

The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam

The Spirituality of Shi‘i Islam

Beliefs and Practices

by
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To my mother, *in memoriam*



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Preface and Acknowledgements

It is only since the 1970s, if not as recently as the 1980s, that critical studies on Shi'i Islam have increased in scope, with a substantial number of scholars making it their primary field of research.¹ Numerous statistics published in the media indicate that, in the West, public interest in Shi'ism and the Shi'is goes back no more than a few years. It would seem that it took events as dramatic as the civil war in Lebanon, the Islamic revolution in Iran and more recently the war in Iraq (and the related daily atrocities) in order for sustained attention to be given to the specifics of the faith of this minority community of Islam which nonetheless comprises more than 200 million believers.²

To this day, Shi'i beliefs and practices remain relatively unknown and poorly understood. The wider public is often only witness to dramatic demonstrations of exacerbated fanaticism: heavily veiled women, totalitarian mullahs, indoctrinated crowds, public displays of corporal punishment and bloody mourning rituals. These complex forms of the politico-social instrumentalisation of religious belief, notably in its popular component, almost completely obscure the fact that Shi'ism, with its numerous branches, has also one of the richest intellectual and spiritual traditions in Islam; that

1. By Shi'i Islam I refer to the main branch of Shi'ism, namely Imami or Twelver Shi'ism.

2. See M. A. Amir-Moezzi and C. Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le shi'isme?* (Paris, 2004), pp. 11–22 and 75–76.

its history is made up of the lives and work of thousands of brilliant theologians, exegetes, philosophers, artists, scholars, jurists, mystics and men of letters; and that the corpus of Shi'i texts – one of the richest in the world – is made up of literally thousands of works.³

Why such ignorance? First, as just mentioned, academic studies specifically devoted to Shi'ism are for the most part very recent; moreover, Western specialists in this field make up no more than some thirty scholars, to whom one ought to add those rare Shi'i learned men who apply historico-critical methodology and publish only in the Islamic languages. This is a very limited number when compared with the hundreds of scholars specialising in Sunni Islam who, for more than a century and a half, have been studying a wide range of disciplines in the relevant areas of Arabic and Islamic studies.⁴ What is more, most of the Shi'is themselves have little knowledge or a poor understanding of their own religion. Many, as is so often the case with all religions, do not read the basic texts of their faith, and often rely on the received knowledge of religious authorities. The latter, whether theologians, religious leaders, political theoreticians or leaders of mystical orders, again as is so often the case universally, offer no more than a tendentious, often unilateral, vision of matters related to the faith. There are also the vagaries of history to be considered and the resulting ideological rivalries; consequences in Shi'ism itself include, and this since the Middle Ages, not only the ostracism that thinkers who were considered to be 'deviant' were subjected to but also to the censorship of texts that were judged to be problematic.⁵

3. The bibliographical encyclopaedia of Shi'i works, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shi'a* (Tehran and Najaf, 1353–1398/1934–1978) by Āghā Bozorg al-Ṭihirānī consists of twenty-five large volumes and is still far from exhaustive.

4. See M. A. Amir-Moezzi and S. Schmidtke, 'Twelver-Shi'ite Resources in Europe', *JA*, 285/1 (1997), pp. 74–78.

5. This concerns the treatment meted out by 'rationalist' Doctors of Law, ever since the Middle Ages, to Shi'is accused of 'extremism' (*ghuluww*) and to a great many mystics and philosophers (see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin dans le Shi'isme original* [Paris and Lagrasse, 1992], pp. 15–58, tr. as *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism* [New York, 1994]). For cases of censorship in the early

Finally, Shi'ism defines itself in its foundational sources as an essentially esoteric and initiatory doctrine and does not reveal itself easily. Indeed, the faithful are divided into three categories: the masses (*al-'amma*), the elite (*al-khāṣṣa*) and the elite of the elite (*khāṣṣa al-khāṣṣa* or *akhaṣṣ al-khāṣṣa*). Admittedly, this classification is often applied to Muslims in general, where the 'masses' refer to the Sunni majority, the 'elite' to Shi'is and the 'elite of the elite' to initiated Shi'is. However, it is also applied within Shi'ism and in this case the ordinary Shi'i believers are the 'masses'; the exoteric scholars well versed in exoteric Shi'i teaching constitute the 'elite'; and the esotericist masters, initiated into the mysteries of hidden teachings exemplify the 'elite of the elite'. The doctrinal and initiatory nature of the secret is even more pertinent if we acknowledge that this tripartite vision of humanity

period, see Amir-Moezzi and Schmidtke, 'Twelver-Shi'ite Resources', 'Appendix', pp. 120–121. Regarding the censorship before the Islamic revolution of modern editions of ancient sources, see the case of the *Tafsīr* by 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, a censored version of the edition prepared by al-Sayyid Ṭayyib al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'irī in Najaf, 1386–1387/1966–1967 (see M. M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* [Leiden, 1999], pp. 39–45). After the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran, some texts that clearly disturbed the 'ultra-rationalist' authorities were censored; for example, in the 1980s, the numerous traditions that make up volumes 7 to 9 of the older edition in thirty-five volumes of *Biḥār al-anwār* by al-Majlisī, regarding Shi'i hostility towards the first three caliphs, were deleted from the new edition undertaken in Tehran and Qumm (undoubtedly in order not to shock the Sunnis whom the new regime wanted to mobilise for a widespread Islamic revolution); the 'revised' version of *Tuḥfat al-mulūk* by Ja'far al-Kashfi (Tehran, n.d. [ca. 1982], with no mention of the editor's name) where half the text especially regarding the divine aspect of the imams in general and 'Alī in particular is missing (to be compared with older lithographed editions published in Iran, at the end of the nineteenth century); the *Taqrīb al-ma'ārif* by al-Ḥalabī in the R. Ustādhi edition (Qumm, 1404/1984) in which the chapter on the first three caliphs was removed (this section was restored in the edition by F. Ḥassūn, Qumm, 1417/1996–1997; an easing of restrictions undoubtedly due to a certain flexibility in the political regime); the section regarding *wilāyat al-faqīh* – differing from the theory of the same name advanced by Khomeynism – in 'Kitāb al-bay', *al-Makāsib al-muḥarrama* of Ayatollah Muḥammad 'Alī Arākī (Qumm, 1415/1994–1995) (to be compared with the edition published in 1313/1895–1896, pp. 94ff.).

veils yet another truth according to which men can only be of three kinds: the 'master initiator', the 'initiated disciple' and the 'ignorant adversary'.⁶

In a tradition that is traced back to many of the Shi'i imams, it is stated: 'Our teaching is secret, it is a secret about a secret. It includes an exoteric (*ẓāhir*), esoteric (*bāṭin*) and esoteric of the esoteric (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*) dimension.' It is to be expected then that, in these conditions, parts of the religious teachings, undoubtedly those judged the most essential, are protected by the rules that govern all esoteric doctrines. Hence the use of certain tactics in Shi'ism that illustrate different forms of the discipline of mystery: the 'preservation of secrets' (*taqiyya*, *kitmān*), referring to the believer's strategic dissimulation of his religious affinity when it places him at risk. This practice also has a hidden meaning, namely the protection of those doctrinal teachings considered secret from 'those who are not worthy'. There is also the literary process adopted by certain writers of 'scattering knowledge' (*tabdīd al-'ilm*) which consists of 'shredding' the exposition of a secret doctrine and dispersing bits of information throughout the various parts of a vast corpus of miscellaneous teachings, with the result that only an especially persevering scholar familiar with the subject is able to discover these disparate elements and reconstitute a coherent whole.⁷ For all these various reasons, some intrinsic and others extrinsic to Shi'ism, the religion remains veiled and relatively unknown.

The studies that make up the present work examine some of the less explored aspects of Shi'i history and spirituality. These studies have appeared in various specialised journals or academic publications between 1992 and 2005. Together they constitute the

6. Refer to Chapter 8, this volume.

7. On *taqiyya*, now consult E. Kohlberg, 'Taqiyya in Shi'i Theology and Religion', in H. G. Kippenberg and G. G. Stroumsa (eds), *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 345–380. On *tabdīd al-'ilm*, see Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index.

series 'Aspects of Twelver Imamology' (see bibliography) supplemented here by four other articles. Updated and placed in an order justifiably their own, these essays seek to restore a certain coherence to what is a priori difficult to reconstruct regarding Shi'i doctrines and devotional practices.⁸ The first two chapters concern the emergence and early developments of Shi'ism.

Chapter 1 analyses 'the religion of 'Ali', which combines ancient Arab beliefs with Jewish, Christian and Qur'ānic concepts of the cult of kinship and the sacred family, representing the early core of what was to progressively and substantially develop to become the Shi'i religion.⁹ Chapter 2 examines the history of the Sasanian princess Shahrabānū – one of those legends that at times carry more historical significance than real events – which would have been, among other things, an early means of bringing together Shi'is and Iranian converts, thus probably facilitating Shi'ism's acceptance of doctrinal elements deriving from the ancient Iranian religions, notably Mazdaism and Manichaeism.¹⁰

Chapters 3 to 8 are devoted to the twofold dimension of the figure of the imam,¹¹ namely the divine (*lāhūt*) and the human (*nāsūt*) elements and the correspondences between them; the theological ideas linked to his nature and ontological status as the Ally of God (*walī Allāh*); the central role of the initiation and the initiates as well as the ontological and anthropological duality in Shi'ism.

8. For editorial considerations, the transcriptions of Arabic and Persian, abbreviations and bibliographical references have been standardised. The original pagination is not provided.

9. 'Considérations sur l'expression *dīn 'Alī*. Aux origines de la foi shi'ite', *ZDMG*, 150/1 (2000), pp. 29–68 (also published with a translation in Turkish in A. Y. Ocak [ed.], *From History to Theology: Ali in Islamic Beliefs* [Ankara, 2005], pp. 27–58).

10. 'Shahrabānū, Dame du Pays d'Iran et Mère des Imams: entre l'Iran préislamique et le shiisme imamite', *JSAI*, 27 (volume dedicated to Shaul Shaked) (2002), pp. 497–549.

11. 'Imam' is written with the 'i' upper case when it relates to the ontological, cosmic, archetypal Imam, and lower case when it relates to the historical imam, the manifestation of the first, or the perceptible level. Also, 'Imami' and 'Twelver' are used interchangeably.

In Chapter 3, the divinity of the metaphysical Imam is analysed through the prism of the 'paradoxical utterances' attributed to the historical imams,¹² whereas the next two chapters follow the course of the gradual immanence of the Imam in man and his cosmogonic and cosmological significance in the economy of the sacred. Thus his role emerges, as both the dispenser of divine knowledge (the historical imam) in the here and now and, ultimately, the very content of this gnosis (the metaphysical Imam).¹³ By studying the figure of the Guide as a thaumaturgic sage,¹⁴ the supreme temporal and spiritual authority as well as a theophanic being,¹⁵ Chapters 6 and 7 examine the theological, spiritual and political implications of this Imamology. Finally, Chapter 8 analyses mystical anthropology as the basis for the Shi'i theory of opposites.¹⁶

Different aspects of hermeneutics and the way they have spread through Shi'i spiritual practices form the content of Chapters 9 to 11: the imam as initiator, transmitter and at the same time the

12. 'Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine I. Remarques sur la divinité de l'Imam', *Studia Iranica*, 25/2 (1996), pp. 193–216.

13. Chapter 4, 'The Preexistence of the Imam', is taken from sub-chapters II-1 and II-2 in my *Guide divin*, pp. 73–112 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 29–59). Chapter 5 originally appeared as 'L'Imam dans le ciel. Ascension et initiation (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine III)', in M. A. Amir-Moezzi (ed.), *Le Voyage initiatique en terre d'islam. Ascensions célestes et itinéraires spirituels*. Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes, vol. 53 (Louvain and Paris, 1997), pp. 99–116.

14. The original in French, 'Savoir c'est pouvoir. Exégèses et implications du miracle dans l'imamisme ancien (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine V)', in D. Aigle (ed.), *Les Miracles des saints dans l'hagiographie chrétienne et islamique médiévale*. Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes, vol. 106 (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 241–275.

15. 'Notes à propos de la *walāya* imamite (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine X)', *JAOS*, 122/4 (2002), pp. 722–741 (also published in G. Gobillot [ed.], *Mystique musulmane. Parcours en compagnie d'un chercheur: Roger Deladrière* [Paris, 2002], pp. 21–58 and in G. Filoramo [ed.], *Carisma Profetico. Fattore di innovazione religiosa* [Brescia, 2003], pp. 207–241).

16. 'Seul l'homme de Dieu est humain. Théologie et anthropologie mystique à travers l'exégèse imamite ancienne (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine IV)', *Arabica*, 45 (1998), pp. 193–214 (English trans. in E. Kohlberg (ed.), *Shi'ism* [Aldershot, 2003], article II, pp. 17–39).

object of the hermeneutical method applied to the sacred texts;¹⁷ the internalisation of the imam as an aid in the practices of concentration and visualisation;¹⁸ and, finally, the position of this figure as the actual focal point for acts of devotion or prayer.¹⁹

Eschatology, the figure of the messianic Saviour – the ‘present and hidden’ imam of our time – the implications of his Occultation and other hermeneutical practices linked to these issues are dealt with in the last three chapters. The ‘organic’ correspondences between the disciplines of cosmogony, cosmology and eschatology, both in terms of the individual and in the collective dimension, leading to the appearance in Shi‘ism of this triptych which is characteristic of dualist doctrines of an initiatory nature, constitute the theme of Chapter 12.²⁰ The next chapter is devoted to reports of encounters with the hidden imam, accounts that for over a thousand years have sustained the faith and hopes of the believers.²¹ Finally, Chapter 14 is devoted to an examination of the eschatological hermeneutics of the theologico-mystical Shaykhiyya School of Kirman, particularly their central doctrine of the

17. “Le combattant du *ta’wil*”: un poème de Mollâ Sadrâ sur ‘Alî (Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine IX), *JA*, 292/1–2 (2004), pp. 331–359 (also published in T. Lawson [ed.], *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Essays in Honour of Hermann Landolt* [London, 2005], pp. 432–454).

18. ‘Visions d’imams en mystique duodécimaine moderne et contemporaine (Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine VIII)’, in E. Chaumont et al. (eds), *Autour du regard: Mélanges islamologiques offerts à Daniel Gimaret* (Louvain and Paris, 2003), pp. 97–124.

19. ‘Notes sur la prière dans le shi‘isme imamite’, in M. A. Amir-Moezzi, C. Jambet and P. Lory (eds), *Henry Corbin: philosophies et sagesse des religions du Livre*, Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes, vol. 126 (Turnhout, 2005), pp. 65–80.

20. ‘Fin du Temps et Retour à l’Origine (Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine VI)’, *RMMM*, special issue, ‘Millénarisme et messianisme en Islam’, ed. M. Garcia Arenal, 91–94 (2000), pp. 53–72.

21. ‘Contribution à la typologie des rencontres avec l’imam caché (Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine II)’, *JA*, 284/1 (1996), pp. 109–135.

'Fourth Pillar' where initiates have as significant an influence on the spiritual economy as the prophets and imams.²²

Shi'i spirituality thus proves to be rather complex. In the diversity of its manifestations, beliefs and practices one finds consistence and coherence in the determining role of knowledge and initiation; in ontological and anthropological dualism and especially in the ambivalence of the figure of the Imam, the alpha and omega of Shi'ism. A veritable soteriological horizon, the presence of the Divine Guide fills the devotional universe to the brim. Just as Christianity is the religion of Christ, Shi'ism may above all be considered that of the imam.

The 'mass of believers', the people of the *zāhir*, assuage their thirst for the divine in this world and put their faith in the Hereafter through the Divine Guide. In quest of the *bāṭin*, the 'elite' find salvation in knowledge and the imam's teachings, in the contemplation of doctrines that bear upon his nature and authority, in the hermeneutic of his exegesis of sacred texts. Finally, the 'elite of the elite', seekers of the *bāṭin al-bāṭin*, bearing in mind this absolute exemplar, seek to follow the mysterious path that can lead to the divinisation of man, this 'secret of secrets' of Shi'i doctrine that the sages have designated by the elegant term *ta'alluh*.²³

* * *

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22. 'Une absence remplie de présences: herméneutiques de l'Occultation chez les Shaykhiyya (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine VII)', *BSOAS*, 64/1 (2001), pp. 1–18 (English trans. in R. Brunner and W. Ende [eds], *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture and Political History* [Leiden, 2001], pp. 38–57).

23. Active noun of the fifth form of the root 'L-H, that gives us *al-'ilāh* = *Allāh*. This definition, as incisive as it is grammatically exact, was provided by the Ismaili thinker Nāṣir-i Khusraw: '*muta'allih*' (active participle of the same fifth form) meaning 'he who becomes God' ('*muta'allih ya'nī khodā shavandeh*') Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Kitāb jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn*, ed. H. Corbin and M. Mo'in (Tehran and Paris, 1953), p. 99; English translation, *Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*, IIS, forthcoming.

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Abbreviations

AI(U)ON	<i>Annali dell'Istituto (Universitario) Orientale di Napoli</i>
BEO	<i>Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales</i>
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale</i>
BSL	<i>Bulletin de Société de Linguistique</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
EI2	<i>The Encyclopedia of Islam</i> , ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (new edn, Leiden, 1960–2004)
EIR	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i> , ed. E. Yarshater (London and New York, 1982–)
EJ	<i>Eranos Jahrbuch</i>
EPHE	Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Sorbonne).
GAL	C. Brockelmann, <i>Geschichte der arabischen Literatur</i> (Weimar, 1898)
GAS	F. Sezgin, <i>Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums</i> (Leiden, 1967–1986)
IC	<i>Islamic Culture</i>
IJMES	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
IOS	<i>Israel Oriental Studies</i>
JA	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>

<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland</i>
<i>JSAI</i>	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>MIDEO</i>	<i>Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicaïn d'Etudes Orientales du Caire</i>
<i>MW</i>	<i>Muslim World</i>
<i>REI</i>	<i>Revue des Etudes Islamiques</i>
<i>RHR</i>	<i>Revue de l'Histoire des Religions</i>
<i>RSO</i>	<i>Rivista degli Studi Orientali</i>
<i>SI</i>	<i>Studia Islamica</i>
<i>WZKM</i>	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i>
<i>ZA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

Part I: Early Emergence and Ancient Convergence

Reflections on the Expression *dīn* ‘Alī: The Origins of the Shi‘i Faith*

In Shi‘i lands generally, and in Iran more particularly, there are a number of compound first names ending in ‘Alī. Many are very common: for instance, *Husayn-‘Alī*, *Muḥammad-‘Alī*, *Ja‘far-‘Alī*; others have a more literary even poetic resonance: *Sayf-‘Alī* (‘Sword of ‘Alī’), *Nūr-‘Alī* (‘Light of ‘Alī’), *Maḥabbat-‘Alī* or *Mehr-‘Alī* (‘Love of ‘Alī’), *Īmān-‘Alī* (‘Faith of ‘Alī’); still others are quite unusual if not very rare: *Shīr-‘Alī* (‘Lion-‘Alī’), *Gurg-‘Alī* (‘Wolf ‘Alī’), *Chirāg-‘Alī* (‘Lamp of ‘Alī’) and *Dīn-‘Alī* (‘Religion of ‘Alī’).

This last appellation has always intrigued me: ‘Alī’s religion’. Is this not the same as Islam, as Muḥammad’s religion? How might one explain this term, especially given that *Islām* and *dīn Muḥammad* are used as first names as well? Imagine my surprise when, a few years ago, I encountered the expression *dīn* ‘Alī in certain passages from early historiographical works. What does this term stand for? How can it be interpreted? Although the context is obviously not the same, this chapter is thus an attempt to answer a long-standing question. The chapter consists of five parts: (1) *Dīn* ‘Alī in the works of the historiographers; (2) The uniqueness of ‘Alī; (3) Themes concerning ‘Alī and the ‘Alids; (4) The basis for the religion of ‘Alī (The

* I extend my gratitude to Professors Wilferd Madelung and Etan Kohlberg for their pertinent comments during the process of writing this chapter. Any imperfections that still remain are the responsibility solely of the author.

Qur'ānic bases; and The pre-Islamic bases); (5) Reactions and repercussions.

1. *Dīn 'Alī* in the works of the historiographers

In certain passages of his monumental work *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH/923 AD) reproduces some reports in which the expression *dīn 'Alī* appears. The first is found in a long account reported by 'Aṭīyya b. Bilāl about the battle of the Camel in 36/656.¹ At one point during the battle, 'Amr b. Yathribī al-Ḍabbī *al-rājiz*, a poet-warrior in the camp of the confederates allied against 'Alī, kills three of his men, 'Ilbā' b. al-Haytham al-Sadūsī, Hind b. 'Amr al-Jamalī and Zayd b. Šūḥān, before being laid low by 'Ammār b. Yāsir, one of 'Alī's oldest supporters. After he had been brought down, he is said to have recited this *rajaz*:

Let he who knows me not, learn that I am Ibn Yathribī, killer of 'Ilbā' and Hind al-Jamalī. As well as of the son of Šūḥān, all (adepts) of 'Alī's religion.²

He is then led to 'Alī who does not accept his request for *amān*, and orders his execution. According to the author of this account, Ibn Yathribī was the only captive to whom 'Alī denied a pardon. Al-Ṭabarī does not provide any clarification of his intransigence.

1. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879–1901), series 1, pp. 3196ff.; ed. M. A. F. Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1960), vol. 4, pp. 514ff.

2. *Anā li-man yunkirunī ibnu yathribī qātīlu 'ilbā'i wa hindi'l-jamalī wa ibnin li-šūḥāna 'alā dīni 'Alī*; al-Ṭabarī, ed. de Goeje, series 1, p. 3199; ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 4, p. 517, varies slightly: *'In taqtulūnī* [if you plan to kill me, know that etc.] *fa anā ibnu yathribī qātīlu 'ilbā'i wa hindi'l-jamalī thumma bni šūḥāna 'alā dīni 'Alī*. See also al-Mufid, *Kitāb al-Jamal aw al-nuṣra fi ḥarb al-Baṣra* (Najaf, 1963), p. 146; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, ed. M. Burūjerdī (lithograph, Tehran, 1316–1317/1898–1899; Najaf, 1956), vol. 3, p. 156; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, ed. based on the edition by Kumpānī, 90 vols, in 110 tomes (Tehran and Qumm, 1376–1392/1956–1972), vol. 32, p. 176, in which 'Ammār b. Yāsir shouts at Ibn Yathribī: 'It is as a follower of 'Alī's religion that I fight you (*uqātīluka 'alā dīni 'Alī*)'.

The reader can reasonably conclude that the *rājiz* (poet-warrior) was executed for rather haughtily boasting about killing three of the most loyal of 'Alī's companions. During the same period, another erudite scholar, Ibn Durayd Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Azdī (d. 321/933), reproduces the poem in his *Kitāb al-ishtiḳāq*, adding that in order to justify this unique execution, 'Alī is supposed to have said:

He [i.e Ibn Yathribī] claimed to have killed [my three companions] because they followed the religion of 'Alī; well, the religion of 'Alī is the religion of Muḥammad (za'ama annahu qatalahum 'alā dīn 'Alī wa dīn 'Alī dīn Muḥammad).³

According to Ibn Durayd's account, the reason for putting Ibn Yathribī to death was the distinction made by him between the religion of 'Alī and that of Muḥammad, thus implicitly accusing 'Alī of professing a deviant religion compared with Islam.⁴ Other passages in al-Ṭabarī call into question the explanation provided by *Kitāb al-ishtiḳāq*, since in this case the expression is uttered by 'Alī's supporters. One of these passages appears in a report by the

3. Ibn Durayd, *Kitāb al-ishtiḳāq*, ed. 'A. M. Hārūn (Baghdad, 1399/1979), p. 413; the version of the poem by Ibn Durayd is slightly different: '*Qataltu 'ilbā'a wa hinda'l-jamālī wa ibnan li-ṣūḥāna 'alā dīni 'Alī*.' In the margins of the *unicum* dated the seventh/thirteenth century, used by 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, are found earlier notes that often provide different understandings (see the editor's introduction, *ibid.*, pp. 36–37). For the passage cited, the notes in the margin follow the version by al-Ṭabarī in the edition prepared under the guidance of de Goeje; *ibid.*, p. 413, note 2, *in fine*.

4. L. Caetani makes an error of interpretation by comparing this punishment of Ibn Yathribī to that of 'Abd Allāh b. Saba', inflicted, according to tradition, by 'Alī himself, *Annali dell'Islam* (Milan, 1905–1926), vol. 9, p. 142; re: 'Abd Allāh b. Saba', see M. G. S. Hodgson, *El2*). To accuse 'Alī of professing a deviant religion is entirely different to claiming to defend 'Alī's cause while professing an 'extremist' doctrine; this error is pointed out by W. Madelung in *The Succession to Muḥammad* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 178, n. 183. Another historiographical source, *Kitāb al-futūḥ* by Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī (d. 314/926) gives as the sole reason for the execution of Ibn Yathribī, his violent animosity towards 'Alī; see Ibn A'tham, *al-Futūḥ*, Persian trans. Harawī (sixth/twelfth century), ed. G. Ṭabāṭabā'ī Majd (Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995), pp. 432–433.

famous Abū Mikhnaḥ (based on 'Ubayd Allāh b. al-Ḥurr al-Ju'fī) regarding Mu'āwiya's order to arrest and execute a large number of 'Alid rebels led by Ḥujr b. 'Adī. During an interrogation, one of 'Alī's partisans, Karīm b. 'Afīf al-Khath'amī, is supposed to have had the following conversation with Mu'āwiya:

Al-Khath'amī: 'Fear God, Mu'āwiya [literally: God! God! O Mu'āwiya] for you will be led [inevitably] from this transitory place to the final and eternal resting place; there you will be questioned about the reasons for my execution and you will be asked to explain why you shed my blood.'

Mu'āwiya: 'What say you regarding 'Alī?'

Al-Khath'amī: '[I say] The same as you: I dissociate myself from the religion of 'Alī, by which he submits to God (*atabarra'u min dīni 'Alī alladhī kāna yadīnu llāha bihi*).'⁵ At this [declaration], having difficulty in devising a reply, Mu'āwiya remained silent.⁵

5. Al-Ṭabarī, ed. de Goeje, series 2, p. 143; ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 5, p. 276. In speaking of these 'Alids, Mu'āwiya calls them 'rebels among the Turābiyya Saba'iyya', a reference to the *kunya* Abū Turāb for 'Alī (see E. Kohlberg, 'Abū Turāb', BSOAS, 41 [1978], pp. 347–352; rpr. in *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shi'ism* [Aldershot, 1991] article VI) and to 'Abd Allāh b. Saba'. See also the abridged version of this account in al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, vol. 4/a, ed. M. Schloessinger and M. J. Kister (Jerusalem, 1972), p. 225. Admittedly, al-Khath'amī's response is ambiguous, hence Mu'āwiya's embarrassment. His 'dissociation' from 'Alī's religion is surely based on the obligation of *taqiyya*, but one wonders if the expression *dīn 'Alī* does not in fact stem from Mu'āwiya or more generally from 'Alī's adversaries. The expression does indeed seem to have posed a problem for at least some of 'Alī's supporters, since it could establish a distinction between 'the religion of 'Alī' and Islam. According to a report by al-Ṭabarī, during the battle of the Camel, when in order to spare their lives the Azd of Baṣra, declared themselves followers of 'Alī's religion (*naḥnu 'alā dīni 'Alī*), a man from the Banī Layth of Kūfa (no doubt an 'Alid) mocks them for what they have just said (al-Ṭabarī, ed. de Goeje, series 1, pp. 3,189–3,190; ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 4, p. 512). However, as we shall see, the expression is sometimes unambiguously attributed to supporters of 'Alī. Cf. also verses by 'Alī's Companion al-Nu'mān b. al-'Ajlān al-Anṣārī, praising 'the religion of 'Alī' after the battle of Ṣiffīn, according to al-Minqarī, *Waq'at Ṣiffīn*, ed. A. M. Hārūn (Cairo, 1382/1962), p. 380 and Ibn Abī'l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha*, ed. M. A. Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1965), vol. 1, p. 149.

Still according to al-Ṭabarī, during al-Mukhtār's revolt, Rufā'a b. Shaddād al-Hamdānī, the former's supporter, recites the following verse while in the heat of battle:

I am the son of Shaddād, adept of 'Alī's religion / I am not an ally of 'Uthmān, offspring of a goat.⁶

Finally, according to a tradition reported by Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) in *al-Muṣannaf*, during the battle of the Camel, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya, the son of 'Alī, spares the life of an adversary when the latter claims to have adopted 'Alī's religion.⁷

Some elements of this account seem to indicate that the expression is authentic. First is the rarity of such occurrences and their somewhat fortuitous nature. In addition to the care taken in highlighting an expression, one of the features of the apocryphal is its repetitious and frequent usage.⁸ I certainly do not claim to have thoroughly examined al-Ṭabarī's monumental *History* in its entirety, but I have read it attentively, and with these few passages, I believe we have a fairly accurate picture. What is more, the expression is allotted to the fiercest adversaries as well as to the loyal and devout supporters of 'Alī, which tends to indicate that it was a current expression known by all and that its usage by

6. *Anā bnu shaddāda 'alā dīni 'Alī/lastu li-'Uthmāna bni arwā bi-walī* (al-Ṭabarī, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 6, p. 50). Usage of *arwā* (lit. 'mountain goat') is a play on words with *'affān* (the name of 'Uthmān's father, one meaning of which is 'animal with malodorous skin or hair'). Al-Majlisī reports this account based on al-Ṭabarī's *History*, but his version presents significant differences with the *Ta'rīkh*: for example, the individual is named al-Aḥraṣ b. Shaddād and his verse is a response to a verse by his adversary Ibn Dhab'ān al-Kalbī: 'I am Ibn Dhab'ān al-Karīm al-Mufaḍḍal/One of the leaders among those who dissociate themselves from the religion of 'Alī (*anā bnu Dhab'āna'l-karīmī'l-mufaḍḍali/min 'aṣabatin yabra'ūna min dīni 'Alī*)', *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 45, p. 381.

7. Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. S. M. al-Laḥḥām, 9 vols (Beirut, 1409/1989), vol. 8, p. 711.

8. See e.g. J. Schacht, 'A Revaluation of Islamic Traditions', *JRAS* (1949), pp. 140–152; G. H. A. Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt* (Leiden, 1969), pp. 30ff.

reporters in historiographical traditions was not dictated by partisanship; this moreover would explain the somewhat fortuitous occurrences, with no particular motive for the context in which they appeared. During the course of the following study, we will consider other indications that the expression could have existed at the dawn of Islam.

2. The uniqueness of 'Alī

To my knowledge, 'Alī is the only personality from early Islam – apart from the Prophet of course – with whom the term *dīn* is associated. Thanks to analyses by R. B. Serjeant and, especially, due to the pioneering study by M. M. Bravmann, we know that just as in the earliest days of the new religion of the Arabs, *dīn* in pre-Islamic times designated a set of both secular and sacred laws.⁹ By extension, *dīn* also referred to submission to a law or a leader, thus contrasting with the anarchy and wild behaviour associated with *jahl* or ignorance. Gradually becoming more exclusive in the Islamic period, the interpretation of 'religion' would have been derived from this original secular and/or religious sense of the term.¹⁰ The use of the expression *dīn* 'Alī is all the more remarkable since when speaking of his most notable contemporaries, namely the three other *rāshidūn* (rightly guided) caliphs, the sources employ the term *sunna*, almost never *dīn*. Here too, studies by M. M. Bravmann (correcting J. Schacht's analyses), followed

9. R. B. Serjeant, 'Haram and ḥawṭah, the Sacred Enclave in Arabia', in A. R. Badawi (ed.), *Mélanges Taha Husain* (Cairo, 1962), pp. 41–50, esp. p. 42 and p. 50, and 'The "Constitution" of Medina', *The Islamic Quarterly*, 8 (1964), pp. 3–16, esp. 13 (rpr. in *Studies in Arabian History and Civilisation*, London, 1981, articles III and V); M. M. Bravmann, *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam* (Leiden, 1972), see index under 'dāna (dyn)', 'dīn', and pp. 4–7 'Murūwah and dīn'.

10. Bravmann, *The Spiritual Background*, p. 34 and note 1 in which the author argues that the theories advanced by Nöldeke and Horowitz on the Iranian origin of the term are superfluous; see also U. Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton, 1995), see index under 'dīn'.

by those of G. H. A. Juynboll demonstrate that *sunna* was initially a clearly marked path on the ground from which one could only waver wilfully, and by extension the path of the elders or sages in a tribe that one ought to follow scrupulously. Although the Qur'an defines this term as 'path of God', at the dawn of the nascent religion, *sunna* designates a whole set of secular or religious forms of behaviour, attitudes and sayings of sages and role models par excellence, in this instance the Prophet himself and the first caliphs.¹¹ Both historiographical and purely religious sources allude to the *sunnas* of the first caliphs. Al-Balādhurī (d. ca. 302/892) refers to the *sunna* of Abū Bakr and 'Umar, as well as that of the Khārijīs, during the arbitration at Šiffin, as also does al-Ṭabarī.¹² The expression '*sunna* of the Two 'Umars', that is, Abū Bakr and 'Umar, is found again in poetry by Farazdaq (ca. 109/728)¹³ and Ibn Abī Ya'lā (d. 526/1133), who while citing the *Kitāb al-sunna* by al-Barbahārī (d. 329/941), refers to the *sunna* of Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān.¹⁴ In my research to date, I have encountered

11. Bravmann, *The Spiritual Background*, see index under '*sanna*', '*sunnah*'; G. H. A. Juynboll, 'Some New Ideas on the Development of *Sunna* as a Technical Term in Early Islam', *JSAI*, 10 (1987), pp. 97–118, esp. pp. 97f. (rpr. in *Studies on the Origins and Uses of Islamic Hadīth* [London, 1996], article V); J. Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des tribus. L'Islam de Mahomet* (Paris, 1997), p. 652. For a very rare usage of the expression *dīn 'Uthmān* (forged probably in reaction to the expression *dīn 'Alī*), see J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, I–VI (Berlin, 1991–1997), see index under '*dīm*' and also vol. 4, pp. 565ff. (on use of the term *dīn*).

12. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 4/b, ed. M. Schloessinger (Jerusalem, 1961), p. 27; al-Ṭabarī, ed. de Goeje, series 1, pp. 3,350–3,351.

13. Cf. *Naqā'id Jarīr wa'l-Farazdaq*, ed. A. A. Bevan (Leiden, 1905–1909), p. 1013.

14. Ibn Abī Ya'lā al-Farrā', *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābila* (Damascus, 1923; rpr. Beirut, ca. 1980), vol. 2, p. 32. Some reports make a distinction between *sunna* of the Prophet and *sira* of the caliphs (cf. al-Ṭabarī, ed. de Goeje, series 1, pp. 2786 and p. 2793; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma [Leiden, 1883], vol. 2, pp. 186–187). Bravmann believes that in this context these two terms are synonymous, *The Spiritual Background*, pp. 124f. For an excellent historical and doctrinal analysis of these passages, see T. Nagel, *Studien zum Minderheitenproblem im Islam*, vol. 1 (Bonn, 1973), pp. 7–44.

the expression *sunnat 'Alī* only in the anonymous historiographical text from the second–third/eighth–ninth centuries edited as *Akhbār al-dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*.¹⁵ The remarkable analysis of this work by M. Sharon shows how this pro-'Abbasid source deals with 'Alī and the 'Alids,¹⁶ whence the use of the term *sunna* with reference to 'Alī in order to stress the latter's role as model in the same manner as the other *rāshidūn*. The rarity if not the nonexistence of the expression *sunnat 'Alī* seems all the more surprising since as far as concerns legal and ritual practice, 'Alī seems to have taken the same decisions as the first two caliphs. This is no doubt why, much later, marked by their aversion to the Prophet's first three successors, in many cases the Shi'is would follow the legal teachings of Ibn 'Abbās rather than those of 'Alī.¹⁷ Imami literature would itself seek to justify this fact by invoking a form of *taqiyya* practised by 'Alī, who feared being accused of deviation compared with the path followed by Abū Bakr and 'Umar.¹⁸ The striking ostracism of the *sunna* concerning 'Alī is perhaps thus due to the fact that, in speaking of the latter, the term *dīn* was more frequently used, thus emphasising the radical difference of certain positions taken in the area of faith as compared to his predecessors. The traditionalist, Muḥammad b. 'Ubayd b. Abī Umayya (d. 204/819), a fierce opponent of the Kufan Shi'is, never ceased to vaunt the merits of the first three *rāshidūn*, exhorting his public to follow their *sunna*, no doubt by deliberately deleting 'Alī from the list of role models

15. Ed. Dūrī-Muṭṭalibī (Beirut, 1971), p. 284.

16. Cf. M. Sharon, 'The 'Abbasid Da'wa Re-examined on the Basis of a New Source', *Arabic and Islamic Studies* (1973). In this regard, refer also to the important work by M. Q. Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbāsids* (Leiden, 1997), see index under 'akhbār'.

17. Now consult W. Madelung, 'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās and Shiite Law', in U. Vermeulen and J. M. F. van Reeth (eds), *Law, Christianity and Modernism in Islamic Society* (Louvain, 1998), pp. 13–25.

18. According to a tradition going back to imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir reported by Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-madīna al-munawwara*, ed. M. F. Shaltūt (Qumm, 1410/1989–1990), p. 217; cited by Madelung, 'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās and Shiite Law', p. 24.

to be followed.¹⁹ It is surely as a reaction against using the expression *dīn 'Alī*, that, writing at the turn of the fifth and sixth/eleventh and twelfth centuries, Ibn Abi Ya'lā reports that the *sunna* of the first three caliphs – 'Alī is thus wilfully excluded – was called 'the original ancient religion', *al-dīn al-'aṭīq*.²⁰ *Dīn 'Alī* would thus have been much more than a *sunna*, more than a collection of behaviour patterns or decisions relating to daily sacred or secular life. Rather, it seems to designate a whole set of beliefs, professions of faith one might say, touching upon both the sacred and profane, the spiritual as well as the temporal – hence justifying translation of the expression as 'religion of 'Alī'. Let us attempt to discover the content of this 'religion', at least in its broadest terms.

In his outstanding work *The Succession to Muḥammad*, W. Madelung points out almost all the above-mentioned passages in which our expression appears.²¹ An impressive work of erudition and subtle analyses, it treats with numerous fundamental problems in the history of early Islam; this might explain why its eminent author limits himself to a single allusion regarding *dīn 'Alī*:

19. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 12 vols (Hyderabad, 1907–1909; rpr. Beirut, 1968), vol. 9, pp. 328ff. See also a similar opinion held by al-Shāfi'ī, analysed by J. Schacht, *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1950), p. 24. Including 'Alī among the *rāshidūn* caliphs posed a problem until the 'Abbasid period. Ibn Ḥanbal would have been the first great non-'Alid thinker to have sought to employ the image of 'Alī to this end; see his *Kitāb al-sunna* (Mecca, 1349/1930), p. 214; Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Sīrat al-imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, ed. F. 'Abd al-Mun'im Aḥmad (Alexandria, 1981), p. 82. Regarding the rehabilitation of 'Alī, see also T. Nagel, *Rechtleitung und Kalifat* (Bonn, 1975), pp. 232f.

20. Ibn Abi Ya'lā al-Farrā', *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābila*, vol. 2, p. 32 (or *dīn al-'Atīq*, and in this instance it should be translated as 'the religion of 'Atīq', 'Atīq being one of the *laqabs* of Abū Bakr); equally the expression *dīn 'Uthmān* replaced at times *ra'y al-'Uthmāniyya* (al-Ṭabarī, ed. de Goeje, series 2, p. 340) designating those who chose the Banū 'Umayya over the Banū Hāshim, seems to have been a response to *dīn 'Alī*.

21. In the course of the very long chapter on 'Alī's reign, see pp. 178–179, and in the conclusion mainly devoted to Mu'āwiya's rule, p. 338.

Dīn 'Alī could at this stage have only a limited meaning, most likely the claim that 'Alī was the best of men after Muḥammad, his legatee (*waṣī*), and as such most entitled to lead the Community.²²

As we shall see, the above would indeed encapsulate the very fabric of "Alī's religion"; however, each of these facts holds a number of ideas and implicit conceptions – bearing upon both ancestral Arab beliefs as well as the new Islamic faith – that would enable the claim for exclusive legitimacy in the eyes of a number of believers. The meaning of the expression is perhaps limited in scope but nevertheless complex. The aim of this chapter is to attempt to discover the ramifications of this meaning and in modest terms to supplement the masterful study by this renowned Islamic scholar.

3. Themes concerning 'Alī and the 'Alids

The sayings of 'Alī himself offer a most rewarding field of investigation. As is known, authentic or not, they are numerous, filling pages and pages in sources in various literary genres.²³ 'Alī's life seems to have been especially active: the period of his youth just at the birth of Islam; his relationship with Muḥammad first in Mecca and then Medina; his exploits in war, his spiritual dimension, his family; being overlooked in the matter of the succession to the Prophet; his relationship with the first three caliphs; his short-lived reign – an uninterrupted period of civil war and so on – all constitute a myriad of backdrops reflected in the rich variety of sayings of the most highly placed and colourful character that the Islamic sources present to us.

However, among these many sayings on the most varied of subjects, two themes constitute veritable leitmotifs: the very fact of having been the first man to accept Muḥammad's prophetic message and of having vowed to have absolute faith in and loyalty

22. Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 178–179.

23. Cf. L. Vecchia Vaglieri, 'Sul Nahj al-balāghah e sul suo compilatore ash-Sharīf ar-Raḍī', *AIUON*, special issue (1958), pp. 7ff.

to the new religion (the notion of *sābiqa*); and, especially, the fact of being the Prophet's closest male relative with the strongest blood ties to him (the notion of *qarāba*). As we shall see, the importance of this relationship is so fundamental that it encompasses and even explains the idea of *sābiqa*. In implicit or explicit terms, both from his own perspective and in the eyes of his supporters, these two claims made 'Alī the only legitimate successor to the Prophet. One need only glance through the historiographical works, for example the sayings of 'Alī, more specifically those regarding the direction of the community – in which his legitimist claims feature – to pick out the two themes which are omnipresent in the context of the battle of Šifīn,²⁴ his letters to Mu'āwiya and a letter to his elder brother 'Aqīl b. Abī Ṭālib,²⁵ or again, his sayings arising from the famous speech by Muḥammad at Ghadīr Khumm.²⁶

These are the very themes that enable supporters of 'Alī to recognise him as the sole legitimate *waṣī* (legatee) to Muḥammad. In the poem reported by al-Balādhurī of the warrior of the Banū 'Adī who was on the side of 'Ā'isha, Ṭalhā and al-Zubayr, and fought against 'Alī at the battle of the Camel, this title for 'Alī is an object of ridicule (a point which goes to prove the fact of its existence), since for the Banū 'Adī, the only true 'legatee' of the Prophet is Abū Bakr, whose daughter is now in battle against the 'Alids:

24. Al-Minqarī, *Waq'at Šifīn*, ed. 'A. M. Hārūn (Cairo 1382/1962), pp. 470f.; al-Thaqafī, *Kitāb al-ghārāt*, ed. J. al-Muḥaddith al-Urmawī (Tehran, 1395/1975), pp. 303ff.; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. Barbier de Meynard, rev. C. Pellat (Beirut, 1968–1979), vol. 3, p. 201ff.; (Pseudo-) Ibn Qutayba, *al-Imāma wa'l-siyāsa*, ed. M. M. al-Rāfi'ī (Cairo, 1322/1904), vol. 1, pp. 191f. Also, Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 240–241 and pp. 270–271.

25. Al-Thaqafī, *K. al-Ghārāt*, pp. 434–435; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, vol. 2, ed. M. B. al-Maḥmūdī (Beirut, 1974), pp. 74–75. Also, H. Lammens, *Etudes sur le règne du Calife Omayyade Mu'āwīa 1er* (Paris, 1908), p. 175; Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 263–264.

26. E.g. al-Ṭabarī, de Goeje, series 1, pp. 3350ff.; on *ḥadīths* concerning Ghadīr Khumm, see e.g. A. J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* (Leiden, 1936), see under *wālī*. Also, L. Vecchia Vaglieri, *EI2*, under *Ghadīr Khumm*.

We are 'Adī and we are looking for 'Alī (to kill him) ... we will kill all those who oppose the *waṣī* [i.e. Abū Bakr].²⁷

Al-Ṭabarī reports that after the assassination of the third caliph, 'Uthmān, poets competed to commemorate the event. Among them, al-Faḍl b. al-'Abbās b. 'Utba b. Abī Lahab took this opportunity to sing the praises of 'Alī:

Truly, among those who recall (*'inda dhī al-dhikrī*), the best among men after Muḥammad is indeed the legatee of the Chosen Prophet/He who, as the first, the closest (*ṣinw* or *ṣunw*) to the Prophet recited the Prayer and who, as the first, defeated the misguided of Badr.²⁸

In a letter probably written just before Ṣiffīn and which was reported by some of the historiographers and censored by others, Muḥammad, son of the first caliph, Abū Bakr, violently opposed Mu'āwiya. Referring to 'Alī, he describes him as the first man to have responded positively to Muḥammad's Message, to whom he was related as brother and cousin, of whom he was the legatee, who was the leader of the faithful and the father of his (Muḥammad's) descendants.²⁹

27. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 2, pp. 245–246.

28. Al-Ṭabarī, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 4, p. 426; the term *ṣinw/ṣunw*, that I have translated as 'the closest', literally means 'similar, same' and designates the brother, cousin or son. W. Madelung cites the poem using the edition by de Goeje, series 1, p. 3065, and attributes it instead to the father of al-Faḍl, al-'Abbās b. 'Utba who seems to have been the poet and spokesperson for the Banū Hāshim; *The Succession*, p. 186. Ibn Ḥanbal uses the term to define al-'Abbās's relationship to 'Abd Allāh, Muḥammad's father; see his *Musnad*, ed. Muḥammad al-Zuhri al-Ghamrāwī (Cairo, 1313/1896), vol. 1, p. 207 and vol. 2, p. 322.

29. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 2, pp. 393ff.; al-Minqarī, *Waq'at Ṣiffīn*, pp. 118ff.; al-Mas'ūdi, *Murūj*, vol. 3, pp. 197ff. Al-Ṭabarī expressly admits to having censored the letter because the masses (*āmma*) would not have tolerated it; ed. de Goeje, series 1, p. 3248. By this he surely means the Ḥanbalī activists of Baghdad whose hostility towards the great scholar was known to all; cf. al-Iṣfahānī, *Annaliūm Librī*, ed. Gottwald (Petropoli, 1884), vol. 2, p. 155; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam* (Hyderabad, 1357/1938), vol. 6, p. 172.

In one of his *ṭawīls*, the 'Alid poet of Baṣra, Abu'l-Aswad al-Du'alī (d. 69/688), citing his favorite personalities among the immediate blood relations of the Prophet, limits himself to naming 'Alī by the single term *waṣī*.³⁰ The same leitmotifs are found in sermons by al-Ḥasan, 'Alī's eldest son, made at the mosque in Kūfa after 'Alī's assassination; a sermon also reported by the Sunni al-Balādhurī and the pro-Shi'i Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 356/966).³¹ Shi'i sources, and more specifically works of *ḥadīth*, later took up the same themes to the full and embellished themes regarding the *sābiqa* and, even more so, the *qarāba* of 'Alī.

4. The basis of the religion of 'Alī

In what way do these ideas justify being given the appellation 'religion of 'Alī'? How and why might they constitute articles of faith? If 'Alī and his followers laid claim to them in such an obsessive manner and if among both those for and those against the 'Alids the habit had been formed of designating them by the expression *dīn 'Alī*, it is because they were based upon doctrinal and ideological justifications that seemed legitimate from a religious point of view and credible to those who professed them. It appears to me that two categories of 'legitimising proofs' supported these ideas and justified them by giving them the term *dīn 'Alī*: proofs of an Islamic nature based on the text of the Qur'ān and even more so, proofs based on ancestral beliefs.

30. *Dīwān Abu'l-Aswad al-Du'alī*, ed. M. Ḥ. Āl Yāsīn (Beirut, 1974), pp. 119–120; Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 20 vols (Bulāq, 1285/1868), vol. 12, p. 321 (a shorter version of the poem).

31. *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 3, ed. M. B. al-Maḥmūdī (Beirut, 1974), p. 28; Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. S. A. Ṣaqr (Cairo 1949; rpr., Qumm, 1416/1995), p. 62.

The Qur'ānic bases

Famous for his legendary knowledge of and scrupulous faithfulness to the text of the Qur'ān,³² 'Alī could not have failed to present elements of the revealed text in order to legitimise his claims. Here too, Madelung's scholarship will guide us. In a subsection of his dense and pertinent introduction to *The Succession to Muḥammad*, he assiduously examines all the Qur'ānic instances that might serve to justify the 'Alid claim to lead the Community after the Prophet's death. To my knowledge, this is the first time the evidence has been brought forward with such erudition and precision; it even serves as a focus and fundamental argument for the discourse underlying the entire work.³³ In summarising this work we will thus limit ourselves to concentrating in the main on the Qur'ānic proofs.

Genealogical Table of Muḥammad and 'Alī

Quṣayy 'Abd Manāf				
'Abd Shams	Nawfal		Hāshim	al-Muṭṭalib
Umayya				
Ḥarb	Abu'l-'Āṣ		'Abd al-Muṭṭalib	
Abū Sufyān	'Affān	'Abbās	'Abd Allāh	Abū Ṭālib
Mu'āwiya	'Uthmān		Muḥammad	'Alī
			Fāṭima	
				al-Ḥasan
				al-Ḥusayn

32. See e.g. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās, 9 vols (Beirut, 1380/1960), vol. 2, p. 338; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, vol. 7, p. 338; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāya fī gharīb al-ḥadīth wa'l-athar*, ed. al-Zāwī and al-Tināḥī, 4 vols (Cairo, 1963–1966; rpr. Beirut, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 102.

33. Madelung, *The Succession*, 'The obligation of the kinship and the families of the prophets in the Qur'ān', pp. 6–18; whence the reaction of certain critics of the book who perceive it as a kind of pro-Shi'i apologia. This is certainly a flagrant misunderstanding; but further analysis is beyond the scope of the present chapter.

The Qur'ān places great emphasis on respect for family and blood ties:³⁴

Surely God bids to justice and good-doing and giving to kinsmen (*dhi'l-qurbā*); and He forbids indecency, dishonour, and insolence, admonishing you, so that haply you will remember (Q 16:90)

And give the kinsman his right (Q 17:26)

They will question thee concerning what they should expend. Say: 'Whatsoever good you expend is for parents (*wālidayn*) and kinsmen (*aqrabīn*), orphans, the needy, and the traveller.' (Q 2:215)

Generosity to close relatives and providing them with material support is a religious duty but on condition that the latter are converts to Islam; though even if they are not, the Muslim is called upon to be just and impartial to those of his relatives who may have maintained their pagan beliefs (Q 4:135; 6:152; 9:23–24 and 113–114).³⁵ However, in spite of these limitations, the Qur'ān clearly establishes the superiority and pre-eminence of blood ties over all other kinds of bonds or alliances.

Those who are bound by blood (*ūlu'l-arḥām*) are nearer to one another in the Book of God than the believers and the emigrants. (Q 33:6)

Singing the praises of past converts, the Emigrants and the Helpers, verses 72 to 74 of Sura 8 are followed by the following verse (probably added later on):

And those who have believed afterwards and emigrated, and struggled with you – they belong to you; but those related by blood are nearer to one another in the Book of God.³⁶

34. The translation of the Qur'ān used in this work is A. J. Arberry, *The Koran* (Oxford, 1964).

35. Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 6–7.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

There is yet another important contributing factor for our subject: in the Qur'ānic 'History of Prophets', close relatives of the prophets play a vital role: they are the protectors of the Messengers of God against their adversaries and after the Messengers die, they become their inheritors in both temporal and spiritual matters. The prophets of the Banū Isrā'īl are in fact descendants of one and the same family going back to Noah and Adam; the line of this same family continues up to Jesus (Q 3:33–34 and 19:58). The chain of prophets and the importance of their inheritors in the economy of the sacred, as chosen from among their immediate family, are stressed by verses 84 to 89 of Sura 6:

And we gave to him [i.e. Abraham] Isaac and Jacob – each one We guided, And Noah We guided before; and of his seed David and Solomon, Job and Joseph, Moses and Aaron – even so We recompense the good-doers – Zachariah and John, Jesus and Elias; each was of the righteous; Ishmael and Elisha, Jonah and Lot – each one We preferred above all beings; and of their fathers, and of their seed, and of their brethren; and We elected them, and We guided them to a straight path.

That is God's guidance; He guides by it whom He will of His servants; had they been idolaters, it would have failed them, the things they did. Those are they to whom We gave the Book, the Judgement, the Prophethood.

All Noah's people are annihilated by the Flood, except for his family (*ahl*), apart from one son and the wife who had betrayed him (Q 11:40 and 45–46; 21:76–77; 23:27; 37:76–77). Similarly, Lot's relatives, except for his traitor-wife, were the only ones spared the catastrophe visited upon the people (Q 54:33–35; 56:10) since his family was composed of those who had 'purified themselves' (*yataṭahharūn*) (Q 27:56). Abraham, a central figure in the Qur'ān, is the patriarch of the prophets of the Banū Isrā'īl. All the prophets and transmitters of Scriptures after him are in fact his direct descendants via Isaac and his grandson Jacob, thus forming an uninterrupted chain of Messengers and Guides (*imāms*)

(Q 2:124; 19:49–50; 29:27; 57:26). Addressing Sarah and speaking about Abraham's family, the angels say:

What, dost thou marvel at God's command? The mercy of God and His blessings be upon you, O *Ahl al-Bayt*. (Q 11:76)³⁷

Moreover:

Yet We gave the people of Abraham the Book and the Wisdom, and We gave them a mighty kingdom (*mulkan 'azīman*). (Q 4:54)

Moses is assisted in his prophetic mission by his brother Aaron who partakes with him in an intimate relationship with God (Q 20:29–32 and 36; 21:48–49; 25:35). The enigmatic *baqiyya*, a relic containing the divine *sakīna* and signs of divine investiture and royalty of the Banū Isrā'īl, belongs to the family of the chosen brothers (Q 2:248). Similarly, David has Solomon, his son, inheritor and successor, as his assistant (Q 21:78; 27:16; 38:30). Zachariah, John's father, asks God for a divine son who would inherit the status of prophethood possessed by Jacob's family (Q 19:5–6). As for non-Israelite prophets, in this instance Shu'ayb from the

37. Regarding this phrase, 'Family of the Home' seems to me to be a more precise translation than the more conventional 'People of the House'. *Ahl* in Arabic, both in South Arabian as well as in Ugaritic, corresponds to the Accadian origin *ālu* (W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, Wiesbaden, 1965) and to the Hebrew *ohēl*. The latter designates the nomad's tent (e.g. Genesis 13:5; 18:1; Isaiah 38:12) or the tent as sanctuary (Exodus 33:7; Numbers 11:24) and as Residence/Home (*mishkan*) of God (Psalms 15:1; 27:5) (cf. Gesenius-Buhl, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch* [17th edn, Leiden, 1951], p. 95, col. 2). *Ahl*, place of residence, home, eventually came to designate those who live in this place, thus the family; it is the same term that according to the *Tāj al-'arūs*, gave us the term *āl* (family, descendants), with the letter *h* eliminated: *āl wa aṣluhu ahl ubdilāt al-hā' hamza fa šārat a-a-l-tawālat hamzatān fa ubdilāt al-thāniya alifan fa šāra āl* (al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-'arūs*, under *āl*). As for the term *bayt*, whether it means a constructed building, a tent or a natural site, it designates a place of residence; 'home' evokes the latter meaning. I shall return to other semantic levels related to *bayt*.

people of Midian and Šālīḥ from the Thamūd, their families also play a vital role as protectors and disciples (Q 11:91 and 27:49).³⁸

This eminent place accorded close relatives of preceding prophets could not have been left without any parallel with Muḥammad's immediate family. Some Qur'ānic passages are vague and indirect (Q 26:214, "*ashīrataka al-aqrabīn*"; Q42:23, '*al-mawadda fi'l-qurbā*'). Others certainly do refer to the family and blood relatives of the Prophet. These are verses relating to the distribution of a fifth of the spoils (*khums*) and a part of *fay*' – property of the infidels acquired without battle – to close relatives (*dhu'l-qurbā*) of the Prophet (Q 8:41 and 59:7). In the matter of the 'close relatives', practically all the exegetical and historiographical sources are in agreement in recognising the descendants of the brothers Hāshim and al-Muṭṭalib, the sons of Muḥammad's great grandfather, 'Abd Manāf, to the exclusion of another two of his sons, namely 'Abd Shams and Nawfal. According to many reports, these allocations compensated somewhat for the fact that Muḥammad's immediate relatives could not benefit from alms or charity (*ṣadaqa*, *zakāt*). The reason given for this interdiction is that the charity came from the people's 'impurities', whence the purifying function of giving charity. The status of purity associated with the Prophet's family was thus considered incompatible with receiving charity. As in the case of the purity of Lot's family, examined above, the Qur'ān also refers to the purity of Muḥammad's family:

O Ahl al-Bayt, God only desires to put away from you abomination and to cleanse you. (Q 33:33)

38. Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 8–12. For discussions regarding the term *baqiyya*, cf. R. Paret, 'Die Bedeutung des Wortes *baqīya* im Koran', in *Alttestamentliche Studien Friedrich Nötscher zum 60. Geburtstag* (Bonn, 1950), pp. 168–171; A. Spitaler, 'Was bedeutet *baqīya* im Koran?', in *Westöstliche Abhandlungen Rudolf Tschudi zum 70. Geburtstag* (Wiesbaden, 1954), pp. 137–146.

The spiritual and religious importance of Muḥammad's family is equally noted in the famous verse of the Ordeal, *āyat al-mubāhala* (Q 3:61). Just as the Qur'ān constantly establishes parallels between Muḥammad and previous prophets, in terms of his prophetic mission, the fierce resistance of his people and, finally, his victory thanks to God's support, so the similar status of Muḥammad's family and families of past prophets regarding spiritual and temporal heritage seems obvious. Admittedly, according to the dogma of the 'seal of prophecy' Muḥammad's inheritor could not lay claim to prophethood, however, it is just as true that among elements of the prophetic heritage bequeathed by the Envoys of God to their close relatives, the Qur'ān includes sovereignty (*mulk*), authority (*ḥukm*), wisdom (*ḥikma*), Scriptures (*kitāb*) and the imamate. Given this Qur'ānic evidence, it seems to me that W. Madelung is right to conclude that the Qur'ān advises consultation (*shūrā*) in certain cases but never for what bears upon the succession of prophets.³⁹

I will be returning to many of these points. Here I would like to note that, given his privileged relationship with the Prophet, 'Alī would surely not have missed the opportunity to point to this Qur'ānic evidence in order to legitimise his declarations. In his *Ṭabaqāt*, Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845) – an author who could hardly be suspected of pro-'Alid sympathies – recounts a report that seems especially telling in this regard. In a chapter devoted to 'the heritage of the Messenger of God and what he leaves behind' (*dhikr mīrāth rasūli'llāh wa mā taraka*), as derived from 'Abbās b. 'Abd Allāh b. Ma'bad, grandson of al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Ibn Sa'd reports that Fāṭima and al-'Abbās in the company of 'Alī approached the elected caliph, Abū Bakr, to ask him for their rightful share of Muḥammad's heritage. Abū Bakr is said to have replied:

39. Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 12–18.

'The Messenger of God said: "We [the prophets] do not leave behind an inheritance; all that we leave behind is charity." And I am now in charge of all that the Messenger of God left behind.'

Citing the Qur'ān, 'Alī is said to have replied:

"Solomon inherited from David" (Q 27:16) and [invoking God when asking Him for a son] Zachariah says: "So give me, from Thee, a kinsman who shall be my inheritor of the House of Jacob" (Q 19:6).'

Abū Bakr: 'By God, surely you know what I know.'

'Alī: 'It is the Book of God that speaks here.' After this there was silence and then they parted.⁴⁰

This legitimation by the Qur'ān was certainly a factor in the support that (according to the historiographers) the majority of the Qur'ān reciters (*qurrā*) gave to 'Alī at the time of his conflict with Mu'āwiya, especially before the start of the battle of Şiffin and the ensuing arbitration.⁴¹ However, in this early period of Islam, legitimation by the Qur'ān could definitely not guarantee unanimous agreement. The new religion would require several generations of assimilation to profoundly affect people's outlook and to establish itself in their hearts before it could become the kind of social phenomenon capable of shaping minds. To be credible during this early period, a speech or event had to be rooted in ancient, ancestral beliefs and to be supported by the tribal culture of Arab paganism if it were to resonate among recently converted Muslims.

The pre-Islamic basis

For more than a century, a number of eminent Orientalists and specialists in Arabic and Islamic studies have brought to light

40. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, p. 315. I. Hrbek, stressing among other things the incompatibility of the *ḥadīth* cited by Abū Bakr with the spirit and letter of the Qur'ān, considers it apocryphal, 'Muḥammads Nachlass und die Aliden', *Archiv Orientalní*, 18 (1950), pp. 143–149; Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 360–361.

41. Cf. Minqarī, *Waq'at Şiffin*, pp. 88ff.; al-Ṭabarī, ed. de Goeje, series 1, pp. 3385–3386.

and examined the remarkable continuity between the pre-Islamic period and the earliest days of Islam with regard to institutions, beliefs and rituals. These scholars include J. Wellhausen and I. Goldziher and the circle responsible for 'From Jāhiliyya to Islam' gathered around M. J. Kister and his colleagues and students, M. Lecker, U. Rubin, H. Busse and others, not to mention J. Henninger, R. B. Serjeant, T. Fahd, A. F. L. Beeston and J. Chelhod, and more recently E. Conte and J. Chabbi. Many of these have been led to study the system of family relations be it in its secular and sacred dimensions or its natural and supernatural aspects.

The outdated thesis presented by H. Lammens in *Le berceau de l'Islam*, according to which hereditary power and dynastic rulers were completely unknown if not utterly detested by the Arabs does not seem tenable any more.⁴² Ever since the monumental study by E. Tyan, *Institutions du droit public Musulman*, it has been established that though tribal secular leadership was not actually always hereditary religious leadership and theocratic functions depended directly on the importance of a noble lineage, *nasab*, and that this concept was particularly upheld in the tribe of Quraysh.⁴³ Even W. M. Watt, who in his biography of Muḥammad at times seem to concur closely with the opinion held by Lammens,⁴⁴ concedes in his *Islamic Political Thought*, that the Arabs regularly elected their leaders from specific families.⁴⁵ In this regard, the studies by R. B. Serjeant seem decisive. Over the course of a number of publications, the author establishes most convincingly that Muḥammad's rapid success and the ultimate ease he experienced in rallying of a large number of tribes to his cause, were essentially due to the fact that he belonged to a Meccan and Qurashī family; an aristocratic and theocratic family

42. H. Lammens, *Le berceau de l'Islam: l'Arabie occidentale à la veille de l'Hégire* (Rome, 1914), p. 314 et passim.

43. E. Tyan, *Institutions du droit public Musulman* (Paris, 1954–1956), vol. 1, pp. 97ff., 114ff.

44. W. M. Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (Oxford, 1961), esp. pp. 35–36.

45. W. M. Watt, *Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh, 1968), p. 31.

in which religious functions, as was the case throughout Arabia, were hereditary. Were he not part of this lineage, which the English scholar terms 'The Holy Family', Muḥammad would have had no credibility with other tribes.⁴⁶

Well before Muḥammad's time, the Quraysh were held to be a tribe that benefitted from divine protection due to its sacred status as *ahl al-ḥaram*, the People of the Meccan Sanctuary and the area surrounding it. According to U. Rubin, early Muslim exegesis even maintained traces of this ancient belief.⁴⁷ Muḥammad's ancestor Quṣayy seems to have been the guardian and leader of the sanctuary; from then on, the different clans of his direct descendants inherited various responsibilities for the ritual functions relating to the pilgrimage: guarding the Ka'ba (*hijāba*), providing potable water (*siqāya*), food (*rifāda*) and banners (*liwā'*) as well as the privilege of *nadwa*, a term vaguely designating either the council of tribal leadership or the meeting place for the resolution of inter-tribal differences.⁴⁸ One finds traces of the hereditary sacred functions of Muḥammad's ancestors in poems by the Prophet's bard, Ḥassān b. Thābit (d. 54/674).⁴⁹ Muḥammad himself is said to have designated the 'Holy Family' of the Quraysh as consisting of the descendants of al-Muṭṭalib and those of his brother, Hāshim, the great grandfather of the Prophet (see the

46. R. B. Serjeant, 'The Saiyids of Ḥaḍramawt', *An Inaugural Lecture at the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1956 (London, 1957), pp. 3–29; R. B. Serjeant, 'Ḥaram and ḥawṭah, the Sacred Enclave in Arabia', pp. 41–58; R. B. Serjeant, 'The "Constitution" of Medina', pp. 3–16; R. B. Serjeant, 'The *Sunnah Jāmi'ah*, Pacts with the Yathrib Jews, and the *tahrim* of Yathrib: Analysis and Translation of the Documents Comprised in the So-called "Constitution of Medina"', *BSOAS*, 41 (1978), pp. 1–42 (repr. in *Studies in Arabian History and Civilisation*, articles VIII, III, V and VI).

47. U. Rubin, 'The *ilāf* of Quraysh. A Study of Sūra CVI', *Arabica*, 31–32 (1984), pp. 165–188.

48. R. B. Serjeant, 'Ḥaram and ḥawṭah', pp. 53ff. U. Rubin, 'The Ka'ba: Aspects of Its Ritual Functions and Position in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic times', *JSAI*, 8 (1986), pp. 97–131.

49. Ḥassān ibn Thābit, *Diwan*, ed. W. N. 'Arafat (London, 1971), vol. 1, p. 109.

genealogical tree above). The canonical works of *ḥadīth* leave no doubt about this by identifying the 'near kin' (*dhu'l-qurbā*) mentioned by the Qur'ān as those that receive the *khums* and *fay*; the receipt of alms is forbidden to them as descendants of al-Muṭṭalib and even more often of Hāshim.⁵⁰ Moreover, we know that ever since pre-Islamic times the Banū'l-Muṭṭalib and the Banū Hāshim were strongly bound to each other by the *ḥilf al-ḥudūd*.⁵¹

In this connection, the tradition reported by Abū Dāwūd and al-Maqrīzī, on the authority of al-Zuhri, Sa'id b. al-Musayyib and Jubayr b. Muṭ'im, is the most significant: after the victory at Khaybar, the Prophet divided the share of the close relatives (*sahm dhi'l-qurbā*) between the Banū Hāshim and the Banū'l-Muṭṭalib, thus excluding the Banū Nawfal and the Banū 'Abd Shams (Nawfal and 'Abd Shams are two other brothers of Muṭṭalib and Hāshim). So, the reporter Jubayr b. Muṭ'im (a descendant of Nawfal), and 'Uthmān b. 'Affān (the future third caliph, descendant of 'Abd Shams) protest to Muḥammad saying:

Messenger of God, because of the place God has accorded you amongst them, we do not deny the excellence of the Banū Hāshim. But what of our brothers, the Banū'l-Muṭṭalib? You have given them a share and you have excluded us while our relationship to you is the same as theirs.

50. Cf. A. J. Wensinck, *Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition* (Leiden, 1927), p. 266. On the part reserved for the Banū Hāshim in the *diwān* by 'Umar see Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 3, pp. 294ff., completed in al-Balādhuri, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1866), series 1, pp. 448ff. On 'aṭā' reserved for the Banū Hāshim see al-Zubayr b. Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab Quraysh*, ed. M. M. Shākir (Cairo, 1381/1961), p. 111. For an exclusively 'Abbasid appropriation of these facts, refer to Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, ed. I. 'Abbās (Beirut and London, 1985), pp. 102–104, 142ff.

51. W. M. Watt, *Muḥammad at Mecca* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 6–7; C. Pellat, 'Ḥilf al-ḥudūd', *EI2*.

Muḥammad replies:

We [the Banū Hāshim] and the Banū'l-Muṭṭalib have never been separated, neither during the *Jāhiliyya* nor in Islam. We and they are one and the same.⁵²

The saintliness of the Banū Hāshim becomes evident from the subtle analyses of the *Hāshimiyyāt*, a collection of poems by al-Kumayt b. Zayd al-Asadī al-Kūfī (d. 126/743),⁵³ undertaken by T. Nagel, M. Sharon and especially by W. Madelung in his monograph dedicated to this work.⁵⁴ It seems that among the descendants of Hāshim, Muḥammad recognised his own family as *the* 'Holy Family' par excellence.⁵⁵ Muḥammad would have designated this 'Holy Family' by the expression *ahl baytī*, surely having in mind the Qur'ānic occurrences of the expression *ahl al-bayt* that we have examined above. Apart from the purity that the Qur'ān ascribes to Muḥammad's *ahl al-bayt* (Q 33:33), the sacred dimension linked to the term *bayt* must certainly have played a role as well. Indeed, the

52. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, ed. M. M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, 4 vols (Cairo, n.d.), ch. 19, no. 51; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Nizā' wa'l-takhāṣum fi mā bayna banī Umayya wa banī Hāshim*, ed. Ḥ. Mu'nis (Cairo, 1984), p. 60 (slightly different and shorter version).

53. Ed. J. Horowitz, *Die Hāshimijāt des Kumait* (Leiden, 1904; Arabic text reprinted in Qumm, n.d. [ca. 1970]).

54. T. Nagel, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung des Abbasidischen Kalifats* (Bonn, 1972), pp. 70ff. and pp. 79ff.; M. Sharon, *Black Banners from the East* (Leiden and Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 76ff.; W. Madelung, 'The Hāshimiyyāt of al-Kumayt and Hāshimi Shi'ism', *SI*, 70 (1990), pp. 5–26.

55. In this context, in terms of methodology, traditions concerning 'monotheism', signs of election and the saintliness of the ancestors and close relatives of the Prophet, specifically his grandfather 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, his father 'Abd Allāh and his paternal uncle Abū Ṭālib ('Alī's father who adopted and raised Muḥammad after the death of 'Abd Allāh) cannot be exploited here due to their strong Islamic connotations that in turn prove their later date. Regarding these traditions and the historical problems they pose, see e.g. T. Fahd, *La divination arabe* (Strasbourg, 1971; 2nd edn, Paris, 1987), pp. 82ff. and pp. 260ff.; U. Rubin, 'Prophets and Progenitors in Early Shi'a Tradition', *JSAI*, 1 (1979); C. Gilliot, 'Muqātil, grand exégète, traditionniste et théologien maudit', *JA*, 279/1–2 (1991), pp. 68–70; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 103–104 and note 204 (*Divine Guide*, p. 40); Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des tribus*, pp. 166ff.

religious nature of the vocable, originating from the antique heritage of Semitic languages in which it means temple, sanctuary or a supernatural being's place of residence, is again clearly evident in the ways that the Qur'ān employs the term; for example, in the manner that it designates the Ka'ba or in *al-bayt al-ma'mūr* and in the expression *rabb al-bayt* in the early suras, 105, *al-Fil* and 106, *Quraysh*.⁵⁶

It is not a matter of determining here the full meaning that Muḥammad attributed to the expression *ahl al-bayt*, at one and the same time of religious, sacred and political import.⁵⁷ A great many studies have been dedicated to this, analysing both the diverse classical exegeses of the expression and the material which is of a historical and philological nature: from H. Lammens and R. Strothmann who see in it only an allusion to the Prophet's wives⁵⁸ and R. Paret, for whom the *ahl al-bayt* designates adherents of the

56. In Accadian, the term *bīt* designates the temple as a whole, or rooms of which it is made up (W. von Soden, *AHW*); the same evolution is encountered in Hebrew, as well as in Syriac and Arabic. In parallel with its profane, or secular, meaning of 'residence', the religious nature of the term is more specifically emphasised when it is preceded by an article such as *ha-b-ba'it* in Hebrew (Micah 3:12; Haggai 1:8) (Gesenius-Buhl, *Hebräisches*, pp. 95–98) or *al-bayt* in Arabic (e.g. Q 2:125, 127 etc.). Apparently, during the stage of nomadism, among the Arabs as well as the Hebrews, *bayt* was often followed by the word *il/el* (divinity, supernatural entity or protector), which gives us *batil/Bêt-El* (whence 'Betyl'). This composite form originally designated the mobile sanctuary in which the symbols and objects required for worship were held, eventually itself becoming the symbol and/or object of worship. Cf. H. Lammens, 'Le culte des Bétyles et les processions religieuses chez les Arabes préislamites', *BIFAO*, 17 (1919–1920), pp. 39–101; T. Fahd, *Le Panthéon de l'Arabie Centrale à la veille de l'Hégire* (Paris, 1968), ch. 1; J. Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des tribus*, see index under 'bayt', 'beth', 'bétyle'. Regarding the meaning of the word in south-Arabia see A. F. L. Beeston, 'The So-called Harlots of Ḥaḍramawt', *Oriens*, 5 (1952), pp. 21ff., 'Kingship in Ancient South-Arabia', *JESHO*, 15 (1972), pp. 251ff.

57. M. Sharon interprets the expression, in a pre-Islamic context, as 'the leading noble families' among tribes, and more exclusively the tribe of the Quraysh; see his 'Ahl al-Bayt – People of the House', *JSAI*, 8 (1986), pp. 169–184, respectively pp. 183 and 179.

58. Especially in Q 33:33; H. Lammens, *Fātima et les filles de Mahomet* (Rome, 1912), p. 97 et passim; R. Strothmann, *Das Staatsrecht der Zaiditen* (Strasbourg, 1912), pp. 19ff.

cult of the Ka'ba,⁵⁹ to the meticulously prepared monographs by M. Sharon on the various connotations depending on changing times as well as religious and political trends;⁶⁰ studies which seem to me to be decisive regarding certain points and to which I will have the opportunity to return and also considering W. Madelung, according to whom the expression essentially designates the descendants of Hāshim in general.⁶¹ Still, it is useful to recall, as I. Goldziher so aptly demonstrated, that, in spite of the benefit that the 'Alids were to gain from it, the majority opinion had very early on identified Muḥammad's *ahl al-bayt* with the *ahl al-kisā'*, namely Fāṭima, 'Alī, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn.⁶² As an especially telling example, almost all of the numerous early exegeses of verse 33:33, regarding the purity of Muḥammad's *ahl al-bayt*, as reported by al-Ṭabarī in his monumental Qur'ānic commentary, lean in this direction.⁶³ Whatever the case may be, in the context of the problem which now preoccupies us, frankly it seems unthinkable that 'Alī would not have claimed to belong to the Prophet's *ahl al-bayt*. He would have also laid claim exclusively for himself and his progeny to those things in the prophetic heritage concerned with spiritual and temporal matters, thus making of them a veritable collection of articles of faith called *dīn 'Alī*.⁶⁴

59. Especially in Q 11:73 and 33:33; cf. his article 'Der Plan einer neuen, leicht kommentierten Koranübersetzung', in Paret (ed.), *Orientalistische Studien Enno Littmann zu seinem 60. Geburtstag* (Leiden 1935), pp. 121–130, esp. pp. 127f.

60. 'Ahl al-Bayt – People of the House'; 'The Umayyads as *ahl al-bayt*', *JSAI*, 14 (1991), pp. 115–152; see also his article, 'The Development of the Debate around the Legitimacy of Authority in Early Islam', *JSAI*, 5 (1984), pp. 121–142.

61. 'The *Hāshimīyyāt* of al-Kumayt', esp. pp. 15, 21, 24–25.

62. I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, ed. S. M. Stern, vol. 2 (London, 1971), pp. 103ff.; see also sources noted by M. Sharon, 'Ahl al-Bayt – People of the House', pp. 172–173.

63. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, ed. M. M. Shākir and A. M. Shākir (Cairo, 1373–1388/1955–1969), vol. 22, pp. 5–7.

64. In his long letter to Mu'āwiya, reported by several historiographers (Minqarī, al-Balādhurī, al-Ṭabarī) and analysed by Madelung (*The Succession*, pp. 212ff.), 'Alī seems to have identified the *ahl al-bayt* with the Banū Hāshim

‘Alī is actually related to Muḥammad by the two principal aspects of Arab familial ties (*qarāba*), namely *nasab* and *muṣāhara*. Terms difficult to render in translation, the first conveys the sense of genealogy, provenance or paternal lineage, ties by blood or by alliance, noble birth and affinity. The second, as rich in meaning as the first, evokes in its original sense the idea of fusing and thus affinity, relationship through women, an alliance by marriage. Thus, in general, *nasab* refers to a relationship by blood and *muṣāhara* to a link or alliance by marriage.⁶⁵ ‘Alī was Muḥammad’s cousin, the son of his paternal uncle, one of the noblest relationships characterising *nasab* according to the tribal conception.⁶⁶ Once he became the Prophet’s son-in-law, he was also related by *muṣāhara*, thus fulfilling with regard to the latter, the condition of *wālī*, that is, relative by blood and/or by alliance;⁶⁷ the significance this term was to acquire later in Shi’ism is well known.

Other facts pertaining to ancestral beliefs about the supranatural aspects of relationships also seem to have played a role in the establishment of ‘the religion of ‘Alī’. In the context of our

and Banū’l-Muṭṭalib; however, concerning succession to the Prophet, he would most certainly have thought of himself and his sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn.

65. See P. Bonte, E. Conte, C. Hames and A. W. Ould Cheikh, *Al-Ansāb. La quête des origines* (Paris, 1991), pp. 65ff. The third aspect of the *qarāba* is the *riḍā’a* (adoption by milk); see *ibid.*, pp. 73ff. For a more detailed analysis, see J. Cuisenier and A. Miquel, ‘La terminologie arabe de la parenté. Analyse sémantique et analyse componentielle’, *L’Homme*, 5/3–4 (1965), pp. 15–79. In the Qur’ān, these two terms are inseparably linked in verse 25:54: ‘And it is He who created of water a mortal, and made him kindred of blood and marriage (*fa ja’alahu nasaban wa ṣihran*)’. E. Conte proposes ‘relatives (by blood ties) and allies (by virtue of marriage or women)’, see *Al-Ansāb. La quête des origines*, p. 66.

66. At the moment when the tribe is defined as an organic group of relatives descended from the same lineage – *awlād al-‘amm*; on this important notion, studies by the earliest major Arabic and Islamic scholars are still the most reliable reference works; see for example I. Goldziher, ‘Polyandry and Exogamy among the Arabs’, *The Academy*, 13/26 (1880); J. Wellhausen, ‘Die Ehe bei den Arabern’, *Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft und der Georg-Augustus-Universität zu Göttingen*, 11 (1893); O. Proksch, *Über die Blutrache bei den vorislamischen Arabern und Mohammeds Stellung zu ihr* (Leipzig, 1899), esp. pp. 33ff.

67. Cf. Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des tribus*, p. 654.

subject, these beliefs seem inextricably linked to certain aspects of Muḥammad's personality as perceived by certain of his contemporaries.⁶⁸ Muḥammad could have truly possessed a supra-natural aura in their eyes. T. Fahd has shown the continuity of ancient magic-related personas such as the 'soothsayer' (*kāhin*), the 'poet' (*shā'ir*), the clairvoyant (*'arrāf*), and so forth alongside the prophetic figure of Muḥammad: one finds here and there, obviously with different combinations and justifications, communication with supernatural beings, different kinds of divination, inspirations and oracles, healing powers, use of a particular language, knowledge of hidden things, power over objects and so forth. By means of in-depth analyses, this great scholar has, in my view, demonstrated to what extent ancient Arab beliefs and prophethood encountered one another and influenced each other.⁶⁹ According to numerous passages in the Qur'ān, Muḥammad was compared by his adversaries to *kāhins*, *sāḥirs* and *shā'irs* (Q 37:36; 52:29; 59:42). He was often accused of being possessed or inspired by *jinns* (expressions *majnūn* or *mā bihi ... min jinna*). J. Chabbi argues that this was a means by which the Prophet's adversaries sought to trivialise his actions, that is to say to portray him as a kind of magical character, not in a relationship with God but with different kinds of 'genies', characters familiar to Arabia from time immemorial.⁷⁰

Linked to the famous question of Muḥammad's human 'informants', relentlessly upheld by his adversaries, Hūd b.

68. On this point of view, now consult U. Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder. The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton, 1995).

69. Fahd, *La divination arabe*, pp. 63ff. ('Divination et prophétie'), pp. 88ff. ('Prophète et divin') and p. 263, *passim*; see also T. Fahd, 'Le monde du sorcier en Islam', in *Le monde du sorcier* (Paris, 1966), pp. 155–204. On the difficulty in translating the term *kāhin* (priest – soothsayer – oracle – doctor), see *La divination arabe*, pp. 94f. Regarding *shā'ir* ('poet'), etymologically 'he who knows' and has theurgic knowledge, see also F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden, 1971), pp. 12–13.

70. *Le Seigneur des tribus*, pp. 182–183 and pp. 527–529.

Muḥkim/Muḥakkam (second half of third/ninth century) reports a saying by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), according to which one of these presumed informants was a servant of Ibn al-Ḥaḍramī, the famous soothsayer of the age of the *jāhiliyya*.⁷¹ In another report, reproduced by al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122), the same al-Ḥasan speaks of 'Ubayd b. al-Khaḍīr, an Ethiopian soothsayer.⁷² According to Ibn al-Athīr, before his conversion to Islam, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb regarded the Prophet as a *kāhin* and a *shā'ir*.⁷³ Finally, according to a report by Ibn Sa'd, not a supporter of the 'Alid cause, at the beginning, Muḥammad himself was concerned about being a soothsayer.⁷⁴

We know that in a number of ancient belief systems, body fluids such as blood, sperm, saliva, milk and sweat, are considered to be agents for thaumaturgic transmission; they can bear and transmit beneficial or harmful elements, faculties, virtues or spiritual influences from the bearer to another, more specifically, by heredity, to their descendants.⁷⁵ The Arabs, too, held these kinds of beliefs. The *kāhin* was believed to have the power to master and direct consciously and wilfully what he transmitted by his bodily fluids.⁷⁶ Muḥammad appears to have been

71. Hūd b. Muḥkim/Muḥakkam al-Ḥawwārī, *Tafsīr*, ed. B. Sharīfī (Beirut, 1990), vol. 2, p. 389.

72. Abū Muḥammad al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī al-musammā bi-Ma'ālīm al-tanzīl*, Ḥ. 'A. al-'Akk and M. Sawār (Beirut, 1992), vol. 3, p. 361. Regarding the Prophet's 'informants', now consult C. Gilliot, 'Les "informateurs" juifs et chrétiens de Muḥammad', *JSAI*, 22 (1998), pp. 84–126, a study which revisits and very usefully supplements the preceding works by A. Sprenger and T. Nöldeke (respectively: *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad*, 2 vols, [Berlin, 1861–1862], and 'Hatte Muḥammad christliche Lehrer?', *ZDMG*, 12, [1858], pp. 699–708).

73. *Uṣd al-ghāba*, ed. M. Fāyḍ et al. (Cairo, 1963–1972), vol. 4, p. 74.

74. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1/1, p. 129.

75. Cf. e.g. A. van Gennep, *Les rites de passage* (Paris, 1909), pp. 41ff.

76. T. Witton Davies, *Magic, Divination and Demonology* (London, 1933; rpr. Baghdad, n.d. [ca. 1960]), pp. 70ff.; E. O. James, *The Nature and Function of Priesthood* (London, 1955), pp. 87ff.; J. Henninger, *La société bédouine ancienne* (Rome, 1959), index; J. Chelhod, *Les structures du sacré chez les arabes* (Paris, 1986), pp. 189f.

associated with this conception in a number of reports regarding him, both directly and allusively, in which the subject of different organic fluids is discussed.

The exchange of blood made two men brothers or allied relatives.⁷⁷ J. Wellhausen is right to compare the result of Arab blood pacts with *Verbrüderung* and *adoptio in fratres*.⁷⁸ In spite of the great discretion of the Islamic sources, it seems certain that rituals of 'the pact of chosen brotherhood' (*mu'ākhāt*), practised twice by the Prophet upon his arrival in Medina, were accompanied by the exchange of blood. A practice, originating according to L. Caetani, from the ancient Arabic *hilf*,⁷⁹ and already a subject of the pre-Islamic poetry of al-A'shā Maymūn,⁸⁰ it carried infinitely more weight than Qur'ānic and/or Islamic arguments in winning over the Anṣār in Medina. According to a report given by Ibn Hishām, on the occasion of the second meeting in 'Aqaba, faced with the reluctance of the Medinans to conclude a pact with him, Muḥammad declares:

Your blood is mine. I am one of you and you are mine. Your enemies are my enemies; your friends, my friends. Choose twelve leaders among you in order to represent you in the ritual of the oath (*hilf*).⁸¹

77. W. Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1903), pp. 50f. and his *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (2nd edn, Edinburgh, 1914), pp. 314ff., 479ff.

78. *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1884), pp. 124, 127–128.

79. *Annali dell'Islam*, vol. 1, p. 408.

80. 'They swear by darkly intense black blood: we never wish to separate,' cited by J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums* p. 128, and reported by E. Conte, 'Entrer dans le sang. Perceptions arabes des origines', in *Al-Ansāb. La quête des origines*, p. 92.

81. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sira al-nabawiyya*, ed. M. Saqqā, I. Abyārī and 'A. Shalabī (2nd edn, Cairo, 1955), vol. 1, pp. 446 and 454; al-Ṭabarī, de Goeje, series 1, pp. 1,220–1,221.

During the battle of Ḥunayn in the year 8/630, in the midst of the general disarray of Muslim victims when ambushed by the Hawāzin, the Prophet asks his uncle 'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib to use his booming voice to remind the troops of bonds sealed by blood.⁸² The different episodes narrated in Ibn Hishām's account demonstrate that this kind of speech, rooted in ancient culture, was more favourably received by the Arabs than the prophetic statements made by Muḥammad.⁸³ The second pact of brotherhood is of even more interest to us. This, of course, is the ritual of the *mu'ākhāt*, promoted by Muḥammad (according to Ibn Ḥabīb)⁸⁴ among the Muslims of Mecca, from the Meccan period onwards; or (according to Ibn Hishām)⁸⁵ upon his arrival in Medina among both the Meccans and Medinans.

During the 'twinning' ritual, Muḥammad chose 'Alī as his brother. What is remarkable is that according to Ibn Ḥabīb the *mu'ākhāt*, made on 'the basis of law (?) and sharing' (*'alā'l-ḥaqq wa'l-mu'āsāt*) implied that upon the death of either individual, the other, his 'brother', had priority as inheritor,⁸⁶ which seems authentic, since in verses 4:33, 8:75 and especially 33:6, the Qur'an seems to call this institution into question vigorously by stressing the priority of a relationship over the pact of brotherhood.⁸⁷ On the basis of, among others, Roman legal sources concerning the governing of the Bedouin population in Syria during the fifth century AD and studied by Bruns and Sachau (once more proving this to be an age-old practice), E. Conte concludes that the *mu'ākhāt*, sealed by blood, made 'twin brothers' of close relatives

82. Ibn Hishām, *Sira*, vol. 2, pp. 442–443.

83. Cf. on this subject, W. Atallah, 'Les survivances préislamiques chez le Prophète et ses Compagnons', *Arabica*, 24/3 (1977), pp. 299–310.

84. *Kitāb al-muḥabbar*, ed. I. Lichtenstaedter (Hyderabad, 1942), pp. 70ff.

85. Ibn Hishām, *Sira*, vol. 1, pp. 344–346; also, Serjeant, 'The "Constitution" of Medina', p. 6.

86. Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-muḥabbar*, p. 71.

87. See also W. M. Watt, 'Mu'ākhāt', *EI2*; Conte, 'Entrer dans le sang. Perceptions arabes des origines', pp. 93–99.

(*qarā'ib*), who were classified as first cousins (*ibnā'l-'amm*) and as a consequence inheritors of the male lineage (*'aṣaba*); by establishing a relationship, the 'twinning' pact created a common filiation between 'brothers';⁸⁸ which is to say that the *mu'ākhāt* itself enabled 'Alī to claim the prophetic heritage; this may explain the almost complete silence of non-Shi'i sources on this episode in the life of Muḥammad, a rather curious silence about one of the founding acts of the Muslim community in Medina.⁸⁹

There is more. For the Arabs, just like nobility, *kahāna* is hereditary. The qualities of the *kāhin* or nobles are transmitted by various means, including the sperm of the father.⁹⁰ In pre-Islamic Arabia, in order to bear children of distinguished pedigree, the Bedouins went so far as to 'lend' their wives to nobles whose sperm was highly praised.⁹¹ In terms of the qualities of saintliness, Islamic sources speak repeatedly about the power of transmission of the seminal substance from Muḥammad's ancestors, manifested by the 'Light' and symbolised by the *ṣulb* (kidney, loins), an organ regarded as the repository of the semen.⁹² Passing via the uterus (*raḥim*) of the woman, the repository for her 'seed', the man's semen forms the milk in the mother's breast, which in turn enables the transmission of the father's qualities to his child; whence the inseparable link between sperm and milk that one finds in expressions such as 'milk is from man'

88. Conte, 'Entrer dans le sang. Perceptions arabes des origines', p. 94.

89. Regarding the total silence of the sources, see D. Santillana, *Istituzioni di diritto musulmano malichita con riguardo anche al sistema sciafiita* (Rome, 1938), vol. 1, p. 196, note 8; consult also the 'skeletal' bibliography of the article 'Mu'ākhāt' by W. M. Watt.

90. For example Fahd, *La divination arabe*, pp. 23ff.

91. On this practice called *iktisāb*, i.e. 'obtaining' (of the seminal substance and thus noble race), see al-Alūsī, *Bulūgh al-arab fī ma'rifat aḥwāl al-'arab* (Cairo, 1928), vol. 2, p. 4. The custom still designated by the terms *iktisāb* or *kash*, is to this day practised among some Yemeni tribes, cf. J. Chelhod, 'Du nouveau à propos du "matriarcat" arabe', *Arabica*, 28/1 (1981), p. 82.

92. For sources and studies on this subject see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, see index under '*ṣulb*', '*aṣlāb*' and '*nūr*'.

(*al-laban min al-mar*'), 'the reproductive milk' (*laban al-faḥl*) or 'the unique sperm' (*liqāḥ wāḥid*) that designate both the man's seminal fluid as well as the woman's milk.⁹³ The father's sperm provides the child's flesh and blood (*dam wa laḥm*); the mother gives form to this matter and completes the formation of the child by her milk, which is compared to the father's sperm.⁹⁴ Issuing from the same Hāshimid seed as the Prophet and married to Fāṭima, 'Alī also became the father of the male descendants of Muḥammad. And Fāṭima, whose most common title among the Shi'is is 'the Confluence of two Lights' (*majma' al-nūrayn*),⁹⁵ being born from Muḥammad's seed and the recipient of 'Alī's, becomes the other factor in the transmission of prophetic virtues. 'Alī seems to have been fully convinced of these laws.

According to a report by al-Ṭabarī, during his conflict with Mu'āwiya, just before the arbitration of Ṣiffin, at the moment in Kūfa when part of his army had dispersed, 'Alī at one point decided to engage in battle and to fight to the death if necessary. However, upon seeing al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn he realised that if they were to perish, the Muslims would be entirely deprived of descendants of the Prophet. The conclusion one draws from al-Ṭabarī's account is that this was the main reason that led 'Alī put a halt to the campaign.⁹⁶ As reported by al-Maqrizī, some Muslims held the opinion that if 'Alī had directly succeeded the Prophet, as the father of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, people would have concluded that the caliphate was a hereditary sovereignty (*mulk mutawārath*). This seems historically plausible.⁹⁷

93. J. Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1950), p. 194 and n. 4; S. Altorki, 'Milk-Kinship in Arab Society: An Unexplored Problem in the Ethnography of Marriage', *Ethnology*, 19 (1980), pp. 233–244, esp. 234ff.

94. P. Bonte, 'Égalité et hiérarchie dans une tribu maure', in *Al-Ansāb. La quête des origines*, p. 158 et passim.

95. See al-Ṭurayhī, Fakhr al-Dīn, *Majma' al-baḥrayn wa maṭla' al-nayyirayn* (Tehran, 1321/1903), index under 'majma' al-nūrayn'.

96. Al-Ṭabarī, ed. de Goeje, series 1, pp. 3,346–3,347.

97. *Al-Nizā' wa'l-takhāsum*, p. 92.

Saliva is also considered a factor in thaumaturgic transmission. The giving of saliva is the famous practice known as *taḥnīk*, termed 'sputation' by C. Gilliot.⁹⁸ However, according to Arab lexicographers, Ibn Manẓūr or al-Zabīdī for example, the verbal form means 'to rub the roof of the mouth' when accompanied with a complementary noun (*ḥannaka bi-* e.g. *ḥannakahu bi-tamratin*, rub the roof of another's mouth with a [crushed] date, *ḥannakahu bi'l-iṣbi'*, with a finger). Employed without a complement, it means to put one's saliva in someone's mouth (*ḥannaka Zaydun* 'Amran, lit.: with his saliva, Zayd rubs the roof of 'Amr's mouth); in the latter instance, the meaning may be clarified by the addition of the word, 'saliva' (*ḥannakahu bi-rīqihi*).⁹⁹ Saliva can protect, heal, transmit virtues or skills, but also destroy or humiliate. Depending on the intention of one who uses it, it may be an initiation, a blessing, a medicament or a malign act.¹⁰⁰ Both *ḥadīth* and *sīra* literature as well as historiographical works report many examples of *taḥnīk* by the Prophet. The aim is either therapeutic: Muḥammad in this manner cured the ailing hand of Umm Jalil bint al-Mujallal's son¹⁰¹ and epilepsy in a seven-year-old child;¹⁰² or initiatory: Muḥammad transmitted knowledge to Ibn 'Abbās;¹⁰³ or especially the transmission

98. In his fundamental article 'Portrait "mythique" d'Ibn 'Abbās', *Arabica*, 32 (1985), pp. 127–184; pp. 143–144.

99. *Lisān al-'arab*, *Tāj al-'arūs*.

100. Van Gennep, *Les rites de passage*, pp. 138–139 (*taḥnīk* as initiatory ritual); J. Desparmet, *Le mal magique* (Algiers and Paris, 1932), pp. 98ff.

101. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, ed. Muḥammad al-Zuhri al-Ghamrāwī (Cairo, 1313/1896), vol. 3, p. 107.

102. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra Ibn Ishāq al-musammāt bi-kitāb al-mubtada' wa'l-mab'ath wa'l-maghāzī*, ed. M. Ḥamidullāh (Rabat, 1976), p. 103; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3 vols (Cairo, 1378/1958), 'ṭibb', 21.

103. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa'l-nihāya* (Beirut, 1977), vol. 8, p. 295. See Gilliot, 'Portrait "mythique" d'Ibn 'Abbās', p. 143; cf. also Van Gennep, *Les rites de passage*, p. 138. In 1973, I witnessed ritual of *taḥnīk* among the Qādirī dervishes of Iranian Baluchistan; according to them, the master transmits *ilm* and *'amal* to the disciple, which to the dervishes mean initiatory knowledge and supernatural powers.

of blessings and moral virtues: there are many accounts of parents taking their children to the Prophet in order that he may practise *taḥnik*;¹⁰⁴ other accounts speak of new converts who ask the Prophet to perform *taḥnik*.¹⁰⁵ It is useful here to note the direct link between *taḥnik* and *baraka/tabarruk*. In a number of *ḥadīths*, both roots are used (*fa-yubarriku 'alayhim wa yuḥannikuhum*; *ḥannakahu fa-barraka 'alayhi*, etc.).¹⁰⁶

Baraka, a word in Muslim hagiography which eventually comes to mean a kind of mysterious and beneficial flow, an energy or spiritual influx transmitted by contact, affecting living things and objects, originally meant abundant rain or the camping of a camel nearby a source of water; or yet again what the camel does during this stay, that is, chewing on its food and (once mixed in saliva) feeding its little ones with it. In his excellent article on this point, J. Chelhod demonstrates how this latter meaning led to the interpretation of *baraka* as the spiritual energy that the father transmits to his newly born child by placing him upon his knees and putting saliva in his mouth, blessing him and in this way

104. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 'aqīqa', 1; 'adab', 109; Muslim, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 2 vols (rpr. Istanbul, 1383/1963), 'adab', vol. 1, pp. 23–28, 'ṭahāra', 101; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 3, pp. 105–106, 171, 175, 181, 188, 254 and 288; vol. 4, p. 399; vol. 6, pp. 93, 212, 347. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 'adab', 107. On this aspect of the practice, now consult A. Giladi, 'Some Notes on *taḥnik* in Medieval Islam', *JNES*, 3 (1988), pp. 175–179.

105. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 'manāqib al-Anṣār', 45; 'zakāt', 69, 'dhabā'ih', 35; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ/Sunan*, ed. A. M. Shākir, 5 vols (Cairo, 1356/1937), 'manāqib', 44; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, 'jihād', 52. In their translation of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* by al-Bukhārī, O. Houdas and W. Marçais seem to wish to ignore the meaning of *taḥnik* employed without a complementary noun; indeed the term is regularly translated with the complement (in this instance, 'a date'), even when the original text does not mention it; see El-Bokhārī, *Les traditions islamiques*, 4 vols (Paris, 1903–1914, rpr. 1977), see vol. 2, pp. 681ff. and n. 2. In the 5th volume (intro. and amends by M. Hamidullah, Paris, 1981), the error has not been corrected.

106. Refer to the preceding two footnotes.

according him his protection.¹⁰⁷ The common element between *taḥnīk* and *baraka* is the idea of a nourishing and invigorating liquid (rain, saliva and even a source of water) for both the body and the soul, which constitutes a true blessing.

Here too, as in the case of *mu'ākhāt* examined above, 'Alī and his sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn seem to have been ostracised by non-Shi'i authors. There is no mention of them in the numerous *ḥadīth*s or accounts concerning *taḥnīk*s by the Prophet. Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), a pro-'Abbasid author, goes so far as to say that as far as he knew, except for Ibn 'Abbās, no one had received saliva from the Prophet;¹⁰⁸ it is unthinkable that he would not have been aware of at least some of the numerous traditions reported in the canonical works of *ḥadīth* noted above. How can one imagine that Muḥammad had thus 'blessed' a large number of his companions and followers, overlooking his own 'brother', cousin, future son-in-law who was also undoubtedly one of his closest companions? Yet still, is it conceivable that the Prophet would have 'blessed' a large number of children only to neglect, forget or deliberately deprive his very own grandchildren, his own male descendants, of this blessing? To my knowledge, only Shi'i literature reports *taḥnīk*s that the Prophet practised upon 'Alī and the sons born

107. J. Chelhod, 'La *baraka* chez les Arabes', *RHR*, 148/1 (1955), pp. 68–88; see also by him, *Les structures du sacré chez les arabes*, index and esp. pp. 58–62.

108. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa'l-nihāya*, vol. 8, p. 295; elsewhere, he recognises that 'prophetic heritage' returns to the immediate family of the prophets, Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, vol. 5, p. 290; also his *Tafsīr*, ed. Beirut, 1966, vol. 5, pp. 452f., but seems to maintain that this family consists of 'Abbās and his descendants (*Tafsīr*, vol. 5, pp. 456–457, a pro-'Abbasid version of the *ḥadīth ahl al-kisā*', in which these are identified as 'Abbās and his sons).

to Fāṭima – a practice that, according to the same sources, the imams were to continue.¹⁰⁹

Adopted at very young age by his paternal uncle Abū Ṭālib, before the advent of Islam Muḥammad was 'the adopted brother' of his cousin 'Alī. This *qarāba*, as well as the spiritual links between them were such that 'Alī did not hesitate to embrace the religion proclaimed by Muḥammad. Friend and no doubt blessed confidant of the latter, his constant companion, 'twinning' with him by virtue of the *mu'ākhāt* ritual, during which there may have been an exchange of blood, an intrepid warrior fighting for his Cause, 'Alī married Fāṭima, Muḥammad's daughter and became the father of the only male descendants of the Prophet, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. Some Companions had the privilege of one or many of these kinds of relations with Muḥammad, but none of them apart from 'Alī had all these kinds of relationship with him. What is more, he had the exclusive privilege of two fundamental *qarābas*: 'twinning' and fathering male descendants. Thus, 'Alī had cogent reasons, confirmed in his opinion by the Qur'ān and even more so by ancient beliefs, for believing in his own divine election and that of his progeny by Fāṭima later on. Surely it is this 'election' that constituted the essential core of what his contemporaries would have called *dīn 'Alī*.

109. For examples and sources see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 193–195 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 76–77). Here the Prophet not only introduces his saliva into the mouth but also into the eyes of the recipient. Moreover, he does the same with his sweat. See also Sulaym b. Qays (Ps.), *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī*, ed. M. B. al-Anṣārī, 3 vols (Qumm, 1416/1995), vol. 2, p. 779, no. 26. Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī, *al-Durar al-naḥāfiyya* (Qumm, n.d.), pp. 281 and 287.

5. Reactions and consequences

Whatever the expression *ahl bayt al-nabī*, which rapidly became synonymous with *āl Muḥammad*, *āl al-nabī*, *āl al-rasūl* and so on, was originally meant to communicate, 'Alī would surely not have failed to claim it for himself and his household. Certain Hāshimids, especially the 'Alids, seem to have made this claim from the first/seventh century; this seems to be apparent, for example, in a few verses of ancient poets such as Abu'l-Aswad al-Du'ālī (d. 69/688), Kuthayyir 'Azza (d. 105/723) or al-Kumayt b. Zayd (d. 126/743).¹¹⁰ From the extensive and pertinent analyses of the expression and its religious and political implications conducted by M. Sharon in many of his publications, it transpires that popular opinion during this period identified the *ahl bayt al-nabī* with the Hāshimids in general and more specifically with the household of 'Alī (this is also what emerges from a large number of *ḥadīths* on the *ahl al-kisā'*, analysed by I. Goldziher; see above) – without, however, this popular respect actually translating into a recognition of the right to govern the community.¹¹¹ Of those who partook of this respect, some 'Alids seem to have been the first to claim political legitimacy, in other words, that the caliphate was exclusively reserved for 'Alī. One can reasonably assume that they were followers of '*dīn 'Alī*'. M. Sharon examines the probable influence of the Jewish conception of the House of David, as strongly felt in Iraq, on the population in Kūfa, homeland and bastion of the 'Alids. According to this conception, leadership of the community remains exclusively reserved for the descendants of the House of David.¹¹² Elsewhere, the same scholar seems to include the influence of the Christian concept of the 'Holy Family' (equally

110. For the first and third, see above. For the second, see al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, vol. 9, p. 14; al-Nāshī' al-Akbar, *Masā'il al-imāma*, ed. J. van Ess (Beirut, 1971), p. 26.

111. M. Sharon, 'The Umayyads as *ahl al-bayt*', addendum in response to the article '*Hāshimiyyāt*' by W. Madelung, pp. 151–152.

112. Ibid., p. 126; Jewish Exilarchate (in Arabic *ra's al-jālūt*, from the Aramaic *rēsh galūtha*, lit. 'Leader of the Diaspora') resided in Iraq and represented, in himself, the divine election of descendants of the House of

highly present in Iraq during the early centuries of Islam), by underscoring the constant comparisons that Shi'i literature establishes between the figures of Mary and Fāṭima.¹¹³

He considers entirely plausible, the historical existence of a recension of the Qur'ān from Kūfa in which 'Alī and members of his family would have been mentioned numerous times,¹¹⁴ just as Imami *ḥadīths*, repeatedly and openly declared until the mid-fourth/tenth century.¹¹⁵

Quite apart from certain violent reactions against the importance accorded to a relationship with the Prophet or against the legitimacy of the Prophet's family, for example by the Khārijīs,¹¹⁶ the anti-caliph 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr,¹¹⁷ and some *ahl al-ḥadīth*,¹¹⁸ non-'Alid members of the Prophet's family and their descendants, in this instance the Umayyads and subsequently the 'Abbāsids,

David. Also, M. Gil, 'The Exilarchate', in D. Frank (ed.), *The Jews of Medieval Islam* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 33–65.

113. Sharon, 'Ahl al-Bayt – People of the House', p. 173. For sources and studies regarding these comparisons, now consult M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Fāṭema', section 1, *EIr*, vol. 9, pp. 400–402.

114. 'The Umayyads as *ahl al-bayt*', p. 127.

115. On this version of the Qur'ān, see e.g. E. Kohlberg, 'Some Notes on the Imāmīte Attitude to the Qur'ān', in S. M. Stern, A. Hourani and V. Brown (eds), *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 209–224; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 200–227 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 79–91); M. M. Bar-Asher, 'Variant Readings and Additions of the Imāmī-Shī'a to the Quran', *IOS*, 13 (1993), pp. 39–74. And now consult M. A. Amir-Moezzi and E. Kohlberg, 'Révélation et falsification: introduction à l'édition du *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* d'al-Sayyārī', *JA*, 293/2 (2005), pp. 663–722.

116. Cf. e.g. al-Ṭabarī, ed. de Goeje, series 1, p. 3350.

117. According to an account by al-Zuhri, reported by al-Balādhuri, Ibn Zubayr considered the Prophet's family to be 'petty and bad' (*uḥayla su'saw'*, *Ansāb al-ashraf*) vol. 5, ed. S. Goetein (Jerusalem, 1936), p. 372.

118. Those, for example, that transmitted traditions regarding the *kufr* of Muḥammad's father and ancestors; cf. Muslim, vol. 1, pp. 132–133; al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sīrat al-ḥalabiyya* (Beirut, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 29; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 11, pp. 30–31. For the anti-'Alid twist given to these traditions, see al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ 'alā'l-Mawāhib al-laduniyya li'l-Qaṣṭallānī* (Cairo, 1329/1911), vol. 1, p. 179, according to which 'the infidel father' of the *ḥadīth* in fact designates Abū Ṭālib, since in Arabic 'one who raises a child is also called father'.

would also have responded by trying to appropriate the title of *ahl al-bayt*. Although his prudent approach prevents M. Sharon from explicitly declaring his stance on the matter, on many occasions he seems to suggest that Umayyad and 'Abbasid attempts to identify with the *ahl bayt al-nabī* would have been in reaction to 'Alid claims that were much older.¹¹⁹ At one point, their common position against the Umayyads drew the 'Alids and 'Abbāsids¹²⁰ closer together. However, once in power, the 'Abbāsids distanced themselves from the 'Alids by describing themselves as the only 'Holy Family', as witnessed by, among other things, the attempt to undermine the status of Fāṭima and the presentation of 'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and his sons as the *ahl al-kisā'*.¹²¹

Moreover, the study of *dīn 'Alī* seems to corroborate allusions made by G. H. Sadighi and E. Kohlberg that the process of 'Alī's glorification, transforming his historical character into a semi-legendary figure of heroic and even sacred dimensions, can be traced back to very early times, namely the period of his caliphate or even that immediately after the death of the Prophet.¹²² A certain

119. 'Ahl al-Bayt – People of the House', p. 183; 'The Umayyads as *ahl al-bayt*', pp. 127, 151.

120. Gilliot, 'Portrait "mythique" d'Ibn 'Abbās', pp. 159ff., esp. p. 161; Madelung, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās and Shi'ite Law'.

121. Sharon, 'Ahl al-Bayt', pp. 174, 176–179, esp. p. 177. Although not having especially examined the issue, it seems to me that many of the accounts regarding Ibn 'Abbās's privileged relationship with the Prophet including the transmission of prophetic knowledge (reports presented and analysed in detail by Gilliot in 'Portrait "mythique"', esp. pp. 134, 140, 142–143, 151–152, 156) are modelled on the abundant reports about 'Alī in early Shi'i works. This issue merits further attention, see Sharon, *Black Banners from the East*, pp. 126–140 and more especially pp. 93–99 and J. van Ess, 'Les Qadarites et les Ghailāniya de Yazīd III', *SI*, 31 (1970), p. 285.

122. Gh. H. Ṣadiqī, *Jonbesh hā-ye dīnī-ye Īrānī dar qarn hā-ye dovvom va sevvom-e hejri* (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), pp. 225–226 (this publication is a completed and updated version of the author's thesis, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens aux II et IIIe siècles de l'hégire* [Paris, 1938]); E. Kohlberg, 'Some Imāmī Shi'i Views on the *ṣaḥāba*', *JSAI*, 5 (1984) (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article IX), pp. 145–146. See also F. Daftary, 'Alī in Classical Ismaili Theology', in A. Y. Ocak (ed.), *From History to Theology: Ali in Islamic Beliefs* (Ankara, 2005), pp. 59–82.

reaction against the violent and repressive policies of the first Umayyads, especially Mu'āwiya and his son Yazīd, equally seems to have been a catalyst for this process.¹²³ 'Ali's religion' seems thus to have been the early nucleus of what was later to become Shi'ism. Imami sources have retained some reports, admittedly rare, in which one finds the expressions *dīn 'Alī*, *dīn Ḥasan* and *dīn Ḥusayn*, the latter two apparently variants of 'Ali's religion under the imamates of these two sons.¹²⁴

With the doctrinal implications that ensued, Shi'ism – in its different forms and in relative terms, of course – seems to have been the development of components found in the religion of

123. Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 309–310.

124. We have already examined two reports by al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699–1700) in his *Biḥār al-anwār* (notes 2 and 6 above). See also *Biḥār*, vol. 44, p. 125 (a letter from Ziyād b. Abihi to Mu'āwiya in which he writes that the Ḥaḍramīs are followers of 'Ali's religion – based on *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, a work of uncertain attribution but cited by authors of the fourth/tenth century); vol. 4, p. 213 (a letter from al-Ḥusayn to Mu'āwiya in which he refers to the same letter from Ziyād – based on the *Rijāl* by al-Kashshī, d. fourth/tenth century); vol. 45, p. 136 (Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya says to Zaynab bint 'Ali: 'Your father ['Ali] and your brother [al-Ḥusayn] excluded themselves from the religion.' Zaynab: 'If your grandfather [Abū Sufyān], your father [Mu'āwiya] and you had been Muslims, you would have returned to the grace and religion of God, the religion of my father and brother.' Based on the *Manāqib* by Ibn Shahrāshūb, d. 588/1192); also al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022): *al-Irshād*, ed. H. Rasūli Maḥallātī (Tehran, 1346 Sh./1968), vol. 2, pp. 106–107 (during the battle of Karbalā', Nāfi' b. Hilāl al-Bajalī, a supporter of al-Ḥusayn, recites the following verse: 'I am Ibn Hilāl al-Bajalī/I am a follower of the religion of 'Ali/And the religion of the latter is the religion of the Prophet.' His adversary replies: 'I am the follower of the religion of Uthmān'; it remains for Nāfi' to retort: 'You are [in fact] a follower of the religion of Satan'; also *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 45, p. 19 and n.1 by the editor on the faulty metre of the poem; in the version reported by Ibn Shahrāshūb in *Manāqib al Abī Ṭalīb*, 3 vols [Najaf, 1956], vol. 3, p. 252, other verses are attributed to Nāfi': 'I am the young Yemeni man of the Bajalis/My religion is that of Ḥusayn and 'Ali'; *Biḥār*, vol. 45, p. 27); Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 251 (also during the battle of Karbalā', verses by 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd Allāh al-Yazani: 'I am the son of 'Abd Allāh of the Āl Yazan/My religion is that of Ḥusayn and Ḥasan'; *Biḥār*, vol. 45, p. 22). In addition, apart from written sources, Shi'ism has also retained '*Dīn 'Alī*' as a personal name, as seen at the beginning of this chapter.

‘Alī:¹²⁵ the cult of *qarāba*, the notion of prophetic heritage, the divine election of ‘Alī and his descendants, the ancestral and natural, but also supra-natural, aspects, thaumaturgic and initiatory elements linked to the prophetic ‘Holy Family’.

125. It is useful to note here a remarkable and probably ancient evolution in which the aspects which are specifically Arab and ancestral and which underlie a large part of *dīn ‘Alī*, progressively experienced a transmutation of an initiatory and esoteric nature in Shi‘ism. This evolution seems to date especially from the period of the imamates of Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 115 or 119/732 or 737) and Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) (cf. J. Ruska, *Arabische Alchemisten*. II. *Ja‘far al-Šādiq, der sechste Imām* [Heidelberg, 1924]; M. E. G. Hodgson, ‘How Did the Early Shi‘a Become Sectarian?’, *JAOs*, 75, 1955). To illustrate this evolution, allow me to limit myself to examples drawn from early Imami *ḥadīths*: the replacement of the tribal concept of *ḥilm* by ‘*aql* (which I have, in this particular context, translated as ‘intelligence of the sacred’ or ‘hiero-intelligence’) which, in terms of wisdom, is equivalent to ‘*ilm* (in the sense of ‘initiatory knowledge’) (cf. *Guide divin*, esp. pp. 15–28 and 174–199 [*Divine Guide*, pp. 6–11 and 69–79]). The content of the Prophet’s saliva (or sweat) is said to be ‘initiatory knowledge’ (‘Alī often begins his sermons with these words: ‘O people! Question me before you lose me! I am the Bearer of initiatory knowledge; I carry in me the Prophet’s saliva that he made me drink drop by drop. Question me for I hold the knowledge of Beginnings and Ends’, for example, Ibn Bābūya al-Šadūq, *Amālī/Majālis*, ed. M. B. Kamare‘ī [Tehran, 1404/1984], p. 341). After receiving Muḥammad’s saliva in his eyes, ‘Alī acquired the power ‘to see’ and to know the true nature of people; see for example, al-Šaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā‘ir al-darajāt*, ed. M. Kuchebāghī (2nd edn, Tabriz, n.d. [ca. 1960]), p. 390. When Muḥammad taught ‘Alī the ‘thousand chapters’ of knowledge, both men perspired and the sweat of each ran upon the body of the other (*Baṣā‘ir*, p. 313; see also *Guide divin*, pp. 193–194 [*Divine Guide*, pp. 176–177]). In the series of traditions regarding the ‘tripartite division of humanity’, some, surely the earliest, employ tribal terminology (‘We [i.e. the imams] are the descendants of Hāshim, our Shi‘is are Arabs of noble stock [*al-‘arab*] and the others, Bedouins of inferior descent [*al-a‘rāb*]; ‘We are noble Arabs [*‘arabī*], our believers are protected allies [*mawālī*] and those that do not possess the same doctrine as us are vile [*‘iljī*]). Others, clearly later, take up the same division by introducing the initiatory dimension (‘Men are divided into three categories: the wise initiator [*‘ālim*, i.e. the imam], the initiated disciple [*muta‘allim* ‘the imam’s faithful’] and the foam carried by the wave [*ghuththā*’ i.e. the non-believers]; ‘The [true] men are only of two kinds: the wise initiator and the initiated disciple. The others are but vile beings [*ḥamajī*]). Regarding these traditions and their analysis, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, ‘Seul l’homme de Dieu est humain. Théologie et anthropologie mystique à travers l’exégèse imamite ancienne (Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine IV)’, *Arabica*, 45 (1998), pp. 193–214 (Chapter 8, this volume).

Shahrbānū, Lady of the Land of Iran and Mother of the Imams: Between Pre-Islamic Iran and Imami Shi'ism*

For Twelver Shi'is, as well as a large number of Sunnis, it is a fact that the third imam, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (killed at Karbalā' in 61/680), married the daughter of Yazdgird III, the last Sasanian emperor. Known more popularly as Shahrbānū, she gave birth, still according to tradition, to 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-'Ābidīn (d. 92/711 or 95/714), the fourth Shi'i imam. Consequently, the line of imams, from the fourth to the twelfth and last, is said to be her progeny. The figure of Shahrbānū, Sasanian princess and mother of the imams, seems particularly important in the connections that link Imami Shi'ism to pre-Islamic Iran. The present chapter seeks to examine the origin, development and implications of traditions centred on this figure.

1

Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/844–845), is undoubtedly one of the earliest authors to mention the mother of imam Zayn al-'Ābidīn. However, he makes no mention of the fact that she belonged to the royal family of Iran:

* I cordially thank Professors Shaul Shaked, Yohanan Friedmann and Frantz Grenet for their attentive reading of the first draft of this chapter and for their pertinent comments.

Her mother was a slave (of her father; *umm walad*) named Ghazāla who, after (the death) of al-Ḥusayn married Zuyayd *mawlā* of the latter and bore 'Abd Allāh b. Zuyayd, who is thus the uterine brother of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn.¹

Some years later, Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) in his *Ma'ārif*, takes up the same information and adds to it somewhat:

As for 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn [known as] al-Aṣghar, al-Ḥusayn has no descendants except through him. It is reported that his mother was originally from Sind [*Sindiyya*; thus probably a slave from this region] named Sulāfa or Ghazāla who after [the death] of al-Ḥusayn became the wife of Zubayd [and not Zuyayd, as noted in Ibn Sa'd], *mawlā* of the latter, and bore 'Abd Allāh b. Zubayd, who is thus the uterine brother of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn.²

There is still no mention of the Sasanian royal family. Similarly, almost all the authors of the histories and earlier or later historiographical studies that chronicled the invasion of Iran and the fate of the last Sasanian sovereign and his family, usually with remarkable attention to detail, on this point are silent. They do however, with many variants, provide a list of the children, including the daughters, of Yazdgird III, but do not give the least indication about the eventual capture of one these daughters by Muslim soldiers or any relationship between her and the Shi'i imams.³ However, a report supplied by

1. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. I. 'Abbās (Beirut, 1377–1380/1957–1960), vol. 5, p. 211.

2. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, ed. Th. 'Ukāsha (4th edn, Cairo, 1995), pp. 214–215.

3. See e.g. al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M. de Goeje (Leiden, 1866; rpr. 1968), pp. 262–313; elsewhere, in his *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 3 vols, ed. M. B. al-Maḥmūdī (Beirut, 1974), vol. 3, pp. 102–103 and 146, al-Balādhurī writes that the mother of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn was a slave named Sulāfa originally from Sijistān; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (d. 328/940), *al-'Iqd al-farīd* (Cairo, 1316/1898), vol. 3, pp. 103ff.; al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345–346/956–957), *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. and Fr. trans. by Barbier de Meynard (Paris, 1861–1877), vol. 4, pp. 190ff.; in addition, al-Mas'ūdī devotes long passages to 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn (see index, vol. 9, p. 112), but says nothing about his mother; Miskawayh (d. 421/1038), *Tajārib al-umam*,

‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Madā’inī, al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 310/923) well-informed Iranian source, says that around the year 31/650–651, during the conquest of Nisābūr, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Āmir b. Kurayz, captured two daughters of the Kistrā family (*āl*), named Bābūnaj (= Bābūna/Bānūya?) and ṬHMĪJ or ṬMHĪJ (= Ṭahmīnaj > Tahmīna?).

According to another version, the event occurred during the siege of Sarakhs and the famous Arab conqueror offered one of two daughters to a certain al-Nūshajān (I shall return to this name), but the other died.⁴ Nowhere does the great historiographer say that these are the daughters of the Iranian king, or that there was any connection to the ‘Alid imams. The same is true of sources as varied and historically far apart as the *Kitāb al-kharāj* by the Ḥanafī judge Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798) and the *Shāh-nāma* of the pro-Shi‘i poet Firdawsī (d. 410/1019) both of whom, though surely for different reasons, took an interest in the fate of the last Sasanian sovereign of Iran and his descendants.⁵

One of the very first texts to suggest a connection between a daughter of the last Sasanian emperor and the imams seems to be *Kitāb al-akhbār al-ṭiwāl* by Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī (d. ca. 282/894–895). According to this text, under the caliphate of ‘Alī during the

ed. H. F. Amedroz and D. S. Margoliouth (*The Eclipse of the Abbasid Califate*) (London, 1920–1921), vol. 1, pp. 145–220; Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233), *Akhbār-e Īrān az al-Kāmil-e Ibn Athīr* (excerpt from *al-Kāmil fi’l-ta’rīkh* [rpr. Beirut, 1385–1386/1965–1966] and Persian trans. by M. I. Bāstānī Pārīzī [Tehran, 1349 Sh./1971], pp. 209–335. The daughters of Yazdgird III, in varying number and diverse appellations according to the sources, are for example said to be named ‘DRK (var. ‘WZD, ARDK, ĀDhRK), ShHĪN (var. Shāhīn, SHZ), MRDĀWAND (var. MRDĀWZNDĀ, MRDĀWĀR), Tahmīna, Bānūya (var. Bābūna).

4. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa’l-mulūk*, ed. M. de Goeje, series 1, p. 2887; ed. M. A. F. Ibrāhīm, vol. 4, p. 302; on al-Ṭabarī and the conquest of Iran see the introduction by T. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zu Zeit der Sasaniden aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari* (Leiden, 1879; rpr. 1973) and G. Rex Smith to *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 15: *The Conquest of Iran* (Albany, NY, 1994).

5. Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb b. Ibrāhīm, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, ed. I. ‘Abbās (Beirut and London, 1985), p. 30; Abu’l-Qāsim Firdawsī, *Shāh-nāma* (Moscow edn, rpr. Tehran, 1350 Sh./1972), 9, pp. 358ff.

conquest of Nisābūr, Khulayd b. Ka's, the newly appointed governor of Khurāsān,⁶ realises that one of the daughters of Kirsā who had just arrived from Kābul was leading a revolt against the Muslims. He fights the insurgents, captures the princess and sends her to 'Alī, who asks her if she wishes to marry his son al-Ḥasan. The young lady proudly replies that she will not marry one who takes orders from another (i.e. the son who obeys the father) but that she is ready to marry the caliph himself. 'Alī replies that he is too old, and lists the virtues of his eldest son; but the princess is not convinced. At this point, an Iranian noble, a *dihqān* from 'Irāq named Narsī, presents himself as a candidate for marriage; but 'Alī frees her, gives her liberty to go where she wants and allows her to make her own choice of husband.⁷ As we shall soon see, the complicity between 'Alī and the princess, as well her pride (a mark of nobility) and her freedom, are elements that play a key role in Shi'i versions of the account.

It was really after the third century AH, or perhaps from the second half of it onwards, that reports about the Sasanian wife of imam al-Ḥusayn increased in number. A contemporary of al-Dīnawarī, the philologist Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Mubarrad (d. 286/900) is perhaps the earliest, and undoubtedly the only non-Shi'i author of this period to report a tradition implying as much, in his *al-Kāmil fi'l-lughā*, by strongly emphasising the woman's nobility:

The mother of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn was Sulāfa, daughter of Yazdgird [the King], of noble stock (*ma'rūfat al-nasab*), one of the chosen women [due to the nobility of her race, *wa kānat min khiyarāt al-nisā*]. [Regarding this] it is said that 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn was asked: 'You are one of the finest men [as regards treatment of parents,

6. Al-Ṭabarī, we have seen, believes this conqueror was 'Abd Allāh b. 'Āmir b. Kurayz. As for Khulayd, 'Alī's general, al-Ṭabarī identifies him as Khulayd b. Ṭarīf.

7. Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-tiwāl*, ed. V. Guirgass (Leiden, 1888), chapter on the battle of the Camel *in fine*, p. 163; Persian trans. by Ṣ. Nash'at (Tehran, 1346 Sh./1968), p. 169, tr. M. Mahdavi Dāmghāni (Tehran, 1366 Sh./1988), p. 191.

abarr al-nās] and yet you never eat from the same plate as your mother?' He replied, 'I do not wish my hand to reach for something that her eyes have already chosen, for fear of thwarting her desires.'

It is said about 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn that he is the son of the two chosen ones (*ibn al-khiyaratayn*), for according to the Prophet's saying '[a]mong his servants God has two chosen ones; His chosen ones among the Arabs are Quraysh and among the non-Arabs (*al-'ajam*) are the Persians.'⁸

Several Shi'i authors who are exact contemporaries of al-Mubarrad repeat the same story. The chronicler Aḥmad b. Abī Ya'qūb al-Ya'qūbī (d. 292/904) as well as the heresiographers Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ash'arī and al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī (both d. ca. 300/912–913) limit themselves to a brief allusion to the fact that the woman in question was the daughter of the last Sasanian ruler.⁹

From this period onwards, it is above all the Imami authors who take up the theme. First, in his *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–903) reports, perhaps for the first time, an amplified version of the account that should be cited in its

8. Al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, ed. M. A. al-Dālī (3rd edn in 4 vols, Beirut, 1418/1997), vol 2, pp. 645–646; on the *ḥadīth* mentioned and its sources see p. 646, note 2 by the editor.

9. Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma (Leiden, 1883, rpr. Qumm, 1414/1994), vol. 2, pp. 246–247 and 303 ('Among the sons of al-Ḥusayn, 'Alī al-Akbar who had no descendants as he was killed [at a young age] at al-Ṭaff [Karbala'], and his mother was Laylā bint Abī Murra b. 'Urwa b. Mas'ūd al-Thaqafī; then 'Alī al-Aṣghar [i.e. Zayn al-'Ābidīn] whose mother was ḤRĀR daughter of Yazdgird whom [her husband] al-Ḥusayn called Ghazāla'); al-Ash'arī, Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh, *al-Maqālāt wa'l-firaq*, ed. M. J. Mashkūr (Tehran, 1963), p. 70; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-shī'a*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1931), p. 53 (her name before captivity: Jahān Shāh 'sovereign of the world' bint Yazdgird b. Shahriyār; after captivity: Sulāfa). On the relationship between these two earliest heresiographical Shi'i texts, see W. Madelung, 'Bemerkungen zur imamitischen Firaq-Literatur', *Der Islam*, 43 (1967), pp. 37–52 (rpr. in *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* [London, 1985], article XV).

entirety. This is a *ḥadīth* going back to the fifth imam, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. ca. 119/737):

When they sought to take the daughter of Yazdgird to [the caliph] 'Umar [b. al-Khaṭṭāb], she came to Medina; young girls climbed higher [to see her] and the mosque [where 'Umar presided] was illuminated by her radiant face. Once she caught sight of 'Umar inside the mosque, she covered her face and sighed: '*Ah bīrūz bādā hurmuz*' [in Persian: *Ah pīrūz bādā hormoz*; May Hormoz, i.e. Ahura Mazda, be victorious = may God be victorious?]. 'Umar became angry and said: 'She is insulting me.' At this point, the Commander of the Faithful ['Alī] intervened and said to 'Umar: 'Do not meddle, leave her alone! Let her choose a man among the Muslims and he will pay her price [to her as she is a slave] from the spoils he earned.' 'Umar then said to the girl: 'Choose!' She stepped forward and placed her hand on al-Ḥusayn's head. The Commander of the Faithful asked: 'What is your name?' 'Jahān Shāh [in Persian: sovereign of the world]', she answered. And 'Alī added: 'Shahr Bānūya also [in Persian: Lady of the Land + the typically Iranian suffix *ūya*].' He then turned to al-Ḥusayn and said to him: 'Abū 'Abd Allāh [al-Ḥusayn's *kunya*]! She will be the mother of your son who shall be the best of those living in the world [i.e. an imam in the person of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-'Ābidīn].'¹⁰

At this point, the evolution of the tradition seems well under way, and as we shall see later, there will be other developments. Many elements in al-Ṣaffār's account are noteworthy; just as in al-Mubarrad, and perhaps even more so, 'Iranian-ness' and royalty are pronounced. For the first time, it would appear, Persian is used in the text. Although the sentence in Persian is much too short, the prose style seems older, modelled after expressions employed by Iranian

10. Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, ed. M. Kūchebāghī (2nd edn, Tabriz, ca. 1960), ch. 7, section 11 ('the imams speak all languages'), no. 8, p. 335. Regarding the author and his work, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–903) and his *Kitāb baṣā'ir al-darajāt*', *JA*, 280/3–4 (1992), pp. 221–250. A. J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī'ism* (Richmond, 2000), chs 5 and 7.

prisoners-of-war.¹¹ If my understanding of the sentence is correct, its purpose is to insist upon the piety (read monotheism) of the princess and certainly not her Mazdean faith (later versions of the tradition present a princess converted to Islam). 'Ali's intervention is obviously what is of most importance. Thanks to his knowledge of what is hidden and in the future, he recognises the princess and knows the fate that awaits her. Protection of the princess and perfect complicity with her, the fact that he speaks her language (hence the presence of this *ḥadīth* in this particular chapter) and that he insists upon her noble status (it is up to her to choose a husband), his vehement reaction to 'Umar, clearly explaining that he cannot rise to the occasion and that this event is beyond him, the prediction of the birth of a future imam, all fully justify the mention of the Light of royal Glory transmitted by the princess and the fact that this Light can even illuminate the Prophet's mosque in Medina, where the caliph of the Muslims presides.¹²

This information takes on great significance when we consider the importance of the notion of Light in Imamism, in which, briefly stated, the *nūr al-walāya* transmitted by seminal fluid and bearing initiatic knowledge and charisma is transmitted from

11. M. T. Bahār, *Sabk shenāsī. Tārīkh-e taṭawwor-e nathr-e fārsī*, 3 vols (2nd edn, Tehran, 1337 Sh./1959), vol. 1, ch. 5, pp. 208ff., on usage of the volitive *bādhā/bādh/bād* in Persian of the first three centuries of Islam, ch. 10, pp. 356–358; also S. Nafisī, *Tārīkh-e naẓm va nathr dar Īrān va dar zabān-e fārsī tā pāyān-e qarn-e dahom-e hejri* (Tehran, 1344 Sh./1966), vol. 1, p. 83.

12. On the Light of Glory *xvarenah/xwarr(ah)/farnah/farra* and its central role in the spiritual dimension of royalty in ancient Iran, see e.g. H. W. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books* (Oxford, 1943), chs 1 and 2, pp. 1–77; also, Gh. Gnoli, 'Un particolare aspetto del simbolismo della luce nel Mazdeismo e nel Manicheismo', *AION*, N.S., 12 (1962), pp. 95–128, 'Axvaretem Xvareno', *AION*, 13 (1963), pp. 295–298 and 'Un cas possible de différenciation lexicale entre *dari* et *fārsī*', in C. H. de Fouchécour and Ph. Gignoux (eds), *Etudes irano-aryennes offertes à Gilbert Lazard* (Paris, 1989), pp. 151–164; Duchesne-Guillemin, 'Le *xvarenah*', *AION*, s. linguistica, 5 (1963), pp. 19–31, 'La royauté iranienne et le *xvarenah*', in Gh. Gnoli and A. V. Rossi (eds), *Iranica* (Naples, 1979), pp. 375–386 and 'Encore le *xvarenah*', *Studia Iranica*, 20 (1991), pp. 193–195; P. O. Skjaervø, 'Farnah: mot mède en vieux-perse?', *Bulletin de Société de Linguistique*, 78 (1983), pp. 241–259.

imam to imam.¹³ Thus, from 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn onwards, the imams are the bearers of a twofold Light: the Light of *walāya* inherited from 'Alī and Fāṭima (and thus Muḥammad) and the Light of Glory from the ancient kings of Iran, transmitted by Shahr-bānū. Finally, to my knowledge, the text by al-Ṣaffār is the first in which the Sasanian princess is called by this specific name (in the form of Shahr-bānūya). The enigmatic turn of phrases exchanged between the princess and 'Alī is such that one is hard pressed to tell whether this name is indeed one of the names of the princess that 'Alī reveals, or whether it is he that confers the name on his future daughter-in-law.¹⁴ In either case, the acknowledgement and complicity between the parties is undeniable.

In his *Kāfī*, Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940) calls the princess Salāma (surely a *taṣḥīf* of Sulāfa) and reports the same tradition as al-Ṣaffār with some minor variants.¹⁵ He

13. For more details refer to U. Rubin, 'Pre-existence and light. Aspects of the concept of Nūr Muḥammad', *IOS*, 5 (1975), pp. 62–119, and 'Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shī'a Tradition', *JSAI*, 1 (1979), pp. 41–65; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, sections II–1 and II–2, pp. 75–112 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 29–59), 'Twelver Shi'ism: Cosmogony and Cosmology', *Elr*, vol. 6, pp. 317–322, and 'Considérations sur l'expression *dīn 'Alī*. Aux origines de la foi shī'ite', *ZDMG*, 150, 1 (2000), pp. 29–68 (Chapter 1, this volume).

14. Shahr-bānū ('Lady of the Land', i.e. of Iran) seems to be a title for a queen or princess from the Parthian period, and not a first name. According to Firdawsī, *Shāh-nāma*, vol. 2, p. 909, Rostam's wife, Gīv's sister, carries this title; and according to Th. Nöldeke, *Das iranische Nationalepos* (2nd edn, Berlin and Leipzig, 1920), p. 7, Gīv was a Parthian ruler. Elsewhere, in the Parthian romance *Vis o Rāmīn*, the queen mother Shahrū, mother of Vis, is also called Shahr-bānū; Fakhr al-Dīn Gorgānī, *Vis o Rāmīn*, ed. M. Mīnovī (and M. J. Maḥjūb) (Tehran, 1337 Sh./1959), see index under 'Shahrū'. On calling into question the Parthian origin of *Vis o Rāmīn*, a theory maintained by among others V. Minorsky and M. Boyce, see A. Ḥ. Zarrīnkūb, review of the Maḥjūb edition in *Sokhan*, IX/10 (1337 Sh./1960), pp. 1,015–1,018.

15. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī with Persian trans. in 4 vols (vols 1–3, Tehran, n.d.; vol. 4, Tehran, 1386/1966), Kitāb al-ḥujja, 'Bāb mawlid 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn', vol. 2, no 1. pp. 368–369. Main differences with the version by al-Ṣaffār: 1. The princess's sentence: *uf bīrūj bādā hurmuz* (S. J. Muṣṭafawī renders it, without any explanation, in a curious Persian translation that is as unjustified as it is incomprehensible: 'Heavens! The

then adds: 'It was said of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn that he is the son of the two chosen ones, for the chosen of God among the Arabs are the (Banū) Hāshim and among the non-Arabs, the Persians.'¹⁶ Finally, al-Kulaynī ends his report with a verse that he attributes to the famous 'Alid poet from Baṣra, Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ālī (d. 69/688), and which he says is about 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn:

The son who links [i.e. who descends the same time as] Kisrā and Hāshim is the most noble among those who wear the amulet [against the evil eye]

(*wa inna ghlāman bayna Kisrā wa Hāshimin la-akramu man nīṭat 'alayhi al-tamā'im*).¹⁷

existence of Hormoz is shrouded in darkness' (i.e. Hormoz is now unfortunate; *vāy rūzgār-e hormoz siyāh shod*). Perhaps he considered *rūj* to be synonymous with *rūz* (day, light) and so *bī-rūj* = *bī-rūz* = without light, obscure/dark; still, what does this sentence mean? Who might Hormoz be? The father of the princess is called Yazdgird b. Shahriyār b. Shirūya b. Kisrā Abarwiz. 2. Here, upon 'Alī's injunction it is nevertheless 'Umar who authorises the young woman to choose a husband. Did the version reported by al-Ṣaffār seem too audacious and thus improbable?

16. Cf. here above, the version by Mubarrad. Hāshim replaces Quraysh and the sentence is no longer presented as a Prophetic *ḥadīth*.

17. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, p. 369. The poem does not appear in the *Dīwān* by Abu'l-Aswad al-Du'ālī, ed. M. Ḥ. Āl-Yāsīn (Beirut, 1974) and with good reason, the verse is modelled after that by Ibn Mayyāda, a poet from the Umayyad period, an Iranian (on his maternal side):

I am the son of Abī Salmā and my grandfather is Zālim / And my mother is Ḥasān, noble descendant of Persians

A boy linking Kisrā and Zālim / Is he not nobler among those who wear the amulet (against the evil eye)?

anā ibnu Abī Salmā wa jaddī Zālimū / wa ummī Ḥasān akhlaṣat-hā l'a'ājimu / a laysa ghlāmun bayna Kisrā wa Zālimi / bi-akrami man nīṭat 'alayhi al-tamā'im

Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī* (Bulāq, 1285/1868), vol. 2, pp. 262, 294, 330 and vol. 14, p. 104. As one might have realised, 'Kisrā' does not necessarily refer to an Iranian king but is perhaps a title of the nobility; see M. Morony, 'Kisrā' *EI2*; Ibn Abī'l-Thalj al-Baghdādī (d. 325/936–937) a contemporary of al-Kulaynī provides the following names for the mother of the fourth imam: Khilwa, Shahzanān, Shahrbānūya daughter of Yazdgird and daughter of al-Nūshahān (sic) (instead of Nūshajān; see *infra*); *Ta'rikh al-a'imma* (Qumm, 1396/1976), p. 24.

Another contemporary source, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*, attributed to al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345–346/956–957), reports an account which includes some new elements. According to this, two daughters of Yazdgird are captured and reduced to slavery under 'Umar. The latter is ready to sell them. 'Alī then intervenes, declares that the daughters of a king are not sold in the marketplace and asks a woman from the *Anṣār* to present both girls for marriage to noble men from the *Muhājirūn* and *Anṣār*. The first men to lay eyes upon them are 'Alī's two sons, al-Ḥasan, who marries Shahr-bānū and al-Ḥusayn, who marries Jahānshāh. 'Alī then tells al-Ḥusayn to take special care of his wife, for she will give birth to an imam.¹⁸ Although this report attempts to establish parity between the sons of 'Alī, thus reinforcing links between descendants of the Kings of Iran and the Shi'i imams, nevertheless, the last sentence underscores the fact that the imamate well and truly continues in the Ḥusaynid lineage. The report then adds that the mother of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn died in Medina while giving birth.¹⁹ The child was entrusted to a nurse who nursed and educated him. He called the latter 'Mother', and once an adult, he gave her hand in marriage to his *mawlā*. The Umayyads (i.e. his adversaries) said that he was thus disgraced and dishonoured. Ibn Qutayba had already written that 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn had given his mother (and not his nurse called 'mother') in marriage to the *mawlā* of his father al-Ḥusayn and that he himself had married a slave whom he liberated on that occasion. He was subsequently mocked by the Umayyad 'Abd al-Malik.²⁰

18. Al-Mas'ūdī (attrib.), *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya* (Qumm, 1417/1996), p. 170. C. Pellat opts instead for the authenticity of attribution of the book to the author of *Murūj al-dhahab*; see his article 'Mas'ūdī et l'imāmisme', in *Le shī'isme imāmīte*, Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg (6–9 May 1968) (Paris, 1970), pp. 69–90; however, also refer to the very sceptical and often pertinent remarks by T. Khalidī, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Mas'ūdī* (Albany, 1975), pp. 138, note 2 and pp. 163–164.

19. *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*, pp. 170–171.

20. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, p. 215. Reproached by 'Abd al-Malik, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn would thus have opposed the example of the Prophet who had

With the next author, the renowned Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), this episode takes an enigmatic turn that perhaps has special significance. In his *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*,²¹ al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq reports a tradition going back to the eighth imam, ʿAlī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā (d. 203/818), in which the latter, finding himself in Khurāsān as heir to al-Maʾmūn, says to the Iranian Sahl b. al-Qāsim al-Nūshajānī: 'Between you [the Iranians, the Nūshajānī family?] and us [the imams] there is a relationship (*inna baynanā wa baynakum nasaban*).' Faced with the surprised reaction and curiosity of his interlocutor, al-Riḍā replies that the conqueror of Khurāsān, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿĀmir b. Kurayz, captured two of Yazdgird's daughters and sent them to the caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (the story, in keeping with historical accuracy, does not take place during the siege of al-Madā'in and ʿUmar's caliphate but during ʿUthmān's rule and the conquest of Khurāsān where the last Sasanian emperor and his family had sought refuge). The two daughters were given to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. Both died during labour, al-Ḥusayn's wife while giving birth to ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn. The account continues with the episode of the nurse. She was al-Ḥusayn's slave and the young ʿAlī knew no other mother but her; she was known by people as the 'mother' of ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn. As we shall shortly see, 'the people' here are synonymous with the adversaries of the imam, that is, the Umayyads from accounts by Ibn Qutayba and the (Pseudo-?) al-Masʿūdī. This point in the account is interrupted by an enigmatic sentence that may be interpreted in two ways according to whether we read the verb *zawwaja* in the active or passive form:

- And people claimed that he (i.e. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn) gave his 'mother's' hand in marriage (*zawwaja ummahu*).

married the freed slave Ṣafiyya bint Ḥuyayy and who gave the hand of his cousin – the daughter of his paternal aunt – Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, in marriage to his liberated *mawlā*, Zayd b. Ḥāritha.

21. Ed. M. al-Ḥusaynī al-Lājevardī (Tehran, 1378/1958), vol. 2, ch. 35, no. 6, p. 128; Persian trans. by Riḍāʾī and Ṣāʾidī, based on the edition by M. B. Bihbūdī (Tehran, 1396/1976), vol. 2, p. 487.

- And people claimed that he married his 'mother' (*zuwwija ummahu*).

Admittedly the first reading in the active form is more plausible and more in keeping with versions already cited by Ibn Qutayba and the (Pseudo-?) al-Mas'ūdi. However, one may wonder why the complement of the verb is not given: to whom did 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn give his 'mother' in marriage? The verb *zawwaja* in the active form, in the sense of to 'marry a woman', is almost always employed with the direct accusative of the female and with *min* or *bi-* of the male.²² Here we have only *zawwaja ummahu*, which enables a reading in the passive (*zuwwija* in the passive is synonymous with the fifth form *tazawwaja*), so much so that the text immediately adds *ma'ādh Allāh*, 'it displeases God', as if to highlight the ignominy of the assertion, namely marrying one's own mother (as if the first interpretation were not as scandalous!).²³ The question may justifiably be asked: while the traditions reported by Ibn Qutayba and (Pseudo-?) al-Mas'ūdi are clear, even syntactically, why does the tradition reported by Ibn Bābūya maintain (deliberately no doubt) an ambiguity that creates confusion?

I will be advancing a hypothesis that may seem audacious but is plausible in the context of this tradition. Since the account seeks to link the descendants of pre-Islamic Iranian kings to the Shi'i imams, one can reasonably believe that the listeners and/or

22. Ibn Qutayba: *zawwaja 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn ummahu min mawlāh*; al-Mas'ūdi (attrib.): *zawwajāhā bi-mawlāh*.

23. In the next part of the account, we encounter the same issue twice: *fa-zawwaja-hā/fa-zuwwija-hā* and *zawwaja/zuwwija 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn ummahu*. The Persian translators of *'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* opt for the first interpretation; however, S. J. Shahīdī, in his excellent article on the popular beliefs regarding Shahrbānū (an article that I will revisit further below), prefers the second interpretation, pointing out the fact that from ancient times, according to popular belief, the despicable Umayyads had arranged to circulate a rumour that the fourth imam had married his own mother; Sayyid Ja'far Shahīdī, 'Baḥthī dar bāre-ye Shahrbānū', in *Cherāgh-e rowshan dar donyā-ye tārik* (Tehran, 1333 Sh./1954–1955), pp. 175–176.

readers sensitive to this fact saw in the episode of the marriage of the 'mother' a similarity to the notion of *xwētōdas/xwēdōdah*, the incestuous marriage of the kings, priests and nobility of ancient Iran.²⁴ The Muslims had heard – admittedly only rather superficially – of this practice and the educated folk, especially the supporters of 'Arab-ness' did not miss an opportunity to recall this episode in order to point out the decadence and corruption of pre-Islamic Iranian culture.²⁵ In this context, our tradition seems to have two objectives in mind: first, in the eyes of Muslims in general, and more specifically the Shi'is, to clear the Iranians of early times of this accusation which ultimately stems from misinformation and slander from malicious adversaries (not unlike the rumours spread by the Umayyads regarding the fourth imam). The 'incestuous marriage' is only a metaphor and symbol, just as the appellation 'mother' for the nurse is a metaphor. Then, in the eyes of the Iranian converts – or those about to adopt Imami Shi'ism – the fourth imam is described as one who perpetuates a highly respected symbolic practice (since according to ancient Iranian belief, a son issued from *xwētōdas/xwēdōdah* is the most

24. Ever since the publication of the fundamental text by E. W. West, 'The Meaning of the *Khvêtūk-das* or *Khvêtûtād*', in *The Sacred Books of the East*, ed. M. Müller, vol. XVIII, *Pahlavi Texts*, Part II: *The Dādistān-i Dinik and the Epistles of Manuchikar* (Oxford, 1882), Appendix 3; see J. S. Slotkin, 'On a Possible Lack of Incest Regulations in Old Iran', *American Anthropologist*, 49 (1947), pp. 612–617; on the same point, W. H. Goodenough, 'Comments on the Question of Incestuous Marriages in Old Iran', *American Anthropologist*, 51 (1949), pp. 326–328; B. Spooner, 'Iranian Kinship and Marriage', *Iran*, 4 (1966), pp. 51–59 and esp. C. Herrenschildt, 'Note sur la parenté chez les Perses au début de l'empire achéménide', in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt (eds), *Achaemenid History*, vol. II : *The Greek Sources* (Leiden, 1987), pp. 53–67, and 'Le *xwētōdas* ou mariage "incestueux" en Iran ancien', in P. Bonte (ed.), *Epouser au plus proche. Inceste, prohibitions et stratégies matrimoniales autour de la Méditerranée* (Paris, 1994), pp. 113–125.

25. See e.g., al-Jāhīz, *al-Bayān wa'l-tabyīn*, ed. 'A. M. Hārūn, 4 vols (rpr. Cairo, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 260, and *al-Ḥayawān*, ed. 'A. M. Hārūn, 7 vols (Cairo, n.d.), vol. 5, p. 324; Abū'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī, *al-Luzūmiyyāt*, ed. Khānjī (Cairo, 1924), vol. 1, p. 172. For other sources see esp. G. Monnot, *Penseurs musulmans et religions iraniennes*. 'Abdal-Jabbār et ses devanciers (Paris, 1974), index under 'inceste'.

worthy to become either a priest or a king, in other words, the most capable of holding spiritual and temporal powers), is in Shi'i terms, an imam par excellence. I will have much more to say regarding the tradition reported by al-Ṣadūq, and it seems to me that what remains to be said about it in due course will corroborate even more so what has just been observed.

The disciple of Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), introduces yet more variants to the texture of the story. In his *Irshād*, he very briefly mentions that 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Akbar's (and no longer al-Aṣghar) mother was Shāh-i Zanān,²⁶ daughter of Kisrā Yazdgird (and further Yazdgird b. Shahriyār b. Kisrā). The story here apparently takes place during 'Alī's caliphate, when 'Alī, through his agent Ḥurayth b. Jābir al-Ḥanafī,²⁷ who was sent to the East (*al-mashriq*, often synonymous with Khurāsān), received the two daughters of the Iranian emperor. 'Alī offers the first, Shāh-i Zanān, to his son al-Ḥusayn and by her he fathers Zayn al-'Ābidīn; he offers the second (she is not named) to his supporter Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr (son of the first caliph), who fathers a son by her, al-Qāsim.²⁸ To my knowledge, the brief version by al-Mufīd, that introduces Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr into the story is without precedent. When one considers the nature of his work as a whole (apart perhaps from his *Kitāb al-ikhtiṣāṣ*) and his position in Buyid Baghdad,²⁹ one can

26. Most probably instead of the Shāh-i Jahān/Jahān-Shāh that we have already encountered; in any case, it is a more appropriate variant as it means 'Sovereign (lit. King) of women'. According to al-Ṭabarī the title of Shāh-i Zanān was held by the Sasanian queen Būrān/Pūrān (Dokht) who ruled briefly in her own name, in 9–10/630–631; see Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 399 and note.

27. On him see e.g. al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl* (Najaf, 1380/1961), p. 39, no. 26.

28. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, text and Persian translation with commentary by H. Rasūli Maḥallāti (Tehran, 1346 Sh./1968), vol. 2, ch. 5, p. 137 and ch. 6, p. 138.

29. See M. J. MacDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd* (d. 413/1022) (Beirut, 1978); A. A. Faqīhī, *Āl-e Būye va owḍā'-e zamān-e īshān* (2nd edn, Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986), index, under 'Mufīd'; see *Guide divin*, index, under 'Mufīd'.

perhaps suggest that he sought through this to bring the Shi'is and Sunnis closer. But this version seems not to have had any future either.

On the other hand, his Iranian contemporary, Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, known as Ibn Rustam (fifth/eleventh century), reports one of the longest and most interesting versions of the Shahr-bānū tradition in his *Dalā'il al-imāma*.³⁰ To summarise: when the Persian captives arrived in Medina, 'Umar wanted to sell them as slaves. 'Alī vigorously defended the Iranians and, referring to the sayings of the Prophet, insisted on their nobility and pure intentions, all the while declaring that it was foretold that he would have descendants by them (*lā budda min an yakūna lī minhum dhurriyya*). Upon this, he liberated the slaves belonging to him. The Banū Hāshim, *Muhājirūn* and *Anṣār*, in other words, those considered the noblest among Muslim Arabs, followed suit by offering their shares to 'Alī. Thwarted, 'Umar was obliged to do the same.

'Alī then declared that the Persian women now freed were to choose their husbands for themselves, if they so wished. It is thus that Shahr-bānūya bint Kisrā was able to choose al-Ḥusayn as her husband and 'Alī as 'godfather' (*wālī*). One of the 'pillars' (*arkān*) of Imamism, Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān al-'Absī,³¹ 'Alī's famous Companion, read the marriage sermon (*khuṭba*). It is also reported that Shahr-bānūya had a sister, Morvārīd ('Pearl'), who chose al-Ḥasan for her husband. An important section of the account concerns the dialogue in Persian interspersed with Arabic between 'Alī and the princess:

'Alī: '*Mā ismuki?*' [Arabic] What is your name?

Princess: '*Shāh-i Zanān*'. [Persian] Sovereign [lit. King] of Women.

30. Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma* (Qumm, 1413/1992), pp. 194–196; an abridged version of this tradition is also reported in the early anonymous text, *Alqāb al-rasūl wa 'itratihi* in *Majmū'a nafisa fi ta'rikh al-a'imma* (Qumm, 1406/1985), p. 253.

31. For more information and further sources concerning him, now consult M. Lecker, 'Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān and 'Ammār b. Yāsir. Jewish converts to Islam', *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, 11 (1993), pp. 149–162.

'Alī: 'Na Shāh-i Zanān nīst magar dukhtar-i Muḥammad wa hiya sayyidat nisā' [sic, *nisā'* without the article] *anti Shahr-bānūya wa ukhtuki Murwārīd bint Kisrā.*' [Persian] No! No one is the 'Sovereign of Women' except for Muḥammad's daughter [i.e. Fāṭima] [Arabic] who is Sayyidat [al-]Nisā' [which may also be translated as 'Sovereign of Women']. You are Shahr-bānūya and your sister is Morvārīd, daughter[s] of Kisrā.

Princess: 'Āriya.' [Persian] Yes.³²

The Persian of the text is from the fourth and fifth/tenth and eleventh centuries:³³ the Pārsī *magar* as a particle of exception has replaced the Sasanian Darī *judh* (or *judhāk*) or *bēyēk*.³⁴ The same is true for the Pārsī negative *na* that replaces *nai*. The verbal form *nīst* (*na/nê* + *ast*) seems to date from the third and fourth/ninth and tenth centuries.³⁵ And it is noteworthy that, for the first time, a parallel is established between Shahr-bānū and Fāṭima. This point is all the more striking because even the name of Shāh-i Zanān (see note 26 above) seems to correspond to some famous titles given to Fāṭima: 'Sayyidat al-Nisā', 'Sayyidat Nisā' al-Ālamīn, 'Sayyidat al-Niswān', 'Sayyidat Nisā' al-Dunyā

32. Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, p. 196. On the theory of the ancient Iranian origin of the term *morvārīd* (pearl) and the refutation of its supposed late Greek etymology, see B. Sarkārātī, 'Morvārīd pīsh-e khūk afshāndan', reprinted in his *Sāye hā-ye shekār shodeh* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999), pp. 51–70, esp. pp. 64–70. On the Mithraic symbolism of the pearl, see M. Moqaddam, *Jostār dar bāre-ye Mehr va Nāhid* (Tehran, 1978), pp. 32ff. Cf. also I. Gershevitch, 'Margarites the pearl', in Fouchécour and Gignoux (eds), *Etudes irano-aryennes offertes à Gilbert Lazard* (Paris, 1989), pp. 113–136.

33. M. T. Bahār, *Sabk-shenāsi*, vol. 1, ch. 9, p. 283ff.

34. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 336; S. Nafīsī, *Tārīkh-e naẓm va nathr*, vol. 1, p. 94. On these various Iranian languages refer also to G. Lazard, 'Pahlavi, pārsi, dari: les langues de l'Iran d'après Ibn al-Muqaffa', in C. E. Bosworth (ed.), *Iran and Islam: In Memory of the late Vladimir Minorsky* (Edinburgh, 1971), pp. 361–391, and 'Pārsi et dari: nouvelles remarques', in C. Altman et al. (eds), *Aspects of Iranian Culture: In Honour of Richard Nelson Frye. Bulletin of the Asian Institute*, N.S. 4 (1990), pp. 141–148; both articles have now been published in G. Lazard, *La formation de la langue persane* (Paris, 1995), sections 3 and 9.

35. M. T. Bahār, *Sabk-shenāsi*, vol. 1, ch. 10, pp. 343–344 and 349ff.

wa al-Ākhira', etc.³⁶ Although the parallel obviously flatters Shahrbanū, it simultaneously underscores Fāṭima's superiority.

During this same fifth/eleventh century, the Ziyārid prince 'Unṣur al-Ma'ālī Kay Kāwūs b. Iskandar, probably a Sunni, also reports a beautiful version of the story in his *Qābūs-nāma*, one of the masterpieces of medieval Persian prose. The captive princess, here called Shahrbanū, is on the verge of being sold by the caliph 'Umar. Then 'Alī enters the story and dissuades him by citing a Prophetic *ḥadīth*, according to which 'the progeny of kings are not to be bought and sold (*laysa'l-bay' alā abnā' al-mulūk*)'. Shahrbanū is then respectfully taken to Salmān al-Fārisī, another stalwart hero of Shi'ism. Seated beside him, she declares that it is up to her to choose her husband. She acknowledges 'Umar's nobility but finds him too old.³⁷ Regarding 'Alī she announces: 'He is truly noble and suits me but I would be ashamed before Fāṭima al-Zahrā in the hereafter; so I do not want him.' Al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī is also deemed worthy but the princess says that he already has many wives. Finally, al-Ḥusayn is chosen, for his nobility surely, but also because he is a virgin as is Shahrbanū, since (as it is said) 'for a virgin bride, she says, only a virgin groom will do (*dokhtar-e dūshīze rā shū-ye dūshīze bāyad*)'.³⁸

In the next century, in his *Manāqib*, Ibn Shahrāshūb al-Māzandarānī (d. 588/1192) records the tradition reported by al-Shaykh al-Mufīd and especially that by Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr that he

36. Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, 3 vols (Najaf, 1956), 'Bāb manāqib Fāṭima; faṣl fi ḥilyatihā wa tawārikihihā', vol. 3, p. 133; Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Uyūn al-mu'jizāt* (Najaf, 1369/1950), pp. 46–47.

37. The account clearly seeks to rehabilitate the second caliph and to restore his image tarnished by Shi'i versions.

38. 'Unṣur al-Ma'ālī Kay Kāwūs b. Iskandar b. Qābūs b. Voshmgīr, *Qābūs-nāma*, ed. Gh. Ḥ. Yūsufi (8th edn, Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996), ch. 27 and pp. 137–138. Cf. al-Rāzī al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 460/1068), *Ta'rīkh Ṣan'ā'*, ed. Ḥ. b. 'A. al-'Amrī (Beirut–Damascus, 1989), p. 109 (*khiyarat Allāh min Quraysh wa khiyaratuhu min Fāris*). Here, the Arabic name of Shahrbanū is Ḥabbadhā.

reproduces in a version with significant variants.³⁹ In general, Ibn Shahrāshūb's version summarises the text from *Dalā'il al-imāma* or its source, which tends to show – if still necessary – that numerous versions of the Shahrbānū story were simultaneously in circulation in Imami milieus. The dialogue in Persian interspersed with Arabic has been deleted. Greater emphasis is placed on the wisdom and nobility of the entire Iranian people ('the Persians are wise and noble', *al-furs ḥukamā' kuramā'*)⁴⁰ as well as on the Light that is al-Ḥusayn ('auro-ral light and glistening star', *al-nūr al-sāṭi' wa al-shihāb al-lāmi'*).⁴¹ Elsewhere, Ibn Shahrāshūb provides other information in fragments regarding Shahrbānū: she is the mother of imam 'Alī al-Aṣghar Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn.⁴² She was present at Karbalā', and after the massacre of al-Ḥusayn and his family she drowned herself in the Euphrates to escape the humiliation of captivity by Yazīd.⁴³ The poem about imam Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn with a reference to the Prophet's *ḥadīth* on the Quraysh and Persians as the 'Two chosen of God' (based on the *Rabī' al-abrār* by al-Zamakhsharī) was attributed to Abu'l-Aswad al-Du'ālī (see al-Kulaynī's version above).⁴⁴ Finally, there is a passage on the different names for the mother of the fourth imam:

His mother was Shahrbānūya, daughter of Yazdgird b. Shahriyār al-Kisrā; one still called her Shāh-i Zanān, Jahān Bānūya, Sulāfa, Khawla and Shāh-i Zanān bint Shīrūya b. Kisrā Abarwīz and Barra bint al-Nūshajān [I shall comment on this name], but [only?] the first name is correct (*al-ṣaḥīḥ huwa'l-awwal*). The Commander

39. Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, 'Bāb fī imāmat Abi 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn, faṣl fī'l-muqaddimāt', vol. 3, pp. 207–208.

40. Ibid. p. 207.

41. Ibid., p. 208, l. 8.

42. Ibid., 'Bāb fī imāmat al-Ḥusayn, faṣl fī tawārikhihi wa alqābihi', vol. 3, p. 231.

43. Ibid., 'Faṣl fī maqṭalihi', vol. 3, p. 259.

44. Ibid., 'Bāb imāmat Abi Muḥammad 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, faṣl fī siyādātihi', vol. 3, pp. 304–305.

of the Faithful ('Ali) had called her Maryam and, it is said, also Fāṭima. She bore the title of Sayyidat al-Nisā'.⁴⁵

Two brief comments may be made about this list: first, the parallel with Fāṭima becomes more pronounced since Shahrībānū bore the name of Fāṭima (what is more, a name that was given in person by 'Ali) as well as her title: 'Sovereign of Women'. Then, with 'Barra bint al-Nūshajān', this is the third time the name Nūshajān (see the texts by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Bābūya above) is encountered. I shall address this more extensively below.

During the same period, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī (d. 573/1177–1178) reports in his *al-Kharā'ij* what appears to be the last noteworthy version so far known of the Shahrībānū tradition.⁴⁶ The Iranian scholar seems to have endeavoured to report a version that would be a synthesis of many others (al-Ṣaffār, al-Kulaynī, Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr), even including some additional information. According to this tradition, which goes back to the fifth imam, the story took place during 'Umar's caliphate. The princess arrived in Medina, bathed in light (al-Ṣaffār's version is slightly less dramatic at this point for it is no longer the mosque [*maṣjid*] where the caliph presides that is illuminated by the face of the young girl, but the place where the caliph sits [*majlis*]). In this account there is the princess's exclamation (here *a firūzān*), the caliph's anger, 'Ali's intervention, the freeing of the princess and her choice of al-Ḥusayn as husband. At this point, al-Rāwandī reports a new dialogue in Persian interspersed with Arabic between 'Ali and the young woman:

'Ali [Persian]: '*Che nāmī dārī ay kanīzak*. Young lady, what is your name?' (Arabic): '*Ay aysh ismuki yā ṣabiyya*. What is your name, young lady?'

Princess [Persian]: '*Jahān Shāh bār khudhāh*; Jahān Shāh, O Lord!'

45. Ibid., 'Faṣl fī aḥwālīhi wa ta'rīkhihi', vol. 3, p. 311.

46. Al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij wa'l-jara'ih* (Qumm, 1409/1988–1989), vol. 2, ch. 15, no. 67, pp. 750–751.

'Alī [as if a question]: 'Shahrbānūya?'

Princess [Persian]: 'Kh(w)āharam Shahrbānūya. My sister [is called] Shahrbānūya.' [Arabic]: 'Ay tilka ukhtī.' That's my sister.

'Alī [Persian]: 'Rāst gofti.' You have spoken the truth. [Arabic]: 'Ay sadaqti.' You are right.

Then 'Alī speaks to al-Ḥusayn and tells him that his new wife is 'the Mother of the Legatees [i.e. the imams], those of pure descent' (*umm al-awṣiyā' al-dhurriyya al-ṭayyiba. sic*).

Once again the Persian is of a later period, that is, at the earliest dating from the fourth/tenth century. The interrogative particle *che* (those), vocatives (*ay* and *bār*) as well as the diminutive *ak* (in *kanīz-ak*) are evidence of this.⁴⁷ Al-Rāwandī then reports that the princess died giving birth to 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn and finally gives the 'extraordinary account' (*qiṣṣa 'ajība*) of her conversion to Islam. According to this account, before the arrival of the Muslim army, the princess experienced two dreams. In the first, she sees the Prophet Muḥammad accompanied by al-Ḥusayn arriving at her father's palace. He gives her in marriage to al-Ḥusayn, after a sermon delivered by the Prophet. In the second dream, she sees Fāṭima, who converts her to Islam and predicts the arrival of Muslim troops, adding that no harm will come to her as she is promised to her son al-Ḥusayn.

Slightly before the accounts of Ibn Shahrāshūb and al-Rāwandī, the anonymous Iranian author of *Mujmal al-tawārikh*, a Persian text written in 520/1126, calls the wife of imam al-Ḥusayn 'Shahrnāz' (Bounty of the Land; a *taṣḥīf* for Shahrbānū?), daughter of Yazdgird the King or Subhān (a *taṣḥīf* for Nūshajān?), King of Persia (*malek-e Pārs*).⁴⁸ Other authors – whether Imami or

47. M. T. Bahār, *Sabk-shenāsī*, respectively 1:406, 408 and 413–416; P. Nātel Khānlārī, *Zabān shenāsī-ye fārsī* (2nd edn, Tehran, 1344 Sh./1966), pp. 70–71.

48. Anonymous, *Mujmal al-tawārikh wa'l-qiṣaṣ*, ed. M. T. Bahār (Tehran, 1318 Sh./1940), p. 456.

not – such as al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153), ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā al-Irbilī (d. 693/1293) and Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) to the relatively modern al-Nūrī al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1320/1902), including Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699–1700) and his disciple ‘Abd Allāh al-Baḥrānī al-Iṣfahānī, do no more than reproduce one or more of the reports just described.⁴⁹ Between the third/ninth and the sixth/twelfth century, the Shahr-bānū story would have reached full evolution, at least in its literary written form. As we shall see, the oral version spread via by popular beliefs underwent a different process.

2

According to the earliest sources, the mother of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, known as ‘Alī al-Aṣghar, was an oriental slave, originally from Sind or Sijistān, thus perhaps actually Iranian, since both regions were provinces of the former Sasanian empire. Al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī, her master and then spouse, called her Sulāfa

49. See e.g. al-Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī/Ṭabarsī, *I'lām al-warā* (Najaf, 1390/1970), p. 256; al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Qumm, 1381/1961), vol. 2, p. 107; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Tadhkirat khawāṣṣ al-umma* (rpr. Tehran, n.d.), p. 183; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* (lithography, n.p., 1284/1867), p. 374 (based on *Rabī' al-abrār* by al-Zamakhsharī). In this case, three daughters of Yazdgird are given in marriage by ‘Alī to Muḥammad son of ‘Abū Bakr, ‘Abd Allāh, son of ‘Umar and al-Ḥusayn, his own son respectively. ‘Uthmān, although one of the four ‘rightly-guided’ caliphs, is excluded from the list. The tradition is most likely anti-Umayyad); Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-Qummī, *Tārīkh-e Qumm*, ed. S. J. Tihrānī (Tehran, rpr. 1361 Sh./1982), p. 195; Ibn ‘Inaba, *Umdat al-tālib fī ansāb āl Abī Ṭālib* (Qumm, 1417/1996), pp. 172–173; Qāḍī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ghaffārī, *Tārīkh-e Jahān ārā* (Tehran, 1343/1924), p. 25; al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudāt* (3rd edn, Tehran, 1364 Sh./1985), vol. 4, p. 441; Hāshim al-Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār* (Qumm, 1397/1976), vol. 2, pp. 7f., and *Madīnat al-ma‘ājiz* (Tehran, n.d.), p. 129; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (Tehran-Qumm, 1376–1392/1956–1972), vol. 46, pp. 7ff.; al-Baḥrānī al-Iṣfahānī, *Awālim al-‘ulūm* (Qumm, 1409/1988), vol. 18, pp. 6ff.; Muḥammad Bāqir al-Māzandarānī, *Jannat al-na‘im* (lithograph, n.p., 1296/1878), pp. 205–206; Ḥusayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabrisī/Ṭabarsī, *Mustadrak al-wasā’il* (Qumm, 1407/1986), vol. 13, pp. 375ff. The list is obviously not exhaustive.

and/or Ghazāla. Once an adult, 'Alī al-Aṣghar freed her and gave her in marriage to a 'client' of his father. Here we have almost all the likely historic elements that can be gleaned from Ibn Sa'd, Ibn Qutayba and other third/ninth century chroniclers. For reasons we shall try to clarify, numerous accounts were circulated, especially in Iranian Imami milieus, insisting that the mother of imam Zayn al-Ābidīn was the daughter of Yazdgird III, the last Sasanian king of Iran.

Just before the Arab invasion, many Iranian nobles escaped from the capital, al-Madā'in-Ctesiphon, taking their women (free or enslaved), their wealth and valuables.⁵⁰ However, many other Iranians belonging to the noble class were not so fortunate; they were captured and reduced to slavery by the Muslim conquerors.⁵¹

It is nevertheless certain that none among them belonged to the king's immediate family. In his monograph devoted to the Sasanians, M. J. Mashkūr reviews the opinions of a number of specialists in Iranian studies and historians of Sasanian Iran regarding the family of Yazdgird III. J. Darmesteter, T. Nöldeke, B. Spuler and A. Christensen all allude to the Shi'i story of Shahr-bānū, all the while stressing its legendary and biased nature.⁵² According to these scholars, who base their work specifically on non-Shi'i

50. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, p. 30; al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, p. 129; Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, vol. 1, p. 219; Ibn al-Athīr, *Akhbār-e Īrān az al-Kāmil*, pp. 209–210.

51. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, pp. 262ff.; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, vol. 1, pp. 309ff.

52. M. J. Mashkūr, *Sāsāniyān* (revised edn, Tehran, ca. 1339 Sh./1960), vol. 2, pp. 1284ff. As a whole, these scholars of Iranian studies only accord cursory importance to the story; which is perfectly understandable in the context of the issues that preoccupy them; see also Mashkūr, *Īrān dar 'ahd-e bāstān. Dar tārikh-e aqām va pādshāhān-e pīsh az Islām* (2nd edn, Tehran, 1347 Sh./1968), pp. 488ff. The numerous names given to the Iranian princess and her father are perfectly in keeping with the legendary nature of the character (the daughter: Barra, Fāṭima, Ghazāla, ḤRĀR, Jahān Bānūya, Jahān Shāh, Khawla, Khilwa, Maryam, Salāma, Sayyidat al-Nisā', Shāh-e Zanān, Shahr-bān, Shahr-bānū, Shahr-bānūya, Shahr-nāz, Sulāfa, Umm Salama; the father: Malik Harā, Malik Qāshān, Nūshajān, Shīrūya b. Kisrā, Subhān Malik Pārs, Yazdgird); see also Ḥ. Karīmān, *Ray-e bāstān* (Tehran, 1345–1349 Sh./1966–1970), vol. 1, p. 409.

historiographical sources, the woman or women and children of the emperor were simply evacuated from the capital well before the invasion and were not captured.⁵³ In addition, sources from T'ang China concerning the Arab conquest of Iran, the last Sasanian emperor and his descendants also remain silent about the eventual captivity of one of Yazdgird III's relatives.⁵⁴

Some elements that appear sporadically in recurring versions of the Shahr-bānū legend seem to have come to light in reaction to certain historical facts. It is not entirely impossible, for example, that the association of a noblewoman named Ghazālā, captured in al-Madā'in and given in marriage to a noble Arab, was inspired by the fact that 'Uthmān, one of the sons of the wealthy Companion 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf, had as mother a certain Ghazāl bint Kisrā, who was captured during the siege of the Sasanian capital by Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ.⁵⁵

53. Mashkūr, *Sāsāniyān*, vol. 2, pp. 1288–1290 and 1344–1347; see also S. Nafisī, *Tārikh-e ejtemā'i-ye Irān az enqerād-e Sāsāniyān tā enqerād-e Omaviyān* (Tehran, 1342 Sh./1964), pp. 13ff. On Yazdgird's death at the age of 35 in 32/652, he had seven sons and five daughters. According to M. J. Mashkūr and S. Nafisī they included Ādharak, Shahīn, Mardāwand, Bābūna (Bānūya) and Tahmīna (see note 3 above). According to A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (rpr. Osnabrück, 1971), ch. 10, pp. 508–509, the name Shahr-bānū seems to have been made popular by al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab* although the manuscripts are corrupted at this very point. Now also consult the monograph devoted to Yazdgird III by A. Hassuri ('A. Ḥaṣūrī), *Ākherīn Shāh* (Tehran, 1371 Sh./1992), where there is no mention of Shahr-bānū.

54. J. Marquart, *Irānshahr nach der Geographie des Ps. Moses Xorenac'i* (Berlin, 1901), pp. 68–69; E. Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue (Turcs) occidentaux* (St Petersburg, 1903), pp. 171–173; J. Harmatta, 'The Middle Persian-Chinese Bilingual Inscription from Hsian and the Chinese-Sāsānian Relations', in *La Persia nel medioevo* (Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rome, 1971), pp. 363–376, esp. 373–375; M. G. Morony, *Irak after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, 1984), index, under 'Yazdgird III'; R. G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it* (Princeton, 1997), pp. 243ff. The study by C. 'A. A'zamī Sangesarī, 'Bāzmāndegan-e Yazdgerd-e sevvom', *Irān Shenākht*, 10 (1377 Sh./1998), pp. 183–191, is rather perfunctory, based on very few sources, hardly drawing upon any previous studies, and not of use to scholars.

55. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 3, p. 128. Ghazāl would have been the name given to the female slave by her master. Her father's name seems to indicate that she was of noble stock.

Moreover, some reports recorded by historiographers describe the capture and enslavement of a descendant of Yazdgird III under the caliphate of al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik (86–97/705–715). Captured in northern Khurāsān, the young lady would have been sent to the governor of Iraq al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī who offered her to the caliph. She gave birth to Yazīd b. al-Walid known as 'al-Nāqīš', that is Yazīd III, and perhaps Ibrāhīm b. al-Walid.⁵⁶ The somewhat forced insistence on the liberation of the princess to the extent of freely choosing her spouse, in this case al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, is surely, as we shall see, done in order to attract the sympathy of Iranians, but also perhaps arises from the claim of the 'Abbasids, at least up to al-Manṣūr (caliph from 137/754 to 159/775), of being descendants of an uninterrupted line of free mothers and fathers. In this regard, the long letter from al-Manṣūr to the Ḥasanid Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya takes on great significance. The latter's uprising (aggravated by that led by his brother Ibrāhīm) lasted from 132/749 to 145/762. In this letter, al-Manṣūr takes pride in the fact that the 'Abbasids are of pure and free descent, paternal and maternal. At the same time he mocks the Ḥasanid and Ḥusaynid 'Alids who count among their mothers a large number of female slaves. It is interesting to note in

56. Al-Ṭabarī, ed. M. de Goeje, series 1, p. 2873 series 2, pp. 1247 and 1874. According to al-Ṭabarī, Yazīd III's mother was Yazdgird's granddaughter. In series 2, p. 1874, this mother is known as Shāh-i Āfarīd (pehlevi: Shāhāfrīd) and a rather interesting distich is attributed to Yazīd III:

I am the son of Kisrā and Marwān / One of my grandfathers is a *qayṣar*,
another a *khāqān*.

It is therefore possible that Yazīd III al-Nāqīš was a model for subsequent genealogical speculations regarding 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidin. See also, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd al-farīd*, vol. 3, p. 103; Ibn al-'Ibrī, *Mukhtaṣar al-duwal* (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 118–119; Ibn al-Athīr, *Akhhār-e Īrān az al-Kāmil*, vol. 2, pp. 334–335; refer also to A. Amīn, *Ḍuḥā'l-Islām* (Cairo, 1933), vol. 1, p. 11. Al-Mubarrad, one of the first to report the tradition linking Sulāfa, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-'Ābidin's mother, to the last of the Sasanians, attempts to reconcile both reports and writes that Sulāfa was Yazīd al-Nāqīš's paternal or maternal aunt; *al-Kāmil fī'l-lughā*, ed. al-Dālī, vol. 2, p. 646.

passing that the letter makes no mention of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn's mother.⁵⁷

Having considered the formal details, let us now focus on what constitutes the core of the legend as it appears in the most recurrent versions. A Sasanian princess, bearer of the Light of Glory of the Iranian kings, arrives in Medina. Defying the caliph 'Umar, supported by 'Alī and speaking in Persian to him, she chooses al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī as her husband, eventually giving birth to 'Alī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, who in turn will succeed al-Ḥusayn as imam, thus becoming 'the Mother of Legatees'. The story is obviously highly charged in doctrinal, ethnic and political terms. It is at once pro-Shi'i and pro-Iranian and both elements are presented in such a manner as to be inseparable. This is a fundamental aspect of the account that one must always bear in mind. More precisely, one can add that in its Shi'ism, the story undeniably stems from the Ḥusaynid current and in its 'Iranianism' seems to emerge from radical circles. Considered together, these elements conspire to challenge a certain Sunni Arabo-centrist 'orthodoxy'.

Let us examine matters more closely. The Shahrbānū tradition is clearly of Ḥusaynid confession. It is true that, concerned about a kind of balance and stronger rapprochement between Shi'is and Iranians, a good many versions depict two Iranian princesses who each marry al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn respectively, but at the same time, with a stubborn insistence, al-Ḥusayn's wife is presented as the mother of future imams.⁵⁸ Ibn Shahrāshūb precedes the Shahrbānū story with a rather long development arguing for the legitimacy of the Ḥusaynid lineage of imams and consequently

57. Al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, ed. M. Z. Mubārak (Cairo, 1356/1937), vol. 2, pp. 1275–1278 (refer to the sources cited in notes from the editor); al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. de Goeje, series 3(1), pp. 211–215.

58. Al-Mas'ūdī (attrib.), *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya*, p. 170; Ibn Bābūya, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, p. 128; Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, p. 196. The version reported by al-Mufid, *Irshād*, vol. 2, p. 138, in which Imam al-Ḥasan is replaced by Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr is an isolated case.

the illegitimacy of al-Ḥasan's descendants.⁵⁹ Let us recall that in its different variants the tradition would have started circulating from the third/ninth century onwards, only a few decades after the revolt of the Zaydi Ḥasanid brothers, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and Ibrāhīm, a revolt that very quickly seems to have aroused great sympathy, even among the non-'Alid scholars, both in the Ḥijāz as well as in Iraq.⁶⁰ Some decades later, just after the execution of al-Amin in 198/813, another Ḥasanid Zaydi rebel, Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, who was supported by the famous Abu'l-Sarāyā, was declared *al-Riḍā min āl Muḥammad* on Jumādā II 199/January 815 in Baghdad itself, only to be killed a month later.⁶¹ Among other things, was the Shahr-bānū story intended to counteract the popularity of the Zaydis and/or the Ḥasanids, especially in Shi'i milieu, both Iranian and assimilated?

Then, ever since the version reported by al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī in the third/ninth century until Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr in the fifth/eleventh and al-Rāwandī in the sixth/twelfth centuries, the tradition clearly highlights two elements: the magnificence of Persian royalty (Light emanating from the princess, her noble status, the freedom to choose her husband) and the importance of the Persian language (the dialogue with 'Alī, imam par excellence, in a language that he speaks well, in contrast with 'Umar, adversary par excellence of Shi'ism, who does not speak the language at all).

59. Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, pp. 206–207.

60. See al-Ṭabarī, ed. M. de Goeje, series 3, pp. 189–265; Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭalibiyyin*, ed. A. Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1949), pp. 260–299 and 354ff.; C. von Arendonk, *Les débuts de l'imamat zaydite du Yémen*, tr. J. Ryckmans (Leiden, 1960), pp. 44ff.; T. Nagel, 'Ein früher Bericht über den Aufstand des Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh im Jahre 145h', *Der Islam*, 46 (1970), pp. 227–262; M. Q. Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbasids. The Emergence of the Proto-Sunni Elite* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 44–45 and 73–76.

61. See H. A. R. Gibb, 'Abu'l-Sarāyā al-Shaybānī', *EI2*, vol. 1, pp. 153–154 and B. Scarcia Amoretti, 'Ibn Ṭabāṭabā', *EI2*, vol. 3, pp. 975–976. On 'Alid rebellions at the beginning of the 'Abbasid caliphate see F. Omar, *The 'Abbāsīd Caliphate 750/132–786/179* (Baghdad, 1969), ch. 4; J. Lassner, *The Shaping of 'Abbāsīd Rule* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 69–87; H. Kennedy, *The Early 'Abbāsīd Caliphate* (London, 1986), pp. 198–213.

Now in the eyes of some Iranian men of letters in early Islamic centuries, these two notions are the most important elements of Iranian identity. It would perhaps be anachronistic to speak of the 'nationalism' of these educated individuals but it would be just as naive to deny that there was among them a heightened sensitivity, even a kind of historical consciousness of their cultural identity crystalised around a certain perception of royalty and the Persian language. To explain his admiration for the history of the Iranian nation and its continuity, al-Ṭabarī invokes the uninterrupted succession of royal dynasties, from the origins of time up to the advent of Islam.⁶²

In his *al-Āthār al-bāqiya*, Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048) discusses the case of those Iranians who hoped that the Buyids would be agents of change or effect the restoration of the sovereignty of the Iranian monarchs and the religion of the Magi. At the same time, he is surprised that sensible folk should place their hopes in the Daylamīs – those who do not even speak adequate Persian – instead of having faith (as is apparently the case with al-Bīrūnī himself) in the 'Abbasid dynasty, a dynasty that emerged from Khurāsān and that was brought to power by true Persians ('*ajam*').⁶³ In its presentation and justification, Miskawayh's

62. Al-Ṭabarī, ed. M. de Goeje, series 1(1), p. 353; See also J. Chabbi, 'La représentation du passé aux premiers âges de l'historiographie califale', in *Itinéraires d'Orient. Hommages à Claude Cahen*, Res Orientales VI (Paris, 1995), pp. 21–46. For the importance of 'the History of Kings' in the ancient perception of Iranian culture see also Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber*, pp. xix–xxiii and *Das iranische Nationalepos*, pp. 14–16; W. Barthold, *Musulman Culture*, tr. Sh. Suhrawardy (Calcutta, 1934, rpr. Philadelphia, 1977), pp. 49–50; G. Widengren, 'The Sacral Kingship of Iran', in *La regalità sacra* (Leiden, 1959), pp. 242–257; M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago, 1961–1974), vol. I, *The Classical Age of Islam*, pp. 454ff.; E. Yarshater, 'Iranian National History', in E. Yarshater (ed.), *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3(1) (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 359–477. For al-Mas'ūdī's pro-Iranian stance, see T. Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Mas'ūdī*, pp. 90–91.

63. Al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiya 'an al-qurūn al-khāliya*, ed. C. E. Sachau (Leipzig, 1878), p. 213; tr. Sachau, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations* (London, 1897, rpr. Frankfurt, 1969), p. 197. Cf. al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa al-tabyīn*, vol 3,

oeuvre, particularly his *Tajārib al-umam*, is from beginning to end filled with admiration for these two characteristics of Iranian culture; one readily understands why F. Rosenthal termed him 'the Persian nationalist philosopher'.⁶⁴ The same is also true for Firdawsī of Ṭūs in his monumental *Shāh-nāmā*. The role played by these kinds of thinkers is certainly not negligible in the sense that even the non-Iranian dynasties such as the Ghaznavids, Saljūqs and Ilkhāns rapidly adopted Persian and traced their origins to the ancient kings of Iran instead of to Muslim saints or Turko-Mongolian heroes.⁶⁵

For almost a century now, many scholars have sought to show how these Iranian thinkers had, since the formation of Muslim culture, perceived of themselves as inheritors of a glorious cultural past and so constituting the vital last link in the chain of 'the History of Salvation', that is, of Islam.⁶⁶ M. Grignaschi, and more recently

p. 366, where it states that the Umayyad state is regarded as Arab and the 'Abbasid state as Persian Khurāsānian. For differing opinions on the nature of the 'Abbasid revolution (esp. those of M. A. Shaban, M. Sharon and J. Lassner) and for criticism of these opinions see E. Daniel, 'Arabs, Persians and the Advent of the Abbasids Reconsidered', *JAOS*, 117/3 (1997), pp. 542–548 as well as the extensively researched and much documented work by E. Yarshater, 'The Persian Presence in the Islamic World', in R. G. Hovannisian and G. Sabagh (eds), *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 4–125, particularly pp. 59–74. For the importance of Persian in the ancient perception of Iranian culture, see F. Gabrieli, 'Literary Tendencies', in G. E. von Grunebaum (ed.), *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization* (Chicago, 1955), pp. 87–106.

64. F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden, 1952), p. 122.

65. See R. Levy, 'Persia and the Arabs', in A. J. Arberry (ed.), *The Legacy of Persia* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 56–73, esp. pp. 66ff.; B. Spuler, 'Iran: the Persistent Heritage', in G. E. von Grunebaum (ed.), *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, pp. 167–182, particularly 176–177; see also W. Madelung, 'The Assumption of the Title Shahanshah by the Buyids and the Reign of the Daylam (*Dawlat al-Daylam*)', *JNES*, 28 (1969), pp. 84–108 and 168–183, rpr. in *Religious and Ethnic Movements in Medieval Islam* (London, 1992), article 8.

66. Among many other examples, see I. Goldziher, 'Islamisme et parsisme', *RHR*, 43 (1901), pp. 1–29, and *Muslim Studies*, tr. S. M. Stern and C. R. Barber (London, 1967–1971), vol. 1, pp. 135f.; G. E. von Grunebaum, 'Firdausi's Concept of History', in his *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition* (London, 1955), pp. 175f.; M. G. Morony, 'The Effects

C. H. de Fouchécour, Sh. Shaked and A. Tafazzoli have brilliantly demonstrated how what Gustav von Grunebaum calls 'the Persian Humanities' crystallise around the figure of the 'king' and royal ethics as transmitted to Islamic culture by the literary genre of the *Mirrors for Princes* (possibly an equivalent to *naṣīḥat al-mulūk*).⁶⁷ All that, according to learned Iranian 'nationalists', constitutes the sophistication of Persian culture and is designated by terms such as *honar* or *adab*, namely ethics, good manners, courtesy, refinement of the mind and humanism; it is transmitted essentially by

of the Muslim Conquest on the Persian Population of Irak', *Iran*, 14 (1976), pp. 41–55, and 'Conquerors and Conquered: Iran', in G. H. A. Juynboll, *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL, 1982), pp. 73–87; E. Yarshater, *Iranian National History*, in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1983), esp. pp. 360ff., and 'The Persian Presence in the Islamic World', in R. G. Hovannisian and G. Sabagh (ed.), *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 4–125; C. E. Bosworth, 'The Persian Contribution to Islamic Historiography in the Pre-Mongol Period', in *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World*, pp. 218–236; M. Moḥammadi Malāyeri, *Farhang-e Īrānī-ye pish az eslām wa āthār-e ān dar tamaddon-e eslāmī va adabiyāt-e 'arab* (Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995).

67. Among the many publications by M. Grignaschi on the subject, see e.g. 'Quelques spécimens de la littérature sassanide conservés dans les bibliothèques d'Istanbul', *JA*, 240 (1967), pp. 33–59; 'La *Nihâyatu-l-arab fī akhbâri-l-Furs wa-l-'Arab* (first section)', *Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales*, 22 (1969), pp. 15–67, 'La *Nihâyatu-l-arab fī akhbâri-l-Furs wa-l-'Arab* et les *Siyaru Mulûki-l-'Ajam* du Ps. Ibn al-Muqaffā', *Ibid.*, 26 (1973), pp. 83–184, and 'La *Siyâsatu-l-'ammīyya* et l'influence iranienne sur la pensée politique islamique', in *Hommage et Opera Minora*, vol. 3, *Monumentum H.S. Nyberg, Acta Iranica* (Leiden, 1975), pp. 124–141; C. H. de Fouchécour, *Moralia. Les notions morales dans la littérature persane du 3e/9e au 7e/13e siècle* (Paris, 1986); Sh. Shaked, 'Andarz in Pre-Islamic Persia', *EIr*, vol. 2, pp. 11–16. In general, Sh. Shaked is one of the foremost specialists on the subject of the transmission of Iranian themes to Islamic culture. His numerous publications on the subject have now been gathered in one volume: *From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam* (Aldershot, 1995); A. Tafazzoli (Tafaḍḍolī), *Tārikh-e adabiyāt-e Īrān pish az eslām*, ed. Ž Āmūzegār (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997), pp. 180–250; see also T. Qāderī, 'Matn hā-ye akhlāqī-andarzī dar zabān hā-ye Īrānī-ye miyāne-ye gharbī va sharqī', in A. Kāwūs Bālā Zādeh (ed.), *Mehr o dād o bahār. Memorial Volume of Dr Mehrdād Bahār* (Tehran, 1377 Sh./1998), pp. 221–232.

the Persian language and this literature.⁶⁸ Well before translating the Qur'ān into Persian received authorisation from the inner circle of scholars in Sāmānid Transoxiana,⁶⁹ the respectability, even the sacred nature, of the Persian language was stressed, at the very least since the *fatwā* by Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), as reported in *al-Fiqh al-akbar*, according to which the Names, Attributes and Organs of God may be uttered in Persian as well as in the original Arabic.⁷⁰

68. F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, pp. 141–142; M. Moḥammadi Malāyeri, *Tārikh va farhang-e Īrān dar dōwṛān-e enteḡāl az 'aṣr-e Sāsāni be 'aṣr-e islāmī* (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), vol. 1, *Del-e Īrān-shahr* (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996) vol. 2; N. Pourjavady (Pūrjavādī), '*Mā be majles-e mehtarān sokhan nagūyīm*. Fārsi gūyi-ye 'Abd Allāh-i Mubārak va adab-e Īrānī', *Nashr-e Dānesh*, N.S., 16/4 (1378 Sh./1999) vol. 2, pp. 21–25. In this latter article, it is significant that the only two citations of the Khurāsānian ascetic from Marw, 'Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), reproduced in Persian in Arabic sources (namely, *al-Ansāb* by al-Sam'ānī from Marw and *Siyar al-salaf* by Abū'l-Qāsim al-Taymī from Iṣfahān), relate to good manners: 1) *khord pish-e Ḥafṣ pāy derāz nemikonad*, 'In the presence of Ḥafṣ, the younger (i.e. 'Abd Allāh b. al-Mubārak himself), do not stretch out one's legs', and 2) *mā be majles-e mehtarān sokhan nagūyīm*, 'Where great men are gathered, it is out of turn for me to speak'. In the account of the famous meeting between the mystics, Abū Ḥafṣ al-Ḥaddād of Nisābūr and Junayd al-Baghdādī, originally from Nihāwand, taken aback by the politeness of the former's disciples, the latter tells him that they have been initiated into the good manners of kings. See e.g. al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, ed. 'A. H. Maḥmūd and M. b. al-Sharīf (Cairo, 1974), vol. 2, p. 563; 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkira al-awliyā*', ed. M. Este'lāmī (2nd edn, Tehran, 1355 Sh./1977), p. 395; both authors are from Nisābūr; cf. the expression *adab al-mulūk*. One will have noticed that the protagonists as well as the authors are all Iranians, mainly Khurāsānī.

69. M. Moḥammadi Malāyeri, *Tārikh va farhang-e Īrān*, pp. 127ff.

70. Al-Imām Abū Ḥanīfa, *al-Fiqh al-akbar* (2nd edn, Hyderabad, 1399/1979), p. 7 (curiously, the only exception is the Persian term *dast* ['hand'], which Abū Ḥanīfa does not authorise the use of for *yad* in the expression *yad Allāh*); the namesake of the Ḥanafi legal school is said to have allowed those who spoke Persian to say *khodāy bozorg ast* ('God is Great') instead of *Allāhu akbar*; see 'A. A. Ṣādeqī, *Takvīn-e zabān-e fārsī* (Tehran, 1357 Sh./1978), p. 64; M. Moḥammadi Malāyeri, *Tārikh va farhang-e Īrān*, p. 130. On the sacred nature of Persian and its ability to transmit wisdom and religious concepts, see W. Barthold, *Mussulman Culture*, pp. 50ff. and much more recently N. Pourjavady (Pūrjavādī), 'Hekmat-e dinī va taqaddos-e zabān-e fārsī', in his

The staunchest defenders of this Iranian cultural identity, as is well known, were the scribes or secretaries of state of Iranian origin of the 'Abbasid era, the famous *kuttāb* of whom Ibn al-Muqaffa' (executed ca. 140/757), is the emblematic figure. In the context of our subject, the *Kitāb dhamm akhlāq al-kuttāb* by al-Jāhiz (d. 255/869), who saw himself as defender and champion of religious orthodoxy and Arab culture, is especially telling.⁷¹ In a strongly sardonic passage, al-Jāhiz denounced the pro-Iranian stance taken by official secretaries of state and their disdain for Arab and Islamic traditions: they know the maxims of Buzurjmihr, the Testament of Ardashīr, the epistles of 'Abd al-Ḥamīd and the *Adab* by Ibn al-Muqaffa' by heart. Their bedside reading includes the Book of Mazdak and *Kalīla va Dimna*. They praise only the policies of Ardashīr Bābakān, the administration of Anūshiruwān and admire Sasanian methods of government. Thus they consider themselves more expert than 'Umar in administrative affairs, than Ibn 'Abbās in Qur'ānic exegesis, than Mu'ādh b. Jabal in knowledge of the licit and the illicit, than 'Alī in his judgements and arbitration. They do not read the Qur'ān regularly and do not consider exegesis, law or the study of traditions to be basic sciences.⁷²

By evoking the milieu of the Iranian *kuttāb* one is inevitably reminded of the pro-Iranian Shu'ūbiyya, the people that al-Jāhiz

Būy-e jān (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), pp. 1–37 where many studies have been cited and examined usefully.

71. 'Amr b. Bahr al-Jāhiz, *K. Dhamm akhlāq al-kuttāb in Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ed. 'A. M. Hārūn (Cairo, 1965), vol. 2, pp. 185–199, ed. 'A. Muhannā (Beirut, 1988), vol. 2, pp. 199–134. Also edited in J. Finkel, *Three Essays of Abū 'Othmān ibn Baḥr al-Jāhiz* (Cairo, 1926), under the title *Dhamm al-kuttāb*, pp. 40–52.

72. Ed. Hārūn, pp. 191ff.; ed. Muhannā, pp. 126ff.; ed. Finkel, pp. 46ff.; passage cited by E. Yarshater, 'The Persian Presence in the Islamic World', pp. 70–71, based on the edition by Hārūn. French translation in Ch. Pellat, 'Une charge contre les secrétaires d'Etat attribuée à Jāhiz', *Hespéris*, 43 (1956), pp. 29–50. On al-Jāhiz's stance, refer also to *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, vol. 7, pp. 68ff., and *al-Bayān wa'l-tabyīn*, vol. 3, pp. 6–7.

wanted to fight.⁷³ Might one conclude that the Shahrbānū tradition was born in the milieu of pro-Shu'ūbī Iranian scribes? This is quite likely considering that it was in the third/ninth century, just when the tradition began to circulate widely, that the Shu'ūbiyya movement reached its peak.

For the historian of early Islam, Ḥusaynid Shi'ism, opposition to Zaydi Shi'ism, sustained Iranianism, Iranian intellectualism and the challenging of pro-Arab Sunni orthodoxy, all unmistakably evoke the ambiance of the court presided over by al-Ma'mūn 'son of the Persian' in Marw, one of the great cities of Khurāsān, just at the time when in the year 200/815 he designated the Shi'i imam of the Ḥusaynid line, 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, as his successor. Indeed, al-Ma'mūn seems to have sought this moment to re-establish the alliance between the 'Abbasids, 'Alids and Persians,

73. On the connection between scribes and the Shu'ūbiyya see e.g. H. A. R. Gibb, 'The Social Significance of the Shu'ūbiyya', in *Studia Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen Dicata* (Copenhagen, 1953), pp. 105–114, rpr. in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, ed. by S. J. Shaw and W. R. Polk (Boston, MA, 1962), pp. 62–73; M. B. Sharīf, *al-Širā' bayn al-mawālī wa'l-'arab* (Cairo, 1954), passim; 'A. 'A. Dūrī, *al-Judhūr al-ta'rikhiyya li'l-shu'ūbiyya* (Beirut, 1962), passim; W. M. Watt, *Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh, 1968), see index under 'Ibn al-Muqaffa' (French translation, *La pensée politique de l'Islam* [Paris, 1995], pp. 94–99 and 129f.); M. Carter, 'The Kātib in Fact and Fiction', *Abr Nahrain*, 11 (1971), pp. 42–55; R. Mottahedeh, 'The Shu'ūbiyah Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran', *IJMES*, 7 (1976), pp. 161–182; P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 108–112; C. E. Bosworth, 'The Persian Impact on Arabic Literature', in E. Beeston et al., *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 155–167; M. Chokr, *Zandaqa et zindīqs en Islam au second siècle de l'hégire* (Damascus, 1993), ch. 5. For other sources on the Shu'ūbiyya, see S. Enderwitz, *EI2*, vol. 9, pp. 533–536. On al-Jāhīz's anti-Shu'ūbism and anti-Shi'ism, now consult Enderwitz, *Gesellschaftlicher Rang und ethnische Legitimation. Der arabische Schriftsteller Abū 'Uthmān al-Ġāhīz über die Afrikaner, Perser und Araber in der islamischen Gesellschaft* (Freiburg, 1979), see index under 'Shu'ūbiyya'; also Ch. Pellat, 'Ġāhīz à Bagdad et à Sāmarrā', *RSO*, 27 (1952), pp. 63ff., rpr. in *Etudes sur l'histoire socio-culturelle de l'Islam (VIIe-XVe s.)* (London, 1976), article 1, and 'Jāhīz', *EI2*, vol. 2, pp. 395–398, esp. pp. 396b–397a; see also his *The Life and Works of Jāhīz: Translations of Selected Texts* (London, 1969), pp. 272–275.

an alliance that in the past had led to the victory of the *da'wa hāshimiyya*, and fell apart after the assassination of Abū Muslim when the 'Abbasids seized power.⁷⁴

In my view, the tradition reported by Ibn Bābūya in his *Uyūn* implicitly contains some valuable information in this regard.⁷⁵ First, it is possible that the great traditionalist from Rayy had collected this report, like many others in this same work, on his journey to Khurāsān; this is all the more credible since he reports it from a Khurāsānī, apparently unknown except for his name, Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī.⁷⁶ Then, in the body of the *ḥadīth* it is said that imam al-Riḍā held court when he was in Khurāsān, being already designated crown prince by al-Ma'mūn. The eighth imam's interlocutor, as we have seen, is a certain Sahl b. al-Qāsim al-Nūshajānī, who to my knowledge is not mentioned in Imami

74. See M. Rekaya, 'al-Ma'mūn', *EI2*, vol. 6, pp. 315–323. On the relations between the 'Abbasid caliph and Shi'i movements in general and imam al-Riḍā in particular, see e.g. the now classic study by F. Gabrieli, *al-Ma'mūn e gli 'Alidi* (Leipzig, 1929); D. Sourdél, 'La politique religieuse du calife 'abbāside al-Ma'mūn', *REI*, 30/1 (1962), pp. 26–48; E. L. Daniel, *The Political and Social History of Khurasan under Abbassid Rule (747–820)* (Minneapolis and Chicago, IL, 1979), see index under 'al-Ma'mūn'; W. Madelung, 'New Documents Concerning al-Ma'mūn, al-Ḥaḍl b. Sahl and 'Alī al-Riḍā', in W. al-Qāḍī (ed.), *Studia Arabica et Islamica. Festschrift for Iḥsān 'Abbās* (Beirut, 1981), pp. 333–346; D. G. Tor, 'An Historiographical Re-examination of the Appointment and Death of 'Alī al-Riḍā', *Der Islam*, 78/1 (2001), pp. 103–128. On al-Ma'mūn and the challenge to Sunni orthodoxy, obviously reaching its peak in the *miḥna*, see the classic study by W. M. Patton, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna* (Leiden, 1897); M. Hinds, 'Miḥna', *EI2*; J. van Ess, 'Ibn Kullāb et la Miḥna', *Arabica*, 37 (1990), pp. 173–233, and *Theologie und Gesellschaft* (1994), vol. 3, pp. 446–80; J. A. Nawas, 'A Reexamination of Three Current Explanations for al-Ma'mūn's Introduction of the *Miḥna*', *IJMES*, 26 (1994), pp. 615–629; M. Q. Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbāsids*, index under 'Miḥna' and 'Ma'mūn'. Also, M. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mūn* (Cambridge, 2000).

75. Refer to note 21 above; *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, ch. 35, *ḥadīth* no. 6, p. 128.

76. In the present state of knowledge, the chain(s) of transmitters for different versions of the Shahrbānū story – when such exist of course – do not contribute much of any great import to the issue here.

prosopographic works. However, some fragmentary information is provided by other sources regarding the Nūshajānī family. The name is clearly a patronymic — ‘agān’, very likely based on Anōsh ‘immortal’, itself abridged from a composite name typical of Pahlavi onomastics; Nūshajānī would thus be the Arabicised form of Anōshagān. According to the geographer Ibn al-Faqīh (third/ninth century), Nūshajān or Nūshanjān was the last Transoxanian Iranian province before China, in the extreme north-east of Greater Khurāsān, in the border region between al-Shāsh and the Chinese territories. The province, divided into greater and lesser Nūsha(n)jān, consisted of several large and small towns and was populated ‘by Turks, Zoroastrians (*majūs*) worshippers of fire and *zindīqs*’, Manicheans (*mānawīyya*). The family name is thus derived from this region; however Ibn al-Faqīh’s assumption is perhaps mistaken.⁷⁷ The Nūshajānī family seems to have regularly received Sasanian kings and courtiers. Their ancestor would have been Nūshajān, son of Wahraz, the first Iranian governor of

77. Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhānī, *Kitāb al-buldān*, ed. Y. al-Hādī (Beirut, 1416/1996), p. 635; information taken up by Yāqūt al-Hamawī (d. 626/1228), *Muʿjam al-buldān*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Leipzig, 1866; rpr. Tehran, 1965), vol. 4, p. 833, Beirut edn (1376/1957), vol. 5, p. 311. Yāqūt refers to Ibn al-Faqīh via al-Samʿānī (d. 562/1166), but the latter, in his *Ansāb*, speaks only of a Nūshajānī Sufi living in the convent of the famous mystic from Kāzarūn, namely Abū Ishāq al-Kāzarūnī; see al-Samʿānī, *al-Ansāb*, facsimile reproduction of the manuscript by D. S. Margoliouth (London and Leiden, 1912), p. 571b, held at the British Museum; unless it is another Samʿānī or from a work other than the *Ansāb*. See also G. Le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1930; rpr. London, 1966), index under *Ansāb*. The author wonders if one ought to identify Greater Nūsha(n)jān with the Khotan region. The region described by Ibn al-Faqīh corresponds to Barskhān (or Barsghān) as noted by other geographers such as Qudāma, Ibn Khurdādhbih and al-Kāshgharī: these are lands around Lake Issyk-kul in current-day Kirghizistan; see *Hudūd al-ʿĀlam, The Regions of the World*, tr. V. Minorsky (Oxford–London, 1937), pp. 292ff. and p. 292, n. 3. It appears that the Sasanians never exercised any authority over these distant lands. ‘Nūshajān’ would thus be a dummy name due to an erroneous reading of the term Barskhān/Barsghān. The notoriety of the Nūshajānī family, having nothing to do with the region mentioned by Ibn al-Faqīh and most likely of Sasanian nobility, would thus have been a factor in establishing this corrupt manuscript tradition.

Yemen, special envoy of the king, Anūshiruwān.⁷⁸ Ibn Hishām and al-Jāhīz allude to the strong ties that bound the family to the Sasanian court, links that afforded the Nūshajānī great political influence.⁷⁹

We have seen that, according to the *Ta'rikh* by al-Ṭabarī,⁸⁰ 'Abd Allāh b. 'Āmir b. Kurayz offered one of the girls from the Kistrā family captured at Sarakhs to a certain al-Nūshajān (see above). If we are to trust several reports recorded by Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī in his *Aghānī*, the family seems to have maintained its power even after the advent of Islam. During both the Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphates, the Nūshajānī would have retained a large part of their vast lands, fortune and influence. However, some of their palaces must have been ruined, as we can infer from the compositions by Muḥammad b. Bashīr ('Abbasid period), who declaimed nostalgic poetry about the ruined palaces of the family's glorious ancestors to their descendants in their superb mansion in Ja'fariyya, the capital's aristocratic suburb.⁸¹

Aḥmad b. Sahl al-Nūshajānī, who could be the son of imam al-Riḍā's mysterious interlocutor in our *ḥadīth*, aroused the jealousy of the caliph al-Mu'taḍid (r. 279–290/892–902) because of his lavish lifestyle and considerable social and political influence. Al-Iṣfahānī writes that the Baghdadi house of the Nūshajānī family was not only constantly frequented by poets, musicians and

78. Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, vol. 3, pp. 166ff., in particular pp. 176–177.

79. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sira al-nabawiyya*, ed. M. Saqqā, I. Abyārī and 'A. Shalabī (2nd edn, Cairo, 1955), vol. 1, pp. 43–44; al-Jāhīz, *Rasā'il al-Jāhīz*, vol. 1, p. 201 and vol. 2, p. 290. In his entry on 'Nahr al-mar'a', Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī writes that the name of the location ('Lady's River'), in Baṣra, is named after a woman, Kāmwar/Kāmūr-Zād bint Narsī whose palace was offered to the conqueror Khālīd b. al-Walīd by her first cousin (and husband most probably) al-Nūshajān b. JSNSMĀH (?); see Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, ed. Wüstenfeld, vol. 4, p. 844, Beirut edn, vol. 5, p. 323.

80. Ed. de Goeje, series 1, p. 2,887; ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 4, p. 302.

81. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, vol. 3, p. 130 and vol. 12, p. 136.

singers but also by men of letters, thinkers and scribes (*kuttāb*).⁸² The mention of *kuttāb* and the sustained good relations between the Nūshajānī family and the Sasanian royal house leads one to believe that their home could very well have been a meeting place for the pro-Iranian Shu'ūbiyya.

In this context, the note by Ibn Shahrāshūb informing us that Shahrbānū was sometimes called Barra bint al-Nūshajān (*wa yuqāl hiya Barra*; cf. the report by al-Ṭabarī) is seen in an unexpected light.⁸³ Similarly, it is noteworthy that in his *Aghānī*, Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī often gives Abu'l-Aswad al-Du'ālī the name Zālim b. 'Amr al-Nūshajānī.⁸⁴ It should be recalled that in al-Kulaynī and Ibn Shahrāshūb, to cite only two sources, it is to Abu'l-Aswad that the verse praising the fourth imam (descendant of Hāshim and Kisrā) is attributed.⁸⁵ Thus numerous connections link different members of the Nūshajānī family (originally or de facto Mazdaean?): on the one hand, to the Sasanian court and nobility, and on the other, to the Ḥusaynid Shi'is. One may thus reasonably believe that it was not impossible for the Shahrbānū story to have originated in their entourage.

82. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 131 and vol. 8, p. 88. According to information provided by L. Massignon, referring to *Maktūbāt* by 'Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamadhānī, the eminent chamberlain Naṣr al-Qushūrī at some time after 288/899–900 had bought a property in Baghdad from a certain Nūshajānī, director of the *barīd*, see L. Massignon, *La Passion de Hallāj* (rpr. Paris, 1975), vol. 1, p. 474, which once again brings us to the highly placed Iranian bureaucrats or civil servants of the 'Abbasid state.

83. Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 3, p. 311. See above.

84. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, vol. 1, p. 49; vol. 11, p. 105; vol. 15, p. 97; vol. 18, p. 132. Elsewhere, the 'Alid poet is called Zālim b. 'Amr b. Sufyān (or 'Uthmān); clearly the grandfather's name and its orthographic representation poses a problem. See e.g. al-Marzubānī, *Akhbār shu'arā' al-shi'a*, ed. M. Ḥ. al-Amīnī (Najaf, 1388/1968), p. 27; al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, ed. M. Ḥ. Āl-Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Najaf, 1380/1961), p. 95, note from the editor; Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Ṣan'ānī, *Nasmat al-saḥar bi-dhikr man tashayya'a wa sha'ar*, ed. K. S. al-Jabbūrī (Beirut, 1420/1999), vol. 2, p. 276 and the editor's note on sources.

85. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, p. 369; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 305. See above.

In the *ḥadīth* reported by Ibn Bābūya, one finds a member of the Nūshajānī family in the entourage of al-Ma'mūn and 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā in Marw. What we have just noted above makes this historically plausible. And given the family's past as well as its position during the Sasanian era, it would not be illogical to read into these ambiguous lines of the *ḥadīth* (which, as we have seen, reminds us of the Iranian notion of *xwētōdas/xwēdōdah*) a pro-Iranian Shu'ūbism more radical than in other toned-down versions.⁸⁶

Thus the Shahrbanū story would have emerged in the pro-Iranian Shu'ūbī entourage of the Nūshajānī family at al-Ma'mūn's court in Khurāsān. The last sentence of the *ḥadīth* reported by Ibn Bābūya is a telling sign: 'Sahl b. al-Qāsim (al-Nūshajānī) says, 'There was not a single Ṭālibid [Ḥusaynid Alid?] amongst us who did not copy my version of this *ḥadīth* from al-Riḍā (*mā baqiya Ṭālibī 'indana illā kataba 'annī hādhā'l-ḥadīth 'an al-Riḍā*).'⁸⁷

It may be possible to be more precise regarding the dating of this tradition. Immediately after the failure of the revolt by the Ḥasanid, Ibn Ṭabātabā, in 199/815, two Ḥusaynids, both sons of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and half-brothers of 'Alī al-Riḍā, initiated insurrections against the 'Abbasid regime in Baghdad: Zayd known as

86. See above. Through these historical elements and the figure of Shahrbanū one senses a conflict between a radical Iranism that seeks, for example, to establish equal status between the Iranian princess and Fāṭima (see e.g. Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 311: Shahrbanū has the same title as Fāṭima, i.e. Sayyidat al-Nisā'. 'Alī gave this name to two of the most sacred women, according to the Shi'is, namely Fāṭima and Maryam/Mary) and a more moderate Iranianism that attempts to maintain the superiority of Fāṭima (e.g. in the version reported by Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, p. 196 in which it is explicitly stated that Sayyidat al-Nisā' refers only to Fāṭima and as such the princess could not be named Shāh-e Zanān which is almost the Persian equivalent of the title granted to the Prophet's daughter).

87. Ibn Bābūya, *Uyūn*, vol. 2, p. 128. On the intellectual influence of the Iranians in al-Ma'mūn's state and their convergence with the 'Alids see also the intriguing report by al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-wuzarā' wa'l-kuttāb*, ed. 'A. I. al-Ṣāwī (Cairo, 1357/1938), pp. 256ff.

'al-Nār' (literally 'the Fire', that is, the incendiary one) in Baṣra and Ibrāhīm known as 'al-Jazzār' (the Butcher) in Yemen. It was at this point, in 200/815–816, in Khurāsān that al-Ma'mūn initiated his great effort at reconciliation between the 'Alids and 'Abbasids, a movement widely supported by a large number of Iranians. As the Ḥasanid Zaydīs consistently proved to be too aggressive, he opted for reconciliation with the Ḥusaynids in an especially spectacular style: not only did he save the two sons of Mūsā al-Kāẓim who had just been proclaimed anti-caliphs at Baṣra and in Yemen, but on 2 Ramaḍān 201/24 March 817 he designated their brother 'Alī – wise enough to remain above the fray – as his successor, conferring him the title *al-Riḍā min āl Muḥammad*.⁸⁸

It did not take long for the 'Abbasids in Baghdad, supported by a large section of the *ahl al-sunna wa al-jamā'a*, to react. The sons of al-Mahdī led the opposition against al-Ma'mūn: when al-Manṣūr b. al-Mahdī refused to be proclaimed caliph, his step-brother Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī accepted the title on 28 Dhu'l-Ḥijja 201/17 July 817.⁸⁹ Now, al-Manṣūr was born of al-Buḥturiyya, daughter of Khorshīd the last Dābūyid *isfahbadh* (high-ranking military official) from Ṭabaristān, and his step-brother Ibrāhīm was born of Shakla, daughter of the last *maṣmughān* (great Zoroastrian priest) from the district of Damāwand. Both opponents of al-Ma'mūn were therefore descendants of high-ranking Iranian nobility on the maternal side. The Arab nobility of their father's side was not in question either. One may thus reasonably believe that in al-Ma'mūn's entourage it was envisaged that they should do even better with regard to his successor: 'Alī al-Riḍā, a descendant of Hāshim (on the paternal side), would have as his grandmother a woman not simply belonging to the nobility, but to no less than the Iranian royal family.

Some months later, al-Ma'mūn initiated his policy of rapprochement with the 'Abbasid aristocracy in Iraq. His first concession was

88. M. Rekaya, 'al-Ma'mūn', *EI2*, pp. 318–319.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

the announcement of his return to Baghdad and his departure from Marw on 10 Rajab 202/22 January 818. It was during this journey that both major obstacles to this rapprochement were eliminated: the Iranian al-Faḍl b. Sahl on 2 Sha'bān 202/13 February 818 in Sarakhs and the Ḥusaynid imam 'Alī al-Riḍā on 29 Ṣafar 203/5 September 818.⁹⁰ Thus, the Shahr-bānū story – at least in its core form – emerged among the Iranian-Shu'ūbī Nūshajānī family in al-Ma'mūn's entourage in Marw, the Khurāsānian capital, between March 817 (the proclamation of 'Alī al-Riḍā as heir) or the month of July of the same year (proclamation of Ibrāhīm b. al-Mahdī's caliphate in Baghdad) and January 818 (when al-Ma'mūn abandoned his pro-'Alid policy).

3

'One never knows what the past will hold tomorrow.'⁹¹ This proverb perfectly illustrates the posthumous fate of the figure of Shahr-bānū both in popular Shi'ism and throughout Iran, the lands of which she is said to be the Lady. In literary traditions, as we have seen, the Sasanian princess dies either upon the birth of her son Zayn al-'Ābidīn, or drowns in the Euphrates after witnessing the massacre of her family at Karbalā. Popular belief decided otherwise. It is as if such a death did not satisfy Iranian

90. Ibid., pp. 319–320. Let us also point out that the Jewish Exilarch, the *Rosh Golah* (Aramaic: *rēsh galūtha*, 'leader of the diaspora'; Arabic: *ra's jālūt/ra's al-jālūt*) Bustanai, contemporary of imam al-Ḥusayn, is also said to have married an Iranian princess; see M. Gil, *A History of Palestine 634–1099* (Cambridge, 1992), see index under 'Bustanai, exilarch'. On the convergence between Jews and Shi'is, now consult S. M. Wasserstrom, 'The Shi'is are the Jews of our Community: An Interreligious Comparison within Sunni Thought', *IOS*, 14 (1994), pp. 297–324, on Bustanai and al-Ḥusayn, p. 316; now in Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: the Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton, 1995), ch. 3.

91. Proverb cited by the anthropologist F. Aubin, 'La Mongolie des premières années de l'après-communisme: la popularisation du passé national dans les mass média mongols (1990–1995)', *Etudes Mongoles et Sibériennes*, 27 (1996), p. 323.

tradition, which sought to find a more useful and glorious end for its princess.

In a pioneering study devoted to popular beliefs about Shahr-bānū, Sayyid Ja'far Shahīdī relates the most frequently told version of the oral legend of the daughter of Yazdgird III, here called Bibī (Lady; also grandmother) Shahr-bānū: after the day of 'Āshūrā, Bibī Shahr-bānū was able to escape, as her husband had predicted, on his horse Dhu'l-janāh. Pursued by her terrible enemies, she reaches mount Ṭabarak in Rayy, central Iran. Exhausted and alone, she invokes God to deliver her from her assailants; but, as a Persian, instead of saying *yā hū* ('O God!' lit. 'O He') she mistakenly cries out *yā kūh* ('O Mountain!'). The rock miraculously opens and offers her refuge. However, a corner of her dress gets caught in the opening when the mountain closes behind her. A short while later her pursuers notice the trapped fabric and realise that a miracle has taken place – Shahr-bānū's saintliness becomes apparent. The site becomes the sanctuary of the princess, a place of pilgrimage, and remains so to this day.⁹²

An almost identical story explains the Zoroastrian sanctuary of Bānū Pārs (the Lady of Persia), in the north-western plain of Yazd, south of the town of 'Aghdā. Here one encounters the daughter of Yazdgird III (in this instance called Khātūn Bānū), the escape and chase given by the Arabs, the distress of the princess and the appeal for help, the miracle of the mountain – opening and closing behind the young woman, ending with the piece of fabric (here it is the princess's scarf that is caught between the rocks).⁹³

92. S. J. Shahīdī, 'Baḥthī dar bāre-ye Shahr-bānū', in *Cherāgh-e rowshan dar donyā-ye tārik*, pp. 186ff. This study, focused mainly on the popular beliefs regarding Shahr-bānū as well as the sanctuary found in Rayy, hardly deals with the literary tradition of the princess's story.

93. Jamshīd Sorūsh Sorūshiyān, *Farhang-e beh-dīnān*, ed. M. Sotūdeh (Tehran, 1334 Sh./1956), p. 204. No connection is established between the Sasanian princess and the Shi'i imams. In a fiercely anti-Muslim Zoroastrian account dating from the ninth/fifteenth century, Shahr-bānū and Bānū Pārs are presented as sisters, the daughters of Yazdgird III. The first, married to

More generally, themes such as the escape of the Iranian nobility (male and female), or often members of the royal family, in the face of Arab invaders and their miraculous rescue by God acting through the natural world, are frequently seen in the foundation legends of Zoroastrian sanctuaries in central and southern Iran.⁹⁴ According to the study by S. J. Shahīdī, mention of the sanctuary in Rayy becomes more frequent in sources from the Safawid period on. Apparently, it was shortly before this period that what was once a pilgrimage site (*mazār*) became the tomb (*maqbara*, *marqad*) of Shahrbānū.⁹⁵ Indeed, not only Shahīdī but also Ḥosayn Karīmān in his classic monograph devoted to the old city of Rayy, citing the archeological works of Sayyid Moḥammad Taqī Moṣṭafavī, dates the oldest section of the sanctuary to the

Muḥammad by force, died without bearing any children. The second, also coveted by the 'Prophet of the Arabs', fled and was saved by the mountain; for the purposes of discretion, this manuscript is written in a mixture of Persian and Avestan (see the untitled manuscript R VIII/1B at the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute in Bombay, fols. 430a–433a).

94. *Farhang-e beh-dīnān*, p. 204 (sanctuary of Pīrī Sabz also known as Pīrī Chakchakū, pilgrimage site of Princess Nāzbānū, hidden here); pp. 205–206 (sanctuary of Pīrī Hrisht, north-east of Ardakān: a travelling companion of Yazdgird's daughter or the daughter herself chased by Arabs and saved by the mountain); p. 206 (Shozdī Fozel = Shāhzāde Fāḍil, 'Prince Fāḍil'), sanctuary of a Sasanian princess in Yazd, p. 207 (Norakī, in southern Yazd: sanctuary of Zarbānū, princess of Yazd married to the king of Fārs, fled pursued by the Arabs and hidden in the mountains near Norakī), p. 211 (Shāh-e Harāt, north-east of Kirmān, governor of Yazdgird, pursued by the Arabs, hidden near a source henceforth called Pāy-e Shāh). Cf. also E. Strack, *Six Months in Persia* (London, 1882), vol. 1, p. 119 (cave of the Lady – *ghār-e Bibi* – and sanctuary for the Damsel in distress — *Bibi darmānda* — in Fārs province) and vol. 1, p. 227–228 (sanctuary of the Lady of Life — *Ḥayāt Bibi* — between Bāfq and Kirmān). On these pilgrimage sites refer also to R. Shahmardān, *Parastesh gāh-hā ye zartoshtiyān* (Bombay, 1345 Sh./1967).

95. S. J. Shahīdī, 'Baḥthī dar bāre-ye shahrbānū', pp. 186–187. According to some popular beliefs, the princess did not die here but was hidden or rendered invisible by the mountain; cf. also E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* in 4 vols (Cambridge, 1928), vol. 1, p. 131 where belief in Shahrbānū's occultation — *ghā'ib shodan* — is alluded to.

ninth/fifteenth century, shortly before the Safawid period.⁹⁶ Neither Abū Dulaf, in his description dated 330/940 of the Ṭabarak Mountain in Rayy nor al-Qazwīnī (sixth/twelfth century), in his *Kitāb al-naqd*, which includes a detailed listing of sacred sites located in Rayy, say anything about Shahrbanū's sanctuary,⁹⁷ which shows that, almost independently of the development of the literary tradition, the oral tradition develops and reaches maturity around the ninth and tenth/fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Although it is apparently impossible to date precisely the Zoroastrian legends just cited, it nonetheless seems they go back to an earlier period.⁹⁸ It is therefore likely that they were at the source of the foundational legend regarding the Bībī Shahrbanū sanctuary in Rayy. Moreover, the presence of an ancient Zoroastrian 'tower of silence' (*dakhma*) on the same Ṭabarak mountain, further north, would also corroborate the existence of links between the sanctuary of Shahrbanū and Iranian Zoroastrianism.

In a certain fashion, the figure of Shahrbanū and her sanctuary seem to reflect the continuation of ancient Mazdean beliefs. A few years after the works of S. J. Shahīdī, Moḥammad Ebrāhīm Bāstānī Pārīzī, another Iranian scholar, once again took an interest in Bībī Shahrbanū in the context of his studies on Iranian toponyms, including the terms meaning woman, lady, princess and so on

96. S. J. Shahīdī, 'Baḥthī dar bāre-ye shahrbanū', pp. 187ff.; Ḥ. Karīmān, *Ray-e bāstān* (Tehran, 1345–1349 Sh./1966–1970), vol. 1, pp. 403–416 citing at length S. M. T. Moṣṭafavī, 'Boq'e-ye Bībī Shahrbanū dar Rayy', *Eṭṭelā'āt*, 5/2 (1331 Sh./1952), pp. 15–24 as well as the article of the same title in *Gozāresh hā-ye bāstān-shenāsī*, 3 (1334 Sh./1956), pp. 3–40, in which results of the archeological excavations previously published in earlier works are now revisited and supplemented. The most ancient item of the sanctuary seems to be the cenotaph dated 888/1483–1484.

97. Abū Dulaf, *Safar-Nāmeḥ-e Abū Dulaf dar Īrān*, ed. V. Minorsky, tr. A. F. Ṭabāṭabā'ī (Tehran, 1342 Sh./1964), 'al-Risāla al-thāniya', p. 31. 'Abd al-Jalīl al-Qazwīnī, *Kitāb al-naqd*, ed. al-Muḥaddith al-Urmawī (Tehran, 1979), p. 643.

98. Information from *Dārāb Hormazyār's Rivāyat*, ed. M. R. Unvala (Bombay, 1922), vol. 2, pp. 158–159, indicates that the Bānū Pārs sanctuary was already a place of frequent visitation in the tenth/sixteenth century.

(*Bānū*, *Khātūn*, *Bībī*, *Dokhtar* etc.).⁹⁹ Through extensive research into both the archeological evidence and written sources as well as folkloric legends and popular beliefs, Bāstānī Pārīzī convincingly establishes that in most cases, the sites bearing these kinds of names, at one time in the near or distant past, were locations for a temple and/or a cult of Ānāhītā/Anāhīd/Āb Nāhīd/Nāhīd, the very popular goddess of water and fertility: Ardvīsūr Anāhīd of the Zoroastrian pantheon. It is interesting to note that Anāhīd seems to have been the patron goddess of the Sasanians.¹⁰⁰

Some years after Bāstānī Pārīzī's study, and drawing extensively on studies by S. J. Shahīdī and M. E. Bāstānī Pārīzī, Mary Boyce came to the same conclusions, by means of a well-documented comparison between the foundational legends for sanctuaries of Shahr-bānū and Bānū Pārs.¹⁰¹ The title 'Bānū' (the Lady) is the ancient title for Anāhīd. From the Avesta onwards, the goddess is called *Aredvī sūrā bānū*.¹⁰²

In Pahlavi documents as well, the titles of *Bānū* or *ābān Bānū* (the Lady of the Waters) are associated with Anāhīd, Ardvīsūr or Ardvīsūr Amshās-fand.¹⁰³ Citing and using all these references,

99. M. E. Bāstānī Pārīzī, 'Benā hā-ye dokhtar dar Īrān', *Majalla-ye bāstān shenāsī*, 1–2 (1338 Sh./1959), pp. 105–137, and esp. the voluminous collection on the subject: *Khātūn-e haft qal'e* (Tehran, 1344 Sh./1966; 3rd. edn, Tehran, 1363 Sh./1984), pp. 150–368; the Bībī Shahr-bānū sanctuary is referred to in passing on p. 246.

100. R. Ghirshman, *Iran, Parthes et Sassanides* (Paris, 1962), p. 149 and *Bīchâpour* (Paris, 1971), vol. 1, p. 65; however, refer also to the nuances introduced by M. L. Chaumont, 'Anāhīd, iii. The Cult and its Diffusion', *Elr*, vol. 1, p. 1,008a.

101. M. Boyce, 'Bībī Shahr-bānū and the Lady of Pārs', *BSOAS*, 30/1 (1967), pp. 30–44. The renowned English Iranologist had already presented a paper on this topic at the Royal Asiatic Society in May 1965 (*ibid.*, p. 36, n. 19).

102. Y 68.13, see J. Darmesteter, *Le Zend-Avesta* (Paris, 1892–1893), vol. 1, p. 419, n. 25.

103. *Saddar Nasr and Saddar Bundelesh*, ed. B. N. Dhabhar (Bombay, 1909), pp. 116–118 and 149, English trans. by Dhabhar, *The Persian Rivāyats of Hormazyar Framarz* (Bombay, 1932), pp. 537–538 and 559; *Dārāb Hormazyār's Rivāyat*, ed. M. R. Unvala (Bombay, 1922), vol. 1, pp. 93 and 219–220 (tr. Dhabhar, pp. 96 and 221).

Boyce also alludes to the inscriptions of Iṣṭakhr and Paikuli in which Anāhīd is called 'Lady'.¹⁰⁴ Although no trace of a pre-Islamic monument was found at Bībī Shahr-bānū's mount, citing the *History* of Herodotus to support her claims, Boyce believes that a simple rock near a natural source of water (which is the case at Bībī Shahr-bānū) could have served as a temple for the worship of Anāhīd.¹⁰⁵ She even believes that the titles held by the Sasanian princess in Shi'i texts such as Lady of the Land (i.e. Iran) (Shahr-bānū), Sovereign of Women (Shāh-e zanān) and Lady of the Universe (Jahān bānū) could very well have been held by Anāhīd well before Islamicisation of the site.¹⁰⁶

What further corroborates a hypothesis of continuity between Anāhīd, goddess of water/fertility and Shahr-bānū, mother of the imams, is that in a large number of popular versions of the

104. M. Boyce, 'Bībī Shahr-bānū', pp. 36–37; also M. L. Chaumont, 'Anāhīd', *Elr*, vol. 3, p. 1008. On the widespread cult of Anāhīd in pre-Islamic Iran, see M. L. Chaumont, 'Le culte de Anāhitā à Stakhr et les premiers Sassanides', *RHR*, 153 (1958), pp. 154–175, and 'Le culte de la déesse Anāhitā (Anahit) dans la religion des monarques d'Iran et d'Arménie au 1er siècle de notre ère', *JA*, 253 (1965), pp. 167–181.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 43. In her article, 'Anāhīd, i, Ardwiśūr Anāhīd and ii, Anaitis', *Elr*, vol. 1, pp. 1003–1006, M. Boyce traces the cult of the goddess back to Rayy during the Parthian period, p. 1004.

106. 'Shahr-bānū and the Lady of Pārs', p. 38; the author gleans these titles from the prayer book — *ziyārat-nāma* — distributed at the entrance to the sanctuary in Rayy. We have seen that these titles are already noted in the various written versions of the Shahr-bānū story. See also Boyce, 'Anāhīd', p. 1005b. On the analogy between titles given to Bībī Shahr-bānū and Anāhitā (alias Nana), see also the Sogdian title *panchī Nana dhvambana*, 'Nana, Lady of Panch', i.e. the Pendjikent region, on coins issued by this town; see W. B. Henning, 'A Sogdian God', in *Selected Papers II = Acta Iranica* 15 (2nd series-VI) (Leiden–Tehran, Liège, 1977), pp. 617–630; esp. p. 627, n. 68. No doubt in symmetry with *Khshathra pati*, 'Lord of the Lands', a title sometimes given to Mithra; see M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 2, pp. 266–268. On the links – as close as they are complex – between Anāhitā and Nana, now consult F. Grenet and B. Marshak, 'Le mythe de Nana dans l'art de la Sogdiane', *Arts Asiatiques*, 53 (1998), pp. 5–18.

princess story she is also called Ḥayāt Bānū, the Lady of Life;¹⁰⁷ the relationship between life, water and fertility is obvious. In Mithraism, as well as in popular Mazdeism, (A)Nāhīd, mother of Mithra/Mehr, is a virgin; now, according to some popular Imami beliefs, Shahrībānū, although a mother, remains a virgin.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, visits to the sanctuary in Rayy are exclusively reserved for women (and on rare occasions for *sayyids*, men, thus to the actual or presumed descendants of imams considered the 'sons' of Shahrībānū); but most of all, infertile women visit the site to seek

107. M. E. Bāstānī Pārizī, *Khātūn-e haft qal'e*, p. 246 who also cites the name Nik Bānū, 'the Good Lady'; cf. above Ḥayāt Bibi and her sanctuary mentioned by E. Strack, *Six Months in Persia*, vol. 1, pp. 227–228. In a Zoroastrian poem of an unknown period, the princess at the Pīrī Chakchakū sanctuary (note 94 above) is called Ḥayāt Bānū; see Ardāshīr b. Shāhī (or Bonshāhī), *Ganjīne-ye adab* (Bombay, 1373/1952), p. 84.

108. On the virginity of (A)Nāhīd, Mithra/Mehr's mother, see M. Moqaddam, *Jostār dar bāre-ye Mehr va Nāhīd* (Tehran, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 29ff. Regarding Shahrībānū's virginity, Ṣ. Hedāyat, *Neyrangestān* (Tehran, rpr. 1344 Sh./1966), p. 118. One may advance two other hypotheses on the parallel features between Anāhīd as Mithra's mother and the figure of Shahrībānū: 1) Mithra, 'the Petrogenous', born of a rock; on this legend originating probably in Asia Minor or the Caucasus, see F. Cumont, *Les mystères de Mithra*, (rpr. Paris, 1985, from the 3rd edn, Brussels, 1913), pp. 132ff.; On the many monuments representing Mithra born from a rock, see F. Cumont, *Textes et monuments relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* (Bruxelles, 1896–1899), vol. 1, pp. 161ff.; M. J. Vermaseren, *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae* (La Haye, 1956–1960), vol. 1, pp. 158ff.; there is thus an analogy between the rock, a symbol of incorruptibility that gives birth to an Iranian god and Anāhīd, the deity's mother, eternally young and virgin. Shahrībānū, received by the rock at the mountain in Rayy, literally identifies with her. One finds the same analogy, even identity with the Lady of the Rock. 2) Identification of the trinity Ahura Mazdā/(marrying his daughter:) Spenta Aramati/(to give birth to his son:) Vohu Manah with the trinity Ahura Mazdā/Anāhīd/Mithra resuscitates the 'incestuous marriage' archetypal par excellence by placing the Iranian goddess at the centre of the trinity, see e.g. G. Widengren, *Les religions de l'Iran* (Paris, 1968), pp. 256ff., which obviously evokes *xwētōdas/xwēdōdah* regarding the mother of the fourth imam as we have already seen.

healing and fertility from the Lady of the Land; and this has been the case ever since ancient times.¹⁰⁹

Apart from these reasons indicated by Bāstānī Pārīzī and Boyce, namely the prior existence of a sanctuary for Anāhīd,¹¹⁰ the choice of Rayy may also be explained by the fact that it was from this city in 20/641 that Yazdgird III launched a last appeal to his people to put up strong resistance against Muslim troops before escaping to Khurāsān. Moreover, the city of Rayy, although almost entirely Iranian in population (with a minimal Arab presence), had always been one of the most important bastions of all forms of Shi'ism (Zaydism, Ismailism, Qarmatism and of course Imamism) and remained so until the sixth/twelfth century.¹¹¹ Finally, during al-Ma'mūn's reign, pre-Islamic Iranian religious traditions would

109. Bāstānī Pārīzī, *Khātūn-e haft qal'e*, p. 246. Apart from Shahrbanū, in Persian literature, the goddess Anāhīd also seems to have been transformed into another Sasanian princess, namely Shīrīn; see P. P. Soucek, 'Farhād and Tāq-i Bustān: the Growth of a Legend', in *Studies in Art and Literature of the Near East in Honour of Richard Ettinghausen* (Washington, 1974), pp. 27–52. Moreover, the chapter devoted to Shahrbanū in M. R. Eftekhār-Zādeh, *Īslām dar Īrān. Shu'ūbiyye nehdat-e moqāvat-e mellī-ye Īrān 'alayh-e Omaviyān va 'Abbāsiyān* (Tehran, 1371 Sh./1992), pp. 98ff., though well documented, is nonetheless much too tainted by its ideological and polemical stance to be appropriately used in a scholarly study. Similarly, the treatment reserved for Shahrbanū in D. Pinault, 'Zaynab bint 'Alī and the Place of the Women of the Households of the First Imāms in Shi'ite Devotional Literature', in G. R. G. Hambly (ed.), *Women in the Medieval Islamic World* (New York, 1998), pp. 80–81 (the entire article pp. 69–98) is rather a shallow summary to be useful here.

110. Though advanced prudently, Ḥ. Karīmān's hypothesis according to which the Shahrbanū sanctuary would actually have been a Zoroastrian *dakhma* where lie the bodies of Hormoz (son of Yazdgird II) and his family, all assassinated by Pērōz, the other son of the Sasanian king, seems hard to support (*Ray-e bāstān*, vol. 1, p. 379 and pp. 414–415). Indeed according to the Iranian scholar, the transfer of the site to Shi'ism enabled it to be protected from the destructive rage of recent converts; now, another ancient Zoroastrian cemetery, visited in the early fourth/tenth century by Abū Dulaf (*Safar-Nāmeḥ*, 'al-risāla al-thāniyya', p. 31), is located on the same mountatin. It was neither destroyed nor Islamicised. Why reserve such different treatment to locations of the same kind found on the same site? On the contrary, a 'pagan' temple is usually more in need of protection from the zeal of believers of a new religion than a cemetery.

111. V. Minorsky-C. E. Bosworth, 'al-Rayy', *EI2*, vol. 8, pp. 487–489.

have survived in Rayy since the city seems to have sheltered a still active Manichean community.¹¹²

Unlike epic religious accounts, in which Shahrībānū seems to have only a minor role,¹¹³ *ta'ziya*, Shi'i Persian theatre, shows strong evidence of her popularity. In the catalogue of *ta'ziya* plays in the Cerulli collection held at the Vatican Library, Ettore Rossi and Alessio Bombaci have classified more than thirty plays in which Shahrībānū, sometimes called Shāh-e zanān, features. Usually, the scene takes place on the day of Karbalā' and the play describes the mourning and courage of the martyred imam's wife. Some plays (nos 30–424–429–461–579–948 and 1,000) also portray the princess of Iran being captured, her dialogue with 'Alī and her marriage to al-Ḥusayn. Finally, Shahrībānū's escape to Rayy and the mountain miracle are the scenarios in two plays (no. 466 – on the hidden princess – and no. 945).¹¹⁴ In almost all

112. Gh. H. Šadiqī, *Jonbesh hā-ye dīnī-ye īrānī dar qarn hā-ye dovvom va sevvom-e hejri* (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993) a supplemented and updated version of the author's doctorate thesis, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens au IIe et IIIe siècles de l'hégire* (Paris, 1938), see index under 'Yazdānbakht' drawing on Ibn al-Nadīm and al-Bīrūnī.

113. For example, she only appears once and in a cursory manner at the beginning of the voluminous *Abū Muslim-nāma*, though curiously as the daughter of Zayd the Jew (*Abū Muslim-nāma*, the version reported by Abū Ṭāhir al-Ṭarṭūsī, ed. H. Esmāīlī, 4 vols [Tehran, 1380 Sh./2001], vol. 1, p. 92.) However, the Sasanian princess seems to have been emulated in this literature; see e.g. Princess Dhi Funūn Pākdāman, daughter of the King of Irām, who marries the son of 'Alī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya in *Hikāyat-e Muḥammad-e Ḥanafīyye*, cited by J. Calmard, 'Moḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya dans la religion populaire, le folklore, les légendes dans le monde turco-persan et indo-persan', *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale*, 5–6 (1998), pp. 201–220, particularly pp. 214–215. Moreover, in the beliefs of some villages in Simnān, Shahrībānū is the sister of a (Mazdean?) prophet named Sinelūm whose sanctuary on 'the Mountain of Prophets' (*Kūh-e peyghambarān*), has remained a very popular pilgrimage site; see C. A. Azami, 'Payghambarān Mountain Temple', *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute*, 73 (1987), pp. 45–55, and 'Parmgar Fire Temple', *Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute*, 74 (1988), pp. 200–206.

114. E. Rossi and A. Bombaci, *Elenco di drammi religiosi persiani (fondo mss. Vaticani Cerulli)* (Vatican City, 1961), index, p. 386, under 'Shahrībānū'; also C. Virolleaud, *Le théâtre persan* (Paris, 1950), pp. 7–8.

these works, sympathy for Iran and its pre-Islamic past are readily apparent.

The convergence between pre-Islamic Iran and Imami Shi'ism by virtue of Shahrbānū is just as emphatic in some popular rituals dedicated to the wife of the third imam. Sacrifices offered to Bībī Shahrbānū – horses, lambs and cattle – are the same as those offered to Bānū Pārs/Anāhīd of 'Aghdā in Yazd.¹¹⁵ The main ritual offering in the sanctuary at Rayy is a bowl of water¹¹⁶ – an element of nature of which Anāhīd is the goddess. In some regions of Iranian Khurāsān, among the mourning rituals that mark the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram in commemoration of the death of the martyrs at Karbalā', elegies (Persian: *mātam* = Arabic: *marthiya*, *nawḥa*) dedicated to Shahrbānū and often called 'the Farewell of (or: to) Shahrbānū' (*wadā'-i Shahrbānū*) occupy an important place. Processions reciting these elegies almost invariably pass by a Zoroastrian cemetery; if the ritual is not carried out, people believe that the villages will be victim to drought or floods, that is to say, in either case natural disasters related to water.¹¹⁷

115. M. Boyce, 'Bībī Shahrbānū and the Lady of Pārs', pp. 42–43. However, the author is right to stress the difference between the respective moods of the sanctuaries: while the Shi'is make their pilgrimage in sadness, mourning and with lamentations, the Zoroastrians, for whom joy is a form of energy that derives from Ahura Mazda, render worship in a lighthearted manner, with laughter, music and song, p. 44.

116. S. J. Shahīdī, 'Baḥthī dar bāre-ye shahrbānū', p. 189.

117. Ibid., p. 180–181; also M. R. Eftekhār-Zādeh, *Islām dar Īrān* (Tehran, 1371 Sh./1992), pp. 130–132: the elegy given as: '*Ey shahrbānū al-wadā', ey shahrbānū al-wadā'*', copied from the notebook of an official in the village, comes from the region of Birjand, in southern Khurāsān. The Sogdian Manichean text on the Nana cult, published by Henning in 'The Murder of the Magi', in *Selected Papers II = Acta Iranica*, 15, pp. 139–150, though quite fragmentary, offers striking parallels with this cult of Bībī Shahrbānū: one finds the same intermingling of the funerary cult, lamentations and 'the drought curse'; see also F. Grenet and B. Marshak, 'Le mythe de Nana dans l'art de la Sogdiane', pp. 7–9 and F. Grenet in *L'Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Sciences Religieuses*, 105 (1996–1997), pp. 213–217, particularly p. 216.

I am personally acquainted with some Zoroastrian women from the Kirmān region who regularly make a pilgrimage to the Shahr-bānū sanctuary in Rayy. This is not an isolated case. It is true that they would only need to veil themselves in order to disguise themselves among the masses of visiting Muslim women. Although they have not explicitly said so, it seems perfectly plausible that they visit the site to worship the popular Lady Anāhīd.¹¹⁸ As J. Chabbi has so aptly observed, 'In order to survive in a present that denies it, the past must advance masked.'¹¹⁹

4

The figure of Shahr-bānū may be situated within the complex network of relations between Iranians and Shi'is. These relations naturally belong to the wider framework of the attitude of Iranians towards Islam and the authorities that represented it during the first centuries of the Hijra. This framework was extensively studied in its myriad forms.¹²⁰ One could say that this attitude exhibited itself in three ways, each influenced by a number of currents: first, a violent, radical attitude, at times leading to rejection, plain and simple – whether one thinks of the political convergence that linked the Kaysānī 'Alids and Iranian nobility from the Mukhtār revolt in 66/685,¹²¹ or the Khurramī revolts, particularly

118. Jamshīd Sorūsh Sorūshiyān lists a certain number of sacred sites visited by Zoroastrians and Shi'is alike: Seti Pīr in Maryam-Ābād of Yazd (*Farhang-e behdīnān*, p. 206), Āb-e Morād, west of Kirmān (pp. 207–208), Shāh Mehr-īzād, north of Kirmān (p. 209), Shāh Varahrām-īzād in Kirmān itself which the Shi'is call 'Master Murtaḏā 'Alī of the Zoroastrians', *Pīr Morteḏā 'Alī-ye gabrān* (p. 210) and Kūh Borīdā in Zerīsf, east of Kirmān (p. 211).

119. J. Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des tribus. L'Islam de Mahomet* (Paris, 1997), p. 402.

120. Now consult an analysis by E. Yarshater, 'The Persian Presence in the Islamic World'; refer also to his excellent bibliography, pp. 100–125.

121. According to historiographical sources, only Persian was spoken in Mukhtār's army; see al-Dīnawarī, *al-Akhhbār al-ṭīwāl*, p. 302; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. de Goeje series 2, p. 647. Although the assertion seems exaggerated, the reactions of the Umayyad authorities led by the caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, as reported

of the Zoroastrian Sunbādh in Rayy (around 138/756) whose army seems to have consisted of Neo-Mazdakites, Zoroastrians and Shi'is, or of Bābak in Ādharbāyjan (from 201 to 223/816–838) undoubtedly seeking to overcome Islam with a view to restoring the Magian religion of the Persian royal house,¹²² or the Qarmaṭī Shi'is led by Abū Ṭāhir al-Jannābī/Ganāvehī when in 319/931 he transferred power to a young Persian from Isfahan, who according to prophecies attributed to Zoroaster and Jāmāsp, was meant to be the *Mahdī* or agent for the restoration of Magian rule;¹²³ and to free-thinkers, among them some of Iranian origin, who, according to the heresiographers, often hid their Manicheism and sometimes radical 'Iranism' in the guise of Shi'i *rafḍ*.¹²⁴

by other categories of sources appear to corroborate this kind of information; see e.g., Abū'l-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf b. Muḥammad, *Kitāb alif bā'* (Cairo, 1287/1870), vol. 1, p. 24; al-Damirī, *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā* (Cairo, 1306/1888), vol. 2, pp. 78. See also Ḥ. Taqī-Zādeh, *Az Parvīz tā Changīz* (2nd edn, Tehran, 1330 Sh./1952), p. 70; Gh. Ḥ. Ṣadiqī, *Jonbesh hā-ye dīnī-ye īrānī*, p. 42.

122. S. Nafīsī, *Bābak-e Khurramdīn, delāvar-e Ādharbāyjan* (Tehran, 1342 Sh./1963), see index under 'Zoroastrian' etc.; W. Madelung, 'Khurramiyya ou Khurramdīniyya', *EI2*, vol. 5, pp. 65–67, in particular p. 65b; E. Yarshater, 'Mazdakism' in E. Yarshater (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3(2) (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 1,001ff. 'A. Mir Fetṛūs, 'Jonbesh-e sorkh jāmegān. Bar rasī-ye manābe', *Iran Nameh*, 9/1 (1991), pp. 57–89.

123. W. Madelung, 'Qarmaṭī', *EI2*, vol. 4, pp. 687–692, particularly pp. 688b–689a; now consult S. J. Ḥamīdī, *Nehḍat-e Abū Sa'īd Ganāvehī* (3rd edn, Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), ch. 5. Let us not forget the Pārsiyan neo-Mazdakis who in 536/1141–1142 joined the Nizārī Ismailis, loyal supporters of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, see W. Madelung, 'Mazdakism and the Khurramiyya', in his *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany, NY, 1988), pp. 1–12.

124. For example, Bashshār b. Burd, Ibn Abī'l-'Awjā', Abū Shākīr, Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq, Ibn Ṭālūt, Ibn al-Rāwandī; see Gh. Ḥ. Ṣadiqī, *Jonbesh hāye dīnī-ye īrānī*, pp. 130–135; also G. Vajda, 'Les zindīqs en pays d'Islam au début de la période abbasside', *RSO*, 17 (1937), pp. 173–229; M. Chokr, *Zandaqa et Zindīqs en Islam au second siècle de l'hégire* (Damascus, 1993), see index under the names above. S. Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden, 1999), index. See also Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, vol. 2, pp. 115–116; Baghdādī, *al-Farq*, p. 173; Nizām al-Mulk, *Siyāsat-nāma*, ed. J. Sha'ār (Tehran, 1364 Sh./1986), pp. 25, 249, 279, 285f.

A second category of Iranians, consisting mostly of intellectuals, the educated and thinkers, seem to have made an unconditional commitment to the new religion and even its language, to the extent of becoming its most important advocates. Indeed, until proven otherwise, no discernible Iranian trait is perceptible in the works of such figures as al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Mājjā, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī, or even Sībawayh, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī or Ibn Qutayba.¹²⁵

Finally, in a third category, mainly of intellectuals and politicians, men of letters and activists, and in which many tendencies co-exist or at times confront each other, from the most moderate to the most radical, with a range between the two, the protagonists seem to be ardent Muslims, though still holding on to their sense of Iranian identity, that is, the sentiment, even historical consciousness, of belonging to a great culture and an ancient civilisation. In a general way, the twofold conviction found in this third category would have led the Iranians to filter elements belonging to ancient Iranian culture into the new religion; in other words, to 'Islamicise' some traits of pre-Islamic Iranian civilisation and religious sentiment.¹²⁶ Thus, they seem to have been convinced of the need for preventing the loss of some traits considered essential, not

125. See e.g. E. Yarshater, 'The Persian Presence in the Islamic World', pp. 93ff. With regard to Ibn Qutayba, although in his *Uyūn al-akhbār* and *Ma'ārif*, he reproduces the essential works of Ibn al-Muqaffa', this seems to be more of a literary exercise than a deeply felt pro-Iranian sentiment. In any case, his anti-Shu'ūbi sentiments, admittedly moderate, are evident in his *Kitāb al-'arab*, ed. M. Kurd 'Alī, *Rasā'il al-bulaghā'* (2nd edn, Cairo, 1365/1946), pp. 344–377.

126. For the denunciation of this 'infiltration' of Islam by the Iranians, see e.g. al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq* (Cairo, 1328/1910), pp. 269–271; al-Maqdisī, *al-Bad' wa'l-ta'rikh*, ed. and tr. Cl. Huart (Paris, 1901–1903), vol. 5, pp. 133ff.; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, ed. M. R. Tajaddod (Tehran, 1350 Sh./1971), p. 188; al-Birūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqīya*, p. 213; al-Mas'ūdī, *al-Tanbih wa'l-ishrāf*, ed. M. de Goeje (Leiden, 1893–1894), p. 395; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, vol. 1, p. 36 and vol. 2, p. 91; al-Balkhī, Abu'l-Ma'ālī Muḥammad b. Ni'mat, *Bayān al-adyān*, ed. M. T. Dānesh Pazhūh (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997), ch. 5, pp. 106ff.; al-Maqrizī, *al-Khiṭaṭ* (Bulāq, 1853), vol. 2, p. 462; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Naqd al-'ilm wa'l-'ulamā' aw talbīs Iblīs* (Cairo, 1340/1921), p. 212.

only for Iranian culture but also for Islam since they could provide it with fundamental elements that would render it a universal religion and a veritable civilisation. This would have been the position of a large majority of the pro-Iranian Shu'ūbiyya. In this case, it is no longer a case of threatening the permanence of the Islamic empire, but rather fighting for its future orientation. It is not the destruction of the state that is envisaged but the refashioning of its institutions, its political and social values, its structures of thought, in a word, all that would contribute to the development of its culture.¹²⁷ It was due to numerous obvious points of convergence in the opinion of various eminent specialists, that Shi'ism in its different forms constituted one of the most favourable terrains for this category of Iranian.¹²⁸ Apparently, the Shu'ūbī Irano-Shi'i milieu in which the Shahrbānū tradition was nurtured belonged to this third category.¹²⁹

127. H. A. R. Gibb, 'The Social Significance of the Shu'ūbiyya', pp. 62ff.; S. Enderwitz, *Gesellschaftlicher Rang und ethnische Legitimation*, pp. 50ff. and 141ff.; the author supplements theories advanced by Hamilton Gibb by essentially demonstrating that in addition to one culture triumphing over another, it is also a matter of the status, social and political privileges of the new civil servants.

128. See among others, I. Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, 'Arab und 'Ajam' (Halle, 1888), vol. 1, pp. 101–146; *Die Shu'ūbijja*, pp. 147–176, esp. 168ff.; *ibid.*, pp. 177–218, esp. 201ff.; E. Blochet, 'Etudes sur l'histoire religieuse de l'Iran, I. De l'influence de la religion mazdéenne sur les croyances des peuples turcs', *RHR*, 38 (1898), pp. 26–63, particularly pp. 37ff. and 54ff.; B. Spuler, 'Iran: the Persistent Heritage', pp. 171–172; J. K. Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation: Zoroastrian Subalterns and Muslim Elites in Medieval Muslim Society* (New York, 1997), see index under 'Shi'ism', as well as the great many pages in three important Persian works: 'A. Eqbāl, *Khāndān-e Nawbakhti* (Tehran, 1311 Sh./1932); M. Moḥammadī Malāyeri, *Tārīkh va farhang-e Īrān*, and Gh. Ḥ. Šadiqi, *Jonbesh hā-ye dīni-ye īrāni*. At times, the attitude of certain authors (Muḥammad Ghazālī, Suhrawardī Shaykh al-Ishrāq) seems rather 'tactical': in order to save some Iranian cultural elements, it seems necessary to severely criticise others. This issue merits a separate study.

129. Generally speaking, this seems to be the case in the milieu of the first great Imami traditionalists from the Schools of Rayy and Qumm (see *Guide divin*, pp. 48–54 [*Divine Guide*, pp. 19–21]) and this in spite of some fiercely anti-Arab traditions, perhaps stemming from the first category, also found in the compilations of these traditionalists (e.g. certain eschatological *ḥadīths*

The relationship between pre-Islamic Iranian culture and Islam in general, as well as the convergences, even political connivance, between Shi'is and Iranians, as we have seen, have been widely studied; on the other hand, links of a doctrinal and religious nature between ancient Iranian religions and Imami Shi'ism constitute a field of research that is still almost completely unexplored. In this dense assemblage of material, the Shahr-bānū tradition forms a part of those elements that link Imamism to ancient Iran and by the same means serve to rehabilitate pre-Islamic Iranian culture.

Let us limit ourselves to some noteworthy examples: the tradition according to which the celestial Book of Zoroaster consisted of 12,000 volumes containing all Knowledge and in which 'Alī is depicted as the ultimate connaisseur of this Book;¹³⁰ a tradition praising the justice of Iranian royalty, particularly of King Anūshiruwān, during whose reign the Prophet was born;¹³¹ the emblematic figure of Salmān the Persian as the Iranian sage, the

regarding the return of the *qā'im*; see *Guide divin*, pp. 294–295 [*Divine Guide*, pp. 115–123], and 'Eschatology, iii. In Imami Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol. 8, p. 578).

130. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Furū' min al-Kāfi*, 4 vols (Tehran, 1334 Sh./1956), vol. 1, p. 161; Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī/al-Majālīs*, Arabic text and Persian trans. by M. B. Kamare'i (Tehran, 1404/1984), p. 206, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, ed. al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭihrānī (Tehran, 1398/1978), p. 7, and *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruḥu'l-faqīh*, ed. al-Mūsawī al-Kharsān (5th edn, n. p., 1390/1970), vol. 1, p. 17; al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, ed. al-Mūsawī al-Kharsān (Najaf, 1958–1962), vol. 1, p. 381. 'Alī as an expert on Zoroastrianism is also found in Sunni sources, e.g. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, p. 129; al-Ṣan'ānī, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, ed. Ḥ. al-R. al-A'ẓamī (Beirut, 1972), vol. 6, pp. 70–71; for other Sunni sources see also Y. Friedmann, 'Classification of Unbelievers in Sunnī Muslim Law and Tradition', *JSAI*, 22 (1998), p. 180 n. 78. On recourse to the figure of 'Alī for the preservation of certain Iranian traditions from the Sasanian period, see Sh. Shaked, 'From Iran to Islam: On Some Symbols of Royalty', *JSAI*, 7 (1986), pp. 85–87 (rpr. in *From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam*, article VII), and 'A Facetious Recipe and the Two Wisdoms: Iranian Themes in Muslim Garb', *JSAI*, 9 (1987), pp. 31–33 (now in *From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam*, article IX); For other Shi'i *ḥadīths* see also M. Mo'in, *Mazdayasnā va ta'thīr-e ān dar adabīyyāt-e fārsī* (Tehran, 1326 Sh./1948), with an introduction by H. Corbin.

131. Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 15, pp. 250, 254, 279ff.

ideal Muslim and archetype of the Shi'i initiate;¹³² the glorification of two of the greatest Iranian festivals, Nawrūz and Mihrigān in *ḥadīths* going back to the Shi'i imams and texts by Imami thinkers;¹³³ mourning rituals for al-Ḥusayn as a continuation of funerary rituals not unlike ancient practices for the Iranian hero Siyāvash.¹³⁴

In this context, and when we consider the fundamental importance of filiation and the cult of kinship in Shi'ism since earliest times,¹³⁵ the figure of Shahr-bānū takes on special meaning. In the ninth/fifteenth century, Jamal al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Alī, known as Ibn 'Inaba (d. 828/1424) wrote that a number of Ḥusaynid

132. L. Massignon, 'Salmān Pāk et les prémices spirituelles de l'Islam iranien', in his *Opera Minora* (Beirut, 1963), vol. 1, pp. 443–483; H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien* (Paris, 1971–1972), see index under 'Salmān'; 'A. Mohājērānī, *Barrāsī-ye seyr-e zendegī va ḥekmat va ḥokūmat-e Salmān-e fārsī* (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999).

133. For the *ḥadīths* see J. Walbridge, 'A Persian Gulf in the Sea of Lights: the Chapter on Naw-Rūz in the *Biḥār al-Anwār*', *Iran*, 35 (1997), pp. 83–92; among thinkers, see e.g. praises of 'Alī regarding Iranian festivals in poems by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1016), *Dīwān* (rpr. Qumm, n.d.), pp. 134ff. and his brother al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), *Dīwān* (Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986), pp. 56ff. as well as in the poems of the former's disciple, newly converted from Zoroastrianism: Mahyār al-Daylamī (d. 428/1036), cited by M. Moḥammadi Malāyeri, *Tārīkh va farhang-e Irān*, pp. 188–190. On Nawrūz being considered 'Alī's birthday by the Bektashis, see F. De Jong, 'The Iconography of Bektashism. A Survey of Themes and Symbolism in Clerical Costume, Liturgical Objects and Pictorial Art', *The Manuscripts of the Middle East*, 4 (1989), note 56.

134. See Sh. Meskūb, *Sūg-e Siyāvash* (Tehran, 1971), pp. 82ff.; E. Yarshater, 'Ta'zieh and Pre-Islamic Mourning Rituals in Iran', in P. J. Chelkowski (ed.), *Ta'zieh: Ritual and Drama in Iran* (New York, 1979), pp. 80–95; 'A. Bolūkbāshī, 'Tābūt gardānī, namāyeshī tamthīlī az qodrat-e qodsī-ye khodāvandī', *Nashr-e Dānesh*, 16/4 (1378 Sh./2000), pp. 32–38, particularly pp. 33–34. On the identification, made in popular Persian literature, between the Iranian hero Rustam and 'Alī, see S. Soroudi, 'Islamization of the Iranian National Hero Rustam in Persian Folktales', *JSAI*, 2 (1980), pp. 365–383. The article by A. B. Agaëff, 'Les croyances mazdéennes dans la religion chiite', *Transactions of the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists* (London, 1893), pp. 505–514 is now quite outdated.

135. See M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Considérations sur l'expression *dīn* 'Alī', *ZDMG*, 150/1 (2000), pp. 29–68 (Chapter 1, this volume).

Shi'is and even some Sunnis (? *al-ʿawāmm*) take pride in the fact that ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn, in his very being, combined prophethood (*al-nubuwwa*, by virtue of his descent from Muḥammad) and royalty (*al-mulk*, due to his Sasanian descent).¹³⁶ Here, the genealogist seems to have in mind mainly Iranians, mostly Ḥusaynid Shi'is, but apparently also non-Shi'is. It seems quite telling that for many centuries, almost without exception, the writers who have reported the main versions of the Shahr-bānū story have been Iranians or Iranianised Imamis: Šaffār, Nawbakhtī, Ashʿarī Qummī, Kulaynī, Ibn Bābūya, Kay Kāwūs b. Iskandar b. Qābūs, Ibn Rustam Ṭabarī, the unknown author of *Mujmal al-tawārikh waʿl-qīṣaṣ*, Rāwandī, Ibn Shahrāshūb.¹³⁷

Adding the Light of Royal Glory to that of *walāya* stemming from Muḥammad and ʿAlī, Shahr-bānū gives a double legitimacy, Shi'i and Iranian, to her sons, the imams of Ḥusaynid lineage, as well as a dual nobility, Qurashī, and Sasanian. Thus she becomes the main link between the relationship which unites pre-Islamic Iran and Imamism. Much later, an analogous effort was made with regard to the mother of the twelfth imam, the Imami Mahdī, described in some versions as the granddaughter of the Byzantine

136. Ibn ʿInaba, *ʿUmdat al-ṭālib fī ansāb āl Abī Ṭālib*, p. 173. The author, himself an Arab of Ḥijāzī origin and Ḥasanid descent, criticises this attitude, arguing that the nobility of the fourth imam is solely due to the fact that he is a descendant of the Prophet. This kind of polemic lives on today; see e.g. comments made by ʿA. Ḥ. al-Amīnī in response to an Egyptian scholar in *al-Ghadīr fīʾl-kitāb waʾl-sunna waʾl-adab* (Beirut, 1397/1977), vol. 33, pp. 317–318. On polemics of a political nature regarding this subject see e.g. M. Fischer, *Iran: from Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 260–261; Y. Richard, *L'Islam Chi'ite. Croyances et idéologies* (Paris, 1991), p. 115.

137. Note that the presence of al-Mubarrad, one of the first authors to describe ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn's mother as belonging to the Sasanian royal house, is quite mysterious (cf. above); is this sympathy for the ʿAlid cause? (see R. Sellheim, 'al-Mubarrad', *EI2*, vol. 7, pp. 281–284, particularly p. 281b). Or rather, is this a form of teasing aimed at his friend al-Jāḥiẓ whose anti-Shi'i, anti-Iranian and anti-Shuʿūbī sentiments were hardly secret. Such is probably the case given that this kind of jocular behaviour was common among the intellectual circles of the large cities.

emperor, himself a descendant of the apostle Simon.¹³⁸ Thus the Imami Messiah would in his person bring together on the one hand Lights of Islam, Mazdaeism and Christianity and on the other Arab, Persian and Byzantine nobility. This attempt was unsuccessful and the tradition did not increase in popularity, undoubtedly because, in the eyes of Imami Shi'is, Byzantium was less important than Iran.

138. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Qumm, 1405/1985), vol. 2, ch. 41, pp. 417–423; al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba* (Tabriz, 1322/1905), pp. 134–139; Ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, pp. 489ff.; see *Guide divin*, p. 265 (*Divine Guide*, p. 108).

Part II: On the Nature of the Imam: Initiation and Dualism

Some Remarks on the Divinity of the Imam^{*}

In some – it must be said – rather discrete texts, diluted in the mass of traditions that early Twelver compilations contain, the Imam is not only presented as the man of God par excellence but as participating fully in the Names, Attributes and Acts that theology usually reserves for God alone. This ‘figure’ of the Imam presents a number of fundamental similarities with the variously named Cosmic Man of the Near and Middle Eastern spiritual and religious traditions. In many respects, it seems also to lie behind the reiteration of this ancient notion in Muslim spirituality.¹ It is

* ‘Imam’ is written with the ‘i’ upper case when it relates to the ontological, cosmic, archetypal Imam, and lower case when it relates to the historical imam, manifestation of the first or the perceptible level. Also, ‘Imami’ and ‘Twelver’ are used interchangeably.

1. In the present state of our knowledge, it still appears daring to wish to establish links among the diverse pre-Islamic religious traditions and the numerous schools of thought derived from them; even more so because a substantial number of doctrines claim, more or less explicitly, to have emerged from several among them. We can only limit ourselves to a few bibliographical references; for discussions on ‘Man in the image of God’ in Jewish, Christian and Judeo-Christian traditions, consult the extensive bibliography in L. Scheffczyk (ed.), *Der Mensch als Bild Gottes* (Darmstadt, 1969), pp. 526–538; also T. H. Tobin, *The Creation of Man: Philo and the History of Interpretation* (Washington, DC, 1983). On the recurring motif of *Imago Dei* in Hellenistic and Gnostic thought, see U. Bianchi (ed.), *La ‘doppia’ creazione dell’uomo negli Alessandrini, nei Cappadoci nella gnosis* (Rome, 1978). On the concept of Primordial Man in Iranian religions, see the bibliographical study by C. Colpe, ‘Der “Iranische

equally true that obvious similarities exist between the Imam-God of Shi'i texts and the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) of Muslim theosophy, an ontologically necessary intermediary between God and the world, the mysterious ultimate goal and 'Secret of secrets' for the theosophers.²

In this regard, the most representative and outspoken Shi'i texts are undoubtedly certain sermons attributed to 'Alī (assassinated in 40/661), the imam par excellence and the 'father' of all the historic imams of all Shi'i branches. So often does the identity of the speaker

Hintergrund" der islamischen Lehre vom Vollkommenen Menschen', in Ph. Gignoux (ed.), *Recurrent Patterns in Iranian Religions. From Mazdaism to Sufism*, *Studia Iranica*, 11 (1992). On the Perfect Man in Mazdaism, see M. Molé, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l'Iran ancien* (Paris, 1963), Book III, ch. 3. On the Primordial Man in Manichaeism, see H. C. Puech, *Le manichéisme, son fondateur, sa doctrine* (Paris, 1949) (Bibliography to be supplemented by H. C. Puech, 'le Manichéisme', in *l'Histoire des Religions, Encyclopédie de la Pléiade*, vol. 2, pp. 523–645). For Assyro-Babylonian religions, one will find valuable information in S. Parpola, 'The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 52/3 (1993), pp. 161–208.

2. Apart from the now classic works on Muslim mysticism that include more or less full discussions on the Perfect Man (e.g. works by Nicholson, Asin Palacios, Massignon, Arberry, Anawati-Gardet, Ritter, Schimmel, Corbin, Izutsu), there are cited below some monographs containing particularly interesting elements: H. H. Schaeder, 'Die islamische Lehre vom Vollkommenen Menschen', *ZDMG*, 79 (1925), pp. 192–268 (partially translated into Arabic by 'A. R. Badawī, see below); L. Massignon, 'L'Homme Parfait en Islam et son originalité eschatologique', *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 15 (1948), pp. 287–314 (now in *Opera Minora* [Paris, 1969], vol. 1, pp. 107–25); partially translated into Arabic by 'A. R. Badawī in *al-Insān al-kāmil fi'l-Islām* (Cairo, 1950); R. Arnaldez, 'al-Insān al-Kāmil', *EI2*, vol. 3, pp. 1271–1273; W. M. Watt, 'Created in His Image: A Study of Islamic Theology', *Transactions of Glasgow University Oriental Society*, 18 (1959–1960), pp. 36–49; G. C. Anawati, 'Le nom suprême de Dieu (*Ism Allāh al-A'zam*)', *Atti del Terzo Congresso di Studi Arabi e Islamici* (Naples, 1967); M. Takeshita, *Ibn Arabi's Theory of the Perfect Man and its Place in the History of Islamic Thought* (Tokyo, 1987); Ph. Gignoux, 'Imago Dei: de la théologie nestorienne à Ibn al-'Arabi', in Ph. Gignoux (ed.), *Recurrent Patterns in Iranian Religions: From Mazdaism to Sufism*, *Studia Iranica*, Cahier 11 (Paris, 1992), pp. 13–27; the work by B. Radtke, *The Concept of wilāya in Early Sufism* (London, 1993), includes valuable information on the earliest developments of the notion in mystical milieus.

shift, from one sentence to another, between God and the Imam that one could describe these sermons as 'theo-imamosophical'. In a long succession of affirmations, whose repeated hammering in assonant prose, resulted, it is said, in a collective trance on the part of his auditors, the first imam boldly declares his identification with the cosmic *Anthropos*, the Perfect Man, who, in the words of Massignon, is not divinity humanised but humanity rendered divine.³ To convey an idea of the import of these texts, I point out only some of these affirmations, to return to them in greater detail in the second part: 'I am the Secret of secrets, I am the Guide of the Heavens, I am the *First* and the *Last*, I am the *Apparent* and the *Hidden*, I am the *Compassionate*, I am the Face of God, I am the Hand of God, I am the Archetype of the Book, I am the Cause of causes . . . [the terms in italics are Qur'anic names of God].' Some specialists have denounced the late date for the redaction of these sermons.⁴ In addition, since the sixth/twelfth century, a large number of Imami scholars considered these sermons to belong to 'extremist' Shi'ism (the *ghuluww* movement)⁵

3. L. Massignon, 'L'Homme Parfait en Islam', *Opera Minora*, vol. 1, pp. 109–110.

4. 'A. Ḥ. Zarrīnkūb, *Arzesh-e mīrāth-e šūfiyye* (Tehran, 1343 Sh./1965), pp. 281–282; K. M. al-Shaybī, *al-Fikr al-shī'ī wa'l-naza'āt al-šūfiyya* (2nd edn, Baghdad, 1395/1975), pp. 253–254; among traditionalist scholars, Sayyid Muṣṭafā Āl Ḥaydar, *Bishārat al-Muṣṭafā* (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 75f., 214f.; Ja'far al-Āmilī, *Dirāsa fi 'alāmāt al-ẓuhūr* (Qumm, 1411/1990), pp. 110f. The arguments advanced by F. Sezgin, who tends to consider the entire text of one of these sermons (the *khuṭbat al-bayān*) as historically authentic, are not supported by the texts and are far from convincing, F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. 4 (Leiden, 1971), p. 22. Let us recall that from al-Ma'mūn's time (198–218/813–833), nearly two hundred sermons attributed to 'Alī were in circulation and this number rapidly doubled, see L. Veccia Vaglieri, 'Sul *Nahḡ al-balāghah* e sul suo compilatore ash-Sharīf ar-Raḍī', *AIUON*, special issue (1958), pp. 7f.

5. Based on the introduction by Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī (d. 1259/1843) to his *Sharḥ al-khuṭbat al-taṭanjiyya* (Tabriz, 1270/1853). It is true that since the earliest heresiographical treatises, the divinisation of the imam becomes one of the regular accusations levelled against 'extremist' Shi'is (see M. G. Hodgson 'Ghulāt', *EL2*, vol. 2, pp. 1,119–1,121; also W. al-Qāḍī, 'The Development of the Term *Ghulāt* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysāniyya', in

and excluded them from Twelver doctrine, recognised as 'moderate' Shi'ism. The apocryphal nature of these sermons, in their developed form, does indeed seem undeniable; just the philosophical and astronomy-related vocabulary in most of the versions is proof of the late date for their definitive versions.

In this first section therefore, I by no means seek to establish their authenticity but simply to show that, on the one hand, similar speeches existed from an early period in Shi'i-'Alid milieu and, on the other hand, Twelver imamological doctrine as it has been reported by early compilations of *ḥadīths* enables such a conception of the Imam and also consists of texts that could be considered the first steps of the sermons at issue. If it is true, as Corbin stresses: 'Even if the sermon was not in reality pronounced by the 1st imam . . . it was, at a given moment [pronounced] by an eternal Imam, in the Shi'i consciousness, and it is this that matters from a phenomenological point of view,'⁶ it remains no less true that the origin and development of the notion of the Imam-God in Imami Shi'ism has a history that deserves consideration. As a result, according to Watt,⁷ for the early period of Shi'ism, namely

A. Dietrich (ed.), *Akten des VII. Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft* (Göttingen, 1976), pp. 295–319, esp. pp. 299f. and 306f.). Neither the *Nahj al-balāgha*, compiled by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1016), nor the *Bihār al-anwār* by Majlisī II (d. 1111/1699), contain theo-imamosophical sermons. The main reason for such silence on the matter, must be the division of the Twelvers, after the major occultation of the twelfth imam (ca. 329/940–941), into two distinct currents both in nature and 'vision of the world': the original 'non-rational esoteric' trend and the much later 'theologico-legal rational' trend. The second, now predominant and in the majority, often accused the first of 'literalism' (*hashw*) and 'extremism' (*ghuluww*); regarding this subject see *Guide divin*, pp. 15–58 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 6–22).

6. H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris, 1971), vol. 1, p. 96, n. 64.

7. W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973), under 'proto-Shi'ism'.

of 'proto-Shi'ism', the distinction between extremist and moderate Shi'ism proves to be completely artificial.⁸

The glorification of 'Ali by his supporters is a process that transformed the historical individual into a semi-legendary figure of tragic and heroic proportions; it harks back to a very early period since the first signs may be traced to the time that immediately followed 'Ali's assassination if not earlier, to the time just after the latter failed to succeed the Prophet. Early on, this personality acquired cosmic dimensions: the archetypal Imam, manifestation of a primordial Light proceeding from divine Light, a theophanic entity.⁹ He transmitted his qualities to other imams of his progeny, even to the imams' initiates. Indeed, according to heresiographic authors, during the course of the first three centuries of Islam, a large number of Shi'i sects and movements conceived one or another imam or such and such a follower as being the Locus of Manifestation (*maẓhar*) of God.¹⁰ The oldest

8. *Guide divin*, pp. 313–316 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 129–130); also M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Notes sur deux traditions 'hétérodoxes' imāmītes', *Arabica*, 41 (1994), pp. 127–133.

9. Cf. E. Kohlberg, 'Some Imāmī Shī'i Views on the *ṣaḥāba*', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 5 (1984), pp. 145–146 (rpr. in *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shi'ism* [Aldershot, 1991], article IX); Gh. H. Ṣādiqī, *Jonbesh-hā-ye dīnī-ye īrānī dar qarn-hā-ye dovvom va sevvom-e hejrī* (completed and updated version of the author's thesis, Gh. H. Sadighi, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens aux IIe et IIIe siècles de l'hégire* [Paris, 1938]), (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), pp. 225f.; *Guide divin*, pp. 75f. (*Divine Guide*, pp. 29f.). See also Chapter 1 of this publication.

10. One must point out that, contrary to the accusations levelled by the heresiographers, especially the Sunnis, no Shi'i sect, even the most 'extremist', seems to have claimed that the 'Locus of Manifestation' was God in Essence. For all Shi'is, at the level of Essence, God is absolutely ineffable and unknowable. This forms the very theological foundation of imamology; we shall return to this important matter. There is no question thus of divinisation by incarnation but by theophanic participation, the mode of participation differing according to the 'Locus of Manifestation' preferred by the sect. Cf. L. Massignon, 'Salmān Pāk et les prémices spirituelles de l'Islam iranien', *Société d'Études Iraniennes*, 7 (1934) (rpr. *Opera Minora*, vol. 1, pp. 443–483, esp. pp. 467–472). For these Shi'i sects see the list by 'A. Eqbāl, *Khānedān-e Nawbakhti* (Tehran, 1311 Sh./1933), pp. 249–267.

among these sects seems to have been the enigmatic Saba'iyya¹¹ who in a certain number of their doctrinal traits were probably identical to the Kaysāniyya,¹² supporters of the imamate of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya and very likely the first Shi'is with gnostic-like ideas. Thus, a Kaysānite proclamation, dating from 278/890–891 and reproduced by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) in his *Ta'riḫh*, appears to be the oldest written attestation of this type of sermon in an 'Alid milieu.¹³ Two Nuṣayrī texts that, according to Silvester de Sacy and Massignon, date to the late third century AH, reproduce fragments of these two sermons, the *Bayān* and *Taṭanjiyya* (see section 2 below); the Jābirian corpus (second half of the third to the early fourth century AH) contains a citation from the first.¹⁴ In the early fourth century, these attestations grew

11. Supporters of the enigmatic 'Abd Allāh b. Saba'; see M. G. Hodgson, "Abd Allāh b. Saba", *EI2*.

12. Cf. J. van Ess, 'Das Kitāb al-irjā' des Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya', *Arabica*, 21 (1974) and 22 (1975), esp. 1974, pp. 31f.

13. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, ed. M. A. F. Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1960), *sub anno* 278, vol. 10, pp. 25–26. According to al-Ṭabarī, the Kaysāni declaration comes from a Qarmaṭi document.

14. A. I. Silvestre de Sacy, *Chrestomathie arabe* (Paris, 1806), vol. 2, p. 83; L. Massignon, 'L'Homme Parfait en Islam', *Opera Minora*, pp. 122–123; the two Nuṣayrī texts are: 1) one that de Sacy calls 'the catechism of the Nuṣayris' in MS 5188 (Collection de Sacy), BN Paris, fol. 95f. and 2) *Kitāb al-hidāyat al-kubrā* (Beirut, 1406/1986) by the Nuṣayrī thinker Abū 'Abd Allāh (b.) Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī (d. 346/957 or 358/969), cited by Massignon in 'L'Homme Parfait', p. 123. The Nuṣayrī *majmū'a* (MS Arabic 1450, BN, Paris) contains a text attributed to al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fī (famous disciple of the sixth and seventh imams) on 'Alī's divinity; this text is of a later period and dates from the seventh/thirteenth c. See M. M. Bar-Asher and A. Kofsky, 'The Nuṣayrī Doctrine of 'Alī's Divinity and the Nuṣayrī Trinity According to an Unpublished Treatise from the 7th/13th Century', *Der Islam*, 72/2 (1995), pp. 258–292 – now consult their *The Nuṣayrī-'Alawī Religion: An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy* (Leiden, 2002); re. this manuscript see also Cl. Huart, 'La poésie religieuse des nosāiris', *JA*, 14 (1879), pp. 241–248; L. Massignon, 'Esquisse d'une bibliographie nuṣayrie', in *Mélanges syriens offerts à Monsieur René Dussaud* (Paris, 1939), pp. 913–922 = *Opera Minora*, vol. 1, pp. 640–649; and now a series of studies by M. M. Bar-Asher and A. Kofsky in 'A Tenth Century Nuṣayrī Treatise on the Duty to Know the Mystery of Divinity', *BSOAS*, 58 (1995), pp. 243–250 – and

in number. Some fragments of the sermons are reported by the Twelver Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Kashshī¹⁵ and certain phrases of the ‘eschatological prophecies’ (*malāḥim*) that feature at the beginning of some versions of the *khuṭbat al-bayān* are cited in a satirical pastiche by the anonymous author of *Abu’l-Qāsim*¹⁶ as well as by al-Maqdisi in his *Bad’*,¹⁷ which at least goes to show that the early nucleus of what would later become these sermons was known before 350/960. The second half of the third to the first half of the fourth century is also the period given for the redaction of all the first major compilations from the Twelver tradition.¹⁸ These bear the mark of what I have elsewhere named the early ‘non-rational esoteric tradition’,¹⁹ ‘salvaging’ a good number

then published in *The Nuṣayrī-‘Alawī Religion*; see above. For the corpus of Jābir see *Kitāb al-uṣṭuq al-uss al-thānī*, in E. J. Holmyard (ed.), *The Arabic Works of Jābir b. Ḥayyān* (Paris, 1928), pp. 79–96, cited on p. 89. For the dating of this corpus see P. Lory, *Jābir b. Ḥayyān, Dix Traités d’alchimie. Les dix premiers Traités du Livre des Soixante-Dix* (Paris, 1983), pp. 34–51.

15. Al-Kashshī, *Ma’rifat akhbār al-rijāl* (Bombay, 1317/1899), p. 138 (notice on Ma’rūf b. Kharrabūdh who traces the chain of transmission for the sayings of ‘Alī to imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir [d. ca. 119/737]); see also al-Māmaqānī, *Tanqīḥ al-maqāl*, 3 vols (Tehran, 1349/1930), vol. 3, p. 227.

16. Edited by A. Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islams* (Heidelberg, 1922; rpr. Hildesheim, 1968), ch. 5, pp. 57f. On *malḥama*, pl. *malāḥim*, see the article ‘Malāḥim’ by D. B. MacDonald in *EI2*.

17. Muṭaḥhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-bad’ wa’l-ta’rikh* (*Le Livre de la Création et de l’Histoire*), ed. and French trans. by Cl. Huart, 6 vols (Paris, 1899–1919), vol. 2, p. 174 and vol. 5, p. 136.

18. Regarding these compilations and their authors see e.g. E. Kohlberg, ‘Shī‘ī Hadīth’, in A. F. L. Beeston et al. (eds), *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 299–307, esp. pp. 303–306; *Guide divin*, pp. 48–58 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 19–22); the authors we will call upon most here include: al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (290/902–903), Furāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī (ca. 300/912; an author with obvious Zaydī sympathies but claimed by the Imamis; for more on him see M. M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* [Leiden and Jerusalem, 1999], pp. 29–32 et passim), ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (ca. 307/919), Muḥammad b. Mas‘ūd al-‘Ayyāshī (ca. 320/932), Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī (329/940–941), Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq (381/991).

19. Cf. above note 5.

of traditions originating from other Shi'i movements (Kaysāni, Ismaili, Wāqifi, etc.) and incorporating them into the Twelver corpus.²⁰ This monumental corpus does not contain any of the sermons that interest us here, but includes texts that in a fashion clearly predict them. These texts are probably of non-Twelver Shi'i origin but they can be integrated into Twelver imamology if one takes a synoptic view of them. Indeed, at this 'mythical' stage of doctrinal language, when conceptualisation is practically absent and abstract terminology of a philosophical kind is only in its initial stages, when the conceptual distinction between the human nature of the imam (*nāsūt*) and his divine nature (*lāhūt*)²¹ is not yet clearly established in Shi'i milieus, an entire process of doctrinal elaboration seemed necessary in order for imamology to reach its peak in the figure of the Imam-God. Therefore it is by adopting a phenomenological perspective that we will attempt to discern the successive phases of this development.

According to Imami theology, the Divine Being, in his Essence, absolutely transcends all imagination, intelligence or thought. In his Essence, which constitutes his Absolute Being, God remains the inconceivable Transcendent that cannot be described or apprehended except in terms by which He describes Himself through His revelations. At this level, the term 'thing' (*shay*'), one of utmost neutrality, can be applied to God. According to sayings attributed to many of the imams, God constitutes the reality of 'thing-ness' (*shay'iyya*), unintelligible and indefinable (*ghayr ma'qūl wa lā maḥdūd*) that places Him beyond the two

20. J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin and New York, 1990), vol. 1, pp. 306f. (on the eschatological notion of 'return to life' – *raǧ'a* – see also E. Kohlberg, *EI2*); M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Al-Šaffār al-Qummi (d. 290/902–3) and his *Kitāb bašā'ir al-darajāt*', *JA*, 280, 3–4 (1992), pp. 232f. (on the notion of occultation – *ghayba* –, the number of imams and their identity, as well as other information about the Qā'im, the eschatological Saviour).

21. Cf. R. Arnaldez, 'Lāhūt and Nāsūt', *EI2*.

limits of agnosticism (*taʿtīl*) and assimilationism (*tashbīh*).²² The Essence of God is *the* Thing about which man is only able to hold a negative discourse, denying all that could enable a conceivable representation of Him. Indeed, throughout the theological traditions, a whole series of negations characterise sayings of the imams regarding God: negation of a corporeal or formal conception (*jism/ṣūra*),²³ negation of space (*makān*), time (*zamān*), immobility (*sukūn*) and movement (*ḥaraka*), descent (*nuzūl*) and ascent (*ṣuʿūd*), qualification (*tawṣīf*) and representation (*tamthīl*), and so on.²⁴

However, if things had remained thus, God would have been forever absolutely beyond the reach of man and this theology would have been a simple agnosticism. Thus, God in his infinite grace wished to make himself known to his creatures and had Himself described by a certain number of Names and Attributes. Now, revealed to man by the Most Beautiful Names of God (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*) these bear the Locus of Manifestation, Vehicles and Organs applicable to all of creation in general and humanity in particular. It is thanks to these theophanic Organs that God 'reaches' men and they in turn gain access to what is knowable

22. Cf. e.g. al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī, with Persian trans., 4 vols (Tehran, n.d. [4th vol., tr. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī, dates from 1386/1966]), 'Kitāb al-tawḥīd', 'Bāb iṭlāq bi-annahū shay', vol. 1, pp. 109f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. H. al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭīhrānī (Tehran, 1398/1978), ch. 7 'Bāb annahu tabārah wa taʿālā shay', pp. 104f. On the application of the term 'thing' to God in Muslim theology in general see D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam* (Paris, 1988), pp. 142–150.

23. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Bāb al-nahy ʿanī'l-jism wa'l-ṣūra', vol. 1, pp. 140f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ch. 6 ('Bāb annahu ʿazza wa jall laysa bi-jism wa lā ṣūra'), pp. 97f.

24. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Bāb al-ḥaraka wa'l-intiqāl', vol. 1, pp. 169f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ch. 28 ('Bāb nafy al-makān wa'l-zamān wa'l-sukūn wa'l-ḥaraka wa'l-nuzūl'), pp. 173f.; ch. 2 ('Bāb al-tawḥīd wa nafy al-tashbīh'), pp. 31f.; Ibn Bābūya, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, ed. M. Ḥ. Lājevardī (Tehran, 1378/1958), ch. 11 ('Bāb fī ... al-tawḥīd'), pp. 114f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-khiṣāl*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Qumm, 1403/1984), p. 2.

in Him.²⁵ Thus one distinguishes two ontological levels of the Divine Being: that of Essence, indescribable, inconceivable; the level of the Unknowable, of God in his vertiginous unmanifested concealment. Secondly, the level of Names and Attributes which is also that of Acts undertaken by the Organs of God; this is the level of the revealed God, of the Unknown wishing to be known.²⁶ Throughout the corpus of traditions, the imams tirelessly repeat that they are the Vehicles for the Attributes, the Organs of God. Applying their spiritual hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) to Qur'ānic terminology they constantly say:

We are the Eye (*'ayn*) of God, we are the Hand (*yad*) of God, we are the Face (*wajh*) of God, we are His Side (*janb*), His Heart (*qalb*), His Tongue (*lisān*), His Ear (*udhn*).²⁷

It is in order to support this aspect of God that the imam is also designated by names such as 'the Proof of God' (*ḥujjat Allāh*), 'the Vicar of God' (*khalīfat Allāh*), 'the Path of God' (*ṣirāṭ Allāh*), 'the Threshold of God' (*bāb Allāh*) and is described by Qur'ānic expressions such as 'the Greatest Sign' (*al-āyat al-kubrā*,

25. On apophatic theology and the notion of theophany as one of its consequences, esp. in the gnostic milieu, see H. Corbin, *Le paradoxe du monothéisme* (Paris, 1981), esp. the first section; H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, index, under '*tanzīh*' and 'theophanies'.

26. On the Names and Attributes in general, see al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, pp. 143f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ch. 11, pp. 139ff.

27. Obviously here one has the ontological Imam, the Cosmic Man, Locus of the Manifestation of God, of whom the historical imam is in turn the manifestation on the perceptible level. See e.g. al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, ed. Mīrzā Kūchebāghī (2nd edn, Tabriz, n.d. [editor's introduction is dated 1380/1960]), section 2, ch. 3, pp. 61–64 and ch. 4, pp. 64–66 (commentaries on the term *wajh* in the Qur'ān); al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-tawḥīd', 'Bāb al-nawādir', vol. 1, p. 196; 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb jāmi' fi faḍl al-imām wa ṣifātihi', vol. 1, pp. 283f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, ch. 12, pp. 149f. (commentary on 'All things perish, except His Face', Qur'ān, *al-Qiṣaṣ*, 28:88), ch. 22, pp. 164f. (ma'nā janb Allāh), ch. 24, pp. 167f. (ma'nā'l-'ayn wa'l-udhn wa'l-lisān), *Uyūn*, pp. 114–116 and 149–153 and *Kamāl al-dīn*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Qumm, 1405/1985), ch. 22, vol. 1, pp. 231f.

Q 79:20), 'the Exalted Symbol' (*al-mathal al-a'lā*, Q 16:60), 'the Most Secure Arch' (*al-'urwat al-wuthqā*, Q 2:256 or 21:22).²⁸ Commenting on the Qur'anic verse 7:180, 'To God belong the Names Most Beautiful; so call Him by them', the sixth imam, Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765), is said to have declared:

By God, we [the imams], are the Most Beautiful Names; no action by a devoted servant is accepted by God, if it is not accompanied by knowledge of us.²⁹

In this division between Essence/Names and Organs one discerns a transposition, at the level of the divine, of an omnipresent division in Shi'i milieu of all reality into two aspects: *bāṭin* (esoteric, hidden) and *zāhir* (exoteric, apparent). The esoteric, hidden, unmanifested aspect of God would thus be his Essence, forever inaccessible; His Organs, Vehicle of his Names, would constitute His exoteric or revealed aspect. The Imam, exoteric facet of God, is thus the veritable *Deus Revelatus*; knowledge of his reality is equivalent to the knowledge of what is knowable in God. In a tradition going back to the third imam al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī (61/680) one reads: 'O Mankind! God created His servants in order that they may know Him for when they know Him, they worship Him and free themselves from the worship of all else except for Him.' Someone then asks the imam: 'What is knowledge of God?' 'For people of every period, it is knowledge of the imam [of the time] to whom they owe obedience.'³⁰

28. For example, al-Šaffār, *Bašā'ir al-darajāt*, section 2, ch. 3, pp. 16–17; Ibn Bābūya, *al-Amālī*, ed. and Persian trans. by M. B. Kamare'i (Tehran, 1404/1984), 'majlis' 9, no. 9, p. 35, 'majlis' 10, no. 6, pp. 38–39; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 35 vols (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 32, pp. 212–213; vol. 34, pp. 109–110.

29. '*Naḥnu wa'llāhi al-asmā al-ḥusnā allatī lā yaqbalu'llāh min al-'ibād 'amalan illā bi-ma'rifatinā*'; al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 42, no. 119; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-tawḥīd', 'Bāb al-nawādir', vol. 1, p. 196.

30. '*Ayyuhā'l-nās inna'llāha jalla dhikruhu mā khalaqa'l-'ibād illā li ya'rifūhu fa-idhā 'arafūhu 'abadūhu fa idhā 'abadūhu'staghnau bi 'ibādatihī 'an*

The aim of creation is thus knowledge of the Creator by his creatures; the Imam, theophanic being is the 'Supreme Symbol' of what can be known of God, and therefore constitutes the reason for and aim of creation. 'He who knows us knows God, and he who knows us not, knows not God,' the imams repeat.³¹ 'It is thanks to us that God is known', relates a tradition dating back to Ja'far al-Šādiq, 'and thanks to us that He is worshipped.'³² 'Without God, we would not be known, and without us, God would not be known,' adds another tradition attributed to the same sixth imam.³³

Another, similar saying, also attributed to Ja'far, introduces another step in the development of the doctrine of the imam's divinity. This step is characterised by the allusive sayings that can easily be compared to the famous 'ecstatic utterances (*shaṭaḥāt*)' of the mystics:³⁴

'ibāda man siwāh faqāla lahu rajul fa mā ma'rifat Allāh qāla marifa ahl kulli zamān imāmahum alladhī yajibū alayhim tā'atuhu, Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal al-sharāʿi* (Najaf, 1385/1966), ch. 9 'illa khalq al-khalq', p. 9, no. 1. One must always bear in mind that according to Twelver doctrine, each prophet-legislator is accompanied in his mission by one or more imams whose mission is to initiate the elite of believers in the esoteric aspect of the prophetic Message (see *Guide divin*, pp. 96–112 [*Divine Guide*, pp. 38–44]).

31. *'Man 'arafa'nā faqad 'arafa'llāh wa man ankananā faqad ankara'llāh*', e.g. Šaffar, *Bašā'ir al-darajāt*, section 1, ch. 3, p. 6; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, ch. 24, p. 261, no. 7; *Nahj al-balāgha* (note 5 above), ed. and Persian trans. by 'A. N. Fayḍ al-Islām (4th edn, Tehran, 1351 Sh./1972), p. 470.

32. *'Binā 'ubida'llāh... wa flaw lanā mā 'ubida'llāh*', Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, ch. 12, p. 152, no. 9.

33. *'Law lā Allāh mā 'urifnā wa law lā naḥnu mā 'urifa'llāh*', Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, ch. 41, p. 290, no. 10.

34. These are speeches in which 'God speaks in the first person in the words of a mystic often in a state of ecstasy', such as 'I am the Truth' by Hallāj or 'Glory to me' by Bašāmī; regarding *shaṭḥ*, see e.g. the admirable work by L. Massignon in *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (Paris, 1922) and *La Passion de Hallāj, martyr mystique de l'Islam*, 4 vols (rpr. Paris, 1975), see index under '*shaṭḥ*'; H. Corbin's introduction to Rūzbehān Baqlī Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ-e shaṭḥiyyāt*, ed. H. Corbin and M. Mo'in (Paris and Tehran, 1966; rpr. 2004); also 'A. R. Badawī, *Shaṭaḥāt al-šūfiyya* (3rd edn, Kuwait, 1978); P. Nwiya, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique* (Beirut, 1970), under '*shaṭḥ*'. As

God made us His Eye among his worshippers, his Eloquent Tongue among His Creatures, His Hand of benevolence and mercy extended above His servants, His Face thanks to which one is guided towards Him, His Threshold that leads to Him, His Treasure in the heavens and on earth . . . It is by our act of worship that God is worshipped, without us God could not be worshipped.³⁵

Now this last sentence can also be read as follows: 'It is due to the fact that we [the imams] are worshipped that God is worshipped; without us, God could not be worshipped (*bi-'ibādatinā 'ubida'llāh law lā naḥnu mā 'ubida'llāh*).'³⁶ The rather audacious ambiguity seems deliberate for not only does the identification of God with the physical person of the imam seem the logical, final outcome of previous phases of imamology, but other *shaṭaḥāt* of the same tenor are found in the early corpus.³⁶ A remarkable fact

we shall see further, some mystics did not hesitate to consider 'Alī's sermons the quintessential 'paradoxical pronouncements'. It nevertheless seems to me that the similarity between the paradoxical pronouncements of the imams and the *shaṭaḥāt* of the Sufis are only formal, since the premises and conclusions of each of these currents of thought, as well as the theology which underpins them, are different. The subject is much too complex to be treated with here; for analysis on the nature of *shaṭḥ*, see C. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (New York, 1985); P. Lory, 'Les paradoxes mystiques (*shataḥāt*) dans la tradition soufie des premiers siècles', *Annuaire de l'EPHE, Sciences Religieuses*, 102 (1994–1995) and 103 (1995–1996); P. Ballanfât, 'Réflexions sur la nature du paradoxe. La définition de Rûzbehân Baqlî Shirâzî', *Kâr Nâmeḥ*, 2–3 (1995), pp. 25–40.

35. 'Wa ja'alanā 'aynahu fī 'ibādihi wa lisānahu'l-nāṭiq fī khalqih wa yadahu'l-mabsūṭa 'alā 'ibādihi bi'l-ra'fa wa'l-raḥma wa wajhahu'lladhī yu'tā minhu wa bābahu'lladhī yadullu 'alayhi wa khazā'inahu fī samā'ihī wa ardih... bi 'ibādatinā 'ubida'llāh lā law naḥnu mā 'ubida'llāh', Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, ch. 12, pp. 151–152, no. 8.

36. This process of disseminating particularly delicate doctrinal elements occurs regularly in the early corpus; it constitutes one aspect of the Shi'i obligation 'to preserve or guard a secret' (*taqiyya*, *kitmān*, *khab'*) and for the first time in the works of Jābir, it seems to have been called 'the process of the deliberate dissemination of information' (*tabdīd al-'ilm*, literally: 'scattering of knowledge'); cf. *Guide divin*, index under 'tabdīd al-'ilm'; on its usage in the Jabirian corpus whose Shi'i allegiance is no longer in question, see P. Kraus, *Jābir b. Ḥayyān. Contribution à l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'islam* (Cairo, 1942; rpr. Paris, 1986), vol. 1, pp. xxvii–xxx; P. Lory, *Dix Traités d'alchimie. Les*

is that all these sayings, or at least those that we have been able to find, seem to be attributed to the same imam, Ja'far al-Šādiq.³⁷ Commenting on the Qur'ānic verse 39:69, 'And the earth shall shine with the light of its Lord', Ja'far says: 'The Lord of the earth is the Imam of the earth.'³⁸ A disciple asks the sixth imam to explain the meaning of the verse, 'and when you threw [the sentence is addressed to the Prophet] it was not yourself that threw, but God that threw' (Q 8:17). Ja'far is said to have replied: 'It is because it was 'Alī who gave the darts to the Messenger of God who threw them.'³⁹ Finally, a dialogue between the same imam and his disciple Abū Bašīr is highly significant in this regard:

The Disciple: 'Tell me if on the Day of Resurrection, the initiates⁴⁰ will be able to see God.' Ja'far: 'Yes, but they will have already seen

dix premiers Traités du Livre des Soixante-Dix (Paris, 1983), pp. 53 and 242f.; H. Corbin, *Alchimie comme art hiératique* (Paris, 1986), pp. 183–184 and n. 84 (tr. of 'Livre du Glorieux' by 'Jābir'). On Shi'i *taqiyya* in general, now consult E. Kohlberg, 'Taqiyya in Shi'i Theology and Religion', in H. G. Kippenberg and G. G. Stroumsa (eds), *Secrecy and Concealment. Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 345–380, a work which admirably supplements the previous study on the same topic by the Israeli scholar 'Some Imāmi-Shi'i Views on *taqiyya*', *JAOS*, 95 (1975), pp. 395–402 (rpr. in *Belief and Law in Imāmi Shi'ism*, article 3).

37. Which corroborates the status of 'founder' that Muslim gnosis generally (Sufism, theosophy, the occult sciences etc.) reserves for imam Ja'far; regarding this subject, see e.g. J. Ruska, *Arabische Alchemisten*, vol. 2: *Ġa'far al-Šādiq, der Sechste Imam* (Heidelberg, 1924); P. Kraus, *Jābir b. Ḥayyān*; J. B. Taylor, 'Ja'far al-Šādiq, Spiritual Forebear of the Sufis', *Islamic Culture* (1966); T. Fahd, 'Ġa'far al-Šādiq et la tradition scientifique arabe', in *Le shī'isme imāmīte*, Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 6–9 May 1968 (Paris, 1970).

38. '*Rabb al-arḍ ya'nī imām al-arḍ*', 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Ṭ. al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'irī (Najaf, 1386–87/1966–68; rpr. Beirut, 1411/1991), vol. 2, p. 256.

39. '*Alī nāwala rasūl Allāh al-qabḍa'llatī ramā bihā*', al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 52, nos 32–34.

40. '*al-mu'minūn*' literally 'the believers'; in technical Twelver terminology, the term *mu'min* designates a Shi'i initiated by the imam into the esoteric dimension of the faith and is contrasted with the term *muslim* (literally 'one who submits') which in the same context, designates he who submits to the exoteric aspect

Him well before the advent of this Day.’ ‘When?’ ‘When He asked them: “Am I not your Lord and they replied, ‘Yes [Q 7:172]’.”’ Then, reports the disciple, the master remained silent for a long time before declaring: ‘The initiates already see Him in this world before the Day of Resurrection. *Do you not see Him at this very moment [before you]?*’ ‘May I serve you as a ransom, can I report this teaching with your approval?’ ‘No, for a negator unaware of the deeper meaning of these words will use them to accuse us of assimilationism and unbelief.’⁴¹

In such an imamological context, it is not surprising to encounter traditions – in the early Twelver corpus – that unambiguously proclaim texts of theo-imamosophical sermons attributed to ‘Alī.

From the heights of the pulpit in the mosque at Kūfa, ‘Alī, Commander of the initiates, declared: ‘By God, I am the Rewarder (*dayyān*) of men the Day of Rewarding; I am he who assigns the Garden or the Fire, no one enters without my designation; I am the

of the faith; see my analysis, ‘Étude du lexique technique de l’ésotérisme imāmīte’, *Annuaire de l’EPHE, section des sciences religieuses*, 102 (1994–1995), p. 215.

41. Abū Baṣīr: ‘Akhbirnī ‘anī’llāh ‘azza wa jall hal yarāhu’l-mu’minūn yawm al-qiyāma qāla na’am wa qad ra’awhu qabla yawm al-qiyāma fa-qultu matā qāla hīna qāla lahum ‘a lastu bi-rabbikum qālū balā thumma sakata sā’atan thumma qāla wa inna’l-mu’minīn la-yarawnahu fi’l-dunyā qabla yawm al-qiyāma ‘a lasta tarāhu fi waqtika hādhā faqultu lahu ju’iltu fidāk fa-’uhaddithu bihādhā ‘anka fa-qāla lā fa-innaka idhā haddathta bihi fa-ankarahu munkirun jāhil bi ma’nā mā taqūluhu thumma qaddara ‘alaynā anna dhālika tashbih wa kufr’, Ibn Bābūya, *Tawhīd*, ch. 8, p. 117, no. 20. Cf. *Guide divin*, p. 141, note 277 (*Divine Guide*, p. 54); in *A Shi’ite Anthology* (New York, 1981), p. 42. W. Chittick provides a translation of this tradition without pointing out the ‘paradoxical words’ that it contains. Regarding Ja’far’s three disciples with the *kunya* Abū Baṣīr, see *Guide divin*, p. 87, note 182 (*Divine Guide*, p. 34). This concern regarding the incomprehension of non-initiates is constantly present in the early corpus; see e.g. al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfi*, ed. and Persian trans. by H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Tehran, 1386/1969), vol. 1, p. 81; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 23, pp. 254–255 no. 4, *‘Ilal al-sharā’i’*, ch. 7, pp. 5f. and *Uyūn*, vol. 26, no. 22, pp. 262f. (*ḥadīth faḍl al-nabī wa’l-ḥujaj ‘alā’l-malā’ika*), where matters are repeatedly stressed in order to avoid confusion between ‘the Proofs of God’ and God – I have translated excerpts from this extensive tradition in *Guide divin*, pp. 89–91 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 35–36).

Great Judge [between good and evil; *al-fārūq al-akbar*] . . . I hold the decisive Word (*faṣl al-khiṭāb*); I hold the penetrating Insight into the Path of the Book . . . I have learnt the science of fortune and misfortune; and the science of judgements; by me the Completion of Religion; I am the deed of Kindness enacted by God for His creatures⁴² and elsewhere: 'I am the Queen Bee (*ya'sūb*) of the initiates; I am the First of the first believers; I am the successor to the Messenger of the Lord of the worlds; I am the Judge of the Garden and the Fire.'⁴³

In a tradition that goes back to the Prophet Muḥammad, he is said to have praised 'Alī thus:

Here is the most radiant Imam, tallest lance of God, the greatest Threshold of God; whosoever longs for God, so let him enter through this Threshold . . . Without 'Alī, truth would not be distinguished from falsehood, nor believer from non-believer; without 'Alī, it would not have been possible to worship God . . . no Curtain (*sitr*) hides God from him, no Veil (*ḥijāb*) lies between God and him! For 'Alī himself is the Curtain and Veil.⁴⁴

42. 'Wa'llāhi innī la-dayyān al-nās yawm al-dīn wa qasīm al-janna wa'l-nār lā yadkhuluḥā'l-dakhīl illā 'alā iḥdā qismī wa innī'l-fārūq al-akbar... lī faṣl al-khiṭāb wa baṣartu sabīl al-kitāb... wa 'alimtu 'ilm al-manāyā wa'l-balāyā wa'l-qaḍāyā wa bī kamāl al-dīn wa anā'l-ni'mat llatī an'ama'llāhu 'alā khalqih', Furāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Kūfi, *Tafsīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Kāzim (Tehran, 1410/1990), p. 178, no. 230.

43. 'Anā ya'sūb al-mu'minīn wa anā awwal al-sābiqīn wa khalīfa rasūl rabb al-'ālamīn wa anā qasīm al-janna wa'l-nār', al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, pp. 17–18, no. 42; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 3, p. 389. On 'Alī as 'Leader' or 'Commander of the Bees' (*amīr al-naḥl*), see I. Goldziher, 'Schi'tisches', *ZDMG*, 44 (1910), pp. 532–533, re-issued in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. J. de Somogyi (Hildesheim, 1967–1970), vol. 5, pp. 213–214.

44. 'Hādhā'l-imām al-aẓhar wa rumḥu'llāh al-aṭwal wa bābu'llāh al-akbar fa-man arāda'llāh falyadhkhul min al-bāb... law lā 'Alī mā abāna'l-ḥaqq min al-bāṭil wa lā mu'min min kāfir wa mā 'ubida'llāh... lā yasturuḥu min Allāh sitr wa lā yahjibuhu 'anī'llāh ḥijāb bal huwa'l-ḥijāb wa'l-sitr', Furāt b. Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr*, p. 371, no. 503.

Regarding the verses, 'Of what do they question one another?/ Of the solemn tiding/ whereon they are at variance' (Q 78:1-3), 'Ali is said to have declared to his followers: 'By God, I am the solemn Tiding . . . God has no more solemn Tiding, nor greater Sign, than me.'⁴⁵

45. 'Anā wa'llāh al-naba' al-'aẓīm... wa'llāhi mā li'llāh naba' a'ẓam minnī wa lā li'llāh āya a'ẓam minnī', *ibid.*, pp. 533-534, nos 685-686. As might be realised, the notion of 'Man (in general) in the image of God' does not exist in Imami Shi'ism. In any case, the radically dualist Shi'i vision that divides all creatures, thus humans as well, into 'beings of Light' and 'beings of Darkness', designated in various ways, renders such a conception impossible (on Twelver dualism, see *Guide divin*, pp. 91f. [*Divine Guide*, p. 36] and Chapter 8 in this publication). The famous tradition 'God created Adam in his image' (*khalaqa 'llahū Ādam 'alā ṣūratih*) carries no special importance in the early corpus and in the words of the imams is interpreted in two ways that are perfectly 'orthodox', in keeping with the view of Sunni theologians:

a) the attribution (*idāfa*) of 'image' (*ṣūra*, lit. 'form') to God is interpreted in the same general sense as the attribution of the Ka'ba to Him when He calls it 'My House' (*baytī*) or the attribution of all created things to Him as being His work (cf. Twelver interpretation: al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, 'Kitāb al-tawḥīd', 'Bāb al-rūḥ', vol. 1, p. 182; Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, vol. 6, p. 103, no. 18. cf. Sunni interpretation: Ibn Khuzayma, *K. al-tawḥīd*, ed. M. Kh. Harrās (Cairo, 1388/1968), p. 39; al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. A. S. al-Nashshār, B. F. 'Awn and S. M. Mukhtār (Alexandria, 1389/1969), p. 561; Ibn Fūrak, *Mushkil al-ḥadīth*, ed. M. M. 'Alī (Cairo, 1979), p. 57 and ed. D. Gimaret (Damascus, 2003), pp. 21f.

b) the possessive adjective 'his' does not refer to God, but to a particular individual mentioned in some versions of the tradition. According to these versions, the Prophet meets a person who slaps another or humiliates him by making an insulting remark about his physical appearance; the Prophet then intervenes and says: 'Do not do that because God created Adam in his (i.e. the humiliated person's) image', meaning that all men are made in the same image as Adam 'the father of humanity'. For the Twelver interpretation see Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, ch. 12, p. 152, no. 10. Sunni interpretation: Ibn Khuzayma, *K. al-tawḥīd*, pp. 36-38; al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil*, p. 560; al-Juwaynī, *K. al-irshād*, ed. J. D. Luciani (Paris, 1938), p. 93; see also W. M. Watt, 'Created in His Image'. For Sunni sources, see M. Takeshita, *Ibn Arabi's Theory of the Perfect Man*, p. 16, n. 2 and p. 29, n. 58 (information provided by Daniel Gimaret, to whom I am most grateful).

On the other hand, one can say without fear of extrapolation that in Shi'ism the Imam is made in the image of God and that the adept initiated to the esoteric doctrine has been made in the image of the Imam (on the ontological and

Without exception, all these quotations are drawn from the Twelver corpus said to be 'moderate'; as we have noted before, the distinction between moderate and extremist Shi'ism, at least during the early period and especially in the 'esoteric non-rational' tradition, proves to be artificial.⁴⁶ This distinction seems to have been made later, mainly by the first heresiographers at the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth century AH. In 'proto-Shi'ism', the boundaries between different trends seem to have been more easily penetrated and the movement of followers between different sects if not simultaneous adherence to several branches of belief would have been common practice.

* * *

There is great confusion regarding the titles and texts of the sermons as reported by various authors in different periods. A large majority of these writers are Shi'is, others are Sunni mystics. At times, the same title is given to different sermons, at others,

anthroposophical function of initiation see *Guide divin*, pp. 75–95 and 174–199 [*Divine Guide*, pp. 29–38 and 69–79]; also M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Réflexions sur une évolution du shi'isme duodécimain: tradition et idéologisation', in *Les Retours aux Écritures. Fondamentalismes présents et passés*, ed. E. Patlagean and A. Le Boulluec [Louvain and Paris, 1993], pp. 63–81 and esp. pp. 63–69). Thus, the Imam – exoteric dimension of God – as we have seen, is at the same time the esoteric dimension of the initiated faithful.

46. Cf. note 8 above and the related text. One may conclude, as does H. Modarressi, that these kinds of traditions were current in the entourage of the imams, among the Mufawwiḍa or even the 'extremist' Ṭayyāra (cf. H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam: Abū Ja'far ibn Qība al-Rāzī and his Contribution to Imāmīte Shi'ite Thought* [Princeton, 1993], esp. pp. 21f.); still, the 'moderate' corpus contains a large number of these traditions and enables the development of a 'supra-rational' imamology. In this regard, comments by the famous contemporary Imami scholar, 'Abdallāh al-Māmaqānī (d. 1932) in his *Tanqīḥ al-maqāl* (cf. note 15 above) are highly significant: 'We have stated on many occasions that the accusations of extremism levelled by the early [scholars] (*al-qudamā*) do not deserve to be taken into consideration since many aspects that are essential to Imami doctrine (*ḍarūriyyāt al-madhhab*) were held by them to be extremist' (*Tanqīḥ*, vol. 1, p. 349).

almost identical texts are known by different names; sometimes, versions of the same sermon differ greatly, the length of the text varies substantially and in general, the more one advances in time, the more the texts are embellished and interwoven. All occurs as if the authors, in the same assonant prose style and depending on their spiritual or literary concerns, are adding to one or many early kernels of a sermon increasingly numerous affirmations.

Based on the most recurrent material, one could say that at our disposal we have three theo-imamosophical sermons attributed to 'Alī, each closely related to the other: the Sermon of the Clear Declaration (*khuṭbat al-bayān*), the Sermon of Glory (*khuṭbat al-iftikhār*) and the Sermon of the Gulf (*al-khuṭbat al-ṭaṭanjīyya/ṭatanjīyya/ṭaṭanjīyya*, an enigmatic word that one passage of the text explains as being synonymous with *khalīj*, in the sense of 'gulf').⁴⁷

The last appears to be the oldest since, as we have seen, quite a long version was already reported in Nuṣayrī texts dating from the end of the third century AH.⁴⁸ The Ismaili thinker and propagandist Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1077) provides a more elaborate version in his *Majālis*.⁴⁹ The Twelver theosopher and traditionist, Rajab al-Bursī (d. 814/1411), in his *Mashāriq* reproduces more or less the same text as al-Shīrāzī,

47. Regarding these three sermons, H. Corbin has contributed partial translations, interpretations and additional information (see *En Islam iranien*). There is a *ḥadīth*, and not a sermon attributed to 'Alī on the human and divine nature of the imām; this *ḥadīth* is related to our sermons and is reported by Rajab al-Bursī (cf. below). On this tradition see H. Corbin, 'La gnose islamique dans le recueil de traditions (*Mashāriq al-anwār*) de Rajab Borsī', *Annuaire de l'EPHE, section des sciences religieuses* (1968–1969, 1969–1970), rpr. in *Itinéraire d'un enseignement*, Institut Français de Recherche en Iran (Tehran, 1993), pp. 104f. and 111f.; T. Lawson, 'The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty in the Divine Secrets Connected with the Commander of the Faithful by Rajab Bursī', in *The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism*, ed. L. Lewisohn (London and New York, 1992), pp. 267–269. In general, the *Mashāriq* by al-Bursī contains many sayings of the same nature attributed to 'Alī.

48. Cf. note 14 above and the relevant text.

49. Al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, ed. M. Ghālib, vols 1 and 3 (Beirut, 1974 and 1984), vol. 1, pp. 171–173.

although according to other authors, elements from the Sermon of Clear Declaration are inserted there.⁵⁰ Al-Bursi's version served not only Mullā Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680) in his *Kalimāt maknūna*, but also al-Sayyid Kāẓim al-Rashtī (d. 1259/1843), grand master of the theologico-mystical School of the Shaykhiyya, for his monumental unfinished commentary on the Sermon of the Gulf,⁵¹ as well as an Imami scholar who died in the early twentieth century, 'Alī Yazdī Ḥā'irī in his *Ilzām al-nāṣib*.⁵²

The Sermon of Glory would have been of Twelver origin; in fact it was only reported in its more elaborate version by authors belonging to this branch of Shi'ism. It appears that this sermon was reported for the first time under this title by the great scholar Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192) in his *Manāqib*.⁵³ In his *Jāmi' al-asrār*,⁵⁴ the mystical thinker Ḥaydar Āmolī/ Āmulī (d. ca. 790/1387–1388) cites excerpts

50. Al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn* (10th edn, Beirut, n.d.), pp. 166–170; see also note 47 above. An English translation of a substantial portion of the Sermon of the Gulf, as it appears in Bursī, is provided by T. Lawson in his article mentioned above (note 47), pp. 269–270. Now also consult a partial French translation of Bursī's work, by H. Corbin entitled *Les Orient des Lumières* (Paris and Lagrasse, 1996) (tr., ed. and finished by P. Lory). According to al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a*, 25 vols (Tehran and Najaf, 1353–1398/1934–1978), vol. 7, pp. 198–199, this sermon is the same as the Sermon of the Climes (*khuṭbat al-aqālim*) partially reported by Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192) in his *Manāqib*.

51. Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*, ed. 'A. 'Uṭarīdī Qūchānī (Tehran, 1383/1963), pp. 167–168 and 196ff. Texts studied by T. Lawson in 'The Hidden Words of Fayḍ Kāshānī', in M. Szuppe (ed.), *Iran: Questions et connaissances*, vol. 2, 'Périodes médiévale et moderne' (Paris, 2002), pp. 427–447, esp. pp. 438–439. Al-Sayyid Kāẓim al-Rashtī, *Sharḥ al-khuṭbat al-taṭanjīyya* (Tabriz, 1270/1853).

52. 'Alī al-Yazdī al-Ḥā'irī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib fī ithbāt al-ḥujjat al-ghā'ib* (Isfahan, 1351/1932; rpr. Tehran, n.d.), pp. 212–214.

53. Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, ed. M. Burūjerdī (Tehran, 1316–1317/1898–1899), pp. 71–72.

54. Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmolī, *Jāmi' al-asrār wa manba' al-anwār*, ed. H. Corbin and O. Yahia (Tehran and Paris, 1969), pp. 10–11.

(which in other authors' works belong to one of the other two sermons that concern us here). Rajab al-Bursī, a contemporary of Āmolī, reproduces a sermon under this same title that is significantly different.⁵⁵ The erudite Shaykh Āghā Bozorg Ṭīhrānī (d. 1969), unrivalled connoisseur of Twelver texts, postulates that the Sermons of Glory and Clear Declaration belong to the same original text of which yet another part, in this case called the Sermon of Silhouettes (*khuṭbat al-ashbāh*) is reported in the *Nahj al-balāgha*.⁵⁶

The Sermon of the Clear Declaration (or more precisely the texts known under this title), itself also originating from an earlier nucleus, as it seems the most reproduced of these three sermons; the most read, meditated and commented on by both Shi'i theologians and Sunni mystics.⁵⁷ Some texts dating from the second half of the third century and more certainly the early fourth century AH, containing quotations from this sermon have already been mentioned.⁵⁸ Of these, one can point out a (lost?) commentary by the great figure of Iranian Ismailism, Ḥasan (b.) al-Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124).⁵⁹ Of the Sunni mystics, with however Shi'i sympathies, one can cite Muḥammad b. Ṭalḥa al-Ḥalabī al-Shāfi'i (d. 652/1254) and Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 869/1464),

55. Rajab al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār*, pp. 164–166.

56. Āghā Bozorg al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 7, pp. 198f.

57. The *khuṭbat al-bayān* is often part of an 'eschatological prophecy' (*malḥama*, pl. *malāḥim*; see the article by D. B. MacDonald cited above in note 16) attributed to 'Alī. It was analysed and partially translated by L. Massignon in his article on the Perfect Man (see note 2 above). The text used by Massignon is reproduced, based on MS 2661, BN, Paris, fols. 21b–24a, by 'A. R. Badawī in *al-Insān al-kāmil*, pp. 139–143. The beginning of the text is almost identical to excerpts from the *khuṭbat al-iftikhār* reported by Ḥaydar Āmolī.

58. Cf. above, notes 14 to 17 and the related texts.

59. Khayrkāh-i Harāṭi, *Kalām-i pīr. A Treatise on Ismaili Doctrine*, ed. and tr. W. Ivanow (Bombay, 1935), pp. 79–81 of the Persian text.

who reproduced excerpts from this sermon and considered them to be 'ecstatic utterances par excellence'.⁶⁰ Twelver authors who studied the *khuṭbat al-bayān*, that is, cited it, commented on it, translated it into Persian or versified it in Arabic or Persian are far too numerous to be listed here. Let us limit ourselves to a few famous individuals: Ḥaydar Āmolī and Rajab al-Bursī already noted; al-Qāḍī Sa'īd al-Qummī (d. ca. 1103/1691–1692); master of the Ni'matullāhī order, Nūr 'Alī Shāh (d. 1212/1798); Ja'far Kashfī (d. 1267/1850–1851) (we will return to Kashfī); Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsim Rāz Shīrāzī, master of the Dhahabiyya order (d. 1286/1869) and Yazdī Ḥā'irī, cited earlier, who in his *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, reports three long versions of this sermon.⁶¹

60. Muḥammad b. Ṭalḥa al-Ḥalabī, *al-Durr al-munazzam fi'l-sirr al-a'zam* (n.p., 1331/1912), pp. 83–85, also cited by al-Qundūzī, *Yanābī' al-mawadda* (Najaf, 1384/1965), pp. 112–113; Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, *al-Risālat al-i'tiqādiyya*, ed. M. Molé in *Professions de foi de deux kubrāwīs: 'Alī-i Hamadānī et Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh*, BEO, 17 (1961–1962), p. 193 of the Arabic text; see also M. Molé, 'Les kubrāwiyya entre sunnisme et shi'isme aux 8e et 9e s. de l'hégire', *REI* (1961), p. 129.

61. Ḥaydar Āmolī, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, pp. 382, 411 and in the same volume *Naqd al-nuqūd fi ma'rifat al-wujūd*, p. 676; Rajab al-Bursī, *Mashhāriq anwār al-yaqīn*, pp. 170–172 (the author does not provide the title of the sermon); al-Qāḍī Sa'īd al-Qummī, 'Sharḥ ḥadīth al-ghamāma', in *Kitāb al-arba'iniyyāt*, cited by H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 152f. (see also Corbin, *Itinéraire d'un enseignement*, pp. 96f.); and al-Qāḍī Sa'īd al-Qummī, *al-Arba'iniyyāt li-kashf anwār al-qudsiyyāt*, ed. N. Ḥabībī (Tehran, 1381 Sh./2003), pp. 38ff; Nūr 'Alī Shāh, 'Manẓūm-e khuṭbat al-bayān', in *Divān-e Nūr 'Alī Shāh Isfahānī* (Tehran, 1349 Sh./1970) and in *Majmū'e-ye āthār-e N. 'A.sh. Isfahānī* (Tehran, 1350 Sh./1971); Ja'far Kashfī, *Tuḥfat al-mulūk*, 2 vols (lithograph, Iran, n.d.), vol. 1, pp. 20–28; Abu'l-Qāsim Rāz Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ kitāb khuṭbat al-bayān* (sic, instead of *Kitāb sharḥ khuṭbat al-bayān*) (Shiraz, n.d.); al-Yazdī al-Ḥā'irī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, pp. 193–211. For other authors see al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 7, pp. 200–201 and vol. 13, pp. 218–219. For an alchemical hermeneutical reading of the *khuṭbat al-bayān* by Aydamur Jaldakī (d. 750/1349–1350 or 761/1360–1361), see H. Corbin, *Alchimie comme art hiératique*, ed. P. Lory (Paris, 1986), ch. 1.

Of these, the Iranian theosopher Ja'far Kashfī's version is especially interesting.⁶² In his major work, *Tuḥfat al-mulūk*, dedicated to the Qājār prince Muḥammad Taqī Mīrzā, a son of Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh (hence the title that literally means 'the Gift offered to Sovereigns'), when commenting upon it, Kashfī reports the Arabic text of a relatively short sermon that he calls *khuṭbat al-bayān*. Indeed, a substantial portion of the text is a kind of medley of previous versions of this sermon but Kashfī also adds a number of elements drawn from two of our other sermons, namely the *khuṭbat al-taṭanjīyya* and the *khuṭbat al-iftikhār*. Moreover, he deletes the theological introduction (*dībāja*), listing some of the Names and Works of God, as well as the 'eschatological prophecy' (*malḥama*) from the beginning of the *khuṭbat al-bayān*, no doubt considering them far from the main thrust of the sermon, which, according to him is imamological. There is a particularly interesting fact here: though a philosopher and very keen student of astronomy, Kashfī nonetheless deletes assertions of an overly philosophical nature or those that relate to astronomy – assertions that had been later added on to an early nucleus. Thus the Iranian thinker achieves a coherent synthesis of the three sermons and introduces a text that stands a chance of being close to one

62. On Sayyid Ja'far b. Abī Ishāq al-'Alawī al-Mūsawī al-Dārābī al-Burūjirdī called 'al-Kashfī' see Muḥammad 'Alī Mudarris, *Rayḥānat al-adab* (Tabriz, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 366, no. 568; H. Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, 1986) (a volume containing both sections of the work otherwise published separately in 1964 and 1974), esp. pp. 487–489 and *Face de Dieu, Face de l'Homme* (Paris, 1983), pp. 345–358; S. A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago, 1984), pp. 225f.; M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shī'i Islam. The History and Doctrine of Twelver Shī'ism* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 194f. On al-Kashfī's work, see also H. Corbin, 'Cosmogonie et herméneutique dans l'œuvre de Sayyid Ja'far Kashfī', *Annuaire EPHE* (1970–1971) (repr. in *Itinéraire d'un enseignement*, pp. 125–129). Not unlike a number of other theosophers, al-Kashfī's affiliation with the Uṣūliyya is linked to a late development within this movement. This gradual acceptance of an esoteric and theosophical hermeneutics of Imamism seems to have been a development that began in the early seventeenth century; it awaits further study.

of several early theo-imamosophical sermons. For these reasons Ja'far Kashfi's version seems to me to be especially representative of this genre of texts attributed to 'Alī.⁶³

From the top of the pulpit in the mosque at Kūfa, 'Alī, Commander of the initiates delivered this sermon: 'People! Question me before you lose me!⁶⁴ For I am the Treasurer of Knowledge;⁶⁵ I am the Mountain of magnanimity;⁶⁶ I hold the Keys of the Unknown; I am the Mystery of the Unknown; I am the Mystery of Mysteries;⁶⁷ I am the Tree of Lights; I am the Guide of the Heavens; I am the One who is intimate with those who praise God; I am the intimate friend of Gabriel; I am the pure Chosen One of Michael; I am the Conductor of

63. Ja'far Kashfi, *Tuḥfat al-mulūk*, 2 vols (lithograph, Iran, n.d.); this edition offers some variations as compared to the lithograph edition (riddled with errors of all kinds), produced in one volume in-folio (Iran, 1276/1859–1860). The abridged (one ought to say censored) version of the *Tuḥfat al-mulūk* which appeared fairly recently (Tehran, n.d. [ca. 1980s]) does not contain the text of the sermon; it should be noted that more than half the content of the old editions of the work has been left out of this new edition. I have not here translated the author's comments in Persian. The terms in italics are Qur'ānic Names of God. The Arabic text of this sermon is provided at the end of the present study.

64. 'The pulpit in the mosque at Kufa' and this first sentence are *topoi* attributed to 'Alī; the *minbar* in the mosque at Kūfa, his capital, is the favoured site for sermons by the first imam. The sentence is a direct allusion to the fact that 'Alī is held to be the wise, initiated one and thus the source par excellence of knowledge.

65. 'Treasurer of Knowledge' is a recurring title often given to the imams; see *Guide divin*, index, under '*khâzin*, *khuzzân*, *khazana*'.

66. *Hilm*, crucial virtue of tribal ethics, is practically impossible to render in translation by one word, according to Ch. Pellat it ranges from 'serene justice to balance, forbearance and lenience encompassing self-control and the dignity of good order', cf. *EI2*, vol. 3, p. 403.

67. The identity of the speaker shifts, from one affirmation to another, between, on the one hand, the historical imam, manifestation on the perceptible level of the ontological Imam and guardian of the divine Mystery, and on the other hand, the ontological Imam, the Revealed God and thus the content of this Mystery.

Thunder; I am the Witness of the Pact;⁶⁸ I am the Face of God; I am the Eye of God; I am the Hand of God; I am the Tongue of God;⁶⁹ I am the Light of God;⁷⁰ I am the Treasure of God in the heavens and on the earth;⁷¹ I am the Power; I am the Manifestation of [or He who manifests] the Power; I am the Rewarder (*dayyān*)⁷² on the Day of Rewards; I am Judge of the Garden and Fire; I am the Garden and the Fire; I am the Two-horned One [*Dhu'l-qarnayn*; cf. Q 18:83, 86 and 94] mentioned in the earlier scripture; I am the First Adam; I am the First Noah; I am Noah's Companion and Saviour; I am the Companion of Job the tested, and his Healer; I am the Companion of Abraham and his Secret;⁷³ I am the Commander of the Initiates; I am the Source of Certitude; I am the Thunder; I am the Cry for Truth [Q 23:41 and 50:42]; I am the Hour for the negators [a recurring Qur'anic expression]; I am the Call that brings forth those entombed; I am the Lord of the Day of Resurrection; I am the one who has raised up the Heavens; I am the Proof of

68. Reference either to what is traditionally called 'the primordial Covenant' (*mīthāq*; cf. Q 7:172), or to the Pact ('*ahd*') concluded between God and Adam (Q 20:115). On the Imami conception of the *mīthāq*, see *Guide divin*, index under '*mīthāq*, *mawāthiq*', and M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi'ism', *ELr*, vol. 6, pp. 317–322; on the Imami version of Q 20:115, see *Guide divin*, p. 212 (*Divine Guide*, p. 85) and M. M. Bar-Asher, 'Variant Readings and Additions of the Imāmi-Ši'a to the Qur'ān', *Israel Oriental Studies*, 13 (1993), p. 64. On this verse see the monograph by R. Gramlich, 'Der Urvertrag in der Koranauslegung (zu Sura 7, 172–173)', *Der Islam*, 60 (1983), pp. 205–230.

69. On these assertions refer to note 27.

70. On the Imam as Light of God, see *Guide divin*, under '*nūr*' and 'Cosmogony and Cosmology', *ELr*, vol. 6, as well as the excellent article by U. Rubin, 'Pre-existence and Light. Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad', *Israel Oriental Studies*, 5 (1975).

71. Compare with the assertion, 'I am the Treasurer'; the historical imam is the Treasurer par excellence of the divine Treasure whereas the ontological cosmic Imam is its actual content (cf. note 67 above).

72. Although it does not appear in the Qur'ān, this Name is generally considered one of the Divine Names; see D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins*, esp. pp. 350–351.

73. I believe this is an allusion to the Imami belief according to which the Imam, as Light, physically and spiritually accompanies the prophets and imams through the sacred history of humanity; cf. *Guide divin*, pp. 96–112 (Adamic Humanity: the 'voyage' of Light) (*Divine Guide*, pp. 38–44).

God on earth and in the heavens; I am the Light of guidance; I am the Most Beautiful Names by which one invokes Him; I am the Overseer of the deeds of all creatures; Among them, I am the Vicegerent of God the Creator; I am the Lord of the First Creation;⁷⁴ I am the Lord who released the first Flood; I am the Lord of the second Flood; I am with the Calamus and I was before the Calamus [Q 68:1 and 96:4] ; I am with the [Well-Preserved] Tablet and I was before the [Well-Preserved] Tablet [Q 85:22]; I am the Lord of primordial pre-eternity; I was the Steward (*mudabbir*)⁷⁵ of the primordial Universe when neither your heaven nor earth had come into being; I am He who in pre-existence, concluded the Pact with the spirits and He who declared to them, by the commandment of the Eternal: "Am I not your Lord ?" [Q 7:172]; I am the Leader of the initiates, I am the Standard of the well-guided; I am the Guide of the Pious; I am the Certitude; I am the one who speaks by divine revelation;⁷⁶ I am the Governor of the stars and their Steward by the commandment of my Lord and through the science He reserved for me; I am he who will spread justice and equality on earth just as before it overflows with oppression and injustice [or 'darkness'];⁷⁷ I am the one Concealed, the Awaited for the Spectacular Affair; I am the Sinai, the inscribed Book, the inhabited Dwelling; the Elevated Firmament; the swarming Sea [Q 52:1–6]; I am the Master of Hermeneutics [of the Sacred Book]; I am the Commentator of the Gospels; I am the Scholar of the Torah; I am the Archetype of the Book [Q 3:7; 13:39; 43:41]; I am the Decisive Word [Q 38:20]; I am the *First*, I am the *Last*, I am the *Hidden*, I am the

74. On the many creations, see *Guide divin*, p. 101, note 201 (*Divine Guide*, p. 40).

75. cf. D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins*, esp. p. 326.

76. On the imam receiving inspiration (*ilhām*) and divine revelation (*waḥy*) and the modalities of the latter, see *Guide divin*, pp. 176f. (*Divine Guide*, pp. 70ff.).

77. Time-honoured expression for the advent of the Qā'im/Mahdī, the eschatological Saviour, at the End of Time. In this case, as in the following affirmation, there is identification with the Shi'i Mahdī, the hidden imam (refer to Chapters 12 to 14, this volume).

Manifest; I am the Light of the prophets;⁷⁸ I am the Friendship of the Friends [of God]; I am Adam and Seth; I am Moses and Joshua; I am Jesus and Simon [Peter];⁷⁹ I am Ḥanbathā' (?) of the Blacks; I am Bashīr (?) of the Turks; I am Jirjīs (?) of the Franks;⁸⁰ I am the one who Illuminates the sun, the moon and the stars; I am the Recorder of the Resurrection; I am the Riser of the Hour; I am *The Creator*, I am the Created; I am the Contemplator; I am the Contemplated; I am the Lord of the Ka'ba, I am the month of Ramaḍān; I am the Night of Destiny [Q 97:1–3] I am *He who gives* (*mu'ṭī*); I am *He who takes* (*qābiḍ*); I am the Interior of the Sacred Space; I am the Pillar of the People; I am the Light of lights; I am the Bearer of the [divine] Throne with the Devoted [angels?];⁸¹ I am the Pearl of the Oysters; I am the Mountain of Qāf;⁸² I am the Key of Invisible; I am the Lamp of Hearts;⁸³ I am the Splendour of all Beauty [or 'intelligence' or 'metallic vessel, *zurūf*'];⁸⁴ I am the Secret of the Letters; I am the meaning of the *ṭawāsīn*;⁸⁵ I am the esoteric of the *ḥawāmīm*; I am the Lord of the *alif-lām-mīm*; I am the *nūn* of the Calamus

78. Here, as in the following assertions, an allusion is made to the ontological Imam as Light transmitted from prophet to prophet and imam to imam; regarding this complex notion consult the studies mentioned above in notes 70 and 73; see also U. Rubin, 'Prophets and Progenitors in Early Shi'a Tradition', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 5 (1984).

79. On the initiatory lineage of the prophets and their imams, see *Guide divin*, pp. 102f., esp. p. 107 ('spiritual genealogy') (*Divine Guide*, p. 40, esp. 41).

80. These names apparently designate the prophets of 'the peoples' mentioned. Let us simply point out that *bashir* means 'prophet' in Turkish (from the Arabic *bashīr*, 'herald of good news') and that Jirjīs generally designates Saint George, cf. Carra de Vaux, 'Djirdjis', *EI2*.

81. On the imams as 'Bearers of the Divine Throne' (*ḥamalat al-'arsh*), see *Guide divin*, index under '*arsh*'.

82. On the 'psycho-cosmical' Mountain of Qāf, see the analyses by H. Corbin in *Corps spirituel et Terre céleste. De l'Iran mazdéen à l'Iran shi'ite* (Paris, 1979), under 'Qāf'.

83. On the Imam as 'Light of the heart', see *Guide divin*, pp. 112f. (*Divine Guide*, pp. 44f.).

84. Kashfī interprets the term as 'beauty in all that is beautiful' (*jamāl-e har jamīl*), *Tuhfat al-mulūk*, vol. 1, p. 26.

85. An allusion, as in the following two allusions to the separated letters that feature at the head of certain suras of the Qur'ān.

[Q 68:1]; I am the Lamp [in] Darkness; I am He who makes firm the lofty mountains; I am He who makes the sources of water rise; I am He who makes the rain fall; I am He who enables the leaves to grow; I am He who makes the colours burst forth and fruit ripen; I am the Bestower of nourishment; I am the Resurrector of the dead; I am he for whom the sun returned twice on its trajectory and he whom the sun saluted twice;⁸⁶ And I am He who prayed with the Messenger of God towards the *Qiblatayn*;⁸⁷ I am the Hero [of the Battles] of Badr and Ḥunayn;⁸⁸ I am He who enabled Moses to cross the sea; I am He who drowned the Pharaoh and his armies; I am He who spoke from the lips of Jesus while he was still in the cradle; I am He who speaks all languages;⁸⁹ I am He who traverses the seven heavens and the seven earths in the blink of an eye;⁹⁰ I am the *Mahdī* of all moments; I am the Jesus of the Time; I am the Master of the Balance;⁹¹ I am the *Compassionate*, I am the *Merciful*; I am the *High*; I am the *Most High*; I am the Queen Bee of the initiates;⁹²

86. An allusion to a miracle by 'Alī, famous in the tradition; see e.g. *Guide divin*, p. 231 (*Divine Guide*, p. 92), and esp. the monograph by L. Capezzone, 'Un miracolo di 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib: i versi attribuiti ad al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī e il modello storiografico delle fonti relative al *radd al-šams*', in *In memoria di Francesco Gabrieli (1904–1996)*, RSO, 71, supp. 2 (1997), pp. 99–112.

87. According to the tradition, Jerusalem (original direction for prayer at the beginning of Muḥammad's mission) and Mecca.

88. See e.g. H. Laoust, 'Le rôle de 'Alī dans la *Sira* chiite', *REL*, 30/1 (1962), pp. 7–26.

89. See e.g. al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 7, chs 11–16, pp. 333–354 (knowledge of all languages, the language of the various holy books, the language of the birds, of wild beasts and the 'metamorphosed' – *al-musūkh*).

90. For example, al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 8, chs 12–15, pp. 397–409.

91. On the identification of the cosmic Balance with the Imam in general and 'Alī in particular, see e.g. 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, ed. al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'irī (Najaf, 1386–1387/1966–1968), vol. 2, p. 354 (commentary by al-Riḍā on Q 55:7–9).

92. On the symbolism of the bees and honey as representative of Shi'i initiates and the initiatory teaching of the imams respectively, see e.g. al-Majlisī, *Mir'āt al-'uqūl* (Tehran, 1404/1984), vol. 9, p. 170; for other references, see E. Kohlberg, 'Taqiyya in Shi'i Theology and Religion', pp. 358–59, n. 74; see also note 43 above.

I am the Certitude of those who know with certitude; I am the Lion of the sons of Banū Ghālib; I am 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.⁹³

93. Text of *khutbat al-bayān* (version by Ja'far Kashfī):

Ayyuhā'l-nās as'alūni qabla an tafqidūni inni khāzin al-'ilm wa anā ṭur al-ḥilm/
'indī mafātiḥ al-ghayb wa anā sirr al-ghayb/anā sirr al-asrār/anā shajarat al-anwār/
anā dalīl al-samāwāt/anā anīs al-musabbihāt/anā khalīl Jabra'il/anā ṣafī Mikā'il/
anā sā'iḳ al-ra'd/anā shāhid al-'ahd/ana wajh Allāh/anā 'ayn Allāh/anā yad Allāh/
anā lisān Allāh/anā nūr Allāh/anā kanz Allāh fi'l-samāwāt wa fi'l-arḍ/anā'l-quḍra/
anā maẓhar [muzhir] al-quḍra fi'l-arḍ/anā dayyān yawm al-dīn/anā qasīm al-janna
wa'l-nār/anā'l-janna wa'l-nār/anā Dhu'l-Qarnayn al-madhkur fi'l-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā/anā
Ādam al-awwal/anā Nūḥ al-awwal/anā ṣāhib Nūḥ wa munjihi/anā ṣāhib Ayyūb wa
shāfihi/anā ṣāhib Ibrāhīm wa sirruh/anā amīr al-mu'minīn/anā 'ayn al-yaqīn/anā'l-
ra'd/anā'l-ṣayḥa bi'l-ḥaqq/anā'l-sā'a li'l-mukadhdhibīn/anā'l-nidā' al-mukhrīj man
fi'l-qubūr/anā ṣāhib yawm al-nushūr/anā aqimtu'l-samāwāt/anā ḥujjat Allāh fi'l-arḍ
wa'l-samāwāt/anā nūr al-hudā/anā'l-asma' al-ḥusnā allatī yud'a bihā/anā'l-nāzir
'alā a'māl al-khalā'iq/anā fi'l-khalā'iq khalīfat al-ilāh al-khāliq/anā ṣāhib al-khalq
al-awwal/anā ṣāhib al-tūfān al-awwal/anā ṣāhib al-tūfān al-thānī/anā ma'a'l-qalam
qabl al-qalam/anā ma'a'l-lawḥ qabla'l-lawḥ/anā ṣāhib al-azaliyyat al-awwaliyya/anā
mudabbir al-'ālam ḥīna lā samā'ukum ḥadhihi wa lā ghabrā'ukum/anā ākhiḍh al-'ahd
'alā'l-arwāḥ fi'l-azal/wa anā'l-munādī lahum 'alastu bi-rabbikum bi-amri qayyūmi
lam yazal/anā sayyid al-mu'minīn/anā 'ālam al-muḥtadīn/anā imām al-muttaqīn/
anā'l-yaqīn/anā'l-mutakallim bi'l-waḥy/anā ṣāhib al-nujūm wa mudabbiruhā bi
amri rabbi wa 'ilmī lladhi khaṣṣani bihi/anā lladhi amla'a'l-arḍ 'adlan wa qīṣṭan kamā
mulī'at jawran wa ḡlman [ḡluman]/anā'l-ghā'ib/l-muntaẓar li'l-amr al-'azīm/anā'l-
ṭūr wa kitāb maṣṭūr wa'l-bayt al-ma'mūr wa'l-saqf al-marfū' wa'l-baḥr al-maṣjūr/anā
mu'awwil al-ta'wil/anā mufasssir al-injīl/anā 'ālim al-tawrā/anā umm al-kitāb/anā faṣl
al-khiṭāb/anā al-awwal/anā al-ākhir/anā'l-bāṭin/anā'l-zāhir/anā nūr al-anbiyā'/anā
walāyat al-awliyyā'/anā Ādam wa Shīth/anā Mūsā wa Yūsha'/anā 'Isā wa Sham'un/
anā Ḥanbathā' [?] al-Zanj/anā Bashīr [?] al-Turk/anā Jirjis al-Faraj/anā munawwir
al-shams wa'l-qamar wa'l-nujūm/anā qayyim al-qiyyāma/anā qayyim al-sā'a/anā'l-
khāliq/anā'l-makhlūq/anā'l-shāhid/anā'l-mashhūd/anā ṣāhib al-Ka'ba/anā shahr
Ramaḍān/anā Laylat al-Qadr/anā'l-mu'ṭī/anā'l-qābiḍ/anā bāṭin al-ḥaram/anā 'imād
al-umam/anā nūr al-anwār/anā ḥāmil al-'arsh ma'a'l-abrār/anā lu'lu' al-aṣḍāf/anā
jabal Qāf/anā miftāḥ al-ghuyūb/anā sirāj al-qulūb/anā nūr al-zurūf/anā sirr al-hurūf/
anā ma'nā'l-ṭawāṣin/anā bāṭin al-ḥawāmīm/anā ṣāhib alif-lām-mīm/anā'l-nūn wa'l-
qalam/anā miṣbāḥ al-ḡlman/anā rāsī'l-jibāl al-shāmikhāt/anā fājir al-'uyūn al-jāriyāt/
anā munzil al-maṭar/anā mūrīq al-shajar/anā mukhrīj al-lawn wa'l-thamar/anā
muqaddir al-aqwāt/anā nāshir al-amwāt/anā lladhi raddat lī al-shams marratayn
wa sallamat 'alayya karratayn/wa sallaytu ma'a rasūl Allāh al-qiblatayn/anā ṣāhib
Badr wa Ḥunayn/anā jāwaztu bi-Mūsā fi'l-baḥr/wa aghraqtu Fir'awn wa junūdahu/
anā'l-mutakallim 'alā lisān 'Isā fi'l-mahd/anā'l-mutakallim bi kullī lisān/anā lladhi
ajūzu'l-samāwāt al-sab'wa'l-arḍin al-sab' fi ṭurfati 'ayn/anā mahdī'l-awān/anā 'Isā'l-
zamān/anā ṣāhib al-mizān/anā'l-raḥmān/anā'l-raḥīm/anā'l-'alī/anā'l-'alā/anā ya'sūb
al-mu'minīn/anā yaqīn al-mūqinīn/anā layth Banī Ghālib/anā 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

The Pre-Existence of the Imam

This chapter might best begin by briefly recalling a few basic facts covered in almost all studies on Imamism. First, Imami doctrine is entirely dominated by the holy group consisting of the Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭima and the twelve imams, referred to as the ‘Fourteen Impeccables’ (*maʿsum*), or the ‘Fourteen Proofs’ (*ḥujja*). These individuals form a whole that alone faithfully reflects the two ways in which, according to Shiʿism, Divine Truth (*al-ḥaqq*) is manifested to humanity. One of these is obvious, apparent, exoteric (*ẓāhir*), and enclosed within it is the other, which is secret, hidden, esoteric (*bāṭin*). The exoteric side of the Truth is manifested through lawgiving prophecy (*nubuwwa*), bringing to the mass of humanity (*ʿamma*) a Sacred Book that ‘descended from Heaven’ (*tanzīl*); Muḥammad is both the prototype and the culmination of this first aspect. The esoteric side of the Truth is revealed through the mission of the imams (*walāya*),¹ accompanying each prophetic mission, bringing to the elite of the believers (*khāṣṣa*) the only true interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of the Holy Book; together, the twelve imams, but in particular ‘Alī, who is considered the father of the eleven others, are the plenary manifestation of this second aspect. Fāṭima, called the ‘Confluence of the Two Lights’ (*majmaʿ al-nūrayn*), reflects the ‘place’ where the two aspects

1. On the earlier Imami definition of *walāya* see Chapter 7, this volume.

intersect.² Of course, the prophet (*nabī*) also has knowledge of the esoteric side of religion; he is thus also *wālī*, but he reserves his esoteric teaching for his imam(s) exclusively; on the other hand, the imam is never considered the *nabī*. This is a crucial point, since in Imami texts the terms *wālī*, *hujja*, *ūlu'l-amr* and so forth, generally reserved for the imams, sometimes also apply to the prophets.³

The worlds before the world: the Guide-Light

The event took place a few thousand years before the creation of the world,⁴ in an immaterial 'place' called the Mother of the Book

2. Doctrinal information concerning the person of Fāṭima is rare in early Imami texts. A mystical doctrine of sorts developed around her, either in Ismaili circles or in the works of later Imami authors. For the first of these, see especially L. Massignon's studies, 'Der Gnostische Kult der Fāṭima im Šiitischen Islam', 'La Mubāhala de Médine et l'hyperdulie de Fāṭima', 'La notion du voeu et la dévotion musulmane à Fāṭima', in his *Opera Minora*, vol. 1, pp. 514–522, 550–572, 573–591, respectively; H. Corbin, *Corps spirituel et Terre céleste* (Paris, 1979), pp. 82–99. For the second case, see T. Sabri's thesis, based exclusively on later Imami sources and in particular on the *Bihār al-Anwār*: 'L'hagiographie de Fāṭima d'après le *Bihār al-Anwār* de Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1111/1699)' (University of Paris, III, 1969). Finally, note the virtual non-existence of an early Imami bibliography of Fāṭima in H. Lammens's work, *Fāṭima et les filles de Mahomet* (Rome, 1912), and in the otherwise well researched article by L. Vecchia Vaglieri in *El2*, vol. 2, pp. 861–870. In the course of the present discussion there will be occasion to examine some early material on Fāṭima (now see M. A. Amir-Moezzi and J. Calmard, 'Fāṭema', *Elr*).

3. There is no need to delve deeply into this basic material here, as it is found in almost all studies devoted to Imamism; the best presentation, despite being somewhat ahistorical in parts, is that of H. Corbin; see, e.g., *En Islam iranien*, vol. 1, Book One, 'Aspects du shī'isme duodécimain', in toto and *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, First Part, II, A, 3 and 4, pp. 69–85.

4. The figures given most frequently are 2,000, 7,000 and 14,000 years before the creation (*al-khalq*) of Adam or before the world (*al-dunyā*); for 2,000 years, see, e.g., Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, ch. 116, p. 134, ch. 139, p. 174; *Amālī*, 'majlis' 18, p. 75; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1397/1977), p. 131; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 1, p. 183. For 7,000 years, see e.g. Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, ch. 156, pp. 208f. For 14,000 years, see, e.g., Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 275 and 335–336; Ibn al-Bīṭrīq al-Ḥillī, *al-'Umda fī 'uyūn šihāh*

(*umm al-kitāb*).⁵ From his own light, God made a luminous ray spring forth, and from this ray he made a second ray proceed; the first was the light of Muḥammad, that of Prophecy (*nubuwwa*), that of the exoteric (*ẓāhir*); the second, of identical nature but subordinate to the first, was the light of 'Alī, that of the Imamate or of *walāya*, of the esoteric (*bāṭin*):

Two thousand years before creation, Muḥammad and 'Alī were one light before God ... light formed from one main trunk from which sprang a shining ray.... And God said: 'Here is a light [drawn] from my Light; its trunk is prophecy and its branch is the Imamate; prophecy belongs to Muḥammad, my servant and messenger, and the Imamate belongs to 'Alī, my Proof and my Friend. Without them I would have created none of my creation.' This is why 'Alī always said, 'I proceed from Muḥammad [or from Aḥmad] as one clarity proceeds from another.'⁶

Throughout the traditions of the imams, the Prophet himself frequently says that he was created with 'Alī, before the creation of the world, out of one and the same light.⁷ The very names of

al-akḥbār (n.p., n.d.), p. 75 (referring to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal: 'Kuntu anā wa 'Alī nūran bayna yadayyi'llāh 'azza wa jalla qabla an yakḥluqa Ādam bi arba'a 'ashara alfa 'āmin'; this tradition does not appear in the *Musnad*).

5. A Qur'ānic expression (Q 3:7, 13:39 and 43:4). See Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, ch. 70, pp. 79f. Of the Sunni sources, see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'is al-kubrā*, ed. M. Kh. Harrās (Cairo, 1967), vol. 1, p. 10 (referring to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal: 'Innī 'inda'llāh fī ummī'l-kitāb la-khātamu'l-nabiyyīn wa inna Ādam la-munjadil fī ṭinatihī'; cf. *Musnad*, vol. 4, pp. 127–128 where only 'inda is read as 'abd).

6. 'Inna Muḥammadan wa 'Aliyyan kānā nūran bayna yadayy Allāh qabla khalq al-khalq bi-alfay 'ām ... dhālika'l-nūr ... lahu aṣlan qad tash'aba minhu shu'a' lāmi' ... hādḥā nūrun min nūri aṣluhu nubuwwa wa far'uhu imāma amma'l-nubuwwa fa li Muḥammad 'abdī wa rasūlī wa amma'l-imāma fa li 'Alī ḥujjati wa waliyyī wa law lā humā lama khalaqtu khalqī ... qāla 'Alī anā min Muḥammad/Aḥmad ka'l-ḥaw' min al-ḥaw', a tradition attributed to Ja'far, Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, ch. 139, p. 174; for the traditions of the other imams, see *ibid.*, ch. 111, pp. 131f.

7. 'Khuliqtu anā wa 'Alī min nūr wāḥid qabla an tukhlaqa'l-dunyā', Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 41, no. 10, p. 236; Ibn al-Biṭriq, *al-'Umda*, pp. 44–45 and *Khaṣā'is waḥy al-mubīn fī manāqib amīr al-mu'minīn* (n.p., n.d.); ed. M. B.

these two archtypes of prophecy and the imamate are forged from the Names of God. In a prophetic tradition, Muḥammad states: 'In me God placed prophecy and benediction (*al-nubuwwa wa'l-baraka*), and in 'Alī He placed the imamate [var. eloquence] and a chivalrous spirit (*al-imāma/al-faṣāḥa wa al-furūsiyya*); then He gave us names, having our names derive from His: from His name "The Praised Lord of the Throne" (*Dhu'l-'arsh maḥmūd*), He formed my name, Muḥammad, and from His name "The Supreme" (*al-a'lā*), He formed the name of 'Alī.⁸ In a series of *ḥadīth qudsī* reported by either the Prophet or the imams, God proclaims that the name of Muḥammad is taken from His own name *al-Maḥmūd* (the Praised) and that of 'Alī from His name *al-'Alī al-A'lā* (the Supreme Superior).⁹

al-Maḥmūdī (Tehran, 1406/1986), pp. 37–38 and 109–110. On the light of 'Alī, often called 'the shimmering light' (*nūr sha'sha'ānī*), see Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, vol. 1, ch. 120, p. 144 and vol. 2, ch. 1, p. 313; Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 55, pp. 347–348, no. 6.

8. Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, ch. 116, pp. 134–135.

9. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, ch. 23, p. 252, no. 2; Ibn Bābūya, *ʿUyūn*, vol. 1, ch. 6, no. 27, p. 58; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 137; al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, ed. A. Kūhkamare'i (Qumm, 1401/1980), pp. 152–153; Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawhārī, *Muqtaḍab al-athar*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Qumm, n.d.), p. 23; al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 95. It is not necessary to re-examine the concept of *nūr muḥammadī* as dealt with by other Sunnis; on this subject, see, e.g., I. Goldziher, 'Neuplatonische und Gnostische Elemente im Hadīṭ', *ZA* (1908), pp. 324f.; T. Andrae, *Die Person Muhammads in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde* (Stockholm, 1918), pp. 313f.; F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, pp. 157f.; L. Massignon, 'Nūr Mūḥammadī', *EI*; U. Rubin, 'Pre-existence and Light. Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad', *IOS*, pp. 62–119; for the traditions concerning Muḥammad as the first creation and his light in non-Sufi works, see, e.g., Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-nabawīyya*, vol. 1, pp. 164–166; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 1, pp. 1–60; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, series 2, pp. 243f.; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, ed. M. 'Uthmān (Cairo, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 64–86. The concept found its broadest developments among the mystics, e.g. Ibn Sab'īn describes more than thirty-three forms of Muḥammadan light; see *Rasā'il Ibn Sab'n*, ed. 'A. R. Badawī, 'Risāla fi anwār al-nabī' (Misr, n.d.), pp. 201–211, and for a bibliography see the Western studies cited previously. For the Sunni reactions to Shi'i traditions about the primordial lights of the Prophet and the imams, see T. Andrae, *Die Person Muhammads*, pp. 319f.; Rubin, 'Pre-Existence and Light', pp. 113–114.

Other traditions relate that the primordial light that was drawn from the Divine Light was that of the *ahl al-bayt*, the 'five of the cloak' (*ahl al-kisā'*: Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn), or even that of the Fourteen Impeccables (the Prophet, his daughter and the twelve imams); in this case, the light of *walāya* is represented by all the imams, that of Fāṭima being placed at the junction of the two lights of prophecy and the imamate; sometimes, Fāṭima and her light are passed over in silence in favour of the light of the Prophet and the twelve imams.¹⁰ Likewise, it is said that the names of the 'five of the cloak' were derived from the Names of God and inscribed on the Divine Throne (*al-'arsh*). According to one *ḥadīth*, when Adam was brought to life by the breath of God, he lifted his eyes towards the Throne and saw five inscriptions; asking God about this, he received the following reply: 'First there is Muḥammad, for I am *al-maḥmūd* (the Praised One); second, there is 'Alī, for I am *al-'ālī* (the Most High); third, there is Fāṭima, for I am *al-fāṭir* (the Creator); fourth, there is al-Ḥasan, for I am *al-muḥsin* (the Benefactor); and fifth, there is al-Ḥusayn, for I am *dhu'l-iḥsān* (the Lord of Kindness).'¹¹

In his *Tafsīr*, commenting on verse 37 ('And Adam received words from his Lord') of the second Sura of the Qur'ān, *Sūrat al-Baqara*, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq said:

God was, and nothing of His creation existed; then He created five creatures from the light of His glory (*nūr 'azamatihi*) and He gave each of them a name derived from His own Names. Being the Praised One, He called His prophet Muḥammad; being the Most High, He called the prince of the believers 'Alī; being the creator of the heavens and the earth, He created the name of Fāṭima; possessing the most beautiful names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*), He forged the

10. See, e.g., Ibn Bābūya, *'Ilal*, ch. 116, pp. 135f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, ch. 31, p. 319; Ibn Bābūya, *Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, pp. 307–310; al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, pp. 110–111 and 169–170.

11. Ibn Bābūya, *'Ilal*, ch. 116, p. 135; Ibn al-Biṭrīq, *al-'Umda*, p. 120 and *Khaṣā'is*, p. 145; al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *al-Jawāhir al-saniyya fī al-aḥādith al-qudsiyya* (Baghdad, 1964), pp. 233, 278, 304–305, 307.

names of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn; then He placed these names to the right side of His throne.... these were the five names that Adam received from his Lord.¹²

It might be useful here, parenthetically, to add some of the definitions given by the imams of the 'Throne'. According to these, *al-'arsh* appears to be the name given to the Knowledge and the Power of God. As the Divine Seat (*al-kursī*) is the hermeneutic reference (*ta'wīl*) to the visible side, the exoteric part of the Invisible World (*ẓāhir min al-ghayb*), the Throne is, in the same way, its hidden esoteric face (*bāṭin min al-ghayb*); the Seat is the source of the created world, the visible manifestation of the Invisible, while the Throne, marked by the essence of prophecy and of the imamate, is Religion; it contains the esoteric mysteries of the Invisible and the explanations of the mysteries of the world:

'The Throne is not God Himself,' says the eighth imam, 'The Throne is a name that denotes Knowledge and Power, and it contains everything.'¹³

12. See the fragments from al-Nu'mānī's recension of Ja'far al-Šādiq's *Tafsīr*, which appeared under al-Murtaḍā's name, under the title *al-Muḥkam wa'l-mutashābih* (lithograph, Iran, n.d.), p. 72; this passage does not appear in either of the two editions of the *Tafsīr*, ed. P. Nwyia and 'A. Zay'ūr; it is true that these were edited using the recension of the mystic al-Sulamī in his *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*, where the author expurgated any typically Shi'i allusion from the original text of the *Tafsīr*. The only manuscript of the *Ḥaqā'iq* where this passage appears is curiously MS 43, Yeni Camı, Istanbul (cf. P. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique* [Beirut, 1970], p. 159, note 3). It must be added that the Imami interpretation of the *āyat al-nūr* (Q 24:35) sees, in the different forms and instruments of light cited in this verse, allusions to the lights of the different individuals that make up the Fourteen Impeccables; see, e.g., al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb inna'l-a'imma ... nūr Allāh', vol. 1, p. 278, no. 5; Ibn al-Bīṭrīq, *al-'Umda*, pp. 186, 219–220; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 1, pp. 240f.; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 23, pp. 304f.

13. 'Al-'arsh laysa huwa Allāh wa'l-'arsh ism 'ilm wa qudra wa 'arsh fihi kullu shay', al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-tawḥīd', 'Bāb al-'arsh wa'l-kursī', vol. 1, p. 177, no. 2; see also vol. 1, p. 179, no. 6, Ja'far al-Šādiq's words where the Throne is associated with Knowledge.

According to a tradition of al-Bāqir reported by his son Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, 'The Throne is the Religion of Truth'.¹⁴ 'These two [the Seat and the Throne] are two of the greatest thresholds of the invisible worlds,' says Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. 'They are themselves invisible, and intimately connected in the Invisible, for the Seat is the exoteric Threshold [var. hermeneutic; *ta'wīl*] of the Invisible; it is the place where those created beings from which all things proceed appear; the Throne is the esoteric Threshold that contains the Knowledge of how, of existence, of quantity, of limit, of where, of Volition, and of the attribute of Will; it contains also the Knowledge of words, of movements and of immobility (?), as well as the Knowledge of the Return and of the Origin.'¹⁵

As will be seen, initiatory Knowledge (*al-'ilm*) and to a certain extent the consequence of 'ilm, miraculous powers (*al-qudra*, *al-a'ājib*), constitute the two principles characteristic of the existence of the imams. The imams say that their doctrine, which they often refer to as 'the True Religion', contains all the esoteric mysteries of the universe as well as the answers to all questions about the domain of the Sacred. We know that each religion, according to the imams, has two indissoluble aspects, the exoteric, manifested by revelation and the teachings of the prophet of the religion, and the esoteric, manifested by the teachings of each prophet's imam. We also know that, according to an early idea, one which belongs as much to the domain of the religious as it does to the domain of the supra-natural, a

14. 'Al-'arsh dīn al-ḥaqq', Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawhārī, *Muqtaḍab al-athar*, p. 75.

15. 'Li'annahumā bābān min akbar abwāb al-ghuyūb wa humā jamī'an ghaybān wa humā fī'l-ghayb maqrūnān li'anna'l-kursī huwa'l-bāb [huwa'l-ta'wīl] al-zāhir min al-ghayb alladhī minhu maṭla' al-bad' wa minhu'l-ashyā' kulluhā wa'l-'arsh huwa'l-bāb al-bāṭin alladhī yūjad fihī 'ilm al-kayf wa'l-kawn wa'l-qadr wa'l-ḥadd wa'l-'ayn wa'l-mashī'a wa ṣifat al-irāda wa 'ilm al-alfāz wa'l-ḥarakāt wa'l-tark wa 'ilm al-'awd wa'l-bad', Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ch. 50 'Bāb al-'arsh wa ṣifātih', pp. 321–322, no. 1; the text is difficult: why this irregular enumeration? Does the 'mashī'a wa ṣifat al-irāda' group always depend on 'ilm? Is this not rather a case of the Divine Will being placed on the same plane as Knowledge? Does *al-tark* (lit. 'abandonment', 'desertion', 'tranquility') really mean 'immobility' in this case? (The Persian translator of the work, Muḥammad 'Alī b. Muḥammad Ḥasan Ardakānī, renders it thus: *Asrār-e towḥīd* [Tehran, n.d.], p. 369.)

'name' is not a simple appellation, but is the sonorous representation of the essential reality of the named; the Throne, marked by the names of the Prophet and the imams, carries in it the primordial essence of prophecy and the imamate, that is, the essence of Religion, in this case that of the imams. This parallel between the Throne and Imami doctrine is underscored by two successive traditions reported by al-Kulaynī. In the first, the *ḥujjas* are the 'bearers of the Throne';¹⁶ in the second, God calls them 'the bearers of my Knowledge and my Religion'.¹⁷ When it is realised to what extent the content of Imami doctrine is dominated by those individuals known as the Impeccables, the fact that the Throne can carry their names at the same time as it is being carried by them is easier to understand. Thus, one can ask whether *al-ʿarsh* does not, when used purely in reference to the imams, refer to the archetype or the celestial counterpart of the Cause (*amr*) of the imams, a cause intimately linked to the Imam in the usual ontological understanding of the word, as will be seen throughout this present work.

As for the ontological modalities of the lights of the Impeccables, a number of traditions describe them as being 'silhouettes of light' (*ashbāḥ nūr*). In reply to the question, 'What were you before the creation of Adam?' the third imam, al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī replied, 'We were silhouettes of light revolving around the Throne of the All-Merciful'.¹⁸ In other traditions we see expressions like 'spirits made of light' (*arwāḥ min nūr*),¹⁹ or 'shadows of light' (*azilla*

16. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-tawḥīd', 'Bāb al-ʿarsh wa'l-kursī', vol. 1, p. 179, no. 6: *ḥamalat al-ʿarsh*.

17. Ibid., no. 7, *Ḥamalat dīnī wa ʿilmī*.

18. Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, ch. 18, p. 23; also ch. 156, p. 208; see also, e.g., al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 11, pp. 150f. and 192f. (citing al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī's *Tafsīr*); in Sunni literature, the expression *ashbāḥ nūr*, or simply *ashbāḥ*, probably borrowed from the Shi'is, refers in general to the form of the angels, described as being 'luminous subtle bodies' (*ajsām laṭīfa nūrāniyya*); cf. al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ ʿalā al-Mawāhib*, vol. 1, pp. 9f.

19. Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, ch. 130, p. 162 and *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, ch. 33, pp. 335–336, no. 7.

nūr).²⁰ One might think of luminous entities of an extremely subtle substance: 'Before his [material] creation, the imam ... was a shadow made from breath, on the right side of the Divine Throne.'²¹ It must be emphasised that, according to certain (imprecise and allusive) details, this cosmogonic stage did not come about in the primordial 'world' of the Mother of the Book, characterised by that original dart of light (the unique and also double light of prophecy and *walāya*), but in a later world. Names like 'the first world of the shadows' (*‘ālam al-azillat al-awwal*), or 'the first world of the particles' (*‘ālam al-dharr al-awwal*), used with caution in cosmogonic contexts, appear to have been applied to this second 'world'.²² Passing from the Mother of the Book to the First World of the Shadows might thus mark the transformation of formless light into light with a human shape. In a *ḥadīth* reported by al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, the Prophet relates a story about the angel Gabriel. Having seen Muḥammad's name written on the material covering the Throne, Gabriel asked God to show him what the name contained, since it was certainly the most glorious of creatures. God led his angel into the First World of Particles, showed him twelve corporal silhouettes, and said: 'Here is the light of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, here is the light of al-Ḥasan and that of al-Ḥusayn ... [and so on, up to the light of the twelfth imam, the

20. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 328; Ibn 'Ayyāsh, *Muqtaḍab*, p. 15; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 15, p. 25 (citing al-Kulaynī); sometimes these shadows of light are described as being green, cf. *ibid.*, vol. 15, pp. 23 and 24. 'We [the imams] were near our Lord, and other than us there was no one; we were enveloped in green shadows': *'kunā 'inda rabbīnā laysa 'indahū ḡayrunā fī zillatin khadrā'*; 'the first of God's creations was Muḥammad and us, the *ahl al-bayt*, out of the Light of His Majesty (*min nūr 'azamatihī*); then from us He made the same number of green shadows (*fa awqafanā azilla khadrā'*), set before Him; and at that time the sky and the earth, the day and the night, the sun and the moon had not yet come into being.'

21. 'Fa'l-imām ... zillan qabla khalqihī nasamatan 'an yamīn 'arshihi', al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 328; al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, p. 112.

22. See, e.g., al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 274 and 309; Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 89, p. 612, no. 9.

Qā'im].²³ In a number of his ascensions into heaven, the Prophet reached the pre-existential World of the Shadows or Particles, and there looked upon the lights of the twelve Imams (or those of the Fourteen Impeccables).²⁴

What do these subtle entities of light do? They float suspended before the Throne of God,²⁵ or float around it in an archetypal circumambulation, bearing witness to the Unicity of God and praising His Glory. Several different words are used to describe these activities, but it would appear that they can be divided into two principal categories: the first is Unification, witnessing the Unicity (*tahlīl*, *tawhīd*); and the second is Glorification or Sanctification (*taḥmīd*, *tamjīd*, *tasbīḥ*, *taqdīs*). 'Twelve silhouettes of light [suspended] between heaven and earth ... attesting to the Unicity of God and exalting His Glory.'²⁶ 'God created the light of His majesty, Muḥammad, 'Alī and the eleven other imams; He created them [like] spirits enveloped in the clarity of His light [so that] they might worship Him even before creation, glorifying and sanctifying Him.'²⁷

23. 'An al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī 'an al-nabī ... qāla akhbaranī Jabra'īl ... yā rabb hadhā'l-ism al-maktūb fī surādiq al-'arsh 'arinī a'azza khalqika 'alayka (sic) qāla fa-'arāhu'llāhu 'azza wa jall ithnay 'ashara ashbāḥan abdānan ... hādḥā nūr 'Alī', al-Khazzāz, *Kifāya*, pp. 169–170. It is noteworthy that here the lights of the imams are contained in the name of Muḥammad, and constitute the reality of this name.

24. See, e.g., al-Khazzāz, *Kifāya*, pp. 110–111; Ibn Bābūya, *Khiṣāl*, vol. 1, p. 156; according to the Imami tradition, the Prophet had a number of ascensions, the most frequently tendered number being 120; see al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 18, pp. 387f. (citing esp. al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī and Ibn Bābūya). See also ch. 5.

25. 'Mu'allaqa' (lit. 'suspended') or 'bayn al-samā' wa'l-arḍ' (lit. 'between the heaven and the earth', but thus must be understood in the sense of 'floating', since neither the heaven nor the earth was yet created).

26. 'Ithnay 'ashara ashbāḥan min nūr bayn al-samā' wa'l-arḍ ... yuwahhidūna'llāh 'azza wa jall wa yumajjidūnahu', a prophetic ḥadīth, see al-Khazzāz, *Kifāya*, p. 170; Ibn 'Ayyāsh, *Muqtaḍab*, p. 23.

27. A tradition that goes back to the fourth imam, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn: 'inna'l-lāha tabārak wa ta'ālā khalaqa Muḥammadan wa 'Aliyyan wa'l-a'immat al-aḥad 'ashar min nūr 'azamatih arwāḥan fī ḍiyā' nūrih ya'būdūnahu qabla khalqī'l-khalq yusabbihūna'llāh 'azza wa jall yuqaddisūnahu', Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, ch. 31, no. 1, pp. 318–319; on this subject see also Ibn Bābūya,

Then other shadows or particles surge forth from this same pre-existential world; there is no information about just 'when' this new creation took place or 'how much' time separated it from the formation of the luminous entities of the Imams; but these luminous bodies, as has been seen, were created and dedicated themselves to the worship of their creator at a time when nothing had yet been brought into being. The creation of new shadows thus constitutes a later stage. The shadows constitute the pre-existential entities of what might be called 'pure beings'. In fact, several kinds of shadows are presented in a great number of traditions from different compilations, with no regard for order or clarity. They can be divided into three categories:

1. The shadows of future spiritual and non-human inhabitants of heaven and earth (*al-rūḥāniyyūn min ahl al-samāwāt wa'l-arḍ*), that is, the different categories of angels and the supernatural entities of the earth (including, perhaps, the *jinn*).²⁸
2. The shadows of prophets, numbering 124,000, with particular emphasis on those prophets 'endowed with firm resolution' (*ūlu'l-'azm*); there are five of the latter for Imamis: Noah, Abraham,

ʿIlal, ch. 18, p. 23; ch. 97, p. 118, and ch. 157, pp. 208–209; Ibn Bābūya, *ʿUyūn*, vol. 1, ch. 26, pp. 262f.; al-Khazzāz, *Kifāya*, p. 171; Ibn ʿAyyāsh, *Muqtaḍab*, p. 25; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 15, p. 26.

28. See, e.g., al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*, pp. 67 and 69; al-Nuʿmānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 137; Ibn ʿAyyāsh, *Muqtaḍab*, p. 58; Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad al-Qummī, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, pp. 26–27; in Imami tradition, the *jinn*, although classified as being among the *rūḥāniyyūn*, are nevertheless generally considered to be obedient to the imams, and thus beneficent. In this point of view, they are opposed to the *nasnās* (or *nisnās*), maleficent supernatural monsters that live on earth and are compared to the faithful of the adversaries of the imams. Regarding belief in *jinn* among Muslim scholars in general, interesting information may be found in Shihāb al-Dīn b. Ḥajar (d. 973/1565), *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya* (Cairo, 1325/1907), pp. 166f.; for the early literature on this subject, see Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Flügel, p. 308.

Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad; in this particular case it is of course the shadows of the first four that are being referred to.²⁹

3. The shadows of the believers (*mu'minūn*) among the descendants of Adam, that is, the faithful of the imams of all times, those initiated into the esoteric dimension of all religions, as distinguished from simple practisers (*muslimūn*, lit. 'the Muslims'), who are submissive to exoteric religion without understanding its deep meaning.³⁰

Then came the time of the sacred pre-temporal Pact (*al-mithāq*); the term is used more than twenty times in the Qur'ān, where it has most frequently the technical meaning of an Alliance between God and humanity, and with the prophets in particular (*mīthāq al-nabiyyīn*; cf. Q 3:81 and 33:7). Almost all Muslim commentators apply the term to the contract of faith between God and men, in a pre-existential 'time' before their birth. The scriptural proof of this episode would seem to be found initially in verse 172 in Sura 7, *al-A'rāf*, although the term *mīthāq* itself is not there present: 'When your Lord brought forth descendants from the loins of the sons of Adam, He had them bear witness against one another: "Am I not your Lord?" They answered, "Verily, we bear witness."

29. See e.g. al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 70, 74–75; Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, ch. 101, p. 122; Ibn Ayyāsh, *Muqtaḍab*, p. 41; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 51, pp. 149f.; for the list of *ūlu'l-'azm* prophets (cf. Q 46:35) and the reasons why Adam cannot be counted among them, see e.g. Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, ch. 101, *passim*.

30. See, e.g., al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 79–80; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, *Kitāb al-imān wa'l-kufr*, vol. 3, ch. 3, pp. 12f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Faḍā'il al-shī'a*, ed. Ḥ. Fashāhī (Tehran, 1342 Sh./1963–1964), pp. 11–12. On the opposition of *mu'min* and *muslim*, see ch. 3, note 40; on the plane of the perceptible world and during the time of the historical imams of Islam, these two terms referred, respectively, to 'the true Shi'is', those initiated by the imams, and the mass of Muslims, meaning the Sunnis or those who were only nominally Shi'is: those who had not been initiated into the esoteric side of Islam.

He did this lest, on the Day of the Resurrection, they say, "We were caught not expecting this."³¹

In Imami traditions of a cosmogonic character, other developments were elaborated around this central concept. The Pact takes place in the world of shadows or particles that, for this reason, is also called the World of the Pact (*'ālam al-mithāq*). It is with the 'pure beings' in the form of particles or shadows made 'conscious' that God draws up the sacred pact.³² In the Imami tradition this primordial Covenant entails a quadruple oath, although all four parts of the oath are rarely mentioned together in a single *ḥadīth*: an oath of worship (*'ubūdiyya*) of God, oaths of love and fidelity to (*walāya*) Muḥammad and his prophetic mission, to the imams and their sacred Cause, and also to the Mahdī as the universal saviour who appears at the End of Time.³³

31. On the idea of *mithāq* and its later developments, especially in mystical literature, see L. Massignon, 'Le Jour du covenant', *Oriens*, 15 (1962), pp. 14–24; L. Massignon, *La passion de Hallāj*, under 'mithāq'; L. Gardet, 'Les Noms et les statuts', *SI*, 5 (1956); L. Gardet, 'Fins dernières selon la théologie musulmane', *Revue Thomiste*, 2 (1957); R. Gramlich, 'Der Urvertrag in der Koranlegung (zu Sura 7, 172–173)'.

32. In reply to the question 'How then did they [the pure beings] respond if they were only particles?' (*kayfa ajābū wa hum dharr*), Abū 'Abd Allāh Ja'far al-Šādiq said: 'In the world of the Pact, [God] instilled in them that which they needed to answer his questions' (*ja'ala fihim mā idhā sa'alahum ajābū ya'nī fi'l-mithāq*); al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-imān wa'l-kufr', vol. 3, ch. 4, p. 19. Although the statement of the sixth imam remains vague, the commentators did not hesitate to see in it an allusion to conscience (*shu'ūr*), to the faculty of perception-comprehension (*idrāk*), or the faculty of emitting sounds (*nuṭq*) (cf. al-Majlisī, *Mir'āt al-ūqūl*, vol. 2, pp. 12–13, citing particularly al-Mufid and al-Murtaḍā). The disciple who asked Ja'far al-Sādiq the question was Abū Baṣīr; the sixth imam had three disciples with this *kunya*: Layth b. al-Bukhturī al-Murādī, 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Asādī al-Kūfī and Yaḥyā b. Abī'l-Qāsim al-Asādī al-Makfūf (cf. Mudarris, *Rayḥanat al-adab*, vol. 7, pp. 34–37); the first appears to have been the closest of the three since he was known as being one of the 'apostles' (*ḥawārī*) of the sixth imam (al-Kashshī, *Ma'rifa akhbār al-rijāl* [Bombay, 1317/1899], pp. 7 and 113).

33. This is why, in Imami tradition, the plural *mawāthiq* is often used; see, e.g., al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 70–71 and 80–81; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 3, pp. 12–13; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 274; Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, vol. 1, ch. 97, p. 117 and ch. 104, p. 124; vol. 2, ch. 1, pp. 312f.; al-Hurr al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Jawāhir al-saniyya*, p. 215; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 26, pp. 279–280.

Then God made the prophets take an oath, saying to them: 'Am I not your Lord? Is not Muḥammad here My messenger, and is 'Ali not the prince of the believers?' The prophets answered 'Yes', and prophetic status was firmly established for them (*fa-thabatat lahum al-nubuwwa*); and God made 'the resolute prophets' take an oath, saying: 'I am your Lord, Muḥammad is My messenger, 'Ali is the prince of the believers, his heirs (*awṣiyā'u*hu, i.e., the other imams) are, after him, the rulers accountable for my My Order (*wulāt amrī*) and the guardians of the treasures of My Knowledge (*khuzzān 'ilmī*), and the Mahdī is he through whom I will bring My religion to victory, through whom I will show My power, through whom I will take vengeance on My enemies, and through whom I will be worshipped whether they will so or not.' [The resolute prophets] answered: 'We so affirm, Lord, and bear witness.'³⁴

Although the *ḥadīths* offer no details on the matter, it would seem logical to place the 'Primordial Initiation' after this Pact of the fourfold oath. In fact, it is said that in the world of shadows, the pre-existential entities of the Impeccables taught the sacred sciences to the shadows of 'pure beings'. These sciences being secret, the future initiate could receive them only after taking a solemn oath, according to a universal rule of all esoteric or initiatory doctrines. Ja'far al-Šādiq said: 'We were spirits of light, and we taught the secrets of the Science of the Unity and the Glory to the shadows.'³⁵ 'We were silhouettes of light revolving around the Throne of the All-Merciful,' said Ḥusayn b. 'Ali, 'and we taught

34. Al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, section 2, ch. 7, no. 2; see also al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-īmān wa'l-kufr', vol. 3, ch. 1, p. 12, no. 1451; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 26, p. 279, no. 22. As it is reported in what follows in this tradition, Adam, who is also a prophet, remains indecisive and lacks the resolve to take the oaths of *walāya*; he thus does not deserve to be counted among the *ūlu'l-'azm*; the Qur'ānic verse, 'We had already made a Pact with Adam, but he forgot it: We have found no firm resolve in him' (*wa laqad 'ahidnā ilā Ādam min qablu fa-nasiya wa lam najid lahu 'azman*, Q 20:115) is understood in this sense. In other traditions, we are told that only later, after being materially created, does he recognise the sacred supremacy of the Impeccables, repents and takes the fourfold oath of fidelity and is redeemed (see, e.g., al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 21, pp. 311–312, citing al-Kulaynī and Ibn Bābūya).

35. 'Kunnā arwāḥ nūr fa-nu'allimu'l-aẓilla asrār 'ilm al-tawḥīd wa'l-tahmīd', Ibn 'Ayyāsh, *Muqtaḍab al-athar*, p. 23.

Praise, the formula for Unicity, and Glorification, to the angels.³⁶ The luminous entities of the Prophet and the Imams, being the first created by God and the first to have recognised divine Unicity and Majesty, initiate the other shadows of the World of the Pact into what they have known and to what they have spent their time doing since the origin of this World, namely Unification and Glorification of the Lord. In a long *ḥadīth* reported by the eighth imam, ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, and the chain of transmission for which goes back from imam to imam as far as the Prophet, further details are brought of this Primordial Initiation; this is the tradition sometimes known by the title ‘the superiority of the Prophet and the Proofs [i.e. the imams] over the angels’ (*ḥadīth faḍl al-nabī wa’l-ḥujaj ‘alā’l-malā’ika*);³⁷ the Prophet said:

‘Alī, how could we not be superior to the angels when we preceded them (*sabaqnāhum*) in the knowledge of the Lord as well as in praising Him, in witnessing His Unicity, and in glorifying Him. Certainly our spirits were the first of God’s creations, and

36. ‘*Kunnā ashbāḥ nūr nadūru ḥawla ‘arsh al-Raḥmān fa-nu‘allimu’l-malā’ika al-tasbīḥ wa’l-tahlīl wa’l-tahmīd*’, Ibn Bābūya, *‘Ilal*, ch. 18, p. 23.

37. With some slight variation, Ibn Bābūya reports this tradition a number of times, in several of his works: *‘Ilal*, ch. 7, pp. 5f.; *Kamāl al-dīn*, ch. 23, pp. 254–55, no. 4; *‘Uyūn*, vol. 1, ch. 25, pp. 262f., no. 22. My translation is of the version from *‘Ilal*, which seems to be the most complete. The author most probably took the tradition from one of his no longer extant reference books: the *Kitāb tafḍīl al-anbiyā’ wa’l-a’imma ‘alā’l-malā’ika* (cf. *‘Ilal*, pp. 20–27 and 211f.), a work by Muḥammad b. Baḥr al-Ruhnī (from Ruhn, not far from Kirmān, in Persia), the Imami author of at least three known works; apparently, all three have been lost, but fragments have survived thanks to later authors. They are, *al-Furūq bayna’l-abāṭil wa’l-ḥuqūq* (cf. Ibn Bābūya, *‘Ilal*, pp. 211–220) and *al-Ḥujja fī ibtā’ al-qā’im* (cf. *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, pp. 352–357 and 417–423, and al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 104–108 and 124–128). (We are greatly indebted to Professor Etan Kohlberg who, since the original French publication of this work, has pointed out a fourth title of al-Ruhnī’s, *Muqaddimāt ‘ilm al-Qur’ān*, cited by Ibn Ṭāwūs in his *Sa’d al-su’ūd* [Najaf, 1369/1950], pp. 227–228 and 279–281.) Al-Ruhnī lived from the middle of the third to the beginning of the fourth century AH; he is considered as an ‘extremist’ (*ghālī*) by some authors of Imami *Ṭabaqāt*. On Ruhnī, see e.g. al-Kashshī, *Ikhtiyār ma’rifat al-rijāl*, p. 147; al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 189, 219, 271; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist* (ed. Najaf, 1356/1937), p. 132; Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥillī, *Rijāl* (Najaf, 1972), pp. 270 and 277.

immediately thereafter He had us praise him and profess His Unicity. Then He created the angels, and when they contemplated our spirits in the form of a unique light, they recognised the grandeur of our Cause (*amr*); we began to praise [God] in order to teach the angels that we are created beings and that God is absolutely transcendent for us (*innahu munazzah 'an şifātinā*). The angels, as they witnessed the divine transcendence, began to praise us. And when the angels saw the majesty of our rank (*sha'n*), we began to profess divine Unicity so that they might learn that there is no god but God (*lā ilāha illā llāh*) and that we are not gods, but only worshippers.... And when the angels saw the elevation of our position (*maḥall*), we began to bear witness to the grandeur of God, so that they might know that God is the greatest (*Allāhu akbar*).... And when the angels were witness to the noble force and power (*al-'izza wa'l-quwwa*) that God had placed in us, we began to recite: 'There is no force nor power but through God (*lā ḥawl wa lā quwwa illā bi'llāh*) so that the angels would know that we ourselves have no force or power but through God (*lā ḥawl lanā wa lā quwwa illā bi'llāh*).'³⁸ And when they saw that which God had so generously granted to us (*mā an'ama'llāh bihi 'alaynā*) and how He had made obedience obligatory in our case, we said, 'Praise be to God' (*al-ḥamdu li'llāh*), so that the angels might learn our gratitude to God for this gift. And they repeated, 'Praise be to God.' It is thus thanks to us that the angels were guided towards knowledge of the Unicity of God and [knowledge of the words] of Unification and Glorification.³⁹

38. The noun *ḥawl* had two principal meanings in early Arabic. The first is force, and the second is change, upheaval, transformation. Although in the holy words *lā ḥawl wa lā quwwa illā bi'llāh* only the first of these meanings can be applied, in the words of the Prophet *lā ḥawl lanā wa lā quwwa illā bi'llāh* (where just the word *lanā* is inserted into the sacred phrase), the ambiguity appears to have been kept on purpose, and applying the second meaning to the phrase gives, 'We are not subject to change and we have our Power only through God'; this latter is found in the versions of *Tal al-sharā'if* (p. 6) and *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* (vol. 1, p. 263), but in *Kamāl al-dīn* (p. 255), the word *lanā* is taken out of the Prophet's speech, and one finds the sacred phrase as such.

39. Note that in what is taught during this Primordial Initiation are found four phrases commonly used by all Muslims, as well as four phrases from the mystics' *dhikr*: *lā ilāha illā'llāh*, *Allāhu akbar*, *lā ḥawl wa lā quwwa illā bi'llāh*, and *al-ḥamdu li'llāh*; in the very first phase of initiation, although the phrase taught is not specified, it might be supposed that it is *subḥāna'llāh* ('We began to praise God', *fa-sabbahñā*), another phrase of *dhikr*. According to the mystics,

Another event is said to have taken place in the World of the shadows: the creation of Adam's descendants, in the form of particles, out of Earth and Water. The term 'Second World of Particles' might be fitting for this stage, since, on the one hand, it would explain the name attributed to the First World of Particles, and on the other hand it would correspond to this progressive creation of less and less subtle, more and more material worlds. In a commentary on Qur'an 7:172 (cf. above), the fifth imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, relates words that his father, the fourth imam, 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn, spoke in his presence:

God took a handful of earth (*turāb*) from which he created Adam, and poured sweet, pleasant water into it, and left it for forty days; then he poured salty, brackish water⁴⁰ into it, and left it for another forty days; once the clay was ready to knead, he rubbed it vigorously, and out of it sprang the descendants of Adam, in the form of particles, from the right and left sides of this clay; God then ordered them into the fire. 'The People of the Right' (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) obeyed and the Fire became cold and harmless for them; 'The People of the Left' (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*) disobeyed and refused to go into it.⁴¹

There is a whole series of cosmogonic traditions, both parallel and complementary, concerning the division of creatures into two opposite groups: there are the beings of light and knowledge on the

these phrases are extremely powerful and contain numerous spiritual secrets. Cf. also the words of Ja'far al-Šādiq: 'We taught the secrets of the Science of Unification and Glorification to the shadows.'

40. As will be seen (ch. 12) dark Ignorance (*al-jahl*) was created from the 'briny ocean' (*al-baḥr al-ujāḥ*), while Hiero-Intelligence (*al-'aql*), in the same way as the Impeccables, was that which was first created by God, proceeding from the divine light and taken from the right side of the Throne.

41. Al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, section 2, ch. 7, pp. 70 and 71, nos 2 and 6.; cf. also the same tradition with slight variations in al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-imān wa'l-kufr', ch. 1, no. 1449, vol. 3, p. 10, no. 2. In tradition no. 1,448 from this same work, it is said that 'the People of the Right' are the people of obedience (*tā'a*) and Paradise, while 'the People of the Left' are those of disobedience (*ma'ṣiya*) and Hell; on the *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* and the *aṣḥāb al-shimāl*, see also Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī, *Muqtaḍab al-athar*, pp. 9–10. These last expressions are from the Qur'an (56:27 and 41).

one hand, and the beings of darkness and ignorance on the other: we have already seen the *ḥadīth* concerning the Armies of Hiero-Intelligence and those of Ignorance, the 'People of the Right' and those 'of the Left', and we will soon have occasion to see the case of the 'People of *Illīyyīn*' and those of *'Sijjīn*'. These terms refer of course to the Imams and their initiated faithful in the former case, and to the enemies of the Imams and their partisans on the other.

Adam's offspring likewise took an oath before God, but this oath covers only one point: the Unicity of the Creator. Two important details accompany this fact. First, it is said that after this oath the original human nature (*fiṭra*) was marked by recognition of Divine Unicity, a recognition called '*islām*'; it is known that in Imami terminology this term, the opposite of '*īmān*', technically refers to exoteric submission to religion. The second is that all the descendants of Adam, the believers (*mu'min*) as well as the infidels (*kāfir*), took this oath. The 'believers' or the 'People of the Right' are at this stage the subtle materialisation of the human 'pure beings' of the First World of the Shadows; thus, they have already taken oaths of *walāya*, the oaths of the esoteric part of religion. The 'People of the Left', on the other hand, although monotheistic in their original nature, can only fall into 'infidelity', forget their oath and disobey God, since they have failed to recognise *walāya*.⁴²

42. See al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 3, ch. 5 ('Bāb fiṭrat al-khalq 'alā'l-tawḥīd'), pp. 19–21; there are five traditions here, four of which date to Ja'far al-Šādiq, and the other to Muḥammad al-Bāqir. The five give commentaries on the following verses: Q 7:172 (cited above); 30:30 'according to the original nature that God gave to men' (*fiṭrat Allāh allatī faṭara'l-nās 'alayhā*); 31:25 'And if you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they answer: God' (*wa la'in sa'altahum man khalaqa'l-samāwāt wa'l-arḍ la-yaqūlunna Allāh*'), as well as in commentary on the Prophetic tradition: 'Each newborn child has the original nature' (*kullu mawlūd yūlad 'alā'l-fiṭra*). The aim of these elements seems evident: first, to give an ontological and archetypal dimension to the opposition *mu'min/muslim*, and then to denounce the implicit infidelity of the 'Sunni'/exoteric Muslims who fail to recognise *walāya*. The choice of the terms *islām* and *muslim* to denote submission to the exoteric part of religion to the exclusion of the esoteric is evidently not gratuitous. On this concept, in a general sense, see G. Gobillot,

What characterises the Impeccables in this World of particles, besides their role as initiating masters of the 'pure beings', is what might be called the faculty of 'divine foresight'. What this means is that they 'see' in the particles (*al-dharr*) or in the 'clay' (*al-ṭīna*) of Adam's offspring (both the 'pure' and the 'impure') all his offspring's natures and their future destinies, down to the least of their thoughts, words and deeds. The miraculous powers of the imams, relative to the reading of thoughts and to physiognomy during their existence in the sensible world, are sometimes presented as resulting from a remembrance of what they had 'seen' in 'the clay' of men in the World of particles.⁴³ We thus see a kind of archetype of the two main traits of the existence of the imams in these two characteristics of the Impeccables, that is,

La conception originelle (fiṭra), ses interprétations et fonctions chez les penseurs musulmans (Cairo, 2000).

43. There are both traditions that allude to, and traditions that deal directly with, this gift of pre-existential 'seeing' of the Impeccables (called *ru'ya*, vision, or *ilm al-ṭīna*, the science of the Clay, by the texts). 'The Day of Alliance with the Particles, God received the oaths of our faithful regarding the recognition of our mission as imams, recognition of his own lordship, and recognition of the prophetic mission of Muḥammad. Then he showed Adam's descendants to Muḥammad while they were still in the Clay, in the form of shadows; then he created them from the Clay with which he had created Adam, and the Messenger of God knew them and he made them known to 'Alī, and we [the other imams] also knew them' (the words of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Bāqir, '*Inna'llāh akhadha mīthāq shī'atīnā bi'l-walāya lanā wa hum dharr yawma akhdh al-mīthāq 'alā al-dharr wa'l-īqrār lahu bi'l-rubūbiyya wa li-Muḥammad bi'l-nubuwwa wa 'arada'llāh 'alā Muḥammad banī Ādam fi'l-ṭīn wa hum azilla wa-khalaqahum min al-ṭīnat allati khalaqa minhā Ādam wa 'arafahum rasūl Allāh wa 'arrafahum 'Alīyyan wa naḥnu na'rifuhum*'), al-Ṣaffar, *Baṣā'ir*, p. 89. 'The imam knows the characteristics and the names of his faithful as well as those of his enemies, thanks to his knowledge of the Clay from which they were created' (the words of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, '*Inna'l-imām ya'rifu shī'atahu wa a'dā'ahu bi-wujūhihim wa asma'ihim bi'ilm al-ṭīnat allati khuliqū minhā*') Ibn 'Ayyāsh, *Muqtaḍab*, p. 41; also, *Baṣā'ir*, p. 390; see also in this latter source, section 2, chs 14–16 (*bāb fī rasūl Allāh annahu 'arafa mā ra'a fi'l-azilla wa'l-dharr; bāb fī amīr al-mu'minin annahu 'arafa mā ra'a fi'l-mīthāq; bāb fī'l-a'imma annahum ya'rifūna mā ra'au fi'l-mīthāq*), pp. 83–90; for allusions to this subject, see, e.g., Ibn Bābūya, *Iḥāl*, ch. 139, p. 173; 'Uyūn, vol. 2, p. 227 and *Faḍā'il al-shī'a*, p. 31, no. 27.

Initiation and Divine Foresight, the traits being their initiatory knowledge and their ability to perform miracles. We shall return to both of these later.

The table here is an attempt to sum up the cosmogony and anthropogony of Twelver Shi'ism as covered so far in our discussion.

WORLDS	INHABITANTS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS
<i>THE LIGHT OF GOD</i>	
The Mother of the Book	The formless lights of the 'impeccables' (' <i>aql</i>)
The First World of Particles or the World of Shadows or the World of the Pact	Lights formed from the Impeccables (Unification and Glorification) Initiation after the four oaths of recognition of the esoteric and the exoteric) Shadows of pure beings (angels, prophets, believers = the Armies of ' <i>aql</i>) (the four oaths on the esoteric and the exoteric, followed by learning the secrets of Unification and the Glorification)
The Second World of Particles	Particles of Adam's descendants made out of Clay (the People of the Right = the Armies of ' <i>aql</i> = the believers) (the People of the Left = the Armies of ' <i>jahl</i> = the adversaries) (the oath of recognition of the exoteric Unicity that characterises original nature)
Towards the creation of the material, sensible world	

Adamic humanity: the 'voyage' of the Light

It is after this event that the creation of the material world takes place, and it is within this world that the major event of the creation of spirits (*arwāḥ*), of hearts (*qulūb*), and of bodies (*abdān*) must be placed. Here again we are faced with the radical and omnipresent division of all beings into two opposing groups that have been in conflict with each other since the time of the creation. On one side are the Guides and their faithful, and on the other are the Enemies and their partisans. A substantial number of traditions supply the following material on the subject of these powerful parallels: the spirit and the heart (which is where the spirit is believed to reside) of the Impeccables were created out of a Clay located above the *ʿIlliyyin*, while their bodies were formed from the Clay of the *ʿIlliyyin* itself. The spirit and the heart of the faithful of the Imam, as well as the spirit and the heart of the prophets, were formed from the Clay of the body of the Imam, and the bodies of the faithful and of the prophet were formed from a Clay located beneath the *ʿIlliyyin*. On the other hand, the spirits, hearts and bodies of the Enemies of the Imam were formed from the Clay of the *Sijjīn*; the spirits and hearts of their partisans were formed from this same Clay, while their bodies were formed from a clay located below the *Sijjīn*.⁴⁴

44. See, e.g., al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir*, section 1, chs 9 and 10, pp. 14–25; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb khalq abdān al-a'imma wa arwāḥihim wa qulūbihim', vol. 2, pp. 232–234, and 'Kitāb al-imān wa'l-kufr', 'Bāb ṭīnat al-mu'min wa'l-kāfir', vol. 3, pp. 2–16. These traditions are not always clear, and in the work of al-Kulaynī, in particular, the confusion between the entities created on the one hand and the provenance of the Clay from which they were formed on the other, destroys the balance and the correspondence of the system. Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī appears to be more methodical than his disciple in this regard; one of the traditions he reports seems to constitute a kind of synthesis of details on the subject, namely *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, section 1, ch. 9, p. 14, no. 2: 'The fifth imam said, "God created [the bodies of] Muḥammad and his family [i.e. Fāṭima and the imams] from the Clay of *ʿIlliyyin*, and he created their spirits and their hearts from a Clay located above the *ʿIlliyyin*, He created

[above the <i>ʿIlliyyin</i>] the spirits and hearts of the Impeccables	
[<i>ʿIlliyyin</i>] the bodies of the Impeccables	[<i>Sijjīn</i>] spirits, hearts, and bodies of the Enemies
Spirits and hearts of their faithful, and of the prophets	Spirits and hearts of their partisans
[below the <i>ʿIlliyyin</i>] bodies of the faithful of the Impeccables, and those of the prophets	[below the <i>Sijjīn</i>] bodies of the partisans of the Enemies

The terms *ʿIlliyyūn* (*ʿIlliyyin* in the accusative) and *Sijjīn* are from the Qurʾān, and are seen, respectively, in verses 18–21 and 7–9 of Sura 83 (*Surat al-Muṭaffifin*):

[the bodies] of our faithful as well as [those] of the prophets from a Clay found beneath the *ʿIlliyyin*, while he created their spirits and their hearts from the Clay of the *ʿIlliyyin* itself. This is why the hearts of our faithful come from the bodies of the Family of Muḥammad. Likewise, God created the enemy of the Family of the Prophet [his spirit, his heart and his body] as well as the spirits and the hearts of his partisans, from the Clay of the *Sijjīn*, and [the bodies of] the latter from a clay located below the *Sijjīn*; this explains how the hearts of the partisans come from the bodies of the others [i.e. their leaders, the enemies of the imams], and why all hearts long for their bodies.”⁹ This material constitutes the theoretical bases of an ancient spiritual practice, perhaps the most important, the ‘vision with the heart’, see *Guide divin*, pp. 112–145 and, in this book, Chapters 10 and 11. On this subject, see also Ibn Bābūya, *ʿItāl*, ch. 96, p. 117, nos. 12–15. A kind of dualism can be seen here. The Qurʾān speaks of a number of creatures made of different substances (the angels of light, the *jinn* of fire and human beings of clay), but in no case are creatures made of two different substances. This concerns a kind of dualism, of course not the principal kind, but consisting of a division of nature. The pre-existential ‘worlds’ are reminiscent of various Iranian speculations about the creation in the *mênôg* state; the cosmic battle from the origin of creation has shades of the Iranian myth of the Primordial War (cf. Chapter 12). Nonetheless, this radical dualism is sometimes nuanced by rare traditions; see, e.g., *Baṣāʾir*, section 1, ch. 9, pp. 15–17, nos 5, 7, 8, 10 (the ‘mixture of Clays’).

Surely, the Book of the Pure is in the *‘Ilīyyīn*
 And what will have you know what the *‘Ilīyyūn* is?
 It is a Book covered with characters
 Those who are admitted into the Proximity of God will see it.⁴⁵
 Surely, the Book of the impious is in the *Sijjīn*
 And what will have you know what the *Sijjīn* is?
 It is a Book covered with characters.⁴⁶

Commentators have identified *‘Ilīyyīn* and *Sijjīn* respectively as one of the highest levels of Paradise and one of the lowest levels of Hell; the root *‘l-w* or *‘l-y* evokes the idea of elevation, of height, of domination, and the root *s-j-n* that of imprisonment, detention and burying in the ground. Similarly, some authors have also seen, as the Qur’ānic text appears to suggest, that the ‘names’ of the elect and the damned are given in the two divine books. In this sense, *‘Ilīyyūn* (the term also exists in Hebrew and in Chaldean, where it refers to something placed highly, or at a high elevation) may be compared to the ‘Book of Life’ of Judeo-Christian tradition (cf. Exodus 32:32–33; Daniel 12:1; Psalms 69:29; Luke 10:20; Revelation 20:15, etc.). In Imami tradition, the Qur’ānic texts cited previously are almost always accompanied by the *ḥadīth* concerning creation that derives from the *‘Ilīyyīn* and *Sijjīn*, and even though there is a lack of detail from the imams on the subject,⁴⁷ it would appear as though the two concepts (the

45. *Kallā inna kitāb al-abrār la-ḥi ‘Ilīyyīn/wa mā adrāka mā ‘Ilīyyūn/kitābun marqūm/yashhaduhu’l-muqarrabūn.*

46. *Kallā inna kitāb al-fujjār la-ḥi Sijjīn/wa mā adrāka mā Sijjīn/kitābun marqūm.*

47. According to a tradition going back to al-Bāqir, *‘Ilīyyīn* and *Sijjīn* denote, respectively, the ‘seventh heaven’ and the ‘seventh earth’ (al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, under Q 83:7–9, 18–21); in a tradition that the same author attributes to Ja’far, ‘the impious’ of the Qur’ānic verse are identified as Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, just as ‘the pure’ are identified as the Fourteen Impeccables (ibid.). In Ja’far al-Šādiq’s *Tafsīr* there are interesting details about ‘the pure ones’ (*abrār*) and ‘the impious’ (*fujjār*) that the Qur’ānic text directly relates to *‘Ilīyyīn* and *Sijjīn*, respectively. Commenting on Q 82:12–13: ‘Yes, the pure ones [will be plunged] into felicity and the impious into a furnace’ (*inna’l-abrāra la-ḥi na’im wa inna’l-fujjāra la-ḥi jahīm*), he says, ‘Felicity is knowledge and contemplation

name of the place and the name of the Book) are equally present. It should be added that in early Imamism a cosmic book could denote a metaphysical world, such as we saw in the case of the Original World of *umm al-kitāb*.⁴⁸ In one of Ja'far al-Šādiq's traditions, *ʿIlīyyin* is replaced by the Throne:

God created us [i.e. our entities of light or our spirits] from the light of His Majesty, then He gave form to our creation (*šawwara khalqanā*) from a well-guarded secret Clay taken from under the Throne, and He had our light inhabit our form; we are thus luminous human creatures (*naḥnu khalqan wa basharan nūrāniyyin*), endowed with that which God has not bestowed upon any other. And He created the spirits of our faithful from our Clay, and their bodies from another, well guarded and secret, but lower than ours.

(*al-naʿīm al-maʿrifa waʾl-mushāhada*) and the furnace is ignorance and obscurity' (*al-jahīm al-jahl waʾl-hijāb*, lit. 'being hidden behind a veil'); another 'reading': 'the furnace is those [carnal] souls for whom the fires of Hell have been lit' (*al-jahīm al-nufūs fa-inna lahā nayrān tattaqid*), ed. P. Nwyia, p. 228 [501]). Although in al-Sulamī's recension the technical terms used take on a connotation of orthodox 'mysticism', it must be pointed out that in an early Imami context, these terms are charged with doctrinal meanings; 'knowledge' is divine knowledge, of course, but this is not possible except through knowledge of the Imam, who by his ontological status and because of his cosmic role is that aspect of God that can be known; 'contemplation' is vision of the luminous entity of the Imam in the subtle centre of the heart, thus constituting the vision of the 'Face of God' (see Chapter 3 here); the terms 'ignorance' and 'obscurity' are likewise to be understood in this context. For the different interpretations of *ʿIlīyyin* in the Imami tradition, see al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 3, p. 65; for a general view, see R. Paret in *EI2* under *ʿIlīyyin*.

48. In Imamism, the 'Book' (*kitāb*), as a concept, is of particular doctrinal importance; the 'Book' is the container, the vehicle of essential knowledge, of the science of realities in a general as well as a particular sense; a certain correspondence can be detected between the 'Superior Books' (*umm al-kitāb*, *ʿIlīyyin*) that contain 'information' of a divine order and 'the speaking book' that the imam is, the vehicle for all the sacred sciences (cf. the expression *kitāb nāṭiq/Qurʾān nāṭiq*, referring to the IMAM; see, e.g., the 'index' to the *Bihār*, entitled *Safīnat al-Bihār*, by ʿAbbās al-Qummī, ed. 1355/1936, and also M. Ayoub, 'The Speaking Qurʾān and the Silent Qurʾān', in A. Rippin [ed.], *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān* [Oxford, 1988], pp. 177, 198); this correspondence might similarly be considered as between *Sijjīn*'s 'Inferior Book' and the Enemies of the Imams, the Guides of Darkness (*aʾimmat al-ḡalām*).

Other than our faithful and the prophets, God endowed no other creatures in this way. It is for this reason that only we and they [i.e., our initiated disciples, the pure human beings, the prophets, and the faithful of the imams] deserve to be called men, while the others are no more than gnats destined for the fires of Hell [lit. 'this is why we and they have become men and the other men, gnats destined for the fires of Hell' (*wa li-dhālik širnā naḥnu wa hum al-nās wa šāra sā'iru'l-nās hamajan li'l-nār wa ilā'l-nār*)].⁴⁹

Two points from this series of traditions should be borne in mind. First of all, there is the fact of finding this equality of 'level of being' between the faithful of the imams (that is, the 'believers' who have been initiated into the esoteric dimension of religion) on the one hand, and the prophets on the other. This implies the same spiritual status for both. These two groups of humans, like the angels (as we have seen), created simultaneously in the form of shadows in the First World of Particles, together took the four oaths of fidelity and were initiated by the Impeccables into the secrets of the Sacred Sciences. According to Imami tradition, those initiated into the esoteric dimension of religion have the same spiritual 'weight' as the prophets in the universal economy of the Sacred and in the battle against the Armies of Ignorance. The second point that should be taken into consideration is the consubstantiality of the heart of the faithful believer and the body of the imam. This fact constitutes the cosmogonic and propositional basis for

49. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb khalq abdān al-a'imma', vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 232–233; for the replacement of *Illīyyin* by *arsh*, see also al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, section 1, ch. 9, no. 12, p. 17. It would be interesting to show how in Sunni tradition, Mecca (and sometimes Medina) constitutes the terrestrial counterpart to the celestial Abode with the Clay from which the Prophet was created; cf. e.g. al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ*, vol. 1, p. 43; al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sira al-ḥalabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 147; for other sources, see M. J. Kister, 'You Shall Only Set Out for Three Mosques', *Muséon*, 82 (1969), p. 187, n. 63. The mention of Medina is undoubtedly due to the belief that the clay of each individual comes from the place where he will be buried (*turbatu'l-shakhṣ madfanuhu*), see, e.g., al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ*, vol. 1, pp. 42–43. On this subject, see also H. Corbin, *Temple et contemplation* (Paris, 1980), index under 'Ka'ba' and 'Mekke'.

the most important spiritual practice in early Imamism, that of the practice of vision with (or in) the heart (*al-ru'ya bi'l-qalb*).⁵⁰

At the time of the creation of the human race, the single and dual Light of prophecy/imamate, also called the Light of Muḥammad and 'Alī, was placed in Adam by God;⁵¹ it was because of this light that the angels were commanded to prostrate themselves before Adam, which they all did with the exception of Iblis, who was forever damned by God because of his haughty disobedience:⁵² 'Then

50. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, Part II-3 (excursus) (*Divine Guide*, Part II-3 [excursus]), and here below, Chapters 10 and 11.

51. This probably refers to Adam in the present cycle of humanity; actually, the belief in cyclical creations and successive humanities exists in early Imamism, although no specific details or developments are furnished on the subject by the imams; the tradition upon which this belief is based can be found in a commentary by Muḥammad al-Bāqir on Q 50:15: 'Are We [God is speaking] then fatigued from the first creation, such that they are in doubt about a new creation?' (*'a fa-'aynā bi'l-khalq al-awwal bal hum fī labsin min khalqin jadīd*); Muḥammad al-Bāqir: 'When these creatures and this world are annihilated by God (*inna llāha 'azza wa jall idhā afnā hādhā'l-khalq wa hādhā'l-'ālam*) and the people of Paradise and Hell inhabit the Abodes that they deserve, God will create a new world different from this one, with other creatures, not divided into male and female (*min ghayr fuḥūla wa lā unāth*), who will worship Him and will bear witness to His Unicity; and He will create a new earth to support them, and to give them refuge He will create a new sky. Do you think that this is the only world God created? That he did not create races of humanity other than you (*basharan ghayrakum*)? Certainly not, for He has created thousands upon thousands of worlds with thousands upon thousands of Adams, and you dwell upon only the last of these worlds, in the midst of the last of these Adamic humanities (*laqad khalaqa Allāh alfa alf 'ālamīn wa alfa alf Ādama anta fī ākhir tilka'l-'awālim wa ulā'ika al-ādamiyyin*). Cf. Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ch. 38, p. 277, no. 2; the speaker for the fifth imam is here Abū 'Abd Allāh Jābir b. Yazīd al-Ju'fī (d. 128/745 or 132/749), the famous disciple of the fifth and sixth imams to whom we owe the transmission of a great number of traditions of a theological nature; on him, see, e.g., al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 126; al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, see index; al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, p. 111, no. 6, and p. 163, no. 30; al-Ardabīlī, *Jāmi' al-ruwāt* (Qumm, 1331 Sh./1953), vol. 1, p. 144. The doctrinal developments of the theme of successive creations can, in particular, be attributed to Ismaili authors; on this subject, see esp. H. Corbin, *Temps cyclique et gnose ismaélienne* (Paris, 1982).

52. Cf. also Q 7:11f.; 15:26f.; 17:61f.; 18:50; 38:74f. Iblis is regarded in Imami traditions as the archetypal personification of the 'guides of darkness', the 'enemies of the imams and of the Shi'i' (the *nawāṣib* in general); he is the first

God created Adam and deposited us in his loins and commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before him so that we might be glorified (through Adam); their prostration was the proof of their adoration of God and their respect and obedience towards Adam because of our presence in his loins.⁵³

Starting from Adam, this Light begins its 'voyage' through the generations of humanity, traversing the manifestations of time and space of the sacred history of (the present?) humanity, to reach its ultimate predestined vehicles, the historical Muḥammad and the historical 'Alī, and to be transmitted through them to the other imams. The Prophet said:

We were silhouettes of light until God wanted to create our form; He transformed us into a column of light (*ṣayyaranā 'amūda nūrin*) and hurled us into Adam's loins; then He caused us to be transmitted through the loins of fathers and the wombs of mothers without our being touched by the filth of associationism or any adultery due to unbelief (*akhrājanā ilā aṣlāb al-ābā' wa arḥām al-ummahāt wa lā yuṣībunā najas al-shirk wa lā siḥāḥ al-kufr*); and when He had us reach the loins of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib [the grandfather of both the Prophet and 'Alī], He divided the light in two and placed half in the loins of 'Abd Allāh [the Prophet's father] and the other half in the loins of Abū Ṭālib [the Prophet's uncle and the father of 'Alī]; Āmina [the Prophet's mother] received in her breast the half that was for me, and she brought me into the world; likewise, Fāṭima the daughter of Asad [the mother of 'Alī] received in her breast the half that was for 'Alī, and brought him into the world. Then God had the column [of light] come to me and I begat Fāṭima; likewise, He made it go to 'Alī and he begat al-Ḥasan and

to have failed to recognise the light of prophecy/imamate; from this perspective, he may be identified with *jahl*, the universal counter-power of Ignorance and Darkness (*Divine Guide*, part I.1, and, in this book, Chapter 12).

53. The prophetic *ḥadīth* of 'the superiority of the Prophet and the Proofs over the angels', Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, p. 6, *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 255: *'thumma inna llāha tabārak wa ta'ālā khalaqa Ādam fa-awda'anā ṣulbahu wa amara'l-malā'ika bi'l-sujūd lahu ta'zīman lanā wa ikrāman wa kāna sujūduhum li'llāh 'azza wa jall 'ubūdiyyatan wa li-Ādam ikrāman wa ṭā'atan li-kawninā fi ṣulbih.'*

al-Ḥusayn.... Thus, this light will be transmitted from imam to imam until the Day of Resurrection.⁵⁴

54. Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, vol. 1, ch. 156, p. 209; the phrase about 'the loins of the fathers and the wombs of the mothers' being free from any impiety or infidelity refers to the religious status of the genealogical ancestors of the Prophet, a problem dealt with at length in the literature of the *sīra* and the *Ḥadīth*; from the Imami point of view, all the ancestors of the Prophet, and consequently of the imams, were 'Muslims' in the sense of being 'monotheists', and practised the religion of Abraham, that of the *ḥanīfs*; this fact implies, among other things, that their children were not illegal, and thus the allusion to 'adultery due to infidelity' (cf., e.g., Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 89, p. 614, no. 11; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib al-Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 37f. and 132f.; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 11, pp. 10f., and vol. 15, pp. 117–127 and 172f.: '*Ittafaqati'l-imāmiyya 'alā anna wālidayi'l-rasūl wa kulla ajdādih ilā Ādam kānū muslimīn bal kānū min al-ṣiddīqīn wa'l-hunafā'*'). A great number of Sunni authors are of the same opinion, emphasising especially the monotheism of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and his sons, 'Abd Allāh and Abū Ṭālib (see, e.g., Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 1 (1), pp. 1, 2, 5, 31: the Prophet: '*innamā kharajtu min nikāh wa lam akhruj min sifāh min ladun Ādam lam yuṣibnī min sifāh ahl al-jāhiliyya shay'un*'; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, vol. 1, pp. 131f.; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'is al-kubrā*, vol. 1, pp. 93–96; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Wafā bi aḥwāl al-Muṣṭafā fi'l-ta'rikh* [Hyderabad, 1357/1938], vol. 1, pp. 35f. and 77–78; al-Qaṣṭallānī, *Irshād al-sārī li sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* [Beirut, 1323/1905], vol. 6, pp. 31f.; al-Ḥalabī, *al-Ṣīrat al-ḥalabiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 42f.; al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ*, vol. 1, pp. 66f., 174f.). It seems to have been above all the Hashimid tradition, pro-Shi'i but especially pro-'Abbasid, that glorified the religious excellence of the Prophet's ancestors in general, and that of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib in particular, in its propaganda against the Umayyads; let it be remembered that 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib is the common ancestor of 'Abd Allāh, Abū Ṭālib and al-'Abbās; as their ancestor, he is presented as a monotheist, as pious and emanating the light of prophecy that he carried within him; Umayya, the ancestor of the Umayyads, is presented as his exact opposite (cf., e.g., Ibn Hishām — the Hashimid sympathies of his teacher, Ibn Ishāq, are well known — *al-Ṣīrat al-nabawiyya*, vol. 1, p. 180; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, vol. 4b, p. 18 — the words of 'Abd Allāh b. Abbās against the Umayyad caliph Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya and reported by 'Awāna b. al-Ḥakam [d. 147/764]; on him and his pro-'Abbasid sympathies, see GAS, vol. 1, p. 307, and esp. A. A. Dūrī, *Nash'at al-'ilm al-ta'rikhī 'inda'l-arab* [Beirut, 1960], pp. 36f.; for the opposition of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and Umayya, see also al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, vol. 1, pp. 8–9). Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, while deductively demonstrating the truth of this detail concerning 'genealogical purity', implicitly recognises its Shi'i origin (*al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* [Beirut, 1981–1983], vol. 24, pp. 173–174); actually, a certain number of Sunni scholars, beginning with the famous Muslim, reacted rather quickly to the assertion that the immediate forebears of the Prophet were 'Muslims'. Muslim

This tradition and others – especially the terms used therein, particularly ‘loins’ (*aṣlāb*) and ‘wombs’ (*arḥām*) – suggest that the transmission of the legacy of light takes place physically, via the seminal substance. This substance, containing the light of prophecy/imamate (and for the majority of Sunni authors, the light of prophecy only), adorns the body, and particularly the forehead, of the individual that conveys it with a supernatural brilliance;⁵⁵ but according to another series of traditions, this transmission also takes place, this time by a spiritual route, along the initiatory chain of the prophets and their heirs (*waṣī*, pl. *awṣiyā*), that is, their imams. In contrast to the Sunni tradition, here all the ancestors of the Prophet, be they spiritual or physical, were illumined by the single light of Muḥammad and ‘Alī, a light that is divided, as we have seen, only when it reaches ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib. The Prophet says, “Alī and I were created from the same light.... When Adam reached Paradise, we were in him [lit. in his loins].... When Noah boarded the Ark, we were in him; when Abraham was thrown into the fire, we were in him.... God never ceased transmitting us from pure loins to pure wombs (*wa lam yazal yanqulunā* ‘*llāhu ‘azza wa jall min aṣlāb ṭāhira ilā arḥām ṭāhira*) until the moment we reached ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib; there, he divided our light in two.”⁵⁶

relates the *ḥadīth* where the Prophet says to a convert: ‘My father and yours are now in hell’ (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 1, pp. 132–133; see also al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ*, vol. 1, p. 79, where he refers to Muslim, adding that by his father the Prophet actually meant Abū Ṭālib, who had brought him up: ‘*Wa arāda bi-abihi annahu Abū Ṭālib wa li-annahū rabbāhu wa al-‘arab tussami’l-murabbī aban*’; see also al-Ḥalabī, *al-Ṣīrat al-ḥalabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 29; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, vol. 11, pp. 30–31). For other Sunni sources, see C. Gilliot, ‘Muqātil’, *JA*, 279 (1991), pp. 68–70.

55. On this subject and the sources, both Shi’i and Sunni, see Rubin, ‘Pre-Existence and Light’, pp. 62–119; for the Light of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, pp. 94–96; for that of ‘Abd Allāh and Āmina, pp. 84–89; for that of Abū Ṭālib, pp. 75–76.

56. Ibn Bābūya, *‘Ilal*, ch. 116, pp. 134–135; see also Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, ch. 24, p. 275, no. 25. For the presence of the light of *nubuwwa/walāya* in Adam, see also Ibn ‘Ayyāsh, *Muqtaḍab*, p. 32; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 21, pp. 311–312; in Abraham, see Ibn ‘Ayyāsh, *Muqtaḍab*, p. 33; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 21, p. 315; in Moses, see Ibn ‘Ayyāsh, *Muqtaḍab*, p. 41; and al-Majlisī,

In fact, Imami tradition recognises two distinct genealogies for the Prophet and the imams; the first, which might be called 'natural descent', corresponds basically, although there have been the inevitable alterations in certain names, to one or other of the classical genealogies of the Prophet in Sunni literature. The second, 'spiritual descent', which is composed of the uninterrupted chain of the prophets and their imams since the time of Adam, is typically Imami.⁵⁷ The classical sources have been used in constructing these two lists (Ibn Bābūya and Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī in particular); they have been completed and checked, on the one hand using the details available in the *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*, an Imami work attributed to al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/956) and dedicated entirely to the idea of Imami *waṣiyya*,⁵⁸ and on the other hand with the biblical names; some names, nevertheless, remain unidentifiable.

Biḥār, vol. 51, p. 149. The idea of Muḥammad's prophetic descent is also admitted in the Sunni tradition, but despite the opinion of Goldziher, who sees a Neoplatonic kind of spiritual transmission ('Neuplatonische und Gnostische Elemente im Hadīt', p. 340), for Sunni authors it appears to be more a case of a physical transmission via seminal fluid; cf. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 1/1, p. 5 ('*wa min nabiyyin ilā nabiyyin wa min nabiyyin ilā nabiyyin ḥattā akhrajaka nabiyyan*'), also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* (Beirut, 1966), vol. 5, p. 215 ('*ya'nī taqallubahu min ṣulbi nabiyyin ilā ṣulbi nabiyyin ḥattā akhrajahu nabiyyan*'); al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'is*, vol. 1, p. 94 ('*Mā zāla'l-nabiyyu yataqallabu fī aṣlāb al-anbiyā' ḥattā waladathu ummuḥu*'); cf. also al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ*, vol. 1, p. 67 and al-Ḥalabī, *al-Širat al-ḥalabiyya*, vol. 1, p. 29. For some authors it was the 'seal' marked on the body of the Prophet by the prophetic light that made him the 'Seal of the prophets'; on this subject and on theological discussions on this theme, which ended up being an Islamic article of faith, see H. Birkland, *The Legend of Opening of Muḥammad's Breast* (Oslo, 1955); Y. Friedmann, 'Finality of Prophethood in Sunni Islam', *JSAI*, 7 (1986), pp. 177–215.

57. This double genealogy is reminiscent of the double 'natural' and 'royal' descent of Jesus (in Luke 3:23–38 and Matthew 1:1–17, respectively); as will be seen, there is considerable overlap in the ancestors who appear on the two lists.

58. *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya li'l-imām 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib 'alayhi'l-salām*, attributed to al-Mas'ūdī (Najaf, n.d.); on this work and the problems of its attribution, see Ch. Pellat, 'Mas'ūdī et l'imāmisme', in *Le Shi'isme imāmīte*, pp. 69–90.

- 1) Natural genealogy, in ascending order: Muḥammad – ‘Abd Allāh (or Abū Ṭālib) – ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib – Hāshim – ‘Abd Manāf – Quṣayy (or Fihri) – Kilāb – Murra – Ka‘b – Lu‘ayy – Ghālib – (Fihri) – Mālik-al-Naḍr (or Quraysh) – Kināna – Khuzayma – Mudrika – Ilyās – Muḍar – Nizār – Ma‘add – ‘Adnān – Ūdd – Udad – al-Yasa‘ – al-Hamyasa‘ – Salāmān – Nabt – Ḥaml – Qaydār – Ismail/Ishmael (the father of the Arabs), and from there, we pass on to the non-Arabs: Abraham, Terah (Tāriḥ) – Nahor (Nāḥūr) – Serug (Sarūgh) – Reu (Ar‘ū) – Peleg (Fālij) – Eber (Hābir) – Shelah (Shālih) – Arpachshad (Arfaḥshad) – Shem – Noah – Lamech (Lāmak) – Methuselah (Mattūshalah) – Enoch (Ukhnūkh)/Idris – Jared (Yārad) – Mahalaleel (Mahlā‘il) – Cainan (Qaynān) – Enos (Anūsh) – Seth (Shith) – Adam.⁵⁹
- 2) Spiritual genealogy, in descending order: Adam, Seth (Shith/Hibatu’llāh) – Cainan – MkhLT (alteration of Mahlā‘il/Mahalaleel) – Maḥūq (?) – Ghathmishā (or Ghanmishā, or Ghathmishā?) – Enoch/Idris – Noah – Shem – Ghāthās (or ‘Athāmir?) – Barghishāsā (or Bar‘ithāshā?) – Japhet (Yāfith) – BRH (alteration of Tāriḥ/Terah?) – JFNH (or JFSH or JFISH?) – ‘Imrān – Abraham – Ishmael – Isaac – Jacob/Israel – Joseph – Bithriyā (?) – Shu‘ayb – Moses – Joshua (Yūsha‘) – David – Solomon – Āṣaf b. Barakhiyā – Zachariah – Jesus – Simeon (Sham‘ūn) – John (Yaḥyā) – Mundhir b. Sham‘ūn – Salama (or Salīma) – Barda (or Barza or Bālīt or Abī, this last name referring perhaps to a ‘father’ of the church?) – Muḥammad – ‘Alī – the eleven imams.⁶⁰

A few of the biblical prophets (especially the *ulu’l-‘azm*) and their imams are common to the two lists; what gives them this high

59. Cf., e.g., Ibn ‘Ayyāsh, *Muqtaḍab*, pp. 51–52; *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*, pp. 75–90; compare with al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. Barbier de Meynard, vol. 1, pp. 80–83, and vol. 4, p. 115.

60. Cf., e.g., Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, ch. 22, pp. 211–213, no. 1, ch. 58, nos 4 and 5, and vol. 2, p. 644; Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-faqīh*, vol. 4, ch. 72, pp. 129–130; this spiritual filiation takes up nearly seventy pages of the *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya* (pp. 8–74), where the list is more than twice as long (seventy-six names instead of thirty-five); the author attempts to place the prophets and their heirs ‘historically’ by giving the names of biblical prophets and the kings contemporary with them, those of Persia and of Greece; compare with the *Murūj al-dhahab*, vol. 1, pp. 72–73. See also the excellent article by E. Kohlberg, ‘Some Shi‘i Views on the Antediluvian World’, *SI*, 52 (1980), pp. 41–66.

religious rank is the presence in them of the light of Muḥammad and 'Alī (and thus, of the eleven other imams, since 'Alī represents all of them). This is why, throughout the Imami tradition, the imams are constantly compared to the prophets and saints of Israel, although they are superior to them, since it is through the light of the imams that they have acquired their sacred status. Muḥammad said:

I am the master of the prophets; my heir ['Alī] is the master of the *waṣiyyūn*, and his *awṣiyā'* [the other imams] the masters of the other *awṣiyā'* [*waṣiyyūn* and *awsiyā'*, lit. 'heirs'; is there a difference between these terms? Why use two different terms?]; the sages [we will see that in early Imami terminology 'ālim, pl. 'ulamā', refers to the imam as spiritual initiator] are the heirs of the prophets; the sages of my Community are like the prophets of the people of Israel.⁶¹

61. 'Anā sayyid al-anbiyā' wa waṣiyyī sayyid al-waṣiyyin wa awṣiyā'uhu sādā'l-awṣiyā' ... al-'ulamā' warathat al-anbiyā' ... 'ulamā' ummatī ka-anbiyā' Banī Isrā'īl', cf., e.g., al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, section 1, ch. 2; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 211–212. For comparisons between the Impeccables and the prophets and saints of the Bible, see, e.g., Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 25–26 ('Alī has the qualities of the earlier prophets); Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 46 (the relationship between the Prophet and 'Alī is compared to that of Moses and Joshua; al-Shahrastānī takes the origin of this idea back to the mysterious partisan of 'Alī, 'Abd Allāh b. Saba', cf. *al-Milāl wa'l-niḥāl*, ed. Kaylānī [Cairo, 1967], vol. 1, p. 174; M. G. S. Hodgson, 'Abd Allāh b. Saba', *EI2*, vol. 2, p. 219 ('Alī compared with Aaron), vol. 3, p. 166 (al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn compared with the two sons of Aaron, Shabar and Shubayr), vol. 2, p. 164 ('Alī compared with Shem), vol. 1, p. 258 (the twelve imams and the twelve chiefs, *naqibs*, of the Tribes of Israel); al-Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*, p. 259 (the twelve imams and the twelve apostles of Jesus); al-Khawārizmī, *al-Manāqib*, Najaf, 1965, p. 85 (al-Ḥasan and Abraham, al-Ḥusayn and Moses, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn and Aaron); in certain traditions the imams are considered prophets, even by their adversaries (al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 1, p. 173, the words of the Umayyad Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik; Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 47, p. 278, no. 4, the words of the Khawārij). On this theme, see also A. J. Wensinck, 'Muḥammad und die Propheten', *Acta Orientalia*, 2 (1924); R. Selheim, 'Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte', *Oriens*, 18–19 (1965–1966); M. J. Kister, 'Ḥaddithū 'an Banī Isrā'īl', *IOS*, 2 (1972).

The transmission of light constitutes perhaps the most important element of the key idea of *waṣiyya*.⁶² In the texts, this transmission is referred to as *naql* (transport, transferal), *taqal-lub* (return, an allusion to the 'return trip' that the Light takes back to Muḥammad and 'Alī, its first source; or derived from the term *qālab*, the 'cernal envelope' here inhabited by the Light), or *tanāsukh*, which in the context of certain transmigrationalist trends in Islam is usually translated as 'metempsychosis',⁶³ but which here must be translated rather as 'metemphosis' (lit. 'the displacement of light'). In one of his sermons, 'Alī states: 'God deposited them [i.e. the light of the Impeccables carried by the seminal substance] in the most noble places they could be placed, and had them rest in the best of resting places; the glorious loins assured their transmission to the purified wombs.'⁶⁴ The Shi'i

62. The 'Sacred Legacy' is composed of a certain number of material objects also: the Sacred Books of the earlier prophets, the Secret Books (*Jafr*, *Jāmi'a* etc.), and certain objects with supernatural powers that belonged to the prophets (Adam's cloak, the Ark of the Covenant for Moses, and the weapon of Muḥammad). Here again, we find the two ideas of Knowledge and Power that characterised the pre-existence of the Imams and that will continue to characterise their existence. 'The written investiture' (*al-naṣṣ*) is merely the evidence of the transmission of the 'Legacy' designed to prove to the faithful the authenticity of the heir (on the *naṣṣ* of the imams, see, e.g., al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', vol. 2, pp. 40–120; al-Mufid, *al-Irshād*, the section dedicated to the *naṣṣ* of each imam within each relevant chapter). According to a tradition attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, *al-waṣiyya* is also the name of a Sealed Book (*kitāb makhtūm*) that descended from heaven to the Prophet; this book contained twelve sealed letters containing the missions reserved for each imam (al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 82–83).

63. On this subject, see Rainer Freitag, *Seelenwanderung in der islamischen Hāresie* (Berlin, 1985); Guy Monnot, 'La transmigration et l'immortalité', in *Islam et religions* (Paris, 1986), pp. 279–295.

64. 'Fa-stawda'ahum fi afdal mustawda'in wa aqarrahum fi khayr mus-taqarr tanāsakhat-hum karā'im al-aṣlāb ilā muṭahharāt al-arḥām', *Nahj al-balāgha*, p. 279, no. 93; the seeds of a belief in certain forms of reincarnation are found in the early writings of the imams; the word *maskh* in the sense of a debasing reincarnation in an animal form is seen a number of times (cf., e.g., al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, section 7, ch. 16, pp. 353–354; al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 1, p. 285; vol. 2, p. 37; Ibn Bābūya, *Uyūn*, vol. 1, ch. 17, p. 271; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*,

poet Kumayt b. Zayd al-Asadī (d. 125/742), singing of the light of glory of the prophet, uses the same term: 'The long branches of your tree run through your lineage from Eve to Āmina, /From generation to generation you were sent through the brilliance of silver and gold.'⁶⁵

It would appear that the term, in the technical sense of 'metemphosis', is of Imami origin, and that from there was gradually passed on, probably via 'extremist' (*ghulāt*) circles with greater or lesser connections to Shi'ism, to transmigrationalist milieus, taking on the meaning of 'metempsychosis'.

There have been a number of previous studies dedicated to the concept of *waṣiyya* in Islam in general and in Shi'ism in particular;⁶⁶ the majority of them (Hodgson, Watt, Sharon, Momen) have reduced *waṣiyya* to nothing more than its political aspect. The double 'natural' and 'spiritual' descent has been considered the proof of the 'Arabo-Persian conflict' (Goldziher)

p. 387). This theme is more fully developed in the literature of Bāṭinī Shi'is and especially in the corpus associated with Jābir b. Ḥayyān, where we see the appearance, perhaps for the first time, of a whole series of terms used for referring to different kinds of reincarnation: *naskh* (reincarnation in another human form), *maskh* (reincarnation in an animal form), *faskh* (in a vegetable form), *raskh* (in a mineral form) cf. *The Arabic Works of Jābir b. Ḥayyān*, ed. E. J. Holmyard [Paris, 1928], 'Kitāb al-bayān', p. 11; *Mukhtār rasā'il Jābir b. Ḥayyān*, ed. P. Kraus [Paris and Cairo, 1935], 'Kitāb al-ishtimāl', pp. 549–550; *Zeitschrift für Geschichte des arabischen-islamischen Wissenschaften*, Arabic texts, ed. M. 'A. Abū Rīda, 1 (1984), 'Kitāb al-ma'rifa', p. 57; Sharhrastānī, *Livre des religions*, tr. Gimaret-Monnot, p. 512, notes.

65. 'Mā bayna Ḥawwā'a in nusibta ilā'Āminata 'tamma nabtuka'l-hadabū. Qarnan fa-qarnan tanāsukhuka laka'l-fiqḍatu minhā baydā'a wa'l-dhahabū', al-Kumayt b. Zayd, *Ḥāshimīyyāt* (Qumm, n.d.), p. 69.

66. I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, ed. S. M. Stern (London, 1971), vol. 1, pp. 45f. and 135f.; Goldziher, *Vorlesungen über den Islam* (Heidelberg, 1910), pp. 217f.; M. G. S. Hodgson, 'How Did the Early Shi'a Become Sectarian?', *JAOS*, 75 (1955), pp. 1–13; W. Montgomery Watt, 'Shi'ism Under the Umayyads', *JRAS* (1960), pp. 158–172; U. Rubin, 'Prophets and Progenitors in Early Shi'a Tradition', *JSOI*, 1 (1979), pp. 41–64; M. Sharon, 'The Development of the Debate Around the Legitimacy of Authority in Early Islam', *JSOI*, 5 (1984), pp. 121–142, esp. pp. 139–141; M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, ch. 2.

or that of an opposition between the 'Arab Shi'ites of the North and the Arab Shi'ites of the South' (Rubin). Great erudition and rigour of argumentation have not prevented, on occasion, the adherence to an extremely reductionist point of view or the arrival at conclusions that are incomplete; the question of ethnic and cultural mixing at the dawn of Islam is far from being clearly defined, a similarity of ideas does not necessarily prove cultural influence, especially since similar forms may have different content and different forms may have analogous content; one word is not tantamount to a demonstration, and we cannot conclude that there is influence because there is analogy. Within the framework of the history of ideas, the question of the vitality of an early belief possibly influencing the form or content of a new belief remains an open one; neither tribal affiliation nor geographical proximity can necessarily demonstrate the adoption or the assimilation of complex ideas. It is evident that this complex network of problems cannot be solved in the space of a chapter or an article. In the present work we shall be more prudent and remain faithful to the limits that we imposed upon ourselves at the beginning; we shall examine the problem only from within Imamism and within the framework of Imamism's own worldview. It is clear that the idea of the 'Sacred Legacy', giving legitimacy to unquestionable 'inheritors', has political implications, but the idea appears more than anything to be an illustration and an application of two important doctrinal 'axioms' of Imamism: first, the dogma according to which the earth can never be without living Proof of God, otherwise it would be annihilated (*'inna'l-arḍ lā takhlū min al-ḥujja'*, *'law baqiyat al-arḍ bi-ghayr imām la-sākhat'*, *'law lam yabqā fi'l-arḍ illā'thnān la-kāna aḥaduhumā al-ḥujja'*, etc.); the Shi'i imams constitute the continuation of an uninterrupted chain of imams from the origin of our form of humanity onwards, a chain that guarantees universal Salvation, and whose last link is the twelfth imam, the Mahdī, who is present but hidden until the end of this cycle of humanity. The second 'axiom' is that all reality is composed of a *ẓāhir* (an apparent, exoteric

aspect) and a *bāṭin* (a hidden, esoteric aspect); from this point of view, the 'natural descent' would be the *ẓāhir* of the transmission of prophetic/'imami' light, which is brought about through the seminal substance, while the 'spiritual descent' constitutes the *bāṭin*, the transmission that occurs through initiation.

The Imam in Heaven: Ascension and Initiation

One who does not believe in the following three things does not belong among our faithful: the ascension to heaven (*al-mi'rāj*); interrogation at the tomb (*al-musā'ala fi'l-qabr*); and intercession (*al-shafā'a*).¹

According to this tradition and others of the same kind reported by Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, belief in the celestial ascension is clearly one of the Imami articles of faith. But whose ascension? These traditions remain silent on this subject, as they do about intercession. And with reason, for during the period when Ibn Bābūya was writing it was firmly established in Shi'i milieus that, like the Prophet, the imam is capable of heavenly ascent (as well as intercession) and this – as we shall see – in spite of attempts to reserve the term *mi'rāj* for the heavenly journey made by the Prophet Muḥammad. The silence of the tradition regarding this point

1. A tradition going back to imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq; cf. Ibn Bābūya (d. 381/991), *Amālī* (= *Majālis*), ed. M. B. Kamare'i (Tehran, 1404/1984), 'majlis' 49, no. 5, pp. 294–295. Elsewhere, Ibn Bābūya reports a tradition with the same *isnād*, in which belief in the existence of Paradise and Hell is added to the list; see Ibn Bābūya, *Ṣifāt al-shī'a*, ed. Ḥ. Fashāhī (with the text from *Faḍā'il al-shī'a*) (Tehran, 1342 Sh./1963–1964), p. 28. Another tradition going back to imam al-Riḍā extends the list (in addition to the four objects of faith listed in the main text and this note): the Basin, *al-ḥawḍ*, the Bridge *ṣirāt*, the Scales, *mīzān*, Resurrection of the Dead, Reward and Punishment), cf., *ibid.*, p. 30.

seems to be deliberate because the subject would have been especially delicate during this period.²

Imami traditionists were among the earliest authors of *kutub al-mi'rāj*, which were probably no more than compilations of *ḥadīths* attributed to the imams. The same al-Ṣadūq wrote a *Kitāb ithbāt al-mi'rāj*³ in which he undoubtedly had recourse to the material used in *Kitāb al-mi'rāj* by his father, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābūya (d. 329/940–941).⁴ Well before them, in the second century AH, Hishām b. Sālim al-Jawālīqī, a famous disciple of the sixth and seventh imams, seems to have written the first *Kitāb al-mi'rāj*.⁵ In addition to accounts of the Prophet's ascension without any specifically Shi'i element,⁶ the oldest compilations of

2. This is the period when the early 'non-rational esoteric' tradition was ever more marginalised, progressively giving way to domination by the 'rational theologico-legal trend'. See M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide Divin*, pp. 33–48 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 13–19). Ibn Bābūya seems to have been the last great compiler of the early tradition, while at the same time attempting to manage the rationalist movement; in his 'profession of faith' (*Risālat al-i'tiqādāt al-imāmiyya* [Tehran, n.d.], English tr. A. A. A. Fyze as *A Shi'ite Creed*, Oxford, 1942), an especially moderate text with a rational argument, he lists all the objects of faith cited above (note 1) except *mi'rāj*, which was undoubtedly considered much too delicate an issue. This moderate approach in no way prevented his disciple, Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022), an eminent personality of the theologico-legal tradition from criticising him, mainly for a lack of clarity in his reasoning, cf. al-Mufid, *Kitāb sharḥ 'aqā'id al-Ṣadūq aw taṣḥīḥ al-i'tiqād*, ed. A. Charandābī (Tabriz, 1371/1951).

3. Also called *Kitāb al-mi'rāj*, cited by the author in his *Khiṣāl*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Qumm, 1403/1983), pp. 85 and 293; see also al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), *Fihrist kutub al-shī'a*, ed. Sprenger and 'Abd al-Ḥaqq (rpr. Mashhad, 1972); although a work that has apparently been lost, we still find long excerpts in later Imami authors, particularly in al-Ḥasan b. Sulaymān al-Ḥillī (d. early ninth/fifteenth century), *Mukhtaṣar baṣā'ir al-darajāt* (Qumm, n.d.); for other authors who cite from this work, see al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānif al-shī'a* (Tehran and Najaf, 1353–1398/1934–1978), vol. 21, pp. 226–227, no. 4737.

4. Cf. e.g. al-Najāshī (d. 450/1058), *Rijāl* (Bombay, 1317/1899; rpr. Qumm, n.d.), p. 199.

5. Ibid., p. 339; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin, 1991–1997), vol. 1, p. 345 and vol. 5, p. 69.

6. For example, the extensive *mi'rāj* account going back to Ja'far in 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. ca. 307/919), *Tafsīr* (lithograph, Iran, 1313/1895),

Twelver traditions (from the late third and throughout the fourth century AH) and almost all closely connected to the early 'esoteric non-rational tradition', report numerous traditions that list various modes of the imam's presence in heaven.

The celestial ascent of the Prophet and the *walāya* of 'Alī

In Twelver versions of the *mi'rāj* story, at every important step of his night journey and celestial ascent, Muḥammad, in some manner or other, is depicted in the presence of 'Alī. In accordance with the divine decision, the main aim is the revelation, to Muhammad, of 'Alī as his successor.

This revelation is first engraved in the lofty sacred places that the Prophet visits during his experience.

'During my night journey to heaven', Muḥammad tells his daughter Fāṭima, 'inscribed on the Rock of Jerusalem (*ṣakhra bayt al-maqdis*) I saw "There is no god except God, Muḥammad is the messenger of God; I assist him with his lieutenant and I protect him with his lieutenant (*ayyadathu bi-wazīrihi wa naṣartuhu bi-wazīrihi*)"; I then asked [the angel] Gabriel who my lieutenant was. He replied: "Alī b. Abī Ṭālib." And once I reached the Lotus of the Limit (*sidrat al-muntahā*), I saw incised: "I am God, there is no god save I alone, Muḥammad is My chosen one among My creatures (*ṣafwatī min khalqī*). I assist him with my lieutenant and I protect him with my lieutenant." Once again I asked Gabriel the same question and he replied as before. Once I went beyond the Lotus and arrived at the Throne (*'arsh*) of the Lord of the worlds, I saw inscribed on each of the supports (*kull qā'ima min qawā'im*)

pp. 375–376 that constitutes a parallel version of the Sunni version by Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, cf. e.g. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-nabawīyya*, ed. Saqqā' et al. (rpr. Beirut, n.d.), vol. 2, pp. 44–50, and the lengthy descriptions by al-Burāq of the inhabitants of each heaven, the torments of those condemned to Hell or the delights of Paradise; in general terms, see al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699), *Bihār al-anwār* (Tehran and Qumm, 1376–1392/1956–1972), vol. 18/2, pp. 282–409, who reports several of these traditions.

of the Throne: "I am God, there is no god save I, Muḥammad is My dear friend (*ḥabībī*). I assist him with his lieutenant and I protect him with his lieutenant."⁷

According to a tradition going back to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, which relates the story of Muḥammad's initiation during the *mi'rāj* into the forms of the *adhān*, the ablution ritual and the canonical prayer, 'Alī's name as *khalīfa* of the Prophet is inscribed on the fine white sheet (*raqq abyad*) that envelops the Inhabited Dwelling (*al-bayt al-ma'mūr*), the celestial prototype of the Ka'ba.⁸ According to a prophetic tradition reported by the Companion Jābir al-Anṣārī,⁹ during his visit to the seventh heaven, above each of the gates (*bāb*) to this heaven, on each of the veils of light (*hujub al-nūr*) and upon each of the pillars (*rukṇ*) of the divine Throne, Muḥammad saw the following inscription: "There is no god except God, Muḥammad is the messenger of God, 'Alī is the Commander of the Believers."¹⁰

7. Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, p. 653; Ibn Bābūya, *Khiṣāl*, p. 207 (where it is added: "Then I raised my head and saw inscribed in the depths (*buṭnān*) of the Throne: "I am God ... Muḥammad is my servant and messenger, I assist etc"). Regarding the inscription on the Throne, see also Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 38, no. 3, pp. 215–216; Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal al-sharāʿiʿ* (Najaf, 1385/1966), p. 5 (inscription on the base of the Throne, *sāq* instead of *qāʿima*); al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī (d. second half fourth/end tenth century), *Kifāyat al-athar*, ed. A. Kūhkamareʿi (Qumm, 1401/1980), pp. 105, 118, 156, 217, 245 (in which Gabriel is not present and the term *wazīr* is replaced by the name 'Alī; further, the names of the other imams also feature in the inscription; I shall return to this).

8. Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal al-sharāʿiʿ*, pp. 312–316, in particular p. 314; to be compared with Muḥammad b. Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshī (d. ca. 320/932), *Tafsīr*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Qumm, 1380/1960), vol. 1, pp. 157–159, who reports an exactly parallel version of this tradition in which there is no reference to 'Alī.

9. On the role of this Companion in the Shi'i *isnāds*, see E. Kohlberg, 'An Unusual Shi'i *isnād*', *IOS*, 5 (1975), pp. 142–149 (rpr. in *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shi'ism*, Aldershot, 1991, article VIII).

10. Al-Ḥasan b. Sulaymān al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtaṣar baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, p. 142 (citation based on the *Kitāb al-mi'rāj* by Ibn Bābūya); see also Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 27, no. 8, pp. 131–132 (in which the Prophet says that 'Alī's *walāya* is a divine decree and refers to the latter using formulaic statements such

As we know, during the course of his ascension, Muḥammad encounters many prophets and angels; according to the different traditions, these holy figures also variously reiterate the sacred nature of 'Alī's *walāya*. As cited above, in the extensive tradition regarding the Prophet's initiation into the *adhān*, ablution and canonical prayer, the angels of each heaven ask Muḥammad to convey their greetings to 'Alī, adding that they have pledged allegiance on the occasion of the pre-eternal Pact (*mīthāq*) with God, to remain loyal to 'Alī and his cause until the Day of Resurrection.¹¹ In a parallel tradition dating back to Muḥammad al-Bāqir, the angels of the various different heavens as well as Jesus, Moses and Abraham, encountered in the seventh heaven, sing the praises of 'Alī and call him the legatee (*waṣī*) and vicegerent (*khalīfa*) of Muḥammad.¹² Elsewhere, all the previous prophets declare that the ultimate aim of their missions was the preparation and proclamation of Muḥammad's *nubuwwa* and 'Alī's *walāya*; further, to make the Prophet aware of their very own *shahāda*:

We bear witness that there is no god except God, He is Alone and has no associate, Muḥammad is the Messenger of God and 'Alī, the legatee of Muḥammad is the Commander of the Faithful.¹³

as 'Vicegerent of God' – *khalīfat Allāh*, 'Proof of God' – *ḥujjat Allāh*, 'Guide of Muslims' – *imām al-muslimīn*, etc.).

11. Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal al-sharāʿi*, pp. 312–316 (cf. note 8 above).

12. Al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtaṣar baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, pp. 139–140 (based on *Kitāb al-miʾrāj* by Ibn Bābūya). For speeches by Jesus, Moses and Abraham referring to 'Alī with statements such as 'Commander of the Faithful' (*amīr al-muʾminīn*), 'Leader of Muslims' (*sayyid al-muslimīn*) and 'Best among the Best' (lit. 'a horse leading a troop of horses that have a white mark on their foreheads and four white hooves', *qāʾid al-ghurr al-muḥajjalīn*), cf. Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266), *al-Yaqīn fī imrat amīr al-muʾminīn* (Najaf, 1369/1950), pp. 83–87 (for the Shiʿis, all these formulaic statements refer exclusively to 'Alī).

13. Furāt al-Kūfī (d. ca. 300/912), *Tafsīr*, ed. M. al-Kāẓim (Tehran, 1410/1990), p. 182; (Pseudo-?) al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya* (Najaf, n.d.), p. 99; Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Karājakī (d. 449/1057), *Kanz al-fawā'id* (Tabriz, n.d.), pp. 256–260; Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Yaqīn fī imrat amīr al-muʾminīn*, pp. 87–88.

Finally, in the last phase of the *mi'rāj*, when the Prophet is in the divine Presence, God himself speaks of 'Alī's noble status. According to an entire series of traditions, God describes 'Alī with a succession of formulae rendered in assonant prose such as 'Commander of the Faithful, leader of Muslims, Best among the best,¹⁴ Guide of the devout (*imām al-muttaqīn*), Queen-Bee of the faithful (*ya'sūb al-mu'minīn*),¹⁵ First Vicegerent to the Seal of the prophets (*awwalu khalīfa khātīm al-nabiyyīn*), etc.'¹⁶ Elsewhere, God praises 'Alī using other formulaic statements:

The standard of guidance ('*alam al-hudā*), the guide of My Friends (*imām awliyā'ī*), the light of those that obey Me (*nūr man aṭā'ānī*), your [God is obviously addressing the Prophet] legatee and inheritor (*waṣiyyuka wa wārithuka*), defender of the faith, etc.¹⁷

14. Cf. note 12 above.

15. On this title for 'Alī, namely 'Commander of the Bees' (*amīr al-naḥl*), and regarding the Shi'is called Bees, see I. Goldziher, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. J. Desomogyi (Hildesheim, 1967–1970), vol. 5, pp. 210–214.

16. Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, p. 561; al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 160; al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940–941), *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī, 4 vols with Persian trans. (Tehran, n.d. [vol. 4 tr. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī is dated 1386/1966]), 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', vol. 2, p. 166; (Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, to whom this tradition goes back, concludes: 'By God, 'Alī's *walāya* does not depend on anyone except God who declared it out loud, *mushāfahatan*, to Muḥammad'); Ibn Bābūya, *Khiṣāl*, p. 116 and *Amālī*, 'majlis' 49, no. 16, p. 300, 'majlis' 56, no. 7, p. 352, and 'majlis' 92, no. 4, p. 631. We encounter these formulaic statements rendered in assonant prose in a number of sermons attributed to 'Alī, particularly in those I have termed elsewhere 'theo-
imamosophical sermons', M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Aspects de l'imāmologie duodécimaine I. Remarques sur la divinité de l'Imām', *Studia Iranica*, 25/2 (1996), pp. 193–216 (Chapter 3 in this publication).

17. Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, pp. 572–573; al-Karājakī, *Kanz al-fawā'id*, p. 314; Ibn Ṭawūs, *al-Yaqīn*, pp. 89–91. It is interesting to note that these traditions at once report the Shi'i version of a well-known episode of the *mi'rāj* concerning 'the dispute of the Supreme Assembly' (*ikhtiṣām al-mala' al-a'lā*), especially with regard to the definition of 'expiations' (*kaffārāt*) or 'degrees' (*darajāt*). The Sunni versions report that the 'expiations (or degrees) require the following actions: ablution on cold mornings (or when it is unpleasant), travelling on foot to attend collective prayers and waiting for one prayer after another' (*isbāgh al-wuḍū' fi'l-sabarāt* [or *fi'l-makrūhāt*] *wa'l-mashy ilā'l-jamā'āt/jumu'āt wa'nṭizār al-ṣalāt ba'd al-ṣalāt*); cf. e.g. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Cairo, 1313/1896),

In a rather long account of the Prophet's *mi'rāj*, having designated 'Alī as Muḥammad's successor, God declares that He derived the name Muḥammad from His own name, al-Maḥmūd, and that of 'Alī from his name al-'Alī (or al-A'lā), and that both proceed from His own Light.¹⁸ This is why God demands from the angels and all the inhabitants of the heavens (*sukkān al-samāwāt*) a threefold testimony of faith: His own unicity, the mission of Muḥammad and the *walāya* of 'Alī.¹⁹

However, the *walāya* of 'Alī is not limited to the spiritual and temporal role of the terrestrial 'Alī. *Walāya* is the most important cosmic and ontological status in the universal economy of the sacred – we shall return to this in greater detail – and its ultimate symbol, the cosmic 'Alī, tends to fuse with God. Some traditions, in which the deliberate ambiguity is barely veiled by more nuanced expressions, actually report this.

'My Lord had me travel by night', says the Prophet, 'and He revealed to me from behind the Veil what He revealed and among other things said to me: "Muḥammad! 'Alī is *The First*, 'Alī is *The Last*, and *He knows absolutely everything* [*'Alī al-awwal wa 'Alī al-ākhir wa huwa bi-kulli shay'in 'alīm*; the terms in italics are divine names and attributes in the Qur'ān]." I then said: "Lord! Aren't you Yourself all these things?" He replied: "Muḥammad!... I am God and there is no God save I; I am *The First* for there is none before Me. I am *The Last* for there is none after Me. I am *The Manifest* (*al-ẓāhir*) for there is none above Me. I am *The Hidden* (*al-bāṭin*) for there is none below Me. I am God; there is no god

vol. 5, p. 43; Ibn Khuzayma, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* (Cairo, 1388/1968), p. 218. After 'collective prayers' Shi'i sources read: 'Led by you [God is addressing the Prophet] or by the imams descended from you'; a fourth degree (*kaffāra/daraja*) is also given: 'Remain loyal to me [Muḥammad is speaking] and to the people of my Family until death' (*walāyatī wa walāya ahl baytī ḥattā'l-mamāt*); cf. also Ibn Bābūya, *Khiṣāl*, p. 85.

18. Furāt, *Tafsīr*, pp. 73–74; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Qumm, 1405/1985), vol. 1, p. 252; al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, pp. 72, 110, 152; Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī (d. 401/1011), *Muqtaḍab al-athar*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Qumm, n.d.), pp. 11, 24, 26–27, 38; al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtaṣar*, p. 160.

19. Furāt, *Tafsīr*, pp. 342–343 and 452–453.

except Me who knows all things. O Muḥammad! 'Alī is the first for he is the first among the imams to have pledged allegiance to Me; he is the last for he is the last imam whose soul I shall take and because 'the Important Being who will speak to them' is he;²⁰ he is the apparent for I make everything that I confide in you apparent to him, thus you need not hide anything from him; he is the hidden for I hide in him the secret I tell you. Between you and Me there is no secret that I would hide from him. 'Alī knows absolutely everything that I have created, lawful or unlawful."²¹

According to another tradition attributed to the Prophet, God addresses him sounding just like 'Alī:

The Messenger of God was asked: 'In which language (*lugha*) did your Lord speak to you during the night of *mi'rāj*?' He replied: 'He spoke to me in 'Alī's language so much so that I asked Him: "Lord! Is it You or 'Alī who speaks to me?" And he replied: "Aḥmad! I am a Thing (*shay*") different from other things. I cannot be compared to other people nor described by things. I created you from My Light and created 'Alī from yours; I have sounded the depths of your heart and found nothing more dear to you than 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. Well, I speak to you as 'Alī does so your heart may be at ease."²²

20. An allusion to the eschatological verse, 'And when the word is fulfilled concerning them We shall bring forth an important being (lit. great beast) of the earth to speak unto them because mankind had not faith in Our revelations', Q 17:82.

21. Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 10, ch. 18, no. 36, pp. 514–515 (a tradition of the Prophet reported by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq). On identification of the Revealed God with the ontological imam as symbolised by the cosmic 'Alī, refer to my study, 'Remarques sur la divinité de l'Imām' (Chapter 3 in this publication). See also Sulaym b. Qays (Ps.), *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī*, ed. Anṣārī, vol. 2, no. 72, pp. 933–934; al-Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Uyūn al-mu'jizāt* (Najaf, n.d.), p. 4; al-Daylamī, *Irshād al-qulūb*, vol. 2, p. 64; al-Juwaynī, *Farā'id al-simṭayn*, ch. 38.

22. Al-Muwaḥḥaq b. Aḥmad al-Khwārazmī (d. 586/1190), *Manāqib* (Qumm, n.d.), p. 87; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 18/2, pp. 386–387, *Irshād al-qulūb* (Tehran, 1334 Sh./1956), vol. 2, p. 28 and *Ḥayāt al-qulūb* (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 297.

‘Alī in heaven

The presence of ‘Alī, the imam par excellence, in heaven is not confined to his *walāya*. For example, he has a mansion in each heaven that the Prophet visits during his celestial ascension.²³ In the highest of the sacred realms, God has created an angel that is identical to ‘Alī, thus responding to a longing of the angels for a constant vision of ‘Alī. In an elaborate account of the *mi‘rāj* reported by Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, it is said that after hearing the praises of ‘Alī sung by the inhabitants of the respective heavens, Muḥammad’s journey ends in the seventh heaven where the angels conclude:

We made our desire to see ‘Alī known to God and He created an angel identical to him for us [lit. ‘in his form’, *fī šūratihi*] and seated him on the right side of the Throne.... Now whenever we long to see the terrestrial ‘Alī (*‘Alī fī’l-arḍ*) we look upon his celestial image (*mithālihi fī’l-samā*).²⁴

In some, admittedly rare, traditions, ‘Alī accompanies the Prophet on his heavenly journeys:

‘O ‘Alī’, says Muḥammad, ‘God made you appear before me in seven places (*mawāṭin*)... The second place was when Gabriel introduced himself to me and I was raised to heaven. Then Gabriel

23. Al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtaṣar*, pp. 152–155 (based on *Kitāb al-mi‘rāj* by Ibn Bābūya); here the angels call ‘Alī ‘the young man of the Banū Hāshim’ (*fatā min Banī Hāshim*).

24. Furāt, *Tafsīr*, p. 374; see also Ibn Bābūya, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, pp. 110–111 (in the depths of the Throne, the Prophet sees an angel playing with a sword of light, just as ‘Alī does with Dhu’l-Faqr); al-Karājakī, *Kanz al-fawā’id*, p. 258 (immediately below the Throne, Muḥammad meets the angel and asks him: “Alī! Have you arrived in heaven before me?” Gabriel explains that this is an angel identical to ‘Alī); al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtaṣar*, p. 132 (still according to *Kitāb al-mi‘rāj* by Ibn Bābūya; the angel – ‘Alī in this case – is in the fifth heaven); al-Majlisī, *Irshād al-qulūb*, vol. 2, pp. 28–29 (according to *Kifāyat al-ṭālib* by al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Shāfi‘ī = *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 18/2, pp. 386–387; the angel – ‘Alī – is in the fourth heaven).

asked me: "Where is your brother [i.e. 'Alī]?" I said: "I left him where I was." Then Gabriel asked me to pray to God to bring you near me. I prayed and straight away you were with me. Then were revealed to me the seven heavens and seven earths with all their inhabitants, all that is found therein as well as the angel placed between them; and all that I saw you saw as well . . . The fourth place was when, on Friday night, the kingdom (*malakūt*) of the heavens and the earth and all that it contains were shown to me; there, missing you, I prayed to God and straight away you were with me. You saw all that I saw."²⁵

Indeed, although the terms *isrā'* and *mi'rāj* seem to have been reserved for the Prophet, according to other *ḥadīths*, it is clearly recognised that 'Alī is capable of celestial travel:

Ibn 'Abbās reports: 'I heard the Messenger of God say: "God gave me five things and gave five things to 'Alī; He gave me the sum total of speech [*jawāmi' al-kilām*, i.e. traditionally the Qur'ān] and gave him the sum total of initiatory Knowledge (*jawāmi' al-'ilm*)."²⁶ He made me a prophet, and him, successor to a prophet

25. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 2, ch. 20, no. 3, p. 107 and no. 10, p. 108. In later works, such as the *Tafsīr* of al-Qummī, the impact of the tradition is lessened, though only slightly, since it is no longer 'Alī in person who accompanies the Prophet but his *mithāl*, his 'image' or 'imaginal being' (according to Henry Corbin's masterly translation of the term). These texts are undoubtedly among the earliest to mention the term *mithāl* in the sense of 'imaginal entity' (refer to Furāt cited above in note 24 and the relevant text that employs the term); al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, p. 111 (*fa idhā anta ma'ī*, 'and at once you were with me' replaced by *wa idhā mithāluka ma'ī*, 'and at once your imaginal entity was with me'); see also al-Mufid, *Amālī* (= *Majālis*) (Iran, 1345/1926), pp. 50–51; Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Yaqīn*, pp. 83–87 (*mithl* instead of *mithāl*). In a tradition reported by the same Ibn Ṭāwūs in his *Sa'd al-su'ūd* (Najaf, 1369/1950), pp. 100–101, when Muḥammad leads the prophets in prayer, Abraham (his spiritual father) is on his right and 'Alī (his spiritual son) on his left. On 'Alī's presence in heaven on the occasion of the *mi'rāj* according to the Bektashis, see F. De Jong, 'The Iconography of Bektashism. A Survey of Themes and Symbolism in Clerical Costume, Liturgical Objects and Pictorial Art', *The Manuscripts of the Middle East*, 4 (1989), pp. 8ff.

26. In other words, the Prophet is the messenger of the exoteric aspect of the divine Word whereas the imam holds its hidden, esoteric meaning; on Imami *'ilm* that, depending on the context, I translate as 'secret science'

[lit. 'a legatee', *waṣī*].²⁷ He offered me [the paradisiacal fountain of] al-Kawthar and offered him [the heavenly fountain of] al-Salsabīl. He graced me with revelation (*waḥy*) and him with inspiration (*ilhām*). He had me travel by night to Him and He opened the gates of heaven for 'Alī and unveiled the [celestial] veil such that he saw what I saw."²⁸

Moreover, it is said that 'Alī has the power to ride the clouds and scale the heavens (*rukūb al-sahāb wa'l-taraqqī fi'l-asbāb wa'l-aflāk*), a power that he shares with the last imam, the Qā'im.²⁹ According to the tradition, two kinds of clouds may be mounted, enabling ascension to the heavens: *al-dhalūl* ('the manageable') a white cloud, and *al-ṣa'b* ('the unruly'), a dark cloud swollen with rain, thunder and lightning. Riding the first was reserved for Dhu'l-Qarnayn, the ancient double-horned hero;³⁰ the second for

or 'initiativ science', see *Guide divin*, pp. 174–199 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 69–79); also M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Réflexions sur une évolution du shi'isme duodécimain. Tradition et idéologisation', in É. Patlagean and A. Le Boulluec (ed.), *Les retours aux Écritures. Fondamentalismes présents et passés* (Louvain and Paris, 1993) and E. Kohlberg, 'Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period', in S. A. Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (New York, 1988) (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article XIII), pp. 25–26.

27. On the identity of the *waṣī* and imam, see *Guide divin*, index under '*waṣī, awṣiyā, waṣiyya*'.

28. Ibn Bābūya, *Khiṣāl*, p. 293; al-Mufid, *Amālī*, p. 64 (where the term *mi'rāj* is added after *isrā'*: 'He offered me the night journey and celestial ascension and offered him the opening of the heavenly gates and veils such that etc.,')

29. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 8, ch. 15, pp. 408–409. The imams themselves are supposed to have declared that, with regard to supernatural powers, they are not all equal; e.g. al-Riḍā: 'We [the imams] are equal in knowledge and courage; however, in terms of supernatural [gifts], that depends on the orders that we have received.' (section 10, ch. 8, no. 3, p. 480); and Ja'far: 'Some imams have greater thaumaturgical Science than others' (*ibid.*, no. 2, p. 479). For another reading of this latter tradition, see E. Kohlberg, 'Imam and Community', p. 30.

30. Dhu'l-Qarnayn (Q 8:83–98) was especially known among the Semitic peoples as a symbol of Power, both in temporal and spiritual terms. Identified in legend with Alexander the Great, in some ways he becomes the archetypal hero of initiatic journeys; cf. A. W. Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great being the Syrian Version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes* (Cambridge, 1989); M. S. Southgate, 'Alexander in the Works of Persian and Arab Historians of the Islamic

‘Alī and the Qā’im.³¹ It is thus that ‘Alī was able to visit the seven heavens and seven earths, five of which are inhabited and two uninhabited.³²

The reference to the last imam sharing with ‘Alī the ability to ascend the heavens leads us to the next step in examining this issue.

The Imams in Heaven

Though less frequently than ‘Alī, and evoked more discretely or allusively, the other imams and their *walāya* are also present in accounts of Muḥammad’s *mi’rāj*. In the final phase of his ascension, where even Gabriel must abandon his flight lest ‘his wings burn’, left alone with God Muḥammad asks:

‘Lord! Who are my legatees?’ – ‘Your legatees are engraved on the feet of my Throne (*awṣiyā’uka’l-maktūbūn ‘alā sāq ‘arshī*).’ And while facing my Lord [Muḥammad is speaking], I glanced at the feet of the Throne, and I saw twelve lights each containing an inscription in green indicating the names of my legatees, from the first, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib to the last, the Mahdī of my community.³³

Other traditions speak of the names of the twelve imams engraved on the Throne without mentioning their light(s),³⁴ and others still to the individuals, without referring to lights or names:

Era’, in *Iskandarnama: A Persian Medieval Alexander Romance*, tr. M. S. Southgate (New York, 1978).

31. Beliefs shared in other forms, by ‘extremist’ Shi’is, the Saba’iyya and Bayāniyya; cf. Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, vol. I, Fr. trans. by D. Gimaret and G. Monnot (Paris and Louvain, 1986), p. 510 and n. 18 (by D. Gimaret).

32. Cf. also *Guide divin*, pp. 237–238 (*Divine Guide*, p. 95).

33. This tradition is part of an extensive tradition entitled *faḍl al-nabī wa’l-hujaj ‘alā’l-malā’ika*, often cited by Ibn Bābūya, e.g. *‘Ilal al-sharā’i’*, pp. 5f., *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 254f., *‘Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, pp. 262f. Regarding the probable origin of this *ḥadīth* and for the translation of some parts of it, see *Guide divin*, pp. 89–91 (in this publication, refer to Chapter 4, note 37 and the corresponding text).

34. For example, al-Khazzāz, *Kifāyat al-athar*, pp. 74, 105, 118, 217 and 245.

Muḥammad: 'I directed my attention towards the right of the Throne and I saw 'Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn... and the Mahdī.³⁵

The kingdom of the heavens and the earth is open to the imams. They are the guardians of the celestial and terrestrial treasures of God³⁶ and may visit the *malakūt* just like Abraham (Q 6:74) and Muḥammad. Commentating on verse Q 6:74, 'So We were showing Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and earth, that he might be of those having sure faith', Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is said to have declared:

God made Abraham discover the seven heavens such that he saw beyond the Throne and He made him discover the earth such that he saw what is in the Air [that supports the earth];³⁷ He did the same for Muḥammad as well as for your master [i.e. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq] and will do the same for the imams that succeed him.³⁸

Traversing the heavens is even part of the miraculous powers (*qudra, a'ājib*) of the imams.³⁹ The same imam asks a visiting Yemeni:

35. Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī, *Muqtaḍab al-athar*, pp. 11 and 38; al-Karājaki, *Kanz al-fawā'id*, p. 258. Fāṭima's presence in *mi'rāj* accounts is rare and discreet. Apart from a reference to her in the tradition just cited, she is sometimes present during the dialogue between Muḥammad and God when the Prophet receives an order to give her hand in marriage to 'Alī; cf. al-Karājaki, *Kanz al-fawā'id*, p. 314. Moreover, it is during a *mi'rāj* that the Prophet eats a fruit in Paradise that in 'his loins', becomes the seed of Fāṭima; cf. Furāt, *Tafsīr*, pp. 75–76 and 211; al-Qummi, *Tafsīr*, pp. 341–342; Ibn Bābūya, *Ilal al-sharā'ī*, pp. 183–184; see also M. A. Amir-Moezzi (with J. Calmard), 'Fāṭima Daughter of Muḥammad', *Elr*, vol. 9, pp. 400–404.

36. For example, al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 2, ch. 19, pp. 103–106.

37. According to one version of traditional cosmology; see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol. 6, pp. 317–322, especially the first section.

38. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 2, ch. 20, no. 2, p. 107.

39. Regarding these powers see *Guide divin*, section III. 4., pp. 228–242 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 91–99). See also Chapter 6, this volume.

'Among you, are there any initiated sages (*'ulamā*)?'⁴⁰ 'Yes,' replied the visitor. 'How far does their knowledge extend?' 'In one night they are able to travel a distance that takes two months, they practice divination based on the behaviour of birds and omens marked upon the earth (*yazjurū al-ṭayr wa yaqīfū'l-āthār*).'⁴¹ Ja'far al-Ṣādiq then declares: 'The initiate from Medina [i.e. the imam himself] is even more knowledgeable than your initiates, for in an hour of the day he travels the distance the sun covers in one year . . . and he visits twelve suns and twelve moons, twelve Sunrises and twelve Sunsets, twelve Earths, twelve Seas and twelve Worlds.'⁴²

Other traditions reveal the highly initiatic dimension of the power to journey (*qudrat al-sayr*), all the while underscoring the imam's spiritual capacity for celestial ascent. Three sayings attributed to the sixth imam regarding the knowledge acquired every Friday night (*al-'ilm al-mustafād fi laylati'l-jumu'a*) – one aspect of the imam's initiatic science – gives a good illustration of these dimensions:

By God, every Friday night, our spirits [i.e. of the imams], accompanied by those of the prophets, make the pilgrimage to the divine Throne and return to our bodies only when satiated with the sum of knowledge (*jamm al-ghafīr min al-'ilm*).⁴³

On Friday nights, it is permitted for the spirits of deceased prophets and legatees [i.e. past imams] as well as the legatee who is amongst you [i.e. the present imam] to make the heavenly journey (*ya'ruju ... ilā'l-samā'*) to the Throne of their Lord. There, they circle seven times around the Throne, and at each of its supports recite a prayer of two *rak'as*. Then the spirits return to their bodies. That is why the prophets and the legatees awake in the morning

40. In the context of the 'esoteric supra-rational' tradition, this *ḥadīth* by itself justifies my translation of the term *'ilm*, as 'secret initiatic science' and the term *'ālim* as 'initiated sage'; see the references provided above in note 26.

41. Types of ornithomancy and geomancy; cf. T. Fahd, *La divination arabe* (2nd edn, Paris, 1987), respectively pp. 403 f. and 432 f.

42. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 8, ch. 12, nos 14 and 15, p. 401.

43. Ibid., section 3, ch. 8, no. 6, p. 132.

[on Fridays] filled with joy and the legatee among you awakes with his knowledge abundantly multiplied (*zīda fi 'ilmihi mithl jammi'l-ghafīr*).⁴⁴

On Friday night, the Prophet, messenger of God [i.e. Muḥammad] and the imams make the pilgrimage to the divine Throne, and I, too, make the journey in their company, returning only after acquiring [new] knowledge; without this, the knowledge that I possess already would disappear.⁴⁵

The initiate's ascension and the relationship between *nubuwwa* and *walāya*

In the Twelver conception, the initiatory nature of the heavenly journey is infinitely more pronounced than its visionary aspect. As for the apocalyptical, eschatological dimension, it is conspicuous by its absence. Ascension to heaven is one means, among others, of receiving revelations and elements of sacred Knowledge (*'ilm*); moreover, the visions that are presented to the initiate during his experience serve to increase his knowledge of the mysteries concerned with God and the universe. It is this initiation that sanctifies the one who ascends to heaven.⁴⁶ Early Shi'i literature thus appears

44. Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb anna'l-a'imma yazdādūn fī laylati'l-jumu'a 'ilman', vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 372–373.

45. Ibid., vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 373–374. Indeed it is said that the imam's knowledge must inexorably increase or disappear; initiation must also continue all life long (cf. al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, section 3, ch. 8, nos 1 and 5, pp. 130–131; section 8, chs 9 and 10, pp. 392–396; al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 'Bāb law lā anna'l-a'imma yazdādūn la nafida mā 'indahum', vol. 1, pp. 374–375). Regarding the knowledge acquired on Friday night see also Furāt, *Tafsīr*, p. 381.

46. For the initiatic dimensions of the *mi'rāj*, see B. Schrieke, 'Die Himmelsreise Muhammeds', *Der Islam*, 6 (1916); J. Horovitz, 'Muhammeds Himmelfahrt', *Der Islam*, 9 (1919). On the initiatory and sanctifying aspects of the *mi'rāj*, see A. M. Piemontese, 'Le voyage de Mahomet au Paradis et en Enfer: une version persane du *mi'rāj*', in C. Kappler (ed.), *Apocalypses et voyages dans l'au-delà* (Paris, 1987), esp. p. 298. Now consult M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Me'rāj', *Elr* and C. Gruber and F. Colby (eds), *The Prophet's Ascension: Cross Cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi'rāj Tales* (Bloomington, IN, 2010).

as one of the main elements in the preservation of an ancient theme in spirituality and, more specifically, Muslim initiation.⁴⁷

Initiate par excellence, the imam is able to traverse the sky and the heavens; initiator par excellence, he can also enable his initiate to travel to the same places. Al-Şaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–903), whose *Başā'ir al-darajāt* is undoubtedly one of the earliest compilations of an esoteric nature to have come down to us,⁴⁸ devotes an entire chapter to accounts of the supra-natural journeys of the disciples led by the imams.⁴⁹ In one of these accounts, Jābir b. Yazīd al-Ju'fī (d. 128/745 or 132/749), an especially intimate disciple of the fifth and sixth imams,⁵⁰ asks Muḥammad al-Bāqir to explain how Abraham had seen the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. The imam then changes his clothing and lifts his arm; the ceiling of the house instantly splits open and the master guides the disciple on a journey that leads them successively to the Land of Darkness (*ẓulumāt*), where Dhu'l-Qarnayn had been before, to the Fountain of Life (*'ayn al-ḥayāt*), from which Khaḍir had imbibed, to the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and,

47. On the subject of initiatic heavenly journeys in pre-Islamic religious cultures, see e.g. B. Schrieke, 'Die Himmelsreise', esp. pp. 5–6; F. Raphaël et al. (eds), *L'apocalyptique*, Actes du Colloque du Centre de Recherches d'Histoire des Religions de l'Université de Strasbourg, 1974 (Paris, 1987), esp. J. Schwartz, 'Le voyage au ciel dans la littérature apocalyptique', pp. 91–126; M. Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature* (Frankfurt, Bern and New York, 1984); *La Bible. Ecrits intertestamentaires*, ed. A. Duppont-Sommer and M. Philonenko (Paris, 1987), pp. 549–552; H. Busse, 'Jerusalem in the Story of Muḥammad's Night Journey and Ascension', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 14, 'Third Colloquium From Jāhiliyya to Islam', vol. 2 (1991), esp. p. 6, notes 17 to 25, and pp. 21–25.

48. See my article 'Al-Şaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–3) and his *Kitāb başā'ir al-darajāt*', *JA*, 280/3–4 (1992), pp. 221–250.

49. Al-Şaffār, *Başā'ir al-darajāt*, section 8, ch. 13, pp. 402–407.

50. Several traditions of an initiatic and esoteric nature are reported in his name; regarding this figure, refer to al-Kashshī (mid fourth/tenth century), *Rijāl* (Bombay, 1317/1899), p. 126; al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, under al-Ju'fī; al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl* (Najaf, 1380/1961), p. 111, no. 6 and p. 163, no. 30; al-Ardabīlī, *Jāmi' al-ruwāt* (Qumm, 1331 Sh./1953), vol. I, p. 144.

finally, to the celestial worlds, where the deceased imams are to be found.⁵¹

In another account, Abū Baṣīr, also a close disciple of the sixth imam,⁵² tells how, embarking on a silver vessel (*saḡīna min fiḡḡa*) that appeared through the miraculous powers of his master, he was led to the celestial world where tents of silver (*khiyām min fiḡḡa*) housing the deceased of the *ahl al-bayt* were pitched.⁵³ In the eschatological corpus, among the prodigious powers attributed to the initiated companions of the Qā'im, some *ḡadīths* refer to the power to travel as clouds or to walk upon them; it is thus that during the final Rising (*qiyām*) against the forces of Evil, they will speedily join forces with their master in Mecca.⁵⁴

It is but a minor leap from being led upon a heavenly journey by a master initiator to being initiated into the art of celestial ascent; and this task seems to have been accomplished by some adepts. To my knowledge, compilations of Twelver traditions make no mention of the disciple's ability to traverse the heavens, but heresiographical literature has maintained traces of sayings related to at least two adepts (accused of extremism, *ghuluww*) describing their personal heavenly journeys.⁵⁵ First, Abū Maṣṣūr al-ʿIjlī, who was a disciple of the fifth imam, Muḡammad al-Bāqir, and was executed on the orders of Yūsuf al-Thaqaḡī, the governor of

51. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 8, ch. 13, no. 4, pp. 404–405.

52. Regarding these three disciples of Ja'far bearing the *kunya* Abū Baṣīr, see *Guide divin*, pp. 86–87, n. 182 (*Divine Guide*, p. 34); (this volume, Chapter 4, note 32).

53. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, no. 5, pp. 405–406.

54. See e.g. al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḡa min al-Kāfi*, text with Persian trans. by H. Rasūlī Maḡallātī (Tehran, 1389/1969), vol. 2, p. 145; al-Nu'mānī (d. 345 or 360/956 or 971), *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1397/1977), ch. 20, pp. 445f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, pp. 654 and 672; see also M. A. Amir-Moezzi 'Eschatology in Twelver Shi'ism', *EIr*, vol. 8, pp. 575–581.

55. The distinction between 'moderate' and 'extremist' Imamism seems to have been a later development. In any case, it seems rather artificial and *a posteriori* with regard to the early 'non-rational esoteric' tradition; see *Guide divin*, pp. 312–16 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 129–130) and 'Remarques sur la divinité de l'Imam' (Chapter 3, this volume).

Iraq between 120/738 and 126/744. According to the heresiographers, speaking in clearly Christological terms, he claimed to have been raised to heaven and seen God who caressed his head with His Hand – thus appointing him His *masīḥ* – supposedly stating: 'O my son! Descend and deliver [My Message to others].'⁵⁶ Next, the famous Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb, a disciple of the sixth imam, Ja'far al-Sādiq, who shortly after Abū Maṣṣūr, claimed to have made a 'celestial night journey' from his own city of Kūfa to the seat of his master in Medina.⁵⁷

Celestial journeys and aerial travel are thus possible for the initiate, whether an imam or his initiated disciple. This is one of the ideas that may be deduced from the early Imami corpus regarding celestial ascent. Though linked to the first, a second, subtler concept concerns the superiority of *walāya* to *nubuwwa*. This especially delicate notion is implicitly present throughout the Imami corpus, in suggestive tones and by allusion; traditions bearing upon celestial ascent seem to constitute fertile ground for clarifying the relationship between *walāya* and *nubuwwa* in early Imamism.⁵⁸

Generally speaking, we know that *nubuwwa* is concerned with the exoteric aspect (*ẓāhir*) of Truth, revealed by Muḥammad, whereas the imam/*wālī*, often symbolised by 'Alī, imam par excellence, reveals the *walāya* or esoteric, hidden aspect (*bāṭin*) of this same Truth. Often there is even identification on the one hand between Muḥammad and the *ẓāhir* and on the other between 'Alī

56. Al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq al-Shi'a*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1931), p. 34; Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt wa'l-firaq*, ed. M. J. Mashkūr (Tehran, 1963), p. 46; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, ed. H. Ritter (rpr. Wiesbaden, 1963), p. 9; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 196; Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions*, p. 520 (and note 88 in which D. Gimaret corrects the reading by Ritter in Nawbakhti, *Firaq*); H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis. Die extreme Schia und die 'Alawiten* (Zurich and Munich, 1982), pp. 86f.; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 1, p. 377 and vol. 5, p. 71.

57. For sources, refer to J. van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 1, p. 277.

58. I have already briefly discussed this subject in my article, 'Notes sur deux traditions "heterodoxies" imamites', *Arabica*, 41 (1994), esp. pp. 128–131.

and the *bāṭin*. These two emblematic Figures each in turn contain two levels: there is the cosmic, universal, archetypal, esoteric Muḥammad of whom the historic, exoteric Muḥammad is the manifestation par excellence. Similarly, the historical 'Alī constitutes the *ẓāhir* and the manifestation par excellence of a cosmic, universal, archetypal 'Alī. In the early corpus, where the language is still in its 'mythic' state and conceptualisation almost entirely absent, one never speaks of *nubuwwa* or *walāya* be it particular or universal, but on the one hand simply of Muḥammad and 'Alī or, as we have seen, of Muḥammad and 'Alī 'on earth' and, on the other hand, Muḥammad and 'Alī 'in heaven' or of their Lights;⁵⁹ and still, the lines of demarcation are not always clear. Now, one must at the same time bear in mind some axiomatic information: the pre-eminence of *bāṭin* over *ẓāhir* and thus of the cosmic-archetypal over the perceptible-historical. Admittedly, the exoteric forms the basis and foundation for the esoteric, but without the esoteric, the exoteric loses its very reason for being.

The concrete expression of *walāya*, the imam, is the alpha and omega of Shi'ī teaching, and the knowledge of his secret reality is presented throughout as equivalent to the recognition of God and as the ultimate goal of creation.⁶⁰ *Walāya* constitutes the very essence of *nubuwwa*, without which it loses its significance and sense of direction. In a tradition reported by imam al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī it is said that the angel Gabriel asked God to reveal the content of Muḥammad's name to him. God then showed the angel the Light of the twelve imams.⁶¹ Cosmic *walāya* – here symbolised by the Light of all the imams – forms the content of Muḥammad's essential reality, symbolised by his name. Imamology, in the etymological

59. On these notions that concur with those of the primordial Lights of Muḥammad and the imams, see U. Rubin, 'Pre-existence and Light. Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad', *IOS*, 5 (1975), pp. 62–119; *Guide divin*, pp. 73–112 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 29–38) and 'Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi'ism', *ELr*, section 2.

60. See e.g. Chapters 3 and 7 in this volume.

61. Al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, p. 170.

sense of the term, that is, the knowledge of the imam, forms the secret content, the *bāṭin* of the prophetic message. According to a *ḥadīth* going back to Muḥammad al-Bāqir and taken up by Ja'far al-Šādiq:

'Ali is a divine Sign (*āya* – just like a verse of the Qur'ān) for Muḥammad. The latter summons [the people] to 'Ali's *walāya*.⁶²

While commenting on Q 91:1, 'Did we not expand thy breast for thee [O Muḥammad]?' Ja'far al-Šādiq is supposed to have said that '(God expanded his breast) for the *walāya* of 'Ali.'⁶³ And the Prophet himself supposedly said:

'The Angel Gabriel came to me and said: "Muḥammad! Your Lord has designated for you the love and *walāya* of 'Ali.'"⁶⁴

62. Al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 2, ch. 7, nos 5 and 8, pp. 71–72 (al-Bāqir) and ch. 9, no. 5, p. 77 (al-Šādiq).

63. *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 2, ch. 8, no. 3, p. 73.

64. *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, no. 9, p. 74 (a tradition going back to imam al-Bāqir). The pre-eminence of the *wālī*'s Cause over the exoteric message of the *nabī* is also evident in the dialectic of *īmān/islām*; in Imami technical terminology, the first term designates faith in the initiatory teachings of the imams, whereas the second denotes submission only to the exoteric religion. Replying to the question: 'What is the difference between Islam and faith (*īmān*)?', Ja'far answers: 'Islam is the exoteric dimension to which people adhere [*al-islām huwa'l-zāhir alladhī 'alayhi'l-nās* – this latter term is one of the names by which the imams refer to non-Shi'i Muslims]: both professions of faith relate to the unicity of God and to Muḥammad's mission of prophethood, canonical prayer, alms giving, the pilgrimage to Mecca and the fast during the month of Ramaḍān. Now, in addition to all this, faith is knowledge of our teaching. He who professes and practices [these rituals] without knowing this, although a Muslim, has gone astray (*kāna musliman wa kāna ḍāllan*)'; al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 'kitāb al-īmān wa'l-kufr', vol. 3, p. 39. The same sixth imam reiterates: 'Islam is the profession of divine unicity and acceptance of our Prophet's mission; it is by Islam that the blood wit is exacted, that conditions for marriage and inheritance are regulated. It is [a collection of] exoteric laws obeyed by the majority of people [*akthar al-nās*, another expression designating the 'Sunnis', non-initiated Muslims as opposed to the 'minority', *aqall al-nās*, i.e. initiated believers of the imams]. As for faith, it is a guidance that manifests itself in the heart. Exoterically, faith is joined with Islam, whereas esoterically, Islam is not joined with faith (*inna'l-īmān yushāriku'l-islām fi'l-zāhir wa'l-islām la yushāriku'l-īmān fi'l-bāṭin*). Faith is thus superior (*arfa*) to Islam'; al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, vol. 3, pp. 41–42; for the equivalence established between *īmān* and the doctrine of the imams, see also e.g.

If *walāya* constitutes the hidden essence of the historical Muḥammad's message, and if he is the master initiator of the historical 'Alī, as the imams regularly say, it is so because he was initiated, during his numerous celestial ascensions, not only in to the secrets of the cosmic *walāya* but also into those of the historical *walāya*, that is, to his own essential reality and the ultimate content of his message.

In almost all the Imami accounts of the *mi'rāj*, as has been seen above, Muḥammad is confronted at one point or another in his heavenly journey with the *walāya* of 'Alī (both cosmic and terrestrial) and the magnitude of the latter's ontological status.

The prophet was raised up to heaven one hundred and twenty times; not a single journey went without God entrusting the Prophet with the *walāya* of 'Alī and the imams [that come] after him, to a greater extent than that by which He recommended to him canonical obligations.⁶⁵

The successive *mi'rājs* mark the different steps of Muḥammad's initiation because it is due to them that he progressively learns his own reality, the meaning of his prophetic message and his duties

al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 131 and 188; Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 93, pp. 639f.

65. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, section 2, ch. 10, no. 10, p. 79 (tradition attributed to Ja'far); Ibn Bābūya, *Khiṣāl*, pp. 600–601 (the canonical obligations, *farā'id*, are often said to be determined and established in relation to *walāya*; cf. e.g. Ibn Bābūya, *Ilal al-sharā'i*, pp. 312f.). On the number of *mi'rāj* undertaken by the Prophet, refer to the remarks made by al-Majlisī in *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 18/2, pp. 306–307 outlining the doubts that must have existed among Imami scholars, not only on the number of *mi'rājs*, but also with regard to the locations where they took place (Mecca or Medina), as well as their exact nature (corporeal or spiritual). To my knowledge, the early corpus remains largely indifferent to these preoccupations. It seems to me that according to the early conception, apart from the celestial ascension on Friday nights whose spiritual nature is explicitly stated, the other 'supernatural travels' occurred physically; in this regard, refer to the learned introduction by N. Mayel-Heravi to his *Me'rāj-Nāma-ya Abū 'Alī Sina be enḍemām-e taḥrīr-e ān az Shams al-Dīn Ebrāhīm Abarqūhī* (Mashhad, 1365 Sh./1986), pp. 11–67.

as the messenger of God. One tradition is especially significant in this regard. This is a commentary on Q 10:94–95, attributed to Ja'far al-Sadiq.⁶⁶

When the messenger of God was elevated to heaven by night, God revealed to him what He wished to reveal about the grandeur and glory of 'Alī. He [i.e. Muḥammad] was then introduced to the Inhabited Abode where the prophets were gathered to follow him in prayer. [At this moment] – [a sense of doubt or hesitation]⁶⁷ crossed the mind of God's messenger regarding the immensity of what was revealed to him about 'Alī (*'urīḍa fī nafs rasūli'llāh min 'izām mā ūḥiya ilayhi fī 'Alī*). God then had this message revealed:

So, if thou art in doubt (*shakk*) regarding what We have sent down to thee, ask those who recite the Book before thee [Q 10:94, that is to say the prophets] regarding his supreme character (*faḍlihi*; i.e. 'Alī's) We have sent down in their sacred Books what We have sent down in your Book.

The truth has come to thee from thy Lord; so be not of the doubters, nor be of those who cry lies to God's signs so as to be of the losers [Q 10:95].⁶⁸

Surprising at first glance, this tradition takes on its full significance when one considers that the historical prophet is here placed before the archetypal Imam who is not only superior to him but also to all of creation, since the Imam, the cosmic *wālī*, is the plenary mani-

66. Regarding this tradition, see M. M. Bar-Asher, 'Deux traditions hétérodoxes dans les anciens commentaires imamites du Coran', *Arabica*, 37 (1990), pp. 291–314 and M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Notes' (note 58 above).

67. The next part of the account and the use of the term *shakk* in the verse justifies this interpolation.

68. Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, p. 212; note that in this context, 'the Truth' and 'Signs of God' from verse 10:95 are to be understood as allusions to the *walāya* of 'Alī. For other commentaries on this verse, refer to the sources provided by M. M. Bar-Asher in 'Deux traditions hétérodoxes dans les anciens commentaires imamites du Coran'.

festation of the divine Names and Attributes, the culmination of all that is knowable in God, the veritable *Deus Revelatus*.⁶⁹

It is hardly surprising, then, that the terrestrial Muḥammad (still in the midst of his apprenticeship, since this was one *mi'rāj* among others) was astonished and fearstruck before the highest manifested Truth. Even the superiority of the terrestrial Muḥammad over the terrestrial 'Alī is presented in quite a nuanced manner. It is true that the former is the master initiator of the latter, but as we have seen, only after being initiated himself in the secrets of the archetypal Imam whose absolute manifestation is the terrestrial 'Alī. The historical prophet can fulfill this responsibility as the master initiator of the imam because in his very being is combined both *walāya* and *nubuwwa*, the first constituting the foundation and essence of the second.⁷⁰

Cosmic *walāya* is the source for *nubuwwa*, just as terrestrial *walāya* is its necessary extension. The universal *wālī* constitutes the ultimate content of Revelation communicated to the *nabī*, just as the historical *wālī* is the initiator of its hidden meanings. Apart from the power of being the messenger of the literal Revelation, in other words, apart from legislating prophethood (*risāla*), the *wālī*, master of the *bāṭin* and plenary manifestation of the cosmic Imam, enjoys all the prerogatives of the *nabī*. He is capable of all that the latter is capable, including, naturally, celestial ascent.

69. Cf. Chapter 3 here; also *Guide divin*, pp. 114–118 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 44–46).

70. Ultimately, the Prophet is but 'the warner' (*al-mundhir*) whereas the IMAM is 'the guide' (*al-hādī*), cf. Furāt, *Tafsīr*, p. 206; 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābūya (d. 329/940), *al-Imāma wa'l-tabṣīra min al-ḥayra* (Qumm, 1404/1984), p. 132, commentary on Q 13:7: 'Thou art only a warner, and a guide to every people.' It is noteworthy that apart from the cosmo-anthropogonic traditions and those concerning the 'History of the Prophets' which in some ways constitute an extension of the first (see the references provided above in note 59 and E. Kohlberg, 'Some Shī'ī Views on the Antediluvian World', *SI*, 52 [1980], pp. 41–66 [rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article 16], the early corpus is unaware of the archetypal Muḥammad. Both in heaven and on earth, all takes place as though the *nabī* only constituted the initial impulse of a dynamic that has an enduring meaning solely due to the *wālī*.

Knowledge is Power: Interpretations and Implications of the Miracle in Early Imamism

Twelver *Hadīth* is infused with the miraculous and the marvellous.¹ One of the most remarkable qualities of the imams is their capacity to accomplish miracles and to master mysterious forces; there is no distinction here between the marvellous in religion on the one hand and thaumaturgy on the other.² Early Shi'ism, as it emerges from its oldest sources, and also in heresiographical literature, presents an undeniable thaumaturgic-spiritual dimension. Miracles even constitute an essential aspect of the Shi'i concept of the prophet's continuity through *walāya*. I will attempt to present here a two-part account of the economy of the phenomenon of the miracle and its development during the course of the formative

1. On Imami *hadīth* literature and its principal sources, see G. Lecomte, 'Aspects de la littérature du *hadīth* chez les imāmites', in *Le shi'isme imāmite*, Actes du colloque de Strasbourg, 6–9 mai 1968 (Paris, 1970), pp. 91–101; H. Löschner, *Die dogmatischen Grundlagen des schi'itischen Rechts* (Cologne, 1971), especially the introduction; Modir Shānetchī, 'Kotob-e arba'e-ya *hadīth*-e shī'e', *Nāme-ya Āstān-e Qods*, 18/1–2, new series (1975), pp. 22–71; E. Kohlberg, 'Shi'i *Hadīth*', in A. F. L. Beeston et al., *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, vol. I: *Arabic Literature to the End of Umayyad Period* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 299–307; M. 'A. Mahdavi Rād, A. 'Ābedī, 'A. Rafi'i, 'Hadīth', in *Tashayyo*. *Seyrī dar farhang va tārikh-e tashayyo* (Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994). For the earliest sources see also M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 51–56 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 20–22); refer also to Chapter 3, this volume.

2. See Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 182–185 and the entire section III.4, 'Sacred Power', pp. 228–242 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 72–73 and 91–99).

period of Twelver Shi'ism: 1) miracles among the imams; 2) miracles in the entourages of the imams and in Shi'i milieus.

Elsewhere, I have described certain miraculous powers attributed to the imams.³ In what follows I will attempt to supplement this information and demonstrate its connection to other doctrinal chapters as well as its implications for Imami religious history since the early centuries of the Hijra.

Belief in the miraculous powers of the imams and the plethora of texts about the subject are truly ancient phenomena in Shi'ism. Such interest seems to have begun with the process of the glorification of 'Alī (d. 40/661), whereby his supporters transformed an individual from a historical personage into a semi-legendary figure of tragic and heroic proportions. The first indications of this process appear to date back to the period that immediately followed his assassination, if not earlier, to when he was bypassed for the succession after the Prophet's death.⁴ Shortly thereafter, his character acquired a cosmic and superhuman dimension: the archetypal Perfect Man, theophanic Being – the manifestation of a primordial Light drawn from the divine Light. He transmitted these qualities to other imams descended from him, even to their initiates.⁵ According to heresiographers, during the first three centuries of Islam, a relatively large number of movements and Shi'i sects regarded one or other of the imams, or one of their followers, as the locus of manifestation (*mazhar/majlā*) of God (*mazhariyya* even becomes an article of faith in early Imami

3. Ibid., pp. 233ff.

4. Gh. H. Ṣadiqī, *Jonbesh-hāye dīnī-ye īrānī dar qarn-hāye dovvom va sevvom-e hejrī* (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), pp. 225ff.; E. Kohlberg, 'Some Imāmi Shi'i Views on the *ṣaḥāba*', *JSAI*, 5 (1984) pp. 145-146, (rpr. in *Belief*, article IX); see also the dense text by van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, vol. I (Berlin and New York, 1990), pp. 233ff., and 397-403 (on the influence of the Stoics via Iranian dualism, and the Jews, on early Shi'i theology). Refer also to Chapter 1 in this volume.

5. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 75ff. (*Divine Guide*, p. 29); Chapters 3 and 8 in this volume.

tradition).⁶ The oldest of these sects seems to have been the enigmatic Saba'iyya who, at least in some doctrinal elements, were probably identical to the Kaysāniyya, the supporters of the imamate of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya, who was one of 'Alī's sons, and most likely the first Shi'is with truly esoteric ideas.⁷ Being a locus of manifestation is in itself a miracle; it is therefore quite natural for such a person to be a thaumaturge.

According to Imami and other bio-bibliographical works, since the second century AH, the Shi'is began to compose 'books' on the various miraculous powers of the imams. These were, most likely, more or less extensive collections of *ḥadīths* on the subject. It appears that none of this literature has come down to us; however, their titles in the recensions provided in bio-bibliographies speak volumes. Indeed, it is very common to find titles such as *Kitāb al-mu'jizāt* (Book of Miracles), *Kitāb mu'jizāt al-nabī wa'l-a'imma* (Book of the Miracles of the Prophet and the imams), *Kitāb mu'jizāt al-a'imma* (Book of the Miracles of the imams), *Kitāb al-a'ājib* (Book of supra-natural powers), *Kitāb al-a'ājib al-a'imma* (Book of the supra-natural powers of the imams) and so forth, and also less obviously telling titles taken up by later authors for their books, or the devoted almost always to the miracles of the imams: *Kitāb dalā'il al-imāma* (Book of Proofs of imamate) (miracles constituting the most striking proofs), *Kitāb al-malāḥim* (Book of eschatological prophecies) (proving

6. See e.g. L. Massignon, 'Salmān Pāk et les prémices spirituelles de l'Islam iranien', *Cahiers de la Société d'Etudes Iraniennes*, 7 (1934) (= *Opera Minora*, Paris, 1969, vol. I, pp. 443–483); M. G. S. Hodgson, 'How did the Early Shi'a Become Sectarian?', *JAOS*, 75 (1955), pp. 5–97; Hodgson, 'Ghulāt', *EI2*, vol. 2, pp. 1,119–1,112. For these kinds of Shi'i sects, see the list made by 'A. Eqbāl, *Khānedān-e Nawbakhtī* (Tehran, 1311 Sh./1933), pp. 249–267.

7. For the relationship between the Saba'iyya and Kaysāniyya see J. van Ess, 'Das *Kitāb al-irjā*' des Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya', *Arabica*, 21 (1974) and 22 (1975), esp. 21, pp. 31ff.; regarding these two sects, refer to Shahrastani, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, vol. I, Fr. trans. with intro. and notes by D. Gimaret and G. Monnot (Louvain and Paris, 1986), index, see the corresponding notes by D. Gimaret.

the imam's Knowledge of the future) and *Kitāb al-nawādir* (Rare and unusual traditions) (which, among much later authors very often contain *ḥadīths* on the miracles or supra-natural powers of the imams).⁸ The earliest compilations of Imami traditions that have come down to us, almost all written roughly between 235 and 390/850 and 1000, devote much importance to the miracles and thaumaturgic powers of the imams: *al-Maḥāsin* by al-Barqī (274 or 280/887 or 893), *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* by al-Ṣaffār (290/902–903)⁹, *al-Imāma* by 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābūya (329/940), *Uṣūl min al-Kāfī* by al-Kulaynī (329/940–941), *Kitāb al-ghayba* by al-Nu'mānī (345 or 360/956 or 971), *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* by Ibn Qūlūya (369/979), the oeuvre of Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq (381/991),¹⁰ *Kifāyat al-athar* by al-Khazzāz (second half of the fourth/end of the tenth century) and even the exegetical works by Furāt b. Furāt al-Kūfī (ca. 300/912), by 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (ca. 307/919) and al-'Ayyāshī (ca. 320/932), etc.¹¹ The oldest monograph that has come down to us would be the work by Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī 'al-Ṣaghīr' (who was born in the second half of

8. To come across these titles, one need only leaf through works such as al-Najāshī (d. 405/1014), *Kitāb al-rijāl* (Bombay, 1317/1899), or (Tehran, n.d. [ca. 1970]); al-Tūsī (d. 460/1067), *Fihrist kutub al-shī'a*, ed. Sprenger and 'Abd al-Ḥaqq (rpr. Mashhad, 1972) or Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 380/990 – for this date see R. Sellheim, 'Das Todesdatum des Ibn al-Nadīm', *IOS*, 2, 1972, pp. 428–432), *al-Fihrist*, ed. M. R. Tajaddod (Tehran, 1971). See also Āghā Bozorg al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānif al-shī'a*, 25 vols (Tehran–Najaf, 1353–1398/1934–1978), see under the titles cited above. This material and that which follows makes one wonder about the categorical assertions made by H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 44–45, who maintains that belief in the miracles of the imams was only professed by a minority of 'extremist' Shi'i.

9. Regarding this compiler and his work, see Amir-Moezzi, 'Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–903) et son *Kitāb baṣā'ir al-darajāt*', *JA*, 280/3–4 (1992), pp. 221–250.

10. Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 305, even cites a monograph by al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb dalā'il al-a'imma wa mu'jizatihim*, which seems to have been lost.

11. On these works and their authors, see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 51–57 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 20–22); Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*; Newman, *The Formative Period*.

the fourth century AH and died in the first half of the fifth century AH), *Nawādir al-muʿjizāt fī manāqib al-aʿimma al-hudāt*.¹² This marks the beginning of an immense body of literature of which only a few of the major titles of particular importance are given here, for instance *al-Kharāʾij waʾl-jarāʾih* by Quṭb al-Dīn Saʿīd al-Rāwandī (d. 573/1177–1178),¹³ *Ithbāt al-hudāt biʾl-nuṣuṣ waʾl-muʿjizāt* by al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (1104/1693),¹⁴ *Madīnat al-maʿājiz fī dalāʾil al-aʿimma al-aḥbār wa maʿājizihim* by al-Sayyid Ḥāshim b.

12. Latest edition: Qumm, 1410/1990. In *Dalāʾil al-imāma*, al-Tabarī 'al-Saghīr' also devotes much space to the miracles of each imam. On this author, see F. Sezgin, *Geschichte der arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. I (Leiden, 1967), p. 540. On the authenticity of *Dalāʾil al-imāma* and its other appellations, see the detailed discussion in Ṭihirānī, *Dharīʿa*, vol. 8, pp. 241–247; on citations from the first two missing chapters of this work of Ibn Ṭāwūs, see E. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work. Ibn Ṭāwūs and his Library* (Leiden, 1992), pp. 140–141.

13. Latest edition: Qumm, 1409/1990 in 3 vols. Although the title does not indicate it at first glance, this work is entirely devoted to the miracles of the Prophet and the twelve imams. The author himself explains the title: 'And I have entitled [the work] *al-Kharāʾij waʾl-jarāʾih* because the miracles that they [the Prophet and the imams] have revealed [lit.: the or their miracles (that have) emerged — *kharajat*, same root as *kharāʾij* — upon their hands (i.e. by them)] authenticate their claims, and because [the miracles] vindicate [*tuksibu* = one of the meanings of *jaraḥa* and *ijtaraha*, same root as *jarāʾih*] the truthfulness of the claimant who did indeed perform them' (*wa sammaytuhi bi kitāb al-kharāʾij waʾl-jarāʾih li-anna muʿjizatihim allatī kharajat ʿalā aydihim muṣaḥḥiha li-daʾawihim li-annahā tuksibuʾl-muddaʿī wa man ṣaharat ʿalā yadihi ṣidq qawlih*) (al-Rāwandī, *Kharāʾij*, vol. 1, p. 19). Al-Rāwandī added five of his treatises on the same topic at the end of this work: *Kitāb nawādir al-muʿjizāt*, *al-Muwāzāt bayn muʿjizāt nabiyyinā (š) wa muʿjizāt awṣiyāʾihi wa muʿjizāt al-anbiyāʾ*, *Kitāb umm al-muʿjizāt (=Qurʾān)*, *al-Farq bayn al-ḥiyal waʾl-muʿjizāt*, *Kitāb ʿalāmāt wa marātib nabiyyinā (š) wa awṣiyāʾihi*. On al-Rāwandī see e.g., al-Kh(w)ānsārī, *Rawḍat al-jannāt*, ed. A. Ismāʿīliyān (Qumm, 1390–1392/1970–1972), vol. 4, pp. 5–9; al-ʿĀmilī, *Aʾyān al-shīʿa* (Damascus and Beirut, 1354–1382/1935–1963), vol. 35, pp. 16–24.

14. Al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudāt biʾl-nuṣuṣ waʾl-muʿjizāt* (Tehran, 1364 Sh./1985). Regarding the author, see e.g. M. 'A. Mudarris, *Rayḥanat al-adab*, 8 vols (Tabriz, n.d.), vol. 2, pp. 31–33; al-Māmaqānī, *Tanqīḥ al-maqāl* (Tehran, 1349/1930), vol. 3, p. 106.

Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī (1107 or 1109/1695–1696 or 1697–1698),¹⁵ chapters in the numerous works belonging to the genre known as the *manāqib*, beginning with *al-Irshād fī ma'rifat ḥujaj Allāh 'alā'l-'ibād* by Shaykh al-Mufid (413/1022),¹⁶ and *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib* by Ibn Shahrāshūb (588/1192),¹⁷ not to mention countless pages devoted to the subject by such notable authors as Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥasan Ibn al-Biṭriq (600/1203), Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn Ṭāwūs (664/1266), 'Alī b. 'Īsā al-Irbilī (696/1296), Rajab al-Bursī (eighth/fourteenth century), Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (1111/1699), Ḥusayn al-Ṭabarsī/Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī (1320/1902) and so on.

The prodigious powers and miracles of the imams, that the sources most often designate by terms such as *mu'jiza*, pl. *mu'jizāt/ma'ajiz* ('miracle'), *u'jūba*, pl. *a'ajīb* (lit. 'that which surprises', 'that which amazes' hence amazing powers) or quite simply *qudra* ('power'),¹⁸ may be considered the results either of their ontological or initiatory rank if not both combined, so inseparable are these two aspects of the imams. The terrestrial imam, Friend or Ally (*wālī*) of God is, on the perceptible level, a manifestation of the celestial, archetypal, cosmic Imam. As Light produced from the divine Light, the imam is the Organ of God, that is, the medium of the Names and Attributes of God. He is the *Deus revelatus*, the

15. Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-ma'ajiz fī dalā'il al-a'immat al-aṭhār wa ma'ajizihim* (Tehran, n.d. [ca. 1960]). Regarding the author, now consult W. Madelung, 'Baḥrānī, Hāshem', *Elr*, vol. 3, pp. 528–529.

16. Al-Mufid, *al-Irshād fī ma'rifa ḥujaj Allāh 'alā'l-'ibād*, ed. and Persian trans. by H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Tehran, 1346Sh./1968; rpr. Qumm, n.d. [ca. 1985]). Regarding the author see M. J. Mc Dermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufid* (d. 413/1022) (Beirut, 1978), and the introduction by I. K. A. Howard, *The Book of Guidance*, English trans. of the *Irshād* by al-Mufid (London, 1981).

17. Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib* (Beirut, 1405/1985), 4 vols: based on the Najaf ed. (1375–1376/1956), 3 vols. Regarding the author, consult Amir-Moezzi, 'Ebn Shahrāshūb', *Elr*, vol. 8, pp. 53–54.

18. For the last two terms, less frequent than the first, see e.g., al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, ed. M. Kūchebāghī (2nd edn, Tabriz, n.d. [ca. 1960]), section 10, ch. 18 ('Bāb al-nawādir fī'l-a'imma wa a'ajibihim'); section 8, chs 12–15 (*mā u'tiya al-a'imma min al-qudra...al-qudra allatī a'ṭahum Allāh...fī qudrat al-a'imma...*).

ineffable Essence of God being the unknowable – *Deus Absconditus*.¹⁹ This privileged ontological status explains why the terrestrial imam's life – even before his birth – is marked by miracles. The entire process of his birth, from conception, pregnancy to delivery, is accompanied by a series of wondrous phenomena. At birth he is radiant, clean and already circumcised; the umbilical cord is already severed. He speaks from the cradle and grows at an extraordinary rate. Whilst in the mother's womb he communicated with angels and other celestial beings; at his birth a column of light (*'amūd min nūr*) appears before him, linking him to heaven and providing him with all kinds of knowledge, and so on.²⁰ Moreover, the cosmo-anthropogonic traditions relate that the first thing that marks the existence of the Imam, from the original world of the *umm al-kitāb* – well before the creation of the perceptible world – is his initiation by God into the sacred and secret Sciences of Unification and Glorification.²¹

Initiated by God, the imam is in turn the wise initiator par excellence. *'Ilm*, secret initiatory science is part of the very being of the imam and one of its direct consequences is his supernatural power and ability to perform miracles.²² Essential to the thaumaturgical powers of the imam is a body of sacred and/or occult knowledge. To this end, even elements linked to his ontological status are presented as sources of his knowledge and thus of

19. On theology of the Twelver imamate, see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 75–81 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 29–32) and 'Cosmogony', in particular pp. 319–320; see also Chapters 3 and 8, this volume.

20. For all this information and early sources that provide it, see *Guide divin*, II.4 pp. 145–154 (*Divine Guide*, 'Conception and Birth', pp. 56–61).

21. *Guide divin*, pp. 82ff. (*Divine Guide*, p. 32); Chapter 4, this volume.

22. On *'ilm* in early Imamism, see *Guide divin*, III.2, pp. 174–199 (*Divine Guide*, 'The Sacred Science', pp. 69–79); on the evolution of this term's meaning see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Réflexions sur une évolution du shi'isme duodécimain: tradition et idéologisation', in E. Patlagean and A. Le Boulluec (eds), *Les retours aux Écritures. Fondamentalismes présents et passés* (Louvain and Paris, 1993), pp. 63–82, esp. pp. 64–69; see also E. Kohlberg, 'Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period', in S. A. Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (Albany, NY, 1988), pp. 25–53 (rpr. in *Belief*, article 13), esp. pp. 25–27.

his power. For example, the 'column of light' that the imam can visualise at will and throughout his life, contains answers to his questions and knowledge of hidden things.²³ Two other sources of inspiration, both supra-natural powers, one of which 'marks his heart' and the other 'pierces his eardrum' provide him with knowledge of the future.²⁴ Endowed with a sacred spirit (*rūḥ al-quds*) he is able to communicate with celestial beings that procure for him extraordinary inspired knowledge; he is himself able to make the celestial ascension mainly for initiatory purposes.²⁵

Transmission of initiatory knowledge takes place mostly in an occult fashion. The Light of imamate is already itself partially hereditary and can be transmitted by semen; other bodily fluids (saliva, sweat) introduced into pores of the skin and into the mouth and eyes of the disciple, as well as on his body or

23. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 431–443; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī, 4 vols (Tehran, n.d.) vol. 2, pp. 225–231; al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfi*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Tehran, 1389/1969), vol. 1, pp. 182–183; al-Ṭurayhī, *Majma' al-baḥrayn wa maṭla' al-nayyirayn* (Tehran, 1321/1903), see under 'amūd' and 'nūr'. Regarding the visionary power of the imams, see E. Kohlberg, 'Vision and the Imams', *Mélanges Gimaret*, pp. 125–157.

24. For the 'marking of the heart' (*nakt/qadhḥ/qar' [fi] al-qalb*) and 'the piercing of the eardrum' (*naqr/nakt fi al-udhn/al-sam'/al-asmā'*) see e.g. al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 316–319; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, pp. 394ff.; al-Kulaynī, *Rawḍa*, vol. 1, p. 182; al-Ṭurayhī, *Majma'*, index. With regard to these two powers, the traditions often employ the terms *waḥy* and *ilhām*.

25. On the presence of the Holy Spirit in the imam, see al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 445–450; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, pp. 15–17; on communication with celestial beings, mainly the angels and the Holy Spirit, see e.g. al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 319–326 and 368–374; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, pp. 13–15; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī and Persian trans. by M. J. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1985), pp. 95 and 126; Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal al-sharāʿi wa'l-aḥkām* (Najaf, 1385/1966), ch. 146, pp. 182ff.; al-Ṭabari, *Dalā'il al-imāma* (Qumm, 1413/1994), pp. 270–271; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, p. 394. It is for this reason that the imam is called *al-muḥaddath* ('the one to whom celestial beings speak') and *al-mufahham* ('the one to whom is given understanding from the Most High'), see E. Kohlberg, 'The Term "Muḥaddath" in Twelver Shi'ism', in *Studia Orientalia memorie D.H. Baneth dedicata* (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 39–47 (rpr. in *Belief*, article V). On the celestial ascension of the imam see Chapter 5, this volume.

by placing the hand upon his chest enables the transmission of secret knowledge.²⁶

A portion of the prodigious knowledge of the imams stems from certain secret texts: the white *Jafr* that contains a section on revelations of previous prophets, writings of the imams and sages of the past, the Knowledge of Fortune and Misfortune (*'ilm al-manāyā wa'l-balāyā*), the science of the past and future; the Book of Fāṭima which, among other things, contains an account of the various states of Muḥammad after death; the Book of 'Alī containing an account of 'all that will occur in the world until the Day of Resurrection'; the Book of Rulers of the World (enabling knowledge of who will, or will not, be successful in attaining power); the Book of the People of Paradise and those of Hell (enabling the recognition and distinguishing of good souls from evil ones).²⁷

The imams know the Supreme or Greatest Name of God (*al-ism al-a'zam* or *al-ism al-akbar*) with its almost limitless supra-natural powers and they are in possession of 'icons of power' carrying the miraculous forces of the prophets: Adam's Tunic; Solomon's Seal, Joseph's Tunic; the Staff, Ark and Tablets of Moses; Muhammad's weapon was (perhaps the same as the terrifying red *Jafr*), an invincible weapon of the Qā'im at the

26. On transmission by seminal fluid, see *Guide divin*, II-2, pp. 96–112 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 38–44); see also U. Rubin, 'Pre-existence and Light. Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad', *IOS*, 5 (1975), pp. 62–119; Rubin, 'Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shi'a Tradition', *JSAL*, 1 (1979), pp. 64–98. On transmission by other means, see e.g. al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 313 and 390; al-Nu'mānī, *Ghayba*, p. 204; Ibn Bābūya, *al-Amālī* (= *al-Majālīs*), ed. M. B. Kamare'i (rpr. Tehran, 1404/1984), 'majlis' 28, no. 5, p. 136 and 'majlis' 55, no. 1, p. 341; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'ma*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (rpr. Qumm, 1405/1985), vol. 2, ch. 42, p. 425.

27. On these sacred Texts and the secrets of the imams, see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 185–189 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 73–75) and especially the monograph by E. Kohlberg, 'Authoritative Scriptures in Early Imami Shi'ism', in E. Patlagean and A. LeBoulluec (eds), *Les retours aux Écritures. Fondamentalismes présents et passés* (Louvain and Paris, 1993), pp. 295–312.

End of Time.²⁸ The esoteric sciences and their miraculous effects are also part of the resources of the imams: divination, transmutation of objects, communicating with the dead (especially with the spirits of prophets and saints), astrology or, more specifically, precise knowledge of the stars and their influence over life on earth.²⁹ Further still, there is the knowledge of consciences and souls (*'ilm al-aḍmār wa'l-anfus*), knowledge of the Clay (*'ilm al-ṭīna*; i.e. knowledge about man's original nature), knowledge of the faculty of vision and physiognomy (*firāsa/tafarrus/tawas-sum*), knowledge of all languages, including those of the animals

28. On the Greatest Name, see e.g., al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 208–219; (Pseudo-?) al-Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya* (Najaf, n.d.), p. 202; Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 71, no. 10, pp. 467f.; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 251f., pp. 414, 420; al-Ṭabarī 'al-Ṣaghīr', *Nawādir al-mu'jizāt fī manāqib al-a'immat al-hudāt* (Qumm, 1410/1990), p. 188; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 4, pp. 230f.; al-Irbili, *Kashf al-ghumma fī ma'rifat al-a'imma*, ed. H. Rasūli Maḥallātī (Tabriz; rpr. Qumm, 1381/1962), vol. 2, p. 385; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 358 and 544; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 110 tomes in 90 vols (Tehran and Qumm, 1376–1392/1956–1972), vol. 27, pp. 25–28. On the 'icons of power' see e.g. al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 174–190; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, pp. 335ff.; Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī, *Muqtaḍab al-athar* (Tehran, 1346/1927), pp. 56–57.

29. On divination: al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 389f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 64, no. 16 *in fine*, p. 416; a tradition by 'Alī narrated by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, ed. and Persian trans. by 'A. N. Fayḍ al-Islām (Tehran, 1351 Sh./1972), p. 177, that censors the reference to divination. On the transmutation of objects: Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 29, no. 19, pp. 148–149; Ibn Bābūya, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, ed. M. H. Lājevardī (Tehran, 1378/1958), vol. 1, pp. 95–96; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 169f., 198ff., 397ff.; al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 103f., 113f., 179ff.; Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, pp. 158ff., 254ff.; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 204ff., 293ff., 523ff. On communication with the dead: al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 274–284 (where the most audacious and interesting traditions are grouped together); on astrology: al-Kulaynī, *Rawḍa*, vol. 2, pp. 166, 196–197, 279–280 and as a general reference, Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraj al-mahmūm fī ta'rikh 'ulamā' al-nujūm* (Qumm, 1363 Sh./1985), devoted to astrology and riddled with *ḥadīths* (plus those that also contain, among other passages, the first two chapters previously lost of the *Dalā'il* by al-Ṭabarī on the astrological science possessed by 'Alī [pp. 202–207]). See also the thesis by Z. Matar, 'The *Faraj al-mahmūm* of Ibn Ṭāwūs: A Thirteenth Century Work on Astrology and Astrologers' (New York University, 1986) and especially E. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Ṭāwūs and his Library* (Leiden, 1992), index.

and the 'transformed' (*al-musūkh*); power to revive the dead, to cure disease and heal the sick, to walk on water, to travel and transport others (their disciples in this case) through the air, to other 'worlds', to different regions of the world, to ride the clouds,³⁰ and this list is far from exhaustive.

In principle, all the Impeccable Ones are able to perform the full range of miracles;³¹ however, in terms of the twelve imams, it appears that each one of them has a preference for a certain number of specific miracles. Indeed, our hagio-biographical sources do not uniformly attribute all miraculous deeds to all the imams.³² In this form of casting, the principal role is reserved

30. On these powers and the earliest sources that report them, see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 233-239 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 93-95); (on p. 237 [p. 94], I note that the earliest sources, the *Baṣā'ir* by al-Ṣaffār in this case, attribute the power to ride clouds to the first and last imams; one should add that in later sources, this miracle seems to have been extended to other imams; cf. e.g., the fourth imam in Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, p. 113; Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, p. 199; al-ʿĀmili, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, p. 254; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, p. 293; and the sixth imam in al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, p. 137; *Dalā'il*, p. 249; al-ʿĀmili, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, p. 453; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, p. 357).

31. Our sources often (but not always) begin with the miracles of the Prophet; however, in most cases these are much fewer and less spectacular than those of the imams. This procedure seems to have two aims: first to stress the fact that the imams are only continuing the work of the Prophet; and secondly, to hint at the superiority of the *bāṭin* – represented by the imam – over the *ẓāhir* – represented by the Prophet, an idea that is a recurring motif in Imamism, especially early on. Moreover, there seem to be very few ancient sources that relate the miracles performed by Fātima; regarding this, see e.g. al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 2, pp. 524-540; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 4, pp. 115-119; T. Sabri, 'L'hagiographie de Fātima d'après le *Bihār al-anwār* de Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699)' (PhD thesis, University of Paris, III, 1969), see under 'Miracles', and my article (with J. Calmard), 'Fāṭema', *Elr*.

32. Indeed a tradition has 'Alī al-Riḍā (al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, p. 480) saying: 'We [the imams] are equal in knowledge and bravery; and as for our [supra-natural] gifts, that depends on what we have received as commandments' (*naḥnu fi'l-ʿilm wa'l-shajā'a sawā' wa fi'l-aṭāyā 'alā qadri mā nu'maru bihi*), and another tradition dating back to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, p. 479): 'Some imams have greater thaumaturgical knowledge than others' (*al-a'imma ba'duhum a'lam min ba'd*). See also the comments by E. Kohlberg, 'Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period', in S. A. Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and*

for 'Alī, imam par excellence and father of all the others, then, to a lesser extent, to the sixth imam, Ja'far al-Šādiq, the veritable 'developer' of Imami doctrine. Let us briefly review the various types of miracle that the sources attribute most frequently to the different imams:

1. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661): practically all the types of miracle mentioned above. The chapter devoted to 'Alī's miraculous powers is almost always the most extensive one in our sources,³³ perhaps with more emphasis placed on his knowledge of the invisible world (*al-ghayb*),³⁴ his ability to intervene in cosmic matters,³⁵ his command over the divinatory sciences and his prophecies.³⁶

Political Culture in Shi'ism (Albany, NY, 1988), pp. 25–53 (rpr. in *Belief*, article XIII), p. 30.

33. For example, al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 56–172; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, pp. 171–235; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 2, pp. 83–175; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 78–190; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, see index (in 30 vols, Qumm, 1991–1992), see index under 'mu'jizāt 'Alī'. One should add the vast literature of the *manāqib* of 'Alī.

34. Al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, pp. 177ff.; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 2, pp. 94–112; 'Alī b. 'Isā al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma fī ma'rifat al-a'imma*, ed. H. Rasūlī Mahallātī (Tabriz; rpr. Qumm, 1381/1962), vol. 1, pp. 273–286.

35. (Pseudo) Sulaym b. Qays, *Kitāb al-saqīfa* (Qumm, n.d.), p. 234; al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 217–2119; Shādhān b. Jabra'īl, *al-Faḍā'il* (Najaf, 1381/1962), p. 69; Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 71, no. 10, pp. 467f.; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 1, pp. 120–128; al-Irbilī, *Kashf*, vol. 1, pp. 274ff.; al-Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Uyūn al-mu'jizāt* (Najaf, n.d.), p. 4. See also L. Capezzone, 'Un miracolo di 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib: i versi attribuiti ad al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī e il modello storiografico delle fonti relative al *radd al-šams*', in *In memoria di Francesco Gabrieli* (1904–1996), RSO, 71, suppl. 2 (1997), pp. 99–112.

36. Al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 389f.; Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraj al-mahmūm fī ta'rīkh 'ulamā' al-nujūm* (Qumm, 1363 Sh./1985), pp. 102ff.; another work by Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Malāḥim wa'l-fitan* (e.g. Qumm, 1398/1989, entitled *al-Malāḥim wa'l-fitan fī zuḥūr al-ghā'ib al-muntaẓar*), contains many eschatological prophecies by 'Alī; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 58, pp. 229ff.

2. Al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī (d. 49/669): levitation³⁷ and power over objects.³⁸
3. Al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī (d. 61/680): knowledge of the future, especially foreknowledge of his own violent death at Karbalā'.³⁹
4. 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn (d. 92 or 95/711 or 714): celestial ascension,⁴⁰ power over objects (particularly the episode in which, after Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya laid claim to the imamate, in his presence, the Black Stone of the Ka'ba was made to speak in favour of Zayn al-Ābidīn's imamate; which, according to our sources, convinced Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya).⁴¹

37. Al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 100ff.; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 166–169; al-Āmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, pp. 158f.; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 203ff.

38. Al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 104f.; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, pp. 238ff.; al-Āmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, pp. 160f.; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 43, pp. 323ff.

39. Al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 107ff.; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 182ff.; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, pp. 245ff.; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 211 f.; Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Luhūf fi qatlā al-ṭufūf* (Qumm, 1364 Sh./1985), pp. 26ff.; al-Āmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, pp. 206ff.; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 44, pp. 180ff.; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 238ff.

40. Al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 113ff.; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 199ff.; al-Āmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, pp. 254ff.; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 293ff.

41. Al-Ṣaffār, [*Baṣā'ir*], pp. 522–523; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, pp. 282–283; 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa'l-taṣīra min al-ḥayra* (Qumm, 1404/1984), pp. 60–62; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 206–208; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, pp. 257–258; Abu'l-Faḍl al-Ṭabarsī/Ṭabrisī, *I'lām al-warā bi-a'lām al-hudā*, ed. M. al-Kharsān (3rd edn, Qumm, 1970), p. 258; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 288; al-Ḥasan b. Sulaymān al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtaṣar baṣā'ir al-darajāt* (Najaf, 1370/1950), pp. 14 and 170; al-Āmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 3, p. 292 and vol. 5, p. 123; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 45, p. 347 and vol. 46, pp. 22 and 111–113; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, p. 297 (clearly this is an anti-Kaysānī tradition, so much so that in several versions, the reporter is none other than Abū Khālid Kankar al-Kābulī, a Kaysānī deserter who accepted the imamate of 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn; now consult L. Capezzone, 'Abiura dalla Kaysāniyya e conversione all'Imāmiyya: il caso di Abū Khālid al-Kābulī', *RSO*, 66/1–2 (1992), pp. 1–14.

5. Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. ca. 119/737): power over objects,⁴² power of supra-natural travel.⁴³
6. Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765): as stated above, a great many miracles are attributed to this imam, with particular emphasis on: thaumaturgical use of the Greatest Divine Name,⁴⁴ the power of supra-natural travel (*qudrat al-sayr*, i.e. travel for himself as well as transporting others, in this case, his closest disciples),⁴⁵ prediction of the deaths of others (especially his followers).⁴⁶
7. Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799): miraculous powers ever since his early childhood,⁴⁷ power to become invisible (especially when

42. Al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 133f.; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 219f.; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, pp. 272ff.; al-Irbilī, *Kashf*, vol. 2, pp. 141ff.; al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, pp. 292f. and 315f.; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 322f.

43. Al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 135f.; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, pp. 285f.; al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtaṣar*, p. 15; al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, p. 317; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 46, pp. 252f.; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 323f.

44. Al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 237–238; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 251–252; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, p. 296; al-Irbilī, *Kashf*, vol. 2, p. 199; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, pp. 357ff.; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, p. 358.

45. Al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 397–407; al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 138ff.; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, p. 249; al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, pp. 453ff.; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 357ff.

46. Al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, p. 283; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 256ff. and 286; al-Mufīd, *al-Ikhtisāṣ*, ed. ʿA. A. Ghaffārī (Qumm, n.d.), pp. 84f.; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 2, pp. 647f.; Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraj*, p. 229 (predicted the deaths of Sawra b. Kulayb, al-Muʿallā b. Khunays, Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī). See also J. Loebenstein, 'Miracles in Ši'i Thought. A Case Study of the Miracles Attributed to Imām Ḡa'far al-Šādiq', *Arabica*, 50/2 (2003), pp. 199–244.

47. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, p. 247 and vol. 3, p. 16; al-Masʿūdī, *Ithbāt*, p. 162; Ibn Shuʿba, *Tuḥaf al-uqūl ʿan āl al-rasūl*, ed. ʿA. A. Ghaffārī with Persian trans. by M. B. Kamare'i (rpr. Qumm, 1404/1984), p. 411; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, p. 326; al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād fī ma'rifa ḥujaj Allāh ʿalā'l-ibād*, ed. and Persian trans. by H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Tehran, 1346 Sh./1968; rpr. Qumm, n.d., [ca. 1985]), p. 290; Ibn Ḥamza, *al-Thāqib fī al-manāqib*, ed. N. R. ʿUlwān (Beirut, 1411/1992), p. 433; al-Irbilī, *Kashf*, vol. 2, p. 221; Abū Muḥammad al-ʿĀmilī al-Nubātī, *al-Širāt al-mustaḳīm ilā mustaḥaqqī'l-taqdīm* (Najaf, 1338/1919), vol. 2, pp. 163f.

- imprisoned by the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd)⁴⁸ and miracles in the presence of this caliph.⁴⁹
8. 'Alī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818): resurrection of the dead⁵⁰ and miracles in the presence of the caliph al-Ma'mūn.⁵¹
 9. to 11. The three imams, Muḥammad al-Jawād (d. 220/835), 'Alī al-Naqī (d. 254/868) and al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (d. 260/874): power over objects.⁵²
 12. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Mahdī (the hidden imam, the eschatological Saviour): before his minor occultation (which, according to tradition, occurred in 260/874 on the death of his

48. Al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 320f.; al-'Āmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, p. 566; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 44, p. 66; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 427f.

49. Ibn Bābūya, *'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, ed. M. H. Lājevardī (Tehran, 1378/1958), vol. 1, pp. 95–96, vol. 2, pp. 95f. and 100f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 29, no. 19, pp. 148f.; al-Mufid, *Irshād*, pp. 293ff.; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 315ff.; al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 163ff.; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, p. 334; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 4, pp. 303ff.; Ṭabrisī, *I'lām*, pp. 302f.; al-Nubāṭī, *al-Širāṭ al-mustaqīm*, vol. 2, pp. 192ff. The fact that, in these kinds of traditions, the 'Abbasid caliph was accused by the Shi'is of having poisoned the seventh imam clearly had a polemical aim: Hārūn is all the more unjust because he was well aware of the imam's miracles and thus his saintliness and legitimacy.

50. Ibn Bābūya, *'Uyūn*, vol. 2, pp. 167ff.; al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 168f.; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, p. 363; Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraj*, p. 231.

51. Ibn Bābūya, *'Uyūn*, vol. 2, pp. 184ff. and 214ff.; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 360 and 376–382; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, pp. 350ff.; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 4, pp. 370ff.; Ibn Ḥamza, *Thāqib*, pp. 467ff.; Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Juwaynī, *Farā'id al-simṭayn*, ed. M. B. al-Maḥmūdī (Beirut, 1398/1979), vol. 2, p. 212; al-Nubāṭī, *Širāṭ*, vol. 2, pp. 197ff.; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 49, p. 300 and vol. 82, p. 46; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, p. 498. Same comment as note 49.

52. On Muḥammad al-Jawād being gifted with miraculous powers since his childhood: see e.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 179ff.; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 397ff.; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, p. 373ff.; al-Irbilī, *Kashf*, vol. 2, p. 365ff.; al-'Āmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 6, pp. 184ff.; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 523ff. On 'Alī al-Naqī: al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 184ff.; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 412ff.; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, pp. 396ff.; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 50, p. 144; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 547ff. On al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī: al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, pp. 507f.; al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 190ff.; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 426ff.; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, pp. 421f.; al-'Āmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 6, pp. 344ff.; al-Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār fi faḍā'il Muḥammad wa ālihi'l-aṭhār* (Qumm, 1397/1978), vol. 2, pp. 491f.

father): miraculous powers of the child imam;⁵³ and after his major occultation (which according to the tradition occurred in 329/940): ability to help those in difficulties with miraculous powers and to initiate the loyal faithful by supra-natural means.⁵⁴

The imam is capable of performing miracles because he is a divine initiate and, further, because he is part of the divine being and his knowledge is of divine origin.⁵⁵ Thus, the theological, anthropological and initiatory content of *walāya* is put into effect to provide a veritable exegesis of the miracle. Certain especially audacious *ḥadīths* clearly illustrate this conception. After causing light to burst from the sky (which just about made Medina explode) imam al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī is said to have declared:

We [the imams] are the First and the Last; we are the Commanders; we are the Light. The Light of spiritual beings [i.e. non-material celestial beings] comes from us. We illuminate by the Light of God. We render joyful by its/His joy [or 'we spiritualise by its/His spirit'; the pronoun can refer either to the light or to God; the ambiguity

53. See Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, section IV. 2 ('L'imām et son occultation: aspects ésotériques'), pp. 264–270 (*Divine Guide*, ch. 4, section 2); also e.g., al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, pp. 455ff.; al-Irbilī, *Kashf*, vol. 2, pp. 498ff.; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 51, pp. 4ff.; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 590ff.; *Ḥilya*, vol. 2, pp. 536ff.

54. For these miracles and others performed by the hidden imam during the Occultation, refer to Chapter 13 in this volume. Once departed from the perceptible world the other imams also continued to perform miracles. According to a tradition dating back to 'Alī: 'Among us, he who dies is not dead' (*yamūt man māta minnā wa laysa bi-mayyit*) (al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, p. 275); on the *post-mortem* condition of the imams, see also *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 405–406 and 424–428; al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 146–148; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 294–296; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 373–376 and Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, p. 243 (*Divine Guide*, p. 99). Practically all the hagio-biographical sources contain a sub-chapter on the miracles of an imam after death ('Bāb fī mu'jizātihi ba'd wafātihi', or other similar titles). An entire form of literature reports miracles that have taken pilgrims by surprise at the imams' tombs (see Ḥ al-Najāfī, *al-Durra al-bahiyya fī faḍl Karbalā' wa turbatihā al-zakiyya* [Najaf, 1970]; 'A. Ḥ. Balāghī, *Tārikh-e Najaf-e ashraf va Hira* [Tehran, 1328 Sh./1949–1950] – modern sources that provide valuable early pieces of information on the subject).

55. Chapters 3 and 8, this volume.

is clearly deliberate]. Within us, its resting-place; towards us, its source. Our last is like unto our first and our first like unto our last.⁵⁶

Once, the fourth imam, ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, transformed himself into a winged creature and disappeared into the heavens. Upon his return, he explained that he had reached the highest heaven (*a‘lā ‘illiyyin*). Then to an amazed disciple, he continued:

We [the imams] are the ones who created it [i.e. the highest heaven], so how could we be unable to ascend to it? We are the Bearers of the [divine] Throne and we are seated upon the Throne; the Throne (*‘arsh*) and the Pedestal (*kursī*) belong to us.⁵⁷

After performing several miracles, Ja‘far al-Šādiq declares:

We bring forth light in darkness; we are the oft-frequented House (*al-bayt al-ma‘mūr*; Q 52:4); whoever enters there is safe; we are the Magnificence of God and His Greatness . . . We are beyond all description. . . it is because of us eyes light up, ears listen, hearts are filled with faith.⁵⁸

The imams initiate their closest disciples into secret knowledge and even, according to certain rare and allusive *ḥadīths*, the most profound mysteries of this knowledge. ‘Alī had taught the archetypal initiated follower, Salmān al-Fārisī, the Greatest Name of God, which

56. ‘*Naḥnu al-awwalūn wa’l-ākhirūn wa naḥnu al-āmirūn wa naḥnu al-nūr nunawwiru al-rūḥāniyyin nunawwiru bi-nūri’llāh wa nurawwiḥu bi-rawḥih* [or *bi-rūḥih*] *finā maskanuhu wa ilaynā ma’dīnuhu al-ākhir minnā ka’l-awwal wa’l-awwal minnā ka’l-ākhir*’, al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, p. 103; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā’il*, pp. 168–169; al-‘Āmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, p. 157; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 204–205.

57. Al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, p. 116; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā’il*, p. 201; al-‘Āmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, p. 256; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, p. 294.

58. Al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā’il*, pp. 270–271; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 394–395. On other sayings of the imams that may be compared with the ecstatic utterances (*shaṭaḥāt*) of the mystics, refer to Chapter 3, this volume.

is an enigmatic key to the most prodigious of miracles.⁵⁹ Rushayd al-Hajārī, another of 'Alī's disciples, had been initiated into the secret Science of Fortune and Misfortune (*'ilm al-manāyā wa'l-balāyā*).⁶⁰ The astonishing descriptions of God provided by the 'two Hishāms', Ibn al-Hakam and Ibn Sālim al-Jawālīqī (companions of the fifth, sixth and seventh imams) seem to bear witness more to their visionary experiences than to purely theological speculations; do they not relate, by their 'anthropomorphist' descriptions of what they perceived during miraculous visions of God, what the imams had initiated them into?⁶¹ A *ḥadīth* going back to 'Alī al-Riḍā alludes to the fact that every initiated follower has the potential to become a fount of inspiration (*muḥaddath*).⁶²

At the same time, many *ḥadīths* stress the relationship, the ontological affinity, between the imam and his adept. For example, a series of anthropogonical traditions on the creation of spirits (*arwāh*), hearts (*qulūb*, i.e. the seat of the soul) and bodies (*abdān*): the heart and soul of an imam is created from a Clay found above the celestial Dwelling, *'Ilīyyin*, and the body, from Clay of the same *'Ilīyyin*. The hearts and souls of their initiated followers are also created from this Clay of *'Ilīyyin* and their bodies

59. Al-Kashshī, *al-Rijāl* (Bombay, 1317/1899) (summary by Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār ma'rifat al-rijāl*), p. 8; Mufid, *Ikhtisāṣ*, p. 11; al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī/Ṭabrisī, *Nafas al-Rahmān fī faḍā'il Salmān* (Tehran, 1285/1868), pp. 31 and 59 (pagination by hand).

60. Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl* p. 52; al-Mufid, *Ikhtisāṣ*, p. 77; al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, p. 98; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, p. 325; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 1, p. 310; Ibn Ḥamza *Thāqib*, p. 434; al-'Āmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, p. 504; al-Bahrānī, *Madina*, p. 459; al-Ardabīlī, *Jāmi' al-ruwāt* (Qumm, 1331 Sh./1953), vol. 1, p. 319.

61. Cf. al-Shahrestānī, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, Fr. trans. with intro. and notes by D. Gimaret and G. Monnot (Louvain and Paris, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 531–538 (especially notes by D. Gimaret, pp. 531–532 and 535); J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin and New York, 1990), vol. 1, pp. 342–379 (to be compared with what the author says about Muqātil b. Sulaymān, vol. 2, p. 530); Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 139–141 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 54–55).

62. Ibn Bābūya, *Ma'āni al-akhbār*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1379/1959), p. 172.

from a Clay found below the same *‘Illiyin*. The adept’s heart is thus consubstantial with the imam’s body, his master initiator.⁶³ According to other *ḥadīths* of the same kind, the cosmic Intel-ligence (*‘aql*) and its Armies (the cosmogonical archetype of the Imam and his followers) all originate from an Ocean of sweet and pleasant waters⁶⁴ and the People of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*, i.e. the imam and his people) are created from one and the same pet-rified Clay with the same sweet Water.⁶⁵ In the symbol of the ‘Tree of *walāya*’, God is said to be its roots, Muḥammad the trunk, the imams its branches, initiatory knowledge the fruit, and the initi-ated faithful the leaves.⁶⁶ There is thus an ‘organic’ link between the imam and his initiate. By means of the imam who is from the revealed Being of God, the initiate also participates in the divine Being. Like the imam, the adept thus also possesses the onto-logical and initiatory qualities required for performing miracles.

63. Imami dualism similarly requires that the imam’s Enemy (*‘aduww al-imām*) and his supporters be created from the infernal ‘Residence’, *Sijjīn*; cf. e.g. al-Barqī, *Kitāb al-maḥāsīn*, ed. J. Muḥaddith Urmawī (Tehran, 1370/1950), vol. 1, pp. 31f.; al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir*, pp. 14–19; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, pp. 232–234; Ibn Bābūya, *‘Ilal*, pp. 117–118; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 96–100 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 38–39); Chapters 3 and, especially, 8, this volume.

64. Just as cosmic Ignorance (*jahl*) and its Armies (archetypal Enemies of the imam and his supporters) originate in an Ocean of bitter and salty Water; on these traditions see e.g. al-Barqī, *Maḥāsīn*, vol. 1, pp. 196–198; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, pp. 24–27; al-Mas‘ūdī, *Ithbāt*, pp. 15–17; Ibn Shu‘ba, *Tuḥaf*, pp. 423–425; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 18–21 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 7–8) and Amir-Moezzi, ‘Cosmogony and Cosmology in ‘Twelver Shi‘ism’, *Elr*, vol. 4, pp. 317–322, esp. p. 320. Also, Chapter 12, this volume.

65. Just as People of the Left (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*, i.e. adversaries of the imams, forces of injustice and counter-initiation) are created from Clay hard-ened with bitter Water; see e.g. al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir*, pp. 70–71; Muḥammad b. Mas‘ūd al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Tehran, 1380/1960), vol. 2, pp. 39–40; Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 3, p. 10.

66. For variants of this tradition see al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir*, pp. 58–60; ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Ṭ. al-Mūsawī al-Jazā’irī (Najaf, 1386–1387/1966–1968), vol. 1, pp. 398–399; Furāt b. Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, ed. M. al-Kāzīm (Tehran, 1410/1990), pp. 219–220; al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2 p. 224; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 311; as well as Chapter 8 below *in fine*.

Indeed, the heresiographical sources repeatedly tell us that from a very early period onwards, many adepts in the entourage of the imams claimed to possess thaumaturgical powers by frequently vaunting their initiatory knowledge and the immanence in them of the imam's divine particle (*juz' ilāhī*).⁶⁷ The effect of the penchant for esoterism in Shi'i circles, along with widespread social dissatisfaction, meant that many of the adepts who advertised their theurgic powers attracted a considerable number of people. The adepts thus led a double life, both initiatory and political. Many went so far as to rebel against the authority of the Umayyad and 'Abbasid regimes, or were openly hostile to other groups; thus many of them met with a violent death.⁶⁸ Moreover, miracles conferred religious authority on those who performed

67. In the present state of research, the exact date of the traditions just mentioned is not known. The oldest sources that report them date from the third/ninth century; however, simply their apologetic and proselytising nature leads one to believe that at least the early 'kernel' texts circulated in 'Alid milieus from a very early period onwards. The theory of the creation of Shi'is from an Ocean of sweet and luminous Water and of their adversaries from an Ocean of bitter and murky Water is, for example, attributed by the heresiographers to al-Mughīra b. Sa'īd al-'Ijlī, the esoterist who was familiar with the teachings of the fifth imam, at the end of the first or in the early second century AH. See, e.g., al-Nawbakhtī, *Fīraq al-shī'a*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1931), pp. 52ff.; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, ed. H. Ritter (2nd edn, Wiesbaden, 1963), pp. 6 and 23; al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-fīraq*, ed. M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 57 and 238; al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn* (Istanbul, 1928), pp. 74 and 331; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 145, 148, 196–197; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fī al-mīlāl* (Baghdad, n.d.), vol. 4, p. 18; al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-mawā'iz wa'l-i'tibār fī-dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa'l-āthār* (Bulāq, Cairo, 1256/1840), vol. 4, p. 176; Ibn Abī'l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha*, 4 vols (Cairo, 1330/1911), vol. 2, p. 309; al-Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions*, pp. 515ff.

68. The variety of individuals and the increase in number of groups clearly demonstrates that the term 'Shi'ism' suggests a unity that in fact never existed. In order to reflect reality more closely, during the medieval period, not unlike today, one might speak of 'Shi'isms'; J. van Ess demonstrates this convincingly in *Theologie*, vol. 1, pp. 233–403; more generally, on the esoterico-political Shi'i sects see A. S. al-Sāmarrā'ī, *al-Ghuluww wa'l-fīraq al-ghāliya fī'l-ḥadāra al-islāmiyya* (Baghdad 1392/1972); H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis: die extreme Schia und die 'Alawiten* (Zurich and Munich, 1982) and M. Moosa, *Extremist Shiites. The Ghulat Sects* (New York, 1987) (focusing more on the modern and contemporary periods).

them, as well as undeniable political influence. The corpus of Twelver *ḥadīths* itself repeatedly refers to a miracle as a 'sign' ('*alāma*) or 'proof' (*dalīl*) of imamate, just as he is the prophet's proof of prophethood.⁶⁹ Let us study the examples of some key figures in early Shi'ism.

According to the Kaysāniyya, 'Alī's son Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya possessed initiatory knowledge and had received from al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn all the wisdom required for the esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ān as well as knowledge of 'the horizons and souls' ('*ilm al-āfāq wa'll-anfus*; cf. Q 41:53; i.e. the external and internal worlds). He is said to have miraculously entered into occultation in order to return later to save the world from injustice.⁷⁰ One of his supporters, the Medinan Ḥamza b. 'Umāra al-Barbarī, professed his divinity and declared himself his messenger.⁷¹ Another Kaysānī save the world, the famous Mukhtār b. Abī 'Ubayd al-Thaqafī (whom certain traditions identify with Kaysān, 'Alī's emancipated slave and the sect's namesake), appears to have claimed to own a Pedestal (*kursī*) containing, not unlike the Israelite's Ark of the Covenant, the divine Presence (*sakīna*) and Relics with the thaumaturgical powers of previous prophets (*baqiyya*). On the battlefield, he placed this seat at the head of his army to render it invincible and attract the support of angels who are said to have flown in to his troops in the form of white pigeons.⁷²

69. See e.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir*, pp. 104 and 140; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā'il*, pp. 169, 250–251, 263; al-Rāwandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 2, p. 636; al-Irbilī, *Kashf*, vol. 2, p. 19; al-'Āmilī, *Ithbāt*, vol. 5, pp. 158, 451, 454; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīna*, pp. 204, 357, 393.

70. Al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq*, pp. 20–21; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 18ff.; al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, pp. 27ff.; al-Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions*, pp. 437–438; al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 4, p. 174; al-Murtaḍā b. Dā'ī al-Ḥusaynī, *Tabṣirat al-'awāmm fī maqālāt al-anām* (Tehran, 1327/1909), p. 421; W. Madelung, 'al-Khaṭṭābiyya', *EI2*, vol. 4, pp. 1,163–1,164.

71. Al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, p. 25; Ṣadiqī, *Jonbesh*, p. 225.

72. Al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq*, pp. 24–25; al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, pp. 31–37; al-Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions*, pp. 439–443; H. Laoust, *Les schismes dans l'Islam* (Paris, 1977), pp. 27ff. On *sakīna* and *baqiyya* in the Ark of the Israelites see Q 2:248; also A. Spitaler, 'Was bedeutet *baqiya* im Koran?', in *Westöstliche*

Coming from the Kaysāniyya, 'Abd Allāh b. Mu'āwiya declared that the Spirit of God (*rūḥ Allāh*), or the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-quds*), transmigrated from one human form (*shakhs*) to another and then entered him after having been with Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya and his son Abū Hāshim. Such a person is thus obviously invested with thaumaturgical powers.⁷³

Another supporter of Abū Hāshim, Bayān b. Sam'ān al-Nahdī, seems to have made a synthesis of those ideas attributed to the Saba'iyya and the Kaysāniyya. According to the heresiographers, he professed the divinity of 'Alī, who is said to have transmitted his 'divine particle' to his son Muḥammad and grandson Abū Hāshim. Although he did not belong to the *ahl al-bayt*, he claimed to have received the divine particle of the imams by means of the phenomenon of transmigration. He thus considered himself an imam invested with miraculous powers such as knowledge of the Invisible and future events.⁷⁴

Al-Mughīra b. Sa'īd al-'Ijlī was very probably a disciple of imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir. After the latter's death, he supported the Ḥasanid Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Nafs al-Zakiyya. Shortly thereafter he declared that he himself was an imam (or prophet, according

Abhandlungen Rudolf Tschudi zum Siebzigsten Geburtstag (Wiesbaden, 1954) and R. Paret, *Der Koran. Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart et al., 1978), vol. 2, pp. 52–53.

73. Al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, pp. 246f.; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 6f.; al-Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions*, pp. 448–449. (Pseudo-) al-Nāshī' al-Akbar, *Uṣūl al-niḥal*, ed. J. van Ess as *Frühe mu'tazilische Häresiographie* (Beirut and Wiesbaden, 1971). W. Madelung convincingly attributes the work to Ja'far b. Ḥarb in 'Frühe mu'tazilische Häresiographie: das *Kitāb al-uṣūl* des Ġa'far b. Ḥarb?', *Der Islam*, 57 (1980) (rpr. in *Religious Schools and Sects*, article VI), p. 37 and al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, p. 29 attributes these theories not to 'Abd Allāh b. Mu'āwiya but 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥarb (or b. al-Ḥārith). See also Laoust, *Les schismes*, pp. 35–36; W. F. Tucker, 'Abd Allāh b. Mu'āwiya and the Janāhiyya: Rebels and Ideologues of the late Umayyad Period', *SI*, 51 (1980), pp. 39–57.

74. Al-Nāshī', *Uṣūl*, § 60; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, pp. 25f.; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 5 and 23; al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, p. 236; al-Shahrastānī, *Le livre des religions*, pp. 450–451; also M. G. S. Hodgson 'Bayān b. Sam'ān', *EI2*, vol. 1, p. 1150 and especially W. F. Tucker, 'Bayān b. Sam'ān and the Bayāniyya: Shi'ite Extremists of Umayyad Iraq', *Muslim World*, 65 (1975), pp. 86–109.

to other traditions), having received a 'spirit' from al-Nafs al-Zakiyya due to which he could revive the dead, heal the sick and know hidden things. He also claimed to have had luminous visions of God and to know the Greatest Name.⁷⁵

Abū Manṣūr al-'Ijlī would also have belonged to the entourage of imam al-Bāqir. Upon the death of the latter, he first declared himself an imam and then, probably later on, a prophet. Advancing the theory of a continuous cycle of prophethood until the end of the world, he claimed, that like Muḥammad, he had undertaken a celestial journey (*mi'rāj*) during which God made him His *masīḥ*, that is, one upon whom God has placed his hand or God's Anointed.⁷⁶

Similarly, the famous supporter of imam Ja'far, Ab'l-Khaṭṭāb al-Asadī al-Ajda', claimed to have been able to make a celestial journey and to transport himself as if by magic.⁷⁷ His disciple

75. See note 67 above. On the 'Saba'ism' of al-Mughīra see also Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-akhbār* (Cairo, 1383/1963), vol. 2, p. 149; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, ed. Th. 'Ukāsha (Cairo, 1960), p. 623; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, ed. de Goeje, series 2, p. 1619; now refer to W. F. Tucker, 'Rebels and Gnostics: al-Mughīra b. Sa'īd and the Mughīriyya', *Arabica*, 22 (1975), pp. 42–61; Halm, *Gnosis*, pp. 89ff. and S. Wasserstrom, 'The Moving Finger Writes: Mughīra b. Sa'īd's Islamic Gnosis and the Myths of its Rejection', *History of Religions*, 25/1 (1985), pp. 62–90.

76. Al-Nāshī', *Uṣūl*, p. 40; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, pp. 34f.; Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt wa'l-firaq*, ed. M. J. Mashkūr (Tehran, 1963), p. 46; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 9 and 24; al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, pp. 243f.; al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl*, p. 331; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 196; Ibn Ḥazm, *Fiṣal*, vol. 4, p. 185; al-Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions*, pp. 519–521; Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 4, p. 176; Ḥusaynī, *Tabṣira*, p. 419; now consult W. F. Tucker, 'Abū Manṣūr al-'Ijlī and the Manṣūriyya: A Study in Medieval Terrorism', *Der Islam*, 54 (1977), pp. 39–57, 'terrorism' because, according to the heresiographers, the supporters of Abū Manṣūr ambush their adversaries and killed them by strangulation; on these *khannāqūn* ('stranglers'), see also C. Pellat, *Le milieu baṣrien et la formation de Ḡaḥīz* (Paris, 1953), pp. 199–201. Also Halm, *Gnosis*, pp. 86ff.

77. Al-Nāshī', *Uṣūl*, § 63 and 75; al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, pp. 37 and 58; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 10ff.; al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, pp. 247ff.; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 187ff.; Ibn Ḥazm, *Fiṣal*, vol. 4, pp. 186–187; al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 4, p. 174; al-Shahrastānī, *Le livre des religions*, pp. 522ff.; B. Lewis, 'Abū al-Khaṭṭāb', *EI2*, vol. 1, pp. 137–138; W. Madelung, 'al-Khaṭṭābiyya', *EI2*, vol. 4, pp. 1,163–1,164;

Bazigh/Buzaygh b. Mūsā (or b. Yūnus) professed the imam Ja'far's divinity and claimed that every initiate could receive divine revelation. Followers of the latter spoke of themselves as immortal and as able to communicate with the dead.⁷⁸

Heresiographers and prosopographers call these figures Shi'i 'exaggerators' or 'extremists' (*ghālī*, pl. *ghulāt/ghālūn*).⁷⁹ Imami *ḥadīths* do the same, and there are many traditions in which one or another imam disavows or publicly curses such and such a follower for drifting away into what our texts consider an extremist deviation. As a result, from the early period on, authors made a clear distinction in Imamism between a 'moderate' version (that of the imams) and an 'extremist' variety (that of the *ghulāt*), rejected by the imams. But to what extent are these disavowals and curses convincing? Is the opposition between teachings dating back to the historical imams and those attributed to the 'extremists' as clear as the sources would have us believe? There are indications that a more nuanced view is called for. Putting aside the inevitable distortions on the part of the heresiographers, which are hard to confirm, there are indications that justify questioning, in this early phase of Shi'ism, any clear distinction between a 'moderate' and 'extremist' trend. Among the most representative doctrines and conceptions held by the 'extremists', we point out: an allegorical and esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ān (*ta'wīl*); reincarnation – particularly those of their adversaries into animals (*maskh*); belief in the superhuman, read divine, nature of the initiated Sage (the notion of *juz' ilāhī*); inherence of the divine in the human (*ḥulūl*), the transmigrationist doctrine (*tanāsukh*) which, for early Shi'ism

A. A. Sachedina, 'Abū al-Khaṭṭāb', *Elr*, vol. 1, pp. 329f; Halm, *Gnosis*, pp. 199ff. Also H. Corbin, *L'Iran et la philosophie* (Paris, 1990), pp. 190–217.

78. Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 12; al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, pp. 39–40; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 197; Ibn Ḥazm, *Fīṣal*, vol. 4, p. 186; al-Shahrastānī, *Le livre des religions*, p. 524; al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 4, p. 174. Another sub-sect of the Khaṭṭābiyya, the Ma'mariyya, believed its leader Ma'mar b. Khaytham, to be a prophet capable of performing miracles (al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 11; al-Baghdādī, *Farq*, p. 39; al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 4, p. 175).

79. Cf. e.g. M. G. S. Hodgson, 'Ghulāt', *EL2*, vol. 2, pp. 1119–1121.

should not, it seems be rendered as metempsychosis but rather as metemphosis (i.e. the 'organic' transmission of prophet-imamic Light);⁸⁰ belief in the occultation (*ghayba*) of the eschatological Saviour and of course the ability of those other than the prophets to perform miracles.⁸¹ Now, all these ideas are present, in one form or another, in the early corpus of the sayings of the imams.⁸² The most notable difference pertains to antinomianism (*ibāḥa*) that one does not find at all in the Imami corpus and that constitutes a constant accusation levelled against the 'extremists'; however, in some cases is this not 'exaggeration' on the part of the heresiographers?⁸³

In addition, the earliest Twelver *kutub al-rijāl* that have come down to us, those by al-Kashshī, al-Najāshī or al-Ṭūsī (fourth and

80. Cf. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, p. 109 (*Divine Guide*, p. 42) et passim; Chapter 4, this volume.

81. Apart from the works on the subject already cited (van Ess, Halm, Hodgson, Moosa, Tucker etc.) see also e.g. I. Friedländer, 'Abdallāh b. Saba', der Begründer der Shī'a und sein Jüdischer Ursprung', *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, 23 (1909), pp. 32–63; R. Strothmann, 'History of Islamic Heresiography', *Islamic Culture*, 17 (1938), pp. 95–110; S. Moscati, 'Per una storia dell'antica shī'a', *RSO*, 30 (1955), pp. 56–70; P. J. Vatikiotis, 'The Rise of Extremist Sects and the Dissolution of the Fatimid Empire in Egypt', *Islamic Culture*, 46 (1957), pp. 121–142; W. al-Qāḍī, 'The Development of the Term *ghulāt* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysāniyya', in *Akten des VII Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft* (Göttingen, 1976), pp. 86–99; G. Monnot, 'La transmigration et l'immortalité', *MIDEO*, 14 (1980), pp. 149–166, (rpr. in *Islam et religions* [Paris, 1986], article XII); R. Freitag, *Seelenwanderung in der islamischer Häresie* (Berlin, 1985), esp. pp. 1–112; A. Straface, 'Il concetto di estremismo nell'eresiografia islamica', *AION*, 56 (1996), pp. 471–487; A. Straface, 'Hulul and Taḡassud: Islamic Accounts of the Concept of Incarnation', in U. Vermeulen and J. M. F. Van Reeth (ed.), *Law, Christianity and Modernism in Islamic Society* (Leuven, 1998), pp. 125–132; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Heresy', *Encyclopaedia of the Qor'ān*.

82. Cf. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, see index.

83. It is interesting to see that in the *Baṣā'ir* by al-Ṣaffār, one of the oldest compilations of Imami traditions that has come down to us, it is only the antinomians who are described as extremists, since the absolute superiority of the *bāṭin* over the *ẓāhir* among them leads to the simple elimination of the latter (al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 526–537, especially the long letter from imam Ja'far to al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ju'fi, pp. 526–536).

fifth/tenth and eleventh centuries) for example, describe many 'extremist' disciples of the imams. Al-Ṭūsī (460/1067) in particular, seems to be the first to systematically present the doctrinal beliefs of individuals in the entourage of the imams in order to distinguish, according to the proper criteria, true believers from those gone astray by belief in errant doctrines.⁸⁴ In his *Rijāl*, he has arranged the chapters in the order of the companions (*aṣḥāb*) of the imams from 'Alī to al-'Askarī.⁸⁵ Now, many of the notices end with formulaic statements such as *fa-yurmā bi'l-ghuluww* ('and he was accused of extremism') and *ghālin mal'ūn* ('cursed extremist', i.e. cursed by the imam). What is especially interesting to note is that, in a number of cases, an 'extremist' follower, cursed and banished by an imam is found among the followers of one or more of the subsequent imams, which shows that in spite of the 'public condemnation', he continued to frequent the imams and to benefit from their teachings. Examples of this include: Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Baṣrī al-Daylamī (the 'cursed' disciple of the seventh but then a disciple of the eighth imam);⁸⁶ Muḥammad b. al-Fuḍayl al-Azdī al-Ṣayrafi (an 'extremist' who was familiar with the teachings of the sixth, seventh and eighth imams);⁸⁷ al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī 'Uthmān (disciple of the ninth and tenth imams),⁸⁸ just as Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh b. Mihrān al-Karkhī;⁸⁹ Aḥmad b. Hilāl al-Baghdādī (disciple of the tenth and eleventh imams);⁹⁰

84. See M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Remarques sur les critères d'authenticité du ḥadīth et l'autorité du juriste dans le shī'isme imāmīte', *SI*, 85 (1997), pp. 5–39, esp. pp. 22–25; on al-Ṭūsī, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'al-Ṭūsī', *EI2*.

85. Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-rijāl* (Najaf, 1380/1961).

86. *Ibid.*, pp. 359 and 386.

87. *Ibid.*, pp. 297, 360 and 389, cf. also al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist kutub al-shī'a*, ed. Sprenger and 'Abd al-Ḥaqq (rpr. Mashhad, 1972), p. 174.

88. Al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, pp. 400 and 413 (also al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 48–49; al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, p. 73); author of *Kitāb al-nawādir* probably on miracles.

89. Al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, pp. 406 and 423 (also al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 270; al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, p. 181); author of a number of texts, among them *Kitāb al-nawādir*, *Kitāb al-malāḥim* ('eschatological prophecies') and *Manāqib Abī'l-Khaṭṭāb*.

90. Al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, pp. 410 and 428, also al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, p. 6.

and Ishāq b. Muḥammad al-Baṣrī⁹¹ or al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Bābā al-Qummī⁹² and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (disciple of the ninth, tenth and eleventh imams).⁹³

The curse alone, therefore, does not prove a divergence in doctrine. One might even be led to believe that the imam's curse, when sincere and not a strategic manoeuvre, was not due to *what* the followers said but *because* they said it, in other words, because they betrayed the rule, standard for all esoteric traditions of an initiatory nature, namely to dissimulate or keep a secret (*taqiyya*, *kitmān*, *khab'*).⁹⁴ A *ḥadīth* dating back to imam Ja'far al-Šādiq is especially significant in this regard:

It happens that I confer a teaching to someone; then he leaves me and reports it exactly as he heard it from me. Because of this, I declare that it is lawful to curse him and to dissociate oneself from him.⁹⁵

91. Al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, pp. 411 and 428.

92. Ibid., pp. 414 and 430.

93. Ibid., pp. 407, 424 and 436, also al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, p. 182.

94. On this very important practice for Shi'ism, see I. Goldziher, 'Das Prinzip der *takijja* im Islam', *ZDMG*, 60 (1906), pp. 201–204 (rpr. in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. J. de Somogyi [Hildesheim, 1967–1970], vol. 5, pp. 59–72); K. M. al-Shaybī, 'al-Taqiyya uṣūluḥā wa taṭawwuruhā', *Revue de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université d'Alexandrie*, 16 (1962–1963), pp. 14–40; E. Meyer, 'Anlass und Anwendungsbereich der *taqiyya*', *Der Islam*, 57 (1980), pp. 246–280; E. Kohlberg, 'Some Imāmi-Shī'i Views on *taqiyya*', *JAOS*, 95 (1975), pp. 395–402 (rpr. *Belief and Law*, III); E. Kohlberg, 'Taqiyya in Shī'i Theology and Religion' in H. G. Kippenberg and G. G. Stroumsa (eds), *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions* (Leiden, etc., 1995), pp. 345–380; van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 1, pp. 312–315; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, index under '*taqiyya*'.

95. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī and Persian trans. by M. J. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1985), ch. 1, p. 57, no. 7. Elsewhere, it is reported from Muḥammad al-Bāqir that keeping initiatory Knowledge secret (*kitmān al-'ilm*) is a tradition that dates back to the time of Noah; see al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, pp. 64–65. See also imam Ja'far who allows his disciples to express their compassion for Abū'l-Khaṭṭāb, although he himself had cursed him (al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 189).

The distinction between 'moderate' and 'extremist' Shi'ism appears to be artificial in terms of the early period unless one considers the imams themselves to be 'extremist', which would be at odds with the entire corpus and their sayings.⁹⁶ With regard to all that has been observed above, in addition to the confirmed cases of Salmān al-Fārisī and Rushayd al-Hajarī, possessing thau-maturgical knowledge leads one to believe that the imams would have conceived it possible for an initiated follower to perform miracles without being a prophet or imam, or even necessarily belonging to the *ahl al-bayt*. This seems even theoretically legitimate since such a believer is ontologically of the imam and possesses initiatory knowledge or, in other words, he has the fundamental elements of *walāya*.⁹⁷ In this area, the only obliga-

96. I have devoted many studies to demonstrate the artificial nature and lateness of this distinction; indeed it is the thesis that underlies much of *Le Guide divin*; as well as Chapters 3 to 5, this volume; see also 'Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–903) et son *Kitāb baṣā'ir al-darajāt*', *JA*, 280/3–4 (1992), pp. 221–250; 'Notes sur deux traditions "heterodoxes" imāmītes', *Arabica*, 41 (1994), pp. 127–133, esp. pp. 128–131. Even if one believes as does Hodgson, see his 'Ghulāt', or H. Modarressi, see *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam* (Princeton, 1993), esp. pp. 21ff., that 'extremist' ideas were first professed by the *ghulāt* and not the imams (which from an historical perspective is practically impossible to verify; nor have either of these authors claimed it is), it is nevertheless the case that the 'orthodox' (thus reputedly 'moderate') Imami corpus contains almost all of them in one form or another.

97. This concurs with an influential current in early mysticism in which, in contrast to the ascetic current, miracles and the miraculous played a fundamental hagiographical role. Cf. now B. Radtke, 'The Concept of *Wilāya* in Early Sufism', in L. Lewisohn (ed.), *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi* (London and New York, 1993), pp. 483–496; the classification of miracles suggested by R. Gramlich, *Die Wunder der Freunde Gottes. Theologien und Erscheinungsformen des islamischen Heiligewunders* (Freiburger Islamstudien, 11) (Wiesbaden, 1987), in the second section, does not sufficiently take into account certain Shi'i material. Much later, when the dogma of the *mu'jiza* reserved exclusively for the prophets is established, classical Sufism, at least in its speculative and scholarly dimension, diminishes the importance of the miracle (henceforth called *karāma*) as proof of saintliness; cf. D. Gril, 'Le miracle en islam, critère de la sainteté?', in D. Agile (ed.), *Saints orientaux, Hagiographies médiévales comparées* (Paris, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 69–81. Unlike the ascetico-mystical currents, early Shi'ism does not conceive the miracle as a possible result of piety and moral rectitude; rather

tion the imams seem to have required of them was discretion, absolute respect for *taqiyya*. The initiate was obliged to keep his supra-natural Powers secret.

The requirement for discretion had its own reasons, of an esoteric, but also political and socio-communal nature. The miracle, as we have seen – a sign and proof of imamate – conferred on the thaumaturge an undeniable authority. The ‘gnostic revolutionaries’⁹⁸ not only jeopardised the safety of the Shi‘is by exposing them to the wrath of those in power, but also defied the supreme authority of the imams. The many *ḥadīths* of the imams against ‘the desire to rule’ (*ṭalab al-ri’āsa*) are obviously a call to a quietist and apolitical stance;⁹⁹ but they are also most likely a denunciation of all other authority except their own, including that of the ‘gnostic revolutionaries’, all the more so since most of the *ḥadīths* date back to the imams al-Bāqir and, especially, Ja‘far, who counted the largest number of ‘extremists’ among their disciples.¹⁰⁰

Forsaken is he who seeks to command;¹⁰¹ Distrust those who command and consider themselves leaders. By God, the man behind whom is heard the sound of sandals [belonging to his supporters] will only perish and cause to perish;¹⁰² Cursed is the one who believes himself leader, cursed is he who attempts to become one,

the miracle is described as an almost certain consequence of an ontological disposition and of secret knowledge, itself acquired due to piety, purity and especially *walāya* or alliance with the imams.

98. According to Wasserstrom’s expression, ‘The Moving Finger’, p. 27.

99. Cf. *Guide divin*, pp. 155–173, esp. pp. 170–171 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 61ff., esp. p. 68).

100. See al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 3, pp. 405–407 (‘Kitāb al-īmān wa’l-kufr’, ‘Bāb ṭalab al-ri’āsa’); on ‘those who claim to be leaders’ (*mutara’asūn*), see al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 148, 151–152 and 207–208; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 15, tome 3, pp. 102–104. The term *ri’āsa* designates both religious and political leadership; a *ra’īs* can at once be a political leader, a leader of men, a theologian or jurist ‘head of a School’.

101. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, *ibid.*, nos 2 and 7.

102. *Ibid.*, no. 3.

cursed is one who declares himself thus;¹⁰³ Avoid leading [people] and avoid following them leaders.¹⁰⁴

The authority of the imams was not threatened solely by their miracle-working followers and activists. It was also undermined by certain theologians and jurists in their community. Indeed, from the imates of al-Bāqir and especially al-Šādiq onwards, certain individuals in the entourage of the imams seemed to profess theological doctrines that were independent of those of their masters: Zurāra b. A'yan (d. 150/767) of Byzantine Christian origin, Hishām b. Sālim al-Jawālīqī and Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān 'Mu'min' (or according to his adversaries 'Shayṭān') al-Ṭāq, both with Murji'i Jahmī tendencies, Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. ca. 179/795–796) in whom Dayṣāni influences are evident, and two of the companions of Zurāra, Muḥammad b. Muslim and Burayd b. Mu'āwiya.¹⁰⁵ In the *Rijāl* by al-Kashshī the latter three are justifiably called *al-mutara'isūn fī adyānihim* ('those who call themselves leaders in [i.e. because of] their religious beliefs').¹⁰⁶ The imams seem to have been obliged to maintain a paradoxical attitude towards these kinds of 'disciples': on the one hand they criticised them most harshly, if not dissociating themselves from them and cursing them for their independence vis-à-vis the authority of the imams; and, on the other hand, they tolerated them because the Imami cause needed their theological acumen for polemical debates with followers of other religious groups.¹⁰⁷ From the ima-

103. Ibid., no. 4.

104. Ibid., no. 5. On *ri'āsa* see also E. Kohlberg, 'Barā'a in Shī'i doctrine', *JSAI*, 7 (1986), pp. 139–175, esp. 158–161 and, 'Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period', in S. A. Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (Albany, NY, 1988), pp. 25–53 (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, XIII), pp. 35–37.

105. On these individuals and their ideas, now consult van Ess, *Theologie*, vols 1 and 2, see index.

106. Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 151, 174 and 208; Kohlberg, 'Barā'a', p. 158; Kohlberg, 'Imam', p. 36.

107. Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 168; Kohlberg 'Barā'a', pp. 158–160; Kohlberg, 'Imam', pp. 36–37.

mate of al-Riḍā (183 to 203/799 to 818) onwards, the independence of regional scholars with regard to the authority of the imams increased. The historical reasons for this are obvious: the expansion of Imamism and the ever-growing communities establishing themselves in the most remote regions far away from the imams (especially in central and north-eastern Iran and as far as Central Asia);¹⁰⁸ and also the fact that the imams were very closely observed by the 'Abbasid authorities; the ninth, tenth and eleventh imams in particular spent practically their entire lives under surveillance. Jurists in the old Imami centre of Qumm seem to have benefitted the most from this situation in which direct communication with the imam became increasingly problematic. The following two examples are revealing: imam al-Riḍā himself gave full authority to Zakariyā b. Ādam in Qumm to settle any legal issues faced by the Shi'is in Iran, by comparing his importance in this city with that of imam al-Kāẓim in Baghdad.¹⁰⁹ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ash'arī al-Qummī, a disciple of the eighth, ninth and tenth imams and a powerful leader of the community in Qumm, without any authorisation from the imam accused three important individuals in the community of *waqf* or *ghuluww* and excommunicated them: Abū Sumayna al-Ṣayrafī, scholar and esoterist; Sahl b. Ziyād al-Ādamī, himself a disciple of the ninth, tenth and eleventh imams; and finally, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Barqī, author of the famous *Kitāb al-maḥāsin*.¹¹⁰

108. On the history of the conversion of the Iranian peoples to Imami Shi'ism see A. Mishkāt Kermānī, *Tārikh-e tashayyu' dar Īrān* (Tehran, 1358 Sh./1980); R. Ja'fariyān, *Tārikh-e tashayyu' dar Īrān: az āghāz tā qarn-e dahom-e hejrī* (Qumm, 1375 Sh./1996).

109. Al-Mufid, *Ikhtisāṣ*, pp. 83f.; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 496; Kohlberg, 'Barā'a', p. 160; Kohlberg, 'Imam' pp. 37–38. See also the important letter by al-Riḍā to his disciple 'Abd Allāh b. Jundab, reported by al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 489, cited and analysed by M. M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmi Shiism* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 98–99.

110. Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 234; 'Alī al-Quhpā'i, *Majma' al-rijāl* (Isfahan, 1384–1387/1964–1967), vol. 3, p. 179 and vol. 5, pp. 264–265; Muḥammad Taqī al-Tustarī, *Qāmūs al-rijāl* (Tehran, 1379/1958), vol. 1, pp. 189, 390 and 420; Kohlberg, 'Barā'a', pp. 160–161; Kohlberg, 'Imam', p. 39.

According to the tradition, the minor Occultation of the twelfth and last imam began in 260/874, leading, seventy lunar years later in 329/941, to his definitive or major Occultation.¹¹¹ The imam is no longer present, or according to the Imami belief that gradually imposed itself and equates Imamism with Twelverism,¹¹² he is and will remain hidden until the End of Time. Even the institution of the hidden imam's delegation held by a single person (*niyāba/sifāra/wikāla*) seems to be a later conceptual development;¹¹³ it is no less true that the four individuals later recognised as having been successively the 'representatives' of the imam during the minor Occultation, were particularly important spiritual and financial authorities. The first two, 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd al-'Amrī/al-'Umarī and his son Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān (d. ca. 305/917) were already financial agents, that is, collectors of religious taxes for the tenth and eleventh imams. They remained so after the Occultation, on behalf of the hidden imam, as did both their 'successors', al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī (d. 326/937) and 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Simmarī (d. 329/941).¹¹⁴ These four 'delegates' would have belonged to

111. On this period see Javad Ali, 'Die beiden ersten Safire des Zwölften Imams', *Der Islam*, 25 (1939), pp. 197–227; M. al-Ṣadr, *Ta'rikh al-ghayba al-ṣughra* (Beirut, 1972); A. A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: the Idea of the Mahdī in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany, NY, 1981), pp. 41ff.; J. M. Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background* (London, 1982); V. Klemm, 'Die vier *Sufarā*' des Zwölften Imams. Zur formativen Periode der Zwölferschia', *Die Welt des Orients*, 15 (1984), pp. 126–143; Modarressi, *Crisis*, passim; S. A. Arjomand, 'The Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation in Twelver Shi'ism', *IJMES*, 28 (1996), pp. 491–515.

112. E. Kohlberg, 'From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-'ashariyya', *BSOAS*, 39 (1976), pp. 521–534 (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, XIV) and 'Early Attestations of the Term *ithnā'ashariyya*', *JSAI*, 24 (2000), pp. 343–357; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 245–264 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 99–108) and 'Al-Ṣaffār', pp. 236–242; Chapter 13, this volume.

113. This is a central thesis of the very well researched and convincing work by Klemm, 'Die vier *Sufarā*'.

114. Refer to the studies given in note 111.

the category of jurist-theologians,¹¹⁵ the majority of whom took a very sceptical view of miracles performed by anyone other than the imam. However, once the institution of the 'delegation' was elevated to the status of an article of faith, different miracles were attributed to the four delegates:¹¹⁶ powers of divination, clairvoyance, knowledge of languages, reading thoughts, writing from a distance, power over objects, knowledge of the science of letters and of course supra sense-perceptible communication with the hidden imam.¹¹⁷ According to Imami belief, the miracle-working powers the four delegates were due to their privileged relationship with the hidden imam and the initiation they received from him. Indeed these miracles were proof of their legitimacy and lent credibility to their claims.

Shortly thereafter, things were to change radically for the majority of the Twelvers. From the second half of the fourth/tenth century, the 'theologico-legal-rational' movement, which continues to this day, began to dominate, thus marginalising the original 'esoteric non-rational' current.¹¹⁸ After the Occultation

115. The Imami scholar from Basra, Ibn Nūḥ al-Sirāfī (early fifth/eleventh century) had compiled a legal compendium called *Akhhbār al-wukalā' al-arba'a* (al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 63) or *Kitāb akhhbār al-abwāb* (al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, p. 62).

116. Their canonisation was owed especially to Ibn Bābūya (d. 381/991) and his work *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'ma*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (rpr. Qumm, 1405/1985); see e.g. Chapter 12, this volume.

117. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, vol. 2, pp. 486, 501–504, 507–510, 516–522; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 273–275 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 112–113).

118. I have devoted several studies to this process: *Guide divin*, pp. 15–48 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 6–19); 'Šaffār', pp. 223–242; 'Réflexions sur une évolution du shī'isme duodécimain: tradition et idéologisation', in E. Patlagean and A. Le Boulluec (eds), *Les retours aux Écritures. Fondamentalismes présents et passés* (Louvain and Paris, 1993), pp. 63–82; 'Remarques sur les critères d'authenticité du ḥadīth et l'autorité du juriste dans le shī'isme imāmīte', *SI*, 85 (1997), esp. pp. 17–28. Belief in the miraculous powers of the imams is discussed by al-Mufīd who accuses thinkers belonging to al-Nawbakhtī's family, mainly influenced by Mu'tazilism, of rejecting them. Al-Mufīd, *Awā'il al-maqa'lāt*, ed. F. Zanjānī (Tabriz, 1371/1951–1952), French tr. D. Sourdel, *L'imamisme vu par le cheikh al-Mufīd* (Paris, 1972), pp. 40–41; see also McDermott, *The Theology*, p. 112 and Modarressi, *Crisis*, p. 44.

and the following period of confusion and rapid growth of a number of more or less short-lived schisms,¹¹⁹ Doctors of Law and scholastic theologians were to become ever more powerful, mercilessly fighting Shi'i movements led by the 'gnostic' thaumaturges who often cherished revolutionary and messianic ideas.¹²⁰ The authority of these threatened that of the Doctors of Law and

119. This is the period known as *ḥayra* (confusion, perplexity). A. A. Sachedina lists up to thirteen schisms after the death of al-ʿAskarī (*Messianism*, pp. 42–55). Among the famous defections from imamism, the case of Ibn Ḥawshab Maṣṣūr al-Yaman is known; he became an Ismaili and an important figure; see H. Halm, 'Die *Sīrat Ibn Ḥawshab*. Die ismailitische *daʿwa* im Jemen und die Fatimiden', *Die Welt des Orients*, 12 (1981), pp. 107–135.

120. See the works by S. A. Arjomand, in particular his introduction to the collective work published under his direction, *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (Albany, NY, 1988): 'Shi'ism, authority and political culture', pp. 1–24; also his 'The Consolation of Theology: Absence of the Imam and Transition from Chiliasm to Law in Shi'ism', *The Journal of Religion*, 21 (1996), pp. 548–571 and 'The Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation in Twelver Shi'ism', *IJMES*, 28 (1996), pp. 491–515. In this regard, the role of the imami jurist-theologians of Baghdad and Qumm, Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī at the helm, in the trial and execution of al-Ḥallāj (who was initiated into several 'extremist' Shi'i sects, the friend of a number of notable personalities of esoteric Shi'ism and the eponym of the esoteric Shi'i sect al-Ḥallājiyya) seems especially significant. L. Massignon who masterfully discusses the responsibility of the Shi'is in the tragic fate of the executed mystic, nevertheless gives too monolithic an impression of Shi'ism and fails to stress sufficiently the fact that, with al-Ḥallāj as an example, Shi'i scholars sought to eliminate their esoterist co-religionists and/or to take their place in key posts in the 'Abbasid administrative and financial offices. The role played by al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī, third 'representative' of the hidden imam, in the trial and execution of the Shi'i Ḥallājīan esoterist al-Shalmaghānī mirrors that played by Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī in the tragedy of al-Ḥallāj and led to the same sorry end. Note that the latter was executed in 309/921, and al-Shalmaghānī in 322/933; one might wonder to what extent the successive victories of Imami jurist-theologians of the rationalist current and their infiltration of the structures of 'Abbasid power contributed to the Buyid seizure of power (themselves Shi'is and rationalists) in 334/945. Many esoterist Imamis were to join the Qarmaṭis of Baḥrayn or the Fatimid Ismailis. This subject deserves a separate study; see L. Massignon, *La passion de Ḥallāj. Martyr mystique de l'Islam* (Paris, 1975), see index: al-Nawbakhtī (A. Sahl Ismā'il b. 'Alī), al-Nawbakhtī (Hy. b. Rawḥ), al-Shalmaghānī (A. Ja'far M. b. 'Alī Ibn Abu'l-'Azāqir).

the theologians, and the spirituality they preached was much too 'unwieldy' to be controlled. For the rationalist trend, the four representatives were to be the last among the initiated faithful able to perform miracles. The term *'ilm*, hitherto meaning initiatory science or knowledge providing access to miraculous powers, was now completely 'disavowed' and henceforth designated only the religious sciences, mainly rational theology and canonic law.¹²¹ Certain later thinkers, admittedly isolated cases, would go so far as to question the superhuman knowledge of the imams,¹²² no doubt in order to reduce the distance between the imams and the jurist-theologians (endowed with strictly human knowledge) and by so doing, to increase the latter's charismatic authority. The ancient adage 'knowledge is power' still remained valid, but its content changed; 'knowledge' was no longer initiatory science but that of the theologico-legal disciplines. 'Power' was no longer thaumaturgical ability but temporal authority. In the absence of the imam and except for him, miracles were not proof of saintliness; quite the contrary, they attested to the lies and falsehood of the one who claimed to be capable of performing them since they were now considered to be no more than just 'amazing tricks' (*makhārīq*), 'conjuring' (*sha'badha*) and 'ruses' or crafty stratagem (*hīla*).¹²³

At the same time, the earliest major compilers of *ḥadīths* were successful in transmitting an impressive number of esoteric and occult teachings that they traced back to the imams. Over the

121. On the evolution of the term, see Amir-Moezzi, 'Réflexions sur une évolution du shi'isme duodécimain'; also J. Matīnī, 'Ilm va 'ulamā' dar zabān-e Qur'ān va aḥādīth', *Iran-Nameh*, II/3 (1363 Sh./1984), pp. 147–162.

122. Al-Mufid, *Sharḥ 'aqā'id al-Ṣadūq aw Taṣḥīḥ al-i'tiqād* (Tabriz, 1371/1951), pp. 65f. (where the author condemns this 'reductionism' [*taqṣīr*] by certain scholars from Qumm); al-Mufid, *Awā'il*, p. 41; al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *Tanzīh al-anbiyā'* (Najaf, 1380/1960), pp. 221ff. (in an introduction to the tragedy at Karbalā, the author seriously questions Imam al-Ḥusayn's foreknowledge). Al-Ash'arī had maintained that some groups among the Imamis put stock in the miraculous powers of the imams (al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, pp. 50–51), which tends to indicate that the Imamis of his period differed on this subject.

123. Cf. e.g. al-Rawandī, *Kharā'ij*, vol. 3, pp. 1018ff.

course of centuries, and on the margins of rationalist domination, a number of isolated thinkers would perpetuate and then transmit this original tradition (for example, al-Rāwandī or Ibn al-Bīṭrīq in the sixth/twelfth century; Ibn Ṭāwūs, al-Irbilī and thinkers from the School of Baḥrayn; Ibn Sa'āda, 'Alī b. Sulaymān and Maytham/Mītham al-Baḥrānī in the seventh/thirteenth century; Ḥaydar al-Āmulī and Rajab al-Bursī in the eighth/fourteenth century; Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī in the ninth–tenth/fifteenth–sixteenth centuries, etc.).¹²⁴ The persistence of the early tradition, along with

124. Studies on some of these thinkers exist; on Ibn Ṭāwūs, see especially E. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work. Ibn Ṭāwūs and his Library* (Leiden, 1992) and Kohlberg, 'Alī b. Mūsā ibn Ṭāwūs and his Polemic against Sunnism', in the Proceedings of the Symposium *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1992), pp. 325–350; see also Z. Matar, 'The *Faraj al-mahmūm* of Ibn Ṭāwūs: a Thirteenth-Century Work on Astrology and Astrologers' (PhD, New York University, 1986), as well as two of her articles on the same subject, 'Some Additions to the Bibliography of Mediaeval Islamic Astronomy from the *Faraj al-Mahmūm* of Ibn Ṭāwūs', *Archiv Orientalni*, 57 (1989), pp. 319–322 and 'The Chapter on Death-Prediction (*Qaṭ'/'Quṭū*) from the *Kitāb Faraj al-Mahmūm* by Ibn Ṭāwūs', in A. Regourd and P. Lory (eds), *Sciences occultes et Islam*, BEO, 44 (1993), pp. 119–125. On the School of Baḥrayn, see A. al-Oraibi, 'Shī'i Renaissance. A Case Study of the Theosophical School of Bahrain in the 7th/13th Century' (McGill University Montreal, 1992). On Ḥaydar al-Āmulī, see the introduction by H. Corbin to Ḥaydar al-Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār wa manba' al-anwār*, ed. H. Corbin and O. Yahia (Tehran and Paris, 1969); H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 4 vols (Paris, 1971–1972), Book IV/1, III, pp. 149–213; P. Antes, *Zur Theologie des Schi'a. Eine Untersuchung des Jāmi' al-asrār wa Manba' al-anwār von Sayyid Ḥaidar Āmolī* (Fribourg, 1971). On Rajab al-Bursī, see H. Corbin, 'La gnose islamique dans le recueil de traditions (*Mashāriq al-anwār*) de Rajab Borsī', *Annuaire de l'EPHE, Sciences Religieuses*, 1968–1969 and 1969–1970 (rpr. in *Itinéraire d'un enseignement* [Tehran and Paris, 1993], pp. 104–114); T. Lawson, 'The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty in the Divine Secrets Connected with the Commander of the Faithful by Rajab Bursī', in L. Lewisohn (ed.), *The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 261–276; P. Lory's introduction to a partial translation of the *Mashāriq* in Rajab al-Bursī, *Les Orients des Lumières*, tr. H. Corbin (Paris, 1996). On Ibn Abī Jumhūr, see W. Madelung, 'Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī's Synthesis of *Kalām*, Philosophy and Sufism', in *La signification du Bas Moyen Âge dans l'histoire et la culture du monde musulman* (Actes du 8e Congrès de l'Union européenne des arabisants et islamisants) (Aix-en-Provence, 1978), pp. 147–156 (rpr. in Madelung, *Religious Schools*, article 13); S. Schmidtke, 'The Influence of Shams al-Dīn Shahrazūrī

the resurgence in Iran of mystical Imami brotherhoods from the tenth/sixteenth century onwards (more than six centuries after the time of the imams), enabled the miraculous powers of the believer, initiated by the imam through supra sense-perceptible means, to once more gain acceptance, and this in spite of persecution, at times violent, by the rationalist jurists.¹²⁵ But that is another story.

(7th/13th century) on Ibn Abi Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī (d. after 904/1499). A Preliminary Note', in L. Edzard and C. Szyska (eds), *Encounters of Words and Texts: Intercultural Studies in Honor of Stefan Wild on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday. Presented by his Pupils in Bonn* (Hildesheim, 1997), pp. 223–232 and now especially S. Schmidtke, *Theologie, Philosophie und Mystik im zwölfershi'itischen Islam des 9./14. Jahrhunderts. Die Gedankenwelten des Ibn Abi Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī (um 838/1434–35 – nach 906/1501)* (Leiden, 2000).

125. See R. Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, vol. 1: *Glaube und Lehre* (Wiesbaden, 1976).

Notes on Imami *Walāya*

As is widely known, Shi'ism is centred on the notion of *walāya*. The Shi'is refer to themselves as 'the people of *walāya*' (*ahl al-walāya*). The charisma of the imam, the very nature of his Person, seems entirely focused on this concept. This chapter attempts to examine the content of *walāya* – and especially ways in which the term is understood – to foster a better appreciation of what may be considered the very substance of the Shi'i faith in general and Imami beliefs in particular.

Walāya and the Qur'ān

When one considers the evidence of the earliest Imami sources that have come down to us, that is to say sources mainly from the pre-Buyid period, one realises that for almost all Shi'is, the so-called 'Uthmānian Qur'ānic vulgate was a censured and falsified version of the original revelation received by Muḥammad. This much more voluminous version, than the one known to all, was recorded in the recension by 'Alī and remains in the possession of the Imams to be revealed universally by the Qā'im at the End of Time.¹

1. On this topic see now E. Kohlberg and M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and falsification: The Kitāb al-Qirā'āt of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 24–46; J. Eliash, 'The Shi'ite Qur'ān Reconsideration of Goldziher's Interpretation', *Arabica*, 16 (1969), pp. 15–24; E. Kohlberg, 'Some

This explosive belief was apparently abandoned from the Buyid period onwards by the dominant trend of Imamism, yet to some extent it was still held to secretly and has continued to nourish certain minority branches to the present day.² Early sources include quotations from this 'complete' Qur'ān, containing words, expressions or parts of sentences that at times differ significantly from the official recension.³ Now, among these expressions 'censured'

Notes on the Imāmite Attitude to the Qur'ān', in S. Stern, A. Hourani and V. Brown (eds), *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: Essays Presented to Richard Walzer* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 209–224; T. Lawson, 'Notes for the Study of a 'Shi'i Qur'ān', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 36 (1991), pp. 279–295; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 200–227 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 79–90); M. M. Bar-Asher, 'Variant Readings and Additions of the Imāmi-Shi'a to the Quran', *IOS*, 13 (1993), pp. 39–74 and *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmi Shiism* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 88ff. See also A. Falaturi, 'Die Zwölfer-Schia aus der Sicht eines Schiiten: Problem ihrer Untersuchung', in *Festschrift Werner Caskel* (Leiden, 1968), pp. 2–95; H. Modarressi, 'Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qur'ān', *SI*, 77 (1993), pp. 5–39; P. Sander, 'Koran oder Imām? Die Auffassung von Koran im Rahmen der imāmitischen Glaubenslehren', *Arabica*, special no., 'Les usages du Coran, Présupposés et méthodes', 47/3–4 (2000), pp. 420–440; T. Bayhom-Daou, 'The Imam's Knowledge and the Quran According to al-Faql b. Shādhān al-Nisābūrī (d. 260 A.H./874 A.D.)', *BSOAS*, 64/2 (2001), pp. 188–207. Appearing to be more ideological than scientific, the latter four studies contain problems relating to methodology and employment of sources. The first two studies attempt at all costs to demonstrate the 'orthodox' nature of the Shi'i attitude towards the Qur'an at all times and in all places. The next two unconvincingly attribute Imami criticism of the vulgate to Shi'i *ghulāt* and describe the principal Imami trend (which might that be?) as having always been 'moderate' and 'rationalist', or essentially 'legalist', according to the latest study, to be precise. These points of view do not stand up to the evidence from countless traditions as reported by the earliest sources and employed by the other studies mentioned in this note. Finally, I have not had the time to employ, as it deserves, the excellent and recently published work of Dakake M. Massi, *The Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam* (New York, 2007), a monographic study devoted to the concept of *walāya*.

2. Regarding the extension of this question to the modern and contemporary period see R. Brunner, *Die Schia und die Koranfälschung* (Würzburg, Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 2001).

3. For these quotations see, for instance, W. St. Clair Tisdall, 'Shi'ah Additions to the Koran', *The Moslem World*, 3/3 (1913), pp. 227–241 (based on a manuscript of the Qur'an from Bankipore, India, dated sixteenth or seventeenth

by ‘enemies’ of the Shi‘is, those that recur most frequently would have concerned ‘Alī, the descendants of the Prophet (i.e. the imams) and their *walāya*.⁴ To cite a few examples (expressions in addition to the official vulgate are in *italics*):

Q 2:87: ... and whensoever there came to you *Muḥammad* [instead of a messenger] to reveal something *concerning the muwālāt of ‘Alī* [here *muwālāt* is synonymous with *walāya*, see below] with that your souls had not desire for, did you become arrogant, and some *among the Family of Muḥammad* cry lies to, and some slay?⁵

century AD); Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 210–214 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 84–85); M. M. Bar-Asher, ‘Variant Readings’, pp. 39–74, 51–72 and esp. Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification* (Arabic text).

4. The reader will forgive us for not immediately translating this term and others belonging to the same root WLY. This study attempts to show, among other things, the semantic complexity of these terms and thus the difficulty in translating them once and for all. It should be specified straight away that this work deals exclusively with the Shi‘i technical meanings and not the entire, especially wide-ranging, semantic field related to this root; to cite just one example, the root WLY takes up almost ten folio pages formatted in two columns in Ibn Manẓūr’s, *Lisān al-‘arab* (3rd edn, Beirut, 1414/1994), pp. 15, 406–415. Out of numerous relevant studies, these are some important works bearing mainly upon mysticism, M. Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints. Prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d’Ibn ‘Arabī* (Paris, 1986), see index under ‘WLY’; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra, Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin, 1990–1997), vol. 4, index of technical terms, under ‘w-l-y’; H. Landolt, ‘Walāyah’, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 15, pp. 316–323; B. Radtke and J. O’Kane, *The Concept of Saint-hood in Early Islamic Mysticism* (London, 1996); G. Elmore, *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Book of the Fabulous Gryphon* (Leiden, 1999), particularly pp. 111–140 (on the influence of Shi‘ism upon the eschatological hagiography in Ibn ‘Arabī); P. Walker, ‘Wilāya’, in Shi‘ism, *EI2*, vol. 10, pp. 208–209; and now see Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*.

5. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi fī ‘ilm al-dīn*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī, 4 vols (Tehran, n.d.), ‘Kitāb al-ḥujja’, ‘Bāb fihi nukat wa nutaf min al-tanzīl fi’l-walāya’, vol. 2, p. 285, no. 31; cf. al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā’āt* in E. Kohlberg and M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, p. 18, no. 51 (Arabic text) and p. 76 (notes).

Q 4:167–170: Surely the unbelievers who are unjust [instead of those who deny and are unjust], *regarding the rights of the Family of Muḥammad*, God would not forgive them, neither guide them on any road/ but the road to Gehenna, therein dwelling forever and ever; and that for God is an easy matter./ O men, the Messenger has now come to you with the truth *about the walāya of 'Alī* from your Lord; so believe; better is it for you. And if you deny *the walāya of 'Alī* know that to God belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth.⁶

Q 5:67: O Messenger, deliver that which has been sent down to thee from the Lord *regarding 'Alī*.⁷

Q 7:172: And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' *Is Muḥammad not the messenger of God, 'Alī not the Prince of initiates?* They said, 'Yes, we testify.'⁸

6. 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, ed. al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'iri (Najaf, 1386–1387/1966–1968), vol. 1, p. 159; Muḥammad al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr* (Qumm, 1380/1960), vol. 1, p. 285; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, p. 295, no. 59; Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 5 vols (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 428; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Šāfi fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 2 vols (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 414; Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 110 vols (Tehran, 1376–1392/1956–1972), vol. 36, p. 99; cf. al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt in Revelation and Falsification*, p. 39, no. 138 (Arabic text) and p. 106 (notes).

7. Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt in Revelation and Falsification*, p. 45, no. 165 (Arabic text) and pp. 155–166 (notes); al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 201; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Šāfi*, vol. 1, pp. 460, 462–463; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 501 has, instead of *fī 'Alī*, the expression *anna 'Aliyyan mawlā'l-mu'minīn*.

8. Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt in Revelation and Falsification*, p. 52, no. 195 (Arabic text) and pp. 125–126 (notes); al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 41; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 50; al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudāt* (rpr. Tehran, 1364 Sh./1985), vol. 3, p. 545; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 9, p. 256. For this technical translation of *amīr al-mu'minīn* (i.e. 'Alī), literally 'Prince of the believers' and the notion of *mu'min* as the loyal-faithful Shi'i initiated into the teaching of the imams see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 174–199 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 69–79) and index under 'imān' and 'mu'min'; as well as Chapter 8, this volume. On this verse see also the article by R. Gramlich, *Der Islam*, 60 (1983), pp. 205–230.

Q 16:24: And when it is said to them, 'What has your Lord sent down *regarding* 'Alī?' they say, 'Fairy-tales of the ancients.'⁹

Q 17:89: We have indeed turned about for men in this Qur'ān every manner of similitude; yet most men refuse all but unbelief in the *walāya of 'Alī*.¹⁰

Q 33:71: Whosoever obeys God and His Messenger concerning the *walāya of 'Alī and the walāya of the imams after him*, has won a mighty triumph.¹¹

Q 40:13: because when God was called to alone, *as well as that [the unicity] of the People of walāya* you disbelieved.¹²

Q 41:27: So We shall let the unbelievers *who have fosaken the walāya of the Prince of the initiates* taste a terrible chastisement in this world, and shall recompense them with the worst of what they were working.¹³

Q 42:13: He has laid down for you *O Family of Muḥammad* as religion that He charged Noah with, and that We have revealed to thee, *O Muḥammad*, and that We charged Abraham with, Moses

9. Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, ed. M. al-Kāzīm (Tehran, 1410/1990), p. 234; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 383; al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 257; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 363; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Šāfi*, vol. 1, p. 920; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 9, p. 102 and vol. 36, p. 104.

10. Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 317; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 445; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Šāfi*, vol. 1, p. 989; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 9, p. 102 and vol. 36, p. 105; cf. al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt in Revelation and Falsification*, p. 79, no. 302 (arabic text) and pp. 161–162 (notes); On 'the majority' (*akthar al-nās*), in its technical sense denoting non-Shi'is, if not uninitiated Shi'is as opposed to 'the minority' (*aqall al-nās*), i.e. initiated Shi'is, see *Guide divin*, index under '*shī'a*'; Chapter 8 here, and now esp. E. Kohlberg, 'In Praise of the Few', in G. R. Hawting, J. A. Mojaddedi and A. Samely (eds), *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions, In Memory of Norman Calder*, JSS, suppl. 12 (2000), pp. 149–162.

11. Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt in Revelation and Falsification*, p. 111, no. 428 (arabic text) and p. 202 (notes); al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 198; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, p. 279, no. 8; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 3, p. 340; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Šāfi*, vol. 2, p. 369.

12. Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt in Revelation and Falsification*, p. 125, no. 478 (Arabic text) and p. 216 (notes); al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, p. 291, no. 46.

13. Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt in Revelation and Falsification*, p. 129, no. 489 (Arabic text) and p. 219 (notes); al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, *ibid.*, no. 45.

and Jesus: 'Establish the religion of the Family of Muḥammad, and scatter not regarding it *and be united*.' Very hateful is that for the associationists, *those that associate with the walāya of 'Alī* [i.e. other *walāyas*] thou callest them to *concerning the walāya of 'Alī*. Surely God guides, O Muḥammad towards this religion he who repents, *he who accepts your call to the walāya of 'Alī* [instead of God chooses unto Himself whomsoever He will, and He guides to Himself whosoever turns, penitent].¹⁴

Q 67:29: . . . and thou shalt certainly know, them, O denying people; whereas I brought you a message from my Lord concerning the *walāya of 'Alī and of the imams after him, which of us finds himself in manifest error*.¹⁵

Q 70:1–3: A questioner asked of a chastisement about to fall / for the unbelievers *in the walāya of 'Alī*, which none may avert, / from God, the Lord of the Stairways.¹⁶

One can continue expanding this list much further.¹⁷ Other than the 'Qur'ān of the imams' one may simply point out that according to Shi'i scribes the manuscript of the Qur'ān discovered by St Clair Tisdall (see note 3 above) contains an entire sura of seven verses precisely entitled the Sura of *walāya*, totally deleted from the original Revelation by the imam's adversaries:

14. Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, p. 387; al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfī*, ed. and Persian tr. by H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Tehran 1389/1969), vol. 2, p. 163, no. 502; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, p. 285, no. 32 (shorter version); al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 2, p. 509; cf. al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'at in Revelation and Falsification*, p. 131, nos 491 and 492 (Arabic text) and pp. 220–221 (notes).

15. Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'at in Revelation and Falsification*, p. 163, no. 594 (arabic text) and p. 249 (notes); al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, p. 291, no. 45.

16. Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'at in Revelation and Falsification*, p. 165, no. 601 (arabic text) and p. 251 (notes); al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 1, p. 83, no. 18; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, p. 291, no. 47; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 4, p. 381; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 2, p. 742.

17. Apart from the references in works already cited (note 2 and esp. note 3), see also e.g. al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 23, p. 374, no. 55; vol. 24, p. 336, no. 59; vol. 27, p. 159, no. 7; vol. 36, p. 100, no. 44 and vol. 51, p. 59, no. 57.

In the Name of God the Compassionate the Merciful/ You who believed, believe in the Prophet and the *wālī* that We have sent in order that they may guide you upon the right path / A Prophet and a *wālī* one from the other and I am the Omniscient He who knows all/ Those that remain loyal to the Pact of God, for them a Garden of delights / Whereas those that deny Our verses after hearing them/ They will be ushered into the Gehenna until the Day of Resurrection when they shall be asked to account for the oppressors and negators of the messengers./ [God] created them as the messengers [*sic*] especially for [the cause of] the truth and he shall soon manifest them/ Praise the Glory of your Lord and [know that] ‘Ali is among the witnesses.’¹⁸

This insistence on the original Revelation disclosed to Muḥammad concerning the *walāya* of the imams is, among other things, supposed to provide a literal Qur’ānic basis for the political and theological doctrines of the imamate. However, although not containing any literal indication of the *walāya* of the imams, and with reason, since all indications of this kind were systematically deleted by their adversaries, the official vulgate seems to abound in allusions to this notion. Exegetic annotations traced to the imams often refer to this.

According to several exegetic *ḥadīths* attributed to the sixth imam, Ja’far al-Šādiq, in verse 2:257: ‘He brings them forth from the shadows into the light’, ‘shadows’ refers to the adversaries of the imams and ‘light’ to the imams and/or their *walāya*.¹⁹

Practically all the Imami and indeed Shi’i sources in general unanimously affirm that the reason for the ‘descent’ of the famous verse 5:3 (‘Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you’) is the proclamation of

18. St Clair Tisdall, ‘Shi’ah additions’, the Arabic text of ‘the sura’ p. 226; English, p. 234; for a discussion on this ‘sura’ see *Guide divin*, pp. 224–228 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 87–91); also Brunner, *Die Schia und die Koranfälschung*, pp. 16, 95–96.

19. Al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 138–139; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 15/1, pp. 17, 129; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 244; Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, p. 197.

the *walāya* of 'Alī by Muḥammad; hence the regular association of this verse with the events at Ghadīr Khumm. There are countless *ḥadīths* that refer to this matter.²⁰ One therefore often finds in Shi'i works expressions such as 'Religion is perfected by *walāya*',/ 'The cause of *walāya* (or imamate) completes the faith' and 'It is by *walāya* (or imamate) that religion and the (divine) blessing is perfected'.²¹

Sources unanimously consider verse 67 of this same Sura 5 to be an allusion to the *walāya* of the imams; in effect God commands Muḥammad to openly reveal the truth regarding the *walāya* of 'Alī and his descendants (see above); this verse would have been revealed prior to Ghadīr Khumm, whereas verse 5:3, which we have just examined, is said to have 'descended' shortly thereafter:

20. See e.g. al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol 1, p. 293; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 190; Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, pp. 117–120; Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī, *Tafsīr al-tibyān*, 10 vols (Najaf, 1957), vol. 3, pp. 435ff.; Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Tehran, 1395/1975), vol. 3, p. 159; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 9, p. 306; al-Bahrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 444; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Šāfi*, vol. 1, p. 421; Sharaf al-Dīn al-Najafī al-Astarābādī, *Ta'wīl al-āyāt al-zāhira*, (Qumm, 1417/1997), pp. 151–152; Bar-Asher, *Scripture*, p. 197. For the especially important role of this verse among Ismailis see e.g. al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, ed. A. A. A. Fyzee (Cairo, 1370/1951), vol. 1, p. 16 et passim; Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-zīna*, ed. 'A. S. Sāmarrā'i in his *al-Ghuluww wa'l-firaq al-ghālīya fī'l-ḥadārat al-islāmiyya* (Baghdad, 1972), pp. 256ff. See also the sources indicated by E. Kohlberg, 'The Attitude of the Imāmi-Shi'is to the Companions of the Prophet' (University of Oxford, 1971), p. 81, n. 5, as well as in general, 'A. H. Amīnī, *al-Ghadīr fī'l-kitāb wa'l-sunna wa'l-adab* (Tehran, 1372/1952; rpr. 1986). On Ghadīr Khumm, see the article by L. Vecchia Vaglieri in *EI2*, also *Elr*.

21. *Kamāl al-dīn bi'l-walāya; amr al-walāya/al-imāma min tamām al-dīn; bi'l-walāya/al-imāma kumila'l-dīn wa tummat al-ni'ma*; see e.g. al-Faḍl b. Shādhān, *Kitāb al-idāh* (Beirut, 1402/1982), p. 185; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, p. 278; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'ma* (even the title refers to it), ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (rpr. Qumm, 1405/1985), vol. 2, p. 658. See also the index in al-Majlisī's *Biḥār* and Bayhom-Daou, 'The Imam's Knowledge and the Quran' (see note 1 above), p. 195, n. 55 (the interpretation of the third expression mentioned above in which the verbs are put into the active form seems problematic).

5:67: 'O Messenger, deliver that which has been sent down to you from your Lord; for if you do not, you will not have delivered his Message.'²²

Imam al-Bāqir is said to have stated that 'the way that is straightest' (*aqwam*) mentioned in verse 17:9: 'Surely, this Qur'ān guides to the way that is straightest', refers to the *walāya* of the imams.²³ In a commentary on Q 27:91, which tradition attributed to 'Alī:

Whosoever comes with a good deed (*al-ḥasana*), he shall have better than it; and they shall be secure from terror that day. And whosoever comes with an evil deed (*sayyi'a*), their faces shall be thrust into the Fire: 'Are you recompensed but for what you did?' It is said: 'The good deed is recognition of our *walāya* and love (*ḥubb*) for us, the *ahl al-bayt*. The evil deed is denial of our *walāya* and hatred (*bughḍ*) for us.'²⁴

According to a tradition going back to the Prophet regarding the same verse:

22. Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 331–332; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 199–202; Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, pp. 129–131; Ibn Bābūye, *Amālī* (= *al-Majālis*), ed and Persian tr. M. B. Kamare'i (Tehran, 1404/1984), 'majlis' 56, no. 10; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, vol. 1, pp. 574ff.; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 489; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 9, p. 207; al-Astarābādī, *Ta'wīl*, pp. 161–165. On commentaries by imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir on these and other verses, see A. R. Lalani, *Early Shi'a Thought: The Teachings of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir* (London, 2000), pp. 61ff. See note 7 above and the relevant text (remarking that an allusion to the *walāya* of 'Alī appeared in the original text of the Qur'an).

23. Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 283; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 409; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Šāfi*, vol. 1, p. 960; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 7, p. 120; al-Astarābādī, *Ta'wīl*, p. 273 (according to al-Kulaynī's *Kāfi*, this work reports a tradition going back to imam Ja'far that says 'imam' instead of '*walāya*').

24. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb ma'rifat al-imām', vol. 1, p. 262, no. 14. See also *al-Uṣūl al-sittat 'ashar* (Qumm, 1405/1984), p. 117; Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, pp. 311–312; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 132 (where other instances of the term *ḥasana* are also commented upon as meaning the *walāya* of the imams); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 7, p. 117, no. 54; al-Astarābādī, *Ta'wīl al-āyāt al-zāhira*, pp. 403–405. Regarding the translation of *ahl al-bayt* see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Considerations sur l'expression *ḍīn 'Alī*, Aux origines de la foi shi'ite', *ZDMG*, 150/1 (2000), pp. 48ff.; Chapter 1, this volume.

The *walāya* of 'Alī is a good deed that cannot give rise to an error. ... Just as the *walāya* of his adversaries (*aḍḍād*) is a misdeed that nothing can efface.²⁵

According to *ḥadīths* going back to several of the imams, the exegesis of Q 39:56 ('Lest any soul should say, "Alas for me, in that I neglected God's side and was a scoffer. . . .") establishes a synonymous relationship between 'the side of God' and the figure of the imam and/or his *walāya*.²⁶

Here again one can cite many more examples. Very often while speaking of the unbelievers when the Qur'ānic text employs the root *KFR* (to negate, deny, disbelieve, be impious etc.), exegetic traditions attributed to the imams add *bi-nubuwwat Muḥammad wa walāyat 'Alī* ('to deny' the prophetic mission of Muḥammad and the *walāya* of 'Alī). As has been seen, certain Qur'ānic terms are associated with *walāya*, namely *nūr* (light), *aqwam* (the most direct path), *ḥasana* (good deed), *janb Allāh* (God's side).

Other terms are likewise associated, in some cases even more frequently, in doctrinal literature: *al-ḥaqq* (the truth, real, right), *ḥikma* (wisdom), *sabīl* (path), *ṣirāṭ mustaqīm* (straight path), *na'im* (benefit, delight), *raḥma* (mercy), *'ahd* (pact), *dhikr* (remembrance) and of course *īmān* (faith) and *amr* (cause, the *res religiosa*).²⁷ One need only refer to the exegetic glosses that deal with these instances in the Qur'ān; by just turning for example to pre-Buyid *tafsīrs*, one becomes convinced that, according to the Shi'is, numerous passages in the 'Uthmānic vulgate are devoted to different aspects of the *walāya* of the imam and this in spite of

25. Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 8, p. 300, no. 50, also vol. 8, pp. 352ff.

26. Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, ed. Mirzā Kūchebāghī (Tabriz, n.d. [ca. 1960]), section 2, ch. 3, pp. 61–63; Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, pp. 366ff.; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 4, p. 9, no. 18 and vol. 7, p. 200, no. 78; al-Astarābādī, *Ta'wīl al-āyāt al-zāhira*, pp. 508–509.

27. See Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, p. 202.

censorship. Hence the following *ḥadīth* attributed to imam Ja'far: 'God has made of our *walāya*, we the *ahl al-bayt*, the axis (*quṭb*) around which the Qur'ān gravitates.'²⁸

The Pillars of Islam

In the economy of the sacred, *walāya* is essential and of such fundamental importance that it is considered one of the Pillars (*da'ā'im*) if not *the* Pillar of Islam.²⁹ M. M. Bar-Asher's observation that for Shi'is the *walāya* of the imams is the most important of the canonical obligations and a precondition for all the rest is very pertinent. The many traditions describing *walāya* as one of the Pillars as well as a number of differences among these traditions lead him (just as J. Eliash before him) to wonder whether one must count *walāya* among the five Pillars or rather as a sixth one in itself.³⁰ Indeed, to cite al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940–941) as only one example, in a chapter of his *Uṣūl min al-Kāfī* dealing with the subject of the Pillars of Islam he reports fifteen traditions all going back to the fifth and sixth imams in which *walāya* is included separately as one of the five Pillars:³¹

28. Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 5; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 10; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Šāfi*, vol. 1, p. 12; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 19, p. 8.

29. To designate the Pillars of Islam, Shi'i literature tends to use the term *da'ā'im* than *arkān*, which is employed more often by Sunni authors, see E. Kohlberg, 'The Attitude of the Imāmi-Shi'is to the Companions of the Prophet', p. 81, note 4.

30. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, part 3.3 devoted to the necessity of *walāya*, pp. 196–198; J. Eliash, 'On the Genesis and Development of the Twelver-Shi'i Three-tenet *Shahāda*', *Der Islam*, 47 (1971), pp. 265–272. On the same subject now see L. A. Takim, 'From *bid'a* to *sunna*, the *wilāya* of 'Alī in the Shi'i *adhān*', *JAOS*, 120 (2000), pp. 166–177 (curiously the author appears to ignore Eliash's pioneering article). See also Lalani, *Early Shi'i Thought*, pp. 69f.

31. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-īmān wa'l-kufr', 'Bāb da'ā'im al-islām', vol. 3, pp. 29–38.

Islam is built upon five elements: canonical prayers, alms, the fast, pilgrimage to Mecca and *walāya*. More than the others, it is to the latter that people are called.³²

The components of the faith (*ḥudūd al-īmān*) are: the *shahāda* that there is no god but God and Muḥammad is the envoy of God; belief in what the prophet brought on behalf of God; the five canonical prayers, alms, fasting during the month of Ramaḍān, the pilgrimage to Mecca, *walāya* with regard to the *walī* among us (the imams); hostility to our enemy ('*adāwat 'aduwwinā*') and finally frequenting the truthful (*al-dukhūl ma'a'l-ṣādiqīn*).³³

Islam rests upon a tripod (*athāfi*): prayer, alms and *walāya*. Neither one of the three may have priority over the others.

32. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 3, p. 29, no. 1 (tradition attributed to al-Bāqir); also vol. 3, pp. 29–30, no. 3 (al-Bāqir), the same text with an additional sentence, 'and the people accepted the (first) four and abandoned the last'. In another tradition also attributed to al-Bāqir (vol. 3, pp. 30–32, no. 5), it is said that among the five Pillars, *walāya* is the supreme Pillar for it is 'the key' (*miṭṭāḥ*) to all the others; then follow in sequence: prayers, alms, the pilgrimage and fast. The imam's *walāya* is the highest degree of religion to the extent that 'if a man were to spend the entire night praying and all day fasting, offer all his possessions as alms and all the time he has to making the pilgrimage, but not recognise *walāya* of the *walī* of God, in order to undertake all his actions as guided by the latter, well then God would not reward him at all and he is not considered among people of the faith (*ahl al-īmān*)'. See nos 7 and 8 (al-Bāqir), vol. 3, p. 33. See also al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 259; Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī/al-Majālis*, 'majlis' 45, no. 14, p. 268.

33. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 3, p. 29, no. 2 (Ja'far); also no. 11 (Ja'far, vol. 3, p. 35); Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Khwājagī Shirāzī, *al-Nizāmiyya fī madhhab al-imāmiyya* (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996), pp. 153–155. I will return to the idea of hostility towards enemies of the imams. The latter expression, *al-dukhūl ma'a'l-ṣādiqīn*, is still a mystery to me; is it a question of associating with Shi'is, specifically the initiated among them, as a number of traditions recommend? (See e.g. several chapters by al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'kitāb al-īmān wa'l-kufr' and 'kitāb al-'ishra' and esp. Ibn Bābūya, *Muṣādaqat al-ikhwān* Tehran, n.d. [ca. 1325 Sh./1946]). Regarding this list of 'terms of the faith' see also nos 6 and 9 (Ja'far, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 3, pp. 32–33 and vol. 3, p. 34) where prayers, the fast and pilgrimage are not counted; nos 10 and 13 (al-Bāqir, vol. 3, pp. 34–35 and vol. 3, p. 36) where the list is extended by duties such as awaiting the Qā'im, piety, the struggle, humility, submission to the imams etc., see also al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī and the Persian translation by M. J. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1985), ch. 11, no. 16.

One must bear in mind that when canonical duties such as canonical prayers, the fast or pilgrimage to Mecca do not appear on a list, it does not mean that they are not one of the Pillars, rather that they are integrated into *walāya* since the latter is ‘the Key’ to all the rest.³⁴

As it is unthinkable for it not to be among the Pillars of Islam, the most telling example is the *shahāda*. When missing from a list it is included in *walāya*, since for a Shi‘i, the *shahāda* implicitly contains a triple profession of faith: the unicity of God, Prophet Muḥammad’s mission, the *walāya* of ‘Alī and the imams in his lineage.³⁵ Without the imam, the *wālī* of God and his *walāya*, there would be no religion at all. God does not accept any of the religious duties without *walāya*.³⁶ In *al-Maḥāsīn*, Abū Ja‘far al-Barqī (d. 274/887 or 280/893) devotes three chapters of his ‘kitāb ‘iqāb al-a‘māl’ to the consequences of not recognising the imams and their *walāya*.³⁷ To cite a few typical examples of traditions from these chapters:

34. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 3, p. 30, no. 4 (Ja‘far). Tradition no. 15 (Ja‘far, vol. 3, p. 38) refers only to prayers, alms and the holy war. It is true that the last is not one the Pillars of Islam and seems out of place in this chapter. Also Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭabarī, *Bishārat al-Muṣṭafā li-shi‘at al-Murtaḍā* (Najaf, 1963), p. 81; ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī, *Tuḥfat al-abrār fī manāqib a‘immat al-aṭḥār* (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997), pp. 155ff.

35. See e.g. al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, section 2, ch. 10, p. 78, no. 7; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 208; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, p. 258; Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī/al-Majālis*, ‘majlis’ 63, no. 13, p. 409 (‘the attestation of Unicity – *al-tawḥīd* – is only accepted due to ‘Alī and his *walāya*’); al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 3, p. 14, no. 39; vol. 37, p. 141, no. 35; vol. 38, p. 118, no. 60. For other sources see Eliash, ‘On the Genesis ... of Three-tenet Shahāda’, esp. pp. 266ff.; cf. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, p. 198, who believes that differences in various lists of the Pillars would seem to reflect internal debates within the Imami community.

36. See above n. 32; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 304–305 (*Divine Guide*, p. 125).

37. Al-Barqī, *Kitāb al-maḥāsīn*, ed. J. Muḥaddith Urmawī (Tehran, 1370/1950), ‘kitāb ‘iqāb al-a‘māl’, ch. 15 (‘iqāb man shakka fī amīr al-mu‘minīn), ch. 16 (‘iqāb man ankara āl Muḥammad ḥaqqahum wa jahala amrahum’ – we have seen that often *ḥaqq* and *amr* are synonymous with *walāya*) and ch. 17 (‘iqāb man lam ya‘rif imāmahu), vol. 1, pp. 89–93.

God established 'Alī as a point of reference (*'alam*) between Himself and His creation and there is none other. He who follows 'Alī is a believer, he who rejects him is an unbeliever and he who doubts him, an associationist.³⁸

[God says to the Prophet]: 'I created the seven heavens and what they contain; I created the seven earths and what they contain. If one of My followers invoked Me from the beginning of creation [to the Resurrection] or if I were to encounter him while he rejects the *walāya* of 'Alī, I would swiftly send him to hell.'³⁹

If at Mecca a servant worshipped God for a hundred years [lit. between al-Rukn and al-Maqām, two sacred sites considered places of worship in the holy city]; if he devoted his days to fasting and nights to prayer until old age but all the while remained unaware of our truth [or 'rights', *ḥaqq* i.e. *walāya*] he would receive no reward [from God].⁴⁰

He who dies without having known his imam dies a pagan's death as in the Age of Ignorance [i.e. pre-Islamic times – *al-jāhiliyya*].⁴¹

Other early Imami compilers of *ḥadīths* report many other traditions of the same sort:

The man who fasts the entire day and prays all night long, but encounters God (upon the Day of Resurrection) without (having professed) our *walāya*, will find God dissatisfied and even angry with him.⁴²

38. Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, vol. 1, ch. 15, p. 89, no. 34 (a tradition going back to al-Bāqir). The accusation of *shirk* is probably levelled at those who make association with *walāyas* other than that of 'Alī. See above verse 42:13 according to 'the Qur'an of the imams' (note 14 and the related text; also note 86 below).

39. Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, vol. 1, p. 90, no. 38 (Ja'far).

40. Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, vol. 1, ch. 16, p. 90, no. 40, (Ja'far).

41. Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, vol. 1, ch. 17, p. 92, no. 46 (Ja'far). Regarding this very famous tradition, *mīta jāhiliyya* and the early sources that report it see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, p. 301 (*Divine Guide*, p. 123) and n. 671. For similar traditions see also Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb thawāb al-a'māl wa 'iqāb al-a'māl*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1391/1971), pp. 242–244.

42. Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 89; Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, p. 196.

Are you not satisfied (you who are faithful to the imams) that due to your *walāya* towards us your prayer is accepted, whereas theirs [i.e. of the adversaries of the imams] is not; that your alms are accepted whereas theirs are not; that your pilgrimage is valid whereas theirs is not.⁴³

The Prophet: 'The imams that will follow are twelve in number; the first is 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and the last is the Qā'im. In my community, after me they are my caliphs, legatees, my *awliyā*' and the Proofs of God. He who recognises them is a believer and he who does not is an infidel.'⁴⁴

43. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 43, no. 316 (a tradition going back to Ja'far); a tradition also reported by al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 8, pp. 300 and 352, as well as a similar tradition that ends with the sentence, 'Those who excuse themselves from fulfilling their canonical duties will in this world benefit from comfort, health or influence (*al-ni'am wa'l-sihha aw al-si'a*), but in the Hereafter they will experience only eternal punishment.' See also al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 1, p. 154, no. 80 (Ja'far) or vol. 2, p. 89, no. 399 (Ja'far), 'God made five elements obligatory for Muḥammad's community: prayer, alms, fasting, the pilgrimage to Mecca and our *walāya*. Now for the first four, He allowed exemptions in special circumstances (*rukḥṣa*, in cases such as illness, menstruation and financial difficulties these duties may be abandoned) whereas our *walāya* must never be abandoned.'

44. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, p. 259 (a tradition going back to Ja'far which he received from his father and paternal forebears); also vol. 1, p. 261 (a tradition attributed to al-Riḍā). See also Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī/al-Majālīs*, 'majlis' 73, no. 12, pp. 484–485 and 'majlis' 85, no. 28, pp. 583–584. Among the Ismailis, it is quite telling that a great thinker such as al-Qāḍi al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974), begins his monumental profession of faith, the *Da'ā'im al-islām* with 'kitāb al-walāya', ed. Fyze, vol. 1, pp. 1–120. He reports a number of the traditions that we have just mentioned. It is true that a great majority of traditions from the corpus going back to the imams Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far al-Šādiq are common to both the Imamis and Ismailis. English translation: 'The Book of Walāya' in *The Pillars of Islam: Da'ā'im al-islām* of al-Qāḍi al-Nu'mān, by A. A. A. Fyze, completed, revised and annotated by I. K. Poonawala, vol. 1 (New York and Oxford, 2002); see the important article by A. Nanji, 'An Ismaili Theory of Walāya, in the *Da'ā'im al-islām* of al-Qāḍi al-Nu'mān', in D. P. Little (ed.), *Essays on Islamic Civilization Presented to Niyazi Berkes* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 260–273. See also, Sulaym b. Qays (Ps.), *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī*, ed. Anṣārī, vol. 2, pp. 858–860 and pp. 928–929, nos 46 and 70 respectively.

The semantic levels and the theological and eschatological implications

A central issue and motivating factor for the revelation of the Qur'ān, both in its original complete version and in the so-called censored *textus receptus*, as the supreme Pillar of Islam and a canonical duty of the greatest priority, which determines the validity of all the others, for the Shi'is *walāya* constitutes the core of the faith without which the religion loses its substance. Where does the sacred significance attached to it derive from?

What does it mean exactly for the Shi'i religious consciousness? H. Corbin devoted studies of some consequence to this very issue.⁴⁵ The following brief summary is a modest attempt to supplement the renowned French scholar's work, mainly by drawing on the earliest sources for Imami *ḥadīths*, which Corbin explored somewhat less than others.⁴⁶

In a note in *The Divine Guide*, I proposed a cursory definition of *walāya*:

In contrast to the semantic complexity of the term *walāya* in the administrative, social, and religious language of the beginnings of Islam and later in the technical terminology of sufism, *walāya*, in the context of early Shi'ism, has a quite simple translation with two interdependent and complementary meanings: applied to the imams of different prophets, it refers to their ontological status or their sacred initiatory mission; several nuances of the root *WLY*

45. See particularly H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, vol. 1, 'Le shī'isme duodécimain' (Paris, 1971–1972), chs 6 and 7, pp. 219–329; also *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, 1986), sections II. A. 4. and II. A. 5, pp. 78–98.

46. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī* is practically his only early source. In his studies, H. Corbin bases his argument mainly on philosophical and mystical texts of a much later period. May I reiterate that *Le Guide divin* is also a monograph devoted entirely to the imamate and the figure of the imam in early Shi'ism. See also the excellent summary by H. Landolt, 'Walāyah', *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 15, pp. 316–323 (on Shi'i *walāya*, pp. 319–320), as well as P. Walker, 'Wilāya', 'Shi'ism', *EI2*.

are found in the meaning: the *walī*-imam is the 'friend' and the closest 'helper' of God and His prophet; he immediately 'follows' the latter in his mission; he is the 'chief', the 'master' of believers par excellence. In this understanding, *walī* is a synonym of *waṣī* (the inheritor, the heir [of the sacred cause of the prophets]) or *mawlā* (applied to the imam, the term means the master, the guide, the protector, the *patronus*). Applied to the faithful of the imams, *walāya* denotes the unfailing love, faith and submission that the initiated owe to their holy initiating guide; in this understanding, the term becomes the equivalent of *tawallī* (being the faithful friend or the obedient protégé of someone); 'true Shi'ī' are called the *mutawallī* of the imams.⁴⁷

Let us consider these two semantic levels more closely.

1. *Walāya* in relation to the imam

Walāya as a sacred mission of the imams is equivalent to the imamate, that is, briefly stated, the spiritual and temporal direction of the faithful. In this case, one may translate it as 'power', even 'sacred power', since it is granted to the imams by divine election. If the imam is called upon to direct the faithful after the Prophet's death, it is because the imamate/*walāya* is the indispensable complement to prophethood (*nubuwwa*) in accordance with the Shi'ī pair *ẓāhir/bāṭin* that operates at every level of reality.⁴⁸

According to this understanding, the prophet (*nabī*) is the messenger of the letter of the Revelation (*tanzīl*) for the masses ('*āmma*/'*awāmm*) that constitute the majority (*akthar*) of a given community. In the same way the imam (*wālī*), complementing the prophet's mission, teaches the hidden spiritual meaning (*ta'wīl*) of the Revelation to a minority (*aqall*) which constitutes the elite

47. *Guide divin*, p. 74 (*Divine Guide*, p. 29), n. 151.

48. See M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Du droit à la théologie, Les niveaux de réalité dans le shi'isme duodécimain', *L'Esprit et la Nature* (Actes du colloque tenu à Paris les 11 et 12 mai 1996), *Cahiers du groupe d'études spirituelles comparées*, 5 (1997), pp. 37–63.

(*khāṣṣa/khawāṣṣ*) of this community.⁴⁹ Without the initiatory teaching of the imam, the profound meaning of the Revelation would remain unfathomed, just as a text interpreted in letter but not in spirit would remain forever poorly understood.

This is why the Qur'ān is called the mute, Silent Book or Guide (*imām ṣāmit*), whereas the Imam is said to be the speaking Qur'ān (*qur'ān nāṭiq*).⁵⁰ 'Among you there is someone', the Prophet is said to have stated, 'who fights for a spiritual interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the Qur'ān as I fought for the revelation in the word (*tanzīl*), and this person is 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.'⁵¹

As we know, in early Shi'i *ḥadīths*, Muḥammad as the archetype of *nubuwwa* and the legislating prophets may symbolise prophethood and all the prophets as a whole; just as 'Alī, imam par excellence, archetype of *walāya*, may be the supreme symbol of imamate or of all the imams as a whole.⁵² For according to Imami prophetology, all the prophets as messengers of various divine revelations in the letter (the *ẓāhir*) were accompanied in

49. See E. Kohlberg, 'In Praise of the Few', in G. Hawting et al., *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 149–162. And Chapter 8, this volume.

50. M. Ayoub, 'The Speaking Qur'ān and the Silent Qur'ān: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imāmī Tafsīr', in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 177–198; Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, pp. 88ff.

51. Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 15–16 (tradition no. 6 going back to Ja'far which he received from his paternal ancestors. See also tradition no. 13, going back to the same imam, 'God taught the prophet the letter of the Revelation; as for the interpretation of its hidden meaning, the Prophet of God taught it to 'Alī'); al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar* (Qumm, 1401/1980), pp. 76, 88, 117, 135 (on p. 66, it is the Qā'im who is said to be the warrior of *ta'wīl*); al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa'l-niḥal* (Beirut, n.d.), p. 189; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 17; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 19, pp. 25–26; for other sources, see Bar-Asher, *Scripture*, p. 88, n. 1; also ch. 9, n. 30 and the related text.

52. See Chapter 5, this volume, *in fine*.

their mission by one or more imams whose task was to unveil the hidden meaning (the *bāṭin*) of the Word of God.⁵³

This dimension and meaning of *walāya*/imamate are sufficiently well known and so there is no need to elaborate much further. However, there is more to the term. *Walāya* also denotes the essential nature of the figure of the imam, his ontological status. Now, the imam/*wālī* in the ultimate reality of his being, is the locus for the manifestation of God (*maẓhar, majlā*), the vehicle of the divine Names and Attributes (*al-asmā' wa'l-ṣifāt*). 'By God', Imam Ja'far is said to have declared, 'we (the imams) are the Most Beautiful Names (of God).'⁵⁴

The imam reveals God, he provides access to what may be known of Him, the *Deus Revelatus*, the *ẓāhir* of God. The *bāṭin* of God, His Face, the unknowable and hidden dimension, is the level of the Essence (*al-dhāt*), the *Deus absconditus*.⁵⁵ One can never emphasise enough this fundamental conception of *walāya* in Shi'i esoterism. Whether, as I believe, it is the matter of an early doctrine professed by the imams themselves,⁵⁶ at least – according to

53. See e.g. the entire first part of the important early work, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya li'l-imām 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib* attributed to al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/956) (in one of the most recent editions, Qumm, 1417/1996), pp. 20–90. See also U. Rubin, 'Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shi'a Tradition', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 1 (1979), pp. 41–65.

54. Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 42; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-tawḥīd', 'Bāb al-nawādir', vol. 1, p. 296, no. 4.

55. Chapter 3 above; also 'Du droit à la théologie', pp. 47–48 and 62–63.

56. In several publications, apart from *Le Guide divin*, and 'Du droit à la théologie' mentioned already, see also 'Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–903) et son *Kitāb Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*', *JA*, 280/3–4 (1992), pp. 221–250. Briefly stated, in my opinion, taking into consideration the fluctuating descriptions that the heresiographers and other authors provided of the *ghulāt*, and considering traditions related to theories attributed to the *ghulāt* as reported by the earliest compilations of Imami *ḥadīths*, added to our lack of knowledge regarding the nature of relations between different Shi'i branches in the earliest centuries, the distinction between 'moderate' and 'extremist' Shi'is during these early times seems artificial and not based on textual evidence.

M. G. S. Hodgson⁵⁷ – since the time of Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) or of beliefs emanating from 'extremist' Shi'i circles which later influenced so-called 'moderate' imamism, as H. Modarressi maintains,⁵⁸ it is nonetheless true that this conception of the divine nature of the imam has been reported since the second half of the third/ninth century⁵⁹ in the earliest Imami compilations of *ḥadīths* and has thus formed an integral part of the Imami religious consciousness for at least a thousand years. This is often forgotten by scholars, surely because the Shi'is themselves hardly speak of it, or if so allusively only, no doubt due to the discipline of the arcanum.

This explains certain sayings traced back to the imams that are inevitably associated with the *shaṭaḥāt* ('ecstatic utterances') of the mystics.⁶⁰

'I am the Rewarder (*dayyān*) of men on the day of Retribution',
'Ali is supposed to have said; 'I am he who allocates between

57. 'How did the Early Shi'a Become Sectarian', *JAOS* (1955), pp. 1–13, esp. pp. 8ff., and 'Dja'far al-Šādik' and 'Ghulāt', *EI2*.

58. H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam: Abū Ja'far ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and His Contribution to Imāmīte Shi'ite Thought* (Princeton, 1993), Part One, esp. pp. 19–53.

59. On the most important and earliest of these compilations, namely those by al-Barqī (d. 274/887 or 280/893), al-Šaffār (d. 290/902–903) and al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940–941) now see A. J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi'ism: Hadith as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad* (Richmond, 2000).

60. These are sayings in which 'God speaks in the first person through the lips of the mystic'; see e.g. L. Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (Paris, 1922), see index under '*shaṭaḥāt*', and *La passion de Hallāj, martyr mystique de l'Islam*, 4 vols (2nd edn, Paris, 1975), see index under '*shaṭaḥāt*'; the introduction by H. Corbin to Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ-i shaṭhiyyāt*, ed. H. Corbin and M. Mo'in (Paris and Tehran, 1966; 2nd edn, Tehran, 2004); C. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (New York, 1985); P. Ballanfāt, 'Réflexions sur la nature du paradoxe, La définition de Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī', *Kār Nāmeḥ* (Paris, 1995), pp. 2–3 and 25–40. It is important, however, to clarify the point that the bases, as well as the theological and anthropological implications, of the Sufi 'words of ecstasy' and the paradoxical sayings of the imams are different.

Garden and Fire, none is to enter without my allocation. I am the Supreme Judge (*al-fārūq al-akbar*). . . I possess the decisive word (*faṣl al-khiṭāb*); I hold the penetrating view of the path of the book . . . I have knowledge of the fortunes and misfortunes as well as of the judgements. I am the perfection of religion. I am God's blessing for His creatures.⁶¹

And:

I am the Queen Bee (*ya'sūb*) of the initiates; I am the first among the ancients; I am the successor to the messenger of the lord of the worlds; I am the judge of Garden and Fire.⁶²

In a tradition going back to the Prophet, regarding 'Alī Muḥammad declared:

Here is the most radiant imam, the tallest lance of God, the most ample Threshold of God; let he who seeks God enter by this Threshold . . . Without 'Alī, the truth shall not be distinguished from the false, nor the faithful from the unfaithful; without 'Alī, God would not have been worshipped... Neither shield (*sitr*) nor veil (*ḥijāb*) between God and him . . . No! . . . 'Alī himself is the shield and the veil.⁶³

A tradition has al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī saying:

We (the imams) are the First and the Last; we are the commanders; we are the Light. The Light of spiritual beings comes from us.

61. Furāt al-Kūfi, *Tafsīr*, p. 178; the last two sentences are clearly allusions to Qur'ān 5:3 on the 'perfection of religion and blessing' as we have examined above.

62. Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, pp. 17–18; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 3, p. 389; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 20. Regarding the Shi'is symbolised as bees or about 'Alī as the 'Commander of Bees' (*amīr al-naḥl*), see I. Goldziher, 'Schī'tisches', *ZDMG*, 64 (1910), pp. 532–533, now in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. J. de Somogyi (Hildesheim, 1967–1970), vol. 5, pp. 213–214.

63. Furāt al-Kūfi, *Tafsīr*, p. 371. This kind of declaration already prefigures what I have called 'theo-imamosophic exhortations' of 'Alī, reported by later sources; see Chapter 3.

We illuminate by the Light of God. We render joyful by His Joy [or we spiritualise by His spirit — *nurawwiḥu bi rawḥih/rūḥih* — the possessive adjective, here as well as below, may refer to the Light as well as to God; the ambiguity is undoubtedly intended]; within us His abode; towards us His source. Our first is identical to our last and our last identical to our first.⁶⁴

According to a tradition reported by a number of sources, imam 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-Ābidīn once transformed himself into a winged being and to the amazement of his disciples disappeared into the heavens. Upon his return, he declared that he had travelled to the loftiest of heavens (*a'lā 'illiyyin*) and is said to have responded to an adept thus:

We [the imams] are the ones who built the most elevated heaven; why then would we not be able to scale its heights? We are the bearers of the [divine] Throne (*'arsh*) and we are seated upon the Throne. The Throne and Pedestal (*kursī*) belong to us.⁶⁵

According to a *ḥadīth* attributed to imam Ja'far:

We manifest Light in darkness. We are the Oft-Frequented Abode (*al-bayt al-ma'mūr*; Q 52:4) where the one who enters, enters in safety. We are the magnificence and grandeur of God . . . We are beyond all description; due to us eyes are brightened, ears listen; hearts are filled with faith.⁶⁶

The sixth imam is also said to have declared:

64. Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Nawādir al-mu'jizāt* (Qumm, 1410/1990), p. 103, and *Dalā'il al-imāma* (Qumm, 1413/1994), pp. 168–169; al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudāt*, vol. 5, p. 157; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-ma'ājiz* (Tehran, n.d. [ca. 1960]), pp. 204–205.

65. Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Nawādir al-mu'jizāt*, p. 116, and *Dalā'il al-imāma*, p. 201; al-Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudāt*, vol. 5, p. 256; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-ma'ājiz*, p. 294.

66. Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, pp. 270–271; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-ma'ājiz*, pp. 394–395.

God has made of us His Eyes among His worshippers, His eloquent tongue among His creatures, His benevolent and merciful hand extended over His servants, His face by which one is led to Him, His threshold which leads one to Him, His treasure in the heavens and on the earth . . . It is by our act of worship that God is worshipped; without us God would not be worshipped.

The last sentence (*bi 'ibādatinā 'ubida'llāh law lā naḥnu mā 'ubida'llāh*) may also be read: 'It is by virtue of the fact that we [the imams] are worshipped that God is worshipped; without us God would not be worshipped.' Here too the rather audacious ambiguity seems deliberate.⁶⁷

To end this hardly exhaustive list, here is a dialogue between Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and one of his disciples who asks him if on the Day of Resurrection, the initiated believers (*al-mu'minūn*) will be able to see God. The imam replies:

'Yes, but they will have already seen him long before the advent of this Day.' 'When was this?' 'When God asked them: "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied "Yes, most certainly" (Q 7:172).' The disciple reports that his master then remained silent for a long time before declaring: 'The initiates see Him already in this world before the Day of Resurrection. Do you not see Him at this very moment, even before you now? [i.e. in my very being].' 'If I were to serve as ransom, may I with your permission report these words?' 'No, for a negator unaware of their true meaning, will use them to accuse us of assimilationism and unbelief.'⁶⁸

67. Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, ed. H. al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭihrānī (Tehran, 1398/1978), ch. 12, pp. 151–152, no. 8. According to another tradition, someone asks imam Ja'far, 'What would happen on earth if a physical living sage (*'ālim ḥayy zāhir*; i.e., the imam) to whom people have recourse for what is licit and illicit were not present?' Ja'far answers: 'God could not be worshipped (in such a world)'; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Nawādir al-akhbār*, ed. M. al-Anṣārī al-Qummi (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996), 'kitāb al-nubuwwa wa'l-imāma', p. 129, no. 2 (based on Ibn Bābūya, *Ilal al-sharā'i*, vol. 1, ch. 153, p. 195, no. 3).

68. Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, ch. 8, p. 117, no. 20; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, p. 141 (*Divine Guide*, p. 54), n. 277 (with other *ḥadīths* similar in content). It is symptomatic that W. Chittick who provides an English translation of this

This aspect of *walāya* characterises the Imam (with an upper case 'I') in the cosmic, archetypal, metaphysical sense: the divine Perfect Man, if not Man-God, that is to say *walāya* as the locus of manifestation for the Attributes of God. The last part of the dialogue between Ja'far al-Šādiq and his disciple demonstrates clearly that this concept constitutes a secret that must be kept from the unworthy. It is even *the* ultimate Secret teaching of the imams.⁶⁹

All things have a secret, the secret of Islam is Shi'ism (literally: the Shi'is, *al-shi'a*) and the secret of Shi'ism is the *walāya* of 'Alī.⁷⁰

If we were to apply the technical meaning to these terms we would understand that a secret veiled behind the letter of a religion is the esoteric teaching of its initiated, and the key secret of this teaching is the divinity of the Imam, the divine Guide.

'Something in you resembles Jesus the son of Mary', the Prophet is supposed to have said to 'Alī, 'and had I not feared that some groups

tradition in *A Shi'ite Anthology* (New York, 1981), p. 42, does not point out the 'shāh' that it contains and which constitutes its focal point.

69. Amir-Moezzi, 'Du droit à la théologie', pp. 47–48, 55, 62–63.

70. Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawhārī, *Muqtaḍab al-athar* (Tehran, 1346/1927), p. 23 (a tradition attributed to Ja'far); see also a shorter version in al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 2, p. 14. Although each imam in every cycle during mankind's sacred History has been the locus of manifestation for this cosmic Imam, 'Alī remains His supreme vehicle and symbol. Which is why in a number of traditions – apart from the obvious meaning – 'Alī also signifies the cosmic Imam or *walāya*/imamate in general; just as Muḥammad, beyond the obvious meaning may also signify the archetypal Messenger-Prophet or prophethood (*nubuwwa*) in general; see Chapter 5, this volume, *in fine* and note 52 above as well as the relevant text. One may make a similar comment regarding the terms *islām* (strictly referring to the Muslim religion and in a wider sense, the exoteric dimension, the 'letter' of each religion) and *shī'a* (referring to the Shi'is of Islam; and in a wider sense: the initiatic, esoteric dimension 'the spirit' of each religion), see note 95 below. Thus the *ḥadīth* attributed to Ja'far may also be understood as follows: 'All things have a secret; the hidden secret behind the "letter" of every religion is its initiatic, esoteric dimension and the secret of the latter is the *walāya* of the cosmic Man.'

in my community would say what is said of Jesus by the Christians, I would have revealed something about you that would have made people gather the dust beneath your feet to seek blessings.⁷¹

This secret dimension of *walāya* may be considered the esoteric of the esoteric (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*) of the imams' teachings. Thus *ḥadīths* such as:

Our teaching is the truth; truth of the truth; it is the exoteric, esoteric and esoteric of the esoteric; it is the secret and secret of a secret, a well-guarded secret, hidden by a secret.⁷²

Our doctrine [*amr*: cause, order, affair, teaching . . . as we have seen, the term is often identified with *walāya*] is a secret contained within a secret, a well-guarded secret, a secret whose only benefit is a secret, a secret veiled by a secret.⁷³

Our doctrine is hidden, sealed by the original Pact [*al-mīthāq* – I shall return to this matter regarding the pre-existence of *walāya*], God will render he who reveals it contemptible.⁷⁴

One may say that the historical imam/*wālī*, physical, initiating master par excellence is the guardian of a Secret whose content is the metaphysical Imam, throne of the cosmic *walāya*: 'We are the treasure (*khazāna*) and the treasurers (*khuzzān/khazana*)

71. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 1, p. 81. See also Sulaym b. Qays (Ps.), *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī*, ed. Anṣārī, vol. 2, p. 891, no. 58 and vol. 2, p. 910, no. 62; al-Baḥrānī Ḥāshim b. Sulaymān, *al-Lawāmi' al-nūrāniyya* (Isfahan, 1404/1983), pp. 373, 376.

72. Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 1, ch. 12, p. 28, no. 4 (Ja'far).

73. *Baṣā'ir*, p. 28, no. 1 (Ja'far).

74. *Baṣā'ir*, p. 28, no. 2 (al-Bāqir). On the duty of preserving a secret (*taqiyya, kitmān, khab'*), now see E. Kohlberg, 'Taqiyya in Shī'i Theology and Religion', in H. G. Kippenberg and G. G. Stroumsa (eds), *Secrecy and Concealment. Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 345–380; supplementing a previous study by the same author, 'Some Imāmi-Shī'i Views on *taqiyya*', *JAOS*, 95 (1975), pp. 395–402 (now in *Belief and Law in Imāmi Shī'ism* [Aldershot, 1991], article III).

of God's Secret.⁷⁵ Both meanings of *walāya* vis à vis the imam are therefore inseparable: first, the historical imam is the locus of manifestation for the cosmic Imam, just as the latter, the absolute theophany is the locus of manifestation for God. Secondly, the ultimate content, the very 'marrow' of the historic imams' teachings is therefore the secret substance of different Revelations, the veritable spirit hidden behind the letter of these revelations, the mystery of the ontological Imam.

At this level, *walāya* may be translated as 'Friendship' (with God), 'Alliance' (with God), Proximity (of God) – all qualities implying the profound meaning of 'Saintliness' (the conventional translation of *walāya*) – yet, although obviously corresponding to some of the meanings that the root WLY harbours, none of these terms is equal to the theological content of this very special dimension of the concept at hand. It is in this sense that *walāya* constitutes the esoteric dimension of the prophet's message and mission: *al-walāya bāṭin al-nubuwwa* as Shi'is authors have tirelessly emphasised. It is the central term of an entire series of 'complementary pairs' that characterise the dialectic of manifest and hidden in Shi'ism.

<u>Manifest</u>	<u>Hidden</u>
<i>ẓāhir</i>	<i>bāṭin</i>
<i>nubuwwa</i>	<i>walāya</i>
Muḥammad	'Alī
<i>tanzīl</i>	<i>ta'wīl</i>
<i>islām</i>	<i>īmān</i>
<i>muslim</i>	<i>mu'min</i>
<i>akthar/'amma</i>	<i>aqall/khāṣṣa</i> ⁷⁶

75. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 2, ch. 3; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'kitāb al-ḥujja', chs 13 and 14; al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 1, pp. 101f.; Ibn Bābūya, 'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā, ed. M. H. Lājevardī (Tehran, 1398/1978), vol. 1, chs 19 and 20; Ibn Bābūya, *Ma'ānī'l-akhbār*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1379/1959), p. 132; Ibn Bābūya, *Ṣifāt al-shī'a* (+ *Faḍā'il al-shī'a*), ed. Ḥ. Fashāhī (Tehran, 1342 Sh./1963–1964), pp. 60f.; Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī, *Muqtaḍab al-athar*, p. 39.

76. See *Guide divin*, p. 308 (*Divine Guide*, p. 127); for the pair *islām/īmān* technically referring to 'Islam of the Majority/the religion of the Initiated i.e. Shi'ism' and 'submission exclusively to the letter of the Exoteric religion/initiation

Whether it relates to the imam's mission or his ontological status, in other words to the historical or metaphysical sense of imamate, the imam's *walāya* is said to be as ancient as creation.

'When God the Most High created the Heavens and the Earth', the Prophet is supposed to have said, 'He summoned them and they replied. Then He introduced my *nubuwwa* and the *walāya* of 'Alī b. Abi Ṭālib and they accepted. Then God created all beings and entrusted us the matter of (their) religion (*amr al-dīn*). So it came to be that the fortunate are fortunate by us and the unfortunate, unfortunate by us. We render what is licit for them licit and what is illicit for them illicit.'⁷⁷

Walāya permeates the entire history of mankind and constitutes its spiritual substance since it is at the heart of all Revelations and prophetic missions. Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–903) devoted several chapters in the second part of his book *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* to these issues.⁷⁸ According to a number of traditions going back mainly to the fifth and sixth imams, Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the pre-temporal Pact (*al-mīthāq*) – concluded between God and his creatures at the dawn of creation and to which the Qur'ānic verse 7:172 supposedly alludes – mainly concerns *walāya*.⁷⁹

Other *ḥadīths* specify that only the 'elite' of creation pledged an oath of allegiance with regard to the *walāya* of 'Alī (i.e. the cosmic Imam) namely, the Closest (*al-muqarrabūn*) among angels, the Messengers (*al-mursalūn*) among prophets and the tested ones

into the Esoteric religion', as well as *muslim/mu'min* signifying 'common' Muslim/initiated Shi'i, see *Guide divin*, index under these terms and note 95 below.

77. Ibn Shādhān, *Mī'a manqaba* (Qumm, 1413/1993), 'manqaba' 7, p. 48; al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Tabriz; rpr. Qumm, 1381/1962), vol. 1, p. 291; al-Khwārazmī, *Maqṭal al-Husayn* (Qumm, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 46.

78. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 2, chs 6–16, pp. 67–90. See also al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 26, pp. 280ff.

79. *Baṣā'ir*, chs 7–12; see also notes 8 and 74 above as well as the relevant texts.

(*al-mumtaḥanūn*) among believers.⁸⁰ According to a tradition attributed to the Prophet, in the pre-existential world of Shadows (*‘ālam al-aẓilla*), the status of prophets only attained its final stage once they recognised the *walāya* of the Impeccable Ones.⁸¹ Similarly, the Pact accorded Adam, as referred to in Q 20:115, concerns *walāya*⁸² – the essential purpose of every prophetic mission.

Neither prophet nor any messenger was ever commissioned save by (or ‘for’) our *walāya* (*bi-wilāyatīnā*).⁸³

Our *walāya* is the *walāya* of God. Every prophet was only ever sent [by God] for / by it.⁸⁴

The *walāya* of ‘Alī is inscribed in all books of the prophets; a messenger was only ever sent to proclaim the prophethood of Muḥammad and the *walāya* of ‘Alī.⁸⁵

80. *Baṣā’ir*, ch. 6, pp. 67–68. For the technical term ‘Tested’ derived from the expression *al-mu’min imtaḥana ‘llāhu qalbahu li’l-imān* (the believer – or initiate whose heart is tested by God for faith; see *Le Guide divin*, index under ‘*imtiḥān* (*al-qalb*)’ and esp. Chapter 10 in this volume.

81. *Baṣā’ir*, ch. 8. On ‘the Worlds before this world’, see *Guide divin*, section II. 1, p. 75ff (*Divine Guide*, ch. 2, section 1, pp. 29–37; see also Chapter 4, this volume).

82. *Baṣā’ir*, ch. 7, pp. 70–71; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, pp. 64–65; al-Astarābādī, *Ta’wīl al-āyāt al-ẓāhira*, pp. 313–314. According to some traditions, the allusion to *walāya* in this verse featured textually in the original revelation made to Muḥammad and was subsequently censured. ‘We have entrusted Adam with Words concerning Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and the imams in their lineage but he forgot them’; al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir*, p. 71; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, ‘Kitāb al-ḥujja’, ‘Bāb fīhi nukat wa nutaf min al-tanzīl fi’l-walāya’, vol. 2, p. 283, no. 23; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 3, p. 45; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 2, p. 80; *Guide divin*, p. 212 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 84–85); Bar-Asher, ‘Variant Readings’, p. 64.

83. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, ch. 9, pp. 74–75 (Ja’far).

84. *Baṣā’ir*, p. 75 (al-Bāqir).

85. *Baṣā’ir*, ch. 8, p. 72 (al-Riḍā). See also al-Qundūzī, *Yanābī’ al-mawadda* (n.p. [Iraq], 1385/1965), p. 82; al-Baḥrānī, *Ghāyat al-marām* (Qumm, n.d.), p. 207.

As we have already seen, the Qur'ān in its 'original complete version' would have clearly mentioned the fact that:

He has laid down for you O Family of Muḥammad as religion that He charged Noah with, and that We have revealed to thee, O Muḥammad, and that We charged Abraham with, Moses and Jesus: 'Establish the religion of the Family of Muḥammad, and scatter not regarding it and be united.' Very hateful is that for the associationists, *those that associate to the walāya of 'Alī* [i.e. other *walāyas*] that thou callest them to *concerning the walāya of 'Alī*. Surely God guides, O Muḥammad towards this religion he who repents, *he who accepts your call to the walāya of 'Alī* [instead of 'God chooses unto Himself whomsoever He will, and He guides to Himself whosoever turns, penitent']. (Q 42:13)⁸⁶

Adam was banished from paradise because he had forgotten the *walāya*.⁸⁷ The prophet Jonah was enclosed in the stomach of a whale because he had momentarily denied loyalty to *walāya*.⁸⁸ Certain Israelites were transformed into fish or lizards because they had neglected *walāya*.⁸⁹

Without *walāya*, there is no religion. Without its spirit, the letter is barren, an empty shell, lifeless. It is therefore not surprising that Islam, ultimate religion of the most perfect of prophets, should – more than the others – be centred on the concept of *walāya*; what is more, if Muḥammad is Muḥammad it is so because – even more than the other prophets – during his celestial ascensions he was initiated into the mysteries of the *walāya* of the Imam, the Man-God symbolised by the cosmic 'Alī: "Alī is a Sign of God [*āya* – just as a verse from the Qur'ān] for Muḥammad.

86. See notes 14 and 38 above.

87. In addition to references provided in n. 79, Ibn Bābūya, *Ma'ānī'l-akhbār*, pp. 107–109, and *al-Khiṣāl* (Najaf, 1391/1971), p. 246; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib al Abī Ṭālib*, 3 vols (Najaf, 1375–1376/1956), vol. 1, p. 214.

88. Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, p. 94; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 401 and vol. 26, pp. 333ff. See also Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, p. 200.

89. Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 35; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 5, p. 345 and vol. 14, p. 55; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 44; Bar-Asher, *Scripture*, pp. 200–201.

The latter did no more than summon [people] to the *walāya* of 'Alī.⁹⁰

Commenting on Q 91:1, on Muḥammad's destiny as a prophet, imam Ja'far is said to have proclaimed: 'God opened his chest [heart] to the *walāya* of 'Alī'.⁹¹

'The Angel Gabriel came to me', the Prophet supposedly reported, 'and said: "Muḥammad! Your Lord prescribes for you the love (*ḥubb*) and *walāya* of 'Alī"'.⁹²

The Prophet was elevated to the heavens twenty times; not once did God not entrust the *walāya* of 'Alī – and the imams [that come] after him – even more so than what He recommended regarding canonical duties.⁹³

This is why 'the *walāya* of 'Alī beside the Prophet has nothing earthly about it; it descends from heaven, even from the Lips of God (*mushāfahatan*; i.e. a message transmitted orally to Muḥammad during his celestial ascensions)'.⁹⁴

Walāya therefore constitutes the central message of Islam and of all religions before it:

God made [of our] *walāya*, we the *ahl al-bayt*, the axis (*quṭb*) around which the Qur'ān gravitates; as well as the axis of all [sacred] Books. It is around the *walāya* that the clear verses of the Qur'ān turn; it is with the *walāya* that the sacred Writings are filled; by *walāya* that one clearly recognises the faith.⁹⁵

90. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, ch. 7, pp. 71–72, nos 5 and 8 (al-Bāqir) and ch. 9, p. 77, no. 5 (Ja'far).

91. *Baṣā'ir*, ch. 8, p. 73.

92. *Baṣā'ir*, ch. 8, p. 74.

93. *Baṣā'ir*, ch. 10, p. 79 (Ja'far). See Chapter 5, this volume.

94. Al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 28, p. 306, no. 13 (Ja'far). See Ibn al-Biṭrīq, *Khaṣā'is*, ed. M. B. al-Mahmūdī (Tehran, 1406/1986), p. 98 and Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Ṭarā'if fi ma'rifa madhāhib al-ṭawā'if* (Qumm, 1400/1979), p. 101.

95. A tradition going back to Ja'far, al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 5; al-Bahrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 10; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 1, p. 12; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 19, p. 78; *al-Uṣūl al-sittat 'ashar*, p. 60; see also note 28

Thus denying the imam's *walāya* amounts to denying all heavenly revelations. And justifiably so: the *walāya* of the Impeccable Ones, of the theophanic Guides, living examples of divinisation potential in man, is the ultimate aim of creation:

The *walāya* of Muḥammad and his descendants is the ultimate aim and most noble goal (*al-gharaḍ al-aqṣā wa'l-murād al-aḥḍal*). God created his beings and commissioned his messengers especially to summon to the *walāya* of Muḥammad, 'Alī and the successors of the latter.⁹⁶

above and the relevant text. Let us recall that in the technical lexicon of Shi'ism, the word 'faith' (*īmān*) means 'the teaching of the imams, esoteric dimension of religion, Shi'ism'. In response to the question, 'what is the difference between Islam and faith', imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is said to have answered, 'Islam is the exoteric dimension [of religion] to which people adhere [*al-islām huwa'l-ẓāhir alladhī 'alayhi'l-nās* – the latter term is one of the names by which Shi'is refer to non-Shi'is], the twofold profession of faith regarding the Oneness of God and Muḥammad's mission as Prophet, canonical prayers, alms, the pilgrimage to Mecca and fasting during the month of Ramaḍān. Now, in addition to this, Faith is knowledge of our teachings. He who professes and practices the former without knowing the latter though he may be a Muslim has gone astray [because, as we have seen, he neglects the principal canonical obligation, *walāya*], al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-īmān wa'l-kufr', 'Bāb anna'l-islām yuḥqanu bihi'l-dam wa anna'l-thawāb 'alā'l-īmān', vol. 3, p. 39, no. 4. The same sixth imam is supposed to have further stated: 'Islam is the profession of divine Oneness and the acceptance of our Prophet's mission; it is by Islam that the price of blood is exacted, the conditions of marriage and rules of heritage established. There are a whole series of exoteric laws that the majority of people obey [*akthar al-nās*; another technical term for non-Shi'is, exoterist Muslims]. As for faith, it is guidance manifested in the heart. Exoterically, faith is linked to Islam whereas esoterically Islam is not linked to faith [*inna'l-īmān yushāriku'l-islām fi'l-ẓāhir wa'l-islām lā yushāriku'l-īmān fi'l-bāṭin*]. Faith is therefore superior to Islam', *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 3, pp. 41–42. For the equal value accorded to 'faith' and the teachings of the imams see also al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba*, pp. 131, 188; Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī/al-Majālis*, 'majlis' 93, pp. 639ff.

96. (Pseudo?) al-imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, *Tafsīr* (Qumm, 1409/1988), p. 379, no. 264. Regarding this source now see M. M. Bar-Asher, 'The Qur'ān Commentary Ascribed to Imam Ḥasan al-'Askarī', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 24 (2000), pp. 358–379. A section of this study is devoted to the doctrine of *walāya* in this work (pp. 377–378). The tradition just cited is referred to on p. 375.

An omnipresent message, whether explicit or implicit in the early Imami corpus, *walāya* constitutes the central meaning and purpose of *nubuwwa* just as the *bāṭin* is the *ẓāhir*'s *raison d'être*.⁹⁷

2. *Walāya* in relation to the followers of the imams

The second semantic level of *walāya* relates to the followers of the imams, sometimes referred to as *ahl al-walāya*. It denotes love, faithfulness, devotion, loyalty and the submission that an adept owes to his master initiator – all qualities inherent in the root WLY. In this case, it is synonymous with other *maṣḍars* stemming from the same root, such as *tawallī/tawallā* (fifth form) and *muwālāt* (third form). In this sense one may say that Shi'ism is the religion of love for the Divine Guide: as the lapidary phrase attributed to Ja'far declares, '*walāya* is love (*al-walāya al-maḥabba*)'.⁹⁸

By God the sixth imam allegedly remarked, if a stone were to love us, God would revive it with us; is religion anything other than love?⁹⁹

97. However, the superiority of *walāya* over *nubuwwa* or *bāṭin* over *ẓāhir* does not imply (at least for the Imamis) superiority of the *wālī* over the *nabī* (more specifically the legislating prophet), since in his person, the latter at once accumulates *walāya* as well as *nubuwwa* and constitutes a source of wisdom for his imams. On the other hand, the *wālī*/cosmic Imam is superior to both; as the revealed Face of God, he is the ultimate aim of teachings proffered by all *nabīs* and *wālīs*. On this point, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Notes sur deux traditions hétérodoxes imamites', *Arabica*, 41 (1994), pp. 127–130; and esp. Chapter 5 above *in fine*.

98. Ibn 'Ayyāsh, *Muqtaḍab al-athar*, p. 45. 'Al-Matāwila', a term designating certain Shi'is from Lebanon and Syria, seems to be the irregular plural of the active participle in the 5th form (*mutawallī*; 'métouali' in French). However, this etymology is not entirely certain. (see W. Ende, 'Mutawālī', *EI2*). It would thus denote 'people practising the *walāya* of the imams'.

99. Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 167; Ibn Bābūya, *al-Khiṣāl*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī, (2nd edn, Qumm, 1403/1983), p. 21, no. 74; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 277; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 1, p. 254; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 7, p. 377.

In addition, 'All things have a foundation (*asās*); the foundation of Islam is love for us, the *ahl al-bayt* (of the Prophet).'¹⁰⁰

This is certainly how one must understand these kinds of expressions that recur very frequently in the *Ḥadīth*: *inna walāyat 'Alī* (and/or *al-a'imma*) *walāyat rasūl Allāh wa walāyat rasūl Allāh walāyat Allāh*, 'love of 'Alī (and/or the imams) is love for the Messenger of God (Muḥammad) and love of the Messenger of God is love for God'.¹⁰¹

However, in a doctrine strongly marked by a dualist conception of the world and its history, love for the imam is inevitably accompanied by hatred for his enemy. According to this conception, the faithful cannot only ally himself to the forces of Light, he must at the same time detach himself from the forces of Darkness. Given the fundamental role of knowledge in the Shi'i vision of the world,¹⁰² to fervently adhere or belong to the forces of the initiation is inextricably linked to hostility towards those who are 'anti-initiation', for the latter use their power and violent means to repress even eliminate people of salutary gnosis. In this case therefore, *walāya/tawallī* is inseparable from its opposite namely *barā'a/tabarrī-tabarrā*.¹⁰³

100. Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, 'kitāb al-ṣafwa wa'l-nūr wa'l-raḥma', vol. 1, ch. 20, p. 150, no. 66; al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, p. 71; Ibn Bābūya, *al-Mawā'iz* (Qumm, n.d.), p. 29, and *Amālī*, p. 221; see Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, p. 194 (the distinction made between 'the duty to love the imam', pp. 192–195 and 'the duty of *walāya* to the imam', pp. 195–202, does not seem pertinent as these two notions are inseparable if not, depending on the context, identical).

101. See e.g. *al-Uṣūl al-sittat 'ashar*, p. 60; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 37, pp. 41ff.; vol. 38, pp. 118ff. All chapter 87 of the *Bihār* is devoted to the *walāya*/love for 'Alī ('Love for him [i.e. 'Alī] is *walāya* and faith, whereas hatred of him is unfaithfulness and hypocrisy; from his *walāya* is *walāya* to God and His messenger and hostility to him is hostility to God and His messenger').

102. See *Guide divin*, section III–2, pp. 174–200 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 69–79); Chapters 5 and 8, this volume.

103. On this fundamental notion see the monograph by E. Kohlberg, 'Barā'a in Shi'i Doctrine', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 7 (1986), pp. 139–175. Many other works by the same scholar provide invaluable information on the

The firmest handle of faith (. . . more so than prayer, alms, fasting, the pilgrimage to Mecca and the holy war . . .) is love (*ḥubb*) for God and hatred (*bughḍ*) for God, friendship (*tawallī*) of the friends of God and enmity (*tabarrī*) towards the enemies of God.¹⁰⁴

Friendship (*walāya*) with 'Alī is a good deed (*ḥasana*) that cannot give rise to any misdeed (*sayyi'a*) . . . and friendship with 'Alī's adversaries (*addād*) is a misdeed that no good deed may redeem.¹⁰⁵

Love (*walāya*) of God is only won by love for His friends (*awliyā*) and hostility (*mu'adāt*) to His enemies.¹⁰⁶

According to many traditions that are traced back to the Prophet himself, love for the imams can only be accepted when accompanied by dissociation from their enemies:

'dualist conception' that the Shi'is have of history and spirituality, 'The Term "Rāfiḍa" in Imāmī Shī'i Usage', *JAOS* (1979), pp. 677–679 (rpr. in *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shī'ism*, article IV); 'Some Imāmī Shī'i Views on the *ṣaḥāba*', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 5 (1984), pp. 143–175 (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article IX); 'Non-Imāmī Muslims in Imāmī *fiqh*', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 6 (1985), pp. 99–105 (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article X); 'In Praise of the Few' already cited; 'Evil', *Elr*, vol. 9, pp. 182–185. See also A. Arazī, 'Ilqām al-ḥajar li-man zakkā sābb Abī Bakr wa 'Umar d'al-Suyūṭī ou Le témoignage de l'insulteur des Compagnons', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 10 (1987), pp. 211–287; for much later periods, see J. Calmard, 'Les rituels shī'ites et le pouvoir. L'imposition du shī'isme safavide, eulogies et malédictions canoniques', in *Etudes Safavides*, ed. J. Calmard (Tehran, 1993), pp. 109–150 and Chapter 14, this volume.

104. Ibn Bābūya, *Ma'ānī'l-akhbār*, pp. 398–399, and *al-Mawā'iz*, p. 25 (a tradition attributed to the Prophet reported by Ja'far through his father and his paternal ancestors). Also al-Qundūzī, *Yanābī' al-mawadda*, p. 121; al-Daylamī, *Irshād al-qulūb* (Qumm, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 209; al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*, vol. 1, p. 112; al-Baḥrānī, *Ghāyat al-marām*, p. 293.

105. Al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 8, p. 300, nos 55 and pp. 352ff. (a tradition going back to the Prophet).

106. *Bihār*, vol. 24, p. 348, no. 60 (al-Bāqir). On the pair *muwālāt*/*mu'adāt* see the extensive tradition going back to the eleventh imam in (Pseudo?) al-imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, *Tafsīr*, pp. 76–79, no. 39. See also al-Khwārazmī, *al-Manāqib* (Qumm, 1411/1990), ch. 6, pp. 64–79; Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Bishārat al-Muṣṭafā li-shī'at al-Murtaḍā*, pp. 20ff.

‘Alī! *walāya* towards you and the imams in your lineage is only accepted due to *barā’a* towards your enemies and those of the imams in your lineage. Angel Gabriel told me this in person.¹⁰⁷

By He who chose me from all His creatures and sent me as a messenger, if one were to worship God for a thousand years, this would not be accepted by God were one not to profess your *walāya* O ‘Alī and that of the imams in your lineage; and your *walāya* is only accepted if it is accompanied by *barā’a* towards your enemies and those of the imams in your lineage.¹⁰⁸

In spiritual life and sacred economy, *barā’a* is thus as fundamental as *walāya*, which is why we may translate these terms as sacred Hatred and sacred Love respectively.¹⁰⁹ In some traditions, *barā’a* is considered – not unlike *walāya* – as one of the Pillars of Islam.¹¹⁰ According to a *ḥadīth* going back to al-Bāqir: ‘God sent his prophets especially for sacred Love for us (the imams) and sacred Hatred towards our enemies.’¹¹¹

A concise statement attributed to Ja‘far al-Šadiq asks whether ‘is faith anything other than love and hate?’ (*hal al-īmān illā al-ḥubb wa al-buḥd*). If one accords these terms their technical meaning, we may read the statement as: is the esoteric teaching within a religion anything other than love for the imams as well as for wise initiators of this faith and hatred towards the adversaries of the latter?¹¹²

107. Al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 27, p. 60, no. 16.

108. Ibn Shādhān, *Mi’a manqaba*, ‘manqaba’ 9, p. 51; al-Karājaki, *Kanz al-fawā’id* (Beirut, n.d.; rpr. Qumm, 1369/1949–1950), p. 185; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 27, p. 199, no. 66. To be compared with Ibn Ṭawūs, *al-Yaqīn fī imrat amīr al-mu’minīn* (Najaf, 1369/1950), pp. 56–57.

109. *Guide divin*, index under ‘*walāya*’ and ‘*barā’a*’.

110. Al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 117; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 25/1, pp. 214f.

111. Al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 258; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 368; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Šāfi*, vol. 1, p. 923.

112. For the *ḥadīth* see Shaykh ‘Abbās Qummī, *Safīnat al-Bihār* (Tehran, 1370 Sh./1991), see under *ḥubb*, vol. 1, p. 199; for the technical meaning of *īmān*, see note 95 above.

The struggle between Good and Evil, Knowledge and Ignorance, Light and Darkness is woven into the fabric of existence. According to cosmogonic traditions, what marks creation from its origin is the battle between the armies of cosmic Intelligence (*al-'aql*) and those of cosmic Ignorance (*al-jahl*), respective symbols and archetypes of the Imam and his adepts on the one hand and Enemy of the Imam and his partisans on the other.¹¹³

This battle has repercussions in every period during all the cycles of history, opposing prophets and imams of each religion, People of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*), against forces of ignorance, People of the Left (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*). According to *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*, since the creation of Adam, the world has known two kinds of 'government' (*dawla*): that of God in which the prophets and imams, the Guides of Light and Justice (*a'immat al-nūr*, *a'immat al-'adl*) are able to teach the religion of *walāya* openly, and that of Iblis in which this faith can only be practised secretly since the world is under the influence of the Guides of Darkness and Injustice (*a'immat al-ḡalām*, *a'immat al-ḡulm*).

Since Iblis was Adam's adversary (*ḍidd*), the history of Adamic humanity has been marked by adversity and violence on the part of demonic forces of ignorance that will always be predominant and in the majority during the current cycle; thus they will isolate and marginalise the persecuted initiates.¹¹⁴

113. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Cosmogony and Cosmology (in Twelver Shi'ism)', *EIr*, vol. 6, pp. 317–322; E. Kohlberg, 'Evil (in Shi'ism)', *EIr*, vol. 9, pp. 182–185. On the tradition regarding Armies of Intelligence and Ignorance see Chapter 12 in this volume.; also D. K. Crow, 'The Role of *al-'Aql* in Early Islamic Wisdom, with Reference to Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq' (PhD thesis, McGill University, 1996), ch. 13.

114. (Pseudo?) al-Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*, pp. 17ff.; on *dawlat Allāh* and *dawlat Iblis* see also al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 199. Cf. the analysis by M. Molé, 'Entre le Mazdéisme et l'Islam, La bonne et la mauvaise religion', in *Mélanges Henri Massé* (Tehran, 1963), pp. 303–316 and esp. E. Kohlberg, 'Some Shi'i Views on the Antediluvian World', *SI* (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article XVI), pp. 45ff. and note 3, where other sources belonging to the Nuṣayriyya or Ismailis are cited. It is in reference to the power of the 'Guides of Darkness' and their loyal 'ignorant ones' that Shi'i *ḥadīths* employ expressions such as *walāyat al-ṭawāghīt* or *walāyat al-shayāṭīn*.

The adversaries of *walāya*, whom the faithful Shi'i is urged not to frequent, are not necessarily pagans and unbelievers. The Israelites who betrayed Moses by pledging faith in the Golden Calf, and Muḥammad's Companions who rejected 'Alī are not 'non-Jews' and non-Muslims but people who reject the esoteric dimension of their respective religions, emptying the latter from what is most profound, thus becoming what the *ḥadīth* call, 'the Muslim gone astray', that is to say those subject exclusively to the letter of Revelation and astray because they reject *walāya*.¹¹⁵

Barā'a, like its inseparable opposite, *walāya*, is also as ancient as the world. This pair of opposing concepts is at the heart of the Shi'i dualist vision of the world, a vision that may be illustrated by an entire series of contrasting terms typifying the dialectic of Good/Knowledge and Evil/Ignorance:

Good/Knowledge

imām

a'immat al-nūr/al-'adl

'aql

aṣḥāb al-yamīn

walāya/tawallī/muwālāt

Evil/Ignorance

'aduww al-imām

a'immat al-ḡalām/al-ḡulm

jahl

aṣḥāb al-shimāl

barā'a/tabarrī/mu'ādāt

Brought into being ever since the Origin of the universe, sacred Love/sacred Hatred also determines eschatology:

He who enters into the *walāya* of Muḥammad's descendants has entered paradise; he who enters into the *walāya* of their enemies has entered hell.¹¹⁶

This tradition, variously formatted or expressed in approximately the same manner is repeated literally hundreds of times in *Ḥadīth* literature. Salvation due to love of the imams begins at the moment of death (*iḥtiḍār*) and the interrogation of the tomb (*al-musā'ala fi'l-qabr*) conducted by Nakīr and Munkar. In

115. See notes 76 and 95 above as well as the relevant texts.

116. Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 8, p. 347, no. 7 (Ja'far).

a very long *ḥadīth* going back to the sixth imam, it is explained how upon the deathbed of one who has loved the imams, 'Alī, Muḥammad and the angel Gabriel appeared before the Angel of Death to request him to be loving and kind to the dying person and ease his death.¹¹⁷

Not a single death, from dawn to dusk, on land or sea, without Munkar and Nakīr questioning [him] regarding *walāya* of 'Alī, his Lord, religion, prophet and imam.¹¹⁸

We have already seen that reward (*thawāb*) in the hereafter is only obtained by the grace of *walāya*. The most radical versions implying as much were reported in a systematic manner, perhaps for the first time by al-Barqī in his *Maḥāsīn*:

For one who loves us, the *ahl al-bayt*, and for whom this love is heartfelt (*ḥuqqīqa* (?) *ḥubbunā fī qalbih*), for him the sources of wisdom will flow from his tongue and faith will be strengthened in his heart. He will merit the reward of seventy prophets, seventy sincere believers, seventy martyrs and seventy worshippers having worshipped God for seventy years.¹¹⁹

Cherish love and affection (*mawadda*) for the *ahl al-bayt*, for he who encounters God having loved us, will enter paradise by our intercession (*shafā'a*). By He who has my life in His hands, no action will benefit man if not taken by knowledge of our truth (*ḥaqq*; as we have seen, one of the terms used to denote *walāya*).¹²⁰

117. *Bihār*, vol. 6, p. 197, no. 51.

118. *Bihār*, vol. 6, p. 316, no. 6 (the Prophet). On the interrogation of the tomb and love of the imams see also vol. 6, pp. 236ff.; vol. 7, pp. 128, 186ff., 275ff., 331ff.; vol. 8, pp. 67ff.

119. Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, 'kitāb thawāb al-a'māl', ch. 80, p. 61, vol. 1, no. 103, (Ja'far); al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 27, p. 90.

120. *Maḥāsīn*, ch. 81, p. 61, vol. 1, no. 105 (the Prophet through al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī). On the notion of *shafā'a*, see A. J. Wensink, *A Muslim Creed, Its Genesis and Historical Development* (Cambridge, 1932), pp. 61–64, 180–183; T. Huitema, *De Voorsprak* (*shafā'a*) *in den Islam* (Leiden, 1936), and concerning Shi'ism now consult Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, ch. 4, section 2.5, pp. 180–189.

He who longs to see God unveiled and wishes God to look upon him unveiled, let him love the descendants of the Prophet and dissociate himself from their enemies; let him have as imam one among them [i.e. the imams] in order that on the Day of Resurrection God looks upon him unveiled and that he sees God unveiled.¹²¹

At this level of meaning, *walāya* – synonymous with *maḥabba/hubb* (love), *mawadda* (affection) and *taslīm* (submission, undying loyalty, obedience)¹²² – is directed either towards the historic imam or through him towards the metaphysical Imam, the manifestation of God. The first form, which is found especially in popular Shi'ism, is the foundation for the origin and development of the generally known adoration of the imams. The second is more often found among philosophers, theologians and mystics.

Thus we may better appreciate how the Shi'i religious consciousness, in its various components, perceives the many levels of meaning attached to the famous phrase that Muḥammad is said to have uttered during his speech at Ghadir Khumm and that the Imamis call the '*ḥadīth of walāya*', since according to them the Prophet there proclaimed the investiture of 'Alī to both the temporal and spiritual caliphate:

121. Al-Barqī, *Maḥāsīn*, vol. 1, ch. 78, p. 60, no. 101 (al-Riḍā); it is interesting to note that some years later, Ibn Bābūya (d. 381/991) in his *Thawāb al-a'māl* reports a much more toned down version regarding the reward linked to *walāya* and *barā'a* (*Thawāb al-a'māl* + *ʿIqāb al-a'māl*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī [Qumm, 1391/1971], vol. 30, p. 204). On this account of the 'rationalist' trend within early Imamism, see *Guide divin*, pp. 15–48 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 6–19).

122. On this important notion, signifying submission to the esoteric dimension of religion as it differs from *islām* understood to mean submission to the exoteric religion, see e.g. al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 10, ch. 20 ('Bāb fi'l-taslīm li āl Muḥammad'), pp. 520ff.; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb al-taslīm wa faḍl al-musallimīn', vol. 2, pp. 234ff.; the term is also defined as obedience to the imam's directives as an antidote to the polemics surrounding matters of faith, see Ibn Bābūya, *al-Tawḥīd*, 'Bāb al-naḥy 'anī'l-kalām', pp. 458f., and *Kamāl al-dīn*, ch. 31, no. 9 (*taslīm* as opposed to reasoning by analogy – *qiyās* – and personal opinion – *ra'y*).

Let he who considers me to be his *mawlā*, take 'Alī to be his *mawlā*.
O my God, love the one who loves him [i.e. 'Alī] and be the enemy
of whosoever is hostile towards him.¹²³

Conclusion

Walāya in its technical Shi'i sense thus has three principal meanings that are at once complementary and interdependent: the imamate, love of the imam and theology of the metaphysical Imam¹²⁴ – complementary and interdependent meanings indeed.

123. *Man kuntu mawlā-hu fa-'Aliyyun mawlā-hu Allāhuma wāli man wālā-hu wa 'ādi man 'ādāhu*; on this '*ḥadīth al-walāya*' and its countless transmitters and sources, now see *Ṣaḥīfat al-imām al-Riḍā* (Qumm, 1408/1987), pp. 172–224, no. 109. See also 'A. Ḥ. Amīnī, *al-Ghadīr fi'l-kitāb wa'l-sunna wa'l-adab* (Tehran, 1372/1952; rpr. 1986), index of *ḥadīths*. Words belonging to the root WLY are pointed out in the text of the *ḥadīth*: the *mawlā* is the patron, the protector; it often has this meaning when describing God in the Qur'ān. It obviously also denotes that which is the object of *walāya*, i.e. love, devotion and loyalty. In the Shi'i context, the term *mawlā* is applied either to God or more frequently to 'Alī and the other imams; this moreover is symptomatic. Although highly informative the article 'Mawlā' by P. Crone in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* does not sufficiently take into account matters relating to Shi'ism (*EI2*, vol. 7, pp. 865–874).

124. It would be tempting to read into this text the famous phrase pronounced by Ja'far al-Šādiq, 'Our matter [*amr*; a very commonly used term for *walāya*] contains an exoteric (*zāhir*), an esoteric [dimension] (*bāṭin*) and an esoteric of the esoteric (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*)', al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, MS Mashhad, Āstān-i Quds I, Akhbār 62/169, fol. 18r.; MS Āstān-i Quds V/36, Akhbār 407/1933, fol. 20; MS India Office 932, fol. 22r.; the Kūtchebāghī edition used hitherto (section 1, ch. 12, p.29, no. 4) drops the term *bāṭin* and contains just *zāhir* and *bāṭin al-bāṭin*, which is clearly a mistake. Al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 2, p. 71, no. 33 contains *zāhir*, *bāṭin al-zāhir* and *bāṭin al-bāṭin*. It seems to me that *bāṭin* and *bāṭin al-zāhir* are equal. A laconic statement by the mystic master Khāksār, Mudarris-i 'Ālam (d. ca. 1950?), appears to concur: *walāyat sirr-i islām ast wa maẓhariyyat sirr-i walāyat* (*walāya* is the secret of Islam and [the fact that imam is] the locus of manifestation for God is the secret of *walāya*), *Tuḥfa-yi darwīsh* (Tehran, 1337 Sh./1959), p. 40 (cf. note 72 above and the related text). It should be added that *walāya* in its most basic meaning of temporal authority does not connote any particularly Shi'i notion; thus *ḥadīths* may speak of *walāyat al-ṭawāghit al-thalātha* (the authority of the three rebels verses God, i.e.

Let us recall a self-evident matter: if the historic or metaphysical imamate or theology of the divine Face of the Imam and love for the imam/Imam are all denoted by one and the same term, *walāya*, it is so because in the Shi'i religious consciousness there is an organic link between these three principal meanings: the historic imamate is fundamentally the religion of love for the Face of God, which is none other than the cosmic Imam.¹²⁵

It is especially interesting to re-read passages containing or concerning *walāya* in 'the Qur'an of the imam', the vulgate and in

the first three caliphs), *walāyat fulān wa fulān* (the authority of such and such, i.e. Abū Bakr and 'Umar), *walāyat Banī Umayya*, *Banī'l-'Abbās*, etc.

125. Ḥaydar Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār wa manba' al-anwār*, ed. H. Corbin and O. Yahia (Tehran, 1969), 'al-aṣl al-thālith, al-qā'ida al-thāniya, fī asrār al-nubuwwa wa'l-risāla wa'l-walāya', pp. 379–394; Sulṭān Muḥammad Gunābādī Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh, *Walāyat-Nāmāh* (Tehran, 1344 Sh./1966), section 1, ch. 6, pp. 20–21; section 2, chs 1–3, pp. 22–32; section 5, chs 1 and 2, pp. 61–71; section 9, ch. 1, pp. 157–170 and ch. 8, pp. 214–221; throughout section 10, pp. 226–243. One must point out the problem faced when dealing with esoteric teachings, namely that the authors' language is typically allusive. This richness in meaning better shows to what extent the notion of *wilāyat al-faqīh* – a theory that is central to Khomeynist ideology – plays upon ambiguity in order to assure, in the opinion of the Imami masses, the politico-religious charisma of the jurist-theologian and thus replace the figure of the imam with that of the former (see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Réflexions sur une évolution du shi'isme duodécimain, tradition et idéologisation', in *Les retours aux Ecritures, Fondamentalismes présents et passés*, ed. E. Patlagean and A. Le Boulluec [Paris, 1993], pp. 63–82). That the term is vocalised and pronounced *wilāya* clearly makes no difference because the term maintains the same meaning (see M. Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints*, pp. 34ff.). But in the Sufism, the two terms may have different meanings, see V. Cornell, *The Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, 1998), mainly the introduction and pp. 216ff., 227ff., 272. Similarly, the mass of faithful have difficulty in grasping the distinction made between '*wilāya* pertaining to' the jurists (*wilāyat i'tibāriyya*) and the 'creative *wilāya*' of the imams (*wilāyat takwīniyya*). Although this attempt by a politico-religious leader is understandable, one is perplexed by researchers who seem to measure *walāya* in religious texts by the yardstick of the doctrine of *wilāyat al-faqīh* (see e.g. A. A. Sachedina, *The Just-Ruler* (al-sulṭān al-'ādil) in Shi'ite Islam (New York, 1988); Bayhom-Daou, 'The Imam's Knowledge', see n. 1 above, in which *walāya*, vocalised *wilāya*, is translated as 'the legislative authority of the imam' (p. 195); admittedly *dīn* is also without any explanation at all translated as 'the law' (p. 204).

traditions on the Pillars of Islam in the light of one or another or even all of these meanings.

According to the Shi'i conception, the ultimate aim of knowing God and His Message transmitted by the revelations made to the prophets is knowledge of the imam and love for him. At this point, 'the journey of return' begins: knowledge and love of the imam directs the faithful towards knowledge of the latter's secret reality that is none other than the revealed Face of God. This twofold movement, descending and ascending, from God to one imam after another and from the imams to God – typifying the believer's gnostic spirituality – can be illustrated by the following *ḥadīths*:

My Lord, make yourself known to me, for if you do not make yourself known to me, I will not come to know your prophet. My Lord, make your prophet known to me, for if you do not make your prophet known to me, I will not come to know your Proof [*ḥujja*, i.e. the imam]. My Lord, make your Proof known to me, for if you if you do not make your Proof known to me, I shall be led astray, far from my religion.¹²⁶

The imam al-Ḥusayn: 'God created all beings especially to know and worship Him.'

A disciple: 'What is the knowledge of God?'

The imam: 'Knowledge, during each era, of the imam of this era.'¹²⁷

This is why, in Shi'ism, a faith is either based on *walāya* with the esoteric dimension of every prophetic message, or it simply does not exist, that is to say in this case it is but a 'pseudo-faith', whether in this regard we have in mind the Pillars of Islam or the triple profession of the *shahāda* (the third of which concerns the *walāya* of 'Alī) and the recitation of these formulaic declarations

126. A tradition going back to Ja'far reported by al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb fi'l-ghayba', vol. 2, pp. 135 and 144, nos 5 and 29; it constitutes the beginning of the prayer known as the prayer of Deliverance (*du'ā' al-faraj*), meant to be read during the Occulation to ease the pain of waiting for the Qā'im; see Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, ch. 45, pp. 512ff., no. 43.

127. Ibn Bābūya, *Ilal al-sharā'ir* (Najaf, 1385/1966), ch. 9, p. 9, no. 1.

during the call to prayer (*adhān*) thus introducing *walāya* into the ritual.¹²⁸

To conclude, a word about the 'organic' aspect of *walāya* bearing upon the subtle spiritual anatomy. It is *walāya* that carries out the transmutation of faith into an intensely felt religious and spiritual experience, first, for the common folk among Shi'is, obviously by means of the cult of the imams with all the naiveté, excesses and deviations which are common in popular religions; secondly, especially for the spiritual 'elite' engaged in a quest for the realisation of the light of *walāya* (*nūr al-walāya*). Far from being an abstract notion, the latter seems to designate a spiritual faculty, an internal 'organic' disposition since it can also be transmitted physically and is called the single and double Light of Muḥammad and 'Alī or more commonly, the Light of *walāya*.

As if in a continuation of certain works by U. Rubin,¹²⁹ I have devoted extensive studies to different aspects of this issue that constitutes one of the main foundations of Imami spiritual practices.¹³⁰ Let us therefore confine ourselves to a very brief summary of matters: several thousand years before the creation of the world, the luminous entities of the Impeccable Ones (Muḥammad, Fāṭima and the imams) are made to proceed forth by God from His own Light. He initiates them to the arcanum of the divine sciences. These archetypal Guides of Light in turn teach the sciences to the pre-existing entities of the initiates that have been created as particles.

128. See L. A. Takim, 'From *Bid'a* to *Sunna*: the *Wilāya* of 'Alī in the Shi'i *Adhān*', *JAOS*, 120 (2000), pp. 166–177.

129. U. Rubin, 'Pre-existence and Light. Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad', *Israel Oriental Studies*, 5 (1975), pp. 62–112, and 'Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shi'a Tradition', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 1 (1979), pp. 41–65.

130. *Guide divin*, section II, pp. 73–154 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 29–60) (an abridged but updated version of the excursus on 'vision by the heart' pp. 112–145 [*Divine Guide*, pp. 44–55], was published in a special issue of *Connaissance des Religions*, 57–59 [1999], *Lumières sur la Voie du Coeur*, pp. 146–169); see also 'Cosmogony and Cosmology (in Twelver Shi'ism)', *Elr*, the second section; and Chapters 4 and 10, this volume.

Upon the creation of the world and the first man, the initiatic Light of *walāya* is deposited in Adam. Thus commences the long journey of the Light through the long chain of divine initiates to reach the historic Muḥammad and 'Alī. The transmission takes place by two means: by natural physical genealogy with the grace of 'blessed and purified loins', the seminal substance; and by initiatory spiritual genealogy whence prophets, imams and saints succeed each other. Having reached Muḥammad, Fāṭima, 'Alī and the imams – earthly manifestations of these original Vehicles – the Light reaches its most intense level. It is transmitted by the latter to their physical descendants¹³¹ and then to the faithful initiates who perpetuate its transmission. This is why, in Imami mysticism, one of the greatest spiritual aims is to realise in oneself – by diverse means, whether initiation, ascetism, rituals or practice – the Light of *walāya* in the heart whose essential 'components' are the transformatory knowledge and the ability to perform miracles.

One who reaches this level does not become an imam (who has his own theological and ontological status) but attains the rank of saint comparable to the imam, and linked to him becomes a *wālī*, an Ally or Friend of God, a practical and living example of *walāya*. For Imami spirituality, such a *wālī* then ipso facto belongs to the Holy Family of the Prophet; for example, Salmān al-Fārisī, 'the stranger' about whom Muḥammad is said to have declared: 'Salman is one of us, the *ahl al-bayt*'¹³² and al-Fuḍayl b. Yasār

131. One reason why in Shi'i lands the real and supposed descendants of the imams (*sayyids* and *ashrāf*) are treated with great respect. The virtues flowing from the Light of *walāya* are found in them in a potential state. However, according to mystics, these virtues are prone to be realised more easily among the imams' spiritual descendants. Regarding *sayyids* now see the special issue, *Oriente Moderno*, 18 (77.2–1999), *Il Ruolo dei Sādāt/Ashrāf nella Storia e Civiltà Islamiche*, ed. B. Scarcia Amoretti and L. Bottini. Unfortunately, the spiritual dimension of capital importance is largely missing from this collection of articles.

132. For example al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, section 1, ch. 11, p. 25, no. 21.

al-Nahdī, a disciple about whom imam al-Bāqir reportedly said the same thing.¹³³

The Shi'i faith in general and the Imami expression of it in particular revolves around the double vision of the world that we recalled above: the dual conception of the world illustrated by the 'complementary pairs' (manifest/hidden; exoteric/esoteric; prophet/imam; *nubuwwa/walāya*; letter/spirit of the Revelation etc.) and the dualist conception illustrated by the 'opposing pairs' (Good/Evil; imam/enemy of the imam; Knowledge/Ignorance; People of the Right/People of the Left; *walāya/barā'a* etc.).

The first may be symbolised by a 'vertical axis' since passing from the manifest to the hidden approaches the divine and the understanding of secrets of Being. This vertical axis of Initiation determines mankind's spirituality. Similarly, to the second vision of the world, one might apply the symbol of a 'horizontal axis', for this axis of the battle determines the history of creation, a history traversed by the leitmotif of the perpetual struggle between the forces of knowledge and ignorance.¹³⁴ With its various meanings *walāya* is the only notion that one can find on both axes. It holds an eminent place of fundamental importance both in its dual and dualist vision of the world. It thus constitutes the very substance of the religion of the Shi'i faithful, both commoner and elite, called upon to constantly maintain himself where both 'axes' intersect.¹³⁵

133. Al-Kashshī, *Ikhtiyār ma'rifat al-rijāl* (Mashhad, 1348 Sh./1969), p. 213.

134. *Guide divin*, pp. 308–310 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 127–128).

135. I wish to express my gratitude to M. M. Bar-Asher, R. Brunner and E. Kohlberg for their attentive reading of the first version of this text and for their instructive comments.

Only the Man of God is Human: Theology and Mystical Anthropology According to Early Imami Exegesis

At the heart of the Twelver corpus of sayings attributed to the imams¹ there is a series of traditions that divide humans into three categories: the Impeccable Ones (i.e. the Prophet, his daughter Fāṭima and the twelve imams, particularly the latter), their faithful supporters (that is to say, those who have joined the cause of the imams), and finally the others. The most ancient layer of the series might be the one that establishes this division in terms appropriate to a tribal lexicon. ‘We are the descendants of Hāshim’, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) is reported to have declared, ‘Our faithful supporters [literally “our Shi‘is”] are Arabs of noble stock and the others are Bedouins of low descent.’² Responding to a Qurashī

1. Concerning this corpus see, e.g., H. Löschner, *Die dogmatischen Grundlagen des shi‘itischen Rechts* (Cologne, 1971), esp. the introduction; E. Kohlberg, ‘Shi‘ī Ḥadīth’, *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, vol. I: *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 299–307. For a discussion of the older sources, see *Guide divin*, pp. 51–56; also my article, ‘Remarques sur les critères d’authenticité du ḥadīth et l’autorité du juriste dans le shi‘isme imāmīte’, *SI*, 85 (1997), pp. 5–39.

2. ‘*Naḥnu banū Hāshim wa shi‘atunā al-‘arab wa sā’ir al-nās al-a‘rāb*’, al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfī*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Tehran, 1389/1969), vol. 1, p. 244, no. 183.

who spoke about his tribe and the nobility of the Arabs, imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799) is reported to have declared:

Leave all that be! There are three types of men: the noble of pure descent, the protected ally and the vile man of base descent. We are the nobles, our faithful supporters are the protected allies and those who do not share our doctrine are the vile.³

An analogous tradition, attributed to the same imam, provides even more precise information:

There are three types of men: the noble of pure descent, the protected ally and the vile man of base descent. We are the nobles of pure descent; the protected ally is the one who faithfully loves us; the base man is one who dissociates himself from us and openly declares himself to be our enemy.⁴

3. 'Da' hādhā al-nās thalātha 'arabī wa-mawlā wa-'ilj fa-naḥnu al-'arab wa-shī'atunā al-mawālī wa man lam yakun 'alā mithli mā naḥnu 'alayhi fa-huwa al-'ilj', al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 2, p. 30, no. 287. 'Arab, mawlā and 'ilj are part of the tribal vocabulary and indicate literally and respectively: 'a free Arab of noble stock, lord', 'protected ally, freedman, "client", whether or not of Arab race', and 'the non-Arab savage without religion, a barbarian'.

4. 'Fa-ammā al-'arab fa-naḥnu wa ammā al-mawlā man wālānā wa ammā al-'ilj man tabarra'a minnā wa nāṣabanā', Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (rpr. Qumm, 1403/1983), p. 123, no. 116. The tradition brings together the different technical meanings of the root *w-l-y* 'protection' and 'alliance' in *mawlā*, 'love-proximity-fidelity' through the third form *wālā*. This last sense is in contrast to one of the meanings contained in the root *b-r-*, whose fifth form *tabarra'a* is used in this tradition. The reference is of course to the pair of opposites *wālāya/barā'a* or *tawallī/tabarru'* that is omnipresent in Imami, particularly early Imami, doctrine. I will return to this point. Concerning these technical terms and this pair, see U. Rubin, 'Barā'a: a Study of Some Qur'ānic Passages', *JSAL*, 5 (1984), pp. 71–91; E. Kohlberg, 'Barā'a in Shī'i Doctrine', *JSAL*, 7 (1986), pp. 139–175; H. Landolt, 'Walāya', in M. Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 15; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, under 'walāya' (*Divine Guide*, *ibid.*); J. Calmard, 'Les rituels shī'ites et le pouvoir. L'imposition du shī'isme safavide: eulogies et malédictions canoniques', in J. Calmard (ed.), *Etudes Safavides* (Paris and Tehran, 1994), pp. 117–121 and Chapter 7, this volume. Finally, *nāṣabanā*, which I translate as 'openly declares himself to be our enemy', is evidently an allusion to the notion of *naṣb* and to the one who applies it, that

At first glance, it is clear that the tribal anthropological criteria have been abandoned in favour of those of a doctrinal nature where these criteria are understood as metaphors for the three categories that make up mankind: the spiritual guides, their supporters and their adversaries.

It is necessary at this juncture to recall two points that serve to clarify the implication of these traditions and at the same time to facilitate an understanding of what is to follow. Twelver Shi'ism, of the type that emerged from the doctrines that can be traced back to the historical imams, has a dualist vision of history that might be characterised as one determined by a perpetual combat between the two antagonistic forces of good and evil. These forces are represented, respectively, by the imam and his adepts on the one hand and the 'enemies' of the imam and their partisans on the other. This combat had already begun before the creation of the material world, with the conflict between the armies of cosmic knowledge (*'aql*, the cosmogonic Imam of the forces of good and the archetype of the terrestrial imam) and those of cosmic ignorance (*jahl*, the leader of the forces of evil and the archetype of the enemy of the imam).⁵ This struggle has continued throughout time in a conflict that has pitted the imams of the various legislative prophets and their adepts against their adversaries, led by leaders who rejected the mission of the prophets and/or of the

is to say the *nāṣibī*, pl. *nawāṣib/nuṣṣāb*. In the technical Shi'i lexicon, this latter is designated the adversary of 'Alī (or someone who does not recognise 'Alī's superiority over the other Companions), the enemy of all the *ahl al-bayt*, or, in a more general fashion, the adversary of the Shi'is.

5. Concerning the cosmogonic account of the combat between *'aql* and *jahl*, see al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, ed. J. al-Ḥusaynī al-Muḥaddith (Tehran, 1370/1950), vol. 1, pp. 196–198; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 1, pp. 24–27; (Pseudo-?) al-Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya* (rpr. Qumm, 1417/1996), pp. 15–17; Ibn Shu'ba, *Tuḥaf al-'uqūl*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1366 Sh./1986), pp. 423–425. For an overview, see my article 'Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol. 4, pp. 317–322 and also Chapter 12, this volume.

imams.⁶ This combat will only end with the definitive victory of the Mahdī/Qā'im over the forces of ignorance at the end of time (*ākhir al-zamān*).⁷ This dualism lies at the basis of the doctrinal 'theory of opposites' (*ḍidd*, pl. *aḍḍād*), which was characterised by speculations concerning fundamental 'pairs' such as imam/enemy of the imam (*imam/'aduww al-imām*), intelligence/ignorance, people of the right/people of the left (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn/aṣḥāb al-shimāl*), guides of light/guides of darkness (*a'immat al-nūr/a'immat al-ḡalām*), imams of guidance/imams of error (*a'immat al-hudā/a'immat al-ḡalāl*), sacred love (for the imam)/hatred (for the imam, but also that which was sworn by the imam's followers against their adversaries: *walāya/barā'a*) and so on.⁸ During the Islamic period, the adversaries and the enemies are those who have rejected the *walāya* of 'Alī and the imams who descended

6. According to the Shi'i conception, divine truth (*ḥaqq*) manifests itself under two aspects: the exoteric aspect (*ẓāhir*) of truth is revealed by the legislator prophet, while the esoteric aspect (*bāṭin*) is revealed by the imam(s) who always accompanies the prophet in his mission. I will return to this point at greater length. On this subject see e.g. H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris, 1971–1972), vol. 1, Book one, passim, and *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (3rd edn, Paris, 1986), pp. 69–85. The initiatory mission of the imam (*imāma/walāya*) always meets with the hostility of the leaders of unbelief and those who follow them – that is to say, those who do not believe in the truthfulness of either the prophetic message or the mission of the imam, which for the Shi'is is one and the same. This vision of the history of mankind is the main subject of the *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya* attributed to al-Mas'ūdī (see the preceding note). Cf. also E. Kohlberg, 'Some Shi'i Views on the Antediluvian World', *SI*, 52 (1980), pp. 41–66 (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article XVI); and my *Guide divin*, pp. 106ff. (*Divine Guide*, p. 41ff.).

7. See e.g. A. A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: the Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany, NY, 1981); Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 279–301 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 115–123); and my article 'Eschatology in Twelver Shi'ism', *Elr*.

8. As far as I know, no comprehensive critical study of the Imami 'theory of opposites' has yet been undertaken. Nevertheless, one can find elements of this issue in Kohlberg, 'Some Shi'i Views on the Antediluvian World', esp. pp. 45–46, as well as in his other article, 'The Term "Rāfiḍa" in Imāmī Shi'i Usage', *JAOS*, 99 (1979), (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article IV); see also the important data discussed by M. Molé in 'Entre le mazdéisme et l'Islam: la bonne et la mauvaise religion', in *Mélanges Henri Massé* (Tehran, 1963), esp. pp. 314–315.

from him. In this case the reference is to almost all of the Companions, in particular the first three caliphs, to the Umayyads, to the 'Abbasids, and more generally to all of those whom the Shi'is call 'the majority' (*al-akthar*) or 'the masses' (*al-ʿamma*), that is to say, those who would eventually come to be called 'the Sunnis'.⁹

The second point concerns another aspect of the Imami world view, an aspect that one might describe as 'dual'. In effect, Shi'ism perceives reality in all its aspects as consisting of two levels: an apparent, manifest, exoteric level (*al-zāhir*), and a second level, hidden by the first, that is secret and esoteric (*al-bāṭin*). This second level, in turn, could contain many other increasingly secret levels (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*). The teaching attributed to the imams establishes a correspondence between the levels and attempts to maintain an equilibrium between them, although the superiority of *bāṭin* over *zāhir* is detectable between the lines almost everywhere. This process is, fundamentally, hermeneutical. If the *bāṭin* gives direction and meaning to the *zāhir*, the latter constitutes in turn the basis and indispensable support for the *bāṭin*. Without esotericism, exotericism loses its meaning and without exotericism, esotericism finds itself stripped of its foundation.¹⁰ This dialectic constitutes the fundamental correspondence between prophecy and imamology. The legislator prophet (*nabī/rasūl/nabī mursal*) brings to the mass of humanity (*al-ʿamma*) a sacred Book

9. The attitude of the Shi'is towards their adversaries is epitomised in the notion of *sabb al-ṣaḥāba*. On this subject, see I. Goldziher, 'Spottnamen der ersten Chalifen bei den Schi'iten', WZKM, 15 (1901), pp. 320–332 (rpr. in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, pp. 291–305); A. S. Tritton, *Muslim Theology* (London, 1947), pp. 27ff.; E. Kohlberg, 'Some Imāmi Shi'i Views on the *Ṣaḥāba*', JSAI, 5 (1984), pp. 143–175 (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article IX); A. Arazī, 'Ilqām al-ḥajar li-man zakkā sābb Abī Bakr wa-ʿUmar d'al-Suyūṭī ou le témoignage de l'insulteur des Compagnons', JSAI, 10 (1987), pp. 211–287.

10. On the importance and omnipresence of this concept in Imamism, see my article 'Du droit à la théologie: les niveaux de réalité dans le shi'isme duodécimain', *L'esprit et la nature, Cahiers du Groupe d'Etudes Spirituelles Comparés*, 5 (1997), pp. 37–63, where I study the role of the pair *zāhir/bāṭin* in various doctrinal fields (law, exegesis, theology, eschatology etc.), in the different semantic layers of certain technical terms, and in the different dimensions of the figure of the imam.

which has 'descended' from heaven (*tanzīl*). The imam/*wālī*, for his part, initiates a small elite (*al-aqall/al-khāṣṣa*) into the esoteric aspect of the sacred Book, thus 'returning [it] to its origin' (*ta'wīl*, see also n. 6 above). We can see here a recurrence of the 'pairs' of 'complementary terms': prophet/imam-*wālī*, *nubuwwa/walāya*, *tanzīl/ta'wīl*, *al-akthar/al-aqall*, *al-'amma/al-khāṣṣa*, as well as many others that were also abundantly used, such as Muḥammad/'Alī (the first evidently representing legislative prophecy, that is the letter of the revealed message, and the second, the imam par excellence, representing the initiatory mission of the imams, the esoteric hermeneutics of revelation), *islām/īmān* (literally 'Islam/faith' in the technical sense of 'submission to the letter of the exoteric religion' and 'initiation into the esoteric religion of the imams').¹¹ All these 'pairs' can be understood as a continuation of the fundamental pair of *ẓāhir/bāṭin*. Yet the centre of gravity of the *bāṭin*, of *walāya* as the esoteric aspect of *nubuwwa*, is the notion of '*ilm*, literally 'knowledge', which, however, in the context of the doctrinal traditions attributed to the imams, can only be translated as 'initiatory and secret knowledge'.¹² Apart from its ontological status, to which I will return, one could say that an imam is what he is by dint of his possession of '*ilm* and his position as spiritual initiator. Alongside perpetual combat, continuous initiation forms the other constant element of the Imami world view. It too begins before the creation of the physical world with the primordial initiation of the pre-existing entities of the impeccable beings into the secret divine knowledge and, subsequently, the initiation by these impeccable beings of the shades/

11. See my 'Du droit à la théologie', and *Guide divin*, pp. 308–309 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 127–128).

12. See my monograph in *Guide divin*, III-2, 'la science sacrée', pp. 174–199 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 69–79). See also my 'Réflexions sur une évolution du shi'isme duodécimain: tradition et idéologisation', in E. Patlagean and A. Le Boulluec (eds), *Les retours aux Ecritures: fondamentalismes présents et passés* (Louvain and Paris, 1993), esp. pp. 64–69. See also E. Kohlberg, 'Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period', in S. A. Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (Albany, NY, 1988), esp. pp. 25–28 (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article XIII).

particles (*dharr/azilla*) of the pure beings (angels, prophets and faithful supporters from all the ages) into this same knowledge.¹³ The initiation of the disciples by the imam or imams of each religion is a constant feature of all periods of history.¹⁴ The end of time is marked by the universal initiation into the esotericism of all religions as set forth by the Qā'im, the eschatological saviour.¹⁵ Just as perpetual combat determines human history, so continual initiation assures its spirituality. From this point of view, the supporters of the imams, the 'Shi'is' of our texts, are not only the Shi'is of the Islamic period, but also those who are initiated into the divine secret knowledge in all periods. At the same time their 'enemies', the people of ignorance, are generally the forces set in opposition to initiation in every period of history. They might be those who denied of the prophetic message (for example, Nimrod or Pharaoh denying the message of Abraham or Moses). They might be the supporters of exoteric religion who, failing to accept the initiatory teaching of the imam, cut off their religion from its hidden depths and thereby condemn themselves to ignorance, to oppression and finally to impiety (for example, the majority of the Jews and the Christians rejected the teaching of the imam or imams of their religions and thereby betrayed their prophets. The same goes for the majority Muslims who rejected the *walāya* of 'Alī and the other imams who were of his progeny).¹⁶

13. Cf. my *Guide divin*, II-1, 'Les mondes d'avant le monde. Le Guide-Lumière', pp. 75-95 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 29-37), 'Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi'ism', pp. 319-320; also Chapter 4, this volume.

14. *Guide divin*, 'L'humanité adamique: le "voyage" de la Lumière', pp. 96-112 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 38-43, 133-134); and 'cosmogony and Cosmology', p. 320; see also Chapter 4, this volume.

15. *Guide divin*, pp. 290-292 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 119-120); 'Eschatology in Imami Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol. 8, pp. 578-581.

16. See e.g. G. Vajda, 'Deux "Histoires des Prophètes" selon la tradition de shi'ites duodécimains', *Revue des Etudes juives*, 106 (1945-1946), pp. 124-133, and 'De quelques emprunts d'origine juive dans le *ḥadīth* shi'ite', in S. Morag et al. (eds), *Studies in Judaism and Islam Presented to S. D. Goitein* (Jerusalem, 1981), esp. pp. 242-244; M. M. Ayoub, 'Towards an Islamic Christology: an Image of Jesus in Early Shi'i Muslim Literature', *MW*, 66 (1976); E. Kohlberg,

One is thus able better to understand the tripartite division of humanity, particularly the variants, which are probably later and which are much more significant. Many *ḥadīths*, ascribed to Ja'far al-Šādiq, introduce the notion of initiation into this division: 'People are divided into three categories: the spiritual initiator, the initiated disciple and the scum carried off by the waves. We [the imams] are the spiritual initiators, our supporters are the initiated disciples, and the others are the scum on the waves.'¹⁷ In another place: 'The [true] men are of two types: the spiritual initiator and the initiated disciple. The others are vile beings, and vile beings are in the Fire [of hell].'¹⁸ It is easy to see that the third category, which does not even include true human beings, designates the 'enemies' of the initiated. Elsewhere, this imam repeats the division in another form:

'The Term "Rāfiḍa" in Imāmī Shī'i Usage', 'Some Shī'i Views on the Antediluvian World', and 'Some Imāmī Shī'i Views on the *Ṣaḥāba*' (see above).

17. '*Yaghdū al-nās 'alā thalātha ṣunūf 'ālim wa muta'allim wa ghuthā' fa-naḥnu al-'ulamā' wa shī'atunā al-muta'allimūn wa sā'ir al-nās al-ghuthā'*', al-Šaffār al-Qummī, *Bašā'ir al-darajāt*, ed. M. Küchebāghī (2nd edn, Tabriz, n.d.), section 1, ch. 5, pp. 8–9; Ibn Bābūya, *Khiṣāl*, vol. 1, p. 123, no. 115.

18. '*Al-nās ithnān 'ālim wa muta'allim wa sā'ir al-nās hamaj wa'l-hamaj fi'l-nār*', Ibn Bābūya, *Khiṣāl*, vol. 1, p. 39, no. 22. The term *hamaj*, which I have translated as 'vile beings', actually has three meanings: an individual of the lowest category, an old or lean sheep or ewe, or a small fly that pesters domestic cattle. We should note the expression 'in the Fire' and not 'towards the Fire' (*ilā'l-nār*, that is destined for or headed towards the Fire of Hell), as one might normally expect (aside from the edited text, the two manuscripts of the *Khiṣāl* that I have been able to consult also have '*fi'l-nār*', MS Āstān-e Qods, Mashhad, 5/82, *akhbār* 516, fol. 11, and *akhbār* 517, fol. 18). This seems to signify that the vile beings are in hell already in this life. The same tradition is also attributed to the Prophet with the slight difference that *lā khayra fihim* ('without anything of good in them') replaces *wa al-hamaj fi'l-nār*; see al-Dārimī, *al-Sunan* (Medina, 1986–1966), vol. 1, ch. 32, p. 80, no. 329; al-Shahrastānī, *Maḥāṭib al-asrār wa maṣābiḥ al-abrār*, facsimile publication of the unicum (Tehran, 1409/1986), fols 39a and 335b, cited by G. Monnot in 'Opposition and hiérarchie dans la pensée d'al-Shahrastānī', in Amir-Moezzi, Jambet and Lory (eds), *Henry Corbin: philosophies et sagesse des religions du Livre* (Turnhout, 2005), p. 96, n. 16.

Human beings are divided into three sections: the first consists of those found in the shadow of the [divine] Throne on the day when there is no other shadow (that is, on the Day of Resurrection). The second consists of those who are consigned to an accounting [of their acts] and to chastisement. The third group finally consists of those who have human faces, but whose hearts are those of demons.¹⁹

The first are the imams and their initiated supporters of all times. The second are their adversaries. The third, in all probability, are the leaders of the second group, that is, the 'guides of ignorance and darkness', the misguided *shayāṭīn* and seducers who draw 'the majority' along the road to perdition.

This anthropological conception appears to be supported by other elements of an anthropogonic order. As one might expect, these latter are not always coherent. In fact, they are rather confused, since they have been elaborated progressively down the ages and are made up of many strata. The authors of the most ancient compilations of traditions include Abū Ja'far al-Barqī (d. 274 or 280/887 or 893) and Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940–941), who record traditions that appear to be fragmentary, unbalanced in structure.²⁰ Their contemporary, al-Šaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–903), in this case as in many others, reports traditions that contain more information and have a more rigorous

19. 'Al-nās 'alā thalātha ajzā' fa-juz' taḥta zill al-'arsh yawma lā zilla illā zilluhu wa juz' 'alayhim al-ḥisāb wa'l-'adhāb wa juz' wujūhuhum wujūh al-ādamiyyīn wa qulūbuhum qulūb al-shayāṭīn', Ibn Bābūya, *Khiṣāl*, vol. 1, p. 154, no. 192 (Ja'far al-Šādiq begins his words by enumerating the three categories of *jinn*: those who are in the company of the angels, those who fly through the air, and those who take the form of dogs and serpents. One can recognise here the two good categories and the one bad category, corresponding to the tripartite division of human beings).

20. Al-Barqī, *Maḥāsin*, vol. 1, pp. 131ff., 'Kitāb al-ṣafwa wa'l-nūr wa'l-raḥma', 'Bāb khalq al-mu'min'; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, pp. 232–234, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb khalq abdān al-a'imma'; vol. 3, pp. 2–16 'Kitāb al-imān wa'l-kufr', 'Bāb ṭīnat al-mu'min wa'l-kāfir'.

construction.²¹ The anthropogonic episodes under discussion here are said to have occurred after the formation of the physical world at the moment of the creation of the souls (*arwāḥ*), hearts (*qulūb*, the seats of the souls) and bodies (*abdān*) of human beings. Here too we can see the omnipresent and radical division of creatures into two opposing groups: the guides of initiation and their adepts on the one side, the enemies and their supporters on the other. According to a tradition ascribed to al-Bāqir (d. 119/737):

God created the [the body of] Muḥammad and [those of] his family from the clay (*tīna*) of 'Illiyyin and created their souls and hearts from a clay found above the 'Illiyyin. He created [the bodies of] our faithful supporters and of the prophets from a clay found below the 'Illiyyin, just as he created their souls and hearts from the clay of 'Illiyyin. *It is thus that the hearts of our faithful supporters came from the bodies of the Family of Muḥammad.* [This is an important phrase to which I will return.] In the same manner, God created the enemy of the family of Muḥammad [that is, his soul, his heart and his body] as well as the souls and hearts of his partisans from the clay of *Sijjīn*, and [the bodies of] the latter from a clay found below the *Sijjīn*. *It is in this manner that the hearts of these latter [the partisans] issued from the former [their chiefs, the enemies of the imams].*²²

The terms *'Illiyyūn* ('*Illiyyin* in the accusative) and *Sijjīn* are both Qur'ānic and appear, respectively, in verses 18–21 and 7–9 of Sura 83:

No indeed; the Book of the pious is in '*Illiyyin*
And what shall teach you what is '*Illiyyūn*?
It is a book inscribed

21. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 1, ch. 9, pp. 14–19. Concerning this compiler and the use of his major work for a better understanding of what I have called the 'esoteric, non-rational, original' Imami tradition, see my article 'Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummi (m. 290/902–903) et son *Kitāb baṣā'ir al-darajāt*', *JA*, 280 (1992), pp. 221–250. Concerning these three scholars see Newman, *The Formation Period of the Twelver Shi'ism*.

22. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, p. 14, no. 2; also Ibn Bābūya, '*Ilal al-sharā'i wa'l-aḥkām*' (Najaf, 1385/1966), ch. 96, pp. 117–118, nos 12–15.

Witnessed by those brought nigh.²³
 No indeed; the Book of the libertines is in *Sijjīn*;
 And what shall teach you what is *Sijjīn*?
 It is a book inscribed.²⁴

Classical exegesis identifies *‘Illīyyīn* and *Sijjīn* respectively as one of the highest levels of Paradise and one of the lowest abodes of Hell, or as divine books that each list respectively the ‘names’ of the chosen and the damned. Although another tradition ascribed to Muḥammad al-Bāqir refers to *‘Illīyyīn* and *Sijjīn* as ‘the seventh heaven [of paradise] and the seventh level [of hell?]’,²⁵ discussions of these two terms in the early Imami corpus are almost always exegetical glosses on these verses quoted above and address the anthropogenic episodes under consideration here.

It is clear that here *‘Illīyyīn* and *Sijjīn* are, respectively, ‘celestial’ and ‘infernal’ ‘places’ that provide the primary matter of good and evil creatures. Moreover, in certain traditions, *‘Illīyyīn* appears to have been replaced by ‘*arsh*’ (the divine throne). This occurs, for example, in an important *ḥadīth* ascribed to Ja‘far al-Šādiq, where the tripartite division of humanity reappears:

God created us [our souls] from the light of His majesty, then he gave form to our creation [i.e. our body] from a well-guarded and secret clay taken from below the Throne, and placed this light in it. We are thus luminescent human creatures, favoured by God

23. ‘*Kallā inna kitāb al-abrār la-fi ‘illīyyīn / wa-mā adrāka mā ‘illīyyūn / kitābun marqūm / yashhaduhu’l-muqarrabūn.*’

24. ‘*Kallā inna kitāb al-fujjār la-fi sijjīn / wa mā adrāka mā sijjīn / kitābun marqūm.*’

25. ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Ṭ. al-Mūsawī al-Jazā‘irī (rpr. Beirut, 1991), vol. 2, p. 437. Somewhat later, a *ḥadīth* attributed to Ja‘far identifies ‘the libertines’ of the verse as Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, and ‘the pious’ as the fourteen impeccable ones (ibid., vol. 2, p. 438). Another tradition, also attributed to the sixth imam, glosses the verses, “‘*Sijjīn*, is a Book inscribed” on the hatred (*bughḍ*) towards Muḥammad and his descendants. “‘*‘Illīyyīn*, it is a Book inscribed” on the love (*ḥubb*) for Muḥammad and his descendants.’ Cf. Furāt al-Kuḥfī, *Tafsīr*, ed. M. al-Kāẓim (Tehran, 1410/1990), p. 543, no. 697.

in a manner shared by no other. And he created the souls of our supporters from our clay and their bodies from another clay that is well guarded and secret [but] lower than ours.... It is for this reason that we and they have become human while the others have become only vile beings [*hamaj*, see note 18 above] [made] for the Fire and [facing/going towards] the Fire.²⁶

The beings of good and evil are thus ontologically different. They are made of different substances, only the former merit being called human. The latter are only sub-humans, damned demonic beings that have nothing of humanity except their shape. According to a tradition ascribed to the third imam, al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī (d. 61/680), people are of three types: human beings (*al-nās*), those who resemble human beings (*ashbāh al-nās*) and monsters with a human shape (*nasnās* or *nisnās*).²⁷ The tradition adds:

We [the Impeccable Ones] are the human beings: those who resemble human beings are our supporters who are our friendly allies (*mawālī*) and come from us [this probably means 'they are formed of the same substance as us']; the monsters with a human

26. 'Inna llāha khalaqanā min nūr 'aẓamatih thumma ảawwara khalqanā min ẗīna makhzūna maknūna min taḥt al-'arsh fa-askana dhālika al-nūr fihi fa-kunnā naḥnu khalqan wa-basharan nūrāniyyin lam yuj'al li aḥad fī mithl alladhī khalaqanā minhu naṣīb wa khalaqa arwāḥ shi'atinā min ẗīnatinā wa abdānahum min ẗīna makhzūna maknūna asfal min dhālika al-ẗīna wa li dhālika ṣirnā naḥnu wa hum al-nās wa ṣāra sā'ir al-nās hamajan li'l-nār wa ilā'l-nār', al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, pp. 232–233, no. 2. See also al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 1, ch. 9, p. 17, no. 12, 'arsh in place of 'illiyyin; see also *Guide divin*, pp. 96–100 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 38–39), see also Chapter 4, this volume.

27. *Nasnās/nisnās* is a fictitious malevolent being, often described as a kind of 'monkey' with a human face, covered with bushy hair. See, e.g., al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* (Cairo, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 189; vol. 7, p. 178; Zakariyā al-Qazwīnī, 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt, in the margins of al-Damīrī, *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā* (Cairo, 1356/1937), vol. 1, pp. 190ff.; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. and tr. Barbier de Meynard and C. Pavet de Courteille (Paris, 1861–1877), vol. 4, pp. 10–17. See also F. Viré, 'Ḳird', *EI2*.

appearance are the great majority', and he [imam al-Ḥusayn] pointed to the mass of the people.²⁸

The following are supplementary details concerning the identity of these three types of people. The first group consists clearly of the long initiatory chain of prophets and their imams: Adam and Seth/Abel/Hibat Allāh (according to the different lists of imams of each prophet), Noah and Shem, Solomon and Āṣaf b. Barakhiyā, Abraham and Ishmael/Isaac, Moses and Aaron/Joshua, Jesus and Simon/John/the apostles, Muḥammad and 'Alī/the other eleven imams, to cite only the most celebrated. Thus, each pair of prophet/imam(s) is connected to the following pair along chain of divinely initiated sages. Thus Imami Shi'ism, in the strict sense of the term, appears as the last link in a long chain of initiation, the beginning of which is traced back to Adam, 'the father of humanity', and the continuity of which until the end of time is assured by the twelfth imam, the hidden imam, the Lord of Time (*ṣāhib al-zamān*) and the eschatological Saviour.²⁹

The second group consists of the 'loyal followers' of the imams of the different prophets, that is the *shī'a* of all times. But does this group also include all of the Shi'is of Islam? Should one take

28. 'Fa-naḥnu al-nās... *ashbāh al-nās fa-hum shī'atunā wa hum mawālīnā wa hum minnā... al-nasnās/ nīsnās fa hum al-sawād al-a'zam wa ashāra bi yadihi ilā jamā'at al-nās*', Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, p. 64, no. 30; al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 54, no. 339.

29. On the initiatory chain of prophets and imams, see 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābūya (the father of al-Ṣadūq), *al-Imāma wa'l-taḥṣīr min al-ḥayra* (Qumm, 1404/1985), pp. 21–23; (Pseudo?) al-Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya*, pp. 20–93; Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*, ed. al-Mūsawī al-Kharsān (5th edn, Tehran, 1390/1970), vol. 4, pp. 129–130, ch. 72, and *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-nī'ma*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Qumm, 1405/1985), vol. 1, pp. 211–213, ch. 22, no. 1; vol. 2, p. 664, ch. 58, nos 4–5; Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī, *Muqtaḍab al-athar* (Tehran, 1346/1927), pp. 51–52. Also see C. Pellat, 'Mas'ūdī et l'imāmisme', in *Le shī'isme imāmīte* (Paris, 1970), esp. pp. 80–81; U. Rubin, 'Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shī'a Tradition', *JSAI*, 1 (1979), pp. 41–65; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 106–108 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 41–42). The lists and the names of which they are comprised vary, sometimes considerably, from one source to another and certain names remain unidentified.

it that all those who call themselves Shi'is were created from the heavenly substance of the Imam and have henceforth won their salvation through their doctrinal affiliation? If one consulted only the rich literature of the *faḍā'il al-shī'a*, which from a very early date became virtually a literary genre among the Shi'is, one might tend to respond in the affirmative.³⁰ But other traditions provide a more nuanced picture. An initial group of texts, still anthropogonic in nature, aim at attenuating the radicalism of the anthropogonic traditions we have already considered and the certain kind of determinism that they convey. We are dealing here with traditions concerning 'the mixture of the two clays' (*ikhtilāṭ al-ṭīnatayn*): after the creation of good from the clay of 'Ilīyyīn and evil from the clay of *Sijjīn*, God mixed the two clays. This, according to the traditions, is why a believer can beget an unbeliever and an unbeliever can beget a believer. Furthermore, this is why a believer can commit evil and an unbeliever can do good.³¹ According to other accounts, which are often presented as exegetical glosses on Q 7:172 concerning the primordial pact (*mīthāq*), God took a handful of earth from which He created Adam and then poured on it sweet and pleasing water, and He let it rest for forty days. Then He poured salty and briny water over it and let it rest for another forty days. Once this clay had become muddy, God rubbed it vigorously and Adam's descendants came forth in the form of particles (*dharr*, literally 'ants'), on the right and left

30. Practically all compilations of Imami traditions, if not all the doctrinal works, include one or more chapters concerning 'the virtues of the Shi'is' or 'the virtue of being a Shi'i'. See, e.g., for the early period, al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, pp. 60–63, nos 78–87 'kitāb thawāb al-a'māl'; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 4, pp. 447ff. 'kitāb al-'ishra', and *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 1, pp. 49ff., 115ff.; vol. 2, pp. 13ff., 43ff., 215ff. Ibn Bābūya has numerous quasi-monographic works on this subject: *Thawāb al-a'māl* (Tehran, n.d.); *Muṣādaqat al-ikhwān* (Tehran, n.d.; the introduction by S. Nafīsī dates from 1325 Sh./1946); and esp. *Ṣifāt al-Shī'a + Faḍā'il al-Shī'a*, ed. with Persian tr. by Ḥ. Fashāhī (Tehran, 1342 Sh./1963–1964).

31. Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, pp. 136–137, ch. 7, kitāb al-ṣafwa wa'l-nūr; al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, pp. 15–17, section 1, ch. 9, nos 5, 7, 8, 10; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 3, pp. 2–8 'Kitāb al-īmān wa'l-kufr', 'Bāb ṭīnat al-mu'mīn wa'l-kāfir'.

of the clay, thereby giving birth to the 'people of the right' and the 'people of the left'.³² As a consequence, none of the believers are free from evil or error, and therefore from chastisement. The 'Sijjīnī' element in each person can become active at any moment through lack of awareness. On the other hand, an unbeliever has the ability to actualise the good in his basic nature in order to change his destiny. Thanks to the element of 'Illīyyīn within him, the veil that covers his conscience may be removed, thus allowing him to join the other side. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Imamism opts for an intermediate position between determinism and free will, a position designated by the expression 'a state between two states' (*amr bayn al-amrayn*).³³

In certain other traditions, moreover, a clear distinction is drawn between two categories of Shi'is. Muḥammad al-Bāqir is reported to have said:

You, faithful followers of the descendants of Muḥammad, you will be cleansed and washed clean just as kohl is washed off eyelids. Certainly one knows when one applies kohl to the eyes, but one does not know when it will be washed off. In the same manner, a man will wake up as a follower of our cause (*amr*) and lie down whilst abandoning it, or he will lie down as a follower and will wake up as a denier.³⁴

32. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, pp. 70–71, section 2, ch. 7, nos 2 and 6; Muḥammad b. Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Tehran, 1380/1960), vol. 2, pp. 39–40; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 3, p. 10.

33. Cf., e.g., al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, pp. 215–228 'Kitāb al-tawḥīd', 'Bāb al-jabr wa'l-qadar wa'l-amr bayn al-amrayn'; Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. H. al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭīhrānī (Tehran, 1398/1978), pp. 359–364, ch. 59, 'Bāb nafy al-jabr wa'l-tafwīḍ', pp. 364–390, ch. 60, 'Bāb al-qaḍā' wa'l-qadar'; and for speculations concerning the tradition '*lā jabr wa lā tafwīḍ bal amr bayn al-amrayn*', pp. 47, 69, 96, 143, 337–340, 344, 381–383, 407, 413; against the Jabriyya and the Tafwīḍiyya, see pp. 181 and 382.

34. Muḥammad b. Humān/Hammām al-Iskāfī, *Kitāb al-tamḥiṣ* (Qumm, n.d. [ca. 1995]), p. 37; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī with a Persian trans. by M. J. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1985), p. 301, ch. 12, no. 12.

The sixth imam is reported to have addressed his supporters in these terms:

By God, you will be broken like glass (*al-zujāj*), but glass, having been treated, will return to what it was. By God, you will be smashed like dry clay (*al-fakhhār*) and clay, once broken, will never return to what it was. By God, you will be severely sifted, tested and clearly distinguished from each other. By God, you will be purified completely until only a few of you remain.³⁵

This notion of sifting, of purification, of being put to a test from which only a few of Shi'is will emerge, appears in a substantial number of traditions.³⁶ This is a long way from the laudatory tone of the *faḍā'il al-shī'a*, at least when one considers that the term *shī'a* only refers to a small number of 'true' Shi'is.³⁷ Certain *ḥadīths*

35. Al-Iskāfī, *Tamhīṣ*, p. 43; al-Nu'mānī, *Ghayba*, pp. 301–302, no. 13. 'Glass' (*al-zujāj*), a transparent and noble material, designates of course the 'true faithful'; 'dry clay' (*al-fakhhār*), a dark and vile material, symbolises the 'nominal' Shi'is who are weak in their faith. The tradition may also conceal a play on words: the root *z-j-j* evokes the idea of effort and perseverance while the root *f-kh-r* evokes the idea of pride and vanity.

36. Cf., e.g., al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, pp. 194–199, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb al-tamhīṣ wa'l-imtiḥān'; al-Nu'mānī, *Ghayba*, pp. 294–310; ch. 12, Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 285–286 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 117–118). See in general the monograph compiled by al-Iskāfī, *Tamhīṣ* (already cited).

37. It is true that the doctrinal, and certainly the historical, contexts of the *faḍā'il al-shī'a*, appear to be different from those of the traditions dealing with the testing of the Imamis. The former seem older to me. One can detect in them a 'proselytising' tone that usually characterises the beginnings of a religious movement. The latter often have an eschatological context: the 'true followers' are those who remain firm in their faith in the hidden imam and his return. The test is in fact the occultation of the imam; this when the true Shi'is are distinguished from the false ones. But even in this particular context, a distinction is drawn between two categories of Shi'is. Moreover, in other traditions, which do not seem to have any eschatological elements, note also the existence of these two distinct categories. The 'true' are only a small minority: 'a [true] believing woman (*mu'mina*) is rarer than a [true] believing man (*mu'min*), and the latter is rarer than red sulphur (*al-kibrit al-aḥmar*)'; 'all men are animals (*bahā'im*) except for a handful of followers (*illā qalīl min al-mu'minīn*) and the [true] follower is a stranger (*gharīb*)'; 'a simple profession of love for us (*walāya*) does not

even refer to hostility between the two groups. The sixth imam is reported to have said: 'Some of you will spit in the faces of others, some of you will curse others, some of you will treat others as liars.'³⁸ Those who fail the test are the Shi'is who do not have faith in all of the teachings of the imams, those who keep some elements and reject others. The 'sifted' follower, he who emerges victorious from the test, is certainly the one to whom Shi'i *ḥadīths* frequently refers by the expression 'the follower whose heart has been tested by God for the faith' (*mu'min imtahana llāh qalbahū li'l-īmān*). A tradition repeated by many of the imams states clearly:

Our teaching (*ḥadīthunā*) is difficult (*ṣa'b*), extremely arduous (*mustaṣ'ab*); it cannot be undertaken except by a messenger prophet (*nabī mursal*), an angel of proximity (*malak muqarrab*), or a believing follower whose heart has been tested by God for the faith.³⁹

Certain particularly arduous or difficult aspects of the teaching are emphasised by words such as 'redoubtable' (*hayūb*), 'terrifying' (*dha'ūr*), 'grievous' (*thaqīl*), 'exasperating' (*khashin*), 'distressing' (*makhshūsh*), 'veiled' (*mastūr/muqanna*).⁴⁰ 'Our doctrine [*amrunā*, lit. "our cause"] is a secret (*sirr*), a secret contained in a secret, a secret that has been rendered secret (*mustasirr*), a secret on the subject of a secret.'⁴¹ Muḥammad al-Bāqir is reported to have said:

turn a person into a follower, rather those who profess love simply diminish the solitude of our followers'. In another tradition, the imam Ja'far says allusively that the number of true Shi'is is not above two dozen. See al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 3, pp. 339–342, 'Kitāb al-īmān wa'l-kufr', 'Bāb qilla 'adad al-mu'minin'. On this point see E. Kohlberg, 'In Praise of the Few', in G. R. Hawting, J. A. Mojaddedi and A. Samely (eds), *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions, In Memory of Norman Calder*, JSS, Supplement 12 (2000), pp. 149–162.

38. Al-Iskāfī, *Tamḥiṣ*, p. 54; al-Nu'mānī, *Ghayba*, p. 300, no. 10, ch. 12.

39. Cf., e.g., al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, pp. 20–28, section 1, chs 11 and 12; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 2, pp. 253–257, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb fī-mā jā'a anna ḥadīthahum ṣa'b mustaṣ'ab'.

40. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, pp. 21–25.

41. Ibid., pp. 28–29.

Our teaching shrivels the hearts of men (*tashma'izzu minhu qulūbu'l-rijāl*). Tell more to him who acknowledges it and leave him who denies it, because the coming of the ordeal (*fitna*) is inevitable when friend and ally alike (*biṭāna wa-waliya*)⁴² will fall until no one remains but we [the imams] and our supporters (*shī'atuna*).⁴³

The imam 'Alī is said to have declared:

Our teaching is difficult, particularly arduous, exasperating, distressing. Offer it to people in small quantities (*fa'nbadhū ilā'l-nās nubdhan*). To those who acknowledge it, tell more, but avoid telling more to him who denies it, because those who can bear this teaching are only an angel of proximity, a messenger prophet, or a faithful believer whose heart has been tested by God for the faith.⁴⁴

This 'faithful believer whose heart has been tested' indicates he who has been initiated into the secret teaching of the imam. This point is made explicit in a *ḥadīth* going back to the fourth imam 'Alī b al-Ḥusayn (d. 92/711 or 95/714), which concerns the relationship between Salmān al-Fārisī and Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, two of the 'pillars' (*arkān*) of Shi'ism. The first is the archetype of the initiated follower having access to the arcane matters of the secret teaching. The second is the archetype of the ascetic and pious follower who has knowledge only of the exoteric elements of the teaching:

Once a discussion regarding the duty of keeping the secret (*al-taqiyya*), was held in the presence of the [imam] 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn.⁴⁵ The imam said: 'By God, if Abū Dharr had known

42. *Biṭāna* and *waliya* are also part of the tribal vocabulary. A *biṭāna* is a member of the tribe (the term also signifies a 'close friend' and 'heart/the interior of a thing'), while a *waliya* is a stranger attached to a tribe through an alliance.

43. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, p. 23, no. 14.

44. Ibid., p. 21, no. 5.

45. Concerning *taqiyya*, see I. Goldhizer, 'Das Prinzip der Takija im Islam', *ZDMG*, 60 (1906); (rpr. in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, pp. 59–72); K. M. al-Shaybī, 'al-Taḳīya uṣūluḥā wa-taṭawwuruḥā', *Revue de la Faculté des Lettres d'Université d'Alexandrie*, 16 (1962), pp. 14–40; E. Meyer, 'Anlass und Anwend-

what was in the heart of Salmān, he would have killed him despite the fact that the Prophet had established a pact of brotherhood between these two. How much more so does this hold for others! Know that the secret knowledge of the spiritual initiator is difficult, particularly arduous, and cannot be undertaken by anyone except a messenger prophet, an angel of proximity, or a believing follower whose heart has been tested by God for the faith. Salmān became an initiate (*ṣāra Salmān min al-‘ulamā’*), which is why he formed part of us, the *ahl al-bayt* [of the Prophet] and why his origin is traced back to us.³⁴⁶

ungsbereich der *taqiyya*’, *Der Islam*, 57 (1980); E. Kohlberg, ‘Taqiyya in Shī‘i Theology and Religion’, in H. G. Kippenberg and G. G. Stroumsa (eds), *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions* (Leiden, 1995) (a study which magisterially complements an earlier article by the same scholar: ‘Some Imāmī Shī‘i Views on *taqiyya*’, *JAOS*, 95 [1975], pp. 395–402, also rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article 3); Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, index under ‘*taqiyya*’.

46. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, p. 25, no. 21. On the level of practical spirituality, the expression ‘testing of the heart for the faith’ would seem to designate ‘techniques’ of vision by (or ‘in’) in the heart (*al-ru’ya bi’l-qalb*), which consisted of visualising the reality of the imam as a form of light in the subtle centre of the heart, cf. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 112–145 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 44–55); R. Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwishorden Persiens*, vol. 2: *Glaube und Lehre* (Wiesbaden, 1976), p. 207 and n. 1073, pp. 247–250. In certain traditions, ‘the follower whose heart has been tested’ (placed alongside the ‘messenger prophet’ and ‘the angel of proximity’) is replaced by expressions such as ‘illuminated breasts’ (*ṣudūr munīra*), ‘healthy hearts’ (*qulūb salīma*) or even ‘fortified city’ (*madīna ḥaṣīna*), defined as a metaphor for the ‘concentrated heart’ (*qalb mujtama*); cf. al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, p. 25, no. 20 and p. 21, no. 3. For the definition of *madīna ḥaṣīna*, see Ibn Bābūya, *al-Amālī (Majālīs)*, ed. with a Persian trans. by M. B. Kamare’i (Tehran, 1404/1984), p. 4, ‘majlis’ 1, no. 6, and *Ma’ānī al-akhbār*, ed. ‘A. A. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1379/1959), p. 189. Other traditions stress the equality in soteriological rank between the tested follower and the prophets and imams: ‘The spiritual initiator [i.e. the imam] and the initiated disciple will receive the same reward. On the Day of Resurrection, they will advance together tight against each other like two race horses’ (*anna al-‘ālim wa’l-muta’allim fi’l-ajr sawā’ ya’tiyān yawm al-qiyāma ka-farasay rihān yazdahimān*); al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, p. 3, section 1, ch. 2, no. 1. The long tradition of the 75 armies of ‘*aql*’ ends as follows: ‘And the totality of these [75] qualities which form the armies of hiero-intelligence are only brought together in a prophet, a legatee [*waṣī*, i.e. the imam], or a follower whose heart has been tested by God for the faith ... who does not cease to perfect himself and to purify himself of the armies

The 'true' Shi'is thus appear to have been the initiated Shi'is. They were those who, in contrast to the non-initiated Shi'is, came from the imams and formed part of them. The notion of the 'mixing of the clays' enables one to say that a non-Shi'i who discovers the *walāya* and is initiated into the divine knowledge thereby gains the status of a 'true Shi'i'. In this case, his celestial nature will have succeeded in overcoming his infernal nature. The Imami 'matter between two matters' (*amr bayn al-amrayn*) mentioned above, between determinism and free will, implies in this context that it is not the origin of an individual that determines his destiny, but rather his destiny that, a posteriori, gives proof of his origin. Therefore, it is the 'true Shi'is' who constitute the second category in our tripartite division.

Finally, a few remarks on the subject of the third category. As we have seen, this refers to the 'enemies', the forces arrayed against initiation, the sub-human creatures or the satanic monsters in human form. Within this context, the Imami views on the subject of 'metamorphosis' (*maskh*) appear in a new light. In the early corpus of Twelver traditions there are numerous attestations of *maskh*, namely a degrading reincarnation in animal form.⁴⁷ The beings who undergo metamorphosis of this type

of ignorance until he attains the highest state (*al-daraja al-'ulyā*) occupied by the prophets and legates' (see the sources above in note 5).

47. For example, al-Šaffār, *Bašā'ir al-darajāt*, pp. 353–354, section 7, ch. 16; al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 1, p. 285, vol. 2, pp. 37–38; Ibn Bābūya, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, ed. M. H. Lājevardī (Tehran, 1378/1958), p. 271, vol. 1, ch. 27; al-Nu'mānī, *Ghayba*, p. 387. This theme is more fully developed in the literature of the Shi'is called Bāṭinīs. For example, in the corpus attributed to Jābir ibn Ḥayyān one finds a whole series of terms that designate many different types of reincarnation (often degrading): *naskh* (reincarnation in another human form), *maskh* (reincarnation in an animal form), *faskh* (reincarnation in a vegetable form), *raskh* (reincarnation in a mineral form). Cf. *The Arabic Work of Jābir b. Ḥayyān*, ed. E. J. Holmyard (Paris, 1928), 'Kitāb al-bayān', p. 11; *Mukhtār rasā'il Jābir ibn Ḥayyān*, ed. P. Kraus (Paris and Cairo, 1935), 'Kitāb al-ishtimāl', pp. 549–550; *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften*, Arabic texts, ed. M. 'A. Abū Rida (1984), 'Kitāb al-ma'rifa', p. 57. The theme of *maskh* likewise occupies numerous chapters of *Kitāb al-haft* (one of the sacred writings of the Nuṣayrīs and certain Ismailīs), ed. M. Ghālib (under the title *al-Haft al-sharīf*)

are called *musūkh*. In many cases, these are historical adversaries of the Shi'is designated by name: a lizard (*wazagh*) defends 'Uthmān, the third caliph; it is most likely he is a reincarnation of the caliph.⁴⁸ The Umayyad 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān is also transformed into a lizard after his death.⁴⁹ Ja'far al-Šādiq touches the eyes of his close disciple Abū Bašīr and thus enables him to see the true nature of the great majority (i.e. the non-Shi'is) among the pilgrims to Mecca: they are monkeys (*qirada*) and pigs (*khanāzīr*).⁵⁰ The *musūkh*, and more generally the third category of people, are the 'adversaries', namely, according to the Shi'i theory of the *ḍidds*, the descendants of Cain who oppose the descendants of Abel.⁵¹ Seen from this angle, one might conclude

(3rd edn, Beirut, 1980), and ed. 'A. Tamer and A. Khalifé (under the title *al-Haft wa'l-ażilla*) (2nd edn, Beirut, 1970). See also al-Shahrastānī, *Livres des religions et des sectes*, vol. 1, tr. D. Gimaret and G. Monnot (Louvain, 1986), p. 512, and note 40 by Gimaret, who points to the discussion of this subject in al-Bīrūnī, al-Ījī and in Ibn al-Khaṭīb. For a general overview, see G. Monnot, 'La transmigration et l'immortalité', in his *Islam et religions* (Paris, 1986), article XII; U. Rubin, 'Apes, Pigs and the Islamic Identity', *IOS*, 17 (1997), pp. 89–105; S. Schmidtke, 'The Doctrine of the Transmigration of the Soul According to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (killed 587/1191)', *Studia Iranica*, 28/2 (1999), pp. 237–254.

48. Al-Šaffār, *Bašā'ir al-darajāt*, pp. 353–354, section 7, ch. 16, nos 1–2; al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 2, p. 37.

49. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 2, p. 38.

50. Al-Šaffār, *Bašā'ir al-darajāt*, pp. 270–271, section 6, ch. 3, no. 4. On the disciples of Ja'far al-Šādiq carrying the *kunya* 'Abū Bašīr' see *Guide divin*, pp. 86–87 (*Divine Guide*, p. 34), n. 182. On the Sunnī reaction to the Shi'i doctrine of *maskh* see e.g. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Tadhkira ūlī'l-bašā'ir fī ma'rifa al-kabā'ir*, MS. Garrett 1896, Princeton, fols 176ff. (cited by Kohlberg, 'Some Imāmī Shī'i Views on the *Ṣaḥāba*', p. 171) or Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Bulāq, 1329/1911), vol. 2, p. 8, and *Muḥāḍarat al-abrār* (Beirut, 1968), vol. 1, p. 418.

51. According to Ḥaydar al-Āmulī, *al-Kashkūl fī mā jarā 'alā āl al-rasūl* (Najaf, 1372/1953), p. 30 (according to H. Corbin, this author should be distinguished from his contemporary and namesake, who wrote the *Jāmi' al-asrār*; cf. his introduction to the edition of this latter work, produced with O. Yahia [Tehran and Paris 1969], p. 46). For other examples of the *ḍidd* according to the Shi'is, see also al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyin*, ed. H. Ritter (2nd edn, Wiesbaden, 1963), pp. 11ff.; Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba* (Najaf, 1385/1965), pp. 250ff.; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa'l-nihāya* (Cairo, 1932–1939), vol. 8, p. 49;

that the reference is to demonic monsters, who assume a human shape during their lives and return to their true nature after death.

When considered alongside traditions dealing with the ontological connection between God and the Imam, the tripartite anthropological division also takes on a theological dimension. I have analysed these traditions, which clearly establish what specifically concerns or derives from the imams in the foundations of Imami theology, elsewhere.⁵² Here I will only offer a brief overview in order to clarify the connection with mystical anthropology.

The divine being comprises two ontological planes: the Essence (*dhāt*), which is unknowable, unimaginable and unintelligible, to be comprehended only through a negative, apophatic theology;⁵³ and the Names and Attributes (*al-asmā' wa'l-ṣifāt*) thanks to which creatures in general and human beings in particular are able to approach that which is knowable of God. This is the domain of theophanic theology because, in effect, the names and attributes, which are revealed through God's Most Beautiful Names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*), possess the places of manifestation (*maẓhar/majlā*) that, like the organs, permit a relationship between God and his creatures.⁵⁴ God's organs are nothing other than the different aspects of the cosmic Imam, the archetypal Perfect Man. The terrestrial imams, for their part, are manifestations of him on the physical plane. There are numerous traditions in which the imams repeat continuously: 'We are the eye (*'ayn*) of God, we are the hand (*yad*) of God, we are the face (*wajh*) of God,

al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-ta'rīfāt* (*Livre des définitions*), tr. M. Gloton (Tehran, 1994), p. 412, no. 1692.

52. Cf. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 75ff., 114ff. (*Divine Guide*, pp. 29ff., 44ff.); see also Chapter 3, this volume.

53. See e.g. al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, pp. 109ff., 140ff., 169ff.; Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, chs 2, 6 and 7, 'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā, ch. 11, and *Khiṣāl*, p. 2ff; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 114–115 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 44–45); and Chapter 3, this volume.

54. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, p. 143; Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, ch. 11, pp. 139ff.; see also H. Corbin, *Le paradoxe du monothéisme* (Paris, 1981), esp. the first part; likewise his *En Islam iranien*, index, 'tanzīh' and 'théophanies': Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 115–116 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 45–46).

we are His flank (*janb*), His heart (*qalb*), His tongue (*lisān*), His ear (*udhn*).⁵⁵ The plane of essence constitutes the *Deus absconditus* (Hidden God), while the plane of names-attributes-organs constitutes the *Deus revelatus* (Revealed God), that is to say, the Imam. Commenting on Q 7:180: 'God possesses the Most Beautiful Names, invoke Him by these names', the sixth imam, Ja'far al-Šādiq, is reported to have declared: 'By God, we are the Most Beautiful Names; no act of the servants is accepted unless it is accompanied by recognition of us.'⁵⁶ In this division of essence/names-organs, one can clearly detect a transposition to the divine level of the omnipresent pair of *bāṭin/ẓāhir*. The esoteric, hidden and non-manifest aspect of God becomes His essence, which is forever inaccessible. His organs, which are the theophanic vehicles of His names, become His exoteric, revealed aspect. The Imam, who is the true revealed God, is therefore the exoteric aspect of God, and recognition of his reality is the equivalent of a recognition of what can be known of God. There are numerous traditions attributed to many imams where it is stated: 'He who knows us knows God, and he who fails to know us fails to know God.'⁵⁷ 'It is thanks to us that God is known, and it is thanks to us that He is adored.'⁵⁸ 'Without God we would not be known, and without us God would not be known.'⁵⁹

55. We are dealing here with the ontological Imam, the cosmic man, of whom the terrestrial imam is the locus of manifestation on the physical plane. On the 'organs' of God and the theology of theophany (*tajallī*) as the 'antidote' to 'assimilationist' theology (*tashbīh*) and 'agnostic' theology (*ta'ṭīl*) see e.g. al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, pp. 61–66, section 2, chs 3–4; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, pp. 196ff., 283ff.; Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, chs 12–22 and 24, 'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā, pp. 114–116, 149–153, and *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, pp. 231ff, ch. 22; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 116–117 (*Divine Guide*, p. 45).

56. Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 42, no. 119; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, p. 196.

57. Al-Šaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, p. 6, section 1, ch. 3, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 261, ch. 24, no. 7; *Nahj al-balāgha* (the speech of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib compiled by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī), ed. with a Persian trans. 'A. N. Fayḍ al-Islām (4th edn, Tehran, 1351 Sh./1972), p. 470.

58. Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, p. 152, ch. 12, no. 9.

59. Ibid., p. 290, ch. 41, no. 10.

Moreover, the cosmo-anthropogonic accounts state explicitly that the Imam, or the Impeccable Ones in general, issue from the light of God. Even before the creation of the physical world, God had a ray of light spring forth from His own light, from which proceeded a second shaft of light. The first was the light of Muḥammad, that of prophecy (*nubuwwa*) and of the exoteric aspect. The second was the light of 'Alī, that of the imamate, or the *walāya*, and of the esoteric aspect:

Two thousand years before the creation, Muḥammad and 'Alī were a light before God, a light formed from the principal trunk from which a resplendent ray went forth. God said: 'Here is a light [taken] from my own light; its trunk is prophecy and its branch is the imamate. Prophecy comes from Muḥammad, my servant and messenger, and the imamate comes from 'Alī, my proof and my friend. Without them I would not have created any of my creation.' ... This is why 'Alī always repeated: 'I come from Muḥammad as one light comes from another.'⁶⁰

For his part, Muḥammad never ceased to reiterate that he had been created with 'Alī thousands of years before the creation of the world from the same unique light.⁶¹ Other accounts relate that this primordial light, taken from God's light, was the light of the *ahl al-bayt*, the *ahl al-kisā*' (the five 'People of the Mantle', that is, Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn; in this case we are told how their names are taken from the names of God), or rather the light of the fourteen Impeccable Ones.⁶² Here again the

60. Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal al-sharāʿiʿ*, p. 174, ch. 139, also pp. 131ff, ch. 111.

61. Ibn Bābūya, *Amālī*, 'majlis' 41, no. 10, p. 236; Yaḥyā b. al-Biṭriq, *al-ʿUmda fī ʿuyūn ṣiḥāḥ al-akhbār* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 44–45, and *Khaṣāʾiṣ waḥy al-mubīn fī manāqib amīr al-muʾminīn* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 37–38, 109–110; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, p. 76 (*Divine Guide*, p. 30).

62. Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal al-sharāʿiʿ*, pp. 135ff, ch. 116, and *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 319, ch. 31; al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar* (Tehran, 1305/1888), pp. 110–111; Ibn al-Biṭriq, *ʿUmda*, p. 120, and *Khaṣāʾiṣ*, p. 145; al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *al-Jawāhir al-saniyya fī l-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya* (Baghdad, 1964), pp. 233, 278, 304ff; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 77–78 (*Divine Guide*, p. 30). On the light

Impeccable Ones, who together symbolise the cosmic archetypal Imam, form an integral part of God and manifest through their light the ineffable light of God.

We have seen at the same time that the true believer-follower forms part of the imam. The soul and heart (the seat of the soul) of the imam come from the clay that is found above the *ʿIlīyyin*; the body of follower comes from another clay found below the *ʿIlīyyin*; but the body of the imam and the soul-heart of the follower are consubstantial since they are formed of the same clay of *ʿIlīyyin*.⁶³ Thus, the imam is always ontologically superior to his follower but is present, one might say 'organically', in the heart of the latter, and constitutes its true *bāṭin*. The imam is the heart and soul of his initiated followers. He is the hidden content of the inner life and spiritual quest of his true follower. At the same time, he is the exoteric aspect of God, of that which can be revealed of God, the *Deus revelatus*. The imam thus enables his followers to participate in the divine being. In recognising his heart, that is to say his true self, the true follower accedes to a knowledge of the reality of the imam that, as we have seen, is the equivalent of knowledge of the revealed God. Thus, he becomes fully aware of his own divine element. The heart of the true follower of the *walāya* is indeed the Face of God, which is the Imam. No Shiʿi mystic or theosoph has ever failed to interpret in this manner the celebrated *ḥadīth*: 'He who knows himself knows his Lord.'⁶⁴

of Muḥammad in early Shiʿism, see U. Rubin, 'Pre-Existence and Light. Aspects of the Concept of *Nūr Muḥammad*', *IOS*, 5 (1975), pp. 62–119; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 75–112 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 29–43).

63. Just as the body of the enemy and the soul/heart of his partisans are made of the same substance of *Sijjīn*. Cf. above.

64. There are innumerable examples. We will confine ourselves to only a few particularly representative ones: Ḥaydar Āmulī, *Jāmiʿ al-asrār*, pp. 270, 307ff., 315, 464, and (in the same volume), *Risāla naqd al-nuqūd fī maʿrifat al-wujūd*, p. 675; Abu'l-Ḥasan Sharīf al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr mir'āt al-anwār* (lithograph, n.p. [Iran], n.d.), the introductory section; Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, *Kitāb al-mashāʾir*, ed. H. Corbin (Tehran and Paris, 1964), pp. 186ff.; *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī* (lithograph, Tehran, 1283/1865), pp. 475ff.; Muḥammad Karīm

The participation of the imam and his initiated follower in the divine being is equally illustrated by the symbol that one might call the 'tree of the *walāya*'. In commenting on Q 14:24–25: 'A good tree whose root is firm and whose bough is in heaven; it gives its produce every season by leave of its Lord', a tradition ascribed to the fifth imam states: 'The root of the tree is Muḥammad, its bough is 'Alī, its branches are the imams, its produce is initiated knowledge, its leaves are the followers.'⁶⁵ Other traditions, ascribed to the sixth imam, appear to be more audacious in that they suppress Muḥammad and replace him with God: 'God is the root of the tree, 'Alī is its bough, the imams of his progeny are its branches, their knowledge is its produce, the followers are its leaves.'⁶⁶ The first two categories of people in our tripartite division are thus divine beings. They obey God's order and realise God's work on earth because they participate in the divine being

Khān Kermānī, *Ṭarīq al-najāt* (Kermān, 1344 Sh./1966), pp. 103 ff.; Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh Gonābādī, *Bishārat al-mu'minin* (Tehran, 1337 Sh./1959), ch. 6, and *Walāyat-nāmah* (2nd edn, Tehran, 1385/1965), pp. 11 ff., 18 ff., 171 ff., 258 ff. See also Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, index, under 'soi', and *Face de Dieu, face de l'homme* (Paris, 1983), pp. 237–310. On the development of this concept among Ismaili authors, see also Corbin's 'Épiphanie divine et naissance spirituelle dans la gnose ismaélienne', *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 23 (1955), esp. pp. 213 ff., 241–242, and his *Trilogie ismaélienne* (Tehran and Paris, 1961), index under 'connaissance de soi'. All our authors insist that knowledge or contemplation of oneself, which provides access to the knowledge and contemplation of the Face of God, which is the Imam, is based on love of the imam (*walāya/maḥabba/ḥubb*). For many of them, putting this concept into practice is explained by the 'technique' of 'vision by the heart' (see note 46 above).

65. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, pp. 58–59, section 2, ch. 2, – numerous traditions with variants. In certain traditions, Fāṭima is added as the 'seed' (*unṣur*) of the tree. In other traditions, knowledge is suppressed in favour of the imams who are at the same time both the branches and the produce of the tree etc.

66. Ibid., pp. 59–60. Here again there are variants: the roots are the imams and the boughs are the *walāya* of all of those who seek refuge there; God is the root, 'Alī is the seed – or even the top (*dharw*), Fāṭima is the bough, the imams are the branches, and the followers are the leaves etc. Cf. also 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummi, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 398–399; Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, pp. 219–220; al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 224; Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Bahrānī, *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 311.

thanks to love (*walāya*) and initiated knowledge (*‘ilm*). This is indeed what makes them human. Only the men of God deserve to be called human. The others, the enemies, the forces of violence and ignorance, are nothing but monsters in human form.

It seems useful to end my study with a *ḥadīth* attributed to ‘Alī, a *ḥadīth* that, it seems to me, recapitulates and summarises a good many of the points discussed here. The tradition is presented as a conversation between the first imam and his close disciple Kumayl b. Ziyād al-Nakha‘ī.⁶⁷

Kumayl! Remember well what I tell you. There are three types of people: the divine spiritual initiator (*‘ālim rabbānī*), the initiated disciple [proceeding] along the way of deliverance (*muta‘allim ‘alā sabīl najāt*), and the stupid vile beings (*hamaj ra‘ā*) who obey any appeal and are carried off by every wind. These latter are not illuminated by the light of knowledge (*‘ilm*) and do not lean on any firm pillar. Kumayl! Knowledge has greater value than material things (*māl*). It is knowledge that watches over you just as you watch over your material possessions. Wealth diminishes as it is spent, but knowledge increases as it is spent... The treasure of material goods perishes while the sages live lives that will last as long time shall endure (*hum aḥyā’ wa’l-‘ulamā’ bāqūn mā baqiya’l-dahr*). Their physical bodies disappear, but others, who resemble them in their hearts, take their place (*a’yānuhum mafqūda wa amthāluhum fi’l-qulūb mawjūda*).

And the imam, gesturing with his hand towards his chest, continued:

There is superabundant knowledge here. If only I found men [strong enough] to carry it! Certainly, on occasion I meet someone who is perceptive enough, but I cannot confide in him because he

67. I rely here on the excellent translation by H. Corbin (*En Islam iranien*, vol. 1, pp. 113–114), which I have modified in places in order to remain closer to the original text and to the technical lexicon of early Shi‘ism. Other differences from Corbin’s text arise from the fact that he based his translation on the version in the *Nahj al-balāgha* (compiled by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, d. 406/1016), while I relied on the version transmitted by Ibn Bābūya (d. 381/991–992), which seems to be older by at least several decades (for the sources, see the following note).

turns religion into a means of serving worldly interests, utilising the proofs of God [*hujaj Allāh*, that is the imams] and the favours of God to dominate the weak. On occasion I meet someone who obeys the sages but who, lacking an interior vision (*baṣīra*), cannot perceive the immensity of the knowledge and falls into doubt at the first difficulty that presents itself. Thus, neither the one nor the other [are worthy either of my trust or my knowledge] Must initiated knowledge thus die with the death of its carriers? No! The world will never lack a Qā'im who, speaking for God, guarantees the safeguarding of His testimony, whether he is manifest and unveiled, or hidden. It is thanks to men such as these that the divine testimony and [the understanding of] its meaning have not been destroyed. How many are they? Where are they? Their number is small, but their rank is lofty. It is through them that God safeguards His witnesses until they transmit it to their peers and implant the seed in the heart of those who resemble them. For them, knowledge appears all at once (*hajama bihim al-'ilm*) to show them the true nature of things. They set in motion the joy of certitude and find easy what the indulgent consider to be arduous. They are familiar with matters that frighten the ignorant. They go through this world in bodies of which the souls [that animate them] are suspended in the highest abode (*mu'allaqa bi'l-maḥall al-a'lā*). Kumayl! They are the vicegerents of God, those who summon to His religion. Oh! How I yearn to see them!⁶⁸

68. Cf. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 290, ch. 26, no. 2, and *Khiṣāl*, pp. 186–187; cf. also al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. M. T. Houtsma (Leiden, 1883; rpr. Qumm, 1414/1994), vol. 2, pp. 205–206; *Nahj al-balāgha*, pp. 1155–1158; also al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (Tehran and Qumm, 1376–1392/1956–1972), vol. 1, p. 186. The tripartite division of humanity is also found in *The Arabic Works of Jābir b. Ḥayyān*, ed. Holmyard, 'Kitāb al-bayān', pp. 7 ff.; Kraus (ed.), *Mukhtār rasā'il Jābir ibn Ḥayyān*, 'Kitāb al-baḥth', pp. 502–503 (a slightly different version of the conversation between 'Alī and Kumayl). See also P. Lory, *Alchimie et mystique en terre d'islam* (Paris and Lagrasse, 1989), pp. 51, 107. For other sources on this 'ḥadīth Kumayl' see H. Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shi'ite Literature* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 77–78.

Part III: Hermeneutic and Spiritual Practice

‘The Warrior of *Ta’wīl*’: A Poem about ‘Alī by Mollā Ṣadrā*

Of the works written by Mollā Ṣadrā (b. 979/1571 or 980/1572 in Shiraz, d. 1050/1640 in Basra), those in Persian, in particular his poetry, have attracted little scholarly attention. In 1961, having published the renowned philosopher’s treatise, *Seh aṣl*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr published *Montakhab-e mathnavī* and, for the first time, eight *robā’īs*.¹ More recently, in 1997, Moḥammad Khājavī, the indefatigable editor and Persian translator of Mollā Ṣadrā’s work, edited his *Dīvān*, containing, apart from the texts already published by S. H. Nasr, some forty other poems.² A few

* Given the Iranian context of this chapter as well as the language of the text analysed herein, the transliteration is, generally speaking, given in the Persian pronunciation.

1. Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (Mollā Ṣadrā), *Seh aṣl*, ed. S. H. Naṣr (Tehran, 1340 Sh./1380/1961); *Montakhab-e mathnavī*, pp. 131–153 (based on two manuscripts: MS 849 from the Meshkāt collection of the Central Library, Tehran University, and the personal manuscript belonging to Mr Lājevardi of Qom); *robā’iyāt*, pp. 159–160 (based on the manuscript signed by Mollā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ al-hidāya*, Meshkāt collection, MS 254, as well as his *Rasā’il*, and *Riyāḍ al-‘arīfīn* of Hedāyat, *Shams al-tawārikh* of Golpāyagānī and *al-Dharī’a* of Āghā Bozorg Tīhrānī).

2. Mollā Ṣadrā, *Majmū’-e ash’ār*, ed. M. Khājavī (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1418/1997); *Montakhab-e mathnavī*, pp. 79–100, *robā’iyāt*, p. 78; the other poems, pp. 3–78, are edited based on two manuscripts: MS 2992 of the Majles in Tehran and MS 322-D held by the Faculty of Theology at the Central Library, Tehran University. Author of *Lawāmi’ al-‘arīfīn fī aḥwāl Ṣadr al-muta’allihīn* (Tehran, 1366 Sh./1987), M. Khājavī, during the last two decades in Tehran,

months before the appearance of Khājavī's edition, the Library of Ayatollah Mar'ashī Najafī published yet another collection of the philosopher's poetry, edited by the religious scholar Moṣṭafā Fayḍī.³ This edition, prepared from a single manuscript, often gives a different 'reading' from the other two and contains a number of additional verses, unknown to the editions by Nasr and Khājavī. However, given that almost nothing is said about the manuscript used, the authenticity of these variants remains to be proved.⁴ Nevertheless, with these three editions, we now undoubtedly have at our disposal almost all of the poetry by Mollā Ṣadrā, to which one ought to consider adding the verses scattered throughout his major philosophical texts.⁵

Mollā Ṣadrā's poetry often illustrates some of his theological and philosophical preoccupations and, perhaps even more so, his eschatological thought.⁶ Though of uneven literary qual-

edited and translated into Persian some major works by Mollā Ṣadrā such as *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, *Asrār al-āyāt*, numerous *Tafsīrs* and *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*.

3. *Mathnavī-ye Mollā Ṣadrā*, ed. Moṣṭafā Fayḍī (Qumm, 1376 Sh./1417/1997), *Mathnavī*, pp. 102–205.

4. In his (far too) brief preface, Dr Sayyid Maḥmūd Mar'ashī, currently Director of the Mar'ashī Library, briefly states that the manuscript comes from what has survived of the private collection of Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680), Mollā Ṣadrā's disciple and son-in-law, adding that it is undoubtedly a signed manuscript (*ibid.*, pp. 3–4). In addition to a rather poor reproduction of an unnumbered folio (*ibid.*, p. 5), this is the most that we learn about the manuscript. In the editor's introduction of almost one hundred pages regarding the philosopher, his milieu and his work, not a word is said about this manuscript either (*ibid.*, pp. 7–102).

5. This, for example, is what M. Khājavī (*Majmū'e-ye ash'ār*, pp. 77–78) does with the seven verses in Persian commenting on the Verse of Light; Mollā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr āyat al-nūr*, ed. M. Khājavī (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1403/1993), p. 182 (Arabic text), p. 99 (Persian trans.); there are other passages as well, for example following his commentary on Q 32:4 (Mollā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* [lithograph, Tehran, n.d.], p. 531) and throughout his *Seh aṣl*.

6. On his eschatological beliefs, now consult C. Jambet, *Se rendre immortel*, also containing *Traité de la résurrection* (French translation of *Risālat al-ḥaṣhr*) by Mollā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (Paris, 2000); and C. Jambet, *L'acte d'être. La philosophie de la révélation chez Mollā Ṣadrā* (Paris, 2002).

ity, the poetry is nonetheless infused from beginning to end in a mystical spirit that creates a heightened effect. Although none of the poems is dated, the editors agree that, like any Iranian literary figure worthy to be so called, Mollā Ṣadrā would have composed these poems during the course of his adult life, all the while revising his earlier versions to modify or complete them in accordance with his intellectual and spiritual development.⁷

The relationship between *Montakhab-e mathnavī* (literary 'extracts', 'fragments' or 'selected pieces' from the *mathnavī*) and poems from the *majmū'e* (collection), which also constitute a *mathnavī*, pose certain problems that at present remain unresolved. Both are presented in the manuscripts as independent collections;⁸ however, many verses from the *Montakhab* reappear in the *majmū'e*, but at times with considerable variation, whereas other verses do not appear at all. Do these collections stem from two entirely different sources hitherto unknown? If the poem is an independent work composed later than the *majmū'e*, as M. Khājavī believes,⁹ could the term *montakhab* have been a scribal addition? Does it consist of one and the same *mathnavī* or a collection of more or less independent poems dedicated to various themes but set to the same *ramal musaddas maḥdhūf* metre?¹⁰

The poem about 'Alī is the fourth in the *majmū'e*, and is entitled (by the author or the scribe?) 'In praise of the Prince of Believers

7. *Seh aṣl*, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv; *Majmū'e-ye aṣḥ'ār*, pp. xii–xv. One might have concluded that the additional verses in the Fayḏī edition, *Mathnavī-ye Mollā Ṣadrā* were inserted later by the philosopher, but as we will further see below, the sheer mediocrity of some of these verses seems to disqualify this hypothesis.

8. *Majmū'e-ye aṣḥ'ār*, p. xii. Only the manuscript used by M. Fayḏī seems to present them as one whole collection.

9. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

10. All the poems in the *majmū'e* are in the *ramal musaddas maḥdhūf* metre (*fā'ilātun fā'ilātun fā'ilun*), the standard metre for Persian mystical *mathnavīs*. Some poems unfold in a logical progression and clearly form a coherent whole (for example, the last ten or eleven poems in the Collection are devoted to eschatology); others, touching upon religious, philosophical, mystical themes etc., often appear as independent pieces, separate from each other.

and the *ahl al-bayt* (of the Prophet) (*dar manqabat-e haḍrat-e amīr al-mo'menīn va ahl-e beyt*):¹¹

- 1) *Shahsavār-e lā fatā shīr-e vaghā / az khodā vo moṣṭafā bar vey thanā*
Horseman of *lā fatā*, Lion of the battle / He whom God and the Pure Chosen One [Muḥammad] have praised

Lā fatā: this is an allusion to the tradition *lā sayfa illā Dhu'l-faḡār wa lā fatā illā 'Alī*, 'No sword save Dhu'l-Faḡār, no chivalrous hero save 'Alī'.¹² According to Twelver Shi'i exegesis, God's praise of 'Alī features in the very text of the Qur'ān. Mollā Ṣadrā returns to this in a later section of the poem.

- 2) *Sāqī-ye Kowthar valī-ye kardegār / dāde tighash dīn-e Aḥmad rā qarār*
Cupbearer of Kowthar [a river in paradise], friend of God / He whose sword perfected the religion of Aḥmad [i.e. Muḥammad].

11. *Majmū'ē-ya ash'ār*, pp. 7–11; *Mathnavī-ye Mollā Ṣadrā*, pp. 107–110 (title: 'In praise of the Prince of Believers'; as we will see later, in this edition, the last thirteen verses of the poem are presented separately under the title, 'In praise of the *ahl-e beyt*'). For a discussion of the translation of *ahl al-bayt* (*ahl-e beyt* in Persian) see Chapter 1, this volume, notes 36 and 55 as well as the relevant texts.

12. Or *Lā fatā illā 'Alī lā sayfa illā Dhu'l-faḡār*; see for example Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, ed. M. al-Kāzīm (Tehran, 1410/1990), p. 95; Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, *Ma'ānī'l-akhbār*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1379/1959), pp. 63 and 119; Furāt al-Kūfī, *al-Khiṣāl*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Qumm, 1403/1983), pp. 550 and 557 and *Ilal al-sharā'i* (Najaf, 1385/1966), pp. 7 and 160. On Dhu'l-faḡār, literally 'double-edged', according to tradition a sword borne by the Angel Gabriel and given to Muḥammad, then handed by the latter to 'Alī, see for example, al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, ed. M. Kūchebāghī (2nd edn, Tabriz, n.d. [ca. 1960]), section 4, ch. 4; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, ed. J. Muṣṭafāwī, 4 vols (Tehran, n.d.), 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb mā 'inda'l-a'imma min silāh rasūlī'llāh', vol. 1, pp. 337ff.; Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, *Amālī (al-Majālis)*, ed. Ṭabāṭabā'ī Yazdī (rpr. Tehran, 1404/1984), 'majlis' 17, p. 71 and 'majlis' 48, p. 289. About the pronunciation *faḡār* and not the more conventional *fiḡār*, see Abū 'Ubayd al-Bakrī, *Mu'jam mā sta'jam*, ed. M. al-Saqqā (Cairo, 1364–1371/1945–1951), vol. 1, p. 156 and vol. 3, p. 1026.

From the beginning of the poem, two of 'Alī's qualities are strongly emphasised: the fact that he is the friend of God, the *wālī*, and the warrior for the faith par excellence. As we shall see in what follows, for Mollā Ṣadrā these two qualities seem inseparable and together constitute the basis for a spiritual interpretation (*ta'wīl*) that he provides for the figure of 'Alī.¹³

- 3) *Az zabān-e tigh zang-e kofr o jowr / ḥak namūd az ṣafḥe-ye 'ālam be-fowr*
 With the language of his sword, the rust of infidelity and oppression / were instantly wiped off the face of the earth.

(See verse 16 below.)¹⁴

- 4) *Az vojūdesh 'aql imān yāfte / az jabīnash nūr reḍvān yāfte*
 Through his existence reason discovered faith / Due to his forehead paradise acquired light.¹⁵

Further on, in the twenty-second poem of the *majmū'ē* in Khājavī's edition, Mollā Ṣadrā makes a distinction between angelic reason ('*aql-e malakī*), illuminated by faith, and worldly reason, severed from On High, dark, sly and bestial, that of the misguided ones

13. Regarding 'Alī as he who serves the believers (i.e. the Shi'is) on the Day of Resurrection – *sāqī'l-mu'minīn fi'l-qiyāma* – or who serves the inhabitants of paradise with water from the river of Kawthar – *sāqī min nahr al-kawthar* – see al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, ed. based on the edition by Kumpānī (Tehran and Qumm, 1376–1392/1956–1972), 90 tomes in 110 vols, vol. 17, p. 324, vol. 26, p. 264, vol. 39, p. 61. For the enigmatic Qur'ānic term *kawthar*, see Q 108:1.

14. *Mathnavi-ye Mollā Ṣadrā* here gives *az zabān o tigh* (by his language and his sword), which does not fit the context. Moreover, this Fayḍī edition includes a fourth verse which does not appear in the edition by Khājavī:

ennamā vo hal atā dar sha'n-e ū / qā'ed-e imān-e mā imān-e ū

'*Innamā* and *hal atā* are (revealed) regarding him / the commander of our faith is his faith.' Regarding *innamā* and *hal atā*, two Qur'ānic expressions, see here below verses 29 and 30 respectively as well as the explanations and relevant notes.

15. This fourth verse in the Khājavī edition is the eleventh in the edition by Fayḍī.

(*'aql-e gomgashtegān*).¹⁶ 'Alī, or the divine Allegiance (*walāya*) and the imamate which he represents, are here identified as the light of the faith that transforms human reason into angelic reason.¹⁷

- 5) '*Aql-e peyghambar cho qor'ān āmadī / nafs-e vey mānand-e forqān āmadī*'¹⁸

Like the Qur'ān, he ('Alī) manifests the intelligence of the Prophet / His individuality serves to distinguish between good and evil.

Furqān (pronounced *forqān* in Persian) stands for that which distinguishes good from evil, the licit and illicit, whence the code or collection of the Sacred law, more precisely the Qur'ān. This verse, as well as the six subsequent verses, sets up the relationship between imamology and prophetology, between the *wālī*, messenger of the esoteric dimension of religion and the *nabī*, messenger of the exoteric dimension (yet in a concealed fashion both *walāya* and *nubuwwa* culminate in the same figure of the *nabī*). *Walāya/imāma* is the locus of the secret of *nubuwwa*, revealing its essence.¹⁹ Clearly, both these functions are symbolised respectively by 'Alī al-Murtaḍā and Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā.

16. *Majmū'e-ye ash'ār*, pp. 47–48.

17. Regarding '*aql* and its different meanings (reason, intelligence, hiero-intelligence etc.) in early Imami literature, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 15–33 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 6–13); see also D. S. Crow, 'The Role of *al-'Aql* in Early Islamic Wisdom, with Reference to Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq' (PhD Thesis, McGill University, 1996).

18. In the Fayḍi edition, the second hemistich reads: *vīn khalīfe hamcho forqān āmadī*; 'and this Caliph's (i.e. 'Alī's) purpose to distinguish good from evil.'

19. H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien* (Paris, 1971–1972), vol. 1, Book 1, especially ch. 6; H. Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, 1986), section II-A, esp. pp. 69–85; see also Chapter 5 *in fine* and esp. Chapter 7, this volume. For Mollā Šadrā's position on the relationship between prophethood and *walāya*, the reader should consult his *Mafātih al-ghayb*, ed. M. Khājavī (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1994), 'Miftāḥ' 14, '*Inna li'l-nubuwwa bāṭinan wa huwa'l-walāya*', pp. 483–495; Persian trans. M. Khājavī (Tehran, 1363 Sh./ 1994), pp. 810–825.

- 6) *Farq joz ejmāl o joz tafṣīl nīst / īn do hamrah qābel-e tabdīl nīst*
The difference is only between the concise and the explained / these two associates are not reducible
- 7) *Har che dar ejmāl bod bā moṣṭafā / gasht zāher az vojūd-e mortaḍā*
Whatever was implicit in Muṣṭafā/became manifest by the existence of Murtaḍā.²⁰

The imam's teaching essentially consists of rendering the prophet's message explicit; this message is distilled in the Revelation. We are reminded of this by a number of traditions according to which the *ḥadīths*, that is mainly the imam's teachings, explain in detail (*tafṣīl*) that which the Qur'ān presents in a condensed form (*mujmal*).²¹

- 8) *Ma'nī-ye al-yawma akmalī īn bovad / gar to hastī mard-e dīn ey mo'tamad*
This is the deeper meaning of 'al-yawma akmalu' / (Know)
O trusted friend, if you are a man of faith.

'Al-yawma akmalu lakum dīnakum wa atmamtu 'alaykum nī'matī'

'This day have I perfected your religion for you, fulfilled My favour upon you'

According to the most classical and most frequently reiterated Imami exegesis, this part of the third verse of Sura 5, *al-mā'ida*, concerns the divine revelation of 'Alī's *walāya* to Muḥammad.

20. The Fayḍī edition here includes an additional verse, poetically rather mediocre and philosophically quite confusing: 'ānchenān ke 'aql-e kol bā naḥs-e kol (are we meant to read *kel* in order to rhyme with *monḥāṣel*?) / hast ān yek *mojmal* o īn *monḥāṣel* (should this be read *monḥāṣol* to rhyme with *kol*?); 'Just like the Universal Intellect vis-à-vis the Universal Soul/ the first is condensed, the second is differentiated.'

21 E.g. al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, pp. 11–12; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, pp. 77ff. M. M. Bar-Asher is correct in presenting this notion as one of the methodological bases for Imami exegesis; see his *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* (Leiden and Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 92–93.

This verse establishes *walāya*, loyal friendship towards the imams, as a religious duty (*farīḍa*) of the same order as canonical prayer and the pilgrimage to Mecca.²² For Mollā Ṣadrā, the imam's teachings, in this instance those of 'Alī consisting of the explanation of the prophet's message, constitute the essential content of *walāya*. It is by this teaching that God has perfected the religion.²³

22. Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, pp. 117–120; 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Ṭ. al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'irī (rpr. Beirut, 1411/1991), vol. 1, p. 190; Abu'l-Naḍr al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Qumm, 1380/1960), vol. 1, pp. 292–293 (according to *ḥadīth* no. 21 reported by al-'Ayyāshī, the revelation of the Qur'ān by the Angel Gabriel on a Friday and the day of 'Arafāt, originally contained the expression, 'by the divine Friendship of 'Alī son of Abū Ṭālib': '*al-yawma akmaltu lakum dīnakum bi-walāyat 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib wa atmamtu 'alaykum ni'matī ...*' This obviously has a bearing upon early Shi'i belief, according to which the 'Uthmānic recension is a censured and falsified version of the original revelation; on this, see E. Kohlberg, 'Some Notes on the Imamite Attitude to the Qur'ān', in S. M. Stern et al. (eds), *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: Essays Presented to Richard Walzer* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 209–224; T. Lawson, 'Notes for the Study of the Shi'i Qur'ān', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 36 (1991), pp. 279–295; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 200–227 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 79–91); beginning of Chapter 7, this volume; M. M. Bar-Asher, 'Variant Readings and Additions of the Imāmī-Shi'a to the Qur'ān', *IOS*, 13 (1993), pp. 39–74; R. Brunner, *Die Schia und die Kor'anfälschung* (Würzburg, 2001). For another interpretation of matters, see H. Modarressi, 'Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qur'ān', *Studia Islamica*, 77 (1993), pp. 5–39. On the different Shi'i meanings of the term *walāya*, see esp. Chapter 7 in this volume.

23. The Fayḍī edition here contains fifteen additional verses: *Sāqī-ye Kowthar shah-e rūz-e jazā / ebn-e 'amm-e Moṣṭafā serr-e khodā*; 'The cupbearer of Kawthar [see verse 2 above], Lord of the Day of Retribution [allusion to 'Alī's eschatological role, he is often called *qasim al-janna wa'l-nār* – he who assigns (people) either to the Garden (of paradise) or to the Fire (of hell)']; see e.g. Furāt, *Tafsīr*, p. 178; al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, pp. 17–18 / the first cousin of Moṣṭafā, God'. While eleventh in the Fayḍī edition, the following verse is fourth in the Khājavi edition.

Man gedāyam āmade dar kū-ye to / mīzanam shay'un lelāhi az [sic – the metre is uneven] *rū-ye to*; 'I am a beggar that wandered into your alley [O 'Alī] / beseeching you to grant me the vision of your face [lit.: saying *shay'un li llāh* – something to (please) God (the beggar's prayer) – regarding your face]'.

Gar to khānī ommat-e khīsham yeki [sic; very clumsily expressed] */ jān daham bar yād-e rūyat bī shakī*; 'If you call me one of your faithful [lit. community] I will offer my life without hesitation simply at the thought of your face.'

- 9) *Ūst bābā-ye nofūs-e owliyā / hamchonān ke moṣṭafā bā anbiyā*
He ('Alī) is Father of the Friends (of God) / As (Muḥammad) Muṣṭafā is for the prophets;
- 10) *Owliyā yek yek cho farzandān-e ū / jire khārān-e navāl-e khān-e ū*
The Friends his children are one by one/ Nourished by portions placed upon his tablecloth.

Āftābī var bekhānī dharre-am / tāj-e rafat bogzarad az sedre-am: 'You are the sun, if you call me your atom / the crown of my glory will surpass the celestial Tree [allusion to *Sidrat al-muntahā* in Q 53:14–16].'

Man kī am gomgashte-yī dar rāh-e to / khāk būs o bande-ye dargāh-e to;
'Who am I? One astray on your path (O 'Alī) / kissing the dust and a servant at your threshold.'

Gar to khānī ommat-e'āsī-ye khad [= khod] / man fedā sāzam del o jān tā abad; 'If you call [me] a companion [lit. community] though a sinner / I would eternally sacrifice heart and soul.'

Ommat-e 'āsi ṭalab kār-e to ast / gar bad ast ar nīk dar kār-e to ast; 'Your sinning companion thirsts for you / good or evil, he is in search of you.'

Ān bas-am kaz bandegān bāsham torā / bande che kāsh az sagān bāsham torā; 'I am content to be among your servants / what am I saying? I am more than happy to be your dog.'

Har ke rā chon to shahanshāhī bovad / farq-e ū az haft gardūn bogzarad:
'He who recognises you as a great king / will hold his head higher than the seven heavens.'

Gisovānat hast ān ḥablo'l-matīn / ke forū hesht-ast az charkh-e barīn; 'Your locks are that secure rope [Q 3:103 and 112] / which fell from the most high heavens.'

Tā biyāvizand dar vey ommatān / az belā-ye īn jahān yāband amān; 'In order that the companions hold on to them / to be saved from the trials of this world.'

Ey shafi' al-modhnibīn ey shāh-e dīn / chand bāsham īn chonīn zār o ḥazīn; 'O thou, intercessor for sinners [on *shafā'a* of the imams, now consult M. M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, pp. 180ff.], Sovereign of faith / how long must I remain so sad and forsaken?'

Rū-ye to hast āyatī az kardegār / mū-ye to bahr-e najāt-e jormkār; 'Your face is a sign of God / tresses of your hair, salvation for the blameworthy [regarding the pair 'face and hair', see verse 35 below].

Rū-ye to bāshad behesht o mū-ye to / gashte āvīzān be mā az rū-ye to; 'Your face is paradise and tresses of your hair / tumble over your face to reach us.'

Hamcho lafz o mā'nī-ye qor'ān be mā / gashte nāzel bahr-e ḥājat az samā;
just as the Qur'ān, in letter and content / fell from heaven to fulfill our needs.'

Muḥammad, in his essential reality called 'the Light of Muḥammad', constitutes the origin and substance of prophet-hood (*nubuwwa*); just as the Light of 'Alī is the very origin and substance of Divine friendship (*walāya*).²⁴

- 11) *Ānke pāyash dūsh-e peyghambar bodī / ḥabbadhā shākhi ke īnash bar bodī*
He who placed his foot upon the Prophet's shoulder / How wonderful a tree that bears such fruit.²⁵
- 12) *Ānke nafsash būd dast-e kardegār / īn yadollā rā ke dānad kard khār?*
He who was the hand of God in person / this Hand, who is able to lower it?

As the locus of manifestation and instrument for the will of God, the imam is often described as 'an organ' of God: eye, tongue, hand, ear, face, heart, and so on.²⁶ The last hemistich alluding to 'Alī's adversaries serves as an introduction to the next fifteen verses where Mollā Ṣadrā allows himself a true spiritual interpretation of the warrior aspect of the first imam:

24. On Muḥammad's metaphysical relationship with the earlier prophets and 'Alī's with the previous imams/*awliyā* respectively, see U. Rubin, 'Pre-existence and Light. Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad', *IOS*, 5 (1975), pp. 62–112 and 'Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shī'a Tradition', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 1 (1979), pp. 41–65; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, sections II-1 and II-2, pp. 73–112 (*Divine Guide*, ch. 2, parts 1 and 2, pp. 29–79, see also Chapter 4, this volume); M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Cosmology and Cosmogony in Twelver Shī'ism', *Elr*, vol. 6, pp. 317–322, esp. pp. 319–321.

25. An allusion either to the event of Ghadir Khumm or to when, according to some versions, Muḥammad bore 'Alī on his shoulders, see L. Veccia Vaglieri, 'Ghadir Khumm', *EI2*, M. Dakake and A. Kazemi Moussavi in *Elr*, or even perhaps to the episode in which, in order to remove the idols from the roof of the Ka'ba, Muḥammad lifted 'Alī on to his shoulders (this episode is known as *is'ādu'l-nabī* 'Aliyyan 'alā saṭhi'l-Ka'ba); see al-Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad al-Khwārazmī, *al-Manāqib*, ed. M. B. al-Maḥmūdī (Qumm, 1411/1991), ch. 11; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 35, p. 49 and vol. 38, p. 82. For Mollā Ṣadrā, this scene evokes the image of a tree (Muḥammad), bearing fruit ('Alī) on its branch (*shākh* meaning both 'tree' and 'branch').

26. Chapter 3, this volume, esp. note 27 for earliest sources.

- 13) *Gar kasī rā būdī az qadrash khabar / key chonān bā vey namū dandī ḡarar?*
He who had known his true value / How could he have done him harm?
- 14) *Kofr-hā-ye mokhtaḡī dar jāneshān / būd dā'em rahzan-e imān-e shān*
Infidelity hidden in their depths [i.e. 'Alī's adversaries] / constantly ravaged their faith
- 15) *Dhāt-e ū chon būd tanzīl-e kalām / kard az shamshīr ta'vīl-e kalām*²⁷
Just as his ['Alī's] essential reality formed the letter of revelation / So he made of his sword its spiritual interpretation
- 16) *Az zabān-e tigh tafsīr-e sokhan / mīnamūd az bahr-e aṣḡāb-badan*²⁸
Commentary on the Word by the language of the sword / He made it thus for the people of exteriority

Dhāt (lit. the essence of 'Alī, which I translate as 'essential reality') is the *walāya* that is presented by many traditions as the ultimate goal of the Revelation, the message hidden beneath the letter of the Qur'ān.²⁹ Those who oppose 'Alī are thus against what the Qur'ān contains as its most profound message. They are the adversaries of *walāya*, the esoteric dimension of *nubuwwa*. It is thus up to 'Alī to fight them in order that the Revelation does not become letter without spirit; which of course evokes the famous tradition attributed to the Prophet:

27. The Fayḏī edition here reads *ta'bīr* and *tafsīr* instead of *tanzīl* and *ta'vīl* as in the Khājavī edition.

28. Fayḏī edition: *az zabān-e tigh tafsīr-e kalām / mīnamūd o dād dīn rā entezām*; translation of the second hemistich: 'He made and thus consolidated the faith.'

29. On this notion and early sources regarding it, refer to Chapters 5 and esp. 7, this volume.

Among you there is someone who fights for the spiritual interpretation of the Qur'ān, just as I myself fought for its Revelation, and this person is 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.³⁰

'Alī's sword is thus depicted as the instrument of the inner expression or meaning of the Qur'ān, a symbol of sacred, as opposed to profane, violence that consists of emptying Islam of its essential content. It is interesting to note that the expression *aṣḥāb-e badan* (lit. 'people of the body', which I translate as 'people of the exterior') is employed in *Seh aṣl* as such, or in the form of *tan parast* (lit. 'body worshipper') to designate the official religious authorities of the period whom the philosopher justifiably denounces as

30. 'Inna fikum man yuqātīlu 'alā ta'wili'l-Qur'ān kamā qātaltu 'alā tanzīlihi wa huwa 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib', in al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 15; al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar* (Qumm, 1401/1980), pp. 76, 88, 117, 135 (on p. 66, in a Prophetic tradition, it is the Qā'im who is portrayed as 'the warrior of spiritual hermeneutics'); al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 19, pp. 25–26; Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 5 vols (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 17. Cf. also the Prophetic tradition: 'I am the Lord of the revealed letter (of the Qur'ān) and 'Alī is the Lord of spiritual hermeneutics (of the Qur'ān) – 'anā ṣāhib al-tanzīl wa 'Alī ṣāhib al-ta'wīl' – see e.g. the Ismaili author Ḥamid al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, *Majmū'at al-rasā'il*, ed. M. Ghālib (Beirut, 1983), p. 156. See also Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Kitāb al-Kashf*, ed. R. Strothmann (Bombay et al., 1952), pp. 54f., 66ff., 119f., 157ff.; al-Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, ed. M. Ghālib (Beirut, 1974–1984), vol. 1, pp. 219ff. D. Gimaret translates *ta'wīl* as 'spirit' and *tanzīl* as 'letter', of the Qur'ān; see Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, Fr. trans. by D. Gimaret and G. Monnot (Paris and Louvain, 1986), vol. 1, p. 543. For other sources, see M. M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, p. 88, n. 1. See also the words attributed to 'Ammār b. Yāsir, an old Companion of 'Alī, spoken during the Battle of Ṣiffin: 'By He who holds my life in His hand, just as before we fought our enemies for [the letter of] the Revelation, today we are fighting them for its spirit' (al-Mas'ūdi, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. Pellat [Beirut, 1965–1979, § 1676]). See also Sulaym b. Qays (Ps.), *Kitāb*, ed. Anṣārī, vol. 2, p. 602, no. 6 and vol. 2, p. 770, no. 25; al-Ṭabrisī, Abū Manṣūr Aḥmad b. 'Alī, *al-Ihtijāj*, ed. M. B. al-Mūsawī al-Kharsān (Najaf, 1386/1966), vol. 1, p. 229; Shādhān b. Jabra'il, *al-Faḍā'il*, p. 145; al-Rāzī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn, *Nuzhat al-karām*, ed. M. Shirwānī (Tehran, 1402/1981), p. 556. The idea conveyed in these traditions constitutes the centre of gravity in Mollā Ṣadrā's poem.

'people of appearances' or 'of the exoteric' (*ahl-e zāher*), those that seek only to satisfy their bodies and personal ambitions.³¹

- 17) *Qāriyān būdand ahl-e Nahrawān / lik kajrow dar nahān o dar 'ayān*
The people of Nahrawān were readers of the Qur'ān / Yet misguided secretly and openly.
- 18) *Dar darūn-shān naqsh hā-ye por ghalat / ma'nī-ye Qur'ān nabāshad zīn namaṭ*
Within them mistaken impressions / That had no bearing upon the meaning of the Qur'ān.
- 19) *Ān ghalat-hā ḥak namūd az tigh-e tiz / kard az ta'wīl-e Qur'ān rastkhiz*
He ('Alī) wiped away these errors by the blade of his sword / From the hermeneutics of the Qur'ān he makes a resurrection.

The 'people of Nahrawān' obviously represent 'Alī's adversaries, just as 'readers of the Qur'ān' stand for the 'misguided' religious figures with false ideas about the true 'meaning of the Qur'ān'. 'Alī, symbol of *walāya*, is himself the true meaning; his adversaries are adversaries of meaning and therefore, according to the poet, those who are only aware of the letter and its reading, hence the expression, 'readers of the Qur'ān' (*qāriyān*).

Returning to the theme recalled above, and in an even more audacious manner, Mollā Ṣadrā repeats that 'Alī's sword is not only an instrument for the *ta'wīl* (spiritual hermeneutics) of the Qur'ān, but it is also by doing away with people of exteriority, and by extension the letter they represent, that this *ta'wīl* in turn becomes an instrument for resurrecting meaning.

31. *Seh aṣl*, e.g. pp. 10 and 66. Generally speaking, this text by Mollā Ṣadrā is written against a certain type of *fuqahā'*, those that gravitated towards the circles of power at the Safawid court and/or those who denied the spiritual hermeneutics of the Scriptures; the same is true for another one of his books, *Kasr aṣnām al-jāhiliyya*, ed. M. T. Dānesh-Pažūh (Tehran, 1340 Sh./1962), mainly directed against the Sufis but also the literalist jurists. I shall return to this.

- 20) *Şehhat-e Qur'ân chonîn bāyad namūd* ³² / *eqtedā bā shāh-e dīn bāyad namūd*
It is thus that one must show the truthfulness of the Qur'ân / One must thus follow the example of the King of Religion ('Alī).
- 21) *Zang-e kofr az rüy-e dīn bestorde ast* / *'khāşef on-na'l* in *hedāthat būde ast* ³³
In this way he scraped away the rust concealing religion / This is why he was called 'repairer of the sandals'.
- 22) *Harb bar ta'wīl karde murtaḍā* / *hamcho bar tanzīl* ³⁴ *şadr-e anbiyā*
Murtaḍā ('Alī) fought for the spirit (of the Qur'ân) / Just as the leader of prophets (Muḥammad) fought for its letter.³⁵

'Repairer of the sandals', *khāşif al-na'l*: in some versions of the *ḥadīth* of the 'Warrior of *Ta'wīl*' (see verse 15 below and the relevant note), the Prophet refers to 'Alī by this nickname because it is said that whilst he was speaking, 'Alī was repairing a sandal.³⁶ The root *kh-ṣ-f* literally means to join two detached pieces or to sew what is torn. It seems that Mollā Şadrā wishes to suggest that

32. The Fayḍī edition reads *şoḥbat* instead of *şehhat*; which is unintelligible.

33. In the Fayḍī edition, instead of *hedāthat* there is *chonîn farmūde*, 'Which is why he [i.e. the Prophet] said "repairer of sandals".'

34. Clearly a reference to the *ḥadīth* cited above in note 30, one must correct this error: instead of *tanzīl* the edited texts read *tafsīr*. What is more, in the second hemistich, the Fayḍī edition reads *shāh-e anbiyā* (King of the Prophets) and not *şadr-e anbiyā*.

35. Translations of *ta'wīl* and *tanzīl* rendered following those by D. Gimaret, referred to above in note 30.

36. Either his own, Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāya fī gharīb al-ḥadīth wa'l-āthār*, ed. al-Zāwī and al-Tināhī (Cairo, 1963–1966), vol. 2, p. 38; al-Qundūzī, *Yanābī' al-mawadda* (Bombay, n.d.), p. 59; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 17, or that belonging to the Prophet (Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 3, pp. 31 and 33); al-Muḥibb (*sic*, i.e. Muḥibb al-Dīn) al-Ṭabarī, *al-Riyāḍ al-naḍīra* (rpr. Tehran, ca. 1985), vol. 2, pp. 52–53. In Talmudic literature, it is the prophet Enoch (Ukhnūkh/Idrīs) who is called then 'repairer of sandals' (in Hebrew: *tofer min 'alim*). The parallel deserves further consideration in a separate study. I owe this information to my friend and colleague M. M. Bar-Asher at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, whom I cordially thank.

in his battle for *ta'wīl* 'Alī, the messenger of the esoteric dimension of the Qur'ān, corrected errors caused by the rampant literalism that had crept into Muḥammad's religion; hence my translation of *khāshif* as 'repairer'. Similarly, in the expression *ṣeḥḥat-e Qur'ān* that I have translated as 'truthfulness of the Qur'ān' (verse 20), the term *ṣeḥḥat* (*ṣiḥḥa* in Arabic) literally means 'health, state of something that is faultless', but also in Persian 'correction, rectification' (meaning of the second causative form of the root in Arabic). The wars conducted by 'Alī are thus inseparable from his vocation of imam, of *wālī*, Friend of God and interpreter of the esoteric meaning of the Revelation.

The next five verses seem to emphasise this double dimension of the imam, namely the apparent as symbolised by 'the day' of the joyful and intrepid warrior of *ta'wīl*, and the hidden as symbolised by 'the night' of the sad Friend and Ally of God:

- 23) *Rūz-e hayjā chun be-peydā āmadī / chūn khor az ṣobḥ-e dovom khande zadī*
When he emerged on the day of the battle / He smiled as if a second sun.
- 24) *Shab cho dar meḥrāb-e ṭā'at mīshodī / khūn ze gerye bar moṣallā mīzadī*
At night, when he went to the *mīhrāb* / He drowned the place of worship with his bitter tears.
- 25) *Rūz tiḡhash āb-e ātash bār būd / ashk-e chashmash shab dar-e raḥmat goshūd*
By day, his sword destroyed like a sea of fire / By night, his tears opened the doors of mercy.
- 26) *Dar waghā daḡḡhāk o shab bakkā bodī / bā khodā shab rūz bā a'dā bodī*
In the clamour of battle, he laughed, and at night he wept / By night he was with God, by day with his enemies.
- 27) *Rūz kār-e doshmanān rā sākhtī / shab be kār-e dūstān pardākhtī*
By day he settled accounts with his adversaries / By night he cared for his friends.

The next seven verses form a series of allusions to Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīths* that the Twelver tradition associates with the figure of the first imam:

- 28) *Alladhīna yunfiqūn dar sha'n-e ū / qaddemū bayna yaday ehsān e ū*
 'Alladhīna yunfiqūn' (is revealed) for his case / 'Qaddimū bayna yaday' (refers to) his bounty.

Alladhīna yunfiqūn: Q 3:134: 'Alladhīna yunfiqūna fi'l-sarrā' wa'l-ḍarrā' wa'l-kāzimīna'l-ghayṣ wa'l-āfīn 'ani al-nās wa'llāhu yuḥibbu'l-muḥsinīn': 'Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity; who restrain anger and pardon (all) men – for God loves those who do good.'³⁷

Qaddimū bayna yaday: Q 58:12: 'Yā ayyuhā lladhīna āmanū idhā nājaytumu'l-rasūli fa-qaddimū bayna yaday najwākum ṣadaqatan'; 'O you who believe! When you consult the Messenger in private, expend something on charity beforehand.'³⁸

- 29) *Khal'at-e ennā hadaynā dar barash / mighfarī az lā fatā andar sarash*
 The robe of honour, 'innā hadaynā', draped around him /
 The headdress of 'lā fatā' gracing his head.

Innā hadaynā: Q 76:3: 'Innā hadaynāhu al-sabīl': 'We showed him the way',³⁹

37. For how this verse is linked to 'Alī, see for example, al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 315; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3 vols (n.p. [Tehran?], n.d.), vol. 1, p. 152.

38. On the connection of this verse with 'Alī, see Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, p. 469; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 369; al-Ṭūsī, *Tafsīr al-Tibyān*, ed. A. Ḥ. al-'Āmilī, 10 vols (Najaf, 1380/1960–), vol. 9 (1389/1969), pp. 549–550; al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī/Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-bayān*, ed. H. al-Rasūlī al-Maḥallātī, 10 vols in 5 parts (Beirut, 1379/1959–1960), vol. 9, p. 253.

39. Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 422; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, vol. 10, pp. 204ff.; al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-bayān*, vol. 10, pp. 402f. Generally, *Sūrat al-Dahr*, also known as '*al-Insān*' or '*Hal Atā*' (the first two words of the verse), is linked in

- 30) *Dar kafash az o'ṭiyanna rāyatī / dar delash az ennamā khosh āyatī*
 In his hand, the standard of 'u'ṭiyanna' / In his heart, the beautiful sign (or verse) of 'innamā'.

U'ṭiyanna: an allusion to the *ḥadīth* which goes back to the Prophet, who during the battle of Khaybar is reported to have said: '*la-u'ṭiyanna al-rāya ghadan rajulan yuḥibbu'llāha wa rasūlahu wa yuḥibbuhu'llāhu wa rasūluhu yaftaḥu'llāhu 'alā yadayhi laysa bi-farrār*'; 'Tomorrow, I will pass the standard to a man [i.e. 'Alī] who loves God and His Messenger and whom God and His Messenger love; thanks to him, God will grant victory and he will not flee.'⁴⁰
Innamā: Q 5:55: '*Innamā waliyyukumū'llāhu wa rasūluhu wa'lladhīna āmanū alladhīna yuqīmūna al-ṣalāt wa yu'tūna al-zakāt wa hum rākī'ūn*': 'Your friend is only God, and his Envoy, and the believers who perform the Prayer and give Alms and bow down.'⁴¹

- 31) *Anta mennī ma'nī-ye īmān-e ū / āyat-e taḥīr andar sha'n-e ū*
 'Anta minnī' is the meaning of his faith / the verse of 'Purification' concerns him.

Anta minnī: from the *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet reportedly spoke thus to 'Alī: '*Anta minnī bi-manzila Hārūn min Mūsā illā*

Imami tradition to 'Alī. For '*lā fatā*' in the second hemistich, refer above to verse 1 and the relevant note.

40. See Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 3, p. 16; 'Alī b. 'Īsā al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma* (Qumm, 1381/1961), vol. 1, p. 212; al-Sayyid 'Alī al-Hamadhānī, *al-Mawadda fi'l-qurbā*, in the margins of al-Qundūzī, *Yanābī' al-mawadda* (Bombay edition), p. 48; the last clause of the *ḥadīth* is an allusion to the *laqab* 'al-Farrār' which was bestowed on 'Uthmān by his adversaries who claimed he had fled from the battle of Uḥud; see I. Goldziher *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle, 1888), vol. 2, pp. 122–124.

41. On the connection of this verse to 'Alī, see e.g. Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, pp. 123–129; al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 327–329; al-Tūsī, *al-Tibyān*, vol. 3, pp. 549ff.; al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-bayān*, vol. 3, pp. 209ff.; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 9, pp. 34ff.; al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudāt*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Qumm, n.d.), vol. 3, pp. 542ff.; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, pp. 482ff.

annahu lā nabiyya ba'dī; 'You are to me as Aaron was to Moses, with one difference, after me there will be no other prophet', which for the Shi'is, proves that 'Alī was truly the imam and Muḥammad's successor.'⁴²

The verse of Purification (*āyat al-taḥhīr*): Q 33:33: '*Innamā yurīdu llāhu li-yudhhibā 'ankumu'l-rijsa ahl al-bayti wa yuṭahhirakum taḥhīrā. . .*' ; 'And God only wishes to remove all abomination from you, you *ahl al-bayt* [of the Prophet], and to make you pure and spotless.'⁴³

- 32) *Ū madīne-y 'elm rā bāb āmade / jān fedā dar jāme-ye khāb āmade*
He is the gate to 'the city of knowledge' / Offering himself for sacrifice, he slept in his [Muḥammad's] bed.

'City of knowledge': from the *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet: '*Anā madīnatu'l-'ilm* (another version: *madīnatu'l-ḥikma*) *wa 'Alī bābuhā*'; 'I am the city of knowledge [or wisdom] and 'Alī is its gate.'⁴⁴ The second hemistich alludes to the famous epi-

42. E.g. Ibn Bābūya, *Ilal al-sharā'ī*, p. 222, *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 278 and '*Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*' (Tehran, n.d. [ca. 1980]), vol. 1, p. 232 and vol. 2, pp. 10, 59, 194; Ibn Shādhān al-Qummī, *Mi'a manqaba*, ed. N. R. 'Ulwān (Qumm, 1413/1994), 'manqaba' 57, p. 112; al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *al-Shāfi fi'l-imāma* (lithograph, Tehran, 1301/1884), pp. 148ff.; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib* (Najaf, 1956), vol. 2, pp. 219ff. and vol. 3, p. 46. See M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, p. 156, n. 122.

43. Obviously, for Imamis the Qur'anic expression, '*ahl al-bayt*' refers to 'Alī, Fāṭima and their descendants; see e.g. Furāt al-Kūfi, *Tafsīr*, pp. 331–342; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, pp. 193–194; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān* (1388/1968), vol. 8, pp. 307–308; al-Ṭabrisi, *Majma' al-bayān*, vol. 7, p. 357. For discussions regarding the expression *ahl al-bayt*, see M. Sharon, 'Ahl al-Bayt. People of the House', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 8 (1986) and his 'The Umayyads as Ahl al-Bayt', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 14 (1991); W. Madelung, 'The Hāshimiyyāt of al-Kumayt and Hāshimi Shi'ism', *SI*, 70 (1989) and *The Succession to Muḥammad* (Cambridge, 1997), index under '*ahl al-bayt*'; also Chapter 1, this volume.

44. See e.g. Furāt, *Tafsīr*, pp. 63–64; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 241, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. al-Ḥusaynī al-Tīhrānī (Tehran, 1398/1978), p. 307 and

sode known as the *laylat al-mabīt* ('the night of shelter'), when, according to the *Sīra* of the Prophet, threatened by his adversaries, Muḥammad fled in the night from Mecca to Medina, and 'Alī slept in his bed to trick those hunting his cousin, thus endangering his own life for the nascent religion and its prophet.

- 33) *Ennamā anta bar ū nāzel shode / az salūnī 'elm-e dīn ḥāṣel shode*
'Innamā anta' is revealed for him / Due to 'salūnī' the science of religion is acquired.

Innamā anta: Q 13: 7: '*Innamā anta mundhirun wa li-kulli qawmin hādīn*': 'But you are truly a warner, and to every people a guide.' The Imami exegetic tradition identifies 'the warner' with the Prophet and 'the guide' with 'Alī.⁴⁵ *Salūnī*: an allusion to the formulaic expression '*salūnī* (or *is'alūnī*) *qabla an tafqidūnī*', 'Ask me before you lose me', a formula with which several of 'Alī's *khuṭbas* open,⁴⁶ and a direct allusion to the fact that the first imam is the Initiated Sage and therefore the source of all knowledge.

- 34) *Būde nafsash 'endaho 'elmo'l-ketāb / qol kafa bi'llāh govāh-e īn khetāb*
'Indahu 'ilmu'l-kitāb' relates to his being / 'Qul kafa bi'llāh' bears witness to this.

al-Khiṣāl, p. 574; generally, for an extensive bibliography on this *ḥadīth*, see *Ṣaḥīfat al-imām al-Riḍā* (Qumm, 1408/1366 Sh./1987), pp. 123–133.

45. Furāt, *Tafsīr*, p. 206; al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, pp. 203–204; 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa al-tabṣīra min al-ḥayra* (Qumm, 1404/1984), p. 132; Ibn Shādhān, *Mī'a manqaba*, 'manqaba' 4, p. 44; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, vol. 6, p. 223; al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-bayān*, vol. 6, pp. 278–279; al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudāt*, vol. 3, pp. 548ff.; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, pp. 277ff.

46. One need only leaf through selections from the *Nahj al-balāgha* to note this. See Chapter 3, this volume.

'indahu 'ilmu'l-kitāb and *Qul kafā bi'llāh*: Q 13:43: 'Wa yaqūlu'lladhīna kafarū lasta mursalan qul kafā bi'llāhi shahīdan baynī wa baynakum wa man 'indahu 'ilmu'l-kitāb': 'The Unbelievers say: "No Messenger are you." Say: "Sufficient as a witness between me and you is God, and such as have knowledge of the Book".'

For Imami exegesis, God and 'Alī, 'who have knowledge of the Book', suffice as witnesses to prove the truthfulness of Muḥammad's prophetic mission.⁴⁷

- 35) *Moṣḥaf-e āyāt-e īzād rūy-e ū / selsele-y ahl-e valāyat mūy-e ū*
His face is the Book of the signs of God / The curls in his hair, the chain for people of the (divine) Friendship.

Mollā Ṣadrā here employs two terms from the technical vocabulary of erotic symbolism in Persian mystical poetry to allude to theological and hagiological functions of the imam; 'Alī's 'face' or 'visage' (*rū*) is the locus for the manifestation of Divine signs. In many traditions, the person of the imam is said to be the Face of God.⁴⁸ Moreover, '*moṣḥaf-e āyāt-e īzād*', which I have translated as 'the Book of the signs of God', can be translated as 'the Book of verses from God', that is, the celestial revealed Book. The Figure of 'Alī, the imam par excellence, thus constitutes the veritable revealed Word or conversely, the reality of Revelation is the Face of the imam. The tresses of his hair (*mū*), or locks or curls, link the 'people of the Divine Friendship' *ahl-e valāyat*. This expression obviously refers to the *awliyā'* *Allāh*, the friends or allies of God, the saints simply put. 'Alī's *walāya* forms the substance of saintliness, assuring the proper succession of the men of God.⁴⁹

47. See al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, pp. 220–221; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, vol. 6, pp. 267–268; al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-bayān*, vol. 6, p. 301; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 9, pp. 82–83; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 303; al-Kāshānī, *al-Šāfi*, vol. 1, p. 880.

48. See *Guide divin/ Divine Guide*, index under 'wajh'. Cf. also above, verse 12.

49. In the Fayḍī edition, the poem on 'Alī seems to end with this verse. This seems somewhat abrupt. The verses that follow are said to belong to an ode

- 36) *Goft peyghambar ke ey yārān-e man / dūstān o peyrovān-e mo'taman*⁵⁰
The Prophet declared: 'O Companions / Friends and trusted comrades,
- 37) *Mīgozāram ba'd-e khod nazd-e shomā / bahr-e peydā kardan-e rāh-e khodā*
After me, I leave with you / So that you may follow the path of God,
- 38) *Do gerān qeymat cho māh o āftāb / ahl-e beyt o in ketāb-e mostafāb*
Two precious (objects) like the sun and moon / My Family and this sublime Book.'

There is obviously a reference here to the tradition of the 'two precious objects' (*ḥadīth al-thaqalayn*): 'I leave behind two precious objects, the Book of God and My Family.'⁵¹

- 39) *'ālemān-e ahl-e beyt-e Moṣṭafā*⁵² / *hamcho Qor'ān būde har yek bar shomā*
The wise initiators [i.e. the imams] among the *ahl al-bayt* of Muṣṭafā / Are for you, each identical to the Qur'ān.

'Ālim, in Persian *'ālem*, here in the plural form *'ālemān* (lit. 'learned one') is one of the most frequently used titles for the imams and refers, more specifically in the early Imami corpus and

to the *ahl al-bayt* and the Qur'ān (*dar madh-e ahl al-bayt 'alayhim al-salām va Qor'ān kalām-e elāhī*); *Mathnavī-ye Mollā Ṣadrā*, p. 110.

50. The Fayḍī edition: *peyrovān o dūstān-e mo'taman*.

51. *Innī tāriku fikum al-thaqalayn kitāb Allāh wa 'itrātī*; on this tradition and its different versions, now consult M. M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, pp. 93–98. For supplementary sources, see *Guide divin*, p. 215, note 440 (*Divine Guide*, p. 86) and especially the extensive bibliography noted by the editor(s) of *Ṣahīfat al-imām al-Riḍā*, pp. 135–150.

52. Re. questions regarding its meaning, which we shall examine below, I prefer the interpretation *'ālemān-e ahl-e beyt*, to the edited version, i.e. *'ālemān o ahl-e beyt*. As for the Fayḍī edition, it reads *'āmelān-e ahl-e beyt* ('the practising among the *ahl-e beyt*'), and in the second hemistich *dā'em rahnomā* ('forever guiding') instead of *har yak bar shomā*.

in the 'esoteric non-rational tradition', to the master or sage who initiates a disciple into the secret teaching.⁵³

It would seem, according to the second hemistich, that Mollā Ṣadrā opted for the equality between these Two Precious Objects, the Qur'ān and the Prophet's Family. However, in some versions of the *ḥadīth al-thaqalayn*, reported both in Shi'i and Sunni sources, it is explicitly stated that one of the Two Objects, which the majority of interpreters identify as the Qur'ān, is superior to the other (*al-thaqalayn aḥaduhumā akbar min al-ākhar*).⁵⁴

However, a typically Shi'i version of the *ḥadīth* reads: 'I leave behind, after me, two precious objects: the Book of God and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib; know that for you 'Alī is greater than the Book of God, since for you, he is its interpreter',⁵⁵ that is to say, without the imam's interpretation the Qur'ān remains incomprehensible; which of course speaks to the Shi'i notion of the figure of the imam as the ultimate interpreter of the Qur'ān, the imam as the tongue of the Qur'ān or as the 'Speaking Book' (*kitāb Allāh al-nāṭiq*, *Qur'ān nāṭiq*), indeed what the following verses refer to:

53. Cf. *Guide divin*, section III.2, 'la Science sacrée', pp. 174–199 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 69–79); for the semantic shift of this term see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Réflexions sur une évolution du shi'isme duodécimain: tradition et idéologisation', in E. Patlagean and A. Le Boulluec (eds), *Les retours aux Ecritures. Fondamentalismes présents et passés*, Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes, vol. 99 (Louvain and Paris, 1993), pp. 63–82. On the 'non-rational esoteric tradition', see *Guide divin*, pp. 33–48 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 13–19).

54. *Ṣaḥīfat al-imām al-Riḍā*, p. 135 and notes.

55. *Kitābu'llāh wa 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib wa a'lamū anna 'aliyyan lakum afḍal min kitābi'llāh li-annahu yutarjimu lakum kitāba'llāhi ta'ālā*; see for example Ibn Shādhān al-Qummī, *Mi'a manqaba*, 'manqaba' 86, p. 140; al-Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad al-Khwārazmī, *Maqṭal al-Ḥusayn* (Najaf, 1367/1948), vol. 1, p. 114; al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Daylamī, *Irshād al-qulūb ilā'l-ṣawāb* (Najaf, 1342/1923), p. 378.

- 40) *Har yekī zishān kalām-e nāṭeqī / rāh-e ḥaqq rā nūr-e īshān sā'eqī*
Each of them [i.e. the imams] an eloquent word / Their
light is a guide upon the path of the Real.⁵⁶
- 41) *Gar nadādī nūr-e shān dīn rā nezām / montasher gashtī*
dayājir-e ḡalām
If their [the imams] light did not lend order to religion /
The dust of darkness [or 'of injustice'] would have spread
everywhere.
- 42) *Gar nabūdī kashtī-ye anvār-e shān*⁵⁷ / *dar jahālat gharqe*
*gashtī ens o jān*⁵⁸
If the Ark of their light did not exist / All creatures [lit.
Humans and Jinns] would drown in ignorance.
- 43) *Ahl-e beyt-e anbiyā zīnsān bodand / ke najāt-e ommat az*
*nīrān bodand*⁵⁹
The Families of the Prophets have all been thus / Rescuing
their communities from the Fire.
- 44) *Har ke bāshad 'ālem-e rāh-e khodā / in safīne sāzad az bahr-e*
hodā
Every wise person on the path of God / Holds fast to this
Ark for guidance.

The Persian word *kashtī* (verse 42), just as the Arabic term *safīna* (verse 44), alludes to the famous *ḥadīth* about Noah's Ark: '*Ahl bayti* are akin to Noah's Ark; whoever enters there is saved and

56. On this notion see M. Ayoub, 'The Speaking Qur'ān and the Silent Qur'ān: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imāmī Tafsīr', in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 177–198; M. M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, ch. 3, sections 1 and 2. It must be added that the term *kalām* in the first hemistich inevitably evokes the expression *kalām Allāh*, Speech or Word of God, i.e. the Qur'ān.

57. Instead of *anvār-e shān* the Fayḍī edition reads *a'lām-e shān* ('If the Ark of "their sign" or "the most famous among them" [?] did not exist').

58. Fayḍī Edition: *az jahālat gharqe gashtandī jahān* (sic; very awkward formulation); 'due to ignorance the world [singular form] would be [respecting the metre, the verb is given in the plural] drowned.'

59. Fayḍī Edition: *pīrān* ('the aged?') instead of *nīrān*; which is meaningless.

whoever drifts is drowned.⁶⁰ Thus Mollā Ṣadrā moves from 'Alī to other imams of the Prophet's Family. Like 'Alī, father to all of them, the imams are the instrument of the inner aspect of the Qur'ān, the messengers of the esoteric dimension of Muḥammad's religion. Which is why in his last four verses, the poet boldly returns to his accusation against 'the people of exteriority', those whom he had previously referred to as *aṣḥāb-e badan* (see verse 16 above), the false scholars who – unaware of the 'secrets and true intentions' (refer to verse 45) of religious precepts and seeking worldly pleasures – compromise their religion and faith.

These final verses seem to reflect Mollā Ṣadrā's position in *Seh aṣl* (written, as we know, in opposition to a certain category of literal-minded legalist-theologians) and are, more specifically, a summary of 'three basics' (hence the title of the work) that impede transformative gnosis: ignorance of reality and the ultimate goal of human existence which indeed must only be a step in preparation for the ultimate journey to the Hereafter (*ākherat*);⁶¹ the love of power, wealth, baser instincts and worldly pleasures that together tarnish the heart and hinder self-knowledge;⁶² finally, the snares and wiles of the ego as a result of which reality is perceived as its opposite, good appearing as evil and evil as good.⁶³

- 45) *Kār-e jāhel nīst*⁶⁴ *gheyr az sokhriyat / nīst jān āgah ze*⁶⁵ *asrār o niyat*
The ignorant person only ridicules all / Surely, he knows
neither the secrets nor true intentions.

60. *Mathalu ahli baytī mathalu safinati nūhin man rakibahā najā wa man takhallaḡa 'anhā ghariqa* (or *zukkhkha fi'l-nār*, 'is pushed into the Fire', whence perhaps 'the fires/flames', *nīrān*, of verse 43). For the numerous sources regarding this *ḥadīth*, see *Ṣaḥīfat al-imām al-Riḍā*, pp. 116–120.

61. *Seh aṣl*, pp. 13ff.

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 28f.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 32ff.

64. Fayḏī Edition: *chīst* instead of *nīst*: 'What else does the ignorant one do, if not ridicule everything?'

65. Instead of *jān āgah ze* the Fayḏī edition reads *chon vāqef bar*; which has the same meaning.

- 46) *Ṭab'-e jāhel hamcho ṭeflān tā abad / 'ākef āmad*⁶⁶ *süy-e ladhhdhāt-e jasad*
Like children, his nature remains forever / Captive to pleasures of the mortal body.
- 47) *Ṣan'at-e donyā safīne sākhtan / kār-e nādān*⁶⁷ *dīn be donyā bākhtan*
The Great Work on earth is to prepare one's Ark / Whereas the ignorant only trades his faith for this world.
- 48) *Ān safīne sāzad az bahr-e najāt / ān hamī dar baḥr-e donyā gashte māt*⁶⁸
One builds the Ark for salvation / The other remains adrift in the sea of the world.

It is interesting to note how, in the last two verses, and by virtue of images of the Ark (*safīna*) and the alchemical Great Work (*ṣan'at*), Mollā Ṣadrā establishes a equivalent status between, on the one hand, the imams and their teachings, and, on the other, the resurrected body. It seems that according to this idea, which is related to his notion of 'substantial movement' (*al-ḥarakat al-jawhariyya*), the assimilation of the Imam's sacred teachings indicates the intensification of being (by internal alchemy) and the evolution of the resurrected body which traverses the physical world, as on an Ark, in order to attain salvation in the hereafter.⁶⁹ We shall return to this.

Let us conclude with a few words regarding the form and content of the poem. This work belongs to the genre of poetry

66. The Fayḍī edition reads *gashte 'ākef* instead of *'ākef āmad*; same meaning.

67. Fayḍī edition: *jāhel* instead of *nādān*; which is obviously the same thing.

68. The Fayḍī edition provides a slightly different version of this verse: *īn hamī sāzad safīne dar najāt/ān yekī dar baḥr-e donyā gashte māt*. The phraseology is clumsy but the meaning remains the same.

69. See for example H. Corbin, *Corps spirituel et Terre céleste* (Paris, 1979), pp. 194–200 and *La philosophie iranienne islamique aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1981), pp. 69ff.; C. Jambet, *Se rendre immortel*, pp. 13ff. and 78ff.

termed *ghadīriyya*, a poem in celebration of the Figure and the *walāya* of 'Alī, since the event at Ghadīr Khumm, according to Shi'i tradition, is the ideal context for speaking of this. It appears that this genre, composed in Persian, was especially appreciated by philosophers and thinkers of the Safawid period. Those who wrote *ghadīriyya* include: Fayyāḍ Lāhijī (d. 1072/1661),⁷⁰ Lāmi' Darmiyānī (d. 1076/1665),⁷¹ Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680)⁷² and Ḥazīn Lāhijī (born in 1103/1691).⁷³

Mollā Ṣadrā also has recourse to two complementary techniques in poetry: *talmīḥ*, a fleeting allusion to a character that the audience (or reader) is supposed to recognise, and *iḍmār*, literally, 'to introduce into the mind', from *ḍamīr*, which consists of stating only the beginning or part of a famous saying, obliging the audience (or reader) to mentally reconstruct the rest.⁷⁴ This process is unvarying in the Persian *ghadīriyya* since we encounter it in the fourth/tenth century in Kasā'ī Marwazī (d. 341/952)⁷⁵ and

70. The *qaṣīda* that begins thus: *Sezā-ye emāmat be šūrat be ma'nā/ 'Aliy-ye valī ān ke shāhast o mowlā; Divān-e Fayyāḍ-e Lāhijī*, ed. A. B. Karimī (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), pp. 23–26.

71. *Maqbūl-e anta minnī o mamdūh-e hal atā/qā'el be qowl-e law kashaf o dāfe'e maḍārr; Divān-e Lāme'*, ed. M. Rafī'i and Z. Moṣaffā (Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986), p. 51.

72. *Āmadam bar sar-e thanā-ya 'Alī/ey del o jān-e man fedā-ye 'Alī*; Mullā Muḥammad Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Divān*, ed. M. F. Kāshānī (Tehran, 1371 Sh./1992), p. 423.

73. *Āmad saḥar ze kūy-e to dāman keshān ṣabā/ahda'l-salāma minka 'alā tābi'i hudā; Divān-e Ḥazīn-e Lāhijī*, ed. B. Taraqqī (Tehran, 1350 Sh./1971), p. 130.

74. Refer to the chapters devoted to these techniques (*talmīḥ* is also given as *tamlīḥ*) in works related to *badi'* such as Ṣāhib b. 'Abbād, *al-Iqnā'* (Qumm, n.d.); Taftāzānī, *Muṭawwal* (Tehran, 1333 Sh./1955) and *Mukhtaṣar al-ma'ānī* (Qumm, 1386/1966); al-Qazwīnī al-Khaṭīb, *al-Talkhiṣ* (Cairo, n.d.). For the use of *talmīḥ* in Persian poetry, see S. Shamīsā, *Farhang-e talmīḥāt* (Tehran, 1366 Sh./1987); for *iḍmār*, see M. Dhākerī, 'Shegerd hā-ye nā ma'lūf dar she'r-e Sa'dī', *Nashr-i Dānish*, 16/2 (1378 Sh./1999), pp. 16–24, esp. pp. 21–23.

75. *Fahm kon gar mo'menī faḍl-e amīr al-mo'menīn/faḍl-e ḥeydar shīr-e yazdān Morteḍā-ye pākda'n* in M. A. Riyāḥī, *Kasā'ī-ye Marwazī* (Tehran, 1367 Sh./1988), p. 93. There is some doubt about the attribution of this poem.

Shāh Ni'mat Allāh Walī (d. 834/1430) in the eighth and ninth/fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁷⁶

In purely formal terms, Mollā Ṣadrā's *mathnavī* is not especially original. The philosopher's personal contribution lies mainly in the nature of the content. First, the processes of *talmīh* and *iḍmār* are applied to relevant passages from the Qur'ān, *ḥadīths* and *sīra*. The poem thus draws exclusively from traditional disciplines (*naqlī*) and not from rational speculative sciences ('*aqlī*). Then, as we have seen, the poem on 'Alī is written in the same vein as the *Seh aṣl*. Resonating between the lines, one can hear echoes from long periods in exile and of suffering endured by the philosopher from Shiraz because of the actions of certain *fuqahā'*.⁷⁷ One knows, but often forgets, that Mollā Ṣadrā had himself been a jurist and theologian.⁷⁸ Yet, in addition to the *Seh aṣl*, a monographic epistle on the subject, in numerous places in his oeuvre he does not fail to attack the religious figures frequenting the circles of Safawid power and among them those who according to him, either through ignorance or hypocrisy, are unaware of the esoteric dimension ('*ilm al-bāṭin*) of Shi'ism,⁷⁹ the very same religious

76. *Ān amīr al-mo'menīn ya'nī 'Alī/vān emām al-mottaqīn ya'nī 'Alī; Dīvān-e Shāh Ne'matollāh-e Valī*, ed. J. Nūrbakhsh (Tehran, 1361 Sh./1982), p. 762; see also note 72 above: the poem by Lāmī Darmiyānī in which both techniques are used. For *ghadiriyya* in Persian, see Ā. Sajjādī, 'Ghadiriyya hā ye fārsī', in S. J. Shahidi and M. R. Ḥakīmī, *Yād-nāmeḥ ye 'Allāma Amīnī*, vol. 1 (Tehran, 1973), pp. 413–430. See also 'al-Qaṣīdat al-ghadiriyya' attributed to the Nuṣayrī thinker al-Khaṣībī, in *Majmū' al-a'yād*, ed. R. Strothmann, *Der Islam*, 27 (1946), cited by M. M. Bar-Asher and A. Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-'Alawī Religion* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 122ff.

77. On this matter, and Mollā Ṣadrā's enforced retirement (self-imposed exile?) for many years in Kahak, a small village near Qumm, see for example S. Ḥ. Naṣr, introduction to *Seh aṣl*, p. v; H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 60–61; A. Shafī'ihā's introduction to his edition of Mollā Ṣadrā, *al-Wāridāt al-qalbiyya fī ma'rīfat al-rubūbiyya* (Tehran, 1358 Sh./1979), pp. 4–5; M. Khājavi, *Lawāmī al-'arīfīn*, pp. 23ff.

78. See S. Ḥ. Naṣr's introduction to *Seh aṣl*, pp. xi–xii.

79. See e.g. *al-Asfār al-arba'a* (lithograph, Tehran, 1282/1865), p. 876; *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, p. 11; *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara* (lithograph, Tehran, n.d.), pp. 183 and 450; *Kasr aṣnām al-jāhiliyya*, pp. 32ff.

scholars that his famous disciple and son-in-law Fayḍ Kāshānī ironically calls 'the possessors of turbans' (*arbāb-e 'amā'em*) and 'the turbaned ones, worldly-wise and scholars from the masses' (*ahl-e 'amāme va dastār ke dāneshmandān-e donyā va 'olamā-ye 'avāmmānd*).⁸⁰

Conversely, in certain religious circles Mollā Ṣadrā has always been considered a notorious heretic. Curiously, it seems that he was vilified not so much for his practice of philosophy but because he was perceived and denounced as a skilful theoretician of Sufism.⁸¹ On the part of his detractors, this is obviously a confusion (and possibly a deliberate one) between mystical gnosis (*'irfān*) – to which Mollā Ṣadrā adheres – and Sufism, against a certain form of which, in fact, Mollā Ṣadrā had written his *Kasr aṣnām al-jāhiliyya*.⁸² Given

80. Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Sharḥ-e ṣadr* in his *Risālāt* (Tehran, 1321 Sh./1943), pp. 15–16.

81. Which is at least what we are led to believe in the critical text by Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī in *Lu'lu'at al-Baḥrayn* (Najaf, 1386/1966), see index under 'Fayḍ Kāshānī' (citing Sayyid Ni'mat Allāh al-Shūshtārī who denounced Mollā Ṣadrā's philosophy and his Sufism) or Mīrzā Ḥusayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabrisī/Ṭabarsī in *Mustadrak al-wasā'il* (lithograph, Tehran, n.d.), vol. 3, pp. 422–424, who acknowledges the breadth of Mollā Ṣadrā's knowledge, but adds, in a critical tone, that he supports 'claims' by the Sufis, frequently criticises the *fuqahā'* and admires Ibn 'Arabī. Attacking Mollā Ṣadrā's commentary on *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, Nūrī says it is a Sufi text and as evidence cites a satirical verse composed by an author that he does not name: 'The commentaries on *al-Kāfi* are many and precious / The first to have commented upon it as an infidel was Ṣadrā' (*Shurūḥu'l-Kāfi kathīra jalīlatu qadrā/wa awwalu man sharāhahu bi'l-kufri Ṣadrā*).

82. Still, some Sufis did not hesitate to link themselves to the *taṣawwuf* of Mollā Ṣadrā, for example, Muḥammad Karīm Sharīf Qummī in his *Tuḥfat al-'ushshāq* written in 1097/1685, cited by M. T. Dānesh-Paṣūh in his introduction to *Kasr aṣnām al-jāhiliyya*, p. 4, or Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad Nayrīzī Shīrāzī (d. 1173/1759) in his *Faṣl al-khiṭāb*, cited by M. Istakhrī, *Oṣūl-e taṣawwuf* (Tehran, 1338 Sh./1960), p. 30. It is true that Mollā Ṣadrā seems to be against the institutional Sufism of mystical orders that he considered decadent in comparison to a more authentic, original Sufism. His criticisms have nothing in common with those for example of Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Qummī (d. 1098/1686; *Tuḥfat al-akhyār* [Qumm, 1393/1973]) and well before him, those of the Imami double of the Ḥanbalī Ibn al-Jawzī, Murtaḍā b. Dā'ī al-Ḥasanī al-Rāzī, the seventh/thirteenth century author of *Tabṣīrat al-'awāmm fī ma'rīfat maqāmāt al-anām*, ed. 'A. Eqbāl (2nd edn, Tehran, 1364 Sh./1985), according to Āghā

this historical context of a conflict of ideas, the traditionalist aspect of the poem takes on a special meaning, namely confronting the adversary on his own territory. And this all the more so since the actual core of the poem lies indisputably in its insistence on the portrayal of 'Alī and the other imams in his lineage as warriors of *ta'wīl* and consequently the depiction of their enemies as adversaries of *ta'wīl*. It is also noteworthy that more than half the verses of the poem, both in the edition by Khājavi and that by Fayḍi, deal with these subjects. Certain others are tangentially linked to them.

In basing his discourse on the most traditional Imami interpretations of the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*, and more specifically on the famous tradition of the 'Warrior of *Ta'wīl*', Mollā Ṣadrā has himself made of the Figure of 'Alī, of his battles and adversaries nothing less than a spiritual hermeneutic. Elsewhere, he explicitly states that the divine science above all, the knowledge that transforms human beings, since it is based on contemplation (*mushāhada*) and unveiling (*mukāshafa*), is none other than knowledge of the esoteric meaning of the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*.⁸³ In other words, *ta'wīl*, as a spiritual hermeneutic, the discernment of the hidden meaning beneath the letter of sacred texts, constitutes the key to transformative gnosis. No other science or body of knowledge has such a virtue:

Well then, which is the noblest of sciences? Is it Law, Rhetoric or Speculative Theology? Philology, Grammar, Medicine, Astrology or Philosophy? Geometry, Arithmetic, Astronomy or Physics? No,

Bozorg al-Ṭihirānī the author's name is Jamāl al-Dīn Murtaḍā Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Rāzi, see *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a*, 25 vols (Tehran-Najaf, 1353–1398/1934–1978), vol. 24, p. 123, all Imami scholars who maintained that Sufism in itself constitutes a heretic deviation. On Mollā Ṣadrā's very favourable opinion of early Sufism, now consult N. Pourjavady, 'Ḥallāj va Bāyazīd Baṣṭāmī az naẓar-e Mollā Ṣadrā', *Nashr-i Dānish*, 16/3 (1378 Sh./1999), pp. 14–24. On the opposition to Sufism in Imamism, see Pourjavady, 'Opposition to Sufism in Twelver Shiism', in F. de Jong and B. Radtke (eds), *Islamic Mysticism Contested. Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 614–623.

83. *Seh aṣḥ*, pp. 74–75 and 83–84.

none of these sciences, considered in isolation (*hich yek az afrād-e īn 'ulūm*), has such a sublime status. It is exclusively to be found in the science of the esoteric aspects of the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* and not in the letter [of these texts] to which anyone can gain access (*īn 'elm monḥaṣer ast dar 'elm-e boṭūn-e qor'ān va ḥadīth na zāher-e ānche fahm-e hame kas bedān mīrasad*).⁸⁴

Likewise in his other works, more specifically in his various prologues (and/or epilogues) Mollā Ṣadrā insists, sometimes heavily-handedly, on the importance, in the process of self-perfection, of the coming together of piety, spiritual unveiling and the discovery of the hidden meaning in sacred texts of Shi'ism.⁸⁵ In this way, the other sciences, including philosophy, are only steps in preparation for *the Science*, that is, *ta'wīl*.

The last verses of the poem on 'Alī seem to indicate that, according to our philosopher, this knowledge plays a key role in the Great Spiritual Work, the formation of the subtle body of the resurrection. Throughout his oeuvre, and most explicitly in *Seh aṣl*,⁸⁶ Mollā Ṣadrā describes what he calls the true Science, 'ilm, as an all-encompassing knowledge in which the inner experience, the spiritual unveiling (*mukāshafa*) sustained by divine inspiration (*ilhām*) and knowledge of the hidden aspects of reality, determine and complement each other, rendering the faithful devotee, a divinely wise person (*ḥakīm muta'allih*), a man of inner vision (*baṣīr*) among 'people of the heart' (*aṣḥāb al-qulūb*).⁸⁷ The late

84. Ibid., p. 84.

85. For example *al-Asfār*, p. 2; *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya fi'l-manāhiḡ al-sulūkiyya*, ed. S. J. Āshtiyānī (2nd edn, Tehran, 1360 Sh./1981), p. 4; *al-Ḥikmat al-'arshiyya* (lithograph, Tehran, 1315/1897), p. 1, Persian trans. Khājavi, 'Arshiyya (Tehran, 1341 Sh./1963), p. 2, English trans. J. W. Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne* (Princeton, 1981), pp. 90–92; *Sharḡ al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, the entire prologue; *Asrār al-āyāt*, ed. M. Khājavi, (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983), the whole *muqaddima*, Persian trans. Gh. Ḥ. Āhanī (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1984), pp. 3–55; *al-Wāridāt al-qalbiyya*, pp. 120–121 (Arabic text), pp. 186–187 (Persian trans.).

86. In particular chs 8 and 9.

87. On the mystical dimension of Mollā Ṣadrā's thought, now also consult P. Ballanfat, 'Considérations sur la conception du cœur chez Mullā Ṣadrā', (1),

Moḥammad Taqī Dānesh-Pažūh was certainly not mistaken when he wrote that, in his insistence upon the importance of the *bāṭin* and the path leading towards it, namely, *ta'wīl*, Mollā Ṣadrā seems to go much further than such mystical theosophers as Ḥaydar Āmolī, Rajab Bursī and Ibn Abī Jumhūr Aḥsā'ī.⁸⁸ For Mollā Ṣadrā, the true Shī'i scholar, the authentic continuator of the imams' path – in this case himself – must, above all, be a warrior of *ta'wīl*.

Kār-Nāmeḥ, 5 (1999), pp. 33–46; (2) *Kār-Nāmeḥ*, 6 (2000), pp. 67–84; J. Eshots, 'al-Wāridāt al-qalbiyya fī ma'rifat al-rubūbiyya, resāle-yī 'erfānī az yek ḥakīm', *Kherad-Nāmeḥ Ṣadrā*, 15 (1999), pp. 74–82, 'Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī mobtaker-e ḥekmat-e 'arshī', *Kherad-Nāmeḥ Ṣadrā*, 20 (2000), pp. 61–66 and 'Unification of Perceiver and Perceived and Unity of Being', *Transcendent Philosophy*, 1 (2000), pp. 1–7.

88 Introduction to *Kasr aṣṇām al-jāhiliyya*, p. 13.

Visions of the Imams in Modern and Contemporary Twelver Mysticism

Introduction*

During the course of a previous study, devoted to the theological and practical aspects of *ru'ya bi'l-qalb* in early Imamism, I briefly referred to their subsequent treatment by certain modern authors who belong to various Imami mystical orders.¹ The present study may thus be considered a supplement to the first. It is nevertheless vital to reiterate some of the concepts analysed in the first study – and in some of my other publications – in order to clarify the fundamental doctrines that underpin the material to be examined below.

The supersensible vision that the believer may have of the imam obviously bears upon Imamology and is thus at the confluence of several doctrinal chapters, in this case theology, anthropogony, anthropology and eschatology. The pair *zāhir/bāṭin* is omnipresent in Imamism.² God himself includes two ontological levels:

*I wish to express my gratitude to my friends Sadigh-Yazdtchi, Bagheri, Aghakhani and Bahmanyar whose kind assistance with my research was invaluable.

1. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 112–145: 'Excursus: la vision par le cœur' (*Divine Guide*, pp. 44–55); on Imami mystics, pp. 132–136. See also Chapter 11 in this volume.

2. See my article, 'Du droit à la théologie: les niveaux de réalité dans le shi'isme duodécimain', *Cahiers du Groupe d'Etudes Spirituelles Comparées*, 5, 'L'Esprit et la Nature' (1997), pp. 37–63.

that of Essence that constitutes His *bāṭin*, His level, which is forever unknowable, inaccessible, hidden in his absolute unknowableness and the level of Names and Attributes which corresponds to the revealed, manifested Face, the *zāhir* of God and possesses as its absolute Vehicle or Organ, the Imam in the archetypal and metaphysical sense.³

It is absolutely impossible for the level of Essence to be perceived; but the Names and Attributes, the only knowable level of God, can be 'seen' by the 'eye of the heart' through vision of the Imam's Reality.⁴ This Reality of the Imam, the true Revealed God of early Imami theology, is among other things, his 'body of light' present in the heart of the initiated believer designated by the well-established expression, 'the faithul believer whose heart has been tested for faith by God' (*al-mu'min qad imtaḥana'llāhu qalbahu li'l-imān*).⁵

If this 'body' of the Imam can be seen 'by' or 'in' the initiate's heart (both meanings of the particle *bi-* in the expression *al-ru'ya bi'l-qalb*), according to cosmoanthropogonic traditions this is because they are consubstantial, both made from the same celestial matter known as *'Ilīyyūn*.⁶ According to the Aristotelian theory of the vision that early Imami speculative theology rather clumsily advances, there can be no vision unless the subject viewing and the object viewed are of the same nature.⁷ However, the

3. Refer to Chapter 3 in this volume.

4. *Guide divin*, pp. 112–127 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 44–49); also G. Vajda, 'Le problème de la vision de Dieu (*ru'ya*) d'après quelques auteurs shi'ites duodécimains', in *Le shi'isme imamite* (Paris, 1970), pp. 31–53; although it includes a short description of 'vision by the heart' (pp. 44–45), this study focuses mainly on only one of the two aspects of the theological problem, namely the impossibility of the vision of the Essence of God; in brief, a distinction between the two ontological levels of God is not made here.

5. *Guide divin*, pp. 137–139 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 53–54).

6. *Guide divin*, pp. 96ff. (*Divine Guide*, p. 38); also M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol. 6, pp. 317–322, in particular p. 320b.

7. *Guide divin*, pp. 120–121, esp. n. 236 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 46–47); also G. Vajda, 'Le problème de la vision de Dieu', pp. 35–36 and 50–51; J. van Ess,

vision of the imam may take other forms: dreams, in the awakened state or in the world of the soul, completely independent of the believer's will and practice, a meeting or encounter in the physical world with the hidden imam and so forth.

As the latter is identified with the Qā'im, some mystics have not hesitated to describe an encounter as the point of departure for an individual eschatology of a believer on whom has been bestowed this great honour.⁸ In the following study, given the space allotted, it is only possible to take into account the category of 'vision'; indeed dreams of the imam or encounters with the hidden imam can be considered under several different categories, each having its own theoretical and practical ramifications. I must add that I have already dealt with the issue of encounters with the Imami Qā'im, during both the minor and major Occultation at some length.⁹

Non-institutional mysticism

The special relationship that a believer is called upon to maintain with the imams and the specific implications of this relationship are contained in the very nature of Shi'ism in general and Imamism in particular, and this means that once we deal with issues of faith the mystical dimension is always present. This explains why the mystic, oriented essentially towards the figure of the imam, has always been present in the Imami milieu, among all tendencies and with a greater or lesser degree of discretion depending on the various periods, locations and individuals, both before and after the development of various paths in mystical brotherhoods from the Safawid period onwards (tenth/sixteenth century). After

Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jh. Hidschra, 6 vols (Berlin, 1991–1997), vol. 5, pp. 83ff.

8. Chapter 13 in this volume, as well as my article, 'Eschatology in Imami Shi'ism' (henceforth 'Eschatology'), in *EIr*, vol. 8, pp. 575–581, in particular pp. 578b–579b.

9. Refer to the studies indicated in the preceding note.

the 'original tradition', strongly marked by an esoteric and initiatory mysticism, that predominated until the mid-fourth/tenth century, one can cite the works of authors such as Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, Ibn Shahrashūb or Yaḥyā Ibn al-Biṭrīq in the sixth/twelfth century, Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn Ṭāwūs and 'Alī b. 'Isā al-Irbilī in the seventh/thirteenth century, Ḥaydar Āmulī and Rajab al-Bursī in the eighth/fourteenth century and Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī in the ninth-tenth/fifteenth–sixteenth centuries. However, a kind of mysticism of the imam is also evident among thinkers belonging to the 'rationalist theological-juridical tradition' especially post Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022) and Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067).¹⁰

* * *

In the course of several visits to Iran between the 1970s and the present I was able to collect the testimony of some dozen individuals on their visionary experiences of one or more of the imams, not only in many dreams but also visions in an awakened state. Judging from certain observations consistently reported by the subjects, the latter always occurred in a particular state of consciousness, a certain state of rapture, transformation of the usual environment, contraction of time and/or space (the few minutes of an experience, depending on the subject, in fact lasted long hours even entire days in real terms, at times the subject found

10. On these different 'traditions' within Imamism, see *Guide divin*, pp. 15–48 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 6–19) and M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Remarques sur les critères d'authenticité du hadīth et l'autorité du juriste dans le shī'isme imāmīte', *SI*, 85 (1997), pp. 5–39. Naturally, one finds many thought-provoking observations in the numerous studies devoted to the relationship between Shī'ism and Sufism; of these, let us limit ourselves to citing a few monographs: H. Corbin, 'Sayyid Ḥaydar Amolī, théologien shī'ite du soufisme', in *Mélanges Henri Massé* (Tehran, 1963) and *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, 1964), vol. 1, section 1; M. Molé, *Les mystiques musulmans* (Paris, 1965), ch. 4; K. M. al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila bayna al-taṣawwuf wa'l-tashayyū'* (Baghdad, 1966); J. B. Taylor, 'Ja'far al-Sādiq, Spiritual Forebear of the Sufis', *IC*, 40/2 (1966) and 'An Approach to the Emergence of Heterodoxy in Medieval Islam', *Religious Studies*, 2/2 (1967); S. H. Nasr, 'Le shī'isme et le soufisme. Leurs relations principales et historiques', in T. Fahd (ed.), *Le shī'isme imāmīte* (Paris, 1970).

himself at great distance from his home), immersion in light from an unknown source, the advent of a miracle (granting of a secret wish, presence of some article or anything serving as physical proof of the imam's actual presence, successful treatment of an otherwise incurable disease) and initiation into a certain teaching hitherto unknown to the subject.¹¹ These individuals, male or female, from either urban or rural backgrounds, were of mature age and shared a common feature: a reputation of exemplary piety, moral rectitude and especially great generosity. They did not belong to any brotherhood and most of them even expressed an antipathy towards the various mystical orders.

In any case, these anonymous individuals do not often attract the attention of textual sources, which tend to favour famous figures: religious clerics, philosophers, mystics, men of letters, men in power. In this regard, works by the Iranian Mirzā Ḥusayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī/Ṭabrisī (d. 1320/1902) constitute a veritable treasure trove of information. Renowned religious scholar, author of a vast body of work, teacher of the great Āghā Bozorg al-Ṭihirānī, the author of the famous *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a*, Nūrī Ṭabrisī was both of traditionalist tendency (akhbārī) and a mystic.¹² In the last chapter of his *Jannat al-ma'wā*¹³ and its almost complete Persian paraphrase *Kitāb al-najm al-thāqib*¹⁴ Mirzā Ḥusayn

11. One obviously finds many of these permanent features in accounts of encounters with the hidden imam; see Chapter 13 of this volume.

12. Regarding him see D. MacEoin, 'Ṭabrisī', *EI2*, vol. 10, p. 42. Add to these references: the autobiographical account contained in the last of the twelve final 'lessons' (*fawā'id*) in Ṭabrisī's *Mustadrak al-wasā'il* (latest edn, Qumm, 1407/1987); Mudarris Ṭabrizī, *Rayḥānat al-adab* (Tabriz, n.d.), vol. 3, pp. 389–391, under *ṣāḥib mustadrak al-wasā'il*; the introduction by A. B. al-Ṭihirānī to Nūrī Ṭabrisī, *Dār al-salām fī mā yata'allaqu bi'l-ru'yā wa'l-manām*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Qumm, 1380/1960); M. al-ʿĀmilī, *A'yān al-shī'a*, vols 1–56 (Damascus, 1935–1961), vol. 9, pp. 97–98; R. Brunner, *Die Schia und die Koranfälschung* (Würzburg, 2001), pp. 39–69 and 'La question de la falsification du Coran dans l'exégèse chiite duodécimaine', *Arabica*, 52/1 (2005), pp. 1–41, especially pp. 22–29.

13. In Arabic, published at the end of vol. 53, pp. 199–336, of al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 110 vols (Tehran and Qumm, 1376–1392/1965–1972).

14. Latest edn (Qumm and Jamkarān, 1412/1991).

Nūrī presents a masterful summary of practices required for the preparation for a vision of the imam. Although these two works are monographs devoted to the hidden imam and to accounts of those who have had the honour of meeting him, the last few chapters, as the author himself reiterates, relate to the eventual vision of the Impeccable Ones (*ma'ṣūmūn*), in this case the Prophet Muḥammad and especially the twelve imams. Being very familiar with Imami sources, Nūrī justifies his assertions by constantly citing traditions reported in previous authoritative works:¹⁵

One can become a confidant of secrets [i.e. of the Impeccable Ones] and worthy of being introduced into the close circle of the elect (*khāṣṣān va khavāṣṣ*) thanks to learning and its application (*'elm va 'amal*), through total piety, knowledge, beseeching, repentance and the purification of the soul from all impurities, doubts, uncertainties, errors and vices . . . However, the goal here is not to indicate an absolutely certain method [to attain the vision] since even if all the religious obligations, rules and principles are observed, and all that is unlawful or even ill-advised abandoned, there are other preliminary veiled and secret factors that they [the imams? their initiates?] do not reveal and only explain to those who are worthy (*sā'er-e moqaddamāt-e ān mastūr va makhfi va joz bar ahl-ash makshūf wa mobayyan nadārand*). The aim here is to indicate a path that will perhaps enable the good sent accomplishment [*ne'mat*, i.e. the vision], be it in a dream.¹⁶

Next, Nūrī enumerates an entire series of practices beginning with a devotional period of forty days (*arba'in*; in Persian *chelle* i.e. *chehele*) placing emphasis on good deeds, acts of worship, prayer, repentance and during these forty nights, regular attendance at mosques: on Wednesdays, the mosque of Sahla (in Najaf); on Fridays, the mosque of 'Alī in Kūfa or the mausoleum of al-Ḥusayn in Karbalā'. There follows a lengthy series of traditions – gleaned

15. Based on Mirzā Ḥusayn Nūrī Ṭabrisī, *al-Najm al-thāqib* (Qumm and Jamkarān, 1412/1991), ch. 12, pp. 655–666, which is here more complete than the original Arabic text from *Jannat al-ma'wā*, pp. 325–332.

16. *Najm*, pp. 655–656.

from various sources including books of *ḥadīths*, moral literature or books of prayer – which stress the sacred value of the number forty, ending with the famous tradition dating back to the Prophet: ‘He who sincerely worships God, for forty mornings, God will have sources of knowledge rise up from his heart towards his tongue.’¹⁷ The author then continues as follows:

It is also possible that each individual shall be obliged to accomplish a specific action chosen from the good pious deeds and conduct inherited from the Prophet (*a‘māl-e ḥasane-ye shar‘iyye va ādāb-e sonan-e aḥmadiyye*), according to his personal situation, his time, place and capabilities. He may discover this practice [by himself] by sustained attention and contemplation or by seeking help from someone wise and intelligent who is capable of internal perception (*dānā-ye naqqād-e baṣīr*). It may be that a certain practice, of word or deed, might better suit an individual, and in this case, the rate of success for practices varies greatly. One person might have to offer alms, another to teach, a third [to focus on] the canonical prayer, fasting or the pilgrimage etc. However, there are certain conditions one must follow in all cases: fulfill the canonical duties; avoid unlawful things; respect ritual purity with regard to food, drink and clothing; have pure intentions – all this to an even greater extent than required by canonical Law (*ziyāde az ānche be zāher-e shar‘ mitavān kard*).¹⁸

Next follows a number of specific prayers, drawn from books of prayer (some very old), or the repetition of specific passages from the Qur’ān, at times accompanied by simple rituals: specific ablutions, body positions, in this instance, lying on one’s right flank while sleeping, repetition of a varying number, at times or places appropriate for the prayer. Nūrī calls these actions ‘special practices’ (*a‘māl-e makhṣūṣe*) in order to attain the objective mentioned (i.e. the vision) not only of the imam of the Time (i.e. the hidden imam, the Qā’im) but also of other imams, indeed even the

17. *Najm*, pp. 656–661.

18. *Najm*, p. 662.

Prophet.¹⁹ Elsewhere in his *Dār al-salām fī mā yata'allahu bi'l-ru'yā wa'l-manām*, a considerable monograph on sleep, dreams and visions, Nūrī devotes a small chapter to the vision of imams by reporting and notably commenting upon a tradition dating back to the seventh Twelver imam, Mūsā b. Ja'far (d. 183/799), based on *Kitāb al-ikhtiṣāṣ* by al-Mufīd:

He who has a request to make to God or seeks to see us [we, the imams] and to know his situation before God (*an ya'rifa mawḍi'ahu min Allāh*), ought for three consecutive nights to perform full ablutions and pray secretly through us (*falyaghtasil thalātha layālin yunājī binā*); then, he will see us, he will be pardoned thanks to us and his situation (before God) will be revealed to him.

Commenting upon the enigmatic statement 'praying secretly through us', Nūrī writes: 'By this is probably meant, to pray secretly to God and implore him in our name in order that one may see us . . . however, also affirmed is (*wa qīla*) the sense that the person must concentrate on the desire for our vision (*yahtammu bi-ru'yatinā*), surrender himself to us, our vision and love (*yuhaddithu nafsahu binā wa-ru'yatinā wa-maḥabbatinā*).²⁰ It is interesting to note that our author, a loyal believer, convinced of the truth and legitimacy of Imami tradition exclusively, devotes a long chapter to a formal refutation of the opinions held by Sufis and philosophers about truthful dreams.²¹

19. *Najm*, pp. 662–666.

20. *Dār al-salām*, vol. 3, p. 9 (chapter entitled '*Amal li-man yurid an yarā aḥad al-a'imma*'), complete version of the tradition in al-Mufīd, *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ*, ed. 'A. A. al-Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1379/1958–1959), pp. 90–91; see *Biḥār*, vol. 7, p. 336; Persian version in *Najm*, pp. 664–665.

21. *Dār al-salām*, vol. 4, pp. 240–267 (chs *Fi dhikr maqālāt al-ṣūfiyya wa'l-radd 'alayhim* and *Fi dhikr maqālāt al-ḥukamā' wa'l-falāsifa wa'l-radd 'alayhim*). On the role of dreams in Iranian culture see Kh. Kiyā, *Kh(w)āb va pendāreh. Dar jostojū-ye vižegī-hā ye kh(w)āb-hā ye Irānī* (Tehran, 1378/1999). On dreams in Islam, now consult P. Lory, *Le rêve et ses interprétations en Islam* (Paris, 2003).

Thus as for non-institutional mysticism, Twelver sources report a certain number of cases regarding visions of the imams experienced mainly by great religious scholars, philosophers and mystics.

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ardabīlī known as 'Muqaddas' (d. 993/1585), a great religious leader of Najaf with mystical and philosophical leanings, is said to have experienced a number of visions of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalīb and the hidden imam: the first and last imams. It is related that as a result of supernatural communication with these two imams, he found solutions to theological and legal problems (*masā'il 'ilmiyya*).²²

The great philosopher of Safawid Isfahan, Muḥammad Bāqir Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631), known as 'the third Master' (after Aristotle and al-Fārābī), has left us an account of an ecstatic vision that he had of the imams, a vision during which 'Alī taught him a 'prayer for protection'.²³

Mullā 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. Yūnus Damāvandī (d. ca. 1150/1737 or 1170/1757), philosopher and mystic, according to his own remarks and hints by other writers, regularly had visions of the

22. Ni'matallāh al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 2, pp. 36ff.; *Najm*, pp. 454–455; Mudarris Tabrizī, *Rayḥānat al-adab*, vol. 5, pp. 366–370; 'A. Ḥ. Balāghī, *Maqālāt al-ḥunafā'* (Tehran, 1369/1949), pp. 137–138; 'Aqīqī Bakhshāyeshī, *Foqahā-ye nāmdār-e shī'e* (Qumm, 1405/1985), pp. 203–207.

23. This account is recorded by his disciple Qutb al-Dīn Ashkevarī in his *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*; see H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris, 1971–1972), vol. 4, pp. 36–38. The monumental work by Ashkevarī is still in manuscript form; for some years, I. al-Dibāji and Ḥ. Šidqī have been working on a critical edition but to date only the two first sections (approx. one quarter) has been published (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999 and 1382 Sh./2008). For the text of the prayer, see also the prayer collection *Muntakhab al-da'awāt* (lithograph, Tehran, 1304/1886 and 1382 Sh./2004), pp. 57–58 (see also Corbin, *Islam iranien*, vol. 4, p. 37, n. 44). On the ecstatic experiences of Mīr Dāmād, see also his *Taqwīm al-imān* published with al-Sayyid Aḥmad al-'Alawī, *Sharḥ* and al-Mullā 'Alī al-Nūrī, *Ta'liqāt*, ed. 'A. Awjabī (Tehran, 1376/1998), pp. 81–86 of the editor's introduction.

third imam, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, and less frequently of the hidden imam.²⁴

Finally, the most numerous examples concern the famous Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī b. Murtaḍā al-Burujirdī al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī known as 'Baḥr al-'Ulūm' (d. 1212/1797), the great religious leader of Najaf. According to his bio-hagiographers, Sayyid Baḥr al-'Ulūm had, on many occasions, the privilege of visions of several of the Impeccable Ones including the hidden imam. The vastness of his knowledge and many miracle-working powers were, according to these sources, in large measure due to his experiences and supersensible contacts with the imams.²⁵

Although the accounts are at times lengthy and detailed, the actual descriptions of the visionary experiences themselves are brief and allusive, as though shrouded by a veil of discretion. We are simply told that one or another imam is seen and then, in some cases, the standard features that we have already recognised appear: a special state of consciousness; the transformation of the environment; a supernatural light; the transmission of a secret and so forth. The reader or listener is aware that these few lines are the essence of the account and the vision of the holy imams is the reward for an exemplary life of devotion, quest for knowledge, moral rectitude and above all, and with special emphasis, unconditional love (*walāya*, *maḥabba*) for the imams and their Cause. The subject thus becomes an *exemplum*, even for the most

24. See his *Sharḥ-e asrār-e asmā'-e ḥosnā = Meftāḥ-e asrār-e ḥoseynī* in S. J. Ashtiyānī (ed.), *Montakhabātī az āthār-e ḥokamā-ye elāhī-ye Irān* (Tehran and Paris, 1976), vol. 3, pp. 577–790, in particular pp. 577–578 and 628; *Janna*, p. 306; *Najm*, p. 506. Regarding this author, see also H. Corbin, *La philosophie iranienne islamique au XVIIIe et XVIIIe siècles*. (Paris, 1981), pp. 340–393. The assertion made by S. J. Ashtiyānī, *Montakhabātī az āthār*, vol. 3, p. 576, even cited by H. Corbin in *La philosophie iranienne islamique*, p. 340, on Damāvandī's affiliation to the Dhahabiyya order does not seem to be founded on any reliable source.

25. See e.g. *Janna*, pp. 236ff.; *Najm*, pp. 474ff.; *Dār al-salām*, vol. 4, pp. 411ff., Mudarris, *Rayḥāna*, vol. 3, pp. 274–275, under Mirzā Muḥammad Mahdī Shahrastānī; 'Aqīqī Bakhshāyeshī, *Foqahā*, pp. 290–297.

humble of followers, opening up the possibility of a spiritual future, accessible and renewable. In this regard, a report concerning Muqaddas Ardabīlī (known among other things, as we have seen, for his visions of the imams), collected by Mudarris in his *Rayḥānat al-adab* seems especially significant. After the death of Muqaddas, a religious scholar (*yekī az mujtahidīn*) sees him in a dream. Handsomely dressed in fine garments, he emerges from 'Alī's mausoleum. The scholar then asks him: 'By virtue of which particular deed have you attained this state?' Muqaddas replies: 'I now realise that deeds do not count for much. I only benefit from my love and loyal friendship (*maḥabbat va valāyat*) of he who rests in this mausoleum.'²⁶

Mystical Brotherhoods

The principal Twelver mystical brotherhoods developed from the Safawid period (tenth/sixteenth century) onwards in Iran and spread outwards to other Imami lands, notably Iraq, the Caucasus and India.²⁷ There are four major orders, each containing several branches: Dhahabiyya, Ni'matullāhiyya, Khāksār and Shaykhiyya.²⁸ Here too, the vision of the imam plays an important role on the spiritual path. Certainly, piety, scrupulous observance of acts of worship, moral rectitude and, in particular, unflinching love for the Impeccable Ones are once more prerequisites for experiencing visions of the imams. However, other speculative information and technical methods may be added to these indispensable

26. *Rayḥāna*, vol. 5, p. 369.

27. See the masterful and now classic study by R. Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, 3 vols (Wiesbaden, 1965–1981).

28. The above-mentioned work by R. Gramlich deals with the first three orders; regarding the last, see e.g. Corbin, *Islam iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 203–300; D. M. Mac Eoin, 'From Shaykhism to Babism. A Study in Charismatic Renewal in Shī'ī Islam' (University of Cambridge, 1979); V. Rafati, 'The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam' (University of California, 1979). Further on, I provide other sources for these mystical orders. See also Chapter 14, this volume.

conditions. The 'vision by [or in] the heart' (*al-ru'ya bi'l-qalb*), transforming the simple believer into a 'faithful believer whose heart has been tested by God', is found to be, among the large majority of the mystics, the key issue.²⁹ As this is a secret and highly initiatory practice, texts regarding it are rare, allusive and at times enigmatic. Expressions such as 'the inner vision of the heart' (*baṣīrat-e qalbiyye*), 'contemplation of the Lights of the heart or of the Love for the imams' (*moshāhadāt-e anvār-e qalbiyye/anvār-e valāyat*) appear frequently but it is rare for concrete details about the vision to be given.

Among the masters of the Dhahabiyya, Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsim Sharīfī Shīrāzī known as 'Rāz' (d. 1286/1869) is perhaps the author who provides the most significant details. For example, in the fourth of his twelve responses to his disciple, Rā'iḍ al-Dīn Zanjānī, we read the following (the eulogical and brotherhood-related expressions are not translated):

The Disciple: Why do we call 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā [the eighth imam] the seventh *Qibla*?³⁰

The Master: Know, dear and honorable son, that this serious question touches upon one of the greatest secrets of the heart that no simple curious mind can easily discover . . . Its understanding is only possible through the unveiling of the heart by the lord of the hearts (*kashf-e qalbī-ye arbāb-e qulūb*) for even the most sound and powerful intelligences are unable to apprehend secrets of the heart and perception of the mysteries of *walāya* and love of God . . . The reason for this honorable title, like other titles for the holy imam, such as 'the Confidant of Souls' (*anīs al-nufūs*) and 'the Sun of Suns' (*shams al-shumūs*), is the radiance of the Light of his *walāya* in the heart of the faithful (*nūr-e valāyat-e ān ḥaḍrat dar qalb-e mo'menān tābesh dārad*). This holy Light does not only belong to him but all the imams are in fact the Light descended from God for the sake of creation (*a'emme ... hamegī nūr-e monzal*

29. Cf. above notes 4 to 7 and the corresponding texts.

30. The initiatic chain of the Dhahabiyya goes back to the eighth imam via Ma'rūf al-Karkhī; see *Die schiitischen Derwischorden*, vol. 1, pp. 5ff.

az haqq ta'ālā bar khalā'eqand). But as the initiatic chain of [our] School begins with the eighth imam, it is the blessed form of the latter which manifests itself in [a subtle centre called] 'the blackish innermost [part] of the heart of his Friends (*serr-e soṣaydā'-e qalb-e awliyā'*)'.³¹ This centre is the Seventh Mountain (*ṭūr-e haftom*) of the heart that is manifested to the Friends ... Know that the Sevenfold Mountains in the heart of the holy Friends designate the manifestations of the variously coloured seven Lights (*tajaliyyāt-e anṣār-e sab'e-ye motelavvene be alvān-e mokhtalefe*) and the seventh manifestation, is the black Light that is the Light of the sacrosanct Essence of Unicity (*nūr-e siyāh ke nūr-e dhāt-e aqdas-e aḥadiyyat ast*).³² It is this Light that is manifested for the

31. The identification of the Light of the heart with the ultimate spiritual master, namely the imam, is an idea already present in the earliest Twelver sources; cf. *Guide divin*, pp. 125–126 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 48–49). This belief is also firmly held by the Kubrāwiyya order with whom the Dhahabiyya are affiliated. As a Kubrāwī Imami, Rāz Shīrāzī identifies 'the form of light' viewed at the subtle centre of the heart with the 'invisible master' who for a Dhahabī, is the eighth imam. On the 'invisible master', *shaykh al-ghayb*, also called 'sun of the heart', *shams al-qalb*, in Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, see F. Meier, *Die Rawā'ih al-jamāl wa fawātiḥ al-jalāl des Najm ad-Dīn al-Kubrā* (Wiesbaden, 1957), chs 7, 13, 66 and 79; French trans. by P. Ballanfat as *Les éclosions de la beauté et les parfums de la majesté* (Nîmes, 2001). See also, H. Corbin, *L'homme de Lumière dans le soufisme iranien* (Paris, 1971), ch. 4, English trans., *The Man of Light* (New York, 1971). On one group's conversion to Shi'ism among the Kubrāwiyya, see M. Molé, 'Les Kubrawiyya entre sunnisme et shi'isme au huitième et neuvième s. de l'Hégire', *REI* (1961), pp. 61–142. On the Kubrāwī affiliation of the Dhahabiyya, see *Die schiitischen Derwischorden*, vol. 1, pp. 9ff.; see also A. Khāvarī, *Dhahabiyye* (Tehran, 1362/1983), vol. 1, ch. 3; L. Lewisohn, 'An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism. Part II: A Socio-cultural Profile of Sufism from the Dhahabi Revival to the Present Day', *BSOAS*, 62/1 (1999), pp. 36–59.

32. I have advanced a hypothesis on the allusion to epiphanic coloured light in the sayings of the imams reported since the earliest compilations of Imami traditions; cf. *Guide divin*, pp. 127–128 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 49–50). On this phenomenon in the Kubrāwī tradition, see e.g. Najm Dāye Rāzī, *Miršād al-'ibād*, ed. M. A. Riyāhī (Tehran, 1973), ch. 3, sections 17 and 18, pp. 299–315; 'Alā' al-Dawla al-Simnānī, *al-'Urwa li-ahl al-khalwa wa'l-jalwa*, ed. N. Māyel Heravī (Tehran, 1362/1985), index under '*laṭā'if rūḥānī*', '*laṭīfa*'; Shams al-Dīn Lāhijī, *Mafātiḥ al-i'jāz fi sharḥ Golshan-e rāz*, ed. M. R. Barzegar Khāleqī and 'E. Karbāsī (Tehran, 1371/1992), pp. 67, 83–84, 130, 344, 523; *Homme de Lumière*, chs 4–6 and index under 'lumière' and 'photismes'. On the relationship between coloured light and the inner master in Iranian spirituality, refer to

Friends [i.e. Dhahabiyya mystics] in the blessed form of the eighth imam. It is a transparent black Light, magnificent and radiant, of overwhelming intensity; it is the 'Confidant of souls' and the 'Qibla of the Seventh Mountain of the heart'. The great [mystics] consider it to be a canonical duty (*vājib*) to direct one's sincere prayer in the direction of this veritable *qibla*.

First discover your *qibla* and then offer your prayer

The prayer of lovers is offered with sorrow and resignation

... That is why we call this imam 'the seventh *qibla*' ... My son, grasp the true value of secrets of the hearts of Friends being revealed in order that God may lead you there; and hide this from those who are not worthy [in Arabic in the text: *fa-ghthanīm yā waladī kashf asrār qulūbi'l-awliyā' laka la'allaka tahtadī ilā'llāhi ta'ālā wa ktumhā min ghayri ahlihā*].³³

Elsewhere, especially in letters addressed to his closest disciples, Rāz Shīrāzī seems to provide other indications on the exercises of concentration on the heart whose aim is the vision of the imam. In a letter addressed to Mullā Ḥusayn Rawḍa Khān, the master seems to indicate – the language is highly allusive – that the practice ought to be accompanied by the famous *dhikr* that every Imami mystic knows as *nādi* 'Alī, termed *dhikr* of *walāya* by the Dhahabiyya and which Rāz identifies with nothing less than the Supreme Name of God (*ism a'ẓam*):

Invoke 'Alī, locus of manifestation of wonders/ In him you will find support in all trials/ All your worries and hardships will vanish/By the grace of your *walāya*, O 'Alī, O 'Alī, O 'Alī (*nādi* 'Aliyyan *mazhar al-'ajā'ib/tajidhu 'awnan laka fi'l-nawā'ib/kullu*

T. Pūrnamdāriyān, *Ramz va dāstān-hā-ye ramzī dar adab-e fārsī* (Tehran, 1346/1985), pp. 240–275.

33. *Resāle dar ḥall-e eshkāl-e davāzdah so'al-e...Rā'iḍ al-Dīn Zanjānī... az Mirzā Bābā Rāz Shīrāzī*, in Ḥ. Palāsī Shīrāzī, *Tadhkira Shaykh Muḥammad b. Šadiq al-Kujuji* (Tehran, 1367/1947), pp. 125–126 (the entire treatise: pp. 112–150); also *Guide divin*, p. 136 (*Divine Guide*, p. 52); Khāvarī, *Dhahabiyye*, vol. 1, pp. 141–145.

*hammin wa ghammin sa-yanjalī/bi-walāyatika yā ‘Aliyyun yā ‘Aliyyun yā ‘Alī).*³⁴

In another letter, presented as a doctrinal treatise, Rāz seems to write that concentration on the visage of the living master of the School – in this case, himself – constitutes the first step in the experience of vision by the heart, as if the master’s face was the exoteric form (*ẓāhir*) of the imam’s light which is its esoteric (*bāṭin*) aspect. Following a series of guidelines regarding the meetings of dervishes, led by an elder, delegated by the Master, Rāz writes:

May they be united in the practice of *dhikrs* in order to attain spiritual states and contemplations of the heart (*ḥālāt-e ma’naviyye va moshāhadāt-e qalbiyye*) and thus benefit from the grace and mercy of God. Thus, they must concentrate, in these precise moments and during the *dhikr* and [exercise] of the presence in the heart (*awqāt-e khāṣṣe dar awqāt-e dhikr va ḥudūr-e qalb*), upon the Face of the Perfect Man [i.e. the imam] . . . this spiritual Face deriving from the mystery of the Light of *walāya* that they have [already] seen, esoterically, in their inner perception by the eye of the heart (*ān ṣūrat-e ruhāniyye ke az gheyb-e nūr-e walāyat bāṭenan be baṣīrat va dīde-ye qalb-e khod dīde-and*) and no longer upon this perceptible exoteric face as seen by them in this external world and belonging to this humble servant [i.e. Rāz himself] (*na ṣūrat-e ḥessiyye-ye zāher ke dar khārej az faqīr dīde-and*). May they scrupulously observe the respect and veneration (*adab va ḥormat*) of this Face which is the Face of God the most Noble, and the most noble of all faces, in order that due to this spiritual veneration their innermost self may be educated and they gradually reach the station of ‘effacement in the master’ (*fanā*)

34. (Anonymous), *Mujallil al-anwār yā kashkūl silsilat al-dhahab*, ed. Sh. Parvīzī (Tabriz, 1336/1958), pp. 21–22, the whole letter: pp. 16–22. According to a Dhahabī friend, the ‘Ali of this *dhikr* designates both the first and the eighth imam, namely ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, ‘since the reality of the Impeccables is one’.

fi'l-shaykh) which is none other than 'effacement in God' (*fanā' fi'llāh*).³⁵

Concentration on the spiritual image of the master's face appears to be an initial step that must be rapidly passed. Mīrẓā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Majd al-Ashrāf (d. 1331/1913), successor to Rāz as leader of the Dhahabiyya Aḥmadiyya seems even to advise against this practice. In his *Mir'āt al-kāmilīn*, when considering the preparatory exercises for *dhikr* and *fikr* (literally contemplation, meditation, also known as *tafakkur*, ultimately a matter of contemplation of the Face of God, that is, the Imam), Majd al-Ashrāf writes:

As for the spiritual Face [lit. the meditative Face, *ṣūrat-e fekriyye*] the followers of the errant Path direct their inner contemplation onto the face of their physical master [or 'exoteric', *pīr-e zāherī*]. Now, in the true Path which is ours, to contemplate the visage of the master is to worship him and is considered pure polytheism (*'eyn-e sherk*) for this depends on the personal will of the follower whereas the inner manifestation of the Face of God which is the most noble of Faces [i.e. the Imam] does not depend upon the will of the follower but upon the grace of the Lord (*vajh-e haqq akram al-vujūh bī ekhtiyār-e sālek mibāyad dar bāten be 'enāyat-e rabbāniyye peydā shavad*).³⁶

Further on, in a poem, the author lists the Seven Mountains of the heart and the coloured Lights of each among them leading up to the black Light of the Face of the imam.³⁷

35. *Mujallil*, pp. 35–36, the entire letter: pp. 22–40. Passage cited and translated into German in *Die schiitischen Derwischorden*, vol. 2, p. 248. On the very common mystical practice in Sufism of concentrating on the spiritual image of the master's visage (*murāqaba/murābaṭa/rabṭ ... 'alā wajh/ṣūra al-shaykh/murshid*) and for sources on it consult *Die schiitischen Derwischorden*, vol. 2, pp. 245–251.

36. Majd al-Ashrāf, *Mir'āt al-kāmilīn* (Shiraz, n.d.), pp. 7–8.

37. *Mir'āt*, pp. 10–11.

However, this issue regarding the kind of visual aid for concentration seems to depend on the progress made by the follower. Some years ago in Shiraz, a Dhahabī dervish showed me a piece of wood, about 20 x 10 cm, upon which was drawn the portrait (known at least since the Qājār period) of Imam ‘Alī. He explained that this piece of wood, called *shamā’il* (image, portrait of a saint), was one of the items a novice mystic ought to possess. It is for those who are forbidden to concentrate upon the face of their living master, for fear of ‘idolatry’, and who are at the same time, unable to visualise ‘the Face of Light’ of the Imam. One therefore provides them with these ‘portraits of ‘Alī’, the Imam par excellence, in order that they may use them, at least for some time, as a visual aid until they are able to put it aside.³⁸

The vision of the imam’s spiritual Face is designated, apparently by generations of Dhahabīs masters, by the technical term *wijha*, literally ‘Face of a body, of an object’ (*vejhe* in Persian pronunciation). This is undoubtedly also an allusion to the Qur’ānic usage of the term that designates ‘the direction to turn for prayer’ in verse 2:148: *wa li-kulli wijhatun huwa muwallihā* (‘To each a direction towards which to turn in prayer’). In a recent internal document belonging to the brotherhood and apparently written by Dr Ganjaviyān, the current *pīr* of the Dhahabiyya Aḥmadiyya, various pieces of information old and new about this issue are admirably summarised. Numerous *ḥadīths* drawn from ancient compilations, for instance by Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq as well as the teachings of previous Dhahabiyya masters, are brought to bear in order to arrive at the following conclusions: the *vejhe* can only designate the Face of the imam; the Impeccable Proof (*ḥojjat-e ma’ṣūm*, i.e. the imam) is identical to the Face of God;

38. Recently in Tehran, Mme Živa Vesel, a colleague and CNRS scholar of Iranian studies, acquired a collection of fourteen of these wooden objects of unknown origin for safekeeping. It is interesting to note that on one of them, clearly of Indian origin, ‘the portrait of ‘Alī’ is surrounded by a kind of mandala – a geometric figure that, as we know, is used in several Indian religions as an aid for concentration.

the vision of this Face is possible, not by the naked eye but by the eye of the heart; what is seen is not the physical body of the imam but his spiritual form and the vision is achieved by effacement and rebirth in the *walāya* of the latter. The author ends this passage with a poem by Rāz Shirāzī:

Thanks to his love, I have attained a state/in which I see nothing other than the eternal Witness. The Universes and all they contain were effaced when I reached the eternal Face of God. In the vastness of spaces beyond space/Without wings I have flown for thousands of years, and there I have seen the Face of the Real/All that I have heard and said was through Him.³⁹

The regular practice of this discipline of spiritual life seems to provide the mystic with the ability to have regular contact with the imams, even apart from the special moments during exercises of *dhikr* and *fikr*. According to a mystical expression, the follower's entire existence can become 'a constant remembrance and uninterrupted meditation' (*dhekr-e davām va fekr-e modām*), thus rendering him worthy of the privilege of visits from the saintly Impeccable Ones. This is what emerges from a number of autobiographical accounts by Majd al-Ashrāf entitled 'epiphanic visions and spiritual itineraries' published posthumously with the authorisation of his great grandson, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Sharīfī, a previous master of this branch of the Dhahabiyya.

39. Ze 'eshq-e ū be-jā'ī man rasīdam. Ke gheyr az shāhed-e bāqī nadīdam/Hame kawnayn o māfihā fanā shod. Be vajh Allāh-e bāqī chon rasīdam/Dar ān vo'sat sarā-ye lā makānī. Hezārān sāl rah bī par parīdam/Nadīdam ghayr-e vajh-e ḥaqq dar ānjā. Be ū būdī hame goft o shanīdam. (Anonymous), *Veġhe chīst?* Thanks to the kindness of some Dhahabi friends, I was able to obtain a copy of this text (pp. 150–160) from a work unknown to me; citations, p. 155. It is interesting to note that the last section of the epistle (pp. 156ff.) is devoted to citations from *Dār al-salām* by Nūrī Ṭabrisī in which, drawing on early *ḥadīths*, the latter demonstrates that visions of the Impeccable Ones are necessarily true since Satan is absolutely incapable of taking their form, cf. *Dār al-salām*, ch. 8, with traditions from 'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā and Majālis/Amālī by Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq.

Throughout a handful of texts, a long sequence of visions, dialogues and dreams unfolds of one or another imam, retold with great simplicity as if they were accounts of anodine relationships. Often we find statements such as 'This morning, I found myself before Imam 'Alī when he said to me etc.', 'At dawn, I was before Imam al-Riḍā; Imam al-Jawād was also present etc.', 'Then at that very moment the hidden imam addressed me thus etc.', 'I met *Amīr al-mu'minīn* 'Alī, not recognising him at first, he then said to me: "But it is I, 'Alī"; I fell to the ground etc.' The outcome of these visions is either an initiation into a secret teaching (in the first few texts this is the knowledge of alchemy) or an ecstatic state leading to mystical knowledge, or at times a solution to a specific problem.⁴⁰ Generally, in the most ancient texts, initiatory knowledge (*'ilm*) and supernatural powers are described as resulting from the vision of the imam's Reality.⁴¹

Emerging from the Dhābiyya in the early twentieth century, the Oveysī mystical order, which is led by the 'Anqā family, also accords an important place to vision by the heart in spiritual progress. Their motto and emblem is '*alayka bi-qalbika*, a lapidary statement attributed to Uways (in Persian, Oveys) al-Qaranī, the famous ascetic who was a contemporary of the Prophet and is the school's namesake. This is a formulaic statement approximately translated as 'it is your duty to be watchful of your heart'. While staying guarded about technical aspects, the order quite recently asked a follower to publish a book on references to visions by the heart in sacred texts from Judaism, Christianity and

40. *Şūrat-e namāyeshāt va seyr hā-ye bātenī-ye ḥaḍrat-e Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad in Mujallil*, pp. 364–369; in several accounts, the author relates that he was initiated by the imams into alchemy.

41. Cf. *Guide divin*, p. 142 passim (*Divine Guide*, p. 55); one will find other information alluding to Dhahabī *vejhe* in Palāsī, *Tadhkira*, pp. 14, 18, 25, 36, 68; Anon, *Qaṣā'id va madā'eḥ dar sha'n-e... 'Alī* (Tabriz, n.d.), poems nos 10 and 11; Anon, *Yek qesmat az tārikh-e ḥayāt va karāmāt-e Sayyed Qoṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī* (Tabriz, 1309/1891), pp. 7ff. and 37; Sayyid Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad, *Faṣl al-khiṭāb* (Tabriz, n.d.), ch. 18; Rāz Shīrāzī, *Tabāshīr al-ḥikma* (Shiraz, 1319/1900), pp. 16–67 and *Miršād al-'ibād* (Tabriz, n.d.), pp. 4, 10–17, 21.

Islam, as well as in Sufi texts, notably those of the masters of his school, Jalāl al-Dīn 'Alī Mīr Abu'l-Faḍl (d. 1323/1905), Mīr Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 1962) and Shāh Maqṣūd 'Anqā (d. 1986). The Light of the heart is considered to be the inner imam of the mystic. The realisation and vision of this imam as well as obedience to him guarantees progress along the spiritual path.⁴²

* * *

The Ni'matullāhiyya order is comprised of several families and branches,⁴³ all of which seem to accord the greatest importance to visions of the imam. Some passages from travel journals by Zayn al-'Ābidīn Shīrvānī (d. 1253/1837–1838) and the *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq* by Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh (d. 1344/1926) would indicate that the vision of the imam is achieved by visualising the face of the order's living master (*ṣūrat-e morshed/vajh-e shaykh*). At times, citing the Qādirī Sufis' statement, '*Ḥifẓ taṣawwur ṣūrat al-shaykh fī'l-fikr*' (Hold in the mind the image of the master's

42. Shaykh Muḥammad Qādir Bāqirī Naminī, *Dīn va del* (Tehran, 1356/1977–1978). The practice of concentrating on the sevenfold subtle centres of the heart also exists among the Oveysis; however, the previous master of the order, Shāh Maqṣūd, appears to have also taught concentration on the yogic *Chakras*, cf. his *Zavāyā-ye makhfi-ye ḥayātī* (Tehran, 1354/1975), pp. 45ff. Alchemy is also one of the spiritual practices among the Oveysiyya. In his somewhat hermetic text on the Great Work, Shāh Maqṣūd seems to repeatedly indicate that one of the resulting benefits of the Philosopher's Stone is the epiphany of the imam; Shāh Maqṣūd 'Anqā, *Sirr al-ḥajar* (Tehran, 1359/1980), pp. 48–50, 81, 92, 105, 122.

43. See Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden*, vol. 1, pp. 27–69; M. Ş. Sohā, *Tārīkh-e enshe'ābāt-e mota'akhhkhere-ye selsele-ye Ne'matollāhiyye in Do resāle dar tārīkh-e jadīd-e taṣavvof-e Īrān* (Tehran, 1370/1991), pp. 5–121; see also N. Pourjavady and P. L. Wilson, *Kings of Love: The Poetry and History of the Ni'matullahī Sufi Order* (Tehran, 1978), esp. the introduction; L. Lewisohn, 'An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism. Part I: Ni'matullāhiyya', *BSOAS*, 61/3 (1998), pp. 437–464. On the namesake of this order and their gradual conversion to Imami Shi'ism, one can find valuable information in J. Aubin, *Matériaux pour la biographie de Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī Kermānī* (Tehran and Paris, 1956). The religious affiliation of authors will not be given here; all the more so because some among them are claimed by several branches of the order.

face)',⁴⁴ these authors also identify this step with technical terms such as *ḥuḍūr-e ṣūrat* (the presence of the face), *ḥuḍūr-e ṣūrat-e shaykh* (the presence of the master's face) or quite simply *ḥuḍūr-e qalb* (the presence of the heart), leading to the vision of the Impeccable Ones.⁴⁵

In the introduction to his *Red Sulphur*, Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh Kermānī (d. 1215/1801) writes:

The reality of the heart is this locus of manifestation of the divine Light and the mirror for epiphanies of the Imams' presence. It is a subtle divine entity, a simple spiritual entity (*laṭīfe-īst rabbānī va mojarad-īst rūḥānī*). The physical form of this spiritual heart is the pineal shaped carnal organ located on the left of the hollow of the chest which is like a window opening upon the subtle spiritual entity . . . Every non-material epiphany realised in the spiritual heart manifests itself in the form and concrete representation at the level of the physical heart. The most perfect form, representation of the perfect epiphany ... is the Human form (*ṣūrat-e ensānī*).⁴⁶

44. See e.g. Ismā'īl b. Muḥammad al-Qādirī, *al-Fuyūḍāt al-rabbāniyya* (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 28–29. On Qādirī practices focused on the heart, see also, A. Ventura, 'La presanza divina nel Cuore', *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, 3 (1985), pp. 123–134 and 'L'invocazione del cuore', in *Yād Nāma...Alessandro Bausani* (Rome, 1991), pp. 475–485. On the importance accorded the 'heart' in Sunni mysticism generally, see G. Gobillot and P. Ballanfat, 'Le cœur et la vie spirituelle chez les mystiques musulmans', *Connaissance des religions*, 57–59 (1999), pp. 170–204.

45. Zayn al-'Ābidīn Shirvānī Mast 'Alī Shāh, *Riyāḍ al-siyāḥa* (Tehran, 1339/1920), pp. 369–374, esp. 373 and *Bustān al-siyāḥa* (Tehran, 1378/1958), pp. 430–432; Ma'šūm 'Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq* (Tehran, 1318–1319/1900–1901), vol. 1, p. 217 and vol. 3, p. 83. Consider however the nuances introduced to the practice of concentrating on the master's visage by Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh (d. 1238/1822, another Nī'matullāhī master) in Muḥammad Ja'far Kabūdārhangī Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh, *Rasā'el majdhūbiyye*, ed. H. Nāji Isfahānī (Isfahan, 1377/1998), 'Resāle-ye e'teqādāt', pp. 93–99.

46. Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh, *Kebrīt-e aḥmar* with *Baḥr al-asrār*, ed. J. Nūrbakhsh (Tehran, 1350/1971), p. 5; also *Guide divin*, pp. 132–133 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 51–52); in the *Rasā'el majdhūbiyye*, the text of *Kebrīt-e aḥmar* is attributed to Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh bearing the title *Kanz al-asmā'*, pp. 131–154 (see also the editor's introduction, p. xxxvii). The incorrectness of this attribution

In the next part of the treatise, in a rather abstruse and hermetic vocabulary, the mystical master describes the *dhikrs* and signs that must be visualised – especially at the level of the heart – during visualisation exercises for the Light of the imam.⁴⁷ In his versified work devoted to alchemy, *Nūr al-anwār*, Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh alludes to three of his visions, through which he acquired perfect knowledge of the secrets of alchemy. During the first experience, he had a vision of 'Alī and the Prophet, and in the third, his true master in alchemy, the imam al-Riḍā.⁴⁸

The most detailed theoretical explanations seem to have been provided by Mullā Sulṭān Muḥammad Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh (d. 1327/1909). In fact he devotes the whole of chapter 18 of the fourth section of his *Majma' al-sa'ādāt* to 'an explanation of knowledge of the imam as Light' (*dar bayān-e ma'refat-e emām be nūrāniyyat*):

One who possesses the senses [literally 'the eye and ear'] pertaining to the sense-perceptible Kingdom (*mulk*) of God can know the imam as a human being (*bashariyyat-e emām*) ... but one whose senses pertaining to the celestial Kingdom (*malakūt*) are acti-

is convincingly demonstrated in the article by S. M. Āzmāyesh, '*Kebrīt-e aḥmar va Kanz al-asmā'*', *Erfān-e Īrān*, new series, 1 (Paris, 1378/1999), pp. 181–195.

47. Among the *dhikrs*, one finds *nādi* 'Alī (already examined above, note 34, here called 'the extensive 'Alawī speech', *kaleme-ye 'alaviyye-ye tafṣiliyye*), as well as 'the condensed 'Alawī speech', *kaleme-ye 'alaviyye-ye ejmāliyye*, i.e. the *dhikr*: *Lā fatā illā 'Alī lā sayfa illā Dhi'l-faḡār/yā 'Alī yā iliyā yā bā Ḥasan yā bā Ṭorāb* ('No chivalrous hero except 'Alī, no sword but Dhu'l-Faḡār [name of the sword of celestial origin that according to tradition 'Alī inherited from the Prophet] / O 'Alī, O Īliyā, O Bā Ḥasan [i.e. Abu'l-Ḥasan], O Bā Ṭurāb [meaning Abū Ṭurāb; in this second hemistich two names and two *kunyas* of 'Alī are given]), see *Kebrīt-e aḥmar*, pp. 7–16.

48. Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh, *Nūr al-anwār*, ed. N. Sobbūhī (Tehran, n.d.), ch. 3, section 1; cited by P. Lory, 'Alchimie et philosophie chiite. L'œuvre alchimique de Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh Kirmānī', in Ž. Vesel, M. Beyghaghban and Th. de Crussol des Epesse (ed.), *La science dans le monde iranien à l'époque islamique* (Tehran and Paris, 1999), p. 341; see also *Nūr al-anwār*, p. 15 where the author says that the Great Work of alchemy gives rise to the epiphanic manifestation of the Impeccable Ones.

vated, he can attain knowledge of the imam as Light (*nūrāniyyat-e emām*) . . . When someone takes an oath [*bay'at*; this term technically refers to the handshake between master and disciple during the latter's initiation] with the imam or a master authorised by the imam [*shaykh-e mojāz az jāneb-e emām* i.e. the spiritual master of the order], the celestial form [or the face] of the imam (*ṣūrat-e malakūtī-ye emām*) is introduced into his heart by virtue of this oath.

It is this Face that we call the *walāya* of the holder of (spiritual) authority (*valāyat-e valī-ye amr*) . . . and the Love of 'Alī (*maḥabbat-e 'Alī*) and it is well and truly 'faith entering the heart' (*īmān-e dākhel-e qalb*)⁴⁹ . . . It is because of this Face that a filial relationship is established between the imam and the believer and that, as a consequence, a fraternal relationship is established between the followers. . . However, the luminosity of the Face remains hidden if one who bears this Face in his heart remains captive to the obscuring veils of the ego; but once these veils are lifted, the Light becomes manifest. In the microcosm [*'ālam-e ṣaghīr*, i.e. the external physical world], this epiphany is called 'the final manifestation of the Resurrector' [*zohūr-e qā'em*, i.e. the eschatological Return of the hidden imam] and [in the internal spiritual world] it constitutes one of the degrees of the Light of the imam in the heart and is designated by expressions such as 'Presence', 'Serenity' or 'Contemplation' (*ḥoḍūr, sakīna, fekr*).⁵⁰ This is what illuminates the follower, enabling him to know the imam as Light . . . The manifestation of this celestial Face awakens the adept's capacity for celestial perception (*madārek-e monāseb-e malakūt*), making it possible for him to contemplate the inhabitants of the heavens, the

49. One should note that the term *īmān* is one of the technical designations for the doctrine of the imams, i.e. of Shi'ism denoting the esoteric dimension of Muḥammad's message, whose exoteric aspect is called *islām*, see *Guide divin*, index under '*īmān*'.

50. The hidden imam is thus presented as the external figure of an internal Imam of Light that is none other than the Face of God. cf. Chapter 13 in this volume and Amir-Moezzi, *Eschatology*, pp. 578b–580. Note here the convergences between hermeneutical doctrine and early Imami theology, cf. Chapter 3, this volume.

imaginal world, even the world of souls and universal intelligences (*'ālam-e methāl balke 'ālam-e nofūs va 'oqūl*) ... He may thus be able to free himself from any attachment to time and place; walk upon water or in the air; travel miraculously from one place to another (*ṭayy al-ard*); enter fire, etc.⁵¹

The author then explains that while waiting to attain this level of spiritual awareness, the follower is advised to concentrate constantly on the spiritual image of his master's face. Here, there is some ambiguity with the term 'Face'. Is it the master's face or really that of the imam? The ambiguity is undoubtedly deliberate in order to subtly suggest a kind of identity between the two. The text continues as follows:

It is this adept, and he alone, who is called 'the tested faithful' [*mu'min mumtaḥan*; an allusion to the formulaic statement 'the believer whose heart has been tested by God for faith', cf. above]. . . and it is this Face which is called the Supreme Name'; then the author cites a *ḥadīth* of the imams listing the magical and miraculous powers of the Supreme Name of God.⁵²

51. Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh Gonābādī, *Majma' al-sa'ādāt* (2nd edn, n.p., 1394/1974), pp. 289–291. At the beginning of ch. 9 in section 3, p. 198, the author explains that, for the 'the ones of a middling state' (*mutavassefīn*) knowledge of the Imam of Light is equivalent to knowledge of God. For the 'incompleted ones' (*nāqeshīn*), this knowledge is of the historical imams. Finally for the 'accomplished' (*muntahīn*), this knowledge is of the epiphany of the Real (*zohūr-e ḥaqq*), where subject and object have fused and where there is neither a subject who knows nor an object that is known.

52. *Majma'*, pp. 291–293. The author repeatedly states that 'the celestial form of the imam' in the heart (also called 'the Greatest Name', or 'the seed of *walāya*' (*ḥabbat al-walāya*) is planted by the master in the disciple's heart during *bay'a* (the oath of allegiance). Its existence is thus an assurance of legitimacy and a sign of regular transmission. Conversely, only legitimate transmission assures the existence of 'the form of the imam' in the master and the possibility of it being transferred to the disciple. Implicitly emphasised is the delicate issue of spiritual authority and legitimacy. The schismatic adept ipso facto loses 'the seed of *walāya*'. Thus he cannot transmit what he no longer possesses. According to the time-honoured expression, the branch to which he gave birth lacks vigour

In another work, the *Valāyat-nāmeḥ*, Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh revisits (though only in a fragmentary manner) some of the elements just mentioned: in the chapter on *dhikr*, vision by the heart;⁵³ the figure of the hidden imam as the exoteric aspect of the inner imam;⁵⁴ and the critical role of initiatory *bay'a* as the point of departure for illumination of the heart by the imam of Light.⁵⁵ The successor to Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh in the Gonābādī branch, Nūr 'Alī Shāh II (d. 1337/1918), summarises his master's sayings in his *Šāleḥiyye* (written for his son and successor, Šāliḥ 'Alī Shāh, d. 1966): 'The Light which manifests itself in the heart is of the imam, a Light more radiant than that of the sun.' He goes on to cite the *ḥadīth* attributed to 'Alī, especially valued by Shi'i mystics:

To know me as Light is to know God and to know God is to know me as Light. He who knows me as Light is a believer whose heart God has tested for faith (*ma'rifati bi'l-nūrāniyya ma'rifatu'llāh wa ma'rifatu'llāh ma'rifati bi'l-nūrāniyya man 'arafani bi'l-nūrāniyya kāna mu'minan imtaḥana'llāhu qalbahu li'l-īmān*).⁵⁶

Elsewhere he adds:

The Heart contains two faces (*rū*): its exoteric (*zāhir*) manifest face represents life, guarantying the existence of the body and organic energies. This face is the foundation upon which is posed the Light (*in vejhi qā'ide-ye nūr ast*).⁵⁷ Its esoteric (*bāṭin*) hidden face whose locus of manifestation is found in the chest (*ṣadr*) is the place for the reunion and epiphany of the divine Names and Attributes;

and is bound to dry up sooner or later (see for example, Shirvānī Mast 'Alī Shāh, *Riyāḍ al-siyāḥa* [Tehran, 1339/1920], pp. 201 and 238–239).

53. Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh, *Valāyat-nāmeḥ* (Tehran, 1385/1965), section 9, chs 2–6.

54. *Valāyat-nāmeḥ*, section 9, ch. 9 and section 10, chs 1–2.

55. *Valāyat-nāmeḥ*, section 12.

56. Nūr 'Alī Shāh Thānī, *Šāleḥiyye* (Tehran, 1387/1967), *ḥaqīqa* 86, pp. 159–160.

57. According to the Imami notion that *bāṭin* can only be founded upon *zāhir*.

which is why it is called the Throne ('*arsh*). Indeed, 'the heart of the sage is the supreme Throne of God' . . . 'Ali [as the archetypal Imam] is verily the Throne of God since by his esoteric Face he is God, which is why he is the confluence of secrets (*li-hādhā 'Alī 'arsh ast ke be-rū-ye bāḡin Allāh ast ke majma'-e asrār ast*).⁵⁸

Also mentioned in various passages of the same work, are the five or seven subtle 'levels' of the heart (*qalb*, *fu'ād*, *sirr*, *khafī*, *akhfā* and *ṣadr*, *qalb*, *rūh*, '*aql*, *sirr*, *khafī*, *akhfā*), their respective colours, (green, blue-grey, combined colours, *alvān-e āmīkhte*, red, white, colourless, *bī lawn*, yellow, black) and the corresponding *dhikrs* and oraisons.⁵⁹

* * *

The Khāksār dervishes are not given much to writing.⁶⁰ Spiritual descendants of the ancient Middle Eastern *fityān* and of the *Qalandars* who wander throughout the Indian sub-continent, they emerged in Iran during the nineteenth century. They are usually to be found amongst the itinerant dervishes of Iran, wearing long hair and long beards and all the paraphernalia of members of rare guilds of old style professions or in the milieu of the *zūr-khāneh* – the traditional Persian martial arts – and among the 'mystic *aèdes*', bards and travelling reciters (*naqqāl*) of the *Shāh-nāma* of Firdawsī.⁶¹ Loyal to the Qalandarī tradition,

58. *Ṣālehiyye*, *ḥaqīqa* 587, p. 330.

59. *Ṣālehiyye*, pp. 149–150, 156, 328ff.; cf. *Guide divin*, pp. 133–134 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 51–52).

60. Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden*, vol. 1, pp. 70ff., esp. pp. 85–88; N. Modarresī Chahārdehī, *Khāksār va Ahl-e ḥaqq* (Tehran, 1368/1989); S. A. Mir 'Ābedinī and M. Afshārī, *Ā'n-e qalandarī* (Tehran, 1374/1995), editor intro.; C. Tortel, *Saints ou démons? Les Qalandar-s Jalālī et autres derviches errants en terre d'islam (Russie méridionale et Inde aux XIIIe-XVIIe s.)* (PhD EPHE, Religious Sciences, Paris, 1999), ch. 4, pp. 191–197.

61. Modarresī, *Khāksār*, section 1; also M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'De quelques interprétations spirituelles du *Šāhnāme* de Ferdowsī', in C. Balay, C. Kappler and Ž. Vesel (eds), *Pand o sokhan. Mélanges offerts à Charles Henri de Fouchécour* (Tehran and Paris, 1995), pp. 22–23. I owe the expression 'mystic

the various branches of the Khāksār favour the oral transmission of their teachings. To my knowledge, unlike other orders, the Khāksāriyya possess neither a publishing house nor a printing press. The rare publications of the order, for example the standard reference works by Ma'šūm 'Alī Shāh 'Abd al-Karīm 'Modarres-e 'Ālam' (who died, I believe in the 1950s) do not provide any information regarding the subject at hand.⁶²

In the current state of research, the only Khāksār text containing elements concerning the vision of the imam seems to be a text in verse by Sayyid Aḥmad Dehkordī (d. 1339/1920) entitled *Borhān-nāme-ye ḥaqīqat*. At a given moment, the poet begins to describe the Sevenfold Mountains of the heart (*aṭvār-e sab'e-ye qalbiyye*) with the *dhikr* appropriate to each level: *ṣadr* with the word *al-'alī*, *qalb* with *al-ḥayy*, *shaghāf* with *huwa'l-ḥayy*, *fu'ād* with *'alī Allāh*, *ḥabbat al-qalb* with *'alī al-a'lā*, *suwaydā* with *'alī al-ḥaqq*, and *sirr al-sirr* apparently in silence. It is at this ultimate level that the Face of God manifests in the heart of the mystic in the radiant form of the imam, of whom 'Alī is the archetype, whom the poet calls 'the Sun of Truth' (*khoshīd-e ḥaqīqat*); this section ends with the following verse:

What good news, announces, reveals this secret / 'Alī is well and truly the Lord, there is no one but he.

'Alī is the universal Truth, the Illuminator of creatures / 'Alī is the mercy of God, the secret of the mighty Aḥmad [i.e. the prophet Muḥammad] (*beṣhāratī ke zabān bar goshā vo fāsh begū/'Alī-st*

aède' to I. Mélikoff who applies it to the Anatolian *ashiks*; see for example, her work *Les traces du soufisme turc. Recherches sur l'islam populaire en Anatolie* (Paris, 1992), index under 'ashik'.

62. Modarres-e 'Ālam, *Toḥfe-ye darvīsh* (Tehran, 1337/1959) and *Ganjīne-ye awliyā' yā ā'īne-ye 'orafā'* (Tehran, 1338/1960); 'Modarres-e 'ālam', the *laqab* of the Khāksār master means 'teacher of the world'; R. Gramlich spells it incorrectly 'Modarriṣi-i 'Ālim', see *Die schiitischen Derwischorden*, vol. 1, pp. 85–86.

*khodā laysa ghayrahu dayyār. 'Alī ḥaqīqat-e kol nūr bakhsh-e 'ālamīyān/'Alī -st raḥmat-e ḥaqq serr-e aḥmad-e mokhtār).*⁶³

* * *

The theologico-mystical School of the Shaykhiyya derives its name from Shaykh Aḥmad Zayn al-Dīn al-Aḥsā'ī, originally from Baḥrayn (d. 1241/1826). The Shaykhīs works, and in particular the masters of the school, at times refer to the visions of one or another imam, but never, to my knowledge, following a specific spiritual 'technique'. Much is said about the imam's World and his Light; the eye of the heart, illumination (*ishrāq*, *tanwīr* etc.) of the follower. It cannot be otherwise since a number of *ḥadīths* dating back to the imams refer to this, and the Shaykhiyya accord the greatest doctrinal importance to reading, meditation and commentary on *ḥadīths*.⁶⁴

What appears to be customary here as preparatory exercises for vision of the imam is a life dedicated to devotion, the most scrupulous observance of religious Law, ever more penetrating meditation on Imami works, more specifically the *ḥadīths* of the imams, and above all, unfailing spiritual love for the imams and their Cause. One becomes convinced of this simply by leafing through Shaykhīs texts. Is this due to the practice of 'dissimulation' (*taqiyya*)? Or is it perhaps quite simply the product of my insufficient reading? Consulting some dozen works did not provide me with any precise indication regarding a technical exercise leading to a vision, as is the case among other orders; but some dozen works are still too few from a vast corpus of several thou-

63. S. A. Dehkordī, *Borhān-nāme-ye ḥaqīqat* (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 81ff.; also Balāghī, *Maqālāt al-ḥunafā'* (Tehran, 1369/1949), pp. 129–132.

64. See their monumental compilations of traditions, e.g. Muḥammad Karīm Khān and Muḥammad Khān Kermānī, *Faṣl al-khiṭāb*, pp. 1,508 in folio (lithograph, Tehran, 1302/1885); Muḥammad Khān and Zayn al-Ābidīn Khān Kermānī, *Kitāb al-mubīn*, 2 vols in folio, pp. 617 and 634 (lithograph, n.p., 1305–1324/1887–1906).

sand titles, some of which are in several large folio volumes.⁶⁵ The literature of the Shaykhiyya still remains largely unexplored by researchers and the few observations that follow, as with all previous studies on the doctrinal teachings of this brotherhood, can only be considered provisional.

In a letter addressed to a friend, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī mentions his spiritual states rich with extraordinary dreams, premonitions, visions of the imams and ecstatic revelations of secrets. Most notably, he writes:

It is reported of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir: 'When a follower loves us [the imams], makes progress in his loyal friendship (*walāya*) for us and dedicates himself to know us, there is not a question that he poses for which we do not inspire an answer in his heart.' I then had visions of the imams during which matters were revealed to me that I would be hard pressed to describe to others.⁶⁶

Elsewhere, dealing with the question of the authenticity of traditions, he cites the *ḥadīth*, 'The vision of the perfect faithful initiate is equivalent to direct visual perception' (*mushāhadatu'l-mu'mini'l-kāmil ka'l-mu'āyana*) and maintains that the super sense-perceptible encounter with the imams provides the believer

65. For an idea of the richness of Shaykhiyya literature, see A. Q. Ebrāhimi Kermānī, *Fehrest-e kotob-e... Shaykh Aḥmad-e Aḥsā'ī va sā'er-e mashāyekh-e 'ezām va kholāṣe-ye aḥvāl-e ishān* (Kerman, 1377/1957); H. Corbin, 'L'Ecole Shaykhi en théologie shī'ite', *Annuaire de l'EPHE* (1960–1961), pp. 3–59 (rpr. in *Islam iranien*, vol. 4); V. Rafati, 'The Development of Shaykhi Thought in Shīi Islam'; M. Momen, *The Works of Shaykh Ahmad al-Aḥsa'ī. A Bibliography* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1991); D. McEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History* (Leiden, 1992); I. S. Hamid, 'The Metaphysics and Cosmology of Process According to Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī' (State University of New York, 1998). See also M. A. Amir-Moezzi and S. Schmidtke, 'Twelver Shī'ite Resources in Europe', *JA*, 285/1 (1997), pp. 73–122, especially pp. 87–120 (description of the Shaykhī collection at EPHE [Religious Sciences] and the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Cologne).

66. Āghā Sayyid Hādī Hindī, *Tanbīh al-ghāfilīn wa surūr al-nāzīrīn* (n.p. [Tabriz], n.d.), pp. 53–54; Ebrāhimi Kermānī, *Fehrest-e kotob*, vol. 1, p. 180.

with a 'spiritual initiation' (lit. savour' *dhawq*) due to which he can immediately perceive the authenticity or otherwise of a tradition.⁶⁷

Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kermānī (d. 1288/1870), a master of the Shaykhiyya from Kermān, has also left us an account of a vision he had of the ninth imam, Muḥammad al-Jawād, and of its consequences:

After my encounter with the imam al-Jawād, I was careful to pay more attention to hidden things. I had a vision of (other) imams and felt guided by them. Henceforth, for my understanding in matters of Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*, I have recourse directly to them and rely upon no one else. I profess nothing that is not based on them and their teachings. I do not submit (*taslīm*) or emulate (*taqlīd*) anyone but them. All my knowledge is as a result of these inner visions.⁶⁸

According to the masters of the Shaykhiyya, the vision of the imam occurs in a 'World' that, following the philosophical School of the *Ishrāq*, specifically Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, the commentator on Suhrawardī, they call the World of Hūrqulyā.⁶⁹ This has been masterfully studied by H. Corbin in his *Corps spirituel et terre celeste* and one can only refer the reader to this rich and detailed

67. Al-Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī, *Sharḥ al-ziyāra al-jāmi'a* (lithograph, Tabriz, n.d.), pp. 73–74; *Fehrest-e kotob*, vol. 1, p. 185; Corbin, *Islam iranien*, vol. 4, p. 218; Amir-Moezzi, 'Remarques sur les critères d'authenticité du ḥadīth et l'autorité du juriste dans le shi'isme imāmīte', p. 34.

68. Mīrzā Nī'matullāh Rīdāwī (a direct disciple of Muḥammad Karīm Khān), *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'* (lithograph, Bombay, 1313/1895), p. 14; *Fehrest-e kotob*, vol. 1, p. 83; Amir-Moezzi, 'Remarques', p. 35.

69. See for example, *Sharḥ al-ziyāra*, pp. 369ff.; Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī, *al-Risāla al-qaṭifiyya* and *Jawāb 'alā Mullā Ḥusayn al-Anbarī al-Kirmānī in Jawāmi' al-kalim* (lithograph, Tabriz, 1273/1856), vol. 1, pp. 136 and 153–154 respectively; Sayyid Kāzim b. Qāsim al-Ḥusaynī al-Rashtī, *Sharḥ al-khuṭba al-ṭaṭanjiyya* (lithograph, Tabriz, 1270/1853), intro.; Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī, *Irshād al-'awāmm* (Kerman, 1354/1935), vol. 2, pp. 274–275; Abū'l-Qāsim Khān Ebrāhīmī, *Tanzīh al-awliyā'* (Kerman, 1367/1948), pp. 702–726; and here, section 14, note 72.

work.⁷⁰ Based on the analysis of the philosopher Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680), this World, part of the Imaginal World (to cite Corbin's translation of *'ālam al-mithāl*), is a world where the spirits take corporeal form and bodies take spiritual form.⁷¹ This universe which has its own ontological reality and where (still based on Corbin), 'all phenomenology of the spirit is effected' for the Shaykhīs is not only the world of vision of the imam but also, quite simply the World of the Imam. It is up to the initiate-follower to develop his 'organs of Hūrqalyā' (*aḍā'-e hūrqalyāviyye*); and more specifically, of these, his 'eye capable of recognising the imam' (*chashm-e emām shenās*) by means of sincere prayers and purifying acts of ascetism, in order to be able to gain access to this World and there discover the Light of the imam.⁷² In his *Irshād al-'awāmm* Muḥammad Karīm Khān writes: 'When the world we are [sic] scales the heights and reaches the World of the Hūrqalyā, at that very point he sees the Light of the Imam. Truth is revealed. Darkness then dissipates.'⁷³

Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ebrāhīmī (d. 1969) writes:

In *Hūrqalyā*, you will be elevated above the phenomenon of the sense-perceptible world; you will have perceived and contemplated the eternal Image (*methāl-e azālī*), the pure Form (*ṣūrat-e pāk*) and the Light of your Imam, as a primordial Image completely covering the horizon of this world . . . You will then understand why it is that none save he governs and decides; how all else only execute his orders. You will perceive all actions and operations as

70. *Corps spirituel*, index under 'Hūrqalyā'. See also M. Mo'in, 'Havarqalyā', *Revue Fac. Lettres de l'Univ. de Téhéran* (1333/1955), pp. 78–105; according to Mo'in, the etymology for this term is an expression in Hebrew, *habal qarna'im* (suggesting something like 'double path') whence its vocalisation 'Havarqalyā'; see also Rafati, *Development of Shaykhi Thought*, pp. 106ff.

71. *Kalimāt maknūna* (Tehran, 1316/1898), p. 70.

72. Ebrāhīmī, *Tanzih*, p. 725.

73. Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Irshād*, vol. 2, p. 275; trans. in Corbin, *Corps spirituel*, pp. 262–264.

dominated by this imaginal Form (*ṣūrat-e methālī*) and permanently depending on the Imam.⁷⁴

At the same time, as I have written elsewhere,⁷⁵ accounts of encounters with the hidden imam serve as hermeneutic elements for Kāẓim Rashtī (d. 1259/1843), the second master and actual founder of the order, who describes the vision of the last imam in individual eschatological terms. Considering at one and the same time these accounts and what tradition presents as the last signed letter by the hidden imam, a letter according to which the latter could not be seen until the End of Time,⁷⁶ Sayyid Kāẓim essentially proposes the following syllogism: according to his own words in his last letter, the hidden imam can only be seen at the End of Time; now, according to reliable sources, some people have seen him; therefore these individuals have reached the End of Time.⁷⁷ The conclusion drawn by this syllogism obviously designates 'an initiatic death': an encounter with the Qā'im leads to the death of the ego and an inner rebirth of the faithful-initiate. The vision of the hidden imam here signifies the End of the era of the occultation in the individual and coincides with his spiritual birth (*al-wilāda al-rūḥāniyya*).⁷⁸

74. *Tanzih*, p. 726; trans. in *Corps spirituel*, p. 290. See also Chapter 14, this volume.

75. Chapter 13, this volume.

76. For the text of this letter, its implications and the studies concerning it, see *Guide divin*, pp. 276ff. (*Divine Guide*, pp. 113–114) and Chapter 13, this volume.

77. Al-Sayyid Kāẓim al-Rashtī, *al-Rasā'il wa'l-masā'il* (lithograph, Tabriz, n.d.), pp. 356–365.

78. See also section 14 *in fine*. The eschatological thought of Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī deserves a separate study. To the sources already mentioned in Chapter 14, one should add his *Dalil al-mutaḥayyirīn* (lithograph, Tabriz, n.d.) and *Sharḥ qaṣīda lāmiyya li-'Abd al-Bāqī Efendī* (lithograph, n.p. [Tabriz], n.d.); some excerpts of this latter work have been translated into French by A. L. M. Nicolas, *Essai sur le Chéikhisme* (Paris, 1910–1914), vol. 2, pp. 37–44 and 52–55.

Conclusion

Among us (the imams), he who dies is not dead;⁷⁹ the light of the imam in the hearts of the faithful is more radiant than the morning star;⁸⁰ our teachings are a secret, a secret hidden by a secret . . . it is arduous, especially difficult; only a prophet-envoy, an angel of Proximity or a believer whose heart is tested by God for faith can bear it.⁸¹

The issue of the visions of the imams in their different forms seems to be a fertile hermeneutic field for these kinds of traditions which have been reported in the most ancient compilations of Twelver *ḥadīths* and subsequently. Indeed, for the believer, even after ending their terrestrial lives, the imams are not dead. They continue to live and help their true believers by being present in their hearts and, at times, by rendering themselves visible to them. How might this be? In modern Imami mysticism, the answers are as varied as the range of mystical orders.

In non-institutionalised mysticism largely represented, at least in the texts, by religious scholars, the points of view are more or less similar to what is encountered in popular beliefs. The imam manifests himself in the physical world and thus becomes visible to the naked eye. The imam's being is an absolute miracle. Due

79. *Yamūt man māta minnā wa laysa bi-mayyit*, tradition dating back to 'Alī: Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, ed. M. Kūchebāghī (Tabriz, n.d. [ca. 1380/1960]), p. 275. On beliefs about the post-mortem life of the imams 'in their bodies' among some Shi'is, especially in Kūfa, see M. Ayoub, *Redempting Suffering in Islām: a Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Āshūrā' in Twelver Shi'ism* (The Hague, 1978), pp. 245ff.; H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis. Die Extreme Shia und die 'Alawiten* (Zurich and Munich, 1982), pp. 240ff. and 284ff.

80. *La-nūr al-īmām fī qulūb al-mu'minīn anwar min al-shams al-muḍī'a bi'l-nahār*, tradition dating back to al-Bāqir: al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī, 4 vols (Tehran, n.d.), 'kitāb al-ḥujja', vol. 1, p. 276.

81. *Ḥadīthunā sirr wa sirr mustasirr...ḥadīthunā ṣa'b mustaṣ'ab lā yaḥmiluhu illā nabī mursal aw malak muqarrab aw mu'min imtaḥana'llāhu qalbahu li'l-īmān*, traditions dating back to several of the imams; *Baṣā'ir*, pp. 26–29.

to this fact, and since he is alive, he is able to show himself to whomsoever has made himself worthy through leading a life of devotion, moral rectitude and unfailing love for the *ahl al-bayt*. To my knowledge, the issue of the nature of the imam's body which lets itself be 'seen' is not discussed in these kinds of sources; is it a physical body or does it take a subtle spiritual form? Nūrī Ṭabrisī, to cite him once more, is a perfect representative of this trend.

In a chapter of *al-Najm al-thāqib*, devoted to 'the place' where the hidden imam is located, he extends the discussion to include all the Impeccable Ones and categorically denies the possibility of any spiritual hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) being applied either to their 'place of residence' or to a vision concerning them. According to him, when the imam manifests himself, anyone can see him; the problem lies in the fact that not just anyone is capable of recognising him.⁸² Obviously familiar with traditions regarding the 'vision by the heart', Nūrī maintains that the 'eye of the heart' is the organ for seeing the ultimate reality of the imam's being; this, as we have seen in the introduction of our study, according to Imami theology is identical to the Names and Attributes of the revealed God. However, the author carefully avoids saying so. And this accounts only for the great initiates who make up a very limited number.⁸³ The manifestation of the imam in the physical world momentarily transfigures it (only in the immediate environment of the witness?) by introducing a break in the time-space continuum and overwhelms forevermore the inner world of the believer.

The mystical schools that developed from traditional Sufism (Dhahabiyya, Oveysiyya, Ni'matullāhiyya, Khāksāriyya) developed an internalised conception of the imam. Faithful to the Shi'i structural pair of *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, they maintain in essence that the Imam – the Perfect Man and divine Being par excellence – is exoterically manifested in our times by the hidden imam (the living

82. *Najm*, pp. 410ff.

83. *Najm*, p. 412.

occulted Qā'im) and esoterically by the imam in the follower's heart. This 'imam of light' is visible to the 'eye of the heart' not only through devotion and purity, but also a series of spiritual exercises carried out within the order: basically these are the various forms of *dhikr* and *fikr*, concentrating on the spiritual image of the living master's visage, but also the thaumaturgic sciences, chiefly alchemy. As R. Gramlich observes, we can certainly speak of a 'Shi'i-influenced Sufism' but we may also consider it to be a reasonable state of affairs to the extent that a number of the concepts, beliefs and practices in question seem to have originated in early Shi'ism and undergone a gradual process of adaptation in the Sufi milieu.⁸⁴

In this spiritual landscape, however, the theologico-mystical School of the Shaykhiyya from Kirmān constitutes a slightly different case. Having never hidden their differences, and at times their hostility towards the purely theological strands (both Uṣūlī and Akhbārī) on the one hand and the Sufi orders on the other,⁸⁵ this mystical order draws upon the theosophical tradition of the *Ishrāq*, chiefly and freely commented on by their eponymous founder, so as to advance an actual topography for the vision of the imam. *Hūrqalyā*, the World of the imam, is a spiritual *and* physical world, in which the imam can be an object of vision in his 'corporeal spiritual' body. Supported by the holy imams, it is up to the believer to develop his '*hūrqalyāwī* organs', particularly this 'eye of the heart capable of recognising the imam' in order to be able to perceive the 'realities' of this world. Here, in a fashion, we again encounter the consubstantiality of the subject doing the viewing and the object viewed referred to at the beginning of this study.

84. See *Guide divin*, pp. 129ff. and 316–317 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 50 and 130–131).

85. Lastly, see Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ebrāhīmī, *Ejتهād va taqlīd*, in *Rasā'el-e marhūm-e āqā-ye hājj Abu'l-Qāsim Khān*, facsimile of an autograph manuscript, Fonds Shaykhī (collection) de l'EPHE (sc. religieuses), SHA. VI.5, fol. 245ff. Regarding this collection, see note 65 above *in fine*.

As we have just seen, speculative explanations and spiritual practices vary from one strand to another. However, all the strands agree on the fundamental importance of devotion, the observance of acts of worship, moral rectitude and above all, *walāya*: the love-friendship-loyalty-submission offered to the imams.⁸⁶ A sign of spiritual authority and the criterion of veracity for inner progress, the vision of the imam also shows to what extent the Figure of the imam, to this day, remains pivotal for Twelver spirituality in its myriad forms.

86. For the fundamental importance of *walāya*, which the Imamis consider the essential core and one of the 'pillars' (*da'ā'im*) of Islam, see J. Eliash, 'On the Genesis and Development of the Twelver-Shī'ī Three Tenet *Shahāda*', *Der Islam*, 47 (1971), pp. 265–272; *Guide divin*, pp. 303–304 (*Divine Guide*, p. 125); M. M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* (Leiden and Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 195–202; and esp. Chapter 7, this volume.

Notes on Prayer in Imami Shi'ism*

1

This chapter does not presume to speak about Henry Corbin or his monumental work in general. Rather, it seeks to briefly deal with a subject that was especially dear to him, namely prayer. At the outset, let us also clarify that we will not be examining this fundamental practice from the perspective of Islam in general, or the daily canonical prayer (Ar. *ṣalāt*; P. *namāz*).¹ We are concerned more specifically with a few little-known elements about the literature and some aspects of the superogatory prayer (*du'ā'*) in Twelver Shi'ism, considered in its various forms (invocation, supplication, prayer, pilgrimage prayer, occasional etc.) and often addressed to the entire group or to one or other of the Fourteen Impeccable Ones, that is, the Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭima and especially the twelve imams.

* This chapter was previously published in a volume devoted to Henry Corbin's works, M. A. Amir-Moezzi, C. Jambet and P. Lory (eds), *Henry Corbin: philosophies et sagesse des religions du Livre*, Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes (Turnhout, 2005), vol. 126, pp. 65–80; hence the frequent references to his work.

1. See e.g. L. Gardet, 'Du'ā', *EI2*, vol. 2, pp. 632–634; G. Monnot, 'Ṣalāt', *EI2*, vol. 8, pp. 956–965 (G. Monnot devoted part of his seminars during 1987–1988, at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes to the examination of prayer in Shi'ism and Sufism). See also A. d'Alverny, 'La prière selon le Coran II. La prière rituelle', *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, 10 (1960), pp. 303–317; S. D. Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1966), ch. 3, pp. 73–89; G. Monnot, 'Prières privées en islam traditionnel: autour d'un texte de Rāzī', *RHR*, 206/1 (1989), pp. 41–54; E. de Vitray-Meyerovitch, *La prière en Islam* (Paris, 1998).

In the course of his great work *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*, Corbin devotes a few magnificent pages to prayer. In the third chapter of the second section entitled 'Prayer of Man, Prayer of God' he writes mainly about the 'reciprocity' of prayer:

This idea of a *sharing* of roles in the manifestation of being, in the eternal theophany, is fundamental to Ibn 'Arabī's notion of prayer; it inspires what we have termed his method of prayer and makes it a 'method of theophanic prayer'. The notion of sharing presupposes a dialogue between two beings, and this [is a] living experience of a '*dialogic situation*' . . . True, this reciprocity becomes incomprehensible if we isolate the *ens creatum* outside the *Ens increatum* . . . For prayer is not a request for something; it is the expression of a mode of being, a means of existing and of *causing to exist*, that is, a means of causing the God who reveals Himself to appear, of 'seeing' Him, in order not to be sure in His essence, but in the *form* which precisely He reveals by revealing Himself by and to that form.²

A few pages later, he cites a poem – as audacious as it is brief – by the great Andalusian mystic:

It is He who glorifies me at the moment when I glorify Him. It is He who worships me at the moment when I worship Him [which means that the Prayer of man is the Prayer of God].³

2. H. Corbin, *L'imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī* (Paris, 1958), p. 185, English trans. Ralph Manheim, *Alone with the Alone, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī* (Princeton, 1997), pp. 247ff. (Corbin's italics). J. L. Vieillard Baron has written an excellent philosophical analysis of this section of the work in 'Temps spirituel et hiéro-histoire selon Henry Corbin : une phénoménologie de la connaissance psycho-cosmique', *Cahiers du Groupe d'Etudes Spirituelles Comparées*, 8, 'Henry Corbin et le comparatisme spirituel' (2000), pp. 25–37.

3. *L'imagination créatrice* p. 190, *Alone with the Alone*, p. 254.

All this is presented as a hermeneutical interpretation of the Qur'ānic verse 2:152, *fa-dhkurūnī adhkurkum* (lit. 'remember Me, and I shall remember you') that Henry Corbin, as he was wont, renders with an exegetic annotation, 'Have me present to your heart, I shall have you present to myself'.⁴

'Reciprocity' perhaps constitutes the most fundamental dimension of prayer; indeed it transforms prayer from a monologue that often seems flat and mechanical into a vibrant devotion deeply felt as an intense dialogue with the Person addressed – what Corbin calls 'the dialogic situation'. How is this dimension present in Imami prayer? Relatively speaking, this issue has not held Corbin's interest to any great extent. Indeed, this interest in Twelver prayer was expressed in a very limited context. During the academic sessions of 1968–1969 and 1969–1970, he devoted half his seminars at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes to an examination of the commentary that Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī (d. 1241/1826) contributed on prayer relating to the 'spiritual pilgrimage of the twelve imams', that is to say, a text known as *al-Ziyārat al-jāmi'a*, attributed to the tenth imam, 'Alī al-Naqī, at least since the *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruḥu'l-faqīh* by Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991).⁵ The substance of this study, as well as other allusions to prayer in Imamism are fragmentary and scattered in *En Islam iranien*.

4. Ibid., p. 187. On the heart as 'an organ of prayer' in Ibn 'Arabī, see *ibid.*, Part 2, ch. 2, pp. 164ff., *Alone with the Alone*, p. 250.

5. Now consult summaries of seminars by H. Corbin at Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in the collection *Itinéraire d'un enseignement*, Institut Français de Recherche en Iran (Tehran, 1993), pp. 107–110 and 118–124; the work by Shaykh Aḥmad, *Sharḥ al-Ziyārat al-jāmi'a* (Tabriz, 1276/1859); Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruḥu'l-faqīh*, ed. al-Mūsawī al-Kharsān (Tehran, 1390/1970), vol. 2, pp. 370–376, no. 1625.

2

Prayer in its different forms, is undoubtedly the most regular and widespread illustration of Shi'i devotion. There are thousands of them and the relevant literature is vast. Qualitatively, some prayers are of undeniable literary beauty, and are at times profoundly philosophical or mystical. As for the nature of the works that report these prayers, it may be possible to establish a kind of typology:

- Collections of prayers categorised according to their themes or the time and circumstances appropriate for recitation (specific moments during the day, particular days of the week, month, year, natural events etc.).
- Works devoted to the liturgical or ritualistic aspects of prayer (*ādāb al-ṣalāt*, *ādāb al-du'ā*).
- Books of salutations (*ṣalawāt*) addressed to the Impeccable Ones.
- Prayers of an 'thaumatugic' kind, to be used as an element in divination (*istikhāra*), a talisman (*ṭilism*) or an amulet (*ta'wīdh*) etc.
- Oraisons and/or pilgrimage prayers (*ziyārāt*) at the tombs of the Impeccables. These are perhaps the most common. It is interesting to note that the same term, *ziyāra*, denotes both the pilgrimage, literally 'the visit' to the tomb, as well as the prayer recited on this occasion.

The oldest texts would have been compiled during the time of the imams themselves. Although the authenticity for the entirety of works such as *Nahj al-balāgha* (attributed to the first imam, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib) and *al-Ṣaḥīfat al-sajjādiyya* (attributed to the fourth imam, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn) is subject to discussion, it is nevertheless almost certain that they were constituted from an early core which is most likely authentic. The first contains a number of oraisons and the second is a collection of prayers.⁶ In addition, early compilations of *ḥadīths*, such as those by al-Kulaynī (329/940–941), Ibn

6. See e.g. L. Vecchia Vaglieri, 'Sul "*Nahj al-balāghah*" e sul suo compilatore ash-Sharīf ar-Raḍī', *AIUON*, special issue, 8 (1958); the introduction by

Bābūya (381/991) or Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (460/1067) contain chapters, even entire 'books' devoted to prayers attributed to the imams.⁷

From the fifth/eleventh century onwards, the bibliographical and prosographical 'dictionaries', in this case the *Rijāl* by al-Najāshī or the *Fihrist* by the same al-Ṭūsī,⁸ list works devoted to different aspects and forms of prayer written by Shi'i thinkers and other learned individuals, the eldest of whom were contemporaries of and acquainted with the imams. These books, huge in number, would have been compilations of *ḥadīths* dating back to one or another of the imams. Almost all of them seem to have been lost, but as is the case for other religious subjects, one may reasonably conclude that the contents of many of them were rescued and reported by other authors much later. Let us limit ourselves to some examples of famous authors from the third/ninth to the fifth/eleventh centuries:

- (a) Works bearing the title *kitāb al-du'ā'*: 'Alī b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī (Najāshī 253), Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ash'arī al-Qummī (Najāshī 178),⁹ Muḥammad b. Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshī al-Samarqandī (Najāshī 351), Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Barqī (Najāshī 77, Ṭūsī 21), Ḥumayd b. Ziyād b. Ḥammād al-Dihqān (Najāshī 132), Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (Najāshī 377, Ṭūsī 135),¹⁰

W. Chittick to his English translation of *al-Ṣaḥīfat al-sajjādiyya: The Psalms of Islam* (London, 1988).

7. For example in chapters devoted to canonical prayers or pilgrimages in legalist texts by these authors, al-Kulaynī, *al-Furū' min al-Kāfi*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1391/1971); Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruḥu'l-faqīh*, ed. al-Mūsawī al-Kharsān (Tehran, 1390/1970); al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, ed. M. J. Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, 1412/1992), and 'The Book of Invocations' (*K. al-du'ā'*) in al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī (Tehran, n.d.); for earlier compilations see further below.

8. Abu'l-'Abbās al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, ed. M. al-Shubayrī al-Zanjānī (Qumm, 1407/1987); Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist* (Beirut, 1403/1983).

9. This text seems identical to *Kitāb faḍl al-du'ā'* by al-Ash'arī, cited by Ibn Ṭāwūs in several of his works; see E. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Ṭāwūs and his Library* (henceforth KIT) (Leiden, 1992), pp. 158–159.

10. Is this work the same as the *Kitāb al-du'ā'* by the same author in his *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, vol. 4, pp. 210–393?

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (Najāshī 354),¹¹ Muḥammad b. Ūrama al-Qummī (Najāshī 330) and *Kitāb ad'iyat al-a'imma* by Ubayd Allāh b. Abī Zayd al-Anbārī (Najāshī 233).

- (b) Prayers meant for specific occasions and described as '*amal al-ayyām/al-shuhūr*', collected for example in *Kitāb 'amal yawm al-jumu'a* by Muḥammad b. 'Alī Ibn Abī Qurra (Najāshī 398);¹² *Kitāb yawm wa layla* by Mu'āwiya b. 'Ammār al-Duhnī (Najāshī 411); several texts by Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī such as *Kitāb 'amal rajab*, *Kitāb 'amal ramadān* or *Kitāb 'amal sha'bān* (Najāshī 85, Ṭūsī 33); *Kitāb al-najāḥ fi 'amal shahr ramadān* by Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nisābūrī (Najāshī 307) and *Kitāb 'amal yawm al-jumu'a* by Abu'l-Faṭḥ al-Karājakī (KIT 109).
- (c) Various prayers offered in different circumstances, reported in collections such as *Kitāb al-tahajjud* by Ibn Abī Qurra already cited (Najāshī 398),¹³ *Da'f al-humūm wa'l-aḥzān* by Aḥmad b. Dāwūd al-Nu'mānī (KIT 138), the anonymous works *Majmū'a mawlānā Zayn al-Ābidīn*, apparently different from *Ṣaḥīfat al-sajjādiyya*¹⁴ and *Majmū'a ad'iya al-mustajābāt 'an al-nabī wa'l-a'imma* (KIT 266) and *Zād al-musāfir* by Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan b. Shādhān al-Qummī.¹⁵

In Imamism, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (460/1067) and Ibn Ṭāwūs (664/1266) are considered the two main 'pillars' for prayer literature. Indeed the famous *Miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid* by Abū Ja'far

11. In many of his works, Ibn Ṭāwūs cites a *Kitāb faḍl al-du'a* by al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī which must be the same text (KIT, p. 159).

12. *Kitāb 'amal shahr ramadān* (Najāshī 398) and *Kitāb 'amal al-shuhūr* (ibid.) are also attributed to the same author. The first, known and used by Ibn Ṭāwūs, was perhaps part of the second (KIT, pp. 108–109).

13. As for Ibn Ṭāwūs, he speaks of a *Kitāb al-mutahajjid* (KIT, pp. 292).

14. It seems that *Iqbāl al-a'māl* by Ibn Ṭāwūs is the only source that includes some excerpts of this text attributed to the fourth imam (KIT, pp. 150).

15. Āghā Bozorg al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānif al-Shī'a* (Tehran–Najaf, 1353–1398/1934–1978), vol. 12, p. 7, no. 40.

al-Ṭūsī may be considered *the* fundamental book in this literary genre.¹⁶ Extremely popular, this voluminous collection has been commented upon extensively and translated into Persian on more than one occasion.¹⁷ As for Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn Ṭāwūs, he is without a doubt, the most methodical author of prayer books. In his excellent work on this major figure of Imamism, Etan Kohlberg has demonstrated how Ibn Ṭāwūs, having more than seventy works of prayer by earlier authors at his disposal, organised for his readers a veritable syllabus for the religious formation of the individual through this spiritual practice.¹⁸

An admirer of the *Miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid* by Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, who was one of his maternal forebears, Ibn Ṭāwūs wrote a complement to the work (apparently lost today) entitled *Kitāb (al) muhimāt (fi [or li] ṣalāḥ al-muta'abbid) wa ('l-) tatimmāt (li miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid)* in which he advocated a programme based on five of his works devoted to prayer, to be read in the following order: *Falāḥ al-sā'il*, *Zahrāt al-rabī'*, *al-Shurū' fi ziyārāt wa ziyādāt ṣalawāt...*, *al-Iqbāl* and *Asrār al-ṣalawāt*. Elsewhere, he offers an even richer programme based on ten volumes of his works: *Falāḥ al-sā'il* (2 volumes), *Zahrāt al-rabī'*, *Jamāl al-usbū'*, *al-Durū' al-wāqiya*, *Miḍmār al-sabaq*, *Masālik al-muhtāj...*, *al-Iqbāl* (2 volumes) and finally, *al-Sa'ādāt bi'l-'ibādāt*.¹⁹ Apart

16. Latest edition by A. Bidār (Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994).

17. For example the very old Persian translation most likely dating back to the seventh/thirteenth century, known as *Tarjama-ye mukhtaṣar-e Miṣbāḥ (Fihrist-e nuskha-hā-ye khaṭṭi-ye Kitābkhāne-ye... Mar'ashī* [new edn, Qumm, 1378 Sh./1998], nos 877, 5987, 8911). Of the commentaries, see *Minhāj al-ṣalāḥ fi ikhtiṣār al-Miṣbāḥ* by al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325), in ten chapters, with its famous eleventh theological chapter entitled 'al-Bāb al-ḥādī 'aṣhar' (latest edn, Qumm, 1419/1998); and in the eighth/fourteenth century, *Īdāḥ al-Miṣbāḥ li ahl al-ṣalāḥ* by Bahā' al-Dīn al-Najafī (*Fihrist-e Kitābkhāne-ye Mar'ashī*, MS 4568) and the modern *Mukhtaṣar Miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid* by Mullā Ḥaydar 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Shīrwānī (*Fihrist-e Kitābkhāne-ye Mar'ashī*, MS 3948).

18. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, passim, esp. the introduction, pp. 49ff.

19. Some of his books have now been edited, even more than once. Here only one edition is cited: *Falāḥ al-sā'il* (Najaf, 1385/1965); *al-Iqbāl* (Tehran,

from these texts, Ibn Ṭāwūs left other important works on the subject of prayer such as *Muhaj al-da'awāt*,²⁰ *al-Mujtanā min al-du'ā' al-mujtabā*²¹ and *Fatḥ al-abwāb*.²²

3

Elsewhere, we have at length examined two traditions within Imamism, namely the early esoteric non-rational tendency reported by the traditionalists of the Schools of Rayy and Qumm, and the theologico-legal tendency of the Baghdad School, mainly during the Buyid period.²³ The points at which they diverge are numerous and at times insurmountable; one sometimes gets the impression that a vast gulf lies between teachings deeply marked by esoterism, initiatory mysticism, even the thaumaturgy, reported by compilers such as al-Barqī, al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, Furāt al-Kūfī, 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, al-'Ayyāshī, al-Kulaynī, Ibn Abī Zaynab al-Nu'mānī or even Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq²⁴ and the rationalist

1407/1987); *Jamāl al-usbū'* (Tehran, 1330 Sh./1952); *al-Durū' al-wāqiya* (Qumm, 1374 Sh./1992).

20. Tehran, 1323/1905; there are several Persian translations (*Fihrist-e Kitābhkhāne-ye Mar'ashī*, MSS 2626, 4050, 6741).

21. Incomplete text published in the same volume as *Muhaj al-da'awāt*.

22. Ed. Ḥ. Al-Khaffāf (Beirut, 1409/1989).

23. See M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 15–48 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 6–19), and 'Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī et son *Kitāb baṣā'ir al-darajāt*', *JA*, 280 (1992), pp. 221–250 and 'Réflexions sur une évolution du shī'isme duodécimain : tradition et idéologisation', in E. Patlagean and A. Le Boulluec (eds), *Les retours aux Ecritures: fondamentalismes présents et passés*, Bibliothèque des Hautes Etudes (Paris and Louvain, 1993), pp. 63–82.

24. Regarding these authors, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 48–58 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 19–22) and 'Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī et son *Kitāb baṣā'ir al-darajāt*'; M. M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shi'ism* (Leiden, 1999); A. J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi'ism: Ḥadīth as Discourse Between Qum and Bagdad* (Richmond, 2000).

writings tinged with the Mu'tazilism of jurist-theologians such as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī or al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā.²⁵

Yet prayer is one area on which both camps agree without too many reservations. The most typical illustration of this entente is found in the examples of invocations and prayers addressed to the Impeccable Ones. For supporters of the original esoteric tradition, the countless eulogistical formulae, invocations and titles given the Impeccable Ones in these invocations, contain in a very densely written style the most hidden doctrines of initiatic imamology.²⁶ This same density of discourse, which effectively makes it extremely allusive, also satisfies the followers of the rationalist tradition who do not find explicit imamological beliefs of the first tradition, which had been previously judged deviant and extremist but simply the demonstration of a profound and sincere devotion. A telling example is found in the very long and popular 'Prayer of the twelve imams' attributed to the great philosopher and Avicennian scholar Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), which has been partially translated by Henry Corbin.²⁷

This prayer is comprised of a succession of long sentences, often in rhyming prose, divided into fourteen 'moments' (one for each of the Impeccables) each containing two parts: an invocation to

25. For more on these authors see e.g. M. MacDermott, *The Theology of Al-Shaikh Al-Mufīd* (d. 413/1022) (Beirut, 1978); the introduction by A. al-Ḥusaynī to al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *al-Dhakhīra fī 'ilm al-kalām* (Qumm, 1411/1990) (for this important work, now consult S. Schmidtke, 'II. Firk. Arab III. A copy of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā's *Kitāb al-Dhakhīra* completed in 472/1079-80 in the Firkovitch-collection, St Petersburg (in Persian: Nuskha yi kuhan az *Kitāb al-Dhakhīra* yi Sharīf Murtaḍā (tārīkh-i kitābat 472)', *Ma'ārif*, 20/2 (2003), pp. 68-84; M. M. Ja'farī, *Sayyid Raḍī* (Tehran, 1999).

26. On this imamology refer to Chapters 3, 5 and 8, this volume.

27. *En Islam iranien*, vol. 1, pp. 70-73. In spite of its title, the invocation is addressed to the Fourteen Impeccable Ones and not only the twelve imams. The text of the prayer is based on the eclogue by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Zād al-ma'ād* (lithograph, Tehran, 1352/1933), in the margins of pp. 207-227. This is the edition used by H. Corbin. There are many others, the latest being: Qumm, 2 vols, n.d. (ca. 1995). (In the original text of the book, the author uses Corbin's translation.)

God in the form of a variable litany and a response in unison. The work in its entirety constitutes a long spiritual pilgrimage to the sanctuaries of the Fourteen Impeccables. Each sentence touches upon an aspect of hagiography or imamology. To convey an idea of this typical text, we cite a few excerpts:

O dear God! Honour and hail, serve and bless the Prophet . . . the Lamp that glows, the Star that glistens . . . The prince of Messengers, the Seal of prophets . . . Honour and salvation upon you . . . O Messenger of God, O Merciful Guide, O Intercessor of the community, O witness of God before his creatures . . .

.....

O dear God! Honour and hail, serve and bless the Prince most pure, 'Alī the victorious imam . . . the epiphany of miracles and wonders . . . the dazzling Meteor . . . Centre of the circle of secrets . . . Lion of God the victorious . . . Guide of East and West . . . O Husband of the virgin [Fāṭima] . . . O our Lord and Prince . . . intercede for us before God.

.....

O dear God! Honour and greet, serve and bless Fāṭima the glorious Lady, the beautiful, the most pure, the oppressed, the generous, the noble . . . who endured so many afflictions in the course of such a brief life . . . the Queen of women, She of the huge black eyes, Mother of the imams . . . the immaculate Virgin . . . O Fāṭima the Radiant . . . O our Lady and Sovereign . . . intercede for us before God.

.....

O dear God! Honour and greet . . . the ascetic prince, Ḥusayn son of 'Alī [the third imam], imam of prayer . . . ornament of thrones and temples, Afflicted by misfortune and sorrow . . . O martyr, O Oppressed One! Son of the Messenger of God, son of the Master of Believers, son of Fāṭima the Radiant . . . O Prince of the Youths of paradise . . . intercede for us before God.

.....

O dear God! Honour and greet . . . the loyal and most true Prince, the wise, the steadfast, the forbearing, the compassionate, guide upon the path, he who serves the Shi'is a full and pure wine . . .

O Ja'far son of Muḥammad [the sixth imam] . . . intercede for us before God.

.....

O dear God! Honour and greet . . . the oppressed imam, the martyr who succumbed to poison. . . the wise one who knows secret sciences, the full moon in a starry night . . . companion of souls, Sun of suns . . . O 'Alī son of Mūsā al-Riḍā [the eighth imam] . . . Son of the Messenger of God . . . God's witness before his creatures . . . intercede for us before God.

.....

O dear God! Honour and greet . . . he who in his being recapitulates the Prophet's vocation, the impetuosity of the Lion of God [i.e. 'Alī], the absolute pureness of Fāṭima, the forbearance of Ḥasan, the bravery of Ḥusayn . . . the *incognito* of the divine occultation, in truth the Resurrector, the Word of God . . . the Triumphant by God's command . . . Imam in concealment and to be discovered, who dispels sadness and sorrow . . . Muḥammad son of Ḥasan [the twelfth imam, hidden imam and eschatological Saviour] invisible lord of the age and steward of the Most Merciful . . . intercede for us before God.

Thus Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī, one of the founding fathers of the rationalist current and Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn Ṭāwūs, one of the most brilliant representatives of the traditionalist tendency, work in partnership to glorify the spiritual role of prayer in Shi'i faith. The same could be said of the famous rationalists al-Karājaki (449/1057), in his work *Riyāḍ al-'ābidīn* or Abū 'Alī al-Ṭabrisī (548/1153), author of *Kitāb kunūz al-najāḥ*, and traditionalists such as Faḍl Allāh al-Rāwandī (573/1177–1178), in his *Ad'iyat sirr*, and his contemporary, the anonymous author of *Nuzhat al-zāhid*.²⁸

Following Ibn Ṭāwūs, the development of prayer literature occurred as a result of the work of authors such as Ibn Fahd al-Ḥilli

28. The first work seems to have been lost. Al-Ṭabrisī, *Kunūz al-najāḥ* (n.p. [Iran], 1318/1900). For *Ad'iyat sirr* by al-Rāwandī refer to *Fihrist-e Kitābkhāne-ye Mar'ashī*, MS 499 and *Fihrist-e nuskha-hāye khaṭṭī-ye majmū'a-ye...Mishkāt...dāneshgāh-e Tehrān* (Tehran, 1960–1969), vol. 1, p. 130. As for *Nuzhat al-zāhid*, it has been edited by R. Ja'fariyān (Tehran, 1376 Sh./1997).

(841/1437) and his *‘Uddat al-dā’i wa najāḥ al-sā’i*, often summarised and also translated into both ancient and modern Persian;²⁹ and especially Taqī al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. ‘Alī al-Ka’fāmī (905/1499), author of two very popular key works, *al-Balad al-amīn* and *Junnat al-amān al-wāqiya wa jannat al-īmān al-bāqiya*.³⁰ From the Safawid to the modern period, and even up to contemporary times, there are dozens of works – of varying importance – which bear witness to the vitality of prayer literature. At either end of this long period, of particular note are, on the one hand, in the eleventh and twelfth/seventeenth century, texts by famous members of the Majlisī family, first the father Muḥammad Taqī, then the sons, Muḥammad Ja’far and the renowned Muḥammad Bāqir;³¹ and on the other, the highly popular eclogues currently in use such as *Mafātīḥ al-jinān* by Shaykh ‘Abbās al-Qummī or the *Miftāḥ al-jannāt* by Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn.³²

It is noteworthy that ever since the Safawid period and with the origin and expansion of specifically Imami philosophy, increasing numbers of philosophers, of both Neoplatonic and Aristotelian tendencies (although the distinction is subtle

29. Most recent edition by F. Ḥassūn Fāris (Qumm, 1420/1999). First summary, prepared by the author himself, entitled *Nabdhāt al-dā’i* (*Fihrist-e Kitābkhāne-ye Mar’ashī*, MSS 35, 2642 and 8977); now edited by F. Ḥassūn Fāris as *Mukhtaṣar ‘uddat al-dā’i* in the review *Turāthunā*, 55–56 (1421/2000). Most recent Persian trans.: Ḥ. Fashāhi (Tehran, 1379/1959–1960).

30. *Al-Balad al-amīn* (Tehran, 1383/1963); *Junnat al-amān* (Tehran, 1349 Sh./1971) (many other editions of this work exist). Numerous summaries in Arabic and Persian as well as several Persian translations, especially of the second.

31. Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, *Riyād al-mu’minīn* (Mar’ashī, MS 9850) and *Sharḥ al-ziyārat al-jāmi’at al-kabīra*, in the margins of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā’ī, *Sharḥ al-ziyārat al-jāmi’a* (see note 5 above). Muḥammad Ja’far al-Majlisī, *Miftāḥ al-najāḥ* (Mar’ashī, MS 5153). Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Miqbās al-maṣābiḥ* (Mar’ashī, MSS 2911 and 4226), *Rabī’ al-asābi’* (Mar’ashī, MS 8955; *Mishkāt*, 1/118), *Zād al-ma’ād* (see note 27 above).

32. Numerous editions of these two books published in various countries (Iraq, Iran, Lebanon). For the first, see e.g. Tehran, 1381 Sh./2001. For the second, Beirut, 1389/1969.

and not always evident), wrote works of prayer and published commentaries on previous books on prayer. This, once again, demonstrates the extent to which prayer texts (including the earliest examples) as a result of many devotional factors, frequently of a mystical and theosophical nature, but also because of their extremely dense allusive style, easily lend themselves to hermeneutical exercises. Unfortunately, almost all of these philosophical texts are unedited and still remain in manuscript form. Let us limit ourselves to citing just a few well-known examples:

Al-Shaykh al-Bahā'ī (1030/1621), *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ* (Mar'ashī, MS 8197; Mishkāt, 1/216). The disciple of the latter, Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Nayrīzī, *Ādāb-e 'abbāsī*, Persian paraphrase of the already cited work by his master (Mar'ashī, MSS 3953 and 8988). Other disciple of Shaykh al-Bahā'ī, Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-'Askarī al-Baḥrānī, *Zubdat al-da'awāt* (Mar'ashī, MS 5971; Mishkāt, 1/126).

Sayyid Aḥmad al-'Alawī (d. between 1054/1644 and 1060/1650), famous cousin and disciple of Mīr Dāmād, *al-Jawāhir al-manthūra fi'l-ad'iyat al-ma'thūra* (Mar'ashī, MS 1146) and *Makhzan al-da'awāt* (Mar'ashī, MS 6029).

Mullā Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (1091/1680), student and son-in-law of Mullā Ṣadrā, *Dharī'at al-ḍarā'a* (Mar'ashī, MS 598; Mishkāt 1/117), *Khulāṣat al-adhkār* (Mishkāt 1/105), *Lubb al-ḥasanāt* (Mar'ashī, MS 8236).

'Alī Aṣghar b. Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī, student of Mullā Khalīl al-Qazwīnī (1089/1678), *Safīnat al-najāt* (Mar'ashī, MS 6043; Mishkāt 1/128).

Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-Rasūl al-Zunūzī (twelfth/eighteenth century), *Wasīlat al-najāt* (Mar'ashī, MS 8745).

Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī (d. 1241/1826), *Sharḥ al-ziyārat al-jāmi'a* (see note 5 above).

What mainly attracts the philosophers and exegetes or interpreters of prayer are the different aspects of *walāya* doctrine as

the theological approach to the figure of the imam;³³ a doctrine perfectly illustrated by the brief phrases containing invocations addressed to the Impeccable Ones, such as those we have examined in 'The Prayer of the Twelve Imams' attributed to Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī. To better appreciate what is to follow, let us briefly review the broader outlines of this doctrine.

4

The Essence of God is forevermore and absolutely unknowable. What can be knowable in God, the unknown wishing to be known, are His Names and Attributes. The Imam, in the metaphysical and ontological sense, is the locus of manifestation, the epiphanic place (as Henry Corbin liked to say), of the divine Names. As for the terrestrial imam, the *wālī*, he is the locus of manifestation of the cosmic Imam. Thus, through a theological exposition of successive theophanies, the imam is described as the veritable revealed God, a divine being whose recognition is equivalent to the ultimate mysteries of being.³⁴ This theological doctrine of *walāya* is encountered, in a more or less developed form though explained in a fragmentary manner, from the era of the *ḥadīth* compilations in the third and fourth/ninth and tenth centuries onwards. Briefly, the figure of the imam acquires a level of saintliness equal to, if not implicitly greater than that of the Prophet. At the same time as being the most qualified of religious scholars, the most gifted of wise thaumaturges and the Most High locus of divine epiphany, the imam is also both guardian and content of the Secret (*sirr*, *bāṭin*) of all

33. Chapter 7, this volume.

34. Corbin has explained this very clearly; see for example *En islam iranien* (Paris, 1971–1972), vol. 1, chs 6 and 7, pp. 219ff. and *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, 1986), sections II.A.4 and II.A.5, pp. 78ff. See also Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin* as well as the works cited above in notes 26 and 33.

religions.³⁵ According to *walāya* doctrine, this Secret is no less than divinisation of the man of God. With their audacious tone comparable to the 'ecstatic utterances' (*shataḥāt*) of the mystics, some *ḥadīths* dating back to the imams are especially explicit in this regard:

'We [i.e. the imams] manifest light in darkness', imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said, 'We are the oft-frequented House [*al-bayt al-ma'mūr*; an allusion to Q 52:4] where he who enters is safe. We are the magnificence and grandeur of God . . . We are beyond all description. By us, eyes shine, ears listen and hearts overflow with faith.'³⁶

'God has made of us', relates another tradition from the same imam, 'His eye among His worshippers. His eloquent tongue among His creatures, His hand of beneficence and mercy extended over all His servants, His face towards which one turns, His threshold that leads to him, His treasure in heaven and on earth. It is by our act of worship that God is worshipped; without us, God would not be worshipped.'³⁷

Another tradition reports the words of imam al-Ḥasan:

'We are the First and the Last. We are the commanders, we are the Light. The Light of spiritual beings comes from us. We illuminate (all things) by the Light of God. We spiritualise (all things) by His spirit (or "we render joyful by His joy," *nurawwīḥu bi rūḥih/rawḥih* [the possessive adjective, here and subsequently, can refer both to God as well to the Light of God].) In us, His dwelling

35. See Chapter 7, this volume; also Amir-Moezzi, 'Du droit à la théologie: les niveaux de réalité dans le Shi'isme duodécimain', *Cahiers du Groupe d'Etudes Spirituelles Comparées*, 5, 'L'Esprit et la nature' (1997), pp. 37–63.

36. Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma* (Qumm, 1413/1994), pp. 270–271; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-ma'ājiz* (Tehran, n.d., ca. 1960), pp. 394–395.

37. Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. H. al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭīhrānī (Tehran, 1398/1978), pp. 151–152 (the ambiguity of the last sentence, *bi 'ibādatinā 'ubida'llāh law lā nahnu mā 'ubida'llāh*, which may also mean 'due to the fact that we are worshipped, God is worshipped; without us God would not be worshipped' seems deliberate).

place. Towards us, His source. Our first is the same as our last and our last the same as our first.³⁸

According to a tradition transmitted by several sources, the fourth imam, 'Alī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn on one occasion, before the eyes of his disciples, transformed himself into a winged creature and disappeared into the sky. Upon his return, he reported that he had reached the loftiest of the heavens and replied thus to an astounded disciple:

We [the imams] are the ones who constructed the highest heaven, why then would we not be able to scale its heights? We are the bearers of the divine Throne and we are seated upon the Throne. The Throne and the Pedestal are ours.³⁹

The famous 'theo-imamosophical' sermons attributed to 'Alī, the first imam, are of the same tenor:⁴⁰

I am the queen-bee (*ya'sūb*) of the initiates; I am the First among the Last; I am the successor to the Messenger of the Lord of the worlds; I am judge of the Garden and Fire⁴¹ ... I am the Rewarder on the day of Rewards ... I am the supreme Judge ... I have the decisive Word; I possess penetrating insight into the Path of the Book. I hold the knowledge of fortunes and misfortunes and that of judgements; I am the completion of the religion. I am the good deed by God for His creatures.⁴²

38. Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, pp. 168–169 and *Nawādir al-mu'jizāt* (Qumm, 1410/1990), p. 103.

39. Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Nawādir al-mu'jizāt*, p. 116 and *Dalā'il al-imāma*, p. 201; al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudāt* (Tehran, 1364 Sh./1985), vol. 5, p. 256; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-ma'āziz*, p. 294.

40. Regarding these sermons, see Chapter 3, this volume.

41. Al-ʿAyyāshī, *Tafsīr* (Qumm, 1380/1960), vol. 2, pp. 17–18; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 5 vols (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 20.

42. Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, ed. M. al-Kāzīm (Tehran, 1410/1990), p. 178. The last two sentences certainly refer to Qur'an 5:3. For sources that report these sermons as well as their mystical and/or philosophical exegesis see Chapter 3, this volume.

There is therefore nothing unusual about the imam being the main object of the believers' invocations, or that they are fervently devoted to him, that his sanctuary is a most sacred pilgrimage site. It is significant that ever since an early work such as *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* by Ja'far b. Muḥammad Ibn Qūlūya/Qūlawayh al-Qummī (368/978–979),⁴³ undoubtedly the oldest transmitted monograph regarding pilgrimage and prayers at tombs of the Impeccable Ones, visits to these tombs, especially those of 'Alī at Najaf and al-Ḥusayn at Karbalā', are described as being as important as the pilgrimage to Mecca or Medina.⁴⁴

Moreover, while it is true that each imam possesses his own saintliness, his unique representation in the devotions of the believers, at the same time, one must always bear in mind that the entire group of the Impeccable Ones, the twelve imams more specifically, forms a unique sacred entity and that they are considered identical as theophanic beings, the acting 'organ' of God and locus of manifestation for divine Names. Many prayers are addressed to this group as a single entity, just as 'the collective spiritual pilgrimage' (*al-ziyārat al-jāmi'a*) is undertaken mentally at all the tombs of all the imams as though at a single sanctuary.⁴⁵ According to a tradition dating back to the seventh imam, Mūsā al-Kāzim:

He who visits [*zāra* i.e. who makes a pilgrimage to a shrine] the first among us [the imams], also visits the last among us and he who visits the last among us, also visits the first among us. He who expresses love for the first of us, has also expressed it for the last and he who loves the last of us, also loves the first.⁴⁶

43. Ed. B. Ja'farī (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996).

44. Ibid., passim, and esp. chs 10, 11, 15, 38, 39, 43, 59, 83, 88.

45. Of the earliest compilers we limit ourselves to the following: Ibn Qūlūya and Ibn Bābūya have related some exquisite texts on 'collective pilgrimage'. See *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, ch. 104, pp. 330ff.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruḥu'l-faqīh* (Tehran, 1390/1970), vol. 2, pp. 370–376, no. 1625 (see note 5 above).

46. Ibn Qūlūya, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, p. 350, no. 13.

Some phrases concerning the 'collective pilgrimage', dating back to the tenth imam 'Alī al-Naqī and reported by Ibn Bābūya in his *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruḥu'l-faqīh*, go even further and present this unique theophanic being which is composed of the whole group of imams as a divine reality hidden in the depths of each person, cradled within each reality. Every prayer in reality is addressed to the imam, to the being that reveals God; every sincere pilgrimage is made to the theophanic entity that the Shi'a call the imam:

Your worship is in each worshipper, your names in all names, your body in all bodies, your spirit in all spirits, your soul in all souls, your sign in all signs and your tombs in all tombs.⁴⁷

It is the presence of a transcendental reality, mediated by the figure of the imam, that transforms prayer into an intense spiritual experience. The mystics have gone so far as to endow this experience with 'organic' fundamentals.

5

Vehicle for the revealed God, the spiritualised and internalised figure of the imam thus becomes the object of invocation. This is possible for the most humble of believers as well as the mystic, since prayer lends itself to contemplative practices and a visionary experience. Let us review for a moment what Corbin said regarding the initiatory practice of prayer in Ibn 'Arabi: 'Prayer is not a request for something: it is the expression of a mode of being, a means of existing and of *causing to exist*, that is, a means of causing the God who reveals Himself to appear, of "seeing" Him, not to be sure in His essence, but in the *form* which He reveals precisely by revealing Himself by and to that form.'⁴⁸

47. Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruḥu'l-faqīh*, vol. 2, p. 374.

48. See H. Corbin, *L'imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi* (Paris, 1958) in note 2 above.

In Imami mysticism, the initiatory practice of prayer seems linked to what from the earliest sources is called 'the vision by (or 'in') the heart (*al-ru'ya bi'l-qalb*)'. Elsewhere, we have examined at length the many allusions to this secret practice, going back to the compilations of the third and fourth/ninth and tenth centuries, both in terms of its theoretical foundations and historical development.⁴⁹ We will therefore describe this practice only briefly here. Two *ḥadīths* going back to the first and sixth imams respectively, perfectly illustrate how it is perceived in Imami mysticism. Someone once asked 'Ali if he could see the God to whom he prayed. He replied: 'I would not worship a God that I could not see' and then added: 'However, the naked eye cannot attain Him by its sight; it is the hearts that see Him by means of the realities of faith.'⁵⁰

Replying to a disciple's question regarding the vision of God on the Day of Resurrection, Ja'far al-Šādiq is said to have declared: 'The initiated followers already see Him in this world before the Day of Resurrection. Do you not see him at this very moment before you [i.e. in myself as the locus of manifestation of God]?' And in response to the bewildered disciple who seeks permission to relate this answer to others, the imam says: 'No, because a negator unaware of the true meaning of these words will use them to accuse us of associationism. Now, the vision of the heart differs from ocular vision and God transcends descriptions by the assimilationists and the heretics.'⁵¹

The initiate can thus experience a vision of the imam as the sublime divine theophany in his heart. Other traditions allude to the modalities of this spiritual experience: contemplation of light,

49. On *al-ru'ya bi'l-qalb* in Imamism, see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 112–145 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 44–55) and 'La vision par le cœur dans l'Islam shi'ite', *Connaissance des Religions*, special issue, 'Lumières sur la voie du cœur', 57–59 (1999), pp. 146–169; also Chapter 10, this volume.

50. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, 'kitāb al-tawḥīd', ch. 9, no. 6; Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ch. 8, p. 109, no. 6.

51. Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, p. 117, no. 20. For the translation of *mu'minūn* as 'initiates' at the beginning of this *ḥadīth*, see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, index, and Chapter 8 here.

or more exactly of coloured glimpses at the level of the heart; the nature or form of the object seen; consequences and implication of the experience etc. In brief, one can say that due to the spiritual teachings and to ascetic and initiatory practices *walāya*, love of the imam, can be crystallised at the level of the heart in the form of a luminous 'energy' composed of glimpses of several colours, or lights, named, among other things 'the light of *walāya*'. By practising concentration upon the heart, this light gives access to a living entity, present in the centre of the heart. This is none other than each person's inner Guide, 'the imam present in the heart'; for each individual seeker of truth this is an internal reflection of the external imam's reality, a reflection of the cosmic Imam who in turn is none other than the revealed Face of God. By a practice of successive theophanies, the mystical teaching of the imams thus enables one to discover God in one's own heart.

These allusions to the initiatic 'exercise' of 'the vision by the heart', perhaps related to what was taught in the entourage of the imams, appear to be the earliest attestations to it in esoteric Islamic literature. The practice would thus have been introduced to Islam by the Shi'a, but is also widespread in Sunni Sufism.⁵²

As for Imami Sufi Shi'is, arriving on the scene from the Safawid period onwards, in a few major mystical orders (mainly from the eleventh/seventeenth century), they present themselves as inheritors of two traditions, the Imami and the Sufi.⁵³ It is they especially

52. On the role of the heart in Sunni Sufism, now consult G. Gobillot and P. Ballanfat, 'Le cœur et la vie spirituelle chez les mystiques musulmans', *Connaissance des Religions*, special issue, 'Lumières sur la voie du cœur', 57–59 (1999), pp. 170–204; see also A. Ventura, 'La presanza divina nel cuore', *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, 3 (1985), pp. 54–74 and 'L'invocazione del cuore' in *Yād Nāma...Alessandro Bausani* (Rome, 1991), pp. 475–485.

53. Regarding these orders, see R. Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, 3 vols (Wiesbaden, 1965–1981); and now, L. Lewisohn, 'An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism. Part I: Ni'matullāhiyya', *BSOAS*, 61/3 (1998), pp. 437–464 and 'An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism. Part II: A Socio-cultural Profile of Sufism from the Dhahabī Revival to the Present Day', *BSOAS*, 62/1 (1999), pp. 36–59. There are four major Imami mystical orders: the first three, Dhahabiyya, Ni'matullāhiyya and Khāksār,

who relate the initiatory practice of prayer to the experience of 'vision by the heart'. The role of the imam, an internalised figure in terms of being the object of prayer, is obviously central here. Here too, given the secret nature of the practices, the texts are highly allusive and the vocabulary very technical. However, with a basic understanding of the history of the practice, certain sources appear less obscure. For example, Mullā Muḥammad Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh, great Ni'matullāhī master of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, writes in his important work in Persian, *Majma' al-sa'ādāt*:

He who possesses senses pertaining only to the sense-perceptible realm of God is able to know the imam only in his physical human form (*bashariyya*). But he whose senses pertaining to the celestial realm have been activated is able to acquire knowledge of the imam as Light (*nūrāniyyat-e imām*). When the disciple pledges an oath of allegiance to a master authorised by the imam [i.e. the legitimate spiritual master of the mystical order] and when the master places his hand in the disciple's, the celestial luminous form of the imam is introduced into the heart of the disciple through the initiatory hand gesture. This luminous form is variously called the Face of the imam, *walāya* or finally, the love of 'Alī.

It is by virtue of this Visage of Light that a filial relationship is established between the imam and his followers and that the initiated become true brothers ... In the external physical world, this divine manifestation occurs through the figure of the hidden imam (as the living imam of our time) and his final manifestation as the Resurrector. In the internal spiritual world, it constitutes one of the theophanic degrees of the Light of the imam in the heart, a degree that one denotes by terms such as 'presence', 'serenity' or 'contemplation' (*ḥudūr, sakīna, fikr*). This is what illuminates the adept, enabling him to recognise the imam as the light of the heart. This is what the Prince of initiates [i.e. 'Alī] means when he declares:

'To know me as Light (*ma'rifatī bi'l-nūrāniyya*) is to know God and to know God is to know me as Light. He who knows me as Light is an initiate whose heart has been tested for faith by God (*mu'min*

consider themselves Sufis. The fourth, the Shaykhiyya, refuses to consider itself a Sufi order and describes itself as a theologico-mystical brotherhood.

imtahana'llāh qalbahu li'l-īmān) . . . This indeed is *walāya* and he who professes my *walāya*, this person may truly accomplish his prayer.'⁵⁴

Whence the Shi'i adage that mystical texts repeat frequently in many forms: he who knows himself knows his imam, and he who knows his imam knows his Lord. In Imami mysticism, the vision of the Face of the imam in the heart – contemplation of the esoteric form of the physical imam – appears to be one of the main aims of spiritual practices of concentration. Thus is born the believer's spiritual being. The above-cited Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh continues:

The manifestation of the luminous Face of the imam in the heart brings wisdom to the adept and awakens his capabilities for celestial perception, giving him access to the contemplation of the inhabitants of the heavens. He can thus free himself from the shackles of time and space, walk on water or upon the air, travel miraculously from one place to another.⁵⁵

Among certain masters of the Dhahabiyya order, the information is even more specific and the links to prayer become explicit. An Imami Shi'i branch of the long established and powerful Kubrawiyya order, are bearers of a long spiritual and literary tradition dating back to the order's namesake, Najm al-Dīn Kubrā himself (617/1220–1221), a tradition that includes visionary experiences of contemplation of the inner master and the accompanying coloured luminosity.⁵⁶

54. Mullā Muḥammad Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh, *Majma' al-sa'ādāt* (2nd edn, n.p., 1394/1974), pp. 289ff. The expression 'the initiate [lit. 'faithful believer'] whose heart God has tested for faith' is found in the earliest sources, very often in relation to the practice of concentration on the heart; see *Guide divin*, index under '*imtiḥān* (*al-qalb*)'.

55. Mullā Muḥammad Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh, *Majma'*, p. 291.

56. On this subject, see H. Corbin, *L'homme de lumière dans le soufisme iranien* (2nd edn, Paris, 1971), English trans. as *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, tr. Nancy Pearson (New York, 1971); the fundamental work by Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, ed. F. Meier in *Die Rawā'iḥ al-jamāl wa fawātiḥ al-jalāl des Najm*

First, the contemplative practice of 'vision by the heart' is denoted by the term, *wijha* or *wajha* (*vejhe* in Persian), as rich as it is evocative. Not only does it mean, 'what is related to the face' but also 'the direction in which prayer is oriented', referring to the Qur'ānic verse 2:148: *wa li-kulli wijhatun huwa muwallihā* ('To each a direction towards which to turn in prayer', as translated by Arberry). According to the Dhahabi texts, the aim of this practice is the contemplation of the Face of the imam, identical to the Face of God. Vision is possible, not by the naked eye but by the eye of the heart and it is achieved by initiation, self-effacement and spiritual rebirth in the love of the imam.⁵⁷ The Light of 'the imam of the heart' is in fact composed of many layers of coloured lights, each revealing an aspect of the inner Guide's reality on the one hand and the adept's degrees of progress on the other. The adept is thus able to perform his true prayer since he has found the true direction of prayer, in this way fulfilling the initiatory requirement of the order as formulated by the master Rāz Shīrāzī (1286/1869): 'To perform your prayer, first discover the direction of prayer.'⁵⁸ He seems to be the author who has provided the most important information regarding this practice. In response to his disciple who asks him to explain why the Dhahabi dervishes call 'Alī al-Riḍā the eighth imam, 'the seventh direction of prayer' (*qibla-ye haftom*), he states:

Know, dear and honourable son, that this important question touches upon one of the greatest secrets of the heart . . . its true understanding is only possible by the unveiling of the heart by the Masters of the heart (*kashf-e qalbī-ye arbāb-e qulūb*) . . . The reason

ad-Dīn Kubrā (Wiesbaden, 1957), has now been translated into French by P. Ballanfat as *Les éclosions de la beauté et les parfums de la majesté* (Nîmes, 2001).

57. See the anonymous summary, *Vejhe chīst?*, a publication of the Dhahabiyya Aḥmadiyya (n.p., n.d.), (above, Chapter 10).

58. *Cho qibla yāftī āngah namāz ast*, see for example, Rāz Shīrāzī, *Miršād al-'ibād* (Tabriz, n.d.), p. 14, and *Risāla-ye ḥall-e ishkāl-e davāzdah su'al-e ... Rā'iq al-Dīn Zanjānī*, in Ḥasan Palāsī Shīrāzī, *Tadhkirat Shaykh Muḥammad b. Šadiq al-Kujuji* (Tehran 1367/1947), p. 126.

for this noble title, just as for other titles given the holy imam, such as 'companion of souls' (*anīs al-nufūs*) and 'the Sun of suns' (*shams al-shumūs*)⁵⁹ is the radiance of the Light of his love (*walāya*) in the believer's heart. This holy light does not only belong to him since all the imams are in fact the Light descended from God for His creatures. . . But as the initiatic chain of [our] School begins with the eighth imam, it is thus the blessed form of the latter that manifests itself in a [subtle centre called] 'the blackish secret of the heart' belonging to his Friends (*sirr-e suwaydā'-e qalb-e awliyā'*) This centre is the seventh level of the heart that manifests itself to the Friends . . . Know that the Seven Levels [or 'Seven Mountains' *aṭwār-e sab'a*] in the heart of the saintly Friends denote the places for manifestation of seven Lights varying in colour; the seventh among them is the black Light, that is of the sacrosanct Essence of Unitude. It is well and truly this Light that appears to the Friends [belonging to our order] in the blessed form of the eighth imam. It is the luminous form of a bright, magnificent, transparent black of extreme intensity. This is 'the companion of souls', the 'Sun of suns' and 'direction of prayer' located within the seventh level of the heart. For the great [mystics], directing one's true prayers in this true direction (*qibla*) is a canonical duty.⁶⁰

Let us return to this 'dialogic state' of prayer that Henry Corbin spoke about; to this reciprocity that transforms a simple invocation into a transformative experience. By prayer, the Shi'i seeker offers his imam his inner focus, his efforts at concentration and

59. We have already encountered these titles of the eighth imam in 'the prayer of the twelve imams' attributed to Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (cf. note 27 above). Far from being simply poetic or metaphoric images, the Dhahabī mystic explains that, invoked by the faithful during prayer, they designate spiritual realities likely to be experienced by the mystic in what one might call an 'organic' fashion.

60. Rāz Shirāzī, *Risāla-ye ḥall-e ishkāl-e davāzdah su'āl*, pp. 125–126. See also A. Khāvari, *Dhahabīyya* (Tehran, 1362/1963), vol. 1, pp. 141ff. Regarding these practices see Chapter 10, this volume. On the heart as the veritable Ka'ba (direction of prayer) among Muslim mystics, see L. Massignon, *La passion de Hallāj, martyr mystique de l'Islam* (Paris, 1975), index under 'qalb (qulūb)' and 'Ka'ba, Ka'bāt'. See also Corbin, *L'imagination créatrice*, section 2, ch. 2; M. Gloton, 'Les secrets du cœur selon l'Islam', *Connaissance des Religions*, special issue 'Lumières sur la voie du cœur', 57–59 (1999), pp. 118–145.

contemplation, above all his entire presence imbued with love (*walāya*). The Imam, the object of his follower's devotion and prayer, his true 'lord', provides him with either 'ilm, the salvational knowledge, or 'amal, the miraculous act, or still more love, a surfeit of *walāya* with regard to the imam and all divine beings.⁶¹ By prayer, the theological exposition of successive theophanies, as we have already discussed on many occasions, undergoes a transmutation into a theological exposition of presence: the physical, external, terrestrial imam renders God present in the sense-perceptible world, whereas the spiritual, internal imam renders the terrestrial imam present in the heart of the believer. This is so for mystics, philosophers and theosophers but also for the most humble of believers in whom we can discern this reciprocity. In his prayer the latter offers his supplication, his love and suffering. In return, the imam grants his wishes, alleviates his sorrow and brings him peace and serenity, assuring him of the imam's intercession (*shafā'a*) before God, whether in this life or in the hereafter.⁶²

In conclusion, let us once more call upon Corbin and through him Ibn 'Arabī, in order to appreciate to what extent prayer constitutes a spiritual space where, as we have seen, not only traditionalist and rationalist Imamis are in agreement but so also are Sunni and Shi'i mystics:

We are now very close to the denouement that will crown the *monājāt*, 'confidential psalm', remembrance, meditation, recurrent presence One who meditates on his God 'in the present' maintains Himself in His company. And a tradition (*khavar ilāhī*) from a reliable source tells us: 'I myself keep company with him who meditates on me [maintains me present in himself].' But if the faithful believer's divine Lord keeps him company when the faithful remembers Him internally, he must, if he is endowed with

61. See for example, Majd al-Ashrāf (a Dhahabī master), *Mir'āt al-kāmilin* (Shiraz, n. d.), p. 34.

62. On *shafā'a*, now consult Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shi'ism*, pp. 180–189.

inner vision, *see* he who is thus present. This is called contemplation (*moshâhada*) and visualisation (*ru'ya*).⁶³ Of course, one who is without this sense of vision does not see Him. But this, says Ibn 'Arabî with gravity, is the criterion by which each worshipper (*mosalli*) can recognise his own level of spiritual progress. Either he *sees* his Lord who shows Himself to him (*tajalli*) in the subtle organ that is his heart or else he does yet see Him in this way; then let him worship Him through faith *as though he saw Him*. This injunction, which carries a profound savour of Shi'i Imamism [the imam being the theophanic form par excellence], is nothing other than a summons to set the power of the Active Imagination to work. 'Let the faithful represent Him by his Active Imagination, face to face in his *Qibla*, in the course of his intimate dialogue.'⁶⁴

Thus, the worshipper will direct himself, continues Corbin in his introduction to the thought of the great Andalusian mystic, from presence towards audition and from audition to vision to eventually perceiving the prayer of God which is no less than the ultimate reality of his own prayer, that is, 'the action of the Lord placing his faithful in the presence of his own Presence'.⁶⁵ It is here that, according to Sulţān 'Alî Shâh, the expert scholar on Ibn 'Arabî, vision becomes imageless, prayer becomes silence and all silence inner prayer.⁶⁶

63. It would be more precise to translate *ru'ya* as 'vision'.

64. H. Corbin, *Imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn Arabî*, pp. 195–196, *Alone with the Alone, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabî*, p. 262 (we have respected the author's italics and system of transliteration).

65. *Ibid.*, p. 196 (p. 262).

66. Mullâ Muḥammad Sulţān 'Alî Shâh, *Majma' al-sa'ādâ*, pp. 198–199. The Ni'matullâhî master links this evolution of the worshipper towards 'effacement' (*fanâ*) to knowledge, particularly that of the imam; according to him, knowledge of the 'incompleted ones' (*nâqishîn*) is limited to knowledge of the historical imams. For the 'intermediaries' (*mutawassifîn*), knowing God comes through knowing the imam as Light. Finally for the 'accomplished' (*muntahîn*), the highest manifestation of the Real is accompanied neither by sound nor image, because at this level, there is neither subject knowing nor object known.

Part IV: Aspects of Individual and Collective Eschatology

The End of Time and the Return to the Origin

Nowadays, in Islamic lands, the term 'eschatology' is almost always translated as *'ilm al-ma'ād*, *ma'ād shenāsī* or *'elm-e ma'ād* to cite only from the Arabic and Persian, the two major languages of Islamic culture; which is to say that learned Muslims have always perceived the notion of *ma'ād* as generally referring to the ultimate end of man and the world, incorporating other aspects of the *eskaton* such as *'āqiba*, *ḥashr*, *ba'th*, *qiyāma* or *ākhirā*. Now, as we know, *ma'ād* literally means the place of return or the very movement of returning towards the point of departure, whence the countless speculations by theologians, philosophers and mystics generally considering this eschatological notion either as a return to the source of being, namely God, or as a return to existence after death or resurrection.¹

As for Imami eschatology, it has already inspired a large number of studies;² however, to my knowledge, no critical study

1. L. Gardet, *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme* (Paris, 1967), passim; R. Arnaldez, 'Ma'ād', *EL2*, vol. 5, pp. 899–901; M. Smith and Y. Y. Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Albany, NY, 1981); J.-R. Michot, *La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne. Le retour à Dieu (ma'ād) et l'imagination* (Louvain, 1986) (this work, devoted to Avicenna's philosophy, also contains much valuable information on other authors and doctrinal trends).

2. E. Moeller, *Beiträge zur Mahdilehre des Islams* (Heidelberg, 1901); H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris, 1971–1972), vol. 4, pp. 301–460; A. A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The*

has as yet been devoted to the relationship that exists between the two crucial concepts of the End of Time and the Return to the Origin as established in the earliest sources, texts dating mainly from the pre-Buyid and Buyid periods,³ and developed subsequently by later thinkers. Notwithstanding, it seems to me that this relationship proves to be fundamental for not only a better understanding of the specific concepts regarding Imami eschatology and messianism but also a better appreciation of the key role played by the figure of the imam.

Established almost definitively in the early fourth/tenth century, Twelver messianism is entirely centred around the figure of the hidden imam, the twelfth and last, or the eschatological Saviour.⁴ The figure of the latter, his Occultation, his soteriological mission, his manifestation at the End of Time and the situation of the world at the moment of his coming constitute the principal subjects of the vast corpus of messianic and eschatological Imami literature, to such an extent that the more classical material such

Idea of the Mahdī in Twelver Shi'ism (Albany, NY, 1981); J. M. Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background* (London, 1982). To place the analysis provided by these monographs in a larger historical context, see e.g. J. Aguade, *Messianismus zur Zeit der frühen Abbassiden: Das Kitāb al-Fitan des Nu'aim b. Hammād* (Tübingen, 1979) or J. O. Blichfeldt, *Early Mahdism: Politics and Religion in the Formative Period of Islam* (Leiden, 1986). For sources and other studies, now consult M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Eschatology in Imami Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol. 8, pp. 575–581.

3. Regarding these sources, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 48–58 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 19–22).

4. E. Kohlberg, 'From Imāmiyya to Ithnā'ashariyya', *BSOAS*, 39 (1976), pp. 521–534 (rpr. in *Belief and Law in Imāmi Shi'ism*, article XIV); V. Klemm, 'Die vier *Sufarā*' des Zwölften Imām. Zur formativen Periode der Zwölferšī'a', *Die Welt des Orients*, 15 (1984), pp. 126–143; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Al-Šaffār al-Qummi (d. 290/902–3) et son *Kitāb basā'ir al-darajāt*', *JA*, 280/3–4 (1992), pp. 221–250, esp. pp. 236–242; H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam* (Princeton, 1993) part 1; S. A. Arjomand, 'The Consolation of Theology: Absence of the Imam and Transition from Chiliasm to Law in Shi'ism', *The Journal of Religion*, 21 (1996), pp. 548–571 and 'The Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation in Twelver Shi'ism', *IJMES*, 28 (1996), pp. 491–515. Also, Chapter 13, this volume.

as the description of the final Tribunal of the resurrection, the fate of the elected in paradise or that of the damned in hell seem comparatively meagre and secondary.⁵ The first major source for this genre of literature would be *Kitāb al-ghayba* by Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ‘Ibn Abī Zaynab’ al-Nu‘mānī (d. ca. 345/956), which is the earliest monograph regarding the hidden imam that has come down to us.⁶ Widely and regularly used by later authors, in this section it will constitute our main source.

The End of Time and the manifestation of the Saviour consists of two dimensions, responding it seems to the pair, *ẓāhir/bāṭin*, omnipresent in Shi‘ism: a collective, universal, external dimension supposed to occur in ‘history’ in order to disrupt or shatter it, and then another entirely individual internal dimension, shattering the being of the faithful.⁷ For the sake of clarity, it is useful to examine our subject – the relationship between the notions of *ākhir al-zamān* and *ma‘ād* – in each of these two dimensions.

1

What characterises the End of Time, and in a manner renders the manifestation of the Hidden Imam indispensable, is the widespread invasion of the earth by Evil, the crushing of the forces of Light by forces of Darkness, the universal rule of violence, injustice and ignorance; whence the sacred formulaic statement: ‘The Mahdī/Qā’im will rise at the End of Time and will fill the earth with justice just as before it overflowed with oppression and injustice (or “darkness”) (*sa-yaqūmu’l-mahdī/al-qā’im fī ākhir al-zamān fa-yamla’u’l-arḍ ‘adlan kamā mali’at jawran wa ẓulman/ẓuluman*).’ The universal Deliverance (*faraj*) will be accomplished only by violent means, by a terrible war.⁸ The

5. Amir-Moezzi, ‘Eschatology in Imami Shi‘ism’, pp. 575–576a.

6. Al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, Arabic text ed. ‘A. A. Ghaffārī with Persian trans. M. J. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1985).

7. ‘Eschatology in Imami Shi‘ism’, pp. 576bf.

8. *Guide divin*, pp. 283ff. (*Divine Guide*, pp. 116ff.).

Saviour will not only deliver the oppressed of the period but also avenge all the accumulated injustices over the ages.

He [i.e. the Mahdī] will rise, emboldened by the spirit of revenge and anger, grief-stricken with the wrath of God striking the creatures. He will be dressed in the shirt worn by the Messenger of God on the day of [the battle of] Uḥud, as well as al-Saḥāb, his 'turban with a train' (*imāmathu al-saḥāb*), his imposing armour and his sword, Dhu'l-faḡār. For eight months, he will have his sword drawn, killing with no respite.⁹

Aided in his mission by God, the Mahdī – final successor to Muḥammad – is bound to be victorious:

He will bear the Prophet's standard (*rāya*) whose pole is made from pillars of the Throne of God ('*umud al-'arsh*), and His Mercy (*rahma*); the fabric from His triumphal Assistance (*naṣr*). All that is touched by this standard, will be annihilated by God.¹⁰

Apart from divine assistance, the Mahdī is helped by other companions of war. Who might they be, and generally speaking, who are the protagonists of the Battle? The forces of Good, those that fight on the imam's side, are composed of various kinds of 'support'. First, according to Imami doctrine of the 'return to life' (*al-raja'a*),¹¹ some individuals, mostly great figures from sacred history, victims of injustice and impiety of their day, will be revived in order to help the Mahdī in his final battle and to avenge their oppressors and tyrants; these antagonists will also return to life in

9. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ch. 19, pp. 437–438, no. 2 (tradition attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq).

10. Ibid., p. 438, no. 3 (Muḥammad al-Bāqir), p. 441, no. 5 (Ja'far al-Ṣādiq); see also al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī, 4 vols (Tehran, n.d.), 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb mā 'inda'l-a'imma min šilāḥ rasūl Allāh', vol. 1, pp. 337–343.

11. R. Freitag, *Seelenwanderung in der islamischen Häresie* (Berlin, 1985), pp. 29–34; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin and New York, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 285–308; E. Kohlberg, 'Radj'a', *EI2*, vol. 8, pp. 371–373.

order to be punished.¹² The traditions differ on the exact identity of the saintly individuals but some names recur more frequently than others: 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib,¹³ al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī and generally the Impeccable Ones (the Prophet Muḥammad, his daughter Fātima and the first eleven imams), the mysterious prophet mentioned in Q 19:54–55, Ismā'īl 'True to his promises' (*ṣādiq al-wa'd*)¹⁴ and Jesus Christ who according to a well-known tradition, will participate in prayers led by the Qā'im.¹⁵

Just as when the major prophets faced trials in their missions, in his battle, the imam will be assisted by angels, archangels and celestial beings: the angels who accompanied Noah in the Ark, Abraham when he was cast into fire, Moses when he parted the sea, Jesus when God raised him to be with himself;¹⁶ the different troops of angels mentioned in the Qur'an, the *murdifīn* (angels in procession i.e. coming one after another, Q 8:9), the *munzalin* (angels descended from Above, Q 3:124), the *musawwimīn* (the swooping angels, Q 3:125), the Cherubim (*karrūbiyyīn*), Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel and the Frightful One (*al-ru'b*), a terrifying celestial being, bringing victory to the Mahdī's army by 'marching' alongside it.¹⁷

12. The notion of *raj'a* in the sense just mentioned is also called *hashr khāṣṣ* ('particular resurrection') as distinct from return to universal life for the Last Judgement called *hashr 'amm* ('general resurrection').

13. In this context, surnamed *ṣāhib al-karrāt*, 'Master of cyclical Returns'; *karra*, pl. *karrāt* is here synonymous with *raj'a* (see E. Kohlberg, 'Radj'a').

14. According to Imami tradition, he was the son of the Prophet Ezekiel and was seized, dismembered and executed by his own ungrateful people.

15. Ibn Qūlūya al-Qummī, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* (lithograph, Iran, n.d.), ch. 19, pp. 65ff.; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* (Tehran and Qumm, 1376–1392/1956–1972), vol. 51, pp. 77–78 and vol. 53, pp. 101–117; in general, see al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *al-Īqāz min al-haj'a fi'l-burhān 'alā'l-raj'a*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Qumm, 1381/1962).

16. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ch. 19, pp. 439–440.

17. Ibid., ch. 13, pp. 337f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'ma*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Qumm, 1405/1985), vol. 1, ch. 33, p. 331.

There is particular insistence on the 313 angels who accompanied the Prophet on the day of the Battle of Badr.¹⁸ In this eschatological context, comparisons with this famous battle are constantly made. Badr is considered Muḥammad's first major victory against the disbelievers and in a way represents the beginning of the establishment of Islam. The battle of the Qā'im will signal the ultimate and definitive victory of initiatory religion of the imams against their 'enemies'. Badr universally established the exoteric dimension of religion; the manifestation (*zuhūr*) and rising (*qiyām*, *khurūj*) of the Mahdī will universally establish the esoteric religion. Moreover, the core of the Saviour's Army is composed of initiates. The Companions of the Qā'im (*aṣḥāb al-qā'im*), whom tradition also calls 'the militia' (*jaysh*), 'the militia of anger' (*jaysh al-ghaḍab*) or 'men of sincere devotion' (*ahl al-ikhhlāṣ/al-khullaṣ*)¹⁹ are also, like the soldiers of Badr, 313 in number.²⁰

An entire series of traditions describe them as warriors initiated into the secret Science ('*ilm*):²¹ each one of them bears a sword upon which is inscribed a 'thousand words, each leading to another thousand', a sacred statement denoting Imami initiation.²² At the moment of the Rising, when the Qā'im launches his appeal from Mecca, they will come to join him by supra-natural means, by the

18. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ch. 19, pp. 440f.

19. Ibid., pp. 285, 378f., 443f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, pp. 268 and 331, vol. 2, pp. 378, 654, 671f.

20. It should be noted in passing that the numeric value of the term *jaysh* is 313: *jīm* = 3, *yā'* = 10, *shīn* = 300. On the existence of the esoteric science of letters in early Imamism, and for relevant sources, see *Guide divin*, index, under '*ilm al-ḥurūf*' and '*ḥisāb al-jummal*'.

21. For more on this concept see *Guide divin*, pp. 174–199 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 69–75).

22. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 447ff.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, p. 671; for the sacred formula see al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, ed. Mīrzā Kūchebāghī (Tabriz, n.d. [ca. 1960]), part 6, ch. 18, pp. 309–312; part 7, ch. 1, pp. 313–315; Ibn Bābūya, *al-Khiṣāl*, ed. M. B. Kamare'i (Tehran, 1361 Sh./1982), pp. 326f.

power of the Supreme Name of God and by supernatural aerial travel. Once gathered in Mecca, their swords will descend from heaven. Sent by the imam to places throughout the earth, they will dominate absolutely everything; even the birds and wild beasts will obey them. For difficult decisions, they will receive directives from the imam that will be written on the palms of their hands. Knowledge of the Supreme Name of God will provide them with miraculous powers such as walking on water and soaring through the heavens, etc.²³

Poised against the divine forces of justice and knowledge are those of oppression and ignorance led by illustrious eschatological characters such as al-Dajjāl or al-Sufyānī. Based on what emerges from messianic Imami traditions, we come to realise that the Qā'im's adversaries in the final battle are not the disbelievers but rather ignorant Muslims.²⁴

23. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfi*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Tehran, 1389/1969), vol. 2, p. 145; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 352f., 445f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, pp. 672f.

24. For a better appreciation of what is to follow, it seems necessary to recall some fundamental concepts that underpin the Imami 'theory of opponents' (*ḍiddiyya*). The omnipresent pair *ẓāhir/bāṭin* is obviously also at work in the revelation. Divine Truth is manifested in two forms: the exoteric aspect of Truth is revealed by the legislating prophethood (*nubuwwa*) which brings to the masses (*ʿamma*) a Sacred text 'descended from heaven' (*tanzīl*). The secret dimension of Truth, its esoteric aspect, enveloped by the letter, is revealed thanks to the initiatory mission of the imam (*imāma*, *walāya*, *amr*), accompanying each prophetic mission and bringing to an elite minority (*khāṣṣa*) the veritable hermeneutics of the sacred Book which 'returns [the Book] to its Origin (*ta'wīl*)'. Each religion has thus had its 'Shi'is'. As Muḥammad is considered the 'Seal of Prophets', historical Shi'ism presents itself as the last link in the chain of the initiatory tradition of sacred History. Due to this, the imam is naturally presented as the leader of the forces of knowledge. At the same time, it is said that these, especially the imam at the helm, always endure adversity inflicted by the forces of ignorance. Indeed each revelation of the divine Word within the community of the Book gives rise to a certain number of 'adversaries' (*ḍidd*, pl. *aḍḍād*) or 'enemies' (*aduww*, pl. *a'dā'*) who deny the very existence of a hidden meaning to revelation, and thus oppose the imam's mission and betray the prophet by cutting off religion from its most profound element, dragging the majority of the community, the People of the Exoteric (*ahl al-ẓāhir*), into

On the occasion of his Rising, our Qā'im will have to confront ignorance (*jahl*) even greater than that of the ignorant ones faced by the Messenger of God during the Age of Ignorance [before Islam] (*juhhāl al-jāhiliyya*) . . . For, at the time of the Prophet, the people worshipped stones, rocks, plants and wooden statues, but when our Qā'im will summon the people [to his Cause], they will interpret the entire Book of God [i.e. the Qur'ān] against him and will argue against him and use the Book to fight him (*kulluhum yata'awwalū 'alayhi kitābi'llāh yahtajjū 'alayhi bihi wa yuqātilūnahu 'alayhi*).²⁵

The enemies of the Mahdī are naturally the descendants of the adversaries in the history of Shi'ism. In a prophetic tradition reported by Ja'far al-Šādiq, after telling 'Alī that the Mahdī will be one of the descendants of al-Ḥusayn, the Prophet addresses al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the namesake of the Abbasids, thus:

'Uncle of the Prophet! Do you wish me tell you about what the Angel Gabriel revealed to me?' 'Yes, Messenger of God.' – 'Gabriel said to me: "Your descendants will have to bear suffering inflicted by the descendants of al-'Abbās."' – 'Messenger of God, must I avoid women [to avoid having descendants]?' – 'No, God has already decided from whom they will come.'²⁶

In addition, a number of eschatological traditions have a pronounced anti-Arab flavour, no doubt because, from the Imami perspective, those truly responsible for the decadence of religion from overlooking 'Alī to the persecution and assassination of the imams and their followers were Arab Muslims. 'Misfortune to the

ignorance, injustice and violence. In the Islamic period, the 'Enemies' are those that reject the *walāya* of 'Alī and as a consequence, that of the other imams. In this case, this means almost all of the Companions, particularly the first three caliphs, the Umayyads, the 'Abbasids and generally speaking, those whom the Shi'is call 'the majority' (*al-akthar*) or 'the masses' (*al-'amma*), those who eventually came to be known as 'the Sunnis'; refer to Chapter 8 in this volume.

25. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 423–424 (tradition attributed to Ja'far al-Šādiq).

26. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 356f.

Arabs', 'Misfortune to the Arabs for the Evil that forebodes', 'Our Qā'im will be merciless against the Arabs', 'Between the Qā'im and the Arabs shall be nothing but the sword', 'Between the Arabs and us, only massacres will be left' and so on.²⁷

At the same time, it is said that almost all of the Companions of the Qā'im are 'non-Arabs' or Persians (*'ajam*). In response to the question: 'How many among those accompanying the Qā'im are Arabs?' imam Ja'far al-Šādiq is said to have answered: 'Very few,' 'But there are many Arabs who profess this Cause', 'The people will inevitably be tested, separated, riddled (*yumaḥḥašū wa yumayyazū wa yugharbalū*); many will fall from this riddle.'²⁸ According to a tradition dating back to imam al-Bāqir, the 313 Companions of the Qā'im are all sons of *'ajam*²⁹ and a saying attributed to Ja'far al-Šādiq seems to indicate that they profess a religion entirely different than exoteric Islam since: 'They resemble worshippers of the sun and moon (*shibh 'abadat al-shams wa'l-qamar*).'³⁰

In this gloomy picture of the Islamic community, the Shi'is are not better provided for than the others:

'When the standard of Truth (*rāyat al-ḥaqq*) [of the Qā'im] becomes manifest', Ja'far al-Šādiq is supposed to have said, 'the inhabitants of the Rising and Setting will curse it . . . due to what the people will have endured from his family before the Rising [*ahl baytihi* or according to another version, "from the Banū Hāshim"]'.³¹

27. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb al-tamḥiṣ wa'l-imtiḥān', vol. 2, pp. 194–197; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 337f.; al-Iskāfi, *Kitāb al-tamḥiṣ* (Qumm, n.d. [ca. 1995]), pp. 42f.

28. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 298–299; al-Iskāfi, *Kitāb al-tamḥiṣ*, p. 53.

29. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 448; al-Ṭūsī, Abū Ja'far, *Kitāb al-ghayba* (Tehran, 1398/1979), p. 284.

30. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 451–452.

31. Ibid., pp. 424–425.

In another tradition, going back to the same sixth imam, it is said: 'This event [i.e. the Rising of the hidden imam] will not take place until some among you [the Shi'is] spit in the face of the others, until some of you curse the others and accuse them of lying.'³² Only a small minority, 'the true Shi'is', that is, those initiated into the complete teachings of the imams, will be spared from the clutches of Evil. This minority is composed of followers each of whose 'hearts has been tested by God for faith' (*al-mu'min imtahana'llāh qalbahu li'l-īmān*), those that are supported by the strength of their *walāya*, their certitude and knowledge.³³

The Mahdī's army, swelling in numbers with the mass of oppressed and volunteers won over to the Cause, will triumph. The Hijaz, Iraq, the East, Egypt, Syria and then Constantinople, will be conquered before the whole world surrenders to the Saviour. The 'Enemies' and their supporters will once and for all be wiped off the face of the earth; the world will be restored with justice, humanity will be revived by the light of knowledge. And what shall happen thereafter? The Saviour will prepare the world for the final Resurrection. According to some traditions, he will rule over the world for several years (seven, nine, nineteen . . . years) to be followed by the death of all humanity before the appearance of the final Tribunal. Other traditions report that after the death of the Qā'im, the government of the world will remain, for a relatively long time before the Day of Resurrection in the hands of the initiated wise ones.³⁴

* * *

Let us now consider accounts of the Origins, in cosmogonic traditions. These may be divided into two groups. The first concern

32. Ibid., p. 300; al-Iskāfī, *Kitāb al-tamhīṣ*, p. 43.

33. Refer to Chapter 8, this volume.

34. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 473–475; Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal al-sharāʿi' wa'l-aḥkām* (Najaf, 1385/1966), pp. 6f., and *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, p. 256; also Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 279–301 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 115–123) and 'Eschatology'.

what we might call exoteric cosmogony: the *ex nihilo* creation, the First Created Things, the cosmos of the seven heavens and the seven subterranean worlds, angelology and demonology, the Pillars of the universe, the regions, their inhabitants and the age of the universe etc. This information is generally found in one form or another in Muslim cosmographic works and is thus common to both Shi'i and Sunni literature. The second group seems specifically Shi'i and presents a cosmogony that one might define as esoteric since it contains material regarding the initiatory doctrine of the imams.³⁵ The tradition that interests us here (mainly because a comparison with eschatological elements proves to be significantly informative) belongs to the second group. This is the long and important *ḥadīth* of the 'Armies (*junūd*) of 'aql and *jahl*'. Several of the earliest sources report this tradition³⁶ and it has attracted the attention of many major interpreters of *ḥadīth*.³⁷ Here are some excerpts:

Samā'a b. Mihrān [Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥadramī al-Kūfī, disciple of the sixth and seventh imams, died in the second/seventh century in Medina] says: 'I was in the house of Abū 'Abd Allāh

35. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol. 6, pp. 317–22.

36. Al-Barqī, Abū Ja'far, *Kitāb al-maḥāsin*, ed. J. Muḥaddith Urmawī (Tehran, 1370/1950), vol. 1, pp. 96–98; Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'kitāb al-'aql wa'l-jahl', vol. 1, pp. 23–26; (Pseudo?) al-Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya* (Najaf, n.d.), pp. 1–3; Ibn Shu'ba, *Tuḥaf al-'uqūl 'an āl al-rasūl*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1366 Sh./1987), pp. 423–425.

37. Al-Majlisī, *Mir'āt al-'uqūl* (Tehran, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 45; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi* (lithograph, Tehran, 1283/1865), pp. 14ff.; al-Qazwīnī, Mullā Khalīl, *al-Shāfi fī sharḥ al-Kāfi* (lithograph, Lucknow, 1308/1890), pp. 21f. I have already devoted a study to the various meanings, technical or otherwise, of the term 'aql in the Imami corpus and have suggested translating it – in its cosmogonic dimension – as 'hiero-intelligence' to distinguish this level from other semantic levels of the notion such as 'reason', 'intellect', 'discernment' etc. See *Guide divin*, pp. 15–33 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 6–13); on this tradition see also D. Crow, 'The Role of al-'Aql in Early Islamic Wisdom, with Reference to Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq' (McGill University, Montreal, 1966), ch. 13; E. Kohlberg, 'Evil: in Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol. 9, pp. 182–185, esp. 182.

[i.e. Ja'far al-Šādiq] along with a group of his disciples. We spoke of Hiero-Intelligence and Ignorance. He then said: "Recognise Hiero-Intelligence and its Armies, Ignorance and its Armies and you will be on the well-guided path." — Samā'a: "May I serve you as ransom! We only know what you enable us to know."

‘Abū ‘Abd Allāh: "God, may He be glorified and exalted, created Hiero-Intelligence and it was the first of the spiritual beings (*rūḥāniyyīn*) to be created, drawn from the right-hand side of the Throne and from the Light of God.

"Then He ordered it to retreat and it retreated, to advance and it advanced. God then proclaimed: 'I created you glorious and gave you pre-eminence over all My creatures.' Then God created Ignorance from a bitter Ocean; He made it dark and commanded it to retreat and it retreated, to advance but it did not advance at all. God therefore said: 'Surely you have become arrogant' and He cursed it.

"God then created seventy-five Armies for Hiero-Intelligence. When Ignorance saw the divine generosity to Hiero-Intelligence, it felt a fierce hostility (*‘adāwa*) against it and addressed God thus: 'Lord! Here is a creature similar to me [Ignorance is also a "non-material" entity, a cosmogonical, archetypal counterforce]; You favoured and rendered it powerful; now, I am its adversary [lit. its Opponent, *ḍidd*] and I have no power. Give me troops similar to his.' 'So be it', answered God, 'but if you prove to be rebellious once again, I shall banish you and your troops from My Mercy.' 'Let it be so', said Ignorance. Then God created seventy-five Armies for it as well. Here then are the seventy-five Armies that God provided [for Hiero-Intelligence and Ignorance]: Good, minister of Hiero-Intelligence and its adversary (*ḍidduhu*), Evil, minister of Ignorance; Faith and its adversary Infidelity . . . Justice and its adversary Injustice . . . Clemency and its adversary Wrath . . . Knowledge and its adversary Ignorance . . . the Preservation of secrets and its adversary, Divulging of secrets . . . Wisdom and its adversary Passion . . . Joy and its adversary Sadness, etc."

We will set aside theological issues of divine justice or the origin of Evil that the *ḥadīth* includes and that have attracted and held the attention of commentators. In the context of the issue that interests us, the parallel with messianic-eschatological traditions is striking. One must first note that the correspondence, even the

identification between 'aql and the figure of the imam is constant in the early corpus of traditions attributed to the historical imams. 'Aql is said to be the 'interior proof' (*al-ḥujja'l-bāṭina*) of God whereas the imam is His 'exterior proof' (*al-ḥujja'l-zāhira*) (bear in mind that *ḥujja*, pl. *ḥujaj*, is one of the most recurring titles for the imams in general and the hidden imam in particular).³⁸ The imam is the exterior 'aql, whereas 'aql is the interior imam of the loyal-faithful.³⁹ According to a Prophetic tradition reported by imam 'Alī: 'The 'aql in the heart is like a lamp in the centre of a home.'⁴⁰ And Ja'far al-Šādiq is said to have declared: 'The status of the heart (seat of 'aql) within the body is the same as the status of the imam in the midst of men who owe him obedience.'⁴¹ Similarly, the adversaries of the imams are frequently called 'the guiding leaders of Ignorance (*a'immat al-jahl*) and their supporters', 'the ignorant ones (*juhhāl, jahala, ahl al-jahl*)'.⁴²

In the sayings of Ja'far al-Šādiq, as reported by Samā'a b. Mihrān, the usage of the term *jund*, pl. *junūd* (army, troops) is obviously not without significance. It relates to the archetypal Battle between two forces: Intelligence and Ignorance, in which their troops, the virtues and the vices, are elevated to the rank of cosmic forces and counterforces. It is the first battle of a universal war that defines the entire History of humanity by setting the imams, various prophets and their followers against their adversaries – the forces of counter-initiation and their leaders. In this context, the eschatological battle of the Mahdī is the last of this endless cosmic War which will seal the definitive victory of the Forces of Intelligence over those of Ignorance. This victory thus constitutes the *ma'ād*, the Return to the Origin, since by overcoming Ignorance and its Armies, the Mahdī restores

38. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, p. 19.

39. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 28–29; Ibn Shu'ba, *Tuḥaf al-'uqūl*, pp. 404ff.

40. Ibn Bābūya, *Ilal*, p. 98.

41. Ibid., p. 109.

42. *Guide divin*, see index.

the world to its original state, when *jahl* and its troops had not yet come into existence. In my translation of the *ḥadīth*, I have emphasised the adverb 'then' used on two occasions. This is so because Hiero-Intelligence was created first and 'then' Ignorance. The Armies of 'aql come into existence first and 'then' those of *jahl*. Moreover, in his commentary, Mullā Ṣadrā underlines the importance of the adverb (*ḥarf*, 'thumma' and 'fa-') to develop his philosophy on the Good Origin of creation.⁴³ By establishing his worldwide government over a population exclusively composed of faithful initiates (I shall return to this point later in this chapter), this Origin of creation is started again by the Saviour, when the universe was only peopled with the Hiero-Intelligence and its troops.

2

On the individual dimension of eschatology, information is much scarcer, more discreet, following the principle that almost always prevails in esoteric aspects of the teachings of the imams. Moreover, as we will see, the developments concerning this dimension are found especially in the works of later authors but, not surprisingly, the latter support their claims with information gathered from the early corpus.

Witnessing the manifestation of the Mahdī and being one of his Companions constitutes the most fortunate soteriological aspect of Imami piety. However, of course not everyone can witness the End of the World and it is undoubtedly for this reason that many traditions repeatedly state that to have faith in the invisible presence and eventual final advent of the Mahdī is equivalent to being a part of his Army. This hopeful note, perhaps originally meant for those disappointed and frustrated by an indefinite delay of the Saviour, at the same time introduced an individual soteriological dimension into Twelver eschatology. Believing in the hidden imam is an article of faith for all the faithful; for Shi'is, it even

43. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl min al-kāfī*, pp. 18–19.

constitutes part of putting them to the test (*imtiḥān, tamḥiṣ*); this in turn is one of the conditions of the period of Occultation that distinguishes ‘true Shi‘is’ from those simply in name (see above). However, as with all esoteric doctrines, teachings dating back to the imams contain many levels of understanding meant for different categories of disciples.⁴⁴ In fact, some *ḥadīths* seem to go much further than a simple invitation to an unconditional faith and an indefinite waiting period before the manifestation of the Saviour; they suggest that some especially advanced believers are able to know ‘the place where the hidden imam is located’, or, in other words, to establish contact with him and eventually see him:

The Qā‘im will enter two Occultations [allusions to the minor Occultation, *al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā*, from 260/874 to 329/940–941 and the major Occultation, *al-ghayba al-kubrā*, which began in 329 and continues to this day], one term short and the other long. During the first, only the elect few of the Shi‘is (*khāṣṣa shī‘atihi*) know where the imam is located and during the second, only those elect of the faithful Friends (*khāṣṣa mawālīhi*).⁴⁵

The expression ‘the elect of the Shi‘is’ no doubt refers to the four ‘representatives’ (*nā‘ib/wakīl/safīr*) of the hidden imam during the minor Occultation; according to tradition, during this period they alone had the privilege of knowing the ‘location’ of the imam. ‘The elect of the faithful Friends’ refers to the faithful who have been especially initiated in order to be able to communicate with the imam during the major Occultation.

The Lord of this Cause (*ṣāḥib ḥādḥā’l-amr*) will enter two Occultations, one of which will last so long that some among you [the Shi‘is] will say that he is dead, others that he was killed and still

44. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, ‘Du droit à la théologie: les niveaux de réalité dans le shi‘isme duodécimain’, in *L’Esprit et la Nature*, Groupe d’Etudes Spirituelles Comparées, 5 (1997), pp. 37–63.

45. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, ‘Bāb fi’l-ghayba’, vol. 2, pp. 141–142; al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 249–250.

others that he has [definitively] disappeared. Only some of the faithful (*aṣḥāb*) will remain true to his Cause, but none of his allied Friends (*wālī*) or others will know where he is located, except the faithful friend who champions his Cause (*al-mawlā'l-ladhī yalī amrahu*).⁴⁶

Hagiographical literature devoted to the Awaited imam (*al-muntazar*) indeed contains several reports of encounters with the hidden imam.⁴⁷ Now, according to Imami belief, the last signed letter from him, received by 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Simmārī, his fourth and last 'representative' during the minor Occultation, stipulates, among other things, that the hidden imam will henceforth no longer be seen by anyone until the End of Time. This is why this letter signals the beginning of the major Occultation.⁴⁸ One of the many attempts to reconcile these contradictory facts, derives from the mystical milieu of Shi'ism and develops the individual dimension of eschatology. To my knowledge, this interpretation is used for the first time by Sayyid Kāzīm al-Rashtī (d. 1259/1843), second great master and true founder of the theological mystical Shaykhiyya order. In response to a disciple, during a long exposition on the relationship between the believers and the hidden imam, al-Rashtī presents a rich and dense system of thought that may be summed up by the following syllogism: the hidden imam cannot be seen until the End of Time (according to his last letter); now some people have seen the hidden imam (according to numerous reports from reliable sources), therefore these individuals have reached the End of Time (i.e. the End of their 'time', the 'time' of their own egos). The conclusion reached in this syllogism is obviously meant in the sense of an initiatory death: the vision of the Resurrector imam (one of the meanings

46. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 250–251.

47. Chapter 13, this volume.

48. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, p. 516; al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 257; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 52, p. 151; Chapter 13, note 51 in this volume and the relevant text.

given by tradition to the word *qā'im*) signals the death of the ego and the resurrection, the rebirth, of the initiate.

Having cited the Prophetic *ḥadīth* 'Die before dying' (*mūtū qabla an tamūtū*) that mystical literature regularly advanced, Sayyid al-Rashtī gives a hermeneutical reading of some of the reports of encounters with the Qā'im. He concludes:

These accounts may be interpreted spiritually (*maḥmūl 'alā'l-ta'wīl*). These thirsty men, overburdened, sick, threatened and tortured, are symbols (*rumūz*) of suffering imposed by the perilous desert of spiritual quest (*tih al-ṭalab*) and the oppression of the thirst for the vision of the Beloved (*liqā' al-maḥbūb*). These dead men are brought to life by the imam, meaning to say, they have had a spiritual birth (*wilāda rūḥāniyya*) due to a vision of the radiant face of the imam and the initiation (*ṭa'lim wa talqīn*) that this vision includes.⁴⁹

This conception of some encounters with the Mahdī⁵⁰ was subsequently repeated in one form or another by other mystics belonging to Imami mystical orders, such as, for example, Mīrẓā Abu'l-Qāsim Rāz Shīrāzī (1286/1869), master of the Dhahabiyya, or Sayyid Aḥmad Dehkordī (1339/1920), master of the Khāksāriyya.⁵¹

It is obvious that the subject is a delicate one and when it concerns visionary experience, just as their predecessors had, these later authors limited themselves to allusive comments. Humility

49. Al-Rashtī, Sayyid Kāzim, *al-Rasā'il wa'l-masā'il* (lithograph, Tabriz, n.d.), pp. 356–365; Chapter 13 in this volume.

50. This initiatic context of eschatological bearing does not necessarily concern all those individuals, quite numerous in fact, to whom the hidden imam – mainly as a humanitarian gesture – appeared for specific reasons or by chance, and whose reports fill chapters, and even entire monographs, such as the works by Ṭabarsī/Ṭabrisī Nūrī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, published at the end of vol. 53 of the *Biḥār al-anwār* by al-Majlisī, and *al-Najm al-thāqib* (Qumm and Jamkarān, 1412/1991). See also Chapter 13, this volume.

51. Rāz Shīrāzī, *Mirṣād al-'ibād* (lithograph, Tabriz, n.d.) (published in a collection of his works), pp. 97–115, esp. pp. 98ff.; Dehkordī, Sayyid Aḥmad, *Burhān-nāme-ye ḥaqīqat* (lithograph, Tehran, n.d.), pp. 123ff.

and the duty to maintain secret (*taqiyya*, *kitmān*) are certainly factors, but also the penultimate sentence of the letter from the hidden imam, according to which whosoever claims to have seen the Mahdī before the End of Time is but an imposter and liar.⁵² Still, the analysis of such reports of encounters that are initiatory, soteriological and eschatological in nature, reveal some significant recurring motifs. The imam of the Time is always bathed in light or depicted in a luminous form. He initiates the witness into secret teachings that plunge him into a state of ecstasy and fill him with bliss. It is this state that some authors do not hesitate to describe as initiatory death and spiritual resurrection. Finally, the imam can be seen either 'externally', as a luminous physical person, or 'internally', as a luminous spiritual form in the subtle centre of the heart (*laṭīfa qalbiyya*). Some examples follow.

In his treatise *al-Muwāsa'a wa'l-muḍāyaqa*, Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn Ṭāwūs (664/1266) narrates in a highly allusive style, in the guise of a description of his companion's dreams, that he encountered the hidden imam in a state of deep contemplation, that the latter revealed secret knowledge of a higher order that drove him into a profound and intensely beatific state.⁵³

Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhijī (912/1506–1507) devotes a chapter to the Seals of prophethood and *walāya* in his monumental commentary on the *Golshan-e Rāz* by Maḥmūd Shabistārī (720/1317). In his long mystical account, in which his own encounter with the hidden imam is only hinted at, he explains that manifestation of the Mahdī is equivalent to the revelation of realities, of divine knowledge and secrets (*ḥaqā'iq*, *ma'ārif*,

52. Ṭabrisī Nūrī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, p. 236 and *al-Najm al-thāqib*, p. 474 (the account by Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī 'Baḥr al-'ulūm').

53. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Risāla fi'l-muḍāyaqa fi fawāt al-ṣalāt* (known as *al-Muwāsa'a wa'l-muḍāyaqa*) published in the margins of Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī, *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya* (lithograph, n.p. [Iran], 1321/1904), pp. 30–40, in particular pp. 36–37. It is interesting to note that this legalistic text by Ibn Ṭāwūs, on the rules concerning the forgetting of canonical prayers, is not *a priori* mystical in nature. Discreetly including a report of his encounter with the hidden imam in it seems to be a form of *taqiyya*.

asrār-e elāhī) and it is this that constitutes the reality of the Resurrection, transforming simple followers into 'Companions of the Qā'im' (*aṣḥāb-e qā'im*) and veritable men of knowledge (*ʿarīfān-e haqīqī*).⁵⁴

Mullā Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, known as Majlisī the First (1070/1659–1660), father of the famous author of *Biḥār al-anwār*, is said to have allusively stated in his *Sharḥ al-ziyāra al-jāmi'a l-kabīra* that he encountered the Mahdī on many occasions, both in dreams and in an awakened state. It is reported that regarding the following ecstatic experience, he wrote:

It is as though I tasted death and returned to my Lord due to his overwhelming presence [i.e. the Mahdī] and his blessed light (*ka-annī dhā'iq al-mawt wa rāji' ilā rabbī min fayḍ huḍūrihi'l-mutaḍammin wa nūrihi'l-mutabarrik*).⁵⁵

Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī (1241/1826), namesake of the Shaykhiyya order as well as Muḥammad Karīm Khān (1288/1870) his second successor in the Kirmānī branch, allude to their visionary experiences, in which the imams appear in the form of luminous beings, and mention that they achieved contentment through their initiation.⁵⁶ Although neither mystic master specifically mentions

54. Lāhijī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, *Mafātīḥ al-i'jāz fī sharḥ Golshan-e Rāz*, ed. M. R. Barzegar Khāleqī and 'E. Karbāsī (Tehran, 1371 Sh./1992), pp. 265–268.

55. Al-Aḥsā'ī, Shaykh Aḥmad, *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-jāmi'a* (lithograph, Tabriz, n.d.), p. 268; Bihbahānī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad 'Alī, *Mir'āt al-aḥwāl-e jahān-namā*, ed. 'A. Davānī (Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993), p. 70. The sentence clearly draws from two Qur'ānic passages. First, 'Every soul [one day] tastes death' (*kullu nafs dhā'iqatu'l-mawt*) (Q 3:185; 21:35 and 29:57). Secondly, 'O soul at peace, return unto thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing!' (*yā ayyatuhā al-nafsu'l-muṭma'inna/irji'i ilā rabbiki rāḍiyyatan marḍiyya*) (Q 89:27–28). The saying attributed to al-Majlisī seems thus to suggest that the encounter with the Resurrector signals the death of the ego and the resurrection of spiritual individuality.

56. Al-Hindī, Āghā Sayyid Hādī, *Tanbīh al-ghāfilin wa surūr al-nāzirin* (lithograph, n.p. [Tabriz], n.d.), pp. 53–54; al-Riḍawī, Mirzā Ni'mat Allāh, *Tadhkirat al-awliya'* (lithograph, Bombay, 1313/1895), p. 14.

the Mahdī among the imams encountered, given their mystical profession of faith which includes considering the latter 'the living imam of the Time' who certainly enters into contact with his 'Companions',⁵⁷ one can reasonably conclude that the vision of the Qā'im was also part of their spiritual experiences.

Later mystics, belonging to other Imami orders (Ni'matull-āhiyya, Dhahabiyya, Khāksāriyya, Uwaysiyya) mention the possibility of the vision of the imam, in the form of a luminous entity, in the subtle centre of the heart, and thus benefiting from this secret initiation. The assertion is almost always founded on the *ḥadīth* dating back to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, applied to all the imams and to the Qā'im in particular, as the 'imam of this Age':

To know me as Light is to know God, and to know God is to know me as Light. He who knows me as Light is a believer whose heart God has tested for faith' (*ma'rifatī bi'l-nūrāniyya ma'rifatu'llāh wa ma'rifatu'llāh ma'rifatī bi'l-nūrāniyya man 'arafani bi'l-nūrāniyya kāna mu'minan imtaḥana'llāhu qalbahu li'l-imān*).⁵⁸

This is 'vision by (or "in") the heart' (*al-ru'ya bi'l-qalb*), a spiritual experience whose outcome is said to be salvatory knowledge and paranormal powers.⁵⁹ It should be recalled that the expression 'the believer whose heart God has tested for faith' designates, among others, the Companions of the Qā'im, the 'true Shi'i' (cf. above). These later authors continually justify and corroborate their asser-

57. Al-Kirmānī, Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Tawḥīd nubuwwa imāma shī'a* (lithograph, Tabriz, 1310/1892), pp. 56–59.

58. Muzaḥfar 'Alī Shāh Kirmānī, *Kibrīt-e aḥmar* (+ *Baḥr al-asrār*), ed. J. Nūrbakhsh (Tehran, 1350 Sh./1971), pp. 5f.; Nūr 'Alī Shāh Gonābādī the Second, *Ṣālihiyya* (2nd edn, Tehran, 1387/1967), pp. 159f.; Palāsī Shirāzī, Ḥasan b. Ḥamza, *Tadhkire-ye Muḥammad b. Ṣādiq al-Kujujī* (Shiraz, n.d.), pp. 14, 18–25, 38, 68.

59. R. Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, Zweiter Teil, *Glaube und Lehre* (Wiesbaden, 1976), p. 207, n. 1073 and pp. 247–250; *Guide divin*, pp. 112–145 (for earlier sources) (*Divine Guide*, pp. 44–56) and refer especially to Chapter 10, this volume (where many other sources and studies are cited).

tions by traditions from the early corpus of sayings attributed to the imams. It is true that, ever since the early period, the influence of the hidden imam is constantly likened to an illumination or a luminous ray and it appears that for the followers, benefiting from this radiating effusion is only possible by mysterious or occult means, since on each occasion, each one adds that this is a sacred secret.⁶⁰ For example, in a tradition dating back to the Prophet and reported by Jābir al-Anṣārī, it is said that, during the Occultation, only those whose heart has been tested by God for faith will remain loyal to the hidden imam, that they shall be illuminated by his Light and will benefit from his friendship (*walāya*) just as one benefits from the sun while it is hidden by clouds; the saying ends with these words: 'This is God's sealed secret, a hidden treasure of divine knowledge. Jābir! Hide this secret from those who are not worthy of it.'⁶¹

In one section of the famous and extensive 'Prayer during the Qā'im's Occultation', it says: 'O Lord, show us eternally his Light [i.e. of the Mahdī] which has no shadow and by which dead hearts are revived . . . (*yā rabbi arinā nūrahu sarmadan lā ḡulma fihi wa aḡyi bihi'l-qulūb al-mayyita*).'⁶²

The initiate with 'a tested heart' can thus attain the luminous Reality of the imam, the ultimate aim of Imami teaching. As the Mahdī is the living imam of the Time, that is the Time of Occultation, he is naturally the focus of these elements and constitutes the principal aid for meditation and spiritual practice. His 'Encounter' and the initiation undertaken during it, entails salvation and is equivalent to individual resurrection. It is in this sense that our mystics understand the early traditions, attributed to many of the imams, such as: 'The advent or the delay of the End of Time bears no prejudice for one who knows the Qā'im', and 'He who knows

60. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, pp. 253, 372 and vol. 2, pp. 485f.

61. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 253.

62. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 515.

his imam is just as if he had already found himself inside the tent of the Awaited imam.⁶³

This individual eschatology corresponds fundamentally with certain cosmic and anthropogonic traditions of an esoteric nature. These accounts of the Origin can be regarded as narratives of the Primordial Initiation. I have described and analysed them elsewhere in detail.⁶⁴ Here, I will only describe them briefly in order to show their connection with individual eschatology.

Creation begins with calling a series of 'Worlds' and their inhabitants into existence; these are all non-material, as they have been created thousands of years before the creation of the material world. The first of these Worlds is called 'the Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*)' and its inhabitants, the first created beings, are the luminous formless entities of the Impeccable Ones (the Prophet, Fāṭima and the imams), drawn from the Light of God Himself. This pleroma is the Imam in the original, cosmic, archetypal dimension. Next is created the First World of Particles (*ālam al-dharr*, lit. 'ants', *al-awwal*) also called the First World of the Shadows (*ālam al-aẓilla al-awwal*) or the World of the Primordial Pact (*ālam al-mīthāq*). There the luminous entities take human form. Designated by expressions such as 'silhouettes of light' (*ashbāḥ nūr*), 'spirits made of light' (*arwāḥ min nūr*) or 'shadows of light' (*aẓilla nūr*), they undertake an archetypal circumambulation around the divine Throne, attesting to the Unicity (*tawḥīd*, *tahlīl*) and praising the Glory (*taḥmīd*, *tamjīd*, *taqdīs*, *tasbīḥ*) of God. Then the Particles or Shadows, that is, the non-material, pre-existent entities of the 'pure beings', enter this world: angels and other celestial entities, prophets and believers (*mu'minūn*), the latter being faithful to the imams of all the ages, those initiated to the esoteric dimension of all religions, different from the simple practitioners who have submitted only to the

63. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 470–473.

64. *Guide divin*, pp. 75–110 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 29–43); 'Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi'ism', *Elr*, vol 6, pp. 317–322; Chapter 4 in this volume.

exoteric religion (*muslimūn*). After taking an oath of allegiance, the 'pure beings' are initiated by the Imam of Light into the secret knowledge of the Unicity and the Glory (*asrār 'ilm al-tawhīd wa'l-tahmīd*).⁶⁵ The subsequent phases in the cosmo-anthropogony, such as the creation of the Second World of Particles and Adam's descendants, that is, their non-material entities or the creation of the physical world, are not dealt with here as these points do not bear upon our current subject.

One can readily see that in these accounts of the Origin we find the essential elements of individual eschatology: the imam in his form of light, the elect of tested believers, the initiation into secrets. Everything occurs as if the Encounter and initiation of the hidden imam bathed in light provokes the *ma'ād* of the faithful 'with the tested heart', his Return to this Origin where his non-material, pre-existent being was initiated by the luminous entity of the Imam with divine, secret knowledge, and his individual resurrection was effected by the same.

The initiatory dimension of the *ma'ād* is also very present in collective, universal eschatology. The supporters of the Qā'im during his final battle are exactly the same as the 'pure beings' initiated in the First World of the Particles: angels, celestial entities, prophets and saints, faithful initiates (cf. above). After his victory, the Saviour brings wisdom for all human beings won over to his Cause:

During the Manifestation [of the Qā'im], God will place the hand of our Qā'im upon the head of the faithful; due to this hand, they will have their wisdom ('*aql*) unified and their sagaciousness (*ḥilm*) completed.⁶⁶

65. It seems that what is taught are the thaumaturgic powers of the formulae that every Muslim knows: *lā ilāha illā'llāh*; *Allāhu akbar*; *al-ḥamdu li'llāh*; *subḥāna'llāh*; *lā ḥawl wa lā quwwa illā bi'llāh*. It should be recalled that these formulae also constitute the standard mystical *dhikrs*.

66. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, vol. 1, p. 29; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, p. 675. The term *ḥilm* here denotes an intelligence applied to the profane sphere, as differentiated from '*aql*', intelligence, intuition or knowledge applied in the sacred sphere, see *Guide divin*, pp. 16–17 (*Divine Guide*, p. 7).

Islam, along with other religions, especially Judaism and Christianity, distorted and abandoned by their followers, will be re-established in their original truth and integrity.⁶⁷ Moreover, the re-established religions will no longer be only exoteric dogmas but also spiritual esoteric teachings, for the Mahdī will provide the believers of each religion with the hermeneutics of the hidden meaning of their sacred Scripture.⁶⁸

[At the time of the Qā'im] men will have their eyes enlightened by the [authentic] text of the Revelation and their ears touched by the explanation of its hidden meaning. Morning and evening, they will constantly be drinking from cups of wisdom ([...] *tujlā bi'l-tanzīl abšāruhum wa yurmā bi'l-tafsīr fī masāmi'ihim wa yughbiqūna ka's al-ḥikma ba'd al-ṣabūḥ*) [a tradition dating back to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib].⁶⁹

By universal initiation, lifting the veil that separates the exoteric from the esoteric, the Qā'im re-actualises the Primordial Initiation and returns the world to this original 'moment' when only those filled with wisdom inhabited the universe. In these terms, the End of Time marks, in the words of Lāhijī, a new Beginning (*isti'nāf*),⁷⁰ literally *Apokatastasis*, the restoration of the world to its primordial state of light and wisdom.

In messianic Twelver eschatology, although not mentioned *expressis verbis*,⁷¹ the *ma'ād* begins well before the final Tribunal of the universal *qiyāma* and the division of men between Heaven

67. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 333ff., 342–343; Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal*, pp. 161–163.

68. Al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (attrib.), *Tafsīr* (lithograph, Lucknow, 1310/1893), p. 186; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 345.

69. Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, Arabic text and Persian trans. by 'A. N. Fayḍ al-Islām (6th edn, Tehran, 1351 Sh./1972), p. 458.

70. Lāhijī, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, *Mafātīḥ al-i'jāz fī sharḥ Golshan-e Rāz*, p. 267.

71. Perhaps because of *taqiyya*, since in this way the 'orthodox' meaning of *ma'ād* is made to recede into the background.

and Hell. It is intimately linked to the different episodes of cosmo-anthropogony, in such a way that one might say that the End of Time and the Return to the Origin define each other in a mutual relationship. Whereas in the universal dimension of eschatology, it is the End of the World which sets off the process of the Return to the Origin, in the individual dimension, the inverse seems to be the case since it is the re-actualisation of the Origin that gives rise to spiritual Resurrection.

* * *

It has often been said and written that Imami eschatology is a reflection of the frustration and thwarted hopes of a much-oppressed minority at the mercy of the vicissitudes of history. It is true that, as it appears in its foundational texts, the specifically vengeful attitude of Imamism crystallised around the Figure of the Awaited imam and his eventual advent. The very term *qā'im* (in the sense of 'standing imam'), applied to the eschatological Saviour, is in contrast to *qā'id* ('seated imam') which characterises the other imams, who especially after the tragedy of Karbalā', refused to let themselves be entangled in the vagaries of armed rebellion and, indeed, justified their quietist policy by reasoning that armed uprising against oppression was the prerogative of the Mahdī upon his final manifestation:

Any banner raised before the uprising of the Qā'im belongs to a rebel against God (*inna kulla rāyatin turfa'u qabla qiyāmi'l-qā'im fa-ṣāhibuhā ṭāghūt*).⁷²

However, critical analyses of both early and later texts that deal with messianic beliefs clearly show that the chapter on eschatology is much more complex and can hardly be reduced to this one 'political' dimension. Indeed, just like some preceding faiths,

⁷². Al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa*, vol. 2, pp. 121–122; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 161–168; on the Imami quietist political attitude see *Guide divin*, pp. 155–173 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 61–69).

for example the Iranian religions, or the 'heterodox' Jewish, Judeo-Christian or Christian sects of the first centuries of the common era, precedents from which it seems to have inherited many elements, doctrinal Imami Shi'ism can only be appreciated, in its particular features, as an initiatory esoteric teaching with a mythical discourse. Summarising the research of scholars of the esoteric tradition, Antoine Faivre has very ably shown that the mythical language of esoteric doctrines (which he calls 'theosophical') always rests on the all-encompassing triptych, namely the origin, the present state of things and the final happenings.⁷³ In other words, this constitutes a cosmogony (often linked to a theogony and/or an anthropogony) marked by the force of Good, a cosmology in which – enduring the counter-force of Evil – the 'real' will be a perpetual continuation of the confrontation of both forces simultaneous with preparation for the final happenings, and lastly an eschatology which is essentially soteriological because it is founded on a return to the sacred Origin.⁷⁴ This triptych, in which each term bears its full meaning only in relation to the other two, characterises the fundamental *Weltanschauung* of Neoplatonism or of gnosticism built upon the triad: the original unity of beings, the division or the fall and finally the return to unity. One can look further back in history and cite the concepts of *bundahishn* (Creation), *gumezishn* (Mixture) and *wizarishn* (Separation)/*frashgird* (Transfiguration) in Mazdaism and Zoroastrianism.

In this sense, the collective dimension of Imami messianism, emphatically marked by violence and a battle against Evil, re-enacts the primordial Battle between the forces of Hiero-Intelligence and Ignorance. Waged ever since the dawn of creation, this Battle defines the History of humanity since it has repercussions, from age to age, in the conflict setting the imams of all times and their initiates against the forces of darkness and counter-initiation. The

73. A. Faivre, *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental* (Paris, 1986), p. 24.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25, 117 and 158f.

definitive annihilation of the forces of Ignorance by the Saviour, by means of a liberating battle and enlightening initiation brings the world to this original state in which it was only inhabited by the Armies of *'aql* before those of *jahl* were created. As for the individual dimension, it completes the cycle of Initiation which also began at the origin of creation and continues throughout the Spiritual life of humanity, since it is renewed over the ages by the teaching of the imams of all times. The believer who discovers the Light of the imam of the Time and the initiation that he grants also returns to the Origin since he reenacts the primordial Initiation when in the World of Particles his pre-existing entity was initiated into divine secrets by the luminous form of the archetypal Imam.

A Contribution on the Typology of Encounters with the Hidden Imam^{*}

The figure of the hidden imam and the spiritual and philosophical implications of the Occultation form part of the recurring themes in Henry Corbin's work, preoccupying him for almost two decades.¹ Since the studies by this late orientalist philosopher, other scholars have dealt with the same subject from other angles, with different interests.² I myself have devoted some of my studies to

^{*} This chapter is the written version of a lecture presented at the conference 'On the work of Henry Corbin' held in Tehran by the Institut Français de Recherche en Iran (IFRI) on 30 and 31 October 1995. I thank Rémy Boucharlat, then director of IFRI, for kindly inviting me to the conference.

1. See e.g. 'Sur le douzième Imam', *Table Ronde* (Feb. 1957), pp. 7–21, Persian trans., 'Dar bâb-e emâm-e davâzdahom', by Ī. Sepahbodî, *Revue Iranienne d'Anthropologie*, 2 (1958); German trans., 'Über den zwölften Imam', by H. Landolt, *Antaios*, 2 (1960); 'L'Imam caché et la rénovation de l'homme en théologie shî'ite', *EJ*, 28, 1959 (Zurich, 1960), pp. 47–108; 'Le combat spirituel du shî'isme', *EJ*, 30, 1961 (Zurich, 1962), pp. 69–125; 'Au pays de l'Imam caché', *EJ*, 32, 1963 (1964), pp. 31–87; *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, [1st edn 1964] 1986), pp. 107–114; 'Juvénilité et chevalerie (javânmardi) en Islam iranien', *EJ*, 40, 1971 (1973), pp. 311–356 (rpr. in *L'homme et son ange* [Paris, 1983], part 3); *En Islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris, 1972), vol. 4, book 7 (in which previous studies are reviewed and supplemented), pp. 303–460.

2. E.g. J. M. Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background* (London, 1982). On the various implications of the Occultation, especially in social, economic and political terms, see e.g. J. Calmard, 'Le chiisme imamite en Iran à l'époque seldjoukide d'après le *Kitâb al-naqḍ*', *Le monde*

this theme and, having a more or less similar conception to that held by Corbin, I attempted, on the one hand, to adopt a critical approach to supplement the material that he has contributed and, on the other hand, to restore to what one might call his intuitions, the historical-doctrinal foundations supported by the texts.³

iranien et l'Islam, 1 (1971); E. Kohlberg, 'The Development of the Imāmi Shī'i Doctrine of *jihād*', ZDMG, 126 (1976) (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article 15); A. A. Sachedina, 'A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imamite Imam', *SI*, 48 (1978); idem, 'Al-Khums: the Fifth in the Imāmi Shī'i Legal System', *JNES*, 39 (1980); idem, *Islamic Messianism: the Idea of the Mahdī in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany, NY, 1981) and *The Just Ruler (al-sulṭān al-'ādil) in Shi'ite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence* (New York and Oxford, 1988); W. Madelung, 'Authority in Twelver Shi'ism in the Absence of the Imam', in *La notion d'autorité au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident. Colloques Internationaux de la Napoule*, 1978 (Paris, 1982) (rpr. in *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, article X), and 'A Treatise of the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā on the Legality of Working for the Government (*Mas'ala fi'l-'amal ma'a'l-sulṭān*)', *BSOAS*, 43 (1980) (rpr. in *Religious Schools*, article IX), and 'Shi'ite Discussions on the Legality of the *Kharāj*', *Proceedings of the Ninth Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants*, ed. R. Peters (Leiden, 1981) (rpr. in *Religious Schools*, article XI); N. Calder, 'Zakāt in Imāmi Shī'i Jurisprudence', *BSOAS*, 44 (1981) and 'Khums in Imāmi Shī'i Jurisprudence', *BSOAS*, 45 (1982); S. A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago, 1984); A. J. Newman, 'The Development and Political Significance of the Rationalist (usuli) and Traditionalist (akhbārī) School in Imami Shī'i History from the Third/Ninth to the Tenth/Sixteenth Century' (PhD thesis, UCLA, Los Angeles, 1986). On the issue of the break with the original tradition due to the Occultation, see N. Calder, 'Accommodation and Revolution in Imāmi Shī'i Jurisprudence: Khumayni and the Classical Tradition', *Middle East Studies*, 18 (1982); J. R. Cole, 'Imami Jurisprudence and the Role of the Ulama: Mortaza Ansari on Emulation of the Supreme Exemplar', in N. R. Keddie (ed.), *Religion and Politics in Iran. Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution* (New Haven and London, 1983), and idem, 'Shi'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1772–1780: The Akhbārī-USulī Conflict Reconsidered', *Iranian Studies*, 28 (1985); S. Schmidtke, 'Modern Modifications in the Shi'i doctrine of the Expectation of the Mahdī (*Intiẓār al-Mahdī*): The Case of Khumayni', *Orient*, 28/3 (1987) and my studies cited in the following note.

3. See *Guide divin*, ch. 4 and Appendix; 'Réflexions sur une évolution du shī'isme duodécimain: tradition et idéologisation', in E. Patlagean and A. Le Boulluec (eds), *Les retours aux Ecritures. Fondamentalismes présents et passés*, Bibliothèque de l'EPHE (Sciences Religieuses), vol. 99 (Louvain and Paris,

In the context of this issue, Corbin gives special attention to the theme of encounters with the hidden imam during the Occultation.⁴ This chapter seeks to respond to one of his wishes concerning this subject, a wish he expressed during his important study on 'the twelfth imam and spiritual chivalry' that constitutes Book VII of his *En Islam iranien*:

Until the hour of the parousia, the hidden imam is visible only in dreams or in certain individual manifestations that thus bear the qualities of visionary events; they do not interrupt the period of *ghaybat*, precisely because they occur in this 'in-between time' [i.e. the time of the *mundus imaginalis*, *imaginal* time]; nor do they materialise in the stream of historical, material facts that the first observer on the scene can record and attest to. The accounts of these theophanic visions are rather numerous in Shi'i books. It will be necessary to establish a typological classification.⁵

I will therefore attempt to establish a typology of accounts of encounters with the hidden imam during the Occultation;⁶ I believe this will shed new light on the development and evolution of the Imami dogma of Occultation as well as the role of the hidden imam in the spiritual economy of Imamism, all the while

1993); 'Remarques sur les critères d'authenticité du hadith et l'autorité du juriste dans le shi'isme imamite', *SI*, 85 (1997), pp. 5–39.

4. H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris, 1971–1972), vol. 4, Book 7, ch. 2, in which previous studies are reviewed and completed; see also in particular, the article 'Au pays de l'Imam caché' (refer to note 1 above).

5. *Ibid.*, vol 4, p. 330, a wish already expressed with a less elaborate philosophical argument, in 'L'Imam caché et la rénovation de l'homme' (see note 1 above), p. 85.

6. 'Encounters, meetings' and not 'contact' in general; absent from my exposition therefore are oral and written messages supposed to have emanated from the hidden imam and received directly or indirectly by the faithful. In this regard, see the brief but evocative text by E. Kohlberg, 'Authoritative Scriptures in Early Imāmi Shī'ism', in E. Patlagean and A. Le Boulluec (eds), *Les retours aux Ecritures. Fondamentalismes présents et passés* (Louvain and Paris, 1993), pp. 307–309.

determining to what extent observations by Henry Corbin (as summarised in the passage cited above on the nature and context of these encounters) prove to be verifiable.

* * *

In general, hagiographical literature devoted to the twelfth imam accords a prominent place to reports of encounters with him. As we know, according to the most widely accepted traditional material, the Occultation took place in 260/874 and, according to Imami dogma, continues to this day since it will only come to an end at 'the End of Time'. The numerous sources containing these reports therefore cover a period of about a thousand years, ranging from a few decades after the Occultation with, for example, al-Kulaynī (329/940–941)⁷ down almost to recent times with monographs by Ḥusayn al-Ṭabarsī/Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī (1320/1902)⁸ after al-Nīlī (alive in 803/1401) and al-Majlisī II (1111/1699) of course.⁹ As we shall see, the further we advance in time, the more these accounts increase, vary and gain in substance.

7. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī with Persian trans., 4 vols (Tehran, n.d. [vol 4, tr. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī, 1386/1966]).

8. Conventionally rendered: 'Ṭabarsī', but this is the Arabised form of the name of the Iranian city of Tafresh, not far from Qumm; the correct spelling is therefore 'Ṭabrisī'; cf. the learned note by A. Bahmanyār in his edition of *Tārīkh-e Bayhaq* by Ibn Funduq al-Bayhaqī (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 347–353 and Muḥsin al-ʿĀmilī, *A'yān al-shī'a*, vols 1–56 (Damascus, 1935–1961), vol. 9, pp. 97–98; see, however, the arguments by E. Kohlberg, 'al-Ṭabrisī', *EI2*. Mirzā Ḥusayn Ṭabrisī Nūrī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, published at the end of vol. 53 of the *Bihār al-anwār* by al-Majlisī (Tehran, 1385/1965) (see following note), and *al-Najm al-thāqib* (in Persian) (Qumm and Jamkarān, 1412/1991) and also, *Kalima ṭayyiba* (in Persian) (Tehran, n.d.) that contains some accounts of the encounter.

9. Al-Nīlī, *al-Sultān al-mufarrij 'an ahl al-īmān*, ed. Q. al-ʿAṭṭār (Qumm, 1384 Sh./2006); Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 110 tomes in 90 vols (Tehran and Qumm, 1376–1392/1956–1972), vols 52 and 53.

Encounters during the minor occultation

The first testimonies of this kind are those reported by Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940–941) in his *Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, no doubt written some decades after the beginning of the Occultation, during the period said to be one of 'confusion' (*ḥayra*) in the community.¹⁰ The year of al-Kulaynī's death coincides with the date that the Twelver community recognised as marking the end of the minor Occultation. For the Twelvers, these reports therefore stem from this period; al-Kulaynī himself seems convinced that he is writing during the first Occultation since he reports some traditions on the notion of two successive *ghaybas* of which the second will be longer.¹¹ Unlike later accounts, those reported by the famous compiler present a rather meagre typological variety: a list of a dozen individuals – Imami faithful or others – who were able to see the twelfth imam in his childhood, adolescence or youth. In a large majority of cases, no noteworthy event marks the encounter.¹²

In three cases, the imam proves his true nature by performing miracles: the transformation of a handful of clay into gold;¹³ having a knowledge of languages (in this instance of the Hindus, *kalām al-hind*) and of intimate secrets from the life of the witness;¹⁴ and finally, having knowledge of the future.¹⁵ The miraculous powers of the hidden imam, and in particular the

10. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb fī tasmiya man ra'āhu 'alayhi'l-salām', vol. 2, pp. 120–126 and 'Bāb mawlid al-ṣāhib 'alayhi'l-salām', vol. 2, pp. 449–468.

11. Ibid., 'Bāb fī'l-ghayba', vol. 2, pp. 138 and 140–141, nos 12, 19 and 20.

12. Ibid., 'Bāb fī tasmiya man ra'āhu', vol. 2, pp. 120–125, nos 1, 2, 4–14.

13. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 125, no. 15 (report from the resident of al-Madā'in and his travelling companion; cf. *Guide divin*, p. 281 [*Divine Guide*, p. 115]).

14. Ibid., 'Bāb mawlid al-ṣāhib', vol. 2, pp. 453–454, no. 3 (a report by Abū Sa'īd Ghānim al-Hindī).

15. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 455, no. 4 (here the witness finds himself in the presence of the twelfth imam, hidden behind a curtain and thus only hears his voice; a report by al-Ḥasan b. al-Naṣr).

precise knowledge of secrets known only to the reporter, as well as his perfect knowledge of religious matters and his benevolence towards those believers who consider him the supreme authority of the community, are the recurring themes of the messages from the imam, written or oral, as transmitted by his 'representatives'.¹⁶

Some of these messages are reported by another famous author from this period, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Ibn Bābūya, the father of al-Ṣadūq (who also died in 329/940–941), in his book *al-Imāma wa'l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra*.¹⁷ Quite remarkably, Ibn Bābūya, 'the Father' did not report any encounters with the hidden imam, at first glance, a curious lacuna in a work meant 'to dissipate confusion or perplexed reactions' (*al-tabṣira min al-ḥayra*) of believers succumbing to uncertainty as to the existence or identity of the twelfth imam after his disappearance.¹⁸ The relative importance of these accounts of contacts (meetings or messages) with the hidden imam, the paucity of information and the meagre typological variety of encounters in our author's work, may be explained precisely by factors that characterise this period as one of *ḥayra*.

An examination of the sources that have come down to us from this period reflect the hesitation, uncertainties and lacunae in a number of doctrinal elements that later became articles of faith; first, regarding the definitive number of imams and the very

16. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 449–468.

17. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa'l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra* (Qumm, 1404/1985), ch. 38, pp. 140–142.

18. On this period, see Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism* (note 2 above), under '*ḥayra*' and especially the work by H. Modarressi indicated here below, note 31; according to tradition, Ibn Bābūya 'the Father' was a friend of al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī, the third 'representative' of the hidden imam during the minor Occultation (see below); he had two sons, including the renowned Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, after submitting a written request to the hidden imam for intercession before God; the father received a signed letter from the imam announcing the imminent birth of his children; see e.g. al-Najāshī, *al-Rijāl* (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 198–199; al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba* (Najaf, 1385/1965), pp. 187f.; Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij wa'l-jarā'ih* (Tehran, 1389/1969), vol. 1, p. 189; al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl* (= *Rijāl al-'Allāma*) (Najaf, 1961), p. 94.

notion of *ghayba*. Abū Ja'far al-Barqī (274/887 or 280/893) does not provide any information in his *Kitāb al-mahāsin* regarding these subjects. In the first chapter, entitled 'al-Ashkāl wa'l-qarā'in', the author reports traditions concerning the significance of numbers; these consider the numbers three to ten and say nothing about the number twelve.¹⁹

In *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, his contemporary al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (290/902–903) cites only five traditions (from a total of 1,881) regarding the fact that the imams are twelve in number but says absolutely nothing about the Occultation.²⁰ It is only from al-Kulaynī onwards that traditions regarding the definitive number of imams and the Occultation of the last of them increase. But even in this case, an examination of the chains of transmission (*isnād*) of these traditions, both in al-Kulaynī as well as in monographs by two of his famous successors, *Kitāb al-ghayba* by al-Nu'mānī (about 345/956 or 360/971),²¹ and *Kamāl al-dīn* by Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq (381/991)²² show that information from older books on the *ghayba*, written mainly by authors belonging to other Shi'i movements, was appropriated for the needs of

19. Abū Ja'far al-Barqī, *Kitāb al-mahāsin*, ed. J. Muḥaddith Urmawī (Tehran, 1370/1950), vol. 1, pp. 3–13.

20. Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, ed. Mīrzā Kūchebāghī (2nd edn, Tabriz, n.d. [editor's introduction is dated 1380/1960]); regarding this author and his book, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–903) et son *Kitāb baṣā'ir al-darajāt*', *JA*, 280/3–4 (1992), pp. 221–250. On the problems relating to the number of imams and the Occultation in al-Barqī and al-Ṣaffār, see E. Kohlberg, 'From Imāmiyya to Ithnā'ashariyya', *BSOAS*, 39 (1976) (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article XIV), pp. 521–534, esp. pp. 522–523; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 249–252 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 101–103) and, 'Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī', pp. 240–242. On al-Barqī, al-Ṣaffār, al-Kulaynī and their compilations, now consult A. J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi'ism: Ḥadīth as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad* (Richmond, VA, 2000).

21. Ibn Abī Zaynab al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1397/1977); Arabic text and Persian trans. by M. J. Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1985).

22. Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'ma*, ed. 'A. A. Ghaffārī (Qumm, 1405/1985).

the Twelver cause.²³ For example, in the transmission chains of our authors we encounter the following names: Ibrāhīm b. Ṣāliḥ al-Anmāṭī, the author of *Kitāb al-ghayba* and a supporter of the fifth imam al-Bāqir, who believed he would be the hidden Qā'im.²⁴ The *wāqif*s of the seventh imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, such as 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭaṭārī al-Ṭā'ī and al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Sumā'a, were both authors of a *Kitāb al-ghayba*.²⁵ Another Sevens author (a *wāqif* of Mūsā? An Ismaili?), Muḥammad b. al-Muthannā al-Ḥaḍramī (third/ninth century) produced a *kitāb* which is part of '400 original collections' (*al-uṣūl al-araba'umi'a*) of the Imamīs in which he reports a tradition by Ja'far stating there will be seven imams, the last being the Mahdī.²⁶ Probably a *wāqif* of the eighth imam al-Riḍā as was his father, al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Baṭā'inī al-Kūfī, was the author of a work also bearing the title *Kitāb al-ghayba*.²⁷ Abū Sa'īd al-'Uṣfurī (250/864), was a contemporary of the tenth and eleventh imams, and author of another *kitāb*, part of the '400 original collections', in which he speaks of eleven imams that he avoids naming, the last being the Qā'im.²⁸ Even the collection

23. See *Guide divin*, pp. 249–253 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 101–104); on earlier books on the *ghayba*, see Hussain, *Occultation of the Twelfth Imam* (refer to note 2 above), Introduction, section 2.1.1 and 2.1.2., pp. 2–6.

24. Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 12 and 19; al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist kutub al-shī'a*, ed. Sprenger and 'Abd al-Ḥaqq (rpr. Mashhad, 1972), p. 14; Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥillī, *Kitāb al-rijāl* (Tehran, 1964), pp. 15 and 416.

25. Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, pp. 193 and 39 respectively; on the first see also al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist kutub al-shī'a*, pp. 216–217.

26. 'Kitāb Muḥammad b. al-Muthannā', *al-Uṣūl al-araba'umi'a*, Tehran University, MS 962, fol. 53b. On the '400 original collections' see E. Kohlberg, 'al-Uṣūl al-arab'umi'a', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 10 (1987) (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article VII), pp. 128–166.

27. Āghā Bozorg al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānif al-shī'a*, 25 vols (Tehran and Najaf, 1353–1398/1934–1978), vol. 16, p. 76, no. 382; on al-Baṭā'inī 'the Father', see also al-Kashshī, *Rijāl* (Bombay, 1317/1899), pp. 288–289.

28. *Al-Uṣūl al-araba'umi'a*, fols 10af.; *Kitāb Abī Sa'īd al-'Uṣfurī* (Tehran, 1371/1951), p. 34.

by the Twelver, al-Ṣaffār, already cited, contains two traditions that seem to indicate that the imams will be seven in number.²⁹

We also encounter signs of hesitation and a groping for answers regarding the forms of the Occultation including the notion of two Occultations, the second being much longer. For discussions about the Occultation, let us cite the case of Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī (311/923), a very influential man to whom two conceptions have been attributed. According to the first, of a spiritual nature, the hidden imam is 'existant in the world in substance and subsistant in essence' (*mawjūd al-'ayn fi'l-'ālam wa thābit al-dhāt*).³⁰ According to the second, the twelfth imam passed away but left a son who was living in secret and who had succeeded him; the line of the imams would thus be perpetuated during the Occultation, passing from father to son until the last manifests himself publicly as the Qā'im.³¹ We know that

29. Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section, ch. 12, 3, p. 146, no. 24 and ch. 13, p. 150, no. 17 in which in a tradition dating back to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the angel Gabriel brought the Prophet a sheet of paper (*ṣaḥīfa*) bearing seven sealed messages meant to be opened successively by each imam upon his investiture; cf. also my article 'Notes sur deux traditions 'hétérodoxes' imamites', *Arabica*, 41 (1994), p. 132, note 21. The first truly reliable text to have come down to us in which the complete list of the twelve imams is given appears to be the *Tafsīr* by 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. ca. 307/919), ed. al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'irī (Najaf, 1386–1387/1966–1968), vol. 2, p. 44, text written a few years after the beginning of the minor Occultation.

30. Cited by Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, p. 90 based on *Kitāb al-tanbīh fi'l-imāma* by Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī, a work that has apparently been lost.

31. Cited by Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, ed. R. Tajaddod (Tehran, 1971), p. 225. Here we recognise the earliest attempts to rationalise the Occultation. During the same period, Abū Ja'far Ibn Qiba (d. before 319/931) writes treatises on the Occultation that tend to reach the same conclusions (cf. his first two treatises, namely *Mas'ala fi'l-imāma* and *al-Naqd 'alā Abi'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. Bashshār fi'l-ghayba* edited based on the recension by Ibn Bābūya in his *Kamāl al-dīn*, by H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shī'ite Islam: Abū Ja'far ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and his Contribution to Imamite Shī'ite Thought* [Princeton, 1993]). The greatest theoreticians who rationalised the *ghayba* were Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022) and his two disciples al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (436/1044) and Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī (460/1067) who explicitly had

neither of these ideas was accepted. As for the notion of 'double occultations', this too existed in different forms in various Shi'i movements, at the very least expressed by the *wāqifis* of the seventh imam onwards.³² Among the Twelvers, in the already cited *Kitāb al-ghayba* by al-Nu'mānī, written in the mid-fourth/tenth century, clearly after the proclamation of the major Occultation, a tradition has imam Ja'far saying that of these two occultations, the first will be the longer.³³ At such a late date, this is surely a sign of hesitation. As a corollary to the preceding concept, belief in the 'delegation' (*niyāba/sifāra/wikāla*) to four official representatives of the hidden imam during the minor Occultation seems to have coalesced long after the proclamation of the major Occultation, most likely in the second half of the fourth/tenth century. As we have seen, al-Barqī and al-Ṣaffār do not even deal with the subject of occultation. Two other writers from the end of the third/ninth

recourse to a rational demonstration (*dalīl 'aqlī*) notably based on the old Mu'tazili principles of God's Justice and man's responsibility. As the latter is fallible and in need of guidance, divine Grace (*lutf*) must necessarily and forever accord humanity the fortune of true direction that can only be provided by an infallible imam (see Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, pp. 108ff.; on works by early rationalist writers relating to the Occultation, see *Guide divin*, p. 248, n. 536 [*Divine Guide*, p. 101]).

32. Indeed some *wāqifis* of the seventh imam believed that, after his death, the master was revived and entered into occultation before manifesting as the Qā'im, then dying definitively, after having accomplished his true mission; this then is a double death (see al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā Abū Muḥammad al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shī'a*, ed. H. Ritter [Istanbul, 1931], p. 68; Sa'd b. 'Abdallāh al-Ash'arī al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt wa'l-firaq*, ed. M. J. Mashkūr [Tehran, 1963], p. 90). The *wāqifis* of the eleventh imam included those who professed that he would enter upon two occultations, between which he would be manifested to his believers (cf. al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, pp. 79–80; al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt*, pp. 106–108). Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Tabrisī (d. 548/1154), citing *Kitāb al-mashyakha* by al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb al-Sarrād (d. 224/838) (see Āghā Bozorg al-Tihirānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 21, p. 69, no. 3995), reports a tradition dating back to imam al-Bāqir in which it is said that the Mahdī will enter into two occultations, one of which will be short and another long (al-Tabrisī, *I'lām al-warā fi a'lām al-hudā*, ed. al-Kharsān, Najaf, 1390/1970, p. 443).

33. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ch. 10, p. 170, no. 1 (Arabic text only); p. 249, no. 1 (text with Persian translation) (refer to note 21 above).

century, namely Abū Muḥammad al-Nawbakhtī in his *Firaq*³⁴ and Sa'd b. 'Abdallāh al-Ash'arī in his *Maqālāt*,³⁵ make no mention of any 'representative'. The same is true for al-Nu'mānī, an author of the first half of the fourth/tenth century. During this period, al-Kulaynī and al-Kashshī (ca. 340/950) in his *Rijāl*³⁶ provide names of a number of 'representatives' but never speak of an instance that is well and truly institutionalised.³⁷

In a thoroughly substantiated study, Verena Klemm demonstrates convincingly that al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī (326/938), the 'third' *nā'ib*, appears to have been the first to claim to be the only representative of the imam and consequently the supreme leader of the community. According to Klemm, the dogma of the representation of the hidden imam by a single 'delegate' seems to have been constructed and spread by the influential Nawbakhtī family in Baghdad; two other claimants, Ibn Rawḥ, the two 'Amrī/'Umarī were no doubt posthumously elevated to the rank of 'representative' to prove the continuity of this institution since the Occultation.³⁸ This conception of the *niyāba* was far

34. Cf. note 32 above; for a French translation of this work by al-Nawbakhtī, see M. J. Mashkour (i.e. Mashkūr), *Les sectes shiites* (2nd edn, Tehran, 1980).

35. Note 32 above; Persian translation, based on the edition by Mashkūr, prepared by Y. Faḍā'i, *Tārīkh-e 'aqā'ed va madhāheb-e shī'e* (Tehran, 1371 Sh./1993).

36. Cf. note 27 above.

37. The names of the 'official' representatives are the two 'Amrī/'Umarī, Abū 'Amr and Abū Ja'far, al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī and Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Simmarī – and not as conventionally given, al-Samarri; on this reading/vocalisation for the name of the 'fourth' representative, see H. Halm, *Die Schia* (Darmstadt, 1988), see index, in which the German scholar refers to *Ansāb* by al-Sam'ānī and *Lubb al-lubāb* by al-Suyūṭī and aptly notes that the adjective formed from the city of Sāmarrā is 'Sāmarrā'i' and not 'Samarri'. Also presented as *nā'ib* of the hidden imam are for example, Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār, al-Marzubānī al-Ḥārithī, Ḥājjiz b. Yazīd etc. (al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, pp. 449f.; al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, under these names). On the four 'representatives' in general, see Hussain, *Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, chs 4–7.

38. V. Klemm, 'Die vier *sufarā*' des Zwölften Imams. Zur formativen Periode der Zwölferschia', *Die Welt des Orients*, 15 (1984), pp. 126–143; this work brilliantly revives previous studies on the subject, in particular those by Javad

from being accepted without hesitation and resistance; it was not until half a century later, with the appearance of *Kamāl al-dīn* by al-Ṣadūq, that the idea first took shape in its definitive canonical form.³⁹

All this tends to show that during this period the Imami community experienced what may be considered a serious identity crisis. This was the age of 'perplexity' (*ḥayra*) and of groping for certainties, of research and development, and the relatively painful establishment of a doctrine relating to the twelfth imam. These doctrines had to confront and overcome a great deal of resistance before they were established as articles of faith. The transition from Imamism to Twelverism most certainly did not take place without difficulty.⁴⁰

In the introduction of his *Kitāb al-ghayba*, al-Nu'mānī complains that a large majority of his coreligionists are still not aware of the hidden imam's identity and even go so far as to contest his existence.⁴¹ Al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq makes similar observations when he states that he was overwhelmed by questions on the identity of the hidden imam by the Shi'is of Khurāsān, which spurred him to write his *Kamāl al-dīn*.⁴² During this period of confusion, a time

Ali, 'Die beiden ersten Safire des Zwölften Imams', *Der Islam*, 25 (1939) and Hussain as indicated in the note above. On the great and influential Nawbakhti family, see the now classic monograph by 'A. Eqbāl, *Khāndān-e Nawbakhti* (2nd edn, Tehran, 1966). See also W. M. Watt, 'Sidelights on Early Imāmite Doctrine', *SI*, 31 (1970), pp. 287–298.

39. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, ch. 42, p. 432, no. 12; but elsewhere the author presents another list of 'representatives' of the hidden imam according to cities (cf. *ibid.*, vol. 2, ch. 43, p. 442, no. 16).

40. See in particular, E. Kohlberg, 'From Imāmiyya to Ithnā'ashariyya' (refer to note 20 above) and now, 'Early attestations of the term *ithnā'ashariyya*', *JSOI*, 24 (2000); see also *Guide divin*, section IV.1, pp. 245–264 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 99–108).

41. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 18–32 (Arabic text only), pp. 26–53 (text with Persian translation).

42. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, pp. 2f.; in the introduction to his work, his father complains about the same kind of confusion, see *al-Imāma wa'l-taḥsira min al-ḥayra*, pp. 9f.

when schisms multiplied,⁴³ when opposing movements, benefiting from this state of affairs, redoubled their propaganda and, as a result, the Twelver movement saw many of its followers (including some of the most prominent figures) deserting,⁴⁴ the foremost concern of Twelver thinkers was to demonstrate the actual existence of the eleventh imam's son and at the same time to prove his imamate.

This no doubt accounts for the meagre typological variety in reports of encounters with the hidden imam in the work of so prominent a scholar as al-Kulaynī. It is most important to state that some individuals had actually seen the imam, that he being regularly invested possessed initiatory knowledge ('ilm), namely sacred knowledge and supra-natural powers, and that he is most

43. Based on what emerges from writings on the *firaq*, the majority of Shi'is had very little knowledge of the twelfth imam. After the death of the eleventh imam, between eleven and fifteen schisms occurred among his supporters. One can nevertheless group these sects into four main categories: 1) those that supported the cessation of the imamate; not believing in the existence of a *mahdī*, one group maintained that al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī died without leaving an heir. Another group also believed that the eleventh imam died without leaving a child but simultaneously held that at the End of Time one of the imams would be raised in this world and accomplish the mission of the awaited Saviour. 2) the Ja'fariyya: supporters of the imamate of Ja'far, brother of the eleventh imam, whom the Twelvers were later to call 'Ja'far the liar'. For the Ja'fariyya sect, the eleventh imam died without a son and so the imamate fell to his brother. 3) the Muḥammadiyya: supporters of another brother of the eleventh imam, Muḥammad b. 'Alī; an elder brother, he predeceased his father but his supporters believed in his occultation and claimed he would return as *mahdī*. 4) the *wāqifīs* of al-'Askarī for whom he was the Saviour who had not left behind a son. cf. al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shī'a*, pp. 90f.; al-Ash'arī al-Qummī, *al-Maqālāt wa'l-firaq*, pp. 102f.; al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. and Fr.trans. by Barbier de Meynard (Paris, 1861–1877), vol. 8, pp. 50f.; al-Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, vol. 1, Fr. trans. by D. Gimaret and G. Monnot (Louvain and Paris, 1986), pp. 500f.; for more details on these schisms, see Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, pp. 42f.; Hussain, *Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, pp. 56f.; E. Kohlberg, 'Muḥammadiyya' and 'Radj'a', *E12*.

44. As an example of those that deserted, there is Ibn Ḥawshab who converted to Ismailism; see H. Halm, 'Die *Sirat Ibn Ḥawshab*. Die ismailitische *da'wa* im Jemen und die Fatimiden', *Die Welt des Orients*, 12 (1981).

generous to his faithful followers.⁴⁵ The complexity and portrayal of the accounts, as well as the variety in the nature of encounters – so many essential elements in the rich typological diversity – hardly concerned authors of this period. Even much later, in the second half of the fourth/tenth century, apart from al-Ṣadūq (to whom I shall return later in this chapter), the identity and cohesion of the community around the figure of the twelfth imam, the hidden resurrector-imam, remain the main concerns of these authors.

Ibn Qūlūya (369/979) in his *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*,⁴⁶ al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī (second half of fourth/tenth century) in his *Kifāyat al-athar*⁴⁷ and Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī (401/1011) in *Muqtaḍab al-athar*⁴⁸ especially seek to demonstrate that the imams are twelve in number and that the last among them, the son of al-'Askarī, is well and truly the hidden Qā'im. Reports of encounters with the hidden imam in these authors, just as in al-Kulaynī, are very rare and incidental in nature. One may say that in these instances the accounts have a doctrinal dimension that serves to consolidate the identity of the community; moreover, this is also the case with reports of encounters before the Occultation.⁴⁹ One should add,

45. On 'ilm as a 'Secret Initiatory Science' see E. Kohlberg, 'Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period', in S. A. Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (Albany, NY, 1988) (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article XIII), pp. 25–27 and esp. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, section III.2, pp. 174–199 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 69–79) and 'Réflexions sur une évolution' (note 3 above), pp. 63–69.

46. Ja'far b. Muḥammad Ibn Qūlūya al-Qummī, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, ed. Najaf (lithograph, Iran, n.d.), ed. Najaf (1937–1938); most recent ed. B. Ja'farī (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996).

47. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar fi'l-naṣṣ 'alā'l-a'immat al-ithnay'ashar*, ed. al-Ḥusaynī al-Kūhkamarī (Qumm, 1401/1981).

48. Aḥmad b. 'Ubayd Allāh Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī, *Muqtaḍab al-athar fi'l-naṣṣ 'alā 'adad al-a'immat al-ithnay'ashar*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī (Qumm, 1379/1959).

49. These are especially intimate accounts by believers who were privileged to see the twelfth imam in his youth, at his father's house, before his Occultation. In *Guide divin* (pp. 269–270) (*Divine Guide*, pp. 110–111) I have translated a typical account of this kind given by Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Ash'arī, a disciple of the ninth, tenth and eleventh imams and one of the influential leaders of the traditionalists in Qumm during the third/ninth century.

however, that, as we shall see, they nevertheless contain the seeds for various types of accounts developed in later narratives, occasionally of great consequence.

Encounters during the major Occultation

With his *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni‘ma*, Ibn Bābūya al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (381/991–992) may be considered the main architect of the rendering canonical of material pertaining to the hidden imam, his Occultation and eschatological Return; material that we now recognise as articles of the Imami faith. The vast number of traditions and sayings reported, the judicious use of prior sources, the rigour and structure of the work, explain why *Kamāl al-dīn* is a critical factor in the definitive formulation of Twelver belief in this area. In a chapter devoted to reports of encounters with the hidden imam, Ibn Bābūya obviously reports the witness accounts found in al-Kulaynī, but also many other narratives, some of which are set during the major Occultation.⁵⁰ Henceforth a question is raised and a fair number of Twelver thinkers are obliged to propose answers: how to believe in the authenticity of encounters during the major Occultation while in the last letter to his final representative, the imam declares the impossibility of any such encounter until the End of Time? Here, according to the tradition, is the text of this signed letter received by al-Simmarī in 329/941:

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. O ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Simmarī, thanks to you, may God increase the reward of your brothers in religion [i.e. the Imamis]; yes, your death is due in six days. Prepare yourself and do not designate anyone to succeed you [as *nā’ib*] after your death. The advent of the second Occultation [variant: ‘the complete Occultation’] is upon

50. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, ch. 43, pp. 434–479; these accounts reported by Ibn Bābūya were methodically taken up by later authors, beginning with al-Mufid in his *Irshād*, Arabic text and Persian trans. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī, Tehran (1346 Sh./1968), ch. 38 and al-Ṭūsī in his *Kitāb al-ghayba* (Tabriz, 1322/1905), pp. 148f.

us. During this time there will no longer be a manifestation, unless permitted by God, and this shall only take place after a long period when hearts have been hardened and the earth filled with violence. Some of my supporters will claim to have seen me with their own eyes. Beware! He who claims to have seen me with his own eyes before the uprising of al-Sufyānī and [the sounding] of the Cry [two of the warning signals for the End of Time and Return of the Qā'im], such a person is a liar and imposter. Grandeur and Might are due to God, the Most High, alone.⁵¹

Here again, Ibn Bābūya appears to be the first to have reproduced this letter. However, he supplied reports of encounters during the major Occultation, and his example was followed by many later authors. From the inception of the major Occultation, ocular vision of the hidden imam, as referred to in the letter, seems to have been compromised not in a general sense, but as a condition for being a representative of the imam. What is declared impossible during the major Occultation, and therefore until the End of Time, is not an encounter with the hidden imam per se, but the claim to *niyāba* (representation) of the imam on the basis that he had encountered him. The follower may be granted the privilege of seeing the imam with their own eyes. However, if because of this, he subsequently declares himself 'representative' of the imam, he can only be considered – according to contents of the letter – a liar and an imposter.⁵²

51. For the text of this letter see e.g. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, ch. 45, vol. 2, p. 516, no. 44; al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, p. 257; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 52, ch. 23, p. 151, no. 1; For translations see e.g. H. Corbin, 'L'Imam caché et la rénovation de l'homme', p. 84, and 'Au pays de l'Imam caché', p. 45 and *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, p. 324; V. Klemm, 'Die vier *sufarā*', p. 135; J. Eliash, 'Misconceptions Regarding the Juridical Status of the Iranian 'Ulamā', *IJMES*, 10 (1979), pp. 23–24; Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, p. 96; Hussain, *Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, pp. 134–135; M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrine of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven and London, 1985), p. 164; *Guide divin*, p. 276 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 113–114).

52. Cf. e.g. al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (436/1044), *Tanzīh al-anbiyā'* (Qumm, n.d.), pp. 233f.; al-Ṭūsī (460/1068), *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 6–7 and 66–67; Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn Ṭāwūs (664/1266), *Kashf al-maḥajja* (n.p. [Iran], 1350/1931), pp. 34,

From Ibn Bābūya onwards, the accounts progressively increase and become more varied. As a general rule, each author reworks prior sources, adds some new testimonials collected by himself or his contemporaries, and on some rare occasions, also includes his own visionary experience of the hidden imam. As the religious identity of the community becomes more securely constructed, other dimensions are superimposed, which, as we have seen, aim to prove the existence of the hidden twelfth imam and thus the veracity of Twelverism. Before examining what distinguishes these different kinds of accounts, it will be useful to describe their common characteristics and in so doing reconsider the opinions held by Corbin cited at the beginning of this chapter.

The encounter always depends on the will of the imam and never the believer. Faith in and love for the imams and their

48 and 73–75 (several times and especially in the letter to his son Muḥammad, Ibn Ṭāwūs alludes to his meeting the hidden imam); regarding this author, now consult the brilliant study by E. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Ṭāwūs and his Library* (Leiden, 1992); al-Majlisī (1111/1699), *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 52, p. 151 (where, after reproducing a signed letter from the twelfth imam, the author takes up the position of his predecessors in a pithy statement: ‘This letter undoubtedly concerns someone who claims to have met [the imam], declares himself his representative and allows himself [the right] to bring information to the Shi‘is [supposed to emanate] from the imam, as was the case with the [four] representatives. If not [this letter] would be in contradiction with what is written here and what shall be written in future about those who have seen the imam [during the major Occultation]’); al-Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī (1320/1902), *al-Najm al-thāqib* (cf. note 8 above), ch. 8, pp. 559–568 and *Jannat al-ma’wā*, pp. 318–325 (the author reports in six points the various arguments of previous scholars as well as his own to prove not only the possibility but also the necessity of vision of the hidden imam during the major Occultation; according to him, there is always a secret group of thirty individuals in direct contact with the hidden imam). However, the issue appears to have remained delicate since in recent times a person as influential as al-‘Allāma Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī Baḥr al-‘Ulūm (d. 1355/1937; regarding him see e.g. M. ‘A. Mudarris, *Rayḥānat al-adab*, 8 vols [Tabriz, n.d.], vol. 1, pp. 234–235) has remained very discreet about his encounters with the hidden imam, vehemently arguing that based on the last letter of the imam, he who claims to have seen the Qā’im during the major Occultation is a liar (see his moving testimonial in al-Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī, *Jannat al-ma’wā*, p. 236 and *al-Najm al-thāqib*, p. 474).

cause, moral rectitude and the sincerity of the individual follower's needs are often presented as the conditions required. But they do not suffice. Appearance of the vision ultimately depends on the imam himself; in turn his decision is obviously based on divine Will. Certain locations seem especially favourable for an encounter: Mecca, beside the sepulchres of the imams, the Cave (*sardāb*) of Sāmarrā, the Sahla mosque in Najaf, the mosque in Jamkarān, renowned for being a sanctuary for the hidden imam, in proximity to Qumm. However, in principle the Qā'im is able to become manifest anywhere. The encounter is always marked, more or less emphatically, by the wondrous. As we shall see, some elements regularly intervene in the course of accounts to indicate a break from ordinary reality: the miraculous appearance and disappearance of the imam, unexpected locations (a palace, an oasis, an island, a city) unknown to geography and towards which the chosen traveller is mysteriously led to meet the imam; confinement of space which often implies the contraction of time; the unfurling of secret knowledge and deployment of the imam's supernatural powers of all kinds, for example. All this makes the witness aware, often after the fact, that he was indeed in the presence of the hidden Saviour. Some elements of symbolic significance recur frequently and also indicate a change in the level of reality: a desert, the night, sleep or a state between sleep and wakefulness (symbolising 'moments' in which the senses are almost free from what they usually perceive), the changing or removal of clothing or sandals (symbolising shifts in the level of consciousness and consequently of reality), the symbolism of light in different forms (indicating the intrusion of the imam's reality into sensory reality).⁵³

53. On the imam as 'light', see U. Rubin, 'Pre-existence and Light. Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad', *IOS*, 5 (1975) and 'Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shī'a Tradition', *JSAT*, 5 (1984); *Guide divin*, sections II-1 and II-2, pp. 75–112 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 29–43); on the hidden imam in particular as 'light', see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Eschatology: in Twelver Shi'ism: Individual eschatology', *EIr*.

The repeated presence of such elements seems to corroborate Corbin's idea that the 'place' and 'time' of the hidden imam are in this 'inter-world' that he designates by the brilliant expression, the 'imaginal world' – often rendered in latin as *mundus imaginallis*.⁵⁴ Let us limit ourselves to a few brief excerpts:

By saying that these visions, these epiphanies are the hagiography, *the history* of the 12th Imam, one is led to believe that this history, accomplished in a parallel world, is an anti-history vis à vis history in the ordinary sense of the word; it does not enter *into* this history, any more than the image is immanent in the mirror (...) The place where it occurs is a spiritual place; similarly its time is 'between time(s)'.⁵⁵

Everything occurs as if (...) the place which is not at all contained, identifiable with a place in the topography of the sensory world, suddenly and fleetingly bursts into our world (...) For it is a fact that its 'where', its *ubi* in relation to our 'where', our place and our *situs* in this world is an *ubique*.⁵⁶

Here the intervention of the *mundus imaginallis* is critical. To 'save the phenomenon' the phenomenologist will profess 'realism of the *imaginal*'. There is no hermeneutic of the Great Occultation, without the existence of this *world parallel to our own* (...). Failing to admit to this parallel world, one fears will be the ruin of every kind of explanation here.⁵⁷

From a strictly philosophical perspective, we can agree with this interpretation. However, from a phenomenological point of view,

54. Practically all the major works by Henry Corbin contain more or less detailed information on this important contribution in his studies; see esp. 'Pour une charte de l'Imaginal', in H. Corbin, *Corps spirituel et Terre céleste. De l'Iran mazdéen à l'Iran shi'ite* (rpr., Paris, 1979), pp. 7–19; the best introduction to the concept remains D. Shayegan, *Henry Corbin. La topographie spirituelle de l'Islam iranien* (Paris, 1990), see index, and 'Corbin, Henry', *EIr*, vol. 6, pp. 268–272; for a critical perspective, see E. Meyer, 'Tendenz der Schiaforschung: Corbins Auffassung von der Schia', *ZDMG*, suppl. 3/1 (1977).

55. *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, p. 337.

56. 'Au pays de l'Imam caché', pp. 76–77; *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, p. 374.

57. *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, p. 329.

as defined by Corbin himself⁵⁸ – that is, as regards a religious phenomenon as it appears to the believers – matters differ. To my knowledge, among Imami thinkers, only two masters of the Shaykhiyya theological-mystical school in Kerman, namely Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (1288/1870)⁵⁹ and Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī (d. 1969)⁶⁰ have described the 'location' of the hidden imam as being the world of *hūrqalyā/huwarqalyā* that Corbin equates with the 'imaginal world'.⁶¹

All the others – and there are at the least hundreds of these – they maintain that for more than a thousand years, the hidden imam has been and is in this world with his physical body. The miraculous events that accompany his presence are simply due to his ontological reality, due to the fact that he is the imam, the veritable manifestation of the Names and Attributes of God.⁶² This is why Ibn Bābūya devotes lengthy chapters of his *Kamāl al-dīn* to famously long-lived individuals, and here, too, his example was followed by many others seeking to prove that 'with divine permission' a human being is able to enjoy an exceptionally long life.⁶³ Al-Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī, the great expert with traditionalist and mystical tendencies, whose monographs are veritable encyclopedias

58. E.g. *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. xixff. and see index.

59. Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kermānī, *Irshād al-'awāmm* (Kerman, 1354/1935), vol. 2, p. 275.

60. Sarkār Āqā Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Tanzīh al-awliyā'* (Kerman, 1367/1948), pp. 724–726.

61. Corbin, *Corps spirituel et Terre céleste*, pp. 262–264 and 287–290; even the Imami authors (Mullā Ṣadrā, 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī, Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī) translated in this work did not adhere to this notion of the 'country' of the hidden imam.

62. See Chapter 3, this volume.

63. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, chs 46–54, pp. 523–638 (*mā jā'a fi'l-ta'mīr wa dhikr al-mu'ammarīn*); also al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 85–95 (*al-jawāb 'ani'l-i'tirāḍ 'alā ṭūl 'umrihi wa ziyādatihi 'ani'l-'umr al-ṭabī'ī wa kawnihi khāriqan li'l-'āda wa dhikr al-mu'ammarīn*) and Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Karājakī, *al-Burhān 'alā ṣiḥḥat ṭūl 'umr ṣāhib al-zamān* in the margins of *Kanz al-fawā'id* by the same author (Tabriz, n.d.), pp. 24–26 (*fi'l-ta'mīr wa'l-mu'ammarīn*).

of reports of encounters with the hidden imam,⁶⁴ denied the possibility of any spiritual interpretation (*ta'wīl*) applied to the 'location' of the hidden imam. Under these conditions, it is with a great deal of reservation that one is able to accept the unambiguous statement by Corbin according to which, 'admittedly, there was no lack of naïve souls for whom the imam had to exist as a man entirely similar to our contemporaries frequented by each one of us every day; there has even been serious discussion about certain "macrobiotes" envisaging the biological possibility of survival down the centuries'.⁶⁵

Moreover, as we shall see and in contrast to Corbin's idea, some thinkers have had recourse to spiritual hermeneutics of the Occultation and the vision of the hidden imam without necessarily feeling the need for the existence of a *mundus imaginalis*. Let us return to our typology. In the profusion of accounts, some of which are models of narrative beauty and others of stupefying brevity, in keeping with the event they relate, one can distinguish three categories according to the principal dimension conveyed. Of course, in some accounts several dimensions are present at the same time.

1. The humanitarian dimension

The vast majority of accounts belong to this category in which the extreme generosity of the hidden imam to his believers, and his concern for their welfare is emphasised – whence the sacred expression defining the role of the imam during his Occultation 'to assist the afflicted and to grant the wishes of the needy' (*ighāthat al-malhūf wa ijābat al-muḍṭarr*). The hidden imam is presented in these accounts as a benevolent father, especially sensitive to the needs and suffering of those near and dear to him. One should note that these accounts are not always related by Imami followers; some depict individuals with other beliefs who convert to Imamism

64. Al-Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī, *al-Najm al-thāqib*, p. 410.

65. *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 329–330.

after encountering the hidden imam and recognising the Saviour. Here are some typical examples:

Report of a man of the Banī Rāshid of Hamadān (fourth/tenth century). Abandoned by the caravan and lost in the desert not far from Mecca, the narrator comes to an enchanting landscape in the midst of which stands a paradisaical palace. There he encounters the Qā'im. While leaving the palace, he finds himself next to Hamadān, near Asadābādh. The palace has disappeared but the man still holds in his hand the purse presented to him by the Saviour.⁶⁶

Report of an Imami follower lost in the desert (fourth/tenth century). Just as the narrator is on the point of dying of thirst, the hidden imam appears and makes him drink. The Qā'im then orders him to close his eyes. When he re-opens his eyes, the imam is no longer there and the narrator finds himself in the midst of his caravan.⁶⁷

The report of Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī'l-Layth (sixth/twelfth century). Threatened by death, the narrator seeks refuge in a cemetery of the Qurashīs in Baghdad. He falls asleep there and in his dreams sees the hidden imam who teaches him a prayer which will bring him salvation.⁶⁸

The report by Amīr Ishāq al-Astarābādī (eleventh/seventeenth century). Another case of a man lost in the desert on the verge of dying: he encounters the imam who rescues him taking him away on horseback and then teaches him the true version of the prayer attributed to 'Alī and known as 'al-ḥirz al-yamānī'. When he has

66. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, pp. 453–454; Persian version in 'A. A. Burūjirdī, *Nūr al-anwār* (Tehran, 1347/1928), pp. 175–177; H. Corbin, 'Au pays de l'Imam caché', pp. 77–79 and *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 374–376.

67. Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* (Tehran, 1320/1902), pp. 119–120, citing K. *al-ghayba* by al-Ḥasan b. Ḥamza al-'Alawī al-Ṭabarī (fourth/tenth century).

68. Al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī, *Kunūz al-najāh* (n.p. [Iran], 1318/1900), pp. 46–47.

finished reciting the prayer al-Astarābādī has arrived at his destination while the imam has disappeared.⁶⁹

The report by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Qārūn (eleventh/seventeenth century). The story as told by the narrator concerns his friend Abū Rājīḥ, an elderly Imami who was atrociously tortured and mutilated by the governor of Ḥilla. The following night, Abū Rājīḥ begged for help from the Qā'im. Flooding the house with light, the latter appeared and with his hand caressed the elderly man's head. Not only were his wounds immediately healed, but henceforth and until his death, he had the appearance of a healthy young man.⁷⁰

The report by al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1104/1693). The author, a child struck with an incurable illness, sees all the imams in his dreams and begs for their help. The twelfth imam proffers him a mysterious drink that cures him instantaneously.⁷¹

2. The initiatory dimension

Often set alongside the humanitarian dimension, many accounts contain an initiatory aspect. During the encounter, the imam teaches the believer one or more prayers (this is most often the case), provides him with a solution to a theological, legal or spiritual problem, reveals knowledge of a secret. What is emphasised here, is the figure of the imam as 'the initiated and initiating sage' (*ʿālim*).⁷² These accounts illustrate a typically Shi'i theme of love-loyalty-submission (*walāya*) to the imam leading to initiation. Let us cite a few typical accounts:

69. Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 52, p. 170; al-Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī, *al-Najm al-thāqib*, p. 366.

70. Al-Nīlī, *al-Sulṭān al-mufarrij*, pp. 37–40; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 52, pp. 162–163; al-Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī, *al-Najm al-thāqib*, pp. 418–420.

71. Al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudāt bi'l-nuṣūṣ wa'l-muʿjizāt* (n.p. [Iran], 1341/1922), p. 81; see also the discussion and examples provided by E. Kohlberg, 'Authoritative Scriptures in Early Imāmi Shi'ism', pp. 308–309.

72. For this translation of *ʿālim*, refer to the references provided above in note 45.

The report by Ibrāhīm b. 'Alī b. Mahziyār (fourth/tenth century). The narrator encounters the hidden imam in a tent pitched in the desert near Mecca. The imam speaks at length about ethical and spiritual matters.⁷³

The report by Ibn Ṭāwūs (dating from 641/1243). In a highly allusive manner, the author refers to his companion's dream in which he finds the hidden imam deep in meditation; the latter reveals knowledge of a mystical nature that plunges the initiate into a state of ecstasy.⁷⁴

The report by Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-'Alawī al-Ḥusaynī (seventh/thirteenth century). His life threatened by the governor of Egypt, the narrator seeks refuge in Karbalā'. Near the tomb of al-Ḥusayn, for many successive nights in a state between sleep and wakefulness, he encounters the hidden imam; the latter teaches him a prayer and a specific ritual. A few days later, the narrator learns that the governor he feared has been assassinated.⁷⁵

The report by Amīr (ou Mīr) 'Allām (eleventh/seventeenth century). This concerns his famous master Muqaddas Ardabili who discovered the solutions to his theological and legal problems (*masā'il 'ilmiyya*) by spending time in contemplation near the

73. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, pp. 443–453.

74. Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Risāla fi'l-muḍāyaqa fī fawāt al-ṣalāt* (better known as *al-Muwāṣ'a wa'l-muḍāyaqa*) published in the margins of al-Astarābādī, *al-Fawā'id al-madaniyya* (n.p. [Iran], 1321/1904), pp. 30–40, quotation pp. 36–37 (I have unfortunately not been able to consult the more recent, undoubtedly better, edition of this text by M. 'A. al-Ṭabāṭabā'i al-Marāghī in *Turāthunā* [1407/1986–1987], vol. 2, pp. 2–3, entitled *Risāla 'adam muḍāyaqa al-fawā'it* – an edition pointed out by Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar*, p. 409).

75. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Muhaj al-da'awāt* (n.p. [Iran], n.d.), pp. 182–184 (according to dating by Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar*, p. 231, n. 311, the source for Ibn Ṭāwūs dates from the fourth/tenth century, and the story dates back approximately to the beginning of the minor Occultation; in this case, the encounter would have occurred during or just before the first Occultation); al-Ṭabrisī al-Nūri, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, pp. 227–229 (Persian version in his *al-Najm al-thāqib*, pp. 256–259); now quite famous, this prayer is known as 'The Prayer of al-'Alawī al-Miṣrī'.

tomb of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, eventually engaging in supernatural communication with the first imam. One 'particularly sombre' evening, the imam advises him to go to the mosque at Kūfa. There the scholar encounters the Qā'im who provides answers to all his questions.⁷⁶

To these accounts one should add the numerous stories of encounters accompanied by the teaching of prayers. Among them the different versions of the famous 'Prayer of Deliverance' (*du'ā' al-faraj*),⁷⁷ or as translated by Corbin, accounts of truly initiatic journeys, for example that to the Jamkarān sanctuary;⁷⁸ the Green

76. Al-Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī, *al-Najm al-thāqib*, pp. 454–455, citing *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* by Ni'matallāh al-Jazā'irī; A. Ḥ. Balāghī, *Maqālāt al-hunafā'* (Tehran, 1369/1949), pp. 137–138.

77. The oldest version of this prayer seems to be the one reported by Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 2, ch. 45, pp. 512–515, no. 43 (the very beginning is already reported by al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb fi'l-ghayba', vol. 2, pp. 135 and 144, nos 4 and 29); for other prayers taught by the hidden imam and other versions of the 'Prayer for Deliverance', see al-Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, report nos 4 to 6, 33, 36, 40 and 55.

78. Al-Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, pp. 230–234 (Persian version in *al-Najm al-thāqib*, pp. 294–300, and *Kalima ṭayyiba*, pp. 457–461 slightly different version). Al-Nūrī claims he cites from *Ta'rikh Qumm* (written in 378/988) by al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Qummī who would have reported it from the work, now apparently lost, by Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq entitled *Mu'nis al-ḥazīn fi ma'rifat al-haqq wa'l-yaqīn*. The Arabic original of *Ta'rikh Qumm*, also seems to have been lost; we possess an old partially preserved Persian translation by Ḥasan b. 'Alī Qummī dated 805–806/1402–1403 (ed. S. J. Tehrānī, 3rd edn, 1361 Sh./1982). This latter text contains only five of the twenty sections from the original Arabic version; it provides some information on the pre-Islamic period of Jamkarān but the account regarding the establishment of the sanctuary is missing. Corbin provides a partial translation of this account (based on *Kalima ṭayyiba* by al-Nūrī) in 'Au pays de l'Imam caché', p. 79 (where it should read 'Ramaḍān 373' instead of '379') and especially in *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 338–346. On Jamkarān, see also M. A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Jamkarān et Māhān, deux pèlerinages insolites en Iran', in M. A. Amir-Moezzi (ed.), *Lieux d'islam. Cultes et cultures de l'Afrique à Java* (Paris, 1996; 2nd edn, 2005).

Island in the White Sea⁷⁹ and the five maritime cities where the sons of the hidden imam are to be found.⁸⁰

3. The eschatological dimension

These are not strictly speaking narrative accounts but mystical in conception with an eschatological angle based on the spiritual hermeneutics of some accounts from the categories above. To my knowledge, the first to have introduced this concept was al-Sayyid Kāẓim al-Rashtī (1259/1843), the second master of the Shaykhiyya and successor to Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī (1241/1826), namesake of the school. Having considered both the last letter of the twelfth

79. Nūrallāh Shūshtarī, *Majālis al-mu'minīn* (Tehran, 1365 Sh./1987), vol. 1, pp. 78–79 (to my knowledge, this book from the eleventh/seventeenth century is the earliest source that mentions this account); Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī, *Tabṣīrat al-walī fī man ra'a'l-qā'im al-mahdī* (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 243–251; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 52, pp. 159–180; al-Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, pp. 213–221 and *al-Najm al-thāqib*, pp. 387–415; partial trans. by Corbin in 'Au pays de l'Imam caché', pp. 48–68 and especially *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 346–367. The authenticity of this account was doubted by the Imamīs themselves, and this ever since al-Majlisī (*Bihār al-anwār*, p. 159: 'I devote a separate chapter to this account because I have not been able to find it in any of the reliable sources'); for further discussion on this topic, see Sayyid Ja'far Murtaḍā 'Āmilī, *Dirāsa fī 'alāmāt al-zuhūr wa'l-jazīrat al-khaḍrā'* (Qumm, 1411/1990), pp. 226 f.; A. Ṭarīqeh-dār, *Jazīre-ye khaḍrā'* (Qumm, 1372 Sh./1994).

80. Al-Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī, *al-Najm al-thāqib*, pp. 300–309, citing *Kitāb al-ta'āzī* by al-'Alawī al-Ḥusaynī (sixth/twelfth century); al-Ḥā'irī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib fī ithbāt al-ḥujjat al-ghā'ib* (Tehran, 1351/1922), pp. 148–149; Persian version in 'A. A. Burūjirdī, *Nūr al-anwār*, pp. 165–175; a partial trans. by Corbin, 'Au pays de l'Imam caché', pp. 68–76 and *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 367–374. Like the previous account, this one is also considered inauthentic and is thus rejected by a number of Imami scholars (see the works by 'Āmilī and Ṭarīqeh-dār indicated in the preceding note). Al-Nūrī defends the account all the while advancing arguments to prove the necessity for the existence of the hidden imam's sons (*al-Najm*, pp. 309–312). In my view, this reflects the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī (traditionalist/rationalist) conflict, the former opting for authenticity of these accounts, the latter rejecting them as forged (regarding this refer to important comments made by the scathing leader of the rationalists, al-Shaykh Ja'far 'Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' [d. 1227/1812] in the margins of Ni'matallāh al-Jazā'irī, *al-Anwār al-nu'māniyya* [Tehran, n.d.], vol. 2, p. 64).

imam and the many reports of encounters with him, in the course of an elaborate argument Sayyid Kāẓim proposes the following syllogism: the hidden imam cannot be seen until the End of Time; some individuals have seen him, therefore these people have reached the End of Time.⁸¹ The argument and especially the syllogism have been taken up almost word for word and translated into Persian by Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsim Rāz Shīrāzī (1286/1869), the master of the Dhahabiyya order⁸² and by Sayyid Aḥmad Dehkordī (1339/1920), the master of the Khāksāriyya order.⁸³ The conclusion of the syllogism is obviously understood as an initiatory death: vision of the Resurrector-imam signals the death of ego and the rebirth of the initiate. This is what may be called individual eschatology. The eminent scholar Sayyid Kāẓim is very familiar with hagiographical literature devoted to the twelfth imam and has recourse to a hermeneutical reading of encounters with the latter to support his idea. After citing several of these accounts as examples,⁸⁴ he writes:

These accounts lend themselves to be a spiritual interpretation (*maḥmūl 'alā'l-ta'wīl*); the parched, devastated, threatened and tortured men are symbols (*rumūz*) of the suffering that the perilous desert of spiritual quest (*tīh al-ṭalab*) exacts upon the individual and of the oppression he feels as he thirsts for the vision of the Beloved (*liqā' al-maḥbūb*). These dead men are brought back to life by the imam, which is to say they have experienced a spiritual rebirth (*wilāda rūḥāniyya*); how so? By the vision of the radiant face of the imam and by virtue of the initiation (*ta'lim*) that this blessed vision includes.⁸⁵

81. Al-Sayyid Kāẓim al-Rashtī, *al-Rasā'il wa'l-masā'il* (Tabriz, n.d.), pp. 356–365.

82. Abu'l-Qāsim Rāz Shīrāzī, *Mirṣād al-'ibād* (Tabriz, n.d.), pp. 98f.

83. Aḥmad Dehkordī, *Borhān-nāme-ye ḥaqīqat* (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 123ff.

84. Al-Rashtī, *al-Rasā'il wa'l-masā'il*, pp. 360–362.

85. Ibid., p. 362.

Then, with only slight variations, our three authors offer their disciples a practical path to be followed in preparation for the vision of the imam, and through that, their individual resurrection. It is interesting to note that all three have recourse to the same series of early traditions attributed to the imams. Let us present the essential aspects of their observations:⁸⁶ some traditions suggest that the fortunate believers can, during the major Occultation, come to know the 'location of the hidden imam', in other words, they are able to meet him. 'The Qā'im will enter on two Occultations', states a tradition by Ja'far al-Šādiq, 'one short and another longer in duration. During the first, only certain elect Shi'is (*khāṣṣa shī'atihi*) will know the location; and during the second [occultation], only the elect among his faithful friends (*khāṣṣa mawālīhi*) will know the location.'⁸⁷ The 'elect Shi'is' designate the 'representatives' during the minor Occultation. 'The elect among his faithful friends' are those believers who have been initiated so that they can enter into contact with the imam during the major Occultation. 'The Lord of this Cause [i.e. the hidden imam]', Ja'far al-Šādiq is also supposed to have said, 'will enter upon two Occultations – one will last so long that some among them [i.e. the Imamis] will say that the imam is dead, others that he was killed, and others yet that he has [definitively] disappeared. Only some of his adepts (*aṣḥāb*) will remain loyal to his Cause but no one, his friends (*wālī*) or others, will know where he is to be found except for the faithful friend (*mawlā*) who champions his Cause.'⁸⁸

86. Al-Rashtī, *al-Rasā'il wa'l-masā'il*, pp. 362–365; Shīrāzī, *Miršād al-'ibād*, pp. 107–110; Dehkordī, *Borhān-nāme-ye haqīqat*, pp. 129–134. It is interesting to compare these preparatory practices of an essentially mystical kind with those that are moral, ascetic and specifically religious, proposed by al-Nūrī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, pp. 325–326 and *al-Najm al-thāqib*, pp. 655–657, which draws upon other traditions dating back to the imams; see also Chapter 10, this volume.

87. E.g. al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, 'Kitāb al-ḥujja', 'Bāb fi'l-ghayba', vol. 2, pp. 140–141, no. 19; al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ch. 10, pp. 249–250 (bilingual edn) and p. 170 (Arabic).

88. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, pp. 250–251 and 171–172 respectively.

According to our authors, this faithful elected friend can only be a 'believer whose heart has been tested by God for faith' (*al-mu'min imtaḥana'llāh qalbahu li'l-īmān*). This recurring formula that the imams enunciate generally designates the true believer initiated into the spiritual practice of 'vision by (or "in") the heart' (*al-ru'ya bi'l-qalb*), a secret practice that consists of discovering the imam in his form of light in the subtle centre of the heart' and resulting in the acquisition of salvational knowledge and supernatural powers.⁸⁹ Preparing the path that leads to an encounter with the hidden imam thus entails acquiring this secret, initiatory 'technique'. Once again, in this case the authors provide a hermeneutical reading of encounter narratives, in which the 'light' of the hidden imam intervenes, adding other early traditions in which the Occulted presence of the hidden imam is compared to a flood of light or a luminous radiance.⁹⁰

All three cite the tradition attributed to the Prophet and reported by the Companion Jābir al-Anṣārī in which it is said that during the Occultation only those whose heart has been tested for faith will remain loyal to the hidden imam's Cause, that they will be illuminated by the light of the imam and will benefit from his *walāya* just as one benefits from the sun when it is hidden by clouds. And the tradition ends with these words: 'This is a secret sealed by God, a hidden treasure of divine knowledge. Jābir, keep this secret from those who are not worthy of it.'⁹¹

By 'testing of the heart' the initiate is able to encounter the imam and attain his Reality, namely his form as light. This knowledge entails salvation and is equivalent to individual resurrection.

89. On *al-ru'ya bi'l-qalb* in the early tradition and its continuation in mystical schools, see my *Guide divin*, pp. 112–145 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 44–56); for the practice of this 'technique' in Shi'i mystical orders, see R. Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, vol. 2: *Glaube und Lehre* (Wiesbaden, 1976), p. 207, n. 1, 073 and pp. 247–250. See also Chapter 10, this volume.

90. Cf. e.g. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, ch. 23, p. 253, no. 3, vol. 2, ch. 35, pp. 371–372, no. 5 and ch. 45, p. 485, no. 4 *in fine*.

91. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, ch. 23, p. 253, no. 3 *in fine*.

It is in this sense that one should understand the traditions dating back to the imams, according to which 'the remotness or imminence of the End of Time, brings no harm to he who knows his imam' and 'he who knows his imam, is like one who already finds himself in the tent of the awaited imam',⁹² for such a believer is already revived through knowledge of the imam who is the veritable Revealed God.⁹³

92. Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ch. 25, pp. 470–473 (bilingual edn) and pp. 329–331 (Arabic). In general, on the individual dimension of Imami eschatology, see my article, 'Eschatology: in Twelver Shi'ism: Individual eschatology', *EIr*.

93. Any one of the imams can manifest himself to a 'tested believer' who has faith in the fundamental unity of all the imams' Reality and their teaching (cf. the saying attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq: 'Our creation [i.e. ours, the imams] is one, our science is one, our merit is one, we are all one', e.g. al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ch. 4, p. 127, bilingual edn and p. 86 Arabic). I have already cited the case of Muqaddas Ardabili and his supernatural communications with the first imam (above, 'initiatory dimension', 4th report); see also the case of Mullā 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. Yūnus al-Damāwandī (d. ca. 1150/1737 or 1170/1757) who relates being blessed with 'direct' teaching from the third imam, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, see his *Sharh-e asrār-e asma'-e hosnā = Meftāḥ-e asrār-e ḥusaynī* in *Montakhabātī az āthār-e ḥokamā-ye elāhī-ye Īrān*, ed. S. J. Āshtiyānī, Bibliothèque Iranienne (Tehran–Paris, 1976), vol. 3, pp. 577–790 and esp. pp. 577–578 and 628. Mullā 'Abd al-Raḥīm is also known having encountered the hidden imam, see al-Ṭabrisī al-Nūrī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, p. 306 and *al-Najm al-thāqib*, p. 506; regarding him see also H. Corbin, *La philosophie iranienne islamique aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1981), pp. 340–393. One of the greatest spiritual aims of Sufis belonging to the Dhahabiyya order is to encounter the eighth imam, 'Alī al-Riḍā, to whom the order's initiatory chain is traced; see *Resāle-ye ḥall-e eshkāl-e davāzdah so'āl-e...Zanjānī az...Rāz-e Shīrāzī* (Tehran, 1367/1947), pp. 125–126; *Guide divin*, pp. 135–136 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 52–53). In general, Imami mystical works cite numerous cases of these 'direct' disciples of one or another imam, graced by the vision of the imam; cf. e.g. N. Modarresī Chahārdehī, *Khāksār va ahl-e ḥaqq* (2nd edn, Tehran, n.d.), pp. 80–83 – a rather muddled work but a treasury of information; 'Abd al-Riḍā Khān Ibrāhīmī (master of the Shaykhiyya of Kerman), *Dūstī-ye dūstān* (Kerman, 1400/1979). These reports of encounters with imams other than the hidden imam, although of initiatory significance, do not appear to include an individual eschatological dimension.

An Absence Filled with Presences: Shaykhiyya Hermeneutics of the Occultation^{*}

In *Le conflit des interprétations*,¹ Paul Ricoeur wrote: 'I call hermeneutics any discipline that proceeds by means of interpretation, and I give the word "interpretation" its strongest meaning: the discernment of hidden meaning within apparent meaning.' I begin with this quotation from the French philosopher, itself based on certain classical definitions of the term, because it seems a fine introduction to the present chapter. Curiously, the definition has a certain Shi'i resonance: the 'hidden'/'apparent' pair obviously recalls the *bāṭin/ẓāhir* pair, omnipresent at all levels of Shi'i doctrine.² The notion of the discernment of what is hidden immediately evokes that of *kashf al-maḥjūb*, central to all Muslim mysticism. And Shi'ism combined with mysticism perfectly describes the nature of the order of the Shaykhiyya. This chapter examines certain hermeneutics – in Ricoeur's sense – of the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam within this order.

^{*} This chapter was originally given as a paper at the colloquium 'Die Zwölferschia in der Neuzeit', organised by Werner Ende and Rainer Brunner, for which they are most cordially thanked, at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität de Freiburg-im-Breisgau (4–7 October 1999).

1. P. Ricoeur, *Le conflit des interprétations* (Paris, 1969), p. 260.

2. On this question see my 'Du droit à la théologie: les niveaux de réalité dans le shi'isme duodécimain', *Cahiers du Groupe d'Etudes Spirituelles Comparées*, 5, 'L'Esprit et la Nature' (Actes du colloque tenu à Paris, 11–12 May 1996) (Milan and Paris, 1997), pp. 37–63.

The eschatological dimension in general and the Occultation and its implications in particular, constitute the central themes of the Shaykhī doctrine since its founding sources; namely, the works of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'i (d. 1241/1826) and Sayyid Kāzīm al-Rashtī (d. 1259/1843).³ On the matter of the Occultation, successive masters of the order consistently used two fundamental notions,⁴ which may be understood as two methodological, hermeneutic foundations. First, the existence of at least two levels to all reality, an obvious, manifest, exoteric level (*zāhir*) and another, secret, esoteric level, hidden by the first (*bāṭin*). In some cases this notion is multiplied into *zāhir al-zāhir*, *al-zāhir*, *bāṭin al-zāhir*, *al-bāṭin* and *bāṭin al-bāṭin*. The notion is of course applied first and foremost to the Qur'ān, *ḥadīths* and other religious texts, but it is also used for other matters, such as canonical duties, legal data and points of doctrine. It was used as a hermeneutic method in the writings of Shaykh Aḥmad⁵ and Sayyid Kāzīm,⁶ and in an even more developed way by the two sons and consecutive successors to Muḥammad Karīm Khān: Muḥammad Khān (d. 1324/1906)⁷

3. On Shaykhī eschatology see V. Rafati, 'The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'i Islam' (University of California, 1979), ch. 4, pp. 102–125; also Appendix A, pp. 218–219, for a list of monographic writings by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'i and Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī on the Qā'im. See also I. Samawi Hamid, 'The Metaphysics and Cosmology of Process According to Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'i' (State University of New York, 1998), ch. II.2.

4. This study will only discuss the Kirmānī branch of the Shaykhiyya order that recognises Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d. 1288/1870) and his descendants as the successors of Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī. Branches such as those of Tabriz and, more recently, Islamabad will not be taken into account.

5. Al-Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'i, *al-Risāla al-Tawbaliyya*, called *Lawāmi' al-wasā'il* (responses to questions by Mullā 'Alī Tawbālī) in *Jawāmi' al-kilām/kalīm*, vol. 1, pp. 95–99, response no. 15, and *al-Risāla al-Qaṭi'fiyya* (responses to 71 questions by Shaykh Šāliḥ Qaṭifi), vol. 1, pp. 117–120, response no. 9.

6. Sayyid Kāzīm al-Ḥusaynī al-Rashtī, 'Risāla fi jawāb Mullā 'Alī Baraghānī' in *al-Rasā'il wa'l-masā'il* (Tabriz, n.d.), pp. 335–336, response no. 7; al-Rashtī, *Risāla fi bayān maqāmāt al-zāhir wa'l-bāṭin* (lithograph, n.p., n.d.).

7. Muḥammad Khān Kirmānī, 'Sharḥ lā ḥawl wa lā quwwa illā bi'llāh' in *Majma' al-rasā'il* (Kirmān, 1348 Sh./1970), vol. 3, pp. 62–111; and 'Risāla

and Zayn al-‘Ābidīn Khān Kirmānī (d. 1360/1942).⁸ Second, there is the notion of the universe as macrocosm (*al-‘ālam al-kabīr*), man as microcosm (*al-‘ālam al-ṣaghīr*), and the correspondence between the two. An event in the external world may have its counterpart in the corresponding internal world of man, and thus constitute one of its hidden, esoteric meanings. Thus, concomitantly, as an event that has happened in the world the Occultation corresponds to something deep inside the individual. Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī⁹ and Muḥammad Khān Kirmānī¹⁰ have produced pages of luminous, profound writing on this notion, employing it as a hermeneutic method.

With these two constants of Shaykhī thought in mind, and in the interests of clarity, I have chosen to present the following analysis in two parts, the hermeneutics (in the sense of revelation of hidden meaning) of the Occultation first as macrocosmic event and then as microcosmic event.

The Occultation in the world

In the course of a recent research expedition to Iran (July–August 1999), I heard Zayn al-‘Ābidīn Khān Ibrāhīmī, current master of the order in Iran,¹¹ say that according to the Twelver Shi‘i profession of faith, the twelfth, hidden imam is not only alive but his being has never stopped exercising its active, effective influence on the world. This influence is not an abstraction or

dar jawāb-i ba‘dī ikhwān’, response no 2, in *Majma‘ al-rasā’il* (Kirmān, 1350 Sh./1973), vol. 78, pp. 132–149.

8. Zayn al-‘Ābidīn Khān Kirmānī, ‘al-Risāla al-Ḥasaniyya’ (responses to questions by Mirzā Ḥasan Sardrūdī), response no 3, in *Majma‘ al-rasā’il* (Kirmān, 1350 Sh./1973), vol. 28, pp. 78–93.

9. *Risāla fī jawāb Mullā ‘Alī Baraghānī*, pp. 334–335.

10. *Wāridāt*, ‘Wārida’ in *Majma‘ al-rasā’il* (Kirmān, 1349 Sh./1971), vol. 27, pp. 23–32, no. 4.

11. The function of great universal master of the Shaykhiyya of Kirmān is currently undertaken by Sayyid ‘Alī al-Mūsawī of Baṣra; see D. MacEoin, ‘Shaykhiyya’, *EI2*, p. 417b.

just metaphysical concept; on the contrary, it is and must be concrete. And it is so because it is exercised through a certain number of flesh-and-blood persons called the Friends of the Hidden Imam (*dūstān-i imām-i ghā'ib*). Without pronouncing the term, Sarkār Aghā Ibrāhīmī was here clearly evoking the doctrine of the Fourth Pillar (*rukn rābi'*). This doctrine can be considered a kind of hermeneutics of the hidden Imam's Occulted presence and influence in the world. The first two grand masters of the school, Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāzīm, would seem to have made only furtive allusions to the *rukn rābi'*.¹² The doctrine was first significantly developed at length in the immense body of work by the third master, Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d. 1288/1870); he not only wrote monographs on the subject,¹³ but devoted long chapters of his major works to it,¹⁴ as well as numerous parts of his *responsa*.¹⁵ Calling into question the exclusive legitimacy of

12. See Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī (d. 1389/1969), *Fihrist-i kutub*, pp. 75–78. The author, son and successor to Zayn al-Ābidīn Khān Kirmānī, published here two letters by Sayyid Kāzīm that allude to the *rukn rābi'*. I have not found any text by either of these authors on the subject, but I am still far from having completed my reading of their monumental writings. However, the importance of the concept of the Fourth Pillar and its constituent parts in the work of the Bāb, himself a disciple of Sayyid Kāzīm, gives one to think that the two initial masters of the Shaykhiyya, and above all the second, spoke of it greatly; cf. D. M. MacEoin, 'From Shaykhism to Babism: A Study in Charismatic Renewal in Shi'i Islam' (PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 1979), pp. 170f. 201f. and 'Early Shaykhi Reactions to the Bāb and His Claims', in M. Momen (ed.), *Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī history* (Los Angeles, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 1–47, esp. pp. 34–36; T. Lawson, 'The Qur'ān Commentary of the Bāb' (PhD thesis, McGill University, 1987), pp. 48f., 80–81, 150f., 165f., 181–182, 253f., 294, 363.

13. For example, *Rukn-i rābi'* and *Tawḥīd nubuwwa imāma Shi'a*.

14. For example *Irshād al-'awāmm*, 4 parts in 2 vols, the whole of vol. 4; *Tarīq al-najāṭ*, 4 parts in 1 vol., the whole of part 2, ch. 3; *Izhāq al-bāṭil*, ch. 3; *Sī faṣḥ*, the first four *faṣḥ*; *al-Fiṭra al-salīma*, the whole of vol. 3; *Hidāyat al-ṭālibīn*, ch. 2.

15. For example 'Risāla dar raf-i shubuhāt-i ba'ḍ-i ahl-i Karbalā', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 15, response no. 5; 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Sayyid Jawād Karbalā'i', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 66, response no. 2; 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Mullā Ḥasan Yazdī', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 66, response no. 6; 'Risāla dar Jawāb-i Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Kāzarūnī', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 68, response

the official religious authorities and being made use of in various versions in Bābism, which was an involuntary offshoot of Shaykhism according to Muḥammad Karīm Khān and his successors, the *rukṇ rābi* was thus much written about and also the cause of a great deal of the violence perpetrated against the Shaykhiyya of Kermān.¹⁶ It was at this time that the Shaykhiyya's adversaries began to call them (amongst other names) 'Rukniyya'. Though subsequent masters continued to expound the notion, they had to explain the doctrinal foundation of the Fourth Pillar, to demonstrate its perfect orthodoxy within Imāmism, and thereby calm those who had been stirred up against it by impassioned public sermons.¹⁷

no. 10; 'Risāla dar Jawāb-i nawwāb 'Abbās Mīrzā b. Muḥammad Shāh Qājār', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 70, response no. 5.

16. See e.g. MacEoin, 'From Shaykhism to Babism'; A. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (London, 1989), pp. 48ff. For a short but useful review of the doctrinal differences between Imami theologian-jurists and the Shaykhiyya, see esp. S. A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago, 1984), index under 'Shaykhiyya', and M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrine of Twelver Shi'ism* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 226–228. The open conflict between the Shaykhis and the Uṣūlī clerics seems to go back to the anathema (*takfīr*) hurled against Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'i by Mullā Muḥammad Taqī Baraghānī Qazwīnī around the year 1238/1822 (see also Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭīrānī, *Ṭabaqāt a'lām al-shī'a* [Najaf, 1956], vol. 2, pp. 226–228; M. Sharīf Rāzī, *Ganjīna-yi dānishmandān* [Tehran, 1354 Sh./1976], vol. 6, p. 162).

17. This is quite clear from many Shaykhī writings; for example Muḥammad Khān Kirmānī, *Yanābī' al-ḥikma* (Kirmān, 1383/1964), vol. 1, 'maqāla' 4, *Burhān-i qāṭi'* (a monograph on the subject), *Wasīlat al-najāt*, 'maqṣad' 4; Zayn al-'Ābidīn Khān Kirmānī, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Muḥammad Ṣādiq Khān Nā'īnī', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 8, response nos 6–9, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Āqā Mīrzā Sayyid Muḥammad Riḍawī', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 11; 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Shaykh Ḥusayn b. Shaykh 'Alī Ṣaḥḥāf dar rukn-i rābi', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 79; Abū'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Tanzīh al-awliyā*, chs 35–38 and 49–50; Ibrāhīmī, *Ijtihād wa taqlīd*, 2nd edn, all of the 'Tatmīm' and 'Risāla falsafiyya dar jawāb-i Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Falsafi', response nos 11 and 12, and *Fihrist*, pp. 74–111 (partial trans. and commentary by H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques* [Paris, 1971–1972], vol. 4, pp. 274–286); 'Abd al-Riḍā Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Dūsti-ye dūstān* (a monograph on the subject). It should be noted that 'Abd al-Riḍā Khān, son and successor to

What is the *rukṇ rābi*?¹⁸ The first three pillars of the profession of Imami faith are God's unicity (*tawḥīd*), the mission of the prophets (*nubuwwa*), and that of the Imam (*imāma*). The fourth, just as essential as the other three, is what the Shaykhī masters designate with the terms 'the Shi'is (*al-shī'a*)' or 'the allied saints or friends of the Imam' (*awliyā*' in Arabic, *dūstān* in Persian); that is, the true Shi'is, those initiated into the esoteric teachings of the imams, the most worthy of whom are in spiritual relation with the hidden Imam. We can examine this issue more closely by considering the three essential components of the doctrine of the Fourth Pillar.

1. The Men of the Mystery (*rijāl al-ghayb*)

Throughout his monumental work *Irshād al-'awāmm*, Muḥammad Karīm Khān explains that the universe only has meaning from a gnostic perspective. The purpose of creation is knowledge (*ma'rifa*), the living and lived knowledge of the mysteries of God, man and the laws that govern the world. The existence of the Four Pillars and the dialectical relation connecting them to each other are determined by this living knowledge.¹⁹ The reality

Abu'l-Qāsim Khān and penultimate master of the order, was assassinated on 26 December 1979, a few months after the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran (see E. Franz, 'Minderheiten im Iran. Dokumentation zur Ethnographie und Politik', *Aktueller Informationsdienst Moderner Orient*, Sondernummer 8 [Hamburg, 1981], p. 192). In general terms, on the persecution of mystics in Iran from the Safawid period to modern times, it is useful to consult L. Lewisohn, 'An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism', Part I, *BSOAS*, 61/3 (1998), pp. 437–464 and Part II, *BSOAS*, 62/1 (1999), pp. 36–59.

18. Corbin provides a discussion of this question, which is in fact an annotated translation of Abu'l-Qāsim Khān's presentation in his *Fihrist*, in *En Islam iranien* (see n. 17). In it he incorporates and expands his previous discussion in 'L'École Shaykhie en théologie Shi'ite', *EPHE* (1960–1961), pp. 50–59. This chapter seeks to further develop Corbin's work, which is to my knowledge the first and only one of its kind. See also Lawson, 'The Qur'an Commentary of the Bāb'.

19. This explains the very structure of the *Irshād al-'awāmm*: vols 1 and 2: 'Dar shinākhtan-i khudāwand wa ma'rifat-i payghambarān wa bayān-i haqiqat-i ma'ād', vol. 3, 'Dar ma'rifat-i imāmān', vol. 4, 'Dar ma'rifat-i Shī'a'.

of the divine Unicity is the mystery of mysteries. The essential *raison d'être* of the Prophet's mission was to guide men on the path to understanding this mystery. The Imam's mission consists in making the reality of the prophetic message known. Finally, because the Occultation is a realised fact and the knowledge must remain alive, the *raison d'être* of the initiated²⁰ is to make the reality of the teaching of the imams known and thereby keep it alive.²¹ The existence of this corps of initiates is thus absolutely necessary in the economy of the sacred; without it, all humanity would lose the transcendental meaning of its being and sink into the darkness of impious ignorance.²²

This group of sages, whom H. Corbin calls *ecclesia spiritualis*,²³ is a secret spiritual hierarchy designated in Shaykhī writings by the ancient term *rijāl al-ghayb*, 'the men of the mystery'.²⁴ This expression has several meanings. First, the men in this hierarchy are in relation with the divine, invisible world, the world of mystery, the *ghayb*. In different ways, according to their place in the hierarchy, they are in relation with the hidden Imam (*ghayb* is of course from the same root as *ghayba*, 'Occultation'). Finally, they are themselves 'invisible', in the sense that as companions of the hidden Imam, their spiritual rank and real activities are completely hidden. Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī explicitly writes that a tradesman or peasant can just as easily belong to the hierarchy as a great cleric, without anyone knowing it.²⁵ The

20. On the translation of 'Shī'a' as 'initiated ones' see Chapter 8 in this volume.

21. Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Irshād al-'awāmm*, vol. 4, pp. 5–75 and *Tawḥīd nubuwwa imāma shī'a*, pp. 45–54.

22. Zayn al-Ābidīn Khān, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Muḥammad Qulī Khān sipīhr', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 80, response no. 5; 'Abd al-Riḍā Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Dūstī-ye dūstān*, pp. 187–190.

23. *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, p. 276.

24. See for example Zayn al-Ābidīn Khān, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Muḥammad Ṣādiq Khān Nā'ini', response no. 9, with references to both the ancient texts and earlier Shaykhī writings.

25. *Fihrist*, p. 108.

exact number of these men is not known. The sources specify only that they belong to two main categories: the chiefs (*naqīb*, pl. *nuqabā'*) and the nobles (*najīb*, pl. *nujabā'*). Commenting on certain ancient traditions presented in the *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* of al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–903) and the *Kāfī* of al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940–941), Muḥammad Karīm Khān makes the supposition that there are twelve *nuqabā'* and seventy *nujabā'*, while adding that because his predecessors, Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāẓim, gave no specifics on this matter, his supposition should be considered no more than a hypothesis.²⁶ The Chiefs are the holders of sacred Power; they intervene in a secret manner in the affairs of the world to prevent ignorance-bred injustice and violence from entirely invading the earth. The nobles, on the other hand, have no earthly power but are rather the holders of sacred knowledge, and their function is to safeguard and transmit initiatory science.²⁷ This hierarchy is secret because humanity is going through a long cycle of ignorance and violence. If the friends of the hidden Imam are incognito, this is because men have lost the 'organs' necessary to recognise them. And this itself is a sign of divine wisdom, because otherwise the friends would either be persecuted or confused with those external powers that organise each human community socially and politically. Still, nothing prevents the members of this hierarchy from revealing their true function to certain rare individuals worthy of such a revelation.²⁸ A poem by Muḥammad Karīm Khān sums up these ideas very well:

26. *Irshād al-'awāmm*, vol. 4, pp. 275–276. An allusion by Sayyid Kāẓim also seems to indicate that there are twelve *nuqabā'* (see *infra*).

27. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 252–273; Kirmānī, Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Tariq al-najāt*, vol. 2, ch. 3, pp. 123–138; Muḥammad Khān Kirmānī, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Shaykh Ḥusayn Rashtī', response no. 5, facsimile of the autograph MS (Kirmān, n.d.); Abū'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Tanzih al-awliyā'*, chs 32 and 50; 'Abd al-Riḍā Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Dūstī-ye dūstān*, passim.

28. Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Irshād al-'awāmm*, vol. 4, pp. 310–315; Zayn al-'Abidin Khān, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Muḥammad Qulī Khān Sipīhr', response no. 5 and 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Muḥammad Ṣādiq Khān Nā'ini', response

If there is error, this is because of our ignorance / The ignorant one acts only out of ignorance

When God saw people's ignorance / He chose a group of sages.

He manifested them amidst the masses / And he initiated them into the science of the Imam,

So they would reveal (true) government / and thereby put an end to polemic and enmities.

Through charisma, some are chiefs / Through dignity, others are Nobles

Through its power, the group of chiefs / replaces the Imam like a delegate;

Their power is the Power of God / They make anyone they wish obey.

The reign of the sovereigns of being / is the sign of their reign in both worlds.

The group of Nobles are all Sages / Guides for the community and guardians of the faith.

Dispensers of science in this world / Arbiters of judgement in the other World.²⁹

The *nuqabā'* and *nujabā'* secretly direct men towards knowledge of the reality of the hidden Imam. In the way of symbols, they both hide and reveal that which is symbolised, the Mahdī. Muḥammad Karīm Khān employs an elegant formula to describe this situation: 'the men of the mystery' constitute together the name (*ism*) of the hidden Imam: they identify him, call out to him and make him known. But everyone knows that in Imamism, the name of the Mahdī must not be uttered – hence the secret nature of this spiritual hierarchy.³⁰

no. 9; Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Fihrist*, pp. 90–91 (annotated translation by Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, p. 276).

29. Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Risāla manzūma Raḥīmīyya*, pp. 41–42.

30. *Irshād al-awāmm*, vol. 4, pp. 302–303. On the interdiction to pronounce the name of the twelfth imam and the ancient sources on this subject, see my *Guide divin*, pp. 257–260 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 105–106).

In this way, by applying it to the Occultation, Shaykhism actualises an extremely ancient Shi'i belief, known since at least the Kumayl *ḥadīth*, which was reported, among others, by al-Ya'qūbī (d. 284/897), in which 'Alī speaks of a group of rare holy men, who cannot be detected but who are so many signs and proofs of God's existence on earth.³¹

2. The unicity of the speaker (*waḥdat al-nāṭiq*)

A second component of the doctrine of the *rukn rābi'* is the unicity of the speaker, also called the unique speaker (*al-nāṭiq al-wāḥid*). As in any hierarchy, 'the men of the mystery' have at their head a supreme authority, the wisest and most powerful among them, who is in a direct relationship with the Imam and is called the 'perfect Shi'i' (*akmal al-shi'a*; *shī'a-i kāmīl* in Persian) or 'the gate' (*bāb*) of the hidden Imam.³² This pole (*quṭb*) which is of the earthly world (the hidden Imam is the pole of both worlds), is called *nāṭiq*, literally 'the speaker', once again because of the primary importance of initiatory knowledge: in any initiatory relation, the master is the one who speaks while the disciple is the one who listens in silence (*ṣāmit*). This is a cosmic law applying from God all the way down to the humblest of initiates. The notion is expounded in a didactic text by Muḥammad Karīm Khān, and further developed by Abu'l-Qāsim Khān: the order of

31. Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, pp. 205–206; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, ch. 26, p. 290, no. 2 and *al-Khiṣāl*, pp. 186–187; al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāgha*, pp. 1,155–1,158; see also Chapter 8 *in fine*. The secret hierarchy of saints is a familiar concept in Sunni Sufism, but it is also discussed in interesting ways in Imami Sufism; see Sayyid Haydar Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, pp. 223ff.; Shams al-Dīn al-Lāhijī, *Mafātīḥ al-i'jāz fī sharḥ Gulshan-i rāz*, pp. 265ff. (on al-Lāhijī's Imamism see p. xl of the editors' introduction).

32. Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Izhāq al-bāṭil*, ch. 3, pp. 91–92; Muḥammad Khān, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Shaykh Ḥusayn Mazīdī', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 73, response no. 1; Zayn al-Ābidīn Khān, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Muḥammad Ṣādiq Khān Nā'ini', response nos 6 and 7; Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Tanzīh al-awliyā'*, ch. 50; Ibrāhīmī, 'Tatmīm' in *Ijtihād wa taqlid* and 'Risāla sharifiyya dar jawāb-i Shaykh 'Alī Akbar Sharīf al-Wā'izīn', response no. 19.

the world is governed by teaching, initiation (*ta'lim*); God is the first master; He 'speaks' and the Angel Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation, listens while remaining 'silent', just as when Gabriel speaks the Prophet remains silent, and so on with the Prophet and the Imam, the Imam and his gate, and the Imam's *bāb* or gate and the rest of the initiates ('Shi'is').³³ The master has only one *bāb*: 'Alī was Muḥammad's *bāb* according to the ancient Prophetic *ḥadīth*: 'I am the city of knowledge and 'Alī is its gate' (*anā madīnat al-'ilm wa 'Alī bābuhā*); Salmān the Persian was 'Alī's gate, as Abū Khālid al-Kābulī was the fourth imam's gate, Jābir al-Ju'fī the fifth imam's and Mufaḍḍal al-Ju'fī the sixth's, etc.³⁴ Like all the other imams, the hidden Imam also has a 'gate', but since the Occultation lasts so long, the hidden Imam has been represented over time by a series of unique 'gates'. The hidden Imam is *nāṭiq* in relation to his 'gate', who is *ṣāmī* in relation to the Imam but *nāṭiq* in relation to other members of the secret hierarchy; whence the well-known saying 'Each period has its own Salmān' (*li-kulli 'asr salmān*).³⁵ According to the '*ḥadīth* of Mufaḍḍal', continually cited by our authors, 'The gate of the Twelfth [imam] is hidden by the very fact of the Occultation of the Twelfth [imam]' (*bāb-i thānī 'ashar bā ghaybat-i thānī 'ashar ghā'ib mīshawad*). That the spiritual hierarchy, with the unique speaker at its head, is secret results from the Occultation of the last Imam and thereby constitutes the secret meaning of the Occultation. In this our own era

33. Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Irshād al-'awāmm*, vol. 4, pp. 383–384; Abū'l-Qāsim Khān, *Tanzīh al-awliyā*, chs 25–32 and *Fihrist*, pp. 86ff. (partial trans. and commentary by H. Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 281–282); 'Abd al-Riḍā Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Dustī-ye dustān*, pp. 102–103.

34. *Fihrist*, pp. 85–86. Another way of understanding this is that an imam is 'silent' during his predecessor's imamate, then accedes to the rank of 'speaker' upon his predecessor's death; see *ibid.*, p. 86.

35. Muḥammad Khān Kirmānī, *Burhān-i qāṭi'*, pp. 76ff.; 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Shaykh Ḥusayn Mazīdī', response no. 1; Zayn al-'Ābidīn Khān, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Muḥammad Ṣādiq Khān Nā'īnī', response no. 6; 'Abd al-Riḍā Khān Ibrāhīmī, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i āqā-ye muhandis Mūsā Zām', in *Majma' al-rasā'il-i fārsī*, vol. 17, response no. 2.

of ignorance, true science and true power can only be operative if they are exercised in secret, independent of all earthly power.³⁶

The [Shaykhī] idea of the *occultation* of the Imam forbids all socialisation of the spiritual, all materialisation of forms and hierarchies that could be identified with the 'instituted organisations' of visible external history.... The *ḥadīth* of Mofazzal (*Mufaḍḍal*) thus has serious, decisive consequences. Whosoever publicly proclaims himself the Imam's Bāb puts himself *eo ipso* outside Shi'ism, for he has profaned its fundamental secrecy.³⁷

These lines by Corbin, based only on a text by Abu'l-Qāsim Khān, are corroborated by certain earlier Shaykhī writings, beginning with those of Muḥammad Karīm Khān. In effect, the notion of the 'unicity of the speaker' that is part of the doctrine of the Fourth Pillar is the source of the main charge against the Shaykhiyya of Kirmān, for two reasons. First, it radically calls into question the legitimacy of the theocratic corps of Uṣūlī jurist-theologians understood to be the official representatives of the hidden Imam, especially since, according to their adversaries, each of the Shaykhiyya masters declared *themselves* to be 'the unique speaker'.

Second, it launched Bābism (which later developed into Bahā'ism) as a new religion.³⁸ Starting with Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī, the Shaykhiyya masters were forced to defend the doctrine of the *rukṇ rābi'* on two fronts. They had to demonstrate first of all that when 'Alī Muḥammad Bāb proclaimed himself to be the gate of the hidden Imam, the break between Shaykhism and Bābism had become irreversible: according to Shi'i and Shaykhī

36. Muḥammad Khān, *Burhān-i qāṭi'*, p. 82; Abu'l-Qāsim Khān, *Fihrist*, pp. 88ff.

37. H. Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 276 and 283 (analysis of above mentioned passages from the *Fihrist* of Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī).

38. Aḥmad Kasrawī's violently polemical works have at least the advantage of giving us a view, as broad as it is significant, of the anti-Shaykhī attacks; e.g. *Shī'igari*; *Bikhānīd wa dāwari konid*; *Bahā'igari*.

dogmas, Bābism could only be a false religion.³⁹ Then, Muḥammad Karīm Khān and his successors insisted that no Shaykhī master had ever proclaimed himself ‘the unique speaker’ or even said he belonged to ‘the men of the mystery’. Such a declaration would be in flagrant contradiction with the Shaykhī dogma of the necessarily hidden nature of everything that had any direct relation to the Occultation. The purpose of all the general information about the Fourth Pillar was only to prove the effective existence of the secret spiritual hierarchy and its supreme chief, but no Shaykhī in charge had ever given the slightest piece of specific information about particular individuals. To cite the well-known formula:

39. This explains the many Shaykhī writings against the Bāb and his doctrine: Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Izhāq al-bāṭil* (Kirmān, 1351 Sh./1973) and *Rujūm al-shayāṭīn* with *Risāla dar radd-i Bāb-i khusrān ma'āb* (Tabriz, n.d. [ca. 1283/1866]), *Risāla-ye radd-i Bāb dar jawāb-i Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh Qājār* (Kirmān, 1383/1963); ‘Tir-i shihāb dar radd-i Bāb-i khusrān ma'āb’, in *Majma' al-rasā'il* (Kirmān, 1386/1967), vol. 1; *al-Shihāb al-thāqib* (Kirmān, 1353 Sh./1975). Muḥammad Karīm Khan's vigorous and systematic attacks, which go as far as anathematising the Bāb (*takfīr*) no doubt played a role in the transformation of Bābism, from a branch of Shaykhism into an independent religion. See MacEoin, ‘From Shaykhism to Bābism’, pp. 196ff., where he also presents other anti-Bābī Shaykhiyya writings. MacEoin further developed this study in ‘Early Shaykhī Reactions to the Bāb and his Claims’, in M. Momen (ed.), *Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī history* (Los Angeles, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 1–47; see now his *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History* (Leiden, 1992), index under ‘Shaykhism’; Muḥammad Khān Kirmānī, *Taqwīm al-'awaj* (lithograph, Bombay, 1311/1893); *Risāla dar radd-i Bāb-i murtāb* (Kirmān, n.d.); ‘Risāla dar radd-i ba'dī ta'wīlāt-i bābiyya’, in *Rasā'il* (Kirmān, 1398/1977), pp. 10–152; *al-Shams al-muḍī'a* (lithograph, Tabriz, 1322/1904); ‘Risāla dar jawāb-i Sayyid Ḥusayn Karbalā'ī’, in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 4, response no. 8; ‘Risāla dar jawāb-i ba'dī ikhwān-i Shīrāz’, in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, response no. 3; Zayn al-'Abīdīn Khān, ‘Sā'iqā’ in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 9 and *Mī'rāj al-sa'āda* (rpr., Kirmān, 1352 Sh./1974). For the reactions of the Bāb and the Bābiyya, see MacEoin, ‘From Shaykhism to Babism’, pp. 216ff.; M. Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (New York, 1982), ch. 4; T. Lawson, ‘Interpretation as Revelation: The Qur'ān Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī the Bāb (1819–1850)’, in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 223–253; also M. Mudarris Chahārdihī, *Shaykhigari Bābigari* (Tehran, 2nd edn, 1351 Sh./1972)) (this muddled work is nonetheless a mine of information).

'the Fourth Pillar is generic, not specific' (*rukṇ-i rābi' naw'i-st na ta'yīnī*).⁴⁰ According to Shaykhiyya sources, the Fourth Pillar as the hidden, esoteric meaning of Occultation prohibits all socialisation and collectivisation of religious spirituality.

Occultation means that the Imami doctrine is an individualistic type of spirituality, in which not only many collective canonical duties cannot be carried out because of the Imam's absence, but any claim to religious power in the world can only be heresy. In this connection, the sixth chapter of the *Sī faṣl* by Muḥammad Karīm Khān, on the problem of declaring *jihād* during the Occultation, is highly significant:

How can we be accused of seeking power in this world [through the doctrines of the Fourth Pillar and the unicity of the speaker], of loving power and inciting people to rebel, when during the Occultation *jihād* is not legitimate (*dar zamān-i ghaybat jihādī nīst*)? To declare *jihād*, the presence of the Imam is necessary (*wājib*). ... According to the doctrine of our masters, [during the Occultation] not only can there not be *jihād*, but it is also forbidden to enact legal punishments (*hudūd*) such as killing, stoning, or flagellation; even the enjoining of good and preventing of evil (*amr-i bi ma'rūf wa nahy az munkar*) are forbidden in most cases. ... This is to be done only by the hidden Imam upon his Return (*ḥadd zadan wa jāri kardan makhṣūs-i imām ast dar waqt-i zuhūr-i amrash*). ... At this time [i.e. at time of the Occultation], the distinctive sign of the pious learned man and ascetic (*'ālim-i mutadayyin-i zāhid*) is solitude and retreat. He transmits the light of the imams through science; otherwise, he avoids people (*az khalq i'rāḍ kardan*).⁴¹

40. The most explicit texts on this matter are Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Irshād al-'awāmm*, vol. 4, pp. 303–310; *Rujūm al-shayāṭīn*, pp. 81–91; *Sī faṣl*, pp. 26–33 and 102–103; *Chahār faṣl*, pp. 18–20; Muḥammad Khān Kirmānī, *Burhān-i qāṭi'*, pp. 17–23, 89–100, 120–127; *Wasīlat al-najāt*, 'maqṣad' 4; 'Risāla dar jawāb-i su'āl-i ba'qī', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 3; Abū'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Fihrist*, pp. 102–110; *Tarjama Rujūm al-shayāṭīn* (Persian trans. of Muḥammad Karīm Khān's work), intro., p. 13.

41. Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Sī faṣl*, pp. 37–39; for the author's thinking on *jihād*, see also his *al-Risāla al-jihādiyya*. On the history of the Occultation's implications in the doctrinal and legal fields, see my *Guide divin*, appendix, pp. 319–335 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 133–139) and my article 'Remarques sur les critères

3. Alliance and dissociation (*tawallī* and *tabarrī/tabarru'* in Arabic; *tawallā* and *tabarrā* in Persian)

The *tawallī/tabarrā* pair constitutes the third important element of the *rukṇ rābi'*. It involves applying the very old Shi'i notion of *walāya* and *barā'a* to the time of the Occultation. Literally, these terms signify, respectively, 'proximity, alliance, association' and 'dissociation, renunciation'. The typically Shi'i technical meaning of *walāya* is love of, obedience to, alliance with or loyalty to the imams and their cause; the opposite, *barā'a*, means dissociation from, disobedience to, renunciation and abandonment of the adversaries of the imams.⁴²

The fundamental importance of initiation, together with the radically dualist Shi'i vision, which presents world history as a perpetual battle between the forces of Good and Evil, mean that *walāya/tawallā* and *barā'a/tabarrā* are inseparable from each other: in a context of cosmic combat between the forces of knowledge and ignorance, to love and vow loyalty to the Imam, the master-initiator, must involve dissociation from and hostility to those who deliberately try to do damage to him and his teaching. This is why I have elsewhere translated the Shi'i terms *walāya* and *barā'a* as 'sacred love' and 'sacred hatred'.⁴³ For the Shaykhiyya masters, during the Occultation and because of it, *tawallā* for the

d'authenticité du ḥadīth et l'autorité du juriste dans le shi'isme imamite', *SI*, 85 (1997), pp. 5ff. On the evolution of the Imami doctrine of holy war see E. Kohlberg, 'The Development of the Imāmī Shi'i Doctrine of *jihād*', *ZDMG*, 126 (1976).

42. On *walāya/tawallā* see H. Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, index, and *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, 1986), pp. 66–98; H. Landolt, 'Walāya', in M. Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion* (New York, 1987), vol. 15; M. M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* (Leiden and Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 195–201. On *barā'a/tabarrā* see E. Kohlberg, 'Barā'a in Shi'i Doctrine', pp. 139–175; J. Calmard, 'Les rituels shi'ites et le pouvoir. L'imposition du shiisme safavide: eulogies et malédictions canoniques', in idem (ed.), *Etudes Safavides*. Publications de l'Institut Français de Recherche en Iran (Tehran, 1993), pp. 117–120; and esp. Chapter 7 in this volume.

43. See *Guide divin*, index. On Imami dualism see *ibid.*, pp. 308–310; Amir-Moezzi and Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le shi'isme?* (Paris, 2004), pp. 36f.

hidden Imam also and above all includes *tawallā* for the Imam's friends; that is, 'the men of the mystery' and their head, the 'gate' or 'unique speaker'. Likewise, *tabarrā* for the adversaries and deniers of the hidden Imam includes *tabarrā* for the adversaries and deniers of the secret spiritual hierarchy that renders the hidden Imam's influence on humanity effective.⁴⁴ Citing and synthesising the writings of earlier masters of the order on this subject, Abu'l-Qāsim Khān explicitly concluded in his *Fihrist* that, given the fact that 'the men of the mystery' are not known, our only possibility of being honoured by their influence and perhaps of becoming worthy to enter into contact with them is to believe in their existence and vow to love them with a pure, unwavering, disinterested love.⁴⁵ Because of the Occultation and its implications, Imamism became an essentially individual religion of pure mystic love for the hidden Imam and his friends and radical dissociation from their adversaries. To give a foundation to his ideas in this domain, Muḥammad Khān Kirmānī, in his *Hidāyat al-mustarshid*,⁴⁶ made use of certain ancient traditions: 'Is religion anything else but love?'⁴⁷ 'The most solid handle on faith [more solid than prayer, alms-giving, fasting, the pilgrimage to Mecca

44. Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Irshād al-ʿawāmm*, vol. 4, pp. 274ff., 316ff., 378ff., *Izhāq al-bāṭil*, ch. 3; *Rukn-i rābiʿ*, pp. 34ff.; *Ilzām al-nawāṣib*, pp. 86–87 and 123ff.; *Hidāyat al-ṣibyān*, ch. 4; 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Kāzarūnī', in *Majmaʿ al-rasāʾil*, vol. 69, response no. 10; Muḥammad Khān Kirmānī, *Burhān-i qāṭiʿ*, pp. 45–47, 167ff.; *Wasīlat al-najāt*, 'maqṣad' 4, ch. 2; *Hidāyat al-mustarshid*, ch. 5; Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn Khān Kirmānī, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Mīrzā Sayyid Muḥammad Riḍawī', in *Majmaʿ al-rasāʾil*, vol. 11; 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAlī Bahrānī Āl-i ʿUṣfūr', in *Majmaʿ al-rasāʾil*, vol. 82, response no. 2; Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Falsafiyya*, response nos 12–16, *Fihrist*, pp. 81–83 (partial trans. and commented on by H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, p. 277); 'Abd al-Riḍā Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Dūsti-ye dūstān* (title may be translated into Arabic thus: *walāya/tawallī al-awliyā*; the entire work is devoted to the subject).

45. *Fihrist*, pp. 109–111.

46. Ch. 5, pp. 187–188.

47. *Hal al-dīn illa'l-ḥubb*, a *ḥadīth* going back to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq; see al-ʿAyyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 167; Ibn Bābūya, *al-Khiṣāl*, p. 21.

and holy war] is love God and hatred on God's behalf, friendship for the friends of God and enmity for God's enemies';⁴⁸ 'Each thing has a foundation; the foundation of Islam is love for us, the *ahl al-bayt* [of the Prophet]'.⁴⁹ Unable to personally know the Friends of the hidden Imam, the faithful were invited to believe in their existence and to love them, to make themselves worthy of them, and to prepare themselves spiritually for a possible encounter with them, by leading a life of devotion and purity and studying in depth the doctrine of the imams, for instance with the help of Shaykhī writings.⁵⁰

Who were these adversaries of the hidden Imam, the secret spiritual hierarchy and the unique speaker? Shaykhī polemical writings, of which there are many, are aimed either generally at 'the people of ignorance' (*ahl/aṣḥāb-i jahl*) or, more specifically, at Bābism;⁵¹ the Sufi orders, especially the Imami ones;⁵² and above all a certain category of clerics from among the official jurist-the-

48. *Awthaqu 'ura'l-imān al-ḥubb fi'llāh wa'l-bughḍ fi'llāh wa tawallī awliyā'i'llāh wa'l-tabarrī min a'dā'i'llāh*, a ḥadīth going back to the Prophet; see Ibn Bābūya, *Ma'ānī al-akhbār*, pp. 398–399 and *al-Mawā'iz*, p. 25.

49. *Li-kulli shay' asās wa asās al-Islām ḥubbunā ahl al-bayt*, a ḥadīth going back to Ja'far al-Šādiq; see al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, vol. 1, p. 150; Ibn Bābūya, *al-Mawā'iz*, p. 29 and *al-Amālī*, p. 221.

50. 'Abd al-Riḍā Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Dūstī-ye dūstān*, pp. 102–104 et passim.

51. See *supra*; and more recently against Bahā'ism; see Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Fikrat dar jawāb-i Aqā 'Alī Darakī*, response nos 4 to 6. The term 'Bālāsari' is sometimes applied to the non-Shaykhī Shi'is and not necessarily to the adversaries of the Shaykhīs; see D. M. MacEoin, 'Bālāsari', *Elr*. On the bloody conflict between Shaykhīs and Bālāsaris in Kirmān in 1905 see G. Scarcia, 'Kerman 1905: la Guerra tra Sheikhī e Bālāsari', *AIUON*, new series 13 (1963), pp. 195–238; H. Algar, *Religion and State in Iran 1785–1906* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), pp. 243–244; Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, pp. 181f.

52. The main criticism here is against the Sufi masters, who usurp the imam's rank and recommend 'heterodox' practices; see Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Irshād al-'awāmm*, vol. 4, pp. 235ff., 241, 294ff.; Muḥammad Khān, *Risāla dar jawāb-i Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī Salmāsī*, in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 27, response no. 1; Zayn al-'Ābidīn Khān, *Durūs* (vol. 1?), pp. 76–79 and 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Khān b. Amīr Aṣḥān Khān', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 8.

ologians, the Uṣūlī *mujtahids*. More criticism is directed against the Uṣūlī *mujtahids* than any other group, but this criticism is also the most discreet. They are often designated pejoratively in Shaykhī writings as *'amala-i jahl* ('agents of ignorance'), *mullā* (*mollah*, as distinct from the true religious learned man, *'ālim*), *ahl-i ṣāḥir* ('people of the exclusively exoteric doctrines') and the like. It is true that the Shaykhiyya, who had themselves been attacked by numerous clerics ever since their order was founded, have always had to be on the defensive; still, in identifying certain *'ulamā'* as enemies of the hidden Imam and inviting the faithful to practice *tabarrā* against them, they were adopting a position that could be called offensive. It was for obvious reasons of tactical dissimulation that, despite the incalculable number of passages criticising this type of figure, criticism that may be found in almost every great Shaykhī work, there is, to my knowledge, no specific chapter or monograph devoted entirely to the subject.⁵³ What this type of religious man is reproached for is using faith to attain power, glory or wealth; and worse yet, having betrayed Shi'ism, a fundamentally esoteric and theosophic doctrine, by reducing it to little more than the single domain of canon law. It was in speaking of this category of Imami jurist-theologians that Zayn al-Ābidīn Khān declared, 'The enemy is now within the walls of the house' (*imrūz dushman khāna nashīn ast*).⁵⁴ When consulting Shaykhī sources, one has the clear impression that for the authors, the main adversaries and deniers of the friends of the hidden Imam were neither non-Muslims, or non-Shi'is, or even

53. One has only to leaf through the main Shaykhiyya works, especially starting with those of Muḥammad Karīm Khān, to see this. Muḥammad Khān Kirmānī's work, *Risāla Bihbahāniyya*, sums up in a conciliatory tone the Shaykhiyya position toward the Uṣūlī clerics; see also Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī's clarifications in *Fihrist*, pp. 83, 89, 95–96, 102–104 and 109. On the tensions between the Shaykhīs and the Uṣūlī clerics see also Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, chs 2 and 3; Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, first part of ch. 1; D. M. MacEoin, 'Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Nineteenth-century Shi'ism', *JAOS*, 110/2 (1990), pp. 323–324.

54. Zayn al-Ābidīn Khān Kirmānī, *Durūs*, p. 124.

non-Imamis; rather, they were to be found within the Twelver community itself. They are those who, refusing all hermeneutics of the Occultation, refuse even to believe in the existence of the secret spiritual hierarchy. Responding to religious detractors of the doctrine of the Fourth Pillar, who sarcastically ask how it is that ‘the men of the mystery’ and ‘the unique speaker’ never show themselves to defenders of the doctrine of the imams, Muḥammad Karīm Khān used a delightful allegory drawn from popular tales of the Kirmān region:

One dark night, a monstrously ugly servant was carrying a child on his shoulders. The child [here the symbol of the men of the mystery, the Unique Speaker, or even the hidden Imam] wept the whole time and kept his eyes closed. The servant [here the symbol of certain ‘official’ Imami clerics] said, ‘Why are you afraid? I won’t leave you alone.’ ‘That’s just the problem? It’s not the dark night [symbol of the surrounding world, the non-Shi’i world, or perhaps the Shi’i community as a whole] that frightens me; it’s you – you terrify me,’ replied the child.⁵⁵

The Occultation within man

As mentioned above, there is a correspondence between the world as macrocosm and man as microcosm.⁵⁶ To my knowledge, there are only a few instances of a hermeneutics of the Occultation as an internal event in Shaykhī literature. Following the logic of the Shaykhī authors, we could say that if the doctrine of the *rukn rābi‘* represents the esoteric aspect (*bāṭin*) of the Occultation, then microcosmic hermeneutics applied to the individual are the esoteric aspect of the esoteric (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*),⁵⁷ since traditionally

55. Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Irshād al-‘awāmm*, vol. 4, pp. 306–307.

56. See above notes 9 and 10 and the texts cited there.

57. See above notes 5 and 8 and the texts cited there.

the more esoteric the doctrinal material is, the rarer, more allusive and more fragmentary our information about it becomes.⁵⁸

Sayyid Kāzim al-Rashtī seems to have been the first author to clearly expound this type of hermeneutics of the Occultation. In his *Risāla fī jawāb Mullā 'Alī Baraghānī*, he wrote:

As for the hidden Qā'im, his example in you is your intelligence (*'aql*), which is manifest in the Primordial World (*al-'ālam al-awwal*);⁵⁹ then you [that is, your mind] began the descent, and at that point cold, wet and all kinds of dense elements (*kathāfāt*) dominated you, which caused the occultation of intelligence and its dissimulation. However, intelligence never stops directing and organising the vital forces (*al-bunya*), the body, the mind and other functions, while remaining hidden and non-manifest. At the age of fourteen, intelligence begins to manifest itself, and at that time the vital forces begin to increase. Intelligence manifests itself and fills the body with equity and justice, just as earlier it overflowed with oppression and injustice [or 'darkness'],⁶⁰ due to the different dominations of the authoritarian soul (*al-nafs al-ammāra*), which is the [real] unjust sovereign (*sultān al-jawr*) [Thanks to the intelligence] the body becomes filled with faculties, such as apperception (*idrāk*), understanding (*fahm*), serenity (*tuma'nīna*), and calm (*sukūn*). In this way, the continuous growth of intelligence and its sovereignty are fortified until the age of forty, when its manifestation and balance reach their peak. As for the places of residence [literally, the 'cities', *madā'in*] of the hidden Imam, the Green Isle (*al-jazīra al-khaḍrā'*)⁶¹ corresponds to the breast and the soul

58. See my 'Du droit à la théologie', esp. pp. 41ff.

59. This is no doubt an allusion to the cosmogonic dimension of '*aql*'; See *Guide divin*, pp. 18–21 (*Divine Guide*, pp. 7–8) and my 'Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi'ism', *EIr*, vol. 6, esp. p. 320.

60. This is a citation of the hallowed description of the hidden Imam's triumphant return at the end of time: 'the Mahdī will manifest himself [or "raise himself up"] at the End of Time and fill the earth with equity and justice just as before it overflowed with oppression and injustice [or "darkness"]' (*sa yazhuru'l-mahdī fī ākhir al-zamān fa yamla'u'l-arḍ qīṣṭan wa 'adlan kamā malī'at jawran wa ḡulman [ḡuluman]*).

61. Allusion to the Green Isle in the White Sea, traditionally understood as the hidden Imam's place of residence during the Occultation; see Corbin,

(*al-ṣadr wa'l-naḥs*) and the White Sea corresponds to the lights of intelligence (*al-anwār al-'aqliyya*) thanks to which all cities and countries – that is, all the human faculties – reach their perfection in the light. These cities will be full of greenery and waterways if irrigated by science and action. (...) It is reported that the oath of fidelity (*bay'a*) to the hidden Imam will be concluded in the fourth climate [i.e. in the median climate of the seven climates, at the centre of the world]; this corresponds to Jesus, who lives in the fourth Heaven, who is the Spirit of God and His Word (...) and who corresponds to man's heart, which is the first [organ] to which the orders and graces of intelligence come.⁶² The Chiefs [*al-nuqabā'*; i.e. the chosen companions of the hidden Imam] correspond to the ten purified senses (the five external and five internal senses), plus the breast (i.e. the seat of the mind) and the body of light [*al-jism al-nūrānī*; i.e. the subtle spiritual body],⁶³ for their gaze is directed toward the supreme face [an enigmatic expression: *min ḥayth naẓaruhā ila'l-wajh al-a'lā*]; whereas those who flee and cannot bear [the Return of the hidden Imam] correspond to the other faculties and organs, whose gaze is directed toward the lowest face (*naẓaruhā ila'l-wajh al-aṣfal*).⁶⁴

In his *Fihrist*, Abu'l-Qāsim Khān mentioned two other writings by Sayyid Kāzīm which, according to his cursory description of them, could also involve an 'interiorist' hermeneutics of the Occultation.

The first, on the hidden Qā'im's *taṣarruf* – a technical term that could be translated as 'the esoteric government of world affairs' – and the support he brings to those who serve him, seems to have been lost. Of the second, on the profound reason (*ḥikma*, lit.

En Islam iranien, vol. 4, pp. 346ff. For the sources of this late tradition and discussions of it see Chapter 13, n. 79, this volume.

62. In Muslim eschatology, Jesus is generally considered one of the Mahdī-Qā'im's primary companions.

63. Sayyid Kāzīm seems to be indicating here that the *nuqabā'* form a group of twelve persons (see *supra* note 26 and the corresponding text); he says nothing, however, of the *nujabā'*.

64. Al-Sayyid Kāzīm al-Rashtī, *al-Rasā'il wa'l-masā'il*, pp. 334–335. The parallel and correspondence between 'aql and the Imam are to be found very early in Shi'ism; see *Guide divin*, index under 'aql' and here the opening of chapter 12.

wisdom) of the Occultation, there seems to be only an old lithographed version extant, which unfortunately I was not able to find.⁶⁵

In addition to this symbolic hermeneutic, the Shaykhī authors propose a theological hermeneutic of the Occultation within man that is even more veiled and allusive. It is developed through a commentary on the famous *ḥadīth* attributed to 'Alī: 'He who knows himself knows his Lord' (*man 'arafa nafsahu fa-qad 'arafa rabbah*). It seems that this hermeneutic, which dates back to al-Rashtī's work, was given a typically Shi'i interpretation originating in the former theological approach of a theophany, centred on Imamology. Because the Divine Essence is forever unknowable, God can only be known through His Names and Attributes. The latter manifest themselves in the cosmic Imam, the metaphysical Perfect Man, who, in turn, manifests himself in a way perceivable to the senses through the persons of the historical imams.⁶⁶ The hidden meaning (*bāṭin*) of this tradition is therefore summed up in the formula: 'He who knows his Imam knows his Lord' (*man 'arafa imāmahu fa-qad 'arafa rabbah*).⁶⁷ Juxtaposing these two statements produces the following conclusion: 'He who knows himself knows his Imam, who is his Lord.' For the individual, knowledge of the reality of the Imam, who is the true God revealed, is the equivalent of knowledge of the true Self (*al-nafs al-ḥaqīqiyya*), the divine particle (*juz' ilāhī*) present in each

65. Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Fihrist*, p. 313 ('Risāla dar jawāb-i Shaykh Muḥammad b. Shaykh 'Abd 'Alī 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Qaṭifī') and p. 353 ('Risāla dar jawāb-i su'ālāt-i Isfahān', response no. 3).

66. On this aspect of theology and illustrations of it in the 'theo-Imamosophical' sermons attributed to 'Alī, see Chapter 3 in this volume.

67. Sayyid Kāzīm al-Rashtī, *Sharḥ al-khuṭba al-tatanjiyya/tutunjiyya*, pp. 13–14; al-Rashtī, 'Risāla fī jawāb 'Abd Allāh Beg', in *al-Rasā'il wa'l-masā'il*, pp. 221–224, response no. 17; Muḥammad Karīm Khān, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī Dawānī', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 67, response no. 29; Muḥammad Khān Kirmānī, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Ḥājī 'Abbās Būshihri', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 26, response no. 1; Zayn al-'Ābidīn Khān, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Muḥammad Ṣādiq Khān Nā'ini', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 8, response no. 3.

person's heart.⁶⁸ In this way, the Shaykhiyya masters contributed to a tradition of exegesis of the *ḥadīth* in question, a tradition very present in Imami mysticism from Ḥaydar Āmulī to Mullā Ṣadrā, Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Iṣfahānī, and all the way up to Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī.⁶⁹ Moreover, for the Shaykhiyya this hermeneutic, which could be called theo-imamological, is related to a spiritual topography of the Imam's 'World' and a mystical physiology of the believer. As many studies have shown, in the Shaykhiyya vision, the World of the Imam's reality, called *hūrqalyā* (*hawarqalyā* or *huwarqalyā*), is a metaphysical world halfway between the spiritual and the physical worlds and ontologically as real as the perceptible world.⁷⁰ The description by the traditionalist philosopher Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680) of the '*ālam al-mithāl*' applies perfectly here: 'a world in which spirits are embodied and bodies are spiritualised'.⁷¹ This 'location' of the concrete reality of spiritual visions and experiences may be reached by the believer who has developed the 'organs of *hūrqalyā*' (*a'ḍā' hūrqalyāwiyya*) – most

68. Al-Sayyid Kāzīm al-Rashtī, 'Risāla fi jawāb 'Abd Allāh Beg', p. 224; Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Ṭarīq al-najāt*, pp. 103–105; Muḥammad Khān, *Wāridāt*, 'Wārida' 3 and esp. 8; Zayn al-'Ābidīn Khān, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Muḥammad Sādiq Khān Nā'ini'.

69. Cf. Ḥaydar Āmolī, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, pp. 270, 307–309, 315, 464, 'Risāla naqd al-nuqūd fi ma'rifat al-wujūd', in *Jāmi' al-asrār*, p. 675; Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, *Kitāb al-mashā'ir*, pp. 186–188 and *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, pp. 475–476; Abu'l-Ḥasan Sharīf al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr mir'āt al-anwār*, intro., esp. pp. 13–15; Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī, *Bishārat al-mu'minīn*, ch. 6, and *Walāyat-nāmeḥ*, pp. 11–12, 18–21, 171–173, 258–261. In his commentaries on this same *ḥadīth* al-Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī seems to be close to this exegetical tradition, see his *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-jāmi'a*, p. 323; al-Aḥsā'ī, *Sharḥ al-Fawā'id*, pp. 25ff. See also J. Cole, 'Casting Away the Self: the Mysticism of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī', in R. Brunner and W. Ende (eds), *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture and Political History* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 25–37.

70. M. Mo'in, '*Havarqalyā*', *Nashriyye-ye Dāneshkade-ye Adabiyyāt-e Dāneshgāh-e Tehrān* (1333 Sh./1955), pp. 78–105; Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, index under 'Hūrqalyā', and *Corps spirituel et terre céleste: De l'Iran mazdéen à l'Iran shī'ite* (Paris, 1979), chs 9–11; Rafati, 'The Development of Shaykhī Thought', pp. 106ff.

71. Al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*, p. 70.

importantly, the 'eye capable of knowing the Imam' (*chashm-i imām shinās*) – thanks to his perpetual devotions and purifying asceticism.⁷² It should be noted that Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī and Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī explicitly identify the World of *hūrqalyā* with the 'place' of the hidden Imam during the major Occultation.⁷³ To reach the reality of the hidden Imam, the living Imam of our times, in the *hūrqalyā*, one must acquire the subtle body particular to this World (*jism hūrqalyāwī*) and the necessary organ, 'the eye capable of knowing the Imam', also called 'the heart's eye' (*chashm-i dil*). Conversely, the esoteric role of the historical Imam – here, of course, the hidden Imam understood as the living Imam of our time – is to enable the discovery of the internal Imam, the Lord hidden in the believer's heart, and to actualise that Imam.⁷⁴ The heart's eye and the subtle *hūrqalyāwī* body constitute the true Self, knowledge of which is the equivalent of knowledge of the Imam who is the Lord within each person.

72. See e.g. Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'i, *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra*, vol. 1, pp. 369ff., 'al-Risāla al-Qaṭifiyya', in *Jawāmi' al-kalim*, vol. 1, p. 136, 'Risāla fi jawāb Mullā Ḥusayn al-Anbārī al-Kirmānī', in *Jawāmi' al-kalim*, vol. 1, pp. 153–154, 'Risāla fi jawāb Ākhūnd Mullā Ḥusayn Anārī', in *Jawāmi' al-kalim*, vol. 1, p. 204, 'Risāla Rashtiyya fi jawāb Mullā 'Alī b. Mīrzā Jān Rashti', in *Jawāmi' al-kalim*, vol. 1, p. 312, response no. 28; Sayyid Kāzim al-Rashti, *Sharḥ al-khuṭba al-ṭatanjiyya/tutunjiyya*, intro. Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Irshād al-'awāmm*, vol. 2, pp. 274–275; 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī Dawānī', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 67, response no. 61; 'Risāla dar amr-i jinn', last section, in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 67; Zayn al-'Ābidīn Khān, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Shaykh Muḥammad Bihbahānī dar Jābalqā wa Jābarsā', in *Majma' al-rasā'il*, vol. 29, 'Risāla dar jawāb-i Muḥammad Ṣādiq Khān Nā'ini', response no. 10; Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Tanzīh al-awliyā'*, pp. 702–726.

73. Muḥammad Karīm Khān, *Irshād al-'awāmm*, vol. 2, pp. 275–276; Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Ibrāhīmī, *Tanzīh al-awliyā'*, pp. 724–726; tr. Corbin, *Corps spirituel et terre céleste*, pp. 262–264 and 287–290.

74. Abu'l-Qāsim Khān, *Tanzīh al-awliyā'*, p. 725. On 'vision by (or "within") the heart' (*al-ru'ya bi'l-qalb*) and 'the heart's eye' (*'ayn al-qalb*) in ancient and modern Imamism, see respectively *Guide divin*, pp. 112–145 (*Divine Guide*, ch. 2, section 3, 'Excursus: "Vision with the Heart"') and R. Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, 3 vols (Wiesbaden, 1979–1981), vol. 2: *Glaube und Lehre*, p. 207, n. 1073 and pp. 247–250. And Chapter 10, this volume.

According to this hermeneutic of the Occultation within man, each person's hidden Imam, his true hidden Guide, is his true Self, his divine Self, buried in the secrecy of his heart.

At the end of the third/ninth century, the mysterious fate of the putative son of imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī threw the Imami community into disarray. The absence of the Imam's authority in a religion governed completely by the figure of the Imam, plunged the faithful into what is traditionally called *al-ḥayra* – confusion, perplexity.⁷⁵ Yet even after the Occultation theology was established, the problem of the absence of legitimate authority – in temporal matters of course, but perhaps even more in spiritual ones – remained intact. This is why, for more than a millennium, the history of Imami doctrine consists essentially in the devising of different solutions to this problem, solutions which vary according to the different religious movements but which are all various ways of filling the void created by this absence. Viewed from this angle, the history of post-*ghayba* Imamism may be perceived as a great attempt, rich in options, of coping with the absence of a legitimate supreme authority. Rationalist scholars, traditionalist scholars, philosophers, Sufis and so on, each in their own way, filled this absence with all sorts of presences. In this plurality of approaches to the problem, the Shaykhī hermeneutics of the Occultation, seeking to fill both the world and man with ‘the presence’ of the hidden Imam, undoubtedly constitutes one of the most complex and highly structured of these solutions.

75. This is a much-studied phenomenon; I note here only the most recent and authoritative monographs: J. M. Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background* (London, 1982); V. Klemm, ‘Die vier *Sufarā* des Zwölften Imams. Zur formativen Periode der Zwölferschia’, *Die Welt des Orients*, 15 (1984), pp. 126–143; H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi‘ite Islam: Abū Ja‘far ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and his Contribution to Imāmīte Shi‘ite Thought* (Princeton, 1993); S. A. Arjomand, ‘The Consolation of Theology: Absence of the Imam and Transition from Chiliasm to Law in Shi‘ism’, *The Journal of Religion*, 21 (1996), pp. 548–571; idem, ‘The Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation’, *IJMES*, 28 (1996), pp. 491–515; idem, ‘*Imam Absconditus* and the Beginnings of a Theology of Occultation: Imami Shi‘ism circa 280–90/900 A.D.’, *JAOS*, 117/1 (1997), pp. 1–12.

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