

# THE RENAISSANCE OF SHI'Ī ISLAM

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FACETS OF THOUGHT AND PRACTICE



EDITED BY  
FARHAD DAFTARY & JANIS ESOTS

# The Renaissance of Shi'i Islam

**The Institute of Ismaili Studies**  
**Shi‘i Heritage Series, 9**

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# The Renaissance of Shi‘i Islam

*Facets of Thought and Practice*

Edited by  
Farhad Daftary and Janis Esots

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The Institute of Ismaili Studies was established in 1977 with the object of promoting scholarship and learning on Islam, in the historical as well as contemporary contexts, and a better understanding of its relationship with other societies and faiths.

The Institute's programmes encourage a perspective which is not confined to the theological and religious heritage of Islam, but seeks to explore the relationship of religious ideas to broader dimensions of society and culture. The programmes thus encourage an interdisciplinary approach to the materials of Islamic history and thought. Particular attention is also given to issues of modernity that arise as Muslims seek to relate their heritage to the contemporary situation.

Within the Islamic tradition, the Institute's programmes promote research on those areas which have, to date, received relatively little attention from scholars. These include the intellectual and literary expressions of Shi'ism in general, and Ismailism in particular.

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1. Occasional papers or essays addressing broad themes of the relationship between religion and society, with special reference to Islam.
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3. Editions or translations of significant primary or secondary texts.
4. Translations of poetic or literary texts which illustrate the rich heritage of spiritual, devotional and symbolic expressions in Muslim history.
5. Works on Ismaili history and thought, and the relationship of the Ismailis to other traditions, communities and schools of thought in Islam.
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This book falls into category six listed above.

In facilitating these and other publications, the Institute's sole aim is to encourage original research and analysis of relevant issues. While every effort is made to ensure that the publications are of a high academic standard, there is naturally bound to be a diversity of views, ideas and interpretations. As such, the opinions expressed in these publications must be understood as belonging to their authors alone.

## *Shi'i Heritage Series*

Shi'i Muslims, with their rich intellectual and cultural heritage, have contributed significantly to the fecundity and diversity of the Islamic traditions throughout the centuries, enabling Islam to evolve and flourish both as a major religion and also as a civilisation. In spite of this, Shi'i Islam has received little scholarly attention in the West, in medieval as well modern times. It is only in recent decades that academic interest has focused increasingly on Shi'i Islam within the wider study of Islam.

The principal objective of the *Shi'i Heritage Series*, launched by The Institute of Ismaili Studies, is to enhance general knowledge of Shi'i Islam and promote a better understanding of its history, doctrines and practices in their historical and contemporary manifestations. Addressing all Shi'i communities, the series also aims to engage in discussions on theoretical and methodological issues, while inspiring further research in the field.

Works published in this series will include monographs, collective volumes, editions and translations of primary texts, and bibliographical projects, bringing together some of the most significant themes in the study of Shi'i Islam through an interdisciplinary approach, and making them accessible to a wide readership.





*In memoriam Janis Esots (1966–2021)*



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## Abbreviations

<i>AEPHE-SSR</i>	Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études. Section des Sciences Religieuses
<i>BJMES</i>	British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
<i>BSOAS</i>	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
<i>EI</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , ed. M. Th. Houtsma et al. 1st edition, Leiden, 1913–1938; reprinted, Leiden, 1987
<i>EI2</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , ed. H.A.R. Gibb et al. New edition, Leiden, 1960–2004
<i>EI3</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , ed. Kate Fleet et al. 3rd edition, Leiden and Boston, 2007–
<i>EIr</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i> , ed. E. Yarshater. London, and New York, 1982–
<i>EIs</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Islamica</i> , ed. W. Madelung and F. Daftary. London, 2008–
<i>IS</i>	Iranian Studies
<i>IJMES</i>	International Journal of Middle East Studies
<i>JFR</i>	Journal of Folklore Research
<i>JIP</i>	Journal of Islamic Philosophy
<i>JIS</i>	Journal of Iranian Studies
<i>JPS</i>	Journal of Persianate Studies
<i>JRAS</i>	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
<i>JSAl</i>	Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam
<i>JSIS</i>	Journal of Shia Islamic Studies
<i>MW</i>	The Muslim World
<i>RSO</i>	Rivista degli Studi Orientali
<i>SSR</i>	Shii Studies Review





## Preface

After almost a millennium of marginalisation in the Muslim world, Shi'i Islam entered an era of renaissance at the end of the 9th/15th century. This renaissance had multiple facets, probably the most important of them being the spread of Shi'i sentiments and 'Alid loyalism through the Sufi orders, the coalescence of Shi'ism and Sufism and the resurgence of Shi'i messianism. Another significant facet was an increased interest in lettrism (*'ilm al-ḥurūf*). During the 9th–11th/15th–17th centuries, magnificent monuments of Shi'i scholarship and art imbued with the spirit of regained self-confidence were produced not only in transmitted and rational sciences, but also in literature, art and architecture.

The Nizārī Ismailis began to experience their own renaissance with the commencement of the imamate of Mustanṣir bi'llāh (II) around 868/1463–1464: this date marks the beginning of the so-called Anjudān revival in Ismaili history. Around the same time, several Shi'i messianic movements, probably not unrelated to the Ismailis, as well as a number of Sufi orders, emerged in Iran and spread to the neighbouring countries. One of these, the Safavids, was particularly successful: in 906/1500, led by the youthful Ismā'il I, the Safavid forces defeated the army of the Aq-Qoyunlu, and a year later, in the summer of 907/1501, took their capital Tabrīz, thus establishing the Safavid state which became the first major Shi'i power since the fall of the Fatimids in 567/1171.

The Institute of Ismaili Studies held an international conference on 3–5 October 2018 with the aim of investigating and evaluating the complexities of the roles of different groups, movements and currents of thought in the sophisticated multifaceted process that may be described as 'the Renaissance of Shi'i Islam in the 9th–11th/15th–17th centuries'. The conference addressed, in particular, the following issues:

- What were the common characteristics of Shi‘i messianic movements of those centuries? Why was one of them, the Safavids or Qizil-bāsh, particularly successful?
- What was the substance of the Anjudān revival of the Nizārī Ismailis?
- Which developments of *kalām* (speculative theology) and Sufism in this era can be described as the ‘Shi‘itisation of Sunnism’?
- How did the intellectual movement known as the School of Isfahan emerge? What were its principal manifestations in different fields of knowledge?
- How did different Shi‘i groups interact with Sufis?
- What were the defining characteristics of Shi‘i exegesis, theology, law and gnosis during this period?

The present volume brings together a selection of the revised versions of the papers presented at this conference. In accordance with the principal facets of the phenomenon explored, the volume consists of four parts.

Farhad Daftary’s keynote article outlines the principal developments in the Shi‘i milieu of post-Mongol Persia (Iran) and establishes the landmark figures of the period.

Part One discusses Ismailism in the context of the coalescence of Shi‘ism and Sufism in the post-Mongol period. It consists of three contributions. Jalal Badakhchani’s paper provides a brief survey of post-Alamūt Nizārī Ismaili literature in the Persian language, introducing a hitherto unknown compendium of poetry by the 11th/17th-century Iranian Ismaili poet, Darwīsh Quṭb al-Dīn. Shafiqe Virani’s contribution represents an analysis of a long poem written by another 11th/17th-century Persian Nizārī Ismaili poet Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī who flourished during the imamate of Nūr al-Dahr ‘Alī (d. 1082/1671). In his poem, Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī identifies numerous contemporary Ismaili leaders, listing their names and the areas of their activity (in Iran, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent), and distinguishing them by their ranks (*pīr*, *dā‘ī* and *mu‘allim*). The poem also sheds some light on the Nizārī Ismaili doctrine of the time. By establishing and cataloguing the quotations from the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*, and from the *Risālat al-Jāmi‘a*, in Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkivarī’s *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, Daniel De Smet reflects on

the presence of Ismaili doctrines in the latter work and its impact on late Safavid thought. De Smet argues that the manner in which Ashkivari introduces the selected quotations shows that he had a clear understanding of their doctrinal implications. He concludes that the investigation of the influence of the *Jāmi‘a*, due to its explicit Ismaili character, is the best way to evaluate the importance of Ismaili traces in the works of Safavid philosophers.

Part Two, which deals with Shi‘i messianism and lettrism, consists of three papers. Amelia Gallagher examines the ‘resurrection’ of Shah Ismā‘il in Alevi-Bektashi literature through the oral transmission of the corpus of his poetry, under the pen-name Khaṭā‘ī, that continued to expand for several centuries after his death, becoming a major channel for the spread of Shi‘i attitudes and motifs in the Ottoman empire. The author demonstrates why and how this process was crucial for the development of esoteric Shi‘i Islam. Fatih Usluer presents an account of the fate of the Ḥurūfiyya after the execution of their founder Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī in 796/1394, based on a detailed analysis of a letter written by Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn in Jumāda I 836/January 1433, a few months after he escaped from the prison of Shākhrukh. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov revisits Nuṭṭavī-Safavid relations during the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 996–1038/1588–1629). He argues that the Nuṭṭavī group in Qazvīn that attracted the attention of Shah ‘Abbās was part of a learned Nuṭṭavī tradition which was closely aligned with the original texts of Maḥmūd Pasikhānī. The author proposes a new understanding of the role of Nuṭṭavī ideas in the evolution of Shah ‘Abbās’s religious and political thinking.

Part Three, which consists of four papers, discusses the manifestations of the Shi‘i renaissance in the fields of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi examines the role of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1110/1699), the compiler of the monumental collection of Shi‘i *ḥadīth*, *Biḥār al-anwār*, in the formation of the religious policy of the state in Safavid Iran. The author points out that some of Majlisī’s actions contradicted certain teachings found in the sayings attributed to the Ithnā ‘asharī imams, while he himself posed as the reviver of these teachings. Amir-Moezzi wonders whether Majlisī’s actions should be interpreted as a voluntarily ambiguous attitude, or as an attempt to maintain the balance between safeguarding the Tradition and establishing Twelver Shi‘ism as the state religion. Building on a

number of disparate studies dealing with Akhbārī influence in particular genres, Devin J. Stewart investigates the role that the Akhbārīs played in shaping Safavid literary production. The author particularly focuses on the intersection of the production of learned works during the Safavid period and the contours and effects of the Akhbārī movement. Robert Gleave presents a study on the post-classical legal literature of Twelver Shi‘ism. Drawing on a history of scholarship, he establishes the ways in which the legal works he examines are distinctively Twelver Shi‘i and demonstrates that, in many ways, they display characteristics which are not specifically ‘legal’, whereas in other ways they are deeply involved in expounding legal principles. Gleave argues that the post-classical legal tradition of the Ithnā ‘asharī Shi‘is reveals a dynamic of commentary which can be identified across scholarly disciplines. In this sense, it is both distinctive and conventional in the Islamic post-classical scholarly milieu. Andrew J. Newman’s paper examines Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān al-Qaṭīfī’s (d. after 945/1539) *ijāzāt* preserved in Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī’s *Bihār al-anwār* in order to establish how their style and substance contribute to the understanding of al-Qaṭīfī’s debate with ‘Alī al-Karakī (d. 940/1534) and to the discussions on Twelver Shi‘i *ijāzāt* in general. The author concludes that al-Qaṭīfī’s discourse in these *ijāzāt* might be viewed as both jurisprudential and personal, whereas al-Qaṭīfī himself cannot be described as either Uṣūlī or Akhbārī. Newman points to al-Qaṭīfī’s deep anxiety about the developments in Twelver Shi‘ism after it became the state religion of Safavid Iran.

Part Four, consisting of four papers, focuses on philosophy, theology and intellectual history. The late Janis Esots’s paper presents a concise account of Mīr Dāmād’s ‘Wisdom of the Right Side’ (*al-ḥikma al-yamāniyya*). First he discusses Mīr Dāmād’s metaphysics, in particular, the pivotal concepts of perpetuity and perpetual inception, and then briefly examines the impact of the philosopher’s metaphysical doctrine on his physics, psychology and eschatology. Christian Jambet looks at some aspects of Mullā Ṣadrā’s reception of Suhrawardī’s philosophy. Building his argument on a number of passages in Ṣadrā’s commentary on Suhrawardī’s *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, Jambet concludes that Mullā Ṣadrā’s reaction to *ishrāqī* doctrine may be described as an exegesis which sets Suhrawardī’s theses in a new metaphysical perspective. To demonstrate this, Jambet discusses such issues as

Şadrā's reinterpretation of the human caliphate of God, the dispute between philosophy and religious dogma regarding the eternity of the world and the definition of the human soul (as the rational soul that descends to the sensible world). Sheila Canby discusses Shah Ṭahmāsp's (r. 930–984/1524–1576) view of nature as reflected in his *Shāhnāma*, a magnificent manuscript consisting of 759 folios and 258 illustrations, which he commissioned soon after his accession to the throne. After investigating how the illustrations reflect the actual environment of Iran in the 10th/16th century and the Safavid attitude to the land and its stewardship, Canby attempts to establish to what extent the paintings reflect the Safavids' Shi'i faith. Mathieu Terrier introduces Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkivarī's (d. between 1088 and 1095/1677 and 1684) treatise *Fānūs al-khayāl fī irā'at 'ālam al-mithāl* ('The Lantern of Imagination concerning the Presentation of the World of Image'), written in 1077/1667. Terrier's paper, based on the study of the sole extant manuscript of the treatise (MS 1615, Malek Library, Tehran), is a preliminary to its critical edition. It gives a useful overview of the work, focusing first on the concept of imaginal world, then on the convergence between Shi'ism, Sufism and philosophy.

Our esteemed colleague Janis Esots died unexpectedly in June 2021, shortly after he had finished assembling the first draft of the papers published in this volume. He had been with The Institute of Ismaili Studies for some eight years and was embarking on what would undoubtedly have been an important series of publications. He was held in high respect throughout the field of Islamic studies and will be greatly missed by all who knew him and worked with him, not least his friends and fellow academics at the Institute. This volume is dedicated to his memory.

*Farhad Daftary*



## The Shi'ī Milieu of Post-Mongol Persia

*Farhad Daftary*

The Mongol invasions of southwestern Asia changed the political map of Persia and other parts of that region. After Chingiz Khan's death in 624/1227, the Mongols made new efforts, under Chingiz's son and first successor, Ögedei, to conquer all Persia, a task completed in the reign of the Great Khan Möngke (r. 649–658/1251–1260). By 654/1256, Möngke's brother Hülegü had destroyed the Nizārī Ismaili state of Persia before he entered Baghdad in 656/1258 and murdered the last Abbasid caliph, al-Mustaʿsim (r. 640–656/1242–1258). By then, the Mongols had indeed completed their conquest of southwestern Asia.

It was during the same eventful period in Islamic history that Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (597–672/1201–1274), one of the most eminent Shi'ī scholars of all time, lived amongst and benefited from the patronage of the Nizārī Ismaili Shi'īs of Persia in their fortress communities, before attaching himself to the court of the Mongol Īlkhānid rulers of Persia and Iraq, a dynasty (654–754/1256–1353) founded by Hülegü himself. Al-Ṭūsī played a significant role in the political events of his time, under both the Ismailis and the Mongols. Born into a Twelver Shi'ī family, it was around 624/1227 that al-Ṭūsī entered the Ismaili fortresses of Persia, first in Quhistān, southern Khurāsān, and subsequently at Alamūt, the central headquarters of the Nizārī Ismaili state. During that period, al-Ṭūsī also converted to Ismailism, as related in his spiritual autobiography,<sup>1</sup> and made important contributions to Ismaili thought.

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<sup>1</sup> Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Sayr wa sulūk*, ed. and tr. S. J. Badakhchani as *Contemplation and Action: The Spiritual Autobiography of a Muslim Scholar* (London, 1998). See also Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*, ed. and tr. S. J. Badakhchani as *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought* (London, 2005), which remains our major primary source on the Ismaili teachings of the Alamūt period.



On the surrender of the fortress of Alamüt, in northern Persia, to the Mongols in 654/1256, al-Ṭūsī became a trusted adviser to Hülegü and accompanied the Mongol conqueror to Baghdad and witnessed the demise of the Abbasid caliphate. Subsequently, Hülegü built a great observatory for al-Ṭūsī at Marāgha, Ādharbāyjan. Al-Ṭūsī, who had by then reverted back to Twelver Shi'ism,<sup>2</sup> also served Hülegü's son and successor Abaqa (r. 663–681/1265–1282) in the Īlkhānid dynasty, while engaged in his theological, philosophical and scientific enquiries. He now produced major works on Imāmī Shi'i theological principles, notably the *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id* and the *Tajrid al-'aqā'id*, which became the most widely used *kalām* text in Persia and the eastern lands. Al-Ṭūsī was also the first Twelver scholar to have been at once a theologian and a philosopher, having been particularly influenced by Ibn Sīnā's (d. 428/1037) philosophy. This represented a tradition of philosophical theology elaborated earlier in Fatimid times by a number of Iranian *dā'īs*, and more fully developed later in Persia under the Safavids.

Be that as it may, al-Ṭūsī may be considered to have initiated a new phase in the intellectual history of Twelver Shi'ism. In fact, al-Ṭūsī and his disciple Ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī represented the last school of original thought in Twelver *kalām* theology. Subsequently, Twelver Shi'i scholars produced mainly works of the genre of commentary (*sharḥ*) on, or restatements of, the earlier treatises. Meanwhile, close relations were also developing between Twelver theology and the Sufism of Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240), while the Nizārī Ismailis of Persia and Central Asia were beginning to develop their own relationships with Sufism (*taṣawwuf*).

Similarly to Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf Ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325) gained eminence at the court of the Īlkhānid rulers. It was, in fact, under his influence that Öljeitü (r. 703–716/1304–1316), better known in the Islamic sources as Muḥammad Khudābanda, converted to Twelver Shi'ism in 709/1310 and minted coins to that effect. Ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, called 'Allāma or the 'most learned one',

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<sup>2</sup> On al-Ṭūsī's search for different patrons and his changing religious affiliations, see H. Dabashi, 'The Philosopher/Vizier: Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and the Isma'ilis', in F. Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 231–245.

and his uncle Ja‘far b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥillī (d. 676/1277), known as al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī or al-Muḥaqqiq al-Awwal, were two major scholars from Ḥilla, in Iraq, which had superseded Qum and Baghdad as the stronghold of Twelver Shi‘i learning in the aftermath of the Mongol conquests. These scholars had significant impacts on the direction of Imāmī Shi‘i law that was to prevail. In particular, ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, the author of numerous legal treatises, had a lasting influence on the foundations of Twelver Shi‘i jurisprudence. He argued against the reliability of *ḥadīth* and reorganised jurisprudence so as to make reason (*‘aql*) its central focus. He also introduced new principles of legal methodology adapted from Sunni practices. Building on the work of his uncle, ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī provided a theoretical foundation for *ijtihād*, the principle of legal ruling by the jurist (*faqīh*) through reasoning (*‘aql*). He argued that the jurist could arrive at valid judgements in religious law using reason and the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*).<sup>3</sup>

Al-Ḥillī’s acceptance of *ijtihād*, exercised by jurists known as *mujtahids*, represents a crucial step towards the enhancement of the juristic authority of the ‘*ulamā*’ in Twelver Shi‘ism in the absence of a manifest imam, even though the *mujtahids*, in contrast to imams, are fallible. In the absence of the infallible imams, any ruling by a qualified *mujtahid* is nevertheless binding. These ideas, propounded by ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, also provided the antecedents of the concept of *taqlīd*, or emulation, by those who are not qualified to exercise *ijtihād*, accounting for the bulk of the Twelver community. The emulators, or *muqallids*, seek the opinions of the *mujtahids* and are expected to abide by their judgements. It should be noted that *ijtihād* also gained importance within the Zaydī Shi‘i communities, even earlier than its adoption by the Twelvers, but was rejected by the Ismailis.

Īlkhānid rule effectively ended with Abū Sa‘īd (r. 717–736/1317–1335), the last great member of that Mongol dynasty. Subsequently, until the advent of the Safavids, Persia became increasingly fragmented,

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Allāma Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, *Mabādi’ al-wuṣūl ilā ‘ilm al-uṣūl*, ed. ‘A. M. ‘Alī (Najaf, 1390/1970), especially pp. 240–252. See also S. Schmidtke, *The Theology of ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325)* (Berlin, 1991) and Andrew J. Newman, *Twelver Shi‘ism: Unity and Diversity in the Life of Islam, 632 to 1722* (Edinburgh, 2013), pp. 122–137.

with the exception of certain periods during the reign of Timūr (d. 807/1405), and that of his son Shāhrukh (r. 807–850/1405–1447). During this turbulent and confusing period in Persian history, in the absence of any strong central authority, different parts of the country were held by various local dynasties, including the minor Īlkhānids, the later Timūrids, the Jalāyirids, the Qara-Qoyunlu and the Aq-Qoyunlu, based on federations of Turkoman tribes. The post-Mongol political fragmentation of Persia provided more favourable conditions for the activities of various religio-political movements, most of which were now essentially Shi'ī or influenced by Shi'ī ideas. These conditions were indeed conducive to the rising tide of Shi'ism in post-Mongol Persia. Under the circumstances, the Nizārī Ismailis and certain Shi'ī-related movements with millenarian aspirations, such as those of the Ḥurūfis, the Nuḡṭavīs, the Sarbadārs and the Musha'sha', as well as a number of Sufi *ṭarīqas* or orders, now found a respite in Persia during the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries. As a result, these communities, movements or orders could actively organise themselves, though they were still occasionally persecuted by different local rulers who detected messages of opposition in their religio-political campaigns and agendas.

In the meantime, Shi'ī tendencies had been spreading in Persia and Central Asia since the 7th/13th century, creating a more favourable religious milieu in many predominantly Sunni regions for the activities of the Shi'ī communities (both Twelvers and Ismailis) as well as a number of Shi'ī-related extremist movements. These movements, as noted, normally entertained millenarian or Mahdist aspirations for the deliverance of the oppressed and the economically underprivileged, who rallied in large numbers, especially after Timūr's death in 807/1405, to lend support to their leaders, who often hailed from Shi'ī-Sufi backgrounds.

In this context, particular reference should be made to the Ḥurūfis founded by the Shi'ī-Sufi Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394), whose doctrines were later adopted by the Bektashi dervishes of Anatolia, and the Nuḡṭavīs who split off from the Ḥurūfis under the initial leadership of Maḥmūd-i Pasīkhānī (d. 831/1427). From early on, Ḥurūfī teachings spread to Anatolia due to the missionary activities of 'Alī al-A'lā' (d. 822/1419), one of Faḍl Allāh's original disciples and the author of numerous Ḥurūfī texts. In fact, Anatolia soon became

the main stronghold of Ḥurūfism, and the Ḥurūfī doctrines were adopted by the Bektashi and several other Sufi orders. Subsequently, Ḥurūfism disappeared from Persia, but its teachings have continued to be upheld by the Bektashi dervishes of Turkey, who have also preserved the early literature of the community.

The Nuḡṭavī movement became very popular in Persia, and by the early Safavid times it had numerous followers in the Caspian regions of northern Persia and in the Persian cities of Qazvīn, Kāshān, Iṣfahān and Shīrāz. The Nuḡṭavīs were influenced by the Nizārī Ismaili doctrines of the Alamūt period. At least some eminent Nuḡṭavīs may even have been crypto-Ismailis. The Nuḡṭavīs disbanded completely in Persia under Safavid persecutions, while many of them, including a number of poets, sought refuge in India. By contrast to Ḥurūfism, which emphasised the secret of the letters of the alphabet (*ḥurūf*), Maḥmūd-i Pasīkhānī elaborated a system based on points (singular, *nuḡṭa*).<sup>4</sup>

There was also the Twelver-related Musha‘sha‘ of Khūzistān, in southwestern Persia, founded by Ibn Falāḥ (d. ca. 866/1461), who claimed Mahdism. The Musha‘sha‘ ruled over parts of Iraq, and under their persecution policies Ḥilla lost its prominence as a centre of Twelver Shi‘i learning to Jabal ‘Āmil in Lebanon.

Instead of propagating any particular form of Shi‘ism, a new syncretic type of popular Shi‘ism was now arising in post-Mongol Persia, Central Asia and Anatolia. Expressed largely through Sufi orders, this popular Shi‘ism ultimately culminated in early Safavid Shi‘ism. Marshall Hodgson (1922–1968) designated this popular Shi‘i phenomenon as ‘*ṭarīqa* Shi‘ism’, as it was transmitted mainly through a number of Sufi orders.<sup>5</sup> The Sufi orders in question, most of which

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<sup>4</sup> On the Ḥurūfīs and the Nuḡṭavīs, see Ṣādiq Kiyā, *Nuḡṭawiyān yā Pasīkhāniyān* (Tehran, 1320 Sh./1941); A. Amanat, ‘The Nuḡṭawī Movement of Maḥmūd Pasīkhānī and his Persian Cycle of Mystical-Materialism’, in F. Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma‘ili History*, pp. 281–297; K. Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), pp. 57–108; S. Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis* (Oxford, 2005) and O. Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power: Ḥurūfī Teachings Between Sufism and Shi‘ism in Medieval Islam* (London, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago, 1974), vol. 2, pp. 493 ff.

were formed in post-Mongol Persia, remained outwardly Sunni for quite some time, following one of the Sunni schools of law (*madhhab*), usually the Shāfi'ī school, while being particularly devoted to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and the Prophet Muhammad's family (*ahl al-bayt*). 'Alī was in fact included at the head of their *silsilas* or chains of spiritual masters.

Among the Sufi orders that played a leading role in spreading this eclectic type of popular Shi'ism mention may be made of the Nūrbakhshiyya and the Ni'mat Allāhiyya orders. Both of these orders, as well as the most effective, the Ṣafaviyya, eventually became fully Shi'ī. Be that as it may, in this milieu of religious eclecticism, 'Alid loyalism soon became more widespread, beyond the Sufi orders, and Shi'ī elements began to be superficially imposed on Sunni Islam. By the 9th/15th century, the general outlook of predominantly Sunni Persia and its adjacent regions was increasingly moulded by this type of Sufi-disseminated Shi'ī-Sunni syncretism. Claude Cahen (1909–1991) has referred to this curious process as the 'Shi'itisation of Sunnism', as opposed to the conscious propagation of Shi'ism of any particular form, Twelver or otherwise.<sup>6</sup> It was through such a complex process that Persia was gradually prepared for the official adoption of Shi'ism under the Safavids.

Amongst the Sufi orders that contributed to the 'Shi'itisation' of Persia, the most direct role was played by the Ṣafavī *ṭarīqa*, because of the unique position it occupied in terms of the political ambitions of its masters.<sup>7</sup> The political and military successes of this order

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<sup>6</sup> Claude Cahen, 'Le problème du Shi'isme dans l'Asie Mineure turque préottomane', in T. Fahd, ed., *Le Shi'isme Imāmite. Colloque de Strasbourg* (Paris, 1970), pp. 118 ff. See also M. Molé, 'Les Kubrawiyya entre Sunnisme et Shiisme aux huitième et neuvième siècles de l'hégire', *Revue d'Études Islamiques*, 29 (1961), pp. 61–142; S. Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago, 1984), pp. 66–84; B. Scarcia Amoretti, 'Religion in the Timurid and Safavid Periods', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Volume 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. P. Jackson and L. Lockhart (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 610–634 and H. Halm, *Shiism*, tr. J. Watson (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 71–83.

<sup>7</sup> On the Ṣafavī Sufi order and the background to the establishment of Safavid rule in Persia, see Michel M. Mazzaoui, *Origins of the Ṣafawids: Ši'ism, Ṣūfism, and the Ġulāt* (Wiesbaden, 1972), pp. 41–63, 71–82; R. Savory, *Iran under the Ṣafavids* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 1–26; H. R. Roemer, 'The Safavid Period', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Volume 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. P. Jackson and L. Lockhart (Cambridge, 1986) pp. 189–212 and Babayan, *Mystics*, pp. 3–7, 121–196.

eventually culminated in the accession of the Şafavī master (*shaykh*) to the throne of Persia. The Şafavī order was founded by Shaykh Şafi al-Dīn (d. 735/1334), an eminent Sufi master of the Īlkhānid period and a Sunni Muslim of the Shāfi‘ī *madhhab*. It was after the establishment of the Safavid state that the dynasty claimed an ‘Alid genealogy, tracing Shaykh Şafi’s ancestry to Mūsā al-Kāzim (d. 183/799), the seventh imam of the Twelver Shi‘is.

The Şafavī order, initially centred at Ardabīl, spread rapidly throughout Ādharbāyjan, eastern Anatolia, Syria and Khurāsān. Most significantly, the order acquired a deep influence over several Turkoman tribes in Ādharbāyjan and adjacent regions. With Shaykh Şafi’s fourth successor, Junayd, the Şafavī order was transformed into a militant revolutionary movement. The order’s *murīds*, or ordinary members, mainly from amongst the Turkomans, were gradually organised into a dedicated fighting force of Sufi soldiers. Junayd was also the first *shaykh* of the order to display Shi‘i sentiments combined with radical religious notions of the type held by the Shi‘i *ghulāt*. Shaykh Junayd was killed in 864/1460 in a battle against Caucasian Christians around Ādharbāyjan. However, his policies and ambitions were retained by his son and successor, Shaykh Ḥaydar, who also lost his life in 893/1488 in one of the numerous battles he fought. Shaykh Ḥaydar was responsible for instructing his followers to adopt the scarlet headgear with twelve gores, commemorating the Twelve imams of the Twelver Shi‘is, which led to their being designated by the Turkish epithet, Qizil-bāsh (Red-head). Sulţān ‘Alī, Ḥaydar’s son and successor, also fell in battle in 898/1493.

By then, the Şafavī order had acquired a strong military organisation, supported by many local adherents and powerful Turkoman tribes, which constituted the backbone of the Qizil-bāsh Sufi-soldiers. With these assets, Sulţān ‘Alī’s youthful brother and successor, Ismā‘īl, readily succeeded in seizing Ādharbāyjan from the Aq-Qoyunlu dynasty of Turkoman rulers. Thereupon, Ismā‘īl entered Tabrīz, the capital of the deposed dynasty, in 907/1501 and proclaimed himself Shah Ismā‘īl, the first member of the new Safavid dynasty, which was to last until 1135/1722.

The popular and eclectic Shi‘ism of the Qizil-bāsh Turkomans manifested itself more clearly under Shah Ismā‘īl (r. 907–930/1501–1524), who portrayed himself to his Qizil-bāsh followers as the

representative of the hidden Twelfth imam-Mahdi of the Twelvers, or even as the expected Mahdi himself, also claiming divinity. This type of Shi'ī extremism, characterised by Mahdist or chiliastic expectations, and even the deification of the Ṣafavī order's masters, had very little in common with the 'orthodox' doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism. However, this extremist, eclectic type of Shi'ism was gradually disciplined and brought into conformity with the tenets of Twelver Shi'ism. Be that as it may, Shah Ismā'īl, who brought all of Persia under his control, inaugurated a new era for Shi'ism and the activities of the various Shi'ī movements in Persia.

It was under such circumstances that close relations had developed between Twelver Shi'ism and Sufism, as well as between Nizārī Ismaili Shi'ism and Sufism in Persia. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī had already composed a treatise entitled *Awṣāf al-ashrāf* on the mystical path or *ṭarīqa*. However, one of the earliest Twelver-Sufi associations is reflected in the works of Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, the eminent theologian, theosopher and gnostic ('*ārif*) who died not long after 787/1385.<sup>8</sup> He hailed from Āmul in the Caspian region and served for some time as vizier to the local Bāwandid rulers there, before emigrating to Baghdad where he studied under 'Allāma al-Ḥillī's son. Strongly influenced by the Sufi teachings of Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240), Sayyid Ḥaydar combined the latter's mystical ideas with his own Shi'ī theology into an original synthesis in his *Jāmi' al-asrār* and other works. More than anyone else before him, he emphasised the common grounds between Shi'ism and Sufism and prepared the ground also for the doctrines held by many of the Persian Sufi orders.

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<sup>8</sup> On Ḥaydar Āmulī, and relations between Shi'ism and Sufism in general, see H. Corbin, *En Islam Iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris, 1971–1972), vol. 1, pp. 74–85, and vol. 3, pp. 149–213; Kāmil M. al-Shaybī, *Tashayyū' va taṣawwuf*, tr. 'Alī R. Dh. Qaraguzlū (Tehran, 1359 Sh./1980), pp. 64–71, 112–125; S. H. Nasr, 'Le Shi'isme et le Soufisme', in Fahd, ed., *Le Shi'isme Imāmīte*, pp. 215–233; idem, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (New rev. ed., Cambridge, 2001), pp. 115–140 and J. van Ess, 'Ḥaydar-i Āmulī', *EI2*, vol. 12, Supplement, pp. 363–365. See also M. Terrier, 'The Defence of Sufism among Twelver Shi'ī Scholars of Early Modern and Modern Times: Topics and Arguments', in D. Hermann and M. Terrier, ed., *Shi'ī Islam and Sufism: Classical Views and Modern Perspectives* (London, 2020), pp. 27–63.

According to Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, a Muslim who combines *sharī‘a* with *ḥaqīqa* and *ṭarīqa*, the spiritual path followed by the Sufis, is not only a believer but a believer put to the test (*al-mu‘min al-mumtaḥan*). Such a gnostic Muslim, at once a Sufi and a true Shi‘i, would preserve a balance between the *zāhir* and the *bāṭin*, equally avoiding the literalist interpretations of Islam undertaken by the jurists (*fuqahā’*) as well as the antinomian (*ibāhī*) tendencies of the radical groups such as the Shi‘i *ghulāt*.<sup>9</sup>

The efforts at integrating Sufism and Twelver Shi‘ism, initiated by Ḥaydar Āmulī, were continued by others, notably the Twelver scholar Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Aḥsā’ī (d. after 904/1499), better known as Ibn Abī Jumhūr. This scholar hailed from al-Aḥsā’ in Bahrain and later taught in Najaf and Mashhad in Persia. Thus, in his *Kitāb al-mujlī*, anticipating the contributions of the so-called ‘School of Iṣfahān’, Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā’ī offers a synthesis of Twelver *kalām* theology, Avicennan Peripatetic (*mashā’i*) philosophy, the illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) thought of Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) and the gnostic-mystical teachings of the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, aspects of interactions between Twelver Shi‘ism and gnosis (*irfān*), in combination with different philosophical/theosophical traditions, later culminated in the works of Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1630), Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640), and other Shi‘i gnostic theologians belonging to the ‘School of Iṣfahān’. Members of this school, who produced a metaphysical synthesis of a variety of philosophical, theological and gnostic traditions within a Shi‘i perspective, elaborated

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<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, *Jāmi‘ al-asrār wa manba‘ al-anwār*, ed. H. Corbin and O. Yahya, in their collection of Āmulī’s works entitled *La philosophie shi‘ite* (Tehran and Paris, 1969), pp. 2–617, at pp. 47, 116–117, 216–217, 220–222, 238, 388, 611–615 and Āmulī’s *Asrār al-sharī‘a wa anwār al-ḥaqīqa*, ed. M. Khwājawi (Tehran, 1360 Sh./1982), pp. 5 ff., 23 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā’ī, *Mujlī mir’at al-munjī fi’l-kalām wa’l-ḥikmatayn wa’l-taṣawwuf*, ed. R. Y. Fārmad (Beirut, 2013). See also W. Madelung, ‘Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā’ī’s Synthesis of *kalām*, Philosophy and Sufism’, in *La signification du Bas Moyen Age dans l’histoire et la culture du monde Musulman: Actes du 8ème Congrès de l’Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants (Aix-en-Provence, 1976)* (Aix-en-Provence, 1978), pp. 147–156; reprinted in his *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London, 1985), article XIII.



an original intellectual tradition of ‘philosophical Shi‘ism’ designated as *al-ḥikma al-ilāhiyya* (Persian, *ḥikmat-i ilāhī*), generally translated as divine wisdom or theosophy.<sup>11</sup> It may be noted here that with the persecution of the Sufi orders in early Safavid times, the advocates of the mystical experience in Islam adopted the term ‘*irfān*’ (gnosis) in preference to *taṣawwuf* (Sufism).

In the meantime, the Nizārī Ismailis of Persia and Central Asia had developed their own coalescence with Sufism in post-Mongol times. In the aftermath of the demise of their state at the hands of the Mongols in 654/1256, the Nizārī Ismailis espoused a diversity of religious and literary traditions in different languages. Research difficulties here stem from the scarcity of primary sources as well as the widespread practice of *taqiyya* adopted by the Nizārīs during the early post-Mongol times in order to safeguard themselves against rampant persecution. It was during the same obscure period that Persian Nizārī Ismailis disguised themselves under the cover of Sufism, without establishing formal affiliations with any of the Sufi *ṭarīqas* then spreading across Persia and Central Asia. This phenomenon soon gained wide currency among the Nizārī Ismailis of Central Asia and Sind as well. By the middle of the 9th/15th century, Ismaili-Sufi relations had indeed become well established in the Iranian world.

The origins and early development of the complex association between Persian Ismailism and Sufism remain rather obscure in the absence of adequate sources and studies. Be that as it may, better understanding of the history of Sufism in Persia and our access to post-Alamūt Ismaili literature in modern times have greatly enhanced our knowledge of the relations between Sufism and Persian Ismailism, the two independent esoteric traditions in Islam with common

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<sup>11</sup> On the ‘School of Iṣfahān’, see H. Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie Islamique* (Paris, 1986), pp. 462–475; English tr., *History of Islamic Philosophy*, tr. L. Sherrard (London, 1993), pp. 338–348; S. H. Nasr, ‘The School of Iṣpahān’, in M. M. Sharif, ed., *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Wiesbaden, 1963–1966), vol. 2, pp. 904–932 and H. Dabashi, ‘Mīr Dāmād and the Founding of the “School of Iṣfahān”’, in S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman, ed., *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London, 2001), vol. 1, pp. 597–634. See also *Patterns of Wisdom in Safavid Iran: The Philosophical School of Iṣfahan and the Gnostic of Shiraz* (London, 2021) by the late Janis Esots for the most recent assessment of this important subject.

doctrinal grounds. It has now become rather clear that after the fall of Alamūt, Nizārī Ismailism became increasingly infused in Persia with Sufi teachings and terminology. At the same time, the Sufis themselves, who relied on *bāṭinī ta’wīl* or esoteric exegesis like the Ismailis, began to use ideas which were more widely ascribed to the Ismailis. As part of this coalescence, the Nizārī Ismailis began to adopt Sufi ways of life even externally. Thus, the post-Alamūt Nizārī imams, starting with Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. ca. 710/1310), lived clandestinely for the most part as Sufi *pīrs*, while their followers adopted the typically Sufi designation of *murīd* or disciple.<sup>12</sup>

It is due to the close relationships between Persian Ismailism and Sufism that it is often difficult to ascertain whether a certain post-Alamūt Persian treatise was written by a Nizārī author influenced by Sufism, or whether it was written in Sufi circles exposed to Ismaili teachings. As an instance of Ismaili-Sufi interactions, mention may be made of the celebrated Sufi treatise entitled *Gulshan-i rāz* (The Rose-Garden of Mystery) and a later esoteric commentary on it by a Nizārī author. This versified work was composed by Maḥmūd-i Shabistārī (d. after 740/1339), a Sufi *shaykh* from Ādharbāyjān. He was a contemporary of Nizārī Quhistānī (d. 720/1320), probably the first Nizārī Ismaili to express his religious ideas in the guise of Sufi expressions and poetry,<sup>13</sup> a model adopted by many later Nizārī authors of Persia, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Nizārī Quhistānī was the first post-Alamūt Nizārī Ismaili to use Sufi terminology such as *khānaqāh*, *darvīsh* (dervish), *qalandar* (wandering dervish) as well as *pīr* and *murshid*, terms used by Sufis in reference to their spiritual

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<sup>12</sup> F. Daftary, ‘Ismā‘īlī-Sufi Relations in Early Post-Alamūt and Safavid Persia’, in L. Lewisohn and D. Morgan, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism: Volume III, Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501–1750)* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 275–289; reprinted in his *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies* (London, 2005), pp. 183–203; idem, ‘Khayrkhwāh-i Harātī and the Post-Mongol Revival in Nizārī Ismaili Literary Activities in Persia’, in M. A. Amir-Moezzi, ed., *Raison et quête de la sagesse. Hommage à Christian Jambet* (Turnhout, 2020), pp. 215–227 and H. Landolt, ‘Aṭṭār, Sufism and Ismailism’, in L. Lewisohn and C. Shackle, ed., *Aṭṭār and the Persian Sufi Tradition: The Art of Spiritual Flight* (London, 2006), pp. 3–27.

<sup>13</sup> Nadia Eboo Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols: Nizārī Quhistānī and the Continuity of Ismaili Tradition in Persia* (London, 2002), especially pp. 57–146.

guide.<sup>14</sup> Maḥmūd-i Shabistārī produced his *Gulshan-i rāz*, in 717/1317, in reply to a number of questions put to him on Sufi teachings by a Sufi master in Herat. This treatise gained much popularity in Sufi circles, and numerous commentaries have been written on it. However, the Nizārī Ismailis of Persia and Central Asia consider this work part of their own literary heritage and, as such, it was commented upon in Persian by at least one Nizārī author. This anonymous Ismaili commentary consists of esoteric interpretations (*ta'wīlāt*) of selected verses of the *Gulshan-i rāz*.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of their close relationship with Sufism in post-Alamūt times, the Nizārī Ismailis have regarded some of the most prominent mystic poets of Persia as their co-religionists, and selections of their works have been preserved by the Persian-speaking Nizārī communities of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Persia. Among these appropriated personalities, mention may be made of Sanā'ī (d. ca. 535/1140), Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. ca. 627/1230), and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273).<sup>16</sup> The Nizārīs of Badakhshān, now divided between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, also regard 'Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī as a co-religionist. This celebrated Central Asian Sufi master and author emigrated to Persia and died there around 661/1262. His Sufi treatise entitled *Zubdat al-ḥaqā'iq* has been preserved in Badakhshān as an Ismaili work.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>14</sup> Nizārī Quhistānī, *Dīwān*, ed. M. Muṣaffā (Tehran, 1371–1373 Sh./1992–1994), vol. 1, pp. 583–584, 617, 632–633, 634–635, 642–643, 660, 674–675, 724–725, 753–754, 795, 860, 866, 880, 881, 966–968, 994–995, 1359–1360. See also L. Lewisohn, 'Sufism and Ismā'īlī Doctrine in the Persian Poetry of Nizārī Quhistānī (645–721/1247–1321)', *Iran*, 41 (2003), pp. 229–251.

<sup>15</sup> An early critical edition of Shabistārī's work, together with a prose English version, was produced by Edward H. Whinfield (1836–1922) under the title of *Gulshan i Raz: The Mystic Rose Garden* (London, 1880). The anonymous Ismaili commentary, entitled *Ba'dī az ta'wīlāt-i Gulshan-i Rāz*, has been edited and translated into French by Henry Corbin in his *Trilogie Ismaélienne* (Tehran and Paris, 1961), text pp. 131–161, translation pp. 1–174.

<sup>16</sup> W. Ivanow, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran, 1963), pp. 129–131, 164, 185, and idem, 'Sufism and Ismailism: *Chirāgh-nāma*', *Revue Iranienne d'Anthropologie*, 3 (1338 Sh./1959), pp. 53–70.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Bertel's and M. Bakoev, *Alphabetic Catalogue of Manuscripts found by 1959–1963 Expedition in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region* (Moscow, 1967), pp. 63–64, 81–82 and F. Daftary, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies* (London, 2004), p. 166.

Nizārī Ismailis of Persia, Afghanistan and Central Asia have continued to use verses of these and other mystic poets of the Iranian world in their social and religious ceremonies.

By the middle of the 9th/15th century, the Nizārī Ismaili imams had established their seat at the village of Anjudān near Qum and Maḥallāt in central Persia, initiating the so-called Anjudān revival in Nizārī *da'wa* and literary activities.<sup>18</sup> Taking advantage of the changing religio-political milieu of post-Mongol Persia, including the spread of 'Alid loyalism and Shi'ī tendencies through Sufi orders, the imams now successfully began to reorganise and reinvigorate their *da'wa* activities to win new converts and reassert their central authority over various Nizārī communities. However, the Nizārīs were still obliged, in Sunni-majority Persia, to observe *taqiyya* under the guise of Sufism.

The Anjudān period in Nizārī history, lasting until the end of the 11th/17th century, also witnessed a revival in the literary activities of the Nizārīs. In the context of Ismaili-Sufi relations during the Anjudān period, valuable details are preserved in the *Pandiyāt-i javānmardī* (Admonitions on Spiritual Chivalry), containing the religious sermons of Imam Mustanṣir bi'llāh (II), the first Nizārī imam who established his residence in Anjudān and died there in 885/1480.<sup>19</sup> Permeated with Sufi ideas, the imam's admonitions in the *Pandiyāt* start with the *sharī'at-ṭarīqat-ḥaqīqat* categorisation of the Sufis, and depicting *ḥaqīqat* as the *bāṭin* of *sharī'at* which could be attained by the faithful (*mu'minīn*) through the spiritual path or *ṭarīqat*. Other doctrinal works of the period were written by Abū Ishāq Quhistānī (d. after 904/1498) and Khayrkhwāh-i Harātī (d. after 960/1553), among others.

By the time of the establishment of Safavid rule, the Shi'ī milieu of Persia had developed significantly, although Persia and adjacent regions still remained mainly Sunni. At any rate, the founder of the Safavid dynasty, as noted, adopted Twelver Shi'ism as the official religion of his realm. However, it took more than a century to transform the initial

<sup>18</sup> F. Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 170–177.

<sup>19</sup> Mustanṣir bi'llāh, *Pandiyāt-i javānmardī*, ed. and tr. W. Ivanow (Leiden, 1953). See also Shafique N. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 122–126, 140 ff., 159–164, 180–182.

extremist, eclectic Safavid form of Shi'ism into what could be designated as the 'orthodox' Twelver form of Shi'i Islam; and all this renaissance of Shi'ism occurred with the help of the Twelver jurists brought to Persia from Arab lands, notably Jabal 'Āmil (in today's Lebanon), Iraq and Bahrain. It is also to be noted that the early Safavids soon adopted persecutionary policies against all Shi'i communities or Shi'i-related popular movements that fell outside the confines of Twelver Shi'ism, in addition to suppressing the majority of the Sufi orders.

It was under such circumstances that by the time of Shah 'Abbās I (r. 995–1038/1587–1629), the greatest member of the dynasty who established his capital at Iṣfahān, the Persian Ismailis had widely and successfully adopted what was the now 'politically correct' Twelver Shi'ism as another form of disguise. Needless to add that in due course, the bulk of the Persian Nizārī Ismailis were in fact assimilated into the Twelver Shi'i milieu of their surroundings. Meanwhile, Zaydī rule in the Caspian regions of northern Persia was ended in 1000/1592 by the Safavids, by which time all Zaydī communities in the Caspian provinces as well as in the Persian regions of Rayy, Fārs and Khurāsān had also disintegrated or converted to Twelver Shi'ism.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the highly complex and gradual process of the 'Shi'itisation' of Sunni Persia, initiated during the early post-Mongol times, eventually led to the emergence of Twelver Shi'ism as the prevailing religion of Persia – a position retained into modern times, making Iran the single most important Twelver Shi'i country of the world.

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<sup>20</sup> For a brief history of Zaydī Shi'ism in the Caspian regions, see F. Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam* (London, 2013), pp. 151–162.

**PART ONE**

**ISMAILISM IN THE CONTEXT OF  
SHI'Ī-SUFI COALESCENCE**



## A Reconsideration of Post-Alamūt Nizārī Ismaili Literature in Iran: Prose and Poetry

*S. J. Badakhchani*

The remarkable Ismaili tradition of producing religious literature in both prose and poetry, despite a lessening of momentum after the fall of Alamūt, continued to be a dynamic mean of expressing the religious identity, the tenets of faith, the history and above all of highlighting the lineage of the Nizārī Ismaili imams. With reference to new discoveries in the field, this study aims at producing a brief survey of the bulk of post-Alamūt Nizārī Ismaili literature in the Persian language and introduces a hitherto unknown compendium of poetry by the 11th/17th-century Iranian Ismaili poet known as Darvīsh Quṭb al-Dīn.

In general terms, the Ismaili written heritage, has not enjoyed treatment equal to the majority of the Muslim written heritage of which it constitutes an important part. In the eventful course of Ismaili history, the main repositories of their literature were destroyed twice: first by the Ayyubids, under the command of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn at the fall of the Fatimid caliphate in 567/1171,<sup>1</sup> and again by Hülegü the Mongol warlord at the fall of Alamūt in 654/1256.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the Fatimids, the celebrated Ismaili *dā'ī* al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, foreseeing the volatile political conditions that were to come, or

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<sup>1</sup> Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn founded the Ayyubid dynasty in Egypt in 569/1174 and ordered the destruction of the Dār al-'Ilm and the renowned Fatimid libraries. For details see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 253–254.

<sup>2</sup> On Hülegü's confrontation with the Nizārī Ismailis, see Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, pp. 380–402 and Shīrīn Bayānī, *Dīn va dawlat dar Īrān-i 'ahd-i Muḡhul* (Tehran, 1367 Sh./1988), vol. 1, pp. 196–256.



perhaps seeking to elevate and strengthen the Ismaili mission, transferred part of the Ismaili literature to Yemen which at the time was governed by the Ṣulayḥids as part of the Fatimid empire.<sup>3</sup> This collection seems to have been preserved up to the present time among the Musta'lian Ismailis.<sup>4</sup> The Nizārī Ismailis on the other hand, possessing invincible fortresses, did not take the precautionary measure of transferring their written heritage to an alternative safe place and consequently when they surrendered to the Mongols a sizable bulk of their written heritage was put to the fire.<sup>5</sup>

At the turn of the 7th/13th century, the Ismaili imam, Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥasan (d. 618/1221), in his effort to improve good relations with neighbouring Sunni rulers, forged a rapprochement with the Abbasid caliphate, ordered his followers to abide by the prescripts of Sunni religious law and in the process invited Sunni dignitaries from Qazvīn, the city closest to Alamūt, to inspect its library and destroy any books that in their opinion did not conform with their theology. As a result, a great number of treatises in support of the Nizārī Ismaili teachings composed by Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124), Jalāl al-Dīn's father, Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad II (d. 607/1210) and his grandfather Ḥasan II, better known as *'alā dikrihi'l-salām* (d. 561/1166) were destroyed.<sup>6</sup> Thus in all these cases, apart from any social or political motives, it seems that annihilation of the Ismaili written heritage by their opponents was considered an act of piety.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For al-Mu'ayyad's close relationship with the Ismaili mission in Yemen, see Daftary, *The Ismā'ilis*, pp. 203–207.

<sup>4</sup> In recent years a substantial part of this collection was donated to the Ismaili Special Collections Unit of The Institute of Ismaili Studies, now housed at the Aga Khan Centre. For more information and catalogues of the works see: 1) Delia Cortese, *Arabic Ismaili Manuscripts: The Zāhid 'Alī Collection in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London, 2003), and 2) François de Blois, *Arabic, Persian and Gujarati Manuscripts: The Hamdani Collection in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Aṭā Malik b. Muḥammad Juwaynī, *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushā*, ed. M. Qazvīnī (Leiden, 1912–1917), vol. 3, pp. 269–270.

<sup>6</sup> Juwaynī, *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushā*, vol. 3, p. 244.

<sup>7</sup> The case of the Fatimids and the annihilation of their written heritage has resulted in some controversy since it was not considered an official act and was executed gradually. For details, see Fozia Bora, 'Did Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Destroy the Fatimid Books: A Historiographical Enquiry', *JRAS*, 25 (2014), pp. 21–39. For the case of Nizārī Ismailis, see Juwaynī, *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushā*, vol. 3, p. 270.

There are, however, other factors that have played a decisive role in limiting the production of the Ismaili written heritage: the first in the order of importance, and a classical one, would be the alternation between the periods of concealment (*satr*) and those of manifestation (*kashf*). In a period of *satr*, direct communication between the imam and his followers was severed, the imam's identity being known only to a few trusted members of the community, and consequently his followers had to practise religious dissimulation (*taqiyya*). In this context we need to look at the corollaries of *satr* and *taqiyya* which at times had a positive effect on the production of religious literature and at others a negative one. The positive corresponds to those times when the community was striving to gain political power, as in the case of the pre-Fatimid Ismailis and the beginning of the Nizārī Ismaili mission in Iran, when there was a surge in the production of the written heritage. The negative effect appeared when the community was defeated politically and an 'obligatory' *satr* and *taqiyya* was enforced. It was during such a period that a tradition of oral transmission of religious knowledge arose and became the main channel of communication and, as might be expected, the slightest resemblance in the work of a famous scholar to Ismaili tenets of faith would be sufficient reason to consider it as an Ismaili work compiled under the disguise of religious dissimulation.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from the points highlighted above, we can add another two factors that played a role in the production of the Nizārī Ismaili written heritage of post-Alamūt times. The first would be a consequence of the Mongol invasion and the simultaneous fall of Alamūt and Baghdad within a short span of time resulting in the diminishment if not the end of Abbasid political power, when the arena of Sunni theological writing contracted and the surviving written heritage of the Nizārī Ismailis in a

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<sup>8</sup> The subject requires detailed study which is beyond the scope of the present article. Famous poets and scholars like Rūdakī, Firdawsī, Kasā'ī, Khayyām, Sanā'ī, Sa'dī, Jalāl al-Dīn Balkhī (Mawlānā), as well as Ibn Sīnā, al-Shahrastānī and Afḍal al-Dīn Kāshānī, to name but a few, are included in the list. In a number of cases the resemblance is compelling and such assumptions may not be utterly implausible. The case of Mawlānā is an exemplar since his devotion to Shams-i Tabrīz is well known and indisputable, and Shams, according to the oral tradition of the Iranian Ismailis, is in fact their 28th imam. For a general overview on the subject, see 'Aṭā Allāh Tadayyūn, *Mawlānā wa ṭūfān-i Shams* (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), pp. 558–584.

subtle manner was claimed by various Sufi circles, by Twelver Shi'ism<sup>9</sup> and, in some cases, utilised as a substratum of thought by religious movements that appeared at this time.<sup>10</sup> The second phenomenon is interpolation, carelessness and defective corrections by the scribes. Take for example a qualified Nizārī Ismaili author who wrote a treatise, or in rare cases a book. For some reason the original copy cannot be traced, the scribe rarely mentions preparing his copy from the original and consequently among the existing manuscripts of the same work one can hardly find two closely similar copies. Manuscript variants and interpolations are so numerous that when W. Ivanow (1886–1970) started his pioneering work of editing Persian Nizārī Ismaili texts, in the majority of cases, he preferred to correct them, that is, in a way producing another manuscript of the text.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> To name a few, the *Āghāz wa anjām* and *Akhlāq-i Muhtashamī* by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and some of the works by Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahraṣṭānī such as *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* and *Majlis-i maktūb-i Khwārazm*.

<sup>10</sup> Shīrīn Bayānī. *Dīn va dawlat*, vol. 1, p. 256 and Abbas Amanat's remark: 'The dynamics of dissent inherent in Ismailism could not have remained dormant infinitely, however. The eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries witnessed one of the most intense, yet diffuse, phases of "heterodox" resurgence in the Iranian world, with doctrinal features and political consequences akin to Nizari Ismailism. Ranging from Ni'mat Allāhi and Nurbakhshi Sufi orders to Hurufi and Nuqtavi heresies, these movements shared a doctrinal pattern founded on the ideas of cyclical renewal of sacred time, anticipation of a messianic advent, and hermeneutical (*batīnī*) interpretation of the text'; see Abbas Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism* (London, 2009), p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> Continuing the remarkable efforts of W. Ivanow (1888–1970), after joining The Institute of Ismaili Studies in 1979, and while organising its library and teaching various courses, the editing and translation of Alamūt and post-Alamūt Nizārī Ismaili written heritage became part of my own assignments. Circumstances then also gave me the opportunity to edit and translate all the major Ismaili works of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, namely the *Sayr va sulūk* as *Contemplation and Action* (London 1998); the *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* as *Paradise of Submission* (London, 2005), and a collection of his short treatises, namely the *Āghāz wa anjām*, *Tawallā wa tabarrā* and *Maṭlūb al-mu'minīn* as *Shi'i Interpretations of Islam* (London, 2010). Further, Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib's compendium of poems known as 'Poems of the Resurrection' (*Dīwān-i Qā'imīyyāt*) was published in 2011 and his prose treatise known as *Haft bāb* was published as *Spiritual Resurrection in Shi'i Islam* in 2017. For the new edition of *Haft bāb*, 30 manuscripts were consulted, compared with 19 for Ivanow's edition and the final text was based on 6 manuscripts. For more information see my introduction to *Spiritual Resurrection in Shi'i Islam: An Early Ismaili Treatise on the Doctrine of Qiyāmat* (London, 2017), pp. 37–42.

In the Persian-speaking territories, that is, Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and the northern provinces of Pakistan, for almost 100 years – apart from the works of Nizārī Quhistānī (d. 720/1320) who seems to have been well informed about Ismaili teachings and actually was born around the last years of Alamūt period – we do not have any literary work worth mentioning. It was in the second half of the 7th/13th century, that Qāsim Shāh, the 31st imam authorised Abū Ishāq-i Quhistānī to produce a book on the Ismaili mission (*daʿwat*). Entitled the *Haft bāb-i Abū Ishāq* this work soon became the source for a number of books and treatises produced at the time of the rise of the Safavid dynasty and the beginning of the renaissance of Shiʿī Islam, when the Nizārī Ismaili imams had also regained sufficient political power to revive the community and establish themselves in Anjudān.<sup>12</sup> The appearance of *Haft bāb-i Abū Ishāq* meant that the period of *satr* or concealment of the Nizārī Ismaili imams, begun at the fall of Alamūt in 654/1256, was practically over.

Farhad Daftary in his comprehensive work, *Ismaili Literature*, classifies the Nizārī Ismaili written heritage of the post-Alamūt period into four main categories, namely, the Persian, the Badakhshānī or Central Asian, the Syrian and the South Asian, and highlights the obstacles that the Nizārī Ismailis were facing in the production of their literature.<sup>13</sup> This classification defines the scope of the present paper, which is concerned with the Persian and Central Asian production, since the Arabic and a large component of the Nizārī Ismaili literature produced in various vernacular languages of South Asia have their own story which cannot be covered here.

### **The scope and extent of Persian Nizārī Ismaili literature**

In 1997, while preparing a tentative list of the Nizārī Ismaili literature in Persian by comparing almost all the bibliographical sources available

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<sup>12</sup> For more information, see Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs*, pp. 422–442.

<sup>13</sup> Daftary, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies* (London, 2004), pp. 61–62.

at the time,<sup>14</sup> an inventory containing 224 titles was compiled. The list included extant original manuscripts or their photocopies housed at the library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS); titles whose existence were somehow certain but which had not yet been procured by the IIS library, doubtful titles and titles that had been recorded but whose whereabouts are not known and titles that may not be genuine Ismaili works. Out of 224 titles, 51 belonged to the Alamūt and the rest to the post-Alamūt period, of which 22 titles are specifically in praise of Ismaili imams. Although an updated catalogue of Persian Ismaili works held at the Ismaili Special Collections Unit of the IIS has not yet been published, from a tentative survey of the existing works and being mindful of the on-going discovery of new titles, the inventory of Persian Ismaili literature may well exceed three hundred titles.<sup>15</sup>

### **Content, Reflection of Faith and Religious Identity**

Having at our disposal reliable editions of the Ismaili literature of the Alamūt period and Ivanow's edition of the *Haft bāb-i Abū Ishāq* that reflects the main trend of the Ismaili teachings of the post-Alamūt period, it is possible to confirm that there were no major changes in the basic tenets of faith and the religious identity of the Nizārī Ismailis. A brief scrutiny of the contents of *Haft bāb-i Abū Ishāq* shows that not only is it a reiteration, but sometimes an elaboration and commentary upon two major works composed during the Alamūt period, namely the *Haft bāb* of Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*. The only genuine addition in Abū Ishāq's work is the description of the ceremonies of the *qiyāma*, an event that took place at Alamūt in

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<sup>14</sup> The main bibliographical sources at the time were Ivanow's *Guide to Ismaili Literature* (London, 1933) and his *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran, 1963); *Fihrist al-Majdū'* by Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Rasūl al-Ujjainī (Tehran, 1344 Sh./1966), Appendix iii, pp. 305–352 provides a list of 1344 titles out of which 122 are in the Persian language; A.E. Bertel's and M. Bakaev, *Alphabetic Catalogue of Manuscripts found by 1959-1963 Expedition in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region* (Moscow, 1967) and Ismail K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature* (Malibu, CA, 1977).

<sup>15</sup> This inventory did not include small fragments and a substantial number of Blessed Directives (*ta'liqa-yi mubārak*) issued by the imams after their migration to the Subcontinent.

559/1164.<sup>16</sup> The interpolations, in the majority of cases, were aimed at presenting the work as a counter-balance to Twelver Shi'ī religious manuals (*Risāla-yi 'amaliyya*).<sup>17</sup> Examples of this approach are visible in the various manuscripts of Abū Ishāq's work. The Ismaili Special Collection Unit holds eight manuscripts of the text, and earlier copies are in tune with the Alamūt style of authorship without interpolations, but later copies contain detailed additional material that gives the work a new outlook. To highlight the point, a cursory word-count of two chapters in the existing manuscripts of the *Haft bāb* is given below:

Catalogue number	Date	Chapter One	Chapter Four
MS BT 270	1968	124 lines, 928 words	96 lines, 846 words
MS BT 118	No date	134 lines, 1206 words	109 lines, 981 words
MS BA 229	1989	114 lines, 1250 words	111 lines, 1124 words
MS BA 63	No date	124 lines, 1488 words	114 lines, 1368 words
MS BA <sub>3</sub>	1903	112 lines, 1120 words	158 lines, 1422 words
MS BA 48	1870	138 lines, 1074 words	223 lines, 1784 words
MS BA 107	No date	217 lines, 1736 words	185 lines, 1665 words
MS BT 117	No date	123 lines, 1107 words	102 lines, 918 words
MS 60	1935	257 lines, 3598 words	112 lines, 1568 words

<sup>16</sup> *Haft bāb-i Bū Ishāq*, ed. and tr. W. Ivanow (Bombay, 1959), pp. 40–42.

<sup>17</sup> In a broad sense, if we consider Twelver Shi'ism as a representative of juristic and Ismailism of gnostic Islam, then, *Haft bāb-i Abū Ishāq* can be considered as a religious manual or handbook, similar to the religious manuals of the *marāji'-i taqlīd* authorities in Twelver Shi'ism.

The word-count<sup>18</sup> comparison shows that chapter one in BT 270 has 928 words, while it has 3598 in MS 60 and chapter four in BT 270 has 846 words, while it has 1784 words in BA 48.

In the preamble to his edition of Abū Ishāq's work Ivanow speaks of its close resemblance to *Kalām-i pīr*, a text by Khayrkhwāh Harātī, a prolific writer and poet who unscrupulously plagiarised the writings of Abū Ishāq and to enhance the work's authenticity attributed its authorship to Nāṣir-i Khusraw.<sup>19</sup> In the matter of attribution Ivanow is correct, but a comparison of *Kalām-i pīr* with eight manuscripts of Abū Ishāq's work tells a different story about the plagiarising of the contents. Undoubtedly, the main skeleton of both the *Haft bāb-i Abū Ishāq* and the *Kalām-i pīr* comes from al-Ṭūsī's *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* and Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd's *Haft bāb*.<sup>20</sup> The popularity of the *Haft bāb* by Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd, which was composed during the imamate of Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad II, was probably later suppressed due to it being *qiyāma* literature. But in the month of Sha'bān 633/April 1236, after almost fifty years, permission was given to the chief *dā'ī* Muẓaffar b. Mu'ayyad to read the sacred chapters (*Fuṣūl-i muqaddas*) of Ḥasan 'alā dhikrihi al-salām,<sup>21</sup> and this probably paved the way for the return of the *Haft bāb* to the main arena of Ismaili scholarship. The popularity of *Haft bāb-i Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd* was further enhanced when al-Ṭūsī incorporated large segments of it in the *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*<sup>22</sup> and introduced it as a work of reference in theological matters.

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<sup>18</sup> Since page size and the writing style of each scribe differs, I have counted the number of lines per chapter, multiplied by the average number of words per line, therefore figures are approximate.

<sup>19</sup> Ivanow, preface to *Haft bāb-i Bū Ishāq* (Bombay, 1959).

<sup>20</sup> Based on newly found manuscripts of the *Haft bāb-i Bū Ishāq* which are compared with the *Haft bāb-i Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd* and the Ismaili writings of Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, I have prepared a new edition and English translation of the *Haft bāb of Abū Ishāq*, in which Abū Ishāq's sources are highlighted. This is to be published in the *Ismaili Texts and Translations* series of The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

<sup>21</sup> See Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, *Dīwān-i Qā'imīyyāt* (Tehran, 1395 Sh./2016), ode 90, pp. 251–253.

<sup>22</sup> al-Ṭūsī, *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*, ed. and tr. by S. J. Badakhchani as *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought* (London, 2005), pp. 136, 191–194.

In the aftermath of the fall of Alamūt, it seems that a new style of authorship developed among the Persian-speaking Ismailis of the Quhistān and Badakhshān regions who were left with only a handful of reliable texts from their ancestors and the *Haft bāb* of Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd, due to its unsophisticated language became the main source of their compilations. According to Ivanow, Abū Ishāq compiled his *Haft bāb* towards the beginning of 10th/16th century, during the imamate of Gharīb Mirzā, that is, Mustanṣir bi'llah III (d. 904/1498).<sup>23</sup> The fact that this work was itself based on the writings of Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd, allowed Khayrkhwāh to improve on it without any intentional forgery; in other words, by adding further material that he felt was important to his milieu, he produced an updated version of the book. Among the eight manuscripts entitled *Haft bāb-i Abū Ishāq*, MS 60 also starts in so different a fashion that it cannot be said to be a copy of either *Kalām-i pīr* or the *Haft bāb* of Abū Ishāq. As has been pointed out, the only original segment in Abū Ishāq's work is his description of the *qiyāma* ceremonies. This segment is summarised in MS 60 and partly deleted in the *Kalām-i pīr* which leads us to conclude that apart from the possibility of being a copy, there are also some versions like *Kalām-i pīr* and MS 60, which it would be more appropriate to speak of as independent works or editions with amendments to Abū Ishāq's work.

Having briefly touched upon some features of the post-Alamūt Nizārī Ismaili literature, it would be appropriate here to mention a unique component of the bulk of this collection that deals with eulogy, praise and exaltation of the imams. As mentioned earlier in the listings of Nizārī Ismaili literature, there are 22 odes in praise of the imams which differ remarkably from those of the Fatimid and Alamūt periods. If we take the eulogies by Ibn Hānī'<sup>24</sup> and Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i

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<sup>23</sup> In the oldest manuscript at our disposal, MS BA48, f. 20, the author specifically mentions that he met the Ismaili imam, Qāsim Shāh and was appointed by him as a *ma'dhūn* to write works. But the composition of the book actually took place after the imam's demise.

<sup>24</sup> Muḥammad b. Hānī' al-Andalusī al-Azdī (d. 362/973), was the chief court poet to the Fatimid Imam-caliph, al-Mu'izz.



Kātib<sup>25</sup> as representatives of the Fatimid and Alamūt periods, we find many exaggerated expressions, while the post-Alamūt odes serve instead as historical narratives and occasionally end up with the reiteration of the names of the imams up to the one contemporary with the poet. Information of this nature could be used for substantiating dates, the real names of the imams and above all the trend towards using Sufi terminology that found its way into the Nizārī Ismaili written heritage.

The inroads made by Sufi terminology were indeed concomitant to the close relationship the Ismaili imams had with Sufi circles after the Mongol invasion and the revival of Twelver Shi'i juristic Islam. A good example of this phenomenon in the post-Alamūt Nizārī Ismaili written heritage would be the hitherto unknown compendium of poetry by Darvīsh Quṭb al-Dīn of Yahn, a village some 50 kilometres from Bīrjand in southern Khurāsān. Little is known about his life apart from certain oral traditions and the recording of his name as a major Ismaili *dā'i* in 11th/17th-century Quhistān.<sup>26</sup> Three manuscripts of the text are currently available. It is a compilation of approximately 2300 lines of poetry arranged in semi-*ghazal* style with seven lines in each *ghazal*. The terminology follows a hermeneutic style of expression. Without a background knowledge of Ismaili teachings, it is difficult to decipher an Ismaili orientation here. As an example, the text and translation of a *ghazal* from the oldest manuscript, which seems to be the autograph copy, is reproduced here. In this poem, Darvīsh not only re-caps Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ's doctrine of *ta'lim* (in the last couplet), but also describes a specific type of relationship that exists between the imam and his followers which is invoked repeatedly in the *Qā'imīyyāt* of Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib.

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<sup>25</sup> Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib was contemporary with three imams of the Alamūt period, that is, Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad II, Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥasan and 'Alā al-Dīn Muḥammad. For more information on him see my introduction to the *Dīwān-i Qā'imīyyāt*, pp. 7–20.

<sup>26</sup> *Qaṣīda-yi Maḥmūd dar Madḥ-i dā'iyān*, scribe Ghiyāth al-Dīn Mīrshāhī, Ismaili Special Collections Unit, Acc. No 14708 (به جو درویش قطب الدین که در یهن است قطب) (دین طریقت دان حقیقت بین، چه غم از خارجی دارم). 'Look for Darvīsh Quṭb al-Dīn who is the pole of faith in Yahn. He knows the path, he sees the truth. How can (our) enemies cause (us) grief?'

آنها که آشنائی خود با خدا کنند  
آیا بود که پیش خدا یاد ما کنند  
پرواز داده از قفس جسم مرغ روح  
منزل فراز عالم لا منتها کنند  
آن قوم از عنایت لطف خدای خویش  
در دم سما زمین و زمین را سما کنند  
یابند اگر ز جانب جانان اشارتی  
فی الحال جان خود به تمامی فدا کنند  
مستی کنند بر سر کویش ز شوق او  
دانی که در حریم وصالش چه ها کنند  
با خویش تا به چند نشینیم بی ملال  
ایشان مگر که ما و من از هم جدا کنند  
کس قطب الدین بخود بخدا آشنا نشد  
ایشان مگر ترا به خدا آشنا کنند

Will it be possible for those who recognise God  
To remember us in His presence?

They who have liberated the bird of [their] soul from the cage of  
the body,  
Are denizens of the higher world!

In one breath, by Divine Grace and Bounty,  
They can change heaven into earth and earth into heaven! [and],

If they receive but an indication from the Beloved,  
Instantly, they sacrifice their soul for it entire!

Within His precincts they ecstatically yearn for Him,  
Imagine what they will do within the sanctity of His union!

On our own, how long shall we sit unafflicted [by our isolation],  
Could it happen that they separate the 'I' and 'us'?

O Quṭb al-Dīn, no one on his own can recognise God,  
Unless they familiarise you with God.



## The Scent of the Scarlet Pimpernels: Ismaili Leaders of the 11th/17th Century\*

Shafiqe N. Virani

*A servant of 'Alī, king of men, am I. What have I to fear of his foe?  
Submissive to God's command am I. What have I to fear of a rebel?  
Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī*

### A. Introduction: The Scarlet Pimpernel and the Ismaili *Dā'īs*

*'The Scarlet Pimpernel?' said Suzanne, with a merry laugh. 'Why! what a droll name! What is the Scarlet Pimpernel, Monsieur?' She looked at Sir Andrew with eager curiosity. The young man's face had become almost transfigured. His eyes shone with enthusiasm; hero-worship, love, admiration for his leader seemed literally to glow upon his face. 'The Scarlet Pimpernel, Mademoiselle,' he said at last 'is the name of a humble English wayside flower; but it is also the name chosen to hide the identity of the best and bravest man in all the world, so that he may better succeed in accomplishing the noble task he has set himself to do.'*

Baroness Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*<sup>1</sup>

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\* This article is dedicated to the memory of Mīrzā Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Ghaffār (d. ca. 1305/1887) of the village of Sidih, near Bīrjand. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Faquir M. Hunzai, the late Dr Janis Esots, Dr Rahim Gholami and Russell Harris for their valuable and detailed input on a draft of this article, to Dr Maryam Mu'izzī for her kind correspondence and sharing the material she had available, and to Kiana Mozayyan Esfahani, Parnian Haeri Hindi, Seoren A'Garous and Pouya Ebrahimi for their excellent insights.

<sup>1</sup> (New York, n.d.), pp. 35–36.

In 1939, Wladimir Ivanow wrote, 'The Bāṭinī (i.e., Ismaili) *dā'ī* already at an early date becomes a prominent figure in the annals of Islam' and the redoubtable Russian author went on to paint a vivid picture of how their foes depicted these Ismaili emissaries or 'inviters':

As elusive and omnipresent as the 'Scarlet Pimpernel', as malicious, ruthlessly cruel, and unscrupulous in farfetched diabolical schemes as the leader of a criminal gang in any detective best seller, as superhumanly clever, brave, persevering, and daring as any detective hero of the best American cinema film, — the *dā'ī* appears as the chief 'villain of the plot', responsible for many failures and defeats which the corrupt and incapable Abbasid administration had to suffer.<sup>2</sup>

Naturally, Ismaili depictions of their *dā'īs* contrast sharply with this kind of characterisation. For example, in his treatise on the etiquette expected of Ismailis in leadership positions, al-Nisābūrī (fl. ca. 4th/10th century) provides extensive details on the conduct of the *dā'īs*:

We hold that the *dā'ī* must be firmly grounded in the principles of the religion to which he invites with a sincerity and certainty untainted or mixed with another purpose, loyal to the Imam for whom he appeals and to the Messenger who is the foundation of the religion on whom, to whom, and by whom the invitation is based. . . . He should be God-fearing in his piety and that cannot happen without knowledge of both the exterior and the interior. . . . The *dā'ī* must be chaste and upright. It is as God said: 'The good word ascends unto Him and the pious deed exalts it' (Q 35: 10). . . . He must be kind to the believers, merciful and forgiving. As God has said: 'We sent you not but as a mercy for the worlds' (Q 21: 108). . . . A *dā'ī* should be humble, not haughty with the believers. . . ., intelligent, with a perfect wisdom and knowledge. . . ., generous and not miserly. . . ., truthful in what he says. . . ., chivalrous, for chivalry is an aspect of faith. . . ., modest, for modesty is also a part of faith. . . ., sound of opinion and skilled in administration. . . ., and firm in his word, for religion is the fulfilment of the covenant. He must keep secret what is secret. Religion is based on the preservations of secrets that need

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<sup>2</sup> Wladimir Ivanow, 'The Organization of the Fatimid Propaganda', *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, New Series, 15 (1939), p. 1.

to be kept from those who are not worthy of them. If the secrets are lost, religion is lost. At times, the divulging of a secret connected to a matter of religion has led to the destruction of a nation or the ruin of a province.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the dramatic contrast between the two depictions, a common feature is the emphasis on the exercise of discretion and prudence by the *dā'īs*, not drawing attention to themselves and maintaining secrecy when necessary, particularly when working in hostile milieus.<sup>4</sup>

In Ivanow's words, the *dā'ī* was something of a 'Scarlet Pimpernel', the hidden protagonist of Baroness Orczy's perennial bestselling novels. In these tales as much as the Pimpernel is admired and adored by his proteges who help him save victims from the guillotine, he is feared and despised by the French revolutionaries. Notably, his symbol was 'a humble English wayside flower', a plant as inconspicuous as it is anonymous. Ivanow's reference also imaginatively depicts, unsurprisingly, how little we know about the lives of even some of the most distinguished Ismaili luminaries. As the eminent Islamicist Henry Corbin wrote with regard to the Ismailis, 'Over the course of centuries, the secret was so well kept that the names of great thinkers and titles of monumental works remain completely absent from our repertoires.'<sup>5</sup>

Detailed information on the community's dignitaries is rare in Ismaili literature, and in this respect, the 11th/17th-century poem examined here is unusual. Written by a certain Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī, the work

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<sup>3</sup> Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Naysābūrī, *al-Risāla al-mūjaza al-kāfiya fī ādāb al-du'āt*, ed. and tr. Verena Klemm and Paul E. Walker as *A Code of Conduct: A Treatise on the Etiquette of the Fatimid Ismaili Mission* (London, 2011), pp. 27–36 (Arabic), 49–55 (English). Translation slightly modified. On the meaning of Q 35: 10, see Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, ed. Ghulām Riḍā A'wānī (Tehran, 1398/1977), p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> For example, in describing the departure of a *dā'ī* and his disciple from a religious gathering, Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 346/957) wrote, 'Then the two of them took their leave and left together, cautiously and in secret', Ja'far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *al-Ālim wa'l-ghulām*, ed. and tr. James Winston Morris as *The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialogue* (London, 2001), p. 115 (English).

<sup>5</sup> Henry Corbin, 'Étude préliminaire', in Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Kitāb-e Jami' al-Hikmatain: Le livre réunissant les deux sagesse; ou harmonie de la philosophie Grecque et de la théosophie Ismaélienne*, ed. Henry Corbin and M. Mo'in (Tehran and Paris, 1953), p. 4, my translation. All translations are by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

invokes dozens of the poet's contemporaries who were in positions of community leadership dispersed across many lands: 'I shall speak the name of every guide (*rahbar*), of the teachers (*mu'allim-hā*) of every land.' He enumerates Ismaili notables in locations scattered throughout Khurāsān, Quhistān, Badakhshān, Iraq, Turkistān and Hindūstān, and in this candidness his composition is highly unconventional.<sup>6</sup>

With the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the Muslims adopted diverse interpretations of his message, and various schools emerged. The Imāmī Shi'a accepted the privileged position of the hereditary imams of the Prophet's family, adhering closely to their guidance. Following the death of Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq in 148/765, the Imāmī community divided. Among other groups, one group eventually recognised the imamate of his son Mūsā al-Kāẓim, while others held to al-Ṣādiq's designation of his elder son, Ismā'il al-Mubārak. Over time, the adherents of this elder lineage were designated as Ismailis, while the younger lineage came to be known as the Ithnā'asharīs, or Twelvers, after the occultation of their Twelfth imam. In common with many other Shi'is, the Ismailis championed intellect's role in religion and disavowed exclusively literal understandings of scripture. Thus, their enemies dubbed them the people of inner meaning (*bāṭin*), as opposed to those of outward form (*ẓāhir*).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Of currently extant literature, perhaps only modern works, such as some of the 'Rules of the Shia Imami Ismailia Councils' promulgated in various parts of the world from 1905 onwards, which were the predecessors of the Ismaili 'Constitutions', give details of those appointed to community leadership. See, for example, *Rules of the Shia Imami Ismailia Councils of Kathiawar, Kāṭhiyāvādānī Shīyā Imāmī Īsmāīlīā Kāunsīlnanā kāyadā*, Revised ed. (Rajkot: Alijehan Esmail Virji Madhani J.P. President, Shia Imami Ismaili Kathiawar Supreme Council (Ālijahāṃ Ismail Virajī Mādhanī Je.Pi., President, Shīyā Imāmī Ismailī Kāṭhiyāvād Suprīm Kāunsīl), 1928), F-G, 2–19, which lists the 32 members of the Ismaili Supreme Council of Kathiawar, and 785 locales in the region with an Ismaili presence. With regard to leadership specifically charged with religious guidance, *Rules of the Shia Imami Ismailia Missions of Bombay* (Mumbai, 1922) bears some similarities to Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī's account. Works such as *Khojā Īsmāīlī kelendar ane dīrektārī: 1910* (Mumbai, 1910) are similarly informative about leadership in the community. But even these modern examples, when taken individually, do not have the geographical scope of Khālū Maḥmūd's poem.

<sup>7</sup> It was a name in which many Ismailis took pride. See, for example, Shafique N. Virani, 'The Right Path: A Post-Mongol Persian Ismaili Treatise', *JIS*, 43 (2010), pp. 200, 205, 213.

In 297/909, the Ismaili imam ‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī (d. 322/934) established the Fatimid caliphate. At the height of their power, the Fatimids ruled over much of North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant and Sicily, patronising numerous scientific, literary and artistic endeavours. Following the death of the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mustanşir in 487/1094, there was a succession struggle between two of his sons, Nizār al-Muṣṭafā li-Dīn Allāh and al-Musta’li bi’llāh, leading to a split in the Ismaili community. Shortly before this rupture, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124), one of al-Mustanşir’s most senior dignitaries, successfully had acquired the fortress of Alamūt, which was to become the headquarters of the followers of Imam Nizār.<sup>8</sup> Under the able leadership of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ and his successors, Ismailism spread throughout the domains of its sworn enemies, the Turkish Saljūqs. The Saljūqs governed with the blessing of the Abbasid caliphs, who were now largely reduced to being the titular heads of Sunni Islam. Repeated massacres were perpetrated against Shi‘i Ismaili communities living in the Saljūq empire.<sup>9</sup> They were burned alive or put to the sword in Aleppo, Baṣra, Baghdad, Damascus, Qazvīn, Rayy, Iṣfahān, south Khurāsān and elsewhere. Unable to confront the empire’s considerable military superiority head-on, they defended themselves in their remote fortresses which constituted an independent state both opposed to and within the Saljūq state.<sup>10</sup> However, at the start

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<sup>8</sup> Hasan-i Sabbah held the position of ‘proof (*ḥujja*) in the Ismaili religious hierarchy. See, for example, the work of his near contemporary Muḥammad b. ‘Ubayd Allāh Abu’l-Ma‘ālī, *Bayān al-adyān: Dar sharḥ-i adyān wa madhāhib-i jāhili wa Islām*, ed. ‘Abbās Iqbāl Āshtiyānī and Muḥammad Taqī Dānishpazhūh (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997), p. 55. For more details on his position and activities, see Shafique N. Virani, ‘Alamūt, Ismailism and Khwāja Qāsim Tushtari’s *Recognizing God*’, *SSR*, 2 (2018), pp. 194–197; Farhad Daftary, ‘Hasan-i Sabbah and the Origins of the Nizari Isma‘ili *Da‘wa* and State’, Chapter 7 in his *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies* (London, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> For details and sources, see Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs against the Islamic World* (The Hague, 1955), pp. 78, 85, 88, chart following p. 89, pp. 93–94, 101, 105, 144–146, 215; Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 329–330, 335–336; Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (London, 1967), pp. 50, 52, 70; Bogdan Smarandache, ‘The Franks and the Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs in the Early Crusade Period’, *Al-Masaq*, 24 (2012), pp. 227–231.

<sup>10</sup> On this dynamic, see Hodgson, *Order of Assassins*, pp. 111–112; Daftary, *Ismā‘īlīs*, pp. 328–329. On depictions of the Ismailis at Alamūt, see Shafique N. Virani, ‘An Old Man, a Garden, and an Assembly of Assassins: Legends and Realities of the Nizari Ismaili Muslims’, *Iran* (2021), pp. 1–15 <https://doi.org/10.1080/0578967.2021.1901062>.



of the 7th/13th century the Mongols, an adversary of far greater destructive ability, appeared on the horizon. After these invaders captured Alamūt in 654/1256, they hunted down Ismailis and slaughtered them indiscriminately. The destruction of the Ismaili state ushered in an era so nebulous and hazy that the first half a millennium after the Mongol conquest has had to be classified by researchers under the amorphous title of 'post-Alamūt history'.<sup>11</sup> In the first edition of his landmark work, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, Farhad Daftary echoed the sentiments of earlier scholarship in describing this period as 'the darkest phase' in the annals of the community.<sup>12</sup>

In the wake of this wholesale slaughter, the Ismailis resorted to *taqiyya*, or pious circumspection, to survive.<sup>13</sup> However, as Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī's poem demonstrates, there were different degrees of circumspection, and times when and regions where the community had the wherewithal to be more public about its identity. This was most likely the outcome of policies implemented in the previous century. The writings of Khayrkhwāh-i Harātī (d. after 960/1553) allude to this situation. He explains that hitherto 'a veil was drawn over the visage of truth', but that the imam had now 'allowed the veil to be lifted', permitting written communication.<sup>14</sup> The unpublished poetry

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<sup>11</sup> Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, p. 403; Farhad Daftary, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies* (London, 2004), p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (1st ed., Cambridge, 1990), p. 435. He was preceded in this regard by Edward Irving Howard, *The Shia School of Islam and its Branches, Especially that of the Imamee-Ismailies: A Speech Delivered by E.I. Howard, Esquire, Barrister-at-Law, in the Bombay High Court, in June, 1866*, ed. H. Wynford Barrow (Bombay, 1866); Syed Mujtaba Ali, *The Origin of the Khojāhs and their Religious Life Today* (Bonn, 1936), p. 55; Hamid Algar, 'The Revolt of Āghā Khān Maḥallātī and the Transference of the Ismā'īlī Imamate to India', *Studia Islamica*, 29 (1969), p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> On this phenomenon, see Shafique N. Virani, 'Taqiyya and Identity in a South Asian Community', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 70 (2011) and 'Surviving Persecution: Ismailism and Taqiyyah after the Mongol Invasions', in Leonard Lewisohn and Reza Tabandeh, ed., *Sufis and their Opponents in the Persianate World* (Irvine, CA, 2020), pp. 205–236.

<sup>14</sup> Shafique N. Virani, 'Khayrkhwāh-i Harātī: The Epistle (Risāla)', in Hermann Landolt et al., ed., *An Anthology of Ismaili Literature: A Shi'i Vision of Islam* (London, 2008), pp. 247–249; Shafique N. Virani, 'Khayrkhvāh-i Harātī', *EI3*.

of a certain Ustād Maṣṣūr supports this. Writing in the year 1052/1642 during the reign of Imam Nūr al-Dahr ‘Alī, also known as Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī (d. 1082/1671), he proclaims:

*digar bu-g(u) dhasht ān dawrī kih pinhān būd sirr-i ḥaqq  
sar āmad ḡulmat-i shab-hā bu-shud layl ū nahār āmad*<sup>15</sup>

Passed has the age when God’s secret was hidden

The oppressive darkness has waned. Night has departed and  
day has arrived!

However, such writings were held strictly within the confines of the community and they were not shared with outsiders. Works written in the period immediately preceding Khayrkhwāh’s emphasise prudence and discretion. Thus, in his *Pandiyāt-i javānmardī*, Imam Mustanṣir bi’llāh of Anjudān also known as Gharīb Mirzā (d. 885/1480), cautioned his followers not to reveal the identities of their imams to non-Ismailis.<sup>16</sup> The verses of Ḥusayn, an Ismaili poet and contemporary of this imam, mirror this sentiment: ‘The time has come to express love openly, we expound the secrets of faith to the lovers. After this we shall sit together in probity, concealing the path of the invitation from the enemies of faith.’<sup>17</sup> That this mindset still prevailed in Khālū Maḥmūd’s time can be seen in the compositions of his near contemporaries. Many of them invoked the tragic figure of Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), whom the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 295–320/908–932) had executed after he publicly disclosed his convictions. For example, in a poem in praise of Imam Dhu’l-Faḡār ‘Alī (d. 1043/1634), Mullā ‘Azīz Allāh Qummī wrote:

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<sup>15</sup> Ustād Maṣṣūr (pseud.), ‘Dar bāb-i tashrīf āwardan-i Shāh ‘Abbās-i thānī wa Āqā-yi Buzurg’, incipit, بحمد الله که بازم نخل امیدى ببار آمد، accession number 14713, Ismaili Special Collections Unit, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London.

<sup>16</sup> Mustanṣir bi’llāh, *Pandiyāt-i Javānmardī*, ed. and tr. Wladimir Ivanow (Leiden, 1953), p. 56 (Persian), p. 35 (English). On the authorship of this text, see Shafique N. Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages* (New York, 2007), pp. 122–126.

<sup>17</sup> For the text of the poem from the manuscript, see Virani, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, p. 251, n. 13. On this poet, see Virani, *Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, pp. 26, 112, 115, 129–139, 136, 172–174.

*tū ham imām-i zamān-rā bi-dān ū wāfiq bāsh*  
*agar zi ahl-i yaqīn-i az ū ma-kun inkār*  
*ma-gūy sirr-i ḥaqīqat bi-jāhil-i munkir*  
*mithāl-i Khwāja-yi Maṣṣūr mī-shawī bar dār*<sup>18</sup>

You, too, must know and follow the Imam of the time  
 Deny him not, if you be of the people of certainty  
 Tell not the secret of reality to the ignorant deniers  
 Lest you mount the gallows like Khwāja Maṣṣūr!

The poetry of the most senior representative of Imam Nūr al-Dahr ‘Alī, Ṣūfī b. Ṣādiq, also uses this precise imagery:

*ma-gūy Ṣūfī az īn ramz-i khāṣṣ bā dīddān*  
*kih mī-barand sarat-rā bih dār chūn Ḥal(l)āj*<sup>19</sup>

Speak not to rivals of this special mystery, Ṣūfī,  
 Lest like Ḥallāj they make off to the gallows with your head!

During the reign of this imam, authors widely used the Ḥallājīan trope to caution their audiences against revealing the inner mysteries of the faith. For example, in his lengthy *Nigāristān* (Gallery of Paintings), Khākī Khurāsānī (d. after 1056/1646), the Ismaili poet of the village of Dīzbād, apportioned God’s creatures to three realms: the law (*shar‘*), the way (*ṭarīq*), and the reality (*ḥaqīqat*). The people of the law cannot understand the way, and the people of the way cannot understand the reality. Gnostics like Maṣṣūr meet their end on the gallows when

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Muḥammad b. Zayn al-‘Ābidīn Fidā’ī Khurāsānī, *Hidāyat al-mu’minīn al-ṭālibīn*, ed. Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semenov (Moscow, 1959), p. 138. It is in one of the most common Persian metres, and particularly favoured by Sa‘dī, see Finn Thiesen, *A Manual of Classical Persian Prosody: With Chapters on Urdu, Karakhanidic and Ottoman Prosody* (Wiesbaden, 1982), pp. 145–146, *mujtath-i muthamman-i makhbūn-i ašlam (musbagh)* ~ - - - | ~ - - - | ~ - - - | - -. The word *wāfiq* is unusual, and one wonders if the original word may have been *wāqif*, and the letters *qāf* and *fā* were transposed. If this is so, the translation of the first line would be ‘You, too, must know the Imam of the time and be aware.’

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Maryam Mu‘izzī (Moezi), *Ismā‘īliyyān-i Īrān: Az suqūt-i Alamūt tā imrūz bā takya bar dawrān-i mu‘āšir* (MA, Dānishgāh-i Firdawsī-yi Mashhad, 1372 Sh./1993), p. 350, n. 60. The metre is ~ - - - | ~ - - - | ~ - - - | ~ -, hence the gemination of the letter *lām* in Ḥallāj is eliminated.

<sup>20</sup> Imām Qulī Khākī Khurāsānī, *An Abbreviated Version of the Diwan of Khaki Khorasani*, ed. Wladimir Ivanow (Bombay, 1352/1933), p. 115.

they utter words incomprehensible to others.<sup>20</sup> Given the prevailing sentiment, we can assume that Ismailis carefully guarded their literature from outsiders. However, as evidenced by the testimony of Khayrkhwāh Harātī, and the revelation of the identities of Ismaili leaders in Khālū Maḥmūd's poem, the imam had permitted his appointees to commit the faith's teachings to writing for circulation within the community.

Through an analysis of the known elements of Khālū Maḥmūd's biography and work, and a critical edition and translation of 'A servant of 'Alī', this study uncovers aspects of the Ismaili *da'wa* and its *dā'īs* in the 11th/17th century. This will help us in, as it were, detecting the 'scent of the scarlet pimpernel' at that time. Following this introduction, the article continues with section B, 'Manuscripts and Studies', which documents our sources, including the discovery of a new manuscript that helps us to resolve several ambiguities in the text. Section C, '*Di Dam Dam Dam*: Prosody in Khālū Maḥmūd's Composition', examines the poem's rhythm and how this affects the understanding of its contents. Sections D, *Ghulām-i Shāh-i mardān-am* and E, 'A servant of 'Alī, King of Men, am I', contain the critical edition and translation, respectively. Section F, 'Prayers of Proximity in Ismaili and Sister Communities', places the poem in the context of its genre. It is followed by section G, 'Whose Uncle Was He?', which analyses what can be deduced about the author, primarily from his own writings. Finally, section H, 'Afterword', concludes the piece and outlines further areas for exploration.

## B. Manuscripts and Studies

*A number of years ago, when I had an exhibition of my work, the people in charge who came to pick up my manuscripts saw them piled up haphazardly in the garage, and were shocked. 'What?! They'll grow mold like this!' they said. People who do things properly apparently make a dedicated manuscript room, where they can control humidity.*

–Akira Toriyama, Japanese manga artist<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Akira Toriyama and Masanori Nakamura, *WIRED Japan*, 1997 <https://www.kanzenshuu.com/translations/wired-japan-1997-akira-toriyama-interview/> (accessed on 10 October 2019).

I first encountered Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī’s writings many years ago when researching the manuscript archives of the library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. A photocopied text with the accession number 14708 contained a poem that was of immense importance. I was given to understand that the paper copy reproduced photographs of an original manuscript that belonged to an unnamed Ismaili in Iran. It began:

*Ghulām-i shāh-i mardānam chih bāk az khārijī dāram?  
Muṭī‘-i amr-i Yazdānam chih bāk az khārijī dāram?*<sup>22</sup>

A servant of ‘Alī, king of men, am I. What have I to fear of his foe?  
Submissive to God’s command am I. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?

It was copied by Ghiyāth al-Dīn Mīrshāhī, originally from the village of Dīzbād in the province of Khurāsān. At the time of this writing, he resides in Mashhad, where he was formerly a congregation leader (*mukhī*) of the Ismaili community (*jamā‘at*). The handwriting was familiar to me. The text occupies pages 51 to 66 of what was apparently a larger manuscript, but the remainder, which may have included a colophon, was not present.

In her 1993 MA thesis, ‘Ismailis of Iran’ (*Ismā‘iliyān-i Īrān*), Maryam Mu‘izzī identified three manuscripts of this poem coming from three different villages. None of these indicated the scribe or date of copying. No further information about the manuscripts was provided, except that she used the text with the greatest number of verses as her source.<sup>23</sup> Farhad Daftary later wrote that in 1985 the leaders of the Nizārī Ismaili community in Khurāsān gave him copies of this and other poems of Khālū Maḥmūd.<sup>24</sup> In 2015, Maryam Mu‘izzī published an important Persian article on the subject entitled *Qāsim-shāhiyān dar sh‘ir-i*

<sup>22</sup> Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī, incipit, ‘غلام شاه مردانم چه بک از خارجی دارم’, accession number 14708, Ismaili Special Collections Unit, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London.

<sup>23</sup> Mu‘izzī, *Ismā‘iliyān-i Īrān*, p. 47.

<sup>24</sup> Daftary, *Ismā‘ilis: History and Doctrines*, pp. 438–439. I am grateful to Dr Daftary for checking his collection to try to locate these manuscripts of Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī’s poetry. They were not currently available to him, and so I was unable to consult them. Personal communication, 20 January 2020.

*Maḥmūd*.<sup>25</sup> Lamenting the fact that years of searching had failed to yield exemplars of greater antiquity than those she had discovered previously, she resolved to conduct her study based on the replicas produced by two contemporary Ismaili scribes. The aforementioned Mukhī Ghiyāth al-Dīn Mīrshāhī also transcribed the first exemplar available to her, and the second was by Ṣadr al-Dīn Mīrshāhī.<sup>26</sup> The latter, also of Mashhad, is a grandson of the prominent Ismaili scholar, the late Muḥammad b. Zayn al-‘Ābidīn ‘Fidā’ī Khurāsānī, known as Hājji Ākhūnd (d. 1342/1923). Dr Mu‘izzī kindly corresponded with me about these two manuscripts, but as her copies were in Iran while she was in the United States, she could not provide me with them. However, her edition based on these is available in her article.

Fortunately, I was able to identify an older and better copy of the poem, which served as the primary manuscript for preparing the new critical edition provided here. It occupies folios 82 verso to 87 verso of a volume entitled *Gul-chīn-i ahl-i ‘irfān*, (The Rose-Gatherer of the Gnostics) copied by a certain Murtaḍā b. Muṣṭafā on 1 Rabi‘ I 1328/13 March 1910. The original, numbered 55, is in the Ismaili Special Collections Unit of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. I have used this number as its siglum.<sup>27</sup> The scribe does not distinguish between the letters *kāf* and *gāf*, generally omits the letter *wāw*, meaning ‘and’, uses the *alifkhanjariyya* rather than the *madda* for the long *ā* sound, and normally abbreviates the *radīf* or recurrent rhyme words *chih bāk az khārijī dāram* to *chibāk*. That the copyist checked his work is evident from the correction he makes in verse 44, changing *dil āgāh* to *Mīr Nūr Allāh*.

The secondary manuscript used is the copy made by Mukhī Ghiyāth al-Dīn Mīrshāhī, with the siglum 14708. While produced by the same

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<sup>25</sup> Maryam Mu‘izzī, ‘Qāsim-shāhiyān dar shī‘r-i Maḥmūd (Qasim Shahi Communities in the Poem of Mahmud)’, *Muṭālī‘āt-i ta’rīkh-i Islām*, 7 (Autumn 1394 Sh./2015).

<sup>26</sup> Mu‘izzī, ‘Qāsim-shāhiyān’, p. 153. I am grateful to Dr Jalal Badakhchani for the information he has provided on these two contemporary Ismailis.

<sup>27</sup> Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī, ‘Ash‘ār-i durr nithār-i Maḥmūd Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī’, incipit, ‘غلام شاه مردانم چپاک از خارجی دارم’, in manuscript 55, Ismaili Special Collections Unit. Dr Karim Jawan kindly informed me of the existence of this manuscript, and Dr Wafi Momin and Dr Nour Nourmamadchoev of the Unit were kind enough to provide copies of the relevant pages for me.

scribe, it is not identical to the document available to Maryam Mu'izzī. Her text has the title 'From the Poetry of Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī' (*min ash'ār-i Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī*) and has scribal glosses that are absent in mine. There are also several variants in the text.<sup>28</sup> For example, verses 8 and 34, present in the manuscripts I consulted, are missing in the two manuscripts to which Mu'izzī had access, while verses 53 and 54, available in other manuscripts, are not included in the manuscript with siglum 14708. Verse 26, present in other manuscripts, is not found in manuscript 55. Drawing on all the manuscripts, the critical edition presented here has 78 verses. As the Mu'izzī edition does not record variants, where the readings differ, the siglum *mīm* identifies them in the critical apparatus.

### **C. *Di Dam Dam Dam*: Prosody in Khālū Maḥmūd's Composition**

For rhetoric, he could not ope  
     His mouth, but out there flew a trope;  
 And when he happened to break off  
     I' th' middle of his speech, or cough,  
 H' had hard words ready to show why,  
     And tell what rules he did it by;  
 Else, when with greatest art he spoke,  
     You'd think he talked like other folk.  
 For all a rhetorician's rules  
     Teach nothing but to name his tools.  
 Samuel Butler, *Hudibras*<sup>29</sup>

Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī composed 'A Servant of 'Alī, king of men, am I' in *baḥr-i hazaj*, the so-called 'trilling metre', an infrequent cadence in both Arabic and Persian.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, several poets employed it to

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<sup>28</sup> Mu'izzī, 'Qāsim-shāhiyān', p. 153.

<sup>29</sup> Samuel Butler, *Hudibras* (Boston, MA, 1866 [originally published 1684]), pp. 18–19.

<sup>30</sup> Chris Golston and Tomas Riad, 'The Phonology of Classical Arabic Meter', *Linguistics*, 35 (1997), pp. 113–114; Ashwini Deo and Paul Kiparsky, 'Poetries in Contact: Arabic, Persian, and Urdu', in Maria-Kristiina Lotman and Mihhail Lotman, ed., *Frontiers in Comparative Prosody* (Bern, 2011), p. 156.

impressive effect, including Hāfiẓ in his famous *ghazal*, *Agar ān Turk-i Shīrāzī bih-dast ārad dil-i mā-rā*, (Were that Turk of Shīrāz to capture my heart).

Similarly, a popular composition by Sanā'ī, *Ma-kun dar jism ū jān manzil kih īn dūn ast ū ān wālā*, (d. ca. 525/1131) is in this metre. Notably, the Ismaili luminary Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib (d. 645/1246) extolled it in his *Dīwān-i qā'imīyyāt* (Poems of the Resurrection):

*ma-kun dar jism ū jān manzil kih īn dūn ast ū ān wālā*  
 'Abide not in body and soul, for this one's sordid and that sublime'<sup>31</sup>

In Khālū Maḥmūd's poem, each foot (*rukṅ*) has a short (*kūtāh*) syllable, followed by three long (*buland*) syllables, traditionally articulated by the mnemonic device, *mafā'ilun*. In breve-macron notation, this is ~ – – –, or what Western analysis refers to as a first epitrite. The foot repeats four times in each of two hemistiches (sg. *mišrā'*), for a total of eight feet in each verse (i.e., *baḥr-i hazaj-i muthamman-i sālim*).

Most of Khālū Maḥmūd's verses follow the rules of prosody. However, he often resolves overlong (*darāz*) syllables as long (*buland*), even when these are not the final syllable of a hemistich. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) also took liberties of these kinds in his poetry.<sup>32</sup>

Occasionally, I have introduced minor emendations to the text for metrical reasons. For example, in verse 47 مطيع امر الرّحمن, present in all manuscripts, needs to be read in a highly convoluted manner to scan correctly: *muṭī' -i amr-i ar-Raḥmān*. It is preferable to conjecture a reading along the lines of *muṭī' -i amr-i Raḥmān [khwān]*, which satisfies the metre and does not significantly change the meaning. Meanwhile, I have provided the original reading of the manuscripts in the critical apparatus. Similarly, verse 38 appears in the manuscripts as follows:

*Buwad dar 'Ārak ū dar Afkisht*

<sup>31</sup> Abu'l-Majd Majdūd b. Ādam Sanā'ī Ghaznawī, *Dīwān-i Ḥakīm Sanā'ī Ghaznawī bar asās-i mu'tabartarīn nuskha-hā*, ed. Parwīz Bābā'ī and Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar (Tehran, 1381 Sh./2002), p. 58; Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, *Dīwān-i qā'imīyyāt*, ed. Sayyid Jalāl Badakhchānī (2nd ed., Tehran, 1395 Sh./2016), no. 3, p. 44. In this regard, see JRAS, Series 3, 29 (2019), p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> Thiesen, *Classical Persian Prosody*, pp. 15–18.



The second *dar* breaks the metre and we can easily remove it without affecting the meaning. Once again, the manuscript renderings are available in the critical apparatus.

Prosody lapses in five verses particularly draw the attention as all involve proper names. It is possible the scribes did not correctly record these names, or that the poet himself erred in his prosody.

The first hemistich of verse 20 reads:

*Ham az Bābā 'Alī Kūhsārī ṭalab kun himmat ū yārī*

As is readily apparent to a Persian speaker, an extraneous long syllable in the second foot spoils the rhythm. One could, of course, recompose the line to fit the metre:

*Ham az Bābā-yi Kūhsārī ṭalab kun himmat ū yārī*

However, this reading is entirely speculative and leads to little else but a poem that is easier to recite.

A similar issue can be seen in verses 23, 51 and 62, where the third syllable is short where it should be long:

*Ghulām 'Alī bih Kūhābād (23)*

*'Azīz Amīr kī bāshad (51)*

*Muḥib(b) 'Alī'st dar Ghūrī (62)*

In verse 51, one might hazard that originally 'Azīz Amīr (عزيز امير) was 'Azīz al-Mīr (عزيز المير), thus solving the metrical problem, though remaining entirely hypothetical. There are, however, occasional instances in Persian poetry in which the composer doubles a consonant for the sake of metre. Therefore, technically, it is unnecessary to make a change, and 'Azīz Amīr may be the correct name.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, in verse 59, a syllable is missing in the second foot, most likely in the third position:

*digar az jūy-naw wa'z 'Alī Khwāja bayād āwar*

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<sup>33</sup> For examples of this, see Thiesen, *Prosody*, pp. 59–60.

D. *Ghulām-i Shāh-i mardān-am*<sup>34</sup>

غلام شاه مردانم چه باک<sup>35</sup> از خارجی دارم  
 مطیع امر یزدانم چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 به قلبم سگه شاهی ز دل جو هر چه<sup>36</sup> می خواهی  
 بیاگر مرد این راهی چه باک از خارجی دارم

<sup>34</sup> In the main, this edition follows the ‘Guidelines for Editors of Scholarly Editions’ promulgated by the Modern Language Association; see Robert Hirst, Dirk Van Hulle, and MLA Committee on Scholarly Editions, *Guidelines for Editors of Scholarly Editions*, New York, Modern Language Association of America, access date: March 29, 2018, <https://www.mla.org/Resources/Research/Surveys-Reports-and-Other-Documents/Publishing-and-Scholarship/Reports-from-the-MLA-Committee-on-Scholarly-Editions/Guidelines-for-Editors-of-Scholarly-Editions>. It takes into account, however, the criticisms levelled at the Committee on Scholarly Editions, such as those directed towards editions of non-English language texts; see D.C. Greetham, ‘Textual Scholarship’, in Joseph Gibaldi, ed., *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1992), p. 107. The spelling conventions adopted reflect the guidelines provided in Farhangistān-i zabān ū adab-i Fārsī, *Dastūr-i khatt-i Fārsī* (Tehran, 1394 Sh./2015). These guidelines, however, are for prose, and so some recommendations do not apply to poetry.

The basic format of the critical apparatus is as follows.

Lemma: variant, siglum

Additional sigla are separated by commas. Additional variants are separated by semicolons. Additional lemma are separated by periods.

- a. <angle brackets> indicate lacunae
- b. [square brackets] are the editor’s interpolations
- c. + means this lemma was added by the scribe
- d. – means this lemma was omitted by the scribe

The following example illustrates a typical entry in the critical apparatus:

معمور: مأمور، ۱۴۷۰۸

This indicates that the lemma معمور used in the critical edition is represented by معمور in the manuscript with siglum ۱۴۷۰۸.

In the critical edition, the doubling or gemination (*tashdīd*) of letters is only indicated where required by poetic metre. Thus, occasionally the same word may appear in some places with the *shadda* and other places without. For example, we find *ḥad* (حد) in verses 43, 48 and 51, but *ḥadd* (حَدّ) in verse 60, since here the word requires a doubled consonant for the metre to be correct.

<sup>35</sup> چه باک: چباک، ۵۵

<sup>36</sup> جو هر چه: جوهر چه، م

شب معراج پیغمبر که بود دربان [او]<sup>37</sup> بر در  
 بغیر از<sup>38</sup> خواجه قنبر؟ چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 رسولی<sup>39</sup> چون نبی دارم به دل مهر علی دارم  
 نظرا بر وصی دارم چه باک از خارجی دارم

۵ شب معراج کز بستر نبی شد جانب داور  
 ندید آنجا به جز حیدر چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 هزاران پند گفتم من ترا<sup>40</sup> از<sup>41</sup> رهبر<sup>42</sup> سالک  
 بکن گوش ار نه‌ای هالک چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 مرو دنبال نام و<sup>43</sup> ننگ سگ نفس آور اندر بند  
 ز مردان این شنیدم<sup>44</sup> پند چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 به مرد<sup>45</sup> حق تمنا کن ز غیر او تیرا کن  
 تو آنگه زو به مولا<sup>46</sup> کن چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 اگر مولا شود یارم نسازد مرد حق خوارم<sup>47</sup>  
 خبر از مؤمنان آرم چه باک از خارجی دارم

۱۰ معلّم‌های هر کشور بگویم اسم هر رهبر  
 شفیع خود کنم یک سر چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 به اول<sup>48</sup> از خراسان گو ز پیر و<sup>49</sup> رهبر آن<sup>50</sup> گو  
 دمامد ذکر ایشان گو چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 تو یعقوب شاه داعی دان [و امرش]<sup>51</sup> امر شاهی دان  
 ملازم‌هانش راهی دان چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 مقام و منزلش پترو خدا خواهی<sup>52</sup> به امرش<sup>53</sup> رو

37 بود دربان [او]: بوده رامیان، ۵۵، ۱۴۷۰۸، م

38 از: -، ۱۴۷۰۸

39 رسولی: رسول، ۵۵

40 ترا: تورا، ۵۵

41 از: ای، ۵۵

42 رهبر: هر، ۱۴۷۰۸

43 و: -، ۵۵

44 شنیدم: شنودم، ۱۴۷۰۸

45 به مرد: بمرد، ۵۵

46 مولا: <بحورا>، ۱۴۷۰۸

47 خوارم: خارم، ۵۵

48 به اول: باول، ۵۵

49 و: -، ۵۵

50 رهبر آن: رهبران، ۵۵؛ رهبر او، ۱۴۷۰۸

51 [و امرش]: امورش، ۵۵، ۱۴۷۰۸، م

52 خواهی: خاهی، ۵۵

53 به امرش: بامرش، ۵۵

ز من این نکته‌ها<sup>54</sup> بشنو چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 خدایا نقد صوفی‌را نگهدار از همه آفات  
 بدین و<sup>55</sup> مذهبش صلوات<sup>56</sup> چه باک از خارجی دارم

۱۵ دگر از ایل بیچاره تو ذکر میر حیدر گو  
 ز صدقش سر بسر برگو چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 تو شمس‌الدین علی‌را<sup>57</sup> دان که باشد مسکنش غوریان<sup>58</sup>  
 ز لطفش جان و<sup>59</sup> دل شادان چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 میان لایحیان ره بین بجو ملاً کمال‌الدین  
 کند بیگانها تلقین چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 دگر مرزا<sup>60</sup> علی‌را دان که باشد ایل شیبانی  
 اگر دانای مردانی چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 کنیم<sup>61</sup> از میر رستم باد کو ساکن به جاجرم است  
 ز عشاقان دل گرم است چه باک از خارجی دارم

۲۰ هم از بابا علی کوهساری طلب کن همت و<sup>62</sup> یاری  
 طلب زان بنده<sup>63</sup> باری چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 یکی عارف که در جام است و<sup>64</sup> محمود است نام او  
 مطهر جسم و جان<sup>65</sup> او چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 [و]<sup>66</sup> انهداد<sup>67</sup> خلق او که باشد در فره ساکن  
 بُود از زمره باطن چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 غلام‌علی به کوه‌آباد<sup>68</sup> دلش از «ما سیوی» آزاد

54 نکته‌ها: نکته‌ها، ۵۵

55 و: -، ۵۵

56 On the Persian pronunciation *ṣalwāt* rather than *ṣalawāt*, required here for metre, see 'Alī Akbar Dihkhudā, Muḥammad Mu'īn and Ja'far Shahīdī, *Lughat-nāma* (2nd ed., Tehran, 1377 Sh./1998), s.v. صلوات.

57 را: -، ۱۴۷۰۸

58 Here, the letter *wāw* in the word غوریان must be pronounced as a short vowel to maintain the metre. Regarding the shortening of this vowel in Persian poetic license, see Thiesen, *Classical Persian Prosody*, p. 64.

59 و: -، ۵۵

60 مرزا: میرزا

61 کنیم: کنم، ۱۴۷۰۸

62 و: -، ۵۵

63 بنده: بنده، ۵۵

64 و: -، ۵۵

65 جسم و جان: جان و جسم، ۱۴۷۰۸

66 [و]: ز، ۵۵، ۱۴۷۰۸، م

67 و: +، ۱۴۷۰۸، م

68 کوه‌آباد: کوه‌آباد، ۵۵

شوند عشاق ازو<sup>69</sup> دلشاد چه باک از خارجی دارم  
کند مرغ دلم پرواز به مولدگاه خویشم باز  
شود با مؤمنان همراز چه باک از خارجی دارم

۲۵ بیا بپیک صبا برسان سلام من به صد<sup>70</sup> دستان  
به درویشان قوهستان چه باک از خارجی دارم  
به ماهوسک<sup>71</sup> نعمت الله است غلام خاص الله است  
به سوی حق ورا راه است چه باک از خارجی دارم  
به رایک ساکن [ش]<sup>72</sup> عارف که اسمش شاه حسین آمد  
محبان را چه<sup>73</sup> عین آمد چه باک از خارجی دارم  
ز میرزگ یادگار است آن منور دین و ایمانش<sup>74</sup>  
کران روشن بود<sup>75</sup> جانش چه باک از خارجی دارم  
بجو درویش قطب الدین که در یهن است قطب دین  
طریقت دان حقیقت بین چه باک از خارجی دارم

۳۰ ورا<sup>76</sup> بی شک ولی می دان به خلقش چون نبی می دان  
محب متقی می دان چه باک از خارجی دارم  
چه ملا قاسم بورنج که نقد خواجه جان آمد<sup>77</sup>  
محب خاندان آمد<sup>78</sup> چه باک از خارجی دارم  
در اصل مسک<sup>79</sup> مرد حق یقین سلطان علی باشد  
اخویم چون ولی باشد چه باک از خارجی دارم  
مرا مولود از آن خاک است و دایم جسته ام همت  
ز روح خواجه ها<sup>80</sup> همت چه باک از خارجی دارم  
یکی زان خواجه جان باشد که آسو جای آن<sup>81</sup> باشد  
دلایل مؤمنان باشد چه باک از خارجی دارم

69 ازو: <او>، ۱۴۷۰۸

70 به صد: بصد

71 ماهوسک: م؛ مایوسک، ۱۴۷۰۸

72 او: +، ۵۵

73 چه: چو، ۱۴۷۰۸

74 و ایمانش: ایمانش، ۵۵؛ و دنیایش، ۱۴۷۰۸

75 بود: -، ۵۵

76 ورا: -، ۱۴۷۰۸

77 آمد: باشد، ۱۴۷۰۸

78 آمد: باشد، ۱۴۷۰۸

79 در اصل مسک: بکسکک، ۱۴۷۰۸؛ به بسکک، م

80 خواجه ها: خواجهها، ۵۵

81 آن: او، ۱۴۷۰۸

۳۵ ز سلطان بازگو آن به به نزد اهل که تا مه  
 بُود در خُنگ و<sup>82</sup> در نوده چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 ملک اندر سده رهبر به امر داعی سرور  
 خدایش حافظ و<sup>83</sup> یاور چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 چه گویم<sup>84</sup> و صف از کُنْدُر رضا ساکن در او<sup>85</sup> چون دُر  
 دلش از مهر مولا پر چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 بُود در عارک و<sup>86</sup> افکشت امین<sup>87</sup> امن با ایمان  
 ثنا گویم ورا از جان چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 به سرخیچ دوست محمّدا دعا گویم در هر دم  
 نه اندوه بیند و نه غم چه باک از خارجی دارم

۴۰ ز جازار ولی گویم هم از میرزا علی گویم  
 ورا کلب علی گویم چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 بشو سوی عراق ای دل بشکرت روز هر منزل  
 که گردد مَدعا حاصل چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 جماعات<sup>88</sup> عطاء اللّهیان را<sup>89</sup> صد صفا باشد  
 معلّمشان رضا باشد چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 معلّم در حد کرمان تو ملاً شاه بیکر<sup>90</sup> دان  
 بُود از جمله مردان چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 معلّم در سرقو<sup>91</sup> دان ز احشاماتِ دل آگاه  
 همی دان میر نورالله چه باک از خارجی دارم

۴۵ به<sup>92</sup> عشاقان هندوستان مجالسشان<sup>93</sup> بُود بستان  
 بگویم صدق آن مستان چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 حسن شاه است در لاهور داعی سوی مولانا  
 در این اسرار با معنا چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 ابل<sup>94</sup> بین ساکن ملتان<sup>95</sup> اخویش پیر محمّد دان

82 و: -، ۵۵

83 و: -، ۵۵

84 چه گویم: چگویم، ۵۵

85 در او: در آن: ۱۴۷۰۸

86 در: +، ۵۵، ۱۴۷۰۸

87 و: +، ۱۴۷۰۸

88 جماعات: جماعت، ۱۴۷۰۸

89 عطاء اللّهیان را: عطاء اللّهیان را، ۵۵

90 بیکر ا: بیکر، ۱۴۷۰۸

91 سرقو: سیرقو: ۱۴۷۰۸

92 به: ز، ۱۴۷۰۸

93 مجالسشان: مجالسشان، ۵۵

94 ابل: امین ۱۴۷۰۸؛ ایل، م

95 ملتان: بلتان، ۵۵؛ مولتان، ۱۴۷۰۸، م

مطیع امر رحمان [خوان]<sup>96</sup> چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 معلّم در حد گجرات پیر فاضل علی باشد  
 چه آن<sup>97</sup> فاضل ولی باشد چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 خضر خان ساکن دیول به دیول نیستش مُبَدَل  
 خیبر و عالم و<sup>98</sup> اکمل چه باک از خارجی دارم

۵۰ بُود اندر جلالپور کسکه نام آن<sup>99</sup> دانا  
 غلام خاص<sup>100</sup> مولا [نا] چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 عزیز امیر کی<sup>101</sup> باشد معرف<sup>102</sup> در حد کابل  
 غلام صاحب دلدل چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 ز بک توت<sup>103</sup> میر محمّدر ا دعا خواندن بُود رخصت  
 خداوندش دهد فرصت<sup>104</sup> چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 یکی در چاریک کار است که اسمش رحمت الله است  
 محبّ خاص الله است چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 دگر اندر فریضه آن مَلِک حاجی معلّم دان  
 بُود حق دان بُود حق خوان چه باک از خارجی دارم

۵۵ به لبهان کرده است<sup>105</sup> آن حیدر قاسم بحق گویا  
 از او<sup>106</sup> روشن شود دل ها چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 مراد<sup>107</sup> طاهری را هم<sup>108</sup> ارس خان کنکش<sup>109</sup> داده  
 بُود ساقی<sup>110</sup> این باده چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 ارس خان داعی<sup>111</sup> حق دان که اندر درّه نور است

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96 امر رحمن [خوان]: امر الرّحمن، ۵۵، ۱۴۷۰۸، م  
 97 آن: او، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 98 و: -، ۵۵  
 99 آن: او، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 100 خاص: خُوصه، ۵۵؛ خاصه، ۱۴۷۰۸، م  
 101 کی=که  
 102 معرف: معروف، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 103 ز بک توت: به یک توت، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 104 فرصت: رخصت، ۵۵  
 105 کرده است: کرد، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 106 او: آن، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 107 خان: +، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 108 هم: -، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 109 کنکش: گنگنش، م  
 110 از: +، ۵۵، ۱۴۷۰۸، م  
 111 داعی: داعی، ۵۵

از او<sup>112</sup> آن گوشه معمور<sup>113</sup> است چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 بُود درویش علی در اصل سبز از<sup>114</sup> عارفِ حیدر  
 به صدق و<sup>115</sup> خلق چون قنبر چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 دگر از جوی نو<sup>116</sup> از علی<sup>117</sup> خواجه بیاد آور<sup>118</sup>  
 ارس خانش بُود رهبر<sup>119</sup> چه باک از خارجی دارم

۶۰ کُنل یک موضعی باشد محمّد رهبر است آنجا  
 در آن حدّش بُود ماوا چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 شنو ز اقلیم ترکستان و حقدانان آن کشور  
 ز<sup>120</sup> یک یک گویم ای رهبر چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 محبّ علی است در غوری که امرش هست دستوری  
 بیگویم ار نه دل کوری<sup>121</sup> چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 بُود حقداد دُر قندز معلّم بر سر جمعی  
 دل تاریکرا شمعی چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 بدیع آن عارف حقدان که ساکن در بدخشان است  
 به تحقیق از محبّان است چه باک از خارجی دارم

۶۵ بحقّ این معلّمها بحقّ این خدادانها  
 گناهمرا عفو فرما چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 الهی فردی و اکبر پناه کهتر و<sup>122</sup> مهتر  
 ز تقصیرات من بگذر چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 کنی ز اسرار آگاهم نمایی سوی خود راهم  
 کمینه کلب درگاهم چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 الهی بی‌نیازی تو الهی کار سازی تو  
 یقین دانای رازی تو<sup>123</sup> چه باک از خارجی دارم  
 بحقّ آدم و حوا بحقّ صالح و<sup>124</sup> یحیی

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112 او: آن، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 113 معمور: مأمور، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 114 سبز از: سبزار، ۵۵  
 115 و: —، ۵۵  
 116 و: +، ۵۵، ۱۴۷۰۸، م  
 117 علی: اعلی، ۵۵  
 118 آور: آر، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 119 رهبر: سرور، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 120 ز: که، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 121 دلکوری: دلکور، ۵۵  
 122 و: —، ۵۵  
 123 تو: —، ۱۴۷۰۸  
 124 و: —، ۵۵



ببخشای گناه ما چه باک از خارجی دارم

۷۰ بحقّ نوح و<sup>125</sup> طوفانت به اسماعیل و<sup>126</sup> قربانت  
شدم در امر و<sup>127</sup> فرمانت چه باک از خارجی دارم  
بحقّ موسیٰ و عیسیٰ رسول الله نبیّ ما  
شفیع آخرت فردا چه باک از خارجی دارم  
به سیدنا و رای او به اعجاز و<sup>128</sup> دعای او  
رئیسان<sup>129</sup> با رضای او چه باک از خارجی دارم  
بحقّ صوفی<sup>130</sup> صادق علومش بر همه فایق  
که غمگین باد نالایق چه باک از خارجی دارم  
به یعقوبشاه پیر ما<sup>131</sup> و آن<sup>132</sup> دست دعای او  
رضای حق رضای او چه باک از خارجی دارم

۷۵ چرا اندیشه باطل<sup>133</sup> از این ضدان<sup>134</sup> کنی محمود  
چه نورالذّهر شد یارم<sup>135</sup> چه باک از خارجی دارم  
شفیع جرم من باشند این مردان راه دین  
بزرگان را است این آیین چه باک از خارجی دارم  
شفیع ما ستمکاران بسویت<sup>136</sup> حق شناسانند  
غلامش را غلامانند چه باک از خارجی دارم  
بحقّ ذات نورالذّهر بزرگ آن قائم<sup>137</sup> اعظم  
بُود با این [همه]<sup>138</sup> همدم چه باک از خارجی دارم

125 و: -، ۵۵

126 و: -، ۵۵

127 و: -، ۵۵

128 و: -، ۵۵

129 رئیسان: رائیان، ۵۵

130 و: +، ۱۴۷۰۸

131 پیر ما: ما پیرو، ۵۵

132 آن: بآن، ۵۵

133 باطل: باطن، ۱۴۷۰۸

134 ضدان: مندان، ۵۵

135 یارم: یاور، ۱۴۷۰۸

136 ما ستمکاران بسویت: هاشم والدان بوند، ۵۵

137 بزرگان قائم: بزرگان خالق، ۵۵؛ بزرگ آن قائم، ۱۴۷۰۸

138 این [همه]: این‌ها، ۵۵، ۱۴۷۰۸

### E. A Servant of ‘Alī, King of Men, am I

A servant of ‘Alī, king of men, am I. What have I to fear of his  
foe?

Submissive to God’s command am I. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?<sup>139</sup>

Stamped on my soul is his royal die. From my heart, seek what  
you will.

Come hither if you be a man of this path. What have I to fear  
of a rebel?

On the night of the Prophet’s heavenly ascent, who stood guard  
by the gate?

It was none save ‘Alī, master of Qanbar. What have I to fear  
of a rebel?<sup>140</sup>

I have a prophet like Muhammad, love for ‘Alī fills my heart.

I set my sights upon the legatee (*waṣī*). What have I to fear of  
a rebel?

5

When the Prophet from where he slept, ascended to the Judge  
Divine,

He saw none there save ‘Alī, the lion. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?

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<sup>139</sup> The rhythm of the poem in Persian is such that each hemistich is further divided by a caesura. This pause in the rhythm often indicates a transition in the meaning as well. The translation frequently reflects these caesurae with punctuation marks in mid-hemistich, even if these are not requisite in English.

<sup>140</sup> Abu’l-Sha‘thā’ Qanbar b. Kādān al-Dawsī is celebrated in many stories for his unswerving fidelity and devotion as the servant of Imam ‘Alī. For references to him in Ismaili poetry written by a contemporary of Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī, see Khāki Khurāsānī, *Muntakhab-i dīwān*, pp. 35, 94. For references to Qanbar in Fatimid times, see al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, tr. A. A. A. Fyzee and completely revised by Ismail K. Poonawala as *The Pillars of Islam: Acts of Devotion and Religious Observances* (New Delhi, 2002–2004), vol. 1, p. 64, with bibliographical references in n. 168 and vol. 2, pp. 444, 474, 486. A general sense of the traditions circulating about Qanbar at the time of Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī’s writing may be gleaned from Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1698), *Biḥār al-amwār*, ed. ‘Abd al-Zahrā’ ‘Alawī (Beirut, 1403/1983), vol. 42, pp. 121–140. Some examples of the relationship between Qanbar and Imam ‘Alī as a trope in Persian poetry may be found in Habibeh Rahim, ‘Perfection Manifested: ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib’s Image in Classical Persian and Modern Indian Muslim Poetry’ (PhD, Harvard University, 1989), pp. 296–298.

Thousands of counsels I related to you, from the guide of the  
traveller on the spiritual path.  
If you're not destined for perdition, take heed! What have I to  
fear of a rebel?  
Chase not name and fame. Leash the dog of ego.  
This counsel have I heard from the brave. What have I to fear  
of a rebel?  
Long for the man of God alone. Disavow all save him,  
Then turn your face towards the Imam. What have I to fear of  
a rebel?<sup>141</sup>  
If the Imam aids me, the man of God won't debase me.  
I bring you tidings of the faithful. What have I to fear of a rebel?  
10  
I shall speak the name of every guide (*rahbar*), of the teachers  
(*mu'allim-hā*) of every land,  
Taking them together as my intercessors. What have I to fear  
of a rebel?  
Speak first of Khurāsān, tell of its sage (*pīr*) and guide.  
Remember them with every breath. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?  
Know Ya'qūb Shāh to be the inviter (*dā'i*). His command is the  
Imam's.  
Know his attendants to be emissaries (*rāhī*). What have I to  
fear of a rebel?<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> In Ismaili writings, *mard-i haqq* generally refers to the imam or the Prophet as the 'man of God', or *mard-i Khudā*, i.e., God's representative on earth, who is also the *mard-i haqqiqat*, the 'true man', i.e., the sole human being in his time who conveys knowledge but does not need to receive it from any earthly source. With regard to the latter meaning, see Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, pp. 289, 295. Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī, however, seems to use it for someone appointed by the imam as a member of the religious hierarchy (*ḥudūd-i dīn*), as becomes clear in couplet 32, in which his brother Sulṭān 'Alī of Mask is also referred to as the *mard-i haqq*.

<sup>142</sup> On the *rāhīs*, see Virani, *Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, pp. 41, 213 n92. While all manuscripts read امورش, 'his affairs', this is almost certainly the result of the transposition of the letter *wāw* and should be read و امرش, 'and his command'. Cf. couplet 74, *riḍā-yi Haqq riḍā-yi ū*. Among Central Asian Ismailis, there is a common expression *amr-i mu'allim amr-i imām-i zamān*, 'the command of the teacher is the command of the Imam of the time', a formula that directly parallels one found among South Asian Ismailis, *amar mukhī sāheb amar hāzar imām*. See His Highness Prince Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismailia Supreme Council for Europe, Canada, U.S.A. and Africa, ed., *Religious Rites and Ceremonies* (Nairobi, 1981), p. 2.

Patraw is his home and hearth. Follow his commands if you  
seek God.

Harken to my pithy hints. What have I to fear of a rebel?  
O God, from every trial and tribulation, guard the son of Šūfi.  
Benedictions be upon his faith and fold. What have I to fear  
of a rebel?<sup>143</sup>

15

Recall Mīr Ḥaydar of the Bīchāra tribe.

Tell of his honesty from start to finish. What have I to fear of  
a rebel?<sup>144</sup>

Know Shams al-Dīn ‘Alī who dwells in Ghūriyān.

Heart and soul rejoice at his grace. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?

Seek Mullā Kamāl al-Dīn, who knows the path among the  
people of Lākhī.

It is he who instructs strangers. What have I to fear of a rebel?

Next, if you are wise among men, know Mīrzā ‘Alī,

Who is of the Shaybānī tribe. What have I to fear of a rebel?

We shall recall Mīr Rustam, for he lives in Jājarm.

Our heart is stirred by the lovers. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?

20

Seek courage and support from Bābā ‘Alī of Kūhsār.

Seek from that servant of the Creator. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?

A gnostic named Maḥmūd lives in Jām.

How pure his body and soul! What have I to fear of a rebel?

And Allāh-dād of his flock who lives in Farah

Is among the company of inner meaning. What have I to fear  
of a rebel?

Ghulām ‘Alī of Kuhābād, his heart is free of ‘all else but (God)’.

The hearts of the lovers rejoice at him. What have I to fear of  
a rebel?

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<sup>143</sup> On the translation of *naqd* as ‘son’ in this context, see Dihkhudā, Mu‘in, and Shahīdī, *Lughat-nāma*, s.v. نقد where the following verse is cited as an example:

بس است این دو صاحبقران را همین  
که این نقد آن است و آن جد این

The verse may also be read, ‘guard the treasure of Šūfi’, etc.

Once again, to my birthplace, the bird of my heart takes flight,  
Sharing secrets with the faithful. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?

25

Come, O footman of the zephyr, convey my salutation with a  
hundred tales

To the dervishes of Quhistān. What have I to fear of a rebel?

In Māhūs is Nī'mat Allāh, a special servant of God.

He has a path towards the Truth. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?

There dwells a gnostic in Rāyak named Shāh Ḥusayn.

What a spring came to the true lovers. What have I to fear of  
a rebel?

He is a memento of Mīrzag. May his religion and faith be  
resplendent.

Thus is his soul illumined. What have I to fear of a rebel?

Seek Dervish Quṭb al-Dīn, who is the pole of religion in Yahn

A knower of the path (*ṭarīqat*), a seer of the truth (*ḥaqīqat*).

What have I to fear of a rebel?

30

Without doubt, know him as a saint (*walī*), whose nature is like  
the Prophet's.

Know him to be a pious lover. What have I to fear of a rebel?<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Mu'izzī regards *Bichāra* here as a corruption of *Jabbāra*, the name of an Arab tribe. There seems to be no compelling reason to modify the word *Bichāra* though. It is found in all manuscripts and, as Aḥmad 'Alī Khān Vazīrī informs us, the *Bichāra* tribe in Kirmān is closely connected with the Ismaili 'Aṭā' Allāhī tribe, see his, *Jughrāfiyā-yi Kirmān*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Bāstānī Pārīzī (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997), p. 317. Interesting information about the *Bichāra* community in Gunābād, an important centre of the Nī'mat Allāhī community, which has historically had close connections with the Ismailis, may be found in Ḥājj Sulṭān-Ḥusayn Tābanda, *Ta'rikh wa jughrāfiyā-yi Gunābād* (2nd ed., Tehran, 1379 Sh./2000), pp. 169–170. Elsewhere, I have pointed out that the scholarly consensus tracing Ismaili-Nī'mat-Allāhī connections to the fifteen-century is based on an incorrect reading of the sources. See Virani, *Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, p. 146. However, in Khālū Maḥmūd's 11th/17th-century poem, we may have the earliest known evidence of such a connection in the reference to the *īl-i Bichāra*.

<sup>145</sup> Or, 'For his people consider him like the Prophet'.

What about Mullā Qāsim of Būranj, who is the son of Khwāja  
Jān?

He is a lover of the Holy Family. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?<sup>146</sup>

From Mask, the man of God is certainly Sulṭān ‘Alī.

Like unto a saint is my brother. What have I to fear of a rebel?  
I was born in that land and have constantly sought high-minded  
resolve.

Resolve comes from the spirit of the masters (*khwāja-hā*).

What have I to fear of a rebel?

Among them is Khwāja Jān, who hails from Āsū.

He is the director (*dalīl*) of the faithful. What have I to fear of  
a rebel?

35

In the presence of great and small, it is best to speak of Sulṭān.

He is in Khung and in Nawdih. What have I to fear of a rebel?  
Malik is the guide in Sidih, by the command of the master  
inviter (*dā‘ī-yi sarvar*).

May God be his protector and helper. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?

How can I describe Kundur in which, like a pearl, resides Riḏā?

Love for the Imam fills his heart. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?

In ‘Ārak and in Afkišt is the faithful Amīn, protector of peace.

From the depths of my soul, I praise him. What have I to fear  
of a rebel?<sup>147</sup>

40

With every breath, we pray for Dūst Muḥammad in Sarkhij.

May he witness neither grief nor sorrow. What have I to fear  
of a rebel?

I speak of Jāzār of Walī, and also speak of Mīrzā ‘Alī.

I call him the hound of ‘Alī. What have I to fear of a rebel?<sup>148</sup>

<sup>146</sup> It is likely that this is the Khwāja Jān from Āsū mentioned in couplet 34, below. Regarding the word *naqd*, see the note to couplet 14, above.

<sup>147</sup> It is likely that *amīn-i aman* is here used as a proper name, Amīn, and not in its root meaning of trustee or protector. Without detailed knowledge of the individuals mentioned, it is often difficult to determine whether particular words in the poem are to be understood as proper names.

<sup>148</sup> Or ‘the saint’s Jāzār’, Jāzār probably being modern-day Gāzār in Khurāsān-i Junūbi.

Turn towards Iraq, O heart, to give thanks each day for every  
 place,  
 That your desire be fulfilled. What have I to fear of a rebel?  
 May the congregations (*jamā'āt*) of 'Aṭā' Allāhīs have a hundred  
 joys.  
 Their teacher (*mu'allim*) is Riḍā. What have I to fear of a  
 rebel?  
 Know Mullā Shāh Bīk to be the teacher in the boundary of  
 Kirmān.  
 He is among the company of courageous men. What have I to  
 fear of a rebel?  
 Know the teacher in Saraqū to be in the retinue of perceptive  
 hearts.  
 Know him to be Mīr Nūr Allāh. What have I to fear of a  
 rebel?

45

I speak of the rectitude of those intoxicated ones, the lovers of  
 Hindūstān.  
 May their assemblies turn into gardens. What have I to fear of  
 a rebel?  
 In these meaningful mysteries, it is Ḥasan Shāh in Lahore  
 Who is the inviter to our Imam. What have I to fear of a  
 rebel?  
 Abal-bīn lives in Multān, know his brother to be Pīr  
 Muḥammad.  
 Call him submissive to the will of the Merciful. What have I  
 to fear of a rebel?<sup>149</sup>  
 The teacher in the bounds of Gujarāt is Pīr Fāḍil 'Alī.  
 What a gifted saint is he. What have I to fear of a rebel?  
 Khīḍr Khān of Daiwal is peerless in that land,  
 Learned, a scholar, so perfect. What have I to fear of a rebel?

<sup>149</sup> Here, in place of *Abal-bīn* (ابلیبن) as found in manuscript 55, Mu'izzī has *Īl bīn*. However, this does not fit the metre. Manuscript 14708 has *Amīn bīn*. It is possible that this was an Indic name, which was incorrectly rendered by the scribes. *Abalājan* (ابلاجن, अबलाजन), for example, is a synonym of *abalā*, or helpless maiden, an epithet used by Pīr Ḥasan Kabīrdīn (fl. 9th/15th c.) to describe his humility before the imam. See, for example, his, 'Ādam ād niriñjan', in *100 Gīnānani chopāḍi: Venatī moṭī maher karo tathā Sat vachan ne Sataguranuranā vivānuṃ nānuṃ gīnān tathā bijā gīnāno vāli* (5th ed., Mumbai, 1990 VS/1934), vol. 1, no. 3, 6–14. It is also possible that bīn should be read separately, as a verb: 'Behold Abal . . .'

50

In Jalālahpūr Kaskah lives one named Dānā.

He is a special servant of our Imam. What have I to fear of a rebel?

‘Azīz Amīr, known in the bounds of Kābul

Is the servant of Duldul’s lord, ‘Alī. What have I to fear of a rebel?<sup>150</sup>

Mīr Muḥammad of Bik Tūt is granted leave to read the prayer.

May the lord give him ease. What have I to fear of a rebel?

There is one in Chārayak Kār named Raḥmat Allāh.

He is a special lover of God. What have I to fear of a rebel?<sup>151</sup>

Know also that in Farīḍa, Malik Ḥājī is the teacher.

A knower of God, an invoker of God. What have I to fear of a rebel?

55

He appointed that Ḥaydar, son of Qāsīm, to speak the truth in Lihān

Through whom hearts are illuminated. What have I to fear of a rebel?

Aras Khān also gave his divining rod to Murād-i Ṭāhirī.

He is the cupbearer of this wine. What have I to fear of a rebel?<sup>152</sup>

Know that in Darra-yi Nūr is Aras Khān, the inviter, knower of God.

Through him, that corner flourishes. What have I to fear of a rebel?

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<sup>150</sup> Duldul was the famous mount of ‘Alī. The *EI2* article provides some useful historical information, but is inadequate for understanding Duldul as a poetic trope. See Huart and Pellat, ‘Duldul’, *EI2*. [https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_2151](https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2151). For the poetic trope, see Habib Rahim, ‘Perfection Manifested: ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib’s Image in Classical Persian and Modern Indian Muslim Poetry’, pp. 291–295.

<sup>151</sup> The name of the place must be read Chārayak Kār for the metre. It is likely this is modern-day Chārikār.

<sup>152</sup> Mu‘izzī suggests that Kankan may refer to the Kang district of Nīmrūz province, Afghanistan, Mu‘izzī, ‘Qāsīm-shāhiyān’, p. 164. I have followed Dihkhudā, who treats it as meaning *kān-kan* or *kahan-kan* in the sense of *chāh-kan*, *qanāt-kan*, or *muqannī*, the latter meaning ‘skillful at finding water.’ The hoopoe is sometimes referred to as *muqannī al-arḍ*. In this sense, I’ve tentatively rendered it with the English expression ‘divining rod,’ a forked tree branch that indicates to a skilled user the presence of water or treasure underground.



In reality, Darwish 'Alī flourishes as Ḥaydar's gnostic.

In honesty and temperament, he's like Qanbar. What have I  
to fear of a rebel?<sup>153</sup>

Next, recall 'Alī Khwāja from Jūy-Naw.

Aras Khān is his guide. What have I to fear of a rebel?

60

Kutal is a place in which Muḥammad is the guide.

In that realm of his, he lives. What have I to fear of a rebel?

Harken to the tale of the clime of Turkistān, and the knowers of  
God in that land,

For I shall speak of them one by one, O guide. What have I to  
fear of a rebel?

Muḥibb 'Alī is in Ghūrī, where his command rules the land.

I shall speak if your heart isn't blind. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?

Haqq-dād is the pearl of Qunduz, the teacher at the head of a  
group.

He is a candle for the benighted heart. What have I to fear of  
a rebel?

Badī', that God-knowing gnostic, who lives in Badakhshān,

Most assuredly, he is among the lovers. What have I to fear of  
a rebel?

65

For the sake of these teachers, for the sake of these knowers of  
God,

Forgive my sins. What have I to fear of a rebel?

O God, You are unique and greater, refuge of high and low.

Forgive all my transgressions. What have I to fear of a rebel?

Grant me knowledge of mysteries. Show me the path to You.

This humble creature is a dog at Your threshold. What have I  
to fear of a rebel?

O God, You are self-sufficient, beyond need. O God, You are my  
helper.

You are certainly the knower of the secret. What have I to fear  
of a rebel?

For the sake of Ādam and Ḥawwā (Eve), for the sake of Ṣāliḥ  
and Yaḥyā (John the Baptist),

Forgive our sins. What have I to fear of a rebel?

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<sup>153</sup> *Sabz az* might more fruitfully be read here as *Sibzār*, a place near Herat. The metre, however, would be broken and the translation would be a rather strained, 'originally Darwish 'Alī is from 'Arif Ḥaydar's *Sibzār*'.

70

For the sake of Nūḥ (Noah) and Your flood, by Ismā'il (Ishmael)  
and the sacrifice made for You,

I have submitted to Your command and will. What have I to  
fear of a rebel?

For the sake of Mūsā (Moses) and 'Īsā (Jesus), Rasūl Allāh, our  
Prophet,

Is the intercessor in tomorrow's Judgment. What have I to  
fear of a rebel?

By Sayyidnā [Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ] and his vision, by his wonders  
and prayer.

By the chieftains (*rā'is-ān*) in accord with him. What have I  
to fear of a rebel?

For the sake of Ṣūfī, son of Ṣādiq, whose knowledge is superior  
to all,

May the unworthy be rent by sorrow. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?<sup>154</sup>

By Ya'qūb Shāh, our sage, and his hands (raised in) prayers.

His pleasure is God's pleasure. What have I to fear of a rebel?

75

Wherefore these futile cares of foes, Maḥmūd?

When Nūr al-Dahr has befriended me, What have I to fear of  
a rebel?

These brave men, followers of the path of faith, will intercede  
for my sins,

For such is the custom of the noble. What have I to fear of a  
rebel?

Before you, the intercessors for us, the sinful, are those who  
have recognised God.

His (Nūr al-Dahr's) slave has his own slaves. What have I to  
fear of a rebel?

By the essence of Nūr al-Dahr, how great that resurrector  
sublime!

United with all these, What have I to fear of a rebel?

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<sup>154</sup> *Ṣūfī-yi Ṣādiq* may equally be translated as 'sincere Ṣūfī'. However, Ismaili oral tradition in Quhistān, as recorded by Maryam Mu'izzī, traces the family genealogy to this Ṣādiq. See Maryam Mu'izzī, 'Risāla-yi Ḥusayn bin Ya'qūb Shāh', *Faṣl-nāma-yi muṭāla'āt-i ta'rikhī*, 3 (1370 Sh./1991-1992), p. 408.

## F. Prayers of Proximity in Ismaili and Sister Communities

*Tobho tobho takasīradār, bando sīr tā pā gunehagār, yā shāh tuṃ bakṣīe bakṣaṇahār. Dhuā to pīr paḍe, bando to venati kare, sachcho shāh to kabul kare.*

I repent, I repent! This sinner is a slave guilty from head to foot – forgive me O lord, for you are the clement. The *pīr* prays, this slave entreats, true Lord – yours is to pardon.

Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn, *The Primordial Prayer*<sup>155</sup>

In his poem, Khālū Maḥmūd seeks refuge in Imam Nūr al-Dahr, and the intercession of ‘those who have recognised God’. These are the community’s dignitaries in scattered lands, along with Adam, Eve and several prophets, culminating in the Prophet Muhammad. He also invokes Sayyidnā, i.e., Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, the imam’s proof (*ḥujjat*) Ṣūfī son of Ṣādiq, ‘whose knowledge is superior to all’, and Ya‘qūb Shāh, the poet’s own *pīr*, who was the son of Ṣūfī.<sup>156</sup> Entreaties that invoke the imams in general, and the imam of one’s time in particular, in seeking sanctuary and proximity to God, are ubiquitous at every period of Ismaili history. We find direct parallels of this practice in many sister Muslim communities, such as the invocation of the Ithnā‘asharī imams in Twelver Shi‘i practice, or of the saints of various Sufi orders in their prayers, plentiful examples of which are documented by Constance Padwick in her *Muslim Devotions*.<sup>157</sup> These works, often

<sup>155</sup> Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn, *Asal Dhuā: Shiyā Īmāmi Isamāilīnī traṇ vakhatanī bandagī* (4th ed., Mumbai, 1984 VS/1928), p. 2.

<sup>156</sup> On Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, see Ali Mohammad Rajput, *Hasan-i-Sabbah: His Life and Thought* (revised ed., London, 2013); Farhad Daftary, ‘Hasan-i Sabbah and the Origins of the Nizari Ismaili *Da‘wa* and State’, in his *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies* (London, 2005), pp. 124–148. On the family of Ṣūfī b. Ṣādiq, Ya‘qūb Shāh b. Ṣūfī and Ḥusayn b. Ya‘qūb Shāh, see Virani, ‘Ḥusayn b. Ya‘qūb Shāh b. Ṣūfī: The Adornment of Assemblies’, in *An Anthology of Ismaili Literature: A Shi‘i Vision of Islam*, pp. 296–297; Shafique N. Virani, ‘Spring’s Equinox: Nawrūz in Ismaili Thought’, in Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, ed., *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread* (London, 2020), pp. 471–479; Mu‘izzī, ‘Ḥusayn bin Ya‘qūb Shāh’, pp. 405–408. A manuscript of a poem by Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī, available to Mu‘izzī but not to me, explicitly states that Ṣūfī held the rank of *ḥujjat*. See Mu‘izzī, ‘Ḥusayn bin Ya‘qūb Shāh’, p. 405; Mu‘izzī, *Ismā‘īliyyān-i Īrān*, p. 351, n. 61.

<sup>157</sup> Constance Evelyn Padwick, *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use* (London, 1961), pp. 234–244 et passim.

called *istighātha* or ‘imploring help’ and *awrād* or ‘litanies’, regularly mirror the powerful rhythmical prose and stylistic elements of the Ismaili prayers, such as those found in the work of the 11th/17th-century author, Mīrzā Ḥusayn b. Ya‘qūb Shāh. His *Tazyīn al-majālis* (Adornment of Assemblies) contains the *Awrād al-mu‘minīn* (Litanies of the Faithful) immediately followed by a section invoking the imams’ names, entitled *Fi’l-istighātha* (On Imploring Help). Similarly, among several Sufi orders a practice known as the frock or chain of the litany (*khirqat* or *silsilat al-wird*) exists. This recounts the ‘heads of the *ṭarīqa* [order] from the founder to the Prophet’.<sup>158</sup>

Such practices had already taken root by the early years of the Fatimid caliphate. In his *Da‘ā‘im al-Islām*, the Ismaili jurist al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān (d. 363/974) writes:

‘Alī related that the Messenger of God was wont to say, ‘Surely, God will grant the wishes of those in my community who pass their right hand over their faces upon the completion of prayers and recite: “O God, praise belongs to You. There is no god save You, the knower of what is visible and what is unseen. O God, dispel my open and hidden sorrow, distress, and temptations.”’

The Imams related to us their decree to recite the prayer of drawing nigh (*taqarrub*) after every mandatory prayer. After ending the prayer with the salutations, the worshipper should raise his hands, palms exposed, and recite, ‘O God, I approach You through Muhammad, Your Messenger and Prophet, and his legatee, Your sanctified authority, ‘Alī, and the pure Imams descended from him, namely al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī, and Ja‘far b. Muḥammad. . . .’

The worshipper should name every Imam, one after the other, till he reaches the Imam of his time, and then he should say, ‘O God, I approach You through them, and befriend them, and before You I disavow their enemies. I bear witness, O God, by the realities of sincerity and veracity of certainty that they are Your representatives on Your earth, and Your Proofs against Your creatures and the means of reaching You and the gates of Your Mercy. O lord, gather me with them and banish me not

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<sup>158</sup> J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (New York, 1971), p. 183, transliteration modified. See also Frederick Mathewson Denny, ‘Wird’, *EI2*; Louis Massignon, ‘Wird’, *EI*, vol. 4, p. 1139.

from the circle of their friends, and make me firm in my covenant to them. O God, through them, dignify me before You in this world and the next, and make me among those drawn near to You. O lord, strengthen the certainty in my heart and increase my guidance and illumination. O Lord, bless Muhammad and the progeny of Muhammad. Grant me of the abundance you bestowed on Your faithful worshippers, by which I may be safe from Your punishment and be worthy of Your pleasure and mercy. By Your sanction, guide me aright when differences of opinion arise. Surely, You guide whom You will unto the right path. I beg You, lord, for Your grace in this world and the next, and I beseech You to save me from the torment of Hell.<sup>159</sup>

Ismaili literature is replete with such prayers of proximity (*taqarrub*) in which the faithful draw nigh unto God by invoking the imams, generally in succession. This feature of the supplications, many in rhymed prose, is vividly depicted in the manuscripts. Generations of scribes sometimes crowd into the margins the names of the imams of their time, adding them to the list provided by the original author.<sup>160</sup> The Sufis were later

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<sup>159</sup> Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, ed. Asaf A.A. Fyzee (Cairo, 1383/1963 [1st ed. 1951]), vol. 1, p. 171. My translation, which benefits from al-Nu'mān, *Pillars of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 214–215. The original Arabic has masculine singular in its address, which was regularly used in providing guidance of a general nature. As this is no longer common in English, I have used the plural, which does not show gender.

<sup>160</sup> Some good examples may be seen in the following manuscripts: Ḥusayn b. Ya'qūb Shāh, 'Tazyīn al-majālis', accession number 7822, Ismaili Special Collections Unit, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, p. 134; Ḥusayn b. Ya'qūb Shāh, 'Tazyīn al-Majālis: Fi'l-istighāthah', accession number 15107, RK61, Ismaili Special Collections Unit, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London. On the author of this work, see Mu'izzī, 'Ḥusayn bin Ya'qūb Shāh', pp. 404–409. I am completing a critical edition and translation of the *Adornment of Assemblies*. For further details and extended excerpts, see Virani, 'Ḥusayn b. Ya'qūb Shāh b. Šūfi: The Adornment of Assemblies', in *An Anthology of Ismaili Literature: A Shi'i Vision of Islam*; Virani, 'Spring's Equinox'. The practice of adding the names of succeeding imams is present in Ismaili poetry as well. One may take, for example, the genealogy found in the poetry of Dā'ī Anjudānī (fl. 9th/15th c.), which ends with the name of the imam of his time, Mustanšir bi'llāh (d. 885/1480), Dā'ī Anjudānī, '[Qaṣida-yi dhurriyya]', accession number AG53, Ismaili Special Collections Unit. The poem was continued by 'Abd al-Šamad Shāh, a great-grandson of Imam Ḥasan 'Alī Shāh Aga Khan I (d. 1298/1881), who, writing under his penname 'Yaḥyā', extended the verses to the imam of his own time, Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Aga Khan III. On the poet Dā'ī, see Virani, *Ismailis in the Middle Ages*,

to adopt similar initiatic lines (*silsilas*), a development which, as Massignon and Trimingham observe, took place with the fall of the Shi'i Fatimid and Būyid dynasties, and the Sufi adoption of the primarily Shi'i custom of the pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*).<sup>161</sup>

Prayers of proximity abound in the works of Khālū Maḥmūd's Ismaili contemporaries. Most of these remain unedited in yet to be catalogued manuscripts. For example, we may find elements in a poem entitled *The Seven Pillars of the Prophetic Dispensation* (*Haft arkān-i sharī'at*) by the aforementioned Šūfi b. Šādiq, in the writings of his son Ya'qūb Shāh b. Šūfi, such as his poem 'O lord, by my life, make my heart submissive to your command' (*Khudāwandā dil-i mā-rā bi-jān ma'mūr-i farmān kun*), and most elaborately in the *Tazyīn al-majālis* of the latter's son, Ḥusayn b. Ya'qūb Shāh, and in the works of other contemporary Ismaili poets, such as 'Come hither, O sincere servant, invoke Shāh Nūr al-Dahr' (*Biyā ay banda-yi šādiq bu-gū yā Shāh Nūr al-Dahr*) by a certain Ustād Maṣṣūr, who composed it in 1052/1642 on the occasion of the imam's arrival in Mashhad.<sup>162</sup>

From at least the Fatimid period of Ismaili history, these invocations often incorporate the names of spiritual guides in a chain from the

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pp. 25–26, 81–82, 86, 117–118, 174–175; Virani, 'Dā'i Anjudāni: The Trusted Spirit', in *An Anthology of Ismaili Literature: A Shi'i Vision of Islam*. On this poem of 'Abd al-Šamad Shāh, see Mu'izzī, *Ismā'iliyān-i Īrān*, p. 41. The *Qaṣida-yi dhurriyya* was composed by Raqqāmī Khurāsānī (fl. 11th/17th), the son of the more famous Khākī Khurāsānī. His versified register of Ismaili imams was continued by a later poet to the time of Imam Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, Aga Khan III, who succeeded to the imamate in 1885. See A. A. Semenov, 'Ismailitskaya oda, posvyashchennaya voploshcheniyam 'Aliya boga', *Iran*, 2 (1928) and Wladimir Ivanow, 'Notes on the Ismailis in Persia', in *Ismailitica*, in *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 8 (1922), pp. 73–76. See also Paul E. Walker, 'Introduction', in his *Master of the Age: An Islamic Treatise on the Necessity of the Imamate* (London, 2007), p. 27 with regard to a similar phenomenon in the manuscripts of al-Kirmānī's *Lights to Illuminate the Proof of the Imamate* (*al-Maṣābiḥ fi'l-ithbāt al-imāma*).

<sup>161</sup> Massignon, 'Wird', *EI*, p. 1139; Trimingham, *Sufi Orders*, p. 14.

<sup>162</sup> 'Haft arkān-i sharī'at', incipit, 'ای دل طریق بندگی دوست کن شعار', accession number 14714, Ismaili Special Collections Unit; Anjuman-i ta'līm u tarbiyat-i madhhabī-yi Shī'a-yi Imāmiyya-yi Ismā'iliyya-yi Khurāsān, ed. *Majmu'a-yi ash'ār-i madhhabī az bayn-i jamā'at-i Īrān* (Mashhad, 1374 Sh./1995), np; Ḥusayn b. Ya'qūb Shāh, 'Tazyīn al-majālis', accession number 7822, Aga Khan Library; Maṣṣūr (pseud.), 'Dar bāb-i tashrif āwardan-i Shāh 'Abbās-i thāni wa Āqā-yi Buzurg', incipit, 'بحمد الله که بازم نخل امیدى ببار آمد', accession number 14713.

time of Adam onwards.<sup>163</sup> This trend of including figures from hoary antiquity as manifestations of a single divine light (*nūr*) continues in the *Gināns* of the South Asian Ismailis, as in the *Primordial Canticle* (*Muḥ gāvantri*) of Sayyid Imām Shāh (fl. 9th–10th/15th–16th c.).<sup>164</sup> Indic Ismaili literature mirrors Khālū Maḥmūd's invocation of the imam's appointees 'who had recognised God'. Examples include the *Primordial Prayer* (*Asal dhuā*) of Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn (fl. 8th/14th c.) and

<sup>163</sup> See, for example, *Ad'iyat al-ayyām al-sab'ah* (Beirut, 1427/2006), p. 14.

<sup>164</sup> Sayyid Imām Shāh, *Muḥ: gāvantri* (Mumbai, 1905), passim. On this figure, see Shafiqe Virani, 'The Voice of Truth: Life and Works of Sayyid Nūr Muḥammad Shāh, A 15th/16th Century Ismā'īlī Mystic' (MA, McGill University, 1995), pp. 19–22. Similar compositions continued to be written in modern times. As an example, see the Gujarati poem *Jay jay Alī-oṃm nakalaṅk*, Ebrāhīm Jusab Varatejī, *Vedik Islām athavā Mī. Jīmane Jawāb: pahelo bhāg – Varatejīnuṃ Vīl, bijo bhāg – Īsmā'īlīyā rahasy* (Mumbai, 1339 AH/1977 VS/1921 CE), section 16, 1–3. For examples in Persian Ismaili literature, see, for example, the manuscript '[*Du'ā-yi taqarrub*]', accession number n.a., Ismaili Special Collections Unit, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, pp. 3–5, with the incipit [ت]وکلت بمولانا توکلت بمولانا توکل کردم و بیزارم از خویش. This is a hitherto uncatalogued item with no visible accession number in the Ismaili Special Collections Unit of the IIS. It is a paper copy produced, I am told, from photographs taken in 1978 of a manuscript, the original of which was apparently in the possession of an unidentified Ismaili in Iran. Handwritten English numbers occur as later additions at the top right-hand corner of the first four pages. The extract available to me, unfortunately, does not include a colophon or other information that would allow us to identify the scribe or the year of writing. However, there is another item in the collection in precisely the same handwriting that does have a colophon. We can safely presume that manuscript نغ, used in S. J. Badakhchani's critical edition of the Poems of the Resurrection (*Dīwān-i qā'imīyyāt*) of Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Katib (d. 645/1246), was produced by one and the same hand. An image of the last page of نغ, reproduced in Badakhchani's edition indicates that the scribe was Muḥammad Ḥusayn b. Mīrẓā 'Alī 'the fashioner of 'Arabī footwear of Sidih, who completed it on Tuesday, the 25th of the month of Muḥarram, 1101 AH', which corresponds to 1689 CE. S. J. Badakhshānī, 'Muqaddima-yi muṣahḥih', in his edition of *Dīwān-i qā'imīyyāt*, p. cxxviii. The Imam of the time in this manuscript is identified as 'Mawlānā Shāh Khalīl Allāh' (d. 1090/1680), however, certain indications in the text of the prayer suggest that it may originally have been written during the Alamūt period, and like other works of its genre, had the names of succeeding imams added each time it was recopied. Similarly, an anonymous *mathnawī* copied in 986/1560 recounts the names of the imams from the time of Adam to 'Alī, and then from 'Alī until the author's time. See Virani, *Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, pp. 81–82.

the *Prayer of the Vessel on the Dais* (*Ghāṭ pāṭ nī dhuā*), supplications in a combination of Arabic, Persian, Sindhi, Punjabi and Gujarati. While Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī identifies the imam’s representatives in his own lifetime, these South Asian ismaili prayers invoke a lineage of representatives stretching back to the founding days of Islam.<sup>165</sup>

### G. Whose Uncle Was He?

*Āb-rā ū khāk-rā barham zadī*

*Z’āb ū gil naqsh-i tan-i Ādam zadī*

*Nisbat-ash dādī ū juft ū khāl ū ‘am*

*Bā hazār andīsha ū shādī ū gham*

Together You cast water and dust

From clay and water, You moulded man’s form

Giving him lineage, a mate, and uncles, maternal and paternal

With a thousand thoughts, and joys, and sorrows

Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *The Spiritual Couplets* (*Mathnawī-yi ma‘nawī*)<sup>166</sup>

We must deduce virtually everything we know about our poet from his own compositions, as no other works yet discovered mention him. In verse 78, he gives his penname (*takhalluṣ*) as ‘Maḥmūd’. In verses 75 and 78 he identifies the imam of his time as Nūr al-Dahr, also known as Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī. This imam held his position from 1043/1634 to 1082/1671 and thus he was contemporary with three Safavid sovereigns, Shah Ṣafī (d. 1052/1642), Shah ‘Abbās II (d. 1077/1666) and Shah Sulaymān I (d. 1105/1694):

*chirā andīsha-yi bāṭil az īn dīddān kunī Maḥmūd*

*chih Nūr al-Dahr shud yār-am chih bāk az khārijī dāram. . .*

*bi-ḥaqq-i dhāt-i Nūr al-Dahr buzurg ān qāyim-i a‘zam*

*buwad bā īn hama hamdam chih bāk az khārijī dāram*

<sup>165</sup> Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn, *Asal Dhuā: Shiyā Īmāmī Isamāīlīnī traṅ vakhatanī bandagī, Mānavantā bodhaguru Pīr Sadarādīn Sāhebe Rachelī asal dhuā*, 1st [Gujarati] ed. (Mumbāi, 1975 VS/1919 CE), pp. 19–22 et passim; *Ghaṭapāṭanī dhuā*, 2nd [Gujarati] ed. (Mumbāi, 1978 VS/1922 CE), pp. 47–51.

<sup>166</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Mathnawī-yi ma‘nawī*, ed. and tr. R. A. Nicholson (London, 1925–1940), vol. 1, p. 285. My translation, which benefits from Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. and tr. R. A. Nicholson, vol. 2, p. 257.



Wherefore these futile cares of foes, Maḥmūd?,  
 When Nūr al-Dahr has befriended me, What have I to fear of  
 a rebel? . . .  
 By the essence of Nūr al-Dahr, how great that resurrector  
 sublime!  
 United with all these, What have I to fear of a rebel?

Not found in the composition itself, however, is the poet's full name, 'Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī', which we must glean from elsewhere. Fortunately, manuscript 55 heads his composition with the words, 'The Pearl Scattering Verses of Maḥmūd Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī' (*Ash'ār-i durr nithār-i Maḥmūd Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī*). Similarly, the Mukhī Ghiyāth al-Dīn Mīrshāhī manuscript available to Maryam Mu'izzī, includes the title 'From the verses of Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī' (*Min ash'ār-i Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī*).<sup>167</sup> A previously unknown poem of the author in a manuscript from Sidih, Iran, also begins with the words, 'Verses of Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī' (*ash'ār-i Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī*).<sup>168</sup>

This last manuscript is especially revealing. A cover label announces that the owner of the notebook (*bayāḍ*) was a certain Muḥammad Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Rashīd Rīsh Qirmiz of Sidih, Bīrjand district, Khurāsān.<sup>169</sup> It records the poetry of Ākhūnd Mawlānā Mīrzā Ḥusayn, an Ismaili luminary also mentioned in Khālū Maḥmūd's 'A servant of 'Alī, king of men, am I'. It records compositions by several other poets as well, including such noted figures as Hilālī Astarābādī Jaghatā'i (d. 936/1529) and Ṣā'ib Tabrīzī (d. 1087/1676). The label tells us the scribe wrote (i.e., copied) the text around 1112/1701, in other words, during the reign of Imam Shāh Nizār (d. 1134/1722), and that the accession number of the copy housed in the Ismaili Special Collections Unit is RK32. A researcher photographed the images on 24 December 1978 and apparently developed the film. The reproductions of the first

<sup>167</sup> Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī, 'Ash'ār-i durr nithār-i Maḥmūd Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī', incipit, 'غلام شاه مردانم چباک از خارجی دارم', in manuscript 55, 82v; Mu'izzī, 'Qāsim-shāhiyān', p. 153.

<sup>168</sup> Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī, 'Ash'ār-i Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī', incipit, 'ایدل بیا که وعده هتکام محشر است', accession number RK32, vol. 2, Ismaili Special Collections Unit, IIS, p. 35.

<sup>169</sup> Transliteration slightly modified.

three reels were available to me, though the label suggests that there were originally seven reels. The handwriting is very obscure and difficult to decipher in the copy. We can only hope that the original has survived in Sidih and will one day be available for scholarly research.

As explained above, our poet wrote during the reign of Imām Nūr al-Dahr ‘Alī (r. 1043–1082/1634–1671). Therefore, the copyist recorded the main portions of the Sidih manuscript a maximum of 66 solar years (69 lunar years) after Khālū Maḥmūd composed ‘A servant of ‘Alī’.<sup>170</sup> Most importantly, Maḥmūd’s poem in this collection reveals that he penned it during the campaign by the Safavid shah ‘Abbās II (d. 1077/1666) to retake Qandahār in the 1050s/1640s. The shah recaptured this important city from the Mughals in 1059/1649, after an immense struggle.<sup>171</sup> Khālū Maḥmūd composed the poem in the very popular metre *muḍāri‘-yi makhbūn-i akhrab-i makfūf-i maḥdhūf*, that is, – – ˇ | – ˇ – ˇ | ˇ – – ˇ | – ˇ –.

*ay dil biyā kih wa‘da-yi hangām-i maḥshar ast*

*ṣad shūr ū ṣad futūr dar īn charkh-i akhḍar ast*

Come hither, O heart, for arrived has the promised resurrection

Beneath earth’s azure dome, pandemonium and upheaval

reign

Both the sentiment and the rhythm of the composition are reminiscent of Muḥtasham Kāshānī’s (d. 996/1588) famous and oft-imitated strophe (*tarkīb-band*) on the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn at Karbala, which may have been Khālū Maḥmūd’s inspiration:

*Bāz īn chih shūrish ast kih dar khalq-i ‘ālam ast?*

*Bāz īn chih nawḥa ū chih ‘azā ū chih mātām ast?*

Whence this tumult that again grips the world’s people?

Whence this lament, this mourning, this weeping?

<sup>170</sup> There appears, however, to have been more than one scribe of the Sidih manuscript, one of whom notes the year 1314/1896 on a page later numbered 10 in Latin script.

<sup>171</sup> For a background to these events, see Rudi Matthee and Hiroyuki Mashita, ‘Kandahar iv. From the Mongol Invasion through the Safavid Era’, in *EIr* <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kandahar-from-the-mongol-invasion-through-the-safavid-era>.

The composition depicts Khālū Maḥmūd being confronted by a hidden oracle, a man of God (*mard-i Khudā*). If we take *mard-i Khudā* in 'Come hither, O heart' to be synonymous with *mard-i haqq* in verse 32 of 'A servant of 'Alī', it is likely that it refers to a member of the religious hierarchy. The poet expresses his confusion about whether to support the Safavid campaign. 'Hush!' the figure replies, as this is an unrevealed secret. However, as Khālū Maḥmūd is among the people of unity, the oracle will guide him. He divulges that the time for the advent of 'Alī's progeny is nigh and that Shah 'Abbās should be supported, as he is a lover of 'Alī and a Shi'i. Khālū Maḥmūd concludes by seeking refuge in 'Alī against all evil.

Verses 32–33 of 'A servant of 'Alī' inform us that our poet was born in Mask in the Mu'minābād region, where there was a well-established Ismaili presence, and that his brother, Sulṭān 'Alī, had an important leadership role there.<sup>172</sup> The wistful memory of his homeland reveals that he no longer lived in the village of his birth. He seeks the intercession of the community's various leaders, thereby confessing they hold a rank higher than his own. However, his detailed knowledge of the notables of his time and their geographical distribution indicates that he himself occupied a position in the hierarchy. In his poem 'Come hither, O heart', the allusion that he was among the people of unity (*ahl-i waḥdat*) to whom the oracle could confide information about the Safavid shah is suggestive. He does not use the phrase 'people of unity' (*ahl-i waḥdat*) here in the technical sense found in Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd's *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* (Paradise of Submission), where it refers to the imam's supreme proof (*hujjat-i a'zam*). It does, however, intimate that our poet played a role in the religious hierarchy and was not merely a lay believer, or 'respondent' (*mustajīb*).<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> The name of the locale is corrupted as 'Baskak' in the more recent manuscripts. Mu'izzī ably demonstrates that Mask (or alternatively, Gask) is more likely to be correct. That it is indeed Mask is established definitively in the newly discovered manuscript 55, used for this edition. Mu'izzī, 'Qāsim-shāhiyān', pp. 153–157.

<sup>173</sup> On the technical use of the phrase *ahl-i waḥdat*, see Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*, ed. S. J. Badakhchani (Tehran, 1393 Sh./2014), p. 69; Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, *Rawḍa-yi*

I have encountered the penname ‘Maḥmūd’ associated with a handful of other poems in scattered Persian Ismaili manuscripts, mostly uncatalogued. At present, it is not possible to determine if these spring from the pen of our poet, but I document them here as the references may be useful for future researchers.

A short composition entitled the *Couplets of Maḥmūd* (*mathnawī-yi Maḥmūdī*) exists. It is in praise of the Prophet Muhammad and is an extended commentary on the famous mystical tradition (*ḥadīth*), *anā Aḥmad bilā mīm*, ‘I am Aḥmad (i.e., Muhammad) without the letter *m*’, i.e., Aḥad, ‘One’.<sup>174</sup> It begins:

*zabān-am qābil-i ḥamd-i Khudā shud*  
*kih bā nām-i Muḥammad āshanā shud*

Like Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī’s ‘A servant of ‘Alī, king of men, am I’, this composition is also in a ‘trilling metre’ (*hazaj*), which is uncommon for a *mathnawī*.

Another poem explores the mystical meaning of the letters ‘*ayn*’ (ع) and ‘*ghayn*’ (غ), and begins:

*Ay chashm-i chirāgh-i qurrat al-‘ayn*  
*wāy zubda-yi muqtadā-yi kawmayn*

The type of letter symbolism present in these two compositions, however, strongly suggests that they are by Maḥmūd Paṣīkhānī (d. 831/1428), the founder of the Nuqtawī movement in Iran.

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*taslīm*, ed. and tr. S. J. Badakhchani as *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought* (London, 2005), p. 85 (English). While continuing to use the phrase *ahl-i waḥdat* in the technical sense in his *Seven Chapters*, Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd also uses it with a broader meaning, making it synonymous with *mu’min*, *mūqin*, ‘*ārifān*, *mustajīb*, *mujāhid*, *qā’imī*, *muḥiqqa*, *bāṭiniyya* and *arjāl-i qā’im*. See Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, *Haft bāb*, ed. and tr. S. J. Badakhchani as *Spiritual Resurrection in Shi’i Islam: An Early Ismaili Treatise on the Doctrine of Qiyāmat* (London, 2017), pp. 42 (Per.), 83 (English).

<sup>174</sup> On the use of this *ḥadīth qudsī* in esoteric Islam, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1975), pp. 224, 419–420; A. Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985), pp. 116–117, 200, 202, 205, 212, 217, 240, 289 n66, 307 n138.

*Āfāq-nāma-yi Maḥmūd* (Maḥmūd's Tale of Horizons) is another composition, documented in Bertel's and Bakoev's *Alfabetical Catalogue* (*Alfavitniy katalog*) and also found in private collections.<sup>175</sup> It begins:

*ay giriftār dar man ū mā'ī*  
*tā kay az bahr-i nafs bar pā'ī*

However, the contents of this text and allusions to both Nāṣir-i Khusraw and the *Umm al-kitāb* strongly suggest that it was written in Central Asia, and not Iran.<sup>176</sup>

In trying to decipher our poet's identity, the Iranian scholar Maryam Mu'izzī said, 'It is not clear whose uncle (*khālū*) he was'. While the word *khālū* does, indeed, refer to an uncle in Persian, or more specifically, a mother's brother, the simplest explanation may be that it is also a common expression of respect. However, this interpretation itself begs the question of why the title is specific to Maḥmūd 'Alī. To the best of our knowledge, the name *khālū* as a mark of esteem is not associated with any other Ismaili author.

There is a plausible explanation for this. When Imam Ḥasan 'Alī Shāh Aga Khan I (d. 1298/1881) went to India, he took with him an entourage of Iranians, among whom were many Ismailis whose descendants, till today, are known as the 'Khālū' *jamā'at*, i.e., the Khālū community. Referring to the larger group of Iranian émigrés that included this group, in his *Memoirs*, Aga Khān III wrote:

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<sup>175</sup> Andrei E. Bertel's and Mamadvafo Bakoev, *Alfavitniy katalog rukopisey obnaruzhennikh v Gorno-Badakhshanskoy Avtonomnoy Oblasti ékspeditsiyey 1959-1963 gg.*, ed. Bobodzhon G. Gafurov and A.M. Mirzoev (Moscow, 1967), p. 23, no. 12.

<sup>176</sup> On the special attachment of the Central Asian Ismailis to the memory of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, see Shaftolu Gulamadov, 'The Hagiography of Nāṣir-i Khusraw and the Ismā'īlīs of Badakhshān' (PhD, University of Toronto, 2018); Daniel Beben, 'The Legendary Biographies of Nāṣir-i Khusraw: Memory and Textualization in Early Modern Persian Ismā'īlism' (PhD, Indiana University, 2015) and Dagikhudo Dagiev, *Central Asian Ismailis, An Annotated Bibliography of Russian, Tajik and Other Sources* (London, 2022), pp. 15–23. For a partial bibliography of studies on the *Umm al-kitāb*, see Farhad Daftary, 'Omm al-ketāb', in *Elr* <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/omm-al-ketab>.

My grandfather [Āghā Khān I] in his migration from Persia had brought with him more than a thousand relatives, dependents, clients, associates, personal and political supporters, ranging from the humblest groom or servant to a man of princely stature, a direct near-descendant of Nadirshah of Delhi fame, who had taken my grandfather's side in the disputes and troubles in Persia and with him had gone into exile.<sup>177</sup>

He referred more specifically to the Khālū *jamā'at* in addresses to his Indian followers at Mañjevaḍī (Junāgaḍh) and Nāgalpur (Kachchh) in 1903, mentioning the difficulties of his Khālū disciples in Iran. They lived in circumstances where they could not openly practice their faith and publicly passed as Twelver Shi'is.<sup>178</sup> In many ways, this scenario parallels that of the imam's 'Guptī' adherents in India, who blended with the majority Hindu population.<sup>179</sup> In another communication in the same year, this time to the Ismailis in Kerā (Kachchh), he distinguished between his 'Khurāsānī' and 'Khālū' followers. This suggests that like his Khwāja (also known as Khojā), Momnā, Shamsī and other Indian adherents, the Khālūs were one among several distinct Iranian Ismaili communities.<sup>180</sup> In 1923, the imam deputed Ālijāh (i.e., 'Āli-jāh) Dātū Merū of Gwādar (d. 1939) as an emissary to his Iranian devotees.<sup>181</sup> A manuscript with details of the journey in

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<sup>177</sup> Sultan Mahomed Shah Aga Khan III, *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time* (London, 1954), p. 9.

<sup>178</sup> Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Āghā Khān III, *Kalāme imāme mubīn: yāne avval imām Hajjarat Maulā Muratujhā Alīthī nasal b nasal utarī āvelā imāmatanā 48 mā jomānā dhanī Maulānā Hājhar Imām Nur Sulatān Mohammad Shāh Āgākhān sāhebanā mubāarak pharamāno* (i. s. 1885 thī 1910 sudhīnā), *Kalam E Imam E Mubin: Holy Firmans of Mowlana Hazar Imam Sultan Mahomed Shah the Agakhan (from 1880 [sic] A.D. to 1910 A.D.)* (1st ed., Mumbaī, 1950), vol. 1, pp. 180, 212–213.

<sup>179</sup> Virani, 'Taqiyya and Identity', pp. 99–139. On the Ismaili practice of *taqiyya* particularly in post-Mongol Iran, see Virani, 'Surviving Persecution', in *Sufis and their Opponents in the Persianate World*.

<sup>180</sup> Āghā Khān III, *Kalāme imāme mubīn*, vol. 1, p. 222. On the Khurāsānī Ismailis and their various tribes, see Ivanow, 'Ismailis in Persia', p. 51.

<sup>181</sup> Gwadar is today a port city on the southwestern coast of Baluchistan, Pakistan. Located on the shores of the Arabian Sea opposite Oman, it was at the time an overseas possession of Oman. On this figure, see Shihābuddīn A. Gvādrī, *Gohar-i Gvādar: Gvādar ke Ismā'ilīon kā tārikhī jā'izah* (Karāchī, 1994); Mumtaz Ali Tajddin Sadik Ali, *101 Ismaili Heroes: Late 19th century to Present Age*, vol. 1 (Karachi, 2003).

Khwāja Sindhi (Khojki) script and Sindhi language specifies that five of the imam's 'Khālū' followers, whose ancestors hailed from Iran, accompanied him. These were 'Alī-khān Ma'ṣūm-'alī, Qāsim Mukhī Ya'qūb-'alī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ghulām-ḥusayn Sirjānī, 'Abbās Ibrāhīm Khurāsānī and Ḥasan-qulī 'Abbās Khurāsānī. When romanised from the original Khwāja Sindhi, these are: Alikhān Māsumālī, Kāsam Mukhī Yākub-ali, Māmad Husenī Gulāmahusenī Sira<jā>nī, Abāsī Ebrāhem Khurāsānī and Hasana<ku>li Abāsī Khurāsānī.<sup>182</sup> That the manuscript identifies two of these figures as 'Khurāsānī' may suggest that there was no distinction between the Khālūs and the Khurāsānīs, or possibly that with time Indic Ismailis addressed all their Iranian coreligionists as 'Khālū'. Similarly, many Western scholars refer to the various groups of South Asian Ismailis simply as 'Khwāja' or 'Khojā', without realising the historical and ancestral distinctions among the imam's diverse followers in the Subcontinent. Rā'ī Sha'bān Dādullāhī, the first president of His Highness Shia Imami Ismaili Council for Iran, originally from Shahr-i Bābak and currently a resident of Tehran, provides additional confirmation. According to the oral tradition of the area, Imam Ḥasan 'Alī Shāh used to refer to his community in the area intimately as 'Khālū'. He also notes that the area of Shahr-i Bābak where the imam and his followers lived is still known as Maḥlah-yi Khālū-hā, 'the neighbourhood of the Khālūs'. A fortress and many other Ismaili antiquities are still in existence there.<sup>183</sup>

While the foregoing outlines the existence of an Iranian Ismaili community known as 'Khālū', no proper study yet exists of its history. It is, therefore, not possible to ascertain definitively how far back the use of this name goes.<sup>184</sup> However, it is certainly conceivable that

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<sup>182</sup> 'Siri Mubaithi saphar Erān taraph ravānā. . .', incipit, 'n.a.', personal collection of the late Abdul Aziz Gilani 'Sairab Abuturabi', Karachi. I am grateful to Mr Mumtaz Ali Tajddin for kindly sending me a scan of this manuscript.

<sup>183</sup> I am grateful to Rā'ī Sha'bān Dādullāhī for kindly providing this information and to Seddigheh Kardan for graciously conveying it to me. Maps of the area place this neighbourhood at 30.1148° N 55.1165° E.

<sup>184</sup> I have met and interviewed many members of the diaspora Khālū community in India in two of their historical centres, Vāḍi in Mumbai, and in Pune. See also Hamīr 'Sinnaph' (pseud.) Lākhā, *Kachchhanā Vāras Moledīna Meghājīnām jīvan*

Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī may have been a member of the Khālū *jamā‘at*, and that this could be the reason for his unusual title.

## H. Afterword

*And so instinctively she walked along the terrace towards that more secluded part of the garden just above the river bank, where she had so oft wandered hand in hand with him in the honeymoon of their love. There great clumps of old-fashioned cabbage roses grew in untidy splendour, and belated lilies sent intoxicating odours into the air, whilst the heavy masses of Egyptian and Michaelmas daisies looked like ghostly constellations in the gloom.*

Baroness Orczy, *The Elusive Pimpernel*<sup>185</sup>

For the Ismailis, the 11th/17th century was a time of both great promise and significant risk. Without providing details, Khālū Maḥmūd’s poem suggests that a rebel threatened the community. However, it also expresses confidence in the imam’s appointees to positions of spiritual leadership, the sages (*pīrs*), inviters (*dā‘īs*), guides (*rahbars*), teachers (*mu‘allims*) and others stationed across much of the Near East. The poet seeks the intercession of these luminaries, along with the prophets, illustrious sages of the past, and most importantly, the Imam of the Age, Shāh Nūr al-Dahr. His approach is both rooted in centuries-old tradition and an innovation in its own right. Invoking the imams in ‘prayers of proximity’ is a practice recorded since at least Fatimid times and prevalent among Maḥmūd’s Ismaili contemporaries, with analogous practices found in sister communities. We can find parallels to Maḥmūd’s invocation of the

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*saḥsmaraṇo: Smṛti jhaṅkāṛ* (2nd ed., Karāchī, 1961), p. 24. Aḥmad ‘Alī Khān Vazīrī (d. 1295/1878) mentions a tribe of Turkic origins centred on Rābur and Shastfīch in Kirmān, a region with significant Ismaili activity, which goes by the name Khālū. However, they apparently adopted this name because a leader of the Mihnī tribe named Faṭḥ ‘Alī Khān (fl. 19th c.) married a woman of their tribe named Faṭīma Khānum. After this, they came to be known as Khālūs. See Vazīrī, *Jughṛāfiyā-yi Kirmān*, p. 199; A.K.S. Lambton, ‘Kirmān’, *EI2*. If this is the same tribe from which the Ismaili Khālūs come, then the name is of too late an origin to have applied to Khālū Maḥmūd ‘Alī.

<sup>185</sup> Baroness Emmuska Orczy, *The Elusive Pimpernel* (Mineola, New York, 2007), p. 97.



members of the spiritual hierarchy in the compositions of the author's coreligionists, including those of South Asia. Identifying dozens of spiritual officers of one's time by name and domain, however, is something that in hitherto known Ismaili literature is unique to Khālū Maḥmūd. From the author's own works, we have deduced facts about his identity, such as his full name and penname, a few details about his family, his place of origin, suggestions about his position within the spiritual hierarchy, and so on. Limitations of space, however, prevent an exploration of the richness of historical detail provided in the poem. This includes the identities and locations of the dignitaries recounted and the possible distinctions between the various leadership positions mentioned, which often differ from the nomenclature recorded in the better documented Fatimid and Alamūt periods.<sup>186</sup> I anticipate returning to these questions in a future publication.

Khālū Maḥmūd 'Alī's poem reveals much about the so-called 'scarlet pimpernels' of his time, the members of the Ismaili invitation (*da'wa*). In Baroness Orczy's *The Elusive Pimpernel* cited above, a sequel to her original novel, she writes not only of the demure pimpernel, but of cabbage roses, lilies, and Egyptian and Michaelmas daisies. As the evidence of Khālū Maḥmūd's 'A servant of 'Alī, king of men, am I' demonstrates, the Ismaili leaders of the 11th/17th century counted figures scattered across much of the Muslim world, doubtless with myriad approaches to their tasks in the face of local circumstances. Future research will certainly reveal that the Ismaili *dā'īs* included not just the 'scarlet pimpernels', of Ivanow's estimation, but were a kaleidoscopic garden of various hues.

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<sup>186</sup> Some insightful work in this direction has already been accomplished by Mu'izzī in 'Qāsim-shāhiyān', pp. 157–169.

**Ismaili Doctrines in a Late Safavid Work:  
Quotations from the *Risālat al-Jāmi‘a* in  
Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkivarī’s *Maḥbūb al-Qulūb***

*Daniel De Smet*

The renaissance of Islamic philosophy in Safavid Iran was the fruit of a creative reflection on a wide range of sources, belonging to different traditions such as *falsafa* (al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī), *ishrāq* (Suhrawardī, Shahrāzūrī), Sufism (Ibn ‘Arabī) and the Arabic Plotinus (the so-called *Pseudo-Theology of Aristotle*). That the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* were also part of these sources is attested by literal quotes, for instance in the works of Mullā Ṣadrā,<sup>1</sup> although the influence of the Brethren’s thought on Safavid philosophy and the diffusion of their Epistles at that time in Iran still need to be investigated.

An initial contribution to this topic was provided by Mathieu Terrier in the annotation and commentary to his outstanding French translation of the first book of the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, an impressive universal history of wisdom and philosophy, from Adam to Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1631), compiled by the late Safavid philosopher, Quṭb

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Jambet, *L’acte d’être. La philosophie de la révélation chez Mollā Sadrā* (Paris, 2002), pp. 238, 241, 251 (quotes from the *Rasā’il* in Ṣadrā’s *Asfār*); Mathieu Terrier, ‘La représentation de la sagesse grecque comme discours et mode de vie chez les philosophes šrītes de l’Iran safavide (XI<sup>e</sup>/XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle)’, *Studia graeco-arabica*, 5 (2015), p. 316 (quotes in Ṣadrā’s *al-Mabda’ wa’l-ma‘ād*). However, in the hand-written catalogue of Ṣadrā’s private library, the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* and the *Risālat al-Jāmi‘a* do not occur; for the 111 titles appearing in this list, see Sajjad Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī: His Life and Works and the Sources for Safavid Philosophy*, *Journal of Semitic Studies*. Supplement 18 (2007), pp. 117–135 (hence, in his study, Rizvi does not include the writings of the Ikhwān among the sources for Safavid philosophy).

al-Dīn Ashkivarī (who died ca. 1088/1677 and 1095/1684).<sup>2</sup> Among the large number of disparate sources Ashkivarī used, Terrier identified a few quotes from the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* and, more surprisingly, a long citation taken from the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a*. In this study, I will first briefly examine the quotations from the *Rasā'il*, before addressing the long passage from the *Jāmi'a* occurring in the chapter on Adam and a second citation from the same work in the entry on Zoroaster, which apparently was not noticed by Terrier. As the quotes from the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a* are directly linked to the main tenets of Ismaili doctrine, the question arises as to whether Ashkivarī consciously included them, although they were not common issues in Safavid philosophy.

### Ashkivarī and the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*

In the second book of the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, devoted to the philosophers from the Islamic era, Ashkivarī has an entry about the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'.<sup>3</sup> It opens with an explicit identification of the Brethren:

The philosophers of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' [were]: Abū Sulaymān Muḥammad b. Ma'shar al-Bustī, known as al-Maqdisī, Abū'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Hārūn al-Zanjānī, Abū Aḥmad al-Mihrajānī,<sup>4</sup> al-'Awfī al-Baṣrī and Zayd b. Rifā'a al-Hāshimī. This group agreed to compose a book containing fifty-one treatises; fifty of them are about fifty branches of science, whereas the fifty-first is the summary (*jāmi'a*) of all the other treatises in a concise and selective way.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Mathieu Terrier, *Histoire de la sagesse et philosophie shi'ite. "L'Aimé des cœurs" de Quṭb al-Dīn Aṣḥqavārī* (Paris, 2016); on Ashkivarī, his life and his works, see Terrier, *Histoire*, pp. 41–105; Terrier, 'Quṭb al-Dīn Aṣḥqavārī, un philosophe discret de la renaissance safavide', *Studia Iranica*, 40 (2011), pp. 171–210; Terrier, 'Le *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* de Quṭb al-Dīn Aṣḥqavārī: une œuvre méconnue dans l'histoire de l'histoire de la sagesse en islam', *Journal Asiatique*, 298 (2010), pp. 345–387.

<sup>3</sup> Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb al-qulūb, al-maqāla al-thāniyya fī aḥwāl ḥukamā' al-Islām*, ed. Ḥamid Ṣidqī and Ibrāhīm al-Dibājī (Tehran, 1382 Sh./2003), pp. 133–137: n° 81 *ḥukamā' Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*.

<sup>4</sup> The name appears in this form in the edition of the *Maḥbūb* and in Lippert's edition of Ibn al-Qifī (see note 6). However, in secondary literature, the form al-Nahrajūrī, which is attested in some manuscripts, is often used.

<sup>5</sup> Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 2, pp. 133–134.

This information, along with the major part of Ashkivarī's entry, is taken from Ibn al-Qiftī's chapter about the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', which in turn partly depends on Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's *Kitāb al-Imtā' wa'l-mu'ānasa*.<sup>6</sup> In the beginning of his chapter, Ibn al-Qiftī mentions different opinions about the identity of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', including those who claim that the author was an imam from the offspring of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.<sup>7</sup> At first sight it looks strange that Ashkivarī, as a convinced Twelver Shi'ī, should have skipped this part of Ibn al-Qiftī's entry, and he seems to accept the authorship of a Sunni group of scholars around Abū Sulaymān al-Maqdisī. Perhaps he was well aware of the fact that claims about (hidden) imam(s) as author(s) of the *Rasā'il* were stemming from Ismaili circles,<sup>8</sup> which inevitably would arouse suspicion as to the orthodoxy of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'.

Ashkivarī further introduced a significant alteration in Ibn al-Qiftī's text. He copied part of the conversation which al-Tawḥīdī had in 373/983-84 with the Būyid *amīr* Ṣamsām al-Dawla about two presumed members of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā': Zayd b. Rifā'a and Abū Sulaymān al-Maqdisī. Questioned about the latter's opinion concerning the relationship between revealed law and philosophy, al-Tawḥīdī mentions, according to Ibn al-Qiftī's version, al-Maqdisī's bold position in the following terms:

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<sup>6</sup> Ibn al-Qiftī, *Ta'riḫ al-ḥukamā'*, ed. Julius Lippert (Leipzig, 1903), pp. 82–88 (the passage of Ashkivarī translated above is a combination of Ibn al-Qiftī, p. 83.15–16, with addition of the name Zayd b. Rifā'a mentioned on p. 82.17, and Ibn al-Qiftī, p. 82.2–5). On al-Tawḥīdī's and Ibn al-Qiftī's famous 'witness' about the supposed authors of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, see Samuel M. Stern, 'The Authorship of the Epistles of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'', *Islamic Culture*, 20 (1946), pp. 368–370; idem, 'New Information about the Authors of the "Epistles of the Sincere Brethren"', in his *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism* (Jerusalem and Leiden, 1983), pp. 155–157; Ismail K. Poonawala, 'Why We Need an Arabic Critical Edition with an Annotated English Translation of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*', in Nader El-Bizri, ed., *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and their Rasā'il. An Introduction* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 51–54; Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam. The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age* (Leiden, 1986), pp. 165–178; Godefroid de Callataÿ, *Ikhwan al-Safa'. A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 4–8.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn al-Qiftī, *Ta'riḫ*, p. 82.9–11.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel De Smet, 'L'auteur des *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* selon les sources ismaéliennes ṭayyibites', *SSR*, 1 (2017), pp. 151–166.

The *sharī'a* is a medicine for the sick, whereas philosophy is a medicine for the healthy. The prophets only treat the sick with the aim that their diseases may not increase and sickness may be replaced by health. As to the philosophers, they protect the health of the healthy, so that disease never can affect them. Between the manager (*mudabbir*) of the sick and the manager of the healthy there is a manifest difference and [this is] an evident matter.<sup>9</sup>

Ibn al-Qiftī introduces this passage with the following sentence: 'But al-Ḥārīrī, the *ghulām* of Ibn Ṭarrāra provoked him one day at the booksellers (*fi'l-warrāqīn*) with such words that he [al-Maqdisī] rushed off and said. . .'. Although Ashkivarī mentions the same passage *verbatim*, he introduces it in a quite different way: 'But al-Mihrajānī said one day. . .'. The quotation is thus attributed to another presumed member of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. It is repeated in the introduction to the first book of the *Maḥbūb*, where it is presented in such a way that the reader gets the impression that the quote is taken from the *Rasā'il*: 'The philosopher al-Mihrajānī, who belongs to the philosophers of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', said. . .'.<sup>10</sup> In fact, it is not a literal quote, although the idea that philosophers and prophets both practice the medicine of the souls is common in the *Rasā'il*.<sup>11</sup> It is also noteworthy that Ashkivarī adds a (personal?) note in Arabic, specifying that it is easier to preserve health than to cure sickness.<sup>12</sup> He thus implies that prophets are superior to philosophers, a subtle way of neutralising the heterodox undertone of the quotation.

According to Ashkivarī, in the introduction of the *Maḥbūb*, the 'true' philosophers are dependent on the prophets, as they derive their wisdom from the 'niche of prophecy and guardianship' (*mishkāt*

<sup>9</sup> Ibn al-Qiftī, *Ta'rikh*, p. 88.7-12 = Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 2, pp. 135.19-136.2.

<sup>10</sup> Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb al-qulūb, al-maqāla al-ūlā*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Dibājī and Ḥāmid Ṣidqī (Tehran, 1370 Sh./1999), p. 106.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* (Beirut, 1958), vol. 2, p. 141; Carmela Baffioni, *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. On the Natural Sciences. An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 15-21* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 384-385 (Arabic), 301-302 (tr.); cf. Terrier, *Histoire*, p. 192.

<sup>12</sup> Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 1, p. 106; vol. 2, p. 136.

*al-nubuwwa wa'l-walāya*).<sup>13</sup> There follows praise of the virtues of the true philosopher, the description of the scope of his learning (knowledge of the essence of things, their genus, their species and the individuals) and nine questions about their causes, the whole copied from Epistle 40 of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'.<sup>14</sup>

Ashkivarī closes his introduction with a long passage about the division of sciences, mainly copied from Epistle 7.<sup>15</sup> There are many differences between the two texts, partly due to corruption in the manuscripts and their modern editions.<sup>16</sup> More important is the fact that Ashkivarī distinguishes nine religious sciences, three more than the Ikhwān: the science of divine unity (*'ilm al-tawhīd*), the science of the principles (*'ilm al-mabādi'*) and the science of the harmony between revelation (*tanzīl*) and (esoteric) exegesis (*ta'wīl*).<sup>17</sup> Finally, in Ashkivarī's version there are a number of phrases without parallel in the text of the

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<sup>13</sup> The revealed origin of 'true' philosophy is one of the basic ideas in the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*. The conviction that the first Greek philosophers took their wisdom from the 'niche of prophecy' goes back to Abu'l-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī's *Kitāb al-Amad 'ala'l-abad* and was shared by a large number of authors, not at least by al-Shahrastāni; see Daniel De Smet, *Empedocles Arabus. Une lecture néoplatonicienne tardive* (Brussels, 1998), pp. 39–45. Significantly, as a Shi'ī, Ashkivarī adds the term *walāya* to the expression *mishkāt al-nubuwwa*, implying that the philosophers are not only the heirs of the prophets, but also of the imams. On *walāya*, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *La religion discrète. Croyances et pratiques spirituelles dans l'islam shi'ite* (Paris, 2006), pp. 177–207.

<sup>14</sup> Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 1, p. 99.5–10, corresponding to Ikhwān, *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 345.7–12; cf. Terrier, *Histoire*, p. 183.

<sup>15</sup> Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 1, pp. 132.2–133.20, corresponding to Ikhwān, *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, pp. 266.14–268.13; cf. Terrier, *Histoire*, pp. 220–223.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, in Ashkivarī's version, there are four classes of science: the propaedeutic (*riyādiyya*), those pertaining to religious law (*shar'iyya*), the 'conventional' (*waḍ'iyya*) and the true philosophical (*al-falsafa al-ḥaqīqiyya*) (Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 1, p. 132.2–3), whereas in the text of the Ikhwān, there are only three classes: *al-riyādiyya*, *al-shar'iyya al-waḍ'iyya* and *al-falsafiyya al-ḥaqīqiyya*, the label *waḍ'iyya* ('conventional' or rather 'imposed') being a qualification of the *shar'i'a* (Ikhwān, *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 266.14–15). Hence, it seems that Ashkivarī was misled by a textual corruption in his manuscript. On the division of the sciences according to the Ikhwān, see de Callatay, *Ikhwan al-Safa'*, pp. 59–68.

<sup>17</sup> Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 1, p. 132.13–16, to compare with Ikhwān, *Rasā'il*, vol. 1, p. 267.4–7.

Ikhwān.<sup>18</sup> Hence, we cannot exclude the possibility that Ashkivarī relied on Epistle 7 only indirectly, copying from another source regarding the division of sciences that was dependent on the Ikhwān's *Risāla*.

In the opening part of his chapter concerning Pythagoras, Ashkivarī includes a long quotation from Epistle 32, about numbers as the principles of being, the presence of dyads, triads, tetrads, pentads . . . in different realms of reality, and the correspondence between the nine numbers of the decad and the nine levels of the universe.<sup>19</sup> In the last part of the quote, there is a significant difference between the text of the Ikhwān (at least in the 'uncritical' Beirut edition), who, in conformity with their usual doctrine, associate Matter (*hayūlā*) and Nature respectively with the numbers four and five (between three = the Soul and six = the Body), whereas Ashkivarī (and Walker's new edition of the Epistle) reverses the order: Nature, corresponding to four, precedes Matter, abased to the fifth level.<sup>20</sup> Ashkivarī's and Walker's versions look like an adaptation of the Ikhwān's cosmic hierarchy to more 'orthodox' Neoplatonic standards: the order Intellect, Soul, Nature and Matter.<sup>21</sup> As noted by Terrier, the first part of the quotation from Epistle 32 also occurs in Ḥaydar Āmulī's *Jāmi' al-asrār*, one of the many sources used by Ashkivarī in his *Mahbūb*

<sup>18</sup> Ashkivarī, *Mahbūb*, vol. 1, p. 132.3-5; 132.6-8; 132.15-21.

<sup>19</sup> Ashkivarī, *Mahbūb*, vol. 1, pp. 209.9-210.6 and 210.7-211.3, which is a slightly abridged version of Ikhwān, *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, pp. 178.15-180.7 and 181.5-182.4; Paul E. Walker, Ismail K. Poonawala, David Simonowitz and Godefroid de Callataÿ, ed., *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. Sciences of the Soul and Intellect. Part 1. An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 32-36* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 5.11-7 ult., 8.14-10.6 (Arabic), pp. 17-19; cf. Terrier, *Histoire*, pp. 374-375.

<sup>20</sup> Compare Ikhwān, *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 181.20-21 with Walker, *Epistles*, p. 9.14-15. This inversion is not mentioned in Walker's *apparatus*.

<sup>21</sup> The usual cosmic hierarchy of the Ikhwān, with Prime Matter preceding Nature, appears in another passage of Walker's edition (*Epistles*, Arabic p. 20 Arabic, tr., p. 29); on Matter preceding Nature, see Yves Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'* (2nd corrected ed., Paris and Milan, 1999), pp. 82-84; de Callataÿ, *Ikhwan al-Safa'*, pp. 19-20; Daniel De Smet, *La quiétude de l'intellect. Neoplatonisme et gnose ismaélienne dans l'œuvre de Ḥamīd ad-Dīn al-Kirmānī (Xe/XIes)* (Leuven, 1995), pp. 258-259. For the part of Epistle 32 quoted by Ashkivarī, see Yves Marquet, *Les "Frères de la pureté" pythagoriciens de l'Islam. La marque du pythagorisme dans la rédaction des Épîtres des Iḥwān aṣ-Ṣafā'* (Paris, 2006), pp. 220-224.

*al-qulūb*. But as Āmulī's quotation, explicitly introduced as being taken from the *ṣāhib [Rasā'il] Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, is shorter than Ashkivarī's, it seems likely that the latter copied it directly from the *Rasā'il*.<sup>22</sup>

This short examination of the citations from the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* in the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* leads to the conclusion that Ashkivarī probably had at his disposal a copy of the *Epistles*, although the possibility that he found the quotes in other sources cannot be excluded. In any case, their content has no direct link with Ismaili doctrine. It is also striking that Ashkivarī avoids mentioning the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* by name and that in the entry devoted to them in the second volume of the *Maḥbūb*, he remains silent about the possibility that the authors of the *Epistles* were Shi'ī, although this option is suggested in Ibn al-Qifṭī, his main source. Hence, the presence of the *Ikhwān* in Ashkivarī is rather discrete. If we restrict our investigation to the influence solely of the *Rasā'il*, Terrier's statement 'La voix des *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* participe de l'originalité doctrinale du *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*'<sup>23</sup> looks somewhat exaggerated.

### Ashkivarī and the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a*

However, things are quite different with the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a*, the so-called 'crown' (*tāj*) of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*. This work presents itself as the quintessence of the *Rasā'il*, of which it is supposed to reveal the esoteric meaning. It would thus have been reserved for an initiated elite. In reality, the text offers a rather incomplete summary of the *Rasā'il*, which has been infiltrated by Ismaili concepts and doctrines (in particular concerning the transmigration of souls, the fall of the Universal Soul into matter and eschatology) that are absent from, or only discretely present in the *Rasā'il*. Traditionally attributed variously to the same author(s) as the *Rasā'il*, or to the Andalusian mathematician and astronomer Maslama al-Majrīṭī (d. 398/1007) or to the Ismaili imam Aḥmad, the

<sup>22</sup> Ḥaydar Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, ed. Henry Corbin, in his *La philosophie shi'ite* (Tehran and Paris, 1969), § 453-457, pp. 233-234; cf. Terrier, *Histoire*, p. 375 n. 2. This is the only quote from the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*.

<sup>23</sup> Terrier, *Histoire*, p. 149.



grandson of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a* seems to have been written by an Ismaili author at a later date than was the *Rasā'il*.<sup>24</sup>

The diffusion of the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a* in Safavid Iran has never been studied. However, the first volume of Ashkivarī's *Mahbūb al-qulūb* contains two longer citations from the *Jāmi'a*, in the chapters on Adam and Zoroaster. They deserve a further investigation.

### *The Story of Adam*

In Ashkivarī's history of philosophy, Adam is presented as the first sage, preceding Seth and Hermes. The long chapter devoted to Adam opens with a discussion about the nature of the names and the wisdom that God revealed to him, according to the Qur'an and Shi'i tradition, and closes with some conventional material about the story (*qiṣṣa*) of Adam, his life and death.<sup>25</sup> In the central part of this chapter Ashkivarī copies almost *verbatim* two long passages from the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a*, but reversing the order in which they appear there: he first copied what corresponds to pages 119 to 128 in Muṣṭafā Ghālib's edition of the *Jāmi'a* and then immediately continued with pages 66 to 69.<sup>26</sup> Unlike the citations from the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, those from the *Jāmi'a* are mostly unabridged; Ashkivarī reproduces the entire text, without adding any comment.<sup>27</sup> The choice of these passages is remarkable for a Twelver Shi'i author, as they address some central tenets of Ismailism; the reversing of the order in which they were copied even enhances their Ismaili flavour.

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel De Smet, 'The Religious Applications of Philosophical Ideas', in Ulrich Rudolph, Rotraud Hansberger and Peter Adamson, ed., *Philosophy in the Islamic World. Volume 1: 8th – 10th Centuries* (Leiden and Boston, 2017), p. 755.

<sup>25</sup> Ashkivarī, *Mahbūb*, vol. 1, pp. 135–157; cf. Terrier, *Histoire*, pp. 249–275.

<sup>26</sup> Ashkivarī, *Mahbūb*, vol. 1, pp. 138.18–144.4, corresponding to Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (attr.), *al-Risāla al-Jāmi'a*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib (Beirut, 1984), pp. 119.16–128.12; *Mahbūb*, vol. 1, pp. 144.6–146.4, corresponding to *Jāmi'a*, pp. 66.11–69.13; cf. Terrier, *Histoire*, pp. 253–261.

<sup>27</sup> In fact, the first quote is interrupted (Ashkivarī, *Mahbūb*, vol. 1 p. 143.6, corresponding to *Jāmi'a*, p. 126.4) by some unidentified verses in Persian; then (p. 143.14) the citation goes on with *Jāmi'a*, p. 127.13, introduced with 'one of the philosophers of Islam said. . .'. Thus, Ashkivarī skipped *Jāmi'a*, pp. 126.4–127.13. In the second quote from the *Jāmi'a* (pp. 144.6–146.4) there are some abridgements.

Following the example of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, the author of the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a* was a master in *tabdīd al-'ilm* ('dispersing the knowledge'), a well-known technique in esoteric writing: elements of a single doctrine are scattered throughout different parts of a book, introduced into the most unexpected places, so that the careful reader has to identify them, putting them together as pieces of a puzzle in order to understand their relationship. Hence, in the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a*, there is not one chapter about Adam, but his story is told in different ways at different places, even in sections related to *Epistles* which have nothing to do with Adam.<sup>28</sup>

It is remarkable that Ashkivarī (or his source?) selected two passages and put them together in such an order as to provide a long Ismaili *ta'wīl* of Qur'anic verses and *ḥadīth* about Adam, Iblīs, the forbidden Tree, Adam's fall and repentance. The esoteric interpretation of this well-known story is developed on four distinct levels, which are however somehow interwoven, thus creating a rather complex picture. We distinguish successively the cosmic, psychic, soteriological and epistemic levels.

Let us start with the cosmic level. In the passage of the *Jāmi'a* immediately preceding the section quoted by Ashkivarī, we learn that the Universal Soul, given its intermediary position between Intellect and Nature, is unable to resist to the temptations of Nature. Given its inclination for the physical world the Soul partly gets entangled in matter; through its fall (*hubūt*) the partial soul (*al-nafs al-juz'iyya*) is bound to corporeal envelopes (*hayākil jismāniyya*). The author calls this embodiment 'the hell of the world of generation and corruption'. Apparently, in this 'hell', there is a hierarchy of fallen souls and their respective bodies, the highest level being the 'human form': the human soul linked to a human body.<sup>29</sup>

It is with this evocation of the superiority of the human form that the passage quoted by Ashkivarī begins. Here, the author of the *Jāmi'a*, after addressing the topic of man as a microcosm (see *infra* our second level of the *ta'wīl*), returns to the fall of the soul. This fall into the corporeal world is caused by the fact that the partial soul only receives

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<sup>28</sup> For the location of all the passages about Adam, see al-Majrīṭī (attr.), *al-Risālat al-Jāmi'a*, ed. Jamīl Ṣalībā (Damascus, 1949), vol. 2, pp. 409–410 (index, s.v. Ādam).

<sup>29</sup> *Jāmi'a*, p. 119.

in an imperfect way the benefits (*fawā'id*) of the Universal Soul and the infusions of the Intellect (*al-mawādd al-'aqliyya*). However, the body in which the soul is imprisoned after its fall is also an instrument for its salvation, as it is through the sense perception of the body that the soul can acquire the intellectual knowledge necessary for its escape from the material world and its ascent to Paradise (*jannat al-ma'wā wa'l-firdaws al-a'lā*), which is the intelligible world, the realm of the Intellect.

At this stage, the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a* establishes an explicit link with the story of Adam: 'The soul then repents, as did Adam when he repented from his disobedience after having fallen into error'.<sup>30</sup> Hence, the fallen soul corresponds to Adam; Nature, the cause of the fall, is similar to Iblis; after the fall, the soul or Adam repents and is forgiven, allowing it to return to its home.

The fall of the Universal Soul into Nature, its division into a plurality of partial souls embodied in a corporeal envelope, and the valorisation of the body as a necessary instrument for the soul's salvation are central components of 4th/10th-century Ismaili Neoplatonism. The details of this doctrine, for instance the question of whether human souls are a 'part' (*juz'*) or rather an 'imprint' (*athar*) of the Universal Soul, were among the issues under discussion in the famous debate between opposing Persian *du'āt* such as Muḥammad al-Nasafī, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī and Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī.<sup>31</sup>

This first, cosmic, level of the *ta'wil* of Adam's story is intimately linked to the second level, which I called psychic, as it concerns the faculties of the human soul. Elaborating on the Ikhwān's conception of man as a microcosm and their comparison of the human body with the organisation of the state, the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a* associates the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqā*), which receives the effusions of the Universal Soul, with the king and with Adam: just as Adam was placed in Paradise, the rational soul is the noblest part of the human form, located close to the intelligible world, whose intellectual forms it is

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<sup>30</sup> Ashkivari, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 1, pp. 140–141 = *Jāmi'a*, p. 122.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel De Smet, 'La doctrine avicennienne des deux faces de l'âme et ses racines ismaéliennes', *Studia Islamica*, 93 (2001), pp. 77–89; Daniel De Smet, *La philosophie ismaélienne. Un ésotérisme chiite entre néoplatonisme et gnose* (Paris, 2012), pp. 113–125. On this debate, see Ismail K. Poonawala, 'An Early Doctrinal Controversy in the Iranian School of Isma'ili Thought and its Implications', *JPS*, 5 (2012), pp. 17–34.

able to conceive of. However, it has to struggle continuously against all kinds of forbidden bodily pleasures: these pleasures refer to the Tree the fruits of which Adam was forbidden to eat. The lower faculties of the soul – the concupiscent soul (*al-nafs al-shahwāniyya*) and the irascible soul (*al-nafs al-ghaḍabiyya*) – try to seduce the rational soul, so that it yields to bodily pleasures: they play the role of Iblīs. If they are successful, the rational soul falls down and the lights of the intellect (*al-anwār al-‘aqliyya*) no longer reach it. In the same way Iblīs provoked the fall of Adam, who was expelled from Paradise, so deprived of the benefits emanating from the intelligible world.<sup>32</sup>

The soteriological level starts with Adam’s repentance and God’s mercy. The disobedience of Adam, by eating the forbidden fruit, not only caused his fall and expulsion from Paradise, but also the closing of the ‘cycle of manifestation’ (*dawr al-kashf*), during which the intelligible realm was directly accessible to all creatures, and the opening of a ‘cycle of occultation’ (*dawr al-satr*). Hence, the intelligible world could only be approached through the teaching of an uninterrupted succession of prophets and messengers sent by divine mercy in order to rescue the fallen souls. Adam, after his repentance, was the first of them: ‘Every prophet, every messenger, was in his own time what Adam was in his period; the people of this period are his children.’ However, Adam was not yet endowed with ‘firm resolution’ (*dhu’l-‘azm*), the force to resist the temptations of Iblīs and to save mankind from the sin he committed. Only the prophets after Adam had this resolution.<sup>33</sup>

Although Iblīs had no longer a direct influence on the sinless prophets, he appeared at their side as an antagonist (*ḍidd*), similar to the concupiscent or irascible soul trying to corrupt the rational soul. In those cases where Iblīs succeeds in stirring up people against their prophet, he transforms their rational soul into a satan in potentiality

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<sup>32</sup> Ashkivārī, *Mahbūb*, vol. 1, pp. 139–140 = *Jāmi‘a*, pp. 120–122.

<sup>33</sup> Ashkivārī, *Mahbūb*, vol. 1, pp. 141–142 = *Jāmi‘a*, pp. 122–123. Here again, the *Risālat al-Jāmi‘a* echoes a controversial issue in 4th/10th-century Ismailism: was Adam among the *ulū’l-‘azm* and was he a prophet?; see Daniel De Smet, ‘Adam, premier prophète et législateur? La doctrine chiite des *ulū al-‘azm* et la controverse sur la pérennité de la *ṣarī‘a*’, in Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Meir M. Bar-Asher and Simon Hopkins, ed., *Le shī‘isme imāmīte quarante ans après. Hommage à Etan Kohlberg* (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 187–202.

(*shayṭān bi'l-quwwa*), which becomes a satan in actuality (*shayṭān bi'l-fi'l*) after the death of the body. This means that the rational soul remains attached to the passions of the physical world, rejects the emanation coming from the intelligible realm and returns to the 'house of ignominy' (*dār al-hawān*), 'the place of sufferings and pains' (*maḥall al-asqām wa'l-ālām*), which is the world of generation and corruption. This allusion to metempsychosis is confirmed by the quotation of Q 4:56, a verse often invoked by the adepts of *tanāsukh*, including Ismaili authors: 'Surely those who disbelieve in Our signs – We shall certainly roast them at a Fire; as often as their skins are wholly burned, We shall give them in exchange other skins, that they may taste the chastisement' (Arberry's translation).<sup>34</sup>

In contrast, if the rational soul rejects the temptations of Iblīs (the bodily pleasures) and listens to the prophets (the messengers of the intelligible world), it becomes an angel in potentiality; after its separation from the body, having been purified and transformed into an angel in actuality, it undertakes its heavenly ascent. At the end of the cycle of manifestation, when the Resurrector (*qā'im*) will reveal all the truths (*kashf al-ḥaqā'iq*), Iblīs will be definitively neutralised.<sup>35</sup>

At this eschatological level, the prophets correspond to Adam and the rational soul; their antagonists to Iblīs and the concupiscent and irascible souls; the cycle of occultation is the result of Adam's fall; the cycle of manifestation refers to the initial paradisaical state before the fall; its reopening by the *qā'im* means the final redemption and the return to Paradise.<sup>36</sup>

Human souls turning into devils or angels in potentiality and in actuality, the succession of cycles of occultation and manifestation, and the final redemption by a Resurrector disclosing all 'truths', are well-known Ismaili concepts developed by 4th/10th-century authors, for instance in the *Kitāb al-Shajara* attributed to a *dā'ī* called Abū Tammām.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> For the use of this verse, see Daniel De Smet, 'Isma'ili-Shi'i Visions of Hell. From the 'Spiritual' Torment of the Fāṭimids to the Ṭayyibī Rock of Sijjīn', in Christian Lange, ed., *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), pp. 248–249.

<sup>35</sup> Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 1, pp. 142–143 = *Jāmi'a*, pp. 124–126.

<sup>36</sup> Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 1, pp. 143–144 = *Jāmi'a*, pp. 127–128.

<sup>37</sup> This is in particular the case with the distinction between *al-shayṭān bi'l-quwwa* / *bi'l-fi'l* and *al-malak bi'l-quwwa* / *bi'l-fi'l*; see Daniel De Smet, 'The Demon in Potentiality and the Devil in Actuality. Two Principles of Evil according to 4th/10th Century Ismailism', *Arabica*, 70 (2023), pp. 1–25 (forthcoming).

The fourth and last level in our *ta'wīl* is the *epistemic* one, as it concerns the transmission of knowledge from God to mankind. It is the highest level, and probably the most 'esoteric' one, as it explains the ultimate reason for Adam's fall and its consequences. Remarkably enough, Ashkivarī copied it from an earlier part of the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a* (some 60 pages in Ghālib's edition) and inserted it immediately after his long quote discussed thus far, introducing it with: 'this sage (*hādihā al-ḥakīm*) said. . .'<sup>38</sup>

After Adam's creation, God established him in the garden of Paradise and concluded a pact with him: he was forbidden to approach a certain tree and to eat of its fruit. God even explained to him the reason for this interdiction. The fruit of the tree contained the remnants of the first cycle of manifestation (*dawr al-kashf al-awwal*). Throughout the entire cycle of occultation, of which Adam was the first lieutenant (*khalīfa*),<sup>39</sup> the fruit of the tree had to remain hidden, as it was reserved for the end of the cycle, when things would return to their origin. With the opening of the cycle of felicity (*dawr al-sa'āda*) by the 'pure soul' (*al-nafs al-zakiyya*, a denomination of the Resurrector), the tree, identified with the *sidrat al-muntahā* (Q 53:14), will appear, which is the sign of the advent of the second creation or final resurrection.

Iblīs tried to convince Adam and his wife Eve to violate their pact with God and to acquire the knowledge reserved for the *qā'im*, as the possession of this knowledge would make him equal to God. The devil aroused Adam's curiosity and avidity, by claiming that the knowledge was about the Resurrection, the second creation, and the 'appearance of spiritual forms without material bodies in the abode of permanence'. With this knowledge, Adam and Eve would become eternal angels. Blinded by Iblīs's words, Adam violently desired this knowledge, passionately aiming to proceed from potentiality to actuality, from the cycle of occultation to the cycle of manifestation. By the consumption of the forbidden fruit, he acquired a forbidden knowledge, which caused his fall and expulsion from Paradise.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ashkivarī, *Mahbūb*, vol. 1, p. 144.6; cf. *Jāmi'a*, p. 66.11

<sup>39</sup> This contradicts what was said earlier, that Adam's disobedience and fall were the cause for the opening of a cycle of occultation: here Adam is from the outset the first 'lieutenant' of this cycle.

<sup>40</sup> Ashkivarī, *Mahbūb*, vol. 1, pp. 144-146 = *Jāmi'a*, pp. 66-69.

Here Ashkivarī borrows the standard esoteric Ismaili interpretation of the fall of Adam from the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a*, one which was considerably expanded (partly under the influence of the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a* itself) by Ṭayyibī authors.<sup>41</sup> Hence, he included in the central part of his chapter on Adam what looks as an Ismaili treatise exposing a four-level *ta'wīl* of the story of Adam and his fall. By copying and inserting two longer passages that appear in a different order in the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a*, Ashkivarī built a coherent whole, demonstrating that he was well aware of the underlying doctrine. Of course, it cannot be excluded *a priori* that he found this combination in an Ismaili (Ṭayyibī?) work dependent on the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a*, but so far there is no evidence that Ismaili literature in the Arabic language (and thus belonging to the Fatimid and Ṭayyibī traditions) circulated freely in Safavid Iran.

### *Zoroaster and the origin of evil*

That Ashkivarī had access to the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a* is also clear from his chapter about Zoroaster, although he depends for the major part on al-Shahrastānī's *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*.<sup>42</sup> However, in the middle of al-Shahrastānī's exposition of Zoroaster's doctrine of Light and Darkness, in order to clarify and explain the link between Darkness and evil Ashkivarī introduces a longer passage defending the thesis that 'evil has no root in the first origination from the true Creator' (*al-sharr lā aṣl lahu fi'l-ibdā' al-awwal min jihat al-mubdi' al-ḥaqq*). This passage, a quote from the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a*,<sup>43</sup> attributes the origin

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Lewis, 'An Ismaili Interpretation of the Fall of Adam', *BSOAS*, 9 (1938), pp. 691–704; Daniel De Smet, 'L'Arbre de la connaissance du bien et du mal. Transformation d'un thème biblique dans l'ismaélisme ṭayyibite', in Stefan Leder, ed., *Studies in Arabic and Islam. Proceedings of the 19th Congress of the U.E.A.I., Halle 1998* (Leuven, 2002), pp. 513–521; De Smet, *La philosophie ismaélienne*, pp. 100–111.

<sup>42</sup> Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 1, pp. 355–359, mainly based on al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Kaylānī (Beirut, n.d.), vol. 1, pp. 236–244; cf. Terrier, *Histoire*, pp. 643–649. The chapter about Zoroaster in the *Maḥbūb* was briefly studied by Henry Corbin, 'L'idée du paraclet en philosophie Iranienne', in *La Persia nel Medioevo* (Rome, 1970), pp. 56–59.

<sup>43</sup> Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 1, pp. 357–358 = *Jāmi'a*, pp. 49.5–50.15. The quote ends with Q 21:104. But before proceeding with al-Shahrastānī's text, Ashkivarī adds one sentence ending with the repetition that 'evil has no root in the origination' (Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 1, p. 358). This sentence seems to belong to the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a*, although it is absent in both Ghālib's and Ṣalīb's (vol. 1, p. 76) editions.

of evil to the gradual loss of perfection in the scheme of emanation: if the Intellect proceeding from the Originator is at the highest level of perfection, imperfection increases with the successive emanation of the Soul, Nature and the composite beings. As evil is the result of the downward procession from the Intellect, it will disappear with the final reversion, the *reditus* or way up back to the Intellect.

In the previous *faṣl*, the *Risālat al-Jāmiʿa* uses the sentence ‘evil has no root in the origination from the Creator’ against the dualists (*al-thanawiyya*), who claim that Good and Evil are eternal ultimate principles.<sup>44</sup> This is also the case in the 25th ‘wellspring’ of the *Kitāb al-Yanābīʿ* by the Ismaili *dāʿī* Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, a chapter entitled: *Fī anna al-sharr lā aṣl lahu fiʾl-ibdāʿ*.<sup>45</sup> But here, the polemical tone against the dualists is even more explicit, mentioning Ahuramazda and Ahriman, the Magians and the followers of Bihāfarīd.<sup>46</sup> However, Ashkivarī uses his quote from the *Risālat al-Jāmiʿa* in the opposite way, not as an argument against the dualists, but rather as a clarification of Zoroaster’s doctrine as he found it in al-Shahrestānī. And indeed, in the *Kitāb al-Milal waʾl-niḥal*, Zoroaster is presented as a monotheist, believing in a one and unique God, who created the two contrary principles of Light and Darkness. Evil only occurs in the composite things, as a result of the mixing of Light and Darkness, without which the world could not exist. In no case, can the Creator be considered as the origin of evil.<sup>47</sup> It is this Islamised picture of Zoroaster that allows

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<sup>44</sup> *Jāmiʿa*, pp. 48–49.

<sup>45</sup> Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Yanābīʿ*, ed. Henry Corbin, in his *Trilogie ismaélienne* (Tehran and Paris, 1961), pp. 61–63; English translation by Paul E. Walker in his *The Wellsprings of Wisdom* (Salt Lake City, UT, 1994), pp. 85–87.

<sup>46</sup> Al-Sijistānī, *Yanābīʿ*, § 121, pp. 61–62; Walker, *Wellsprings*, p. 85. Although the wordings are different, al-Sijistānī’s argument against the dualists is similar to what is found in the *Risālat al-Jāmiʿa*. The relationship between these texts requires further investigation.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Shahrestānī, *Milal*, vol. 1, pp. 237–238; al-Shahrestānī, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, tr. by Daniel Gimaret and Guy Monnot (Paris and Leuven, 1986–1993), vol. 1, pp. 643–644. On the transformation of Iranian dualist systems into monotheist religions more or less compatible with Islam, see Daniel De Smet, ‘Le combat mythique entre le Roi de la Lumière et le Prince des Ténèbres selon le Mani arabe: une lecture Islamisée du dualisme?’, in Marie-Anne Persoons, Christian Cannuyer and Daniel De Smet, ed., *Les combats dans les mythes et les littératures de l’Orient* (*Acta Orientalia Belgica*, 31) (Brussels, 2018), pp. 293–304.



Ashkivarī to include him among the sages and philosophers who took their knowledge from the 'niche of prophecy'.

The same passage of the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a*, with the sentence *al-sharr lā aṣl lahu fi'l-ibdā'*, is often quoted by Ṭayyibī authors in a similar way, although without explicit reference to Persian dualism. The dualistic opposition between light and darkness, good and evil, which permeates the Ṭayyibī worldview, is absent here from the highest levels of the intelligible world, as it is the result of the gradual loss of perfection and brightness in the process of emanation.<sup>48</sup>

### Conclusion

If occasional quotes from the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* by Iranian Twelver Shi'i authors of the Safavid era are quite common (although still unstudied), Ashkivarī's use of the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a* is, to the best of my knowledge, unique. In contrast with his citations from the *Rasā'il*, which have few doctrinal consequences, the two longer quotes from the *Jāmi'a* in the chapters on Adam and Zoroaster contain Ismaili teachings, which were already present in 4th/10th-century authors, but were extensively elaborated on in the later Ṭayyibī system: the fall of the Universal Soul (or the third Intellect) to Nature and the fall of the individual 'partial' souls into bodily envelopes; the dualist opposition between good and evil, light and darkness as a result of this fall, but occurring at a lower level in the scheme of emanation; the gradual disclosure of the knowledge leading to salvation by an uninterrupted chain of prophets and imams; the transmigration of unpurified human souls into new bodily envelopes; the final redemption of souls and the victory of light over darkness with the advent of the Resurrector.

There is no evidence that Ashkivarī was aware of the Ismaili origin of these doctrines, as they are exposed in the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a*. It is clear

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<sup>48</sup> Daniel De Smet, 'La *Risāla al-Jāmi'a* attribuée aux Ikhwān al-Ṣafā': un précurseur de l'ismaélisme ṭayyibite?', in Antonella Straface, Carlo De Angelo and Andrea Manzo, ed., *Labor Limae. Atti in onore di Carmela Baffioni* (Naples, 2018), vol. 1, pp. 278–279, 295; Daniel De Smet, "Le mal ne s'enracine pas dans l'instauration". La question du mal dans le shi'isme ismaélien', *Oriens*, 49 (2021), pp. 181–215.

from his *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* that he was a master in copying and inserting material. But the quotes he selected from the *Jāmi‘a* and the intelligent way he introduced them into his chapters on Adam and Zoroaster, show that he had a quite correct understanding of their doctrinal implications. It is also noteworthy that Ashkivarī, who embellished his book with numerous traditions attributed to the Ithnā‘asha‘rī Shi‘i imams and explicit references to Twelver Shi‘i ideas, never establishes a link with any Shi‘i tradition when quoting material related to the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā‘. In the entry about them in the second volume, he only refers to Ibn al-Qifṭī on the Sunni opinion about the attribution of authorship to Abū Sulaymān al-Maḥdisī and his circle. Can this be seen as a form of *taqiyya*? Even if he ignored the Ismaili background of the *Risālat al-Jāmi‘a*, he must have been aware that the book contains ‘heterodox’ material according to the standards of contemporary Twelver Shi‘i views. But he also adopted an unconventional position towards radical forms of Sufism, which brings Mathieu Terrier to the conclusion that he was ‘un esprit indépendant de toute orthodoxie’.<sup>49</sup> The same can be said about his treatment of the citations from the *Risālat al-Jāmi‘a*.

Ashkivarī’s use of the *Risālat al-Jāmi‘a* shows in any case that the work circulated in 11th/17th-century Iran, raising the question about its influence on Safavid thought. More than the possible use of the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā‘* by authors such as Mullā Ṣadrā or Mīr Dāmād, the investigation of the influence of the *Jāmi‘a*, with its explicit Ismaili character, seems the best way to evaluate the importance of Ismaili traces in the works of Iranian philosophers from the Safavid era.

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<sup>49</sup> Mathieu Terrier, ‘Apologie du soufisme par un philosophe shī‘ite de l’Iran safavide. Nouvelles remarques sur le *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* d’Ashkevarī’, *Studia Islamica*, 109 (2014), pp. 240–273; the quote is on p. 272.



**PART TWO**

**SHI'Ī MESSIANISM AND THE  
SYMBOLISM OF LETTERS**



## The Resurrection of Shah Ismā‘īl in Alevi-Bektashi Literature

*Amelia Gallagher*

### Introduction: Shah Ismā‘īl and the Renaissance of Shi‘i Islam

While the title of my chapter declares a ‘Resurrection’ of Shah Ismā‘īl Şafavī (d. 930/1524), literary history points more to his ‘immortality’ among the Qizil-bāsh (Turkish: Kızılbaş), the main descendant communities of which today are referred to as Alevi, or Alevi-Bektashi.<sup>1</sup> Considering the large scope of the attributions to his pen-name Khaṭā‘ī, Shah Ismā‘īl can be said to have gone on, after his death, to compose a varied corpus perhaps well into the 20th century.<sup>2</sup> Of course, there are logical explanations for this supra-human feat. We can see this resurrection through a literary dynamic, one that is not fully understood because of its oral transmission. Yet this literary process is crucial for the development of what we have been characterising as a ‘broader esoteric’ Shi‘i Islam during the period of time we would like to discuss here. The corpus of Shah Ismā‘īl’s poetry

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<sup>1</sup> Although communities with a historical relationship to the Safavids include the Ahl-i Ḥaqq and the Shabak, this study confines itself to the Alevi-Bektashi of Anatolia and the Balkans. On related communities, see Irène Mélikoff, ‘Le problème Bektaşî-Alévî: quelques dernières considérations’, *Turcica*, 31 (1999), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> According to Vladimir Minorsky, Shah Ismā‘īl probably derived his *makhlaṣ* from the medieval Persian name for China, ‘Khaṭā(y)’. Vladimir Minorsky, ‘The Poetry of Shāh Ismā‘īl I’, *BSOAS*, 4 (1942), p. 1028. A more recent anthology of his work relates a tradition in which Shah Ismā‘īl styled his pen-name to mimic the name of the Chaghatay poet Mīr ‘Alī Shīr Navā‘ī (d. 906/1501). See İbrahim Arslanoğlu, *Şah İsmail Hatayî: Divan, Dehnâme, Nasihatnâme ve Anadolu Hatayîleri* (Istanbul, 1992), p. 14.

that continued to generate after his death was a major way in which esoteric Shi'i Islam spread in the Ottoman empire, including not only Anatolia, but also the Balkans – in Albania and Bulgaria and other places where descendant communities of the Qizil-bāsh still live today.

As we are aware, the young Shaykh Ismā'il inherited the leadership of the Ṣafavī Sufi order sometime after the death of his father Shaykh Ḥaydar (d. 893/1488).<sup>3</sup> By this time, Ḥaydar had outfitted and militarised his 'devotee-soldiers' into loyal and disciplined troops as he and his followers became major players in the power struggles of the Turkoman dynasties.<sup>4</sup> In 907/1501, Ismā'il was crowned and seated on the Aq-Qoyunlu throne in Tabrīz, founding the Safavid empire, the dynastic state responsible for the establishment of Ithnā'ashari Shi'ism in Ādharbāyjān and the rest of Iran. As the first ruler of an important Shi'i state, Ismā'il stands as a central figure in this broader context. His has become one of the iconic voices of the transformation of Iran and of this renaissance of Shi'i Islam during the 9th/15th, 10th/16th and 11th/17th centuries.

What role did Shah Ismā'il play in this renaissance of Shi'i Islam, which saw both Ismailis and Twelvers enter the arenas of power after centuries of marginalisation? It is difficult to deny that the establishment of Twelver Shi'ism as the religion of his nascent state was his crowning political and religious achievement. But modern Safavid historiography has placed an even more profound emphasis on the role of Ismā'il in the triumph of the Safavids. In a quest to account for how such a young leader of a dervish order managed to become the shah of an empire, modern scholarship analysed Ismā'il through Max Weber's understanding of the concept of 'charisma'. In this way, the Safavids, by elevating their *pīr* to the throne, were held up as the most successful

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<sup>3</sup> On the history of succession from Ḥaydar to Ismā'il, see A. H. Morton, 'The Early Years of Shah Ismā'il in the *Afzal al-Tavārikh* and elsewhere', in Charles Melville, ed., *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society* (London, 1996), p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Although Ḥaydar's 'soldier-devotees' donned red headdresses, the term Qizil-bāsh (red-head) became identified with these tribes only after the establishment of the dynasty. See Shahzad Bashir, 'The Origins and Rhetorical Evolution of the Term Qizilbāsh in Persianate Literature', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 57 (2014), pp. 364–369.

of all of the messianic movements of the post-Mongol period.<sup>5</sup> And in discerning the role of Ismā'īl's personal charisma in this achievement, we have his own words as evidence; words which, from the point of view of Safavid historiography, seemed to be a gift from God himself.

### **Shah Ismā'īl's Poetry: The Question of a Messiah**

Every student of Safavid history has an image of Ismā'īl as a leader that is gleaned from his own words, his own poetry. This verse became known to international academia through Vladimir Minorsky's publication, 'The Poetry of Shāh Ismā'īl', which included poems from the Paris manuscript of Ismā'īl's *Dīwān*, at that time evaluated as the oldest and most authentic of his formal collections. Presenting this vivid imagery as an articulation of the young shah's theocratic mission, Minorsky was the first to see that the poetry of Shah Ismā'īl had profound historical consequence. To demonstrate this, Minorsky curated and translated about twenty poems of various forms from the original Turkic or Azeri verses. In these selections, Ismā'īl seems to be speaking directly to his soldiers as an ethereal military commander, 'My name is Shah Ismā'īl. I am God's mystery', with orders to 'Prostrate yourselves before the shah'.<sup>6</sup> Declaring himself the 'Eye of God,' the poet would transmute into an alignment with the divine speaking as the 'Essence of Divine Truth' (*aṣl-i haqq*).<sup>7</sup>

At times Khaṭā'ī seemed to be preparing his audience for the coming of the Mahdi, at times announcing the revelation of the awaited one, using language taken directly from Shi'i apocalyptic tradition. This apocalyptic expression is used carefully, however. Subsequent critical analysis of Shah Ismā'īl's *Dīwān* of poetry has established that in his

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<sup>5</sup> See Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago, 1984); Roger Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids* (Cambridge, 1980); Hans Roemer, 'The Safavid Period', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Volume 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. P. Jackson and L. Lockhart (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 189–350.

<sup>6</sup> Translations taken from Minorsky, 1042, 1047 and 1043, corresponding to Turhan Gandjei, ed., *Il Canzoniere di Šāh Ismā'īl Ḥaṭā'ī* (Naples, 1959), nos. 16, 198 and 20.

<sup>7</sup> *Dīwān-i Khaṭā'ī*, MS, n.d., Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Preserve, ff. 38v–39r. For the full *ghazal* and translation, see Amelia Gallagher, 'The Apocalypse of Ecstasy: The Poetry of Shah Ismā'īl Revisited', *IS*, 51 (2018), pp. 363–366.



poetic assertions he consistently stops short of taking the presumptuous last step of declaring himself to be the Mahdi.<sup>8</sup> More likely, Ismā'īl aimed to present himself as a major herald in the return of the eschatological Mahdī, certainly the most rightful of his generation's contenders.<sup>9</sup> In any event, it became almost inevitable to view his words as reflections of Safavid political aspirations, as the circumstantial evidence tends to corroborate. Perhaps the Safavid soldier-devotees did see Ismā'īl as immortal, just as they had deemed his father and grandfather before him, according to the Aq-Qoyunlu historian Rūzbihān Khunjī (d. 927/1521).<sup>10</sup> Or perhaps he saw himself as divine chastisement for the Ottomans, just as the contemporary European observers portrayed him, reporting that he was 'reverenced as a god'. However, both Aq-Qoyunlu courtiers and Venetian informants had reasons to project their fears and expectations upon the Safavids and their partisans. Influenced by their own political aims, the sensational Italian accounts at least should be regarded with caution as 'entertaining anecdote' and 'rumour' rather than objective witness.<sup>11</sup>

Elsewhere, I have analysed the poetic strategies of Shah Ismā'īl's *Dīwān* as apocalyptic in a revelatory and literary sense, as opposed to eschatological in a literal sense.<sup>12</sup> One could further argue a wider

<sup>8</sup> According to A. T. Karamustafa, Shah Ismā'īl does not present himself as the Mahdi, but rather 'the supreme enabler of the 'Alid mission on earth.' See, 'In His Own Voice: What Hatayi Tells us about Şah İsmail's Religious Views', in M. A. Amir-Moezzi, ed., *L'Ésotérisme shi'ite, ses racines et ses prolongements* (Turnhout, 2016), p. 608.

<sup>9</sup> Erika Glassen was the first to argue for Shah Ismā'īl's role as the forerunner of the Mahdi in her 'Schah Ismā'īl, ein Mahdī der anatolischen Turkmenen?', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 121 (1971), pp. 61–69. More recently, Rıza Yıldırım has also analysed Shah Ismā'īl's poetic persona along these lines. See his 'In the Name of Hosayn's Blood: The Memory of Karbala as Ideological Stimulus to the Safavid Revolution', *JPS*, 8 (2015), pp. 127–154.

<sup>10</sup> 'They openly called Shaykh Junayd "God" (*ilāh*) and his son "the son of God (ibn-Allāh)" ...'. See John E. Woods, ed., *Faḍlullāh b. Rūzbihān Khunjī-Isfahānī, Tārīkh-i 'Ālam-ārā-yi Amīnī* (London, 1992), p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> Palmira Brummett, 'The Myth of Shah Ismail Safavi: Political Rhetoric and 'Divine' Kingship', in John Victor Tolan, ed., *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays* (New York, 1996), p. 333.

<sup>12</sup> A. Gallagher, 'The Apocalypse of Ecstasy: The Poetry of Shah Ismail Revisited', pp. 361–397.

capacity for interpretation on the part of the audiences of this poetry, as the entire premise of *ghazal* poetry rested on a foundation of allegory. One of the assumptions regarding the potency of the lyrics was that later copies of the *Dīwān* had toned down Ismā'īl's blasphemous self-regard. Minorsky speculated that concerns of orthodox Shi'i propriety were in mind as later editions of Ismā'īl's *Dīwān* (dating from the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsp onwards) were cleansed of their original excess.<sup>13</sup> However, it is difficult to regard any of the later Safavids as unaware of Ismā'īl's strident self-imagining, since a representative selection of his poetry appears in a later genealogy of the Safavid dynasty.<sup>14</sup> It is also difficult to imagine how later audiences would take such imagery seriously. Gradually, as more copies of Shah Ismā'īl's *Dīwān* have been discovered, we have seen the extent to which it was copied throughout the 10th/16th and 11th/17th centuries, although critical analysis of the contents of a newly discovered manuscript awaits comparison.

The elevated language of Ismā'īl's descriptions of himself accompanied by the graphic violence of his poetic images has gained attention in a way that perhaps has masked other literary influences and references. Ismā'īl's indebtedness to the Ḥurūfī poet and martyr Nesīmī (d. 820/1417) and the towering figure of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) in his own ecstatic pronouncements ('I am the Divine Truth') could have been interpreted as literary expression of the poet's own achievement of mystical union had they been written by anyone else. Furthermore, a common assumption held in both historical and literary circles was that not only was his poetry primarily political propaganda, but sub-standard art as well. However, Azeri literary historians consistently defended his status as an early standard of Azeri poetics, in a literary canon which also includes Nesīmī and Fuzūlī (d. 963/1556).<sup>15</sup> In the modern republic of Azerbaijan, where

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<sup>13</sup> Minorsky, 'The Poetry of Shāh Ismā'īl I', p. 1026.

<sup>14</sup> A. Gallagher, 'Shah Isma'īl's Poetry in the *Silsilat al-Nasab-i Safaviyya*', *IS*, 44 (2011), pp. 895–911.

<sup>15</sup> See Azizaga Memedov, 'Le plus ancien manuscrit du *divān* de Shah Ismail Khatayi', *Turcica*, 6 (1972), pp. 8–23.

large civic statues place the pen as well as the sword in his hands, Ismā'īl has been resurrected as a proto-nationalist literary giant.

Even if the verse is divorced from Ismā'īl's status as a revolutionary, he cultivates a formidable poetic persona in the midst of an imminent reckoning for the opponents of the 'Alid loyalists. The awaited parties of this event are at once vague and all encompassing: 'Alī, Ḥusayn, the Mahdi, 'the Shah'. As seen in the following *ghazal* taken from the Paris *Dīwān*, the poet presents the return of the entire line descending from 'Alī as a collective event that has been fulfilled. The Mahdi has come to the battlefield (*maydān*) in the successive line of the Twelve imams, followed directly by the shah-poet himself in the final succession and couplet:

1. Praise be to God that the gate of the world, the manifest of the saints has come,

The lantern of Islam has ignited so that the religion of Muṣṭafā has come.

2. To the hypocrites' destruction, to the partisans of Yazīd numerous blows have come,

The Shah of the world, 'Alī Murtaḍa, again has come.

3. 'Alī is the shah of the holy lineage (*wilāyat*), the secret of spiritual guidance (*hidāyat*),

To manifest the secret of the saints, 'Alī has come.

4. Ḥasan is as magnificent as the Mahdi is generous,

Still wielding his sword, Ḥusayn of Karbala has come.

5. Zayn al-'Ābid, Bāqir and Ja'far Ṣādiq have decreed,

The venerable imams, Kāzīm and 'Alī Mūsā Riḍā, have come.

6. Taqī is the sultan of the world, Naqī is the firmament of faith,

After them, to battlefield, Ḥasan has come.

7. Muḥammad the Mahdi, the righteous guide, became the master of the faith,

Demons who reject the path to the battlefield have come.

8. Awake, be not prodigal, for Shah Ismā'īl has come,

On this path, sacrifice your life for the guiding Imam who has come.<sup>16</sup>

Although Minorsky did not cite this particular poem, it seems to express the sort of militancy which characterised the loyalty of the Safavids' followers. The beginning of the poem predicts destruction for the partisans of Yazīd, and later, the presence of demonic minions in battle against 'Muḥammad the Mahdi'. The royal title 'Shah Ismā'īl' in the signature couplet inserts a physical identity into the company of sacred presences. Against the conventions of a genre that favours pen-names, this brazen revelation of the 'real' author would support the theory that Ismā'īl used his art for political ends. But this should not detract from the main objective of the verse, which is adoration of the Twelve imams. Embedded in the body of the poem and taking up the majority of its lines, is a structured litany of praise to the Twelve imams named in sequence. While Shah Ismā'īl's poetry is often cited as primarily a vehicle for his own praise, many more of his poems bear themes of pious devotion, including this one. Perhaps these poems in which the central strategy consists of expressing reverence for sacred Shi'i figures such as the Twelve imams have been overlooked despite their prominence in the *Dīwān* because of their formulaic constructions and conventional piety. And yet it is likely that these kinds of approach were more influential in the literary evolution of the Qizil-bāsh and related groups than any of Ismā'īl's flights of grandiose self-expression.

We have reached an important limitation as to the extent to which Shah Ismā'īl's bold and complex verse affected political history. However, despite the correctives, we cannot yet claim a complete revision of Minorsky's original premise of the poetry's historical value.

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<sup>16</sup> Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Šāh Ismā'īl Ḥaṭā'ī*, no. 19.

With three *Dīwān* manuscripts that were probably produced during Ismā‘īl’s lifetime and many more afterwards, his historical body of work, that is, the material produced during his life along with subsequent copies, will be a source for future reflection on the foundational generations of Safavid rulers.<sup>17</sup> Although no longer deemed the ‘mass of authentic facts’<sup>18</sup> it was once assumed to be, Ismā‘īl’s *Dīwān* should be subject to comprehensive interpretation as much as any literary source in consideration of both poetic interpretation and socio-political context. While we cannot be confident that Shah Ismā‘īl’s poetry played a role in bestowing on him the contested Turkoman throne, it certainly contributed to the Renaissance of Shi‘i Islam, especially when we see this rebirth as a phenomenon beyond the defeat of opponents and seizing of political power.

### **Shah Ismā‘īl’s Resurrection in ‘Broader Esoteric’ Shi‘i Islam**

One of the more obscure aspects of Shah Ismā‘īl’s literary legacy has to do with the people among whom he was resurrected. Important questions still surround the development of the Qizil-bāsh tribes into a stable sectarian community in the Ottoman empire. Subject to persecution because of their suspect loyalty, the Ottoman Qizil-bāsh were bound to the Safavids, at least in the eyes of the Ottoman authorities, until the 11th/17th century.<sup>19</sup> By modern times, when these communities came to be identified as ‘Alevi’, they had preserved and

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<sup>17</sup> For a detailed examination of the existing manuscripts of Shah Ismā‘īl’s *Dīwān*, see Ferenc Csirkés, ‘Messianic Oeuvres in Interaction: Misattributed Poems by Shah Esmā‘īl and Nesimi’, *JPS*, 8 (2015), pp. 155–194. On several recently discovered manuscripts, see, Mehmet Fatih Köksal, ‘Şah İsmail Hatâyî’nin Şiirlerinde Kullandığı Vezin Meselesi’, *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Velî Araştırma Dergisi*, 66 (2013), pp. 169–185; Muhsin Macit, ‘Şah İsmail’in Eserleri ve Şairliği Üzerine’, *Yeni Türkiye*, 72 (2015), pp. 623–630.

<sup>18</sup> Minorovsky, p. 1025.

<sup>19</sup> On the complex evolution of Qizil-bāsh leadership during the Ottoman period, see Ayfer Karakay-Stump, *Subjects of the Sultan, Disciples of the Shah: Formation and Transformation of the Kizilbash/Alevi Communities in Ottoman Anatolia* (PhD, Harvard University, 2008).

developed a faith distinct from that of 'orthodox' Shi'i Islam as regards theology, law, ritual, philosophy and clerical authority. However, any discussion of Qizil-bāsh-Alevi history in Turkey today, especially their development throughout the pivotal Safavid period in the 10th/16th century is often political, even polemical. This tension can be sidestepped to an extent: given their Twelver identification, it is common for Alevi accounts of their own religious history to begin with the Prophet's family and 'Alī, going through each of the imams in an unbroken chain and revived in the fervent 'Alid mysticism of medieval Anatolia. It is also common to go back further still and seek the origins of Qizil-bāsh beliefs in pre-Islamic Turkic religion. This was the dominant nationalist position in modern Turkish academia.<sup>20</sup> When modern eyes turned to the Alevi-Bektashi faith and started to study it in its own right, it became commonplace in Turkey and beyond to attribute the 'heterodox' beliefs and practices of the Qizil-bāsh to pre-Islamic Turkic beliefs ('shamanism'), and to emphasise the ancient Central Asian basis of their tribal culture. Whether or not this was the intention, this orientation had the effect of claiming Qizil-bāsh communities for the modern nation-state of Turkey, despite the demographic reality that a large portion of Alevis are Kurdish (native speakers of Zaza and Kurmanji).<sup>21</sup> In recent decades, there has been a renewed interest in these questions of origin, one of the results of which is that Alevis are writing their own histories, published in both the academic and popular press, with a pronounced presences in digital media. Shah Ismā'īl, both as a heroic figure and an influential *pīr*, has been a central figure of these communally-conscious narratives of Alevi history.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Associated with the modern pioneer of Turkish studies, Fuad Köprülü, this approach is extensively analysed in Markus Dressler, *Writing Religion: The Making of Turkish Alevi Islam* (Oxford, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> For an overview of the issue of Kurdish Alevism, see Martin van Bruinessen, 'Between Dersim and Dālahū: Reflections on Kurdish Alevism and the Ahl-i Haqq religion', in Shahrokh Raei, ed., *Islamic Alternatives: Non-Mainstream Religion in Persianate Societies* (Wiesbaden, 2017), pp. 65–93.

<sup>22</sup> Several recent examples include: Tufan Gündüz, *Son Kızılbaş: Şah İsmail* (Istanbul, 2018); Ahmet Taşgin, Ali Yaman and Namiq Musalı, ed., *Safeviler ve Şah İsmail* (Istanbul, 2014), which was published to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the battle of Chaldirān, and Mustafa Ekinci, *Şah İsmail ve İnanç Dünyası* (Istanbul, 2010).

Connected to this fundamental historical question outlined above is the issue of the relationship between the Bektashi order and the Qizil-bāsh-Alevi. Of course, the Bektashi order pre-dates Qizil-bāsh formation in Anatolia. With their mythical beginnings in the 7th/13th century, the Bektashi dervishes seem to have been granted a privileged position by the Ottoman sultans as their historic association with the Janissary units attests. However, during in the 10th/16th century, the order went through profound structural transformations. While most histories indicate that this structural change accompanied a theological transformation of the order due to an alignment with the Qizil-bāsh and other non-conformist elements, major aspects of this alignment remain obscure.<sup>23</sup> For example, it is now common to speak of 'Alevi-Bektashi' as a fused religious identity of shared beliefs and practices, but two distinct social structures survived into the Republican period: a centralised dervish order on the one hand, and a trans-regional set of communities under the authority of local hereditary lineages on the other.<sup>24</sup> While historically speaking it would make sense to disentangle the two traditions, their unity is evidenced in a body literature held in common which is often paralleled in and even claimed as Turkish folk literature, with which it shares many stylistic features.

This collection of religious literature is a central aspect of the cohesion between the Alevi and Bektashi, as it is a major conduit of their religious thought. In this way, literature must be understood in the broadest sense, including long periods dominated by oral-musical transmission. And inasmuch as Alevi scholars are discussing the possibility and process of a written canonisation of the literary tradition, Shah Ismā'il's poetry is chief among the bodies of work for consideration.<sup>25</sup> But at

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<sup>23</sup> As a result of the Bektashi order's mandate to neutralise 'extremist' Shi'i groups such as the Qizil-bāsh, it 'assimilated the heterodox trends it was intended to change' (Thierry Zarcone, 'Bektaşiyye', *EI3*) [https://referenceworks-brillonline-com.iiij.idm.oclc.org/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/bektasiyye-COM\\_24010?s.num=1&s.f.s2\\_parent=s.f.cluster.Encyclopaedia+of+Islam&s.q=zarcone](https://referenceworks-brillonline-com.iiij.idm.oclc.org/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/bektasiyye-COM_24010?s.num=1&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.cluster.Encyclopaedia+of+Islam&s.q=zarcone) (accessed on 24 January 2021)

<sup>24</sup> Officially banned by the Republic along with other dervish orders, the Bektashis' central organisation moved to Albania. See Zarcone, 'Bektaşiyye'.

<sup>25</sup> On the question of discerning and canonising Alevi written sources, see Rıza Yıldırım, 'Literary Foundations of the Alevi Tradition: Mainstream, Canon, and Orthodoxy', in Benjamin Weinek and Johannes Zimmermann, ed., *Alevism between Standardisation and Plurality: Negotiating Texts, Sources and Cultural Heritage* (Berlin, 2018), pp. 61–96.

which precise point Shah Ismā'īl's poetic persona was transferred to a later literary stream or tradition is difficult to measure, for like many of the authoritative figures of this tradition, we have to assume major developments took place during periods of orality. But in the early written examples of pious attributions to Shah Ismā'īl a disjuncture with his *Dīwān* of poetry is evident.<sup>26</sup>

In this subsequent Khaṭā'ī tradition, new strategies, themes and concerns emerge in the poetry, while the poetic forms, metres, and dialects diverge significantly from the contents of Shah Ismā'īl's *Dīwān*.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, these works are designated as performance pieces marking specific episodes in a variety of rituals – communal, initiatory and funerary, as well as informal prayer or supplication. Folklore studies which trace the way in which oral literature develops, view the pen-name essentially as a collective identity composing in the original poet's name. Khaṭā'ī is not the only poet who has enjoyed a literary afterlife through this process of pseudo-epigraphy, as this phenomenon is associated with other poetic figures of the tradition, such as Pīr Sulṭān Abdal, and those outside the Alevi-Bektashi tradition proper, including Yunus Emre (d. 720/1320).<sup>28</sup> This growing body of poetic attributions not only served to express ritual and theological teachings, it also served to perpetuate the poet's legacy.

Often dismissed in academic histories as 'pseudo-Khaṭā'ī', in these later attributions scant memory of the notorious demagogue so closely associated with the poetry in Shah Ismā'īl's *Dīwān* remains. Self-references become relegated to the signature couplet where they are generally self-deprecating as a final statement of the poet's humility.

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<sup>26</sup> On these early written poems attributed to Khaṭā'ī, see Gallagher, 'Poetry Attributed to Shah Ismail in the Study of Anatolian Alevism', *Turcica*, 49 (2019), pp. 61–83. These early written examples from the 'pseudo-Khaṭā'ī' tradition are included in an 11th/17th-century Qizil-bāsh manuscript of a text known as the *Buyruk* ('Order'). As a category, the *Buyruk* consists of written teachings traditionally attributed to either the Sixth imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, or the first Safavid shaykh, Ṣafī al-Dīn (d. 735/1334). On these written sources, see Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, 'Documents and Buyruk Manuscripts in the Private Archives of Alevi Dede Families: An Overview', *BJMES*, 37 (2010), pp. 273–286.

<sup>27</sup> I am referring to the three oldest copies of his *Dīwān*: the manuscripts of Paris, Tashkent and the Sackler Gallery.

<sup>28</sup> See Paul Koerbin, 'Pir Sultan Abdal: Encounters with Persona in Alevi Lyric Song', *Oral Tradition*, 26 (2011) <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed June 21, 2019).



This not only in accordance with convention, but is a trait associated with the voice of Khaṭā'ī and his role in the transmission of teachings. Even the meaning of the pen-name 'Khaṭā'ī', which Minorsky had assumed derived from *khaṭā'* (the one from Cathay), becomes understood in this subsequent tradition to mean 'The Culpable One', based on the slightly different root *khaṭā* (offence, transgression). It is tempting to see this as literary evidence of political vicissitudes among the descendants of the Anatolian partisans of the Safavids. Did the Qizil-bāsh become disenchanted with the idea of Ismā'īl as an immortal saviour after his defeat by the Ottomans in 920/1514? That is a difficult theory to prove, but Shah Ismā'īl as a figure at the head of a messianic dispensation is not a trope that was carried through in the later Khaṭā'ī poetic tradition. While this fascinating aspect of Shah Ismā'īl is relegated to his *Dīwān*, Khaṭā'ī was regenerated in Alevi-Bektashi culture as a sage.

### **Düvaz Imam**

For over a century, Turkish literary specialists have regarded Shah Ismā'īl's historical *Dīwān* collections and the corpus of his attributions known in the Alevi-Bektashi context, as two separate bodies of work. Both folklorists and literary historians who study the Alevi-Bektashi characterise Ismā'īl as a revered figure, but one that has little connection to the historical shah apart from a pen-name. Within the community, however, there is a strong cultural memory of Ismā'īl's historical achievements as shah. And despite the stylistic disjuncture, common themes run throughout all of the poetry attributed to Shah Ismā'īl, from the distinctly Alevi-Bektashi ritual songs ('Hatayileri'), back to the historical *Dīwāns*, that is, the material which was collected before 930/1524.

In this regard, poems dedicated to the Twelve imams stand out as the most prominent examples of a strategy indebted to Shah Ismā'īl's original *Dīwān* of poetry. An important structural transformation was necessary, however, in order for these themes to fulfil a new ritual purpose: the poetry became recast in the metre of song. In Alevi-Bektashi literature and musicology, poetic-lyric categories are identified according to their content, or strategy, rather than their formal structure. Poetry or hymns in praise of the Twelve imams, for

example, are simply referred to as 'dūvaz imam'. Moreover, there is little distinction in content between poetry, song or prayer in this wisdom tradition which for most of its history and for most of its adherents, was inherited orally as ritual song. As a discernable approach, the *dūvaz imam* is a prayer that parallels earlier litany like supplications (*du'ā*) in which the Twelve imams are iterated, invoked and praised for their divine-like attributes. These supplications were originally in Arabic, and of course the names of the imams are Arabic. For this reason, it is possible that the earliest *dūvaz imam* in the Qizilbāsh milieu were originally composed as mnemonic songs for a Turkic-speaking audience.<sup>29</sup>

Literary evidence shows that these hymns dedicated to the Twelve imams proliferated among the Alevi-Bektashi bearing both devotional and ritual content. *Dūvaz imam* are intended for both formal communal ritual and informal rites, as before a meal or *sofra*, as a verbal amulet or apotropaic, or to elicit intercessory healing (*shifā*).<sup>30</sup> Although the earliest poetic eulogies of the *dūvaz imam* type are traced to the earlier Hūrūfī and Bektashi contexts of the 9th/15th century, the form became fully developed in the ritual poetry attributed to Khaṭā'ī in the 10th/16th century.<sup>31</sup> Again, like so many other aspects of the tradition, Shah Ismā'īl is cited as the innovator of the *dūvaz imam* form itself in the secondary literature. This is due to the fact that a majority of *dūvaz imam* poems that have come down to us are attributed to Khaṭā'ī and, as will be shown, a clear precedent of the *dūvaz imam* form is present in his original works.

Therefore, it is helpful to turn to the poetry contained in Shah Ismā'īl's historical *Dīwān* collection when establishing the basis of the *dūvaz imam* poetry that flourished later. Out of the numerous poetic invocations of the Twelve imams in Shah Ismā'īl's formal collections,

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<sup>29</sup> Rıza Yıldırım, 'Red Sulphur, the Great Remedy and the Supreme Name: Faith in the Twelve Imams and Shi'i Aspects of Alevi-Bektashi Piety', in Denis Hermann and Mathieu Terrier, ed., *Shi'i Islam and Sufism: Classical Views and Modern Perspectives* (London, 2020), pp. 255–290.

<sup>30</sup> Fatih İyiyol, 'Alevi-Bektaşî Geleneğinde Dūvâzlar-Dūvâzimamlar', *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 6 (2013), p. 235.

<sup>31</sup> Rıza Yıldırım, 'Red Sulphur, the Great Remedy and the Supreme Name'; İyiyol, 'Alevi-Bektaşî Geleneğinde Dūvâzlar', p. 231.

the following *qaṣīda* is chosen because of its rich theological and mythical references. Its inclusion in the Sackler Gallery's manuscript, which is one of the *Dīwāns* which has been assessed as dating from the lifetime of Ismā'īl, is also a factor in its selection, despite the fact that the text in the original manuscript is damaged, rendering some lines illegible.<sup>32</sup> The ubiquitous presence of 'Alī dominates the poem, with his sacred name terminating each couplet. Accompanied by the prophet Muhammad and Fāṭima in the opening section, 'Alī is manifested through the main body of the poem as the spirit behind the sacred lineage, the source of its heart, soul, faith and knowledge.

1. The mine deep in the ocean of Najaf is 'Alī,

That Balas ruby within the mine is 'Alī.

2. Emanating from its gems are two lights,

The sun is Muḥammad and the luminous moon is 'Alī.

3. The two worlds came into existence by his command,

['Alī illuminated what was concealed in its heart].<sup>33</sup>

4. It was Muḥammad who made the ascent (*mi'rāj*) from below,

[Within the *dargāh*, he saw the divine lion who was 'Alī].<sup>34</sup>

5. In Islam, the blessed Fāṭima is the 'Best of all women',

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<sup>32</sup> *Dīwān-i Khaṭā'ī*, MS, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, ff. 59r–50v. On the dating of the Sackler Gallery manuscript, see Wheeler Thackston, 'The Diwan of Khata'i: Pictures for the Poetry of Shah Isma'il I', *Asian Art*, 1 (1989), p. 39.

<sup>33</sup> Here, the Sackler Gallery manuscript is damaged. As this couplet is absent in the Paris *Dīwān*'s version of this poem, the second line from this couplet is taken from Ekber Necef and Babek Cavanşir, ed., *Şah İsmail Hatâ'i Külliyyatı: Türkçe Divanı, Nasihat-name, Tuyuğlar, Koşmalar, Geraylılar, Varsağlar ve Bayatılar* (Istanbul, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> This line in the Sackler MS is damaged. The translation is completed based on the Paris *Dīwān* in Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Şah İsmâ'il Ḥaṭâ'î*, no. 17.

He who who embodies all faith is 'Alī.

6. I am the servant of the Shah Ḥasan, the ruler of the age,

The heart on the sultan's throne is 'Alī.

7. Become a Sufi and martyr and sacrifice your life for the love of Ḥusayn,

Come, abandon your doubt for the Shah of the brave is 'Alī.

8. Go to the street of Zayn 'Abā and proclaim, 'I am the Truth' (*anā al-ḥaqq*),

Bāqir is the body, and the soul of the holy one is 'Alī.

9. In the letters of Ja'far's visage (*yüz*) I learn 100 (*yüz*) lessons,

With his every look (*şūrat*), I see that the Sura Raḥmān is 'Alī.

10. Like the seven wonders, the divine attributes manifest in Mūsā Kāzim,

He became the sea and the ocean was 'Alī.

11. The doors of paradise open through the sanctity of Mūsā Riḍa,

The Shah of Khurāsān is 'Alī.

12. In the verses of the Qur'an, Taqī takes the most beautiful form,

Do not be scrupulous in piety, for true knowledge (*'irfān*) is 'Alī.

13. You will find the Imam Naqī present in Baghdad,

Turning, revolving under his dome is 'Alī.

14. Trust in God and clutch the cloak of 'Askar,

The cure of suffering for the faithful is 'Alī.

15. The sultan became manifest behind the palace curtain just like the Mahdi,

As it was revealed, the Shah of the age is 'Alī.

16. Khaṭā'ī abandon your doubt and unbelief,

Just Solomon knows every cursed demon, know [the reality] is 'Alī.

The poem is remarkable not only as an early precedent for the *dūvaz imam* form, but as expression of an esoteric theology which would become fully developed in Alevi-Bektashi teachings. This 'Alī-centred theology is present throughout Shah Ismā'il's *Dīwāns*, but here he carries this theological reality through the succession of the Twelve imams, in an unbroken chain of *walāya*. This is a hidden reality, of course, and the poet also considers the privileged nature of this understanding. To do this, the poem begins by setting up the dichotomous 'Two Worlds', with Muhammad as the visible daylight of the sun, and 'Alī as the moon, which is no less luminous, but hidden except for those who possess true knowledge. Revelation of this hidden truth is addressed directly in the fourth couplet, which tells of Muhammad's recognition of 'Alī as the divine lion (*ḥaqq aṣlān*) appearing to him during the celestial ascent (*mi'rāj*). This obscure, yet pivotal episode describes the Prophet's ascent as culminating in the realisation of 'Alī's omnipresent divinity, becomes fully elaborated in mythic-poetic narratives (*miraçlama*) as part of the later Alevi-Bektashi poetic complex.<sup>35</sup>

The sacred names of the imams, however, establish the rhythmic pace and constitute each step of the poem's steady progression. This historical arc begins with their Eve and matriarch, Fāṭima, and culminates with the Mahdi unveiled, who is likened to a sultan hidden behind the palace curtain. In the intervening couplets, the poet

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<sup>35</sup> See A. Gallagher, 'Shāh Ismā'il Ṣāfevī and the *Mi'rāj*: Ḥaṭā'ī's Vision of a Sacred Assembly', in Christiane Gruber and Frederick Colby, ed., *The Prophet's Ascension: Cross-Cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi'rāj Tales* (Bloomington, IN, 2010), pp. 313–329.

acknowledges each of the Twelve imams by their divine attributes, their battles, their thrones, sepulchres and teachings, with 'Alī as the divine presence behind these visible and material aspects of their history. This is a history that does not culminate, as one has come to expect, in the triumphalism of the worldly shah-poet. Rather, the poet uses the concluding lines to confess his weakness of faith and doubt, invoking King Solomon as the legendary demonologist for his discernment of the occult. Other cursory self-references in the poem are similarly modest. The Sufi-martyr sacrifices his life, not for the commanding shah, but for the love of Ḥusayn, just as the author declares himself the servant of the elder brother, Ḥasan.

It may seem radically revisionist to speak of Shah Ismā'īl's humility, but self-effacing statements are present even in the original poetic sources. These are easy to attribute to a false affectation, seeking the real voice of the Ismā'īl in his statements of military and spiritual supremacy. However, it is the subservient Khaṭā'ī that is preserved in the later esoteric tradition. For that reason, we must assume a degree of nuance in Shah Ismā'īl's image of himself and interpret his persona of the humble servant as more than perfunctory conformity to poetic convention.

To demonstrate the resonance of this voice for later generations, the following *düvaz imam* attributed to Khaṭā'ī will be considered. This version of the poetic prayer (*nefes*) is taken from a recently published version of the Alevi compendium of teachings, therefore its dating is not precise.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, *düvaz imam* poems that are attributed to Khaṭā'ī predominate in pious sources. As stated, *düvaz imam* poems serve a variety of ritual and devotional functions, and this piece serves to mark specific death rites in the Alevi ritual cycle. Recited as a prayer of supplication, it serves as a final plea for forgiveness recited by the community on behalf of the deceased.

I have transgressed, for the sake of God (*Khudā*), forgive,  
For Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, forgive.

I know my sin has violated the boundary,  
For 'Alī Murtaḏā, forgive.

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<sup>36</sup> Mehmet Yaman, ed., *Buyruk: Alevi İnanç-İbâdet ve Ahlâk İlkeleri* (Mannheim, 2000), p. 200. The orthography of the text cited has been retained in this translation.

For Fāṭima-i Zahrā, for 'The Great Khadija',  
For their dignity, forgive.

Entering the field (*maydan*) for the love of Ḥasan,  
For Ḥusayn of Karbala, forgive.

Forgive for [the sake of] Imams Zayn al-ʿĀbid, Muḥammad  
Bāqir,  
Cāfer, Kāzīm and Ali Musā Rızā.

For Muḥammad Taqī and Aliyyūn-Naqī,  
For the person of Ḥasan-i Askari, forgive.

Muḥammad Mahdi, the Lord of Time,  
For the beggar at his threshold, forgive.

Khatāyî, the Shah, the Twelve imams,  
Come all, and for the light of God, forgive.

This invocation of the Twelve imams stands as a typical example of Shah Ismā'īl's later attributions, in which plays on the root of his pen-name, *khaṭā*, are commonplace. Here, the connection to Shah Ismā'īl's image as a penitent sinner is even more pronounced, as the entire intention of the poem is to seek forgiveness. Again, in this *dūvaz imam*, the author eschews mention of his own illustrious lineage in favour of the sacred lineage of the Twelve, summoned here for the sake of the sinner's appeals in their final hour.

Numerous attributions to Khaṭā'ī such as this circulate as litanies usually in the form of lyric song, with succinct iteration of the sacred names, producing the effect of a *dhikr*. We can surmise the proliferation of these poetic invocations of the Twelve imams attributed to Khaṭā'ī are early, perhaps from the 10th/16th century, given the strong presence of similar works in his *Dīwān*. This connection between the historical works and the enduring tradition, moreover, suggest a conscious custodianship of Shah Ismā'īl's poetic legacy, beyond mere attribution. This poetic process by which devotion to the Twelve imams was instilled among the Qizil-bāsh helped to define Qizil-bāsh Shi'ism as it contracted from Safavid Shi'ism both in space and in time. For the descendent communities of the Qizil-bāsh, this poetry did not usher in a radical and new dispensation. Rather, it restored the sacred presence of the imams who had grown more distant with the advance of time.

## Conclusion

We should revisit certain interpretations regarding Shah Ismā'īl when considering his role in the Renaissance of Shi'i Islam: did the Safavids come to power based on the personal charisma of their leaders? Did Shah Ismā'īl command the sort of loyalty and devotion that was based on the reverencing of a personal cult, as his original verse seems to demonstrate? And further still, did Shah Ismā'īl play a role in establishing the foundations of Qizil-bāsh belief, the most prominent form of esoteric Shi'i Islam in the Ottoman lands, which then spread throughout the empire and its successor states?

Revisiting these sorts of questions, and questioning these common assumptions often leads to the diminishing of a particular figure's role during the analysis of a broad cultural transformation. Further investigation of the influence of Shah Ismā'īl's *Dīwān* of poetry on the rise of the Safavids may well result in ascribing a more proportionate historical role to him. However, we must also consider Shah Ismā'īl's rebirth for successive generations in poetry and beyond. He is a subject of various traditional literary vehicles such as romantic folktales and heroic narratives in Persian, Azeri and Turkish.<sup>37</sup> His persona continued to be a source of religious and political inspiration in the 20th century through new genres and media, including opera and the historical novel.<sup>38</sup> The lyrics attributed to him became more widespread than ever, being performed in *maykhāna*, broadcast on radio and posted on youtube. And finally, his poetry, a major conduit by which esoteric Shi'i Islam re-emerged during the Renaissance, continues to generate new meanings for each of his many lives.

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<sup>37</sup> On later Persian heroic narratives about Ismā'īl, see Barry Wood, "The *Tārīkh-i jahānārā* in the Chester Beatty Library: An Illustrated manuscript of the "Anonymous Tales of Shah Isma'il", *IS*, 37 (2004), pp. 89–107; On the Turkic folktales, see A. Gallagher, "The Transformation of Shah Ismail Safevi in the Turkish *Hikāye*", *JFR*, 46 (2009), pp. 173–195.

<sup>38</sup> On the Azeri opera based on Shah Ismā'īl's *destan*, see Aida Huseynova, *Music of Azerbaijan: from Mugham to Opera* (Bloomington, 2016), p. 133; Reha Çamuroğlu's, *İsmail* (Istanbul, 1999) is the most notable of the novels about Ismā'īl's reign.





## Ḥurūfism after Faḍl Allāh's Execution: Revisiting *Şahīfat al-Istikhlāş*

*Fatih Usluer*

### Introduction

When Tīmūr died, eleven years after Faḍl Allāh's execution in 796/1394, his sons and grandsons became involved in a struggle for the throne. In the end, most of the brothers and cousins of Shāhrukh were defeated, and in 811/1409 Shāhrukh, Tīmūr's eldest son, took the throne.

Certain Turkoman ruling clans, such as those of the Qara-Qoyunlu and Aq-Qoyunlu, sought to attain power during Tīmūr's era, strengthening their positions in Ādharbāyjān before Shāhrukh took the throne. There were also potential alternative focal points of power, such as the Jalāyirids and Muẓaffarids.

After taking control of the vast area that now constitutes Iran and Afghanistan (his son Ulug Beg reigned over Samarqand and Bukhara), Shāhrukh asked the Qara-Qoyunlu khān, Qarā Yūsuf, to acknowledge his suzerainty. Qarā Yūsuf refused, and Shāhrukh marched his army from Herat to Tabrīz, arriving on 15 Sha'bān 823/25 August 1420.<sup>1</sup> Despite the defeat and death of Qarā Yūsuf, Shāhrukh's seizure of lands in Ādharbāyjān and Eastern Anatolia and the acknowledgment of his authority by the local *amīrs*, there were no fundamental changes in the balance of power in western Iran because Shāhrukh returned to Khurāsān about a year later in Shawwāl 824/October 1421.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> İsmail Aka, *Tīmūr ve Devleti* (Ankara, 2000), p. 62; Faruk Sümer, *Karakoyunlular* (Ankara, 1992), pp. 105–108.

<sup>2</sup> Aka, *Timur*, p. 63; Sümer, *Karakoyunlular*, p. 121.

After Shāhrukh returned to Herat, Iskandar, the son of Qarā Yūsuf, starting his campaign from Tabrīz, captured and looted cities such as Akhlāt, Van, Shirvān and Sulṭāniyya, punishing the local governors who had submitted to Shāhrukh.<sup>3</sup>

Inevitably, Shāhrukh embarked on a second expedition to Ādharbāyjan. He left Herat on 5 Rajab 832/10 April 1429. On 17 Dhu'l-Hijja 832/17 September 1429, in the valley of Salmas near Tabrīz, Iskandar and his brother, Jahānshāh, were defeated in a battle and retreated to Eastern Anatolia. After Shāhrukh left the region on 15 Sha'bān 833/9 May 1430, Iskandar began recapturing the places he had lost.<sup>4</sup> Finally, in 837/1434, he marched his army to Shirvān and looted it. The cry for help from the Shirvānshāh, the conflicts between the princes of the Qara-Qoyunlu and the capture of Erzurum by Qarā Yuluk of the Aq-Qoyunlu forced Shāhrukh to embark on yet another expedition.<sup>5</sup>

Shāhrukh left Herat on 2 Rabī' II 838/5 November 1434 on a third expedition to Ādharbāyjan. This time he had Iskandar's brother Jahānshāh on his side and made him a governor of Ādharbāyjan.<sup>6</sup> The conflict between Jahānshāh and Iskandar ended only when the latter was killed in 841/1438.<sup>7</sup> Following Shāhrukh's death in 850/1447, Jahānshāh organised expeditions against the Tīmūrids as sultan, taking the throne of Tīmūr by entering Herat.<sup>8</sup> Jahānshāh was killed in battle with the Aq-Qoyunlu in 872/1467.<sup>9</sup>

After Faḍl Allāh left Tabrīz in 787–788/1385–1386, he travelled to Samarqand and Iṣfahān and, after a long journey, settled on an island near Baku on the Caspian Sea. After Faḍl Allāh's execution, his grandson Amīr Nūr Allāh was staying in Faḍl Allāh's *zawiya*, Valī-yi Dulaq, in Tabrīz which changed hands between the Tīmūr and the

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<sup>3</sup> Sümer, *Karakoyunlular*, p. 127.

<sup>4</sup> Aka, *Timur*, p. 68; Sümer, *Karakoyunlular*, pp. 128–131.

<sup>5</sup> Sümer, *Karakoyunlular*, pp. 131–132.

<sup>6</sup> Aka, *Timur*, p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> Sümer, *Karakoyunlular*, pp. 139–140.

<sup>8</sup> 'Alī Baṣīrī Pūr, 'Ash'ār-i bāz-mānda az Dīwān-i Ḥaḳīqī', *Āyina-yi Mirāth*, 45 (1388 Sh./2009), p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Qandīm Qurbānof; Yūsuf Qucaq, 'Jahānshāh-i Ḥaḳīqī', *Shi'r*, 21 (1376 Sh./1997), p. 228.

Qara-Qoyunlu. The expansion of the Ḥurūfis into new areas, such as Bitlis, the Black Sea coast and Anatolia, took place during this era.

### *The Shāhrukh Era*

Faḍl Allāh never had any direct contact with Shāhrukh or the leaders of the Turkoman confederacies mentioned above. However, when he interpreted Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥayy's dream in Mashhad, he hinted at Shāhrukh without actually mentioning his name.<sup>10</sup>

A year after the death of 'Abd al-Ḥayy in 829/1425-6, who was known for his closeness to both the Ḥurūfis and Shāhrukh, Aḥmad Lūrī attempted to assassinate Shāhrukh. This event and the accounts of it in the the chronicles of that era have been analysed in detail by Evrim Binbaş,<sup>11</sup> however some comments are in order here.

The historians of the Shāhrukh era, Ḥāfiẓ-i Ābrū (d. 833/1430), Muḥammad Ṭūsī (d. 869/1464), Faṣīḥ Khwāfī (d. 845/1441), 'Abd

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<sup>10</sup> During his last journey to the south, as Faḍl Allāh was passing through Mashhad, Sayyid (Nizām al-Dīn) 'Abd al-Ḥayy (d. 829/1425), (see Faṣīḥ Khwāfī, *Mujmal-i Faṣīḥī*, ed. Sayyid Muḥsin Nāji Naṣrābādī (Tehran, 1386 Sh./2007), vol. 3, p. 1112), a prominent individual in Mashhad, had a dream and he invited Faḍl Allāh for dinner to have his dream interpreted. Faḍl Allāh told him that the dream had many interpretations, one of which he recounted. When 'Abd al-Ḥayy asked about the other interpretations, Faḍl Allāh answered that they were in a chapter of 'the Book'. As explained more explicitly in the Persian version of the *Khwāb-nama*, it is the book in which Faḍl Allāh wrote about the significant events that would take place in the next 30 years. According to the notes, the king of the era would send 'Abd al-Ḥayy to the governor of Gilān. The interpretation ends here. The report continues in 'Abd al-Ḥayy's own words: *Ḥadrat-i khilāfat-panāh, amīr-i sultān-zāda Shāhrukh khallada Allāhu saltānatahū* (referred to only as *Shāhrukh* in the Turkish translation) sent Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥayy to Lāhijān, one of the townships in Gilān, to Sayyid Riḍā Kiyā, the governor of Gilān. This dervish (Sayyid Riḍā Kiyā in the translation) asked Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥayy for the Book in order to study it. 'Abd al-Ḥayy told him that the Book was very precious and valuable to them, and they therefore had placed it in Imam Riḍā's shrine, but a fire broke out in the treasury, so that it was burnt along with the other items. (Sayyid Iṣḥāq, *Khwāb-nama*, Millet Library, 'Alī Amīrī, Persian, No. 1042, ff. 25b–26b; 'Abd al-Majīd b. Firishta, *Tarjuma-yi Khwāb-nama*, ff. 46b–47a.)

<sup>11</sup> Ilker Evrim Binbaş, 'The Anatomy of a Regicide Attempt: Shāhrukh, the Ḥurūfis, and the Timūrid Intellectuals in 830/1426–27', *JRAS*, 23 (2013), pp. 391–428. See also Ṣadiq Kiyā, *Wāzhanāma-yi Gurgānī* (Tehran, 1330 Sh./1951), pp. 9–14; Yā'qūb Āzhand, 'Ḥurūfiyān wa bidād-i Timūrī', *Kayhān-i farhangī*, 61 (1368 Sh./1989), pp. 52–54.

al-Razzāq Samarqandī (d. 887/1482) and Mīr Khwānd (d. 903/1498), give the following information regarding the attempted assassination of Shāhrukh:

On 23 Rabī' II 830/ 21 February 1427,<sup>12</sup> Shāhrukh went to the royal mosque of Herat for the Friday prayer. After the prayer, he mounted his horse and left the mosque. Aḥmad Lūrī, a follower of Mawlānā Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī, wearing a *kepenek* (a gown worn by Sufis), stopped him, making a request. Shāhrukh asked someone from his retinue to find out what the man wanted. Taking advantage, Aḥmad Lūrī leapt forward and stabbed Shāhrukh in his abdomen. One of Shāhrukh's *amīrs*, 'Alī Sulṭān Quchin, killed Aḥmad Lūrī on the spot. It turned out that Shāhrukh's wound was not fatal: he recovered after receiving treatment. Shāhrukh's son, Mīrzā Bāysunghur, and his *amīrs* established which inn Aḥmad Lūrī had stayed in by dint of a key they found in his belongings; the inn-keeper told them that Lūrī made caps and also gave them the name of Mawlānā Ma'rūf Khaṭṭāṭ.

Mawlānā Ma'rūf Khaṭṭāṭ was a Sufi in a long coat and hat who carried an *alifī namad* around his neck. Previously he had been Sulṭān Aḥmad Jalāyirī's companion in Baghdad but then came to despise Aḥmad Jalāyirī and went to Shīrāz, where he met Mīrzā Iskandar and became a calligrapher in his private library. After Shāhrukh captured Shīrāz, he sent him to Herat, where he worked as a calligrapher in the palace library. Mīrzā Bāysunghur sent him a letter, proposing that he prepare a copy of Nizāmī's *Khamsa*. Ma'rūf Khaṭṭāṭ returned the letter to Bāysunghur a year later without fulfilling the request. Based on the claim that Ma'rūf Khaṭṭāṭ was a friend of Aḥmad Lūrī, Bāysunghur decided to execute him. However, Ma'rūf Khaṭṭāṭ was not executed, despite being taken to the gallows three times, but was imprisoned in the dungeon in the castle of Ikhtiyār al-Dīn. After torture he said that the name of the person who had attempted the assassination was Aḥmad Lūrī, who was one of the followers of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī, and that a person named 'Aḍud (the son of Mawlānā Majd al-Dīn Astarābādī) was the instigator.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Binbaş, 'The Anatomy', p. 398. For the date of '23 Jumāda II 830' see Muḥammad Yūsuf Vāleh Işfahānī Qazvīnī, *Khuld-i Barrīn: Sections 6–7*, ed. Mīr Hāshim Moḥaddith (Tehran, 1380 Sh./2001), p. 469.

Khawāja 'Aḍud al-Dīn (the son of Faḍl Allāh's daughter) and the comrades of Aḥmad Lūrī were captured and put on trial. Initially, they argued that their conviction was a slander. However, after being tortured and beaten with sticks, they confessed. According to their statements, while they had been discussing a conspiracy against one of the sultan's servants, Aḥmad Lūrī had acted precipitately. Since they had confessed, they were executed in the marketplace and put to death by fire with wood put together the people. The smell of the burning spread throughout the city.

We do not know whether Aḥmad Lūrī was a Ḥurūfī or the extent to which he was devoted to the Ḥurūfī cause. Among the books found in his room, it is said, were works about Ḥurūfism and also Qāsim Anwār's *Dīwān*, and probably other lettrism-related books or esoteric works, as a result of which, such people as Ṣā'in al-Dīn Turka, Qāsim Anwār,<sup>13</sup> his disciple Amīr Makhtūm Nīshābūrī and Mawlānā Ma'rūf Khaṭṭāṭ<sup>14</sup> whom we know was not a Ḥurūfī, were treated as suspects; yet this event was not related to Ḥurūfism, and the authorities had a very superficial knowledge of Ḥurūfism.

Though Ṣā'in al-Dīn is not mentioned in the chronicles among those tortured and exiled after the attempt to assassinate Shāhrukh, he also had problems with the authorities.<sup>15</sup> Ṣā'in al-Dīn responded to the accusations of the 'ulamā' that his faith was improper by compiling the treatises *Nafsat al-maṣḍūr-i awwal* and *I'tiqādāt*, and so was pardoned. *Nafsat al-maṣḍūr-i thānī* was written during his exile in the

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<sup>13</sup> Faḍl Allāh's grandson Nūr Allāh said that Qāsim Anwār was viewed by the Ḥurūfīs as a believer in the unity of existence and thus they had many conflicts. Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn, *Ṣaḥīfat al-istikhlās*, Millet Library, 'Alī Amīrī, Persian no. 825, f. 14a. Nevertheless, one of the dream interpretations of Faḍl Allāh in the *Khawāb-nāma* was narrated by Qāsim Anwār which shows clearly that he was attending Faḍl Allāh's gatherings. See Sayyid Iṣḥāq, *Ibid.*, f. 24b.

<sup>14</sup> In the *Khawāb-nāma* Sayyid Iṣḥāq includes hearsay about a 'peaceful calligrapher living in Herat'. This calligrapher, named Mawlānā Badr al-Dīn Astarābādī, said to Sayyid Iṣḥāq that a person had gone to Faḍl Allāh to recount his dream and mentioned Faḍl Allāh's interpretation. It was understood that this calligrapher was living in Marv, like Ma'rūf Khaṭṭāṭ, and had visited the Ḥurūfī circle. Sayyid Iṣḥāq, *Khawāb-nāma*, ff. 68a–68b.

<sup>15</sup> *Chahārdah risāla-yi fārsī az-Ṣā'in al-Dīn 'Alī b. Muḥammad Turka-yi Iṣfahānī*, ed. S. A. M. Bihbahānī, S. I. Dībājī and Taqī Sharīf Riḍā'ī (Tehran, 1351 Sh./1972), pp. 205–206.

aftermath of the assassination attempt as a plea for his innocence.<sup>16</sup> From his writings on the science of letters, it was clear that Şā'in al-Dīn was not a Ḥurūfī.

Most notably in *Nafsat al-maşḍūr-i thānī*, Şā'in al-Dīn covertly vilified 'the group' (*in tā'ifa*), whom he had had many occasions to meet. He accused them of two things in particular: they disregarded the laws of Islam, and they believed that the end of the era of sainthood (*khatm-i walāyat*) would arrive in two years' time.<sup>17</sup> However, according to Ḥurūfism, the era of sainthood came to an end with Faḍl Allāh's death, some claiming that a new era of divinity (*dawr-i ulūhiyat*) had already begun.

The information about Şā'in al-Dīn's attitude towards this group is not related to the Ḥurūfīs. He could not have been so ignorant of Ḥurūfism as to claim that the Ḥurūfīs believed the end of the era of sainthood would take place in the near future. Undoubtedly, Şā'in al-Dīn knew more than these stereotypical accusations. We know that, following Faḍl Allāh's advice, his brother Şadr al-Dīn, abandoned the idea of writing a book interpreting Islamic law through philosophy, and that his father, Afḍal al-Dīn, became a Ḥurūfī and was encouraged by Faḍl Allāh to wear the conical head-dress. As a result, Şā'in al-Dīn faced difficulties for nine months following the assassination attempt before he was admitted into the presence of Shāhrukh. He said that he was fortunate enough to kiss Shāhrukh's hand and the hem of his garment and had been permitted to attend an audience with him twice a week.<sup>18</sup>

As mentioned above, some contemporary chronicles said that Faḍl Allāh's grandson and his companions were burned alive, the stench spreading across the entire city. However, we have a letter written by a certain Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn addressed to another Ḥurūfī, refuting this, in which those who elsewhere were said to have been burnt

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<sup>16</sup> *Chahārdah risāla-yi fārsī*, pp. 197–217.

<sup>17</sup> *Chahārdah risāla-yi fārsī*, p. 212. Here, and on the previous page, he claims that the group disregarded the rules of Islam (*takālīf-i shar'iyya*). Binbaş understands *takālīf-i shar'i* (Islamic rules/duties) to mean the Islamic taxes by saying that 'he demanded the easing of the *shar'i* taxes (*takālīf-i shar'i*) levied upon dervishes like him. These were probably the taxes that had been imposed upon them after the assassination attempt.' Binbaş, 'The Anatomy', p. 415.

<sup>18</sup> *Chahārdah risāla-yi fārsī*, p. 207.

discussed the trial. This letter, which we believe to be the most important document regarding the extent of the Tīmūrīds' knowledge about the Ḥurūfis, demonstrates the nature of their relations with the 'ulamā' and the Tīmūrīd statesmen. One and a half years after the assassination attempt, Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn was among those who were detained.

This letter was first published by Abdūlbaki Gölpınarlı and later also by Alyārī.<sup>19</sup> Notwithstanding this, Alyārī, like Gölpınarlı, does not reflect on the nature of the letter. Parts of it, however, were taken into consideration by Bashir<sup>20</sup> and Binbaş<sup>21</sup> in their discussions regarding the assassination attempt.

The importance of this letter is undeniable, as it is a significant example of internal Ḥurūfī correspondence. The criticism of certain Ḥurūfis, the consistency of the names mentioned and dates of events, given the information we have, are the most significant proof of the authenticity of this letter.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Husayn Alyārī, 'Nāma'ī az pīsar-i Faḍl Allāh-i Ḥurūfī', *Pazhūhishhā-yi falsafī-yi dānishkada-yi adabiyāt wa 'ulūm-i insānī-yi Tabrīz*, 82 (1346 Sh./1967), pp. 175–197.

<sup>20</sup> Bashir believes that 'the letter was written five years after the arrest (ca. 836/1432–33), while they were still in captivity and Amīr Nūr Allāh was probably executed in the end' (*Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Ḥurūfis*, p. 105). In fact, it was written after their escape from prison during their stay in Bā 'anqaba (probably Baquba, near Baghdad), on 16 Jumādā I 836/17 January 1433.

<sup>21</sup> However, there are some mistakes in the readings of Binbaş. For example, he says: 'Khwāja Pīr Aḥmad alleged that some tax irregularities were discovered in the books of Amīr Nūr Allāh. The defiant Amīr Nūr Allāh rejected the first allegation, but conceded that he was not in a position to respond to the question of his tax records, but he promised to check his records when he returned to Tabrīz.' (Binbaş, 'The Anatomy', p. 408). In fact, the original text says that Khwāja Pīr Aḥmad told the person accusing Amīr Nūr-Allāh that, in the case that the slander was not proved, he would be fined 50 *tenges*, and reminded him that he had already paid such an amount in the past. He slandered readily saying that 'he found the treasury', implying that he was rich enough to pay the penalty for slander (f. 3b). Binbaş uses this argument as one of the main proofs of his argument in his article. There are some other misreadings too. For example, while Binbaş mentions that the captured Ḥurūfis were tried in Herat in the presence of Ulugh Beg (p. 409), the encounter with Ulugh Beg actually took place in Samarqand (ff. 10b–11a).

<sup>22</sup> Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn, *Ṣaḥīfat al-Istikhlās*, Millet Library, 'Alī Amīrī, Persian, No. 825.



An Analysis of *Ṣahīfat al-istikhlāṣ*

The author of this letter, Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn, was one of the leading thinkers of the Ḥurūfīs and is best known for his *Istiwā-nāma*. We also know that he was the son of 'Alī al-A'lā's sister.<sup>23</sup>

Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Amīr Nūr Allāh (the son of Makhdūmzāda) were detained in Māzandarān, and were handed over to soldiers of Shāhrukh, who at that point having left Herat had arrived in Baḥrābād. The family tree documenting the children and grandchildren of Faḍl Allāh and his testament reveal that the name of the second daughter of Faḍl Allāh, nicknamed Makhdūmzāda, was 'Āisha. Since 'Alī al-A'lā (d. 822/1419) mentions the death of Makhdūmzāda in his *Mahshar-nāma*,<sup>24</sup> it is obvious that Makhdūmzāda was not party to the assassination attempt. Therefore, we can confidently say that the person who in the letter is called 'Ḥaḍrat-i Amīr', is Nūr Allāh, who appears in the family tree of Faḍl Allāh as Makhdūmzāda's son. Additionally, since the letter says that 'two persons of bad *madhhab*, who are non-believers and infidels, have been caught and will be executed', (f. 8a), we can conclude that only two persons figured in the case, namely Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Amīr Nūr Allāh.

Even though the events in the letter focus on the fates of two people, we understand that there were two other Ḥurūfīs involved, Darvīshzāda 'Abd al-Wahhāb and Darvīsh Najm al-Dīn, who were imprisoned and joined Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Amīr Nūr Allāh later. The names of these two dervishes were first mentioned when the prisoners travelled to Samarqand. While Amīr Nūr Allāh and Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn were travelling by horse, these two dervishes accompanied them on foot. When the two escaped from Suleymānī Castle, the dervishes were with them.

According to the letter, the first interrogation of Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Amīr Nūr Allāh by Shāhrukh and his religious scholars took place in Baḥrābād, and the second in Herat one year and seven months later (when Amīr Nūr Allāh alone was present). The

<sup>23</sup> Ishqurt Dede, *Ṣalāt-nāma*, Millet Library, 'Alī Amīrī, Persian, No. 1043, f. 50.

<sup>24</sup> 'Alī al-A'lā, *Mahshar-nāma*, Millet Library, 'Alī Amīrī, Persian, No. 139, f. 219a.

subsequent interrogations or disputes also took place in Herat, at the Gawharshād Madrasa and Bāgh-i Naw. Subsequently, Ulugh Beg questioned them in Samarqand on five different days, one during the Ramaḍān.

During these interrogations, Amīr Nūr Allāh insisted that he had not been involved in the assassination plot because at the time of the assassination they were travelling from Tabrīz to Bitlis and Kurdistān, and they had not sent any assassins (f. 2b). Another charge against them was that they had been preparing for a war against Shāhrukh as allies of Mirzā Iskandar. As there were no witnesses to support this second charge, and Khwāja Sayyidī Muḥammad, who was declared a witness by the person claiming their involvement in the assassination plot, did not testify regarding this charge, subsequent hearings focused on their alleged unbelief.

As the jurists of Shāhrukh could not prove their unbelief through their statements regarding Ḥurūfism, their persuasion, religion and the principles of faith, and their status as *sayyids*, were all questioned. When they could not find any evidence against the accused, they accused them of drinking alcohol and/or proclaiming that drinking alcohol was permitted. When they could not find any witness for this charge too, all the charges were dropped and the case was forwarded to Ulugh Beg.

It was obvious that without any witnesses the charge of assassination could not be maintained. Therefore, Ulugh Beg then questioned them about Ḥurūfism. At one point, he asked if it was true that they drank wine. Eventually, it could not be concluded from their answers that they were infidels. In view of this, Ulugh Beg refused to punish them and sent them back to his father Shāhrukh.

The letter contains some information between the lines about Ḥurūfism. For example, during the initial interrogation in Bahrabad, Amīr Nūr Allāh said that, at the time of the attempted assassination, they were travelling from Tabrīz to Bitlis and Kurdistān (f. 2b).<sup>25</sup> We

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<sup>25</sup> On another occasion Amīr Nūr Allāh sent Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn to Bitlis. See Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn, *Istiwā-nāma*, Millet Library, 'Alī Amīrī, Persian, No. 269, f. 38a.

can conclude that the Ḥurūfīs travelled north to Anatolia and Kurdistan and south to the island of Hurmūz (f. 16b).

In the first interrogation, Amīr Fīrūzshāh said that Sayyid Shahrastānī and Khwāja Sayyidī Muḥammad had visited Amīr Nūr Allāh's *zāwiya* in Tabrīz (ff. 2b–3a). This tells us that after Faḍl Allāh left Tabrīz his lodges continued to function, and literati and statesmen continued to visit them. The letter of denunciation which Amīr Fīrūzshāh presented as evidence allows us to conclude that people with bad intentions also visited the lodges, as was the case already in the time of Faḍl Allāh (f. 3a).

One of the important points of the letter is that Shāhrukh, Ulugh Beg and the learned men present at the interrogations were ignorant of Ḥurūfism. The strongest evidence in support of our conclusion is: 1) 'Shāhrukh raised his eyebrow and asked "Which letter is this?"; 2) Amīr Nūr Allāh asked the religious scholars 'in which part of the Qur'an are the *rak'ats* of the prayer (one of the basic themes of Ḥurūfism) mentioned' but they could not answer; everyone present heard the basic tenets of Ḥurūfism for the first time.

We can arrange the events that followed the capture of Amīr Nūr-Allāh and his companions chronologically as follows: We know that Shāhrukh left Herat on 5 Rajab 832/19 April 1429 for a military campaign in Ādharbāyjan, arriving in Baḥrābād on 27 Rajab 832/14 May 1429.<sup>26</sup> As Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Amīr Nūr Allāh were detained in Mazandaran and handed over to Shāhrukh's soldiery, he in the meantime having left Herat and arrived at Baḥrābād, we can ascertain that their first interrogation took place either at the end of the month of Rajab or at the beginning of Sha'bān 832/May 1429.

After that, the two prisoners were held in separate fortresses, and it took Shāhrukh a year and seven months to return from Tabrīz. When on returning from the expedition to Ādharbāyjan, Shāhrukh had reached the city of Turbat-i Jam in Dhu'l-Hijja 833/September 1430, Amīr Nūr Allāh was then dispatched from the castle of Sarakhs, arriving in Herat on 8 Muḥarram 834/26 September 1430.

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<sup>26</sup> According to Samarqandī, *Matla'*, vol. 3, part 2, p. 390. In Khwāfī, *Mujmal*, vol. 4, p. 1117, Shāhrukh arrived in Baḥrābād on 27 Rajab 831/12 May 1428.

Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Amīr Nūr Allāh travelled to Samarqand to Ulugh Beg before Ramaḍān 834/May 1431. After several interrogations, they broke their fast with Ulugh Beg.

Then they left Samarqand and reached Herat in twelve days on 3 Muḥarram 835/20 September 1431. Upon the arrival, they were imprisoned in a well, or oubliette. Hence, we can conclude that they stayed in Samarqand with Ulugh Beg until 20 Dhu'l-Hijja 834/7 September 1431.

On 9 Muḥarram 835/26 September 1431, after six days they were taken out of the well, and were then sent to Kirmān.

After a month in Kirmān, they were taken to the Castle of Sulaymānī and imprisoned there in Rabī' I 835/November 1431.

On 8 Jumādā II 835/20 February 1432, they escaped from the Castle of Sulaymānī.

They hid in a well for twenty-two days, until 30 Jumādā II 835/12 March 1432.

On 10 Rajab 835/22 March 1432, after travelling for nine days, they arrived in Hurmūz and, after a few days there, continued on to Shīrāz, and from there, to Baghdad. Their travels had lasted, all in all, eight months.

So, after eight months, they reached Baghdad in Rabī' II 836/December 1432, and had an audience with Shāh Muḥammad, the son of Qarā Yūsuf.

They left Baghdad and went to Bā 'anqaba<sup>27</sup> (probably Baquba, near Baghdad), where the letter was written on 16 Jumādā I 836/17 January 1433.

In the introduction we said that, according to the material contained in the chronicles of the period, after being tortured, Mawlānā Ma'rūf named 'Aḍud, the son of Mawlānā Majd al-Dīn, as the instigator of the attempted assassination. According to the chronicles, Khwāja 'Aḍud al-Dīn and Aḥmad Lūrī, companions of Faḍl Allāh's nephew, were detained and interrogated; after being subjected to torture, they pleaded guilty. As a result, they were executed in the bazaar and were burned alive with firewood brought by the people.

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<sup>27</sup> In *Istiwā-nāma*, f. 43b this place is referred to as Bāgh Qupa.

However, 'Aḍud al-Dīn was not the nickname of Amīr Nūr Allāh; in fact, none of the children and grandchildren of Faḍl Allāh were called 'Aḍud al-Dīn.<sup>28</sup> Conversely, if, as has been claimed, 'Aḍud al-Dīn confessed that he was the instigator of this assassination attempt and was punished, it is pointless to search for clues pointing to any other instigators in the above letter; it contains no information on this matter. Hence, we must conclude that the information in the chronicles of the period is unreliable.

Another point that we want to underscore is the absence of any indication that the imprisoned persons who were accused of 'instigating an assassination' were tortured other than being restrained by a ball and chain and imprisoned in a dungeon or well. Furthermore, because in this letter, we see that the persons so charged were interrogated and investigated such that their conviction was beyond any doubt and they were not executed summarily.

According to the information provided by Ḥasan Rūmlū (d. 985/1577), the Ḥurūfis rebelled in 835/1431 in Iṣfahān under the leadership of Ḥājī Surkh, and killed two sons of 'Abd al-Ṣamad, one of the *amīrs* of Shāhrukh. Eventually, the Ḥurūfis involved were caught, and Ḥājī Surkh was executed.<sup>29</sup> No chronicler writing before Rūmlū mentions such an event. Since Rūmlū places this information in an appendix to the events of 835, it is likely that his source was rumours circulating among the people.

### The Qara-Qoyunlu

The Qara-Qoyunlu state, established by Bayrām Ḥoja (d. 782/1380) and which included the cities of Mosul, Mush, Akhlat and Erzurum, initially fought against the Jalāyirid rulers, Sulṭān Uways and Sulṭān Ḥusayn. At this time, when Faḍl Allāh was in the Jalāyirid lands, Ḥurūfi sources make no mention of Bayrām Ḥoja or his successor and nephew, Qarā Meḥmed (d. 791/1389).

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<sup>28</sup> For Faḍl Allāh's relatives see Fatih Usluer, 'Ḥurūfism: The Faḍlallāh Family, Children, and Testament', *IS*, 54 (2021), pp. 605–631.

<sup>29</sup> Ya'qūb Āzhand, *Ḥurūfiyya dar tārikh* (Tehran, 1369 Sh./1990), p. 87; Rawshan Khiyāvī, *Ḥurūfiyya* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), p. 235.

The first contacts between the Hurūfis and the Qara-Qoyunlu that can be identified took place during the reign of Qarā Yūsuf (d. 822/1420), the son of Qarā Meḥmed. Amīr Nūr Allāh, the grandson of Faḍl Allāh, said that he, Nūr Allāh, drank wine in the assembly of Qarā Yūsuf. Amīr Nūr Allāh cited the ignorance of Qarā Yūsuf as the justification for his behaviour. Fearing for his life if he disobeyed Qarā Yūsuf by abstaining from alcohol, he had drunk wine in his presence (f. 14b).

However, 'Alī al-A'lā in his elegy for his brother praised Qarā Yūsuf, saying: 'The fortunate sultan, loyal Yūsuf, who, with the help of God, obtained the throne, since Yūsuf killed Mirānshāh.' According to 'Alī al-A'lā, Mirānshāh was responsible for killing Amīr Nūr Allāh.<sup>30</sup> Ritter argued that 'Alī al-A'lā wrote the *Kursī-nāma* after Qarā Yūsuf's victory in Tabrīz.<sup>31</sup>

We know that when Qarā Yūsuf died, of his five sons, Jahānshāh, Shāh Meḥmed and Iskandar were in contact with the Hurūfis.

In the letter, when narrating the imprisonment and interrogation of Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Amīr Nūr Allāh over the attempted assassination, the names of Mirzā Iskandar and Shāh Meḥmet, the Qara-Qoyunlu princes, are mentioned. While Amīr Firūzshāh was questioning Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Amīr Nūr Allāh (f.3a), we learn that the Hurūfis were accused of planning a rebellion, and because they had slaughtered many people on the way to Sulṭāniyya, Mirzā Iskandar expelled them from Tabrīz. Even though these charges could not be proved and Amīr Nūr Allāh denied them, they may contain factual information albeit presented in an exaggerated and distorted way. Thus, it may be argued that the Hurūfis and Mirzā Iskandar were close during a particular period but, after a while, disagreements arose between them.

<sup>30</sup> 'Alī al-A'lā, *Firāq-nāma*, Istanbul University Library, No. 1158, f. 58b.

<sup>31</sup> Hellmut Ritter, 'Studien zur Geschichte der Islamischen Frömmigkeit: Die Anfänge der Hurūfisekte', *Oriens*, 7 (1954), pp. 1–54; Persian tr. by Ḥ. Mu'ayyad in *Farhang-i Īrān Zamīn*, 10 (1341 Sh./1962), p. 362. See also B.S. Amoretti, 'Religion in the Timurid and Safavid Periods', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Volume 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. P. Jackson and L. Lockhart (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 610–656, but in particular p. 624.

The most substantial evidence for Amīr Nūr Allāh attending meetings with Mīrzā Iskandar is found in his statements. In fact, during the trial, Khwāja Ghiyāth al-Dīn, the son of Iskandar's vizier, and Besīḥaq, claimed that in Iskandar's presence Amīr Nūr Allāh had said, 'I sent someone to stab Mīrzā Shāhrukh.' In his response to this accusation, Amīr Nūr Allāh said that they should confirm whatever he said in the meeting with Iskandar, or at another meeting, by asking Sulṭān Ghāzān Mīrzā.

After the name of Amīr zāda Iskandar the expression *zādat nuṣratuhu* ('may God increase his victory!'), is added. Fīrūzshāh, one of the commanders of Shāhrukh who fought against Amīr zāda Iskandar, is given the sentence in which this expression is inserted. But it is obvious that Amīr Fīrūzshāh did not actually say these interpolated words. We do not know who added the expression, either Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn or a copyist.

After Amīr Ghiyāth al-Dīn and Amīr Nūr Allāh escaped from prison, they travelled to a number of places and had an audience with the son of Qarā Yūsuf, Shāh Muḥammad, in Baghdad on Rabī' II 836/December 1432.<sup>32</sup> Shāh Muḥammad showed them much affection. However, because of problems with Shāh Muḥammad's faith, they left Baghdad without his permission (f. 16b).

The daughter of Faḍl Allāh and a dervish called Yūsuf or Pīr Turābī increased adherence to Ḥurūfism in Tabrīz during the reign of Jahānshāh (d. 872/1467). Allegedly, the *faqīhs* who were afraid of the Ḥurūfī influence on Jahānshāh, forced the mufti, Uskūyī, to give a *fatwā* on the subject and eventually in 845/1441–2 Jahānshāh ordered the execution of five hundred Ḥurūfīs, including the daughter of Faḍl Allāh.<sup>33</sup> However, the earliest source for this information is Ḥāfīz

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<sup>32</sup> Shāh Muḥammad (Shāh Meḥmed) was the eldest of the five sons of Qarā Yūsuf. He governed Baghdad, which he had conquered on 5 Muḥarram 814/29 April 1411, until he was killed by Amīr Baba Ḥājī Hamadānī on 18 Sha'bān 836/9 April 1433. See Samarqandī, *Matla'*, vol. 3, part 1, p. 155 and vol. 3, part 2, p. 429.

<sup>33</sup> See Shahzad Bashir, 'Enshrining Sainthood: The death and memorialization of Faḍlallāh Astarabadi in Ḥurūfī Thought', *MW*, 90 (2000), p. 302; Šādiq Kiyā, 'Āgāhīhā-yi tāza az Ḥurūfīyān', *Majalla-yi dānishkada-yi adabiyāt-i dānishgāh-i Tīhrān*, 2 (1333 Sh./1954), pp. 39–42.

Ḥusayn Tabrīzī's (d. 997/1589) *Rawḍāt al-jinān wa jannāt al-janān* dated 975/1567.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently Ḥaşrī Tabrīzī repeated this account in his *Rawḍa-yi aṭhār* (1011/1602).<sup>35</sup> Thus, the earliest source describing this incident dates to one and half centuries later. Before that, no chronicler referred to the execution of five hundred Ḥurūfis. On the other hand, the original source relies only on the tales heard from the locals living near the Ḥurūfī shrine in Tabrīz. The author visited the city, catalogued its shrines and collected the legends associated with the shrine.

However, we have Jahānshāh's *Dīvān* (he wrote poetry under the penname Ḥaḳīqī) which reveals to us the intellectual dimensions of Jahānshāh's contacts with Ḥurūfis.

When Jahānshāh learned that Nesīmī had been killed, he found a copy of Nesīmī's *Dīvān* with the help of his assistant, Bashīr Baghdādī; he read it and was influenced by it, and composed eulogies on the death of Nesīmī.<sup>36</sup>

Even though this information can be disputed, we can confidently state that the poems of Jahānshāh are similar to those of Nesīmī. It is beyond the scope of this article to evaluate his poems as literary works. Let us just say that many of Ḥaḳīqī's poems abound with images related to Ḥurūfism. In addition, there are some allusions to Faḍl Allāh in Ḥaḳīqī's poems. Like all Ḥurūfī works, these are used with a double meaning related to those of both 'the grace of God' and 'Faḍl Allāh':

*O Ḥaḳīqī, God helped you through his grace (Faḍl).  
If you die in that way, that is eternal life (jāvidān here refers to  
the Jāvidān-nāma).*<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ḥāfiẓ Ḥusayn Tabrīzī b. al-Karbalā'ī, *Rawḍāt al-jinān wa jannāt al-janān*, ed. Ja'far Sulṭān al-Qurrā'ī (Tehran, 1344-44 Sh./1965-70), vol. 1, pp. 478-481.

<sup>35</sup> Mullā Muḥammad Amin Ḥaşrī Tabrīzī, *Rawḍa-yi aṭhār* (Tabrīz, 1371 Sh./1992), p. 74.

<sup>36</sup> Qurbānof, Qucaq, 'Jahānshāh', p. 228.

<sup>37</sup> Macit, *Karakoyunlu Hükümdarı Cihanşah ve Türkçbayna ale Şiirleri* (Ankara, 2002), p. 84. See also pp. 87, 94, 102, 105, 121, 131, 143.



### Conclusion

After the death of Faḍl Allāh, his grandson Amīr Nūr Allāh was arrested and imprisoned because of an assassination attempt made against Shāhrukh by a person called Aḥmad Lūrī, someone who was not proved to be a Ḥurūfī. Even though he was imprisoned for a serious crime, namely instigating a murder, he was not convicted as a result of the interrogations carried out separately by both Shāhrukh and Ulugh Beg. Even though Shāhrukh and his subordinates were certain that Amīr Nūr Allāh was the instigator, since it could not be proved, they were content to punish him with imprisonment. We see that, in fact, according to the account given, a trial process in the 9th/15th century was very close to the concept of 'a fair trial'.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the trials of Amīr Nūr Allāh is that outsiders, including the '*ulamā*' of the era, lacked any substantive knowledge of Ḥurūfism. What circulated outside Ḥurūfī circles were rumours, misinterpretations and defamation. Thus, we conclude that we should not give credence the chronicles regarding the beliefs or the fate of the Ḥurūfīs in the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries.

The Qara-Qoyunlu Turkomans, who were becoming more and more powerful in the region of Eastern Anatolia and Ādharbāyjan in this period, established close relations with the Ḥurūfīs. We see the Ḥurūfīs present at the assemblies of Qarā Yūsuf and his sons. There may be two basic explanations for this: first, the Qara-Qoyunlu Turkomans, who were neither completely nomadic nor settled, were not greatly Islamised. Second, the Ḥurūfīs hated the Tīmūrīds, who were the enemies of the Qara-Qoyunlu.

Jahānshāh represented the acme of this rapprochement. It is obvious that Jahānshāh understood the basic tenets of Ḥurūfism better than any of the '*ulamā*' at the courts of Shāhrukh and Ulugh Beg. Indeed, he often referred to them in his poems. The claim that during his reign five hundred Ḥurūfīs were executed may have emerged as a popular myth long after his death. Even if some real event lies behind this myth, we must interpret in pragmatic terms, rather than in political and religious ones – for example, in the light of Jahānshāh's submission to Shāhrukh in order to receive support in his conflict with his brother, Iskandar.

## Nuḡṡavīs, Safavids and Shi‘ism in the 9th–11th/15th–17th Centuries

*Orkhan Mir-Kasimov*

Much scholarly attention has been paid recently to the relationships between the Safavids, and more specifically Shah ‘Abbās I (r. 996–1038 /1588–1629), and the Nuḡṡavīs, a mystical and messianic movement founded by Maḡmūd Pasikhānī (d. 830/1427). This interest is mostly due to the importance of the Safavid-Nuḡṡavī connection in our understanding of the Safavid religious policies. However, many aspects of these policies, as well as issues related to the balance of political forces within the Safavid structure of power, remain insufficiently explained.<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted that all existing studies relied heavily on historical sources written by non-Nuḡṡavī authors, most of whom were indeed openly hostile to the Nuḡṡavīs. The input of Nuḡṡavī sources has been disproportionately low and is generally limited to excerpts from an unidentified Nuḡṡavī treatise published by Ṣādiq Kiyā as an appendix

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Babayan has conducted in-depth research and addressed this topic in several publications, most extensively in her *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2003), pp. 1–117. Other scholars who have proposed various theoretical frameworks for the Safavid-Nuḡṡavī relationships are Said Amir Arjomand and Abbas Amanat. See S. A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi‘ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago and London, 1984), pp. 198–199; Abbas Amanat, ‘The Nuḡṡavī Movement of Maḡmūd Pisikhānī and his Persian Cycle of Mystical-Materialism’, in Farhad Daftary, ed., *Mediaeval Isma‘ili History and Thought* (Cambridge and New York, 1996), pp. 281–297.

to his ground-breaking monograph.<sup>2</sup> To this has been added some information about Nuḳṭavī doctrinal views derived from the *Dabistān-i madhāhib*, an Adhar-Kayvānī source composed in India in the 11th/17th century.<sup>3</sup>

This almost complete dearth of information about the Nuḳṭavī doctrinal positions has inevitably caused some distortion in the analysis of Safavid-Nuḳṭavī relationships. First, it led to inaccurate and sometimes simply erroneous assumptions – based mainly on non-Nuḳṭavī sources – regarding the theoretical basis of the Nuḳṭavī ideology, as well as the confessional identity and possible political aspirations of this group. Consequently, some potentially important factors in the evaluation of the motivations of the Safavid-Nuḳṭavī relationships have been overlooked. Second, hostile historical accounts have drawn scholarly attention to the negative aspect of the Safavid-Nuḳṭavī relationship, namely, the rejection and persecution of the Nuḳṭavīs as dangerous heretics. No serious exploration has taken place of the positive aspect of this relationship, that is, the Nuḳṭavī doctrinal points that could have found favour with the Safavid rulers as politically viable ideologies.

A rebalancing of this relationship by modern scholarship started at the end of the twentieth century with a series of studies by the Iranian scholar 'Alī Riḍā Dhakāvātī Qarāguzlū which were devoted to the foundational Nuḳṭavī texts, including the major works of Maḥmūd Pasikhānī, such as *Kitāb-i mizān* and *Mafātīḥ al-ghuyūb*.<sup>4</sup> In addition, we are now equipped with a better knowledge of the intellectual background of the Nuḳṭavī works due to progress in the

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<sup>2</sup> Šādiq Kiyā, *Nuḳṭaviyān yā pāsikhāniyān* (Tehran 1320 Sh./1941–42, repr. 1392 Sh./2013–14), pp. 76–125. The incipit of the untitled manuscript cited by Kiyā (p. 73) is the same as MS 4761 of the Majlis Library in Tehran, which is catalogued under the title *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* and attributed to Maḥmūd Pasikhānī. However, several other texts with this title are attributed to the same author in various manuscript collections. Further research is needed in order to confirm the titles and authorship of these works.

<sup>3</sup> It is remarkable that one of 12 chapters of the *Dabistān* is entirely devoted to the Nuḳṭavīs. On this work, see Azfar Moin, 'Dabistān-i madhāhib', *EL*3.

<sup>4</sup> Some of these studies have been now conveniently brought together in a book titled *Junbish-i Nuḳṭaviyya* (Qum, 1383 Sh./2004–05). Unfortunately, Dhakāvātī does not seem to address the issue of the textual identification of a work known as *Mafātīḥ al-ghuyūb* or *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*. This is probably because he was aware only of one manuscript with this title. Cf. *Junbish-i Nuḳṭaviyya*, p. 175, where he mentions 'the only manuscript copy of that [work]' (*tanhā nuskha-yi khattī-yi ān*).

study of Ḥurūfī doctrinal literature, which was doubtless one of the main sources that inspired Maḡmūd Paṡīkhānī’s thought.<sup>5</sup> Even if critical editions and comprehensive studies of the Nuḡṡavī and Ḥurūfī texts are still desiderata, we are now in a position to attempt a preliminary revision of the previous studies, taking into account the new doctrinal evidence. Therefore, the purpose of the present paper is to use the Nuḡṡavī texts themselves in order to introduce a more balanced representation of the Nuḡṡavī voice in the Safavid-Nuḡṡavī relationship. When necessary, Nuḡṡavī doctrinal points will be clarified with reference to the works of Maḡmūd Paṡīkhānī’s teacher and the founder of the Ḥurūfī doctrine, Faḡl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394).

It must be mentioned that – by using the foundational Nuḡṡavī texts (composed at the latest in the first half of the 9th/15th century) to represent the thought of the Nuḡṡavīs mentioned in the Safavid chronicles contemporary to Shah ‘Abbās I, that is, those chronicles composed at the end of the 10th/16th and in the first half of the 11th/17th centuries – we make an assumption that the core ideas of the Nuḡṡavī doctrine were preserved over almost two centuries without significant modifications. In other words, we assume that the Nuḡṡavī groups that came into contact with Shah ‘Abbās were aware of, and adhered to, the learned Ḥurūfī/Nuḡṡavī tradition as developed in Paṡīkhānī’s works.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Maḡmūd Paṡīkhānī was an excommunicated disciple of Faḡl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394), the founder of the Ḥurūfīyya. On the Ḥurūfīs and their doctrine, see Shahzad Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis* (Oxford, 2005) and, more recently, Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power: Ḥurūfī Teachings between Sufism and Shi‘ism in Medieval Islam* (London and New York, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> We are poorly informed about the evolution of the Nuḡṡavī groups and their doctrines after the death of the movement’s founder. However, in case of the Ḥurūfī tradition, we know that the doctrinal uniformity of the movement was compromised shortly after the death of Astarābādī in 796/1394. Different Ḥurūfī groups emphasised different aspects of the original doctrine, and its further evolution was influenced by other mystical and intellectual currents. Therefore, the doctrinal identity of groups described as Ḥurūfīs in later sources is uncertain. See Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, pp. 17–18. The same kind of division and doctrinal divergence could very well also have taken place with the Nuḡṡavīs. By the ‘learned’ tradition we understand the tradition based on doctrinal works building on the thought of the movement’s founder, as opposed to what can be called the ‘popular’ tradition combining some salient elements of the foundational theories with beliefs and rituals not necessarily linked to the movement’s original doctrine.

The soundness of this approach can be contested, however, on the grounds that we have no first-hand information about the doctrines professed by the Nuḡṭavī circle of Qazvīn at the time of Shah 'Abbās I. If this group produced any texts, they have not survived nor yet been recovered.<sup>7</sup> We cannot therefore compare their doctrines with the foundational Nuḡṭavī texts. As mentioned, no detailed account of their beliefs is given in any of the available historical sources that mention Shah 'Abbās I's interaction with the Nuḡṭavīs. These sources either refer to the Nuḡṭavīs as a group whose heresy is self-evident and does not require any explanation, or they provide a short list of non-specific heresiographical clichés.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, some accounts of the Nuḡṭavīs do not mention the term 'Nuḡṭavī' at all, referring to this group either as 'heretics' (*mulḥidān*), or simply 'that people' (*ān jam'*).<sup>9</sup>

However, historical chronicles and other non-Nuḡṭavī sources do contain some evidence confirming the existence of the Nuḡṭavī learned tradition at that time. What is more, these sources suggest that there existed a vast and influential Nuḡṭavī intellectual network spread over Iran and India, which doubtless deserves further study. Prominent Nuḡṭavī scholars, such as Mīr Aḡmad Kāshī in Kāshān, Sharīf Āmulī in India and others were part of this network and at least some of them were connected with Dervish Khusraw who led the Nuḡṭavīs of

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<sup>7</sup> Two of the historical chronicles examined below say that the Nuḡṭavī group in Qazvīn and their leader, Dervish Khusraw, possessed books. See Mullā Jalāl al-Dīn Munajjim Yazdī, *Tārīkh-i 'Abbāsī*, ed. Sayf Allāh Vaḡīd-niyā ([Tehran], 1366 Sh./1987), p. 121; and Faḡlī Beg Khūzānī Iṣfahānī, *Aḡḡal al-tawārīkh*, ed. K. Ghereghlou (Exeter, 2015), vol. 1, p. 144.

<sup>8</sup> For similar observations concerning the historical accounts of the Ḥurūfīs, see Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, 'Takfīr and Messianism: The Ḥurūfī Case', in Camilla Adang et al., ed., *Accusations of Unbelief in Islam: A Diachronic Perspective on Takfīr* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), pp. 189–212.

<sup>9</sup> This is the case of Maḡmūd b. Hidāyat Allāh Afūshta-yī Naṡanzī's *Naḡāvat al-āthār fī dhīkr al-akhyār dar tārīkh-i Ṣafaviyya*, ed. Iḡsān Ishrāqī (Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994) and of Yazdī's *Tārīkh-i 'Abbāsī*. The editor had to add a footnote to Naṡanzī's text (p. 527) explaining that the 'heretics' mentioned in the chronicle are in fact a group known as the Nuḡṭavīs.

Qazvīn.<sup>10</sup> There are only limited accounts of the Nuḡṡavī teachings in the sources such as the already mentioned *Dabistān-i madhāhib* and perhaps these accounts even underwent some distortion in the process of being transmitted by non-Nuḡṡavī authors. However, they do contain some recognisable traces of ideas found in the original Nuḡṡavī texts. The survival of these original ideas might also be confirmed by the works of such thinkers as Muḡammad b. Maḡmūd Dihdār Shīrāzī (d. 1016/1607) who, according to Dhakāvātī, established links between Ibn 'Arabī's teachings, Nuḡṡavī theories and some Buddhist concepts.<sup>11</sup> The learned character of the Nuḡṡavī teachings is also indirectly demonstrated by the fact, almost unanimously acknowledged in non-Nuḡṡavī sources, that they attracted not only simple people but also elites, including nobles, statesmen and kings.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For the mention of the Nuḡṡavī leaders connected with the circle of Qazvīn, see Naḡanzī, *Naḡāvat*, pp. 523–527; Iskandar Beg Turkmān Munshī, *Tārīkh-i 'ālam-arā-yi 'Abbāsī* (Tehran, 1350 Sh./1971), vol. 1, p. 476; Iṡfahānī, *Afḡal al-tawārīkh*, p. 145. In a letter addressed to Aḡmad Kāshī, the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 963–1014/1556–1605) asks him to send his greetings to Dervish Khusraw, which also confirms that the Nuḡṡavī leaders in various locations were in contact with each other. See Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York, 2014), pp. 164–165 and references on p. 292, n. 131. Sharīf Āmulī was influential at the court of Akbar and is mentioned in several Indian texts, including 'Abd al-Qādir Bada'ūnī's *Muntakhab al-tawārīkh*. See Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, pp. 165–166 and Kiyā, *Nuḡṡaviyān yā pāsikhāniyān*, pp. 11–12 and 32–35.

<sup>11</sup> See Dhakāvātī, *Junbish-i Nuḡṡaviyya*, pp. 132–134 with reference to Dihdār's *Risāla-yi durr-i yatīm*. Excerpts from this and another of Dihdār's treatises titled *Risāla-yi nafā'is al-arḡām* are also cited in Kiyā, *Nuḡṡaviyān*, pp. 24–32. Dihdār's criticism of the Nuḡṡavī doctrinal views shows his close familiarity with the Nuḡṡavī doctrinal positions, including some expressions (such as *markab al-mubīn*) from Pasikhānī's foundational works. However, a closer reading of Dihdār's works is necessary to determine the extent of his familiarity with the original Nuḡṡavī texts. Both works of Dihdār are available in the collection of his treatises titled *Rasā'il-i Dihdār*, ed. Muḡammad Ḥusayn Akbārī Sāvī (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996).

<sup>12</sup> Shah 'Abbās himself is, of course, a salient example of this, and the interest of his courtiers and military commanders in Nuḡṡavī teachings is noted in the chronicles analysed below. The Mughal Emperor Akbar also evinced an interest in Nuḡṡavī doctrine, maintaining contact with various Nuḡṡavī leaders in Iran and in India, as well as having prominent Nuḡṡavī thinkers at his court. According to Iskandar Munshī, Akbar's advisor, Abu'l-Faḡl 'Allāmī (d. 1011/1602) was a Nuḡṡavī who converted him to Nuḡṡavism. See *Tārīkh-i 'ālam-arā-yi 'Abbāsī*, p. 476.

This evidence indicates both that the learned Nuḳṭavī tradition not only survived but was thriving during the 10th–11th/16th–17th centuries in Iran and India, and that the Nuḳṭavī group in Qazvīn which attracted the attention of Shah ‘Abbās I belonged to that tradition. Therefore, it seems safe to assume that the Nuḳṭavī circle of Qazvīn adhered to teachings that were more or less closely aligned with the original texts of Maḥmūd Pasīkhānī.<sup>13</sup> This would justify our use of Pasīkhānī’s foundational works as the main source for the doctrinal views of the Nuḳṭavīs at the time of Shah ‘Abbās. Examining the historical accounts of the relationship of Shah ‘Abbās with the Nuḳṭavīs against the background of doctrinal evidence from the Nuḳṭavī texts may provide us with a new understanding of the role that Nuḳṭavī ideas may have played in the evolution of the religious and political thinking of Shah ‘Abbās.

We shall start with a reflection on the nature of Safavid Shi‘ism and on the situation of the Nuḳṭavīs in the context of Shi‘i and Sufi trends in Safavid Iran. We shall then summarise the information available in the historical chronicles contemporary with Shah ‘Abbās I, along with a discussion of inconsistencies in the narratives and unanswered questions posed by these chronicles. This material will be collated with the doctrinal evidence contained in the Nuḳṭavī texts to see if this can shed new light on the reasons for Shah ‘Abbās’s interest in the Nuḳṭavīs. In conclusion, we shall briefly discuss the fate of the Nuḳṭavīs in Mughal India under the Emperor Akbar, comparing it to the narrative of their encounter with Shah ‘Abbās.

### **Twelver Shi‘i scholars, esoteric Shi‘ism, mystico-messianic Shi‘i/Sufi trends and Safavid Shi‘ism**

Jean Aubin suggested that during the period preceding the rise of the Safavids, Iran was evolving towards some form of Shi‘ism, and that the advent of the Safavids supported by the Qizil-bāsh Turkic tribes,

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<sup>13</sup> Bada’ūnī in his *Muntakhab al-tawārikh* explicitly refers to Sharīf Āmūlī’s use of Pasīkhānī’s books; see Kiyā, *Nuḳṭaviyān*, pp. 32–33, and Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, p. 165.

originating in Anatolia and external to the Iranian religious landscape, restricted the rich diversity of various Shi'i and Shi'i-sympathising tendencies in Iran by subordinating them to the Qizil-bāsh interpretation of Shi'ism.<sup>14</sup> This observation doubtless reflects some aspects of the reality behind the radical change in the religious and political evolution of Iran that was introduced by the rise to power of the Safavids. However, we know that Safavid religious experimentation was not confined within the limits of Qizil-bāsh beliefs, and it arguably involved a broad range of existing religious orientations in the lands they conquered. Despite Safavid persecution of various religious groups, their religious politics were also influenced by the diversity of Shi'i, and also Sufi and Sunni tendencies and doctrines which had developed in Iran and Iraq in the period preceding the Safavid conquest. Furthermore, many of these tendencies and doctrines continued to develop under the Safavids, creating new forms of philosophical and mystical thought and contributing to the 'Shi'i renaissance' to which this volume is dedicated.

It is well known that Twelver Shi'ism did not immediately become the predominant religious paradigm in Iran when, upon his entry into Tabrīz in 907/1501, Shah Ismā'il I proclaimed it the official religion of his still-growing empire. This action by the fourteen-year-old king still puzzles historians. It is also difficult to say what kind of Twelver Shi'ism he had in mind, since it is unlikely that he or his supporters had any systematic knowledge of the theologico-jurisprudential Twelver

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<sup>14</sup> Jean Aubin, 'La politique religieuse des Safavides', in *Le shī'isme imāmīte* (Paris, 1970), pp. 238–239. On the historical evolution of the meanings attributed to the term 'Qizil-bāsh', see Shahzad Bashir, 'The Origins and Rhetorical Evolution of the Term Qizilbash in Persianate Literature', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 57 (2014), pp. 364–391. For the sake of simplicity, I use here the term 'Qizil-bāsh' to designate the Turkic tribes supporting the Safavids.



tradition at that time.<sup>15</sup> It is more likely that the Twelver Shi'ism of Shah Ismā'īl, in his initial understanding, was just another name for the faith of his soldiers and disciples, the Qizil-bāsh. Focused on the cult of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and his descendants, the Qizil-bāsh faith included the veneration of the Prophet's family and of the imams of

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<sup>15</sup> None of the best-known historical accounts of Shah Ismā'īl's proclamation of Twelver Shi'ism, such as Khwāndamīr's *Ḥabīb al-siyar*, Yaḥyā b. 'Abd al-Laṭīf Qazvīnī's *Lubb al-tawārikh* or Ḥasan Beg Rūmlū's *Aḥsan al-tawārikh*, specifies what kind of Twelver Shi'ism he intended to promote. A later, 11th/17th-century source, *Alam āra-yi ṣafavī*, mentions the support of 'Alī that Shah Ismā'īl received in a dream. For an analysis of these and other sources relevant to Shah Ismā'īl's religious initiative see Rosemary Stanfield-Johnson, 'The Tabarra'īyan and the Early Safavids', *IS*, 37 (2004), pp. 47–71. It is remarkable that the religion proclaimed by Shah Ismā'īl is also described in the sources as the 'religion of the *ahl al-bayt*', the 'Ḥaydarī religion' (*madhhab-i Ḥaydarī*) and the 'Ja'farī faith' (Stanfield-Johnson, 'The Tabarra'īyan', pp. 56 and 58, citing Qazvīnī, *Lubb al-tawārikh* and Mīrzā Beg Junābadī, *Rawdat al-Ṣafawiyya*). These expressions suggest that the proclamation of Twelver Shi'ism by Shah Ismā'īl was in line with the beliefs of his father Ḥaydar and indeed with the doctrine of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Shi'i imam and a foundational figure of the early Shi'i thought. The idea that Shah Ismā'īl was restoring the Twelver faith of the Būyid era after it was interrupted by the Saljūqs, or that he was a millennial reviver of the Shi'i Islam is also mentioned in the sources; see Stanfield-Johnson, 'The Tabarra'īyan', p. 58, with reference to Rūmlū's *Aḥsan al-tawārikh*; K. Ghereghlou, 'Chronicling a Dynasty on the Make: New Light on the Early Ṣafavids in Ḥayātī Tabrizī's *Tārikh*', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 137 (2017), p. 808, citing 'Abdi Beg Qavāmī Shīrāzī (d. 988/1580), *Takmilat al-akhbār* and Qāsim Beg Ḥayātī Tabrizī (fl. 961/1554), *Tārikh*. Although he also had contacts with Shi'i scholars at earlier dates, Shah Ismā'īl's interest in the learned Twelver tradition was confirmed during his military campaigns in Iraq and his conquest of Baghdad in 914/1508, several years after his initial proclamation. In his *Tārikh*, Ḥayātī Tabrizī reports that in Baghdad Shah Ismā'īl received a delegation from the Shi'i shrines of Iraq, led by the prominent Shi'i jurist, 'Alī al-Karakī (d. 940/1535) (who was perhaps already known to the shah from their meeting in Isfāhān in 910/1504–1505), and that Shah Ismā'īl visited the centres of Shi'i learning in Najaf and Ḥilla. See Ghereghlou, 'Chronicling', p. 830 and his edition of Ḥayātī Tabrizī's *Tārikh, A Chronicle of the Early Ṣafavids and the Reign of Shah Ismā'īl (907–930/1501–1524)* (New Haven, CT, 2018), pp. 354–355 and 362–366. Three years later al-Karakī responded to Shah Ismā'īl's invitation and moved to Iran where he became the main proponent of the Twelver Shi'i scholarly tradition. On al-Karakī, see Wilferd Madelung, 'al-Karakī', *EI2*.

Twelver Shi'i Islam, but otherwise had little in common with its normative tradition.<sup>16</sup>

However, whatever his initial idea of Twelver Shi'ism might have been, Shah Ismā'il soon turned to the normative Twelver Shi'i tradition represented by Shi'i scholars and jurists in Iran and Iraq, and invited them to preside over the establishment of Twelver Shi'ism in his realm.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> On Qizil-bāsh beliefs, see Markus Dressler, 'Alevīs', *EI3*, and references cited there. Although the Qizil-bāsh tradition includes the veneration of the 12 imams and several elements of the rituals linked with Shi'i religious memory and values, it is unclear whether Shah Ismā'il or his followers identified themselves as Twelver Shi'is prior to his declaration of Twelver Shi'ism as the official religion of his state in 907/1501. The literature also throws up the potential influence of other branches of Shi'i Islam which could have influenced the Qizil-bāsh. The *Abū Muslim-nāmas*, the epic narratives devoted to Abū Muslim al-Khurāsānī (d. 137/755) – the leader of the movement that had overthrown the Umayyads and resulted in the Abbasids seizing caliphal power – were used by the early Safavids to attract followers among the Anatolian Qizil-bāsh. These narratives, which depicted Abū Muslim as the champion of the rights of the Prophet's family and of the 'Alid cause, conveyed some information on the early Shi'i sect of the Kaysāniyya, who supported the right of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya, one of the sons of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. It is also known that at the initial stage of his career Shah Ismā'il and his followers were sheltered by the Zaydīs, and therefore might have been influenced by Zaydī Shi'ism. See, for example, Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, pp. 124 ff.; Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran* (London and New York, 2009), p. 14, n. 3 and p. 151, n. 4. It should be kept in mind that, in the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries, the adoration of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, of the wider family of the Prophet and of the Twelver imams of the Twelver tradition was not an exclusively Shi'i feature, it was also widespread in some Sunni circles. This phenomenon, which is probably rooted in the audacious religious reforms of the Abbasid caliph, al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (r. 575–622/1180–1225), is referred to in scholarly literature in varied terms, such as 'Alid loyalism' (Marshall Hodgson), 'Imamophilism' (Matthew Melvin-Koushki) or even 'Twelver Sunnism' (Rasūl Ja'fariyān). For further references, see Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, 'Connaissance divine et action messianique : la figure de 'Alī dans les milieux mystiques et messianiques (du V<sup>e</sup>/XI<sup>e</sup> au X<sup>e</sup>/XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle)', in M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Alī, le secret bien gardé* (Paris, 2020), pp. 325–352 and Angelika Hartmann, *An-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (1180–1225) : Politik, Religion, Kultur im der späten 'Abbāsidenzeit* (Berlin, 1975).

<sup>17</sup> The nickname 'inventor of Shi'ism' (*mukhtari' al-shi'a*) attributed to 'Alī al-Karakī by his enemies, who resented his zeal in implementing the principles of Shi'i jurisprudence, reflects the extent to which this form of Shi'ism was still perceived as something new and artificial at the time of Ismā'il's successor Shah Ṭahmāsp. For this nickname see, for example, Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London and New York, 2004), p. 19.

Like his choice of Twelver Shi'ism as the official creed, the subsequent persecution of the Sunnis and other religious groups and the forced conversions, Shah Ismā'īl's transition from the Qizil-bāsh creed to the theologico-jurisprudential version of Twelver Shi'ism has not, as yet, been convincingly explained. It can be argued that the learned, moderate Shi'ism of scholars and jurists was more suitable for the role of the state religion than the 'unruly' creed of the Qizil-bāsh, and also that the turn to the Twelver scholars was part of the Safavid plan to harness the power and messianic expectations of their Qizil-bāsh followers. That may well have been the case. It is true that, unlike the theologico-jurisprudential Twelver tradition, Qizil-bāsh Shi'ism did not possess any systematic doctrine that could be used as the basis of a state administration.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Twelver scholars had developed political theories that, at the first glance, could establish Safavid legitimacy on a more solid basis that appealed to a broader population.<sup>19</sup> Also, the Qizil-bāsh constituted a

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<sup>18</sup> It should be recalled that before the Safavids, the Sarbadārs, a similar movement with Shi'i leanings but apparently without any clearly articulated doctrine, took the same steps in inviting the prominent Twelver Shi'i scholar, Muḥammad b. Makki al-Āmilī (d. 786/1384), to establish the theologico-jurisprudential form of Twelver Shi'ism in the short-lived polity that they founded in Khurāsān in the 8th/14th century. On the Sarbadārs, see C.P. Melville, 'Sarbadārids', *EL2*. Ibn Makki wrote an important work on Imāmī law titled *al-Lum'a al-Dimashqiyya* for the Sarbadārs. Michel Mazzaoui observed that 'in many ways, Šāh Ismā'īl was the successor who put [the Sarbadār leader] 'Alī Mu'ayyad's attempt into effect a little more than a century later in Aḍarbaiḡān'. See Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Šafawids: Šī'ism, Šūfism, and the Ġulāt* (Wiesbaden, 1972), p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> According to Twelver Shi'i beliefs, only the imam, who is endowed with special knowledge, is the legitimate political and spiritual leader of the Islamic community. Since the occultation of the Twelfth imam, and especially since the beginning of the major occultation (329/940) when communication between the Hidden imam and the community was definitively severed, Twelver scholars developed various theories concerning the legitimacy of participation in government in the absence of the Hidden imam as well as the legitimacy of the ruler – depending on the ruler's adherence to Twelver beliefs and his treatment of the Twelver community. Some degree of legitimacy could be conceded to a ruler in the absence of the Hidden imam if that ruler was 'just'. For a concise outline of the evolution of the Twelver political theories see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Christian Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le shī'isme?* (Paris, 2004), pp. 181–199; Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven and London, 1985), pp. 191–196; and, for a short summary of Twelver attitudes towards Safavid legitimacy, see Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, pp. 15–16.

specific group determined by its tribal organisation and Turkic identity. The members of this group regarded the Safavid leaders as their spiritual masters. It is clear that applying this socially and ethnically limited Qizil-bāsh model with its unusual set of beliefs to a vast empire with its culturally and religiously diversified populations could have been a difficult task.<sup>20</sup>

However, Qizil-bāsh loyalty was also a substantial asset for the Safavid kings, and it is not clear whether this asset outweighed the benefits of the alliance with the Imāmī scholars or not. Qizil-bāsh beliefs focussed on the figure of the Safavid shah, investing him with quasi-divine spiritual authority. Consequently, for the Qizil-bāsh, the legitimacy of the Safavid shahs as political rulers was unquestionable. Conversely, in the doctrinal framework of the Imāmī Shi‘i tradition, the Safavid claim to religious and political authority could never be completely fulfilled in the absence of the Hidden imam. Even though Safavid genealogy was conveniently arranged to present them as descendants of the seventh imam of the Twelver line, Mūsā al-Kāzim<sup>21</sup> and, starting from the beginning of the dynastic period, the traces of Qizil-bāsh ‘deviations’ in their past were progressively censored and removed, the most positive description of their legitimacy that the Safavids could obtain within the limits of Twelver political theory would have sounded more like a justification than a confirmation: since the imam, who is the only rightful ruler, was absent, and since the Safavids belonged to the ‘Alid and Fatimid line, it was conceivable to recognise them as rightful rulers, but only to the extent that they

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<sup>20</sup> The Qizil-bāsh supporters of the Safavids belonged to a limited number of *oymāqs*, or tribes, and were bound by tribal loyalties. After the Safavids became a royal dynasty, a principle was introduced according to which it was no longer possible to become a Qizil-bāsh by conversion, and only people born into an *oymāq* were considered Qizil-bāsh. See Babayan, ‘The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imamite Shi‘ism’, *IS*, 27 (1994), p. 138.

<sup>21</sup> This apparently happened in the middle of the 9th/15th century. See Kazuo Morimoto, ‘The Earliest ‘Alid Genealogy for the Safavids: New Evidence for the Pre-dynastic Claim to *Sayyid* Status’, *IS*, 43 (2010), pp. 447–469.

could be regarded as executing the will of the Hidden imam.<sup>22</sup> This attitude constituted a sharp contrast to the central place that the Safavid kings occupied in the Qizil-bāsh mindset.<sup>23</sup>

It is reasonable to suppose that, despite their support of Twelver scholars and their self-imposed role as the champions of the Twelver Shi'ī cause, the Safavid shahs were aware of the limited scope of the authority and legitimacy that they could enjoy within the scholarly Twelver paradigm. Therefore, they were prepared to consider any reasonable means of legitimising their authority without either maintaining a privileged link with the Qizil-bāsh or sacrificing their religious charisma to the Twelver clergy in exchange for a half-hearted recognition.<sup>24</sup>

Seen from this perspective, Shah Ismā'īl's proclamation of Twelver Shi'ism does not appear to be a watershed after which the Safavids' commitment to the scholarly form of Twelver Shi'ism was unwavering and from which point this form of Shi'ism was irrevocably bound to remain the official religion of the Safavid state. This event can be regarded rather as an experiment in the Safavids' search for a new

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<sup>22</sup> 'As the ruler of the age and the Lord of Command is absent, it is rightful for a competent member of the exalted Fatimid, 'Alid dynasty to execute the commandments of the Imam of the age among God's creatures . . .' 'Abdī Beg Qavāmī Shīrāzī (historian under Shah Ṭahmāsp, d. 988/1580), *Takmilat al-akhbār*, cited in Saïd Amir Arjomand, 'The Rise of Shah Esmā'īl as a Mahdist Revolution', in his *Sociology of Shi'ite Islam* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), pp. 305–306.

<sup>23</sup> In the long term, the alliance with Twelver scholars proved to be rather a bad choice not only for the Safavids, but for Iranian monarchy in general.

<sup>24</sup> The potentially discordant aspects of the Safavid alliance with the juristic version of Twelver Shi'ism were present from the outset of this difficult relationship and, as we will see below, were soon transformed into open conflict. As noted by Ernest Tucker: 'Shah Ismā'īl I's 1501 enthronement in Tabriz created a situation that would affect the Safavids for the rest of their time in power. It initiated an implicit tension between the monarch and the clergy over the definition of royal legitimacy.' See Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran* (Gainesville, FL, 2006), p. 17.

formula of religious and political authority.<sup>25</sup> There was nothing to prevent Shah Ismā'īl's successors from being open to alternative choices, if these choices were beneficial to their quest for legitimacy and if they could be implemented without radically challenging the existing balance of political forces. The tentative character of the Safavid move towards the normative Twelver tradition seems to be confirmed by the swings in their religious policies, going even as far as a return to Sunni Islam. A realisation of the danger posed by the growing power of the Twelver scholars and jurists, sometimes in alliance with the Qizil-bāsh, was one of the possible motivations for the move towards Sunni Islam contemplated by Ismā'īl II (r. 984–985/1576–1577), Ṭahmāsp's successor, early in Safavid history, and this led to a conflict between the Safavid shah and some groups of the Twelver clergy and the Qizil-bāsh.<sup>26</sup> Over a century and a half later, a fusion with Sunni Islam, by presenting Twelver Shi'ism as a legal school (*madhhab*) similar to the four Sunni schools, was advocated by Nādir Shah Afshār (r. 1149–1160/1736–1747), founder of the Afshārid dynasty that succeeded the Safavids.<sup>27</sup>

It is also worth noting that, in spite of their support for the Twelver scholars, theologians and jurists, the Safavid kings did not totally abandon their claims of mystico-messianic authority. Their attachment to their status as Sufi leaders is confirmed by the attention given by Ṭahmāsp I and 'Abbās I to the shrine of the founder of the Safavid order, Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn (d. 735/1334) in Ardabīl, Iran, and the

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<sup>25</sup> The effective 'watershed', when the consolidation of Twelver Shi'i clergy and the conversion of the Iranian population reached the point of no return, must arguably be situated at the end of, or even after, Safavid rule. Alessandro Bausani observed, 'It is a fact that when the Safavids arrived the majority of the Persian population was Sunnite, and the change to Shi'ism was a conscious and deliberate policy carried out by the Safavids themselves. . . The effective conversion of the mass of the Persian people to Shi'ism probably occurred in the eighteenth century'; see Alessandro Bausani, *The Persians* (New York 1971), p. 139.

<sup>26</sup> See Michel Mazzaoui, 'The Religious Policy of Safavid Shah Isma'īl II', in Michel Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen, ed., *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson* (Salt Lake City, UT, 1990), pp. 49–56; Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, pp 41–50.

<sup>27</sup> On Nādir Shah's religious policy, see Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest*.

preservation of elements of Sufi rituals at their courts.<sup>28</sup> Eschatological and messianic expectations were high at the time of Shah Ṭahmāsp, who was described by his court historian, ‘Abdī Beg Qavāmī Shīrāzī (d. 988/1580), as the king of the ‘end of time’.<sup>29</sup> Shah Ṭahmāsp also expected the imminent return of the Hidden imam, as the eschatological saviour (Mahdi). A white horse was kept ready for the Mahdi, and Ṭahmāsp’s favourite sister, Sulṭānim, remained unmarried as the Mahdi’s fiancée.<sup>30</sup> Andrew Newman has argued that Shah Ṭahmāsp’s declaration of ‘Alī al-Karakī as the ‘deputy of the Twelfth imam’ might suggest that the shah himself was identified as the imam.<sup>31</sup> Shah Ṭahmāsp’s friendly disposition towards mystico-messianic groups, including the Nuṭṭāvīs, is attested in some sources.<sup>32</sup> A study of the anti-Abū Muslim literature in Safavid Iran also suggests a surge in the popularity of the mystico-messianic discourse after the death of Shah Ismā‘il I, when Twelver scholars found themselves in a defensive position.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Newman, *Safavid Iran*, pp. 32, 59; A.H. Morton, ‘The Chub-i Tariq and Qizilbash Ritual in Safavid Persia’, in Calmard, ed., *Études Safavides* (Tehran/Paris, 1993), pp. 225–245.

<sup>29</sup> Arjomand, ‘The Rise of Shah Esmā‘il’, p. 307, with reference to ‘Abdī Beg’s *Takmilat al-akhbār*.

<sup>30</sup> Arjomand, ‘The Rise of Shah Esmā‘il’, p. 307, with reference to Michele Membré, *Relazione di Persia*.

<sup>31</sup> Newman, *Safavid Iran*, p. 37.

<sup>32</sup> Iṣfahānī, *Afḍal al-tawārīkh*, vol. 1, p. 142, notes that the father of Dervish Khusraw (who will be discussed further below), the Nuṭṭāvī leader of Qazvīn, was known to be a heretic (supposedly a Nuṭṭāvī like his son), that he was appreciated by Shah Ṭahmāsp and was often present at the royal meetings with scholars and learned men. This did not stop Ṭahmāsp from ruthlessly persecuting the Nuṭṭāvīs. The same love-hate relationship can also be observed between Shah ‘Abbās and the Nuṭṭāvīs. It is noteworthy that Qāsim Beg Ḥayātī Tabrizī, mentioned above as the author of the chronicle of the early Safavids entitled *Tārīkh* and written at the time of Shah Ṭahmāsp, probably also had some Nuṭṭāvī proclivities. See Ghereghlou, ‘Chronicling’, p. 809.

<sup>33</sup> See Newman, *Safavid Iran*, pp. 31–33, and his ‘The Limits of “Orthodoxy”? Notes on the Anti-Abū Muslim Polemic of Early 11th/17th Century Iran’, in Denis Hermann and Mathieu Terrier, ed., *Shi‘i Islam and Sufism: Classical Views and Modern Perspectives* (London, 2020), pp. 65–119.

The Safavids' search for a new formula of religious and political authority inevitably brought them into contact with the milieu of Shi'i and Shi'i/Sufi mystical and messianic groups and movements in Iran and Iraq. Indeed, since the traditional balance of religious and political authority represented by the caliphate was disrupted by the Mongol invasions in the middle of the 7th/13th century, this milieu can be regarded as a testing ground for various doctrines that specifically addressed the issue of religious authority and its possible links to political power.

Modern scholarship has come to distinguish this milieu as a separate phenomenon of sorts, but its nature and the role it played in the socio-political transformations of the post-Mongol period have still not been sufficiently conceptualised. This is also visible in the somewhat confused terminology used to refer to the groups and movements that belonged to this milieu and combined Sufi and Shi'i doctrinal elements with active political agendas. These groups and movements are most often described as 'messianic', 'antinomian' or 'extremist'. However, none of these terms conveys an accurate idea of their identity. The word 'messianic' is in general problematic in Islamic contexts and suggests the expectation of the imminent advent of an eschatological saviour,<sup>34</sup> something that none of these groups and movements

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<sup>34</sup> Following the Qur'anic use, the word 'Messiah' (*masīh*) generally refers, in Islamic context, to Jesus. The Islamic concept which comes closest to the Judaeo-Christian idea of the eschatological saviour is that of the Mahdī, 'the rightly guided one'. However, the Mahdī is not necessarily a saviour expected at the end of time, he can also be a millennial justifier who appears at the turn of every century or millennium in order to restore the pristine purity of Islam. In this sense, the Mahdī is a renovator (*mujaddid*). Obviously, a claim to be the saviour coming at the end of time would put the claimant in an embarrassing situation if the end of time did not occur as expected. Therefore, most of the leaders of the so called 'messianic' movements of the post-Mongol era did not claim to be eschatological saviours, but rather renovators initiating a new era, which might or might not lead to the coming of the eschatological Mahdī in a more or less distant and usually unspecified future. Presiding over a new era provided them with a broad degree of freedom in advocating new doctrinal and socio-political models without being concerned with preparations for an imminent end of time. It is in this sense that the term 'messianic' is used in this paper.



seemed to claim.<sup>35</sup> Two other concepts, 'antinomianism' and 'extremism', are doxographic clichés inspired by medieval polemical literature and correspond to the Arabic terms *ibāḥa/ilḥād* and *ghuluww* respectively. Again, as far as is known, none of these movements was 'antinomian' in the sense of medieval heresiology, that is, none of them explicitly advocated the abolition of Islamic religious law.

The last term, 'extremism' (*ghuluww*) is perhaps the most frequently employed to refer to the post-Mongol mystico-messianic groups and movements. This term originated in early Islamic doxological literature where it was used to refer, in particular, to the supporters of the Shi'ī imams who, according to their opponents, 'exaggerated' some aspects of the imams' esoteric teachings, the term being applied especially to those who allegedly deified the imams.<sup>36</sup> The occultation of the Twelfth imam in the middle of the 4th/10th century weakened the esoteric wing of the Twelver branch, and fostered the development of the rationalist theologico-jurisprudential tendency which became predominant. However, the esoteric elements of the Twelver line did not completely disappear. Apparently nurtured by other esoteric currents, especially Sufism and Ismaili Shi'ism, Twelver esotericism re-surfaced after the major disruption in the balance between various

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<sup>35</sup> Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī's major work, *Jāvidān-nāma-yi kabīr*, does not contain any explicit claim. It can be deduced from its contents and from other works attributed to Faḍl Allāh that he saw himself as the inaugurator of the new era of hermeneutical disclosure leading to the final apocalypse presided over by Jesus. See Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, pp. 13–15. Muḥammad b. Falāḥ (d. 870/1465–1466), founder of another influential post-Mongol mystico-messianic movement, the Musha'sha', claimed the status of the representative of the Hidden imam rather than that of the imam himself. On him, see Michel Mazzaoui, 'Musha'sha'iyān: A Fifteenth Century Shi'ī Movement in Khūzistān and Southern Iraq', *Folia Orientalia*, 22 (1981–1984), pp. 139–162, and 'Alī Riḍā Dhakāvati Qarāguzlū, 'Nahḍat-i Musha'sha'ī va gudhāri bar kalām al-Mahdī', *Ma'ārif*, 37 (1375 Sh./1996), pp. 59–67. Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 869/1464), founder of the Nūrbakhshī Sufi movement, claimed the status of the Mahdī, but again, in the sense of renewer and inaugurator of a new era rather than eschatological saviour presiding over the end of time. See Shahzad Bashir, 'The Imam's Return: Messianic Leadership in Late Medieval Shi'ism', in Linda S. Walbridge, ed., *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid* (New York, 2001), pp. 21–33, p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> On this term, see Sean Anthony, 'Ghulāt (extremist Shi'is)', *EI3*.

religious currents in Islam brought about by the Mongol invasions and Mongol rule. It was represented by such thinkers as Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385) and Rajab Bursī (d. 843/1411).<sup>37</sup> A great synthesis of Islamic theology, Shi'ism, Sufism, the illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) theosophy of Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) and Avicennian philosophy was attempted in the work of Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī (d. after 906/1501).<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the boundaries between the juristic and esoteric currents of Twelver Shi'ism became more porous. Imāmī scholarly culture under the Safavids combined commitment to the juristic pattern with broad erudition and deep interest in philosophy and esotericism, a tendency exemplified by such prominent scholars as Shaykh Bahā'ī (d. 1030/1621), Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631) and Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640) as well as many others.

Another part of Twelver Shi'ī esotericism, again closely linked to Sufism and implicitly nurtured by Ismailism and perhaps by other mystical Shi'ī trends, fed into mystico-messianic movements outside the fold of Twelver Shi'ism as such.<sup>39</sup> These groups were at the forefront

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<sup>37</sup> The introduction of Shi'ī sensibilities to Sufi thought, and more specifically the Shi'ī reinterpretation of the work of Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) started in the 7th/13th century in the Shi'ī circles of Bahrain and was continued by Ḥaydar Āmulī. On the school of Bahrain, see Ali al-Oraibi, 'Shi'ī Renaissance: A Case Study of the Theosophical School of Bahrain in the 7th/13th Century' (PhD, McGill University, Montreal, 1992), especially pp. 172–217; and his 'Rationalism in the School of Bahrain: A Historical Perspective', in L. Clarke, ed., *Shi'ite Heritage* (Binghamton, NY, 2001), pp. 331–343. On Ḥaydar Āmulī, see Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris, 1971–1972), vol. 3, pp. 198–199. On Rajab Bursī, see Bursī, *Les Orient des lumières*, tr. H. Corbin (Paris, 1996) and Kāmil Muṣṭafā al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣīla bayna al-taṣawwuf wa'l-tashayyūʿ* (Beirut, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 224–256.

<sup>38</sup> On him, see Sabine Schmidtke, *Theologie, Philosophie und Mystik im zwölfterschiitischen Islam des 9./15. Jahrhunderts: die Gedankenwelten des Ibn Abī Ğumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī (um 838/1434–35 – nach 906/1501)* (Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> For possible Ismaili traces in the Ḥurūfī texts, see Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, 'The Nizārī Ismaili Theory of the Resurrection (*qiyāma*) and Post-Mongol Iranian Messianism', in O. Mir-Kasimov, ed., *Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread* (London, 2020), pp. 323–352. For Ismaili-Nuqtavī relations, see Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2007), pp. 421–422.

of experimentation with the Shi'i and Sufi ideas of religious authority conferred by divinely inspired knowledge. In some cases, these ideas were combined with the theories of a new, messianic, age that required a new kind of leader, one commissioned from above to operate a radical renewal and re-unification of the Islamic community and/or to lead it to the final apocalypse. Some movements of this kind, such as the Ḥurūfīs, Nuqtavīs and Nūrbakhshīs produced substantial and original doctrines including new conceptions of religious authority, but they failed to find political support for them. Others, like the Sarbadārs or Musha'sha', were politically more successful, and were able to create distinct political entities in various locations in Iran and Iraq.<sup>40</sup> These political entities are seen as forerunners of the Safavid empire. Some of these groups, such as the Nūrbakhshīs and the Musha'sha' derived directly from the Twelver branch of Islam.<sup>41</sup> Others, like the Ḥurūfīs and the Nuqtavīs, were apparently rooted in more syncretic Shi'i/Sufi values which included veneration of the Prophet's family, and more specifically of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and of the Shi'i imams, however, still with an arguably recognisable Shi'i esoteric background.<sup>42</sup> It is remarkable that some of these movements evolved towards various formulations of confessional universalism that transcended the boundaries between various Islamic groups, especially that between the Shi'is and Sunnis, in line with the messianic expectations of the re-unification of the Islamic community in the

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<sup>40</sup> On the Sarbadārs, see C.P. Melville, 'Sarbadārids', *El2*. On the Nūrbakhshīs and Musha'sha's, see n. 35 above.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Falāḥ studied with Aḥmad b. Fahd al-Ḥilli (d. 841/1438), a well-known Twelver Shi'i scholar with Sufi proclivities. On him, see al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila*, vol. 2, pp. 257–265. A less plausible connection between al-Ḥilli and Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh is also mentioned in one source. More importantly, the Twelfth imam occupies a prominent position in the doctrines of Ibn Falāḥ and Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh.

<sup>42</sup> It will be argued further below that this esoteric Shi'i background is most clearly attested to in the hermeneutical perspectives of these movements. Also, it is worth mentioning that Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī's genealogical tree makes him a descendant of the seventh imam of the Twelver line, Mūsā al-Kāzīm. For references regarding Astarābādī's genealogy, see Abdūlbākī Gölpinarlı, *Hurūfīlik metinleri kataloĝu* (2nd ed., Ankara, 1989), pp. 4–5.

final age.<sup>43</sup> The Safavids maintained complex relationships, ranging from persecution to integration, with most of these groups.

To the extent that post-Mongol mystico-messianic movements incorporated elements of early Shi'i esoteric lore, they can indeed be regarded as the heirs of those early Shi'i esoteric groups which were designated as *ghulāt* by their opponents. Nevertheless, the term is still misleading for the following reasons. First, the term *ghulāt* has pejorative connotations. Most of the groups that were designated as *ghulāt* in the heresiographical sources neither called nor considered themselves 'extremists', and the perpetuation of this medieval terminology in modern scholarship is a moot point. Second, the post-Mongol mystico-messianic movements combined the heritage of Shi'i esotericism with many other elements of Islamic mysticism, theology and philosophy. The inappropriateness of the term *ghulāt* has been recognised by modern scholars, but its use has nevertheless continued as no convincing or widely accepted alternative has emerged so far.<sup>44</sup> I prefer to use 'mystico-messianic movements' instead as, in a sense, these movements can be regarded as a form of generalisation and extension of the original esoteric Shi'i substratum, and especially of the Shi'i hermeneutical theories and doctrines of the imamate, through the incorporation of other mystical, philosophical and theological elements. In this sense, they could perhaps better be described as 'broader Shi'i', or 'supra-Shi'i'.

As the first Safavid kings were establishing themselves in lands they conquered in Iran and Iraq, they encountered these 'broader Shi'i' mystico-messianic movements, and it seems reasonable to suppose that they considered these movements as possible substitutes for both

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<sup>43</sup> This universalist ethos also recalls the spirit of the project of the Abbasid caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (see n. 16 above). For the universalist dimension of Ḥurūfī thought, see Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, pp. 427–433, for Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, see Bashir, 'The Imam's Return', p. 30. Nuqtavī universalism will be discussed further below.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, a discussion of the term *ghulāt* and its application to the Qizil-bāsh in Arjomand, 'The Rise of Shah Esmā'il', p. 303, and Babayan, 'The Safavid Synthesis', p. 136, n. 3.

Qizil-bāsh and theologico-jurisprudential Twelver ideology.<sup>45</sup> In any case, when Shah 'Abbās ascended the throne, the issue of Safavid religious legitimacy was far from being solved.<sup>46</sup>

In the following sections we will discuss how Nuḡṭavī doctrine addressed this issue, and the possibility that Shah 'Abbās seriously considered the advantages of the Nuḡṭavī option for some time, but then decided to reject it.

### **Safavi-Nuḡṭavī relationships in historical sources: does the historical narrative make sense?**

The importance attached to the relationship of Shah 'Abbās I<sup>47</sup> with the Nuḡṭavīs of Qazvīn during his reign is corroborated by the fact that this is discussed, sometimes at significant length, in most contemporary chronicles. These chronicles, which are hostile to the

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<sup>45</sup> The Safavids' progressive familiarisation with the Shi'i and 'supra-Shi'i' intellectual milieus of Iran and Iraq, and their engagement, either in the form of patronage or of persecution, with some of the groups and movements of these milieus and an official endorsement of one of them, namely the theologico-jurisprudential form of Twelver Shi'ism, can be regarded as one aspect of the gradual 'Iranisation' of the originally Turkic Safavid dynasty.

<sup>46</sup> As Sholeh A. Quinn has put it: 'Safavid kings initially promoted their legitimate right to rule by presenting themselves as (1) the representative of the Hidden Imam, (2) the shadow of God on earth, in line with pre-Islamic Persian notions of kingship, and (3) the head of the Safavid Sufi order. By the time Shah 'Abbās came to power, these three "pillars of legitimacy" were not functioning very well. The Shi'i 'ulama' (religious clerics), initially brought to Iran from Jabal al-'Amil in Lebanon, elaborated on Shi'i doctrines, thereby rendering it difficult for the king to claim to be the representative of the Hidden Imam. The Qizilbash, to whom the rulers appealed as head of the Sufi order, had become increasingly powerful and thus constituted a threat to the state. Shah 'Abbās, therefore, had to pursue alternative legitimizing programs in order to maintain his power.' (Quinn, *Historical Writing During the Reign of Shah 'Abbas: Ideology, Imitation and Legitimacy in Safavid Chronicles* (Salt Lake City, UT, 2000), p. 5. Aubin noted that Shah 'Abbās's contact with the Nuḡṭavīs was informed by his search for a form of religious authority alternative to Qizilbashism, however he linked this, in my opinion erroneously, with the alleged Persian nationalism of the Nuḡṭavīs; see his 'La politique religieuse', p. 240.

<sup>47</sup> For the sake of simplicity, the regnal number of this monarch is omitted in the rest of the chapter.

Nuḡṡavīs, constitute our main source of information on this episode. In this section, we shall discuss information obtained from these sources in order to compare it with evidence from the Nuḡṡavī doctrinal sources that will be presented in the next section.

The longest and the most detailed account of the encounter of Shah ‘Abbās with the Nuḡṡavīs in Qazvīn at the onset of the second Islamic millennium (around the years 1001–1002/1592–1594) is found in Afūshṡa-yi Naḡanzī’s (d. after 1008/1599) *Naḡāvat al-āthār fī dhikr al-akhyār dar tāriḡh-i Ṣafaviyya*, which was completed in 1007/1598.<sup>48</sup> Naḡanzī may have been employed at Shah ‘Abbās’s court, and may have been a direct witness of the events he described, but this is not certain. It is possible that he disliked Shah ‘Abbās,<sup>49</sup> but this does not mean that he sympathised with the Nuḡṡavīs. The description of the Nuḡṡavī episode is given in the chapter on heretics (*malāḡhida*). It is remarkable that the Nuḡṡavīs appear in Naḡanzī’s work as the supreme heretics of the time of Shah Ṣahmāsp and Shah ‘Abbās, following such arch-heretics as Mani and Mazdak in pre-Islamic Iran and Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḡh in the time of the Saljūqs. With the exception of a short introduction, the whole of the chapter on heretics is devoted to them. Their status as the most prominent heresy is also emphasised by the fact that the name of the group is not mentioned in the chapter and they are referred to simply as ‘the heretics’.<sup>50</sup>

According to Naḡanzī, Shah Ṣahmāsp was determined to uproot the Nuḡṡavīs because they were spreading unbelief, transgressing the *sharī‘a* and misleading uneducated people. He arrested some of their leaders, had others killed, and the movement was silenced until the time of Shah ‘Abbās. At that time, an individual named Khusraw, dressed as a dervish, set up residence in Qazvīn and, in Naḡanzī’s

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<sup>48</sup> Naḡanzī, *Naḡāvat*, pp. 515–528. On him, see Quinn, *Historical Writing*, p. 20, and K. Ghereghlou, ‘Afuṡṡa’i Naḡanzī, Maḡmūd’, *Elr.* Kathryn Babayan used this source extensively, along with Iskandar Beg Munṡhī’s *Tāriḡh-i ‘ālam-arā-yi ‘Abbāsi*, in her analysis of the Nuḡṡavī episode; see her *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, pp. 1–117.

<sup>49</sup> Quinn, *Historical Writing*, p. 20.

<sup>50</sup> It is also remarkable that neither Naḡanzī nor the authors of other chronicles hostile to the Nuḡṡavīs explain in any detail what the doctrinal positions of the Nuḡṡavīs were, and nor do they engage in any substantial polemic against their views. The Nuḡṡavī ‘heresy’ is presented as a self-evident fact, which does not need to be demonstrated.

words, started the 'trade of deceit and hypocrisy' (*bāzār-i shayd va zarq*).<sup>51</sup> His influence grew fast, since people came to see him 'from far and near, Turks and Tajiks'.<sup>52</sup> This growing influence attracted the attention of Shah 'Abbās. One day when the shah happened to pass near the residence of Dervish Khusraw, he came out and invited the king to enter. After this first visit, Shah 'Abbās returned regularly to see Dervish Khusraw, and each time offered him large amounts of cash and other goods. Many military commanders and nobles (*umarā' va arkān*) joined the shah and became disciples (sing. *murīd*) of Dervish Khusraw.<sup>53</sup> In a short time, the number of his disciples increased dramatically.

Naṭanzī hastens to add that Shah 'Abbās's interest in the Nuṭqavīs was motivated exclusively by his wish to 'understand the true identity' (*bi-tahqīq-i ḥāl va kayfiyyat*) of Dervish Khusraw,<sup>54</sup> a suspected heretic. This does not seem consistent either with the lavish presents that the shah gave to the dervish, nor with him encouraging his military commanders and statesmen to become the heretic's disciples, thus promoting the heresy among his military and state apparatus and making it more influential. Also, it hardly makes sense to suppose that Shah 'Abbās would personally infiltrate a suspect group and spend a sizeable amount of his time carrying out an investigation for the reasons of general piety only. Shah 'Abbās's interest in Dervish Khusraw's teachings was most probably authentic, and clearly represented some goal that was extremely important to him.<sup>55</sup> This would explain the shah's support for the movement and the fact that he did not prevent his high-ranking officers and ministers from joining it. The popularity of Nuṭqavī teachings among the elite also obviously contradicts Naṭanzī's statement that the Nuṭqavī ideas appealed only to uneducated people. There was apparently something in these

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<sup>51</sup> Naṭanzī, *Naqāvat*, p. 515.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 516.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> This was also noted by several scholars who examined the mentioned historical chronicles.

teachings that attracted people from all walks of life, and there was something that strongly attracted Shah 'Abbās.

In the continuation of Naḡanzī's account, it is said that one of the persons occupying a high status in Dervish Khusraw's circle, Yūsifi Khurāsānī the quiver-maker (Tarkishdūz), often visited Shah 'Abbās to deliver quivers he had ordered. Believing that Shah 'Abbās could be unreservedly trusted, Yūsifi freely discussed with him the details of Nuḡṡavī beliefs. Something in these discussions must have interested Shah 'Abbās so intensely that he delayed his departure to Luristān, where he had to deal with a rebellion, and went to see Yūsifi in Dervish Khusraw's residence. At that point, he was told that if his journey to Luristān could not be cancelled, he must try and return to Qazvīn a few days before the month of Muḡarram of the year 1002/[1593–94], because at the beginning of that year, one of the 'masters of spirit' (*arbāb-i ḡāl*), that is, one of the Nuḡṡavī dervishes, would reach the station of kingship and independence and become the ruler (*ṡāḡib-i amr*), combining spiritual and temporal power and marking the beginning of the Nuḡṡavī cycle. 'Since the shah's capacity to exercise this [power] is more developed than [the capacity to rule] of that people who claim it, and it is the shah who presently holds the royal power, it would be preferable that the power should not be transferred to another person.'<sup>56</sup>

Considering the story of ruthless persecution of the Nuḡṡavī by Shah 'Abbās's grandfather Shah ṡahmāsp that Naḡanzī mentioned at the beginning of his account of the Nuḡṡavī heretics, it sounds highly improbable that a high-ranking Nuḡṡavī dervish such as Yūsifi the quiver-maker would have divulged any sensitive information to Shah 'Abbās, even if he allegedly supposed that the shah was one of them. Does Naḡanzī's narrative reflect a proposal made by the Nuḡṡavī leadership to Shah 'Abbās to transform the nature of his rule by becoming the king who combines political and spiritual power and

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<sup>56</sup> Naḡanzī, *Naḡāvat*, pp. 517–518.



ushers in the new historical cycle informed by the Nuḡṭavī ideals?<sup>57</sup> For the reasons discussed in the previous section, Shah 'Abbās might have seen in Nuḡṭavī teachings the possibility of finding a new basis of legitimacy for his rule.

However, Naṭanzī's story includes also an element of threat to Shah 'Abbās's rule: Shah 'Abbās is told that if he does not manage to return to Qazvīn by the date indicated, his rule will be transferred to another member of the group. According to Naṭanzī, it was this threat, combined with Dervish Khusraw's claim to be able to put together a strong army (which he offered to send to Shah 'Abbās to help him defeat the rebellion in Luristān),<sup>58</sup> that convinced Shah 'Abbās to take immediate action against the Nuḡṭavīs. He entrusted this mission to his herald (*jārchī-bāshī*), who marched soldiers to the residence of Dervish Khusraw and eventually killed or arrested many dervishes.<sup>59</sup> This was followed by the episode of Yūsifī being put on the throne for

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<sup>57</sup> Although some sources mention Qizil-bāsh involvement in the Nuḡṭavī movement, however there seems to be insufficient evidence to demonstrate that this involvement was significant. Iskandar Beg Munshī reports that 'even some of the *qezelbāš* were members of this sect', giving as example Būdāq Beg Dīn-oḡlū Ustājū (Eskandar Beg Monshi, *Tārikh-e 'Alamārā-ye 'Abbāsī*, tr. R. Savory as *History of Shah 'Abbas the Great* (Boulder, CO, 1930) vol. 2, p. 650), which suggests that Qizil-bāsh adherence to the Nuḡṭavī movement was an exception rather than a rule. This would therefore discount Babayan's thesis that Nuḡṭavī doctrine provided the Qizil-bāsh with an alternative to their original ideology and with a means of expressing their disillusionment with the Safavids, which links Shah 'Abbās's anti-Nuḡṭavī persecutions with his anti-Qizil-bāsh policies (cf. Babayan, 'The Safavid Synthesis'). Some features of Nuḡṭavī doctrine also seem to make a large-scale Qizil-bāsh-Nuḡṭavī alliance problematic. For example, although the figure of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib plays an important role in the Nuḡṭavī texts, it is far from occupying a place as central as that in Qizil-bāsh belief. Also, some sources report that the Qizil-bāsh were compared to dogs in Nuḡṭavī teachings (cf. *Dabistān al-madhāhib*, tr. David Shea and Anthony Troyer as *The Dabistan, or School of Manners* (Paris and London, 1843), vol. 3, p. 21), an idea which, if proved true, would not have contributed to the popularity of Nuḡṭavism among the Qizil-bāsh. It seems more plausible that Shah 'Abbās was considering the Nuḡṭavī ideology as a means of re-establishing his status as an absolutist spiritual and temporal ruler on a basis independent of the Qizil-bāsh.

<sup>58</sup> Munajjim Yazdī and Faḡlī Beg Khūzānī Iṣfahānī mention 50,000 and 40,000 men, respectively. See *Tārikh-i 'Abbāsī*, p. 121, and *Afḡal al-tawārikh*, p. 143.

<sup>59</sup> Naṭanzī, *Naqāvat*, pp. 520–521.

three days in order to counter the effects of an ominous star, and then being executed.

It is difficult to make sense of the Nuḡṡavī threat to Shah ‘Abbās. Dervish Khusraw’s proposal to muster a powerful army and place it in support of Shah ‘Abbās is not consistent with the fact that the herald with a small detachment of 100 soldiers was able to surround the Nuḡṡavī residence, and to arrest and kill the members of the group, including its leaders, apparently without any resistance. Considering the Nuḡṡavī influence at court and among the population that Naṡanzī mentioned earlier in his account, and his claim that many army commanders and nobles were enrolled in the sect, the enthronement of a high-ranking Nuḡṡavī, accompanied by all the formal rituals of the transmission of power from Shah ‘Abbās to Yūsifī, seems a dangerous thing to have done.<sup>60</sup> Does Naṡanzī not exaggerate the influence of the Nuḡṡavīs and especially the threat they represented to Shah ‘Abbās’s rule in order to justify their persecution, the real motivation of which could have been different?

Jalāl al-Dīn Munajjim Yazdī (d. 1028/1618), author of the *Tārīkh-i ‘Abbāsī* which was probably completed in 1020–21/1611–12, was directly involved in the Nuḡṡavī episode (he was Shah ‘Abbās’s court astrologer and it was he who suggested the three-day enthronement of Yūsifī the quiver-maker). His hostile stance towards the Nuḡṡavīs could have been fostered by occultist rivalry and competition for influence over Shah ‘Abbās, since the Nuḡṡavī theories, especially those concerning the advent of the new cycle, were also based on astrological predictions.<sup>61</sup> Similarly to Naṡanzī, Yazdī does not mention the name ‘Nuḡṡavī’ in his account, referring to the Nuḡṡavīs as ‘heretics’

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<sup>60</sup> Something of this concern transpires in Iskandar Beg Munshī’s account: ‘One of the functions of a king is to issue orders, and so far this artificial king issued no orders. Now that he knows you are out to kill him, if he decides to forestall you by issuing an order for your execution, the order must inevitably be carried out. You had better be careful for the next three days!’ (*History of Shah ‘Abbas the Great*, vol. 2, p. 649). This warning, addressed to the court astrologer Jalāl al-Dīn Munajjim Yazdī, holds true for Shah ‘Abbās himself.

<sup>61</sup> For possible competition over political support between the Ḥurūfīs and other Timūrid and Ottoman trends focussed on astrology, alchemy and the science of letters, see Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, p. 432. For the political ambitions of the ‘occultist’ intellectuals, see numerous publications by Matthew Melvin-Koushki.

or simply 'that lot' (*ān jam*'). As in other chronicles, Yazdī recognises that Shah 'Abbās often visited Dervish Khusraw. He also is keen to emphasise that this interest was based uniquely on Shah 'Abbās's intention to establish whether or not Dervish Khusraw was a heretic. And should the Nuḡṭavīs' heresy be established, adds Yazdī, Shah 'Abbās should act against them, reduce them to poverty, seize their false books and destroy them, since 'those people' (Dervish Khusraw's followers) are far from reason.<sup>62</sup> Yazdī's account of the reasons that led to the persecution of the Nuḡṭavīs corroborates Naṭanzī's narrative but contains minor differences. He also mentions that some Nuḡṭavīs divulged the secret teachings of their group to Shah 'Abbās because they believed that he sincerely adhered to their creed. Moreover, they asked the shah to eliminate his attendants, including the '*ulamā*' and the learned men (*fuḍalā*') because, according to the Nuḡṭavīs, 'those people' had completely lost their way. Shah 'Abbās should not worry about the number of his attendants though, because the Nuḡṭavīs would provide him with a force of nearly 50,000 devoted and battle-capable men, an army with which he would be able to conquer the world. An interesting point in Yazdī's narrative is that Shah 'Abbās did not take immediate action against the Nuḡṭavīs because he wanted to obtain their books. At that time, the shah had to leave Qazvīn in order to deal with an insurrection in Luristān. En route, he received a message from Dervish Khusraw containing certain claims. According to Naṭanzī's chronicle, it was the nature of these claims that apparently triggered a radical and secretly prepared punishment for the Nuḡṭavīs. Shah 'Abbās sent a robe of honour and some cash to Dervish Khusraw and simultaneously issued an order to his chief herald, Malak Sulṭān 'Alī, to arrest the Nuḡṭavīs. This is followed by the account of the ominous star and Yūsifī's enthronement.<sup>63</sup>

Iskandar Beg Munshī (d. ca. 1043/1633–34) was Shah 'Abbās's secretary and could have personally witnessed the events that he describes in his '*Alam-ārā-yi 'Abbāsī*'. The second part of this work, which contains the description of the Nuḡṭavī episode, was completed

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<sup>62</sup> Yazdī, *Tārikh-i 'Abbāsī*, p. 121.

<sup>63</sup> Yazdī, *Tārikh-i 'Abbāsī*, pp. 121–122.

in 1038/1629, several decades after the events.<sup>64</sup> Munshī provides some additional details about Dervish Khusraw and his link to the Nuḡṭavīs. According to Munshī, Dervish Khusraw ‘came from a line of well-diggers and refuse collectors’. He became a wandering dervish and, at some point, met a group of Nuḡṭavīs and studied their doctrine.<sup>65</sup> Dervish Khusraw was established in Qazvīn by the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsp. In spite of complaints from the Twelver ‘*ulamā*’, Shah Ṭahmāsp was not able to find anything heretical in Dervish Khusraw’s beliefs and left him alone. When ‘Abbās became king, what caught his attention was the influence of Dervish Khusraw and his large following (described as ‘luckless people and idlers’).<sup>66</sup> Like Naṭanzī, Munshī also suggests that Shah ‘Abbās’s interest in Dervish Khusraw was founded exclusively on the desire to establish whether or not Khusraw was spreading heretical views. He notes, however, that Shah ‘Abbās and Dervish Khusraw discussed mystical knowledge, since Shah ‘Abbās ‘adopted the manner of speech used by travellers on the mystical way, and unfolded his own personal knowledge of God to him after the fashion of dervishes’.<sup>67</sup> Like Naṭanzī, Munshī reports that Shah ‘Abbās’s decision to persecute the Nuḡṭavīs was triggered by some ‘extravagant claims’ made by his followers, Yūsufī and Dervish Kūchek Qalandar, who, due to their ‘complete lack of caution’, exposed Dervish Khusraw’s heresy to the shah. Unlike Naṭanzī, Munshī does not specify what this ‘heresy’ was, and nor does he mention the Nuḡṭavī notion of a new cycle that would be initiated by the advent of a ruler in whom were combined temporal and spiritual powers. He simply notes that the shah decided to persecute them. His account of Yūsufī’s enthronement displays no significant difference from Naṭanzī’s account. The statement that Dervish Khusraw was eventually executed because wine was found in his residence sounds somewhat dubious, since wine drinking was part of Iranian culture of that time and Shah ‘Abbās himself drank it.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> See Quinn, *Historical Writing*, p. 22.

<sup>65</sup> *History of Shah ‘Abbas*, vol. 2, p. 647.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *History of Shah ‘Abbas the Great*, vol. 2, p. 648.

<sup>68</sup> For Shah ‘Abbās’s drinking habits as an expression of his adherence to the model of Persian kingship, see Sholeh A. Quinn, *Shah ‘Abbas: The King Who Refashioned Iran* (London, 2015), pp. 77–78.

The rest of Munshī's account deals with the persecution of the Nuḡṡavī elsewhere in Iran, including the learned Nuḡṡavī scholar, Mīr Sayyid Aḡmad Kāshī, Dervish Kamāl Iqlidī and Dervish Biryānī, and is accompanied with a short summary of what the author thought were the core Nuḡṡavī beliefs. We will return to Munshī's short outline of the Nuḡṡavī presence in India in the conclusion.

The description of the Nuḡṡavī episode in the third volume of Faḡlī Beg Khūzānī Iṡfahānī's (d. after 1049/1639) *Aḡḡal al-tawārīkh* (unfinished), is different from other historical accounts in that, as noted by Melville, Faḡlī Beg downplays Shah 'Abbās's involvement with the Nuḡṡavīs and emphasises the role of the shah's attendants, including the nobles and the 'ulamā', in eradicating the Nuḡṡavī heresy.<sup>69</sup> Faḡlī Beg spent most of his life in the Caucasus and there is no evidence to suggest that he could have directly witnessed the events in Qazvīn. However, his paternal uncle, 'Ināyat Allāh, surnamed "Ināyat the Bald" (*'Ināyat-i kal*) served at Shah 'Abbās's court and, according to Faḡlī Beg's chronicle, took an active part in dealings with the Nuḡṡavī group in Qazvīn.<sup>70</sup>

According to Faḡlī Beg, Dervish Khusraw himself and his father had an inclination for learning and both Shah Ṣahmāsp and Shah 'Abbās appreciated their company.<sup>71</sup> Dervish Khusraw had frequent discussions with Shah 'Abbās, who eventually became his disciple. Since Dervish Khusraw attracted many followers, Shah 'Abbās granted him a residence and a daily allowance. When Shah 'Abbās left for Luristān, a certain Mawlānā Yūsifī, who was one of Dervish Khusraw's trusted vicegerents, promulgated the notion that if Shah 'Abbās were to remove the people of wrong beliefs (meaning his courtiers and attendants) from his entourage, there would be 40,000 Sufis from among the followers of Maḡmūd [Pasīkhānī?] ready to serve him. 'Ināyat Kal suggested to Shah 'Abbās that he should speak kindly to Mawlānā Yūsifī in order to obtain the list of those people from him.

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Melville, 'New light on the Reign of Shah 'Abbās: Volume III of the *Aḡḡal al-tavarikh*', in A.J. Newman, ed., *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid Period* (Leiden and Boston, 2003), pp. 83–85.

<sup>70</sup> For a more detailed account of Faḡlī Beg Khūzānī Iṡfahānī and his work, see Ghareghlou's introduction to his edition of *Aḡḡal al-tawārīkh*, vol. 1, pp. xi–lxvi.

<sup>71</sup> Faḡlī Beg Khūzānī Iṡfahānī, *Aḡḡal al-tawārīkh*, vol. 1, p. 142.

But when the list of Dervish Khusraw's trusted followers reached Shah 'Abbās, 'Ināyat Kal took hold of it and tore it into pieces, because it contained many names of 'highly placed people and their sons' whose execution would be a disaster. It was 'Ināyat Kal who persuaded Shah 'Abbās to arrest Mawlānā Yūsifī and other Nuḡṡavīs.<sup>72</sup> At a later point, a commission of '*ulamā*', counting such prominent members as Mīr Dāmād and Shaykh Bahā' al-Dīn, interrogated Dervish Khusraw but found nothing contrary to the *sharī'a* in his discourse. It was only when his books were found and examined that it appeared that he was a Nuḡṡavī who practised dissimulation (*taqiyya*) of his true beliefs.<sup>73</sup> Like other authors of historical chronicles, Iṡfahānī does not specify what exactly the heretical doctrine of Dervish Khusraw was. Their heresy thus established, Dervish Khusraw and his followers were executed.

What sense can be made of the historical accounts discussed above? There are certainly some inconsistencies which indicate that the real situation was more complex than the narratives of the chroniclers. The claim that Nuḡṡavī doctrine was so unsophisticated that it could only appeal to simple, uneducated people, contrasts with the attraction this doctrine had for Shah 'Abbās and his high-ranking officers. The alleged Nuḡṡavī military threat is not consistent with the fact that a small detachment of 100 soldiers easily dealt with the 'heretics'. This is another argument against any extensive Qizil-bāsh involvement in the Nuḡṡavī movement, in which case the Nuḡṡavīs could count on Qizil-bāsh military support. Therefore, it is more likely that the Nuḡṡavīs sided with Shah 'Abbās, as part of the monarch's plan to weaken the power of the Qizil-bāsh. It is less likely that Nuḡṡavī ideology was used by the Qizil-bāsh as an alternative to their original beliefs which sustained their absolute allegiance to the Safavids. The enthronement of an influential Nuḡṡavī leader by Shah 'Abbās looks like a somewhat opportunistic and over-adventurous enterprise at a time when the Nuḡṡavī movement had many followers and supporters in the army, in the state administration and at court. The conflict between the Nuḡṡavīs and the '*ulamā*' mentioned in all the chronicles may be a reflection of a struggle for influence over the shah.

<sup>72</sup> Faḡlī Beg Khūzānī Iṡfahānī, *Aḡḡal al-tawārikh*, vol. 1, pp. 142–143.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143–144.

Finally, it seems quite obvious that Shah 'Abbās had an authentic interest in Nuḡṭavī teachings. Statements concerning his pious motivations – claiming that the only reason for his contact with the Nuḡṭavīs was his wish to investigate the integrity of their faith – sound unconvincing, as does the alleged carelessness of the high-ranking Nuḡṭavīs who 'divulged' the most secret points of their doctrine to the shah. The *Dabistān-i madhāhib*, a source less hostile to the Nuḡṭavīs, claims that Shah 'Abbās was a Nuḡṭavī initiate, and that even his persecution of the Nuḡṭavīs was not an expression of hostility, but was carried out in order to purify the movement of its unworthy members.<sup>74</sup> The truth is perhaps somewhere in the middle of the various rationales provided, at one extreme, by historical chronicles hostile to the Nuḡṭavīs and, at the other, by sympathetic accounts like *Dabistān-i madhāhib*. It is unlikely that Shah 'Abbās was a voluntary inquisitor animated by pious zeal and obsessed with rooting out heretics, or that he was a Nuḡṭavī hero. It is more likely that, as a pragmatic ruler, he found something in the Nuḡṭavī teachings that could serve his interests. Our chronicles hint at such a pragmatic point: the Nuḡṭavīs apparently offered Shah 'Abbās the status of a millennial leader combining spiritual and temporal authority, that is, the status of a charismatic king who was to usher in a new era in the history of mankind. How exactly was such a claim expressed in the Nuḡṭavī theoretical framework, how could it be reconciled with Shah 'Abbās's commitment to Shi'ī Islam, and how could it serve his wish to establish his religious and political authority on a basis independent of both Qizil-bāsh and legalist Twelver Shi'ī ideologies? These questions bring us to the next section where we propose to take a closer look at the relevant points of Nuḡṭavī doctrine.

### **Nuḡṭavī doctrinal positions: what the Nuḡṭavīs had to offer to Shah 'Abbās?**

As noted, in the doxographical and historical literature hostile to the Nuḡṭavīs this movement is described as a heresy *par excellence*, an antinomian group falling outside the fold of Islam, a description that has been perpetuated in modern scholarship that has drawn on these

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<sup>74</sup> *The Dabistān*, vol. 3, p. 23.

hostile accounts. Obviously, if the Nuḡṡavīs unambiguously advocated a rupture with Islamic tradition and the inauguration of some sort of new religion, Shah 'Abbās could not have considered their ideology as a possible source for his legitimacy, which was supposed to be not only Islamic, but specifically Shi'i, even if not necessarily in complete accord with either Qizil-bāsh or normative Twelver interpretations of Shi'ism. But the evidence from the Nuḡṡavī doctrinal works is significantly at odds with the image conveyed by the sources hostile to the movement. As mentioned, an in-depth systematic study of the Nuḡṡavī texts is still a desideratum. However, even a cursory reading of the foundational Nuḡṡavī texts shows that theirs is a complex and original doctrine with deep roots in Islamic scriptural material and in the intellectual substratum of various Islamic trends, including esoteric Shi'ism and Sufism as well as theological and legal schools of thought. Even if this doctrine did contain some authentically antinomian trends, we will try to demonstrate below that there is ample evidence in Nuḡṡavī works supporting their adherence to Islamic law and the continuity of the religious tradition established by the Prophet Muhammad, as well as indicating links with Shi'i, and more particularly Twelver, doctrinal views. This intellectual substratum, associated with the idea of a charismatic millennial leader – whose advent is determined by a particular configuration of stars, and who is expected to combine political and spiritual power and launch a new era in the history of the mankind – could understandably have attracted Shah 'Abbās. And this is exactly what the Nuḡṡavī group in Qazvīn offered Shah 'Abbās according to Naṡanzī's account discussed above.

The perceived 'antinomianism' of the Nuḡṡavīs might be explained by their understanding of the consecutive stages of the development of prophetic revelation, and more specifically of Qur'anic revelation. According to the Ḥurūfī theory, which was one of the main sources of Nuḡṡavī doctrine, the meaning of the Qur'an unfolded in two different and complementary processes, the 'descent' (*tanzīl*) of the literal meaning and the 'return to its [metaphysical] origin' (*ta'wīl*). Faḡl Allāh Astarābādī, the founder of the Ḥurūfī doctrine, never claimed to abrogate the *sharī'a* or to be a prophet of a new religion, but he may well have regarded himself as a herald of the era of *ta'wīl*, the era of spiritual hermeneutics leading to the apocalyptic disclosure of the innermost meaning of the Qur'an and of all preceding prophetic



revelations. Along the same lines, Maḥmūd Paṣīkhānī, the founder of the Nuḡṭavī tradition and a former disciple of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī, may well have believed that his mission was to initiate the last stage of *ta'wīl*. Such an evolution is in fact suggested by the very names of these groups and is also reflected in the diagram from Paṣīkhānī's *Kitāb-i mīzān* (see fig. 7.1). According to the Ḥurūfīs, the disjointed letters (*hurūf*) are the instrument of the ultimate *ta'wīl* and the key to the metaphysical meanings of the Qur'an and to the metaphysical dimension of Islamic law, while the dot (*nuḡṭa*) represents the same meanings but in a concentrated, undifferentiated form that is beyond the grasp of the human mind. It is possible that Paṣīkhānī took one step further along that line and claimed to possess secret knowledge of that ultimate dot that leads to the deepest level of the hermeneutical process. While this would not involve any kind of rupture with Islam or with its religious law, it could involve a claim that new hermeneutical knowledge would lead to a different, deeper understanding of the Islamic scriptural sources and of the law based on them.

The evidence from Nuḡṭavī texts would appear to confirm the idea that Maḥmūd Paṣīkhānī perceived his mission as an expansion of the religious tradition introduced by the Prophet Muhammad and continued, according to Shi'i beliefs, through the line of the Shi'i imams. More precisely, like his former master Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī, Paṣīkhānī arguably viewed his doctrine as an extension of the Shi'i idea of a hermeneutical cycle following the revelation (*tanzīl*) of the divine Word and of the divine Law by the Prophet and led by the imams endowed with special knowledge by virtue of their close relationship or 'friendship' (*walāya*) with God.<sup>75</sup> The mission of the imams does not include a new revelation, but the disclosure of the true meanings of the already existing one. In this perspective, both Ḥurūfīs and Nuḡṭavīs may be qualified as 'broader Shi'i' or 'supra-Shi'i' movements in the sense discussed above. Let us now turn to the textual evidence that could support this view.

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<sup>75</sup> This idea of an extension of the Shi'i idea of the imamate is arguably present already in Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī's work; see Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, 'Ummis versus Imāms in Ḥurūfī Prophetology: An Attempt at a Sunni/Shi'i Synthesis?', in O. Mir-Kasimov, ed., *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam* (Boston and Leiden, 2013), pp. 221–246.

One of the main arguments cited in the scholarly literature as a proof of the Nuḡṡavī rupture with Islam is the distinction between the Arab and the ‘Ajami’ cycles frequently mentioned in Nuḡṡavī texts. We will explain in the following paragraphs the meaning of the term ‘Ajami’ in the context of Pasīkhānī’s work and why we think it cannot be unequivocally translated as ‘Persian’. At this point, let us note that the fact that the ‘Ajami cycle follows the Arab cycle does not necessarily mean that Islam, and the Arabic Qur’an are replaced by a new, ‘Ajami religion and a new revelation. The finality of Muhammad’s prophetic dispensation, of the Qur’an, of the customs and religious law established by him, is stated rather explicitly in Pasīkhānī’s *Kitāb-i mīzān*:

Any [claim to] have a prophetic mission or to compose a [sacred] book after the seal of the prophets [has to be] obliterated and abolished. [Such a claim] is an innovation invented by a [heretical] innovator. It is an act of highway robbery which is against the order and the word of [the Prophet] Muhammad. The person who claims such a mission treats [the Prophet] Muhammad as a liar. . . And whoever claims to introduce new laws, customs and regulations after him is, like the previous person, an innovator, a highway robber and a dissident, [such a person] is discordant with the language of Muhammad. . . Whoever does not know that Muhammad, peace be upon him, is water, should know that *sharī‘at* means ‘watering place,’ [the place] where the animals can reach the source of water. That is to say, whoever reaches the *sharī‘at* reaches the source of the water of life, which alludes to [the person of] Muhammad.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Kitāb-i mīzān*, ms. Malik library, Tehran, n. 6226, f. 52 a–b.: *ba’d az khātīm-i rusul har ke risālatī rā inshā kunad yā kitābī rā taṡnīf kunad fī’l-jumla har inshā’ī ke bar sabīl-i risālat kitābat karde āyad ān inshā va risālat mansūkh va mundaris buwad. . . bal bid’atī bāshad ke muḡṡadi’yi badī’ āvarde bāshad bal rahzanī bāshad ke be-khilāf-i silk va qawl-i Muḡammad zāhir āmade bashad va muṡammif-i in risālat shakhṡī bāshad ke lisān-i Muḡammad rā be-takdhīb dāshte bāshad. . . va har ke ba’d az sunan-i ū va ba’d az nahj va rasm-i ū rasmī va sunnatī rā zāhir kunad yā qā’ide-yi ba’d az qavā’id-i ū biyāvarad in shakhṡ nīz mithl-i shakhṡ-i avval muḡṡadi’ va rahzan va mukhālīf āmade bāshad va ham dar in zuhūr nīz khilāf-i lisān-i Muḡammad karde bāshad. . . har ke nadānad ke Muḡammad ṡlm āb ast bāyad be-dānad ke har che sharī‘at be-mā’nā-yi jāyist ke ḡayvānāt bad-ānjā be-chashma-yi āb vurūd kunand va be-āb be-rasand tā har ke be-sharī‘at dar-āyad be-chashma-yi āb-i ḡayvān ke kināyat az Muḡammad ast be-rasad.*

Also, continuity with the prophetic mission of Muhammad and with the 'Arab cycle' is clearly emphasised in Paṣīkhānī's works. Paṣīkhānī described himself as the combined manifestation of Muhammad and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who were a single light in pre-eternity and are focused again as a single power in the person of Maḥmūd Paṣīkhānī.<sup>77</sup> Significantly, in Shi'i thought, these figures are associated respectively with revelation (*tanzīl*) and its spiritual hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*). Maḥmūd Paṣīkhānī's major works, and especially *Kitāb-i mīzān*, contain abundant citations of, and comments upon, Qur'anic passages and various *ḥadīths*. Thus, Paṣīkhānī's 'Ajāmī cycle does not appear as a totally new prophetic dispensation representing a 'rupture' with Islam, with the revelation of Muhammad or with anything Arab.<sup>78</sup> It is, on the contrary, described as developing from and being the consequence of the preceding Arab cycle. The 'Ajāmī cycle complements the cycle of Muhammad just as day complements night.<sup>79</sup> The number 28, which characterises the 'Arab' cycle (the number of the lunar phases and that of the letters of the Arabic alphabet), in conjunction with the number 12 which governs the 'Ajāmī cycle (the number of the constellations of the Zodiac associated with Sun, and the number of dots under or over the four Persian letters added to the Arabic alphabet (*pe*, *che*, *zhe* and the *gāf*)),<sup>80</sup> produces 40, which is the number of temporal perfection and completion.<sup>81</sup> 'Ajām is from the Arab descent ('*īrat*), and the dot

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<sup>77</sup> *Kitāb-i mīzān*, ff. 54b–55a. For the description of Muhammad and 'Alī as a single light in Islamic, and more specifically Shi'i literature, see Uri Rubin, 'Pre-existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of *Nūr Muḥammad*', *Israel Oriental Studies*, 5 (1975), pp. 62–119. In f. 15a Maḥmūd Paṣīkhānī is described as the meeting point of prophethood (*nubuwwa*, associated with Muhammad) and sainthood (*walāya*, associated with 'Alī).

<sup>78</sup> However, in the *Kitāb-i mīzān*, f. 12a, Maḥmūd Paṣīkhānī's *Mafātīḥ* is included among the prophetic books.

<sup>79</sup> Kiyā, *Nuqtaviyān yā pāsīkhāniyān*, p. 76.

<sup>80</sup> The Persian letters *pe*, *che* and *zhe* are written with three diacritic points each, and the line over the Persian letter *gāf* is interchangeable with three dots. Therefore, the dots associated with these four Persian letters add up to twelve.

<sup>81</sup> Kiyā, *Nuqtaviyān yā pāsīkhāniyān*, p. 85. The idea that the number 40 represents perfect temporal duration is also expressed in the *Jāvidān-nāma* of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī. See Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, pp. 156–157.

(*nuḡṡa*) is from the descent of letter (*ḥarf*). Maḥmūd is from the descent of Muhammad.<sup>82</sup> Muhammad is the letter and Maḥmud the dot, and everything is composed of letters and dots.<sup>83</sup>

One of the reasons for the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the Nuḡṡavī relationship between the Arab and ‘Ajāmī cycles is the limiting of the meaning of the word ‘*ajāmī*’ to ‘Persian’ or ‘Iranian’, which led to far-fetched theories developed in modern scholarship on the Nuḡṡavīs as the flag-bearers of Persian nationalism and of Persian/Arab antagonism.<sup>84</sup> While it is true that in the context of Ḥurūfī and the Nuḡṡavī hermeneutical theories some degree of superiority is implicitly ascribed to the Persian alphabet, regarded as an extension of the Arabic alphabet with four added letters, this superiority is not accompanied by any ideological and still less nationalistic discourse. Furthermore, the word “*ajāmī*” has a broader meaning in Nuḡṡavī doctrinal works. In the *Kitāb-i mīzān*, ‘Ajām is defined as the place that contains the seeds of every existing thing, and these seeds are likened to the diacritical dots with which the letters are provided. The dots represent the concentrated, undifferentiated potentialities of existents, the seeds from which the external forms of letters, objects and beings develop.<sup>85</sup> This interpretation of the dot (*nuḡṡa*) is in line with Ḥurūfī thought.<sup>86</sup>

‘*Ajam* in Arabic means ‘seed’, . . . and *ḥarf mu‘jam* means ‘a letter provided with a seed’. Therefore, the seed of every existing thing is contained in ‘*ajam*, and the dot, which is the self of Maḥmūd, indicates [‘*ajam*] as well. Whoever does not reach ‘*ajam* does not

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<sup>82</sup> Kiyā, *Nuḡṡaviyān yā pāsikhāniyān*, p. 91.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 121. This relationship between the letter and the dot is also reflected in the diagram in fig. 7.1.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Abbas Amanat, ‘The Nuḡṡawī Movement’, pp. 282 ff.

<sup>85</sup> The derivatives from the Arabic root ‘*JM*’ include ‘seed’ and ‘diacritical dot’. Cf. Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (3rd ed., Beirut and London, 1980), p. 694: “*Ajam*: stone, kernel, seed; *Mu‘jam*: dotted, provided with diacritical point (letter).”

<sup>86</sup> See Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, pp. 70 ff. and Glossary, pp. 454–455.

reach the seed, and whoever does not reach the seed cannot fully fulfil [the purpose of] his/her life.<sup>87</sup>

'Ajam thus refers to the realisation of the innermost potentialities, the 'seeds' of existing things. It is the place of the dot which, in Ḥurūfī and in Nuqtavī doctrines symbolises the highest, albeit undifferentiated, knowledge of divine metaphysical truths, the source of all possible realisations in the universe. As such, the dot is associated with the figure of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and with spiritual hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*).<sup>88</sup> Therefore, the distinction between the Arab and the 'Ajamī cycles in Pasikhānī's works reflects neither the antagonism between the 'old' and 'new' religious dispensations, nor between the Arabs and the Persians, but the mutual complementarity of *tanzīl* and *ta'wīl*. In Shi'i thought, *ta'wīl* is closely associated with *walāya*, the divine 'friendship' bestowed on the chosen ones, the imams. Hermeneutical knowledge is received by divine election only, which means that *ta'wīl* is impossible without *walāya*. The fact that elsewhere in the *Kitāb-i mizān*, 'ajam is defined as the 'land of the *walāya*' could be an additional indication of the Shi'i inspiration of Maḥmūd Pasikhānī which, as we shall see, is also corroborated by other evidence from Nuqtavī works.<sup>89</sup>

It is also possible that Pasikhānī's idea of 'ajam as place where the 'seeds' of things are revealed is a reflection of Ibn 'Arabī's theory of the 'seal of sainthood,' which was influential among post-Mongol

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<sup>87</sup> *Kitāb-i mizān*, f. 59b: *dar kalam har che 'ajam ast be-muṣṭalīḥ-i 'arab dāna ast ke be-pārsī tukhm-i mavīz va ḥarf mu'jam ya'nī ḥarf-i dāna-dār a'nā ḥarf-i tukhm-dār tā muḥaqqiq gardad ke tukhm-i kull va kulīyyāt be-juz-i 'ajam natavānad būd ke nuqta ishārat be-dūst ke naḥs-i Maḥmūd khūd ūst tā har ke be-'ajam narasad be-tukhm narasīda bāshad va har ke be-tukhm narasīda bāshad ū barkhūrdār-i 'umr-i khūd be-hīch vajh nashuda bāshad.*

<sup>88</sup> See Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, pp. 70 ff. The famous ḥadīth where 'Alī is described as the dot under the letter *bā*' of the *bismi'l-Lāhi al-rahmān al-rahīm* ('In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful', the opening formula of the Qur'an), the dot that contains all the meanings of the Qur'anic text, is cited in this context in the Ḥurūfī and Nuqtavī texts. For references for this ḥadīth, see *Words of Power*, p. 466.

<sup>89</sup> *Kitāb-i mizān*, f. 10b.

mystico-messianic movements.<sup>90</sup> If this is the case, this could also clarify the nature of Paṣīkhānī's claim. According to Ibn 'Arabī, the seal of Muhammadan sainthood was manifested at Muhammad's time, while the seal of general sainthood was Jesus. Both seals introduced new eras. Elmore's observation that 'On the strength of the data in the *'Anqā'* it would be possible to construe Ibn al-'Arabī's theory of the seals of prophecy/sainthood as a binary system alternating between the manifestation of Mosaic/Muhammadan (Semitic) *nubu'a* and Christic/Akbarian (*a'jamī* = "Aryan") *wilāya*<sup>91</sup> seems perfectly applicable to Maḡmūd Paṣīkhānī's works. Ibn 'Arabī also stated that 'The one who is worthy [of being the seal of sainthood] is a man. . . who is non-Arab (*'ajamī*)', and that 'He is from a foreign people, not an Arab'.<sup>92</sup> And Jesus, an important, if not the key figure, in Islamic eschatological lore, and the seal of general sainthood according to Ibn 'Arabī, was obviously non-Arab, that is to say, an *'Ajamī*. Paṣīkhānī's familiarity with Ibn 'Arabī's theory of seals is corroborated by his use of expressions such as 'seal of the prophecy' (*khātām-i nubuwwa*) and 'seal of the sainthood' (*khātām-i walāyat*).<sup>93</sup>

As mentioned, Shah 'Abbās was deeply engaged with Twelver Shi'ism, in its Qizil-bāsh form on the one side and its scholarly and legalist form, on the other. Only if he had wanted to make a revolutionary move could he have considered adhering to any new ideology that was completely disconnected from the fundamental tenets of Shi'i Islam. We have already discussed some indications of Shi'i influence on Nuḡṭavī thought. Let us now turn to some more tangible evidence that suggests links between the Nuḡṭavī and Twelver Shi'i doctrines.

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<sup>90</sup> For Ibn 'Arabī's theory of the seals of prophethood and sainthood, see Michel Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints : prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn Arabī* (Paris, 1986), and Gerald T. Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time: Ibn al-'Arabī's Book of the Fabulous Gryphon* (Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 1999). For an example of the interpretation of this theory in post-Mongol mystico-messianic milieus, see Muḡammad Nūrbakhsh, *Risālat al-hudā*, ed. Shahzad Bashir, *RSO*, 75 (2001), p. 107.

<sup>91</sup> Gerald T. Elmore, "The "Millennial" Motif in Ibn al-'Arabī's "Book of the Fabulous Gryphon", *Journal of Religion*, 81 (2001), p. 431.

<sup>92</sup> See Gerald T. Elmore, "The "Millennial" Motif, pp. 417, 418, with reference to Ibn 'Arabī's *al-Jawāb al-mustaḡim* and his *'Anqā' muḡhrib*, respectively.

<sup>93</sup> *Kitāb-i mīzān*, ff. 14b–15a.

The number 12 is prominent in Nuṣṭavī works. It is associated with the 'ajamī cycle which, as we have seen, is that of *walāya*. More importantly, it is explicitly associated with the Twelfth imam of the Twelver Shi'is. According to the *Kitāb-i mīzān*, there are 16 imams in the era of Maḥmūd Pāsīkhānī, twelve of whom are those of the era of Muhammad, which is a clear allusion to the imams of the Twelver branch.<sup>94</sup> According to the Nuṣṭavī work published by Kiyā, the cycle of Muhammad is associated with the number 28 and the Moon with its 28 phases, while the 'ajamī cycle of Maḥmūd is associated with the number 12 and with the Sun, which is the master of the 12 constellations of the Zodiac. The Twelfth imam is an allusion to this Sun.<sup>95</sup>

The figure of 'Alī plays an important role in Nuṣṭavī thought. The symbolism attributed to 'Alī in Nuṣṭavī texts echoes some Shi'i motifs but is also embedded in the Ḥurūfī/Nuṣṭavī context. 'Alī is an intermediary between Muhammad's age of the letter (*ḥarf*) and the 'ajamī age of the dot (*nuṣṭa*): 'That [morning] star is an allusion to 'Alī, because [it is he who], after the setting of the full moon of Muhammad, announces the transition from the era of the letter, which is an allusion to the era of Muhammad, to [the era of the] dot, which is an allusion to the appearance of Maḥmūd.'<sup>96</sup> As in the Ḥurūfī works, 'Alī's link with the dot is highlighted by the famous *ḥadīth* where 'Alī states that he is the diacritical dot under the letter *bā'* of the basmala

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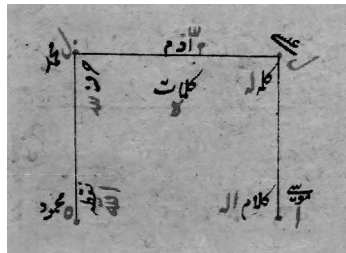
<sup>94</sup> *Kitāb-i mīzān*, f. 51b. Thus, the era of Maḥmūd continues in the line of the 12 imams, which also corroborates the use of the term 'supra-Shi'i' that we proposed earlier to describe the movements such as the Nuṣṭavīs.

<sup>95</sup> Kiyā, *Nuṣṭaviyān yā pāsīkhāniyān*, pp. 77, 81. Significantly, these statements are supported by references to the Qur'anic verses.

<sup>96</sup> Kiyā, *Nuṣṭaviyān yā pāsīkhāniyān*, p. 83: *ān sitāra-yi madhkūr kināyat az 'Alī ast ke ba'd az ghurūb-i badr-i Muḥammadī khabar dād ke 'ahd-i ḥarf ke kināyat az 'ahd-i Muḥammad ast be-nuṣṭa ke kināyat az zuhūr-i Maḥmūd ast badal shud*. As mentioned, this transition is most likely one from one hermeneutical stage to another, from the *tanzīl* to the consecutive stages of the *ta'wīl*, not from one prophetic dispensation to a new one. The association of Muhammad with the 'letter' echoes the Ḥurūfī idea that Muhammad was the only prophet to whom the meanings of the disjointed letters were revealed, which is reflected in the isolated letters that appear at the beginning of some Qur'anic suras (*al-ḥurūf al-muqatta'a*). A broader perspective of the hermeneutical transition from the more complex to the simpler elements of the language (speech – word – letter – dot) is represented in Fig. 7.1.

which contains all the meanings of the Qur’an.<sup>97</sup> ‘Alī’s approach to the religious rituals, accomplished not out of weakness (‘*ajz*) and submission, but as an act of generosity (*karāmat*) and manliness (*muruwat*, *javānmardī*), exemplifies the Shi‘i attitude.<sup>98</sup> ‘Alī is the seal of sainthood (*khātām-i walāyat*).<sup>99</sup>

Its universalism was another aspect of Nuḡṭavī doctrine that may have appealed to Shah ‘Abbās and could be effectively used to attenuate frictions between various Islamic groups, especially between the Sunnis and the Shi‘is, and perhaps even to render his rule more attractive to religious minorities such as the Jews and the Christians. As in Ḥurūfī thought, the universalist dimension of the Nuḡṭavī doctrine is directly linked to its claim to possess the keys to the ultimate hermeneutics (*ta’wīl*) leading to the direct perception of universal metaphysical truths which constitute the innermost meanings of the Qur’an and of all other prophetic books. This idea is expressed in the rectangular diagram found on f. 3b of the manuscript of the *Kitāb-i mizān*.<sup>100</sup>



**Figure 7.1.** Rectangular Diagram (Maḡmūd Pasīkhānī, *Kitāb-i mizān*, ms. Malek National Library and Museum Institution n. 6226, undated, f. 3b).

<sup>97</sup> Kiyā, *Nuḡṭaviyān yā pāsikhāniyān*, p. 83, see also n. 89.

<sup>98</sup> Kiyā, *Nuḡṭaviyān yā pāsikhāniyān*, pp. 119–120.

<sup>99</sup> *Kitāb-i mizān*, f. 15a. This corresponds to the interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s idea of the ‘seal of the saints’ by the Shi‘i thinkers of the School of Bahrain, such as ‘Alī b. Sulaymān (d. ca. 672/1273) and Maytham al-Baḡrānī (d. 689/1290), followed by the Iranian scholar Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385). See references in n. 37.

<sup>100</sup> Image courtesy of the Malek National Library and Museum Institution in Tehran. My thanks to Ms Marjan Afsharian and Mr Shahram Khodaverdian for helping me to obtain a high resolution copy of this image and for securing permission to reproduce it from the Malek Library.



The text surrounding the diagram (ff. 2b–3b) (fig. 7.1) explains that it represents the divine balance (*mīzān-i Allāh*), which encompasses every existent thing. Every letter of the name *Allāh*, including the *tashdīd* over the second *lām*, is associated with a prophet and with an element of the divine language. Thus Adam is associated with the *tashdīd* and with 'words' (*kalimāt*), Moses is associated with the *alif* and with speech (*kalām*), Jesus is associated with the *lām* and with the Word (*kalima*), Muhammad is associated with the *lām* and with 'letter' (*ḥarf*), and Maḥmūd is associated with the *hā*' and with the 'dot' (*nuqṭa*). Neither the order of the names nor the linguistic elements attributed to them are discussed in the text. But in the Ḥurūfī texts, Adam's knowledge of the 'words' is inspired by the Qur'anic episode where God teaches to Adam the 'names of all things' (Q. 2:31); the attribution of 'speech' to Moses is based on the Qur'anic episodes where Moses hears divine speech (on the Mount [Sinai] and from the Burning Bush); Jesus's identification with the Word of God is explicitly Qur'anic (4:171); and Muhammad's 'lettrism' is an allusion to the famous disjointed letters of the Qur'an (*al-ḥurūf al-muqatta'a*). Maḥmūd Pasīkhānī's identification with the dot is, of course, his own idea.

Also with reference to the Ḥurūfī context, it is possible to offer an explanation for the order of the linguistic entities and related prophets. From right to left in the diagram, linguistic entities progress from complex to simple: the sum of all words, speech, word, letter, dot. This is also a progression from the specific to the universal: words can produce all possible speech, letters can produce all possible words, and dots can produce all possible letters, in all possible languages. A knowledge of the metaphysical meanings of the simpler linguistic units is the key to the interpretation of the more complex entities. Maḥmūd takes this schema one step further than his master, Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī, claiming the knowledge of the ontological dot, which is the source of all letters. The choice of prophets on the diagram indicates Pasīkhānī's ecumenical ambitions. Moses represents the Jews, Jesus represents the Christians and Muhammad represents the Muslims. By positioning himself as the most universal and the simplest linguistic element (the dot, of which the letters, words and larger linguistic entities of all languages are composed), Maḥmūd Pasīkhānī expresses the idea that he presides over the final stage of the hermeneutical process at which confessional divisions will be overcome and the followers of all religions will be brought together.

This idea of universality obtained at the highest point of the hermeneutical process is also expressed in the concept of a universal Nuḡṡavī language (*lisān-i Nuḡṡavī*):<sup>101</sup>

The distinctive sign of Maḡmūd is that he speaks all the languages of the first and of the last. The condition of his speech is such that he speaks all these languages in one language of oneness which is the Nuḡṡavī language. [This Nuḡṡavī language] cannot be dual. For example, he [Maḡmūd] speaks the language of Moses to the Jews, but in the Nuḡṡavī language; he speaks the language of Jesus to the Christians, but in the Nuḡṡavī language, and he speaks the language of Muhammad to the Muslims, but in the Nuḡṡavī language . . . All this is the language of the oneness which is the Nuḡṡavī language . . . For every soul, it is the language of [this individual] soul. For the genies it is the language of genies, and for humans, it is the language of human beings. For every person, it is the language of [this] person. But for everything it is the language of oneness, the Nuḡṡavī language that expresses the oneness: 'God hath given us speech, (He) Who giveth speech to everything' [Q. 41:21].<sup>102</sup>

The Nuḡṡavī doctrinal positions analysed above suggest that the Nuḡṡavī texts did not advocate any radical rupture with Islam or

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<sup>101</sup> Here Pasikhānī implicitly uses the idea of a universal language underlying all existing human languages and, in fact, all the sounds in the universe, produced either by inanimate objects, plants or animals, which was developed in the works of Faḡl Allāh Astarābādī. In Astarābādī's works, the return to this universal language, which is the direct and immediate expression of the metaphysical truths, is obtained at the end of the hermeneutical process. The Qur'anic verse Q. 41:21 is used by Pasikhānī in the passage cited below, which reports the speech of the skin of human beings in the Hereafter, to support the idea that everything is endowed with speech, figures prominently in the relevant passages of the *Jāvidān-nāma* of Faḡl Allāh Astarābādī. For Astarābādī's theory of universal language see Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power, passim*.

<sup>102</sup> *Kitāb-i mizān*, ff. 21a–b.: *Har che 'alāmat-i Maḡmūd ast dar zuhūr-i ānast ke be-jumla alsina-yi avālīn va ākhirīn khūd nāṡiq gardad va shart-i nuḡṡ-i ū ān bāshad ke bedān jumla zabān ke ū nāṡiq āmade bāshad be-hamān yak lisān-i vāḡid nāṡiq āmade bāshad ke lisān-i nuḡṡavī ast ke dū būdan-i ū muḡāl ast mithl-i ānke ū-rā bā yahūdī lisān-i Mūsā bāshad [valī] be-zabān-i nuḡṡavī va bā naṡrānī lisān-i 'Isā bāshad valī be-lisān-i nuḡṡavī va bā musulmān lisān-i Muḡammad bāshad valī be-zabān-i nuḡṡavī. . . valī jumla be-lisān-i vāḡid bāshad ke lisān-i nuḡṡavī ast. . . va ū-rā bā kull-i naṡs lisān-i kull-i naṡs bāshad va bā jinn va ins lisān-i jinn va ins bāshad va bā kull shakhṡ lisān-i kull-i shakhṡ bāshad valī bā jumla lisān-i vāḡid dāshte bāshad ke lisān-i nuḡṡavī ast be-izhār-i vāḡidī aṡṡaqanā Allāh alladhī aṡṡaqa kulla shay' . . .*

Islamic law. Nuḡṭavī doctrine had some features that brought it close to Shi'i and, more specifically, Twelver Shi'i tenets. These features include recognition of the prominent role of 'Alī as the harbinger of the ultimate hermeneutical cycle, the seal of sainthood and the upholder of the inner meaning of the external manifestations of the religion established by the Prophet Muhammad, as well as recognition of the Twelve imams. On the other hand, the idea that the doctrine of Maḡmūd Paṣikhānī is the extension and culmination of the hermeneutical mission of the Twelve imams, seems to corroborate the suggested description of the Nuḡṭavīs as a 'broader Shi'i' or 'supra-Shi'i' movement. These features presented Shah 'Abbās with the possibility of adopting the image of a Muslim ruler who adhered to the values of Twelver Shi'ism without any particular commitment to either its Qizil-bāsh or its theologico-jurisprudential interpretations.

In addition, both Ḥurūfī and Nuḡṭavī doctrines promoted the idea of a leader possessing supreme religious authority based on the knowledge of the most fundamental hermeneutical principles (knowledge of the metaphysical meanings of the separate letters in Ḥurūfism and knowledge of the metaphysical meaning of the primordial dot in Nuḡṭavī thought). In order effectively to open the new hermeneutical era associated with this knowledge, both the Ḥurūfīs and the Nuḡṭavīs sought political support.<sup>103</sup> Shah 'Abbās had the opportunity to explore this source of religious authority as a basis for the legitimisation of his temporal power, thus becoming independent of the uncomfortable paradigms of legitimacy offered by the Qizil-bāsh (who wanted the shah to remain their spiritual leader) or by the Twelver scholars (for whom the ultimate political authority belonged to the Hidden imam and therefore Safavid legitimacy was questionable). The universalist scope of Nuḡṭavism combined with the status of a millennial charismatic king ushering in a new era could have, potentially, provided Shah 'Abbās with a remarkable degree of authority in both the religious and the political spheres.

From the historical accounts, it seems that Shah 'Abbās seriously considered this possibility but at some point decided to reject it. We can only speculate about the reasons that lay behind his decision, and

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<sup>103</sup> For the Ḥurūfī political involvement see Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, pp. 15 ff.

about what shape the history of the Safavid dynasty and of Iran might have taken had he decided to further experiment with Nuḡṭavī ideas. But we do know that Shah 'Abbās's decision to abandon the Nuḡṭavī and to support the Twelver Shi'i clergy led to the Safavids' progressive loss of religious and then also of political authority to the clergy.<sup>104</sup> We also know that an experiment very close to that abandoned by Shah 'Abbās was carried out by his contemporary, the Mughal emperor, Akbar. We will now briefly turn to Akbar's religious experimentation, which resulted in the successful application of principles close to, and probably directly inspired by, Nuḡṭavī ideals.

### **Conclusion: Shah Akbar and the scenario of Nuḡṭavī political success**

That Safavid/Nuḡṭavī relationships concerned the fundamental issue of power and legitimacy is perhaps indirectly confirmed by the positive turn that Nuḡṭavī relations with rulers took in a different cultural, religious and political context, namely, in Mughal India.

It is interesting that the most prominent stage of Nuḡṭavī political activity is contemporaneous with the reigns of two key figures of Safavid and Mughal state building, that is, Shah 'Abbās I (r. 995–1038/1587–1629) and the Emperor Akbar (r. 963–1014/1556–1605). It is not surprising that the Nuḡṭavī model of a universal millenarian charismatic ruler was one of great interest at a time when the rulers of these two Muslim empires were reflecting upon and developing the foundations of their religious and political legitimacy, a time replete in millenarian references with the completion of the first one thousand years of Islam.

We have seen how Shah 'Abbās I considered and eventually rejected the Nuḡṭavī model. He chose to support instead the Twelver Shi'i scholars who, in the context of Safavid Iran, had several strong points in their favour in contrast to the Nuḡṭavīs. First, the Twelver scholars were legal experts, they were able to introduce and guarantee the working of religious law and the administration of the Safavid state. This was an extremely important point in a state with a majority

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<sup>104</sup> The Shi'i clergy survived the downfall of the Safavid dynasty, consolidated their power under the Qājārs (1789–1925) and, in the late 20th century, claimed political power in the Iranian revolution of 1979.

Muslim population. Second, the implementation of a form of juristic Islam would bring the Safavids, who emerged from the 'unruly' mystico-messianic milieu, into the fold of 'orthodox' Islam, thus creating bridges with their neighbours, in particular with the Sunni Ottomans. But this choice came at a price: the Safavid monarchs had to delegate a significant part of their religious authority to the jurists and scholars, which resulted in the laying down of the foundations of a powerful clergy which today holds the reins of power in Iran.

The situation in Mughal India was very different. Normative juristic Islam was arguably not the most effective tool of administration in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious context of the Indian subcontinent where Muslims constituted only a small minority. In contradistinction, a universalist doctrine founding the authority of a messianic millennial leader, such as that proposed by the Nuḡṭāvīs, was very much in line with the political philosophy of Akbar and was likely to find some resonance with the official ideology of the Mughal state in India.

Instead of devolving his religious authority to the clergy, Akbar emphasised his own spiritual authority, thus dominating the clergy. With the simultaneous elaboration of the doctrine of 'universal peace' (*ṣulḥ-i kull*), which advocated the tolerance of all religions based on their common inner truth, Akbar assumed the status of a universal spiritual and political leader. There is some evidence that the Nuḡṭāvīs and similar groups, some of which, such as the Ādhar Kayvānīs, were very probably influenced by the Nuḡṭāvīs, were part of the inner circles of Akbar and his adviser, Abu'l-Faḍl 'Allāmī (d. 1011/1602). These groups took an active part in the construction of Akbar's image as a universal charismatic ruler.<sup>105</sup>

The Nuḡṭāvīs were apparently active at the court of Akbar even before Shah 'Abbās came to the throne. Iskandar Beg Munshī notes that both Abu'l-Faḍl 'Allāmī and Akbar had converted to Nuḡṭāvī beliefs.<sup>106</sup> As

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<sup>105</sup> On possible Nuḡṭāvī influence on the Ādhar Kayvānīs, an Iranian religious group which thrived in India and was founded by Ādhar Kayvān (d. 1027/1618), see Daniel J. Sheffield, 'The Language of Heaven in Safavid Iran: Speech and Cosmology in the Thought of Ādhar Kayvān and His Followers', in Alireza Korangy and Daniel J. Sheffield, ed., *No Tapping around Philology: A Festschrift in Honor of Wheeler McIntosh Thackston Jr.'s 70th Birthday* (Wiesbaden, 2014), pp. 161–183.

<sup>106</sup> *History of Shah 'Abbas the Great*, vol. 2, p. 650.

mentioned, there is evidence that Akbar corresponded with Mīr Aḡmad Kāshī, a well-known Nuḡṡavī from Kāshān, and that he was aware of the existence of, and entertained friendly relationships with, the Nuḡṡavī group in Qazvīn led by Dervish Khusraw.<sup>107</sup> Akbar’s letter to Kāshī also suggests that Akbar used the widespread Nuḡṡavī network to recruit followers in Iran. Further evidence concerning relationships between the Mughal rulers and the Nuḡṡavīs is reported in *Muntakhab al-tawārīkh* of ‘Abd al-Qādir Bada’ūnī (d. ca. 1024/1615). Bada’ūnī was a scholar and historian at the court of Akbar known for his dislike of the Nuḡṡavīs and of the religious experimentation of Akbar. Bada’ūnī describes the success of a prominent Nuḡṡavī intellectual, Sharīf Āmulī, at the court of Akbar and Āmulī’s contribution to the shaping of Akbar’s messianic image.<sup>108</sup> Nuḡṡavī ideas, combined with the doctrines of Ibn ‘Arabī and apparently with some Indian, and more particularly Buddhist, substratum, were developed and promulgated in India in the works of intellectuals such as the *Risāla-yi durr-i yatīm* of Muḡammad b. Maḡmūd Dihdār Shīrāzī (d. 1016/1607).<sup>109</sup>

According to Moin, the partnership between Akbar and the Nuḡṡavīs was ‘built upon a shared adoration of pre-Islamic Persianate symbols.’<sup>110</sup> However, as we have seen, the Nuḡṡavī works do not seem to display any specific focus on pre-Islamic Persianate symbols. What they do display, in continuation of Ḥurūfī doctrines, is a strong theoretical support for the image of a charismatic millennial leader initiating a new era in the history of Islam and in the history of mankind, and that this new era will be informed by a universalist ethos grounded in Islamic hermeneutical and eschatological beliefs. The use of this kind of theory as a possible ideology and source of legitimacy was seriously considered by the key figures of both the Safavid and Mughal dynasties. Rejected in Iran, this ideology realised at least a part of its political potential in India by feeding into intellectual milieus that supported Akbar’s religious reforms.

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<sup>107</sup> See n. 10.

<sup>108</sup> Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, pp. 165–166; the relevant passage is cited in Kiyā, *Nuḡṡaviyān yā pāsikhāniyān*, pp. 11–12, 32–35.

<sup>109</sup> See n. 11.

<sup>110</sup> Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, p. 165.



**PART THREE**  
***ḤADĪTH AND FIQH***





## Majlisī the Second, Ambiguous Architect of the Shi‘i Revival in Safavid Iran

*Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi*

Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1699), also known as Majlisī the Second, one of the most important historical figures of Safavid Iran, needs no introduction, although a number of the important events of his life will be referred to in the course of this discussion.<sup>1</sup> By his time, the division of the Imāmī scholars between the Principlists (*uṣūliyya*) and the Traditionalists (*akhbāriyya*) was well established. From the sharp distinction made, in the 6th/12th century, by ‘Abd al-Jalīl al-Qazwīnī in his *Kitāb al-naqḍ* to the constitution of the Uṣūlī ‘clergy’ under the second Safavid king, Ṭahmāsp, in the 10th/16th century, and in particular after the decisive work of the ‘neo-traditionalist’ Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī (d. 1030/1624) and his radical and methodical criticism of his principlist co-religionists, the rift, violent conflict even, between the two groups was clearly visible and attested

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<sup>1</sup> Reliable studies on him are numerous, made by both Western and Shi‘i scholars. For the first category, see for example, Karl-Heinz Pampus, ‘Die theologische Enzyklopädie *Biḥār al-anwār* des Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (1037–1110/1627–1699)’ (PhD, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 1970); Abdul-Hadi Hairī, ‘Madjlisī, Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir’, *EL2*, vol. 5; Rainer Brunner, ‘Majlesī, Moḥammad Bāqer’, in *ELr* <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/majlesi-mohammad-baqer> (accessed on 26 January 2021); for the second group, see, for example: Muṣliḥ al-Dīn Mahdavi, *Zindagi nāmāyi ‘Allāma Majlisī* (Isfahan, n.d.; repr. Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999); Ḥusayn Dargāhī and ‘Alī Akbar Talāfī Dāriyānī, *Kitāb shināsi-yi Majlisī* (Tehran, 1st ed. 1370 Sh./1991; repr. 1382 Sh./2003); Ḥasan Ṭāramī, *Allāma Majlisī* (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1997).

to by both sides.<sup>2</sup> The divergences between the two groups were numerous and can probably be traced back to the differences between the original esoteric Shi'ism and the rationalist Shi'ism of the Būyid era.<sup>3</sup> Certain divergences that emerged later will be examined but as regards the general aim here in sum one can say that the Akhbārīs were the proponents of the exclusive recourse to the text of the Qur'an and the *ḥadīth* (in its Shi'ī conception) and therefore opposed to the personal endeavour of interpretation in its various forms (*ijtihād*, *ra'y*, *qiyās*) and also opposed to participation in political activity. The Uṣūlīs, for their part, practised a critical reading of the scriptural sources, especially the *ḥadīth*, used *ijtihād* and the scholastic argumentation of *kalām* and often involved themselves in political

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<sup>2</sup> On these two rival Shi'ī groups, see, for example, Gian Roberto Scarcia, 'Intorno alle controversie tra Akhbārī e Uṣūlī presso gli Imāmīti di Persia', *RSO*, 33 (1958), pp. 211–250; Etan Kohlberg, 'Akḥbārīya', *Elr*, <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/akbariya> (accessed on 26 January 2021); Etan Kohlberg, 'Aspects of Akhbārī Thought in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in his *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shi'ism* (Aldershot, 1991), article XVII. Many of the works of Andrew J. Newman, for instance, are devoted to this subject: 'The Development and Political Significance of the Rationalist (Uṣūlī) and Traditionalist (Akhbārī) Schools in Imāmī Shi'ī History From the Third/Ninth to the Tenth/Sixteenth Century' (PhD, UCLA, 1986); 'The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late-Safawid Iran', *BSOAS*, 55 (1992), pp. 22–52 and 250–262; 'Anti-Akhbārī Sentiments among the Qājār *Ulamā'*: the Case of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khwānsārī (d. 1313/1895)', in Robert Gleave, ed., *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran* (London-New York, 2005), pp. 155–173. Also Devin J. Stewart, see for example his *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shi'ite Response to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City, UT, 1998); 'The Genesis of the Akhbārī Revival', in Michel Mazzaoui, ed., *Safavid Iran and Her Neighbors* (Salt Lake City, UT, 2003), pp. 169–193; and for Robert Gleave, especially his *Inevitable Doubt: Two Theories of Shi'ī Jurisprudence* (Leiden, 2000); *Scripturalist Islam. The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shi'ī School* (Leiden, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin dans le shi'isme originel. Aux sources de l'ésotérisme en islam* (Paris, 1992 (2005<sup>2</sup>)), Introduction, pp. 13–48 (English translation *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, tr. D. Streight. New York, 1994). Ḥasan Anṣārī (= Hassan Ansari), 'Akḥbārīyān wa aṣḥāb-i ḥadīth-i imāmīyya: nīm nigāhi bi tārikhcha-yi taḥawwulāt-i fiqh-i imāmī', in his *Tashayyu'-i imāmī dar bastar-i taḥawwul. Tārikh-i maktab-hā va bāvar-hā dar Īrān va Islām* (Tehran, 1395 Sh./2016), vol. 1, pp. 37–80.

activity, especially when power lay in Shi‘i hands. But what was Majlisī’s position in Safavid Iran in the 11th/17th century?<sup>4</sup>

### The *Uṣūlī* trend: Positions and activities

Having pursued a successful career as *mujtahid*, Majlisī reached the apex of the theological-political hierarchy as the *shaykh al-Islām* of the capital, Iṣfahān, during the reigns of Shah Sulaymān (r. 1077–1105/1666–1694) and Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn (r. 1105–1135/1694–1722).<sup>5</sup> However, we know that in the traditions attributed to the Ithnā ‘asharī Shi‘i imams, they urged their followers, explicitly and insistently, to stay away from any political activity. Notably, the imams were particularly opposed to the quest for any form of political and religious leadership (*ri’āsa*) on the part of their followers, to any revolt against political power (*qiyām*) before the advent of the End of Time, or to any effective collaboration with the government (*ittibā‘ al-sulṭān*).<sup>6</sup>

There was an initial decisive break with this early tradition when the Shi‘i dynasty of the Būyids came to power in the 4th/10th century and the figure of the jurist-theologian, Principlist and collaborator with

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<sup>4</sup> There has already been some debate about Majlisī’s ideological adherence; see for example Ḥ. Ṭaramī, *Allāma Majlisī*, chapters 3 and 6; ‘Alī Malikī Miyānjī, *Allāma Majlisī, akhbārī yā uṣūlī?* (Qum, 1385 Sh./2006); Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, pp. 201 and 257. My study attempts to bring new elements of reflection and new historical perspectives to this debate.

<sup>5</sup> On the institution of *shaykh al-Islām*, a kind of ministry of religious affairs, and its relations with other important politico-religious positions such as *ṣadr*, *muftī*, *qāḍī*, *qāḍī ‘askar*, see Rasūl Ja‘fariyān, *Dīn va siyāsāt dar ‘aṣr-i Ṣafavī* (Qum, 1370 Sh./1991), pp. 90–92; Mahdavi, *Zindagī nāma*, vol. 1, pp. 275–277; Willem Floor, ‘The *ṣadr* or Head of the Safavid Religious Administration, Judiciary and Endowments and Other Members of the Religious Institution’, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 150 (2000), pp. 461–500.

<sup>6</sup> On *ḥadīth* concerning these subjects, reported in particular by al-Kulaynī in his *Kāfī*, see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 170–171 and the Part III-1; also Amir-Moezzi and Hassan Ansari, ‘Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī (m. 328/939–940 ou 329/940–941) et son *Kitāb al-Kāfī*. Une introduction’, *Studia Iranica*, 38 (2009), pp. 220–221.

rulers, began to replace that of the imam, who was still hidden.<sup>7</sup> The political and social weight of the Imāmī jurist-theologian became even more important thanks to the scholars of the School of Ḥilla during the 6th/12th and 7th/13th centuries, and especially after the turning point in the formalisation of Twelver Imamism as a state religion under the Safavids in the 10th/16th century. The most spectacular illustration of this evolution is the royal decree issued by the sovereign Ṭahmāsp I in Dhu'l-Ḥijja 939/July 1533, declaring the great *mujtahid*, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Karakī, 'the representative of the Hidden imam' (*nā'ib al-imām al-ghā'ib*).<sup>8</sup> In another undated decree, he also declared that the *mujtahids* were the representatives of all the infallible imams and opposition to them was equivalent to the associationism (*shirk*) and would be severely punished.<sup>9</sup>

It must be pointed out that even before becoming the *shaykh al-Islām* and being appointed as the official preacher at Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn's coronation ceremony, Majlisī was closely involved socially and politically in the defence of official Shi'ism and the repression of the ideas and currents of belief deemed deviant: the doctrinal attacks on, and most probably the violent repression of, Sufism and the mystical orders;<sup>10</sup> the declaration of philosophy, as well as

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<sup>7</sup> Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, Appendix, pp. 319ff; Amir-Moezzi and Christian Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le shi'isme?* (Paris, 2004; repr. 2014), part 3, chapters 1 to 3; English translation as *What is Shi'ī Islam?* tr. E. Ormsby (Richmond, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> 'Abd Allāh b. 'Īsā Afandī/ Efendī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'* (Qum, 1401/1981), vol. 3, pp. 445–460.

<sup>9</sup> Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khwānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* (Qum, 1390–1392/1970–1972), vol. 4, p. 363.

<sup>10</sup> For his doctrinal attacks see, for example, Majlisī, *'Ayn al-ḥayāt*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad Rafī'ī (Tehran, n.d. [ca. 1993]), pp. 25ff, 52ff, 202ff, 233ff; idem, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 'Kumpānī's edition (Beirut, 1403/1983), vol. 1, pp. 3ff; idem, *Mir'āt al-'uqūl*, ed. Sayyid Ḥāshim Rasūlī Maḥallātī (2nd ed., Tehran, 1404/1984), vol. 1, pp. 1–2. See also Bahrānī, *Lu'lu'at al-Baḥrayn*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-'ulūm (Qum, n.d.), p. 55; Laurence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Ṣafavī Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 70ff; Dhabīḥallāh Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i adabiyāt-i Īrān* (Tehran, 1370 Sh./1991), vol. 5, pp. 181, 205–209; Colin Turner, *Islam without Allah? The Rise of Religious Externalism in Safavid Iran* (Richmond, 2000), pp. 148ff. However, in the accounts of the repression of the Sufis, some scholars seem sometimes to have confused Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī with Muḥammad Bāqir Khātūnābādī, mentor of Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn; see Ṭarāmī, *'Allāma Majlisī*, pp. 109ff and 218ff.

Sufism, as a false form of learning (*'ilm bāṭil*) and a blameworthy innovation (*bid'a*);<sup>11</sup> the violent denunciation of Shi'ī esotericism, as well as spiritual hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) as 'extremism' or exaggeration (*ghuluww*);<sup>12</sup> the intermittent repression of non-Shi'ī religious communities epitomised by the destruction of the Hindu temple in Iṣfahān and the expulsion of Hindus from the city.<sup>13</sup> The rigour of Majlisī is manifested through his writings and his actions as a major politico-religious authority but also in his decrees as a religious judge (*qāḍī, ḥākīm*) during the last twenty years of his life. The latter illustrates one of the many ambiguities of our man. Indeed, Majlisī was thoroughly acquainted with the *ḥadīths* of the imams emphasising the extreme difficulty of the profession of judge, the dangers it held for personal salvation as well as the problematic cases of religious jurisdiction (*ḥukūma*) and the application of the canonical punishments (*ḥudūd*) during the Occultation, i.e., in the physical absence of the infallible

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<sup>11</sup> Majlisī, *Mir'āt al-'uqūl*, vol. 1, p. 2; idem, *Biḥār*, vol. 1, pp. 3ff and 103ff; idem, 'Jawāb al-masā'il al-thalāth', in Rasūl Ja'fariyān, 'Rūyārūyī-yi faqīhān va šūfiyān dar 'aṣr-i ṣafaviyān', *Kayhān-i andīsha*, 33 (1370 Sh./1991), pp. 101–127; Ṣafā, *Tārīkh*, vol. 5, pp. 181, 205–209.

<sup>12</sup> Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 25, pp. 261–350 (against the *ghulāt*); *Biḥār*, vol. 5, pp. 260–261 and 267; vol. 6, pp. 201–202 and 255; vol. 54, p. 363; vol. 57, p. 149, also vol. 58, pp. 144–164 (and many other instances). It should be noted, however, that sometimes Majlisī's criticism of *ta'wīl* seems ambiguous in the sense that it is not directed against Shi'ī esotericists but against a certain kind of rationalist who illegitimately deflects the Qur'an and the *ḥadīth* from their writings (see e.g. the critics against al-Shaykh al-Mufid in *Biḥār*, vol. 6, pp. 249–252, or against al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā – *Biḥār*, vol. 6, pp. 201–202).

<sup>13</sup> Majlisī speaks about it himself in *Biḥār*, vol. 102, p. 20; cf. 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Khātūnābādī, *Waqā'i' al-sinīn wa'l-a'wām* (Tehran, 1352 Sh./1973), p. 540. On the repression of Sunnis, Zoroastrians and Jews see Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge, 1908–1930), vol. 4, *Modern Times (1500–1924)*, pp. 403ff; Lockhart, *Fall of the Ṣafavī Dynasty*, pp. 54ff; Pampus, *Theologische Enzyklopädie*, pp. 33–34. These acts of repression seem to have depended on social conditions and periods of political crisis. On the doctrinal side, Majlisī supports the usual position of Islamic law recognising the rights and duties of the People of the Book/the Protected people (*ahl al-kitāb/ahl al-dhimma*), see Majlisī, 'Ṣawā'iq al-yahūd', in his *Bist o panj risāla-yi fārsī*, ed. Sayyid Mahdī Rajā'ī (Qum, 1412/1991), pp. 515–522.

authority of the imam.<sup>14</sup> ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Riḍawī, who allegedly flourished in the 12th/18th century, in his *Ḥadiqat al-shī‘a* relates a sermon that Majlisī gave in a mosque in Iṣfahān in which after having wept lengthily he reportedly declared: ‘People! How puzzled I am faced with my destiny. My father and I spent our lives spreading the faith and teaching the doctrinal foundations and practical applications [of Shi‘ism] and this is how people from all over the region learned the chapters of the Law, what is licit and what is illicit. So how is it I came to be a judge?’<sup>15</sup>

Finally, effective collaboration with the political power of the day – which, as we have seen, was in contradiction to the teaching of the imams – reached a peak in Majlisī’s career with the coronation sermon for Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn in 1106/1694, referred to above.<sup>16</sup> Following many other Uṣūlī scholars, Majlisī sought to provide legal and theological justifications for a legitimate government during the Occultation. Presenting Safavid power as grounded in justice and fidelity to the imams in general and the Hidden imam in particular, he said that the best possible government was achieved through close collaboration between a just ruler (*sulṭān ‘ādil*) and a learned jurist (*faqīh ‘ālim*). Majlisī had already defended the legitimacy of Safavid

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<sup>14</sup> Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 323–325; Amir-Moezzi and Jambet, *Qu’est-ce que le shi‘isme?*, Part 3, chapter 2, n° 1.

<sup>15</sup> Cited by R. Ja‘fariyān, *Dīn va siyāsāt*, p. 351. On *Ḥadiqa al-shī‘a* and its author, see Andrew J. Newman, ‘Sufism and Anti-Sufism in Safavid Iran: the Authorship of the *Ḥadiqat al-Shī‘a* Revisited’, *Iran*, 37 (1999), pp. 95–108. It should be added that for another problematic case during the Occultation, namely the practice of Friday collective prayer, Majlisī opts for the lawfulness or even the obligatory nature of it in all situations, a position more often adopted by the Uṣūliyya (but also by some Akhbāriyya), see for example *Bihār*, vol. 86, pp. 146, 221, 231, 319. Studies on this question, especially in Persian, are numerous; see for example Ja‘fariyān, *Dīn va siyāsāt*, pp. 121–180; Andrew J. Newman, ‘Fayḍ al-Kāshānī and the Rejection of the Clergy/State Alliance: Friday Prayer as Politics in the Safavid Period’, in Linda S. Wallbridge, ed., *The Most Learned of the Shi‘a*, pp. 34–52; idem, ‘The *Veẓir* and the *Mulla*: a Late Safavid Period Debate on Friday Prayer’, in Michele Bernardini et al., ed., *Etudes sur l’Iran médiéval et moderne offertes à Jean Calmard*, special issue of *Eurasian Studies*, 1–2 (2006), pp. 237–269.

<sup>16</sup> A good manuscript of this sermon exists in the Majlis collection, n°1, majmū‘a n° 2721, ff. 352–359 (‘Khuṭba dar julūs-i Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn-i Ṣafavī’); see an analysis of it in Ṭāramī, *Allāma-yi Majlisī*, pp. 246–250.

rule and therefore the need to collaborate with it in his *Biḥār al-anwār*: first, by commenting on certain traditions of the imams which say that the Riser (*al-qā'im*) begins his uprising in the province of Jilān (Gilān, in northern Iran), Majlisī declared that Shah Ismā‘īl I had started his movement in Jilān before going to Ardabil.<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere, he reported a *ḥadīth* of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir, taken from al-Nu‘mānī’s (disciple of al-Kulaynī) *Kitāb al-Ghayba* where it says that in the future, seekers of the truth (*ṭalabat al-ḥaqq*, i.e. the faithful Shi‘a), after having suffered many defeats, will resort to arms and will eventually achieve power in order to entrust it to the imam of the Time (i.e. the Hidden imam). In his commentary Majlisī wrote: ‘The *ḥadīth* is probably alluding to Safavid power. May God consolidate the pillars of this power and associate it with the government of the *qā'im*.’<sup>18</sup> The position advocated by Majlisī is not readily defensible because it contradicts not only certain fundamental teachings of Twelver Shi‘ism reported in the ancient corpus of Imāmī *ḥadīth*, but also a legal tradition of addressing the problems that collaboration with any power, by definition unjust (*jā'ir*), posed. Indeed, according to an old Imāmī dogma, all political power before the advent of the eschatological Saviour (the only just ruler) can only be unjust. This is the notion called *al-tawallī ‘an al-jā'ir*, ‘dissociation with the unjust (power or sovereign)’.<sup>19</sup> Majlisī himself dedicated an entire chapter of his *Ayn al-ḥayāt* to the ‘Corruptions related to the proximity with rulers’ (*Mafāsīd-i qurb-i pādshāhān*) where he enumerated a great number of perils that the faithful faced in their salvation when they collaborated with holders of political power. But, at the same time, he presented extensive arguments in defence of the point that when the government is in the hands of ‘the religion of the truth’ (*dīn-i ḥaqq*, i.e. Imāmī Shi‘ism), it sometimes becomes necessary, even legally obligatory

<sup>17</sup> Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 52, p. 236. Indeed, Ismā‘īl Mīrzā had begun his insurrectionist messianic movement in Gilān around 903/1497 before moving to Ardabil in 905/1499 at the age of 13 and taking command of his Sufi warrior adherents.

<sup>18</sup> Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 52, p. 243. For other works relating some Imāmī eschatological *ḥadīths* to the arrival of the Safavids see Āqā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dhari‘a ‘alā taṣānīf al-shī‘a* (Beirut, 1403/1983), vol. 15, pp. 4–5.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Najafī, *Jawāhir al-kalām fi sharḥ sharā‘i al-Islām* (Beirut, 1983), vol. 22, pp. 155–168.



(*wājib*), to collaborate with it.<sup>20</sup> Majlisi also defended this position in his 'Mirror for Princes' in Persian, entitled *Ādāb-i sulūk-i ḥākim bā ra'yat*.<sup>21</sup>

### Some Akhbārī aspects

At the same time, Majlisi's life and works present many explicitly traditionalist aspects. Among those who had granted him permission to transmit from the sources, some of whom were undoubtedly his masters, we find some great Akhbārī names, such as Mullā Šāliḥ Māzandarānī (d. 1080/1669), Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680), Ḥurr 'Āmilī (d. 1096/1685) or Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qummī (d. 1098/1687).<sup>22</sup> To these must be added his own father, the great scholar Muḥammad Taqī Majlisi (d. 1070/1659), known as Majlisi the First, a scholar of mystical and Akhbārī proclivity and a great admirer of the aforementioned Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī, the founder of so-called Neo-Akhbārism.<sup>23</sup>

It was especially in his *'Ayn al-ḥayāt* that our author revealed his taste for mysticism. While criticising Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the spiritual hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) of the Sufis who do not respect the letter of the scriptures, Majlisi declared that the legal religion has an esoteric dimension (*bāṭin*) that can be attained through the acquisition of knowledge (*ma'rifat*) and the purification of oneself

<sup>20</sup> Majlisi, *'Ayn al-ḥayāt*, pp. 499–506.

<sup>21</sup> Majlisi, in *Bīst va panj risāla-yi fārsī*, pp. 135–179.

<sup>22</sup> Majlisi, *Bihār*, vol. 107, pp. 103–106; idem, *Ijāzāt* (Qum, n.d.), p. 122; also al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-shī'a*, ed. Rabbānī Shīrāzī (Qum, 1403/1983), vol. 20, pp. 49ff; Nūrī Ṭabarsī/Ṭabrisī, *al-Fayḍ al-qudsī fī tarjamat al-'Allāma al-Majlisi*, edited in *Bihār*, vol. 102, p. 80.

<sup>23</sup> On him, see the article of Rainer Brunner in *Elr* (2002), and in particular the monograph of Ḥamid Mīr Khandān, *Muḥammad Taqī Majlisi* (Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995). On his admiration for Astarābādī and his work, see Majlisi I, *Lawāmi'-yi šāhibqarānī* (Qum, 1416/1995), vol. 1, p. 47; it is a commentary in Persian of the *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruḥu'l-faqīh* of Ibn Bābūya; in the Arabic version of this commentary entitled *Rawḍa al-muttaqīn* (Qum, 1399/1979), vol. 1, p. 21, Muḥammad Taqī Majlisi is less laudatory about the criticisms of the Principlists made by Astarābādī (we will come back to this later).

(*tahdhīb-i nafs*), while respecting the religious rules of conduct (*ādāb-i dīn*). The aim is to reach proximity to God (*taqarrub-i ḥaqq*) and its ultimate consequences, annihilation in God (*fanā’ fī Allāh*) and the ability to perform miracles (*karāmāt*), on which it is advisable to remain silent.<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere in the same book, he readily referred to some of the great names of the Ithnā ‘asharī tradition – Raḍī al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Ṭāwūs, Ibn Fahd al-Ḥillī, ‘the Second Martyr’ Zayn al-Dīn b. ‘Alī and Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ardabilī, the eponymous founder of the Safavid dynasty – as ‘Imāmī Sufis’ (*ṣūfiyya-yi imāmiyya*), and presented their works as containing ‘the subtleties of the secrets of Sufism’ (*daqā’iq-i asrār-i ṣūfiyya*).<sup>25</sup> In his responses to Mullā Khalīl Qazvīnī, Majlisī recounted how his father, Mullā Muḥammad Taqī, was introduced to the Sufi practices of *dhikr* and *fikr* by his spiritual master, the famous Bahā’ al-Dīn Muḥammad ‘Āmilī or Shaykh Bahā’ī (d. 1031 or 1032/1622 or 1623). He then added that he himself had been initiated in the same practices and that he had repeatedly performed ‘forty-day retreats’ (*arba‘ināt*).<sup>26</sup> Finally, in another work of mystical tendency, *Kitāb al-arba‘in*, the great *mujtahid* severely criticised those Shi‘a, especially the scholars, who were content with the exoteric aspects (*zāhir*) of religion and who did not attempt to explore the subtle secrets of the teachings of the imams.<sup>27</sup>

But the Akhbārī tendencies (in the literal sense of the term) of Majlisī are most impressively manifested in his *magnum opus*, the monumental encyclopedia of Shi‘i traditions (*akhbār*), the famous *Bihār al-anwār*.<sup>28</sup> In the most recent edition, known as the Kumpānī

<sup>24</sup> Majlisī, *Ayn al-ḥayāt*, pp. 49–57.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 238ff.

<sup>26</sup> A treatise on this is discussed by Rasūl Ja‘fariyān in ‘Rūyārūyī-yi faqīhān wa ṣūfiyān dar ‘aṣr-i ṣafaviyān’, pp. 123ff.

<sup>27</sup> Majlisī, *Kitāb al-arba‘in* or *Sharḥ-i ‘Arba‘in* (Qum, 1358 Sh./1977), pp. 101, 179.

<sup>28</sup> K.-H. Pampus, *Die theologische Enzyklopädie Bihār al-anwār* (PhD, Bonn, 1970); Etan Kohlberg, ‘Behār al-anwār’, *Elr*, vol. 4, pp. 90–93; <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/behār-al-anwār> (accessed on 26 January 2021); Ḥasan Ṭāramī, *al-‘Allāma al-Majlisī wa kitābuhu Bihār al-anwār* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999). Ḥasan Anṣārī (= Hassan Ansari), ‘Zindagī, āthār wa andīsha-yi yak muḥaddith-i imāmī dar nīma-yi avval-i sada-yi sizdahum-i hijrī’, in his *Tashayyu‘-i imāmī dar bastar-i taḥawwul* (see above footnote 3), pp. 81–120 (the article is about the Imāmī scholar Sayyid ‘Abd Allāh Shubbar but includes important studies on the structure and method of *Bihār al-anwār*).

edition, the work is divided into 110 volumes with about 450 pages in each. Unique in all Shi'i *ḥadīth* literature, it is the result of a heroic attempt to bring together all the teachings of the Fourteen Infallibles, the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fāṭima, and especially the Twelve imams of the Ithnā 'asharī Shi'a, as reported by all known sources. Most of the work seems to have been done by Majlisī himself, but he also sought help from other scholars, including two of his main disciples, Ni'matullāh Jazā'irī (d. 1112/1701) and 'Abd Allāh b. 'Īsā Afandī / Efendī (d. between 1130/1717 and 1140/1727) and a team of excellent scribes. The project was supported by the Safavid royal treasury, which financed many and sometimes extended journeys in search of manuscripts across the lands of Islam and paid the salaries of the scribes. Writing it took almost fifteen years, from 1077/1666 to 1091/1681. Etan Kohlberg has divided the innumerable sources of the *Bihār* into five groups according to their era: from the time of the historical imams to the beginning of the Minor Occultation (which occurred in 260/874 according to Imāmī Tradition); from the time of the Minor Occultation to the beginning of the Major Occultation in 329/941 and then the Būyid period; thirdly, the period up to the Mongol invasion and the fall of Baghdad in 656/1258; fourthly, from the end of the Abbasid caliphate until the advent of the Safavids in the early 10th/late 15th century; lastly, the sources of Safavid period up to the time of Majlisī himself. The reported traditions relate to all religious issues, from fundamental doctrines to law, from prayers to sermons, from historical accounts to medical recipes, from ethics to ritual and canonical practice. What is remarkable and concerns our subject is that in the 'Oceans of Light', almost no source has been set aside, including compilations containing the most esoteric traditions or those whose authenticity or legitimacy have been questioned by Principlist scholars (works like Sulaym b. Qays's *Kitāb*, al-Mufaḍḍal's *Tawḥīd*, Ibn Shu'ba al-Ḥarrānī's *Tuḥaf al-'uqūl*, al-Khaṣībī's *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya* attributed to al-Mas'ūdī and Rajab Bursī's *Mashāriq al-anwār*). No tradition, even the most 'subversive', seems to have been suppressed or censored, for example those concerning the theory of the falsification of the official text of the Qur'an (*taḥrīf al-Qur'ān*), those on the practice of anathematising the non-'Alid companions of the Prophet (*sabb al-ṣaḥāba*) or on the divine nature of the imams and their knowledge, and their miraculous powers (the

notion of *tafwīd* and its implications); subjects that the Uṣūlī tradition always regarded as either embarrassing or pertaining solely to the Shi‘i *ghulāt* and therefore to be dismissed. At the same time, Majlisī often tried to justify his choices, anticipating the possible criticisms of his detractors.

It is true that certain historical circumstances may explain the choices that Majlisī made, such as the promotion of an aversion to Sunnism in the atmosphere of the incessant wars between the Safavids and Ottomans or the legitimisation of the divine nature of the imams and their miracles and therefore exhorting the faithful to undertake pilgrimage (*ziyāra*) to their graves, with the resultant economic benefits.<sup>29</sup> But it seems that his main objective was the collection and preservation of the heritage of Shi‘i *ḥadīth*, in its entirety and historical fullness, without taking into account any ideological or technical considerations. Indeed, on a technical level, Majlisī quite often did not comply with the criteria and rules of *‘ilm al-ḥadīth* – in particular, he did not take into account the factors that conventionally determine the reliability of the chains of transmitters (*sanad, isnād*).<sup>30</sup> The partial neglect of these purely technical aspects in favour of content made Majlisī the object of criticism (sometimes severe) by some Uṣūlī scholars. Thus, he was attacked by Muḥammad Ḥusaynī Mīr Lawḥī (who was also his political rival) in his *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, and the criticism continued into recent times as can be seen in the *A‘yān al-shī‘a* of Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn al-‘Āmilī (d. 1952).<sup>31</sup>

### *Search for balance or voluntary ambiguity?*

In *al-Ḥadā’iq al-nāḍira*, Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1773) reported that Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī was a convinced Akhbārī throughout his

<sup>29</sup> E. Kohlberg, ‘Beḥār’, conclusion.

<sup>30</sup> See what Majlisī himself says about this subject in *Bihār*, vol. 1, pp. 10, 26–30, 42.

<sup>31</sup> For the first source, see Muḥammad Taqī Dānishpažūh, *Fihrist-i kitābkhāna-yi ihdā’ī-yi āqā-yi Sayyid Muḥammad Mishkāt bi kitābkhāna-yi dānishgāh-i Tihārān* (Tehran, 1334 Sh./1956), vol. 3, pp. 1497–1507; Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 465, 470–471; Rainer Brunner, ‘Majlesī, Moḥammad Bāqer’, *Elr*; Muḥsin al-Amīn, *Ayān al-shī‘a* (Beirut, 1403/1983), vol. 9, p. 183.

youth, with critical attitude towards the *mujtahids*. Then, after years of study, reflection and contact with the Uṣūlīs, he came to the conclusion that it was necessary to overcome the divisions and oppositions between the different Imāmī tendencies. Baḥrānī thus placed him among the precursors of those who try to establish a balance between scholars of both tendencies.<sup>32</sup> The above discussion indeed points in this direction. Majlisī attempted to achieve an equilibrium by including the most important Sunni or Mu'tazilī Qur'anic commentaries in the sources for his *Biḥār al-anwār*. Thus, he used works such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, al-Bayḍāwī's *Anwār al-tanzīl*, al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf*, al-Baghawī's *Ma'ālim al-tanzīl* and al-Suyūṭī's *al-Durr al-manthūr*. One can also refer to the great compilations of Sunni *ḥadīth* and their commentaries (the *Ṣiḥāḥ sitta* and the commentaries of Ibn Ḥajar, al-Nawawī and al-Kirmānī), the Sunni books of history (al-Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Khallikān etc) and the works of the great Sunni thinkers such as al-Ghazālī, al-Taftāzānī, Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, and many others.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, Majlisī did not hesitate to express his admiration for the great Akhbārī thinker, Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī, as his father had already done, calling him 'the chief of the transmitters of *ḥadīths*' (*ra'īs al-muḥaddithīn*), while criticising his attacks against the Principlists.<sup>34</sup> It can also be pointed out that like a typical Uṣūlī author, he sometimes dwelt on the critical methodology of the study of *ḥadīth*, examining in detail the criteria for authenticity or inauthenticity of traditions or those for the credibility of a compiler. At the same time, as already noted, he used several sources and reported thousands of traditions that only Akhbārīs or even only Shi'ī mystics treat as

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<sup>32</sup> Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī, *al-Ḥadā'iq al-nāḍira* (Qum, 1363–1367 Sh./1985–1987), vol. 1, author's 2nd introduction.

<sup>33</sup> Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 1, pp. 24ff (presentation of the sources of *Biḥār*).

<sup>34</sup> For the praise of Astarābādī, see Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 1, p. 20; for his criticism, Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 2, p. 284 (here Astarābādī is discreetly called *ba'ḍ al-muta'akhhirīn*, but the allusions are clear to those who know the work of the leader of the neo-Akhbārīs).

authentic.<sup>35</sup> Finally, like any authentic Usūli thinker, Majlisī often resorted to the arguments of scholastic theology (*kalām*).<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, our author presented himself as a moderate Akhbārī according to what Yūsuf Baḥrānī calls ‘the middle way’ (*ṭariq wustā*).<sup>37</sup> Indeed, in a treatise entitled ‘Response to a question by a dear man’ (*Pāsukh-i su’āl-i mard-i ‘azīzī*), edited by Rasūl Ja‘fariyān, Majlisī wrote:

However, with regard to the way of the *mujtahids* and the Akhbārīs, my method consists of choosing the middle gate (*bāb-i wasaf*) between the two groups. Exaggerations of any kind are reprehensible. I consider the opinion of those who accuse the Imāmī doctors of reductionism erroneous, because they were the great figures of our religion. In the same way, I dismiss those who consider these men as impeccable guides and sources of imitation and present their adversaries as good for nothing . . . I firmly believe that the use of rational arguments not supported by the Qur’an and the *ḥadīth* is wrong; on the other hand, I think it is lawful to follow guidelines rationally deduced from the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* if they are not in contradiction with the letter of these sacred texts.<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, Majlisī sought to be the driving force behind the widest diffusion and expansion of Imāmī Shi‘ism. The fact that he wrote a large number of his doctrinal works in Persian, especially his monumental encyclopedia of Shi‘i traditions, makes him one of the most important figures in the Shi‘i revival of the Safavid era, whether among the elite or the generality of the faithful. It is true that, it is due to Majlisī, a considerable number of fundamental doctrines – but also popular beliefs and even superstitions reported by all kinds of sources – were widely disseminated. In this respect, Ḥujjat Balāghī is

<sup>35</sup> See the analysis of Ḥ. Ṭāramī, ‘*Allāma Majlisī*’, pp. 185–196; idem, *al-‘Allāma al-Majlisī wa kitābuhu* Biḥār al-anwār, chapter 5.

<sup>36</sup> See, among many other citations, *Biḥār*, vol. 1, pp. 85, 124; vol. 3, pp. 144, 231–234; vol. 4, pp. 28–33, 62, 137; vol. 5, pp. 43, 223–226, 332–334; vol. 6, pp. 110, 326–328, etc.

<sup>37</sup> *Al-Ḥadā’iq al-nāḍira*, vol. 1, author’s 2nd introduction.

<sup>38</sup> See R. Ja‘fariyān, ‘Rūyārūyī-yi faqihān va sūfiyān’, pp. 120–125; see also long abstracts of this letter of Majlisī in Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh, *Tarā’iq al-ḥaqā’iq*, ed. Muḥammad Ja‘far Maḥjūb (Tehran, 1339 Sh./1961), vol. 1, pp. 280–284.

right when he says that Majlisī sought above all to collect, safeguard and transmit as many Shi'i texts as possible even if he did not believe in the authenticity of some of them.<sup>39</sup> It is by pursuing this goal that Majlisī sought to establish the right balance between Uṣūlism and Akhbārism. But it is equally true that the search for a balance between two tendencies of unequal strength always serves better the one that is more powerful, in this case the Uṣūliyya. In such a situation, the balance borders on ambiguity: it was deemed necessary at one and the same time to protect Shi'i spirituality based on individual reverence for the imams and the community dimension of religion, and to ensure that this community dimension remained under the control of its jurists or experts of religious law who were almost always Principilists.<sup>40</sup> This ambiguity becomes even more evident when one takes into account Majlisī's political life, his proximity to the Safavid rulers and his repressive severity, as we saw earlier, with regard to those groups of the Shi'a which he perceived as deviant and vis-à-vis the non-Shi'a, such as Sunnis, Jews or Hindus.

Two of Majlisī's texts are particularly symptomatic in this respect. The first is the sermon for the coronation of Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn referred to earlier. In it, Majlisī tried to show that, contrary to what is stated in certain Imāmī traditions, government other than that of the Saviour of the End of Time (obviously he means that of the Safavid state) can be just.<sup>41</sup> Then, in his *'Ayn al-ḥayāt*, he took up the same arguments adding that it is true that those responsible for such power are not infallible (*ma'ṣūm, muṭahhar*), and obedience, or disobedience, to them is not equivalent to obedience or disobedience to God, but since they seek to establish justice (*'adāla, 'adl*), their government represents that of the Hidden imam and is therefore legitimate. Majlisī

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<sup>39</sup> Ḥujjat Balāghī, *Gulzār-i Ḥujja* (sic) *Balāghī* (Tehran, 1350/1931), chapter on Majlisī.

<sup>40</sup> I have already studied such ambiguity in Shaykh al-Mufid, the 'founding father' of the rationalist tradition in 'Al-Shaykh al-Mufid (m. 413/1022) et la question de la falsification du Coran', *RSO*, 87 (2014), pp. 155–176; also in Daniel De Smet and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, ed., *Controverses sur les écritures canoniques de l'islam* (Paris, 2014), pp. 199–229.

<sup>41</sup> For this text, see above footnote 16. Also, R. Ja'fariyān, 'Rūyārūyī-yi faqihān va ṣūfiyān', pp. 124–125.

went on to speak about two kinds of ‘right to power’: that of the imams, based on their divine election and that of those who govern justly (*hākīmān-i ‘adl*) who, as reason requires, seek to ‘implement what is good for the city’ (*ri‘āyat-i maṣāliḥ-i madīna*).<sup>42</sup> Thus, he argued that the *sine qua non* of a just government is its absolute conformity to religious rules and laws which can only be possible in the presence of a strict control of power by the religious scholars (*‘ulamā-yi dīn*), i.e., the jurists.<sup>43</sup> In other words, according to Majlisī, a legitimate, and thus doctrinally acceptable power during the Major Occultation, is one founded and governed by two pillars: justice (*‘adl*), guaranteed by the sovereign and his government, and law (*fiqh*) ensured by the jurist.<sup>44</sup>

Was Majlisī the Second aiming to establish balance and moderation or to maintain a strategic ambiguity? His approach must be considered in the historical context of the delicate balance that most of the Twelver Shi‘i scholars sought to reach after the Occultation of the Twelfth imam; the balance between the religion as an individual mystical relationship binding the believer to the imams, especially the ‘hidden’ one, and the safeguarding of a collective and institutional religion necessary for the survival of a community of believers.

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<sup>42</sup> Majlisī, *‘Ayn al-ḥayāt*, pp. 488–499.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 487, 490–491.

<sup>44</sup> See also Majlisī, ‘Ādāb-i sulūk-i ḥākīm bā ra‘yat’, in Majlisī, *Bist o panj risāla-yi fārsī*, pp. 176ff.





## The Akhbārī Movement and Literary Production in Safavid Iran

*Devin J. Stewart*

The Islamic world witnessed two major periods of Shi‘i political expansion, one in the 4th/10th and 5th/11th centuries and one in the 10th/16th and 11th/17th centuries. The Shi‘i dynasties that ruled substantial regions of the Islamic world during those periods – the Būyids in Iran and Iraq, the Fatimids in North Africa, Egypt and Syria in the first period, the Quṭbshāhīs in southern India, the Safavids in Iran, and others in the second – had major and lasting effects, not only on political history but also on the religious, intellectual and literary history of the Islamic world. Of all these Shi‘i dynasties, it was the Safavids that produced what arguably have been the most profound long-term effects. Thanks to the Safavids, most of the population of Iran converted to Shi‘i Islam, with the result that Iranian culture and Twelver Shi‘ism have become inextricably intertwined. Iran became the centre of gravity of the Shi‘i world in the 10th/16th century and has remained so ever since. The shrine of the eighth Ithnā ‘asharī imam ‘Alī Riḍā in Mashhad and that of his sister Fāṭima in Qum have been built up through centuries of donations and patronage and have become major centres of religious culture and learning. Shi‘i manuscripts from all over the Islamic world have been taken to Iran and are now in the major collections in Mashhad, Qum, Ardabil and Tehran. The present study examines one facet of these varied historical effects, the production of works related to the Akhbārī movement, in the broader category of the production of Shi‘i literature during the Safavid period.

Safavid literary production has been the focus of significant scholarly attention. In some respects, the Safavid dynasty, including not only the

shahs but also princes and princesses, as well as high officials of the realm, continued the patterns of patronage set by their predecessors. The lavishly illustrated *Shāhnāmas*, the *Khamṣa* of Niẓāmī and other canonical works of Persian literature, the royal chronicles, the biographical-anthological *tadhkiras* of poets that had been popular at the courts of Herat, Tabrīz and elsewhere continued to be written and patronised. However, considerable effort was put into certain novel forms of literary production particularly having to do with Shi'ī Islam. This was part of the Safavid policy to promote Twelver Shi'ism as the religion of their empire. Works on all aspects of Shi'ī doctrine and practice were patronised by the Safavid shahs, including creeds, expositions of the Twelver Shi'ī theory of the imamate, basic religious devotions, collections of prayers connected with the Shi'ī religious calendar, Shi'ī prayers generally, Lives of the imams and other figures from Shi'ī history, and anti-Sunni polemic. Famous works from the Shi'ī tradition of the Islamic religious sciences were abridged or translated into Persian, and introductory works were written in both Persian and Arabic.

Scholars who had immigrated from Lebanon, Iraq and Bahrain to Iran played a particularly important role in this movement, both in writing accessible works in Arabic for aspiring students of Shi'ī religious studies and in translating popular works into Persian. As a result, a considerable number of works were produced. Particularly noteworthy are those that al-Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī (d. 940/1534) composed in support of the Safavid dynasty's pro-Shi'ī policies, such as his books on the legitimacy of collecting the *kharāj* or land tax, on the legitimacy of anathematising the companions of the Prophet, and on the performance of the Friday prayer in the absence of the Twelfth imam, all of which justified the ideological positions and practices favoured by the Safavid shahs. There were also Shi'ī doctrinal works dedicated to the monarchs, such as the *Jāmi'-i 'Abbāsī*, the legal manual of Bahā' al-Dīn al-'Āmilī (d. 1030/1621), which was written in Persian and which was clearly intended to serve as an accessible standard reference work for a wide audience.<sup>1</sup> An important role in this sort of

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<sup>1</sup> See Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London, 2004).

production was played by scholars from Jabal ʿĀmil in Lebanon, who were specialists in Shiʿī religious traditions and had immigrated to Iran. Native Persian scholars more often produced similar works in Persian or translated fundamental works of the Shiʿī tradition from Arabic into Persian. The remarkable translation movement undertaken during the Safavid period is just beginning to be explored.<sup>2</sup>

Over the last several decades, considerable progress has also been made in the understanding of the history and thought of the Akhbārī movement, which constitutes a major facet of the intellectual history of Safavid Iran in its final century. Most of these studies have brought out aspects of the jurisprudential and hermeneutical theory of the Akhbārīs, refining the understanding of the ideological differences between the Akhbārīs and their opponents, the Uṣūlīs, providing a more substantial account of the adherents and salient works of the Akhbārī movement, and recognising the existence of considerable differences of opinion and approach among the Akhbārīs themselves.<sup>3</sup> One phenomenon

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<sup>2</sup> For some examples, see Yusuf Ünal, ‘Princesses, Patronage, and the Production of Knowledge in Safavid Iran’, in Mirjam Künkler and Devin J. Stewart, ed., *Women’s Religious Authority in Shiʿī Islam* (Edinburgh, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Juan Cole, ‘Shiʿī Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722–1780: The Akhbārī-Uṣūlī Conflict Reconsidered’, *Iranian Studies*, 18 (1985), pp. 3–34; Etan Kohlberg, ‘Aspects of Akhbārī Thought in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, in Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll, ed., *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Syracuse, 1987), pp. 133–160; Andrew J. Newman ‘The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Ṣafawid Iran. Part 1: ʿAbdallāh al-Samāhijī’s “*Munyat al-Mumārīsīn*”’, *BSOAS*, 55 (1992), pp. 22–51; idem, ‘The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Ṣafawid Iran, Part 2: The Conflict Reassessed’, *BSOAS*, 55 (1992), pp. 250–261; Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shiʿī Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City, UT, 1998), pp. 175–208; idem, ‘The Genesis of the Akhbārī Revival’, in Michel Mazzaoui, ed., *Safavid Iran and Her Neighbors* (Salt Lake City, UT, 2003), pp. 169–193; Mazlum Uyar, *Ahbārīlik İmami Şiasından Düşünce Ekolleri* (Istanbul, 2000); Robert Gleave, ‘The Akhbārī-Uṣūlī Dispute in *Ṭabaqāt* Literature: An Analysis of the Biographies of Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Bihbihānī’, *Jusur: UCLA Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 10 (1994), pp. 79–109; Robert Gleave, ‘Akhbārī Shiʿī Uṣūl al-fiqh and the Juristic theory of Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Baḥrānī’, in Robert Gleave and E. Kermeli, ed., *Islamic law: Theory and Practice* (London, 1997), pp. 24–45; idem, *Inevitable Doubt: Two Theories of Shiʿī Jurisprudence* (Leiden, 2000); idem, ‘The Qadi and the Mufti in Akhbārī Shiʿī Jurisprudence’, in Wolfhart Heinrichs, Peri Bearman and Bernard Weiss, ed., *The Law Applied: Contextualizing the Islamic*

that has not been satisfactorily explained hitherto is the broad role of the Akhbārī movement in shaping Safavid literary production. Overall, then, advances have been made in the understanding of both the production of learned works during the Safavid period and the contours and effects of the Akhbārī movement, but the intersection of these two phenomena has only been addressed in a piecemeal and incomplete fashion. The present essay is an attempt to provide an overview of the influence of Akhbārism on Safavid literary production, building on and expanding the work of a limited number of studies that mention the Akhbārī influence on particular works and genres.

### The Akhbārī Movement

The beginning of the Akhbārī movement may be dated to the first half of the 11th/17th century and more precisely to 1031/1622, when Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1036/1626-27) published *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya*, in effect the movement's manifesto. Although the Akhbārīs claimed to be revitalising an earlier trend in Twelver Shi'ism, and despite the fact that the exact term *akhbārī* had been used in Twelver Shi'i writings centuries earlier, such as in the manual of legal hermeneutics *Nihāyat al-uṣūl* by al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325), it is clear that this movement was a new phenomenon and not the continuation of an existing trend. It was not directly related to the thought of earlier thinkers labelled Akhbārīs in Twelver history. In *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya*, Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī decried two historical developments in the history of Twelver jurisprudence and legal hermeneutics. One was the adoption of a system for grading

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*Shari'a*, *Studies in Honor of Frank Vogel* (London, 2007), pp. 235–258; idem, 'Questions and Answers in Akhbārī Jurisprudence', in A. Christmann, Robert Gleave and Colin Imber, ed., *Studies in Islamic law* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 73–122; idem, *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shī'ī School* (Leiden, 2009); idem, 'Compromise and Conciliation in the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī Dispute: Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī's Assessment of 'Abd Allāh al-Samāhijī's *Munyat al-Mumārīsīn*', in Omar Ali-de-Unzaga, ed., *Fortresses of the Intellect: Ismaili and Other Islamic Studies in Honour of Farhad Daftary* (London, 2011), pp. 491–520; Rula Jurdi Abisaab, 'Was Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1036/1626-27) a Mujtahid?', *SSR*, 2 (2018), pp. 38–61; Etan Kohlberg, 'Akbārīya', *Elr*, vol. 1, pp. 716–718.

the authenticity of *ḥadīth* reports, including the levels of *ṣaḥīḥ* 'strong', *ḥasan* 'good' and *da'īf* 'weak'. The other was, as he put it, the division of Twelver Shi'is into two groups, the members of which are termed *mujtahid* 'one who is capable of arriving at independent legal rulings' and *muqallid* 'one who submits to the opinion and authority of another'. According to al-Astarābādī, both of these developments were due to Sunni influence.

The Akhbārī movement was intended to right what the Akhbārīs viewed as a historical tragedy. In their view, Shi'ī jurists had, over centuries, assimilated their legal system to that of the Sunni legal *madhhabs* to an unacceptable degree. At the same time, they had adopted a view of the religion that assigned religious authority to an exclusive group of scholars who attained their authority through training in rationalist legal hermeneutics. One characteristic of the jurisprudence adopted by this group was that they were willing to override the evidence of a *ḥadīth* report, which they considered a scriptural text, with probative value, in favour of a variety of rational arguments. The Akhbārīs argued instead that, during the occultation of the Twelfth imam, when direct, intentional contact with the imam was cut off, Shi'ī believers had to rely on recourse to the oral reports, or *akhbār*, of the imams, as preserved in the canonical Twelver Shi'ī collections, and interpretive priority should be given to these texts over any rational considerations. Their designation as Akhbārīs derived from their insistence on the idea that religious authority inhered in the texts, the *akhbār* of the imams.

Developments in the field of *ḥadīth* criticism played a critical role in sparking the Akhbārī movement. Jamāl al-Dīn b. Ṭāwūs (d. 673/1274-75) and al-'Allāma al-Ḥilli had written on *ḥadīth* criticism, but the main impetus for al-Astarābādī's manifesto was a more recent work by Zayn al-Dīn al-'Āmilī (d. 965/1558) and the scholarly disputes it had engendered. By applying methods of *ḥadīth* criticism that he had adopted from Sunni works to the canonical Shi'ī *ḥadīth* works, Zayn al-Dīn had created what the Akhbārīs viewed as an epistemological threat to the entire Shi'ī *ḥadīth* corpus. It was this threat above all that drove al-Astarābādī to write *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya*. He was intent upon defending the integrity of the *ḥadīth* corpus and particularly concerned about the assimilation of Shi'ī learned institutions to Sunni norms. The *akhbār* of the imams, in his view, represented the surest, indeed for most

intents and purposes the only, means of access to their guidance. The authenticity of the extant Shi'i *ḥadīth* corpus had to be upheld *in toto*. Furthermore, religious authority did not lie in a class of jurists but rather in the texts themselves. The Akhbārīs, like Martin Luther with the famous dictum *sola scriptura*, sought to locate authority in the texts themselves. Even if this, in a practical sense, was impossible, the implication is that in order for scholars to participate in Shi'i religious authority, they needed to consult *ḥadīth* reports above all other sources. One may argue that, in both cases, this was somewhat disingenuous attempt to argue that authority is not actually located in people. In the case of the Akhbārīs, it appears that, in essence, they were attributing religious authority to experts in *ḥadīth* above other categories of scholars.<sup>4</sup>

Zayn al-Dīn wrote two works on *ḥadīth* criticism, one of which has been lost, and one of which is extant. Zayn al-Dīn's student, Ibn al-'Awdī, lists in his master's bibliography the work *Kitāb Ghunyat al-qāṣidīn fī ma'rifat iṣtilāḥāt al-muḥaddithīn*, and Zayn al-Dīn mentions it at the end of his extant work on *ḥadīth* criticism, suggesting that it was incomplete but would be more comprehensive.<sup>5</sup> As far as is known, this work is not extant. The work that has survived is a basic text along with its commentary, the title of which Ibn al-'Awdī gives as *al-Bidāya fī 'ilm al-dirāya*, 'and its commentary'.<sup>6</sup> This work has been published several times and translated into English once.<sup>7</sup> In the colophon Zayn al-Dīn records that he completed the work on the eve of Tuesday, 5 Dhu'l-Ḥijja 959/22 November 1552.<sup>8</sup> The commentary,

<sup>4</sup> Stewart, 'The Genesis of the Akhbari Movement'.

<sup>5</sup> 'Alī al-'Āmilī, *al-Durr al-manthūr min al-ma'thūr wa-ghayr al-ma'thūr* (Qum, 1398/1978), vol. 2, p. 188; Zayn al-Dīn al-'Āmilī, *Sharḥ al-Bidāya fī 'ilm al-dirāya*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā al-Ḥusaynī al-Jalālī (Qum, 1432/2011), pp. 141–142.

<sup>6</sup> 'Alī al-'Āmilī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 2, p. 188.

<sup>7</sup> Zayn al-Dīn al-'Āmilī, *al-Dirāya: Sharḥ al-Bidāya fī 'ilm al-dirāya* (Tehran, 1360 Sh./1981); *Sharḥ al-Bidāya fī 'ilm al-dirāya*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad 'Alī Baqqāl (Tehran, 1361–62 Sh./1982–83); Zayn al-Dīn al-'Āmilī, *al-Ri'āya li-ḥāl al-bidāya fī 'ilm al-dirāya wa al-Bidāya fī 'ilm al-dirāya* (Qum, 1381 Sh./2002); Zayn al-Dīn al-'Āmilī, *Dirāyat al-ḥadīth*, English translation followed by *Introduction to Ḥadīth* by 'Abd al-Hādī al-Faḍlī, tr. Nazmina Virjee (London, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Zayn al-Dīn al-'Āmilī, *Sharḥ al-Bidāya*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā al-Ḥusaynī al-Jalālī (2nd ed., Qum, 1389 Sh./2011), p. 142.

entitled *al-Ri'āya li-ḥāl al-Bidāya*, is an interwoven commentary (*sharḥ mazj*), in which the original text, distinguished by overlining, is written into the sentences of the commentary, rather than being presented separately, after sections of the original text.

Zayn al-Dīn's work on *ḥadīth* criticism soon influenced the teaching of religious learning in Iran. His student Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Ṣamad (d. 984/1576), who studied with him and travelled and taught with him for decades, also became a proponent of the teaching of the subjects connected with *ḥadīth*. Ḥusayn reached the Safavid empire in 961/1554 and stayed there until 983/1575, the year before he died. The Safavid chronicler, Iskandar Beg Munshī, emphasises the point that Ḥusayn studied *taṣḥīḥ-i ḥadīth va-rijāl* with Zayn al-Dīn, in addition to instruction in the tools of legal interpretation.<sup>9</sup> Mirzā 'Abd Allāh al-Iṣfahānī reports that Ḥusayn played a pivotal role in promoting the study of the canonical Shi'ī *ḥadīth* works.<sup>10</sup> Shortly after arriving and settling in Iṣfahān in 961/1554, Ḥusayn wrote a work on *ḥadīth* criticism that is based closely on *al-Bidāya fī 'ilm al-dirāya*. It is essentially a rearranged, slightly expanded, version of the text. Ḥusayn reports that he completed the work in Mashhad, and he dedicated it to the reigning shah, Ṭahmāsp I (r. 930–984/1524–1576). It is possible that he completed the work later the same year, 961/1554, after undertaking a pilgrimage to Mashhad.

A third figure who was involved in the spread of the teaching of Shi'ī *ḥadīth* criticism was 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn al-Tustarī [or al-Shūshtarī] (d. 1021/1612). He was born in Shūshtar, and in his youth studied in the shrine cities of Iraq with al-Muqaddas Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ardabīlī (d. 993/1585). In 987/1579–80 he made the *hajj*, and on the way back he stopped in the town of 'Aynāthā in Jabal 'Āmil, where he received *ijāzas* from Ni'mat Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khātūn al-'Āmilī and his son Aḥmad. One *ijāza* is dated 17 Muḥarram 988/4 March 1580 and the other to the middle decade of Muḥarram 988/early March 1580. He apparently arrived in Iṣfahān after fleeing from

<sup>9</sup> Iskandar Beg Munshī, *Tārīkh-i 'ālam-ārā-yi 'Abbāsī* (Tehran, 1350 Sh./1971), vol. 1, p. 155.

<sup>10</sup> Mirzā 'Abd Allāh al-Iṣfahānī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā' wa-ḥiyāḍ al-fudalā'*, ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī (Qum, 1401/1980), vol. 2, p. 118.



Karbala around 1006/1598. Mīrzā ‘Abd Allāh al-Iṣfahānī suggests that he fled from Iṣfahān to Mashhad some time after this on account of some problem with the shah, but that he was restored to favour when the shah came to Mashhad, which must have been on the occasion of Shah ‘Abbās’s famous barefoot pilgrimage in 1009/1601. Al-Tustarī supposedly played an instrumental role in convincing Shah ‘Abbās to make the extensive pious endowment called the *chahārdah ma‘šūm* ‘The Fourteen Chaste Ones’. He returned to Iṣfahān with Shah ‘Abbās, who had a *madrasa* built for him where he reportedly taught hundreds of students. Many of the scholars of the next several generations who were trained in the *ḥadīth* sciences had him as their main teacher, including his son Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Tustarī (d. 1069/1658-59), and Mīr Muḥammad Qāsim Quhpā’ī (fl. 11th/17th c.), Mīrzā Rafī‘ al-Dīn al-Qā’inī (fl. 11th/17th c.), Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1660), ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Fāḍil al-Tūnī (d. 1071/1660-61), and Muṣṭafā al-Tafrishī (fl. 11th/17th c.). He died on 26 Muḥarram 1021/29 March 1612. Iskandar Beg Munshī reports in *Tārikh-i ‘ālam-ārā-yi ‘Abbāsī* that he had studied for thirty years with al-Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī.<sup>11</sup> His student, Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, wrote that when al-Tustarī first arrived in Iṣfahān there were no more than fifty students of the religious sciences in the capital, but by the time he died, about fourteen years later, there were over a thousand.<sup>12</sup> As Abisaab and Gleave have noted, together with Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, he was responsible for a surge in interest in *ḥadīth* scholarship before the Akhbārī movement, something that is particularly evident from the writings of his students. Robert Gleave has discussed al-Tustarī’s teaching of *ḥadīth* and *ḥadīth*-based elaboration of the law, referring to his ‘proto-Akhbārī *madrasa*’ in Iṣfahān.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Iskandar Beg Munshī, *Tārikh-i ‘ālam-ārā-yi ‘Abbāsī*, vol. 2, pp. 859–860; Al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *Amal al-āmil*, vol. 2, p. 159; Mīrzā ‘Abd Allāh al-Iṣfahānī, *Riyāḍ al-‘ulamā’*, vol. 3, pp. 195–205; Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khwānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt wa-aḥwāl al-‘ulamā’ wa’l-sādāt* (Qum, 1390–1392/1970–1972), vol. 4, pp. 234–235.

<sup>12</sup> Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khwānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, vol. 4, p. 241, citing Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī’s commentary on the *mashyakhā* of *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*. This would imply that he first arrived in Isfahan ca. 1006/1598.

<sup>13</sup> Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, p. 106; Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, pp. 163–165, 238–239.

In the next generation after Zayn al-Dīn, various scholars wrote several short works on *ḥadīth* criticism. Zayn al-Dīn's son al-Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1011/1602) wrote a short treatise on *ḥadīth* criticism as an introduction to his work on *ḥadīth*, *Muntaqā al-jumān*, which he completed in 1006/1597-98. Ḥusayn's son, Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad, wrote *al-Wajīza*, a similarly short work on *ḥadīth* criticism as an introduction to *al-Ḥabl al-matīn*, which he completed in Mashhad on 18 Shawwāl 1007/14 May 1599, and yet another similar short treatise as an introduction to his work *Mashriq al-shamsayn*, which he completed in Qum on 14 Dhu'l-Qa'da 1015/13 March 1607.<sup>14</sup>

The application of *ḥadīth* criticism to the Twelver Shi'i *ḥadīth* corpus posed an epistemological threat. According to Zayn al-Dīn and his student, Ḥusayn b. ʿAbd al-Ṣamad, many of the *ḥadīth* reports in the canonical Twelver Shi'i *ḥadīth* books could not be categorised as 'sound' or even as 'good', because their chains of authority were defective in some way. Either not enough information was provided about the transmitters in the first place, since there were simply missing links in the chain, or the transmitters were unknown or not Imāmīs, or there was insufficient evidence of their probity and reliability as transmitters. This critical stance presented a problem for the elaboration of Islamic law from the Twelver Shi'i perspective, because it threatened to remove from consideration many reports on which legal rulings had been based for centuries. With so much of the scriptural evidence removed, there was a chance that many traditional Twelver legal positions would be weakened or undermined.

It was in large part in response to this challenge that the Akhbārī movement emerged. They fundamentally opposed the *ḥadīth* criticism of Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī and viewed it as a faulty and alien import from Sunni *ḥadīth* criticism inserted into the Shi'i learned tradition. Their response to the epistemological threat was to champion the opposing view. They held that the canonical collections of Shi'i *ḥadīth* were of unassailable authenticity *in toto*. It did not make sense to try to perform a triage, separating out layers of varying probability and reliability,

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<sup>14</sup> Stewart, 'Genesis', pp. 177-178.

when the whole corpus was guaranteed.<sup>15</sup> In their efforts to promote their views and to bolster the authority of the canonical Shi'i *ḥadīth* collections, the Akhbārī movement exerted a tremendous influence on the production of works of Islamic religious learning, primarily in the Safavid empire and primarily in the 11th/17th and early 12th/18th centuries, but also extending beyond these parameters to lands outside Iran and into the late 12th/18th and the 19th century as well. The following is an attempt to outline the main genres that were strongly affected, building on and gathering together existing secondary scholarship but also examining particular primary texts in detail.

## **The Akhbārī Movement and Safavid Literary Production**

### *A. Akhbārī and Uṣūlī Legal Hermeneutics*

The first set of works that were engendered by the Akhbārī movement were direct polemical writings. These included, first and foremost, the work that inaugurated the movement, Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī's *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya*.<sup>16</sup> Though this book touched on a large number of topics, including law, theology, *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr* and philosophy, the fundamental message of the text had to do primarily with legal hermeneutics. Above all, it aimed to refute the hermeneutical claims and methods of contemporary Twelver Shi'i jurists. That this was the centre of Akhbārī thought and the basis of

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<sup>15</sup> I have discussed these developments in Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, pp. 175–208; Stewart, 'The Genesis of the Akhbari Movement'. Rula Jurdi Abisaab has criticised the views expressed there, and particularly the idea that the Akhbārī movement was motivated in part by resistance to the Shi'i jurists' assimilation of Sunni norms. She argues instead that the movement arose primarily because of factors internal to Shi'ism and that the Akhbārīs and their opponents were drawing on various ideas found in the majority Islamic tradition. She stresses in particular the Akhbārīs' scepticism regarding the epistemology and methods of the rationalist jurists and their rejection of Safavid legitimacy and the *mujtahids'* legal authority. See Rula Jurdi Abisaab, 'Shi'i Jurisprudence, Sunnism, and the Traditionist Thought (Akhbārī) of Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī (D. 1626-27)', *IJMES*, 47 (2015), pp. 5–23. I hope to address these criticisms in a future study.

<sup>16</sup> Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī, *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya, wa-bi-dhaylihi al-Shawāhid al-makkiyya li-Nūr al-Dīn al-Mūsawī al-Āmilī* (Qum, 1426/2005).

their movement may be understood from the fact that their opponents came to be known primarily as the ‘Uṣūlis’, indicating their dependence on *uṣūl al-fiqh*, the ‘roots of the law’, that is, jurisprudence or legal hermeneutics. *Al-Fawā’id al-madaniyya* engendered a number of other works in the same category, such as *al-Shawāhid al-makkiyya*, a refutation of *al-Fawā’id al-madaniyya* by al-Sayyid Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī b. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Abī al-Ḥasan al-Mūsawī al-Āmilī (d. 1068/1657-58). The most important continuations of *al-Fawā’id al-madaniyya* were written by Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680), *Safīnat al-najāh* and *al-Uṣūl al-aṣīla*.

This category includes a number of specialised discussions that list subsidiary issues related to the hermeneutical stances espoused by the Akhbārīs and their opponents. Andrew Newman has discussed one important example of this genre of text, that of ‘Abd Allāh al-Samāhījī (d. 1135/1722-23), which was titled *Munyat al-mumārīsīn*.<sup>17</sup> Robert Gleave has discussed a large number of other examples of such lists, both those that exist as independent works, like that of al-Samāhījī, and those that are embedded in larger works. He provides an appendix that identifies twenty-five of these texts, ranging in date from the 12th/18th century to the 20th century. A substantial chapter of his work, *Scripturalist Islam*, discusses the various ways in which these lists frame and portray the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī conflict.<sup>18</sup>

Other works address particular issues in the broader category of legal hermeneutics. A prominent doctrinal dispute in this area was that of *taqlīd al-mayyit*: whether one could adhere to, and base one’s religious practice on, the opinions of a deceased authority. Zayn al-Dīn al-Āmilī had written a work against this view, and his opinion represented a common view among the Uṣūlis. Many Akhbārīs rejected this position, along with the ideas that *mujtahids* had the exclusive right to interpret scriptural material having to do with law and theology and that non-*mujtahids* were required to follow the opinions of a living *mujtahid*. Zayn al-Dīn’s work rejecting adopting the opinion of a deceased jurist as authoritative, *Risāla fi ‘adam jawāz taqlīd al-mayyit*,

<sup>17</sup> Newman, ‘The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Ṣafawid Iran’, parts 1 and 2.

<sup>18</sup> Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, pp. 177–215, 311–314.

was completed on 15 Shawwāl 949/22 January 1543. He dedicated it to his student al-Sayyid Ḥusayn b. Abī'l-Ḥasan (d. before 980/1572-73), who was also his father-in-law.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting that Zayn al-Dīn wrote the work in the year following his announcement of his status as a *mujtahid*, 948/1542, something which suggests that the treatise was meant in part to support his claim to have attained *ijtihād*. He was apparently arguing against contemporaries who were still following the opinions of al-Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī, who had died in 940/1534 and was widely recognised as the most important jurist of the previous generation.

A representative text on the Akhbārī side of the debate is *Manba' al-ḥayāt*, by Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī (d. 1112/1701). Robert Gleave has discussed this text briefly in his book on the history and doctrines of the Akhbārīs.<sup>20</sup> Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī completed his treatise, entitled *Kitāb Manba' al-ḥayāt wa-hujjiyyat qawl al-mujtahid min al-amwāt* in Shūshtar in southwestern Iran on 6 Jumādā II 1100/28 March 1689. Though the title does not refer to Zayn al-Dīn's treatise, it is clear from al-Jazā'irī's introduction that he is undertaking a refutation of that work in particular. Al-Jazā'irī's remark that he came to this question after reading widely in Twelver Shi'i religious literature while writing his commentaries on *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār* suggests he was presenting it as an attempt to correct a historical deviation from earlier Shi'i positions, as is evident when studying the full span of Shi'i legal texts.

These two works, however, are only a small part of the literary production on this question. Āqā Buzurg al-Ṭihri'nī's catalogue of Shi'i works, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a*, includes twenty-one works devoted to the topic of *taqlīd al-mayyit* or *taqlīd al-amwāt* that were written between the 10th/16th and the 20th century.<sup>21</sup> The works that are clearly meant to uphold Zayn al-Dīn al-Āmilī's position on the topic, that it is forbidden to adopt the opinion of a deceased *mujtahid* and also obligatory for the layman to adopt the opinion of a living *mujtahid*, include the following:

<sup>19</sup> 'Alī al-Āmilī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 2, p. 188.

<sup>20</sup> Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, pp. 194–202.

<sup>21</sup> Muḥammad Muḥsin Āqā Buzurg al-Ṭihri'nī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a* (Qum, 1366 Sh./1987), vol. 4, pp. 390–393, vol. 11, p. 154.

*Taqlīd al-mayyit*, Zayn al-Dīn al-‘Āmilī (d. 965/1558)

*Taqlīd al-mayyit*, Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn (d. 1011/1601-2)

*Taqlīd al-mayyit*, Muḥammad b. Jābir b. ‘Abbās al-‘Āmilī al-Najafī  
(11th/17th c.)

*Taqlīd al-mayyit*, Muḥammad Bāqir al-Bihbihānī (d. 1205/1791)

Treatises on the topic that espoused the opposite opinion, allowing laymen to adopt the opinion of a deceased authority, are the following:

*Taqlīd al-mayyit*, Faḍl Allāh al-Astarābādī (fl. 10th/16th c.)

*Taqlīd al-mayyit*, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf b. Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Jāmi‘ī  
(11th/17th c.) *Taqlīd al-mayyit*, al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī (d. 1104/1693)

*Manba‘ al-ḥayāt*, Ni‘mat Allāh al-Jazā‘irī (d. 1112/1701)

*Taqlīd al-mayyit*, Sulaymān b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Māḥūzī (d.  
1121/1709-10)

*Taqlīd al-mayyit*, Mīrzā Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shirwānī (d.  
1098/1687)

*Risāla fī taqlīd al-mayyit*, Mullā Muḥsin b. Samī‘ (fl. early  
12th/18th c.)

*Taqlīd al-mayyit*, Muḥammad b. ‘Abd ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b.  
Aḥmad Āl ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Qaṭifī (fl. 12th/18th c.)

Overall, scholarship on this topic began before the rise of the Akhbārī movement in the 11th/17th century. Both Zayn al-Dīn and his son evidently wrote on the topic. Indeed, it is suggested that refutations were also written before the rise of the Akhbārīs, by Faḍl Allāh al-Astarābādī, a contemporary of Zayn al-Dīn, and ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Jāmi‘ī, a student of Zayn al-Dīn’s son. However, it is clear from al-Jazā‘irī’s *Manba‘ al-ḥayāt* and from other works by al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī and Sulaymān al-Māḥūzī that this topic was of significant concern to Akhbārīs generally. Moreover, the treatise by al-Bihbihānī shows that this issue was also one that the opponents of the Akhbārīs viewed as a crucial part of their general refutation of the Akhbārīs’ legal hermeneutics.

### B. Commentaries on the canonical ḥadīth works

A principal area of literary production that was spurred on by the Akhbārī movement was the publication of commentaries on the canonical Shi‘ī ḥadīth works: *al-Kāfi* by Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb

al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh* by Muḥammad b. Bābawayh al-Qummī (d. 381/991), and *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār* by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067). In the 11th/17th century a large number of commentaries on these collections was produced in Iran. Aside from the obvious intention to explain and elaborate on difficult or complex passages in these collections, such commentaries reflected an aim to bolster the authenticity of the standard Shi'i *ḥadīth* corpus, which had been called into question by the application of stringent *ḥadīth* criticism to the reports they contained. They also stressed the idea that the four canonical collections together form an integral whole that should not be split up or picked apart. The following lists of commentaries on the four canonical *ḥadīth* works represent those that are mentioned in *al-Dharī' a ilā uṣūl al-sharī' a*. I have excluded a number of works that al-Tīhrānī included on the grounds that they were produced long after the Safavid period.<sup>22</sup>

Commentaries on *al-Kāfī*:<sup>23</sup>

1. *al-Rawāshih al-samāwiyya*, by Mīr Muḥammad Bāqir-i Dāmād al-Astarābādī (d. 1041/1632).
2. Commentary by Rafī' al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Mu'min al-Jilānī (fl. 11th/17th c.), a student of Bahā' al-Dīn al-Āmilī (d. 1030/1621).
3. *al-Ṣāfi fī sharḥ al-Kāfī*, by Mullā Khalīl al-Qazwīnī completed 1064-74/1653-64.
4. Commentary by Mīrzā Rafī' al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Nā'inī (d. 1082/1671).
5. Commentary by Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī (d. 1086/1675).
6. *Mir'āt al-'uqūl*, by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699)
7. Commentary by Muḥammad Hādī b. Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī (fl. late 11th/17th c.).
8. Commentary by Ya'qūb b. Ibrāhīm b. Jamāl al-Ḥuwayzī (d. 1147/1734-35).

<sup>22</sup> Robert Gleave is working on a study of commentaries on *ḥadīth* works in the Safavid and later periods.

<sup>23</sup> Āqā Buzurg, *al-Dharī' a ilā taṣānif al-shī' a*, vol. 14, pp. 26–28.

Commentaries on *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*:<sup>24</sup>

1. Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1036/1626-27).
2. Mullā Ṣadrā, Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640), completed in Shīrāz in 1044/1634-35.
3. Anonymous, begun in Mecca in 1057/1647-48, uses philosophical language.
4. Ismā'īl al-Khātūnābādī (fl. 11th/17th c.)
5. *Shawāhid al-Islām*, by Mullā Rafi'ā, Rafi' al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ḥaydar al-Ḥasanī al-Nā'inī (d. 1082/1071).
6. Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad al-Sarawī al-Māzandarānī (d. 1086/1675), in four large volumes. He finished *Kitāb al-'Aql wa-faḍl al-'ilm* on 14 Ṣafar 1063/14 January 1563. In it, he refuted Mullā Ṣadrā's commentary. He also wrote a continuation, commenting on the next sections of *al-Kāfi*.
7. Muḥammad Ma'ṣūm b. Mīr Faṣīḥ b. Mīr Awliyā' al-Tabrīzī al-Qazwīnī (d. 1091/1680-81).
8. 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn (d. 1103/1692). He completed the commentary on the chapters of *al-'aql* and *al-'ilm*, and gave it the title *al-Durr al-manzūm min kalām al-ma'ṣūm*.
9. . . . b. Muḥammad Shafi' (fl. late 11th/17th c.).
10. Muḥammad Ḥusayn b. Yaḥyā al-Nūrī al-Māzandarānī (d. after 1133/1720-21), student of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī.

Commentaries on *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*, by Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī:<sup>25</sup>

1. Commentary by Bahā' al-Dīn al-'Āmili (d. 1030/1621).
2. *Ma'āhid al-tanbīh*, by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn (d. 1030/1621), grandson of al-Shahīd al-Thānī.
3. *Rawḍat al-muttaqīn*, in Arabic, by Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1659)
4. *al-Lawāmi' al-qudsiyya*, in Persian, by Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1659).

<sup>24</sup> Āqā Buzurg, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānif al-shī'a*, vol. 13, pp. 94-100.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., vol. 14, pp. 93-95.



5. Commentary by Mullā Ḥusām al-Dīn Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ b. Mullā Aḥmad al-Sarawī al-Māzandarānī (d. 1081/1670-71).
6. Mīr Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ b. Mīr 'Abd al-Wāsi' al-Khātūnābādī (d. 1126/1714),
7. *Mi'rāj al-nabih*, by Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1772).

Commentaries on *al-Istibṣār*, by al-Shaykh Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī:<sup>26</sup>

1. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn (d. 1030/1621).
2. Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1036/1626-27), incomplete.
3. Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1632), perhaps similar to *al-Rawāshih al-samāwiyya*.
4. 'Abd al-Laṭīf b. Abī Jāmi' al-'Āmilī (d. 1050/1640).
5. 'Abd al-Rashīd b. Nūr al-Dīn al-Tustarī (d. ca. 1078/1667-68).
6. Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī (d. 1112/1701). He first wrote a short commentary, then expanded it to form the work *Kashf al-asrār*.
7. Sayyid 'Abd al-Riḍā b. 'Abd al-Ṣamad al-Ḥusaynī al-Uwālī al-Baḥrānī (fl. late 11th/17th c.).
8. Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ b. 'Abd al-Wāsi' al-Khātūnābādī (d. 1126/1714).
9. Sayyid Muḥsin b. al-Ḥasan al-A'rajī al-Kāzimī (d. 1127/1715).

Commentaries on *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, by al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī:<sup>27</sup>

1. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Abī al-Ḥasan al-Mūsawī al-'Āmilī (d. 1009/1600-1)
2. al-Qāḍī Nūr Allāh al-Shushtarī (d. 1019/1610).
3. Mullā 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn al-Tustarī (d. 26 Muḥarram 1021/29 March 1612). Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī quotes this work in his commentary.
4. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn (d. 1030/1621).
5. Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1036/1626-27), incomplete.
6. 'Abd al-Laṭīf b. 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. Abī Jāmi' al-'Āmilī (d. 1050/1640).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., vol. 13, pp. 83-87.

<sup>27</sup> Āqā Buzurg, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānif al-shī'a*, vol. 13, pp. 155-159.

7. *Ihyā' al-aḥādīth*, by Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1659).
8. Muḥammad Ṭāhir b. Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Shīrāzī al-Qummī (d. 1098/1686-87).
9. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shīrwānī (d. 1099/1687-88).
10. 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (fl. 11th/17th c.).
11. *Malādh al-akhyār fi fahm Tahdhīb al-akhbār*, by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699).
12. An extensive commentary by Ni'mat Allāh b. 'Abd Allāh al-Jazā'irī (d. 1112/1701), in twelve volumes. Only parts of it are extant.
13. *Ghāyat al-marām*, by Ni'mat Allāh b. 'Abd Allāh al-Jazā'irī (d. 1112/1701), an abridged version of the previous work, in eight volumes.
14. Anonymous commentary which cites the works of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī and Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī.
15. Aḥmad b. Ismā'il al-Jazā'irī al-Najafī (d. 1149/1136-37).

Even though Āqā Buzurg was a very careful scholar, it is likely that important examples have been missed because they were uncatalogued and not accessible to him, because they had individual titles that did not make it clear that they were commentaries on one of the four canonical *ḥadīth* books, or because they have simply been lost. The lists provided above represent an attempt to indicate the scope of production of these commentaries.

Not all of the authors of these works were Akhbārī jurists, but it is nevertheless true that the Akhbārī movement provided the main impetus for their production. Very striking is the fact that Āqā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī does not record any such commentaries during the exceedingly long period between the 5th/11th century, by which time the canonical collections had been compiled, and the late 10th/16th century. But several commentaries were written before Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī completed *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya*. They include works by such authors as Ṣāhib al-Madārik, Mullā 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn al-Tustarī, al-Qāḍī Nūr Allāh al-Shushtarī and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn al-Āmilī.

In the 11th/17th century, there was an explosion in the writing of these works. Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī started the trend, for he wrote commentaries on *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, *al-Istibṣār* and *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, all listed in *al-Dharī'a*, and a commentary on *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu*

*al-faqīh* that has been discovered in manuscript as well.<sup>28</sup> The bulk of the works in these lists were written by Akhbārī scholars, or at least by scholars who were sympathetic to Akhbārī views and methods. Robert Gleave has discussed what may be taken as typical examples of this genre, the two commentaries on Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī’s *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*, one in Arabic and one in Persian, by Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1659). The first work, written in Arabic, *Rawḍat al-muttaqīn fi sharḥ Man la yaḥḍuruh al-faqīh*, was completed in 1046/1636–37. The second, *Lawāmi‘-i ṣāhib-qirānī*, also called *al-Lawāmi‘ al-qudsiyya*, and written in Persian, was completed in Shawwāl 1066/June 1656. Gleave has examined the *Lawāmi‘* and argued on the basis of this work that Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī was thoroughly Akhbārī in his methodology, not only focusing on *ḥadīth* reports in this particular collection, but also arguing that the *ḥadīth* of the imams constituted the main basis of all Shi‘i doctrine, whether theology or law. Gleave noted, however, that al-Majlisī argued for the religious authority of the scholars on this basis, and also that he had close ties to the Safavid court and accepted royal patronage.<sup>29</sup> This conclusion is a little surprising, given what is generally understood regarding his academic background, and that he was a student of Bahā’ al-Dīn al-‘Āmilī, the leading legal authority of the previous generation, and regarding his more famous son, Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, who is renowned as a leading representative of the Uṣūlīs and a fierce proponent of the authority of the Twelver jurists.

<sup>28</sup> Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarabādī, ‘*Hāshiyā ‘alā Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*’, Kitābkhāna-yi markazī-yi ihyā’-i mirāth-i islāmī, Qum, MS 2750, pp. 84–174; ‘Alī Fāḍilī, ed., ‘*al-Hāshiyā ‘alā Uṣūl al-Kāfi* li Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarabādī, jama‘ahā wa-rattabahā Mawlā Khalīl Qazwīnī (d. 1089AH/1678AD)’, *Mirāth-i ḥadīth-i shī‘a*, 8 (2001), pp. 229–410; ‘Alī Fāḍilī, ‘*Hāshiyat Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu’l-faqīh*, Mawlā Muḥammad Amīn Astarabādī (d. 1036)’, *Mirāth-i ḥadīth-i shī‘a*, 10 (2003), pp. 449–513; ‘Alī Fāḍilī, ‘*Hāshiyat al-Istibṣār*, Muḥammad Amīn Astarabādī (d. 1036/1626–7), Muḥammad Astarabādī (d. 1025/1616)’, collected by Muḥammad b. Jābir Najafī, *Mirāth-i ḥadīth-i shī‘a*, 13 (2005), pp. 35–125; ‘Alī Fāḍilī, ‘*Sharḥ Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*’, Kitābkhāna-yi ‘umūmī-yi Āyat Allāh al-‘Uzmā Mar‘ashī Najafī, Qum, MS 3789, cited in Abisaab, ‘Was Muhammad Amin Astarabadi a Mujtahid?’, pp. 59–60.

<sup>29</sup> Gleave, ‘Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī and Safavid Shi‘ism: Akhbarism and Anti-Sunni Polemic During the Reigns of Shah ‘Abbas the Great and Shah Safī’, *Iran*, 55 (2017), pp. 24–34.

Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī wrote several large commentaries on the canonical *ḥadīth* works, including *Ghāyat al-marām fī sharḥ Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *Kashf al-asrār fī sharḥ al-Istibṣār*, both commenting on the works of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī. *Kashf al-asrār* includes a substantial introduction, divided into ten sections termed 'jewels', in which al-Jazā'irī makes several fundamental points reflecting his goals and concerns. In his view, Shi'ī scholars who insisted on restricting the definition of sound *ḥadīths* and restricting the definition of probity, thus removing many transmitters and many reports from being considered reliable, did not take into account the critical practices of the famous compilers of Shi'ī *ḥadīth* and the types of corroborating evidence that were available to them. The fact that a certain transmitter had belonged to a non-Imāmī sect, for example, did not disqualify him as a transmitter, particularly if he adopted the correct doctrine at a later point. Al-Jazā'irī remarked that later scholars had been misled into thinking that they must adopt the material included in the canonical *ḥadīth* works on what appears to be blind faith, accepting only the authors' assurances that these works are based on earlier sources that are entirely reliable, on the grounds that the earlier sources are no longer available for inspection. In fact, he argued, there is a great deal of corroborating evidence that allowed later scholars to validate the authenticity of particular reports which appear to be inadequately documented. When al-Kulaynī did not provide full *isnāds*, for example, it was often because he supplied similar but more complete *isnāds* for other reports, so that familiarity with his *isnāds* generally enables one to fill in the ellipses. It is not that he was being lax or did not have well-documented material; rather, he did so merely to save space. Al-Ṭūsī followed a similar method, according to al-Jazā'irī, and, in addition, his *isnāds* and his use of sources are confirmed by the material contained in his bibliographical work, *Fihrist kutub al-shī'a*.<sup>30</sup> Overall, then, the Akhbārī method in such commentaries is clear: not only to explain the *ḥadīth* reports on which Shi'ī law is based but also to build up corroborating evidence and arguments to vindicate the methods of the

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<sup>30</sup> Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī, *Kashf al-asrār fī sharḥ al-Istibṣār*, ed. Al-Muftī al-Sayyid Ṭayyib al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'irī (Qum, 1408/1987), vol. 2, pp. 39–93; Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, pp. 257–259.

compilers of the canonical *ḥadīth* works and to prove that the material they contained was generally authentic and reliable.

A prominent example of a commentary that does not hold to Akhbārī ideological positions is *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, completed in 1044/1635 by the well-known philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā, that is Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Shīrāzī (d. 1045/1636).<sup>31</sup> In addition to this commentary, which addresses the *ḥadīth* of the imams, Mullā Ṣadrā also wrote three works that address Qur'anic studies: *Asrār al-āyāt*, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* and *Mutashābihāt al-Qur'ān*. In all these works, he used the commentary as a structure within which to address questions discussed in the scholarly tradition of Islamic philosophy without presenting it as material that falls outside the traditional religious sciences.<sup>32</sup> In *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, Mullā Ṣadrā used the popularity of *ḥadīth* commentary that had been established by Akhbārī scholars in order to write, it would appear, in a manner in keeping with the general scholarly trends of his day. However, he also introduced important aspects of philosophical discourse through the commentary form, criticising exoteric scholars of law and theology and presenting a portrayal of the intellect drawing on the theories of earlier philosophers.

Al-Kulaynī's work is particularly suited to this approach, because it accords tremendous importance to reason (*al-'aql*) and knowledge, suggesting that reason, or 'the intellect', the term favoured by the philosophers, is central to the *ḥadīth* of the imams and to the Shi'i faith in general. Andrew Newman has characterised *al-Kāfī* as a Qummī response to the rationalism of the Baghdadi Shi'i scholars of the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries, finding that al-Kulaynī stresses the point that all religious knowledge was based on revealed texts.<sup>33</sup> The

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<sup>31</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, ed. Riḍā Ustādī et al. (Tehran, 1383–86 Sh./2003–08).

<sup>32</sup> In general, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and His Transcendent Theosophy: Background, Life and Works* (Tehran, 1978); Sajjad Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī: His Life and Works and the Sources for Safavid Philosophy* (Oxford, 2007); Mohammad Rustom, *The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mullā Ṣadrā* (Albany, NY, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Andrew J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi'ism: Ḥadīth as Discourse between Qum and Baghdad* (London, 2000), pp. 94–112.

appearance of a chapter on *‘ilm* at the outset of the work may be explained, in part, as an attempt to follow the example of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), in which the *Kitāb al-‘ilm* is the third chapter, very near the beginning of the work, following chapters on ‘the beginning of revelation’ (*Kitāb bad’ al-waḥy*) and ‘faith’ (*Kitāb al-īmān*). The first section of this ‘Chapter on Knowledge’ is devoted to ‘the merit of knowledge’ (*faḍl al-‘ilm*), which is also found in al-Kulaynī’s chapter on the same. Given this correspondence, the chapter on *‘aql* in *al-Kāfī* stands out even more, because no such chapter occurs in al-Bukhārī’s work. One might suppose that the use of the term here signals an engagement with the scholarship of the Mu‘tazilī theologians, whose discussions revolved around dialectical reason. However, Mohammed-Ali Amir Moezzi argues that to interpret *‘aql* in this fashion is misleading and anachronistic. In his view, that meaning became prominent only at a later historical period, while in early Shi‘ism, and in most of al-Kulaynī’s *Kitāb al-‘aql wa’l-jahl*, *‘aql* constituted a principal and essentially esoteric feature of early Shi‘i theological arguments regarding the imamate that may be rendered as ‘hiero-intelligence’. According to Amir-Moezzi, in the term *‘aql* are encapsulated cosmogonic, ethical-epistemological, spiritual and soteriological dimensions. The *‘aql* is what God created before all else. It and its armies are parallel to the imams and their followers, and *jahl* and its armies are parallel to the inimical rulers and their followers. It is not an acquired skill, but a divine gift through which one may gain access to sacred knowledge. It is the thread that ultimately ties man to God, a cosmic entity, equivalent to the imam of the forces of Good.<sup>34</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā may have chosen to write a commentary on this work in particular because al-Kulaynī’s chapter *Kitāb al-‘aql wa’l-jahl* opened up the possibility of connections with the Neoplatonic concept of emanation and the active intellect.

Several scholars have argued that philosophy and mysticism constitute Mullā Ṣadrā’s main concern in *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfī*, while *ḥadīth* is instrumental to his presentation. Jari Kaukua has shown that Mullā Ṣadrā’s work engages directly with the Islamic philosophical

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<sup>34</sup> Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, tr. David Streight (Albany, NY, 1994), pp. 6–13.

tradition in a manner that would be obvious to fellow philosophers but not to outsiders. In particular, his crucial discussion of 'the intellect' early on in the work draws extensively on the *Risāla fi'l-‘aql* of al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), without citing it explicitly.<sup>35</sup> According to Maria Massi Dakake, the hierarchical epistemology and ontology he expounds in his commentary are essentially the same ones that appear in his expressly philosophical works. Attention to the *ḥadīth* corpus does not force him to adjust or accommodate his views. He expands the category of the *awliyā'*, 'God's wards', a traditional title accorded by the Shi'īs to the imams, to include others. The imams are thus in the company 'not of the exoteric Shi'ī religious scholars who claimed to be heirs to the knowledge and authority of the Imams, but of the saints and gnostics who in Ṣadrā's description look far more like Sufi mystics than Shi'ī devotees.'<sup>36</sup> It is clear, in this case, that adherence to the Akhbārī movement and a desire to support the Akhbārī ideological goals, especially the aim to bolster the authenticity of the canonical *ḥadīth* works, were not uppermost in Mullā Ṣadrā's mind when he wrote this work. Rather, his main goal was to expound and justify his philosophical system within an outwardly scriptural framework, drawing on a fundamental Shi'ī doctrinal work in the field of *ḥadīth*. Whereas most of Mulla Sadra's similar works focused on the Qur'an, the choice of *Uṣūl al-Kāfī* must have been conditioned by the popularity of commentaries on the canonical *ḥadīth* collections during this period, a result of the Akhbārī movement.

It is not surprising, then, that Mullā Ṣadrā's work drew the attention of his ideological opponents. Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad al-Sarawī al-Māzandarānī (d. 1086/1675) wrote another commentary on *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, in four large volumes. He also wrote a continuation, commenting on the later sections of *al-Kāfī*. He finished the commentary on the chapters devoted to reason and to the merits of knowledge, *Kitāb al-‘aql wa-faḍl al-‘ilm*, on 14 Ṣafar 1063/14 January 1653. This commentary on *Uṣūl al-Kāfī* was primarily a sustained

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<sup>35</sup> Jari Kaukua, 'The Intellect in Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary on the *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*', in S. Nizamuddin Ahmad and Sajjad Rizvi, ed., *Philosophy and the Intellectual Life in Shīah Islam* (London, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> Maria Massi Dakake, 'Hierarchies of Knowledge in Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary on *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*', *JIP*, 6 (2010), pp. 5–44, esp. p. 40.

refutation of Mullā Ṣadrā's work and formed part of a markedly anti-philosophical trend in Safavid Iran in the late 11th/17th century.<sup>37</sup>

### C. Re-collection of hadīth and related texts

Perhaps the most striking effect of the Akhbārī movement was the production of extensive works that reframed the entire Shi'i *ḥadīth* corpus. Among these were several that have remained extremely influential, despite the historical decline of the Akhbārī movement. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī (d. 1104/1693) completed the monumental work *Tafṣīl wasā'il al-shī'a ilā taḥṣīl masā'il al-sharī'a*, generally known as *Wasā'il al-shī'a*, which runs to thirty volumes in modern editions, in Mashhad in 1082/1671. It focuses on *ḥadīth* reports having to do with legal rulings, including all the legal *ḥadīth* reports of the four canonical *ḥadīth* collections in combination, as well as those from a large number of other early Shi'i works. This work made it more convenient for any interested party to look up the *ḥadīth* reports related to a particular topic without having to consult multiple works and to go back and forth between them. In this it served a purpose similar to that of the gospel harmonies of the Christian tradition, such as Tatian's *Diatessaron*, which combined the four gospels into one text that could be read on its own. It also served a rhetorical and polemical purpose, which was to stress the idea that the canonical *ḥadīth* works corroborated each other and formed a unified and complete corpus. Together, the canonical *ḥadīth* collections were greater than the sum of their parts, and their combined effect was to bolster the authenticity of each individual work. The work includes a final section devoted to *'ilm al-rijāl* and other related topics, also serving to support and justify the authenticity of the reports contained in the canonical works.<sup>38</sup> A similar objective may be ascribed to Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī's major *ḥadīth* work *al-Wāfi*, which also brought together the material of the four canonical *ḥadīth* works.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ata Anzali and S. M. Hadi Gerami, ed., *Opposition to Philosophy in Safavid Iran: Mulla Muḥammad-Ṭāhir Qummi's Ḥikmat al-Ārifīn* (Leiden, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> Al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī and al-Muḥaddith Mirzā Ḥusayn al-Nūrī, *Wasā'il al-shī'a wa-mustadrakuhā* (Qum, 1433/2011), vol. 22, pp. 404–765.

<sup>39</sup> Amin Ehteshami, 'The Pivot of Canonisation: Al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī and the Safavid Ḥadīth Discourse' (PhD, University of California, Berkeley, 2019).



The largest and most ambitious of these monumental works was *Biḥār al-anwār* by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699).<sup>40</sup> The work consisted of twenty-five large volumes in al-Majlisī's original plan, corresponding to 110 volumes in one of the modern editions. The work was a grand project involving not only al-Majlisī himself but also a number of students and assistants, including Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'iri and Mīrzā 'Abd Allāh b. 'Īsā al-Iṣfahāni. The kernel of the project was a work al-Majlisī completed in 1070/1659, entitled *Fihrist biḥār al-anwār* or *Fihris muṣannafāt al-aṣḥāb*. What had begun as a historical catalogue of Shi'i works evolved into a massive encyclopedia of Shi'i lore based on nearly the entire corpus of Shi'i literature as known in his day. The project continued for many decades. The earliest volume was completed on 1 Rabi' II 1077/1 October 1666, and the latest volumes – volumes 15–17, 19–20, 21–24 – were in an incomplete draft when al-Majlisī died in 1111/1699. These were eventually completed by al-Majlisī's student Mīrzā 'Abd Allāh b. 'Īsā al-Iṣfahāni.

The plan of the work according to the original volumes is as follows:

- Volume I. Knowledge
- Volume II. God's unicity and the divine attributes
- Volume III. Free will and predestination; death and the afterlife
- Volume IV. Defence of belief in the imamate
- Volume V. Stories of the prophets
- Volume VI. Biography of the Prophet Muhammad
- Volume VII. The imamate (*Kitāb al-imāma*)
- Volume VIII. The First *fitna*, or Civil War in the Muslim Community; the vices and nefarious deeds of the Sunni caliphs and others.
- Volume IX. Biography of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the First imam
- Volume X. Biographies of Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn (Second and Third imams)

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<sup>40</sup> On this work, see Karl-Heinz Pampus, 'Die theologische Enzyklopädie Biḥār al-anwār des Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (1037–1110 A.H. = 1627–1699 A.D. Ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte der Safawidenzeit' (PhD, Bonn, 1970); Etan Kohlberg, 'Beḥār al-anwār', *EIr*, vol. 4, pp. 90–93; Rainer Brunner, 'The Role of *Ḥadīth* as Cultural Memory in Shi'i History', *JSAL*, 30 (2005), pp. 318–360; Rasūl Jafarian, 'The Encyclopaedic Aspect of *Biḥār al-anwār*, Part I', *JSIS*, 1 (2008), pp. 1–17; Jafarian, 'The Encyclopaedic Aspect of *Biḥār al-anwār*, Part II', *JSIS*, 1 (2008), pp. 55–69.

- Volume XI. Biographies of the Imams Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, Ja‘far al-Šādiq and Mūsā al-Kāzim (Fourth–Seventh imams)
- Volume XII. Biographies of Imams ‘Alī al-Riḍā, Muḥammad al-Taqī, ‘Alī al-Naqī, and Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (Eighth–Eleventh imams)
- Volume XIII. ‘The Proof, or the Twelfth imam, and the Occultation (*Kitāb al-ḥujja*)
- Volume XIV. Cosmology and Natural History (*Kitāb al-samā’ wa’l-‘ālam*)
- Volume XV. Belief and Unbelief (*Kitāb al-īmān wa’l-kufr*)
- Volume XVI. Proper Social Mores and Etiquette (*Kitāb al-‘ishra wa’l-ādāb wa’l-sunan*)
- Volume XVII. Exhortations
- Volume XVIII. Ritual Purity (*Kitāb al-ṭahāra*) and Prayer (*Kitāb al-ṣalā*)
- Volume XIX. The Qur’an; Occasional Prayers (*du‘ā’*) and Litanies (*dhikr*)
- Volume XX. Alms; *Khums*; Fasting; Holy Days in the Calendar
- Volume XXI. Pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj* and *‘umra*); Medina; *Jihād*, Enjoining Good and Forbidding Wrong (*al-amr bi’l-ma‘rūf wa’l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*)
- Volume XXII. Pilgrimages to the graves of the Prophet, the imams, and others (*Kitāb al-mazār*)
- Volume XXIII. Sales, Lending, Endowments, Bequests, Marriage, Divorce, Slavery, Vows (*Kitāb al-‘uqūd wa’l-iqā‘āt*)
- Volume XXIV. Court Cases; Inheritance; Felonies (*Kitāb al-aḥkām*)
- Volume XXV. Certificates of Study (*Kitāb al-ijāzāt*)<sup>41</sup>

*Biḥār al-anwār* thus includes sacred history, both before the rise of Islam and after, including the biographies of the Biblical prophets, along with those who entered the tradition from Arabian pagan lore such as Hūd, Šāliḥ and Shu‘ayb, the Prophet Muhammad and his ancestors, the lives of the twelve imams, together with Fāṭima, and discussion of the Occultation of the Twelfth imam. It covers the main topics of theology, including the unicity, nature, and attributes of God, predestination and free will, faith and unbelief, and the theory of the imamate. It covers the sacred law as well, including the three major categories of ritual obligations, transactions and judgments. Several volumes treat other

<sup>41</sup> al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 1, p. 231.

aspects of religious life that are not strictly legal, such as prayers for particular occasions, the special holy days of the Shi'i calendar, proper social behaviour, ethics, and so on. Overall, the work covers four major areas of Shi'i lore: history, theology, ritual and law.

Despite the enormous size of *Bihār al-anwār* and the tremendous range of topics covered, certain subjects are omitted. A number of topics that appear in theological treatises that are traditionally termed *daqīq al-kalām* ('the fine points of theology'), and involve philosophical discussions of cosmology, theories of movement, and so on, do not appear. The legal material is decidedly skewed, partly on account of the source material but also partly because al-Majlisī did not have the opportunity to complete the later volumes of the work. A remarkable amount of material is devoted to daily prayer and other ritual obligations such as fasting and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Pilgrimages to the graves of the imams receive considerable attention as well, but the twenty-third and twenty-fourth volumes, which treat of transactions and judgments, are very slim in comparison to the other volumes. Al-Majlisī explicitly excluded discussions of philosophy and mysticism.<sup>42</sup> These last two lacunae are striking given the importance of such works in the Shi'i tradition. The Shi'i tradition of producing philosophical works goes all the way back to the writings of Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. after 187/803), a companion of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, and include writings by such authors as Ibn Bitrīq al-Ḥillī (d. 602/1203), Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), and Mītham al-Baḥrānī (d. 680/1281), not to mention Ghiyāth al-Dīn al-Dashtakī (d. 948/1542), Mīr Dāmād (d. 1042/1631), and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) from the Safavid period. On the Sufi side, one may mention *Asrār al-sharī'a wa-aṭwār al-ṭarīqa wa-anwār al-ḥaqīqa* and other works by Ḥaydar al-Āmulī (d. after 787/1385).

The title of *Bihār al-anwār* merits some attention. The full title is *Bihār al-anwār al-jāmi'a li-durar akhbār al-a'imma al-aṭḥār*. Etan Kohlberg has pointed out that the texts on which al-Majlisī drew as sources belonged to many genres: Qur'anic exegesis, *ḥadīth* compilations, biographies of the imams, historical, theological, legal and polemical works, and so on. Nevertheless, they all depended, to varying extents, on reports of the imams, so that the entire collection is imbued with these

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<sup>42</sup> Etan Kohlberg, 'Behār al-anwār', *Elr*.

reports. As Kohlberg remarks, ‘Most of this material consists of traditions from the Prophet and the imams, the significance of which was greatly enhanced by the growing influence of the Akbārīs in the 11th/17th century; and Majlesī, though not a declared Akbārī, was in sympathy with their belief that *ḥadīth* is the repository of all religious knowledge.’<sup>43</sup> I would only add that the fact that the title frames the work as a collection of reports of the imams should not be overlooked.

Karl-Heinz Pampus called *Biḥār al-anwār* a ‘theological encyclopedia’,<sup>44</sup> but while it certainly merits the label encyclopedia, the adjective ‘theological’ does not do justice to the work’s contents overall and in particular to the centrality of *ḥadīth*. In the introduction to *Biḥār al-anwār*, al-Majlisī presents himself as a scripturalist, suggesting that he had undergone an experience of conversion that led him to focus exclusively on the *akhbār* of the imams.

I found that all knowledge resided in the glorious Book of God, ‘which no falsehood may approach, from before it or from behind’ (Q 41–42), and in the reports of the people of the House of Messengership, whom God made the treasurer-keepers of His knowledge and the interpreters of His revelation. However, I realised that the rational capacities of the worshippers were not fully able to derive knowledge of the Qur’an from within it with certainty and that no one could encompass it save those whom God had selected for that purpose from among the leading figures of the faith, in whose House the trustworthy spirit had settled. I therefore abandoned that with which I had wasted a long period of my life, despite the fact that it is what is commonly appreciated in this age, and I turned to that which I knew would benefit me with regard to my afterlife, despite the fact that it garners little attention in our era. I chose to search for the reports of the pure, chaste imams, God’s peace be upon them, and I began to investigate them, giving them their due in terms of inquiry, and their full measure of mental engagement. Upon my life! I found that they were the Ark of Salvation, laden with the treasures of real prosperity, and I found them to be adorned with shining stars that rescue from the murk of ignorance. I saw that

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<sup>43</sup> Etan Kohlberg, ‘Beḥār al-anwār’, *EIr*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*.

their paths were clear and their roads manifest, with the landmarks of guidance and success raised up along their ways, and the voices of those who call to prosperity and salvation easily audible along their routes. Following their avenues, I arrived at lush meadows and verdant gardens, adorned with the flowers of every science and the fruits of every form of wisdom. Making the circuit of their stations, I witnessed well-travelled, populated routes that lead to every type of honour and high status. I stumbled across no piece of wisdom but that its clearest expression was to be found in those reports, and I attained no truth but that its origin lay in them.<sup>45</sup>

This extraordinary statement follows a passage in which al-Majlisī reports that in his youth he had spent a great deal of time and a considerable effort studying the sciences (*ṭalab al-‘ulūm*) in general. This passage then shows how his view of religious knowledge changed radically as a result of reflection. He came to realise the centrality of the *akhbār* among the other learned pursuits in which he had engaged, and which, he admits, proved to be a substantial waste of time. Now, in a new, enlightened state, he agrees with Akhbārī views to a surprising extent. In general, the most obvious concurrence is that al-Majlisī places an enormous emphasis on, indeed had an obsession with, the *ḥadīth* reports of the imams, making clear that in his conception, they are the most valuable element of Shi‘i scholarly tradition. He thereby implies that *Bihār al-anwār* is based entirely on the Shi‘i *ḥadīth* corpus. In addition, though he states that knowledge lies in two ‘scriptural’ sources, the Qur’an and the *akhbār*, he suggests that the content of the Qur’an is not directly accessible to human reason. Consequently, human beings require additional guidance in order to understand and interpret the Qur’an, and that is to be found in the interpretation of the imams, or more precisely, in their *akhbār*. It is striking that he does not mention any other sources of religious knowledge here. Indeed, he limits his attention to the two categories of the Qur’an and the *akhbār* despite the fact that he uses several terms that are standard in the arsenal of the Uṣūlīs, *istinbāṭ* (‘deduction’) and *naẓar* (‘rational speculation’). It is clear, then, that in al-Majlisī’s opinion, *Bihār al-anwār*

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<sup>45</sup> al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* (Tehran, 1376–1405/1957–1985), vol. 1, p. 180.

is not a theological encyclopedia, but a *ḥadīth*-based encyclopedia of Shi‘ism.

The outline of *Bihār al-anwār* shows affinities with the organisation of the most famous canonical collection of Shi‘i *ḥadīth*, al-Kulaynī’s work *al-Kāfi*. The fact that al-Majlisī devotes volume one to ‘ilm seems to reflect the discussion of reason and knowledge at the beginning of *al-Kāfi*. The title of volume seventeen, devoted to exhortations, *Kitāb al-rawḍa*, recalls al-Kulaynī’s use of the same title. The decision to term volume thirteen, which addresses the Twelfth imam, *Kitāb al-ḥujja*, may have been influenced by al-Kulaynī’s prominent use of the term in his chapter titles. One may argue that the grand scheme of the work owes something to al-Majlisī’s reading of *al-Kāfi*. This is not surprising, given that *Mir’āt al-‘uqūl*, another of al-Majlisī’s major works, is a twelve-volume commentary on *al-Kāfi*.

Even though it is clear that al-Majlisī was a *mujtahid* and fully endorsed their methods, *Bihār al-anwār* includes sections that fit with the Akhbārī’s characteristic hermeneutics. The first volume of *Bihār al-anwār* includes a section that addresses legal hermeneutics, including presentation of the traditional Shi‘i rejection of *qiyās* or legal analogy and sections devoted to the other principles of interpretation that may be derived from the *akhbār* of the imams. Indeed, this section is reminiscent of the work *al-Uṣūl al-aṣīla* by the well-known Akhbārī, Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, which similarly addressed legal hermeneutical principles that were endorsed by the imams, being sanctioned in their *akhbār*.

*Bihār al-anwār* may be connected to an enhanced focus on the historiography of the Twelver Shi‘i learned tradition spurred by the Akhbārī’s overall goal of corroborating the authenticity of the Shi‘i *ḥadīth* corpus and of proving an unbroken connection between the early works and contemporary Shi‘i scholars. The work has an impressive scholarly apparatus. The introduction provides a long list of the sources used in its compilation.<sup>46</sup> Al-Majlisī explains, in each case, how he authenticated the copies he used.<sup>47</sup> He provides a table

<sup>46</sup> al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 1, pp. 183–196.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 196–209.

of the abbreviations (*rumūz*) he used in the text to refer to these numerous sources without taking up too much space.<sup>48</sup> He describes how he refers to *isnāds* in an abbreviated manner to save space.<sup>49</sup> As is commonly found in works on *ḥadīth* criticism, he provides a section on names of transmitters and authorities that are easily confused.<sup>50</sup> At the end of his introduction, al-Majlisī provides his own chains of transmission to famous Sunni and Shi'ī works and explains how the authors he cites handled the citation of their sources.<sup>51</sup> The work also provides evidence of an enormous amount of archival research. Al-Majlisī mentions in his introduction to the *Biḥār* that he has had to travel far and wide to collect books; he was helped in this by friends and acquaintances.<sup>52</sup> These works had been ignored by his predecessors, who were convinced that they had been superseded by later works or did not contain anything of value. After an examination of the works in question, however, al-Majlisī found otherwise; they contained material not to be found elsewhere.<sup>53</sup>

The final volume of *Biḥār al-anwār*, *Kitāb al-ijāzāt*, merits special attention. It is devoted to *ijāzas*, certificates or diplomas of study from the Shi'ī tradition and also includes other texts that are not certificates of study in the strict sense but rather notes about paths of scholarly transmission or other aspects of the biographies and writings of earlier scholars. Overall the material has to do with the history of Shi'ī learning and the biographies of Shi'ī scholars of earlier periods. It is evident that these documents were collected from manuscripts found throughout Iran. The most important of colleagues who helped al-Majlisī collect rare books was his student Mīrzā 'Abd Allāh al-Iṣfahānī, who, along with Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī, worked for years on *Biḥār al-anwār*, as noted earlier. His biographical dictionary, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'* and his anthological work *al-Fawā'id al-ṭarīfa* show that he travelled widely in the Safavid empire, visiting dozens of libraries, *waqf*

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 209–210.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 210–216.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 216–219.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 219–230.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 180–181.

and private, throughout Iran.<sup>54</sup> He was evidently searching for manuscripts of rare works at the express request of his master, al-Majlisī. At the same time, he recorded marginalia from the manuscripts he encountered, including colopha, marginal notes and *ijāzas*, which were often written on the final pages or covers of books scholars had studied with a particular teacher. It was presumably he who collected large percentage of these *ijāzas* and other texts found in the *Kitāb al-ijāzāt* of the *Bihār*. Scholars have only begun to investigate the movement of manuscripts from the periphery into Safavid Iran and the efforts that Mīrzā ‘Abd Allāh and other scholars like him made to locate, identify and record them.<sup>55</sup>

One enterprise that is emblematic of the considerable commitment to historical investigation in Shi‘i letters in late Safavid Iran was the search for *Madīnat al-‘ilm*, a major collection of Twelver *ḥadīth* by Ibn Bābawayh. This compendium was extant in earlier eras but had been lost by the 11th/17th century. Especially given the size of the work, this was viewed as a tragic loss. According to the report of al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī in *Fihrist kutub al-shī‘a*, it was larger and more comprehensive than Ibn Bābawayh’s other collection, *Man lā yahḍuruḥu al-faqīh*. Ibn Shahrāshūb reported in *Ma‘ālim al-‘ulamā’* that while *Man lā yahḍuruḥu al-faqīh* comprised four volumes, *Madīnat al-‘ilm* comprised ten, thus being two-and-a-half times its size. Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad mentions the work in *Wuṣūl al-akhyār* as one of the ‘five’ canonical *ḥadīth* books of the Twelver Shi‘is. The way in which he mentions it suggests that it was extant, but this is not at all certain since he does not cite any specific passages. The latest authors definitely to possess the work and cite it were Raḍī al-Dīn b. Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266), who cited it in several works, and his student Yūsuf b. Ḥātim al-Shāmī (fl. 7th/13th c.), who cited it in his work *al-Durr al-naẓīm*. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī seems to have been convinced or at least hoped that it was extant, and he is reported to have expended large sums of money in his attempts to locate a manuscript of the work. He even enlisted the

<sup>54</sup> Mīrzā ‘Abd Allāh al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Fawā’id al-ṭarīfa*, ed. Al-Sayyid Mahdī al-Rajā’ī (Qum, 1385 Sh./2006).

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Rasūl Ja‘fariyān, ‘Mīrzā ‘Abd Allāh Afandī va-yāddāshthāyi vey dar bārayi mirāth-i maktūb-i shī‘a dar Baḥrayn’, *Ā’ina-yi mirās*, 4 (1385 Sh./2006), pp. 178–196.



help of the throne when he tried to acquire a manuscript of it that was said to be in Yemen.<sup>56</sup>

#### D. Tafsīr Based on Ḥadīth Reports

Another distinctive facet of literary production of the late Safavid period is that of *ḥadīth*-based *tafsīr*, which Todd Lawson has addressed in an excellent study.<sup>57</sup> It was a tenet of the Akhbārīs that the Qur'an is best understood through the interpretation of the Shi'i imams, and since their teachings are embodied in their reports, it follows that commentaries on the Qur'an ought to be based mostly, or even entirely, on the *ḥadīth* of the imams. It is no surprise, then, that several large Qur'anic commentaries produced in the late Safavid period by Akhbārī scholars were devoted to a large extent to explanation of the Qur'anic text through recourse to Shi'i *ḥadīth*. The following are among the crucial works of this trend: 'Abd 'Alī b. Jum'a al-'Arūsī al-Ḥuwayzī (d. before 1105/1693) completed his *tafsīr*, *Nūr al-thaqalayn*, in the late 1060s/1650s.<sup>58</sup> Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī completed his *tafsīr*, *al-Ṣāfi*, in 1074/1664, Hāshim al-Baḥrānī (d. 1106/1695 or 1108/1697) completed *Tafsīr al-Burhān* in 1094/1683 and Mulla al-Sharīf Abu'l-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-'Āmilī al-Futūnī al-Iṣfahānī completed *Mir'āt al-anwār* in the 12th/18th century.<sup>59</sup> These commentaries on the Qur'an share more than simply a reliance on *ḥadīth*, and they are also quite different from their Sunni counterparts which rely on Prophetic *ḥadīth*, such as the famous work of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*. As Lawson points out, these commentators were not literalists in the ordinary meaning of the word. Rather, they exhibited veneration for the pronouncements of the imams on Qur'anic texts, and they were concerned with promoting adherence to these among

<sup>56</sup> Āqā Buzurg, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a*, vol. 20, pp. 251–253; Eitan Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Ṭāwūs and His Library* (Leiden, 1992), pp. 240–241.

<sup>57</sup> B. Todd Lawson, 'Akhbārī Shī'ī Approaches to Tafsīr', in G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, ed., *Approaches to the Qur'ān* (London, 1993), pp. 173–210.

<sup>58</sup> 'Abd 'Alī b. Jum'a al-'Arūsī al-Ḥuwayzī, *Tafsīr Nūr al-thaqalayn*, ed. Ḥāshim Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Qum, 1362 Sh./1983).

<sup>59</sup> Abu'l-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-'Āmilī al-Futūnī, *Tafsīr al-Burhān al-musammā bi-Mir'āt al-Anwār wa-mishkāt al-asrār fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut, 2006).

the believers. In this sense, he argues, their outlook might be termed 'fundamentalist'. They hoped to show the harmony of the exegetical structure, based on both scriptural text and religious authority. In their view, the authority of the Qur'an and the authority of the imams went hand-in-hand. Thus, according to Lawson, reliance on Shi'i traditions and an unreserved approach to the imams' supranatural qualities led to a fusion of the sacred text and the imams, whereby the experience of reading and interpreting the Qur'an allowed one to participate in their charisma.

### E. Biographical Dictionaries and Works on Ḥadīth Transmitters

The production of biographical works was given a major boost by the Akhbārī movement. Indeed, Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī's mentor, Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Astarābādī, who urged him to write *al-Fawā'id madaniyya*, was an expert in *rijāl*, that is the transmitters of *ḥadīth*, and wrote a biographical work, *Manhaj al-maqāl fī taḥqīq aḥwāl al-rijāl*.<sup>60</sup> Also before the Akhbārī manifesto was published, the students of 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn al-Tustarī in Iṣfahān showed a strong interest in the genre of biography. Muṣṭafā al-Tafrishī (fl. 11th/17th c.) completed *Naqd al-rijāl* in 1015/1606, and Zakī al-Dīn 'Ināyat Allāh b. 'Alī al-Quḥpā'ī (fl. 11th/17th c.) completed *Majma' al-rijāl* in 1016/1607. A similar work, *Nizām al-aqwāl fī aḥwāl al-rijāl*, was completed between Shawwāl 1021/November 1612 and Ṣafar 1022/March 1613 by a student of Bahā' al-Dīn al-'Āmilī, Nizām al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Qurashī al-Sāwajī (d. after 1038/1629), and includes all the transmitters from the four canonical Shi'i *ḥadīth* works.<sup>61</sup> These biographical works focused relatively narrowly on *ḥadīth* transmitters. Similar in generic conventions and scope was Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Gharawī al-Ḥā'irī al-Ardabilī's (d. 1101/1690) *Jāmi' al-ruwāt*, a work which apparently took over twenty-five years to write.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Astarābādī, *Manhaj al-maqāl fī taḥqīq aḥwāl al-rijāl* (Qum, 1380–1381 Sh./2001–2002).

<sup>61</sup> Āqā Buzurg, *al-Dhari'a ilā taṣānif al-shī'a*, vol. 24, p. 191.

<sup>62</sup> Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Gharawī al-Ḥā'irī al-Ardabilī, *Jāmi' al-ruwāt* (Qum, 1403/1983).

Biographical dictionaries that were completed during this period and which may be said to have been inspired by the Akhbārī movement and their concerns include works that have become absolutely essential for the investigation of Shi'i intellectual history during this and earlier periods. These include al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī's *Amal al-āmil*, Mīrẓā ʿAbd Allāh al-Iṣfahānī's *Riyāḍ al-ʿulamāʾ*, and Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Baḥrānī's *Lu'lu'at al-Baḥrayn*. Al-Baḥrānī's work above all others shows the intimate affinity between Akhbārī sensibilities and the production of biographical dictionaries, for the entire work is framed as an *ijāza* or certificate of transmission from the author, Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī himself, to his two nephews, Khalaf b. ʿAbd ʿAlī and Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad.<sup>63</sup> Here, it is as if the biographical dictionary *in toto* has been incorporated into a chain of *ḥadīth* transmission.

#### F. Autobiographies

In Islamic letters, most academic autobiographies are closely related to the genres of the biographical entry and the biographical dictionary. Some scholarly attention has been paid to Twelver Shi'i autobiographies within the broader category of pre-modern Arabic and Persian autobiographies: the present author, Sabrina Mervin and Rainer Brunner have focused on various aspects of this topic.<sup>64</sup> I have pointed out previously, in a study of the autobiography of Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Baḥrānī, that the production of Shi'i biographies in the 11th/17th and 12th/18th centuries appears to have been spurred on by the Akhbārī movement and the concomitant attention shown to *ḥadīth* studies.<sup>65</sup> Rainer

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<sup>63</sup> Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Baḥrānī, *Lu'lu'at al-Baḥrayn fi'l-ijāzāt wa-tarājim rijāl al-ḥadīth*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-ʿUlūm (Manama, 2008), pp. 6–7.

<sup>64</sup> Dwight F. Reynolds et al., *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* (Oakland, CA, 2001); Devin J. Stewart, 'The Humor of the Scholars: The Autobiography of Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī', *IS*, 22 (1989), pp. 47–81; Devin J. Stewart, 'Capital, Accumulation, and the Islamic Academic Biography', *Edebiyat*, 7 (1997), pp. 345–362; Muḥsin al-Amin, *Autobiographie d'un clerc chiite du Ḡabal ʿĀmil: Traduction et annotation par Sabrina Mervin et Haitham al-Amin* (Damascus, 1998); Rainer Brunner, "'Siehe, was mich an Unglück und Schrecken trat!' Schiitische Autobiographien', in Rainer Brunner et al., ed., *Islamstudien ohne Ende—Festschrift für Werner Ende zum 65. Geburtstag* (Würzburg, 2002), pp. 59–68.

<sup>65</sup> Stewart, 'Capital, Accumulation, and the Islamic Academic Biography', pp. 347–348.

Brunner has also noted the connection between the production of autobiographies and the Akhbārī school, despite the fact that not all the authors of autobiographies were Akhbārīs themselves:

It was not until the seventeenth century that autobiographical entries showed up in reference works, as at that time there occurred an enormous increase in biographical literature. This productivity went hand in hand with the revival of the Akhbārī school, which accorded the authoritative character of the entire Ḥadīṭ corpus far more weight than did their opponents, the Uṣūlīs, and therefore had the greatest interest in the academic careers of transmitters.<sup>66</sup>

The interest in autobiography appears to be closely related, in the first place, to the interest in biographical dictionaries. A number of the autobiographies that were produced appeared as autobiographical entries in biographical dictionaries: the autobiography of al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī in *Amal al-āmīl*, that of Mīrzā ‘Abd Allāh al-Iṣfahānī in *Riyāḍ al-‘ulamā’*, and that of Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Baḥrānī in *Lu’lu’at al-Baḥrayn*. Ultimately, these works were connected to the grand project of building up the scholarly apparatus around the canonical works of *ḥadīth*. It was only natural to extend the urge to record, collect and compile the biographical data of past participants in the Twelver Shi‘i scholarly tradition to contemporary Shi‘i scholars and thus to oneself. These were not the earliest autobiographies in the Twelver Shi‘is tradition, but they were certainly influential.

As in other aspects of the Akhbārīs’ literary production, the 10th/16th-century scholar, Zayn al-Dīn al-‘Āmilī, may be seen as influential. He believed that, in addition to studying the lives of earlier scholars, it was important for scholars to document and record events in their own careers and learned production. His student, Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-‘Āmilī, refers to this several times as part of Zayn al-Dīn’s advice to his students.<sup>67</sup> Zayn al-Dīn wrote an autobiography,

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<sup>66</sup> Brunner, “Siehe, was mich an Unglück und Schrecken trat!”, p. 61.

<sup>67</sup> Devin J. Stewart, ‘An Episode in the ‘Āmilī Migration to Safavid Iran: The Travel Account of Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-‘Āmilī’, *JIS*, 39 (2006), pp. 481–509, esp. pp. 497–99; Devin J. Stewart, ‘Husayn b. ‘Abd al-Samad al-‘Āmilī’s Flight from Lebanon to Iraq’, *SSR*, 3 (2019), pp. 59–106, esp. p. 83.

much of which is embedded in the hagiographical work *Bughyat al-murīd min al-kashf 'an aḥwāl al-Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn al-Shahīd*, written around 966–980/1559–1573 by Zayn al-Dīn's long-time student-servitor (*khādīm*), Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Ḥasan b. al-'Awdī (d. after 970/1563).

At some point in 1078/1668 or later, Zayn al-Dīn's great-grandson, 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn al-'Āmilī (d. 1103/1691–92), compiled a two-volume anthology titled *al-Durr al-Manthūr min al-ma'thūr wa-ghayr al-ma'thūr*. Part of the anthology consists of a family history presenting the biographies of five members of the author's family, including himself:

1. Zayn al-Dīn b. 'Alī al-'Āmilī (d. 965/1558), great-grandfather.
2. Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn (d. 1011/1602–03), grandfather.
3. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn (d. 1030/1621), father.
4. Zayn al-Dīn b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan (d. 1064/1654), brother.
5. 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn (d. 1103/1691–92), the author.<sup>68</sup>

The biography of Zayn al-Dīn included an incomplete version of *Bughyat al-murīd*, with as mentioned above the autobiography of Zayn al-Dīn, or at least a substantial part of it.<sup>69</sup>

Another source of inspiration was the well-known auto-bibliographies from the tradition. In his comprehensive bibliography of Shi'i works, *Fihrist kutub al-shī'a*, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī included his auto-bibliography. Similar texts were well-known from the biographical works *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl fī aḥwāl al-rijāl*, by al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, and the *Rijāl* of Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥillī (d. after 707/1307). One indication of the popularity of the genre is the fact that Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī actually wrote two auto-bibliographies, one in 1089/1678–79 and one in 1090/1679–80.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Ja'far Muhājir, *Sittat fuqahā' abṭāl* (Beirut, 1994), p. 166.

<sup>69</sup> Devin J. Stewart, "The Ottoman Execution of Zayn al-Dīn al-'Āmilī", *Die Welt des Islams*, 48 (2008), pp. 289–347, here pp. 294–296.

<sup>70</sup> Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Fihristhā-yi khudnivisht-i Fayḍ-i Kāshānī*, ed. Muḥsin Nāji Naṣrābādī (Mashhad, 1377 Sh./1998), pp. 73–108 and 111–125.

Another early work that was an important influence on the Akhbārīs in connection with autobiographies was the *Mashyakha* of Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, in which he presented an account of his teachers and the authorities from whom he transmitted *ḥadīth*. Ibn Bābawayh included this text as an appendix to his *ḥadīth* collection, *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*, and it served the aims of the Akhbārīs exactly, for they wanted to argue that this text supplied all the necessary information regarding the transmission of the reports included in the collection, allowing modern scholars to restore the chains of transmission that appeared to be missing. The problem of documentation was thus only apparent, and the *Mashyakha* solved it. For this reason, al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī included much of the information from Ibn Bābawayh’s *Mashyakha* in the first sub-section of the concluding section of *Wasā’il al-shī‘a*, which addressed issues of *ḥadīth* criticism.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī devoted the final section of his commentary on *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh* to a commentary on Ibn Bābawayh’s *Mashyakha*. The result is a major biographical work, including not just entries on individual transmitters but also assessments of Ibn Bābawayh’s various chains of transmission, over 700 pages of printed text in the modern published version.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to ‘Alī al-‘Āmilī, prominent writers of autobiographies in late Safavid Iṣfahān include Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, Ni‘mat Allāh al-Jazā’iri and Mīrzā ‘Abd Allāh al-Iṣfahānī, all of whom were involved in writing works on Akhbārī method or ideas, commentaries on the Shi‘i *ḥadīth* corpus, or biographical works. Somewhat later Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Baḥrānī was engaged in similar work. Al-Baḥrānī’s autobiography is particular revealing because it maintains a theme of accumulation, both of wealth and of learning, throughout the text. It is clear that, as far as he was concerned, wealth consists of two parts, one’s inherited wealth (*tilād*, *talīd*) and one’s newly acquired wealth (*ṭārīf*, *ṭarīf*). In the realm of learning, one of the few things the effects of which can outlive this earthly existence and which provide one with a store (*dhakhīra*, *zād*) for the afterlife, are the

<sup>71</sup> Al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī and al-Muḥaddith al-Nūrī, *Wasā’il al-Shī‘a wa-mustadrakuhā*, vol. 22, pp. 404–478.

<sup>72</sup> Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, *Rawḍat al-muttaqīn fī sharḥ Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh li’l-Ṣadūq* (Qum, 1387 Sh./2008), vol. 20.

books one writes. Inherited wealth is represented in a biography or autobiography by the *mashyakha* or catalogue of teachers, while newly acquired wealth is represented by the catalogue of one's own compositions.<sup>73</sup> The autobiographies of this period combine the two.

Particularly interesting are the autobiographies of Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī and Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī, both of which are rather more emotional than is common in Islamic scholarly biographies and autobiographies. Al-Kāshānī gave his autobiography the title *Sharḥ al-ṣadr*. In the introduction to the work, which he wrote in 1065/1654-55 at the age of 58, he claims that he had no one in whom he could confide and to whom he could complain of his many troubles. This particular situation, the lack of an effective network of emotional support, led him to compose the work. Unlike the other autobiographical texts discussed here, *Sharḥ al-ṣadr* is written in Persian, perhaps on account of its relatively intimate, emotional content. Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī includes his autobiography as an appendix or epilogue to his anthology of general Shi'i literature, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya*. In it, he includes much of the usual information, his teachers, travels and bibliography, but his humour is striking, as are his accounts of trials and tribulations in his youth, when he suffered acutely from poverty and exploitative teachers.<sup>74</sup> It becomes evident that a major rhetorical strategy in the text is to deflect envy, the evil eye, by putting the apparent attractiveness of his current success into perspective through revelation of the miseries he had to suffer to attain it.

### G. Ḥadīth-Based Legal Manuals

Before al-Astarābādī wrote *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya*, Twelver scholars were already addressing the challenge to Twelver Shi'i law, that is *fiqh*, the actual points of law, as opposed to *uṣūl al-fiqh*, legal hermeneutics, represented by the stringent application of *ḥadīth* criticism to the reports in the four canonical *ḥadīth* works. Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn (d. 1101/1602) wrote *Muntaqā al-jumān* in 1006/1597-98 in order to

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<sup>73</sup> Reynolds et al., *Interpreting the Self*, pp. 216–223; Stewart, 'Capital, Accumulation, and the Islamic Academic Biography'.

<sup>74</sup> Stewart, 'The Humor of the Scholars'; Brunner, "Siehe, was mich an Unglück und Schrecken trat!"

present a restricted collection of *ḥadīth* reports that rose to the level of 'sound' (*ṣaḥīḥ*) or 'good, excellent' (*ḥasan*) according to the criteria of *ḥadīth* criticism but that would support the traditional Twelver positions on the main points of Islamic law. In 1007/1599, Bahā' al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī wrote a similar work, *al-Ḥabl al-matīn*, and then *Mashriq al-shamsayn* in 1015/1607, which included not only the main *ḥadīths* that served as the basis for legal rulings, but also Qur'anic verses. The Akhbārīs held a radically different view of the epistemological status of the reports of the imams, but they attempted to address the same hermeneutical situation that Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn and Bahā' al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī had faced, and this led them as well to write legal works that granted a larger and larger space to the oral reports of the imams, while also providing a critical analysis of the hermeneutical methods of their opponents.

The Akhbārīs' emphasis on adherence to *ḥadīth* reports and the rejection of legal analogy and similar rational methods led to distinct differences in the interpretation of some points of law. Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī, the founder of the Akhbārī movement, gave greater attention to legal hermeneutics and legal theory than he did to the points of law but he did, nevertheless, address some particular legal issues in his writings, including the question of the ritual purity of wine. His treatise on this issue, in which he upheld the view that wine, despite the fact that its consumption is forbidden, is not a ritually impure substance, provides an example of Akhbārī legal interpretation. His evidence for this position is, first, reports of the imams that allow believers to pray in garments that have been spattered by wine. Secondly, he stressed the declaration that wine is impure has been concluded on the basis of an invalid legal analogy between ritual purity and the consumption of food and drink. Thirdly, the fact that the Sunni legal authorities all agree that wine is impure, going against the reports of the imams, should indicate to Shi'īs that the Sunni view is incorrect and that the opposite is in fact the true ruling.<sup>75</sup> Another example is the distinct ruling that a Muslim man cannot marry two women who are *sayyidas*, descendants of the Prophet through his

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<sup>75</sup> See Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, pp. 97–99.



daughter Fāṭima, on the basis of a *ḥadīth* report. The logic behind this seems to be the analogy with sisters, for one cannot marry two sisters simultaneously, but this is not *qiyās* since it is based on an explicit report. Robert Gleave has analysed two treatises on this topic, the first by Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī, upholding this opinion on the basis of the report, and the other by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Bihbihānī, rejecting this opinion, largely on the basis of consensus and historical precedent.<sup>76</sup>

The prominent Akhbārī Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī wrote two legal manuals which straddle his 'conversion' to the Akhbārī school. In Rajab 1029/June 1620, when he was still quite young, he wrote the legal manual *Mu'taṣam al-shi'a fī aḥkām al-sharī'a*, adhering to what would come to be called the Uṣūlī method. In his later years he wrote a thoroughly Akhbārī elaboration of the law entitled *Mafātīḥ al-sharā'ī'*.<sup>77</sup> Another major work of Akhbārī law is Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī's *al-Ḥadā'iq al-nāḍira fī aḥkām al-'itra al-ṭāhira*. This work is a thorough and extensive treatment of the law, in eight volumes or more in modern editions, based throughout on the Shi'i *ḥadīth* corpus. Its introduction presents what is essentially a complete manual of legal hermeneutics or *uṣūl al-fiqh* from the Akhbārī point of view. The work may be fairly characterised as the culmination and high point of Akhbārī scholarship on the points of law.<sup>78</sup> It is likely that a number of additional, important Akhbārī legal works have not yet been recognised, in part because they may have been framed as commentaries on the standard legal works of the Shi'i tradition, such as al-Fāḍil al-Tūnī's (d. 1071/1660-61) commentary on al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī's legal manual *Irshād al-adhḥān ilā aḥkām al-īmān*.

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<sup>76</sup> Robert Gleave, 'Marrying Fatimid Women: Legal Theory and Substantive Law in Shi'i Jurisprudence', *Islamic Law and Society*, 6 (1999), pp. 38–68. Gleave discusses a number of other issues in his *Scripturalist Islam*, pp. 89–99.

<sup>77</sup> Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Mu'taṣam al-shi'a fī aḥkām al-sharī'a*, ed. Masiḥ al-Tawḥīdī (Tehran, 1388 Sh./2009); Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Mafātīḥ al-sharā'ī' fī fiqh al-īmāmiyya*, ed. Mahdī Rajā'ī (Qum, 1401/1981).

<sup>78</sup> Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Baḥrānī, *al-Ḥadā'iq al-nāḍira fī aḥkām al-'itra al-ṭāhira*, ed. Muḥammad Taqī al-Īrwānī (Najaf, 1958–1962). See Gleave, *Inevitable Doubt*.

### H. The Recuperation of Neglected and Marginalised Works

As mentioned above, the grand project to support the authenticity of the four canonical *ḥadīth* collections led to massive efforts to recollect *ḥadīth* and to locate early sources that could, potentially, provide corroboration of the material in these collections. Also mentioned above is the effort of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī to locate the lost work *Madīnat al-‘ilm*, by Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī. In some cases, the historiographical aspects of these scholars’ labours restored earlier works that had been rejected on ideological grounds. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Abī al-‘Azāqir al-Shalmaghānī was a jurist active in the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries who served as an agent for Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī (d. 326/937–38), the third representative of the Hidden imam. When al-Nawbakhtī was imprisoned, al-Shalmaghānī claimed to be a representative of the imam. On account of this claim, he was denounced and executed in 322/934, and his book on Shi‘i law, *Kitāb al-taklīf*, was rejected by the subsequent legal tradition. Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā voiced the opinion that one ought not to consult the work, but the question to which his *fatwā* responded gives the impression that this work was still widely used in the early 5th/11th century. However, during the Safavid period, the book was recovered, edited and presented as *Fiqh al-Riḍā*, avoiding mention of al-Shalmaghānī and focusing on the figure of the Eighth imam as the supposed source of the legal rulings contained in the work. Both Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī accepted the authenticity of the work, and it has remained a widely used text in Twelver Shi‘i legal circles.<sup>79</sup>

In addition to the monumental *ḥadīth* works and the commentaries on the individual canonical *ḥadīth* collections mentioned above, Akhbārī scholars also resurrected lesser-known *ḥadīth* works by writing commentaries on them. One notable example of this trend is

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<sup>79</sup> *Al-Fiqh al-mansūb li al-Imām al-Riḍā al-mushtahir bi-Fiqh al-Riḍā* (Beirut, 1990); Devin J. Stewart, ‘al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (D. 436/1044)’, in Oussama Arabi et al., ed., *Islamic Legal Thought: A Compendium of Muslim Jurists* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 167–210, in particular pp. 180–181, 199; Wilferd Madelung, ‘Alī al-Rezā’, *EIr*, vol. 1, pp. 877–880; al-Sayyid Ḥasan al-Ṣadr, ‘Faṣl al-qaḍā’ fi’l-kitāb al-muṣhtahir bi-Fiqh al-Riḍā’, in Riḍā al-Ustādī, ed., *Āshnā’i bā chand nuskha-yi khaṭṭī* (Qum, 1355 Sh./1976), vol. 1, pp. 86–136.

Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī's *al-Jawāhir al-ghawālī*, a commentary on 'Awālī al-la'ālī, a *ḥadīth* compilation that Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī (d. after 901/1506) completed in the winter of 897/1491-92.<sup>80</sup> Āyat Allāh al-Mar'ashī al-Najafī (d. 1990) reported that despite the great value of the work, it had been abandoned in libraries and eaten by moths. The work was neglected for three main reasons: the lax manner of *ḥadīth* documentation in the work, its mystical, philosophical and *ghulāt* content, and the fact that it drew on Sunni sources. Accordingly, Ibn Abī al-Jumhūr was accused of being a Sufi mystic, a philosopher, or one of the *ghulāt* Shi'is. In al-Mar'ashī al-Najafī's view, none of these claims was true.<sup>81</sup>

Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī had similar issues in mind when he wrote his commentary on 'Awālī al-la'ālī. This was one of his late works; he completed the first volume of the book in Shūshtar in Rajab 1105/February 1694.<sup>82</sup> He presented it as part of his larger project of commenting on the works of *ḥadīth*,<sup>83</sup> but it is clear that 'Awālī al-la'ālī does not belong to the same category as the other works Ni'mat Allāh addressed, namely *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār*. In the introduction, he makes it clear that the work had been viewed with some suspicion by earlier Twelver scholars. He reports that his teacher Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī did not at first favour the work, particularly on account of Ibn Abī Jumhūr's treatment of *ḥadīth*. The work contains many *marāsīl*, that is, reports attributed to particular imams without specifying all of the intervening transmitters, and the author generally did not indicate the earlier sources from which he derived the reports that he cited. In addition, other scholars accused him of associating with Sunnis, philosophers and mystics. However, al-Majlisī changed his mind about the book because of the positive assessment of Ibn Abī Jumhūr's reliability and great learning by

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<sup>80</sup> Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī, 'Awālī al-la'ālī *al-'azīziyya fi'l-aḥādīth al-dīniyya*, ed. Mujtabā al-'Irāqī (Qum, 1362 Sh./1983); Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī, *Ghawālī al-la'ālī*, vol. 1, p. 117.

<sup>81</sup> Āyat Allāh al-'Uzmā al-Sayyid Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī al-Marashī al-Nafajī, *Risālat al-Rudūd wa'l-nuqūd 'alā al-kitāb wa-mu'allifihī wa'l-ajwiba al-shāfiya al-kāfiya 'anhumā*, a treatise prefaced to Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī, 'Awālī al-la'ālī, vol. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī, *Ghawālī al-la'ālī*, vol. 1, p. 102.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

prominent Shi'ī biographers and other scholars and because of the quality of his other works. On these grounds, al-Majlisī felt that it was inappropriate to be suspicious of such an author's treatment of his sources.<sup>84</sup> Al-Jazā'irī viewed his own task as restorative. First, his work would preserve the author's own glosses or marginal commentaries (*hawāshī*) on the text, which were in danger of being lost. This often happened, Ni'mat Allāh pointed out, because when later scholars copy works, they often omit the glosses. Though he had seen many copies of the work, only two copies included the glosses, one in the library of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, and one, an autograph copy, in the library of a Shūshtarī *sayyid*.<sup>85</sup> In addition, through assiduous examination, Ni'mat Allāh was able to identify the sources for Ibn Abī Jumhūr's *ḥadīth*, including the four canonical *ḥadīth* collections and other works.<sup>86</sup> He passed over the particular issue of the radical content of the reports that are emphasised in the work. Overall, it is fair to say that the Akhbārīs' inclusive approach to *ḥadīth* reports re-integrated into mainstream scholarship aspects of the Shi'ī *ḥadīth* corpus that had been previously marginalised for centuries.

This reintegration was particularly important with regard to certain topics and ideological positions. Drawing especially on two works by Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī (d. 1107/1695-96), Christian Lange has recognised that the Akhbārīs played a notable role in popularising a particular Shi'ī eschatology. He describes *Ma'ālim al-zulfā fi ma'ārif al-nash'a al-ūlā wa'l-ukhrā* as a *summa* of eschatological traditions. A shorter treatise, *Nuzhat al-abrār wa-manār al-anzār fi khalq al-janna wa'l-nār* brings together a smaller collection of traditions describing Paradise and Hell. These works include stories of a legendary and fantastical nature, including many that portray the involvement of the imams in Paradise. For example, two stories about the Prophet's *mi'rāj* connect Fāṭima with Paradise. In one, Gabriel gave the Prophet a date to eat in Paradise, and this date settled in his loins and later caused the conception of Fāṭima. In another report, Fāṭima existed in Paradise in the form of an apple that the Prophet consumed and then was born

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 109–110.

<sup>85</sup> Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī, *Ghawālī al-la'ālī*, vol. 1, pp. 116–117.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

on earth.<sup>87</sup> An Akhbārī account of eschatology that Lange does not address is embedded in Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī's work *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya fi'l-nash'a al-insāniyya*, which he completed on 15 Ramaḍān 1089/31 October 1678.<sup>88</sup>

A number of other ideological emphases were associated with works inspired by Akhbārī methods and approaches. Etan Kohlberg has pointed out that the *ḥadīth* corpus collected in *Biḥār al-anwār* brought out three issues that had been suppressed in earlier centuries. The Akhbārīs revived significant material impugning the integrity of the Qur'an, suggesting that the enemies of the Shi'is had historically suppressed many Qur'anic passages, most of which referred to the special status of the imams.<sup>89</sup> They also stressed derogatory reports concerning the status of the companions of the Prophet. Polemical works against the companions formed an important aspect of Safavid literary production in general, beginning long before rise of the Akhbārī movement, with 'Alī b. 'Abd al-'Āl al-Karakī's *Nafahāt al-lāhūt fi la'n al-jibṭ wa'l-ṭāghūt*, a work dedicated to Shah Ismā'īl I (r. 907–930/1501–1524) and justifying the practice of anathematising the Prophet's companions, especially Abū Bakr and 'Umar. Other reports highlighted by the Akhbārīs stressed the suprahuman status and powers of the imams.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

The Safavid period saw a general increase in literary production of all kinds, particularly in the Shi'i religious sciences, including law, theology, general devotional works, conversion narratives and polemical literature. Alongside this general trend, Akhbārī ideology played an important role in shaping directions of intellectual debate in

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<sup>87</sup> Christian Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 204–209.

<sup>88</sup> Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya fi'l-nash'a al-insāniyya*, ed. Muḥammad Alī al-Qāḍī al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (Beirut, 2010), vol. 4, pp. 173–259.

<sup>89</sup> On the issue of the falsification of the Qur'an in Shi'i literature, see Rainer Brunner, *Die Schia und die Koranfälschung* (Würzburg, 2001); Etan Kohlberg and Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi, ed., *Revelation and Falsification: The Kitāb al-Qirā'āt of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī* (Leiden, 2009).

<sup>90</sup> Kohlberg, 'Behār al-anwār'.

a number of specific genres. The Akhbārī movement strongly affected literary production in Twelver Shi'ī environments in the 11th/17th and 12th/18th centuries. It involved many areas and regions of the Islamic world, including Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, the Hijaz and Mashhad, but it was concentrated overwhelmingly in Iṣfahān, which was not only the Safavid capital from the late 10th/16th century onwards, but also the cultural capital of the Twelver Shi'ī Islamic world up until the fall of the dynasty in 1134/1722.

The literary production engendered by the Akhbārī movement involved a large number of genres, including some that are perhaps not obvious. Some were polemical and directly related to the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī controversy, like *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya* and *Safīnat al-najāt*, or the lists of differences between the Akhbārī and Uṣūlī schools. Some had to do directly with *ḥadīth* reports, such as the commentaries on the canonical *ḥadīth* works, the massive, comprehensive *ḥadīth* compilations such as *al-Wāfi*, *Wasā'il al-shī'a* and *Biḥār al-anwār*. Others were at one or more removes from *ḥadīth* works, such as Qur'anic commentaries, biographical dictionaries and autobiographies. It is notable that the typical representatives of several of the genres produced, especially the commentaries on the canonical *ḥadīth* works and the comprehensive *ḥadīth* compilations, were large, multi-volume works. In some sense, the surge in production in Safavid Iṣfahān resembled that which had occurred in Baghdad in the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries, involving many works running to ten, twenty, or more volumes.

Even though the Akhbārī movement had been defeated by the early 19th century and in most contexts disappeared completely thereafter, the literary production they had inspired lived on. If the explicitly polemical works lost popularity, others did not. Al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī's *Wasā'il al-shī'a* has remained a fundamental reference work in Twelver Shi'ī legal scholarship. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī's *Biḥār al-anwār* is recognised as the premier encyclopedia of Shi'ī Islam. As Rainer Brunner argues, *Biḥār al-anwār* has taken on an emblematic function, representing the collective memory of Shi'ī society and standing as a monument to the Shi'ī tradition as a whole.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Brunner, 'The Role of *Ḥadīth* as Cultural Memory'.

The Akhbārī movement also played a crucial role in shaping the entire collective archive of Shi'i religious literature. Emphasis on the centrality of the *ḥadīth* corpus for guidance of the believer resulted in an expansion in the interests of members of the religious establishment who, for centuries, had focused rather narrowly on legal studies and limited any forays into other fields that were considered ancillary to law. The Akhbārīs brought about a renewed interest in, and focused examination of, the Shi'i *ḥadīth* legacy, thereby infusing a number of genres with innovative conceptions and methods. The insistence on bolstering the epistemological status of the canonical *ḥadīth* collections rendered the Akhbārī movement a restorative, historical project that involved locating, investigating, disseminating and commenting on those texts in the Shi'i tradition that could provide context or corroboration for the Shi'i *ḥadīth* corpus. Because the investigatory net was cast widely, the Akhbārīs ended up promoting the diversity of the tradition, resuscitating formerly marginalised works that had been considered doctrinally suspect. Throughout the Twelver Shi'i world, the Akhbārī movement played a crucial role in the collection, cataloguing and preservation of manuscripts and the recovery of neglected works.

## Postclassical Legal Commentaries: The Elaboration of Tradition in the Twelver Shi‘ism of Safavid Times<sup>1</sup>

*Robert Gleave*

### Islamic Postclassicism

The term ‘Postclassical’ has emerged in the study of Islamic intellectual history to describe (roughly) scholarly activity during the time between 9th–13th/15th–19th centuries.<sup>2</sup> The foremost genre of religious literary production was the commentary; the prevalent educational method was intense textual study in a scholar-led study circle; the principal institutional setting was the *madrassa*. All of these elements existed in the so-called ‘classical’ period (that is, between the 4th and 8th/10th and 14th centuries). There were commentaries, study circles

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<sup>2</sup> Use of the timeframe of the ‘postclassical’ is not without its critics. Following the publications of Roger Allen et al., *Arabic literature in the post-classical period* (Cambridge and New York, 2006), Thomas Bauer embarked on a detailed critique of the use of the term in the field of Arabic and Islamic Studies: Thomas Bauer, ‘In Search of “Post-Classical Literature”: A Review Article’, *Mamlūk Studies Review*, 11 (2007). On the other hand, we have the productive use of the time-period in Robert Wisnovsky, ‘The Nature and Scope of Arabic Philosophical Commentary in Post-Classical (ca. 1100-1900 AD) Islamic Intellectual History: Some Preliminary Observations’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 47 (2004), pp. 149–191. There is no equivalent term in use (apart from recent neologisms), as far as I can tell, in the various intellectual traditions of Islam, but that in itself does not make it a useful marker. See also, Robert Gleave and Asad Q. Ahmed, ‘Rationalist Disciplines and Postclassical Islamic Legal Theories’, *Oriens*, 46 (2018), pp. 1–5.



and *madrasas* during this period, though these features were not yet fully established as the prime elements of intellectual enquiry. Furthermore, the 'modern' period (from the 19th century onwards) was not devoid of these features: that is, there was no cliff-edge, sudden disappearance of these phenomena; they simply began to decline as the principal scholarly fora. What sets the postclassical period apart is the dominance (almost monopoly) of these modes of intellectual activity in the area of Islamic religious scholarship, and the stability of the institutional structures which supported them. This stability has sometimes been interpreted as unoriginality and stagnation giving rise to moribund, self-referential scholarship. One of the rallying calls of the so-called reform (*iṣlāḥī*) movements of the 19th century was that, intellectually speaking, 'Islam' had failed to advance due to the introspection of postclassical scholarship; this meant it was insufficiently robust to counteract new ('Western') forms of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> The supposed postclassical torpor needed to be swept away, and a renewed vision of Islamic scholarship was needed, the reformers argued – one which was more engaged with the needs of society, more dynamic in the face of social change and better equipped to rebuff both the military and intellectual challenges of imperial Western Europe.<sup>4</sup> This analysis was also promoted by early European academic

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<sup>3</sup> An example of this attitude can be found in the approach of the famous reformer Muhammad Abduh, whose comment on his own postclassical (Azharī) education caused some controversy: 'whose comment have a portion of true knowledge, I got it through ten years of sweeping the dirt of the Azhar from my brain, and to this day it is not as clean as I would like.' See Mark Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh* (Oxford, 2010), p. 103.

<sup>4</sup> Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, one time associate (and perhaps mentor) of Abduh, viewed traditional Muslim education as a hindrance to scientific and political development. The traditional Muslim scholar is '[y]oked, like an ox to the plow, to the dogma whose slave he is, he must walk eternally in the furrow that has been traced for him in advance by the interpreters of the law. Convinced, besides, that his religion contains in itself all morality and all sciences, he attaches himself resolutely to it and makes no effort to go beyond.' See Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, 'Answer to Renan', in *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani*, tr. Nikki Keddie (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1968), pp. 181–187.

scholarship on Islamic intellectual history. There was a twin focus on the 'classical' period of Islam, and recent innovations in Muslim thinking; the period between (the 'postclassical', one might say) was viewed as repetitive, intellectually uninteresting and tediously casuistic. One thing the so-called 'Orientalist' scholarship and the Muslim modernists agreed upon was that the postclassical model was not only intellectually uninteresting; it was no longer fit for purpose.

There has, though, been a renewed appreciation for the postclassical period and its modes of knowledge production recently. There has been discussion over whether the term 'postclassical' devalues the phenomenon under discussion, and is best seen as an imposition of European modes of periodisation on the history of Islamic civilisation. Recently there has been the assertion of Muslim neo-traditionalism which features a nostalgia for the intellectual structures of the period before modernism, coupled with a frustration with a perceived superficiality (and overtly political agenda) of so-called 'Modernist Islam'. In the academic literature, there has also been a new focus on the complexity and sophistication found in 'postclassical' works in the various Islamic religious sciences. First, there is a growing recognition that these works were not simply unoriginal repetitions of the great works of the classical period: novel interpretations, along with intellectual advances did occur, albeit within a pedagogical framework which was usually rigid and unbending. Second, there is a rejection that originality (as conceived in European humanism) is necessarily the only marker of intellectual vibrancy: evaluating a cultural product solely in terms of a perceived 'originality' is to prioritise a particular notion of intellectual worth (i.e. 'novelty') over another (i.e. 'established tradition'). Some commentators appear to subscribe to the view that 'real' originality cannot take place in a 'traditional' framework. But it can be argued that 'postclassical' has moved from being a term with negative connotations, to one which usefully describes a particular cultural form which was common to the major Islamic empires of the time, encompassed various sectarian contexts and traversed the myriad societal settings of the period. What was previously described as 'late medieval' or 'early premodern' now has its own identity, facilitated by the development of the idea of a distinctive history of 'postclassical' Islamic intellectual activity. This renewed focus on the

postclassical in the secondary literature may turn out to be a fad, and Islamicists shall, perhaps, return to the supposed excitement of the advances of earlier and later periods in time. But even if focus shifts, the current vogue for postclassical developments will leave a lasting mark, and it will no longer be acceptable for researchers to write with an implicit dismissal of half a millennium of Muslim scholarship.

In this chapter, I will endeavour to present a description and analysis of the postclassical legal literature of Twelver Shi'ism – both commentaries and monographs. In many ways the style of argument in these works is unsurprising, revealing features which one typically finds in postclassical legal works from different Muslim intellectual traditions and *madhāhib*; in other respects, the works are distinctly Ithnā 'asharī Shi'i, drawing on a history of scholarship which is exclusive, reserving a prominent place for particular works by Ithnā 'asharī scholars for commentary. In the same vein, the works analysed below display characteristics which are not, in many ways, specifically 'legal'. The subject of these books may be *fiqh* (jurisprudence), but the mode of discourse is characteristic of postclassical works treating other subjects (philosophy, theology, mysticism, etc.). In other ways, the works described below are virtuoso works in the specific field of *fiqh*; they are deeply involved in explaining legal principles for legal scholars, and do not engage extensively with non-legal works. As we shall see, the invariably legal focus of these works is, in itself, a feature of postclassical works, which often plough a furrow within a genre or discipline reflecting and reinforcing disciplinary divisions in the seminary curriculum.

### **Postclassical Ithnā 'asharī Shi'i Legal Scholarship**

Two political events fix the limitations of this study – the beginnings of the Safavid and Qājār periods (907/1501 and 1203/1789 respectively). These dates are partly convenient markers, but they do represent significant changes in the way Twelver Shi'ism was organised, this is reflected, in part, in the styles of scholarship in the period. This is not to say that scholarship did not take place outside the Iranian (or more broadly, Persianate) context – Arab Twelver scholars, in particular, were particularly active in areas under Ottoman control, and there

was a developing tradition of Twelver scholarship in India.<sup>5</sup> However, the establishment of the Safavid dynasty as an avowedly Twelver Shi'i political power changed the dynamic of Twelver Shi'i scholarship. The patronage of religious learning by the Safavids facilitated the elaboration of established modes of scholarly enquiry in Iran and, to some extent, elsewhere. In *fiqh*, this meant the entrenchment of the *ijtihād*-based approach, initiated by the school of Ḥilla and led by the Ḥilla-based scholars al-Muḥaqqiq and al-ʿAllāma. Later, Safavid possibilities for scholarly endeavour led to the expansion of previously neglected scholarly disciplines in Shi'ism, most notably philosophy and the collection of and commentary on *ḥadīth* (the former associated with the so-called 'Iṣfahān school of philosophy', the latter with the Akhbārī movement). The increase in resources encouraged greater intellectual activity, which in time led to greater diversity in the religious outlook of the scholarly classes. For these reasons, then, the beginning of the Safavid period is a useful point at which to begin any study of postclassical Twelver legal scholarship, even if not all the scholarship under consideration here was written in Iran (or through Iranian patronage). At the other end of the period under consideration, the beginning of the Qājār period marks not only the beginning of a new relationship between the Twelver Shi'i 'ulamā' and political power; it also coincides with (and is not unconnected to) the loss of the Akhbārī school's pre-eminence at the seminaries of Iraq and Iran.

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<sup>5</sup> It is, though, worth remembering that whilst Shi'i jurists may have been affected by the rise and fall of Iranian dynasties, much scholarship was taking place outside the Iranian realm. Shi'i scholars living under Ottoman control were particularly active, notwithstanding regular instances of political pressure, and many of the works discussed in this chapter were composed outside the Iranian lands. See Devin Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shi'ite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City, UT, 1998). Furthermore, in the later part of the period, Indian Shi'i scholars were active not only in the Iranian sphere of influence; there was also a burgeoning Shi'i scholarly community emerging in India itself. The period, then, is chosen partly for convenience (the 19th century legal material is voluminous and would be impossible to cover adequately in a single chapter) – see Juan Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1988); but also, in part, because there are significant intellectual markers (from the end of classicism to the revival of the Uṣūlī movement) and political changes (the rise of the Safavids and the establishment of the Qājārs) which bookend the period.

The much-discussed 'revival' of the Uṣūlī school under the leadership of al-Waḥīd al-Bihbahānī marked both a new relationship with political power and a major realignment of Twelver Shi'i scholarship. Al-Bihbahānī's revival, though drawing on the tradition of *ijtihād*-based legal scholarship of preceding centuries, had a quite novel character described, albeit patchily, in the scholarship to date. The emergence of this revived Uṣūlī school makes an appropriate marker for the terminus of the period under examination here.

The principal surviving legal literature from this postclassical period of Ithnā 'asharī scholarship consists of works of *fiqh* (including both the comprehensive works of jurisprudence and the shorter treatises on specific legal issues), works of legal theory (*uṣūl*) and legal *ḥadīth* collections and commentaries. There are few collections of Safavid *fatwās* and the wealth of legal documentary evidence is yet to be made available for extensive scholarship. I have discussed postclassical Twelver *uṣūl* and *ḥadīth* scholarship elsewhere; the emergence of the *risāla* as a method of juristic expression deserves a discrete treatment.<sup>6</sup> The focus of this chapter is the composition of comprehensive (or unfinished attempts at) works on *fiqh* and their commentaries. In the Safavid period, the writing of works of *fiqh* by Twelver scholars increased at an almost industrial rate, mirroring the explosion of *fiqh* composition in non-Shi'i postclassical settings elsewhere in the Muslim world, with a similar abundance of commentaries, super-commentaries and marginal glosses.<sup>7</sup> It is quite possible that *fiqh* works constitute the single largest genre of religious literary production in the postclassical Ithnā 'asharī context, though there are yet to be available the bibliographic resources to confirm this. The Twelver legal works of the period can be divided between independent monographs

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<sup>6</sup> See R. Gleave, 'Moral Assessments and Legal Categories: The Relationship between Rational Ethics and Revealed Law in Post-Classical Imāmī Shi'i Legal Theory', in F. Bouhafa, 'Towards New Perspectives on Ethics in Islam: Casuistry, Contingency and Ambiguity', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, themed issue, 21 (2021), pp. 183–207.

<sup>7</sup> See now Samy Ayoub, *Law, Empire, and the Sultan: Ottoman Imperial Authority and Late Hanafi Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 2020) and Alan Guenther, 'Hanafi Fiqh in Mughal India: The *Fatāwā-i 'Ālamgīrī*', in Richard Eaton, ed., *India's Islamic Tradition, 711–1750* (New Delhi, 2003), pp. 207–230.

and commentaries, with the latter probably being more numerous. Independent monographs were, in the main, the prerogative of the established, respected scholar. To compose a monographic treatment of all areas of jurisprudence is, in a sense, to propose that one's new monograph should be the subject of subsequent teaching and commentarial activity. Writing such a monograph would, in the main, be attempted only by an established scholar who has a sufficient following not only to teach the text himself (perhaps thereby creating an 'auto-commentary'), but also for his students and their students to teach the text and produce subsequent commentaries.<sup>8</sup>

Commentaries, then, are often the product of teaching classes, where the base text (*matn*) was taught and explained by a teacher (sometimes the *matn*'s author) to a group of students. The teacher's comments formed the basis for the commentary (*sharḥ* or *ḥāshiya*). He (the teacher, almost all of whom were male) might commit these comments to the paper himself (often in the margins of the *matn* textbook), or one of the students would record them, and this became a new work which was then transmitted, copied and studied along with the *matn*. This new work was, sometimes, the subject of additional commentary (i.e. supercommentary) and on occasions the supercommentary itself was the subject of commentary (super-supercommentary, one might say).<sup>9</sup> Examples of the style and format of each of these different types of legal writing (monograph/*matn*, auto-commentary, commentary, supercommentary) are given in the exposition below, though it should be noted that the boundaries between these styles of writing were hardly fixed either in Twelver Shi'ī or other postclassical intellectual traditions.

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<sup>8</sup> For example, al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, who will be discussed in greater detail below, wrote a work of law titled *Talkhīṣ al-marām fī ma'rifat al-aḥkām*; he then wrote a commentary (*sharḥ*) on it called *Ghāyat al-Aḥkām fī taṣḥīḥ talkhīṣ al-marām*, Āqā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a* (Najaf, 1936), vol. 16, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> For example, there is an astronomical work titled *al-Mulakhkhas* by Maḥmūd al-Jaghmīnī (whose death date is uncertain but who lived in the 8th/14th century); this was subject to a commentary by Qāḍizāda al-Rūmī, a 9th/15th-century scholar. This commentary then received a supercommentary by al-Shaykh al-Bahā'ī, the great Safavid scholar, whose pupil wrote a *ḥāshiya* on al-Shaykh al-Bahā'ī's commentary, thereby creating a super-supercommentary on the base text. Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 6, p. 123.

### ***Fiqh* texts, Commentaries and Supercommentaries**

In the postclassical period, there were, broadly speaking, three types of *fiqh* literature being composed: (1) commentaries on existing *fiqh* works (and supercommentaries on those commentaries); (2) new, independent *fiqh* works and (3) short treatises (*rasā'il*, sing. *risāla*) on specific (usually controversial) *fiqh* questions (e.g. a *risāla* on Friday prayer, a *risāla* on the permissibility of smoking tobacco, etc). The first of these literary activities (the production of commentaries and supercommentaries) comprise the bulk of legal literature from the period. It is this body of literature which is the focus of this chapter, as it reveals much about the dynamics of legal thinking during the period. The second category, new works of *fiqh*, were also the subject of commentary in the period and hence examples from new works and their commentaries are included below also. As these works became the standard textbooks in Shi'i seminaries (which experienced a period of sustained growth in Safavid Iran), a series of supercommentaries (sometimes no more than teaching notes) are produced. In addition to all this, there is the rise of the legal *risāla* as a form of intellectual exchange in the Safavid period – this important development deserves a detailed separate study.

The terminology used for commentaries in the biobibliographical literature is reasonably stable, though not without occasional ambiguities. The base text is the *matn* (pl. *mutūn*); some *mutūn* are intentionally compressed (i.e. are *mukhtaṣars*) to aide memorisation and to invite commentary, making them intentionally difficult to read (or giving only partial understanding) without the assistance of a teacher and his commentary (oral or otherwise). Indeed, one of the four popular classical *mutūn* has the title *mukhtaṣar* – though this is because it is an abbreviation of another, already abbreviated, text. What should be noted about all these texts is the low level of rule justification found in them. As we shall see, these texts are characterised by a statement of the rules, with very little discussion of alternative rules, or explicit justification for the rules given. They are, in the main, compressed handbooks of regulations, and this is a phenomenon common to both the Ithnā 'asharī jurists and those in other classical Islamic intellectual traditions. Whilst books from the classical period were the popular contenders for postclassical commentary, there were

new *mukhtaṣars* written in the postclassical period which spawned commentaries and occasionally supercommentaries. They represent a continuation rather than a break with practices established in the classical period.

In the Ithnā ‘asharī biobibliographical literature, the *sharḥ* (pl. *shurūḥ*) is probably the most common name for a commentary. The *sharḥ* is sometimes distinguished from the *ḥāshiya* (pl. *ḥawāshī*, occasional comments), of which there are also many listed. It is commonly said that a *sharḥ* commented on every element of the text, whilst a *ḥāshiya* focused on selected phrases deemed worthy of comment. Notwithstanding this distinction, the difference between a *sharḥ* and a *ḥāshiya* is not always clear, though, and sometimes the terms are used interchangeably. Biobibliographers sometimes make the point that an author’s *ḥāshiya* might actually be the same as the author’s *sharḥ*; on rare occasions (for this period at least), there is also a record of *ta‘liqāt* (sing. *ta‘liqa*) on a work (‘occasional remarks’, one might call them), which, the biobibliographers add, could actually be an indirect reference to the author’s *ḥāshiya*, or even his *sharḥ*, rather than a separate work. Some authors are recorded as composing both a *sharḥ* and a *ḥāshiya* on the same work, and the biobibliographers are explicit in saying these are separate works, usually having seen copies of both works. Whilst there exist inconsistent formal definitions of each category of commentary (*sharḥ*, *ḥāshiya*, *ta‘liqa*), these do not always appear to correspond perfectly to how the terms are used in titles and descriptions found in biobibliographical sources. In the analysis below, works called by all these terms are given below: they may represent different forms of commentarial activity, but the various styles of commentary discussed below do not perfectly match up with the different titles given to books of commentary. In the biobibliographical literature, these broad categories are supplemented by various subcategories. For example, the *sharḥ bi’l-qawl* (‘commentary by statement’) is described as ‘on the pattern of *his statement*, then *I say*’ (*qawluhu aqūlu*).<sup>10</sup> *Sharḥ mamzūj* (also called *sharḥ mazj* and *sharḥ mazjī*, ‘blended commentary’) is glossed as ‘the commentator mentions the phrase from the *matn* without indicating it with *qawluhu*,

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī‘a*, vol. 14, p. 50.



or *qāla* or *matn* or anything else; then he gives a commentary on it.<sup>11</sup> Commonly, the *sharḥ mamzūj* is understood to be a commentary which is inserted between the words and phrases of the *matn* text which clarifies and expands on the *matn* but does not disrupt the grammatical flow of the original text. The effect is to create a new 'blended' text, which might then become the subject of additional commentary. The various terms appear reasonably fluid, as in the example 'this is a *sharḥ mazjī* in the form of a *ta'liq*',<sup>12</sup> or more simply 'a *sharḥ* in the form of *ta'liq*'<sup>13</sup> or 'a *sharḥ* in the form of a *ta'liq*, abbreviated (*mukhtaṣar*) with the title *qawluhu aqūlu*'.<sup>14</sup> Some of these classifications and subclassifications can be seen to be useful when examining the commentaries themselves (see below).

In the 'postclassical' period, many commentaries were produced on 'classical' works of Ithnā 'asharī *fiqh* (that is, works written in the preceding period; roughly speaking, before 800/1400). Four were the focus of extensive commentary – outstripping other classical works in popularity. These are:

1. *Sharā'i' al-Islām* of al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī (Ja'far b. al-Ḥasan b. Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd al-Ḥillī, d. 676/1277).
2. *al-Mukhtaṣar al-nāfi'* of al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī – this, according to al-Muḥaqqiq himself is an abbreviation of the author's *Sharā'i' al-Islām* (hence, so it is stated, the name, *mukhtaṣar/legal breviary*).
3. *Irshād al-adhḥān* of al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī (al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, d. 726/1325).
4. *Qawā'id al-aḥkām* of al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī.

These works became the foremost base-texts for commentary in the postclassical period, although there are other texts which received commentary in this period.<sup>15</sup> A brief survey of selected biobibliographical data records over 110 commentaries on these four

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., vol. 13, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., vol. 14, p. 63.

<sup>15</sup> Examples include al-'Allāma's *Mukhtalaf al-shī'a* and his *Tabṣirat al-muta'allimīn*.

works alone in the Safavid period (along with many both before and after). Many others are unreferenced in these sources but are extant, listed in the manuscript catalogues. This indicates that there are probably many more waiting to be uncovered in library collections as yet uncatalogued. From the available data, the most popular work is *Irshād al-adhhān*, with nearly forty commentaries recorded in this period; if one includes the post-Safavid period, though, there is a shift to the *Sharāʿiʿ al-Islām*, which becomes, for reasons that are not entirely clear, the most popular by some margin. Some of these commentaries became so well known that their stature eclipsed that of the original *matn*.<sup>16</sup> In time, the commentary text became the focus of study, meaning any understanding of the *matn* was (almost) entirely refracted through the commentary and the *matn* was not considered an important object of direct study. The most widely-read and studied commentaries on the four classical texts mentioned above are probably the following five works:

- ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Karakī’s (d. 940/1534) *Jāmiʿ al-maqāṣid* (on al-ʿAllāma’s *Qawāʿid*).
- Zayn al-Dīn b. ʿAlī al-Shahīd al-Thānī’s (d. 965/1557 or 966/1558), *Masālik al-afhām* (on al-Muḥaqqiq’s *Sharāʿiʿ al-Islām*).
- Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Muqaddas al-Ardabilī’s (d. 993/1585) *Majmaʿ al-fāʿida waʾl-bayān* (on al-ʿAllāma’s *Irshād al-adhhān*).
- Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1009/1600), *Madārik al-aḥkām* (on al-Muḥaqqiq’s *Sharāʿiʿ al-Islām*).<sup>17</sup>
- Muḥammad Bāqir al-Sabzawarī’s (d. 1090/1679) *Dhakhīrat al-maʿād* (on al-ʿAllāma’s *Irshād al-adhhān*).

Many of these commentaries achieved sufficient renown to become the base text for supercommentary. The most prominent example of this phenomenon are the commentaries on the *Madārik al-aḥkām* by

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<sup>16</sup> It seems to have become common to read a base text (such as al-ʿAllāma’s *Sharāʿiʿ*) alongside one of its widely respected commentaries (such as al-Shahīd al-Thānī’s *Masālik al-afhām* and al-ʿĀmilī’s *Madārik al-aḥkām*, discussed below).

<sup>17</sup> Muḥammad al-ʿĀmilī also wrote a brief commentary on al-Muḥaqqiq’s *al-Mukhtaṣar al-nāfiʿ* titled *Ghāyat al-marām*, demonstrating again the clear preferences of these texts as *mutūn* for *sharḥ* in this period.

Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-'Āmilī (known as *Ṣāhib al-Madārik*). The biobibliographical date records over twenty commentaries on the *Madārik* (which thereby form supercommentaries on the *Sharā'i*). Well-known supercommentaries, composed at the end of the period under examination here, include:

- the *Hāshiya Majma' al-fā'ida wa'l-bayān* – a commentary on al-Ardabilī's *Majma'* (and therefore a supercommentary on al-'Allāma's *Irshād*) by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Bihbahānī (known as al-Waḥīd, d. ca. 1205/1791, described as the great reviver of the Uṣūlī school).
- *al-Fadhālik* by Muḥammad 'Alī al-Kirmānshāhī (d. 1206/1795, son of al-Waḥīd), being a commentary on the *Madārik* (and thereby a supercommentary on the *Sharā'i*).<sup>18</sup>

Sometimes, a postclassical commentary on a classical work became so popular that it seemed to eclipse all other commentaries on the *matn*, and it appears that scholars felt any further commentaries would not be meaningful contributions. An example of this might be the extremely important *al-Rawḍa al-bahiyya*, a commentary by al-Shahīd al-Thānī on the condensed breviary (*mukhtaṣar*) of all areas of *fiqh*, *al-Lum'a al-Dimashqiyya* by Muḥammad b. al-Makkī al-'Āmilī al-Shahīd al-Awwal (d. 786/1386). *Al-Rawḍa* itself became an important teaching text, and, in later years, became the principal guide for students studying *al-Lum'a*. Despite the widespread popularity of *al-Lum'a al-Dimashqiyya* as a teaching text, there are few postclassical commentaries on it. I have found only three references to commentaries on *al-Lum'a* from the postclassical period.<sup>19</sup> None of these could compete with *al-Rawḍa*, though, for popularity and influence. *Al-Rawḍa*'s popularity, though, led to the production of

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<sup>18</sup> Indeed, al-Waḥīd himself also wrote a commentary on the *Madārik*, and hence a supercommentary on the *Sharā'i*.

<sup>19</sup> One anonymous manuscript; one by a pupil of the famous Sulaymān al-Māhūzī (d. 1121/1709); and another by Mu'izz al-Dīn al-Tūnī, a contemporary of Shahīd II. Interestingly, there were a significant number of commentaries on *al-Lum'a* in the 19th century indicating perhaps a wish to return to the original text and bypass *al-Rawḍa*. See Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 14, pp. 47–51.

supercommentaries in great number in the postclassical period, into the 19th century, with nearly 100 supercommentary titles (i.e., commentaries on *al-Rawḍa* which is a commentary on *al-Lum'a*) being identified in the sources.<sup>20</sup> These are called both *ḥāshiya* and *sharḥ*. Most of these supercommentaries do not appear to have acquired widespread use in the seminary teaching circles, probably because many would have simply been comments gleaned from teaching sessions. Some works, though, achieved respect in their own right, including Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Fāḍil al-Hindi's (d. 1131/1718) *al-Manāḥij al-sawīyya* (on which see below). These supercommentaries do not themselves, it appears, become the subject of commentary (forming 'super-supercommentaries'), as one sometimes sees in other postclassical fields of study.

Commentarial activity was also sparked by new monographic *fiqh* texts composed in the postclassical period (i.e. writing texts which hope to replace the breviary texts such as *al-Lum'a*, *Qawā'id* and *Sharā'i*). Examples include al-Sabzawāri's *Kifāyat al-aḥkām* and Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī's (d. 1091/1680) *Mafātiḥ al-sharā'i*. Both attracted commentaries, though the *Mafātiḥ* was a more popular base text. *Mafātiḥ*, one can argue, is written in a style which, more or less, invites commentary (rules are stated, argument is minimal); the *Kifāya*'s style is more discursive (albeit argument is present). As is exemplified below, the ideal base text contains rule stipulation with little or no argument or elucidation. Explaining why rules are as they are and what they precisely mean is the task of the commentator – the less expansive the *matn*, the greater the scope of the *sharḥ*. This is not to say that *mukhtaṣars* are merely lists of rules – the structure of their presentation often forms an argument without it being explicitly stated. The authors of *mukhtaṣars* are not simply listing rules; they are, in large part, writing texts intended for commentary, and one gets the impression that is what Muḥsin al-Fayḍ was attempting to do in his *Mafātiḥ*.

Finally, note should be taken of the enormous *al-Ḥadā'iq al-nādira* of Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1772). This work stands apart from the other monographs on *fiqh* of the period mentioned above. It

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<sup>20</sup> There is an early translation of *al-Rawḍa* into Persian by Mīr Findiriskī (d. 1050/1640). Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 4, p. 105.

received hardly any commentary in the subsequent tradition, even though it remains hugely influential and much utilised. As demonstrated below, it is the only work of this period which attempts to work through *fiqh* using an Akhbārī juristic methodology. It was left unfinished at the author's death, though al-Baḥrānī's notes on the remaining chapters were collected from his sessions and notes by his students, and these works display a continuation of his manner of presentation and argumentation.<sup>21</sup>

In short, most who might pick up a work of postclassical Twelver *fiqh*, finding abbreviations for these works and their authors cited without explanation, the text turns into a secret code for the initiated, excluding all but the expert. The intensity of this self-referential tradition is a hallmark of the postclassical scholarly milieu. Nevertheless, this was what formed the intellectual space in which the art of commentary was performed. These authors and their works, for the commentary writer, exist in an arena outside the restrictions of time – they all speak at once in answer to a legal question. *Fiqh* discourse (and particularly postclassical *fiqh* discourse) features a plethora of opinions that are cited and analysed, supported or rebuffed. The discussion occurs (in the main) without reference to the context of the authors and jurists cited. It is, one might say, as if all the authors are equally present in an extended *majlis*; they are all simultaneously available to have their views interrogated and tested. To the unfamiliar ear, it can appear to be a cacophony of voices. In these *fiqh* works, there is almost no attention paid to historical development or contextualisation either in the history of the Twelver law or outside it. There may, at times, be a privileging of certain authorities and their opinions (al-Muḥaqqiq, al-ʿAllāma etc) since theirs is often the base text the writer is subjecting to commentary. The default position of the commentator is to defend the view of the *matn*'s author, though there are regular instances of divergence (often masked as 'clarifications'). However, as we shall see, the citations sometimes reveal an unexpressed hierarchy for some commentators. In terms of legal debate, though, all (qualifying) opinions are equal – all are tested by the same reasoning

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<sup>21</sup> See Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad Āl ʿUṣfūr, *ʿUyūn al-ḥaqaʿiq al-nāzira fi tatimmat al-Ḥadāʿiq al-nādira* (Qum, 1414/1993).

process. The works cited, and the jurists quoted, all form part of the canon of Twelver Shi'i legal history and the opinions, creating an acceptable *ikhtilāf* ('difference of opinion') – the tradition's range of legal opinions which can be acceptably incorrect.

### **An Example: Sexual Intercourse and the End of Menstruation**

An illustration of all the above phenomena can be seen in a series of examples from the discussions around menstruation and the menopause in *fiqh* works. The sections on menstruation (various called *kitāb al-ḥayḍ*, *bāb al-ḥayḍ*, *faṣl fi'l-ḥayḍ*) are found in the first section on ritual purity (*ṭahāra*) of any *fiqh* work.<sup>22</sup> Examples of discussions with the regulations around menstruation illustrate the dynamics of *matn*, *sharḥ*, *hāshiya* and other commentarial activity in postclassical Ithnā 'asharī legal scholarship. Here I take examples from the question of permission for sexual intercourse after the end of the menstrual cycle but before the ritual body wash (*ghusl*) has taken place.

#### **Post-menstruation sexual contact before full ritual washing (*ghusl*)**

Refraining from sexual intercourse during the period of menstruation is stipulated in the Qur'an (albeit obliquely with the phrase in Q 2.222 'keep away (*fa'tazilū*) from women during menstruation, and do not go near them until they are pure. When they are pure, then go to them as God has commanded.'). It is such a well-known prohibition that the Ithnā 'asharī legal tradition, along with Sunni legal scholarship, classes it as one of the indisputable religious rules (*min ḍarūriyyāt al-dīn*). To reject this rule and declare menstrual intercourse permitted (*istiḥlāl*) is an act of unbelief (*kufr*) carrying the appropriate punishment. Having

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<sup>22</sup> An example from the discussions around purity is particularly convenient because regularly commentaries and supercommentaries were left unfinished at the commentator's death. In addition, there is often an express intention on the part of the commentator only to cover the early sections on devotional practices (*'ibādāt*), ending with the book on pilgrimage (*kitāb al-ḥajj*). Hence, viewing the postclassical *fiqh* corpus as a whole, the early *fiqh* chapters receive disproportionate coverage.

sexual intercourse with one's menstruant wife (after having forgotten the rule, or never having heard it) makes one liable for a discretionary punishment (*ta'zīr*) and, according to many, a compensatory payment (*kaffāra*). During menstruation, the Ithnā 'asharī authors permit certain sexual activity (kissing, touching, fondling, though there is discussion about each of these, and different opinions are taken). There must, though, be no contact with the protected area of the menstruating woman (and there is some debate as to the extent of this area of a woman's body).

When the period of menstruation is over, sexual contact of all permitted types can resume, and the regulations are presented as developing out of the phrase in the above cited Qur'anic verse, '...do not go near them until they are pure. When they are pure, then go to them as God has commanded'. The Sunni schools, generally, require the post-menstruation woman to perform full ritual body wash (*ghusl*) before sexual intercourse is permitted: some even require her to have performed a valid prayer before sexual intercourse is permitted. The Ithnā 'asharī jurists, though, consider it permitted (though for most, discouraged) to have sexual intercourse after the end of the menstrual period without a ritual purification – a simple washing of the genital area (*ghasl al-faraj*) will suffice (note here the difference between *ghusl*/the ritual wash and *ghasl*/ordinary wash). This, it appears, was a minority view amongst some Mālikī scholars, though it was not accepted within any of the Sunni schools as a mainstream opinion.<sup>23</sup>

The four popular Ithnā 'asharī *mukhtaṣar* works simply state the rule without any elaboration:

*Sharā'i' al-Islām*: After she is pure, it is permitted for her husband to have sexual intercourse with her before she washes, though it is discouraged ('*alā al-karāhiyya*).

*al-Mukhtaṣar al-nāfi'*: It is discouraged... to have intercourse with her before full ritual washing (*ghusl*).

*Irshād al-adhhān*: It is forbidden for her husband to have sexual intercourse with her [during menstruation]... And it is discouraged after the end of it before *ghusl*.

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<sup>23</sup> It does appear to have been an opinion amongst some Zāhirīs – Abū Muḥammad 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā* (Beirut, 1998), vol. 2, p. 171.

*Qawā'id al-aḥkām*: It is permitted for her husband to have sexual intercourse with her before *ghusl*, though it is discouraged. He should have patience until she washes, but if desire overcomes him, he should tell her to wash her genital area.<sup>24</sup>

The other classical *mukhtaṣar* which concerns us here is *al-Lum'a*:

*al-Lum'a*: Sexual intercourse with her is discouraged after the end but before the *ghusl*, as this is the clearest position (*al-aḥzar*).<sup>25</sup>

All of these mention that sexual intercourse before *ghusl* is discouraged, but the phrasing differs between indicating 'it is permitted but discouraged' (*Sharā'i'*, *Qawā'id*) and 'it is discouraged' (*Nāfi'*, *Irshād*, *Lum'a*). The different phrasings might indicate levels of disapproval (with 'permitted but discouraged' being higher than the forceful 'it is discouraged'). The *Qawā'id* is the only one to give additional information, giving details not only of how it is discouraged, but also an additional stipulation (the woman's washing of her genital area). It might constitute a more expansive presentation style, with the author being less interested in creating a highly abbreviated 'text for commentary/classroom exposition' and closer to a full exposition of the law and its details. For the other authors, the detail about the washing is not required in their text. It should be noted that, as is typical in the *fiqh* discourse, it is to the man that permission is given; it is he who is being overcome by desire; and it is he who orders her to wash. It is usual in *fiqh* works, except when a rule is specifically addressed to women, for men to be the assumed addressee of the text. Indeed, as in the Qur'an, one finds the second person plural ('you') to refer to men (or a mixed group), but almost always when women are the subject of a

<sup>24</sup> Ja'far b. al-Ḥasan al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī, *Sharā'i' al-Islām fī masā'il al-ḥalāl wa'l-ḥarām* (Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995), vol. 1, p. 25; al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī, *al-Mukhtaṣar al-nāfi' fī fiqh al-imāmiyya* (Tehran, 1387 Sh./2008), p. 10; al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Irshād al-adhhān ilā aḥkām al-aymān* (Qum, 1410/1989), vol. 1, p. 228; al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Qawā'id al-aḥkām* (Qum, 1413/1992), vol. 1, p. 218.

<sup>25</sup> al-Shahīd al-Awwal Muḥammad b. Jamāl al-Dīn Makki al-'Āmilī, *al-Lum'a al-Dimashqiyya* (Qum, 1374 Sh./1995), vol. 1, p. 19. The last phrase *al-aḥzar* is an indication that there is a difference of opinion in the school and the author considers this position to be the soundest, though without recounting the other opinion(s). It forms a prompt for the commentator.



ruling, it is expressed in the third person feminine plural (*hunna*). This is clearly a stylistic convention which emerges out of the assumption that men (and specifically male jurists) are the addressees and conduits through which women gain knowledge of the law.

The various commentaries on these brief statements of the law explain the argument by which this position – which, it should be added, is held by the vast majority of Ithnā 'ashari jurists across time – is justified. The commentaries, though, approach the presentation of the justification in distinctive ways. Some take the opportunity for an extended discussion (for example, the lengthy (8-page in the printed edition) exposition in al-Shahīd al-Thānī's *Rawḍ al-janān* on the above-cited passage from al-'Allāma's *Irshād*).<sup>26</sup> Others express the arguments in a highly condensed fashion<sup>27</sup> or even give the statement no attention at all.<sup>28</sup> Despite these various approaches, the arguments are quite standard across the commentaries.

If one drills down further, and examines the various commentaries on a single phrase from just one of these *mutūn*, there is a clear illustration of the various approaches to commentary. Here is the passage from the *Irshād* as an example:

*Irshād al-adhhān*: it [i.e. sexual intercourse] is discouraged after the end of it [i.e. menstruation] before full ritual washing (*ghusl*).

Ibrāhīm al-Qaṭīfī's *al-Hādī ilā al-rashād fī bayān mujmalāt al-Irshād* – a title which could be translated 'The guide to the right path concerning the elucidation of the obscurities of the *Irshād*' – is the earliest of the commentaries employed here. The title indicates that there are elements in al-'Allāma's *Irshād* which need elucidation and al-Qaṭīfī, in this work, aims to provide much-needed clarification. On the precise passage under examination here, Qaṭīfī writes:

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<sup>26</sup> Zayn al-Dīn b. 'Alī al-'Āmilī al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Rawḍ al-janān fī sharḥ Irshād al-adhhān* (Qum, 1422/2001), vol. 1, pp. 224–232.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, the passage from al-Ardabili's *Majma' al-fā'ida wa'l-burhān*, commenting on the passage in *Irshād* and explained in the Appendix to this chapter.

<sup>28</sup> al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Ḥāshiyā sharā'i' al-Islām* (Qum, 1422/2001), vol. 1, p. 62.

His statement (*qawluhu*): *it is discouraged after the end of it*  
 I say (*aqūlu*): this is the established position, on account of the statement ‘until they are pure’, read without a doubling [i.e. of the middle root letter]; and according to the report of ‘Alī b. Yaqtīn from Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq] who said, ‘When the bleeding stops, even if she has not washed, then her husband can go to her when he wishes.’ One should interpret other reports which contradict this as meaning discouragement in order to achieve a reconciliation.<sup>29</sup>

The *qawluhu* – *aqūlu* exchange demonstrates the ‘commentary by statement’ style (*sharḥ bi’l-qawl*) referred to in the formal lists of commentarial types. Even though the commentary is not comprehensive (i.e. not every phrase of the text is subject to commentary), the work is not considered one of *ḥāshiya* by the tradition – illustrating how the terms *ḥāshiya* and *sharḥ* are not always used with formalistic precision. Al-Qaṭīfī apparently did write a *ḥāshiya* on the *Irshād*, which is sometimes referred to by the abbreviated title ‘*ta’līqa*’ (once again, the use of terms appears imprecise), but this work, *al-Hādī*, is a quite separate work.<sup>30</sup>

Turning to this particular passage, the two pieces of evidence for the ‘established’ (*mashhūr*) position are adduced – the Qur’anic verse and the report of ‘Alī b. Yaqtīn. But the evidence cited appears to indicate simple permission without any hint of negativity (that is, discouragement). Al-Qaṭīfī refers to (but does not cite) other reports which are much more negative, and accepts the idea that in order to reconcile these differing reports, one needs to downgrade the permission for sexual intercourse to ‘discouraged’ (with the act remaining within the permitted realm).

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<sup>29</sup> Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān al-Qaṭīfī, *al-Hādī ilā rashād fī bayān mujmalāt al-Irshād* (Qum, 1429/2008), vol. 1, p. 194. The passage continues: God’s statement ‘until they have purified themselves’ reading it with a *shadda* means – and God knows best here – that they have cleansed themselves – as when one says they have eaten well, and they have eaten – or it could mean they have washed their genital area, and therefore it can be understood to be discouraged. And there is debate on this.’

<sup>30</sup> The editor says forcefully the two should not be confused, al-Qaṭīfī, *al-Hādī ilā rashād*, vol. 1, p. 15.

Underpinning this theory is, of course, the notion that although texts have a *prima facie* meaning, this not necessarily their actual intended meaning. The language system employed in texts can regularly function such that, on the production of convincing evidence, the *prima facie* meaning can be set to one side and another possible meaning is then indicated. In this case, the sources indicating permission (Qur'an and the report of 'Alī b. Yaḡḡīn) could possibly indicate that the action is 'permitted but discouraged'; similarly, a source indicating prohibition (the other uncited report) could, possibly, indicate discouragement. To reconcile these contradictory sources, the compromise position is proposed: it is discouraged but nonetheless permitted to have sexual intercourse after the end of menstruation but before the full ritual wash.

Al-Qaṭīfī continues with another piece of counter-evidence which might indicate something stronger than discouragement here:

God's statement could be read with a doubling of the middle root letter, and it would then mean – and God knows best – that they perform the act of purification – along the pattern of the phrase 'they perform' or 'they performed' the 'act of feeding'. Or it could mean 'until they have washed their genitals'. [The verse read in this way] would be understood as discouraged, and this can be debated.<sup>31</sup>

Here al-Qaṭīfī is dealing with the variant Qur'anic reading in which the verse in question is read as either *ḥattā yaṡḥurna* ('until they are pure' – single middle root letter) or *ḥattā yaṡṡaharna* ('until they perform the act of purification' – doubled middle root letter). The two readings are, when written without vowel pointers, identical, and therefore form more convincing possible variants. This is clearly an argument employed by those who argue for a prohibition on sexual relations before full ritual washing. Their argument appears to be that a possible Qur'anic reading in which the requirement of 'purification' (i.e., full ritual wash) is stipulated clearly makes prohibition more likely than permission (or discouragement). Al-Qaṭīfī's response here is to argue that even if the verse is read in this way, *ḥattā yaṡṡaharna* need not mean the performance of the full ritual wash. It could mean simply washing the genitals. And even with this reading, the whole

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, p. 194.

verse could still be understood as indicating a ‘discouraged’ action because any negative imperative (‘do not do X’), even though it might have a *prima facie* meaning of prohibition, can also, when there is sufficient evidence, be understood as a mere discouragement (since that is the way language works). His final phrase (*wa-fihi nazar* – ‘and this is can be debated’) recognises this may not be the strongest argument, but implies also that the alternative reading is not the definitive proof the opponents are putting forward.

Al-Qaṭīfī’s commentarial technique is, as noted above, compliant with one of the types of commentary formally laid out elsewhere (i.e. the *sharḥ bi’l-qawl* style). In terms of content, there is a defence of the opinion laid out in the *Irshād*, by the production of evidence. The argument is not fully explained (there are many instances of abbreviation which require full exposition), but the aim is to provide the reader with both the evidence and the arguments; there is even an exploration of counter-arguments. What is clear is that al-Qaṭīfī wishes to portray the agreed established position (of discouragement) as a compromise result. The evidence is far from clear: there are contradictory revelatory sources (opposing reports), ambiguity in the formal text of the Qur’an itself (the double v. single readings), and equivocality in what the sources might actual mean (even if their form were to be fixed). There is no source which indisputably indicates the ‘discouraged’ position; instead, this position is formed out of a combination of the evidence in an attempt to keep all sources in line with each other (through a preference for reconciliation).

This is a brief but efficient commentarial style which assumes background knowledge but is not overly referential. It contrasts with a roughly contemporary commentary the *Irshād* by Zayn al-Din al-Shahīd al-Thānī. Whilst in his commentary on the *Sharā’i*, Zayn al-Din al-Shahīd al-Thānī passes over the topic without comment, in his commentary on the *Irshād* (titled *Rawḍ al-janān fī sharḥ Irshād al-adhhān*), he devotes a lengthy passage, as previously mentioned, to discussing the arguments for and against the positions of permission and prohibition, examining arguments for and against, making reference to positions in works of legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and how they impact on the argumentation from this case. The lengthy exposition begins with a citation of the *Irshād* passage (here in italics) but with interspersed glosses (here in normal type):

*It is discouraged* to have intercourse with the menstruant *after the end of it* whether it be during the normal period time or not *before the full ritual wash* but without being forbidden, in accordance with the more established of the two opinions, on account of indications from the Qur'an and reports concerning it.<sup>32</sup>

This is a convenient example of the above mentioned *sharḥ mamzūj* ('blended commentary'). The grammar of the *matn* is not disrupted (though the sentence becomes extremely lengthy through al-Shahīd al-Thānī's insertions). The precise reference of the verb *it is discouraged* is supplied by the commentator; a gloss on the phrase *the end of it* is given; and the final phrase *before full ritual wash* acts as a springboard for subsequent recounting of the argumentation for the position expressed in the *matn*. There is no need to run through the lengthy argumentation produced by al-Shahīd al-Thānī here. It should be noted, though, that there is regular reference to al-'Allāma's views as recounted in other works (*Mabādi' al-uṣūl*, *Mukhtalaf al-shī'a* and the *Nihāyat al-aḥkām* are all referenced). These are used to try and understand what the arguments might be for the position he puts forward in the *Irshād*. There is also a respect given to the position that sexual intercourse is actually forbidden before *ghusl* – a view attributed to Ibn Bābawayh in the Ithnā 'asharī legal tradition. This, al-Shahīd al-Thānī indicates, is not an unreasonable position to hold since there are reports which could be seen as indicating prohibition. The main target of al-Shahīd al-Thānī's presentation, though, are those 'permitters' (*muḥawwizūn*) who view it as not even discouraged to have sexual intercourse with a menstruant before *ghusl*. He lists eight arguments against the 'proof of permission' (*ḥujjat al-ḥill*), and though he does not list any jurists as 'Permitters', it is clear they are a real group whose view needs to be discredited. Al-Shahīd al-Thānī sees the discouragement as emerging out of the conflicting indicators: the Qur'an has two readings, and each one of them is ambiguous but might indicate prohibition before *ghusl*; the reports are contradictory, some indicating prohibitions, and others permission (with or without the genital washing). Conflicting indicators without clear advantage to one over the other means, for al-Shahīd al-Thānī, that the practice is discouraged. It is possible to interpret the 'permission' indicators as

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<sup>32</sup> al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Rawḍ al-janān*, vol. 1, p. 224.

meaning discouragement; and likewise, the ‘prohibition’ indicators could mean discouragement. This combination (*jam‘*) means discouragement is the most appropriate ruling; not because it has the clearest indicators, but because it is the best combination of conflicting indicators. Whilst the argumentation does not contract that found in al-Qaṭīfī’s presentation, the exposition is much fuller, and the evidence is cited in full, and examined in forensic detail. In both cases, the focus is directly on the text of al-‘Allāma’s *Irshād* – explaining how he and the rest of the scholars (with the notable exception of Ibn Bābawayh) have come to conclusion that this is a discouraged – rather than a ‘permitted’ or ‘forbidden’ – act.

This contrasts with the commentary of al-Qaṭīfī’s pupil, al-Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī (d. 993/1585). His *Majma‘ al-fā’ida wa’l-burhān*, a commentary on the *Irshād*, is a masterpiece of brevity, and the result is barely comprehensible in translation. Whilst he does cite the *Irshād*, his focus is not the text itself. On this occasion, the text itself is not even cited, or forensically examined (as it was with al-Qaṭīfī through *sharḥ bi’l-qawl* or al-Shahīd al-Thānī through *sharḥ mamzūj*). Instead, the content of the *Irshād* statement is taken as clear and in no need of analysis – the focus for al-Ardabīlī is on the evidence, and the arguments which might be made from them:

As for it being discouraged to have vaginal sexual intercourse with the menstruant after the end of bleeding and before the full ritual wash, then this is the clear position on the basis of

[1] *al-aṣl*, and the lack of any statement that it is forbidden absolutely. Agreeably there is, in the text of *al-Faqīh* [of Ibn Bābawayh] something which indicates a prohibition [on intercourse] before washing without any precedent. But it does not have a strong indicator.

[2] the apparent meaning of one of the verses, recited without doubling [the middle root letter] and

[3] the combination of the indicators and the two recitations without any indication that reading [the verse] with doubling definitively requires a full body wash

[4] the reason for the prohibition has been removed, as is understood from the apparent meaning of this verse and others.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī, *Majma‘ al-fā’ida* (Qum, 1403/1983), vol. 1, p. 152. Numbering is mine.

This commentary itself clearly requires extensive annotation. There needs, one might say, to be a commentary on the commentary.<sup>34</sup> A number of observations can be made. First, al-Ardabīlī puts forward a series of arguments for permission to have sexual intercourse before *ghusl*, but he does not explicitly address the position of the *Irshād* (the so-called *mashhūr* position) that it is discouraged to do so. His primary focus is to side-line the view that it is prohibited (which is the majority Sunni position, and that of Ibn Bābawayh). This contrasts with al-Shahīd al-Thānī's position, which argues that although Ibn Bābawayh's position that it is forbidden is based on a valid textual source (reports from the imams), other evidence requires one to understand this textual report as meaning discouraged rather than prohibited. For al-Ardabīlī, by contrast, Ibn Bābawayh does not have a strong indicator (*dalīl qawī*) for his view. It is clear that the *Irshād* says it is discouraged, but al-Ardabīlī only ever presents arguments to establish that it is permitted. Once again, the focus is not on al-'Allāma and his exposition in the *Irshād* but on something beyond that. The *Irshād* text seems bypassed in the presentation, whilst in the texts of al-Qaṭīfī and al-Ardabīlī, it held centre-stage.

Second, given the condensed nature of the argumentation, the reader needs to be relatively expert in *fiqh* before understanding it. Al-Ardabīlī's text itself is not sufficient (contrast this with al-Shahīd al-Thānī's full exposition referred to above). He assumes the reader already has a full understanding of the arguments, referring to them only obliquely. For example, 'the combination of the indicators and the two recitations' only makes sense if one already knows what the two Qur'anic readings are, why they might indicate different rulings, and why, despite this, the *ghusl* is not required (since variant Qur'anic rulings cannot be the sole basis for legal stipulations). Al-Ardabīlī is confident that his audience knows what he is talking about. This leads one to the question as to what the purpose of the commentary might be. It certainly does not appear to be to provide the non-expert reader with a guide to the contents of the *matn*. Rather, al-Ardabīlī is demonstrating his virtuosity as a jurist author by condensing four complex arguments into a few lines of commentarial text.

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<sup>34</sup> I provide an exposition of the argumentation in the Appendix to this chapter.

Third, al-Ardabīlī's intention in employing this highly compressed form may itself be to attract commentaries (and there were numerous *ḥawāshī* on the *Majma'*). The new 'supercommentary' need not be supplied in written form. The referential style might be thought to act as an aide memoir for the teacher when giving a textual exposition (either of the *matn*, or indeed of the *sharḥ*). Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the purpose of commentary is not, it seems, to make the *matn* more accessible, but rather to supply legal arguments relevant to the topic which is addressed in the quoted segment of the *matn*. It is not even necessarily to support the *matn*'s rule – since, as we can see here, the arguments produced support permission, but are not explicit on the 'discouraged' assessment. In this commentary at least, the *matn* appears as simply a prompt for a cataloguing of the relevant arguments. The target appears to be the law itself, not the *matn* – that is to say al-Ardabīlī is simply using the *matn* as a vehicle through which he might present his own legal thinking.

The next generation of commentaries on the *Irshād* included the *Dhakhīrat al-ma'ād* of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Sabzawārī. This continues the full exposition of source citation and argumentation exemplified in al-Shahīd al-Thānī's exposition. His commentary on the *Irshād* passage is lengthy, with developed and precise examination of each source. He begins, like al-Shahīd al-Thānī, with a *sharḥ mamzūj* of the text:

*It, sexual intercourse is discouraged with her – that is the menstruant after the end of it, that is, the blood of menstruation before full ritual washing.*<sup>35</sup>

Whilst formally a *sharḥ mamzūj*, one can see that the textual focus here is greater even than in al-Shahīd al-Thānī's attempt. All pronouns are spelled out:

it=sexual intercourse  
 her=the menstruating woman  
 it=the blood of menstruation.

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<sup>35</sup> Muḥammad Bāqir al-Sabzawārī, *Dhakhīrat al-ma'ād* (Qum, 1363 Sh./1984), p. 72.



This exposition of the text continues:

This is the established position amongst the fellow scholars (i.e. the Ithnā 'asharī jurists). It is transmitted from Ibn Bābawayh that he considered [sexual intercourse] forbidden before the full ritual wash, but its words in *Man lā yaḥduruhu al-faqīh* do not indicate this – rather their apparent meaning is the opposite. He says:

It is not permitted to have sexual intercourse with a woman during her period because God has prohibited this when he says: 'Do not go near them until they are pure' meaning by this 'until after they have done *ghusl* from menstruation'. If the man is overcome with lust, and the woman is pure from her menstruation, and her husband wants to have sexual intercourse before the *ghusl*, he orders her to wash her genitals, and then have sexual intercourse.

Clearly this statement means that there is no prohibition on sexual intercourse without *ghusl*.<sup>36</sup>

Here we have something new – Ibn Bābawayh's view – which was accepted as unambiguous in the other commentaries, is here problematised. Al-Sabzawārī brings Ibn Bābawayh into the fold of the established opinion, by citing the passage itself and not being content with the manner in which his opinion has been caricatured in previous commentaries. The debate now moves on to the status of the genital washing – is this obligatory (*wujūb*) before sexual relations can commence (as is indicated by al-Muḥaqqiq in his *al-Mu'tabar*)? Is the permissibility of sexual relations dependant on the washing? For al-Sabzawārī, 'the most plausible answer (*al-aqrab*) is that the elimination of the prohibition on sexual intercourse is not dependent on washing', and he cites a series of reports from the imams which indicate this. Washing the genital area is recommended, but not a prerequisite for legitimate sexual relations. There follows a detailed discussion of the reports, whether their chains of transmission are reliable and whether they indicate what scholars have thought. Also included is a detailed discussion of the Qur'anic variants and the correct hermeneutical tools whereby the intended meaning might be understood. In conclusion, al-Sabzawārī states that even though there

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<sup>36</sup> al-Sabzawārī, *Dhakhīrat*, pp. 72–73.

is a ‘hint of prohibition’ in the Qur’anic verse – that is, the Qur’an does not unambiguously say sexual intercourse is permitted before the ritual wash – the reports indicate that it is permitted. In the interest of reconciliation between the indicators, the interpretation should be that it is discouraged, but not forbidden; the washing of the genital area is encouraged but not required; and the man need not be overcome with lust, though this might explain why he might be unable to wait until the woman does the preferred course of action – namely carrying out the full ritual wash.

### Concluding Remarks

There is nothing in the text of the *matn* which requires any of these authors to approach the act of commentary in this way. Some see their task as first filling out the potential ambiguities in the *matn*, and then providing argumentation for the established position put forward in the text (al-Sabzawāri: commentary as expansion). Others see the *matn* as an opportunity to explore all the arguments for the various possible positions on an issue, and to engage in a denunciation of those they consider bogus (al-Shahīd al-Thānī: commentary as polemic). Yet others see the *matn* as purely a prompt for a discussion around the law beyond the text, ostensibly ignoring the content of the text beyond the legal issue it raises (al-Ardabili: commentary as independent exposition). And finally, there are those who see the commentary as the opportunity to defend the scholarly tradition, and strengthen the established positions of the scholars (al-Qaṭīfī: commentary as school bulwark). These types of commentarial activity could be multiplied through the examination of additional commentaries; and any single commentary need not exclusively exhibit one attitude throughout all its comments. What the evidence does suggest though is that commentary is much more than a reiteration of the content of the *matn* text – it is a creative elaboration, in which the commentators have the opportunity to exhibit their skills. This could be in the production of highly compressed text which itself needs much commentary; or in the exposition of arguments, the citation of sources, and the debunking of deviant opinions. In this, the postclassical legal tradition of Ithnā ‘asharī Shi‘ism reveals dynamics of commentary which can be identified across scholarly disciplines, from philosophy

to *ḥadīth* commentary. In this sense it is both distinctive and conventional in the Islamic postclassical scholarly milieu.

### APPENDIX: Explanation of al-Ardabilī's Commentary on *Irshād*

He outlines four arguments (labelled [1] to [4], numbering is mine) and none of them can be understood simply from the text of al-Ardabilī's commentary, so some explanation is required:

[1] *al-aṣl*, and the lack of any statement that it is forbidden absolutely. Agreeably there is, in the text of *al-Faqīh* something which indicates a prohibition [on intercourse] before washing without any precedent. But it does not have a strong indicator.

The first argument requires the reader to know arguments from *al-aṣl* in *fiqh* texts. *Al-aṣl* denotes the 'original state of affairs': that is, the situation without (or even before) any law was revealed – the natural state of affairs one might say. In the absence of a rule, the assumption is that an action is permitted. In this case, there is a prohibition on intercourse during menstruation, but there is a permission for intercourse after menstruation. In the absence of a ruling about the period between the end of menstruation and the time of the ritual wash (*ghuṣl*), the assumption is that it is permitted.

Al-Ardabilī next refers to the position indicated in *al-Faqīh* – by which he means the work *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh* by Ibn Bābawayh. The passage referred to there, but not cited by al-Ardabilī is:

It is not permitted to have intercourse with a woman during her period because God said, 'do not go near them until they are pure...' – this means until they have performed *ghuṣl* after menstruation.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh* (Qum, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 95 – Ibn Bābawayh does go on to say that if the man is overcome by lust then he can ask her to wipe her genitals and then sexual intercourse can take place, but this I understood to be a ruling out of necessity (*darūra*) brought about because of the man's lust, rather than a permission. That is, for Ibn Bābawayh, the ruling is that it is forbidden, but like many forbidden things, in extreme circumstances, they can become permitted. This state of affairs is different from saying that it is discouraged but permitted, as the various *mukhtaṣars* do.

Ibn Bābawayh's deduction appears to be from an understanding of the Qur'anic verse where the phrase 'until they are pure' (*ḥattā yaṭḥurna*) is taken to mean, 'until they have finished their menstruation and have performed the ritual *ghuṣl* wash'. Al-Ardabīlī, along with most Ithnā 'asharī scholars before him, argues that this is not a strong indicator of prohibition, and the reason is given in his second argument:

[2] the apparent meaning of one of the verses, recited without a *shadda*

There are two readings of this Qur'anic phrase: one 'reading without a *shadda*', namely, *ḥattā yaṭḥurna* ('until they are pure'); and the other reading with a *shadda*, namely *ḥattā yaṭṭaharna* ('until they have ritually purified themselves?'). The preferred reading is the first, and the verse's obvious meaning is that the woman has finished her menstrual period (i.e. where 'to be *tāhir*' here means 'to be free of menstrual bleeding'). One might dispute whether this is the apparent meaning, but the structure of the legal argument is clear.

When there is an alternative reading of a verse, and when this might lead to a different ruling (i.e. the reading with a *shadda* rather than without it), then another procedure comes into play:

[3] the combination of the indicators and the two recitations without any indication that reading [the verse] with a *shadda* definitively requires a *ghuṣl*

Al-Ardabīlī states that even the reading with a *shadda* – that is, *ḥattā yaṭṭaharna* ('until they have purified themselves') does not clearly indicate that a *ghuṣl* is required. The verb has changed from 'to be pure' to another form – which can mean 'to purify oneself, though it can also indicate an intensive meaning 'to be completely pure'. Since this alternative reading with this different verbal form does not definitively indicate the requirement to perform the *ghuṣl*, and given that there are other indicators (not only the first reading, but also other uncited reports), the permission to have sexual intercourse when menstruation has ended but before the *ghuṣl* has been performed stands.

The final argument is a logical argument:

[4] the reason for the prohibition has been removed, as is understood from the apparent meaning of this verse and others.

From the Qur'anic verse in question (and from other, uncited, verses), it is clear that the reason for the prohibition on sexual intercourse is the presence of menstrual bleeding. When that reason has been removed (i.e. there is no longer menstrual bleeding), then the corresponding prohibition must also be removed. When the reason for a rule disappears, the rule must, logically, also disappear. One returns to the pre-regulative state of affairs – namely that it is permitted for a man to have sexual intercourse with his legitimate sexual partner after she has completed her period of menstruation but before she has performed the ritual wash known as the *ghusl*.

## A View from the Periphery: The *Ijāza* as Polemic in Early 10th/16th-Century Twelver Shi'ism

Andrew J. Newman

In earlier research on the exchanges between Ibrāhīm b. Sulaymān al-Qaṭīfī (d. after 945/1539<sup>1</sup>) and ʿAlī al-Karakī (d. 940/1534) it was concluded that the composition and increasingly forthright and distinctly Akhbārī-style aspects of al-Qaṭīfī's criticisms of al-Karakī were most usefully understood in the context of the changing fortunes of the Safavid polity during the years these exchanges took place.<sup>2</sup>

The present paper examines al-Qaṭīfī's *ijāzāt* as preserved in *Biḥār al-anwār* of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1699),<sup>3</sup> to examine whether such a contextual approach also sheds light on the style and substance of these texts and thereby further contributes to the understanding of the al-Qaṭīfī/al-Karakī 'debates' and to the extant discussions on Twelver Shi'ī *ijāzāt* more generally.

The paper first addresses some of this literature and then discusses each of the extant *ijāzāt* in turn. Of the five texts in *Biḥār*, three are

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<sup>1</sup> The editor of Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī's (d. 1186/1772) *Lu'lu'ā*, on which see further below, says al-Qaṭīfī was alive in 951/1544, when he completed *al-Firqa al-nājiyya*. Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī says this work was completed in 945/1538. See al-Baḥrānī, *Lu'lu'at al-Baḥrayn* (Manama, 1429/2008), p. 154, n. 3; Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'ā ilā taṣānīf al-shī'ā* (Beirut, 1403/1983), vol. 16, p. 177; al-Ṭīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt al-lām al-shī'ā*, vol. 7 (Beirut, 1430/2009), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> A. Newman, 'The Myth of the Clerical Migration to Safawid Iran: Arab Shi'ite Opposition to ʿAlī al-Karakī and Safawid Shi'ism', *Die Welt des Islams*, 33 (1993), pp. 78ff.

<sup>3</sup> On other dates for al-Majlisī's death, see our 'The Idea of Bāqer al-Majlesī in 'The Idea of Iran: The Safavid Era', in C. Melville, ed., *Safavid Persia in the Age of Empires* (*The Idea of Iran*, vol. X) (London, 2021), pp. 157 n. 1, 166 n. 56.

dated to 915/1509, 920/1514 and 944/1537 respectively, and the larger historical contexts of each will be discussed before the texts themselves. Of the two undated texts, the very short one merits only passing notice. The second, longer, undated *ijāza* is discussed and, on the basis of its style and substance, a relative date for its composition is offered.<sup>4</sup>

Al-Karākī's presence looms large, if indirectly, across the four. The complex blend of al-Qaṭīfī's jurisprudential criticisms in these texts – documents not necessarily intended for widespread circulation – complement his open critique of al-Karākī as discussed elsewhere even as al-Qaṭīfī's personal reflections attest to a sense of being an 'outsider' of lesser stature in comparison with al-Karākī, based on fewer opportunities, ill health and personal slights, all leading to a lack of self-confidence. As such, the paper suggests that in the context of the Western-language discussion of Shi'i *ijāzāt* to date the combination of the jurisprudential with the personal on offer in al-Qaṭīfī's *ijāzāt* is distinctive.

### **The Extant Literature on Twelver *Ijāzāt***

With a few exceptions, the limited Western-language academic discussion in works dedicated specifically to Twelver *ijāzāt* has not generally recognised these documents as having the potential for an 'agenda' above and beyond that of the function for which they were, ostensibly, intended. Most focus on the information on scholarly networks contained in these texts and refer to post-Safavid *ijāzāt*. Al-Qaṭīfī's *ijāzāt* have been given little or no attention.

Vajda and others in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.) discuss the *ijāza* as the form in which an 'authorized guarantor of a text or of a whole book (his own work or a work received through a chain of transmitters going back to the first transmitter or to the author) gives a person the authorisation to transmit it in his turn so that the person

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<sup>4</sup> Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisi, *Biḥār al-anwār*, ed. S. Ibrāhīm al-Miyānījī, et al. (n.p., 1403/1983), vol. 105, pp. 85–123. Four of the five *ijāzāt* can also be found in *Mawsū'at al-fāḍil al-Qaṭīfī*, ed. Ziyā' Āl Sunbul (Qum, 1429/2008), vol. 4, pp. 205–270. For al-Qaṭīfī's seven *ijāzāt*, see al-Ṭihriyānī, *al-Dhari'a*, vol. 1, pp. 134–135.

authorised can avail himself of this transmission.’ They note ‘the pre-eminent value attached to oral testimony’ and note, therefore, the value ‘contained in the *isnāds* . . . in the *samā*’s (“certificates of hearing”) and in the *idjāzas* —often having indications of dates and places and details of the names of the persons who formed links in the transmission’. Thus, ‘Separate from the texts there appear the systematic lists of authorities.’ They note that ‘among the ‘Twelver’ *Shī*’ is the *idjāza* obtains its authority from the infallible imāms whose *ḥadīth*s are scrupulously transmitted by their faithful supporters.’<sup>5</sup>

More recently Stewart noted ‘three main types of certificate developed in the medieval period’: 1. The certificate of audition (*samā*’ or *ijāzat al-samā*’) or the certificate of transmission (*ijāzat al-riwāya*); 2. the certificate of memorisation (‘*ard*’, ‘*irāḍa*’); and, 3. the license to teach law and issue legal opinions (*ijāzat al-tadrīs wa’l-iftā*) and discusses each in turn. He notes while in Sunni circles use thereof ‘seems to have lapsed’, in Twelver circles the practice survives as *ijāzat al-ijtihād*, not extant in the Safavid period but prevalent by the mid-19th century.<sup>6</sup>

Gleave’s detailed discussion of an *ijāza* of the Akhbārī Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1772), written between 1175/1761 and 1182/1768, delineates the main sections of the text – introductory prayers; an introduction to the text, to the *mujīz* (the giver of the *ijāza*) and to the *mujāz* (the recipient); a list of 35 *isnād*; a list of 19 works whose transmission is being authorised; closing prayers and praise for the *mujāz*. Here the shaykh refers to the different forms of transmission – *qirā’a*, *samā*’ and *ijāza*. Citing Goldziher and Vajda, Gleave argues this text represents ‘a late stage in the development of the *ijāza* system’ and suggests it as a ‘prototype’ for al-Baḥrānī’s *Lu’lu’at al-Baḥrayn*,

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<sup>5</sup> G. Vajda et al., ‘Idjāza’, *EI*2. In *EI*, Goldziher defines the term as ‘Permission. . . granted to any one by a competent “carrier” of a text or even a whole book — whether it is the latter’s own or an older text which he is able to trace back by a reliable chain of transmitters to the original transmitter or to the author — to transmit further the work, and to quote the transmitter as an authority. The *idjāza* does not require immediate contact between the person receiving the permission and him who grants it.’ Shi’i variants are not discussed. See I. Goldziher, ‘Idjāza’, *EI*.

<sup>6</sup> D. Stewart, ‘Ejāza’, *EIr*, vol. 8, pp. 273–275.



which Gleave describes as a biographical work with 'the external form of an *ijāza*'. As discussed, the text appears devoid of polemic.<sup>7</sup>

Schmidtke, discussing an 1128/1716 *ijāza* by the Akhbārī scholar 'Abd Allāh b. Ṣāliḥ al-Samāhijī (d. 1135/1722), highlights the attention the latter gives, as *mujīz*, to scholarly networks, contemporary and older. She does not note any particular polemical tone in the text, beyond the author's reproaching two named 10th/16th-century scholars who were, in fact, Akhbārīs.<sup>8</sup>

Discussing a 1168/1755 *ijāza* composed by 'Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 1173/1759), Schmidtke refers to the several kinds of *ijāzāt*, *al-riwāya* ('to transmit') and *al-samā* 'or' *al-qirā'a*, the latter based on the 'kind of instruction', and describes the al-Tustarī *ijāza* as 'comprising the whole literature of a certain scholarly tradition (*ijāza kabīra* or *ijāza 'amma*)', these often issued by a 'scholar more advanced

<sup>7</sup> R. Gleave, 'The *Ijāza* from Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1772) to Sayyid Muḥammad Maḥdī Baḥr al-'Ulūm (d. 1212/1797-8)', *Iran*, 32 (1994), esp. p. 115. On al-Baḥrānī, see E. Kohlberg, 'Baḥrānī, Yūsuf', *Elr*, vol. 3, pp. 529–530; Newman, 'al-Baḥrānī, Yūsuf ibn Aḥmad', *EI3*.

The *Lu'lu'a*, composed in Karbala in 1182/1768 was, in fact, an *ijāza* given to al-Baḥrānī's two sons in the form of a biographical dictionary. See al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dhārī'a*, vol. 18, pp. 379–380, and al-Baḥrānī's introductory comments to the text (5f).

Elsewhere we have noted the polemical nature of such biographical dictionaries in general and Gleave has noted these in the case of the *Lu'lu'a*'s biographical entries. See A. J. Newman, 'The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī in Late-Safawid Iran. Part Two: The Conflict Reassessed', *BSOAS*, 55 (1992), pp. 252–253, 260; idem, 'Anti-Akhbārī Sentiments among the Qajar 'Ulamā', The Case of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khwānsārī (d. 1313/1895)', in R. Gleave, ed., *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran* (London, 2005), p. 124; R. Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam. The history and doctrines of the Akhbārī Shī'ī school* (Leiden, 2007), s.v., esp. p. 56f.

On al-Baḥrānī, see also R. Gleave, 'The Akhbārī-Uṣūlī Dispute in *Ṭabaqāt* Literature: An Analysis of the Biographies of Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Bihbihānī', *Jusūr*, 10 (1994), pp. 79–109.

<sup>8</sup> S. Schmidtke, 'The *ijāza* from 'Abd Allāh ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Samāhijī to Naṣīr al-Jārūdī al-Qaṭīfī: A Source for the Twelver Shi'i Scholarly Tradition of Baḥrayn', in F. Daftary and J. Meri, ed., *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung* (London, 2003), pp. 64–85, esp. 74. On al-Samāhijī, see also Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, s.v. and our contributions ad nn. 7, 66.

In passing Schmidtke (pp. 67, 67n7, 76n36) refers to al-Qaṭīfī's inclusion, in his 915/1509 *ijāza*, of the text of an *ijāza* of al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī's (d. 726/1325) son Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn Muḥammad (d. 771/1369-70). The 915/1509 *ijāza* is discussed below.

in age'. Most *ijāzāt al-riwāya*, she says, 'follow a more or less fixed pattern': an opening prayer, an introduction on the *mujīz* and *mujāz*, a listing of 'the contents and extent of the *ijāza*', often with extensive coverage of the donor's own shaykhs, and an ending with a statement of 'conditions'. Al-Tustarī's text is typical of such 'text-independent', i.e. *ijāza kabīra* or *ijāza 'amma*, *ijāzāt*. The 'special features' she mentions include the author's many 'theoretical reflections', in one of which she notes he addresses 'the admissibility of transmission by means of licences . . . in comparison with other ways of transmission, particularly the *samā*', and concludes the former are admissible 'beyond doubt'.<sup>9</sup> He does, she notes, criticise some of his contemporaries as having made little, if any, advancement beyond 'mere imitation (*taqlīd*)'.<sup>10</sup> Schmidtke does note, without unpacking it, al-Tustarī's discussion of conditions attached to receiving a licence.<sup>11</sup>

Kondo also focuses on post-Safavid period texts, discussing developments in the 12th/18th and 13th/19th centuries in *ijāzāt* and the practice of *ijāzāt al-ijtihād* and *riwāya*. He presents two such texts of each type, all from the 19th century but notes the forms are basically the same as those of the 12th/18th and 11th/17th centuries.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> S. Schmidtke, 'Forms and Functions of "Licenses to Transmit" (*Ijāzas*) in 18th-Century-Iran: 'Abd Allāh al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'irī al-Tustarī's (1112-73/1701-59) *Ijāza Kabīra*', in G. Kramer et al., ed., *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies* (Leiden, 2006), esp. pp. 96-97, 101-103, 109f, 111. See especially p. 109, citing *Ijāzat al-kabīra li'l-'Allāma . . . 'Abd Allāh al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'irī al-Tustarī*, ed. Muḥammad al-Samāmī al-Ḥā'irī (Qum, 1409/1988-89), pp. 7-9. See, also, further below.

<sup>10</sup> Schmidtke, 'Forms', pp. 112-113.

<sup>11</sup> Schmidtke, 'Forms', p. 111, citing *Ijāzat al-kabīra*, pp. 212-215. See also below.

<sup>12</sup> N. Kondo, 'Shi'i 'Ulama and *Ijāza* during the Nineteenth Century', *Orient*, 44 (2009), esp. pp. 63-64. Kondo references Gleave, above, for the 12th/18th century text, and Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1659-60)'s *ijāza* to his son, Muḥammad Bāqir, cited in M. M. Tunikābunī, *Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā*', ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Barzīgar Khāliqī et al. (Tehran, 1383 Sh./2004), pp. 266-281, as his 11th/17th-century example. Kondo refers (pp. 56, 59-61) to M. Litvak's discussion of *ijāzāt al-ijtihād* in the latter's *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-century Iraq: The 'Ulama' of Najaf and Karbala* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 41-42 (that the *ijāza riwāya* was less prestigious and could be given to 'not direct disciples. . . primarily as a token of esteem'), pp. 104-106. Kondo references (p. 59, n. 4) Stewart on *ijāzat al-ijtihād* as not extant in the Safavid period but prevalent by the mid-19th century.

To date then, the dedicated Western-language literature on Shi'i *ijāzāt* has mainly been interested in the aspects of these texts concerning scholarly networking, has highlighted these texts' tendency to exhibit a 'fixed pattern' in their organisation, has – aside from instances in respect of individuals specifically named by the *muǰīz* – not noticed/highlighted any particularly polemical dimensions, and has mainly discussed late-Safavid and/or, especially, post-Safavid *ijāzāt*. In the process, across these works 10th/16th-century Twelver *ijāzāt* have received relatively little attention and the texts of al-Qaṭīfī's *ijāzāt* none at all.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Although, as Litvak, not a bespoke work on *ijāzāt*, Gleave (*Scripturalist Islam*, pp. 145–146), cites the introduction in Taqī al-Majlisī's *Lavāmi 'i šāḥibqirānī* in which he lists the seven forms of transmission: 1) the teacher reads a work to his pupil from beginning to end; 2) the teacher reads part of a work to his pupil – these being *qirā'a* – and then 3) the pupil reads the work to the teacher; 4) the pupil is present when another pupil reads the work to the teacher; 5) the teacher gives a copy of the work to the pupil, telling him to relate this work to the teacher; 6) the teacher gives the pupil permission to relate a particular book on his authority; 7) the pupil finds a work in the possession of his teacher, and then relates the work with qualification. Gleave suggests this list reflects al-Majlisī's 'order. . .of preference'. See further below, ad n. 69.

See also Gleave's general remarks on Safavid-period *ijāzāt* (143f) though he seems especially interested in their information on scholarly networks (142f, 215).

Although also not *per se* a study of *ijāzāt*, in her *Formation of a Religious Landscape, Shi'i Higher Learning in Safavid Iran* (Leiden, 2018), M. Moazzen does discuss *ijāzāt* generally (pp. 128–129) and Safavid-period *ijāzāt* (pp. 136ff, 208, 209 (where she says: 'The *ijāza* also guaranteed the integrity of a manuscript copy used by a scholar.'). p. 243 and s.v.). Moazzen is particularly interested in scholarly networking (p. 25) and what the texts reveal of Uṣūlī dominance of 'higher learning', especially in the 10th/16th century (pp. 28, 133, 136f, 244) and the next century (p. 153f), and of the *madrasa* curriculum and study processes (pp. 24–25, 142f, 153f, 161f, 168f, 206f, 243). Although Moazzen notes (146–147) Muḥammad Ṭāḥir al-Qummī's (d. 1098/1687) refutation of philosophy in an *ijāza* to Bāqir al-Majlisī who, she notes also (p. 165, n. 10), taught the rational sciences to his students, she does not otherwise explore the potentially polemical nature of these texts. Al-Qaṭīfī and his *ijāzāt* receive but passing attention (p. 22, citing Bāqir al-Majlisī's student Afandī's biographical dictionary on al-Majlisī's apparent poor opinion of al-Qaṭīfī, pp. 133, 133, n. 24, 136, 165, n. 11). See also pp. 11–13, 29. See 'Abd Allāh Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, ed. A. Al-Ḥusaynī (Qum, 1403/1982), vol. 1, esp. 19.

On al-Qummī see A. J. Newman, 'Glimpses into Late-Safavid Spiritual Discourse: An 'Akhbārī Critique of Sufism and Philosophy', in R. Tabandeh and L. Lewisohn, ed., *Sufis and Mullas: Sufis and Their Opponents in the Persianate World* (Irvine, CA, 2020), pp. 259–307.

*Al-Qaṭīfī's 915/1509 Ijāza*

The earliest dated *ijāza* of al-Qaṭīfī in *Bihār* was composed in Najaf in 915/1509, the year after the Safavid conquest of the region.

By this point, al-Karakī's Safavid connections were well established. In 908/1503, he was present at Ismā'īl I's capture of Kāshān. Al-Karakī settled in Najaf in 909/1504 with some financial support from the court. In 910/1505 he was in Iṣfahān with Ismā'īl. Having returned to Iraq, he was imprisoned, with Baghdad's Shi'ī *naqīb*, by the Aq-Qoyunlu. When in 914/1508 Ismā'īl took Baghdad they were released and joined him in touring al-Ḥilla and the shrine cities. Al-Karakī received land grants of several villages in Iraq in these years.

As early as 908/1503 or 909/1504 Arab clerics, probably based in Iraq, were voicing disquiet at his ties to court.

Al-Qaṭīfī himself arrived in Iraq in 913/1507 from al-Qaṭīf. He settled in Najaf, went to al-Ḥilla but then returned to Najaf. Between 914/1508 and 916/1510, he journeyed to Mashhad and there debated with al-Karakī on the matter of al-Qaṭīfī's refusal to accept gifts from Ismā'īl.<sup>14</sup>

At eighteen pages, this is the longest of al-Qaṭīfī's *ijāzāt* in *Bihār*.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, *Bihār*'s editor cites the biographical dictionary of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khwānsārī (d. 1313/1895) calling it an *ijāza kabīra*.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Newman, 'Myth', p. 78f. On the date of al-Qaṭīfī's arrival, see al-Baḥrānī, p. 160; Shaykh 'Alī al-Bilādī al-Baḥrānī, *Arwār al-badrayn* (Qum, 1407/1986), p. 282. al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 1, p. 134, n. 56. On Persian Gulf scholars moving to Iraq in these centuries, see A.J. Newman, *Twelver Shiism: Unity and Diversity in the Life of Islam, 632 to 1722* (Edinburgh, 2013), pp. 148, 166. These included Aḥmad b. Fahd al-Ḥillī (d. 841/1437), from whom al-Qaṭīfī narrated via intermediaries. On al-Karakī's 909/1504 *ijāza* received in Najaf, see n. 67. As noted below, al-Qaṭīfī composed the 915/1509 and 920/1514 *ijāzāt* in Najaf.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 105, pp. 89–106; Āl Sunbul, *Mawsū'at*, vol. 4, pp. 209–242. See also al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 1, p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 105, p. 83, n. 9. On this term, see ad n. 9; Moazzen, pp. 129, 133, n. 23.

Afandī (vol. 1, p. 15) and al-Baḥrānī (p. 159) do not use the term in reference to this work, but al-Ṭīhrānī (*Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 7, p. 4) does. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khwānsārī, *Rawḍat al-jannāt* (Tehran, 1390 Sh./2011), vol. 1, pp. 25–29) also applies the term *kabīra* to al-Qaṭīfī's *ijāzāt* to Shāh Mahmūd and al-Tustarī, but not that to al-Astarābādī, discussed below.

The *ijāza* is written to Shaykh Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Turk.<sup>17</sup> It comprises one page of introductory prayers; one page of opening remarks; a three-page introduction with three *masā'il* (sing. *mas'ala*; issues, matters); and a seven-page listing of the materials for which the *ijāza* is being given – the longest part of the text. It concludes with a one-page *fā'ida* (benefit) and a four-page *waṣiyya* (admonition).

In his opening, al-Qaṭīfī recounts the promulgation of *al-sharā'i* and the role of the angels and *al-rusul* (prophets). When, he says, creation started to splinter and it was no longer possible for the *sufarā* (His envoys) to reach people directly, God commanded the *ḥifẓ* (memorisation) of *al-athār* (the words and actions of the Prophet), *al-aḥādīth al-sharī'a* (the legalistic *ḥadīth*), and the Prophetic *sīra* (biography). Those who knew these were to hand them down to those who did not, he says. Those who understood these were to help those who did not.

The Qur'anic verses 16: 43<sup>18</sup> and 9: 122,<sup>19</sup> he says, are confirmed by *al-akhbār al-mutawātira*.<sup>20</sup> He cites two texts from Imam Ja'far (d. 148/765), the Sixth imam. In the first al-Ṣādiq says, 'It is to us [i.e. the imams] to set forth the *uṣūl* (sing., *aṣl*, the core statements) and to you *tafarr'ū*' (pl., to derive/deduce – put forth branches, i.e. of the law).<sup>21</sup> In the second, partially quoted, he says, 'Look to a man from

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<sup>17</sup> The name is 'Turk' on vol. 105, p. 89, but 'Turkī' on vol. 105, p. 101. *Bihār's* editor (vol. 105, p. 89, n. 3) cites al-Khwānsārī (p. 27) as giving 'Turkī', as does al-Ṭīhrānī (*al-Dharī'a*, vol. 1, p. 134).

<sup>18</sup> 'Ask Ahl al-Dhikr if You Do Not Know.' The imams explain the term as referring to themselves. See al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, ed. 'A. A. al-Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986), vol. 1, pp. 210–212/1–9.

<sup>19</sup> 'If a contingent from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to studies in religion and admonish the people when they return to them that thus they (may learn) to guard themselves (against evil).' Not all of al-Qaṭīfī's Qur'anic citations in these texts are noted. Qur'anic translations are from <https://quran.com/>

<sup>20</sup> That is, a *ḥadīth* narrated by many narrators, not *khabar al-wāḥid*, a text narrated via but one narrator. See Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, s.v.

<sup>21</sup> *Furū'* referring to branches/ancillaries of the law, e.g. ritual cleanliness, prayer, fasting. On the text, see Muḥammad b. Manṣūr, Ibn Idrīs (d. 598/1202), *Mustarafāt al-sarā'ir* (Qum, 1411/1990), p. 575.

among you who knows something of our *qaḍāya* (judgements).<sup>22</sup> The *akhyār* (superior) *salaf* (forefathers) did this and, says al-Qaṭīfī, the imams assured them of *al-najāt* (salvation).

This process, he says, turns on *al-riwāya*. It is the path to truth and *dirāya* (understanding) and the path revealed by the Prophets and the Infallible imams. The only path to that is by *naql* (transmitting) from those of earlier generations who are trustworthy back to the ‘successors of the progeny’ [i.e. the imams]. *Ḥifẓ al-riwāya* (memorising/protection of the transmission) insures that the lowest (*al-adna*) and the highest equally understand.

In the first *mas’ala*, al-Qaṭīfī says that *ijtihād* is *bāṭil* (false) except in time of *ḍarūra* (necessity), such as the *ghayba* (absence) of the imam. It is not a *ṭarīq mustaqil* (independent path) but is to be traceable to the specific issue to hand, as the Prophet’s companions would do.<sup>23</sup>

This is not *jāriy* (permitted) for all matters. This mandates that *istidlāl* (deduction) is based on the *dalāla* (evidence) of the *ḥadīth*, and its ‘*umūm* (generality), *ijmāl* (conciseness) and *bayān* (clarity), *iṭlāq* (not being restricted) and *taqyīd* (restriction) and what most people do by it.

Absent *naṣṣ* (specific designation), there is *al-barā’a al-aṣliyya* (the principle of presumed permission), *istiṣḥāb* (continuance of past practice) or derivation from suitable issues where there is an *aṣl* (original statement of an imam) or *athār* in the *ḥadīth* or a *fatwā* from one of the best of the *aṣḥābūn*.<sup>24</sup> Then *al-ẓann* (speculation), based on *sabab* (a cause, reason), prevails because the imams’ statements are *ḥujj* (proofs) in the *dalāla*.

All this is incumbent on one seeking a *fatwā* from a mufti who possesses *sharā’iṭ al-istiftā* (conditions of issuing a *fatwā*).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> This was not the well-known narration cited via Ibn Ḥanẓala but that cited via Abū Khadija. See al-Kulaynī (vol. 7, p. 412/4) in which the imam cautions believers against seeking recourse to the *qāḍīs* of *al-jawr* (tyranny, oppression). The Ibn Ḥanẓala text is 412/5. See A.J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Shi’i Law: Hadith as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad* (Richmond, 2000), pp. 107–108, 180–181.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Qaṭīfī cites the example of the Prophet’s companion ‘Ammār b. Yāsir and *al-tayammum* (dry ablution). See al-Kulaynī, vol. 3, p. 62/4.

<sup>24</sup> On these Uṣūlī-style principles and exegetical pair of analysis, see Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, pp. 183–185, 269–270, 279, 290.

<sup>25</sup> This refers to the skill set and training on which, according to Uṣūlīs, the mufti’s competence must be based. See Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, pp. 129, 136, 142.

The *fatwā* is acted upon as long as the mufti lives. At his death, one must refer to another mufti<sup>26</sup> because the latter might discover a *wajh* (aspect) of the Qur'an or the Sunna in which there is a *dalāla*, or whose *dalāla* is stronger. Ignoring the Qur'an and following the *fatwās* of *ahl al-ijtihād* is not the path to salvation.

The second *mas'ala* addresses the levels or degrees (*al-marātib*) of *al-riwāya*. The highest of these is that of *qirā'a* (reciting) to the shaykh. Then there is *qirā'a* to him, *samā'* (listening) to his reading, then *mukātiba* (exchanging of correspondence). 'The last', says al-Qaṭīfī, is the *ijāza*. Even then, he says, the *ijāza* is most common in terms of benefit (*naḥ'*), the most widespread, the most in terms of *fā'ida* and the strongest in terms of *'ā'ida* (advantage).

The *ijāza* may be *mursala* (transmitted with an interruption) from an *'adl* (just person) to another *'adl* or to a *mamdūh* (praiseworthy person) from a *mamdūh* to someone like him, or to an *'adl*. It might also be transmitted from [one who is] a *thiqa* (trustworthy person) from a *ḍa'if* (weak person); this based on *iqsām* (divisions) of *al-riwāya*.

If the *riwāya* is to books of *fatwās*, then the transmission ends at their authors. If it relates to *ḥadīth*, then this line of transmission ends with the imam, then the Prophet.

In the last *mas'ala* al-Qaṭīfī says *al-riwāya* has *marātib*, but it absolutely does not mandate *'amal* (action). It is based on what is being transmitted, so if action is being permitted then act, but if not, then do not.

This limits the authority of the *mujāz* to that for which he is authorised by the *riwāya* and *ijāza*. Al-Qaṭīfī notes it can be that someone who transmits acts on it without the latter having actually been transmitted to him. After all, he says, 'someone *ḥāmil* (bearing) *fiqh* (jurisprudence) may not be a *faqīh*.'<sup>27</sup>

An *ijāza* is from a *mujtahid* or ends with him. The *riwāya* stops with him. It is not continuous. The *mujtahid* is not authorising action except based on what he has shown of *dalīl* (proof) for it. This is so even if the

<sup>26</sup> On Uṣūlī opposition to *taqlīd al-mayyit* (following rulings of a dead *mujtahid*), see Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, pp. 188, 195, 296.

<sup>27</sup> For a fuller version of the text, see al-Kulaynī, vol. 1, p. 403/1, 2. Al-Qaṭīfī cites the text again in his 920/1514 *ijāza*.

*ijāza* comprises an authorisation of all writings; because the *ijāza* can contain what the *mujīz* himself may not do, he cannot permit that to someone else.

Because the *ijāza* is only *riwāya*, it is not invalid at the death of the *mujīz*, because *akhbār* are not invalid at the death of the person narrating them.

The longest section of the *ijāza*, at seven pages, delineates the items and/or authors being authorised.

This *ijāza* comprises books of ‘our companions’, what ‘our ‘*ulamā*’ compiled from the *akhbār* of the *muḥaddithīn* and their *ijāzāt* and that whose *naql* stands out from various *riwāyāt* in the works *mansūba* (ascribed, traced) to the Imāmī Shi‘a.

Al-Qaṭīfī says he approves narrating from his own shaykh Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥasan al-Dhirāq, from other *thiqāt* from such as ‘Alī b. Hilāl, back through Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Fahd<sup>28</sup> and, via the same *ṭarīq* – and others are also cited – to yet others, including al-‘Allāma ‘and all of his [unnamed] writings’ on *uṣūl*, *al-furū‘*, *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*, and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) and all of his, also uncited, works in *fiqh*, *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth*. Also cited, via various links, are Muḥammad b. Makkī, al-Shahīd al-Awwal (d. 786/1384), Muḥammad b. Muḥammad, al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022), whom he calls *ra’īs al-madhhab* (master of the faith), the works of Muḥammad b. ‘Alī, Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991) and al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfī*. Al-Qaṭīfī also cites such figures and their works as Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Najāshī (d. after 463/1071), and his *rijāl* work and other, named works of this genre and now names *fiqh* works of al-‘Allāma.

Here al-Qaṭīfī includes the 758/1357 *ijāza* given by al-‘Allāma’s son, Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn, to one Muḥammad b. Ṣadaqa.<sup>29</sup> At four pages, this is longer than al-Qaṭīfī’s three-page listing of his own *ṭuruq* to items and authors. Al-Qaṭīfī says he also authorises Turkī (sic) with all that is in Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn’s *ijāza*, so Turkī can narrate all this from him, i.e. al-Qaṭīfī, and can then himself pass it on.

<sup>28</sup> On these three, see al-Ṭīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 7, pp. 3 (where the name is ‘al-Dirāq’), 169; 6: 9–10. Others (Afandī, vol. 1, p. 15; al-Bahrānī, p. 159; al-Khwānsārī, *Rawḍa*, vol. 1, p. 16; al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī‘a*, vol. 1, p. 135) call the first al-Warrāq. See n. 67 on his 909/1504 *ijāza* to al-Karakī.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 105, pp. 97–101; n. 8.



The one-page *fā'ida*<sup>30</sup> addresses a question about an *ijāza*'s worth, that there could be no references to specific works or specific authors or there might be errors in the works being transmitted.

The 'āqil (wise person), al-Qaṭīfī replies, has no doubts that a specific text is that of its author. *Ijtihād* depends on *al-riwāya* and if there are doubts about the *isnād* of a transmission, then one cannot make a deduction (*yastadal*) or undertake an action based on it. If someone says he found something in al-Ṭūsī's *Tahdhīb*, his first of two collections of the imams' *aḥādīth/akhbār* – that would be the 'weakest' of *al-murāsīl* (transmissions). Absent its being traced back to the imams, one cannot act on it.

If there is a *ḥadīth* that is *mutawātir* based on *sharā'it* of *tawātūr* (successive transmission) then one can act on the basis of it. Absent successive transmission of meaning from the Qur'an, however, it cannot be acted upon without *tashīḥ* (verification) of the transmission as being from the imams. Anyone who does not proceed in this manner is an apostate, and he cites Qur'an 3: 85.<sup>31</sup>

The four-page *waṣiyya* is the *ijāza*'s second longest section.<sup>32</sup>

Here al-Qaṭīfī refers to a Muslim who, he says, knows the faith and repeats the great verses of the Qur'an but without these finding a place in his soul, owing to the *ḥijāb* (barrier) of his citing himself and his love of the world. Although he denies this, says al-Qaṭīfī, in fact, he is *makhḍū'* (misled).

Al-Qaṭīfī then offers words on piety and what this love of the world should entail. Qur'an 2: 165,<sup>33</sup> he says, refers to the *mushrikūn* (polytheists) and one should remember God is always with him

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 101–102.

<sup>31</sup> 'And whoever desires other than Islam as religion – never will it be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers.'

<sup>32</sup> Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 105, pp. 102–106.

<sup>33</sup> 'And [yet], among the people are those who take other than God as equals [to Him]. They love them as they [should] love God. But those who believe are stronger in love for God. And if only they who have wronged would consider [that] when they see the punishment, [they will be certain] that all power belongs to God and that God is severe in punishment.'

and then cites 57: 16.<sup>34</sup> These remarks, he says, are *fi'l-'umūm* (in general).

As for *al-khuṣūs* (specifically, i.e. to Shams al-Dīn), al-Qaṭīfī tells him to look out after his time and when he completes something then *idhkir* (invoke) God. He should not look to *hājāt al-dunyā* (the desires of the world) and should take care not to say something he would not want to see written down for judgment on *Yawm al-qiyāma*. ‘What you do not like,’ says al-Qaṭīfī, ‘leave it off.’ He should not give over to *ḥubb al-riyāsa* (love of being in a leading position). ‘This is of the great things that God opposes.’

Finally, says al-Qaṭīfī, ‘Do not hasten to *al-futyā* (legal opinion).’ There is, he says, a *khabar* that the person reaching Hell the quickest is the speediest person to the *fatwā*.<sup>35</sup> He then cites Qur’an 69: 44–46,<sup>36</sup> 16: 116<sup>37</sup> and part of 10: 59.<sup>38</sup>

This, he says, is his admonition to himself and to his fellow-believers.

### *The First Undated Ijāza*

The nine-line second *ijāza* in *Biḥār* is written to Maṣṣūr, the son of ‘Shaykh Muḥammad b. Turkī (sic)’, for whom al-Qaṭīfī wrote the aforementioned 915/1509 *ijāza*.

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<sup>34</sup> ‘Has the time not come for those who have believed that their hearts should become humbly submissive at the remembrance of God and what has come down of the truth? And let them not be like those who were given the Scripture before, and a long period passed over them, so their hearts hardened; and many of them are defiantly disobedient.’

<sup>35</sup> Although Āl Sunbul traces this text (*Mawsū‘at*, vol. 4, p. 241, n. 1) to *al-Sunun al-kubra* (vol. 6, p. 402) of Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), a version is found in Ibn Bābawayh’s *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faḥīh* (Qum, 1413/1992), vol. 4, p. 286.

<sup>36</sup> ‘And if Muhammad had made up about Us some [false] sayings, We would have seized him by the right hand; Then We would have cut from him the aorta.’

<sup>37</sup> ‘And do not say about what your tongues assert of untruth, “This is lawful and this is unlawful”, to invent falsehood about God. Indeed, those who invent falsehood about God will not succeed.’

<sup>38</sup> ‘Say, “Has God permitted you [to do so], or do you invent [something] about God?”’

Here al-Qaṭīfī says he gives him an *ijāza* for all that he cited in the *ijāza* to his father. There is no date or place of composition.<sup>39</sup>

#### *Al-Qaṭīfī's 920/1514 Ijāza*

This text is dated Muḥarram 920/March 1514, in Najaf, about four months before the battle of Chaldiran at which the Ottomans decisively defeated the Safavids.<sup>40</sup>

In the interim between the 915/1509 *ijāza* and this text, al-Karakī had been present at Ismā'il's seige of Herat which took place the following year. The same year al-Karakī authored 'Nafaḥāt al-Lāhūt', a tract approving the open anathematising of the first three caliphs; Twelver clerics in the Hijaz later complained they were 'chastised' as a result. In these years, also, he replied for Ismā'il to the Ottoman sultan Selim's questions as to why Ismā'il had destroyed the tomb of the Sunni jurist Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) in Baghdad when he took the city. The year 916/1510 also saw al-Karakī receive additional administrative authority in Arab Iraq and a large stipend he is said to have distributed among his students. In 916/1510 al-Karakī completed his 'Qāṭi'at al-Lajāḥ', defending his receipt of *kharāj* land as a gift from Ismā'il by arguing that, as a *faqīh*, he possessed *ṣifāt al-niyāba* (the qualities of deputyship) and that based on the principle of *niyāba 'amma* (general deputyship – the general authority possessed by a *faqīh* as deputy of the Hidden imam), he was permitted to accept *kharāj* land from *sulṭān al-jawr* (a tyrannical ruler). In an essay composed the next year, al-Karakī argued that in the absence of the imam the Friday prayer could be led by a *faqīh* possessing *al-sharā'it* (the qualifications for practising *ijtihād*).<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 105, p. 107; Āl Sunbul, *Mawsū'at*, vol. 4, p. 245. *Biḥār's* editor notes (p. 107, n. 2) he found no further information on Manṣūr. See also al-Ṭihriānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 1, p. 135.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 105, pp. 108–115; Āl Sunbul, *Mawsū'at*, vol. 4, pp. 249–258; al-Ṭihriānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 1, p. 134. On Chaldiran (Rajab 920/August 1514), see Michael J. McCaffrey, 'Čālderān', *Elr*, vol. IV, pp. 656–658. See also A. J. Newman, *Safawid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London, 2006), pp. 20f, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Newman, 'Myth', pp. 78f, 82–85, 88. Al-Karakī's argument concerning the *jā'ir* was perhaps first offered by al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044). See W. Madelung, 'A Treatise of the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā on the Legality of Working for the Government ("Masāla fī l-'Amal ma'al-sulṭān")', *BSOAS*, 43 (1980), pp. 28–29.

The seven and-a-half page *ijāza* is written for one Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Astarābādī. It is comprised of the standard opening prayers; two pages of prefatory remarks; a nearly three-page *muqaddima* (introduction), with five *fawā'id*; a two-page listing of items and authors being authorised; and a one-page conclusion.

In his preface al-Qaṭīfī refers to the divisions and fighting which appeared in Islam. Each group adhered to different *wujūh* (aspects) of the Qur'an. 'We', he says, 'took recourse to the Prophetic Sunna and the narrated *ḥadīth*.' These include the *ḥadīth* of the 'two precious things' that the Prophet said he left to the *umma*, referring to the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt – a text, he says, narrated by numerous narrators in various forms that mandated holding fast to the Ahl al-Bayt.<sup>42</sup> The Ahl al-Bayt must, therefore, be followed just as the Prophet, and he cites Qur'an 25: 27 in respect of those who do not.<sup>43</sup>

However, al-Qaṭīfī continues, the people of *ḍalāl* (error) took over, and *fiṣād* (corruption) and *ẓulm* (oppression) spread. The Ahl al-Dhikr [the imams] and *dalāla* were hidden, and the muftis became confused by ignorance.

Al-Astarābādī was one who remained true to the faith, al-Qaṭīfī says. In Najaf, he says, where the recipient came on *ziyāra*, they studied the entirety of *al-Sharā'ī* (of al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī, Ja'far b. Ḥasan, d. 676/1277). At his return to Najaf, al-Astarābādī contacted al-Qaṭīfī to ask for an *ijāza* in what al-Qaṭīfī had by way of *al-riwāya* from the imams and to connect to the narration of *fatwās* to narrate to students as he wishes. Here al-Qaṭīfī cites the text in his 915/1509 *ijāza* saying that not everyone who is a scholar of *fiqh* understood it.<sup>44</sup>

In his *muqaddima*, al-Qaṭīfī says the faithful take the *aḥkām* (legal rulings) only from *ṣādiq* (someone truthful) and that truthfulness is known by his being infallible [i.e. an imam].

Those who took the place of the Prophet, i.e. the imams, allowed their Shi'a to act based on what which was narrated from them. They

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On the Shi'i concept of the *faqīh* as *nā'ib* of the Hidden imam, see Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, s.v.

<sup>42</sup> The version of this text cited here is particular to this *ijāza* (vol. 105, p. 109). See, however, Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> 'And the Day the wrongdoer will bite on his hands [in regret] he will say, "Oh, I wish I had taken a path with the Messenger."'

<sup>44</sup> n. 27.

commanded the *tafīrī* (derivation) of the *aḥkām* from the *uṣūl*. The Shi'a did this owing to necessity, i.e. the absence of the imam.

If there is an *aṣl* on the issue in question, he says, then there is nothing to be derived. They agreed on the falseness of acting on the statement of a dead person. The *'āqil* then turns to another of the heirs of al-Dhikr so as not to break from the Prophetic *athār* or abandon acting based on the Qur'an and the narrated Sunna.

And this was custom of the *salaf* and on this there are, he says, clear *adilla* in the *uṣūl*.

This process depends on *sharā'it*. These include acquaintance with the *uṣūl al-'aqā'id*, *sharā'it* of *al-ḥadd* and *al-burhān*, *al-uṣūl*, *al-adab* and grammar. Using these, the *masā'il* can be derived. The process needs a *ṭarīq* connected to the Ahl al-Bayt. The majority of *furū'*, he says, are down to their *uṣūl*. That is, there is present in the *ḥadīth* an *aṣl* on which one relies and with an *isnād* that is known.

There are many *ṭuruq* (paths) to the *isnād*. The *ijāza* is the most general of these in terms of *naf'* and the easiest in term of *tanāwul* (comprehension).

Here al-Qaṭīfī offers five *fawā'id*. First, he says the *ijāza* is *idhn* (permission) for the *naql* of *ḥadīth* or a *fatwā* from a person himself or someone who narrates from him via *wāsiṭa* (an intermediary) or intermediaries. Secondly, the *fā'ida* (of the *ijāza*) is the *tasalluṭ* (authority) of the *mujāz* over that which is authorised to him and its *isnād* to its author or to the narrator of the *ḥadīth*. Its *riwāya* from him is based on the *ṭarīq* being *ṣaḥīḥ* (correct), or *mawwathaq* (confirmed), or *ḥasan* (good) or something else.

Thirdly, if a *ḥadīth* lacks a *mu'arid* (contradiction/objection) or a preference as to what is being objected, then action on it and reliance on it is *wajaba* (mandated), if it is one of the [above-mentioned] three categories. If the *ḥadīth* is weak, *mursil* or cut off (*maqṭū'*, i.e. in its link to the imam), then one must seek recourse from the *'umūm* of the Qur'an, the Sunna, or what is well known among the *ashāb*, or a *dalīl 'āqilī* (rational proof) or the reasons for preponderance on it, and act on this. One cannot act on the basis of anything else.

Fourth, if there are two opposing *amāratān* (signs) and there is no preference, then, citing Qur'an 17: 36,<sup>45</sup> al-Qaṭīfī says *waqf* (hesitation) is mandated, given the absence of *'ilm*.

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<sup>45</sup> 'And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge.'

Finally, the *ijāza*'s *fā'ida* is clear. A written work is confirmed in its attribution to its speaker and author, and so too is the *ḥadīth*. This is because it is *mutawātir*. So, in the *ijāza* there must be knowledge of that. If not, then *naql* is not permitted. Each *mujīz* must certify that the works in question are Imāmī.

As to the attributing of the book to its author, there is no problem in permitting it. But this is not part of *al-riwāya*. Action and *al-naql* depend on *al-riwāya* and the *adna* (lowest form) of this is the *ijāza*. Absent *al-riwāya* the item cannot be narrated. Otherwise, it would be as if one found a book that someone else wrote: even if he knows who wrote it is not correct to narrate it from him.

The *ijāza* of a scholar relates to the writings of all the 'ulamā'. Since these include contradictory *fatwās*, he says, how could one give an *ijāza* to act on these? How, he asks, can Ibn Idrīs (Muḥammad b. Maṣṣūr, d. 598/1202) give an *ijāza* of the books of al-Ṭūsī for action?<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the *ijāza* is given from one *mujtahid* to another.

Al-Qaṭīfī then offers a one-page enumeration of items and authors for which he is giving authorisation. These include *al-Sharā'ī* and its *ḥawāshī* (marginalia) that he and al-Astarābādī read, *al-Alfiyya* of al-Shahīd and its *ḥawāshī*, al-Qaṭīfī's own *al-Rasā'il al-najafiyya*, the books of Shi'ī *fatwās* that he narrated from his shaykhs, including al-'Allāma's *Qawā'id al-aḥkām*, and other named texts. These included the *ḥadīth* and non-*ḥadīth* works of al-Ṭūsī, and books of other of 'our *aṣḥāb*' such as al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), Ibn Bābawayh, al-Mufid and al-Kulaynī.<sup>47</sup>

Al-Qaṭīfī closes this section saying that he authorises al-Astarābādī to give his *ijāza* to others as he wishes, based on the *sharā'it* of the *ijāza* and *al-riwāya*.

In his conclusion al-Qaṭīfī says the *ṭuruq* of his own *fuqahā'* are well known. They include those noted by al-'Allāma in his *rijāl* work, *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl*, and those figures whom al-Ṭūsī names at the end of his *al-Istibṣār* (his second collection of the imams' *ḥadīth* after

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Idrīs's criticisms of al-Ṭūsī were well known. See A.J. Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, p. 109.

<sup>47</sup> On *Qawā'id* as the Twelver Shi'ī text supposedly available to Ismā'il I, see A.J. Newman, *Safawid Iran*, p. 151, n. 3. On al-Qaṭīfī's 927/1521 *al-Rasā'il* and his 939/1532 *sharḥ* (commentary) on *al-Alfiyya*, see al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 11, p. 227; vol. 2, p. 296.

*Tahdhīb*), and Ibn Bābawayh at the end of *al-Faqīh*. He says his *ṭuruq* to these are many and include what had been authorised to him from his own teachers. The *awthāq* (most trustworthy) of these is Ibrāhīm al-Dhirāq from 'Alī b. Hilāl al-Jazā'irī from Aḥmad b. Fahd al-Ḥilli through to al-Shahīd. He cites other *ṭuruq* linking him to al-Ṭūsī to al-Murtaḍā and al-Mufid to Ibn Bābawayh and al-Kulaynī and, thence, to the best of 'our *fuqahā'* whose *ṭuruq* end in the imams and thence the Prophet himself. This includes their *fatwās* and, for the *ḥadīth*, links to the Prophet, to the angel Gabriel and thence to God.

#### *Al-Qaṭīfī's 944/1537 Ijāza*

In 924/1518, four years after Chaldiran, as the fate of the Safavids, and Ithnā 'asharī Islam, in Iran continued to be uncertain, al-Qaṭīfī composed his 'al-Sirāj', rebutting al-Karakī's 916/1510 essay on *kharāj*, arguing that receipt of any items from a tyrannical ruler was illegal as these had certainly been taken improperly from their owner. Al-Karakī, said al-Qaṭīfī, should have hesitated to accept these but, in any case, gifts from a tyrannical ruler should be avoided. In 926/1520, al-Qaṭīfī composed an essay on *al-riḍā'* (wet-nursing), replying to 916/1520 al-Karakī's essay on the subject. Al-Qaṭīfī's essay rebutting al-Karakī's ruling that the *faqīh* might perform Friday prayer during the Imam's continued absence might also have been completed in these post-Chaldiran years.

Ismā'īl I died in 930/1524. The year after his son Ṭahmāsp's accession, al-Karakī returned to Iran. There he became embroiled in two confrontations, first with the two co-*šadrs* – one of whom was a student of both himself and al-Qaṭīfī – with one of the points of dispute being al-Karakī's view that the *faqīh*, as *nā'ib al-Imām* (deputy of the imam), might lead the Friday prayer and the second regarding al-Karakī's formulations on the direction of the *qibla*.

Ismā'īl's death, however, unleashed a civil war lasting over ten years, not regarding the legitimacy of the Safavid house but among Qizil-bāsh tribal elements and their Tajik associates over a new hierarchical alignment around the ten-year-old Shah Ṭahmāsp. The turmoil encouraged invasions by the Uzbeks from the East and the Ottomans from the West. The Ottomans seized Tabrīz and Kurdistān, and attracted support in Gilān.

At the height of the civil war, around 936/1529, al-Karakī ‘won’ both confrontations: both his opponents were dismissed. Al-Qaṭīfī, in Iraq, was also formally admonished to cease his criticisms of al-Karakī.<sup>48</sup> In 939/1532 Ṭahmāsp issued the famous *firmān* appointing al-Karakī *nā’ib al-imām* with authority over the realm’s religious affairs. He was also given additional holdings in eastern Iraq and other western Safavid lands. Al-Karakī subsequently issued a series of rulings including the appointment of a prayer-leader in every village to instruct the people in the tenets of the Ithnā ‘asharī faith and the changing of the *qibla* direction throughout the realm.

Al-Karakī died in 941/1534. That year Baghdad and all of Arab Iraq, including the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala, surrendered to the Ottomans. Basra surrendered four years later, the year after al-Qaṭīfī composed this *ijāza*. In Iran, although two of al-Karakī’s students subsequently served as *ṣadr*, the observance of the Friday prayers that he had promoted was discontinued.<sup>49</sup>

If the Safavid project, and its support for the Twelver faith, had not collapsed with Chaldiran, as al-Qaṭīfī wrote the present text, the fall of the one and, in consequence, of the other, may well still have seemed possible.

The *ijāza* is written to Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn b. Nūr Allāh b. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Shāh al-Ḥusaynī al-Tustarī. No place of composition is cited.<sup>50</sup>

The eight-page text contains no formally delineated sections. More than a page is devoted to opening prayers, about two pages to preliminary remarks, and four pages to a ‘discussion’. Six lines concern that for which authorisation of transmission is being given.

After the prayers, al-Qaṭīfī, in what is likely to have been a reference to al-Karakī’s death, notes that God decreed the *faqd* (loss) of

<sup>48</sup> Newman, ‘Myth’, pp. 84–91, 99. On al-Qaṭīfī’s *al-riḍā’* and Friday prayer essays, see also al-Baḥrānī, p. 155; al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī’a*, vol. 11, p. 188; vol. 15, pp. 62, 75–76.

<sup>49</sup> Newman, ‘Myth’, pp. 96–105; Newman, *Safawid Iran*, pp. 26f, 38.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 105, pp. 116–123; Āl Sunbul, *Mawsū’at*, vol. 4, pp. 261–270. Al-Ṭīhrānī’s entry on the *ijāza* (*al-Dharī’a*, vol. 1, p. 134) is cited by *Biḥār*’s editor, who notes that the recipient’s name is given there as Ziyā’ al-Dīn b. Nūr Allāh and that he is the father of Qāḍī Nūr Allāh al-Tustarī, killed in India in 1019/1610. See Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, p. 194.



'the *'ulamā'* and *ahl al-faḍl* (people of virtue)', and refers to Qur'an 13:41.<sup>51</sup>

Al-Qaṭīfī says he noted that he was a *muta'akhir* (late-comer), owing to the paucity of his *biḍā'a* (resources) and many *iḍā'a* (lost opportunities). But, he says, he was also fearful of the Lord of the *sharī'a* and of such of the Prophetic *ḥadīth* as

When *al-bad'* (innovation) emerges in my community,  
it is obligatory for the scholar to make his knowledge  
public, otherwise, God will condemn him.<sup>52</sup>

Although al-Qaṭīfī says he also tended to be withdrawn from people, he therefore embarked on much reading and study. He remained without resources and weak in health and, he says, probably also referring to al-Karakī, he faced much resistance from *ahl al-ḍalāl*, *al-ḥāsidiṅ* (the jealous), widespread *fitna* (strife) and *al-qīl wa'l-qāl* (idle talk).

Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn's reading of al-'Allāma's *al-Irshād* showed al-Qaṭīfī that this man was of *ahl al-'ilm*. He asked al-Qaṭīfī for an *ijāza* in the text and the *ḥawāshī*. Al-Qaṭīfī gave him an *ijāza* in the *riwāya*, for him and whoever narrated from him via al-Qaṭīfī.

<sup>51</sup> 'Have they not seen that We set upon the land, reducing it from its borders?'

As noted in *Āl Sunbul (Mawsū'at*, vol. 4, p. 262, n. 1), in *al-Kāfī* the verse refers to *faḍl* as the 'death' of the *'ulamā'*. See the six texts cited in al-Kulaynī, vol. 1, p. 38, esp. 2, 6; the latter referencing this verse.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Kulaynī, vol. 1, p. 54/2, citing the Prophet. Al-Qaṭīfī refers to, but does not cite, other, similar texts. See also ad n., 57.

Although the poetry cited by al-Qaṭīfī across these texts is not discussed here, here he cites the verse

I was late to keep life and I did not find  
a life for myself that is like progressing.

by the Syrian poet Abu Tamām (d. ca. 845/1441), author of *al-Ḥamāsa*. The text can be found in 'Abd al-Qādir al-Baghdādī, *Khazānat al-adab*, vol. 7, p. 465, for which see: [http://www.shiaonlineibrary.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8/4655\\_%D8%AE%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AF%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%AC-%D9%A7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%81%D8%AD%D8%A9\\_o?pageno=4650p](http://www.shiaonlineibrary.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8/4655_%D8%AE%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AF%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%AC-%D9%A7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%81%D8%AD%D8%A9_o?pageno=4650p), (accessed 13.8.20).

This *ijāza*, al-Qaṭīfi says, entails both the teaching of the work but also the *taqrīr* (determination) of its meaning, since the sayyid had mastered both. He was authorised to do likewise for those who read it with him who were of such people, in all of this observing *al-iḥtiyāt* (caution); the one who does not *ḍalla* (stray from) the *ṣirāṭ* (the path), he says, is he who follows the path of *al-iḥtiyāt*.

An *ijāza*, al-Qaṭīfi says, is of the *iqsām* (parts) of *al-riwāya*, being the last of the *marātib* in strength although the most common in terms of *fā'ida* and the most complete with respect to *'a'ida* (benefit).

It is last because the highest degree of transmission was for the *rāwī* (transmitter) to hear his shaykh reading, to insure against errors. The second is the *rāwī* reading and hearing what is being read. Then there is the reading of someone other than the two of them and the *rāwī* hearing the reading. Then, there is the *ijāza*.

The *mujāz* has authority over what he narrates from the person who gave him authorisation. This, says al-Qaṭīfi, refers to the narration of *lafz* (the words). The *mujīz* is not establishing the meaning. The meaning might be *mawkūl* (assigned) to something on which there is *al-'itimād* (reliance) in relation to knowledge of the three *dalālāt* and its associated *mafḥūmāt* (understandings)

The *ijāza* is not *mufīda* (useful) for action by the *mujāz*. It is not relevant to what rulings the *mujīz* had issued. If he was a *mujtahid* who was in substantial disagreement with another *mujtahid*, then the *ijāza* would be giving permission in relation to all the *fatwās* of his opponent. If the *ijāza* allowed for action, then the *mujtahid* would be permitting action in accord with what his opponent had demonstrated to be true.

The *ijāza* covers only *al-riwāya* (the transmission) of that for which an individual had been given an *ijāza*, so the recipient might master that field and become associated with the transmitters. If the *ijāza* refers to written works composed by a scholar, the latter is at the end of the line of transmission. If the *ijāza* is for transmission of books of *ḥadīth*, the line of transmission must end with the imam who made the statement, from the Prophet, from the angel Gabriel and from God.

As to works being authorised that the *mujīz* corrected and gave to the recipient, there is no discussion on the *tasalluṭ* of these being related. The recipient can only narrate that which is corrected in books of *fatwās*.

As for the *ijāza* in what was read and the 'ilm of its meaning from a specified shaykh, this is an *ijāza* of *riwāya* and action. So, that which he read and understood of its meaning is in books of *ḥadīths*. The *ḥadīths* are *thābita* (affirmed) and there is no intrusion of the life of the *mujīz* in their being correct or corrupt. Thus, the statement that so and so said this is not made false by his death.

Rather the matter turns on the probability of truthfulness or lying. If he was 'adl then the *riwāya* is *ṣaḥīḥ*. If there are *wasā'it* and all are 'adl, then it is also correct. If they or one is *mamdūh*, which does not relate to justness, the *riwāya* is *ḥasan*. If there is among them a transmitter who is *mukhālīf al-dīn* (non-Imāmī) but a just individual and 'adl in his *madhhab* (belief) and *mawthūq* in his *amāna* (reliability), and there is no lying, then the *riwāya* is *mawthūqa*. If not, it is weak. A *khabar* is *ḍa'if* if the transmitter is *majhūl* (unknown) or *majrūḥ* (unworthy of trust) even if other narrators are 'adl.

If the *ijāza* relates to books of *fatwās*, if there is *ijmā'* (scholarly consensus) on the *fatwā*, the transmitters gain authority over the *riwāya* and action on it based on the *ijāza*. What is disputed in the *ḥukm* is *shādh* (anomalous) and not regarded or *munqariḍ* (outdated) owing to later *ijmā'*.

If, al-Qaṭīfī says, a *fatwā* is the source of well-known disagreement from two sides, or what was not known did not reach the point where we noted it, acting on it is correct for one who receives it from him and about him, either orally or by intermediary/ies. When the *mujtahid* dies, he says, no action is permitted because a dead man's ruling is invalid. So, even if the giver was a *mujtahid* there is no *taqlid* (emulation), as al-'Allāma said in *al-Irshād* and elsewhere.<sup>53</sup>

The *ijmā'* comes together after his death if there was no agreement with him in the *fatwā* of living *mujtahids*. If there was disagreement there is no *ijmā'* with his death as there was none when he was alive.

*Al-sirr al-zāhir* (the presenting issue) here is the necessity of considering (*murā'āh*) the Qur'an and the Sunna. This is because a person, being fallible, can err. Even if the word of the *mujtahid* is reliable, not reconsidering the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet is of the greatest religious corruptions.

<sup>53</sup> Āl Sunbul (*Mawsū'at*, vol. 4, p. 268, nn. 3, 5) references *Irshād* and al-'Allāma's *Mabādi' al-Wuṣūl ilā 'ilm al-uṣūl*, but without citing editions.

*Ijtihād* among Imāmīs, he says, is not a permitted *ṭarīq* (path) by *bi'l-aṣāla* (in principle). It is permitted by necessity owing to the absence of the imam and the impossibility of knowing his *fatwā*. It is permitted to the *mujtahid* as long as he safeguards the Qur'anic proofs, the Prophetic *aḥādīth* and the divine *athār*. If the *mujtahid* dies and someone else takes his place, then recourse to the other on the disputed issue is necessary.

If, al-Qaṭīfī says, any age is devoid of a *mujtahid*, reliance on the *fatwā* of a dead *mujtahid* is permissible as long as all who have the capacity (*qābiliyya*) for that strive day and night to attain *ijtihād*. *Ijtihād*, he concludes, is a word based on *tashkīk* (doubt/scepticism/questioning) and *yatajazi* (limited/specific) in the chosen faith to the Uṣūlis.<sup>54</sup>

In the few lines in which he ends the *ijāza*, al-Qaṭīfī says he authorises the *riwāya* of all the writings of the Imāmī 'ulamā' on the *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, *fiqh* and others. Everything except the *ḥadīth* is traced to him and his shaykhs and thence to the author. The *ḥadīth* are narrated from him through to the imams. He cites no names of his shaykhs and their *isnād*, nor does he name any works.<sup>55</sup>

#### *Al-Qaṭīfī's Second Undated Ijāza*

The four-page *ijāza* to Khalīfa Shāh Maḥmūd, also lacking any place reference, comprises three lines of prefatory prayers; one page of introductory remarks; three *fawā'id* over two pages, including one page on items and authors for which the *ijāza* is being given; and a four-line *khātima* (conclusion).<sup>56</sup>

Al-Qaṭīfī commences saying that looking about him he saw that those embracing the faith were either a *mudda'in* (a pretender) who

<sup>54</sup> Āl Sunbul (*Mawsū'at*, vol. 4, p. 269, n. 2) references al-'Allāma's *Mabādi'*.

<sup>55</sup> The citation here (vol. 105, p. 123) of al-Qaṭīfī's *ṭarīq al-riwāya* from al-Dhirāq (sic) from 'Alī b. Hilāl to Muḥammad b. Makkī and to his shaykhs is a later addition, possibly by the copyist. See also Āl Sunbul, *Mawsū'at*, vol. 4, p. 270.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Majlisī, vol. 105, pp. 85–88. This *ijāza* is not cited in Āl Sunbul's *Mawsū'at*. Al-Ṭīhrānī (*al-Dhari'a*, vol. 1, p. 134) only notes there that al-Qaṭīfī arrived in Iraq in 913/1507. Unusually, *Bihār's* editor does not cite this *al-Dhari'a* reference. See also n. 14.

has no 'ilm or a *nāqil* transmitting from someone from whom it is not correct to transmit.

Al-Qaṭīfī says that although he saw he was neither, he had faced issues of *biḍā'a* and many *iḍā'a*. He then cites the same text as he had in the 944/1537 *ijāza*, that when *al-bad'* emerged, the learned man had to act.<sup>57</sup>

While in Najaf, he says, Khalīfa's study of some works of *fiqh* with him proved his astuteness. He requested, and al-Qaṭīfī wrote, an *ijāza*. Khalīfa sought, says al-Qaṭīfī, a path to the Prophet referenced in Qur'an 34: 18.<sup>58</sup> The Ahl al-Bayt, al-Qaṭīfī says, explain that the 'blessed' cities referred to Prophet's family and the 'visible' cities to those who narrated from them.<sup>59</sup>

In the first *fā'ida*, he says the *ijāza* does not include the authorisation of action. It is the last of the *marātib* of *al-riwāya* and its most general in terms of benefit. It gives the recipient authority to transmit that for which he was given an *ijāza*, whether a book of *fatwās* – which he narrates from its author – or a work which he narrates back to the imam and thence to the Prophet and thence to God.

Citing Qur'an 53:3,<sup>60</sup> al-Qaṭīfī says the Prophet did not undertake *ijtihād*. The imams are *ḥafāza*, he says – that is, they know the Qur'an by heart – from the Prophet.

If it were said, if this were so then there would not be differences 'among the Imāmīs' and their transmissions, al-Qaṭīfī says he would say that correctness does not prove clarity of meaning, such that something else is not probable. Even if it did, it does not necessitate the lack of the possibility of the opposite, given that the Arabic language and its *dalāla* are not devoid of differences.

The meaning turns on *al-ḥaqīqa* (the truth) and the *ḥikma* (rationale) requires the presence of the 'umūm (generality) and the *khuṣūṣ*

<sup>57</sup> In his only use of verse in this *ijāza*, al-Qaṭīfī then cites the same line of poetry from Abū Tammām as cited above. See n. 52.

<sup>58</sup> 'And We placed between them and the cities which We had blessed [many] visible cities. And We determined between them the [distances of] journey, [saying], "Travel between them by night or day in safety?"

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Ibn Bābawayh, *Kamāl al-dīn* (Qum, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 395; vol. 2, p. 483.

<sup>60</sup> 'He did not speak of his own desire, it is an inspiration which inspires him.'

(specificity), *ijmāl* (abridged) and *bayān* (clear, obvious), *itlāq* (not being restricted) and *taqyīd* (restriction) (together, loosening and tying), and *al-nusukh* (abrogation), all present in the Qur'an. He then cites Qur'an 16: 43<sup>61</sup> and explains that 'Dhikr' refers to the Prophet, as in Qur'an 65: 10<sup>62</sup> and that his Ahl are the Ahl al-Bayt.

In the second *fā'ida*, al-Qaṭīfī says it is inevitable that there be both correctness and error in the transmission of a work if it is not *maqrū'* (read) personally.

It might be said that, since the Imāmīs hold that the dead person's word cannot be followed, what is the *fā'ida* of narrating their writings?

Al-Qaṭīfī replies there are many. These include knowledge of where there is *ijmā'* and where *khilāf* (disagreement) and *tasalluṭ* over the narration of *masā'il* (issues) on which there is no disagreement. There is no disputing, he says, that one does not follow the dead in that in which there is dispute. As for that on which there is no *khilāf*, the statement is not based on him at all but on the *madhhab*, and, he says, there are other benefits.

What is the benefit of an *ijāza* if the book is correct and its *tawātur* and the author are well known?

Al-Qaṭīfī says the *ijāza* allows its recipient to narrate the book. There is a difference, he says, between narrating the work from the author and *isnād* (tracing it to the author). Among the conditions of *ijtihād*, he adds, is the tracing of *al-riwāya*.

The one-page third *fā'ida* addresses his own *ṭuruq*. He says he narrates from many *thiqāt* orally, calling al-Dhirāq (sic) *awthaq*, thence from 'Ali b. Hilāl, from his shaykh through Aḥmad b. Fahd, via Shaykh Fakhr al-Dīn (sic) to his father, al-'Allāma. Via Aḥmad b. Fahd he has links to al-Shahīd and via 'Ali b. Hilāl also to al-'Allāma. Fakhr al-Dīn said he had 'more than 100' *ṭuruq* to Imam Ja'far. There also are *ṭuruq* from the latter's father, al-'Allāma, to al-Ṭūsī, to al-Mufid, to al-Kulaynī through to Imam Mūsā, from Imam Ja'far. These all end in God.

Khalifa's *ijāza*, he says, entails *riwāya* of all the works he has mentioned including the *ḥadīth* collections of *al-Kāfī*, *al-Faḥīh*,

<sup>61</sup> 'Ask *ahl al-dhikr* if you do not know.'

<sup>62</sup> 'O ye who believe! Now God hath sent down unto you a *Dhikr* (messenger).'

*Tahdhīb* and *al-Istibṣār*.<sup>63</sup> These *ṭuruq*, he says, are via Fakhr al-Dīn via his father and the aforementioned *ṭarīq* to al-Ṭūsī and thence al-Mufid as well as, via another *ṭarīq*, from Fakhr al-Dīn's grandfather Shaykh Yūsuf via a different path that, however, also ends in al-Ṭūsī, al-Mufid and thence to the imams. These *ṭuruq* are enumerated in the *ḥadīth* collections he has cited.

In the four-line *khātima* al-Qaṭīfī, citing part of Qur'an 3: 83<sup>64</sup> and 16: 53<sup>65</sup> says one is to seek only the face of God and not to forget prayer. He apologises for the *ikhtiṣār* (brevity) and says there may soon be a *taṭwīl* (elaboration).

### Summary and Conclusions

Al-Qaṭīfī's discourse across these *ijāzāt* might be described as one of limits, both jurisprudential and personal.

First, across all four al-Qaṭīfī argues for limits on the *ijāza* and the authority it bestows. He acknowledges the various *marātib* of the *ijāza* and that, in this hierarchy, the *ijāza* is the last even as, he adds, it is the most beneficial and the most common. In the process, he also consistently notes that the *ijāza* does not grant authority to act or, similarly, authorise the transmission of meaning. In the first instance, it only traces the chain of transmitters back to the author of the text, if it is work of *fatwās*, or, in relation to the imams' *ḥadīth*, back to the imam, the Prophet and, finally, God himself.

He refers also to the rules for categorising the named transmitters of the works authorisation for the transmission of which is being given and to the skills and learning needed to qualify as a *mujtahid*.

His references to the processes associated with *fiqh* and the *aḥkām/furū'* also highlight limits. Al-Qaṭīfī rejects the absolute legitimacy of *ijtihād*. He acknowledges that in the Imam's absence its exercise may be necessary and, in the process, refers to the various

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<sup>63</sup> Although not named as such, these are the 'four books' of the imams' *ḥadīth* compiled before the Saljūq's arrival in Baghdad in 447/1055. See Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, pp. 62, 75, n. 30, 87, 179, 209.

<sup>64</sup> 'So is it other than the religion of God they desire'.

<sup>65</sup> 'And whatever you have of favour – it is from God. Then when adversity touches you, to Him you cry for help.'

exegetical pairs and principles of textual analysis generally associated, he notes, with the Uṣūlī school of Twelver jurisprudence. The latter, he carefully cautions, must be grounded in the Qur'an, the Sunna and the imams' narrations. The resulting *fatwā* is valid only during the lifetime of the mufti/*mujtahid*. At the latter's death, recourse to a living mufti is mandated. The latter must start the process afresh, making sure to ground any resulting *fatwā* in recourse to the above sources. In all these discussions, however, he stresses the virtues of practicing *waqf* and *iḥtiyāt* – a very Akhbārī reference.<sup>66</sup>

As to the relevance of historical context, across the dated *ijāzāt*, these 'polemical' jurisprudential discussions receive approximately the same attention – seven, five and six pages respectively. Four pages are devoted thereto in the undated Khalifa Shāh *ijāza*.

There are also personal limits in evidence in these texts and here context seems to play a role: that al-Karakī's presence looms large, if indirectly, here suggests that al-Qaṭīfī's jurisprudential and personal concerns with al-Karakī as an associate of the Safavid court were of a piece.

Al-Qaṭīfī's 915/1509 *ijāza* was composed two years after his arrival in Iraq, by which time, as noted, both al-Karakī's connections to Ismā'īl's court and also his standing in Iraq were well established. Al-Qaṭīfī's *waṣīyya* in it, condemning over-attention to the Qur'an by those whose souls are untouched by the faith, *ḥubb al-riyāsa* and hasty recourse to *fatwās* certainly intends to refer to al-Karakī.

Al-Qaṭīfī's citing of Qur'an 13:41 in his 944/1537 *ijāza* to refer to the death of the '*ulamā*' clearly references al-Karakī's recent death. Al-Qaṭīfī's care to note, separately, that the verse also refers to the loss of the *ahl al-faḍl* implicitly excludes al-Karakī from their number.

It is only after al-Karakī's death, in the 944/1537 text, that al-Qaṭīfī makes reference to clearly still-painful memories of the distinct contrast between his situation and that of al-Karakī after his own arrival in Iraq three decades earlier, his lack of self-confidence, health issues and numerous personal slights.

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<sup>66</sup> A. J. Newman, 'The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late-Safawid Iran. Part One: 'Abdallāh al-Samāhijī's "Munyat al-Mumārīsīn"', *BSOAS*, 55 (1992), pp. 19, 46.



Secondly, as to those works for which transmission is being authorised in these *ijāzāt*, al-Qaṭīfī's lists include a wide range of material across such different genres as *fatwās*, *tafsīr*, *rijāl* and *ḥadīth*. His naming of individuals here demonstrates that his own *ṭuruq* to the works in question are *mutawātir* through his own shaykhs.

This said, across these texts, in comparison with those discussed in the field, al-Qaṭīfī offers quite limited reference to his own immediate network of teachers. While he alludes to having studied with others, of these only al-Dhirāq/al-Warrāq, cited as *awthaq*, is named as his 'direct' shaykh. Only via al-Dhirāq does al-Qaṭīfī trace his own *ṭuruq* back through generations of named scholars, to the earliest well-known works and figures of the faith. Perhaps, knowing that al-Karakī himself had studied with al-Dhirāq/al-Warrāq years before al-Qaṭīfī's arrival coupled with awareness that the pedigrees of others of his shaykhs were more limited drove al-Qaṭīfī to seek out al-Karakī's teacher. Indeed, al-Qaṭīfī's references to him in his two early dated texts stand as statements of, if not pleas for, equal status with al-Karakī, attesting all the more to al-Qaṭīfī's lack of self-confidence.<sup>67</sup>

Further attesting thereto is that al-Qaṭīfī's devoted four of the seven pages on his *ṭuruq* in his 915/1509 text to a verbatim citation of the 758/1357 *ijāza* of Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn.

This said, al-Qaṭīfī's attention to his *ṭuruq* markedly diminishes, from seven pages in the 915/1509 text, to two in the 920/1514 text, to – after al-Karakī's death – six lines in the 944/1537 text, the latter lacking any names at all.

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<sup>67</sup> On al-Dhirāq (sic)'s *ijāza*, see al-Bahrānī, p. 159; al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 1, p. 133.

In the undated *ijāza* to Khalīfa Shāh, al-Qaṭīfī refers to his shaykhs as al-Dhirāq, 'orally', and one Shaykh 'Alī b. Ja'far b. Abī but the latter as among the *awthaq* who narrated from al-Dhirāq. Al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 1, p. 133; al-Ṭīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 7, p. 5, notes that he narrates from 'al-Warrāq' directly and indirectly, the latter via Shaykh 'Alī. Afandī (vol. 1, p. 18) refers to other '*ulamā'*' of Bahrain. See also al-Bahrānī, pp. 155, 159. The latter suggests al-Qaṭīfī studied with al-Karakī himself, but al-Khwānsārī (vol. 1, p. 29) suggests al-Karakī also studied with al-Dhirāq/al-Warrāq. See the 909/1503 *ijāza* given to al-Karakī referenced in al-Ṭīhrānī, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 7, p. 3; n. 28.

In the aftermath of al-Karakī's death in 941/1534 al-Qaṭīfī could reflect on, and commit to paper, in a document not immediately intended for widespread circulation, the painful memories of his early situation. Indeed, the recollections on offer in the 944/1537 *ijāza* may have been further stirred up by a sense that the impact of his discourse was perhaps limited, even if across the century, in and outside Iran, others also had had reservations about the Safavid association with the faith and al-Karakī's connections therewith.<sup>68</sup> The absence of a detailed *ṭuruq* in it suggests he felt the argument for equal status with al-Karakī was now less of a requirement. Al-Qaṭīfī's briefer references to his early situation in the Khalīfa Shāh *ijāza* and to those pretending to embrace the faith, his devotion of but a page in the text to his own *ṭuruq* and his apology for its brevity all intimate that this *ijāza* also post-dates al-Karakī's death, perhaps even the 944/1537 text.

By contrast, none of the Shi'ī *ijāzāt* discussed by the field to date suggest their authors expand on discussions in them to address such other associated jurisprudential issues as did al-Qaṭīfī, let alone to offer also such personal reflections.

Taqī al-Majlisī's listing of the seven forms of transmission in his 1066/1655 *Lavāmi'*, a Persian-language commentary on Ibn Bābawayh's *al-Faqīh*,<sup>69</sup> in a separate *fā'ida*, precedes a discussion of, in order, the necessity for recourse to the imams and their narrations and for verifying the texts in question, his own *ṭuruq* – citing the same *ḥadīth* as al-Qaṭīfī concerning the 'bearer' of *fiqh*, his caution that the

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<sup>68</sup> In al-Qaṭīfī's post-Chāldirān 924/1518 'al-Sirāj' essay, there is the sense that he was, or at least perceived himself to be, not without allies (Newman, 'Myth', p. 87). His connection with one of the co-*šadrs* involved in the early Ṭahmāsp-period disputes with al-Karakī and his admonishment by the Safavid court in the aftermath of al-Karakī's 'win' in these years both attest to his having had some standing in Iran in these later years and also to the ending of it. Indeed, perhaps indicative of relative popularity over the period, Dirāyatī lists six copies of 'al-Sirāj', as extant today; only two are dated, to 1116/1704 and 1321/1903. Nearly 70 copies of al-Karakī's *al-kharāj* essay are extant; nos eleven and seven date to the 10th/16th and 11th/17th centuries respectively. See M. Dirāyatī et al., ed., *Fihristvāri-yi dastnivishtihā-yi Īrān* (Mashhad, n.d.), vol. 6, pp. 81–82; vol. 8, pp. 7–9. On later unease with Safavid Shi'ism, see also Newman, 'The Myth', pp. 91f, 104f.

<sup>69</sup> See Gleave (n. 13) citing Taqī al-Majlisī, *Lavāmi'-yi šāhibqirāni* (Qum, 1414/1993), vol. 1, pp. 65–76, esp. pp. 65–67.

*ḥadīth* must be narrated in their original Arabic and recorded accurately, perhaps out of place in a commentary on *al-Faqīh*, bespeak Akhbārī-style concerns; indeed, elsewhere he does denounce *ijtihād*.<sup>70</sup>

Al-Tustarī's post-Safavid comments on *ijāzāt* seem relatively perfunctory – stressing the care to be used in the texts' transmission and the *isnād*, for example – and certainly not overly/overtly polemical.<sup>71</sup> Like al-Majlisī, al-Tustarī does not immediately address such related issues as the question of action on the basis on an *ijāza* and *taqlīd al-mayyit* that were addressed by al-Qaṭifī.

Reference might be made to works in *dirāyat al-ḥadīth*, the discipline of criticism of the text and narrative chains of *ḥadīth* evolving in the early 10th/16th century. In his *Wuṣūl*, Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Ṣamad, (d. 984/1576), the father of Shaykh Bahā'ī (d. 1030/1620), divides the *ijāza* into seven sections.<sup>72</sup> Ḥusayn's own teacher Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn b. 'Alī al-Āmilī (d. 966/1559), al-Shahīd al-Thānī, had, in fact, written on *'ilm al-dirāya* and, briefly, the various forms of the *ijāza*.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, Shaykh Ḥusayn, born in 918/1512, apparently composed *Wuṣūl* after arriving in Iran,<sup>74</sup> after Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn's death. Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn was born in 911/1506, before al-Qaṭifī arrived in Iraq.<sup>75</sup> Interestingly both, like al-Qaṭifī, were mainly based to the west of Iran.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Taqī al-Majlisī, vol. 1, pp. 68–71, 45. On this text, see al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 18, pp. 369–370.

<sup>71</sup> Al-Tustarī, *Ijāza kabīra*, pp. 7–9, 212–215; nn. 9–11.

<sup>72</sup> Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Ṣamad, *Wuṣūl al-akhyār ilā Uṣūl al-akhbār*, ed. J. al-Mujāhidī (Karbala, 1436/2015), pp. 201f.

<sup>73</sup> 'Abd al-Hādī al-Faḍlī, *Introduction to Ḥadīth, including Dirāyat al-Ḥadīth by al-Shahīd al-Thānī*, tr. N. Virjee (London, 2002), pp. 35–36, 227–228. See al-Khwānsārī's reference to *'ilm al-dirāya* ad n. 75.

<sup>74</sup> Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Ṣamad, pp. 13, 17–18, 35 (some copies are said not to have the reference in question).

<sup>75</sup> In this same discipline, in the next century, Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631) in his *al-Rawāshih* also, briefly addresses the *iqsām*. See Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ḥusaynī, Mīr Dāmād, *al-Rawāshih al-samāwiyya*, ed. Gh. Qaysariha et al. (Qum, 1422/2001), pp. 157–160. Al-Khwānsārī (*Rawḍa*, vol. 1, pp. 25–29) notes al-Qaṭifī's *ijāza* to al-Tustarī is very useful on *funūn al-dirāya* and *al-rijāl* (biography) and cites from it.

<sup>76</sup> On the continued vitality of the western centres of the faith across the period, see Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, pp. 163f, 190f; n. 68.

By the ‘standards’ of al-Samāhijī’s later evaluation of the state of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī debate,<sup>77</sup> al-Qaṭifī’s jurisprudential reservations here together with those in other works of his, as discussed elsewhere, render it difficult to affix a label to him. His disavowal of *taqlīd al-mayyit* and references to exegetical pairs of analysis, *istiṣhāb* and *al-barā’ a al-aṣliyya*, and *sharā’iṭ al-istiftā*, for example, suggest Uṣūlī sympathies. His disavowal of absolute *ijtihād*, the *faqīh* as *nā’ib al-Imām* and association with the court/*ḥubb al-riyāsa*, with his insistence on recourse to the revealed ‘texts’ and references to *waqf* and *iḥtiyāt*, for example, all suggest Akhbārī proclivities. Nevertheless, it was precisely this combination of concerns and criticisms that al-Qaṭifī deployed against al-Karakī as the ‘face’ of Safavid Shi‘ism in these years.

Taken together, al-Qaṭifī’s contributions reflect both a profound unease with the directions in which the faith, as being carried forward by al-Karakī, seemed to be headed now that it had found official favour in Iran – an unease which others shared. On offer here, as well, is a profound sense of his own status as an outsider, coming from the Twelver periphery to the centres of the faith in Iraq.

Al-Qaṭifī may not have been overly popular in his own century or – *pace* Bāqir al-Majlisī – the next. But his sentiments offer a different perspective on, and something of a corrective to views of, developments in Safavid-period Twelver thought and practice based on the privileging of scholarly works produced in Safavid Iran.

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<sup>77</sup> See our ‘The Nature’.



**PART FOUR**  
**PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY AND**  
**INTELLECTUAL HISTORY**



## Mīr Dāmād's 'Wisdom of the Right Side' (*al-ḥikma al-yamāniyya*)

Janis Esots

The founder of the so-called 'Iṣfahān philosophical school', Mīr Dāmād (969–1040/1561–1631), described his philosophical doctrine as the 'Wisdom of the Right Side' (*al-ḥikma al-yamāniyya*).<sup>1</sup> In this article, I will attempt to establish the principal characteristics of this doctrine and its key implications, in particular in metaphysics.

As attested by Mīr Dāmād himself, at the heart of his 'wisdom of the right side' lie two interrelated principles: 1) the Creator makes the quiddities (*māhiyāt*) of the things by simple making (*ja'ʿl basīṭ*); their existence is then abstracted from this 'making', i.e., the establishment of a relationship with the Maker. Hence, existence must be treated as a derived meaning (*ma' nā maṣḍarī*) which does not possess any

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<sup>1</sup> The expression alludes to the Q. 19:52 'We called to him (Moses) from the right side of the Mount (*nadaynāhu min jānīb al-ṭūr al-ayman*), and We brought him near in communion' and the *ḥadīth*: 'Faith is from the right side and wisdom is from the right side' (*al-īmān yamānī wa'l-ḥikma yamāniyya*) (Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* (Beirut, 1990), vol. 2, pp. 277, 457; cf. Abū Ja'far al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi* (Tehran, 1357 Sh./1978), vol. 8, p. 70). Sajjad Rizvi translates the expression as 'Yemeni philosophy' (Sajjad H. Rizvi, 'Mīr Dāmād's (d. 1631) *al-Qabasāt*: The Problem of the Eternity of the Cosmos', in Khaled El-Rouayheb and Sabina Schmidtke, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford–New York, 2016), pp. 438–464; Sajjad H. Rizvi, 'Mullā Shamsā al-Gilānī and His Treatise on the Incipience of the Cosmos', in Mullā Shamsā al-Gilānī, *Hudūth al-'ālam*, ed. 'A. Aṣgharī and Gh. Dādkhāh (Costa Mesa, CA, 2015), pp. 16–19 (of the English introduction)); I myself did so previously (Janis Esots, 'Mīr Dāmād's "Yemeni" Wisdom: A Variety of Platonism?', *Islamic Philosophy Yearbook Ishraq*, 8 (2017), pp. 34–46). However, it is not Yemen as a country/region what Mīr Dāmād has in mind primarily – rather, it is the source of legitimate and undistorted divine inspiration.



instances but only portions related to different quiddities<sup>2</sup> – the stance, which Mullā Ṣadrā (and, following him, most later Iranian philosophers), not quite precisely,<sup>3</sup> interpreted as the ‘principality of the quiddity’ or ‘genuineness of the quiddity’ (*aṣālat al-māhiya*) and 2) (apart from the receptacle of time,) there exist the receptacles of eternity (*sarmad*) and perpetuity (*dahr*).<sup>4</sup> The term ‘eternity’ (*sarmad*) refers to the relationship of the eternal to the eternal (say, the relationship of God’s attributes to His essence); the term ‘perpetuity’ (*dahr*) refers to the relationship of the eternal to the temporal (which can be described as ‘the eternal’s being with (*ma‘a*) the temporal’ (but not in [*fī*] it), and the term ‘time’ (*zamān*) refers to the relationship of the temporal to the temporal. Taking a different point of view, it can be said that eternity is the realm of the necessity, perpetuity is the realm of the essential contingency or possibility (*al-imbkān al-dhātī*), and time is the realm of the possibility of preparedness or predisposition (*al-imbkān al-isti‘dādī*).<sup>5</sup>

For a wider educated public, Mīr Dāmād as a thinker is primarily associated with the theory of the ‘perpetual inception’ (*ḥudūth dahrī*),<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Ufuq al-mubīn*, ed. Ḥāmid Nājī (Tehran, 1391 Sh./2013), p. 114, n. 135. Sabzawārī associates this stance with Davānī’s *dhawq al-muta’allihīn*: “Those Theologians who assert that “existence” is nothing but the portions would seem to have borrowed from the “tasting” of theosophy’ (Ḥājī Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, *Sharḥ al-manzūma fi’l-manṭiq wa’l-ḥikma*, ed. Muḥsin Bīdārfarr (Qum, 1386 Sh./2007), vol. 1, pp. 210–211; the English translation by Mehdi Mohaghegh and Toshihiko Izutsu in *The Metaphysics of Sabzawārī* (Tehran, 1991), p. 51).

<sup>3</sup> Philosophy, simply because it is philosophy, deals with universals (i.e., quiddities), not particulars (regardless of whether it treats these universals as transcendent or immanent of their particulars. If we treat the universals as mere mental positions (*i’tibārāt*) void of reality, this (as I will try to show) inevitably leads to treating the whole as a single individual, in which all distinctions are relative – i.e., to professing the individual oneness (*al-waḥda al-shakhṣiyya*) of the affair.

<sup>4</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Ufuq al-mubīn*, p. 536.

<sup>5</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Qabasāt*, ed. Mahdī Mohaghegh (2nd ed., Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995), p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> The term, apparently, was coined by Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (see Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Davānī, ‘Nūr al-hidāya’, in his *al-Rasā’il al-mukhtāra*, ed. Sayyid Aḥmad Tūysirkānī (Isfahan, 1364 Sh./1985), pp. 114–116). In their recent article, ‘Ta’ammulī dar intisābi risāla-yi *Nūr al-hidāya* ba Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī: muṭālī‘a-yi matn-i mihwar bar bunyād-i nazāriyya-i “ḥudūth-i dahrī” wa āthār-i Mīr-i Dāmād’,

according to which the quiddities are created in perpetuity by establishing a relationship between them and the Creator. This theory is sometimes conceived simply as a refutation of the Ash'arī theory of illusory time (*zamān mawhūm*) allegedly existing before the creation of the world, which, like the hypothesis it refutes, must primarily be considered in the context of the *kalām* discourse of creation. Hence, it is claimed, it belongs to the domain of theology rather than to the realm of philosophy. I will attempt to show that this assumption is only partially correct, and to demonstrate the fundamental philosophical importance of the theory.

### Metaphysics I: Making the Quiddities

According to Mīr Dāmād, previous to being made (*qabl an yakūna maj'ūl<sup>an</sup>*), quiddities enjoy a hypothetical (*taqdīrī*) existence in the Creator's knowledge; through the act of making, these hypothetical quiddities become related (*intasaba*) to the reality of being/existence, thus turning into realised (*taḥqīqī*) or established (*mutaqarrar*) ones.<sup>7</sup> This establishment of a relation is described by Mīr Dāmād as the 'perpetual inception' (*ḥudūth dahrī*) – which he believes to be an a-temporal and a-local act that occurs in the realm of the factuality (*fī naḥs al-amr*),<sup>8</sup> and through which nothing (*lays*) becomes something (*ays*).

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*Ā'ina-yi mīrāth*, 65 (1398 Sh./2019), pp. 123–143), Ḥusayn Najafī and Ḥāmid Nāji question the authenticity of *Nūr al-hidāya*. However, while raising legitimate doubts, the article fails to convincingly disprove the authorship of Davānī. I have modified the English rendering suggested by Sajjad H. Rizvi ('perpetual incipience', see, Rizvi, 'Mīr Dāmād's (d. 1631) *al-Qabasāt*', pp. 439–461, passim).

<sup>7</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Ufūq al-mubīn*, pp. 10, 53, 264, 412, 663; idem, *al-Qabasāt*, pp. 38–39, 73; idem, 'al-Taqdīsāt', in Mīr Dāmād, *Muṣannafāt*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Nūrānī, 2 vols (Tehran, 1381–1385 Sh./2002–2006), vol. 1, p. 171.

<sup>8</sup> For the key texts on the history of the problem of *naḥs al-amr*, see Muḥammad 'Alī Ardīstānī, *Naḥs al-amr dar falsafa-yi islāmī* (2nd ed., Tehran, 1392 Sh./2013), in particular part 2. *Tafāsīr-i naḥs al-amr* (pp. 101–298), and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī et al., *Risāla ithbāt al-'aql al-mujarrad wa shurūḥ-i ān*, ed. Ṭayyiba 'Ārifniyā (Tehran, 1393 Sh./2014). As Sabzawārī explains, factual proposition (*qaḍīya naḥs al-amriya*) is the proposition 'in which judgment is made concerning the instances which may exist in the external world, regardless of whether they are realised or hypothetical, like for instance: "Every

The principle of the Maker's making the quiddities by simple making can be treated as a variant of Ibn Sīnā's teaching on the necessitation (*ijāb*) of the existence of the contingents by the Necessary Existent.<sup>9</sup> As said, in Mīr Dāmād's view, before they are made, the quiddities enjoy a hypothetical (*taqdīrī*) being in the Creator's knowledge (one wonders if this hypothetical state is in any way different from Avicennan contingency?) Through the act of making, these hypothetical quiddities become related (*intasaba*) to the reality of existence, thus turning into realised (*muḥaqqaq*) or established (*mutaqarrar*) ones. To restate this in Avicennan terms, owing to the establishment of the relation with the Necessary, the contingents become necessarily-existent-through-the-other (*wājib al-wujūd bi ghayrihi*). Does the new terminology employed by Mīr Dāmād change, or make more perfect, the scheme outlined by Ibn Sīnā, which rests on the necessary-contingent dichotomy? I am not sure.<sup>10</sup>

Although Mīr Dāmād's principle of the double referent of the concept of existent (the reality of existence and the quiddity related to that reality) appears to ultimately go back to the Avicennan division of the necessary existent into the necessary by/through itself and the necessary by/through the other, its immediate source seems to have been Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (although the founder of the Wisdom of the Right Side does not acknowledge this).

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body is limited, or has a place, or is divisible *ad infinitum*" and other similar propositions used in sciences' (Sabzawārī, *Sharḥ al-manzūma fi'l-manṭiq wa'l-ḥikma* (Qum, 1386 Sh./2007), vol. 1, p. 264; the English translation by Mehdi Mohaghegh and Toshihiko Izutsu (Mohaghegh and Izutsu, *The Metaphysics of Sabzawārī*, p. 87), modified by the present author). According to Sabzawārī, factuality (*nafs al-amr*) is the receptacle of the subjects of all factual propositions, regardless of whether they are real (realised) or hypothetical (Sabzawārī, *Sharḥ al-manzūma*, vol. 1, p. 64; cf. Ardistanī, *Nafs al-amr*, p. 113). Hence, *ḥudūth dahrī* appears to be a change of the mode of the thing's/proposition's factuality, which does not affect its factual status (being the fact itself).

<sup>9</sup> For Ibn Sīnā's treatment of the matter, see, for example, Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, tr. Michael Marmura (Provo, UT, 2005), p. 31 (I.6.5–6).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Henry Corbin, 'Confessions extatiques de Mīr Dāmād, maître de théologie à Ispahan', in *Mélanges Louis Massignon* (Damascus, 1956), vol. 1, p. 74, where Corbin acknowledges the Avicennan foundations of Mīr Dāmād's doctrine, but simultaneously describes the teaching of Ibn Sīnā as 'un avicennisme théorique' and that of Mīr Dāmād – as 'un avicennisme éprouvé au fond de l'âme, jusqu'à l'extase'.

According to Davānī, there is one truly existent individual, which is identical with the Necessary Existent.<sup>11</sup> However, by extension, every quiddity related to this single individual can also be called 'existent'. Explaining his understanding of the individual unity of existence, Davānī writes:

The existence, which is the source of the derivation of the [concept of] 'existent', is a single entity, and it is an external reality. Both this self-subsistent existence and the entity that is in some particular way related to it are called 'existents'.<sup>12</sup> But, while the reality of existence possesses existence truly and substantially, the entity which is related to it possesses existence only accidentally and metaphorically, owing to its relation (*intisāb*) to the reality of existence.<sup>13</sup>

He illustrates this with the example of light and an illuminated thing: the first is itself the light; the second is an entity related to it.<sup>14</sup>

Mīr Dāmād introduces his principle in a very similar way:

If the reality [of the thing] is substantiated by itself, [the concept of] 'existent' is predicated of its reality as such, without taking into account any additional consideration, be it a delimitation or a causal inference. If, however, its reality is substantiated through its relation to the Maker, [the concept] 'existent' can be predicated of this established reality in the aspect of causal inference, i.e., in the aspect of its issue from the generosity of the Maker and its being based on the presence of the latter.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Reza Pourjavady, 'Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (d. 908/1502), "Glosses on 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Qūshjī's Commentary on Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's *Tajrīd al-i'tiqād*'", in Sabine Schmidtke and Khaled El-Rouayheb, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford, 2016), p. 423.

<sup>12</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī, *Sab' rasā'il*, ed. Sayyid Aḥmad Tūysirkānī (Tehran, 1381 Sh./2002), p. 131.

<sup>13</sup> Or its participation in the latter. For relation in Davānī's thought, see the discussion in Munīra Palangī, 'Ma'nā-yi intisāb dar andīsha-yi Davānī', *Khīradnāma-i Ṣadrā*, 56 (Summer 1388 Sh./2009), in particular pp. 22–23.

<sup>14</sup> Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dashtakī, *Ishrāq hayākil al-nūr li kashf zulūmāt shawākil al-ghurūr*, ed. 'Alī Awjabī (Tehran, 1382 Sh./2003), pp. 184–185; cf. Ḥusayn Muḥammadkhānī, 'Waḥdat-i wujūd nazd-i Davānī', *Faṣḥnāma-i andīsha-yi dīnī dānishgāh-i Shīrāz*, 28 (1387 Sh./2008), p. 88.

<sup>15</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Ufūq al-mubīn*, pp. 271–272.

As we see, both Davānī and Mīr Dāmād endorse the double meaning of the term 'existent', which divides into truth (the reality of existence) and metaphor (something related to that reality). The relationship between the two referents can be described as 'systematic ambiguity' (*tashkīk*).<sup>16</sup> Mīr Dāmād calls the transformation of the hypothetical quiddity into a real/realised essence, through establishing a relation with the reality of existence, 'substantiation' (*tajawhur*)<sup>17</sup> or (elsewhere in *al-Ufuq al-mubīn*) 'essentialisation' (*tadhawwut*)<sup>18</sup> – which means, there are no essences or substances proper before the realisation or necessitation of the hypothetical quiddities.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The terms *tashkīk* ('systematic ambiguity') and *mushakkak* ('systematically ambiguous') were coined by the Arab translators of Aristotle's works on logic and their Neoplatonic commentaries, as an attempt to render the Greek word *amphibolous* (a term which is used to describe a certain kind of homonym – a word which is used in one and the same sense, but in different ways) – for further details, see H. A. Wolfson, 'The amphibolous terms in Aristotle, Arabic philosophy and Maimonides', *Harvard Theological Review*, 31 (1938), p. 173; cf. C. Bonmariage, *Le Réel et les réalités : Mollā Sadrā Shīrāzī et la structure de la réalité* (Paris, 2007), pp. 54–55. For the list of examples of the usage of *tashkīk* and related terms (*shakk*, *tashakkuk*, *al-mashkūk fīhi*) in Arabic translations, see Alexander Treiger, 'Avicenna's Notion of Transcendental Modulation of Existence (*Taškīk al-Wuğūd*, *Analogia Entis*) and Its Greek and Arabic Sources', in Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman, ed., *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas* (Leiden, 2012), p. 344, n. 31. Treiger's study, *inter alia*, demonstrates that in the late Greek and early Arabic commentary tradition of Aristotle's logical works the term 'existent' was typically treated as *ism mushakkak* ('a systematically ambiguous word').

<sup>17</sup> Which may have led his student Mullā Ṣadrā to the conclusion that the substance experiences some sort of motion or intensification, whereas Mīr Dāmād meant that the presence of the constituents (the genus and the differentia) of the substance necessitates the presence, or the 'establishment' (*taqarrur*) of the said substance (which entails the relationship of logical priority and posteriority between the substance and its constituents). See Sa'īd Anwārī and Khadija Hāshimī 'Aṭṭār, 'Barrasī-yi taqaddum wa ta'akhhur bi al-tajawhur wa sayr-i ta'rikhī-yi ān dar falsafa-yi islāmī', *Ta'rikh-i falsafa*, 10 (1398 Sh./2019), pp. 113–142.

<sup>18</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Ufuq al-mubīn*, p. 370.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 406.

He typically describes the presence of the thing in the realm of perpetuity or factuality as its establishment (*taqarrur*),<sup>20</sup> or obtainment of actuality,<sup>21</sup> treating existence (*wujūd*) as a secondary intelligible (albeit the one which is extracted from an established/ realised thing before all other secondary intelligibles),<sup>22</sup> which imitates or explains the establishment of the quiddity or the ipseity<sup>23</sup> (which possibly made Mullā Ṣadrā view his teacher as an exponent of the 'principality of quiddity' [*aṣālat al-māhiya*]).

## Metaphysics II: Perpetuity and Perpetual Inception

There can be little doubt that Mīr Dāmād believed his principal philosophical contribution to consist in making a clear-cut distinction between the realm of perpetuity (*dahr*), which he, apparently, identified with the domain of factuality (*nafs al-amr*) or occurrence (*wāqi'*),<sup>24</sup> and the realm of becoming, or generation and corruption, in which everything occurs in time, and which is divided into past, present and future. 'Realisation' (*taḥqīq*) and 'establishment' (*taqarrur*) (which Mīr Dāmād identifies with the activity of the quiddity [*fi'liyyat al-māhiya*]),<sup>25</sup> thus, refer to the emergence of the thing in the realm of perpetuity (*dahr*) or factuality (*nafs al-amr*, i.e. the area of the applicability/

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<sup>20</sup> Mīr Dāmād understands *taqarrur* ('establishment') as the essence that is actually made (*maj'ūla bi'l-fi'l*). It is posterior to the constituents of the essence but prior to (any consideration regarding) its existence. For a detailed discussion, see Dā'ūd Ḥusaynī, *Ḥaḥiqat, wujūd wa taqarrur: ta'ammulī-yi ta'rikhī dar bārai nazar-i Ṣadrā dar bāb-i taḥaqquq-i wujūd dar barābar-i nazar-i Mīr-i Dāmād*, *Ḥikmat-i mu'āshir*, 7 (1395 Sh./2016), pp. 85–94. Based on Mīr Dāmād's remark in *al-Ufūq al-mubīn* (p. 19), the later philosophical tradition correlates *taqarrur* with the conceptualisation (*taṣawwur*) of the known object in the mind of the knowing subject and *wujūd* with the assent (*taṣdīq*).

<sup>21</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Ufūq al-mubīn*, p. 663.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>23</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Qabasāt*, pp. 73, 196.

<sup>24</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *Muṣannaḥāt*, vol. 1, p. 9. Cf. al-'Alawī: 'the occurrence to which one refers as "perpetuity"' (*al-wāqi' mu'abbar 'anhu bi al-dahr*), see Mīr 'Abd al-Ḥasib b. Aḥmad al-'Alawī, *Arsh al-iqān fī sharḥ taqwīm al-imān*, ed. 'Alī Awjabī and Akbar Thaqafiyān (Tehran, 1390 Sh./2011), p. 277.

<sup>25</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Ufūq al-mubīn*, p. 663.

validity of logical and philosophical laws, which comprises both the external and mental existence).<sup>26</sup> This emergence occurs once and forever: once the thing has emerged in perpetuity, it cannot fall back into perpetual non-being ('*adam dahri*'), or become non-established (*ghayr mutaqqarrar*). What remains outside the limits of *nafs al-amr* – e.g., such concepts as 'the Companion of the Creator' and 'the hybrid of camel and cat' – are phantoms of our imagination and/or estimative faculty, void of an intelligible quiddity, and cannot exist in the realm of perpetuity or factuality.

According to some thinkers, apart from the forms of the things, the realm of the factuality includes all unconditionally true propositions (such as 'the whole is bigger than its part'). The position of Mīr Dāmād, who defines the existence of the thing in the realm of factuality as 'its being established as such and its realisation as such',<sup>27</sup> is not sufficiently elucidated on this point. One tentatively concludes that the realm of perpetuity or factuality is, for him, inhabited by the intelligible forms of the things and the propositions that describe the relationships between these forms. To put this in terms of theology, the objective paradigms/models (*al-muthul al-'ayniyya*) of the things, pertaining to the realm of God's decree (*qaḍā'*), are realised/established in perpetuity, while their material instances, pertaining to the realm of measuring out (*qadar*, i.e. gradual implementation of that decree), emerge in time.<sup>28</sup> Mīr Dāmād argues that the Platonic forms (which he identifies with the universal natures)<sup>29</sup> are nothing else but these models or paradigms, present in the objective (= external) Decree,

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<sup>26</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Qabasāt*, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. This point was taken over by Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī who treated *nafs al-amr* as the container (*zarf*) of unqualified affirmation (*thubūt muṭlaq*), or realisation (*taḥaqquq*), of both affairs/things (*umūr*) and propositions (*qaḍāyā*) – see his gloss on Ṣadrā's *Asfār* (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā), *al-Ḥikma al-muta'aliyya fi'l-asfār al-'aqliyya al-arba'a*, ed. R. Luṭfi, I. Amīnī and F. Ummīd (3rd. ed., Beirut 1981), vol. 7, p. 271); cf. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Nihāyat al-ḥikma* (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1984), pp. 2, 24–25; see also Ardīstānī, *Nafs al-amr*, pp. 185–187.

<sup>28</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Ufuq al-mubīn*, p. 636.

<sup>29</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Qabasāt*, p. 159.

which is identical with *dahr* in a certain sense,<sup>30</sup> quoting the *Uthūlūjīyā* of Pseudo-Aristotle in support of his claim.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, as mentioned above, according to Ibn Sīnā, perpetuity is the relation of eternity to time.<sup>32</sup> Does this mean that the Platonic forms, according to Mīr Dāmād, must be treated as the relations between the eternal and the temporal, or between being and becoming? If yes, are they, as relations, dependent on the entities which they relate to each other? If so, they must, in a way, be dependent not only on being, but also on becoming, i.e., on their instances in the realm of becoming – at least, it appears that we cannot perceive them without taking into account these instances. To my knowledge, Mīr Dāmād does not address these questions.

In addition, in what sense exactly are these forms, or relations, created? We know that they are present as possibilities, or hypothetical entities, in God's mind before obtaining existence in perpetuity/factuality. In my view, their creation can be interpreted as an (atemporal) apprehension of the intelligible structure (the Paradigm) of the world in its entirety by God (which apprehension is a concomitant of His apprehension of Himself). Calling this atemporal apprehension 'perpetual inception' must be taken as a metaphor.

Mīr Dāmād also argues that whatever is contingent in its essence, cannot beginninglessly exist in perpetuity, since, in his words, 'it cannot bear the weight of eternity' (which he, presumably, identifies with necessity):<sup>33</sup> hence, it must be created not only in essence (i.e., be essentially contingent), but also in perpetuity (i.e., represent an object of knowledge that was previously absent from the knower). As mentioned above, this presupposes the existentionation of the given thing in God's mind (whereas, if considered as a purely hypothetical entity, the contingent thing has no beginning in perpetuity).

The relationship between perpetuity and temporality is sometimes interpreted as the relationship between God's decree (*qaḍā'*) and

<sup>30</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Ufuq al-mubīn*, pp. 636–637.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 638. Cf. 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, ed., *Uthūlūjīyā: Afluṭīn 'inda al-'arab* (2nd ed., Qum, 1413/1992), p. 68.

<sup>32</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, ed. Sayyid Ḥusayn Mūsawiyān (Tehran, 1391 Sh./2013), p. 99 (§118).

<sup>33</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Qabasāt*, p. 226.



measuring out (*qadar*). This was the path taken by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī in his concise discussion on *qaḍā'* and *qadar* in the commentary on Ibn Sīnā's *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt* (a corollary of a more extensive discussion on the Necessary's atemporal knowledge of the particulars), and Mīr Dāmād elaborated on it. According to al-Ṭūsī, *qaḍā'* consists in the summary existence of all existents in the world of the Intellect, which they obtain through their creation *ex nihilo*. In turn, *qadar* consists in their existence in the external matter, after the obtaining of the required conditions, in a detailed manner, and in a certain sequence (*wāḥidan ba'da wāḥid*). The intelligible substances come to exist at once (*marrat<sup>an</sup> wāḥidat<sup>an</sup>*) in both *qaḍā'* and *qadar* (which constitute two aspects of their single and simple existence), whereas the corporeal substances come to exist twice, in perpetuity and in time, in two different ways.<sup>34</sup>

Mīr Dāmād developed al-Ṭūsī's seminal discussion into a theory on two types of decree and measuring out, mental and external. According to this theory, both *qaḍā'* and *qadar* exist in two aspects or levels – namely, as the entity's existence in the Creator's knowledge and as its objective external existence.<sup>35</sup> The entities which become the objects of the decree and the measuring out, as he elucidates, are of three kinds: a) the world as a whole; b) the immaterial beings created *ex nihilo* (i.e. the intellects); c) material things, which are engendered from a prime-material substrate and pertain to the world of becoming. The world as a whole is envisaged only in the decree of God's knowledge (*al-qaḍā' al-'ilmī*). It acquires existence in the Creator's knowledge in the aspect of His knowledge of His single and unique essence, which is the perfect efficient cause of the world, from the point of the view of His perfect knowledge of Himself being the cause of the most perfect order that the nature of the contingency can receive through His agency. The existence of the world decreed is posterior to the decree of God's knowledge in two aspects – essentially and perpetually.

In turn, the 'measuring out' of the world as a whole can occur only in the objective/external world, as a hierarchical arrangement of its

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<sup>34</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt, ma'a sharḥ al-khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī wa al-Muḥākamāt li Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, ed. Karīm Fayḍī (Qum, 1383 Sh./2004), vol. 3, p. 343; cf. Mīr Dāmād, *al-Qabasāt*, pp. 421–422.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 420–421.

existence in the receptacle of factuality, created after its essential non-being and its explicit non-existence in *dahr*, in accordance with the Creator's knowledge and providence.<sup>36</sup> Its objective existence in perpetuity (*al-wujūd al-‘aynī fi’l-dahr*) represents a detailisation (*tafṣīl*) of its existence in God's knowledge, implicitly present in His perfect knowledge of His true single essence, which is the paradigm of the knowledge of all existents.

As for the immaterial intellects, they are the objects of God's decree in His knowledge (*al-qaḍā’ al-‘ilmī*) in the aspect of their presence in His knowledge, and in the aspect of His knowledge and providence being the cause of their creation from nothing, as well as in the aspect of their transition from (the state of) pure nothingness to the (state of) the actuality of somethingness and establishment (*taqarrur*). The immaterial entities are the objects of God's decree in the external world in the aspect of their issue from the Creator and their transition from absolute nothingness to somethingness in actuality, and in the aspect of their transition, as parts of the universal comprehensive single order, from pure non-existence to the existence in the receptacle of perpetuity. The objective/external measuring out (*al-qaḍar al-‘aynī*) of the immaterial entities, in turn, is envisaged in the aspect of the issue of their existence from the Creator in perpetuity, both in their particularity and specificity. Thus, the existentionation of the intellects in the decree and in the measuring out occurs at once but must be considered in two different aspects.

As for the things generated in matter, they exist both in perpetuity and in time, and both in a summary manner (in the universal order) and in a detailed way (where their specific traits are manifested). In addition, they enjoy a formal universal existence, as impressions in the intellect, and a formal universal and particular existence as impressions in the minds of celestial souls. For this reason, they possess multiple levels of decree and measuring out (each of which relates as decree to the posterior and as measuring out to the prior).

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<sup>36</sup> Which, according to Mīr Dāmād, is primarily related to the macrocosm – see Mīr Dāmād, *al-Qabasāt*, p. 172. According to some indications, Mīr Dāmād, like Plotinus (*Enn.* III, 3 (48), 1–2), appears to distinguish two levels of providence, universal and particular.

The last degree of measuring out, which cannot be treated as a decree at all, in view of its being the ultimate idealisation, is the existence of the temporal and material existents, originated in their particular places and times, gradually and in a certain sequence, as self-renewing and perishing affairs, in accordance with their predispositions that gradually manifest themselves in the course of time, through an orderly arranged chain of causes, preparing them.<sup>37</sup>

This theory (outlined by al-Ṭūsī and elaborated by Mīr Dāmād) attempts to integrate the approaches of *kalām* and *falsafa* (the path which was well trodden by Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī and later Ash'arīs), but, it seems, with only a partial success: the lucid and transparent division between perpetuity and time, and being and becoming, previously established by Mīr Dāmād, considered in the categories of decree and measuring out, becomes blurred. In particular, one wonders if the relationship between perpetuity and temporality can be adequately expressed in terms of summarising and detailing (*ijmāl – tafṣīl*), which is pivotal principle of the *qaḍā'* – *qadar* relationship. As *dahr* and *zamān* represent different modes of being (or, more precisely, being and becoming), it is difficult to argue that the latter (time) can be viewed as a detailing of the former (perpetuity) – because, properly speaking, perpetuity can be imitated but not detailed. In a way, the *kalām* doctrine of *qaḍā'* and *qadar* represents the reasoning of the commoners (people who have not received philosophical training); as such, it cannot be useful in elucidating philosophical tenets. Mīr Dāmād could not have been unaware of this – hence, it can be argued that the primary goal of his extensive discussion on *qaḍā'* and *qadar* was to boost the seemingness of the compatibility of religious dogma and philosophical thought, in order to secure the survival of the philosophical tradition.

On the other hand, Mīr Dāmād treats perpetuity (*dahr*, the term, which, as we have learnt, was used by Ibn Sīnā to denote the relationship between the domains of the immutable and the changing)<sup>38</sup> simultaneously as a relation, a receptacle and a mode of being, in which 'all existents and all multiple entities count as a single immutable existent in its completeness'.<sup>39</sup> As mentioned above, the first Muslim

<sup>37</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Qabasāt*, pp. 421–422.

<sup>38</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, p. 98, §117; p. 99, §118; p. 422, §757; p. 423, §762.

<sup>39</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Ufuq al-mubīn*, p. 632.

philosopher who introduced the concept of the 'perpetual inception' (*ḥudūth dahri*) of the world (which he defined as its non-existence 'on the level of the essence of the Necessary Existent, which is identical with the external existence' – and, hence, as its being preceded by the external non-existence) – was Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī.<sup>40</sup> His theory of the perpetual inception represented a philosopher's response to the *kalām* discussions on the creation of the world: the Mutakallimūn, who spoke of the 'temporal inception' (*ḥudūth zamānī*) (believing that God has created the world in time, at a certain moment of it), found it difficult to prove that time had existed before the creation of the world, in particular since their opponents, the Peripatetic philosophers (who, in turn, admitted only the essential inception (*al-ḥudūth al-dhātī*) of the world, i.e. its contingency in relation to the Necessary Existent or God, which did not necessarily rule out its eternity) argued that time was created by the motion of the celestial spheres, which were part of the world. More precisely, they treated it as the measure of the motion of the outermost and all-encompassing sphere (known as the *falak al-aflāk*, *al-falak al-muḥit*, or *muḥaddid al-jihāt*). As such, it could not have existed before the creation of the world, they claimed. Attempting to solve this difficulty, without renouncing their belief in the temporal

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<sup>40</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Davānī, 'Nūr al-hidāya', in Davānī, *al-Rasā'il al-mukhtāra*, ed. Sayyid Aḥmad Tūysirkānī (Iṣfahān, 1364 Sh./1985), pp. 114–116; cf. idem, 'Unmūdhaj al-'ulūm', in Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī, *Thalāth rasā'il*, ed. Sayyid Aḥmad Tūysirkānī (Mashhad, 1411/1991), pp. 310–311; idem, *Sharḥ al-'aqa'id al-'aḥudiyya*, with the appendices of Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abdu, ed. Sayyid Hādī Khusrawshāhī (n.p., 1423/2002), p. 51. Hāmid Nājī and Ḥusayn Najafī, in their recent article ('Ta'ammulī dar intisābi risāla-yi *Nūr al-hidāya* ba Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī' – see note 6) and in separate personal conversations in Iṣfahān and Tehran in September 2019, questioned the authenticity of *Nūr al-hidāya*, because of the absence of manuscripts older than 1019/1610 and because the treatise is not mentioned in Qāḍī Shūshṭarī's (d. 1019/1610) list of Davānī's works provided in his *Majālis al-mu'minīn*: Qāḍī Nūr Allāh Shūshṭarī, *Majālis al-mu'minīn*, ed. Ibrāhīm 'Arabpūr et al. (Mashhad, 1392–1393 Sh./2013–2014), vol. 4, pp. 551–556. Nonetheless, to me, these objections do not amount to a refutation of its authenticity. In addition, the author of *Nūr al-hidāya* refers to his addenda to al-Ṭūsī's *Tajrid* and 'Aḥudī's *al-'Aqa'id al-'aḥudiyya* (Davānī, *al-Rasā'il al-mukhtāra*, p. 114), two works which Davānī is known to have composed.

inception, some theologians proposed the existence of an illusory time (*zamān mawhūm*)<sup>41</sup> before the moment of the inception of the world.

Davānī's remarks on *ḥudūth dahrī*, scattered in his works, can be viewed as a harbinger that preceded for more than a century Mīr Dāmād's elaborated theory on the subject, which systematically disproved the *kalām* theory of illusory time (*zamān mawhūm*).<sup>42</sup> According to Davānī, perpetual inception should be understood as the establishment of a relationship between the reality of existence and the entities that are mere virtualities if considered as such and if they acquire their (relative and/or metaphorical) existence owing to the establishment of this relation.<sup>43</sup>

However, Mīr Dāmād apparently was the first Muslim philosopher who indicated the separative (*infikākī*) character of the essential posteriority of perpetuity in relation to the Creator (which was further elucidated by his disciples, in particular Mullā Shamsā Gīlānī).<sup>44</sup> In other words, he held that there was an ontological and epistemological gap between God and the world (including the Intellect). All Muslim Peripatetics share the opinion that the world, as a whole, relates to the Creator as the effect to its cause: however, Mīr Dāmād and his disciples appear to be unique in their belief in the unbridgeable rupture between the cause and the effect (a stance which places them close to Proclus<sup>45</sup>).

<sup>41</sup> On which, see Mullā Ismā'il Khāju'i, 'Risālat ibtāl al-zamān al-mawhūm', in Davānī, *Sab' rasā'il*, pp. 239–283, in particular pp. 253–256, 268–269 and 274.

<sup>42</sup> Dāmād's acquaintance with Davānī's theory is confirmed by numerous references to the latter in his works (in particular, by the quotation of the relevant passage from Davānī's *Unmūdḥaj* in his *Qabasāt*, see Mīr Dāmād, *Qabasāt*, p. 109).

<sup>43</sup> Mahdī Dahbāshī, 'Taḥlīlī az andishahā-yi falsafī wa kalāmī Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq Davānī', *Khīradnāma-i Šadrā*, 3 (Farvardīn 1375 Sh./April 1996), p. 49. Since, due to our inability to separate the intelligible from the sensible and imaginable, it is difficult for us to grasp the totality of these entities as a unique entity (the world), we find it equally difficult to apprehend the nature of the perpetual inception, which consists in establishing a relationship between the reality of existence and this entity, argues Davānī (Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Davānī, 'Risālat al-zawra', in idem, *Sab' rasā'il*, p. 177).

<sup>44</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Qabasāt*, pp. 75, 250; idem, 'Ḥawāshī Ilāhiyyāt al-Shifā', in Mīr Dāmād, *Awraq-i parākanda az mušannafāt*, ed. Ḥusayn Najafī (Tehran, 1396 Sh./2017), p. 253; Mullā Shamsā al-Gīlānī, *Ḥudūth al-'ālam*, pp. 49, 53, 55, 56, 69.

<sup>45</sup> Proclus repeatedly emphasises the transcendence of the productive cause over its effect – see Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, ed. and tr. Eric Robertson Dodds (2nd ed., Oxford, 1963), pp. 8–11, 71, 87 (propositions 7–10, 75, 98).

Mīr Dāmād, following Ibn Sīnā and al-Ṭūsī, distinguishes between the essential possibility (*al-ḥikmah al-dhātī*) and the possibility of preparedness (or predisposition) (*al-ḥikmah al-isti'dādī*), which belongs to the category of quality. The essential possibility is abstracted from an essence that exists. It is an adjoined accident of the quiddity (and not a concomitant, caused by it),<sup>46</sup> to the effect that it is a concept which cannot be separated from the notion of quiddity: taken as such, the quiddity lacks any actuality and/or determination, be it the actuality and determination of realisation (*taḥqīq*), or that of invalidation (*buṭlān*). Its reality consists of a double negation, i.e. in its being neither 'non-establishment' (*lā taqarrur*), nor 'non-non-establishment' (*lā lā taqarrur*), or in its negating both the establishment and non-establishment, in the aspect of congruence or derivation.<sup>47</sup> In turn, the possibility of preparedness (or predisposition) pertains to the temporal material substance when it is considered in relation to something that is not existent *in actu*: when the potency is actualised, it disappears. It is the potency and preparedness of matter to produce something which it is prepared to produce and potent to make.<sup>48</sup> This possibility presupposes the pre-existence of matter to the creation of the thing. In turn, the nature of contingency as such demands that the establishment/realisation of all contingent essences in the external world be preceded by their invalidity in the realm of perpetuity (while in the mind they are eternally preceded by their essential non-existence), argues Mīr Dāmād.<sup>49</sup> Hence, perpetual inception is an indispensable requirement for the establishment of the world, dictated by the innate contingency of the essences: all contingent entities are created in perpetuity.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

Mīr Dāmād was a philosopher who focused mainly on one subject – perpetuity and perpetual inception, because he believed the correct understanding of it to be the precondition for the proper understanding

<sup>46</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Ufuq al-mubīn*, pp. 412–413.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 414; cf. Mīr Dāmād, *al-Qabasāt*, p. 265.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>49</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Ufuq al-mubīn*, pp. 424–425.

<sup>50</sup> Mīr Dāmād, 'al-Taqdīsāt', in *Muṣannaḥāt*, vol. 1, p. 176.

of all, or almost all, other philosophical problems. To put it differently, he held that, in order to properly perceive the world of time and becoming and its relation to the world of eternity, we need to duly apprehend the world of perpetuity and (intelligible) being. On the other hand, according to Mīr Dāmād, a careful and systematic examination of the phenomena of the world of time leads to the affirmation of the existence of the realm of perpetuity, inhabited by the universal natures of things.

It can be said that what is in perpetuity relates to what is in time as the point relates to the line drawn by it,<sup>51</sup> as the traversal motion (*al-ḥaraka al-qaṭ'iyya*) relates to medial motion (*al-ḥaraka al-tawassuṭiyya*),<sup>52</sup> and the flowing instant (*al-ān al-sayyāl*) – to extended contiguous time.<sup>53</sup> Hence, God/the reality of existence can be envisaged in two aspects – 1) as the creator of the intellect(s)/perpetual being(s) (referred to as the point, the spark, the traversal motion and the flowing instant), and 2) as its/their 'mover', i.e. the creator of the temporal manifestation of this/these perpetual beings.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> This perhaps can be best illustrated by comparing the relation of the First Intellect (described by Mīr Dāmād as the 'prime element of the universal order' (= the world as a whole) and 'the *stoicheion* (*uṣṭuquṣṣ*) of the world of the contingency') to the lower parts of that order with the relation of the point to the line drawn by it, or with the relation of the spark rotating around the centre of the circle, which draws a circle perceived by the sense, to that circle. Cf. Aristotle, *De anima*, I.4, 409a3–6 (but Aristotle does not describe the now as the producer of time). However, Philoponus and Simplicius do: [John Philoponus] *Ioannis Philoponi in physicorum libros quinque posteriores commentaria*, ed. Hieronymos Vitelli (Berlin, 1888), p. 727, ll. 10–23 (the English translation in Philoponus, *On Aristotle Physics 4, 10–14*, tr. Sarah Broadie (London, 2014), pp. 30–31); Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Physicorum libros quattuor priores commentaria*, ed. H. Diels (Berlin, 1882), p. 722, ll. 26–34 (the English translation in Simplicius, *On Aristotle Physics 4.1–5, 10–14*, tr. J. O. Urmson (London, 2014), pp. 131–132). Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* I.7 [54].1.23–28; IV.4 [28].16.23–31; VI.8 [39].18.7–26. See also Dietrich Mahnke, *Unendliche Sphäre und Allmittelpunkt: Beiträge zur Genealogie der mathematischen Mystik* (Halle-Saale, 1937), pp. 215–244, in particular 217–221, and the discussion in Andreas Lammer, 'The Elements of Avicenna's Physics: Greek Sources and Arabic Innovations' (PhD thesis, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, 2016), pp. 484–487.

<sup>52</sup> Mīr Dāmād believed that the medial motion 'draws', or 'engraves' (*rāsīm*) the traversal motion and sustains its subject (Mīr Dāmād, *al-Qabasāt*, p. 405).

<sup>53</sup> Mīr Dāmād, *al-Qabasāt*, pp. 408–409.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409.

From the point of the view of perpetuity, this motion/manifestation is illusory.<sup>55</sup> What really is, is the realm of the immutable perpetual essences, or universal natures, made (= existentiated) by the Creator; the temporal manifestations of these essences enjoy a quasi-existence, similar to the becoming of the reflections of motionless statues in a running stream.

If we consider the thought of Mīr Dāmād from this perspective, he appears to us as primarily a Platonic (and only secondarily – an Avicennan) philosopher, in spite of the ebbs and flows in his attitude towards another great Platonist, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī. This opinion is supported by the sheer number of quotations from Neoplatonic texts, first of all, from the *Uthūlūjīyā* of Pseudo-Aristotle, present in his works. Furthermore, his doctrine of causation, according to which the cause is independent from its effect, in all likelihood is based on Proclus Arabus (i.e. the *Kitāb maḥḍ al-khayr*). Hence, his 'Wisdom of the Right Side' may be considered as an alternative reading of the Plotinus and Proclus Arabi, and, ultimately, as an insightful reflection on the eternal themes of Platonism.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Mīr Dāmād, *Jadhawāt wa mawāqīt*, ed. 'Alī Awjabī (Tehran, 1380 Sh./2001), pp. 204–205, where the point and the spark are said to resemble the inhabitants of the domain of the perpetuity, such as the immaterial intellects and the souls, and the line and the circle – the beings that inhabit the realm of the time, such as forms and matters, whereas the mover of the point and the spark is said to refer to God's Command (and not God Himself). Cf. also idem, *al-Ufūq al-mubīn*, pp. 481, 552 (where, in both cases, the point is compared with the instant, and the line with time).

<sup>56</sup> Dimitri Gutas has recently described Mīr Dāmād's theory on *ḥudūth dahrī* as a perfect example of what he calls 'paraphilosophy', because 'it has theological intent and motivation, it consists of abstruse arguments of little or no scientific substance, and, from what we know from Mīr Dāmād himself, it was acquired through suprarational means' (Dimitri Gutas, 'Avicenna and After: The Development of Paraphilosophy. A History of Science Approach', in Abdelkader Al Ghouz, ed., *Islamic Philosophy from the 12th to the 14th Century* (Bonn, 2018), p. 50). To me, this statement serves as regrettable evidence of the shallowness of his positivist approach.





## Some Aspects of the Reception of Suhrawardī's Philosophy by Mullā Ṣadrā

*Christian Jambet*

Shi'ī philosophers constructed some of the most famous metaphysical systems in Islamic philosophy under the Safavid dynasty in Persia, especially towards the end of the 10th/16th and throughout the 11th/17th century.<sup>1</sup> Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631) and Mullā Ṣadrā (Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī, d. ca. 1050/1640), for instance, incorporated *ishrāqī* philosophy in their theological and metaphysical works. This paper deals with the reception of *ishrāqī* philosophy by Mullā Ṣadrā.

In the foreword to his glosses on *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, Mullā Ṣadrā explains why philosophy is necessary. Metaphysics is the highest happiness because it confers the highest authority. According to Ṣadrā, the ancient philosophers were faithful to the prophetic way whereas his contemporaries who were Peripatetic philosophers made many mistakes in the divine science (i.e., metaphysics). Mullā Ṣadrā said that he had revived the original gnosis of the ancients in his *Four Journeys*<sup>2</sup> and in other works, as did Suhrawardī before him. He spoke in defence of philosophy against the 'common people' who, he said, are unable to understand the truth because 'truth does not suit the intellects of the people (*qawm*) corrupted in their natural dispositions by the internal

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<sup>1</sup> See Henry Corbin, *La philosophie Iranienne Islamique aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1981), and Sajjad H. Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī: His Life and works and the Sources for Safavid Philosophy* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā), *al-Ḥikma al-muta'āliyya fi'l-asfār al-arba'a al-'aqliyya* (Tehran, 1397/1976). Henceforth abridged as *Asfār*.

diseases that cannot be cured by the healers of the soul.<sup>3</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā claimed that whoever tried to acquire knowledge of the divine world (*ḥikma ilāhiyya*) had first to read Avicenna and Suhrawardī. Nevertheless, Mullā Ṣadrā credited himself with the foundation of the highest science in his *magnum opus*, the *Four Journeys*. However, even though he held Suhrawardī in high esteem, Mullā Ṣadrā was not a strict *ishrāqī*. In fact, he did not consider himself in any way an *ishrāqī*. Reading and explaining Suhrawardī is necessary, Mullā Ṣadrā believed, not because one should accept his every word and thought but for the exegetic distance we should observe between him and us. Suhrawardī is a necessary step in the philosophical journey, but he is just a step and not the final end.

Henry Corbin was the pioneer in studies on Mullā Ṣadrā's commentary on *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, translating a significant part of it into French. The author of the present article edited and published the translation after Corbin's death,<sup>4</sup> and would respectfully suggest that the magnificent picture drawn by Henry Corbin has to be slightly altered. The metaphysical continuity between *ishrāqī* philosophy and Mullā Ṣadrā's metaphysics as depicted by Corbin needs to be reconsidered. According to Corbin, Mullā Ṣadrā's exegesis in his commentaries of *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* fits in the continuous tradition of 'oriental' philosophy,<sup>5</sup> but this is not so manifestly evident to us. Of course, Suhrawardī inspired Mullā Ṣadrā to adopt many themes in ethics. His vocabulary, his esoteric notion of *ishrāq* and his illuminative knowledge influenced many of Mullā Ṣadrā's works, but Mullā Ṣadrā never considered himself a disciple or a reviver of Suhrawardī's philosophy. Rather, Mullā Ṣadrā considered *ishrāqī* philosophy an esoteric teaching whose meaning had to be disclosed by him according to the true signification of *walāya*.

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<sup>3</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, in Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq bā Sharḥ-e Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī wa Ta'liqāt Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī* (Tehran, 1392/1972), vol. 2, *Mantiq*, pp. 5–6.

<sup>4</sup> Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā al-Suhrawardī, *Le Livre de la sagesse orientale*. Kitāb Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq. *Commentaires de Qoṭboddīn Shīrāzī et Mollā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī*, tr. Henry Corbin, ed. Christian Jambet (Lagrasse, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques: Sohrawardī et les Platoniciens de Perse* (Paris, 1971), vol. 2, pp. 346–381.

This is not the place to consider now the numerous quotations and allusions concerning *ishrāqī* philosophy in the works of Mullā Ṣadrā. Instead, this will be an endeavour to demonstrate that the interpretation of *ishrāqī* doctrine by Mullā Ṣadrā may be described as an exegesis which places Suhrawardī's theses in a new metaphysical domain. Therefore, the focus here will be on Ṣadrā's commentary on *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. It consists of glosses on the earlier literal explanation (*tafsīr*) of this synthetic book by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311). Unlike this well-known *ishrāqī* commentator, Mullā Ṣadrā often moves far away from the main theses of Suhrawardī's doctrine. He translates *ishrāqī* theses into his own ontology and eschatology. On the three main subjects of metaphysics — the nature of being, the universe and the soul—Mullā Ṣadrā disagrees with Suhrawardī. Before we briefly examine their disagreement over ontology, cosmology and psychology, we shall refer to Ṣadrā's reinterpretation of human perfection, the human caliphate of God.

### A New Interpretation of the Human Caliphate of God

It is possible that Mullā Ṣadrā commented on *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* for the following important reason: freedom of intellect is achieved through assimilation with the divine lights. It is the foundation of the authority given by God to the Perfect Man. The authority of the Perfect Man rests on his mystical knowledge. Only the true possessor of the supreme knowledge is free, absorbed in God and qualified to govern the community of believers.<sup>6</sup>

In his foreword to his commentary on Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, Mullā Ṣadrā listed his reasons for examining the book which exactly coincide with the traditional philosophical aims. As Mullā Ṣadrā says at the beginning of *Four Journeys*, 'Philosophy is the way to perfection (*istikmāl*) for the human soul through the acquisition of knowledge of the true realities.'<sup>7</sup> That is why experiential knowledge of

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<sup>6</sup> See al-Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* § 5, in *The Philosophy of Illumination. A New Critical Edition of the Text of Ḥikmat al-ishrāq with English Translation, Notes, Commentary and Introduction*, ed. John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Provo, UT, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, vol. 1, p. 23.

the intelligible world is the highest happiness. Such a definition of philosophy comes, obviously, from Avicenna.<sup>8</sup> Coming into possession of such knowledge, one acquires supreme authority and the highest rank (which, according to Mullā Ṣadrā, is that of the prophet or the imam). The most elevated knowledge is in attendance on the higher lights in the Kingdom (*malakūt*). The goal of that perfect knowledge is the true happiness of the afterlife.

Obviously, in his introduction Mullā Ṣadrā identifies the most educated philosopher, whose intellect is similar to the divine light as depicted by Suhrawardī, with the prophetic guide, Abraham, the possessor of the highest authority. Nevertheless, it seems that the levels of both prophet and imam are superior to that of the philosopher. A very interesting gloss on the governing light of the human species, on the archangelic light named Gabriel, describes the ascension and the rank of the prophet. As we know, what is said of the prophet can be said of the imam as well. Mullā Ṣadrā comments on what Suhrawardī says about Gabriel. The angel is 'the proximate father among the mighty lords of the Kingdom of Dominance. He is *Ravān-Bakhsh*, the Holy Spirit, the bestower of knowledge and certainty, the giver of life and virtue.'<sup>9</sup> The governor of man's soul or spirit does not belong to the lowest immaterial intellects which govern natural species. The dominating light which is the Holy Spirit rules over the pleroma of all other intellectual substances. He stands at the top of the angelic world, which is the intelligible world. The Holy Spirit, according Mullā Ṣadrā, is the first and universal Intellect, not the tenth intellect as in Avicenna's cosmology.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the Perfect Man, either a prophet or an imam, is able to ascend to a station situated beyond the stations of governing angels. The Perfect Man ascends to the intelligible world and receives a rank situated above the angelic world. He reaches the station of the universal Intellect, the Holy Spirit. Just as with the first Intellect, there is no intermediary between the Perfect Man and God. That is the special experience of Muhammad during his *mi'rāj*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibn Sinā (Avicenna), *al-Shifā', al-Mantiq, al-Madkhal*, ed. I. Madkour (Cairo, 1955), p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, ed. Walbridge and Ziai, p. 132, § 210.

<sup>10</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, vol. 4, pp. 268–269.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

Finally, Mullā Ṣadrā says that spiritual ascension of the Prophet is the pattern of human destiny. The human soul is freed by philosophical practice from corporeal links, and it rises up to all upper levels of the psychic life and to all intellectual degrees. That is the substantial motion (*al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya*) of the human soul. When its ascent is completed, man's soul unifies with the first universal Intellect, and the rational soul becomes an active intellect. By the unification with the intelligible world, the rational soul becomes an intellective world and not only an acquired intellect.<sup>12</sup>

In this ultimate station, the Perfect Man abandons the potentiality of existence, he becomes a truly divinised being, he is actually free and lives the necessary divine life. That is the station of the 'ultimate proximity to God'. Sometimes Mullā Ṣadrā equates the *mi'rāj* of Imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib with Muhammad's ascension. Of course, Muhammad, the Perfect Man, returns to the human condition, to the 'station of human nature', just as the Platonic philosopher does upon his return to the Cave. Through the mediation of the first Intellect, the Holy Spirit, he is now able to give the people valid instructions. The divinised philosopher, entrusted to govern souls, is now the authentic gnostic (*'arif*), and this authentic gnostic is the Prophet Muhammad or his successor, the imam in his double mission, contemplation and pedagogical practice. When the time of legislative prophecy comes to an end, the master of contemplation, the educator of the elite, is the immaculate imam. The ancient pillars of wisdom, such as Plato and Empedocles inter alia, are placed in second rank, for they are conceived as students who receive their wisdom from the prophets and imams. The ancient sages of Persia have gone. So, philosophy and the esoteric teaching of the imams pursue the same goal, namely to guide mankind to its perfection. The Sufi Pole (*quṭb*) is assimilated to the esoteric figure of the imam.

### Mullā Ṣadrā's Critical Approach to *Ishrāqī* Ontology

Suhrawardī is well known for his criticism of Avicenna's doctrine of existence and quiddity, *wujūd* and *māhiya*, according to which existence always has the same signification whether it is said of a

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

quality, for instance blackness, or of a substance, for example a man or a horse. Existence taken in the most general sense is an empty concept typically used as a predicate and hence it adds nothing to a universal quiddity. That is because all predicates, whatever they be, are abstract representations and so have no reality *in concreto*. The quiddity of Zayd is Zayd himself, and to say that Zayd exists is not different from saying that Zayd is Zayd. The concept of existence is a pure abstraction, a point of view on the concrete existent.<sup>13</sup>

According to Mullā Ṣadrā, we have to reverse all these propositions. Every existence is a concrete singularity, a singular degree in the intensity of being determining the reality of the essence. More precisely, the essential nature of an existent is its own existence; it is its own act of being. Quiddity is only the 'umbra'<sup>14</sup> of this act of being. When Mullā Ṣadrā comments on Suhrawardī's theses about 'the abstractions of the intellect' in the third discourse of the first part of *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, he demonstrates very clearly the nature of the misunderstanding. In accordance with the theory of the pre-eminence of the act of being, he says that existence is a concrete ipseity (*huwiyya* 'ayniyya). Common existence which is abstracted from real existents is only a representation and imitation (*ḥikāya*). It is impossible to grasp the concrete act of being by a representative thought, because the act of being is not similar to a common predicate. Mullā Ṣadrā says: 'According to our theses, truly the concept of existence has priority, because it possesses reality. The existence of blackness exists by essence, even though the blackness united with it exists by accident and not by essence.'<sup>15</sup>

In his commentary on the first propositions of the metaphysical part of *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, Mullā Ṣadrā dismisses Avicenna's treatment of existence and quiddity. In addition, he also dismisses the *ishrāqī* notion of existence.<sup>16</sup> Although it is not possible now to discuss in

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<sup>13</sup> Al-Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, ed. Walbridge and Ziai, p. 45, § 56.

<sup>14</sup> In Latin, 'shadow'. In astronomy, refers to the innermost and darkest part of the shadow cast by a celestial body (ed.).

<sup>15</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 245.

<sup>16</sup> See Christian Jambet, *The Act of Being. The Philosophy of Revelation in Mullā Ṣadrā* (New York, 2006), pp. 77–78.

detail all the consequences of this interpretation, we must examine the most important of its implications. Suhrawardī says that 'anything in existence that requires no definition or explanation is evident. Since there is nothing more evident than light, there is nothing less in need of definition.'<sup>17</sup> In his masterly commentary, Mullā Ṣadrā proves first that both terms, apparition or evidence (*ẓuhūr*) and being (*wujūd*), have the same meaning. Sometimes we understand an intellectual concept. Sometimes we understand why something that is evident or existing is concretely true. Sometimes we understand that it is about the existing lights, sometimes that it is about the metaphysical nature of revelation and being. Consequently, the word 'light' in *ishrāqī* vocabulary means being. Mullā Ṣadrā says:

All the things which have been said or will be said about being, all the questions and all the conclusions, for example, the simplicity, absence of need in definition, impossibility of a definition and of a description, affirmation of intensity or weakness, priority or posteriority, being the pure good and its contrary the pure evil [. . .] all of these predicates and the other modes of being are also predicated of light.<sup>18</sup>

Then Mullā Ṣadrā analyses the way in which Suhrawardī speaks about light: Suhrawardī prefers the word 'light' to the word 'being'. He limits the use of the term 'light' to the necessary being, to God, to the being of the intellects and to the being of the souls and their faculties of knowledge, and also to the visible qualities of the luminous bodies. On the other hand, Suhrawardī says that bodies, bodily qualities and bodily aspects are 'the obscure things' (*al-ghawāsiq*). The natural body is called *barzakh* due to its medial situation between intelligible light and material obscurity. The body is hidden to itself. Neither evidence, nor an apparition, nor any knowledge or consciousness is present in the body. So each body is inexistent. The equation between being and knowledge or self-consciousness means that the body cannot belong to the field of being.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Al-Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, ed. Walbridge and Ziai, p. 76, § 107.

<sup>18</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, vol. 4, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, p. 7.



Mullā Ṣadrā approves of such a definition of the body. He often says that the sensible world (*al-dunyā*) is the realm of evil, of privation, suffering and Hell. The dualistic meaning of conflict between corporal inexistence and intelligible immaterial being is a major trend of his ethics and eschatology.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Mullā Ṣadrā has inherited Ibn 'Arabī's conception of being.<sup>21</sup> He cannot agree with Suhrawardī's dualistic definition of light and obscurity. Being is principally God Himself, and being is by essence necessity and freedom. Just as existence is the Real (*al-ḥaqq*), so all existences proceeding from the Real are forms of reality which are variously powerful, intense or weak in their mode of existence. As a result of the body's unity, it participates in being and must be said to be existent. Light, being, unity and necessity are all the Real, which is the essence of God. And so, Mullā Ṣadrā dismisses radical dualistic theses while using the ontology he inherited from Ibn 'Arabī rather than Suhrawardī's definitions. Mullā Ṣadrā substitutes his doctrine of being for the *ishrāqī* metaphysics of light and darkness. Nevertheless, he preserves the dualist view which discriminates between the world of lights and the enigmatic darkness of matter. He writes that in its reality being is full light, even if some of the beings are mixed with non-existences and potentialities. The substitution of the language of ontology for *ishrāqī* doctrine allows Mullā Ṣadrā to reconcile Suhrawardī's thought with the most important inspiration that he received from the writings of Ibn 'Arabī.

### **The Conflict of Philosophy with Religious Dogma about the Eternity of the World**

Suhrawardī's cosmology is faithful to the doctrine of the *falāsifa* about the eternity of the world. He summarises his thesis at the end of the third discourse of the second part of *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, saying that 'the Light of lights is the cause of existence and the cause of the permanence of all existents, and so are also the dominating lights.'<sup>22</sup> Hence, the

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<sup>20</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, ed. Muḥammad Khājavī (Qum, 1361 Sh./1982), vol. 6, pp. 142–143; idem, *Asfār*, vol. 6, p. 144 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, vol. 4, pp. 27–29.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, ed. Walbridge and Ziai, p. 123, § 193.

Intellects are eternal. 'Since the celestial bodies are neither generated nor corrupted, their managing lights never depart from them, but, on the contrary, govern them perpetually.'<sup>23</sup> Hence the celestial souls are eternal. In his commentary, Mullā Ṣadrā reminds us of the conflict of this thesis, asserting the eternity of the world (which assertion is congruent to Suhrawardī's theory of causality), with the dogma of all religions: 'For it is a general belief in all true revealed religious laws (*sharā'i*) that we must maintain the world's creation in accordance with the *ḥadīth* "God existed and nothing was existent with Him".'<sup>24</sup>

Philosophers maintain, just as Suhrawardī does, that the intellects, celestial souls, celestial bodies and universal essences of the elements are eternal. In turn, the revealed religions and Plato agree that the universe is created and that it will perish. Mullā Ṣadrā says that he is guided by the doctrine of the prophets and imams. Hence, according to him, the metaphysical interpretation of the world's creation must be congruent with the religious tenets of the prophetic discourse whilst it also contradicts the *falāsifa* and the *ishrāqī* philosophy. The subtle exposition of the problem appearing in an important gloss of Mullā Ṣadrā combines a range of arguments, such as a critical approach to the problem of existence and essence, the distinction between the intellects and other beings, the status of the wisdom of the ancient Greeks, the authoritative gnosis inherited from Ibn 'Arabī, and the refutation of the world's eternity by the essential movement in corporeal natures. The result of such a combination of arguments is the rejection of Suhrawardī's cosmology and his theological teaching about the destiny of created beings.<sup>25</sup>

According to Mullā Ṣadrā, when we ask if a thing can exist forever or comes to be in time, our question is about the act of being and not about the specific quiddity. Time or eternity is nothing by itself but is a determination of the act of being. Mullā Ṣadrā does not consider there to be an intermediate degree such as the perennial duration (*dahr*) between time (*zamān*) and eternity (*sarmad*). Hence, he has to distinguish the everlasting existent from the temporal existent, without

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, vol. 4, p. 207.

<sup>25</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, pp. 208–213.

any resort to the intermediate degree, as it was done by Mīr Dāmād.<sup>26</sup> All corporeal beings are differentiated into species by their specific form which is their nature. Every nature 'flows' into the body and is its principle of movement and rest. The movement's substratum is matter. Of course, we should admit that the concept of movement is equivocal. The term 'movement' refers to changes in the attributes of a substance and also refers to the substantial or essential movement of the substance itself. There is nothing ambiguous or subject to misunderstanding in the use of the term 'movement'. Essential movement is a concept inherited from Plotinus. Essential movement is the perpetual renewal of each nature. The accidental movements and the final and natural rest result from the nature of the corporeal substance, and so they are determined by its essential movement. To support his philosophical treatment of nature, Mullā Ṣadrā appeals to three authorities, quoting from Zeno of Citium,<sup>27</sup> Ibn 'Arabī and, of course, the Qur'an. All these demonstrations and quotations, and also the important *Risāla fi hudūth al-'ālam*, allow Mullā Ṣadrā to summarise his thesis in few words:

The corporeal world is never deprived of an origination (*hudūth*) and of corruption without interruption. But the divine world and the world of the incorporeal forms do not pertain to anything but God. They are the radiant lights of the Real, his attributes and his beautiful names and the forms existing in the knowledge and the decree of God.<sup>28</sup>

In Ṣadrā's cosmology, there is no place for *dahr*, perpetuity. However, we find there three modes of being and three degrees of reality. First, the divine world, including the essence of God and the intelligible world. This world is eternal. Secondly, we find the world of nature, including all the corporeal substances, namely the elementary and mineral bodies, the corporeal mode of being of the vegetative and of the animal forms and the natural part of the human being. This

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<sup>26</sup> See Mathieu Terrier, 'De l'éternité ou de la nouveauté du monde : Parcours d'un problème philosophique d'Athènes à Ispahan', *Journal Asiatique*, 299 (2011), pp. 369–421.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milāl wa'l-niḥāl*, tr. Jean Jolivet and Guy Monnot as *Livre des religions et des sectes* (Paris, 1986), vol. 2, pp. 239–244.

<sup>28</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥi Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, vol. 4, p. 228.

world is temporal and temporary. Mullā Ṣadrā says that the world of bodies is continuously annihilating and passing from its present abode to the realm of rest. The essential movement proves that any kind of corporeal body, even if it is a celestial sphere, is a vanishing reality. It leaves no place for the celestial theology or a religious devotion to the world of stars. We will see that this point is of great importance in the interpretation of *'ālam al-mithāl*. The essential movement has a goal, which is the afterlife, the world of Resurrection, that will manifest itself at the end of time, corresponding to the events of the Hour announced in Qur'anic verses.

Between these two worlds, we find the *barzakh* (literally 'screen'), the isthmus between *al-mulk*, the sensible world of nature, and *al-malakūt* and *al-jabarūt*, the two stages of the intelligible world. It is not really an ontologically distinct world, even if it is invisible and separate from the inferior matter. It is the intermediate stage of the spiritual journey of all psychic realities. In the rational soul, every inferior soul finds its final stage of development. Hence, there we find rational souls, including the souls of the spheres and the lowest degree of man's rational soul. The rational and psychic mode of being is a double one. Rational souls have two dimensions or aspects. In the first one, they look to the upper world and are permanent. In the second, they look at the lower world and are transient. All Mullā Ṣadrā's ethical recommendations are given in view of this.

Of course, the status of the Intellects and the intelligible world is ambiguous. In one aspect, the Intellects are distinct from the essence of God, for they are emanations from the pure and everlasting absolute and the necessary Being. But, in another aspect, the Intellects are eternal for they draw their own eternity from God's eternity. Mullā Ṣadrā thinks that God does not *make* them permanent beings. Rather, they are permanent by themselves because they simultaneously vanish in God's essence by their love and are eternally permanent by their immateriality. The intelligible world proceeds from divine knowledge which is an attribute of God, united with God's essence. The intelligible world is the world of God's decree. It encompasses all the eternal forms and does not belong to the temporal universe. Unlike Mīr Dāmād who preserved the absolute One in its eternity (*sarmad*) and thought that the intelligible world was everlastingly coming to being in perpetuity (*dahr*), Mullā Ṣadrā unites the essence of God and the

divine decree in the eternal divine world. He draws a strange correspondence between five denominations, which, to him, denote the same thing, namely the intelligible world: the cognitive forms of God's knowledge (wrongly attributed to Aristotle), divine archetypal forms (according to Plato), the divine attributes (according to the Ash'arīs), the states or modes of being (according to the Mu'tazilīs), the divine names and eternal essences (according to Ibn 'Arabī).

As we can see, Mullā Ṣadrā's cosmology deals only with the world of nature. The intelligible world is the subject of metaphysics and theology. Psychology deals with the afterlife of rational souls, which is an ethical and eschatological subject dependent on comprehension of the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*. Mullā Ṣadrā puts forward his positions and enlists his references, the ancients, the prophets, even Aristotle, to argue against Suhrawardī and the *falāsifa*. We cannot agree with Henry Corbin when he associates the *ishrāqiyyūn* with Mullā Ṣadrā against Avicenna's doctrine of the world's eternity.<sup>29</sup>

### A New Definition of the Human Soul

Mullā Ṣadrā's rejection of Suhrawardī's concept of the rational soul stems from the fact that they were not speaking about the same reality. They defined the human soul in different ways and ascribed to it different properties. The difference in the definition of the soul is best seen in Mullā Ṣadrā's comments on two important topics: the immateriality of the soul and the psychic life before the body; and, the destiny of the soul in the afterlife and the so-called 'imaginal world'.

We know that, according to Suhrawardī, it is impossible to give a definition of the immaterial light which is the soul, including its existence before the body. Suhrawardī points to the simplicity and the singularity of each human soul in support of his thesis. The existence of a singular ego and the indistinct existence of all souls before the body are both inconsistent assertions. If all human souls constituted a unique universal soul before their government of bodies, they would not be able to divide themselves among the material bodies because only bodies are divisible. Suhrawardī was unwilling to accept the concept of

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<sup>29</sup> Corbin, *Le Livre de la sagesse orientale*, p. 569.

the universal soul, which idea originated with Plotinus. Should the human soul exist before the body, the governing lights would lose their original singularity. Also, if souls could exist in an indistinct way in the universal soul, they would never multiply as they do after their descent into the bodily fortresses. Both states, before and after the body, the oneness of the soul and the multiplicity of souls, are inconsistent with the theory of the pre-existence of the soul to the body. As the immaterial souls cannot initially be a common or universal soul, they cannot be multiple. Therefore, Suhrawardī says that 'since they can neither be many nor one before managing the fortresses, they cannot exist.'<sup>30</sup> The impossibility of the existence of the immaterial soul would be a logical result of its assumed pre-existence.

In his commentaries, Mullā Ṣadrā does not assume, as Suhrawardī seems to do, that all individual existences of the human soul belong to one unique species. He also does not accept the idea that a soul, from the time it becomes linked to the embryo and until the time of its perfection, could remain at the same degree, having one substance or essence. The human soul is perfect through the perfection of its intelligible principle. It is temporal and subject to becoming when it lives as a corporeal substance, and it is perpetual and permanent in its afterlife. What depends on the disposition of body is only the natural condition of the soul. If the body were a condition of the soul's life, we could not imagine anything other than the soul's death when the managing or the government of the body ceases. The refutation by Suhrawardī of the pre-existence of the human soul endangers three important principles: 1) the invincible diversity of human souls predetermined in God's decree; 2) the modulated being of the changing/'flowing' soul; and 3) the soul's afterlife. One must note the complete disagreement between Mullā Ṣadrā's doctrine, founded on the priority of existence, and Suhrawardī's doctrine, founded on the specific immutable nature of each being.<sup>31</sup> In his commentaries on *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, Mullā Ṣadrā provides many arguments against Suhrawardī which are reproduced and developed in a chapter of his

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<sup>30</sup> Al-Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, ed. Walbridge and Ziai, p. 132, § 211.

<sup>31</sup> Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, vol. 4, pp. 270-274.

masterwork, the *Asfār*, written after the commentaries.<sup>32</sup> His main thesis is: the rational soul is corporeal in its origination, and spiritual in its permanence. Hence, we can agree with the philosophers who assert the link between soul and body. It can be said that the rational soul passes through certain corporeal states before it actualises its rational power. However, in fact there is no link between soul and body, for corporeal existence is a transient state in the development of the soul. During its vegetative and animal life, the human soul lives as the body does, while in its essence it is an incorporeal and immaterial substance.

The foundation of Mullā Ṣadrā's doctrine is the substantial movement, the intensification in the category of substance. In *Asfār* he writes: 'The human soul originates as a body and during its government of a body. It is spiritual in her permanence and her intellection. Its government in the bodies is corporeal, but its intellection of its own essence and of its Creator's essence is spiritual.'<sup>33</sup>

The pattern of the soul's destiny is the existential permanent evolution from the immaterial intelligible origin to the immaterial return to the first Intellect, and then to God. That is the reason why Mullā Ṣadrā has many objections to Suhrawardī's arguments. All of them are damning. Of course, their credibility depends on the credibility of Ṣadrā's exegesis. For instance, Mullā Ṣadrā sees the proof of the soul's fall and ascent in several Qur'anic verses (2: 36, 38; 7: 29–30; 19: 71–72; 95: 4–6; 102: 1–8). And he interprets some words of the Prophet in the prophetic *ḥadīth* as a proof of the pre-existence of the human soul, for instance: 'Men are mines similar to gold and silver mines' and, of course, 'I was a Prophet when Adam was between water and clay'. He also discerns such proof in the *ḥadīth*: 'We are what came before and what comes after.'

The most important philosophical proof given by an authoritative author, according to Mullā Ṣadrā, is found in the *Theology* of Pseudo-Aristotle. Mullā Ṣadrā comments on numerous quotations from the *Theology*. He thinks that Plotinus's doctrine, ascribed to Aristotle, is the true exegesis of the teaching of the Prophet and the imams

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<sup>32</sup> Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, vol. 8, pp. 398–434, especially pp. 406–409. See also *Asfār*, vol. 8, pp. 385–397. *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, vol. 4, pp. 274–285.

<sup>33</sup> Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, vol. 8, p. 402.

regarding the soul. The purpose of such an exegesis is to prove that the human soul is the rational soul that it descends to the sensible world.<sup>34</sup> Hence, as Mullā Ṣadrā writes in one of his glosses: 'Human souls have a mode of being in the world of Intellect and a mode of being in the sensible world, and their mode of being up there is not [identical with] their mode of being down here.'<sup>35</sup> One cannot provide a better proof that Ṣadrā's doctrine of the human soul is incompatible with Suhrawardī's doctrine. Suhrawardī dismisses Plotinus's understanding of Plato's doctrine of the soul, while Mullā Ṣadrā bases his interpretation of the true discourse, that of the Prophet and the imams, on it.

The transformation of the concept of the soul has great consequences for eschatology. Were it possible to go into detail, we would note that Mullā Ṣadrā disagrees with the earliest commentators concerning the interpretation of the imagination and imaginative forms.<sup>36</sup> Suhrawardī's statements on the reward in the afterlife are well known. As for the ascetics and 'those who have attained an intermediate bliss', he says they will escape from their corporeal bodies to the world of suspended images whose locus of manifestation is one of the celestial bodies. The damned are punished in a similar way: 'They will possess shadows of suspended forms in accordance with their moral qualities.'<sup>37</sup> Suhrawardī calls the locus of these suspended forms 'the world of immaterial figures' (*ashbāh*), and he adds: 'The resurrection of bodies,<sup>38</sup> the apparitions of the Lord, and all promises of prophecies find their reality through it.'<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Hikmat al-ishrāq*, vol. 4, pp. 278, 282–285. See 'Theology', in *Plotinus apud Arabes, Theologia Aristotelis et fragmenta quae supersunt*, ed. and introd., A. Badawi (Cairo, 1955), pp. 35–37, 38, 84, 87.

<sup>35</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Hikmat al-ishrāq*, vol. 4, p. 277.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, ed. Walbridge and Ziai, pp. 148–150, §§ 244–248; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Hikmat al-ishrāq*, vol. 4, pp. 408–447.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-ishrāq*, ed. Walbridge and Ziai, pp. 148–149, §§ 244–245.

<sup>38</sup> We read *ajsād* and not *amthāl* as it is read in the Walbridge and Ziai edition.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-ishrāq*, ed. Walbridge and Ziai, p. 150, § 248.



### Conclusion

First, Suhrawardī seems to have placed in the same world the forms seen in mirrors, the forms perceived by the imagination and the separated forms of reward and punishment. Mullā Ṣadrā dismisses Suhrawardī's fanciful interest in forms seen in mirrors, an interest very close to the mysterious and horrific feeling of the modern writer, Jorge Luis Borges, referring to the Islamic conception of images. Forms seen in mirrors exist concretely but by accident, not by themselves.<sup>40</sup> In this way, Suhrawardī's conception of the afterlife and imaginal world depends on the astral religion of the ancient Greeks. Mullā Ṣadrā cannot agree with such an astral theology, for the celestial bodies are vanishing substances. An Islamic doctrine of reward and punishment cannot easily integrate ancient forms of devotion to the eternal celestial world into the dogma of man's future perennial destiny as Suhrawardī does in *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. Mullā Ṣadrā says:

You know yet that forms which are present to the soul in the afterlife do not subsist by something belonging to the external bodies. The soul does not need any locus of manifestation that might be separate from it, as mirror or other similar things are. It does not have any need of that for the contemplation of forms which belong to the soul.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, Mullā Ṣadrā dismisses the *ishrāqī* celestial religion in its entirety, reminding us that those celestial bodies belong to the inferior sensible world and that celestial bodies do not differ from elementary bodies in their transient nature. Hence, we must dismiss the external existence of the imaginal world that is not situated inside the human soul.

Since Mullā Ṣadrā's lengthy and detailed glosses on the fifth discourse in the third section of the second part of *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* are more explicit than the brief corresponding chapter in *Asfār*, it is necessary to be brief. The main sources Mullā Ṣadrā uses are the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and, curiously, Avicenna. However, the pattern of his conception of imaginal world is mostly borrowed from Plotinus and perhaps from Proclus's analysis of Plato's

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<sup>40</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, vol. 4, pp. 337–338.

<sup>41</sup> Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, p. 416.

famous symbol of the line in the *Republic*. In his commentary on a gloss written by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, Mullā Ṣadrā quotes some relevant passages from the *Theology* of [Pseudo-]Aristotle.<sup>42</sup> According to this paraphrase of Plotinus, Mullā Ṣadrā discerns three degrees in human reality: natural man whose faculties subsist by his body is the image of the median man, the psychic man, whose faculties, in turn, are the umbra and the image of intelligible man. Mullā Ṣadrā exalts the light of so-called Aristotle (in fact Plotinus) and his intelligence. He says that his rank in the luminous *walāya* is very high, and so Plotinus with Plato and Socrates can be treated as authoritative authors by Shi'ī believers. The world of imaginal forms which is the world of the afterlife is nothing other than the second man, the psychic man, corresponding to the second degree of cosmic being, the psychic world.

In conclusion, we have to say that Mullā Ṣadrā read Suhrawardī for himself, with the purpose of establishing his own doctrine firmly and without any concession to his illustrious predecessor. Of course, he writes with the aim of giving a place to Suhrawardī in his programme of gnosis and philosophy and he defends *ishrāqī* philosophy against the numerous attacks launched by the Shi'ī clerics of his time. His commentary on *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* is an important element in his system of defence and an illustration of the real *walāya*, including metaphysics and Platonic gnosis. Mullā Ṣadrā has to defend his own philosophy against those he considers to be ignorant *fuqahā'* and bigots. So, he interprets *ishrāqī* philosophy in terms of his own doctrine, and he claims that his interpretation is the true meaning and the perennial truth taught by Suhrawardī and his disciples.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 339–341.



**A *Symphonia* of Shi'ism, Philosophy and Sufism  
from the Late Safavid Period: Quṭb al-Dīn  
Ashkivarī's Epistle on the Imaginal World  
(written in 1077/1667)**

*Mathieu Terrier*

Safavid Iran, in the 10th to 11th/16th to 17th centuries, was the centre of three major evolutions in the intellectual history of Islam: the revival of the Imāmī Shi'ī tradition, with an increase of activity in the fields of *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*; the renaissance of philosophy, through the schools of Iṣfahān and Shīrāz; and the mutation of Iranian Sufism, with the repression of the Sunni-minded brotherhoods on the one hand, and the widespread adoption and Shi'itisation of a certain Sufi heritage on the other.<sup>1</sup> Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkivarī (d. between 1088 and 1095/1677 and 1684), who was active during the reign of Shah Sulaymān (r. 1077–1105/1666–1694), is a complex figure in this threefold process, being at the same time a traditionist (*muḥaddith*) and a member of the Shi'ī clergy, even if at a middle rank, a populariser of philosophy rather than being himself an original philosopher, and an open defender of Sufism, if not himself a Sufi.<sup>2</sup> Sent to Iṣfahān in his early youth, he was the pupil of the famous philosophers and theologians Shaykh Bahā'ī (d. 1030/1621) and Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1631); but he had to return early to his hometown of Lāhījān, in Gīlān, to assume the role of *shaykh al-Islām*. He seems to have spent most of his life there, away from the main centres of power. His own intellectual production dates from 1070/1660.

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<sup>1</sup> See A. J. Newman, *Safavid Iran. Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London and New York, 2006). On the school of Iṣfahān, see now Janis Esots, *Patterns of Wisdom: The Philosophical School of Isfahan and the Gnostic of Shiraz* (London, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> On this author, see Mathieu Terrier, *Histoire de la sagesse et philosophie shi'ite. L'aimé des cœurs de Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkevari* (Paris, 2016).

Ashkivarī's most famous work, the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* (first written in 1077/1667, then completed in 1088/1677 or after), is an encyclopedia of all the sages from Adam to Mīr Dāmād;<sup>3</sup> it should be regarded as the last great opus in a genre that first appeared in the 4th/10th century, immediately after the Greek-Arabic *translatio studiorum*, and the first to be composed from an explicitly Shi'ī point of view.<sup>4</sup> Noteworthy, his final notice on Mīr Dāmād was the major source for Henry Corbin's pioneer study on the 'third master' (*al-mu'allim al-thālith*, Mīr Dāmād's epithet), and, significantly, of his founding of the 'Iṣfahān school of philosophy' paradigm.<sup>5</sup> Under the name of al-Sharīf al-Lāhijī, Ashkivarī was also the author of a commentary on the Qur'an consisting mainly of Imāmī *ḥadīths* or *akhbār* translated into Persian.<sup>6</sup> His third work of importance is entitled *Fānūs al-khayāl fi irā'at 'ālam al-mithāl*, also referred to as *al-Risāla al-mithāliyya*, written in 1077/1667.

The concept of the 'ālam al-mithāl or 'imaginal world', according to Henry Corbin's famous translation, is undoubtedly a key topic in Islamic philosophy, first developed among Suhrawardī's (d. 587/1191) and Ibn 'Arabī's (d. 638/1240) disciples, then throughout Safavid times, notably by Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) and his student Muḥsin

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<sup>3</sup> *Maḥbūb al-qulūb, al-maqālat al-'ulā*, ed. I. al-Dibājī and H. Ṣidqī (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999); *Maḥbūb al-qulūb, al-maqālat al-thāniyya* (Tehran, 1382 Sh./2003); third part unpublished. First part translated into French in Terrier, *Histoire de la sagesse et philosophie shī'ite*.

<sup>4</sup> On the history of this genre, see M. Terrier, 'Histoire de l'histoire de la sagesse en islam. Résumé des conférences 2015-2016', *AEPHE-SSR*, 124 (2015-16), pp. 363-372 <https://journals.openedition.org/asr/1652> (accessed on 28 January 2021); idem, 'Histoire de l'histoire de la sagesse en islam. Résumé des conférences 2016-2017', *AEPHE-SSR*, 125 (2016-17), pp. 395-404 <https://journals.openedition.org/asr/2115> (accessed on 28 January 2021); idem, 'Histoire de l'histoire de la sagesse en islam. Résumé des conférences 2017-2018', *AEPHE-SSR*, 126 (2017-18), pp. 365-374 <https://journals.openedition.org/asr/2930> (accessed on 28 January 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Henry Corbin, 'Confessions extatiques de Mīr Dāmād, maître de théologie à Ispahan (ob. 1041/1631-1632)', in H. Massé, ed., *Mélanges offerts à Louis Massignon* (Damascus, 1956), vol. 1, pp. 331-378; idem, *En Islam Iranien* (Paris, 1971-1972), vol. 4. For a critical study of this paradigm, see Sajjad Rizvi, 'Iṣfahān School of Philosophy', *EIr*, vol. 14, pp. 119-125 <http://iranicaonline.org/articles/isfahan-school-of-philosophy> (accessed on 28 January 2021).

<sup>6</sup> *Tafsīr al-Sharīf al-Lāhijī*, ed. M. Urmawī (Tehran, 1340 Sh./1962).

Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679).<sup>7</sup> Noteworthy, Ashkivarī's *Fānūs al-khayāl* seems to have been the first monograph on the subject.<sup>8</sup> Despite this, maybe because its author is a rather obscure figure, it has not received any scholarly interest since a brief mention by Corbin, and still remains unpublished.<sup>9</sup> This paper, based on the study of its sole manuscript (MS 1615, Malek Library of Tehran), is conceived as a preliminary to a critical edition and French translation.<sup>10</sup> After a presentation of Ashkivarī's project and sources, an overview of this work will be presented by focusing first on the concept of the imaginal world and then on various themes of the convergence between Shi'ism, Sufism and philosophy addressed by the author throughout the epistle.

### Ashkivarī's Project, Style and Sources

#### *The Symphonic Project*

In my study on the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, I was able to show that the aim of this encyclopedia of sages was to demonstrate the harmony between the Shi'ī esoteric tradition, Greek and Islamic philosophy, and a certain type of Sufism, clearly three separate and rival threads in the quest for truth in spiritual Islam. This aim of harmonisation or establishing *symphonia*, in the sense of the term in Greek literature and exegesis (Jewish, Christian and Neoplatonist), i.e., concordance or agreement between texts and doctrines,<sup>11</sup> is also at the core of the *Fānūs al-khayāl*. With this project, Ashkivarī follows the line of thinkers such as Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385-86), Ibn Abi Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī (d. after 904/1499) and Qāḍī Nūr-Allāh Shūshtarī (d. 1019/1610), who

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<sup>7</sup> See L.W.C. Van Lit, *The World of Image in Islamic Philosophy. Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, Shahrāzūrī, and beyond* (Edinburgh, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Actually, another monograph on the imaginal world was composed in the same period by a mysterious namesake of our author, if not he himself: Bahā'ī Lāhijī, *al-Risāla al-nūriyya al-mithāliyya*, ed. J. Ashtiyānī (Tehran n.d.).

<sup>9</sup> Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie Islamique* (Paris, 1986), p. 465.

<sup>10</sup> Mathieu Terrier, *Le guide du monde imaginal. Présentation, édition et traduction de la Risāla mithāliyya de Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkevarī* (Turnout, forthcoming).

<sup>11</sup> On this notion, see Sébastien Morlet, *Symphonia. La concorde des textes et des doctrines dans la littérature grecque jusqu'à Origène* (Paris, 2019).

in particular sought to reconcile Shi'ism and Sufism.<sup>12</sup> However, this attitude is even more significant in Ashkivarī's time, marked by a severe reaction on the part of the Shi'i clergy against Sufism and philosophy.<sup>13</sup> When most of his contemporaries were banishing the word 'Sufism' (*taṣawwuf*) from their vocabulary and preferred to refer to 'gnosis' (*'irfān*), Ashkivarī was openly praising the 'unitarian Sufis' (*al-sūfiyya al-muwaḥḥida*) and their masters (*mashā'ikh*), whom he considered as both disciples of the imams, following Āmulī's and Shūshtarī's historiography, and 'true philosophers' of the lineage of the ancient sages, in accordance with Suhrawardī's claim.<sup>14</sup>

Ashkivarī's mode of composition is not that of an 'author' in the modern sense of the word, but rather it is an assemblage of personal reflections and numerous quotations, including Qur'anic verses, Prophetic and Imāmī *ḥadīths*, extensive extracts from various philosophical works, as well as poetic verses. For this reason, like the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, the *Fānūs al-khayāl* is written in a mixed language of Arabic and Persian sometimes called *mulamma'*. Most of the verses quoted are in Persian; many of the *ḥadīths* and Qur'anic verses, after being quoted in Arabic, are also translated into Persian; and some philosophical ideas are also expressed in turn in both languages. This reflects the diglossia of Safavid learned society as well as Ashkivarī's particular willingness to address the Persian-speaking population and not only the elite that was well acquainted with Arabic.

However, this kind of compilation by 'cut and paste' is far from being a formal exercise. In the *Fānūs al-khayāl* as well as in the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, Ashkivarī displays not only a fantastic degree of erudition and a 'rhapsodic art', as noted by Corbin,<sup>15</sup> but also real philosophical

<sup>12</sup> On this tradition of reconciliation, see Mathieu Terrier, 'The Defence of Sufism among Twelver Shi'i Scholars of the Early Modern and Modern Times: Topics and Arguments', in D. Hermann and M. Terrier, ed., *Shi'i Islam and Sufism: Classical Views and Modern Perspectives* (London, 2020), pp. 27–63.

<sup>13</sup> See on this Leonard Lewisohn, 'Sufism and the School of Iṣfahān: Taṣawwuf and 'Irfān in Late Safavid Iran ('Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī and Fayḍ Kāshānī on the Relation of Taṣawwuf, Ḥikmat and 'Irfān)', in L. Lewisohn and D. Morgan, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism* (Oxford, 1999), vol. 3, pp. 63–134; Ata Anzali, 'Mysticism' in Iran: *The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept* (Columbia, SC, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, *Kitāb al-talwihāt*, in his *Ceuvres philosophiques et mystiques*, vol. 1, ed. H. Corbin (Tehran and Paris, 1952), pp. 73–74.

<sup>15</sup> Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, vol. 4, p. 27.

and historical ambition. By compiling different sources and setting them in sequence, his purpose is not only to defend the idea of an agreement between the three main spiritual currents of Islam in theory, but also to make their harmony or *symphonia* actually heard.

### *The Argument of the Fānūs al-khayāl*

Unlike the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, the *Fānūs al-khayāl* is a concise epistle that deals with an issue that is specifically both theological and philosophical. The introduction clearly states the motive behind the work, its project and what could be called its methodology:

As the immaterial human souls, after their separation from the material bodies referred to as 'natural death' in the noble teachings reported from the Impeccable beings [i.e. the imams], attach themselves to imaginal shapes (*ashbāḥ mithāliyya*) similar to these bodies, they experience bliss or punishment in [these shapes] until the advent of the hour [of Resurrection]; then, they will go back into these bodies as they were, with the permission of their Giver of Existence. I was then called to write a brief epistle on the verification (*taḥqīq*) of the imaginal world and the shapes to which souls are attached after being delivered from bodily receptacles and sensitive attachments. We will first mention a handful of *ḥadīths* confirming this view (. . .); then we will explain the reality of this world according to what the philosophers of Illumination (*ḥukamā' al-ishrāq*) professed, as well as what the deified men among the unitarian Sufi sects (*al-muta'alliḥa min al-firaq al-ṣūfiyya al-muwahhida*) have made known through their spiritual struggles and contemplations (*mujaḥadātihim wa mushāhadātihim*). You are [already] aware that the masters of spiritual observation (*al-irṣād al-rūḥānī*) have a higher rank than the masters of material observation. So, since you give credit to the latter in what they give you from the secrets of astronomy, it is right that you also give credit to the former in what they reveal to you from the secrets of the angelic worlds.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, MS 1615, Malek Library Tehran, pp. 1–2. The last argument is an echo of Suhrawardī's *Kitāb hikmat al-ishrāq*, in idem, *Œuvres philosophiques et mystiques*, vol. 1, pp. 155–156, § 165; Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, ed. and tr. J. Walbridge and H. Ziai (Provo, UT, 1999), pp. 107–108.



The argument of the epistle, stated from the outset, lies therefore at the crossroads of eschatology and metaphysics: human souls, between death and the greatest Resurrection, will experience at first reward or suffering in the grave, designated as a *barzakh* ('isthmus') in reference to Q 23:100, an intermediary world between the sensory and the intelligible one, labelled by the philosophers as 'the imaginal world'. Introduced by the first sentence, the distinction and the justification of these two bodies of Resurrection, that of the 'lesser Resurrection' in the grave, and that of the 'greatest Resurrection' at the end of time, is actually one of the main topics of the epistle. Since the beginning, this conception is presented as shared by the Impeccable beings (i.e. the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fāṭima and the Twelve imams), the *ishrāqī* philosophers and 'unitarian' Sufis.

Despite the announcement of a structured plan in which the three major currents are separated, the epistle constantly cross-references the Shi'i sacred scriptures (i.e. the Qur'an and Imāmī *ḥadīth*), philosophy and Sufism. It is also not divided into isoform parts (*faṣl* or *bāb*) but proceeds by free association. In its form and content, the *Fānūs al-khayāl*, like the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, is both an anthology and a personal work, a syncretic proposal and a work combatting the dominant exoteric and legalist trend of his time.

### *The Sources of the Symphonia*

As demonstrated by his *Tafsīr*, Ashkivarī can himself be considered an expert in Imāmī *ḥadīth*, concerned with the conservation of the genuine esoteric tradition of the imams. Of the earlier sources, he borrows from al-Kulaynī's (d. 329/940-41) *Kitāb al-Kāfi* and Shaykh Ṣadūq's (d. 381/991) works such as *Kamāl al-dīn*, *al-Āmālī* and 'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā. Out of the medieval sources (5th-6th/11th-12th centuries), the *Nahj al-balāgha* compiled by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1015); Shaykh Ṭabarsī's (d. 548/1153-54) *I'lām al-warā*, and al-Rāwandī's (d. 573/1177-78) *al-Kharā'ij wa'l-jarā'ih* are frequently quoted. Last, among the late works on *ḥadīth*, Ibn Abī Jumhūr's 'Awālī al-li'ālī, a collection often considered unorthodox, and Shaykh Bahā'ī's *al-Arba'ūn ḥadīth* are also used. It should be noted that Ashkivarī's works predate the three main encyclopedias of Imāmī *ḥadīth* composed in the Safavid era by some of his contemporaries, namely Fayḍ

Kāshānī's *al-Wāfi*, Ḥurr 'Āmilī's (d. 1104/1693) *Wasā'il al-shī'a*, and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī's (d. 1111/1699) *Biḥār al-anwār*.

Regarding philosophy, Ashkivarī mentions ancient sages such as Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras, Thales, Plato, Aristotle and Theophrastus, taking his information from medieval bio-doxographies as he does in his *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*.<sup>17</sup> From the Islamic period, Ibn Sīnā's (d. 428/1037) *al-Najāt* and *al-Shifā'* are quoted, as well as al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) *al-Maḍnūn bihi 'alā ghayr ahlihi*, an epistle of Avicennian inspiration.<sup>18</sup> Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī is directly quoted several times. However, most of the *ishrāqī* material is borrowed from his major commentators, Shams al-Dīn Shahrazūrī (d. between 687/1288 and 704/1305), Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311) and Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dashtakī (d. 949/1538). Shahrazūrī's philosophical encyclopedia *Rasā'il al-shajara al-ilāhiyya* is one of the main philosophical sources used in the epistle. In addition to Dashtakī, Shams al-Dīn al-Khafri (d. between 942/1535 and 946/1539), one of the first Shi'i philosophers of 10th/16th-century Iran, is also mentioned. Last, among his early contemporaries, Ashkivarī quotes at length, without mentioning their names, his former teacher Mīr Dāmād – mainly his Persian *Jadhawāt wa mawāqit*, but also his *Risāla al-khal'iyya*, the notoriety of which is mostly due to his report in the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* – and, more surprisingly, Mullā Ṣadrā – mainly *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya* and *Sharḥ al-hidāya al-athīriyya*.<sup>19</sup>

As for Sufism, Ashkivarī draws from several traditions. Rabī'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 185/801) and Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/911) are briefly mentioned as spiritual authorities. Ibn 'Arabī and the Akbārī school are widely represented through a Persian translation of *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, the commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* by Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350), and various works by 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. between 730-6 /1329-35). The commentary of Kamāl al-Dīn Maybudī (d. 907/1501-2) on the *Dīwān* attributed to the First imam,

<sup>17</sup> On these sources, see Terrier, *Histoire de la sagesse et philosophie shī'ite*, pp. 124–137; on Suhrawardī's representation of the ancients, see John Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardī and the heritage of the Greeks* (Albany, NY, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> On this, see Jean Michot, 'Avicenne et le *Kitāb al-Maḍnūn* d'al-Ghazālī', *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale*, 18 (1976), pp. 51–59.

<sup>19</sup> The latter is a commentary on Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī's (d. ca. 663/1265) philosophical textbook. Noteworthy, Mullā Ṣadrā is never mentioned by name in Ashkivarī's works.

‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, a synthesis of Shi‘i and Sufi doctrines, is frequently employed as a poetic archive. However, the most frequently cited work remains the *Mafāṭīḥ al-i‘jāz* of Shams al-Dīn Lāhijī (d. 912/1506-7), a commentary on Maḥmūd Shabistārī’s (d. ca. 720/1317) poem *Gulshān-i rāz*. This work is marked by Nūrbakhshī Shi‘i Sufism, an influential though repressed tradition in Safavid Iran, and is undoubtedly a significant indication of Ashkivarī’s spiritual and social attitudes.<sup>20</sup>

In Ashkivarī’s symphonic device, poetry plays an important role. Out of the Persian mystical poets, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) is widely cited as a spiritual authority and designated as a ‘gnostic’ (‘*ārif*’), although he was not a Shi‘i. ‘Aṭṭār al-Nishābūrī (d. ca. 618/1221) and Ḥāfiẓ (d. ca 792/1390) are also included. Of the Arabic poems quoted, those attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib have the lion’s share. Last, Ashkivarī also scattered his own Persian verses throughout the text, and poetry is obviously the only literary genre in which he laid claim to write.

### **The Imaginal World: A Syncretic Concept**

#### *The Temporal Definition: The Barzakh or the Lesser Resurrection*

Ashkivarī introduces the imaginal world as an equivalent of the Isthmus (*barzakh*), the interregnum between natural death and the greatest Resurrection. He therefore cites several *ḥadīths* of the Prophet as confirming the existence of Heaven and Hell in the ‘imaginal Isthmus’ (*barzakh-i mithālī*), two of them borrowed from al-Qāshānī’s definition of the ‘first [i.e. lesser] Resurrection’. From the Prophet: ‘The grave is a garden from among the gardens of paradise, [or] a pit from among the pits of hell’; ‘As you live, you will die, and as you die, you will rise again’; ‘When someone dies, his resurrection has come’.<sup>21</sup>

Several *ḥadīths* attributed to the imams describe more precisely the forms in which believers will experience their first resurrection. From Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Imam: ‘[The spirits of the believers] are in

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<sup>20</sup> About the Nūrbakhshī order, see Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: the Nurbakhshīya Between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia, SC, 2003); Hamid Algar, ‘Nūrbakhshīyya’, *EI2*, [http://dx.doi.org/prex.num.bulac.fr/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_5992](http://dx.doi.org/prex.num.bulac.fr/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5992) (accessed on 28 January 2021).

<sup>21</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 5; the last two are quoted from ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. A. al-Kayālī (Beirut, 2005), p. 66.

Paradise in the forms of their bodies. If you could see it, you would say: "It's so-and-so!"<sup>22</sup> And from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib: 'When God takes back [the soul of] the believer, He carries his spirit in a frame (*qālab*) similar to the one he had in this world. That is why [believers] eat and drink, and when a newcomer comes along, they recognise him by this form that he had in this world.<sup>23</sup> Ashkivarī considers these forms as 'imaginal' or 'isthmic' bodies, intermediate between the sensory and the intelligible, neither having the rudeness of the former, nor the subtleness of the latter, and does not hesitate to attribute this philosophical conception to the imams.<sup>24</sup>

Quite surprisingly, Ashkivarī deemed it necessary to distinguish this conception from the heresy of transmigration (*tanāsukh*). The concept of the imaginal world as separated from the sensory world is a key to the argument:

Some people imagine that to profess that human spirits, after separation from their original bodies, attach themselves to imaginal shapes, as we understand from these *ḥadīths*, is to profess transmigration. It is an unfounded presumption. For the transmigration rejected by all sects of Islam means that spirits, after separation from their original bodies, attach themselves to other bodies composed of the four elements, in this very world of generation and corruption. [. . .] But to profess that in another world, different from this birth (*nash'a*), [spirits] will attach themselves to imaginal bodies; that in the duration of the *barzakh*, between the time of death and the coming of the [greatest] Resurrection, they will perform in these bodies the service of God; and that after the advent of the [greatest] Resurrection, they will return to their first bodies by the power of God (. . .), no one would call this transmigration.<sup>25</sup>

However, in a quotation from Mullā Ṣadrā, the 'lesser resurrection' of evildoers is identified with a legal meaning of *tanāsukh*, understood as a human-to-animal metamorphosis (*maskh*), as attested in the Qur'an (2:65; 5:60; 7:166):

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<sup>22</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10. The source: al-Kulaynī, *Furū' al-Kāfi* (Beirut, 1426/2005), p. 125.

<sup>24</sup> A similar interpretation of these traditions can also be found in Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*, ed. 'A. 'Alizāda (Qum, 1390 Sh./2011), p. 148.

<sup>25</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 10–11.

The second meaning [of *tanāsukh*] (. . .) is the migration of the soul from this body to the body of the afterlife (*ukhrāwī*), corresponding to the qualities and mores that have dominated it in this world. This is confirmed by the guides of unveiling and contemplation [i.e. the imams], reported by the bearers of revelations and religions [i.e. the prophets]. This is why it is said that there is no religion in which transmigration is not firmly rooted.<sup>26</sup> This is confirmed by many verses in the Qur'an. It is in this meaning, I think, that the doctrine of transmigration is attributed to the pillars of wisdom such as Plato and his predecessors among the sages who drew the lights of wisdom from the niche of the lights of the prophets.<sup>27</sup> For, with their foresight, these sages have contemplated the interiors of souls and the forms in which they will be resurrected according to their intentions and deeds, as in His word: 'And We shall muster them on the Resurrection Day upon their faces' (17:97) [. . .]. This is the metamorphosis of the interiors (*maskh al-bawāṭin*) without the form being changed on the outside: you see human forms, but inside there is a form of angel, demon, dog, pig, lion, or another animal appropriate to the interior.<sup>28</sup>

The imaginal body is therefore a subtle embodiment of the interior, by which the soul of the deceased may take the form of an individual of another species. This body will 'rise' or appear in the grave to experience, or constitute itself as, the soul's first reward or punishment. This conception is confirmed by a *ḥadīth* dealing with the supranatural attributes of the imams, characteristic of the so-called 'excessive' Shi'īs (*ghulāt*):

I said to the sixth Imam, 'O son of the Prophet, we [the Shi'īs] see ourselves as having no superiority over our enemies (. . .); they are more favoured than us, more fortunate, better dressed and better prepared.' The imam became angry and said, 'Do you want me to show you your superiority over these perverse creatures?' (. . .) He passed his hand over his face and said, 'Look at these

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<sup>26</sup> The formula is borrowed from al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa'l-niḥal*, ed. M. Badrān (Cairo, 1366–1375/1947–1955), vol. 2, p. 262.

<sup>27</sup> This includes certainly Pythagoras, Thales and Empedocles.

<sup>28</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 17–18. The source: Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā), *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, ed. S.J. Ashtiyānī (Mashhad, 1360 Sh./1981), pp. 231–233.

ones.' I turned to a group of Umayyads in front of the city gate, looked at them and saw monkeys, pigs, dogs and jackals in their place. I said to the imam, 'O son of the Prophet, what a great affair! By God! Make me return to my former condition or I will lose my mind!' He passed his hand over his face and I saw them again as human as before. Then he said, 'Soon, their condition will be as they saw it. [. . .] Here is your superiority over them.'<sup>29</sup>

Obviously, the *ḥadīth* quoted supports a literalist and non-allegorical approach to metamorphosis. However, Ashkivārī assimilated it to the reign of the imaginal world, itself based on the Platonic distinction between the intelligible and the sensible worlds. That is to say, he not only reactivated the most esoteric and seemingly non-rational Imāmī tradition, but also drew it closer to philosophical and mystical conceptions that were highly controversial.

### *Cosmo-Ontological Definitions: The Imaginal World in the Hierarchy of Worlds*

Ashkivārī stresses that the concept reported in the *ḥadīth* of the imam, according to which rational souls, after their separation from their bodies and during their stay in the Isthmus, attach themselves to shapes substantially different from natural bodies, is similar to that of 'a group of leading sages' saying:

There is in existence a measured world (*'ālam-i miqdārī*) which is not the sensory world but an intermediate one between the world of immaterial realities and the world of material things, without having either the subtlety of the former, or the denseness of the latter. In this world, all bodies, species and accidents – including movements, rest, sounds, tastes and smells – have imaginal shapes. [These shapes] subsist by themselves; they have an attachment, but not to a matter. It is a huge world whose inhabitants are of different classes and unequal ranks of subtlety and coarseness, beauty and ugliness. In these imaginal bodies, [men] possess all the external and internal senses through which they perceive pain and pleasure and enjoy physical and spiritual happiness (*na'īm*).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Having been introduced into the temporal or diachronic framework of eschatology, throughout the epistle the concept of the imaginal world also receives various synchronic, cosmo-ontological definitions and descriptions. As seen before, the attribute of 'imaginal' is first related to Heaven and Hell, as well to the bodies of their respective inhabitants. In this regard, the imaginal world is situated in the hierarchy of worlds and also possesses an internal hierarchical structure. It lies above the world of sensation and location (*'ālam al-ḥiss wa'l-makān*) and below the world of the Intellect (*'ālam al-'aql*), being intermediary between these two worlds. It has many layers (*tabaqāt*) that are beyond the count of all but the Creator. Its upper layers, which are noble, bright and pleasant, are those of the Paradise that is enjoyed by the mid-ranked rewarded souls. Its lower layers are dark and painful; they are the layers of Hell (*al-nār*) where the souls of the damned suffer. The uppermost and brightest layer is contiguous with the world of the Intellect; the lowest and darkest layer is at the semblance and the nearness of the sensory world.<sup>31</sup> It is called the imaginal world because it comprehends the forms of every existent of the sensory world, as well as the images of the true entities and realities (*a'yān wa ḥaqā'iq*) which are found in the Presence of Divine Science. It is also called the eighth clime, because the measured world is divided into eight climes: seven encompassing the sensory measures and the eighth one encompassing the imaginal ones.<sup>32</sup> In order to attest the existence of the imaginal world as so defined, Ashkivarī refers to Suhrawardī's report on the testimonies of Ādharbāyjānī villagers, as well as a direct testimony from Ibn 'Arabī during the *hajj*.<sup>33</sup>

According to an Akbārī concept, the imaginal world has its own place in the esoteric structure of the unique divine reality, as an isthmus between the world of Testimony (*'ālam al-shahāda*), that of nature, and the world of Mystery (*'ālam al-ghayb*), that of the true realities. In this understanding, 'the world of Testimony is a cover (*ghīṭā*)' for the

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 26; Shams al-Dīn Shahrazūrī, *Rasā'il al-shajara al-ilāhiyya fi 'ulūm al-ḥaqā'iq al-rabbāniyya*, ed. N. Ḥabībī (Tehran, 1383 Sh./2004), vol. 3, p. 457.

<sup>32</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 26.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 26–27. Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, ed. 'A. Nūrānī and M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1383 Sh./2004), p. 490; Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Beirut, 1331/2010), vol. 6, ch. 390, pp. 458–459.

world of the Image; the world of the Image is a cover for the divine Attributes and Names; the world of divine Attributes and Names is a cover for the divine Essence.<sup>34</sup> This is confirmed by a *ḥadīth* from the Sixth imam, maybe the sole one in which the notion of 'image' (*mithāl*) appears: 'Of every believer, there is an image on the [divine] Throne. When he prostrates himself in prayer, his image acts like his act; then the angels see him and pray for his forgiveness. If [the believer] commits an act of disobedience, God casts a veil over his image so that the angels do not know about it.'<sup>35</sup>

Ashkivarī then presents a cartography of the imaginal world drawn from various sources. 'This world contains images of every immaterial and material reality, such as the Throne, the Pedestal, the seven skies and the two earths.' It also possesses countless cities, including three said to have been known to the Prophet: Jābalqā and Jābarsā, which belong to its elementary (*unṣurī*) part, and Hūrqaḷyā, which lies in the heavens of the same world.<sup>36</sup> Jābalqā is located to the east of the spirits and Jābarsā is in front of it, to the west of the bodies. The imaginal world itself lies to the west of the world of Lordship (*ālam al-rubūbiyya*), so that the divine Effusion flows onto it from the latter, and to the east of the world of Testimony, so that the divine Effusion flows from it onto the latter.<sup>37</sup>

In the framework of the correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm, a philosophical commonplace especially adhered to by Ashkivarī's master Mīr Dāmād, the imaginal world plays a role similar to that of the animal spirit (*al-rūḥ al-ḥayawānī*), which ensures the first attachment of the spirit to the body. Quoting an anonymous source, Ashkivarī asserts that the creation of the imaginal world is

<sup>34</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 32; the source: *Tafsīr Ibn 'Arabī (Ta'wīlāt 'Abd al-Razzāq Qāshānī)*, ed. S. M. Rabbāb (Beirut, 1422/2001), vol. 1, p. 148.

<sup>35</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 34; the source: Shaykh Bahā'ī, *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ fī 'amal al-yawm wa'l-layla min al-wājibāt wa'l-mustahabbāt* (Beirut, 1405/1984), p. 201.

<sup>36</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 34–35. Source: Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dashtakī Shirāzī, *Ishrāq hayākīl al-nūr*, ed. A. Awjabī (Tehran, 1382 Sh./2003), pp. 255–256. These three cities are mentioned in Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-ishrāq*, in *Œuvres*, vol. 2, p. 254, and Hūrqaḷyā specifically in *Kitāb al-mashāri' wa'l-muṭārahāt*, *Œuvres*, vol. 1, p. 494.

<sup>37</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 35–36; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Lāhijī, *Mafātīḥ al-i'jāz fī sharḥ Gulshan-i rāz*, ed. M. R. Barzagar Khāliqī and I. Karbāsī (Tehran, 1391 Sh./2012), p. 52.



relevant to God's wisdom (*ḥikma*). Since spirits are prior to bodies in existence and quiddity, because they are simple while bodies are composite, their government of bodies would be impossible without an intermediary, for otherwise there would be no relationship at all between them. Thus 'God, exalted be He, created the imaginal world as an isthmus uniting the worlds of spirits and bodies, so that the relationship between the two could be established, the influence exercised and experienced, the help provided and requested. And this is conceivable [only] in the imaginal world.'<sup>38</sup>

### *Objections to the Imaginal World*

Ashkivarī also mentions philosophical objections to the concept of imaginal world. The first appears when the concept is introduced, in a quotation of Shams al-Dīn Khafrī:

As for the world of the Image, for the *ishrāqīs* it is an existent world that does not subsist through bodily faculties [of the soul], which are only loci of manifestation for it. What man sees in a dream only happens in this world. However, according to those other than [the *ishrāqīs*], this world only happens [to exist] by means of the bodily faculties, and therefore is not to be counted among the four [categories of] substances that are the intelligences, souls, natures and hyletic realities.<sup>39</sup>

A second series of objections appears at the end of the epistle, in a section entitled 'the problems raised by the concept of the imaginal world according to the masters of examination and deduction' (*arbāb al-naẓar wa'l-istidlāl*), i.e. the Peripatetic and non-*ishrāqī* philosophers. It contains a long anonymous quotation from Mīr Dāmād's *Jadhawāt wa mawāqīt*. His first argument is actually of Peripatetic inspiration: 'The imaginal world and the suspended images of imagination, if they are pleasantly suited to the faculty of intuitive tasting (. . .), to rhetorical disposition and poetic syllogisms, remain problematic according to the

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<sup>38</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 57–58, source unknown.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26. Shams al-Dīn Khafrī, *Tafsīr āyat al-kursī*, ed. A. Awjabī, summarised in Manūchīhr Ṣadūqī Sahā, ed., *Tafsīr 'aqliyya li-falāsifa ilāhiyyīn* (Tehran, 1389 Sh./2010), pp. 269–290, here p. 276.

method of examination and demonstrative proof.<sup>39</sup> The second criticism, theologically based, seems in direct contradiction to Ashkivari's thesis in this epistle: 'The issues of corporal resurrection, promises of rewards and corporal punishment, authentication of dreams and miracles, do not depend on the burden of proof of this world and these images'. The last argument, which draws on an Akbārī inspiration, one originally more Platonic than Aristotelian, results in the rescuing of the concept of the imaginal world by denying its ontological independence:

Considering existence, there is no intermediary between the immaterial and the material. For the individualised existent is either dependent, in its existence, on the world of time and place (. . .), or free from these chains and links (. . .). Yes, the kinds of attachments, the ranks of subtlety and coarseness of material things actually differ in intensity and weakness. If they apply this to the [whole world of] Testimony and materiality, and if they regard the world of the Image as the most subtle layer and the noblest rank in the world of Testimony, it would have sense.<sup>40</sup> As for their saying, 'These images are suspended forms (*ṣūwar-i mu'allaqa*), not in a matter or a substrate', it does not fit with the balance of demonstrative evidence. For just as every form of the sensory world, i.e. the world of Testimony, has an image in the imaginal world – which they consider related to the Testimony (*muḍāfash*) – so every material of that world necessarily has an image in this world. Consequently, the imaginal form must be actualised by imaginal matter. The imaginal matter and forms of the world of the Isthmus are in correspondence with the hyletic matter and the material forms of the sensory world.<sup>41</sup>

This quotation of Mīr Dāmād's only significant text on the imaginal world is especially revealing of Ashkivari's independence from his former master, since the epistle clearly supports, on the contrary, the *ishrāqī* conception of this world as a genuine intermediary between the intelligible and the sensible. However, as we shall see, Ashkivari attests elsewhere to his spiritual respect for the 'third master'.

<sup>40</sup> A somewhat parallel Arabic text in Mīr Dāmād's *Kitāb al-qabasāt*, ed. M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1977), p. 167, ll. 6–12.

<sup>41</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 104–105; Mīr Dāmād, *Jadhawāt wa mawāqīt*, ed. A. Awjābi (Tehran, 1380 Sh./2001), pp. 65–67.

## Subaltern Theories and Themes of Convergence

### *The Companion of the Grave*

Apart from the concept of the imaginal body which is to be resurrected, Ashkivarī supports the idea that man's actions and beliefs in life take on an individual form after death that accompanies the departed soul to the grave. This understanding of the 'embodiment of beliefs and actions' (*tajassud al-'aqa'id wa'l-a'māl*), he argues, is held by intellectual philosophers (*al-ḥukamā' al-'uqalā'*) as well as by the Prophet and the imams: 'According to the opinion of the gnostic sages, when freed from bodies human souls possess shadows that derive from the imaginal forms, consecutive with their mores and habits, by means of which they enjoy or suffer.' As an argument of authority, Ashkivarī quotes a saying attributed to Pythagoras, 'the deified sage' (*al-ḥakīm al-muta'allih*), and a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, whose congruence is indeed striking. From the former:

Know that you will be facing your actions, words and thoughts. From each movement of thought, speech or action, spiritual and bodily forms will be manifest for you. If the movement is of the irascible or concupiscible [part of the soul], it becomes matter for a demon who will make you suffer in this life and veil your perception of light after death. If the movement is of the intellectual [part of the soul], it becomes an angel of which you will enjoy the company in this world and which will guide you in the last world.<sup>42</sup>

From the Prophet:

O Qays, you must have a companion (*qarīn*), that he be buried alive with you, that you be buried dead with him; if he is noble, he will honour you, if he is guilty he will submiss you (. . .). So make sure he is wholesome, because if he is, you will enjoy his familiarity, but if he is corrupt, you will suffer from loneliness with him. [This companion] is your action.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 40–41. Among the possible sources: Dashtakī, *Ishrāq hayākīl al-nūr*, pp. 264–265; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, ed. N. Ḥabībī (Tehran, 1386 Sh./2007), vol. 2, p. 1041.

<sup>43</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 41–42; the source: Shaykh Bahā'ī, *al-Arba'ūn ḥadīth* (Qum, 1431/2009), p. 493.

A quotation from the *ishrāqī* Shāhrazūrī draws out the philosophical consequences of this doctrine:

The suffering that happens to the soul after the separation of the body results from its own defect and error and not, as the ordinary person imagines, like in this world where punishment occurs through external causes, from an external avenger who would punish it and take revenge on it. But this is not the case [in the other world]. For this suffering happens to [the soul] because of [its] vile forms and wicked mores. Thus, [the soul] is the bearer of its own punishment that it requires through these forms: it is itself that requires its punishment.<sup>44</sup>

One could remark that the same comment is appropriate for the conception of the 'lesser resurrection' presented above, of which this appears as an alternative. What is more, in contrast with the initial denials concerning transmigration, Shāhrazūrī's reasoning fits with the fundamental idea of the Hindu and Pythagorean doctrine that the retribution of the soul after death is an immanent justice, not the act of a transcendent avenger, as obviously understood by monotheist religions.<sup>45</sup>

### *Apparitions, Miracles and Wonders*

According to the *ishrāqī* tradition, in the city of Hūrqalyā human souls possess imaginal bodies which they dispose of at will and through which they manifest miracles (*mu'jizāt*) or breaches in the customary course of things (*khawāriq al-'ādāt*).<sup>46</sup> It permits the explanation of the apparition of the angel Gabriel to the Prophet in the form of his young companion Daḥya al-Kalbī, and to Mary 'in the form of a perfect man' (Q 19:17). Ashkivarī stresses that 'the meaning of this form is not the essence because the essence has no form', and that 'this change of state

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<sup>44</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 42–43. The source: Shams al-Dīn al-Shāhrazūrī, *Rasā'il al-shajara al-ilāhiyya*, vol. 3, p. 619.

<sup>45</sup> On the ambiguous positions of *ishrāqī* philosophers on this issue, see Sabine Schmidtke, 'The Doctrine of the Transmigration of Soul according to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (killed 587/1191) and his Followers', *Studia Iranica*, 28 (1999), pp. 237–254.

<sup>46</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 37–38. The source: al-Dashtakī, *Ishrāq hayākil al-nūr*, pp. 255–256.

(*istiḥāla*) in the angel is not a transformation (*inqilāb*), Gabriel remaining in his reality and his true attributes while he manifested himself to the Prophet in the form of Daḥya al-Kalbi.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, it enables Ashkivarī to justify rationally the wonders attributed to the imams as well as to the Sufi saints, i.e. the *awliyā'*, in the respective views of Shi'ism and Sufism. The first of these wonders is the gift of ubiquity. According to a tradition, during the month of Ramadan, Imam 'Alī broke the fast in different companions' houses before the Prophet declared that he was his guest and had broken the fast with him at his home.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, some Sufi saints were held to have been simultaneously in their country and in Mecca on the *ḥajj*.

Ashkivarī also supports a tenet at the core of the doctrine of the Nūrbakhshī order, that of *burūz* (technically 'projection'), according to which the spirit of a deceased master can return to dwell in the body of an heir.<sup>49</sup> From Shams al-Dīn Lāhijī, he quotes Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, the founder of the order, without mentioning his name. It appears that this tenet, like that of the imaginal body of the lesser resurrection, has to be distinguished from transmigration:

The difference between transmigration (*tanāsukh*) and projection (*burūz*) (. . .) is that transmigration occurs when a spirit departs from one body and joins an embryo ready for a spirit, in the fourth month from the time when the sperm settled in the womb. This removal of the spirit from one body and its junction with the other occur simultaneously. However, projection occurs when a perfect spirit pours (*yafīḍu*) into [another] individual in the same way that the theophanies (*tajalliyyāt*) pour into him: [this individual] then becomes his locus of manifestation (*mazhar*).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 36.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35. The original source for this tradition is unknown but a Persian version of this account can be found in Mīr Dāmād, *Jadhawāt wa mawāqīt*, p. 63, before the passage quoted above.

<sup>49</sup> Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, pp. 53–54.

<sup>50</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 52. The source: Qāḍī Mīr Ḥusayn Maybudī, *Sharḥ Diwān mansūb bih Amīr al-mu'minīn*, ed. Ḥ. Raḥmānī and I. Ashkishirīn (Tehran, 1390 Sh./2011), p. 124; obviously borrowed from Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh's *Risālat al-hudā*, quoted in Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, pp. 98–99.

This is illustrated by three accounts resulting in an original synthesis of Sufism and philosophy. First comes a quotation from Ibn 'Arabī reporting, in his *Futūḥāt makkīyya*, a story from the mystic Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. 636/1238). While he was on the pilgrimage route with his shaykh, the latter became ill. Awḥad al-Dīn asked him for permission to go in search of a medicine and the shaykh gave him permission to do so. He finally found a hospital, whose head received him with great honour and gave him the medicine he was asking for. When he returned to his shaykh, the latter told him that after his departure, for fear that his search would fail, he had himself seized the body of the head of the hospital to satisfy his request, and that he did not need medicine any more. To verify this, Awḥad al-Dīn returned to the hospital, whose head did not recognise or receive him.<sup>51</sup> Remarkably, this example confers the gift of *burūz* to the living perfect master as well as the deceased one, and allows the projection of the perfect spirit in an imperfect being.

Ashkivarī continues with a personal anecdote that suggests his family affiliation to Nūrbakhshī Sufism, and in a reference to his master opus, integrates Peripatetic philosophy in Shi'ī gnosis:

My brother told me that after our father's death, he sent a letter of request to the sovereign's camp (...) in order to recover the paternal charge [of the *Shaykh al-Islām* of Lāhijān] (...). The night after receiving the news of the fulfilment of his wish, he saw our father in a dream and asked him, 'In the books of the masters of Sufism, I have read that the refined soul has the power to seize certain bodies in order to ensure the fulfilment of men's wishes in this life. If the soul has this ability when it lies in the dwelling of attachment, it must be able to do so even more after breaking its ties with the body. Are the fulfilment of my wish and the success of my request due to your help and assistance in accordance with their saying?' [Our] father answered him, 'Such a state only occurs to powerful, refined and holy souls. I have no capacity of this kind, neither power of this rank. However, the fulfilment of your wish is only due to my supplication to these masters.' Long after my brother's dream, I found in the speech of the wise Theophrastus, cousin, disciple and legatee of the very great and wise Aristotle, that the soul is able to fly and descend (*hulūl*) in all

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<sup>51</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 52–53; Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt makkīyya*, vol. 1, p. 339.

that it wants by means of its real wings, as we have reported in our book the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*.<sup>52</sup>

### *The Progress after Death*

The theory that presents the imaginal body as the subject of the lesser Resurrection also enables Ashkivarī to justify an idea commonly rejected, that of a moral acquisition (*kasb*) and progression (*taraqqā*) of the soul after death. Many theologians, he says, argue this world is the only place to acquire acts of merit, referring to Q 2:254: 'O believers, expend of that wherewith We have provided you, before there comes a day wherein shall be neither traffic, nor friendship, nor intercession; and the unbelievers – they are the evildoers',<sup>53</sup> and to a Prophetic *ḥadīth*: 'When man dies, his action separates from him'. However, the belief in a post-mortem progress of the soul has been held by Sufis such as Ibn 'Arabī and Rūmī, from whom this verse is quoted: 'Learn such a trade that hereafter gain, earning and knowledge may come in as revenue (to thee) / Yonder world is a city full of trafficking and earning; think not that the earnings here (in this world) are a sufficiency.'<sup>54</sup>

Ashkivarī reports from Ibn 'Arabī that he not only supported this tenet, but also proved it by a personal experience: 'I have helped Junayd, Shibli and Bāyazīd and they did progress; however, this progress does not concern the knowledge of God.'<sup>55</sup> This precision is confirmed by Q 17:72–74: 'And whosoever is blind in this world shall be blind in the world to come, and he shall be even further astray from the way'. According to al-Qayṣarī, blindness here only concerns the knowledge of God.<sup>56</sup> As for the *ḥadīth* mentioned above, Ashkivarī argues that it does not contradict Ibn 'Arabī when including the

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<sup>52</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 53–54; see also Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, al-maqāla al-thāniyya, p. 404.

<sup>53</sup> Arberr's translation of the Qur'an, amended.

<sup>54</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 62; Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Mawlavī (Rūmī), *Mathnavī-yi ma'navī*, ed. R. Nicholson (Tehran, 1390 Sh./2011), p. 284; Nicholson's translation modified according to the text of the MS.

<sup>55</sup> The famous Sufis, Junayd al-Baghdādī, Abū Bakr al-Shibli (d. 334/945–46) and Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/874).

<sup>56</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 62–63; Dāwūd b. Maḥmūd Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ bar Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam-i Ibn 'Arabī*, Persian tr. M. Khwājavi (Tehran, 1387 Sh./2008), p. 787.

addition reported by some traditionists: 'excepting a current donation, a science from which he has benefited (through action), and a virtuous child praying for his forgiveness.'<sup>57</sup>

This is in turn confirmed by a Shi'i *khavar* borrowed from al-Kulaynī's *Kitāb al-ḥujja* and obviously altered. Imam Ja'far related that on Friday nights, the spirits of the deceased Prophets and imams, as well as the spirit of the living imam, perform a celestial ascent to the divine Throne, turn around it and pray before returning to their bodies; then in the morning, when the living imam rises his action ('*amaluhu*') is considerably increased. In the original *ḥadīth* as it appears in al-Kulaynī, this is the imam's learning ('*ilmuhu*'), not his action, that has been increased. Ashkivarī's comment shows that he had another version of the *ḥadīth* on his desk: 'As this ascent is spiritual, the spirit must be attached to an imaginal body in order to perform the acts of worship, being impossible to pray without bodily members. The imaginal body is therefore, like the material body, a means of acquiring practical perfections (*kamālāt-i 'amalī*).'<sup>58</sup> One may remark that the *ḥadīth* attests to the progression of the living imam, not to that of the deceased ones; however, its interpretation clearly reinforces the concept of the imaginal body by conferring on it a religious legitimacy.

### *Voluntary Death and Ecstatic Experiences*

An important commonplace between Shi'ism, Sufism and philosophy, is the notion of 'voluntary death' (*mawt irādī*) and the ability of the men of God to leave their body at will. This theme appears in a sequence taken from Mullā Ṣadrā and Mīr Dāmād, although without their names being mentioned, and concludes with a famous verse by Maṅṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922):

<sup>57</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 63. The sources: *Tuḥaf al-'uqūl 'an Āl al-rasūl*, ed. A. al-Ghiffārī (Qum, 1436/2014), p. 363; al-Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Sha'īrī, *Jāmi' al-akhbār* (Beirut, 1420/1999), p. 101; Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'i, '*Awālī al-li'ālī al-'azīziyya fi'l-aḥādīth al-dīniyya* or '*Awālī al-li'ālī al-ḥadīthiyya 'alā madhab al-imāmiyya*, ed. M. al-'Irāqī (Beirut, 1430/2009), vol. 1, p. 97; vol. 2, p. 53.

<sup>58</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 64; al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfi* (Beirut, 1426/2005), pp. 144–145; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *La preuve de Dieu. La mystique shi'ite à travers l'œuvre de Kulaynī (IX<sup>e</sup>-X<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris, 2018), p. 214.



It is no secret to you that the Creator (. . .), as required by His all-encompassing Mercy and universal Grace, established all bodily and sensory things as images and signs of spiritual and intellectual beings; that He made the sensory experience a means of elevation and progression towards the knowledge of intellectual beings. This is the ultimate goal of the advent of the soul among sensory things, of its appearance at the horizon of the material things. Just as material things are deprived in essence and in need of the intelligible beings, the latter being the sudations of the Light of lights and the shadows of its radiations, so the knowledge of bodily and sensory things needs the body and its organs to perceive these things by their means. However, after what it has acquired by sensory experience and through the body, [the soul] does not need anything, except its own essence and substance, in order to perceive the spiritual realities. When it succeeds, it becomes in actuality both Intellect and intellectual, and then no longer needs senses or any attachment to the body. Therefore, make efforts to seek the [true] wealth before the extinction of time, the expiration of life and the corruption of [your] body. Thus, the voluntary death, whose attainment is spurred on by the words of the masters of clear vision (*akābir ahl al-baṣā'ir*), must be grasped and attained: 'Die by will and you will live by nature',<sup>59</sup> that is, it is necessary to kill the bond of formal attachments before natural death, to rise from the rank of animality, which is the lowest pit of the Sijjīn, to the highest degree of the angel, and to sit on a place on the Throne of contemplation. [. . .] 'Kill me, my faithful friends / For in my being killed is my life'.<sup>60</sup>

Ashkivarī was inspired by Plato and al-Ḥallāj in regarding death as the source of perfect certitude, quoting a *ḥadīth* attributed to Imam 'Alī: 'People are asleep, they wake up when they die'.<sup>61</sup> However, he argues, the human rational soul is already able, during its life, to

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<sup>59</sup> This sentence is commonly attributed to Plato.

<sup>60</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 59–60; Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikma al-muta'aliyya fī'l-asfār al-'aqliyya al-arba'a*, ed. M. 'Aqīl (Beirut, 1432/2011), vol. 1, p. 352; Mir Dāmād, *Jadhawāt wa mawāqīt*, p. 79.

<sup>61</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 64; *Mi'a kalimāt li'l-imām amīr al-mu'minīn 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, sharahā Kamāl al-Dīn Maytham al-Baḥrānī* (Beirut, 1412/1992), pp. 54–57.

abstract itself from attachment to the body and the temporal world. The one who acquires the habit (*malaka*) of divesting himself of his body (*khal'-i badan*) and attains the level of the perfection of the acquired intellect ('*aql-i mustafād*), can thus make his *hijra* from the material world, designated as the 'city of evildoers' (*al-qariya al-zālīma ahlukā*) according to Q 2:75: 'Our Lord, bring us forth from this city whose people are evildoers' (2:75). Such a man merits the appellation of 'pure intellect' ('*aql khāliṣ*) and engages himself in the higher rank of the *Malakūt*.<sup>62</sup> The ecstatic state of the perfect men is described in a long sequence borrowed from Shahrazūri and Mullā Ṣadrā, giving another synthesis of philosophy and mysticism under the authority of a *ḥadīth qudsī*:

Thus, the intellectual lights become places of manifestation for the separated souls; these ones are seized by the intellectual illuminations and then find themselves in a pleasurable, a love and a brightness unrelated to the pleasures of this world. [...] Such is the state of the perfect men who have disposed themselves to immateriality after separation [from their bodies].<sup>63</sup> [...] This reveals the secret of what a certain man of spiritual realisation has said: 'When the soul reaches its intellectual perfection, free from any movement and reflection, its faculties become one, so that its science becomes action and its action becomes science, just as the science and power of separate entities, in their relationship with what is subordinate to them, are one.'<sup>64</sup>

Then, when the soul is united to certain immaterial lights and of a sudden is stripped of its body, through the power of intellectual delectations and spiritual elations which adhere to it, through the intensity of the shining auroras, it withdraws from its essence and from the consciousness of its essence. The sovereign of the immaterial and intellectual lights takes hold of it and it then disappears from its own essence (*tafnā 'an dhātihā*). They describe this state as 'unification' (*ittiḥād*). [...] When the journeying soul reaches the station of unification, so that the weaker light is extinguished in the more powerful and intense light, so that he becomes intoxicated with the pleasures of the

<sup>62</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 65–66.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66; Shahrazūri, *Rasā'il al-shajara al-ilāhiyya*, vol. 3, pp. 600–601.

<sup>64</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 66; Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, p. 200.

lights of Victory, such that these immaterial lights become the epiphanic forms where rational minds unite, then this soul is in such a state that it only sees the epiphanic form, and speaks only with the language of this epiphanic form, as it says in the *ḥadīth qudsī*: 'My servant draws not near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I have enjoined upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him. When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps (. . .). Were he to ask [something] of Me, I would surely give it to him.'<sup>65</sup>

It is notable that this argument is used in the *Mahbūb al-qulūb* in order to justify the ecstatic utterances (*shaṭaḥāt*) of Sufis such as Baṣṭāmī and Ḥallāj against an accusation of heresy;<sup>66</sup> here, it enables the author to validate the ecstatic reports of reputed philosophers past and present.

Ashkivārī gives three testimonies confirming that, in Suhrawardī's words, 'the divine sage is the one for whom the body has become like a tunic, which he sometimes puts on and at other times casts off, and who rises when he wants to the world of Light.'<sup>67</sup> First comes the divine sage Pythagoras, who ascended ('*araja*) by his soul to the higher world until he heard the music of the spheres, and then returned to his body.<sup>68</sup> Then there is the famous account of the *Theology* of the Pseudo-Aristotle, adapted from Plotinus's *Enneads* (IV, 8, 1), beginning with 'often have I been alone with my soul and have doffed my body and laid it aside. . .'.<sup>69</sup> Ashkivārī, quoting it from Suhrawardī,<sup>70</sup> attributes this to Plato but mentions that 'in some books' it is attributed to Aristotle: even more, he considers that both attributions may be

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<sup>65</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 67; Shahrāzūrī, *Rasā'il al-shajara al-ilāhiyya*, vol. 3, pp. 474–475.

<sup>66</sup> See Terrier, 'The Defence of Sufism', pp. 91–93.

<sup>67</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 37. The source: Shahrāzūrī, *Rasā'il al-shajara al-ilāhiyya*, vol. 3, p. 471.

<sup>68</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 29.

<sup>69</sup> *Aflūṭīn 'inda al-'Arab – Plotinus apud Arabes*, ed. A. Badawī (Kuwait, 1977), p. 22.

<sup>70</sup> Suhrawardī, *al-Talwihāt*, in *Œuvres*, vol. 1, pp. 112–113.

reliable as both sages were prepared to reach such a spiritual level.<sup>71</sup> The third testimony, not attributed by name, is Mīr Dāmād's narrative known as *al-Risāla al-khal'iyya*, in which he declares: 'It was as if I had divested myself of my body (. . .), as if I had withdrawn from the domain of time to enter the world of sempiternity (*'ālam al-dahr*).'<sup>72</sup> As in the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, Ashkivarī comments on these two last reports by saying that such experience is not 'proper to a people [i.e. the ancient Greeks] at the exclusion of another [i.e. the Muslim 'moderns']', an argument confirmed by a verse of Ḥāfiz: 'If the bounty of the Holy Spirit would assist once more / Others would do that which Jesus Christ did.'<sup>73</sup> It should be noted, in all the three cases mentioned, the ecstatic experience comes to corroborate theoretical views on true reality, in accordance with Suhrawardī's claim, quoted in the introduction, that spiritual observation is more trustworthy than any physical kind. In other words, with the concept of imaginal world, metaphysics becomes an empirical discipline, eluding in advance its death as pronounced in Kant's criticism of it.<sup>74</sup>

### *The Corporal Resurrection*

In the last part of the epistle, philosophers, Sufis and men of Revelation (prophets and imams) are brought together in the statement of the twofold Return (*ma'ād*) of body and spirit (*jismānī wa rūḥānī*). It is well known that philosophers were frequently accused of denying this tenet, especially since al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. Ashkivarī aims to defend the first two groups against the charge of unbelief:

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<sup>71</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, p. 68. Symmetrically, in *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, vol. 2, p. 139, the same account is attributed to Aristotle, but the hypothesis that it could be from Plato is mentioned.

<sup>72</sup> On this text, see Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 43–53; Terrier, 'Mīr Dāmād (m. 1041/1631), philosophe et mujtahid. Autorité spirituelle et autorité juridique en Iran safavide shī'ite', *Studia Islamica*, 113 (2018), pp. 121–165, see pp. 152–156.

<sup>73</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 69–70. Translation of Ḥāfiz taken from Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, *Hafiz and His Contemporaries: Poetry, Performance and Patronage in Fourteenth-Century Iran* (London and New York, 2019), p. 263.

<sup>74</sup> E. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason, Second Edition*, English tr. N. Kemp Smith (London, 2007), Preface, pp. 17–37.

Men of weak intelligence assume that the people of *ishrāq*, the Peripatetic philosophers and the Sufi masters do not profess the resurrection of the body. This is far from being the case! Contrary to these erroneous assumptions, all of them explicitly professed this tenet by referring to and conforming themselves to the divine Revelations. (...) What they said is that the resurrection of the body cannot be proved by the way of demonstrative syllogisms. That is why they have only expressed themselves on the resurrection of the soul (*al-ma'ād al-nafsānī*), in terms of the support provided for this view by demonstrative syllogisms.<sup>75</sup>

A passage of Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-Najāt* is quoted as evidence for this statement.<sup>76</sup> Then, Ashkivarī reproduces a lengthy section of Mullā Ṣadrā's commentary on *al-Hidāya al-athīriyya*, in which Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī are quoted in turn in order to provide a distinction between sensory, imaginal (*khayālī*) and intellectual pleasures.<sup>77</sup> The reconciliation of these two thinkers over the concept of the 'imaginal' can seem like an ironic glance at the controversy about the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. To be sure, in the thought of the Shi'i gnostics such as Mullā Ṣadrā and Ashkivarī, the quarrel between the philosophers, theologians and mystics is definitely over.

The argument continues with the issue of the resurrected body. The *ishrāqī* notion of prime matter (*hayūlā*) as a continuous and infinite subtle body (*jism*), allows for conservation in the grave until the Day of the Resurrection, of certain particles of the original body. These original particles (*al-ajzā' al-aṣliyya*) are designated in the *akhbār* as the clay (*tīna*) or the sacrum bone ('*ajb al-dhanab*), from which the individual body will be recreated after the time of the Isthmus (the interregnum of the Grave).<sup>78</sup> Ashkivarī argues that this also

<sup>75</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 76–77.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77; Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, ed. M. Fakhri (Beirut, 1405/1985), p. 326; idem, *Ilāhiyyāt al-Shifā'*, ed. G. C. Anawati and S. Zāyid (Qum, 1404/1983), p. 423.

<sup>77</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 78–81. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ al-hidāya al-athīriyya*, ed. M. Muḥammadi (Tehran, 1393 Sh./2014), vol. 2, pp. 315–323. Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt al-Shifā'*, p. 432; al-Ghazālī, *Risālat al-maḍnūn bihi 'alā ghayr ahlihi*, in idem, *Majmū'at rasā'il al-imām al-Ghazālī* (Beirut, 2011), vol. 4, pp. 111–113.

<sup>78</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 85–89.

corroborates the belief in *raj'a*, i.e. the resurrection of certain deceased individuals, among the people of *walāya* and their enemies, for the manifestation of the Redeemer (*al-qā'im*). This tenet, he says, distinguishes the people of the 'saved sect' (*al-firqa al-nājiya*), i.e., the Imāmī Shi'is, from the people of 'the sect of the hypocrites and of the infidels', i.e., the Sunnis.<sup>79</sup> The ecumenism of our thinker here reveals its limits. It should be noted that the doctrine of *raj'a* is known to be supported by the *ghulāt*, probably more faithful to the original doctrine than the so-called 'moderate' Shi'i scholars, who generally tended to overlook the messianic doctrine. In a tour de force that can also be found in his contemporary Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī,<sup>80</sup> Ashkivarī defends this ancient, pre-philosophical and non-rational tenet of Shi'i Islam, by suggesting that its reality has to be situated in the imaginal world as defined by the *ishrāqī* philosophers.

In his conclusion, Ashkivarī stresses that asceticism and spiritual exercises (*riyāḍāt*), i.e. autodeification (*ta'alluh*), are necessary in order to be able to apprehend the imaginal world.<sup>81</sup> This philosophical concept having been itself regarded necessary to interpret correctly the Revelation (i.e. Qur'an and Imāmī *ḥadīth*), one may understand that for Ashkivarī, to paraphrase Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, the true Shi'i has to be a philosopher and a Sufi, just as the true philosopher and the true Sufi have to be Shi'is in order to achieve their perfection and fulfill their salvation.

## Conclusion

Ashkivarī's *Fānūs al-khayāl* is not only the first monograph on the imaginal world; it is also one of the few works of the Safavid period to openly defend Shi'i esotericism, philosophy and Sufism all together. No doubt the decision to dedicate this epistle to the concept of the imaginal world was not in any way accidental. Indeed, it responded to major challenges of his time, both theoretical and practical: on the one hand, rationalising the most esoteric material of the ancient Imāmī

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 89–93.

<sup>80</sup> Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*, pp. 88–89.

<sup>81</sup> *Fānūs al-khayāl*, pp. 109–111.

tradition in order to better preserve it; on the other, and as if in exchange, to integrate *ishrāqī* philosophy and theoretical Sufism into the heritage of the Imāmī Shi'i understanding of Islam. In so doing, the concept of the imaginal world itself plays the role of an isthmus connecting the main spiritual trends of Islam.

## Shah Ṭahmāsp's View of Nature, as Reflected in his *Shāhnāma*<sup>1</sup>

*Sheila R. Canby*

Shah Ṭahmāsp, the second Safavid shah who ruled from 930/1524 to 984/1576, has been widely acknowledged as an inspired patron of the arts of the book, particularly in the first half of his reign. Despite acceding to the throne at the tender age of ten, Ṭahmāsp engaged a team of artists, binders, calligraphers and others to produce a magnificent *Shāhnāma* manuscript consisting of 759 folios and 258 illustrations.<sup>2</sup> The manuscript's illustrations not only represent the finest, most inspired paintings of their day, but also provide insights into myriad physical features of early Safavid Iran, ranging from dress and armour to architecture, flora and fauna. This paper will focus on the flora and fauna that appear in a selection of the *Shāhnāma* paintings in order to investigate whether they reflect the actual environment of Iran in the 10th/16th century and by extension the Safavid attitude to the land and its stewardship. If such an outlook can be determined, to what extent did it reflect the Safavids' Shi'i faith or is it simply an extension of a long-standing approach to Iranian resource management? Needless to say, 10th/16th century illustrations to a

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank The Institute of Ismaili Studies for inviting me to deliver the paper on which this chapter is based at the London conference, 'The Renaissance of Shi'i Islam in the 15th–17th Centuries: Facets of Thought and Practice', in October 2018.

<sup>2</sup> The manuscript's illustrations are published in full in Martin Bernard Dickson and Stuart Cary Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* (Cambridge, MA, 1981) and Sheila R. Canby, *The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp* (New York, 2011, 2nd ed. 2014). The *Shāhnāma*, or Book of Kings, was composed by Abu'l-Qāsim Firdawsī and completed in 400/1010.



literary work are not photographs. Artists were just as likely to base their depiction of a horse or a flower on a pictorial prototype as an actual living example, especially in the case of certain wild animals. Thus, underlying any discussion of flora and fauna in the *Shāhnāma* paintings is the question of naturalism and how faithfully the artists reproduced the details of their world.

In 'The Feast of Sada' (fig. 15.1), attributed to Sultān Muḥammad who was Ṭahmāsp's teacher, Hūshang, the grandson of the first Iranian legendary king, Gāyumars, is depicted at the beginning of a feast on a mountainside celebrating the discovery of fire. This king is credited in the *Shāhnāma* with the development of metalworking and animal husbandry, a subject woven into the composition of this painting. Wild animals appear in the mountains at the top of the painting. In addition, faces of lions and other creatures are embedded in the rocks at the lower right and in combination with human forms in the outcrops above Hūshang. At the upper left and right are groups of men, some of whom clutch animals in their arms. Held as if they were pets, a young fox and a marmot at the left and a leopard cub and another marmot appear in the story as 'furry rovers' who were slain for their skins to clothe men. Oxen, asses and sheep, however, were domesticated and 'turned to good use . . . for toil, . . . [and] their produce' and taxes were paid on profits made from them.<sup>3</sup>

Along the lower edge of the painting appear a number of animals that were domesticated and some that were not. At the right a red deer with a magnificent set of antlers turns back towards his doe, while at the lower right edge a pair of young deer peek out behind the rocks. These, of course, are animals that were never tamed. Moving to the left along the lower edge of the image, we see a herdsman with four goats and a mouflon sheep with s-shaped horns and at the far left a bullock and cow and a mule braying. Although mouflon sheep appear on Sasanian dishes of the 5th–6th century,<sup>4</sup> they are shown hunted in the wild. Interestingly, they are now considered the ancestors of domestic

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<sup>3</sup> Firdawsi, *Shahnama*, tr. Arthur George Warner and Edmond Warner (London, 1905–1929) <https://persian.packhum.org/main>, v. 19, (accessed on 28 March 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Prudence Oliver Harper and Pieter Meyers, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period* (New York, 1981), vol. 1, pp. 64–66, pl. 17.

sheep, but the appearance of the mouflon in this painting may have more to do with Sulṭān Muḥammad's desire to suggest the transition from wild to domestic that took place during the reign of Hūshang. If that is a subtext of this painting, the range from wild to tame would occur across the lower edge of the image from right to left.

Firdawsī's mention of taxes paid on income from rearing animals reflects the longevity of an organised system of agriculture in Iran. The Turko-Mongol occupation of the country from the 5th/11th to the 9th/15th century introduced new ways of distributing land such as the *iqṭā* in which tribal leaders whose followers were conscripted to fight for the reigning sultan were rewarded with land grants. In the early Safavid period the Qizil-bāsh Turkomans who supported the shahs also received land as payment. However, the shahs additionally converted certain lands into crown property and collected taxes from sharecroppers and the landed gentry. Although Ṭahmāsp was a teenager during the period in which this *Shāhnāma* was produced, he would have understood that his dominion depended on agriculture supported by the domestic animals – cattle, donkeys, and sheep – depicted in 'The Feast of Sada'.

As for produce from the land, the pomegranates and apples or guava fruit on a dish at the right allude to the orchards found in various parts of Iran. Otherwise, the notable plants in this painting are flowers and trees. Aside from the small conifers along the ridges of the mountains, the few deciduous trees include a flowering prunus at the left and lower down a couple of leafy trees without flowers. Prunus, a member of the rose family, includes some of the fruit most favoured in Iran such as peaches, apricots and almonds. Although they can grow wild, they were cultivated in domestic gardens and often appear in this *Shāhnāma*'s illustrations in tamer settings than this one. The flowers include a pair of hollyhocks on either side of Hūshang, suggesting an arch or niche to frame him. At the base of the hollyhock spray at the right are blue and white six-petalled flowers that are most likely primulas. Next to the trunk of the prunus tree grows a red lily, while in the lower part of the painting a large blue iris appears next to the fire with small yellow and white flowers sprouting around its base, apparently primroses or cowslips. While all of these plants and flowers can be found in Iran and were presumably familiar to the artist, some of them recur repeatedly throughout the manuscript in scenes set in

the wild or in palace gardens. Unlike the animals, the story line rarely hangs on an individual flower or tree. Yet, Persian poetry abounds with floral imagery and like an underlying melody, flowers appear in almost every illustration of Ṭahmāsp's *Shāhnāma*.

One problem with trying to connect the depictions of flora and fauna in Ṭahmāsp's *Shāhnāma* with his view of nature is that the written information about him is mostly second-hand, written by historians concerned with politics and regional power struggles, chroniclers writing after Ṭahmāsp's death or composers of poetical panegyrics. None of the sources dates exactly to the period in which the manuscript was produced, roughly between 930 and 941/1524 and 1535. On the one hand, this increases the importance of the *Shāhnāma* illustrations as documents of their time, and on the other it forces one to look outside that decade for relevant texts. One of these is the five-part poem *Jannat-i 'adn* or 'The Garden of Eden', from 965–7/1557–60, by 'Abdī Beg Shīrāzī, a longstanding Safavid government administrator and poet. This five-part poem was commissioned by Shah Ṭahmāsp to celebrate the building of his new palace at Qazvīn between the late 950s–965/early 1550s and 1558–59. In addition to descriptions of the wall paintings in the palace buildings and the general relationship of palace buildings to one another, the poet provides a detailed account of its various gardens. While the whole poem praises Shah Ṭahmāsp's taste and the wondrous artists who realised his vision, it also provides a sense of the combination of elements in an ideal garden, with lovely, scented flowers and delicious fruit.

In addition to small gardens associated with the main palace buildings, a pavilion, the Chihil Sutūn, sat in the centre of a large formal garden with other small buildings and gardens around it. (fig. 15.2) In his lyrical, somewhat extravagant poem 'Abdī Beg describes the shah's garden as consisting of two avenues that cross and just below the intersection stands a pavilion, the Chihil Sutūn. On either side of the perpendicular avenues ran water channels along which were planted trees, bushes and flowers. Called Sa'ādātābād, this garden included the Dawlat-khāna where the shah lived as well as lodgings for government and military employees, smaller gardens and water courses. While only the Chihil Sutūn remains today, the description seems to indicate that the shah's garden was constructed along the lines of the *chahār bāgh*, a formal garden with rectangular

plots intersected by water channels forming four, or multiples of four, sections. According to the poem apples, plums, peaches and 'hundreds of kinds of flowers' grew in the garden along with red and yellow roses that 'make the grieving hearts bloom'.<sup>5</sup> A modern reconstruction of another 10th/16th-century garden, described in the *Irshād al-zirā'a*, a 10th/16th-century treatise on cultivation and agriculture, shows how trees, bushes and flowers were planted in square plots on either side of a central channel.<sup>6</sup>

Two illustrations from the *Shāhnāma*, 'Siyāvush and Farangīs Wedded' (fig. 15.3) and 'The Coronation of the Infant Shāpūr II' (fig. 15.4) are both set in gardens, but the gardens do not conform to the *chahār bāgh* plan. Instead, in both of them a pavilion stands before a hillside through which flows a stream, once silver, now tarnished to black. The brick structure in the painting of Siyāvush and Farangīs has a window next to their bed through which we see a large hollyhock on a gold ground. Presumably the artist, Qāsim b. 'Alī, intended to imply that the hill dropped off so steeply that one could only see the sky from the window, not the earth from which the flower springs. Despite the flowers, clumps of vegetation and the flowering tree, why would we consider this to be a cultivated garden and not just a meadow with wild flowers, shrubs and trees? The gate at the right through which young women crowd onto the terrace where musicians play is one indication that they are coming from another part of the royal precinct. Moreover, the permanence of the structure and the high wall at the left of the picture imply that uninhabited or at least undeveloped space lies beyond the wall, in contrast to the greensward at the right. Most convincing is the figure in the red tunic turning to look at a greybeard who offers him a round yellow object, perhaps one of the gold coins thrown to the crowd at the wedding of Farangīs and Siyāvush. Over the shoulder of the younger man is a spade, its business end now oxidised and misshapen. A gardener with a spade would have no role on an uncultivated hillside. Even if the vegetation around him is

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<sup>5</sup> Paul E. Losensky, 'The Palace of Praise and the Melons of Time: Descriptive Patterns in 'Abdi Bayk Širāzi's *Garden of Eden*', *Eurasian Studies*, 1 (2003), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes* (Philadelphia, PA, 2008), p. 60, fig. 36.

rendered in a conventional style, the presence of what appears to be a Rose of Sharon seems to conform to one type of garden found in late 9th/15th and early 10th/16th century paintings.

'The Coronation of the Infant Shāpūr II' presents a variation on the garden and pavilion theme of 'Siyāvush and Farangīs Wedded'. Instead of placing the protagonist, the infant king Shāpūr II, in a permanent structure, he has been seated on an ornate throne within a portable pergola. Out of the tiled building at the right emerges a servant with a platter of gems to be presented to the new king, while young ladies regard the scene from an upstairs window. The garden extends up a hill beyond a red fence. Once again, the scene contains a gardener holding his spade, beside a small stream. Here the artist, Muẓaffar 'Alī, who would go on to decorate the walls of Shah Ṭahmāsp's new palace in Qazvīn, has taken care to depict the flowers and trees accurately. The pink flower at the right appears to be a variety of primula, while the flowering tree is probably an almond. At the foot of a pair of cypresses with differently coloured trunks to the right of the throne are a purple iris and a red lily while slightly higher up on the hill is what appears to be a variety of wallflower. The tall cypress behind the throne may be a reference to the future stature of the king, but it is also one of the trees most closely associated with the *chāhar bāgh* type garden. Nonetheless, the gardens in these illustrations conform to a type found in painting from the 9th/15th and into the 10th/16th century that presents the garden as a pleasant place in the countryside surrounded by a fence. Although gardeners may have tended the plants, they were not grown in beds or lined up along straight canals. Rigidly planned *chāhar bāgh* gardens only begin to appear in Persian painting in the second half of the 11th/17th century, as in the 1074/1663 *Shāhnāma* illustration of 'Siyāvush Captive before Afrāsiyāb' (fig. 15.5) by Muḥammad Zamān.<sup>7</sup> Even though the *chāhar bāgh* type garden is attested in Iran by the Mughal Bābur by 912/1506, the concept of the ideal garden with a natural stream outside an enclosure

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<sup>7</sup> B.W. Robinson, 'The Shahnameh Cochran 4 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art', in Richard Ettinghausen, ed., *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1972), p. 76 attributes the painting to Muḥammad Zamān on the basis of the inscription 'Yā sāhib al-zamān' that appears below the curtain.

remained stubbornly current for over a century and a half. Since Shah Ṭahmāsp spent a great deal of time moving around his kingdom, trying to quell rebellions or fighting against the Uzbeks in the east, he would have been familiar with the variety of landscapes in Iran. While his construction of a new palace in Qazvīn and the transfer of the administrative capital there were part of a strategic move away from the border with the Ottomans, 'Abdī Beg Shīrāzī's detailed description of the buildings and the grounds of Sa'adatābād Garden suggests that Ṭahmāsp appreciated his natural surroundings and was so pleased with his new capital that he commissioned a long poem praising it.

Whether the depiction of animals and landscapes in the *Shāhnāma* produced for Shah Ṭahmāsp can be linked to a Shi'ī point of view is almost impossible to prove. According to Ann Lambton, 'early Shi'ī authorities [were] even more theoretical than the Sunni authorities, since the Shi'ī, except for certain isolated instances such as the Zaydīs in the Caspian provinces and the Būyids, did not achieve political power until the Safavid period, and there was no imperative need for them . . . to reconcile theory with practice.'<sup>8</sup> In the six hundred years between the Būyids and the Safavids the systems of land tenure in Iran mentioned earlier became well established. Following on from the position of the Safavid shahs as divinely ordained spiritual and temporal leaders, the lands they ruled were theoretically owned by them as well, though in practice this took the form of appropriating privately owned land to use it for land grants to tribal leaders and their militias. We would call this redistribution. Moreover, land given in *waqf* to Shi'ī shrines by landowners in the early Safavid period attests to the continuation of the traditional system of land ownership.

Shah Ṭahmāsp's well-known aversion to hunting – he apparently only liked to fish – may also reflect a dislike of the large-scale carnage that occurred in big organised hunts with scores of participants. What this antipathy to killing animals actually means and if it was based in the religious belief that animals have souls and by extension should not be slaughtered for sport or was a basic distaste for hunting as a pastime remains a matter of debate. Where the land was concerned,

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<sup>8</sup> A. K. S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia: A Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration* (London, 1953), p. xx.

'Abdī Beg Shīrāzī's poem equates Ṭahmāsp's new garden with the garden of Paradise and calls him the 'king of power and faith' and states 'The King of Kings has spread out a cradle [*mahd*] of security.'<sup>9</sup> Certainly, he was viewed as a righteous temporal and spiritual leader and descendant of the Shi'i imams. Through his sparing of wild animals and his commissioning of a major garden, can he be considered a responsible steward of the natural world?

To a certain extent the paintings in Ṭahmāsp's *Shāhnāma* represent the environment of Iran as it must have existed in the early 10th/16th century. Yet, even details such as a day lily sprouting next to an iris at the foot of a pair of cypresses suggest that Ṭahmāsp's artists manipulated nature to their own pictorial needs. Thus, they placed botanically correctly drawn flowers in artistically expedient situations. Similarly, in 'The Feast of Sada' the placement of wild and domesticated animals in close proximity to one another serves a narrative purpose but compresses the natural setting so all the different creatures are found in one place at the same time. What the manuscript succeeds in doing is conjuring up the many environments of Iran as a charming and believable backdrop for the myriad episodes of the *Shāhnāma* without necessarily respecting the temporality or spatial unity of the natural world. While the depiction of flora and fauna may have been primarily in the service of pictorial necessities or predilections in Ṭahmāsp's *Shāhnāma*, the level of verisimilitude strongly suggests not only a high level of awareness of plants and animals but the desire on the part of the artists and their patron to render them faithfully and thus respectfully.

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<sup>9</sup> Paul E. Losensky, 'The Palace of Praise', p. 28.

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**Figure 15.1.** ‘The Feast of Sada’, folio 22v from the *Shāhnāma* of Shah Ṭahmāsp, attributed to Sulṭān Muḥammad, Tabriz, ca. 1525, opaque watercolour, ink, silver and gold on paper, Painting: H. 9 1/2 in. (24.1 cm), W. 9 1/16 in. (23 cm); Page: H. 18 1/2 in. (47 cm), W.12 1/2 in. (31.8 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 1970.301.2



**Figure 15.2.** Chihil Sutun, Qazvin, Safavid, built mid-10th/16th century, with 18th and 19th-century alterations. Behnam Minaei, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons



**Figure 15.3.** 'Siyavush and Farangis Wedded', folio 185v, from the *Shāhnāma* of Shah Ṭahmāsp, attributed to Qāsim b. 'Alī, ca. 1525-30, opaque watercolour, ink, silver and gold on paper, Painting: H. 11 3/8 in. (28.9 cm), W. 7 1/4 in. (18.4 cm); Page: H. 18 5/8 in. (47.3 cm), W. 12 5/8 in. (32.1 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr 1970. 1970.301.28



**Figure 15.4.** ‘The Coronation of the Infant Shāpūr II’, folio 538r, from the *Shāhnāma* of Shah Ṭahmāsp, attributed to Muẓaffar ‘Alī, ca. 1525–30, opaque watercolour, ink, silver and gold on paper, Painting: H. 13 1/4 (33.7cm.), W. 8 11/16 in. (22.1 cm); Page: H. 18 9/16 (47.1 cm.), W. 12 1/2 in. (31.8 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr 1970. 1970.301.59



**Figure 15.5.** ‘Siyāvush Captive before Afrāsiyāb’, fol. 110b, from a *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī, probably Isfahan, dated A.H. 1074–79/A.D. 1663–69, signed by Muhammad Zaman, Opaque watercolour, ink, silver and gold on paper, H. 18 1/2 in. (47 cm), W. 11 1/8 in. (28.2 cm), Gift of Alexander Smith Cochran, 1913. 13.228.17