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by Robin Ostle

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Tunisia has long benefitted from the cultural crosscurrents that derive from its situation at the meeting point of the Eastern and Western basins of the Mediterranean and its proximity to Europe. Islamic tradition has been a rich source for Tunisian writers, but fanaticism, whether secular or religious, is bad news for creative literature.

The Ottoman statesman Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi, who was Prime Minister of Tunisia from 1873 to 1877, had written with urgency and enthusiasm in the 1860s about the modernization of the state and society strictly within an Islamic context. 'The shari'a was the cradle of justice and security for all ages, and a perfectly adequate fabric for a modern and progressive society, provided that it was not interpreted in a narrow, xenophobic fashion. According to Khayr al-Din, all manner of eclectic adaptation from Europe could and should take place, provided that the basic principles of the shari'a were not contravened. Tyrannical despotism was the harbinger of the destruction of society, and this had to be curbed by the development of institutions of government and public service that would outlive individual rulers. In this respect Khayr al-Din also saw an important role for a free press which would allow the expression of opinion and provide a vital channel of communication between the ruler and his subjects. In any event the wise ruler would always take care to consult his subjects through some modern version of the traditional shura. Above all, says Khayr al-Din, the genuine bases of the shari'a, Justice, and Knowledge or Enlightenment, must be re-asserted

at all times, along with the principle of *maslaha*; this would then lead to change and innovation which would benefit the whole community and complement rather than contradict the shari'a.²

Khayr al-Din Tunisi's vision was a glowing and optimistic version of what might be achieved in an Islamic society that gives full scope to its own dynamic potential, but the vision was overtaken by history. In 1881 the French Protectorate was established in Tunisia, and this introduced a colonial period for this country in the course of which the Tunisian nationalists chose increasingly to fight the colonizers through educational systems and political methods and philosophies that had less and less to do with the indigenous Islamic tradition as time went on.

There is a clear parallel here with the case of Egypt, particularly in that period between the two World Wars. In Tunisia official Islam was both represented and symbolized by the Zaitouna Mosque and its ulama, but these circles became increasingly discredited as they seemed quite incapable of offering any alternative or effective opposition to the French Protectorate. Rightly or wrongly they were also stigmatized as those who had presided over the invasion of their country.

Initially the reactions to the ineffectiveness of the Zaitouna were slow to appear, but they were significant: in 1896 the Khalduniya Institute was founded in order to supplement the increasingly irrelevant education of the Zaitouna Mosque, and this happened in the teeth of the opposition of many of the ulama. In 1905 the founding of the Sadiqiya Association brought together former students of Sadiqi College under the leadership of Ali Bach Hamba, and this Association

was to have a tremendous impact on the formation of the future political elite of the country.³

As the nationalist movement in Tunisia gathered impetus in the early decades of the twentieth century, official Zaitounan Islam seemed to become more and more compromised by its coexistence policies with the French Protectorate authorities. Here it may be instructive to consider the issue over which the Neo-Destour Party split away from the original Destour Party in 1934: the immediate cause of the quarrel was over the right of Muslims who had accepted French citizenship to be buried in a Muslim cemetery." Habib Bourguiba and his followers argued strongly against this right. They had sought and obtained a fatwa from the Mufti of Bizerta to support their point of view. However, the leaders of the old Destour Party defended the right to Muslim burial even of those who had accepted French citizenship, and they persuaded the Rector of the Zaitouna to issue a fatwa contrary to that of the Mufti of Bizerta. Thus the Zaitouna was seen to be identifying itself with the French point of view on the most sensitive of issues, and this was to lead to the formation of a much more vigorous, uncompromising nationalist movement which distanced itself from the ulama.

One of the problems one faces when discussing Islam, or even a specific Islamic institution such as the Azhar in Egypt or the Zaitouna in Tunisia, is that it is quite impossible to characterize them in sweeping monolithic terms and retain any vestige of accuracy. For all its time-serving collaboration the Zaitouna produced its fair share of radicals: the group of reformers who were at the center of the Sadiqiya Association during the first decade of this century became known as the "Young Tunisians" (after the Young Turks), and one of their most important members was Shaikh Abd al-Aziz Taalbi, a graduate not of the Sadiqi College but of the Zaitouna.⁴

None of the Zaitounan radicals was more impressive or more controversial than the young *mujtahid* Tahir al-Haddad (1899-1935), who produced an analysis of Tunisian society which in socio-economic terms is recognizably Marxist and who espoused the unpopular cause of female emancipation in a particularly far-reaching manner.⁵ Al-Haddad's friend and fellow Zaitounan graduate, the poet Abu'l-Qasim al-Shabbi (1909-1934), was equally disaffected by the version

of Islam as it was proclaimed by his alma mater. Both of them had been dismayed and revolted by the nature of the instruction presented to them and their contemporaries. Muhammad Ferid Ghazi describes how this was a "soulless education, a pale reflexion of what Islamic education had been at the height of its creative activity." Al-Shabbi and his generation were traumatized by the sheer irrelevance of their Zaitounan formations to the economic, social, and political problems in which the majority of their compatriots lived. It was this that made them a generation of militants, in literature and in life.

In 1927, in the Khalduniya Institute, al-Shabbi delivered an extreme and bitter attack on traditional Arab-Islamic culture in the form of a long lecture entitled "Poetic Imagination and the Arabs":

Arabic literature no longer suits our present spirit, temperament, inclinations or aspirations in life. . . . It was not created for us, children of these times, but for hearts that are now silenced by death. . . . We must never look upon Arabic *litterature* as an ideal which we have to follow or whose spirit, style, and ideas we have to imitate, but we must consider it simply as one of those ancient literatures which we admire and respect, and no more. . . . We have now come to desire life. But we must first realize that we are hungry and naked and that that huge and abundant wealth bequeathed to us by the Arabs cannot satisfy or fulfill our need and hunger.⁶

Al-Shabbi's lecture is extreme in its views and for much of the time quite unscholarly. To extract any value at all from it, we must see it as an emotional reaction of extreme frustration, a loud rhetorical protest against the travesties of Islamic ideals and values as they existed in the sorry state of his own society. Posterity can be grateful for the fact that his poetry is relatively free of such polemical material, but at least one poem is a revealing summary of the impatience felt by al-Shabbi and his friends in the face of the ossification of vital parts of the Islamic tradition in their life and times:

The learned clerics have been in a deep and powerful sleep, and closed their ears to what the world repeated. . . .

You kept silent, Defenders of the Faith, silent and speechless; you slept with eyelids tightly closed as the floods gathered.

Behind your silence *clamour* the ranks

of heresy and unbelief, and lo, the air is full of sin.

Awake! For the night of sleep is far advanced, and signs of the rays of morning have appeared.⁷

It would not be accurate to think of this poem as anti-Islamic. Certainly it castigates the so-called "Defenders of the Faith," those who should be in the vanguard of the defense of the real interests of Islam and its tradition, but who are in fact presiding over its degradation:

Practices which bring forth disasters in the country cut down the pillars of Religion, while Religion looks on!

But the poem is not negative. It seeks to bring about a rebirth and a new beginning; it is not seeking to turn away from religion but to revitalize it and rejuvenate it. Essentially al-Shabbi's is the same voice as that of Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi or Tahir al-Haddad. It rails against that peculiarly Islamic form of ignorance that sees the shari'a and the tradition as a means for restriction and regressive coercion, rather than the basis for genuine creativity and progress.

"Defenders of the Faith" is by no means a particularly unfortunate example of modern Arabic verse, but it must be said that it is far removed from the best that al-Shabbi wrote. He revolted against the sterility of the Zaitounan worldview by embracing the soaring aspirations and the limitless horizons of Arab romanticism, and while much of his poetry is imbued with the language and imagery of spiritual adoration and spiritual anguish, this is not a type of poetic devotion which is practiced within the limits of any specific religious system. Al-Shabbi chants his own deeply personal and moving liturgies, not of Islam, but of the pantheistic religiosity of the true romantic:

In the vastness of my heart is a temple to Beauty

Built by life of visions and dreams.

And I recited prayers in its humble shadows,

I burned incense and lighted *candles*.¹⁰

In the original Arabic, lines such as these are part of the best of his poetic achievement, and it is by no means unreasonable to suggest that a powerful factor which made him the romantic that he was was the lifeless constriction of Zaitounan Islam. He and his circle of revoltes felt frustrated and betrayed by the lack of positive leadership to come from the Religious

Establishment in the extreme circumstances in which their country found itself during the period between the World Wars. Yet both they and the Neo-Destour Party recognized that Islam was the fundamental cultural reality of their population, and they sought to present it in a more dynamic and progressive light.

A variety of aspects of the Islamic tradition form a central part of the writings of Mahmud al-Mas'adi (b.1911), a major writer whose work moves clearly away from the romantic style which was such a feature of Arabic literature during the inter-war period. Although most of his prose-writing was not actually published until after Tunisia became independent in 1956, it was written much earlier: his best-known work, *al-Sudd* ("The Dam")¹¹ dates from 1939-40 and others such as *Mawlid al-Nisyan* ("Genesis of Oblivion")¹² and *Had-datha Abu Hurayra, Qal . . .* ("Abu Hurayra related, saying . . .")¹³ were composed in the early 1940s.

Al-Sudd is usually thought of as a play in formal terms, but careful analysis of its structure reveals that it has elements drawn from old narrative forms and language patterns found in the classical Arabic tradition.¹⁴ The essential conflict in the work is expressed through the two main characters, Ghaylan and his female companion Maymuna: they arrive in a valley dominated at one end by a mountain and inhabited by a tribe who worship the Goddess Sahabba'. The central themes of their cults and rituals are fire and drought. Ghaylan decides to transform the life of the community by constructing a dam to exploit a long-neglected spring, thus providing water and destroying the power and the cult of Sahabba'. But just as the structure is completed, it collapses as a result of natural and supernatural forces.

Al-Sudd is a highly philosophical work of literature and its drama arises from conflicts of intellectual attitude as the two main characters seek to impose on each other very different solutions to their problems. Ghaylan is a positive, existential individual with an overriding belief in the power of action to transform reality, and one of his most frequent phrases is *al-iman bi'l-fi'l* — "belief in action." He is the progressive visionary for whom the traditional forms of religion and superstition are obstacles to his desired transformations of life and society. He is so fired by the power of his own imagination that he is quite blind to the necessity of

taking account of the religious beliefs and practices of the inhabitants of the valley whose lives he is going to change. Maymuna is quite different: she has made a certain effort to learn all about the strange cults of the inhabitants of the valley, and has an awareness of being but a part of some much greater whole. She dwells with a certain reverence on the power, beauty, and mystery of nature in the shape of the mountain and the valley, while Ghaylan sees them merely as the raw material for his own designs. With his fanatical "belief in action" Ghaylan throws down the gauntlet in uncom-

promising, Promethean fashion, challenging the age-old established order of the tribe and its cults of desiccation. Maymuna strives to instill in him some sense of humility, some idea of compromise and acceptance of natural limitations and the facts of their situation. Her task is to prevail upon him to accept the existence of other realities outside his own imagination.

In fact, *al-Sudd* is nothing less than a literary treatment of some of the fundamental problems that attend the evolution of Islamic society, both in individual and communal terms. What is the scope for individual responsibil-

Explanations of Technical Terms in order as they appear in the Text.

<i>shari'a</i>	The Islamic canon law.
<i>shura</i>	A word meaning "consultation." Traditionally rulers would seek advice from their subjects through <i>shura</i> .
<i>maslaha</i>	Public interest or benefit. If some measure could be shown to be in the public interest, then it could be adopted as community practice, provided that it was not disapproved of in the Qur'an or in Sacred Tradition.
<i>ulama</i>	Religious dignitaries or legal authorities.
<i>fatwa</i>	A formal legal opinion delivered by a Mufti.
<i>Mufti</i>	An official expounder of Islamic law.
<i>mujtahid</i>	One who exercises <i>ijtihad</i> , which is the process of legal interpretation by qualified individuals.
<i>Qadariya</i>	Term applied to very early groups of Muslim theologians who maintained that God did not necessarily determine all human acts.
<i>Murji'a</i>	The name applied to a non-Shi'ite school of thought amongst pious opposition groups in the first two centuries of Islam.
<i>Mu'tazilis</i>	Muslim theologians who lay great stress on human free responsibility and divine justice.
<i>Hanbalis</i>	The followers of the school of Islamic law founded by Ahmad b. Hanbal (750-855).
<i>Hadith</i>	In general the word means "conversation," "report," or "account," It has the more specific meaning of the sacred tradition of the deeds and utterances of the Prophet and his Companions.
<i>mashreq</i>	The eastern regions of the Arab World
<i>Sufism</i>	The name usually given to Islamic Mysticism.
<i>Ikhwan al-Safa'</i>	"Brethren of Purity." Originally they were groups of scholars and philosophers based at Basra and Baghdad in the tenth century, dedicated to enlightening and spiritually purifying themselves, and to propagating their ideas throughout the Islamic World.
<i>mahjar</i>	Emigration. The name given to a group of Syro-Lebanese poets active in parts of North and South America in the early twentieth century.

ity, action, and initiative, in situations where the sources of power, both spiritual and temporal, are essentially authoritarian? This dilemma has been expressed in Islamic theology through the antithesis of the *Qadariva* and *Murji'a* solutions, or through the conflicts between the Mu'tazilis and the Hanbalis. At what point does tradition cease to be a source of strength and the basis of creativity, and become something as barren and destructive as the cults of Sahabba' and her followers? How does one achieve the necessary balance between beneficial innovation and the consensus of the religious authorities and the people as a whole? It is no accident that some of Ghaylan's diction seems to echo the terminology of treatises on Islamic theology: the words most frequently on his lips are *khalq* (creation) and *fi'l* (action),¹⁵ the typical vocabulary of one of the oldest theological controversies in Islam, that of Free Will and Predestination. Al-Mas'adi has a profound knowledge of wide areas of the classical Arabic literary and religious tradition, and further investigation reveals that his character Ghaylan is based upon Ghaylan b. Muslim, one of the very earliest supporters of the Qadari views. He was the son of a freed slave of the third Caliph Uthman b. Affan, who ruled from 644 to 656, and worked as a government official for the Umayyad regime in Damascus. During the Caliphate of Hisham b. Abd al-Malik (724-743) he was put to death after he had been interrogated about his Qadari beliefs.¹⁶ The character Maymuna is probably named after one of the wives of the Prophet.

An examination of al-Mas'adi's other prose works reveals equally strong links with the Arab-Islamic tradition in both formal and thematic terms. The form of *Mawlid al-Nisyan* ("Genesis of Oblivion") seems to be a deliberate imitation of the structure of an old tale, or hikaya, where the dialogue of the two protagonists, Madyan and Layla, proceeds by the alternation of *qal* ("he said") *qalat* ("she said") and the passages of prose and description which form the bridging sections between the dialogue are relatively brief and insubstantial. In the case of Haddatha Abu Hurayra Qal ("Abu Hurayra related, saying . . .") Mas'adi has quite patently adapted the old hadith form of narrative.

Al-Mas'adi chose to retain and to embellish basic structures of old Arabic prose forms for his creative purposes, instead of writing in the

form of short stories or novels which by the 1940s were very well established in modern Arabic literature. The choice cannot be explained by the relative backwardness of the literary scene in Tunisia compared with, for example, Egypt in the East. The modern Arabic literature of the mashreq was certainly known and to some extent read in Tunisia, and since the late 1920s Tunisian writers had developed their own version of the modern short story. It did not exist in such profusion, nor was it so technically advanced as its Egyptian counterpart; nevertheless it was there. It is not that al-Mas'adi used these traditional prose forms because the other modern nonindigenous forms were unknown and inaccessible to him; rather, he seems to have taken a definite decision to build on the Arabic literary tradition in this way.

In addition to the three prose works mentioned above, two shorter compositions form part of the same volume as "Genesis of Oblivion": these are entitled *Sindbad wa'l-Tahara* ("Sindbad and Purity"), and *al-Musafir* ("The Voyager"). In the majority of these works one can discern a common thread in the various character portrayals, namely the idea of rising above the decayed state of ordinary existence to a higher realm of spiritual purity.

The first story in Haddatha Abu Hurayra Qal, which has as its title "Tale of the First Resurrection," is illustrative." One day a friend comes to Abu Hurayra offering to distract him and to turn him away from the cares and preoccupations of daily life. They ride out from Mecca into the desert and his friend leads him to a place in the sand dunes where they see a youth and a maiden, like Adam and Eve, stretched out side by side on the top of a dune. As the sun rises the two figures stir to life. The maiden begins to dance and sing, and the movement of her body begins to fuse with the sand and the breeze which surrounds her. Abu Hurayra is captivated by the scene, and feels transported by her dancing and singing, as though he is no longer in his normal earthly form. The youth accompanies her dance and song on a musical instrument, and she begins to undulate with the tones of the music, now quickly, now slowly, so that as the tones rise into the air, she seems to melt into the air or to be in the folds of one of the breezes. The climax comes when the youth raises the maid into the air and she adopts the attitude of

one plunging into the sea, bathed in the rays of the sun. The two embrace and then disappear, dancing away across the dunes. Abu Hurayra finds his friend weeping bitterly, and the friend explains that this is because of his sadness that he must remain a prisoner of earthly life (*al-dunya*) and can only be a fascinated spectator of such spiritual ecstasy without becoming a part of it.

In *Mawlid al-Nisyan* ("Genesis of Oblivion") it is a constant desire of Madyan, the hero, to transcend the death and decay which for him are represented by life on earth, whereas his female companion Layla has settled for a life on earth, a life of substance and matter. In al-Mas'adi's writing, it is usually the female characters who display a capacity for making compromises and accommodations with reality, and who show great qualities of tact and common sense. *Sindbad in Sindbad wa'l-Tahara* ("Sindbad and Purity") is prey to feelings of existential disgust with the life of substance and matter, and is nauseated by the moral and physical filth of the taverns in the ports: "he turned round and dragging his kit-bag he forced his way through the tavern and went out into the night saying wildly, 'To what lies beyond life, to Purity.' He got on to the first ship that he encountered and sent it violently forward, plunging into the tempest and the sea. That was the last of his voyages, the purity of the depths engulfed him."¹⁸

These themes and characters which seek after a state of ultimate purity are derived directly from Sufism, and perhaps also from the doctrines of emanation as developed by the Ikhwan *al-Safa'*. The major aim is to seek happiness not in this world but in the next (*al-Akhira*), and as the soul comes closer and closer to a state of purity it gradually begins to disengage itself from the burdens of its earthly form and its earthly milieu as it loses interest in the body and its appetites (*shahawat*). Through this pursuit of purity eventually the soul gains release from the body and is able to merge with the universal soul. Some of these ideas had been introduced into modern Arabic literature by the emigre Arab poets from Syria and Lebanon who worked in North and South America during the early decades of this century, the so-called *mahjar* poets. In the writings of Jibran Khalil Jibran, Mikha'il Nu'ayma, Ilya Abu Madi, and Nasib Arida, there are well-known examples of poems which explore in

particular the theme of the dualism of Body and Soul, but none of the mahjar writers embraces Sufi ideas and imagery in such depth and detail as Mahmud al-Mas'adi. It is by no means impossible that al-Mas'adi in Tunisia was acquainted with mahjar literature, as this was relatively well-known in the Arab world from the 1920s onwards, but all the evidence suggests that the inspiration for most of his work was derived directly from classical Arabic sources.

One is struck by the extent to which Sufi-derived themes have become widespread in modern Arabic literature, and especially in poetry, in the 1960s and the 1970s, and in this respect al-Mas'adi, who wrote these works in the late 1930s and the 1940s, would appear to be something of a precursor. Some of the greatest names in Arabic literature since World War II have found Sufism a fertile source of inspiration — the Iraqi poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, or Salah Abd al-Sabur of Egypt, who in 1965 published a famous verse drama based on the arrest, trial, and martyrdom of the Sufi al-Hallaj (d.922).¹⁹ None has paid more attention to Sufism than the Syrian Adonis (Ali Ahmad Sa'id),²⁰ who is generally recognized as the foremost Arab poet living today, and such has been the extent of Adonis' influence amongst younger poets that Sufism certainly has become something of a cult-theme in the 1970s.

One reason often put forward for the popularity of mysticism in contemporary Arabic poetry is that writers are seeking a form of escape from the multitude of political ills which beset the region and are a constant cause of tragedy and needless sacrifice. Those who hold this view look back at the enthusiasm with which Arabic poetry espoused political themes in the late 1950s, and claim that as the political hopes turned to despair and a series of depressing failures ranging from the catastrophic military defeat of 1967 to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, so writers were driven to turn their backs on socio-political material, seeking refuge in mysticism.

This negative point of view, usually upheld by those seeking to score polemical points at the expense of modern Arab culture, ignores the much more positive reasons why Sufism has such attraction for Mahmud al-Mas'adi and other writers who have succeeded him elsewhere in the Arab world. It is much more convincing to consider this phenomenon

as another example of the extent to which Arab writers have been exploring the potential of their own cultural heritage in recent years; they are fascinated by the wealth and subtlety of the language and imagery of Sufism, and rightly so. It is a fresh literary world for them to explore, and one from their own tradition. In addition, the characters derived from these Sufi sources are of necessity figures who do not fit easily within the orthodox legalistic perimeters of the Islamic religious system. They are usually controversial dreamers and visionaries — Ghaylan, Madyan, Sindbad — who have quite a lot in common with the poet al-Shabbi or the mujtahid Tahir al-Haddad in real life. Characters such as these are essential to the longevity and continuing creativity of the Islamic tradition, but they will always be marginal to the mainstreams of Muslim orthodoxy. This makes them extremely attractive subjects to creative writers, who have a natural tendency to explore the more marginal areas of their social and cultural situations in the constant quest for fresh vision and innovation. Furthermore, in many Arab countries it is not difficult for writers to feel an affinity with the unorthodox outsider, as that is the very position occupied by a lot of them who struggle against constant attempts made by the state to coerce them into becoming extensions of the national bureaucratic machines.

Since 1956 in post-independence Tunisia, the conflict between the progressive, aspiring character-type and the weight of local religious traditions have continued to have a powerful impact on literary expression. The novella by Abd al-Majid Atiya (b. 1925) entitled *al-Munbatt* ("Man Without Roots") and published in 1967 will serve to illustrate the theme.²¹ The story is set in the Sahel region of Tunisia and the hero, Hasan, is determined to avoid becoming one of the "condemned" (mahkumin 'alayhim), those who are trapped in a web of restricted possibilities reinforced by cultural and religious pressures. The core of the book is the traditional Muslim family background of his home in the Sahel, and the demands his devoted widowed mother and the local social traditions make upon him. On becoming a qualified teacher, Hasan wishes to pursue higher education at the university but there are strong and insidious pressures on him: provided that he marries his cousin Habiba, his own sister Saliha will then be betrothed to

Jabir, his cousin, and thus the wealth and property of the family will not go outside the family circle. Even the most passive characters in the book exert subtle but powerful pressures on Hasan: the neighbors of the family are constantly on the watch to see that he does the proper and logical thing in this context; while Saliha his sister hardly ever speaks, her mute presence is a powerful factor bearing down on him as her fate depends entirely on his decision. The duty he owes to his mother (and the social context of his birthplace) ebbs and flows against his natural desire to fulfill his talents and aspirations. The web of the traditional behavior patterns that surround him is strengthened by numerous details and insights into the local folklore and superstition, and an additional pressure on Hasan is the fact that if he marries Habiba he will heal an old family quarrel.

The plot reflects the violent movements of the young man's dilemma: temporarily the traditional mores win the day and he agrees to become betrothed to Habiba, but then, desperate to pursue higher studies, he flees from Tunis, where he had taken a post as a teacher, to Paris. In the end, Hasan is quite unable to reconcile the varying demands of his home milieu, the senseless chaotic bureaucracy of the Tunisian Ministry of Education, and his own ambitions. His mother dies, he abandons both his family and his country, and he becomes al-Munbatt — a man without roots, cut off from his origins.

There is a direct continuation of the work of Mahmud al-Mas'adi in the writings of Izz al-Din al-Madani. In his book *Khurafat* ("Fables") published in 1968,²² he adapts a variety of traditional prose forms from classical Arabic, including the hadith. It is true that on occasion al-Mas'adi did this for satirical reasons, but on the whole al-Mas'adi's satire is gentle and sympathetic. This is not so with al-Madani: he transforms this traditional material in order to expose it to ridicule, demonstrating at the same time a great gift for linguistic and thematic parody, again reminiscent of al-Mas'adi's style in *al-Sudd*. This book is iconoclastic in tone, the protest of an angry young radical impatient with the weight of tradition, and published at a time when Ahmed Ben Salah, the Minister of Planning, was at the height of his considerable powers, having introduced the country to a period of economic and social upheaval provoked by his

ambitious programs for reform.²³ Ben Salah was disgraced and imprisoned in 1970, and the reforming zeal of the late 1960s became considerably muted throughout Tunisian society. Had al-Madani written *al-Khurafat* some ten years later, it is most unlikely that it would have seen the light of day.

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In common with most other societies throughout the Near and Middle East, Tunisia has experienced its own version of Islamic political resurgence in the 1970s. The Tunisian

fundamentalist movement is usually referred to as *al-Ittihad al-Islami* which has strong support in both town and countryside, and certainly benefitted from the impact of the Iranian Revolution. This society has always been one of the most open in the Arab World, deriving benefit from many cultural crosscurrents because of its proximity to Europe and its situation at the meeting point of the Eastern and Western basins of the Mediterranean. It would seem to be an unlikely candidate for the revival of Muslim fundamentalism, but one could also say the same of Egypt, a country well endowed with

liberal traditions in its culture and its society, if not in its politics, and where Muslim activism has been particularly strong during the last decade. The purpose of this brief study has been to demonstrate that the Islamic tradition can continue to be a rich source of inspiration for the Arab writer both in positive and negative terms, as authors either identify with some facets of it, or react against others. But fanaticism, whether it is secular or religious, is bad news for creative literature.

[July 1983]

NOTES

1. Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi: *Aqwam al-Masalik fi Ma'rifat Ahwal al-Mamalik*, Tunis 1972. (Ed. M.al-Shanufi). There is an English translation of this treatise by L.C. Brown entitled *The Surest Path*, Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs, 1967.
2. See pages 74-86 of the English translation.
3. Wilfrid Knapp (Ed.): *North West Africa*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 355.
4. *Ibid.* p. 359.
5. *Ibid.* p. 356
6. Tahir al-Haddad: *al-Ummal al-Tunisiyyun wa Zuhur al-Harakat al-Niqabiyya*, Tunis 1966.
Imra'atuna fi'l-Shari'a wa'l-Mujtama', Tunis 1972.
7. M.F Ghazi: "Le Milieu Zitounien de 1920-1933 et la Formation de Abu'l-Qasim al-Shabbi." *Cahiers de Tunisie*, No. 28, 1959.
8. Translated by M.M. Badawi in his article "Convention and Revolt in Modern Arabic Poetry." See G.E. von Grunebaum (Ed): *Arabic Poetry, Theory and Development*, Wiesbaden 1973, p. 196.
9. The poem is entitled "Oh Defenders of the Faith" (*Ya Humat al-Din*), pp. 165-166 of Abu'l-Qasim al-Shabbi's collected poems Aghani *al-Hayat*, Tunis 1966.
10. *Ibid.* p. 235. The title of the poem from which this extract is taken is "The New Morning (*al-Sabah al-Jadid*).
11. References are to *al-Sudd*, 2nd edition, Tunis 1974.
12. References are to *Mawlid al-Nisyan*, Tunis, no date of publication.
13. References are to Haddatha Abu Hurayra *Qal*, 1st edition, Tunis 1973
14. For a more detailed analysis of *al-Sudd*, see my article "Mahmud al-Mas'adi and Tunisia's 'Lost Generation.'" *Journal of Arabic Literature*, VIII, 1977, pp 153-166.
15. See Ghaylan's speeches in *al-Sudd*, p. 23 and p. 129.
16. *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New edition), article on Ghaylan b. Muslim.
17. Haddatha Abu Hurayra *Qal*, pp. 17-27.
18. *Mawlid al-Nisyan*, p. 151
19. Salah Abd al-Sabur. *Ma'sat al-Hallaj*, Beirut 1965.
20. See particularly the collection of poems by Ali Ahmad Sa'id entitled Aghani Mihyar *al-Dimashqi*, Beirut 1961. See also his poems entitled "The Second Songs of Mihyar the Damascene," *al-Mawaqif* (Beirut), nos. 30-31.
21. Abd al-Majid Atiya: *al-Munbatt*, 1st edition, Tunis 1967.
22. Izz al-Din al-Madani: *Khurafat*, Tunis 1968
23. Wilfrid Knapp: *North West Africa*, p. 375.