

WITNESSES OF GOD: EXHORTATORY PREACHERS IN
MEDIÉVAL AL-ANDALUS AND THE MAGREB

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This article analyzes the rhetorical and ritual characteristics of pious exhortation (*wa'iz*) as practiced in al-Andalus and the Maghreb, based on specimens from two homiletic sources. The texts are considered in light of hagiographical and juridical data in order to assess the social role of exhortatory preachers and to explain the extraordinary impact of their sermons. The sermon's affective power derives from the preacher's personal charisma, rhetorical prowess, and his active engagement of his audience in the production of their own charismatic experience. The hagiographies considered depict the *wa'iz* as a witness to God's omnipotence, precipitating the religious conversion of even the socially marginalized.

Key words: Muslim sermons; Pious exhortation; *Maw'iza*; *Majlis al-wa'iz*; Sufi hagiography.

Este artículo analiza los aspectos retóricos y rituales de la exhortación piadosa (*wa'iz*) practicada en al-Andalus y el Magreb, tomando como base documental dos fuentes homiléticas. Los textos se analizan a la luz de noticias hagiográficas y jurídicas con el fin de determinar el papel social de los *wu'āz* y el impacto de sus sermones. El poder seductor del sermón se halla en función del carisma del predicador, sus dotes de oratoria y su afán en involucrar activamente a su auditorio en su propia experiencia carismática. Los textos hagiográficos examinados presentan al *wā'iz* como testigo de la omnipotencia divina, propiciando la conversión religiosa, incluso de individuos situados al margen de la sociedad.

Palabras clave: sermones musulmanes; exhortación piadosa; *maw'iza*; *maylis al-wa'iz*; hagiografías sufíes.

Abū Ishāq al-Mayūrqi's sermon (*wa'iz*) affected a certain Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Azkānī (d. after 590) to such a degree that "he could not stop crying and wallowing his face in the dust until blood flowed from it."¹ Immediately al-Azkānī renounced his life as a musician and singer at weddings and devoted himself exclusively to God for the remaining twenty-one years of his life. This account, which is preserved in al-Tādilī's *al-Tashawwuf ilā rijāl al-taṣawwuf*,² focuses on al-Azkānī, who is lauded as a pious Sufi.

¹ I would like to thank Professors María Jesús Viguera, Ana Echevarría, and Maribel Fierro for their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper.

Al-Tādilī, Ibn al-Zayyāt, *al-Tashawwuf ilā rijāl al-taṣawwuf wa-akhbār Abī al-'Abbās al-Sabī*, ed. Aḥmad al-Tawfiq, Rabat, 1984, 365.

² *Ibidem*, 365-368.

My interest lies in that al-Azkānī's stunning conversion occurred after listening to an exhortatory sermon. Al-Tādilī has provided us with a rare glimpse of the potential impact of homiletic exhortation that merits further inquiry into the nature of this genre of Islamic preaching.

Until recently the scholarly literature on medieval "popular" preachers of pious exhortation (*wa'z*) and storytelling (*qaṣaṣ*) has focused primarily on the Arab East, with pride of place given to the Iraqi preacher Ibn al-Jawzī.³ Particular emphasis has been placed on the contested authority of popular preachers and storytellers and the struggle for control between themselves and the 'ulamā' over the definition and transmission of religious knowledge,⁴ or over rival paradigms of religio-political power.⁵ Other issues, such as the personal charisma of the preacher, the performative and ritual aspects of his

³ Swartz, M. L., *Ibn al-Jawzī's "Kitāb al-Quṣṣās wa l-mudhakkirīn"*, Beirut, 1986; *idem*, "The Rules of the Popular Preaching in Twelfth-Century Baghdad, According to Ibn al-Jawzī", in *Prédication et propagande au Moyen Âge, Islam, Byzance, Occident*, eds. G. Makdisi, D. Sourdel and J. Sourdel-Thomine, Paris, 1983, 223-239; *idem*, "Arabic rhetoric and the art of the homily in medieval Islam", in *Religion and Culture in Medieval Islam*, eds. R. G. Hovannisian and G. Sabagh, Cambridge, 1999, 36-65. See also Hartmann, A., "Les ambivalences d'un sermonnaire ḥanbalite", *Annales Islamologiques*, 22 (1986), 51-115. An exception to the prevailing interest in popular preachers in the Arabic East is found in Fierro, M., "La política religiosa de 'Abd al-Rahmān III (r. 300/912-350/961)", *Al-Qanṭara*, XXV (2004), 119-156, which deals with the absence of *quṣṣās* (storytellers), who should be distinguished from the *wu'āz*. Additionally, M.^a Jesús Viguera has published several articles on Andalusian and Magrebi official preachers and their sermons, see, "Al-Khuṭab al-dīnīya li-bn Marzūq", in *Studia Arabica et Islamica. Festschrift for Ihsan 'Abbas*, ed. Wadad al-Qadi, Beirut, 1981; "Un sermón político de Šurayḥ al-Ru'aynī", *Homenaje al prof. Darío Cabanelas*, Granada, 1987, 142-146; "Los predicadores de la corte", in *Saber religioso y poder político en el Islam. Actas del simposio internacional. (Granada, 15-18 octubre 1991)*, Madrid, 1994, 319-332; and "Sermones aljamiados", *Revista de Filología de la Universidad de la Laguna*, 17 (1999), 759-64. See also Khafāja, M. A. M., *Qiṣṣat al-adab fī l-Andalus*, Beirut, 1962, 342-362 and Jones, L.G., "The Boundaries of Sin and Communal Identity: Muslim and Christian Preaching and the Transmission of Cultural Identity in Medieval Iberia and the Magreb (12th to 15th Centuries)", Doctoral Thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2004.

⁴ On this theme see the article by Pedersen, J., "The Islamic Preacher, *Wā'iz*, *Mudhakkir*, *Qāṣṣ*", in *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, Part I, eds. S. Lowinger and J. Somogyz, Budapest, 1948; and most recently, Berkey, J., "Storytelling, Preaching, and Power in Mamluk Cairo", *Mamluk Studies Review*, 4 (2000), 53-73; and *idem*, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*, Seattle and London, 2001.

⁵ Fierro sustains that 'Abd al-Rahmān III's suppression of the *quṣṣās* constituted a vital part of his anti-Masarrī and anti-Ismā'īlī Shī'ī policies. See Fierro, "La política religiosa de 'Abd al-Rahmān III", 132.

delivery, the content of his sermons, the narrative and rhetorical devices that he employs in his discourse, audience response, and the exhortatory sermon (*maw'īza*, *wa'z*) as a literary genre have either been ignored or relegated to a secondary plane. This article seeks to address some of these omissions by focusing on the figure of the *wā'iz* and the genre of the *maw'īza* in medieval al-Andalus and the Maghreb. The references to exhortatory and storytelling preachers and their sermons, found in a variety of literary, historical, and juridical sources, attest to the presence of *wu'āz* or exhortatory preachers in al-Andalus and the Maghreb.⁶ The aim of this article is to analyze the activities of these preachers and to discern how they were perceived firstly by the textual communities that deemed them worthy of inclusion in biographical dictionaries and hagiographies, and secondly by the Muslim community at large. Ultimately, I would like to discover what made exhortatory preachers and their sermons so appealing to their audiences – an appeal capable of producing the kind of profound, somatic, and life-changing responses depicted in the above anecdote.

The Generic and Performative Characteristics of *Wa'z*

In al-Andalus and the Maghreb the most common expressions for pious exhortation that appear in the literary, juridical, and biographical sources are those that derive from the Arabic root *w-ʿ-z*, whose meanings include “counsel”, “guidance”, as well as “admonition.” Pedersen points out that this verb “is often employed in the *Qur'ān* as characteristic of the activity of the prophets” and that the *Qur'ān* refers to itself, the Law of Moses, and the Gospel as *wa'z*.⁷ Another term employed is *tadhkira*, from the Arabic root *dh-k-r* “to remind.” The Qur'ānic contexts in which this word and its variants appear, Q. 73:19 and Q. 74:49, for instance, indicate that this type of preaching encompasses both reminders of the punishment that befell past unbe-

⁶ Although the traveler and geographer al-Muqaddasī (d. 380/990) comments that one of the characteristic features of al-Andalus is that there are very few *quṣṣās* (cf. Fierro, “La política religiosa de ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III”, 119), the 12th- to 15th-century sources that I have surveyed do indeed bear witness to the presence of some *quṣṣās*, and, more importantly, of *wu'āz*, the focus of this article.

⁷ Pedersen, “The Islamic Preacher”, 227.

lievers and warnings about the Day of Judgment.⁸ While the terms *wa'z*, *maw'iza*, *'iza*, and *tadhkira* are virtually interchangeable, the Andalusí and Maghrebi sources most frequently employ the terms *maw'iza* and *wa'z*, to refer to the sermon as homiletic text. One deduces from al-Wansharīshī's juridical opinions⁹ that *kutub al-wa'z* and *kutub al-mawā'iz wa-l-raqā'iq* were the most common denominations of the literary genre. The latter term suggests that the texts both warned the listener-reader of the eschatological punishments for sins committed, and enticed them with the heavenly rewards for piety and rectitude.¹⁰ Typical names for the preaching event are *maqāmat al-wa'z*, or *majlis al-wa'z*, which may be translated as "exhortatory preaching assemblies", although we shall see that *maqāmat al-zuhd* (ascetic assemblies) also feature preaching.

The close association between homiletic exhortation and asceticism is attested in the titles of several works written by Andalusian and Maghrebi ascetics and those composed by Eastern authors but diffused in the Islamic West.¹¹ Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi's literary anthology *al-'Iqd al-farīd* includes a definition of the genre that must have been current in the Arab West as well the Arab East. In the prologue of his chapter, "The Book of the Emerald on the Exhortatory Sermon and Asceticism", he writes:

We shall proceed, with God's help and willingness, to speak about asceticism (*zuhd*) and the men renowned for it. We shall record excerpts of their speeches: the exhortations that the prophets preached..., those that circulated among the wise and erudite men (*al-ḥukamā' wa-l-udabā'*), and the preaching assemblies of the ascetics (*maqāmat al-zuhhād*) delivered before the caliphs. The most affective and eloquent (*ablagh*) exhortation of all is the word of God Almighty... God the Exalted and Sublime said, "invite to the path of your Lord with wisdom and the good lesson (*al-maw'iza al-ḥasana*)" (Q. 16: 125)... After [God's exhortations come] the exhortations of the prophets, may God bless them, then the exhortations of the wise men and the men of letters (*udabā'*), then the preaching as-

⁸ *Ibidem*, 227.

⁹ Al-Wansharīsī, Abū l-'Abbās, *Al-Mi'yār al-mu'rib wa-l-jāmi' al-mughrib 'an fatāwā ahl Ifriqiyā wa-l-Andalus wa-l-Maghrib*, ed. M. Hājji, Rabat, 1981. The cases featuring pious exhortation are discussed in vol. XI.

¹⁰ Cf. Pedersen ("The Islamic Preacher", 237), who noted that "the preacher is not only expected to scare, but also to encourage".

¹¹ For a list of several such works, see Vizcaino, J. M., "Las obras de *zuhd* en al-Andalus", *Al-Qanṭara*, XII (1991), 417-438, specially 420-421.

semblies of the ascetics before the caliphs, then their discourses on asceticism and the men known for them...¹²

From the above, we may understand that homiletic exhortation characterizes the speech of ascetics who consider themselves to be emulating the speech of the divinity and the prophets. *Wa'z*, is thus a discourse of authority or socially recognized authoritative speech, the authority of which is ultimately traced back to God and the prophets. Viewed in this way, one can perhaps begin to comprehend the persuasive power and impact of this oratorical genre, as witnessed in the opening anecdote.

Additionally, it is telling that Sufi-ascetics appear to be the most prolific practitioners of *wa'z*, judging by the fact that most of the biographical information about *wu'āz* is located in Sufi hagiographies where there is a corresponding absence of notices about *khuṭabā'*. Detailed information is found, for instance, in al-Tādilī'ó hagiography of Andalusian and Maghrebi Sufis, *al-Tashawwuf ilā rijāl al-ṭaṣawwuf* and Ṭāhir al-Ṣadafī's *Kitāb al-Sirr al-maṣūn fī mā ukrima bi-hi al-mukhliṣūn*. Conversely, the Andalusian and Maghrebi biographical dictionaries of scholars, jurists, and other notables surveyed for this study typically exclude storytellers,¹³ while notices of canonical preachers (*khuṭabā'*) tend to outnumber those of exhortatory preachers. The choice of whom to include and exclude is driven by the respective canons of religious authority to which each category of persons – Sufī mystics, judges, and other '*ulamā'*' – subscribes.

It would be misleading, however, to assume that Sufis monopolized the activity of homiletic exhortation. Jurists also engaged in this activity, as is the case of Muḥammad b. Yabqā al-Amawī of Murcia, who regularly held a popular exhortatory preaching assembly,¹⁴ and Ibn Abī Zamanīn (d. 399/1008-9), a prominent Mālikī jurist from Elvira whose works on exhortatory preaching and asceticism "circulated widely"¹⁵.

¹² Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *al-'Iqd al-farīd*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn, *et. al.*, Cairo, 1948-1953, IV, 140.

¹³ Indeed, the disdain for storytellers, *quṣṣās*, must have been widespread and is reflected in the fact that notices about them are almost invariably related to discourses about transgression, e.g. in *hisba* manuals and treatises on *bid'a*, for instance.

¹⁴ Al-Ḍabbī, *Bughyat al-Multamis fī ta'rīkh rijāl ahl al-Andalus*, ed. R. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suwayfī, Beirut, 1997, n.º 326, 127.

¹⁵ Cited in al-Ḍabbī, *Bughyat al-Multamis*, n.º 160, 75-76, but see also Fierro, "La política religiosa de 'Abd al-Raḥmān III", 123, and Vizcaino, "Las obras de *zuhd*", 424.

Indeed, the Almoravid *muḥtasib* Ibn ‘Abdūn of Seville urged the authorities to appoint a *faqīh* to serve as *wā‘iz* in the congregational mosque. In his section on the functionaries of the congregational mosque he advises the *qādī* to “install in the roofed galleries a pious and honorable *faqīh* to instruct the people in matters of religion, preach exhortations to them, and teach them what is right and good... No one is permitted to read in the lower naves [of the mosque] anything other than the *Qur’ān* and the *ḥadīths* of the Sunna. The other sciences should be read in the upper galleries (*al-saqā‘if*).”¹⁶ Ibn ‘Abdūn insists that religious instruction go hand-in-hand with preaching and specifies that the preacher be a *faqīh* as opposed to a professional *wā‘iz*. Also noteworthy is the exigency of a spatial differentiation between the canonical and non-canonical forms of preaching. Exhortatory preaching, religious instruction, and reading extra-scriptural literature – and here we could infer the “*kutub al-wa‘z*” and “*kutub al-tadhkira*” – should be not be conducted in the same space as the official cult. They should take place in other areas of the mosque, e.g., in the upper galleries (*saqā‘if*), the naves, or in the *sharī‘a*¹⁷ (more widely known as the *muṣallā* or extra-mural oratory), to distinguish them from the liturgical *khuṭba*, delivered from the *minbar*. According to Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, one of the chroniclers of the Almoravid and Almohad Dynasties, the Maḥdī Ibn Tūmart followed this practice by preaching his exhortations while seated on a stone in front of the *miḥrāb* of the *sharī‘a* located outside the town of Tinmal.¹⁸

The reference to the Maḥdī is one reminder of the religious and political authorities’ use of the exhortatory preaching as ideological propaganda and to shape the cultural and ethical mores of the community. But Ibn al-Qaṭṭān also depicts the Almoravid and Almohad

¹⁶ Ibn ‘Abdūn, M., *Risālat Ibn ‘Abdūn fī l-qaḍā wa-l-ḥisba*, ed. É. Lévi-Provençal, *Documents arabes inédits sur la vie social et économique en Occident Musulman au Moyen Âge*, Cairo, 1955, 22.

¹⁷ According to L. Torres Balbás, the term *sharī‘a* was widely used in the Maghreb and al-Andalus and is synonymous with *muṣallā*. As is well known, the prescribed functions of this ritual space include the ritual prayer for the two canonical festivals and the prayer for rainfall (*ṣalāt al-istisqā’*). See Torres Balbás, L., “Crónica arqueológica de la España musulmana”. ‘Muṣallā’ y ‘Šarī‘a’ en las ciudades hispanomusulmanas”, *Al-Andalus*, XIII (1948), 167-180. (My thanks to Manuela Marín and Maribel Fierro for bringing this article to my attention.)

¹⁸ Ibn al-Qaṭṭān al-Marrākushī, *Naẓm al-jumān li-tartīb mā salafa min akhbār al-zamān*, ed. M. A. Makkī, Cairo, 1990, 139. Ibn al-Qaṭṭān thus gives evidence of an additional usage of this ritual space.

majlis al-wa'z as a pedagogical forum for the transmission of *ḥadīth* to the general public. He specifically mentions the “assemblies of exhortatory preaching (*majālis al-wa'z*), in which the ‘ulamā’ and pious men (*al-ṣulahā*) were entrusted with the responsibility for [reciting] *ḥadīth* with which they would exhort the people and guide them spiritually.”¹⁹ The historian ‘Abbās b. Ibrāhīm al-Marrākushī, a contemporary of Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, further notes that exhortatory preachers would select a specific day of the week to hold their preaching assemblies. For example, the scholar (‘*ālim*) Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Lakhmī, established himself in Marrakesh and had his preaching assembly on Mondays and Thursdays of every week.²⁰ Among the most famous of the Maghrebi exhortatory preachers appears to have been the Sufi saint Abū Madyan, “whose sermons [delivered in his private mosque] would attract people from all around.”²¹ Nor did exhortatory preachers confine their activities to congregational or private mosques; according to H. A. Hussein, “many would select marketplaces and open roads as their preferred locales to exhort the people”. He cites the example of Abū l-‘Abbās al-Sabtī al-Marrākushī (d. 601/1204), “who would hold his assembly wherever he could sit down in the marketplaces and roads and exhort the people to do good deeds.”²² These notices provide evidence that exhortatory preaching was routinely practiced in al-Andalus and the Maghreb in a variety of guises and for a ranging from Sufi-ascetic assemblies, to the *faqīh*’s regular moral instruction of the people in the congregational mosque, to itinerant preachers delivering their sermons in marketplaces and roadsides.

While there are numerous references to exhortatory preachers and the holding of preaching assemblies, information is less forthcoming about the actual content of these sermons. The preservation of a lengthy manuscript of anonymous exhortatory sermons, MS Junta

¹⁹ Al-Marrākushī, *Naẓm al-jumān*, 94. See also Husayn, H. A., *al-Ḥaḍāra al-Islāmiyya fī l-Maghrib wa-l-Andalus fī ‘aṣr al-Murābiṭīn wa-l-Muwaḥḥidīn*, Cairo, 1980, 414. Arabic: *wa-huwa majālis al-wa'z allātī yatawallā al-ḥadītha fī-hā al-‘ulamā’ wa-l-ṣulahā’ yu’izū na wa-yuršidūna al-nās.*”

²⁰ Husayn, *al-Ḥaḍāra al-Islāmiyya*, 417. The source is ‘Abbās b. Ibrāhīm al-Marrākushī, *al-I’lām bi-man halla Marrākush wa-Aghmāt min al-a’lām*, Fez, 1936, I, 246.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 417, where the author cites from a manuscript of Aḥmad b. al-Qāsim’s *al-Mu‘azzā fī akhbār Abī Ya’zzā*.

²² *Ibidem*, 417, cf. al-Marrākushī, *al-I’lām*, I, 246.

C/3, is therefore significant. According to Ribera and Asín, the manuscript hails from Zaragoza and possibly dates from between the late twelfth to fourteenth century.²³ It is comprised of 20 folios containing ten “moralistic sermons”, the last of which is incomplete, but contains an explicit reference to “our living oppressed and captive under Christian rule”, indicating that the author was a Mudejar preacher who delivered his sermons before a Mudejar community.²⁴ The text exhibits several indicators of an ascetic and/or Sufi influence. The author of this sermon collection cites ascetics and Sufis whom we know composed similar anthologies, such as Muḥammad al-Makkī (d. 387/998) and Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 382/993), and he also frequently quotes al-Ghazālī.²⁵ Most of the sermons are untitled except for three: “a *maw‘īza* to pronounce and remember that God is greatest”, “a *maw‘īza* warning to remain steadfast in prayer”, and “a *maw‘īza* to remain patient in adversity.”

A synopsis of the third sermon (ff. 41-61), untitled, and which apparently was delivered on the occasion of ‘*Āshūrā*’,²⁶ will suffice to analyze the general characteristics of the genre. The exhortatory preaching assembly does not appear to follow a precisely choreographed ritual order like that prescribed for the *khuṭba*,²⁷ at least

²³ Ribera, J. and Asín, M., *Manuscritos árabes y aljamiados de la Biblioteca de la Junta*, Madrid, 1912, i-xxix, 255-256. In the prologue the authors explain that a large cache of Arabic and Aljamiado manuscripts were found hidden in a house in Zaragoza that belonged once to a Morisco (p. vi). The manuscript belongs to a codex of loose documents written in Arabic using Maghrebi script, which are older than the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts that comprise the majority of the texts (pp. xxv-xxvi). Folio 1 of the manuscript mentions the twelfth-century *mufassir* Ibn ‘Atiyya (d. 569/1174) by name, indicating that the preacher was alive at the end of the twelfth century or somewhat later.

²⁴ Ribera and Asín, *Manuscritos árabes y aljamiados*, 256.

²⁵ Abū Ṭālib Muḥammad al-Makkī, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, Cairo, 1892; Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Qurrat al-‘uyūn wa-maḥrah qalb al-maḥzūn*, Rabat, n.d.; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, Cairo, 1964.

²⁶ The only “blessed day” that the preacher explicitly singles out in this sermon (ff. 51-61) to reap the blessing of fasting, charity, and other good deeds.

²⁷ The canonical *khuṭba* (*khuṭba shar‘iyya*), which is prescribed for the Friday congregational prayer and the two great feast days, is performed according to a set of legal norms (*aḥkām*), which may differ slightly according to the *madhhab*. For a detailed description of the rules of the *khuṭba* performance, see Ibn al-‘Aṭṭār, Alā’ al-dīn Abū l-Ḥasan, *Kitāb Adab al-khaṭīb*, ed. M. b. Husayn al-Sulaymānī, Beirut, 1996, 91-115. See also *EI*² s.v. “Khuṭba” (art. by A.J. Wensinck); Calder, N., “Friday prayer and the juristic theory of government: Sarakhsī, Shirazi, Mawardī”, *BSOAS*, xlix, 1 (1986), 35-47, and Jones, “The Boundaries of Sin”, 147-174.

based on the evidence of Andalusian and Maghrebi sources. Nevertheless, the third sermon, as well as many others in the collection, begins with an invocation of God, in this case, “Praise be to God, the One” (Q. 112), the utterance of which is a speech act through which God is in fact praised,²⁸ and which may also allude to the performance of a Qur’ānic litany prior to the commencement of the actual sermon. Several sources indicate that such performances formed part of what could be called the “ritualization” of the preaching event. Ibn Jubayr’s eyewitness account of the preaching assemblies of Ibn al-Jawzī and of al-Qazwīnī, the rector of the Madrasa Nizamiyya, both feature the initial recitation of Qur’ānic verses by multiple psalmists. This recitation produces an intense emotional reaction among the audience, “arousing the fear of God (*taqwā*) and the desire for God (*shawq*)” and inducing uncontrolled weeping in some cases.²⁹ Al-Wansharīsī’s juridical responses describe elaborate Sufi ceremonies that feature the collective performance of Qur’ānic recitation and *dhikr* or chanted ritual invocations of God and blessings on Muḥammad prior to or following the sermon, and sometimes the recitation of mystical poetry accompanied by music. For instance, a case from fifteenth-century Fez mentions the gathering together of Muslims “on the occasion of the birthday (*mawlid*) of the Prophet in order to engage in pious exhortation (*mawā’iz*) and litanies and sometimes a psalmist recites poetic verses in praise of the Prophet.”³⁰ One such ceremony will be analyzed in further detail below. Here it suffices to note the close association between preaching and *dhikr* performance, vestiges of which survive in the written text.

After the pronouncement of the litany, the third sermon in the Mudejar collection issues two exhortations, the Qur’ānic verse, “Hasten to the forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden of Paradise whose width is as the width of heaven and earth” (Q. 57:21), followed by a saying of the Prophet, which serves as its commentary: “Whoever yearns for Paradise, let them hasten to do good deeds, and who-

²⁸ The classic studies on performative utterance include Austin, J. L., *How to do Things with Words*, Oxford, 1962; Searle, J. R., *Speech Acts*, Cambridge, 1969, and with respect to ritual, see Tambiah, S. J., “A Performative Approach to Ritual”, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 65 (1979), 113-69.

²⁹ Quoted in Maḥfuz, A., *Hidāyat al-murshidīn ilā ṭuruq al-wa’z wa-l-khiṭāba*, Cairo, n.d., 79-80. See also Swartz, “The Rules of the Popular Preaching”, 233.

³⁰ Al-Wansharīsī, *Kitāb al-Mi’yār*, XI, 46-47.

ever dreads the hellfire, let them renounce their lusts and desires...” (f. 4l). Divine and prophetic exhortation may be categorized as “overt acts” of power³¹ that demand response and reaction on the part of the recipients. The Qur’ānic and *ḥadīth* exhortations complement each other and together define the theme of repentance around which the preacher will develop the rest of the sermon. The order of these recitations, beginning with sacred scripture followed by the *ḥadīth*, is not arbitrary; it corresponds to the preacher’s acknowledgement of the supreme authority of God and the elect role of Muḥammad as the interpreter of the divine word, through his own deeds and sayings. It is after the pronouncement of these two sublime authorities that the preacher begins to speak in his own words explaining, “All of this is divided into parts: the first is following all the commands... and the second is abandoning all that is forbidden...” (f. 4l).

The preacher structures the sermon using divisions based on the principle of commanding right and forbidding wrong. In his ensuing explanations, he relies upon similitudes (*amthāl*, s. *mathal*) comparing repentance to the cure of the sick body through both medicine and proper nourishment and the avoidance of harmful substances, and cites further sayings of Muḥammad and al-Ghazālī. The denouement of this section of the sermon issues a stern warning that those insincere in their repentance are tantamount to polytheists and will be denied any spiritual reward: “they will gain nothing from their prayers but insomnia and nothing from their fasting but hunger and thirst” (f. 4l).

The second part of the sermon introduces two sayings, a prophetic *ḥadīth* followed by a Qur’ānic verse, both related to the central theme of repentance. The *ḥadīth* states that “The believer will not attain the reality of faith (*ḥaqīqat al-īmān*) until he wants for his fellow believer that which he wants for himself” (f. 5r). The preacher establishes a relation between this *ḥadīth* and the divine saying, “The Muslim is he who spares the people from his hands and tongue”, by clarifying that the former saying means that the true believer spares his fellows from his own evil deeds and words. He elaborates upon the meaning of these sayings by mentioning specific vices that must be avoided so as to not injure one’s fellow Muslim, for instance, “... that he not be envious of his brother..., despise him or delight in a calamity that has af-

³¹ Graham, W. A., *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, Cambridge, 1987, 64.

flicted him...” (f. 5r). As with the previous passages on commanding right and forbidding wrong, he also cites additional Qur’ānic verses and employs similitudes.

His elucidation of the divine saying, “The Muslim is he who preserves the people from his hands and tongue”, is particularly interesting since it allows him to redefine being a Muslim for his audience: “... the Muslim, that means he who is saved by his submission and his submission is his faith..., shall be spared from the punishment of God due to his separation from the polytheists... and to his sparing the people from [the harm] of his hand and tongue” (ff. 5r-5l). The preacher explains the meaning of this verse by comparing the Muslim to “one who appears at the court of a judge and finds that there is no opposing party to accuse him and consequently the judge orders his release: Likewise will God release His servant from the fires of hell on the Day of Resurrection” (f. 5l). He ends this section reiterating the moral command to avoid social sins such as calumny, envy, or delighting in the misery of others.

Following additional promises of the heavenly rewards, the preacher approaches what is the centerpiece of the sermon: the exhortation to perform good deeds, particularly fasting, prayer, and charity, on the day of ‘*Āshūrā*’. He cites a lengthy *ḥadīth* “on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās”, in which the Prophet urges the people to “supplicate God on the day of ‘*Āshūrā*’ because it is a blessed day...” (f. 5l). The remainder of the *ḥadīth* extols the talismanic effects of fasting and prayer on ‘*Āshūrā*’. The passages dealing with prayer include precise instructions for performing supererogatory rituals:

... one hundred *rak’āt*, reciting at each *rak’a* the first chapter of the *Qur’ān* (lit. *umm al-Qur’ān*) and (the verse) “Say! He is God the one...” (Q. 112) ten times, then when he has finished his prayer he says, “glory be to God”, “praise belongs to God”, “there is no god but God...”, “God is greater”, “there is no power and no might other than from God Almighty” (Q. 18: 37, 39) seventy times...(f. 5l).

Those who perform this ritual on the night of ‘*Āshūrā*’ are promised “salvation from the torments of the grave on the Day of Resurrection” (f. 5l). Similar rewards accrue to those who give charity on that day. Here the preacher illustrates the promise of redemption by drawing upon Qur’ānic or perhaps “stories of the prophets” imagery or *faḍā’il* literature that recount the prophets who were saved or especially blessed on the day of ‘*Āshūrā*’. Thus we read that “on the day

of ‘*Āshūrā*’ God Almighty rescued Abraham from the fire... and [He] granted victory to Moses and the Sons of Israel over the Pharaoh and his armies” (f. 51). The implication is that if God performed these prodigies on that day, surely He would redeem repentant Muslims as well for their sincere acts of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.

The sermon concludes with a narrative of the origins of the Prophet’s observation of ‘*Āshūrā*’, acknowledging at once its supererogatory status (having been replaced by the obligatory fast of Ramadan), while insisting that “the Prophet extolled it and commanded its exaltation and respect” (f. 6r). Again, the preacher appeals to the Prophet Muḥammad’s example saying that he commanded his own family to observe it, which justifies his exhortation to the audience to seek God’s forgiveness and do good deeds on that day. The final speech is an epithet reaffirming the Muslim community’s self-definition in view of their observance of ‘*Āshūrā*’: “God has made us the first to gain His satisfaction [and blessed us with] the virtue of this blessed day for all of Muḥammad’s *Umma* – a day endowed with spiritual merit, goodness, and blessings” (f. 6r).

A number of observations may be made about the content of the *maw‘īza* described above that will enhance our understanding of the potential impact of the preaching event. Allusion has already been made to the ritualizing features of the text, notably the initial litany, “Praise be to God, the One”, and especially the passages specifying to the audience the supererogatory rituals to be performed on the night of ‘*Āshūrā*’ and their ensuing heavenly rewards. I believe that such passages may constitute surviving vestiges of the orality of the preaching event to the extent that they harmonize with descriptions of Sufi rituals preserved in al-Wansharīsi’s *fatāwā*. One case from Granada that arose during the qadiship of Abū Sa‘īd b. Lubb (d. 782/1381) meticulously describes a ritual performed by “a group of Muslims that would gather together in a *ribāṭ* on the seashore during the meritorious nights (*al-layālī al-fāḍila*).” The ritual consisted of communal recitation of Qur’ānic verses, listening to readings from “the books of exhortation and delights (*wa-yasma‘ūna min kutub al-wa‘z wa-l-raqā‘iq*)”, repeated performances of litanies in praise of God and the Prophet (*dhikr*), the recitation of poetic verses in praise of Muḥammad by a mystical singer (*qawwāl*), sharing of a communal meal, and saying prayers for the Muslim community and its ruler before dispersing. The reaction of the participants is de-

scribed in the mystical language of hearts becoming “inflamed”, souls “yearning with desire”, and convulsed with “mystical ecstasy”.³²

This particular case mentions ceremonial homiletic readings rather than the live delivery of a sermon, thus revealing another modality of exhortatory preaching in al-Andalus and the Maghreb.³³ Nevertheless, it serves to illustrate the close affiliation that could exist between *dhikr* and homiletic exhortation. Pious exhortation, whether in the form of live preaching or homiletic readings, often took place within the larger ritual context of the *dhikr* assembly, while the sermon, in turn, exhorted the performance of *dhikr* rituals and extolled their talismanic rewards. Indeed, the title of two of the Mudejar sermons, “*maw‘īza li-dhikr Allāh akbar*” echoes this symbiosis. The performance of these rituals, coupled with the preacher’s words, “inflames” the audience and “provokes mystical ecstasy” in them. Scholars of ritual studies³⁴ argue that ritualizing elements such as periodicity – holding the ceremony at a special time believed to be spiritually “meritorious” or propitious; the use of liturgical language – Qur’ānic and *ḥadīth* recitation and the *dhikr* litanies; and prescribed bodily practices – performing the required ablutions prior to prayer or praying a specified number of *rak‘āt* – help to create a “controlled environment”³⁵ that enhances audience reception of the sermon. The Mudejar preacher engages his audience in his message of repentance and redemption through his exhortations to perform specific supererogatory rituals as an act of penitence on ‘*Āshūrā*’. The possibility of audience participation in the production of charismatic experience contrasts with the prescribed silence of the audience during the canonical *khutba*.

Analyzing the internal structure of the sermon also provides clues to understanding its potential impact. Theorists of public discourse argue that “the way in which the structure of the information [is presented] makes its messages meaningful, delimiting and disambiguate-

³² Al-Wansharīsī, *Kitāb al-Mi‘yār*, XI, 105.

³³ Jones, “The Boundaries of Sin”, 216-219.

³⁴ Bell, C., *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford, 1992, 197-223; Connerton, P., *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge, 1999, 72-104, and Smith, J. Z., *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, Chicago and London, 1992, 96-117.

³⁵ Smith, J. Z., *Imagining Religion: from Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago, 1988, 63.

ing the messages it communicates".³⁶ We have seen that the sermon began with a Qur'ānic exhortation of repentance, succeeded immediately by a prophetic *ḥadīth*, and finally by the preacher's own explanation of the same. The initial position of the scriptural verse, "Hasten to the forgiveness of your Lord and a Garden of Paradise whose width is as the width of heaven and earth" acknowledges the Qur'ān as the foremost exhortation. It is worth recalling that the ultimate aim of this sermon is to reinforce communal solidarity around the acts of repentance on the "blessed day" of *'Āshūrā'*. While this manuscript reveals no explicit indication of audience response, evidence elsewhere suggests that the recitation of Qur'ānic exhortations could elicit spontaneous acts of repentance from the audience.³⁷ The subsequent prophetic warning, "whoever yearns for Paradise, let them hasten to do good deeds, and whoever dreads the hellfire, let them renounce their passions and desires", ratifies Muḥammad's position as messenger of the divine word. The preacher then explains the meaning of these two sayings in terms of the familiar moral injunction of commanding right and forbidding wrongdoing. In so doing, he positions himself in a genealogy of authority that follows from God through the Prophet Muḥammad to the exhortatory preacher, whom he includes in the first sermon among the "heirs of the prophets" (f. 1r). Throughout the sermon, whether the divine saying precedes the prophet saying or vice-versa, the preacher's authority resides in his role as liaison, translating for his audience mythic, authoritative discourse into concrete moral and bodily acts.

Another "disambiguating" feature of this sermon is the strategic use and placement of *amthāl* or similitudes within the homily. More than mere aesthetic adornments, these "ornaments of speech (*washy al-kalām*)"³⁸ operate in the sermon as didactic tools, comparable to

³⁶ Witten, M., "The Restriction of Meaning in Religious Discourse: Centripetal Devices in a Fundamentalist Christian Sermon", in Robert Wuthnow (ed.), *Vocabularies of Public Life: Empirical Essays in Symbolic Structure*, London, 1992, 19-38, 20.

³⁷ Among the "reprehensible" innovations current in Fez was the practice of repeating the words "I repent" after the recitation of any Qur'ānic verse containing an exhortation. See Lagardère, V., *Histoire et Société en Occident Musulman au Moyen Âge. Analyse du Mi'yār d'al-Wanṣarīsī*, Madrid, 1995, 51; al-Wanṣarīsī, *Kitāb al-Mi'yār*, II, 461-511.

³⁸ One of the numerous words of praise that Ibn 'Abd Rabbīhi uses to extol the rhetorical power of *mathal*. See, *al-'Iqd al-farīd*, 3, 63.

their Christian counterparts the *exemplum*³⁹ and *similitudine*.⁴⁰ The *mathal* takes the form of brief sayings, proverbs, parables, or stories whose fundamental characteristics are comparison (*tashbīh*) with familiar (*sā'ir*)⁴¹ imagery (drawn from quotidian experience or nature). The *mathal*'s compactness and cultural logic lead toward a predictable resolution⁴² that elucidates the preceding Qur'ānic and Prophetic speech. By appealing to familiar concepts the preacher entices his audience to apply the message to their own contemporary situations.⁴³ Moreover, the underlying message of the homiletic *mathal* is almost invariably moral and eschatological and its comparative structure depicts a "dualistic eschatology"⁴⁴ drawing clear boundaries between faith and unbelief or heaven and hell. In this way, the *mathal* makes the sermon's message intelligible and applicable to audience mem-

³⁹ The scholarly literature on the *exemplum* is vast and thus the reader is referred to the classic study by Bremond, C., Le Goff, J. and Schmitt, J. C., *L'Exemplum: typologie des sources du Moyen Âge*, Turnhout, 1982, and the comprehensive bibliography contained therein on pp. 16-26. See also Aerts, W. J. and Gosman, M., *Exemplum et similitudo: Alexander the Great and Other Heroes as Points of Reference in Medieval Literature*, Groningen, 1988, 123-41. On Spain, see Sánchez, M. A., *Un sermonario castellano medieval*, Salamanca, 1999, 1, 95-110. While there is irrefutable evidence that some of the medieval Christian exempla collections derive from "Oriental" fables and Jewish sources, I have not encountered evidence of direct borrowing between Iberian Christian and Muslim sermon literature. Christian preachers borrow from eastern tales such as "Kalila wa Dimna", "Barlam and Josephat", and "The Book of Alexander", while Muslim exhortatory and canonical preachers tend to favour sources stemming from Scripture, *hadīth*, ascetic, and "stories of the prophets" literature, or the numerous collections of *amthāl*, e.g. the *Kitāb al-Amthāl* of Abū 'Ubayd (d. 224/838), the *Majma' al-Amthāl* of al-Maydānī (d. 518/1124) or al-Tirmidhī's *Amthāl min al-Qur'ān wa-l-Sunna*. Obviously these specimens have parallels in the parables attributed to Jesus and the other Biblical prophets.

⁴⁰ On the similitude, see Bataillon, L. J., "'Similitudines— et 'exempla' dans les sermons du XIIIe siècle", in *The Bible in the Medieval World. Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley*, Oxford, 1985, 191-205; Sánchez, M., *Un sermonario castellano medieval*, 1, 111-119.

⁴¹ On the *mathal* see *EF*² s.v. "Mathal" (art. by R. Sellheim) and his more extensive *Die klassisch-Arabischen Sprichwörter Sammlungen insbesondere die des Abu 'Ubayd*, The Hague, 1954. Sellheim specifies that the rhetorical device has three essential characteristics: comparison (*tashbīh*), brevity (*i'jāz*), and familiarity (*sā'ir*).

⁴² Witten, "The Restriction of Meaning", 23.

⁴³ González-Casanovas, R. J., *The Apostolic Hero and Community in Ramon Llull's Blanquerna*, New York, 1995, 56. The author's comments on the exemplum and similitude are relevant to the present discussion.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 58.

⁴⁵ In this sense the *mathal* helps realize one of the basic goals of eloquent speech according to classical Arabic rhetorical theory, that of "making the far near" and "clarifying

bers⁴⁵ and renders palpable the eschatological rewards and punishments expressed in the homiletic warnings.

Altogether there are three *amthāl* in this sermon, corresponding to its three parts. In the first *mathal* the preacher compared his moral instructions to “follow all the commands and avoid all the prohibitions” to the cure of the sick body, which demands equally the ingesting of medicine and nutritional food and the avoidance of all the harmful substances that provoked the illness. This allows him to introduce a theological warning that good deeds are in vain if they do not inhibit a person from committing “the abominations”. The second *mathal* explains the *ḥadīth* stipulating that those who wish to “attain the reality of faith” must desire for their fellow Muslims the same treatment as they desire for themselves. He compares those who fail in this regard to a tree: “if the roots are cut, it will not benefit from the sunshine and will have no use other than to kindle fire. Such is the case of the one who does a good deed without professing the oneness of God: there is nothing for him except for the fire (of hell)”. The final *mathal* forms part of the explanation of the saying that the Muslim “is he who preserves the people from his hands and tongues”. This true believer is defined as one who submits to God not only in the theological profession of the unity of God but also morally through his refusal to harm others with his hand or tongue. Such persons will be “differentiated from the polytheists”; they will be “as one who appears at the court of the judge and finds that there is no opposing party making a charge against him and that the judge orders his release”. Unlike the previous two similitudes, which were followed by stern warnings about hell, the final one is bounded by a series of enticements of the heavenly rewards for those who do good deeds and avoid sin.

The warnings of hell and enticements of paradise that follow these similitudes are meant to be as self-evident as the statements about the sick man, the uprooted tree, and the exonerated person. The familiar and mundane nature of these images positively enhances audience reception,⁴⁶ as does the strategic placement of the enticements of para-

the hidden truth”. See Alhelwah, K, “The Emergence and Development of Arabic Rhetorical Theory”, Doctoral Thesis, The Ohio State University, 1998, 146-147 and 160-161 in reference to al-Mubarrad’s treatise *al-Kāmil fī l-luġha wa-l-adab* and Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi’s *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*.

⁴⁶ Young Gregg, J., *Devils, Women, and Jews: Reflections of the Other in Medieval Sermon Stories*, Albany, 1977, 3.

dise after the frightful warnings of the hellfire. Such strategies may be seen as part of the preacher's technique of "softening the hearts"⁴⁷ of his audience to achieve the desired effects of repentance and a sustained "differentiation from the polytheists".

The discussion thus far has centered upon the general characteristics of pious exhortation, from the point of view of the content of the sermon and the performative and ritual aspects of the preaching event. To complete the portrait of homiletic exhortation in al-Andalus and the Maghreb, attention must now be turned to the hagiographic sources to explore the social role of the exhortatory preacher and the response of his audience.

The Preacher as a Witness to God and Society

Ibn al-Zayyāt al-Tādilī (d. 627/1230-31), the author of *al-Tashawwuf*, completed his hagiography of pious Sufī saints in the year 617/1221, during the reign of the Almohads. A *qāḍī* and man of letters, al-Tādilī was also one of the companions of the Moroccan saint Abū l-‘Abbās al-Sabtī (d. 601/1205) and a notice (*akhbār*) of this saint's life is appended to many of the surviving exemplars of the *al-Tashawwuf*. In the beginning of his work Ibn al-Zayyāt devotes several chapters to mapping out a typology of sainthood composed mainly of *ḥadīth* anecdotes that appear to serve as criteria for inclusion in his hagiography. The entry on "the pious servant" and *wā‘iz* Abū Waljūt Tumārt (d. 680/1281) is rich in details that stress the preacher's humble origins but is equally laconic about his background and formation. Of the latter we are told only that he was born in the town of Naffīs in Marrakesh and that his Sufī master (*shaykh*) was Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Khāliq b. Yasīn. The remainder of the notice merits quoting in full:

In his youth Abū Waljūt was a wedding singer. He repented before Almighty God and from then on would speak with wisdom (*bi l-ḥikma*) even though he was illiterate (*ummī*). I stayed with him one night in Marrakesh at the house of one of the Sufī adepts (*raḡul min al-murīdīn*) and he (Abū Waljūt) spent the entire night

⁴⁷ The idea of using exhortation to "soften the hearts" of the people in the obedience of God is mentioned several times by Ibn al-Jawzī. See *Kitāb al-quṣṣāṣ wa-l-mudhakkirīn*, 97, 104.

uttering all kinds of wisdom sayings (*al-ḥikam*) and parables (*al-amthāl*) without stuttering, faltering, or wavering. Truly, virtue is in the hands of God and comes to whom He wills. [Abū Waljūt] would speak before the Masmuda Berbers in their *ribāṭs* with exhortations not found [even] among the [most] eloquent preachers (*khaṭīb balīgh*). Whoever wanted could approach him. One night, at the ribāṭ of ‘Uqba in the town of Naffis, Abū Waljūt stood up and addressed the Masmuda Berbers, preaching an eloquent sermon (*maw‘īza balīgha*) to them in their own language, and he exhorted them to renounce the world and adopt an ascetic way of life (*wa-zahhadahum*).⁴⁸

Abū Waljūt’s social profile is similar to that of al-Azkānī, the protagonist of the anecdote at the start of this article. He, too, was a wedding singer, the implication being, perhaps, that he was of an inferior social class and uneducated or a libertarian who squandered his time on vain and trifling activities that distract from the remembrance of God. Whatever al-Tādilī’s motive for mentioning Abū Waljūt’s prior profession, the biographer seems to share the Mālikī disdain for singing and music, since this is the only reason that he gives to explain the preacher’s repentance. Generally, al-Tādilī’s biographies follow a similar pattern of revealing the sins or moral defects of the person in question before going on to describe the circumstances of his conversion. Thus we read in the notice on Abū ‘Imrān Mūsā al-Dar‘ī, for instance, that “[he] led an extravagant, dissolute life and then he repented (*kāna musrifan ‘alā nafsi-hi thumma tāba*).”⁴⁹

Abū Waljūt’s illiteracy is further substantiated by the absence of any indication that he received formal instruction in the Islamic sciences or that he hailed from a family of learned folk. Al-Tādilī’s reference to Abū Waljūt’s *ḥikma* therefore merits commentary. The biographer suggests that Abū Waljūt’s wisdom is of a different order and origin than that of ‘*ulamā*’, who owe their renown to their illustrious familial and intellectual genealogies, knowledge of the Qur’ān and the Traditions, rigorous adherence to the law and the duties of worship. In this al-Tādilī is perhaps following the precedent of some Muslim hagiographers and Arab and Greek philosophers for whom, as Goichon observes, ‘*ilm* is considered a sub-category of *ḥikma*.’⁵⁰ Certain Qur’ānic verses also define *ḥikma* as a higher spiritual truth that God bestowed upon the purest of his prophets, such

⁴⁸ Al-Tādilī, *al-Tashawwuf*, 400-401.

⁴⁹ Al-Tādilī, *al-Tashawwuf*, 306.

⁵⁰ *EF* s.v. “Ḥikma” (art. by A. H. Goichon).

as Jesus.⁵¹ Abū Waljūt is portrayed as the antithesis of the *‘ālim* whose pious reputation is inextricably bound to the degree of his exoteric scholarly knowledge.

The diminished importance accorded to scholarly knowledge frequently characterizes the literary genre of hagiography. Biographical dictionaries of scholars emphasize the subject’s intellectual pedigree, beginning with a general description of his scholarly formation and works, and listing his teachers and those from whom he received and to whom he transmitted knowledge. In contrast, the *al-Tashawwuf* belongs to the category of *manāqib*, hagiographies that record the virtues, moral character, charisma, and praiseworthy deeds of Sufis and “saints”. Accordingly, some of al-Tādilī’s entries subvert the traditional categories of knowledge and knowledge acquisition in favor of charismatic gifts and moral qualities. In some cases, he directly extols the superior virtues and gnosis of a Sufi/saint over the exoteric knowledge of the *‘ulamā’*.⁵² Such competition over religious authority informs, in my opinion, al-Tādilī’s qualification of Abū Waljūt’s wisdom in the terms of divine dispensation – “virtue is in the hands of God” – and his comparison of the *wā’iz*’s preaching with that of the liturgical preacher (*khaṭīb*). For instance, he implies that Abū Waljūt’s ability to speak “with wisdom” resulted directly from his spiritual conversion: “he repented to God Almighty and then he would speak with wisdom (*thumma tāba ilā Allāh ta‘allā fa-kāna yatakallamu bi-l-ḥikma*”). Yet if Abū Waljūt’s wisdom is divinely inspired, so, too, is his rhetorical eloquence (*balāgha*).

Eloquence is more than an aesthetic quality in the Islamic homiletic tradition; it constitutes the rhetorical and symbolic power through which an orator persuades and moves his audience and defeats his patron’s enemies.⁵³ Al-Tādilī marvels at Abū Waljūt’s ability to perform all night “without stuttering, faltering, or wavering” and insists that his eloquence matches, if not *surpasses* that of the li-

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² As a *qāḍī* of the Regrāga, al-Tādilī is obviously less caustic in his criticism of the *‘ulamā’* than other hagiographers, for instance, Ṭāhir al-Ṣadaḥī, who portrays open confrontation between Sufi saints and the *‘ulamā’*, portraying the latter as corrupted by mundane power and worldly pursuits.

⁵³ Jones, “The Boundaries of Sin”, 175-187. See also ‘Abd al-Sallām Shaqūr’s discussion of al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ’s rhetorical techniques in Shaqūr, ‘Abd al-Sallām, *al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ al-adīb. Al-adab al-Maghribī fī zill al-Murābiṭīn*, Rabat, n.d., 199-201.

turgical *khaṭīb*. The explicit contrast with the eloquent *khaṭīb* serves to highlight the extraordinary qualities of Abū Waljūt's preaching. A charismatic gift versus years of study of classical Arabic, rhetoric, and the Islamic sciences that would be required for a *khaṭīb* to master the art of eloquent oratory. Moreover, al-Tādilī's insistence upon Abū Waljūt's eloquence hints at a further underlying competition between the Arab and Berber sectors of society. *Balāgha* or eloquence is identified in Arabic rhetorical theory as synonymous with the perfect classical Arabic of the Bedouin and the ability to speak "without hesitation, without error" or "without repetition, stammering, nor seeking help" is particularly valued.⁵⁴ It would appear that Abū Waljūt knows no Arabic, since al-Tādilī only mentions that he preached to the Masmuda Berbers "in their own language". Thus the affirmation that his sermons were as eloquent as those of the educated *khaṭīb* coincides with the decidedly Berber character of the Almohad project, which included the vindication of Berber language and identity over and against the prominence of Arab identity in Islam⁵⁵.

Al-Tādilī provides a brief example of one of Abū Waljūt's parables, suggesting perhaps that his eloquence was most visible in this narrative form. At any rate, it demonstrates something of how the preacher connected with his audience:

Oh people! Your parable (*mathal*) is like that of a people for whom a bridge (*qaṭara*) was built so that they might cross over it. They went up to the highest point of the bridge and asked to settle down upon it and subsequently commenced building. Someone who saw them said, "This is a foolish people! They ask to settle in a place that is not a dwelling (*manzil*)." Like them, you have sought to remain in the mundane world, which is not an eternal abode (*dār qarār*), but rather a passageway to the hereafter. The hereafter is the [true] homeland (*al-mawṭan*), so there is no need for you to settle in a home that has no permanence.⁵⁶

That Ibn Zayyāt highlights Abū Waljūt's recourse to parables in order to preach asceticism and the Sufī and Qur'ānic concept of yearning for and preferring the hereafter to the mundane world is fur-

⁵⁴ Alhelwah, "The Emergence and Development", 165, 166, where the author cites al-Jāhiz's *al-Bayān wa-l-tabayīn*, I, 96, 97.

⁵⁵ *EF*² s.v. "Al-Muwaḥḥidūn" (art. by M. Shaztmiller); Sánchez Sandoval, J. J., *Sufismo y poder en Marruecos*, Cádiz, 2004, 109.

⁵⁶ Al-Tādilī, *al-Tashawwuf*, 401.

ther indication of the prominence of the *mathal* in homiletic exhortation. We have seen that the anonymous author of a collection of Mudejar exhortatory sermons employed numerous parables to illustrate the spiritual virtues of repentance in his sermon delivered on 'Āshūrā'. In the latter case, however, the preacher also includes multiple Qur'ānic citations and *ḥadīths* of the Prophet Muḥammad or his Companions. This raises the question of why al-Tādilī has chosen to single out the parable of the bridge to illustrate Abū Waljūt's rhetorical prowess. Since al-Tādilī has not reproduced the entire text of Abū Waljūt's sermon, it is dangerous to argue from silence that the preacher did not also cite from the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. Moreover, while not quoting scripture or *ḥadīth* explicitly, Abū Waljūt's parable echoes the imagery of Q. 40:39, which refers to the hereafter as the *dār al-ḡarār*. Also, the narrative style of Abū Waljūt's parable resembles many found in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, enhancing its recognition and reception as authoritative speech.

Ibn al-Zayyāt's inclusion of Abū Waljūt in his hagiography confirms that he considers him to be a preacher endowed with charisma. He possesses divinely inspired wisdom and rhetorical eloquence as well as thaumaturgic powers. The end of the notice describes the account told by "a trustworthy man" who was in Naffis with Abū Waljūt and heard him say "amen" although he did not appear to be praying (*al-du'ā*). «When he finished saying "amen" I asked him [about this] and he said, "Shayj Abū Balbujt was praying on Dimnat Mountain and I heard his prayers so I said 'amen' for him.»⁵⁷ This episode shows that Abū Waljūt has the charismatic gift of clairvoyance in his ability to "hear" the prayers of his fellow saints although separated by long distance.

Admittedly, al-Tādilī provides few details about the audience's composition and reception to Abū Waljūt's preaching. Yet it is probable that the preacher delivered his sermons exclusively before Sufi audiences, given the reference to numerous preaching engagements in the *ribāṭs* of the Masmuda Berbers, in addition to the sermon he delivered in the "house of one of the Sufi adepts". Al-Tādilī implies that others in the Masmuda region shared his enthusiasm for Abū Waljūt's charismatic exhortatory preaching, since we are told that "whoever

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 401.

wanted could approach him”. His popularity among his Sufi peers is reinforced by the observation that he would be invited into people’s homes to preach. Lastly, one may also conjecture that at least some audience members were unlettered in Arabic or at least not immersed in the tradition of the Islamic sciences, since al-Tādilī has no need to impress his readers with Abū Waljūt’s knowledge of the *ḥadīth* or the Qur’ān. As noted, the parable of the bridge, while echoing Qur’ānic parabolic discourse, cites neither the *ḥadīth* nor the Qur’ān nor any other authorities. In sum, the preacher has apparently chosen a parable that would appeal to and persuade his audience.

The second biographical notice is preserved in Ṭāhir al-Ṣadafī’s *Sirr al-maṣūn fī mā ukrima bihi l-mukhlisūn*, which, according to the editor, was compiled sometime before the death of Abū Ya’zzā in 572/1177.⁵⁸ Al-Ṣadafī describes Abū l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Fā’ida as “an admonitory preacher [and] ascetic [who] uttered many religious wise sayings, preached in a mosque which belonged to him, was open, simple, trustworthy, unpretentious and irrefutable.”⁵⁹ The hagiographer relates an anecdote in which a beggar interrupts al-Fā’ida’s sermon to ask him to take up a collection from the audience to gain enough money to purchase a garment to protect him from the cold weather. Al-Fā’ida does not wish to do so, it would seem, out of fear that his preaching activities would be linked to charlatanism.⁶⁰ Eventually, he relents to the poor man’s pleas and exhorts a member of the audience to “Give him a garment! In return God will give you another one in Paradise.” The audience member refuses, however, and rebukes him for asking him saying, “your kind normally only asks God.”

Al-Ṣadafī goes on to depict the preacher’s humiliation. He relates that al-Fā’ida instructed the beggar to come to his house the following day, hurriedly ended his sermon, and once at home he prayed to God to “clothe so-and-so and do not humiliate me in his eyes but show him Your omnipotence!” Instantly his prayer is answered, for some-

⁵⁸ Meier, F., “Ṭāhir al-Ṣadafī’s Forgotten Work on Western Saints of the 6th/12th Century”, in *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, Fritz Meier (ed.), Leiden, 1999, 427.

⁵⁹ Meier, “Ṭāhir al-Ṣadafī’s Forgotten Work”, 464.

⁶⁰ One is reminded of al-Ḥarīrī’s lampoon of an exhortatory preacher who is often seen using his oratory skills to gain money. See, for instance, the eleventh assembly in al-Ḥarīrī, *The Assemblies of Al Hariri*, transl. and notes Thomas Chenery, London, 1867, I, 163-164.

one knocks on his door delivering money to be used to aid a poor person whom “you think is worthy!” The next day, the beggar arrives, receives the garment, and al-Fā’ida instructs him to go to the man who had reproached him during the sermon the previous day and tell him, “I now have a garment thanks to God, not thanks to you.” The man “nearly died out of regret” over losing the heavenly reward for giving charity to the poor.⁶¹

This notice focuses less attention on al-Fā’ida’s prowess as an exhortatory preacher than on his charismatic gift as one whose prayers are immediately answered. Indeed, on the surface, al-Fā’ida appears to be unsuccessful as a preacher since his sermon is interrupted by the beggar and, moreover, his exhortation to the man in the audience to give the beggar money to buy a garment is met with reproach. It is important to note the competing audience expectations portrayed in this anecdote. The beggar fully expects the preacher to use his authority to secure alms on his behalf and determines that the preaching event is the appropriate venue for charity to be received. One may even conjecture that he approached al-Fā’ida in the first place due to his reputation as one whose prayers are answered. The man in the audience, however, evidently believes otherwise and reproaches the preacher for an apparent abuse of his vocation by exhorting him in an inappropriate manner. The fact that al-Fā’ida instructs the beggar to taunt the man with the garment that he has received “thanks to God and not to you” vindicates the reputation of the preacher and reinforces the exigency to acquiesce to the authority of exhortatory preachers. The man’s lament over having lost an opportunity to gain the heavenly recompense for almsgiving had he unhesitatingly obeyed al-Fā’ida’s exhortation positions the *wā’iz* as an intermediary between the ultimate divine authority and the members of the Muslim community. Thus, al-Ṣadafī affirms the authority of the popular preacher al-Fā’ida by portraying him as a witness to the omnipotence of God.

To understand properly the notices on Abū Waljūt and al-Fā’ida, the exhortatory preacher’s biography must be located within the larger social contexts of hagiography as a product of a specific textual community and of the contest between Sufi/ascetic and non-ascetic forms of religious authority. In other words, how are we to interpret

⁶¹ Meier, “Ṭāhir al-Ṣadafī’s Forgotten Work”, 464-465.

the portraits of Abū Waljūt, al-Fā'ida, and other *wu'āz* within the genres of hagiographic and biographic writing? What are authorial intent and agenda of al-Tādilī and al-Ṣadafī? I will suggest that part of the answer lies in his notion of witness.

Al-Tashawwuf begins with a lengthy prologue that, among other things, provides what al-Tādilī describes as a typology of sainthood (*ṣifat al-awliyā'*). Most relevant to the present discussion is the fifth chapter, "On the Goodness of their Praise and the Situation of their Acceptance on Earth", which begins with a quote from a *khuṭba* of the Prophet, as recorded in Ibn Māja's *Kitāb al-zuhd*. The Prophet preached, "'Hasten to distinguish between the people of paradise and the people of the hellfire, the best of you from the worst of you.' They said, 'By what, Oh Prophet of God?' 'By their good repute and their ill repute. You are witnesses of God, each of you to the other.'" ⁶² Muḥammad explained further: "There is no servant of God without reputation in heaven; if his reputation in heaven is good, his reputation on earth will be good. And if his reputation in heaven is bad, his reputation on earth will be bad." ⁶³ Al-Tādilī's inclusion of these sayings seems to me of singular importance in understanding the social function of sainthood. At the meta-level, like all hagiography, the *al-Tashawwuf* is propagandistic and thus participates in this process of witnessing by calling attention to the "good reputation" of the saints al-Tādilī has included in his biography. Regrettably, the introductory prologue of al-Ṣadafī's *al-Sirr al-maṣūn* has been lost. ⁶⁴ Yet the anecdote analyzed above also conforms to the motif of the exhortatory preacher fulfilling the social roles of witnessing to God before one's peers and exposing the good or bad reputation of the persons depicted.

A close reading of Abū Waljūt's hagiographic notice suggests that for al-Tādilī, preachers operate as witnesses in two modalities: as witnesses of the unlimited power of God and as catalysts for the conversion of others to the path toward God. We have already seen that al-Tādilī affirms the divinely inspired origins of Abū Waljūt's wisdom and homiletic eloquence. That an illiterate wedding singer should speak with a quasi-prophetic wisdom, rhetorical eloquence,

⁶² Al-Tādilī, *al-Tashawwuf*, 49.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 49.

⁶⁴ Meier, "Ṭāhir al-Ṣadafī's Forgotten Work", 427.

and charismatic authority that exceeds those of the *khaṭīb* witnesses to the power of God to work wonders.

The exhortatory preacher and sermon are also depicted as precipitating a climax or turning point in the life of an ascetic. This article began with the notice of al-Azkānī's conversion from professional wedding singer to Sufī devout – a conversion that was prompted by listening to a sermon of the preacher Abū Ishāq al-Mayūrqī. Brief allusion was also made to Abū 'Imrān b. Dar'ī whom al-Tādilī described as a “dissolute libertine until he repented sincerely to God”. Al-Tādilī says that he “learned the entire Qur'ān by heart in a short time and devoted himself to fasting, prayer, and spiritual exertion (*ijtihād*)”

... Whenever I looked at him his mystical state (*hālu-hu*) reminded me of the hereafter. The reason for his death was that he had attended a preaching assembly (*majlis wa'z*) one Friday and he was suddenly struck with a state of rapture (*aṣābahu ḥāl*). He left the mosque, went home, and woke up the next day in the same condition. He lost consciousness and collapsed on the road and was carried back to his home. After two or three days he died, may God rest his soul.⁶⁵

In this anecdote the preaching assembly acts as a catalyst for Abū 'Imrān's “illumination by divine light”, which precipitates his final union with God.⁶⁶ Sufī theosophy distinguishes between the state of rapture or enlightenment (*ḥāl*), which is a “free gift from God”⁶⁷ and the stages (*maqāmāt*) through which the soul progresses on its mystical journey toward God and which are the product of human effort. Al-Tādilī's association of Abū 'Imrān's attendance of a preaching assembly with his subsequent rapture further supports the prominence given to the role of pious exhortation as a catalyst or harbinger of charismatic experience.

Concluding Remarks

From the previous discussion of hagiographic representations of exhortatory preachers and audience response the preacher emerges as

⁶⁵ Al-Tādilī, *al-Tashawwuf*, 305-306.

⁶⁶ Trimmingham, J. S., *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford, 1998, 140.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 139.

a charismatic witness to God, playing the role of conduit of the audience member's experience of the divine. It is interesting to note that al-Tādilī's typology of sainthood included visits to *ribāṭs* ⁶⁸ and the regular attendance of the assemblies of "remembering God... and mentioning the Hereafter", ⁶⁹ in both of which, as we have seen, preaching formed an integral part. The preaching assembly thus offered a public venue where Muslims could display their piety in the form of supererogatory ritual performance, weeping copious tears, fits of ecstasy, and other somatic experiences as part of the participation in and the acquisition of charisma. The hagiographic notices imply that life-changing conversion to the Sufi path, mystical illumination, or even union with the divine (death) could result from attending preaching *majālis*. Al-Tādilī and al-Ṣadafī also transmit the compelling message that the socially marginalized – the illiterate, those unschooled in the Islamic sciences, popular musicians, even beggars, far removed from the prestigious social milieu of the '*ulamā*' or elite Sufi circles – can access "the sacred" by attending preaching assemblies. In one sense, the analysis of the hagiographic texts reconfirms previous scholarly assessments (Swartz, Berkey, *et. al*) of popular preachers as posing a challenge to the prestige and authority of Sunni '*ulamā*' – recall al-Tādilī's insistence that Abū Waljūt's preaching was as eloquent as "the most eloquent *khaṭīb*". Yet the consideration of the homiletic samples in view of the biographical and juridical evidence allows us to go further and draw some tentative conclusions about why these sermons were potentially so powerful.

We have seen that the preaching event is composed of a range of devices – ritual, structural, rhetorical, and scriptural-narrative – that together have tremendous affective capacity to evoke or engender religious ecstasy and other religious experiences in the audience. ⁷⁰ To the well-known emotional and somatic responses induced by listening

⁶⁸ Al-Tādilī, *al-Tashawwuf*, 51. He mentions in particular visiting the "*ribāṭ* of Shākir", located in the Sahl in the village of Sidī Shākir, where the devout would gather during Ramadan to recite the Qur'ān. The editor points out the *ribāṭ* of Shākir was only one of "numerous *ribāṭs*" in which exhortatory preaching (*wa'z*) was employed to spread Islam among the Masmuda Berbers.

⁶⁹ Al-Tādilī, *al-Tashawwuf*, 48.

⁷⁰ On the shared or interactive component of emotional experience produced in *qawwālī* and other performance genres, see Brenneis, D., "Shared and Solitary Sentiments: the Discourse of Friendship, Play, and Anger in Bhatgaon", in *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, C. A. Lutz and L. Abu-Lughod (eds.), Cambridge, 1990, 114.

to or performing the Qur'ānic recitation and *adhkār* that immediately precede the sermon one must add the expectation of a positive response to divine and prophetic exhortation, especially when framed within the language of talismanic rewards for obedience and dire castigations for wilful disobedience or negligence. If the commonsensical examples and predictability of the *amthāl* entice listeners to apply the homiletic message to their own lives, the preacher's instructions to carry out specific rituals, fasts or acts of charity, coupled with detailed descriptions of the divine recompense for each act enhances and indeed, partially determines, audience reception to exhortations of repentance. Al-Wansharīsī's records of Sufi ceremonies featuring *maw'iza* and *dhikr* suggest how the audience actively participates in the production of its own ecstatic religious experience.

Lastly, the personal charisma of the preacher is fundamental in determining the affective capacity of homiletic exhortation. Al-Ṣadafī's and al-Tādilī's vignettes show that such preachers were enthusiastically pursued for their powers of intercession and the *baraka* received from listening to their sermons. But the anonymous Mudejar preacher provides elegant testimony of a self-awareness of his charisma and his duty as one of the "heirs of the prophets" to assume the role of divine and social witness. He began his first sermon with the Qur'ānic exhortation, "God All-powerful and Exalted said, 'And remember! Verily, the remembrance [of God] benefits the believers'" (Q. 51:55). To explain the verse, he narrated an account of the origins of Muḥammad's preaching mission, in which he also cites Q. 74:2-7: "[God] said, 'Oh Muḥammad, arise and deliver thy warning! And thy Lord do thou magnify!...'" The narration of this event constitutes a mimetic representation of the prophetic mission of warning and reminding the people of God. The overarching theme of this series of sermons is that *dhikr* "benefits the believers" in two ways, "one for the elites and the other for the masses." As he goes on to explain, the religious duties of the elites "are warning and reminding (*al-indhār wa-l-tadhkira*) and these are the special domain of the prophets and after them the '*ulamā*' because they are "the heirs of the prophets (*wārithat al-anbiyā*)" (f. 1r). In other words, the Mudejar preacher represented himself to his audience as continuing the genealogy of charismatic authority that conjoins the '*ulamā*' to this prophetic legacy and privileges exhortatory preachers, since they embody the functions of "warning and reminding" "the masses" to fulfil their duties

toward God. The determination of whether liturgical *khutba* or other forms of pious exhortation, particularly that engaged in by the *faqīhs*, fulfilled similar social and spiritual functions must await the location of further textual evidence.

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