ṢAʿDA REVISITED

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Colonial and orientalist tainted visions of an "islamic" or a "muslim" city (singular intended), a view which flourished from roughly the thirties to the seventies of the last century, are to a large part obsolete (cf. Raymond 2008[1]). This leaves room for glances in directions that only rarely would have been possible for minds confined by an idea of one essential prototype of the islamic city. The short-lived invention of the Muslim city is over, and we can now direct our – at least in that instance – impartial eyes to cities without having to form our thoughts along the ever so labyrinthic/chaotic or rectangular/orderly/modern grid. We therefore can take into account differences and similarities in town-planning and in the organization of urban life without paying undue heed to religion, since this is what that invention was aiming at. This is not to deny that religion can certainly have influence on town-planning and the organization of urban life, but it is by far not the only influence, and in some cases it even is of minor importance.

In the course of his "Anthropologische Untersuchungen zur sozialen Evolution" (so the subtitle of his "Egalität und Klassengesellschaft in Südarabien") Walter Dostal incorporated two south Arabian towns into the concluding presentation of his model of social evolution in southern Arabia, Ṣanʿāʾ and Tarīm. By means of these two towns he referred to two "Grundmuster" (basic patterns):

"In Ṣanʿāʾ wird das Grundmuster durch die ausgebildete tribale Klassengesellschaft mit vollzogener gesell-schaftlicher Arbeitsteilung bestimmt; Tarīm ist durch ein Grundmuster geprägt, in welchem sich das tribale Element lediglich auf die Schutzgewährung beschränkt." (Dostal 1985: 363)[2]

In the following chapter Ṣaʾda, the capital town of the northernmost province of Yemen and for a long period of time capital of the Yemeni Zaydi Imams, will again be at the center of my considerations.[3] I want to show that Ṣaʾda corresponded originally to the model of Ṣanʿāʾ as presented by Dostal. Yet through the arrival of the first imam and through the second foundation of the town in the wake of the imam's arrival it evolved to something else, situated between the models of Ṣanʿāʾ and Tarīm: through the presence of the members of the Prophet's family (originally the Imams and their entourage) the town matched the role of Tarīm, whereas the presence of tribal inhabitants gave the town a certain similarity to Ṣanʿāʾ.

This second visit to Ṣaʾda is caused by some additional texts that were edited or came to my knowledge since my first article was published. The new material permits to tell more about the old, in essence pre-islamic and pre-imamic town Ṣaʾda which lay at the foot of Jabal Tulummuṣ, not far away of the modern and now sadly destroyed town (see fig. 4).

Before that, an additional consideration of materials concerning towns in Ḥaḍramawt might be helpful. In her book "On the Edge of Empire" Linda Boxberger describes the organization of some towns there. Boxberger, dealing with "urban and rural life in the interior" (Boxberger 2002: 67 – 95), describes among others Sayʾūn between ca. 1880 and 1930, where she speaks of "two true quarters, al-Suhayl in the densely populated eastern third of the town and al-Hawta in the west." (Boxberger 2002: 72). She continues: "Sayʾun had perhaps the greatest rivalry between the quarters of any town in Hadhramawt. At times of celebrations, the two quarters competed formally in extemporaneous poetry composition and in dancing" (ibid.). The rivalry

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[1] "There is no great difficulty in defining the principles underlying the Orientalist approach vis-à-vis the Mediterranean Arab cities. Chief among these is the assumption that in a globalizing civilization like the Muslim one every phenomenon must be regarded as specifically Muslim." (Raymond 2008: 49)

[2] „In Ṣanʿāʾ the basic pattern is determined through a developed tribal class society with an effective social division of labor; Tarīm is characterized by a basic pattern where the tribal element is limited to the provision of protection."

[3] after a first article (1987) in Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 17: 63-80, called "Historical and Social Aspects of Ṣaʿda, a Yemeni Town", pitifully marred by many printing errors

between the quarters (or rather halves) manifested itself also in everyday-situations, "when members of one quarter were considered by the other to have 'crossed the line' into their territory and thus merited attack by fists, clubs, or even knives. The rivalry was so severe that the only time that al-huwik[4] from al-Suhayl could enter Say'un as a group through the town's main gate in al-Hawta quarter was during the ceremonial return from the ziyara, ritual visit, to the tomb of Prophet Hud" (Boxberger 2002: 72 – 73). The dividing line between the halves could be crossed for e.g. Friday prayers and for visits of relatives. At special occasions, "emergencies or celebrations" (Boxberger 2002: 73) for instance, the people of the other half "could not appear there without risk", and there were only few exceptions. Relatives of one half attending e.g. a wedding in the other half were closely watched. "He or she could not even sing or dance at a wedding of a relative in the other quarter." Service men from one half were not allowed to work in the other half; even the sultans were "subject to the system of service providers" (Boxberger 2002: 73). This enforced partition of the town was bound to lead to conflicts: "The sultans … mediated in disputes between the quarters that their leaders were unable to resolve" (Boxberger 2002: 73). Boxberger relates a case where a funeral procession had to lead from one half to the other. The service-providers or ḥuwīk bearing the bier had to hand over the corpse at the dividing line to the service-providers of the other half.

Competition and frequent disputes between residential quarters, however, existed not only in inland Ḥaḍramawt. As Boxberger relates, in the coastal town al-Šiḥr "service providers, tradesmen, and workers of the quarters … were almost as competitive as those of Say'un" (Boxberger 2002: 105). She continues: "Late in the nineteenth century, a rivalry between two quarters led to a fracas with knives in which seven people died."

There obviously existed dividing lines between ḥārāt or quarters of towns in Wādī Ḥaḍramawt and on the coast that were intensively maintained and much more emphasized than usual. For many persons and/or on many occasions it was not possible to cross this line without incurring difficulties and provoking disputes. Other towns seem to lack such clear and controversial demarcations: at least Boxberger does not mention a sharp division between quarters in Mukallā or Tarīm, and for Šibām she explicitly states: "There was no system of quarters with corresponding organization of providers of social services as found in other towns" (Boxberger 2002: 81).

It would be not only presumptuous but certainly wrong to directly transfer data from the turn of the 19th to the 20th century's Ḥaḍramawt to Ṣa'da in the north of Yemen in an even more distant time around the end of the 9th/beginning of the 10th century CE. Yet the examples from Ḥaḍramawt show at least that there are differing possibilities of regulations for living together in south Arabian towns, among them one where explicit borders between living quarters (and inhabitants of towns) are effectively kept up, and where this sharply drawn line can cause disputes and even violent conflicts thus necessitating occasional mediation which optimally is provided by somebody from outside and/or high up like the sultans in the case of Ḥaḍramawt. A comparison between towns in Ḥaḍramawt and in the north of Yemen makes sense insofar as it shows diverse possibilities of developments but certainly not any historical continuity or a diffusion between Ṣa'da and the towns in Ḥaḍramawt in much later times.

THE OLD TOWN AND ITS INHABITANTS

The old town of Ṣa'da, which obviously was not or only partly destroyed when the dam of al-Ḫāniq (now Wādī al-'Abdīn or al-'Abdīyīn) was demolished in the year 815/16 (Heiss 1987: 66; Heiss 1998: 182f), was still in use for a considerable time. This old town, the organization of the townspeople and the end of the use of the old town will be the main subjects of my contribution. From the biography of the first imam, the sīrat al-Hādī,[5] we learn of the existence of two halves of the old town which were separated from each other, the

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[4] The word "ḥuwīk" is a plural in Ḥaḍramī dialect of "ḥā'ik", the weaver (Boxberger 2002: 32). The word is used as a generic name for service-providers of non-elite, non-tribal origin (like ahl al-t̲ul̲t̲ or muzayyinīn in the north). They comprised certain craftsmen, drummers and singers. The women of this group assisted at births and marriages.

[5] The sīrat al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn is (at least to a greater part) written by 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Ubaydallāh al-'Abbāsī al-'Alawī, a combatant and younger contemporary of the first imam al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq (cf. Arendonk 1960; Heiss 1998, esp. 1-16)

šiqq[6] Ukayl and the šiqq Yursam. The two halves or sides of the town obviously had separate entrances: it was possible to enter the town on the Ukaylī side (al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī 1981/1401: 410, 411, 413) or on the Yursamī side (al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī 1981/1401: 413, 414). The Ukaylī half was inhabited also by merchants (tujjār) from Ṣanʿāʾ (al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī 1401/1981: 412), who had lived in this half of Ṣaʿda apparently for quite some time and who at least partly bore weapons. At another, earlier instance we are told by the author of the sīra that there existed a "sāḥat al-Yursamīyīn" (a gathering place of Yursam) at one side of the town (fī jānib al-qarya; al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī 1981/1401: 156) possibly on its outside. It can be conjectured that there was also a similar sāḥa outside the (old) town belonging to Ukayl. At least those persons who entered the šiqq Ukayl had to pay, because when the Ukayl tried to draw one of the tribal leaders of their time, Ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk to their side, they "offered their obedience and asked him to levy taxes for the town and to take the maks[7] from those who entered the half of Ukayl" (al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī 1981/1401: 413). The situation in the old town was perhaps similar to the situation in Sayʾūn as described by Linda Boxberger, certainly with one difference: there is no mentioning of any obligation to pay if someone wanted to enter a half of Sayʾūn.

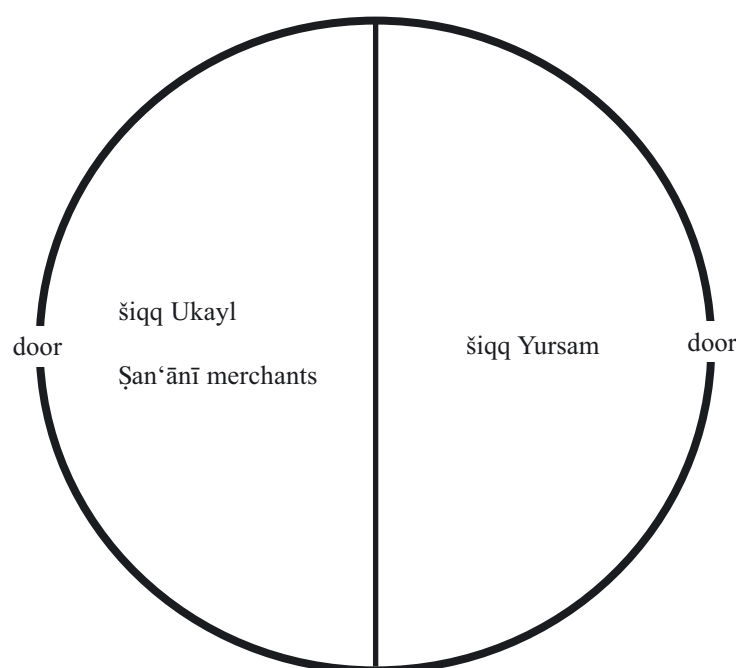In a schematic way, the old town can be imagined like that:

Figure 1: The halves of old Ṣaʿda according to al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī

We can render this information by ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. ʿUbaydallāh al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī even some-what more precise if data are included with which al-Hamdānī[8] provides us in his "Description of the Arab Peninsula", where he describes the "miḫlāf [district] Ṣaʿda" (al-Hamdānī 1984/1394: 248-250, esp. 249):

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[6] šiqq is "The half … of a thing … or the half of a thing when it is cloven, or split" (Lane 1984: 1577 b) and "the side, or lateral part". Consequently, one could translate "the Ukayl half" or "the Ukayl side" of the town Ṣaʿda.

[7] maks is a word designing non-canonical taxes, and "passage, droit pour passer" (Dozy 1968 [1881]: 614)

[8] Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad b. Yaʿqūb al-Hamdānī was born (possibly 893) around the time when the later imam Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn reached the Yemen (which was in 897). He belonged to the tribal stratum of Yemeni inhabitants and was an important polymath; he lived in Ṣaʿda for twenty years, and some leading persons of Ukayl were among his friends there. He wrote among other themes on genealogy (al-Iklīl or "The Diadem", originally 10 volumes) and geography in a wider sense (ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿArab or "Description of the Arabic Peninsula"). For him cf. Heiss 1998: 17-60.
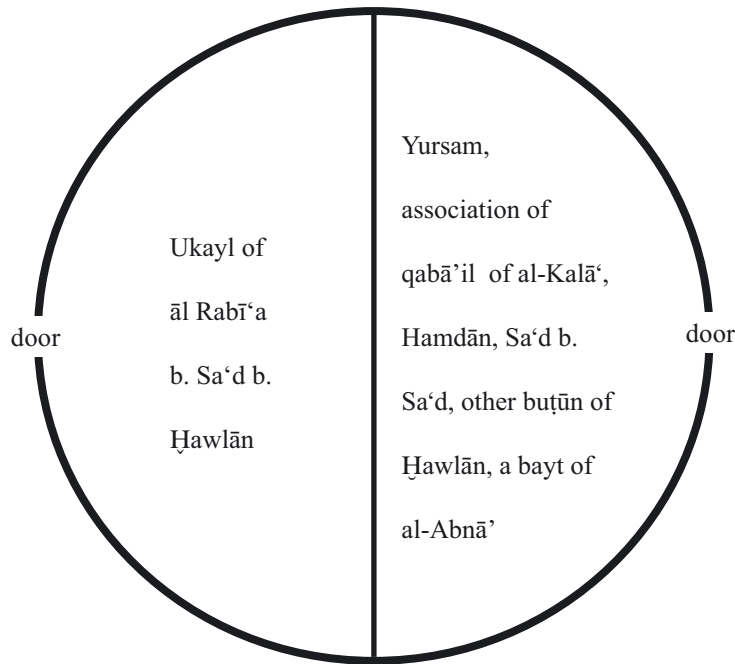
Figure 2: The halves of old Ṣaʿda according to al-Hamdānī

In al-Hamdānī's presentation, one half of the town was inhabited by the Ukayl, a group with a thorough tribal pedigree, whereas the other half was inhabited by a mixture of members of many, genealogically very different groups who nevertheless had a certain feeling of belonging together, if one can interpret the existence of a common name in that way. There is a certain possibility that this presentation is biased, because al-Hamdānī preferred the political and religious views of the Ukayl and was friends with some of them. Consequently he could have been motivated to denigrate their opponents.

THE CONFLICT IN ṢAʿDA AND ITS ENVIRONMENTS

The halves of the town with their respective inhabitants precisely reflect the conflict of the time when the later imam Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn arrived in the region. The conflict is presented by al-Hamdānī in genealogical terms as one between brothers, whose relatives and allies involved in the conflict lived in and to a greater part around the town of Ṣaʿda:[9]

The two principal parties of conflict, imagined as brothers in the genealogy of the Ḥawlān-federation, were al-Rabīʿa b. Saʿd with the banū Kulayb, the Ukayl and their leading family, the āl ʿAbbād, on one side, and Saʿd b. Saʿd together with Saʿd b. Hāḍir with their leading family, the āl Abī Fuṭayma on the other. On the side of Ukayl were as allies banū ʿUwayr, al-Muhāḍir, banū Šihāb and groups of Ḥimyar who inhabited Ṣaʿda. On the side of Saʿd b. Hāḍir and Saʿd b. Saʿd stood Yursam, Sufyān of Arḥab (Hamdān), Wādiʿa of Ḥāšid (Hamdān) and again groups of Ḥimyar. As usual, one has to keep in mind that not all persons of the mentioned groups took part in the conflict.

With these arrangements concerning the old town of Ṣaʿda in mind it is quite instructive to read about the arrival of the later imam Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, as his biographer al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī relates it:

"Arrival of al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq (ṣalawāt Allāh ʿalayhi) in Ṣaʿda: Muḥammad b. ʿUbaydallāh[10] said: We arrived in Ṣaʿda when six days had passed of Ṣafar of the year 284.[11] We came to Ḥawlān, among whom

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[9] for the conflict see Heiss 1998: 176-185
[10] The father of the author and his main source before he himself arrived in Yemen
[11] corresponds to 16 March 897

Ḥawlān

| Ḥayy | Saʿd | Rašwān | Hāniʾ | Rāziḥ | al-Azmaʿ | Ṣuḥār |

al-Rabīʿa　　　　　　　　　　Saʿd　　　　　　　　　　　　　Ḥādir

Banū Mālik　　banū ʿAwf　　Ḥarb　Ġālib　Samḥak　　　Saʿd

Ukayl　　　　banū Kulayb　　　　　　　　　　　　āl Abī Futayma

āl ʿAbbād

allies:
Banū ʿUwayr, al-Muhāḏir,
banū Šihāb, groups of
Ḥimyar from Ṣaʿda

allies:
Yursam, Sufyān (Arḥab),
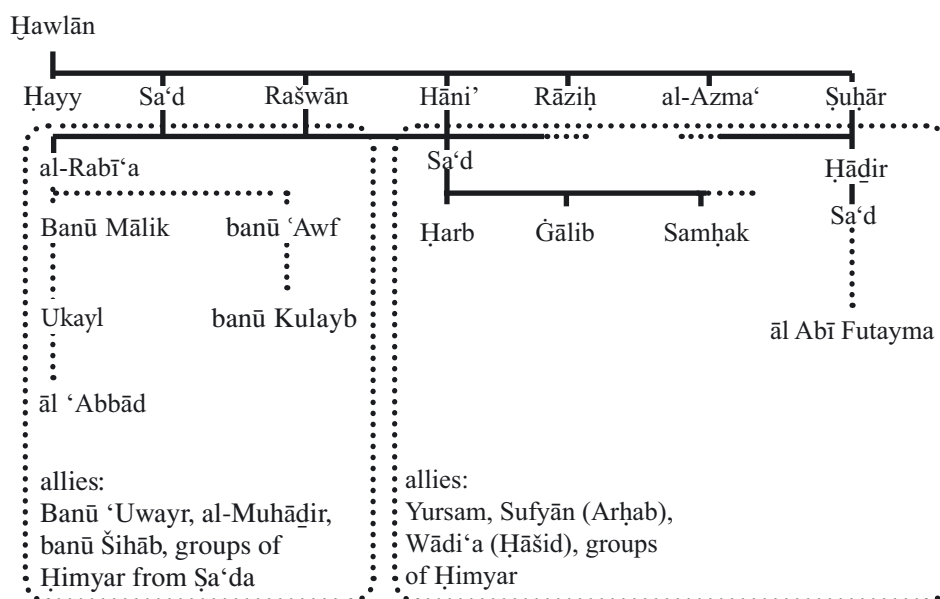Wādiʿa (Ḥāšid), groups
of Ḥimyar

Figure 3: The parties of the conflict in and around the old town of Ṣaʿda in the year 897, when
Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn, the later al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq, arrived (cf. Heiss 1998: 184)

there was a severe fitna[12], in the course of which men perished and possessions dwindled away. The town
was without rain, the earth had become dry. This was the time of the fruits, and I saw the crops partly
dried out because of water shortness, and I saw the animals famished to death.

When Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn came close to the town, he pitched his tents near to it and gave us the order to
camp in them, so we camped. The people came out to him voluntarily; he did not force a single one of
them to come out to him, and he had sent to no one of them to exempt him. So the inhabitants of Ṣaʿda,
among whom the fitna was, came out to him; they were Saʿd and al-Rabīʿa. All of them came to meet him,
and they greeted him. So he greeted them and gave them the order to greet one another.
Then he began and made a speech, a powerful and eloquent one. He praised God (taʿālā) and extolled him,
and he prayed for the prophet (ṣallā Allāh ʿalayhi wa-sallam). He reminded them of God and exhorted
them with many exhortations. I saw the people, and they were shocked and cried because of his words
and his exhortations which they heard. They were noisy, like the pilgrims are noisy at the house of God,
the ḥarām" (al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī 1981/1401: 41).

The imam did not enter the town – in that case, the old town – of Ṣaʿda. He stayed at the outside near the
town and waited until the inhabitants came out to him.[13] The two groups of inhabitants are called with the
names of their forefathers, Saʿd and al-Rabīʿa, giving once more the impression that whole groups participated
in the events, and thus keeping up the ideology of tribal solidarity. If the imam would have entered the town,
he would at the same time have to enter one of the halves and would have stayed with one of the two groups
of inhabitants and opponents, which would have meant in the eyes of the other group that he was not impar-
tial in their conflict. Mediation in the conflict would then have been a difficult if not impossible endeavor.
To enter the town (and one šiqq) would have endangered his whole mission, but Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn was
prepared by the group of people he had sent to Ṣaʿda already months before to explore the situation and to
prepare his arrival. The imam was invited by members of the āl Abī Futayma (cf. al-Hamdānī 1954/65: 133;

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[12] fitna denotes originally a "burning with fire", or, among others, in the Coran, a "trial", "whereby the condition of a man is evinced,
in respect of good and of evil", and "civil war, or conflict occurring among people" (Lane 1984 [1863/93]: 2335c)

[13] The use of neutral places for gatherings, often uninhabited and sometimes called ḥaram, hijra or ḥawṭa in Yemen, is also attested by
Dresch 1993: 147 -149; it would be tempting to compare saints in Morocco who by living on the seams of tribal borders preserve
their impartiality, cf. Gellner 1969: 10.

Figure 4: Ṣaʿda in the background, seen from the foot of Jabal Tulummuṣ (Johann Heiss, 1983)

al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī 1981/1401: 17), representatives of one side of the conflict: so already on these grounds he could have been accused of being biased for one side.

ṢAʿDA AND AL-ĠAYL

After the imam's successful mediation in the conflict – if he was ever successful in the long run, as will be seen – the āl Abī Fuṭayma lived in al-Ġayl, and al-Ġayl belonged to Saʿd b. Saʿd (al-Hamdānī 1984/1394: 249), with whom the āl Abī Fuṭayma were allied through intermarriage (Heiss 1987: 67; Heiss 1998: 181).

The fact that the first imam built his mosque not inside the old town may have partly had the reason that he did not want to appear too partial in the local conflict: if there was a place for a mosque it would have to be in one of the halves of the town, and that would entail resentment in the other half. So al-Ġayl with its relatively new population, the āl Abī Fuṭayma who were his foremost friends (al-Hamdānī 1954/65: 133) clearly was the best choice to build a mosque and living quarters for the imam. Additionally, when al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq founded his new mosque, he had to choose a place where water was available for ablutions. As the name al-Ġayl indicates, there was water, because the name means "the water which flows from springs on the surface of the earth." (al-Ḥimyarī 1999/1420: 8, 5038 sv)

For the imam, the situation in al-Ġayl was propitious, whereas in (old) Ṣaʿda hostility against him prevailed. This emerges from an event of the year 286/899 (al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī 1981/1401: 133) when the first imam had taken some prisoners in Najrān, brought them to Ṣaʿda and imprisoned them in al-Ġayl; for that choice of place the author of the biography gives the following explanation:

"He detained them in a nearby [i.e. near Ṣaʿda] village [qarya] called al-Ġayl; between it and Ṣaʿda lies roughly half a mile. It is a qarya which belongs to the banū Ḥamza [read Ḥamra or Ḥumra] and the banū Saʿd, and there are the Fuṭaymīyūn, who were his trustworthy ones and his friends. He detained them [i.e. the prisoners from Najrān] in al-Ġayl, because Muḥammad b. ʿUbaydallāh had taken captive a man from

Duhma of Hamdān whose name was Ḥusayn b. Ḥabaš, who was an evil one. He had him detained in the jail in Ṣaʿda, but persons of Ukayl were busy because of him until they got him out [of jail]. So he did not detain these [persons from Najrān] in Ṣaʿda because of that reason, rather he detained them in al-Ġayl."

al-Ġayl belonged not only to Saʿd b. Saʿd, the allies of the first imam, it was the dwelling place of āl Abī Fuṭayma, who had sent a delegation to Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn to bring him to the region as mediator. It is therefore understandable that the imam and his family and sons preferred to live there. It seems quite logical that he also built his mosque there and choose the area adjacent to the mosque as his burial place. If the market of Ṣaʿda was not already there, the relocation of the market to the place in front of the mosque brought further importance to the location, and it seems quite probable that out of al-Ġayl, which may originally have been a small village, developed what we know today as Ṣaʿda. Old Ṣaʿda was situated at the foot of Jabal Tulummuṣ, as Ibn al-Mujāwir[14] was told: "It is said that old Ṣaʿda (Ṣaʿda al-qadīma) was in the beginning near the ḥiṣn [fortress] Tulummuṣ. After the ruin of Ṣaʿda and its high places, al-Hādī Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn rebuilt it" (Ibn al-Mujāwir 1986/1407: 204; Ibn al-Mujāwir & Smith 2008: 212, translation slightly changed). If we take Ibn al-Mujāwir or his informant by the word, the old town was a few kilometers south of the modern town or the former village al-Ġayl (see figure 4; cf. Gingrich & Heiss 1986: 15 and 87, figure 9).

"OLD ṢAʿDA"

Ḥumayd b. Aḥmad al-Muḥallī (killed in battle 652/1254), the author of "al-ḥadāʾiq al-wardīyya" ("Gardens of Roses"), a collection of biographies of Zaydī imams, included a biography of the son of the first imam and his second successor, Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā or al-Imām al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh. There he presents the scene when the people paid homage to Aḥmad as imām[15] on a Friday in Ṣafar 301/September 913, which took place in the mosque of his father al-Hādī, who was already buried there. This shows that during that ritual procedure Aḥmad was at the location of al-Ġayl or perhaps new Ṣaʿda. After the oath or bayʿa (presumably after the Friday-prayer) he left the place and rode to "old Ṣaʿda" or "Ṣaʿda qadīma" (al-Muḥallī n. d.: 2, 48) on the same day (which hints at the proximity of the two sites), and many people gathered around him. They were mostly Ḥawlān, as Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn b. Hārūn al-Hārūnī al-Ḥasanī, the author of an older collection of biographies relates (al-Hārūnī al-Ḥasanī 1996/1417: 172). Others maintain, we are told, that the gathering of people occurred between Ṣaʿda and al-Ġayl. This location indicates a point between Ṣaʿda (meaning the old town) and the village (qarya) al-Ġayl which presumably denotes the location of what today is Ṣaʿda, the new town. According to al-Hamdānī in his "ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿArab" "the qaryat [village] al-Ġayl was founded near Ṣaʿda." (al-Hamdānī 1984/1394: 249) With Ṣaʿda al-Hamdānī designated "old Ṣaʿda", and the foundation of the qaryat al-Ġayl possibly happened not so long before he wrote his description.

The author al-Muḥallī apparently knew the scene cited above from the biography of the mentioned imam Aḥmad written by the imam's intimate ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar al-Hamdānī (d. ca. 315/927). This biography is not preserved, but Musallam al-Laḥjī (d. 545/1150) included it in a probably shortened version in the second volume of his "aḫbār al-Zaydīya bi al-Yaman". From this version, Wilferd Madelung edited the biography of Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā in the year 1990. There, the people present at the gathering are designated as "Ḥawlān and others of unknown descent" (Madelung 1990: 11) and what is important, the biographer does not speak of Ṣaʿda qadīma but only of Ṣaʿda. The house of the imam Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā, as his biographer repeatedly mentions (Madelung 1990: 24, 28, 57), was in the village al-Ġayl.

In the fourth volume of his "aḫbār al-Zaydīya bi al-Yaman" Musallam al-Laḥjī adds biographies of people of his own generation and two or three generations before that. The first of these biographies concerns a certain Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Muḥsin al-ʿAlawī who is described as a qāḍī, a learned man and a collector and heir of partly precious books. By the son of the collector, the author Musallam

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[14] Ibn al-Mujāwir is given as the author of a travelogue; obviously he came from the east of the islamic regions. During the second quarter of the 13th century he traveled repeatedly presumably as merchant in the Yemen but never reached Ṣaʿda, at least he gives no dates for this region. He traveled in the time of the imam ʿAbdallāh b. Ḥamza, when the importance of the new town of Ṣaʿda had already surpassed that of the old town.

[15] the bayʿa, or "A striking together of the hands of two contracting parties in token of the ratification of a sale" or "The act of … promising, or swearing allegiance and obedience" (Lane 1984: 285b)

al-Laḥǧī is told: "In the bookshelves of my father (raḥimahu Allāh) were 600 volumes, among them valuable books of members of the family of Muḥammad (ṣallā Allāhu ʿalayhi), important ones and rare ones which were lost [otherwise]. Among them were some which he had inherited from the books of his grandfather Ibrāhīm b. al-Muḥsin (raḥimahu Allāh), some of which in the handwriting of al-Murtaḍā Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā (ʿalayhumā al-salām), which he wrote in the hijra of al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq (ʿalayhi al-salām) in al-Ġayl of Ṣaʿda, and among them some which were written in the darb al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (ʿalayhumā al-salām), which is well known in the space between al-Ġayl of Ṣaʿda and darb Yursam." al-Ġayl of Ṣaʿda again is cited here, and the author (or the narrator) combines with it the word "hijra". The meaning of this word is a multiple one, among others "emigration from an unbelieving society to a place held by Believers." (Donner 2012: 203, cf. 85f, 118, 134; for its contemporary usage cf. Dresch 1993: 145 - 149) al-Hādī Yaḥyā's son al-Murtaḍā Muḥammad, who as successor of his father reigned as imam for only a relatively short time, abdicated in favor of his brother al-Nāṣir Aḥmad but remained an important and famous learned man until his death in May 922. He obviously lived in al-Ġayl, in this place held by believers, among them his father al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq. Of the old town of Ṣaʿda, the author just mentions the darb Yursam. darb obviously is used here with a similar meaning as Ibn al-Muǧāwir's usage, as a quarter of a town (or a town, or a group of houses) surrounded by a wall:[16] It seems relatively clear that with this half of the imam's old friends, the Yursam, the old town of Ṣaʿda is intended. Between the two, al-Ġayl and Ṣaʿda, the "darb al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh" was situated, a fortified cluster of houses which possibly corresponds with the western, now destroyed imam's quarter which at a later point of time was incorporated into the town (cf. Niewöhner-Eberhard 1985: fig. 4). In any case, if we remember the scene of al-Nāṣir Aḥmad's oath of allegiance or bayʿa, the following gathering of people occurred between Ṣaʿda and al-Ġayl. Maybe this was the place where Aḥmad built his dwelling houses (see figure 5).

WHEN DID AL-ĠAYL BECOME ṢAʿDA?

How long the old town named Ṣaʿda was in use, and at what time the qaryat al-Ġayl was renamed to Ṣaʿda cannot be stated exactly. But it seems logical that al-Ġayl was renamed only when old Ṣaʿda had lost its importance at least to a great extent. In any case, this process must have taken place after the death of ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar al-Hamdānī (d. ca. 315/927), the author of the biography of imam Aḥmad, or after the death of Musallam al-Laḥǧī (d. 545/1150): in their texts, the old town is just called Ṣaʿda, and there was no necessity to specify further which one was meant, the old or the new one: al-Ġayl still was al-Ġayl. But when al-Muḥallī takes up the same narrative, he has to specify that he means old Ṣaʿda. Consequently there must have been a possibility of ambivalence in his time: it was not clear whether Ṣaʿda designated the old or the new town. Obviously, the old town was still functioning at al-Muḥallī's time, but the new town (the former al-Ġayl) could already also be called Ṣaʿda. We can sum up and maintain that somewhere during the hundred years between 1150 and 1250 the new town had gained enough importance to be called with the name of the old town.
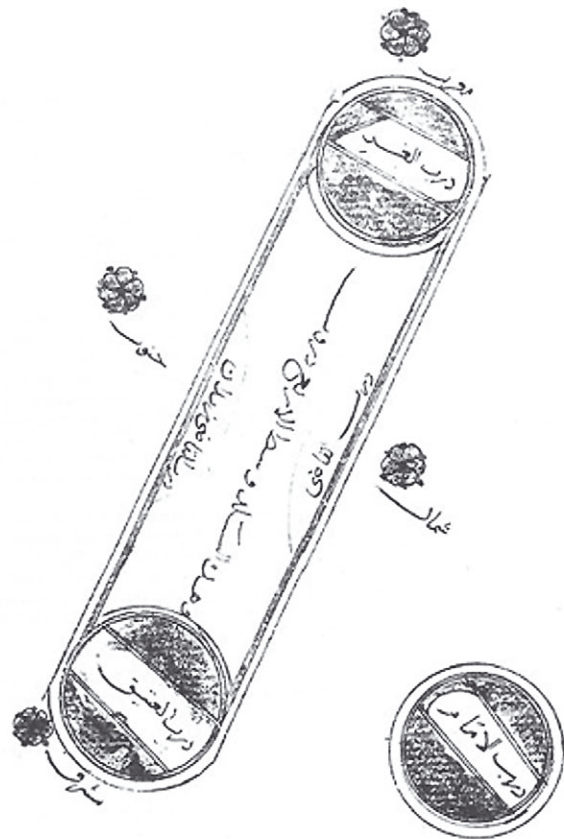

Figure 5: Ibn al-Muǧāwir's map of Ṣaʿda (from the Istanbul manuscript): north is shown on the right side, the circle to the right is called "darb al-imām", the imam's quarter

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[16] Ibn al-Muǧāwir 1986/1407: 204-206, describing Ṣaʿda, cf. Ibn al-Muǧāwir & Smith 2008: 213-214

CONFLICT AGAIN

In a text towards the end of the biography of al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq (at least in the form as it came down to us), in a part which possibly was not written by al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī, a fitna brakes out again in (old) Ṣaʿda (al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī 1981/1401: 406) between Ukayl (with Ṣanʿānī merchants on their side) and Yursam. Like in former times, each side had their allies, and their areas of retreat. This happened at the beginning of the year 322, corresponding to December 22nd, 933, when the imam al-Naṣir Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā was still alive. But he died in the following year, on June 6th, 934. Immediately after his death two of his sons, al-Qāsim b. Aḥmad and al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad, began to quarrel about the succession.

One of the brothers, al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad, cooperated with Ukayl and the Ṣanʿānis in (old) Ṣaʿda, and with banū Baḥr[17], banū Kulayb and banū Jumāʿa (al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī 1981/1401: 411) from the surroundings of the town. One of the strongholds of that party was Wādī ʿAlāf which according to al-Hamdānī (al-Hamdānī 1984/1394: 249) was "the best wādī of Ḥawlān" and which "belonged to the banū Kulayb and to inhabitants of Ṣaʿda". Since banū Kulayb were allies of Ukayl, their fertile valley becomes a safe haven for Ukayl. We can now specify al-Hamdānī's "inhabitants of Ṣaʿda": clearly he intends the Ukayl.

The other one of the sons of imam al-Nāṣir Aḥmad, al-Qāsim b. Aḥmad was allied with banū Ḥamra or Ḥumra[18] (who stayed in al-Ġayl), banū Saʿd and Yursam (al-ʿAbbāsī al-ʿAlawī 1981/1401: 410). Besides al-Ġayl, one of his strongholds was al-ʿAšša, a wādī not far from the town, which again according to al-Hamdānī belonged to the banū Saʿd b. Saʿd together with al-Ġayl and another wādī named al-Baṭina (or al-Buṭna). If one tries to integrate the parties of this conflict of the years 326/7 or 938/9 into a schematic sketch, it would be the following:
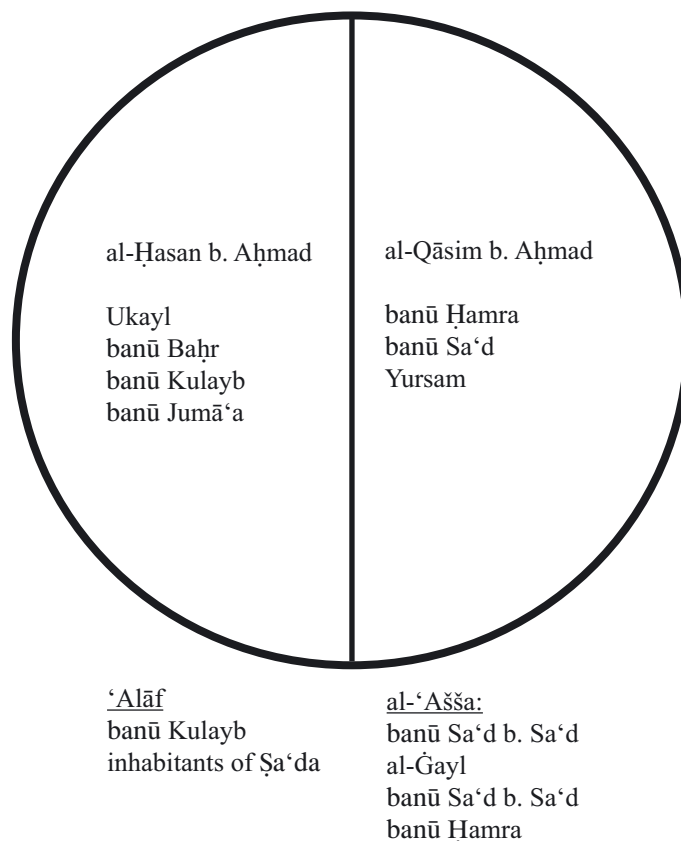

Figure 6: The conflict in Ṣaʿda between 322/934 and 327/939

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[17] in Suhayl Zakkār's edition "banū Naḥr", which should be corrected.
[18] the editor Suhayl Zakkār writes „banū Ḥamza" which should be corrected.

If one compares the figures 1, 2, 3 and 6 it becomes immediately clear that there are important similarities between the conflict parties, with only few differences: on figure 6 banū Baḥr and banū Jumāʿa appear for the first time on the Ukaylī side, and banū Ḥamra or Ḥumra on the Yursamī side. But banū Baḥr, a group of mixed origin, are originally built into the genealogy of al-Rabīʿa b. Saʿd like Ukayl (cf. Heiss 1998: 126-130, 245). The banū Ḥamra or Ḥumra, like banū Baḥr a group of mixed origin, consisted partly of groups reckoned to be the offspring of Saʿd b. Saʿd (cf. Heiss 1998: 131-137). It comes as no surprise that in a variant of their genealogy banū Ḥamra or Ḥumra appear as sons of Saʿd b. Saʿd (cf. Heiss 1998: 136; al-Hamdānī 1954/65: 146). In a loose way these groups genealogically belonged to their respective sides and possibly were not mentioned before – partly because greater units were given by the authors, e.g. Saʿd b. Saʿd, comprising the bigger part of banū Ḥamra or Ḥumra, or al-Rabīʿa b. Saʿd including banū Baḥr. It is remarkable that two groups show up here with no fixed or with mixed descents. This fact alone shows that there existed conflicts which necessitated a flexible and changeable genealogy, particularly when old commitments were dissolving and new ones were not quite formed. Only the mention of banū Jumāʿa constitutes something new which could point to a change in intratribal relations in the Ḥawlān-federation.

A comparison of the figures furthermore shows that nothing much changed in the conflict in and around Ṣaʿda between at least the time of the arrival of Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn in the year 897 (and presumably earlier) and the conflict between his grandchildren, the sons of al-Nāṣir Aḥmad, which ended with the death of one of them, al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad, on 13ᵗʰ of ḏū al-Qaʿda 327/August 31ˢᵗ, 939. The conflict which supposedly was settled by al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq in reality had lingered on for the next forty years, possibly in a rather suppressed state for some years. Judging from the final outcome, the first imam was not able to end the conflict successfully. But it is revealing and in a way trendsetting how the two quarreling brothers, al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad and al-Qāsim b. Aḥmad, intervened in that conflict and used the parties as allies for their purposes. Or was it the other way around: Did the conflict parties use the two quarreling brothers for their respective purposes?

The answer would be that both, the sons of the imam and the conflict parties hoped to gain from their alliances. With this alliance of religious and tribal players in a conflict at that time (and presumably already before that time) the actors introduced a kind of cooperation which was perpetuated for many years after, and possibly such alliances disclose a political/religious interconnectedness and (hopes for) mutual gain which are typical for the relations between the tribal society like the one prevailing in southern Arabia, and religiously legitimated elites. The result was a kind of unstable or uneasy equilibrium which could easily be disturbed and was disturbed again and again, granting the imams new instances of mediation.

CONCLUSION

Like similar instances in the Ḥaḍramawt, the old town of Ṣaʿda with its two groups of inhabitants represented a conflict-prone model of living together, in the northern case resulting in two separated halves which had to be entered through different gates. The separation of the halves did not prevent the development of a major conflict between the groups of the inhabitants and their allies. As a mediator in this conflict, the first imam was invited to come to Yemen, but in the long run he was not successful: the conflict lingered on and broke out again after forty years. Yet the situation had changed: the first imam and his two successors and sons could use their tribal allies in their wars against their adversaries who in most of the cases were also groups of tribal origin. The grandsons had to proceed differently: they had to use the tribal conflict for their purposes: in their quarrel for succession they had to decide between one of the two parties of the conflict as allies: one side had to build an alliance with the former adversaries and had to justify this change of opinion.

The town (or the towns) of Ṣaʿda are examples for different kinds of towns, of which the younger one shows clear influences of religion regarding its foundation and its center consisting of the mosque of al-Hādī with his tomb and those of his sons. The sūq in the neighborhood cannot be counted as primarily influenced by religious concerns. Regarding the first version of Ṣaʿda we simply do not know if there was a mosque in the center with a sūq near to it. But the variants of these two cities alone and the differences between the towns of Ḥaḍramawt as described by Linda Boxberger indicate the validity of a sentence like the following:

"Viewed from such a religious standpoint, sub specie aeternitatis, urban phenomena appear as constants within a historical continuum stretching over some thirteen centuries, and within a Muslim world covering three continents, as far as distant China" (Raymond 2008: 49).

There certainly are no constants concerning urban organization. Urban phenomena are bound to change from time to time, and they can have a deceptively stable outlook if seen only from the reduced perspective of religion, economics, ideologies etc. alone. To modify Raymond's formulation: urban phenomena have to be looked at with a whole complex of determinants in mind.

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