THE SAINT OF ʿAYḎĀB: AN EARLY CASE OF SUFI SAINTHOOD ON THE RED SEA LITTORAL OF THE EGYPT-SUDAN BORDER REGION (LATE 6TH/12TH–EARLY 7TH/13TH C.)

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Introduction: A Neglected but Important Text

In what follows I present a published but hitherto never discussed passage that offers evidence of Sufism and saint veneration in the Sudan-Egypt borderlands at a remarkably early date. To be more precise, the early 7th/13th-century text analysed below attests typical Sufi practices at a time slightly prior to its composition in ʿAyḏāb, an important mediaeval port town on the Red Sea coast of the Sudan-Egypt borderland area (less than fifteen miles north of present-day Ḥalāyib, just north of the current Egyptian border).[1] Remarkably, the cult seems to have been home-grown rather than imported, although ʿAyḏāb had regular contacts with Egypt at the time, especially with Qūṣ in Upper Egypt, through which the pilgrimage route passed to ʿAyḏāb and thence to Ǧidda across the Red Sea and eventually to Mecca.

The passage in question tells of the activity of a Nubian saint at ʿAyḏāb; it can be found in *al-Muḫtār fī kašf al-asrār* by Zayn ad-Dīn ʿAbd ar-Raḥīm b. ʿUmar al-Ǧawbarī, an author of Syrian origin who flourished in the early decades of the 7th/13th century. To the best of my knowledge this passage has never been cited, much less discussed in any detail, by specialists of Sudanese and/or Egyptian history, probably because the book is about a entirely different subject. I have found no reference to al-Ǧawbarī's work in any of the literature on ʿAyḏāb's history or the history of Sufism in the wider region, but in view of the significance of the information that the passage provides, it may well be useful to make this instructive account better known. We know little of the author of this work, apart from the following few data (al-Ǧawbarī, *Muḫtār* 3). Born in Ḥarrān, al-Ǧawbarī later settled near Damascus in a settlement called Ǧawbar, hence his *nisba*. The date of his death is unknown, but he was a contemporary of Nūr al-Dīn Zangī and Saladin, and was alive in 635/1237–8, when the last mention of him appears in a work. He appears to

[1] The site forms part of the disputed Ḥalāyib Triangle and is now permanently under Egyptian control.

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have travelled widely (as he himself claims in this book) and visited various parts of Syria, Anatolia, Egypt, Nubia, the Hijaz, and India, which makes the rare information in his book on ʿAyḏāb especially valuable, since in all probability he gathered it locally and just a few years after the events that he describes. In other words, while his narrative is technically not an eyewitness account, it is not far from being one. The book is a collection of information on the tricks and subterfuges applied by various categories of people in their dishonest dealings, a focus that, as I argue below, evidently influences al-Ǧawbarī's perspective and his discussion of the Sufi saint of ʿAyḏāb. Written in a quasi-colloquial style and containing a considerable amount of colloquial vocabulary, the work is infused with a general sense of scepticism, even cynicism at some points.

Here is the relevant passage (al-Ǧawbarī, *Muḫtār* 180) in its entirety, followed by my English rendering:

> وقد ظهر في ساحل عيذاب رجل من النوبة ادّعى المشيخة وسمع له خلق كثير وتبعه جماعة من التكرور وبُنِيَ له زاوية في جانب البحر وكان يعمل السماع فإذا طاب في السماع رقص ساعةً ثمّ خرج من الزاوية الى جانب البحر فرمى سجّادته على الماء وصعد فوقها وهو يرقص ثمّ يعود اليهم وقد ارتبط عليه جميع النوبة والحبشة والتكرور وقالوا إنّه يُعرف بعبد الله التكروري وكان جميع تجّار الهند واليمن يُقبلون عليه ويهدون له من كلّ الطُرف المعدومة في البلاد وحصل له بهذا الناموس وهذه الحيلة جملة كثيرة وقُتِلَ سنة ٦١٥.

> "In the coastland of ʿAyḏāb a Nubian man came to prominence, claiming to be a holy man (*iddaʿā l-mašyaḫa*). A great multitude listened to him, and a group of West Africans (*at-Takrūr*) became his followers; a Sufi retreat (*zāwiya*) was built for him at the seaside. He held [Sufi] musical séances (*kāna yaʿmalu s-samāʿ*). When his spirits were high from a musical séance, he would dance for some time, then he left his *zāwiya* for the seaside, cast his prayer rug upon the water and climbed on it, dancing all the time until he returned to them. All the Nubians, Abyssinians and West Africans became quite attached to him. They say that he was known as ʿAbdallāh at-Takrūrī. All the traders of [or: frequenting] India and the Yemen called on him and gave him gifts of luxury items (*ṭuraf*) unknown in this land. By such cunning (*hāḏā n-nāmūs*) and trickery he acquired a great amount [of wealth]. He was killed in the year 615 [=1218-9]."

The text offers several tantalising glimpses into the local religious scene, without providing sufficient detail and specificity to determine several important aspects. Precisely where did this African saint originate? How did he begin his career as a holy man? Why was he killed? The text is regrettably reticent on these important issues. However, the passage is sufficiently graphic as well as specific to make it likely that its core is a factual account of contemporary events. Moreover, it offers some important data that must make us reconsider some of the received wisdom about the history of Islam, and especially Sufism, in the area. What are, then, the

implications of this early reference to the veneration of saints in the lands to the south of Egypt?

Islam in ʿAyḏāb and Its Hinterland

ʿAyḏāb is of course hardly a typical place within the Sudan or Upper Egypt. It was a wealthy port town that owed its affluence to the lively Red Sea trade in spices (black pepper, cinnamon, etc.) and brazilwood from India, as well as in Chinese porcelain wares, locally produced pearls, Egyptian products (textiles, sugar, glassware) and gold mined in the Wādī al-ʿAllāqī area southeast of Aswān and west of ʿAyḏāb itself. Perhaps an equally important source of the town's income were the taxes and customs duties imposed on the passing pilgrims to and from Mecca and the renting of ships for the Red Sea passage (Insoll 2003:94; Paul 1955:64; Kawatoko 1993:205–7; Peacock – Peacock 2008:34).[2] After the Ayyūbid period the town gradually declined and Sawākin came to emerge as the foremost port of the region. Surveying seafaring routes and ports in the Red Sea in the late 9th/15th to early 10th/16th centuries, Ibn Māǧid and Sulaymān al-Mahrī make no mention at all of ʿAyḏāb, probably a ruined town or a miserable settlement by that time (Tibbets 1961:329).[3]

The region was the first zone of present-day Sudan to come under Muslim influence. The first (probably nominal) conversions to Islam among the local Beja population took place as early as the first half of the 3rd/9th century (Hasan 1966:149), but this could barely have influenced the mass of the Beja inhabiting the Eastern desert between the Nile and the Red Sea. Small nuclei of an Islamic presence were present in the Eastern desert, such as a Muslim settlement at Ḫawr Nubt (far to the south of ʿAyḏāb) that left the earliest Arabic-inscibed tombstones in the Sudan (mid-3rd/9th to early 4th/10th centuries), but it is unclear if this community was composed of Beja converts or Arab immigrants or both. By all indications (e.g. odd solecisms in the use of Arabic) at least some of those who made these tombstones were non-native speakers of Arabic.[4] Archaeologists also found Muslim inscribed tombstones at the Bāḍiʿ site south of ʿAyḏāb dated 387/997, 405/1015 and 428/1037, with some of the names in these inscriptions possibly pointing to Egyptian origins (Crowfoot 1911:545). Most of the Beja probably converted to a nominal Islam in the 14th to 15th centuries. In the late 7th/13th to early 8th/14th centuries the Beja of both the Red Sea coast (including the vicinity of the ʿAyḏāb site) and the hinterland-built

[2] However, Power (2008:93–94; 2010:20–21) presents strong arguments against over-emphasising the role of the pilgrimage traffic in the economic life of ʿAyḏāb and similar ports. Also cf. Power 2012 on the wider picture of trading networks and activities in the Red Sea region in the relevant period; and Goitein 1954:188, 192–3, 197 on examples of Jewish trading to and from India passing through ʿAyḏāb in the 5th-6th/11th–12th centuries.

[3] On Sawākin's gradual taking over the mercantile role of ʿAyḏāb see Bloss 1936:278–85.

[4] On the Ḫawr Nubt site see Sandars – Owen 1951; Glidden 1954.

tower tombs constructed of stone that seem to have served as graves for outstanding personalities. These latter perhaps included Muslim holy men; at any rate the orientation of the tombs shows them to be Islamic and they have often served as objects of local pilgrimage and saint veneration (Insoll 2003: 101–3; Clark 1938: 29).[5]

From the mid-5th/11th to the mid-7th/13th century the Crusaders' wars in the Palestine region diverted the main North African pilgrimage route from the Sinai to Qūṣ in Upper Egypt and on to ʿAyḏāb on the Red Sea coast, which undoubtedly contributed to the increasing Islamisation of the ʿAyḏāb region and its inhabitants (Hasan 1966: 151).[6] Educated Muslims from Egypt and elsewhere visited ʿAyḏāb and no doubt raised the general level of Islamic knowledge there. A well-known example is the poet Abū l-Fatḥ Naṣrallāh b. ʿAbdallāh b. Qalāqis from Alexandria, who frequented the main ports of the Red Sea between Aden and ʿAyḏāb and wrote an ode describing these places (Yāqūt, *Buldān* I, 324)[7]; indeed it is in ʿAyḏāb that he died and was enterred in 567/1172 (Yāqūt, *Udabāʾ* VI, 2751). The region around ʿAyḏāb even produced some religious scholars of its own by the 6th/12th century, if we trust as-Samʿānī (d. 562/1166), who mentions a certain Abū l-Ḥasan Ṭāhir b. ʿAtīq al-Sakkāk aẓ-Ẓayqī, whose *nisba* was derived from the toponym Ẓayqa, a camping-ground in the desert at a distance of 10 *farsaḫ* (ca. 60 km) from ʿAyḏāb (as-Samʿānī, *Ansāb* IV:105).[8] Of course such a level of Islamic scholarship must have been exceptional among the inhabitants of this region, as it is hard to reconcile with the vivid eyewitness account given by Ibn Ǧubayr (d. 614/1217) in roughly the same period, during his travels in 578-81/1182-5. He describes the black inhabitants of ʿAyḏāb as being mainly of Beja stock under the jurisdiction of a Beja chieftain that paid nominal tribute to the Egyptian governor of the town.[9] Despite the Beja

[5] For detailed descriptions, sketches, and pictures of three such towers see Madigan 1922; and see additional information and corrections in Crowfoot 1922, esp. p. 87, where the likely dating of these domed structures is given as between the 5th/11th and 7th/13th centuries, during the heyday of the pilgrimage route from Qūṣ to ʿAyḏāb.

[6] In 1182 (just a few years before Ibn Ǧubayr's visit) a Crusader expeditionary force headed by Renaud de Chatillon sacked ʿAyḏāb itself, but this being an extraordinary rather than typical incident, the pilgrimage route continued to pass this way for almost another century; see Murray 1926:235–7; Newbold 1945:221–3. Remarkably, the 6th/12th-century Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela does not seem to mention ʿAyḏāb at all in his decription of the Red Sea region; see Hess 1965:16–8.

[7] Crowfoot (1911:542) found Ibn Qalāqis' description of the ruins of Bāḍiʿ (far to the south of ʿAyḏāb near the Eritrean border) remarkably precise.

[8] Yāqūt (*Buldān* III, 465) claims the reading Ẓayqa must be a misspelling for Ḍayqa, because the letter *ẓāʾ* exists only in Arabic (and in Arabic the word *ẓayqa* is unknown).

[9] Ibn Baṭṭūṭa specifies (*Riḥla* 32) that the local Beja chieftain bore the name al-Ḥaḍrabī, a reference to the *Ḥaḍārib* group known to this day. The Beja subgroup that controlled ʿAyḏāb and the route to and from Qūṣ probably represent the predecessors of the present-day *ʿAbābda* (now Arabic speakers but somatically and culturally Beja), some of whom, being

townsfolk's affluence resulting from participating in trade and the pilgrimage business, Ibn Ǧubayr characterises them as semi-naked savages "*further astray from the way than the cattle* [Quran 25:44] and of less intellect, having no religion whatever other than the words of the monotheistic creed (*kalimat al-šahāda*) that they utter so as to appear Muslims" (Ibn Ǧubayr, *Riḥla* 45–6, 48–9).[10]

Ethnicity of the Sufi Community: West Africans, Locals, Merchants

The ethnic identity of the holy man in al-Ǧawbarī's account and his followers is a complex and significant issue. The passage uses various ethnic labels (*Nūba*, *Ḥabaša*, *Takrūr*) to describe the ethnicities present among the Sufi leader's disciples, but such labels tend to be rather liberally applied in premodern Arabic texts. What is certain is that the sheikh was a black African man, in all probability a local (i.e., either a Nubian from the southern reaches of Upper Egypt or a Beja from the Red Sea region). The text is also explicit about most of his followers being, like him, black Africans (apparently a motley crowd of various ethnicities). This is hardly surprising, because the population of ʿAyḏāb in that period (as in later periods too) was predominantly black. That much is explicitly stated in al-Idrīsī's geographical work completed in 548/1154 (*Nuzha* II, 134–135), and less than a century later – but relying on other, earlier sources – Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229) calls ʿAyḏāb "the town of the Beja" (*Buldān* IV, 388) in particular. The same passages in the *Nuzhat al-muštāq* also assert that most of the town's inhabitants were traders and fisherfolk. Al-Ǧawbarī's text refers to overseas merchants paying their respects to the local African saint. However, the wording *tuǧǧār al-Hind wa-l-Yaman* is too ambiguous to make it clear if these wealthy traders were Indians and Yemenites, or else local merchants (and perhaps Egyptians too) doing trade with those countries.[11]

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more 'civilised' from a mediaeval Arab perspective than the rest of the Beja, intermarried with immigrants from Ḥaḍramawt to form the *Ḥaḍārib* (a Beja-speaking group). See Murray 1923:417–8; Murray 1927:43; MacMichael 1922:I, 338–9, 346–7; Weschenfelder 2012:223–224. On the historical role of the *Ḥaḍārib* as a sort of upper caste among the northern Beja see Paul 1959, esp. p. 76–7; Hjort af Ornäs – Dahl 1991: 23–29; Dahl – Hjort 2006:485. In the Mamluk period, al-Qalqašandī states (*Nihāya* 124) that the *Ḥaḍārib* (his spelling of the word is *Ḥadāriba*) live around Sawākin (far to the south of ʿAyḏāb) and their chieftain is recognised by the Mamluks as ruler over all the nomads of the eastern desert southeast of Qūṣ (*ʿurbān al-qibla mimmā yalī Qūṣ*). Today some of the *Bišārīn* subgroup of the Beja also live in the proximity of ʿAyḏāb (a name that they still use in reference to the place). *Bišārīn* traditions ascribe the origins of their group to Jabal ʿElba, a mountain located a mere ten miles from ʿAyḏāb. See Sandars 1933:123.

[10] Some other Muslim sources concur with this negative assessment, see Insoll 2003: 96–7; Paul 1955: 65–6; and for an early twentieth-century European assessment of the desultory religious observations of the northern Beja groups see Clark 1938:4–5.

[11] The most probable guess is that the reference is to the Kārimī merchants of the Ayyūbid period, who dominated the trade between Egypt and India and used ʿAyḏāb as a major trading post up to 781/1380, whereupon they moved their activities to al-Ṭūr on the western coast of

At any rate, most of the local black African population obviously venerated the sheikh, and he had a large group of committed devotees around him. The text further states that his followers included a great number of West Africans, but the ethnic label *Takrūr* does not allow more precision as to the exact origins of the latter. The toponym Takrūr could be applied in a restrictive as well as a broader sense, and it could thus refer to a town (and its environs) along the Senegal River (e.g., al-Idrīsī, *Nuzha* I, 17), to the whole Senegambia and Mauritania region (e.g., al-Bartilī, *Fatḥ* 26), indeed even to the whole of Muslim West Africa (Levtzion 1986:183–185). Be that as it may, the holy man's West African followers seem to have formed a sufficiently numerous or even predominant part of his coterie to lend him the ethnic *nisba* at-Takrūrī. With ʿAyḏāb serving as an important station in the pilgrimage route from West and North Africa at the time, there can be little doubt that many of these people had arrived as pilgrims *en route* to Mecca or returning from there. While in later times the east-west route through the savannah belt south of the Sahara was the usual route of the pilgrims from West and Central Africa, in the 12th–13th century West African pilgrims would typically travel north across the Sahara and then go east with the North African caravans, reaching ʿAyḏāb via the Nile valley after having crossed the Eastern desert from Qūṣ (Insoll 2003:96).[12] This explains the presence of considerable numbers of West African Muslims in Egypt and parts of the Nilotic Sudan at a very early date. Some of these West Africans were sufficiently learned and pious to be regarded as holy men by the local population. For instance, al-Maqrīzī in his *Ḫiṭaṭ* describes a mosque called *Ǧāmiʿ at-Takrūrī* in Būlāq, which was named in honour of one Abū Muḥammad Yūsuf b. ʿAbdallāh at-Takrūrī. A contemporary of the Fāṭimid al-ʿAzīz (r. 365–86/975–96), this saint was still widely venerated in the late 6th/12th century, and his tomb continued to be considered holy at least to the late 8th/14th century (Levtzion 1986:206–7).

Sufi Practices and Rituals

al-Ǧawbarī's account describes several well-known aspects of popular Sufism, using terminology that is also familiar from other regions. Thus, the ritual led by the sheikh employed music (*samāʿ*) and dancing to induce ecstasy, the master's prayer-rug played a prominent role during the proceedings, miracle-making (stressing the marvellous prayer-rug) was an important source of the sheikh's hallowed status, and the devotees built a Sufi centre (*zāwiya*) for the sheikh and, presumably, for the whole group.

Musical séances with dancing having been a mainstay of the *ḏikr* practices of the Sufi orders from a very early period (Trimingham 1998:195–197), it is unsurprising

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the Sinai Peninsula; see Kawatoko 1993:203. For a comprehensive discussion of the Kārimī, see Ashtor 1956.

[12] Even in the early twentieth century the contrast between the eagerness of West Africans to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and the rarity of local Beja to have done do so was remarkable; see Clark 1938:4.

that we should find it as part of this Sufi sheikh's antics. The prayer-rug (*saǧǧāda*) is of course a well-known symbol of the authority of a Sufi group's founding sheikh, a kind of 'throne' of the order that is formally inherited by its subsequent leaders (Trimingham 1998:173). It would be interesting to know more details about the Sufi centre (*zāwiya*) referred to in al-Ǧawbarī's text: what it might have looked like, how many persons resided there, what functions it fulfilled for the community, etc. The term *zāwiya* is probably to be understood in its Egyptian sense rather than in the sense common in the Maghreb, even though West African pilgrims might have carried some Maghrebi influences to ʿAyḏāb. Thus, the *zāwiya* must have been a modest establishment housing a Sufi sheikh with his circle of disciples without a formal endowment (*waqf*) being made for their benefit (Trimingham 1998:18, 20, 168, 176–7). However, it is apparently difficult or impossible to identify even such a modest institution in the archaeological remains of ʿAyḏāb or in contemporary descriptions of the town. Ibn Ǧubayr's travelogue describes ʿAyḏāb in 583/1187 as composed mainly of straw huts, and also containing some recently constructed buildings of plaster (*akṯar buyūtihā al-aḫṣāṣ wa-fīhā al-ān bināʾ mustaḥdaṯ bi-l-ǧiṣṣ*) but does not specify the function of those more solid structures (Ibn Ǧubayr, *Riḥla* 45).[13] Modern surveys of the site have identified a cluster of nomadic encampments, a port area and an adjacent area built up of coral-stone houses, and disproportionately extensive cemeteries, including separate ones for Jews and Coptic Christians (Insoll 2003:94–6; Paul 1955:67–8; Breen 2013:315).[14] Ibn Ǧubayr certainly does not make reference to anything resembling a Sufi convent, and while archaeological excavations have been carried out intermittently at the ʿAyḏāb site, they have not so far brought to light the remains of any structure that could be identified as a Sufi establishment of any sort. However, some of the mediaeval area of ʿAyḏāb town may well be underwater today, as David and Andrew Peacock note in their recent article[15]; note that al-Ǧawbarī's text specifies that the *zāwiya* was situated directly on the beach (*fī ǧānib al-baḥr*). It might also be a relevant fact that a recent archaeological study (Breen 2013:315–6) mentions "a number of possible fourteenth-century tombs" near the ʿAyḏāb site, at Marsā Marob (75 km north of Dungunab), which "could be interpreted as the graves or memorial markers of well-known Islamic holy men or those of leading members of a local community", and

[13] On the typical dwellings of the northern Beja tribes, see Clark 1938:6–7.

[14] Insoll's work includes a helpful general plan of the ʿAyḏāb site on p. 95. For an earlier map and description of the site see Murray 1926:237–40. (The latter source mentions the ruins of houses built of rubble and covered with matting as well as extensive cisterns and cemeteries, with the grandest building within the site being a mosque.) Peacock and Peacock 2008:42–44 also give a detailed description of the buildings (including the mosque) and the layout.

[15] "It is abundantly clear that some buildings may have been lost to the sea, as streets and walls seem to terminate abruptly at the coast or protrude onto the beach." See Peacock and Peacock 2008:43.

also notes the existence at nearby Ḫawr Tibadeb of a domed building (perhaps the grave of a holy man?) by the sea, south of which are freshwater springs, mediaeval cemeteries and a possibly the remains of a tower.

Despite the clear Sufi attributes of the man's activities, al-Ǧawbarī portrays him as essentially a crook rather than a *bona fide* Sufi saint – a charlatan consciously playing tricks upon his gullible followers. However, one ought not to give this assessment too much credit since other passages of the same work show al-Ǧawbarī as inordinately sceptical of popular religion in general. In fact, he includes a whole chapter on the guile of popular religious leaders and respected sheikhs. For instance, having mentioned the practice of fire-eating and biting off the heads of snakes during ecstasy, he adds (al-Ǧawbarī, *Muḫtār* 53): "By God, if this were done in front of children, they would laugh at what [the devotee] is doing. Oh, people of blind hearts, are these the miracles of saints (*karāmāt aṣ-ṣāliḥīn*)? Come to your sense, oh sleepers, and wake up!" al-Ǧawbarī's scepticism at some points borders on cynicism, and of course the stated purpose of his book is what he regards as exposing the vile trickery of various classes of mountebanks, which sets the general tone.

An Important Fact for the History of Sufism in the Region

al-Ǧawbarī's text seems to demonstrate the existence of Sufi holy men in the northern Sudan (albeit admittedly in a very special locality) well before the earliest references to Sufi practices in *Ṭabaqāt Wad Ḍayf Allāh*, the standard primary source on Muslim holy men and scholars in the Nilotic Sudan.[16] This work explicitly states that "the sheikh Tāǧ ad-Dīn al-Bahārī arrived from Baghdad [in the 10th/16th c.] and introduced the way of the Sufis (*adḫala ṭarīq aṣ-Ṣūfiyya*) into the land of the Funǧ" (Wad Ḍayfallāh, *Ṭabaqāt* 4).[17] It bears emphasis, however, that the geographical range of the *Ṭabaqāt* is limited and excludes practically any reference to the region between the Nile and the Red Sea (Holt 1967:145). Although he is usually not associated with Sufism *per se*, perhaps the earliest known Muslim scholar to migrate to the Nilotic Sudan was Ġulāmallāh b. ʿĀʾid, a Yemeni immigrant to Dongola in the early 9th/15th century and ancestor of the *Rikābiyya* and the *Awlād Ǧābir* scholarly lineages (Holt 1967:145–6; MacMichael 1922:I, 333). According to the traditional account, before this period the only type of Muslim immigrants to the Sudan had been Bedouin tribesmen having little knowledge of Islam, and Muslim religious figures had been virtually non-existent in the region. It is only after the founding of the Funǧ sultanate that men of religion began to migrate to the Sudan in sufficient numbers to raise the level of Islamic religious learning (Hasan 1966:154–5). The following phrasing (al-Tayyib 1975:46) is an explicit summary of this traditional view: "The beginning of Sufism in the Sudan, and the first Sufis to appear

[16] The title exists in various variants; see Holt 1967:142.

[17] For a biography of al-Bahārī see *Ṭabaqāt* 42–43.

there came with the rise of the Islamic Sultanate of the Funj [i.e., in the 10th/16th c.]."

al-Ǧawbarī's account predates this time by several centuries. It is indeed a remarkably early account of Sufi practices for this region. To put it in chronological perspective, the case recounted by al-Ǧawbarī is only a few decades later than the lifetime of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ǧīlānī (d. 561/1166) in Baghdad; the celebrated Egyptian Sufi poet ʿUmar b. al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235) was for all practical purposes a contemporary of the ʿAyḏāb saint; while Abū l-Ḥasan aš-Šāḏilī (d. 656/1258), Aḥmad al-Badawī (d. 675/1276) of Ṭanṭā and Abū l-Ḥaǧǧāǧ Yūsuf (d. 642/1244) of Luxor were active roughly half a century later, to mention some of the Sufi figures significant for the Egypt/Sudan region. According to al-Maqrīzī, the first major Sufi convent (*ḫānaqāh*) in Egypt was the Dār Saʿīd as-Suʿadāʾ, established in the second half of the 6th/12th century (Trimingham 1998:18), not much earlier than the founding of the *zāwiya* in ʿAyḏāb that al-Ǧawbarī mentions. It is worth noting in this context that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, more than a century after al-Ǧawbarī, tells of the presence of several holy men in ʿAyḏāb, including a very old Moroccan called Muḥammad al-Marrākušī who claimed to be a son of the Almohad ruler Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar al-Murtaḍā (r. 646–65/1248–66). He also mentions a mosque bearing the name al-Qasṭallānī, reputed to be a much-venerated holy place (*kaṯīr al-baraka*) (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla* 32). It is also obvious from another passage in his book that the tomb of Abū l-Ḥasan aš-Šāḏilī at Ḥumayṯirā in the eastern desert was well connected to ʿAyḏāb by land routes and visiting it from ʿAyḏāb was something of a routine affair (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla* 164).[18] The veneration of saints was apparently well established in both the region and the town by the time of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's visit, but al-Ǧawbarī's narrative clearly shows that it had begun at least a whole century before that period.

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[18] Today the ʿAbābda Beja of the Eastern desert regard Abū l-Ḥasan aš-Šāḏilī as their patron saint; see Murray 1927: 46.

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