason for the Hilali tribe’s migration from Arabia to Tunis is to be found in the initial father-daughter incest drama, which takes place in Tunis. According to this narrative, the Tunisian ruler, Maʿbad, wishes to marry his daughter, the Princess ʿAzīza. When Muslim theologians of the realm object, the king imprisons his daughter in a castle with a Hilali maidservant. A prisoner in the castle, the princess falls in love with Yūnis, the Hilali, having heard from the maidservant’s lips tales of his beauty. The princess sends an envoy, Jabr al-Qurayshi, to inform the Arabian Hilalis that the west is weak and ripe for conquest. During a break in the performance, I asked ʿAwaḍallah if cases of father-daughter incest had ever occurred in the village. He vehemently answered no, while we were among a group of male listeners. When I asked him again in private, he told me that about fifteen years previously a man had been banished from the village for sexual activities with his daughter.⁸

ʿAwaḍallah offers other explanations for the Hilali migration westward. On one occasion, I was told that due to conditions of famine and lack of rainfall (*innajd amḥalit*), the tribes sought greener pasturage elsewhere. A second reason, which was also brought up by ʿAbd as-Salām Ḥāmid Khalīfa, specifically explains the Bani Filial attack upon the ruler of Tunis, Khalīfa Zanāti, and the tribes he led. Both Upper Egyptians, ʿAwaḍallah, the professional poet (*šāʿir*), and ʿAbd as-Salām, the tale-teller (*rāwi*) in the Luxor marketplace, speak of the betrayal of Jabr al-Qurayshi by the Tunisian Khalīfa Zanāti. While Jabr al-Qurayshi and other *ʿashrāf* (descendants of the Prophet

Muḥammad) were praying in the mosque, Khalīfa Zanāti attacked and killed many of them. In order to avenge their murders, the Hilalis resolved to sack Tunis. Although neither poet suggests this, it is possible to conjecture that the attack and overthrow of the Tunisian rulers is understood to be a just punishment for a sultan's incestuous desire to marry his daughter.

The villains of the narrative are identified by ʿAwaḍallah as the Jew al-Tash al-Khorasani and his sister, Sanyūra. When the hero kills the Jew, the Jew's sister, a female warrior whose magical powers equal her brother's prowess, must also be slain. The figure of the Jew represents a charged locus of values for Egyptian tale-tellers, and the Jew means different things to different narrators.⁹ For ʿAwaḍallah, the Jew represents a conflation of different religious and ethnic groups from various historical times. He believes that both Arabia in the east and the Tunisian littoral in the west were ruled by Jewish kings before the advent of Islam. Similarly, he claims that the pharaohs of Egypt were also Jews. Jews are descended from Hābil (Abel) and not Qābīl (Cain). ʿAwaḍallah also conflates the Russians, communists, and Shi'ite Muslims with the Jews, perhaps because the word for Shi'ite and the word for communist in Arabic share the same triconsonantal root of š-y-ʿ (see n. 313, performance text). The names that ʿAwaḍallah calls the Jews in his version of the tale, namely, Magar, Dimyān, Faltas, etc., are appellations exclusively associated with Egypt's Coptic Christian minorities. Customs that ʿAwaḍallah attributes to Jews, such as eating pork and worshipping idols, are more commonly practiced by the Copts. On another occasion, ʿAwaḍallah identified the Jews with the tribe of Israel (*qōm israʿīl*), who have fought many wars with modern Egypt.

ʿAwaḍallah's recitation is the most extensive version I recorded. It is his and his audience's favorite section from the epic. The variants that follow below also speak to the popularity of the story, for these were often the only sections from the middle of the epic that the narrators could recall. In the variants that follow, two tales emerge out of the middle section, "the reconnaissance trip" (*irriyāda*), which tells the adventures of the hero Abu Zayd and his three nephews. The first story is the tale of the defeat of an enemy who menaces an Arab king in order to marry his daughter. The second story is the tale of a maiden hung by her hair, who is rescued by the hero from the villain figure. For Ibrahīm Khaḍr, a storyteller from the north of Egypt, the hero rescues the maiden hanging from her hair not only from an enemy Jew but also from her father, who has willingly permitted marriage to the Jew. The

Jew and the Israeli are the same for Ibrāhim Khaḍr. Another tale variant, by Ḥājj Sayyid Murshid, a narrator from the south, identifies the enemy as a Jew, but Ḥājj Sayyid does not accept any connection between Jews and Israelis. Rizg Būlus Sintāʿus, another southern narrator, and the only reciter who is a member of the Coptic Christian minority, equates the battle between Arab and Jew with the war Rizg fought in 1948 in Palestine. In contrast to all of the above, the fourth tale-teller, ʿAbd as-Salām, conceives of the enemy as the Persians.

2. Summary of a tale recited by Ibrahīm Muḥammad Khaḍr. Ibrahīm Khaḍr is a Muslim, age mid-fifties, an illiterate fellah, from the village of Shabbās al-Malḥ, district of Dessūq, Governorate of Kafr Shaykh, the Delta. The recitation was taped on January 10, 1983, and is approximately ten minutes long. Ibrahīm remembered only this one tale from the Hilali cycle. He first heard it more than twenty years ago. He narrates the tale in prose with sections of rhymed couplets.

Abu Zayd was asked to conquer a place called *wādi ilḡarb* (the western wadi). He chooses his three nephews, Yaḥya, Marʿi, and Yūnis to accompany him. He orders Marʿi, the geomancer, to cast the sands and reveal their futures. Marʿi casts the sands. They all march onward for three days without drinking or tasting food. Abu Zayd and his nephews arrive at a beautifully decorated green tent with no entrances. Abu Zayd cuts open three doors to the tent. He enters and sees a maiden hanging by her hair. He asks her to quench his thirst. She tells him that the water jar and its scooper are near him. Again he asks her to quench his thirst. She replies that she cannot quench his thirst because she is hanging by her hair. Abu Zayd fetches water for his nephews but vows to forego drinking or tasting food. The maiden tells Abu Zayd that the green tent belongs to a Jew. Each year the Jew visits her father for three days. The Jew wishes to marry her, and her father has agreed, though the daughter refuses. Abu Zayd becomes angry and searches for the Jew. The maiden tells Abu Zayd about the Jew’s powerful beast (often a horse). Abu Zayd smashes the beast and masters it (*ḍarab ilḡūl bi -lxamāsi*). The Jew comes running out demanding to know who these Arabs are and what brings them to his lands. (*?ēh jābkum ya ʿrab fi bilādi / ya -lli ʿalēkum xarāb ilcūmrān*). They answer that they are wandering poets (*ya ʿammi da -ḥna šuʿara / kull ʿlēla nibayyit fi makān*). Abu Zayd forbids the Jew from entering the women’s quarters. Abu Zayd and the

Jew challenge each other to battle. The Jew sets in motion a magic spring (*ḥarrak illōlab*), whereupon “helpers” of the djinn (?*a^cwān ijinn*) arrive. The magic helpers address the Jew as Abu Dimyān and Abu Ḥanna. Abu Zayd defeats the Jew. He is greeted by the happy maiden, who asks him: “Where are you from, O Arab, O defender of the wretched?” (?*antum minēn ya ^carab ya naṣr li -lǧalbān*).

3. *Summary of a tale recited by Ḥājj Sayyid Jōda Murshid. Ḥājj Sayyid is a Muslim, age sixty-five, an illiterate fellah from aḍ-Ḍab^ciyya, Luxor district, Qina Governorate, Upper Egypt. The recitation was taped in Luxor, October 22, 1983, and is approximately one hour long. Ḥājj Sayyid claims to have learned his entire repertoire from the oral epic poet Shamāndi Tawfīq thirty-five years earlier. He narrates the tale in prose with rhymed quatrains. There are many oral-formulaic phrases that conform to ^cAwaḍallah’s rendition of the same episode.*

Abu Zayd, disguised as a poet, comes to ^cĀmir. Dawāba enters bringing coffee. Abu Zayd demands whether the presence of women is the custom or is Dawāba an orphan? Dawāba tells Abu Zayd that her father has long been battling non-Arabs (*^cajam*). Abu Zayd is roused to war and sings with his *rabāba*. A letter arrives demanding two thousand swords and camels. ^cĀmir blames Abu Zayd for this current state of affairs. Abu Zayd, after smashing a black slave, sends him as a messenger to al-Khorasan. ^cĀmir awakes from sleep to see his city surrounded by men. Abu Zayd tries to make ^cĀmir engage in war. ^cĀmir battles and is grievously wounded by the Jew, al-Khorasan. Ninety healers cannot cure ^cĀmir. Dawāba and ninety fair maidens depart. Abu Zayd comes to the palace to complain about the king’s mistreatment of the visiting poets. Upon learning of ^cĀmir’s illness, Abu Zayd sets in motion his magic belt (*farak illōlab*), and the magic helper (*^cōn*) Zaḥrān returns to Arabia to retrieve Abu Zayd’s medicine. Abu Zayd makes coffee, secretly puts a narcotic (*binj*) in the liquid, cures ^cĀmir’s wound, and leaves to save Dawāba. First, Abu Zayd tames a mighty horse. He employs the ruse of riding the horse while seated in reverse and in this manner sets off to al-Khorasan. Abu Zayd battles al-Khorasan and kills him. al-Khorasan’s sister, Yasmīn, seeks her brother’s revenge. Abu Zayd sends his three nephews to battle her, but each one of the three is defeated. She possesses the magic ability to disappear. Abu Zayd calls upon his protector al-Khiḍr. Abu Zayd kills the sister. Dawāba returns to

reveal the true identity of Abu Zayd.

Ḥājj Sayyid uses three different words to describe the enemy of ʿĀmir Khafāji, King of Iraq. The first is a geographical place name, ‘al-Khorasan’; the second is the word ‘Jew’ (*yahūdi*); the third, *ʿajam*, is the word for non-Arab, foreigner, Persian. I asked Ḥājj Sayyid who the Jews were. His young cousin, present during the story-telling session, said that the Jews are the Israelis. Ḥājj Sayyid violently disagreed, insisting that there was no relation between Jews and Israelis. He said, after much hesitation, that the Jews belonged to the tribe of Kisra (*gōm kisra*), a term he could not explain, nor did anyone else know about this tribe.

4. A summary of the tale recited by Rizg Būlus Sintāʿus. Rizg is a Coptic Christian, age fifty-seven, an illiterate weaver from the village of Nagāda, Qina Governorate, Upper Egypt. The recitation was taped in Luxor, November 8, 1983, and is approximately fifteen minutes long. Rizg narrated in prose with rhymed quatrains.

Abu Zayd and his three nephews travel westward to a castle of four pillars (*gaṣr ilyahūdi b- arbaʿ ilʿumdān*) belonging to a Jew. They travel three days and find that the castle has no windows or doors. Abu Zayd tells his nephews to wait outside, and if the Jew comes out, they are to inform him that they are poets traveling westward. Abu Zayd comes upon a maiden whose hands and feet are shackled. He asks her to quench his thirst. She points to the water jar and scooper. He insists that she quench his thirst. She answers that she is shackled and asks him if he is blind or has no eyes. She says Abu Zayd can be recognized by the gap in his teeth. Abu Zayd laughs and reveals himself by his gap teeth. Abu Zayd sets the maiden free and asks her story. She says that a state of vengeance (*tār*) exists between her father and the king. Abu Zayd confronts a mighty horse, masters it, then disguises himself as a Jew. He goes out to his nephews, threatens them, and demands to know their identity. Yaḥya and Marʿi flee, but Yūnis fights back. Abu Zayd laughs again, and his laugh reveals his identity to his nephew. Then Abu Zayd visits the Jew in his four-pillared castle to announce the arrival of poets. The Jew threatens Abu Zayd, and they engage in battle, each allowing the other three strikes. The Jew insists on hitting first, misses Abu Zayd three times, and is killed. Abu Zayd takes the maiden.

Rizg provides an unusual instance of a Christian reciting an Arabo-Muslim epic. Rizg believes that the Copts of Egypt are Arabs, a fact that most

Copts would deny. He calls himself an Arab Christian (*ʿarab massīḥī*) and maintains that his branch of the Coptic Christian church is purely Egyptian and receives no money from abroad. He fought in the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 at the age of twenty-six. He told me he had been to Tunis during that war, and he located it in Palestine, whose principal cities, he said, were Tunis, Khan Yunis, and Rafa. In fact, the latter two cities are to be found in the Gaza Strip, and perhaps Rizg conflated a major character of the epic, Yūnis, with a place, Khan Yunis (the caravansary of Yūnis) in the Gaza Strip, that Rizg believed was named after the Hilali personage and nephew of Abu Zayd, the handsome Yūnis. Rizg identified Abu Zayd with heroes of Egyptian nationalist movements, such as Saʿd Zaghlūl, and he equated the epic’s anti-hero, Khalīfa Zanāti, with Anwar Sadat. Rizg saw Yūnis, Abu Zayd’s nephew, as reminiscent of Colonel Nagīb, the officer who led the coup that overturned the monarchy of King Farouk in 1952.

5. Summary of a tale recited by ʿAbd as-Salām Ḥamid Khalīfa. ʿAbd as-Salām is a Muslim, age given eighty-three, an illiterate beanseller in the marketplace of Luxor (see [plate 4](#)), Qina Governorate, Upper Egypt. The recitation was taped on March 9, 1983, and is approximately forty-five minutes long. I taped approximately ten hours of his version of the Hilali epic in his shop off the main market street. He used the interior of the shop to store folk musical instruments. He narrates the tale in rhymed quatrains with brief narrative sections.

“The reconnaissance trip” (*irriyāda*) of Abu Zayd and his nephews from Arabia to Tunis is brought about by the actions of Khalīfa Zanāti of Tunis. Zanāti conducts a raid against the *ašrāf* (those claiming noble descent from the line of Muḥammad) during “virtuous Friday” (*jumaʿ faḍīla*) while they are bowing in prayer to God. The leader of the *ašrāf*, Jabr Qurayshi, flees to the Hilali in Arabia in order to demand help from Sultan Abu ʿAli and Abu Zayd. Jabr brings with him golden draughts to play *sīja*. Abu Zayd rouses the war drums to attack Tunis, but first proceeds westward on a scouting trip accompanied by his three nephews. Along the way, Abu Zayd casts the sands and sees the future of Yūnis (who will be imprisoned in Tunis), of Marʿi (who will be killed by a slave), and of Yaḥya (who will be bitten to death by a serpent).

The four arrive at a city, and Abu Zayd enters a diwan. He meets a young maiden hanging by her hair. Abu Zayd asks her if she is human or djinn. She

answers that she is human and asks his name and tribe. Abu Zayd says they are wandering epic poets and that he wishes to hear her story. She tells him that a ghouh (*ǧūl*) has forced her to hang by her hair. Abu Zayd is armed by his mentor al-Khiḍr and decapitates the ghouh. Abu Zayd escorts the young maiden to her family in the mountains. Two hundred horsemen gather. They do not believe that Abu Zayd has killed the ghouh. He brings forth the decapitated head, throws it down, and laughs at them.

Abu Zayd and his nephews refuse further offers of hospitality and press onward to the kingdom of ʿĀmir Khafāji of Iraq. When they arrive, Dawāba, the king's daughter, tells Abu Zayd that her father is wounded from war with "non-Arabs" (*ʿajam*) because Abu Zayd has scolded her for not treating visiting poets with the proper hospitality. Abu Zayd throws water on the wound, but it does not heal. He looks for the medicine case given him by his mentor al-Khiḍr. Abu Zayd sets in motion a magic spring (*farrak illōlab*), and Zahrān, a magic helper arrives. Zahrān retrieves the magic ointment from Abu Zayd's daughter in Arabia. She sends her father greetings. Abu Zayd cures ʿĀmir Khafāji's wound by putting a narcotic (*binj*) in his coffee. When ʿĀmir awakes, Dawāba informs him that a poet has healed him. Scholars and doctors are amazed. ʿĀmir calls for the poet, who voices his anger at the inhospitable treatment of poets; they have not been fed for three days. Abu Zayd asks ʿĀmir for a horse. The groom conducts him to the stable. Not a single horse pleases Abu Zayd. He then attempts to mount the famous wild beast of ʿĀmir, smashes the animal, and rides away, though saddled and seated in reverse. The Arabs mock his horsemanship. Abu Zayd demands forty fair maidens and Dawāba to take with him to fight the enemies of Iraq. ʿĀmir refuses. Marʿi, Abu Zayd's nephew, secretly reveals Abu Zayd's identity to Dawāba and urges her to sing beautifully on the drum (*ṭār*) during the battle. Abu Zayd attacks the king of the Persians (*malik ilfūrs*), who is also called the king of Khorasan. The enemy are mounted on birds, pigs, and mice. They engage in ninety bouts. Abu Zayd sets in motion his magic spring, and the djinn, Zahrān, comes to his aid. Abu Zayd defeats the king of the Persians, and Dawāba reveals his true identity to ʿĀmir Khafāji. ʿĀmir urges him to stay forty days. ʿĀmir offers his daughter Dawāba. Abu Zayd refuses. The Hilali stay forty days in Iraq and then travel westward.

6. *A summary of the printed edition. The printed episode appears in ar-Riyāda al-bahiyya, pp. 71-74, a Cairo lithograph widely sold in the al-Azhar area for*

approximately twenty-five cents. The various printed editions are summarized in Wilhelm Ahlwardt, "Verzeichniss der arabischen Handschriften," in Die Handschriften-verzeichnisse der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin, Vol. 8, Book 19 (Berlin: A. Asher, 1896), pp. 155-462. Additional titles are listed in Alexander G. Ellis, "Hilāl, Tribe of," Catalogue of Arabic Books in the British Museum (London: British Museum, 1967), columns 638-42, and A. S. Fulton and Alexander G. Ellis, Supplementary Catalogue of Arabic Printed Books (London: British Museum, 1926), pp. 428-29.

Although I am primarily concerned with oral versions, there are also cheap printed editions called "yellow books" (*ilkutub iṣṣafra*), which circulate in the larger cities of Egypt. All five of the above Egyptian storytellers and reciters are illiterate, and none has ever seen or consulted these books. Certainly, the printed editions provide only a brief, bland description of the encounter of Abu Zayd with ʿĀmir Khafāji of Iraq. The printed Egyptian edition, unlike the oral versions, does not concern itself with the story or the rescue of the Princess Dawāba from an evil enemy. The enemy in the written text is the ʿajam, here apparently the Persians. Such a translation of the word ʿajam is based, first, on the attachment of the word *shāh* to the name of the hero's adversaries and, second, on the fact that the text announces, with a proverb, that the adversary is a Muslim (see below). The oral versions of the story of ʿĀmir Khafāji concern themselves with a similar episode recounted in the printed version. However, the printed edition is complete in four pages, while oral renditions continue to be major and lengthy incidents of the recited Bani Hilal epic cycle.¹⁰ The lithograph edition printed in Cairo, whose plot is summarized below, is dated between 1860 and 1880.

Abu Zayd and his three nephews, disguised as poets, are welcomed to Iraq by King Durghām and his son, Sultan ʿĀmir Khafāji. Durghām then recounts in verse to his son a story about the foreigners (ʿajam) who rule over their country. The next morning ʿĀmir and his men descend to war. They battle the foreigners until ʿĀmir's horse is killed, and he and his men return home defeated. Abu Zayd sees the Iraqi's defeat and confides in his nephews that he wishes he could battle ʿĀmir's enemy. They reply that they are poets. Abu Zayd says: *?allaḍī ya?kul ʿayš yahūdi yuḍrab bi sayfihi wa hādhā muslim.* The translation of this phrase (with *yuḍrab* in the passive voice) is 'whoever eats the bread of the Jew, will be struck by the [Jew's] sword, and this is a Muslim.' Abu Zayd asks each of his three nephews if they will fight with him, and each

one refuses. Abu Zayd obtains a horse from the groom and descends to war, killing many princes. (The word for those slain, *ṣalāyib*, can mean either ‘Christian’ or ‘strong.’) Abu Zayd kills Ḥusayn Shāh.

Qāsim Shāh then advances to avenge his dead brother and insults Abu Zayd for being a black slave: *ya ʿabd ya zarbūn ya ʾaxuss ilkalāyib* (‘O slave, O vile one, most loathsome dog’). Abu Zayd replies that he is an Arab and of noble lineage. Abu Zayd is compared to a lion, and his battle cry is *allāhu ʾakbar*, (‘God is great’). Abu Zayd kills the brother, and the enemy flees. When ʿĀmir sees what happened, he knows that Abu Zayd is not a poet but one of the Arab rulers. ʿĀmir orders three robes (*quṭṭān*) for Abu Zayd; one is presented at the gate of the city, the second at the entrance to the diwan as he descends from his horse, and the third when they are all seated. The first one is for Abu Zayd’s victory, the second for hospitality, and the third in exchange for Abu Zayd’s recounting the story of himself and his tribe. Abu Zayd says he is from Najd and his tribe is the Arab Banu Hilal. ʿĀmir is acquainted with the Hilali leaders, Sultan Ḥasan, Diyāb, and the Qāḍi Badīr, though he has never met Abu Zayd whose fame has reached Iraq. Abu Zayd reveals his identity to ʿĀmir and tells him they are headed westward to the land of Jazāyir (Algeria). ʿĀmir says he will join them on their journey. The Hilalis stay three days in Iraq, and, accompanied by ʿĀmir, they set off. Their next adventure is with Shabīb, king of Syria, on whose behalf they fight supernatural beings.

Other oral versions recorded in Tunisia differ greatly from their Egyptian counterparts. ʿĀmir Khafāji becomes the son of Ameer Khouaja, and his importance emerges mainly in the third section of the Bani Hilal, the move to the west (*taḡrība*). He is famous for his love of Zaziya (Jāz in Egypt), and dies far from his homeland betrayed, by a fighter of Khalīfa Zanāti.

7. Oral variants (Tunisia): Summary of a tale recited by Ḥājj ʿAbd as-Salām Mahadhdhabi. He is a Muslim and a schoolteacher. The recitation is excerpted from the collection of southern Tunisian Hilali tales by Cathryn Anita Baker, in “The Hilali Saga in the Tunisian South,” Ph.D. diss., University of Indiana, 2 pts., 1978. In these texts, ʿĀmir Khafāji of Iraq, is known for following the Hilalis westward. ʿĀmir Khafāji loves Zaziya, the Hilali (in Egypt she is called Jāz), and dies in Tunis, far from his home (pt. 1, pp. 137-38).

It should be noted that the tale that most resembles the Upper Egyptian version of ʿĀmir Khafāji is one told in Tunisia about another ruler, King

Shabīb Tibḥi of Syria (pt. 1, pp. 209-19). Abu Zayd, disguised as a poet named Ṣuljān (lit. ‘serpent,’ but as a possible pun ‘master sergeant of djinn’), arrives at the court of the king of Syria, Shabīb Tibḥi. Shabīb invites him to ride, but Abu Zayd is not pleased with any of the mounts presented to him. Abu Zayd chooses a powerful beast known to eat people for food, smashes the horse, and rides off. This feat of horsemanship is recognized to be the work of Abu Zayd. A soothsayer is called to cast sand lines and to identify the visiting poets. He is able to name the various Hilali warriors. Shabīb imprisons them. Shabīb’s son, Sagr, wishes to battle them. Instead, Shabīb sets up a contest of professions in which Abu Zayd competes with the Syrians. Abu Zayd surpasses them all in every craft. Finally, they bring a wrestler who is instructed to pierce Abu Zayd with a poisoned arrow. Abu Zayd defeats him too. Shabīb releases the Hilalis from prison. Shabīb battles the Hilalis and is wounded by Ḥasan. Abu Zayd, disguised as a surgeon, comes to treat him. Instead, Abu Zayd slits the throat of Shabīb. When the Syrians discover their dead ruler, they attack the Hilalis and are slaughtered.

8. Summary of a tale recited by Mohammed of Téchine, Governorate of Médenine, Tunisia. The recitation is excerpted from Micheline Galley and Abderrahman Ayoub, Histoire des Beni Hilal et de ce qui leur advint dans leur marche vers l’ouest (Paris: Armand Colin, 1983).

The tale concerns the son of Khouaja Ameer, whose kingdom the storyteller locates in Libya. The Bani Hilal tribe have spent seven years in the domain of the son of Khouaja Ameer. After a season of famine, the Hilali tribe decides to send Abu Zayd and his three nephews to Tunis on a scouting trip. The son of Khouaja Ameer does not appear in the sequence of events about this trip. However, in the third part of the epic, when Abu Zayd returns without his three nephews to the lands where the rest of the Hilali tribe are gathered, the son of Khouaja Ameer, out of love for Zaziya, leaves his father and his homeland in order to accompany the Hilali on their westward migration (p. 115). He dies in battle in Tunis, and both Suḥada, the daughter of the Tunisian ruler, and Zaziya, the Hilali princess, mourn his death (p. 129).

The same storyteller narrates an episode of Zaziya, the Hilali who is kidnapped by a Jewish peddler and rescued by Diyāb.

9. *Summary of a tale recited by an unnamed Tripolitanian (Libya) storyteller from the oasis of Jadou on the Libyan-Tunisian border. The recitation is excerpted from the collection of Abderrahman Guiga in La geste hilalienne, traduit de l'arabe parlé tunisien; preface et mise au point de la traduction par Tahar Guiga (Tunis: Maison Tunisienne de l'Édition, 1968); Min Aqāšīš Banī Hilāl (Tunis: Dār al-tunisiyya li-l-nashr, 1968).*

The son of Khouaja Ameer stops the Hilali westward advance in Egypt. The Hilali warriors, Badr, Zaidane, Dhiab (in Egypt Diyāb), and Bou Zid (Abu Zayd) battle Ameer, and each retreats defeated. They decide to depart, and again the son of Khouaja Ameer bars their way. He sees the beautiful Zazia, falls in love with her, and offers the Hilali his hospitality. He eventually departs with them to Tunis out of love for Zazia Bent Bou Ali (French ed.: pp. 50-52; Arabic ed.: p. 139-41). He dies in battle in Tunis (French ed.: pp. 75-76; Arabic ed.: p. 161).

In the abridged Egyptian oral forms, the hero must rescue the daughter from her father's inability to withstand the demands of the villain. However, all versions of the tale, whether Egyptian or Tunisian, seem to be told from the father's point of view. For example, in gratitude for the hero's rescue of his daughter, the king, according to ^cAwaḍallah, does not give his daughter in marriage to the hero (who, in fact, refuses her in some variants), but instead the king "gives himself in marriage" to the hero. Rescuing princesses and hapless hanging maidens serves here to strengthen the bonds of male camaraderie and assistance in war. A reading of ^cAwaḍallah's version of "The Story of ^cĀmir Khafāji" as a written literary text suggests that the plot revolves around a father-daughter relationship: ^cĀmir must defend his daughter Dawāba from the Jew al-Tash al-Khorasani. In ^cAwaḍallah's narrative, and in the Egyptian variants, the hero Abu Zayd performs a series of feats that serve to emasculate all other male figures. Abu Zayd may test his nephews repeatedly, for example, by disguising himself as the villainous enemy Jew and watching them flee in terror. Abu Zayd tames untameable wild horses that belong, in some variants to the Jew, in others to the king. Abu Zayd's mighty, staring eye subjugates ^cĀmir of Iraq, insolent black slaves, and a gatekeeper.

It should be noted that the slang phrase for 'penis' in Egypt is *?abu -lcēn* ('the one-eyed'). Furthermore, in Egypt, during the period when Moshe Dayan was Israel's famous war hero, he was nicknamed *?abu -lcēn* ('the one-eyed' and 'the prick'), a reference to the eye-patch over his eye and to his putative

personal character. Abu Zayd's powerful hand grip paralyzes the hands of cĀmir, the slave, and the gatekeeper. Abu Zayd mutilates the external orifices of the disobedient black slave. He cuts off his ears and nose and sends the mutilated black slave as a sign to the enemy Jew. In the end, Abu Zayd cures cĀmir of his battle wound in the thigh by spitting upon cĀmir's bandages. All of these images evoke the "phallic" hero, whose spittle (semen) is magical and whose eye (penis) is powerful. All these events mask a deeper connection than the more obvious and explicit father-daughter tie. The audience is aware that the Hilali scout westward at the behest of a Tunisian princess, who hopes to avoid the amorous embraces of her father. Furthermore, the previous narrated episode of cAwaḍallah's Bani Hilal cycle concerns itself with the hero's rescue of a princess about to be given in marriage to the father's favored black slave. Fathers are ambivalent figures: they want to marry their daughters or have surrogate slaves marry them; they must be roused to war to defend their daughters by a series of artful ruses on the part of the hero. cĀmir Khafāji is the weak, unreliable father; Abu Zayd is the heroic, powerful, succoring father. The good parent must rescue the bad parent; the rescue of a princess is secondary. Thus, there is a powerful bond underlying the tale, one that takes place between the two parental figures, the king-father cĀmir and the hero-father Abu Zayd.

In the next section, in which I consider the tale in its performance context, a tale told by an elderly professional epic poet to a male audience, another level of screening is unmasked. What I would like to convey in the following redaction of a performance of "The Story of cĀmir Khafāji" is that the evidence of the performance reveals an expression neither of father-daughter incest nor of male peer bonding but, rather, of the mother-son tie.



Plate 4. ʿAbd as-Salām Ḥāmīd Khalīfa and his son, Luxor market

¹ For an account of folktale morphology, see Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale*, 2d ed., trans. Lawrence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

² For an account of folktale morphology, see Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale*, 2d ed., trans. Lawrence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 63-65.

³ Abderrahman Ayoub has developed a series of Proppian functions to enumerate the basic scheme of written episodes in the Hilali saga: Departure→ Opposition→ Ruse→ Dream→ Pact → War→ Victory→ Departure; see his “The Manuscripts of the Hilali Epic: An Essay on a Segmentary-Sequential Mode of Reading,” paper presented at the Conference of the American Oriental Society, West Branch, Phoenix, Arizona, Feb. 27-28, 1982, unpublished paper. The Hilali women, usually Jāz, activate the “ruse.”

⁴ See Wilhelm Ahlwardt, “Verzeichniss der arabischen Handschriften,” in *Die Handschriftenverzeichnisse der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, Vol. 8, Book 19 (Berlin: A. Asher, 1896), Catalog no. 9261, pp. 246-52.

⁵ The only known instance of a female professional Hilali epic singer in Egypt was recorded in 1975 by ʿAbd al-Ḥāmīd Ḥawwās and Muḥammad ʿUmrān of the Folklore Center Archives, Folklore Institute, Cairo. The female epic singer, Shaʿbān Muḥammad Ibrahīm, known as Umm Ibrahīm of Fayyūm Governorate, played the drum and was accompanied by her husband. Both she and her husband died in 1982. I interviewed their son, who was ashamed of his parents’ vocation and unwilling to discuss their art. I am grateful to Muḥammad ʿUmrān, archivist, for providing me with a selection of her renditions.

⁶ According to Alan Dundes, “To Love My Father All’: A Psychoanalytic Study of the Folktale Source of *King Lear*,” in *Interpreting Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 211-22, folktales are characteristically told from the point of view of the son or daughter.

⁷ See Ignaz Goldziher, “ʿArab and ʿAjam,” *Muslim Studies*, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern, vol. 1

(London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), pp. 98-136.

⁸ Yaḥyā Ṭāhir ʿAbdallah, the Upper Egyptian writer, recounts a banishment from his village caused by homosexual congress, in “Al-raqṣa al-mubāḥa,” *al-Kitābāt al-kāmila* (Cairo: Dār al-mustaqbal al-ʿArabī, 1983), pp. 224-31. In this short story, the father mourns his banished son, who will now live and die as a stranger, like wandering gypsies who are people without honor, chicken-stealers.

⁹ For a survey of the Jew in Egyptian folklore, see Muḥammad Fahmī ʿAbd al-Laṭīf, *Alwān min al-fann al-shaʿbī* (Cairo: 1964), pp. 30-31; and Giovanni Canova, “‘Muḥammad, l’ebreo et la gazzella’: Canto di un *maddāḥ* egiziano,” *Annali dell’Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 41 (1981): 195-211.

¹⁰ For a comparison of oral and written versions of an episode from Part III of the epic, see my “The Death-Song of ʿĀmir Khafāji: Puns in an Oral and Printed Episode of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* (1987, forthcoming).

POETICS AND PERFORMANCE

This chapter begins with a brief outline of ʿAwaḍallah’s theories on poetics and puns, which is followed by an interlinear Arabic transcription and English translation of the performance. The performance text is divided into four sections according to the places where ʿAwaḍallah chose to pause for a break. A brief summary of the performance precedes each of the four sections.

ʿAwaḍallah’s poetic theories of the *sīra* of Bani Hilal, and of the rhetorical devices with which he embellishes a performance, are formulated in terms of a series of rhymed opposing terms. The first set of oppositions concerns the way in which ʿAwaḍallah designates “true” history versus “imaginary” legend: the successive episodes of the Hilali saga are either *?aṣli*, ‘original, authentic,’ or *ʿaqli*, a product of ʿAwaḍallah’s ‘intelligence.’¹ For ʿAwaḍallah, “The Story of Ḥanḍal,” in Part I of the epic, and “The Story of Shabīb Ibn Mālīk” and “The Story of the Warrior Saʿīd,” in the Part III of the epic, are not original, authentic episodes of the tale; rather, they are embellishments, ʿAwaḍallah claims, derived out of his personal imaginative artistry.

Quite a different pair of oppositional terms are employed by ʿAwaḍallah to refer to what is important, meaningful, or even the correct way to live and behave, as opposed to all that is insignificant, minor, and frivolous. ʿAwaḍallah sets up the word *naʿnāʿ* in opposition to the word *maʿna*. According to ʿAwaḍallah, the word *naʿnāʿ* (lit. ‘a sprig of mint’) is applied to such diverse situations as the presence of women during a Hilali epic performance, the character and lack of warlike prowess of the hero Abu Zayd’s nephew Yūnis (see performance text, line 1111), and the use of the disreputable *rabāba* instead of the serious drum as musical accompaniment to epic recitation.²

On the other hand, the extensive lexical domain of the category of meaningfulness, *maʿna*, only emerged during my year in ʿAwaḍallah’s company. People could possess this quality (*nās lī maʿna*), as well as words (*kalām ʿa -lmaʿna*), or an individual man could be so addressed: *?inta rājil*

ilma^cna. For example, hashish has *ma^cna* because it gives a man strength and permits him emotions (*ḥašīš līh ma^cna, yigawwi -l^cazam wi yxalli rājil līh šu^cūr*). Hashish smoking by both patron and audiences during performances was commonplace. ^cAwaḍallah claimed that only the geographical area of southern Egypt, from the provincial capitals of Qina to Aswan (*gina wi gibli*), encompassing the two southern governorates of Egypt, possessed *ma^cna*. I was told by ^cAwaḍallah that tea served in a glass, and not in the cup and saucer I offered him, has *ma^cna*. When I asked him to define this word, he said that it was when one knows ‘where something came from and where it was going’ (*rāyih fēn wi jāy min fēn*) or in poetry when ‘the sound is beautiful and words fit together’ (*ḥissu jamīl wi kalām rākib ba^cdu*). When specifically discussing poetry, ^cAwaḍallah opposed the word *ma^cna* to a different term, *maḡna*, ‘pertaining to song,’ which he defined as ‘a beautiful voice,’ (*ṣōt jamīl*).

^cAwaḍallah considers his fellow Upper Egyptians Ḥājj aḍ-Ḍūwi, who died in 1978, his son Sayyid aḍ-Ḍūwi, and also Jabr Abū Ḥusayn, who died in 1982, as the great epic poets of the Hilali saga.³ He has also expressed his dislike of other poets, notably Nādi Usmān, from the village of Ṭōṭ outside Luxor. In so doing, ^cAwaḍallah enumerates qualities that do not belong to a poet; for example, a poet should not be ill-mannered (*gillit ?adab*), should not drink alcohol, and must not be greedy for money. Another Hilali poet, Fawzi Jād of Luxor, listed the necessary qualities of a poet to be someone who is gifted (*mawhūb*); he should be passionate about art (*ḡaram ilfann*), a melodious vocalist (*muṭrib*), pure and good (*rayig*), and, finally (using the Ṣa^cīdi phrase), *fāḍi -lbāl*, a frequent epithet of the hero Abu Zayd, which translates as quick-thinking, clearheaded—“cool,” in the American slang usage. Furthermore, Fawzi insisted that an artist who could not explain his words was not a true artist (*fannān maya^crifš yišrah kalāmu miš fannān*).

Another term, and the one most crucial to understanding ^cAwaḍallah’s punning technique, concerns his use and explanation of the word *taškīl*, which I translate as ‘pun.’ Puns or wordplays are the characteristic trope of the oral folklore of Egypt.⁴ Puns are exploited in proverbs, riddles, songs, and *blasons populaires*, etc. For ^cAwaḍallah, a poet’s artistry is measured by the degree to which he plays with words and puns during epic recitations. The word *taškīl* in Arabic grammatical terminology means to vocalize a word. It also means ‘to create, shape, and bring variety.’ ^cAwaḍallah’s sense of linguistic playfulness is closely related to the variegated vocalization possibilities that can be inserted within the structure of the three consonant root system that is the basis of most

Arabic words. Even his understanding of a word's meaning is bound by Arabic's triconsonantal framework, with the vowels as auxiliary, as in the example cited above, where ʿAwaḍallah conflates 'Shi'ite' Muslim and 'communist' because these two words share the same three consonant root. Following ʿAwaḍallah's terminology, a quatrain is either punned, that is, demonstrates *taškīl* (in the passive voice, *maškūl*), or it is the opposite, that is, without puns, which he associates with being 'light' (*xafīf*), 'flowing' (*sāyil*), 'open' (*fathā* or *maftūḥ*), and 'clear' (*ṣāfi*). Finally, a quatrain can employ no puns and thus become a discourse ʿAwaḍallah associates with 'normal speech' (*lafz ilʿadiyya*).

ʿAwaḍallah describes his punning technique as something that audiences frequently find difficult to grasp. In many cases, after he sings or recites a line, he will either repeat the word that is punned, or he will gloss the pun with another form of the word, or, sometimes, he will even warn the audience to pay attention to meaning (*maʿna*). In the performance text that follows, I have highlighted ʿAwaḍallah's puns by capitalizing the punned Arabic word and its English translation. All capitalized words represent specific instances pointed out to me by ʿAwaḍallah during my redaction of the tape-recorded performance. Each time ʿAwaḍallah heard one of his puns, he announced to me "taškīl" and told me to stop the tape recorder while he explained their meanings. As the year wore on, ʿAwaḍallah found it more difficult to sit through repetitions of his previous performances. To avoid lengthy explanations, near the end of my year in his company, ʿAwaḍallah created a literary device he called *sanda*. He defined this term to be a filler word necessary for the rhythms of a verse and likened its use to a cushion one might sit upon in order to be comfortable (*farš illi yġaṭṭi*) but which would nevertheless be unnecessary (*malhaš lazma*). The word *sanda* derives from the triconsonantal root *s-n-d*, which means 'to lean upon, to prop something.' ʿAwaḍallah began using this explanation so frequently that I became suspicious. I tested him on a punned phrase that he had provided earlier, and when he declined to explain by calling upon his new category of *sanda*, or 'meaningless filler,' I precipitated a quarrel. I cited the importance of his lectures to me on the meaningfulness, *maʿna*, of words, and I repeated his own explanations. Thereafter, ʿAwaḍallah no longer spoke to me of "filler words."

The performance took place on March 10, 1983, at the house of the father of ʿAbd al-Ghafūr in Najac al-Ḥajis, Aswan Governorate. The occasion was

ostensibly to honor Jamāl Zaki on his return visit to the village where he had worked four years earlier. However, in retrospect, since I was present and known to be interested in Hilali performances, it seems quite possible that my presence was a motivating cause of the performance, the honorific singing and feasting of Jamāl being but a convenient cover. The performance began around the time of the evening prayer, *salāt ilmaġrib* and, because of short winter days and colder nights, ended far earlier than performances conducted in the warm summer evenings. Reconstructing from memory, it seems to me that the performance, including breaks, lasted approximately three and a half hours. In attendance were Jamāl, °Abd al-Ghafūr, °Abd aj-Jalīl, and their male relatives and friends who stopped in and out of the main reception room (*diwān*). I was the only female present.

PERFORMANCE TEXT

answer, that indeed it was the hero Abu Zayd's speech that had just finished. cAwaḍallah, a gifted public performer, immediately inserts a short poem, lines 139-44, in which he pronounces the name of the inattentive culprit, cAbd aj-Jalīl, in a separate, rhymed section clearly set apart from the main body of the recitation both musically and poetically. This insult poem includes the name of the offending listener along with stock oral-formulaic phrases, such as "a pity lest my art go, / lest cAbd aj-Jalīl dwell in a dusty tomb." cAbd aj-Jalīl is reprimanded amidst communal laughter and the performance continues.

In a lengthy section from lines 152-68, cAwaḍallah, by repeating lines and varying their punned meaning, emphasizes a subtext of the performance: the King of Iraq, cĀmir Khafāji, does not greet a poet with the proper respect. cĀmir commits a grave error by mistaking Abu Zayd for a black servant and elderly poet and hence deeming him unworthy of proper salutations. The treatment of poets at the Iraqi court reflects the role of the poet as a social outcast and outsider in Upper Egypt. It is possible that cAwaḍallah intends this story about the king of Iraq, which does not occur in other versions, to function as a motivating explanation of cĀmir's subsequent sorrows as they conform to the familiar contours of the customary plot of the dragon-slayer tale. Not to accord respect and hospitality to a poet is to invite loss, exile, and possible murder in Western lands.

However, it should be recalled that the very performance itself, not just the plot of the epic tale, evidences a tension between poet and audience because, whether it is cAwaḍallah singing to an Upper Egyptian audience or a fictive Abu Zayd singing in a fictive Iraq, it is only a poet's words, not his person, that commands respect. cAwaḍallah demonstrates the power of the poet by this first insult poem to a member of the audience, cAbd aj-Jalīl, who belongs to the wealthy, educated village elite. So too events in both the epic tale and the performance context bring forth literary insult poems that will eventually escalate into deadly insult. In the text of the *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, the duel between the epic poet and the king of Iraq is resolved when the king is informed of the poet's importance and then quenches Abu Zayd's thirst before his own. Thus, the first section ends with a feast and a recitation by Abu Zayd to the Arabs of Iraq. Just as cAwaḍallah begins the section with a poem praising the Prophet Muḥammad, as good Muslim epic poets ought to do, so too does he end the section with Abu Zayd leading the prayer to the Prophet prior to the feast. cAwaḍallah is then reminded of his own cigarette cravings and appends a humorous quatrain, in which he begs his audience's indulgence to take a break

and smoke.

<Tape 1>

ʿAwaḍallah

1 muštāg li -zzēn ṣalli

You who yearn for the Beautiful One, pray for Him

Audience

ṣalla -llāhu ʿalēhi wi sallam

God bless Him and grant Him salvation.

ʿAwaḍallah

2 ba^{cd} I ma -nṣalli šIFA^{ca} [*aside*] šŪF^{caH}

After we pray for INTERCESSION [*aside*] SEE AH

Audience

šūf^{cah}

see ah

ʿAwaḍallah

- 3 ba^{cd} I ma nṣalli šifā^{ca}
after we pray for intercession,
- 4 lama -nnār tizḥam tiṣalli
since hell is crowded and blazes
- 5 līna mīn ġērak šifā^{ca}
we have none but you to intercede

Audience

šafī^c
intercessor

ᶜAwaḍallah

- 6 līna mīn ġērak YA ?AḤMAD
we have none but you AḤMAD.
- 7 kalām jadd I xattū NABĪNA [*aside*] NĀYBI
Earnest words, You, OUR PROPHET takes [*aside*] MY LOT I took.
- 8 wājib ᶜala -zzōl YAḤMAD
A duty of all TO EXTOL
- 9 ᶜala šarᶜ ilmušarraḥ nabīna
the sublime Revealed Law of our Prophet.

- 10 kalāmi fi ʿāli -lbās
I say words of lofty courage
- 11 muḥammad ʿuyūnu kaḥāyil
Muḥammad, His eyes kohl-darkened
- 12 ʔabdi w- arattib ʿala nās
I begin, I versify to the people of
- 13 muḥammad ʿuyūnu kaḥāyil
Muḥammad, His eyes kohl-darkened
- 14 ʔabdi w- arattib ʿala nās
I begin, I versify about the men,
- 15 firsān ʿarab ilhalāyil
the horsemen, the Arab Hilali.
- 16 kānu li -lġarb raydīn
One day westward they went scouting
- 17 ʿa -lkitf naglīn ZANĀTA [*aside*] ZĀN
upon their shoulders bearing SPEARS [*aside*] A SPEAR
- 18 ʿa -lkitf naglīn ZANĀTA
upon their shoulders bearing SPEARS,
- 19 u kānu ʔarbaʿ salaṭīn

once there were four sultans

- 20 raydīn balad IZZANĀTA
scouting ZANĀTA tribe country.

Audience

kida
really

ʿAwaḍallah

- 21 rafaʿu rawāya ʿala -lgēn
They hoisted small banners upon spearpoints,
- 22 ʿarab bayyaḍ alla tanāhum
Arabs, may God make pure their honor,
- 23 xaššu ʿarāḍi -lʿuraqēn
they broached the lands of Iraq,
- 24 yistaʿjab illi ʿarāhum
all who beheld them were amazed.
- 25 ʿabu zēd gāl ya -wlād sirḥān
Abu Zayd said, “O sons of Sirḥān,

26 ya nās ya ṭiwāl il^cADĀYIB
O men of the long-fringed HEADSCARVES,

27 ?inzilu min fōg li -bkār
dismount from atop the camels—

28 ḥalāt iḍḍiyūf yikūnu ?ADĀYIB
POLITENESS, a trait of guests.”

[*cAwaḍallah begins clapping*]

29 galū-lu ḥāḍir aya xāl
They said to him, “We obey, O uncle,

30 ya -bu farš^I ḡāli KLĀMAK
you, whose cushions are well-appointed, whose CARPETS, precious

31 ya -bu su?āl jadd^I biyxāl
whose word seems trustworthy,

32 lākin mīn yixālif KALĀMAK
then who dare contradict your WORD?

33 yōm il^carab kānu sāyrīn
The day the Arabs journeyed,

34 wi yista^cjab illi ?arāhum
all who beheld them were amazed,

35 u k̄ānu magādīm salaṭīn
they were the vanguard sultans,

36 u firsān hazzu ganāhum
horsemen brandishing spears.

37 u ṭallit dawāba min iṭṭāg
Then Dawāba peered down from her lattice window,

38 labsa xurṣ jawhar ^I-ylāli
she wore earrings, glittering jewels

[*ʿAwaḍallah stops clapping*]

jōhar ^I-ylāli
glittering jewels—

39 šāfit jamāl yūnis min iṭṭāg buṣṣ
she saw fair Yūnis from her lattice window [*pauses, points*] look!

Audience

šibbāk
window

ʿAwaḍallah

40 ŠABAKHA ġarām ilhalāli

Passion for the Hilali youth ENMESHED HER.

Audience

kida

really

ʿAwaḍallah

41 min ilgaṣr fāṭḥa šIBBAKHA

From the castle she opened HER WINDOW,

Audience

šibbākha

her window

ʿAwaḍallah

42 sijʿān gaṣḍīn tūnis

courageous ones heading for Tunis,

43 ḥubb ilhalāli šABAKHA

love for the Hilali ENMESHED HER

44 u rāḥit bālha ʿind I yūnis

and her thoughts went out to Yūnis.

Audience

kida

really

ḥarām ʿalēk

shame on you

šūf biyuwzin izzayy

see how he rhymes

[laughter]

ʿAwaḍallah

45 ah gālit ya -lli TIJARRIDU -LFĒN

“Oh,” she said, “you who DISPATCH THOUSANDS,”

Audience

tāni -lḥitta di

say this part again

ʿAwaḍallah

46 gālit ya-lli TIJARRADU -LFANN

she said, “O you who CREATE ART,”

- 47 kalām li -lmaqādim QABĪLA
these words to the vanguard BEFORE HER,
- 48 wi ?intu ya sijcān MIN FĒN
“and where, O courageous ones, ARE YOU FROM?”
- 49 gulū-li min anhi QABĪLA
tell me from which of the TRIBES?”

Audience

tit^cirif baga
to become acquainted

ʿAwaḍallah

- 50 mar^ci gāl ya bint issulṭān
Mar^ci said, “O daughter of the sultan,
- 51 ya -mm il^cuyūn ilkaḥāyil
O woman of kohl-darkened eyes,
- 52 šu^cara fi kull ^I bakān
we are poets in every place,
- 53 u nās fi -rrakb ^I sāyir

men in the caravan marching,

54 nās šu^cara -w maddaḥīn
poets and praise-singers,

55 kull ^I lēla -nbayyit fi diwān
each night, a different diwan.”

Audience

kida

really

ridd ^calēha

he answered her

biyḡaṭṭi ^calēh

he covers up

^cAwaḍallah

56 mar^ci yigūl ya dawāba
Mar^ci says, “O Dawāba,

57 u ya -lli -llyāli NABŪKI [*aside*] NĀYBAK
nights of suffering have BEFALLEN YOU [*aside*] are YOUR LOT.

- 58 šu^cara niziff irrabāba
Poets, we perform on the rababa,
- 59 wu ḍuyūf ^cāmīr abūki
guests of ^cĀmir, your father.”
- 60 gālit rayyiḥu -lbill ^I ya -dyūf [*aside*] dawāba
She said, “Rest the camels, O guests” [*aside*] Dawaba

Audience

ʔitfaḍḍal ilbill
if you please, the camels

^cAwaḍallah

[*^cAwaḍallah begins drumming*]

- 61 gālit rayyiḥu -lbill ya -ḍyūf
She said, “Rest your camels, O guests,
- 62 ʔiḥna -f kalāmna ^cumr ^I MA NĀZIL [*aside*] MAN ZILL
never DO WE GO BACK on our word [*aside*] ARE NOT MISTAKEN,
- 63 ma law kuntu ʔalf -uw ʔalūf
though you number a thousand thousands,
- 64 nārit bīkum kull ilMANĀZIL

the entire ENCAMPMENT lights up at your presence.

ya salām, ta^cbīr ^calēh gūl ya ʔustāz

wonderful, well-spoken, tell it, O master

65 gālit rayyiḥu -lbill ^I ya ŠĀ^cIR

She said, “Rest the camels, O POET,”

66 dawāba gālit rayyiḥu -lbill ^I ya šu^cara

Dawāba said, “Rest the camels, O poets,

67 wala -nnisr yišbah ḤADĀNA

the vulture does not resemble the KITE,

68 ṭalab ilhign ^I gamḥ ^I wi -š^cĀR

camels need grain and BARLEY,

69 ʔadi -lkull ^I humma ḤADĀNA

everything is here WITH US.”

70 dawāba tinādi ya xaddām

Dawāba called, “O servant,

71 ^cala -lfann ^I ma^cna WI JIBNA

art has meaning and WE BRING IT,

72 ma^cāna sa^cd ^I li -lkull ^I xaddam

Saʿd is with us, a servant to all,

73 ʿimil gahwa yigaḏḏu WAJIBNA
make coffee—fulfil OUR DUTIES.”

74 šaraḥu ṣinniya min ilʿāl
They set forth a tray of high quality,

[*Drumming stops*]

75 yāma -lcagl I minnu TALĀTA [*aside*] ?ITLATT
O how his reason split THREE ways [*aside*] CONFUSED:

76 zaga fawāris kānu min giddām
he gave the lead horsemen to drink,

77 u -wlād sirḥān humma -TTALĀTA
the sons of Sirḥān, the THREE of them.

Audience

wara baʿḏ māši
one after another they came

ʿAwaḏallah

78 zaga ?abu zēd BAʿDĒN

He gave Abu Zayd to drink AFTERWARDS

79 il^cabd I lam yi^ciddiṣ wajāyib [*aside*] yi^cidš ilwājib
the slave did not prepare his duties [*aside*] did not return his duties,

80 yilgā sab^c I fāriṭ BĀ^c IDĒN
he takes him for a lion AT FULL STRETCH,

81 yij^calu ^cibēd ijjalāyib
he considers him a purchased slave.

Audience

^cašān šakklu
because of his appearance

^cAwaḍallah

82 ya nās kān allā BI -L^cĒN [*aside*] BI -L^cŌN
O people, God's EYE WAS ON HIM [*aside*] God came to HIS AID,

83 ya nās kān allā bi -l^cēn
O people, God's eye was on him,

84 u bi -l^gulb I mannūš rāḍi
he consents not to insults,

- 85 ?abu zēd iṭṭalla^c [bī] fī bi -l^cēn
Abu Zayd’s eyes glared at the slave,
86 iṣṣinniya waga^cit minnu fōg il?arāḍi
the slave’s tray fell to the ground.

Audience

xāf
he was afraid

[laughter]

ʿAwaḍallah

- 87 bigi yitnafaḍ il^cabd kēf bardān
The slave, trembling as if cold,
88 gāl magadīr sabatit ^calayya
said, “Destiny defies me,”
89 ṭili^c fōg abu ^cumdān
he climbed to the top of the many-pillared castle,
90 fōg ilgiṣūr il^caliyya
the topmost of high castles.
91 dawāba-tgul-lu aya ^cabd
Dawāba says to him, “O slave,

- 92 yak ilʿagl I minnak jarālak
can it be, reason has run away from you?
- 93 suʿālak yak ilʿagl I minnak jarā līk
Your words, can it be, your reason has run away?
- ġāb fēn ʿaglak
 where has your reason disappeared?
- 94 yak ilʿagl minnak jarālak
can it be, reason has run away from you?
- 95 suʿālak yifatfit ilkibd
Your words cut the liver to pieces,
- 96 titnafaḍ ēh da -lli jarālak
you tremble, what happened to you?”
- 97 gāl līha ya sitt innasawīn
He said to her, “O mistress of the ladies,
- 98 mita -f kalāmi MANĀZIL
when do I GO BACK on my word?
- 99 ilʿabd sakan iddawawīn
A slave inhabits the diwans,
- 100 malak ilmōt juwwa -lMANĀZIL

an angel of death, within the DWELLINGS.

Audience

malak ilmōt šabbah

he compares him to the angel of death

tašbīh

a simile

[laughter]

ʿAwaḍallah

101 malak ilmōt fi -ddawawīn

The angel of death is in the diwans,

102 lākin šāʿir wi yuḍrub rabāba

as a poet playing the rababa,

Audience

kamān

also

ʿAwaḍallah

103 ya salām lama ʿabd I xanzīr

see, the pig of a slave—

- 104 ʔazunn^I raḥ yiṣabbiḥ diwān abūki xarāba
I think he will destroy your father's diwan.

Audience

Kamān

also

ḥawl il -llah

strength is in God

min ilmanzar^cirfu

they know him from his appearance

cAwaḍallah

- 105 galit-lu ya^cabd^I kām fajrān
Dawāba said to him, “O slave! How impudent!

- 106 rājil ma t^cidd ilmalāma
Man, heedless of reproaches,

- 107 yimkin zagit siyādu min giddām
perhaps you gave his masters to drink first?

- 108 huwwa kabīr ḥāla malāma
A matter for reproach: he is old.

cēb! tizgi siyādu giddāmu!?

Shame on you! You quench his masters' thirst before him!?

wa huwwa rājil kabīr fi -ssinn

for he is a man very old in years

[*Drumming begins*]

109 dawāba bint ilmalik

Dawāba, daughter of the king,

[*Drumming ends*]

110 wi -thayya?at fi ġadāhum

then she prepared them their meal,

111 dabaḥit wazz ^I ṭāyib wi šuršar

she slaughtered a plump goose, wild duck,

112 bi xarūf mir^ciz libāni

young lamb, pastured, unweaned,

113 u nizl- issamn ^I -mšaršar

clarified butter dripping—

114 ġada li -zrafāt ilma^cāni

a meal for well-spoken guests.

Audience

kamān

also

ʿAwaḍallah

115 u rāyig iḍḍuḥa gaddamu -zzād

By the morning light, they served up the feast,

[*Single drumbeat*]

116 ʿabdēn wi ʔarbaʿ ṭawāši

two slaves and four eunuchs.

ṭawāši -lli humma -lxadam

ṭawāši are the “servants”

[*Drumming begins*]

117 dawāba -mm ^I xadd warrād

Dawāba of the rose-colored cheeks,

118 wi -b ʿēnu naẓarha -lḥibāši

the Abyssinian’s eyes glaring at her,

119 naẓarha -tradd ^I gahrān

she glared back in anger,

120 mizān iššarīʿa -ngīma

“We uphold the scales of the Revealed Law,

- 121 lēh giddāmt izzād [*drumming stops*] niswān
why are the presenters of food [*drumming stops*] women?
- 122 sibr ^I walla yatūma
Is this custom, or is she an orphan?”
- 123 dawāba -tnādm- itgaddu
Dawāba called them to dinner,
- 124 ya -lli tirīḥu gasāya
“O you who would comfort my misery,
- 125 ḥarb ilcajam manṣūb mudda
war with the foreigners drags on,
- 126 fī ?iḥtār cāmīr abāya
it confuses cĀmir, my father,
- 127 yiḥtār cāmīr u durḡām
it confuses cĀmir and Durghām.”
- 128 ?ibn iššarīfa -xlāṣ
Then the son of Sharīfa, of good family,
- 129 rikib ḥēt hazz ^I -lagdām
climbed a wall, he stamped his feet,
- 130 ?abu zēd baḥtar iššaš rās
Abu Zayd’s head-turban unwound.

- 131 yūnis gal-lu ya xāli ʔindalla
Yūnis said to him, “O my uncle, descend,
- 132 matibgāš бага дѣf u xāṭir
don’t act as a guest and visitor,
- 133 līk ^I -drāc zayy ilmaḥalla
you have an arm like a cleaver—
- 134 wi lēh sa^ct iššarr ^I šāṭir
and why are you in evil times aroused?”
- 135 ḥalaf cāmīr lam nifitū
Abu Zayd swore, “We shall not abandon cĀmir,
- 136 ma ʔilla bi ṭōla kabīra
not even as a great favor.
- 137 lama -rūḍu -lġarb wi nijū
When I scout westward we return together,
- 138 yibga xabīr li -ddarb līna
then will he guide us on the road.”

[*Drumming begins*]

cAbd aj-Jalīl

mīn illi biygūl kida

who says this?

Audience

?abu zēd xabīr iddarb huwwa -lli ʿarif ilamākin

Abu Zayd, the expert on the road, it is he who knows the places

[*Drumming interlude*]

ʿAwaḍallah

139 ?ēh ṭabīb li -jjarāyih DA FANNI fēn fēn

Healer of wounds, THIS IS MY ART, where, where?

140 ʿarab intu tizīn ilwajāyib

Arabs, you adorn social duties,

141 ya -xsāra la -yrūḥ fanni

O, a pity lest my art go,

142 li ʿabd ijjalīl yiskin liḥōd ittarāyib

lest ʿAbd aj-Jalīl dwell in a dusty tomb,

143 kām kām ya ʿēni

how much more, how much more, O my dear.

144 ?abu zēd бага-ygīm bi-lʿēn

Then Abu Zayd stared with his eyes,

[*Drumming ends*]

- 145 ?abu kalām min ilfann ^cĀMIR
eloquent, RICH in arts of speech,
- 146 bigi baħr ^I yuxbuṭ bi gil^cēn
he is a river making boat sails clash,
- 147 bi -l^cēn ḥaggag baga bass ^I ^cĀMIR
with his eyes he saw it was only ^cĀMIR.

Audience

šāfu
he saw him

^cAwaḍallah

- 148 ^cāmir ^{ca} -lfawāris tigaddam
^cĀmir went towards the horsemen,
- 149 ^{ca}la sij^cān gaṣḍīn tūnis
to courageous ones heading for Tunis,
- 150 sallam ^{ca}la -lwild ^I giddām
he gave greetings to the youths in front,
- 151 ^{ca}la -ḥaya u mar^{ci} u yūnis
to Yaḥya, Mar^{ci}, and Yūnis.

?ahō ilcēb ya -xi, ahō -lcēb illi yiḥsal kabīr

here is the disgrace, O my brother, here is
the great disgrace which takes place

152 sallam cāla-bu zēd BA^cDĒN

He gave greetings to Abu Zayd AFTERWARDS

153 sallam cāla -bū zēd BA^cDĒN

he gave greetings to Abu Zayd AFTERWARDS,

154 u migdim ṣa^cība lagāta

the one in the vanguard, harsh in encounter,

155 bigi sab^c I fāriṭ BĀ^c IDĒN

he became a lion, AT FULL STRETCH

156 cāla-nnās ṣa^cība lagāta

against men, he is harsh in encounter,

157 ligi sab^c I fāriṭ BĀ^c IDĒN

he became a lion, AT FULL STRETCH

158 u migdim badī^ca -ṣfāta

the one in the vanguard, of sterling qualities.

159 sallam cāla -bu zēd BA^cDĒN

He gave greetings to Abu Zayd AFTERWARDS,

- 160 ḥadīt min funūni nitamma
this is a story from my art, we shall complete,
- 161 yilgā sab^c I fāriṭ BĀ^c IDĒ
he takes him for a lion, AT FULL STRETCH,
- 162 ?illi yi^cāni yiṣabbaḥ wilādu yitāma
whoever opposes him orphans his own children.
- 163 sallam ^cala -bu zēd BA^cDĒN
He gave greetings to Abu Zayd AFTERWARDS,
- 164 u kēf ^cala -lkull I rāsi
over all his will prevails,
- 165 yilgā sab^c I fāriṭ BĀ^c IDĒN
he takes him for a lion, AT FULL STRETCH,
- 166 naššaf ma^cāh ilxanāšir
his small fingers dried up.
- 167 ṢABA^cĒ wi -l?idēn šallat
HIS TWO FINGERS and hands stiffened,

Audience

šallat

stiffened

^c*Awaḍallah*

168 rōḥu bigyit fi -ttarāgi
his breath caught in his throat,

[*Drumming begins*]

169 galt- il^carāyib šūf illāt
the Arabs said, “See the mighty hero—

170 sāg innataḥ ^{ca} -l^cirāgi innataḥ ^{ca} -l^cirāgi
Abu Zayd butting his head against the Iraqi, butting his head against
the Iraqi.”

171 ah ya ^carab innaga ya hū
Ah, O pure Arabs, O people!

172 ya ?āl ilbēt ya ḥabībi ya muḥammad
O family of the Prophet, O my Beloved, O Muḥammad!

[*Drumming ends*]

173 ^cāmir li -l^carāyib lama gāl
Then ^cĀmir said to the Arabs:

174 galbi min ilhamm ŠĀ^cIR [*aside*] ŠA^cAR
“My heart from sorrow is a POET [*aside*] FEELS,

- 175 galbi -mn ilhamm šĀ^cIR
my heart from sorrow FEELS
- 176 da tilb yuhdur ilgōl
that stalwart camel, Abu Zayd, spitting in rage,
- 177 ya ^curbān walahūš šĀ^cIR
O Arabs, he is no POET!
- 178 da ^cabdukum walahūš ^cabd
That slave of yours is no slave,
- 179 mita -f kalāmi MA NĀZIL
when DO I GO BACK on my word?
- 180 salāmu fatfat ilkabd
His greetings cut the liver to pieces,
- 181 da nāwi ^cala xarāb ilMANĀZIL
that one is a destroyer of DWELLINGS!”

Audience

ya sātir

O Protector

^cAwaḍallah

182 yūnis abda -w GAL-LA
Yūnis began and SAID TO HIM,

183 gāl^I -tgūm ya -bu dawāba
he said, “Arise, O father of Dawāba.”

184 yūnis abda-w GAL-LU
Yūnis began and SAID TO HIM,

Audience

gal-lu
he said to him

ʿAwaḍallah

185 gāl^I -tgūm ya -bu dawāba
he said, “Arise, O father of Dawāba,

186 baṭṭil ḥadītak wi GILLA
an end to your stories, LESSEN THEM!

187 da šāʿir wi yuḍrub rabāba
That one is a poet and plays the *rabāba*,

Audience

kida
really

ʿAwaḍallah

- 188 da šāʿir w- ana -mrabbī
that one is a poet, I’ve known him long,
- 189 ʿīdu wi -mnāh galīb izzān
his holiday, his wish, wielding the spear.”
- 190 ʿāmīr gāl ya gahwajī
ʿĀmir said, “O coffee maker,
- 191 ?izgi -lʿabd I da min giddām
quench the slave’s thirst before,
- 192 ?izgi -lʿabd I giddāmi
quench the slave’s thirst before me,
- 193 šāyif dōru miš xalṣān
I see his turn has not yet come.
- 194 min baʿd I ma šīrb- abu rayya
Only after Rayya’s father drank
- 195 ḥatta šīrib ʿāmr-issulṭān
did ʿĀmir, the Sultan, drink.

- 196 cāmir šayya^c makatīb
cĀmir sent forth letters
- 197 kull ^I badana kabīrha -flān
to every clan, their leaders:
- 198 illēla cindīna šā^cir
Tonight there is among us a poet
- 199 yi?ānis kull issij^cān
to entertain all the brave men.
- 200 min issubḥ ilxalg ^I -tjurr
From morning, the folk arrive,
- 201 issarāya ma šayla -lfirsān
the palace cannot contain the horsemen.
- 202 ba^cd ilmuḡrib bi -šwēyya
Just after the evening prayer
- 203 ṣallu farāyḍ- irraḥmān
they prayed their obligatory service to the Merciful One,
- 204 u ba^cd ilmuḡrib bi šwēyya
and just after the evening prayer
- 205 gaddamu [*drumming begins*] wajb- iḍḍifān
they attended [*drumming begins*] to their guests.

206 āh dawwar ^{ca} -lxēma munādi
Ah, send round to the tents a crier!

207 ya ^{ca}štān ya ji^{ca}n
O thirsty ones, O hungry ones!

208 ?adi saḥt- ilmalik
Here is the king's courtyard,

209 sāḥit jīb durġām
the courtyard of Durghām's son.

[Drumming ends]

210 šālu -l^{ca}ša wi yaddan il^{ca}iša
They carried in dinner, evening prayer was called,

211 wi ṣallu farāyḍ- irraḥmān
and they prayed their obligatory service to the Merciful One.

212 min ba^{ca}d iṣṣalāt ^{ca} -zzēn
After the prayer to the Beautiful One,

213 muḥammad illi nūru -ybān
Muḥammad Whose light is manifest,

214 tismaḥū-li ^{ca}ād ya -xwāni
forgive me, then, O my brothers,

- 215 līkum ʕagl^l -f rās rāwi
 you have reason in a clear mind,
- 216 wi -1 kān ʕala -lfann malyān
 as for art, it is bountiful,
- 217 xallīni ʔašrab w- ašūf ilgahāwi
 let me drink and see to my coffee.
- 218 muḥammed niṣalli ʕalēh
 Muḥammad we praise Him.

[*Laughter*]

<Pause>

Section II: lines 219-553

ʿAwaḍallah opens this section of the recitation with a *madīḥ*, a poem in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad. Just as ʿAwaḍallah begins his performance by singing a praise poem, so too does ʿAwaḍallah sing of the way the hero Abu Zayd, the epic poet, sings a praise poem. The two poets, ʿAwaḍallah and Abu Zayd, then sing a quatrain (called a *murabbaʿ* by ʿAwaḍallah) concerning the importance of an Arab art that is understood only by Arabs:

221 Ah, blessing the Prophet is beneficial before all,
222 my speech is earnest, my art is Arab,
223 northwards and to the east of my words,
224 my art only Arabs understand.

ʿAwaḍallah believes the Ṣaʿīdi (Upper Egyptian) dialect of Arabic is intelligible throughout the Arab world. Likewise, ʿAwaḍallah claims to understand all Arabs from all Arabic-speaking nations and that he is able to do so because he is a poet (see performance text, n. 272).

Beginning with line 407, ʿAwaḍallah inserts an insult embedded within the unfolding narrative of the epic, an insult that is directed against ʿAbd aj-Jalīl. In the previous section ʿAwaḍallah placed ʿAbd aj-Jalīl’s name inside an insult verse of stock oral-formulaic phrases, and this evoked laughter from the audience. There is another way, more violent and secretive, that ʿAwaḍallah uses to insult and to take revenge upon his audiences when he feels such punishment is deserved. In this form of insult to an offending member of the audience, the poet does not set off a quatrain stylistically or musically. The effect is much less good humored than the first insult against ʿAbd aj-Jalīl that took place at lines 139-44. In this second case, the insult of the poet directed against a member of the audience is encoded within the story line of the episode. This is narrated by the poet in the following manner: ʿAwaḍallah is in the midst of reciting the section of the epic in which the insatiable enemy Jew demands of the king of Iraq camels, horses, money, fair maidens of the tribe—

all his customary tribute. The hero, Abu Zayd, in order to provoke war between the kingdom of Iraq and its enemy, brashly counters each demand—the camels have scabies and the maidens are poisonous, and then, at this point, ʿAwaḍallah inserts the insult. The hero states:

407 As for the subject of lances,
408 Ḥusayn has died a long time,
409 Ḥusayn has died from among us
410 and Zakiyya weeps the day long.

As soon as the poet finished this last line, muffled laughter, silenced by an angry exclamation from one of the audience, was heard. A listener shouted: “no, beware of saying such words.” I was the only one who did not understand the man’s reaction, nor did the verse make sense within the context of the story line. ʿAwaḍallah answered: “are you a partner? I say it as I say it.” He then added another two lines, “Our blacksmith has died / three years ago, and ...”

The entire event was puzzling to me. Why, suddenly, the appearance of “the blacksmith Ḥusayn,” and why did “Zakiyya weep the day long,” and who were these new characters within the epic tale? The full force of the poet’s insult emerged only after several weeks sojourn in the village, since, of course, I could not ask the injured party to explain. In the village, I discovered that there had been a recently deceased blacksmith named Ḥusayn, and he had a wife named Zakiyya. The poet attached a well-known oral-formulaic phrase, ‘the lover weeps all night long’ (*ilʿāšig yibki ṭūl illēl*), to the name of the widow Zakiyya, thus giving her the sexual yearnings of a lover in a popular Egyptian love song. However, the name of the blacksmith’s widow, Zakiyya, also happens to be the name of the mother of the angry insulted son in the audience. To give voice to the name of the mother in Upper Egypt, as in many areas of the Arab world, is a very grave offense. To identify the name of the mother with the named eroticism of the blacksmith’s wife, since the two women were both called Zakiyya, invites angry and communal violence. Also, and this was brought to my attention several months after ʿAwaḍallah uttered this insult, the poet himself was accused by village gossips of a dalliance with the blacksmith’s merry widow. Of the four figures in our drama, the poet, the mother, the insulted son, the blacksmith’s wife, it was the son who saw the two women as having no difference, sharing the same name, and reduced to a kind of anonymity of sexual equality. Mother and blacksmith’s wife are accused of

forbidden erotic behavior, and by the voice of a poet who not only speaks the mother's name, but also dallies with the blacksmith's wife, the mother's namesake. The poet ʿAwaḍallah could protect himself by innocently pointing to the blacksmith's wife, but the son's rage, the audience's titters, and the knowing explanations to the folklorist, provide an instance in which the performing poet incorporates village inhabitants and local events into the narration of the epic. ʿAwaḍallah's interpolation resulted in an acknowledged moment of considerable tension for a member of the audience.

This section of the performance ended abruptly in mid-quatrain, when ʿAbd al-Ghafūr emerged from a back room and crossed over the partition of a wooden door carrying in a tray of food. In spite of the audience's protests, ʿAwaḍallah pronounced the formula for closure, "Muḥammad, we praise Him," and all seated themselves around a low table. ʿAbd al-Ghafūr poured water over the hands of each individual diner from a brass ewer into a basin (*ibrīk* and *ṭišt*). The table was laden with food: cooked pieces of lamb on a bed of rice, white beans in tomato sauce (*faṣūlya*), potatoes, Jew's mallow (*miluxiyya*), tomato salad, and large round loaves of bread cooked under the sun (*ʿēš šamsi*). Food was constantly pressed upon me by the host, who placed choice bits of meat on my bread. Dinner ended when ʿAbd al-Ghafūr handed round strong cups of tea.

ʿAwaḍallah

[Drumming begins]

219 ʿāšig li -nnabi ṣalli

Lover of the Prophet, praise Him!

220 ṣalātu ṭibb¹ li -lǧalbān

Blessings on Him cure the wretched

li -lǧalbān

to the wretched

[*ʿAwaḍallah is offered a cigarette*]

lā ya -xi, miš ʿāwzu

No, my brother, I don't want any

221 ah ṣalāt innabi fayda gabl

Ah, blessing the Prophet is beneficial before all,

222 kalām jadd, fanni ʿarāyib

my speech is earnest, my art is Arab,

223 baḥri wi šarg ^I min ilgāl

northwards and to the east of my words,

224 fanni tifhamu -lla -lʿarāyib

my art only Arabs understand.

225 gūm ya šāʿir salli

Arise, O poet, divert us,

[*Drumming stops*]

226 kān lēltak ʔabyaḍ liyyām

your night will be the happiest of times.

227 saḥab issabīb wi gāl fi -lḥabīb

He drew on the bowstring and sang of the Beloved,

228 zikr innabi lama ḥilw ^I ladīd

a remembrance to the Prophet, O sweet, O delicious!

229 yāma dandan wi jāb mawwāl

O how he hummed and brought forth a poem!

230 gāl ya lēl gāl ya lēl

He sang, “O night,” he sang, “O night,”

231 fi jamāl innabi -zzēn

of the beauty of the Prophet, the Fair One.

232 ʔabu zēd dandan jāb giṣḍāl

Abu Zayd hummed, he brought forth an ode,

233 ɗarab ilgōs fi ṣalāt muḥammad

he struck the bow in prayer to Muḥammad,

234 fi -nnabi wi jāb mawwāl

to the Prophet, he brought forth a poem.

[*Drumming interlude*]

235 nizlit dawāba b- ʿADALHA

Dawāba descended IN FULL REGALIA

Audience

kida

really

ʿadalha, ʔadawāt zīna, ḥalag

“ʿadalha” means ‘makeup, earrings’

[*Drumming begins*]

ʿAwaḍallah

236 min fōg ʿāli -lbawāzil

from atop the lofty fortress,

[*Drumming ends*]

237 kuḥl ilʿēn xāyil ʿĀDALHA [*aside*] ʿĀDA LĪHA

kohl-darkened eyes beautifying HER FORM [*aside*] AS WAS HER CUSTOM

238 ʿind abūha raḥt- ilmanāzil

at her father’s, and she went to the dwelling.

[*Drumming begins*]

239 ilbitt^I xaššit fi -ddawawīn

The maiden entered the diwans,

240 līha kalām ʿa -lkull^I rāsi

she is eloquent with wisdom for all,

241 tilga -lʿurbān jalsīn

she meets the Arabs in session,

242 ʿarab xāṣṣa bi -lkarāsi

Arabs honored with chairs.

243 dawāba gāl ya ḥilwit ittūl
“Dawāba,” he said, “O handsome of stature,”

244 cāmīr gāl ya ḥilwit ittūl
cĀmīr said, “O handsome of stature,

[Drumming ends]

245 ya bitt^I ma -t^ciddi -lwajāyib
O maiden, perform now your duties,

246 yak ilfann cⁱndik MA^cDŪL
I hope you know the PROPER art.

247 ?ēh tāji lē cⁱnd il^carāyib
Why do you come among the Arabs?

248 tāji lēh juwwa -ddawawīn
Why do you come inside the diwans?

249 ya -mm u -lḥalag wu -DDALĀYIL
O woman wearing earrings, COQUETTISH,

250 faḍīḥa -w gillit gawanīn
a scandal, a lack of conduct:

251 tibga cār wast ilgabāyil

you are a dishonor among the tribes.

252 yak ijǰalsa bigit li nasawīn
Is this a council for women?

253 u bi -ḥyāt ṭurgit lamāna
I swear by the path of trust,

254 faḍīḥa -w gillit gawanīn
a scandal, a lack of conduct,

255 ya bitt ^I ?ixši malāma
O maiden, be wary of censure!”

[*Drumming begins*]

256 dawāba -tgul-lu ya -bayyi
Dāwaba says to him, “O my father,

257 ?iddīni maḥramt il?amān
yield me the sanctuary of your trust.”

258 dawāba -ygul-li si?ālik
“Dawāba, your words speak to me,

259 wi -tfadḍali wast il^curbān
may you be welcome among the Arabs.”

260 ya -būya lama -l^cabd ^I kida

“O my father, if the slave’s like this,

261 u -syāl I -syādu fi -lmawwāl
then how are his masters in poetry?

262 šhāl I syādu fi -lmawwāl
Then how are his masters in poetry?

263 ya -smar ?inta ma baṭṭil
O dark one, why not be silent,

264 xalli -jjamīl I -yjīb giṣdān
let the handsome one bring forth an ode.”

Audience

kida

really

hiyya cāwza yūnis yitkallam bi ?ayy ṭarīga

she wants to get Yūnis to speak any way she can

[*Drumming ends*]

cAwaḍallah

265 yūnis gāl gāl il?amīr yūnis

Yūnis said, said the Emir Yūnis:

[*Drumming begins*]

266 ʔaʕmil ēh fi jōr liyyām
 “What’s to be done about unjust times?”

267 la šuʕara wala maddaḥīn
 We are neither poets nor praise-singers,

268 wala dōrak juwwa -lmawwāl
 have not even a verse inside a poem,

269 nisidd ^I li -lhamm ^I da ṭāga
 we shut fast a window on those troubles

[Drumming ends]

270 w- abu zēd fattaḥha -drūb wi bibān
 and Abu Zayd flings wide paths and doors.”

271 ʔabu zēd gal-lu ya -bn axti
 Abu Zayd said to him, “O my nephew,”

272 bi -lsān najd ^I ḡarīb ya -lsān
 in the language of Najd, a strange language,

273 ya waladi baṭṭil kalāmak
 “O my son, cease your words,

274 ya yūnis kalāmak kalām jūhhāl
 O Yūnis, your words are childish words.

[Drumming interlude]

- 275 ʔana xālak ilbaṭal abu zēd
I am your uncle the hero Abu Zayd,
- 276 lam yakl- issab^c nāybi
the lion does not eat my portion,
- 277 wala -f waḏīna wala -lbuldān
neither in our wadis nor our homeland.
- 278 ʔana bizāti -lgurm abu zēd
I myself am the warrior Abu Zayd,
- 279 ḥālif ma -nfūt ilgalbān
I have sworn not to pass by the wretched.
- 280 ya walad baṭṭil gōlak
O son, cease your speaking,
- 281 mita -ḥtār^I -f radd^I -sʔāl
when am I ever confused how to reject a request?”
- 282 ʔabu zēd gal-lu ya cāmīr
Abu Zayd said to him, “O cĀmir,
- 283 ʔisma^c gōli aya sulṭān
hear my words, O Sultan:
- 284 yōm ṭili^{cna} -mn^I -blādna
the day we set forth from our country

- 285 šilna fawātiḥ li -ssukkān
we spread forth our hands praying for the inhabitants,
- 286 kull ^I wāḥid yušʿur talatīn
each made poetry for thirty,
- 287 kull ^I -wḥayyid talatīn ^I -nhār
every last one, thirty days.

[*Drumming begins*]

- 288 humma wagfit ^I -šfūf
They were standing in rows,
- 289 walla -llēl ʿindak ya sultān
by God, this night we spend with you, O Sultan,
- 290 ʿin gult ^I lli baṭṭil ʿabaṭṭil
if you bid me to stop I shall stop,
- 291 fi ʿaṭāya [*drumming ends*] m- afūtlak nawāl
as my gift [*drumming ends*], I refuse no fee.
- 292 gal-lu ya šāʿir salli
He said to him, “O poet, divert us,
- 293 lēltak ʿabyaḍ ilʿayyām
your night will be the happiest of times.”

- 294 gāl ya lēl fi zikr izzēn
He said, “O night,” to invoke the Beautiful One,
- 295 zikr innabi -mḏallal bi ḡamām
an invocation to the Prophet, sheltered by clouds.
- 296 saḥab issabīb wi gāl fi -lḥabīb
He drew on the bowstring, sang of the Beloved
- 297 lama ^camūd ilfajr it^cadal ^I -w bān
until dawn’s rays widened into light.

[*Drumming begins*]

- 298 a ... ay abu zēd yigīm bi -l^cēn
Abu Zayd stared with his eyes,
- 299 lākin gaḏḏa farḏ irraḥmān
yet performed the obligatory prayer to the Merciful One.
- 300 bayunḏur li -l^cabd ^I biyāti
He observes the slave coming forward,

[*Drumming ends*]

- 301 wi -f rāsu nākit faramān
with a firman stuck in his head,

[*Drumming begins*]

- 302 fi rāsu nākit maktūb

with a letter stuck in his head

- 303 šūf il^cabd^I -šrāyit ilmāl
see the slave, purchased with money!

[*Drumming ends*]

- 304 ʔabu zēd ^calēh itgaddam
Abu Zayd went towards him,

- 305 gal-lu -šbāḥ ilxēr ya -wlēd mirgān
he said to him, “Good morning, O lad of Mirgān,

- 306 -šbāḥ ilxēr ya -bn^I xalti
good morning, O my cousin.

Audience

kida
really

^cAwaḍallah

- 307 ʔummi w- ummak kānu -xwān
My mother and your mother were sisters,

- 308 ʔinta ʔummak mas^cūda

as for you, your mother is Masūda

309 w- ana ?ummi simyit zēd ilmāl

and I, my mother was named Zayd al-Māl,

310 lākin rāyih fēn u jāy min fēn

but where are you going and from where do you come?

311 ʿala -xbārak addīni dallāl

The news of yourself, give me a sign.”

312 gal-lu ?ana jāy min ʿind ilxarasāni

The slave said to him, “I come from al-Khorasani,

313 min ʿind ilṭāši -lxirasāni

from al-Tash al-Khorasani.”

314 gal-lu ṭayyib warrīni-lmaktūb

Abu Zayd said to him, “Good, show me the letter,

315 ?ana -šūf ḥarf ilʿulwān

I would see the writing of the title.”

316 gal-lu baṭṭil ya zarbūn

He said to Abu Zayd, “Enough, O vile black slave

317 galīl ?adab ma -tʿidd l wagār

ill-mannered, you show no respect

318 kēf¹ -grāyt ilmamalīk
how can Mameluke writing

319 tigrāha ʿabīd sunnār
be read by slaves from Sunnar?”

320 ?abu zēd biḥannis fī
Abu Zayd nagged at him

321 lama daxxalu juwwa -ddiwān
until he caused him to enter the diwan,

[*Drumming begins*]

Audience

bisaysu
he is politicking

ʿAwaḍallah

322 lama daxxalu juwwa -ddawawīn
when he caused him to enter the diwans

323 yilga -lmajāl ʿamrān
he found the assembly abustle.

Audience

waga^cit

he fell into the trap

ʿAwaḍallah

324 il^cabd gal-lu -tfaḍḍal ya -bu dawāba

The slave said to ʿĀmir, “Behold, O father of Dawāba,

325 maktūb ilṭāši -lxirasān

a letter from al-Tash al-Khorasani.”

326 lākin ʿāmīr šāf ilmaktūb

When ʿĀmir saw the letter,

327 dam^cu sabag ball ilguṭṭān

his tears fell first, wetting his caftan

Audience

lōnu -tḡayyar

his color changed

ʿAwaḍallah

328 ʿāmīr baka -b dam^c il^cēn

ʿĀmir wept, tears of his eyes,

- 329 dam^cu ^cala -lxadd ^I nāzil
his tears upon the cheek, descending,
- 330 lawwa^cu -zzaman wi -lbēn
fate and parting tormented him,
- 331 ?ista^cjabit-lu kull ilmanāzil
all present were astonished by him.
- 332 ^cāmir baka bi dam^c il^cēn
^cĀmir wept, tears of his eyes,
- 333 mita ḥadd ^I gāḍi ^cAZĀLA
when no one fulfils ONE's NEEDS
- 334 mita ḥadd ^I gāḍi ^cĀZA LĒ
when no one asks after ONE's SADNESS, WHY?
- 335 dam^cu sabag ball ilxaddēn
His tears fell first, wetting his cheeks,
- 336 baka wi balbal ^cIZĀLA
he wept, drenching HIS CLOTHES.
- 337 salāma -lbaṭal kān GAL-LA
Salāma the hero had said TO HIM:
- 338 lēh iddam^c ^I nāzil jarā-lak

“Why tears descending, what happened to you?”

339 ?aya tilb tuhdur bi GULLA

O stalwart camel, you SPIT IN RAGE,
[Drumming ends]

340 ya cāmīr tibki ēh da -lli jarā-lak

O cĀmir, why weep, what happened to you?

341 tibki ya šēx wi -lcamal KĒF

You weep, O Shaykh, and WHAT TO DO?

342 u bi -ḥyāt ṭurgit lamāna

I swear by the path of trust!”

343 gal-lu ya cabd min kalāmak da бага KIFF

cĀmir said to Abu Zayd, “Then FORBEAR your words,

344 yōm šūm jābak ḥidāna

an evil day brought you among us,

[Drumming begins]

Audience

ya sātīr

O Protector

cAwaḍallah

- 345 tarīk ya -^cbēd fagri
so you O little slave are ill-omened,
- 346 misayyibīnak fi -lwidyān
they turn you loose in the wadis,
- 347 lēlit ma bāyit ^cindiyya
The night you passed in my home
- 348 jibtihā-li бага lazz ^l ḥiṭān
you brought it, like the close walls, down upon me.”
- 349 ʔabu zēd gal-lu -wrī -lmaktūb
Abu Zayd said to him, “Show me the letter,
- 350 ʔana -fassir juwwa -l^culwān
I shall explain what the address contains.”

[*Drumming begins*]

- 351 gal-lu ya^cni -bticrif tigra
^cĀmir said to him, “Then you know how to read?”
- 352 gal-lu middarris fi -lqurʔān
Abu Zayd said to him, “I am schooled in the Koran.

Audience

ya salām [exclamation]

ʿAwaḍallah

- 353 ilʔawwal ʿammak ṭabīb
First, this old man is a healer,
- 354 ʔaṭabbib kull ilʿayyān
I heal all the sick,
- 355 ittāni ʿammak xaṭīb
secondly, this old man is a preacher,
- 356 ʔagra fi -lʔālif wi -ddāl
I read the a's and d's,
- 357 ittalta ʿammak šāʿir
thirdly, this old man is a poet,
- 358 ʔafannin w- ajīb mawwāl
I make art and bring forth poems,
- 359 irrābʿa ʿammak fāris
fourthly, this old man is a horseman,
- 360 nafsi xaḍra fi ṭaʿn izzān
my spirit is young in my spear thrust.”

[Drumming interlude]

- 361 ʿāmīr wi lafāh ilmaktūb

Then ʿĀmir gave him the letter,

362 ʔabu zēd fassar fi -lfaramān

Abu Zayd set forth the firman:

363 ʔawwal maktūbu -lyahūdi -ygūl

“The letter begins, the Jew says:

[*Drumming begins*]

364 ya ʿāmir ana ʿāwz- ijjizya

O ʿĀmir, I want tribute.

365 ʔiwca tiçsa -cšūr ilmāl

Beware refusing the tithe of goods!

366 ʿāwiz tisʿīn nāga

I want ninety she-camels,

367 yikūnu lūggaḥ bu -rgāb^I -ṭwāl

fruitful, long-necked ones,

368 ʔana ʿāwiz tisʿīn jamal

I want ninety he-camels

369 min abu gulla wi dak ilhaddār

of the spitting kind, roaring ones,

370 ʿāwiz tisʿīn^I -kḥēl

I want ninety kohl-black horses,

371 sabību māyil ʿala-rmāl
their tail hairs sweeping the sands,

[*Drumming ends*]

372 ʿāwiz tisʿīn ardabb ʾI gamḥ
I want ninety portions of flour,

373 dakar yūsfi yinām ʿa -lǧurbāl
the choice grains that sleep on the sieve,

Audience

huwwa kida
that's the way it is

ʿAwaḍallah

374 u tisʿīn ardabb ʾI ḥanna
and ninety portions of henna

375 tiḥanna banāt liʿjām
for the hair of the foreigners' daughters.

376 ʿawzīn tisʿīn dabbūs
We want ninety lances,

- 377 rummāntu tiltāy ginṭār
their spearpoints, two thirds of a gintar.
- 378 cāwiz tis^cīn ḥarba
I want ninety spears,
- 379 sanīna tighraḥ il?ⁱnsān
whose teeth wound men,
- 380 wi?ⁱāxir dōla -w dōla
and besides all these,
- 381 w- isma^c gōli aya jīb durḡām
hear my words, O son of Durghām,
- 382 minnīk cāwiz dawāba
from you, I want Dawāba
- 383 fi -lkanīsa -tjīb mawwāl
in the temple, she will bring forth poems.
- 384 ?ana cāwiz, ana cāwiz tis^cīn bēḍa
I want, I want ninety fair maidens,
- 385 nagāwa min banāt lislām
the choicest of the daughters of Islam.
- 386 ?iza jibtⁱ dōla -w dōla
If you bring all these

387 ḥabāyib lāgit ḥibbān
we shall meet as friends meet,

388 w- in majibtiš dōla -w dōla
and if you do not bring all these

389 ?addin bi xarāb lawṭān
I proclaim destruction for your homeland!

<Side one of a sixty minute cassette was completed and at this point I turned over the tape. Both the poet and the audience were aware of the recording equipment. ᶜAwaḍallah stopped reciting but continued to drum until he received my signal to begin.>

[*Drumming*]

ᶜAwaḍallah

kammil tasjīlu da
did this thing complete its recording?

[*Drumming ends*]

390 ?abu zēd gāl walla balāwi
Abu Zayd said, “By God, what folly!

391 w- illi-yᶜīš tuwrīh liyyām
To him who lives long enough, time shows all.”

[*Drumming begins*]

- 392 ?itkallam bi -lsān najdi
He spoke in the Najdi tongue
- 393 li -bn axtu yuns- il^cajbān
to his nephew, Yūnis, the amazing one,
- 394 dilwak jib-li dawāya
“Now bring me the ink pot,
- 395 wi -lwarag hāt-li laglām
some paper, fetch me pens.”
- 396 jabū-lu dōla -w dōla
They brought him all these,
- 397 jab-lu -ttumunni bālu faḍyān
they brought this to the longed-for one, his mind at ease.

[*Drumming ends*]

- 398 ?abu zēd lamma[n] saṭṭar
When Abu Zayd wrote,
- 399 wi -tma^cnan fi haḍa -lkalām
he pondered these words.
- 400 ?awwal maktūbu -lbaṭal abu zēd
The first part of his letter, the hero Abu Zayd,

401 gāl agla^c ḥanna wiyya -ḥnēna
he said, “Get rid of Ḥanna along with Ḥanayna

402 u faltas wi -lmal^cūn magār
and Faltas and cursed Magār.

403 ?iza kān ^cala galam ilbill
As for the subject of camels,
ilbill ijjimāl
“ilbill” are camels

404 ?atāna -jjarab ḡayyar il?aḥwāl
scabies came to us changing conditions,

Audience

biyriidd ^calēh dilwagti biyiktib-lu
he answers him, now he is writing him

^cAwaḍallah

405 ?atāna -jjarab juwwa wadīna
scabies came to us inside our wadis,

406 la xalla ?a^cwar wala jarbān
not sparing the one-eyed and scabrous.

Audience

kamān

also

[*Drumming begins*]

ʿAwaḍallah

407 wi -za kān ʿala -lḥirāb

As for the subject of lances,

[*Drumming ends*]

408 ʾiḥsēn -tkafat badri zamān

Ḥusayn has died a long time,

409 ʾitkafat minnāna -ḥsēn

Husayn has died from among us,

410 wi zakiyya tibki-b ṭūl liyyām

and Zakiyya weeps the day long.

Audience

la ʾiʿwa -tgūl ikkalām da

no, beware of saying such words

[*Laughter. Drumming interlude*]

ʿAwaḍallah

- šarīk inta? zayy ma -gūl ?agūl
are you a partner? I say it as I say it
- 411 ḥaddādna -tkafat
Our blacksmith has died
- 412 līh tālit cām wi -za kān
three years ago, and as for
- 413 cāla -lxēl, di rakāyb- ilfirsān
the horses, they are mounts for horsemen,
- 414 di rakāyb- ilfawāris
these are mounts for horsemen
- 415 lamman yiṭawwiḥu -zzān
when they are hurling their spears,
- 416 lamman ninzil fi -ssūg^I -
when we descend to the fray,
- 417 -njīb ilcāli cāla -lwaṭayān
we bring the highest down low.
- 418 wi -za kān cāla -lḤANNA
And as for the HENNA
- 419 galbi līk lam fi ḤANA

my heart PITIES you not:

420 ʕindīna nišfit ilʔasjār
among us trees have dried up.

[*Drumming begins*]

421 ʔēh wi -1 kār ʕala -lbīḍ
Oh, and as for the fair maidens,

422 ʕindīhum biṇṭawwaḥ zār
on their behalf we hurl spears.

423 wi -1 kār ʕala dawāba
As for Dawāba

424 ʕalēha simm ilʔafāʕin
upon her, cobra venom,

425 la yigbal ḥāwi wala duwyār
that does not accept a snake doctor or cure.

[*Drumming ends*]

426 wi -1 kār ʕa -lʕabīd wiyya -lxadam
As for the slaves with the servants,

427 innihār da saʕd I xadam
today Saʕd is working.

428 ?ajīb zayidkum ʿala nagṣān
I fight the lot of you, and what is left over

429 ?ajīb zayidkum wi -lʿamal kēf
I fight the lot of you—then what to do?

430 mīn yigūl makka KAHĀNA
Who says Mecca is LIKE HERE?

431 ḥālif la wallad issēf
I swear to bring forth the sword,

432 wa -šūf ḥāli maʿ -lKAHĀNA
and see how it is with the JEW.”

[*Drumbeat*]

ya sātir ya sātir
O Protector, O Protector

[*Drumming begins*]

rājil gāwi ya -xi
a powerful man, O my brother

433 ?abu zēd lama ṭabbag ilmaktūb
When Abu Zayd folded the letter,

[*Drumming ends*]

- 434 gal-lu xud ?amđi ya sulṭān
he said to cĀmir, “Take it, sign, O Sultan,
- 435 xud ?amđi ya -bu dawāba
take it and sign, O father of Dawāba,
- 436 u ṣaddig fi ma^cna -lkalām
and affirm the import of my words.”
- 437 cāmīr šāf ilmaktūb
cĀmir looked at the letter,
- 438 cāla rāsu zawwad bi -ttirbān
he cast more dust on his head.
- 439 gal-lu ta^cāla ya šācīr ilgōl
cĀmir said to him, “Come, O poet of speech,
- 440 yak nāwi tixrib iddiwān
do you mean to destroy the diwan?
- 441 yak nāwi tixrib ilmanāzil
Do you mean to destroy dwellings,
- 442 wi -lyahūd ^calēna -ktār
with the Jews numerous upon us?”
- 443 cāmīr iṭṭalla^c fī bi -lcēn
cĀmir stared at him with his eyes,

444 ʔabu zēd iṭṭalla^c fī bi -l^cēn
Abu Zayd stared at him with his eyes,

445 xatam ḡaṣab ^I bala raḍayān
 ^cĀmir sealed it not willing, not consenting.

[*Drumming begins*]

446 ʔabu zēd gal-lu ya -bn ^I baxīta
Abu Zayd said to the slave, “O son of Baxīta,

 kida ya -btā^c ilfann, ya -btā^c ilma^cna
 this way O you who have art, you have meaning,
 kida ya rayyis, ṭayyib
 this way, O chief, excellent!

447 xud ilmaktūb wi sīr giddām
take the letter, journey ahead.”

[*Drumming ends*]

448 gal-lu ḡalaft ^I bi lawi -zzandi
The slave said to him, “Do you swear with raised forearm:

449 ʔadīkum tis^cīn fāris
 ‘here are your ninety horsemen,

450 kull ^I badawi ḡatta -ryāl

for each Bedouin I give as much as a riyal,

451 ?ajīb maṣrūf issikka

I will pay the expense of the road

452 u bīha -nkassi -jjuhhāl

and of clothes for the slave children?’’

453 ?abu zēd gal-lu jurr ^I warayya

Abu Zayd said to him, ‘‘Follow me,

454 ?ana sīdi -m?āminni

my master trusts me,

455 -w middīni mafatūḥ xaznit il?amwāl

he has given me keys to coffers of wealth.’’

[*Drumming interlude*]

456 ṭallaʿu barra -ddawawīn

Abu Zayd threw the slave outside the diwans,

457 ʿagad ilgūra ʿind ilmuxxār

with furrowed brows down to his nose,

458 ?abu zēd ʿagad ilgūra

Abu Zayd with furrowed brows,

459 gal-lu taʿāla ya -wlēd ilxāl

- said to him, “Come, O little cousin,
460 ta^cāla ya -wlēd xalti
come, O my cousin,
461 xud ^I -ḥsābak ^{ca} -ttamām
take your full reckoning.”
462 ?abu zēd ṭalṭal yaddu
Abu Zayd let his hand hang,
463 tiḥlif tigūl faxda -mn ijjān
you would swear saying it’s a demon’s thigh,
464 šalag il^{ca}abd bi -xmāsi
he smashed the slave with his open palm,
465 wi -tgūl mayyit lu talāt tiyyām
dead, you would say, these three days past.

[*Laughter*]

Audience

rayyaḥu
he laid him to rest
lē biyuḍrubu
why did he hit him?

ʿAwaḍallah

- 466 ḍarab ilʿabd bi -xmāsi
He struck the slave with his open palm.
- 467 kē filg^I -w ṣallabu -nnajjār
like a palm trunk a carpenter quarters.

Audience

zayy innaxla
like a palm tree

ʿAwaḍallah

- 468 gal-lu maṭabbigš
The slave said to him, “I would not say anything more,

Audience

kifāya wāḥid
one is enough

ʿAwaḍallah

- 469 šaraṣīri bitigli li -llān

my jaws burn even now,

Audience

walla

by God

ʿAwaḍallah

- 470 ṣaraṣīri bitig̃li li -llān
my jaws burn even now!”
- 471 gal-lu yimkin ʿāwiz tāni
Abu Zayd said to him, “Perhaps you want more?”
- 472 gal-lu ʿāwiz amāra
The slave said to him, “I want a sign,
- 473 bīha -ṣaddig̃ ilxarasān
a sign to convince al-Khorasani.”
- 474 gal-lu ʿalayya
Abu Zayd said to him, “It must be done,
- 475 issahw^I jāyiz ʿa -lʿinsān
a man tends to forget,
- 476 taʿāla ya -bn^I xālti

- come, O my cousin,
- 477 ʿindiyya -lmaxzan malyān
I have coffers plentiful.”
- 478 saḥab-lu kazlak rūmi
He brought forth a Rūmi knife,
- 479 yiğni faġāra fi -ssnīn lamḥāl
riches for the poor in difficult years.
- 480 ilawwal ʔagaṭṭaš manaxīru
“First I cut off his nose tip
- 481 wi -ttanya ḥatta -lʔawdān
and second, also his ears.”
- 482 ʔabu zēd xallāh ʔagram
Abu Zayd mutilated him
- 483 kēh izzīr ilxāli -nnuṭṭāl
like a water jar lacking its scooper.
- 484 gal-lu rawwaḥ ya -bn^l xālti
Abu Zayd said to him, “Return home, O my cousin,
- 485 li -lxarasāni jaddid ʔaxbār
to al-Khorasani bring fresh news.”

486 biyimši wa -ysudd^I warā
The slave walks glancing behind

487 la -ygūl malak ilmōt^calayy nadmān
lest the angel of death regret the slave lives.

[*Drumming begins*]

488 āy, āy ... sār il^cabd izzarbūn
The vile black slave traveled,

489 tiwakkal rāḥ li -lxarasān
journeying, he went to al-Khorasani.

490 ilyahūdi gām bi -l^cēn
The Jew glared at him with his eyes,

491 baṣṣ^I -b^cēnu li -la^cyā
he looked at him with his eyes, at the weary one,

492 gal-lu lēh wala sāyig wala gāyid
he said to him, “Why neither goading nor herding?”

[*Drumming ends*]

493 yak ijjuzya^caddūha ?amwāl
What of the tribute in money—have they paid,

494^cadduhālak^I -flūs
have they paid you the money?”

- 495 gal-lu matbuṣṣ I -f ḥāli
The slave said to him, “Why not look at my state?”
- 496 ?is?alni ʿala -wdāni
Ask me about my ears?
- 497 gul-li rāḥat fēn ilmuxxār
Say to me, where has your nose gone?
- 498 ?ana ʿāmir wala šuftūš
I did not even see ʿĀmir
- 499 wala šuftūš I -b nigl a ʿyān
with a glance of the eye, never saw him.
- 500 ʿindu ʿabd azrag wi ṭawīl
He has a slave, blue-black and tall
- 501 ki -nni ʿōn wa -bū šīṭān
like a “helper,” and his father Satan.

Audience

la ḥawla*

there is no power

ʿAwaḍallah

[Drumming begins]

- 502 malak ilmōt fi -ddawawīn
The angel of death is in the diwans,
- 503 zāhir ma^cāya -^cyān wi bayān
he appeared to my eyes, clearly,
- 504 ya sīdi law rēt ^l -šnābu
O my master, if you beheld his mustache
- 505 bitgūl birriyya sitt ^l -snā[n]
you would say a lance with six teeth!
- 506 ya sīdi law rēt ^cuyūnu
O my master, if you beheld his eyes
- 507 tigaddiḥ kēh baṣṣ ^l sayāl
they pierce like live coals glowing—
- 508 ?amāna -māna law rēt tūlu
Refuge! Sanctuary! If you beheld his stature,
- 509 wi mārid wi -l?abb ^l šitān
a giant, and his father Satan.
- 510 il kutt ^l -mkaddib ya malikna
If you do not believe, O our king,

- 511 rāḥ tidūg issi^cr I -b kām
you will taste the cost of unbelief!”
- 512 ya rētak ma ruḥt I wala jīt
“If only you had not gone nor come,
- 513 ʿabd ijjalab ya galīl ilxāl ... ah, āy
O purchased slave, O you without family.”

[*Drumming ends*]

- 514 ?āh, ilyahūdi sim^c- ilgōl
After the Jew heard his speech,
- 515 bayindah gāl ya sam^cān
he cried out, he said, “O Sam^cān,
- 516 ya wad aḍrub-lī nagūsi
O lad, strike for me my gong,
- 517 xalli tiḥḍar kull ilkuffār
let all the infidels gather.”
- 518 ilyahūdi ḍarab innagūs
The Jew struck the gong,
- 519 gōl ilyahūdi -gdūs I -gdūs
the words of the Jew, “Holy, holy,

- 520 ilmithazzim wi -l^ciryān
both armed and naked,
- 521 ?illi rākib ḥallūf
those riding pigs,
- 522 wi -lmutmaddin rākib xayyāl
and city dwellers riding horses.”
- 523 ḥanna -ynādi ya badīr
Ḥanna is calling, “O Badīr!”
- 524 faltas gāl ya dimyān
Faltas said, “O Dimyān,
- 525 ?ana muhri magadīrš¹ -yṭīr
my steed cannot fly swiftly.”
- 526 gal-lu sību wi -mši -l giddām
He said to him, “Let it be, advance!”
- 527 ?iṣṣanyūra 1- axūha -tgūl
Sanyūra says to her brother,
- 528 u ṣāḥb- irrutab il^caliyya
a man of the highest rank:
- 529 ya tilb tuhdur¹ ilgōl
“O stalwart camel you spit in rage,

- 530 u mālak wi māl ilmaniiyya
why do you seek out death?
- 531 xallīk min iššarr I ganċān
Keep evil far from yourself,
- 532 u bi -ḥyāt I ṭurgit lamāna
I swear by the path of trust,
- 533 dayya ḍēf ismar lilwān
that one is a guest, the dark-colored one,
- 534 u ḍēf ilhilāli salāma
the guest is the Hilali Salama,
- 535 lākin ḍēfu -lʔamīr abu zēd
indeed his guest is the Emir Abu Zayd,
- 536 macāh ʔaḥya -w marċi -w yūnis
with him, Yaḥya, Marċi, and Yūnis,
- 537 naṣr izzuġba maċa -drēd
defender of the Zughba with the Dirēd
- 538 u ruwwād li -lġarb I tūnis
and scouts westward to Tunis.”
- 539 gal līha baṭṭili -lgōl

The Jew said to her, “Cease your speaking,

540 kalāmik wi min jōf cĀMIR
your words come from within you, EXCESSIVELY,

541 bi-ḥyāt ṭurgit lamāna
I swear by the path of trust,

542 kān ēh jābu li bilād cĀMIR
what brings him to the country of cĀMIR?

543 u yāji kama rīḥ DŪR [B]-ĠĀM
He arrives like the wind TURNING IN CLOUDS,

544 ma^cāh aḥya -w mar^ci -w yūnis
with him are Yaḥya, Mar^ci, and Yūnis,

545 u rāyid li -blād kiwān
scouting to the country of Kiwān,

546 u rāyid ?ila -blād tūnis
scouting to the country of Tunis,

547 u rāyid ^cala barr ^I kiwān
scouting upon the shores of Kiwān,

548 u -mgāṣdin ^carab izzanāta
heading for the Zanāta Arabs,

- 549 u kullu ʿalēhum mikawwan
for them, everything is foreordained,
- 550 bi -wlād sirḥān kānu [*drumming begins*] talāta
for the sons of Sirḥān, [*drumming begins*] they were three.”
- 551 falamman šadd ilyahūdi
When the Jew saddled up
- 552 bi -dyūš lam lihāš ʿadadān
with an army that cannot be counted—

[*Food is brought in on a tray*]

ʔallā yinawwar ya -xi ʔistanna ʿala baʿdēn

God grant you light, O my brother, wait until later... .

ya salām ya -xi

[*Drumming ends*]

- 553 muḥammad ṣalli ʿalēh
Muḥammad, praise Him.

Audience

la la

no, no

ʿAwaḍallah

?axallah-lak yurguş

I shall make him dance for you later.

<Pause>

Section III: lines 554-1151

After the meal, ʿAwaḍallah begins at lines 554-68 by recapitulating the previous section, which was interrupted when ʿAbd al-Ghafūr entered with a tray of food.

At line 607, ʿAwaḍallah tests his audience’s memory of an oral-formulaic phrase: *mita -nnisr yišbah ḤADĀNA*, ‘when does the vulture resemble the KITE?’ The word for ‘kite,’ which is *HADĀNA* (see n. 67 of the performance text), puns with the word *ḤADĀNA*, or ‘among us.’ ʿAwaḍallah pauses just before the last word of the last line that completes the punned quatrain, allowing the audience to chorus the correct word, which it does. Then ʿAwaḍallah continues with another quatrain that expresses a variation on the same theme of honor. He seeks approval from a member of the audience, and he inserts a poem praising himself and his poetic artistry (lines 615-20). He follows this with an aside, in which he apostrophizes himself: “ʿAwaḍallah, Shaykh of the Arabs!”

After line 721, ʿAwaḍallah calls out the name of an inattentive listener, “O Abu Zaki” (‘O father of Zaki’). This refers either to ʿAbd aj-Jalīl Zaki, the recipient of an earlier, wounding insult poem, or Jamāl Zaki, the guest of honor. In Upper Egypt, a man may be called “father of so-and-so,” with the second element the name of the man’s eldest son. For example, Jamāl was often addressed as “Abu Yūsif,” ‘father of Joseph,’ after his first son, Joseph. Similarly, in a practice unknown to me in other parts of the Arab world, an Upper Egyptian could be called not only father of his own son, but also father of his own father. Both ʿAbd aj-Jalīl and Jamāl’s father are named Zaki; hence the appearance of Zaki as the second part of their names. Both answer to the name “Abu Zaki” (‘father of Zaki’), and they have both joked about their same second name of the father and their possible shared paternal origin. ʿAwaḍallah castigates an Abu Zaki. He does so by stopping in mid-quatrain in order to interpolate a poem of praise (*madīḥ*) in the midst of the narrative. Here the insertion of a *madīḥ*, a different literary genre customarily reserved for opening performances, is intended more to rebuke an inattentive listener than

to praise God. A member of the audience is heard murmuring that it is ʿAwaḍallah who is warring, perhaps with his audience, rather than Abu Zayd battling his enemy. Since the insult is oblique and mild, the literary equivalent of someone tearing their hair in friendly exasperation and calling upon God’s help, I conjecture that Jamāl, the guest of honor, and not ʿAbd aj-Jalīl, is the reproved “Abu Zaki.”

After line 923, ʿAwaḍallah warns the audience to pay attention to the upcoming intended pun by interrupting his rhymed recitation and saying: *xallīk ʿa -lmaʿna* (‘stay with the meaning’). This pun is embedded in the conversational speech of the king of Iraq, who has just been informed by the hero of the epic that he, the king of Iraq, must relinquish his beloved daughter to the enemy Jew. The king of Iraq addresses the hero and says:

ḥadītak ya šāʿir ʿalēna

Your words, O poet, are our duty

Then ʿAwaḍallah pauses, looks at the audience, and delivers an aside, the word *yiʿalla*. This tells the audience to interpret the last word differently to mean: “Your words, O poet, make us sick.” Opposing meanings are evoked in a motivated way by the poet who plays with the triconsonantal root, pharyngeal-the letter *l*-the letter *w* (ʿ-*l*-*w*). The last letter of the Arabic triconsonantal root, *wāw*, can function in Arabic as a consonant, which gives the surface meaning ‘our duty, our obligation,’ or it can function as a vowel, hence not part of the root system, which then gives the meaning ‘to make sick’ from the different Arabic root, pharyngeal-letter *l*-letter *l*. The punned word, with its two opposing meanings sounds the same so that the poet not only cues the audience by the interjected “stay with the meaning,” but also provides them with an aside, the verb ‘to make sick’ in the disambiguating present tense, as opposed to the ambiguous past tense form of the pun. We first hear and understand the obvious polite meaning, and then the rug, figuratively speaking, is pulled out from under us. Both the audience and the poet explained the opposition to me and agreed upon its interpretation. ʿAwaḍallah claimed he enjoyed using this phrase when speaking to northerners from Cairo. It reinforces northerners’ stereotypes of southern obsequiousness and allows southern Egyptians privately to mock their northern “superiors” from the capital.

ʿAwaḍallah closes this section with a rhymed quatrain consisting of two

interlocking puns, the first based upon the word *ṭār*, which has three possible meanings: ‘perfumed,’ ‘a drum,’ and ‘vengeance’; and, the second pun based upon the the word for ‘cigarette.’ The following double meanings of each line were explained by ^cAwaḍallah:

1148 Much of art is perfumed
 Much of art is on vengeance

1149 and bring me cigarettes
 and the burden upon me, a sinful outrage

1150 allow me to stop the drum,
 allow me to stop vengeance

1151 let me smoke and see to my cigarette.
 let me smoke and see to sinful outrage.

^cAwaḍallah

554 bahdīk u rabbi yihdīk
 “I guide you and my Lord guides you,”

555 gālt- iṣṣanyūra la -xūha
 Sanyūra said to her brother,

556 bahdīk u rabbi yihdīk
 “I guide you and my Lord guides you.”

[*Drumming begins*]

557 xudit min finūni ḤAZĀNA

You took from my arts, SADNESS,

ṭayyib ya rayyis

excellent, O captain

558 ḥadīt min funūni ḤŌZI ?ANA

a story from my arts, MY POSSESSION,

559 la tinfa^cak dikka wala dīk

it does you no good, neither this nor that,

560 la ba^cdīk nibgu ḤAZĀNA

lest after you die we become SAD.

561 ah ... ḥadītik ya bitti ^I wala -y^cūd

“Ah, your story, O girl, do not repeat,

562 kalāmik min jōf ^cAMRĀN [*aside*] ^cĀMIR

your words come from within EXCESSIVELY [*aside*] PLENTIFUL,

563 ?abu zēd bilādu -njūd

Abu Zayd, his lands are the Najd,

564 kān ēh jābu fi -blād ^cĀMIR

what brings him to the land of ^cĀMIR?”

565 gālit-lu ^calēk ^I -mkawwan

She said to him, “For you it is foreordained,

566 ʿala -lkitf^I [*drumming ends*] nāgil zanāta
on shoulders [*drumming ends*] bearing spears,

567 rāyid ?ila -blād kiwān
scouting to the land of Kiwan,

568 bi -wlād sirḥān humma -ttalāta
the sons of Sirḥān, the three of them.”

[*Drumming begins*]

569 lamman šadd ilyahūd^I milku -lbalad
When the Jews saddled up, they seized the land

570 hāwid lēl wi -nnās^I -nyām
in the still night while people slept,

571 ḥadīt ilʿarab BAYLĀL [*aside*] BI -LLĒL
the story of the Arabs ECHOES [*aside*] IN THE NIGHT—

572 kalām jadd^I xattu MADĪNA [*aside*] MUDDA ?ANA
earnest words, they took THE CITY [*aside*] I took it FOR A SHORT TIME,

573 u milkūha -f hāwid illēl
they seized it in the still night,

[*Drumming begins*]

574 milku li sūr ilMADĪNA

they seized to the wall of the CITY.

[*Drumming ends*]

575 cāmir ṭil^c- I -yṣalli

cĀmir went out to pray,

576 lākin yigaḍḍi farāyḍ- irraḥmān

to perform the obligatory prayer to the Merciful One.

577 cāmir baygīm bi -l^cēn

cĀmir stared with his eyes,

578 w- ^calēha baranīt sōda

upon the walls, black hats

579 kēf -gnaḥāt ilḡirbān

like the wings of crows.

580 w- cāmir wi ṭala^c yijri

Then cĀmir came out running,

581 yijri bi ḥadd ilmišwār

running to bring a message.

582 rawwaḥ 1- abu rayya

He returned to the father of Rayya,

583 -lgāh -mlaflaf juwwa ḥrām

he found him swathed in a cloak.

584 gal-lu gūm aya zarbūn
cĀmir said to him, “Arise, O vile black slave,

585 ya -zrag wišš ilgirbān
O black crow-face,

586 jībtīha wi -ssidd^I fīha
you caused this—you solve it!

587 šāyif dōrak miš xalšān
I see your role never ends,

588 jībtīha wi -ssidd^I fīha
you caused this—you solve it!

589 u jāni -lṭaši -lxirasāni
al-Tash al-Khorasani has come to me.”

590 salāma -lhilāli -ygul-lih
Salama the Hilali said to him,

591 fi -lgōl ti^crif xalāṣak
“Through speech you find the solution,

592 ?irsi li ḥamlak wi gilla
lay down your burden and lighten it

- 593 la yāji ʿuḡbiha fōg rāsak
lest the outcome be on your head.
- 594 ya ʿāmir jaḥrid ʿa -lḥarb
O ʿĀmir, make ready for war,
- 595 mīn yigūl makka KA HAYNA
who says Mecca is LIKE HERE?
- 596 lama tibga fi ḥāl ilkarb
If Mecca falls into a pitiful plight
- 597 wala sībha li -lKAHĀYNA
never abandon it to the JEWS.”
- 598 gal-lu sībha bass ^I baladak
Abu Zayd said to him, “It is only your land you abandon—
- 599 kalām jadd ^I xattu DAWĀBA [*aside*] DA WABA
earnest words—they take DAWĀBA [*aside*] you take THIS PLAGUE,
- 600 kalām jadd xattu DA WABA
earnest words—they take THIS PLAGUE.

[*Drumming interlude*]

- 601 il kān ṣaʿbāna ʿalēk baladak
If you feel any pity for your land

- 602 tismaḥ tiddīhum DAWĀBA
please give them DAWĀBA,
- 603 ʔaddīhum dawāba -bnētak
give them Dawāba, your beloved daughter,
- 604 u bi -ḥyāt ʔurgit lamāna
I swear by the path of trust,
- 605 ʔaddīhum sitt innasawīn
give them the mistress of the ladies
- 606 la ma^cāk tibga nadāma
lest you be forever regretful.”
- 607 gal-lu ʔajaḥrid jawādi ^cala -nnār [*aside*] ^cala -nnār
^cĀmir said to him, “I shall make my steed descend into the fire [*aside*]
into the fire,
- 608 mita -nnisr yišbah ḤADĀNA
when does the vulture resemble the KITE?
- 609 lama ʔafūt il^cār
Whenever I ignore dishonor
- 610 tibga faḍāyiḥ [*pause*]—
it will be a scandal [*pause*]—

Audience

ḤADĀNA

AMONG US

ʿAwaḍallah

—ḤADĀNA

—AMONG US

[laughter]

611 ?ajaḥrid jawādi ʿala -nnār

I shall make my steed descend into the fire,

Audience

da šaraf ṭabʿān

this is honor of course

waḥḥidū

profess the unity of God

ʿAwaḍallah

612 wi jōr illayāli ḥayāta

his life, a tyranny of darkness,

613 rājil yifūt il^cār
when a man ignores dishonor

614 mōtu ?axēr min ḥayātu
his death is preferable to life.

Audience

kida ṭab^cān
of course this is so

^cAwaḍallah

kida ya jamāl
right Jamāl?

[*Drumming begins*]

615 ?ah ... ya layāli
O dark nights

616 ilfann u bāli faḍyān
with art, my mind is at ease,

617 ?ana -dandan w- agūl ^cala ḥāli
I sing, I tell of myself,

618 ^cala fawāris ?ahl ^I zamān

about the horsemen, the people of times past,

619 law kān itkālak ^{ca} -ššā^cir

were you to trust a poet

620 ?ifriṭ ḥimlak wi –gbal il^cazayān

then you'd cast off your load, you'd welcome solace.

?ah axi, ^cawaḍallah šēx il^curbān

Oh my brother, ^cAwaḍallah, Shaykh of the Arabs!

[*Drumming ends. ^cAwaḍallah claps*]

621 ^cāmir nabbah ṭablu

^cĀmir alerted his drums,

622 ḥiḍrit kull issij^cān

all the brave ones gathered,

623 ḥiḍrit jamī^c ilfawāris

all of the horsemen gathered,

624 magādim zayy innuwwār

valiant ones like flowers.

625 lākin nabbah iṭṭabl ^I ḥarbi

Then he alerted the war drums,

626 u -ssulṭān juwwa majālu

the sultan within his domains,

627 laman jū-lu бага рāyih ġarbi
when they arrived, going westward,

628 ḥiḍrit wi ʿazwit rijālu
the clans of his men gathered,

629 ḥawlu -lʿarāyib tilammu
around him the Arabs assembled

630 wi fann ilmagādim ḥadāna
the feats of valiant ones are among us,

631 lākin ḥiḍru wild I ʿammu
also his kinsmen gathered,

632 ?ēh illi jara kān ḥadāna
what happened to those once among us?

Audience

?ah ?ēh illi ḥaṣal
ah, what happened?

ʿAwaḍallah

633 gal-lhum ʿala -lḥarb giddām

ʿĀmir told them of war ahead,

634 ʿala -lxiṣm I gāsi BALADNA [*aside*] BALA ʔĪDNA

of the adversary, cruel to OUR COUNTRY [*aside*] CALAMITY BROUGHT
BYOUR HANDS,

635 ilyahūdi lama -tgaddam

whenever the Jew advances,

636 u milk I kull I BALADNA

he seizes all of OUR LAND,

637 milikha li rēd li rēd

he seizes it bank by bank,

638 u jōr illayāli ḥayāta

his life a tyranny of darkness,

639 faḍīḥa -w gillit gawanīn

a scandal, a lack of conduct,

640 ilwāḥid yimūt ʔaxēr min ḥayāta

one's death is better than life.

[*Drumming begins*]

641 šadd ilyahūdi lama sār ʿāmir

The Jew saddled up, when ʿĀmir marched,

642 u šaddu lama sār

they saddled up, when he marched—

643 ṣāḥib raʔy^I wiyya ṣawābi
a man of reason and warcraft,

[*Drumming ends*]

644 yirja^c gōli ʔila -bu zēd ʔasmar ilʔalwān
my words return to Abu Zayd, the dark-colored one,

645 cīdu wi -mnuāh sūg iṣṣawābi
his feast day, his passion, the battlefield,

646 ligī-lu cagab^I -kḥel
he found himself a worn-out nag

647 sāyib ka dīb sāyib^ca -lkimān
slinking away like a jackal, slinking off to a dung heap.

Audience

kida miš kamān muhr^I -kwayyis

that is not a very good colt

ta^cbān

tired out

cAwaḍallah

- 648 ccallag rabābu wi -jrābu
He slung on his *rabāba* and case,
- 649 rabābu wi -jrābu -btā^c -lʔaḥyāl
his *rabāba* and case of tricks.
- 650 ʔabu zēd ^{ca} -lmuhr ^I -tgaddam
Abu Zayd advanced upon the steed,
- 651 u rikib ^cāmal xayyāl
he mounted, pretends he’s a soldier.
- 652 cāmīr gal-lu rāyih fēn
cĀmir said to him, “Where are you going?”
- 653 gal-lu rāyih aš^cur li -lxarasāni
Abu Zayd said to him, “I go to sing for al-Khorasani,
- 654 yimkin yiddīna ḥagg idduxxān
perhaps he will tip us in cigarettes,
- 655 ʔinta ṭam^cān ya malik
you are greedy, O king,
- 656 ṭam^cal-lak juwwa ʔamwāl
too greedy about your possessions.”
- 657 gal-lu ya šā^cir xallīk fi -ddawawīn
cĀmir said to him, “O poet, stay in the diwans

658 fi hamm irradiyya KA -SĀWI
I am in sorrow at ruin, WHAT WILL I DO?

659 min ba^cd I m- āji -mn iddašamīn
After I come from the war,

660 ḥālif la ^caṭīlak KASĀWI
truly I promise you CLOTHING.”

[*Drumming begins*]

661 ilyahūdi lama-twakkal
When the Jew went forth

662 u gābal ^cāmir issultān
he met with ^cĀmir the Sultan,

663 gal-lu ta^cala ya -bu dawāba ?ēh jābak
the Jew said to him, “Come, O father of Dawāba, what brings you?

664 lēh I -^cṣīt I -^cšūr ilmāl
Why do you refuse me a tithe of your wealth?”

665 ^cāmir abda -w gal-lu
^cĀmir began, he said to him,

666 kull I sana ya yahūdi
“Each year, O Jew,

- 667 ijizya taxudha ?amwāl
the tribute—you take my wealth—
- 668 lākin jīt fi -ssana diyya
instead, this year I come
- 669 min ʿindi ʿāwiz-lak niswān
and of mine, you want for yourself women,
- 670 min ʿindi ʿāwiz-lak nasawān
of mine, you want for yourself many women,
- 671 ?ana -mūt wala -fūt ilʿār
I will die rather than ignore dishonor,
- 672 ?adi -lḥarb l w- adi -lwaḡa
here is war, here is tumult,
- 673 -yxāf min ilbard illa -lʿaryān
who fears the cold but the naked.”
- 674 galūha u nizlu litnēn
They said this and the two set on each other,
- 675 bān ijjayyid wi -lḡammāl
the best and the worst appeared,
- 676 taḥlif wi -tgūl sabʿēn
you would swear, saying two lions,

- 677 magādim zayy innuwwār
valiant ones like flowers,
- 678 wala dayya -mta^cta^c dayya
neither one moving the other,
- 679 wala wāḥid middi -ttāni layyān
neither granting respite to the other, weakening,
- 680 līhum rōḥa -w jayya
there is coming and going
- 681 tišayyib iṭṭafl ijahlān
to whiten the hair of ignorant children.
- 682 ilyahūdi baḥr ^I māliḥ
The Jew is the salt sea,
- 683 la cāmu gāriḥ wala cawwām
not even a gifted swimmer could float.
- 684 saṭṭ ^I cāmir bi ḥarūba
The Jew struck down ^cĀmir with a spear,
- 685 u jāt ^I -f wirku lʔaysar
it went into his left thigh,
- 686 minnīh kisbu dawāba

from cĀmir they won Dawāba.

[*Drumming ends*]

Audience

xadūha

they took her

cAwaḍallah

kisbūha kē -lcamal

they won her, what can be done?

687 ʔaxadu sitt inniswān
They took the mistress of women.

688 dawāba -tgul-lu ya sultān
Dawāba says to cĀmir, “O Sultan,

689 ṣaḥīb ya -frāg ilḥabāyib
difficult, O loved ones’ parting,

690 irrājil lama -yfūt ilcār
when a man ignores dishonor

691 ʔaḥsan yiskin liḥūd ittarāyib
better he dwell among dusty tombs,

- 692 ya -būya jaḥrid ʿala sēf
O my father, unsheathe your sword,
- 693 u mīn yigūl makka KAHĀNA
who dare say Mecca is JEWISH?
- 694 u mīn yigūl makka KĒ HINĀ?
Who dare say Mecca is LIKE HERE?
- 695 u bi -jrūḥ ma tigbal^I -lṣūg
With wounds that do not take bandages,
- 696 ʿēb inn -tfūtni li -lKAHĀNA
a disgrace to leave me to the JEWS.”
- 697 ʿāmir gāl ilʿamal kēf
ʿĀmir said, “What can be done?”
- 698 ʿabu sēf wiyya matāna
A swordsman with strength of will,
- 699 garaṭ jirūḥu ma bi -ššāš
he bound his wounds with turban cloth
- 700 wi ʿāwid ʿala -lḥarb^I tāni
and he returned again to the battle.

Audience

raja^c

he went back

ʿAwaḍallah

- 701 ʿāmīr bigi -f ḥāla karb
 ʿĀmir was in a state of torment,
- 702 ḥadīt min funūni KĒ ?ANA
 a story from my arts, LIKE HERE,
- 703 lamman jaḥrad ʿa -lḥarb
 when ʿĀmir descended to war,
- 704 bigi garīḍit KAHĀNA
 he set to slicing up JEWS,
- 705 bigi garīḍit MALA^cĪN
 he set to slicing up the CURSED ONES,
- 706 u jōr illayāli DA WABA
 and THAT PLAGUE, a tyranny of darkness,
- 707 wala wāḥid fīhum MALA -L^cĒN
 not one of the Jews FILLED HIS EYE

708 fi -lhāl rajja^c DAWĀBA
right away ^cĀmir recaptured DAWĀBA,

[*Drumming begins*]

709 rajja^cha min fōg lijmāl
he recaptured her, Dawāba on the camel,

710 u liha dam^c I ^ca -lxadd I sāyil
she had tears upon her cheeks, flowing,

711 dawāba -mm I ḥalag wi dalāl
Dawāba wearing earrings, coquettish,

712 tigul-lu -xsāra raʔis ilgabāyil
she says to him, “Pity for the chief of the tribes.”

713 wi ^cāmir rawwaḥ ^cA -LBATT [*aside*] ^cAL- BĒT

Then ^cĀmir RETURNED TO SEE ABOUT THE MATTER [*aside*] RETURNED
HOME,

[*Drumming ends*]

714 nizil dam^c I ^cēnu ṬABĀBA [*aside*] YIṬUBB
tears of his eyes fell, DROPLETS [*aside*] IT DROPS,

715 bigi ^ca -lfarša ^cALĪL BĒT [*aside*] ^cALĪL BAYYAT
he remained upon his bed, A PLEASANT HOME [*aside*] AILING, PASSING
THE NIGHT.

Audience

rāyih xalāṣ

he's going, finished

ʿAwaḍallah

716 jātu-rbiʿīn min IṬṬABĀBA

They came to him, forty HEALERS,

717 jātu -rbiʿīn ṭabīb

they came to him, forty doctors

718 tiṭabbib ʿāmir issulṭān

to heal ʿĀmir the Sultan.

719 yirjaʿ kalāmi li -lbaṭal abu zēd

My words return to the hero Abu Zayd,

Audience

lissa madaxalš

he still hasn't come upon the scene

ʿAwaḍallah

720 salāma tubbaʿ ilmuḥṣār

Salama, partisan of the beleaguered,

721 nāṣir izzaġāba ma^ca drēd

defender of the Zughba with the Dirēd.

[*ʿAwaḍallah calls the name of an inattentive listener*]

ya -bu zaki

O Abu Zaki

Audience

ma^cāk ma^cāk

he is with you, he is listening

kān huwwa -lli biyḥārib

he is the one fighting

[*Drumming begins*]

ʿAwaḍallah

722 ṭabīb li -jrāḥ

Healer of wounds,

723 rišš ittībb^l -f baladna

sprinkle healing upon our village,

724 ʿala nās zēnīn

upon beautiful people

- 725 tidrak ilfann ^I ma^cnitna
aware of art and our meaning.
- 726 rabbi mawjūd rabbi mawjūd
My Lord is present, my Lord is present,
- 727 ṣaḥb- ilkaram wi -jjūd
the munificent generous One,
- 728 wi -ḥyāt irrabb ^I mawjūd
I swear by the Lord Who is present,
- 729 ġērkum mīn yifham bass ^I ma^cnitna
none but You then understands our meaning.
- 730 ?abu zēd nadam ya yūnis
Abu Zayd cried out, “O Yūnis,
- 731 ?ismi^cna -mn ilkabīr yigūl
we heard from an elder, saying:

[*Drumming ends*]

- 732 ṭallak ^{ca} -lmarīḍ ḥalāl
‘It is enjoined to look in on the ill!’”
- 733 yūnis gal-lu ya xāli
Yūnis said to him, “O my uncle,

- 734 yibga ?aḥna nās ġarāba
but are we not foreign people?
- 735 kēf nirišš iṭṭibb wi dduwyān
How can we sprinkle cures and medicines?
- 736 raydīn ?ila barr ^I tūnis
We are scouting towards the Tunis coast,
- 737 kēf ni^cmil ṭabāba fi kull ^I bakān
how pretend to be healers every place?”
- 738 ?abu zēd gal-lu ya -bn axti
Abu Zayd said to him, “O my nephew,
- 739 lōla fummak ^I -tgūl ya xāli
were it not for your mouth saying, ‘O my uncle,’
- 740 ?ašrab min dimāk finjān
I would drink of your blood, a cupful.
- 741 ?ana xālak ilbaṭal ?abu zēd
I am your uncle, the hero Abu Zayd,
- 742 lam yakl- issab^c ^I nāybi
the lion does not eat my portion,
- 743 wala fi waḍīna wala -lbuldān
neither in our wadis nor lands,

- 744 ʔana min ʕahdi rabbi našāni
 from my earliest time, my Lord so made me
- 745 ʕindīna fōt innazāla ʕār
 that for us to cast off the wretched is dishonor.
- 746 ʔana -bzāti -lʔamīr ʔabu zēd
 I myself am the Emir Abu Zayd—
- 747 kām ʕa -rrās ḍaggit tīrān
 upon how many heads have the war drums sounded?”

[Drumming interlude]

- 748 ʔabū zēd mallas
 Abu Zayd ran his hand down,
- 749 ʔabū zēd mallas ʕala wajhu
 Abu Zayd ran his hand down his face,

Audience

ʕala wajhu, huwwa, āh, hayḡayyar iṣṣūra dilwagti
down his own face, ah, he is going to change the picture now

ʕAwaḍallah

750 bigi ʿajūz kallaḥ innībān
he became old, side teeth sticking out.

751 salāma mallas ʿala dignu
Salāma ran his hand down his beard,

Audience

ḡayyar fi -ṣṣūra
he changed the picture

ʿAwaḍallah

752 bigit kēf dign I ʿAwaḍallah
it became like Awaḍallah’s beard,

753 šābit min kull I bakān
white-haired every place,

[Laughter. Drumbeat]

754 mallas ʿala ḍahru
he ran his hand down his back,

755 ḥanā -lgōs fāḍi -lbāl
he bent like a bow, his mind at ease.

Audience

xalāṣ, bigi ʕajūz dilwagti
that's it, he became an old man now

ʕAwaḍallah

- 756 ʕallig rabābu wi -jrābu
He fastened his rababa and its case
- 757 wi -ktābu -btāʕ lʔaḥyāl
and his book of tricks.
- 758 sār ilbaṭal ʔabu zēd
The hero Abu Zayd journeyed
- 759 wi -ssibḥa -ṭṭagtig fi kull l bakān
with his prayer beads rattling everywhere.

[*Drumbeat*]

Audience

šēx
an old man

ʕAwaḍallah

- 760 ilbawwāb gal-lu rāyih fēn

The gatekeeper said to him, “Where are you going?

761 rāyih fēn bawwāb ilgaṣr

Where are you going?” The gatekeeper of the castle.

762 gal-lu rāyih ʔašūf cāmīr

He said to him, “I go to see cĀmir,

763 ʔajīb ilcaṭa w- amši la giddām

to receive my gift and fare forward,

764 ʔiyyām ṭālit calēna

for days are lengthy upon us

765 wala ḥadd sāʔil calēna

and no one asks after us

766 min ġēr gahwa wala duxxān

with no coffee or tobacco.”

767 gal-lu cāmīr biyjuḍḍ I wi -ynīn

The gatekeeper said to him, “cĀmir bellows and moans,

768 biyjuḍḍ I wi -ynīn biyjuḍḍ I wi -ynīn

bellows and moans, bellows and moans,

769 fi hamm irradiyya KĒH ANA

in sorrow at evil, LIKE ME

770 fīh^I -jrūḥ fi jjōf baynān
he has wounds in the belly, appearing,

771 fi lḥarb^I jaraḥūh ilKAHĀNA
in war wounded by the JEW,

[*Drum interlude*]

772 fīh^I -jrūḥ fi jjōf baynān
he has wounds in the belly, appearing.”

773 gal-lu ?aftaḥ-li bawawīb
Abu Zayd said to him, “Open the great doors to me,

774 ?ana^{ca} -lmalik ?aridd^I salām
I wish to return greetings to the king.”

775 gal-lu wala-m?amir ilmalik
The gatekeeper said to him, “Not even by order of the king,

776 maḥaddiš yiṭla^c fōg abu^cumdān
no one ascends the many-pillared castle.”

[*Drum interlude*]

777 gal-lu xud ballag-li salāmi
Abu Zayd said to him, “Take my message for me, my greetings,

778 ?ana -w huwwa ?illuga giddām
he and I will meet sometime ahead.”

- 779 ilbawwāb madd I yamīnu
The gatekeeper stretched out his right hand,
- 780 ṭabag fī ṭabgit cawwāl
he grasped him in a violent grip,
- 781 ṭabag fīh ilʔamīr abu zēd
the Emir Abu Zayd grasped him,
- 782 tigūl biss cakaš-lu fār
you would say, a cat pounced on a mouse.

Audience

kida
really

cAwaḍallah

- 783 gal-lu -jjīra ya malak ilmōt
The gatekeeper said to him, “Sanctuary, O angel of death,
- 784 ʔana -cyāli lissāc I -zgār
my own children are still young.”
- 785 gal-lu -jjīra ya malak ilmōt
He said to him, “Sanctuary, O angel of death,

- 786 sāyig ʿalēk innabi -lʿadnān
for the sake of the Prophet, the ʿAdnān!”
- 787 fataḥ-lu -lbawawīb
He ordered the great gates open to him.
- 788 wi ṭiliʿ itkammaš fōg abu ʿumdān
He climbed, crawling to the top of the many-pillared castle,
- 789 ?abu zēd ṭiliʿ itkammaš
Abu Zayd climbed crawling,
- 790 huwwa wa ṭāliʿ jabad rabāba
while climbing he played the rababa,
- 791 waṣṭ issalalīm jāb giṣṭāl
midway up the stairs he composed a poem.
- 792 ʿāmir gāl ya dawāba
ʿĀmir said, “O Dawāba,
- 793 ?ana sāmiʿ ḥiss iššāʿir
I now hear the sounds of a poet,
- 794 dilwak jībī bi lagrab ḥāl
now bring him as quickly as possible.”
- 795 ?abu zēd wiʿi -1 dawāba
Abu Zayd laid eyes on Dawāba,

796 ʕa -ssillim kawwaʕ nām
 he reclined on his elbow, asleep on the steps.

[*Drum interlude*]

797 ʔabu zēd wiʕi -1 dawāba
 Abu Zayd laid eyes on Dawāba,

798 ʕa -ssillim kawwaʕ nām
 he reclined on his elbow, asleep on the steps.

799 galit-lu ya šāʕir himm I -šwayya
 She said to him, “O poet, hurry a little,

800 ʕāwzak abūy fōg abu ʕumdān
 my father wants you at the top of the many-pillared castle.”

801 nadah gāl ya dawāba
 He cried out, he said, “O Dawāba,

802 ʔana ʕammak rājil kubra
 I am your ‘uncle,’ an older man,

803 [ma]gadirš aṭlaʕ ilbinyān
 I cannot climb up the building,

804 law kān abūki ʕawizni
 if your father wants me

805 xallīh yijīni hina -1 ḥadd ilbakān
let him come to me here, to this place.

Audience

šūf da baṭal gawi
look, that's some hero

ʿAwaḍallah

806 ʾismaʿī ya dawāba
Listen, O Dawāba,

807 yitnigil izzibūn walla -ddukkān
do the customers move or the store?"

[Laughter. Drumming begins]

808 ah, baʿat-lu marasīl
ʿĀmir sent him emissaries,

809 sannadū¹ -šmāl wi yamīn
they supported him, left and right,

810 waddūh ʿand issultān
they accompanied him to the sultan.

kē ʿājiz

like an old man

[*Drumming ends*]

- 811 ?abu zēd hatt^I fi cāmīr hatt^I fi cāmīr
Abu Zayd yelled at cĀmir, yelled at cĀmir,
- 812 gal-lu gūm matitbahtāš
he said to him, “Arise, stop whining
- 813 wala tiḥāyal ti^cmil cāyyān
or deceiving—feigning illness,
- 814 sāyib-lak ?arba^c šu^cara
you abandon four poets
- 815 min ġēr gahwa wala duxxān
with no coffee or tobacco
- 816 wala ḥadd sā?il calēna
and no one asks after us
- 817 u ṭawwalit ma^cāy liyyām
and the days are long upon me.”
- 818 gal-lu ya šā^cir ta^c šūf ḥāli
cĀmir said to him, “O poet, come see my condition,
- 819 ?ana min jarḥi ?abayyit ma ?anām

from my wounds I pass the night, not sleeping,

- 820 ʔahīni bajudḍ I -w ʔanīn
 here I lie bellowing and moaning
- 821 wa dunya radiyya talāhi
 and the world is evil, capricious,
- 822 fiyya -jrūḥ fi jjōf baynīn
 within me belly wounds appearing,
- 823 bizālik yirīd ilʔilāhi
 thus the Divine One desires it.”

[*Drumming begins*]

āh, āh, āy

[*Drumming ends*]

- 824 ʔabu zēd gāl ya dawāba
 Abu Zayd said, “O Dawāba,
- 825 ʔiʕmilī-li -šwayyit gahwa
 prepare me some coffee,
- 826 min issafar ʕammak xarmān
 ‘your uncle’ is needful from the journey.”
- 827 sawwit gahāwi 1- abu muxx I rāwi

She made coffee for the crafty one,

828 širib rāyg- ilfinjān

he drank the clear froth from the cup,

829 širib finjān m- adri -tnēn

he drank one cup—I don't know, two,

830 ḥaṭṭ ilbinj^I -f tālit finjān

he put the narcotic in the third cup.

831 gal-lu -tfaḍḍal ya sulṭān

Abu Zayd said to ^cĀmir, “If you please, O Sultan,

832 -tfaḍḍal ya -bu dawāba

if you please, O father of Dawāba,

833 gahwit iššifa ya -bu ḍurġām

a medicinal coffee, O son of Durghām.”

834 ^cāmir širb- ilgahwa

^cĀmir drank the coffee,

835 ma^crifš nafsu -f ?anhi bakān

he did not know where he was.

836 ?abu zēd gāl ya dawāba

Abu Zayd said, “O Dawāba,

837 šūfi -ddunya -lkaddāba
look at the world of deceit,

838 mīn iṭhazzim bīha ʿaryān
whoever clothes himself with it, is naked.

839 gāl ya ʿibād
He said, “O God’s worshippers

[Drumming continues to the end of tape 1, side 2]

840 wu ya -lli -llyāli nabūki
and you whose lot is darkness,

841 šūfi-ddunya-lkaddāba
look at the world of deceit,

842 -w бага ḥāl iddunya f- abūki
this is how the world became for your father,

843 iddunya madamitš
the world does not last

844 [ʿala mīn
[for any one,

845 madaymāš li zuwwāl wāhid
it does not endure for a single man,

- 846 ʔazkur rabbi wāhid
 I invoke my Lord, Who is One,
- 847 rabbi bi -lhāl ʕalamīn
 my Lord all-knowing
- 848 ma daymāš li zōl wāhid]
 it does not endure for a single man.]

<Tape 2>

Audience

baʕd ilfinjān ʕala ʔul gāl liha ʔabūha māt
right after the cup of coffee he told her her father died

[*Drumming begins*]

ʕAwaḍallah

- 849 ʔabu zēd gāl ya dawāba
 Abu Zayd said, “O Dawāba,
- 850 ya ma ṣaʕīb furg ilḥabāyib
 O how difficult is loved ones’ parting!
- 851 šūfi -ddunya -lkaddāba
 See the world of deceit,

852 ʔabūki sākin fi laḥd ittarāyib
your father dwells in a dusty tomb.”

853 jītni -mnēn
“From where do you come to me?

854 ya -ḡrab ilbēn
O raven of discord,

855 āy azrag wišš ilḡirbān
O black crow-face,

856 ʔabūya dilwak biykallimni
just now my father was speaking to me.

[*Drumming ends*]

857 gal-laha ḥatta ʔana kallimni
Abu Zayd said to Dawāba, “Just now he spoke to me as well—

858 malak ilmōt ḡarafū gawām
the angel of death snatched him quickly.”

[*laughter*]

859 bakit bi madma^c il^cēn
She wept tears from her eyes,

860 wala ḥadd^I ḡāḍi ^cAZALHA
no on asked after HER NEEDS,

- 861 šaggit ilgamīš nuṣṣēn
she rent her shirt in two,
- 862 min ilġulb ^I šarakit ^cAZĀLHA
in torment she tore off HER CLOTHES.

Audience

^cAZĀLHA

HER CLOTHES

^cAwaḍallah

- 863 bakit bi madma^c il^cēn
She wept tears from her eyes,
- 864 jismiha ma gābil xalāyig
her body would not bear rags,
- 865 šaggit ilgamīš nuṣṣēn
she rent her shirt in two,
- 866 ṣa^cib ya -frāg ilḥabāyib
difficult O loved ones' parting,
- 867 bakit līha dami^c biysīl
she wept, her tears flowing,

- 868 ʕumriha wala ʔathānit
never before so shamed,
- 869 ʔarēt šaggit ilgamaṣīn
I beheld her rending her shifts
- 870 ḥatta ṭabāyig ilbaṭn^I bānit
even her belly folds were revealed.
- 871 ʔabu zēd kān tilb^I falfūs
Abu Zayd was a wise, stalwart man

Audience

kida
really

ʕAwaḍallah

- 872 u migdim raʔīs izzaḡāba
in the vanguard of the Zughba chiefs,
- 873 galaʕ inhilāli -lbarnūs
the Hilali took off his burnous,
- 874 satar ijjamīla dawāba
he covered the beautiful Dawāba.

- 875 gaṣdu -yjīb il^cilba
He intended to bring the box
- 876 bita^ct- iṭṭibb
of medicines,
- 877 nisīha fi -njūd^l -hlāl
he forgot them in Najd Hilal.
- 878 salāma ḥarrak iṭṭalsamiyya
Salama set in motion the talisman
- 879 wa -tḡayyarit ma^cāh laḥwāl
and conditions changed for him,
min il—[^cAwaḍallah interrupts himself to ask]
šarīt diyya yikfa -lḥāl
will this tape be enough?

Audience

māši māši
it's okay, it's okay

[*Drum interlude*]

^c*Awaḍallah*

- 880 ḥarrak iṭṭalsamiyya
he set in motion the talisman,
- 881 min ilʔa^cwān jātu miyya
of the “helpers” came to him a hundred,
- 882 wi -lmiṭḥazzim wi il^caryān
both girded and naked:
- 883 gul-li mālak ya -hlāli
“Tell me what is wrong, O Hilali?”
- 884 ʕala -nhī garm I ʕalēk ʕaṣyān
Which warrior do you oppose?”
- 885 ʔabu zēd gāl ʕāwz- il^cilba
Abu Zayd said, “I want the box
- 886 tajīni fi ʔagrab ḥāl
brought to me in the shortest time.
- 887 il^cōn zahrān lamma -tnafaḍ
The “helper,” Zahrān, when he shook himself
- 888 bigi ṭūlu talāt tišbār
his height became three arms’ span,
- 889 fariš widn -u mitgatti -b widn
he slept on one ear, the other ear for his blanket—

890 ya sīdi -w fiʿl ilʔaʿwān
O my master, these the deeds of the “helpers.”

891 šūf ilʿōn xaṭṭa -b jambu
See the “helper” striding to his side,

892 jāb ilʿilba min nijūd^I -hlāl
he brought the box from Najd Hilal.

893 gal-lu -tfaḍḍal ya -hlāli
The “helper” said to Abu Zayd, “If you please, O Hilali,

894 ēh ma tuṭlubu
whatever you request,

895 yajīlak fi ʔagrab ḥāl
it shall come to you in the shortest time.”

[*Drumming begins*]

896 ʔabu zēd ġasai jarḥ ilmalik
Abu Zayd washed the king’s wound,

897 ʔitmaʿnan wi rišš idduwyān
he examined, he sprinkled medicine,

898 rišš^I -llu ʔawwal lišga
he sprinkled the first bandage,

- 899 jarḥ ilmalik balac idduwyān
the king's wound swallowed up the medicine.
- 900 ?abu zēd yindah cammu -lxiḍr I
Abu Zayd called on his "uncle" al-Khiḍr:
- 901 ya guṭḅ ilc amāyim hill I -w bān
"O pillar of turbaned ones, appear, be manifest!"
- 902 ?adi -lcōn lamma ?atā-lu
Here is the "helper," when he came to him
- 903 tafal fi jarḥ issultān
he spat upon the sultan's wound.
- 904 gal-lu dāwi ya -hlāli
al-Khiḍr said to him, "Cure him, O Hilali,
- 905 rišš iṭṭibb I ya fāḍi -lbāl
sprinkle medicine, O you with mind at ease."
- 906 rašš I ?awwal liṣga
He sprinkled the first bandage,
- 907 tāni liṣga
the second bandage
- 908 u gašgaš jarḥ issultān
and the sultan's wound shrank

- 909 innuṣṣ I -f tālit liṣga
in half at the third bandage,
910 gaṭab ijjarḥ I zayy I ma kān
he sewed the wound, the flesh was as it had been.

[Drumming ends]

- 911 ?abu zēd minnu jaḥrad ilbinj
Abu Zayd took the narcotic from him,
912 cāmīr siḥi wi naffaḍ xalagātu -w gām
cĀmir awoke, shook his clothes and arose
913 gal-lu ta^cāla ya ^cammi ya šā^cir
and said to Abu Zayd, “Come here, O uncle, O poet,
914 yak inta ^cōn min il?^acwān
can it be, you are one of the ‘helpers’”?
915 gal-lu ta^cāla ya ^camm I ya šā^cir
He said to him, “Come here, O uncle, O poet,
916 lāzim ^cōn w- il?^ab šēṭān
you must be a ‘helper’—your father, Satan.”
917 gal-lu ya ^cāmīr xallīha ^cal alla
He said to him, “O cĀmir, leave it to God,

918 u min gaṣad ilkarīm la yiḏām
he who turns to the Benefactor shall not be harmed.”

919 šā^cir ^calayya -tmanna
“Poet, make a wish, I will do it,

920 u ṣaḥḥēt jarḥi DA WABA
you healed THIS PLAGUE-RIDDEN wound of mine.”

921 ?abu zēd gal-lu law kān taminna
Abu Zayd said to him, “If I make my wish,

922 bass ^I minnīk ?āxud DAWĀBA
of yours I would take only DAWĀBA,

923 jamīla wiyya -ḏwiyya xiddha
beautiful, with sweetly glowing cheeks.”
ah xallīk ^{ca} -lma^cna ya -xi
ah, stay with the meaning

[*Drumming begins*]

924 hadītak ya šā^cir ^cALĒNA [*aside*] YI^cALLA
Your words, O poet, are OUR DUTY [*aside*] ARE SICKENING,

925 xayfīn il-yahūdi yaxidha
we fear the Jew will marry her,

926 u tibga faḍīḥa ʿALĒNA
this would be a scandal UPON US.

927 dawāba tigul-lu ya bayyi
Dawāba says to him, “O my father,

928 u xuṭṭār-kum rakkibūha
have your visitors mounted,

[*Drumming ends*]

929 lākin dōla ʿarab zēnīn
for these are trustworthy Arabs,

930 ʿumr ilʿayba lam yajūha
never will they commit a disgrace,

931 yak I -tgūl da ʿabd I majhūl
how can you say he’s an ignorant slave?

932 wala yiṭri-1 kalāmu malāma
No meanness clings to his words,

933 yitkallam kalām bi ganūn
he speaks words of measure,

934 ?ana -nxāf ḡanni salāma
I fear, I believe he is Salāma,

935 ?ana -nxāf ḡanni abu zēd
I fear, I believe he is Abu Zayd.

Audience

ʿiriftu hiyya
she recognizes him

ʿAwaḡdallah

936 min iḡḡēf mru MA KĪNA
Towards guests he is never MISERLY,

937 šabīh baḡr misra lama -yzīd
he resembles the river in Misra, when it swells,

938 yihidd ijirūf ilMAKĪNA
undermining STRONG river bluffs,

939 yihidd ijirūf ilʿaliyya
undermining high river bluffs,

940 min iṣṣuḡr ^I ṡāyil BA^cĪDA [*aside*] BA^c ĪDA
from his youth he reaches FAR [*aside*] FOREARM.”

941 -yḡūl jību -ttagīla ʿalayya
Abu Zayd says, “Bring the heavy burdens upon me,

- 942 ma law k̄an balādha BI^cĪDA
even if her country be DISTANT.”
- 943 ^cāmīr gāl ya sāys- ilxēl
^cĀmir said, “O groom of horses,
- 944 u xallīk šadīd il^cazāyim
be firmly resolute,
- 945 xud iššā^cir fi -sṭabl ilxēl
take the poet to the horses’ stable,
- 946 xallī -ynaggī juwwa -lbahāyim
let him select from the beasts within.”
- 947 ʔabu zēd baram ilgils ^I nubtēn
Abu Zayd twisted the rope twice round
- 948 wi yalla -l^cawāgib SALĀMA
and let the outcome be SURE,
- 949 migdim ʔasmar ilʔalwān
he in the vanguard, the dark-colored one,
- 950 wala wāḥid biyi^cjib SALĀMA
not a single horse pleased SALĀMA.
- 951 gāl abu zēd il^camal kēf

Abu Zayd said, “What to do?”

ah ṭayyib ṭayyib ya sīdi ḥāḍir

ah good, sir, okay

[*Drumming begins*]

952 ?abu zēd gāl di balāwi

Abu Zayd said, “What folly!

953 wi -bgēna maḍḥakit firsān

we become the laughingstock among horsemen.”

[*Drumming ends*]

954 ti^cakkar salāma -lḡūl

Salāma, the ogre, was enraged,

955 u fi -ssūg yigrac^c nadīdu

in the fray he thrashes his rivals,

956 ?abu zēd itgarrab ^cala -ssūg

Abu Zayd advanced to the fray,

957 gāl wa^cd illayāli makīdu

he said, “A gloomy fate is plotted,

958 ?isma^c ṣahīl ilḡūl

hear the whinny of a beast,

959 ʔarēt zalzal ilbinyān
I beheld buildings quaking.”

960 gal-lu ya ġūl fēn ʔARĀḌĪK
Abu Zayd said to it, “O beast, What is YOUR LAND?”

Audience

ya salām [interjection]

ʕAwaḍallah

961 fēn ʔaraḍīk inta -lli btushul hina
where are you hiding, you the one whinnying here?

962 fēn ʔaraḍīk
Where are you hiding?

Audience

mistaxabbi fēn
where is he concealed?

[*Drumming begins*]

ʕAwaḍallah

963 yak rakūbit abu dawāba

Can it be, the mount of Dawāba's father?

[*Drumming ends*]

964 wallāhi fi -lḥarb ʔARĀḌĪK
By God, in war I SHALL NEED YOU,

965 w- afattiḥ bīk ilḥirāba
with you I shall conquer in battle.”

Audience

Kida
really

[*Drumming begins*]

ʿAwaḍallah

966 tigarrab ilbaṭal ʿa -ssūr
The hero drew near to the wall,

967 mīn fi -lḫalīga KALĀMU [*aside*] KĀN YILIMMU
who among men is SO WELL-KNOWN [*aside*] CAN CAPTURE IT?

968 u jālu bawwāb ʿa -ssūr
The gatekeeper at the wall came to him,

969 l- abu zēd wajjah KALĀMU

to Abu Zayd he addressed HIS WORDS,

- 970 gal-lu ya ʿabd -u rāyih fēn
he said to him, “O slave, and where are you going?”
- 971 la tiskin wi juwwa -lʔarāḍi
Lest I make you dwell within the earth,
- 972 la taḥt itturāb tidfin
lest you be buried beneath the dust,
- 973 mālak wi mal mālak wi māl
what have you to do with,
- 974 mālak wi māl libs ijjarādi
what have you to do with wearing chain mail?”
- 975 gal-lu sibni sāys -lxēl
Abu Zayd said, “Leave me, O groom of the horses,
- 976 ʔana -šūf haza -ššaḥtan
I would see this stallion.”
- 977 gal-lu -lgūl yiftaḥ maxālbū
The groom said, “The beast will open his claws,
- 978 sabaʿ sinīn ma rikbu xayyāl
seven years no rider has mounted him,

- 979 lākin isma^c ya šā^cr- ilgōl
so hear me, O poet of words,
- 980 mayya tinzil bi -ḥbāl kittān
water goes down to the beast by a linen rope.”
- 981 salāma jaddad ilḥīla
Salāma renews his trickery,
- [*Drumming ends*]
- 982 gal-lu rūḥ ilxabar li -ssultān
he said to him, “Go, take the news to the sultan,
- 983 waddī-lu -lxabar 1- abu dawāba
bring the news to him, to Dawāba’s father,
- 984 xallī yāji -yšidd^I -lli -ššaḥtān
let him come saddle me the stallion.”
- 985 issāyis tili^c yijri
The groom came out running,
- 986 wi huwwa saṭṭ ilbāb^I -b lukāmi
when Abu Zayd struck down the door with his fist,
- 987 cazal illōḥa -mn ilmusmār
he tore loose a plank from its nail.

Audience

kida

really

ʿAwaḍallah

?ēh maʿāh tāni huwwa

what else did he have with him?

Audience

wala ḥadd muftāḥu maʿā

no one, he has his own key

ʿAwaḍallah

muftāḥu jāhiḥ zayy muftāḥ ilḡūl

a ready-made key, like the key of an ogre

[*Drumming begins*]

988 gōm ilḡūl ʿalēh KAŠŠAR [*aside*] KAŠŠAR

The beast bore down on him BARING HIS TEETH,

989 wi yalla -lʿawāgib SALĀMA

and may the outcome be SURE,

- 990 jālu -ilhilāli KAMA -SSĀR [*aside*] KAŠŠAR KĒ -ŠŠARR
the Hilali came to him LIKE EVIL [*aside*] BARING HIS TEETH, EVIL
SEEMING,
- 991 ḍarabu bi lukāmi SALĀMA
SALĀMA struck it with his fist,
- 992 ḍarab ilmuh^r I -b lukāmi
he struck the steed with his fist,
- 993 xašmu saff ilʔarmāl
its mouth snuffled the sands,
- 994 ilmuh^r ga^cad yitnafaḍ
the steed began to tremble,
- 995 yitnafaḍ kē -lbardān
trembling as if cold.
- 996 ʔabu zēd sāg ilḥīla
Abu Zayd worked his trick,
- 997 -w xalaṭ izzōr jāb ilbuhtān
he mixed lies, he brought falsity,
- 998 jāb ilkarbūs wa min warā
he put the saddle horn behind
- 999 wi ḥaṭṭ ilgaṣ^ca min giddām

and placed the seat in front.

1000 ʔabu zēd lajjamu min dēlu

Abu Zayd reined the horse in by its tail,

1001 tigūl ^canz ^l gayyidha-jjazzār

you would say, sheep the butcher shackled.

1002 gādu -lbaṭal abu zēd

The hero Abu Zayd led it out

1003 min widnu fāḍi -lbāl

by its ears, he was at ease.

1004 kull il^carab gālu milḥit ya ^cāmir

All the Arabs said, “Distasteful, O ^cĀmir,

1005 yak ^l -^cgēlak minnīk zalgān

can it be, your reason has fallen from you?

[*Drumming begins*]

1006 ṭam^cān irrājil iššā^cir

Ambitious, the poet man,

[*Drumming ends*]

1007 ya^cni -yḥārib-lak il?^acjām

you mean, he will battle foreigners for you?

- 1008 yiḥārib-lak бага -lyahūd
He will battle Jews for you,
- 1009 wala ʿārif yirkab xayyāl
not knowing how to ride a horse,
- 1010 wala ʿārif yisidd ilgūl
not knowing how to saddle the beast—
- 1011 w- inta rāyih fi ?anhi bakān
and where do you mean to go?”
- 1012 gāl sidd^I -llu ya sāys- ilxēl
ʿĀmir said, “Saddle him up, O groom of the horses,
- 1013 yimkin badri zamān
perhaps it has been a long time
- 1014 tarak ma -rkibš^I xayyāl
since he gave up riding horses.”

Audience

ya salām [interjection]

ʿAwaḍallah

- 1015 šaddu 1-ilbaṭal fāḍi-lbāl

They saddled up the hero, his mind at ease,

ya cēni ya cēni

1016 yidūs ilʔarāḍi -lmuxīfa

he tramples through fearsome lands,

1017 yifattiḥ li-ššarr ṭīgān

he flings wide the windows to evil,

1018 tiʕakkar jēb xaḍra šarīfa

the son of Khaḍra Sharīfa was angered,

1019 tiʕakkar wi-lʕamal kēf

angered—what to do?

1020 ʕalēk fī -ḥmūli talāta

“Upon you there are three of my burdens,”

1021 nadam wi gal-lu ya sulṭān

he called out, he said out to him, “O Sultan,

1022 cāwiz rakāyib talāta

I need three mounts.”

Audience

li -wlād uxtu

for his nephews

ʿAwaḍallah

- 1023 jābu talāta li -wlād sirḥān
He brought him three, for the sons of Sirḥān,
- 1024 ʿarab bayyaḍ alla tanāhum
Arabs, may God make pure their honor,
- 1025 kull wāḥid ʿili fōg šaḥtān
each one towered on top of a steed,
- 1026 yistaʿjab illi ʿarāhum
all who beheld them were amazed.

Audience

kida
really

ʿAwaḍallah

- 1027 rikbu fawāris min ilcāl
The finest horsemen mounted,
- 1028 kalām jadd, xattu dawāba

earnest speech—they took Dawāba.

1029 gal-lu ʔisma^c ya jēb durgām

Abu Zayd said to ^cĀmir, “Listen, O son of Durghām,

1030 ^cāwiz b- il^cajal ijjamīla dawāba

I must have at once the beautiful Dawāba.”

Audience

kida

really

^cawzīn tiruḥ ma^cāhum

they want her to go with them

[*Drumming begins*]

^cAwaḍallah

1031 ḥadīt illēl ah ... ah ...

A nighttime story, ah ...,

1032 ḥadīt illēl madhūn bi zibda

a nighttime story, coated with butter,

1033 lākin in ṭala^c ^calēh innihār yisāl

but when daylight falls upon it, it melts away.

1034 ʔana ^cāwiz dawāba bi JAMALHA

“I want Dawāba upon HER CAMEL,

1035 bih- afattiḥ bibān iddahāyil

with her, I open the gates to misfortune.”

1036 jamīla -w xāyil JAMĪLHA [*aside*] JAMMĀLHA

Beautiful, and imagine HER BEAUTIFUL [*aside*] CAMEL-DRIVERS
BEFITTING HER,

1037 ?anwār ma ^cā -lxadd ^l sāyil

lights of her cheeks, glowing.

1038 ba^catu-lha -rba^c marasīl

They sent her four emissaries,

[*Drumming ends*]

1039 galīl waṣfha fi -ṣṣabāya

few of her description among the maidens,

1040 nizlit min fōg abu ^cumdān

she descended from the top of the many-pillared castle,

1041 min fōg ^cali -ssarāya

from the top of the high palace,

1042 nizlit sitt-innasawīn

the mistress of ladies descended,

1043 u-tunḥur b- ^cēnak tarāha

and you gaze with your eyes to see her,

1044 dawāba sitt ilxalaxīl

Dawāba, mistress of ankle-bracelets

1045 bi tis^cīn bēḍa warāha

with ninety fair maidens behind her,

1046 šūf iššard^I nassam ^cadalha

see the breeze fragrant from her figure,

1047 ^calīl fī -ḥmūli talatā

wearisome, there are three of my burden,

1048 ya ^cēn xāyil ^cadalha

O imagine her figure,

1049 šafit^I -wlād sirḥān ittalāta

she saw the three sons of Sirḥān.

[*Drumming begins*]

^cAbd aj-Jalīl

bagūl yūnis gāyid ijjamāl

I tell you Yūnis is leading the camel

^cAwaḍallah

kifāya ya ʿabd ijjalīl xallīni ʾagūl
enough, ʿAbd aj-Jalīl let me tell it
jamāl rājil saḥbi
Jamāl is my friend

1050 ah ... ah gālu-lha -ṣṣabāya rāḥḥa fēn
Ah, the young virgins said to her, “Where are you going?”

1051 iṣṣabāya banāt ilʿarab
The young virgins, the daughters of the Arabs,

1052 gālu-lha rāḥḥa fēn
they said to her, “Where are you going?”

1053 ya bitt I ya sitt ilʿaṣāyib
O daughter, O woman wearing headscarves

1054 faḍāyiḥ gillit gawanīn
scandalous, a lack of conduct,

1055 laḥsan tirūḥi ṣatātīt
lest you end up being taken away,

1056 laḥsan tirūḥi ṣatātīt nihāyib
lest you end up being taken away, plundered.”

1057 gālit ana ṣadda warā nās firsān
Dawāba said, “I am saddled behind men who are horsemen,

1058 ʿarab bayyaḍ alla tanāhum
Arabs, may God make pure their honor,

1059 lama yulṭum izzān ʿa-zzān
when spear clashes upon spear,

1060 ?ana -lli ?asōmir warāhum
it is I who chant behind them.

Audience

kida
really

ʿAwaḍallah

1061 ?ana šadda warā nās firsān
I am saddled behind men who are horsemen,

1062 ʿarab bayyaḍ alla tanāhum
Arabs, may God make pure their honor,

1063 lama yulṭum izzān ʿa-zzān
when spear clashes upon spear,

1064 ?ana -lli ?asōmir warāhum
it is I who chant behind them.”

Audience

ta^callag

she hangs behind

^cAwaḍallah

tḡanni ya^cni

it means, she sings**

Audience

tḡanni ya^cni tsōmir

“tsōmir” means she sings

[*Drumming begins*]

1065 ʔabu zēd baṭal ṣaybu -lgahr

Abu Zayd is a hero, fury comes over him

1066 u rikb-ilmuḥajjal ^carāyib

and he rode the white-footed Arab horse,

1067 lama ^cili fōg ilmuhr

when he mounted upon the steed,

1068 u fāris yikīd il^carāyib

a horseman vexing the Arabs,

- 1069 u fāris yikīd ʕuzzāl
a horseman vexing the enemy,
- 1070 ʔabu farš I ġāli KALĀMU
his cushions well-appointed, HIS CARPETS precious.
- 1071 sāl yulḍum maʕā-ššaḥtān
He began conversing with his stallion,
- 1072 lākin li -lmuhr wajjah KALĀMU
to his steed, he addressed HIS WORDS,
- 1073 gal-lu ʔinta ʔiswad w- ana ʔiswad
Abu Zayd said to it, “You are black and I am black,
- 1074 tanāna ʔabyaḍ min iššišān
our honor is whiter than a turban.
- 1075 ʔinta ʕalēk ramḥ iṣṣawābi
It is your duty to gallop vast deserts,
- 1076 w- ana ʕalayy giriḍ ilʔaʕjām
it is mine to slice up foreigners.
- 1077 ʔana -nzil ʕala -lḥarb I w- anīn
I descend to war aroused,
- 1078 ʔana -nzil ʕala -lḥarb I w- anīn

I descend to war aroused,

1079 ʔāh ma^{ca} -lyahūdi ʔanzur ḥalaytak
ah, I shall see how you act with the Jew,

1080 yajīni raʔīs ilmala^{cīn}
let him come to me, the chief of the cursed ones

1081 ṣagr ilxwiyya bizāti
I myself am the falcon of the wastes.”

[*Drumming ends*]

1082 ʔabu zēd gāl šiddi JAMĀLKI
Abu Zayd said, “Strengthen YOUR BEAUTY.”

Audience

ḥilwa ya jamīl
pretty, O beautiful

ʿAwaḍallah

ʔāy wallāh ya -xi
yes, by God, O my brother

Audience

?ēh illi gāl dawāba fī
what did he tell Dawāba?

ʿAwaḍallah

1083 gāl ya dawāba šiddi JAMĀLKI
He said, “O Dawāba, saddle YOUR CAMEL,

1084 ?ayyām ṣulb^I kullu kazālik
hard days are all like this,

1085 бага -ḍḍammanak fāḍi -lbāl
your safety pledged, my mind at ease,

[*Drumbeats*]

1086 ḥāmi -jju^{caf} gabl^I zālik
I shielded the caravan before this.”

1087 gāl dawāba šiddi JAMĀLKI
He said, “Dawāba, saddle YOUR CAMEL,

1088 ya -mm ilḥalag wi -ddalāyil
O woman wearing earrings, coquettish,

1089 kama -lbarg zāhi JAMĀLKI
like lightning YOUR BEAUTY glitters,

1090 ya -mm ward ^I ca -lxadd ^I sāyil
O woman with roses upon your cheeks, glowing.”

[*Drumbeats*]

1091 šadd ^I sitt inniswān
He saddled up the mistress of women,

1092 u tunzur bi ^cēnak tarāha
and you gaze with your eyes to see her,

1093 dawāba -mm ^I xadd ^I na ^csān
Dawāba, woman of the cheeks, languorous,

1094 bi tis^cīn bēḍa warāha
with ninety fair maidens behind her,

1095 bi tis^cīn min innasawīn
with ninety of the women,

1096 wi ʔamm ilḥalag wi -ddalāyil
O woman wearing earrings, coquettish,

1097 wi sārīt sitt innasawīn
the mistress of the ladies journeyed,

1098 līha ward ^ca -lxadd ^I sāyil
she has roses upon her cheeks, glowing.

- 1099 u rikb- ilhilāli ʿala -lxēl
The Hilali mounted his horse,
- 1100 ʔana -lli -ḥmūli talāta
I whose burden is three,
- 1101 ḥadīthum jadd ^I biyxīl
their words appear serious,
- 1102 kallam wild ^I ʔaxtu -ttalāta
he spoke to his nephews, the three of them,
- 1103 nadah gāl ya -ʿyāl sirḥān
he called, he said, “O children of Sirḥān,
- 1104 ya -lli mirbākum
those who were raised in,
- 1105 ya -lli mirbākum ʔarḍ izzaḡāba
those who were raised in the land of Zughba,
- 1106 lama yulṭum izzān ʿa -zzān
when spear clashes upon spear,
- 1107 gulū-li mīn yiḥmi-l dawāba
tell me who will fend for Dawāba?”
- 1108 yūnis yigul-lu aya xāl
Yūnis said to him, “O uncle,

1109 u xāyla -ssawāyir FI -DĀHA
bracelets beautify HER HAND

Audience

fidāha fi ?idēha
fidāha means “in her hands”

ʿAwaḍallah

1110 lama tuṭṭum ilxēl ʿala -lxāl
when horse clashes upon horse,

1111 ?ana -lli rōḥi FADĀHA
it is I who goes to DEFEND HER.”

Audience

mīn illi gāl kida? yūnis
who said this? Yūnis

ʿAwaḍallah

?aḥya ?aḥya ya wad yūnis naʿnāʿ

Yaḥya, Yaḥya, lad, Yūnis is a sprig of mint
ʔafham ilmaʕna ya wad
understand the meaning, lad

[*Drum interlude. Laughter*]

1112 marʕi gāl ʔaḥya gāl marʕi gāl
Marʕi said, Yaḥya said, Marʕi said:

1113 garīda lam ḥadd yiḥya
“Sliced up, not a one shall live.

1114 ya mutna fi ḥubb ^I dawāba ḥalāl
O to die for the love of Dawāba is sacred.”

Audience

ya salām [interjection]

ʕAwaḍallah

haymūt muslim
he will die Muslim

Audience

[*laughter*]

mīn

who?

ʿAwaḍallah

Marʿi

1115 yūnis zōgu jamīl

Yūnis chooses well,

1116 gāl ana -lli ʔagūd ilhaddār

he said, “I am the one to lead the camel.”

1117 ʔabu zēd gāl ya dawāba

Abu Zayd said, “O Dawāba,

1118 ʃīḥi-w ḡanni

shout and sing,

1119 ʔaya -mm ilḥalag wi -ddalāyil

O woman wearing earrings, coquettish,

1120 bizāti salāma -timunni

I myself am Salama, the longed-for one,

1121 ʔabūy rizg wi -jjidd ^I nāyil

my father Rizg and my grandfather Nāyil.”

[*Drumming begins*]

- 1122 ġannit līha bāl faḍyān
She sang, her mind at ease,
- 1123 yalla -l^cawāgib SALĀMA
onward, may the outcome be SURE,
- 1124 lama sārīt ?umm l dalāl
when the coquettish woman journeyed,
- 1125 fi -nhār yalla -SSALĀMA
during the day, onward SALĀMA.
- 1126 lākin ġannit ḥilwit ittūl
When she sang, handsome of stature,
- 1127 wara sij^cān gaṣḍīn tūnis
behind the courageous ones heading for Tunis,
- 1128 tiġanni wi -lbāl masrūr
she sang, her thoughts joyous
- 1129 wi rāḥ bālha ^cind l yūnis
and her thoughts went out to Yūnis.

[Drumming ends]

- 1130 wi^cī-lu -lyahūdi madad ^cēn
The Jew laid eyes on him at a distance,

- 1131 wi -ḥyāt ṭurgit -lamāna
I swear by the path of trust,
- 1132 kēf baḥr ^I yuxbuṭ bi gil^cēn
like the river making boat sails clash,
- 1133 ?āta li -lhilāli salāma
he came towards the Hilali Salāma.

Audience

baṭal ^cazīz
a mighty hero

^cAwaḍallah

- 1134 gal-lu ta^cāla ?aya ^cabd
The Jew said to him, “Come here, O slave,
- 1135 yak sīdak ^cāmir itwaffa
can it be, your master ^cĀmir died?
- 1136 jābik fi -jjuzya ^cuṣr ilmāl
He sent you with the tribute, the tithe of wealth,
- 1137 lama jaraḥtu ?ana ya^cni māt
when I wounded him, did he die?”

1138 gal-lu baṭṭil ḥadītak BALA LĪK
Abu Zayd said to him, “Cease your words, A SCOURGE UPON YOU!

1139 fi -lgōl ti^crif xalāṣak [*aside*] BALĀ LAKK
In speaking, you know what’s good for you [*aside*] ENDLESS TALK.

Audience

?aywa

yes

ʿAwaḍallah

1140 baṭṭil ḥadītak BALA LĪK
Cease your words, A SCOURGE UPON YOU!

1141 fi -lgōl ti^crif xalāṣak
In speaking, you know what’s good for you,

1142 malak ilmōt jīt BALA LĪK
the angel of death came, A SCOURGE UPON YOU,

1143 tikašših yāji fōg rāsak
you throw dust, it comes down on your head.

Audience

fōg rāsak kida ʔummāl
on your head then
kalām zāyid
too many words

ʕAwaḍallah

- 1144 baṭṭil ḥadītak BALA LĪK
Cease your words, A SCOURGE UPON YOU!
- 1145 matijrīš lēlak nihārak
Don't run on night and day,
- 1146 malak ilmōt jīt BALA LĪK
the angel of death came, A SCOURGE UPON YOU,
- 1147 u-mʕāy gaṣṣar nihārak
and through me, shorten your days.”
- 1148 katīr min ilfann ʕAṬṬĀR
Much of art is PERFUMED
- 1149 u ḥimli ʕalayya -SJĀRA [*aside*] ʕAṢA JĀR
and bring me CIGARETTES [*aside*] and the burden upon me, A SINFUL
OUTRAGE,
- 1150 tismaḥu ʔabaṭṭil IṬṬĀR

allow me to stop the DRUM,

1151 xall- atkayyif w- ašūf ma^cna -SSIJĀRA

let me smoke and see to my CIGARETTE.

<Pause>

Section IV: lines 1152-1347

In the break between the third and last section of the recitation, ʿAwaḍallah and the listeners enjoyed cigarettes and tea. The hour was late. I had been seated, drinking tea, most of the day, and I badly needed to urinate. With rare exceptions, ethnographers do not discuss their toilet arrangements.¹ The subject preoccupied me inasmuch as there was little privacy (usually, watched by the extended family’s children, I would elbow aside a huge water buffalo in its straw stall) and no nearby hotels. I whispered my problem to Jamāl, employing an euphemistic phrase heard from ʿAwaḍallah’s lips. What I thought I heard was *lāzim aḥāsib ilmalik*, ‘I must pay my accounts to the king.’ I said this to Jamāl, who stared at me partly horrified and partly concerned. He whispered to ʿAbd al-Ghafūr, a marked silence descended upon my companions, and ʿAbd al-Ghafūr and I walked down the street to an adjacent house. He knocked on the door, I entered, and came upon a room full of older women (were they listening to the performance or was I disrupting their day?). They gave me a can filled with water and directed me to a luxurious toilet, a small cabin with two raised platforms for my feet, on either side of which a deep hole had been dug. After I emerged, they washed my hands, kissed me, and told me to stay with them, that women had better, different stories to tell. I promised to return.

After the performance was over, ʿAbd al-Ghafūr invited only me through the wooden doorway that bars the diwan, or reception area, from the kitchen. We crossed over the threshold, the door was closed behind me, and I was introduced to his mother, sister, and younger female relatives, though not his wife. I thanked them for their delicious cooking. I was asked to photograph them, but forbidden to show their pictures to anyone else. Several months later I was able partially to repay his family’s hospitality and give them copies of their pictures.

I usually paid ʿAwaḍallah twenty Egyptian pounds per day when we worked together. I also provided gifts, such as material to make robes for

himself and his family, a water faucet, clothing, towels, framed photographs of his family, etc. In Cairo and Luxor, I was responsible for his food, board, transportation, and entertainment costs. I always gave ʿAwaḍallah cassette copies of all his performances, which he then passed out to friends and colleagues to repay favors. From listening to village gossip, it seemed that ʿAwaḍallah sang for his dinner at ʿAbd al-Ghafūr’s, who wished to honor Jamāl and myself with a feast and recitation, in order to repay ʿAbd al-Ghafūr for installing, without any fee, the water faucet that I had given ʿAwaḍallah.

ʿAwaḍallah

[Drumming begins]

- 1152 ʔāh ... ya dāyim rabbi -ddāyim
 O Eternal One, my Lord eternal,
- 1153 ṣāḥb-ilmulk ^I ʿazīm iṣṣān
 Sovereign One, Almighty One,
- 1154 yirzig iṭṭēr ilḥāyim
 Who provides for the hovering bird,
- 1155 razg- iddūd fi ḥajar ṣiwwān
 Provider for the worms among granite rocks,
- 1156 razg- iddūd fi ḥajar jamlūd
 Provider for the worms among petrified rocks,
- 1157 jalla jalālahu -rraḥmān
 His Exalted Majesty, the Merciful One.

- 1158 ʔēh, ʔabu zēd gal-lu ya yahūdi
Abu Zayd said to him, “O Jew,
- 1159 -tkattīrš miḥāy kalām
don’t bring so many words to me,
- 1160 ʔadi -lḥarb^I w- adi -lwaḡa
here is war and here is tumult,
- 1161 yixāf mi- -lbard ilia -lciryān
who fears the cold but the naked,
- 1162 ʔadi -lḥarb^I dūni -w dūnak
here is war, just you and I,
- 1163 mayt- ilmiḥāsa min ššaḥbān
trees are dead since Shaḥban,
- 1164 ʔadi -lḥarb^I dūni -w dūnak
here is war, just you and I,
- 1165 mayt- ilmiḥāsa min ššaḥbān
trees are dead since Shaḥban.
- miḥāst- issajara
 “miḥāsa” means a tree
- 1166 ʔana ḥālif la hidd^I ganūnak
I swore to slander your name

- 1167 w- awrīk ijjana ma^{ca} -nnār
and show you Paradise and Hell.”
- 1168 tiḥārabu wi -l^{ca}amal kēf
They waged war, what to do?
- 1169 firsān laṭamu SAWIYYA
The two horsemen clashing TOGETHER,
- 1170 ʔarēt sikru bala kēf
I beheld them drunken without intoxicants,
- 1171 bigi ṭa^cniha fi -SSAWIYYA
stabbing continued to the BELLY,
- 1172 bigi ṭa^cniha wi -lḥarb^I jabbār
stabbing continued and ferocious battle,
- 1173 ṣaḥḥb- irrāʔy^I wiyya ṢAWĀBI
a man of skill and WARCRAFT,
- 1174 hazzu -lgana ^{ca}ala-zzān
they brandished spears against lances,
- 1175 litnēn juwwa -ṢṢAWĀBI
the two of them, within the WIDE DESERT.

[Drumming ends]

- 1176 u gal-lu salāma ʿirifnāk
The Jew said to Salāma, “We know about you,
- 1177 wi ṭaʿn issalat lam tihābu
you fear not the thrusts of battle,
- 1178 la[w] kān jīt jayyid w- abināk
if you had come a warrior, and we had refused you,
- 1179 kunt I gult I liʿjām I ʿābu
I would have said, foreigners are shameful.”
- 1180 yigul-lu salāma ʿirifnāk
The Jew said to him, “Salāma, we know about you,
- 1181 u ṭaʿn issalat lam yihībak
and the thrusts of battle do not frighten you,
- 1182 ʔiza kān jīt jayyid w- abināk
if you had come a warrior, and we had refused you,
- 1183 kān fi -lḥarb I tilga naṣībak
then in battle you would have met your fate.

[*Drumming begins*]

- 1184 ḥadītak ya kalb I ma -yxīl
Your words, O dog, do not deceive me,

- 1185 ʕumrak dana jaddid liwṣāl
your life is ending, renew your loves.”
- 1186 ʕala baʕḍ jaḥradu -lxēl
They set their horses at each other,
- 1187 wi -sbūʕa -w rabṭīn fi -jbāl
lions, standing planted on the mountain,
- 1188 la diyya -mtaʕtaʕ diyya
neither one moving the other,
- 1189 wala wāḥid ʕa -lmōt garbān
neither one approaching death,
- [*Drumming interlude*]
- 1190 tismaʕ li -lxēl dayya wi -tgūl
if you hear the horses roar, you would say,
- 1191 mayya -w nāzla -f waṭayān
water descending to the lowlands.
- 1192 saḥabu -ssalat wi -lxēl insalat
They unsheathed spears, the horses weakening,
- 1193 wi ḥarb issalat fargaʕ giddām
and the battle of spears broke forth in front.

- 1194 ʔaya -rwāḥum insabbalat
 O their souls prepared to take the path
- 1195 li -lwāḥid ilkarīm la -ynām
 to the One, the Noble, Who does not sleep,
- 1196 ya^cni -lkilma -lḥilwa fatūha
 that is, an end to fine words,
- 1197 wi bigyu fi dagg innagaṣān
 and they grow weak with their blows,
- 1198 ʔarwāḥhum sabbalūha
 they made their souls ready to take the path,
- 1199 ʔaya rāf^c- ilbala ya salām
 O You Who lift plagues, O peace.
- 1200 ilyahūdi jabad ḥarba
 The Jew threw his spear,
- 1201 ṭam^cān fi ^camūd^l -hlāl
 greedy for the “pillar of Hilal.”
- 1202 ʔabu zēd gāl walla balāwi
 Abu Zayd said, “By God, what folly!
- 1203 iddūda tiṭma^c fi -tta^cbān
 The worm tries for the snake,

Audience

kida

really

ya salām [interjection]

[laughter]

ʿAwaḍallah

1204 yaʿni balāwi ya dunya balāwi
that is, folly, O world, folly!

1205 yāma -lli -yʿīš tuwrīh ya zamān
O, whoever lives long enough, O fate, to him you show all.

1206 ilyahūdi jabad ilḥarba
The Jew threw his spear,

1207 ligifha -bu zēd min irragzān
Abu Zayd caught it by its point.

[Drumming ends]

1208 šayyaʿ-lu tāni ḥarba
The Jew sent him a second spear,

1209 yilgāha jawāhir min ilʿāl

he thought it a jewel, of the finest.

1210 gal-lu xud kiḥēlak kida -w dīr

Abu Zayd said to him, “Take your horse round,

1211 ḥadīt min finūni ḤAZĀNA

a story from my arts, MY POSSESSION,

1212 mālak wi māl ilmagādīr

what have you to do with destiny?

1213 la ba^cdīk yibku ḤAZĀNA

Lest after you they weep in SORROW,

1214 la ba^cdīk yibku ḥazīnīn

lest after you they weep, sorrowing,

1215 u bi -ḥyāt ʿīsa -w mūsa

I swear by Jesus and Moses,

1216 ya kalb raʿīs ilmala^cīn

O dog, chief of the cursed ones,

1217 la tixrab ʿalēk ilkanīsa

lest the temple be destroyed over you.”

[*Drumming begins*]

1218 yigūl-lu ta^cāla ʿaya ʿabd

The Jew said to him, “Come here, O slave,

1219 ʔadi -lḥarb jū-lu -l^cuwwāl
here is war, paid soldiers come to it,

1220 kalāmak yifatfit ilkibd
your words slice up the liver,

1221 asakkinak laḥd ilʔarmāl
I shall make you dwell in a tomb of sands.”

1222 nizlu litnēn
The two joined battle again,

1223 kull ^I wāḥid rākib xayyāl
each one a mounted rider,

1224 salāma jaḥrad ilxēl
Salāma galloped down on his horse,

1225 subū^{ca} u rabṭīn fi -jbāl
lions, standing planted on the mountain,

1226 ti^cakkar wi -l^camal kēf
he became angry, what to do?

1227 ʔabu sabra, ʔit^cakkar wi -l^camal kēf
The father of Ṣabr became angry, what to do?

1228 min iljadd I ḥalaf ilYAMĀNI
Earnestly he swore an OATH,

[*Drumming ends*]

1229 ?abu zēd wallad issēf
Abu Zayd brought forth his sword,

1230 ?axad rāsu bi-lyAMĀNI
he took off the Jew's head with the SWORD,

1231 ?axad rāsu ca -l?arḍ I -w ramāh
he took off his head, threw it on the ground,

1232 ?axad rāsu ca -l?arḍ I -w ramāh
he took off his head, threw it on the ground,

1233 u jismu magābil XALĀYIG
the body cannot take CLOTHES,

1234 sāḥit dimāh uw ramāh
he threw it—blood flowed,

1235 wallit jamī^c ilXALĀYIG
all the MEN fled,

1236 wallit jamī^c ilmaxalīg
all creatures fled,

- 1237 yidūs ilʔarāḏi -lmuxīfa
Abu Zayd treads upon fearsome lands,
- 1238 jaḥrad ilyamān fi -ddīg
he slid the sword inside its sheathe,
- 1239 jāt sanyūra li jēb xaḏra -ššarīfa
Sanyūra came to the son of Khaḏra Sharīfa.

[*Drumming begins*]

- 1240 issanyūra tigul-lu ya zarbūn
Sanyūra said to him, “O vile black slave,
- 1241 ʕumrak dana lam fīh waṣalān
your life is finished, there is no safe arrival,
- 1242 šagīgi ya tār šagīgi
my brother, O vengeance for my brother,
- 1243 ʔaḥsan askin laḥd ilʔarmāl
lest I dwell in a tomb of sands.”
- 1244 gāl, ʔinzil līha ya marʕi
Abu Zayd said, “Join battle with her, O Marʕi,
- 1245 warrīha -jjana maʕa-nnār
show her Paradise and Hell.”

- 1246 nizil ilcāyig marci
Marci, the elegant, joined battle,
- 1247 makammalš^I ma^cāha talāt -tidwār
he did not complete three bouts with her.

Audience

kida
really

[*Drumming ends*]

ʿAwaḍallah

- 1248 ilwalad xawwad yiḍrabha
The lad rushed in boldly to strike her,
- 1249 yilga -ssarj^I bala xayyāl
he found the saddle riderless,

[*Drumming interlude*]

- 1250 kānit lābsa ṭagīt- ilxafa
she was wearing a cap that hid her—
- 1251 šayy yiḥayyir ilʿinsān
a thing to bewilder a man.

[*Drumming begins*]

1252 ʔinzil ya jamīl ʔaḥya
 “Join battle with her, O handsome Yaḥya.”

1253 nizil ʔaḥya walad sirḥān
 Yaḥya, son of Sirḥān, joined battle.

1254 aḥya gāl ijrī-li ya xāl
 Yaḥya said, “Run to me, O uncle,

1255 ya -bu rayya ya fāḍi -lbāl
 O Rayya’s father, O you with mind at ease.”

[*Drumming ends*]

1256 ʔabu zēd gāl walla balāwi
 Abu Zayd said, “By God, what folly!

1257 ʔāxir zamāni -nḥarb- inniswān
 At the end of my days, we fight women!

1258 balāwi ya dunya balāwi
 Folly, O world, folly!

1259 ʔilli -y^ciš -twirīh -liyyām
 To him who lives long enough, time shows all.”

1260 ʔabu zēd nadah ʕammu
 Abu Zayd called upon “his uncle,” al-Khiḍr:

- 1261 madadēn guṭb ilʔaxwān
“Twice *madad*, pillar of brothers,”
- 1262 u minnīha xad iṭṭagiyya
and from her, al-Khiḍr took the cap.
- 1263 yōm ḡaharit ʕayān wi bayān
When she appeared, clear and visible,

[*Drum interlude*]

- 1264 marʕi xawwa ʕalēha
Marʕi chased after her,
- 1265 -w xaṭafha min fōg iššaḥtān
he snatched her from the top of the horse.
- 1266 ʔimma -ḡya gāl ilʕamal kēf
But Yaḡya said, “What do to?”
- 1267 min iljadd I ḡālif yamāni
Earnestly I swore an oath.”
- 1268 lama gaḡḡabha ma bi -ssēf
When he chopped her up with the sword,
- 1269 ʕa- lʔarḡ I rāḡit ramāni
her corpse fell upon the earth.

[*Drumming begins*]

- 1270 ʔabu zēd gāl ya -wlēd axti
Abu Zayd said, “O my nephews,
- 1271 ʕalēkum wala -ḡaṭṭi kalām
I shall not hide my words from you,
- 1272 ʔismaʕū-li ya fawāris
hear me, O horsemen,
- 1273 magādim zayy innuwwār
valiant ones like flowers,
- 1274 gulū-li mīn yaḥmi dawāba
tell me, who protects Dawāba,
- 1275 yiwaddī -lxabar li jēb ḍurḡām
who brings the news to the son of Durghām?
- 1276 ʔawaddī -lxabar li ʕāmir
I shall bring the news to ʕĀmir.
- 1277 ṣallu ʕala -lli nūru -ybān
Pray to the One Whose light is manifest.”
- 1278 ʔabu zēd dakam [*drumming ends*] ^I -kḥēlu
Abu Zayd set spurs to [*drumming ends*] his horse,
- 1279 lamma -twakkal rāḥ ildīwān
when he set forth, going to the diwan,

[Drumbeat]

1280 -twakkal rāḥ iddawawīn
he set forth going to the diwans,

1281 u migdim wi lū bā^c ṭāyil
the valiant one, with a mighty armspan,

1282 yilga -l^curbān jalsīn
he found the Arabs in council.

1283 ^cāmir rākib fōg ḍahr issalāyil
^cĀmir rides on the back of a charger,

fōg ḍahr ilxēl
on the back of a horse

1284 ^cāmir rākib ^cala -lxēl
^cĀmir rides upon a horse,

1285 u mistanzir ^cala -l[?]ayyām
waiting patiently,

1286 gal-lu ta^cāla ya zarbūn
he said to him, “Come here, O vile black slave,”

<Pause. Tape is turned over and ^cAwaḍallah repeats the line and begins drumming.>

- 1287 gal-lu ta^cāla ya zarbūn
he said to him, “Come here, O vile black slave,
- 1288 ^cabd ijjalab ya galīl ilxāl
purchased slave, O you of no family,
- 1289 yak^I -syādak kitlu
can it be, your masters are killed?
- 1290 sakanu laḥd ilʔarmāl
They dwell in a tomb of sands,
- 1291 kisbu dawāba minnīk
they won Dawāba from you,
- 1292 ya -zrag wišš ilḡirbān
O black crow-face.”
- 1293 ʔabu zēd gal-lu ya ^cāmir
Abu Zayd said to him, “O ^cĀmir
- 1294 ya -xsāra ittirāb lammām
a pity the dust that gathers,
- 1295 ʔisyādi, ʔilyahūd
my masters are the Jews,
- 1296 ilyahūd [*drumming ends*] rājil gāsi
the Jew is [*drumming ends*] a cruel man

- 1297 wi ḥarbu šayyab ilmurdān
and war with him whitens the hair of the beardless.”
- 1298 gāl il^camal kēf
Abu Zayd said, “What do to?”
- 1299 ṣa^cīb ya -frāg ilḥabāyib
Difficult, O loved ones’ parting,
- 1300 ʔarēt wallad issēf
I beheld the sword unsheathed,
- 1301 sakkan ^I -syādi fi laḥd ittarāyib
he made my masters dwell in a dusty tomb,
- 1302 kisbu dawāba sitt iddawawīn
they won Dawāba, mistress of the diwans,
- 1303 kisbu dawāba sitt iddawawīn
they won Dawāba, mistress of the diwans,
- 1304 mīn yigūl makka KA-HĀNA
who dare say Mecca is LIKE HERE?
- 1305 ʔaxadūha -kbār ilmala^cīn
Leaders of the cursed ones took her,
- 1306 ʔaxadūha -kbār ilKAHĀNA

leaders of the JEWS took her.”

- 1307 gal-lu ta^cāla ya zarbūn
cĀmir said to him, “Come here, O vile black slave,
- 1308 c^abd ijjalab fi ?anhi bakān
purchased slave, in what place
- 1309 magdirtiš^I [t]sidd^I fiha
did you fail to act on her behalf
- 1310 -w tīfdī-li -ṣṣibyān
and protect the young virgin for me?”

[*Drumming begins*]

- 1311 cāmir nadam gāl ya walad
cĀmir cried out, he said, “O lad,
- 1312 dilwak jīb-li dabbūs
now fetch me a javelin,
- 1313 w- adīni rākib iššaḥtān
here am I mounted on the horse,
- 1314 ?adīni rākib-^I -kḥēli
here am I mounted on my stallion
- 1315 w- ašūf bitti -f anhi bakān

and I shall see in what place is my daughter.”

[*Drumming ends*]

1316 humma fi -lḥadīt w- ilgōl

While they were in the midst of speech,

1317 ?atit dawāba bi -wlād sirḥān

Dawāba arrived with the sons of Sirḥān,

1318 ʿarab bayyaḍ alla tanāhum

Arabs, may God make pure their honor.

1319 tiḡanni wi -lḥiss^l layyān

She sings and her voice is tender,

1320 yāma tima^{cn}nin warāhum

O how inspired behind them,

1321 tiḡanni līha bāl faḍyān

she sings, her mind at ease

1322 ʿala sij^cān gaḥdin tūnis

about the courageous ones heading for Tunis,

1323 jamīla sitt inniswān

the beautiful mistress of women,

1324 ḥili -ḡnāha^cind^l yūnis

her songs delighted Yūnis,

1325 ḥili -ǧnāha li -jjamīlīn

her songs delighted the handsome ones,

1326 u -b -ḥyāt^I ṭurgit lamāna

I swear by the path of trust,

1327 tigarrab raʔīs issalaṭīn

the chief of the sultans drew near

1328 u tarak ilmunayyib salāma

and he left the leader, Salāma.

1329 gal-lu -zzayy^I -nhār kum ya fawāris

ʿĀmir said to them, “How are you, O horsemen,

[*Drumbeat*]

1330 wiyya -lṭāšī -lxirāsan

concerning al-Tash al-Khorasani

[*Drumbeat*]

1331 gulū-li kēf ya šu^cara

tell me, how it is, O poets,

[*Drumbeat*]

1332 ma fi -lḥarb^I wi -ddišmān

what happened in war and battle?”

[*Drumbeat*]

1333 nadahit wi gālit ya -būya
 She cried out and said, “O father,

[*Drumbeat*]

1334 yak il ^cagl ^I minnīk mindār
 can it be, your reason has left you?

[*Drumbeat*]

1335 ya -bu -ššāš al- garn ^I māyil
 Your turban tilted, your side-fringe aslant,

[*Drumbeat*]

1336 dōla magadim min il^cāl
 these are worthy, valiant ones,

[*Drumbeat*]

1337 u firsān yismu -lhalāyil
 horsemen named the Hilali.

[*Drumbeat*]

1338 kalāmak ya -būya wala -yzīd
 Do not add to your words, O my father,

[*Drumbeat*]

1339 yidūs ilʔarāḏi -lmuxīfa
he treads on fearsome lands

[*Drumbeat*]

1340 bizātu -lbaṭal ʔabu zēd
he himself is the hero Abu Zayd,

[*Drumbeat*]

1341 timunni wi ʔummu šarīfa
the longed-for one and his mother Sharīfa,

[*Drumbeat*]

1342 talāta бага -wlād sirḥān
the three then are the sons of Sirḥān

[*Drumbeat*]

1343 gaṣḏīn li barr ^I tūnis
heading for the shores of Tunis,

[*Drumbeat*]

1344 ʕarab naga kē -nnuwwār
pure Arabs like flowers,

[*Drumming*]

1345 ʔaḥya wi marʕi wi yūnis
Yaḥya and Marʕi and Yūnis.”

1346 muḥammad niṣalli ʿalēh
 Muḥammad let us pray to Him.

1347 takmīl guṣṣit ʿāmir
 Conclusion of the story of ʿĀmir.

¹ Lucienne Saada describes a Tunisian Hilali poet, engaged in writing his version of the Bani Hilal epic, who distinguishes between an original epic “*aṣlanīyya*,” that is also an official epic, “*rasmīyya*,” and those versions in which “les gens ajoutent les faits jusqu’à ce que le texte ne soit plus conforme à la réalité,” in “Documents sonores tunisiens concernant la geste des Banū Hilāl,” *Association internationale d’étude des civilisations méditerranéennes: Actes du IIIème congrès* (Algiers: SNED, 1978), p. 367.

² For definitions of *tār* and *rabāba*, see Lois Ibsen al-Farūqī, *An Annotated Glossary of Arabic Music Terms* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), pp. 271-72, 350.

³ These poets have been recorded by Abderrahman Abnoudy, who has released, as of this writing, approximately a dozen commercial cassette recordings of Jabr Abu Ḥusayn, and by Giovanni Canova, in *Egitto 1: Epica*, I Suoni, Musica di Tradizione Orale 5 (Milan, 1980). Record with notes by Giovanni Canova, musicological notes by Habib H. Touma, English trans. M. Astrologo and L. Lappin.

⁴ A ninth-century Arab rhetorician, Ṣalaḥ al-Dīn Khalīl Ibn Aybak al-Ṣafādī, remarked upon the Egyptian propensity for punning, in *Faḍḍ al-Ḫitām Can at-Tawriya wa al-Istixdām*, folios 13a-14b, 9a-10b, cited in S. Bonebakker, *Some Early Definitions of the Tawriya* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1966), p. 74: “The poets of Egypt and Syria excelled in the use of this difficult figure [*tawriya* pun]. The reason for this is, according to Ṣafādī that, the water of the Nile in Egypt and the air of Syria are of excellent quality so that poets living in these regions are endowed with both delicacy and intellect.”

⁵ I am grateful to Peter Maund, Music Department, University of California, Berkeley, for his analysis of the drum beat patterns, and for providing me with the following musical and bibliographic citations: Jihad Racy, “Music,” in *The Genius of Arab Civilization: Source of the Renaissance*, ed. John Richard Hayes (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 121-48; and Habib Hasan Touma, *Die Musik der Araber* (Wilhelmshaven: Heinrichshofen, 1975), pp. 73-80.

¹ The Beautiful One, i.e., the Prophet Muḥammad. Throughout the text I follow conventions that capitalize all references to the Prophet. *ṣalli*: ‘praise’ or ‘pray for’ evokes the phrase *ṣalla allāhu ʿalēhi wi sallam*, always said after pronouncing the name of the Prophet or, as is the case here, after the command *ṣalli*.

² *ʿah* or *ʿād* are filler words often found after commands or interrogatives; Madiha Doss, oral communication.

⁷ In Ṣaʿīdi dialect a noun with attached pronoun is treated as a single word and receives a single stress,

e.g., *abuyāna*, ‘my father’; see Madiha Doss, “Le dialecte Sa^Cidi de la region de Menya,” diss., Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris-III), 1981, pp. 11-12. Thus, e.g., in the text, *nabīna* can then mean *nāybi ?ana*, ‘my lot,’ as well as ‘our Prophet.’

8 *zōl*, lit. ‘person,’ a “somewhat untranslatable” Nubian word “addressed to an audience to draw attention to a specific point”; see Ahmed al-Shahi and F. C. T. Moore, *Wisdom from the Nile: A Collection of Folk-Stories from Northern and Central Sudan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 231.

11 The use of the adjective *kaḥāyil* in the plural, as opposed to the participle *mikāḥḥil*, linguistically mirrors the historical uncertainty as to whether the Prophet Muḥammad darkened his eyes with kohl makeup (participle) or his eyes were naturally darkly rimmed (adjective).

12 ^CAwaḍallah defines *arattib* as *yigūl dōr*, *?itkallam*, *?afannin* or *tartīb*.

19 The four sultans are Abu Zayd and his three nephews, Yaḥya, Mar^Ci, and Yūnis. In Sa^Cidi dialect, the name *Yaḥya* is often pronounced *Aḥya*.

23 Iraq is in the dual form because it is between two rivers (*ma bēn innahrēn*), according to Awaḍallah, and it is situated adjacent to Libya.

26 ^C*adāyib* is the plural form for ^C*adaba*. This was described to me as the piece of material that is left hanging down after turban cloth is wound around the head. ^CAwaḍallah considered this a sign of virility, *rujūla*, and courage, *sajā^Ca*. ^CAwaḍallah considers the word ?ADĀYIB, ‘politeness,’ which begins with a glottal stop, and the word ^CADĀYIB, which begins with a pharyngeal fricative, to be possible puns.

30 ^CAwaḍallah explained that KLĀMAK was a punned word meaning *klīmak* or *sajāda*, ‘carpet’; he also defined it as ‘your words.’ Therefore, line 30 can also be translated: ‘whose cushions are well-appointed, whose word is precious.’ The audience understood the pun and later explained it to me.

38 The change in pronunciation from the literary *jawhar* to the more colloquial *jōhar* seems to be an instance of ^CAwaḍallah’s technique of using colloquial to gloss literary Arabic.

41 ^CAwaḍallah pronounces the first *a* in *šibbakha* ambiguously, as a half-long vowel, and hence the audience supplies alternate translations for *fāṭha šibbakha*: ‘she opened [herself], he ensnared her,’ or ‘she opens her net.’

45 For the use of *ya -lli* in colloquial utterances, see Ariel Bloch, “Direct and Indirect Relative Clauses,” *Journal of Arabic Linguistics* 8 (1980):24-25.

47 ^CAwaḍallah explained that the punned word *qabīla* means here *qabla*, ‘before her.’ A member of the audience suggested *qibla*, ‘in the direction of the qibla’ or Mecca, which, in Upper Egypt designates the south.

50 ^CAwaḍallah actually said: *mar^Ci gāl ya bint ma^Cbad ya bint issulṭān*. (‘Mar^Ci said, “O daughter of Ma^Cbad, O daughter of the sultan.”) *Ma^Cbad* is the ruler of Tunis, and ^CAwaḍallah mistakenly introduces him in this line but quickly corrects himself.

52 ^CAbd al-Ḥamīd Ḥawwās of the Folklore Institute in Cairo, has pointed out to me that the b/m alternation in the Upper Egyptian pronunciation *bakān* for the word *makān* exists as an ancient dialectal variation found in the Koran, Sura 3:96, where the word *bakka* alternates for *makka*, ‘Mecca.’

54 *maddahīn* are professional poets who sing praises to the Prophet Muḥammad. For a study of an Upper Egyptian *maddah*, see Giovanni Canova, “Muḥammad, l’ebreo e la gazzella: Canto di un *maddāḥ* egiziano,” *Annali dell’Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 41 (1981): 195-211.

55 *diwān*, ‘royal court, hall, reception room, court of justice, sofa.’ See glossary in H.R.P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949). For a description of a Cairene diwan, see Edward Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: Ward, Lock, n.d.), pp. 1-11.

64 ^cAwaḍallah apostrophizes himself as though he were in the audience. Similar instances of singers’ self-greetings and self-congratulation are noted briefly in the liner notes of “Greek-Oriental: Smyrnaic-Rebetic Songs and Dances, the Golden Years: 1927-1937, from the Collection of Martin Schwartz,” ed. M. Schwartz and C. Strachwitz, notes by M. Schwartz. Folklyric Records #9033 (1983).

67 The audience informed me that the word for ‘kite’ was usually *ḥadādi* or *ḥadāya*; however because of the presence of the word “vulture,” *nīsr*, they understood the poet to mean another bird, namely, the ‘kite.’ The poet is allowed to change words, they assured me, for the sake of the rhyme: ^c*aṣan yuwzin*. The Egyptian kite, *milvus migrans*, is a carrion eater, and the vulture, *buteo ferox*, is both a carrion eater and a predator.

69 *?adi* is a demonstrative of reference in Ṣa^cīdi Arabic; see Doss, “Le dialecte Ṣa^cīdi,” p. 202.

70 When I went over this tape with ^cAwaḍallah six months later, lines 70-73 were somewhat unclear. ^cAwaḍallah provided the following variant:

line 70: dawāba tinādi ya xaddām Dawaba called, O servant

line 71: kalām carāyib WA JIBNA Arabic speech and WE BRING IT

line 72: u sacd li -lkull I xaddam and Sacd, [good fortune] a servant to all

line 73: lāzim tigaḍḍi WAJIBNA we must fulfil OUR DUTIES

72 According to ^cAwaḍallah, *sa^cd* means either ‘good fortune’ or the actual name of a servant, Sa^cd. Sa^cd and derivations of the triradical root s-^c-d, such as Mas^cūd, Mas^cūda (fem.), are considered black slave names. The same tradition is noted in southern Tunisian versions; see Cathryn Anita Baker, “The Hilali Saga in the Tunisian South,” Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1978, pt. 1, p. 227, 135. Also, while on the scouting trip to Tunis, Abu Zayd as the black servant to his three nephews, will call himself Ḥājj Mas^cūd, in *Kitāb al-riyāda al-bahiyya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Jumhūriyya, n.d.), p. 69.

75 ^cAwaḍallah defined *?itlatt* as *majnūn*, *maltūt*, *maxbūt*, ‘deranged, crazy, confused.’

80 Later interviews with the audience yielded differing interpretations of the pun phrase BĀ^c IDĒN, e.g., BI YIDĒN, ‘stretching WITH TWO ARMS,’ or BU^cDĒN, ‘stretching AT A DISTANCE.’

82 ^cAwaḍallah plays with a common expression of commiseration: *?allā yikūn fi ^cōnu*, ‘may God come to his aid.’

92 *jarālak* is verb plus enclitic pronoun, and *jarā līk* is verb plus detached pronoun.

94 *yak* functions in Upper Egyptian dialect as a topicalizer, interrogative, and emphatic.

108 Lit. trans.: ‘he is old, a matter for reproach.’ ^CAwaḍallah glosses Dawāba’s speech in order to make clear to the audience the servant’s mistake.

114 ^CAwaḍallah defined *zuraḥāt ilma^Cāni* as *bašawāt*, ‘pashas,’ or *xawajāt*, ‘foreigners.’

115 An intense controversy arose over what time of day *rāyig iḍḍuḥa* takes place. ^CAwaḍallah stated the words meant ‘early in the morning,’ as opposed to everyone else who defined this phrase, ‘early evening.’ A general discussion ensued in a Luxor cafe, drawing upon the interpretation of a Koranic verse. Evidence was brought from Sura 93:1-2, which begins *al-ḍuḥā wa-al-layl*. The second term, *al-layl*, ‘the night,’ was interpreted as a gloss on the first, i.e., ‘by the evening and by the night,’ versus ^CAwaḍallah’s oppositional ‘by the morning and by the night.’ The discussion was eventually resolved when an emissary was sent by the discussants to Shaykh ^CĀlim of the Mosque of Abū ^CAyyād, Luxor, who ruled in favor of ^CAwaḍallah. *al-ḍuḥā* is between seven-thirty and nine in the morning, and *rāyig*, the ‘purest’ part of this time period, was stated to be eight-thirty until nine in the morning.

118 ‘The Abyssinian’ is one of the many epithets for the hero Abu Zayd, so-called because of his dark skin.

128 ^CAwaḍallah defined the word *xlāṣ* as *muxalaṣ*, or ‘of a good family.’ However, ^CAbd al-Ḥamīd Ḥawwās, of the Folklore Institute, Cairo, has suggested that the word *xlāṣ* announces a change in the narrative subject from the daughter Dawāba to the hero Abu Zayd. Therefore, the word *xlāṣ* would translate: ‘he had enough,’ or ‘as soon as he heard this, then the son of Sharīfa...’

132 Pierre Cachia suggest the following gloss: ‘Don’t be (inhibited by your position as) a guest: be venturesome!’

136 ^CAwaḍallah defined *ṭōla* as *ma^Crūf*, ‘favor.’

139 Lines 139-143, ^CAwaḍallah considers extraneous, or in his own words: *di ziyāda*. Technically, he calls this extraneous section, a *dūr*. Line 139: the punned words DA FANNI allows the alternate translation: ‘healer of wounds BURIED ME, where, where?’ One of the members of the audience, ^CAbd aj-Jalīl, interrupts to ask who is the speaker in lines 139-43. ^CAwaḍallah then improvises an insulting poem to mock ^CAbd aj-Jalīl’s lack of understanding. The patron of the performance, ^CAbd al-Ghafūr, called this insult poem, *takrīm*, a ‘tribute.’

143 *ya ^Cēni*, lit.: ‘O my eye,’ common expression in folksongs.

145 ^CAwaḍallah defined the word ^CĀMIR, which I translate ‘rich, abundant, or copious,’ as *galbu min ?islām šadīd*, or ‘his heart was staunchly Muslim.’

146 A lengthy discussion took place among members of the audience when I asked what this phrase meant. They all agreed that the word for ‘boat’ was left out (*šāl kilmit saḥīna*). The patron of the performance, ^CAbd al-Ghafūr called this *taḥwīl* or ‘transposition’ and said it was common in the epic. They glossed the line: ‘he is a boat on the river making sails clash.’

154 *lagāta*, means ‘encounter in battle.’

164 This line, according to ^CAwaḍallah, can also mean: ‘how calm he is over everybody.’ *kēf*, meaning *kēfiyyitu*, *šaxsiyittu*, and *rāsi*, ‘a boat in port at rest.’ In ^CṢaḥīdī dialect *rasīni* means ‘explain to me calmly.’

167 The punned word ṢABA^{CĒ} also gives another possible translation: ‘WHAT A LION, and his hands stiffened.’

169 ^CAwaḍallah defined *lāt* as *rājil gawi*, ‘a mighty hero.’

171 *ya hū* means *ya nās*, ‘O people.’

177 The participle ṢĀ^ḤIR, ‘feeling’ or ‘poet,’ though not the verb, is ambiguous, giving an alternate meaning: ‘O Arabs, he is without FEELINGS!’

188 ‘I’ve known him long,’ lit.: ‘I raised him.’

194 ‘Rayya’s father’ is another name for Abu Zayd whose daughter is called Rayya.

197 *badana*, means ^C*ā?ila*, ‘family,’ according to ^CAwaḍallah. See also Abdelghany A. Khalafallah, *A Descriptive Grammar of Sa^Ci:di Egyptian Colloquial Arabic* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1969), p. 62. Lane’s Lexicon: lineage or parentage of a man and his grounds of pretension to respect or honor.

207 Metathesis in Ṣa^Cīdi dialect: *Caṣṣān* to *Caṣṭān*.

215 *rās rāwi*, can mean ‘the mind of a poet’ or ‘a clever clear mind,’ as in the Ṣa^Cīdi expression, *muxxu rāwi*, ‘someone who never forgets anything.’ ^CAwaḍallah preferred ‘clear mind.’

223 *baḥri*, lit.: ‘seaward.’ In Egypt, facing the sea, or the Mediterranean, means to the north.

226 *?abyaḍ*, lit.: ‘whitest.’ *kān* in Ṣa^Crdi dialect gives the future sense of *yibga*, ‘to become.’

228 *lama* alternates with *yāma*: ‘O how.’

230 ‘O night’ is the characteristic opening of a poem, song, or even a performance.

235 A closer translation of the phrase b- ^CADALHA is the French expression *en forme*; see also line 237.

236 ^CAwaḍallah defined *bawāzil* as *gaṣr*: ‘castle’ or ‘fortress.’ Later, when I questioned the audience, no one had ever heard of this word, but all understood its meaning within the context.

242 According to ^CAwaḍallah, chairs are a sign of government and authority: *karāsi ?ilḥukm*. In Baker, “Hilali Saga,” “*xaṣṣa* is a reference to nobility,” pt. 1, p. 59, n. 18.

243 When I reviewed the tape with ^CAwaḍallah, he considered this line to be a mistake since it begins in Arabic with ‘Dawāba said’ instead of the correct ‘^CĀmir said.’ During the performance he rectifies the error in line 244. I follow his suggestion for the translation of line 243: “Dawāba,” he said, “O handsome of stature,” instead of the more obvious: “Dawāba said, ‘O handsome of stature.’”

246 Later ^CAwaḍallah announced that MA^ḌŪL was a punned word, which could also be MA^ḌADŪL giving a different translation: ‘I hope you have nothing to do WITH THOSE.’

249 DALĀYIL also means ‘pendants,’ so the line can be translated ‘O woman wearing earrings and PENDANTS.’

261 ^CAwaḍallah said he mispronounced the first word of this line; therefore, he repeated it.

272 According to ^CAwaḍallah, the hero Abu Zayd speaks in the Najd dialect of the Arabian peninsula, a dialect unfamiliar to the Iraqi ^CĀmir. The Najdi dialect is not Arabic but, ^CAwaḍallah says, Nubian (*lisān ilbarābra*). In Upper Egypt, *barbari* (sing.), *barābra* (pl.), means blacks in general and Nubians in particular. Only poets, e.g., ^CAwaḍallah himself, can understand all Arab dialects. On the other hand, he claims that Ṣa^Cīdi, the dialect of Upper Egypt, is understood all over the Arab world.

291 ^ʕAwaḍallah defined *nawāl* as *?ujra, ḥagg*, the poet's 'fee' or 'right.' The audience defined this word as ^ʕ*aṭa*, 'gift.'

297 Lit. trans.: 'until the rays of dawn became light and appeared.'

305 According to ^ʕAwaḍallah, *mirgān* is a slave name.

308 *mas^ʕūda* is a black slave name; see note to line 72.

309 *zēd ilmāl* means 'increase of wealth.'

313 According to ^ʕAwaḍallah, the kingdom of Khorasan belongs to Russia, and Russians are originally Jewish. Jews, like Christians and Russians, worship granite and eat pigs. A further conflation takes place, based on the Arabic triconsonantal root š-y-ʕ, from which are derived both 'Shi'ite' (*šīʕī*) and 'communist' (*šuyūʕī*). Communists, according to ^ʕAwaḍallah, are Jews who are Russians and who are Shi'ites.

315 *Culwān*: Arlette Roth-Laly, *Lexique des parlers arabes tchado-soudanais* (Paris: CNRS, 1969) —'signature.' Alternate trans.: 'I would see the letter of the signature.' See also line 350.

316 The audience defined *zarbūn* as 'deep black' (*šadīd samar*), 'ill-mannered' (*galīl adab*), and 'without family and lineage' (*galīl ašl*).

318 According to ^ʕAwaḍallah, *mamlūk*, is a 'white slave,' and ^ʕ*abd* (pl. ^ʕ*abīd*) is a 'black slave.' Among the Bedouins of the Arabian peninsula, Dickson found "mamluke" defined as "a purchased slave owned by his master," in *The Arab of the Desert*.

319 *sunnār* is a town in Sudan.

334 According to ^ʕAwaḍallah, ^ʕ*cāza* means *mašlaḥa* 'concerns, interests, or welfare.' Another audience interpretation is ^ʕ*azā* meaning the 'ceremony of mourning' or 'sadness.' Here the audience understood and explained the puns to me, adding meanings the poet did not intend. Another interpretation they offered was ^ʕ*ĀZA LĪH*, 'when no one fulfils a need on his behalf.'

345 ^ʕAwaḍallah defined *fağri* as *?adīm irrizg* or 'improvident, lacking a livelihood.'

352 *middarris* = participle of the verb *?iddarris*.

353 Abu Zayd refers to himself in conversing with ^ʕ*Āmir* as ^ʕ*ammak*, lit. 'your uncle,' in the sense of 'this old man in front of you.' The term for paternal uncle is regularly used to address non-relatives; see Dilworth Blaine Parkinson, "Terms of Address in Egyptian Arabic," Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1982, p. 197.

360 Lit.: 'my spirit is green.'

366 The Egyptian tales use the number ninety for large quantities in oral-formulaic phrases. Tunisian verses in the Baker collection employ the number forty; see Baker, pt. 1, p. 191: "They were asked for women and for a tribute from each / That is they were asked for forty women"; also pp. 219, 220, 223, 234; p. 259, "Each one entitled to a share received 400 horseloads of booty"; p. 281: "Sa^ʕda went out and with her were 39 maidens"; p. 283: "they cut forty women's hair."

369 *dak*, a masculine demonstrative adjective preceding its noun represents distant reference. It is used restrictedly in a few fixed forms, e.g., *dakinnihār*, 'the other day.' Madiha Doss, "The Position of the Demonstrative 'DA, DI' in Egyptian Arabic: A Diachronic Inquiry," *Annales Islamologiques* 15

(1979):350.

372 *ardabb* = 198 liters.

373 *dakar yūsfi* was defined as a variety of grain currently known by the name of *dagīg*.

375 ^C*ajām*, ‘foreigner, non-Arab,’ as opposed to ^C*arab*. Lit. trans.: ‘for the daughter’s of non-Arabs to henna themselves.’

377 *gintār* = 44.93 kg.

380 Lit. trans.: ‘besides these and these.’ The demonstrative plural, *dōla*, is doubled for intensive and inclusive meaning; see Ariel Bloch, “Morphological Doublets in Arabic Dialects,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 16 (1971):53-73.

383 *kanīsa* = non-Muslim house of worship.

387 Lit. trans.: friends meet friends.

397 *tumunni* is one of the many epithets of the hero Abu Zayd. It means ‘the wished-for one’ or ‘the longed-for one.’ This is because, according to ^CAwaḍallah, Abu Zayd’s mother went down to the magic waters and wished upon a black bird for a son.

399 The verb *itma^Cnan* is an unusual form of *itma^Can*. The doubling of the third radical to form a quadriliteral verb imparts an intensity of meaning, i.e., not just ‘to look’ but ‘to scrutinize, ponder, reflect upon.’

haḍa = ^CAwaḍallah here exceptionally pronounces a spirant *dāl*, the literary classical pronunciation.

401 The names of the Jews are *Ḥanna* (John), *Ḥanayna* (diminutive of John), *Faltas*, and *Magār* (Makarios), names common to the Coptic Christians of Egypt.

403 *galam*: Ṣa^Cīdi dialect for *mawḍu^C*, ‘subject, matter.’

425 *ḥāwi* is a person believed to be immune from serpent bites and who frequently makes his living as a snake charmer; see Lane, pp. 352-55.

427 Alternate trans.: ‘today luck is working.’

430 Alternate trans.: ‘Who says Mecca is JEWISH?’ The audience understood and explained the pun KAHANA, adding another interpretation: *kahhān*, defined as *saḥḥār*, ‘magician.’

450 *riyāl*, the most common currency in the Arabian peninsula, was a Maria Theresa coin dated 1788.

452 *juhhāl*, according to ^CAwaḍallah, are *?ayyāl il^Cabd*, ‘slave children.’

453 *jurr*, means ‘to drag, trail, pull oneself.’

470 In Ṣa^Cīdi dialect *ṣaraṣīr* alternates with *ḍaraḍīr*. *li -llān* seems to alternate with *li -llāl*.

478 *kazlak* = derived from Turkish *geslik*, ‘archaic: clasp-knife, a kind of curved sword, sabre’; see *New Redhouse Turkish-English Dictionary* (Istanbul; Redhouse Press, 1968), p. 399. The audience defined *rūmi* as ‘golden.’ ^CAwaḍallah said it meant ‘Rome’ (*balad rūmi fi ?italya*). Another time, ^CAwaḍallah said that the people of *Rūm* are Arab Muslims. In Cairene dialect *rūmi* refers to Greeks.

487 Lit. trans.: ‘lest the angel of death say he regrets *I* live.’

489 *tiwakkal*, lit.: ‘to rely’ (on God); in Ṣa^Cīdi dialect, ‘to set off, to journey.’

501 The audience defined ^Cōn as an ‘angel,’ *malak*, and good spirit, as opposed to *mārid*, an evil spirit, frequently taking the form of boat sails (*šakl ilgil^C*) in order to carry off people. An ^Cōn, a “helper,” is defined as “the Jinn which may be used by a ‘magician’ to perform a task are called khoddam (servants) or a’wan (aids)”]; see Hasan El-Shamy, “Belief Characters as Anthropomorphic Psychosocial Realities: The Egyptian Case,” *Egyptian Yearbook of Sociology* 4 (1983): 13.

* A member of the audience said: *la ḥawla* after ^CAwaḍallah mentioned Satan’s name. This expression is a shortened form of the classical Arabic phrase *lā ḥawla walā quwwata ?illā bi-llāhi*: ‘there is no power and no strength save in God.’

505 The audience gave different interpretations for the word *birriyya*. ‘cat’ (*guṭṭa*), ‘snake’ (*tirēša*), and a ‘rake with six prongs.’ ^CAwaḍallah defined *birriyya* as a *ḥarba, nō^C min issilāḥ*: ‘lance, a kind of weapon.’

509 *mārid* is a species of djinn characterized by the ability to grow to an immense size; see Aḥmad Amīn, *Qāmūs al-^Cādāt wa-al-taqālīd wa-al-ta^C ābīr al-miṣriyya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-naḥḍa al-miṣriyya, n.d.), p. 387.

511 Lit. trans.: ‘you will taste how much is the price!’

513 *ya galīl ilxāl*: lit.; ‘O you who have few maternal uncles.’ A man will be addressed: *ya ṭayyib ilxāl*; ‘O you who has a good maternal uncle’; see Edward William Lane, trans., *A Thousand and One Nights* (hereafter *1001*) (London: East-West Publications; Cairo: Livres de France, 1979), vol. 1, p. 385.

519 According to ^CAwaḍallah, *gidūs* or ‘holy’ is the war cry to gather the infidel soldiers. It is a word ^CAwaḍallah might have heard from Coptic Arabic ritual, namely, the *Trisagion*, the thrice-repeated word ‘holy.’ He says it is the name of Jesus (*īsa*) in the Bible. The audience said that the gong and bells are characteristic of non-Muslims in time of war as a call to arms.

527 ^CAwaḍallah explained to me that Sanyūra, the sister of the Jewish king, like many of the women in the epic, is a diviner and geomancer. She casts the sands and therefore knows the identity of the disguised black poet and his three companions at the court of the king of Iraq. This is an example of an unstated plot device familiar to the audience. For the use of the dream and geomancy in the Hilali saga, see Giovanni Canova, “La funzione del sogno nella poesia epica hilaliana,” *Quaderni di studi arabi* 2 (1984): 107-25.

540 Maurice Salīb suggests another translation: ‘your words come from a full mouth,’ i.e., your words are forcefully spoken.

543 ^CAwaḍallah explained that the punned word was both DÜRĠĀM meaning ‘lion,’ and also the name of ^CĀmir’s father.

545 ^CAwaḍallah locates Kiwān to the west of Tunis (*ḡarb tūnis*). It is for him a location named after one of the early Jewish kings of Tunis.

549 ^CAwaḍallah defines *mikawwan*, ‘foreordained’ as *maktūb ^Calēhum*, ‘written upon them.’

557 The punned word ḤAZĀNA was explained to me by the audience to mean both SADNESS and MY POSSESSION: ‘You took from my arts, MY POSSESSION.’ Lines 557-60:^CAwaḍallah inserts a quatrain about his art.

- 562 An alternate trans.: ‘your words come from within ^CĀmir,’ i.e., you sound just like the enemy ^CĀmir.
- 572 This line also translates: ‘I took it as serious words for a short time,’ or ‘is it serious that you took the city?’
- 573 ^CAwaḍallah and the audience defined *hāwid illēl* as ^C*umq illēl*, ‘deep night,’ which is after midnight.
- 580 In the narrative, ^CAwaḍallah’s construction of *wa*, ‘and’ + noun + *wa*, ‘and’ + verb, serves as a device to move the characters of the epic into and out of a scene. A possible translation, giving the sense of the poet’s stage directions would be: ‘Enter ^CĀmir running.’
- 582 ‘The father of Rayya’ is another epithet for the hero Abu Zayd, whose daughter is named Rayya.
- 583 ^CAwaḍallah defined *ḥirām* as *abāya*, *baṭaniyya*, ‘cloak, blanket.’
- 585 Skin colorations from light to dark and their terms were explained to me as (1) *?asmar*: ‘brown or dark,’ (2) *?azrag*: for a Sudanese black, (3) *?aswad bi Cakār*: ‘deep black,’ and (4) *?aswad gātim*: ‘extreme coal-black.’
- 586 *-ssidd* shows the assimilation of ‘t’ in the second-person singular *tsidd*.
- 598 Maurice Salib suggests a possible pun for BALADAK, ‘your land’: BALA DAKK, ‘leave it undevastated,’ due to the strong stress on the last syllable *dak*.
- 600 ^CAwaḍallah explained that the pun on the Princess Dawāba’s name meant DA WABA, ‘this plague.’
- 627 When I reviewed the tape with ^CAwaḍallah several months later, he glossed *rāyih ḡarbi*, ‘going westward,’ as a pun that also meant *rīḥ ḡarbi*, ‘west wind,’ which he defined as *xamasīn*, the hot southerly wind of Egypt.
- 633 The audience suggested an alternate translation for lines 633-34:
633 ^CĀmir said to them: “Forward to war
634 against the adversary ...”
- 654 *hagg*: Roth-Laly, *Lexique des parlers arabes*—‘pourboire, prix’; Socrates Spiro, *An Arabic-English Dictionary of the Colloquial Arabic of Egypt* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1973)—‘price.’
- 702 ^CAwaḍallah gave three meanings to the punned word KĒ ?ANA: ‘like here,’ KĒ HINĀ?; ‘Jews,’ KAHĀNA; ‘like myself,’ KĒ ?ANA.
- 707 FILLED HIS EYE means ‘to be his equal, to be impressive.’
- 731 Tape not clear, possibly: *?ismaCna*. This gives the alternate trans.: ‘Hear us, when an elder speaks.’
- 744 ^CAwaḍallah used the word ^C*ahd*, which the audience interpreted as *mahd* or ‘cradle.’ ^CAwaḍallah defined ^C*ahd* as ^C*umru kullu*, ‘all his life.’ ^CAwaḍallah employed a classical Arabic phrase *min Cahd* unknown to the audience. The colloquial expression *min yōmi*, meaning the same thing, would have been understood by the audience.
- 745 Some members of the audience interpreted *nazāla*, ‘wretched,’ to mean the word for ‘guest,’ *nazīl*, which gives the translation: ‘to cast off guests is dishonor.’ Ṣa^Cīdi dialect: ^C*indīna*; Cairene: ^C*andina*, ^C*andīna*.
- 747 *ḥirān*: instance of an internal unstressed long vowel in Ṣa^Cīdi dialect, not found in Cairene.
- 757 ^CAwaḍallah said that Abu Zayd stole his book of tricks from Jāyil, an early adversary in Part I of

the *Sīra*. Jāyil, who also employed a magic belt, *mantiga*, was finally overpowered when Abu Zayd called upon his protector al-Khiḍr. ʿAwaḍallah said that the book of tricks dates from the days of King David, who passed it on to King Solomon, the latter considered to be the ruler of the djinns (*ḥākīm iljinn*). To further clarify the matter for me, ʿAwaḍallah compared Abu Zayd’s book of tricks to a green book I always carried with me and frequently consulted. ʿAwaḍallah called my book *nagūs*, the word for ‘church bell’ or ‘gong.’ It was, in fact, Hans Wehr’s Arabic-English dictionary, and the word for dictionary in Arabic is *qāmūs*.

769 The three meanings of the pun KĒH ANA were explained to me by the audience. See n. 702.

786 ʿ*adnān*: name of tribal confederation to which the Prophet Muḥammad belonged.

791 ʿAwaḍallah alternates pronunciation of the word ‘ode’: *giṣṭāl*, *giṣḍāl* or *giṣṭān*, *giṣṭān*.

814 ʿAwaḍallah explained that ʿĀmir, King of Iraq, has mistreated his four poet guests, namely, Abu Zayd and his three nephews.

826 ʿAwaḍallah defined *xarmān* as *milaxbaṭ*, ‘confused.’ *xarmān* is generally used for cigarette craving. In Redhouse, *Turkish-English Dictionary*, *harman* is defined as ‘a low feeling from lack of narcotics.’ Martin Schwartz informs me that *xarmanis* in Greek slang means a craving for marijuana.

830 *binj*: Lane, 1001, vol. 1, p. 117, n. 46—hemp, henbane, used to induce intoxication. In M. A. H. Ducros, *Essai sur le droguier populaire arabe de l’inspectorat des pharmacies du Caire*, Mémoires de l’Institut d’Égypte (Cairo: Imprimerie de l’Institut Français d’archéologie Orientale, 1930), vol. 15, p. 11: “*bizr el bing*, *Hyoscyamus albus* L.: C’est la graine de la Jusquiame, qu’elle soit blanche ou noire ... employée comme calmant et comme hypnotique, soit prise à l’intérieur, soit en cataplasmes ou en frictions.”

842 This is a formulaic phrase said after someone’s death. Lit. trans.: ‘here the condition of the world has come to your father.’ The ‘condition’ refers to death. Here Abu Zayd is telling Dawāba that her father has died. The audience understood this and commented on Dawāba’s father’s death.

843 The tape ended at line 843 after the word *madamitš*. Lines 844-48, within brackets, were supplied later by ʿAwaḍallah.

847 The meaning of ʿ*alamīn* is not clear. If it means ‘all-knowing,’ it should be singular, ʿ*ālim*, and follow the subject as in the formulaic phrase: *rabbi ʿālim bi -lḥāl*, ‘My Lord knows our conditions.’ It is possible that ʿAwaḍallah confused the above formulaic phrase and the Koranic phrase: *rabb ilʿalamīn*, ‘Lord of the worlds.’

858 Later, several people explained to me why they were laughing: *kullu kizb fi kizb*, ‘everything is lie upon lie.’ This is because Abu Zayd tells Dawāba that her father is dead, though he is only drugged.

861 *gamīs*: two shirts or shifts are worn by Ṣaʿīdi women, the inner shirt, *kumblēzōn* (French *combinaison*?) and the outer one, *jarrār*.

871 *falfūs*: ʿAbd al-Ghafūr defined this word as *gawi ʾaktar min illāzim*, ‘more powerful than necessary.’ Spiro, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, defines this word as a corruption of *faylasūf* ‘philosopher.’ My translation, ‘wise, stalwart,’ follows ʿAwaḍallah’s explanation.

901 *guṭb*, lit.: ‘pole, axis, pillar.’ For a description of the hierarchy and miracle-working powers of the

saints, see Lane, 1001, vol. 1, pp. 208-16.

902 Later when I asked ^CAwaḍallah how al-Khiḍr could be an ^Cōn, ‘a helper,’ he said he was mistaken and corrected the line, using another appellation of al-Khiḍr, namely, Mitwalli:

?illa wa jā-lu mitwalli

then suddenly Mitwalli came to him

920 The audience explained to me the pun on DAWĀBA. They suggested an alternate meaning: ‘you healed my wound, DAWĀBA.’

925 The verb ‘to marry’ can also mean ‘to take’: ‘we fear the Jew will take her.’

928 *xuttār*: Roth-Laly, *Lexique des parlers arabes*— ‘traveler, voyager, passant, hôte.’

933 ^CAwaḍallah defined *kalām bi ganūn* as *kalām bi ritāba, bi -l?adab*, ‘ordered, polite words.’

937 *misra* is the Coptic month that corresponds to August, a time when the Nile River, before the construction of the Aswan Dam, flooded the land. See Yacoub Artin, “Devises qui accompagnent les noms des mois coptes dans le langage populaire arabe, en Egypte,” *Bulletin de l’Institut Egyptien* 2 (1891):263.

958 *ǧūl* in Ṣa^Cīdi dialect can refer not only to a mythical beast or ghoul, but also to a powerful animal or even a human being. During a performance featuring the Hilali poet, Fawzi Jād, who was preceded by a group of entertainers, when the poet finally arrived on the scene, the person next to me announced: *?ahō ja -lǧūl*, ‘here comes the ghoul.’

960 ‘What is YOURLAND?’ means ‘where are you from?’ ^CAwaḍallah explained that the punned word ^CARĀḌĪK means ‘your land,’ or ‘I want you, I need you,’ or ‘I would please you,’ or ‘you would please me.’

968 ^CAwaḍallah explained that the phrase ^Ca -ssūr, ‘at the wall,’ puns with ^Ca -ssīra, ‘talking about it.’

973 Fixed expression in Ṣa^Cīdi dialect; see Doss, “Le dialecte Sa^Cīdi,” p. 221: “qu’as-tu à faire avec ..., quelle est ton affaire avec... .”

980 In Baker, “Hilali Saga,” pt. 1, p. 41, lines 14-17, a ferocious horse is similarly described:

Now they had a horse, whoever is condemned to death

They put him in that stall where the horse is

He crunches him up and eats him—people are his food!

They let down his water and barley to him in a pail.

998 *karbūs*: Carl Raswan, “Vocabulary of Bedouin Words Concerning Horses,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 4 (1945): 119—*karbūz*.

999 Abu Zayd’s trick of sitting reversed upon his horse, facing his horse’s tail, also appears in J. R. Patterson’s translation of *Stories of Abu Zeid the Hilali in Shuwa Arabic* (London: Kegan Paul, 1930), p. 34. In this tale, Abu Zayd and his nephew Yaḥya are escaping from a sultan who wishes to kill them: “when they mounted on the camel, it set off toward their homeland, and they sat looking towards its tail.” The sultan does not pursue them, assuming since they are facing him, they will soon draw near. In this manner they escape.

1004 *milḥit*, lit.: ‘salty.’ ^CAwaḍallah defined the word as *wisix*, ‘dirty,’ and ^C*ifiš*.

1005 The audience interpreted ^C*ugēlak* as either the diminutive of ^C*agl*, ‘reason, brain,’ or as the black headband that keeps the white headcloth of the Bedouin Arab in place: ‘can it be, your headband has slipped away from you?’

1015 For a translation of *ya* ^C*ēni* see n. 143.

1032 A proverb known to the audience is paraphrased by ^CAwaḍallah: *kalām illēl madhūn bi zibda yiṭla*^C ^C*alēh innihār wi yisīh*, ‘The promise of night is rubbed with butter which melts away when the day shines upon it.’ See John Lewis Burckhardt, *Arabic Proverbs* (London: Curzon Press, 1972), p. 201, no. 561.

1034 The punned word JAMALHA also means ‘in her beauty’: ‘I want Dawāba in HER BEAUTY.’

1053 ^CAwaḍallah defined ^C*aṣāyib* as *mandīl*, ‘handkerchief, scarf and also ^C*asaba*, ‘clan, family’: ‘O woman from a mighty clan.’

** ^CAwaḍallah corrects a gloss of the word *tsōmir*, mistakenly defined by a member of the audience as ‘she hangs back,’ instead of the correct, ‘she chants.’

1069 ^CAwaḍallah defined ^C*uzzāl* as ‘enemy’; however the audience understood the word as it is commonly used in Upper Egyptian songs, namely, ‘the person who comes between, and causes distress to lovers.’

1093 Lit. trans.: ‘Dawāba of the languorous cheeks.’

1109 I was told that the punned word FI-DĀHA also means ‘silver,’ FADḌITHA: ‘she is beautiful, SILVER BRACELETS,’ or FIDĀHA, ‘I will DEFEND HER.’

1110 The word *xāl* was also translated by the audience as ‘maternal uncle,’ referring to the uncle Abu Zayd: ‘when horse clashes upon the uncle.’ ^CAwaḍallah suggested another interpretation, *xāl* meaning ‘wide, empty spaces,’: ‘when horses clash upon empty spaces.’

1111 Later in reviewing the tape with ^CAwaḍallah, he said he was mistaken, and the audience was correct. In fact it was Yūnis, not Yaḥya, that stayed behind to defend the Princess Dawāba. In the next line, 1112, ^CAwaḍallah begins with ‘Mar^Ci said’ and informed me that here he was also mistaken. Yaḥya is supposed to be speaking and since he wasn’t certain, ^CAwaḍallah sang both names. In Baker, “*Hilali Saga*,” she notes mistakes in the narration, usually of an epic character’s name, made by the storytellers. In pt. 1, p. 329, line 7, Dhiyāb’s name replaces ‘Bū Zayd’; on p. 332, line 5, the name ‘Ḥassan’ is used instead of the correct ‘Dhiyāb’; on p. 257, lines 14, 16, ‘Hilālī’ instead of ‘Zanāti,’ and on p. 307, lines 11-14, part of the narration is the storyteller announcing that he forgot the name of a king.

line 1111: alternate translation ‘my soul is in her hands.’

1115 Alternate trans.: ‘Yūnis’s conduct is excellent.’

1138 ^CAwaḍallah defined LĪK as *kalām katīr*, ‘too much talk.’ He said the singular form is LĪK and the plural LAK.

1148 The audience suggested also ^CA -TTĀR: ‘much of art is about vengeance.’

1149 Unclear tape, possibly ?ASA: ‘and the burden upon me, TORMENT FROM OPPRESSION.’

1151 ^CAwaḍallah creates a rhymed punned quatrain in order to announce a cigarette break. During the

performance, members of the audience would place cigarettes next to the poet until a small pile was formed. ^CAwaḍallah's poetic plea for a break, which did not end with the customary closure, *muḥammad niṣalli ^Calēh*, 'Muḥammad, we praise Him,' followed directly upon the moment when the host placed a cigarette onto the pile. The professional epic poets' abilities to improvise poems immediately appropriate to the situation are in contrast to the Tunisian storyteller, in Micheline Galley and Abderrahman Ayoub, *Histoire des Bani Hilal ...* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1983), p. 129, who announces in midtale: *xalli nirtāḥu, wi nitkayyif sijāru*, 'laisse-moi me reposer. Je vais fumer une cigarette.'

1156 ^CAwaḍallah metathesized *julmūd*.

1162 ^CAwaḍallah defined *dūni* as a contraction of *da ?ana, ya^Cni ?ana w- inta sawa*, 'I and you together.'

1163 ^CAwaḍallah explained that the world was one tree, a tree of souls, *sajar ?arwāḥ*. Each person has a leaf on the tree, and during the month of Sha^Cban, the tree shakes, a leaf falls, and someone must die. No one in the audience was familiar with this image or the name of the tree. In Dueros, *Essai sur le droguier*, vol. 15, pp. 119-20, a plantain tree, *Plantago Media L.*, is also known as *maṣāṣa*. Lane describes the same belief of man's fate and life determined during the month of Sha^Cban. He reports the name of the tree as the "lote tree of Paradise" (Koran 53:14); see his *Manners and Customs*, p. 435-36.

1170 ^CAwaḍallah defined *kēf*, 'intoxicant,' as *ḥamra*, 'wine,' and *ḥašīš*, 'hashish.'

1211 Alternate meaning: 'SAD stories from my arts.'

1227 *Abu Sabra* is one of the many names of the hero Abu Zayd. Here his name plays upon the fact that he has a son, Ṣabr, and *ṣabr* also means 'patient,' or 'the patient man.'

1261 *madad* "signifies ... spiritual or supernatural aid, and implies an invocation for such aid"; see Lane, *Manners and Customs*, p. 414.

1 However, see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (New York: Pocket Books, 1974), pp. 13-14, on bathing and toilet arrangements aboard his ship to Brazil; and Richard Critchfield, *Villages* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1981), pp. 356-57, who writes amusingly about his inability to defecate amid communal village arrangements and chose instead a mad early morning dash to a swanky city hotel.

CONCLUSION

Upper Egyptians (Ṣaʿīdis) honor the words, not the person, of the poet. The Hilali poet is an outsider, a gypsy, an outcast, sexually dangerous, all this despite the fact that he alone speaks the true history of the Arabs. What ʿAwaḍallah wants to demonstrate in his performance is that one ought to honor a poet, that the poet, despite prevailing custom, should be treated with respect and hospitality. Though he may arrive disguised as a black slave or be a feeble old man, the poet is truly a warrior in deeds and in speech. In the Hilali tale narrated by ʿAwaḍallah, the audience learns how the King of Iraq, ʿĀmir Khafāji, is tricked repeatedly not only because he is the protagonist in the equation of father-daughter incest, but also because he must be punished by a poet for disregarding the worth of a poet.

Upper Egyptians regard the epic poet as the bearer of an epic story-telling tradition, not as an individual creative artist. ʿAwaḍallah shows his improvisatory abilities by playing with the plot of the well-known story of ʿĀmir Khafāji. He frames the princess's rescue story and its message of father-daughter incest with a cautionary tale to his audience about the perils of mistreating artists. Through the power of his words to insult and to praise, ʿAwaḍallah transcends his place within the social hierarchy. The colloquial language poet and epic singer exploit the Ṣaʿīdi Arabic dialect and its multiple meanings by means of punning techniques that allow him to reverse Egyptian codes of conversation and politeness, to subvert obsequiousness, and to express anger and true sentiments. Furthermore, the performance context in which the puns are uttered along with the literary, textual analysis of the story of ʿĀmir Khafāji validate certain claims. What initially appears to be a tale of father-daughter incest in the narrative of the tale, is recast during ʿAwaḍallah's performance of the tale to his male Egyptian audience, in terms of a mother-son constellation. In the context of the performance, in the relationship of the poet performing the oral recitation of a (father-daughter incest) text,

ʿAwaḍallah rebukes a member of the audience by a scandalous allusion embedded in the epic narrative, one which brings up the possibility of the mother’s eroticism.

In a parallel instance of sex-role reversals, just as my friends in Upper Egypt turned a Western female into an “honorary male” for the purposes of epic performance attendance, so too did they reverse daughters into sons and fathers into mothers in order to conform to their customary practice of the absent, but powerful, woman. Male terror of women is expressed in a mutually reinforcing manner in a way that combines literary and social mores: a foreign woman is treated as a man when given the privilege of joining the audience for a narrative that evokes the son’s relations with his mother. However, the fearsomeness of women is particularized; it is neither the virginal daughter nor the peculiar case of a female “honored” with ambiguous male prerogatives, but, rather, the fear of the mature woman and mother who is regarded as dangerous.

Thus, both audience and poet parade linguistic ingenuity to cover a dark secret, namely female and maternal eroticism. Puns give voice to competing ideas and allow the poet to express and the audience to understand, that something is the case and at the same time to deny it nonetheless. A genuine and good performance of the Hilali epic demands that poet and audience know each other well, that they have rich, textured lives in common. The poet must know his audience not just to please them in the obvious sense of entertainment, but also to strike fear and anger in the listener’s heart. Epic poetry may be pleasing, but above all, it is truthful because it not only pleases and entertains, it also commemorates famous deeds of Arab history. ʿAwaḍallah’s performance of oral epic poetry delights because it commemorates the truth, a truth that is both entertaining in itself and pleasurable communicated.

ʿAwaḍallah characteristically ends an evening’s rendition with a closing poem of salutations. In the example below, which I taped on June 2, 1983, three months after the occasion of the performance text, ʿAwaḍallah singles out a member of the audience, a man who is the son of Ibrahīm as-Sāwi, and honors him by punning on the name of his father, which is, at the same time, the second and third part of the son’s full name. Previously, ʿAwaḍallah had converted my name, Susan, which he pronounced sōsō into a punned word, *soww* ¹ *soww*, that meant ‘both together’ or ‘the two of us together.’ In this case, ʿAwaḍallah puns on the name *Ibrahīm*, with the word *brahīm*, meaning ‘salve,

ointment,' and the name *as-Sāwi*, 'we compose.' With his punning artistry, ʿAwaḍallah draws foreign females into a friendly partnership and considers Ibrahīm's son a healing medicine that is related to the speech which ʿAwaḍallah composes. In conclusion, ʿAwaḍallah completes his performance in the following manner.

ʿAwaḍallah

TAḤIYYĀT SALUTATIONS

kalām l- ilḥabāyib JAMAʿNA [*aside*] JĀʿ MAʿNA

Words to loved ones BROUGHT US TOGETHER [*aside*] GIVE MEANING,

kalām l- ilḥabāyib JAMAʿNA

words to loved ones BROUGHT US TOGETHER,

mita -ššarṭ wi murr ^I DA XILLA

when there are bitter conditions, THERE IS FRIENDSHIP,¹

yōm ʿīd illi jamaʿna

a festive day brought us together,

?imsāy li kull il?axilla

my evening greetings to all close friends.

masāy ʿala -nnās zēnin

My evening greetings to all good people,

ʿarab bayyaḍ alla tanāhum

Arabs, may God make pure their honor,

yimurru ʿala -lgēs wi -llīn

they spurn the unworthy and weak,

ḥalafu ma fātu ʿidāhum

they swear not to ignore their enemies.

ṭabīb li -jjarāyih BRAHĪM

Healer of wounds, A SALVE²

w- ana -lgōl ʿindi ʔinsāwi

and as for me, speech is what I compose,

ʔin massa jīb 1- ibrahīm

if the son of Ibrahīm gives evening greetings,

min aṣl min ilʔab sāwi

he whose origin is the father as-Sāwi.

ʔagra ḥirūfi ya ʿabd ijjalīl

Read my letters, O ʿAbd aj-Jalīl,

mita -nnisr yišbah ḥabāyib

when does the eagle resemble loved ones,

salāmi li ʿabd ilġafūr wi ʿabd ijjalīl

my greetings to ʿAbd al-Ghafūr and ʿAbd aj-Jalīl,

salamāt ya ʿazz ilḥabāyib
greetings, O dearest of loved ones.

Audience

šukran
thank you

ʿAwaḍallah

nabīna -lmušarraf GĀʿID -DDĪN

Our sublime Prophet, LEADER OF RELIGION,

wi nazkur rabbi wāḥid

we mention our Lord, Who is One,

inmassi ʿala kull ilGĀʿDIN

we give evening greetings to all those SEATED,

mansāš wala zōl wāḥid

I would forget not a single one.

Audience

barak allāh fīk

Thank you

(God's blessings upon you.)

¹ ᵀAwaḍallah explained that DA XILLA, 'there is friendship,' is a pun that also means DAXILA, 'within oneself: 'when there are bitter conditions within oneself.'

² ᵀAwaḍallah begins a rhymed quatrain to honor a member of the audience whose name is ᵀAbd al-Minᵀim Ibrahīm as-Sāwi. ᵀAwaḍallah begins with a pun on the name 'Ibrāhim.' He compares it with the word for 'salve, ointment,' *brahīm*, (sing. *barḥam*), the Ṣaᵀīdi pronunciation of the same Cairene word, *mrahīm* (sing. *marḥam*). ᵀAwaḍallah puns the surname 'as-Sāwi' with the word *?insāwi*, 'we compose.'

Appendix A

Notes on Translation and Transliteration

TRANSLATION

For the purposes of smoother translation and easier reading, names of characters are substituted for pronouns in the following lines of the performance text: lines 85, 86, 105, 135, 176, 314, 316, 324, 343, 351, 352, 446, 448, 471, 472, 486, 487, 495, 539, 584, 607, 657, 663, 709, 767, 783, 818, 857, 893, 904, 913, 960, 1012, 1029, 1073, 1210, 1230, 1237, 1260, 1298, 1307, and 1329.

TRANSLITERATION

Two systems of transliteration have been employed: (1) for written and printed material in literary Arabic, the English transliteration system set out by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* has been followed, and (2) for Ṣaʿīdi Arabic the convention below has been followed:

Vowels

Long

ā back or front long vowel

ē as in English 'rate' (rēt)

ī 'beet' (bīt)

ō ‘boat’ (bōt)

ū ‘pool’ (pūl)

Short

a back or front short vowel

i as in English ‘pin’ or ‘pen’

u ‘too’

A macron over the vowel marks stressed long vowels.

The helping vowel (epenthetic) is superscript ^l. It is inserted under various circumstances, in particular across a word boundary (#) in the following context:

C # Helping vowel C C

Example: bu -rgāb ^l -ṭwāl (The “inherent” shwa of ṭiwāl is elided.)

Consonant Table of Ṣaḥīdi Arabic

	Labial	Dental	Emphatic	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Vcls stops		t	ṭ		k	q		ʔ
Vcd stops	b	d	ḍ		g			
Vcls fricatives	f	s	ṣ	š		x	ħ	h
Vcd fricatives		z	ẓ	j*		ġ	c	
Nasals	m	n						
Lateral		l						
Flap-trill		r						
Semi-vowels	w			y				

* Madiha Doss, “Le dialecte Saḥīdi,” p. 26, employs the convention g^y to

express the highly palatalized *jīm* of the Ṣaḥīd.

Hyphen

1. The hyphen accounts for elision that occurs as a result of liaison. If the vowel at the end of one word and the vowel at the beginning of the next word are the same, the first vowel is considered primary (following the rule of order of appearance), even if the second vowel receives stress:

Example: ^ˈcala an^{hī} —> ^ˈcala -n^{hī} (line 884)

If the vowel at the end of one word and the vowel at the beginning of the next word are different, the order of vowel strength followed is a —> u —> i.

Examples: di ummi —> d- ummi

 ya ummi —> ya -mmi

For reasons of grammatical significance, an exception is made for:

 ma adri —> m- adri (line 829).

2. The following are considered independent words in the transcription:

u

wi

bi

li (except if indirect object)

^ˈa

^ˈala

fī

kē

3. The hyphen joins the indirect object particle *li* and its conjugated forms to the preceding verb.

Example: sāyib-lak

Phonological Features

1. Doubling of the *l* of the indirect object after a two-consonant cluster plus helping vowel (also a characteristic of Syro-Palestinian dialects); example:

Cairene *Ṣacīdi*

ʔin gult^I -li ʔin gult^I -lli (lines 898, 984, 1012)

2. Metathesis:

Cairene *Ṣacīdi*

ʕaṣṣān ʕaṣṭān

3. Dissimilation: š to s (near j)

Classical *Ṣacīdi*

ašjār asjār

šijcān sijcān

4. Dissimilation: n to l (with the exception of gisṭān, gisṭāl alternation)

Cairene *Ṣacīdi*

gisṭān gisṭāl, gisṭān

finjān finjāl

ʕunwān in kāl

ʕunwāl

5. Nasal dissimilation:

Cairene *Ṣaḥīdi*

makān makān, bakān

6. Assimilation of the palatal voiced fricative:

Example: ^cAbd aj-Jalīl

7. Affricate (j) is sometimes a stop (d) in *Ṣaḥīdi*:

Cairene: g *Ṣaḥīdi*: d *Classical*: j

gēš dēš jayš

Demonstratives

	Masculine	Feminine	Plural
Proximal reference	da	di	dōla
Distal reference	dak diyya, dikka	dīk dikka	dōla dōla

Wāw of Narration

wa ('and') + noun + *wa* + verb

Example: line 580

wi ^cāmīr wi ṭalaḥ yijri
and ^cĀmir and emerged running
Then ^cĀmir came out running

This appears to be a linguistic device to move the narrative forward and characters in and out of a scene, as if stage directions were intended:

‘exit cĀmir running’

¹ I am grateful to Maurice Salib, my Arabic language professor from 1979 to 1985 at the American University in Cairo and the University of California, Berkeley, for helping me to understand the linguistic structures of Ṣaċīdi Arabic. The protocol governing the linguistic transcription used throughout this book emerged from an extended and still ongoing analysis of Upper Egyptian recordings. I am deeply indebted to Salib’s guidance and learning.

For more detail on the grammar of the Ṣaċīdi dialect, the reader is referred to the works of Doss and Khalafallah (see Bibliography).

Appendix B

Partial List of Oral-Formulaic Phrases and Epithets

The identification of an oral-formulaic phrase presupposes at least two occurrences within a text. However, the examples listed below are based not only upon the performance text, where some examples only appear once, but also upon my acquaintance with more than thirty-five hours of ʿAwaḍallah’s version of *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*. As in the main text, a capitalized word indicates a pun.

A and Other Vowels

?*abu*

?*abu kalām min ilfann* ʿĀMIR
eloquent, RICH in arts of speech
line: 145

?*abu farš ġāli* KLĀMAK

you, whose cushions are well-appointed, whose carpets precious
line: 30

see also line 1070: his cushions well-appointed, his carpets precious

?*abu -lʿumdān / abu ʿumdān*

the many-pillared one
lines: 89, 776, 788, 800, 1040

?*adi -lḥarb w- adi -lwaġa*

here is war and here is tumult
lines: 672, 1160

?illi yiḥīš tuwrīh liyyām
to him who lives long enough, time shows all
lines: 391, 1259

see also line 1205: O, whoever lives long enough, O fate, to him you show
all

ulād

ulād sirḥān humma talāta
the sons of Sirḥān, the three of them
line: 77

bi -wlād sirḥān kānu talāta
for the sons of Sirḥān, they were three
line: 550

?umm

?umm xadd warrād
of the rose-colored cheeks
line: 117

ya -mm ilḥuyūn ilkaḥāyil
O woman of kohl-darkened eyes
line: 51

ya -mm ilḥalag wi dalāyil
O women wearing earrings, coquettish
lines: 249, 1088, 1096, 1119

dawāba -mm ḥalag wi dalāl
Dawaba wearing earrings, coquettish
line: 711

baħr ʾ yuxbuṭ bi gilcēn
he is a river making boat sails clash
lines: 146, 1132

baṭṭil

baṭṭil kalāmak
cease your words
line: 273

baṭṭil ya zarbūn
enough, O vile black slave
line: 316

baṭṭil ḥadītak
an end to your stories
line: 186

?inta ma baṭṭil
why not be silent
line: 263

baṭṭil gōlak
cease your speaking
lines: 280, 539

?in gult ʾ lli baṭṭil abaṭṭil
if you bid me to stop I shall stop
line: 290

bāl

bāl faḍyān
his (her, my) mind at ease
lines: 397, 616, 1122

faḍi -lbāl
mind at ease
lines: 755, 905, 1003, 1015, 1085

walla balāwi

By God, what folly!

lines: 390, 952, 1202, 1205, 1258

T

tis^cīn bēḍa

ninety fair maidens

lines: 384, 1045, 1094

?aya tilb tuhdur bi gulla

O stalwart camel, you spit in rage

lines: 176, 339, 529

J

jāb giṣḍān/giṣḍāl (see mawwāl)

he brought forth an ode

lines: 232, 264

jana ma^ca -nnār

Paradise and Hell

lines: 1167, 1245

H

ya ḥilwit iṭṭūl

O handsome of stature

lines: 243, 244, 1126

b -ḥyāt ṭurgit lamāna

I swear by the path of trust

lines: 253, 342, 532, 541, 604, 1131, 1326

X

yixāf min ilbard illa -l^caryān

who fears the cold but the naked

lines: 672, 1161

D

yidūs ilʔarāḏi -lmuxīfa
he treads upon fearsome lands
lines: 1237, 1339

dōla -w dōla
all these
lines: 380, 386, 388, 396

Z

ya zarbūn
O vile black slave
lines: 316, 488, 584, 1240, 1286, 1287, 1307

ya -zrag wišš ilġirbān
O black crow-face
lines: 585, 855, 1292

S

saba^c
-sbu^ca rabṭīn fi -jbāl
lions standing planted on the mountain
lines: 1187, 1225

saba^c fāriṭ BA^c iDĒN
a lion AT FULL STRETCH
lines: 80, 155, 157, 161, 165

lam yakl- issab^c naybi
the lion does not eat my portion
lines: 276, 742

sitt

sitt inniswān
the mistress of women

lines: 687, 1091, 1323

sitt innasawīn

the mistress of the ladies

lines: 97, 605, 1042, 1097

sijcān gaṣḍīn tūnis

courageous ones heading for Tunis

lines: 42, 149, 1127, 1322

saḥab issabīb wi gāl fi -lḥabīb

he drew on the bowstring and sang of the Beloved

lines: 227, 296

sakan liḥūd itturāyib

aḥsan yiskin liḥūd itturāyib

better he dwell among dusty tombs

lines: 691, 852

sallam ʿala -bu zēd BA^cDĒN

he gave greetings to Abu Zayd AFTERWARDS

lines: 152, 153, 159, 163

asmar

ya -smar

O dark one

line: 263

asmar ilalwān

the dark-colored one

lines: 533, 644, 949

fi -ssūg yigra^c nadīdu

in the fray he thrashes his rivals
line: 955

š

šabīh bahr misra lamma yizīd
he resembles the river in Misra, when it swells
line: 937

šūfi -ddunya -lkaddāba
look at the world of deceit
lines: 837, 841, 851

š

ša^cīb ya frāg ilḥibāyib
difficult, O loved ones' parting
lines: 689, 850, 866, 1299

šallu farayīḍ irraḥmān
they prayed the obligatory service to the Merciful One
lines: 203, 211

c

ista^cjab
yista^cjab illi ʔarāhum
all who beheld them were amazed
lines: 24, 34, 1026

ista^cjabit-lu kull ilmanāzil
all present were astonished by him
lines: 331

cār

tibga cār wast ilgabāyil
you are a dishonor among the tribes

line: 251

lamma ʔafūt il^cār
whenever I ignore dishonor
line: 609

rājil yifūt il^cār
when a man ignores dishonor
line: 613, 690

ʔana -mūt wala -fūt il^cār
I will die rather than ignore dishonor
line: 671

^candīna fōt innazāla ^cār
that for us to cast off the wretched is dishonor
line: 745

^carab bayyaḍ alla tanāhum
Arabs, may God make pure their honor
lines: 22, 1024, 1058, 1062, 1318

^cēn
baka bi dam^c il^cēn
he wept tears of his eyes
lines: 328, 332

bakit bi madma^c il^cēn
she wept tears from her eyes
lines: 859, 863

ʔabu zēd iṭalla^c fī bi -l^cēn
Abu Zayd's eyes glared at him (the slave)
lines: 85, 443, 444

bi ^cēnu naẓarha -lḥabāšī
the Abyssinian's eyes glaring at her

line: 118

u tunzur bi ^cēnak tarāha
and you gaze with your eyes to see her
lines: 1043, 1092

?abu zēd бага yigīm bi -l^cēn
Abu Zayd stared with his eyes
lines: 144, 298,

ilyahūdi gām bi -l^cēn
the Jew glared at him with his eyes
line: 490

^cāmir baygīm bi -l^cēn
^cĀmir stared with his eyes
line: 577

F

yifatfit ilkibd
cut the liver to pieces
lines: 95, 180, 1220

farḍ irraḥmān
lākin gaḍa farḍ irraḥmān
yet performed the obligatory prayer to the Merciful One
lines: 299, 576

farāyiḍ irraḥmān
lines: 203, 211

faḍīḥa
faḍīḥa u gillit gawanīn
a scandal, a lack of conduct
lines: 250, 254, 639
see also line 1054: faḍāyiḥ gillit gawanīn scandalous, a lack of conduct

tibga faḍāyih ḤADĀNA
it will be a scandal AMONG US
line: 610

K

kalām

iḥna -f kalāmna ʿumri MA NĀZIL [*aside*] MAN ZILL
never DO we GO BACK on our word [*aside*] ARE NOT MISTAKEN
line: 62

mita fi kalāmi MA NĀZIL
when DO I GO BACK on my word?
lines: 98, 179

kalām jadd

kalām jadd^I xattū NABĪNA [*aside*] NAYBI
earnest words, You, OUR PROPHET takes [*aside*] MY LOT I took
line: 7

kalām jadd^I xattu MADĪNA [*aside*] MUDDA?ANA
earnest words, they took the CITY [*aside*] I took it FOR A SHORT TIME
line: 572

kalām jadd^I xattu DA WABA
earnest words—they take THIS PLAGUE / DAWĀBA
lines: 599, 600, 1028

kalām jadd fanni ʿarāyib
my speech is earnest, my art is Arab
line: 222

L

laḥd

laḥd ittarāyib
dusty tomb

lines: 691, 852, 1301

laḥd ilʔarmāl

a tomb of sands

lines: 1221, 1243, 1290

lamma yulṭum izzān ʕa -zzān

when spear clashes upon spear

lines: 1059, 1063, 1106

lēltak abyāḍ ilʔayyām

your nights will be the happiest of times

lines: 226, 293

M

Muḥammad

muḥammad ʕuyūnu kaḥāyil

Muḥammad, His eyes kohl-darkened

lines: 11, 13

muḥammad niṣalli ʕalēh

Muḥammad we praise Him

lines: 218, 553, 1346

migdim (pl. *magādim*)

migdim salaṭīn

the vanguard sultans

line: 35,

migdim asmar ilʔalwān

he in the vanguard, the dark-colored one

line: 949

migdim ṣaʕība ligāta

the one in the vanguard, harsh in encounter

line: 154

migdim badīca -ṣfāta
the one in the vanguard, of sterling qualities
line: 158

magādim izayy innuwwār
valiant ones like flowers
lines: 624, 677, 1273

malak ilmōt
the angel of death
lines: 100, 101, 487, 502, 783, 785, 858, 1146

mawwāl: poem
lines: 229, 334, 358, 383

N

nisr
wala -nnisr yišbah ḤADĀNA
the vulture does not resemble the KITE
line: 67

mita -nnisr yišbah ḤADĀNA
when does the vulture resemble the KITE?
line: 608

nāṣir izzaġāba ma^ca -drēd
defender of the Zughba with the Dirēd
lines: 537, 721

W

wala dayya -mta^cta^c dayya
neither one moving the other
lines: 678, 1189

Y

yalla -l^cawāgib salāma
let the outcome be sure / onward may the outcome be sure
lines: 948, 989, 1123

yōm (pl.: *liyyām*)
yōm šūm jābak -ḥdāna
an evil day brought you among us
line: 344

Epithets of the hero Abu Zayd

ilḥabāši
the Abyssinian
line: 118

Abu Rayya
father of Rayya
lines: 194, 582, 1255

Abu Ṣabra
father of Ṣabr
line: 1227

Salāma
lines: 337, 534, 1120, 1125, 1176, 1180, 1224, 1328

attumunni
the longed-for one
lines: 397, 1120, 1341

Epithets of ^cĀmir

Abu Dawāba
father of Dawāba
lines: 324, 435, 663

jīb durḡām

son of Durghām

lines: 209, 381, 1029

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