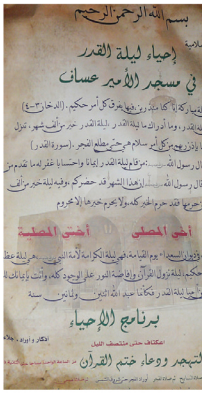
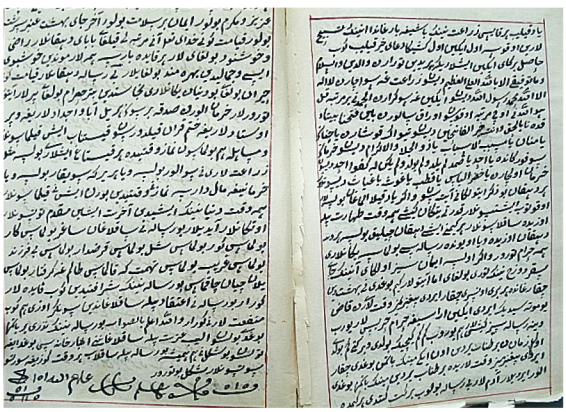
Performing Religion: Actors, contexts, and texts

Case studies on Islam

Edited by Ines Weinrich





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Performing Religion:
Actors, contexts, and texts
Case studies on Islam

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Preface

This volume is one component in a wider process of exploring the relation between texts and actors. An initial step was made at the Deutscher Orientalistentag of 2010 in Marburg on the panel 'Handlung, Text und Kontext. Überlegungen zu Gattungsbegriffen, Definitionen und Kategorien', organized in cooperation with Ulrike Stohrer.[1] The panel was followed by the international conference 'Performing Religion: Actors, contexts, and texts', held at the Orient-Institut Beirut in November 2011. The core of this volume's contributions was presented at this conference.[2] Another outcome of the conference was a subsequent joint workshop, organized by the Cluster of Excellence 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context' (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg) and the Orient-Institut Beirut: 'Aesthetics of the Sublime: Religious texts and rhetorical theory' held in Cairo in December 2012. The publication of the workshop is forthcoming. The contributions collected in the volume at hand reflect the multiple academic backgrounds and angles that were present at the conference in Beirut: Islamic Studies, Religious Studies, Cultural Anthropology, Literary Studies, and Musicology. I share the conviction that the study of religious practice can benefit from such a plurality of approaches.

A note on transliteration

The transliteration of quotations and terms in Oriental languages is based on the system of the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft[3] but uses the common English spelling for certain consonants (th, j, kh, dh, sh, gh) and does not assimilate the article. However, changes in scholarly interests became tangible in the formal considerations which arose in the process of editing. The study of Islam is no longer limited to regions of the Middle East but takes account of the religion's global and transnational character. In our case, it includes Islam's agents of Europe and North America, be they migrants or converts. This influenced the formal editing process of this volume: the Islamic (and often Arabic) names of Italian converts are spelled as they spell them themselves. Given the international character and environment of the Burhaniya [Burhāniyya] Sufi order, its name

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1 The contribution by Marius Hundhammer stems from this panel.

2 As part of the conference, Marion Katz elaborated on the communicative structure of ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) and her contribution can be read in full length in her monograph (Marion Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice*, Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press 2013, chapter three).

3 *Die Transliteration der arabischen Schrift und ihrer Anwendung auf die Hauptliteratursprachen der islamischen Welt. Denkschrift dem 19. Orientalistenkongress in Rom*, vorgelegt von der Trankriptionskommission der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Leipzig: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft in Kommission bei F. A. Brockhaus 1935.

Tariqa Burhaniya is spelled like it appears on the order's English website, thus as it is known to its followers and sympathizers. This holds equally for names and terms used in the religious movement of Universal Sufism. The names of Lebanese villages and towns are spelled as they appear on street signs and maps or are pronounced in common parlance to make them trackable on maps, navigation apps, or through inquiries to the local population. In many cases, the transliteration is provided in […] when the name or term is mentioned for the first time. Common terms and names of places have not been transcribed (e.g. Qur'an, Sura, Mecca).

Acknowledgments

The conference "Performing Religion: Actors, contexts, and texts" at the Orient-Institut Beirut was made possible by generous financial support from the Fritz Thyssen Foundation. A research grant by the Max Weber Foundation following my position at the Orient-Institut Beirut allowed me to finalize my own contribution and to progress in the editing process. The manuscript was finalized and the proofs were corrected during my stay at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg "Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe" (Ruhr-Universität Bochum). To all these institutions I would like to express my gratitude.

I am also grateful to the Orient-Institut Beirut and its director Stefan Leder for supporting the idea and implementation of the conference. I am especially indebted to the staff and student assistants at the Orient-Institut for doing a marvellous job during the conference to create an intense and inspiring working atmosphere.

I would like to thank the editorial board of the series Beiruter Texte und Studien (BTS) for including this volume in their series. Finally, I like to thank Carly McLaughlin for her excellent work in language editing and Torsten Wollina at the Orient-Institut who has overseen the production process.

Introduction: From Texts to Performances

Ines Weinrich

A brief look at the history of the study of Islam: Texts, contexts, and actors

The study of Islam as a religious belief system has been primarily undertaken as a study of texts. This is fairly self-evident, as the main religious medium is a written text. Around this text, the Qur'an, various branches of indigenous scholarship have developed, partly driven by the wish and need to understand its meaning and to read it with an understanding of the social reality of a given society. These branches include fields like linguistics, historiography, exegesis, and law and have been written in Arabic as well as other languages. Thus, philological competence is a must in the study of Islam.

Yet, for a long time the main written text in Islam was treated solely as a book, i.e. a textual composition in its entirety, and the oral character of the text and its formation was thereby largely neglected. This neglect refers, on the one hand, to its main mediality as oral performance during and as ritual, that is, its recitation as a means to re-enact and to complete the miracle of Divine interaction with the Human. It also refers, on the other hand, to the Qur'anic text as a reflection of a communicative process taking place during the emergence of the early Muslim community. Rhetorical devices, topics, and the composition of Suras reveal the interaction with the cultures and belief systems of that time and indicate the development of an Islamic liturgical practice.[1] This holds equally for the study of many other texts whose primary function does not lie in written form. Angelika Neuwirth rightly remarks that one of the more recent textbooks on Islamic ritual does not contain any example of a ritually employed text.[2]

With respect to the study of ritual, scholarly interest has lain primarily in the historical development of ritual and the identification of pre-Islamic elements

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1 Cf. Andreas Kellermann, "Die Mündlichkeit des Koran. Ein forschungsgeschichtliches Problem der Arabistik", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft* 5 (1995), 1-33; William A. Graham and Navid Kermani, "Recitation and Aesthetic Reception", in: *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006, 115-141; Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike. Ein europäischer Zugang*, Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen 2010, especially chapter one for an overview of the research history and chapter six for liturgical development.

2 Neuwirth, *Der Koran*, 346, referring to Gerald Hawting, ed., *The Development of Islamic Ritual*, Ashgate: Variorum 2006.

which have been incorporated into Islamic ritual.[3] On the other hand, the study of small-scale Muslim communities and their religious practices, the interaction between religious specialists and believers, the use of the body or of devices aiming at the senses has often been carried out by scholars from the field of Cultural Anthropology – to the extent that we can actually speak of a division of labour between Islamic Studies and Cultural Anthropology. This labour division has unfortunately led to a tendency which has further deepened the division: studies of Islamic religious practice have tended to focus on the seemingly sensational, on the so-called 'different': Sufi practices, religious minorities, or so-called 'folk' or 'popular' religion. Valuable as these works are, showing the great diversity of Islamic practices and lending deep insight into individual forms of it, they have at the same time suggested – often without intention – that the use of aesthetic sensation or bodily techniques is limited to the extra-ordinary practices and groups of Islam. With the aforementioned labour division, a thematic and conceptual division also evolved: that between 'normative' and 'non-conformist' Islam, the latter being defined by deviancy. This notion becomes problematic when we look at social reality, as many Muslims who participate in *dhikr* or *mawlid* gatherings or perform *ziyāra* would consider this as meritoriously pious and often: as Sunni practice. Recently, a growing body of scholarly literature on religious practice has emerged, especially in the field of historical studies, due to interest in historical anthropology and a growing awareness of the problematic binary of popular culture vs. elite culture.[4] The critical voices of *'ulamā'* writing in the 13th or 14th century on a variety of believers' practices, for instance, should not be read as an indication of a clear-cut division between elite and folk practice but as a discourse on power vis-à-vis popular preachers or Sufi shaykhs who base themselves on other forms of cultural capital than the formal education of the traditional scholar.[5]

Religion performed

The fact that only a few studies on Islam have relied on the observation and analysis of practice is not unique to Islamic Studies but is symptomatic of a gen-

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3 Cf. William A. Graham, "Islam in the Mirror of Ritual", in: *Islam's Understanding of Itself*, Richard G. Hovannisian and Speros Vryonis, eds, Malibu, California: Undena Publications 1983, 53-71.

4 Amongst others: Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous:* Ziyāra *and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt*, Leiden: Brill 1999; Jonathan P. Berkey, "Popular Culture under the Mamluks: A Historiographical Survey", *Mamluk Studies Review* 9 (2005), 133-146; Daniella Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria: Mosques, Cemeteries and Sermons under the Zangids and Ayyūbids (1146-1260)*, Leiden: Brill 2007; Stephan Conermann, ed., *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus? Mamluk Studies – State of the Art*, Göttingen: Bonn University Press 2013.

5 Cf. Berkey, "Popular Culture", 139 ff.

eral trend. Equally, in Religious Studies, 'ritual thought' and 'ritual action' have been treated as rather separate entities of study.[6] Growing interest in the study of ritual, including secular ritual and addressing issues of arbitrariness and meaninglessness, has emerged since the 1970s.[7] Although the question of what a ritual is does not form the key question of this volume, a variety of rituals constitute the basis of its authors' observations and examinations: local pilgrimage, the recitation of praise poetry, the crafts' *risāla* or elegies, *dhikr*, preaching and praying. Rather than setting out for yet another attempt at defining 'ritual', I will briefly name elements of a cluster of characteristics which define ritual that are relevant for questions addressed in this volume. Rituals are thus understood as a sequence of acts which

- are carried out after planning or spontaneously
- can be, or are, repeated
- rely on different modes of authorization (e.g. age, charisma, framing by salvation narratives)
- are performed with intention (sometimes emphasized by a formal *niyya*)
- are not necessarily performed and understood by all actors in the same way
- can be altered, negotiated, or changed
- both display and produce reality
- transform the everyday.

The shift towards an emphasis on the study of ritual practice coincided with the so-called *performative turn* in Cultural Studies.[8] Building on theories developed in the field of Linguistics (most prominently John L. Austin's series of lectures *How to do Things with Words*, 1955, published 1962), performance theory was adopted and expanded by Theatre Studies.[9] It has been elaborated as an effective tool for analysing the dual quality of performance as being both material and ephemeral.[10] This dual quality holds equally for the performance of ritual. Drawing on the etymology of 'performance' from Latin 'per' ('through') and 'forma' ('form'), Ronald Grimes states that "ritual […] would count as performance insofar as it is

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6 This fact has been most prominently voiced by Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press 1992.

7 Cf. Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press 1997; Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek and Michael Stausberg, eds, *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2006 for both the history and different schools of ritual studies and a re-evaluation of major concepts.

8 Cf. Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Reinbek: Rowohlt 2006, 38, 104-143.

9 Cf. amongst others Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* [1988], rev. ed., New York and London: Routledge 2003; Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2004; Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Performativität*, Bielefeld: transcript 2012.

10 Cf. Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik*, chapter four on the materiality of performance.

formal behaviour".[11] Other than this, he argues in favour of keeping ritual distinct from performance, thus emphasizing both similarities and differences between the two.[12] The intention to study not only the structure of rituals but also their mediation is reflected in a more recent shift in Religious Studies towards aesthetics and material culture.[13] This field of studying religion emphasizes the role of the body and of objects; interest lies less in the study of abstract thought than of practice, of the 'doing with' as an important factor which shapes meaning:

> Nowadays scholars of material culture are much more intrigued by the felt-knowledge that looking, touching, shopping, revering, or praying constitutes. The context for understanding things, in other words, is practice. But practice is understood as the cultivation of embedded or embodied ways of knowing. […] Meaning is a complex process of interaction in which people, objects, environments, histories, words, and ideas take part.[14]

Notably, this view embraces both directions: how people handle and use things as well as how things may shape human behaviour. Here, performance is understood less in its theatrical dimension and more in a general sense as social practice.

> Performance has encouraged the development of a much more robust, less intellectualized understanding of the social construction of reality. Social performance is understood to make public attitudes, to create shared consciousness, to order social fields, to circulate feelings, and thereby to establish consensus, which may be thought of as the social body of a group.[15]

In the volume at hand, performance is understood in two ways. It is understood as practice, as the way of dealing with objects and ideas as a means to ascribe meaning to them. Within this understanding, performance is scrutinized in a narrower sense in its relation to text. Here, it signifies the materialization of text by bringing it into an acoustically manifested form, that is, into a different materiality than the text's chemical consistency ('ink on paper'). This acoustic materiality is not limited to the mere verbalization of words but also includes non-verbal elements which

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11 Ronald L. Grimes, "Performance", in: *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek and Michael Stausberg, eds, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 379-394, here 381.

12 Grimes, "Performance", 382 f., 392 f.

13 'Religionsästhetik' or 'Religionsaisthetik' and 'Materiale Religion' in German; cf. Jürgen Mohn, "Religionsaisthetik: Religion(en) als Wahrnehmungsräume", in: *Religionswissenschaft*, Michael Stausberg, ed., Berlin: de Gruyter 2012, S. 329-334; Inken Prohl, "Materiale Religion", in: *Religionswissenschaft*, Michael Stausberg, ed., Berlin: de Gruyter 2012, 379-392; in English 'Material Religion'. A journal of the same name, devoted to this aspect, was established in 2005, cf. "Editorial Statement", in: *Material Religion* 1 (2005), 4-8. For a more recent volume on the mediation of religion see Sally M. Promey, ed., *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2014.

14 David Morgan, "The Materiality of Cultural Construction", *Material Religion* 4 (2008), 228-229, here 228.

15 David Morgan, "Materiality, Social Analysis, and the Study of Religion", in: *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, David Morgan, ed., London and New York: Routledge 2010, 55-74, here 66.

accompany and constitute performance, like facial expressions, the treatment of time, or the creation of atmosphere. Writing on literature in a general sense, Ruth Finnegan defines performance as "realization as a publicly enacted display in the here and now"[16]. Such a performance allows the audience to experience the sensual quality of a text, it involves the body, and it creates interaction between the religious or ritual specialist (the performer) and the audience.

Whereas the first understanding studies performative practice which produces reality, the second understanding studies the performative qualities of a text. Rather than viewing texts merely as repositories of data, the concern is to highlight the role of agency in people's dealings with texts.[17]

Acts – texts – interpretations

The contributions in this volume explore the place and function of texts in religious practice; they study not only what a text does to listeners – how it is received, how listeners get emotionally involved –, but also the relation of the believers to text: what is done with texts, how do people use, value, or alter them. The contributions ask how religious practice is reflected in texts, scrutinize their relation to objects, study verbalized and non-verbalized ideas, and read rituals as texts.

The volume is divided into three sections. The first section deals with objects, texts, and acts carried out in the context of the positive power or blessing which may be acquired by believers: it asks how objects are used, what types of actions are performed, and what notions arise around concepts of blessing (*baraka*) and its acquisition.

The contribution of Marianus Hundhammer shows how the investigation of textual sources isolated from actual practice may lead to assumptions which do not match the religious meaning and significance attributed by the doers. In the case of the *quba*ʿ, an important object within the local pilgrimage to the tomb of the

16 Ruth Finnegan, "The How of Literature", *Oral Tradition* 20 (2005), 164-187, here 164.

17 The emphasis of this volume lies on religious practice as ritual practice. Regarding texts in the milieu of teaching and religious scholarship, see Andreas Görke and Konrad Hirschler, eds, *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*, Beirut: Ergon 2011; Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2012 and their respective bibliographies. Studies on contemporary practices have been conducted in the field of *mawlid* – albeit mainly with regard to theological controversies or the celebrations' interrelationship with political power – and of Shiite ʿĀshūrāʾ practices, here predominantly on processions and the passion play and less on the performance of poetry and narratives. With regard to language performance, the studies by Charles Hirschkind – for the context of audio-taped sermons in Cairo – and by Linda Jones – on medieval Arab homiletics – should be mentioned (Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*, New York: Columbia University Press 2006; Linda G. Jones, *The Power of Oratory in the Medieval Muslim World*, Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press 2012).

prophet Hūd in Yemen, attention has been focused on the outer (phallic) form of the object, missing the fact that the objects kept inside are the bearers of religious meaning. It is only through a combination of philological study and fieldwork that one can approach the meaning of the object and the actions performed with it. His contribution nevertheless also broaches the limits of fieldwork, here cases in which members hesitate to provide full information to outsiders of the community or feel restricted when writing or talking about sacred objects.

Nour Farra-Haddad elaborates on practices which in most cases do not have any fixed or written sets of rules but nevertheless constitute an essential part of lived religion for many Christians and Muslims in Lebanon. She presents immensely rich material stemming from her extensive fieldwork on various sites in Lebanon which are religiously meaningful to Christian Catholics, Christian Orthodox, Muslim Sunni, Shiite, Druze, and other confessional groups. Tombs, shrines, chapels, caves or other natural sites are visited by believers to seek support, to express gratitude, to perform a vow, and, above all, to obtain blessing (*baraka*). Farra-Haddad shows the wide range of performed acts and touches on how traditions and rites are generated, for instance through the imitation of spontaneous acts. Her contribution furthermore documents the commonalities between different confessional groups in Lebanon which is manifested in the practices of local pilgrimage.

Gebhard Fartacek and Lorenz Nigst researched similar sites in Syria. Whereas Farra-Haddad focuses on the different types of (shared) actions, Fartacek and Nigst focus on the overall operational mode of *baraka*. Analysing the concepts of 'holy place' and '*baraka*' in relation to everyday life, they show that the overall goal of acquiring *baraka* is 'good' communal living according to local norms and values (norm-conformant mode). To achieve this, pilgrims nevertheless have to perform actions they term as 'not normal', and the person who is responsible for having imbued a specific place with *baraka* has likewise accomplished this as a result of breaking with norms for the sake of God (dissociative mode). These contrary but complementary modes of *baraka*, read within the 'structure' and 'anti-structure' of Victor Turner's theory of ritual, the authors argue, explain the healing effects of *baraka* for its believers.

Whereas the contributions by Hundhammer, Farra-Haddad, Fartacek and Nigst study the acquisition of blessing through the rites of local pilgrimage, Stefan Reichmuth highlights a different context of blessing, that of Sufi scholarship in the 18th century. Focusing on the writings of the Sufi scholar Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1791), he examines the role of the Sufi chains of transmission (*salāsil*). The intensified accumulation of Sufi chains and the parallels it shows with structures of the transmission of prophetic traditions is characteristic of a type of Sufi writing developed from the 15th century onwards. It reveals a new quality of the chains as bearers of blessing, manifested in the growing lists of chains which are in some cases an attempt to trace back to the prophet himself.

In the second part of the book, authors study the use and composition of literary texts in the widest sense. This part explores how texts are used in ritual settings, how they are publically enacted and what kinds of performances are inscribed into the text. It further draws on questions of genre and textual modes, especially the dynamics between oral and written forms of texts.

Ines Weinrich studies contemporary usages of the 13th-century poem *al-Burda* by the Mamluk poet al-Būṣīrī, one of the most renowned poems of praise for the prophet Muḥammad. This poem of 160 verses is performed either in its entirety or in selected parts. Particularly striking are its framing by prayer verses and the use of an antiphon and refrain which turns the text's linear structure into a strophic one. The refrain provides not only the basis for alternate singing, thus adding a participatory element; it also serves, through its form as an invocation of blessings for the prophet, a ritual function by securing the recitation's efficacy. Based on fieldwork carried out in urban Sunni milieus in Beirut, Weinrich's study identifies two major forms of performance, the litany style and the *qaṣīda* style. These correspond to the different functions of the poem: as a supplication and ritual re-enactment of the poem's transformative power, as a prayer for the occasion of *laylat al-qadr*, and as praise for the prophet in a more general sense. As such, the poem's function is primarily defined by its performance mode rather than by its textual character.

Jeanine Dağyeli explores the problems of researching historical performances: her contribution features the craft's *risāla* in Central Asia in the 19th and early 20th century. The *risāla* contains information on the origin of the craft, the craft's patron, and moral conduct, as well as basic concepts of Islam and prayers which should accompany the various stages of the production process. Copied frequently, altered according to the needs of the audience, recited publicly, kept as a book in the work space and used as an amulet, the *risāla* more than once straddles the boundaries between genres, the divine and mundane spheres, and written and oral text. Operating at the interstices of oral and written tradition, the oral and the written modes serve different functions: as a channel for the flux of information and emotional responses on the one hand and as authorization, latent magical communication acts, and *aide mémoire* on the other.

The textual genre which Roxane Haag-Higuchi examines in her contribution is of particular interest for its performative character: religious elegies in the context of Shiite mourning sessions. Performed together with the recitation of martyr narratives, the passion play, or street processions, they are one component of a dense ritual texture which commemorates the death of the prophet's grandson Ḥusayn and other family members in the month of Muḥarram. She views these texts as "a constant in which its variable performative actualizations are contingent". To present her argument, she draws mainly upon the poems of Yaghmā Jandaqī (d. 1859) who is credited with having invented a specific poetic form ('dirges for breast-beating'). Elegies create a bond between performers and their audiences; Jandaqī's elegies further create a bond between the texts and the material performance of the

passion play on stage. His texts compose objects, props, and colours in conjunction with notions of space and time all of which refer to the staged commemorated events; they furthermore feature a palpable rhythmic quality which is achieved by a novel arrangement of the poetic elements within the verse. These techniques result in a mutual reinforcement of the elegies and the performance on stage and establish a close bond between the text and the human body through the text's perception of the material world, space, and time.

Sabine Dorpmüller analyses three dimensions of preaching: the devices of the preacher, its effect on his listeners and their response, and the evaluation by its observer who is both an insider and an outsider. The Andalusian traveller and adherent to the school of Mālikī law Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217) describes several preaching events in his travelogue: a Friday prayer at the Great Mosque in Mecca, evening Ramadan sermons at the same place, and the famous preaching sessions of the Ḥanafī scholar Ibn al-Jawzī in Baghdad. Drawing on performance theory grounded in theatre studies and the notion of preaching as ethical entertainment, Dorpmüller focuses not only on the auditory sense but presents preaching as a multisensory event. Moreover, it is exactly his position as an outsider which allows Ibn Jubayr to focus in his descriptions on the event-character, without having to evaluate its religious appropriateness.

Susanne Enderwitz takes modern literature both as documentation and evaluation of religious practices. As the Arabic novel in Egypt set out with a nationalist agenda, the 'common people' and their culture played a decisive role in the authors' vision of a modern society. Analysing Egyptian authors writing in the 20th and early 21st century, and therefore spanning a period from early monarchy to the Mubarak regime, she especially highlights how the authors conceive Islam's role in society as it encounters and competes with other ideologies. Their portrayals of Islam as repetitive, lacking in intellectual pervasion, and full of myths display a notion of modernity which can also be traced in attitudes towards the craft's *risāla* (cf. Dağyeli) or in modern editors' comments on narratives about al-Būṣīrī's *Burda* (cf. Weinrich). Nevertheless, authors also viewed Islam as a potential basis for humanism. It was this view that came to an end as the gap between the profiteers and losers of the regimes widened and gave way to more extreme forms of religiosity and thereby considerably changed the fate of the novel's hero who is no longer able to fight the obstacles but embraces militant Islam.

Part three of the collection focuses on the negotiation of meanings, aesthetics, and identity. Jan Scholz and Max Stille analyse a ceremony at a shrine in the neighbourhood of Nizamuddin in New Delhi in 2010. Though carried out by the European and North American members of 'Universal Sufism', the ceremony nevertheless took place in the presence of and together with members of the local community and musicians from the tradition of North Indian Sufism. The movement of Universal Sufism, founded in the first half of the 20th century in the United States by the Indian-born Inayat Khan, has no adherents in India. For the

ceremony, its members brought their own rituals but also adopted elements from the North Indian Sufi tradition, thus creating a unique transcultural blend of ritual. For their analysis, the authors refer to Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response, notably his notion of 'gaps of indeterminacy', to explain the handling of unknown elements in the ceremony, like the musicians' performance or the recitation of Muslim prayers in Arabic or Urdu. In the same way that aesthetic texts 'initiate performances of meaning' (Iser), the participants fill in spots of indeterminacy according to their prior experiences. The perspective of the 'open ritual', the authors argue, is especially apt for the analysis of rituals performed by a New Religious Movement in a transcultural context.

The antagonism of two different approaches to text lies at the core of Paola Abenante's contribution. She studies the dynamics between Italian converts to Islam and the immigrant religious leaders in the Burhaniya Sufi order against the background of social hierarchies (education, economic status, religious prestige), which is reflected in attitudes towards ritual. Whereas the converts have read numerous books on Islam and are interested in discussing theosophical issues, the immigrant native speakers of Arabic who have access to the original texts but can barely communicate in Italian or English place more emphasis on the ritual embodiment of the text than its semantic meaning. The latter attitude becomes a means of both resistance and domination: by emphasizing the spiritual power of the sound of the performed texts, produced by the knowledge of prosodic rules and body techniques, over the scripturalist approach, thus emphasizing oral teaching over the written manifestation of text, the teacher places embodied capital over other forms of symbolic capital. The binary of the semantic/embodied text becomes essentialized and performative in the way that it guides behaviour and generates power relations.

Songül Karahasanoğlu focuses on the relation between religious movements, political and economic changes, and aesthetic language. Her article analyses the booming sector of Islamic popular music in Turkey (so-called 'Green Pop') which started in the late 1980s and has achieved enormous sales figures. She shows that the producers of Islamic popular music in Turkey have not created a new musical language but have used already existing musical styles. Islamic pop and its later sub-category of *zikir* pop (since the early 2000s) were conceived as a means to attract potential followers and, at times of immense political and economic change, also as an opposition habitus towards political and social currents. It was part of, and a contributor to, a new popular Islamic culture in parallel with developments in 'Islamic ways of everyday-life' like fashion or leisure behaviour. New religious developments create their own aesthetic dimension, she shows, but this does not necessarily have to be a new and unique one but may be based on borrowing. In the case of the new Islamic culture in Turkey, it is no longer the aesthetics of the traditional religious music rooted in Ottoman art and Sufi music; rather, Turkish popular music (thus including Arabesk and folk music) marks musical expression.

Further considerations

The core of the volume's contributions deals with ritually employed text – e.g. the *risāla*, *Burda*, elegies, sermons, prayers, or *dhikr* – and the narrative staging and valuation of text and ritual. The contributions illuminate important aspects of the study of religion and the role of texts therein, which may be summarized as follows:

Written texts are often perceived as a medium of storage, connected with functions of preservation, fixation, and cultural memory. Contributions in this volume have shown, however, that this is only partly the role of a text. Various points make this evident. For instance, significant information may be missing from the written form, as it has not been set down in writing. Such missing information may include instructions for performance in the widest sense, like bodily gestures or voice techniques, or parts which belong to a text's ritual framing, thus textual and non-textual elements which are constitutive for the oral delivery but transient. Therefore, a written text does not necessarily contain all information. Furthermore, written texts are not fixed or stable entities but may be altered. This altering may be a result of the adaptation of a text to the needs of a specific audience or a specific context. Alteration may also be the outcome of the performer's artistic creativity. Both issues, missing information and alteration, make the performed text distinctive from the written text and would uncouple a written text from characteristics such as stability or completeness.

As has been extensively discussed in studies on oral traditions[18], oral and written forms or texts are not mutually exclusive but often complementary, serving different functions. The examples in this volume show furthermore that texts are highly polyvalent, regarding both written and oral modes. Written forms may serve as a mode of authorization, a mode of preservation[19] and may also bear non-verbal communication acts. Oral forms are meant to agitate or recruit new adherents, they seek to be emotional experiences or fulfil educational purposes, or they are performed with a ritual function. A text's function is not exclusively bound to a specific form; we find for instance written *salāsil* as transmissions of blessings, non-verbal communication in written form and in performance, and the ritual efficacy of texts in both modes – for instance as amulet and orally performed. Therefore, a text may be powerful in its ritual efficacy, but this efficacy is not bound exclusively to a written or an oral form. Furthermore, the use of text is not bound to its semantics. In ritual, the primary function of language articula-

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18 See for instance the special volume on 'Performance Literature', *Oral Tradition* 20, 1 and 2 (2005).

19 It shall be noted that written preservation exists in different degrees: a text may be performed letter by letter, or a text is an *aide mémoire*, i.e. a 'pool' for possible realizations. These two poles are illustrated in this volume through the case of Sufi litanies (cf. Abenante) and the case of the *risāla* (cf. Dağyeli).

tion is often not to convey information but – besides its well-researched role as speech act – to create participation through collective engagement in recitation or singing or listening to its sounds.

Finally, various forms of religious practise for which no underlying texts exist are vital for the everyday life of believers.[20] Contemporary *ziyāra* practices are connected to a number of objects and actions whose meaning in many cases is not explicitly stated. Moreover, in some cases the rituals performed may be volatile, as the examples of spontaneously performed acts or the individual combination of appropriate rites at a pilgrimage site demonstrate. Also, the material quality, both natural and architectural, of pilgrimage sites clearly invites related actions during *ziyāra*.[21] The case studies from Syria show that the idea of the presence of *baraka* is not tied to a place or person *per se*. Rather, it is tied to the related *stories* about them. *baraka* is not the inherent quality of a place or a person as such but the result of the relationship between a place and its 'owner' (*ṣāḥib*) and of the relation between acts carried out there and in everyday life. The transmission of *baraka* may take on quite different forms of material quality. Incorporating *baraka* through direct physical contact with the imbued object is one of the most common forms. Besides this, Sufi masters have been seen as sources of blessing. Transmission through direct contact and teaching has been marked throughout history by performative acts such as the bestowal of a formal licence (*ijāza*) or garment (*khirqa*). However, for the historical period investigated in this volume, the written form of chains of transmission seems to gain a quality of its own, too. The function of such written chains as bearers of *baraka* is reflected in the material form of textual arrangement, here the parallels to prophetic traditions. These relations between textual materials and extra-textual practices and notions shall make us reconsider the above-mentioned attributes assigned to written texts.

In turn, our study of texts in religious practice should be based on an expanded understanding of text beyond its function as a storage of information: 'text' is not limited to the written form but may also refer to the text of a recitation or an oral performance. Such a performance may partly draw on a written source and may be partly constituted during performance.[22] The function of text does not necessarily

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20 This does not mean that no written texts or directives exist at all; in the case of local pilgrimage, for instance, we know of hagiographies of the respective venerated persons or of pilgrimage handbooks. But these written sources do not necessarily constitute the basis of present-day practice, at least not directly. In the search for textual material, the various prayers which are sometimes dedicated to a pilgrimage site and may be kept there as a poster or booklet would be of greater relevance.

21 For instance the formations of caves or tombs, the natural existence of water, stones, etc. prompt ablution rites or circumambulations.

22 There are various degrees of the relation between oral and written text which cannot be discussed in detail here; it is noted only that not every performance is created anew or without any written backup, as was assumed during the first phase of the study of oral traditions (cf. Finnegan, "The How of Literature", 168).

depend on its semantics: a text may be ritually valid and effective without semantic meaning.[23] Furthermore, the composition of texts is not only shaped by considerations concerning the conveying of information but by the fact that some composed texts are 'oral texts' in their use of rhetorical devices which create a specific structure of sound and rhythm in order to produce a palpable effect on the body.

Framing operates as an important element on various levels: for religious actions and events, like a pilgrimage or a sermon; for the delivery of text, e.g. through prayer formulas; and as a technique for communicating the efficacy of a text, for instance by embedding it in salvation narratives. Furthermore, the delivery and reception of text take other factors into account than contents, like contexts and actions, in parallel with one current notion of material religion: "Belief […] is not merely discursive assent to a proposition or teaching, but the entire body of human activities that makes a force, an event, or a place sacred."[24] We find the use of the body and the senses figuring at the core of preaching, praying[25], reciting, and listening to the Qur'an. The auditory experience of text through the listening to recitation and preaching or collective reciting and singing features prominently in most of the described case studies in this volume. But visual, olfactory, haptic and taste experiences are present during many events as well: Ibn Jubayr elaborately describes the extraordinary amount of light on Ramadan nights and the sight of fruit and sweets; the members of the Burhaniya Sufi order burn incense; and feasting and listening to the *risāla* is reported to occur together. Touching and smelling belong to the rites of local pilgrimage; some rites even include swallowing and drinking (although the taste experience would not feature as the centre of this action). The preacher Ibn al-Jawzi stroked the heads of the penitents with his hands while praying for them, Ibn Jubayr reports; and various gestures and postures accompany the prayers and recitations during the ceremonies of Universal Sufism.

It is at the interplay of text and doing that participation is created which goes beyond an intellectual reading, listening, and understanding of religious propositions. Although quite heterogeneous, dealing as they do with different parts of the world and historic periods, the contributions to this volume comprehensively capture the diverse elements of what constitutes belief and how it is mediated. They embrace the different aspects of studying religion beyond the assessment of texts as an information medium.

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23 Semantics shift, then, to a different level. For further considerations of this aspect, particularly in the Hindu context, see Annette Wilke, "Text, Klang und Ritual. Plädoyer für eine Religionswissenschaft als Kulturhermeneutik", in: *Religionswissenschaft*, Michael Stausberg, ed., Berlin: de Gruyter 2012, 407-420.

24 Morgan, "Materiality", 73.

25 See also Katz, *Prayer*, especially 62-70 on the cultivation of emotions in the context of prayer.

Part I
Objects, Actions, and Notions in the Context of Blessing

Antique Phallic Symbol or Mobile Relic? Remarks on the Cult of the *quba*ᶜ in Ḥaḍramawt

Marianus Hundhammer

The veneration of saints in the Islamic world has always been an object of interest in the history of Islamic studies. From the beginnings of research in the field to the phase of colonially biased orientalist studies to contemporary theoretical debates, these practices were and still are a recurrent subject. Scholars can thus draw on a large corpus of historical sources as well as on secondary literature.

The case of the *quba*ᶜ, the central cult object of the annual pilgrimage (*ziyāra*) to Qabr Hūd (the tomb of the prophet Hūd) in eastern Ḥaḍramawt is different.[1] Despite the importance and popularity of the cult, the scholarly sources on it are few and contradictory. This article compares these sources with the results of a field study which I conducted during the pilgrimage in 2008.

Based on these research findings, it is possible to analyse this specific cult object and its usage in detail. In this analysis, the question of whether the *quba*ᶜ can be characterized as an antique phallic symbol or a mobile relic will be central. First, the form and function of the *quba*ᶜ in its contemporary usage will be described and then analysed against its scholarly historical and religious background. In the following, the interpretation of the *quba*ᶜ as a relic of an antique phallic cult as well as its role within the context of antique South Arabian astral religion shall be discussed in the light of these research results. A second section will focus on an alternative interpretation of the *quba*ᶜ as a construction made for the transportation and protection of the relics of saints. To that end, a textual source from the 17th century will be considered in order to characterize the continuity of these rites. Given the weak body of source material, this reading will be supported by an etymological analysis of the root q-b-ᶜ in Arabic lexicography.

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1 To my knowledge, the following works represent the complete body of research on the *ziyāra* to Qabr Hūd, which, with a total of 20,000 participants, constitutes the greatest pilgrimage in South Arabia: Jean-François Breton, "Le tombeau de Hūd", *Saba* 3-4 (1997), 79-83; Nahida Coussonnet, "Le pèlerinage au sanctuaire de Hūd, le prophéte de Dieu", *Saba* 3-4 (1997), 73-79; Marianus Hundhammer, *Prophetenverehrung im Ḥaḍramaut. Die Ziyāra nach Qabr Hūd aus diachroner und synchroner Perspektive*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz 2010; François de Keroualin et al., "Hūd, un Pèlerinage en Hadramaout", *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 13 (1995), 181-189; Lynne Newton, *A Landscape of Pilgrimage and Trade in Wadi Masila, Yemen: Al-Qisha and Qabr Hud in the Islamic Period*, Oxford: Archaeopress 2009; ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ṣabbān, *Ziyārāt wa-ʿādāt. Ziyārat nabi llāh Hūd*, ed. and transl. Linda Boxberger et al., Ardmore: Institute for Yemeni Studies, 1998; Robert Bertram Serjeant, "Hūd and other pre-Islamic prophets", *Le Muséon* 67 (1954), 121-179.

Form and function of the quba^{c}

The *quba^{c}* consists of the *jarīda*, a stick, measuring up to two metres in height, which is normally made from the leaves of the date palm (in some cases of bamboo) and a conically tapered, approximately one-metre-long sack, the mouth of which is attached to the *jarīda*.[2] This sack contains the clothing of deceased saints (*awliyā'*, sg. *walī*, lit. "someone close to God") or their remains.[3]

Before the pilgrimage can start, the *quba^{c}* is uncovered by the pilgrim group's religious leader, the *manṣab*. At dawn, the *manṣab* enters the grave of the local saint (*walī*), escorted by a procession which is accompanied by drummers. In a solemn procedure which takes place in the sepulchre, the saint's clothes or rags are stuffed into the sack, which is attached, upright, to the top end of the *jarīda*. Following this, the *quba^{c}*, containing the relics, is carried by a specially authorized bearer who leads the pilgrim group. During the pilgrimage the *quba^{c}* is repeatedly brought into physical contact with holy places or persons. The believers' most notable practice relating to the *quba^{c}* throughout the entire pilgrimage is to touch the cult object as often and for as long as possible. In this regard, touching the sack is prioritized over touching the stick. As the results of the field study show, this practice is performed in general as well as in the context of different rituals on this pilgrimage.[4]

The quba^{c} *as a relic of Antique South Arabian cults*

The question of the *quba^{c}'s* pre-Islamic origins has been largely neglected by scholars, not least because such a question was and still is a taboo in the traditional discourse of Muslim scholarship. In western oriental studies, the religio-historical approach has led to the interpretation of the *quba^{c}* as an antique phallic symbol.[5]

The discussion about the antique religious veneration of male (and female) genitals is not restricted to South Arabia, but for the northern and western Semitic cultural areas it is based entirely on hypothetical grounds.[6] Various sources

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2 Serjeant, "Hūd", 137. See Plates, figure 1, 251.

3 On the veneration of *awliyā'* in Ḥaḍramawt see Alexander Knysh, "The cult of saints in Ḥaḍramaut", *New Arabian Studies* 1 (1993), 137-152.

4 See Plates, figure 2, 251.

5 This assumption was a result of the research conducted by the British professor of Arabic Studies Robert Bertram Serjeant in Ḥaḍramawt in 1954. In this year, as a consequence of clan feuds, the *ziyāra* to Qabr Hūd was called off, meaning that Serjeant could not analyse the cult of the *quba^{c}* by means of fieldwork. See Serjeant, "Hūd", 137 f.

6 See Robert A. Campbell, *Phallic Worship*, London: Kegan Paul, 2004, 121-193; Detlev Fehling, *Ethologische Überlegungen auf dem Gebiet der Altertumskunde. Phallische Demonstration, Fernsicht, Steinigung*, Munich: Beck 1974, 7-14; Alain Daniélou, *Der Phallus. Metapher des Lebens, Quelle des Glücks – Symbole und Riten in Geschichte und Kunst*, Munich: Diederichs 1998,