

THE SAMER, THE SAINT AND THE SHAMAN: ORDERING BEDOUIN HERITAGE IN JORDAN

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Introduction

On July 22, 2006, the 'Al Samer Song and Dance Troupe' stepped onto the stage of the Roman Amphitheatre in Amman, Jordan, to perform their traditional song *al-Samer* in a festival celebration of Jordanian cultural heritage. The troupe consists of nine men from the Ammarin Bedouin tribe, located in the Petra region of southern Jordan. The men wore the best of their newly-pressed white dresses and perfectly-ironed red and white chequered headgear, thus embodying the image of the Bedouin in Jordan. In front of the group was the leader, in the figure of the *hashi*, in his black coat with golden rim. He carried a swaying stick in his hand, and the eight other men followed in a slow walk behind him, forming a straight line, clapping their hands in time and singing their song. Presented alongside other cultural performances, such as the popular *dabka*² dance by a group from Ma'an, and a Roman gladiator fight, the Ammarin tribe represented Jordanian Bedouin culture;³ a distinct honour in a country that persistently lauds its Bedouin roots (cf. Layne 1994; Massad 2001; Al-Mahadin 2007; Shryock 1997).

I had, however, come across a press release for the Al Samer Troupe, which presented the *Samer* as a 'shamanic séance' in which the leader of the troupe, the *hashi*, performed the role of a *shaman* entering a trance. Furthermore, by living close to Petra the Ammarin take part in the heritage industry, and have established a Bedouin camp for tourists. On the webpage promoting the Bedouin camp, deceased members of the Ammarin tribe, along with their descendants, are presented to the English-speaking

¹ I would like to thank Geraldine Chatelard and staff at Centre for Comparative Cultural Studies for useful comments on an earlier draft. Variations of this chapter have been given in a heritage seminar in Cambridge and at Aarhus University.

² Literally meaning: "stamping the feet".

³ The term Bedouin is here understood as a social identity rather than as referring to people actively practising a pastoral nomadic mode of subsistence (cf. Cole 2003; Young 1999).

tourists as having 'shamanic abilities'. In Arabic, these people are considered *fuqara* (singl. *faqīr*), a religious figure characterised by poverty, much like a Dervish. The *fuqara* are highly esteemed by the various tribes in the area, and play important roles in the negotiation of reputation among their descendants. In much literature, figures such as the *fuqara* and related figures like the *sālih* and *derwish*, are collectively translated as saints, without insinuating any Christian conceptualisation (Bandak & Bille this volume; Eickelman 2002: 266–267; Denny 1988: 69–97; Meri 2002). Yet to the tourists and the heritage industry at large, they are not conceived of as 'saints' but as 'shamans': the same term with which the *hashi* in the *Samer* was presented. Two very different versions are thus at play. Both are oriented towards a religious figure, but saints and shamans point in very different directions.

When it comes to ordering the past, dissonance is ever lurking in the representation of tradition (Asad 1986: 17; Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996). What is intriguing about the trope of shamanism in the conceptualisation of Bedouin traditions is that shamanism appears diametrically opposed to the influence of the Islamic Revival discourse that is developing among the Ammarin themselves and in the wider Middle East, and which has been the focus of much recent literature (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). Among the Ammarin, the practice of Islam, and the moral and pious life this cultivates, has recently taken a more scriptural turn, inspired by the Gulf and Saudi Arabia. A very immediate sign of this is that, within a five-year period from 2002 to 2007, one quarter of all female heads of household had started wearing the *niqab*; a type of veil previously unseen in this area that covers everything but the eyes with a black cloth. Shamanic séances in the press release and on the webpages, including spirit manipulation and individuals entering trances through drum playing, seem absolutely incompatible with the emerging moral ideals of the Islamic Revival, wherein the *Samer* and *fuqara* are presented as renowned cultural traditions and saints.

Taking what appears to be a traditional Bedouin oral performance as my starting point, I will show in this chapter how cultural practices and religious figures from the Bedouin past are not just cherished traditions but are framed and contested in contemporary negotiations over the past in the present at various levels of Jordanian society and extending to global narratives of spirituality and heritage. My main interest is thus to understand how multiple versions of the same figures, which may initially seem incompatible, can co-exist. These multiple versions are not just about representations of culture, but more precisely questions about shaping

the very possibilities and moralities of human action: Can one manipulate the spirits and still be a saint? Is the *hashi* in a spiritual trance, or is the figure merely energising the other men in their cultural performance?

Ordering the Past in the Present

What appear as conceptual gaps between the saint and the shaman are, I argue, constantly rearticulated through parallel modes of ordering that are tied together by the social networks and material infrastructure forged by the saints' graves, cultural performances and tourist industry. This points to the way in which multiple ordering processes, rather than a single order, emerge. As John Law notes, "Perhaps there is ordering, but there is certainly no order" (1994: 1–2). There is no single order, and orders are never complete. If such compromise or closure exists, it "does not imply the stability of a single outcome" (Dugdale 1999: 131–132). Instead as Law notes, "they are more or less precarious and partial accomplishments that may be overturned" (1994: 1–2). Between various modes of ordering emerges the productive space for reconfiguring knowledge that draws on various scales of legitimacy, in this case Islamic, heritage and New Age conceptualisations. While the *Samer* and the saint may appear quite different at first, they connect in one ordering process in the guise of the shaman, and in another process of ordering the past in the present, they merge as performances of the historical consciousness of cultural traditions from which the Bedouin are being rapidly dissociated.

Focusing on the ordering processes enables us to highlight some of the inconsistencies and gaps in engagement with the past that are also present in the lives of people in the Middle East. To frame the inconsistency that erupts in the slipstream of showcasing traditions and of the emerging heritage industry, I will take the *Samer* as a point of departure but also as a performance that strikes a cord beyond the confines of the heritage industry and instead relates to questions of the conceptualisation of spirituality and the role of the Bedouin in contemporary Jordan. This article is based on thirteen months of anthropological fieldwork, from 2006 to 2007, living among the Ammarin—a formerly semi-nomadic Bedouin tribe whose members were settled twenty years earlier in the village of Beidha, north of Petra, Jordan.⁴

⁴ The Ammarin themselves estimate that they number between 1,500 and 2,000 in Jordan. Around 350 of them live in Beidha.

The aim of this article is hence to explore the tensions, gaps and dissonance between the articulations of heritage, shamanism, sainthood and forging of pious subjects. I will do this by discerning how parallel versions of various renowned characters from the past (and present) are employed in contemporary Jordanian heritage discourse. The *Samer*, the shaman and the saint all figure in complex ways in this heritage discourse. By exploring the apparent gaps between these versions, I will argue that a precarious, even uncanny, relationship exists between shamanism and sainthood, which is continuously ordered through oscillations between the minimizing and maximizing the gaps. The three versions of the figures may be singular in that they share the same object, yet as also becomes evident they are also multiple in the sense that they do not share the same part (Mol 2002). This selection of and oscillation between parts shapes partial connections that are used intentionally by some to promote shamanic or heritage discourses while others move between foci and include other aspects to shape other moral and social regimes.

More than simply a matter of exploring a particular ethnographic context, it is a discussion of the practical influence of such diverse universalising processes as the Islamic Revival, UNESCO heritage and New Age movements, which cannot easily be separated into distinct spheres of social, moral or economic life. This will take us from the stage of the Roman amphitheatre in Amman to the impact of the Islamic Revival on saintly intercession in a small village in southern Jordan, and through New Age ideas about shamanism to the halls of UNESCO world heritage proclamations (see also Bille 2009; 2012). Before we embark on the details of Bedouin heritage, let us return to the *Samer*, with a brief explanation that will join up the dots.

Celebrating the Samer

According to the Ammarin, the *Samer* is one of the oldest dance traditions in Jordan, whereas they see the *dabka* performance as a Lebanese/Palestinian cultural tradition deriving from farming communities that lacks roots in 'real' Jordanian culture. They are thereby contributing to the sensitive politics of identity in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which has a substantial population of Palestinians, Iraqi refugees and guest workers but in which the Bedouin have remained a central figure in the national identity politics (Al-Mahadin 2007; 2007b; Layne 1994; Massad 2001). The *Samer* originates with the Bedouin, and *they*—the members

of the Ammarin tribe—were, as a result of their presentation in the theatre, the group to present it at public cultural performances around Jordan. The Ammarin thereby came to personify Bedouin culture—knowing full well that with their now settled, goat-herding lifestyle with tourists around Petra they could not lay as strong a claim to being ‘real’ Bedouin as could the long distance camel herding tribes living in tents in Wadi Arabah or the Eastern Deserts. Nonetheless, through these cultural performances, the Ammarin, and Bedouin traditions more generally, are valorised and preserved in the public imagery of Jordanian cultural heritage. The Ammarin and their *Samer* performance are even famed for being part of the Bedouin traditions celebrated on UNESCO’s new Cultural Heritage list of ‘*Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*’ since 2005 (Bille 2012).

The *Samer* is performed at weddings and other celebrations, and includes an improvised poetic style. Due to changing ideas in recent decades concerning gender separation, most often substantiated by claims to Islamic morality, the role of the *hashi* as the head of the group is today performed by a male.⁵ In the application to UNESCO, the *Samer* was presented as follows:

The *samer* song is a vocal genre that accompanies the *Samer* dance which is specifically performed by men. At a later stage, and in an attempt to rouse more excitement and reinvigorate the dancers, the storyteller ends his song and invites a *hashi*, a female member of the tribe, to join the dance in the centre of the dance area. With a veil covering her face, she steps in wielding a sword, with which she defends herself against being touched by any of the dancers. Dancers and spectators alike become very excited and the energy level rises tangibly almost reaching trance. At the height of the excitement, the *dahiyyah* escalates into an ignited dance, wherein the clapping men advance to a short distance from the *hashi* repeating the word ‘*dahu*’ until she succeeds in slipping out of the dance ring. (Third proclamation of *Masterpieces*).

According to the late official Ammarin, Sheikh Suleiman,⁶ the idea of creating a cultural performance of the *Samer* came from the Ammarin themselves but they needed experienced people to create it as a showcase of cultural tradition. The Ammarin Tourist Association, established

⁵ Only once during my fieldwork was I aware of a woman performing the role of the *hashi*.

⁶ Informants are represented by pseudonyms unless their statements relate to their official position, as tribal sheikh, journalist, mayors or company owners. All named informants have declined my offer of anonymity.



Fig. 5.1. Ammarin men performing the *Samer* in Amman, Jordan (photo by the author).

to present one voice for the tribe amidst growing tourism industry around Petra, collaborated with two businessmen from Amman, Ziad Hamze and Rami Sajdi, to construct the showcase of Ammarin Bedouin cultural heritage. The *Samer Troupe* was promoted through the PR Bureau 'I♥Jordan'. Although no longer in use, the press release was sent to major magazines and cultural interests in Jordan, and is here quoted in rather long excerpts since it is here that the first spiritual interpretations were disseminated to the broader public:

The magical performances that Al Samer Song and Dance Troupe perform are a modern replica of what is known in archaic [sic] cultures as a 'shamanic séance'. A séance is a spiritual journey of the body and mind that is enacted by a tribal healer in the company of the tribal members [...]. The Troupe conductor symbolizes the shaman-doctor who heads the spiritual performance. A shaman is most clearly defined as the spiritual leader of a society, with his knowledge of healing and his capacity as a mediator between spirits and human beings [...]. The healer, through a controlled state of consciousness, puts his power into practice and journeys to the underworld of the spirits [...]. When possessed by the spirit, the shaman shrieks in a high-pitched voice similar to a woman's. The piercing voice is that of the spirit's and is therefore attributed to that of a female. In Al Samer Troupe, the black-cloaked conductor swaying in abrupt gestures signifies a female persona [...]. The final art of the séance takes place with a *dehiyyeh*—a

traditional Bedouin chant. Historically, when a shaman is possessed, a stream of incoherent words pours from his lips. The shaman is used as a medium for the spirit to communicate with its audience by revealing the secrets of the other world, which will consequently solve the problem that the tribe wants to address [...] The Troupe has therefore successfully managed to contribute to safeguarding the intangible Bedouin heritage concealed from our day-to-day 'civilized' lifestyles.

Through the PR Bureau, the Ammarin had thus entered a much broader commercial market for cultural performances than before, when the *Samer* was performed mostly at local celebrations. The press release explained the 'shamanic' roots of one of the Ammarin's most valued cultural traditions. It explicitly states that the *Samer* has "less spiritual edge to it" and is "dissociated from any spiritual significance" today. However, the official presentation of Bedouin culture as containing 'shamanism', spirit possessions and trances illustrates the potency of defining the past. Among the Ammarin, it is clearly at odds with emic understandings of the past and current standardisation of Islamic practice whereby spirit possession, or manipulation, and trances, if even possible or effective, are seen as religious deviance or heresy.

The promotion of the *Samer* Troupe as a shamanic séance in the press release also sparked interest in the Jordanian media. In an article in *JO magazine*, one of the larger international magazines in Jordan, journalist Nicholas Seeley wrote an article on the Ammarin (2006). Seeley interviewed some of the Ammarin working with tourists, as well as the Amman-based French anthropologist, Geraldine Chatelard, who has published widely on the Bedouin culture. Chatelard particularly addresses the issue of shamanism arguing that, "You can use 'shamanism' when you're talking about animist societies that endow every living being with a spiritual persona [...] but you can't use it here: 'The Bedouin identity is Muslim'" (Seeley 2006: 91). The article further states that, "New-Age mysticism goes down like gangbusters with today's spirituality-seeking Western tourists, according to the PR people" (Seeley 2006: 91). In response to this I questioned my Ammarin informants about the alleged shamanic practices. They fiercely contested this version of the *Samer*, which was inherently un-Islamic. Even the informants from the Ammarin *Samer* Troupe that I talked to had no idea about the press release.

Hamze and Sajdi no longer use the press release, and yet the shamanic versions of Bedouin traditions extends beyond this press release to religious figures of tribal pasts known as saints or 'friends of God'. The *hashi* in the *Samer*, it will become clear, is not the only figure from the Ammarin

past that has been cast into a 'shamanic' terminology, thereby highlighting the instability and potency of religious categories.

Sainthood as Heritage

Sites and shrines associated with renowned figures from Biblical history have been capturing the attention of the heritage industry in Jordan for quite some time. Mount Nebo (associated with Moses) and Jebel Haroun in Petra (associated with his brother Aaron), and Bethany beyond Jordan (associated with John the Baptist and Jesus) are but a few cases in Jordan. Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing focus on Islamic heritage, not least due to the growing number of tourists (and refugees) from other Arab countries. Shrines, mosques and other sites from Islamic history have been excavated, restored or otherwise brought to the awareness of Jordanians and foreign tourists alike. For example, the recent renovation of the shrine of Abu Ubaidah Ibn Jarrah, one of the Prophet Muhammad's companions, has placed it in a prominent line of sites that celebrates the Islamic history of Jordan. Members of the Royal family—Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed (1998) in particular—are also presenting a wide range of both Islamic and Christian shrines as Holy Sites important to Jordanian cultural heritage.

By featuring Islamic figures and history more prominently, the importance of Islam in Jordanian national heritage is being reasserted alongside the Christian heritage. Saints, prophets, companions and otherwise recognised religious figures have become players in the heritage industry, both in terms of diverting the geography of tourism and shaping the representation of Jordanian history. Aside from these renowned people and sites, many more shrines of local figures associated with various versions of sainthood (*fuqara*, *awlia*, *dervish* etc.) are located throughout the landscape, where they act as anchors in tribal historiography, especially around Petra, where the Ammarin live.

The village of Beidha, north of Petra, was constructed in the mid-1980s as part of the modernisation and settlement policies aimed at the seminomadic Bedouin tribes around Petra. Their land had fallen under the regulations of UNESCO's heritage protection when Petra became a World Heritage site in 1985. For the now relocated Ammarin, two shrines figure prominently in the landscape and in their pilgrimage traditions (see also Bille forthcoming). One is south of the village, where the aforementioned shrine of the prophet Aaron is located on the top of Jebel Haroun.

Following a vision in a dream, a local Dervish would announce the beginning of the collective pilgrimage to the shrine, where songs and rituals would be performed asking Aaron to act as their intercessor with God. Although it is recognised that this practice is no longer performed, it plays a prominent role in the UNESCO intangible heritage application, as we shall shortly see.

Another site, a few hours' walk west of Beidha, is the graveyard of the Awwad branch of the Ammarin tribe. Here lies buried the renowned forefather Salem Awwad. He lived seven generations ago, and is considered a *faqīr*: a poor man but, in the particularly religious sense, a man blessed by God—a saint. As one informant today described a saint:

The saints are good people, from God Almighty. An honest, believing human. His heart is with God [...] With the belief that this good person prays to God [...] you bring the sick person to him [and] he will pray to God and say: God, I am an honest, poor and weak person, please heal this sick person. So God grants him this wish!

Salem Awwad's shrine has been used for centuries for saint intercession—practising what has often been associated in the literature with 'folk Islam' (for example Gellner 1981; but see Makris 2007: 49–51). The saint also holds a prominent social position in Ammarin tribal history by offering deep historical links to the landscape that they are now largely removed from, and through genealogical ties, important in contemporary local politics and power structures. Today, people from the Awwad family line for example enjoy social recognition because of their saintly genealogical ties.

Since the mid-1990s, however, religious practices have changed as a renewed Islamic awareness has gained impetus in Beidha through increasing access to public schools, televisions and mosques, intensified by settlement. This religious development ultimately seeks to purify the world from 'magic' and 'return' to an Islam as allegedly practised at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, shaping stronger associations of religious homogeneity in a Muslim collectivity, the *Umma*. The moral and pious influence of this more scriptural understanding of Islam has meant that the bi-annual pilgrimages to Jebel Haroun, along with visits to Salem's grave, have ceased, and they are now surreptitiously visited by only a few people. To most Ammarin today, the saint is a person God has chosen and bestowed with *Baraka*. But he is no more than a human being, not one to be set beside God or capable of transmitting messages or wishes through saintly intercession or contagious magic at his grave. These practices are explicitly termed *jahiliyyah*—belonging to the 'age of ignorance'.



Fig. 5.2. The grave of Salem Awwad (photo by the author).

Oddly enough, then, in light of the uniformity of defining the saint as a “good and righteous man” among the Ammarin, I kept running into versions—as in the case of the *Samer*—in which the understanding of the *faqīr* somewhat diverted from the Ammarin versions, and where the trope of shamanism had had its impact. To find out more, we need first to take a brief detour from the influence of one modern process of standardising Islam to an equally modernist and universalising agenda that finds its sources in the past, namely UNESCO World heritage politics.

Sainthood as UNESCO Heritage

UNESCO’s newly developed recognition of intangible heritage as Masterpieces, is not intended to preserve specific lyrics or practices but rather to allow for the continued practice of the tradition and enable it to develop (Nas 2002; Ruggles & Silverman 2009; Smith & Akagawa 2009; UNESCO 2003). But like UNESCO tangible heritage, the intangible heritage list also plays a role in performing and shaping social, local and national identities (Scholze 2008; Winter 2007; Hafstein 2009). This is no less so in a Jordanian context, where the large-scale nomadic pastoral economy has almost ceased due to modernisation politics, to the bemoaning tones of the loss

of authenticity and the increasing incorporation of Bedouin culture into the tourism industry (cf. Cole & Altorki 1998; Hazbun 2008).

Jordanian national heritage discourse is shaped around narratives of the continued role of the tribes, the Bedouin in particular, the Great Arab revolt, the Hashemite's genealogical link to the Prophet Muhammad (Layne 1994), and the iconic imagery of Petra built by what is understood to have been a nomadic proto-Jordanian Arab tribe, the Nabataeans (Taylor 2005: 3–4). This focus on heritage follows Timothy Mitchell's insight that, "One of the odd things about the arrival of the era of the modern nation-state was that for a state to prove it was modern, it helped if it could also prove it was ancient" (Mitchell 2001: 212). Cultural heritage, in this sense, has a prominent role in shaping national identities, particularly in Jordan, where the Bedouin past is consistently brought into contemporary debates about what it means to be Jordanian, in a country with a substantial population of Palestinian descent and Iraqi refugees. The Bedouin offers a potent source of what was, and is, a central feature of Jordanian history.

Paradoxically, as alluded to above, the Bedouin tribes around Petra that have now been settled due to UNESCO world heritage protection were proclaimed UNESCO '*Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*' in 2005.⁷ Among the many practices highlighted as Bedouin intangible heritage were both the saints' pilgrimages and the *Samer*. Aside from committing the Jordanian state to making efforts to safeguard this heritage, and the many good intentions and moral obligations of the 'salvage paradigm' (Clifford 1987) regarding the antiquities and traditions of the late 20th century, announcing cultural heritage is also a method of highlighting and ordering a selected part of the past in ways that consolidate claims to belonging, rights and cultural distinctiveness. Both Petra and the Bedouin play a central role in the presentation of Jordanian national identity and, through UNESCO these narratives are further consolidated and valorised (Al-Mahadin 2007; Bille 2012; Smith 2006). UNESCO intangible heritage is thus not only a means of shaping a heritage of our common humanity but also a tool to strengthen national identities and legitimise existing versions of heritage order.

So while the Islamic Revival seeks to rid the world of magic, and the modernisation process seeks to abandon pastoral nomadism and shape

⁷ Which also includes the Bedouin in Wadi Ramm.

citizens out of the often insistently autonomous Bedouin, another universal process, argued by some scholars to be an effect of the modernisation process (Lowenthal 1998), is seeking to safeguard what remains of “outstanding value to humanity”: the Bedouin intangible heritage. The settled Bedouin are now celebrated as UNESCO World Heritage for the way in which they relate, through mobile pastoral skills and oral traditions, to the landscape they no longer inhabit due to UNESCO’s tangible World Heritage.

Ziad Hamze, who helped the Ammarin to promote the *Samer* performance, was one of the main players in formulating the application to UNESCO. The application was submitted through an NGO (JOHUD, Jordan Hashemite Fund for Human Development) headed by Jordanian Princess Basma, who also chaired the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Committee. It included the oral traditions, camel herding, tent making skills, and particularly the rituals of hospitality⁸ that are lauded in the Jordanian heritage discourse as a general characteristic of their Bedouin origin (Shryock 2004; Hazbun 2004; 2008). Among the many things celebrated, the aspect that really located the intangible heritage in this particular landscape—rather than taking the Bedouin from any other area where they may actually still predominantly be living a nomadic pastoral life—was the pilgrimage to Aaron’s shrine at Jebel Haroun. In other words, it is pilgrimages and sainthood that locate UNESCO Bedouin intangible heritage more than the specific people or any of their other individual practices.

The various version of the saint, is however, also present in the application to UNESCO. In the 10-minute video presentation that the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Committee was given as part of the application, a brief scene shows Ziad Hamze explaining how descendants of the saint Salem Awwad were “shamans and healers”. Similarly, in the actual application, the word ‘shaman’ also occurs. While the word does not play a prominent role, shamanism just slips in, and yet seems somewhat misplaced in the Ammarin conceptualisations of religious figures.

Shamanism is usually something anthropologists associate with Siberia or the Amazon: magic, mental trances and spirit manipulation. Even the broadest description of a shamanic practice in the anthropological literature includes direct contact with spirit ‘entities’, control over the spirit and altered states of consciousness. Both the pilgrimage and the notion of the shaman were now in the UNESCO application, and while that may not

⁸ Hospitality was already celebrated on the UNESCO Harmony List in 2004.

have been the main reason why the Bedouin of Petra were selected by the UNESCO committee, the narratives that were the reason for their initial incorporation had been legitimised, at least for those who wrote them.

How could this shaman have anything to do with the saint who, after all, was just a man to the Ammarin, “a good and righteous person” selected by God? Perhaps the question is just one of semantics that seeks to slip in between anthropological categories to capture local history in ways that reflect popular interests? That is, as a question of translation both conceptually and linguistically. Perhaps ‘shaman’ is just another word for *faqīr*, in the sense of being a blessed poor person, one that works better in English, rather than a person with supernatural abilities and spirit contact, as the term ‘shaman’ normally suggests? To ascertain this, we need to turn to a brief overview of some of the literature on the *faqīr* as presented to the Western audience.

Defining a Saint

Looking into the early travel literature on the Bedouin in Jordan, the image of what the *faqīr* does becomes increasingly ambivalent. Ethnographic descriptions of the *faqīr* rarely correspond with the explanations Ammarin informants provide of a just and good person who emanates *Baraka*. The French priest, Antonin Jaussen (1908; Jaussen & Savignac 1914), and also the Czech explorer, Alois Musil (1928: 400–407), for example, have left detailed descriptions from the early 20th century in which they discuss several religious figures. Jaussen specifically refers to them as *fuqara*, and describes them as performing spirit exorcism by playing the tambourine, burning incense, reaching ecstasy, and even having visions of disappeared objects (1908: 386, 387).⁹

Alois Musil does not use the precise term *faqīr* but describes what they do in much the same way as Jaussen. He describes encounters between ‘seers or sorcerers’ and the Rwala Bedouin tribe. These sorcerers¹⁰ are considered to have supernatural powers. The sorcerer has disciples who follow him, and one of their duties is to carry a little drum and other musical

⁹ In Doughty’s (1883) travels in the Arabian desert, the *fuqara* is a term used for a tribe, without spiritual connotations. In Petra, one branch of the Bedouin tribe, previously living around Jebel Haroun, is also called *al-fuqara*, and are by some claimed to have the same divine blessing as Salem Awwad.

¹⁰ The Rwala call them sorcerers, while they call themselves ‘owners of Islam’.

instruments. The 'gift' of seeing is hereditary, yet at times the disciples of the sorcerer also claim to have received the blessing of God through being a disciple. When curing people, the sorcerer seeks ecstasy, according to both Jaussen and, here, Musil:

If the sorcerer wants to call the spokesman-angel to him, he beckons the disciples to play, while he himself squats with his head bent down. After a while he begins to move, stands up, stretches out his hands, jumps about, contorts his body, and puts his hands, feet, and even his head close to the fire, clapping his hands. The Bedouins say of this that he is just playing, *jel'ab*, but his disciples call it yielding to the influence of the *islâm*, ecstasy. (1928: 401, see also page 403).

These ethnographic descriptions suggest that practices such as drum playing, spirit exorcism and trance states reminiscent of Sufi traditions and non-conformist peripatetic religious figures elsewhere have occurred in the territory now known as Jordan.

Even more recent studies in medical anthropology have pointed to the practices of the dervish, generally among the Ammarin and literature alike, considered another word for the *faqîr*. In terms of healing psychiatric illnesses, in particular, these studies have described how trance, spirit communication, incense burning and drum beating are used in ways that much resemble that of the early 20th century descriptions (Al-Krenawi & Graham 1996; 1997; Al-Krenawi et al. 1996; Makris 2000). Yet it is important to note that these practices are framed within an Islamic context, with references to the Koran.

While there may be local differences, the ethnographic sources suggest that there may be aspects of past practices that are being reformulated in the present to fit with current religious traditions. Dale Eickelman also demonstrated this in terms of the *marabout* in Morocco, when he noticed how:

Many of the Sherqawi elite dissociate themselves from the *maraboutic* interests of some of their kinsmen because such activities would open them to attack and ridicule from educated persons. Such Sherqawa seek to redefine the activities of some of their kinsmen and ancestors in light of the formal doctrines of reformist, modernist Islam. (1977: 15).

Judging from the above, there are certain indications that much of the same ordering of practices is occurring among the Ammarin. To my Ammarin informants today, the *faqîr* is a saint—'a good man' who does (and did) not perform drum performances, spirit communication or ecstasy but rather has a knowledge of plants, good judgement, is poor and

blessed by God. It would appear that the relationship between sainthood and shamanism is not necessarily one in which the nuances in theological terminology are as crucial as the association with any of the types. It is not, as such, the intention here to determine which version of the figures is correct, or lay claims to what the past was *really* like. Rather the intention is to explore the gaps and tensions that emerge in the guise of the *Samer*, the shaman and the saint.

Making a Shaman of a Saint

After many interviews with my Ammarin informants about the *faqīr* as a renowned saint (*weli*) and having received consistent explanations of what s/he does (as indeed both men and women can become saints), surprisingly, in the web pages that promote the Ammarin Bedouin camp to tourists and elsewhere, the *faqīr* is presented as a 'shaman'. The *faqīr* is described (particularly in relation to the Bedouin tribe in Petra) on the website of the Ammarin Bedouin camp as follows:

In Arabic, the word *fuqara* means literally poor people. Among Bedouins it signifies in addition, a shaman or a person endowed with supernatural powers, somewhat like the Indian Fakirs [...] Part of the skills of the *Fuqara* is to prepare for the Bedouins [sic] talismans in the form of bracelets made of cloves, and necklaces made of Syrian Rue, which is central to their mythology.¹¹

One sign in the tourist museum of the Ammarin Bedouin camp specifically describes how Salem Awwad "had fame of having supernatural and telepathic abilities to bring news from far away places about his tribe members. He was able to light Almond branch without matches". Not only is the representation of the *faqīr* as possessing supernatural powers unlike anything the Ammarin recounted about their 'saint', but people from the very recent past are also presented as "the last respected shamans" and direct descendants of Salem Awwad, both in the Ammarin museum and on the web page promoting the Ammarin Bedouin camp. While stating that the "the branch of Eyal Awwad have another claim to fame, that of having supernatural abilities",¹² tourist trekking routes are promoted as passing "Haj Shtayyan's pool, the shaman's pool" and

¹¹ <http://www.bedouincamp.net/mawasa.html> accessed 6/5/07.

¹² <http://www.bedouincamp.net/fuqara.html> accessed 26/2/07.

“visiting the Ammarin’s shaman houses”.¹³ Haj Shtayyan is one of three, now deceased, siblings presented in the Ammarin Bedouin Museum in sepia-toned photos as shamans, although taken in the 1990s.

These public statements are problematic to many Ammarin in more ways than just by raising awareness of alternative modes of ordering. Hajj Shtayyan is the father of prominent members of the Ammarin in Beidha today. Even if they say that their father was a saint (although not in the same league as Salem Awwad) and even if they may lay claims to having been hereditarily blessed with *Baraka*, they denounce all stories of supernatural abilities, performing trances or entering into states of spiritual ecstasy. This is, of course, not to say that these people do not use or recognise traditional healing, such as Koranic healing, which is still widely used, or have a knowledge of herbal medicine as passed down the generations and held particularly by the elders, quite the contrary. They are simply not shamans manipulating spirits—they are saints blessed by God.

The representation of shamanism among the Bedouin appears to have a particular audience. The promotional pamphlets for the Ammarin Bedouin camp, produced by Rami Sajdi and Ziad Hamze, stress—in the English version—that one can learn about medicinal and spiritual therapies, and how Ammarin shamans use stones and plants. The Arabic version of the pamphlets, however, explains nothing about ‘shamans’, saints or spirituality. Instead it briefly states that traditional herbal medicine is displayed. Similarly, all explanations about shamanism and supernatural abilities in the museum are in English, not Arabic. In other words, in the public English representation of the Ammarin in the museum and on the Internet, the *faqīr*, of whom my informants only truly recognize Salem Awwad, is interpreted as a shaman rather than a saint. The houses and places of the recent generations of the Awwad family branch, who lived only a decade ago, are presented as shamanic tourist destinations.

As the main contributor to the public representation of the Ammarin past, Rami Sajdi explained to me how he discussed these issues with the most recent shamans (i.e. the three siblings) when they were alive, as well as elsewhere in southern Jordan. Sajdi came into contact with the Ammarin shamans in spring 1996 when he was investigating the spiritual properties of the *Peganum Harmala*. He discovered that they were using *Harmala* seeds:

¹³ <http://www.bedouincamp.net/trekking.html> accessed 5/5/07.

Burnt with certain incense 'gum-resins' [were] used for curing people possessed by the *jinn*, a treatment that often includes the beating of drums and the recitation of Koranic verses. The techniques was taught [sic] by an Ammarin elder who lived in the early nineteenth century [Salem Awwad]. A man that held many sacred keys and certain ancient knowlegde [sic] in relation to the spirit of the lands he dwelt in.¹⁴

Sajdi's homepage also has extensive information on the Bedouin, both Ammarin and Bedoul, but also New Age interests such as 'ley lines', 'energy zones' and 'sacred crossings', and the pages concerning the Bedouin highlight the magical and healing properties of certain plants, stripped of any Islamic context. According to Sajdi, shamanic abilities are ancient knowledge, inherited and passed on from parents to children, which allow the person not only to act as a judge and herbal healer but also to perform exorcism, for example to heal epilepsy.¹⁵ Becoming a shaman, in this sense, and referring to the *fuqara* in Beidha, involves a change in consciousness:

After the initiation, nothing is hidden from them any longer; not only can they see things far, far away, but can also discover souls, stolen souls, stolen objects, hidden treasures, hidden remedies and other intelligence gathering. The Fugara makes a journey during which he is spoken to by the spirits, or they may appear to him in the form of visions or even in physical form [...]. All shamanic practice aims to give rise to ecstasy. Drumming, manipulating of breath, ordeals, fasting, theatrical illusions, all are time-honored methods for entering into the trance for shamanic work.¹⁶

Sajdi believes that these shamans (as, in this description, their actions would conform to most anthropological definitions of what constitutes a 'shaman') have passed on knowledge from ancient times, from even before Islam, when there were more accepted deities etc., and that they thus represent a sort of original spirituality that is universally shared around the globe among indigenous people. As he explained to me during an interview, "We have nothing called Bedouin shaman, we have something called Bedouin fuqara. So, to connect, what is fuqara? I used the word shaman for these people so all of the others in the world and anthropologists will realise that I am talking about shamans".

Sajdi further stresses that, aside from being someone who contacts the spirits, the *faqīr* may also be a healer or a judge. According to Sajdi,

¹⁴ <http://acacialand.com/rami.html> accessed 15/4/07.

¹⁵ <http://acacialand.com/Hamad.html> accessed 28/1/07.

¹⁶ <http://www.acacialand.com/ndex2.html> accessed 26/5/07.

equating 'shamans' with '*fuqara*' forges a connection between different indigenous populations around the world, and is intended to show the authenticity of this original spirituality and close relationship that the Bedouin have with Nature; it is a moral obligation to cherish and safeguard this original and somewhat pure spirituality of humankind.

I also took up the topic with Ziad Hamze (and his companion) since, aside from administering the Bedouin camp and museum, he was also responsible for the camp's website and the UNESCO application. He facilitates contact with tourists via the Internet, and presents the *Samer* to a broad audience. I asked him, "Who is the *faqīr*?":

Hamze: It is someone who is very much connected with God. Naturally. By blood [...] So they are healers, they are good judges, they always settle problems; very wise. This is characteristic of a *faqīr*. And these guys, the guys you saw pictures of [in the museum], their grandparents were *fuqara*. [...] There are some [left], but it is a dying generation. Because it is blood lineage there must be someone coming up. [...] It is not a sect. It is not religion. It's a way of life. It is nature. The prophet was a *faqīr*. This is why he got it [the message from God]. I am not saying they are on the level of the Prophet, they are spiritual people, they are very much connected with God. They are healers, they are wise, and they are powerful.

In a sense, Hamze here takes on the blessed version of the figure rather than the spirit-manipulating version. After this, his companion interrupted with a reasoning that tunes into the New Age reasoning:

Companion: Because they are in tune with nature. With God and nature. Not even the earth, the whole universe. They open up. Their consciousness is very open. Their awareness is open to receive. So they become earth messengers. To give something... and God is using those people to facilitate or to give certain messages or a certain mission for the benefit of the human. [...] So what we are trying to tell you is, now the Bedouin have information... not information... the instinct which leads them to do whatever. We the educated people, we want to know more, so we gather information and transform this information into knowledge, to understand why. Because we want to know: Curiosity. I read books, I study books, I read about healing, I am a healer, I know reiki, I am a pranic healer also, I study energy, I study energy for human beings. I know about earth energy. The more you become conscious and aware the more you become 'I want to know, I want to know, I want to know'. But for them they just do things by nature.

On the one hand, I was becoming aware that the Ammarin were increasingly dissociating themselves from previous practices, such as saintly intercession—but not the saint. Yet, in presenting Bedouin heritage to tourists or in cultural performances, the spiritual aspects of a renowned

figure are highlighted in ways that are not compatible with most local people's understandings of the past, or of religiosity for that matter. These various versions of the *faqīr* as shaman or saint and, indeed, the *hashi* as shaman, must therefore also be viewed in the context of a broader relationship between the increasing influence of a particular Islamic theology over the Bedouin communities and the way settlement has reshaped traditions.

In response to such changes, other non-Bedouin are trying to protect and gain further insights into what they see as traditional practices. This is not only a matter of presenting 'authentic' Bedouin culture to tourists; there is more at stake, it seems. People like Hamze and Sajdi, in different ways, felt that the Bedouin represented an authentic relationship with nature, which has kept some of them in tune with the spirits by being gifted from God (Sajdi 2007: 95). This authenticity is rapidly disappearing, however, as literal Islamic teachings and modernisation increase. People working and living in urban areas, according to this line of thought, are removed from this authentic relationship with nature.

Looking at the shaping of the *hashi* as shaman and the religious figure of the *faqīr* as a shaman or saint, the Ammarin Bedouin camp becomes a place of relaxation and engagement with nature and authenticity. This site-specific element of contemporary negotiations of spirituality is also expressed in reiki healer Susie Tamim's autobiography (2005). According to Tamim, the Amman-based owner of the Bedouin Museum, under the pseudonym of 'Sami', had advised her to visit Jerusalem, Masada and Petra.¹⁷ In each of these places she experienced a revelation. In Petra, this would come after visiting the Ammarin Bedouin Museum, where she would inhale incense and touch magical stones on display there and, finally, when walking through the mountains afterwards, she would witness a figure of the Virgin Mary with Baby Jesus in her arms carved in the sandstone. The Bedouin and the mountainous desert became the vehicle for spiritual enlightenment. This potent role of the desert is not only a phenomenon among a few urbanites in Jordan, such as the Circle of Friends¹⁸ in Amman, who also use Petra as a location for workshops on holistic therapy etc. Even beyond Petra, desert areas in the Middle East are now becoming places of such refuge, of getting away from it all in order to experience a close relationship with nature, such as the

¹⁷ Which is argued to follow the ley lines of the star sign Orion's belt, also known from some explanations of the Giza pyramid's off-axis positioning.

¹⁸ <http://www.ammancircleofriends.org/> accessed 24/1/2008.

Rainbow Gathering in 2007 in Wadi Rum. Thus, while one version is that the *faqīr* was ‘a good man’—a salient saint—another version claims shamanic practices, some more supernatural and telepathic than others, and which tap into a broader New Age movement. There seem, in other words, to be gaps in the various modes of ordering the world, gaps that cannot easily be bridged.

Parallel Universalities and the Uncanny Saint

In the above, we see three very different ways of ordering the past in the present. One ordering process presents the *hashi* in a male metamorphosis and the *faqīr* as a particularly good and righteous person, a saint. This process is the predominant one among the Ammarin. It is clearly enacted within the context of a growing awareness of the moral and pious obligations of being a modern Muslim. It is a moral regime that finds its source in a distant past—a ‘discursive tradition’ (Asad 1986) if you will—but one that also explicitly aims to discard certain traditions that have hitherto been understood as Islamic. Thus rather than imputing trance and spirits to the saints, it focuses instead on piety, in the same sense as the ‘pious ones’ in North Africa (Eickelman 2002: 266–267). The process is framed within a universality shaped in a modern (and modernising) context among the Ammarin that aims to order the past through the potency of proclaiming ignorance of certain traditions and practices (Gilsenan 2000). That is, ordering knowledge through processes of not-knowing and the moral judgment of ignorance (Dilley 2010; High et al. 2012).

In another version, both the *hashi* and the *faqīr* are ordered in shamanic narratives. This mode of ordering is similarly employing an idea of universality, nurtured globally by indigenous populations and urban segments within the framework of New Age spirituality. The premise is that there is an original spirituality, shared across the globe, which people have detached themselves from in modern times, and no less so with the Islamic Revival. Yet some people, such as the Bedouin shamans, still have some kind of access to it. The New Age movement—or ‘alternative spirituality’ as some adherents would rather call it—is equally a modern phenomenon, which, unlike the competing Islamic universality, aims to sustain and reclaim past practices through the trope of shamanic authenticity. It does so, however, by de-contextualising the actions, for example by stripping healing practices of their Koranic framework. Within the New Age framework, once existing vehicles or media for communication are

lost. However, they do not see themselves as filling in the gaps of lost knowledge (cf. Strathern 2004: 97–98). Rather they make do with what is present—or on the verge of extinction—including borrowing from what they see as related indigenous groups in the Amazon and Siberia.

It initially appears that we are dealing with two versions of the same object, which in no way can be reduced to each other. To the Ammarin, the *faqīr* cannot be both a shaman and a saint. Yet despite the transformations of the *hashi*, shamans and saints, they still share some sort of link: these versions are not fragmented or isolated. Rather they connect in the ambiguity relating to the possibility that the figure *could* be something else. Each version partially ties to some aspect of the other version, although far removed in the long line of interpretations and ordering processes that have taken them in different directions. As Marilyn Strathern states, these “semantic transformations are the outcome of the way specific metaphors are elaborated, leading people’s interpretations in different directions. There is no single body of knowledge any more than there is a single [...] culture, but a number of small local centres” (2004: 96).

Aside from the museum and tourist information, the main meeting point is found in the third version of the saint, the heritage version. In the universal scope of UNESCO’s heritage discourse of safeguarding material and practices of “outstanding value to humanity”, the Ammarin (and neighbouring tribes) are represented as having special knowledge and skills in relation to the landscape. This discourse—like that of the New Age movement—seeks to sustain the cultural diversity of people and their heritage. This heritage trope is equally a product of modernity, and equally—although perhaps unintentionally—it seems in this case to strip the representation from its context; that is, from the fact that the Bedouin were relocated due to UNESCO tangible heritage. The problem is that UNESCO heritage is dependent on situating the heritage in a specific place within a nation state. Camel (and goat) herding skills, oral traditions and weaving skills are practised among most Bedouin groups in the Middle East but, by highlighting saint veneration, Bedouin culture comes to be situated among the Ammarin and neighbouring tribes in Petra, regardless of whether other Bedouin tribes are more comprehensively living the ‘Bedouin culture’ that UNESCO is seeking to safeguard.

Authenticity is as much at the heart of the heritage discourse as it is in the return to a pure Islam, or original spirituality among the indigenous groups in the eyes of a New Age movement. Authenticity, however, is not an object but a relationship. Within a heritage discourse, authenticity becomes a tool for legitimising a particular narrative of the past through

international heritage proclamations. For the shamanism trope, it is a mode of ordering both the *Samer* and the saint as shamanic practices, whereby the potency of the past to transgress time is an aspiration of an urban segment for whom the Bedouin represent an original human condition.

To the Ammarin, however, it is a relationship of ordering the nature of the presence of the past. The specific feature of sainthood is multiple and remains ambivalent and precarious, as the figure performs a powerful social role, yet is also entangled in the practices of contemporary Islamic morality. The *faqīr* is precariously positioned between being a salient saint and a shameful shaman.¹⁹ While there may appear to be a gap between these versions, they also co-exist, however volatile their connection may be with the source they share. To the Ammarin, the pivotal, contemporary role of the saint, Salem Awwad, lies in his ability to offer social recognition of divine closeness for his descendants. To both the Heritage and New Age discourse, it is crucial that the object of interest is situated “just prior to the present” or at least threatened by the present (Clifford 1987: 122). Certain pasts may, to the Ammarin, thus be in a state of abjection within a discourse on the past, neither too detached nor too attached to the present day (Chadha 2006). Sainthood may today belong to the Age of Ignorance to the Ammarin but many of the same people now denouncing the pilgrimages did themselves perform them in the past, and they still rely on the social potency of lineage and the sense of belonging that the saint graves instil. The saint becomes meaningful on an individual level as both a figure of commemoration and disassociation; an ambivalence that is productive in bridging presumed gaps between modes of ordering. The multiplicity of versions allows for the same person to simultaneously denounce the shamanic version while also bringing tourists to the shaman’s pool, or simply by being knowledgeable about alternative versions, but indifferent, leaving it up to God’s will (Marcus 1985: 456). Many of my Ammarin informants may, on initial questioning, be absolutely certain of what a saint is. Yet they also accept the uncanny possibility that the saint could be something else. He is not a shaman, yet he is also not *not* a shaman—at least to someone else. By remaining precarious and ambivalent, the uncanny possibility of the *faqīr* being something other than a ‘good person’ allows for the continued co-existence of versions. This inde-

¹⁹ The term “shameful shaman” was coined by Geraldine Chatelard (Pers. Comm.).

terminacy in orderings allows, at times, for a bridging of the gaps through partial connections between what may initially seem as incompatible versions of the same object.

Conclusion

What I have wished to show in the above is that the three competing universalities may, as analytical categories, be separate or even opposites. Yet rather than fragmented versions of the same object, there seem to be productive gaps forged through fragile connections which have evolved through transformations that have taken different directions. To the Ammarin, the subject of sainthood is, on one level, rendered an object of shame in the guise of the shaman. This goes, too, for the representation of the *Samer*, which, although in nature unlike the saint, is also ordered within the same trope of shamanism by Sajdi and Hamze. Yet, simultaneously, in a community such as that of the Ammarin where tourism, heritage, modernisation and an Islamic Revival go hand in hand, such connections allows for multiplicity.

None of these three versions stands alone. The moral obligations of an emerging Islamic pious awareness are not completely detached from obligations to know and cherish one's history, or make money from tourists attracted to the narratives of authenticity that the shaman affords—or take pride in being selected as UNESCO Intangible Heritage for practices no longer performed, such as the pilgrimage.

The problem for the Ammarin thus lies not in deciding what the saint *is*; the problem relies on being confronted by what the saint *could also* be. It is in the gaps between modes of ordering that the socially productive tension and potency of presenting the past resides. And it is in the gaps, which have emerged through semiotic transformations that the question of sainthood takes on a potent role of carrying with it an uncanny potentiality and sustained indeterminacy in the multiple orderings of the world. The point is thus that three very different modes of ordering exist in parallel and compete to enchant or disenchant the world. All seek recourse in the past to shape the future, where both the New Age and the Islamic Revival claim some sort of pure spirituality. Thus, while these versions are very different, the gaps and connections appear productive by not being completely determined, and allow for co-existence.

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