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INTELLECT, MADNESS, INSTINCT: DEFINING FOOLISHNESS IN IBN AL-JAWZI'S STORIES OF FOOLS

In his emblematic master reference on the Arabic language (*Lisan al-'Arab*)² the lexicographer Ibn Manzur (d. 1312) presented his readers with an upfront definition of foolishness (*humq*). Before indulging into a prolonged exercise on the derivatives of the *h-m-q* consonant root, he succinctly dealt with the task of clarification. Foolishness, he stated briefly, „is the opposite of intellect“³ (*al-ḥamāqa ḍidd al-'aql*) or, in accordance with a milder

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² Within the present paper the transliteration guide of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) has been followed. Unless otherwise specified, all translations of original Arabic source texts are mine. Additions and clarifications within them have been parenthesized.

³ For the purposes of the present paper „intellect“ has been the preferred option to translate the Arabic ‘*aql*’ over the rest of the English alternatives, among them being „reason“, „mind“, „common sense“ or „intelligence“.

saying of an earlier linguistic authority – Abu Nasr Isma‘il Ibn Hammad al-Jawhari (d. ca. 1003) – „the deficiency of intellect“ (*qillat al-‘aql*).⁴ Drawn by such a straightforward approach, a look into the corresponding article on *‘aql* reveals that it is defined again by the opposite: among other synonym terms such as *nuhā* („intelligence“), *‘aql* is presented as the antonym of „foolishness“ (*al-ḥumq*).⁵ Obviously, because of the nature and genre of his work, the definitions of Ibn Manzur serve the purposes of language practicalities and orientation in the lexical landscape of classical Arabic. With all the credentials his authoritative work bears, if we go further the road of inquiry, we face a couple of methodological bottlenecks. First, it is the scope of the *Lisan* itself. As confirmed by Ibn Manzur, being primarily a lexicographic piece focusing on the „preservation of the fundamental principles of the language“ and guarding over its merit⁶, it can hardly be suggested that the dictionary was intended to provide a deeper insight into the larger cultural and theoretical framework within which foolishness in specific was perceived by the Muslims. Second, the usage of both terms as parts of explanations referring to each other, despite establishing an illuminative relation between both, bears the characteristics reminiscent of the logical risks of circular definitions. And third, such a high level definition clearly omits to consider the nuances and cover such possible cases of absence or deficiency of „intellect“ as momentary lapses of intoxication, madness or a wider range of medical mental disabilities. Thus, using the *Lisan* of Ibn Manzur as a key starting point to outline the problematic field of defining foolishness, we have to resort to a wider source basis to resolve the conundrum of perceptions within the Muslim intellectual milieu. This will be attempted within the present paper whereas the textual production of the Sunni theologian Abu al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1200) will provide the main body of conceptual material; whenever appropriate, it

⁴ Ibn Manzur. *Lisān al-‘Arab*, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, 1955–1956, vol. 10, p. 67.

⁵ Ibn Manzur. *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 458.

⁶ *Ibid.* vol. 1, p. 8.

will be positioned against the context of an already established religious framework and other Muslim scholarly authorities trying to outline some of the attitudes articulated thereof. Thus narrowing down the circle of the meanings of foolishness will be in scope, proceeding from identification of related key terms and mapping their touch points with stupidity.

Touching on the topic of intellect and rationality, their function and relation to divine revelation, no effort has been spared by Muslim thinkers both within the philosophical and theological realms. Even for the sake of the present paper whereas no deep inquiry into the works dedicated to the subject is needed, the notion of the philosophers (*falāsifa*) Abu Yusuf al-Kindi (d. 873), Abu 'Ali al-Husayn Ibn 'Abd Allah Ibn Sina (d. 1037), Abu Nasr Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Farabi (d. 951), Abu al-Walid Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), is almost instinctively conjured up. In a more recent age, the large scale overviews of Muslim philosophy of T.J. De Boer⁷, Majid Fakhry⁸, or the specialized summaries of Fazlur Rahman⁹, Seyyed Hossein Nasr¹⁰ and Gustave E. von Grunebaum¹¹ are only a few of the representative pieces to offer a glimpse into the contexts and paradigms of thinking within which the term

⁷ De Boer, T.J. *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, Dover Publications, New York, 1967, translation of the 1st ed. published by Luzac & Co in 1903.

⁸ Fakhry, Majid. *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2nd ed., 1983, ref. also „Rationality in Islamic Philosophy“, in *A Companion to World Philosophies*, ed. by Eliot Deutsch and Ron Bontekoe, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1997, pp. 504–514.

⁹ Rahman, Fazlur. „Akl“, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, E.J.Brill, Leiden, 1986, vol. 1, pp. 341–342.

¹⁰ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. „Intellect and Intuition: Their Relationship from the Islamic Perspective“, *Studies in Comparative Religion*, vol. 13, No. 1 & 2, Winter-Spring, 1979.

¹¹ Von Grunebaum, Gustave E.. „Concept and Function of Reason in Islamic Ethics“, *Oriens*, Brill, vol. 15 (December, 31, 1962), pp. 1–17.

of *'aql* was found operable; in Islamic theology (*kalām*) *'aql* has become looked upon as a „source of knowledge“, contrasted with tradition (*naql*).¹²

Quite disproportionately, however, foolishness as bound to intellect has not often stood under the spotlights of the Muslim scholarly focus; it appears that considering the „Stories of Fools and Ignoramuses“ (*Akhbar al-Hamqa wa-l-Mughaffalin*)¹³ authored by Ibn al-Jawzi is a must. Thinking of the Abbasid 12th century and its intellectual landscape, it seems that one cannot lightly dismiss the figure of this influential conservative Hanbali. While Abu Hamid al-Ghazali approximately one century earlier has been known for enriching Muslim looks at doctrine through incorporation of elements borrowed from both Sufism and philosophy¹⁴, Ibn al-Jawzi stood at an opposing pole of the complex religious and ideological layout within the late Abbasid age. Having a reputation of a public figure with taste for political influence to marginalize his opponents and little tolerance for innovations (*bid'a*) within the doctrinal field, he is known to have polemicized against a large circle of Sunni and Shi'a activists, including al-Ghazali himself.¹⁵ The historian Ibn Kathir (d. 1373) has attributed to his authorship about three hundred works of various nature; moreover, Ibn al-Jawzi has been portrayed as a preacher of an unsurpassed skill, being self-closed since youth, going out of his house only on occasion of Friday prayers and avoiding mixing with dubious company.¹⁶

Yet, with the book of fools we face a slightly different insight into this face of Hanbali intellectualism. Genre-wise, it can be

¹² Rahman, Fazlur. Ibid. p. 341.

¹³ Ibn al-Jawzi, Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman Ibn 'Ali. *Akhbār al-Ḥamqā wa-l-Mughaffalīn*, Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, Beirut, 1990.

¹⁴ Watt, W. Montgomery. *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1985, pp. 91–92.

¹⁵ Laoust, Henri. „Ibn al-Djawzi“, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, E.J.Brill, Leiden and Luzac & Co, London, vol. 3, 1986. pp. 751–752.

¹⁶ Ibn Kathir, Abu al-Fida' Ismail. *Al-Bidāya wa-l-Nihāya*, Dār Ibn Kathīr, Beirut, 2010, vol. 14, pp. 466–467.

perceived as a work of *belles lettres* and etiquette (*adab*), rather than a strictly theological one. It lacks, for example, the grand scope of the *Muntaẓam* historical chronicle¹⁷, the instructive autobiographical element of the *Sayd al-Khatir*¹⁸ or the passionate anti-heretical pathos of the polemics within the „Devil’s Delusion“ (*Talbis Iblis*)¹⁹; besides, Franz Rosenthal uses the „Stories of Fools“ in his work on humour in Islam within a short discourse on the permissibility of Muslim indulgence in jokes.²⁰ What could be the primary motivators that provoked compilation of such a voluminous²¹ work then? The author left us with little space for disambiguation here: the „Stories of Fools“ were linked to and followed a previous book of the same author, namely the „Book

¹⁷ Ibn al-Jawzi, Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman Ibn ‘Ali. *Al-Muntaẓam fī Tārīkh al-Mulūk wa-l-Umam*, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Beyrut, vol. 1–19, 1992–1993.

¹⁸ Ibn al-Jawzi, Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman Ibn ‘Ali. *Şayd al-Khāṭir*, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, Beyrut, 1992.

¹⁹ Ibn al-Jawzi, Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman Ibn ‘Ali. *Talbis Iblis*, Dār al-Waṭan li-l-Nashr, Riyadh, 2002.

²⁰ Rosenthal, Franz. *Humor in Early Islam*, Brill, Leiden–Boston, 2011, pp. 4–5, where he translated the title of the book with the simple „History of Fools“.

²¹ The book is divided by the author into twenty four chapters, starting from the meaning of foolishness, then elaboration on the notion that foolishness is an „instinct“, the divergence of people with regards to foolishness, the different names of the fool, the characteristics of fools, warning against being the company of fools, on the proverbs of the Arabs concerning people who have been known for their folly, stories of people who have set prime examples with their folly, stories of intelligent people that committed foolish acts, stories of foolish reciters of the Qur’an, transmitters of *ḥadīth*, judges, princes and rulers, secretaries and door keepers, muezzins, imams, Bedouins, fools who have been striving to achieve eloquence, people who have composed poetry on the topic of fools, fools among the storytellers, idiots among ascetics, then teachers, weavers and finally, a notion on fools in general, ref. pp. 20–21.

of the Intelligent²² compiled with an edifying purpose, „just as the stories of the brave teach bravery“.²³ Then three main reasons have been listed as justification.²⁴ The first one reminds us of the definition of Ibn Manzur which was put on paper somewhat a century after Ibn al-Jawzi and bound intellect to foolishness. It suggested a primacy of the intellect, affirming that the stories of fools would stir thankfulness within the intelligent one (*āqil*) who „upon hearing them [that is, the stories of fools, parenthesis mine, A.Sh.], would know the measure of what has been granted to him“.²⁵ In the similar spirit of thanking the Almighty for sparing certain people the deficiency of intellect, a saying attributed to the grandson of the prophet Muhammad – al-Hasan (d. 670) – has been put forth, presenting an account of the creation of man. When Allah goes on the narrative, created Adam, he formed out of his right side the inhabitants of Paradise (*ahl al-janna*), while their counterparts who were doomed to the fire of hell (*ahl al-nār*) were extracted from his left side and replenished the earth, among them being the blind (*al-a'mā*), the deaf (*al-aṣamm*) and the disease stricken ones (*al-mubtalā*). This aroused the question of the forefather of all humanity on the equality of his offspring [„Have You not equalled among my children?“ (*A lā sāwayta bayna waladī?*)], to which the divine answer of the creator was presented in clear terms: „I would like to be given thanks“ (*innī aradtu an ushkar*).²⁶ This story not only effectively confirms the divinely established divide between the intelligent and the foolish, but eventually aggravates the uneasy position of the latter by drawing

²² Published also as „Stories of the Intelligent“: *Akhbār al-Adhkiyyā*, Dār Ibn Ḥazm li l-l-Ṭibā'a wa l-Nashr, Beirut, 2003.

²³ Ibn al-Jawzi, Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman Ibn 'Ali. *Akhbār al-Ḥamqā wa-l-Mughaffalīn*, Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, Beirut, 1990, p. 13.

²⁴ See for a succinct summary of them Rosenthal, Franz. *Ibid.*

²⁵ Ibn al-Jawzi, Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman Ibn 'Ali. *Akhbār al-Ḥamqā wa-l-Mughaffalīn*, Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, Beirut, 1990, p. 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

a striking parallel between them and the inhabitants portioned to the Muslim hell.

The dichotomy between „intellect“ and „foolishness“ within the repeated definition by negation enforces an excursion into the way Ibn al-Jawzi himself perceived „intellect“. A short but helpful exposition on this is found in the „Stories of the Intelligent“. There the Hanbali theologian included a brief chapter on the „Notion of The Quiddity of Reason and the Place Where it Resides“ (*Dhikr Māhiyya al-‘Aql wa-Maḥallihi*).²⁷ Ibn al-Jawzi opens the paragraph drawing on a saying of the eponym of the legal school of law to which he himself belonged: Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 855) – „Intellect (‘*aql*) is an instinct“ (*gharīza*). Intellect has also been likened to light, while

Others have said that it is the ability [literally, „strength“, *quwwa*] to distinguish (*yufaṣṣal*) among the facts of the known things (*haqā‘iq al-ma‘lūmāt*). A group has stated that it is a type of the necessary cognitions (*al-‘ulūm al-ḍarūrīyya*), and it is the knowledge of the contingency of the possible [things] (*al-jā‘izāt*) and the impossibility of the impossible things (*istihālat al-mustaḥīlāt*). Others have said that it is a simple essence, while others: it is a transparent body. A Bedouin was asked about intellect and he said: „[Knowledge of the?] heart (*lubb*) I obtained through experience“.²⁸

Ibn al-Jawzi then clarifies that the term *‘aql* has encompassed four meanings. Firstly, it is the characteristic that distinguishes between man and beasts, and is ready for the reception of the theoretical sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-naẓariyya*). This is, goes on the theologian, what those who said it is „instinct“ meant; it is „like light shed into the heart for the sake of knowing things“. The second one is the knowledge of the contingency (*jawāz*) of the possible [things] (*jā‘izāt*) and the impossibility of the impossible things (*al-mustaḥīlāt*) that has been implanted in one’s natural

²⁷ Ibn al-Jawzi, Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman Ibn ‘Ali. *Akhbār al-Adhkiyyā*, Dār Ibn Ḥazm li l-l-Ṭibā‘a wa l-Nashr, Beyrut, 2003, pp. 35–36.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 35.

character (*tibā'*). The third one are the cognitions arising as a result from experience (*al-tajārub*), while the fourth is the „strength of instinct to suppress the lust that calls to immediate pleasure“²⁹ – something related also to the etymology of the word '*aql* itself explained through terms like „refrainment“ (*imtinā'*). In an illuminative manner, the derivative verb '*aqala* has been illustrated by Ibn al-Jawzi contextually through the sentence „I refrained (*'aqaltu*) the camel, that is, I prevented (*mana'tu*) it from moving“; or in another expression, „the stomach of a man has been refrained (*'uqila*) when it is has been tightened [or constipated] (*hubisa*).“³⁰

It is not the scope of the present paper to analyze the associative summary of Ibn al-Jawzi in detail. A mention of views on '*aql* could only appear supportive to a better understanding of foolishness as the primary focus; yet as noted by the Abbasid theologian through the multiple references, his exposition in no way appeared *ex nihilo* and he owed much to previous authoritative opinions on intellect and reason. It suffices here to remind of the similar definitions appearing within al-Ghazali's „Revival of the Religious Sciences“ (*Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*).³¹

Now turning the paradigm around to fit the definition by negation, bearing the risks thereof, we can summarize the possible ways in which foolishness has been construed to respond to the definitions of '*aql* proposed by Ibn al-Jawzi. A fool turns out to be intellectually impoverished by nature and deprived by the inherent ability to acquire knowledge by virtue of divine will; in

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 36.

³¹ The four meanings of '*aql* in accordance with al-Ghazali as follows: first, '*aql* distinguishes man from beast and predisposes him to the reception of the theoretical sciences (*al-'ulūm al-naẓariyya*), then it is the knowledge which teaches a child to distinguish the possible from the impossible and makes him discern „axiomatic“ facts; third, it is also the knowledge resulting from experience; and finally, we call him possessed of '*aql* who realizes the consequences of actions and manages to control his emotional impulses, ref. for the summary above Gustave E. von Grunebaum, Ibid., p. 4.

addition to this, because of the insufficiency of intellect, he has also been unable to restrain his lusts, as one of the functions of intellect has been outlined to be the ability to exercise control over one's lowly passions. In this sense, we have a hint of the connection between reason and right conduct „firmly established in popular and in theological consciousness“ and observed by Gustave E. von Grunebaum.³² If we intend to keep close to such a perception of intellect imparting moral dimensions of it, then we would consequently be lead to the inference that a fool is also found to be morally wanting.

The second reason to motivate the production of a work on idiots³³ is also illuminative for our understanding of folly. Mentions of lamebrains will urge the vigilant ones to avoid the causes of foolishness (*ghafla*), „if it has been acquired“ (*idhā kāna dhālika dākhilan taht al-kasb*); but in case it has been congenital in the natural character (*majbūla ft l-ṭibā'*) then it is hardly susceptible to change (*lā takādu taqbal al-taghyīr*)³⁴. The instructive element of such a compilation – which is the usual objective of an *adab* piece – has been complemented by a more nuanced elaboration of the types of folly. Seemingly, in spite of the hints that a fool might have been created such – then instruction would be of little avail – not all foolishness is inherent; there are causes for it that can be adequately addressed by the social agents and avoided. This assumption appears indirectly supported by the chapter further in the book, wordily entitled „A Notion of a Group of Intelligent People out of Whom Foolish Acts Have Issued and They Have Insisted upon their Correctness and With This Insistence They Have Grown Foolish and Ignorant“.³⁵ Yet over-emphasizing the

³² Von Grunebaum, Gustave E. Ibid.

³³ Here and below „idiot“ should be construed in the common vernacular sense, and not the one inherited from the Athenian democracy in antiquity.

³⁴ Ibn al-Jawzi, Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman Ibn 'Ali. *Akhhbār al-Ḥamqā wa-l-Mughaffalīn*, Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, Beirut, 1990, p. 14.

³⁵ Ibid. p.63.

aspects of controlled foolishness and its being subsequently acquired, rather than naturally inherent, is not a case Ibn al-Jawzi would decisively stand for; it rather seems the opposite, as we owe to him the chapter of „Foolishness is an Instinct“³⁶ reminiscent of the concept that intellect is also such. And thirdly, exhausting the motivators of the author, we find what made also Franz Rosenthal utilize it – and being out of the topic of the present paper – namely, the need to entertain and provide relaxation of the heart, the arguments for which Ibn al-Jawzi „marshals at length“ through numerous references to sayings of the prophet Muhammad, his companions and early Muslim authoritative authors.³⁷

The introduction of the work helps us delineate quite broadly and indirectly the conceptual field within which foolishness was positioned. If we would like to have a positive definition of it and narrow it down, however, we need to go deeper into the next portions of the textual piece. The „Notion on the Meaning of Foolishness“, entitled in a manner suggestive of its contents, starts with a brief description of the fool who has been labelled in such a manner because he is „not accepting any advice“ (*lā yushāwar*). Moreover, an analogy with the name of the weed of Common Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*), *baqla ḥamqā*, has been drawn. It has been named *ḥamqā* [that is, „a stupid one“ (*ḥamqā*)], because „it grows on the roads and the routes of camels“. That is why according to Ibn al-A‘rabi³⁸ „a man has been called „foolish“ (*aḥmaq*), for he does not discern (*yumayyiz*) his sayings (*kalāmahu*) from his silliness (*ru‘ūnatihi*)“.³⁹ Along the same lines goes a recommendation found later on in the text – the one „who does

³⁶ Ibid. p. 24.

³⁷ Rosenthal, Franz. Ibid. p. 4.

³⁸ Ibn al-Jawzi is likely referring here to the notable linguist Muhammad Ibn Ziyad Ibn al-A‘rabi (d. 845).

³⁹ Ibn al-Jawzi, Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman Ibn ‘Ali. *Akḥbār al-Ḥamqā wa-l-Mughaffalīn*, Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, Beirut, 1990, p. 23.

not know, and does not know that he does not know, is the fool“ – so, he should be avoided.⁴⁰

In the spirit of the above mentioned paragraphs, Ibn al-Jawzi is again keen on establishing a relation with intellect; the facility of discernment between manifestations of foolishness and sound verbal articulations of one's mental state is attributed to the legitimate utilization of intellect and its analytical ability to distinguish among various orders of thinking and self-expression. Extending the line of thought suggested by Ibn al-Jawzi and proceeding from the argumentation offered by him, it appears that the dividing line between the intelligent and the fool is not separating the total absence of foolish acts or sayings with the first from their presence with the latter (we just need to keep in mind that „intelligent“ people have also been construed by the author as incidentally capable of committing foolish acts); it is rather the ability of intelligent people to discern and recognize their own foolish acts or sayings by acts of self-reflection through the means of intellect, and – reversibly – the inability of a fool to do the same within his own agency.

Until this moment the Abbasid theologian has been busy with the opposition between the positive end of intellect and the negative extremity of foolishness; in the next paragraph, however, we face another important dichotomy: foolishness as compared to madness. Similar to the perceptions of intellect, the topic of madness has been subject to scholarly treatment within which the

⁴⁰ According to Ja'far Ibn Muhammad [d. 765, most likely the descendant of Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad], people are found to be four types: „ones who knows – and knows that he knows. This is the scholar (*'ālim*), learn from him. [Then] one who knows – but does not know that he knows. This is the sleeping one (*nā'im*), wake him up. [And] one who does not know – and he knows that he does not know. This is the ignorant one (*jāhil*) – teach him. [And last] one who does not know, and does not know that he does not know, is the fool (*aḥmaq*) – eschew him (*fajtanibūhu*).“ [Ibid., p. 39].

works of Michael Dols clearly stand out⁴¹ to outline definitions of madness in Galenic medicine, medical treatment of the insane, descriptions of madman in Muslim sources and his legal status. Be as remarkable in their scope as they are and fully worthy of prominence in the field, his studies of madness have suffered subsequent criticism. It has been pointed out that his work has – despite the richness of contents – has fallen behind to „decide what precisely is medieval Islamic „insanity“ or „madness“⁴²; in his own turn, Boaz Shoshan has problematized fluidity of concept, parallelisms with Foucault’s primary work⁴³ on the topic of madness as positioned in the Western cultural and historical landscape have been drawn.⁴⁴ It appears that the inconsistent approaches to madness in Islamic medicine have been captured in definitions as the ones of al-Majusi at the end of the 10th century attributing the causes of madness to the burnt yellow bile, evident by symptoms such as sleeplessness, ravings, lovesickness, reclusiveness, and restlessness; or the one proposed by Ibn Sina, being „manifested in irritation, jumping about and „sparks flying before the eyes“, together with melancholia“, whereas „reality is replaced by fantasy“.⁴⁵ The ambiguous conclusions with regards to medical diagnosis of madness have been accompanied by similar ones from a Shari’a perspective. Insanity is considered simply „a

⁴¹ In the first place we have his largest work on the subject: *Majnun: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, ref. also by the same author „Insanity in Byzantine and Islamic Medicine“, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 38, Symposium on Byzantine Medicine, 1984, pp. 135–148, as well as „Insanity and its Treatment in Islamic Society“, *Medical History*, Cambridge University Press, January 1987, 31(1), pp. 1–14.

⁴² Shoshan, Boaz. „The State and Madness in Medieval Islam“, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 35, No. 2 (May, 2003), pp. 329–330.

⁴³ Foucault, Michel. *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*, Plon, Paris, 1961.

⁴⁴ Shoshan, Boaz. *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 331.

catch-all expression for various forms of unusual behavior⁴⁶. In the opinions of al-Sarakhsi (d. 1090), mentioned by Dols, a madman is „lacking in reason (*‘adīm al-‘aql*)“, while for Ibn Qudama (d. 1223), insanity seemed obvious to discover, being evident.⁴⁷

How is the topic treated by Ibn al-Jazwi, then? Obviously, the book of fools was not intended to serve as a medical guide on the topic of discerning symptoms of madness and recommending further treatment, having also in mind its primary topic; consequently the dominant theories on the causes of madness have not been elaborated upon. Neither Ibn al-Jawzi took the course of presenting a strict legal point of view for the sake of resolving Shari‘a cases. What he offered, instead, seemed rather high level criteria that bound foolishness and madness in a couple whereas the means of distinguishing was the ability to set goals for one’s actions properly and consequently act meaningfully towards the goal. It is worth citing the whole piece here:

Foolishness is the defect (*ghalaṭ*) in the instrumentaria (*wasīla*) and the way (*ṭarīq*) to a certain desired end (*maṭlūb*) having a sound goal (*ṣiḥḥa al-maṭlūb*), contrary to madness (*junūn*). It is an expression of a defect in both the instrumentaria and the goal (*maqṣūd*), as the foolish one has the goal (*maqṣūd*) [set] correctly, while he follows the road [to it] in a corrupt manner and his vision on the way on attaining his goal (*gharaḍ*) is not correct. As for the madman, the fundamental principle (*aṣl*) of his reference (*ishāra*) is corrupt, because he chooses what cannot be chosen (*yakhtār mā lā yukhtār*).

This will be made evident in the further notion on some ignoramuses, among which is [the story of] a bird which flew away from a prince. He ordered the closure of the gate of the city, while the goal of this man had been to keep the bird.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Dols, Michael, *Ibid.* p. 452, as quoted by Shoshan, Boaz. *Ibid.* p. 331.

⁴⁷ Shoshan, Boaz. *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Ibn al-Jawzi, Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman Ibn ‘Ali. *Akhbār al-Ḥamaqā wa-l-Mughaffalīn*, Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, Beirut, 1990, p. 23.

Thus the Hanbali intellectual outlines a relation within the triad of „madness“ – „foolishness“ – „intellect“ which is defined by the proportion between a sound, reasonable goal and acts towards it. While a madman is found to be missing both the capability of defining properly his own goal and the means to attain it, a fool's ability lies exclusively in the domain of his capacity to set a goal, while wanting the instrumentaria to achieve it properly; and a possessor of intellect within the same triangle would necessarily be capable of both. The saying of a certain judge – Abu Yusuf – that „people are three types: the insane (*majnūn*), the half-insane (*niṣf majnūn*) and the intelligent (*‘āqil*), also reminds us of such a triangle of perception.⁴⁹ The dividing lines drawn by the proportion of the two elements – the goal and the way to it – is exemplified in the table below:

Term	Ability to set goal (<i>maṭlūb, maqṣūd, gharaḍ</i>) right	Ability to utilize proper instrumentaria (<i>wasīla</i>) and follow way to it properly
Madness (<i>junūn</i>) – madman (<i>majnūn</i>)	No	No
Intellect (<i>‘aql</i>) – intelligent one (<i>‘āqil</i>)	Yes	Yes
Foolishness (<i>ḥamāqa, humq, ra‘ūna, taghfīl</i>) – fool (<i>aḥmaq, mughaffal</i>)	Yes	No

Being positioned in the realm of fools, as noted on several occasions, seems hardly reversible. Just as intellect is found innate in man, foolishness, in a subtle expression of irony by Ibn al-Jawzi in reference to Ibn Hanbal, is also labelled as an „instinct“ (*gharīza*).⁵⁰ This has been supported by a number of stories: we have been advised never to trust testimonies that a fool has

⁴⁹ Ibid. 39.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 24.

availed himself of intellect (*istafāda* 'aqlan); then according to a saying which al-Awza'i (d. 774) has attributed to 'Isa [Jesus], he confirmed the power to resurrect the dead „if God wills“ (*bi idhni l-llāh*), then heal the naturally born blind one. Yet, when asked how a fool could be healed, 'Isa retorted that this was something beyond his strength (*hāzā l-lazī a'yānī*).⁵¹ Moreover, refinement of good manners (*adab*) to the fool has been reported to have the effect of water poured down at the roots of the colocynth (*ḥanzal*, *Citrullus colocynthis*)⁵²: „the more it gets irrigated, the bitterer it grows“.⁵³

Ibn al-Jawzi used another story invoking the authority of the caliph himself in order to advance his argument and credited al-Ma'mun (d. 833) with it to throw light on additional nuances. The future ruler entered the presence of his illustrious father, the famous Harun al-Rashid (d. 809) in order to apologize and reconcile being found guilty for some reason; al-Rashid sent him away with the angry exclamation „Go away, oh, fool!“ (*aghrib yā aḥmaq*), which had its desired effect causing the departure of the angry al-Ma'mun again; he did not visit his father in the course of days. Then al-Rashid sent a notice to his descendant and al-Ma'mun again paid him a visit, whereby the caliph informed him that „if we [that is, the *pluralis maiestatis* of Arabic] have been guilty towards you, we have asked your forgiveness; if you have been found guilty, then we have forgiven you“. It is here where the unhappy al-Ma'mun staged his case: had al-Rashid called him „silly“ (*ar'an*) instead of „foolish“ (*aḥmaq*), it would have been much more bearable (*ashal*). The legendary ruler then questioned – what is the difference between those two terms? His heir proved prepared to answer the subtlety of such an inquiry: silliness (*ru'ūna*) seemed to be engendered by women (*tatawallad 'an al-nisā'*), and was transmitted to men in the course of staying within their company. That would mean that as soon as men separated

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 24.

⁵² The *ḥanzal* is the common metaphor for bitterness within the Arabic language.

⁵³ Ibid. p 25.

from women and sided with the virile (*fuḥūl al-rijāl*), they could get rid of it. While foolishness *per se* (*ḥumq*) was found to be an instinct (again, *gharīza*), that is, innate in human nature.⁵⁴

Keeping a critical eye on the story cited by Ibn al-Jawzi, we cannot blankly trust its veracity. Similarly, we cannot know whether the gender oriented discourse ascribed to al-Ma'mun was a product of intentional irony of the Hanbali author of the book of fools towards the ruler-to-be who was known to be under heavy Hellenistic intellectual influence, or reflected a trustworthy historical record. We can neither conclude whether the distinction between types of intellectual misdemeanour as related to women was something peculiar to the discourse of al-Ma'mun within this specific paragraph or a linguistic commonality; we know that the term *ru'ūna* [translated as „silliness“ here for the sake of distinguishing it from foolishness (*ḥumq*) proper] is explained by Ibn Manzur as somewhat synonymous to *ḥumq*.⁵⁵ What we can surely observe here, though, is the congenital character of foolishness in general, in spite of the affirmation of specific instances of it that are subject to rectification. It is here where Ibn al-Jawzi leaves us with no clear criteria between both kinds of foolishness; as if he is more concerned to emphasize the innate nature of foolishness than to draw carefully dividing lines in this aspect.

Following the verbose elucidations, the author acknowledges the divergence of people with regards to foolishness. „We have already mentioned that foolishness is corruption (*fasād*) of the intellect (*'aql*) and mind (*dhihn*), and what has been implanted by essence is an instinct (*mā kāna mawḏū' an fī aṣli l-jawhar fahuwwa gharīza*) which does not benefit from discipline (*ta'dīb*); while sound essence in principle (*min aṣl jawharihi salīm*) will make use of training and discipline (*bi l-riyāda wa-l-ta'dīb*).“ And people have been differing in their intellect and its essence, as well as the degree with which they have been granted (*miqdār mā a'ḏū minhu*),

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibn Manzur. Ibid. vol. 13, p. 182.

hence the difference of foolishness.⁵⁶ Of course, concerning the knowledge of Allah's essence and compared with Him, everyone has been found a fool; some types of foolishness though have been found lighter (*ahwan*) than other⁵⁷; and in seeming confirmation of the variety of foolishness and the accidental types of its bearers, Ibn al-Jawzi lists about forty synonymous lexical units with the meaning of „fool“.⁵⁸

And finally, before diving into the exemplary stories and numerous admonitions related thereof – something that we here leave to the academic pursuit of other fellow colleagues – some remarks should be made on fools with regards to the attributes (*ṣifāt*) of their folly.⁵⁹ They have been grouped into two large categories: the first relating to their physical appearance (*sūra*), and the second treating their moral character and acts (*al-khiṣāl wa-l-af'āl*). The initial portion of the material has been attributed to Galen (*Jālīnūs*, d. ca. 199), which is no wonder, since he has appeared to provide a great part of the medical prescriptions within the Islamic healing tradition.⁶⁰ For the purpose of the present article, only few of them will be mentioned within a selected sample, as the list is quite extensive and detailed. According to him, goes on the text, the small size of one's head inevitably tells of the poor form of brain (*radā'at hay'at al-dimāgh*) contained thereof; shortness of neck tells of weakness of brain and its tiny size (*du'f al-dimāgh wa-qillatīhi*). Then, blue eyes having a yellowish nuance have been perceived as indications of utmost corruption of moral character, while eyes that resemble the eyes of a cow seemed to tell of stupidity.⁶¹ Hair on the shoulders and the neck seemed to

⁵⁶ Ibn al-Jawzi, Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman Ibn 'Ali. *Akhbār al-Ḥamqā wa-l-Mughaffalīn*, Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, Beirut, 1990, p. 26.

⁵⁷ Ibid. pp. 26–27.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 28.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 30.

⁶⁰ Ref. Walzer, Richard. „Djālīnūs“, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1991, vol. 2, pp. 402–403.

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 30.

indicate foolishness and boldness (*al-ḥumq wa-l-jar'a*), while found on the chest and the belly proved its owner to have little of perspicacity (*qillat al-fiṭna*); at the same time, the possessors of a long thin neck were found to be stupid and cowardly. Thickness of nose pointed at little ability to comprehend (*qillat al-fahm*) while thick lips indicated proven foolishness and harshness of character (*ghalīz al-ṭibā'*). Beauty of voice (*ḥusn al-ṣawt*) has been found to be a proof of foolishness again; „a great amount of robust bodily flesh“ (*al-laḥm al-kathīr al-ṣalb*) exhibited coarseness of understanding and sensitivity.⁶²

Beard has occupied a significant position among the formal denominators of stupidity – „among the signs that cannot be mistaken, is the length of beard, as its owner is not deprived of stupidity“.⁶³ It has been told (*ruwīya*) that the Torah has recorded: beard has its roots (*makhraj*) in the brain; that is why whosoever let his beard grow loose beyond measure (*man aḫraṭa 'alayhi ṭūluḥā*), had his brain diminished, and consequently his intellect – thereby becoming a fool. Some wise men have been reported to confirm that „foolishness is the manure of beard“ (*al-ḥumq samād al-liḥya*), consequently, ones who let their beards grow long, were considered to grow also in stupidity. Numerous accounts have been cited to support such a view: the long bearded has been found „thin bearded [or hairless (*kawsaj*)] in his intellect“, that is, bereft of it; if one has been found to be long bearded, he has been defined classified as a fool; then, the residing location of intellect has been found to be the brain, the „way of [his] spirit“ – the nose, while the *locus* of his foolishness: length of beard. And if it happens that we ask ourselves what is the permissible length of beard, then Ziyad Ibn Abihi would supply us with guidance: what has exceeded the measure of what can be grasped by one hand (*qabḍa*), has been found missing from his intellect (*naqṣ min 'aqlihi*).⁶⁴ Thus we observe that the effort invested into listing such outer attributes has been quite significant; until ultimately we find

⁶² Ibid. p. 31.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 32.

out that the „words of the fool are the strongest evidence of his stupidity“.⁶⁵

As demonstrated by this illustrative material, it bears the stamp of the heavy influence of the Greek physiognomy. The closer look into the first category suggests that most of its contents appear to confirm the innate character of foolishness, as most of the characteristics have been positioned beyond the immediate control of the individual, with such notable exceptions as the length of beard. It is another dimension of stupidity, however, that the second category of attributes touches upon, namely, its being incapacitated to enforce proper usage of discerning abilities of intellect. Again, a selection of those exemplifies the views on the topic. A fool is not looking into the consequences, would trust unknown persons, lacks cordiality (*mawadda*); he is boastful and bigmouthed. Inability to control the tongue has been illustrated in a story whereby a man talked too much to al-Mu'awiya (d. 680) tiring him to the degree of boredom. The first Umayyad caliph then ordered him to keep silent, by which he earned a response as arrogant, as foolish – „Have I spoken at all?“ (*hal takallamtu*).⁶⁶ Foolishness again has been equalled to inability to intellect to obtain knowledge and vainglorious rejoicing in fake praises (*al-kadhb min madhihi*); a mark of fool is that he would heed to talks of nonsense with no authenticity (*la aṣl lahu*) while the intelligent one would recognize it and find it reproachable.⁶⁷ Along the same lines, lists of other reproachable moral aspects are lavishly cited⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 33.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 35.

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 35–36.

⁶⁸ Some of them are haste, levity, conceit, immorality, ignorance, treachery, tyranny, excess, arrogance, cunningness etc. Negative characteristics have also been diligently grouped: e.g. „a fool is known by six traits of character: anger with no reason, giving with no right, talks with no use, trust in everyone, divulgence of secrets, he is not distinguishing between his friends and his enemies – and besides, speaks what comes to his heart, and imagines that he is the wisest of men“; then quickness of answer (*sur'a al-jawāb*) appears

and have not been spared which bind the defect of stupidity to a host of vices and thus only demonstrate their interrelation.

The book of fools bears the imprint of a logically structured pyramid – starting from the high level definitions of stupidity stemming from other concepts of Islamic theology, cascading down into the admission of existence of various types of foolishness, and then the typology of their moral character. Within the work we find a surprisingly serious attitude towards foolishness: it is not perceived as an isolated phenomenon to serve the purposes of amusement within the late Abbasid intellectual space, but has rather as dependant on the key terms of intellect, madness and „instinct“, and found positioned against [intellect and madness] or within [„instinct“] their delineated spaces. Thus, facing a multiplicity of argumentation sources, ranging from traditions of antiquity to traditional Muslim authorities, we are presented with the framework of a peculiar *καλοκαγαθία* whereby little, yet some, space has been allocated to personal ability to achieve it; the border between natural and acquired foolishness seems shifting. And ultimately, it is left to our own intellectual effort through an act of discernment to decide where the subtle dividing line has been drawn – if only we had been granted from above the facility to do so.

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as a reproachable feature, together with unrestrained laughter [ref. pp. 36–37].

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