

UNEARTHING A PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIAN PROPHET

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Before he died, Khālid b. Sinān asked his people to unearth his body three days after his burial. They disobeyed.

In the course of time, Khālid was almost entirely forgotten. In this study I try to unearth his story.¹

The cult of saints in Islam was amply described by Goldziher and others.² Various phenomena occur in the framework of this cult, generated, more often than not, by the popular imagination. Ancient gods, trees and stones are personified and turned into deceased holy men and women, etiologies breed fictitious saints, and so on.³ The following information, adduced by Goldziher, should, therefore, appear unexceptional:

The Arabs count as a prophet who preceded Muḥammad, a Khālid b. Sinān, from the tribe of 'Abs, who, in the generation prior to Muḥammad, fought paganism in the Ḥijāz. It is remarkable that it is just the Berbers who adopted this saint. The date is noted when the Maghribī marabout 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Akhḍarī claimed that from the emplacement of a grave near Biskra, in the country of Zāb, a strong light shined for three days and then spread towards the sky. He then declared this to be the grave of the prophet Khālid, who after his death was laid on the back of a camel, which was left to carry the body of the prophet to where it was to

¹ This study led me to investigate Algerian material. I am grateful to Frank Stewart for directing me to the relevant literature and for making many valuable comments. Thanks are also due to the participants of the colloquium for their comments, in particular Professors Maribel Fierro, Pesach Shinar, Yohanan Friedmann, and Michael Lecker.

² Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, vol. 2, pp. 255–341; Montet, *Culte des saints*; Doutté, *L'Islām algérien*, chaps. 5, 9 (see also the bibliography on p. 144); idem, *Les marabouts*. The literature is extensive, but these sources suffice for the purpose of this study. A survey of the French literature on the subject can be found in Julia Clancy-Smith, "In the Eye of the Beholder: Sufi and Saint in North Africa and the Colonial Production of Knowledge," *Africana Journal* 15 (1990): 220–57. For recent research (on modern marabouts) see, e.g., Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London 1969); idem, *Muslim Society*, chaps. 4–6, 10, 11, and references; Nikki R. Keddie, ed. *Scholars, Saints and Sufis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972).

³ Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, vol. 2, p. 319.

be buried. Since this revelation of al-Akhḍarī, the mosque which includes the alleged grave of the prophet became one of the foremost places for pilgrimages in the district of the Zāb. But the grave of this prophet is also shown in Tebessa.⁴

Considering that Biskra is situated in north-eastern Algeria and that al-Akhḍarī was a scholar and a Ṣūfī of the sixteenth century, this information is astonishing. It contains no clues to the questions of "why" and "how." Why should al-Akhḍarī make such a claim? If he needed a saint, why did he not adopt a contemporary local saintly figure, a village simpleton, or at least a local tree, as everyone else was doing in sixteenth century North Africa?⁵ Why and how did the memory of Khālid survive from the Jāhilī sixth century to the Islamic sixteenth century? Why and how did he make such a long journey from the Ḥijāz to a remote place in Algeria?⁶

Goldziher did not address these problems, but some scholars, mainly North African, did. The historian and traveler Abū al-Qāsim al-Zayyānī, who visited Khālid's tomb in the second half of the eighteenth century, remarks that he found no information about it in any book, except the *Rihla* of Abū Sālim al-'Ayyāshī. The latter, who traveled through the country in the seventeenth century, rejected the possibility that Khālid b. Sinān al-'Absī might be buried in that place. Neither did al-'Ayyāshī's shaykh, Abū Bakr b. Yūsuf, know of anything written about this matter. His guess was that the grave belonged to one of Jesus's apostles mentioned by exegetes in connection with *Sūrat Yāsīn*.⁷

As a matter of fact, a version of this view is still current in the settlement centered around Khālid's tomb, which is a small oasis in Wādī Jedī in Algeria, some hundred kilometers south-west of Biskra. During the 1950s, the anthropologist Horace M. Miner conducted research there. In his book he gives a brief account of the place's history. His account has it that "in the latter part of the [sixth] century, there came from the Arabian Hejaz a holy man named Sidi Khaled ben Sinan. He preached Christianity among the Berbers and some say that he prophesied the coming of the Prophet Mohammed. . . . Upon his death, Sidi Khaled was

⁴ Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, vol. 2, p. 321. The passage includes references omitted here.

⁵ Montet, *Culte*, p. 9; Doutté, *Les marabouts*, p. 43.

⁶ The grave, in fact, is situated several hundred kilometers south-west of Biskra, which was quite an important town; see below.

⁷ Qur'ān 36:13; al-Zayyānī, *Turjumāna*, pp. 150–51. Al-'Ayyāshī's shaykh appears here as Abū Bakr al-Saktānī, which is certainly wrong. The correct form is very difficult to read in al-'Ayyāshī, *Rihla*, vol. 2, p. 414; perhaps it is al-Sahnūnī. Al-'Ayyāshī's book, a lithograph, is very hard to find: I thank Yehoshua Frenkel, and in particular 'Aṭāllāh Copti, who made it possible for me to consult this volume. Cf. Ibn Hajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, p. 468, where the author rejects a report that Khālid is buried in the vicinity of Qayrawān.

buried on the south bank of the Oued Djedi...⁸ Unlike the Muslim scholars who preceded him by hundreds of years, Miner did not question the veracity of this story for the simple reason that he was not interested in history but in social institutions and Rorschach tests. He did, however, record the most current legend associated with Sidi Khaled: The holy man miraculously extinguished a forest fire in the cedar-covered Aurès mountains. A modern local saint relates that a fire attacked the atheists, burning all who encountered it. By day it appeared as smoke, by night it flamed and was seen at a distance of three days journey. Khaled beat the fire with a stick, invoking sacred names of Allāh, and thus extinguished it.⁹ The legend does not explain why the prophet should rescue the atheists; we may guess that he was trying to attract them to believe in Allāh. As will be presently shown, this modern account, recorded by Miner, is nearly identical with the legend associated with Khālid in ancient and late medieval Muslim literature, except that, of course, the original scene of the miracle is not the Algerian forest but the Hijāz.

Muslim literature counts Khālid b. Sinān among the prophets, and records his genealogy and a few legends. In what follows, I discuss Khālid's prophethood, the legends associated with him, and his transformation from an Arabian miracle worker to a prophet whose tomb, or rather tombs, attract devout Muslim pilgrims.

Khālid's Prophethood

Khālid belonged to the north Arabian tribe of 'Abs, once powerful but rather weakened by the time of the Prophet Muḥammad.¹⁰ His genealogy was Khālid b. Sinān b. Ghayth b. Murayṭa b. Makhzūm b. Mālik b. Ghālib b. Qūṭay'a b. 'Abs.¹¹ His time is not known, except that he flourished "between Muḥammad and Jesus." He is sometimes said to be the prophet sent to "the people of the *rass*," mentioned in the Qur'ān, but this may be due to a confusion between him and another Arabian prophet, Ḥanzala b. Ṣafwān.¹² Tradition relates that his daugh-

⁸ Miner and de Vos, *Oasis and Casbah*, pp. 19–20. De Vos is the co-author who contributed the analysis of the psychological tests run on certain members of the community. See also below, p. 17. And see the description of the village Sidi Khālid in Daumas, *Le Sahara*, pp. 150–51.

⁹ Miner and de Vos, *Oasis and Casba*, p. 20.

¹⁰ See Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-muḥabbar*, p. 248; Ibn Hazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-'arab*, p. 251; Jād al-Mawlā Bek, Ibrāhīm al-Bījāwī, and Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, *Ayyām al-'arab fī al-jāhiliyya* (Cairo, n.d.) pp. 246 ff, 349 ff; 'Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad al-Tha'libī, *Thimār al-qulūb fī al-muḍāf wa-l-mansūb*, Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, ed. (Cairo, 1965), p. 160.

¹¹ Ibn al-Kalbī, *Jamharat al-nasab*, p. 449.

¹² See Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, p. 468; al-Dasūqī, *Hāshiyat al-Dasūqī*, vol. 4, p. 312. On *aṣḥāb al-rass*, see Qur'ān 25:38, 50:12; *EI*², s.v., "Aṣḥāb al-rass," vol. 1, p. 692

ter came to see the Prophet. It is sometimes added that she was very old at the time. The Prophet addressed her as the "daughter of my brother [in prophethood]," or "daughter of a prophet," and told her that her father was "a prophet who was destroyed by his own people" (or, "a prophet whose people forfeited [guidance, by failing to believe in] him," *nabī ḍayya'ahu qawmuhu*). She, in turn, recognized the second verse of *Sūrat al-Ikhlās* (Qur'ān 112:2) when recited by Muḥammad: "Say, He is the One God, the firm God" (*qul huwa allāh aḥad, allāh al-ṣamad*).¹³ It is because of this tradition that Khālid is considered to be a prophet. Yet many works of the genre *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* ignore him, for he was neither a biblical nor a Qur'ānic figure. In addition, this tradition contradicts the saying attributed to Muḥammad that there was no prophet between Jesus and himself.¹⁴ Some theologians solved this contradiction by arguing that Khālid was sent to the Banū 'Abs alone and not to all Arabs.¹⁵ Other solutions are that he was not a messenger (*rasūl*) like Muḥammad, but only a prophet (*nabī*); that he had no law (*sharī'a*) to give; or, that he was sent to herald Muḥammad's prophecy.¹⁶ Other theologians, apparently Mu'tazilī, denied Khālid's prophethood altogether on the ground that he was a Bedouin. In keeping with the low opinion of Bedouins prevailing in Muslim society, they claimed that God could not and did not send a Bedouin prophet. They also had a Qur'ānic verse to support their claim: "We never sent before you any messengers except men from the towns, whom We inspired."¹⁷

(Wensinck). On the confusion between the two prophets see below, n. 39.

¹³ Al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, vol. 8, pp. 213–14 (one of the versions here has son, not daughter); al-Ḥalabī, *Insān al-'uyūn*, vol. 1, p. 23; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. 7, p. 32; Ibn Abī 'Adasa, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, fol. 136v; Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya, *Majmū'a*, fol. 36r. I would like to thank the Khālidīyya library in Jerusalem, and Dr. Lawrence Conrad, for the use of these two manuscripts. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, p. 229, n. 18. See also al-Bakrī, *Mu'jam*, vol. 2, p. 435; al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, vol. 4, p. 477; Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, vol. 2, p. 317 ('Affī's commentary); al-Qāshānī, *Sharḥ*, p. 266; 'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'rīkh al-Madīna*, vol. 2, pp. 421, 423, 426; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, vol. 1, p. 152; Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, p. 29; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, pp. 466–67, 468; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 448; al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij*, vol. 2, p. 950; idem, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, p. 276. I owe the last three references to Dr. Avraham Hakim.

¹⁴ Al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, vol. 8, p. 214.

¹⁵ Ḥaqqī, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, vol. 7, p. 368.

¹⁶ Al-Ḥalabī, *Insān al-'uyūn*, vol. 1, p. 23; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, p. 467; al-Qāshānī, *Sharḥ*, p. 265; see also al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 18, p. 220, and vol. 9, p. 137. On pre-knowledge of Muḥammad's mission among both pagans and monotheists, see, e.g., Fahd, *Divination*, pp. 83–88. Such traditions appear in the *ḥadīth*, in biographies of Muḥammad and in the *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* literature.

¹⁷ Qur'ān 12:109. See al-'Askarī, *al-Awā'il*, p. 22; Al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, vol. 4, p. 478. A rejection of Khālid's prophethood is also attributed to the imam Ja'far al-Sādiq, see al-Ṭabrisī, *Ihtijāj*, vol. 2, p. 346 (I would like to thank Dr. Avraham Hakim for this reference); al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 10, p. 179, and vol. 14, pp. 451,

Some people thought that Khālid had been a prophet sent to the Zoroastrians.¹⁸

Some of those who considered Khālid b. Sinān to be a prophet used his name in various contexts. For example, he is counted among the twelve prophets who spoke Arabic.¹⁹ As twelve is a formulaic number,²⁰ it may be said that his name serves as a filler.²¹ In the discussion of deeds constituting apostasy and the punishments incumbent upon such offenders, there is a category of people "cursing prophets whose prophethood is not universally recognized." Khālid serves as one of three examples.²² He also figures in philosophical literature. The philosopher and mystic Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240) describes in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* the various aspects of the Divine Wisdom (*ḥikma*), as represented by twenty-seven types of prophets.²³ Khālid b. Sinān is the 26th on the list, representing *ḥikma ṣamadiyya*; this is explained on the grounds that Khālid called on his people to believe in the Firm God (*al-ṣamad*), and that his people had recourse to him in exigencies.²⁴ Obviously, Ibn al-'Arabī bases this construction on the two disparate meanings of the root *ṣ m d*—that is, firmness and the giving of succor—as well as on two of the legends connected with Khālid: First that he used to recite the verse "He is the One God, the Firm God" (see above). Secondly, that he saved his people by extinguishing the disastrous fire (see below).

It is worthy of note that Khālid is the only true Arabian prophet (except Muḥammad) whose people, the tribe of 'Abs, did not become extinct. As a rule, the tribes of true Arabian prophets such as Hūd and Ṣāliḥ disappeared from the face of the earth. By contrast, Arabian prophets whose tribes did not become extinct, were declared by Islam to be false. These false prophets were, in fact, contemporary with Muḥammad. Khālid b. Sinān is the only exception to this rule.²⁵

462. Al-Rāwandī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, p. 277. However, Khālid's miraculous story is also transmitted on the authority of the same Ja'far. See al-Rāwandī, loc. cit.

¹⁸ Al-Ṭabrisī and al-Majlisī. This idea was perhaps generated as an inference drawn from the legend about Khālid and the fire (see below).

¹⁹ 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-ta'rīkh*, George Aguadé, ed. (Madrid, 1991), p. 27.

²⁰ The twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve apostles of Jesus, etc.

²¹ According to another version, there were four Arabian prophets: Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Shu'ayb and Muḥammad. Al-Zayyānī, *al-Turjumāna*, pp. 417, 453; al-Rāwandī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, p. 278.

²² The other two being al-Khiḍr and Maryam. Al-Dasūqī, *Hāshiyat al-Dasūqī*, vol. 4, p. 312.

²³ The number 27 is mystically symbolic. See Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, pp. 108, 110.

²⁴ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, vol. 2, pp. 213–14, 317–18; al-Qāshānī, *Sharḥ*, p. 265; Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, pp. 66–67, 109.

²⁵ The best-known false prophets are Musaylima of the Banū Ḥanīfa, Ṭulayḥa the Asadite, and al-Aswad al-'Ansī the Yemenite, who participated in the apostasy movement (*ridā*). Among the false prophets was yet another 'Absī, Niyār b. Rabī'a. See

The Legends Associated with Khālid b. Sinān in Muslim Literature

Various legends are told about Khālid. Chief among them are the fire legend, recounted in several versions, and the unearthing story. These two are usually loosely connected by the word "*thumma*" or "*wa-lammā*" ("and then"), but sometimes they are integrated in a more sophisticated way.²⁶

Muslim scholars report the existence of many types of fires used by the pre-Islamic Arabs, for instance: "the lion fire," lit in order to scare wild animals, "the war fire," lit to communicate news of an imminent battle, and so on. Among these was "the fire of the volcanic rock tract [*ḥarra*]," which appeared out of nowhere, reaching out and burning whoever happened to pass by.²⁷ By night it shone brightly, by day it was a pillar of smoke. Khālid's people asked him (another version is that he volunteered) to extinguish it, which he did, beating it with a stick, pursuing it into a cave then coming out unharmed; in another version he dug a pit and buried the fire in it.²⁸

This fire should not be included amongst "the fires of the Arabs" because all the other types of fire were lit for specific purposes, whereas *nār al-ḥarra* (or: *al-ḥarratayn*) was a spontaneous fire and an uncalled-for disaster. All the other fires fulfilled social functions, whereas *nār al-ḥarratayn* was a specific event that gave rise to a legend. The fire itself was not necessarily a legend since a similar fire, lasting some fifty

'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'rīkh al-madīna*, vol. 2, pp. 429–30. Cf. Fahd, *Divination*, p. 77, on the poet Umayya b. Abī al-Ṣalt who contended with Muḥammad for prophethood.

²⁶ In some versions Khālid died because his people disobeyed him in the fire story, and before he died he ordered that his body be unearthened after the burial. Al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, vol. 8, p. 213; 'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'rīkh al-madīna*, vol. 2, p. 422; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-talab*, vol. 7, p. 31; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, vol. 1, p. 154. There are similar versions in Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 14, pp. 448, 450; al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij*, vol. 2, pp. 950–52. See below the detailed stories and further references.

²⁷ Al-'Askarī, *Awā'il*, p. 22 (read *ḥarra* for *ḥaras*; *ḥarra* is an area covered with black stones, perhaps of volcanic origin); al-Qazwīnī, *'Ajā'ib*, p. 91; al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā*, vol. 1, p. 467; it is sometimes called "the fire of the two stony tracts," (*nār al-ḥarratayn*); al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, vol. 8, p. 213. It occurred in the stony tract belonging to the tribe of Ashja', between Mecca and Medina. Al-Bakrī, *Mu'jam*, vol. 2, p. 435; cf. Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, vol. 2, p. 252, and vol. 4, p. 728, the place called *Ḥarrat al-nār*, which belonged to the Banū 'Abs. The flame reaching out is described as "a neck," *'unq*, see below.

²⁸ Al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, vol. 8, p. 213; Al-'Askarī, *Awā'il*, p. 22; Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, vol. 2, p. 317 ('Affī's commentary); al-Qāshānī, *Sharḥ*, p. 265 (read *bilād 'abs* for *bilād 'adan*); 'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'rīkh al-madīna*, vol. 2, pp. 421–22, 424, 430–32; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, vol. 1, pp. 152–54 (with additional details); Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, pp. 467, 468; al-Rāwandī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, p. 277.

days, was reported in Medina in the year 654/1256.²⁹ The "stony tract fire" is mentioned by poets, perhaps independently of the Khālid story.³⁰ It is also called "the fire of Ḥadathān," which is the name of a stony tract in the territory of Banū 'Abs.³¹

The core of the story given above is embellished with various motifs in various versions. Some of these motifs are pronouncedly more monotheistic than others:

1. *Disbelief and disobedience.* Khālid's people (or, one of them) doubted his ability to fulfil his promise and extinguish the fire and/or to come out of the cave unharmed. They disobeyed his order to wait for him and to refrain from calling him even if he lingered behind in the cave.³²
2. *A marked, protected area.* Khālid marked an area where he seated the people who came to watch, and ordered them not to leave it.³³
3. *Monotheistic rage.* The Arabs worshiped the fire that appeared in the Hijāz (some say: in imitation of the Zoroastrians), so Khālid extinguished it out of anger on behalf of Allāh.³⁴
4. *Khālid as God's messenger.* It was God who sent Khālid to extinguish the disastrous fire.³⁵

²⁹ Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, vol. 1, pp. 142–52.

³⁰ E.g., Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, vol. 2, p. 317 ('Affī's commentary).

³¹ 'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'riḫ al-madīna*, vol. 2, pp. 421, 430; Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, vol. 1, p. 152. Al-Majlisī, however, says that "*al-ḥadathān*" is a distortion of *al-harratayn*. See al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 449. According to Ibn Abī 'Adasa, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, fol. 136r, and Ibn al-'Arabī, *Muḥāḍarat al-abrār*, vol. 1, p. 55, the fire was called "Dissipation" (?) (*budd, badd, or badā*), but this no doubt is a mistake: the word *badd* is taken from the rhymes uttered by Khālid while pursuing the fire. See al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, vol. 8, p. 213; 'Umar b. Shabba, vol. 2, pp. 422, 430; al-Samhūdī, vol. 1, p. 153; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. 7, p. 29; Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya, *Majmū'a*, fol. 35v (quoted from Kamāl al-Dīn [Ibn] al-'Adīm).

³² Al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, vol. 8, p. 213; al-Bakrī, *Mu'jam*, vol. 2, p. 435; Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, vol. 2, p. 317 ('Affī's commentary); al-Qāshānī, *Sharḥ*, p. 265; 'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'riḫ al-madīna*, vol. 2, pp. 420–21, 431–32; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, vol. 1, p. 153; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. 7, p. 31; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, pp. 467, 468.

³³ Al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, vol. 8, p. 213; 'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'riḫ al-madīna*, vol. 2, pp. 421, 431; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, vol. 1, p. 153; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, p. 468;

³⁴ Al-Bakrī, *Mu'jam*, vol. 2, p. 435; Ibn Abī 'Adasa, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, fol. 136v; Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, p. 229, n. 18; al-Ḥalabī, *Insān al-'uyūn*, vol. 1, p. 23. Ibn al-'Arabī, *Muḥāḍarat al-abrār*, vol. 1, p. 55.

³⁵ Al-Jāhiz, *Ḥayawān*, vol. 4, pp. 467–68; 'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'riḫ al-madīna*, vol. 2, p. 431; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, vol. 1, p. 153; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, p. 467; Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya, *Majmū'a*, fol. 35v.

5. *The fire as God's sign.* God sent it as a response to a provocation by Khālid's disbelieving tribe.³⁶

The motif of the disobeyed prophet also figures in the unearthing legend. When Khālid was about to die, he told his people to bury him, then wait until a herd of donkeys (or sheep) arrived at his grave, led by a donkey whose tail was cut off. The people then were to unearth Khālid's body and listen to his prophecies concerning all the events that will occur until the Day of Judgment. The herd, indeed, came after three (or forty) days, but Khālid's sons prevented the others from carrying out Khālid's will because they were afraid of becoming a laughing stock among the Arabs and of being labeled as people who dig up their dead. They feared being called "Sons of the Unearthed One" (*awlād al-manbūsh*).³⁷ Khālid's religious purpose in his rather odd request was to confirm the prophecies of the previous prophets: He could have done so by rising from the dead and informing his people of what he saw in the hereafter. Had he arisen from the dead, people would have been impressed and would have believed him. But his plan failed because his instructions were not carried out.³⁸

There are other legends about Khālid b. Sinān. One of them tells how Khālid saved his people from the mysterious, pernicious bird, the 'Anqā'.³⁹ Another has it that Khālid left with his wife two tablets (*lawḥayn*) on which were written the answers to his people's future questions. He imposed, however, a condition for consulting these tablets, namely, that no menstruating woman should touch them. When the people came to consult the tablets, Khālid's wife took them out, but

³⁶ Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, vol. 1, p. 154. This version echoes Qur'ānic stories. It was disseminated by the son of an 'Absī chief, al-Qa'qā' b. Khulayd; see below. See also al-Rāwandī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, p. 277.

³⁷ In some versions it is not Khālid's sons who prevented the unearthing, but the same man who disobeyed Khālid in the fire story. Al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, vol. 8, p. 213; see also al-Jāhiz, *Ḥayawān*, vol. 4, p. 477; Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, vol. 2, p. 318 ('Affī's commentary); al-Qāshānī, *Sharḥ*, 266; Ibn Abī 'Adasa, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, fol. 136v; 'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'riḫ al-madīna*, vol. 2, pp. 422–26, 433; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, vol. 1, p. 154; Ibn Qutayba, *Ma'ārif*, p. 29; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, pp. 467–68; Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, p. 229, n. 18; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. 7, p. 30; Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya, *Majmū'a*, fol. 36r (quoted from Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-'Adīm).

³⁸ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, vol. 1, p. 213; al-Qāshānī, *Sharḥ*, pp. 265–66; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, vol. 1, p. 154.

³⁹ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, vol. 3 pp. 101–102. I thank Michael Cook for this reference. Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, p. 467; Basset, *Mille et un contes*, vol. 1, pp. 193–94. The 'Anqā' is usually mentioned in connection with another Arabian prophet, Ḥanzala b. Ṣafwān, sent to *aṣḥāb al-rass*, mentioned in the Qur'an; see above, n. 12. Apparently two sets of legends meet here. Perhaps the clue or meeting point is the description of the "stony tract fire" as sending out a "neck," i.e., a long flame, to devour people and beasts. "Neck," *unq*, could be confused with *'anqā'*, the long-necked bird.

she was menstruating so whatever was written on the tablets was immediately erased. The motif of disobedience again figures here, although not so pronouncedly, for Khālid's wife could have been ignorant of his instructions.⁴⁰ Yet another story relates that Khālid showed his people where to dig for a stone, on which divine verses (i.e., *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*) were written. This stone was to save them in times of drought.⁴¹ Even an old Jewish legend is attached to Khālid. Ibn Abī 'Adasa transmits from the chief Qādī, 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sā'iḥ, that Khālid's people sawed him together with the orange tree (in which he was hiding).⁴² Amikam Elad dealt with this legend at length in his recent book on medieval Jerusalem. He showed how it shifted from Jewish sources, where it was told about the prophet Isaiah, to Muslim sources, where it was told about Zakariyā', father of John the Baptist.⁴³ The legend, now attached to Khālid, did not leave its locality, namely, Jerusalem: the transmitter of the legend, Ibn Abī 'Adasa, flourished in fifteenth century Jerusalem. His name was Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Umar.⁴⁴ His source, 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Sā'iḥ, was the chief judge in Jerusalem since 844/1440. His name was 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan.⁴⁵

The story of Khālid and the fire is sometimes told in a completely Islamized jargon. A version transmitted from al-Sha'bī has it that Khālid called upon his people to believe in Islam (*sic*) and acknowledge that he was a prophet, which they refused. He asked: "Will you acknowledge that I am a prophet if I extinguish the fire?" They agreed, he extinguished the fire, but (of course) they denied him again. A version in the same vein was transmitted by an 'Absī, a son of the chief al-Qa'qā' b. Khulayd.⁴⁶

In spite of some monotheistic features given to the legends about Khālid, they are not typical prophetic stories. Even the fire legend is different from the monotheistic archetype, that is, the Abrahamic fire legend, which consists of persecution, torture, and redemption. Khālid's legends also do not have much in common with miracles usually ascribed

⁴⁰ Al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-zawā'id*, vol. 8, p. 214; 'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'riḫ al-madīna*, vol. 2, p. 422; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. 7, p. 31; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, p. 468.

⁴¹ 'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'riḫ al-madīna*, vol. 2, p. 432; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. 7, pp. 29–30; Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya, *Majmū'a*, fol. 35v (quoted from Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-'Adīm). Cf. below n. 47.

⁴² Ibn Abī 'Adasa, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, fol. 136v.

⁴³ Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 123–25.

⁴⁴ He died in 856/1453. 'Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *Mu'jam muṣannifī al-kutub al-'arabiyya* (Beirut, 1986), p. 74.

⁴⁵ See Mujīr al-Dīn, *al-Uns al-jalīl bi-ta'riḫ al-Quds wa-l-Khalīl* ('Ammān, 1973), vol. 2, pp. 115, 131–32.

⁴⁶ 'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'riḫ al-madīna*, vol. 2, pp. 425, 426–27; al-Rāwandī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, p. 277; cf. above n. 36.

to saints, nor, for that matter, with the functions and works of a Jāhili priest or soothsayer (*kāhin*).⁴⁷ Even the most Islamized versions are useless from a religious point of view, because, unlike the stories of Hūd and Ṣāliḥ, it was not the sinning people who perished, but the prophet Khālid himself. Tradition, with all its resourcefulness, could not change the story and make Khālid's people, the tribe of 'Abs, disappear. The tribe was too well-known and too active for that. Khālid's "life-story," thus, does not constitute a monotheistic lesson, yet it was remembered and handed down. The chief agents in preserving Khālid's memory were his fellow-tribesmen.

The old people of the Banū 'Abs used to tell that Khālid was one of the topics of conversation between the Prophet and the 'Absī delegation that came to him. Muḥammad described him as "the prophet who was destroyed (or forfeited) by his people."⁴⁸ The 'Absī Ubayy b. 'Amāra b. Mālik was alive at the time of the Prophet and is considered a Companion. His father, 'Amāra b. Mālik, lived in the time of Khālid b. Sinān.⁴⁹ Ibn al-Kalbī claims that Ubayy, the Prophet's Companion, was still alive in the time of his own father, Muḥammad b. al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763).⁵⁰ Ubayy transmitted to al-Kalbī the story of Khālid in an Islamized version.⁵¹ Another Islamized version was transmitted from a son of the 'Absī chief, al-Qa'qā' b. Khulayd b. Jaz', who lived in Umayyad times.⁵² As late as the year 210/825–26 'Umar b. Shabba drew

⁴⁷ There are, however, stories in which Khālid appears to be acting as a *kāhin*: he supplies the 'Abs with a talisman to ensure their victory in battles. See 'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'riḫ al-madīna*, vol. 2, p. 428, cf. the above-mentioned story about the stone inscribed with holy words. He is also associated with causing the rain to fall; see al-Ḥalabī, *Insān al-'uyūn*, vol. 1 p. 23. The rhymes attributed to Khālid are also reminiscent of a *kāhin*'s speech. See the rhymes in the references given for the fire story, and in 'Umar b. Shabba, vol. 2, p. 432; Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. 7, p. 30, and Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya, *Majmū'a*, fol. 36r (rhymes about his yet unborn son). For miracles associated with saints, see Rudolf Kriss and Hubert Kriss Heinrich, *Volksglaube im Bereich des Islam, Band I: Wallfahrtswesen und Heiligenverehrung* (Wiesbaden 1960), pp. 9–10; Montet, *Culte*, pp. 26–27. For holy men in the Jāhiliyya, see J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (Berlin, 1961), pp. 130–40; Fahd, *Divination*, pp. 39–130. Note also that the Companion and saintly figure Tamīm al-Dārī is credited with extinguishing a fire in the Ḥarra in 'Umar's time, see al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, vol. 1, pp. 154–55.

⁴⁸ Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, p. 469, vol. 2, p. 13; cf. above p. 45.

⁴⁹ Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, p. 19.

⁵⁰ Ibn al-Kalbī, *Jamharat al-nasab*, p. 444; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-'arab*, p. 252.

⁵¹ 'Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'riḫ al-madīna*, vol. 2, pp. 430–33. The Islamic features may have been given by al-Kalbī himself. A shorter version is said to have been transmitted from Ubayy (read Ubayy b. 'Amāra for "Abī 'Amāra") by Hishām b. 'Urwa. Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya, *Majmū'a*, fol. 35r-v. The passage is quoted from the *Ta'riḫ* by Kamāl al-Dīn (Ibn) al-'Adīm.

⁵² Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā'*, vol. 1, p. 154. On al-Qa'qā', see Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-'arab*, p. 251.

some of the legends about Khālid directly from an 'Absī chief, Zurayq b. Husayn.⁵³

Burial Places of Khālid

Notwithstanding the story that Khālid's body was not unearthed but left untouched, his grave seems ubiquitous. It is reported to be in at least five different places: Jurjān in Persia, Manbij in Syria, the above-mentioned oasis south of Biskra in Algeria, Tebessa in East Algeria, and an unnamed place, apparently in the vicinity of Qayrawān in Tunisia.⁵⁴ It should be noted that at least three of these five places are in North Africa. A fourth, Jurjān, may be a mistake for Jurjura, yet another place in Algeria. The reason for this assumption is that only Ismā'il Ḥaqqī mentions Jurjān as Khālid's burial place.⁵⁵ Ḥaqqī was an Ottoman scholar versed in Persian literature. He, therefore, may have misread his source. He may have substituted Jurjān, a toponym well known to him, for Jurjura, a place of which he probably had never heard. There remains, thus, only Manbij as a site of Khālid's tomb that is outside of North Africa. Therefore, I shall treat it first.

Manbij is mentioned by al-Harawī as the location of a shrine where, "according to what people claim, a prophet is buried; they say that it is Khālid b. Sinān."⁵⁶ It was even claimed that Khālid had lived in Manbij. His tomb there and the mosque erected at the location attracted pilgrims.⁵⁷ A shrine for Khālid b. Sinān in this place can be rather easily accounted for. The Banū 'Abs, or at least a part of them, emigrated to Syria. One of their settlements (*madīna*), situated not far from Manbij, was Hiyār Banī al-Qa'qā', after the 'Absī chief mentioned above, al-Qa'qā' b. Khulayd b. Jaz'. The place had been given to Khulayd b. Jaz' by al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik,⁵⁸ a fact which indicates the high status of Khulayd. The importance of the family is also indicated by the fact that a cousin of al-Qa'qā' was married to the caliph 'Abd al-Malik.⁵⁹ As already mentioned, a son of this Qa'qā' transmitted Khālid's story.

⁵³ Umar b. Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-madīna*, vol. 2, pp. 429-30.

⁵⁴ See Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, vol. 2, p. 321, (Khālid buried in Tebessa and Biskra); Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, p. 468 (in the vicinity of Qayrawān).

⁵⁵ Ismā'il Ḥaqqī, *Rūḥ al-bayān*, vol. 7, p. 368, commenting on Qur'an, 34:44.

⁵⁶ The place is called "the Shrine of Light" (*maṣhad al-nūr*), 'Alī b. Abī Bakr al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-ishārāt ilā ma'rīfat al-ziyārāt* (Damascus, 1953), p. 61 (also quoted by Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. 7, p. 28, and Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya, *Majmū'a*, fol. 36r).

⁵⁷ Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya, *Majmū'a*, fol. 35r. The passage is quoted from the *Ta'rikh* by Kamāl al-Dīn (Ibn) al-'Adīm.

⁵⁸ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, vol. 2, p. 373.

⁵⁹ She was the mother of al-Walīd and Sulaymān, sons of 'Abd al-Malik. Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-'arab*, p. 251.

Another 'Absī, the above mentioned Companion Ubayy b. 'Amāra, was the ultimate source quoted by the Syrian historian Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-'Adīm who died in 660/1262.⁶⁰ Some links in this long chain of transmission may be spurious (such as Hishām b. 'Urwa), but there is no reason to doubt that Syrian 'Absīs handed down the traditions about their prophet, and that they "identified" his tomb in or near their territory in Syria. Unlike tribesmen of false prophets (e.g., Asad, tribe of Ṭulayḥa b. Khuwaylid), the 'Absīs were obviously proud of Khālid b. Sinān.

There remains North Africa, where I started my inquiry. Initially, it was again an 'Absī who disseminated traditions about Khālid. This time it was Khālid's grandson, Ka'b b. Yasār, also called Ka'b b. Dīnna.⁶¹

Ka'b settled in Egypt with the first Muslim conquerors.⁶² Two facts indicate his high status. First, he was the second (some say, the first) judge appointed by 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb in Egypt.⁶³ Secondly, he lived in "the Alley of the Nobles" (*zuqāq al-ashraf*) in Fustāt, and had the governor, 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ, for a neighbor.⁶⁴ Ka'b had Berber clients who admired him and "adopted" his grandfather. "They claimed that his [grand]father was a prophet who was sent to them; they used to come to see Ka'b [in the market], which was subsequently called 'the Berber Market' [*sūq barbar*] after them."⁶⁵ I do not see a reason to doubt the information that Ka'b's Berber clients appropriated Khālid b. Sinān. They would do so in order to enhance their status in Islam, just as many of them forged for themselves Arab genealogies. If my reconstruction is correct, Ka'b's Berber clients were probably the carriers of the Khālid legends to the parts of Algeria where they are current to

⁶⁰ Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. 7, p. 28; quoted by Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya, *Majmū'a*, fol. 35r.

⁶¹ Ka'b is said to be the son of Khālid's daughter. This contradicts the statement that Khālid had no progeny, see Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, p. 469, unless a daughter does not count as progeny. Cf. Khālid's rhymes about his yet unborn son, above n. 47. Ka'b is sometimes said to be Khālid's nephew.

⁶² Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, p. 94; al-Kindī, *Governors*, p. 305; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wal-i'tibār*, vol. 1, p. 296; Ibn al-Taghribirdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, vol. 1, p. 21.

⁶³ Ka'b was not interested in this post and 'Umar eventually accepted his resignation. According to another version he was dismissed. See Wakf, *Akhbār al-quḍāt* (Beirut, n.d.), vol. 3, pp. 220-21, 325; Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ*, pp. 111, 229-30, 315; al-Kindī, *Governors*, p. 305; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 3, p. 303; al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara fi ta'rikh miṣr wa-l-qāhira*, Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, ed. (Dār Ihyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1967), vol. 1, p. 230.

⁶⁴ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, vol. 2, p. 937; Ibn Duqmāq, *al-Intiṣār*, pp. 13-14, 32, 47. According to the latter, the alley, residence of the noblemen, was called "Candles Alley" (*zuqāq al-qanādīl*).

⁶⁵ Al-Kindī, *Governors*, p. 305; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, vol. 1, p. 193. The market was located at the end of "Candles Alley." Ibn Duqmāq, loc. cit.; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wal-i'tibār*, vol. 1, p. 297.

this day. The legends of Khālid preaching Christianity in sixth century Algeria, recorded by Horace Miner in the village Sidi Khaled in 1950, were already mentioned.⁶⁶ Such legends are not, however, confined to this small place. Some one hundred twenty kilometers to the northeast, in the western part of the Awrās mountain in Algeria, people relate that the local Christian population refused to be converted to Islam, until one day Sīdī Khālid arrived, walking from the Azraq mountain (in the southern part of the massif), and called upon the people to convert. First they laughed at him, then demanded a miracle as a token of the truth of his mission. Khālid waved his hand and the area was covered with flames, whereupon the people converted to Islam, begging him to extinguish the fire. Khālid pursued the fire into a cave, at a place called Nārā, and the flames disappeared.⁶⁷ Obviously, we have here a combination of etiology with a myth of origin. The toponym Nārā, similar to *nār*, i.e., fire, and the origin of Islam in the Awrās are explained simultaneously by the unmistakably Hijāzī Jāhili legend.⁶⁸

In the village Sīdī Khālid, the legend was translated into a ritual and a social institution. In addition to the annual pilgrimage to the prophet's tomb, the Khālid ritual centers around the simple act of whitewashing the mosque built at the spot. Every year, the imam decides the time for this activity and sends the public crier to announce it. The leaders of every quarter supervise the digging and preparing of lime. Then, each quarter of the village sets out in its turn to whitewash its allotted portion of the building. Setting out and coming back are performed in a ceremonial fashion, and a festive meal is provided by the wealthier families of the quarter at the end of the day. When all the quarters have done their share and the work is completed, there is an evening entertainment for the whole village — gunplay at the marketplace.⁶⁹ Miner, who recorded this detailed description, does not elaborate on the social significance of this activity. It seems to me to have two functions. First, it enhances the authority of the imam and the leaders of the quarters. Secondly, the ritual expresses the basic facts of life in Sīdī Khālid: the community is made of separate groups each with its own history, but it constitutes one village. Each group performs its share of the whitewashing in isolation from the other groups, but they share the responsibility, and in the end they all gather to celebrate. Thus, the groups show both their distinctiveness and their willingness to cooperate. A *jāhili* holy man of the sixth century contributes to the communal life of a Muslim village in the twentieth century.

⁶⁶ See above, p. 43.

⁶⁷ Masqueray, "Documents," pp. 116–17.

⁶⁸ Cf. Masqueray, "Documents," 107, for a different "fire story" explaining the toponym Nārā.

⁶⁹ Miner and de Vos, *Oasis and Casba*, p. 41.

Khālid's tomb is attested in yet another place in North Africa, in the vicinity of Qayrawān. Ibn Ḥajar cites a report that Khālid is buried in a cave in the vicinity of Qayrawān, on the top of a mountain. He is clad in white wool, his head is rested on his arms as if he were asleep. This report dates from the fourth century.⁷⁰ However, the village Sīdī Khālid, centered around the alleged tomb of Khālid b. Sinān, was founded in the sixteenth century.

The anthropologist Miner reports that, in the sixteenth century, one 'Abd al-Raḥmān ben Khalīfa settled near the tomb, and that his tribe, the Ouled ben Khalīfa, are still revered by the neighboring tribes and exert religious influence.⁷¹ This 'Abd al-Raḥmān can be traced in other sources, but there is no "Khalīfa" in his genealogy. It is, in fact, the same marabout mentioned by Goldziher.⁷² His name was 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. 'Āmir al-Akhḍarī. He was the man who "discovered" (*azhara*) Khālid's tomb, declared the area as sacred, wrote a poem eulogizing the prophet Khālid, and eventually founded the settlement.⁷³

'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Akhḍarī was a sixteenth century scholar who wrote quite popular treatises, especially on logic, arithmetic, rhetoric and *fiqh*.⁷⁴ His rhymed treatise on logic, the *Sullam*, was translated into French by J.D. Luciani, a fact insignificant in itself, had not J.D. Luciani known the region personally. As a result of this knowledge, Luciani was able to write a detailed biography of al-Akhḍarī based mainly on oral and family sources. The following account draws much upon Luciani's introduction to his translation of the *Sullam*.⁷⁵

'Abd al-Raḥmān was born in Banṭiyūs, a small oasis some thirty kilometers south-west of Biskra. He studied first in the local *zāwiya* under his father and his older brother, and later in Tunis. He had his own *zāwiya* in Banṭiyūs where he is also buried (although he died somewhere else).⁷⁶ It is related that he never married, but families bearing his name take care of his tomb, his *zāwiya*, and yet another place associated with him; these families have official documents to prove their identity and ancestry.

⁷⁰ Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 1, p. 468. The source is al-Ḥākim (d. 405/1014), citing one 'Abd al-Malik b. Naṣr, whom I could not trace. Cf. other descriptions of holy people in their graves in Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Karājakī, *Kanz al-fawā'id*, 'Abdallāh Ni'ma, ed. (Beirut, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 380–84. I thank Dr. Avraham Hakim for this reference.

⁷¹ Miner and de Vos, *Oasis and Casba*, p. 22.

⁷² See above, p. 42.

⁷³ Al-Warṭhīlānī, *Nuzhat al-anzār*, pp. 5, 87, 88; al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, vol. 2, p. 413.

⁷⁴ 'Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *Mu'jam al-mu'allifin*, vol. 1, p. 837; *EI*², s.v., "Akhḍarī." Al-Warṭhīlānī, *Nuzhat al-anzār*, pp. 5, 87.

⁷⁵ Luciani, introduction, pp. 12–30.

⁷⁶ On the institution of *zāwiya*, which functions both as an educational center and as a refuge for the locals as well as strangers, see Devoulx, "Les édifices religieux de l'Alger ancien," *Revue Africaine* 6 (1862): 370–82.

‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Akhḍarī became himself a marabout, a local saint, so that at least part of his biography is legendary.⁷⁷ I think that at least three of the legends associated with him deserve special attention, therefore, I cite them in detail.

It is related that one day ‘Abd al-Raḥmān went out of Biskra, praying for God’s guidance. He was transformed into a turtle and was carried southward with the stream. Regaining his human form, he was attacked and robbed, whereupon he prayed and fell asleep. When he awoke, he saw that his aggressors had been turned into statues. He prayed for them, they regained their human form and became his followers. They led him to Banṭyūs but he preferred to stay outside in a deserted shack. People started to visit him and bring presents. At that time there was a false marabout in Banṭyūs who became jealous of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. The latter made a speech in which he showed the pretender for what he was, then he raised his hand, whereupon the pretender’s head rolled off his shoulders.⁷⁸

Another legend relates how ‘Abd al-Raḥmān uncovered the pretenses of the marabout of a neighboring oasis.⁷⁹ The third legend concerns Khālīd b. Sinān. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān spotted a pillar of light rising up to the sky. The phenomenon lasted for three days. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān followed the light and discovered the tomb of the prophet Khālīd b. Sinān. He then wrote a poem to publicize his discovery and eulogize the prophet Khālīd. The place became a pilgrim site.⁸⁰

These three, apparently disparate, legends have a common theme. It is the replacement of the manipulative, falsely-religious authority of the marabouts with the genuine authority of Sunnī Islam, as represented by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Akhḍarī himself.⁸¹ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was a teacher and a scholar, devoted to the Qur’ān and the religious law. He detested the marabouts who were often corrupt, disregarding even the most fundamental religious laws and living at the expense of the poor credulous followers. He opposed them even by violent means. It is reported that he once ordered his pupils to beat one of these would-be saints. He wrote poetry against them, such as the following verses:

⁷⁷ See al-Warḥilānī, *Nuzhat al-anzār*, p. 6, and below.

⁷⁸ Luciani, introduction p. 13, from an oral source.

⁷⁹ Luciani, introduction, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Luciani, introduction, p. 24. The poem and the pilgrimage are real. A manuscript of the poem is found at the national library in Alger, no. 1799, and pilgrims come to the place to this day.

⁸¹ The negative attitude of Sunnī scholars towards the marabouts is well known. See, e.g., Gellner, *Muslim Society*, chapter 6. Cf. a case of one local saint replaced by another (a newcomer) in Ḥaḍramawt is described by Abdallah Bujra, *The Politics of Stratification* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 26, 32.

If you see someone who flies
or walks upon the sea
Never stopping at the boundaries
set by God’s decree
Surely he is an innovator
led to his doom by the Creator⁸²

In view of this information, it is clear that al-Akhḍarī would have turned in his grave had he heard the legends told about him. It also becomes clear why he “adopted” Khālīd b. Sinān. Al-Akhḍarī’s anger was not roused against the cult of deceased saints, but against the living ones. To counterbalance the immense influence exerted by the marabouts, al-Akhḍarī propagated a tradition about a prophet who had been safely dead for centuries.⁸³ This tradition was at once a story rooted in classical *ḥadīth*, and an answer to the popular need for miracles and pilgrimage sites. Moreover, Khālīd’s story had already penetrated precisely this region centuries before, at least at the level of popular tradition. The eighteenth century historian and traveler, Abū al-Qāsim al-Zayyānī, asserts that Khālīd’s story penetrated a local scholarly work as well. He said, “Some scholars say that the grave of this Khālīd b. Sinān is mentioned in a commentary transmitted from the imām Ibn ‘Arafa.”⁸⁴ There is reason to doubt this information. Al-Zayyānī copied this passage from al-‘Ayyāshī, but omitted the latter’s statement that he had looked in vain for the passage (in Ibn ‘Arafa’s works).⁸⁵ Since all other information point to al-Akhḍarī as the initiator of the archeological discovery of Khālīd’s tomb, the attribution to Ibn ‘Arafa may be spurious; apparently, it was an answer to those who criticized al-Akhḍarī for what he did. That there was such criticism is implied by the same al-‘Ayyāshī, who states: “If [al-Akhḍarī]

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*idhā ra’ayta rajulan yaḥīru
aw fawqa mā’ al-baḥr yaḥīru
wa-lam yaqif ‘inda ḥudūd al-shar’
fa-’innahu mustadraj wa-bid’ī.*

‘Abd al-Karīm al-Fakūn, *Manshūr al-hidāya fī kashf man idda’ā al-‘ilm wa-l-wilāya*, ed. Abū al-Qāsim Sa’d Allāh (Beirut, 1987), p. 122. For other verses see pp. 124, 131, 139–40. See al-Akhḍarī’s opposition to marabouts on p. 117, examples of their corruption on pp. 120–33. I thank Ṭāriq Rajab for bringing this extraordinary book to my attention. For examples of marabouts disregarding the religious law and committing crimes, see Montet, *Culte*, pp. 37–41; Doutté, *L’Islam algérien*, pp. 45–46, 49–50; idem, *Les marabouts*, pp. 75–87; see also Gellner, *Muslim Society*, pp. 152–53.

⁸³ Luciani suspects that al-Akhḍarī’s purpose was to establish a public place of pilgrimage, for his own benefit. Luciani, introduction, p. 27. By contrast, the present interpretation does not doubt al-Akhḍarī’s integrity.

⁸⁴ Al-Zayyānī, *al-Turjumāna al-kubrā*, p. 150.

⁸⁵ Al-‘Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, vol. 2, p. 414.

learned about it from his books, it was his right, for he is entitled to it; we have heard of shrines and tombs of prophets and saints in the East (*al-mashriq*) that were discovered by knowledgeable people and became places of pilgrimage. . . .⁸⁶ Ibn 'Arafa must have been an inspiration to al-Akhḍarī, for he had been teaching and functioning as imām of Masjid al-Zaytūna in Tūnis, where al-Akhḍarī completed his education. Moreover, al-Akhḍarī's main fields of study—logic, *fiqh*, arithmetic and the laws of inheritance—are identical with those of Ibn 'Arafa.⁸⁷ Someone, perhaps al-Akhḍarī himself, may have tried to legitimize the discovery of Khālid's tomb, based on a flimsy pillar of light, by [falsely] basing it on the scholarly work of the revered Ibn 'Arafa.

Ironically, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Akhḍarī failed precisely because he was so successful. The success of the discovery was so great, that it was considered one of the chief merits of 'Abd al-Raḥmān. Thus, he failed in his attempt to abate the influence of the local saints, moreover, he added to it unintentionally. He himself was turned into a saint. The oasis around the prophet's tomb came to bear Sīdī Khālid's name, and descendants of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Akhḍarī settled there. Contrary to al-Akhḍarī's wishes they were, and still are, treated reverently by their neighbors. They receive annual gifts from them, as becomes the descendants of marabouts.⁸⁸ Moreover, in the course of time, people were not sure any more whether Khālid b. Sinān had been a prophet or a marabout (*walī*).⁸⁹ The tomb became a central pilgrimage site, "visited by people from the east and the west . . . the best and greatest among the pious people meet there . . . people whose prayers are answered."⁹⁰ Even al-'Ayyāshī, who unambiguously rejects the opinion that the tomb belonged to the Hijāzī Khālid b. Sinān, wrote a poem eulogizing that same Hijāzī prophet on the occasion of his visit to the tomb.⁹¹ To explain how Khālid arrived from the Hijāz, a legend was spread that his body was not buried, but was put on a she-camel and carried to the Bilād al-Zāb, then buried.⁹² There was an alter-

⁸⁶ Al-'Ayyāshī, loc. cit., quoted with variations by al-Zayyānī, *al-Turjumāna al-kubrā*, p. 150.

⁸⁷ Ibn Maryam, *al-Bustān fī dhikr al-awliyyā' wa-l-'ulamā' bi-Tlīmān* (Alger, 1908), pp. 190–201; Muḥammad Maḥfūz, *Tarājim al-mu'allifīn al-tūnisīyyīn* (Beirut, 1984), vol. 3, pp. 363–71.

⁸⁸ Miner and de Vos, *Oasis and Casba*, p. 22. Cf. the similar case of Al-Yūsī, investigated by Jaque Berque in *Al-Yousi: Problèmes de la culture marocaine au XVIIème siècle* (Paris, 1958).

⁸⁹ Al-Warḥilānī, *Nuzhat al-anzār*, p. 5. But see another interpretation of the passage in Luciani, introduction, p. 26.

⁹⁰ Al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, vol. 2, p. 414; Al-Warḥilānī, *Nuzhat al-anzār*, pp. 5–6.

⁹¹ Al-'Ayyāshī, *Riḥla*, vol. 2, pp. 414–15. His doubts, but not the poem, are quoted by al-Zayyānī, *al-Turjumāna al-kubrā*, p. 150.

⁹² Al-'Ayyāshī, loc. cit.

native, more ingenious explanation. It was claimed that *al-rass* of the Qur'ān, sometimes associated with Khālid, was identical with the *masif* of *Awrās*, that is, the region in Algeria where Khālid's story was rooted.⁹³

There remains the discrepancy between the names to account for. As mentioned above, the name of the founder of the settlement is, according to Miner, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ben Khalīfa, and his descendants are called Ouled ben Khalifa. It is not absolutely certain that the information given by Miner is accurate; he may have changed the names for some reason or other.⁹⁴ If, however, the information is correct, there is a puzzle to resolve: how did 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. 'Amir al-Akhḍarī become 'Abd al-Raḥmān ben Khalīfa? Perhaps the solution is that al-Akhḍar, after which al-Akhḍarī was called, was a sub-tribe of the famous Banū Hilāl who invaded North Africa in the eleventh century.⁹⁵ A part of this sub-tribe left the area of Biskra and wandered northward where it settled in the western part of the *Awrās*. This group was called al-Akhḍar al-Ḥalfāwiyya.⁹⁶ The name Ḥalfāwiyya comes from the word *Ḥalfā'*, Alfa grass, which covers large areas in the western *Awrās*.⁹⁷ Perhaps in time, this name was misunderstood and was taken to refer to an ancestor, (being then changed to Khalīfa, since a proper name from the root *ḥ l f* does not exist); and perhaps al-Akhḍarī's family belonged to this particular branch of the Banū al-Akhḍar. This, of course, is a conjecture that cannot be proved, but I do not have a better explanation (except that Miner's information is not correct). The fact remains that thanks to al-Akhḍarī's initiative, Khālid b. Sinān, a Hijāzī *jāhili* miracle worker, became the patron saint of a Muslim Algerian village, and is worshiped to this very day.

⁹³ Al-Warḥilānī, *Nuzhat al-anzār*, pp. 5, 87. Cf. Luciani, introduction, p. 26. Al-Zayyānī speaks of Bilād al-Zāb—which is where Khālid's oasis is situated—as identical with *bilād aṣḥāb al-rass*, al-Zayyānī, *al-Turjumāna al-kubrā*, p. 151. I do not think that al-Akhḍarī himself made this identification, since Luciani, who apparently saw the manuscript of al-Akhḍarī's poem, does not mention it. See above p. 44 for Khālid's association with *al-rass*.

⁹⁴ Miner does not give the source of the information. It should be noted that Miner is not always reliable as regards names and history. See, for example, the curious fact that he consistently refers to Biskra as Gafsa, the latter being an entirely different place. See, *Oasis and Casba*, pp. 18, 20, 24.

⁹⁵ There are, however, other interpretations of the name al-Akhḍarī. See Luciani, introduction, pp. 12, 18.

⁹⁶ Luciani, introduction, p. 20.

⁹⁷ See *EI*², s.v., "Ḥalfā'."

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