

Ali, the Well-Guarded Secret

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# Ali, the Well-Guarded Secret

*Figures of the First Master in Shi'i Spirituality*

*By*

Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi

*With contributions by*

Orkhan Mir-Kasimov  
Mathieu Terrier

*Translated by*

Francisco José Luis  
Anthony Gledhill



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*To Maryam and Said Shaari,  
my old travelling companions,  
for their love of 'Alī*





# Contents

Notice to the Reader	XI
Transcription System	XII
Acknowledgements	XIII
List of Figures	XIV
Abbreviations	XV

Introduction	1
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## PART 1

### *Singularities of ‘Alī*

1 ‘Alī and the Quran	17
1 Introduction	17
2 ‘Alī the Master of Hermeneutics	18
3 Quranic Allusions to ‘Alī	24
4 The Explicit Mentions of ‘Alī in the Quran	29
5 The Double Nature of ‘Alī and His Holiness	32
6 Roots, Extensions and Questions on the Origins: ‘Alī and Christ	39
2 Muḥammad the Paraclete and ‘Alī the Messiah	45
1 The End of the World in the Quran and the Hadith	45
2 Remarks on the Religious Environment of Muḥammad	53
3 The Coming of the Saviour	59
4 Jesus and ‘Alī	68
5 Rewriting of History and Fabrication of a New Collective Memory	73
3 Reflections on the Expression <i>dīn ‘Alī</i> : The Origins of the Shi‘i Faith	80
1 <i>Dīn ‘Alī</i> in the Works of the Historiographers	80
2 The Uniqueness of ‘Alī	84
3 Themes Concerning ‘Alī and the Alids	87
4 The Basis of the Religion of ‘Alī	89
4.1 <i>The Quranic Basis</i>	89
4.2 <i>The Pre-Islamic Basis</i>	95
5 Reactions and Consequences	108

## PART 2

*Between Divinity and Humanity*

- 4 **Some Remarks on the Divinity of the Imam** 115
- 1 Theophanic Being and Perfect Man 115
  - 2 First Textual References 118
  - 3 The Sermons of 'Alī 129
- 5 **The Five Spirits of the Divine Man** 138
- 1 Shi'i Traditions 139
  - 2 "Prehistory" 142
  - 3 Further Developments and Implications 148
- 6 **"The Night of Qadr" (Quran, Surah 97) in Early Shi'ism** 160
- 1 An Enigmatic Text 160
  - 2 Shi'i Perceptions 162
  - 3 The Master of the Order 167
- 7 **Tactical Dissimulation and Sealing of Prophecy** 177
- 1 The Keeping of the Secret 177
  - 2 Prophetic Abilities of the Imam 181
  - 3 The Seal of Prophets 185
  - 4 Epilogue 194

## PART 3

*Spiritual Horizons*

- 8 ***The Precious Pearl* Attributed to Rajab al-Bursī: 500 Quranic Verses about 'Alī** 203
- 1 Brief Notes on al-Bursī and His Major Work *Mashāriq al-anwār* 203
  - 2 Other Works and the Quranic Commentary "The Precious Pearl" (*al-Durr al-thamīn*) 208
  - 3 Annotated Extracts from *al-Durr al-thamīn* 216
  - 4 The Message of the 'Personalized Commentaries' 225
- 9 **Icon and Contemplation: 'Alī as the Face of God and Medium of Meditation** 230
- 1 Portative Icons 230
  - 2 "The Vision by the Heart" 235

- 3 “What Is *Vejhe*?” 239  
4 Analysis of a Panel from the Vesel Collection 243  
5 Icon Contemplation: Between Interpretation and Applications 248

**Epilogue** 253

**Appendix 1: Divine Knowledge and Messianic Action: The Figure of ‘Alī in Mystical and Messianic Circles (5th/11th-10th/16th Centuries), by Orkhan Mir-Kasimov** 265

**Appendix 2: The Presence of ‘Alī in Islamic Philosophy, by Mathieu Terrier** 288

**Bibliography** 317

**Index** 369



## Notice to the Reader

Double dates indicate, first, the hijri date of Islam (h. = lunar hijri; h.s. = solar hijri) then that of the Common Era. When they appear between brackets after the name of an individual, they refer to the date of their death, unless indicated otherwise; e.g.: al-Ḥibarī (286/899) or (d.[i.e. died in] 286/899). When the month is not known, both years of the Common Era overlapped by the hijri year are indicated; e.g.: 329/940-41. Translations from the Quran are ours (we often however remain close to those of Arberry). As for the Quranic references, the first number refers to the surah whilst the second refers to the verse number according to the most usual division of the text; e.g.: 2:43 = Quran, surah 2, verse 43. The term ḥadith designates the second scriptural source of Islam after the Quran. It refers to what is commonly called the Islamic Tradition, that is, for the Sunni, the teachings attributed to the prophet Muḥammad and to some of his Companions and, for the Shi‘i, those of the Prophet, his daughter Fāṭima, ‘Alī himself and the imams descended from him. It is written here with capital h (Hadith) when referring to the Islamic Tradition or the disciplines that belong to it; written with lowercase h (hadith) it refers to a specific tradition, teaching, or a specific saying. In Arabic onomastics, the name of an individual is almost always followed by that of his father. This filiation is marked by the letter “b.”, short for “ibn” that is “son of”; e.g.: Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh = Muḥammad ibn (i.e. “son of”) ‘Abdallāh.

# Transcription System

Consonants: ʾ (indicates the hamza, rendering the soft laryngeal glottal stop), b, t, th (like the English “th” in *think*), j, ḥ (“h” unvoiced pharyngeal), kh (like the Spanish “jota” or the German “ch” of *Buch*), d, dh (like the English *that*), r (always a strongly rolled r), z, s, sh, ṣ (emphatic “s”), ḍ (emphatic “d”), ṭ (emphatic “t”), ḏ (emphatic “z”), ʿ (indicates the voiced pharyngeal ‘ayn), gh (like the “r” in the French *grassayé*), f, q (velarized uvular stop, like a glottal “k”), k, l, m, n, w, h (laryngeal spirant), y (like in *yak*).

Vowels: short: a, i, u; long: ā, ū, ī.

The four additional Persian letters: p, č (like “ch” in *China*), ž (like the French “j”), g (as in *garden*).

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# Figures

- 1 Watercolour on paper (13.5 × 6.5 cm), inv. no. 2003, 197, 5 and 10. © D. Adam, MuCEM, 2005 233
- 2 Watercolour on paper (13.5 × 6.5 cm), inv. no. 2003, 197, 5 and 10. © D. Adam, MuCEM, 2005 234
- 3 Watercolour on paper (15 × 10 cm), inv. no. 2003, 197, 7. © D. Adam, MuCEM, 2005 244
- 4 Bektashi drawing of 'Ali's shape on the human face. Private property of the author 247
- 5 Watercolour on paper (24 × 23 cm), inv. no. 2003, 197, 12. © D. Adam, MuCEM, 2005 250

# Abbreviations

<i>AI(U)ON</i>	<i>Annali dell'Istituto (Universitario) Orientale di Napoli</i>
<i>BEO</i>	<i>Bulletin d'Études Orientales</i>
<i>BIFAO</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale</i>
<i>BSL</i>	<i>Bulletin de Société de Linguistique</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>EI2</i>	<i>Encyclopédie de l'Islam, 2nd edition</i>
<i>EI3</i>	<i>Encyclopédie de l'Islam, 3rd edition</i>
<i>Enc. Ir.</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i>
<i>EPHE</i>	École Pratique des Hautes Études
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān</i>
<i>GAL</i>	Brockelmann, C., <i>Geschichte der arabischen Literatur</i> , Weimar, 1898
<i>GAS</i>	Sezgin, F., <i>Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums</i> , Leiden, 1967-1985
<i>IC</i>	<i>Islamic Culture</i>
<i>IJMES</i>	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
<i>IOS</i>	<i>Israel Oriental Studies</i>
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<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 Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire</i>
<i>MW</i>	<i>Muslim (previously Moslem) World</i>
<i>REI</i>	<i>Revue des Études Islamiques</i>
<i>REMM</i>	<i>Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée</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>SSR</i>	<i>Shi'i Studies Review</i>
<i>St Ir</i>	<i>Studia Iranica</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>



# Introduction

‘Alī son of Abī Ṭālib is without any doubt one of the most important personalities of nascent Islam. First cousin and son-in-law to Muḥammad, the father of Muḥammad’s only male progeny and himself the fourth caliph, he is one of the most respected Companions of the Prophet in the eyes of all Muslims. It is however in Shi‘i Islam, the religion of the mystical cult of the figure of the Guide (*imām*), that ‘Alī is precisely the first Imam, father of all the others and the ideal man of God, that he acquires paramount importance, to the point that, for many, Shi‘ism is the religion of devotion to ‘Alī and the other imams descended from him. As I have written elsewhere, Shi‘ism is the religion of the imam just as Christianity is the religion of Christ, and ‘Alī is the imam *par excellence*.

In recent years hundreds of books and articles and even entire encyclopaedias about ‘Alī have appeared, written by Muslims and, of course, especially by Shi‘is. Nevertheless, apart from these works, admittedly very useful, but written from a confessional point of view, there is no comprehensive study applying critical historical and philological methodologies to the subject. The only such studies in existence confine themselves to the examination of specific aspects of this major figure of the history of Islam. The present short work seeks to at least partly fill that gap and to serve as an introduction to a wider, maybe collective, study.

There are several distinct aspects to the figure of ‘Alī, to which we will return later in this book, but one in particular led me to write it. It is that ‘Alī is the only figure among the ‘Companions of Muḥammad’ who has remained to this day the object of a veritable cult for hundreds of millions of the faithful. Apart from the more than 200 million Twelver, Ismaili or Zaydi Shi‘is for whom ‘Alī is the supreme symbol of the highest sanctity, there are millions of Bektashis and Turkish Alevis, (‘followers of ‘Alī’), Syrian Alawis (a term with the same meaning), and Kurdish Ahl-e Ḥaqq/Yāresān, in addition to the millions of Sunni Sufis, notably in the Muslim East, for whom he represents, amongst other things, the source of their chains of mystical and initiatory transmission, as well as the figure of the perfect divine sage. For a large number of these Muslims, explicitly or occultly, ‘Alī is even superior to Muḥammad. Why? Where does this veritable devotion towards this figure, who therefore constitutes a unique case of its kind, come from? Many other Companions of Muḥammad occupy a central place in Muslim history or spirituality and yet none of them has, like ‘Alī, become the object of such persistent, widespread and fervent devotion. Even such a cardinal figure as ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb,

a father-in-law of Muhammad, the second caliph after him and celebrated as the artisan of the first Arab conquests and the foundation of the Muslim empire, never enjoyed such popularity.<sup>1</sup> And why precisely ‘Alī? This book seeks to provide some elements of a reply to that question.

Beyond the centuries-old positions and polemics, in particular between Sunnis and Shi‘is, the figure of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is thus particularly significant in the history of Muslim spirituality. I am speaking of the “figure” of ‘Alī and not of the historical personality, about whom almost nothing certain is known beyond the broad outlines of some major events. I will return to these subsequently. In an article now more than twenty five years old, Jacqueline Chabbi stressed the impossibility of writing a historical biography of Muḥammad, since the sources are late, contradictory, full of approximations and errors and theologically and politically biased, as they were written in times profoundly different from those of the Prophet and by diverging religious movements.<sup>2</sup> Harald Motzki, however, who is rather less sceptical of the Islamic sources, pinpoints the dilemma of historians who wish to write a life of Muḥammad: “On the one hand it is not possible to write a historical biography of the Prophet without being accused of using the sources uncritically, while on the other hand, when using the sources critically, it is simply not possible to write such a biography”.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 ‘Umar was considered, it seems, to be the eschatological Saviour by a certain number of believers, but the phenomenon was very short-lived; see P. Crone & M. Cook, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge (England), 1977, index p. 268 *sub* ‘Umar al-Fārūq and more particularly pp. 5 and 34; A. Hakim, “‘Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb, calife par la Grâce de Dieu”, *Arabica* 54/3, 2008, pp. 317-336; Id., “‘Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb: l’autorité religieuse et morale”, *Arabica* 55/1, 2008, pp. 1-34.
  - 2 J. Chabbi, “Histoire et tradition sacrée. La biographie impossible de Mahomet ». *Arabica* 43 (1996), pp. 189-205. For less sceptical points of view, see also F.E. Peters, “The Quest of the Historical Muḥammad”, *The International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23 (1991), pp. 291-315; G. Hagen, “The Imagined and the Historical Muḥammad”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129/1 (2009), pp. 97-111; A. Görke, H. Motzki & G. Schoeler, “First Century Sources for the Life of Muhammad? A Debate”, *Der Islam* 89/2 (2012), p. 2-59; for a synthesis of the methods and the impossibility of reaching the historical Muhammad see now S.J. Shoemaker, “Les vies de Muhammad”, in M.A. Amir-Moezzi and G. Dye (dir.), *Le Coran des historiens*, Paris, 2019, vol. 1, pp. 183-245.
  - 3 H. Motzki, “Introduction”, in Id. (ed), *The Biography of Muḥammad: the Issue of the Sources*, Leiden, 2000, p. xiv. The multiple difficulties of establishing a historical life of Muḥammad are also presented, for example, in the collection of articles edited by T. Fahd, *La vie du prophète Mahomet* (Travaux du centre d’études supérieures spécialisé d’histoire des religions de Strasbourg), Paris, 1983; in W. Raven, art. “Sīra”, in *Encyclopédie de l’Islam*, 2e éd. (Er2), s.v. and more recently in H. Ouardi, *Les derniers jours de Muḥammad*, Paris, 2016 that shows, with pertinence, the innumerable contradictions and inconsistencies in the official “biographies” of Muḥammad.

The personality of ‘Alī is no doubt just as problematic as Muḥammad’s, if not more so. He is at the centre of gravity of three major historical issues as inseparable in their origins as in their subsequent consequences, which shaped the beginnings of Islam and have conditioned its destiny right up to the present: the problem of the succession of Muḥammad; the recurrent conflicts and civil wars between Muslims over the centuries; and finally the writing of the scriptural sources of Islam, the Quran and the Hadith.<sup>4</sup> The reserves made earlier over the sources which speak of Muḥammad can be equally applied *mutatis mutandis* to those touching on ‘Alī, with this one difference, that in the conflicts around ‘Alī and his entourage (for example his wife Fāṭima or his son al-Ḥusayn), the divide seems to have been even more violent.<sup>5</sup> The life of the historical ‘Alī appears to be lost in a whirlwind of conflicts that shook those early times and profoundly marked the first writings of Islam.<sup>6</sup> Be that as it may, it is nevertheless possible to write a history or histories of the differing representations of ‘Alī in the different Muslim circles. This book describes some aspects of the figure of ‘Alī in Shi‘i, and notably Twelver, spirituality.

4 The articulation between these historical events is the subject of M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant. Sources scripturaires de l’islam entre histoire et ferveur*, Paris, 2011; Id., “Le shi‘isme et le Coran”, in *Le Coran des historiens*, vol 1, pp. 919-967.

5 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, *op. cit.*, chap. 1; W. Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the early Caliphate*, Cambridge, 1997, *passim*; id., “Social Legislation in Surat al-Ahzab”, in A. Cilardo (ed), *Islam and Globalisation. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. Proceeding of the 25th Congress of l’Union Européenne des Islamisants et Arabisants*, Louvain-Paris-Walpole, 2013, pp. 197-203; Id. “Introduction” to “History and Historiography”, in F. Daftary and G. Miskinzoda (ed), *The Study of Shi‘i Islam: History, Theology and Law*, London-New York, 2014, pp. 3-16; Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “Chosen of All Women: Mary and Fatima in Qur’anic Exegesis”, *Islamochristiana* 7 (1981), p. 19-28; B. Beinbauer-Köhler, *Fāṭima bint Muḥammad. Metamorphosen einer frühislamischen Frauengestalt*, Wiesbaden, 2002, pp. 39-56; V. Klemm, “Image formation of an Islamic legend. Fāṭima, the daughter of the prophet Muḥammad”, in S. Günther (ed), *Ideas, images, and methods of portrayal. Insights into classical Arabic literature and Islam*, Leiden-Boston, 2005, p. 181-208 (especially p. 184-190); C.P. Clohessy, *Fāṭima, Daughter of Muḥammad*, Piscataway, 2013; see also D.K. Crow, “The Death of al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī and Early Shi‘i Views of the Imamate”, *Alserāt* 12 (1986), pp. 71-116 (included in E. Kohlberg (ed), *Shi‘ism*, Aldershot, 2003, article n.3); T. Hylén, *Ḥusayn, the Mediator*, Uppsala, 2007.

6 As has always been stressed there is a plethora of works, even encyclopaedias, of the hagiographical and apologetical type on ‘Alī written by Muslim authors, but the critical history of the sources concerning him and of all the problems that they pose remains unwritten. In the present state of research the following excellent synthetic articles are useful: *E12* (L. Vecchia Vaglieri), the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (I. Poonawala and E. Kohlberg), the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān* (A.S. Asani) or from *E13* (2008-2, pp. 62 *sqq.* by R. Gleave), *s.n.*; the very long, multi-authored article in *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, vol.3, Leiden-Boston, 2011, pp. 477-583. See also the collective work: A.Y. Ocak (ed), *From History to Theology: ‘Alī in the Islamic Beliefs*, Ankara, 2005.

I will nevertheless first examine some “biographical” data on which the sources are more or less in agreement (which does not mean that they convey historical reality) by commenting on the enlightening syntheses that are mentioned above (footnote 6).

‘Alī would seem to have been very young at the beginning of Muḥammad’s prophetic career, although the chronology given in the sources is certainly not reliable. He grew up in the home of Muḥammad, his first cousin, because of the bankruptcy and poverty of his own father. One of the very first followers of Muḥammad, he would have joined him in Medina after the Hijra and married his daughter Fāṭima. She bore two sons to ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the sole male progeny of the Prophet and the two imams who succeeded ‘Alī, according to the majority of the partisans of the latter. One fact is so sufficiently rare as to be worthy of remark: while Fāṭima was alive, ‘Alī took no other spouse.

‘Alī was by the side of Muḥammad in all his battles, often as the flag bearer or as the commander-in-chief. His bravery, his feats of arms and his warrior-like qualities became legendary. And yet, after the death of Muḥammad, he does not seem to have taken part in any further war of conquest. He would seem to be unique among the great Companions in having steered completely clear of those events so crucial to world history, the Arab conquests and the first gestation of the empire. It is one of the peculiarities of ‘Alī which baffles the historians. Some elements which I examine below may perhaps provide avenues for further research.

After the death of Muḥammad in the year 11/632 (according to the most accredited tradition), civil violence erupted around the question of his succession. ‘Alī, his wife Fāṭima and their two sons were at the centre of the conflicts.<sup>7</sup> Let us take a closer look. The fratricidal violence between the followers of Muḥammad seemed to be predictable, given that the precarious balance sustaining that assembly of heterogeneous groups and interests who were the new converts, depended, it would appear, upon the person of Muḥammad himself. He once gone, the Meccan Emigrants who had accompanied him on his Hijrah came into conflict with the Medinan Auxiliaries who had welcomed them. His quite recently and opportunistically converted former Qurayshi enemies, among them the influential Umayyad family, as well as his Companions Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, sought to impose themselves by neutralising by any means the ardour of the other competitors, and in particular the partisans of ‘Alī. The confrontations, although limited, for the time being at least, in both time and space; seem to have been very violent. Fāṭima, daughter of Muḥammad and wife of ‘Alī, is said to have died of injuries sustained in an attack against

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<sup>7</sup> On the following subjects see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*.

her house, led by the henchmen of ‘Umar. After a tense meeting hosted by the Banū Sā‘ida clan of the Auxiliaries, the conflicts came down to a dispute between Abū Bakr and ‘Alī in which the former quickly prevailed, to become the first caliph.

Of this episode, Islamic textual tradition has broadly speaking retained two radically different versions. The great majority of the religious sources derived from what eventually came to be called Sunnism, the majority current of Islam who recognised the legitimacy of Abū Bakr, seem to have sought to attenuate or even conceal the violence of the confrontations and to present him as an almost consensual figure, in an attempt to limit the scope of the conflicts. Yet the historical and historiographical sources, even those of the Sunnis,<sup>8</sup> contain enough elements affirming the contrary to have led a majority of modern researchers to seriously doubt the alleged consensus of the faithful regarding the election of Abū Bakr and the presumed unity of the Companions of the Prophet.<sup>9</sup> According to most Sunni doctrinal works, the Prophet had not explicitly designated anyone to succeed him, either in his own declarations or via Quranic revelations (the “official” Quran that we know today contains no reference to that effect). His community would consequently have had recourse to those ancestral tribal practices that had always marked the succession of a charismatic leader among the Arabs: the designation, by a council of influential notables, of one of the closest companions of that leader, sufficiently aged to be considered wise and belonging to the same tribe as his predecessor or to a tribe allied with him. Abū Bakr fulfilled all those conditions and was thus elected, after the meeting with the Auxiliaries, with almost unanimous approval. The notable exception was ‘Alī, who finally also let himself be convinced of the wisdom of that choice, in his anxiety to safeguard the unity and peace of the community.

The partisans of ‘Alī, who was apparently very young at the time (which according to some constituted a handicap), known as Alids or proto-Shi‘is, give an entirely different version of events. According to Shi‘i sources, Muḥammad had explicitly designated ‘Alī as his sole legitimate successor and this repeatedly so. Even more decisively, God himself, through his revelation had announced

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8 E.g. Ibn Hishām, al-Balādhurī, al-Ṭabarī or even Ibn Shabba; however the silence of Ibn Sa‘d on the conflicts is in this regard significant (see bibliography at the end of this volume).

9 As has been stressed, the question of the sources concerning the death of the Prophet and the events that followed immediately is very complex. About practically every sequence of different episodes there are multiple, sometimes very diverging, narratives depending on the theological and political orientation of the authors. Scientific research has long studied those sources and the related bibliography is plethoric. Seeking to avoid erudite discussion at this level we only offer here a concise summary of the most plausible theses.

this succession. According to the Alids-Shi'is, it could not be otherwise: how could God and his Messenger have left the crucial question of the latter's succession unresolved? Is it conceivable that they would have been so indifferent to the leadership of the community of the faithful as to leave it in uncertainty and confusion? This would be contrary to the very spirit of the Quran, according to which the great prophets of the past have chosen their successors from among the elders of their closest family members, those privileged by the bonds of blood and initiated into the secrets of their religion. It is true that the Quran advises that a council be held in certain cases, but never when it comes to the succession of the prophets which must always be decided by divine election. The Alid-Shi'i sources, notably those of the first Hijra centuries, maintain that the original integral Quran, containing many explicit mentions of and clear allusions to, the members of Muhammad's family and notably designating 'Alī as his successor, had been falsified, heavily censored and profoundly distorted by the adversaries of 'Alī who usurped power after the Prophet's death. Likewise, this integral Quran, far more voluminous than the Quran as we now know it, explicitly cited the names of the adversaries of Muḥammad and 'Alī, who had belatedly and opportunely converted to Islam. To remove him from the succession to the Prophet, these enemies who in the end prevailed were forced to delete all those passages and to deny at the same time the authenticity of the prophetic statements concerning the election of his son-in-law.<sup>10</sup>

'Alī was thus excluded from power during the reigns of the first three caliphs, Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān. The latter was assassinated by other faithful, as were many figures of early Islam, after a rather chaotic reign and in what the sources call the first civil war between Muslims and in which some supporters of 'Alī were also involved. 'Alī, the fourth caliph, thus came to power in an atrocious climate of extreme fratricidal violence. His short five year reign (from 35/656 to 40/661) was marked by a series of major civil wars: the battle of the Camel, against a coalition led by 'Ā'isha (widow of Muḥammad and daughter of Abū Bakr) and other Companions; the battle of Ṣiffin against the Umayyads, led by Mu'āwiya, a war that was ended by an arbitration; and the battle of Nahrawān against the Kharijis, former partisans of 'Alī, who became his worst enemies over their refusal to accept arbitration of Ṣiffin. 'Alī was finally be assassinated by one of them in 40/661.<sup>11</sup>

10 On the question of the Quran and its falsification according to Shi'is see now E. Kohlberg & M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification. The Kitāb al-qirā'āt of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī*, Leiden-Boston, 2009, Introduction; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 2.

11 See also H. Lammens, *Études sur le règne du Calife Omayyade Mo'āwia Ier*, Paris, 1908; L. Caetani, *Annali dell'Islam*, Milano, 1905-1926 (the last two volumes – IX and X dating

It is very difficult to form a clear idea of the personality of the historical ‘Alī, as the sources concerning him are tendentious and contradictory, and with good reason; as Laura Veccia Vaglieri writes (see above footnote 6): “‘Alī was at the centre of struggles that have lasted for centuries”. We have, on the one hand, hagiographical and apologetic Shi‘i writings that from the earliest times portray him as a legendary figure and as an exceptional being with superhuman qualities. On the other hand, after the Umayyad period, whose rare textual remnants give of ‘Alī, their hereditary enemy, a particularly negative image, the Abbassid sources downplay the Shi‘i image of ‘Alī, in an attempt to recuperate him by making of him a Companion of the Prophet particularly worthy of respect, but otherwise similar to the others, without being in any way uniquely superior to them.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, many different sources are unanimous about some aspects of his character: his bravery (as we have seen), his eloquence both in prose and in poetry (a collection of poems of very uncertain authenticity is attributed to him), his excellent knowledge of the Quran and of the prophetic Sunna, not least in his insistence on the duty of putting them into practice, and finally, his ascetic and chivalrous spirit. These qualities are partly evident in the voluminous collection entitled *Nahj al-balāgha* that is attributed to him. It is a sort of anthology of letters, words of wisdom, advice, aphorisms, sermons, eschatological predictions and speeches of different kinds, whose attribution to ‘Alī has been under discussion ever since the Middle Ages. It is true that the book was compiled by the Shi‘i savant al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1016), well after the time of ‘Alī and in the particular context of the Buyid government (I shall come back to this in due course). The Sunnis Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1283) or al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) consider that the compiler is also its author, whereas the Mu‘tazili Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd (d. 656/1258), one of the greatest commentators on this book,

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from 1926 – are dedicated to ‘Alī and his caliphate); E. Petersen, *‘Alī and Mu‘awīya in Early Arabic Tradition*, Copenhagen, 1964. It is interesting to note that these richly documented studies, now considered classics, say almost nothing about the spiritual figure of ‘Alī or the religious dimension of the conflicts related to him. This remark also seems valid for other, less monographic, studies. My own works and those of W. Madelung referenced above (see notes 4 and 5) seek, amongst other things, to fill that gap; see on this subject J. van Reeth, “*Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant: nouvelles perspectives sur les origines de l’islam*”, *RHR* 230/3 (July and September 2013), p. 385–402; M. Terrier, “Violences politiques, écritures canoniques et évolutions doctrinales en islam”, *JSAI* 40 (2013), pp. 401–427.

12 See now N. Husayn, “The Rehabilitation of ‘Alī in Sunnī Ḥadīth and Historiography”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 29.4 (2019), pp. 565–583; For positions hostile to ‘Alī in Islam see now id., *Opposing the Imām. The Legacy of the Nawāṣib in Islamic Literature*, Cambridge, 2021.

opts categorically for its authenticity.<sup>13</sup> Again Laura Veccia Vaglieri, one of the foremost specialists on the subject, considers that an ancient core of the texts can reasonably be attributed to ‘Alī, given that, since after the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Hijra and up to the time of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, many famous authors belonging to all kinds of denominations quote a significant number of sermons and aphorisms of ‘Alī as proofs of his eloquence and of his superior spiritual and moral qualities.<sup>14</sup> However the Italian scholar concedes that it is very difficult to distinguish what is authentic from what is apocryphal in the collection. In any event, both the overwhelming majority, both of cultivated Muslims of all times and of modern scholars are unanimous in attributing the compilation to al-Raḍī and in considering the work as a masterpiece of Arabic prose and moral reflection.<sup>15</sup> The commentaries on it, and its translations into different Islamic languages, can be counted by the hundreds. Al-‘Āmilī, in his monograph on this subject, mentions 210 titles up to 1983 alone. From that date to the present, one must add many hundreds more.<sup>16</sup> As for the Shi‘i faithful, they believe in the authenticity of the attribution of the *Nahj al-balāgha* to ‘Alī and thence consider this book to be sacred. However, for the historian of Shi‘i thought primarily interested in the original esoteric tradition and its extensions – which I am – this source must be approached with prudence and above all parsimony. The reason for this is quite simply the affiliation of its

13 M. Djebli, “Nahdj al-Balāgha”, *EI2*.

14 L. Veccia Vaglieri, “Observations sur le Nahj al-balāgha”, *Actes du 24e Congrès International des Orientalistes*, Munich, 1957, pp. 318-339; and ead., “Sul ‘Nahj al-Balāgha’ et sul suo compilatore ash-Sharīf ar-Raḍī”, *AUON*, special number 8, 1958. On the apocryphal character of certain parts of the book see also W. al-Kāḍī, “An early Faṭimid political document”, *SI* 48, 1978, pp. 71-108.

15 See for example. Z. Mubarak, *La prose arabe*, Paris, 1931, pp. 27 *sqq.*, 128 *sqq.*, 185 *sqq.*; R. Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe*, Paris, 1952-1966, vol. 2, pp. 308 *sqq.*, vol. 3, pp. 721 *sqq.*; M. Djebli, “Encore à propos de l’authenticité du *Nahj al-balāgha*”, *SI* 75, 1992, pp. 33-56. On the prose attributed to ‘Alī see now the many monographic works of Tahera Qutbuddin, in particular: “The Sermons of ‘Alī ibn Abi Talib: At the Confluence of the Core Islamic Teachings of the Qur’an and the Oral, Nature-Based Cultural Ethos of Seventh Century Arabia”, in Linda G. Jones (ed.), *La predicación medieval: sermones cristianos, judíos e islámicos en el Mediterráneo*, special number of *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 42/1 (2012), pp. 201-228; Id., “Alī’s Contemplations on This World and the Hereafter in the Context of His Life and Times”, in A. Korangy et al. (eds.), *Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy*, Berlin, 2016, pp. 333-353; Id., “A Sermon on Piety by Imam ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib: How the Rythm of the Classical Arabic Oration Tacitly Persuaded” in S. Dorpmüller, J. Scholz, M. Stille, I. Weinrich (eds.), *Religion and Aesthetic Experience*, Heidelberg, 2018, pp. 109-123.

16 Ḥ. Al-‘Āmilī, *Shurūḥ Nahj al-balāgha*, Beirut, 1983; also M. Ḥusaynī, *Maṣādir Nahj al-balāgha*, Najaf, 1966, vol. 1, pp. 247-314. See now *Nahj al-balāgha wa shurūḥuh*, Maktabat al-imām ‘Alī Amīr al-mu‘minīn, Najaf, 2016.

compiler, al-Sharīf al-Raḏī, to the staunchest theologico-juridical rationalist tradition of the Buyid period, well known for its opposition, if not outright hostility, to the original tradition mentioned above.<sup>17</sup>

The Alids/Shi'is consider 'Alī to be the sole legitimate successor of Muḥammad, notably because his privileged relationship with God and with the Prophet. Well beyond its political significance, this succession has undeniably a profoundly religious aspect. For reasons that the following chapters will attempt to demonstrate, from very early on, perhaps even during his lifetime, 'Alī seems to have been transmuted, in the eyes of his followers, from a historical actor into a heroic figure of quasi divine stature, at the very centre of what many ancient sources call the "religion of 'Alī" (*dīn 'Alī*).<sup>18</sup> As a man inspired by God, depository of all kinds of knowledge, Proof of God (*ḥujjat allāh*), he soon acquires an eschatological dimension: arbitrator (*qasīm*) on Judgement Day, intercessor with God (*shafī*) or also cupbearer (*sāqī*) of the paradisiac pool of Kawthar in the Afterlife. For the entire Shi'i imamology and metaphysics, in the main currents such as Twelver Imamism (the main branch of Shi'ism) and Sevener Ismailism as well as in the so-called "extremist" (*ghulāt*) sects, 'Alī became the theophanic figure *par excellence*, the manifestation of the Names of God or the incarnation of a celestial 'Alī, supreme symbol of the divinity; and this still holds true today.<sup>19</sup> It is no doubt for these reasons that 'Alī's declaration of the divine alliance, his *walāya*, becomes from very early on the third

17 On the two traditions and their conflict see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin dans le shī'isme originel*, Paris-Lagrasse, 1992, Introduction; on the position of al-Raḏī, *ibid.*, pp. 57 et 69; also M.A. Amir-Moezzi & Ch. Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le shī'isme?*, Paris, 2006, parts 2 and 3; S.M.M. Ja'farī, *Sayyid Raḏī*, Tehran, 1378 solar/1998 (2nd ed.), especially chap. 9.

18 Gh. H. Ṣadiqī, *Jonbesh hā-ye dīnī-ye īrānī dar qarn hā-ye dowvom va sevvom-e hejrī* (completed and updated version of the author's doctoral thesis: G.H. Sadighi, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens aux IIe et IIIe siècles de l'hégire*, Paris, 1938), Tehran, 1372 solar/1993, pp. 225 sqq.; E. Kohlberg, "Some Imāmi Shī'i Views on the *ṣahāba*", *JSAI* 5 (1984), pp. 143-175, especially p. 145 sqq. (now in id., *Belief and Law in Imāmi Shī'ism*, Aldershot, 1991, article no. 9); on *dīn 'Alī* see here chap. 3. L. Vecchia Vaglieri thinks that he owes his "semi-divine aura" to the profoundly religious spirit of 'Alī and to his social and economic reforms of his caliphate, during which he distributed, to the point of their exhaustion, the resources of the state's *bayt al-māl* (E12, p. 393b et 397a). But, in view of the portrait of 'Alī which will emerge from the corpus of documents that we are about to examine, the argument does not appear sufficient.

19 See E. Kohlberg, art. "'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb, ii. 'Alī as seen by the community "Among extremist Shī'ites"', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 1, pp. 845-846; see also for example. H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis. Die Extreme Schia und die 'Alawiten*, Zurich-Munich, 1982; M.M. Bar-Asher & A. Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-'Alawī Religion: An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy*, Leiden, 2002; D. de Smet, *Les Épîtres sacrées des Druzes: Rasā'ul al-Ḥikma*, Louvain, 2007, introduction; and here chap. 4.

element of the Shi'ī profession of faith, after those of the divine unicity and of the prophetic mission of Muḥammad.<sup>20</sup>

One finds a great number of these terms describing the figure of 'Alī in Sufism, obviously in Shi'ī Sufism but also in Sunni Sufism, in the great Muslim philosophers, as well as in the important pan-Islamic “chivalric” movement of the guilds and in the companies of artisans known since the Middle Ages as *futuwwa*. To this movement 'Alī is the *sayyid al-fityān* (“master of the companion-knights”); the cry of *futuwwa* is said to have been uttered by the divine voice during the battle of Uḥud: *lā fatā illā 'Alī lā sayfa illā dhū l-faqār* (“no knight but 'Alī, no sword but Dhū l-faqār”).<sup>21</sup> Finally, emphasis must be placed on the central place of 'Alī in what is known as “popular” Shi'ism, where he is an object of veritable devotion as the holy man *par excellence*, the master of all miracles, the hero of battles against miscreants and against all sorts of demons, the hero of many popular epics and the main character of a number of Shi'ī religious plays known as *ta'ziya*.<sup>22</sup> We shall of course be returning to many of these subjects in the following pages.

20 J. Eliash, “On the Genesis and Development of the Twelver-Shi'ī Three-Tenet *shahada*”, *Der Islam* 47, 1971, pp. 265-272; See also the great monography on the subject of Sayyid 'Alī Shahrastānī, *Mawsū'at al-adhān bayn al-aṣāla wa l-tahrīf*.

21 Concerning Sufism see E. Kohlberg, art. “'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb, ii. 'Alī as seen by the community, “Among Sufis””, op. cit., pp. 846-847; see also R. Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, Wiesbaden, 1965-1981, especially vol. 1, pp. 13-26; K.M. al-Shaybī, *Al-ṣila bayn al-taṣawwuf wa l-tashayyu'*, Baghdad, 1966; H. Corbin, *En islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, Paris, 1971-1972, especially vol. 3 (subheading: *Les fidèles d'amour. Shī'isme et soufisme*); and now D. Hermann & M. Terrier (eds.), *Shi'ī Islam and Sufism. Classical Views and Modern Perspectives*, London, 2020. On *futuwwa* and the moral figure of 'Alī, see especially F. Taeschner, *Zünfte und Bruderschaften im Islam: Texte zur Geschichte der Futuwwa*, Zurich-Munich, 1979 (the *opus magnum* of the author that sums up and completes his many previous works on *futuwwa*); A. Mīr-'Ābedīnī et M. Afshārī, *Āyīn-e qalandarī*, Téhéran, 1374/1995, index. s.n. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib; M. Ali Lakhani (ed.), *The sacred foundations of justice in Islam: the Teachings of 'Alī ibn Abi Talib*, Bloomington, 2006, (volume composed of A. Lakhani, “The Metaphysics of Human Governance: Imam 'Alī, Truth and Justice”; R. Shah-Kazemi, “A Sacred Conception of Justice: Imam 'Alī's Letter to Malik al-Ashtar”; L. Lewisohn, “'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib's ethics of mercy in the mirror of the Persian Sufi tradition”); R. Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance. Introducing the Spirituality of Imam Alī*, London, 2006; L. Ridgeon, *Jawānmardī: A Sufi Code of Honour*, Edinburgh, 2011, index s.v.; Id. (ed.), *Jawānmardī. The Ethics and Practice of Persianate Perfection*, London, 2018; and in particular in that volume: R.Y. Shani, “*La Fata illa 'Alī la Sayf illa Dhu'l-Faqar*: Epigraphic Ceramic Platters from Medieval Nishapur Documenting Esteem for 'Alī ibn Abi Taleb as the Ideal *Fata*”, pp. 28-65; the fascicle 40/1 (2013) of *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* is mostly devoted to *futuwwa*. See also here the contribution of O. Mir-Kasimov (Appendix 1). On the figure of 'Alī among the philosophers see here the contribution of M. Terrier (Appendix 2).

22 E. Kohlberg, art. “'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb, ii. 'Alī as seen by the community, “In popular thought””, op. cit., pp. 843-844; see M.R. Shafi'ī Kadkanī, “Ḥemāseyī shī'ī az qarn-e panjom”, *Majalle-ye*

As I have already stated, the present book is neither a work on the historical figure of ‘Alī, nor even on all the aspects of his spiritual nature. These subjects are too vast and can only be studied adequately in a collective manner. In the following chapters only certain aspects of the significance of the first Imam in the spirituality of Shi‘ism, and in particular of Twelver Imami Shi‘ism, will be examined. The contents of these chapters have already been published as articles in scientific journals or in collective academic publications. Here they have been updated, augmented where appropriate and slightly modified and articulated so that they together form a coherent book.

The work is divided into three sections. The first, entitled “Singularities of ‘Alī” consists of three chapters. The first is a study of the connections that link ‘Alī to the Quran. In it are examined respectively his roles as author and as the subject of the exegesis of Revelation, then as the content and the ultimate object of it. This dual dimension stresses the double nature, human and divine, of ‘Alī. It is for that reason that the study ends with the hypothesis of the possible identification, by certain proto-Shi‘is and their interpretation of a certain number of texts, of their first Imam with Christ.<sup>23</sup> The second chapter can be summed up in a syllogism: Muḥammad came primarily in order to announce the imminent end of world; he belonged to a biblical culture; he thus certainly announced the coming of the Messiah (if the conclusion of the syllogism is expressed in this form it is because the Quran, contrary to the Hadith, never speaks of the Messiah as the Saviour at the end of time). However, in the earlier traditions of the Hadith, this Messiah is Jesus and, in a certain number of Shi‘i texts, ‘Alī is the new manifestation of Jesus and thus the eschatological Saviour.<sup>24</sup> The third chapter focuses on an *a priori* unusual expression that

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*Dāneshkade-ye Adabiyāt va ‘Olūm-e Ensānīye Mashhad*, 33th year, no 3-4 (autumn-winter 1379/2000), pp. 425-491; the introduction of Ḥ. Esmā‘īli to his edition of the *Abū Muslim Nāmeḥ*, Tehran, 2001; the introduction of the editor to Rabī’ (sic), *‘Alī Nāmeḥ*, ed. R. Bayāt-Gholāmī, Tehran, 2010; E. Rossi and A. Bombaci, *Elenco di drammi religiosi persiani (fondo mss. Vaticani Cerulli)*, Vatican, 1961, index s.n. ‘Alī b. Abi Ṭālib. See here chap. 9.

23 “‘Alī et le Coran (Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine XIV)”, *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 98.4 (Oct.-Dec. 2014), pp. 669-704 (published also in A. Straface, C. De Angelo & A. Manzo (éds), *Labor Limae. Atti in onore di Carmela Baffioni. Studi Magrebini*, Nuova Serie vol. XII-XIII, Naples 2014-2015 – in fact 2018 –, tome 1, pp. 1-39).

24 “Muḥammad le Paraclet et ‘Alī le Messie. Nouvelles remarques sur les origines de l’islam et de l’imamologie shi‘ite” under the direction of M.A. Amir-Moezzi, co-edited with M. De Cillis, D. de Smet and O. Mir-Kasimov, *L’ésotérisme shi‘ite, ses racines et ses prolongements / Shi‘i Esotericism, its Roots and Developments*, Turnhout (Belgium), 2016, pp. 19-54 (English translation: “Muḥammad the Paraclet and ‘Alī the Messiah: New Remarks on the Origins of Islam and of Shi‘ite Imamology”, *Der Islam* 95.1, 2018, pp. 30-64).

appears in a significant number of ancient sources, namely “the religion of ‘Alī” (*dīn ‘Alī*). In what way is it distinct from the “religion of Muḥammad”, which will in the end be called “islam”? What are its characteristics? Why was this expression only applied to ‘Alī? The answer to this question implicitly reveals the special significance of the figure of the first Imam amongst the great personalities surrounding Muḥammad.<sup>25</sup>

The second section consists of four chapters and is entitled “Between the Divine and the Human”. Its first chapter, the fourth chapter of the book, examines different aspects of Shi‘i theology of the Imam, of which ‘Alī is the supreme symbol. The esoteric and mystical aspects of this theology are based on the figure of the Imam as the locus of manifestation of the Names and Attributes of God.<sup>26</sup> In chapter 5 the fivefold constitution of the spirit of the Imam is analysed. This notion, inherited no doubt from many biblical traditions of late Antiquity, the last of them being Manicheism, stresses the presence of the “holy spirit” or of the “spirit of sanctity” (*rūḥ al-quds*) as the superior organ of the ‘intellective limbs’ of the divine man. It enables him to receive revelations from God, in other words to possess the spiritual abilities of a prophet in the biblical sense of the term.<sup>27</sup> The following chapter examines some special characteristics of the reception of divine revelation by the Imam, in particular during that holy night *par excellence* of the Muslim calendar, the “Night of Power” or “the Night of the Decree” (*laylat al-qadr*), which gave its name to Surah 97 of the Quran.<sup>28</sup> Chapter 7 shows how belief in the continuity of prophecy through the Imam becomes problematic with the establishment of the orthodox dogma of the “end of prophecy” after the death of Muḥammad. The chapter thus studies the relation between two major notions

25 “Considérations sur l’expression Dīn ‘Alī. Aux origines de la foi shī‘ite”, in *ZDMG* 150/1 (2000), pp. 29-68. This article has been included in my book *La religion discrète. Croyances et pratiques spirituelles dans l’islam shī‘ite*, Paris, 2006 (2015<sup>2</sup>), chap. 1. For obvious reasons this study could not be absent from a book dedicated to the spiritual figure of ‘Alī.

26 “Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine I: remarques sur la divinité de l’Imam”, in *Studia Iranica*, xxv (2), 1996, pp. 193-216. This article became chapter 3 of *La religion discrète*. As with the study cited in the previous footnote, the presence of this study in the present volume seemed to me to be indispensable.

27 “Les Cinq Esprits de l’homme divin (Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine XIII)”, *Der Islam* 92.2 (2015), pp. 297-320 (also published in *Gnose et manichéisme. Entre les oasis d’Égypte et la Route de la Soie. Hommage à Jean-Daniel Dubois*, A. van den Kerchove & L.G. Soares Santoprete (eds.), Turnhout, 2017, pp. 377-398; abbreviated version: “Les cinq membres intellectifs de l’homme de Dieu entre l’Antiquité tardive et l’islam shī‘ite”, *Comptes-rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, April-June 2015 11, pp. 609-625).

28 “La Nuit du Qadr (Coran, sourate 97) dans le shī‘isme ancien (Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine XV)”, *MIDEO* 31 (2016), pp. 181-204.

of Shi'i religion, that of "keeping the secret" (*taqiyya*) and that of the "sealing of prophecy" (*khatm al-nubuwwa*). Islamic "orthodoxy", as just stated, interpreted this expression from the Quran 33:40 to mean "the end of prophecy", which in turn implied that nobody could receive the Divine Word after the death of Muḥammad, and in effect making Islam the last religion. The Shi'is, just like some other believers in the first centuries of Islam, have not adhered to this dogma. For them, revelation could not end. It had continued thanks to the Imams, and more particularly to 'Alī, but, since the sometimes violent imposition of Sunni orthodoxy, they had been compelled for reasons of prudence to dissimulate their continuing adherence to the doctrine.<sup>29</sup>

The third and last section, "Spiritual Horizons", consists of two chapters. It examines the spreading of the cult of 'Alī among his devotees, first towards the end of the Middle-Ages and at the dawn of modern times, then during the contemporary period. Chapter 8 is devoted to the birth of a veritable mystical religion of the figure of the first Imam, thanks to the work of a major thinker of late Imami mysticism, al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī (d. after 813/1410-1411), and in particular through an analysis of what can be considered his Quranic exegesis.<sup>30</sup> The last chapter of the book examines the spiritual role of the icon in modern and contemporary Shi'i Sufism. It shows how painted "portraits" of saints, in particular icons of 'Alī, serve as a medium of contemplation and as means of interiorizing the figure of the Imam among even the illiterate communities of the faithful.<sup>31</sup> For many centuries, 'Alī has thus satisfied the most sublime spiritual aspirations of the hearts of believers, whether it be, in the scholarly

29 "Dissimulation tactique (*taqiyya*) et scellement de la prophétie (*khatm al-nubuwwa*) (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine XII)", *Journal Asiatique* 302.2 (2014), pp. 411-438 (English translation: "New Remarks on Secrecy and Concealment in Early Imāmī Shi'ism: the Case of *khatm al-nubuwwa* – Aspects of Twelver Shi'i Imamology XII", in Sh. Raei (ed.), *Islamic Alternatives. Non-Mainstream Religion in Persianate Societies*, Göttinger Orientforschungen Iranica, Neue Folge 16, Wiesbaden, 2017, pp. 3-27).

30 "*Al-Durr al-Thamīn* attribué à Rajab al-Bursī. Un exemple des 'commentaires coraniques personnalisés' shi'ites (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine XVI)", *Le Muséon* 130 (1-2), 2017, pp. 207-240 (also published in Iyas Hassan (ed.), *La littérature aux marges du Adab. Regards croisés sur la prose arabe classique*, Paris, 2017, pp. 218-266).

31 "Icône et contemplation: entre l'art populaire et le soufisme dans le shi'isme imamite (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine XI)", *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, University of Michigan, New Series/vol. 20, 2006 [in fact 2010], pp. 1-12 (published also in H. Biesterfeldt and V. Klemm (eds.), *Differenz und Dynamik im Islam. Festschrift für Heinz Halm zum 70. Geburtstag*, Würzburg, 2012, pp. 473-490 and updated in C. Altini, Ph. Hoffmann and J. Rüpke (eds.), *Issues of Interpretation. Texts, Images, Rites*, Stuttgart, 2018, pp. 87-103. English translation: "Icon and Meditation: Between Popular Art and Sufism in Imami Shi'ism", in P. Khosronejad (ed.), *The Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shi'ism. Iconography and Religious Devotion in Shi'i Islam*, London-New York, 2012, pp. 25-45).

tradition, through the intellectual and philosophical journey of the educated, or in so-called “popular” religion, where the Sufi brotherhoods are particularly present.

The book concludes with the contributions of two friends and colleagues whom I wholeheartedly wish to thank. The first, Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, researcher at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, examines, with pertinence and erudition, the figure of ‘Alī in mystical and messianic circles from the v/xi<sup>th</sup> to the x/xvi<sup>th</sup> centuries. The second, Mathieu Terrier, researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, studies, thoroughly and with finesse, the presence of ‘Alī in Islamic philosophy, with particular focus on Shi‘i philosophers.

**PART 1**

*Singularities of 'Alī*

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# ‘Alī and the Quran

To Carmela Baffioni  
In friendly homage



## 1 Introduction

“Alī is inseparable from the Quran just as the Quran is inseparable from ‘Alī.”<sup>1</sup> This prophetic tradition, expressed here in its simplest form, has come down to us through Sunni sources. But it is of course also to be found, with many variations, in innumerable Shi‘i documents. It perfectly encapsulates the perception that the Alids (in the sense of the followers of ‘Alī) in general and the Imami Shi‘is in particular have of the privileged character of the relations that bind the Holy Book to their first imam.

Overall, in Shi‘ism, the Quran and the prophetic holy family are indissolubly linked, as the celebrated prophetic tradition of the ‘Two Precious Objects’ (literally “The Two Weighty Things”, *ḥadīth al-thaqalayn*) illustrates. This hadith, attributed to the prophet Muhammad himself, has come down to us in numerous variants and is accepted by both Sunnis and Shi‘is, although, of course, their interpretations of it differ. It in substance declares that Muhammad is bequeathing to his community “Two Precious” inseparable “Objects”, namely his Family and the Book of God.<sup>2</sup> This prophetic saying thus establishes an organic relationship between both objects, and for some even, an equal sanctity, at the core of Islam’s spiritual economy. The identity of the Quran being

1 *‘Alī ma‘a l-Qur‘ān wa l-Qur‘ān ma‘a ‘Alī ...* (literally: “Alī is with the Quran and the Quran is with ‘Alī”); al-Ṭabarānī Sulaymān b. Aḥmad, *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḡhīr*, vol. 1, ed. ‘A. Muḥammad, Medina, 1388/1968, p. 255; al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ‘alā l-ṣaḡhīhayn*, vol. 3, Haydarabad (reprint Riyad), s.d., p. 124.

2 The complete list of all the known sources of this hadith is now available in the collective anonymous work: *Kitāb allāh wa ahl al-bayt fī ḥadīth al-thaqalayn*, Qumm, reprint 1388/2009; see also M.M. Bar-Asher *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shi‘ism*, Leiden, 1999, pp. 93-98; Id., “Shi‘ism and the Qur‘ān”, in J.D. MacAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur‘ān*, s.v.; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, pp. 101 sqq.

manifest, each great politico-religious tendency in nascent Islam tried to recuperate the identity of the second element, the “prophetic Family”, for its own profit, then expressing it, however, in different ways: *‘itra* (family, parents), *ahl al-bayt* (People of the House), *āl al-rasūl* (Family of the Messenger), *āl al-nabī* (Family of the Prophet) ... Even the Umayyads, descended from the Banū ‘Abd Shams, the hereditary enemies of Muhammad’s people, the Banū Hāshim, claimed the title for a while, but the claim was rapidly relinquished after their fall. For some among the first Sunnis, although interpretations vary, the formula was taken to mean either the wives of the Prophet or the community of believers, that is, the entire Islamic community (although the latter contradicts the letter and the spirit of the more generally accepted version of the hadith, that the Two Objects are bequeathed to the community and are thus distinct from it). Finally, common sense prevailing, most Sunnis concluded that the ‘Family of Muḥammad’ overall refers either to the whole Banū Hāshim, – and this interpretation was sustained by all the members of that clan, and in particular the Abbassids – or, in a more restricted sense, to the immediate family of Muḥammad, namely his daughter Fāṭima, his son-in-law and cousin ‘Alī and their two sons, al-Ḥasan et al-Ḥusayn, the sole male offspring of the Prophet, and to the imams descended from them. This more restricted interpretation had always been sustained by the proto-Shi‘i Alids and later by Shi‘is of all tendencies.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, as I will show below, there exists in Shi‘ism a dialectical relationship linking the Imam, believed to be the living Word of God, i.e. the “speaking Quran”, with the Quran, the written Word of God and “silent Guide”.

‘Alī is of crucial significance in these relationships between the holy Book and the Imams of the holy Family of the Prophet. In the traditions that link the first Imam to the Quran, three distinct, yet inseparable “moments” are to be distinguished: ‘Alī as the inspired interpreter of the Book; the allusions of the Quran to ‘Alī; and the explicit mentions of him therein.

## 2 ‘Alī the Master of Hermeneutics

First of all, ‘Alī is the exegete *par excellence* of the divine Word. His role as a major authority on the Quran is also recognized in Sunnism, but it takes on

3 For discussions of the different meanings given to the expression “Prophetic Family” in early Islam see M. Sharon, “Ahl al-bayt – People of the House”, *JSAI* 8 (1986), pp. 169-184; Id., “The Umayyads as ahl al-bayt”, *JSAI* 14 (1991), pp. 115-152; W. Madelung, *Succession to Muḥammad*, introduction; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Considérations sur l’expression *dīn ‘Alī*”, pp. 39-51 (= *La Religion discrète*, pp. 28-37); here chap. 3.

a crucial doctrinal dimension in Shi‘ism.<sup>4</sup> From its most ancient texts Shi‘ism defines itself as a hermeneutic doctrine derived from the teachings of the *imam/walī* (the Friend or Ally of God).<sup>5</sup> His essential function is to reveal the hidden meaning(s) of the Revelation. Without the commentaries and the explanations of the *walī*, the Scripture revealed by the prophet (*nabī*) remains obscure and its profundities are misunderstood. ‘Alī, the greatest of the Allies of God, is therefore the undisputed master of hermeneutics.

‘Alī proclaimed: “Ask me before you lose me! Through God’s agency, at the revelation (*tanzīl*) of each verse, the Messenger of God recited it to me so that I would recite it to him in turn and I was given understanding of the interpretation of its hidden meaning (*ta’wīl*)”.<sup>6</sup>

In one of the sermons attributed to him, ‘Alī, the imam and hence exegete *par excellence*, declares:

[...] This light by which one is guided, this Quran which you have asked to speak and will not speak: it is I who will inform you about it, about what

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- 4 L. Veccia Vaglieri, “‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib”, *EI2*, vol. 1, p. 393a and 396b; I.K. Poonawala, “‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, i. life”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 1, p. 843a and E. Kohlberg, “‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, ii. ‘Alī as seen by the community”, p. 843b; A.S. Asani, “‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib”, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur‘ān*, vol. 1, p. 63.
- 5 The terms *walī* and *walāya*, the latter defining the status of the former, roughly speaking ‘imam’ and ‘imamate’, are of crucial significance to Shi‘i Islam. The doctrinal meaning of the latter word is complex: succinctly put, *walāya* means, first, the alliance with, or closeness of, the imam to God and thence his status and function; then the alliance with or love of the Shi‘i faithful for their imam and/or their fellow-believers; and, finally, the theological nature of the figure of the imam as the ‘locus’ of the manifestation of the Names of God. On this subject see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Notes à propos de la *walāya* imamite (Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine X)”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122/4 (2002), pp. 722-741 (= *La Religion discrète*, chap. 7); M. Massi Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shi‘ite Identity in Early Islam*, Albany, 2007, passim. N. Haider, *The Origins of the Shī‘a: Identity, Ritual and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfa*, Cambridge, 2011, index, s.v.
- 6 *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, (3 vols), ed. M.B. al-Anṣārī al-Zanjānī al-Khū‘īnī, Qumm, 1426/1995, tradition no. 31, vol. 2, p. 802; see also al-Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, vol. 2, Qumm, 1993, p. 136; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, (110 vols), Tehran Qumm, 1376-1392/1956-1972, vol. 40, p. 186. Regarding the couple *tanzīl/ta’wīl*, the revelation of Scripture and the quest for its hidden meaning, Daniel Gimaret translates them by “la lettre” (the letter) and “l’esprit” (the spirit) of the Quran, using the famous Paulinian couple (see Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, vol. 1, traduit par D. Gimaret et G. Monnot, Louvain-Paris, 1986, p. 543). Throughout this study I shall have recourse to this translation, since it seems to me to be most pertinent. Furthermore, in ancient times, terms like *ta’wīl*, *tafsīr*, *ta’bīr* ... seem to be equivalents (except when the text says otherwise) and one could translate them indifferently by “hermeneutics”, “commentary”, “interpretation”, “exegesis”, “explanation”, etc.

it contains of knowledge of the future, of its teachings of the past, of the healing of your ills and of the ordering of your relationships.<sup>7</sup>

The hermeneutic nature of Shi'ism, communicated through the teachings of the imams, is also strikingly illustrated by the celebrated and crucial hadith of the "Warrior of the *ta'wil*", a prophetic tradition in which Muḥammad is said to have proclaimed:

There is among you [i. e. my followers] someone who struggles for the spiritual interpretation of the Quran just as I myself struggled for the letter of its revelation: and this person is 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.<sup>8</sup>

A similar saying is attributed to Ammār b. Yāsir, a loyal Companion of both the Prophet and 'Alī. He is said to have spoken it during the battle of Ṣiffīn between 'Alī's troops and those of Mu'āwiya:

By the One who holds my life in His Hand, just as we once fought our enemies for  
[the letter] of Revelation, we fight today for its spirit.<sup>9</sup>

It is interesting to note that, according to this saying, corroborated by others, the real issue of the battle of Ṣiffīn was the preservation of the spirit of

7 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (attributed to), *Nahj al-balāgha* (compiled by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī), ed. 'A.N. Fayḍ al-Islām, Tehran, 4th ed., 1351/1972, sermon no. 157, p. 499. This type of tradition is at the basis of the Shi'i doctrinal couplet that calls the Quran "the silent guide" and the imam "the speaking Quran". I shall return to it.

8 Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī, Qumm, 1360/1960, p. 15; al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, ed. A. Kūhkamare'i, Qumm, 1401/1980, p. 76, 88, 117, 135 (on p. 66 of this work in a tradition attributed to the Prophet, it is the *qā'im*, the eschatological saviour, who is presented as the "warrior of spiritual hermeneutics"); al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 19, pp. 25-26; al-Baḥrānī Hāshim b. Sulaymān, *al-Burhān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, (5 vols), Tehran, s.d., vol. 1, p. 17. See also M.M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, op. cit., p. 88, footnote 1. It is interesting to note that a great number of Sunni sources also record this tradition and that, what is more, to the first declaration of the Prophet Abū Bakr and 'Umar reply, asking him, one after the other, if they are that "warrior of the *ta'wil*"; to which Muḥammad replies that it is 'Alī; see for example Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 3, Cairo, 1313/1896, pp. 31, 33, 82; Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, vol. 8 (9 vols), ed. S.M. al-Laḥḥām, Beirut, 1409/1989, p. 64; al-Nasā'ī, *Khaṣā'is amir al-mu'minīn 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib*, no. 156, ed. al-Dānī b. Munīr Āl Zahwī, Saïda-Beirut, 1424/2004, pp. 116-117; al-Ḥākīm al-Nīsābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā l-ṣaḥīḥayn* (above footnote 1), vol. 3, p. 122; Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, vol. 1, Cairo, 1351/1932-1933, p. 67.

9 Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, § 1676, ed. C. Pellat, Beirut, 1965-1979, (trans. C. Pellat, *Les Prairies d'or*, vol. 3, Paris, 1962-1997, p. 655: "By the One who holds my life in His hand, just as we have (once) fought them in the name of the revelation of (the Quran), we fight them today for its interpretation") (English transl. is mine).

the Quran by ‘Alī and his followers in the face of the threat of its annihilation by the partisans of a reductive literalism, Mu‘āwiya and his followers. For the Alids, the rupture of the organic link between the Book and its hermeneutic interpretation by the imam, and the consequent reduction of the Word of God to its letter, is an amputation from the religion of its most precious limb. The entire spiritual destiny of Islam was here at stake, hence the necessity of the *jihād* lead by ‘Alī against Mu‘āwiya.<sup>10</sup>

In the conception transmitted by these traditions, the mission of ‘Alī, the first imam and “father” of all succeeding imams and the supreme symbol of Shi‘ism, is to complete the mission of Muḥammad, by unveiling the hidden spirit of Revelation through his hermeneutic teaching. The same idea is contained in another prophetic tradition documented by the Ismaili thinker Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. shortly after 427/1036): “I am the master of the revealed letter [the Quran] and ‘Alī is the master of its spiritual hermeneutics.”<sup>11</sup>

Other traditions also reported by non-Shi‘i sources, notably mystical Sunni writings, stress the role of ‘Alī as the initiate to the arcana of the Quran and to the conditions of its revelation, all traditions to which Shi‘i writings continually refer. ‘Alī himself is reputed to have said:

“Each revealed verse without exception, the Prophet recited it to me, dictated it to me so that I might write it down with my own hand, taught me the esoteric and exoteric commentaries (*ta‘wīl/tafsīr*), the abrogating and the abrogated (*nāsikh/mansūkh*), the clear and the ambiguous (*muḥkam/mutashābih*). At the same time the messenger of God implored God that He might instill in me understanding and learning by heart; and indeed I have not forgotten a single word of it”.<sup>12</sup>

10 *Jihād* (conventionally translated as “holy war”) is the name of the action of the active participle *mujāhid*, term that one finds (besides of the term *muqātil*) in the title of the hadith of the “Warrior of the *ta‘wīl*”. This hermeneutical conception of the battles of ‘Alī is admirably defended many centuries later by the great philosopher Mollā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) in his poetry, which testifies to the longevity of the doctrine; see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Le combattant du *ta‘wīl*: un poème de Mollā Ṣadrā sur ‘Alī (Aspects de l’imamologie du-décimaine IX)”, *Journal Asiatique* 292/1-2 (2004), pp. 331-359 (*La Religion discrète*, chap. 9; also published in T. Lawson (ed.), *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought. Essays in Honour of Hermann Landolt*, London-New York, 2005, article no. 31).

11 Al-Kirmānī, *Majmū‘at al-rasā‘il*, ed. M. Ghālib, Beirut, 1983, p. 156.

12 Al-Ḥākīm al-Ḥaskānī, *Shawāhid al-tanzīl*, ed. M.B. al-Maḥmūdī, Beirut, 1393/1974, vol. 1, p. 35. The doctrinal affiliation of al-Ḥaskānī is not certain. He seems to have been either a Ḥanafī Sunni with strong Shi‘i and mystical sympathies or more probably a crypto-Shi‘i observing *taqīyya* (the duty of guarding the secret); see E. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Ṭāwūs and his Library*, Leiden, 1992, pp. 150-151.

“The Quran has been revealed according to seven Themes (?) (*sabʿat aḥruf*)<sup>13</sup> and each of these Themes includes a clear (*ẓaḥr*) and a hidden (*batn*) level. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is he who has the knowledge of the exoteric (*ẓāḥir*) and of the esoteric (*bāṭin*) [of each Theme]”.<sup>14</sup>

“Ask me, ‘Alī is reputed to have said. In God’s name, I will leave none of your questions unanswered. Ask me about the Book of God. Not one verse has been revealed without my knowing [when] it was revealed, during the night or during the day, [and where it was revealed], on a plain or on a mountain”.<sup>15</sup>

‘Alī is also said to have declared:

“Not a single verse has been revealed without my knowing the reason for it and the place of its revelation. My Lord has given me a heart endowed with penetrating intelligence and a tongue to answer all questions (*qalban ‘aqūlan wa lisānan sa’ūlan*)”.<sup>16</sup>

“There is, apart from the Prophet, none more learned than ‘Alī as in the knowledge to be found between the two covers of the Book of God”.<sup>17</sup>

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- 13 On the complexity of the term *ḥarf*, pl. *ḥurūf*, *aḥruf*, (letter, reading, expression, theme ...) in the framework of Quranic sciences see C. Gilliot, “Les sept ‘Lectures’. Corps social et Écriture révélée”, *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985), pp. 5-25 et (1986), pp. 49-62; Id., *Exégèse, langue et théologie en Islam: l'exégèse coranique de Tabari (m. 311/923)*, Paris, 1990, chap. v, 1st part, pp. 112-126; K. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qurʾānic Exegesis in Early Islam*, Leiden, 1993, index s.v.; V. Comero, *Les traditions sur la constitution du muṣḥaf de ʿUthmān*, Beirut, 2012, pp. 119 sqq. (“Le thème des sept aḥruf”).
- 14 Abū Nuʿaym al-Ḥafḥānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, vol. 1, Cairo, 1351/1932, p. 65 (tradition attributed to Ibn Masʿūd); al-Qundūzī, *Yanābīʿ al-mawadda*, Najaf, s.d., p. 448 (tradition attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās).
- 15 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baḡhd ādī, *al-Faqīh wa l-mutafaqiqh*, vol. 2, ed. I. al-Anṣārī, Beirut, 1395/1975, p. 167; al-Ḥākīm al-Ḥaskānī, *Shawāhid al-tanzīl*, vol. 1, pp. 30-31; Ibn ʿAbdal-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, vol. 2, Beirut (fac-simile of the lithograph edition from Cairo 1328/1910), s.d., p. 509; Id., *Jāmiʿ bayān al-ʿilm wa faḍlihi*, vol. 1, Cairo, s.d., p. 114; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, vol. 7, Haydarabad, 1325/1907, p. 7, no. 338.
- 16 Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, Beirut, 1376/1956, vol. 2, p. 338; al-Ḥākīm al-Ḥaskānī, *Shawāhid al-tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 33; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, vol. 1, p. 68; al-Khwārazmī, *al-Manāqib* (= *Manāqib Amīr al-muʾminīn*), Najaf, 1385/1965, p. 46.
- 17 Al-Ḥākīm al-Ḥaskānī, *Shawāhid al-tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 36 (tradition attributed to ʿĀmir al-Shaʿbī); see also al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Khaṣāʾiṣ amīr al-muʾminīn ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib*, Beirut, 1406/1986, p. 41; on ʿAlī as the first person to have wished to assemble a Quranic codex, see A. Mingana, “The Transmission of the Qurʾān”, *The Muslim World* 7, 1917, pp. 223-232 et 402-414 (citation p. 226).

As numerous ancient textual testimonies declare, ‘Alī had his own Quranic recension, his codex (*muṣḥaf ‘Alī*).<sup>18</sup> According to Shi‘i accounts, after the death of the Prophet, ‘Alī was certain that Muḥammad’s enemies, now in power, would falsify the Book of God which, in its integral original version, explicitly contained his name, the names of his enemies as well as those of his friends, now excluded from power. It is indeed what did happen. It was therefore urgent for ‘Alī to compile the complete version of the Quran, which he alone possessed, in order to preserve the heaven-given Book as it had been revealed to the Prophet, three times more voluminous than the later, official and falsified version.<sup>19</sup> Yet, for a number of Shi‘i authors, this “Quran of ‘Alī” contained both the revelations “come down” to Muḥammad (*tanzīl*) and ‘Alī’s commentaries (*ta’wīl*) upon them, whether inspired by God or taught to him by the Prophet.<sup>20</sup> Both categories of texts taken together were called *al-qur’ān*: the first category being the letter of the Revelation, its exoteric aspect (*ẓāhīr*) and the second its spirit, its esoteric aspect (*bāṭīn*). Both were organically linked. It

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- 18 I.K. Poonawala, “‘Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb; i. Life”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 1, p. 839b; now E. Kohlberg & M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification. The Kitāb al-Qirā’āt of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī*, Leiden, 2009, introduction, *passim*. The hypothesis according to which the codex of ‘Alī was very different from the Quran, we now know, is plausible and the thesis of T. Nöldeke rejecting the very existence of such a codex drafted by ‘Alī is no longer sustainable (T. Nöldeke et al., *Geschichte des Qorāns*, (3 vols), Leipzig, 1909-1938, vol. 2, pp. 8-11); see now S. Kara, *In Search of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib’s Codex. History and Traditions of the Earliest Copy of the Qur’ān*, Berlin, 2018.
- 19 See notably E. Kohlberg, “Some Notes on the Imamite Attitude to the Qur’ān”, in S.M. Stern et al. (ed.), *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical tradition. Essays Presented by his friends and pupils to Richard Walzer on his seventieth birthday*, Oxford, 1972, pp. 209-224; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin dans le shī’isme originel. Aux sources de l’ésotérisme en islam*, Paris, 1992 (2007<sup>2</sup>), pp. 200-227; Id., *Le Coran silencieux*, chapters 1 and 2; E. Kohlberg & M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, Introduction, pp. 24 sqq. (with the mention of all the studies on the subject in footnotes 116 to 119).
- 20 Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Awā’il al-maqālāt*, ed. ‘A. Wajdi Wā’iz Charandābī, with an introduction and commentaries by F. Zanjānī, 2e ed., Tabriz, 1371/1952, pp. 54-56; also in the *Silsilat mu’allaḥāt al-Shaykh al-Mufīd*, vol. 4, ed. I. al-Anṣārī al-Zanjānī al-Khū’īnī with the commentaries of the editor and those of Faḍlallāh Zanjānī (re-edition of Tabriz edition), 1993, pp. 80-82; see also D. Sourdel, *L’Imamisme vu par le Cheikh al-Mufīd*, Paris, 1974, pp. 73-75; E. Kohlberg, “Some Notes on the Imamite Attitude to the Qur’ān”, pp. 215-216; M.J. McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shāikh al-Mufīd (m. 413/1022)*, Beyrouth, 1978, pp. 96-98; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “al-Šayḥ al-Mufīd (m. 413/1022) et la question de la falsification du Coran”, in D. De Smet et M.A. Amir-Moezzi (eds.), *Controverses sur les écritures canoniques de l’islam*, Paris, 2014, the part devoted to the first passage of the *Awā’il al-maqālāt*, pp. 210-213. After al-Mufīd, many other Shi‘i authors defended the same doctrine.

was the commentaries of ‘Alī, indispensable for an adequate understanding of Revelation, that his adversaries removed, rendering the Quran, reduced to its sole letter, barely intelligible. Hence the Shi‘i doctrinal pairing which describes the extant Quran as the silent, mute Book or Guide (*Qur‘ān/kitāb/imām ṣāmit*) and ‘Alī – and, after him, the other imams descended from him – as the speaking Quran or Book (*Qur‘ān/kitāb nāṭiq*).<sup>21</sup>

### 3 Quranic Allusions to ‘Alī

A new stage is arrived at with the second “moment” of Shi‘i doctrines which link the figure of the first imam to the holy Book of Islam, in which ‘Alī is seen to be not only the inspired interpreter of the Quran but also part of its content. Countless texts and traditions contain different kinds of Quranic allusions to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. First of all are the revealed verses which refer directly to him. The Zaydi Shi‘i Quranic commentary of al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥakam al-Ḥibārī (d. 286/899) is no doubt one of the oldest existing sources in this regard. This commentary, edited with its complement, contains a hundred traditions, nearly all of which have the Companion Ibn ‘Abbās as their source, and contain presumed allusions or hidden meanings of the Quran referring to ‘Alī, the members of his family, his followers and his adversaries.<sup>22</sup> The work may be considered as belonging to the genre of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (“circumstances of Revelation”), in a Shi‘i version that hides its identity under the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās, a figure highly respected among non-Shi‘is and the acknowledged

21 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.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux, passim* and especially chap. 3; on the crucial importance of the hermeneutics of the imam for a good understanding of the Quran see also M.M. Bar-Asher, “The Authority to Interpret the Qur‘ān”, in F. Daftary & G. Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shi‘i Islam: History, Theology and Law*, London, 2014, pp. 149-162.

22 *Tafsīr al-Ḥibārī*, ed. M.R. al-Ḥusaynī, Beirut, 1408/1987. The book is known under many titles: *Tanzīl al-āyāt al-munzala fī manāqīb ahl al-bayt* (the Revelation of the verses concerning the virtues of the People of the House of the Prophetic Family), *Mā nazala min al-Qur‘ān fī amir al-mu‘minīn* (What has been revealed in the Quran regarding the Commander of the Faithful, i.e. ‘Alī), *Mā nazala min al-Qur‘ān fī ahl al-bayt* (What has been revealed in the Quran about the People of the Prophetic Family), etc. About this author and his work, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Le Tafsīr d’al-Ḥibārī (m. 286/899). Exégèse coranique et ésotérisme Shi‘ite ancien”, *Journal des savants*, janvier-juin 2009, pp. 3-23 (English translation in F. Daftary & G. Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shi‘i Islam*, part II, chap. 5). A modified version of this article provides the third chapter of M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, pp. 101-125.

“father” of Sunni Quranic exegesis.<sup>23</sup> The *Tafsīr* of al-Ḥibarī is thus one of the most ancient sources of what I have called elsewhere “personalised commentaries” in Shi‘ism.<sup>24</sup> A few examples, among many others, concerning ‘Alī (translations follow A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, London, 1964, with some modifications):

- Quran 2 (al-Baqara) / 45: “Seek sustenance in patience and in prayer, for painful it is, save to the humble.” Ibn ‘Abbās: “‘Humble’ is he who prostrates himself in prayer [before God] and who goes joyfully to pray; this denotes only the Messenger of God and ‘Alī.”<sup>25</sup>
- Quran 2 (al-Baqara) / 82: “And those that believe, and do deeds of righteousness – those are the inhabitants of Paradise; there they shall dwell forever.” Ibn ‘Abbās: “This has been especially revealed concerning ‘Alī, since he was the first to have converted [to Islam] and the first, after the Prophet, to have performed the canonical prayer.”<sup>26</sup>
- Quran 3 (Āl ‘Imrān) / 61: “[...] Come now, let us call our sons and your sons, our wives and your wives, our persons and your persons, then let us humbly pray and so lay God’s curse upon those who lie.” Ibn ‘Abbās: “[This verse] is revealed about the persons of the Messenger of God and ‘Alī; [the expression] ‘our wives and your wives’ concerns Fāṭima; ‘our sons and your sons’, that is Ḥasan et Ḥusayn [sic: both names are without the article].”<sup>27</sup>
- Quran 5 (al-Mā’ida) / 55: “Your friend is only God, and His Messenger, and the believers who perform the prayer and pay the alms, and bow them down [during prayer].” Ibn ‘Abbās: “This has been especially revealed about ‘Alī.”<sup>28</sup>
- Quran 5 (al-Mā’ida) / 67: “O Messenger, deliver that which has been sent down to thee from thy Lord; for if thou dost not, thou wilt not have delivered His Message.” Ibn ‘Abbās: “This was revealed concerning ‘Alī. Indeed the

23 On the *asbāb al-nuzūl*, see A. Rippin, “Occasions of Revelation”, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, vol. 3, pp. 569-573; M. Yahia, “Circonstances de la révélation”, in M.A. Amir-Moezzi (ed.), *Dictionnaire du Coran*, Paris, 2007, pp. 168-171. On the figure of Ibn ‘Abbās, see the seminal article of C. Gilliot, “Le portrait ‘mythique’ d’ Ibn ‘Abbās”, *Arabica* 32/2 (1985), pp. 127-184.

24 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, pp. 115-117. The “personalised commentary”, perhaps the oldest form of Quranic esoteric exegesis in Shi‘ism, identifies different figures of the first times of Islam beneath the veil of the Quranic verses. In this kind of exegesis, ‘Alī gets by far the lion’s share. See here, chap. 8.

25 *Tafsīr al-Ḥibarī*, tradition no. 6, p. 238.

26 *Ibid.*, tradition no 8, pp. 240-241.

27 *Ibid.*, tradition no 12, p. 247. About this verse see P. Ballanfat et M. Yahia, art. “Ordalie”, in *Dictionnaire du Coran*, op. cit., pp. 618-620; on this notion see L. Schmucker, art. “Mubāhala”, *E12*, vol. 7, p. 278.

28 *Tafsīr al-Ḥibarī*, tradition no 22, p. 260.

Prophet had received the order to declare ‘Alī [to be his successor]. He then took his hand and declared: ‘He whose patron (*mawlā*) I am, ‘Alī is also his patron. Lord! Love him who loves ‘Alī (*wāli man wālāhu*) and be hostile to him who is hostile to him.’”<sup>29</sup> To this tradition is may be added one that comments upon Quran 13 (al-Ra’d) / 43, reported by the traditionist ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Aṭā, who cites imam Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad al-Bāqir: “God revealed to his Messenger: ‘Declare to the people: He whose patron I am, ‘Alī is also his patron’. But the Prophet, fearing the people, did not declare it.”<sup>30</sup> Then God revealed to him: ‘O Messenger, deliver that which has been sent down to thee from thy Lord; for if thou dost not, thou wilt not have delivered His Message’. It is then that the Messenger of God took the hand of ‘Alī on the day of Ghadīr Khumm and proclaimed: ‘He whose patron I am, ‘Alī is also his patron.’”<sup>31</sup>

- Quran 9 (al-Tawba) / 18: “Only he shall inhabit God’s places of worship who believes in God and the Last Day, and performs the prayer, and pays the alms, and fears none but God alone; it may be that those will be among the guided.” Ibn ‘Abbās: “This verse is exclusively reserved for ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.”<sup>32</sup>
- Quran 9 (al-Tawba) / 20-21: “Those who believe, and have emigrated, and have struggled in the way of God with their possessions and their selves are mightier in rank with God; and those – they are the triumphant; their Lord gives them good tidings of mercy from Him and good pleasure; for them await gardens wherein is lasting bliss.” Ibn ‘Abbās: “This is exclusively about ‘Alī.”<sup>33</sup>
- Quran 14 (Ibrāhīm) / 27: “God confirms those who believe with a resolute word.” Ibn ‘Abbās: “This concerns the *walāya* of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.”<sup>34</sup>
- Quran 33 (al-Aḥzāb) / 33: “People of the [prophetic] House, God only desires to put away from you abomination and to cleanse you.” Around ten

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29 *Ibid.*, tradition no. 24, pp. 262-263. This sentence, attributed to the Prophet, is called in Shi‘ism “the hadith of the *walāya*” (on this term see note 5 and hereafter). Uttered at Ghadīr Khumm, it is meant to proclaim ‘Alī as the successor to Muḥammad (about this location, highly emblematic for Shi‘is see L. Veccia Vaglieri, *EI2*; Massi Dakake & A. Kazemi Moussavi in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 10, pp. 246-249; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 3, vol. 5, pp. 123-128). On the interpretation of this verse 5: 67, see note 53 below and the related text.

30 The narrative implies that even in the lifetime of the Prophet, his adversaries, being hypocrites and tacticians, were present among his followers and the question of his succession was a source of extreme tension.

31 *Tafsīr al-Ḥibārī*, tradition no 41, pp. 285-287.

32 *Ibid.*, tradition no 32, p. 272.

33 *Ibid.*, tradition no 34, p. 274.

34 *Ibid.*, tradition no 42, p. 288. On the *walāya* of ‘Alī in the Quran see hereafter.

traditions transmitted by several Companions of the Prophet identify the “People of the Prophetic Family” of this verse with the ‘Five of the Cloak’, namely Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn.<sup>35</sup>

Even before al-Ḥibārī, the anonymous author(s) of the *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays* associated numerous Quranic verses with ‘Alī.<sup>36</sup> The verses 9 (al-Tawba): 100 and 56 (al-Wāqī‘a): 10 are said to be linked to the person of the first imam: “And the Outstrippers, the first of the Emigrants and the Helpers [of the Prophet]” and “The Outstrippers, the Outstrippers those are they brought nigh [to God].”<sup>37</sup>

The verses 98 (al-Bayyina): 7 et 6 are associated respectively with the friends and the enemies of ‘Alī: “those who believe, and do righteous deeds, those are the best of creatures” and “The unbelievers of the People of the Book and the idolaters shall be in the Fire of Gehenna, therein dwelling forever; those are the worst of creatures.”<sup>38</sup>

The verses 14 (Ibrāhīm): 37, 22 (al-Ḥajj): 77 et 2 (al-Baqara): 143 are associated with ‘Alī: “[Lord] make hearts of men yearn towards them”; “O men, bow you down and prostrate yourselves, and serve your Lord, and do good; haply so you shall prosper”; “We appointed you a midmost nation that you might be witnesses to the people.”<sup>39</sup> Likewise the verses 11 (Hūd): 17 and 13 (al-Ra‘d): 43: “And what of him who stands upon a clear sign from his Lord, and a witness from Him recites it [the Revelation]”; “and whosoever possesses knowledge of the Book.”<sup>40</sup>

Examples of verses of this kind, supposed to have been revelations concerning ‘Alī, can be counted in the hundreds. Shi‘i religious literature has made these “personalised commentaries’ exclusively dedicated to ‘Alī” into a

35 *Ibid.*, traditions no. 50-59, pp. 297-311. This exegesis, particularly prized by the Shi‘is occurs many times, including in Sunni sources; see *ibid.*, pp. 502-533 (editor’s notes). See also above footnotes 2 et 3 and the relative texts.

36 For the references of this work, see above footnote 6. On this book, whose oldest parts could be among the oldest Islamic sources, see H. Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shī‘ite Literature*, vol. 1, Oxford, 2003, pp. 82-86; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Note bibliographique sur le *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*. Le plus ancien ouvrage Shi‘ite existant”, in Id., M.M. Bar Asher & S. Hopkins (eds.), *Le Shī‘isme imāmīte quarante ans après. Hommage à Etan Kohlberg*, Turnhout, 2009, pp. 33-48 (chapter 1 of *Le Coran silencieux* is an expanded version of that article); M. Massi Dakake, “Writing and Resistance: The Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Early Shi‘ism”, in F. Daftary & G. Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shi‘i Islam*, op. cit., part III.8, pp. 181-201; R. Gleave, “Early shiite hermeneutic”.

37 *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, vol. 2, p. 643-644 (tradition no. 11).

38 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 832-833 (tradition n° 41).

39 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 885-886 (tradition n° 54).

40 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 903 (tradition n° 60).

veritable literary genre which includes countless works from the 3rd/9th century until today.<sup>41</sup>

What is more, many Quranic words or expressions are almost systematically identified as being allusions to ‘Alī or to the status of imam/*walī* of which he is the most illustrious example: *al-sabīl* (“the way”), *al-ḥaqq* (“the truth”), *al-khayr* (“the good”), *al-ḥasana* (“the good action”), *al-mīzān* (“Balance”), *al-ni‘ma* (“the favour”), *al-ṣīrāt* (“the path”, “the way”) or (*al-*)*ṣīrāt al-mustaqīm* (“the straight path”) and many others.<sup>42</sup> From these spring the numerous traditions abundantly used in Shi‘i doctrinal works:

“The Quran is revealed in four parts, ‘Alī is reputed to have said: one quarter concerns us (i.e. us, the people of the Prophetic Family), another quarter is about our adversaries, a third quarter is about what is licit and illicit and the last quarter concerns duties and precepts. The most noble parts of the Quran belong to us.”<sup>43</sup>

“‘Alī has no equal in the Book for what has been revealed about him there.”<sup>44</sup>

“Seventy verses have been revealed about ‘Alī with which no one else can be associated.”<sup>45</sup>

41 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Le Tafsīr d’al-Ḥibārī ...”, pp. 15-17 (= Id., *Le Coran silencieux*, pp. 116-117). Among the works that have come down to us and have been published, let us mention: al-Ḥākīm al-Ḥaskānī (d. after 470/1077-1078), *Shawāhid al-tanzīl*, ed. M.B. Maḥmūdī (already cited); Ibn al-Bīṭrīq al-Ḥillī (d. 600/1203-1204), *Khaṣā’iṣ al-waḥy al-mubīn fī manāqib amīr al-mu’minīn*, M.B. Maḥmūdī, Tehran, 1406/1986; al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī (8th/14th c.), *al-Durr al-thamīn fī khams mi’a āya nazalat fī amīr al-mu’minīn*, ed. al-Sayyid ‘A. ‘Āshūr, Beirut, 1424/2003 (see here chapter 8); al-Baḥrānī Hāshim b. Sulaymān (11th-12th/17th-18th centuries), *al-Lawāmi‘ al-nūrāniyya fī asmā’ amīr al-mu’minīn al-Qur’āniyya*, Qumm, 1394/1974-1975; al-Burūjirdī al-Ḥusayn b. Bāqir (13th/19th c.), *al-Naṣṣ al-jalī fī arba’in āya fī sha’n ‘Alī*, Tehran, 1320/1902-1903; the contemporary scholar, S.M. Ḥusaynī Bahārānchī, *Āyāt al-faḍā’il yā faḍā’il-e ‘Alī dar Qur’ān*, Qumm, 1380/2001. For Quranic references to ‘Alī among Isma‘ili Shi‘is see D. De Smet, “Le Coran, son origine, sa nature et sa falsification. Positions ismaéliennes controversées”, in Id. et M.A. Amir-Moezzi (eds.), *Controverses sur les écritures canoniques de l’islam* (above footnote 20), sub-chapter titled “La présence de ‘Alī dans le Coran”, pp. 258-262.

42 See for example E. Kohlberg, “‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, ii. ‘Alī as seen by the community”, p. 843b.

43 See for example *Tafsīr al-Ḥibārī*, tradition no. 2, p. 233; Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, ed. M.al-Kāẓim, Tehran, 1410/1990, pp. 45 sqq.; al-Ḥākīm al-Ḥaskānī, *Shawāhid al-tanzīl*, nos 57 sqq. The tradition is also attributed to the Prophet.

44 Al-Ḥākīm al-Ḥaskānī, 1, pp. 39 sqq. (tradition going back to Ibn ‘Abbās).

45 *Ibid.*, 1: 43 (tradition going back to Mujāhid).

#### 4 The Explicit Mentions of ‘Alī in the Quran

According to a whole range of other traditions, the presence of ‘Alī in the text of the Quran itself is not limited to allusions, metaphors and symbols. He is also explicitly mentioned there. Now we know this not to be the case in the official version of the Quran known as the ‘Uthmanian Vulgate. This is because, according to a great number of ancient Shi‘i sources, in particular those dating from the pre-Buyyid period, the “califal Quran” is merely a censored and falsified version, concocted by the adversaries of Muḥammad and of ‘Alī, of the true divine Revelation.<sup>46</sup> The latter mentioned very precisely not only the names of a great number of contemporaries of the Prophet, his family, his friends and followers, but also of his adversaries and enemies. Apart from a few rare exceptions that do not pose particular theological and political problems, all the other names are said to have been deleted from the Quranic text (in this ‘Vulgate’ there are only four or five mentions of Muḥammad, a mention of Zayd, the presumed adopted son of the Prophet, and another of Abū Lahab, an uncle and adversary of Muḥammad according to the tradition).

In a tradition reported by al-Kulaynī (d. 328 or 329/939-40 or 940-41), one reads: Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Naṣr [disciple of imam al-Riḍā] tells us:

Imam Abū l-Ḥasan [the eighth imam, ‘Alī al-Riḍā] lent me a codex of the Quran, whilst telling me not to open it. I did so however, and stumbled upon the verse: ‘Those who have become disbelievers’ and there I saw the names of 70 men of Quraysh as well as the names of their fathers. Then the imam sent someone to ask me to return the codex.<sup>47</sup>

In an eschatological tradition telling of a vision of ‘Alī and transmitted by al-Nu‘mānī (d. around 345 or 360/956 or 971), we find the following:

al-Aṣḥbagh b. Nubāta [compagnon of ‘Alī] reports: “I heard ‘Alī say: ‘I see from here the non-Arabs (*al-‘ajam*) [i.e. the companions of the Saviour during his Return in the end times] settled under their tents pitched in the mosque of Kūfa and teaching the Quran as it had been revealed to

46 See above. Also E. Kohlberg & M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, notably the introduction; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, especially chapters 1 to 3; Id., *La Preuve de Dieu. La mystique Shi‘ite à travers l’œuvre de Kulaynī* (1x<sup>e</sup>-x<sup>e</sup> siècle), Paris, 2018, pp. 122 sqq. and 265 sqq.

47 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, (4 vols), ed. J. Muṣṭafawī, Tehran, s.d., with Persian translation (4th vol., translated by H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī dates from 1386/1966), kitāb faḍl al-Qur‘ān, bāb al-nawādir, vol. 4, no. 3570, pp. 440-441.

the people.' I asked: 'Prince of the believers! Isn't it [the Quran] now as it had been revealed?' 'No, he answered, from it have been deleted (*muḥīya minhu*) the names of 70 persons from Quraysh, as well as the names of their fathers and only the name of Abū Lahab was left in order to humiliate the Prophet, because Abū Lahab was his uncle.'<sup>48</sup>

The "original Quran" would have contained many names of Muḥammad's contemporaries and again, according to Shi'i sources, the explicit mentions of 'Alī would have been by far the most numerous. The following quotations from the "Quran" which follow will illustrate our argument (the expressions added to the text of the official Quran are written in italics):

- Quran 2 (al-Baqara) / 6: "[...] As for those who disbelieve in the *walāya of 'Alī*, alike it is to them whether thou hast warned them or hast not warned them, they do not believe."<sup>49</sup>
- Quran 2 (al-Baqara)/87: "[...] And every time there came to you *Muḥammad* [instead of "a Messenger"] with what is about the *muwālāt of 'Alī* [here *muwālāt* is synonymous with *walāya*] you did not desire for yourselves, you became arrogant so you denied a group *from the Family of Muḥammad* and slew and killed another group?"<sup>50</sup>
- Quran 2 (al-Baqara) / 90: "Evil is the thing they have sold themselves for, disbelieving in that which God sent down *regarding 'Alī* and this out of envy ..."<sup>51</sup>
- Quran 4 (al-Nisā') / 167-170: "Surely those who have been unjust [instead of: "Surely the unbelievers, who have been unjust"] *regarding the rights of the Family of Muḥammad*, God would not forgive them, neither guide them on any path / 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 from your Lord *about the walāya of 'Alī*; so believe; better is it for you. And if you disbelieve in *the walāya of 'Alī*, [know that] to God belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth."<sup>52</sup>

48 Al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ed. 'A.A. Ghaffārī, Tehran, 1397/1977, chap. 21, no. 5, p. 452. In surah 111 (al-Masad) Abū Lahab is indeed presented as a highly negative figure.

49 Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-qirā'āt/al-Tanzīl wa l-taḥrīf*, ed. E. Kohlebrg and M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, p. 20, no. 62 (Arabic text), commentary in English, p. 80, no. 62. On the mentions of the *walāya* in the Quran see also Amir-Moezzi, *Preuve de Dieu*, pp. 265 sqq.

50 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb fihī nukat wa nutaf min al-tanzīl fī l-walāya, vol. 2, p. 285, no. 31.

51 Al-Sayyārī, *op. cit.*, p. 20, no. 61 (Arabic text); see also pp. 79-80, no. 61 (commentary in English).

52 Al-Qummī 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr*, ed. al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'irī, Najaf, 1386-87 / 1966-68, vol. 1, p. 159; al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, Qumm, 1380/1960, vol. 1, p. 285; al-Kulaynī, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, p. 295,

- Quran 5 (al-Mā’ida) / 67: “O Messenger, deliver that which has been sent down to thee from thy Lord *about ‘Alī ...*”<sup>53</sup>
- Quran 7 (al-Arāf) / 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?, *isn’t Muḥammad the messenger of God, isn’t ‘Alī the commander of the faithful?*’ They said: ‘Yes, we testify.”<sup>54</sup>
- Quran 15 (al-Ḥijr) / 41: “[God] said: ‘This is *the straight* path of ‘Alī” (*hādhā širāt<sup>u</sup> ‘Alīyin mustaqīm<sup>un</sup>*, instead of: This is for Me a straight path, *hādhā širāt<sup>un</sup> ‘alayya mustaqīm<sup>un</sup>*).<sup>55</sup>
- Quran 16 (al-Naḥl) / 24: “And when it is said to them, ‘What has your Lord sent down *about ‘Alī?*’ they say, ‘Fairy-tales of the ancients.”<sup>56</sup>
- Quran 20 (Ṭāhā) / 115: “And we entrusted Adam before *with Words concerning Muḥammad, ‘Alī, [Fāṭima,] al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and the imams of their progeny,* but he forgot them.”<sup>57</sup>

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- no. 59; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 428; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi fi tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1 (2 vols), Tehran, s.d., p. 414; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 36, p. 99.
- 53 Al-Sayyārī, *Qirā’āt*, p. 45, no 165 (Arabic text), pp. 115-116 (commentary in English); al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 201; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Ṣāfi*, vol. 1, p. 460, 462-63; al-Baḥrānī, *Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 501 (instead of *fi ‘Alī* – “about ‘Alī”, there is a *anna ‘Alīyyan mawlā l-mu’minīn* – “on the fact that ‘Alī is the patron of the faithful” –; *mawlā* has of course the same root as *walāya*). On *mu’min* – literally “believer” – with the technical sense of ‘initiated in the teachings of the imams’, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index s.v. See also footnotes 29-31 above and referenced texts (the exegesis of this same verse in al-Ḥibārī does not refer to any explicit mention of ‘Alī by the Quran, probably because this author seems to avoid explicitly mentioning the question of the falsification of the Quran; see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, p. 113).
- 54 Al-Sayyārī, *Qirā’āt*, p. 52, no. 195 (and p. 53, no 196, with the variant reading: isn’t ‘Alī his legatee?), pp. 125-126 (commentary); al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 41; al-Baḥrānī, *Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 50; al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudāt*, re-ed. Tehran, 1364/1985, vol. 3, p. 545; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 9, p. 256. About this verse see R. Gramlich, “Der Urvertrag in der Koranauslegung (zu Sura 7,172-173)”, *Der Islam* 60 (1983), pp. 205-230.
- 55 Al-Sayyārī, *Qirā’āt*, p. 74, nos 282 et 286 (Arabic text), pp. 155-17 (commentary). A great number of Shi’i sources, Twelver as well as Ismaili, have reported this version of this verse. Generally speaking, the reading of this verse posed many problems to medieval Muslim scholars and to Orientalists and Islamologists. Madelung and Walker translated it as: “This is the straight path of ‘Alī” (in W. Madelung & P. Walker, *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shi’i Witness. An Edition and English Translation of Ibn al-Haytham’s Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, London, 2000, p. 85 (English text = p. 29 Arabic text); see also D. De Smet, “Le Coran, son origine, sa nature et sa falsification. Positions ismaéliennes controversées”, p. 259.
- 56 Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, p. 234; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 383; al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 257; al-Baḥrānī, *Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 363; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Ṣāfi*, vol. 1, p. 920; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 9, p. 102 and vol. 36, p. 104.
- 57 Al-Sayyārī, *Qirā’āt*, p. 21, no. 65 (Arabic text) et p. 87, no. 339 (Arabic text), pp. 80-81 (commentary). With al-Sayyārī, contrary to almost all the numerous other sources, the name

- Quran 33 (al-Aḥzāb) / 71: “Whosoever obeys God and His Messenger *regarding the walāya of ‘Alī and that of the imams after him*, has won a mighty triumph.”<sup>58</sup>
- Quran 33 (al-Aḥzāb) / 25: “God suffices to the believers in fighting *thanks to ‘Alī*, surely God is All-strong, All-mighty.”<sup>59</sup>
- Quran 43 (al-Zukhruf) / 4: In the Mother of the Book “He [i.e. ‘Alī] is with Us [i.e. God], *‘Alī who is full of wisdom*” (instead of the official understanding: “[...] it is [i.e. the Quran], with Us, exalted and wise”).<sup>60</sup>

These quotations suffice, but there are many others.<sup>61</sup> God would have named ‘Alī and his *walāya* in His Book – before the falsification – and this on very numerous occasions; infinitely more than he mentioned the prophet Muḥammad himself, if one is to believe ancient Shi‘i traditions. The question that then needs legitimately to be asked is the following: why? For what reason did God so strongly insist on the importance of ‘Alī?

## 5 The Double Nature of ‘Alī and His Holiness

In the Shi‘i doctrinal corpus in general and in the hadith compilations in particular, ‘Alī is presented under two different, but also interdependent, aspects: the historical, physical, terrestrial figure and the spiritual, metaphysical, celestial being. Here we find again the omnipresent Shi‘i couple of the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*, of the visible and the hidden, of the manifest and the secret, of the exoteric and the esoteric. The earthly ‘Alī, the historical imam *par excellence*, is the manifestation, the revealed face of the celestial Imam, a metaphysical entity,

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of Fāṭima is not mentioned (starting with al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, kitāb al-ḥujja, vol. 2, p. 283, no. 23).

58 Al-Sayyārī, *Qirā’āt*, p. 111, no. 428 (Arabic text), p. 202 (commentary); al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 198; al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 279, no. 8; al-Baḥrānī, *Burhān*, vol. 3, p. 340; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 2, p. 369.

59 Al-Sayyārī, *Qirā’āt*, p. 111, nos 425 et 426 (Arabic text), pp. 201-202 (commentary).

60 Al-Sayyārī, *Qirā’āt*, p. 134, no 501 (Arabic text), pp. 223-224 (commentary). For Ismaili authors see Madelung-Walker, *op.cit.* (above footnote 55), p. 85 (“*In the mother of the Book which is with us, he is ‘Alī, full of wisdom*” = p. 29 of the Arabic text); D. De Smet, “Le Coran, son origine ...”, p. 259.

61 See M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 210-214; Id., “Notes à propos de la *walāya* imamate”, pp. 723-726 (= *La Religion discrète*, pp. 178-183); M.M. Bar-Asher, “Variant Readings and Additions of the Imāmī-Ši‘a to the Quran”, *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993), pp. 39-74. Furthermore, in the commentaries of the *Kitāb al-Qirā’āt* of al-Sayyārī (Kohlerg & Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*), many occurrences of the traditions are noted.

also often called ‘Alī, that is the locus of manifestation of the divine Names and Attributes. This theophanic entity, the first created being, is sometimes (but not always) associated with other pre-existential entities, with the celestial persons of other saintly figures that Shi‘ism described as the Impeccable Ones (*maṣūm*), namely Muḥammad, Fātima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn or, by extension, all the imams. At the dawn of the creation of the physical world, it is placed, in the form of light, in Adam, to be transmitted from generation to generation to the Friends or Allies of God (*walī*, pl. *awlīyā’*), prophets, imams, male and female saints of History, to attain its historical destination, the historical ‘Alī.<sup>62</sup> This “light” of the divine alliance, making of its carrier a man (or woman) of God, receptacle and transmitter of the divine teachings, is described, sometimes with nuances, by various technical terms in theological, prophetological and imamological contexts: *walāya* (as we have seen, the term is difficult to translate with a single word – see above footnote 5), *waṣīyya* (legacy, inheritance), *nūr* (light), *amr* (another word that is difficult to translate: order, thing, affair ...), *amr ilāhī* (divine *amr*), *juz’ ilāhī* (divine particle), or also by combinations of these (*nūr al-walāya*, *nūr al-waṣīyya*, *waṣīyya walawīyya*, *amr al-walāya/al-waṣīyya* ...), etc.<sup>63</sup> It is true, as we have just said, that in the traditions concerning this entity, its creation, its function and its transmission, the other members of the Impeccable Ones, and notably Muḥammad, sometimes accompany, but taking into account the whole of the corpus, it is clear that ‘Alī show evidently is the pole around which the doctrine of the double nature of the divine man gravitates and this especially since ‘Alī is also one of the most important Names of God.<sup>64</sup> In this context “the *walāya* of ‘Alī” identifies a doctrinal element of exceptional richness: the sacredness of ‘Alī as

62 On these data see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, part II/1 and 2 (“Les mondes d’avant le monde. Le Guide-Lumière” and “L’humanité adamique. Le ‘voyage’ de la Lumière”), *op. cit.*, pp. 73-112; Id., “Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi‘ism”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 5, pp. 317-322; Id. *La Religion discrète*, chap. 4 (“La pré-existence de l’Imam”), pp. 109-133; Id. and Ch. Jambet, *Qu’est-ce que le Shi‘isme?*, Paris, 2004, parts 1-1, pp. 27-40; 11-2, pp. 104-110 and 121-129.

63 Apart from the references in the preceding footnote see my monograph, “Notes à propos de la *walāya* imamite” (also above footnote 5 and related text); two seminal articles by U. Rubin, “Pre-existence and light. Aspects of the concept of Nūr Muḥammad”, *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975), pp. 62-119; Id., “Prophets and Progenitors in Early Shi‘a Tradition”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979), pp. 41-65; on *amr* see the classical study by S. Pines, “Shi‘ite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari*”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), pp. 165-251 and now E. Krinis, *God’s Chosen People: Judah Halevi’s Kuzari and the Shi‘i Imām Doctrine*, Turnhout, 2014, index s.v. Order (*amr*).

64 D. Gimaret, *Les Noms divins en Islam*, Paris, 1988, index s.v. ‘Alī.

a theophanic being, the symbol of the Alliance with God (almost in the biblical sense of the term), the love of the metaphysical ‘Alī through love of and loyalty to his earthly manifestation, the historical ‘Alī, his spiritual and temporal power, the brotherhood uniting the members of the Shi‘ī community in their common fidelity to ‘Alī, and lastly, the power, the light, and the divine particle that sanctifies men, of whom the first imam is the ultimate exemplar. This explains the centrality of the idea, and of the person who symbolizes it, to the Shi‘ī who, therefore, often refer to themselves both as the *ahl al-walāya* (People of the *walāya*) and also as the ‘Alawīyūn (the Followers of ‘Alī).

‘Alī thus becomes the religious symbol, the spiritual horizon of an initiatory secret, of a double-sided spiritual itinerary: the humanisation of the divine and the divinization of the human. The doctrine of the *walāya/waṣīyya/amr* is at the core of the Shi‘ī faith, the hidden, esoteric (*bāṭin*) dimension contained in the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) religion sustained by prophecy (*nubuwwa*), itself symbolized by the figure of Muḥammad. Hence the Shi‘ī saying, endlessly repeated in all kinds of texts: *al-walāya bāṭin al-nubuwwa* (the *walāya* is the esoteric dimension of prophecy). The historical ‘Alī is the guardian of this secret, the ultimate content of which is the metaphysical ‘Alī. Thus the Imam is at once the subject and object of the interpretation of Scripture: he is the exegete *par excellence* and his theophanic metaphysical dimension is the ultimate hermeneutic content. After these introductory lines the traditions that we are about to examine will perhaps become clearer:

When God the Most High created the heavens and the earth, said the Prophet, He called them and they answered, then he offered them my *nubuwwa* and the *walāya* of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib [respectively, the exoteric and esoteric aspects of religion as divine Message] and they accepted them. Then God created the creatures and entrusted the matter of [their] religion (*amr al-dīn*) to us both. That is how the blessed are blessed through us and the wretched are wretched through us. We are those who make licit what is licit for them and make illicit what is illicit for them.<sup>65</sup>

The *walāya* of ‘Alī permeates the entire history of humanity and constitutes its spiritual substance, as it is found at the heart of all Revelations and all prophetic missions. Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902-3), an important transmitter of ancient pre-Buyyid Shi‘ism, devoted several chapters of the second section

65 Ibn Shādhān, *Mīa manqaba*, Qumm, 1413/1993, “manqaba” 7, p. 48; al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*, vol. 1, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī, Tabriz, re-ed. Qumm, 1381/1962, p. 29; al-Khwārazmī, *Maqatal al-Ḥusayn*, vol. 1, Qumm, s.d., p. 46.

of his great book *Başā’ir al-darajāt* to those questions.<sup>66</sup> According to many traditions originating mainly with the fifth and sixth imams, Muḥammad al-Bāqir et Ja’far al-Ṣādiq, the pre-temporal Pact (*al-mīthāq*), made between God and the creatures at the dawn of creation and to which Quran 7 (al-A’rāf): 172 is said to allude, is mostly concerned with the *walāya*.<sup>67</sup> Other hadiths affirm that only the “elites” of creation pledged an oath of loyalty to the *walāya* of ‘Alī, namely: the Near Ones (*al-muqarrabūn*) among the angels, the Messengers (*al-mursalūn*) among the prophets and the Tested Ones (*al-mumtaḥanūn*) among the believers.<sup>68</sup> According to a prophetic tradition, in the pre-existential World of Shadows (*‘ālam al-aẓilla*), the status of the prophets was only achieved when they recognized the *walāya*.<sup>69</sup> Likewise the Pact vouchsafed to Adam, to which Quran 20 (Ṭāhā): 115 refers, is concerned with the *walāya*.<sup>70</sup> It is the essential motive of all prophetic missions:

“No prophet and no messenger has been appointed if not by (or “for”) our *walāya* (*bi-walāyatīnā*).”<sup>71</sup>

“Our *walāya* is God’s *walāya*. Every prophet has been sent (by God) but for/through it.”<sup>72</sup>

“The *walāya* of ‘Alī is inscribed in all the books of the prophets; every messenger has been appointed but to proclaim the prophecy of Muḥammad and the *walāya* [or the *waṣīyya*] of ‘Alī.”<sup>73</sup>

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- 66 Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Başā’ir al-darajāt*, ed. Mirzā Kūčebāghī, section 2, chapters 6-16, Tabriz, 2nd ed. n.d. (around 1960) (= ed. K), pp. 67-90; new edition by ‘A. Zakīzādeh Ranānī, vol. 1 (2 vols), with Persian translation, Qumm, 1391/2012 (= ed. Z), pp. 275-350. See also al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 26, p. 280 sqq. On al-Ṣaffār see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 4.
- 67 *Başā’ir*, section 2, chapters 7-12; see also footnote 54 above and the related text.
- 68 *Başā’ir*, section 2, chapter 6, pp. 67-68 (ed. K); vol. 1, pp. 275-278 (ed. Z). For the technical term *tested one* taken from the expression *al-mu’min imtaḥana llāhu qalbahū li-l-īmān* (the believer – or initiated – whose heart God has tested for the faith), see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index s.v. *intihān* (*al-qalb*).
- 69 *Başā’ir*, section 2, chap. 8. On “the Worlds before the World”, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, part 11-1, pp. 75 sqq.
- 70 *Başā’ir*, section 2, chap. 7, p. 70-71 (ed. K); vol. 1, pp. 284-292 (ed. Z). See above footnote 57 and related text; also M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, p. 212; M.M. Bar-Asher, “Variant Readings”, p. 64.
- 71 *Başā’ir*, section 2, chap. 9, p. 74-75 (ed. K); vol. 1, pp. 299-302 (ed. Z).
- 72 *Başā’ir*, *ibid.*, no. 7, p. 75 (ed. K); vol. 1, p. 301 (ed. Z); also *al-Uṣūl al-sittat aṣḥar*, Qumm, 2nd ed., 1405/1984, p. 60; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 26, p. 281, no. 30.
- 73 *Başā’ir*, section 2, chap. 8, p. 72, no. 1 (ed. K); vol. 1, p. 293, no. 1 (ed. Z). See also al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, kitāb al-ḥujja, vol. 1, p. 437; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 26, p. 280, no. 24; al-Qundūzī, *Yanābir al-mawadda*, p. 82; al-Bahrānī, *Ghāyat al-marām*, Qumm, s.d., p. 207.

The Quran, in its “original integral version”, would have clearly mentioned this fact (as at 1.3 above, the passages ‘restored’ to the official version of the Quran are in italics):

Quran 42 (al-Shūrā) / 13: “He has laid down for you *oh Family of Muḥammad*, as religion that He charged Noah with, and that We have revealed to thee *oh Muḥammad*, and that We charged Abraham with, Moses and Jesus: ‘Perform the religion of *the Family of Muḥammad* (i.e. the religion of the *walāya*), and scatter not regarding it. Very hateful is that for the idolaters, *those who associate to the walāya of ‘Alī*; that thou call them to *concerning the walāya of ‘Alī*. Surely, *oh Muḥammad*, God guides to this religion whoever repents, *who accepts your call toward the walāya of ‘Alī*’ (instead of: ‘God chooses unto Himself whomsoever He will, and He guides to Himself whosoever turns, penitent.’).”<sup>74</sup>

If Adam was driven from paradise it was because he had forgotten the *walāya*.<sup>75</sup> If the prophet Jonah was confined in the belly of the whale it was because he had, for a while, refused loyalty to the *walāya*.<sup>76</sup> If certain Israelites had been transformed into fish or lizards it is because they had neglected the *walāya*.<sup>77</sup> The point being that without *walāya* there is no religion. Without a revelation of God in the person of one of His Friends or without the divine Man making the Supreme Mystery manifest in his person and in his teachings, faith loses all meaning. Without the spirit the letter is dead and becomes a mere empty shell, a lifeless corpse. It therefore follows that Islam, the ultimate religion of the most perfect of prophets, should be even more than others centred on the *walāya*. Furthermore, if Muḥammad is Muḥammad, it is because he has been initiated even more deeply than the other prophets, and in particular during his ascensions to Heaven, to the mysteries of the *walāya* of the Imam, the divine Man symbolized by the cosmic ‘Alī: “‘Alī is a Sign of God (*āya* – just as a verse of the Quran is) for Muḥammad. All he did was call (the people) to the *walāya* of ‘Alī.”<sup>78</sup>

74 Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, p. 387; al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfi*, text and Persian translation by H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī, Tehran 1389/1969, vol. 2, p. 163, no. 502; id., *Uṣūl*, kitāb al-ḥujja, vol. 2, p. 285, no. 32 (shorter version); al-Fayḍ al-Kashānī, *Ṣāfi*, vol. 2, p. 509.

75 *Baṣā’ir*, section 2, chapters 7 to 12; also Ibn Bābūya, *Ma’ānī l-akhbār*, ed. ‘A.A. Ghaffārī, Tehran, 1379/1959, pp. 107-109; Id., *al-Khiṣāl*, Najaf, 1391/1971, p. 246; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib al-Abī Ṭālib*, 3 vols. Najaf, 1375-76/1956, vol. 1, p. 214.

76 Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, p. 94; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 14, p. 401 and vol. 26, pp. 333 sqq. See also M.M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, p. 200.

77 Al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 35; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 5, p. 345 and vol. 14, p. 55; al-Baḥrānī, *Burhān*, vol. 2, p. 44; M.M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, pp. 200-201.

78 *Baṣā’ir*, section 2, chap. 7, nos 5 et 8, pp. 71-72 (ed. K); p. 289 and 291 (ed. Z); and chap. 10, no. 5, p. 77 (ed. K); pp. 308-309 (ed. Z); Furāt, *Tafsīr*, pp. 121-122; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 3,

Commenting on Quran 94 (al-Sharḥ) / 1, on the prophetic vocation of Muḥammad, “(Oh Muḥammad) did We not expand thy chest for thee?”, imam Ja‘far is said to have proclaimed: “God expanded his chest for the *walāya* of ‘Alī.”<sup>79</sup>

“The angel Gabriel came to me, said the Prophet, and told me: ‘Muḥammad! Your Lord extends to you the love (*ḥubb*) and the *walāya* of ‘Alī.’”<sup>80</sup>

“The Prophet was elevated to heaven a hundred and twenty times; not a single time did that occur without God entrusting the *walāya* of ‘Alī and the imams (that follow) after him, far more than what He recommended to him regarding canonical duties.”<sup>81</sup>

“The *walāya* of ‘Alī upon the Prophet is not earthly, it comes from heaven, from the very Mouth of God (*mushāfahatan*; i.e. a message received by Mohammed by word of mouth, orally without any intermediary during one of his ascensions to heaven).”<sup>82</sup>

In a solemn declaration attributed to the Prophet, he praises ‘Alī in terms that are clear allusions to his double nature, both human and divine:

... This is the most resplendent Guide, God’s longest Lance, God’s broadest Threshold; let him who seeks God enter across this Threshold ... Without ‘Alī, truth would not be distinguished from falsehood, nor the believer from the unbeliever; without ‘Alī, God could not have been worshipped ... No Screen (*sitr*) hides God from him, no Veil (*ḥijāb*) between God and him. Nay! ‘Alī himself is the Screen and the Veil ...<sup>83</sup>

In other traditions going back to ‘Alī himself, notably in a certain number of sermons said to have been given at the mosque of his capital Kūfa, the identity of the speaker switches, from one sentence to another, between his human

p. 400, no. 150, vol. 23, p. 208, no. 1; vol. 35, p. 369, no. 14; al-Ḥuwayzī, *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn*, 4th ed., Qumm, 1412/1991, vol. 1, p. 595.

79 *Baṣā’ir*, section 2, chap. 8, no. 3, p. 73 (ed. K); p. 294-295 (ed. Z); al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 36, p. 95, no. 27.

80 *Baṣā’ir*, *ibid.* no. 9, p. 74 (ed. K); pp. 297-298 (ed. Z); al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 39, p. 273, no. 50.

81 *Baṣā’ir*, section 2, chap. 10, no. 10, p. 79 (ed. K); p. 314 (ed. Z); Ibn Bābūya, *al-Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, p. 600; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 23, p. 69, no. 4; al-Ḥuwayzī, *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn*, vol. 3, p. 98.

82 Al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 28, p. 306, no. 13. Cf. Ibn al-Biṭrīq, *Khaṣā’iṣ*, p. 98 and Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Ṭarā’if fi ma’rifat madhāhib al-ṭawā’if*, Qumm, 1400/1979, p. 101.

83 *Furāt al-Kūfī*, *Tafsīr*, p. 371, no. 503.

person and his divine Face.<sup>84</sup> In them the first imam seems to boldly affirm his oneness with the cosmic Imam, the theophanic being who manifests in his own person God's Names and Attributes. Here we will restrict ourselves to two examples of those sermons. We shall return to them at length in chapter 4.

“From the pulpit of the mosque of Kūfa, ‘Alī, the Commander of the initiated, declared: ‘By God, I am the Retributor (*dayyān*) of men on the Day of Retribution; I am he who divides between the Garden and the Fire, none enters there without my division; I am the Supreme Judge (between good and evil; *al-fārūq al-akbar*) ... I possess the Sharp Word (*faṣl al-khiṭāb*); I have the penetrating Sight of the Way of the Book ... I possess the science of good and bad tidings and the science of judgements; I am the Completion of Religion; I am God's Benefaction for His creatures ...”<sup>85</sup>

“I am the queen bee (*ya'sūb*) of the initiated; I am the First from among the Ancient; I am the successor of the Messenger of the Lord of the worlds; I am the Judge of the Garden and the Fire ...”<sup>86</sup>

In the following sermon, the Names of God mentioned in the Quran are in italics:

... I am the Secret of secrets ... I am the Face of God; I am the Eye of God; I am the Hand of God; I am the Tongue of God ... I am the Most Beautiful Names through which one invokes God ... I am the lord of primordial pre-eternity ... I am the master of the hermeneutics [of the Quran]; I am the commentator of the Gospel; I am the savant of the Torah ... I am *the First* (*al-awwal*); I am *the Last* (*al-ākhir*); I am *the Manifest* (*al-zāhir*); I am *the Hidden* (*al-bāṭin*) ... I am *the Creator* (*al-khāliq*); I am the Created; I am *the Giver* (*al-mu'tī*); I am *the Taker* (*al-qābiḍ*) ... I am *the Compassionate* (*al-raḥmān*); I am *the Merciful* (*al-raḥīm*) ... I am the Lion [of the clan] of the Banū Ghālib; I am ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.<sup>87</sup>

84 On these texts, their nature, number, titles and the sources that transmitted them see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Remarques sur la divinité de l'Imam” (= *La Religion discrète*, chap. 3). Here chap. 4.

85 Furāt, *Tafsīr*, p. 178, no. 230.

86 Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, pp. 17-18, no. 42; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 3, p. 389. On 'Alī as the “Head” or “Commander of the Bees” (*amīr al-naḥl*) see I. Goldziher, “Schī'tisches”, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 44 (1910), pp. 532-33, included in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. De Somogyi, Hildesheim, 1967-1970, vol. 5, pp. 213-14.

87 The text of the “Sermon of the Clear Declaration” (*khutbat al-bayān*) in the version transmitted by al-Kashfī Ja'far, *Tuhfat al-mulūk*, s.l. (Iran), n.d., (ed. litho. in 2 vols),

It is in this doctrinal context that ‘Alī (and after him the imams descended from him) is described in Shi‘i works with Quranic expressions such as “the supreme Sign” (*al-āya al-kubrā*; Quran 79 [al-Nāzi‘āt] / 20), “the most solid Handle” (*al-‘urwa al-wuthqā*; Quran 2 [al-Baqara] / 256 and 31 [Luqmān] / 22), “the august Symbol” (*al-mathal al-a‘lā*; Quran 16 [al-Nahl] / 60) or titles such as “the Proof of God” (*ḥujjat allāh*), “the Way of God” (*ṣirāt allāh*), “the Vicar of God” (*khalīfat allāh*), “the Threshold of God” (*bāb allāh*), etc.<sup>88</sup>

## 6 Roots, Extensions and Questions on the Origins: ‘Alī and Christ

The two natures of ‘Alī, human and divine, were from early on expressed respectively by the terms *nāsūt* and *lāhūt*, words of Syriac origin which Arabic Christian texts use to describe the double nature of Christ.<sup>89</sup> And with good reason: the main doctrines of Shi‘i imamology, indissolubly bound up with its theology and its prophethood, would seem to be the heirs of the christological speculations of various Neo-Platonizing Christian and Judeo-Christian currents in Late Antiquity, or to derive from both them and especially from a number of Gnostic movements and from Manichaeism.<sup>90</sup> The concept of the metaphysical cosmic Imam, the pre-existing being making manifest the luminous Word of God, and the celestial archetype of the earthly imam, seems to be rooted in the comments in the Gospel of John about the nature of Christ<sup>91</sup> and notably in the interpretations thereof by “the theologians of the Logos”, Philo of Alexandria, Justin, Origen, Arius, etc. The status of ‘Alī, at the same

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vol. 1, pp. 20-28; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Remarques sur la divinité de l’Imam”, pp. 210-214 (= *La Religion discrète*, chap. 3, pp. 105-108).

88 The references are countless; we shall content ourselves with the following: al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir*, section 2, all of chapter 3; Ibn Bābūya, *al-Amālī/al-Majālis*, ed. and Persian trans. by M.B. Kamarehī, Tehran, 1404/1984, “majlis” 9 and 10; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 22, pp. 212 sqq.; vol. 34, pp. 109 sqq.

89 L. Massignon, *La Passion de Hallāj, martyr mystique de l’Islam*, vol. 4 (4 vols), Paris, re-ed. 1975, index of technical terms, s.v. *lāhūt*, *lāhūtī*, *lāhūtīyya*, *nāsūt*, *nāsūtīyya*; R. Arnaldez, “Lāhūt et Nāsūt”, *ETI*, s.v.; and the numerous and perceptive observations of D. De Smet in *Les Épîtres sacrées des Druzes*, Louvain, 2007, index, s.v.

90 See the now classical work by H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis. Die Extreme Schia und die ‘Alawiten*, Zurich-Munich, 1982; more recently M. Asatryan, *Controversies in Formative Shi‘i Islam. The Ghulat Muslims and Their Beliefs*, London-New York, 2017. See also, among others, T. Andrae, *Les origines de l’Islam et le Christianisme* (trans. fr. J. Roche), Paris, 1955; E. Rabbath, *L’Orient chrétien à la veille de l’Islam*, Beirut, 1989.

91 Notably verse 1, 15 where John the Baptist declares of Jesus: “Before me, He was” or also 8, 58 where Jesus himself says: “Truly, I tell you, before Abraham existed, I was (literally: ‘I am’).”

time the heavenly and the earthly Imam, the ontological intermediary between the divine and the human, has more than one analogy with a sequence of christological dogmas running from Saint Paul (e.g. Col 1, 15 or 2, 9) to *the Commentary on John* to Origen, the *Thalia* of Arius, and the speculations of Nestorius on the nature of Christ, not forgetting the christological and gnoseological doctrines of Mani, Bardaisan of Edessa or Marcion.<sup>92</sup> It is interesting to note that those movements were present in Sassanian Iraq, and in particular in the city of Ḥīra, a few centuries before and a few centuries after the advent of Islam. Now Iraq is the birthplace of Shi'ism, especially the city of Kūfa, near the ancient site of Ḥīra. Might this be the reason for the sudden – and enigmatic – transfer of the capital from Medina to Kūfa under the caliphate of 'Alī?<sup>93</sup> The concept of *walāyat 'Alī*, and its vehicle “the light of the *walāya/waṣīyya*”, as well as its “journey” through the generations in order to rejoin the Allies of God, are reminiscent, sometimes in detail, of certain Judeo-Christian and Christian doctrines on the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the True Prophet or the Christology of the angel, that can be found among the Manicheans, the Montanists or the Monarchianists? They have been studied in detail in recent years, notably by Jan van Reeth.<sup>94</sup>

92 There is practically no longer any doubt about the presence of this type of christological and gnostic doctrines in early Shi'ism. What is subject to debate are the milieux and the means of their transmission in the lands of Islam. See, amongst others, L. Massignon, “Die Ursprünge und die Bedeutung des Gnostizismus im Islam”, *Eranos Jahrbuch* 1937, pp. 55-77 (included in Id., *Opera minora*, ed. Y. Moubarac, Beirut, 1963, vol. 1, pp. 499-513); Id., “Der gnostische Kult der Fatima im schiitischen Islam”, *Eranos Jahrbuch* 1938, pp. 161-173 (= *Opera minora*, vol. 1, pp. 514-522); H. Corbin, “De la gnose antique à la gnose ismaélienne”, in *Oriente e Occidente nel Medioevo. Convegno di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, Rome, 1957, pp. 105-146 (included in Id., *Temps cyclique et gnose ismaélienne*, Paris, 1982, 3rd part); Id., “L'idée du Paraclet en philosophie iranienne”, in *La Persia nel Medioevo*, Rome, 1971, pp. 37-68; U. Rubin, “Preexistence and Light”, 1975 (see above footnote 63); H. Halm, *Kosmologie und Heislehre der frühen Ismā'īliyya. Eine Studie zur islamischen Gnosis*, Wiesbaden, 1978; Id., “Das ‘Buch der Schatten’. Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der ghulāt und die Ursprünge des Nuṣairierts”, *Der Islam* 55 (1978), pp. 219-265 and 58 (1981), pp. 15-86; D. De Smet, “Au-delà de l'apparent: les notions de *ẓāhir* et *bāṭin* dans l'ésotérisme musulman”, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 25 (1994), pp. 197-220; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, pp. 157-158, 204 sqq., 215 sq.

93 A question to which no satisfactory answer has yet been given; see on this subject J. van Reeth, “Ville céleste, ville sainte, ville idéale dans la tradition musulmane”, *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 24 (2011), p. 125 and especially “*Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant: nouvelles perspectives sur les origines de l'islam*”, *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 230/3 (juillet-septembre 2013), pp. 393-394.

94 See for example among many other earlier studies, J. van Reeth, “La cosmologie de Bardaysān”, *Parole de l'Orient* 31 (2006), pp. 133-144; Id., “La typologie du prophète selon le Coran: le cas de Jésus”, in G. Dye et F. Nobilio (ed.), *Figures bibliques en islam*, Bruxelles,

Thus the figure of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is placed at the intersection of these spiritual doctrines and is its epicenter. It is thanks to his double nature that ‘Alī is pivotal to the spirituality of the different fields and groups of Islam, as both theophanic being and initiatory guide *par excellence*: all the different tendencies of Shi‘i faith, especially its imamology; mysticism, both Shi‘i and Sunni Sufism; the occult sciences; *futuwwa*; Shi‘i literature and religious art; the devotional practices of such movements as the ‘Alawi Nuṣayris of Syria, the Ḥurūfiyya, the Nuṣṭawīyya, the Bābā’ī, the Bektāshis and the Turkish Alevis, the Musha‘sha‘iyya, the Kurdish Ahl-e Ḥaqq/Yāfersān ... To huge numbers of the Shi‘i faithful, however diverse their doctrines and practices, ‘Alī, the veritable manifestation of God, is superior not only to the other imams but also to the prophet Muḥammad. It is, for example, the case for many Alid sects of the first centuries of Islam (the Saba‘iyya/Kaysāniyya, for the ‘Ayniyya among the Mukhammisa, for the Nuṣayriyya Ishāqiyya ...), for certain Ismailis, with their doctrine of ‘Alī as *asās*, superior to the *imām* and to the prophet/*nāṭiq*, and who consider the *walāya* to be the source of the prophetic mission, for the Druze as well as for present day mystical orders, for the Shaykhiyya and the Sufi Shi‘i brotherhoods (the Dhahabiyya, Ni‘matullāhiyya, Khāksāriyya and others), who believe the Prophet himself had called his followers to the *walāya* of ‘Alī, and so attesting to the superiority of the esoteric, the spiritual, of the *bāṭin*, of which ‘Alī is the symbol and spokesman, over the exoteric, the letter of the law, the *ẓāhir* of which he was himself the messenger. For these faithful, ‘Alī, the Seal of the universal *walāya*, who accompanied all earlier Messengers secretly and the prophet Muḥammad openly, is the locus of manifestation of the Supreme Name of God (*ism allāh al-a‘ẓam/al-akbar*).<sup>95</sup>

Sunni historians of heresy, but also those Shi‘i authors who adhered to the post-Buyyid rationalistic tradition, accuse these doctrines of exaggeration (*ghuluww*) and those who profess them as extremists (*ghālin*, pl. *ghulāt*). The accusation is of course ideological in nature, but it does not stand up to critical historical examination. We have seen that these imamological ideas

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2011, pp. 81-105; Id., “Who is the ‘Other’ Paraclet?”, in C.A. Segovia & B. Lourié (eds.), *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where and to Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, Piscataway, 2012, pp. 423-452. See also J. Barbel, *Christos Angelos*, Bonn, 1941; G. Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des propheten Muḥammad. Eine Kritik am “christlichen” Abendland*, Erlangen, 1981; B.G. Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and other early Christian witnesses*, Leiden, 2009.

95 The sources of these data are innumerable. One will find a pertinent synthesis in E. Kohlberg, art. “Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb, ii. ‘Alī as seen by the community”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 1, pp. 845-847; on those sources see here chap. 4. On these questions see also O. Mir-Kasimov’s contribution to the present book.

are all omnipresent in the corpus of the so-called “moderate” Shi‘i traditions accepted as being authentic.<sup>96</sup> Consider the great Hadith collections, both ancient (III-V/IX-XIth c.) and modern (X-XIII/XVI-XIXth c.); important writers such as Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192) and the great masters of the modern and contemporary mystical orders through to Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 794/1391-1392), Rajab al-Bursī (d. 814/1411), Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā‘ī (d. c. 906/1501); or the great Iranian philosophers of the Safavid era, Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640), Mullā Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/ 1680); or the great theoreticians of the ontological *walāya* (*al-walāya al-takwīniyya*), such as Mīrzā Rafī‘ā Nā‘īnī (d. 1083/1672), ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī (d. 1032/1622), Mullā Na‘īmā Ṭāliqānī (d. after 1135/1722) or Mullā ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Damāvandī (d. 1160/1747).<sup>97</sup>

I would like to close this chapter with some questions, suppositions and hypotheses. I will outline them here summarily and as they come, leaving their more detailed examination to the next chapter. Shi‘ism is the religion of the Imam just as Christianity is the religion of Christ. As with Jesus in Christianity, the Shi‘i doctrine of the Imam, its imamology, which decisively determines both its theology and its prophetology, is entirely centred on the figure of ‘Alī. In other words, for a millennium and a half, Shi‘ism has been, and remains, the religion of ‘Alī, Man and manifestation of God, and supreme guide.<sup>98</sup> The

96 On both early Imami traditions, pre- and post-Buyyid, and the arbitrary division between a “moderate” Shi‘ism and an “extremist” Shi‘ism, especially during the early period, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, introduction, pp. 13-58 and conclusion, pp. 312-317; Id., “al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (m. 290/902-3) et son Kitāb baṣā‘ir al-darajāt”, *Journal Asiatique* 280/3-4 (1992), pp. 221-250 (enlarged and slightly modified version in *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 4); and now Id., “Les Imams et les Ghulāt. Nouvelles réflexions sur les relations entre imamisme ‘modéré’ et shi‘isme ‘extrémiste’”, in *Shii Studies Review* (2020), pp. 5-38.

97 On the great Imami Hadith compilations see E. Kohlberg, “Shī‘ī Ḥadīth”, in A.F.L. Beeston et al. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature I. Arabic Literature to the End of Umayyad Period*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 299-307; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 48-58; Id., *Le Coran silencieux*, pp. 116-117. On the philosophers of the Safavid period and the ontological *walāya* (as opposed to the juridical *walāya* – *al-walāya al-tashrī‘iyya*, as claimed by the Doctors of the Law), see the study by S. Rizvi, “Seeking the Face of God: the Safawid *Ḥikmat* Tradition’s Conceptualisation of *Walāya Takwīniyya*”, in F. Daftary & G. Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shi‘i Islam*, pp. 391-410 and also the contribution of M. Terrier to the present work.

98 In Sunnism, the evolution of the figure of ‘Alī is totally different. The Umayyad period, apart from a few parentheses, seems to be marked by a declared hatred of him, illustrated by the public cursing of ‘Alī and his progeny on the orders of those in power. In parallel, certain other “Companions” of the Prophet seem to have been elevated to the level of divine men most probably in order to suppress the Shi‘i image of ‘Alī; this seems to be particularly the case of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, the historical adversary of ‘Alī, sanctified thanks to his image as the herp of the Arab conquests (See in particular A. Hakim, “Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb, calife par la Grâce de Dieu”, *Arabica* 54/3 (2008), pp. 317-336; Id., “Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb: l’autorité religieuse et morale”, *Arabica* 55/1 (2008), pp. 1-34). The arrival of the

figure of ‘Alī, of and the doctrines which define him, thus possess very great spiritual power for a large, various, representative and widespread community of the faithful, even though they are in the minority, and this from the very beginnings of Islam until today.<sup>99</sup> Now it is difficult to conceive that such a religion, and such widespread devotion to it, could emerge from nowhere or be entirely based on a question of succession, be it that of a prophet. At this stage of the argument, many legitimate questions arise if one examines a few preliminary premises.

First: in numerous Shi‘i traditions (we have already seen a few of them), prophet Muḥammad declares that the ultimate objective of his mission is to affirm the sacred nature of the person of ‘Alī, and to call upon the faithful to follow his person and accept his teachings.

Second: in countless passages of the Quran, the message of Muḥammad is presented as being the prolongation and the culmination of previous monotheistic religions, in this case Judaism and Christianity.

Third (and here I revive the old, unjustly neglected thesis of Paul Casanova, which deserves to be taken seriously): Dozens of the short final surahs of the Quran, deservedly called “apocalyptic”, declare that Muḥammad came to announce the end times. This is also clearly attested, first by one of the titles of the Prophet to be found in some of the most ancient sources, namely that of *nabī* or *rasūl al-malḥama* (“the prophet/messenger of the end times calamities”) and by many other traditions.<sup>100</sup>

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Abbasids, at first Shi‘is themselves, marked the end of the campaign of hatred against ‘Alī but by “sunnifying” themselves out of political pragmatism, the new political establishment would trivialize and recuperate him by placing him at the same level as the other three “rightly guided” caliphs and other henceforth canonized “Companions” of the Prophet (On the late inclusion of ‘Alī as the fourth and last of the “rightly guided caliphs” (*al-khulafā’ al-rāshidūn*), see W. Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen*, Berlin, 1965, pp. 225 sq; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, vol. 3 (6 vols), Berlin-NewYork, 1991-1997, pp. 450 sqq. On the late development of the Sunni doctrine of the “sanctity” of the Companions (*ṣaḥāba*) of the Prophet, see A. Osman, “*Adālat al-ṣaḥāba*: The Construction of a Religious Doctrine”, *Arabica* 60/3-4 (2013), pp. 272-305).

99 One has to remember that even if the Alids, later on called Shi‘is, have been in the minority in the beginnings of Islam, they seem to have been at the centre of its history and its doctrinal development for the first three or four Hijra centuries. It was in fact towards the end of the 3rd/9th century, after centuries of violence and civil wars, that “Sunni orthodoxy”, of which numerous doctrines were developed in reaction to Shi‘ism, now considered as “heterodox”, would be imposed on the majority of Muslims; see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux, passim* and in particular p. 128.

100 P. Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde. Étude critique sur l’islam primitif*, Paris, 1911-1913 (2 vols + 1 vol. of notes) and 1924 (1 vol. of additional notes). According to Casanova, it is impossible for the Quran, an eminently eschatological and apocalyptic book – at

One could then propose the following hypothesis. Muhammad came to declare the end of the world; belonging to a biblical religious tradition, he could not remain silent about the central figure of biblical eschatology, namely the Saviour, the Messiah or Christ, the Anointed One (*al-masīh*). Now, according to some sources, ‘Alī was considered by some of his followers to be the Messiah of the end times. Hence the many explicit mentions in the original Quran of ‘Alī as the Ally of God *par excellence*, and their removal by his adversaries from the official version of the Quran. That is at least what the early Alids seem to have professed. We shall take a closer look at this matter in the following chapter.

least in the final Surahs of the extant version – and a prolongation of the holy books of the Judeo-Christian tradition, not to have said mentioned the figure of the Saviour. His astonishing absence from the Quran could be the result of later deletions by the caliphal authorities, since the messianic dimension of the Quran would have given it an all too Shi‘i character (*ibid.*, chapter VI, pp. 54-67 and chapter VII, pp. 68-69). These remarks by the French scholar, professor at the Collège de France, corroborate the early Shi‘i doctrine of *tahrif*, that large passages of the Quran had been deleted by the adversaries of the Alids, a Shi‘i doctrine Casanova does not seem to have been aware of. For a reminder of the importance of the work of Casanova see now F. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge (Mass.), 2010, pp. 79-82 and especially S.J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*, Philadelphia, 2012, pp. 118-196. See also J. van Reeth, “Muhammad: le premier qui relèvera la tête”, in A. Fodor (ed.), *Proceedings of the 20th Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants (Arabist: Budapest Studies in Arabic 26-27)* (2003), pp. 83-96.

# Muḥammad the Paraclete and ‘Alī the Messiah

To Patricia Crone  
*In Memoriam*



## 1 The End of the World in the Quran and the Hadith

The Quranic corpus insists heavily on the impending end of the world. Many verses and surahs are more or less directly devoted to it. This is particularly the case of a great number of the final surahs, the shorter ones, reputed to be the oldest, which are in archaic language and in a remarkable literary style, close to the rhymed prose (*sajʿ*) that the pre-Islamic Arab seers were said to use in their ecstatic visions. These difficult passages announce the dramatic cosmic changes of the end times, invite incredulous mankind to repent and to purify itself to be spared God’s wrath, to keep in the straight way and so be numbered among the pious and the good, to whom salvation is promised. We will limit ourselves to a few examples (translations follow A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, London, 1964, with some modifications):

Quran 81 (The Darkening), 29 verses:<sup>1</sup> “In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. When the sun shall be darkened, when the stars shall be thrown down, when the mountains shall be set moving, when the pregnant camels shall be neglected, when the savage beasts shall be mustered, when the seas shall be set boiling, when the souls shall be coupled (...) when heaven shall be stripped off; when Hell shall be set blazing, when Paradise shall be brought nigh, then shall a soul know what it has produced.(..) where then are

1 I wholeheartedly thank Guillaume Dye for his careful reading of the first draft of this study and for his erudite and pertinent reflections. For the reasons that have just been mentioned, the translation of these surahs (in French in the original version of the present study) turns out to be particularly arduous. For example, just for the term that has given the most used title for this surah, namely *al-takwīr*, Kasimirski proposes “le soleil ployé” (*Le Coran*, Paris 2010<sup>8</sup>, p. 514), R. Blachère “l’Obscurcissement” (*Le Coran. Al-Qor’ân*, Paris, 1966<sup>2</sup>, p. 638); D. Masson, “le Décrochement” (*Le Coran*, Paris, 1967, vol. 2, p. 743), J. Berque, “le Repliement” (*Le Coran. Essai de traduction*, Paris, 1995<sup>2</sup>, p. 664), etc.

you going? It is naught but a Reminder unto all beings, for whosoever of you who would go straight ...”

Quran 82 (The Splitting), 19 verses: “In the Name of God (...) When sky is split open, when the stars are scattered, when the seas swarm over, when the tombs are overthrown, then a soul shall know its works, the former and the latter. (...) but you cry lies to the Doom (...) Surely the pious shall be in bliss, and the libertines shall be in a fiery furnace roasting (...) And what shall teach thee what is the Day of Doom? Again, what shall teach thee what is the Day of Doom? A day when no soul shall possess ought to succour another soul; that day the Command shall belong unto God.”

Quran 84 (The Rending), 25 verses: “In the Name of God (...) When heaven is rent asunder and gives ear to its Lord, and is fitly disposed; when earth is stretched out and casts forth what is in it, and voids itself, and gives ear to its Lord, and is fitly disposed! O Man! Thou art labouring unto thy Lord laboriously, and thou shalt encounter Him. Then as for him who is given his book in his right hand, he shall surely receive an easy reckoning and he will return to his family joyfully. But as for him who is given his book behind his back, he shall call for destruction and he shall roast at a Blaze. (...) I swear by the twilight and the night and what it envelopes and the moon when it is at the full, you shall surely ride stage after stage. Then what ails them, that they believe not, and when the Koran is recited to them they do not bow? Nay, but the unbelievers are crying lies (...) So give them good tidings of a painful chastisement, except those that believe, and do righteous deeds theirs shall be a wage unailing.”

Quran 99 (The Earthquake), 8 verses: “In the Name of God (...) When earth is shaken with a mighty shaking and earth brings forth her burdens, and Man says, ‘What ails her?’ (...) upon that coming day she shall tell her tidings for that her Lord has inspired her. Upon that day men shall issue in scatterings to see their works, and whoso has done an atom’s weight of good shall see it, and whoso has done an atom’s weight of evil shall see it.”

Quran 100 (The Chargers), 11 verses: “In the Name of God (...) By the snorting chargers, by the strikers of fire, by the dawn-raiders blazing a trail of dust, cleaving there with a host! Surely Man is ungrateful to his Lord, and surely he is a witness against that! Surely he is passionate in his love for good things. Knows he not that when that which is in the tombs is soon over-thrown, and that which is in the breasts is brought out surely on that coming day their Lord shall be aware of them!”

Quran 101 (The Clatterer), 11 verses: “In the Name of God (...) The Clatterer! What is the Clatterer? And what shall teach thee what is the Clatterer? The day that men shall be like scattered moths, and the mountains shall be like plucked wool tufts. Then he whose deeds weigh heavy in the Balance shall inherit a

pleasing life, but he whose deeds weigh light in the Balance shall plunge in the womb of the Pit. And what shall teach thee what is the Pit? A blazing Fire!”

Quran 102 (Rivalry), 8 verses: “In the Name of God (...) Gross rivalry diverts you, even till you visit the tombs. No indeed; but very soon you shall know. Again, no indeed; but very soon you shall know. No indeed; did you know with the knowledge of certainty, you shall surely see Hell; Again, you shall surely see it with the eye of certainty then you shall be questioned that day concerning true bliss.”

The imminence of the end times is further alluded to in many readings. It is particularly stressed by the use of the term *al-sā‘a*, the Hour, in order to designate the coming of that end.<sup>2</sup> “The Hour has drawn nigh: the moon is split. Yet if they see a sign they turn away, and they say ‘A continuous sorcery!’ They have cried lies, and followed their caprices; but every matter is settled.<sup>3</sup> (...) yet warnings do not avail. So turn thou away from them. Upon the day when the Caller shall call unto a horrible thing, abasing their eyes, they shall come forth from the tombs as if they were scattered grasshoppers (...) The unbelievers shall say, ‘This is a hard day!’ (...)” (Quran 54:1-8).

“God it is who has sent down the Book with the truth, and also the Balance. And what shall make thee know? Haply the Hour is nigh. (...) Why, surely those who are in doubt concerning the Hour are indeed in far error.” (Quran 42:17-18)

“Not equal are the blind and the seeing man, those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, and the wrong-doer. Little do you reflect. The Hour is coming, no doubt of it, but most men do not believe.” (Quran 40:58-59)

“To God belongs the Unseen in the heavens and in the earth. And the matter of the Hour is as a twinkling of the eye, or nearer. Surely God is powerful over everything.” (Quran 16:77)

The Quran frequently gives the impression that the main purpose of its revelation is to announce that the end times are imminent. Surah 21 thus begins with the words: “In the Name of God (...). Nigh unto men has drawn their reckoning, while they in heedlessness are yet turning away; no Remembrance from their Lord comes to them lately renewed, but they listen to it yet playing (...)”. It is also the case at the beginning of surah 16: “God’s command (*amr*<sup>u</sup>*llāh*)

2 The term means moment, instant, hour, very short time. Defined by the article *al-*, as it is in the Quran, it means the end of the world, but it also takes on the meaning of expressions signifying immediacy such as “immediately”, “at once”, “right away”, still today in Modern Arabic.

3 *Wa kullu amr<sup>in</sup> mustaqarr*. On the apocalyptic and eschatological dimensions of the difficult Quranic term *amr* (rendered here as “matter”), see J. Bajlon, “The *Amr* of God in the Qur’ān”, *Acta Orientalia* 22 (1958), pp. 7-18; M.J. Kister, “A Booth like the Booth of Moses ... A Study of an Early *Ḥadīth*”, *BSOAS* 25 (1962), pp. 150-155; D. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, Princeton, 2002, pp. 271-272; S.S. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet. The End of Muḥammad’s Life and the Beginnings of Islam*, Philadelphia, 2012, index s.v.

comes; so seek not to hasten it.” One can also stress the use of the term *āzifa* for the Judgement, suggesting an event that is imminent or approaching with great speed, something that occurs suddenly: “And warn them against the Day of the Imminent (*yawm al-āzifa*) when, choking with anguish, the hearts are in the throats and the evil-doers have not one loyal friend, no intercessor to be heeded.” (Quran 40:18) “Then which of thy Lord’s bounties disputest thou? This is a warner, of the warners of old. The Imminent is imminent (*azifat’ l-āzifa*); apart from God none can disclose it.” (Quran 53:57) Furthermore the coming of the End of the World is described with the qualifier *wāq’i’a*, literally “falling, in the process of falling” (Quran 52:7 and 70:1). The list is not exhaustive.

What is more, in some passages, the signs of Judgement Day are already there: “... But those who are guided aright, them He increases in guidance, and gives them their godfearing. Are they looking for aught but the Hour, that it shall come upon them suddenly? Already its tokens have come (...)” (Quran 47:17-18) Thus, those who witnessed the revelation shall also witness the Hour in their lifetime: “Whosoever is in error, let the All-merciful prolong his term for him! Till, when they see that they were threatened, whether the chastisement, or the Hour (...)” (Quran 19:75); “But they disbelieved in it; soon they shall know! (...) So turn thou from them for a while, and see them; soon they shall see! What, do they seek to hasten Our chastisement? When it lights in their courtyard, how evil will be the morning of them that are warned! (...)” (Quran 37:170-177)

Examples like these from the Quran recur frequently on many other pages. They, along with many similar examples in the corpus of the hadith (to which I shall return), have led some scholars, from the 19th century onwards, to consider the Quran, the society in which it was written and the whole early Islamic period, to be peculiar to that period and region (in other words to a history and a geography) strongly steeped in apocalyptic beliefs. The questions raised by these scholars have deeply affected the issues, the perspectives of, and the methods of research into, the birth of the Arab religion: if Muḥammad had come to announce the end of the world, as much of the Quran and the Hadith affirms he did, why would he found a new religion? To which religious milieu(s) did he belong? How far was its conception and message influenced by Judaism, Christianity or Manicheism, the major religions in that time and place? How should we understand the other, non-apocalyptic, parts of the two scriptural sources of Islam? How did the first Muslims, the men of power and knowledge in particular, relate to their prophet? How much confidence can be had in the Islamic sources, at once so abundant and so contradictory, so full of improbabilities and often so patently tendentious and/or ideological? How do we reconcile accounts of the beginnings of Islam and of the Arab conquests from contemporary non-Islamic sources that are prone to be equally biased?

I draw attention here to the authors of the most significant studies of the apocalyptic dimension of the Quran and of the Hadith as well as of the figure of Muḥammad. They are: Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, especially his study of the Mahdist movements and in his debate with Hubert Grimme;<sup>4</sup> Paul Casanova, who wrote the best documented and most solidly argued book of his time and this despite the fact that many sources which would have supported his theses were not yet known;<sup>5</sup> Tor Andrae, in particular in his fundamental study of the origins of Islam;<sup>6</sup> Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, in *Hagarism*, their momentous collaborative work;<sup>7</sup> Suliman Bashear, in many articles on the apocalyptic aspects of Islam;<sup>8</sup> David Cook, in many articles and in numerous passages of his valuable monography on the same subject;<sup>9</sup> Said Amir-Arjomand, in particular in three illuminating articles;<sup>10</sup> Edouard-Marie

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- 4 C. Snouck Hurgronje, "Der Mahdi", *Revue coloniale internationale* 1 (1886), pp. 239-273; id. "Une nouvelle biographie de Mohammed", *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 15, n° 30 (1894), pp. 48-70 and 149-178 (reply to H. Grimme, *Mohammed*, Münster, 1892) (these two articles were republished in *Verspreide Geschriften van C. Snouck Hurgronje*, ed. A.J. Wensinck, Bonn-Leipzig, 1923-1927).
- 5 P. Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde. Étude critique sur l'Islam*, Paris, 1911-1913 [1924].
- 6 T. Andrae, "Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum", *Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift* 23 (1923), pp. 149-206; 24 (1924), pp. 213-292 [our subject is particularly discussed on pages 213-247]; and *ibid.*, 25 (1925), pp. 45-112 (French translation by J. Roche: *Les origines de l'Islam et le Christianisme*, Paris, 1955, especially pp. 67-100); see also id., *Mohammed: The Man and His Faith*, transl. T.W. Menzel, New York, 1960, pp. 53 sqq. (English translation of *Mohammed, sein Leben und sein Glaube*, Göttingen, 1932).
- 7 P. Crone & M. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge, 1977. Apart from this study, both scholars have returned to the subjects of their theses, in more or less developed forms, in many other publications.
- 8 S. Bashear, "The Title 'Fārūq' and Its Association with 'Umar I'", *SI* 72 (1990), pp. 47-70; "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources", *JRAS* 1 (1991), pp. 173-207; "Riding Beast on Divine Missions: An Examination of the Ass and Camel Traditions", *JSS* 37 (1991), pp. 37-75; "Muslim Apocalypses and the Hour: A Case-Study in Traditional Reinterpretation", *IOS* 13 (1993), pp. 75-100; works now assembled in the collection of articles by the author: *Studies in Early Islamic Tradition*, Jerusalem, 2004.
- 9 D. Cook, "Muslim Apocalyptic and *Jihād*", *JSAI* 20 (1996), pp. 66-105; "Muslim Materials on Comets and Meteorites", *Journal of the History of Astronomy* 30 (1999), pp. 131-160; "Messianism and Astronomical Events during the First Four Centuries of Islam", in M. Garcia Arenal (ed.), *Mahdisme et millénarisme en Islam*, n° spécial *REMMM* 91-94 (2000-2001), pp. 29-52; and the monograph that, apart from new studies, includes in part some material of these articles: *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, Princeton, 2002.
- 10 S. Amir Arjomand, "The Consolation of Theology: Absence of the Imam and Transition from Chiliasm to Law in Shi'ism", *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 76, no. 4 (1996), pp. 548-571; "Messianism, Millennialism and Revolution in Early Islamic History", in A. Amanat & M.T. Bernhardtsson (eds.), *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle*

Gallez whose voluminous work *Le Messie et Son Prophète*, is a true mine of information, despite some ideological positions and methods that may invite reserves;<sup>11</sup> and, finally, Stephen S. Shoemaker in his very solidly documented work on disagreements over the date of the death of Muḥammad and their many serious implications.<sup>12</sup>

Each of these studies has provoked many learned reactions, admiring, critical and at times downright hostile. My mention of them does not mean that I fully endorse all of their methods or conclusions. However, to say the very least, these researches, based as they are on serious and pertinent scholarship, and on solid philological and historical methods, have undeniably renewed scientific debates on the origins of Islam and have durably influenced them, when some of them had long been unjustly neglected. The present work is a modest attempt to prolong and complement our understanding of the problems they have studied.

To briefly return to the Hadith: the scholars mentioned above, with others less systematically, have drawn largely on the corpus to support the thesis that the imminent end of the world was the original core of the message of Muḥammad. Here I will confine myself to a few significant examples. There is first “the hadith of the two fingers”. According to the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), the Prophet is said to have declared: “The Hour is coming. My coming and the Hour are separated from one another like these two” and he showed his index and his middle finger.<sup>13</sup> In his book on the life of Muḥammad, Aloys Sprenger examines the same hadith in the light of an incident recorded by Ibn ‘Abbās and mentioned by al-Wāḥidī (d. 411/1020-1021). According to this, after the revelation of the verse “the Hour is coming” (Quran 54:1) the unbelievers were at first anxious, but then, noticing that nothing had happened, they resumed their dissolute lives. God then revealed the verse: “Nigh unto men has drawn their reckoning, while they in heedlessness are yet turning away” (Quran 21:1). The unbelievers responded as before, their initial anxiety

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*East to Modern America*, London, 2002 (2014), pp. 106-125; “Origins and Development of Apocalypticism and Messianism in Early Islam: 610-750 CE”, in id., *Sociology of Shi‘ite Islam*, Leiden, 2016, Part 1, ch. 1, pp. 23-40.

- 11 E.-M. Gallez, *Le messie et son prophète. Aux origines de l’islam*, volume 1: “De Qumrân à Muhammad” & volume 2: “Du Muhammad des Califes au Muhammad de l’histoire”, Paris, 2007-2008.
- 12 S.S. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, Philadelphia, 2012 (already quoted), especially chapter 3, pp. 118-196 which contains a very useful bibliographical overview on this subject. See also now his article: “‘The Reign of God Has Come’: Eschatology and Empire in Late Antiquity and Early Islam”, *Arabica* 61.5 (2014), pp. 514-558, as well as his more recent work *The Apocalypse of Empire. Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, Philadelphia, 2018.
- 13 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, Beirut, 1969, 6 vols., vol. 3, pp. 310-311.

giving way to subsequent indifference. Then the following verse was revealed: “God’s command (*amr*) comes; so seek not to hasten it.” (Quran 16:1) Then the Messenger of God declared: “My coming and the Hour are separated from one another as are my index and my middle finger.”<sup>14</sup>

Ibn Sa’d (d. 230/845) writes in his *Ṭabaqāt* that Muḥammad had been sent at the same time as the advent of the Hour in order to warn his people of the coming of a grave chastisement.<sup>15</sup> Casanova cites another prophetic hadith in the *Khiṭaṭ* of al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442): “My coming and that of the Hour are coincident; the Hour almost preceded me.”<sup>16</sup> The same al-Maqrīzī, quoting al-Kindī (d. 260/873-874), reports these words of Muḥammad addressing his people: “Compared to the peoples that have preceded you, the time that is left for you to live is like the white hair on the hide of the black bull (or the black hair on the hide of a white bull)”, meaning an extremely short time.<sup>17</sup>

Yet again, according to the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal, Muḥammad is said to have received his mission at the coming of the Hour.<sup>18</sup> The same scholar and his contemporary, the great traditionist Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) describe a prophetic tradition where Muḥammad declares: “Those who see me or hear my words will see al-Dajjāl (the Islamic Antichrist) during their lifetime.”<sup>19</sup> In

14 A. Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad*, Berlin, 1869<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1, p. 533 (let us stress the fact that this tradition shows once again, if there still was any need, how in the composition of the Quran the chronological order of the revelations has been disrupted). Tradition analysed at length by Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde*, pp. 155sq.; also Shoemaker, *The Death of A Prophet*, pp. 172-173. In the same chapter of his work (pp. 535-536), Sprenger mentions another prophetic tradition where Muḥammad, pointing at a young man, said: “before he becomes old the Hour will come”. For ancient sources for this tradition (Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaḡ fi l-aḥādith wa l-āthār*, ed. al-Afghānī-al-Nadwī, 15 vols., Bombay, 1979-1983, vol. 15, p. 168; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 3, pp. 192, 213, 228, 269, 283; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 5 vols., Beirut, 1995, vol. 4, pp. 1495-1496) see Bashear, “Muslim Apocalypses”, p. 89 and the analysis of Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet*, p. 174. On the disbelief of the opponents of Muḥammad and the eschatological replies of the Quran see M. Azaiez, “Les contrediscours eschatologiques dans le Coran et le traité de Sahnédin. Une réflexion sur les formes de la polémique coranique” in F. Déroche, C. Robin and M. Zinc (eds.), *Les origines du Coran, le Coran des origines*, Paris, 2015, pp. 111-127.

15 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, ed. E. Sachau, 9 vols., Leiden, 1904-1908, vol. 11, p. 65; Casanova, *op.cit.*, p. 3 sqq.; Shoemaker, *op.cit.*, p. 172.

16 I use the (French) translation of Casanova, “Description historique et topographique de l’Égypte”, 3rd part, *Mémoires de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire*, 3 (1906), p. 18; id., *Mohammed*, p. 18. For other, more ancient sources of this tradition as well as the one according to which “Muḥammad has been sent on the breath of the Hour” see Kister, “A Booth like the Booth of Moses”, p. 152; Bashear, “Muslim Apocalypses”, p. 78.

17 Casanova/al-Maqrīzī, “Description”, p. 20; id., *Mohammed*, p. 17.

18 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 2, pp. 50 and 90.

19 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḡ*, vol. 15, pp. 135 et 168; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 1, p. 195; for these sources and others see D. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, p. 4 and note 7.

their studies mentioned above, Kister, Bashear, Cook and Shoemaker, to cite only them, tell of other stories along those lines taken from the *Sīra*. As for Casanova, he examines a great number of texts and passages taken from the “biographies” of the Prophet or from more or less ancient historiographical works where Muḥammad is called “the prophet of the end times” (*nabī ākhir al-zamān*) or also “the prophet/messenger of the calamities of the end of the world” (*nabī/rasūl al-malḥama* or *nabī al-malāḥim*).<sup>20</sup>

I will not enter here the rather futile debate about the whether the Quran is more eschatological than apocalyptic (Andrew Rippin, David Cook, Fred Donner)<sup>21</sup> or, instead, fundamentally apocalyptic (Carlos Segovia).<sup>22</sup> Both dimensions are very much present, as we have just seen. Michel Cuypers considers, in my eyes quite correctly, that the last 35 surahs, with a few exceptions, are apocalyptic and he shows it quite convincingly.<sup>23</sup> What matters here for our purpose is that the surahs and the Quranic passages, the hadiths and the narrations that we have examined all most probably originate in the time of Muḥammad himself, of his immediate entourage, or very slightly later. Given that the coming of the Hour had finally not taken place and that the world has not yet ended, it would have been futile for later Muslim scholars or currents to invent these types of text and attribute them to Muḥammad, for would have lost all credibility and all prophetic legitimacy by it. That is the central argument of Casanova and more recently that of Shoemaker in support of their thesis that the announcement of the end times was in fact the main message of the Muḥammadan mission, one which subsequent Muslim authorities had every interest in concealing. I shall return to this.

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- 20 Casanova, *Mohammed*, footnote 3 on p. 18, pp. 206-213. Apart from the sources used by Casanova, see also al-Maqrīzī, *Imtāʾ al-asmāʾ bi mā li-rasūl allāh min al-abnāʾ wa l-amwāl wa l-ḥafāda wa l-matāʾ*, ed. M.ʿA.Ḥ. al-Namīsī, 15 vols., Beirut, 1420/1999, vol. 1, p. 5, vol. 2, p. 143-144 and 146; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāya fī gharīb al-ḥadīth*, ed. al-Zāwī-al-Ṭīnāhī, 5 vols., Cairo, 1963-1966, vol. 4, p. 240. On the *malḥama*, plural *malāḥim*, see D.B. MacDonald, “Malāḥim”, *EI2*, s.v.
- 21 A. Rippin, “The Commerce of Eschatology” in S. Wild (ed.), *The Qurʾān as Text*, Leiden, 1996, pp. 125-136; D. Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, p. 301; F. Donner, “Was Early Islam an Apocalyptic Movement?”, (*non vidī*) quoted by Cook, *ibid.*, note 79.
- 22 C. Segovia, “Thematic and Structural Affinities Between 1 Enoch and the Qurʾān: A Contribution to the Study of the Judaeo-Christian Apocalyptic Setting of the Early Islamic Faith” in C. Segovia and B. Lourié (eds.), *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where and to Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, Piscataway, 2012, pp. 231-267, *passim* and in particular p. 240 and footnote 50 (reference to the introduction of J.J. Collins to his collective work, *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, Missoula, 1979, pp. 1-20). See also J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, Cambridge, 1998<sup>2</sup>.
- 23 M. Cuypers, *Une apocalypse coranique: une lecture des trente-trois dernières sourates du Coran*, Pendé (France), 2014.

## 2 Remarks on the Religious Environment of Muḥammad

Another major historical element corroborating this thesis is that the period and the region of the world that saw the birth of Muḥammad and his message (the period from the first half of the 6th century to the first half of the 7th century, in the vast regions now known as the Near and Middle East), are strongly marked by the intense apocalyptic expectations present in all the religious traditions. The ceaseless bloody wars between the Byzantines and the Sassanians, and to a lesser degree, the violent conflicts and bloodshed from Ethiopia to Yemen, with their lot of massacres, destructions, population displacements, epidemics and diseases, the defeated of yesterday becoming the victors of tomorrow, all created a world full of uncertainty and anxiety. Messianic uprisings were frequent, especially among the Jews, who sought to liberate Jerusalem from Byzantine domination and to rebuild the Temple; in 530, in Palestine, under the leadership of Julian, who proclaimed himself Messiah; in 602 at Antioch where the Christian patriarch and thousands of the faithful were killed; Heraclius under whom the Jewish uprisings ended in the occupation of Palestine by the Persians between 614 and 628.<sup>24</sup> Apocalyptic Jewish writings such as the “Apocalypse of Zorobabel” or “The Secrets of Rabbi Shimʿôn ben Yohai” had a great deal of religious influence among certain Jews who impatiently expected the deliverance of Jerusalem and who, after the coming of Muḥammad, would have considered the latter as the providential instrument of that liberation.<sup>25</sup> Apocalyptic beliefs were also present among Zoroastrian Sassanian circles of that time, as appears in texts (whose precise dating is, however, problematic) such as the *Zand-ī Wahman Yasn*, the *Jāmāsp*

24 See for example A. Couret, *La prise de Jérusalem par les Perses en 614. Trois documents nouveaux*, Orléans, 1896, introduction; J.-G. Février, *La religion des palmyréniens*, Paris, 1931, pp. 219sq. (who quotes ancient authors such as Théophanes, Zonaras, Cedrenus ...); F.-M. Abel, *Histoire de la Palestine depuis la conquête d’Alexandre jusqu’à l’invasion arabe*, Paris, 1952, pp. 386sq.; G. Dagron, “L’Église et la chrétienté byzantines” in J.-M. Mayeur, Ch. Pietri, A. Vauchez et M. Venard (eds.), *Histoire du christianisme*, Paris, vol. 4, 1993, pp. 708sq.; A.-L. De Prémare, *Les fondations de l’islam. Entre écriture et histoire*, Paris, 2002, pp. 160 sqq.

25 Generally speaking, the secondary literature on these types of writings, be it in the Judaism or the Christianity of the period is immense. On the first source see for example I. Lévi, “L’Apocalypse de Zorobabel”, *Revue des Études Juives* 68 (1914), 129-160; 69 (1919), pp. 108-121; 70 (1920), pp. 57-65; English translation and analysis by M. Himmelfarb, “Sefer Zerubbabel” in D. Stern and M. Jay Mirski (eds.), *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature*, Philadelphia, 1990, pp. 67-90. On the second source see for example B. Lewis, “An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History”, *BSOAS* 13 (1950), pp. 308-338 (in particular pp. 321-330); P. Crone, M. Cook, *Hagarism*, pp. 4sq.; J.C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalypse Reader*, Leiden, 2006, pp. 76-89; Shoemaker, *Death of A Prophet*, pp. 27-33.

*Nāmag* or the history of the Armenian Sebēos.<sup>26</sup> But the most numerous sources of that kind are from Christian authors, especially in Syriac, some of them dating from a few years after the Arab conquests and provoked by them: the *Testament of the Twelve Apostles*, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodus*, the *Apocalypse of Bahīrā*, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Esdras*, the *Sermon on the End Times* of Pseudo-Ephrem, the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Athanasius*, etc.<sup>27</sup> The emergence of a new prophet among the Arabs, the spectacular conquests of the latter within the two greatest empires of the region and the civil wars opposing the followers of Muḥammad to each other, form a significant part of the apocalyptic doctrines appearing and written down after the coming of the latter.<sup>28</sup>

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- 26 See for example Carlo G. Cereti's introduction to his edition and translation of the *Zand-ī Wahman Yasn. A Zoroastrian Apocalypse*, Rome, 1995; T.W. Greenwood, "Sassanian Echoes and Apocalyptic Expectations: A Re-evaluation of the Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos", *Le Muséon* 115 (2003), pp. 323-397; F. Grenet, "I) Le rayonnement de l'eschatologie et de l'apocalyptique iraniennes; II) Le *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*", *École Pratique des Hautes Etudes, section des Sciences Religieuses, Annuaire*, vol. 115, 2006-2007, pp. 103-109 et vol. 116, 2007-2008, pp. 109-112; D. Agostini, "La conquête arabe de l'Iran et la chute du zoroastrisme: processus eschatologique ou réalité historique? Une réponse d'après les sources pehlevies" in E. Aubin-Boltanski et C. Gauthier (eds.), *Penser la fin du monde*, Paris, 2014, pp. 147-165. See also F. Cumont, "La fin du monde selon les mages occidentaux", *RHR* 103 (1931), pp. 80-99.
- 27 See for example S.P. Brock, "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam" in G.H.A. Juynboll (ed.), *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, Carbondale-Edwardsville, 1982, pp. 9-21 and 199-203; P.J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, Berkely, 1985; F.J. Martinez, "Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodus and Pseudo-Athanasius", unpublished doctoral thesis, The Catholic University of America, 1985; A. Palmer, S. Brock and R.G. Hoyland (eds.), *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, Liverpool, 1993; P. Ubierna, "Recherches sur l'apocalyptique syrienne et byzantine au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle: la place de l'Empire romain dans une histoire du salut", *Bulletin du Centre d'Études Médiévales d'Auxerre (BUCEMA)*, hors série n° 2 (2008); B. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, Leiden, 2009; many articles (M. Debié, L. Greisiger, H. Suermann, etc.), in D. Thomas, B. Roggema et alii (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, volume I (600-900)*, Leiden-Boston, 2009. Also the volume edited by P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais, *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VII<sup>e</sup>-VIII<sup>e</sup> siècles. Actes du colloque international Lyon-Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen et Paris – Institut du Monde Arabe, 11-15 septembre 1990*, Damascus, 1992; as well E. van Donzel and A.B. Schmidt, *Gog and Magog in Early Syriac and Islamic Sources: Sallām's Quest for Alexander's Wall*, Leiden-Boston, 2009; S. Shoemaker, "The Reign of God Has Come", pp. 541 sqq.
- 28 On these questions generally speaking see for example P. Crone, M. Cook, *Hagarism, passim*; H. Suermann, "Muḥammad in Christian and Jewish Apocalyptic Expectations", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 5 (1994), pp. 12-27; R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on*

The apocalyptic nature of the Quran is thus, in a sense, part a rich and widespread literature typical of the period. And for good reasons. Precisely at this period Arabia was heavily influenced by monotheistic biblical culture. This must have been the case in region of Hijaz, in spite of an almost total lack of material proof, an absence doubtless caused by the systematic destruction of all pre-Islamic remains in the region by the Saudi authorities. Contrary to what later Muslim apologists maintained, pre-Islamic Arabia was not an “era of ignorance” (*al-jāhiliyya*) and idolatry, nor was Islam at the origin of Arab monotheism. In all probability, idolatry had no longer existed there for many centuries, except among a few non-sedentary Bedouins.<sup>29</sup> And the message of Muḥammad was directed to the towns, the centres of a non-Bedouin tribal culture. Apart from the existence of numerous epigraphical, archaeological and historical proofs, especially outside the Hijāz, which the numerous studies by scholars like Frederic Imbert, Christian Robin or Jan Retsö have documented, the most evident textual confirmations are to be found in the Quran itself: the overwhelming presence there of figures from the Old and New Testaments, the allusive references to biblical narratives which would have been completely unintelligible had the audience not known them well, the onomastics of the biblical characters, derived from those of Oriental Christianities of Syro-Palestinian culture, the Hebrew, Aramean and Syriac roots of technical terms as fundamental as *Qur'ān*, *sūra*, *āya*, *zakāt* and *ṣalāt* or *ḥajj* and *ʿumra*, the role of Ethiopian Christianity, and so on.... The phenomenon has been extensively studied by many specialists of various disciplines in hundreds of works, of which the synthesis is yet to be undertaken.<sup>30</sup>

And Muḥammad? What was the religious setting of his birth and his education? Which religious traditions were at the source of his spirituality? What is the origin of the many characters and biblical or parabiblical texts of the Quran, whose occurrences can be counted by the hundreds? For

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*Early Islam*, Princeton, 1997, especially pp. 275-335; Shoemaker, *Death of A Prophet*, ch. 1, pp. 18-72; many articles in E. Aubin-Boltanski et C. Gauthier (eds.), *Penser la fin du monde*.

29 See G. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History*, Cambridge, 1999; P. Crone, “How Did the Quranic Pagans Make a Living?”, *BSOAS* 68 (2005), pp. 387-399; C.J. Robin, “L’Arabie préislamique” in M.A. Amir-Moezzi & G. Dye (eds.), *Le Coran des historiens*, Paris, 2019, vol. 1, pp. 51-154; id., “Allāh avant Muḥammad”, *JSAI* 49 (2020), pp. 1-145.

30 See M. Kropp (ed.), *Results of Contemporary Research on the Qur'ān. The Question of a Historico-critical Approach*, Beirut-Würzburg, 2007; G.S. Reynolds, *The Quran and Its Biblical Subtext*, London, 2010; id. (ed.), *The Quran in Its Historical Context*, London, vol. 1, 2008 and vol. 2, 2011; G. Dye et F. Nobilio (eds.), *Figures bibliques en islam*, Brussels-Fernelmont, 2011; F. Déroche, C.J. Robin & M. Zink (eds.), *Les origines du Coran, le Coran des origines*, Paris, 2015.

almost a century and a half many questions have been raised, many theories and theses been advanced around these subjects, there again in innumerable works, without any definite conclusions being arrived at. One or many forms of Judaism?<sup>31</sup> Different Christian currents such as non-Nicean and non-Chalcedonean, that is to say, above all non-trinitarian (Nestorianism? Arianism? Monarchianism? Montanism?)<sup>32</sup> Heterodox tendencies within Manicheism?<sup>33</sup> One could also imagine a syncretism between several of these

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- 31 It is obviously impossible to list, in this footnote and those which follow it, the complete bibliography of these issues, which is enormous. Moreover, they are intimately related to each other. We will therefore settle for some important titles (see also footnotes 24 and sqq.). On the influence of Judaism see for example D.S. Margoliouth, *The Relations Between Arabs and Israelites Prior to the Rise of Islam*, London, 1924; Sh.D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts Through the Ages*, New York, 1955; A.I. Katsch, *Judaism and the Koran: Biblical and Talmudic Backgrounds of the Koran and Its Commentaries*, New York, 1962; Crone-Cook, *Hagarism, passim*; M. Lecker, *Jews and Arabs in Pre- and Early Islamic Arabia*, Aldershot, 1998; H. Busse, *Islam, Judaism and Christianity: Theological and Historical Affiliations*, Princeton, 1998; U. Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'an: the Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-image*, Princeton, 1999; H. Bar-Zeev, *Une lecture juive du Coran: Essai*, Paris, 2005; Many articles in A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai & M. Marx (eds.), *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, Leiden, 2010; H. Mazuz, *The Religious and Spiritual Life of the Jews of Medina*, Leiden, 2014; see also the very recent J. Costa, "Olam ha-zel/olam ha-ba, al-dunyā/al-ākhirā: étude comparée de deux couples de termes dans la littérature talmudique et le Coran", *Arabica* 62.2-3 (2015), pp. 234-259.
- 32 See for example T. Andrae, *Les origines de l'Islam et le Christianisme*; R. Bell, *The Origin of Islam and Its Christian Environment*, London, 1926; K. Ahrens, "Christliches im Quran", *ZDMG* 48 (1930), pp. 15-68 et 148-190; D. Thomas and B. Roggema (eds.), *Christian Muslim Relations*; many article by S.H. Griffith some of which are now published in *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Princeton 2008; many articles by C. Gilliot of which, among the most recent: "Mohammed's Exegetical Activity in the Meccan Arabic Lectionary" in C. Segovia and B. Lourié (eds.), *The Coming of the Comforter*, pp. 371-398; many works by G. Gobillot of which, among the most recent: "Des textes pseudo-clémentins à la mystique juive des premiers siècles et du Sinai à Ma'rib" in C. Segovia and B. Lourié (eds.), *Op.cit.*, pp. 3-89; many articles by J. Van Reeth, of which, among the most recent: "Les prophéties oraculaires dans le Coran et leurs antécédents: Montan et Mani" in D. De Smet et M.A. Amir-Moezzi (eds.), *Controverses sur les Ecritures canoniques de l'islam*, pp. 77-145; same remark regarding multiple collective works and an article by G. Dye, of which, among the most recent: "Lieux saints communs, partagés ou confisqués: aux sources de quelques péripécies coraniques (Q 19: 16-33)" in I. Dépret and G. Dye (eds.), *Partage du sacré: transferts, dévotions mixtes, rivalités inter-confessionnelles*, Bruxelles, 2012, pp. 55-121; many contributions in J.C. Reeves (ed.), *Bible and Qur'an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, Atlanta, 2003; M.H. Zellentin, *The Qur'an's Legal Culture: the Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*, Tübingen, 2013.
- 33 See for example M. Gil, "The Creed of Abū 'Āmir", *IOS* 12 (1992), pp. 9-57; R. Simon, "Mānī and Muḥammad", *JSAI* 21 (1997), pp. 118-141; M. Sfar, *Le Coran, la Bible et l'Orient ancien*, Paris, 1998, *passim* and especially chapters 9 et 11; J. Van Reeth, "La zandaqa et le prophète

religious traditions. Of course, there is no question of going into a detailed discussion of such a complex subject, one that would lead us astray from our purpose. All the same, the most probable hypothesis seems to be the one formulated by Alfred-Louis de Prémare as “a more or less defined affiliation (of Muḥammad) to some sort of Judeo-Christian sect.... The hypothesis being that at the beginning of the 7th century there existed, if not Arab translations of entire books of the Bible, at least anthologies in Arabic of quotes from the Bible or from other related Jewish or Christian apocalyptic texts.”<sup>34</sup> It is true that the term “Judeo-Christian” is ambiguous if not vague. Historically speaking, non-trinitarian Judeo-Christian sects would have disappeared as such around the 4th and 5th centuries of the Common Era.<sup>35</sup> However, many of their doctrines seem to have survived in a “nebula”, often going by the names of “Ebionites” or Nazareans/Nazoreans (the *naṣārā* of the Quran?) on the margins of the Byzantine empire in general and especially among Arabic speaking peoples, from Syria to Egypt and including Arabia and Yemen. A great many researchers, since the second half of the 19th century, have studied the question in fine detail.<sup>36</sup> Simon C. Mimouni even goes to the point of declaring:

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de l'islam”, *Acta Orientalia Belgica* xx (2007), “Incroissance et dissidences religieuses. Jacques Ryckmans in memoriam”, pp. 65-79. As has been said before, often the studies on the Jewish, Christian and Manichean influences are intertwined and therefore a great number of those that have been mentioned here and in the preceding footnotes deal with all those religious traditions or what connects them between each other.

34 A.-L. de Prémare, *Les fondations de l'islam*, pp. 267-269.

35 B. Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision: History and Archaeology of the Judaeo-Christians*, transl. E. Hoade, Jérusalem, 1971, pp. 143 sqq.; R.A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century*, Jerusalem-Leiden, 1988, *passim*; J.E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins*, Oxford, 1993, pp. 5-47.

36 By way of examples: Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad*, vol. 1, pp. 21-45; H.-J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentum*, Tübingen, 1949, pp. 334 sqq.; H. Corbin, “Epiphanie divine et naissance spirituelle dans la gnose ismaélienne”, *Eranos Jahrbuch* xxiii (1954-1955), reprint in id., *Temps cyclique et gnose ismaélienne*, Paris, 1982, partie 2; id., “De la gnose antique à la gnose ismaélienne”, talk given at the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei in 1956, included *Temps cyclique et gnose ismaélienne*, part 3; M.P. Roncaglia, “Éléments Ebionites et Elkasaites dans le Coran”, *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 21 (1971), pp. 101-125; J. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford, 1977; Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*; J.M. Magnin, *Notes sur l'ébionisme*, Jérusalem, 1979; J.S. Trimmingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, London-New York, 1979, especially pp. 49, 68, 82 sqq., 153, 157, 166, 186; G. Rizzardi, *Il problema della cristologia coranica. Storia dell'ermeneutica cristiana*, Milan, 1980, pp. 115sqq.; S. Pines, “Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity”, *JSAI* 4 (1984), pp. 135-152; J. Van Reeth, “Le prophète musulman en tant que Naṣīr allāh et ses antécédents: le ‘Nazōraios’ évangélique et le Livre des Jubilés”, *Orientalia*

“Ebionite and Elkasaite groups (Aramaic speaking) persisted long after the birth of Islam – at least until the 8th century. One of them, the Ebionites, was probably absorbed into the new religion and influenced it to such a point that we should perhaps wonder if it has not to some extent participated in its birth.”<sup>37</sup> The transmission, including a textual one, was probably made mainly through various East-Syrian and Mesopotamian dyophysicist Christian and/or West-Syrian, Egyptian and Ethiopian miaphysicist currents.<sup>38</sup> I have spoken of the “nebula” because, as Daniel Boyarin has pertinently underlined, the term “Judeo-Christian” can designate a non-sectarian group of spiritual movements, very often of the messianic type, sharing a certain number of dogmas and practices with Judaism and Christianity.<sup>39</sup> In the case of the environment of the birth of Muḥammad and of the Quran, to the aforementioned dogmas and practices, the doctrines of certain Jewish Christians sects have been added, in

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*Lovaniensia Periodica* 23 (1992), pp. 251-274; Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*; S.C. Mimouni, “Les Nazoréens. Recherche étymologique et historique”, *Revue Biblique* 105 (1998), pp. 232-244; F. de Blois, “*Naṣrānī* (Ναζωραῖός) and *Hanīf* (ἑθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and Islam”, *BSOAS* 65 (2002), pp. 1-30; (see however: S. Griffith, “*Al-Naṣārā* in the Qur’ān: a Hermeneutical Reflection”, in G.S. Reynolds (dir.), *The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context*, vol. 2: *New Perspectives on the Qur’ān*, 2011, London, pp. 301-322); Ch. & F. Jullien, “Aux frontières de l’iranité: ‘*Naṣrāyē*’ et ‘*Krystyonē*’ des inscriptions du *Mobad* Kirdir: enquête littéraire et historique”, *Numen* 49 (2002), pp. 282-335; Y.D. Nevo and J. Koren, *Crossroads to Islam: the Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State*, Amherst, 2003; E.-M. Gallez, *Le messie et son prophète*; J. Gnlika, *Die Nazarener und der Koran: Eine Spurensuche*, Freiburg, 2007; C. Segovia, “Thematic and Structural Affinities Between 1 Enoch and the Qur’ān”; P. Crone, “Jewish Christianity and the Qur’ān (Part One)”, *JNES* 74.2 (2015), pp. 225-253; for a bibliographical overview see now G.G. Stroumsa, “Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins,” in B. Sadeghi, A.Q. Ahmed, A. Silverstein and R.G. Hoyland (eds.), *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honour of Patricia Crone*, Leiden, 2015, pp. 72-96.

- 37 S.-C. Mimouni, *Le judéo-christianisme ancien. Essais historiques*, Paris, 1998, p. 22. See now H.M. Zellentin, *The Qur’ān’s Legal Culture. The Didascalia Apostolorum as A Point of Departure*, Tübingen, 2013; M. Shaddel, “Quranic *Ummī*: Genealogy, Ethnicity and the Foundation of A New Community”, *JSAI* 43 (2016), pp. 1-60, in particular pp. 21-31; D. Bernard, *Les disciples juifs de Jésus du 1er siècle à Mahomet. Recherches sur le mouvement ébionite*, Paris, 2017.
- 38 R. Duval, *La littérature syriaque*, Paris, 1907 (3rd ed.), pp. 79-86; S. Pines, “The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source”, *PIASH* 2.13 (1966), pp. 1-73; many articles in J.C. van der Kam and W. Adler (eds.), *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis, 1996; A.-L. de Prémare, *Les fondations de l’islam*, pp. 324 sqq.; id., *Aux origines du Coran. Questions d’hier, approches d’aujourd’hui*, Paris, 2004, *passim*.
- 39 D. Boyarin, (ed.), *Judaeo-Christianity Redivivus*, special issue of *The Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9.4 (2001): 417-509; id., *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia, 2004.

particular that of their refusal to accept that Jesus is the Son of God.<sup>40</sup> Be that as it may, many of the doctrines and religious practices which Christian theologians and heresiographers such as Irenaeus in his *Contra Haereses*, Origen in his *Contra Celsum*, Epiphanius in his *Panarion* or even Augustine, for example, in his *Letter on Heresies to Quodvultdeus*, attribute to the Ebionites and Nazareans (those who call themselves Christians yet wish to live according to Jewish law), form an essential part of the message of Muḥammad: a strict monotheism which refuses the divinity of Jesus but yet considers him to be the Christ and the Messiah (both synonymous words are expressed as *masīḥ* in Arabic, literally “anointed”; I shall come back to it), belief in the imminence of the end of the world and the coming of Judgement Day, regular prayer, fasting, alms and the practice of charity, the crucial role of ritual purity, the practice of circumcision and the prohibition of the consumption of pork and wine.<sup>41</sup> That is why Crone and Cook, referring to the Chronicles attributed to the Armenian priest Sebêos, a contemporary of Muḥammad, consider that, apart from wine, the Prophet forbids nothing that is not forbidden in the Bible.<sup>42</sup> So what of the coming of the Messiah?

### 3 The Coming of the Saviour

We are dealing here with a type of syllogism: Muḥammad announces the end of the world; he belongs to a biblical culture; he therefore has to announce the coming of the eschatological Saviour. Indeed, if Muḥammad and his message were derived from a monotheism of “Judeo-Christian sensibility” (the expression is Guillaume Dye’s<sup>43</sup>) and they were intended for an audience that

40 Segovia, “Thematic and Structural Affinities”, pp. 232-233.

41 E.-M. Gallez shows in a convincing way that this abstention from wine is intimately linked to the Messianic expectation. (*Le messie et son prophète*, vol. 1, pp. 262sqq.).

42 P. Crone, M. Cook, *Hagarism*, pp. 6-7 et p. 157, footnote 36. This has also led Fred Donner (who nevertheless rejects the “Judeo-Christian” hypothesis) and more recently Stephen Shoemaker to consider that the very first followers of Muḥammad called “the Believers” (*mu’minūn*) were composed of Jewish and Christian monotheists and of “Muslims”, *muslim*, that is, new converts “submitting” to the movement of Muḥammad. Things will change with the policy of Arabization of Islam by the Umayyads; see F. Donner, “From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community”, *al-Abḥāth* 50-51 (2002), pp. 9-53; id., *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge, Mass., 2010; S. Shoemaker, *The Death of A Prophet, passim* and particularly chapter 4 (“From Believers to Muslims, from Jerusalem to the Hijāz: Confessional Identity and Sacred Geography in Early Islam”) and the conclusion.

43 G. Dye, “Jewish Christianity, the Qur’an, and Early Islam: some methodological caveats”, in F. del Rio Sanchez (ed.), *Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam*, Turnhout, 2018, pp. 11-29.

belonged to the same sort of environment, and if they announced the imminent end of the world – all this being largely attested in the Quran and the Hadith, as we have just seen – then the Prophet could not have not spoken of that central figure of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic and messianic beliefs, the Messiah (*al-masīḥ* from the Hebrew *mashiah* “anointed”). Why the negative formulation of the last sentence? For, oddly enough, and contrary to the Hadith, to which I will return, the Quran says nothing about any announcement that Muḥammad would have made of the imminent coming of the Messiah.<sup>44</sup> However, the non-Islamic works that are contemporary with the Arab prophet do mention it. For example, in the *Doctrina Jacobi*, also known as *Didascaly of Jacob*, a Christian work written in Greek probably shortly before 640, a certain Abraham, a Jew of Caesarea, addresses his brother Justus as follows “... a prophet has appeared with the Saracens (i.e. the Arabs), proclaiming the coming of the awaited Christ, the Messiah. Once in Sykamine, I went to an old man versed in the Scriptures and asked him: ‘What can you tell me concerning the prophet who appeared among the Saracens? He replied sighing: ‘He is a false one! Prophets do not come with a sabre and a war chariot ...’<sup>45</sup>

44 According to Paul Casanova (*Mohammed et la fin du monde*, chap. VI, pp. 54-67 and chapter VII, pp. 68-69), it is impossible that the Quran, an apocalyptic book in its most ancient layers and an extension of the holy books of the Judeo-Christian tradition, would have said nothing about the Messiah as the saviour of end times. The astounding absence of any such mentions in the Quran would have been due to the later deletion of numerous passages by the caliphal authorities, given that the messianic dimension of the Quran would have given it a much too Shi‘i flavour. David Cook thinks that the problem goes even beyond Shi‘ism and concerns all of the early followers of Muhammad. Once the empire was constituted and the Islamic state was established, the caliphal authorities did everything possible to erase the Messianic origins of their religion and removed from the Quran anything that reflected those origins in too obvious a fashion, including the mention of the imminent coming of the Messiah (*Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, pp. 302 sqq.) These assertions reflect the ancient Shi‘i doctrine of *tahrīf*, that is the suppression of large passages of the Quran by the opponents of the Alids (see E. Kohlberg and M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and falsification. The Kitāb al-qirā‘āt of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī*, Leiden, 2009, introduction; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant. Sources scripturaires de l’islam entre histoire et ferveur*, Paris, 2011, *passim* and especially chapter 2). Strangely enough, the figure of the Messiah is remarkable for its absence in the studies of D. Donner and of S. Shoemaker.

45 *Doctrina Jacobi* in *Patrologia Orientalis*, 1903, vol. 8, pp. 715 sqq., v.16; also ed. by G. Dagron et V. Déroche, *Doctrina Jacobi nuper Baptizati* in “Juifs et Chrétiens dans l’Orient du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle”, *Travaux et mémoires* 2 (1991), pp. 47-219 (citation, p. 209); see also P. Crone, M. Cook, *Hagarism*, pp. 4-6 (for whom ‘Umar is that Messiah); R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 55 sqq. et 400-409; Gallez, *Le Messie et son prophète*, vol. 2, pp. 109sqq. (citation, p. 110); S. Shoemaker, *The Death of A Prophet*, pp. 20 sqq. (citation, p. 22). On the dating problems of this source see also S.W. Anthony, “Muhammad, the Keys to Paradise

Similarly, in the Jewish work already mentioned, “The Secrets of Rabbi Shim‘ôn ben Yohai”, reference is made to an ‘Apocalypse’ of the beginning of the seventh century where it is said that, for certain Jews, Muḥammad was considered as a liberator of Jerusalem and an announcer of the Messiah.<sup>46</sup> Towards the end of the 7th century, the Syriac chronicler Jean Bar Penkaye wrote in the *Rīshmellē*: “... (the Omayyad) had received, as I told you, from (Muḥammad) who had been their *mhadyōnō*, an order favouring the Christian people and the order of monks ...”<sup>47</sup> The term *mhadyōnō* has given the specialists of Syriac a few worries. Absent from the Costaz Dictionary, it is rendered as “guided” in Payne-Smith’s. Alphonse Mingana has translated it as “leader” but the translation of Sebastian Brock as “guide”, even “spiritual guide”, seems more pertinent. What matters for

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and the *Doctrina Iacobi*: A Late Antique Puzzle”, *Der Islam* 91.2 (2014), pp. 243-265. In his *Chronography* of the year 622, Theophanes also highlights the fact that certain Jews considered Muḥammad to be one of their prophets; see F. Nau, “Un colloque du Patriarche Jean avec l’Emir des Agaréens et faits divers des années 712 à 716”, *Journal Asiatique* 11.5 (1915), pp. 225-279, quote, p. 258. Fred Donner does not agree with the interpretation of the text which attributes the expectation of the Messiah to all followers of Muḥammad. According to him only a few Jews among them professed that belief (F. Donner, “La question du messianisme dans l’Islam primitif”, in M. Garcia-Arenal (ed), *Mahdisme et millénarisme en Islam*, n° spécial *REMMM* 91-94 (2000), pp. 17-27). It is true that Donner considers the first community of the followers of Muḥammad to have been interconfessional (see his work *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge, Mass., 2010; see however the report by J. Tannous on *Expositions* 5.2 (2011), pp. 126-141) but, given the massive presence of all sorts of Jewish, Christian and Judeo-Christian material in the Quran and in the ancient Hadith, the distinction between people belonging to different religions among the followers of the Prophet seems more arduous. And what to make of the exclusivist passages of the Quran that are very far from any kind of ecumenism? Do they appear after Muḥammad?

- 46 Text edited by A. Jellinek in *Bet ha-midrash: Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und vermischter Abhandlungen aus der ältern jüdischen Literatur*, 6 vols., Leipzig, 1853-1877, vol. 3, pp. 78-82, citation, p. 78. English translation of the entire text by J.C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic*, pp. 76-89, quote, p. 78. See also Lewis, “An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History”, pp. 323-324; Crone-Cook, *Hagarism*, pp. 4-5; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, pp. 310-311; Gallez, *Le Messie et son prophète*, vol. 2, pp. 112 sqq.; Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, pp. 27-33 et 66.
- 47 Jean Bar Penkaye, *Rīsh mellē*, ed. and French trans. of Book xv by A. Mingana, in *Sources syriaques*, vol. 1, t. 11, Leipzig, 1907-1908, “Bar Penkayé”, pp. 143-172 (Syriac text), pp. 172-204 (translation), quote, respectively pp. 146 et 175. English translation of chapters xiv et xv by S. Brock, “North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book XV of John Bar Penkaye’s *Rīš Melle*”, in *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature, Theology*, Aldershot, Variorum, 1992, pp. 51-75, quote, p. 71. See also B. Flusin, “L’esplanade du Temple à l’arrivée des Arabes, d’après deux récits byzantins”, in J. Raby and J. Johns (eds.), *Bayt Al-Maqdis: Abd al-Malik’s Jerusalem*, Oxford, 1992, pp. 215sq. (translation and analysis of a narrative dating from the conquest of Jerusalem in 638 and conserved in Georgian). I will return to the pro-Christian policy of the first Umayyads, in particular Mu‘āwiya.

our present purpose is Brock's remark that the term "*mhadyōnō*" (from the verb *hdī* "to steer, to guide", giving the noun *hadōyō/hadīyō* "leader, guide") does not have an obvious precedent, but that the term *hadōyō*, which is closely linked to it, is a Christological title from the Syriac literature of the first times.<sup>48</sup> By linking this meaning with the texts of the *Doctrina Jacobi* and the "Secrets of Rabbi Shim'ōn ben Yohai", one can reasonably postulate that the title could have meant "he who announces the coming of Christ".

Indeed, much textual evidence shows that, for the first followers of Muḥammad and probably for himself, the Messiah of the end times was none other than Jesus Christ.<sup>49</sup> In the first place, the Quran states this very clearly on many occasions (verses 3:45; 4:157, 171 and 172; 5:17, 72 and 75; 9:30-31). Of those occasions, four use the expression "the Messiah Jesus" (*al-masīḥ 'Īsā*). The passage at 43:57-61, although admittedly obscure, even seems to mean that Jesus is a sign of the coming of the 'Hour' that Muḥammad's people had rejected: "And when the son of Mary is cited as an example, behold, thy people turn away from it (...) He is a sign of the Hour; doubt not concerning it, and follow me. This is a straight way."<sup>50</sup> In his letter to John the Stylite, James of Edessa (d. 708) writes: "the *Mahgraye* (most probably an Aramaic transliteration of *muhājirūn*, a name, along with the *mu'minūn*, that designated the first followers of Muḥammad) ... all confess firmly that Jesus is the true Messiah that was supposed to come and that had been predicted by the prophets; on this point there is no dispute with us (Christians)."<sup>51</sup> Many studies on followers of the

48 S. Brock, "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam", p. 14; quoted by A. Genet, "Le premier siècle de l'islam vu par les chroniqueurs syriaques", M.A. Thesis of the EPHE, June 2015, pp. 88-89 and also pp. 96-97.

49 On this question see the monographs by M. Hayek, *Christ de l'Islam*, Paris, 1959; G. Parrinder, *Jesus in the Quran*, London, 1965; G.C. Anawati, "Īsā", *E12*, vol. 4, pp. 82-87. For other studies about Jesus in Islam see the introduction by G. Dye and F. Nobilio to *Figures bibliques en islam*, note 52, *in fine*, p. 28 and in the same volume J. van Reeth, "La typologie du prophète selon le Coran: le cas de Jésus", pp. 81-105.

50 "He is a sign of the Hour": *innah<sup>u</sup> la-'alam<sup>un</sup> li-l-sā'a* (according to the translation of Blachère), canonical variation (reading known as Warsh 'an Nāfi') that seems preferable to me to that of the Vulgata (reading known as Hafṣ'an 'Āṣim): *innah<sup>u</sup> la-'ilm<sup>un</sup> li-l-sā'a* ("He is knowledge of the Hour", according to the translation of Berque); on this question see Parrinder, *Jesus in the Quran*, p. 34; Anawati, "Īsā", p. 84.

51 Quoted by F. Nau, "Lettre de Jacques d'Edesse sur la généalogie de la sainte Vierge", *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 4 (1901), pp. 512-531, citation, pp. 518-519 (Syriac text), p. 524 (French translation). The text of James of Edessa dates from the last third of the 7th century; does it reflect the data of the first third? Moreover, one should remember that, as seen above, the Biblism of the Quran is of the "Judeo-Christian" type: the simultaneous acceptance of a certain number of Jewish beliefs and practices and of Jesus as the Christ and Messiah, Word and Spirit of God.

Prophet during the early years of Islam were concerned with the identification of the Messiah, as the saviour of the end times, with Jesus Christ.<sup>52</sup>

Thus is most likely the reason why Muḥammad would not have presented himself as the Messiah.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, he would have been considered, at least by some of his followers, as the Paraclete. The most renowned textual confirmation is the famous passage of Ibn Ishāq/Ibn Hishām in *al-Sīrat al-nabawīyya*, which echoes verses 14:16 and 15:23-26 of the Gospel of John: "... 'And when the *munḥamannā* shall come, the one God shall send us on behalf of the Lord, as well as the Spirit of holiness (*rūḥ al-quds*), He who issues from his Lord's house. He shall be a witness for me, as well as you because you are with me since the ancient times. I tell you so that you may not doubt'. The *munḥamannā* in Syriac is *muḥammad* (in Arabic) and the Paraclete in Greek (*al-baraqliṭus*) (*al-munḥamannā bi l-siryāniyya muḥammad wa huwa bi l-rūmiyya al-baraqliṭus*)."<sup>54</sup> The Syriac term *menahḥemānā* (from the Hebrew root *nḥm*, meaning "consoler, advocate, intercessor"), indeed translates as *paraklētos* in Greek. The Arabic text obviously plays on the vague assonance

52 Apart from the works mentioned in footnote 48, one will find very useful indications in H. Michaud, *Jésus selon le Coran*, Neuchatel, 1960; W. Madelung, "Kā'im Āl Muhammad", *EI2*, vol. 4, pp. 456-457; id., "al-Mahdī", *ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 1230-1238; id., "Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr and the Mahdī", *JNES* 40 (1981), pp. 291-305; id., "The Sufyānī between Tradition and History", *SI* 63 (1984), pp. 1-48; G.S. Reynolds, "Jesus, the *Qā'im* and the End of the World", *RSO* 75 (2001), pp. 55-86. See also G. van Vloten, *Recherches sur la domination arabe, le chiitisme et les croyances messianiques sous le khalifat des Omayyades*, Amsterdam, 1894, *passim*; E. Moeller, *Beiträge zur Mahdilehre des Islams*, Heidelberg, 1901, *passim*; S.M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ: An Essay on the Life, Character and Teachings of Jesus Christ According to the Koran and Orthodox Tradition*, Edinburgh-New York, 1912; J.O. Blichfeldt, *Early Mahdism: Politics and Religion in the Formative Period of Islam*, Leiden, 1985, index *s.n.* Jesus.

53 The hypotheses of Carlos Segovia on Muḥammad as the new Messiah, in the postface of his recent work on the Quranic Noah, seem to my eyes to be speculative, given the present state of our knowledge (C. Segovia, *The Quranic Noah and the Making of the Islamic Prophet*, Berlin-Boston, 2015, "Afterword", pp. 114-117). They are based mostly on the sources used by Uri Rubin in his article on the mystical figure of Muḥammad (Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muhammad", *IOS* 5 (1975), pp. 62-119). It is true that certain aspects of that figure recall the descriptions of the Messiah given in 1 Hénoch, 48:2 sqq. and 62:7. But that possible remote root seems to me to be a less pertinent origin for the works examined by Rubin, mainly dating from the 4th et 5th Hijri centuries, than the Shi'i sources of the 2nd and 3rd centuries on the figures of the Prophet and mostly 'Alī (I shall come back to it).

54 Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-nabawīyya*, ed. Saqqā, Abyārī, Shalabī, Cairo, 2nd ed., 1955, vol. 1, pp. 232-233; also ed., F. Wüstenfeld, *Das Leben Moḥammeds nach Muhammad b. Ishāq*, 2 vols., Göttingen, 1858-1860, vol. 1, p. 149; A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad. A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, Oxford, 1955, p. 104.

between *munḥamannā* and *muḥammad* in order to prove the announcement of the Arab prophet by the Christian evangelist. However, the first term means, as we have just seen, “consoler” and the second one “the most praised”. The semantic equivalence that the *Sīra* establishes between both terms could be derived from a confusion between the Greek words *paraklētos* (“advocate”, “defender”, “intercessor”) and *pēriklutos* (“someone renowned, praised”), due to their transcription into a Semitic language without vowel annotations (*brqlts*). One must however note that the evangelist’s term is rendered by *prqlt’/paraqlitā* in the Syriac version of the New Testament, the Peshittā.<sup>55</sup> The name *Aḥmad* of the Quran verse 61:6 (another name of Muḥammad according to the tradition also meaning “the most praised”) seems to have the same purpose, as indeed are traditions such as: “God revealed himself to Jacob and declared: ‘Among your descendants, I shall send kings and prophets until the Prophet of the sanctuary (*nabī al-ḥaram*), he who shall rebuild the Temple (*haykal*) of Jerusalem. He is the Seal of prophets and his name is Aḥmad, that is Muḥammad.’”<sup>56</sup>

- 55 On these questions see T. Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, Leipzig, 1909<sup>2</sup>, vol. 1, pp. 9-10; A. Baumstark, “Eine altarabische Evangelienübersetzung aus dem Christlich-Palästinensischen”, *Zeitschrift für Semitistik und verwandte Gebiete* 8 (1932), pp. 201-209, in particular p. 205; A.E. Bishop Guthrie, “The Paraclete, Almunhamanna and Aḥmad”, *The Muslim World* 41.4 (1951), pp. 251-256; A.-L. de Prémare, “Comme il est écrit, l’histoire d’un texte”, *SI* 70 (1989), pp. 27-56, in particular p. 45; id., “Prophétisme et adultère, d’un texte à l’autre”, *REMM* 58 (1990/4), pp. 101-135, especially pp. 124 sqq.; M.-T. Urvoy, “Annonce de Mahomet” in M.A. Amir-Moezzi (éd.), *Dictionnaire du Coran*, Paris, 2007, pp. 55-56; Gallez, *Le messie et son prophète*, pp. 335 sqq.; J. Van Reeth, “Who is the ‘Other’ Paraclete?” in C. Segovia and B. Lourié (eds.), *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where and to Whom?*, pp. 423-452; S. Anthony, “Muḥammad, Menaḥem and the Paraclete: New Lights on Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767) Arabic Version of John 15:23-16/1”, *BSOAS* 79/2 (2016), pp. 255-278.
- 56 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt*, ed. Sachau, *Biographien Muhammads, seiner Gefährten und der späteren Träger des Islams, bis zum Jahre 230 der Flucht*, Leiden, 9 vols., 1904-1928, vol. 1.1, p. 107; see also O. Livne-Kafri, “Jerusalem in Early Islam: The Eschatological Aspect”, *Arabica* 53 (2006), pp. 382-403 (quote and analysis, pp. 385-386). The belief according to which the mention of the Prophet as the Paraclete was part of the text of the Gospel of John before its falsification by the Christians is deeply rooted in Islam. In his *Relation*, Samson, an Apostolic missionary sent by Louis XIV to Persia, writes: “[the Muslims] says that ... in chapter 14 of Saint John ... the Christians have erased the name of Mahomet whom they claim to be the Paraclete promised by Jesus-Christ” (Samson, *Relation de l’état présent du royaume de Perse*, Paris, 1695, p. 203). Apart from the constant mentions of the subject in the classical literature of anti-Christian controversies, an entire late literary genre is consecrated, especially among the Shi‘is: see for example Muhammad ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Zāhidī al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1181/1767-1768), *Bishārat al-nubuwwa*, Sayyid ‘Alī b. Abī l-Qāsim al-Qummī al-Lāhūrī (d. 1288/1871-1872), *Bishārat-i aḥmadiyya* and also Muḥammad Ṣādiq Fakhr al-Islām (d. after 1330/1911), *Fāraqitā* (quoted by Āghā Bozorg al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī’a*

It should be noted that the name Muḥammad (as well as the very close Aḥmad) is problematic. It seems indeed to be a sort of “onomastic hapax”. In his monographic article dedicated to the subject, Mohammed Hocine Benkheira speaks of an “innovation”, of a “laudatory nickname”, even possibly “a title linked to the messianic status of the Prophet”.<sup>57</sup> It appears that prosopographers, from Ibn Sa‘d (d. 230/845), (incidentally contradicted by Ibn Qutayba – d. 276/889) to the much later Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), by citing the names to other Muḥammads, either earlier than or contemporary with the Prophet, may have attempted to deny the uniqueness of his name, and so consign the messianic nature of his mission to oblivion.<sup>58</sup> The question had already been asked by Hartwig Hirschfeld, for whom the Quranic mentions of Muḥammad are later additions with the same goal in mind.<sup>59</sup> Other scholars, from Aloys Sprenger to Gabriel S. Reynolds, have also studied this problem from different angles.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, the different spellings of the name by Syriac authors – *mḥmṭ* for almost all the syro-occidental authors and *mḥmd* for the syro-oriental ones, could indicate – although it cannot prove – that it was unusual or even unknown in the region.<sup>61</sup> Is this because it is an Arabised form

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*ilā taṣānīf al-shī‘a*, 25 vols., Tehran-Najaf, 1353-1398/1934-1978, respectively vol. 3, pp. 112 and 118 and vol. 16, p. 95).

- 57 M.H. Benkheira, “Onomastique et religion: à propos d’une réforme du nom propre au cours des premiers siècles de l’islam”, in C. Müller and M. Roiland-Rouabah (eds.), *Les non-dits du nom. Onomastique et documents en terre d’Islam. Mélanges offerts à Jacqueline Sublet*, Damascus-Beirut, 2013, pp. 319-356 (citations, pp. 329-330). According to the author, ‘Umar, ‘Alī or Ja‘far are not proper names *stricto sensu* either.
- 58 *Ibid.* pp. 330 sqq. and p. 326.
- 59 H. Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran*, London, 1902, pp. 138-140. Theses adopted and developed, not always in the most convincing of ways, by V. Popp, “The Early History of Islam, Following Inscriptional and Numismatic Testimony”, in K.-H. Ohlig and G.-R. Puin (eds.), *The Hidden origins of Islam: New Research into Its Early History*, New York, 2010, pp. 17-124 and by C. Luxenberg, “A New Interpretation of the Arabic Inscriptions in Jerusalem’s Dome of the Rock”, in *ibid.*, pp. 125-151.
- 60 See for example ex. A. Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad*, vol. 1, pp. 155-161; T. Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde*, Uppsala, 1917, pp. 272-276; U. Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad As Viewed by the Early Muslims*, London, 1995, pp. 39-43; J.-L. Déclais, “Names of the Prophet” in J.D. Mc Auliffe (ed.), *EQ*, vol. 3 (2003), pp. 501-505; H. Djāit, *La vie de Muhammad*, Paris, 2007, pp. 236-240; Gallez, *le messie et son prophète*, pp. 32 sqq. (p. 332 sq. the hypothesis according to which the name Muḥammad comes from the surname *īsh ḥamudōt* of the prophet Daniel is seductive but too speculative because it is philologically too fragile); C. Gilliot, “Nochmals: Hieß der Prophet Muḥammad?” in M. Gross & K.-H. Ohlig (eds.), *Die Entstehung einer Weltreligion II. Von der koranischen Bewegung zum Frühislam*, Berlin, 2011, pp. 53-95; G.S. Reynolds, “Remembering Muḥammad”, *Numen* 58 (2011), pp. 188-206.
- 61 A. Genet, “Le premier siècle de l’islam vu par les chroniqueurs syriaques”, p. 87.

of the name which, in other languages, means Paraclet, like the Syriac word *munḥamannā* as which we have just seen or, as Geo Widengren has pertinently suggested, the Iranian term *Manūḥmēd/Manvahmēd*, a Manichean variation of the Avestic *VohuManah/Vahman/Bahman*?<sup>62</sup>

What does “Paraclet” mean? We cannot be sure, since the definitions, the interpretations and the concepts with which it is associated in the writings of John the Evangelist – its only appearances in the New Testament – and, as one would expect, in Christian literature in general, are so many and varied.<sup>63</sup> A consultation of the articles devoted to the word in such standard reference books as the *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Dogmatique*, the *Dictionnaire du Catholicisme*, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, the *Encyclopédie Théologique de Migne* or even the *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Bible*, as well as in the countless articles or books published about it from end of the 19th century to the present times, will confirm this. In his article “Who is the ‘Other’ Paraclete?”, Jan Van Reeth provides a succinct, well documented synthesis of the different meanings of the term: “the one who comforts, the consoler”, “intercessor, advocate”, “assistant, help”, “resurrector, reviver”, “herald, announcer”.<sup>64</sup> Often identified with the Holy Spirit, with Jesus Christ himself or his spiritual essence, the Paraclete, in its different functions, is a power, a spirit, angelic or divine being who ‘comes down’ to the saint, identifies with him and makes of him a prophet, a messenger from Above.<sup>65</sup> Among these different meanings, the last is most relevant here. It would seem to derive from a Mandaean and more especially gnostic perception of the Paraclete expressed by the Syriac term *parwānqīn* – probably confused with “paraclete” in its adjectival form *pūrqānāyā* – which appears in the famous text called *The Hymn of the Pearl*: “I left the East (and) I went down, and the two guides (*parwānqīn*) were with me. For the way was terrible and difficult and I, to go that way, I was (but)

62 G. Widengren, *The Great Vohu Manah and the Apostle of God: Studies in Iranian and Manichean Religion*, Uppsala, 1945, *passim*; id., *Die Religionen Irans*, Stuttgart, 1965, pp. 12 et 79 sqq. and p. 306. On the parallelism of *Manūḥmēd/Manvahmēd* with the Paraclete, see for example H.Ch. Puech, “Le manichéisme” in *Histoire des religions, Encyclopédie la Pléiade* 11, Paris, 1972, pp. 523-645, in particular pp. 555 sq.; M. Tardieu, *Le manichéisme*, Paris, 1981, pp. 20-21; R. Simon, “Māni and Muhammad”, p. 134; M. Sfar, *Le Coran, la Bible et l’Orient ancien*, pp. 413-414; F. De Blois, “Elchasai-Manes-Muhammad. Manichäismus und Islam in religionhistorischem Vergleich”, *Der Islam* 81 (2004), pp. 31-48, especially pp. 45-46.

63 John 14: 16, 25-26; 15:26 and 16:7. As a gloss one may also add: Revelation 2:1, 7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13.

64 J. Van Reeth, “Who is the ‘Other’ Paraclete?”, respectively pp. 423 sq.; 427 sq.; 430 sq.; 433-434; 434-435.

65 *Ibid.*, pp. 448-450.

a child".<sup>66</sup> The word is of Iranian origin and does in fact mean "guide". It applies more exactly, especially in Parthian, to the herald who announces the coming of the king and guides the people by announcing the king's commands. In Manichean salvation theory, the term means a spiritual being who guides the souls of the faithful toward the Good.<sup>67</sup> This meaning echoes two texts of John. The first, 14: 25-26 has generally been understood to refer to the Paraclete-Holy Spirit announcing the Second Coming: "25 These things I have spoken to you, abiding with you; 26 But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you".

Then, John 15:26, where the Paraclete is said to witness the coming of the Messiah: "When the Paraclete will come, whom I will send to you on behalf of the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will testify on my behalf".<sup>68</sup> Thus, in the "Judeo-Christian" messianic context, the title of "Paraclete" attributed to Muḥammad would have meant the announcer of the Parousia, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>69</sup> But, according to a significant

66 See P.-H. Poirier, *L'Hymne de la Perle des Actes de Thomas. Introduction, texte, commentaire*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1981, verses 16 et 17; I am quoting the translation of the Syriac version, p. 344; translation of the Greek version, p. 358 and that of the paraphrase of Nicetas of Thessaloniki, p. 372. Everywhere *parwānqān* is rendered by "two guides".

67 Van Reeth, *ibid.*, pp. 435-436; also G. Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, pp. 296 sq.

68 The function of "witness" of the Paraclete, derived most probably from a synoptic tradition (see Matthew 10:19-20 = Marc 13:11-12 = Luke 21:16) seems to be a striking parallel with the Quranic verses 48:8-9 if, following Denise Masson and Edouard-Marie Gallez, one identifies "the messenger" (*rasūl*) of verse 9 with Jesus Christ (especially by putting this verse in parallel with 4:171: "The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him"): "Surely We have sent thee [Muḥammad] as a witness, good tidings to bear, and warning (*shāhidan wa mubashshiran wa nadhīran*) / that you may believe in God and His Messenger ..." (D. Masson, *Le Coran*, vol. 1, commentary of verse 4:136 and 171 and vol. 2, commentary of verse 48:9; E.-M. Gallez, *Le Messie et son prophète*, vol. 2, pp. 355-356). Indeed, the second person singular of verse 8, clearly distinguished from the "messenger" of verse 9, has been a problem for the commentators who wished to identify both with Muḥammad. On the question of an intentional confusion between grammatical persons (*iltifāt*) in the Quran see A.-L. de Prémare, *Aux origines du Coran*, pp. 106-107.

69 As was the case for Mani; see H.-C. Puech, "Le manichéisme", *Histoire des religions*, vol. 2, pp. 550 sqq.; J. Ries, "Elchasaïsme" in *Dictionnaire des religions*, Paris, 1984, p. 512. On the importance of the Christian notion of the Second Coming of Christ, the Double Visit or the Second Christ, its Jewish and intertestamentary roots as well as its extensions during the first times of Islam see respectively P.J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, Berkeley, 1985, pp. 151-184; M. Philonenko, *Les interpolations chrétiennes des douze Patriarches et les manuscrits de Qoumrān*, Paris, 1960, *passim* and especially pp. 10 sqq., 31 sqq., 43 sqq.; *Ecrits intertestamentaires*, under the direction of A. Dupont-Sommer and M. Philonenko, Paris, 1987, index *s.v.* et l'introduction de P. Geoltrain, pp. 31sq.; W. Sundermann, "Der Paraklet in ostmanichäischen Überlieferung" in P. Bryder (ed.),

number of texts, for some of his followers, ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) was the locus of manifestation of Jesus and thus the second Messiah.

#### 4 Jesus and ‘Ali

“Addressing ‘Ali the Prophet declared: Something about you resembles Jesus the son of Mary (*fika shibh min ‘Isā b. Maryam*) and if I did not fear that certain groups of my Community would say of you what the Christians have said of Jesus I would reveal something about you that would have made the people gather up the dust in your footsteps, to seek blessings from it”.<sup>70</sup> This tradition, which stresses the theological similarity between Jesus and ‘Ali, is recorded by Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 328 or 329/939-40 or 940-941), one of the most respected authorities on the so-called “moderate” Twelver Shi‘i hadith. But the identification of the two figures with each other culminates in sources from a number of esoteric Shi‘i circles, which were later accused by their adversaries of “bāṭinism” (belief in the supremacy of the esoteric dimension of the faith over its exoteric dimensions) and of “extremism” (*ghuluww*).<sup>71</sup> These circles had their roots deep in the origins of Islam, in the circles of Imams Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. circa 119/737) and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), at the end of the first and the beginning of second Hijri centuries,<sup>72</sup> or perhaps even

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*Manichean Studies. Proceeding of the First International Conference on Manichaeism*, Lund, 1988, pp. 201-212; F. Donner, “The Sources of Islamic Conceptions of War”, in J. Kelsay and J. Turner Johnson (eds.), *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theological Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions*, New York, 1991, pp. 31-69, especially pp. 43 sqq.; id., *Muhammad and the Believers*, pp. 16, 96-97, 125.

70 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfi*, ed. H. Rasūli Maḥallātī, Tehran, 1389/1969, vol. 1, p. 81, n° 18.

71 On the rather late and ideological character of the distinction between “moderate” and “extremist” Shi‘ism, especially during the ancient period, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin dans le Shi‘isme originel. Aux sources de l’ésotérisme en islam*, Paris-Lagrassat, 1992 (2005<sup>2</sup>), especially the conclusion; id., “Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine I: remarques sur la divinité de l’Imam”, *Studia Iranica* 25.2 (1996), pp. 193-216 (= id., *La religion discrète. Croyances et pratiques spirituelles dans l’islam Shi‘ite*, Paris, 2006, chapter 3 and here Ch. 4); id., “Les Imams et les Ghulāt”.

72 See H. Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühe Ismā‘īliya. Eine Studie zur islamischen Gnosis*, Wiesbaden, 1978; id., *Die islamische Gnosis. Die extreme Schia und die ‘Alawiten*, Zurich-Munich, 1982; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, vol. 1, Berlin-New York, 1991, pp. 233-403 and especially 306 sqq.; id., *Der Eine und das Andere. Beobachtungen an islamischen häresiographischen Texten*, Berlin-New York, 2011, *passim*; Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin dans le Shi‘isme originel, passim*. M. Asatryan, *Controversies in Formative Shi‘i Islam, passim*; Tahmin Bayhoum-Daou’s casting doubt on the “gnostic” character of early Shi‘ism and her hypothesis about the late date of the gnostic Shi‘i doctrines is not

earlier, in the entourage of 'Alī himself, and hence possibly in the lifetime of Muḥammad.<sup>73</sup> That is why the somewhat later texts describing the traditions that interest us derive from very old texts, whose content is incidentally confirmed by heresiographical works on the first Shi'ī circles of the esoteric and gnostic type and on the great Alid "heresiarchs". What is more, the question we have already asked about the very probable authenticity of the apocalyptic content of the Quran and the Hadith, is also pertinent here: what interest would later Shi'īs have had in identifying 'Alī with Jesus as the Saviour of the End of Time, when this End did not occur and 'Alī was himself murdered? They would have thus discredited their champion! For all these reasons, the traditions that we are studying here are all very ancient, possibly dating back to the times of Muḥammad and of 'Alī themselves, although only documented in later sources.

"People! I am the Christ (*anā l-masīḥ*)," says 'Alī, "I who heal the blind and the leper, who create the birds and banish the clouds (an allusion to Quran 5:110) ... I am the Christ and he is I ... Jesus, son of Mary, is part of me and I am part of him (*huwa minnī wa anā minhu*). He is the greatest Word of God (*kalimat allāh al-kubrā*)".<sup>74</sup>

'Alī is not a reincarnation of Jesus. His identification with the Son of Mary is explained in ancient Shi'ism by the doctrine of the transmission of the sacred Legacy (*al-waṣīyya*), of the Light of Alliance or the Divine Friendship (*nūr al-walāya*), of the divine particle (*juz' ilāhī*) or of "metemphosis" ("the movement of light", as I have translated the term *tanāsukh*).<sup>75</sup> It is the transmission, the inherence, of a luminous divine force in and between the members of a long chain of initiated saints, making of them inspired figures empowered to communicate with God and so convey messages from On High to mankind

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defensible, as it in fact goes against an enormous mass of textual data as well as against a great number of studies like the ones that have just been mentioned (see her article "The Second Century Shi'ite *ghulāt*: Were They Really Gnostic?", *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 5.2 (2003-4), pp. 13-61).

- 73 Gh.Ḥ. Ṣadiqī, *Jonbesh hā-ye dīnī-ye irānī dar qarn hā-ye dovvom va sevvom-e hejrī* (completed and updated version of the author's thesis by himself: *Les mouvements religieux iraniens au II<sup>e</sup> et III<sup>e</sup> siècles de l'hégire*, Paris, 1938), Tehran, 1372 solar/1993, pp. 225 sqq.; E. Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī Shi'ī Views on the *Ṣaḥāba*", *JSAI* 5 (1984), pp. 143-175, especially pp. 145-146 (= id., *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shi'ism*, Aldershot, 1991, article n° 9); M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Considérations sur l'expression *dīn 'Alī*. Aux origines de la foi Shi'ite", *ZDMG* 150.1 (2000), pp. 29-68 (= id., *La religion discrète*, chapter 1) and here ch. 3.
- 74 *Kitāb al-kashf*, attributed to Ja'far b. Maṣūf al-Yaman (Ismaili author, d. first half 4th/10th c., maybe around 346/957), ed. R. Strothmann, London, 1952, p. 8.
- 75 U. Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muhammad"; Id., "Prophets and Progenitors in Early Shī'a Tradition", *JSAI* 1 (1979), pp. 41-65; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, especially part II and index s.v.; Id., *La religion discrète*, in particular chapters 3 et 4 and index s.v.

and even, in certain cases, transforming them into the locus of manifestation of God (*maẓhar, maġlā*); a doctrine that is in many respects reminiscent of the Paraclete discussed above.<sup>76</sup>

The messianic nature of ‘Alī as Saviour, resurrector and judge of the end times is clearly illustrated by many utterances of some sermons (*khutba*) attributed to him, in which an eternal Guide, speaking through the mouth of the historical ‘Alī, affirms loud and clear his theophanic reality:<sup>77</sup>

“Alī: ... I am the Retributor on the Day of Retribution [*dayyān yawm al-dīn*]. I am the Judge [*qasīm*] of the Garden and the Fire<sup>78</sup> ... I am the first Noah. I am the instigator of the second Flood<sup>79</sup> ... I am the Hour for the deniers. I am the Call that wakes the inhabitants of the graves. I am the Lord on the Day of Resurrection [*anā l-sā‘a li l-mukadhdhibīn/anā al-nidā’ al-mukhrij man fi l-qubūr/anā ṣāhib yawm al-nushūr*] ... I am the One who shall fill the earth with justice and equity, as it was filled before with oppression and injustice [or darkness: *zulman* or *zuluman*]. I am the Concealed One, the Awaited One for the mighty Affair [*anā l-ghā‘ib al-muntaẓar li l-amr al-‘aẓīm*] ... I am the Celebrant of the Resurrection [*anā qayyim al-qiyāma*]. I am the Celebrant of the Hour. I am the Creator. I am the Created One [*anā l-khāliq/anā l-makhlūq*] ... I am the resurrector of the dead ... I am he who spoke through the mouth of Jesus ... I am the Saviour (literally “The Guided One”) of this time [*anā mahdī l-awān*]. I am the Christ. I am the Second Christ. I am the Jesus of this age [*anā l-masīh/anā l-masīh al-thānī/anā ‘Īsā l-zamān*]” (see also here chapter 4).

It is no doubt the reason why the docetic conception of the death of Jesus, reflected in Quranic verses 4:157-158, may have been applied to ‘Alī by his unconditional followers. According to the heresiographer ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī

76 See M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Religion discrète*, index s.v. and also J. Van Reeth, “Melchisédech le Prophète éternel selon Jean d’Apamée et le monarchianisme musulman”, *Oriens Christianus* 96 (2012), pp. 8-46, especially p. 17, 23 et 46; id., “Who is the ‘Other’ Paraclete?”, pp. 428 et 445.

77 The most ancient evidence of that type of sermon comes from a Qarmati document from the 3rd/10th century, reproduced in a kaysānite proclamation dating from 278/890-891 and reported by al-Tabarī (m. 310/923) in his *History (Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa l-mulūk*, éd. Muhammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Cairo, 1960, vol. 10, pp. 25-26). They are also reported by Shi‘ī texts, of all denominations, throughout Islamic history, right up to 19th century Iranian mystics and philosophers such as Ja‘far al-Kashfī (d. 1267/1850-1851) or Abū l-Qāsim Rāz Shīrāzī (d. 1286/1869); see Amir-Moezzi, “Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine I: remarques sur la divinité de l’imam” (see here chap. 4). These sermons attributed to ‘Alī resemble the “I am” sayings of Jesus in the Gospels (e.g. John 10:30 and 14:11) which are the most representative of the way Jesus describes himself; see E. Stauffer, *Jesus. Gestalt und Geschichte*, Bern, 1957, pp. 130-145.

78 To be compared to Christ as the arbiter on Judgement Day in Matthew 25, 31 ss.

79 On the Messianic dimension of the figure of Noah and of the eschatological symbolism of the Flood, see now the careful examination by C. Segovia, *The Quranic Noah and the Making of the Islamic Prophet*.

(d. 429/1037): “When ‘Alī was assassinated, [his follower] ‘Abdallāh Ibn Saba’ affirmed that the person killed was not ‘Alī but a demon (*shayṭān*) which had appeared to the people in the shape of ‘Alī. As for the veritable ‘Alī, he had been elevated to heaven, just like Jesus, son of Mary. Ibn Saba’ also said: Just as the Jews and the Christians lie in affirming the execution of Jesus, so do the enemies (of ‘Alī and his family: *nawāṣib*) and the Kharijis lie in affirming the murder of ‘Alī. The Jews and the Christians have seen a person being crucified and it seemed to them that that person was Jesus (allusion to the above-mentioned verses from the Quran). Likewise those who pretend that ‘Alī has been killed have merely seen a corpse which they took to be him. But ‘Alī ascended into heaven. In the fulness of time he will return to earth and take revenge upon his enemies”.<sup>80</sup>

Likewise al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī (d. circa 300/912-913) another prominent heresiographer writes: “(After the assassination of ‘Alī, his followers were divided into three groups). The first affirmed that ‘Alī had not been killed and that he was not dead; that he cannot be killed and will not die before he leads the Arabs with his staff and fills the earth with justice and equity even as it now overflows with oppression and injustice ... (Learning of the murder of ‘Alī by a messenger Ibn Saba’ told him): You lie! Even if you were to bring us ‘Alī’s brain in seventy bags accompanied by seventy witnesses to his assassinations, we would remain convinced that he is not dead, that he cannot be killed, nor will he die, before returning to reign over the earth”.<sup>81</sup> There is also the example of the heresiarch al-Ablaq, one of the leaders of the Shi‘i Rāwandiyya sect and an upholder of the *tanāsukh* doctrine, who preached that the spirit of Jesus was instilled in ‘Alī.<sup>82</sup>

Moreover in many Shi‘i traditions, ‘Alī is given the two “Judeo-Christian” messianic titles of *Fārūq* (from the Hebrew and Aramaic *pārūqa*, redeemer, saviour)<sup>83</sup> and of *Ṣiddīq* (after the Qumran Master of Justice *Ṣeddēq*).<sup>84</sup> We know that in Sunnism these titles are given respectively to ‘Umar and Abū Bakr, but the Alids have always considered that this was yet another usurpation of ‘Alī’s

80 Al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-fīraq*, ed. M. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, Beirut, 1393/1973, pp. 223-224.

81 Al-Nawbakhtī, *Fīraq al-shī‘a*, ed., H. Ritter, Istanbul, 1931, pp. 19-20.

82 E. Kohlberg, “‘Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb”, *Elr*, partie ii: “‘Alī as seen by the community: among extremist Shi‘ites”, vol. 1, p. 845a.

83 E.g. J. Levy, *Neuhebräisches und chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim*, Leipzig, 1876-1889, s.v. *paroqa*; A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, Baroda, 1938, pp. 227-229. Also Prémare, *Fondations de l’islam*, p. 165 (reference of Zachariah 9,9 according to the Syriac version of the Bible).

84 A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary*, p. 195; see also C. Melchert, “The Interpretation of Three Quranic Terms (*Siyāḥa*, *Ḥikma* and *Ṣiddīq*) of Special Interest to the Early Renoncians”, in S.R. Burge (ed.), *The Meaning of the Word. Lexicology and Quranic Exegesis*, London, 2015, pp. 89-116, in particular pp. 102-103. On the survival of beliefs going back to Qumran into Islam, see J. van Reeth, “Who is the ‘Other’ Paraclete?”, pp. 428, 432, 434, 442.

rights.<sup>85</sup> One may even reasonably opine that, in such a context, the title *amīr al-mu'minīn*, exclusively reserved to 'Alī in Shi'ism, and which even subsequent Imams are not entitled to assume, might have had a messianic and apocalyptic meaning: *amīr*, the officiant of the *amr*, the Hour, the End of Times, hence the Messiah, who is at the head of the *mu'minīn*, that is the "Judeo-Christian" followers of Muḥammad.<sup>86</sup>

Thus, if we consider that the ancient expression *walāyat 'Alī*, the "divine alliance" (practically in the Biblical sense of the term) of 'Alī may also have had the meaning of "theophanic nature and messianic mission of 'Alī", this would cast a different light on a great number of traditions describing the prophetic mission of Muḥammad and the apocalyptic and messianic role of 'Alī:

"For Muḥammad, 'Alī is a miraculous sign of God (*āya*, which also applies to the verses of the Quran dictated by God). The Prophet did but call the people to the *walāya* of 'Alī."<sup>87</sup>

"The angel Gabriel came to me", the Prophet is reputed to have said, "and told me: 'Muḥammad! Your lord orders you the love (*ḥubb*) of 'Alī and the proclamation of his *walāya*."<sup>88</sup>

85 See for example *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī*, ed. M.B. al-Anṣārī al-Zanjānī al-Khu'īnī, 3 vols., Qum, 1426/1995, tradition n° 26, vol. 2, pp. 780-781; al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Ihtijāj*, ed. M.B. al-Kharsān, 2 vols., Najaf, 1386/1966, vol. 2, p. 15; Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī, *al-Durar al-naḡafīyya*, Qumm, copy of litho. ed., s.d., pp. 281 and 287; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 110 vols., Tehran-Qumm, 1376-1392/1956-1972, vol. 33, p. 173 sqq.; vol. 44, pp. 128 sqq.

86 On the exclusivity of the title for 'Alī, see for example al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-qirā'āt*, ed. Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, hadith n° 160; al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Rasūlī Maḥallātī, Qumm, 1380/1960, vol. 1, p. 276, n° 274; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, Beirut, 1405/1985, vol. 3, p. 55; al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-shī'a*, Beirut, 1403/1983, vol. 5, pp. 469-470, n° 19900. On the *mu'minūn* in the meaning indicated and *amīr al-mu'minīn* in the sense of the "Last Emperor" of Christian texts see Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, pp. 16, 81-82, 96-97, 125, 143-144; Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet, passim*, especially pp. 205 sqq.; id., "The Reign of God Has Come", pp. 529-530 and 533; Van Reeth, "L'Hégire et la fin du monde", p. 214.

87 Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, ed. Mīrzā Kūčebāghī, Tabriz, 2<sup>e</sup> ed. s.d. (vers 1960) (= ed. K), section 2, chapters 7, nos 5 and 8, pp. 71-72; new edition by 'A. Zakīzādeh Ranānī, 2 vols. with Persian translation, Qumm, 1391 solar/2012 (= ed. Z), pp. 289 and 291; also chapter 10, nos 5, p. 77 (ed. K) = pp. 308-309 (ed. Z); Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, ed. M. al-Kāzīm, Tehran, 1410/1990, pp. 121-122; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 3, p. 400; vol. 23, p. 208; vol. 35, p. 369; al-Ḥuwayzī, *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn*, Qumm, 1412/1991, vol. 1, p. 595. In verse 19:21 of the Quran, it is Jesus who is called "the miraculous sign of God".

88 Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir*, section 2 no. 9, p. 74 (ed. K); pp. 297-298 (ed. Z); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 39, p. 273, no. 50.

“The *walāya* of ‘Alī with the Prophet has nothing earthly about it; it comes from heaven, from the very Mouth of God (*mushāfahatan*, i.e. the message received orally by Muḥammad directly from God).”<sup>89</sup>

Verse 7 of Surah 13 alludes to two important religious figures: “You are but a Warner (*mundhir*) whereas every people has a Guide (*hādīn*)”. Shi‘i commentators unanimously maintain that the first refers to Muḥammad and the second to ‘Alī;<sup>90</sup> in other words Muḥammad, the prophet, warns of the End of the World but directs his people to follow the guidance of their Messiah ‘Alī.

## 5 Rewriting of History and Fabrication of a New Collective Memory

In Islam, as in other religions with apocalyptic prophecies, the problems begin when the End of the World does not occur; when both the “warning” prophet and the awaited Messiah die without time coming to an end. And for the new Arab religion, other events made things even more complex: unending civil wars, dazzling conquests, the rapid building of an immense empire and the establishment of a strong and more or less centralized state, that of the Umayyad Caliphate. Clearly, a strong state with powerful rulers at its head, not at all motivated by the idea of the end of the world, would never be compatible with Messianism and apocalyptic aspirations.<sup>91</sup> The sum of these factors had inevitable consequences: the rewriting of history, the reinterpretation of Tradition and the distortion of the texts with, as their aim, the creation of a new collective memory.

89 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī, 4 vol., with Persian translation, Tehran, n.d. (the fourth volume translated by H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī dates from 1386/1966), “Kitāb al-ḥujja”, vol. 2, p. 166; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 28, p. 306, no. 13. To be compared with Ibn al-Biṭrīq al-Ḥillī, *Khaṣā’iṣ al-waḥy al-mubīn fī manāqib amīr al-mu’minīn*, ed. M.B. Maḥmūdī, Tehran, 1406/1986, p. 98 and Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Ṭarā’if fī ma’rifat madhāhib al-ṭawā’if*, Qumm, 1400/1979, p. 101. See here chap. 1, footnotes 78 and the ones following and the afferent texts.

90 Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-qirā’āt*, p. 70, no 270 (Arabic text); al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 204, nos 7-9; al-Ḥaskānī, *Shawāhid al-tanzīl*, ed. M.B. al-Maḥmūdī, Beirut, 1393/1974, vol. 1, pp. 293-303, nos 398-416; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 265; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 40, p. 212, no. 12.

91 See however S. Shoemaker, *The Apocalypse of Empire, passim*; or M. Tillier, “Abd al-Malik, Muḥammad et le Jugement dernier: le Dôme du Rocher comme expression d’une orthodoxie islamique”, in *Les vivants et les morts dans les sociétés médiévales*, Paris, 2018, pp. 341-365. It is very clear that after Muḥammad and with the advent of the Umayyad dynasty, the meaning of messianism and of the apocalyptic evolved greatly.

According to Paul Casanova, and more recently Fred Donner and Mahmoud Ayoub, Muḥammad died still convinced that the ‘Hour’ was imminent.<sup>92</sup> The inconvenient fact about such a hypothesis is its radicality, for if one accepts it one has to consider that almost the entire Quranic corpus and the Hadith – everything that is not related to the end times – were invented after the death of the Prophet. There are however a number of elements which nuance this hypothesis and make it possible to reach less radical conclusions.

According to the traditional chronology, the prophetic career of Muḥammad lasted more than twenty years, from 610 to 632 of the Common Era. Even if those dates, like those of many other events of the *sīra*, are not reliable (precisely as a consequence of the rewriting of history under discussion), it is reasonable to believe that this career lasted many long years. To the mind that described the End of the World in such words as *al-sā’a* (the Hour, the Instant, the immediate delay), *al-āzifa* (what is happening) or *al-wāqī’a* (what is “falling”) and had announced the imminence of the Day of Judgement, these years would have seemed extremely long, as they also must have done for those who believed in him. Muḥammad own beliefs might very well have evolved too during that period: perhaps to still believe in the coming of the Hour but in a less immediate future. The Quran itself seems to reflect this evolution. Beside the verses declaring the unavoidable immediacy of the Hour (see the passages from the Quran as well as from Hadith quoted in part 1 above), other passages stress, to allay the incredulity the sceptical, that only God has knowledge of the Hour (*‘ilm al-sā’a*, see verses 7:187; 31:34; 41:47; 43:85), that “a day for God” is the equivalent of a thousand human years (verses 22:47 and 32:5); and even as many as fifty thousand years (verse 70:4). In addition, terms expressing nuances and hesitations (*‘asā an*, “it could be that ...”; *la’alla* “perhaps”) about the coming of the Hour, or please for patience, occur in other verses (e.g. 11:8; 17:51-52; 27:72; 33:63; 40:77; 72:25; see also 22:55 or 70:6-7).<sup>93</sup> The same tendency is perceptible in the hadith, when the Prophet declares that the coming of the Hour could take a century.<sup>94</sup> Other extremely recurrent elements recorded from many different sources, some from divergent or even rival factions, would be inexplicable if Muḥammad had all his life considered the end of the world

92 Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde*, *passim*; F. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Princeton, 1998, *passim* and especially pp. 45 sqq.; M. Ayoub, *The Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam*, Oxford, 2003, pp. 144 sqq.

93 Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, pp. 162-163.

94 Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre*, vol. 1, pp. 535-536; Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde*, p. 17; Bashear, “Muslim Apocalypses”, pp. 90-91.

to be imminent; for example: his ardent desire to have a male descendant;<sup>95</sup> his insistence on the marriage of ‘Alī and Fāṭima; the rich oasis of Fadak he left as an heirloom to his daughter Fāṭima and her family, and in particular to his only two male descendants, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn:<sup>96</sup> he could very well have had his succession in mind. The choice of ‘Alī, the father of his only male offspring (besides the other special relationships which would have bound both men), seems the obvious one: and a decisive one if the Prophet or some of his followers believed ‘Alī, to be the Saviour of the end times.<sup>97</sup>

The rewriting of history and the forging of a new collective memory seem to have begun from the very outset of the Umayyad Caliphate (perhaps even before it), for they were historical enemies of the Banū Hāshim in general and of the Alids in particular, at least since the battle of Badr. The objective of this apparently systematic policy was to replace the figure of the Prophet with that of the Caliph. The defining symbol of this process was to be ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, the conqueror of Jerusalem, to whom the messianic title of Fārūq (see above) was awarded.<sup>98</sup> In his letter to caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (reign 65-86/685-705), the

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- 95 Apart from dozens of hadiths, the Quran itself carries the trace of that desire, perhaps indirectly implied when, in verse 108:3, the enemy of the Prophet is called *abtar*, literally “the one who can only have daughters” – given that this was the term used by those who reviled Muḥammad as long as he did not have his two grandsons according to Shi‘i commentators.
- 96 On the important juridical and religious implications of that act see W. Madelung, “Social Legislation in *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*” in A. Cilardo (ed.), *Islam and Globalisation. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. Proceeding of the 25th Congress of l’Union Européenne des Islamisants et Arabisants*, Louvain-Paris-Walpole, 2013, pp. 197-203; Id., “Introduction” to the part titled “History and Historiography” in F. Daftary & G. Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shi‘i Islam: History, Theology and Law*, London-New York, 2014, pp. 3-16.
- 97 On ‘Alī as sole possible successor of Muḥammad, see W. Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*, Cambridge, 1997, *passim*; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Considérations sur l’expression *dīn ‘Alī*. Aux origines de la foi Shi‘ite” (here chapter 3). If one accepts the hypothesis of a religious evolution in Muḥammad with regard to the immediacy of the Hour, the thesis of scholars such as P. Casanova, F. Donner or M. Ayoub (see above footnote 91) according to which the Prophet did not choose a successor for himself because the imminence of the end times no longer made such a choice pertinent, would no longer be defensible.
- 98 P. Crone, M. Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 5; P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge, 1986; S. Bashear, “The Title ‘Fārūq’ and Its Association with ‘Umar I’; many works by Avraham Hakim on ‘Umar, among others: “Conflicting images of lawgivers: the caliph and the Prophet. *Sunnat ‘Umar and sunnat Muḥammad*” in H. Berg (ed.), *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, Leiden, 2003, pp. 159-178; “Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb, calife par la Grâce de Dieu”, *Arabica* 54.3 (2008), pp. 317-336; “Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb: l’autorité religieuse et morale”, *Arabica* 55.1 (2008), pp. 1-34.

renowned Umayyad governor of Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714) declared that the caliph is superior to the prophet-messenger (*rasūl*) because in the eyes of God he plays a more important role in the fulfilment of God's will. Some powerful figures of 'Abd al-Malik's court considered that the circumambulation rituals performed around his palace were more rewarded by God than those around the tomb of Muḥammad.<sup>99</sup> The public cursing of 'Alī from the pulpits of the mosques and the propaganda of the state apparatus, became systematic, from the reign of Mu'āwiya I, the first Umayyad caliph, onwards. The hatred of 'Alī, of his family – which was of course that of the Prophet – and of his followers reached its peak at Karbalā in 61/680, with the massacre of al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, the grandson of the Prophet, and almost all of his circle by order of the caliph Yazīd I.<sup>100</sup> An official version of the Quran was written at the demand, and under the supervision, of the Caliph and was distributed in all the great cities of the empire; simultaneously the other editions of the Quran were sought out and destroyed. In parallel, the collection of an 'official' corpus of Hadith was assembled, with the same end in view, mostly in the entourage of 'Abd al-Malik and of the court scholar Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742).<sup>101</sup> A wily politician, Mu'āwiya, who was based in Syria – a largely Christian country – had adopted a strongly pro-Christian attitude and policy (without, however, any reference to the Quran, or to Muḥammad, or Jesus, or any other prophet), recuperating, with the same motives, the "Judeo-Christian tendency" of the message of Muḥammad and of his first followers, whilst attempting to obfuscate the Prophet's messianic dimension, still vigorous in Alid circles.<sup>102</sup>

99 P. Crone, M. Hinds, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 sqq.; E.-M. Gallez, *Le messie et son prophète*, vol. 2, pp. 441 sqq.

100 See now M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant*, in particular the introduction and chapter 1.

101 On these questions see now S. Bashear, "Qur'an 2:114 and Jerusalem", *BSOAS* 52 (1989), pp. 251-238 (included in id., *Studies in Early Islamic Tradition*, article n° 11); Hoyland, *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It*, pp. 560-573; De Prémare, *Les fondations de l'islam*, especially chapter 15, pp. 278 sqq.; id., *Aux origines du Coran, passim*; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Coran silencieux*, chapter 2; F. Déroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads. A First Overview*, Leiden, 2013, especially the introduction; id., "Contrôler l'écriture. Sur quelques caractéristiques de corans de la période omeyyade", in M. Azaiez et S. Mervin (eds.), *Le Coran. Nouvelles approches*, Paris, 2014, pp. 39-55; on al-Zuhrī see for example M. Lecker, "Biographical Notes on Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī", *JSS* 41.1 (1996), pp. 21-63 (included in id., *Jews and Arabs in Pre- and Early Islamic Arabia*, Aldershot, Variorum, 1998, article n° 16); H. Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur'an. A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments", *Der Islam* 78 (2001), pp. 1-34, in particular pp. 22-29.

102 See for example P. Crone, M. Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 11; G. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750*, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1987; S. Bashear, "Qibla Musharriqa and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches", *MW* 81 (1991), pp. 267-282 (= *Studies in*

That is why he is the principal hero of most Syriac chronicles of the period which, probably in conform to the Umayyad propaganda, removed 'Alī from the list of Arab "kings" after Muḥammad.<sup>103</sup> With 'Abd al-Malik, yet again, the process of "de-Messianization" becomes decisive. The figure of Muḥammad as the holiest and the last of the prophets is rehabilitated, but at the same time his message, originally 'universalist', uniting all monotheists in the body of the 'Faithful' (*mu'minūn*) is now strongly Arabized, its differences with and, soon, its superiority to Judaism and Christianity affirmed, and its followers rebaptized Muslims (*muslimūn*). The supreme symbols of the inauguration of the new Arab religion were, on the one hand: the construction of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem; the formal introduction of a 'state' Quran to be known as the Vulgate of 'Uthmān, now declared independent of Jewish and Christian scriptures as 'the book of the Muslims' and on the other hand, the sacralisation of the Arab cities of Mecca and Medina.<sup>104</sup> Jesus becomes a prophet virtually indistinguishable from others in the Quran who, in the words of Alfred-Louis de Prémare: "had been, from start to finish, controlled by the Umayyad family, from "Uthmān to 'Abd al-Malik via Mu'āwiya and Marwān".<sup>105</sup> Two other Umayyad figures also played a crucial role in imposing the "official" Quran: the two celebrated governors of Iraq, 'Ubaydallāb b. Ziyād, known as Ibn Ziyād (governor from 56 to 67/675 to 686) and al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf,<sup>106</sup> referred to above.

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*Early Islamic Tradition*, article n° v1); R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 485 sqq.; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, pp. 176 sq., 180 sqq., 192 sqq., 222; Id., "Umayyad Efforts at Legitimation: the Umayyad's Silent Heritage" in A. Borrut and P.M. Cobb (eds.), *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, Leiden, 2010, pp. 187-211. See also A. Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir: l'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides* (v. 72-193/692-809), Leiden, 2011; id., "Introduction: la fabrique de l'histoire et de la tradition islamiques" dans id. (ed.), *Écriture de l'histoire et processus de canonisation dans les premiers siècles de l'islam*, n° spécial REMMM, 129 (2011-1), pp. 17-30.

103 A. Genet, "Le premier siècle de l'islam vu par les chroniqueurs syriaques", pp. 106 sqq. (on admiring portrayals of Mu'āwiya); pp. 69 sqq. and 85 (on the absence of 'Alī from among the caliphs).

104 Apart from the studies mentioned in footnotes 100 et 101, see also H. Busse, "Monotheismus und islamische Christologie in der Bauinschrift des Felsendoms in Jerusalem", *Theologische Quartalschrift* 161 (1981), pp. 168-188; P. Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, Princeton, 1987, *passim*; S. Bashear, "Jesus in Early Muslim *Shahāda* and Related Issues: A New Perspective", published for the first time and posthumously in id., *Studies in Early Islamic Tradition*, article n° xv, pp. 1-18; M. Cook, *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, 2000, pp. 118 sqq.; C. Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, Oxford, 2005, pp. 77 sqq., 102 sqq.; Shoemaker, *The Death of A Prophet*, chapter 4 ("From Believers to Muslims, from Jerusalem to the Hijāz: Confessional Identity and Sacred Geography in Early Islam").

105 A.-L. de Prémare, *Les fondations de l'islam*, pp. 290-291; *Aux origines du Coran*, pp. 90-91.

106 See A.-L. de Prémare, *Les fondations de l'islam*, pp. 292 sqq.; O. Hamdan, "The Second *Maṣāḥif* Project: A Step towards the Canonization of the Qur'ānic Text", in A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai

The common denominator between all these major historical figures is their implacable hatred of ‘Alī and the Alids; Ibn Ziyād was even directly involved in the massacre of Karbalā. The thesis of *tahrīf*, of the “falsified Quran”, largely current in Shi‘i circles until the 4th/10th century and according to which the power hostile to ‘Alī and the Family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) had removed all mention of them from the “original Quran”, thus gains in plausibility.<sup>107</sup> It is interesting to note that, in a letter which the Emperor Leo III addressed in around 719 CE to the Umayyad caliph ‘Umar II, it is said that, in the program of systematic destruction of the versions of the Quran under al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, the only text to survive was the Codex of ‘Alī (called here by his *kunya* Abū Turāb).<sup>108</sup> The idea which emerges from this letter is that ‘Alī’s version of the Quran must have been more protected than the others, probably because it was of crucial importance to his followers. Be that as it may, the “Quranic” passages which are not included in the extant Quran, but are recorded in ancient Shi‘i documents, are said to come from the Quranic codex of ‘Alī (*muṣḥaf ‘Alī*) (see chapter 1 above).

Little by little, even those who believed in ‘Alī as the Messiah of the end times changed their minds, most probably a few years after his death, when hopes of his “return to earth” faded. The Alids, and later the Shi‘is, continued to contest entire parts of the history which had been rewritten under the control of the caliphs and the collective memory which it imposed, and which were progressively accepted as “orthodox”. Nevertheless, the Shi‘is were part of the same empire, of the same community and of the same religion as the others. To completely maintain all their original doctrines would have meant to saw off the branch they were sitting on. Some changes were introduced into the doctrines. Of his messianic pretensions, ‘Alī lost his apocalyptic dimension, but preserved his main spiritual functions: his theophanic nature and his inspired guidance. He thus became the Imam *par excellence*, the first and the father of

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and M. Marx (eds.), *The Qur‘ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur‘ānic Milieu*, Leiden, 2010, pp. 795-835; Amir-Moezzi, *Coran silencieux*, chapter 2, pp. 79 sqq.

107 On the question of the falsification of the Quran and the studies dedicated to it see now E. Kohlberg and M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, introduction; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Coran silencieux*, in particular chapters 1 et 2.

108 A. Jeffery, “Ghevond’s text of the Correspondance between ‘Umar II and Leo III”, *The Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944), pp. 269-332, citation p. 298; quoted by Crone-Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 168, footnote 21; E.-M. Gallez, *Le messie et son prophète*, vol. 2, p. 228. The history of Ghevond/Lewond is now translated into English by Z. Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond, the Eminent Vardapet of the Armenians*, Wynnewood, 1982. Regarding the *kunya* Abū Turāb of ‘Alī, see E. Kohlberg, “Abū Turāb”, *BSOAS* 41 (1978) (included in Id., *Belief and Law in Imāmi Shī‘ism*, Variorum, Aldershot, 1991, article 6).

all the other imams, his sons, with countless descendants, and recognized as such by the manifold Shi‘i currents of the first Hijri centuries. His *qā’imiyya*, his role of “resurrector guide”, who triggers the Day of Judgement, was transferred to one or another of his descendants, according to the different currents of belief. The figure of the imam as it emerged from the ancient sources became the pivot of Shi‘i religion. The historical imam became the theophanic locus of a pre-existential, metaphysical, spiritual Imam who makes manifest the Names and Attributes of God. Shi‘i believers speak of the two natures of ‘Alī, the human and the divine, employing the terms *nāsūt* and *lāhūt*, nouns of Syriac origin which, when they appear in Christian sources, describe the double nature of Christ (see chap. 1 above). The imam in general, and ‘Alī first and foremost among them, is said to be the First (*al-awwal*) and the Last (*al-ākhir*), the alpha and the omega of Christ’s affirmation, words that are at the same time Quranic divine Names. Likewise he is, as the imam, the “Speaking Quran/Book” (*al-Qur’ān/al-kitāb al-nāṭiq*), the veritable Word of God, the Logos contained in the Quran, the “Silent Book/Guide” (*al-kitāb/al-imām al-ṣāmī*). ‘Alī and the imams of his descendance thus prolong prophecy, which is communion with God and the transmission of his divine messages to mankind. It is true that the words originally describing that function (*risāla, nubuwwa*) are no longer used in that context, most probably in order not to contradict the dogmas, later accepted by all, that Muḥammad was the “last prophet” but that, according to the most authoritative sources, all his prophetic qualities and powers now fall to the imams.<sup>109</sup> Shi‘ism thus became, from very early on, the religion of the Imam, just as Christianity is the religion of the Christ.<sup>110</sup> Is this what the unusual expression the “religion of ‘Alī” (*dīn ‘Alī*) means? In what way is it distinct from the religion of Muḥammad which was in the end called “Islam”? That is what we shall see in the next chapter.

109 See here chapters 5 to 7.

110 A great number of my works deal with those subjects, among others: *Le Guide divin dans le Shi‘isme originel, La religion discrète* or *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant*. While being labelled as heterodox, or even “heretical” by Sunni “orthodoxy”, a good number of Shi‘i doctrines seem to be among the most ancient in Islam and seem to be closer to the initial movement of Muḥammad than what heresiographical Sunni works may let us think. The phenomenon is not new. It has been masterfully analysed since the 1930s and applied to the beginnings of Christianity, by Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, Tübingen, 1934; English translation R.A. Kraft and G. Krodel, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, Philadelphia, 1971 and French translation by P. Vuagnat, Ch. and S. Mimouni, *Orthodoxie et hérésie aux débuts du christianisme*, Paris, 2009<sup>2</sup>.

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

In Shi‘i lands generally, and especially in Iran, there are a number of compound first names ending in ‘Alī. Many are very common: for instance, *Ḥusayn-‘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 really unusual: *Shīr-‘Alī* (“Lion-‘Alī”), *Gurg-‘Alī* (“Wolf ‘Alī”), *Chirāg-‘Alī* (“Lamp of ‘Alī”) and *Dīn-‘Alī* (“Religion of ‘Alī”).

The last name 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, some years ago, I came across the expression *dīn ‘Alī* in some passages from early historiographical works. What does this term stand for? How should it be understood? While the context of this study is obviously not the same as the one in which I first asked the question, this chapter is an attempt to answer it.<sup>1</sup> It is in 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
  - 4a Quranic content
  - 4b The pre-Islamic content
- (5) Reactions and repercussions.

### 1 *Dīn ‘Alī* in the Works of the Historiographers

In certain passages of his monumental work *Ta‘rīkh al-rusul wa l-mulūk*, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 /923) includes some records in which the expression *dīn ‘Alī* appears. The first is found in a long account reported by ‘Aṭīyya b. Bilāl about

<sup>1</sup> I extend my cordial thanks to Professors Wilferd Madelung and Etan Kohlberg for their pertinent comments during the writing this chapter. Any imperfections that still remain are the responsibility solely of the author.

the battle of the Camel in 36/656.<sup>2</sup> 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, killed three of his enemies, ‘Ilbā’ b. al-Haytham al-Sadūsī, Hind b. ‘Amr al-Jamalī and Zayd b. Ṣūhān, before being overcome by ‘Ammār b. Yāsir, one of ‘Alī’s oldest supporters. After he had been taken prisoner, the poet is said to have recited this *rajaz*:

Let he who knows me not, learn that I am Ibn Yathribī, slayer of ‘Ilbā’ and Hind al-Jamalī. As well as of the son of Ṣūhān, all (adepts) of ‘Alī’s religion.<sup>3</sup>

He was then led to ‘Alī, who refused his request for *amān*, and ordered 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 give any explanation of his intransigence.

The reader might reasonably conclude that the *rājiz* (poet-warrior) was executed for rather haughtily boasting that he had killed three of ‘Alī’s most loyal companions. In the same period, another erudite scholar, Ibn Durayd Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Azdī (d. 321/933), also includes the text of the poem in his *Kitāb al-ishṭiqāq*, adding that in order to justify this unique execution, ‘Alī was supposed to have said:

He [i.e. Ibn Yathribī] claimed to have killed [my three companions] because they confessed the religion of ‘Alī; but the religion of ‘Alī is the religion of Muḥammad (*za‘ama annahu qatalahum ‘alā dīn ‘Alī wa dīn ‘Alī dīn Muḥammad*).<sup>4</sup>

2 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, ed. M.J. de Goeje *et al.*, Leiden, 1879-1901, series 1, pp. 3196 sq.; ed. M.A.F. Ibrāhīm, Cairo, 1960, vol. 4, pp. 514 sq.

3 *Anā li-man yunkirunī ibnu yathribī qātīlu ‘ilbā’i wa hīndi l-jamalī wa ibnūn li-ṣūhāna ‘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 hīndi l-jamalī thumma bni ṣūhāna ‘alā dīni ‘Alī*. See also al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Jamal aw al-nuṣra fī ḥarb al-Baṣra*, Najaf, 1963, p. 146; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib al Abī Ṭālib*, 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*)’.

4 Ibn Durayd, *Kitāb al-ishṭiqāq*, ed. ‘A.M. Hārūn, Baghdad, 1399/1979, p. 413; the version of the poem by Ibn Durayd is slightly different: *‘qataltu ‘ilbā’a wa hīnda l-jamalī wa ibnan li-ṣūhāna ‘alā dīni ‘Alī*. In the margins of the *unicum* used by ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, dated seventh/thirteenth century, are earlier annotations that often include different interpretations (see the editor’s introduction, *ibid.*, pp. 36-37). For the passage cited, the notes in the

According to Ibn Durayd, Ibn Yathribī was put death because of the distinction he made between the religion of ‘Alī and that of Muḥammad, which implicitly accused ‘Alī of professing a religion different from Islam.<sup>5</sup> Other passages in al-Ṭabarī call into question the explanation provided by *Kitāb al-ishtiḳāq*, since in this case the expression is used by ‘Alī’s supporters. One of these passages appears in a report by the famous Abū Mikhnaf (based on ‘Ubayd Allāh b. al-Ḥurr al-Ju‘fī) about 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. ‘Afif al-Khath‘amī, is said to have had the following exchange with Mu‘āwiya:

Al-Khath‘amī: ‘Fear God, Mu‘āwiya [literally: God! God! O Mu‘āwiya] for you are be led [inevitably] from this transitory abode 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*).’ At this [declaration], having difficulty in devising a reply, Mu‘āwiya remained silent.<sup>6</sup>

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margin follow al-Ṭabarī’s version in the edition prepared under the supervision of De Goeje; *ibid.*, p. 413, note 2, *in fine*.

- 5 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, 1905-1925, vol. 9, p. 142; on ‘Abd Allāh b. Saba’, see M.G.S. Hodgson, *EI2*; S. Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic. Ibn Saba’ and the Origins of Shī‘ism*, Leiden, 2012. 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. Gh. Ṭabāṭabāī Majd, Tehran, 1374 Sh./1995, pp. 432-433.
- 6 Al-Ṭabarī, ed. De Goeje, vol. 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 Shī‘ism* [Aldershot, 1991] article vi) and to ‘Abd Allāh b. Saba’. See also the abridged version of this account in al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 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 *taqīyya*, 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 been problematic for at least some of ‘Alī’s supporters, since it could make a distinction between ‘the religion of ‘Alī’ and Islam. According to a report by al-Ṭabarī, during the battle of the Camel, when to save their lives the Azd of Baṣra, declared themselves followers of ‘Alī’s

Still according to al-Ṭabarī, during al-Mukhtār’s revolt, Rufā’a b. Shaddād al-Hamdānī, a supporter of the rebel, recited the following verse in the heat of the battle:

I am the son of Shaddād, adept of ‘Alī’s religion /I am not an ally of  
‘Uthmān, offspring of a goat.<sup>7</sup>

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, spared the life of an adversary when the latter claimed to have adopted ‘Alī’s religion.<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> I certainly do not claim to have thoroughly examined al-Ṭabarī’s monumental *History* in its entirety, but I have read it attentively, and from these few passages, I believe we have a fairly accurate picture. What is more, the expression is attributed 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 in historiographical traditions was not dictated by partisanship; this moreover would explain its somewhat fortuitous occurrences, with no particular motive for the context in which they appear. During the course of the

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religion (*nahnu ‘alā dīni ‘Alī*), a man from the Banī Layth of Kūfa (no doubt an Alid) mocked them for what they have just said (al-Ṭabarī, ed. de Goeje, vol. 1, pp. 3189-3190; 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 Abi l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha*, ed. M.A.F. Ibrāhīm, Cairo, 1965, vol. 1, p. 149.

7 *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 deriving from al-Ṭabarī’s *History*, but his version presents significant differences with the *Ta’rikh*: for example, the individual is named al-Ahraṣ b. Shaddād and his verse is a response to a verse by his adversary Ibn Ḍab‘ān al-Kalbī: ‘I am Ibn Ḍab‘ān al-Karīm al-Mufaḍḍal / One of the leaders among those who dissociate themselves from the religion of ‘Alī (*anā bnu Ḍab‘ānā l-karīmi l-mufaḍḍali/ min ‘aṣabatin yabra’ūna min dīni ‘Alī*)’, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 45, p. 381.

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

9 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. 305sq.

following study, we will consider other indications that the expression could indeed have existed at the dawn of Islam.

## 2 The Uniqueness of ‘Ali

To my knowledge, ‘Ali is the only figure of early Islam – apart from the Prophet of course – with whom the term *dīn* is associated. Thanks to the analyses of R.B. Serjeant and especially to the pioneering study of 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.<sup>10</sup> By extension, *dīn* also referred to submission to a law or a leader, in contrast with the anarchy and wild behaviour associated with *jahl*, or ignorance. The interpretation of ‘religion’, initially derived from this partly sacred, partly secular sense of the term, then gradually became more narrowly defined in Islamic times.<sup>11</sup> The use of the expression *dīn ‘Alī* is all the more remarkable since, when speaking of his most notable contemporaries, the three other *rāshidūn* (rightly guided) caliphs, the sources employ the term *sunna*, almost never *dīn*. Here too, the studies of M.M. Bravmann (correcting J. Schacht’s analyses), followed by those of G.H.A. Juynboll, demonstrate that *sunna* was initially a clearly marked path from which one could only waver willfully, and, by extension, the path of the elders or sages in a tribe that one ought to follow scrupulously. Although the Quran defines this term as the ‘way of God’, at the dawn of the religion, *sunna* includes a range of both secular and religious behaviours, attitudes, wise lore and idealised exemplary figures, in this instance the Prophet himself and the first caliphs.<sup>12</sup> Both historiographical and purely religious sources allude to the

10 R.B. Serjeant, ‘*Ḥaram 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 111 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*’.

11 Bravmann, *The Spiritual Background*, p. 34 and note 1 in which the author argues that the theories advanced by Nöldeke and Horovitz about the Iranian origin of the term are irrelevant; see also U. Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims*, Princeton, 1995, s.v.; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, ‘Remarques sur le terme *dīn* dans le Coran’, M. De Souza, A. Peters-Coustot et F.-X. Romanacce (eds.), *Le sacré dans tous ses états. Catégories du vocabulaire religieux et sociétés, de l’Antiquité à nos jours*, Publications de l’Université de Saint-Etienne, 2012, pp. 281–296.

12 Bravmann, *The Spiritual Background*, see index under ‘*sanna*’, ‘*sunmah*’; 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. 97 sq. (rpr. in *Studies on the Origins and Uses of Islamic Ḥadīth*, London, 1996, article v); J. Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des tribus. L’Islam de Mahomet*, Paris, 1997,

*sunna* of the first caliphs. Al-Balādhurī (d. circa 302/892) refers to the *sunna* of Abū Bakr and of ‘Umar, but also to that of the Khārijīs, during the arbitration of the battle of Šiffin, in al-Ṭabarī.<sup>13</sup> The expression ‘*sunna* of the Two ‘Umars’, that is, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, is found again in the poetry of Farazdaq (ca. 109/728),<sup>14</sup> and Ibn Abī Ya‘lā (d. 526/1133), who while quoting the *Kitāb al-sunna* by al-Barbahārī (d. 329/941), refers to the *sunna* of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān.<sup>15</sup> In my research so far, I have encountered the expression *sunnat ‘Alī* only once, in an anonymous historiographical text from the second-third/eighth-ninth centuries edited as *Akhbār al-dawla al-‘Abbāsīyya*.<sup>16</sup> M. Sharon’s remarkable analysis of this work shows how this pro-‘Abbasid source deals favourably with ‘Alī and the Alids,<sup>17</sup> and applies the term *sunna* to ‘Alī; thereby acknowledging his role as an ideal model in common with the other *rāshidūn*. That the expression *sunnat ‘Alī* occurs rarely or never seems all the more surprising that, in both secular and the ritual matters at that time, ‘Alī seems to have had the same powers as the first two caliphs. This is no doubt why, much later, marked by their aversion to the Prophet’s first three successors, the Shi‘is would in many cases follow the legal teachings of Ibn ‘Abbās rather than those of ‘Alī.<sup>18</sup> Imami literature would seek to justify this fact by invoking a form of *taqīyya* practised by ‘Alī, who feared being accused of deviation from the path followed by Abū Bakr and ‘Umar.<sup>19</sup> This striking rejection of ‘Alī’s *sunna* is thus

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p. 652. For a very rare usage of the expression *dīn ‘Uthmān* (coined 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 ‘*dīn*’ and also vol. 4, pp. 565 sq. (on use of the term *dīn*).

- 13 Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, vol. 4/b, ed. M. Schloessinger, Jerusalem, 1961, p. 27; al-Ṭabarī, ed. de Goeje, vol. 1, pp. 335<sup>o</sup>-3351.
- 14 Cf. *Naqā’id Jarīr wa l-Farazdaq*, ed. A.A. Bevan, Leiden, 1905-1909, p. 1013.
- 15 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 the *sunna* of the Prophet and the *sīra* of the caliphs (cf. al-Ṭabarī, ed. de Goeje, 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. 124sq. For an historical and doctrinal analysis of these passages, see T. Nagel, *Studien zum Minderheitenproblem im Islam*, vol. 1, Bonn, 1973, pp. 7-44.
- 16 Ed. Dūrī-Muṭṭalibī, Beirut, 1971, p. 284.
- 17 Cf. M. Sharon, ‘The ‘Abbasid Da‘wa Re-examined on the Basis of a New Source’, *Arabic and Islamic Studies*, Bar-Ilan University, 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*’.
- 18 Now see 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.
- 19 According to a tradition going back to imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir recorded 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.

perhaps due to the fact that, in speaking of the latter, the term *dīn* was more frequently used, as it stresses the radical difference of some of his positions on the faith from those of his predecessors. The *muḥaddith* 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*, by doubtless deliberately omitting 'Alī from the list of role models to be followed.<sup>20</sup> It is surely as a reaction against the use of the expression *dīn 'Alī*, that, writing at the turn of the fifth and sixth/eleventh and twelfth centuries, Ibn Abī Ya'lā declares that the *sunna* of the first three caliphs – 'Alī is thus deliberately excluded – was called 'the original ancient religion', *al-dīn al-'atīq*.<sup>21</sup> *Dīn 'Alī* would thus have been much more than a *sunna*, more than a collection of behavioural patterns or decisions about daily sacred or secular life. Rather, it seems to point to 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 the translation of the *dīn 'Alī* as 'religion of 'Alī'. Let us try to define the content of this 'religion', at least in its broadest terms.

Could it have meant "the religion" proclaimed by Muḥammad, for which 'Alī was the Messiah, the Saviour of the End of Times? (see chap. 2). Yes, given that some of his followers would have believed this. But the sources that refer to this messianic belief in the figure of 'Alī do not seem to refer to it as *dīn 'Alī*. Better to follow lines of research where textual evidence is both abundant and concordant.

In his outstanding work *The Succession to Muḥammad*, W. Madelung examines in turn almost all the passages listed above where the expression appears.<sup>22</sup> An impressive work of erudition and subtle analysis, it addresses many fundamental issues in the history of early Islam; which might explain why its eminent author makes only one allusion to *dīn 'Alī*: "*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."<sup>23</sup>

20 Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 12 vols, Hyderabad, 1907-1909; rpr. Beirut, 1968, vol. 9, pp. 328 sq. 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. 232 sq.

21 Ibn Abī Ya'lā al-Farrā', *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābila*, vol. 2, p. 32 (let us state here that 'Atīq is also one of the surnames of Abū Bakr).

22 In the course of the very long chapter on 'Alī's reign, see W. Madelung, *The succession of Muḥammad*, pp. 178-179, and in the conclusion mainly devoted to Mu'āwiya's rule, p. 338.

23 Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 178-179.

As we shall see, “the best of men after Muḥammad, his legatee (*waṣī*), and as such most entitled to lead the Community” would be the literal embodiment of ‘Alī’s religion’; however, each of these terms contains within it numerous implicit conceptions – about both ancestral Arab beliefs and the new Islamic faith – which might justify the case for his exclusive legitimacy in the eyes of a number of believers. The meaning of *dīn ‘Alī* is perhaps limited in scope, but is nevertheless complex. The aim of this chapter is to explore the how and the why of its meaning and hopefully make a modest contribution to the work of the renowned Oxford scholar.

### 3 Themes Concerning ‘Alī and the Alids

The first and best field of enquiry is the sayings of ‘Alī himself. They are notoriously numerous and, authentic or not, fill many pages in a variety of literary genres.<sup>24</sup> ‘Alī’s life as it appears in the sources, and despite many contradictions and improbabilities, seems to have been especially active: 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; his exclusion from the succession to the Prophet; his relationship with the first three caliphs; his short-lived reign – a period of uninterrupted civil war.... The complexity and drama of his life are reflected in the richness and variety of the sayings of the most striking figure that the Islamic sources reveal to us.

Nevertheless, numerous and various as his sayings might be, there are two dominant and recurrent themes: that of his being the first to accept Muḥammad’s prophetic message and to have sworn himself to absolute faith in and loyalty to the new religion (the concept of *sābiqa*); and, more crucial still, 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*.<sup>25</sup> Implicitly or explicitly, these two realities made of ‘Alī, in his own eyes and in those of his supporters, the only legitimate successor to the Prophet. A glance through the texts, for example the sayings of ‘Alī about the government of the community – in which his legitimist claims feature – will suffice to identify his two omnipresent concerns: example giving (of these sayings), his letters to Mu‘āwiya in the context of the battle of Ṣiffin;<sup>26</sup> his letters to

24 Cf. L. Veccia Vaglieri, ‘Sul Nahj al-balāghah e sul suo compilatore ash-Sharīf ar-Raḍī’, *AIUON*, special issue (1958), pp. 7 sqq.

25 Neither of these themes, which we shall examine in detail, are in contradiction with the figure of ‘Alī as Messiah. The subject deserves an entire separate study.

26 Al-Minqarī, *Waq‘at Ṣiffin*, ed. ‘A.M. Hārūn, Cairo 1382/1962, pp. 470; al-Thaqafī, *Kitāb al-ghārāt*, ed. J. al-Muḥaddith al-Urmawī, Tehran, 1395/1975, pp. 303 sq.; al-Mas‘ūdī,

his elder brother ‘Aqīl b. Abī Ṭālib in the same context,<sup>27</sup> or again, his pronouncements after the celebrated speech by Muḥammad at Ghadīr Khumm.<sup>28</sup>

These are the very themes by which the supporters of ‘Alī recognised him as the sole legitimate *waṣī* (legatee) of Muḥammad. In the poem recorded by al-Balādhurī of the warrior of the Banū ‘Adī, who fought on the side of ‘Ā’isha, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr and against ‘Alī at the battle of the Camel, this title of ‘Alī’s was 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 was present at the battle against the Alids: 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].<sup>29</sup>

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 seized the opportunity to sing the praises of ‘Alī: Truly, among those who recall (*inda dhī l-dhikri*), 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.<sup>30</sup>

In a letter probably written just before Ṣiffīn and which was recorded 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 described him as the first man to have responded positively to the Message of Muḥammad, 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) male descendants.<sup>31</sup>

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*Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. Barbier de Meynard, rev. C. Pellat, Beirut, 1968-1979, vol. 3, p. 201 sq.; (Pseudo-) Ibn Qutayba, *al-Imāma wa l-siyāsa*, ed. M.M. al-Rāfi‘ī, Cairo, 1322/1904, vol. 1, pp. 191 sq. Also, Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 240-241 and pp. 270-271.

27 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 Califé Omayyade Mu‘āwīa 1<sup>er</sup>*, Paris, 1908, p. 175; Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 263-264.

28 E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *De Goeje*, vol. 1, pp. 3350 sq.; on Ghadīr Khumm, see e.g. A.J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane*, Leiden, 1936, see under *walī*. Also, L. Veccia Vaglieri, *ET2*, s.v.; Amir-Moezzi, *El Three*.

29 Al-Balādhurī, *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 245-246.

30 Al-Ṭabarī, ed. Ibrāhīm, vol. 4, p. 426; the term *ṣinw/ṣunw*, which I have translated as ‘the closest’, literally means ‘similar, same’ and means the brother, cousin or son. W. Madelung quotes the poem in the edition by de Goeje, vol. 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 spokesman 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*, vol. 1, p. 207 and vol. 2, p. 322.

31 Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, vol. 2, pp. 393 sq.; al-Minqarī, *Waq‘at Ṣiffīn*, pp. 118 sq.; al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, vol. 3, pp. 197 sq. Al-Ṭabarī expressly admits to having censored the

In one of his *ṭawīls*, the Alid poet of Baṣra, Abū l-Aswad al-Du‘alī (d. 69/688), mentioning his favorites among the immediate blood relations of the Prophet, limits himself to naming ‘Alī by the single term *waṣī*.<sup>32</sup> The same leitmotifs are found in the sermon which al-Ḥasan, ‘Alī’s eldest son, preached at the mosque in Kūfa after his father’s assassination; a sermon also recorded by the Sunni al-Balādhurī and the pro-Shi‘i Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 356/966).<sup>33</sup> Shi‘i sources, particularly in the *ḥadīth*, later took up the same themes to the full and embellished the refrains of 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 the expression ‘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, besides, both those who were for these ideas and those who were against them were all in the habit of referring to them as *dīn ‘Alī*, it is because they must have been based upon some doctrinal and ideological ideas that seemed legitimate from a religious point of view and credible to those who professed them. I will argue that two categories of ‘legitimising proofs’ sustained these ideas and justified the Alids in applying the term *dīn ‘Alī* to them: ‘proofs’ of an Islamic nature based on the Quran and even more so, ‘proofs’ based on ancestral beliefs.

##### 4.1 The Quranic Basis

Famous for his legendary knowledge of and scrupulous faithfulness to the text of the Quran,<sup>34</sup> ‘Alī could not have failed to use elements of the revealed text to legitimise his claims. Here too, Madelung’s scholarship will guide us.<sup>35</sup> In a sub-section of his dense introduction to *The Succession to Muḥammad*, he

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letter because the masses (*‘amma*) would not have tolerated it; ed. De Goeje, vol. 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, *Annalium Libri*, ed. Gottwald, Petropoli, 1884, vol. 2, p. 155; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntazam*, Hyderabad, 1357/1938, vol. 6, p. 172.

32 *Dirwān Abū l-Aswad al-Du‘alī*, ed. M.Ḥ. Āl Yāsīn, Beirut, 1974, pp. 119-120; Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 20 vols, Būlāq, 1285/1868, vol. 12, p. 321 (a shorter version of the poem).

33 *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 3, ed. M.B. al-Maḥmudī, Beirut, 1974, p. 28; Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. S.A. Ṣaqr, Cairo 1949; rpr., Qumm, 1416/1995, p. 62.

34 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; here, chapter 1.

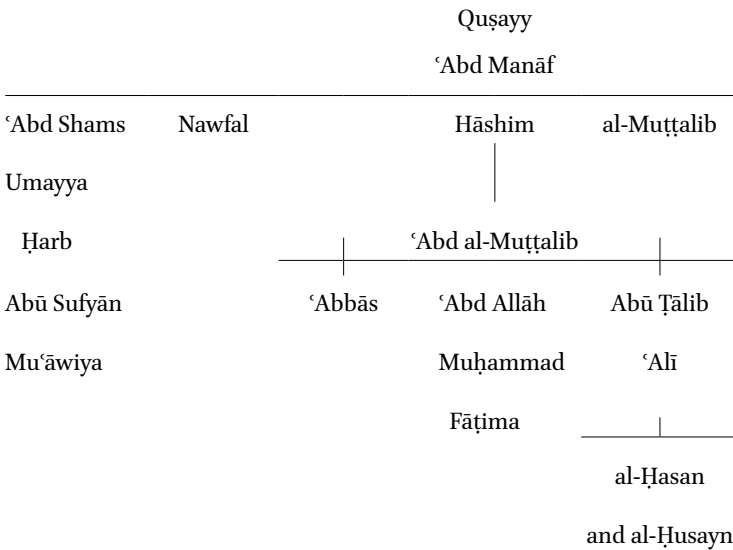
35 In this study I am relying on the official version of the Quran. In other words, the Shi‘i material on the falsification of the Quran is not considered here.

assiduously examines all the Quranic texts 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 provides a focus for, and indeed the fundamental argument of, the thesis which underpins the entire work.<sup>36</sup> In summarising it, we will therefore mainly confine ourselves to a consideration of the Quranic proofs.

The Quran places great emphasis on respect for family and blood ties:

Surely God bids to justice and good-doing and giving to kinsmen (*dhī l-qurbā*); and He forbids indecency, dishonour, and insolence, admonishing you, so that haply you will remember.

Q 16:90



**Genealogical Table of Muḥammad, 'Alī and Omayyads**

36 W. Madelung, *The Succession*, 'The obligations 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 study.

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 (*wāliḍayn*) 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 they are converts to Islam; although even if they are not, the Muslim is called upon to be just and impartial to those of his relatives who may have retained their pagan beliefs (Q 4:135; 6:152; 9:23-24 and 113-114).<sup>37</sup> However, in spite of these reserves, the Quran clearly establishes the superiority and preeminence of blood ties over all other 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

Verses 72 to 74 of Sura 8, which sing the praises of the early converts, the Emigrants and the Helpers, are followed by the following verse (probably a later addition):

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.<sup>38</sup>

There is yet another important contributory factor for our subject: in the Quranic ‘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 to Adam; the line of this same family continues down to Jesus (Q 3:33-34 and 19:58). The chain of prophets and the importance of their inheritors, chosen from among their immediate family, in the economy of the sacred, as, are stressed by verses 84 to 89 of Sura 6:

37 W. Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 6-7.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

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 were destroyed in the Flood, except for his family (*ahl*), with the exception of one son and his wife, who had betrayed him (Q 9:40 and 45-46; 21:76-77; 23:27; 37:76-77). Similarly, Lot's relatives, except for his wife – also a traitor – were the only ones spared in the destruction visited upon the people (Q 54:33-35; 66:10), since his family was composed of those who had 'purified themselves' (*yataṭahharūn*) (Q 27:56). Abraham, a central figure in the Quran, is the patriarch of the prophets of the Banū Isrā'īl. All the prophets and other vehicles of the Scriptures after him are in fact his direct descendants through his sons Isaac and Ishmael and thus form an uninterrupted chain of Messengers and Guides (*imāms*). (Q 2:124; 19:49-50; 29:27; 57:26). Addressing Sarah on the subject of 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 Family of the Home (*Ahl al-bayt*) (in the masculine plural)?

Q 11:76<sup>39</sup>

39 'Family of the Home' seems to me to be a more precise translation of this expression 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, s.v.) and to the Hebrew *ohēl*. The latter means 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 ed, Leiden, 1951], p. 95, col. 2). *Ahl*, place of residence, home, eventually came to designate those who live there, hence the family; it is the same term which, according to the *Tāj al-'arūs*, gave us the term *āl* (family, descendants), with the letter *h* alleviated: *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 refers to a building, a tent or a natural site, it also means a place of residence; 'home' means this. I shall return to other semantic levels related to *bayt*.

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 shares with him an intimate relationship with God (Q 20:29-32 and 36; 21:48-49; 25:35). The enigmatic *baqīyya*, a relic containing the divine *sakīna* and signs of the divine investiture and of the royal rank 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 the Baptist’s father, asks God for a divine son who will inherit the gift of prophecy, hereditary in Jacob’s family (Q 19:5-6). As for non-Israelite prophets, in this instance Shu‘ayb from the people of Midian and Ṣāliḥ from the Thamūd, their families also play a vital role as protectors and disciples (Q 11:91 and 27:49).<sup>40</sup>

This eminent place accorded to close relatives of preceding prophets could not be without any parallel with Muḥammad’s immediate family. Some Quranic passages are vague and indirect (Q 26:214, ‘*ashīrataka al-aqrabīn*’; Q 42:23, ‘*al-mawadda fī l-qurbā*’). Others certainly do refer to the family and the consanguine relatives of the Prophet. These are the verses relating to the distribution of a fifth of the spoils (*khums*) and a part of the *fay*, the property of infidels acquired without battle, to close relatives (*dhū l-qurbā*) of the Prophet (Q 8:41 and 59:7). As to the ‘close relatives’, practically all the interpretive 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 documents, these advantages compensated somewhat for the fact that Muḥammad’s immediate relatives could receive no alms or charity (*ṣadaqa, zakāt*). The reason given for this is that charity issued from people’s ‘impurities’ (*awsākh*), whence the purifying effect of practising charity. The virtue of purity associated with the Prophet’s family was thus considered incompatible with receiving charity. The Quran also refers to the purity of Muḥammad’s family, just as it refers to that of Lot’s family (see above).

40 Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 8-12. For discussions of the term *baqīyya*, 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.

*O Ahl al-Bayt*, God only desires to put away from you abomination and to cleanse you.

Q 33:33

The spiritual and religious importance of Muḥammad's family is also noted in the famous verse of the Ordeal, *āyat al-mubāhala* (Q 3:61). Just as the Quran constantly establishes parallels between Muḥammad and previous prophets, for instance 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 the families of past prophets and their spiritual and worldly heritage seems obvious. Admittedly, according to the later dogma of the 'seal of prophecy' Muḥammad's inheritor could not lay claim to the gift of prophecy (see however here chap. 7), but it is just as true that among the gifts of the prophetic heritage bequeathed by the Envoys of God to their close relatives, the Quran includes sovereignty (*mulk*), authority (*ḥukm*), wisdom (*ḥikma*), Scriptures (*kitāb*) and the imamate. Given this Quranic evidence, it would appear that W. Madelung is right to conclude that the Quran advises consultation (*shūrā*) about the leadership in certain cases, but never on matters concerning the succession of prophets.<sup>41</sup>

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 neglected any opportunity to point to this Quranic evidence in support of his own declarations. In his *Ṭabaqāt*, Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845), an author who could hardly be suspected of pro-Alid sympathies, tells a story which seems especially significant. In a chapter devoted to 'the heritage of the Messenger of God and what he left behind' (*dhikr mīrāth rasūli llāh wa mā taraka*), he records that, according to 'Abbās b. 'Abd Allāh b. Ma'bad, (grandson of al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib), Fāṭima and al-'Abbās, accompanied by '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:

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

Quoting the Quran, 'Alī is said to have replied:

Solomon inherited from David (Q 27:16) and [calling on God to ask 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)

<sup>41</sup> W. Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 12-18.

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.<sup>42</sup>

His legitimization by the Quran was certainly of importance in the support which (according to the historiographers) the majority of the Quran reciters (*qurrā*) gave to ‘Alī at the time of his conflict with Mu‘āwiya, especially before the beginning of the battle of Şiffin and in the ensuing arbitration.<sup>43</sup> However, in this early period of Islam, legitimization by the Quran was assuredly no guarantee of unanimity. The new religion would require several generations of assimilation to profoundly influence the outlook of the people and to establish itself in their hearts with sufficient authority to shape their minds. To be credible during this early period, a speech or an event had to be rooted in ancient, ancestral beliefs and to have antecedents in Arabic tribal culture, if it were to resonate among recent converts to Islam. We have already discussed the influence of Biblical writings on the society which saw the birth of Muḥammad and his message (see above chap. 2). Next we will consider other factors of this milieu.

#### 4.2 *The Pre-Islamic Basis*

For more than a century, a number of eminent Orientalists and specialists in Arabic and Islamic studies have studied and progressively revealed the remarkable continuity between the pre-Islamic period and the earliest days of Islam in questions of institutions, beliefs and rituals. These scholars include J. Wellhausen and I. Goldziher and the circle responsible for ‘From Jāhiliyya to Islam’ around M.J. Kister and his colleagues and students, M. Lecker, U. Rubin, H. Busse and others, not forgetting J. Henninger, R.B. Serjeant, T. Fahd, A.F.L. Beeston, J. Chelhod and, more recently, E. Conte and C.J. Robin. Many of these have been motivated to study the system of family relationships in both in its secular and sacred, in other words its natural and supernatural aspects.

The old thesis of H. Lammens, in his *Le berceau de l’Islam*, according to which hereditary power and dynastic rulers were completely unknown to, if not utterly detested by, the Arabs, would appear to be no longer tenable.<sup>44</sup> Ever

42 Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, p. 315. I. Hrbek, stressing amongst other things the incompatibility of the *ḥadīth* quoted 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. On the spoliation of the inheritance of Fāṭima by the caliphal authorities, see Sulaym b. Qays (attributed to), *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, ed. al-Anṣārī al-Zanjānī, 3 vols., Qumm, 1426/1995, chap. 14 (on this work, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 1).

43 Cf. Minqarī, *Waq‘at Şiffin*, pp. 88ff.; al-Ṭabarī, ed. De Goeje, vol. 1, pp. 3385-3386.

44 H. Lammens, *Le berceau de l’Islam: l’Arabie occidentale à la veille de l’Hégire*, Rome, 1914, p. 314 and *passim*.

since the monumental study by E. Tyan, *Institutions du droit public Musulman*, it has been agreed that, although tribal secular leadership was not in fact always hereditary, religious leadership and priestly functions were always the prerogative of a significant noble lineage, *nasab*, and that this was particularly true of the tribe of Quraysh.<sup>45</sup> Even W.M. Watt, who in his biography of Muḥammad seems at times to be close to Lammens view,<sup>46</sup> concedes, in his *Islamic Political Thought*, that the Arabs regularly elected their leaders from particular families.<sup>47</sup> In this regard, the studies by R.B. Serjeant seem decisive. In a series of publications, he most convincingly shows that Muḥammad's rapid success, and the ease with which he rallied many tribes to his cause, were due essentially to the fact that he belonged to an aristocratic and theocratic Meccan and Qurayshī family in which religious functions were hereditary, as was indeed the case throughout Arabia. Had he been not a member of this lineage, which the English scholar terms 'The Holy Family', Muḥammad would have had no credibility with other tribes.<sup>48</sup>

Well before Muḥammad's time, the tribe of the Quraysh were held to be under divine protection, thanks to its sacred status as one of the *ahl al-ḥaram*, the People of the Meccan Sanctuary and the area surrounding it. According to U. Rubin, even early Muslim exegesis contained traces of this ancient belief.<sup>49</sup> Muḥammad's ancestor Quṣayy seems to have been the chief guardian of the sanctuary; from him onwards, the different clans of his direct descendants inherited various responsibilities for the ritual functions of the pilgrimage: guarding the Ka'ba (*ḥijāba*), providing drinking 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.<sup>50</sup> We find traces of the hereditary priestly functions of Muḥammad's ancestors in the poetry of the Prophet's bard, Ḥassān b. Thābit (d. 54/674).<sup>51</sup> Muḥammad himself is said to have declared the 'Holy Family' of the Quraysh to consist of the descendants of al-Muṭṭalib and those of his

45 E. Tyan, *Institutions du droit public Musulman*, Paris, 1954-1956, vol. 1, pp. 97 sq., 114 sqq.

46 W.M. Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, Oxford, 1961, esp. pp. 35-36.

47 Id., *Islamic Political Thought*, Edinburgh, 1968, p. 31.

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

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

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

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

brother, Hāshim, the great grandfather of the Prophet (see the genealogical tree above). The canonical works of *ḥadīth* leave no doubt about this by identifying the ‘near kin’ (*dhū l-qurbā*) mentioned by the Quran 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.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, we know that since pre-Islamic times the Banū l-Muṭṭalib and the Banū Hāshim were strongly bound to each other by the *ḥilf al-fuḍūl*.<sup>53</sup>

In this connection, the tradition recorded by Abū Dāwūd and al-Maqrīzī, on the authority of al-Zuhrī, Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib and Jubayr b. Muṭ‘im, is of great importance: after the victory at Khaybar, the Prophet divided the share of the close relatives (*sahm dhī 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 were 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) protested to Muḥammad saying:

Messenger of God, because of the place God has given 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 (the former) a share and you have excluded us, when our relationship to you is the same as theirs.

Muḥammad replied:

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.<sup>54</sup>

The saintliness of the Banū Hāshim is evidenced by the subtle analyses of the *Hāshimīyyāt*, a collection of poems by al-Kumayt b. Zayd al-Asadī al-Kūfī

52 Cf. A.J. Wensinck, *Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition*, Leiden, 1927, p. 266. On the part reserved for the Banū Hāshim in the *dīwān* by ‘Umar see Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 3, pp. 294 sq., completed in al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1866, pp. 448 sq. On ‘*atā*’ 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, see Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, ed. I. ‘Abbās, Beirut and London, 1985, pp. 102-104, 142 sq.

53 W.M. Watt, *Muḥammad at Mecca*, Oxford, 1953, pp. 6-7; C. Pellat, ‘Ḥilf al-fuḍūl’, *EI2*.

54 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 (a slightly different and shorter version).

(d. 126/743),<sup>55</sup> in studies by T. Nagel, M. Sharon and especially W. Madelung in his monograph dedicated to it.<sup>56</sup> It seems that, among the descendants of Hāshim, Muḥammad considered his own family to be *the* 'Holy Family' above all others.<sup>57</sup> Muḥammad is said have described this 'Holy Family' by the expression *ahl baytī*, having certainly in mind the Quranic occurrences of the expression *ahl al-bayt* which we have examined above. Furthermore, in addition to the purity which the Quran ascribes to Muḥammad's *ahl al-bayt* (Q 33:33), the sacred dimension of the term *bayt* must certainly have also had been a significant role. Indeed, the religious nature of the term, originating from the antique heritage of Semitic languages in which it means temple, sanctuary or the place of residence of a supernatural being, is again clearly evident from the ways in which the Quran employs the term; for example, in the fact that it describes the Ka'ba, or in the expression *al-bayt al-ma'mūr* and in the expression *rabb al-bayt* in the early suras, 105, *al-Fil* and 106, *Quraysh*.<sup>58</sup> It is not my purpose here

55 Ed. J. Horowitz, *Die Hāshimijjāt des Kumait*, Leiden, 1904; Arabic text reprinted in Qumm, n.d.(ca. 1970).

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

57 In this context, for reasons 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 because of their strongly Islamic connotations, which, in turn, prove their later date. On these traditions and the historical problems they pose, see e.g. T. Fahd, *La divination arabe*, Strasbourg, 1971; 2nd edn, Paris, 1987, pp. 82 sq. and pp. 260 sq.; 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; J. Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des tribus*, pp. 166 sq. It seems however undeniable that the native environment of Muḥammad was deeply permeated by biblical culture, as we have seen (chap. 2). Even the notion of the sainthood of the family of the saint is fundamentally biblical.

58 In Accadian, the term *bīt* designates the temple as a whole, or the rooms of which it is made up (W. von Soden, *AHW*, s.v.); 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 nomadic period, 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 meaning the mobile sanctuary in which the symbols and objects required for worship were held, eventually itself came to be 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*

to define the full meaning which Muḥammad attributed to the expression *ahl al-bayt*, an expression which has simultaneously religious, sacred and political import.<sup>59</sup> A great many studies have been dedicated to this, analysing both the diverse classical interpretations of the expression and the historical and philological material related to it: from H. Lammens and R. Strothmann, who see in it only an allusion to the Prophet's wives<sup>60</sup> and R. Paret, for whom the *ahl al-bayt* means the adherents of the cult of the Ka'ba,<sup>61</sup> to the meticulously argued monographs of M. Sharon on the different meanings attributed to it both in changing times and by different religious and political currents; studies which I consider to be decisive on certain points, and to which I will have occasion to return,<sup>62</sup> and not forgetting W. Madelung, for whom the expression essentially means the descendants of Hāshim in general.<sup>63</sup> Still, it is useful to recall, as I. Goldziher has so aptly shown, that, regardless of the benefits 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.<sup>64</sup> An especially telling example of this is that almost all the numerous early interpretations of verse 33:33, on the purity of Muḥammad's *ahl al-bayt*, as recorded by al-Ṭabarī in his monumental Quranic commentary, lean in this direction.<sup>65</sup> Whatever the case may be, with regard to the problem we are concerned with here, it seems frankly unthinkable that 'Alī would not have claimed to belong to the Prophet's *ahl al-bayt*. He would also have laid an exclusive claim for himself and his progeny to those things in the prophetic

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*Centrale à la veille de l'Hégire*, Paris, 1968, ch. 1; J. Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des tribus*, see index under 'bayt', 'beth', 'bétyle'. On the meaning of the word in south-Arabian language see A.F.L. Beeston, 'The So-called Harlots of Ḥaḍramawt', *Oriens*, 5 (1952), pp. 21 sq., 'Kingship in Ancient South-Arabia', *JESHO*, 15 (1972), pp. 251 sq.

- 59 M. Sharon interprets the expression to mean, in a pre-Islamic context, '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.
- 60 Especially in Q 33:33; H. Lammens, *Fāṭima et les filles de Mahomet*, Rome, 1912, p. 97 and *passim*; R. Strothmann, *Das Staatsrecht der Zaiditen*, Strasbourg, 1912, pp. 19 sq.
- 61 Especially in Q 11:73 and 33:33; cf. his article 'Der Plan einer neuen, leicht kommentierten wissenschaftlichen Koranübersetzung', in Paret (ed.), *Orientalistische Studien Enno Littmann zu seinem 60. Geburtstag*, Leiden 1935, pp. 121-130, esp. pp. 127 sq.
- 62 M. Sharon, '*Ahl al-Bayt* – People of the House'; id. '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.
- 63 W. Madelung, 'The *Hāshimīyyāt* of al-Kumayt', esp. pp. 15, 21, 24-25.
- 64 I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, ed. S.M. Stern, vol. 2, London, 1971, pp. 103 sq.; see also sources noted by M. Sharon, '*Ahl al-Bayt* – People of the House', pp. 172-173.
- 65 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, ed. M.M. Shākir and A.M. Shākir, Cairo, 1373-1388/1955-1969, vol. 22, pp. 5-7.

heritage touching both spiritual and temporal matters, thus making of them a veritable collection of articles of faith called *dīn* 'Alī'.<sup>66</sup>

'Alī is actually related to Muḥammad by the two principal sorts of Arab 'qarāba' (family ties), namely *nasab* and *muṣāhara*.<sup>67</sup> Terms difficult to render in translation, the first conveys the sense of genealogy, provenance or paternal lineage, bonds of blood or alliance, noble birth and affinity. The second, as rich in meaning as the first, suggests in its original sense the idea of fusion and thus affinities and relationships through women, and alliance by marriage. Thus, in general, *nasab* refers to a relationship by blood and *muṣāhara* to a bond or alliance by marriage.<sup>68</sup> 'Alī was Muḥammad's cousin, the son of his paternal uncle, one of the noblest relationships of *nasab* in the tribal conception.<sup>69</sup> Once he became the Prophet's son-in-law, he was also related by *muṣāhara*, thus becoming *walī*, that is, relative by blood and/or by alliance;<sup>70</sup> the significance this term was to acquire later in Shi'ism is well known.

Ancestral beliefs about the supranatural aspects of relationships also seem to have played a role in the establishment of 'the religion of 'Alī'. These beliefs seem to be inextricably linked to certain traits of Muḥammad's personality as some of his contemporaries saw him.<sup>71</sup> He may really have had a supranatural

66 In his long letter to Mu'awiya, recorded by several historiographers (al-Minqarī, al-Balādhurī, al-Ṭabarī) and analysed by Madelung (*The Succession*, pp. 212 sq.), 'Alī seems to have identified the *ahl al-bayt* with the Banū Hāshim and Banū l-Muṭṭalib; however, on the succession to the Prophet, he would most certainly have been thinking of himself and his sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the sole male progeny of Muḥammad.

67 See P. Bonte, E. Conte, C. Hamès and A.W. Ould Cheikh, *Al-Ansāb. La quête des origines*, Paris, 1991, pp. 65sq. The third aspect of the *qarāba* is the *riḍā'a* (adoption by milk); see *ibid.*, pp. 73 sqq.

68 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 Quran, both terms are indissociably linked in 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 sihran*)". E. Conte proposes "parents (par le sang) et alliés (par le mariage ou les femmes)" (*Al-Ansāb. La quête des origines*, p. 66).

69 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 der Wissenschaften 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. 33 sq.

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

71 On this position, now see U. Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder. The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims*, Princeton, 1995.

aura in their eyes. T. Fahd has shown that the prophetic aspect of Muḥammad could be seen as linking him to ancient figures with magical associations, the ‘soothsayer’ (*kāhin*), the ‘poet’ (*shā’ir*), the ‘clairvoyant’ (*‘arrāf*), and so forth: we find 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 secret language, knowledge of hidden things, power over objects and so forth. With subtle analysis, this important scholar of Muslim occult sciences, has, in my view, shown to what extent ancient Arab beliefs and the idea of the prophet mingled and influenced each other.<sup>72</sup> In numerous passages of the Quran, Muḥammad was compared by his adversaries to *kāhins*, *sāhirs* and *shā’irs* (Q 37:36; 52:29; 69:42) and he was often accused of being possessed or inspired by *jinn*s (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, portraying him as a kind of magical figure, not in a relationship with God but instead with different kinds of ‘genies’, characters familiar in Arabia from time immemorial.<sup>73</sup>

On the famous question of Muḥammad’s human ‘informants’, relentlessly upheld by his adversaries, Hūd b. Muhkim/Muhakkam (second half of third/ninth century) records 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*.<sup>74</sup> In another text, of al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122), the same al-Ḥasan speaks of ‘Ubayd b. al-Khaḍir, an Ethiopian soothsayer.<sup>75</sup> According to Ibn al-Athīr, before his conversion to Islam, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb regarded the Prophet as a *kāhin* and a *shā’ir*.<sup>76</sup> Finally, according to a text of Ibn Sa’d, Muḥammad himself, at the outset, was concerned about

72 Fahd, *La divination arabe*, pp. 63 sq. (‘Divination et prophétie’), pp. 88 sq. (‘Prophète et devin’) 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 of translating the term *kāhin* (priest – soothsayer – oracle – doctor), see *La divination arabe*, pp. 94-95. 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.

73 J. Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des tribus*, pp. 182-183 and pp. 527-529.

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

75 Abū Muḥammad al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī al-musammā bi-Ma’ālim al-tanzīl*, Ḥ.‘A. al-‘Akk and M. Sawār, Beirut, 1992, vol. 3, p. 361. Regarding the Prophet’s ‘informants’, now see 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).

76 *Uṣd al-ghāba*, ed. M. Fāyīḍ *et al.*, Cairo, 1963-1972, vol. 4, p. 74.

being a soothsayer; terrified by the supernatural voices he was hearing, he is said to have told his wife Khadija:

I hate nothing more than idols and the *kuhhān*, but I am afraid of being a *kāhin* myself.<sup>77</sup>

We know that in a number of ancient belief systems, bodily fluids such as blood, sperm, saliva, milk and sweat, are considered to be agents for thaumaturgic transmission; they can contain and transmit beneficial or harmful elements, faculties, virtues or spiritual influences from one bearer to another and, more specifically, hereditarily, to their descendants.<sup>78</sup> The Arabs, too, had these kinds of beliefs. The *kāhin* was believed to have the power to master and consciously and intentionally control what he transmitted through his bodily fluids. His supernatural gifts were believed to be hereditary.<sup>79</sup> In a number of records Muḥammad appears to have been associated with this idea, both directly and allusively, in connection with different bodily fluids.

The mixing of blood made two men become brothers or allied relatives.<sup>80</sup> J. Wellhausen is right to compare the Arab blood pacts with *Verbrüderung* and *adoptio in fratres*.<sup>81</sup> In spite of the great discretion of the Islamic sources, it seems certain that rituals of ‘the pact of chosen brotherhood’ (*muʾākhāt*), which the Prophet performed twice upon his arrival in Medina, were accompanied by the exchange of blood. A “pagan” practice, originating according to L. Caetani, from the ancient Arabic *ḥilf*,<sup>82</sup> and already a subject of the pre-Islamic poetry of al-Aʿshā Maymūn,<sup>83</sup> it carried infinitely more weight than Quranic and/or Islamic arguments in winning over the Anṣār in Medina. According to a text of Ibn Hishām, on the occasion of the second meeting in

77 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1/1, p. 129.

78 E.g. A. van Gennepe, *Les rites de passage*, Paris, 1909, pp. 41 sqq.

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

80 W. Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, 2nd edn, Cambridge, 1903, pp. 50 sq. and his *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 2nd ed, Edinburgh, 1914, pp. 314 sq, 479 sq.

81 J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, Berlin and Leipzig, 1884, pp. 124, 127-128.

82 L. Caetani, *Annali dell'Islam*, vol. 1, p. 408.

83 ‘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 P. Bonte et al., *Al-Ansāb. La quête des origines*, p. 92.

‘Aqaba, and faced with the reluctance of the Medinans to conclude a pact with him, Muḥammad declared:

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 to represent you in the ritual of the oath (*hilf*).<sup>84</sup>

At the battle of Ḥunayn in the year 8/630, and general disarray when the Muslims were ambushed by the Hawāzin, the Prophet asked his uncle ‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib to use his booming voice to remind the troops of the bonds sealed by blood.<sup>85</sup> The different episodes of Ibn Hishām’s account show that this kind of speech, rooted in ancient culture, was more favourably received by the Arabs than the prophetic statements of Muḥammad.<sup>86</sup> 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)<sup>87</sup> among the Muslims of Mecca, from the Meccan period onwards; or (according to Ibn Hishām)<sup>88</sup> 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/right (?) 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,<sup>89</sup> which seems authentic, since in verses 4:33, 8:75 and especially 33:6, the Quran seems to call this institution into vigorously question, by stressing the priority of a blood relationship over the pact of brotherhood.<sup>90</sup> From his examination of, amongst other things, Roman legal sources relating to the governance of the Bedouin population in Syria during the fifth century AD which had been studied by Bruns and Sachau, (who had once more proved this to be an age-old practice), E. Conte concludes that the *mu’ākhāt*, sealed by blood, made of these ‘twin brothers’ close relatives (*qarā’ib*), henceforth classified as first cousins (*ibnā l-‘amm*) and consequently inheritors of the male lineage (*‘aṣaba*); in

84 Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya*, ed. M. Saqqā, I. Abyārī and ‘A. Shalabī, 2nd ed, Cairo, 1955, vol. 1, pp. 446 and 454; al-Ṭabarī, *De Goeje*, vol. 1, pp. 1220-1221.

85 Ibn Hishām, *op. cit.*, pp. 442-443.

86 Cf. on this subject, W. Atallah, ‘Les survivances Préislamiques chez le Prophète et ses Compagnons’, *Arabica*, 24/3 (1977), pp. 299-310.

87 *Kitāb al-muḥabbar*, ed. I. Lichtenstaedter, Hyderabad, 1942, pp. 70 sq.

88 Ibn Hishām, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 344-346; also, Serjeant, ‘The “Constitution” of Medina’, p. 6.

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

90 See also W.M. Watt, ‘Mu’ākhāt’, *EI2*; Conte, ‘Entrer dans le sang. Perceptions arabes des origines’, pp. 93-99.

establishing this relationship, the ‘twinning’ pact created a common filiation between ‘brothers’;<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup>

But there is more. For the Arabs, *kahāna* is hereditary, as is nobility. The qualities of the *kāhin* or of the nobles are passed on by various means, including the sperm of the father.<sup>93</sup> In pre-Islamic Arabia, the Bedouins went so far as to ‘lend’ their wives to nobles whose sperm was highly prized so that would bear children of distinguished pedigree.<sup>94</sup> As for the qualities of saintliness, Islamic sources speak repeatedly of the powerful transmission of the seminal substance from Muḥammad’s ancestors, manifested by the ‘Light’ and symbolised by the *ṣulb* (kidney, loins), an organ believed to be the source of the semen.<sup>95</sup> Passing through the woman’s uterus (*raḥim*), the source of her ‘seed’, the man’s semen forms the milk in the mother’s breast, which even further facilitates the transmission of the father’s qualities to his child; whence the inseparable link between sperm and milk which is found in expressions like ‘milk is from man’ (*al-laban min al-mar’*), ‘the reproductive/stallion milk’ (*laban al-faḥl*) or ‘the unique sperm’ (*liqāḥ wāḥid*), which means both the man’s seminal fluid and the woman’s milk.<sup>96</sup> 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 with her milk, identified with the father’s sperm.<sup>97</sup> Springing 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 usual title among the Shi’is is ‘the Confluence of two

91 Conte, *art. cit.*, p. 94.

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

93 For example T. Fahd, *La divination arabe*, pp. 23 sq.

94 On this practice known as *iktisāb*, i.e. ‘obtaining’ (of the seminal substance and thus noble race), see al-Alūsī, *Bulūgh al-arab fi ma’rifat aḥwāl al-‘arab*, Cairo, 1928, vol. 2, p. 4. The custom still described by the terms *iktisāb* or *kasb*, 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.

95 For sources and studies on this subject see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, see index under ‘*ṣulb*’, ‘*aslāb*’ and ‘*nūr*’.

96 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. 234 sqq.

97 P. Bonte, ‘Égalité et hiérarchie dans une tribu maure’, in *Al-Ansāb. La quête des origines*, p. 158.

Lights’ (*majma’ al-nūrayn*),<sup>98</sup> born from Muḥammad’s seed and the recipient of ‘Alī’s, became the other agent in the transmission of prophetic virtues. ‘Alī seems to have been fully convinced of truth of these beliefs.

According to al-Ṭabarī, ‘Alī, in Kufa during his conflict with Mu‘āwiya just before the arbitration of Ṣiffin, at the moment when part of his army had dispersed, decided to join battle and fight to the death if necessary. But, seeing al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, he realised that if they were to perish, the Muslims would be entirely deprived of the descendance of the Prophet. Al-Ṭabarī’s account seems to imply that this was the main reason why ‘Alī pit and end to his campaign.<sup>99</sup> According to al-Maqrīzī, some Muslims held that if ‘Alī, being also father of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, had directly succeeded the Prophet, many would have concluded that the caliphate had become a hereditary sovereignty (*mulk mutawārath*). This seems historically plausible.<sup>100</sup>

Saliva is also considered to be an agent in thaumaturgic transmission. The giving of saliva is the famous practice known as *taḥnīk*, termed ‘sputation’ by C. Gilliot.<sup>101</sup> 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 else’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 made more explicit by the addition of the word, ‘saliva’ (*ḥannakahu bi-rīqihī*).<sup>102</sup> Saliva can protect, heal, pass on virtues or skills, but also destroy or humiliate. Depending on the intention of the person who performs it, the ritual may be an initiation, a blessing, a medicine or a malign act.<sup>103</sup> Both *ḥadīth* and *sīra* literary and historiographical works record many instances of the Prophet’s practising *taḥnīk*. The purpose is either therapeutic – Muḥammad healing the palsied hand of Umm Jalīl bint al-Mujallal’s son<sup>104</sup> and curing epilepsy in a

98 See al-Ṭurayḥī, Fakhr al-Dīn, *Majma’ al-baḥrayn wa maṭla’ al-nayyirayn*, Tehran, 1321/1903, table of contents under ‘*majma’ al-nūrayn*’.

99 Al-Ṭabarī, ed. De Goeje, vol. 1, pp. 3346-3347.

100 *Al-Nizā’ wa l-takhāṣum*, p. 92.

101 In his seminal article ‘Portrait “mythique” d’Ibn ‘Abbās’, *Arabica*, 32 (1985), pp. 127-184; see pp. 143-144.

102 *Lisān al-‘Arab*, *Tāj al-‘arūs*, s.v.

103 Van Gennepe, *Les rites de passage*, pp. 138-139 (*taḥnīk* as initiatory ritual); J. Desparmet, *Le mal magique*, Algiers and Paris, 1932, pp. 98 ff. (practice called *tḥīl*, from the root TFL – to spit out – in Morocco).

104 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, Cairo, 1313/1896, vol. 3, p. 107.

seven-year-old child;<sup>105</sup> – or initiatory – Muḥammad transmitting knowledge to Ibn ‘Abbās.<sup>106</sup> But it serves especially for the transmission of blessings and moral virtues: many accounts tell of parents taking their children to the Prophet for him to practise *taḥnīk* on them;<sup>107</sup> others speak of new converts asking the Prophet to do so.<sup>108</sup> It is useful here to note the direct link between *taḥnīk* and *baraka/tabarruk*. In a number of *ḥadīths*, both roots are used simultaneously (*fa-yubarrīku ‘alayhim wa yuḥannikuhum*; “so that he may bless them” *ḥannakahu fa-barraka ‘alayhi* “he spit in his mouth and blessed him”, etc.).<sup>109</sup> *Baraka*, a word in Muslim hagiography which eventually came to mean a kind of mysterious and beneficial emanation, an energy or spiritual influx transmitted by contact, affecting living things and objects, originally meant abundant rain or the tethering of a camel near a source of water; or yet again what the camel does while there, chewing on its food and (once mixed in saliva) feeding its young with it. In his excellent article on this, J. Chelhod demonstrates how this second meaning led to the interpretation of *baraka* as the spiritual energy that the father passes on to his newborn child by placing him upon his knees and putting saliva in his mouth, thereby blessing him according to his protection.<sup>110</sup> 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 is a veritable benediction.

105 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.

106 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 Gennepe, *Les rites de passage*, p. 138. In 1973, I witnessed the 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.

107 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ‘*aqīqa*’, 1; ‘*adab*’, 109; Muslim, *al-Jāmi’ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 2 vols, rpr. Istanbul, 1383/1963, ‘*adab*’, vol. 1, pp. 23-28, ‘*tahāra*’, 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 *taḥnīk* in Medieval Islam’, *JNES*, 3 (1988), pp. 175-179.

108 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 *taḥnīk* 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. 681 sq. and n. 2. In the 5th volume (intro and amends by M. Hamidullah, Paris, 1981), the error has not been corrected.

109 Refer to the preceding two footnotes.

110 J. Chelhod, ‘La *baraka* chez les Arabes’, *RHR*, 148/1 (1955), pp. 68-88; see also id., *Les structures du sacré chez les arabes*, index and esp. pp. 58-62.

Here too, as in the case of *mu'ākhāt* examined above, ‘Alī and his sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn would appear to have been ostracised by non-Shi‘i authors. There is no mention of them in the numerous *ḥadīths* or accounts about *taḥnīks* 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;<sup>111</sup> it is impossible 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, without doing so to his own ‘brother’, cousin, and future son-in-law, who was also undoubtedly one of his closest companions? Yet again, 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 records *taḥnīks* that the Prophet practised upon ‘Alī and the sons born to Fāṭima – a practice that, according to the same sources, the imams were to continue.<sup>112</sup>

Tradition has it that Muḥammad was adopted at very young age by his paternal uncle Abū Ṭālib, and became, well before the advent of Islam, ‘the adopted brother’ of his cousin ‘Alī. Both this *qarāba* and the spiritual links between them were such that ‘Alī did not hesitate to embrace the religious message of Muḥammad. Friend and no doubt blessed confidant of the latter, his constant companion, ‘twinned’ with him by virtue of the *mu'ākhāt* ritual, during which there may have been an exchange of blood, an intrepid warrior for his Cause, ‘Alī married Fāṭima, Muḥammad’s daughter, and became the father of the only male descendants of the Prophet. Some Companions were privileged to have one or several of these bonds with Muḥammad, but none except ‘Alī had them all. Is this why some of the faithful may have believed that ‘Alī was considered by Muḥammad to be the Messiah of the End of Times? (see above chap. 2).

Furthermore ‘Alī alone had the advantage of two fundamental *qarābas*: the ‘twinning’ and the fathering of male descendants. He thus had cogent reasons, confirmed, in his opinion by the Quran and even more so by ancient beliefs, for believing in his own divine election and in that of his progeny by Fāṭima

111 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. 452 sq., 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).

112 For examples and sources see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 193-195. 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.

thereafter. Surely, this 'election' was the essential core of what his contemporaries would have called *dīn 'Alī*.

## 5 Reactions and Consequences

Whatever the original meaning of *ahl bayt al-nabī*, which rapidly became synonymous with *āl Muḥammad*, *āl al-nabī*, *āl al-rasūl* and so on, 'Alī would surely not have failed to claim it for himself and his household. Certain Hāshimids, especially the Alids, seem to have claimed it from the first/seventh century; this seems apparent, for example, in a few verses of ancient poets such as Abū l-Aswad al-Du'ālī (d. 69/688), Kuthayyir 'Azza (d. 105/723) or al-Kumayt b. Zayd (d. 126/743).<sup>113</sup> From the extensive and pertinent analyses of the expression and its religious and political implications by M. Sharon in his many 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'* studied by I. Goldziher; see above), without, however, this popular respect actually translating into their recognition of his right to govern the community.<sup>114</sup> Of those who shared this respect, some Alids seem to have been the first to claim his political legitimacy, that, in other words, 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, very present in Iraq, on the population in Kūfa, the homeland and stronghold of the Alids. According to this conception, leadership of the community is exclusively reserved to the descendants of the House of David.<sup>115</sup> Elsewhere, the same scholar seems to include the influence of the Christian concept of the 'Holy Family' (equally omnipresent in Iraq during the early centuries of Islam), by underscoring the constant comparisons that Shi'ī literature establishes between the figures of Mary and Fāṭima.<sup>116</sup>

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

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

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

116 Sharon, '*Ahl al-Bayt* – People of the House', p. 173. For sources and studies regarding these comparisons, see now C.P. Clohessy, *Fāṭima*, chapter 4.

He even considers it to be entirely plausible that there existed a version of the Quran from Kūfa in which ‘Alī and members of his family would have been frequently mentioned numerous times,<sup>117</sup> just as Imami *ḥadīths* had repeatedly and openly affirmed up to the mid-fourth/tenth century.<sup>118</sup>

Quite apart from some violent reactions against the importance given to kinship with the Prophet or against the legitimacy of the Prophet’s family, those, for example, of the Khārijīs,<sup>119</sup> of ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr,<sup>120</sup> and of some *ahl al-ḥadīth*,<sup>121</sup> the non-Alid members of the Prophet’s family and their descendants, that is the Umayyads and after them the ‘Abbāsids, may have responded by trying to appropriate the title of *ahl al-bayt* for themselves. Although prudence prevents M. Sharon from explicitly declaring his position on the matter, on many occasions he seems to suggest that Umayyad and ‘Abbasid attempts to identify with the *ahl bayt al-nabī* might have been in reaction to much older Alid claims.<sup>122</sup> At one point, their common resistance to the Umayyads drew the Alids and ‘Abbāsids closer together.<sup>123</sup> 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 affirm the legitimacy of ‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib and his sons as the *ahl al-kisā’*.<sup>124</sup>

117 ‘The Umayyads as *ahl al-bayt*’, p. 127.

118 On this version of the Qur’an, see e.g. E. Kohlberg, ‘Some Notes on the Imāmite Attitude to the Qur’an’, 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; M.M. Bar-Asher, ‘Variant Readings and Additions of the Imāmi-Shī’a to the Quran’, *IOS*, 13 (1993), pp. 39-74. And now E. Kohlberg and M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, Introduction.

119 Cf. e.g. al-Ṭabarī, ed. De Goeje, vol. 1, p. 3350.

120 According to an account by al-Zuhri, reported by al-Balādhuri, Ibn Zubayr considered the Prophet’s family to be ‘petty and bad’ (*uḥayla sū’/saw’*), *Ansāb al-ashraf*, vol. 5, ed. S. Goitein, Jerusalem, 1936, p. 372.

121 Those, for example, that transmitted traditions regarding the *kuf* of Muḥammad’s father and ancestors; cf. Muslim, vol. 1, pp. 132-133; al-Ḥalabī, *al-Sīrat al-ḥalabīyya*, 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-ladunīyya 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’.

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

123 Gilliot, ‘Portrait “mythique” d’Ibn ‘Abbās’, pp. 159sq., esp. p. 161; Madelung, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās and Shi’ite Law’.

124 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 of 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,

Moreover, the study of *dīn* ‘Alī seems to corroborate suggestion made by G.H. Sadighi and E. Kohlberg that the glorification of ‘Alī, which transforming the historical person into a semi-legendary figure of heroic and even sacred stature, can be traced back to very early times, to the period of his caliphate or even that immediately following the death of the Prophet.<sup>125</sup> A certain reaction against the violent and repressive policies of the first Umayyads, especially Mu‘āwiya and his son Yazīd, seems also to have been a catalyst of this process.<sup>126</sup> ‘Alī’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 the expressions *dīn* ‘Alī, *dīn* Ḥasan and *dīn* Ḥusayn can be found, the last two apparently meaning no less than ‘the religion of ‘Alī’, but under the imamates of his two sons.<sup>127</sup>

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156) are modelled on the abundant documents about ‘Alī in early Shi‘i works. This issue merits further attention, see also 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.

125 Gh.H. Ṣadiqī, *Jonbesh hā-ye dīnī-ye Īrānī dar qarn hā-ye dovvom va sevvom-e hejrī*, Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993, pp. 225-226 (this publication is a augmented and updated version of the author’s PhD thesis, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens aux II et III<sup>e</sup> siècles de l’hégire* [Paris, 1938]); E. Kohlberg, ‘Some Imāmi Shi‘i Views on the *ṣaḥāba*’, *JSAI*, 5 (1984) (rpr. in *Belief and Law*, article IX), pp. 145-146.

126 W. Madelung, *The Succession*, pp. 309-310.

127 We have already examined two reports by al-Majlisī (d. 1111/ 1699-1700) in his *Bihār al-anwār* (notes 2 and 6 above). See also *Bihār*, vol. 44, p. 125 (a letter from Ziyād b. Abīhi to Mu‘āwiya in which he writes that the Ḥaḍramīs are followers of ‘Alī’s religion – based on *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, a work of uncertain attribution but cited by authors of the fourth/tenth century); vol. 44, 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 ‘Alī: ‘Your father [‘Alī] 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-Mufid (d. 413/1022): *al-Irshād*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallāī, 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 ‘Alī / 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 *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 45, p. 19 and n. 1 by the editor on the faulty meter of the poem; in the version reported by Ibn Shahrāshūb in *Manāqib al-Abī Ṭālib*, 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 ‘Alī’; *Bihār*, vol. 45, p. 27); Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 251 (also during the battle of Karbalā’, verses by ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Yazani: ‘I am the son of ‘Abd Allāh of the Āl Yazan / My religion is that of Ḥusayn and Ḥasan’;

Shi‘ism in its different forms seems to be, in effect, a very considerable development, obviously with resultant major new doctrinal implications, of a variety of components which composed ‘the religion of ‘Alī’:<sup>128</sup> the cult of *qarāba*, the notion of prophetic heritage, the divine election of ‘Alī and his descendants, with ancestral and natural aspects, but also supernatural, thaumaturgic and initiatory aspects linked to the prophetic ‘Holy Family’. In this evolution, the theophanic dimension of the figure of ‘Alī, his divine attributes probably deriving from his early messianic status, occupies a central place. That is what we shall examine in the following chapters.

*Bihār*, 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.

- 128 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*, were progressively transmuted into 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, I will confine myself to examples drawn from early Imami *hadīths*: 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). 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, *Bašā‘ir al-darajāt*, ed. M. Kūčebāghī (2nd ed, 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 (*Bašā‘ir*, p. 313; see also *Guide divin*, pp. 193-194). 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 [*‘ilj*]). 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 [*hamaj*]). 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 (= *La Religion Discrète*, chapter 8).



**PART 2**

*Between Divinity and Humanity*





## Some Remarks on the Divinity of the Imam

### 1 Theophanic Being and Perfect Man

In some, it must be said, rather inconspicuous texts, drowned in the mass of traditions which fill the pages of early Twelver compilations, the Imam<sup>1</sup> is described not only as the ideal man of God, but as sharing fully in those Names, Attributes and Acts which theology usually reserves for God alone. This 'figure' of the Imam resembles in a number of fundamental ways the variously named 'Cosmic Man' of Near and Middle Eastern spiritual and religious traditions. In many respects, this figure seems to be the source of the reappearance of this ancient idea in Muslim spirituality.<sup>2</sup> It is equally true that obvious similarities exist between the Imam-God of Shi'ī texts and the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) of Muslim

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1 '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 on the perceptible level. Also, 'Imami' and 'Twelver' are used interchangeably.

2 In the present state of our knowledge, it still seems audacious to establish links between different 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. I confine myself here to some 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 "Iranisch Hintergrund" der islamischen Lehre vom Vollkommenen Menschen', in Ph. Gignoux (ed.), *Recurrent Patterns in Iranian Religions. From Mazdaism to Sufism, Studia Iranica*, Cahier 11 (1992). On the Perfect Man in Mazdaeism, see M. Molé, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l'Iran ancien*, Paris, 1963, Livre 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, there is 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, and see now *L'ésotérisme shi'ite, ses racines et ses prolongements*, dir. M.A. Amir-Moezzi, ed. with M. de Cillis, D. De Smet and O. Mir-Kasimov, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Turnhout, 2017.

theosophy, an ontologically necessary intermediary between God and the world, the mysterious ultimate goal and ‘Secret of secrets’ for the theosopher.<sup>3</sup>

In this regard, the most representative and outspoken Shi‘i texts are undoubtedly certain sermons attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the imam “par excellence” and the ‘father’ of all the historic imams of all the Shi‘i communities. So dense is the exchange between God and the Imam, from a sentence to another, that we know who speaks, God or the Imam and these sermons can be described as ‘theo-imosophical’. In a long succession of declarations, in an incessant hammering of resonant prose, which is said to have induced a collective trance in his auditors, the first imam boldly affirms his identity with the cosmic *Anthropos*, the Perfect Man, who, to quote Massignon, is not divinity made human but humanity made divine.<sup>4</sup> To give some idea of the content of these texts, I will give a only a few examples here, but will 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 Quranic names of God].’

3 Apart from the now classic works on Muslim mysticism that include more or less full discussions of the Perfect Man (e.g. works by Nicholson, Asin Palacios, Massignon, Arberry, Anawati-Gardet, Ritter, Schimmel, Corbin, Izutsu ...), there are listed 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 fī 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 (*Isma Allāh al-Aẓam*)’, *Atti del Terzo Congresso di Studi Arabi e Islamici*, Naples, 1967; M. Takeshita, *Ibn Arabī’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-‘Arabī’, in Ph. Gignoux (ed.), *Recurrent Patterns in Iranian Religions: From Mazdaism to Sufism*, *Studia Iranica*, Cahier 11 (Paris, 1992), pp. 13-27; B. Radtke’s book, *The Concept of wilāya in Early Sufism*, London, 1993, includes valuable information on the earliest developments of the notion in mystical milieu; and now see Lory, P. & Terrier, M., “*al-Insān al-kāmil*: l’Homme parfait dans la culture arabe classique”, in H. Touati (ed.), *Encyclopédie de l’humanisme méditerranéen*, Brill, 2017, online: <http://encyclopedie-humanisme.com/?Al-insan-al-kamil-248>. Many contributions in *L’ésotérisme shī‘ite, ses racines et ses prolongements* (footnote 2) also refer to our subject.

4 L. Massignon, ‘L’Homme Parfait en Islam’, *Opera Minora*, vol. 1, pp. 109-110.

Some specialists have pointed out the late date of the composition of these sermons,<sup>5</sup> and from the sixth/twelfth century onwards, many Imami scholars considered them to belong to 'extremist' Shi'ism (the *ghuluww* movement)<sup>6</sup> and excluded them from Twelver doctrine, considered to be 'moderate'. It does indeed seem conceivable that these sermons are apocryphal, both because of their length and because the philosophical and astronomical terms which appear in most of them proves the late date of their final 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 sermons appeared from an early period in the Shi'i-'Alid milieu (perhaps because, in some 'Alid circles, the messianic figure of 'Alī was present from the earliest days of Islam) and that, on the other hand, Twelver imamological doctrine documented in early compilations of *ḥadīths* is compatible with this conception of the Imam as well as because these compilations include texts that could be considered to be early steps on the way to the sermons in question. Even although it is true, as Corbin stresses, that: 'Even if the sermon was not in reality pronounced by the first imam ... it was, at a given moment [preached] by an eternal Imam, in the Shi'i consciousness, and it is this that matters from

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- 5 'A.H. 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 ed, Baghdad, 1395/1975, pp. 253-254; among traditionalist scholars, Sayyid Muṣṭafā Āl Ḥaydar, *Bishārat al-Muṣṭafā*, Tehran, n.d., pp. 75 f., 214 f.; Ja'far al-Āmilī, *Dirāsa fi 'alāmāt al-ḡuhūr*, Qumm, 1411/1990, pp. 110 f. 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 (r. 198-218/813-833), nearly two hundred sermons attributed to 'Alī were in circulation and this number rapidly doubled, see L. Vecchia Vaglieri, 'Sul *Nahj al-balāghah* e sul suo compilatore ash-Sharīf ar-Raḏī', *AIVON*, special issue (1958), pp. 7 f.
- 6 See the introduction by Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī (d. 1259/1843) to his *Sharḥ al-khuṭbat al-taṭanjīyya*, Tabriz, 1270/1853. It is true that, beginning with 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', *EI2*, vol. 2, pp. 1,119-1,121; also W. al-Qāḏī, 'The Development of the Term *Ghulāt* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysāniyya', in A. Dietrich (ed.), *Akten des VII. Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft*, Göttingen, 1976, pp. 295-319, esp. pp. 299 f. and 306 f.). Neither the *Nahj al-balāgha*, compiled by al-Sharīf al-Raḏī (d. 406/1016), nor the *Bihār al-anwār* by Majlisī II (d. 1111/1699), contain all the 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 the 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.

a phenomenological point of view;<sup>7</sup> it remains no less true that the origin and development of the notion of the Imam-God in Imami Shi'ism has a history which deserves consideration. As a result, for the early period of Shi'ism, named 'proto-Shi'ism' by Watt,<sup>8</sup> the distinction between extremist and moderate Shi'ism proves to be completely artificial.<sup>9</sup>

## 2 First Textual References

The glorification of 'Alī by his supporters is a process which 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 of it may be traced to the moment immediately following 'Alī's assassination if not earlier, the time when he would have been considered the Messiah by some or to the period just after he 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.<sup>10</sup> He passed his qualities on to other imams of his progeny, and even to their initiates. Indeed, heresiographers record that, in the course of the first three centuries of Islam, many Shi'i sects and movements believed one or another imam or such and such a follower to be the Locus of Manifestation (*mazhar*) of God.<sup>11</sup> The oldest

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

8 W.M. Wyatt *Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973), under 'proto-Shi-ism'.

9 *Guide divin*, pp. 313-316. I have studied the issue many times from different angles. See now "Les Imams et les Ghulāt. Nouvelles réflexions sur les relations entre imamisme 'modéré' et shi'isme 'extrémiste'", in *Shi'i Studies Review*.

10 Cf. E. Kohlberg, 'Some Imāmi Shī'i Views on the *ṣaḥāba*', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 5 (1984), pp. 145-146 (rpr. in *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shī'ism* [Aldershot, 1991], article IX); Gh. Ḥ. Ṣadīqī, *Jonbesh-hā-ye dīnī-ye īrānī dar qarn-hā-ye dovvom va sevom-e hejrī* (augmented and updated version of the author's thesis, Gh.H. Sadighi, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens aux II<sup>e</sup> et III<sup>e</sup> siècles de l'hégire* [Paris, 1938]), Tehran, 1372 Sh./1993, pp. 225f.; *Guide divin*, pp. 75f. See also here chapters 2 and 3.

11 It is worth pointing 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 thus no question 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 = *Écrits mémorables*, éd.

of these sects seems to have been the enigmatic Saba'iyya,<sup>12</sup> some of whose doctrines were probably identical to those of the Kaysāniyya,<sup>13</sup> who were supporters of the imamate of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya, and very likely the first Shī'is whose thought tended towards gnosticism. Thus, a Kaysānite proclamation, dating from 278/890-891 and recorded by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) in his *Ta'riḫh*, appears to be the oldest written evidence of this type of sermon in an 'Alid milieu.<sup>14</sup> Two Nuṣayrī texts which, according to Silvester de Sacy and Massignon, date to the late third century AH, include fragments of these two sermons, the *Bayān* and *Taṭanjīyya* (see section 2 below) and the Jābirian corpus (second half of the third to the early fourth century AH) contains a quote from the first.<sup>15</sup> In the early fourth century, these records grew in number. Some fragments are recorded by the Twelver Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Kashshī<sup>16</sup> and

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- C. Jambet *et al.*, Paris, 2009, vol. 2, pp. 576 ff.). For these Shī'i sects see the list by 'A. Eqbāl, *Khānedān-e Nawbakhtī*, Tehran, 1311 Sh./1933, pp. 249-267.
- 12 Supporters of the enigmatic 'Abd Allāh b. Saba'; see M.G. Hodgson, 'Abd Allāh b. Saba', *EI2*.
- 13 Cf. J. van Ess, 'Das *Kitāb al-irjā'* des Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya', *Arabica*, 21 (1974) and 22 (1975), esp. 1974, pp. 31 f.
- 14 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 Kaysānid declaration comes from a Qarmaṭī document.
- 15 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 Nuṣayrīs' in MS 5188 (Collection de Sacy), BN Paris, fol. 95 f. and 2) *Kitāb al-hidāya al-kubrā*, Beirut, 1406/1986 by the Nuṣayrī leader Abū 'Abd Allāh (b.) Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī (d. 346/957 or 358/969), quoted 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 see their *The Nuṣayrī-'Alawī Religion: An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy*, Leiden, 2002. On this manuscript see also Cl. Huart, 'La poésie religieuse des nosairīs', *JA*, 14 (1879), pp. 241-248; L. Massignon, 'Esquisse d'une bibliographie nuṣayriye', 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 like 'A Tenth Century Nuṣayrī Treatise on the Duty to Know the Mystery of Divinity', *BSOAS*, 58 (1995), pp. 243-250 – and then published in *The Nuṣayrī-'Alawī Religion*; see above. For the corpus of Jābir see *Kitāb al-ustuquṣ al-uss al-thānī*, in E.J. Holmyard (ed.), *The Arabic Works of Jābir b. Ḥayyān*, Paris, 1928, pp. 79-96, quotation 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.
- 16 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

certain phrases of the 'eschatological prophecies' (*malāḥim*) which appear at the beginning of some versions of the *khuṭbat al-bayān* are the subject of a satirical pastiche by the anonymous author of *Abū l-Qāsim*,<sup>17</sup> and some appear in al-Maqdisi's *Bad'*,<sup>18</sup> 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 centuries is also the period of the editing of all the first major compilations of the Twelver tradition.<sup>19</sup> These compilations are still strongly influenced by what I have elsewhere called the early 'non-rational esoteric tradition',<sup>20</sup> 'recuperating' a good number of the traditions of other Shi'i movements (Kaysānī, Isma'īli, Wāqifi, etc.) and including them in their own.<sup>21</sup> This monumental corpus does not contain any of the sermons that interest us here, but does include texts which, in a fashion, clearly predict them. They are probably of non-Twelver Shi'i origin but, taking the broad view, they are compatible with Twelver imamology. Indeed, at this 'mythical' stage of doctrinal language, when conceptual thinking is practically absent and abstract philosophical terminology is only in its initial stages; and when the conceptual distinction between the human nature (*nāsūt*) of

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Muḥammad al-Bāqir [d. ca. 119/737]); see also al-Māmaqānī, *Tanqīḥ al-maqāl*, 3 vols, Tehran, 1349/1930, vol. 3, p. 227.

- 17 Edited by A. Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islams*, Heidelberg, 1922; rpr. Hildesheim, 1968, ch. 5, pp. 57 f. On *malḥama*, pl. *malāḥim*, see the article 'Malāḥim' by D.B. MacDonald in *ET2*.
- 18 Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisi, *Kitāb al-bad' wa l-ta'rīkh (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. For other, later sources concerning those sermons see *infra*, the third part.
- 19 Regarding these compilations and their authors see e.g. E. Kohlberg, 'Shi'i 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 of 3d/9th and 4th/10th c. we will call upon most here include: al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, Furāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī (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 Imāmi Shiism* [Leiden and Jerusalem, 1999], pp. 29-32 et passim), 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, Muḥammad b. Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshī, Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq. Regarding the sources of these compilations see now H. Ansari, *L'imamat et l'Occultation selon l'imamisme. Étude bibliographique et histoire des textes*, Leiden-Boston, 2017.
- 20 Cf. above note 5 *in fine*.
- 21 J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, Berlin and New York, 1990, vol. 1, pp. 306 f. (on the eschatological notion of 'return to life' – *raj'a* – see also E. Kohlberg, *ET2*); M.A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902-3)', *JA*, 280, 3-4 (1992), pp. 232 f. (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).

the imam and his divine one (*lāhūt*)<sup>22</sup> is not yet clearly established in Shi'i communities, an entire process of doctrinal development was required before imamology would culminate in the figure of the Imam-God. So it is by adopting a phenomenological perspective that we will try to identify 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, his Absolute Being, God remains the inconceivable Transcendent who can only be described or apprehended in the terms by which He describes Himself through His revelations. At this level, the word 'thing' (*shay'*), an absolutely neutral term, can be applied to God. According to sayings attributed to many of the imams, God is the reality of 'thing-ness' (*shay'yya*), unintelligible and indefinable (*ghayr ma'qūl wa lā maḥdūd*), which places Him outside the two limits of agnosticism (*ta'īl*) and assimilationism (*tashbīh*).<sup>23</sup> The Essence of God is *the* Thing about which man can only speak in negative terms, refusing any conceivable representation of Him. Indeed, in all the theological traditions, the words of the imams about God are a whole series of negatives: negation of any body or form (*jism/šūra*),<sup>24</sup> negation of space (*makān*), of time (*zamān*), of immobility (*sukūn*) and of movement (*ḥaraka*), of descent (*nuzūl*) and ascent (*šūūd*), of description (*tawṣīf*) and of representation (*tamthīl*), and so on.<sup>25</sup>

However, had things remained thus, God would have been eternally and absolutely beyond the reach of man, and theology would have been mere agnosticism. So God, in his infinite mercy, wished to make himself known to his creatures and had Himself described by a certain number of Names and Attributes. Now these, revealed to man as the Most Beautiful Names of God (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*), bear Loci of Manifestation, Vehicles and Organs applicable to all of creation in general and to humanity in particular. It is thanks to

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

23 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 itlāq bi-annahū shay', vol. 1, pp. 109 f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. H. al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭihirānī, Tehran, 1398/1978, ch. 7 'Bāb annahu tabāarak wa ta'ālā shay', pp. 104 f. 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.

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

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

these theophanic Organs that God relates to men and they in turn gain access to what is knowable in Him.<sup>26</sup> One can thus distinguish two ontological levels of the Divine Being: firstly, 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.<sup>27</sup> And in all the written corpus, the imams tirelessly repeat that they are the Vehicles for the Attributes, the Organs of God. Applying their spiritual hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) to Quranic 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*).<sup>28</sup>

It is to stress this aspect of God that the imam is also known 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 in the Quran by expressions such as 'the Greatest Sign' (*al-āyat al-kubrā*, Q 79:20), 'the Exalted Symbol' (*al-mathal al-a'lā*, Q 16:60), 'the Most Secure Handle' (*al-urwa al-wuthqā*, Q 2:256 or 31:22).<sup>29</sup> Commenting on the Quranic verse 7:180, 'To God belong the Names Most Beautiful; so call Him by them', the sixth imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), is said to have declared:

26 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'.

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

28 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. Mirzā Kūchebāghī, 2nd ed, 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 Quran); 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. 283 f.; Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, ch. 12, pp. 149 f. (commentary on 'All things perish, except His Face', Quran, 28:88), ch. 22, pp. 164 f. (ma'nā janb Allāh), ch. 24, pp. 167 f. (ma'nā l-'ayn wa l-udhn wa l-lisān), id., *'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, pp. 114-116 and 149-153 and *Kamāl al-dīn*, ed. 'A.A. Ghaffārī, Qumm, 1405/1985, ch. 22, vol. 1, pp. 231 f.

29 For example, al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'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.

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.<sup>30</sup>

In this distinction between Essence and Names as theophanic Organs, one sees, in Shi'i beliefs, a transposition, at the level of the divine, of the separation 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 so that they may know Him, for when they know Him, they worship Him and free themselves from the worship of all else except of Him.' Someone then asks the imam: 'What is knowledge of God?' And the reply: 'For people of every period, it is knowledge of the imam [of their time] to whom they owe obedience.'<sup>31</sup>

The aim of creation is thus to reveal the Creator to his creatures; the Imam as theophanic being is the 'Supreme Symbol' of what can be known of God, and therefore is himself the reason for and the purpose of creation. 'He who knows us knows God, and he who knows us not, knows not God,' the imams repeat.<sup>32</sup> 'It is thanks to us that God is known', says a tradition dating back to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, 'and thanks to us that He is worshipped.'<sup>33</sup> 'Without God, we

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

31 'Ayyuhā l-nās inna llāha jalla dhikruhu mā khalaqa l-'ibād illā li ya'rīfūhu fa-idhā 'arafūhu 'abadūhu fa-'idhā 'abadūhu staghnau bi-'ibādatihi 'an 'ibāda man siwāh faqāla lahu rajul fa-mā ma'rīfat Allāh qāla marīfa ahl kulli zamān imāmahum alladhī yajibu alayhim ṭā'atuhu', Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal al-sharāʿi*, Najaf, 1385/1966, ch. 9 "illa khalq al-khalq", p. 9, no. 1. It must always be borne 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). The imams have thus been present among humanity all throughout history.

32 'Man 'arafanā faqad 'arafa llāh wa man ankaranā faqad ankara llāh', e.g. Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir 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 ed, Tehran, 1351 Sh./1972, p. 470.

33 'Binā 'ubida llāh ... wa law lanā mā 'ubida llāh', Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, ch. 12, p. 152, no. 9 in *fine*.

would not be known, and without us, God would not be known,' adds another tradition attributed to the same sixth imam.<sup>34</sup>

Another, comparable, saying, also attributed to Ja'far, takes another step into the development of the doctrine of the imam's divinity. This step is illustrated by some allusive sayings comparable to the famous 'paradoxical utterances' (*shataḥāt*) of the mystics:<sup>35</sup>

God made us His Eye among his worshippers, his Eloquent Tongue among His Creatures, His Hand of benevolence and mercy extended over 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.<sup>36</sup>

Now this last sentence can also be read as follows: 'It is because 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*).' This rather audacious ambiguity seems deliberate, for not only does the identification of God with the person of the imam seem to be the logical, final outcome of

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

35 These are utterances 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 Ḥallāj or 'Glory to me' by Baṣṭāmī; regarding *shaḥ*, see e.g. L. Massignon in *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, Paris, 1922, index s.v. and *La Passion de Ḥallāj, martyr mystique de l'Islam*, 4 vols, rpr. Paris, 1975, see index under '*shaḥ*'; H. Corbin's introduction to Rūzbehān Baqlī Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ-e shaḥīyyāt*, ed. H. Corbin and M. Mo'in, Paris and Tehran, 1966; rpr. 2004; also 'A.R. Badawī, *Shataḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 3rd ed. (Kuwait, 1978); P. Nwiya, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, Beirut, 1970, index under '*shaḥ*'. As we shall see further, some mystics did not hesitate to consider 'Alī's sermons the quintessential 'paradoxical utterances'. It nevertheless seems to me that the similarity between the paradoxical pronouncements of the imams and the *shataḥāt* 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 *shaḥ*, 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. Ballanfat, 'Réflexions sur la nature du paradoxe. La définition de Rūzbehān Baqlī Shīrāzī', *Kār Nāmeh*, 2-3 (1995), pp. 25-40.

36 'Wa ja'alānā 'aynahu fī 'ibādīhi wa lisānahu l-nāṭiq fī khalqih wa yadahu l-mabsūṭa 'alā 'ibādīhi bi-l-ra'fa wa l-raḥma wa wajhahu l-ladhī yu'tā minhu wa bābahu l-ladhī yadullu 'alayhi wa khazā inahu fī samā'īhi wa arḍih ... bi-'ibādatinā 'ubida llāh lā law naḥnu mā 'ubida llāh', Ibn Bābūya, *Tawḥīd*, ch. 12, pp. 151-152, no. 8.

the previous phases of imamology, but other *shataḥāt* of the same tenor are widespread in the early corpus.<sup>37</sup> A remarkable fact 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-Ṣādiq.<sup>38</sup> Commenting on the Quranic 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.’<sup>39</sup> A disciple asks the sixth imam to explain the meaning of the verse, ‘and when you threw [the remark 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.’<sup>40</sup> Finally, a dialogue between the same imam and his disciple Abū Baṣīr is highly significant in this regard:

The Disciple: ‘Tell me if on the Day of Resurrection, the initiates<sup>41</sup> will be able to see God.’ Ja‘far: ‘Yes, but they will have already seen 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,

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- 37 This process of disseminating of particularly delicate doctrinal elements occurs regularly in the early corpus; it is one aspect of the Shi‘i obligation ‘to preserve or guard a secret’ (*taqīyya*, *kitmān*, *khaf*) 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 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 *taqīyya* in general, consult chapter 7 in this book.
- 38 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: *Ĝa‘far al-Ṣādiq, der Sechste Imam*, Heidelberg, 1924; P. Kraus, *Jābir b. Ḥayyān*; J.B. Taylor, ‘Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, Spiritual Forebear of the Sufis’, *Islamic Culture* (1966); T. Fahd, ‘Ĝa‘far al-Ṣādiq et la tradition scientifique arabe’, in *Le Shī‘isme imāmīte*, Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 6-9 May 1968 (Paris, 1970).
- 39 ‘*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.
- 40 ‘*Alī nāwala rasūl Allāh al-qabḍa llatī ramā bihā*’, al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 52, nos 32-34.
- 41 ‘*al-mu‘minūn*’ literally ‘the believers’; in technical Twelver terminology, the term *mu‘min* means 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 of the faith; see my analysis, ‘Etude du lexique technique de l’ésotérisme imāmīte’, *Annuaire de l’EPHE, section des sciences religieuses*, 102 (1994-1995), p. 215, also Id., *La Preuve de Dieu. La mystique shī‘ite à travers l’œuvre de Kulaynī (9<sup>e</sup>-10<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris, 2018, index s.v.

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 speak of 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.’<sup>42</sup>

In such an imamological context, it is not surprising to encounter traditions in the early Twelver corpus that unambiguously attribute to ‘Alī theomamosophical sermons where his identity switches constantly between a divine nature (*lāhūt*) and a human nature (*nāsūt*):

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 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 Finality of Religion; I am the deed of Kindness enacted by God for His creatures.’<sup>43</sup>

42 Abū Baṣīr: ‘*Akhbirmī ‘ani 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 fī l-dunyā qabla yawm al-qiyāma a lasta tarāhu fī waqtika hādhā faqultu lahu ju‘iltu fidāk fa-uḥaddithu bi-hādhā ‘anka fa-qāla lā fa-innaka idhā ḥaddathta bihi fa-ankarahu munkirun jāhil bi-ma‘nā mā taqūluhu thumma qaddara ‘alaynā anna dhālika tashbūh wa kufī*’, Ibn Bābūya, *Tawhīd*, ch. 8, p. 117, no. 20. Cf. *Guide divin*, p. 141, note 277; 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. It should be noted that this tradition is not reported by an “extremist” author but by Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, who is considered by some to be the leader of the “moderate” Shi‘is. Regarding Ja‘far’s three disciples with the *kunya* Abū Baṣīr, see *Guide divin*, p. 87, note 182 and p. 117. 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. 5 f. and *Uyūn*, vol. 26, no. 22, pp. 262 f. (*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).

43 ‘*Wa llāhi innī la-dayyān al-nās yawm al-dīn wa qasīm al-janna wa l-nār lā yadkhaluhā l-dakhīl illā ‘alā iḥdā qismi wa innī l-fārūq al-akbar ... li-faṣl al-khiṭāb wa baṣartu sabīl al-kitāb ... wa ‘alimtu ‘ilm al-manāyā wa l-balāyā wa l-qaḍāyā wa bi-kamāl al-dīn wa anā*

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.<sup>44</sup>

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, let him enter through this Threshold ... Without 'Alī, truth would not be distinguished from falsehood, nor believer from unbeliever; 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.<sup>45</sup>

On the verses, 'Of what do they question one another? / Of the solemn tiding / whereon they are at variance' (Q 78:1-3), 'Alī 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.<sup>46</sup>

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*l-ni'mat llatī an'ama llāhu 'alā khalqih*; Furāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Kūfi, *Tafsīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Kāzīm, Tehran, 1410/1990, p. 178, no. 230. One will notice the Christ-like and messianic nature of the attributes that 'Alī attributes to himself in this hadith (see above chapter 2, footnotes 77 to 85 and afferent texts). Furthermore, the last sentence is a hermeneutical reference to verse 5:3. On the double nature of 'Alī among Nuṣayri Shi'is see now M.M. Bar-Asher, "Al-Risāla al-Rāstbāshīyya d'Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī, élaborateur de la religion nuṣayrite", *Shi'i Studies Review* 2 (2018), pp. 228-254 (in particular pp. 243-247).

44 *'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, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 3, p. 389. On 'Alī as 'Leader' or 'Commander of the Bees' (*amīr al-naḥl*), see I. Goldziher, 'Schi'itisches', *ZDMG*, 44 (1910), pp. 532-533, re-issued in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. J. de Somogyi, Hildesheim, 1967-1970, vol. 5, pp. 213-214.

45 *'Hādḥā l-imām al-aẓhar wa rumḥu llāh al-aṭwal wa bābu llāh al-akbar fa-man arāda llāh fa-l-yadkhul 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 'ani llāh ḥijāb bal huwa l-ḥijāb wa l-sitr*, Furāt b. Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr*, p. 371, no. 503.

46 *'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

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.<sup>47</sup> This distinction seems

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dualist Shi'ī 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. 91 f. and *La religion discrete*, Chapter 8). The famous tradition 'God created Adam in his image' (*khalāqa llahū Adam 'alā šūratih*) has 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 (*iḍāfa*) of 'image' (*šūra*, 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-Kāfī*, 'Kitāb al-tawhīd', 'Bāb al-rūh', vol. 1, p. 182; Ibn Bābūya, *Tawhīd*, vol. 6, p. 103, no. 18. cf. Sunni interpretation: Ibn Khuzayma, *K. al-tawhīd*, 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 image of Adam 'the father of humanity'. For the Twelver interpretation see Ibn Bābūya, *Tawhīd*, ch. 12, p. 152, no. 10. Sunni interpretation: Ibn Khuzayma, *K. al-tawhīd*, 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 Arabī'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 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. Fondamentalisme 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 Face of God – as we have seen, is at the same time the esoteric Face of the initiated faithful.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. note 8 above and the related text. One may conclude, as does H. Modarressi, that these kinds of tradition 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 Shī'ite Islam: Abū Ja'far ibn Qība al-Rāzī and his Contribution to Imāmīte Shī'ite Thought* [Princeton, 1993], esp. pp. 21 f.); 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

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 permeable and the movement of followers between different sects, and even their simultaneous membership of several, would have been common practice.

### 3 The Sermons of 'Alī

There is great confusion over the titles and texts of the sermons recorded by various authors in different periods. A large majority of these writers are Shi'is, others are Sunni mystics. Sometimes the same title is given to different sermons, at others, almost identical texts are called 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. It is as if the authors, in the same sonorous prose style and according to their own particular spiritual or literary attitudes, are adding increasingly numerous affirmations to earlier, simpler texts.

From the most recurrent material, one could say that we have at our disposal three theo-imamosophical sermons attributed to 'Alī, each closely related to each other: the Sermon of the Clear Declaration (*khutbat al-bayān*), the Sermon of Glory (*khutbat al-iftikhār*) and the Sermon of the Gulf (*al-khutba al-taṭanjīyya/taṭanjīyya/ taṭanjīyya*, an enigmatic word which one passage of the text explains as being synonymous with *khalīj*, in the sense of 'gulf').<sup>48</sup>

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al-Māmaqānī (d. 1932) in his *Tanqīh 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 (*darūriyyāt al-madhhab*) were held by them to be extremist' (*Tanqīh*, vol. 1, p. 349).

48 Regarding these three sermons, H. Corbin has contributed partial translations, interpretations and additional information (see *En Islam iranien*, index s.v.). 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 (see here chapter 8).

The last one appears to be the oldest, since, as we have seen, quite a long version was already recorded in Nuṣayrī texts of the end of the third century AH.<sup>49</sup> The Ismaili thinker and propagandist Mu'ayyad fi l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1077) records a more elaborate version in his *Majālis*.<sup>50</sup> The Twelver theosopher and traditionist, Rajab al-Bursī (d. 814/1411), in his *Mashāriq*, records more or less the same text as al-Shīrāzī, although according to other authors, elements from the Sermon of Clear Declaration are included there.<sup>51</sup> Al-Bursī's version was used not only by Mullā Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680) in his *Kalimāt maknūna*, but also by al-Sayyid Kāzīm al-Rashtī (d. 1259/1843), grand master of the theologico-mystical School of the Shaykhiyya, in his monumental unfinished commentary on the Sermon of the Gulf,<sup>52</sup> as well as by an Imami scholar who died in the early twentieth century, 'Alī Yazdī Ḥā'irī, in his *Ilzām al-nāṣib*.<sup>53</sup>

The Sermon of Glory may well have been of Twelver origin; in fact it was only recorded in its more elaborate version by authors belonging to this branch of Shi'ism. It appears that this sermon was first recorded under this title by the great scholar Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192) in his *Manāqib*.<sup>54</sup> In his *Jāmi' al-asrār*,<sup>55</sup> the mystical thinker Ḥaydar Āmolī/Āmulī (d. ca. 790/1387-1388) quoted excerpts (which in other authors' works are included in one of the other two sermons that concern us here). Rajab al-Bursī, a contemporary of Āmolī, records a sermon under this same title which is significantly different.<sup>56</sup>

49 Cf. note 14 above and the relevant text.

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

51 Al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*, 10th ed, 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 Āghā Bozorg al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣnīf 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-aqālīm*) partially reported by Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192) in his *Manāqib*.

52 Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*, ed. 'A. 'Uṭāridī Qūchānī, Tehran, 1383/1963, pp. 167-168 and 196 ff. 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 Kāzīm al-Rashtī, *Sharḥ al-khuṭba al-ṭaṭanjīyya*, Tabriz, 1270/1853.

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

54 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, ed. M. Burūjirdī, Tehran, 1316-1317/1898-1899, pp. 71-72.

55 Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmolī, *Jāmi' al-asrār wa manba' al-anwār*, ed. H. Corbin and O. Yahia, Tehran and Paris, 1969, pp. 10-11 and 111-112.

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

The erudite Shaykh Āghā Bozorg Ṭīhrānī (d. 1969), unrivalled connoisseur of Twelver texts, opines 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 recorded in the *Nahj al-balāgha*.<sup>57</sup>

The Sermon of the Clear Declaration (or rather several texts with this title), itself also deriving from an earlier nucleus, seems to be the most recorded of these three sermons, and the most read, meditated and commented upon both by Shi'i theologians and Sunni mystics.<sup>58</sup> Some texts dating possibly from the second half of the third century and more certainly from the early fourth century AH, which contain quotations from this sermon, have already been mentioned.<sup>59</sup> It seems there is a (lost?) commentary on it by the great figure of Iranian Ismailism, Ḥasan (b.) al-Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124).<sup>60</sup> Of Sunni mystics with some Shi'i sympathies, two, Muḥammad b. Ṭalḥa al-Ḥalabī al-Shāfi'ī (d. 652/1254) and Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 869/1464), recorded excerpts from this sermon and considered them to be 'exemplary ecstatic utterances'.<sup>61</sup> Twelver authors who studied the *khuṭbat al-bayān*, quoted 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 instead mention a few famous individuals: Ḥaydar Āmolī and Rajab al-Bursī, both mentioned above; al-Qāḍī Sa'īd al-Qummī (d. ca. 1103/1691-1692); Nūr 'Alī Shāh (d. 1212/1798) master of the Nī'matullāhī order; Ja'far Kashfī (d. 1267/1850-1851) (we will return to Kashfī's version); Mīrzā Abū l-Qāsim Rāz Shīrāzī, master of the Dhahabiyya order (d. 1286/1869) and Yazdī Ḥā'irī, cited earlier, who in his *Ilzām al-nāṣīb*, records three very long versions of this sermon.<sup>62</sup>

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

58 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 footnote 3 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.

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

60 Khayrkāh-i Harātī, *Kalām-i pīr. A Treatise on Ismaili Doctrine*, ed. and tr. W. Ivanow, Bombay, 1935, pp. 79-81 of the Persian text.

61 Muḥammad b. Ṭalḥa al-Ḥalabī, *al-Durr al-munazzam fī 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 8<sup>e</sup> et 9<sup>e</sup> s. de l'hégire', *REI* (1961), p. 129.

62 Ḥaydar Āmolī, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, pp. 382, 411 and in the same volume *Naqd al-nuqūd fī ma'rifat al-wujūd*, p. 676; Rajab al-Bursī, *Mashāriq 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

Of these, the version of the Iranian theosopher Ja'far Kashfī's is especially interesting.<sup>63</sup> In commenting on it in his major work, *Tuḥfat al-mulūk*, dedicated to the Qājār prince Muḥammad Taqī Mirzā, a son of Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh (hence the title that literally means 'the Gift offered to Sovereigns'), Kashfī records the Arabic text of a relatively short sermon which 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 the other sermons, the *khuṭba al-taṭanjīyya* and the *khuṭbat al-iftikhār*. And he deletes the theological introduction (*dībāja*) which listed 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 irrelevant to the main thrust of the sermon, which, according to him, is imamological. There is a particularly interesting fact here: although he was a philosopher and a very keen student of astronomy, Kashfī nonetheless deleted assertions of an overly philosophical nature or those that relate to astronomy – assertions which had been added later to an early nucleus. In this way the Iranian thinker achieves a coherent synthesis of the three sermons and creates a text that might well be

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*Kitāb al-arba'īniyyāt*, cited by H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 152 f. (see also Corbin, *Itinéraire d'un enseignement*, pp. 96 f.); see now al-Qāḍī Sa'īd al-Qummī, *al-Arba'īniyyāt li-kashf anwār al-quḍsiyyāt*, ed. N. Ḥabībī, Tehran, 1381 Sh./2003, pp. 38 ff.; Nūr 'Alī Shāh, 'Manzūm-e khuṭbat al-bayān', in *Divān-e Nūr 'Alī Shāh Isfahānī*, Tehran, 1349 Sh./1970 and in *Majmū'e-ye āthār-e Nūr 'Alī Shāh 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 Shirāzī, *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-Ṭihri, *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.

63 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. 225 f.; M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam. The History and Doctrine of Twelver Shi'ism*, Oxford, 1985, pp. 194 f. 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, but see now S. Rizvi, "Shi'i Political Theology and Esotericism in Qajar Iran. The Case of Sayyid Ja'far Kashfī" in M.A. Amir-Moezzi *et al.* (eds), *L'ésotérisme shi'ite*, pp. 687-712.

close to one of several early theo-imamosophical sermons. For these reasons Ja'far Kashfi's version seems to me to be especially representative of the type of text attributed to 'Alī:<sup>64</sup>

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!<sup>65</sup> For I am the Treasurer of Knowledge;<sup>66</sup> I am the Mountain of magnanimity;<sup>67</sup> I hold the Keys of the Unknown; I am the Mystery of the Unknown; I am the Mystery of Mysteries;<sup>68</sup> 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 Thunder; I am the Witness of the Pact;<sup>69</sup> I am the Face of God; I am the Eye of God; I am the Hand of God;

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- 64 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 of 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 Quranic Names of God. The Arabic text of this sermon is provided at the end of the present chapter.
- 65 '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 ideal source of knowledge.
- 66 'Treasurer of Knowledge' is a recurring title often given to the imams; see *Guide divin*, index, under '*khâzin*, *khuzzân*, *khazana*'.
- 67 *Ḥilm*, 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. *E12* (French version), vol. 3, p. 403.
- 68 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; this type of attribute is also applicable to the Messiah, divine man in the biblical and mostly Christian sense if not more: man as locus of manifestation of God.
- 69 Reference either to what is traditionally called 'the primordial Covenant' (*mīthâq*; cf. Q 7:172), or to the Pact ('*ahd*) concluded between God and Adam (Q 20:115). On the Imami conception of the *mīthâq*, see *Guide divin*, index under '*mīthâq*, *mawâthiq*', 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-Šī'a to the Quran', *Israel Oriental Studies*, 13 (1993), p. 64.

I am the Tongue of God;<sup>70</sup> I am the Light of God;<sup>71</sup> I am the Treasure of God in the heavens and on the earth;<sup>72</sup> I am the Power; I am the Manifestation of [or He who manifests] the Power; I am the Rewarder (*dayyān*)<sup>73</sup> on the Day of Rewards; I am the Judge of the Garden and Fire; I am the Garden and the Fire; I am the Two-horned One [*Dhū l-qarnayn*; cf. Q 18:83, 86 and 94] of the ancient scriptures; 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;<sup>74</sup> 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 naysayers [a recurring Quranic expression]; I am the Call that brings forth the entombed; I am the Lord of the Day of Resurrection; I am he who has raised up the Heavens; I am the Proof of 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; I am, with them, the Vicegerent of God the Creator; I am the Lord of the First Creation;<sup>75</sup> 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*)<sup>76</sup> 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

70 On these assertions refer above to the first part and note 27.

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

72 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).

73 Although it does not appear in the Quran, this Name is generally considered to be one of the Divine Names; see D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins*, esp. pp. 350-351.

74 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).

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

76 Same remarks as footnote 72, cf. D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins*, esp. p. 326.

the one who speaks by divine revelation;<sup>77</sup> 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 overflowed with oppression and injustice [or 'darkness'];<sup>78</sup> 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 brimming 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 *Manifest*; I am the Light of the prophets;<sup>79</sup> 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];<sup>80</sup> I am Ḥanbathā' (?) of the Blacks; I am Bashīr (?) of the Turks; I am Jirjīs (?) of the Franks;<sup>81</sup> 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'tī)*; 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?];<sup>82</sup> I am the Pearl of the Oysters; I am the Mountain of Qāf;<sup>83</sup> I am the Key of Invisible; I am the Lamp of

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- 77 On the imam receiving inspiration (*ilhām*) and divine revelation (*wahy*) and the modalities of the latter, see *Guide divin*, pp. 176f. (*Divine Guide*, pp. 70 ff.) and here chapter 7.
- 78 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 an identification with the Shi'ī *Mahdī*, the hidden imam; are we dealing with remnants of the figure of 'Alī as the eschatological Saviour?
- 79 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; on 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', *JSAI*, 5 (1984).
- 80 On the initiatory lineage of the prophets and their imams, see *Guide divin*, pp. 102 f., esp. p. 107 ('spiritual genealogy') (*Divine Guide*, p. 40 and esp. 41).
- 81 These names apparently mean the prophets of 'the peoples' mentioned. Remember that *bashīr* means 'prophet' in Turkish (from the Arabic *bashīr*, 'herald of good news') and that Jirjīs generally refers to Saint George, cf. Carra de Vaux, 'Djirdjīs', *ETZ*.
- 82 On the imams as 'Bearers of the Divine Throne' (*ḥamalāt al-'arsh*), see *Guide divin*, index under '*arsh*'.
- 83 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, index under 'Qāf'.

Hearts;<sup>84</sup> I am the Splendour of all Beauty [or 'intelligence' or 'metallic vessel,' *zurūf*];<sup>85</sup> I am the Secret of the Letters; I am the meaning of the *tawāsīn*;<sup>86</sup> I am the esoteric dimension of the *hawāmīm*; I am the Lord of the *alif-lām-mīm*; I am the *nūn* and the Calamus [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;<sup>87</sup> And I am He who prayed with the Messenger of God towards the *Qiblatayn*;<sup>88</sup> I am the Hero [of the Battles] of Badr and Ḥunayn;<sup>89</sup> 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;<sup>90</sup> I am He who traverses the seven heavens and the seven earths in the blink of an eye;<sup>91</sup> I am the *Mahdī* of all moments; I am the Christ; I am the second Christ; I am the Jesus of this Time;<sup>92</sup> I am the Master of the Balance;<sup>93</sup> 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;<sup>94</sup> I am

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

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

86 An allusion, as in the following two allusions to the separated letters that feature at the head of certain suras of the Quran.

87 An allusion to a miracle by 'Alī (*radd al-shams*), 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. This miracle of course evokes the biblical miracle of Joshua, the imam of Moses according to Shi'ism.

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

89 See e.g. H. Laoust, 'Le rôle de 'Alī dans la *Sīra* chiite', *REI*, 30/1 (1962), pp. 7-26.

90 See e.g. al-Ṣaffār, *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*).

91 For example, al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 8, chs 12-15, pp. 397-409.

92 See above chapter 2 (on the identification of 'Alī with Jesus as the Messiah).

93 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).

94 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,

the Certitude of those who know with certitude; I am the Lion of the sons of Banū Ghālib; I am ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.’<sup>95</sup>

1404/1984, vol. 9, p. 170; for other references, see E. Kohlberg, ‘Taqiyya in Shī‘ī Theology and Religion’, pp. 358-59, n. 74; see also note 43 above.

- 95 Text of *khuṭbat al-bayān* (version by Ja‘far Kashfi): *Ayyuhā l-nās as‘alūnī qabla an tafqidūnī innī khāzin al-‘ilm wa anā ṭūr al-ḥilm/ ‘indī mafāṭiḥ 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 ṣaḥfī Mūkā‘il/anā sā‘iq 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 fī l-samāwāt wa fī l-arḍ/anā l-qudra/ anā mazhar [muzhir] al-qudra fī l-arḍ/anā dayyān yawm al-dīn/anā qasīm al-janna wa l-nār/anā l-janna wa l-nār/anā Dhū l-Qarṣayn al-madhkūr fī l-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā/anā Ādam al-awwal/anā Nūḥ al-awwal/ anā ṣāhib Nūḥ wa munjiḥi/anā ṣāhib Ayyūb wa shāfiḥi/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-mukadhhibīn/anā l-nidā‘ al-mukhrij man fī l-qubūr/anā ṣāhib yawm al-nushūr/ anā aqimtu l-samāwāt/anā ḥujjat Allāh fī l-arḍ wa l-samāwāt/anā nūr al-hudā/anā l-asmā‘ al-ḥusnā allatī yud‘a bihā/anā l-nāzir ‘alā a‘māl al-khalā‘iq/anā fī l-khalā‘iq khalīfat al-ilāh al-khālīq/anā ṣāhib al-khalq al-awwal/anā ṣāhib al-ṭūfān al-awwal/ anā ṣāhib al-ṭūfān al-thānī/anā ma‘a l-qalam qabl al-qalam/anā ma‘a l-lawḥ qabla l-lawḥ/anā ṣāhib al-azaliyyat al-awwalīyya/anā mudabbir al-‘ālam ḥīna lā samā‘ukum ḥādhihi wa lā ghabrā‘ukum/anā ākhidh al-‘ahd ‘alā l-arwāḥ fī l-azal/wa anā l-munādī lahum ‘alastu bi-rabbikum bi-amri qaḥḥim lam yazal/anā sayyid al-mu‘minīn/anā ‘alam al-muhtadīn/anā imām al-muttaqīn/anā l-yaqīn/anā l-mutakallim bi-l-waḥy/anā ṣāhib al-nujūm wa mudabbiruhā bi-amri rabbī wa ‘ilmī lladhī khaṣṣanī bihi/anā lladhī amla‘a l-arḍ ‘adlan wa qīstan kamā mulī‘at jawran wa zulman [zuluman]/anā l-ghā‘ib l-muntazar li l-amr al-‘azīm/anā l-ṭūr wa kitāb maṣṭūr wa l-bayt al-ma‘mūr wa l-saq al-marfū‘ wa l-baḥr al-masjūr/anā mu‘awwil al-ta‘wīl/anā mufassir 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-ẓāhir/anā nūr al-anbiyā‘/anā walāyat al-awliyā‘/anā Ādam wa Shūth/anā Mūsā wa Yūsha‘/anā ‘Isā wa Sham‘ūn/anā Ḥanbathā’ [?] al-Zanj/anā Bashūr [?] al-Turk/anā Jirjis al-Faranj/anā munawwir al-shams wa l-qamar wa l-nujūm/anā qaḥḥim al-qiḥāma/anā qaḥḥim al-sā‘a/ anā l-khālīq/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-ẓurūf/anā sirr al-ḥurūf/ anā ma‘nā l-ṭawāsīn/anā bāṭin al-ḥawāmīm/anā ṣāhib alif-lām-mīm/anā l-nūn wa l-qalam/ anā miṣbāḥ al-zulam/anā rāsi l-jibāl al-shāmikhāt/anā fajīr al-uyūn al-jāriyāt/ anā munzil al-maṭār/anā mūriq al-shajar/anā mukhrij al-lawn wa l-thamar/anā muqaddir al-qaḥwāt/anā nāshir al-amwāt/anā lladhī raddat li al-shams marratayn wa sallamat ‘alayya karratayn/wa sallaytu ma‘a rasūl Allāh al-qiblatayn/anā ṣāhib Badr wa Ḥumayn/ anā jāwaztu bi-Mūsā fī l-baḥr/wa aghraqtu Fir‘awn wa junūdahu/ anā l-mutakallim ‘alā lisān ‘Isā fī l-mahd/anā l-mutakallim bi-kullī lisān/anā lladhī ajūzu l-samāwāt al-sab‘ wa l-arḍīn al-sab‘ fī ṭurfatī ‘ayn/anā mahdī l-awān/anā ‘Isā’ l-zamān/anā ṣāhib al-mizān/ anā l-raḥmān/anā l-raḥīm/anā l-‘alī/anā l-a‘lā/anā ya‘ṣub al-mu‘minīn/anā yaqīn al-mūqīnīn/anā layth Banī Ghālib/anā ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.*

## The Five Spirits of the Divine Man

To Jean-Daniel Dubois  
in loyal friendship



Among the sentences that one finds most frequently in the sermons of ‘Alī, there is: “I am the one who speaks by divine revelation” (*anā al-mutakallim bi-l-waḥy*); and another that can be considered to be the consequence of the first: “I am the Master of hermeneutics” (*anā mu’awwil al-ta’wil*; in other words “He who initiates into the hidden meaning of divine revelation”); this is what is meant by the Shi‘i doctrine which describes the imam as the “speaking Quran”.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, ‘Alī, and after him the imams descended from him, are manifestations of God on earth, as we have seen, and one of the most fundamental aspects of that dimension is that the imam is at the same time the recipient, the transmitter and the ultimate content of the divine Word. Now, if the human nature of the imams possesses such properties it is because of its spiritual constitution. Let us take a closer look.

In a brief but very suggestive 2005 article entitled “The ‘Five Limbs’ of the Soul: A Manichean Motif in Muslim Garb?”, Douglas Karim Crow examined the echoes of the ancient theme of the ‘five organs of the soul’ in three Muslim authors: the Shi‘i imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq, the Sunni mystic al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī and the Ismaili Shi‘i thinker Ja‘far b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman. The bulk of the article, which also briefly reviews antecedents in Iran, is devoted to these three authors. At the end of the article Crow writes: ‘We refrain from pursuing the question beyond this point, hoping that the interested reader will take the materials presented here and ponder the questions raised.’<sup>2</sup> I will try to be that ‘interested reader’ Crow appeals to and will return to his article below. This

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1 See M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, in particular chap. 3.

2 D.K. Crow, “The ‘Five Limbs’ of the Soul: A Manichean Motif in Muslim Garb?”, in T. Lawson (ed.), *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought. Essays in Honour of Hermann Landolt*, London/New York, 2005, p. 30 (all of the article: pp. 19-30; on the Iranian antecedents: pp. 19-20; on the Muslim authors: pp. 21-30; footnotes: 31-33).

chapter comprises three parts: 1. Shi'i traditions; 2. their 'prehistory'; 3. their repercussions and implications.

## 1 Shi'i Traditions

We'll begin our examination with a few traditions recorded by that leading authority on early Shi'i hadith, Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. around 328-329/939-40/41) in the doctrinal section (the *Uṣūl*) of his *Kitāb al-Kāfi* (The Sufficient Book).<sup>3</sup> The chapter on the spirits of the imams in the Book of the Proof (*Kitāb al-ḥujja*) contains these three traditions:

1. "Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq: '... God the Most High created the created beings in three groups as He says it Himself [Quran 56:7-11]: "You shall be three groups next to each other \* The companions of the right [or 'of good omen'] \* What are the companions of the right [/of good omen]? \* And the companions of the left [or 'of ill omen'] \* What are the companions of the left ['of ill omen']? \* And those who go ahead, those who go ahead \* They are the close ones'" [end of Quranic quote].<sup>4</sup> "Those who go ahead' are the messengers of God and the elite among His creatures in whom he has placed five spirits: God supports them [first] through the holy spirit [*rūḥ al-quḍs*; literally the spirit of sanctity], by which one has knowledge of things. He supports them [then] through the spirit of faith (*rūḥ al-imān*), thanks to which they fear God. He supports them through the spirit of power (*rūḥ al-quwwa*), through which they can obey God. He supports them through the spirit of desire (*rūḥ al-shahwa*) through which they desire obedience to God and detest disobedience towards Him. [Finally] He places in them the spirit of movement (*rūḥ al-madraj* – literally the spirit of advancing, of progression) thanks to which people move [literally: come and go]. And God places in the faithful (*mu'minīn*), [who are] the "companions of the right", the last four' [then the hadith repeats word for word the text about the last four spirits in the list].<sup>5</sup>

3 On this author and his compilation see now M.A. Amir-Moezzi and H. Ansari, "Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 328 ou 329/939-40 ou 940-41) et son *Kitāb al-Kāfi*. Une introduction", *Studia Iranica* 39/2 (2009): 191-247; expanded version in M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 5. See also A.J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi'ism: Hadith as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad*, Richmond, 2000, chapters 6 to 8.

4 The terms meaning the "right" and "left", respectively *al-maymana* and *al-mash'ama*, derive from the roots YMN and Sh'M and, etymologically, suggest that which is beneficial, auspicious and that which is maleficent, of ill omen.

5 Al-Kulaynī, *Kitāb al-Kāfi, al-Uṣūl*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī, with Persian translation, 4 vols., Tehran, n.d. (the 4th vol. translated by H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī dates from 1386/1966), "Kitāb al-ḥujja", bāb fihī dhikr al-arwāḥ allatī fī l-a'imma, n. 1, vol. 2, 15-16. See also al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī

2. A disciple asked imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir what knowledge the initiatory sage (*‘ilm al-‘ālim*) possesses.<sup>6</sup> He replies: “... In [the being of] the prophets and legatees [*awṣiyā*, pl. of *waṣī*; one of the titles of the imam] five spirits are found: the holy spirit, the spirit of faith, the spirit of life [*rūḥ al-ḥayāt*; which here replaces the “spirit of movement” of the previous hadith], the spirit of power and the spirit of desire. It is through the holy spirit that [these men] know absolutely everything [literally “everything that is found in the world, from below the divine Throne to what is found beneath the earth”] ... The last four may undergo changes but not the holy spirit [literally “the holy spirit doesn’t enjoy himself or play”; the terms are Quranic].”<sup>7</sup>
3. A disciple asked Ja‘far what knowledge the imam can have of what is happening beneath the earth while he is in a locked room. The imam

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(d. 290/902-903; thus contemporary of al-Kulaynī), *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, ed. Mirzā Kūcebāghī (= ed. K), Tabriz, n.d. (around 1960), section 9, chapter 14, n. 1, 445-446; ed. ‘A. Zakīzādeh Ranānī (= ed. Z), 2 vols. with Persian translation, Qumm, 1391/2012, section 9, chap. 15, n. 1, vol. 2, 622-623. In al-Ṣaffār, instead of “The holy spirit through which they have knowledge of things”, there is “the holy spirit thanks to which prophets are missioned”. Indeed, the holy spirit seems here to be the individual correspondent of the celestial entity of the same name that is sometimes considered to be the equivalent of the angel Gabriel, the angel of revelation, and the entity that enables the divine messages to reach the prophets. See also al-Majlisī Muḥammad Bāqir, *Bihār al-anwār*, Tehran-Qumm, 110 tomes in 90 vols., 1376-1392/1956-1972, vol. 25, 52, n. 13. Note that the term *mu’min* (believer) in Shi‘i technical terminology means the faithful initiated to the teachings of the imam. It is thus distinct from the term *muslim*, which means the simple non-initiated Muslim; see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index s.v. In al-Kulaynī, the third group, “the companions of the left /of ill omen” are not defined, but in a tradition reported by al-Ṣaffār (*ibid.*, n. 5 in ed. K = n. 6 in ed. Z), they are identified with the “People of the Book” (*ahl al-kitāb*) who have not recognized ‘Alī as the legatee of Muḥammad and of whom God deprived the spirit of faith (they thus only possess the last three spirits). We are manifestly dealing here with the “majority of Muslims” (distinguished from the “believers”, i.e. the followers of ‘Alī). In the following hadith, “the companions of the left” are said to be Jews and Christians. It seems that we are dealing with a sort of code, a pejorative title for the Muslim adversaries of the Shi‘is. It is difficult to see how those who have not recognized the legitimacy of ‘Alī could be believers of other religions. The same process can also be seen in al-Barqī (d. around 274/888 or 280/894), *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin*, ed. J. Muḥaddith Urmawī, Tehran, 1370/1950, “K. ‘iqāb al-a‘māl”, pp. 90 *sqq.*; on this issue see R. Vilozny, “Pre-Büyük *Hadīth* Literature: The Case of al-Barqī from Qumm (d. 274/888 or 280/894) in Twelve Sections”, in F. Daftary & G. Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shi‘i Islam. History, Theology and Law*, London/New York, 2014, pp. 216-218 (all of it, pp. 203-230). I shall return more fully to al-Ṣaffār and his work at the end of this chapter.

- 6 On the technical meanings of the terms *‘ilm* and *‘ālim* (literally “knowledge” and “sage”), see Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index s.v. and in particular part III-2 (“La Science sacrée”), pp. 174-199; also *Id.*, *La religion discrète*, index s.v.
- 7 Al-Kulaynī, *ibid.*, n. 2, vol. 2, 16-17; al-Ṣaffār, *ibid.*, ed. K, n. 4, 447; ed. Z, n. 5, vol. 2, 627 (elsewhere in the same chapter in al-Ṣaffār, the spirit of movement/life is replaced by the spirit of the body -*rūḥ al-badan*); al-Majlisī, *ibid.*, vol. 25, 55, n. 15.

Ja'far replied: '... God placed in the Prophet [i.e. Muḥammad] five spirits: the spirit of life, which enabled him to move and to walk, the spirit of power, which enabled him to get up and exert himself, the spirit of desire, which enabled him to eat, drink and have licit sexual relations, the spirit of faith, through which he believed and judged equitably, and finally the holy spirit, through which he was the bearer of prophecy [*rūh al-quḍs fa-bihi ḥamala l-nubuwwa*]. When the Prophet passed away, the holy spirit was transmitted to the imam [*al-imām* with the definite article; it refers to 'Alī and no doubt to the other imams]. The holy spirit never sleeps, nor is it ever negligent or distracted, nor does it become boastful; which is the case of the other four spirits. It is by the holy spirit that everything is understood.'<sup>8</sup>

We find the five elements of the interior man in another form elsewhere in al-Kulaynī: in tradition no. 23 of the Book of Intelligence and of Ignorance (*Kitāb al-'aql wa l-jahl*) in the same *Uṣūl* part of the *Kitāb al-Kāfī*, where intelligence and its four components are mentioned: "Ja'far: 'The pillar of man is intelligence. It is composed of sagacity [*fiṭna*], understanding [*fahm*], attention [*ḥifẓ*] and knowledge [*ʿilm*]. It is intelligence which makes man perfect, which is his guide, which gives him insight and which is the key to his affairs. When his intelligence is sustained by the Light, he becomes wise, attentive, conscious, full of sagacity and understanding; so that he will know the how, why and where [of things]; he will distinguish what is beneficial for him from what is harmful; he shall know his direction, his attachments and his detachments. His witness to the unity of God will become purer, as will his obedience to God. Once this happens, he will achieve what he was unable to achieve [before] and he will be master what will come to pass [in the future]. He will be fully conscious of the present and will know why he is where he is; where he is coming from and where he is going to. All of this thanks to the power of intelligence''<sup>9</sup>

8 Al-Kulaynī, *ibid.*, n. 3, vol.2, 17; variant in al-Ṣaffār, *op. cit.*, section 9, chap. 15, n. 13, 454 (ed. K); section 9, chapter 16, n. 13, vol. 2, 648-649 (ed. Z); here the tradition ends with the following words: "... The holy spirit is unwavering. It is through it that the imam sees [or "that are seen"] the Orient of the earth and its Occident, its lands and its oceans." See also al-Ḥilli, Ḥasan b. Sulaymān (attributed to), *Mukhtaṣar Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, Najaf, 1370/1950, 2; al-Majlisī, *ibid.*, vol. 25, 57, n. 25.

9 Al-Kulaynī, *op. cit.*, "Kitāb al-'aql wa l-jahl", vol. 1, 29, n. 23. Each of these terms can have many translations (e.g. *fiṭna*: comprehension, immediate understanding, etc., *ḥifẓ*: memory, mental alertness, etc.). As we shall see later on, the same problem arises with the languages of texts belonging to other traditions. See also Ibn Bābūya, *ʿIlal al-sharāʿi'*, ed. M.Ṣ. Baḥr al-'ulūm, Najaf, 1385/1966, chap. 91, n. 2, 103 (shorter version); Ibn Shu'ba, *Tuḥaf al-'uqūl*, ed. 'A.A. Ghaffārī, 1366 solar/1988, pp. 369-370 (the teachings of imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, chapter:

These traditions about the Divine Man, and in particular the divine guide, the imam, and his ‘intellective limbs’, do not seem to have a specifically Islamic or Arab origin. No source in pre-Islamic Arab culture, in poetry, or in the Quran, can be attributed to them. But the religious and spiritual traditions of Antiquity and Late Antiquity do contain many striking parallels.

## 2 “Prehistory”

Apart from Manicheism, to which Douglas Karim Crow refers, and to which we will return, the earliest texts which might be at the root of these traditions are Isaiah 11, (1)-2,3 and some of its interpretations. Here is the biblical text (here as it appears in Semitic languages):

“1. (There shall come forth a branch from the stock of Jesse and a shoot shall grow from his roots)/ 2. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him [*rūḥa Yhwh*]: the spirit of wisdom and understanding (*rūḥa hak<sup>e</sup> māh ū-bīnāh*), the spirit of counsel and might [*rūḥa ‘eṣāh ū-g<sup>e</sup> būrāh*], the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord [*rūḥa da‘at v<sup>e</sup> -yir<sup>e</sup>at Yhwh*].”<sup>10</sup> The Syriac text of the Peshiṭta gives us: the Spirit of God [*rūḥā da-Loḥā*], the spirit of wisdom and understanding [*rūḥā de-ḥēk<sup>e</sup> m<sup>e</sup>tā wa de-sūkolā*], the spirit of goodness and

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*kalāmuhū fī khalq al-insān wa tarkībihī*). In his referenced article, D.K. Crow studied this tradition of Ja‘far and a few other parallel texts attributed to him (*art. cit.*, pp. 21-23) as they concerned the doctrine of the “five attributes of the Father of Light”, corresponding to the “five limbs of the soul” of the perfect man in Manicheism: “Reason, Mind, Intelligence, Thought and Understanding”. See the classic study of M. Boyce, *A Reader in Manichean Middle Persian and Parthian*, Leiden, 1975, 10 (D.K. Crow, *ibid.*, p. 20; see also Id., “The Role of *al-‘aql* in Early Islamic Wisdom, with Reference to Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq”, unpublished thesis from McGill University, 1996, chap. 5). I shall return to it. Curiously, D.K. Crow seems to ignore the tradition of the “five spirits” attributed to the same Ja‘far and recorded by the same al-Kulaynī. It is true that it is more relevant to anthropology and that the tradition about the *‘aql* is more relevant to noetics. However, as we shall see, both areas are inseparable. On the central role of the *‘aql* (human intelligence, corresponding to the cosmic entity with the same name) in early Shi‘ism see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, part 1-1 (“la hiéro-Intelligence et la raison”), 15-33. On the difficulties of translating the term *‘aql* (intelligence, intellect, reason, hiero-intelligence ...), see now G. Gobillot, “Les sources de l’anthropologie spirituelle chez les mystiques musulmans: une réflexion à partir de la notion de *‘aql*”, in A. Temimi (ed.), *Mélanges Luce Lopez-Baralt*, Zaghwan, 2001, pp. 267-314.

10 [Oecumenical French Translation of the Bible, Paris, 1986, pp. 775-776.] Massoretic Hebrew text from the Bible Society in Israel, Jerusalem, 1991, p. 394.

might [*rūhā d<sup>e</sup>-tar'ithā wa d<sup>e</sup>-gabo-rūtā*], the spirit of sagacity and fear of God [*rūhā d<sup>e</sup>-yid'atā wa d<sup>e</sup>-dēh<sup>e</sup> l<sup>e</sup> tēh d<sup>e</sup>-Moryā*].<sup>11</sup> As in the Arabic texts, the terms used to describe the spirits, which also describe all the faculties involved in religious thought or consciousness in general, are liable to be differently translated. Besides, how should they be counted? Is the Spirit of God first in the list, or does it include all the others? Is it identical with the holy spirit? Are the other spirits to be counted one by one or is each group of two to be counted as one spirit with two aspects? Is the 'fear of God' also a spirit, or a virtue in its own right? The fairly numerous interpretations of the verses in question, especially by the Greek and Latin Fathers, make different groupings of spirits and hence divergent numbers of them. So we find four, five, six or most often seven spirits or as many gifts of the holy spirit, and most often the following seven gifts: intelligence, knowledge, wisdom, counsel, piety, strength and fear of God (only Origen lists ten of them).<sup>12</sup> It is however clear that we have here the content, sometimes to the letter, as well as the description, of the five spirits of the Shi'i traditions. The Hebrew text speaks of the Messiah, the Christ according to the Christian commentators (Augustine also applies the 'gifts' to the sincere Christian faithful); the Shi'i hadiths speak of 'the elect', that is the prophets and more particularly the imams (some Shi'i texts also ascribe them to the initiated faithful). The following table attempts an approximate correspondence of elements of Isaiah 11, 2-3 to the Shi'i hadiths:

Isaiah 11, 2-3	Shi'i Traditions
Spirit of God/Spirit of Wisdom /Spirit of Knowledge	Holy Spirit
Spirit of the fear of God	Spirit of faith (that leads to fear of God)
Spirit of courage/might	Spirit of power
	Spirit of desire
	Spirit of movement/life/body

11 Ed. Father Benjamin Beit Yadgar, Tbilissi, 2009, p. 1054. I thank my colleague Paul Neuenkirchen for having pointed this out to me.

12 See for example A. Gardeil, 'Dons du Saint-Esprit. Pères grecs; Pères latins', *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, ed. A. Vacant & E. Mangenot, vol. IV/2, 1920, col. 1754-1766; K. Schluetz, *Isaias 11,2 (Die sieben Gaben des Heiligen Geistes) in den ersten vier christlichen Jahrhunderten*, Münster, 1932; P.C. Van Lierde, *Doctrina s. Augustini circa dona Spiritus sancti ex textu Isaia XI, 2-3*, Würzburg, 1935.

However, other sources more directly linked to the Shi'ī texts appear to have Gnostic and Manichean origins. The Gnostics knew Isaiah 11, 2-3 well, as their rich interpretative tradition reveals.<sup>13</sup> The most remarkable parallels can be found in their commentaries on logion 19 of the Gospel of Thomas, brilliantly situated, identified and studied by Henri-Charles Puech, in particular in his classes at the Collège de France in 1961-62.<sup>14</sup> Here is the text of that logion: "Jesus said: 'Blessed is he who was, before he came into being. If you become my disciples (and) listen to my words, these stones will serve you. For you have *five trees in Paradise* that do not change during summer (and) winter, and their leaves do not fall. He who comes to know them will not taste death.'"<sup>15</sup> According to other passages of the Gospel of Thomas, but also in Gnostic texts like 'Pistis Sophia', the Gospel of Eve quoted by Epiphanius, the Acts of Thomas or even Irenaeus, this text and others refer to 'the Elected Ones', the 'Unique Ones', the 'Living Ones', the 'sons of man' or, in other words, those who have been initiated by Jesus into the secret of things.<sup>16</sup> In a certain number of Coptic Gnostic texts mention is made of the 'mystery of the five Trees', the 'five powers' or the 'five seals' treated as noetic symbols (Untitled Text of the Bruce Codex, Pistis Sophia, Papyrus of Deir el Bala'izah). However, two Manichean writings most resemble these Shi'ī traditions about the five spirits and the faculties of intelligence: they are the Coptic Psalter<sup>17</sup> and the Chinese treatise called the "Traité Chavannes-Pelliot".<sup>18</sup> In the first, "the five trees of Paradise" of logion 19 are compared to the "five wise virgins" of the Gospel parable and with

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- 13 See for example *Écrits gnostiques. La bibliothèque de Nag Hammadi*, under the direction of J.-P. Mahé and P.-H. Poirier, Paris, 2007, index. thematic s.v., Esprit, 1772 (in particular: esprit de connaissance, e. de conseil, e. de crainte, e. divin, e. de pensée, e. de puissance, e. de sagesse, e. saint, e. vivant, e. vivifiant).
- 14 See now H.-Ch. Puech, *En quête de la gnose. II. Sur l'Évangile selon Thomas*, Paris, 1978, pp. 98-104, for the examination that follows.
- 15 See the translation *L'Évangile selon Thomas*, Coptic text established and translated by A. Guillaumont, H.-Ch. Puech, G. Quispel, W. Till and Y. 'Abd al-Masih, Leiden-Paris, 1959, pp. 13-15 (p. 84 of the manuscript, lines 17-24).
- 16 H.-Ch. Puech, *En quête de la gnose*, vol. 2, p. 99.
- 17 *A Manichean Psalm-book*, ed. C.R.C. Allberry, Stuttgart, 1938, II, 161; A. Villey, *Psaumes des errants. Écrits manichéens du Fayyūm*, Paris, 1994: I. Hymne aux Quatre Grands Jours, 60, 134,2 (On the new man, the five psychological ones and the five spiritual ones) and comments, pp. 147 sqq., in particular p. 151, 161, 166; especially XVIII. Psalm of the number five, pp. 104-105, and comments, pp. 343-351; also XXVI. Psalm of the Elect, pp. 120-121 (where we find in verse 25 the People of the Right and the People of the Left from the Quranic verses commented upon in the Shi'ī traditions we discussed; see above hadith n. 1) and comments pp. 395-400.
- 18 Chavannes-Pelliot, *Un traité manichéen retrouvé en Chine*, p. 557 sqq.; Id., *En quête de la gnose*, vol. 2, pp. 100-102.

several other series of entities grouped in fives, including the “five gifts” of the holy spirit and the five organs of the soul capable of receiving the holy spirit. The second Manichean writing includes many series of five elements in parallel with the five trees of logion 19, notably the ‘five limbs of nature made of light’ of the initiate, which are, according to the translation of Chavannes and Pelliot, thought, feeling, reflection, intellect and reasoning.<sup>19</sup> However, a note by Paul Demiéville to Henri-Charles Puech says that the Chinese terms also meaning the five limbs, namely *siang*, *sin*, *nien*, *sseu* and *yi*, are much vaguer. Just as the Arabic terms in the Ja’far’s tradition on the faculties of intelligence (*‘aql*), they are more or less related to thought in general, and describe notions such as consciousness, imagination, heart, spirit, memory, reflection or intention. Puech then links these texts to other Manichean sources describing the transformation of the “Old Man” into the “New Man” thanks to the *Noûs*-Light, in this case to a fragment of Tourfan M 14, chapter 38 of the Coptic *Kephalaïa* or also chapter 10 of the *Acta Archelai*. He is thus able to make a list of five spiritual faculties in three important languages of the Manicheans:

- Syriac : *haunā*, *madd<sup>e</sup>ā*, *re’yānā*, *maḥshabtha*, *tar’ithā*.
- Greek : *noûs*, *ennoïa*, *enthumêsis*, *phronêsis*, *logismos*.
- Coptic : *nous*, *meeue*, *sbô*, *sadjne*, *makmek*.

It should be stressed that in this list the four terms of this ‘pentad’ mentioned after *noûs* are in fact only different aspects, properties or manifestations of it. This is exactly what is found in the tradition about the faculties of the *‘aql*. As Schaeder, Nyberg, Reitzenstein and others have shown, this numbering system is of Iranian origin. The Manicheans must have borrowed their interpretations of logion 19 from second century Gnostics. In the epiclesis of the *Acts of Thomas*, the holy spirit is described as the Envoy or Messenger of the five limbs, in this case *noûs*, *ennoïa*, *phronêsis*, *enthumêsis* and *logismos*. Summarising a theological doctrine of Basilides, Irenaeus writes on the supreme God being surrounded by five hypostases emanating from him, namely *noûs*, *logos*, *phronêsis*, *sophia* and *dunamis*.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in the *Sophia of Jesus-Christ*, the five or six perfect or immortal limbs of the first man are identical to the Manichean pentad and are listed in the same order. Tertullian says, in *De anima*, xviii, 4, that the Gnostics, notably the Valentinians, made a parallel between the “bodily

19 On pentads in Manicheism see also T. Petitpièce, “The Face of the Father: Pentadization in the Manichaean *Kephalaia* (Chapter 21)”, *Vigiliae christianae*, 61, 2007, pp. 470-477; Id., *Pentadic Redaction in Manichaean Kephalaia*, Nag Hammadi and Manichean Studies n. 66, Leiden, 2009.

20 H.-Ch. Puech, *En quête de la gnose*, vol. 2, p. 104. The mention of the *dunamis* seems to throw a certain light on “the spirit of movement” (*rūḥ al-madraj*) of Shi’i traditions, *a priori* inexplicable, as is “the spirit of desire” (*rūḥ al-shahwa*).

senses” (*corporales sensus*) and the five foolish virgins of the Gospel parable, and also between the “intellectual powers” (*intellectuales uires*) and the five wise virgins. The doctrine of the five spiritual limbs or senses thus seems to have existed among Gnostic currents prior to Manicheism.

Michel Tardieu adds the Latin and Middle-Persian terms to Puech’s list of the five limbs of the Manichean perfect man.<sup>21</sup> He gives first their general titles in the different languages of the Manichean corpus: the five thoughts (in Parthian), the five aeons, the names of the soul or splendors (in Greek), the five dwellings or fathers (in Syriac), the five worlds (in Syriac, Greek, Latin and Arabic in the description of Manicheans by, for example, Ibn al-Nadīm). He provides the following table:

[trans.] Syriac	Greek	Latin	Middle-Persian
1. Intelligence	Noûs	Mens	bām
2. Science	Ennoïa	Sensus	manohmēd
3. Thought	Phronēsis	Prudentia	ūsh
4. Reflection	enthumēsis	Intellectus	andeshisn
5. Consciousness	logismos	Cogitatio	parmānag <sup>a</sup>

a See also table on page 367 of M. Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, concerning § 12 of the “Livre de sagesse de Jésus et Eugnoste”, p. 180, comments pp. 366-368 (on the five intellectual members of the primordial Man).

We have already noted a possible Iranian influence on the list of spiritual faculties. Michel Tardieu’s mention of the use of the Middle Persian or Pahlavi language by the Manichaeans brings us back to it.<sup>22</sup> It so happens that one of the most important Zoroastrian texts in Middle-Persian, the *Dēnkart*, contains

21 M. Tardieu, *Le manichéisme*, Paris, 1981, pp. 106-107. According to Tardieu, there are countless Manichean texts where the theme of the five intellectual limbs or the five *membra dei* is present. For Gnostic, probably also pre-Manichean literature see also Id., *Écrits gnostiques. Codex de Berlin*, Paris, 1984, “Livre des secrets de Jean”, § 23, pp. 101-103 and comments, pp. 268-271 (on the intellectual entities); § 45, pp. 123-125 and commentary, pp. 300-308 (on the psychic body). M. Tardieu dates this source from the second half of the 2nd century, whereas in a more recent study, Bernard Barc and Wolf-Peter Funk, *Le Livre des secrets de Jean. Recension brève* (NH III, 1 et BG, 2), Louvain, 2012, it was dated back to the first half of the same century and was based on knowledge of the Hebrew text of Genesis and not of the Greek text of the Septuaginta. I thank Jean-Daniel Dubois for giving me a copy of his text.

22 See also Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques*, commentary of § 45, pp. 303 *sqq.* (comparison with several Zoroastrian books).

significant passages about the four or five spiritual faculties of man in relation to the divine world. It is true that this religious text, which dates from the 9th century AD, is very late, but we also know that the materials compiled in this type of Zoroastrian writings, composed three centuries after the advent of Islam and most probably in reaction to it, often have very ancient origins. Remember that the *Book of Isaiah*, whose verses 11, 2-3 seem to be the primary source of the doctrines we are studying, includes the history of the deportation of the Jews to Babylon, their return to Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the Temple on the orders of the Achaemenid sovereign Cyrus the Second. It is thus later than the Persian period during which, according to a good number of scholars, the Jewish religion absorbed some important Zoroastrian influences.<sup>23</sup>

As for the *Dēnkart*, two chapters of its Third Book in particular discuss, amongst other things, the components of the interior man. Chapter 123 mentions the similarities between the *mēnōg*, the spiritual world, and the *gētī*, the material world, in the universe as a whole and in man in particular. In a rather complex list, the spiritual or celestial 'mēnōgian' components of the soul are as follows: *ruvān*, *waxsh*, *čīhr* and *frawahr*, which are the powers of life, *jān*. The most powerful agent animating these faculties is the *xrad/ashn xrad*, intelligence or knowledge, itself eminently "mēnōgian", as it is often identified with the Good Religion (*wēh dēn*).<sup>24</sup> The text again speaks of the components of the soul and of the central role of intelligence, both important in our Shi'i traditions. Then there is chapter 218, the title of which was translated by Father Jean de Menasce as: "On the mēnōgian realities that are in [the person of] man, their agents and their operations."<sup>25</sup> Here the agents of the spiritual realities of man are four in number: *ruwān*, *jān*, *frawahr* and *bōy*. The chapter endeavours to define and link them with other faculties such as *waxsh*, *čīhr*, *ahw*, etc. According to Shaul Shaked, who complements the studies of Harold Bailey on the *xwarnah/farrah* ("light of glory" of the mēnōgian men),

23 See for example *Introduction à l'Ancien Testament*, ed. J.-D. Macchi, Th. Römer et Ch. Nihan, Geneva, 2005, pp. 410 sqq.

24 *Le Troisième Livre du Dēnkart*, translated from Pahlavi by J. de Menasce, Paris, 1973, chap. 123, pp. 125 sqq. (= Pahlavi text ed. D.M. Madan, *The Complete Text of the Pahlavi Dinkart*, Bombay, 1911, p. 119; M.J. Dresden, *Dēnkart, a Pahlavi Text, facsimile Edition of the Manuscript B of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute Bombay*, Wiesbaden, 1966, p. 89). The terms are as difficult to translate as the terminology of the components of the soul in other languages, as we have seen. On the advice of Prof. Frantz Grenet (whom I wholeheartedly thank), the transcriptions from Pahlavi have been updated according to the McKenzie system.

25 *Le Troisième Livre de Dēnkart*, chap. 218, pp. 230-231 (= ed. Madan, p. 241; ed. Dresden, p. 190).

the several components of the soul and their parallels with the heavenly powers are a very old Iranian concept. It is precisely these components, the four to seven faculties, and their articulation with the *mēnōg* world which enable the relationship between the divine man and the divine entities or with Ahura Mazda himself.<sup>26</sup>

### 3 Further Developments and Implications

To return to the four Shi'i traditions: one goes back to the fifth imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. around 119/737), and the other three to the sixth imam, Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765). This takes us back to the end of 1st/7th and especially to the first half of the 2nd/8th centuries. Heinz Halm's study, a classic, complements those of Israel Friedländer and Marshall Hodgson and shows that this period corresponds effectively to the adoption of Manichean, Gnostic and dualistic doctrines by Shi'i communities.<sup>27</sup> The absence of direct sources in the first two centuries of Islam makes the study of the literary connections between Gnostic movements and the different branches of Shi'ism difficult. But numerous studies, of which the most complete is still the mentioned monograph of Heinz Halm have shown that religious currents of the Gnostic type, notably those influenced by, or remaining faithful to, the disciples of Mani (Mānī in Arabic), Bardaisan (Bardayšān) and Marcion (Marqiyūn), remained active in Muslim lands until the 3rd and 4th/9th and 10th centuries, sometimes converting to the new Arab religion with their own spiritual and intellectual baggage in tow.<sup>28</sup> These movements were almost all located in the birthplace of Shi'ism, Iraq (and especially in the cities of Kūfa, not far from the important Sassanian

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- 26 H.W. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-century Books*, Oxford, 1943, *passim*; Sh. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran*, London, 1994, pp. 53 *sqq.*; D.K. Crow, "The 'Five Limbs'", p. 20 and footnotes 22 and 23, where reference is also made to the four interior qualities in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and in Jamblicus (respective references to B.P. Copenhagen, *Hermetica*, Cambridge, 1992, p. 225 and D.J. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Oxford, 1989, Appendix 1, pp. 218-219).
- 27 I. Friedländer, "The Heterodoxies of the Shiites according to Ibn Ḥazm", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 28 (1907), pp. 1-80 et 29 (1909), pp. 1-183; Id., "Abdallāh b. Saba', der Begründer der Shi'a und sein Jüdischer Ursprung", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 23 (1909), pp. 32-63; M.G.S. Hodgson, "How did the early Shi'a become sectarian?", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75 (1955), pp. 1-31 – now in E. Kohlberg (ed.), *Shi'ism*, Aldershot, (2003, article 1); H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis. Die Extreme Shia und die 'Alawiten*, Zurich-Munich, 1982, *passim*.
- 28 Dualistic Gnostics and Manicheans and their doctrines were very well familiar to Muslims; see G. Vajda, "Le témoignage d'al-Māturīdī sur la doctrine des Manichéens, des Dayšānites et des Marcionites", *Arabica* 11 (1964), pp. 1-38 et pp. 113-128; G. Monnot,

city of Ḥīra, and of Bašra).<sup>29</sup> From Muslim heresiographical works, and also from Imami and Ismaili sources, as well as from texts of the so-called “extremist” Shi‘i circles such as the *Kitāb al-Haft wa l-aẓilla* or the *Umm al-kitāb*, (to which I will return), it appears that one can reasonably deduce that teachings of the Gnostic type, being spread most by initiation (thus usually orally or under the seal of secrecy), were widespread during the imamate of the two imams, and especially the second (see above), at the turn of the 1st and 2nd/7th and 8th centuries.<sup>30</sup> Some studies on imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq portray him as a great scholar surrounded by a circle of disciples from many horizons, notably Gnostics, Manicheans, Judeo-Christians, and refer to the large number of texts in all kinds of literary genres attributed to him. They include many teachings derived from the mystical and spiritual traditions of Late Antiquity, from Neo-Platonic theology to the occult sciences, especially alchemy, from Hermeticism to Neo-Pythagoreanism, and from esoteric hermeneutics to

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*Penseurs musulmans et religions iraniennes. ‘Abd al-Jabbār et ses devanciers*, Paris, 1974, especially chapters IV et V; Id., *Islam et religions*, Paris, 1986, chapters III, V et VI.

- 29 There is no doubt about the presence of Gnostic doctrines in many Shi‘i currents (see above chap. 1, the afferent texts of footnotes 90 to 92). See for example L. Massignon, “Die Ursprünge und die Bedeutung des Gnostizismus im Islam”, *Eranos Jahrbuch* 1937, pp. 55-77 (= *Opera Minora*, ed. Y. Moubarac, Beirut, 1963, vol. 1, pp. 499-513); H. Corbin, “De la gnose antique à la gnose ismaélienne”, in *Oriente e Occidente nel Medioevo. Convegno di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* (Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei), Rome 1957, pp. 105-146 (included in Id., *Temps cyclique et gnose ismaélienne*, Paris, 1982, 3rd part); Id., “L’idée du Paraclet en philosophie iranienne”, in *La Persia nel Medioevo* (Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei), Rome, 1970, pp. 37-68 (included in Id., *Face de Dieu, face de l’Homme*, Paris, 1983, pp. 311-358); U. Rubin, “Pre-existence and Light. Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad”, *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975), pp. 62-119; W. al-Qāḍī, “The Development of the Term *Ghulāt* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysāniyya”, in I. Dietrich (ed.), *Akten des VII. Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft*, Göttingen, 1976, pp. 295-319 (now in E. Kohlberg (ed.), *Shī‘ism*, article 8); H. Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismā‘īlyya. Eine Studie zur islamischen Gnosis*, Wiesbaden, 1978, *passim*; M. Bar-Asher & A. Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-‘Alawī Religion. An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy*, Leiden, etc., 2002, *passim*.
- 30 L. Massignon, “Der gnostische Kult der Fatima im schiitischen Islam”, *Eranos Jahrbuch* 1938, pp. 161-173 (= *Opera Minora*, vol. 1, pp. 514-522); E.F. Tijdens, “Der mythologisch-gnostische Hintergrund des *Umm al-Kitāb*”, *Acta Iranica* 7 (1977), pp. 241-526; H. Halm, “Das ‘Buch der Schatten.’ Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der *ghulāt* und die Ursprünge des Nuṣairierts”, *Der Islam* 55 (1978), pp. 219-265 and 58 (1981), pp. 15-86; S.M. 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; D. De Smet, “Au-delà de l’apparent: les notions de *ẓāhir* et *bāṭin* dans l’ésotérisme musulman”, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 25 (1994), pp. 197-220; Id., *La philosophie ismaélienne: un ésotérisme chiite entre néoplatonisme et gnose*, Paris, 2012, *passim*; W. Tucker, *Mahdīs and Millenarians: Shiite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq*, New York, 2008, *passim*; M.A. Amir-Moezzi et al. (eds.), *L’ésotérisme shī‘ite, passim*.

mystical anthropology.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the three traditions relating to the “five spirits” of al-Kulaynī are represented by “the Two Ju‘fī”: Jābir b. Yazīd al-Ju‘fī and Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Umar al-Ju‘fī, both disciples of the two imams. Their names appear in the chains of transmission (*isnād*) of similar traditions documented by al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (see more below). Both are known to have transmitted teachings of the Gnostic, esoteric and mystical type, from their teachers, notably those of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq.<sup>32</sup> All these elements lead us to think that these traditions date effectively from the end of the 1st/7th or the beginning of the 2nd/8th century. Even their attribution to the two imams, Muḥammad al-Bāqir and even more to Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, seems plausible. In this case, these Shi‘i teachings would be the earliest appearance in Islam of the themes we are considering and provide evidence of the communities they have traversed on their journey from the old religious traditions to the new religion.

Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. between 295 and 310/907-922) is a further Islamic thinker to have explored at some length the theme of the components of the soul. An exact contemporary of al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī and of al-Kulaynī, and an original mystic of significant importance in the history of esoteric Islamic ideas, it was to him that Douglas K. Crow devoted most of his article.<sup>33</sup> In many of his works, such as *al-Masā’il al-maknūna*, *‘Ilm al-awliyā’* or *Ghawr al-umūr*, the Sage of Tirmidh identifies four, five or six components of intelligence (*al-‘aql*) which he calls the “armies of the spirit, of the heart or of knowledge” (*junūd al-rūḥ/al-qalb/al-ma‘rifa*). They often include the four elements of intelligence of the Shi‘i tradition from the *Kitāb al-‘aql wa l-jahl* of al-Kulaynī (the fourth and final tradition described at the beginning of our study) along with *‘aql: al-fiṭna* (sagacity), *al-fahm* (understanding), *al-‘ilm* (knowledge), *al-ḥifẓ* (memory/attention; replaced sometimes by *al-dhihn*, the aptitude to learn; variant: *dhukā*, sharpness of spirit), always with the same reserves about their

31 J. Ruska, *Arabische Alchemisten. II. Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, der sechste Imām*, Heidelberg, 1924; P. Kraus, *Jābir b. Ḥayyān. Contribution à l’histoire des idées scientifiques dans l’Islam*, Cairo, 1942 (re-ed. Paris, 1986), index *s.n.*; T. Fahd, “Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq et la tradition scientifique arabe”, in *Le shī‘isme imāmīte, Actes du colloque de Strasbourg (6-9 mai 1968)*, Paris, 1970, pp. 131-142; P. Lory, *Alchimie et mystique en terre d’Islam*, Paris-Lagrasse, 1989, index, *s.n.*; H. Ansari, “Abū l-Khaṭṭāb” (translated from Persian by R. Gholami), *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, vol. 2, pp. 203-210.

32 On Jābir b. Yazīd, see now H. Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival. A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shī‘ite Literature*, vol. 1, Oxford, 2003, index *s.n.* and in particular pp. 86-103; S. Ṭawūsī Masrūr, *Paṣūheshī pīrāmūn-e Jābir b. Yazīd Ju‘fī*, Tehran, 1389 s./2010. On Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Umar, see H. Halm, “Das ‘Buch der Schatten’. Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der *ghulāt* und die Ursprünge des Nuṣairiertums”; L. Capezzzone, “Il *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ* attribuito a Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Umar al-Ju‘fī. Edizione del ms. Unico (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale) e studio introduttivo”, *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 69/3-4 (1995), pp. 29-151; M. Asatryan, *Controversies in Formative Shi‘i Islam. The Ghulat Muslims and Their Beliefs*, London, 2017.

33 D.K. Crow, *art. cit.*, pp. 24-30.

exact translation. The closeness of al-Tirmidhī to Shi'ī traditions is also perceptible in his use of expression: the “armies of intelligence”, *junūd al-‘aql*, reminiscent of the famous cosmogonical tradition at the origin of Shi'ī dualism, the hadith of the 75 Armies of cosmic Intelligence and of cosmic Ignorance (*junūd al-‘aql wa l-jahl*).<sup>34</sup> As Geneviève Gobillot has frequently stressed, the striking parallelism between al-Tirmidhī and al-Kulaynī is evident.<sup>35</sup> It shows very clearly that the Transoxianian mystic drew from the same Shi'ī sources as the author of the *Kitāb al-Kāfi*, and not only on the subject his doctrine of spiritual intelligence.

The third and last author considered by Douglas K. Crow is the Ismaili Shi'ī propagandist Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. around 380/990).<sup>36</sup> In his *Sarā'ir wa asrār al-nuṭaqā'*, Ja'far seems to think of four components of intelligence (*al-‘aql*); *fikr* (thought/meditation), *dhikr* (recall/remembrance), *dhihn* (aptitude to learn) and *ḥifẓ* (memory/attention) and makes a link, in a confusing manner it must be said, between the five intellectual faculties of man (*‘aql, nafs, dhikr, dhihn, fikr*) and the five “hypostases” of the Ismaili cosmogonic system, namely

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- 34 D.K. Crow, *ibid.*, pp. 24-26 et p. 29; see the translation of *Ghawr al-umūr* of al-Tirmidhī by G. Gobillot, *Le Livre de la Profondeur des choses*, Presses universitaires de Septentrion, 1996, pp. 259-260 et 271-272. On the tradition of the Armies of Intelligence and Ignorance, see D.K. Crow, “The Role of al-‘aql in Early Islamic Wisdom, with Reference to Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq”, chap. 5; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp.18-21; Id., *La religion discrète*, chap. 12, pp. 304 sqq.; Id., “Worlds and Their Inhabitants. Some Notes on Imami-Shi'ī Cosmo-Anthropogony”, in E. Coda and C. Martini Bonadeo (eds.), *De l'Antiquité tardive au Moyen-Âge. Études de logique aristotélicienne et de philosophie grecque, syriaque, arabe et latine offertes à Henri Hugonnard-Roche*, Paris, 2014, pp. 519-529. This tradition is recorded by numerous early Shi'ī sources anterior to, contemporary with or slightly later than al-Tirmidhī, for example in chronological order: al-Barqī (m. vers 274/888 ou 280/894), *Kitāb al-Maḥāsīn*, vol. 1, pp. 96-98; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, “K. al-‘aql wa l-jahl”, n. 14, vol. 1, pp. 23-26; (Pseudo?) al-Mas'ūdī (m. 345/956), *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya*, Najaf, s.d., pp. 1-3; Ibn Shu'ba (living in the mid-4th/10th centuries), *Tuḥaf al-‘uqūl*, pp. 423-425. On the attribution of *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya* to al-Mas'ūdī and the problems it poses, see Ch. Pellat, “Mas'ūdī et l'imāmisme”, in *Le shī'isme imāmīte*, pp. 69-90; and now Ғ. Anṣārī (Ansari), “Mo'ammā-ye čand ketāb: az *Kitāb al-awṣiyā'*-e Shalmaghānī tā *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya*-ye Mas'ūdī (hamrāh bā barrasī-ye yekī az manābe'-e do ketāb-e *al-Hidāyat al-kubrā* va *Dalā'il al-imāma*)”, in Id., *Barrasī hā-ye tārikhī dar ḥawze-ye eslām va tashayyo'*, Tehran, 1390 solar/2012, chap. 86, pp. 875-918.
- 35 G. Gobillot, al-Tirmidhī, *Le livre de la Profondeur des choses* (previous footnote), p. 96, 121, pp. 134-136, 139-140 (where reference to the influence of Manicheism on al-Tirmidhī is made), pp. 259-260, 271-272; ead., “Jésus selon les mystiques musulmans”, *Graphé* 7, special issue “Les vies de Jésus” (1998), pp. 101-102 (all of the article, pp. 60-135); ead., “Un point sur les études tirmidhiennes”, *Annales Islamologiques* 32 (2000), p. 77 (all of it, pp. 67-79); ead., “Les sources de l'anthropologie spirituelle ...”, p. 283, 288, pp. 294-296, 309-310, p. 312; ead., al-Tirmidhī, *Le livre des Nuances ou de l'impossibilité de la synonymie (Kitāb al-furūq wa man' al-tarādūf)*, Paris, 2006, pp. 488-489.
- 36 D.K. Crow, *art. cit.*, p. 30.

*sābiq, tālī, jadd, fath* and *khayāl*. Both al-Tirmidhī and Ja'far b. Maṣūir al-Yaman wrote about intelligence and its components and many other authors, especially Ismaili philosophers and theologians also based their noetics on it.<sup>37</sup>

Other sources reflect upon the multiple spirits of the man of God, for example the famous Shi'ī esoteric text *Umm al-kitāb*, of which only an archaic Persian translation from an Arabic original exists. Although Central Asian Ismailis hold it as sacred, it seems to derive from proto-Ismaili esoteric Gnostic circles, which heresiographers accuse of extremism (*ghuluww*). As for the dating of the Arabic original, its editor, Wladimir Ivanow, hesitated, in publications spanning many decades, between the 2nd/8th and the 5th/10th-11th centuries.<sup>38</sup> Now, revising the analyses of Ivanow, Filippani-Ronconi and Tijdens, Heinz Halm, who to date is the author of the most comprehensive studies of the text, believes that its oldest parts date back to the first half of the 2nd/8th century<sup>39</sup> and therefore to the period of the imamate of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. However, much more recently, Sean Anthony, in a very well-documented study, has reconsidered this dating and believes that the oldest parts of this work date from the period of the minor Occultation of the twelfth imam of the Imamīs, in the second half of the 3rd/9th century.<sup>40</sup> In this case, the work is the precise contemporary of the *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* of al-Ṣaffār and the *Kāfi* of al-Kulaynī. In any case, all this

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- 37 On this system and sacred pentads in Ismailism, too briefly discussed by D.K. Crow, see P. Walker, "Cosmic Hierarchies in Early Ismā'īlī Thought. The View of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī", *Muslim World* 66 (1976), pp. 14-28; and above all H. Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der früh en Ismā'īliya. Eine Studie zur islamischen Gnosis*, Wiesbaden, 1978, pp. 67-74; Id., "The Cosmology of the Pre-Fatimid Ismā'īliyya", in F. Daftary (ed.), *Mediaeval Ismā'īlī History and Thought*, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 75-83; D. De Smet, "La fonction noétique de la triade al-Jadd, al-Fath et al-Khayāl. Les fondements de la connaissance prophétique dans l'ismaélisme", in H. Biesterfeldt und V. Klemm (eds.), *Differenz und Dynamik im Islam: Festschrift für Heinz Halm zum 70. Geburtstag*, Würzburg, 2012, pp. 319-336.
- 38 W. Ivanow, "Notes sur l'Ummu' l-kitāb des Ismaéliens de l'Asie Centrale", *Revue des Études Islamiques* 6 (1932), pp. 425-426 (5th/10-11th century); Id., *The Alleged Founder of Ismailism*, Bombay, 1946, pp. 99-101 and *Studies in Early Persian Ismailism*, Leiden, 1948, 108 (2nd/8th century); Id., *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey*, Tehran, 1963, pp. 193 sqq. (5th/10-11th century).
- 39 H. Halm, "Das Buch der Schatten' ...", pp. 36 sqq.; Id., *Die islamische Gnosis*, pp. 113 sqq.; Id., "The Cosmology of the Pre-Fatimid Ismā'īliyya", pp. 82 sq. See also P. Filippani-Ronconi, *Ummu'l-Kitāb*, Naples, 1966; Id., "Note sulla soteriologia e sul simbolismo cosmico dell'Ummu'l-Kitāb", *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, 14 (1964), pp. 98-141; E.F. Tijdens, "Der mythologisch-gnostische Hintergrund des (*Umm al-kitāb*)". See also B. Radtke, "Iranian and Gnostic Elements in Early *Taṣawwuf*: Observations Concerning the *Umm al-kitāb*", in G. Gnoli and A. Panaino (eds.), *Proceedings of the First European Conference of Iranian Studies* (Serie orientale Roma 67/2), ii, Rome, 1990, pp. 519-530.
- 40 S.W. Anthony, "The Legend of 'Abdallāh ibn Saba' and the Date of *Umm al-Kitāb*", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 21/1 (2011), pp. 1-30 (in particular pp. 17-18).

falls fully within what I have elsewhere called the pre-Buyid “original esoteric” tradition.<sup>41</sup>

At the beginning of the *Umm al-kitāb*, during a session in school, the young imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir, a possessor of miraculous initiatory knowledge, explains the esoteric meanings of the alphabet to his teacher ‘Abdallāh b. Šabbāh.<sup>42</sup> In the course of these explanations, the different elements of the traditions we have examined in al-Kulaynī, describing the spiritual and intellectual capacities of the man of God, are mentioned. They are the spirit of life (*rūḥ al-ḥayāt*), the spirit of faith (*rūḥ al-īmān*), the spirit of memory/attention (*rūḥ al-ḥifẓ*), the spirit of reflection/meditation (*rūḥ al-fikr*), the spirit of power (*rūḥ al-jabarūt*; cf. *rūḥ al-quwwa* in al-Kulaynī), the spirit of knowledge (*rūḥ al-‘ilm*), the spirit of intelligence (*rūḥ al-‘aql*), the holy spirit/spirit of sanctity (*rūḥ al-quds*) also called the universal spirit (*rūḥ-i kull*, in Persian) or the supreme spirit (*rūḥ al-akbar* and *rūḥ al-a‘zam* [sic, instead of *al-rūḥ al-kubrā* and *al-rūḥ al-‘uzmā*]). A little further into the text, the spirits of the five physical senses are matched with the “Five of the Mantel” (Muḥammad, Fāṭima, ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan et al-Ḥusayn) and the five interior spirits crowned, yet again, by the holy spirit.<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere, the five “hypostases” of Ismailism are mentioned: *‘aql*, *nafs*, *fath*, *jadd*, *khayāl* (translated here as universal Intellect, universal Soul, Victory, Glory and Imagination), matched with the *afṛād* (the Lonely Ones) and the *yatīm* (the Orphans or the Incomparable Ones) whom the Nuṣayrī Shi‘is identify with the five companions of ‘Alī, namely Salmān the Persian, al-Miqdād b. Aswad, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, ‘Uthmān b. Maz‘ūn and ‘Ammār b. Yāsir (or according to another list: al-Miqdād, Abū Dharr, ‘Abdallāh b. Rawḥa, ‘Uthmān b. Maz‘ūn and Qanbar b. Kādān).<sup>44</sup>

41 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 33 sqq.; Id. and Ch. Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le shi'isme?*, Paris, 2004, part III, chapters 1 to 3.

42 Ed. W. Ivanow, “Ummu’l-kitāb”, *Der Islam* 23 (1936), pp. 21 sqq. (all of the article and the Persian text, pp. 1-132). The name of ‘Abdallāh b. Saba’ has been changed, deliberately or not, into ‘Abdallāh b. Šabbāh (see *ibid.*, p. 7); on this change see Ed. W. Ivanow, “Notes sur l’Ummu’l-kitāb”, p. 428 and footnote 2; E.F. Tjijdens, “Der mythologisch-gnostische Hintergrund des (*Umm al-kitāb*)”, p. 279.

43 Text of the *Umm al-kitāb* (ed. Ivanow), pp. 28-31: the spirits of sight (*rūḥ-e būnā’ī*), of hearing (*shinavā’ī*), of smell (*būyā’ī*), of taste (*‘āshniḡīr*), of speech (*sic gūyā’ī!* instead of touch?), corresponding respectively on the one hand to al-Ḥusayn, al-Ḥasan, Fāṭima, Muḥammad and ‘Alī, and on the other hand to the spirit of life, of faith, of memory/attention, of thought/meditation and of knowledge. The holy spirit placed above the others is presented as being the visible form of the divine Person (*rūḥ al-quds ke mu‘āyana-ye shakḥs-e khodāvand ast*).

44 *Umm al-kitāb*, 107; on the pleroma of the Lonely Ones/Orphans in Ismailism and above all in Nuṣayrism, see M. Moosa, *Extremist Shi‘ites: the Ghulat Sects*, New York, 1988, pp. 357 sqq.; M. Bar-Asher and A. Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-‘Alawī Religion*, index s.v. *yatīm*, *yatīmiyya*. They go back to the Shi‘i sect of the People of Five (*Mukhammisa*); see L. Massignon, *La*

The last text I will consider here is *a priori* unexpected: the *Gospel of Barnabas*, in its Muslim re-reading. An enigmatic apocryphal text of Spanish origin, written probably by one or many Moriscos (Spanish Muslims forced to convert to Christianity during the 15th and 16th centuries, hence after the Reconquista) or perhaps, on the contrary, by a Christian monk converted to Islam; the *Gospel of Barnabas* is a “Life of Jesus” compatible with the idea that a certain Islam has of the New Testament and of the figure of Christ. The oldest reference to it is from the 17th century, but the only manuscript that has come down to us, in Italian and preserved in Vienna, is of the 16th century.<sup>45</sup> What is remarkable, in view of the matter under discussion, is that the text has been thought by some scholars, for example Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, Luigi Cirillo and Jan Joosten, to be part of the Gnostic Diatessaric currents.<sup>46</sup> We now know, thanks to the recent works of Michael Ebstein and Ehud Krinis who have very usefully complemented Shlomo Pines’ classic study, that Spanish Muslim communities with gnostic and mystical leanings were profoundly influenced by Shi’i, notably Ismaili, thought.<sup>47</sup> It is therefore very plausible

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*passion de Hallāj, martyr mystique de l’Islam*, Paris, re-ed. 1975, index s.v. Mukhammisa and Mukhammiṣī, vol. 4, p. 271.

- 45 See for example. J. Jomier, “L’Évangile selon Barnabé”, *Mélanges de l’Institut Dominicain d’Études Orientales* 6 (1959-1961), pp. 137-226; M. De Epalza, “Sobre un posible Autor Español des Evangelio de Barnabé”, *Andalus* 28 (1963), pp. 479-491; P.S. van Koningsveld, “The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabas”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996), pp. 200-228; L.F. Bernabe Pons, *El texto morisco del Evangelio de San Barnabé*, Granada, Universidad de Granada, 1998, introduction. See also Sh. Pines, *The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source*, Jerusalem (The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities Proceedings 11, 13), 1966 (according to Pines a *Gospel of Barnabas* was known of Muslim authors of the 10th century; but are we dealing with the same text?).
- 46 L. & L. Ragg, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, Oxford, 1907, introduction, pp. 4-11; L. Cirillo and M. Frémaux, *Évangile de Barnabé*, with a foreword by Henry Corbin (researches on the composition and origin of the text, Italian text and French translation with notes and index), Paris, 1977, introduction; J. Joosten, “The Gospel of Barnabas and the Diatessaron”, *Harvard Theological Review*, 95/1, January 2002, pp. 73-96. See also Sh. Pines, *The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source*, pp. 13 sqq.; H. Corbin, “L’Évangile de Barnabé et la prophétologie islamique”, *Cahiers de l’Université Saint-Jean de Jérusalem*, Cahier n° 3, Paris, 1977, pp. 169-212.
- 47 Pines, “Shi’ite Terms and Conception in Judah Halevi’s Kuzari”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), pp. 165-251; M. Ebstein, “Secrecy in Ismā’īlī Tradition and the Mystical Thought of Ibn al-‘Arabī”, *Journal Asiatique* 298.2 (2010), pp. 303-343; Id. and S. Sviri, “The So-Called *Risālat al-Ḥurūf* (Epistle on Letters) Ascribed to Sahl al-Tustarī and Letter Mysticism in al-Andalus”, *Journal Asiatique* 299/1 (2011), pp. 213-217; Id., “Absent yet All Times Present: Further Thoughts on Secrecy in the Shi’ī Tradition and in Sunnī Mysticism”, *Al-Qanṭara* 34/2 (2013), pp. 387-413; and now *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus. Ibn Masarra, Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Ismā’īlī Tradition*, Leiden, 2014; E. Krinis, “The Arabic Background of the Kuzari”, *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 21/1

that the sources of this text could be Gnostic Christian and Shi'i, most probably Ismaili. Chapter XLIV of the *Gospel of Barnabas* has: "The messenger of God ... is adorned with the spirit, with intelligence and with (good) counsel, with the spirit of wisdom and of strength, the spirit of fear and of love ..."48 In this list of spirits are some spirits from Isaiah 11, 2-3 and from the Shi'i texts discussed above. Then in chapter CX, the following words are put into the mouth of Jesus: "... Have the desire to be saints ... You shall not receive what you do not wish to desire. If you desire sainthood, God is mighty enough to make you saints in less than the blink of an eye."49

Lonsdale and Laura Ragg translate: "*If you really wish the sanctity by your spiritual desire.*"50 It seems to me that we are not very far from the enigmatic "spirit of desire" (*rūḥ al-shahwa*) of the first hadith of the "Book of the Proof" from the *Kāfi* of al-Kulaynī, introduced at the beginning of the present study.

What do we learn from the texts (and their list is not exhaustive51) we have examined? First, they all their originated in, or were derived from Shi'i doctrines. Then, the ultimate objective of their authors is to prove and to explain, by closely entwined theological, anthropological and noetic arguments, that the divine man is he who is in a direct relationship with God. To receive divine inspiration or revelation is the ultimate purpose and the function of holy intelligence (*'aql*), the reflection in humanity of cosmic Hiero-intelligence, equivalent to the Holy Spirit or the spirit of sanctity (*rūḥ al-quds*), a Quranic expression always associated with Jesus Christ in the Quran, identified by some Sunni theologians with the angel Gabriel and/or to the Quranic "loyal spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*), and by philosophers with the active intellect (*al-'aql al-fā'āl*).52 Most probably inherited from Shi'ism, in a process in which al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, one the oldest and most significant theologians of Muslim hagiology, seems to have played a capital role, the capacity to receive divine inspiration becomes one of the characteristics of the saint in Sunni mysticism. However, the Shi'i doctrine implied by those traditions about the interior qualities of the divine man, whose perfect manifestation is the imam, goes much further, since its consequence is the persistence, the continuity, of prophecy. Here again, we

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(2013), pp. 1-56; Id., *God's Chosen People: Judah Halevi's Kuzari and the Shī'ī Imām Doctrine*, Turnhout, 2014.

48 *Évangile de Barnabé*, translated by Cirillo and Frémaux, 317, pp. 130-131 of manuscript.

49 *Ibid.*, pp. 407-409, 270-272 of manuscript.

50 L. & L. Ragg, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, p. 313.

51 For example, on the different "spirits" in the esoteric Shi'i work *Kitāb al-Haft*, see M. Asatryan, *Controversies in Formative Shi'i Islam*, pp. 154-155.

52 To my knowledge in Shi'ism the Holy Spirit has not been identified with the angel Gabriel. On this subject in general, see S. Griffith, "Holy Spirit", *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 2, pp. 442-444.

are in the prolongation of the Gnostic traditions of Late Antiquity with, in the background, the theory of the direct communication with God, so emphasised in the *Enneads* of Plotinus in particular and in Neo-Platonic writings in general. The ancient Shi'i corpus of the Hadith is totally explicit in this respect. But Shi'ism thus finds itself in contradiction with the "orthodox" dogma according to which Muḥammad is "the seal of prophecy" (understood as meaning the last of the prophets), and Islam is the last religion before the end of the world. I shall return to this.

In al-Kulaynī's "Book of the Proof" the chapter on the "five spirits" of the imam is preceded by that describing the imam as a *muḥaddath* (the being with whom celestial entities, angels included, discourse) and a *mufahham* (the one to whom is given Understanding from Above).<sup>53</sup> It is then followed by a chapter on the imam's investiture by the celestial entity called the Spirit (*al-rūḥ*) of which the Quran speaks (e.g. Q. 16:2, 17:85 or 42:52): "the Spirit proceeding from the Order of the Lord", by means of which the imam is able to directly receive divine revelations.<sup>54</sup> Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902-903), writing most probably a few years before al-Kulaynī, is even more audacious in his *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*.<sup>55</sup> For example, the chapter on the five spirits of the imams records more than twice as many traditions as al-Kulaynī.<sup>56</sup> It is immediately followed by five chapters which lay heavy emphasis upon the abilities of the imams to receive revelations via dozens of traditions: "chapter on the fact that the holy spirit rejoins the imams when these need it";<sup>57</sup> "chapter on the Spirit

53 Al-Kulaynī, *op.cit.*, "Kitāb al-ḥujja", bāb anna al-a'imma muḥaddathūn mufahhamūn, vol. 2, pp. 13-15; on these highly technical terms of Shi'i imamology see E. Kohlberg, "The Term 'Muḥaddath' in Twelver Shi'ism", in *Studia Orientalia memoriae D.H. Baneth dedicata*, Jerusalem, 1979, pp. 39-47 (included in Id., *Belief and Law in Imāmi Shi'ism*, Aldershot, 1991, article n. v); M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index s.v. and in particular pp. 176 sqq.

54 Al-Kulaynī, *ibid.*, bāb al-rūḥ allatī yusaddid Allāh bihā al-a'imma, vol. 2, pp. 17-20.

55 On this major compiler of hadith and his work see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (m. 290/902-3) et son Kitāb baṣā'ir al-darajāt", *Journal Asiatique* 280/3-4 (1992), pp. 221-250; expanded version of this article in Id., *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 4 ("Avènement de la gnose. Une monographie sur la connaissance compilée par al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī"); A.J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi'ism: Hadith as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad*, chapters 5 and 7.

56 Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 9, bāb mā ja'ala Allāh fi l-anbiyā' wa l-awṣiyā' wa l-mu'minīn wa sār al-nās min al-arwāḥ wa annahū faḍl al-anbiyā' wa l-a'imma min āl Muḥammad bi-rūḥ al-quds wa dhikr al-arwāḥ al-khams/khamsa (chapter on the spirits God has placed in the prophets, the legatees [i.e. the imams], the believers [i.e. the initiated faithful] and the others and on the fact that the superiority of the prophets and imams descended from Muḥammad is due to [the presence in them] of the holy spirit, with the mention of the five spirits) (I give the chapter titles first in the version of the K edition, then in that of the Z edition).

57 *Bāb fi l-a'imma anna al-rūḥ al-quds tatalaqqāhum idhā ihtājū ilayh.*

about which God has proclaimed in His Book: ‘Thus we have revealed to you a Spirit proceeding from our Order’, [Q. 42:52] which is present in the Messenger of God (i.e. Muḥammad) and in the imams, and who informs, guides and supports them”,<sup>58</sup> “chapter on the questions asked to the initiating sage (i.e. the imam) regarding the initiatory knowledge to which he has access thanks to the Spirits he possesses, the knowledge he increases or of which he reveals the secret /that he interprets, and all this [through the intermediary] of the Spirit”,<sup>59</sup> “chapter on the Spirit about which God said: ‘They will question thee concerning the Spirit. Say: The Spirit is of the bidding of my Lord. [Q. 17: 85], that it is found in the Messenger of God and in the People of his Family, that it guides, supports and teaches them””,<sup>60</sup> “chapter on the Spirit about which God said: ‘He sends down the angels with the Spirit of His command’ [Q. 16: 2], that his Spirit is found with the prophets and legatees and on the difference between the Spirit and the angels.”<sup>61</sup>

I would like to end this discussion with some particularly significant traditions taken from those chapters:

1. “Someone asked imam Ja’far al-Šādiq: ‘May I be your ransom! Is it possible that one asks you [the imams] a question and that you do not know the answer?’ – ‘Yes, it may occur’. – ‘In that case what do you do?’ – ‘The holy spirit teaches it to us (*tatalaqqānā bihi rūḥ al-quds*)”.<sup>62</sup>
2. “Someone asked imam Ja’far: ‘How do you [the imams] judge the affairs [of the faithful]?’ – ‘Thanks to the precepts of God, those of David and Muḥammad. And if a case occurs that is not found in the Book of ‘Alī, it is then that the holy spirit teaches it to us and God favours us through inspiration (*talaqqanā bihi rūḥ al-quds wa alhamanā Allāh ilhāman*)”.<sup>63</sup>

58 *Bāb al-rūḥ allatī qāla Allāh fī kitābihī: “wa kadhālika awḥaynā ilayka rūḥan min amrinā” annahā fī rasūli llāhi wa fī l-a’immatī yukhbiruhum wa yusaddiduhum wa yuwaffiquhum.*

59 *Bāb mā yus’alu al-‘ālim ‘an al-‘Ilm alladhī yuhaddathu bihi min ṣuḥuf ‘indahum azdādahu aw rōwāya fa-akhbar bi-sirr/sharḥihi wa anna dhālika min al-rūḥ.*

60 *Bāb al-rūḥ allatī qāla Allāh: “yas’alūnaka ‘an al-rūḥ qul al-rūḥ min amr rabbi” annahā fī rasūl Allāh wa ahl baytihi yusaddiduhum wa yuwaffiquhum wa yufaqqihuhum.*

61 *Bāb fī l-rūḥ allatī qāla Allāh: “yunazzilu l-malā’ika bil-rūḥ min amrihi” wa hiya takūna ma’ al-anbiyā’ wa l-awṣiyā’ wa l-farq bayna al-rūḥ wa l-malā’ika.*

62 Al-Šaffār, *Bašā’ir*, section 9, chap. 15 (ed. K = ch. 16, ed. Z), n. 1.

63 *Ibid.*, n° 6; also al-Ḥilli, *Mukhtaṣar Bašā’ir al-darajāt*, p. 1; al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 25, p. 56, n. 21. David, an important biblical figure of the Quran, is the symbol of the just and wise judge as he is inspired by God, like Solomon. The Book of ‘Alī (*Kitāb ‘Alī*) refers, in the Shi’i hadith corpus, either to the Quranic recension of ‘Alī, either said to be the only complete one among all the recensions, or to one of the secret books of the imams; see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 185-189 (in particular p. 187); E. Kohlberg, “Authoritative Scriptures in Early Imāmi Shi’ism”, in E. Patlagean and A. Le Boulluec (eds.), *Les retours aux Écritures: fondamentalismes présents et passés*, Louvain, pp. 295-312 (in particular pp. 300-302); H. Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, pp. 4-12. This type of

3. “Someone asked imam Ja‘far regarding the Quranic verse: ‘Thus we have revealed to you a Spirit proceeding from our Order’. He replied: ‘Since God has made this Spirit descend on Muḥammad, it has not gone back up to heaven because it has remained among us [the imams].’”<sup>64</sup>
4. “A disciple asked imam Ja‘far: ‘The science which you [the imams] teach, have you learnt it from other men or do you have at your disposal a writing from the Messenger of God?’ [implied meaning: what you are teaching is not found in the Quran; it stems from another source] Ja‘far: This affair is greater than all that (*al-amr a‘ẓam min dhālika*). Have you not heard what God proclaims in His Books: ‘Thus we have revealed to you a Spirit proceeding from our Order when you did know not what the Book and faith were?’ – Indeed [I know this verse]. – It is by the divine gift of the Spirit that [Muḥammad] received knowledge and it is thus that a servant of God [i.e. Ja‘far himself and by extension all the imams] is initiated into knowledge and understanding (*wa kadhālika hiya ntahat ilā ‘abdin ‘āliman bihā l-‘ilm wa l-fahm*).”<sup>65</sup>
5. “Imam Ja‘far was asked about the Quranic verse: ‘They will question thee concerning the Spirit.’ Say: ‘The Spirit is of the bidding of my Lord’. The imam replied: ‘It is a creature more magnificent than [the archangels] Gabriel and Michael. It was with the Messenger of God and it is with the imams. It comes from the kingdom of God (*kāna ma‘a rasūli llāhi wa huwa ma‘a l-a‘immati wa huwa mina l-malakūti*).’”<sup>66</sup>
6. We end the examples with a particularly significant hadith about ‘Alī: “Imam Ja‘far was asked about the first imam, ‘Alī: ‘... Some claim that when the Messenger of God sent ‘Alī to Yemen in order for him to judge the affairs of the people, he declared: “There is not a case I do not resolve in obedience to the precepts of God and His Messenger” ... Now, how was that even possible when the totality of the Quran had not yet been revealed and the Messenger of God was absent?’ Ja‘far replied: ‘It was the holy spirit that taught him’ (*tatalaqqāhu bihi rūhu l-quḍsi*).”<sup>67</sup>

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rather frequent tradition seems clearly show that for cases that are not foreseen in the Quran and the Tradition, the inspired sage, and only he, has the power to establish *ad hoc* prescriptions, original rulings or new doctrines.

- 64 *Baṣā‘ir*, section 9, chap. 16 (ed. K = ch. 17, ed. Z), n. 11 (the next three hadiths have practically the same content); al-Majlisī, *op.cit.*, vol. 25, 61, n. 36.
- 65 *Baṣā‘ir*, section 9, chap. 17 (ed. K = chap. 18, ed. Z), n. 3; al-Majlisī, *op.cit.*, vol. 25, 62, n. 40.
- 66 *Baṣā‘ir*, *ibid.*, chap. 18 (ed. K = chap. 19, ed. Z), n. 9 (in this chapter numerous hadiths have more or less the same content); also al-Kulaynī, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, 273; al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, ed. H. Rasūli Maḥallātī, Qumm 1380/1960, vol. 2, p. 317, n. 165; al-Majlisī, *op.cit.*, vol. 58, p. 42, n. 15.
- 67 *Baṣā‘ir*, *ibid.*, chap. 15 (ed. K = chap. 16, ed. Z), n. 8; also al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtaṣar*, p. 2; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 25, p. 57, n. 23 and vol. 39, p. 151, n. 2.

This last tradition declares in the most explicit way, as if there was any more need for it, that the imam is capable, thanks to the holy spirit, a celestial entity but also a component of celestial origin of his own soul, of entering directly into communion with the source of all revelations. If the case arises, he needs neither the Prophet nor the Quran. This point is, it seems to me, the real centre of gravity and at the same time the ultimate consequence of the Shi'i traditions on the internal faculties of the divine man, which are derived from doctrines inherited from numerous religious and philosophical traditions of Late Antiquity, more specifically from Manicheism. It transforms the imam, and even each initiate, into a prophet in the fullest sense of the term. Now, the Imamis do not declare this explicitly, contrary to the different branches of Ismailism which profess more or less openly the existence of a prophet and of a religion belonging to the seventh and last cycle of humanity, thus after the cycle of Muḥammad and of Islam, which are of the sixth. It is because such a doctrine runs contrary to the dogma of the sealing of prophecy by Muḥammad, the "seal of prophets" (*khātim/khātām al-nabīyyīn*) of verse 33: 40, itself another borrowing from Manicheism. This discretion seems directly linked to the semantic evolution of that expression, which, in the first two or three centuries of Islam, did not have yet have for all Muslims the meaning it would later exclusively assume, namely "the last of the prophets". Before this meaning became fixed in dogma, in many circles, and more particularly in esoteric Shi'i ones, the perpetual continuity of prophecy transmitted, firstly, evidently, through the imams, but then also through their initiated faithful,<sup>68</sup> was widely believed in. This is what we shall examine in detail in the next two chapters.

68 However, certain (marginal?) currents seem to have denied the possibility of the continuity of prophecy through the imams; for example the circle of Hishām b. al-Ḥakam and his disciple al-Faḍl b. Shādhān (see T. Bayhom-Daou, "Hishām b. al-Ḥakam"; ead., "The Imam's Knowledge and the Quran").

## “The Night of Qadr” (Quran, Surah 97) in Early Shi‘ism

### 1 An Enigmatic Text

The prophetic powers of ‘Alī and of the imams descended from him are also illustrated in the traditions concerning the Night of Qadr (Destiny, Decree, Power) which the Quran speaks about:

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

1. Indeed, We sent it down on the Night of Qadr
  - And what shall teach thee what is the Night of Qadr?
  - The Night of Qadr is better than a thousand months,
  - In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, upon every Order
  - Peace it is, until the rising of dawn.<sup>1</sup>

Here is an “attempt at translation”, to use Jacques Berque’s expression, of the enigmatic surah 97, called “al-Qadr” (or “Innā anzalnāh”, the first words of the text after the *basmala*) and one of the shortest in the Quran.<sup>2</sup> The word *qadr* has many different meanings. This is why I have preferred to stick to the original Arabic, just as Kasimirski does in his translation of the Quran.<sup>3</sup> The

1 *Bi-sm‘ llāh‘ r-raḥmān‘ r-raḥīm/ innā anzalnāh‘ fī laylat‘ l-qadr/wa mā adrāk‘ mā laylat‘ l-qadr/ laylat‘ l-qadr‘ khayr‘ min alf‘ shahr/tanazzal‘ (?)l-malā‘ikat‘ wa r-rūḥ‘ fihā bi-‘idhni‘ rabbihim min kull‘ amr/salām‘ hiya ḥattā maṭla‘ l-fajr.*

2 J. Berque, *Le Coran. Essai de traduction*, Paris, 1995<sup>2</sup>. The understanding and translation of this surah raise countless problems in almost each line. That is also true of the word *al-qadr* itself, which has sometimes been read as *al-qadar*. The first reading seems preferable as it corresponds to the rhyme of the surah, which is based on the schema consonant/vowel ‘a’/non vocalized consonant/letter ‘r’ (*qadr, shahr, ‘amr, fajr*). According to some medieval Muslim scholars, verse 4 should be split into two, resulting in a total of six rather than five verses.; see R.D. Marcotte, “Night of Power”, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, vol. 3, pp. 537-539.

3 Counting only French translations of the Quran we have a large variety of terms for this mysterious holy night: ‘la nuit de la destinée’ (Blachère, Hamidullah), ‘la nuit du décret’ (Masson, Grosjean), ‘la nuit du destin’ (Khawam), ‘la nuit grandiose’ (Berque), ‘la nuit de la prédétermination’ (Abu-Sahlieh), ‘la nuit sublime’ (Ould Bah). The root of the word means ‘power’, ‘might’ (hence the title of the article of Marcotte mentioned at footnote 2) or also ‘value’, ‘price’, ‘measurement’. See Kh. Azmoudeh, ‘Nuit du Destin’, in M.A. Amir-Moezzi (dir.), *Dictionnaire du Coran*, pp. 608-609.

surah, in whole or in part, has been the subject of a number of monographs.<sup>4</sup> From some studies, as the latest one well documented by Guillaume Dye, it appears more and more likely that it may derive from one or several Christian texts about the Night of the Nativity of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> My purpose here is not to examine the surah al-Qadr as such, nor even its ‘prehistory’, but rather to look at Shi‘i perceptions of it and the doctrinal uses the Shi‘is make of it; a subject which, as far as I know, has not yet been studied. However, as we shall see, parallels can be drawn between some Shi‘i interpretations and the Christian origins of the Quranic text. Despite the mysterious, lapidary character of the surah, almost all Muslim commentators of the Quran have taken it to be about one of the crucial events of their religion, the revelation of the Holy Book. In doing so, they have drawn parallels between this surah and two other Quranic fragments: the beginning of verse 2:185 (“the month of Ramaḍān in which the Quran was revealed as a guide for all men ...”)<sup>6</sup> and the beginning of 44:3

4 For example A.J. Wensinck, “Arabic New-Year and the Feast of Tabernacles”, *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam. Nieuwe reeks. Deel 25/2*, Amsterdam, 1925, pp. 1-17; S.D. Goitein, “Zur Entstehung des Ramaḍān”, *Der Islam* 18 (1929), pp. 189-195 (article included and developed in “Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting”, Id., *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, Leiden, 1966, pp. 90-110); K. Wagtendonk, *Fasting in the Koran*, Leiden, 1968, pp. 82 sqq., 92 sqq., 112 sqq.; T. Lohmann, “Die Nacht al-Qadr. Übersetzung und Erklärung von Sure 97”, *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* 15 (1969), pp. 275-285; S.P. Manzoor, “From the Night of Power to the Dawn of Peace”, *Afkar Inquiry* 3 (1986), pp. 28-33; I.A. Ahmad, “The Dawn Sky on *lailat ul-qadr*”, *Archaeoastronomy* 11 (1989-93), pp. 97-100; M. Sells, “Sound, Spirit and Gender in *Sūrat al-Qadr*”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111/ 2 (1991), pp. 239-259; A. Alves, *A Noite do destino. Laylat al-qadr*, Lisbon, 1993; M. Cuypers, “Structures rhétoriques des sourates 92 à 98”, *Annales Islamologiques* 34 (2000), pp. 95-138; Id., *Une apocalypse coranique. Une lecture des trente-trois dernières sourates du Coran*, Pendé (France), 2014, pp. 213-217; N. Sinai, ‘Weihnachten im Koran’ oder “‘Nacht der Bestimmung’? Eine Interpretation von Sure 97”, *Der Islam* 88 (2012), pp. 11-32.

5 G. Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation. The Rediscovery of a reliable Reconstruction of a comprehensive pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal hidden in the Koran under the earliest Islamic reinterpretation*, Delhi, 2002, pp. 147 sqq. (revised translation of: Id., *Über den Ur-Qur‘ān. Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Stropheneder im Qur‘ān*, Erlangen, 1974); G. Bassetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ*, Chicago, 1977, pp. 153 sqq.; C. Luxenberg, “Noël dans le Coran”, in A.M. Delcambre and J. Bosshard (eds.), *Enquêtes sur l’Islam. En hommage à Antoine Moussali*, Paris, 2004, pp. 117-138; G. Dye, ‘La nuit du Destin et la nuit de la Nativité’, in Id. and F. Nobilio (eds.), *Figures bibliques en islam*, Brussels-Fernelmont, 2011, pp. 107-169 (where in footnotes 3 and 4 other studies on the subject are listed). This thesis was already that of the Ethiopian Christian monk Enbāqom in the 16th century in his *Anqaša amīn (La porte de la foi). Apologie éthiopienne du christianisme contre l’Islam à partir du Coran*, translated by E.J. van Donzel, Leiden, 1969, p. 73 (quoted by M. Cuypers, *Une apocalypse coranique*, pp. 213-214).

6 *Shahr<sup>u</sup> ramaḍān<sup>a</sup> l-ladhī unzil<sup>a</sup> fīhi l-qur‘ān<sup>u</sup> hud<sup>an</sup> li-l-nās ...*

(“Indeed, We have revealed it [the illuminating Scripture of the previous verse] in a blessed night ...”).<sup>7</sup> The study of these Quranic readings, along with that of some hadiths, has led, after some trial and error, to the traditional conclusion that surah 97 alludes to Muhammad’s reception of the Divine Word through the intermediary of the Holy Spirit, identified with the angel Gabriel, during a night (generally an odd-numbered one) within the last ten days of the month of Ramaḍān. There is disagreement on the precise manner of delivery and content of this first revelation, just as on the exact date of the night. The fact remains that Muslims are called upon to make nocturnal vigils in the last ten days of the month of fasting so as not to ‘miss’ that ‘blessed night’ during which the gates of heaven seem open, communication with God easier, the answering of prayers more likely and the forgiveness of sins more certain. For mystics, the Night of Qadr has gradually become a “cypher” symbolizing the spiritual experience of transcendence, at whatever time of year it may occur.

## 2 Shi’i Perceptions

Nevertheless, it seems that, to the ‘Alids, later to be called Shi’is, the importance of the surah was different. Apparently from quite early, there appeared in Shi’i communities a literary genre in which monographical collections of hadiths described the benefits to be derived from this chapter of the Quran. In an article on the subject, Hassan Ansari mentions three early examples: the *Faḍl sūrat innā anzalnāh* or *Thawāb innā anzalnāh* of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Kathīr al-Hāshimī, a disciple of imam Ja’far al-Ṣādiq (first half of the 2nd/8th century); the *Faḍl innā anzalnāh* of Abū Yaḥyā ‘Umar b. Tawba al-Ṣan’ānī (beginning 3rd/9th century); and the *Kitāb thawāb innā anzalnāh* of Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Ḥassān al-Rāzī al-Zaynabī (second half of the 3rd/9th century).<sup>8</sup> But these works, apparently all lost, did not, we can deduce, discuss the content of the surah, but simply the virtues of reciting it, as is also the case for a group of hadith which extoll ‘the virtues and rewards of [reciting] the Quran (*faḍā’il / thawāb al-Qur’ān*) in general.’ On the other hand, the work which is the main subject of Ansari’s article (in which however, Ansari says little about its actual content), is

7 *Innā anzalnāh*<sup>u</sup> [i.e. *al-kitāb al-mubīn*] *fī laylat<sup>in</sup> mubārakat<sup>in</sup> ...*

8 H. Ansari, “L’héritage ésotérique du chiisme: un livre sur l’exégèse de la sourate 97”, *Arabica* 58 (2011), pp. 10-12 (the entire article, pp. 7-18). On the book of Ibn Kathīr al-Hāshimī see also H. Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival. A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shi’ite Literature*, vol. 1, Oxford, 2003, p. 172. For other information on the Night of Qadr in Shi’i works, see E. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work. Ibn Ṭāwūs and his Library*, Leiden, 1992, index. s.v. *laylat al-qadr*.

by a certain Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥasan b. al-‘Abbās also known as Ibn al-Ḥarīsh al-Rāzī (probably beginning 3rd/9th century) and it would seem that this did discuss the content of the surah and its theological and imamological implications. It had, according to Shi‘i bibliographical and prosopographical works, a title which was more or less similar to those mentioned above. This work is lost too, but much of its contents have been recorded in later hadith compilations, amongst others by al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī in his *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt* and Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī in the “Kitāb al-Ḥujja” of his monumental *Kitāb al-Kāfi*.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the center of gravity of the Shi‘i doctrine of the Night of Qadr resides in imamology. This Quranic chapter may even be said to provide one of the most solid proofs of the Shi‘i theory of the imamate.

A disciple asks imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) about the Night of Qadr during which the angels and the Spirit descend. The imam replies with another question: “On whose behalf do these beings come, what do they bring and to whom?” (*mimman wa ilā man wa mā yanzilu?*)<sup>10</sup> The answer is provided by a great number of traditions. According to one of them, Ibn al-Ḥarīsh (whom we have already met) records the following teaching of his master, the ninth imam Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Jawād (d. 220/835): “God created the Night of Qadr at the origin of the creation of the world; and during that night He created the first prophet (*nabī*) as well as the first legatee [*waṣī*, i.e. imam]; and He decreed that during that night knowledge of the events of the coming year would descend from heaven. He who denies this night, denies the Knowledge of God, for the proof of the truthfulness of the prophets, of the messengers and of the inspired men (*muḥaddathūn*), is indeed what the angel Gabriel brings to them during that night ... And this since the very first day of the creation of the earth until the disappearance of the world ... Thus it was during this night

9 Ansari, *ibid.*, pp. 13-18 (on other early sources referred to by Ibn al-Ḥarīsh, see p. 17, footnote 41); see also id., *L’imamat et l’occultation selon l’imamisme*, pp. 156-165 and 49-61 of Arabic texte. On al-Ṣaffār, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (m. 290/902-3) et son *Kitāb Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*”, *Journal Asiatique* 280/3-4 (1992), pp. 221-250; a more developed version is in Id., *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 4; A.J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī‘ism. Hadīth as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad*, Richmond, 2000, chapters 5 and 7. On al-Kulaynī, see Id., *op.cit.*, chapters 4 and 7 and especially M.A. Amir-Moezzi & H. Ansari, “Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī (m. 328 ou 329/939-40 ou 940-41) et son *Kitāb al-Kāfi*. Une introduction”, *Studia Iranica* 38-2 (2009), pp. 191-247; a fuller version is in M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 5; and Id., *La Preuve de Dieu*, *passim*.

10 Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt fī ‘ulūm āl Muḥammad*, ed. ‘A. Zakīzādeh Ranānī, Qumm, 2 vols., 1391 solar/2012, section 5, chap. 3 (“bāb mā yulqī ilā l-a‘imma fī laylat al-qadr”), vol. 1, p. 783, tradition no. 6; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, Tehran-Qumm, 110 tomes in 90 vols., 1376-1392/1956-1972, vol. 94, p. 23, tradition no. 53.

that the Spirit and the angels brought the Order to Adam; and then after his death it was passed on to his legatee imam [i.e. Seth/Shīth] and from the time of Adam the Order was passed down to Muḥammad, who passed it on to his own legatee [i.e. ‘Alī] ...”<sup>11</sup>

According to another tradition, the same Ibn al-Ḥarīsh showed his collection of hadiths to the same ninth imam, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Jawād, who accepted the authenticity of the work and told al-Ḥarīsh a saying of the sixth imam, Ja‘far, which quoted in turn the first imam ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661): “In the morning of the first Night of Qadr following the death of the Messenger of God [Muḥammad], ‘Alī declared [to his followers]: ‘Ask me and I shall inform you of what will happen during three hundred and sixty days [i.e. the events of the year to come], from the [spiritual] World of Particles (*al-dharr*) to what is found above it and beneath it [i.e. the entire universe]. And this without any difficulty, personal opinion or pretention; and all this has been taught to me by God ...”<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, in a hadith of Ja‘far al-Šādiq, the same ‘Alī is said to have often declared: “Once the man from the al-Taym tribe and his companion [i.e. Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, the two future first caliphs]<sup>13</sup> were with the Messenger of God; the latter recited Surah al-Qadr in a state of extreme humility and sadness. They asked him the reason for this: ‘Why does this surah move you so

11 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī, 4 vol., Tehran, s.d. (vol. 4 dates from 1386/1966), “Kitāb al-ḥujja”, bāb fi sha’n innā anzalnāh fi laylat al-qadr wa tafsīrihā, vol. 1, pp. 366-368, no. 7. On the succession of the prophets and the legatee imams and the central notion of “Legacy” (*al-waṣfiyya*), see U. Rubin, “Pre-existence and light. Aspects of the concept of Nūr Muḥammad”, *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975), pp. 62-119; Id., “Prophets and Progenitors in Early Shī‘a Tradition”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979), pp. 41-65; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, part II-2 (“L’humanité adamique. Le ‘voyage’ de la lumière”), pp. 96 sqq. and index s.v. On the *muḥaddath*, see E. Kohlberg, “The Term ‘Muḥaddath’ in Twelver Shī‘ism”, in *Studia Orientalia memoriae D.H. Baneth dedicata*, Jerusalem, 1979, pp. 39-47, (included in Id., *Belief and Law in Imāmī-Shī‘ism*, Variorum, Aldershot, 1991, article 5 and now id., *In Praise of the Few*, Leiden-Boston, 2020, chapter 13); M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index s.v.

12 Al-Saffār, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 786-787, no. 12; al-Majlisī, *op.cit.*, vol. 94, p. 20, no. 44. On the World of Particles (*‘ālam al-dharr*), also known as the World of Shadows (*‘ālam al-aẓilla*) or also the World of the Pact (*‘ālam al-mūthāq*), see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, part II-1 (“Les mondes d’avant le monde. Le Guide-Lumière”), pp. 75 sqq. in particular pp. 80 sqq.; Id., “Worlds and Their Inhabitants. Some Notes on Imāmī-Shī‘i Cosmo-Anthropogony”, in E. Coda and C. Martini Bonadeo (eds.), *De l’Antiquité tardive au Moyen Age*, pp. 519-529.

13 Variant: the man of al-Taym and the man of al-‘Adī, respectively the names of two clans of the tribe of Quraysh from which Abū Bakr and ‘Umar come. The label is intended to be contemptuous. On the pejorative labels used by the adversaries of ‘Alī in Shī‘i literature see E. Kohlberg, “Some Imāmī Shī‘i Views on the ṣaḥāba”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984), pp. 143-175 (= *Belief and Law*, article 9 and now id., *In Praise of the Few*, chapter 3).

much?’ The Prophet replied: ‘Because of what my eyes beheld [on the Night of Qadr] and what my heart has understood and also because of what his – that is ‘Alī’s – heart will see [in that night]’. They asked him: ‘What did you see and what shall he see?’ The Prophet replied: ‘Has not God declared [in this surah] that in this Night, the angels and the Spirit descend with the permission of their Lord for all order? ... Towards whom do they descend to convey him the Order (*al-amr*) of all things?’ – Towards you, oh Messenger of God.’ – But after my death, there will be other Nights of Qadr when the Order will descend to earth, will there not?’ – Indeed ... and on whom will it descend after you?’ The Prophet then put his hand on my head [it is ‘Alī who is speaking] and declared: ‘After me, it will be this man.’<sup>14</sup>

‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Kathīr, again, records a saying of imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (was this tradition part of the collection attributed to the former, mentioned above?): “When the Messenger of God died, the angel Gabriel came down to earth in company of the angels who come down on the Night of Qadr. Then the inner eye of the Commander of the Faithful [i.e. ‘Alī] was opened (*fa-futiḥa li-amīr al-mu‘minīn baṣaruḥu*) and he saw them at the ends of the heavens and of the earth ... And when the Messenger of God was laid in his grave, the [inner] hearing of the Commander of the Faithful was opened (*futiḥa li-amīr al-mu‘minīn sam‘ahu*) and he heard the Messenger recommend him [to the celestial beings] weeping and they replied: ‘Fear not! They [i.e. the adversaries of ‘Alī] will not reach him! After you, he is indeed our companion’. And when ‘Alī left this world, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn were witnesses to the same event in which the Prophet and ‘Alī came to recommend them to the celestial beings [and the hadith repeats the same narrative about the following imams: ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, Muḥammad b.‘Alī to finally arrive at the speaker, Ja‘far b. Muḥammad] ... and Mūsā (my son) [the seventh imam] shall see the same thing at the time of my death and it shall be so until the last one of us (*hākadhā yajrī ilā ākhirinā*).”<sup>15</sup>

14 Al-Ṣaffār, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 792-794, no. 16; slightly different version in al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, “Kitāb al-ḥujja”, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 363-364, no. 5; al-Astarābādī, Sharaf al-Dīn, *Ta’wīl al-āyāt al-zāhira*, Qumm, 1417/1997, p. 792 and 795; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 94, p. 21, no. 47.

15 Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir*, *ibid.*, pp. 794-795, no. 17; see also al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā’ij wa l-jarā’ih*, Qumm, 1409/1988-89, vol. 2, pp. 778-779, no. 102; al-Baḥrānī, Hāshim b. Sulaymān, *Madīnat ma‘ājiz al-a‘imma al-ithnay ‘ashar* (or *Madīnat al-ma‘ājiz*), Qumm, 1413/1992, vol. 3, p. 47, no. 713; Id., *Yanābī‘ al-ma‘ājiz*, Qumm, s.d., p. 158; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 22, p. 513, no. 13 and vol. 27, p. 289, no. 3; al-Ḥuwayzī, *tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn*, Qumm, 1412/1991, vol. 5, p. 64, no. 110. The title of *amīr al-mu‘minīn*, which we have translated as “Commander of the Faithful”, is, in Shi‘ism, exclusively reserved for ‘Alī (even the other imams cannot use it). It can also be translated as “Commander or Head of the Initiates” if one opts for the

To the question of a disciple asking him if the Night of Qadr could exist after Muḥammad, imam Ja'far is said to have replied: "If the Night of Qadr were to be abolished that would mean that the Quran is abolished (*law rufi'at laylat al-qadr lā rufi'a l-Qur'ān*)."<sup>16</sup>

The reasoning behind these traditions is as follows: the Night of Qadr is a cosmic event, decreed by God at the dawn of creation to endure until the end of times. As the Quran says clearly, it is during that single night of the year that God sends to the prophets and after them to their imams, through the intermediary of His celestial messengers, the knowledge of the decrees which will govern the universe during the coming year. This "Order", begun with Adam, continues with Muḥammad and his sole legitimate successors, namely 'Alī and the imams of his descendance.<sup>17</sup> The conclusion is that 'Alī and the imams are the only true successors of Muḥammad in all aspects of his mission, including prophecy, which is the ability to communicate with God through the intermediary of the heavenly beings. I shall return to this.

This reasoning seems irrefutable to the eyes of Shi'is, but also, if one is to believe certain traditions, to other Muslims, if they are impartial, given the manifest superiority in terms of knowledge and moral integrity of 'Alī and his descendants to all other Companions of the Prophet. For example, a long hadith recorded by al-Kulaynī at the head of his chapter on this subject, set in Mecca during the pilgrimage, is a dialogue between the fifth imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 115 or 119/732 or 737) and a mysterious figure who tests his knowledge. When the imam has replied successfully to the many questions, the questioner reveals his identity: he is the prophet Elijah (Ilyās), descended from heaven to assist the imam and his followers in their difficult mission, in an environment dominated by their enemies. In the middle of the narrative, Ilyās asks al-Bāqir if he wishes to learn a decisive and irrefutable argument with which to convince his adversaries. The imam replies to him that he knows this argument, which is none other than the inevitable conclusion to be drawn from surah al-Qadr.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, those who believe that an original complete version of the Holy Book was forged to make what is now the official version

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technical meaning of the word *mu'min* in Shi'ism, that is the faithful initiated into the esoteric teachings of the imams (see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index s.v.).

16 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Furū' min al-Kāfi*, ed. 'A.A. Ghaffārī, Tehran, 1391/1971, "Kitāb al-ṣiyām", bāb fi laylat al-qadr, vol. 4, p. 158, no. 7.

17 The tradition that depicts Abū Bakr and 'Umar, next to the Prophet and 'Alī, is obviously meant to stress the figure of 'Alī as the sole successor to Muḥammad as well as the illegitimacy of the first two. On this subject see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 1.

18 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, "Kitāb al-ḥujja", *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 350-357, no. 1 (tradition reported by Ibn al-Ḥarīsh from imam Muḥammad al-Jawād).

of the Quran, also believe that this original complete version explicitly mentions that fact. Here is this version, deemed to be the real revelation given to Muḥammad, reported by al-Sayyārī (3rd/9th century) in his *Kitāb al-Qirāʾāt* (“Book of the variants of Quranic readings”), also known as *al-Tanzīl wa l-taḥrīf* (“Revelation and Falsification”). The words that do not appear in the canonical version of the Quran are in italics:

1. Indeed We sent it down on the Night of Qadr
2. And what shall teach thee what is the Night of Qadr?
3. The Night of Qadr is better than a thousand months *that do not contain the Night of Qadr (laysa fihā laylat<sup>u</sup> l-qadr)*!<sup>19</sup>
4. In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, *with (bi-kull instead of “for” min kull) every Order for Muḥammad and the progeny of Muḥammad (‘alā Muḥammad<sup>in</sup> wa āl Muḥammad/ variant: for the legates [‘alā l-awṣiyā’])*
5. “Peace it is, until the rising of dawn.”<sup>20</sup>

### 3 The Master of the Order

It seems that for Shi‘is, the Night of Qadr is that of the 21st or 23rd of the month of Ramaḍān. Many traditions are in agreement with this.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, as has been

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- 19 In a certain number of traditions, the “thousand months” are interpreted as being the duration of the reign of the Umayyads; see for example al-Qummī, ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr*, ed. Ṭ. al-Mūsawī al-Jazā‘irī, re-ed. Beirut, 1411/1991, vol. 2, p. 466; Ibn al-Juḥām, *Ta’wīl*, ed. F. Tabrīziyān, Qumm, 1420/1999, p. 463; al-Astarābādī, *Ta’wīl al-āyāt al-ḡāhira*, pp. 790-791; al-Bahrānī, Hāshim b. Sulaymān, *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Teheran, 1374-75/1954-55, vol. 4, p. 487, no. 20; as for Sunni exegeses (recording nevertheless the tradition from the Shi‘i imam al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī): al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*, Cairo, 1388/1968, vol. 30, p. 260; al-Tha‘ālibī, *Jawāhir al-ḥisān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, ed. ‘A.M. Mu‘awwaḍ et al., Beirut, 1418/1997, vol. 10, p. 257; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī l-tafsīr al-ma’thūr*, Beirut, 1411/1990, vol. 6, p. 629.
  - 20 Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirāʾāt*, ed. E. Kohlberg & M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, pp. 186-187 (Arabic text), n°s 674 and 678 and pp. 275 and 276 (English text for the same numbers) for the other sources and discussions of this version of the Quran. See also W. St Clair-Tisdall, “Shī‘ah Additions to the Koran”, *The Moslem World* 3 (1913), p. 240 (all of the article: pp. 227-241); A. Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur’ān*, Leiden, 1937, p. 110. On the question of the falsification of the Quran, see now the introduction by E. Kohlberg-M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, parts 1 to 3; also M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 2. On *min kulli amr/bi-kulli amr* see also G. Dye, “La nuit du Destin et la nuit de la Nativité”, pp. 132 sqq.
  - 21 Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir*, *ibid.*, pp. 780-781, no 3 and pp. 785-786, no 11; al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 368-370, n° 8 (*in fine*); Id., *Furū‘*, *ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 156, n°s 1 and 2 and p. 158, n° 8. Also M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, p. 179, footnote 353. Particular emphasis is laid on the

already stressed, this date is not certain. Ja'far al-Šādiq is quoted as saying: "the 19th night [of Ramaḍān] is that of decision (*taqdīr*); i.e. God's decision concerning the decrees for the coming year (*taqdīr* is from the same root as *qadr*), the 21st night is that of the confirmation (*ibrām*) and the 23rd night is that of the implementation (*imḍā'*)."<sup>22</sup> What is one to understand about the Night of Qadr as such? In reality, this point seems quite secondary compared to the other issues raised by the Night of Qadr. Two other, in principle important, elements are remarkable by their almost total absence, especially in the early Shi'i corpus: first, the fact that the Quran was said to have been revealed that night, second that the dates of the fatal injury and death of 'Alī coincide with the presumed dates of the Night of Qadr.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, two other events give this Night major doctrinal importance. First, it is when God decides the great events of the coming year, decrees them and sends them down in His Order (*al-amr*). Then, the Order is received on earth by a Divine Man called the Master of the Order (*ṣāhib al-amr*) whose presence in the world is a cosmic spiritual necessity.

"It is during the Night of Qadr", imam Ja'far reportedly said, "that the good and the evil of the entire year is written down (*yuktab*), death or life, rain or even the caravans of pilgrims to Mecca; and then it comes down to earth". The disciple: "To who on earth?" The imam: "To he who stands before you [i.e. myself, the present imam]."<sup>24</sup>

A disciple asks the same imam to explain the surah of Qadr. "In that night, Ja'far replies, while people perform canonical prayers [*ṣalāt*], invocations [*du'ā'*] and supplications [*mas'ala*], the Master of the Order [*ṣāhib hādha l-amr*; i.e. the Order that has come down during the unfolding night] is absorbed in his own occupations [*fī shughlin*]; [the imam deliberately reveals nothing about the nature of those occupations] and then the angels descend upon him

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refutation of the date of the 15th of the month of Sha'bān as being that of the Night of Qadr, as some thought; the latter date corresponds traditionally to another famous Night, the *laylat al-barā'a*; for discussions of this see S. Goitein, "Zur Entstehung des Ramaḍān", pp. 192 sq.; G.E. von Grunebaum, *Muḥammadan Festivals*, London-Ottawa, 1976, pp. 53 sq.

22 Al-Kulaynī, *Furū'*, *ibid.*, p. 159, n° 9.

23 Al-Kulaynī records only a single tradition about the revelation of the Quran in his *Uṣūl* (*ibid.*, n° 4) and his *Furū'* (*ibid.*, n° 5). The event does not seem to have any particular importance for al-Šaffār, given that not a single one of the 17 traditions from the chapter devoted to the Night of Qadr in his *Basā'ir* deigns to mention it. Things will eventually change in later works. And the link between the Night of Qadr and the assassination and death of 'Alī seems to be a recent phenomenon (see R.D. Marcotte, "Night of Power" see above footnote 2, p. 538 b).

24 Al-Šaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir*, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 778-779, n° 1; al-Baḥrānī, *Yanābī' al-ma'ā'ijiz*, p. 152; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 94, p. 22, n° 48.

from sunset until the break of day, entrusting to him everything that concerns the [coming] year. That Night is Peace for him.”<sup>25</sup>

A follower asks the same Ja‘far the explanation of Quranic verse 44:4 (which that classic commentary links to surah al-Qadr, as we have seen): “In this night all wise order is distinguished” [*fiḥā yufraq<sup>u</sup> kull<sup>u</sup> amr<sup>in</sup> ḥakīm*]. Ja‘far is said to have replied: “It is in the Night of Qadr during which successes and failures, the piety or the faults, death or life are written down and everything God decides to accomplish during night and day and then He makes it all known to the Master of the Earth [*ṣāḥib al-arḍ*]. The disciple: “And who is that?” The imam: “Your master [i.e. myself].”<sup>26</sup>

Imam Muḥammad al-Jawād reportedly said: “God said regarding the Night of Qadr: ‘In this night all wise order is distinguished’ [Quran 44:4] ... Indeed, in the Night of Qadr the detailed explanation [*tafsīr*] of events which will occur during the year as well as the Order which he must execute out concerning himself and others in such and such case, descends to the Holder of the Order [*walī al-amr*] ...”<sup>27</sup>

Imam Ja‘far is said to have passed down the following hadith from his father Muḥammad al-Bāqir: “Alī b. Abī Ṭālib recited surah al-Qadr in the presence of his two sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. The latter then told him: ‘Father, it seems to me that this surah produces a special gentleness in you’ ‘Alī: ‘Yes, son of the Messenger of God and my son, for I know something about it which you do not. When this surah was revealed, your grandfather, the Messenger of God, summoned me and recited it to me. Then he struck my right shoulder and declared: “Alī, my brother, my legatee, patron (*walī*) of my community after me, who will combat my enemies until the Day of Resurrection! After me, this surah concerns only you and your descendants. The angel Gabriel, who is my

25 Al-Ṣaffār, *ibid.*, pp. 779-780, n° 2; al-Baḥrānī, *op.cit.*, p. 152; al-Huwayzī, *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn*, vol. 5, p. 64, n° 113.

26 Al-Ṣaffār, *ibid.*, pp. 781-782, n° 4 (see also n°s 7, 8 et 10); al-Baḥrānī, *op. cit.*, p. 153 (see also p. 154); al-Majlisī, *op. cit.*, vol. 94, p. 23, n° 51 (see also n°s 54, 55 and footnote); al-Huwayzī, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 625, n° 20 (see also vol. 5, p. 639, n° 106). Here is the beginning of surah 44: “Ḥ M / By the illuminating Writ / We have sent it down during a blessed night, We are indeed warners / During (this night) all wise order is determined / An order coming from Us, We are indeed senders”. (*ḥā’ mīm/ wa l-kitāb’ l-mubīn/innā anzalnāḥ<sup>u</sup> fī laylat<sup>in</sup> mubāraka innā kunnā mundhūrīn/fiḥā yufraq<sup>u</sup> kullu amr<sup>in</sup> ḥakīm/amr<sup>um</sup> min ‘indinā innā mursilīn*).

27 Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl, ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 360, n° 3 (in the last sentence, there is obviously a play on words with terms deriving from the root ‘MR and around the word *amr* (Order) which is one of the central ideas of the entire doctrine): ... *la yanzilu fī laylat al-qadr ilā walī al-amr tafsīr al-umūr sanatan sanatan yu‘maru fiḥā fī amr nafsih bi-kadhā wa kadhā wa fī amr al-nās bi-kadhā wa kadhā ...*

brother, has informed me of the events of the year which will follow the revelation of this surah and it will be so for you and your family, as (it is) in the matter of prophecy [*ka-iḥdāth al-nubuwwa*]. This surah is a shining light in your heart and in the heart of your legatees [i.e. the imams of your descendants] until ‘the break of day’ of the imam Resurrector [*al-qā'im*; i.e. until the end of times].”<sup>28</sup>

In such a context, the Night of Qadr can be understood as being that of Destiny, or rather that of the Decree or decrees issued by God. However, ideas about this Night in early Shi‘i hermeneutics are more complex and make the translation of the word by a single term problematic. Indeed, it is his knowledge, his initiatory science, his *‘ilm*<sup>29</sup> which makes the man of God the Master of the Order, the one worthy to receive the Divine Decree in the blessed Night, “God offers the imam”, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq reportedly said, “the first Science and the last Science (*al-‘ilm al-awwal wa l-‘ilm al-ākhir*)”; he thus “becomes worthy of the visit of the Spirit in the Night of Qadr [*istaḥaqqā ziyārat al-rūh fi laylat al-qadr*].”<sup>30</sup>

The knowledge received by the imam through celestial revelation in this Night has three aspects: the events which will take place during the year, from one Night of Qadr to the other, the deep meaning (*ma‘ānin*) and the detailed explanations (*tafāsīr*) of what the imam already knows in succinct form (*mujmal*), finally ‘another knowledge’ which the imam has been ordered to keep secret.<sup>31</sup>

There is a tradition about the sixth imam Ja‘far, recorded by Ibn al-Ḥarīsh from the ninth imam Muḥammad al-Jawād Abū Ja‘far the Second, which reads as follows: “Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq: ‘The heart that has the vision of what comes down in the Night of Qadr is of a sublime rank’. The disciple: ‘How does this occur, oh

28 Ibn al-Juhām, *Ta’wīl*, pp. 463-464; al-Astarābādī, *Ta’wīl al-āyāt al-zāhira*, pp. 793-794. In this tradition, the Quranic expression “until the rising of dawn” is interpreted as an allusion to the future coming of the Shi‘i Messiah of the end times. And the somehow enigmatic expression *iḥdāth al-nubuwwa* is sufficiently clear to show that the mission of the imams is identical to that of Muḥammad, a prophetic mission.

29 On this idea central to Shi‘i religion see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, part III-2, pp. 174 sqq.; Id., *La religion discrète*, index s.v. *‘ālim*, *‘ilm*, *muta‘allim*.

30 Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir*, p. 788, no 13, *in fine* (variant: *ziyāda* instead of *ziyāra*: “he becomes worthy of the Spirit adding itself to him”); see also al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 25, p. 37, n° 4.

31 Apart from the chapters already mentioned from al-Ṣaffār and al-Kulaynī, see al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, text and Persian translation of M.J. al-Ghaffārī, Tehran, 1363 solar/1985, pp. 9 sqq. On the ideas of condensed and detailed knowledge, see Ibn Bābūya, *‘Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, ed. M.Ḥ. Lājevardī, Tehran, 1378/1958, vol. 1, pp. 14 sqq.; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 8, p. 208 and the study of E. Kohlberg, “Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period”, in S. Amir-Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi‘ism*, New York, 1988, pp. 28 sqq. (all of the article: pp. 25-53 = *Belief and Law*, article no. 13). On the secret science, al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, Kitāb al-ḥujja, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 366-370, nos 7 and 8.

Abū ‘Abdallāh [the *kunya* of Ja‘far al-Šādiq]? The imam: ‘By God, the belly of his person is split, his heart is seized and on it is written all the knowledge with an ink made of light. The heart then becomes a book for the inner eye and the tongue interprets it for the ear. If the person [who receives the vision] wishes to know something, he looks at this heart with the inner eye, and [he sees in it] as if he were to read in a book ...’<sup>32</sup>

Such a man as we have seen, is blessed with the descent of the Spirit/Holy Spirit/angel Gabriel. The importance of his spiritual rank is stressed by another hadith from the father of Ja‘far, the fifth imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir: “... We [the imams] cannot miss the Night of Qadr [literally: the Night of Qadr cannot be hidden from us] because [in that Night] the angels come to circumambulate us.”<sup>33</sup>

32 Al-Šaffār, *op.cit.*, pp. 789-790, no. 14 (Abū ‘Abdallāh: *inna l-qalb alladhī yu‘āyīnu mā yan-zilu fī laylat al-qadr la-‘aẓīm al-sha’n ... yushaqqu wa llāhi baṭn dhālik al-rajul thumma yu’khadhu qalbahū wa yuktabu ‘alā qalb dhālik al-rajul bi-madād al-nūr jamī’ al-‘ilm thumma yakūnu l-qalb muṣṣafan li-l-baṣar wa yakūnu l-lisān mutarjiman li-l-udhn idhā arāda dhālik al-rajul ‘ilm shay’in naẓara bi-baṣarihi qalbahū fa-ka-‘annahu yanzuru fī kitāb*); also al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 94, p. 2, no. 45. The tradition alludes to numerous important initiatory ideas and practices: first of all the heart as the organ of spiritual vision (see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, part II-3 [Excursus: vision by the heart]); then the phrase “to have a split belly”, with the use of the verb *shaqqa*, inevitably reminds one of the two prophetic wonders traditionally linked to the life of Muḥammad, his miracle of “splitting the moon” (*shaqq al-qamar*) and his supernatural initiation described by the Quranic expression “the opening of the chest” (*sharḥ* or *inshirāḥ al-ṣadr*). The use of *shaqq* instead of *sharḥ* and of *baṭn* (belly) instead of *ṣadr* seems to be a type of “tactical dissimulation” (*taqīyya*) to prevent adversaries from accusing the imams of claiming the same rank as the Prophet (see here previous chapter). Finally, it is interesting to note that the tradition does not speak specifically about a prophet or an imam. On the contrary, there appears to be particular insistence on the use of the expression *dhālik al-rajul*, “that man” (which I have translated as “person”), in this case the one whose heart has been made capable of vision during the Night of Qadr. Are we dealing with just any initiated faithful described in Shi‘i literature by the technical expression “the initiate whose heart has been tested by God for the faith” (*al-mu‘min qad imtaḥana llāhu qalbahū li-l-īmān*)? (see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *La religion discrète*, index s.v.); on this last question see the subtle analyses of Ch. Jambet, “Religion du savant et religion du vulgaire. Remarques sur les intentions du commentaire du Livre de la preuve de Mullā Šadrā”, *Studia Islamica* 109-2 (2014), pp. 208-239.

33 Al-Šaffār, *op.cit.*, p. 782, no 5; ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 466; al-Baḥrānī, *Yanābī’ al-ma‘ājiz*, p. 153; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 94, p. 23, no. 52; al-Ḥuwayzī, *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn*, vol. 4, p. 62, no. 9. Here the term for “turning around”, namely *yutūfūn*, is the one used to express the circumambulations of the pilgrims around the Ka‘ba (the *ṭawāf*). The tradition also seems to mean that the imams can “see” the angels during the night of Qadr, another extraordinary power traditionally reserved for the prophets (on this delicate issue, which will later become the theologically important distinguishing trait between a messenger prophet – *rasūl* –, a “simple” prophet – *nabī* – and an *imam/muḥaddath*, see next chapter).

This Night is thus the moment when divine power is transmitted as knowledge to the Divine Man and enables him in turn to exercise his own spiritual power. So, in this respect, the Night of Qadr can legitimately be translated as “the Night of Power”. However, this Night, despite all the peace and blessing that accompany it, is, as the Quran stresses, not the only “moment” when the imam receives knowledge from the heavenly powers: “... Just as in the Night of Qadr, the Holder of the Order (*walī al-amr*) can be seized by the Knowledge of God the Most High at any moment [literally: every day, *kull yawm*]: the particular, secret, marvelous, sealed Divine Knowledge (*‘ilm allāh al-khāṣṣ al-maknūn al-‘ajīb al-makhzūn*).”<sup>34</sup>

As we saw in the previous chapter, al-Kulaynī, in the same *Book of the Proof* (K. al-Ḥujja) of his *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, devotes an entire chapter to the frequent visits which the angels make to the imams. The title cannot be more explicit: “the angels enter the homes of the imams, tread upon their carpets and bring them information” (*inna l-a‘imma tadkhulu l-malā’ika buyūtahum wa taṭa’u busuṭahum wa ta’tihim bi-l-akhbār*).<sup>35</sup> Thus, heaven comes down to the imam. He is capable, reciprocally, like Muḥammad, of celestial ascension to renew and increase his knowledge, and, to be precise, every Thursday to Friday night. It is the “acquired science of the night of Friday” (*al-‘ilm al-mustafād fi laylat al-jumu‘a*) which the imam gathers from the Divine Throne, in the company of the spirits of the prophets, the imams and the sages of the past.<sup>36</sup>

The communications of the angelic beings and the initiation received at the ascension to the Divine Throne are the heavenly sources of the Sacred Knowledge of the imam. But they are not the only ones. He also has access to a certain number of sources which may be qualified as occult (the column of light, the force that brands his heart or those that pierce his eardrum, all kinds of occult sciences), written sources (the Sacred Scriptures of previous religions, the complete original version of the Quran, Secret Books containing many sorts of information about the past, present and future, etc.) and, finally, oral sources, the teachings that each imam has received from his predecessor.<sup>37</sup>

34 Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 260, no 3; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 94, p. 27, no. 68.

35 Al-Kulaynī, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 24 *sqq.*

36 Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir*, section 3, chap. 8 (bāb mā yazdādu l-a‘imma fi laylat al-jumu‘a min al-‘ilm al-mustafād), vol. 1, pp. 48 *sqq.*; al-Kulaynī, *op. cit.*, “bāb fi anna l-a‘imma yazdādūn fi laylat al-jumu‘a ‘ilman”, vol. 1, pp. 37 *sqq.*; on this subject see my monograph: “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*, pp. 99-116 (= *La religion discrète*, chap. 5).

37 See M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, partie III-2 (“La Science sacrée”), pp. 174-199, in particular pp. 175-190 on the sources of initiatory knowledge. On the Secret Books of the imams, see also E. Kohlberg, “Authoritative Scriptures in Early Imāmī Shi‘ism”, in

Contrary to what classical Sunni commentators in their great majority profess, for the Shi‘is it is not the Quran which is at the centre of gravity of the 97th surah. For them, especially if one focusses on the early corpus of hadiths, the Quranic text refers to the privileged moment when the imam receives the inspired knowledge, the gnosis, in Late Antiquity’s sense of the term, the saving and transformative knowledge. This surah does not principally describe the circumstances of the revelation of the Quran to Muḥammad, but, first and foremost, those of all such revelations made and yet to be made, perpetually, from the dawn of creation until the end of times, to the succeeding imams, “Masters of the Order” (*awliyā’ al-amr*). At the close of the long dialogue between Elijah and imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir, the prophet says that the adversaries of the imams and their followers believe is that the surah al-Qadr declares the Proof of God (*ḥujjat allāh*) and that the Proof of God is nothing but the Quran. The imam then replies: “I would tell them [these adversaries] that the Quran cannot speak to order or prohibit [*inna l-Qur’ān laysa bi-nāṭiq ya’mur wa yanha*]; but the Quran has [speaking] men who can order and prohibit [*wa lākin li-l-Qur’ān ahlun ya’murūn wa yanhaw*]. And I would tell them also that calamities may occur to men [literally: the inhabitants of the earth] which neither the Quran, nor the Tradition, nor any authoritative decree could have foreseen. Now the knowledge of God and His justice cannot tolerate that such a tragedy should afflict humanity and that there would be none to put an end to it and deliver them from it.”<sup>38</sup>

It is precisely in this sense that early Shi‘i interpretations of this surah can be compared to its probable “subtext”, namely a text about Jesus Christ (see above the relevant text to footnote 5). The surah does not concern the Word of God in the shape of a revelation or of a Book but in the shape of a human manifestation, that is the *logos*, the Word Incarnate in the case of Christ, “the Speaking Quran” in the case of the Imam. A parallel may also be drawn with another early Shi‘i interpretation of the Night of Qadr (far less frequent in Imamism, it is true), where this Night is said to symbolise Fāṭima. In it, there is, on the one hand “subtext” about the night of the Nativity of Jesus, and on the other, a text about “the Mother of the imams”, in Shi‘ism constantly compared to the figure

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E. Patlagean and A. Le Boulluec (eds.), *Les retours aux Écritures. Fondamentalismes présents et passés*, pp. 295-312.

38 Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 355-356. The tradition is an illustration, among many others, of the Shi‘i doctrinal duality of concepts that define the Quran as a silent, dumb book or guide (*kitāb/imām ṣāmī*) and the imam as a speaking book or Quran (*kitāb/qur’ān nāṭiq*); for more on this duality and its religious implications and sources, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 3, part 1, pp. 101 sqq.

of Mary. However, the symbolism remains enigmatic and it has been subjected to various hermeneutics by Shi'i mystics as well as by modern scholars.<sup>39</sup>

Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, yet again, is reported to have said:<sup>40</sup> *“Indeed, We sent it down on the Night of Qadr [the quotes from Quran 97 are in italics]: the Night is Fāṭima and al-Qadr is God. He who understands the reality of Fāṭima grasps [the reality] of the Night of Qadr. She is called Fāṭima because all created beings are replete with her knowledge.*<sup>41</sup> *And what will teach thee what is the Night of Qadr? / The Night of Qadr is better than a thousand months!* That is to say that [she is] better than a thousand initiates (*mu'min*) for she is the Mother of the initiates [see above footnote 15]. *In it the angels and the Spirit descend:* the angels here are the initiates who possess the initiatory science [*ilm*; see above footnote 29 and the relevant text] of the descendants of Muḥammad [i.e. the imams]. The Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit, is Fāṭima. *By the leave of their Lord, upon every command / Peace it is, until the rising of dawn:* that is to say until the rising of the Resurrector.”<sup>42</sup>

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- 39 See now L. Massignon, *Écrits mémorables*, ed. under the direction of Ch. Jambet, Paris, 2009, vol. 1, 2nd part, “Marie et Fāṭima” (all the articles), pp. 211-289; J. Dammien McAuliffe, “Chosen of All Women: Mary and Fāṭimah in Qur'ānic Exegesis”, *Islamochristiana* 7 (1981), pp. 19-38; D.L. Soufi, “Fāṭima in Classical Muslim Thought”, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Princeton, 1997; V. Klemm, “Image formation of an Islamic legend. Fāṭima, the daughter of the prophet Muḥammad”, in S. Günther (ed.), *Ideas, images, and methods of portrayal. Insights into classical Arabic literature and Islam*, Leiden – Boston, 2005, pp. 181-208; B. Beinhauer-Köhler, *Fāṭima bint Muḥammad. Metamorphosen einer früh-islamischen Frauengestalt*, Wiesbaden, 2002, *passim*; C.P. Clohessy, *Fāṭima, Daughter of Muḥammad*, Piscataway, 2013 (2018<sup>2</sup>), chapter 4, pp. 217-292. For interpretations of this symbolism in Shi'i esotericism, see sources and studies mentioned in footnote 42 below.
- 40 Furāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, ed. M. al-Kāzīm, Tehran, 1410/1990, pp. 581-582, no. 2; al-Astarābādī, *Ta'wil al-āyāt al-zāhira*, pp. 791-792.
- 41 The text plays with the meaning of the root *FṬM*, which means literally ‘to wean, to stop breast feeding’ However I am not sure I have properly understood the meaning of this phrase and to have translated it properly: *wa innamā sumiyat Fāṭima li-anna l-khalq fuṭimū 'an (ou min) ma'rifatihā*. The second part of sentence can also be understood to mean the contrary: “... because created beings [i.e. the mass of people, the majority, the non-Shi'is?] have not been blessed with her knowledge” (for this second understanding see M.M. Bar-Asher & A. Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-'Alawī Religion. An Inquiry into its Theology and Liturgy*, Leiden, etc., 2002, p. 145, quoting from the work of the Nuṣayrī thinker al-Ṭabarānī, *Majmū' al-a'yād*; see following footnote).
- 42 The identification of the Night of Qadr or the Night of the 15th of Sha'bān as a symbol of Fāṭima is quite frequent among the esoteric Nuṣayrī Shi'is; see for example Maymūn b. Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī, *Majmū' al-a'yād*, ed. R. Strothmann in *Der Islam* 27 (1944-46); Id., “al-Masā'il al-khāṣṣa” in *Rasā'il al-ḥikma al-'alawīyya*, ed. Abū Mūsā & al-Shaykh Mūsā, s.l. (“Silsilat al-turāth al-'alawī”), 2006, pp. 195 sq.; al-Khaṣībī/Khuṣaybī, “al-Risāla al-Rāstbāshīyya”, in *Rasā'il al-ḥikma al-'alawīyya*, p. 81. See also the studies by: H. Corbin, “Temple sabéen et Ismaélisme”, in Id., *Temple et contemplation. Essais sur l'islam iranien*,

The Shi‘i perception, notably in the pre-Buyyid period, of the surah al-Qadr is one of the clearest illustrations of the crux of the doctrinal divergence which distinguishes Shi‘is from their adversaries, notably those who will finally be called Sunnis: the fundamental question of the highest religious and spiritual authority. In Sunnism this authority is vested, after the inaugural period of Muḥammad, in the Quran. But Shi‘ism considers the Quran to be a “dumb, silent” guide, which only the Friend or Ally of God (*walī*), the Master of the Order (*ṣāhib/walī l-amr*), the initiating sage (*‘ālim*), represented notably by the figure of the imam, “the speaking book”, can legitimately fulfill that sacred role. Through communication with the angels and the Spirit/Holy Spirit, the Wise Guide (*al-imām al-‘ālim*) thus prolongs prophecy by the grace of his theophanic reality, the ‘quintuple constitution of his spirit’ and his initiatory function. All these aspects are expressed in Shi‘ism by that particularly cogent term, “*walāya*”, of whom the figure of ‘Alī is the supreme symbol. It is here, I believe, that the central significance of the Shi‘i doctrine of the Night of Qadr resides.<sup>43</sup> The final tradition we will examine here sums up almost everything that has just been said:

Ibn al-Ḥarīsh records the following exhortation of imam Muḥammad al-Jawād Abū Ja‘far (the Second): “Oh Shi‘i people [*yā ma’shar al-shī‘a*]! Confront your adversaries with surah al-Qadr and you will disarm them. By God, this surah is the most solid Proof vouchsafed by God to men since the time of the Messenger. It is the best part of your doctrine and it expresses the full range of our knowledge [ours, the imams]. Oh Shi‘i people! Confront your adversaries with the verses [beginning of Quran 44] and you will disarm them: *Ḥ M/By the Clear Book /We have sent it down in a blessed night, (We are ever warning)* [see above footnote 26] for they concern exclusively the Masters of the Order after the Messenger of God. Oh Shi‘i people! Has not God declared: *not a nation there is, but there has passed away in it a warner* [Quran 35:24: *wa inna min ummat<sup>in</sup> illā khalā fihā nadhīr*]!”

Someone then retorted to him: ‘But, Abū Ja‘far, the Prophet Muḥammad was the warner of our community’.

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Paris, 1980, pp. 189-190; H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis. Die Extreme Schia und die ‘Alawiten*, Zurich-Munich, 1982, index s.n. Fāṭima; M. Moosa, *Extremist Shi‘ites. The Ghulat Sects*, New York, 1987, pp. 355 sqq., 391 sqq.; Bar-Asher-Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-‘Alawī Religion*, index s.n. Fāṭima, especially p. 116, pp. 143-145; Beinhauer-Köhler, *Fāṭima bint Muḥammad*, Chap. VI and VII; Y. Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs: an Introduction to the Religion, History and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria*, Leiden, 2009, p. 155, 160; H. Ansari, “L’héritage ésotérique du chiisme ...”, p. 9, footnote 8.

43 See also here chapters 5 and 7.

The imam replied: “You speak true, but during his lifetime did not the Messenger mission other warners to different regions of the earth? So there are warners missioned by Muḥammad just as he himself was a wanner missioned by God.” “Indeed, you are right”. “Then Muḥammad must also have warners after his death and if you deny that, it is as if you condemned the coming generations of this community to go astray”.

“But is the Quran not enough for them?”

“Yes, on the condition that someone interprets it [*mufassir*].”

“Did not the Messenger of God interpret it?”

“Yes, but he only initiated one person to that interpretation and he revealed the rank of this person to his community and this person is ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.”

“Oh Abū Ja‘far, this question is reserved for the elite and the masses cannot bear”.

“God wishes to be worshipped in secret until the day when His religion is made manifest in broad daylight ...”<sup>44</sup>

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44 Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl, ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 364-365, no 6. The secret worship of God in the last sentence seems to refer to “the religion of ‘Alī”, the esoteric dimension of Islam until the advent of the Saviour of the end times and the public manifestation of this secret religion.

## Tactical Dissimulation and Sealing of Prophecy

### 1 The Keeping of the Secret

*Taqiyya*, translated here as “tactical dissimulation”, is the practice of “hiding a truth of faith from those that are not worthy of it” (*al-taqiyya kitmān ḥaḥīqa imāniyya min ghayr ahlīhā*).<sup>1</sup> In this sense it is almost synonymous with two other technical terms: *kitmān* and *khaf*. It is a noun of action of the 8th form of the root *WaQaYa/WaQā* that expresses the idea of guarding (or keeping), conservation, protection or fear of something out of a concern for preservation. This reflexive 8th form means protecting oneself against something, of avoiding something one is afraid of. In theological language the word has taken on the meaning of hiding one’s faith, even denying it in cases of serious threats to one’s physical safety or one’s life. Derived from three Quranic verses (3:28; 16:106 et 40:28), *taqiyya*, which, with this specific meaning, was apparently first practised by the Khārijis, is considered permissible in all branches of Islam if it proves to be necessary.<sup>2</sup> On a legal level it is allowable in situations of *ḍarūra*, “vital necessity”, and with *rukḥṣa*, “temporary permission”, as explained, for example, by the ḥanafi scholar Shams al-Dīn al-Sarakhsī (d. 483/1090) in his *Mabsūt*.<sup>3</sup> And yet *taqiyya* has historically become one of the principle characteristics, almost a symbol or emblem, of Shi‘i Islam. It is even regarded by the adversaries of Shi‘is as a proof of their lying, hypocrisy and contradictory opinions. Sunni heresiographers and polemicists, from al-Malaṭī in his *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa l-radd ‘alā ahl al-ahwā’ wa l-bida’* (‘The Book of Awakening and the Refutation of the Partisans of Passionate Opinions and Blameworthy Innovations’), by way of the 8th/14th century Neo-ḥanbali rigourist Ibn Taymiyya in his *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya fī naqd kalām al-Shī‘a* (‘The Way prescribed by the Prophetic Sunnah for the refutation of Shi‘i Theology’), to contemporary Wahhabi ideologues, all accuse Shi‘ism, because of its practice of *taqiyya*,

1 K.M. al-Shaybī, “al-Taqiyya uṣūluhā wa taṭawwuruḥā”, *Revue de la Faculté des Lettres de l’Université d’Alexandrie* 16 (1962-1963), p. 15 (the entire article, pp. 14-40).

2 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Dissimulation”, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur‘ān*, J.D. MacAuliffe, (ed.), Leiden, vol.1 (2001), pp. 320-324. On its practice among the Khārijis see Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, vol. 1, trans. D. Gimaret et G. Monnot, Paris-Louvain, 1986, p. 383 et 414.

3 Al-Sarakhsī, *al-Mabsūt*, Beirut, n.d., pp. 38-47.

of being a deceitful sect.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, certain Orientalists and Islamologists have taken the same attitude. For example, in his 1906 monograph on *taqīyya*, Ignaz Goldziher accuses it of being ‘a futile imposture’ while at the same time denouncing Shi‘is as immoral; and the authors of the article on ‘taqīyya’ in the second edition of the *Encyclopédie de l’Islam*, Rudolph Strothmann and Moktar Djebli, warn against the ‘great moral dangers’ of ‘tactical dissimulation’.<sup>5</sup>

But more than a century and a half ago, the complexity of the concept had been subtly described by the well-informed traveller Arthur de Gobineau in his famous work *Les religions et les philosophies dans l’Asie centrale*, published in Paris in 1865. Here, Gobineau, while stressing the importance of *taqīyya* and its practice by Shi‘is, insisted on its enormous presence in three other religious communities: the Nuṣayris-Alawis of Syria, the Christians in the regions of Trebizond and Erzurum in Anatolia, and the Zoroastrians in Iran. Thus, for him, *taqīyya* was an essential means of survival for minority communities in sometimes hostile environments: physical, but also spiritual, survival, since *taqīyya* allows a given group to safeguard its particular religious beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, for the last fifty years, the complexity of this notion has been studied from many angles in many works on Islam, both in different movements within Shi‘ism in general and in Twelver Imami Shi‘ism in particular.<sup>7</sup> The

4 Al-Malaṭī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, ed. S. Dederling, Istanbul, 1936, pp. 24-25; Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna*, n.p.n.d., vol. 1, pp. 159-160. For the violent attacks by the Ottoman Mu‘īn al-Dīn Mirzā Makhdūm, *al-Nawāqid li-bunyān al-Rawāfiḍ*, see E. Kohlberg, – “Some Imāmī-Shi‘ī views on *taqīyya*”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 95 (1975), p. 395 (all of it, pp. 395-402; reprinted in Id., *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shi‘ism*, Aldershot, 1991, article no. 111). As for the Wahhabis, see M. Litvak, “More harmful than the Jews: anti-Shi‘i polemics in modern radical Sunni discourse”, in M.A. Amir-Moezzi, M.M. Bar-Asher and S. Hopkins (eds.), *Le Shi‘isme imāmīte quarante ans après. Hommage à Etan Kohlberg*, Turnhout, 2009, pp. 302-303 (all of it: pp. 293-314). See also the discussion by al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shi‘a*, French translation by M.J. Mashkour, *Les sectes shiītes*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1980, pp. 79-80 (the two notions of *taqīyya* and of *badā’* – divine versatility – are denounced by the adversaries of the Shi‘is as means, by which they justify their contradictions and lies).

5 Goldziher, “Das Prinzip der taqīyya im Islam”, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 60 (1906), p. 217 and 224 (all of it: pp. 213-226; re-ed. *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. J. De somogyi, Hildesheim, 1967-70, vol. 5, pp. 59-72); *EI2* (French version), vol. 10, pp. 145-146.

6 A. de Gobineau, re-ed. 1928, pp. 1-18 and in particular pp. 12-13 and 16-17; cited by D. De Smet, “La pratique de *taqīyya* et *kitmān* en islam chiite: compromis ou hypocrisie?”, in M. Nachi (ed.), *Actualité du compromis. La construction politique de la différence*, Paris, 2011, pp. 148-149 (all of it, pp. 148-161).

7 For example A.A. Fyzee, “The Study of the Literature of the Fatimid *Da‘wa*”, in G. Makdisi (ed.), *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honour of H.A.R. Gibb*, Leiden, 1965, pp. 232-249; H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, Paris, 1971-1972, index s.v. *taqīyeh* and *ketmān*; E. Kohlberg, article cited (see above footnote 4); Id., “Taqīyya in Shi‘ī Theology and Religion”, in H.G. Kippenberg and G.G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Secrecy and Concealment. Studies in*

authors of those studies, some, and notably Asaf A. Fyzee, Henry Corbin, Etan Kohlberg, Hans G. Kippenberg, Josef van Ess, Maria Dakake, Daniel De Smet, Orkhan Mir-Kasimov and myself, examining a great number of early as well as recent sources, have been able to show that, far from being mere tactical dissimulation, *taqīyya* has a purely religious and spiritual function and has a significant role in Shi'ī piety. It is in part precisely for the very reason that it is not merely a temporary stratagem to confront a passing danger, that Sunni heresiographers have denounced it so violently. Following Hans Kippenberg, Josef van Ess sees in the sacred nature of *taqīyya* an influence of the Christian *disciplina arcani* derived from Matthew 7:6: "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces"; a passage quoted almost word for word by the Ismaili thinker Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (m. 412/1021) to justify the religious practice of hiding the secret doctrines of the community from the unworthy.<sup>8</sup>

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*the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, Leiden, 1995, pp. 345-380; E. Meyer, "Anlass und Anwendungsbereich der *taqīyya*", *Der Islam* 57(1980), pp. 246-280; M.J. Kister, "On 'Concessions' and Conduct. A Study in Early Islam", in G.H.A. Juynboll (ed.), *Studies in the First Century of Islamic Society*, vol. 3, Carbondale, 1983, pp. 89-107; A. Layish, "*Taqīyya* among the Druzes", *Asian and African Studies* 19 (1985), pp. 245-281; Hans G. Kippenberg, "Ketmān. Zur Maxime der Verstellung in der antiken und frühislamischen Religionsgeschichte", in J.W. van Herten et al. (eds.), *Tradition and Re-Interpretation in Jewish and Early Christian Literature. Essays in Honour of Jürgen C.H. Lebram*, Leiden, 1986, pp. 172-183; A. Schimmel, "Secrecy in Sufism", in K.W. Bolle (ed.), *Secrecy in Religions*, Leiden, 1987, pp. 81-102; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, vol. 1-VI, Berlin-New York, 1991-97, index, s.v.; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index s.v.; D. Steigerwald, "La dissimulation (*taqīyya*) de la foi dans le Shi'isme ismaélien", *Studies in Religion* 27/1 (1998), pp. 39-59; S. Makārim, *al-Taqīyya fī l-islām*, Beirut, 2004; L. Clarke, "The Rise and Decline of *Taqīyya* in Twelver Shi'ism", in T. Lawson (ed.), *Reason and Inspiration in Islam*, London-New York, 2005, pp. 46-63; M. Dakake, "Hiding in Plain Sight: the Practical and Doctrinal Significance of Secrecy in Shi'ite Islam", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 24/2 (June 2006), pp. 324-355; M. Ebstein, "Secrecy in Ismā'īlī Tradition and in the Mystical Thought of Ibn al-'Arabī", *Journal Asiatique* 298/2 (2010), pp. 303-343; D. De Smet, article cited (see above previous footnote); O. Mir-Kasimov, "Techniques de garde du secret en Islam", *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 228/2 (April-June 2011), pp. 265-287; The fascicle of the Spanish review *Al-Qanṭara* 34/2 (2013) is devoted to *taqīyya*. Many articles in it deal with Shi'ī currents: D. De Smet, "La *taqīyya* et le jeûne de Ramadan: quelques réflexions ismaéliennes sur le sens ésotérique de la charia", pp. 357-386; M. Ebstein, "Absent yet All Times Present: Further Thoughts on Secrecy in the Shi'ī Tradition and in Sunni Mysticism", pp. 387-413; R. Gleave, "The Legal Efficacy of *taqīyya* Acts in Imāmi Jurisprudence: 'Alī al-Karakī's *al-Risāla fī l-taqīyya*", pp. 415-438.

8 Kippenberg, *art. cited* (see previous footnote), p. 173; van Ess, *op. cit.* (see previous footnote), vol. 1, p. 313; al-Kirmānī, *al-Risāla al-waḍ'ā fī ma'ālim al-dīn*, ms Cambridge Or1455 Arberry 9, fol. 49r, quoted by D. De Smet, *op. cit.* (see above footnote 6), p. 154. On the "discipline of the arcane" among early Christians such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Saint Basil, Saint

It is for these reasons that I have translated the term *taqiyya* as “the keeping of the secret”, a literal translation of the Arabic expression *hifẓ al-sirr*. Countless traditions attributed to the holy Imams of Shi‘ism and recorded by the earliest hadith compilations, lay an insistent emphasis on the esoteric character of some Shi‘i teachings and on the canonical duty, for the initiated believer, to keep them hidden.<sup>9</sup> Most of these traditions go back to the 5th and 6th imams, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. around 115/733) and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765): “Our teaching is difficult, arduous; it is a secret, made secret, protected by a secret”;<sup>10</sup> “Nine tenths of religion depend upon the keeping of the secret; he who does not do so has no religion”;<sup>11</sup> “the keeping of the secret is part of our religion (ours, the imams) ... he who does not practice it is devoid of faith”;<sup>12</sup> “the rule of God is the keeping of the secret”;<sup>13</sup> “he who divulges our teachings is like he who renounces them”;<sup>14</sup> “Supporting this cause (of ours, the imams) resides not only in knowing and accepting it, but also in protecting it and keeping it secret from those who are not worthy of it.”<sup>15</sup>

Broadly speaking, one may say that *taqiyya* has two dimensions: an external ‘political’ dimension, called by Etan Kohlberg ‘prudential *taqiyya*’ (necessary for a minority community living in a hostile environment), and an “initiatory”

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- Cyril of Jerusalem, Pseudo-Denys the Areopagite, etc., see for example *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, ed. A. Vacant and E. Mangenot, tome 1, Paris, 1937, fasc. 2, col. 1738-1758; J. Daniélou and H.I. Marrou, *Nouvelle histoire de l'Église*, Paris, 1963, vol. 1, pp. 99 sqq.
- 9 On early compilations of Imami traditions, see E. Kohlberg, “Shi‘i Ḥadith”, in A.F.L. Beeston et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature I. Arabic Literature to the End of Umayyad Period*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 299-307; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 48-58.
- 10 E.g. al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā‘ir al-darajāt*, ed. Mirzā Kūčebāghī, Tabriz, n.d. (around 1960), section 1, chapters 1 sqq., pp. 20 sqq. On the centrality of the notion of secrecy in Imami Shi‘ism, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *La religion discrète*, pp. 220 sqq. and index s.v. *sirr*, pl. *asrār*.
- 11 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī, with Persian translation, 4 vols., Tehran, n.d. (the former volume translated by H. Rasūli Maḥallātī dates back to 1386/1966), “Kitāb al-īmān wa l-kufr”, bāb al-taqiyya, no. 2, vol. 3, p. 307.
- 12 *Ibid.*, no. 12, vol. 3, p. 312; also al-Barqī, *Kitāb al-maḥāsīn*, ed. J. Muḥaddith Urmawī, Tehran, 1370/1950, pp. 202-203; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, ed. ‘A.A. Ghaffārī, Qumm, reprint. 1405/1985, bāb 35, no. 5, vol. 2, p. 371 (in certain variants of this hadith, the word “faith” – *īmān* – is replaced by “religion” – *dīn*).
- 13 Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (attributed), *Tafsīr*, ed. P. Nwyia, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* (Beirut), 43 (1968) p. 194; ed. ‘A. Zay‘ūr, *al-Tafsīr al-ṣūfī li-l-Qur‘ān ‘ind al-Ṣādiq*, Beirut, 1979, p. 136.
- 14 Al-Kulaynī, *ibid.*, bāb al-idhā‘a, no 2, vol. 4, p. 77.
- 15 Al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ed. ‘A.A. Ghaffārī, Tehran, 1397/1977, bāb 1, no. 3, p. 55. On other early sources regarding *taqiyya*, see Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 311-312, footnote 685.

inner dimension, which the same scholar calls “non-prudential *taqiyya*” (arising from the duty to protect some doctrines from non-initiates by keeping them secret).<sup>16</sup> Daniel De Smet has convincingly shown that the two dimensions are not always dissociable and are often closely interrelated.<sup>17</sup> Matthew 7.6 seems also to say this.

## 2 Prophetic Abilities of the Imam

But what should be kept secret? Which teachings should be protected, to protect in turn the initiated faithful from the ignorance of the non-initiated, so often accompanied by violence? Shi‘i writings, whether Hadith, theological and exegetical writings or legal treatises, almost all contain a specific chapter, of varying length, on the duty of keeping the secret, on the words which describe it (*taqiyya*, *kitmān*, *khaf*’, as we have seen), on the doctrinal need for it, on its sacred character, and on how it should be implemented. There are even Shi‘i monographs devoted to *taqiyya*. But it is not necessarily these chapters or these treatises which say exactly which doctrines should be kept secret. This information is scattered here and there, often fragmentarily, in a technique which is itself part of *taqiyya* and which has been called ‘dispersion of information’ (*tabdīd al-‘ilm*).<sup>18</sup> One recognizes these doctrines by their esoteric and initiatory character, by the allusive expressions which sometimes accompany them, inviting the faithful to be discrete about them, by their difference from, and even their denial of, Sunni material said to be “orthodox”. This confirms, yet again if need be, the theories of specialists on the ‘cult of secrecy’ in religious traditions, Georg Simmel, Paul Christopher Johnson, Antoine Faivre and others, who suggest that “the secret” is often a stylistic device, a rhetorical figure, whose aim is to tickle the curiosity of listener or reader and to attract his attention to the nature and importance of a given doctrine; but ‘the secret’ itself is never totally hidden. So we know that, in Shi‘ism, the ‘secret teachings’ include messianic material, the history of the composition of the Quran, the thesis of the falsification of the official Quran, the Shi‘i view of the early history of Islam and its view of the Companions of the Prophet, the hidden meanings of the Quran, certain spiritual exercises and, above all, imamological doctrines about the nature, the status and the functions of those cardinal

16 E. Kohlberg, “*Taqiyya* in Shi‘i Theology and Religion”, pp. 346 sqq. and 368 sqq.

17 D. De Smet, “La pratique de *taqiyya* ...”, pp. 152-3; Id., “La *taqiyya* et le jeûne de Ramadan ...”, p. 357.

18 On *tabdīd al-‘ilm*, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index s.v.

saints of Shi'ism, the Imams.<sup>19</sup> Of the imamological doctrines to which *taqīyya* is to be applied, there is one which, to my knowledge, has not been given due attention and yet is of huge religious and political importance. It is the specifically prophetic powers of the Imams.

The earliest documents describing these powers are to be found in the early Imami Hadith corpus. The earliest records were compiled between roughly 850 and 950 CE. They are by traditionists like al-Sayyārī, Abū Ja'far al-Barqī, al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, al-Kulaynī, Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, and include the first Quranic commentaries attributed to the eleventh imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, and those compiled by ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, al-ʿAyyāshī or Furāt al-Kūfī.<sup>20</sup> The traditions which will be considered here are known from these and other similar works, in particular from the *Kitāb al-Kāfī* ("The Sufficient Book") of al-Kulaynī (d. around 329/940-41), no doubt the most systematic compilation dating from the period.<sup>21</sup>

The hadiths about the prophetic qualities of the imams seem to form several groups, corresponding no doubt to several 'layers,' several doctrinal phases. In the first group, no prophetic power of any sort is attributed to the Imams. In these traditions, they themselves tirelessly repeat that their status is similar to the imams of the previous prophets and that their powers are limited to the realm of the licit and illicit, that is, to the (all too) 'orthodox' legal science. The purpose of this group of traditions appears to be to confirm the dogma that Muḥammad is the last prophet and Islam the last religion. Al-Kulaynī has grouped those traditions into a chapter significantly entitled 'the repugnant character of the belief in the prophecy of the Imams' (*karāhiyat al-qawl fihim* [i.e. *fi l-a'imma*] *bi-l-nubuwwa*), which clearly indicates, as we know from other sources, that some Shi'i circles professed that belief.<sup>22</sup> However, the closer one

19 These themes are those studied in my already mentioned works. On the question of the falsification of the "Official Quran" in Shi'ism, see now E. Kohlberg and M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification*, Leiden-Boston, 2009.

20 Regarding these works, see the book mentioned in the previous footnote as well as the studies mentioned above in footnote 9.

21 Regarding this major traditionist and his main work, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi and H. Ansari, "Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (m. 328/939-40 ou 329/940-941) et son *Kitāb al-Kāfī*. Une introduction", *Studia Iranica* 38/2 (2009), pp. 191-247; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 5 (extended version of the previous article); Id., *La Preuve de Dieu*, Paris, 2018, pp. 133 sqq. The traditions concerning the prophetic abilities of the Imams have been included in countless other compilations of traditions. In order not to burden the footnotes, I shall limit myself mainly to the *Kāfī* (most of these traditions are now translated into French in M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *La Preuve de Dieu*, second part, chap. 3).

22 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, "K. al-ḥujja", hadiths n° 696 sqq. (in continuous numbering), vol. 2, pp. 32 sqq.

looks, the more one has the impression that the traditionist has exercised a form of *taqīyya*. This chapter contains only seven very short hadiths where a certain evolution is clearly perceptible: whereas the first hadiths seem to stress that Muḥammad is the last of the prophets, that the Quran is the last of the revealed Books and that the Imams are the guarantors only of the good legal functioning of Islam, the later hadiths attribute to the Imams an increasingly weighty role in 'the economy of the sacred'.<sup>23</sup> In the penultimate hadith of the chapter, Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, while dissociating himself from those who believe in the divine or prophetic nature of the Imams, describes the Imams as being 'the treasurers of God's knowledge' (*khuzzān 'ilm allāh*), 'the interpreters of the cause of God' (*tarājimāt amr allāh*) or also 'the shining proof of God (*al-ḥujjat al-bāliḡha*)'. In the last hadith of all, the same Ja'far is said to have declared that the only difference between the Imams and the Prophet Muḥammad is the number of wives they can legally marry! The following chapters in al-Kulaynī, which include a far greater number of traditions, appear to greatly nuance, if not even contradict, the first group of 'orthodox' hadiths just mentioned. Indeed, beginning with the next chapter, the Imams are described by the two particularly striking technical terms *muḥaddath* and *mufahham*, which mean respectively 'the one to whom celestial entities speak' and 'the one to whom understanding of celestial things is given'.<sup>24</sup> The subsequent chapters record anthropogonical material according to which the Imam is created from the same celestial substance as the Prophet Muḥammad: the clay drawn from the Divine Throne; as we have seen in the previous chapters of the present book, he possesses five spirits of which the most noble is the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of Sanctity (*rūḥ al-quds*), the title which, as we know, describes the entity or faculty that enables the reception of revelation.<sup>25</sup> The Imam is invested with a heavenly entity called the Spirit (*al-rūḥ*) which the Quran mentions (e.g. Q. 16:2, 17:85 or 42:52): "the Spirit proceeding from the Order of the Lord"; thanks to this celestial being, superior to the archangels Michael and Gabriel, the Imam is able to directly receive divine revelations.<sup>26</sup>

23 Respectively traditions n° 1 to 5 and then 6 to 7 of the afore-mentioned chapter.

24 Al-Kulaynī, *ibid.*, n° 703 sqq. (in continuous numbering); regarding these terms, and the first one in particular, see E. Kohlberg, "The Term 'Muḥaddath' in Twelver Shī'ism", in *Studia Orientalia memoriae D.H. Baneth dedicata*, Jerusalem, 1979, pp. 39-47 (= *Belief and Law in Imānī Shī'ism*, article n° v); M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index s.v. and in particular pp. 176 sqq.

25 Al-Kulaynī, *ibid.*, no-s 707 sqq.; also al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 9, chapters 14 and 15.

26 Al-Kulaynī, *ibid.*, n° 711 sqq.; also al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 9, chap. 16.

It is interesting to note that in some traditions, the Imam's interlocutor, often a close disciple, standing before his Master who is listing his own prophetic powers, seems terrified by the enormity of his declarations. The imam then assures him of his sincerity and asks him at the same time to remain discrete.<sup>27</sup> Clearly, what seems to be endangered here is the Islamic dogma of the absolute end, the permanent cessation of prophecy after Muḥammad. I shall return to it.

In other traditions some nuances are introduced, no doubt to preserve the "orthodox" dogma of the superiority of the Prophet Muḥammad over all humans in general and over the Imams in particular. Distinctions are thus established between a messenger prophet (*rasūl*), a simple prophet (*nabī*) and a *muḥaddath* imam ("to whom angels speak"): the messenger prophet sees and hears the angel both in dream and awake, the simple prophet sees and hears the angel only in dream, finally the *muḥaddath* imam hears but does not see the angel.<sup>28</sup> But even these nuances appear to be circumstantial and to have been added *a posteriori*, as they are contradicted by other traditions that are just as allusive as they are suggestive. According to one of them, Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq shows a close disciple "angel fluff" (*zaghāb al-malā'ika*) which has fallen into his house and which he preserves preciously.<sup>29</sup> According to another hadith, in response to a precise question from a follower: "Do the angels reveal themselves to you?", the same imam avoids answering and, caressing the head of one of his sons, says: "the angels are kinder to our children than we are ourselves." In the same hadith, the imam seems to say, in an indirectly allusive way, that the angels come down to his house to hold his hand (*muṣāfaha*).<sup>30</sup> All this seems to indicate that, just like the greatest prophets, the Imam can not only hear but also to see the angel, while being wide awake. Al-Kulaynī, again, has grouped these traditions into a chapter titled "the angels get into where the imams live,

27 Al-Kulaynī, *Ibid.*, n° 704 and 707.

28 Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 8, chap. 1, pp. 368-374; al-Kulaynī, *ibid.*, kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb al-farq bayn al-rasūl wa l-nabī wa l-muḥaddath, nos 434 *sqq.*, vol. 1, pp. 248-250; also E. Kohlberg, "The Term 'Muḥaddath'", *passim*; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, p. 178. The presentation of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb as a *muḥaddath* by Sunni authorities (see Y. Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood in Sunnī Islām", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986), p. 203 (all of it, pp. 177-215)) seems to fall, at least in part, under the influence of anti-Shi'i controversy and the will to neutralize the prophetic abilities of 'Alī by those of the second caliph (see A. Hakim, "Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb, calife par la grâce de Dieu", *Arabica* 54/3 (2008), pp. 317-336).

29 Al-Kulaynī, *ibid.*, nos 1021 and 1022, vol. 2, p. 241.

30 *Ibid.*, n° 1020, vol. 2, pp. 240-241. The term *muṣāfaha* ("to shake hands") can also mean "to face, to present oneself in front of someone". In both cases, the visible presence of the angel seems self-evident.

tread upon their carpets and bring them information" (*inna l-a'imma tadkhulu l-malā'ika buyūtahum wa taṭa'u busuṭahum wa ta'tihim bi-l-akhbār*).<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, just like Muḥammad, the prophets and the ancient sages, the Imam is capable of heavenly ascension; he rises to the Divine Throne to increase his knowledge or to meet the spirits of holy figures from the past.<sup>32</sup> He possesses the Holy Scriptures of the previous religions which he can read in their original languages; he knows the events of the heavens and the earth, those of the past and the future and he has miraculous supernatural and thaumaturgic powers.<sup>33</sup>

A contemporary of al-Kulaynī, al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902-903) devotes chapters 14 to 19 of the ninth section of his *Kitāb Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* to the five spirits of the Imams and to the support that the Holy Spirit and the Spirit-proceeding-from-the-Order-of-the-Lord offer them, exactly as they do to the prophets (see above ch. 5 and 6).<sup>34</sup> Of the dozen traditions of which we examined a number in a previous chapter, I will confine myself to a single one about 'Alī which is quite representative. A disciple tells Imam Ja'far that 'Alī, the first Imam, claimed that in Yemen, where he had been sent by the Prophet, he acted only according to the commands of God and Muḥammad; now, how, the disciple asked, could he claim such a thing when the Quran had not yet been totally revealed and the Prophet was absent? Ja'far replies: "He was informed by the Holy Spirit".<sup>35</sup> In other words, thanks to 'his' Holy Spirit, his personal envoy from the celestial Holy Spirit, sometimes equated with the angel Gabriel, the angel of revelation, the Imam, in this case 'Alī, is able to receive revelation directly, without being dependent on the person of Muḥammad or on the Quran.

### 3 The Seal of Prophets

All these powers are part of what is described by the expression "knowledge of the invisible world" (*'ilm al-ghayb*) which later Islamic orthodoxy will restrict exclusively to the Prophet, or even to God alone. But numerous records seem

31 *Ibid.*, n° 1020 sqq., vol. 2, pp. 240 sqq.

32 See M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "L'imam dans le ciel. Ascension et initiation (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine III)" (= *La religion discrète*, chap. 5).

33 See M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, part III-2, pp. 174-199.

34 Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 9, chapters 14-19, pp. 445-466. On the author and his work, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (m. 290/902-3) et son Kitāb baṣā'ir al-darajāt", *Journal Asiatique* 280/3-4 (1992), pp. 221-250; extended version of that article in Id., *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 4; A.J. Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī'ism: Hadith as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad*, Richmond, 2000, chapters 5 and 7.

35 *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 9, chap. 15, no 8, pp. 452-453.

to suggest that deeply initiated disciples of the Imams are also capable of prophetic feats. First it is claimed that they were created from the same substance as the prophets and Imams, the substance of the heavenly world of 'Iliyyūn.<sup>36</sup> Then, the initiated follower, identified by the technical expression 'the tested faithful' (*mu'min mumtahan*), is constantly put on equal footing with the angel of proximity (*malak muqarrab*) and the messenger prophet (*nabī mursal*).<sup>37</sup> It appears from a number of heresiographical and historical works, that the great heresiarchs of the first centuries of Islam, men like Abū Maṣṣūr al-'Ijlī, Bayān b. Sam'ān, Abū l-Khaṭṭāb or even the mystic and martyr al-Ḥallāj,<sup>38</sup> almost all of them belonging to Shi'i secret circles, claimed to be the locus of manifestation of God and/or to be the Messenger of God and to be endowed with miraculous prophetic and messianic powers, those of the Imams and also the earlier prophets, Jesus Christ in particular. Hence the very widespread use in Shi'i circles of two prophetic traditions: "the Sages are the inheritors of the prophets" (*al-'ulamā' warathat al-anbiyā'*) and "the Sages of my community are like to the prophets of Israel" (*'ulamā' ummatī ka-anbiyā' banī isrā'īl*).<sup>39</sup>

In this respect, the tradition called the "hadith of the rank" (*ḥadīth al-manzila*) seems symptomatic. Muḥammad is said to have told 'Alī. "As Aaron stood in rank to Moses, so you stand to me, except that after me there is no prophet" (*anta minnī bi-manzilat Hārūn min Mūsā illā annahu lā nabīyya ba'dī*). This version of the tradition, known as the 'long version', is recorded in many sources, Sunni

36 Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 96-97.

37 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Seul l'homme de Dieu est humain. Théologie et anthropologie mystique à travers l'exégèse imamique ancienne (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine IV)" (= *La religion discrète*, chap. 8).

38 On these personalities and generally on those whom the heresiographers called "extremists" (*ghulāt*), see for example H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis. Die Extreme Schia und die Alawiten*, Zurich-Munich, 1982; W. Tucker, *Mahdīs and Millenarians: Shiite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq*, New York, 2008; P. Crone, *The Nativist Prophets in Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism*, Cambridge, 2011; J. van Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere. Beobachtungen an islamischen häresiographischen Texten*, Berlin-New York, 2011; S.W. Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic. Ibn Saba' and the Origins of Shi'ism*, Leiden, 2012; M. Asatryan, *Controversies in Formative Shi'i Islam*, London-New York, 2017; B. Tendler Krieger, "Abd Allāh b. Saba' and the Role of the Nuṣayrī Bāb. Rehabilitating the Heresiarchs of the Islamic Tradition", in M.A. Amir-Moezzi et al. (eds.), *L'ésotérisme Shi'ite*, pp. 441-472. On the artificial and probably late character of the heresiographical distinction between the "moderate Shi'ism" of the Imams and the "extremist Shi'ism" of the *ghulāt*, especially during the early period, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 313 sqq. and Id., "Les Imams et les Ghulāt", *Shi'i Studies Review* 4/1-2 (2020), pp. 5-38.

39 On the particularly important role of the disciples of the Imams, see E. Kohlberg, "Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period", in S. Amir Arjomand (ed.), *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, Albany, 1988, pp. 25-53 (= *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shi'ism*, article no. XIII); and now L.N. Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam*, New York, 2006, *passim*.

as well as Shi'ī, and with good reason: it stresses the very high religious 'rank' of 'Alī, comparable to that of the biblical Aaron, whilst still respecting the 'orthodox' dogma that Muḥammad is the last prophet. But there is also a 'short version' of Muḥammad's remark in which "except that after me there is no prophet" is missing. Paradoxically, the 'short' version has also been recorded in the most orthodox Sunni sources.<sup>40</sup> Y. Friedmann, the author of two now classic works on the question of the end or the continuance of prophecy in Islam, believes that the older, short, version dates from a period when the dogma was not yet firmly established. But U. Rubin defends the orthodox position, arguing that the short version was recorded by Sunni authorities because the end of prophecy was already so firmly established in orthodox dogma that it is 'taken as read'.<sup>41</sup> The great Imami scholar Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991) analyses this hadith at length in his work *Ma'ānī l-akhbār* ('Meaning of the Traditions'). He considers only the long version, but he focuses mostly on its last phrase, insisting on the fact that, without it, some Shi'ī circles could have believed in the prophetic powers of 'Alī after Muḥammad. This shows that al-Ṣadūq was aware of the existence of the short version and that, at least until the 4th/10th century, the dogma of the end of prophecy was not yet universally accepted, notably in Shi'ī circles.<sup>42</sup> This type of ambiguity is also palpable in, for example, sermon 234 of the *Nahj al-balāgha*, compiled by al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (406/1015-16) between the 4th and 5th/10th-11th centuries, in which 'Alī declares: "I also see the light of Revelation and of the mission of the messenger and I smell the

40 For example al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Krehl, Leiden, 1864, "Faḍā'il aṣḥāb al-nabī" 9, vol. 2, p. 436; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Cairo, 1955, "Faḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba" 32, vol. 4, p. 187; Ibn Mājā, *Sunan*, Cairo, 1952, "Muqaddima" 115, vol. 1, pp. 42-43.

41 Y. Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood in Sunnī Islām", pp. 186-187; Id., *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Aḥmadī Religious Thought and its Medieval Background*, Berkeley, 1989, pp. 59-60; U. Rubin, "The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy. On the Interpretation of the Qur'ānic Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (33)", *ZDMG* 164/1 (2014), part 5.1 "Alī and Aaron" (all of the article pp. 65-96).

42 Ibn Bābūya, *Ma'ānī l-akhbār*, ed. 'A.A. Ghaffārī, Tehran, 1379/1959-1960, pp. 74-79; tradition analysed by M.M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shi'ism*, Leiden-Boston-Cologne, 1999, pp. 156-157. Indeed, we have already seen, in the traditions recorded by al-Kulaynī, that certain Shi'ī faithful believed in the prophetic status of the Imams; on this, see also al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfī*, ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī, Tehran, 1389/1969-1970, vol. 1, pp. 173 and 176 (the Umayyad caliph Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik recognizes that certain Shi'īs of Kūfa considered Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir to be a prophet); also al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 9, chap. 15, no. 5 (a disciple asked Ja'far al-Ṣādiq if he is a prophet); al-Nu'mānī (d. vers 345/956), *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ed. 'A.A. Ghaffārī, Tehran, 1397/1977, p. 145 (according to the author, the Imams have exactly the same religious stature as the Prophet); Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, *Amālī*, ed. and Persian translation by M.B. Kamare'i, Tehran, 1404/1984, "Majlis" 47, no. 4, p. 278 (a Khārijī, converted to Shi'ism, says he recognized the prophetic mission – *risāla* – of Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq).

perfume of prophecy”, and Muḥammad replies: “‘Alī! You hear what I hear and you see what I see except that you are not a prophet.”<sup>43</sup>

The existence of some groups of contradictory traditions may be due to their dating from different periods, or in others to their being addressed to disciples with different levels of initiatory knowledge, but their appearance together in, for example, an important author like al-Kulaynī, their frequently allusive tone, and the advice of the Imams to treat their content with great discretion, are certainly linked to the duty of ‘keeping the secret’. And with good reason, for some of these documents do question the fundamental article of faith by which Muḥammad is the last prophet and Islam the last revealed religion before the End of Times.

What is the history of this article of faith? Are Shi‘i imamological doctrines of the first Hijri centuries the only ones to question it? The dogma crystallized around the interpretation of the expression ‘seal of prophets’ from the Quranic verse 33:40: “Muḥammad is the father of no man among you but he is the Messenger of God and the Seal of Prophets” [*mā kāna muḥammadun abā aḥādīn min rijālīkum wa lākin rasūla llāhi wa khātama* [or *khātima*] *an-nabiyyīna* ...].<sup>44</sup> The expression *khātam/khātīm al-nabiyyīn* is a hapax legomenon in the ‘Uthmānian Quran and, like other uniquely appearing expressions, it has given a great deal of trouble, first to Muslim scholars and after them to Orientalists and Islamologists. It is said to be of Manichean origin. The early Muslim historians of religion, such as al-Bīrūnī, al-Shahrastānī, Ibn al-Murtaḍā or Abū l-Ma‘ālī al-Balkhī declare almost unanimously that it was Mani who was called ‘Seal of the Prophets’.<sup>45</sup> Without getting into erudite discussions,

43 ... *Arā nūr al-waḥy wa al-risāla wa ashummu riḥ al-nubuwwa ... innaka tasma‘ mā asma‘ wa tarā mā arā illā annaka lasta bi-nabiyy ...* (attributed to) ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, *Nahj al-balāgha*, ed. ‘A.N. Fayḍ al-islām, Tehran, 1351 solar/1972, p. 812.

44 At verse 6 of surah 61, in the version of the Companion Ubayy b. Ka‘b – not in the official Vulgate – one could read: “And [remember:] when Jesus, son of Mary, said: ‘O Children of Israel! I am the messenger of God unto you and I announce to you a prophet whose community shall be the last community and through whom God shall put the seal on the prophets and apostles’. [The Sons of Israel] said: ‘This is pure magic’”; see for example A. Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur‘ān*, Leiden, 1937, p. 170 (English text); R. Blachère, translation of the Quran, Paris, 1966, p. 593 and footnotes. The official version is as follows: “And [remember:] when Jesus, son of Mary said: ‘O Children of Israel! I am truly God’s messenger to you, confirming the Torah which came before me and giving good news of a messenger after me whose name will be Aḥmad’. Yet, when [Jesus] came with clear proofs, [the Children of Israel] said: ‘This is pure magic’”

45 Al-Bīrūnī, *Āthār al-bāqīya*, ed. C.E. Sachau, *Alberuni, Chronologie orientalischer Völker*, Leipzig, 1923, p. 207; al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-mīlāl wa l-niḥāl*, ed. W. Cureton, *Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects*, London, 1846, p. 192; Ibn al-Murtaḍā and al-Balkhī cited by K. Kessler, *Mani: Forschungen über die manichäische Religion*, vol. 1, Berlin, 1889, pp. 349

it seems that most modern researchers tend to agree. H.-Ch. Puech, J. Ries, M. Tardieu, G. Stroumsa and C. Colpe, in his great *Das Siegel der Propheten*, all link the expression to Manicheism and the figure of Mani.<sup>46</sup> They are also unanimous in believing that, in Manichean texts, ‘the Seal of Prophets’ does not necessarily mean the last of the prophets. It is true that Mani saw himself as the equivalent of the Paraclete promised by Jesus but he also practised the *Imitatio Christi*, and the expression ‘Seal of the Prophets’, while it is variously interpreted, seems to have meant to Mani ‘the One who comes to confirm’ the mission of Christ but also of Zoroaster and of Buddha, just as a seal confirms the content of an official letter. Guy Stroumsa has analyzed an extract from the Manichean text *Xuāstvānīft* in its Uyghur translation in which the Manichean initiates, the Elect, are called ‘prophets’. Mani, himself using the title ‘apostle’, considered to be superior to the ‘prophets’, confirms the mission of the Elect. Here, the prophets are not predecessors but the successors, the disciples of Mani.<sup>47</sup> This is very close to the Shi‘i concept of the initiated successors of Muḥammad, the Imams and other sages whom the Prophet is said to have confirmed. As to their origins, these metaphors belong, as Michel Tardieu has stressed, to Judeo-Christianity *strictu sensu*.<sup>48</sup> The significance and variety of the symbolism of the ‘seal’ to the Gnostics is well known: see the dozens of occurrences of the term in the index of *Ecrits gnostiques. La bibliothèque*

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et 371; G. Stroumsa, “Le sceau des prophètes’: nature d’une métaphore manichéenne”, in Id., *Savoir et salut*, Paris, 1992, chap. xv, pp. 276-277 (French translation of “Seal of the Prophets: The Nature of a Manichean Metaphor”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986), pp. 61-74).

46 H.-Ch. Puech, *Le manichéisme*, Paris, 1949, p. 146; M. Tardieu, *Le manichéisme*, Paris, 1981, pp. 19-27; G. Stroumsa (1986; see previous footnote); C. Colpe, *Das Siegel der Propheten: historische Beziehungen zwischen Judentum, Judenchristentum, Heidentum und frühem Islam*, Berlin, 1990, chap. 9; M. Gil, “The Creed of Abū ‘Āmir”, *Israel Oriental Studies* 12 (1992), 38 sq. (all of it, pp. 9-47); R. Simon, “Mānī and Muḥammad”, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21 (1997), p. 135 (all of it: pp. 118-141); M. Sfar, *Le Coran, la Bible et l’Orient ancien*, Paris, 1998, chap. 11 (“Aḥmad, le prophète manichéen”); S. Evstatiev, “On the Perception of the *Khātam al-nabiyyin* Doctrine in Arabic Historical Thought: Confirmation or Finality?”, in S. Leder, H. Kilpatrick, B. Martel-Thoumian & H. Schönig (eds.), *Studies in Arabic and Islam. Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* (Proceedings of the 19th Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants), Louvain, 2002, pp. 455-467; J. Ries, “Les Kephalaia. La catéchèse de l’Eglise de Mani”, in D. De Smet, G. de Callataÿ and J. van Reeth (eds.), *Al-Kitāb. La sacralité du texte dans le monde de l’Islam*, Bruxelles etc., 2004, pp. 143-158; J. van Reeth, “La typologie du prophète selon le Coran: le cas de Jésus”, in G. Dye and F. Nobilio (eds.), *Figures bibliques en islam*, Bruxelles, 2011, pp. 104-105 (all of it, pp. 81-105).

47 G. Stroumsa, “Le Sceau des Prophètes”, p. 283.

48 M. Tardieu, *Le manichéisme*, p. 21.

*de Nag Hammadi*.<sup>49</sup> Hartmut Bobzin has recently proposed the idea that, in a number of Judeo-Christian and Christian texts, the expression means the figure of Jesus, coming to confirm and fulfill the prophecy of Moses.<sup>50</sup> This is also often the case of Muḥammad who, as the Quranic messenger, comes to confirm and fulfill the prophetic missions of Jesus and Moses.

Returning to Islam, this time to Sunni Islam, the doctrine that Muḥammad is the last of the prophets is so firmly based that one might tend to forget that it has a history. However, the complexity of the material in Islamic sources (beginning with the precise meaning of the term *khātam/khātim* in the Quran) as well as of the critical studies on the issue (see H. Hirschfeld, I. Goldziher, J. Horowitz, A. Jeffery, J. Wansbrough, the two studies of Y. Friedmann mentioned above, D. Powers or U. Rubin) highlight that the problematic history and nature of the doctrine is still under discussion.<sup>51</sup>

49 J.-P. Mahé and P.-H. Poirier (dir.), *Écrits gnostiques. La bibliothèque de Nag Hammadi*, Paris, 2007, index p. 1812 (it however needs to be noted that in *Allogène* (NH XI,3), “seal” signifies the closing of revelation; *ibid.*, p. 1574).

50 H. Bobzin, “Das Siegel der Propheten: Maimonides und das Verständnis von Mohammeds Prophetentum”, in G. Tamer (ed.), *The Trias of Maimonides. Jewish, Arabic and Ancient Culture of Knowledge*, Berlin, 2005, pp. 289-306; Id., “The ‘Seal of the Prophets’: Towards an Understanding of Muḥammad’s Prophethood”, in A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai, M. Marx (eds.), *The Qur’ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’ānic Milieu*, Leiden, 2010, pp. 565-583. One could also add to the above-mentioned sources: Tertullian, *Adversus Iudaeos*, XI,10: “Jesus is the seal of all the prophets [*Christus est signaculum omnium prophetarum*] who have preceded him and who came to announce him.” However, for Tertullian, it is not Jesus but John the Baptist who is the last of the prophets (*clausula prophetarum*), the last one to have announced the advent of Christ. On his side, S. Khalil Samir interprets the Quranic expression as being “a mark of belonging” (and not a final mark), a sign of the authenticity of the prophetic mission of Muḥammad, by linking it to the Gospel of John 6,27: “For on him [Christ] the Father, God, has set his seal”; Khalil Samir, “Une réflexion chrétienne sur la mission prophétique de Muḥammad”, in A.-M. Delcambre and J. Bosshard (eds.), *Enquêtes sur l’islam, en hommage à Antoine Moussali*, Paris, 2004, pp. 267 sq. (all of it, pp. 263-292); see already H. Windisch, “Die fünf johanneischen Parakletprüche”, in *Festgabe für A. Jülicher*, Tübingen, 1927, p. 120 (all of it: pp. 110-137).

51 H. Hirschfeld, *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Korān*, Leipzig, 1886, pp. 71 sq.; Id., *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Quran*, London, 1902, p. 139; I. Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, I-II, Halle, 1888-1890, pp. 104 sqq. (partial French translation of tome II by L. Bercher, *Études sur la tradition islamique*, Paris, 1952, pp. 126 sqq.); J. Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Berlin, 1926, pp. 53 sq.; H. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Quran*, Berlin, 1931, pp. 422 sqq.; A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’an*, Baroda, 1938, pp. 120-121; Id., *The Qur’an as Scripture*, New York, 1952, pp. 78-79; J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies. Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford, 1977, p. 64; Y. Friedmann, “Finality of Prophethood in Sunnī Islām”, *passim*; Id., *Prophecy Continuous*; A.A. Ambros, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic*, Wiesbaden, 2004, pp. 83

Consulting the literature of Quranic interpretation, even in the early period, it is clear that almost the only interpretation of *khātām* or *khātim al-nabiyyin* is that there will be no other prophet after Muḥammad. But if one examines other sources, in particular Hadith, even the most 'orthodox', other definitions appear. For example, al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the undisputed authorities of Sunni hadith, record a tradition where it means 'the prophet who comes to fulfill the mission of the previous prophets'.<sup>52</sup>

In many hadith recorded by Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Sa'd, al-Ṭabarī or Ibn Kathīr, the expression means the prophet who appears just before the End of Times and not specifically the last of the prophets.<sup>53</sup>

In a tradition reported by 'Ā'isha, the wife of the Prophet, and recorded by Ibn Abī Shayba and many others, she declares: "Say (about Muḥammad) that he is the Seal of Prophets, but do not say that there will be no prophet after him".<sup>54</sup> Other Companions thought the same thing. In Ibn Abī Shayba's work the relevant chapter is entitled: "All those who refused to profess that there will no prophet after the Prophet" (*man kariha an yaqūl lā nabī ba'd al-nabī*).<sup>55</sup>

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sq.; J. van Ess, "Das Siegel der Propheten: die Endzeit und das prophetische im Islam", in M. Riedl & T. Schabert (ed.), *Propheten und Prophezeiungen*, Berlin, 2005, pp. 53-75; D. Powers, *Muḥammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: the Making of the Last Prophet*, Philadelphia, 2009; U. Rubin, "The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy". The list is far from exhaustive.

- 52 This is the famous "tradition of the brick" (*ḥadīth al-labīna*), i.e. the brick that is missing from the grandiose monument of religion; see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Krehl, Leiden, 1864, "K. al-manāqib", 18, vol. 2, p. 390; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Cairo, 1955, "K. al-faḍā'il", 22-23, vol. 4, p. 1791.
- 53 Y. Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood", pp. 182-183; the theme of "Muḥammad, the prophet of the end times" (*nabī/rasūl al-maḥama/al-malāḥim*), constitutes the central subject of the major and yet unjustly forgotten work of Paul Casanova, *Mohammed et la fin du monde*.
- 54 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ fi l-aḥādīth wa l-āthār*, ed. M.'A. Shāhin, Beirut, 1416/1995, vol. 5, p. 337, no. 26644; also Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl mukhtalaf al-ḥadīth*, Cairo, 1326/1908, pp. 235-236 (French translation by G. Lecomte, *Le traité des divergences du Ḥadīth d'Ibn Qutayba*, Damascus, 1967, pp. 207-209 (with the commentary of Ibn Qutayba)); al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fi l-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*, reprint. Beirut, n.d. (Dār al-thaqāfa), vol. 5, p. 204; Y. Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood", p. 192; Id., *Prophecy Continuous*, p. 63; C. Gilliot, "Miscellanea coranica I", *Arabica* 59 (2012), pp. 118-119 (all of it, pp. 109-133).
- 55 Ibn Abī Shayba, *ibid.*, 19, adab, vol. 5, pp. 219 sqq. Apparently, in order to solve the contradiction of those traditions with the "Muḥammad, the last of the prophets" dogma, other traditions would have been put into circulation according to which 'Ā'isha and other Companions forbade it to be said, according to our formula, that Muḥammad is the last prophet on earth because Jesus was going to return to the world at the end of days; see *ibid.*, no. 26645; see Y. Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood", pp. 192-193; Id., *Prophecy Continuous*, pp. 63-64; U. Rubin seems to accept the traditional point of view of Islamic sources and refutes the analyses of Friedmann; see his article "The Seal of the

Furthermore, in a great number of traditional records concerning Ibrāhīm, the son of the Prophet and of Mary the Copt, and who died young, it is said that Muḥammad, weeping for the death of his child, said: “By God, he was a prophet, son of a prophet” and also “... Had he lived, he would have been a truthful man and a prophet (*ṣiddīqan nabīyyan*)”.<sup>56</sup>

Among documents about the ‘Life of the Prophet’ recorded by the famous Ibn Hishām in his no less famous *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, there is an episode where the Christian monk Baḥīra/ Baḥīrā recognises the prophetic nature of Muḥammad by the ‘seal of prophecy’, i.e. a bodily mark, probably a freckle, on Muḥammad’s body, proving his prophetic powers. This anecdote was passed down to many other “biographers” of the Prophet.<sup>57</sup>

So the assertion that prophecy ended at the death of Muḥammad was not generally accepted for at least the first two or three centuries of Islam. Ancient Arabic poetry from the very first centuries seems to reveal the existence of hesitations about it. The *Dīwān* by, or attributed to, the poet Umayya Ibn Abī al-Ṣalt, the Prophet’s contemporary, contains a verse which says that Muḥammad is the seal of the prophets, those who came before him and those who will come after him.<sup>58</sup> Y. Friedmann also refers to other ancient poetry

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Prophets”, part 7 (“The Muslim Jesus”). In any case, it seems certain that during the first times of Islam, the doctrine according to which Muḥammad is the last prophet was some problematic; see also W. Madelung, *The succession to Muḥammad. A study of the early Caliphate*, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 16-17.

56 Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dīmashq*, al-Sīra al-nabawiyya, 2 vols., ed. N. Ghazzāwī, Damascus, 1984-1991, vol. 1, p. 120; Ibn Māja, *al-Sunan*, ed. M.F. ‘Abd al-Bāqī, 2 vols., Cairo, 1952-1954, bāb al-janā’iz 27, vol. 1, p. 484, no 1511; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, ed. ‘A.M. Qal’ajī, 7 vols., Beirut, 1405/1985, vol. 7, p. 291. For a detailed discussion of these traditions, of those that justify them and other sources recording them see Y. Friedmann, “Finality of Prophethood”, pp. 187-190; id., *Prophecy Continuous*, pp. 58sqq.; C. Gilliot, “Miscellanea corancia I”, pp. 119-20, especially footnote 64; U. Rubin, “The Seal of the Prophets”, part 3 (“Ibrāhīm’s prophecy”) which supports the traditional Islamic point of view that Ibrāhīm died young, because according to God’s will Muḥammad had to be the last prophet.

57 See C. Addas, “Baḥīrā” in M.A. Amir-Moezzi (dir.), *Dictionnaire du Coran*, pp. 105-109.

58 *Bīhi khatama llāhu man qablahu/ wa man ba’dahu min nabīyyin khatam*, in *Umajja ibn Abi ṣ-Ṣalt. Die unter seinem Namen überlieferten Gedichtfragmente*, ed. Schulthess, Leipzig, 1911, p. 24, verse 12. As is the case of other ancient poets, the authenticity of Ibn Abī al-Ṣalt’s poems remains problematic (for the latest state of play see T. Seidensticker, “The Authenticity of the Poems ascribed to Umayya ibn Abī al-Ṣalt”, in J.R. Smart (ed.), *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Language and Literature*, Richmond, 1996, pp. 88-102; N. Sinai, “Religious poetry from the Quranic milieu: Umayya b. Abī al-Ṣalt on the fate of the Thamūd”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74/3 (2011), pp. 396-419). While there are doubts about the attribution of these verses, researchers are unanimous in dating them back to the first two Hijri centuries and that is the point that is

in which the meaning of the term ‘seal’ is ambiguous.<sup>59</sup> In the *Naqā'id* of Jarīr and al-Farazdaq, the word is in the plural and Muḥammad is called *khayr al-khawātim*, “the best of seals”.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, Abū Riyāsh al-Qaysī, who wrote as late as the 4th/10th century affirms, in his commentary on the *Hāshimīyyāt* poems of al-Kumayt b. Zayd al-Asadī, that ‘Seal of the Prophets’ means ‘the best (literally the beauty) of the prophets’ (*khātam al-anbiyā' fa-huwa jamāl al-anbiyā'*).<sup>61</sup>

Of course, texts and traditions of that kind will later on be interpreted, with greater or less subtlety, to show that they confirm the dogma of ‘Muḥammad, the last of the prophets’. But the problematic character of the Quranic verse which was used to create it and ambiguity of the expression ‘Seal of the prophets’ which it contains both seem undeniable. The recent monograph by David Powers devoted to that verse and titled precisely *Muḥammad is not the Father of any of your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet*,<sup>62</sup> is an attempt, using impressive scholarship and sophisticated argument, to prove that verse 33:40 is a late addition, whose main purpose is to establish the dogma of the last prophet. Without necessarily agreeing with the methods or the conclusions of this book, it does bring into focus the scale of the problems raised by the expression in the beginnings of Islam. His study, like many others since the end of the 19th century, as we have just seen, are all evidence of the extreme complexity of the subject and its eventful history.<sup>63</sup> These researches, based as they are on a great number of often very old Islamic sources, show that the Shi'ī were not alone in professing the continuation of prophecy after the death of Muḥammad, in the first islamic centuries.

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relevant to my examination: during the first times of Islam, the expression *khātim/khātam al-anbiyā'* did not mean “the last of the prophets” for everyone. See Y. Friedmann, “Finality of Prophethood”, pp. 184; U. Rubin, “The Seal of the Prophets”, part 7.1 (“Umayya b. Abī l-Ṣalt”) who, in order to justify the traditional Islamic point of view, comments the verse as implicitly announcing the future coming of Jesus.

59 Y. Friedmann, “Finality of Prophethood”, pp. 185-186.

60 *The Naqā'id of Jarīr and al-Farazdaq*, ed. A. Bevan, Leiden, 1908-1912, vol. 1, p. 349. The commentator of the verse (who according to Friedmann is Abū 'Ubayda, d. 209/824-825) declares that “the seal of prophets means the best among the prophets” (... *khātim/khātam al-anbiyā' wa huwa khayr al-anbiyā'*).

61 *Die Hāshimījjāt des Kumait*, ed. Horowitz, Leiden, 1904, p. 85.

62 D.S.Powers, *Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men. The making of the last Prophet*, Philadelphia, 2009; also now see D.S. Powers, “Sinless, Sonless and Seal of Prophets: Muḥammad and Kor. 33, 36-40, Revisited”, *Arabica* 67/4 (2020), pp. 333-408.

63 See above footnote 45 (among the studies cited in that footnote only Uri Rubin's study goes unambiguously in the same direction as “orthodox” Islamic tradition according to which the expression would have always meant, quite clearly, “the last of the prophets”).

#### 4 Epilogue

What can we conclude? In the end, the doctrine of the end of prophecy after the arrival of Islam, probably first proposed after the death of Muḥammad, was accepted by all Muslims, including Shi'is (with the notable exception of certain Ismaili currents),<sup>64</sup> perhaps by the 2nd and 3rd Hijri centuries. This quasi-unanimity was the result of state repression, the consequence of many centuries of bloody conflicts. Indeed, the history of the birth of Islam is marked by centuries of violence, by the endless civil wars, which inevitably had a decisive influence on the genesis and development of scriptural texts and doctrines.<sup>65</sup> Y. Friedmann insists on the importance of numerous 'false prophets' ('false' for the Muslim authorities of course) and the wars waged against them by the central power, in the development of the dogmatic definition of *khatm al-nubuwwa* as the 'end of prophecy'.<sup>66</sup> Just after the death of the Prophet there were the prophetess Sajāḥ and the prophets Musaylima, al-Aswad al-'Ansī and Ṭalayḥa b. Khuwaylid, against whom the first caliph Abū Bakr waged the bloody "wars of sedition" (*ḥurūb al-ridda*). Later a whole series of rebels declared themselves prophets and messengers of God. Such were al-Ḥārith b. Sa'īd under the Umayyads; Muḥammad b. Sa'īd, 'the crucified' (*al-maṣlūb*); Hāshim b. al-Ḥakīm, 'the veiled one' (*al-muqanna'*) and Maḥmūd b. al-Faraj under the Abbassids. However, the number of rebels belonging to one or the other of the many different 'Alid/Shi'i sects and claiming to be prophets is higher by far than in any of the other religious or political groups. We have already mentioned the names of some of them (see above footnote 38 and relevant text). There were, among many others, the revolts of al-Mukhtār b. Abī 'Ubayd, 'Abdallāh b. Mu'āwiya, Muḡhīra b. Sa'īd, and Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl, grandson of Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, believed to be a prophet by many Sevener Shi'is, notably the Qarmatians. The history of the Umayyad and Abbassid caliphates is replete with accounts of their rebellions, of their pretentions to

64 With certain variations, given the diversity of currents, Ismaili doctrine maintains that Muḥammad is the prophet of the sixth cycle, which is that of the occultation of esoteric truths (*dawr al-sitr*), and Islam is the religion of the same cycle. There will thus be, after Muḥammad and Islam, a resurrector-prophet (*qā'im*) and a religion of a seventh and last cycle, that of unveiling (*dawr al-kashf*).

65 This is the main subject of Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*.

66 Y. Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood", pp. 193 sqq.; on the vigour of prophecy and prophets in Arabia just before and during the life of Muḥammad see now C.J. Robin, "Les signes de la prophétie en Arabie à l'époque de Muḥammad (fin du VI<sup>e</sup> et début du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'ère chrétienne)", in S. Georgoudi, R. Koch-Piettre and F. Schmidt (eds.), *La raison des signes. Présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne*, Leiden-Boston, 2012, pp. 433-476.

prophetic status, advanced by themselves or by their supporters, and their ferocious repression by the caliphal armies.<sup>67</sup>

It is reasonable to suppose that the dogma of 'the end of prophecy' may have had its beginnings at the time of the 'wars of sedition', in the circles of caliphal power in Medina, in an effort to invalidate the claims of their adversaries. However, the centuries-long ambiguity, even uncertainty, of the meaning of the term *khātām/khātīm* in the Quranic verse under consideration, clearly shows why the official definition was much resisted and was slow to be accepted by all believers. The physical and doctrinal repression of the Shi'is in general and of their 'heresiarchs' in particular, those figures who S.M. Wasserstrom calls 'the revolutionary thaumaturges', was certainly a factor in the final imposition of that unanimity.<sup>68</sup>

The stakes were immense: the establishment of the criteria by which the right of the religious and political authority to govern the community would be legitimized. For the caliphal power and the jurists-theologians who supported it, and who together came to represent Sunnism, prophecy had ended because all the terms and the directives, divine as well as prophetic, which justified their power, were now set in stone in the approved Quran and the 'authentic' Hadith. For the Shi'is, and some other smaller movements, the spiritual and temporal leadership of the faithful could be ensured, not by texts whose authenticity was in any case problematic for them, but rather by inspired men, divine sages, with at their head the person of the infallible Imam. Now, for the Sunni and its theologians, managing scriptural writings (developed furthermore under their control), imposing their authority and presenting themselves as their sole guardians was easier than to control Shi'i faithful claiming to be in direct communication with the source of the Scriptures and possessing real social influence. It was hence necessary to suppress at all costs the claims to prophecy, most often inspired by Shi'i imamology, of certain opponents at the political level, and, at the religious level, to impose on all the doctrine of the end of prophecy.

67 See studies mentioned in footnote 38. Also Gh.H. Şadiqī, *Jonbesh hā-ye dīnī-ye īrānī dar qarn hā-ye dovom va sevom-e hejri*, Tehran, 1372 solar/1993 (completed version updated of the doctoral thesis of the author: G.H. Sadighi, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens aux II<sup>e</sup> et III<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'hégire*, Paris, 1938); F. Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, Cambridge, 2007<sup>2</sup> (1st ed. 1990), especially index s.v. Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Ja'far al-Şādiq.

68 S.M. 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; also Id., "'The Shi'is are the Jews of our Community': An Interreligious Comparison within Sunni Thought", *Israel Oriental Studies* 14 (1994), pp. 297-324 (now in Id., *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam*, Princeton, 1995, chap. 3).

The latter was also accepted by Shi'ism, or in any case by its main branches, and at least in appearance. It is indeed noteworthy that all the Shi'i interpretations of Quran verse 33:40 (containing the famous expression "Seal of Prophets"), both in pre- or post-Buyid sources, appear to have scrupulously respected it. But is this not a case of *taqīyya*, especially in pre-Buyid interpretations<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the idea of a final rupture of communication between Heaven and the Sage was apparently intolerable for the Imams and their followers. Heirs to a good number of doctrines from Judeo-Christianity, Manicheism and Late Antique Gnostic movements, seeing themselves as divine initiates into, and representatives of, a religion of knowledge, they would have nuanced their beliefs about prophecy and safeguarded the possibility of heavenly communication by applying to it the rules of *taqīyya*, the keeping of the secret.<sup>70</sup> The prophet sees and hears the angels, whereas the *muḥaddath*-Imam – who is never called "prophet" – can only hear the celestial messenger; the prophet receives revelation (*waḥy*) whereas the Imam is able to receive inspiration (*ilhām*); the prophet is the messenger of the letter of the Divine Word (*tanzīl*) in its manifest, exoteric aspect (*zāhir*), whereas the imam is the inspired messenger of its spirit, possessing the knowledge of its esoteric, 'secret' dimension (*bāṭin*); its spiritual interpretation (*ta'wīl*); the prophet is the legislator and the upholder of the manifest external religion for the majority of the faithful (*al-ʿamma, al-akthar*), whereas the imam is the Master of hermeneutics, the inspirer of the interiorised religion of a minority of elites (*al-khāṣṣa, al-aqall*).<sup>71</sup> At the same time, as we have seen, the imam fully possesses the prophetic powers (and teaches them to his initiates): and, according to the 'heresiarchs', is capable of celestial ascension, communication with heavenly entities, knowledge of the future, all kinds of miraculous and thaumaturgic powers, etc. But in order to clearly distinguish his status from that of the prophet, the term used to qualify his nature is *walāya* (divine alliance or friendship), an extension, at the

69 On the turning point of the Buyid era in the doctrinal evolution of Imami Shi'ism, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 33 sqq.; Id. and Ch. Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le Shi'isme?*, Paris, 2004, part III,.; on pre-Buyid Imami Quranic exegeses, see Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*.

70 In a recent article, M. Ebstein pertinently proposes the hypothesis that the dissimulation of religious practices in pious circles of the early times of Islam was directly linked to the violence of the civil wars of that period (see his article "Absent yet All Times Present ...").

71 See M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin* and *La Religion discrète*, index s.v.; I. Poonawala, "Ismā'īlī *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān", in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, Oxford, 1988, pp. 199-222; 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, Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement 12* (2000), pp. 149-162 (and now id., *In Praise of the Few*, chap. 14).

esoteric level, of *nubuwwa*, but distinct from it, and transmitted from generation to generation by the Sacred Legacy, the *waṣīyya*.<sup>72</sup>

Later Shi'ism gradually came to make a distinction between a legislative prophecy (*nubuwwa tashrī'iyya*) and an ontological non-legislating prophecy (*nubuwwa takwīnīyya*) for which the name is *walāya*.<sup>73</sup> It thus seemed to adopt, in a manner of speaking, the old Jewish distinction, made, according to E.E. Urbach, after the advent of Christianity, between legislating prophecy, with authority over religious doctrine, and non-legislating innovative prophecy, without any legislative power.<sup>74</sup> Sunni orthodoxy later categorically and often aggressively rejected these doctrines.<sup>75</sup> The followers of the Imams, for

72 On *walāya*, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Notes à propos de la *walāya* imamate" (= *Religion discrète*, chap. 7); on *waṣīyya*, see U. Rubin's seminal article "Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shi'a Tradition", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979), pp. 41-65; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index s.v. *waṣī*, *awṣiyā'*, *waṣīyya*. On the notion as an extension, in Islam, of the Holy Spirit and/or the Paraclete in Montanist and Manichean doctrines, see Van Reeth, "La typologie du prophète selon le Coran: le cas de Jésus", pp. 95 sqq. (the author does not take Shi'i doctrines specifically into account).

73 For a documented presentation of the history of this issue, see 'A.K. Sorūsh, *Baṣṭ-e tajrebe-ye nabavī*, Tehran, 3rd ed., 1379 solar/2000, mainly introduction and chap. 1. Note that within the "rationalist" (Uṣūlī) branch of Imamism, where, since the Buyid period, the figure of the jurist-theologian will gradually replace that of the Imam, now in occultation, jurists will finally claim the status of *walāya*, traditionally reserved for the Imams, by in turn distinguishing between *walāya takwīnīyya* ("ontological/creative alliance", exclusively reserved for prophets and imams) and *walāya tashrī'iyya* or *i'tibārīyya* ("legislating" or "relative alliance", shared between the Imams and the jurists); see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *La Religion discrète*, p. 204, footnote 125 and now especially S. Rizvi, "Seeking the Face of God: the Safawid Ḥikmat Tradition's Conceptualisation of *Walāya Takwīnīyya*", in F. Daftary and G. Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shi'i Islam. History, Theology and Law*, London-New York, 2014, pp. 391-410.

74 E.E. Urbach, "Matay pasqah ha-nevu'ah" ("When did the prophecy end?"), (in Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 17 (1946-1947), pp. 1-11; Id., "Halakhah u-nevu'ah" ("Law and Prophecy"), (in Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 18 (1947-1948), pp. 1-27 (cited by Y. Friedmann, "Finality of Prophethood", pp. 197-198). It is to be noted that Jewish thinkers seems to have started theorizing this question from the moment they considered emerging Christianity to be a threat to the authority and legitimacy of their own religion.

75 However Sunni mysticism, in its different forms and especially in Sufism, heir to many Shi'i doctrines and practices, adapted them under one shape or other by often purging them of their all too manifestly Shi'i traits. Just like the Shi'i initiate, the mystical saint is able to enter into communication with God and the celestial beings and to receive inspiration, knowledge and miraculous powers. The mystic al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. around 310/922) goes so far as to create the expression *khatm al-walāya* ("Seal of Sainthood") and to build upon it a real doctrine of sainthood (see G. Gobillot, "Le Mahdī, le *khatm al-awliyā'* et le *Qutb*. Evolution des notions entre sunnisme et chiisme", *Mélanges de science religieuse* 59 (2002), pp. 5-31; Id., "Sceau des prophètes", in M.A. Amir-Moezzi (dir.), *Dictionnaire du Coran*, pp. 795-797). The great mystical thinker Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240) distinguishes

many centuries the victims of bloody repression, marginalized and ostracized by an ever more rigid official majority religion, seem to have been obliged to apply *taqiyya* to many of their most important doctrines. The continuity of prophecy, a crucial religious idea inherited from many spiritual traditions of Late Antiquity, was probably at the center of their beliefs.

I will end by examining a tradition which describes a meeting between the first and ideal Imam ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and a Greek convert, claiming to be knowledgeable in philosophy and medicine (*rajuḷ min al-yūnāniyyīn al-mudda‘īn li-l-falsafa wa l-ṭibb*), which provides a good illustration of some aspects of this discussion. It is a long dialogue between the two men, recorded in one of the oldest Shi‘i Quranic commentaries, the *Tafsīr*, attributed to the eleventh imam of the Twelvers, al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (d. 260/874). I will only quote here the moment in the conversation where ‘Alī enjoins the ‘keeping of the secret’ on his disciple:

I order you to practice *taqiyya* in your religion, for God, the Most-High, said: ‘Let not the believers take the unbelievers for friends, rather than the believers – for he whose does that belongs not to God in anything – unless you have a fear of them. (Quran 3:28)’. So I permit you to prefer our enemies to ourselves, and if fear drives you to it, to dissociate yourself openly from us, and if fear brings you to it, to leave the prescribed prayers, if you fear threats and dangers to your well-being. The preference that

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between legislating prophecy (*nubuwwat al-tashrī‘*) and general or free prophecy (*nubuwwat ‘amma/muṭlaqa*) (M. Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des Saints. Prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d’Ibn ‘Arabī*, Paris, 1986, index s.v.). The examples are numerous. In an important article, Orkhan Mir-Kasimov examines two modes of relationship between Heaven and the Sage by calling them respectively: “Word of Descent” and “Word of ascent” (“The Word of Descent and the Word of Ascent in the Spectrum of the Sacred Texts in Islam”, in D. De Smet et M.A. Amir-Moezzi (eds), *Controverses*, pp. 329-372). The rupture of any relationship between the believer and God, after the death of Muḥammad, has also been painfully felt outside mystical and esoteric circles. Sunni traditionalist authorities elaborate different doctrines in order to nuance the official definition of “the end of prophecy” and to alleviate the pain of a certain number of pious believers, while attempting to consolidate it at the same time (A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam. A Reconsideration of the Sources with a Special Reference to the Divine Sayings or ḥadīth qudsī*, The Hague-Paris, 1977, pp. 32 sqq. and 51 sqq.; Y. Friedmann, “Finality of Prophethood”, pp. 199 sqq.; M. Yahia, *Ṣāfi‘ī et les deux sources de la Loi*, Turnhout, 2009, pp. 423-428). It is to be noted that neither doctrinal rigidification nor political repression were able to prevent the resurgence of numerous prophets announcing the advent of a new religion in the lands of Islam from the Middle Ages until modern times. Finally, we have seen the case of Ismailism where another prophet and another religion are awaited after Muḥammad and Islam.

you show externally to our enemies and not to us, because of your fear, is of no use to them and is of no harm to us. For the fact that you disassociate yourself openly from us by practicing *taqiyya* does not imply any offence against us and is not harmful to us. If you distance yourself temporarily from us with your tongue while you remain faithful to us in your heart..., you act in a much better way than if you had exposed yourself to destruction, for then you would be acting for the religion and prosperity of your brothers, the believers. Be wary, I repeat, be wary of neglecting *taqiyya*, I order you to observe it, for you would shed your blood in vain and the blood of your brothers, and you would expose your well-being and theirs to perdition, by putting them in the hands of the enemies of the religion of God.<sup>76</sup>

76 *Al-Tafsīr al-mansūb ilā l-imām Abī Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-‘Askarī*, Qumm, 1409/1988, pp. 175-176; French trans. by D. De Smet, “La pratique de taqiyya”, pp. 151-152. On this Quranic commentary 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; Ḥ. Anṣārī, “Taḥqīqī dar bāre-ye mansha’-e matne mowjūd-e Tafsīr-e mansūb be emām Ḥasan-e ‘Askarī”; Id. “*Tafsīr al-‘Askarī* čegūneh pardākhteh shod?”, <http://ansari.kateban.com>; “Bar-resī ḥā-ye tārikhī” (consulted in April 2017).



**PART 3**

*Spiritual Horizons*





## *The Precious Pearl* Attributed to Rajab al-Bursī: 500 Quranic Verses about ‘Alī

Devotion to ‘Alī, the imam *par excellence*, sacred figure and theophanic man, permeates all of Shi‘i spirituality. Even many centuries after the period of the historical imams and well into that of the domination of the rationalist tradition, in which the authority of the jurist-theologian tended to replace the *walāya* of the imams, ‘Alī remained at the heart of the inner life of the faithful. Some major authors have played a central role in the elaboration and the transmission of what may be called the mysticism of ‘Alī. Rajab al-Bursī, the great architect of the convergence of Shi‘ism, Sufism and philosophy is without doubt one of them.

### 1 Brief Notes on al-Bursī and His Major Work *Mashāriq al-anwār*

In the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries, esoteric Shi‘i thought experienced a golden age. Among its great figures who left their mark on it, it is worth mentioning Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmolī (d. *circa* 790/1388), the architect of a great synthesis between Shi‘ism and a Sufism profoundly influenced by Ibn ‘Arabī; Faḍlallāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394), founder of the Ḥurūfiyya school; and Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā‘ī (838-906/1434-1501), master of the synthesis between Sufism, Avicennian philosophy and Shi‘i theosophy.<sup>1</sup>

1 On Ḥaydar Āmolī, see for example H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, Paris, 1972, vol. III, “Les fidèles d’amour. Shī‘isme et soufisme”, Livre IV, 1 (Ḥaydar Āmolī (VIII<sup>e</sup>/XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle), théologien shī‘ite du soufisme), pp. 149-213; Id., *Temple et contemplation. Essais sur l’islam iranien*, “La science de la Balance et les correspondances entre les mondes en gnose islamique (d’après l’œuvre de Ḥaydar Āmolī (VIII<sup>e</sup>/XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle))”, pp. 67-141; P. Antes, *Zur Theologie des Schī‘a, Eine Untersu-chung des Jāmi‘ al-asrār wa manba‘ al-anwār von Sayyid Ḥaidar Āmolī*, Freiburg, 1971; E. Kohlberg, “Āmolī, Sayyed Bahā’ al-Dīn”, *Encyclopedia Iranica*; Kh.‘A. Ḥamiyya, *al-Ṭrfān al-shī‘ī. Dirāsāt fi l-ḥayāt al-rūḥiyya wa l-fikrīyya li-Ḥaydar al-Āmulī*, Beirut, 1425/2004; M. Terrier, Āmulī, Sayyid Ḥaydar, H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1151-5\\_585-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1151-5_585-1). On Faḍlallāh Astarābādī, see now Sh. Bashir, *Faḍlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, Oxford, 2005; O. Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power. Hurūfī Teachings Between Shi‘ism and Sufism in Medieval Islam: the Original Doctrine of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī*, London-New York, 2015. On Ibn Abī Jumhūr, see for example W. Madelung, “Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā‘ī’s Synthesis of Kalām, Philosophy and Sufism”, in *La signification du Bas*

The end of the Middle Ages was also the period of our author, al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī (flourishing in 813/1410-1411). An important mystical thinker, his work was first made known to Western academic research circles – once again – by Henry Corbin, in the seminars he gave from 1968 to 1970 at the École Pratique des Hautes Études at the Sorbonne.<sup>2</sup> The partial translation of al-Bursī's major work, the *Mashāriq al-anwār*, which Corbin made in the course of these seminars, was published posthumously in 1996, excellently edited with an introduction by Pierre Lory.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Todd Lawson wrote a first fine article on this capital work, which included some excellent pages on the life and work of al-Bursī.<sup>4</sup> More recently, Pierre Lory, again, has published a brief but very profound study on some aspects of the esoteric thought of the author.<sup>5</sup> Apart from works in Western languages, the most substantial studies of al-Bursī and his work are those in Arabic by Kāmil Muṣṭafā al-Shaybī in two essential works, at present unjustly neglected even if slightly outdated, on the relations between Sufism and Shi'ism.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the importance and wide range of his thought, the life of Rajab al-Bursī is mostly unknown and almost all the existing information about him

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*Moyen-Âge dans l'histoire et la culture du monde musulman* (Acte du 8<sup>e</sup> congrès de l'Union Euro péenne des Arabisants et Islamisants), Aix-en-Provence, 1978, pp. 147-156 (reprint in Id., *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, London, Variorum Reprints, 1985, article n° 13.); S. Schmidtke, *Theologie, Philosophie und Mystik im zwölfShī'itischen Islam des 9./15. Jahrhunderts. Die Gedankenwelten des Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī (um 838/1434-35 nach 906/1501)*, Leiden, 2000; Id., "New Sources for the Life and Work of Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī", *Studia Islamica* 38 (2009), pp. 49-68.

- 2 See now H. Corbin, *Itinéraire d'un enseignement*, Tehran, 1993, pp. 104-107 and 111-118.
- 3 Rajab Borsi, *Les Orient des Lumières*, translated from Arabic by H. Corbin, edition established and introduced by P. Lory, Paris-Lagrassat, 1996.
- 4 T.B. 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 Medieval Persian Sufism*, London-New York, 1992, pp. 261-276.
- 5 P. Lory, "Souffrir pour la vérité selon l'ésotérisme chiite de Rajab Borsi", in M.A. Amir-Moezzi, M.M. Bar-Asher & S. Hopkins (eds.), *Le shī'isme imāmīte quarante ans après. Hommage à Etan Kohlberg*, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études vol. 137, Turnhout, 2009, pp. 315-323; M. Terrier, "Bursī, al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al", H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1151-5\\_586-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1151-5_586-1). Finally, in an erudite article, Sajjad Rizvi shows the importance of al-Bursī's work as the starting point for the development of mystical and esoteric thought in the Safavid period: S. Rizvi, "Esoteric Shi'i Islam in the Later School of al-Ḥilla: *Walāya* and Apocalypticism in al-Ḥasan b. Sulaymān al-Ḥillī (d. after 1399) and Rajab al-Bursī (d.c. 1411)" in R. Adem & E. Hayes (eds.), *Reason, Esotericism and Authority in Shi'i Islam*, Leiden, 2021, pp. 190-241.
- 6 K.M. al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila bayn al-taṣawwuf wa l-tashayyuf*, reprint. Beirut, 1982 (first ed., Bagdad, 2 vols., 1963-64), vol. 2, pp. 224-256; id., *al-Fikr al-shī'ī wa l-naza'āt al-ṣūfiyya ḥattā maṭla' al-qarn al-thānī 'ashar al-hijrī*, Bagdad, 1386/1966, pp. 25 ff.

must be treated with caution, despite there being a significant number of references to him and his works in some prosopographical, bibliographical or doctrinal writings.<sup>7</sup>

Raḍī al-Dīn Rajab b. Muḥammad b. Rajab al-Ḥillī al-Bursī is known mainly thanks to his famous work, mentioned above, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn fī ḥaqāʾiq asrār amīr al-muʾminīn* (“the Orient of the Lights of Certainty Concerning the Realities of the Secrets of the Commander of the Faithful”) which, as its title indicates, is a work devoted to the figure of ‘Alī, considered here as the Perfect Man (in agreement with the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī) and the highest ‘locus of manifestation of God’.<sup>8</sup> It is in this book that the author refers to himself as ‘Rajab al-Ḥāfiẓ’ (that is ‘Rajab the traditionist’, ‘Rajab, expert in Hadith’), “al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Bursī” or also “al-Ḥāfiẓ”.<sup>9</sup> He is said to have been born in the village of Burs in the Shi‘i heartland of Iraq, between Ḥilla and Kūfa, around the year 743/1342, perhaps, according to al-Shaybī, in a family of Iranian origin, and to have studied in Ḥilla before migrating to Iran around 780/1378, probably wearied by the vociferations of his all too “exotericist” correligionaries, to seek

7 For example (in alphabetical order; for the complete references, see the general bibliography at the end of this volume) Afandī/Efendī al-Jirānī, ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Īsā, *Rīyāḍ al-‘ulamā’*, vol. 2, pp. 304 ff. (the most extensive record); al-Amīn, Muḥsin, *A’yān al-shī‘a*, vol. 31, pp. 193 ff.; al-Amīnī ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn, *al-Ghadīr*, vol. 6, pp. 33 ff. et vol. 7, pp. 50 ff. and index s.n.; al-Bahrānī, Hāshim, *Ḥilyat al-abrār*, especially vol. 2, pp. 128 ff., etc. (when all the pages are not indicated refer to the table of contents or the index of the work *sub* Bursī or *Mashāriq*); Id., *Madīnat al-ma’ājiz*, vol. 1, pp. 228, 230, 253; al-Burjirdī, *Ṭarāʾif al-maqāl*; al-Daylamī, al-Ḥasan, *Irshād al-qulūb*; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*; al-Ḥasanī, Hāshim Maʾrūf, *al-Mawḍūʾāt fī l-āthār wa l-akhbār*, pp. 293 ff.; al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *Amal al-āmīl*, vol. 2, pp. 44 and 117 ff.; Id., *Ithbāt al-hudāt*; Id., *al-Jawāhīr al-sanīyya*, pp. 30, 195, 526 ff.; id., *Wasāʾil al-shī‘a*; al-Jazāʾirī, Nīmatullāh, *al-Anwār al-nuʾmāniyya*; al-Kafāmī, Taqī al-Dīn, *al-Maqām al-asnā*; Id., *al-Miṣbāh*, pp. 46, 78, 91 ff.; Kantūrī, Iʿjāz Ḥusayn, *Kashf al-ḥujub wa l-astār*, pp. 479 ff.; Khwānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, vol. 3, pp. 327-345; ‘A. Khāqānī, *Shuʿarāʾ al-Ḥilla*; al-Majlisī, Muḥammad Bāqir, *Bihār al-anwār*, especially “al-Madkhal”, vol. 1, pp. 10 ff.; Maʾṣūm ‘Alī Shāh, *Ṭarāʾiq al-ḥaqāʾiq*, vol. 2, pp. 114 ff.; Mudarris Tabrīzī, *Rayḥānat al-adab*, vol. 2, p. 11; al-Qummī, al-Shaykh ‘Abbās, *al-Fawāʾid al-riḍawīyya*, pp. 178 ff.; Id., *al-Kunā wa l-alqāb*, vol. 2, pp. 305 ff.; al-Ṭīhrānī, Āghā Bozorg, *al-Dharīʿa* (multiple records, written under different titles, of the works of our author). I shall attempt to make a short synthesis of the information contained in the sources, while in some aspects complementing, modern research about al-Bursī mentioned above.

8 On these issues, see the studies by Corbin, Lawson and Lory mentioned above in footnotes 3, 4 and 5. Since the end of the 19th century, the book has been edited a dozen times, notably in India, Iran and Lebanon. The last ones are by ‘Alī ‘Āshūr, Beirut, 1419/1999 and by ‘Abd al-Ghaffār Ashraf al-Māzandarānī, Qumm, 1426/ 2005. I here use the Beirut edition published in 1379/1959.

9 Al-Bursī, *Mashāriq*, p. 5 and 14 and the poems of the author, edited in the appendix, p. 240, 246 and 247.

refuge in Khurāsān, in the short-lived “heterodox” Shi‘i state of the Sarbedārs. He is then said to have moved to Ṭūs/Mashhad, not far from the mausoleum of the eighth imam of the Twelvers, ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā (d. 203/818), to dedicate himself to a life of piety, meditation and writing. According to al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, al-Bursī is said to have written the first version of his *Mashāriq* in 773/1371-72 and a second and definitive version, this time according to Afandī/Efendī, in 813/1410-11.<sup>10</sup> He probably died of natural causes some time afterwards. A story that he was assassinated does not seem at all credible. According to most biographers, his grave is in Ṭūs but, according to al-Kh<sup>w</sup>ānsārī, the mausoleum said to be that of Ḥāfiẓ Rajab in Ardestān north of Isfahan in Central Iran may in fact be his.<sup>11</sup>

Rajab al-Bursī is counted by Henry Corbin among the greatest representatives of Twelver Shi‘i metaphysical gnosis. His *Mashāriq* certainly contains profound theological, philosophical and numerological speculations by an author deeply versed in Islamic occult sciences, notably the interpretation of letters of the alphabet, and in different Sufi currents, ranging from the school of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā in the Muslim Orient to the works of Ibn ‘Arabī in the West, on the one hand, and from the Islamic Neo-Platonism of al-Fārābī and from Avicenna to al-Suhrawardī, on the other. Distancing himself both from exotericist Shi‘is (*ahl al-tafrīt*, literally: “the people of reduction”) as from extremist esotericists (*ahl al-ifrāt*, lit.: “the people of excess”, i.e. the *ghulāt*), al-Bursī described himself as belonging to the “middle path” (*al-namṭ al-awsaṭ*) of the Twelver faithful, whom he identified with the People of Knowledge, of salvationist gnosis (*al-‘arīfūn*).<sup>12</sup> He was however fully aware that his positions would not be tolerated by many Muslims, including Shi‘is, and that his writings would be accused of one form or another of heresy.<sup>13</sup> His doctrinal position accounts for the ambiguous attitude of some Imami authors towards him. For example, his *Mashāriq* were already quoted and exploited a few decades after his death, by an author as important as the traditionalist and theologian Taqī al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Kaf‘amī around the years 890/1484-85 and also later by

10 Respectively: *Amal al-āmil*, vol. 2, p. 117 and *Riyāḍ al-‘ulamā*, vol. 2, p. 307. Note, however, that in the *Fihrist-e nuskhā hā-ye khaṭṭī-ye ketābkhāne-ye markazī-ye dāneshgāh-e Tehrān* (numerous editions; for the list of catalogues of manuscripts see the bibliography), vol. 12, manuscript n° 2598 of the *Mashāriq*, considered (erroneously?) as being an autograph, is dated 815 Hijrah. Cf. al-Shaybī, *al-Fikr al-shī‘ī*, p. 258 and footnotes, who speaks of an autographed manuscript dating from 768/1367, written under the reign of the last Sarbedār ruler, ‘Alī al-Mu‘ayyad.

11 *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, vol. 3, p. 330; cf. al-Qummī, al-Shaykh ‘Abbās, *al-Fawā‘id al-riḍawiyya*, p. 380.

12 *Mashāriq*, p. 198 and pp. 213-215.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 14 and 42.

traditionalist philosopher al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī in the 11th/17th century.<sup>14</sup> However, it was three centuries after his death that a bio-bibliographical record was written about him, in this case by al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1104/1693) and Afandī/Efendī al-Jīrānī (d. 1130/1718). Al-Ḥurr in particular very frequently quoted al-Bursī and his writings in his *Jawāhir al-saniyya* and in his *Ithbāt al-hudāt* but did not hesitate to stress, in his *Amal al-ʿāmil* and in his *Wasāʾil*, that, in the *Mashāriq*, some detected extremist Shiʿi doctrines, *al-ghuluww*, and that al-Bursī could not be considered to be a trustworthy transmitter of hadith.<sup>15</sup> Al-Majlisī took the same attitude in his *Biḥār*.<sup>16</sup> Others, on the other hand, defended his Shiʿi “orthodoxy” while at the same time stressing a certain originality in his work.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the authoritative al-Khʿwānsārī declared himself to be in violent opposition to those who abused the term extremism in rejecting doctrines which were among the indispensable articles of faith in Shiʿism and bestowed on Rajab al-Bursī the most flattering titles of the greatest spiritual masters.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the technical arguments of the Hadith experts against the credibility of al-Bursī as a transmitter of hadith, mostly concern hadiths recorded by him, notably in his *Mashāriq*, which are found nowhere else in the authoritative Shiʿi compilations. This is notably the case of many sermons attributed to ʿAlī, such as the *khuṭbat al-iftikhār* or the *khuṭbat al-taṭanjīyya*, in which the first imam declared his theophanic identity with God.<sup>19</sup> All this seems to yet again prove, if need be, that so far as the fundamental imamological doctrines are concerned, the distinction between “moderate” and “extremist” turns out to be artificial.<sup>20</sup> We have already drawn attention to the many editions of the *Mashāriq* (see above footnote 8). The work quickly became very popular, especially in mystical and philosophical circles in Shiʿi Iran. There is a monumental commented Persian paraphrase of it, entitled *Maṭālīʿ al-asrār* and written by a certain al-Ḥasan al-Khaṭīb al-Kirmānī (also known as al-Sabziwārī or

14 Numerous citations in *al-Miṣbāḥ* and *al-Maqām al-asnā* of the first and in the *Kalimāt maknūna* of the second.

15 *Amal al-āmil*, vol. 2, p. 117; *Wasāʾil al-shīʿa*, vol. 30, pp. 159-160.

16 *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 1, p. 10 and vol. 42, pp. 300-301.

17 Al-Amīnī, *al-Ghadīr*, vol. 7, pp. 33-34; al-Burūjirdī, *Ṭarāʾif*, vol. 2, p. 162.

18 *Rawḍat al-jannāt*, vol. 3, pp. 33 ff.: *al-mawlā al-ʿālim ... al-murshid al-kāmīl ... al-quṭb al-wāqif ... al-ʿarīf al-qudsī ...* (“the great wise master ... the perfect spiritual guide ... the solidly established pole ... the gnostic saint ...”; passage cited also by Lawson, *art. cit.*, footnote 8, p. 263).

19 On these sermons of ʿAlī, see here, chap. 4.

20 I have examined this issue from many perspectives in many publications; see for example M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index s.v. *ghāli*, *ghulāt*, *ghuluww*; Id., *La religion discrète*, index s.v. *ghuluww*; Id., *Le Coran silencieux*, index s.v. *ghuluww*; Id., “Les Imams et les Ghulāt”, *SSR* 4/1-2 (2020), pp. 5-38.

al-Mashhadī). It was written in 1090/1680 on the orders of the Safavid ruler Shāh Sulaymān.<sup>21</sup> An unedited summary of it exists in Persian. It was written in 1286/1869 by a certain Muḥammad Zamān ‘Ārif, also called ‘Sāqī’, and otherwise unknown.<sup>22</sup> Finally, it is to be noted that certain manuscripts of the *Mashhāriq* seem to have other titles, for instance *Asrār al-a’imma* (‘Secrets of the Imams’), *Asrār al-ḥurūf* (‘Secrets of Letters’) or *Khafī/Akhfā al-asrār* (‘The (most) hidden of Secrets’).<sup>23</sup>

## 2 Other Works and the Quranic Commentary “The Precious Pearl” (*al-Durr al-thamīn*)

The *Mashhāriq anwār al-yaqīn* is the only work whose attribution to Rajab al-Bursī does not appear problematic. Other writings attributed to him are either not authenticated or, in some cases, even found. It should also be noted that those which are more or less certainly his are all in Arabic.<sup>24</sup> In this respect, the information available in both the manuscript tradition and the prosopographical and bibliographical records is most confusing: one book may have several titles and different books sometimes have almost identical ones. Even the author’s name on the manuscripts varies greatly.<sup>25</sup> Comparing the lists in the manuscript catalogues and in the biblio-biographies of al-Bursī, I have made the following, doubtless provisional, (alphabetical) list:

- a) (*Kitāb*) *al-Alfayn fī waṣf sādāt al-kawnayn*, of which one manuscript is said to exist.<sup>26</sup>

21 Al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī’a*, vol. 9/2, p. 660; vol. 14, p. 65; vol. 21, p. 141. H. Corbin cites this author many times – he calls him al-Ḥasan al-Khaṭīb al-Qārī’ al-Mashhadī – and his work, which is still in manuscript form (seminars of the EPHE in *Itinéraire d’un enseignement*, years 1968-1969 and 1969-1970 and *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, p. 212).

22 *Al-Dharī’a*, vol. 7, p. 233. The same al-Ṭīhrānī points to a *qaṣīda* of a certain Sinjārī in praise of the *Mashhāriq* of al-Bursī (*al-Dahrī’a*, vol. 9/2, p. 472).

23 *Fihrist-e nusakh-e khaṭṭī-ye ... ketābkhāne-ye mellī*, vol. 9, p. 496; *Fihrist ... ketābkhāne-ye āyatollāh Mar’ashī*, vol. 16, p. 159.

24 Except maybe for a treatise in Persian attributed to al-Bursī and entitled *Risālat al-Lam’a* or *Lam’a-ye kāshif* (notably on the subject of the esoteric secrets of the divine Names and letters); see *al-Dharī’a*, vol. 18, p. 354 and Kaḥḥāla, ‘Umar Riḍā, *Mu’jam al-mu’allifīn*, vol. 4, p. 153.

25 On this issue, the hesitations of the great German scholar Carl Brockelmann in his famous *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur* are significant. The name of our author is given there under three different forms: Bursī (*GAL, suppl. 2*, p. 204), Birsī (*GAL, suppl. 3/2*, p. 1266) and Brussawī (*GAL, suppl. 2*, p. 660).

26 Al-Majlisī had at his disposal a copy of this work (*Biḥār*, vol. 1, p. 10); see also al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī’a*, vol. 2, p. 299 and *GAL, suppl. 2*, p. 204.

- b) *Al-Durr al-thamīn*: this Quranic commentary specifically on the figure of ‘Alī is the subject of the present study. I shall return to it later.
- c) *Lawāmi‘ anwār al-tamjīd wa jawāmi‘ asrār al-tawhīd (fī uṣūl al-‘aḳā‘id)*; described by its author as an introduction to the *Mashāriq*, this writing is published in almost all the editions of it. It contains a digest of the theological and mystical doctrines of the author.<sup>27</sup>
- d) *Mashāriq al-amān wa lubāb ḥaḳā‘iq al-īmān*: Its content is close to that of the *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*. It contains esoteric commentaries of varying lengths on a number of important themes of Shi‘ism, ranging from the ‘science of letters’ to Quranic and Hadith commentaries and includes all kinds of eschatological, theological and magical subjects. A recent edition of the work was published in Lebanon.<sup>28</sup>
- e) *Tafsīr sūrat al-ikhhlās/al-tawhīd*, a philosophical commentary of Surah 112 of the Quran, it has no specifically Shi‘i characteristics. It has been published twice in Iran.<sup>29</sup>
- f) (*Risāla fī*) *Ziyārat (li-) amīr al-mu‘uminīn*, is manifestly a document about the visit of the tomb of ‘Alī and the prayers suitable for recital there (indeed, the term *ziyāra* has two meanings: a pilgrimage to the tomb of a saint; and the prayers performed during the visit). Afandī/Efendī al-Jīrānī, who apparently held it in his hands, says that it is very long and is celebrated for its beauties and subtleties.<sup>30</sup>
- A certain number of poems are attributed to al-Bursī. They all concern different aspects of the sainthood of members of the Family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*), notably ‘Alī, and reflect the author’s real devotion to them. The poems have been published at the end of most editions of the *Mashāriq*.<sup>31</sup>

27 On the link between this text and the *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*, see Kantūrī, *Kashf al-ḥujub*, p. 481 and *al-Dharī‘a*, vol. 18, p. 362. In the edition that I consulted (Beirut, 1379), the work is on pages 5 to 13.

28 By ‘Abd al-Rasūl Zayn al-Dīn, Beirut, 1430/2009. According to Afandī/Efendī, it is one of the last works of al-Bursī, *Riḳāḍ al-‘ulamā’*, vol. 2, p. 305; cf. Kantūrī, *Kashf al-ḥujub*, p. 521. It is not known why, despite the existence of many manuscripts of the work (see *al-Dharī‘a*, vol. 21, p. 33; *Fihrist ... Mar‘ashī*, vol. 5, p. 163) the edition was edited from a single very late manuscript.

29 Respectively by Ḥasan Ḥasanzādeh Āmolī, *Waḥdat az dūdḡāh-e ‘arīf va ḥakīm*, Tehran, 1362 solar/1984, “Annex”, pp. 212-225; and by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Derāyatī, in the review *Āfāq-e nūr 2* (Pāyīz va zemestān-e 1384 solar [= autumn-winter 2006]), pp. 25-34 (the second editor apparently ignores the first edition). None of the editions is a critical one. For the references to the works of Bursī, see final bibliography.

30 *Riḳāḍ al-‘ulamā’*, vol. 2, p. 310 et 342 and vol. 12, p. 78.

31 *Mashāriq*, pp. 225-247; see also al-Daylamī, *Irshād al-qulūb*, p. 446; al-Qummī, al-Shaykh ‘Abbās, *al-Kunā wa l-alqāb*, vol. 2, p. 306 (the *takhmīs* of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Aḥsā‘ī on a

- Other writings, of which we know nothing, are mentioned by the sources; it is not known if they even exist in manuscript (the multiple variants of the titles are not indicated here): *Asrār al-nabī wa Fāṭima wa l-a'imma*, *Faḍā'il amīr al-mu'minīn*, *Mawlid al-nabī wa 'Alī wa Fāṭima*, *Risāla fī kayfiyyat al-tawhīd wa l-ṣalāt 'alā l-rasūl wa l-a'imma*, *Risāla fī l-ṣalawāt 'alā l-nabī wa ālihi l-ma'sūmīn*, *al-Risāla al-mukhtaṣara fī l-tawhīd* (are the last three identical?).<sup>32</sup>

Returning now to the Quranic commentary attributed to Rajab al-Bursī and best known by the title: *al-Durr al-thamīn fī khams mi'a āyat nazalat fī amīr al-mu'minīn*, ‘The Precious Pearl regarding the 500 Quranic Verses revealed regarding the Commander of the Faithful [i.e. ‘Alī].’<sup>33</sup> It was edited (not in the form of a ‘critical edition’) by ‘Alī ‘Āshūr in Beirut in 1424/2003.<sup>34</sup> Is this an independent work, as ‘Āshūr seems to imply, according to several early bibliographers? Or is it, as ‘Abdallāh Afandī/Efendī al-Jīrānī and Āghā Bozorg al-Ṭīhrānī declare, a summary of al-Bursī’s Quranic commentaries in his *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*, as edited by a certain Taqī al-Dīn ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥalabī? It is true that the edited text, although far from identical to the corresponding parts of the *Mashāriq*, has obvious similarities with them. But the same type of remark can be said of the parallels and similarities between the *Mashāriq al-amān* and the *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*. If we accept this data, it is possible to surmise, that al-Bursī (or someone using of his ideas?) wrote several more or less similar works.

The number 500 of the title seems symbolic, given that, however one counts the verses in it, 500 is never reached. The chapters of the book consider 35 surahs out of the 114 of the Quran, with the repetition of three among them, namely

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- poem of al-Bursī); al-Amīnī, *al-Ghadīr*, vol. 7, p. 33 ff.; Khāqānī, *Shu'arā' al-Ḥilla*, vol. 2, pp. 371-379.
- 32 See for example *Riyāḍ al-ulamā'*, vol. 2, pp. 305, 307-308; al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī, *Amal al-āmil*, vol. 2, p. 117; *Fihrist ... Āstān-e Quds*, vol. 11, p. 682.
- 33 The most frequent variants: *al-Durr al-thamīn fī dhikr khams mi'a āyat nazalat fī mawlānā amīr al-mu'minīn* (*bi-'ittifāq akthar al-mufasssīrīn min ahl al-dīn*) and *al-Durr al-thamīn fī asrār al-anzā' al-baṭīn*; see for example Afandī/Efendī, *Riyāḍ*, vol. 2, p. 306; al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 8, p. 64. About *al-anzā' al-baṭīn* (“the fat bellied bald one”) as qualifiers of ‘Alī see N. Ṭā'ī, *Shamā'il-e amīr al-mu'minīn*, Persian translation by F. Ardalān, Tehran, 1393 solar/2014, pp. 36-37 and 53 ff. (an apologetical work based however on a great number of sources, some of them being very early ones).
- 34 This work is on pages 19-219 of that volume and is followed (pp. 224-317) by the reproduction of a chapter of the *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi* of al-Kulaynī concerning the mention of ‘Alī and other members of the Family of Muḥammad as well as that of their *walāya* in the Quran (“Bāb fih' nukat wa nutaf min al-tanzīl fī l-walāya”; French translation in M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *La Preuve de Dieu*, pp. 265 ff.). The issue obviously touches upon the Shī'i issue of the “integral original Quran” and the falsified version of the ‘Uthmānian Vulgate (see chap. 1 of the present volume).

al-Kahf (surah 18), al-Nūr (surah 24) and al-Furqān (surah 25). But within each chapter, many verses of other surahs are used to confirm the arguments of the author. The purpose of the book is to reveal what al-Bursī believes to be explicit references, presumed allusions and hidden meanings in these verses concerning 'Alī, his relationship to Muḥammad, the members of his family, his followers or his enemies.

Despite its somewhat resembling a notebook, *al-Durr al-thamīn* provides us with a typical example of a category of interpretative work which is particularly important in Shi'ism and which I have elsewhere called 'personalized commentaries'.<sup>35</sup> Before translating some passages and briefly commenting on them, I will try to define to what type of literary genre it belongs.

The birth and development of this genre of Quranic commentary in Shi'ism appears to be intimately linked to early Shi'i doctrines about the succession of the Prophet and its major consequences, in this case the falsification (*tahrīf*) of the official version of the Quran known as the 'Uthmānian Vulgate'. According to those doctrines, after the death of the Prophet (traditionally in the year 11/632) and in execution of a plan prepared long in advance, his enemies seized power, led principally by the Umayyad clan. After their crushing defeat by Muḥammad at the battle of Badr (2/624), they had converted to Islam, out of a mixture of compulsion and cynical opportunism. But immediately after his death, in a veritable 'coup d'état' they imposed Abū Bakr as his successor to the caliphate, and after him 'Umar, violently removing from power the sole legitimate heir of the Prophet, 'Alī, and killing members of the prophetic Holy Family (*ahl al-bayt*), notably Fāṭima, daughter of Muḥammad and 'Alī's wife. The first consequences of this plot were the creation of a falsified version of the Quran and its imposition on the entire community of believers. The Quran it replaced, its supposedly original version, three times the volume of the new, official state Quran, was said to have declared 'Alī, explicitly or allusively, to be Muhammad's divinely appointed successor, and to have named the other members of the prophetic Family and their real friends and their real enemies. Now these enemies were in power and one of their first tasks would inevitably be to delete or alter compromising passages of the Holy Book. That is what they did, and in doing so made many passages of the sacred text barely intelligible.<sup>36</sup>

35 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Le *Tafsīr* d'al-Ḥibarī (m. 286/899). Exégèse coranique et ésotérisme Shi'ite", *Journal des savants* 2009/1 (janvier-juin 2009), pp. 3-23 (included and developed in *le Coran silencieux*, chap. 3; English translation in F. Daftary & G. Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shi'i Islam: History, Theology and Law*, London, 2014, Part II, chap. 5, pp. 113-134).

36 On these subjects, see now E. Kohlberg & M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and falsification* et M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux, passim*.

“The Quran has been revealed in four parts (*arba‘at arbā‘*): one quarter concerns us [we, the people of the prophetic Family], another quarter deals with our adversaries, a third quarter with what is licit and illicit and a last one with duties and precepts.”<sup>37</sup>

“Nobody is equal to ‘Alī in the Book of God as to what has been revealed in his honour.”<sup>38</sup>

“Seventy verses have been revealed exclusively about ‘Alī to which none else can be associated.”<sup>39</sup>

According to many traditions, the original Quran explicitly contained the names of dozens of eminent members of the tribe of Quraysh, as well as the names of their fathers, declared to be enemies of Muḥammad.<sup>40</sup>

It was precisely these verses or their center of gravity, the precise names of the historical figures which had been revealed in them, that were censored by the caliphs and their men, giving the Quran its fragmentary, often hardly intelligible, nature: “If the Quran had been left as it had been revealed, imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) is reputed to have said, one would have found our names [we, the people of the prophetic Family] as are mentioned the name of those who came before us [i.e. the holy figures of the former religions].”<sup>41</sup> The same imam is also said to have declared: “If the Quran could be read as it had been revealed, not even two people would have differed about it.”<sup>42</sup>

Shi‘i works, those of the Twelvers in particular and notably the early hadith compilations, starting with the monograph of al-Sayyārī (first half of the 3rd/9th c.) on the issue of falsification, indeed contain many records where passages of the Quran are quoted which contain the names of historical figures who were contemporaries of the Prophet, notably ‘Alī (passages which are absent from the ‘official’ Quran today).<sup>43</sup>

The interdependence between the prophetic Family and the Quran is clearly expressed in the famous tradition of the “Two Precious Objects” (*ḥadīth*

37 Tradition often attributed to ‘Alī but also to the Prophet; voir al-Ḥibarī, *Tafsīr*, tradition n° 2, p. 233; Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, pp. 45 ff.; al-Ḥākīm al-Ḥaskānī, *Shawāhid al-tanzīl*, vol. 1, pp. 40 ff., n°s 57 ff.

38 Tradition attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās; al-Ḥākīm al-Ḥaskānī, *Shawāhid*, vol. 1, pp. 39 ff.

39 Tradition going back to Mujāhid; *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 43.

40 See for example al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, kitāb faḍl al-Qur‘ān, bāb al-nawādir, vol. 4, pp. 440-441, n° 3570; al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, chap. 21, n° 5, p. 452.

41 Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-qirā‘āt*, ed. E. Kohlberg-M.A. Amir Moezzi (see footnote 36), tradition n° 9, Arabic text, p. 8; for other sources, see commentaries, English text, p. 59.

42 *Ibid.*, tradition n° 8 and English text, p. 58.

43 See studies cited in footnote 36; also M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 200-227; M.M. Bar-Asher, “Variant Readings and Additions of the Imāmi-Ši‘a to the Quran”, *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993), pp. 39-74; here, chap. 1.

*al-thaqalayn*), attributed to Muḥammad, in which he in effect says that he is leaving to his community two inseparable “precious objects”, his Family and the Book of God.<sup>44</sup> For the Shi‘is, the treason committed by the adversaries of Muḥammad, who usurped the rights of ‘Alī, Fāṭima and their descendants, lay precisely in their breaking the bond uniting the two, thus disfiguring the mission of the Prophet. They effectively assaulted the prophetic Family and falsified the divine Book. In a tradition going back to the Prophet and recorded by the Shi‘is, he warns his community: “... You will be answerable for what you inflict upon the Two Precious Objects which I am bequeathing to you, the Book of God and my Family. Take heed, do not say ‘we have altered and falsified it’ (*ghayyarnā wa ḥarrafnā*), and of my Family, do not say ‘we have abandoned it and killed it.’”<sup>45</sup>

In a letter attributed to imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799) and addressed to a disciple, one reads: “Do not seek to embrace the faith of those who do not follow us [literally: “those who are not Shi‘is”], do not love their religion, for they are traitors who have betrayed God and His Messenger by betraying their Deposits (*amānāt*). Do you know how they betrayed the Deposits? The Book of God had been entrusted to them and they falsified it and altered it. Their real leaders [i.e. ‘Alī and his descendants] had been appointed for them, but they turned away from them.”<sup>46</sup> As has been said above, according to the first Shi‘i writings, the main things deleted from the Quran were mostly names of people, notably those of the members of the Family of the Prophet and their enemies; a falsification that has made the Quran in places unintelligible. Hence the need for interpretation and hermeneutics. The forgery has made of the Quran ‘a silent book’ or guide (*kitāb/imām ṣāmī*). Its Word, its meaning, is restored by the imam and his teachings, and for this reason he is called ‘the speaking Quran’ (*kitāb/Qur‘ān nāṭiq*).<sup>47</sup> From its earliest origins, Shi‘ism has defined itself as a hermeneutical religion, whose purpose is to reveal the hidden meaning of the Quran. The imam is thus entitled the “master” or “warrior of spiritual exegesis” (*ṣāhib/muqātil/ mujāhid al-ta‘wīl*).<sup>48</sup> That is why one

44 On this hadith, its variants and its sources, see now the anonymous collective work *Kitāb allāh wa ahl al-bayt fī ḥadīth al-thaqalayn*; aslo M.M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, Leiden, 1999, pp. 93-98.

45 Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, *Amālī* (or *Majālis*), “majlis” 47, n° 9, p. 280.

46 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 181.

47 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.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux, passim*.

48 Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, pp. 104 ff.; Id., “Le combatant du ta‘wīl. Un poème de Mullā Ṣadrā sur ‘Alī”, *La Religion discrète*, chap. 9.

of the earliest forms of Quranic Shi'ī interpretation is the duty of identifying those deleted names.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the 'personalized commentary', perhaps the earliest mode of Shi'ī Quranic exegesis, is that which reveals the hidden meaning of the Quran, lost at the time of its falsification, its true spirit hidden by the distortion of the text, by identifying the persons about whom the Word was revealed. For a number of Shi'ī currents, especially the one which will culminate in Twelver Shi'ism, the importance of the people and their roles in History are the central focus of the faith; this could not therefore be explicitly present in the text of Revelation. In a letter addressed by the sixth imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq to his disciple al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ju'fi, the imam insists heavily on the fact that real faith, true religion, lies in knowing the names of individual people (*inna al-dīn huwa ma'rifat al-rijāl*), that the knowledge of these individuals is the religion of God (*ma'rifat al-rijāl dīn allāh*), and that these individuals are the Friends of God, above all the Prophet, 'Alī, the imams descended from him and their followers, on the one hand, and the Enemies of God who are the enemies of the imams and their followers, on the other. Consequently the basis of the faith lies in recognizing the Allies of God and their adversaries, who are also the adversaries of God.<sup>50</sup> Among the figures thus identified, 'Alī receives by far the lion's share. I shall return to this.

The "personalized commentary" is also found in non-Shi'ī authors, but far less frequently, and with them it is more especially concerned with the "circumstances of revelation" (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). But it becomes very early on a literary genre particularly valued in Shi'ism. Here are some examples, in chronological order:

In the 3rd/9th century: *Mā nazala min al-Qur'ān fī amīr al-mu'minīn* by Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Thaqafī (d. 283/896), author of the famous *Kitāb al-ghārāt*;<sup>51</sup> the *Tafsīr* by al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥakam al-Ḥibarī (d. 286/899).<sup>52</sup>

In the 4th/10th century: the *Tafsīr* of Furāt al-Kūfī (d. around 300/912), disciple of al-Ḥibarī;<sup>53</sup> *Kitāb al-tanzīl fī l-naṣṣ 'alā amīr al-mu'minīn* (also known under other titles) of Ibn Abī al-Thalj (d. 322/934 or 325/936-937);<sup>54</sup> *Asmā' amīr*

49 It seems that it is later on that the Quran came to be considered to be a text with multiple levels whose hidden meaning(s) would be revealed through the hermeneutics of the imam; see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *ibid.* and the next chapter and the present chapter, part 4.

50 Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, section 10, chap. 21, pp. 526 ff.; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Les Imams et les Ghuāt", pp. 15 ff.

51 Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 12; al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 19, p. 28. The work seems now lost; generally, when an edition of a text is not mentioned that would be the case.

52 See above, footnote 37.

53 See also above footnote 37.

54 E. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work. Ibn Ṭāwūs and his Library*, Leiden, 1992, p. 355, n° 594.

*al-mu'minīn min al-Qur'ān* of Ibn Shammūn Abū 'Abdallāh al-Kātib (d. around 330/941-942);<sup>55</sup> *Mā nazala fī l-khamsa* ("What has been revealed regarding the Five" – i.e. the Five of the Mantel: Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn) and *Mā nazala fī 'Alī min al-Qur'ān* of 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Jalūdī al-Baṣrī (d. 332/944);<sup>56</sup> *Ta'wīl mā nazala min al-Qur'ān fī ahl al-bayt* (with some variations in its title) of Muḥammad b. al-'Abbās al-Bazzāz, also known as Ibn al-Juḥām (flourishing in 328/939-940);<sup>57</sup> *Mā nazala min al-Qur'ān fī šāḥib al-zamān* ("What has been revealed in the Quran regarding the Master of Time" – i.e. the Mahdi; another title with variations) of Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī (d. 401/1010), author of *Muqtaḍab al-athar*.<sup>58</sup>

In the 5th/11th century: *Āy al-Qur'ān al-munazzala fī amīr al-mu'minīn 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib* of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022);<sup>59</sup> two books of al-Ḥakīm al-Ḥaskānī (d. after 470/1077-1078), namely *Khaṣā'is amīr al-mu'minīn fī l-Qur'ān*<sup>60</sup> and *Shawāhid al-tanzīl*.<sup>61</sup>

In the 6th/12th century: *Nuzūl al-Qur'ān fī sha'n amīr al-mu'minīn* of Muḥammad b. Mu'min al-Shīrāzī (precise dates unknown);<sup>62</sup> *Khaṣā'is al-waḥy al-mubīn fī manāqib amīr al-mu'minīn* of Ibn al-Biṭrīq al-Ḥillī (d. 600/1203-1204).<sup>63</sup>

In the 8th/14th century: the work we are examining here: *al-Durr al-thamīn fī khams mi'a āya nazalat fī amīr al-mu'minīn* of al-Bursī.

In the 10th/16th century: *Ta'wīl al-āyāt al-zāhira fī faḍl il al-'itra al-tāhira* of Sharaf al-Dīn al-Astarābādī.<sup>64</sup>

55 Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 52; al-Ṭihrānī, *Dhar'ā*, vol. 2, p. 65.

56 Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 180; al-Ṭihrānī, *Dhar'ā*, vol. 19, p. 28 and 30.

57 E. Kohlberg, *op.cit.*, pp. 369-371, n° 623. Of this work, only fragments in later sources remain. These fragments have now been now collected in Ibn al-Juḥām, *Ta'wīl mā nazala min al-Qur'ān al-karīm fī l-nabī wa ālih*.

58 Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, p. 67; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Ma'ālim al-'ulamā'*, p. 20; al-Ṭihrānī, *Dhar'ā*, vol. 19, p. 30.

59 Kohlberg, *op.cit.*, p. 132, n° 83. On the position of al-Mufīd on the issue of the falsification, see now M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (m. 413/1022) et la question de la falsification du Coran", in D. De Smet & M.A. Amir-Moezzi (eds.), *Controverses*, pp. 199-229 (also published in *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, nuova serie, vol. 87, fas. 1-4 (2014), pp. 155-176).

60 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Ma'ālim al-'ulamā'*, p. 78. The doctrinal affiliation of al-Ḥaskānī is not certain. He seems to have been a Sunni Ḥanafīte with strong Shi'i sympathies, or even more likely a crypto-Shi'i practising *taqīyya* (the duty of keeping the secret); voir E. Kohlberg, *op.cit.*, pp. 150-151.

61 E. Kohlberg, *op.cit.*, pp. 330-331, n°542.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 307, n° 488.

63 Ed. M.B. al-Maḥmūdī, Tehran, 1406/1986.

64 Ed. Ḥ. al-Ustād Walī, Qumm, 1417/1996.

At the turn of the 11th/17th and 12th/18th centuries: two works by Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī, *al-Lawāmi' al-nūrāniyya fī asmā' amīr al-mu'minīn al-Qur'āniyya*<sup>65</sup> and *al-Maḥajja fī mā nazala fī l-qā'im l-ḥujja* (“The broad path towards what has been revealed regarding the Qā'im the Proof” – i.e. the eschatological Savior).<sup>66</sup>

In the 13th/19th century: *al-Āyāt al-nāzila fī dhamm al-jā'irīn 'alā ahl al-bayt* (“The verses revealed to denounce those are unjust towards the prophetic Family”) of Ḥaydar 'Alī al-Shirwānī,<sup>67</sup> or also *al-Naṣṣ al-jalī fī arba'in āya fī sha'n 'Alī* of al-Ḥusayn b. Bāqir al-Burūjirdī.<sup>68</sup> Note also that the writing of this type of work continues to this day in Shī'i circles, especially among Twelvers.<sup>69</sup>

### 3 Annotated Extracts from *al-Durr al-thamīn*

As we shall see in the examples below, the author of *al-Durr al-thamīn*, loyal to a long tradition of ‘personalised commentaries’, populates the Quranic text with different characters, often said to have been deleted by the falsifiers of the text of the Revelation, who have completely modified the pattern of the narrative and hence its meaning.

Quran 1 (al-Fātiḥa): the *Basmala* (that is the formula “*In the Name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate*”):

... It is a reminder (*dhikr*) from God the Unique One that comprises 19 letters, that is, the total of the letters of the Five Silhouettes (*al-ashbāḥ al-khamsa*) that God inscribed with light, with his right hand of might, in the World of Light before the creation of the years and the centuries ...

65 Published in Qumm, 1394/1974-1975.

66 Ed. M.M. al-Milānī, Beirut, 1413/1992.

67 Al-Ṭihrānī, *Dharī'a*, vol.1, p. 48.

68 *Ibid.*, vol. 24, p. 172. This work was published in Tehran, 1320/1902-1903 (not seen). Note that Sunni authors with Shī'i sympathies have also composed this type of work although of course to a much less. Let us mention the examples of the pro-mystic Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī (m. 430/1038) in his *Mā nazala min al-Qur'ān fī amīr al-mu'minīn* (*Dharī'a*, vol. 19, p. 28; the fragments of this work, recorded by other sources, have been edited by M.B. al-Maḥmūdī in *al-Nūr al-mushṭa' al al-muqtabas min kitāb Mā nazala min al-Qur'ān fī amīr al-mu'minīn*, Tehran, 1406/1985.); Ibn al-Faḥḥām al-Nisābūrī (d. 458/ 1066), author of *al-Āyāt al-nāzila fī ahl al-bayt* (Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-mizān*, Beirut, 1407-8/1987-88, vol. 2, p. 251) or also al-Ḥākīm al-Jushamī al-Bayhaqī (d. 494/1100-1101), with Mu'tazilite leanings, in his *Tanbih al-ghāfilīn* (Cairo, n.d.).

69 See for example the monumental work in Persian by the religious scholar M. Ḥusaynī Bahārānčī, *Āyāt al-faḍā'il yā faḍā'il-e 'Alī dar Qur'ān*, Qumm, 1380 solar/2002.

They are the origin of the Creation and its end; the secret of being and its deepest meaning.<sup>70</sup>

The “Five Silhouttes” are pre-existential metaphysical entities, the Five Impeccables (*maṣūm*), the People of the Mantle (*ahl al-kisāʾ*), namely Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn who have a total of 19 letters (i.e. consonants) in their names (M, Ḥ, M, D, ʿ, L, Y, F, Alif, Ṭ, M, H, Ḥ, S, N, Ḥ, S, Y, N), the same number as that of the letters of the *basmala*, that is, the formula *bi-ʾsmi llāhi (al-)raḥmāni (al-)raḥīm*. According to the science of letters, particularly valued by al-Bursī, the letters that make up the name (*ism*) contain the essence of the reality of the named (*musammā*). This means that just as the *basmala* opens ‘the world’ that is the Quran, it is through the Five Impeccables that Being is opened. They are the alpha and omega as well as the ultimate meaning of creation. The chapter continues with hadiths which tell of the pre-existence of the luminous entities of Muḥammad and ʿAlī, which are “externally human and internally divine” (*ẓāhiruhumā bashariyya wa bāṭinuhumā lāhūtiyya*). They have been manifested in human bodies/temples (*hayākil nāsūtīyya*) so that men may be able to bear the sight of them, for they have the rank of the Lord of the Two Worlds (*fa-humā maqāmay rabb al-ʿālamayn*) and they are the veils of the Creator of beings (*ḥijābay khāliq al-khalāʾiq*). Thus, the Impeccables, and most singularly Muḥammad and ʿAlī, are the loci of manifestation of God, the first one represents the exoteric dimension and the second one the esoteric dimension of the divine theophany.<sup>71</sup>

70 *Al-Durr al-thamīn*, I have used the edition of ʿĀshūr (from now on *Dth*), pp. 22-23. In my presentation the Quranic text is in Italics and the commentaries from *Dth* in Roman and smaller characters. Moreover, I have given not identified the passages parallel to the texts translated from *Dth* in the *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn* and the *Mashāriq al-amān*. They are far too numerous and dispersed throughout those works, with more or less important variants.

71 *Dth*, pp. 23-24. The reading ʿālamayn (the two Worlds, that is, this world and the afterworld; the visible world – ʿālam al-shahāda – and the invisible world – ʿālam al-ghayb) instead of the more usual reading of ʿālamīn (the Worlds) corresponds better, it seems to me, to the couple Muḥammad/ʿAlī which occupies the centre of the tradition and which explains, besides, the use of other duals in the text. Furthermore, note that the chains of transmission of the traditions are not shown; however, cross referencing with other sources clearly shows that in almost all cases we are dealing with Shiʿi traditions going back to the imams and often recorded in numerous hadith compilations. On the pre-existential entities of the Impeccables and the metaphysical Worlds before this world, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, partie II (“La pré-existence de l’Imam”), especially pp. 73-111; Id., “Worlds and Their Inhabitants. Some Notes on Imami-Shiʿi Cosmo-Anthropogony”, in Elisa Coda et Cecilia Martini Bonadeo (eds.), *De l’Antiquité tardive au Moyen-Âge*, pp. 519-529. On the pre-existential Lights of Muḥammad and ʿAlī, see U. Rubin, “Pre-existence and Light:

Quran I (al-Fātiḥa), verse 6: “*Guide us unto the right Path*’: God made ‘Alī the right Path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) about which people fell into divergence. ‘Alī is the explicit Book (*al-kitāb al-mubīn*; a recurring Quranic expression) and the Religion of God (*dīn allāh*) outside of which nothing is accepted by the servants.”<sup>72</sup>

Quran I (al-Fātiḥa), verse 7: “*The Way of those upon whom You have bestowed favour*’, that is, the servants of Muhammad. ‘*Not of those who have earned Your anger or those who are astray*’: this wise sentence has two meanings. According to the exoteric meaning [recorded by the exegetes], the first phrase refers to the Jews and the second refers to the Christians; but the esoteric meaning concerns those in the Shi‘i community who take the approach of the Jews and of the Christians ... As the Messenger of God said regarding ‘Alī: ‘You will be at the centre of conflicts for there is in you something similar to Jesus. The Jews dislike Jesus to the point of slandering his mother and the Christians exaggerate regarding him to the point of taking him for God ...’. The targets of the anger of God in this community are those who have turned away from the love (*ḥubb*) of ‘Alī; they are the ‘metamorphosed’ of this community (*musūkh hādhihi l-umma*) and those gone astray are those who exaggerate in their love of ‘Alī (*al-mufritūn*).”<sup>73</sup>

The author provides the readers with a veritable interpretative key for the passages of the Quran which speak negatively about Jews and Christians. These two terms are just symbols, in the etymological sense of the term, that is, identifying signs for particular groups of Muslims: the “Sunnis” vehemently hostile to ‘Alī and his family, the *nāṣibī*, pl. *nawāṣib*, and the exaggerating, extremist Shi‘is, the *ghālīn*, pl. *ghulāt*.

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Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad”, *IOS* 5 (1975), pp. 62-119; Id., “Prophets and Progenitors in Early Shi‘a Tradition”, *JSAI* 1 (1979), pp. 41-46.

72 *Dth*, p. 28. Cf. ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 57; see also P. Lory, “Souffrir pour la vérité ...”, p. 318. ‘Alī is the Way, the Path and the Truth to which this path leads, namely the true religion of God. The “Christic” resonance of these words is to be stressed.

73 *Dth*, pp. 29-30; see also P. Lory, “Souffrir pour la vérité ...”, p. 318. On these points see also al-Sayyārī, *K. al-Qirā‘āt*, n° 33, p. 14 (Arabic texte) et p. 69 (English text) for other sources; Furāt, *Tafsīr*, p. 51, n° 10; al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 22, n° 17. On the “metamorphosed one”, that is, the enemies of the prophetic Family transformed, either before or after their death, into ignoble and malevolent beasts, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index *sub maskh*. On the notions of metempsychosis and reincarnation in Islam, see G. Monnot, “La transmigration et l’immortalité”, *Mélanges de l’Institut Dominicain d’Études Orientales* 14 (1980), pp. 149-166 (included in Id., *Islam et religions*, Paris, 1986, chap. XII.); R. Freitag, *Seelenwanderung in der islamischen Häresie*, Berlin, 1985, pp. 128-159; 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) and his Followers”, *Studia Iranica* 28.2 (1999), pp. 237-254.

Coran II (al-Baqara), versets 1-4: "... *This Book, no doubt stains it*: the Book (*kitāb*) is 'Alī, exoterically and esoterically.<sup>74</sup> '... *is a guide for the pious*': this means that for the people of the *walāya*, the true piety is the love for 'Alī.<sup>75</sup> '... *who believe in the Unseen*': the Unseen here means three things: the advent of the Resurrector (*al-qā'im*), the Day of Resurrection and the Day of the Return (*yawm al-raġ'a*).<sup>76</sup> '... *and establish prayer*': true prayer is love for the Impeccables; the rest is mere metaphor. For a prayer performed without their love and their remembrance is neither recorded nor accepted. Prayer is love for them.<sup>77</sup> '... *and spend out of what We have provided for them*': the real gift is the teaching of the initiates on the virtues of the Progeny of Muḥammad, [i.e. the imams] (*ta'lim al-mu'minīn faḍā'il āl Muḥammad*) and the presentation of their qualities.<sup>78</sup> '... *and who believe in what has been revealed to you and what has been revealed before you*': this means what has been revealed regarding 'Alī and the meaning of 'Alī (*fī 'Alī wa fī ma'nāh*).<sup>79</sup>

This entire sequence insists strongly on the fact that without the love of the Friends or Allies of God, of the men and women who manifest the Names and Attributes of God on earth and fulfill the divine will, without their *walāya*, there is no real religion. Furthermore, as the supreme symbol of the *walāya*, the Divine Man, the deification of the Perfect Man or the humanization of God, 'Alī constitutes the center of gravity, the ultimate meaning and objective of all revelations.

Quran II (al-Baqara), verses 138 and 22. "*An anointing from God. Who can anoint better than God?*": Abū 'Abdallāh [i.e. imam Ja'far al-Šādiq] has declared: '(the anointing) designates our *walāya* and love towards us [i.e. the Impeccables]. This is the light of the initiate in this world and the next<sup>80</sup> ... God has

74 *Dth*, pp. 32 sqq. Aussi al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 59-60; al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 26, n° 1; al-Ḥaskānī, *Shawāhid al-tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 86, n° 106. On the application of the term *kitāb* à l'Homme Parfait, voir al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Šāfi fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, pp. 92 sq. In numerous other passages of *Dth*, 'Alī is identified with the Quran *kitāb*.

75 Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 26, n° 1; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn*, p. 18 et 340.

76 Cf. al-Astarābādī, *Ta'wīl al-āyāt al-zāhira*, p. 33, n° 1; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 24, p. 352, n° 69. On the Shi'i eschatological notion of *raġ'a* (return to life of a certain number of people before the universal Resurrection), see E. Kohlberg, *EI2* et M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v.

77 On the necessity of love/*walāya* in the performance of canonical duties by the faithful and their acceptance by God, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Notes à propos de la *walāya* imamate", *JAOIS* 122.4 (2002), pp. 722-741, 2nd part: "Question des Piliers de l'islam", pp. 726-728 (= *La Religion discrète*, chap. 7, pp. 183-186).

78 On the precise Shi'i technical meaning of the terms '*ilm/ta'lim* and '*imān/ mu'min*', see *Guide divin* and *Religion discrète*, index, s.v.

79 On the *walāya* and 'Alī, supreme symbol of the *walāya*, as ultimate objects of the divine revelations, see chap. 1 of the present work.

80 The word *šibgha*, twice used in this verse and which I have translated as "anointing" (its literal meaning is rather "tincture"), is a hapax and the understanding of its meaning has causes many problems for both Muslim exegetes as well as modern specialists.

considered those who love 'Alī as the real monotheist, for He has said: '*Do not attribute any associates to God*'. The associate here means the one who is similar. The one who gives 'Alī an associate does in fact give God an equal. Now, God has no equal; likewise 'Alī, as the Ally of God has none similar to him. Woe to those who compare him to Zurayq and Ghudar [i.e. 'Umar and Abū Bakr]; woe to those who, instead of the Guide of Truth, have chosen Pharaoh and Hāmān [i.e. Abū Bakr and 'Umar]."<sup>81</sup>

'Alī, the theophanic Ally of God, cannot be compared to anyone else. He is God's and Muḥammad's Chosen One. Those who have usurped his position and their followers have in fact broken away from the true religion of divine Unity, by removing from the leadership of the community the only real initiate to the religion of Muḥammad and thus his only legitimate successor.<sup>82</sup>

Quran III (Āl 'Imrān), verse 2: "*There is no God but He, the Living, the Sustainer*": this surah deals with 'Alī who is the Book and the Veil of God, his supreme Name leading to Him, the mysterious one, his efficient Order, his most noble Symbol, his solemn Announcement, his most grandiose Word."<sup>83</sup>

'Alī is here clearly presented in his divine theophanic dimension (*lāhūt*), as a place of manifestation of the Names of God (*mazhar, majlā*). He is the Book of God, the divine work which guides one to its Author, the Veil which hides and reveals at the same time, the supreme Name, endowed with unlimited powers, leading to the Named One, the divine Order which rules the universe.<sup>84</sup> He is described, as in almost all Shi'i commentaries, by Quranic expressions such as *al-mathal al-a'lā* ("the august symbol", Quran 16/al-Nahl:60), *al-naba' al-'azīm*

81 *Dth*, pp. 53-54. On the hadith of Ja'far, where 'Alī is subtly identified with God, see also al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 62, n° 109. The derogatory names of Zurayq, Ghudar and the rebels against God, Pharaoh and his evil advisor Hāmān, refer here to Abū Bakr and 'Umar, the latter often described to be the manipulator of the former (however the order of the derogative names is not always clear). On these derogative names and others, as applied to the historical enemies of 'Alī and of the 'Alids/Shi'a, and the practice of *sabb al-ṣaḥāba*, ("insulting the Companions of the Prophet"), see I. Goldziher, "Spottnamen der ersten Chalifen bei den Schi'iten", in Id., *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by J. De Somogyi, Hildesheim, 1967-73, vol. 4, pp. 291-305; A.S. Tritton, *Muslim Theology*, pp. 27 ff.; A. Arazi, "*Ilqām al-ḥajar li-man zakkā ṣābb Abī Bakr wa 'Umar* d'al-Suyūṭī ou le témoignage de l'insulteur des Compagnons", *JSAI* 10 (1987), pp. 211-287; M.M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, index s.v. *ṣaḥāba*, "vilification of."; and the excellent monograph by E. Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī Shī'i Views on the *ṣaḥāba*", *JSAI* 5 (1984), pp. 143-175 (= *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shī'ism*, Variorum, Aldershot, 1991, article n° 9).

82 Voir aussi *Dth*, pp. 56-57, the commentaries of the verses 208, 211, 256 and 257 of surah II.

83 *Dth*, pp. 59-60: *wa l-murād fi ḥādhih al-sūra 'Alī kitābuh wa ḥijābuh wa smuh al-a'ẓam al-marmūz al-maknūz wa amruh al-nāfidh wa mathaluh al-a'lā wa naba'uh al-'azīm wa kalimatuh al-kubrā*.

84 On the supreme Name of God, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *La Religion discrète*, index s.v. *al-ism al-a'ẓam, al-ism al-akbar*; on the Order, see chap. 6 of the present work.

(“the solemn announcement”, Quran 78/al-Naba’:2) and finally *al-kalima* (“the Word”, numerous occurrences) which is often associated with Jesus. These audacious assertions are notably illustrated by a number of sermons attributed to ‘Alī where he declares, in long series of declarations, his identity with God. These sermons remind one of the “paradoxical statements” (*shaṭaḥāt*) of the mystics, which are particularly prized by al-Bursī in his *Mashāriq*.<sup>85</sup>

Quran III (Āl ‘Imrān), verse 61: “... *Come! Let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves and let us sincerely invoke God’s curse upon the liars ...*”: the sons are al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn; by ‘women’, it is Fāṭima that is designated and by ‘ourselves’ ‘Alī. It is through them that the Prophet challenged his enemies with an ordeal trial. Now, the sons are the sons of ‘Alī, the woman is that of ‘Alī and the *self*, is ‘Alī himself. It is he who embraces the totality of the verse of the ordeal (*āyat al-mubāhala*). It is through him that God defies His enemies, that He proves the veracity of His Word, that He rectifies what has gone astray in His religion.”<sup>86</sup>

For the author, the verse of the Ordeal does not speak so much of all Five of the Mantle, as in the quasi totality of the interpretative Muslim tradition, be it Shī‘i or even Sunni, but rather of ‘Alī. In other words, it is in him that the sacred nature of the entire holy prophetic Family is concentrated.

Quran III (Āl ‘Imrān), verse 106: “*On the Day some faces will be bright while others dark. To the dark face people will be said: “Did you forsake after having believed?”: ‘You have forsaken ‘Alī after having believed in his walāya on the day of Ghadīr and after having pledged allegiance to him ...’* The Prophet has declared regarding this verse: ‘on the Day of Resurrection, my community will come back to life and will come forward under five banners. A first group will come forward under the banner of the Calf (*‘ijl*; an allusion to the biblical Golden Calf included in the Quran with some important differences) of this community [i.e. Abū Bakr or ‘Umar]. I shall ask it: what have you done with the Two Precious Objects (*al-thaqalayn*) that I entrusted you with?’ [see above footnote 44 and afferent text] They shall say: ‘Regarding the greater Precious Object [i.e. the Quran], we have torn it to pieces and falsified it (*mazzaqnāh<sup>u</sup> wa ḥarrafnāh<sup>u</sup>*) and as for the smaller one [i.e. the prophetic Family], we have hated it and made it an enemy’ [see above footnote 45 and afferent text]. I shall then reply: ‘Move away, leave thirsty [allusion to the thirst that is the characteristic trial on the Day of Resurrection] and with dark faces.’”

85 See here, chap. 4; T. Lawson, “*The Dawning Places ...*”, pp. 269 ff.

86 *Dth*, p. 63; cf. al-Ḥibārī, *Tafsīr*, p. 247, n° 12; al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 176 sq. On this verse, see P. Ballanfat and M. Yahia, “Ordealie”, in M.A. Amir-Moezzi (ed.), *Dictionnaire du Coran*, pp. 618-620; on this notion, see S. Schmucker, “Mubāhala”, *EI2*, vol. 7, p. 278.

The dialogue thus continues with the group of followers of the ‘Pharaoh of this community’, meaning either Abū Bakr or ‘Umar, those of the Samaritan (Sāmīrī, the corrupter of the Sons of Israel in the Quran 20/Tāhā: 85 *ff.*) of the community, meaning either ‘Uthmān or Mu‘āwiya, and finally those of the Khārijis. They all say that they betrayed the Quran, hated and assassinated the members of the Family of Muḥammad and they are repelled by him, crushed by thirst and their faces blackened. The prophetic hadith ends thus: “Then, will come towards me the people of the banner of the guide of pious, of the seal of Legatees [i.e. the imams of all times], the master of the initiates [*imām al-muttaqīn wa khātīm al-waṣīyyīn wa sayyid al-mu‘minīn* i.e. ‘Alī] and I shall ask them: ‘What have you done with the Two Precious Objects I have left with you after me?’ They shall reply: ‘The greater one [the Quran], we have obeyed it and we have followed it; as for the smaller one [the prophetic Family], we have cherished it and defended it until death’. I shall then tell them: ‘Quench your thirst in peace, with shining faces.’”<sup>87</sup>

Quran IV (al-Nisā’), verses 167, 168 and 170: “*Those who deny and put obstacles in the way of God*: according to Ibn ‘Abbās, the Way is ‘Alī ... ‘*Those who deny and are unjust regarding the right of the descendants of Muḥammad*’: according to Ibn ‘Abbās, that is how the verse had been revealed.<sup>88</sup> Then [God] identifies the *walāya* of ‘Alī with the Truth. [in the next verse]: ‘*O mankind! The messenger has come to you with the Truth from your Lord. Believe in it, it is better for you but you disbelieve*’: this means believe in the *walāya* of ‘Alī.”<sup>89</sup>

Quran VI (al-An‘ām), verse 160: ‘*Whoever brings a good deed will receive tenfold the like thereof...*’: “The good deed (*al-ḥasana*), is the profession of faith ‘no god but God’, faith in Muḥammad and love of the prophetic Family (*ḥubb ahl*

87 *Dth*, pp. 66-68. Cf. al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 109; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 30, pp. 240 *ff.* On the day of Ghadīr or the event of Ghadīr Khumm where, according to the Shi‘is, Muḥammad explicitly appointed ‘Alī as his successor, see the summa of al-Amīnī ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn, *al-Ghadīr*; L. Veccia Vaglieri, “Ghadīr Khumm”, *EI2*; M. Dakake, M. & A. Kazemi Moussavi, “Gadīr ḥomm: i. in Shi‘ite Literature and ii: Gadīr Festival”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 10, pp. 246-249; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Ghadīr Khumm”, *EI3*.

88 *Dth*, p. 74. The expression “this is how this verse has been revealed” (*hākadhā nazalat*) means that it is a different version from that of the official Quran: here indeed the sentence *regarding the rights of the descendants of Muḥammad* (*āl Muḥammad ḥaqqahum*) is an addition to the Vulgate; see also al-Sayyārī, *K. al-Qirā’āt*, n° 138, p. 39 (Arabic text), p. 106 (English text, for other sources). The author of *Dth* cites on numerous occasions the “original Quran” (for example Quran 2: 90, pp. 52-53; Quran 4:65, p. 76). See also Bar-Asher, “Variant Readings and Additions”, p. 56.

89 *Dth*, p. 74; in al-Sayyārī, the expression that ends the sequence, namely *fī walāyat* ‘Alī, is part of the verse (*op.cit.*, n° 139, p. 39 of the Arabic text; pp. 106-107 of the English text for numerous other sources that record the tradition); Bar-Asher, “Variant Readings and Additions”, p. 56.

*al-bayt*). And the bad action (*al-sayyi'a*), is to deny their *walāya* ... Hence the hadith of the Prophet: 'the love of 'Alī is a good action that no bad action can alter and the hatred of 'Alī is a bad action that no good action can redeem.'<sup>90</sup>

Quran VII (al-A'rāf), verse 181: '*And of those whom We created there is a community who guide with the Truth and establish justice there with ...*': 'The Messenger of God has declared: 'My community is divided into seventy-three branches of which seventy-two are condemned to the Fire [of Hell]. Only one branch moves towards the Garden [of Paradise] and it is the one composed by you, O 'Alī, and your followers [literally "your Shi'is", *shī'atuk*<sup>a</sup>], for you are never divided from what is true and your followers are never separated from you. Thus they are with what is true.'<sup>91</sup>

Quran VII (al-A'rāf), verse 143: '[*And when Moses came to Our appointed trust and his Lord had spoken unto him, he said:*] "*My Lord! Show me (Thy Self), that I may gaze upon Thee*" ['*Thou wilt not see Me, but gaze upon the mountain! If it stands still in its place, then thou wilt see Me*'].] *And when his Lord revealed (His) glory [on the mountain He sent it crashing down]*': 'The Quran thus declares that the holy Essence of God (*dhātih al-muqaddasa*) cannot be the object of ocular vision nor be within reach of thoughts. But at the same time the Book speaks of manifestation. Now, there is manifestation when there is form (*hay'a*) and aspect (*mathāl*). Then how can one speak of vision of what cannot be an object of vision? The solution to this riddle is in the use of the word 'Lord' (*rabb*) which can mean different things and whose qualifiers are here implied: what was manifested to Moses on the mountain was the Light (*nūr*) of his Lord, the Greatness (*ʿazama*) and the Radiance (*jalāl*) of his Lord. Now, Muḥammad and 'Alī are the Greatness and the Radiance. It is for this reason that the Commander of the initiates ['Alī] said: 'It was I who spoke to Moses from within the bush [literally "the tree", *al-shajara*]. I am that Light that manifested itself to him ...'<sup>92</sup>

What Moses perceives on the mountain and in the burning bush is not God in his transcendental essence but his immanent Face manifested through the Divine Man whose ultimate symbols are the metaphysical Muḥammad and 'Alī. We are here at the heart of Shi'i theology of the figure of the Imam in

90 *Dth*, p. 98; see also Ibn Shādhān, *Mī'at manqaba*, p. 96; al-Qundūzī, *Yanābī' al-mawadda*, vol. 2, p. 75; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 108, p. 99.

91 *Dth*, p. 99. According to the author, the Quranic verse, far from speaking of the Sunni Muslim community as a whole, as the "orthodox" exegesis claims, concerns only a minority within it, namely the followers of the divine Alliance (*walāya*) of which 'Alī is the ideal representation.

92 *Dth*, pp. 102-103.

equilibrium between agnosticism (*ta'tīl*) and assimilationism (*tashbih*).<sup>93</sup> The Essence of God (*dhāt*) can only be the object of a negative theology which is ultimately beyond any comprehension, intelligence or perception. This ever-hidden dimension of God is the Unknowable. But if things had remained so, no relationship, no recognition would have been possible between God, forever entrenched in his unfathomable abscondity, and all beings abandoned facing a metaphysical void. Theology would then only be a form of agnosticism and faith a vacancy. But God possesses another ontological level, that of the Names and Attributes (*asmā' wa ṣifāt*) which, in order to intervene effectively in Being, manifest themselves in theophanic Organs, Hand, Face, Side, Tongue, etc. of God, as described in the Quran. Here God is no longer unknowable, but is an unknown Being who aspires to be known. Now it is precisely for this reason that, far from any assimilationism making of God a being similar to man, these Organs are said to be metaphors of what manifests in the most radiant way possible what can be revealed in God, that is the Imam in the cosmic sense, the spiritual Perfect Man, the Guide of Light of whom Muḥammad and even so more 'Alī are names in the spiritual as well as in the material world. This Guidance of Light, vehicle of the revealed God, which is called, among other things, the *walāya*, is always present on this earth and endures through the ages by incarnating itself in the Allies or Friends of God (*walī*, pl. *awliyā'*) or by manifesting itself to them, revealing to them and through them to others what can be known of God. The imams, or more generally the Friends of God, are men and women who, by their existence and actions, materially prove the existence and intervention of God in the universe. Hence their title "Proof of God" (*ḥujja*, pl. *ḥujaj allāh*). Without them, God is a mere abstraction, the object of merely intellectual speculation or of theoretical spiritualities.

Hence the presence of 'Alī, lord of the *walāya* and Imam of the imams, in an infinite number of Shi'ī texts, as the supreme locus of manifestation of the divine attributes. He thus is the axis around which the theology of theophany turns and which serves as an antidote to what Corbin calls "arithmetical monotheism", the religion of an abstract god, purely speculative, the worship of whom can only be an illusion.<sup>94</sup> Shi'ism wills itself to be the religion of a living, "concrete" God; a God who intervenes effectively in everyday life, bringing transformation and salvation to those who seek to know Him. To approach

93 See on this subject the reflections of H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 1, "Le shī'isme duodécimain", *passim*, and of Ch. Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie islamique?*, Paris, 2011, Part 3, chapters VI to VIII.

94 H. Corbin, *Le paradoxe du monothéisme*, Paris, 1981 (posthumous work), *passim*. See also the subtle reflections on the subject by S. Ayada, *L'islam des théophanies. Une religion à l'épreuve de l'art*, Paris, 2010, *passim* and especially chapters 2 to 4 of the first part.

his devotees, this God manifests himself in his Friend, in the Imam, with his double dimension, spiritual divine (*lāhūt*) and material human (*nāsūt*).

Someone asked ‘Alī if he could see the God to whom he prayed. He replied: “I would not worship a God I could not see (*mā kunt<sup>u</sup> a’bud rabban lam arah<sup>u</sup>*)” to which he then added: “However the eyes of flesh cannot reach Him by their sight. It is the hearts that see Him through the realities of faith.”<sup>95</sup> We now know that this Face of God, which manifested itself to Moses, is the Imam, the ‘Alī of Light, who incarnates himself in the earthly divine Friend in order to transform him into a spiritual model and the mystical horizon of the faithful.

A disciple says to imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq: “Tell me if, on the Day of Resurrection, the faithful initiates (*mu’minūn*) would see God”. Ja‘far replied: “Yes, but they have already seen him well before the advent of that Day ... when God asked them: ‘Am I not your Lord’ and they replied ‘indeed’” [Quran 7/al-A‘rāf:172]. The disciple then says that his master remained silent for a long time and then declared: “The initiated faithful already see Him in this world before the Day of Resurrection. Do you not see Him yourself at this precise moment [in front of you, in my person] (*a last<sup>a</sup> tarāh<sup>u</sup> fī waqtik<sup>a</sup> hādihā*)?” The disciple: “May I be your ransom, may I report this teaching under your authority?” Ja‘far: “No, because a contrarian, ignorant of the profound meaning of these words, will use it to accuse us of assimilationism and infidelity; the vision of the heart is not similar to ocular vision.”<sup>96</sup>

#### 4 The Message of the ‘Personalized Commentaries’

Is there a secret teaching contained in the ‘personalized commentaries’ in general and in the *al-Durr al-thamīn* attributed to al-Bursī in particular? Is there a ‘subliminal message’ which the authors of this literary genre are trying to suggest to the faithful? It is obvious that the figures, positive or negative, identified directly, even explicitly mentioned by the divine Word (according to those believing in the thesis of the falsification) acquire, in the eyes of the

95 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, “Kitāb al-tawḥīd”, vol. 1, p. 131, chap. 9, n° 6; Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, chapter 8, n° 6, p. 109.

96 Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, chap. 8, n° 20, p. 117. It is interesting to note that the traditions are recorded in the chapter on monotheism, the unicity of God (*tawḥīd*). On the vision of the Imam through the heart see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, the excursus “La vision par le cœur”; Id., “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-Paris, 2003, pp. 97-124 (= *Religion discrète*, chap. 10).

faithful, a paradigmatic, emblematic dimension, polarised either positively or negatively. When God deigns to speak of the members of the Holy Family of the Prophet, of their friends or of their adversaries, all these figures become the protagonists of a sacred History of universal import: they are actors in the cosmic struggle between Good and Evil. They are raised to the level of symbols in the battlefield of History. They repeat and renew, as the Quran endlessly repeats, the struggle which prophets and saints of the past have had to engage in against the injustice and ignorance of their adversaries. The letter of the Quran (*tanzīl*), at least in its current version, does not permit a full understanding of this fundamental truth. It is the hermeneutic (*ta'wīl*) of the imam that allows it to be seen. The Forces of Good and the Forces of Evil on the one hand, the letter and the spirit of the Book on the other, these two doctrinal conceptions, the foundations of the literature of 'personalized exegesis' seem to pointing the way towards a decisive religious evolution: the first, as yet simple draft of what I have called elsewhere the 'double *Weltanschauung*' characteristic of Shi'ism: the dualistic vision and the dual vision, distinct yet at the same time inseparable and complementary.<sup>97</sup>

At this stage, the first vision seems to come down to a dualistic vision of humanity, according to which the universe is an immense battlefield where, on which the Creation, the people of Good and those of Evil have fought against each other, the different Allies of God (*walī*, plural *awlīyā'*), the prophets, the imams, the saints of all times and their followers on the one hand, their adversaries and their followers on the other. Adam and Iblīs, Abraham and Nemrod, Moses and Pharaoh, Muḥammad/'Alī and Abū Bakr/'Umar, are the protagonists in the long history of this struggle. This dualism derives from a 'theory of opposite' (*ḍidd*, pl. *addād*) illustrated by those fundamental 'pairs', imam/enemy of the imam (*imām/aduww al-imām*), 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*) or also *walāya/barā'a*, that is, sacred love towards the Allies of God and sacred distancing from their enemies.<sup>98</sup> The adversaries of the *walāya*, the forces of darkness resisted by *barā'a*, are not necessarily pagans or disbelievers. The Israelites who betrayed Moses by prostrating themselves before the Golden Calf, or the Companions of the Prophet who betrayed him by rejecting 'Alī, his sole legitimate successor chosen by him,

97 M.A. Amir-Moezzi & Ch. Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le Shi'isme?*, first chapter, pp. 27-40; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 3.

98 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Seul l'homme de Dieu est humain. Théologie et anthropologie mystique à travers l'exégèse imamite ancienne", *Arabica* 45 (1998), pp. 193-214 (= *La Religion discrète*, chap. 8; English translation in E. Kohlberg (ed.), *Shi'ism*, Aldershot, 2003, article 2).

are not non-Israelites or non-Muslims but those who reject the essential message of the founder of the religion, what Shi'ism calls the *walāya*, the love and authority of the Ally of God as a theophanic being. These ignorant people thus deprive religion of its deepest meaning and transform it into an instrument of power and violence. Indeed, during the Islamic period, the adversaries, the Enemies ('*aduww*, pl. *a'dā'*) were those who rejected the *walāya* of 'Alī and, subsequently, the imams descended from him. This is true of almost all the Companions of the Prophet, notably the first three caliphs, the Umayyads, the Abbassids and in general those whom Shi'is call 'the majority' (*al-akthar*) or 'the mass' (*al-āmma*), that is, those who will finally be called 'the Sunnis.'<sup>99</sup>

This dualistic conception, very ancient in 'Alid circles, who were gradually called Shi'is, is of course communicated by the 'personalized commentaries', including that of al-Bursī, the inheritor of a long textual tradition whose doctrinal consistency and narrative procedures are remarkably coherent across the centuries. As we have seen, the negative expressions and concepts of the Quranic text are almost systematically associated with the adversaries, real or supposed, of Muḥammad and 'Alī, as affirmative expressions and ideas are associated almost in every case with 'Alī, members of his family, or his followers.

One of the esoteric layers of this type of Quranic commentary is to justify and confirm the dualistic vision of humanity in the minds of the faithful by inscribing it into the very fabric of the Holy Book.

The second layer would seem play exactly the same role with regard to the second "vision of the world": the dual conception of the Word of God. According to it, Revelation has two levels: the letter, its obvious, literal, exoteric dimension, and the spirit, its hidden, secret, esoteric dimension. The lawgiver prophets, the Messengers (*nabī*, pl. *anbiyā'* or more often *rasūl*, pl. *rusul*), are the vehicles of the letter of the Divine Word, addressed to the majority of faithful, whereas their imams are the messengers of the spirit of the same Word, which are taught to a minority of initiates. This dialectic, based on the complementary couple of prophet and imam, the *nubuwwa* (status of prophecy) and the *walāya* (status of the divine Alliance or imamate), the letter of revelation and its spiritual hermeneutics (*tanzīl/ta'wīl*), is at the center of a dual vision of Holy Scripture in which each divine Word has at least two levels of meaning: a manifest, exoteric (*ẓāhir*) level, concealing a secret and esoteric (*bāṭin*) level, the hidden giving meaning to the manifest. As we have seen, from the earliest Shi'i exegetical works, the personalized *Tafsīrs* – the work attributed to al-Bursī belongs to that tradition – the essential character of the Quran's

99 The attitude of the Shi'is towards their adversaries is crystallized in the notion of *sabb al-ṣaḥāba* ("cursing the Companions"); see above, footnote 81.

esoteric dimension lies in the identification of the historical figures to whom the revealed text makes explicit or implicit allusion.

So one may propose the following hypothesis: it may very well be that this dual conception of the divine Word was the consequence of the belief in the falsification and censoring of the Quran. The complete original text, with the names of the all the protagonists in their original places in the Revelation (Quran), was clear enough to require no commentary. Remember the saying, discussed above, of Ja'far al-Šādiq: "If the Quran could be read as it had been revealed, not even two people would have differed about it."<sup>100</sup> At this time, the letter and the spirit had no separate existence: the letter was the spirit and the spirit was the letter. The clarity of the letter and the radiance of the spirit were one and the same illumination. It was the falsification that destroyed this unity and made commentary indispensable. This dual conception of Scripture, with Hadith as the necessary commentary on the Quran, was the result of the falsification. One can reasonably conclude that both points of view: that the falsification made the Quran unreadable and thus in need of hermeneutics (a conception which is probably earlier); and that the Quran was intrinsically enigmatic and needed hermeneutics from the outset, were both, in differing degrees circulating in Shi'i circles of the 3rd/9th century. Indeed, perhaps the popularity of both was the result of their antiquity. Nevertheless, with time and the progressive marginalization of the thesis of the falsification from the Buyyid period onwards, the first theory was gradually discarded and became a minority view.<sup>101</sup>

It is to be noted that, in this doctrinal context, the figure of 'Alī, which appears in an impressive number of verses, transcends the historical person and becomes a symbol, both of the Imam *par excellence*, the sovereign guide of all the imams of all times, and of their nature and function, which is the Divine Alliance (*walāya*).

We have already seen what a vital relationship ties the Revelation to the figure of the imam who, as the messenger of the spirit, is the tongue of the Book, without which the Book would remain "silent". Without the explanation of the imam, holy Scripture remains a closed Word, unintelligible and therefore inapplicable. 'Alī is the symbol of this 'master of hermeneutics' (*ṣāhib al-ta'wīl*) and the *walī*/imam, a conception that countless traditions and documents have enriched. The first imam of the Shi'is is also the supreme symbol

100 See above footnote 42 the afferent text.

101 I have devoted numerous studies to the Buyyid turning point of Imamism; see the latest one "Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (m. 413/1022) et la question de la falsification du Coran", first part.

and personification of the *walāya*, a doctrine which, over the centuries, would acquire more substance.<sup>102</sup> The Imam also becomes the subject as well as the object of hermeneutics, its subject, since he is the master initiated into the hidden meaning of the Word, and its object, as he himself is its ultimate secret, which is the Divine Man.

Both concepts are intimately linked. Scripture has a hidden dimension. Its revelation casts light on the struggle between Good and Evil by identifying the opposing protagonists, the Allies of God and their enemies. In consequence, a new relationship is established between Quranic interpretation, the Hadith, ethics and theology. This itself is the consequence of an obvious fact: Islam was born into and grew up in a violent environment, a period of civil wars which lasted several centuries. The first theology of Islam was born in and of those conflicts. The unending discussion between Shi'is, Murji'is, Qadaris, Mu'tazilis, Jabris ... revolve principally around such vital questions as: Why are we fighting one another ceaselessly? What is the cause of all this violence: divine will or human actions? Wherein lies legitimate authority? Does this authority derive from God or from the choice of men? In other words: is there determinism or free will? Who is the just guide, who the unjust ruler? Who is the believer and who the unbeliever? How do we decide what is true faith, what apostasy, what unbelief? Where are the answers to these problems...?<sup>103</sup> Shi'i religious thought took shape in the same troubled world as the rest of Islam and its replies to these questions are coloured by its perception of the historical events of its beginnings and their implications: treason against the prophet Muḥammad and his message, conspiracy against his successor 'Alī, disfiguration of his Faith and falsification of his Book, rendered incomprehensible in its letter, and, as its consequence, the necessity of hermeneutics as a means to reach its spirit and thus its intelligibility.

102 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Notes à propos de la *walāya* imamite".

103 The most complete overview of these discussions in their earliest phase is offered by J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, Berlin-New York, 1991-1997 and more recently in the new master work of the same scholar: *Der Eine und das Andere. Beobachtungen an islamischen häresiographischen Texten*, Berlin-New York, 2011.

# Icon and Contemplation: ‘Alī as the Face of God and Medium of Meditation

## 1 Portative Icons

In common with all religious cultures, Shi‘ism has a rich tradition of popular art.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I will try to show that, in addition to its artistic riches, this tradition can be remarkably complex and will lead us to consider matters which are often thought to be the exclusive domain of learned theologians.

In the very varied panoply of Shi‘i pictorial art, the portable icon (*shamā’il jībī*, literally ‘the pocket pious image’ in Persian) seems to have a special role. Its name, *shamā’il*, is also that of the large mural portraits of saints, such as those of the so-called ‘coffee house’ paintings and those on the painted fabrics (literally ‘screen’ or ‘veil’, *pardeh*) of the itinerant narrators of epic and religious stories (*naqqāl, pardehdār*).<sup>2</sup> The oldest known specimens of the portable *shamā’il* probably date from the eighteenth century. They had their origins in Iran and India, where they are more widespread than elsewhere, but they can also be found in other Shi‘i regions.<sup>3</sup>

1 I hereby wish to wholeheartedly thank my colleague Mrs Živa Vesel for kindly permitting me to study her collection of Shi‘i icons at the beginning of the 2000s.

2 This Persian meaning of the Arabic term *shamā’il* (*shamā’el*, to be more precise, according to Persian pronunciation) is surprising. It is probably an indirect usage of the Arab feminine plural of the word *shimāl*, which means, amongst other things, clothes (especially coat and turban), as well as innate quality or noble character (for this meaning, our word is also the plural of *shamīla*). It is perhaps for this reason that in Persian one very often uses the pair *shikl* and *shamā’il* to describe either the physical form and moral qualities or the physical form and the clothes that cover it. In this study, the word is considered to be, as in Persian, masculine singular.

3 It is, however, possible that this kind of object, showing the portraits of Shi‘i saints, became particularly popular during or after the reign of the Qajar sovereign Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah (1848-1896), who made great efforts to promote religious painting. He was particularly devoted to the image of the First Imam. See, for example, A. de Gobineau *Trois ans en Asie, Paris*, 1859, p. 316 ff.; H. Massé, “L’imagerie populaire de l’Iran”, *Arts Asiatiques* 7-3 (1960), pp. 163-178.

The portable *shamā'il* is a devotional object believed to bring benediction and protection to its owner. It is a rectangular panel made entirely of wood, or wood covered in painted *papier mâché*, measuring about 15-20 cm × 10 cm. It can also be in the form of an altarpiece consisting of two or more panels, occasionally concealing a mirror. It always has a painted polychrome image (*shamā'il*) presumed to be of holy figures of Shi'ism, almost always that of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, all the panels I have seen to date had an image of 'Alī, either alone or accompanied by one or more other figures, especially the Prophet Muḥammad; his two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn; his wife, Fāṭima, who always wears a veil over her face; his servant, Qanbar; or just a lion (an expression of that legendary courage which earned him the sobriquets *Asadullāh*, lion of God, or *Ḥaydar*, lion). The faces of the masculine characters are often unveiled and clearly painted, or occasionally veiled, that is to say, with the faces not outlined.<sup>5</sup> Very often, 'Alī is seated, his head encircled by a halo, and with his famous sword, Dhū l-faḳār, across his knees.<sup>6</sup>

4 Regarding the myth of the complete prohibition of human portrayal in Islam, false but nonetheless persistent, see the classical study of T. Arnold, *Painting in Islam. A Study of the Place of Pictorial Art in Muslim Culture*. 2nd ed. New York, 1965, pp. 6 ff.; also the beautifully written pages by A.S. Melikian-Chirvani, "L'islam, le verbe et l'image", in F. Boespflug et N. Lossky (éds.), *Nicée II, 787-1987: douze siècles d'images religieuses. Actes du colloque Nicée II, Collège de France, 2-4 octobre 1986*, Paris, 1987, pp. 89-117. For a broader discussion of the mediaeval period, see M. Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam*, Paris, 2004, and for an analysis covering the contemporary period see B. Heyberger et S. Naef (eds.), *La multiplication des images en pays d'islam*, Würzburg, 2003; S. Naef, *Y a-t-il une "question de l'image" en islam?*, Paris 2004; and now concerning Shi'ism see F. Suleman (ed.), *People of the Prophet's House. Artistic and Ritual Expressions of Shi'i Islam*, London, 2015.

5 On the question of veiling and unveiling figures in Islamic images, see the relevant comments of R. Milstein, "Light, Fire and the Sun in Islamic Painting", in M. Sharon (ed.), *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in honour of Professor David Ayalon*, Jerusalem-Leiden, pp. 533-552.

6 On the pronunciation *faḳār* and not the more conventional *fiḳār*, see Abū 'Ubayd al-Bakrī, *Mu'jam mā sta'jam*, ed. M. al-Saqqā, Cairo 1364-1371/1945-1951, vol. I, p. 156 and vol. III, p. 1026. The word literally means "possessor of a spine", probably meaning 'double-edged'. This is perhaps why, in iconography, 'Alī's sword is drawn strangely; with a blade whose extremity is divided into two! Regarding this sword, which was, according to tradition, brought by the angel Gabriel to Muḥammad, who then handed it over to 'Alī, see, for example, al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, ed. M. Kūčebāghī, Tabriz s.d. (circa 1960), 2nd ed., section 4 of 4th chapter; al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī*, ed. J. Muṣṭafawī, Tehran s.d., 4 vols., "kitāb al-ḥujja", bāb mā 'ind al-a'imma min silāḥ rasūl allāh, vol. I, p. 337 ff.

Figure 1, where we see ‘Alī and his two sons, and figure 2 are very typical of these *shamā’īl*. On the first panel, the image is surrounded by mystical poems. At the top: *ey shīr e khodā ...* (‘O lion of God ...’ – i.e. ‘Alī; the rest is faded). At the bottom: *dar hā ye omīd bar rokham baste shodeh* (‘The doors of hope have closed before me’). To the right: *ey sāheb e Dhū l-faqār e* (instead of *o/va*) *qanbar fathī* (‘O Master of Dhū l-faqār of – instead of “and of” – Qanbar, [grant me] an opening/inspiration’). To the left: (the beginning is faded) ... *goshā ye dar e Khaybar fathī* (‘O you who opened the door of Khaybar – famous battle of ‘Alī – [grant me] an opening/inspiration’). The text is a quatrain attributed to the famous mystic of Khurāsān, Abū Sa’īd Abū l-Khayr (d. 440/1048):

O lion of God, Prince Lion (‘Alī’s sobriquet) [grant me] an opening/  
 inspiration,  
 O you who conquered the fortress of Khaybar by opening its door,  
 The doors of hope have closed before me,  
 O Master of Dhū l-faqār and of Qanbar, [grant me] an opening/ inspiration.

*Ey shīr-e khodā amīr-e haydar fathī*  
*Vey ḥalqe goshā-ye dar e Khaybar fathī*  
*Dar hā-ye omīd bar rokham baste shodeh*  
*Ey sāheb-e Dho l-faqār o Qanbar fathī<sup>7</sup>*

The text begins at the top of the panel and continues in an anticlockwise direction. Finally, notice that the halo surrounding the saints’ heads on the first panel is circular, whereas it is in the shape of a flame on the second.<sup>8</sup>

7 See *Sokhanān-e manzūm-e Abū Sa’īd Abū l-Khayr*, ed. S. Nafisi, Tehran, 1334 solar/1956, p. 90, quatrain n° 615. Obviously the poet is playing on the double meaning of the Arab word *fathī*: victory (an allusion to the victorious character of the First Imam in combat) and opening/inspiration (in reference to the latter’s role as an initiatory guide). Regarding the image of ‘Alī as lion see in P. Khosronejad (ed), *The Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shi’ism. Iconography and Religious Devotion in Shi’i Islam*, London, 2012, the following articles: T. Zarccone, “The Lion of Ali in Anatolia: History, Symbolism and Iconology” (pp. 104-121); R. Shani, “Calligraphic Lions Symbolising the Esoteric Dimension of ‘Alī’s Nature” (pp. 122-158); F. Suleman, “The Iconography of Ali as the Lion of God in Shi’i Art and Material Culture” (pp. 215-232).

8 Pieces of the Vesel collection (see below). On the image in general and ‘Alī’s effigies in Shi’ism, see R. Paret “Das islamische Bildverbot und die Schia”, in E. von Graf (ed.), *Festschrift Werner Caskel*. Leiden, 1968, pp. 224-232; see also I. Flaskerund, *Visualising Belief and Piety in Iranian Shiism*, London, 2010. For a discussion of the two shapes of the halo and the underlying Sassanid and Christian influences, see R. Milstein, “Light, Fire and the Sun in Islamic



FIGURE 1  
 Watercolour on paper (13,5 × 6,5 cm), inv. no. 2003, 197, 5 and 10  
 © D. ADAM, MUCEM, 2005

As far as I am aware, the portative *shamā'il*, a popular devotional object, has not so far been mentioned in critical art studies. Reference works such as Samuel R. Peterson's *Shi'ism and Late Iranian Arts*; Maria Vittoria Fontana's

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Painting", pp. 537-538; A. Fodor, "A Group of Iraqi Arm Amulets", *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 5-6 (1987-88), pp. 266-277; Id., "Types of Shi'ite Amulets from Iraq", in F. De Jong (ed.), *Shia Islam*, Utrecht, 1992, pp. 124-134.



FIGURE 2 Watercolour on paper (13.5 × 6.5 cm), inv. no. 2003, 197, 5 and 10  
© D. ADAM, MUCEM, 2005

*Iconografia dell'Ahl al-bayt. Immagini di arte persiana dal XII al XX secolo*; Leyla S. Diba and Maryam Ekhtiyar's *Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar Epoch, 1785-1925*, or Pierre Centlivres and Micheline Centlivres-Demont's *Imageries populaires en Islam* and even monographs such as those of Peter Chelkowski or 'Alī Bolūkbāshī, ignore it.<sup>9</sup> The present study makes no claim to filling this gap, but does hope to examine some possible uses of the object in question.

## 2 "The Vision by the Heart"

In the summer of 1983, in Shiraz, a dervish of the Sufi brotherhood of the Dhahabiyya showed me one of the panels, calling it a 'pocket *shamā'il*'. It was the first time I had seen one. He told me it was one of a group of spiritual objects, generally called the dervishes' *waṣla*, which some members of the fraternity must have in their keeping. It is used as an aid to a secret contemplative exercise known as the *vejhe* (from *wijha* in Arabic, see below). The adept must focus his eyes on the image of 'Alī, while at the same time concentrating on his own heart and reciting the *dhikr-e 'Alī*, that is, tirelessly repeating the name of the first imam, which is also one of the names of God. The goal is to achieve contemplation of the 'interior imam', within the heart of the initiate, in the form of light (*imām-e nūrānī*, literally 'Imam of Light', or *nūrāniyyat-e imām*, 'the luminous radiance of the imam'). Finally, the mystic added that this practice is required only of novice dervishes, those who are as yet forbidden to concentrate on the mental image of the face of the order's current master, because they might lapse into 'idolatry', into the 'cult of the master', and also because, without a physical support (the icon), they are incapable of visualising 'the face of Light' of the imam. So they are given these portraits of 'Alī, the archetypal imam, to use as an aid for visualisation, until they become adept at doing without it.<sup>10</sup>

9 M.J. Rogers, "The Genesis of Safawid Religious Painting", *Iran* 8 (1970), pp. 121-141; S.R. Peterson, *Shi'ism and Late Iranian Arts*, doctoral thesis, New York University, 1981; P. Chelkowski, "Narrative Painting and Painting Recitation in Qajar Iran", *Muqarnas* 6 (1989), pp. 98-111; M.V. Fontana, *Iconografia dell'Ahl al-bayt. Immagini di arte persiana dal XII al XX secolo*, Naples, 1994; P. et M. Centlivres, *Imageries populaires en Islam*, Geneva, 1997; L.S. Diba and M. Ekhtiyar (eds.), *Royal Persian Paintings: the Qajar Epoch, 1785-1925*, London, 1998; 'A. Bolūkbāshī, 'Shamā'il negāri dar ḥawze-ye honar hā-ye 'amme-ye Irān', *Honar: ketāb-e māh*, special n° about 'Alī in popular art, 31-32 (2001), pp. 3-7; M. Mohammad-Zadeh, *L'iconographie chiite dans l'Iran des Qâdjârs: émergence, sources et développement*. doctoral thesis, École Pratique des Hautes Études (Sorbonne) and University of Geneva, 2008. The list is obviously not exhaustive.

10 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Visions d'Imams en mystique duodécimaine moderne et contemporaine (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine VIII)", in E. Chaumont *et al.* (eds.) *Autour*

The Shirazi dervish's revelations about the *shamā'il* interested me profoundly. Indeed, what had struck me at first sight was the posture of 'Alī holding his sword: kneeling, forearms crossed so that each hand rests on the opposite thigh; this is one of the typical positions of the Sufi *dhikr* practice. However, despite numerous enquiries, I have not been able to find any written confirmation, or even another oral statement, of this initiatory usage of the portable *shamā'il*. Even other members of the same Dhahabiyya brotherhood of my acquaintance declined to tell me anything about their practice of *vejhe* and of any material aids to it.

Several years later, in the course of my university research in Paris, I was able to confirm that the *vejhe* exercise has very ancient roots in the spiritual practice of 'vision by the heart' (*al-ru'ya bi-l-qalb*). Its theological, anthropological and eschatological content had been allusively revealed by compilers of Shi'i hadiths from as far back as al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī or Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq, from the third/ninth to the fourth/tenth centuries. This encouraged me to extend my research beyond the old corpus of research and to study the persistence of the practice of 'vision by the heart' in Shi'i mysticism, precisely in the literature of Sufi Imami brotherhoods in modern and contemporary times. The results of these studies have now been published in several works. They could perhaps be usefully consulted for a better understanding of what follows.<sup>11</sup>

In the numerous passages on the practice of 'vision by the heart' in those Dhahabi works which I have been able to consult, I have found no explicit mention of the *vejhe* exercise, nor of the portable *shamā'il* as an aid to contemplation. But two finds dating from the 2000s have enabled me to link my studies of doctrinal texts to the revelations of the dervish from Shiraz.

The first of these finds is that, thanks to the kindness of some old Dhahabi acquaintances, I was given access to a document from inside this brotherhood, aptly entitled 'What is *vejhe*?' The copy of the document I was given is from pages 150-160 of a much larger one which would appear to be a manual of Dhahabi practices and beliefs, written, it would seem, by the present master (2010) of the Dhahabiyya Aḥmadiyya, Dr. Ganjavīyān, or perhaps to his dictation.

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*du regard: mélanges Gimaret*, Louvain, 2003, pp. 108-109 (now M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *La religion discrète*, pp. 263-264).

11 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 112-145; Id., "La vision par le cœur dans l'islam Shi'ite", *Connaissance des religions*, n° spécial 57-59 (1999), pp. 146-169 (updated and complemented version of earlier study); Id., "Visions d'Imams ..." (see previous footnote).

The second find was a group of 14 portable *shamā'il* bought in a Tehran market by my colleague and Iran specialist from the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Mrs Živa Vesel, who kindly permitted me to study parts of her collection in the early 2000s.<sup>12</sup> We already know two of the *shamā'il* of this group (Figures 1 and 2). A third piece from this collection appears to have characteristics very relevant to the practice of *vejhe*, and are a strong confirmation of what the Iranian dervish told me.

By way of introduction to a more detailed examination of these two finds, I will briefly summarize earlier recorded studies of the Shi'ī meditational practice of 'vision by the heart' and the role of 'Alī as an object of meditation.<sup>13</sup>

The pairing *zāhīr/bāṭin* (manifest/secret or exoteric/esoteric), omnipresent in Shi'ism, is naturally the subject of theology as well.<sup>14</sup> God himself exists on two ontological levels: that of the Essence (*dhāt*), the secret, non-manifest level, his unknowable Face; and that of the Names and Attributes (*asmā' wa ṣifāt*), God's revealed Face. The revealed Face is manifested in the archetypal ideal 'locus' of theophany (*mazhar, majlā*), which is the Imam, in the cosmic and metaphysical sense.<sup>15</sup> The unfathomable Essence of God can absolutely not be the object of the vision; on the other hand, the Names of God, revealed through the Imam, can be seen, not by the physical eye, but, thanks to the revelation of the light of the imam, 'in' or 'by' the heart (these are the two meanings of the particle *bi* in the expression *al-ru'ya bi-l-qalb*).<sup>16</sup> In this secret spiritual

12 On this collection and others on popular Shi'ī art, graciously offered by Živa Vesel to the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM) in Marseille, see now L. Kleiber, "Expression populaire et dévotion Shi'ite", *La Revue des Musées de France. Revue du Louvre* 4 (octobre 2006), pp. 64-71.

13 See studies referenced in footnotes 10 and 11.

14 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Du droit à la théologie: les niveaux de réalité dans le Shi'isme duodécimain", *Cahiers du Groupe d'Études Spirituelles Comparées (GESC)* 5; *L'Esprit et la Nature*, Actes du colloque de Paris, 11-12 mai 1996, Milan – Paris, 1997, pp. 37-63; D. De Smet, "Au-delà de l'apparent: les notions de *zāhīr* et *bāṭin* dans l'ésotérisme musulman", *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 25 (1994), pp. 197-220.

15 See here chap. 4.

16 See M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 112-145; also G. Vajda, "Le problème de la vision de Dieu (*ru'ya*) d'après quelques auteurs ši'ites duodécimains", in *Le ši'isme imāmīte*. Actes du colloque de Strasbourg, mai 1968, Paris, 1970, pp. 31-53; this study, while alluding to the vision by the heart (pp. 44-45), only addresses the first part of this theological issue, the impossibility of the vision of the Divine Essence. In sum, the distinction between the two ontological levels of God, and hence the two complementary parts of the issue of vision, is not considered. See now the synthesis of J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 vols., Berlin – New York, 1991-1997, vol. 5 (1993), pp. 83ff.; on its practice in Sunni Sufism see A. Ventura, "La presenza divina nel cuore", *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 3 (1985), pp. 63-72; Id., "L'invocazione del cuore", in B.M. Amoretti et L. Rostagno (éds.), *Yād Nāma in memoria*

practice, which makes of the initiated follower ‘the believer whose heart has been tested by God for the faith’ (*al-mu’min qad imtaḥana llāhu qalbahu li-l-īmān*), the vision of the luminous face of the imam in the heart is equivalent to the contemplation of God’s revealed Face. However, everywhere in esoteric Shi’i literature, ‘Alī is declared to be the supreme vehicle of the cosmic Imam, the highest instance of the manifestation of God.<sup>17</sup> In this theosophic imamology, ‘Alī is naturally the focus of contemplative practices. Two hadiths, which ceaselessly mention mystical works when they address this matter of attaining the vision of God through the vision of the Imam, will suffice to illustrate this. First, the following text, attributed to the Prophet, is recorded in groups of hadiths that are considered an authority on the matter: ‘Looking at the face of ‘Alī is an act of religious adoration; remembering him is an act of religious adoration’ (*al-naẓar ilā wajh ‘Alī ‘ibāda wa dhikruhu ‘ibāda*).<sup>18</sup> Next is the hadith attributed to the first imam himself, which is otherwise to be found mostly in Shi’i mystical sources: ‘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 faithful believer whose heart has been tested by God for the faith’ (*ma’rifatī bi-l-nūrāniyya ma’rifatu llāh wa ma’rifatu llāh ma’rifatī bi-l-nūrāniyya man ‘arafanī bi-l-nūrāniyya kāna mu’minan imtaḥana llāhu qalbahu li-l-īmān*).<sup>19</sup> The light which can be ‘seen’ in or by the heart is thus attributed to the face of ‘Alī, the archetypal theophanic being. These initiatory statements on the role of the gaze fixed on a sacred

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*di Alessandro Bausani*, Rome, 1991, pp. 475-485; G. Gobillot and P. Ballanfat, “Le cœur et la vie spirituelle chez les mystiques musulmans”, *Connaissance des religions* 57-59 (1999), pp. 170-204.

17 See here chap. 4.

18 See for example Ibn Bābūya, *al-Amālī* (= *al-Majālīs*), ed. M.B. Kamare’ī, Tehran, reprint. 1404/1984, majlis 28, hadith n° 9, p. 138 and majlis 58, hadith n° 1, p. 361 (without mention of the *dhikr* ‘Alī); Id., *Kitāb man lā yaḥḍuruhu l-faḡh*, ed. al-Mūsawī al-Kharsān, s.l. 1390/1970, 5th ed., chap. 158, hadith n° 2145. Note that the word *dhikr*, translated here as “to remember”, also means the famous mystical practice of the rhythmic repetition of a word or expression; in this case *dhikr* ‘Alī in the hadith means for a Sufi the repetition of the name of ‘Alī. Note that it is on the strength of this type of narration that a religious authority like ayatollah Nakhjavāni justifies the permissibility of the art of portraying Shi’i saints; Āyatullāh Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Alī Nakhjavāni, *al-Du’ā’ al-Ḥusaynī*, Qumm, 1406/1985, pp. 86 ff. (cited by Mohammad-Zadeh, *L’iconographie chiite dans l’Iran des Qājārs* – see above footnote 9 – pp. 100-101).

19 Al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 26, pp. 1-7; al-Bursī, *Mashāriḡ al-anwār*, chapitre 145, pp. 303-307; see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *La religion discrète*, pp. 268-270 and now M. Karbalā’ī, *Sharḥ va taḥlīl-e ma’rifat bi-nūrāniyyat-e Amīr al-mu’minīn*, in Faṭḥ ‘Alī b. Mīrzā Bābā Dhahabī Shīrāzī, *Risāla dar bayān-e ma’rifat be nūrāniyyat-e Amīr al-mu’minīn* (in Persian), ed. Ḥ. Naṣīr Bāghbān, Tehran, 1396 solar/2017, pp. 93-177; S. Rūzvi, “Esoteric Shi’i Islam”, pp. 229-230.

figure, and elaborated in a complex and subtle theology of the Imam, have equally penetrated ‘popular’ religious beliefs. For example, there are several portraits of ‘Alī from the Qajar era, some of which show him accompanied by his two sons, in the museum of Saint Ma’šūma’s mausoleum in Qumm, and also in the Imam Ali museum in Tehran, where one finds inscriptions in Persian in this genre, purporting to be the words of the first imam: ‘He who regards and kisses my portrait (*shamā’il*) every day after the dawn prayer, it is as if he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca sixty times’; and ‘He who constantly contemplates my portrait will avoid difficulties of every sort; and he who doubts it is not a believer’.

### 3 “What Is *Vejhe*?”

(What follows is the translation, with commentaries, of an anonymous Dhahabi treatise. The notes and the texts in brackets are mine; digressions with little or no relevance to the topic and eulogistic expressions are not translated):

Greetings to the Face of God who brings peace and security to he who is faithful<sup>20</sup> [in Arabic followed by a free translation in Persian. The text continues in Persian]. There is no doubt that the last Prophet and each of the Impeccables [i.e. Fāṭima and the Twelve Imams] are each the most noble Face of God as well as His most dazzling proof of existence, His hand of power, His all-seeing eye and His all-hearing ear. With all that has been written before, in the book of the *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*<sup>21</sup> and other trustworthy sources, what has just been said needs no supplementary proof. But to derive blessings from it, a text will be quoted; it is taken from the *‘Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* by Shaykh Ṣadūq [Ibn Bābūya, d. 381/991], one of the surest sources of the hadith [see below]. Now, as regards the meaning of the *vejhe*,<sup>22</sup> one of the thorniest questions on the initiatory path and in mystic knowledge, a saying of Imam [‘Alī], the Commander

20 *Al-salām ‘alā wajh allāh alladhī man āmana bihi amina*. The expression concerns ‘Alī, called, as in many other places, the Face of God. The expression is found, for example, in ‘Alī’s *Ziyāra* (prayers recited during the pilgrimage on the tomb of the first imam in Najaf in Iraq; innumerable editions), *ziyāra* no. 7.

21 The book is quoted above in footnote 6. On this work and its author see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (m. 290/902-03) et son *Kitāb baṣā’ir al-darajāt*”, *Journal Asiatique* 280/3-4 (1992), pp. 221-250 (a more extended version is to be found in id., *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 4); A.J. Newman: *The Formative Period of Twelver Shīsm: Hadith as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad*. Richmond, 2000, chapters 5 and 7.

22 The word *vejhe* is the Persian pronunciation of the Arab word *wijha*, which literally means, like *wajh*, ‘face of a body, of an object’. It also has the Quranic meaning of ‘the direction in which the object of prayer is found’ (Quran 2: 148: *wa li-kulli wijhatun huwa*

of the Believers, a decisive proof, will be added. And now, the hadith reported by Shaykh Ṣadūq in the *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, on the nature of the Master of the *walāya* [i.e. ‘Alī]<sup>23</sup> and the fact that he is the Face of God: [The Arabic text of the hadith and its Persian translation follows. The beginning of the long list of hadith transmitters has been omitted, as not relevant to the subject.] ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā [the eighth imam] records from his father Mūsā b. Ja‘far ... [*the seventh imam; the list goes on up the lineage of the imams*] ... who has it from his father ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, from the Prophet, from the angels Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel, who has it from God, who declares:

I am God. There is no god save from Me. I created all creatures with my power. I chose from amongst them my messengers and from amongst them I chose Muḥammad as friend, intimate confidant and chosen one, and charged him to be an envoy to my creatures. And I chose ‘Alī to [complete the mission of] Muḥammad, I chose him as his brother, successor, lieutenant and messenger of his work after him. I chose ‘Alī as my apostolic vicar to my faithful, to explain to them my Book, so that he will judge them according to my justice. I appointed ‘Alī to be the friend who guides [my people] away from distraction, as my threshold, as my abode where he who enters is saved from fire, as my fortress where I protect who takes refuge there from every bad thing in this world and the next. I have made of ‘Alī my face; I will never turn my face away from him who turns his towards ‘Alī. I have made of ‘Alī the proof of my existence in the heavens and on earth for every one of my creatures in such wise that I will accept none of their acts if they do not add their faith in the *walāya* of ‘Alī and at the same time in Muḥammad’s, my messenger’s. ‘Alī is my hand, stretched out over my servants; he is the blessing with which I gratify those I love. The servants whom I love, and whom I have taken into my benevolence, I grant them the *walāya* and the friendship of ‘Alī, while those who suffer my anger, suffer it because they have ignored ‘Alī, his *walāya* and his friendship. I swear by my glory and my greatness that he who loves ‘Alī will be protected from fire and I will welcome him into my garden; he who turns away from the love of ‘Alī will know my anger and I will plunge him into the Fire, what an evil destiny!<sup>24</sup>

[The text continues in Persian.] In the Quranic commentary *Burhān*, in the exegesis of the verse 88 of surah 28, ‘Everything is mortal except his face’, imam Ṣādiq [the sixth imam] writes: ‘We, the people of the Prophet’s family, we are that

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*muwallihā*, ‘For everyone a direction in which to turn in prayer’). The use of the word in Dhahabi practice doubtless includes the two meanings.

23 Regarding the *walāya*, a central notion in Shi‘i faith, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *La Religion discrète*, chap. 7.

24 Ibn Bābūya, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, ed. M. Ḥ. Lājevardī, Tehran 1378/1958, chap. 31, hadith n° 19, vol. 2, p. 49. See also Ibn Bābūya, *al-Amālī*, majlis 39, hadith n° 10, pp. 222-223.

immortal face.<sup>25</sup> The main motive for quotations of this sort of tradition is to show that the Infallible Proof [i.e. the imam or more generally the Impeccables, either the Prophet, his daughter Fāṭima, or the imams] is the eternal Face of God. He who would turn towards God must turn towards this face.

The people of the mystical gnosis called the act of approaching the divine face *vejhe*.<sup>26</sup> What does it mean? In saying that the imam is the divine face, does one mean his face and his physical appearance? As we said previously, one of the most difficult theological and philosophical ideas in the declarations of the initiated and the sages is around the spiritual practice of *vejhe* and the contemplation of the presence of the adored being by means of this practice. In technical terms, it is also called meditation (*tafakkur*) or just the mental form [or 'face', or 'visage'] (*ṣūrat i fikriyya*), as Mawlavī sung [Jalāl al-Dīn Balkhī Rūmī, d. 672/1273. The following verses are from his *Mathnavī*; They are a variant of verse no. 3207, 'the History of the Bedouin and the Philosopher', Daftar 2<sup>27</sup>]:

Through the practice of *dhikr* [rhythmic repetition of a sacred word],  
a path opens  
Thanks to the practice of *fikr* ['meditation'], [the form] of the King appears.

*dhekr ān bāshad ke bogshāyad rahī*  
*fekr ān bāshad ke pīsh āyad shahī.*

Or again, Shaykh Shabistarī [Sa'd al-Dīn Maḥmūd, d. 720/1320. The following verses come from his *Golshan-e rāz*, the answer to the first question, verse 2<sup>28</sup>]:

Meditation is to go from the illusory to the real,  
It is seeing the universal in the particular.

*tafakkor raftan az bāṭel sū-ye ḥaqq*  
*be jōzv andar bedīdan koll-e moṭlaq.*

25 This is a quotation from the famous Quranic commentary *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Ḥāshim b. Sulaymān al-Bahrānī (d. 1107 or 1109/1695-6 or 1697-8); 5 vols., Tehran s.d., *sub* Coran 28:88. One finds this exegesis of the Face in practically all the Shi'ī *tafsīrs*; see, for example, M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, p. 116, footnote 225.

26 The author makes a play of words with the root WJH: *wajh* (face), *wijha/vejhe* (practice of contemplation), *tawajjuh/tavajjoh* (direction, moving towards something, concentration); for other sources on the same subject, see Amir-Moezzi, "Visions d'Imams", pp. 111 sq. (= *Religion discrète*, p. 266 sq.).

27 Ed. R. Nicholson, reprint. Tehran n.d. (circa 1950), Daftar 2, p. 427.

28 Ed. Ḥ. Rowshandel, Tehran 1351 solar/1972, 2nd ed., p. 59.

This matter is difficult to understand because the people of God spoke of it only in symbols, which is the case of the verses just quoted. The reason is that the vast majority of men are incapable of penetrating beyond the limits of the sense organs, and their understanding is marred by it. Yet these divine questions outstrip not only the senses, but reason. This is why one can only speak allusively of subtle concepts like the *vejhe*. To show the truth of the fact that the religious practice of the ‘people of knowledge and perfection’ is dependent on the *vejhe*, a remark made by the treasurer of the secrets of the Revelation after Muḥammad, the Master of the *walāya* [‘Alī], the Commander of the Believers, will suffice. With it we can dispense with reasoned argument.

In the book *al-Ikhtisāṣ*, Shaykh Mufīd [d. 413/1022] records what follows from Aṣḥāb b. Nubāta [a famous disciple of ‘Alī], who lists the chain of transmitters:

... From the height of the pulpit of the Kūfa mosque, ‘Alī thus addressed the people: ‘Question me before you lose me! Here resides knowledge. In my mouth I have the saliva of the Prophet; question me, as I possess the science of beginnings and of ends.’<sup>29</sup> At that moment, a man named Dhi‘lib known for his eloquence, knowledge and courage, stood up and said: ‘... Commander of the Believers! Have you seen your Lord?’ ‘Alī answered: ‘Take care, Dhi‘lib! Would I worship a Lord that I had not seen?’ ‘So describe him.’ ‘Poor man! One cannot see Him by looking; hearts see him by the reality of faith.’<sup>30</sup>

The purpose of this quotation of the sermon [of ‘Alī], taken from the *Ikhtisāṣ*, is to show that, in the words of the Commander of the Believers, seeing God is possible only thanks to the vision of the heart. He who has attained the ‘realities of faith’ can see Him and he understands the conditions of this vision. The novice in matters of faith may not deny it, and he must be made aware that the veils of unjustified denial are among the densest and darkest veils between God and his creatures. He must also be made aware that to believe in the reality of this vision is a necessary precondition for the perfection of his faith. He should overcome the obstacles that divide him from God through spiritual progression and asceticism, under the guidance of divine instructors who have themselves overcome these obstacles. As Master Rāz [Abū l-Qāsim Sharīfī Shīrāzī, one of the great masters of the Dhahibiyya order, d. 1286/1869] so aptly said:

29 Regarding saliva as a means of transmitting knowledge and spiritual virtues, see here chapter 3.

30 Al-Mufīd, *al-Ikhtisāṣ*, ed. ‘A.A. Ghaffārī, Qumm n.d., “Khuṭbat li-amīr al-mu‘minīn”, 235-236. For another version of the same discourse and its sources see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, p. 123.

Thanks to his love, I have reached a point  
 Where I see nothing other than the eternal Witness.  
 The universes and everything therein were eclipsed  
 When I attained the eternal Face of God.  
 In the spaces of immensity beyond space  
 I flew, without wings, for thousands of years.  
 And there I saw only the Face of the Real  
 All I speak and hear is thanks to Him.

From everything that has just been written, we can conclude the following:

1. The infallible imam is the Face of God.
2. Through the imam, a vision of divine beauty is possible, not with the eyes of flesh, but with the eye of the heart and thanks to the realities of faith. Since the imam is himself the sum total of the realities of faith, he is the direction of prayer in the heart in the act of adoration of God.<sup>31</sup> But this is not about his physical body; it is into his *walāya* that one must pass, to be reborn there eternally, and so to achieve his holy vision through the heart and be able to declare: 'I would not adore a Lord that I would not see' [a long section follows on the subject that the vision of the Impeccables so attained cannot be false, since no evil creature, in this case Satan, has the power to embody them].

#### 4 Analysis of a Panel from the Vesel Collection

In the *shamā'il* shown in figure 3,<sup>32</sup> 'Alī, with a circular halo around his head, is kneeling, forearms crossed and holding Dhū l-faqār on his thighs. We have already noted the similarity of this position to one of the typical postures of the Sufi *dhikr*. Indeed, *dhikr* formulas decorate the panel all around the portrait:

31 It is noteworthy that in the technical vocabulary of Shi'ism, 'faith' (*īmān*) means the esoteric dimension of Islam, the teaching of imams or Shi'ism. The term differs from *islām*, which means, still in the technical lexicon, the exoteric dimension of Muḥammad's message; see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, index s.v. In addition, it is necessary to state that for Rāz Shīrāzī, the Imam of Light contemplated in the heart of the enlightened Dhahabi is also the 'black light' of the spiritual form of the eighth imam, 'Alī al-Riḍā, the alleged founder of the order; see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 105-106; Id., *La Religion discrète*, pp. 260-262.

32 Also reproduced in the article of Kleiber, "Expression populaire et dévotion Shi'ite", illustration n° 7 (black and white), p. 69.



FIGURE 3 Watercolour on paper (15 × 10 cm), inv. no. 2003, 197, 7  
 © D. ADAM, MUCEM, 2005

at the top is the expression *yā 'Alī*; then, from top to bottom and from right to left: *yā Bāqī* (beginning faded), *yā Qayyūm* (ending faded), *yā Dayyān*, *yā Burhān*, *yā Ghufrān*, *yā Subhān*, *yā Samī* (beginning faded), and *yā Baṣīr* (ending faded).<sup>33</sup> Finally, two verses divided into hemistiches are inscribed at the top and bottom of the portrait respectively, in horizontal writing to the left and to the right, and in vertical writing from the top to the bottom and from the bottom to the top. It is believed that their symbolic allusions have now been deciphered from informations found in ancient texts and in the treatise on the practice of *vejhe*. The first verse reads:

So long as the love of 'Alī is reflected in the mirror of the heart  
One can say that my heart is the place where divine mercy shows itself.

*tā dar āyīne-ye del mehr-e 'Alī jelve namāst*  
*mītavān goft delam maḏhar-e alṭāf-e khodāst.*

The second verse reads:

The Lion of God ['Alī] came into being,  
Thus every hidden secret was revealed.

*asadollāh dar vojūd āmad*  
*dar pas-e parde har-ḥe būd āmad.*

The position of 'Alī, the *dhikr* formulas, and the poems chanting 'Alī's theophanic secrets, the beatific vision of his love, which is reflected like a light in the heart, all show the strong links between our *shamā'il*, the practice of the vision by the heart in general, and the exercise of the *vejhe* in particular. This cluster of mutually supporting evidence would seem to confirm the words of the dervish from Shiraz describing the portable *shamā'il* as a physical aid to mystical contemplation.

Another *shamā'il* of 'Alī, a varnished painting on a little *papier mâché* mirror box in the History Museum in Bern (Switzerland), is, in this respect, entirely comparable to our *shamā'il*. Indeed, on the edges of 'Alī's portrait, in which he is surrounded by his two sons, his companions and angels, several verses, of which the first three follow, are finely calligraphied:

33 On these Names, see D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam*, Paris, 1988, index, s.v.

Here is the portrait of the Lion of Truth, the Friend of God,  
Or is it the mirror reflecting God?

*šūrat-e shīr-e ḥaq valī-yye khodāst  
yā ke ā'īne-ye khodāy namāst?*

When wisdom contemplated the image of the face of 'Alī,  
He declared that it was the mirror of God's beauty.

*dīd čon 'aql naqsh-e rūy-e 'Alī  
goft ā'īne-ye jamāl-e khodāst.*

The place where the divine Light is manifest is the beauty of 'Alī,  
It is in him that the secret of the creation of God appears.

*mazhar-e nūr-e ḥaq jamāl-e 'Alī-st  
va ndarū serr-e šon'-e ḥaq peydāst.<sup>34</sup>*

The fact that the initiatory use of *shamā'il*, and especially the portrait of 'Alī, is more widespread than in the Dhahabiyya order, gives more support to the hypothesis. We know it is also part of the *waṣla* (on this term see above, beginning of part 2) of the Khāksār dervishes and maybe also of the order of the Ni'matullāhiyya.<sup>35</sup> For the Bektashiyya, who inherited the Ḥurūfiyya doctrine of the sacredness of the human face and its theophanic nature, the portrait, as well as the calligraphied name, of 'Alī, serve as a powerful medium for meditation and contemplation.<sup>36</sup> The figure of God appears on the face of the

34 L.S. Diba & M. Ekhtiyar, *Royal Persian Paintings*, panel no. 163. We are dealing with a work of Muḥammad Ismā'īl, made in 1288/1871, for the sovereign of Iran, Naṣīr al-Dīn Shah, Bernisches Historisches Museum, exhibit no. 73/1913.

35 On the first see M. Modarresi Čahārdehī, *Khāksār va Ahl-e ḥaqq*, Tehran, 1368/1989, p. 23; as for the second, see illustrations n. 1, 8 and 9 from M. Ekhtiyar, "Exploring *Ahl al-bayt* Imagery in Qajar Iran (1785-1925)", in F. Suleman (ed.), *People of the Prophet's House*, London, 2015, pp. 146-154 (the dimensions indicated are however somehow larger than those of the pocket *shamā'il*).

36 On the subject in general see F. de Jong, "The Iconography of Bektashism: a Survey of Themes and Symbolism in Clerical Costume, Liturgical Objects and Pictorial Art", *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 4 (1989), pp. 7-29 (with illustrations); I. Mélikoff, "Images et symboles chez les Qezelbāš", in H. Beikbaghban (ed.), *Images et représentations en terre d'Islam*, Actes du colloque international de l'université de Strasbourg: 3 et 4 février

Bektashi man because of the name of 'Alī: the *'ayn* is featured in the oval rim of the eye, and the *lām* is formed by the line of the nose and the *yā* by the curve of the moustache. Thus, on both sides of the virtual vertical median line of the face, two 'mirrored' 'Alī-s appear, covering the face. One could thus say that an iconographical identity is established between the being of the enlightened individual – represented by his own face – 'Alī and God.<sup>37</sup> This spiritual doctrine is widely attested. These celebrated verses of the famous Bektashi poet Hilmī Dede Bābā (d. 1907) will illustrate our point:

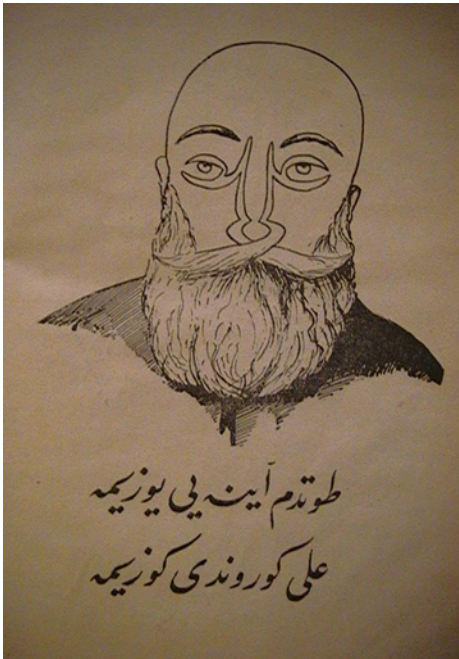


FIGURE 4  
Bektashi drawing of 'Alī's shape on the  
human face  
PRIVATE PROPERTY OF THE AUTHOR

1994, Tehran, 1997, pp. 40-65 (with illustrations); S. Bağcı, "From texts to pictures: 'Alī in manuscript painting", in A.Y. Ocak (ed.), *From History to Theology: 'Alī in Islamic Beliefs*, Ankara, 2005, pp. 229-263 (and illustrations); M. Uğur Derman, "'Alī in Ottoman calligraphy", *ibid.*, pp. 291-303 (and illustrations); O. Mir-Kasimov, "Notes sur deux textes Ḥurūfī: le *Jāvdān-Nāma* de Faḍlallāh Astarābādī et l'un de ses commentaires, le *Maḥram-Nāma* de Sayyid Ishāq", *Studia Iranica* 35/2 (2006), pp. 203-235; Id., *Words of Power. Ḥurūfī Teachings Between Shi'ism and Sufism in Medieval Islam. The Original Doctrine of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī*, London, 2015, index s.v. Face (*wajh, rū*).

37 I. Mélikoff, *ibid.*, p. 45, 51; Id., "La divinisation d'Alī chez les Bektachis-Alevis", in A.Y. Ocak (ed.), *From History to Theology. 'Alī in Islamic Beliefs*, pp. 83-110.



air between the seeing subject and the seen object. Without that air and without light between the subject and the object, no visibility is possible. Now, the existence of common factors in the action between subject and object implies the identity of the nature of both.<sup>39</sup> In agreement with this theory, the consubstantiality of the “spiritual body” of the imam and the heart of the initiated faithful, which allows the vision between them, is reflected in a whole range of cosmo-anthropological hadiths which describe the creation of the bodies, hearts and spirits of human beings. Indeed according to these traditions, both the pre-existential body of the imam and the heart (seat of the spirit) of his follower are created from the same celestial ‘raw material’ known as ‘Illiyyīn.<sup>40</sup> This identity of their natures makes the vision of the “body of light” of the imam by the “eye of the heart” of the faithful possible. Finally, the practice of contemplation by means of the *shamā’il*, as we have seen, can be considered as a practical interpretation and instrumental application of those theoretical doctrines.

Although it is true that the word ‘icon’ possesses a technical meaning in Christianity in general, and in Orthodox Christianity in particular, it is admissible to apply the term to the portable *shamā’il* if we attach a more general meaning to the word, that of the sacred work of art such as Plotinus proposes, a definition, moreover, on which the Christian definition of the icon is founded.<sup>41</sup> This definition is based more on the vision of the seeing subject than on the form of the object that is being looked at.<sup>42</sup> On the subject of the contemplation of a statue of the temple, for example, Plotinus speaks in the *Enneads* (1, 6-9 and 11, 1-13) of a look that is not ‘of the mortal eyes’, but one which the ‘interior eye’ mysteriously executes.<sup>43</sup> This exercise of concentration that transforms the object contemplated:

“[So that the sacred piece of art can perform its role] it is necessary that the eye which looks becomes the same as the object which is being looked at, in order to apply itself to contemplating it. An eye could never see the sun

39 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, Kitāb al-tawhīd, bāb 9, no. 4; Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, ed. al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭihrānī, Tehran 1398/1978, bāb 9, p. 110, no. 7. See also the similar statements going back to the theologian Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, a follower of the sixth imam Ja‘far al-Šādiq, reported by al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, *op. cit.*, no. 12 (the fumbling vocabulary of the discourse is to be noted).

40 On these traditions, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 96-97; Id., “Worlds and Their Inhabitants. Some Notes on Imami-Shi‘i Cosmo-Anthropogony”, in E. Coda & C. Martini Bonadeo (eds.), *De l’Antiquité tardive au Moyen-Âge*, pp. 526-527.

41 A. Grabar, “Plotin et les origines de l’esthétique médiévale”, *Cahiers Archéologiques* 1 (1945), pp. 20 ff.

42 On this, see the subtle reflections of P. Hadot, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, Paris, 1997.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

without becoming similar to the sun, nor could a soul see beauty without being beautiful.” Even more relevant to our topic is this inscription about its icons in a tenth-century oriental church: ‘Small is the image you have under your eyes; immense is he who bears the image of the Infinite [in himself]. Revere the original, of which here you only have the image.’<sup>44</sup> This iconic function of the *shamā’il* is equally manifest in another piece of the Vesel collection, an icon made in India on which ‘Ali’s portrait is surrounded by a sort of mandala, an aid to meditation and contemplation in several Indian religions and faiths.<sup>45</sup>



FIGURE 5 Watercolour on paper (24 × 23 cm), inv. no. 2003, 197, 12  
© D. ADAM, MUCEM, 2005

44 Quoted by J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Histoire de l'art byzantin et chrétien d'Orient*, Louvain, 1987, p. 109.

45 The inscriptions, in more than approximate Arabic, at least indicate the place and date of the making of the *shamā'il*: *hādhā al-naqsh (sic) imām (sic) al-awwal 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib*

The portable icon, the 'pocket *shamā'il*' in the words of the dervish from Shiraz, thus forms a powerful link between Shi'ī pictorial art and the mystical brotherhoods, or even between popular beliefs and Sufi traditions. This link is not the only one; other characteristic connections can also be made: the screens on which the scenes of the holy history of Shi'ism are painted are called, almost everywhere in Iran, 'dervishes' screens' (*pardeh-ye darvīshī*), and the stories told in front of these screens by narrators are called, especially in Khorasan, 'dervishes' stories' or even 'the true stories' (*ḥikāyāt-e darvīshī/ḥikāyāt-e ḥaqīqī*).<sup>46</sup> We know that many of the travelling narrators belonged, and still belong, to the Khāksāriyya brotherhood.<sup>47</sup> It would seem that some very popular expressions in Iran about 'Alī all came from Sufi milieux or from the 'chivalric' circles of the *futuwwa*: 'May the hand of 'Alī protect you' (*dast-e 'Alī negahdārat*), 'May Murtaḍā 'Alī's shadow be on your head' (*sāye-ye Murtaḍā 'Alī bar sarat*), 'May 'Alī be your support and protector' ('Alī *posht o panāhat*), 'O 'Alī, help' (*yā 'Alī madad*), 'Alī king of men, the man of the battlefield' ('Alī *shah-e mardān mard-e meydān*) and so on.<sup>48</sup> But the spiritual functions of the

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*bāb waṣī allāh* (sic) *wa 'Alī allāh* (here is the image of the First Imam, 'Alī son of Abī Ṭālib, threshold to the legate of God [sic, perhaps instead of 'threshold and legate'] and 'Alī is God); *fi sana khamsa* (sic) *wa mi'atayn ba'd al-alf sana 1205 fi balada Bambaī* ([made] in the year 1205 [1790-91] in the province of Bombay). However, it is not sure that this information is to be trusted.

46 See for example A. Panāhī Semnānī, *Tarāne va tarāne sarāyi dar irān*, Tehran, 1376 solar/1996, pp. 39ff.

47 See Gramlich *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*. 3 vols. Wiesbaden, 1965-1981, I, p. 70ff., in particular pp. 85-88; Ch. Tortel, *Saints ou démons? Les Qalandar-s Jalālī et autres derviches errants en terre d'islam: Russie méridionale et Inde aux XIII<sup>e</sup>-XVII<sup>e</sup> s.* Thèse de doctorat, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sciences Religieuses, Paris 1999, chap. IV, pp. 191-197.

48 See M. Mihandūst, "Pendāre hā va bāvardāshht hā-ye 'āmiyāne", *Honar: ketāb-e māh*, special number on 'Alī in popular art 31-32 (2001), pp. 10-16; N. Karīmīyān Sardashtī, "Pažūheshī dar bāre-ye ahl-e fotovvat", *ibid.*, pp. 40-45. On *futuwwa* (in Persian: *javānmardī*, the great movement of brotherhoods of trade guilds), see, amongst others, F. Taeschner, *Zünfte und Bruderschaften im Islam. Texte zur Geschichte der Futuwwa*, Zurich, 1979 (*Magnum Opus* of the author which collects and complements his numerous previous works on the subject); C. Cahen, "Mouvements et organisations populaires dans les villes de l'Asie musulmane au moyen-âge: milices et associations de Foutouwwa", *Recueil de la Société Jean Bodin* 7 (1955), pp. 273-298; Id., *Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du moyen-âge*, Leiden, 1959; J. Baldick, "The Iranian Origin of the *Futuwwa*", *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli* 50 (1990), pp. 345-361; M. Zakeri, *Sāsānid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society. The Origins of Ayyārān and Futuwwa*, Wiesbaden, 1995, *passim*; L. Ridgeon, *Javānmardī. A Sufi Code of Honour*, Edinburgh, 2011; Id., "'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in Medieval Persian Sufi-Futuwwat Treatises", in M.A. Amir-Moezzi *et al.* (eds.), *Lésotérisme Shi'ite*, pp. 665-686; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Les descendants d'Adam sont les

icons of the Shi'ī saints, and of 'Alī more specifically, are possibly the most important evidence of the great extent to which the borders between learned religion and popular religion, and between ancient doctrines and enduring traditions, can be porous. Here, as in many other cases, the union between art and mystical thought and practice forms the most solid bridge between the two shores.

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organes d'un même corps'. Remarques sur la solidarité non-communautaire en islam", in A. Supiot (ed.), *Solidarité. Enquête sur un principe juridique*, Paris, 2015, pp. 183-197.

# Epilogue

“People! I am the Christ; I who heal the blind and the lepers ... I am the Christ and he is I ... Jesus the son of Mary is part of me and I am part of him; he who is the greatest Word of God.”

“... I am the First; I am the Last. I am the Hidden; I am the Manifest. I am the One who gives; I am the One who takes. I am the resurrector of the dead ... I am the one who spoke through the mouth of Jesus ... I am the Saviour of this time. I am the Christ. I am the Second Christ. I am the Jesus of this time ... I am the Compassionate; I am the Merciful. I am the High One; I am the Most High One ...”

In proclamations like these, ‘Alī identified himself with Jesus as the ‘Second Christ’, a christological and eschatological reference to the Second Coming of Jesus as the Saviour at the End of Times. ‘Alī thus claims to be the Messiah, the Divine Man of biblical spirituality, possessing a double nature, human and divine, a man of flesh sharing the attributes of God. These sermons attributed to ‘Alī (discussed above in chapters 2 and 4) were recorded in innumerable Shi‘i sources, the earliest of them dating back to the 3rd and 4th/9th and 10th centuries. However, they are very likely to be even earlier, possibly dating back to the times of ‘Alī himself, for what interest would the faithful have in forging these statements and putting them into the mouth of their first imam, claiming him to be the Divine Man *par excellence* and the Saviour of the End of Times, when the world had not ended and he had died assassinated long before and had tragically failed in his plans to govern? Such a forgery would have completely undermined the credibility of their first Master. For, as we have seen, after the assassination of ‘Alī (which, however, some of his followers had not believed, as they extended the Christian docetist doctrine to ‘Alī), and the apocalyptic threats contained in Muḥammad’s message have been driven away; after the civil wars, the simultaneous conquests and the founding of the empire, the Shi‘is, although they contested large parts of the official history as rewritten by the caliphal power, moderated a certain number of their beliefs about ‘Alī. His messianic nature was stripped of its apocalyptic dimension, but the doctrine of his double nature as a mediator between the divine and the human was maintained, and these attributes would be passed on to the imams of his descentance.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the divine Guide, Master of the *walāya*, the divine

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<sup>1</sup> However, the messianic, even apocalyptic, dimension, will survive in a great many revolutionary ‘Alid movements of the first centuries of Islam, movements which were in armed conflict with the caliphal power and often in disagreement with the political options of the imams;

Alliance and Friendship, became the locus of manifestation of the Names and Attributes of God, the “Organ” of God; sent down to bring about His will on earth, the initiating sage and the living Word of God. It is thanks to the Imam, the divine Master, that God continues to communicate with humans, it is thanks to him that the heavens do not fall silent.

“We are the Eye of God”, the imams endlessly repeat, “we are the Hand of God, we are the Face of God, we are His Side, His Heart, His Tongue, His Ear.” The imams/*walī* in general and ‘Alī in particular are given such titles as “Proof of God”, “Vicar of God”, “Path of God”, “Threshold of God” or expressions from the Quran: “the Supreme Sign” (*al-āya al-kubrā*, Quran 79:20), “the August Symbol” (*al-mathal al-‘alā*, Quran 16:60), “the Strongest Handle” (*al-‘urwa al-wuthqā*, Quran 2:256 or 31:22) (see above chapter 4). It is in this context that ‘Alī is said to have declared: “God has no Annunciation greater than I, no Sign greater than I.”<sup>2</sup> or “God has granted me the vision of His Kingdom; hence nothing is hidden from me of what came before me and of what will come after me.”<sup>3</sup> The purpose of Creation is that God’s creatures may know Him. So the Imam, as the ultimate theophanic being and the “Supreme Symbol” of what can be known of God, is therefore the reason and purpose of creation. “He who knows us knows God and he who disregards us disregards God”, “Without God, we would not be known and without us, God would not be known.” The Guide, in his human function as the “speaking Quran”, is the guardian and the transmitter of initiatory knowledge, of which the ultimate content is himself in his theophanic reality, his divine nature. At the same time, the theophanic Imam is interiorized by the faithful as a “guide-light” (*imām nūrānī, nūrānīyyat al-imām*), ever present in their hearts who, thanks to their spiritual and ascetic exercises, can achieve their own vision and thus attain their personal Lord ‘organically’: “He who knows himself, knows his Lord.” (see above chapter 9).

These doctrines were recorded in the immense corpus of Hadith during what may be called the ‘classical age’ of Imami sources, in the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries, and were later included in great compilations of Iranian

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see e.g. A.A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism. The Idea of Mahdī in Twelver Shi‘ism*, New York, 1981, introduction; W.F. Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians: Shiite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq*, New York, 2008; S. Amir-Arjomand, “Origins and Development of Apocalypticism and Messianism in Early Islam: 610-750 c.e.”, in Id. (ed.) *Sociology of Shi‘ite Islam*, Leiden, 2016. On the “quietist” position of the imams of the ḥusaynid line leading to Twelver Shi‘ism, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, part III-1.

2 One finds this statement of ‘Alī as a commentary to the first verse of surah 78 “(The Announcement”, *al-Naba’*) in all Shi‘i Quranic commentaries and other kinds of Shi‘i sources that refer to this verse.

3 Al-Majlisi, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 26, p. 141.

authors from the Safavid and Qajar periods, between the 10th/16th and the 13th/19th centuries.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, the divine figure of ‘Alī was never forgotten. It was passed on more or less discretely in the main currents of Shi‘ism, such as Imamism or Ismailism, and openly in the sects (such as the Nusayris and the Druzes)<sup>5</sup> said to be ‘extre mist’. As Orkhan Mir-Kasimov clearly demonstrates in his text in the appendix of this book, the figure of ‘Alī was much elaborated upon in mystical and messianic circles, not necessarily Shi‘i, which founded great empires both before and after the Mongol invasion. In them, the ‘religion of ‘Alī (*dīn ‘Alī*)’ was reborn, notably in the Muslim Orient, in both learned and popular circles. The phenomenon, remarkable both for its geographical extent and its duration, is distinguished by some remarkable poetry, especially in Persian, that ideal vehicle of mystical spirituality, from the Ottoman Balkans to Moghul India, including Iran and Central Asia.

Here are some verses of Faḍlallāh Astarābādī (796/1394), the founder of the influential Ḥurūfiyya movement:

What the verse ‘Say, He is God’ describes, is ‘Alī / the King of Kings of the universe of knowledge, is ‘Alī.

This universal Dot from which individual beings have come / By God that is ‘Alī, by God it is ‘Alī.<sup>6</sup>

4 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, Ch. Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le Shi'isme?*, third part; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *La Preuve de Dieu*, Epilog.

5 See for example H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis. Die extreme Schia und die 'Alawiten*, Zurich-Munich, 1982; M.M. Bar-Asher & A. Kofsky, *The Nusayrī-'Alawī Religion. An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy*, Leiden, 2002; D. De Smet, *Les Épîtres sacrées des Druzes. Rasā'il al-ḥikma*, Louvain, 2007; M. Asatryan, *Controversies in Formative Shi'i Islam. The Ghulat Muslims and Their Beliefs*, London, 2017.

6 Quatrain cited by O. Mir-Kasimov, see relevant text in his footnote 36 where the sources are indicated. My translation, a little different from his, attempts to be literal: *Mawṣūf-i ṣifāt-i "Qul huwa Allāh" 'Alīst / Dar 'ālam-e ma'rīfat shahanshāh 'Alīst. Ān nuqṭa-ye kul ke juzw az ū peydā shud / Wa-llāh ke ān 'Alīst, bi-llāh 'Alīst*. In the first hemistich, the verse cited is Quran 112:1, drawn from the surah called “the purity of faith” (*al-ikhhlās*) or “divine Unicity” (*al-tawḥīd*). Faithful to Shi‘i theophanic theology, the poet “describes” ‘Alī as God made manifest, the saving and transformative Presence of a personal God and an antidote to the purely abstract monotheism of an absolutely inaccessible God. Faḍlullah seeks to remain loyal to a very early and particularly audacious Imami exegetical tradition according to which each time the Quran uses the pronoun *huwa*, it is an allusion to ‘Alī (see al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-qirā'āt*, ed. E. Kohlberg and M.A. Amir-Moezzi, in *Revelation and Falsification*, n° 481, pp. 126-127 of Arabic text, pp. 217-218 of the English commentary). In the second hemistich, ‘Alī is described by an expression derived from the royal Iranian title: “King of kings”; in other words, ‘Alī is the master of other “kings” of knowledge, most probably other sages or saints, the Friends of God (*awlīyā' allāh*). The second verse is a clear allusion to the famous statement attributed to ‘Alī, recorded in countless, mostly Shi‘i, late mystical sources: “All of the Quran is contained in the

It can still be seen today it in the devotional songs of the minstrels of Central Asia:

One night, I saw in a sweet dream the beauty of the cupbearer of (the heavenly source of) Kawthar / 'Alī son of Abī Ṭālib, the Prince of the Initiates, the Lion.

He gave me a book containing the Names of God / I opened it and I saw the name of the King of Men ('Alī) at the beginning.<sup>7</sup>

Or also:

This magnificent King who, in the night of the celestial ascension / was at one with Aḥmad the mighty one (i.e. the prophet Muḥammad), was 'Alī.

This is not infidelity, the infidelity is not that at all / For 'Alī is as Being is; 'Alī has been since Being has.<sup>8</sup>

'Alī also occupies a central place in the iconography and the theology of the Bektashis and in the Sunni Sufi Qawwālī songs of Pakistan. These always begin with a devotional song praising the divine nature of 'Alī. There are many more examples. It is however true that very few people, even academics are aware of this. Shi'ism is a 'discrete religion' and 'Alī is its well-guarded Secret. So apart

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Opening (*al-Fātiḥa*, the first surah); all of the Opening is contained in the formula that opens it (the *basmala*): 'In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate'; this entire formula is contained in the letter b that starts it (*bi-smi llāh ...*); all of the letter b in the dot (*nuqta*) which is beneath it (in the written form of the letter *bā'* in Arabic). And I am that Dot"; see for example Rajab al-Bursī (a contemporary of Faḍlallāh), *Mashāriq al-anwār*, ed. 'A. Gh. Ashraf al-Māzandarānī, Tehran, 1426/2005, chap. 3, p. 45; Id., *Mashāriq al-amān*, ed. 'A. Zayn al-Dīn, Beyrouth, 1430/2009, p. 48; Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmolī (another contemporary), *Jāmi' al-asrār wa manba' al-anwār*, éd. H. Corbin-O. Yaḥyā, Téhéran, 1347 solaire/1969, index des hadīth-s, p. 720 (*anā l-nuqta taht al-bā'*); al-Nabāṭī al-Bayāḍī (m. 877/1482), *al-Širāṭ al-mustaḳīm ilā mustaḥaqqī l-taqdīm*, éd. M.B. al-Bihbūdī, Najaf, 1384/1964, vol. 1, p. 222. See also the article of M. Terrier in Annexe 2, afferent texts of the footnotes 72, 79 *sqq.*, 91, for the philosophical approaches of the *ḥadīth al-nuqta taht al-bā'*.

- 7 *Shabī dīdam be khāb-e khosh jamāl-e sāqi-ye kawthar/'Alī ebn-e Abī Ṭālib amīr al-mu'minīn ḥaydar. Be dastam dād yekī daftar ke dar vey nām-e yazdān būd/sar-e daftar goshūdām shāh-e mardān būd sardaftar.* Cited by G. Van den Berg, *Minstrel poetry from the Pamir mountains. A study on the songs and poems of the Ismā'īlīs of Tadjik Badakhshan*, Wiesbaden, 2004, pp. 483-484 (n° G64).
- 8 *Ān shāh-e sarāfrāz ke andar shab-e mī'rāj / bā Aḥmad-e mokhtār yekī būd 'Alī būd. Īn kufr nabāshad sokhan-e kufr na īnast / tā hast 'Alī bāshad tā būd 'Alī būd.* In *ibid.*, pp. 488-89 (the *ghazal*; n° G 70). See also ead., "Literary afterlives: Medieval Persian poets and strategies of legitimization in the oral poetry of the Ismā'īlīs of Tadjik Badakhshan", *JSAI* 45, 2018, pp. 369-370 (all of the article pp. 355-380).

from his place in the religion of the imams, 'Alī is the central mystery of many other currents of spiritual Islam.

Why 'Alī and not some other figure among the companions of the Prophet? For several decades, critical research on the origins of Islam and of the Quran, and the gradual integration of studies of early Shi'ism with it, have led to remarkable progress in our knowledge of these subjects.<sup>9</sup> This progress will perhaps help us to discover new areas of research on the figure of 'Alī. Conversely, the study of different aspects of the figure of 'Alī in the early sources could help us better understand the origins of Islam, still enigmatic on many points.

These new studies have led to two decisive turning points in the last fifty years, first in the 1970s, with the works of Günter Lüling, in Erlangen in Germany, and of John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, in Oxford and Cambridge in England.<sup>10</sup> Then, in the 2000s, new studies of the Quran, such as the very controversial one by Christoph Luxenberg in Germany, or the many publications of the French scholar Alfred-Louis de Prémare on the period that interests us, have been in several respects complemented by the contribution of 'material history', for example the archaeological researches and resultant publications of Christian Robin, and the epigraphical researches of Frédéric Imbert.<sup>11</sup> These studies and other similar ones have consumed great quantities of ink and have attracted much, sometimes justified, criticism, including some by their own authors who, with great intellectual honesty, have recognized their shortfalls and approximations. But they have introduced, durably and perhaps definitively, new epistemological and methodological criteria into research on the origins of Islam and the Quran. These criteria are, broadly speaking, of two kinds: first, we have noted above that the Islamic sources on

9 A monumental synthesis of these studies, since the 19th century but mostly for recent decades, augmented by the results of current studies, is now published in M.A. Amir-Moezzi and G. Dye (dir.), *Le Coran des historiens*.

10 Let us just mention, among the work of these authors (it will also be the case of the next footnotes in order not to burden them): G. Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur'ān. Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Stropheneder im Qur'ān*, Erlangen, 1974 (updated English version: *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation. The Rediscovery of a reliable Reconstruction of a comprehensive pre-islamic Christian Hymnal hidden in the Koran under earliest Islamic reinterpretation*, Delhi, 2003); J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford, 1977; Id., *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford, 1978; P. Crone & M. Cook, *Hagarism, The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge (GB), 1977.

11 C. Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran*, Berlin, 2000; A.-L. De Prémare, *Les fondations de l'islam*, Paris, 2002; Id., *Aux origines du Coran*, Paris, 2004; for the many and important works by C. Robin and F. Imbert, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi and G. Dye (dir.), *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1, chap. 1: C. Robin, "L'Arabie Préislamique", bibliography, pp. 150-152; and chapter 17: F. Imbert, "Le Coran des pierres", bibliography, pp. 730-731.

the origins of Islam and the Quran, especially the proto-Sunni and Sunni ones, are absolutely not credible. They are full of contradictions, improbabilities, special pleading, historical untruths, and legends of all kinds and origins. The inclusion of studies on Shi'i sources about the civil wars between believers, the Arab conquests and the birth of the empire as well as the desire to obscure the apocalyptic dimension of Muḥammad's message have been a major factor in this process.<sup>12</sup> We shall return to this point. To further study these problems, it is also essential to integrate the study of non-Muslim sources, ideally contemporary with or shortly following the advent of Muḥammad, that is to say, Jewish sources in Hebrew or Aramaic, Christian sources in Greek, Ethiopian, Armenian and above all Syriac, Zoroastrian Pahlavi sources and so on.<sup>13</sup> This does not of course mean that Shi'i and non-Muslim sources tell us the historical truth, far from it. They are often just as biased as the proto-Sunni and Sunni literature. But they do provide new elements, new arguments, and new perspectives which are frequently very fruitful.

These new directions and their contributions, as rich as they are diverse, have, over the last twenty years, provoked a veritable explosion in the number of scientific studies on the beginnings of Islam. They have also instigated the creation of research teams in which specialists in Arabic and Islamic, but also in Christian, Jewish, and Manichean studies of the period, experts in Biblical and other regional languages in Late Antiquity, archaeologists, paleographers, codicologists, epigraphers and even historians of astronomy or of geology, all collaborate.

Among the very many results of this intellectual and academic ferment, two are of particular interest here. First, contrary to what Muslim literature claims, pre-Islamic Arabia was far from being a land of ignorance, paganism and barbarism. It was not an island lost in the middle of an ocean, but an immense region situated between the greatest centres of monotheistic civilization and religion, between Byzantium and the Yemen, between Iran and Abyssinia. For many centuries the Arabs, their merchants and their caravans, had travelled between these lands, transporting all kinds of merchandise and also people, books, ideas and beliefs. The Arabia of the cities, that of the sedentary tribes

12 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux, passim*, and especially chapters 1 and 2; here chap. 2.

13 See for example A. Palmer, S. Brock and R.G. Hoyland (eds.), *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, Liverpool, 1993; R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton, 1997; S. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muḥammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*, Philadelphia, 2012; id., *A Prophet Has Appeared. The Rise of Islam Through Christian and Jewish Eyes*, Oakland, 2021.

(not the Arabia of the Bedouins of the desert), and notably that of the cities of Mecca, Medina and Ṭā'if, in other words the Arabia of Muḥammad, had been for centuries the home of the biblical monotheisms (Jewish, Christian, Judeo-Christian, Manichean). Apart from decisive archeological and epigraphical discoveries, the proof is in the Quran itself, for biblical and parabiblical terminologies, adapted, it is true, to Arabian culture, can be found in their thousands, almost on every page there.<sup>14</sup>

Another element, which the most recent philological and historical studies of the Quran confirm more and more consistently, is the importance, in the entourage of Muḥammad, of Syriac-speaking forms of Christianity (but which ones from among the many currents of what is known as Oriental Christianity?) and/or what is vaguely designated by the term "Judeo-Christianity" (broadly speaking the religion of those Jews who, whilst retaining their old beliefs and practices, accepted Jesus as the Christ). Contrary to the majority of specialists from the nineteenth and the most of the twentieth centuries who believed in the preponderant influence of Judaism on the Quran, the last few dozen years have been marked by increasingly precise studies proving the far greater weight of Syriac-speaking forms of Christianity (where, however, Jewish elements can also be important).<sup>15</sup>

Taking into consideration the studies of the last few decades, and complementing them with information derived from the critical investigation of early Shi'ism, it is possible, as a working hypothesis and a possible direction of research, to propose the following overview of the advent of Muḥammad and its religious and historical implications in the first Hijra century.

Around the 6th and 7th centuries AD, in the vast lands which stretch from Byzantium and Iran to the Yemen and Abyssinia, in a world rife with

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14 See now, among many other studies, M. Kropp (ed.), *Results of Contemporary Research on the Qur'ān: the Question of a Historico-Critical Approach*, Beirut, Orient Institute & Würzburg, 2007; A. Neuwirth, N. Sinai & M. Marx (eds.), *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, Leiden, 2010; G.S. Reynolds (ed.), *The Qur'ān and its Historical Context*, London, 2008, vol. 1 and 2011, vol. 2; Id., *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, London, 2010; C. Robin, "Recension de J. Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des tribus. L'Islam de Mahomet*", in *Bulletin Critique des Annales Islamologiques* 18, 2002, pp. 15-21; and especially now Id., "Arabie préislamique", in *le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1, pp. 51-154.

15 For example, G.G. Stroumsa, "Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins", in B. Sadeghi, A.Q. Ahmed, A. Silverstein and Robert G. Hoyland (eds.), *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honour of Patricia Crone*, Leiden, 2015, pp. 72-96; for the many works by Guillaume Dye on the subject see his bibliography in G. Dye, "Le corpus coranique: contexte et composition", *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1, chap. 18, bibliography, pp. 831-833. See also D. Bernard, *Les disciples juifs de Jésus du 1<sup>er</sup> siècle à Mahomet. Recherches sur le mouvement ébionite*, Paris, 2017.

apocalyptic and messianic expectations, Muḥammad came to announce the imminent end of the world, call on people to repent, to practice virtue and piety and to flee from the imminent wrath of God. His first followers were most probably known as the 'faithful' (*mu'minūn*), among whom would be Jews and Christians of whom no 'conversion' would ever be demanded.<sup>16</sup> These were probably pious men and women dedicating themselves to spiritual and ascetic exercises and, above all, non-militant pacifists calling on their fellow men and women to love God and to practice mutual help and charity before the coming Judgement Day. A second group of followers who came to Muḥammad later on and may be called 'the emigrants' (*muhājirūn*) (and 'those who submit', *muslimūn*?), would have joined him for reasons of prudence after his military victories. ('the hypocrites' the Quran refers to?). They were militants, advocating the military preparation of the Earth for the *eschaton*, the conquest and the quest for war booty; for them, contrary to the first group, holy war in 'the Way of God' was superior to any other religious practice. The relationships between the two groups seem to have been far from brotherly and peaceful.<sup>17</sup>

Can this division, which was decisively brought to light by Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, be convincingly superimposed on the division we know between the Banū Hāshim, the immediate family of Muḥammad (and of course 'Alī), who were responsible for religious affairs before Islam on the one hand, and on the other hand the Banū 'Abd Shams, whose family the Umayyads were responsible for economic affairs and the security of the tribe of Quraysh? The enduring conflicts and tensions between the two groups, well before and after Islam, are known by all.<sup>18</sup>

Belonging to a biblical culture, and proclaiming the imminent end of times, Muḥammad announced the advent of the Messiah, probably in the person of Jesus. Now, for a certain number of his followers, certainly among those of

16 S. Bashear, *Studies in Early Islamic Tradition*, Jerusalem, 2004; F.M. Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge (United States), 2010; S. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*. See also the earlier studies such as P. Casanova, *Mohammed*. See here chapter 2.

17 K.-F. Pohlmann, *Militanz und Antimilitanz im Koran. Historisch-kritische Untersuchungen zur Korangese und zu den Ursprüngen des militanten Islam*, Münster, 2018; Id., "Commentaire des sourates 8 et 9", in *le Coran des historiens*, vol. 2a, pp. 335-375 et 377-417. According to this hypothesis, proposed with great rigour and impressive erudition, the final version of the Quran would be a text of a compromise in order to please both groups.

18 See the introduction of C.E. Bosworth to his edition and English translation of al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-nizā' wa l-takhāsum fīmā bayn Banī Umayya wa Banī Hāshim: Book of contention and strife concerning the relations between the Banū Umayya and the Banū Hāshim* (*Journal of Semitic Studies*. Monograph n° 3.), Manchester, 1981, where the English scholar speaks of a kind of literary genre dedicated to the subject.

the first group around Muḥammad, 'Alī would have been a new manifestation of Jesus, a 'Second Christ' and Saviour of the end of the world (see above chap. 2).<sup>19</sup> For them, the divine figure of 'Alī as the Messiah would have been the centre of gravity of the Message of Muḥammad, he himself being simply the announcer of the advent of their saintly hero. These hypotheses might provide an explanation for two remarkable characteristics of 'Alī. First, his name which, as we have seen (see above chap. 2), is certainly a sobriquet, given that apparently no one in that period had the name, at least in the Quraysh tribe. This could also be the case of other 'names', that of Muḥammad himself and also that of 'Umar. But among those unique 'names', the name of 'Alī is the only divine name. It means the Elevated, the Most High.<sup>20</sup> And 'Alī is the only person from Muḥammad's circle to whose name the term 'religion' is attached: *dīn 'Alī*, the religion of those who saw in 'Alī not only the most fervent follower and intimate friend of their prophet, but also the Saviour and Guide of the End Times announced by him (see above chap. 3).

As the years went by and the world did not end Muḥammad seems to have abandoned the idea of the imminence of the Last Judgement and to have introduced some changes into his message. The evolution is in any case reflected in the Quran. He could very well have turned to reflecting on the affairs of his family, his followers and his succession, which ultimately could only go, it seems, to 'Alī, the father of his only male descendants but also his most loyal friend and perhaps his Messiah.<sup>21</sup> 'Alī, known for his religious qualities, was an apparently uncontested candidate in the eyes of the first group of followers, but the prospect of his rise to power was a threat to the second, Umayyads. And

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19 As we have seen, the first followers called themselves the faithful, *mu'minūn*. Is this the reason why 'Alī is called in Shi'ism in an exclusive way *amīr al-mu'minīn*, Commander or Prince of the faithful? Even the other imams do not have the right to use that title (M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Preuve de Dieu*, pp. 264-265). Furthermore, the term *amīr* literally means "the holder of the *amr*", polysemic term (order, affair, power ...) that often refers to the end of the world and/or Judgement Day in the Quran. It corresponds to the messianic status of 'Alī but also of Muḥammad as the prophet announcing the end of the world (*nabī al-malḥama*). A question thus remains: if the followers of Muḥammad called themselves the *mu'min*, why is it that Muḥammad himself is not called *amīr al-mu'minīn*? Let us add that the term *mu'min* later assumes the technical meaning of 'believer in the teachings of the imams' in Shi'ism, in other words the Shi'i faithful. Does this however mean that only the Shi'is have remained loyal to the original Message of Muḥammad, as they have always claimed and as was the case of his very first non-militant followers?

20 Regarding this name of God see D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam*, index *s.n.* and especially pp. 206-207.

21 Regarding 'Alī as the sole legitimate successor of Muḥammad from historical, anthropological and religious standpoints see W. Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*, Cambridge, (England), 1997; here chap. 3.

with good reason. 'Alī had always displayed his bravery in often leading the armies of the Prophet so that his ideas would prevail. He is said to have greatly distinguished himself in the battle of Badr, where he killed a large number of Muḥammad's adversaries belonging to the Quraysh, a tribal coalition of which the Umayyads were the most powerful element. They would never forget.

Muḥammad died in mysterious circumstances. After the civil violence which marked the conflict over his succession, the influential men of Quraysh and their protégés, probably those of the second group, militants and conquerors, assumed the leadership of the Prophet's followers. In the reign of the first three caliphs, the civil wars intensified, while at the same time the conquests began. The southern and African regions of Byzantium and the whole of the Iranian Sassanian empire fell to the Arabs within a few decades. But this narrative omits a remarkable fact, the total absence of 'Alī from the wars of conquest, uniquely among the famous 'companions' of Muḥammad. Indeed, it seems that he did not consider these wars to be compatible with the letter and spirit of the first messages of Muḥammad or of the beliefs of his first followers. These wars were waged by his lifelong adversaries, the 'hypocrites', the *munāfiqūn* of the Quran. He would not take part in them. Meanwhile, he seems to have been mostly occupied in making a written version of the Quran. According to Shi'i sources, he was doing this in opposition to his treasonous enemies, who were preparing a falsified version of the Holy Book.<sup>22</sup>

The short reign of 'Alī was an uninterrupted series of bloody civil wars and ended with his assassination in the year 40/661. For his ultimately tragic caliphate, he mysteriously moved his capital several thousand kilometres, from Medina in Arabia to Kūfa in Iraq. Here is another 'singularity' of this personality which historians fail to explain. Could it have been due to the proximity of the largely Arab city of Ḥīra, one of the vibrant intellectual and spiritual centres of the former Sassanian empire? It was in this same city that a number of Christian groups (mostly non-trinitarian, anti-Nicean and anti-Chalcedonian) were still living. They had been driven from Byzantium because of their accusation of heresy and had sought refuge in the Sassanian Empire. There were also Gnostics with messianic tendencies such as Marcionites and Bardesians, and also Manicheans communities who were active in the region until the 4th/10th century.<sup>23</sup> Did this land, already marked by Late Antique esoteric and

22 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux, passim* and especially chapters 1 and 2.

23 See J. van Reeth, "Ville céleste, ville sainte, ville idéale dans la tradition musulmane", *Acta Orientalia Belgica*, special issue "Décrire, nommer ou rêver les lieux en Orient. Géographie et toponymie entre réalité et fiction. Jean-Marie Kruchten *in memoriam*", 24 (2011), pp. 121-131, especially p. 125; Id., "Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant. Nouvelles perspectives sur les origines de l'islam", *RHR* 230.3 (July-September 2013), pp. 385-402, in particular pp. 393-394; I. Toral-Niehoff, *Al-Ḥīra. Eine arabische Kulturmetropole im spätantiken*

gnostic ideas, not appear more welcoming to the ‘new manifestation of the Messiah’ than the land of Hijaz, allied to Syria, a country committed since the death of Muḥammad to the cause of the worst enemies of ‘Alī?<sup>24</sup> Is this another example of those convergences between ‘Alī, pre-Islamic Iran and Iranian converts, which led the Greek historian Theophanes the Confessor (born 759 AD) to call him “Alī the Persian” in his *Chronography*? Is it a coincidence that the day of Ghadīr Khumm, the 18 Dhū l-ḥijja of the year 10 Hijra (according to the unanimously accepted date), when, according to the Shi‘is, Muḥammad declared ‘Alī to be his successor, corresponds (with a margin of error of a few days) to March 20th 632, the ancient Nowrūz, the Iranian New Year’s day? Ghadīr Khumm is one of the greatest Shi‘i holidays, that is well-known. But what is less well known is that it is apparently the case of Nawrūz as well. There are indeed many traditions passed down from the imams which praise the Iranian New Year and describe it as a sacred cosmic event of the highest importance. The story of Shahrībānū, a Sassanid princess and daughter-in-law of ‘Alī as she was the wife of al-Husayn, is consistent with the same convergences.<sup>25</sup> Finally, it should be added that, according to some recent studies,

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*Kontext*, Leiden, 2013; Ph.J. Wood, “Hira and her saints”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 132 (2014), pp. 5-20.

- 24 On the presence of Gnostic-like doctrines in a good number of early Shi‘i currents see for example L. Massignon, “Die Ursprünge und die Bedeutung des Gnostizismus im Islam”; Id., “der gnostische Kult der Fatima im schiitischen Islam”; H. Corbin, “De la gnose antique à la gnose ismaélienne”; Id., “L’idée du Paraclet en philosophie iranienne”; U. Rubin, “Pre-existence and Light. Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad”; W. al-Qāḍi, “The Development of the Term *Ghulāt* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysāniyya”; H. Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismā‘īliyya. Eine Studie zur islamischen Gnosis*; Id., *Die islamische Gnosis*; Id., “Das ‘Buch der Schatten’. Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der *ghulāt* und die Ursprünge des Nuṣayriertums”; M.M. Bar-Asher & A. Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-‘Alawī Religion*; D. De Smet, “Au-delà de l’apparent: les notions de *ẓāhir* et *bāṭin* dans l’ésotérisme musulman”; W. Tucker, *Mahdīs and Millenarians: Shi‘ite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq*; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, chap. 4 and epilog; Id. *et al.*, *L’ésotérisme Shi‘ite*, parts 1 and 11; M. Asatryan, *Controversies in Formative Shi‘i Islam*.
- 25 On “Alī the Persian”, see *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (written a century and a half after the death of ‘Alī), English translation of *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor, Oxford, 1883, by C. Mango and R. Scott, Oxford, 1997, p. 98. On the importance of Nawrūz and its association with Ghadīr in Shi‘ism, see J. Walbridge, “A Persian Gulf in the Sea of Lights: The Chapter on Naw-Rūz in the *Bīḥār al-Anwār*”, *Iran* 35, 1997, pp. 83-92; R. Sha‘bānī, *Ādāb wa rusūm-e Nawrūz*, Tehran, 1378 s./1999, pp. 168-169, 248; M. Bar-Asher, “The Iranian Component of the Nuṣayrī religion”, *Iran* 41, 2003, pp. 217-227; id. & A. Kofsky, *The ‘Alawī Religion. An Anthology*, Turnhout, 2021, pp. 147-148; On Shahrībānū and these convergences see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Shahrībānū, dame du pays d’Iran et Mère des imams: entre l’Iran préislamique et le Shi‘isme imamite”, *JSAI* 27 (2002), in Honour of Shaul Shaked, pp. 497-549 (= *La religion discrète*, chap. 2).

Muḥammad, a prophet but also a merchant, hence perfectly aware of international events in the region, including the ceaseless wars between Byzantium and Iran, (the title of surah 30 of the Quran is ‘The Byzantines’), indirectly supported the Sassanians against Byzantium.<sup>26</sup> The fact seems to be confirmed by his attempts to attack Byzantine lands towards the end of his life. It is also true that Quranic Christology is in disagreement with the official Christology of the great “universal” Church of Constantinople and in agreement with currents precisely deemed to be “heretical” by Byzantium and present in Iranian lands, especially in Hīra/Kūfa as we have just seen.

After ‘Alī, power fell into the hands of the Umayyads. The civil wars, the ruling house’s ferocious repression of their opponents, notably the ‘Alids, and the expansion of the empire continued. ‘Alī was cursed in public places. His followers were considered to be the principal enemies of the state. Under the fifth Umayyad ruler, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, towards the turn of the 1st and 2nd centuries Hijra, Arabic became the official administrative language of the Empire. Its religion was now officially called ‘islām’. Some of its most important laws which were to govern the conquered lands and peoples were written. Its Book became the official version of the Quran (a compromised version by a caliph who sought to impose unity on his empire by violence?). The Messiah was to be neither Jesus nor ‘Alī, but a indeterminate descendant of Muḥammad. The figure of Muḥammad was glorified, probably in order to marginalise that of ‘Alī. A few decades later, the Abbassids took power in a bloody revolution in which the Umayyads were almost exterminated. But they continued the repressive anti-‘Alid policies of their predecessors, reducing the status of ‘Alī to that of a Companion on a par with the others, attempting to radically minimise his claims to sanctity and thus recuperate his figure for themselves (see the Introduction). But ‘Alī was nevertheless omnipresent in the early history of Islam. In a sense he remains one of its focal points to this day, as the positions taken for or against him have decided both events and beliefs. We have seen that he has been and is still revered by hundreds of millions of Muslims, notably in the East, at least for the last seven centuries. His figure, still in many ways mysterious, is maybe a key to the understanding of Islam, from its origins to today.

26 The issue is addressed in S. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet, passim*; Id., *The Apocalypse of Empire. Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, Philadelphia, 2018, see index; J. Van Reeth, “L’Hégire et la fin du monde”, *Oriens Christianus* 100, 2017, pp. 188-226, notably pp. 211 ff.; however, see S. Shoemaker’s hypothesis, based among other things on the Chronicle of Khūzistān, a Syriac document from the 7th century CE, that Muḥammad was alive at the time of the Arab conquest of the Sassanid capital and led the war against the Iranians himself; S. Shoemaker, *A Prophet Has Appeared. The Rise of Islam through Christian and Jewish Eyes*, Oakland, 2021, pp. 133-134.

# Divine Knowledge and Messianic Action: The Figure of ‘Alī in Mystical and Messianic Circles (5th/11th-10th/16th Centuries)

*Orkhan Mir-Kasimov*

## 1 Introduction

This paper grew out of the following question: how was the figure of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, central to Shi‘i Islam, integrated into mystical and messianic circles other than the Shi‘i, and what role did it play in the profound transformations undergone by the Islamic world in the period from the 5th/11th to the 10th/16th century? The beginning of the period was remarkable for the disintegration of the caliphates: in chronological order, those of the Umayyads in the Iberian Peninsula, the Fatimids in North Africa and in Egypt, and the Abbasids in the Middle East, whilst its end saw the emergence of a new geopolitical order with new conceptions of power. In the Eastern part of the Islamic world, this new order was represented by the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires founded between the 8th/14th and the 10th/16th centuries. In the Western part of the Islamic world the situation was more complex. In the Iberian Peninsula, Islamic al-Andalus was definitively lost to the Christians around the end of the 9th/15th century, whereas in North Africa, the Fatimid caliphate was followed by two powerful empires, the Almoravids (5th/11th-6th/12th centuries) and the Almohads (6th/12th-7th/13th centuries) (the latter having claimed the title of caliphate for themselves). These three empires played a decisive role in the subsequent geopolitical configuration of that region.

The figure of the caliph to some degree symbolised the cohesion of the Islamic community under a legitimate government, that is to say, a government that ensured that the life of the community was organised according to the precepts laid down by the Prophet.<sup>1</sup> Even if the interpretations of what constitutes ‘legitimate power’ varied significantly from one caliphate to the other, and even if the caliphs did not always wield real power,<sup>2</sup> the institution of the caliphate and the sacredness of the caliph

1 This role of caliph is in the meaning of the Arabic word *khalīfa*, ‘successor’, ‘the one that comes after’ (the Prophet). For the semantic evolution of this concept in early Islam, see P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious authority in the first centuries of Islam*, Cambridge, 1986.

2 The authority of the caliphs, in the religious as well the political spheres, could be purely nominal, delegated to scholars and doctors of law on the one hand and to powerful clans with important military and political power on the other. This was notably the case of the

line became a source of near universal legitimacy for the exercise of power in the Islamic world.

The disappearance of the caliphal power was thus a shock to the Muslim communities concerned. The shock might put the very survival of these communities at risk, if an alternative figure could not be found who had a symbolic significance similar to that of the caliph. Thus, the disintegration of the Umayyad caliphate in the Iberian Peninsula was followed by the division of its territory into several independent Muslim kingdoms, none of which had any convincing legitimacy. Even if the mystico-messianic current, and especially the movement led by Abū al-Qāsim Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn Ibn Qasī (d. 546/1251), produced a new conception of religious and political legitimacy, it did not succeed in securing sufficient support in the peninsula, and it was consequently absorbed into the Maghrebi movement of the Almohads.<sup>3</sup> Since no independent conception of religious and political legitimacy emerged to re-unify al-Andalus, the weakening of the Almohads resulted in the progressive loss of this part of the Islamic world to the Christian *Reconquista*.

Similarly, the fall of the Fatimid caliphate in North Africa was a deep shock to the Ismaili community. But this community did manage to survive and to recover because the line of their caliphs-Imāms was not interrupted. There was therefore no need for a radically new conception of religious and political authority, even though important changes to the theory of the Imamate were subsequently made by the surviving branches of Ismaili Shi'ism. In the Eastern part of the Islamic world, the fall of the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad as result of the Mongol invasions marked the beginning of two centuries of intense searching for a new idea of religious and political authority.<sup>4</sup>

In the course of this search, the figure of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib,<sup>5</sup> who was revered as an ideal of the chivalric warrior for the faith and as a source of initiatory knowledge associated with messianic beliefs, became the rallying point of several different currents and factions within Islam. In the following pages, we will closely examine some characteristics ascribed to 'Alī which played an important part in the creation of a new figure of authority in the post-caliphal Islamic world, the figure of a charismatic and/or divinely inspired messianic king.

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Abbasid caliphs under Buyid domination (4th/10th century) and again under Seljuk domination (5th/11th-6th/12th centuries).

3 On Ibn Qasī, his thought and movement, see V. Lagardière, 'La tariqa et la révolte des Murīdūn en 539 H / 1144 en Andalus', *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 35 (1983), pp. 157-170; and M. Ebstein, 'Was Ibn Qasī a Ṣūfī?', *Studia Islamica* 110 (2015), pp. 196-232.

4 This period will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

5 For the image of 'Alī such as it appears from the early sources attributed to him see R. Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam 'Alī*, London, 2006.

## 2 The Figure of 'Alī at the End of the Caliphal Period

For reasons that are as yet unclear, in around the 5th/11th century the legend of 'Alī, until then mostly confined to Shi'ī circles, came to be of central importance in such mystical currents as *futuwwa* and Sufism, thus outside Shi'ism proper.<sup>6</sup>

The popularity of 'Alī among the popular militias who were one of the sources of the *futuwwa*, was without doubt due to his widespread reputation as a warrior. 'Alī was seen as the archetype of the *fatā*, the young man who combined in his person the virile and chivalric qualities of courage, generosity, modesty, etc., an image summed up in the famous words associated with one of the most decisive battles of early Islam: 'there is no *fatā* but 'Alī, no sword but the *Dhū l-faqār*'.<sup>7</sup>

In Sufism, emphasis was placed upon another aspect of the figure of 'Alī: his privileged role as the possessor of mystic knowledge and the bearer of the prophetic message. While references to 'Alī as the source of initiatory knowledge can already be found in early Sufism, in fact since the 5th/11th century, it was thanks to the creation of the Sufi orders that the role of 'Alī became of central importance. From that moment on, nearly all of them have traced their chains of initiation (*silsila*) back to the Prophet through 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.<sup>8</sup>

6 *Futuwwa*, from *fatā*, pl. *fiṭyān*, 'young man' in Arabic, is a complex phenomenon that varies in character in differing historical and geographical contexts. *Futuwwa* can mean a paramilitary group, a chivalric ethical code associated, or not, with Sufism, or the professional guilds, which are organized along lines similar to those of Sufi brotherhoods. See Cl. Cahen and Fr. Taeschner, 'Futuwwa', *EI2*, and L. Ridgeon, 'Futuwwa (in Sūfism)', *EI3*. For a more detailed study of *futuwwa* and similar groups in the socio-political history of Islam, see Cl. Cahen, 'Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du moyen âge', *Arabica* 5/3 (1958), pp. 225-250; 6/1 (1959), pp. 25-56; 6/3 (1959), pp. 233-265 (especially the third part).

7 *Lā fatā illā 'Alī, lā sayf illā Dhū l-faqār*. For the first part of this sentence, see Muḥammad Ja'far Mahjub, 'Chivalry and Early Persian Sufism', L. Lewisohn (ed.), *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 1, Oxford, 1999, pp. 549-582, p. 554. For the complete text, attributed either to Prophet Muḥammad or to a supernatural voice during the battle of Uḥud (3/624), see C. Heger, 'Yā muḥammad – kein "oh Muḥammad", und wer ist 'Alī?', *Schlaglichter: die beiden ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte*, M. Groß and K.-H. Ohlig (eds.), Berlin, 2005, pp. 278-292, p. 286. For the references to Shi'ī sources, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "'Le combattant du ta'wīl": un poème de Mollā Ṣadrā sur 'Alī (aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine IX)', *Journal Asiatique* 292.1-2 (2004), pp. 331-359, p. 334 n. 12.

8 Again, the reason for this phenomenon is not clear. The first Sufi *silsilas* did not necessarily all go back to 'Alī. For examples see R. Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, Wiesbaden, 1976, vol. 2, p. 171 ff.; J. Spencer Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford, 1971, pp. 261-263. See also Sh. Pāzūkī, 'Taṣawwuf-i 'alawī: guftāri dar bāb-i intisāb-i salās-il-ṣūfiyya ba ḥaḍrat-i 'Alī', *Faṣḥnāma-yi andīsha-yi dīnī dānishgāh-i Shīrāz* 2/1-2 (2001), pp. 59-74. It is possible that the general adoption of the image of 'Alī as the leading figure of initiatory knowledge in Islam was partially due to the influence of *futuwwa* on Sufism. It is true that

In the 5th/11th and 6th/12th centuries the *futuwwa* became an important military power in Muslim cities. At the same time, Sufism underwent an important transformation. Initially a movement of ascetics and contemplatives absorbed in a spiritual quest for individual perfection, regardless of any social or political context, it gradually became a highly structured organisation, subject to strict discipline under the authority of a shaykh and exerting enormous influence on society at large. Two apparently unrelated, but contemporary factors caused this transformation: the formation of the Sufi orders and the growth of popular cults of saints around the Sufi shaykhs. This radical growth of the social importance of the Sufi orders and of individual Sufi shaykhs brought them to the attention of caliphs and sultans, for whom Sufism henceforth became a credible source of authority which they could use to consolidate their position in society and to legitimise their power.<sup>9</sup>

The values of the *futuwwa*, understood as a code of martial honour, had been adopted by Sufism at an early stage.<sup>10</sup> But it is not certain that this Sufi interpretation of the *futuwwa* was at first in any way linked to the paramilitary organisations of that name.<sup>11</sup> The rapprochement between the militias and Sufism was consolidated and institutionalised as part of an audacious project of universal *futuwwa* undertaken by one of the last Abbasid caliphs, al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (r. 575/1180-622/1225). Al-Nāṣir's

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the Naqshbandiyya, an extremely powerful and politically active Sufi order, were a notable exception to this rule, given that their main initiatory chain goes back to the Prophet through Abū Bakr and not through 'Alī. However, two other Naqshbandi initiatory chains go back to 'Alī in the same way as other Sufi orders. For the Naqshbandi initiatory chains, see for example I. Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition*, London and New York, 2007, p. 23. Even if the sharing of the paths of transmission of initiatory knowledge between Abū Bakr and 'Alī diminishes the centrality of 'Alī, he and the other members of the prophetic family (*ahl al-bayt*) always had an important place in the foundational texts of Naqshbandi doctrine. For example, the *Faṣl al-khiṭāb* of Muḥammad Pārsā (d. 822/1419) contains many sections devoted to 'Alī, the prophetic family and the twelve Imāms. See K.M. Pārsā, *Faṣl al-khiṭāb*, Jalīl Misgarnizhād (ed.), Tehran 1381/[2002-2003]. Certain passages in the Letters (*Maktūbāt*) of Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1034/1624), founder of the Mujaddidi branch of the Naqshbandiyya, show there is a symmetrical relationship between Abū Bakr and 'Alī: they exemplify two different types of divine attraction; or two different sorts of contemplative practice, one leading to knowledge ('Alī), the other leading to love (Abū Bakr). See A.F. Buehler, *Revealed Grace: The Juristic Sufism of Ahmad Sirhindī (1564-1624)*, Louisville (KY), 2011, p. 138 and 154.

- 9 For the factors that determined the transformation of Sufism into a social and political force, and for examples of narratives of the legitimation of political power by the Sufi shaykhs, see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, Edinburgh, 2007, pp. 143-155.
- 10 For references, see L. Ridgeon, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib in Medieval Persian Sufi-Futuwwat Treatises', in Amir-Moezzi et al. (eds.), *L'ésotérisme shī'ite*, pp. 665-685, pp. 667-668.
- 11 These organisations were also described by terms such as 'ayyārūn, aḥdāth etc. See Cl. Cahen, 'Mouvements populaires'.

project was to unite all the individual *futuwwa* groups in Baghdad into a single unified *futuwwa* under the authority of the caliph, and then to apply its principles to the broader caliphate, by recruiting prominent figures and sultans governing in his name into this one institution. In the execution of this project, al-Nāṣir was advised by several Sufi masters, the most famous among them being Abū Hafs ‘Umar Suhrawardī (m. 632/1234), who had given his name to the powerful Suhrawardiyya brotherhood. The *futuwwa* of al-Nāṣir thus had much in common with a Sufi order, the caliph being in the place of the shaykh, the supreme spiritual guide to whom all his vassals owed absolute obedience, in the same way as the disciples of a Sufi order. Al-Nāṣir’s project of universal *futuwwa* in this way triggered an osmosis of the values and the organisational principles of the *futuwwa* and of the Sufi orders.<sup>12</sup>

Al-Nāṣir’s initiative was also decisive in establishing the figure of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as the undisputed founder of the *futuwwa*. Al-Nāṣir concocted a genealogical link with ‘Alī, cast himself in the role of ‘Alī’s heir and emulator<sup>13</sup> and sought to strengthen his authority as Caliph by linking it to the conception of spiritual authority inherent in Sufism. While the effectiveness of this project can be questioned, it arguably marked a turning point whereby the figure of ‘Alī, the archetype of both initiatory knowledge and military valour, became the source of legitimate political power in the larger Islamic world, well beyond the Shī‘ī communities.<sup>14</sup>

This project of linking universal *futuwwa* to the founding figure of ‘Alī was part of al-Nāṣir’s broader plan to reconcile and unite all the factions in Muslim society, and in particular the Shī‘īs and the Sunnis. Establishing himself as the legitimate caliph

12 On al-Nāṣir and his project of universal *futuwwa*, see A. Hartmann, ‘al-Nāṣir Li-Dīn Allāh’, *E12*, and her *an-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (1180-1225). Politik, Religion, Kultur in der späten Abbāsidenzeit*, Berlin and New York 1975; E. Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition: ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī and the Rise of the Islamic Mystical Brotherhoods*, Leiden and Boston, 2008, pp. 271 ff.

13 A. Hartmann, ‘al-Nāṣir’. The idea that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was the founder and the sole source of *futuwwa*, and that al-Nāṣir, as his heir, was entrusted with preserving the original principles of this institution, is reflected in a decree promulgated by the caliphal chancellery. The text of this decree is preserved in the work of ‘Alī b. Anjab Ṭāj al-Dīn Ibn al-Sā‘ī (d. 674/1276), a Baghdadi historian and contemporary of al-Nāṣir. See his *al-Jāmi‘ al-mukhtaṣar*, ed. Muṣṭafā Jawād, Baghdad 1353/1934, pp. 221-225. This text was reprinted with a German translation by P. Kahle, ‘Ein Futuwwa-Erlass des Kalifen en-Nāṣir aus dem Jahre 604 (1207)’, *Aus fünf Jahrtausenden morgenländischer Kultur: Festschrift Max Freiherrn von Oppenheim*, Ernst F. Weidner (ed.), Berlin 1933, pp. 52-58. For the genealogical revision of al-Nāṣir, see A. Hartmann, ‘al-Nāṣir’, and her *an-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh*, p. 102, where there is a reference to the *Tuḥfat al-waṣāyā* of another contemporary of al-Nāṣir, Aḥmad b. Ilyās al-Naqqāsh Khartabirī.

14 For a general overview of the significance of the figure of ‘Alī in Sufism and *futuwwa*, see L. Lewisohn, ‘Alī ibn Abi Talib’s Ethics of Mercy in the Mirror of the Persian Sufi Tradition’, M. Ali Lakhani (ed.), *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam: The Teachings of ‘Alī ibn Abi Talib*, Vancouver, 2006, pp. 109-145.

descended from the Qurashi and Abbasid lines, the authority on legal matters, the transmitter of prophetic traditions, but also, as the descendant of 'Alī, at the head of the *ahl al-bayt*, the head of the universal *futuwwa* transcending confessional divisions and also a Sufi shaykh, the caliph sought to have his authority recognised by all the important groups of his society.<sup>15</sup> It is possible that this initiative foreshadowed the rapprochement between Shi'ism and Sunnism and the emergence of the figure of 'Alī as the universally acceptable source of religious and political legitimacy in the period following the fall of the Abbasid caliphate as a consequence of the Mongol invasions.

### 3 The Figure of 'Alī in the Mystical and Messianic Doctrines of the Post-Mongol Muslim East

The fall of the Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad in the onslaught of Hülegü's armies in 656/1258 marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Islamic world. Several events led to a further increase in the social, political and spiritual significance of the figure of 'Alī in that period.

As discussed above, towards the end of the Abbasid caliphate the figure of 'Alī emerged from purely Shi'i circles as a crucial part of the effort to legitimize the political power of the Caliph. At that time the prestige of the figure of 'Alī was promoted, on the one hand, by the Sufi orders which by that time were structurally consolidated and able to function autonomously as 'Islamic communities in miniature' under the direction of their shaykhs, who had absolute authority over their disciples and were venerated by the general population.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the significance of the figure of 'Alī increased with the growing influence of the *futuwwa* militias. The rapprochement between Sufi orders and *futuwwa* created a combination of spiritual authority, military

15 Al-Suhrawardī declared this ecumenical vision, which he apparently shared with the caliph, by inviting believers to love all the Companions and all the members of the prophetic family, without favouring one above the other. Thus, Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn had to be respected without any discussion of their relative virtues. See al-Suhrawardī, *A'lām al-hudā wa 'aqīdat arbāb al-tuqā*, 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Sayrawān (ed.), Damascus 1996, p. 83, quoted by E. Ohlander, *Sufism*, p. 269. Al-Nāṣir maintained his ties with moderate Shi'i circles in Baghdad and with the heads of the 'Alid networks. He had Shi'i advisors and ministers and contributed to the restoration of Shi'i shrines. It was also during his reign that the rapprochement with the Nizari Ismailis of Alamūt took place. Hartmann suggests that the propaganda, called the 'well-guided call' (*da'wa hādīya*), for the religious project of al-Nāṣir could have been inspired by similar Ismaili practices. This triggered attacks by Sunni historians who accused al-Nāṣir of Shi'i sympathies. See A. Hartmann, 'al-Nāṣir', and her article 'La conception gouvernementale du calife an-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh', *Orientalia Suecana* 22 (1973), pp. 52-61.

16 On the subject of unconditional obedience to the shaykh in Sufism see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism*, pp. 117 ff.

power and social influence articulated around the mythical figure of 'Alī perceived as the archetype of the initiated sage and the noble warrior of Islam.

Caliph al-Nāṣir recognised the power of this myth as well as the potential of the forms of organised spirituality, such as Sufism and *futuwwa*, which were associated with it, and used it brilliantly in his attempt to reorganise the caliphate. Incorporating some of their principles into the conception of the caliphate, al-Nāṣir enhanced the political importance of these forms of spirituality and at the same time institutionalised the figure of 'Alī as one of the symbols of religious and political authority in Islam.

The end of the Abbasid caliphate had created particularly favourable conditions for the development of diverse mystical groups and movements that claimed some connection with 'Alī. The following factors most probably contributed to the rise of the cult of 'Alī in mystic and messianic circles after the destitution of the last caliph of Baghdad.

First, the absence of the caliph had deprived the Islamic community of the traditional source of legitimate political power. The Muslim population of the Ilkhanate (the Mongol realm in Islamic lands) was governed for a relatively short time by Ilkhanid rulers who were Mongols and non-Muslims. After the conversion of the Ilkhanids to Islam, and especially after their disappearance from the scene, political power returned to powerful Muslim dynasties. Mostly of Turkic and Mongol descent, with no ties to the prophetic family or other links to the origins of Islam, these dynasties needed proofs of legitimacy to make their government acceptable in the eyes of the Muslim population. In the absence of a caliph, the great Sufi masters whose spiritual lineages, as we have seen, all went back to 'Alī, were one of the principal sources of legitimacy. Not only could they extend their charisma, the sign of divine friendship, to a holder of political power but, thanks to their vast social influence, they could also provide the ruler with popular support. Thus, the Timurids, the powerful Turco-Mongol dynasty who controlled most of the territory of the Ilkhanate after the collapse of Mongol power, were intimately linked to Sufis of the Naqshbandi order. This practice of association with a Sufi order (Naqshbandis, Shaṭṭāris, Chishtis) was maintained by their successors, the Mughal rulers.<sup>17</sup> Their bond with mystical circles is part and parcel of the Ottoman founding myths, whilst the Safavid dynasty in Iran also grew out of a Sufi order.<sup>18</sup>

17 On the ties between the Timurids and the Naqshbandis, which also contributed to the increase in political power of the latter, see H. Algar, 'Naqshbandiyya' and 'Aḥrār', *ETI*.

18 One of the Ottoman foundational myths establishes a link between Osman, the founder of the Ottoman dynasty, and the dervish Edebali. The dervish interpreted the dream of Osman and predicted that Osman's descendants would dominate the entire world. Osman married the daughter of the dervish, thus consolidating his bond with the mystical milieu. This story can be found in the *Tavārikh-i Āl-i 'Othmān* of 'Ashiqpāshāzāda, a famous Ottoman historian of the 9th/15th century. See, for example, C. Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power*, New York, 2002, p. 124.

Secondly, the post-Mongol period was marked by a rapprochement between Sufism and Shi'ism, principally with its Twelver and Ismaili branches, where the cult of 'Alī was strongest. In Twelver Shi'ism, it was the time of the rediscovery of the esoteric doctrines of early Shi'ism, after a long period of domination by juridical Shi'ism.<sup>19</sup> This rediscovery was accompanied by the appropriation of Sufi doctrines, especially of the monumental work of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240). These Sufi doctrines are considered by Shi'ī thinkers to derive from the teachings of the Shi'ī Imāms. As a result, Twelver thinkers of Bahrain like 'Alī b. Sulaymān (d. ca. 672/1273) and Mītham al-Baḥrānī (d. 689/1290), followed by the Iranian Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385), reinterpreted Ibn 'Arabī's messianic doctrine of the 'seals' of prophecy (*nubuwwa*) and of the sainthood (*walāya*). They contested Ibn 'Arabī's opinion that the seal of universal sainthood is Jesus and ascribed this role to 'Alī instead.<sup>20</sup>

The Nizari Ismailis associated themselves with Sufism after the destruction of the Ismaili fortresses in Northern Iran by the Mongol armies in the middle of the 7th/13th century. Nizari Ismailism combined devotion to 'Alī and the Imams with a doctrine of Resurrection (*qiyāma*), a messianic doctrine which, together with similar doctrines developed within Sufism, probably contributed to the growth of mystical and messianic movements in the post-Mongol era.<sup>21</sup>

Some elements ordinarily associated with Shi'ism, such as devotion to 'Alī and to the twelve Imāms, were progressively adopted by the Sufis, and notably by such influential Sufi orders of the Mongol and post-Mongol period as the Kubrawis or the

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- 19 On the domination of the juridical current in Twelver Shi'ism after the major occultation of the 12th Imam, which occurred in 329/940, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, Introduction, pp. 15-47 and Appendix, pp. 319-335; also M.A. Amir-Moezzi and Ch. Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le shī'isme?*, pp. 181-239.
- 20 On the school of Bahrain, see Ali al-Oraibi, 'Shī'ī Renaissance: A Case Study of the Theosophical School of Bahrain in the 7th/13th Century', doctoral thesis, McGill University, Montreal 1992, especially pp. 172-217; and his 'Rationalism in the School of Bahrain: A Historical Perspective', *Shī'ite Heritage*, L. Clarke (ed.), Binghamton (NY) 2001, pp. 331-343. On Ḥaydar Āmulī, see H. Corbin, *En islam iranien*, vol. 3, pp. 198 ff.
- 21 On the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Nizārī Ismailis, see N. Tusi, *La convocation d'Alamut: Rawdat al-taslim*, French translation by Jambet with an introduction and notes by the translator, Lagrasse, 1996; the English translation of the same work by Jalal Badakhchani, entitled *Paradise of Submission: A Medieval Treatise on Ismaili Thought*, London, 2005; and J. Badakhchani, *Spiritual Resurrection in Shī'ī Islam: An Early Ismaili Treatise on the Doctrine of Qiyāmat. A new Persian edition and English translation of the Haft bāb by Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātīb*, London, 2017. On the possible links between the Ismaili doctrine of Resurrection and the post-Mongol mystico-messianic movements, see O. Mir-Kasimov, 'The Nizārī Ismaili Theory of the Resurrection (*Qiyāma*) and Post-Mongol Iranian Messianism,' in *Intellectual Interactions in Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread*, O. Mir-Kasimov (ed.), I.B. Tauris (Shī'ī Heritage) in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 2019, pp. 323-352.

Ni‘matullāhis. The figure of ‘Alī has an important place in the initiatory chains of these orders, as well as in their doctrines.<sup>22</sup>

This rapprochement between Sufism and Shi‘ism, stimulated by the project of al-Nāṣir, took place within the more general context of the rapprochement between Shi‘ism and Sunnism from the 7th/13th century on. Expression of deep respect for, and admiration of, the prophetic family became the norm in Sunni Islam at that time and, reciprocally, Shi‘i authors began to refer favourably to the first three caliphs.<sup>23</sup> In contemporary scholarship, this phenomenon is referred to by such terms as ‘Alid loyalism’ (Marshall Hodgson), ‘Twelver Sunnism’ (*tasannun-i davāzdah imāmī*) (Rasūl Ja‘fariyān), ‘confessional ambiguity’ (John Woods), ‘Shi‘i-Sunnism or imamophilism’ (Matthew Melvin-Koushki). It is worth noting that the Sunni descendants of ‘Alī also contributed to this.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, ‘Alī’s descendants, the sharīfs and sayyids, were a separate social group with its own structure and leaders, and that too played an important political role, especially in the Maghreb, as we shall see.

Another area where Shi‘ism and Sunnism met and influenced each other was that of the occult sciences such as astrology, alchemy, numerology and the science of letters (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf*). These sciences are traditionally associated with the prophetic family, and more specifically with ‘Alī, Fāṭima and the Shi‘i Imāms descended from them. This cult of the prophetic family, dominated by the figure of ‘Alī, the supreme authority on occult knowledge, deeply impregnated Sunni occultist circles.<sup>25</sup> Individual thinkers

22 These orders were founded by Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 617/1220) and Shāh Ni‘mat Allāh Walī (d. 834/1430-1431) respectively. On the ‘Shi‘i’ elements among the Kubrawis, see Marijan Molé, ‘Les Kubrawiyya entre sunnisme et shiisme aux huitième et neuvième siècle de l’hégire’, *Revue des Études Islamiques* 29 (1961), pp. 61-142. While Shāh Ni‘mat Allāh Walī was himself most probably not Shi‘i, the Ni‘matullāhiyya became a Shi‘i Sufi order in the course of its history and is today the most popular Sufi order in Iran. See Hamid Algar, ‘Ni‘mat-Allāhiyya’, *EI2*.

23 This is mostly observed in the literature dedicated to the virtues (*faḍā‘il, manāqib*) of the members of the prophetic family, including ‘Alī and the twelve Imāms. For references to authors and works, see M. Melvin-Koushki, ‘The Quest for a Universal Science: The Occult Philosophy of Šā‘in al-Dīn Turka Işfahānī (1369-1432) and Intellectual Millenarianism in Early Timurid Iran’, doctoral thesis, Yale University, 2012, p. 74 and footnote 146; and Rasūl Ja‘fariyān, *Tārikh-i tashayyu‘ dar Irān az āghāz tā ḥulū‘-i dawlat-i şafāvī*, Tehran 1388/[2009-2010], pp. 840-850.

24 Kazuo Morimoto has studied the case of a Sunni scholar from the 9th/15th from the Hasanid branch of the prophetic family who claimed that, in the field of Sunni jurisprudence, scholars belonging to the prophetic family are superior to those who have no ties with that family. See K. Morimoto, ‘The Prophet’s Family as the Perennial Source of Sainly Scholars: al-Samhūdī on ‘ilm and *nasab*’, in C. Mayeur-Jaouen and A. Papas (eds.), *Family Portraits with Saints: Hagiography, Sanctity, and Family in the Muslim World*, Berlin 2014, pp. 106-124.

25 For the veneration of ‘Alī and the prophetic family in Sunni occultist circles of the 7th/13th centuries, see M.A. Masad, ‘The Medieval Islamic Apocalyptic Tradition: Divination,

and intellectual networks with an interest in occult sciences played an important role in the formation of political theories and imperial ideologies during the post-caliphal period, so bringing their deep respect for 'Alī and the prophetic family into the political arena.<sup>26</sup>

An example which illustrates the importance of the figure of 'Alī as a source of universal political legitimacy during the post-caliphal period is provided by an inscription on the tomb of Tamerlane (d. 806/1405), the renowned Turco-Mongol conqueror and one of the most powerful Muslim rulers of his time. This inscription modifies the genealogy of Tamerlane to make him a descendant of 'Alī.<sup>27</sup>

The third factor which favoured the promotion of the figure of 'Alī in the post-Mongol period is the rise of mystico-messianic movements with eclectic doctrines, in which Sufi and Shi'ī elements were so closely intertwined that it became impossible to distinguish between them. 'Alī has consequently an important place in the doctrines of almost all these movements.

The Sarbadār movement was the earliest of its kind to leave a significant trace in the historical record.<sup>28</sup> It began as an ostensibly secular rebellion against the tax policies

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Prophesy and the End of Time in the 13th Century Eastern Mediterranean', PhD thesis, Washington University, Saint Louis (MO), 2008; for the later period (8th/14th-9th/15th centuries), see M. Melvin-Koushki, 'The Quest', especially pp. 69-77.

26 See the PhD thesis and many articles by Matthew Melvin-Koushki; as well as Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters*, Cambridge 2016. Sunni approach to occult sciences, as evidenced by the work of prominent thinkers such as Şā'in al-Dīn Turka İsfahānī (d. 836/1432), 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Bastāmī (d. 858/1454) and Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908/1502) are arguably more rational than mystical. They do not necessarily rely upon a metaphysical link with the source of divine knowledge, which is essential to all forms of mysticism. It is also worth noting that in works on the classification of the sciences, the occult sciences are found either in the category of natural sciences or in that of mathematical sciences. See M. Melvin-Koushki, 'Powers of One: The Mathematicalization of the Occult Sciences in the High Persianate Tradition', *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 5 (2017), pp. 127-199. Of course, this 'scientific' dimension did not prevent the occult sciences from being also present in mystical doctrines.

27 This genealogy can also be found in other historical sources from that period. See John E. Woods, 'Timur's Genealogy', *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson*, Michel M. Mazzaoui and Vera Moreen (eds.), Salt Lake City, 1990, pp. 85-125, p. 88. For a different 'Alid genealogy of the Timurids (through Muḥammad b. al-Hanafiyya), see K. Morimoto, 'An Enigmatic Genealogical Chart of the Timurids: A Testimony to the Dynasty's Claim to Yasavi-'Alid Legitimacy?', *Oriens* 44 (2016), pp. 145-178.

28 The works of Ḥāfiẓ Abrū (d. 833/1430) are the main sources on the Sarbadārs. For a detailed discussion of the sources, see Ya'qūb Āzhand, *Qiyām-i Shī'ī-yi Sarbadārān*, Tehran 1363 s.n./1985, pp. 41-71. See also J. Aubin, 'La fin de l'état Sarbadār du Khorassan', *Journal Asiatique* 263 (1974), pp. 95-118; Id., 'Aux origines d'un mouvement populaire medieval: Le cheykhisme du Bayhaq et du Nichâpour', *Studia Iranica* 5/2, 1976, pp. 213-24; J. Masson Smith, *The History of the Sarbadār Dynasty*, The Hague and Paris, 1970; D. Aigle,

of the last Ilkhans. The Sarbadārs were later joined in it by Sufi dervishes led by the Shaykh Khalifa and Shaykh Ḥasan Jūrī, who brought a more mystical dimension to the movement. It is difficult to evaluate what exact role the figure of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib played in the doctrines of these dervishes, since none of their doctrinal texts have survived.<sup>29</sup> But it is very likely that both the dervishes and the Sarbadār were to some extent influenced by popular Shi‘ism and its messianic expectations.<sup>30</sup> We also know that the last Sarbadār leader, ‘Alī Mu‘ayyad (d. 788/1386), invited a prominent representative of legalist Twelver Shi‘ism, Muḥammad b. Makkī al-Āmilī (d. 786/1384), to establish an ‘official’ form of Shi‘ism in the Sarbadār state. This link with Shi‘ism suggests that the figure of ‘Alī had an important place in the beliefs of the Sarbadār.

In the work of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394), a mystical and messianic thinker and founder of the influential movement known as Ḥurūfiyya, ‘Alī is the primordial Dot, the Dot containing in an undifferentiated state all possible knowledge of God as well as the entire universe with all its possibilities of future evolution. Moreover, without referring explicitly to the Shi‘i doctrine of the Imamate, Faḍl Allāh writes that ‘Alī

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‘Sarbedārs’, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*; Shahzad Bashir, ‘Between Mysticism and Messianism: The Life and Thought of Muḥammad Nūrbaḳš (d. 1464)’, doctoral thesis, Yale University, 1997, pp. 12-34.

29 The only known document written by the founders of this dervish movement is a letter which Ḥasan Jūrī wrote to Muḥammad Bek (d. 772/1370-1371 or 774/1372-1373), head of the Jānī (or Jā‘ūnī) Qurbān tribe. The text of this letter was published by Āzhand, *Qiyām* pp. 86-89. It contains little information about the doctrinal views of its author and deals mostly with the life and travels of Ḥasan Jūrī and his relations with Muḥammad Bek. The outlines of the doctrine of the dervishes proposed by J. Masson Smith (*The History*, pp. 55-89) and Ya‘qūb Āzhand (*Qiyām* pp. 76-77 and 89-92) contain questionable extrapolations and sometimes erroneous interpretations of the historical evidence. The conclusions of Smith, especially those based on the interpretation of numismatic material, have been criticised by other researchers (see H. Morton, ‘The History of the Sarbadars in the light of new numismatic evidence’, *Numismatic Chronicle*, 7th series, 16 (1976), pp. 255-258; S. Bashir, ‘Between Mysticism and Messianism’, pp. 28-34).

30 Information about the messianic tendencies of the dervishes or the Sarbadār comes mainly from two sources. One of them contains Ḥasan Jūrī’s call to his supporters following the death of his predecessor, Shaykh Khalifa, enjoining them to prepare their weapons and to be ready for the advent of the ‘time of manifestation’ (*vaqt-i zuhūr*) which will be revealed to them (Āzhand, *Qiyām*, p. 78, with reference to the *Jughrāfiyā* of Ḥāfiẓ Abrū). However, it is not clear from this passage whether or not the ‘time of manifestation’ has any specifically apocalyptic connotation, and no messianic figure is explicitly mentioned in this text. The second source describes a custom established by the last Sarbadār leader, when a horse was prepared and kept ready for the awaited Savior (*ṣāhib al-zamān*) every day (S. Bashir, ‘Between Mysticism and Messianism’, p. 28, with reference to Mir Khwānd, *Tārīkh-i rawḍat al-ṣafā*). This custom was apparently not an invention of the Sarbadār and was also practised by Shi‘i communities elsewhere, notably in Ḥilla. See S. Bashir, *ibid.*, p. 28 n. 48.

and his descendants possess the knowledge of spiritual hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*).<sup>31</sup> As the guardian, or rather, the ultimate personification of that knowledge, 'Alī can guide the faithful from the written word of the Quran to its deepest meaning. Hence 'Alī's title of 'the Speaking Quran'.<sup>32</sup> Many implicit allusions in the *Jāvidān-nāma-yi kabīr*, the main work of Faḍl Allāh, would appear to establish a parallel between the role of 'Alī and the eschatological mission of Jesus. For example, 'Alī is identified with the 'Book that speaks the Truth' of the Quranic text, and the same expression refers, in other passages, to the eschatological book sealed with seven seals which is mentioned in the Book of Revelation of John, the book which Jesus will open at the End of Time.<sup>33</sup> 'Alī, after Muḥammad and Adam, is also one the figures most frequently mentioned in the dream journal attributed to Faḍl Allāh.<sup>34</sup> Finally, the high status of 'Alī is often emphasised in the poetry attributed to the same author:<sup>35</sup>

31 O. Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power: Ḥurūfī Teachings between Shi'ism and Sufism in Medieval Islam*, London, 2015, p. 349.

32 *Al-Qur'ān al-nātiq*, opposed to the 'silent Quran' (*al-Qur'ān al-sāmī*). For these expressions, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*, pp. 103 ff.

33 O. Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, pp. 347-348 and 376-377. Is this a sign of the resurgence of the messianic role attributed to 'Alī in the formative period of Islam? For the messianic dimension of the figure of 'Alī in early Islam and for the 'Alī/Jésus parallel, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Muḥammad le Paraclet et 'Alī le Messie: nouvelles remarques sur les origines de l'islam et de l'imamologie shi'ite', *L'ésothérisme shi'ite*, pp. 19-54 (here chap. 2). However, in the *Jāvidān-nāma* of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī, it is Jesus and not 'Alī who is the main messianic figure, even if the Jesus/'Alī parallel is prominent in this work too. Other examples of the messianic dimension of the figure of 'Alī can be found in the doctrines of mystical and messianic thinkers of the post-Mongol period such as Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh or Muḥammad Ibn Falāḥ (see further below).

34 In one of his dreams, 'Alī replies to Faḍl Allāh's greeting calling him 'my brother' (*akhī*). See O. Mir-Kasimov, 'Le "journal des rêves" de Faḍlullāh Astarābādī: édition et traduction annotée', *Studia Iranica* 38 (2009), pp. 249-304, paragraph 120 (Persian text p. 277, translation pp. 295-296).

35 There is some confusion between the poetry attributed to Faḍl Allāh and that attributed to his famous disciple, 'Imād al-Dīn Nasīmī (d. 820/1417-1418), so that many poems included in the *divān* of Faḍl Allāh (under his pen name 'Na'imī') can also be found in the *divān* of Nasīmī. On this question, see Ş. Kiyā, "Āgahī hā-yi tāza az ḥurūfiyān", *Majalla-yi dānishkada-yi adabiyāt-i dānishgāh-i Tihirān*, n° 2/2 (1333/1954), pp. 39-65. However, the exact authorship is not our concern in this case. Whether this poetry was written by Faḍl Allāh himself or by one of his close disciples, it still demonstrates the august position of 'Alī in the Ḥurūfī tradition. It is true that these quatrains explicitly describe 'Alī as the locus of manifestation of God, which differs somewhat from the rather cautious language of the main work of Faḍl Allāh, the *Jāvidān-nāma-yi kabīr*. However, in his *Will* (*Waṣīyyat-nāma*), Faḍl Allāh compared himself to al-Ḥusayn, one of the sons of 'Alī killed by the Umayyad forces at Karbalā: 'The Ḥusayn of the Age am I, and each worthless foe a Shimr and Yazīd / My life is a day of mourning [‘Āshūrā (the day of the assassination of Ḥusayn)], and Shirwān my Karbalā' (*man Ḥusayn-i waqt o nā-ahlān Yazīd o Shimr-i man / rūzgāram jumla 'Āshūrā o Shirwān[am ?] Karbalā*) (Faḍlullāh Astarābādī, *Waṣīyyat-nāma*,

The [Quranic expression] 'Say: He is God!' refers to 'Alī,  
 'Alī is the supreme king in the world of knowledge,  
 That universal Dot which is the origin of all particular [objects and beings]  
 By God it is 'Alī, by God, it is 'Alī.<sup>36</sup>

Another example:

The divine secret appears in the [letter] 'āyn of 'Alī  
 In the [letter] lām of 'Alī is [contained] 'He is the Most-High, the Supreme'  
 In the [letter] yā' of 'Alī is the form of the eternal Living One  
 Read and you will see that the supreme name of God is here.<sup>37</sup>

Faḍl Allāh very likely saw himself as a spiritual master initiated into the knowledge of the *ta'wīl* and believed that he was called upon to open a new era in the history of Islam and, no less, of mankind. During that era, spiritual truths were supposed to be gradually revealed through a hermeneutical process controlled by a special category of saints.<sup>38</sup> This unveiling was to culminate in the final apocalypse presided over by Jesus. The belief that the inception of this new eschatological era would bring social and political changes explains Faḍl Allāh's and his disciples' involvement in the political arena. Although their efforts to link themselves to a political power systematically failed, Faḍl Allāh's movement belonged to a mystico-messianic tendency which, as we shall see, was playing an increasingly important part in the socio-political life of the Islamic world.

In the doctrine of Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 869/1464) (he gave his name to the Nūrbakhshīyya movement), at the confluence of Twelver Shi'ism and Kubrawī Sufism,

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E. Granville Browne, 'Further notes on the literature of the Ḥurūfīs and their connection with the Bektāshī order of dervishes', *JRAS* (1907), pp. 533-581, p. 541 (Persian text), p. 542 (English translation). The works of the immediate disciples of Faḍl Allāh explicitly mention 'Alī and the Imāms of the Twelver line. See Sayyid Ishāq Astarābādī, *Maḥram-nāma*, in Cl. Huart, *Textes persans relatifs à la secte des Houroufīs*, Leiden and London, 1909, p. 21 of the Persian text.

36 *Dīvān-i fārsī-yi Faḍl Allāh Na'imī Tabrizī va 'Imād al-Dīn Nasīmī Shīrvānī*, ed. Rustam Aliev, Tehran, n.d., p. 28: *Mawṣūf-i ṣifāt-i 'Qul huwa Allāh' 'Alīst / Dar 'ālam-e ma'rīfat shahanshāh 'Alīst. Ān nuqta-ye kull ke juzw az ū peydā shud / Wa-llāh ke ān 'Alīst, bi-llāh 'Alīst*. This quatrain also appears in the Persian *dīvān* of Nasīmī. See Kathleen R.F. Burrill, *The Quatrains of Nesimi, Fourteenth-Century Turkic Hurufi*, The Hague and Paris, 1972, p. 244.

37 *Dīvān-i fārsī-yi Faḍl Allāh Na'imī Tabrizī va 'Imād al-Dīn Nasīmī Shīrvānī*, p. 28: *Dar 'ayn-i 'Alī sirr-i ilāhī peydāst / Dar lām-i 'Alī 'huwa al-'Alī al-'Alāst' / Dar yā'-i 'Alī ṣūrat-i ḥayy al-qayyūm / Bar-kh'ān o be-bīn ke ism-i a'zam ānjāst [īnjāst ?]*.

38 The 'maternal' saints (*ummīyūn*), according to the *Jāvidān-nāma*. On this concept, see O. Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, p. 273 ff., and Glossary, 'Mother', p. 451.

‘Alī is the symbol of the perfect Imamate, which combines the four following characteristics: knowledge (*al-‘ilm*), divine friendship (*al-walāya*), the nobility inherent in the prophetic lineage (*al-siyāda*), and sovereign power (*al-mamlaka*). According to Nūrbakhsh, none of the historical Shi‘i Imams, with the exception of ‘Alī, had united all four characteristics in their persons, since none of them had wielded political power. The distinctive sign of the expected final Imām, the Saviour (*al-mahdī*), was that he would himself combine all four. In this, the Saviour will be like ‘Alī, and mankind will be united under his reign.<sup>39</sup> Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh believed that his mission was to be that last Imām.<sup>40</sup> So he accordingly claimed political power. When his claim was rejected by Shāhrukh (d. 850/1447), the principal successor to Tamerlane, Nūrbakhsh abandoned the political part of his doctrine and spent the remaining part of his life as an ordinary spiritual master in a village near Rayy.

A contemporary of Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, Muḥammad b. Falāḥ (the founder of the Musha‘sha‘iyya movement, d. 870/1465-1466) was another influential messianic thinker whose doctrines were a synthesis of Shi‘i and Sufi elements. To date his monumental work *Kalām al-mahdī* (‘The Word of the Saviour’) has been neither edited nor methodically studied. But despite its rather enigmatic language, even a superficial reading of the *Kalām al-mahdī* reveals that the figure of ‘Alī has an important place in the thought of Ibn Falāḥ. In this work, ‘Alī is described as ‘the secret of all the prophets’;<sup>41</sup> as the inheritor (*waṣī*) of the Prophet and of ‘the hermeneutical language of the divine [message]’;<sup>42</sup> ‘Alī is thus the supreme authority of Qur‘an interpretation and of the revelation of all its innermost meanings and of those of all other sacred books.<sup>43</sup> ‘Alī is ‘the secret governing heaven and earth’;<sup>44</sup> whilst (the Prophet) Muḥammad is his veil (*al-ḥijāb*).

The *Kalām al-mahdī* goes so far as to proclaim the divine nature of ‘Alī: ‘The father of al-Ḥasan and of al-Ḥusayn and the husband of Fāṭima the most pure, daughter of the Messenger, ‘Alī is God, the Lord of the Worlds.’<sup>45</sup> This idea strongly influenced one of the sons of Muḥammad ibn Falāḥ, Mawlā ‘Alī, who apparently claimed to

39 Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, *Risālat al-hudā*, Shahzad Bashir (ed.), ‘The *Risālat al-hudā* of Muḥammad Nūrbaḳš (d. 869/1464): Critical Edition with Introduction’, *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 75 (2001), fasc. 1-4, pp. 87-137, 118-119.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 122.

41 *Kalām al-mahdī*, MS Majlis 10222, fol. 15b.

42 *Al-lisān al-mu‘abbir ‘an Allāh ta‘ālā*. *Ibid.*, fol. 17a-b.

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Al-sirr al-dā‘ir fi l-samā‘ wa l-arḍ*. *Ibid.* fol. 19a.

45 *‘Alī abū l-Ḥasan wa l-Ḥusayn zawj Fāṭimat al-ṭuhr ibnat al-rasūl huwa Allāh rabb al-‘ālamīn*, *Ibid.* fol. 19b. The rest of this text seems to suggest that ‘Alī is the manifestation of God in the same way as different historical figures were the manifestations of the archangel Gabriel. This is corroborated by another passage from the *Kalām al-mahdī* quoted by M. Mazzaoui, ‘Musha‘sha‘iyan: A Fifteenth Century Shi‘i Movement in Khūzistān and Southern Iraq’, *Folia Orientalia* 22 (1981-1984), pp. 139-162, p. 156.

have received the spirit of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and also to be the locus of manifestation of God. Mawlā 'Alī invaded the city of Najaf and had the swords of his soldiers consecrated in the mausoleum of 'Alī.<sup>46</sup> As to Ibn Falāḥ, he apparently claimed for himself the more modest status of the representative of the 12th Imām of the Twelver Shi'ites, that is, of the Mahdī or Qā'im expected to appear at the end of times.<sup>47</sup> The mission of Ibn Falāḥ thus was to test the believers, distinguishing those who were ready to support his cause from the hypocrites and so preparing the ground for the manifestation of the Imām.<sup>48</sup> The *Kalām al-Mahdī* suggests that Ibn Falāḥ derived his authority as representative of the hidden Imām from his knowledge of the secrets of 'Alī and of the Imāms, and that this knowledge conferred to him the status of the Salmān of his time.<sup>49</sup>

The Musha'sha' is another example of a mystical and messianic movement with the figure of 'Alī at the core of its conception of religious authority and political legitimacy. In the second half of the 9th/15th century it succeeded founding a quasi-independent dynasty, which governed part of Khūzistān (South-West of Iran and South-East of Iraq) before becoming a vassal of the Savafids.

In Anatolia, the figure of 'Alī has a central role in what is known as the Alevi tradition present in a large community in Turkey and elsewhere.<sup>50</sup> Until the 19th century the members of this community identified themselves as 'Qizilbash' (the 'red heads', a reference to their characteristic headgear decorated with twelve red or golden stripes). The name 'Alevi' reflects the primacy of the devotion to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in the group's religious beliefs. In the end the name replaced 'Qizilbash', which had acquired some pejorative connotations.

The origins of the Alevi movement, and the different influences which contributed to its formation between the 7th/13th and 10th/16th centuries, are still the object of scholarly debate.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, whatever the origins of the different strata of Alevi beliefs might be, devotion to 'Alī seems fundamental to Alevi identity, to the point

46 'Alī Riḍā Dhakāwātī Qarāguzlū, 'Nahḍat-i Musha'sha'ī wa gudhārī bar *Kalām al-Mahdī*, in *Ma'ārif* 37 (1375/[1996-1997]), pp. 59-67, p. 61.

47 *Kalām al-mahdī*, fol. 28a, '[God] conceals this secret [that of the 12th Imām, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, the awaited Mahdī], and manifests this *sayyid* [Muḥammad Ibn Falāḥ] to serve as a representative [of the Mahdī]' (*yukhfā hadhā al-sirr wa-yuḏhira hadhā al-sayyid bi-ḥasbi al-niyāba*). For a discussion of the claims of Ibn Falāḥ based on the *Kalām al-mahdī*, see also 'Alī Riḍā Dhakāwātī Qarāguzlū, 'Nahḍat-i Musha'sha'ī, pp. 64-65.

48 'Alī Riḍā Dhakāwātī Qarāguzlū, 'Nahḍat-i Musha'sha'ī, pp. 64-65.

49 *Kalām al-mahdī*, fol. 19b. Salmān Pāk, a convert of Persian origin and a famous Companion of the Prophet was regarded as a member of the prophetic family by the latter. According to the Shi'i tradition, he supported the cause of 'Alī after the death of the Prophet.

50 The Alevis are an important part (15-20%) of the population of contemporary Turkey. They are also present in the Balkans, as well as in Western countries. See M. Dressler, 'Alevīs', *EI3*.

51 For the references and a detailed bibliography, see M. Dressler, 'Alevīs'.

where the Alevi worldview may be called a true 'religion of 'Alī'.<sup>52</sup> This exceptional status of 'Alī as the pre-existential locus of manifestation of the knowable aspect of God is abundantly reflected in Alevi ritual and literature.

For instance, the main Alevi initiatory rite, *āyin-i cem*, is in essence a reenactment of the story of the 'assembly of the Forty' (*kirklar cemi*) which the Prophet Muḥammad attended on his return from his ascension to heaven. The story of the assembly and of the ascension that preceded it strongly suggests the preeminence of 'Alī over Muḥammad and 'Alī's exceptional nearness to God. The lion which Muḥammad encountered at the beginning of his ascension and to whom he gave his ring turns out to be 'Alī; of the ninety thousand words that Muḥammad exchanged with God, sixty thousand remain hidden with 'Alī (*Alī'de sırroldu*); at the end of the assembly, Muḥammad acknowledged 'Alī to be the spiritual master (*pīr*) of the Forty and bowed down before him with the other participants.<sup>53</sup>

Their love of 'Alī and of the twelve Imāms and their hatred for their opponents are also abundantly reflected in Alevi poetry. The following extract from a poem by Abdal Musa (8th/14th century) illustrates this:

May your eyes become blind, oh bloody Yazīd!  
 There is none other than 'Alī on this path.  
 There are no Imāms other than 'Alī  
 Who opens the door of the twelve Imāms  
 Is there anyone other than 'Alī  
 Who would be superior to all the saints?<sup>54</sup>

52 The expression *dīn 'Alī* is very old. According to M.A. Amir-Moezzi, it is a fundamental concept of the original Shi'i faith. See M.A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Considérations sur l'expression *dīn 'Alī*: aux origines de la foi Shi'ite', *ZDMG* 150 (2000), pp. 29-68; reprinted in Idem, *La religion discrète*, pp. 19-47 (here chap. 3). The Alevis belong to the category of religious groups referred to by the common name "Alī ilāhī" (those who deify 'Alī) in Iran. This name probably stems from a belief rooted in early Shi'ism, according to which the cosmic Imām, personified by 'Alī and the imāms his descendants, was considered to be the locus of manifestation of the divine names and attributes. On the idea of cosmic Imām in early Shi'ism see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, pp. 73-154.

53 See, for example, *Buyruk: İmam Cafer-i Sadık Buyruğu*, ed. Fuat Bozkurt, Istanbul, 2013, pp. 15-21. At the same time, the essential identity of Muḥammad and 'Alī as aspects of one pre-existential divine light is also emphasised in the Alevi tradition. For early Shi'i sources mentioning the unity of Muḥammad and 'Alī within the original divine light see U. Rubin, 'Pre-existence and light: Aspects of the concept Nūr Muḥammad', *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975), pp. 62-119; and M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, pp. 73-112. For the Alevi interpretation of this unity, where the pre-existential relationship between Muḥammad and 'Alī becomes the prototype of another important Alevi ritual, the *musahiplik*, see *Buyruk*, pp. 235-238.

54 I.Z. Eyuboğlu, *Alevi-Bektaşî edebiyatı*, Istanbul, 1991, pp. 106-107: 'Gözlerin kör olsun ey kanlu Yezid \ Bu meydanda ne var Aliden gayri \ Oniki İmamın kapısını açan \ İmamlar

In the 10th/16th and the 11th/17th centuries, the Alevi relationship with the Bektashis, one of the most influential mystical orders of Ottoman Empire grew stronger.<sup>55</sup> This rapprochement resulted in the structural and doctrinal interpenetration of these two Anatolian esoteric traditions.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, the figure of 'Alī as a source of initiatory knowledge and as an archetype of the spiritual master became one of the central tenets of Bektashi doctrine.<sup>57</sup> Other possible reasons for the consolidation of the 'Alī's cults of the Alevi and the Bektashis seem to have been the associations of *akhīs*, the Anatolian version of the *futuwwa*,<sup>58</sup> and the growing influence of the doctrines of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī which, from the second half of the 9th/15th century onwards, became widespread in Anatolia, especially within the Bektashi order.<sup>59</sup> The prominence of the figure of 'Alī among the Bektashis is clearly visible in the visual art of that order, which has many images on which the calligraphied name of 'Alī is incorporated into the human body and face.<sup>60</sup>

The Safavid movement, which grew out of an Iranian Sufi order founded by Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī (d. 735/1334), forged strong links with Anatolian movements from the 9th/15th century. Shaykh Junayd (d. 864/1460) recruited many followers from the Turkoman tribes of Anatolia, the 'red heads' (Qizilbash) mentioned above, and they eventually became the main military support of the Safavid movement. According to a legend, it was the son of Junayd, Shaykh Ḥaydar (d. 893/1488), who introduced the headgear with twelve red stripes (the *tāj*) to his disciples, after 'Alī ordered him to do so in a dream.<sup>61</sup> This dream established 'Alī as the patron saint of the Safavids and identified them as fighters for his cause.

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*değildir Aliden gayri ... \ ... Cümle evliyalar üstünden geçen \ Var mıdır hiçbir er Aliden gayri.' Yazīd I (r. 61-64 / 680-683), the second Umayyad caliph under whose rule the tragedy of Karbalā' took place and the Prophet's grandson al-Ḥusayn was killed.*

- 55 On the Bektashis, see J. Kingsley Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, London, 1937; A. Popovic and G. Veinstein (eds.), *Bektachiyya: Études sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach*, Istanbul, 1995.
- 56 Because of this interpenetration these two traditions are often referred to in scholarly literature by the common name of 'Alevism/Bektashism'.
- 57 J. Kingsley Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, p. 36, pp. 132-145.
- 58 M. Dressler, 'Alevīs'.
- 59 On the relationships between the Ḥurūfīs and the Bektashis, see J. Kingsley Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, pp. 58-62 et 148-158.
- 60 This iconography was, at least in part, inspired by the Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī's work, according to which the human body and face are the loci of manifestation *par excellence* of the divine Word and of all the ontological 'letters' contained in the Word. The reference to Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī's work would seem to be confirmed by the Bektashi images including the calligraphied words 'Faḍl Allāh' (the name of the founder of the Ḥurūfī movement meaning 'Bounty of God') on the human face. See here chap. 9, fig. 4.
- 61 See A. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire*, London, 2009, p. 14 and footnote 2 pp. 150-151.

So the Safavid movement placed itself at the confluence of the Iranian mystico-messianic tradition (movements such as the Ḥurūfīs, the Nūrbakhshīs and the Musha‘sha‘) and of Anatolian popular mysticism. The strengthening of the link between the religious authority of a divinely inspired spiritual master and political authority, which was making headway in both Iranian and Anatolian mystical traditions and which was partially implemented in the Sarbadār and Musha‘sha‘ states, culminated in the person of Shaykh Ismā‘īl Safavi (d. 930/1524), the founder of the Safavid Empire. On the strength of his authority as the head of a Sufi order and of his charisma as a descendant of ‘Alī, Shaykh Ismā‘īl led the Qizilbash tribes, who regarded him as their spiritual master, to the conquest of a vast territory and became the first Shāh of a dynasty that reigned until the 11th/17th century.<sup>62</sup>

The figure of ‘Alī is omnipresent in the poetry attributed to Shāh Ismā‘īl:

‘Alī is the Sea of Truth, he is the eternal life of honour.<sup>63</sup>

Those who do not recognise ‘Alī is Truth are absolute unbelievers,

They have no creed, no faith, and are not Muslims.<sup>64</sup>

The figure of ‘Alī would appear to be of central importance to the creation of Shāh Ismā‘īl’s personal charisma, both in his understanding of his spiritual mission and in legitimizing his political ambitions that is his right to govern the Islamic community. If Minorsky’s interpretation of the following poetry is correct, it contains an idea very close to the ‘religion of ‘Alī’ as the foundation of religious and political authority claimed by Shāh Ismā‘īl:

O, fighters in the path of God, say: ‘God, God!’ I am the faith of the Shāh (*dīn-i shāh*) [i.e., faith of ‘Alī]<sup>65</sup>

Come to meet (me), prostrate yourselves. I am the faith of the Shāh ...

62 For the Safavid claim of an ‘Alid lineage, and for a lucid discussion of the sources and studies concerning this question see K. Morimoto, ‘The Earliest ‘Alid Genealogy for the Safavids: New Evidence for the Pre-dynastic Claim to *Sayyid* Status’, *Iranian Studies* 43/4 (2010), pp. 447-469.

63 V. Minorsky, ‘The Poetry of Shāh Ismā‘īl I’, *BSOAS* 10/4 (1942), pp. 1006a-1053a, n° 7, p. 1030a: *Alī baḥr-i ḥaqīqat dūr yaqīn bīl/ Ḥayāt-i jāvidān-i mu‘tabar dūr*; English translation p. 1042a.

64 Minorsky, ‘The Poetry’, n° 194, p. 1036a: *Alīnī ḥaqq bilmīyanlar kāfir-i muṭlaq olūr / Dīnī yokh imānī yokh ol nā-musulmān dūr*; English translation p. 1047a.

65 This is Minorsky’s interpretation. It appears to be more convincing if we consider the last line of the same poem, where Shāh Ismā‘īl more explicitly links the ‘essence of ‘Alī’ with the ‘religion of the Shāh’. ‘The Poetry’, n° 18, p. 1043a, Minorsky’s translation slightly modified. It is also possible to read this expression as *dīn-Shāh*, ‘the King of the religion [of ‘Alī]’. My thanks to Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi for having pointed out the possibility of such reading.

I am Khaṭā'ī<sup>66</sup> ... I have the essence of Murtaḍā 'Alī. I am the faith of the Shāh.<sup>67</sup>  
 I belong to the religion (*madhhab*) of the 'Adherents of the Walī (i.e., 'Alī')  
 (*mawālī*)<sup>68</sup> and on the Shāh's path  
 I am a guide to everyone who says: 'I am a Muslim'.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, it should be mentioned that several founders of mystical and messianic movements of the time claimed an 'Alid genealogy or were given one posthumously by their followers.<sup>70</sup>

#### 4 'Alī, Fāṭima and Their Descendants in the Maghreb

In the west, the Maghreb, the historical context was very different from in the eastern part of the Islamic world. As we saw above, in the East, the figure of 'Alī began to gain influence outside strictly Shi'i circles from the 5th/11th century onwards; but it was apparently the Mongol invasions of the 7th/13th century and the fall of the caliph of Baghdad that consolidated the image of 'Alī as one of the main sources of religious and political authority.

The Maghreb was less affected by the Mongol invasions. Because of its geographical remoteness from the central lands of Islam, and also because of the struggles of the newly converted Berber tribes against Arab supremacy, the Maghreb harboured

66 Pen name of Shāh Ismā'īl.

67 'The Poetry', n° 18, p. 1032a: *Allāh Allāh deyin ghāzīlar dīn-i shāh manam / Qārshū galūn sajda qūlūn ghāzīlar dīn-i shāh manam ... Khaṭā'ī am ... Murtaḍa 'Alī dhātūyām ghāzīlar dīn-i shāh manam*. English translation p. 1043a.

68 This is Minorsky's interpretation of the term *muwālī* (or *mawālī*) in this verse, 'The Poetry', n° 195, p. 1047a. I was unable to consult a complete copy of Shāh Ismā'īl's *Dīwān* to either confirm or deny this interpretation.

69 *Mawālī madhhabam shāhūn yolunda / 'Musulmanam' diyāne rahbaram man*, 'The Poetry', p. 1037a. On the poetry attributed to Shāh Ismā'īl under his pen name Khaṭā'ī, see also Ahmet T. Karamustafa, 'In his own voice: what Hatayı tells us about Şah İsmail's religious views', Amir-Moezzi *et al.* (eds.), *Lésotérisme shī'ite*, pp. 601-611.

70 The 'Alid genealogy of the Safavids has been mentioned above. The genealogy of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādi, the founder of the Ḥurūfī movement, is found in the works of his disciples, such as the *Risāla* of Mīr Fāḍilī (ms. Istanbul, Ali Emiri Farsça 1039, fol. 8b, 30b), and the *Şalāt-nāma* of Ishqurt Dada (ms. Istanbul, Ali Emiri Farsça 1043, fol. 51a). See Abdūlbāki Gölpinarlı, *Hurūfīlik metinleri kataloğu*, Ankara 1989, p. 4. According to some sources, the father of Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, the eponym of the Nūrbakhshī movement, was a descendant of 'Alī. See Bashir, 'Between Mysticism and Messianism', p. 88, with a reference to the *Majālis al-mu'minīn* of Qāḍī Nūr Allāh Shūshtarī (d. 1019/1610). The same source contains the 'Alid genealogy of Muḥammad Ibn Falāḥ, the founder of the Musha'sha' movement. See M. Mazzaoui, 'Musha'sha'iyān', p. 143. It is worth noting that all these lineages go through Imām Mūsā al-Kāzīm (d. 183/799).

movements and political structures based on conceptions of legitimacy different from, and often rival, to those of the Oriental caliphs, the Umayyads and then the Abbasids. The figure of 'Alī is arguably less potent in Maghrebi Islam, but the lineage of 'Alī, and especially his descendants through Fāṭima, played a major role in the formulation of ideas of legitimacy in the Maghreb. Moreover, the doctrine of direct access to the source of divine knowledge and the idea of infallibility closely associated with it, were central to the paradigms of religious and political authority there. Even if these paradigms did not always explicitly mention the name of 'Alī, we know that for some important spiritual currents of Islam, such as Shi'ism, Sufism or *futuwwa*, 'Alī symbolises initiatory knowledge and the infallibility flowing from this knowledge.

Two Maghrebi kingdoms were directly founded on the Shi'i doctrine of 'Alid/Fāṭimid legitimacy. The first one was the Idrissid state of Morocco, which existed between 172/789 and 375/985. The founder of the dynasty, Idrīs b. 'Abd Allāh (d. 175/791), was a descendant of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭima bt. Muḥammad through their son al-Ḥasan. He was also the brother of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, who rebelled against the Abbasid power in 145/762-763. Idrīs b. 'Abd Allāh most probably shared with his brother the surname al-Fāṭimī, 'the Fāṭimid'.<sup>71</sup> Significantly, his son and successor Idrīs II (d. 213/828) founded a city named al-'Aliyya, 'the city of 'Alī', near Fez, which had been founded by his father.<sup>72</sup> The name of 'Alī also appeared on coins minted at the time of Idrīs.<sup>73</sup> It is noteworthy that many Sufi leaders and messianic rebels in North Africa claimed to have an Idrissid pedigree.<sup>74</sup>

The second Maghrebi kingdom to rely on the legitimacy of the 'Alid/Fāṭimid line of descent was the Fāṭimid empire (4th/10th-6th/13th c.) founded by Ismaili Shi'is. Unlike the Idrissids, the Fāṭimids did not trace their descent to al-Ḥasan, but to al-Ḥusayn, another son of 'Alī and Fāṭima. In common with the Twelver Shi'is, the Ismailis believe 'Alī to be the inheritor (*waṣī*) of the Prophet and the possessor of divine knowledge passed down after him through the line of saintly Imams, the only legitimate spiritual and political leaders of the Islamic community.

The importance of 'Alid/Fāṭimid descent may also be seen in the Maghreb outside the currents directly linked to Shi'ism. This is because of parallel developments linked to the situation in the eastern part of the Islamic world. The first of these was the search for new sources of religious and political authority after the end of the

71 See M. García-Arenal, 'La conjonction du ṣūfisme et sharīfisme au Maroc: le Mahdī comme sauveur', *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 55-56 (1990), pp. 233-256, p. 234. For a study of the use of the title 'Fāṭimī' in the Maghreb, see M. Fierro, 'On al-Fāṭimī and al-Fāṭimīyyūn', *JSAI* 20 (1996), pp. 130-160.

72 See M. García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform: Mahdīs of the Muslim West*, Leiden and Boston, 2006, p. 50.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 245.

caliphate of Baghdad. The second was the consolidation of the Sufi brotherhoods. On the one hand, this consolidation was accompanied by the growing authority of the Sufi shaykhs as key figures in the transmission of initiatory knowledge through a line starting with the Prophet and usually including 'Alī and his descendants, the children of Fāṭima. On the other hand, the development of the popular cult of saints extended the authority of Sufi shaykhs well beyond the limits of their orders, thus significantly increasing their social influence.

The idea of an infallible guide (*imām ma'ṣūm* similar to the Shi'i idea of the divine guide represented by the Imam), whether he belonged to the prophetic family or not, had already been formulated in the Maghreb during the caliphal period, outside properly Shi'i circles. Abū al-Qāsim Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn Ibn Qasī (d. 546/1151), an Andalusian mystic who led a messianic revolt against the Almoravid regime, was one of the most prominent defenders of this idea.<sup>75</sup> 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭima certainly had a place in Ibn Qasī's eschatology. However, he accepted that spiritual knowledge and the right to govern the Islamic community were not necessarily limited to the physical descendants of the Prophet, and were also accessible to mystics who did not belong to the prophetic family.<sup>76</sup> Ibn Tūmart (d. 524/1130), another messianic thinker, a contemporary of Ibn Qasī and founder of the Almohad caliphate (6th/12th-7th/13th century) claimed, like Ibn Qasī and probably under his influence, the status of an infallible Imam.<sup>77</sup> However, contrary to Ibn Qasī, membership of the prophetic family was an important condition of legitimacy for Ibn Tūmart, who apparently traced his lineage back to Fāṭima and 'Alī through their son al-Ḥasan.<sup>78</sup> Some genealogies

75 On Ibn Qasī and his thought, see M. Ebstein, 'Was Ibn Qasī a Šūfi?', *Studia Islamica* 110 (2015), pp. 196-232. The main work of Ibn Qasī is the *Kitāb khal' al-na'layn wa iqtibās al-nūr min mawḍī' al-qadamayn* ('The book on the removal of the two sandals and the taking of the light from the place of the two feet'). The text of the *Kitāb khal' al-na'layn* has been published by Muḥammad al-Amrānī, Asifi, 1997, and is also available in the PhD dissertation of David Raymond Goodrich, 'A Šūfi Revolt in Portugal: Ibn Qasī and his *Kitāb Khal' al-na'layn*', Columbia University, 1978, pp. 60-272.

76 Michael Ebstein, 'Was Ibn Qasī a Šūfi?', pp. 223-224. According to the author, whilst Ibn Qasī was undeniably a Sunni, some aspects of his thought were certainly influenced by Shi'i and more specifically Ismaili doctrines.

77 On him, see I. Goldziher, *Le livre de Mohammed Ibn Toumert, Mahdi des Almohades*, Algiers, 1903; M. Fierro, 'Le mahdi Ibn Tūmart et al-Andalus: l'élaboration de la légitimité almohade', *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 91-94 (2001), pp. 107-124; M. García-Arenal, *Messianism*, pp. 157-192.

78 The *A'azz mā yuṭlab* attributed to Ibn Tūmart contains a brief description of six distinctive signs of the Mahdi, one of which is specific to the descendants of Fāṭima (*min dhurrīyyat Fāṭima*), the wife of 'Alī. See Ibn Tūmart, *A'azz mā yuṭlab*, 'Ammār Ṭālibī (ed.), n.p. 2007, p. 254. If one accepts the authenticity of this text, and since Ibn Tūmart was recognised as being the Mahdi himself, he thus had to fulfil this condition of descentance from 'Alī and Fāṭima. This claim seems to be confirmed by a letter which Ibn Tūmart

of 'Abd al-Mu'min (d. 558/1163), the founder of the Mu'minid dynasty, who governed the Almohad empire after the death of Ibn Tūmart, placed him, on his maternal side, among the descendants of 'Alī and Fāṭima through their son al-Ḥasan.<sup>79</sup>

As discussed above, the period following the end of the Abbasid caliphate was followed, in the East as in the West, by the consolidation of the authority of the saints and of the Sufi shaykhs. In the Maghreb, the fact of being a member of the prophetic family progressively acquired a particular importance in this context between the 7th/13th and the 9th/15th centuries. The *shurafā'* (singular *sharīf*), presumed descendants of the Prophet, usually through his daughter Fāṭima and his cousin and son-in-law 'Alī, in association with powerful Sufi brotherhoods such as the Shādhiliyya (founded by the Moroccan sharīf Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258)) and the Jazūliyya (founded by Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Jazūlī (d. 870/1465)), played an increasingly important part in legitimising both spiritual and political authority.<sup>80</sup> Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), the famous Maghrebi historian who lived during the period, devoted many pages of his *al-Muqaddima* to his description of the Sufism of the time, influenced by the growing influence of the Shi'i ideas and expectations of the imminent advent of a Fāṭimid Saviour (that is, a descendant of 'Alī and Fāṭima).<sup>81</sup>

The Marīnids (8th/14th-9th/15th c.), the dynasty that succeeded to the Almohads in Morocco, claimed a Sharīfian lineage and made great efforts to show their respect for the prophetic family.<sup>82</sup> One of the most powerful Sultans of that dynasty, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī (r. 1331-1351), was compared to Imām 'Alī in the Marīnid historical chronicles.<sup>83</sup> A parallel was established between the Marīnid Sultans' title of *mawlā* and the famous remark of the Prophet Muḥammad at Ghadīr Khumm: 'He who has me as his *mawlā*, 'Alī is his *mawlā*'. It seems that the Marīnids were using the reference to 'Alī's presumed election by the Prophet as his sole legitimate successor to legitimise their own government.<sup>84</sup> According to the Marīnid rewriting of the history of the foundation

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wrote to the Almoravid emir 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, in which Ibn Tūmart describes himself, among other things, as 'al-Ḥasanī al-Fāṭimī'. See M. García-Arenal, *Messianism*, p. 182. An 'Alid genealogy is also attributed to Ibn Tūmart by Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-'ayān*, quoted by I. Goldziher, *Le livre*, p. 25 of the Arabic text; while Ibn Khaldūn in his *Kitāb al-'Ibar* (*ibid.*, pp. 53-54) gives a different, purely Berber pedigree. For other sources on the 'Alid, and more specifically the Ḥasanid lineage of Ibn Tūmart and his links to the Idrissid line, see M. Fierro, 'The Genealogies of 'Abd al-Mu'min, the First Almohad Caliph', *The Almohad Revolution: Politics and Religion in the Islamic West During the Twelfth-Thirteenth Centuries*, Farnham (Surrey), 2012, pp. 9-10 and footnote 24.

79 M. Fierro, 'Genealogies'.

80 See M. García-Arenal, *Messianism*, pp. 218-219, 234ff.

81 See *The Muqaddima*, English translation by F. Rosenthal, New York, 1958, chapter 3, section 51.

82 See M. García-Arenal, *Messianism*, pp. 217 ff.

83 *Ibid.*, p. 233.

84 *Ibid.* For the difference between the Shi'i and Sunni interpretations of this prophetic saying see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, 'Ghadīr Khumm', *EI3*.

of their capital, the city of Fez, Idris II, the son of the founder of Fez, had inherited the sword of 'Alī. It was kept in one of the minarets of Fez until he would reclaim at the end of time.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, a conception of religious and political authority claiming membership of prophetic family and including a strong messianic element played a decisive role in the rise of the Sa'dian dynasty which ruled Morocco in the 10th/16th and 11th/17th centuries.<sup>86</sup>

Mystical and messianic milieus proved to be fertile soil for enhancing the figure of 'Alī and transforming him into a powerful symbol which played a central role in various formulations of religious and political authority throughout the Islamic world, in its eastern as well as its western parts. Far from being limited to Shi'i circles, 'Alī was almost universally perceived to be the source of initiatory knowledge, the heir to prophetic wisdom and authority, passed after him down the line of his physical descendants and especially of his children with Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet. Under different guises, in various Islamic movements and in different historical, geographical and cultural contexts, the figure of 'Alī was an important factor in the legitimising of spiritual and political power after the end of the Abbasid caliphate, and in that gradual reorganisation which led to the creation of new structures of government and, eventually, to the new geopolitical configuration of the Islamic world, at the transition from the medieval to the modern era.

85 See M. García-Arenal, *Messianism*, p. 239.

86 See M. García-Arenal, 'Mahdī, murābiṭ, sharīf: l'avènement de la dynastie Sa'dienne', *Studia Islamica* 71 (1990), pp. 77-114.

## The Presence of 'Alī in Islamic Philosophy

*Mathieu Terrier*

In the intellectual and spiritual output of Islam, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the first imam of all the Shi'is, occupies, after the Prophet Muḥammad, a special position. Contrary to the Prophet's other companions, not only were numerous remarkable acts attributed to 'Alī, but also texts of various genres (aphorisms, speeches, poems, etc.), some of them probably authentic, others probably forged, collected in different bodies of work, which have inspired many commentaries and served many purposes. His figure and his words have endured and influenced the entire history of Islamic philosophy, including not only Hellenistic *falsafa*, but also the 'histories of the sages' and works of speculative gnosis and mysticism. And while the presence of 'Alī in Islamic philosophy is proportionate to the importance of Shi'ism in the intellectual history of Islam, his influence has not been limited to Shi'i intellectual circles.

The earliest sources of the declarations of 'Alī to have been quoted and commented on by philosophers are the first Shi'i collections of Imami *ḥadīths*, such as the *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Kāfi* of al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940-1). They contain the most esoteric utterances attributed to the imam in person, which were subsequently taken up only by Shi'i thinkers, whereas Sunni sources attribute to 'Alī, as a companion of the Prophet, other sayings which have no strong doctrinal content. Then there are the "ecumenical" sources, shared by both Sunnis and Shi'is, such as the *Mī'at kalima* ('Hundred Sayings') collected by the illustrious al-Jāhiz (d. 253/867);<sup>1</sup> the *Nahj al-balāgha*, a collection of sermons and sayings recorded by al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1016) in the Buyyid period;<sup>2</sup> and the collection of poems (*Dīwān*) attributed to 'Alī, of which the principal version to have come down to us dates from the 6th/12th century.<sup>3</sup>

In these pages, I will be discussing the presence of 'Alī in Islamic philosophy thematically. But it could first be useful to identify the main historical phases from the outset. The first phase runs from Baghdād under the Buyyids (4th/10th-5th/11th centuries) to Sunni Andalusia (6th/12th century) and corresponds to the golden age of Hellenistic *falsafa* where 'Alī is mentioned in the 'history of the sages' and in the *falāsifa* themselves, whether or Shi'i in character or not. A second phase runs from the Mongol

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- 1 Kamāl al-Dīn Mītham al-Baḥrānī, *Sharḥ 'alā l-mī'at kalima*, ed. s.n., Qumm, 1427/2006-7, p. 2.
  - 2 *Nahj al-balāgha*, ed. Ḥ. al-'Alamī, Beirut, 1413/1993. See Laura Veccia Vaglieri, "Sul Nahj al-Balāgh'ah e sul suo compilatore al-Sharīf al-Raḍī", *AIVON*, 8 (1958), pp. 3-105.
  - 3 Qāḍī Mīr Ḥusayn al-Maybudī, *Sharḥ-e Dīwān-e mansūb beh amīr al-mu'minīn 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib*, ed. Ḥ. Raḥmānī and I. Ashkeshīrīn, Tehran, 1390 h.s./2011, introduction, pp. 45-46. From the first *Dīwāns* attributed to 'Alī, composed in the 4th/10th century, none have come down to us.

conquest and the end of Sunni hegemony in the Orient in the middle of the 7th/13th century, to the 9th/15th century. It is marked by the mingling of three traditions, namely philosophy, esoteric Shi'ism and speculative Sufism, an evolution in which the figure and the authority of 'Alī play a decisive role. The third phase was in Safavid Iran in the 10th/16th-11th/17th centuries, after the establishment of Imami Shi'ism as the state religion there. This gave rise to a 'renaissance' of Islamic philosophy and the veritable 'birth' of Shi'i philosophy, in which the presence of 'Alī proved to be one of the decisive factors.

In these different phases and different currents of thought, 'Alī appears successively as a source of wisdom, a paragon of virtues, a master of truth, an incarnation of the perfect Man and a theophanic being, moving imperceptibly from being a historical figure to become a metaphysical entity. These aspects, which will each be examined in their turn here, have nevertheless to be understood both as moments on a continuum and to be at the same time the different facets of a polymorphous figure.

## 1 The Historical 'Alī in the History of Philosophy

### 1.1 *The Wisdoms of 'Alī*

From the 3rd/9th century, in the Abbassid empire, compilations of sapiential maxims or 'wisdoms' (*ḥikam*) attributed to 'Alī began to appear; a large section of the *Nahj al-balāgha* is devoted to them. These 'wisdoms', aphorisms or gnomic sayings, are reminiscent of those attributed to the Greek philosophers in the histories of the sages written in the wake of the movement to translate Greek into Arabic in parallel with the emergence of the *falsafa*.<sup>4</sup> 'Alī's name indeed appears in one of the most famous of these 'histories of sages', *al-Ḥikma al-khālida* ('The Eternal Wisdom') of the philosopher Ibn Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), a thinker with moderate Shi'i leanings.<sup>5</sup> The work is an anthology of words of wisdom from five nations, the Persians, Indians, Arabs, Greeks and Muslims. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, known as 'the Prince of the faithful' (*amīr al-mu'minīn*), is considered to be, after the prophet Muḥammad, the main author of the 'wisdom of the Arabs'. The sayings attributed to him in this collection are absent from the *Nahj al-balāgha*, written at around the same time, as they are from the Imami compilations of *ḥadīths*. There is nothing specifically Shi'i about them, but in both form and content they do echo the aphorisms of the ancient Greeks. A few examples:

4 On this genre and these works see M. Terrier, "Histoire de l'histoire de la sagesse en islam. Résumé des conférences", in *Annuaire EPHE, Sciences Religieuses*, t. 124 (2015-2016), 2017, p. 363-372; *Ibid.*, t. 125 (2016-2017), 2018, pp. 395-404; *Ibid.*, t. 126 (2017-2018), 2019, pp. 365-374.

5 See M. Arkoun, *L'humanisme arabe au IV<sup>e</sup>/X<sup>e</sup> siècle. Miskawayh, philosophe et historien*, Paris, 1970, 2nd ed., 1982.

“Beware of him who praises you for what you are not, he will soon accuse you of what you are not.”<sup>6</sup> An almost identical maxim is attributed to the ‘father of philosophers’ Hermes in Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq’s anthology (d. 260/873), the first of its kind, and in later anthologies too.<sup>7</sup>

“The favour granted to the ignorant is like a garden planted on a dunghill.”<sup>8</sup> This maxim, which is one of the ‘hundred sayings’ collected by al-Jāhīz,<sup>9</sup> is attributed to Hermes in person by Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq and others.<sup>10</sup>

“Beware of this world (*aḥḍharū al-dunyā*)! It is the enemy of the friends of God (*awliyā* *Allāh*) as it is the enemy of His enemies: as for the friends of God, it afflicts them (*ghamma-hum*), and as for His enemies it deceives them (*gharra-hum*).”<sup>11</sup> This saying, replete as it is with typically Islamic expressions and an example of the rhetorical eloquence (*balāgha*) unanimously attributed to ‘Alī, has an ascetic and gnostic theme, in common with numerous aphorisms attributed to Greek sages, such as this one attributed to Homer: “When this world catches him who flees from it, it injures him. When this world is caught by him who yearns for it, it kills him.”<sup>12</sup>

“All things rise in value when they are rare; as for knowledge it rises in value when it abounds.”<sup>13</sup> This maxim, also typical of Arab rhetoric, enjoining contentment with little and the quest for knowledge, is eminently philosophical in spirit.

“The Prince of the faithful was asked about happiness (*na‘īm*). He said: “He who eats barley bread, drinks fresh water and remains in the shadows lives in happiness.”<sup>14</sup> The saying is reminiscent of a famous saying of Epicurus, a Greek philosopher not much valued in Islam.<sup>15</sup>

Ibn Miskawayh also records, from an anonymous source: “Learn to say: ‘I do not know’. If you say: ‘I do not know’, you will be taught until you do know, but if you say: ‘I know’, you will be questioned until you no longer know. Among the companions of the Prophet not one said: ‘Question me’, except for ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, may peace be upon

6 Ibn Miskawayh, *al-Ḥikma al-khālida*, ed. A. Badawī, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1377 h.s./1998-99, p. 110.

7 Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq, *Ādāb al-falāsifa*, ed. A. Badawī, Kuwait, 1406/1985, p. 134.

8 Ibn Miskawayh, *al-Ḥikma al-khālida*, p. 110.

9 al-Baḥrānī, *Sharḥ ‘alā l-m’ at kalīma*, p. 75.

10 Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq, *Ādāb al-falāsifa*, p. 133.

11 Ibn Miskawayh, *al-Ḥikma al-khālida*, p. 111.

12 *Mukhtaṣar Ṣūwān al-ḥikma* (6th/12th century), quoted in ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa l-niḥal*, ed. M. Badrān, 2 vols., Cairo, 11, p. 106; Shahrastānī, *Le Livre des religions et des sectes*, vol. 11, French trans. J. Jolivet and G. Monnot, Louvain, 1993, p. 242.

13 Ibn Miskawayh, *al-Ḥikma al-khālida*, p. 111.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 112.

15 Epicurus, *Lettre à Ménécée*, § 131, in Id., *Lettres, maximes, sentences*, French transl. J.-F. Balaudé, Paris, 1994, p. 195.

him".<sup>16</sup> The first part of the saying alludes to famous declarations by Socrates in Plato's works;<sup>17</sup> the second part alludes to numerous Shi'i traditions attributed to 'Alī starting with the formula "Question me before you lose me!". Here Ibn Miskawayh was suggesting a link between the consensual figure of 'Alī as a purveyor of wise sayings and the specifically Shi'ite 'Alī, master of infallible truth.

An openly Shi'i philosopher, Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkevarī (d. between 1088/1677 and 1095/1684), wrote the last great 'history of the sages', the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*,<sup>18</sup> in which he made numerous significant comparisons between the sayings of 'Alī and those of the ancient philosophers. Take this maxim attributed to Theophrastus, an immediate disciple of Aristotle: "Intelligence is of two kinds: one given by nature (*maṭbū'*), the other acquired through listening (*masmū'*). Intelligence given by nature is like the soil, intelligence acquired through listening is like the seed and the water. Intelligence given by nature will never produce anything unless intelligence acquired from listening drags it out of its sleep, frees it from its impediments and shakes it from its place, as the seed and the water extract what is in the bowels of the earth."<sup>19</sup> Ashkevarī stresses the similarity of this saying to one of imam 'Alī, whom he calls 'the speaking Word of God' (*kalām allāh al-nāṭiq*):<sup>20</sup> "There are two intelligences: one given by nature, the other acquired through listening. Intelligence acquired through listening would be useless if intelligence given by nature did not exist, just as the sun is useless when the eye is deprived of vision."<sup>21</sup> The rhetorical and thematic similarity of both maxims are indeed striking and one may speculate – something Ashkevarī does not do – whether there is a connection between the *corpus* of the *Nahj al-balāgha* and that of the doxographies of Greek philosophers in Arabic. Mullā Ṣadrā (d. ca 1045/1635), the most illustrious philosopher of Safavid Iran, in his commentary on the *Uṣūl al-Kāfi* of al-Kulaynī, records the saying of 'Alī in the same version as Ashkevarī, in support of the

16 Ibn Miskawayh, *al-Ḥikma al-khālida*, p. 125.

17 Platon, *Apologie de Socrate*, 21c-23b, in Id., *Œuvres complètes*, dir. L. Brisson, Paris, 2011, pp. 70-72 (French translation L. Brisson).

18 On this thinker, see M. Terrier, *Histoire de la sagesse et philosophie shī'ite*. L'Aimé des cœurs de Quṭb al-Dīn Aṣḥkavarī, Paris, 2016.

19 Source of this maxim of Theophrastus in Arabic: Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa l-niḥal*, II, p. 157; *Livre des religions et des sectes*, II, p. 336. See on this subject D. Gutas, "The Life, Works and Sayings of Theophrastus in the Arabic Tradition" in W.W. Fortenbaugh *et alii* (ed.), *Theophrastus of Eresus: On His Life and Work*, New Brunswick/Oxford, 1985, pp. 63-102, included in Id., *Greek Philosophers in the Arabic Tradition*, Aldershot, 2000, art. VII., see pp. 90-91.

20 On this typically Shi'i title, which we will encounter later, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*.

21 Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkevarī, *Maḥbūb al-qulūb, al-maqāla al-ūlā* (1), ed. I. al-Dībāji and A. Ṣidqī, Tehran, 1378/1999, pp. 318-319. In *Nahj al-balāgha, al-ḥikam*, § 339, p. 702: "There are two sciences (*ilmān*) ..."

idea that the religious sciences (*al-sharʿiyya*), acquired through imitation (*taqlīd*) of the prophets, and the rational sciences (*al-ʿaqlīyya*), proceeding from the sole natural intelligence, are complementary.<sup>22</sup> This leads us to consider a new aspect of the figure of ʿAlī in Islamic philosophy: his role as the defender of philosophy itself.

### 1.2 *ʿAlī, Defender of the Rights of Philosophy*

The historical ʿAlī is frequently appealed to as a religious authority to support the accord, or the pre-established harmony, between philosophy and revelation. In the introduction to the anthology of the Greek sages collected by Mubashshir b. Fātik (d. ca 480/1087), the author, probably an Ismaili Shiʿi, justifies the exercise of philosophy in Islam by tradition. Quoting the prophet Muḥammad and ʿAlī – referred to with a single eulogic formula –, he anachronistically exploits the later synonymy of the terms *ḥikma* and *falsafa* to treat their praise of wisdom as if it were a praise of philosophy. Here are two maxims ʿAlī used: “Every word of wisdom which the believing man hears, keeps for himself and offers to his believing brother, is an invaluable gift and grace”; “Wisdom is the goal of the believer; he may take it where he finds it regardless, of which vessel it comes from.”<sup>23</sup>

In the introduction to his great history of the sages, and with the same end in mind, Ashkevarī records other maxims of the “Prince of the faithful” – also to be understood in the technical Shiʿi sense of ‘the Prince of the initiated’ –<sup>24</sup> “the wisest of all of the Arab and non-Arab sages” (*al-ʿarab wa al-ʿajam*): “Take wisdom wherever it is. If it is found in the breast of a hypocrite, it will babble in there until it leaves and finds repose with its companions in the breast of the believer”; “Wisdom is the goal of the believer. Therefore, take wisdom even from among the hypocrites”;<sup>25</sup> “The word of the sages is a remedy when it is correct, an evil when it is false.”<sup>26</sup>

Another frequently mentioned saying of ʿAlī is, “Do not recognize truth through men, but know the truth and you will recognize its people.”<sup>27</sup> Its presence is significant in Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s (d. 505/1111) spiritual autobiography, the *al-Munqidh min*

22 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, ed. M. Khājavi, 4 vols., Tehran, 1367 s.n./1988-89, II, p. 418.

23 Mubashshir b. Fātik, *Mukhtār al-ḥikam wa maḥāsīn al-kilam* (Los Bocados de oro), ed. ʿA.R. Badawī, Madrid, 1958, p. 2. The second maxim is found in a different version in the *Nahj al-balāgha*, §80, p. 642, see *infra*. In *Mīʾat kalima*: “Wisdom is the aim of the believer”; see al-Baḥrānī, *Sharḥ ʿalā l-mīʾat kalima*, pp. 80-81.

24 On the meaning of the expression *amīr al-muʾminīn*, reserved by Shiʿis for ʿAlī alone, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *La preuve de Dieu*, p. 157 et pp. 264-265.

25 *Nahj al-balāgha*, *al-ḥikam*, §§79-80, p. 642.

26 *Ibid.*, *al-ḥikam*, §267, p. 687. Ashkevarī, *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, vol. 1, p. 104; M. Terrier, *Histoire de la sagesse et philosophie shīʿite*, pp. 189-190.

27 In the “Hundred Sayings”: “Do not examine him who speaks but examine what he says”; see al-Baḥrānī, *Sharḥ ʿalā l-mīʾat kalima*, pp. 68-69. The source of the version considered here is unknown.

*al-ḍalāl*.<sup>28</sup> Although in his famous *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* he condemns the main theses of *falsafa*, he explains here that there is great danger in rejecting philosophy *a priori*: “Such is the habit of weak intelligence: it recognizes truth through men, not men through truth. The intellectual man (*al-‘āqil*) follows the path of the prince of the intellectual men (*sayyid al-‘uqalā*) ‘Alī, may God may be pleased with him, when he says: ‘Do not recognize truth through men ...’”. Both in the title he is given here, and the saying that is attributed to him, ‘Alī appears as the champion who seeks truth through reason freed of all prejudice, which quite well defines the philosophical attitude.

Even more astonishing is the presence of ‘Alī as a religious and philosophical authority in the work of that most rational of Muslim philosophers, Ibn Rushd, also known as Averroes (d. 595/1198). In the *Decisive Treatise on the Harmony of the Revealed Law and Wisdom* [or *philosophy*] (*Faṣl al-maqāl fī mā bayn al-sharī‘a wa l-ḥikma min al-ittiṣāl*), he made a legal defense of philosophy against accusations of impiety made notably by al-Ghazālī. To prove that it was impossible to condemn philosophical interpretation for breaking the consensus (*ijmā‘*) of Muslims scholars on theoretical questions raised by the Quran, he declared that there never had been such a consensus. He writes, “It has been transmitted that many in the earliest days [of Islam] used to be of the opinion that the Law (*shar‘*) has both an apparent and an inner sense (*ẓāhir wa bāṭin*) and that it is not obligatory for someone to know about the inner sense if he is not an adept in knowledge of it nor capable of understanding it. There is, for example, what al-Bukhārī relates about ‘Alī Ibn Abū Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, saying: “Speak to the people concerning what they are cognizant of. Do you want God and His messenger to be accused of lying?”<sup>29</sup> Ibn Rushd quoted this saying again when summing up his ‘*Decisive Treatise*’ in the introduction to his *Unveiling of the Methods of Proofs regarding the Dogmas of the Religion*.<sup>30</sup> Although in no way suspected of being Shi‘i, Averroes availed himself of the spiritual authority of ‘Alī to support his belief in the dual nature of Revelation, both exoteric and esoteric; in the need for a discipline of secrecy in the transmission of knowledge; in the refusal of any imposed orthodoxy where theoretical

28 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl (Erreur et délivrance)*, ed. and French transl. F. Jabr, Beirut, 1969, p. 25. This saying is also quoted by Shams al-Dīn Shahrazūrī (d. between 687/1288 et 704/1305), *ishrāqī*, a philosopher we shall return to, in his *Rasā‘il al-shajara al-ilāhiyya fī ‘ulūm al-ḥaqā‘iq al-rabbāniyya*, ed. N. Ḥabībī, 3 vol., Tehran, 1383h.s./2004-05, III, p. 7. A slightly different version is found in Mullā Ṣadrā, *Mafātiḥ al-ghayb*, ed. N. Ḥabībī, 2 vols., Tehran, 1386 h.s./2007-2008, I, p. 511.

29 Averroès, *Discours décisif*, ed. and French transl. M. Geoffroy, Paris, 1996, § 26, p. 125; Averroès, *The Book of the Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom, and Epistle Dedicatory*, English transl. C. Butterworth, Provo Utah, 2001, § 15, p. xx.

30 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf ‘an manāḥij al-adilla fī ‘aqā‘id al-milla*, ed. M. ‘A. al-Jābirī, Beirut, 1998, p. 99, in a slightly different version: “Talk to men about what they understand ...” (*bi-mā yafhamūn* au lieu de *bi-mā ya‘rifūn*).

questions are concerned; and finally in the rights of a philosophical interpretation of the Quran – in summary, everything that Eastern Shi'i philosophers after him will defend, whilst declaring themselves ever more strongly to be the adherents of 'Alī.

It is again as a defender, in theory and practice, of philosophy, that 'Alī intervenes in the chapter that Ashkevarī dedicated to John Philoponus, known as 'the Grammarian' (6th century). The latter is often considered by Muslim historians to be the last Greek philosopher, which is arguable, but also, through confusion with another personality, as being contemporary with the advent of Islam. With two stories in which 'John the Grammarian' appears, Ashkevarī contrasts the respective qualities of 'Alī with those of the second caliph 'Umar, a classical polemical theme between Shi'is and Sunnis, with, as its theme here, which is all the more original, their respective attitudes towards the legacy of Greece. In the first story, set after the conquest of Alexandria, John asks the governor, 'Amr b. al-ʿĀṣ, to return the books of wisdom confiscated from the library; but 'Amr receives the following order from the caliph 'Umar: "Regarding these books, if there is anything in them which is in agreement with the Book of God, then the Book of God dispenses us from reading it; and if there is anything in them which contradicts the Book of God, there is no need of them. Order them to be destroyed." The second story features a certain John the Patrician (*al-biṭriq*) whom an official of the 'Commander of the faithful', Alī, wished to expel from the province of Fārs; John wrote to 'Alī to ask him for protection and the caliph-imam ordered his son Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya to give him a safe conduct.<sup>31</sup> The lesson of this story is clear: whilst 'Umar, the usurper of the caliphate, decreed the destruction of books of foreign wisdom, 'Alī, the only real 'Commander [or Prince] of the faithful', ordered that a scholar of the Greek tradition be protected.

### 1.3 *'Alī, Paragon of Philosophical Virtues*

While the virtues of 'Alī had from the earliest days been a theme of dialectic theology (*kalām*), Shi'i thinkers had also conferred a philosophical meaning on them. Kamāl al-Dīn Mītham al-Baḥrānī (d. 670/1280-1 or 699/1300) and Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385-86) employed the terms of Platonic and Aristotelian ethics to describe the character of 'Alī. The first, in the introduction to his commentary on the *Nahj al-balāgha*, lists the psychic virtues of 'Alī, emanating from those two qualities of the soul, its theoretical and practical powers.<sup>32</sup> 'Alī possessed, first, the perfect theoretical power, that is theoretical wisdom (*al-ḥikma al-'ilmīyya*) defined as "the perfection of the human soul by its reflection of true knowledge and its acquiescence in

31 Ashkevarī, *Mahbūb al-qulūb*, I, pp. 385 et 388; M. Terrier, *Histoire de la sagesse et philosophie shi'ite*, pp. 701 et 704. The first account comes from Ibn al-Qiftī, *Ikhbār al-'ulamā bi-akhbār al-ḥukamā'*, ed. J. Lippert, Leipzig, 1903, p. 356.

32 Kamāl al-Dīn Mītham al-Baḥrānī, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha*, 5 vols., Tehran, 1378 h.s./1999-2000, I, pp. 79-81.

theoretical realities to the limit of human capacity". He also possessed the perfection of practical power:

This perfection is only found in the perfecting of practical wisdom, which is the perfecting of the soul through the perfecting of the habit of acting virtuously, so that man to be firmly settled on the right path, avoiding the two extremes of weakness and excess in all his actions. It is already proved in the science of morals that there are three capital human virtues. The first is human wisdom (*al-hikma al-khalqīyya*). It is the habitus (*malaka*) from which proceed acts at the just mean between ruse and naivety, those extremes of excess and weakness. 'Alī has proved himself in this respect through his conduct in both war and in the affairs of the world. The second is temperance (*'iffa*). It is the habitus which proceeds from maintaining the equilibrium of the power of desire (*al-quwwa al-shahawīyya*), by dominating it by the practical intellect, according to the law of justice (*qānūn al-'adl*). From it proceed the acts which are at the median between apathy and indecency, the two extremes of weakness and excess. This faculty was strongly evident in ['Alī]. [...] The third is courage (*shajā'a*). It is the habitus produced in the soul by moderating the power of anger (*al-quwwa al-ghaḍabīyya*) and by domination of the intellect over it. It is from it that the acts standing at the median between cowardice and temerity proceed from. The proof of the presence of this habitus in ['Alī] has been continuously passed down (...). Given that these three habitus are firmly proved in him, in the most perfect manner, and given that they are concomitant to the virtue of justice, the result is that the virtue of justice is firmly attested in him. As for those other parts of practical wisdom, such as political and domestic wisdom (...), he was in this matter a man of exception.<sup>33</sup>

This catalogue of the virtues of 'Alī is a veritable compendium of philosophical ethics. The soul is divided, as in Plato, into three parts: the rational, the irascible and the concupiscent. Virtue is defined, according to Aristotle, as perfection born from a 'habitus' and is a middle ground between two extremes. As in both Plato and Aristotle, the cardinal virtues are wisdom, courage, temperance and finally justice, which embraces the first three.<sup>34</sup> As the example and model of these virtues, 'Alī has the role of Socrates in Greek philosophy.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

34 Plato, *La République*, livre IV, in Id., *Œuvres complètes*, p. 1580-1611; Aristotle, *Éthique à Nicomaque*, 1, 13 et 11, 5, in Id., *op. cit.*, French transl. J. Tricot, Paris, 1990, pp. 80-86 et 102-105.

Ḥaydar Āmulī, well known as one of the main instigators of the rapprochement between Imami Shi‘ism and Sufism,<sup>35</sup> drew a similar philosophical portrait of ‘Alī in an epistle justifying the attitude of the first imam, apparently so passive and resigned after the death of the Prophet. Opposing both Sunnis and Shi‘i ‘exaggerators’ (*ghulāt*), he bases his proof of the perfect virtue of ‘Alī on Aristotelian ethics:

The main perfections of the soul (...) are four in number: wisdom, temperance, courage and justice. [The imam] must be characterised by them and not by the extremes of excess and weakness, which depart from the true median and the straight moral path, for this is incompatible with perfection. [...] The aim of this research (...) is to prove, to him who disputes it, that courage does not mean what he affirmed, that he who has courage is able to do whatever he wants, for this is not the meaning of courage. Rather, courage is keeping to the median without extremes (...), for being on the extremes excludes perfection, and this cannot proceed from the imam.<sup>36</sup>

For Mītham Baḥrānī and Ḥaydar Āmulī, the praise of ‘Alī’s philosophical virtues of goes hand in hand with the affirmation of his supernatural capacities, whether theoretical, as is his vision of the world of Mystery, or practical, as are his wonders (*karāmāt*) and miracles (*mu‘jizāt*), which are also rationally justified.<sup>37</sup> The historical ‘Alī is thus the object of a portrait with two aspects, one rational, inspired by philosophy, the other supernatural and non-rational, derived from esoteric Shi‘ism, two perspectives which will prove to be complementary rather than antithetical in accounting for the knowledge attributed to ‘Alī.

#### 1.4 *‘Alī, Master of Truth*

As a paragon of philosophical virtues, ‘Alī evidently must possess to the highest degree, that sovereign virtue, theoretical wisdom, or, in Plato’s definition, the contemplation

35 On him, see Henry Corbin, *En islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, 4 vols. Paris, 1971-1972, III, pp. 149-213; Khanjar ‘Alī Ḥamiyya, *al-‘Irfān al-shī‘ī. Dirāsa fī l-ḥayāt al-rūḥiyya wal-fikrīyya li-Ḥaydar al-Āmulī*, Beyrouth, 1425/ 2004; M. Terrier, “Āmulī, Sayyid Ḥaydar”, in H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Medieval Philosophy*, Dordrecht, 2018, online: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1151-5\\_585-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1151-5_585-1). On this current of rapprochement, see M. Terrier, “The Defence of Sufism among Twelver Shi‘i Scholars of Early Modern and Modern Times: Topics and Arguments”, in D. Hermann et M. Terrier (eds), *Shī‘i Islam and Sufism: Classical Views and Modern Perspectives*, London, 2020, pp. 27-63.

36 Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, *Risāla Raf al-khilāf wa l-munāza‘a*, ed. Ḥ. Kalbāsi Ashtarī, Tehran, 1396 h.s./2017, pp. 63-65.

37 Baḥrānī, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha*, I, pp. 82-89; Āmulī, *Raf al-khilāf*, pp. 62-63 et 112. The latter elsewhere attributes suprarational knowledge and a superhuman nature to ‘Alī: see *infra*, part II.

of true, universal and eternal Reality by the intellect. Now it is indeed as a master of truth that the historical 'Alī is described by Shi'ī philosophers and Gnostics. There again, this wisdom has a double aspect, the rational and the non-rational, or mystical. As regards the first aspect, theological propositions are recorded which show 'Alī to be a theoretician of both *tawḥīd* and of creation *ex nihilo*, as in this extract of the first sermon from the *Nahj al-balāgha*:

The perfection of the proof of divine unicity is the negation of attributes (*kamāl al-tawḥīd nafi al-ṣifāt*), by contemplating each attribute as it is, in so far as it is different from the being described (...), for he who describes Him associates [something] with Him, he who associates [anything] with Him has doubled Him, he who doubles Him has divided Him, he who divides Him ignores Him (...) [God] is with all things without association and different from all things without separation.<sup>38</sup>

Mullā Ṣadrā refers to this text many times describing 'Alī as 'the guide of the unitarians' (*imām al-muwahḥidīn*); he interprets it as meaning that the existence of the attributes is none other than the existence of the Divine Essence without adding it to itself as another existence – an interpretation he opposes to that of the Mu'tazilites who deny the meaning of the attributes.<sup>39</sup> His student Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679) even sees in these words of 'Alī "proofs of the [illusory,] purely mental nature of the quiddities and of the principal, [real,] original, nature of existence" (*ṭtibārīyya al-māhiyyāt wa aṣālat al-wujūd*), that is, a scriptural confirmation of the most contested philosophical thesis of his master: the precedence of the act of being or existing over the essence or the quiddity.<sup>40</sup>

The most renowned philosophico-theological proposition attributed to 'Alī is undoubtedly this aphorism with Socratic echoes: "He who knows himself [or his soul (*nafsahu*)] knows his Lord."<sup>41</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (d. 908/1502), a philosopher whose late Shi'ī affiliation is subject to caution, interpreted it as follows:

The secret, is that the obligation (*taklīf*) only relates to the knowledge of God that is commensurate with [each person's] capacity. [Men] are only required to

38 *Nahj al-balāgha*, khuṭba 1, pp. 35-36.

39 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Maḥfātīḥ al-ghayb*, I, pp. 414 and 522.

40 Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*, ed. 'A. 'Alizādeh, Qumm, 1390 h.s./2011, pp. 31-32. On this thinker, see M. Terrier, "Anthropogonie et eschatologie dans l'œuvre de Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī: l'ésotérisme shi'ite entre tradition et syncrétisme", in M.A. Amir-Moezzi (dir.), *L'ésotérisme shi'ite*, pp. 743-780. On the ontology of Mullā Ṣadrā, see Ch. Jambet, *L'acte d'être. La philosophie de la révélation chez Mollā Ṣadrā*, Paris, 2002.

41 Bahṛānī, *Sharḥ 'alā l-mī'at kalīma*, pp. 57-58.

know Him through the attributes they are familiar with and that they observe in themselves, to the exclusion of the shortcomings borne out of this attribution to them. Given that man is made necessary by another [i.e. God], that he is knowledgeable, powerful, living, speaking, hearing and seeing, he has to believe that these attributes are found in the Reality of the Most-High, to the exclusion of the defects born of their attribution to him. [He has] to believe that [God] is necessary by His very own essence, not by another, that He is the knower of all known things, is mighty above all possibilities, and likewise for all the attributes. We do not have to believe in an attribute of the Most High of which there would be no example in us, [for] if we were obliged to, we would be incapable of truly intellectually perceiving Him. That is the first meaning of the saying of [‘Alī], peace be upon him: “*He who knows himself knows his Lord.*”<sup>42</sup>

As regards the second, non-rational or supra-rational, aspect of his wisdom, ‘Alī is described to be the ultimate source of the ‘knowledge of divine proximity’ (*‘ilm ladunī*), an important notion in Sufism, meaning the immediate knowledge received from God through ‘effusion’. In an epistle on this theme attributed to al-Ghazālī one reads:

The knowledge of proximity is given to the men of prophecy and sainthood, as happened to Khaḍīr and to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who record the following: “The Messenger put his tongue inside my mouth, then a thousand doors [or “chapters” (*bāb*)] of Knowledge opened in my heart, and inside each one, a thousand other doors”; and this: “Were the throne to be set up for me, I would take my seat on it and I would judge the followers of the Torah according to the Torah, the followers of the Gospel according to the Gospel, the followers the of the Psalms according to the Psalms and the followers of the Quran [*al-furqān*, the name of surah 25] according to the Quran.”<sup>43</sup>

Mullā Ṣadrā *refers to* the same traditions affirming that this rank cannot be reached through human teaching, but only through divine proximity.<sup>44</sup> He also attributes to

42 Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī, *Risāla ithbāt al-wājib al-jadīda*, in *Sab‘a rasā’il*, ed. A. Tuyiserkānī, Tehran, 1381 h.s./2002, p. 159. On this philosopher, see M. Terrier, “al-Dawānī, Jalāl al-Dīn”, in H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Medieval Philosophy*, 2019, online: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1151-5\\_589-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1151-5_589-1).

43 Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Risāla fī l-‘ilm al-ladunī*, in *Majmū‘a rasā’il al-imām al-Ghazālī*, 7 parts, Beirut, 2011, III, p. 57-74, see p. 70. Ashkevarī quotes this saying as proof of al-Ghazālī’s Shi‘ism in *Maḥbūb al-qulūb, al-maqāla al-thāniya* (II), ed. I. al-Dībājī and A. Ṣidqī, Tehran, 1382 h.s./2003, p. 454.

44 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Maḥfātih al-ghayb*, I, p. 240.

'Alī this saying which Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) attributed to Abū Bakr in his *Futūḥāt makkīyya*: "I have not seen any one thing without seeing God in it", or "without seeing God before it" according to certain records,<sup>45</sup> held to be an evidence of true certainty (*'ayn al-yaqīn*) obtained through testimonial contemplation (*mushāhada*).

This supra-rational aspect is illustrated by an Imami *ḥadīth* entitled 'What is Reality (or Truth)?' (*mā al-ḥaqīqa*), much appreciated by Shi'ī philosophers and Gnostics. It is an esoteric dialogue between 'Alī and one of his closest disciples, Kumayl b. Ziyād (d. 83/702-3), considered by a number of Shi'ī thinkers to the first link in the 'Alid initiatory chain of the Sufi orders.<sup>46</sup> The discourse attributed here to 'Alī is believed by Shi'īs to be a fundamental teaching, a word of revealed truth, an object of philosophical interpretation. Ḥaydar Āmulī, a Shi'ī disciple of Ibn 'Arabī's thought, and Fayḍ Kāshānī in Safavid times, both quoted and commented on this tradition on numerous occasions.<sup>47</sup> But its most surprising mention is found in the *Commentary of the Book of the Wisdom of Illumination* [of Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191)] by Shams al-Dīn Shahrzūrī (d. between 687/1288 and 704/1305), a thinker known not to be Shi'ī. In the passage commented, Suhrawardī invokes prophetic *ḥadīths* in support of his theology of Light; Shahrzūrī adds this dialogue to them, claiming they are a new scriptural confirmation of them:

Among the invocations transmitted by tradition: "I invoke you by the Light of Thy Face, that fills the pillars of your Throne" [prophetic *ḥadīth*], for the Light of His Face is the Reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of His Essence proceeding from the Throne with all it embraces of the luminous and the dark worlds, expressed here by the 'pillars of the Throne'. How beautiful is what is being related about this of the Prince of the faithful ['Alī], blessings be upon him! When Kumayl b. Ziyād asked him, "What is Reality, oh Prince of the faithful?" 'Alī replied, "What do you have to do with Reality?" Kumayl asked: "Am I not your confidant?" 'Alī replied, "Indeed, but what overflows from me flows over you". Kumayl: "Does someone like you disappoint him who asks of him?" 'Alī: "No. Reality, is the unveiling of the invocations of the divine Majesty without any indication (*ishāra*)"; Kumayl: "Explain it to me more." 'Alī: "It is the erasure of presumption by the truth of the known." Kumayl: "Explain to me more". 'Alī: "It is the attraction of absolute Unity (*al-aḥadiyya*) by the clarity of the divine unicity (*al-tawḥīd*)?" Kumayl: "Explain to me more." 'Alī:

45 *Ibid.*, I, pp. 102 and 399; Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyya*, ed. Maktab al-buḥūth wa l-dirāsāt, 8 vols., Beyrouth, 1331-2/2010, V, p. 223. Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt makhnūna*, p. 19, has "without seeing God before it, after it and with it".

46 Ashkevarī, *Mahbūb al-qulūb*, II, pp. 497-498; M. Terrier, "The Defence of Sufism among Twelver Shi'ī Scholars", pp. 35-40.

47 Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār* in Id., *La philosophie shī'ite*, ed. H. Corbin and O. Yahia, Tehran, 1347 h.s./1968, pp. 28-29 et p. 170; Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt makhnūna*, p. 47.

“It is a Light that illuminates from the morning of pre-eternity and whose radiance shines on the temples of monotheism.” Kumayl: “Explain to me more.” ‘Alī: “Put out the lamp, morning has come.”<sup>48</sup>

Shahrazūrī concludes that sufficient proof of the Light of Lights, God, and of the distinct intellective Lights, the angels, can only be adequately expressed by the words of the sages and the prophets who are the best of men. This exchange with ‘Alī, believed to be divinely inspired, confirms the ‘illuminative’ philosophy of Suhrawardī.

Both aspects, rational and non-rational, of the knowledge attributed to the historical ‘Alī thus prove to be complementary rather than antithetical. So when Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1631), the leader of the ‘philosophical renaissance’ of the second Safavid century, described ‘Alī as a master of arithmetic (*‘ilm al-a’dād*), it was in accordance with the Pythagorean belief that the created universe is literally “written in mathematical language”. The better to attribute supernatural knowledge coupled with thaumaturgical powers to ‘Alī, he continued:

The greatest divine sages (...), who perceive the nourishment of the true realities and the flavours of the subtle entities by the sense of taste of the holy might [of their souls] (...), agree in saying that the ranks of the worlds of generation correspond to the ranks of the world of numbers, that the relationships of the generated world correspond to the numerical ratios, that the harmonies of the relationships and the mixtures of the properties of the numerical world (...) are the mirrors and the precise images of the realities of the essences of the world of generation, the measurements and the weighing scales of the ranks of the generated things in existence. If one could know the properties of the relationships and the particularities of the ranks of this world in their totality, then to him the states of the existing in their process of becoming, the quantities and modalities of past and future events would be revealed, by the grace of God. Such was the state of the sanctified soul and of the venerated essence of the Gate of the city of knowledge (*bāb madīnat al-‘ilm*), the Abode of the city of wisdom (*dār madīnat al-ḥikma*), the Inhabitant of the clay of certainty (...), that is of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and of his children and of his purified representatives [...]. It is said that a Jew came to find ‘Alī and asked him, “Tell me, which number has a half, a third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, a seventh, an eighth, a ninth and a tenth which are all prime numbers.” ‘Alī asked him, “If I tell you, will you submit to God?” “Indeed”, replied the Jew. ‘Alī said, “Multiply the number of days of the week with [the

48 Shams al-Dīn al-Shahrazūrī, *Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, ed. Ḥ. Dīyā’ī, Tehran, 1380 h.s./2001, pp. 401-402.

number of days] of the month and the result by [the number of days of] the year; you will learn the desired number" The Jew did the operation (7 times 30 times 360 = 75600) and found the number he was looking for. Then he submitted to God (that is, he converted to Islam).<sup>49</sup>

The knowledge of 'Alī was said to already contain all philosophy, and even surpass it, before it became known in the realm of Islam.<sup>50</sup> That is also what Fayḍ Kāshānī and Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī (d. 1103/1691), both Shi'ī traditionists before being philosophers, suggest by invoking two traditions in particular. The first, a conversation of 'Alī with Kumayl b. Ziyād, has its source in the *Kashkūl* of Shaykh Bahā'ī (d. 1030/1620), a famous anthology of Shi'ī, Sufi and philosophical texts; it was denounced as a Sufi forgery by the traditionist Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699).<sup>51</sup> In it Imam 'Alī revises and corrects, without saying so, the psychology of Aristotle, distinguishing four souls inherent in the human soul: the vegetative soul, the sensitive animal soul, the holy rational soul and the divine universal soul (*ilāhiyya kullīyya*).<sup>52</sup> The second tradition, another account of the conversion of a Jew, contains an explicit mention, undoubtedly anachronistic, of *falsafa*:

A Jew came to ['Alī] while he was talking to a group and asked him,

"Oh son of Abū Ṭālib, if you had learned philosophy, you would be worth something." 'Alī asked him, "What do you mean by philosophy? He whose temperament is balanced, is his mixture not pure? He whose blend is pure, is not the influence of the soul stronger in him? He in whom the influence of the soul is stronger, is he not carried to where the soul lifts him? He who is carried to where the soul lifts him, does he not acquire the ways of the soul? He who acquires the ways of the soul, does he not exist as a man and not as an animal? He who exists as a man, does he not cross the threshold of the angelic form without anything being able to divert him from that end?" The Jew said: "God is great! You have expressed all of philosophy with those words. May God be pleased with you!"<sup>53</sup>

49 Mīr Dāmād, *Jadhawāt wa mawāqīt*, ed. 'A. Owjabī, Tehran, 1380 h.s./2001, pp. 119-121.

50 Mīr Dāmād, *al-Rawāshih al-samāwīyya* [commentary of the *Kitāb al-Kāfi* of al-Kulaynī], ed. Gh. Qayṣariyya-hā and N. al-Jalīlī, n.p., 1422/2001, p. 23, stresses that the 'science of the imams' came before philosophy in Islam.

51 Shaykh Bahā'ī, *Kashkūl*, ed. 'A. al-Namrī, 2 vols., Beirut, 1418/1998, II, pp. 5-6; Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 110 vols., Beirut, 1403/1983, LVIII, p. 85.

52 Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*, p. 92-93; al-Qāḍī Sa'īd al-Qummī, *al-Fawā'id al-riḍawīyya*, in *al-Arba'īniyyāt li-kashf anwār al-qudsīyyāt*, ed. N. Ḥabībī, Tehran, 1381 h.s./2002-3, pp. 93-95 and 100-101.

53 Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*, p. 94.

Fayḍ Kāshānī links this tradition to another declaration attributed to ‘Alī, whose mystical tenor recalls the ecstatic Sufism of Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922): “God has for His friends a drink. When they drink of it, they become intoxicated. When they become intoxicated, they go into a trance. When they go into a trance, they are sublimated. When they are sublimated they melt. When they melt, they are purified. When they are purified they seek. When they seek they find. When they find they reach their goal. When they reach their goal they are connected. When they are connected there is no difference between themselves and their Beloved.”<sup>54</sup> Then this *ḥadīth qudsī*: “He who seeks Me finds Me. He who finds Me knows Me. He who knows Me loves Me. He who loves Me adores Me. He who adores Me I adore him. Him I adore I kill. Him I kill his blood money is on Me. He whose blood money is on Me I become his blood money!”<sup>55</sup> Once confirmed by a *ḥadīth qudsī*, this saying of ‘Alī implicitly received the status of a revealed truth.

The historical ‘Alī, master of both demonstrated and revealed truth, is also a source of direct inspiration to the philosophers through his presence after death. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī says that he composed his *Treatise of al-Zawrā’* (one of the names of the city of Baghdad) after he had a vision of imam ‘Alī in Najaf.<sup>56</sup> An ecstatic vision of imam ‘Alī and of the prophet Muḥammad, experienced in the mosque of Qumm, is also recorded by Mīr Dāmād. During the vision, ‘Alī gave him an incantatory formula (*ḥirz*) which is still appreciated by the Shi‘i ‘*urafā’*.<sup>57</sup> This living presence of ‘Alī from beyond the grave leads us to explore his metaphysical dimension.

## 2 The Metaphysical ‘Alī and the Metaphysics of ‘Alī

### 2.1 *‘Alī in Historiosophy*

‘Alī plays a capital role in what I call Shi‘i historiosophy, a conception of sacred history which is both cyclical and teleological, born out of the meeting of Shi‘i esotericism,

54 This tradition is already present in Āmulī, *Jāmī’ al-asrār*, p. 363-364; Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā’ī (d. after 904/1499), *Mujlī mir’āt al-munjī fi l-kalām wa-l-ḥikmatayn wa-l-taṣawwuf*, ed. R. Yaḥyā Pūr Fārmad, 5 vols., Qumm-Beirut, 1434/2013, v, p. 1682. On the function of this tradition in the strategy of the rapprochement between Shi‘ism and Sufism, see M. Terrier, “The Defence of Sufism among Twelver Shi‘i Scholars”, pp. 53-54.

55 Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*, p. 94.

56 al-Dawānī, *Sharḥ risāla al-Zawrā’*, in *Sab’a rasā’il*, p. 202.

57 The account of it is recorded by his former disciple Ashkevarī as well as by al-Majlisī: Mīr Dāmād, *Kitāb al-Qabasāt*, ed. M. Moḥaqqueq, Tehran, 1977-2016, introduction, pp. 35-37; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, xci, pp. 370-371. On this text, see H. Corbin, *En islam iranien*, t. iv, pp. 36-39; M. Terrier, “Mīr Dāmād (m. 1041/1631), philosophe et mujtahid. Autorité spirituelle et autorité juridique en Iran safavide Shi‘ite”, *Studia Islamica* 113 (2018): 121-165, see pp. 155-157.

the illuminative philosophy of Suhrawardī and the doctrine of sainthood of Ibn 'Arabī. In the introduction of his *Kitāb Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, Suhrawardī had already written, "Do not imagine that wisdom (*ḥikma*) has existed only in the recent times. The world has never been without wisdom or without a person possessing proofs and clear evidences to champion it. He is God's viceregent (*khalīfat Allāh*) on His earth."<sup>58</sup> And further, "The world will never be without a [sage] proficient in the deification of the self (*al-mutawaghghil fī l-ta'alluh*) (...), for the viceregency requires direct knowledge. By this authority (*r'āsa*) I do not mean political power. For the deified Guide (*al-imām al-muta'allih*) may indeed rule openly, or he may be hidden – the one whom the multitude call 'the Pole' (*qutb*). He will have authority even if he is in the deepest obscurity."<sup>59</sup> Here, Suhrawardī identifies the figures of Shi'i Islam, the Sufi Pole and of the ideal sage of philosophy, a man "rendered similar to God as far as it is possible" according to the formula of Socrates in Plato.<sup>60</sup> Shahrazūrī, in his commentary on the first passage, quotes the *ḥadīth* of 'Alī which could be at the origin of this saying:

Divine Providence (*al-'ināya al-ilāhīyya*), having required the existence of this world, also requires its integrity. Now this integrity passes through the sages who are establishers of revealed laws and by the self-deified sages practising speculation (*al-ḥukamā' al-muta'allihīn al-bāḥithīn*). The earth can therefore not lack one or some of them, providing the proofs of God to those who are worthy of it and who are in need of it. It is they who preserve the world and its pillars, it is through them that its order is perpetuated (...) and that the outpouring of the Creator (*ḥayḍ al-bārī*) is conjoined with it.<sup>61</sup> [...] As 'Alī, may God honour his face, has beautifully described them at the end of one of his sermons, "Knowledge (*'ilm*) would die if its carriers were to die. But the earth is never devoid of a man

58 Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, *Kitāb Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, in Id., *Œuvres philosophiques et mystiques*, tome II, ed. H. Corbin, Paris/Tehran, 1952, 2nd ed. 2001, p. 11; Shihāboddīn Yaḥya Sohravardī, *Livre de la sagesse orientale*, French transl. H. Corbin, Paris, 2003, p. 89; *The Philosophy of Illumination*, ed. and English transl. J. Walbridge and H. Ziai, Provo, Utah, 1999, p. 2, translation slightly modified.

59 Suhrawardī, *K. Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, p. 12; *Sagesse orientale*, p. 91; *The Philosophy of Illumination*, p. 3, translation slightly modified.

60 Plato, *Théétète*, 176a, in Id., *Œuvres complètes*, p. 1933 (French translation M. Narcy); on this theme, see P. Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, Paris, 1995, pp. 341-346; C. Jambet, "S'assimiler à Dieu dans la mesure du possible" (*Théétète* 176b): un impératif platonicien dans son interprétation en philosophie islamique", *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie*, t. CXI, n° 4, Paris, 2017. The identification of the Shi'i Imam with the Pole is also affirmed by Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī who does not seem to have been influenced by Suhrawardī; see *Jāmi' al-asrār*, p. 223.

61 The Arabic *ḥayḍ*, "effusion" or "emanation", translates the notion of *próodos* of the Neoplatonists Plotinus and Proclus.

who provides the proofs of God, whether he be manifest or veiled or fearful and oppressed, so that the proofs of God and His evident testimonies may never be abolished. How many [of these men] are there? Where are they? They are the least numerous and the most esteemed of God; their concrete essences (*a'yān*) are lost but their images (*amthāl*) are present in our hearts. God preserves His proofs in order for them to transmit them to their peers and store them in the hearts of those like them.”<sup>62</sup>

Ibn Abī Jumhūr (d. after 904/1499), the last thinker of the rapprochement between Imami Shi‘ism, philosophy and Sufism before the establishment of Imami Shi‘ism as the state religion in Safavid Iran, gives great importance to this tradition.<sup>63</sup> He attributes to the “men of gustative wisdom among the illuminist sages, from the father [of the sages] the great Hermes to the last”, the doctrine by which “divine Providence, having required the existence of this world, also requires its integrity. [...] It is through them that its order is perpetuated and that the outpourings of the Creator are joined to it”. From this he concludes that “the perennity of the material species necessarily results from it, according to the argument of divine Providence, the perennity of the lieutenantcy of God and of His lieutenant, who is the divine sage (*ḥakīm ilāhī*) who penetrates both the mysteries of the deification of the self and of speculation.”<sup>64</sup> Ibn Sīnā or Avicenna (d. 428/1037), in his *Metaphysics of the Shifā*, had already deduced from the divine Providence the necessity for the existence of a prophet and that he be a man;<sup>65</sup> the argument is extended by Suhrawardī and his commentators, whether overtly Shi‘i or not, to the imams, poles and divine sages, of which ‘Alī is the *exemplum*. Ibn Abī Jumhūr explains the providential function of ‘Alī in terms borrowed from both *falsafa* and from Shi‘i and Sufi esotericism:

62 Shahrzūrī, *Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, p. 24; Suhrawardī, *Sagesse orientale*, pp. 248-249. This tradition of ‘Alī, another exchange with Kumayl b. Ziyād, is recorded by *Nahj al-balāgha*, *al-ḥikam*, §147, p. 661, with modifications; see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Seul l’homme de Dieu est humain. Théologie et anthropologie mystique à travers l’exégèse imamite ancienne”, in Id., *la Religion discrète*, pp. 209-228, citation pp. 227-228.

63 On this thinker, see W. Madelung, “Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā‘ī’s Synthesis of Kalām, Philosophy and Sufism”, in Id., *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, London, Variorum reprints, 1985, art. n° 13; S. Schmidtke, *Theologie, Philosophie und Mystik im zwölfterschiitischen Islam des 9./15. Jahrhunderts. Die Gedankenwelten des Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā‘ī (um 838/1434-35 – nach 906/1501)*, Leiden, 2000; M. Terrier, “Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā‘ī”, in H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, 2018, online: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1151-5\\_588-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1151-5_588-1); Id., “The Defence of Sufism among Twelver Shi‘i Scholars”.

64 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujli*, 111, pp. 1102-1103. Another echo of Suhrawardī, *K. Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, pp. 11-12; *Sagesse orientale*, pp. 90-91.

65 Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt al-shifā*, ed. G.C. Anawati and S. Zayed, Beirut, 1960, p. 365.

"['Alī] is the door through which one enters towards Him [God]. With ['Alī] the knowledge of [God] is achieved". This means (...) that divine Providence demands the existence of perfect individuals who are the loci of manifestation of His effects in action, the substrates of His theophanies (*tajalliyātihi*), the orients of His names. They are the doors and the paths leading towards Him, by knowing them and learning from them the secrets that God has placed in them. For it is through them that the knowledge of the sage (*al-ʿārif*) attains its perfection; he finds refuge in his knowledge of the reality of their divine service (*al-tahaqquq bi-l-ʿubūdiyya*), with the secrets and effects made manifest in them and by them. [...] These perfect men become for that purpose a locus of manifestation of all the servants, for all is accomplished through them. It is through them that one prays, through them that one knows. They are the models of everything and it is on them that everything is regulated.<sup>66</sup>

'Alī is here hypostatised into a theophanic being, an archetype of the perfect Man, endowed with an initiatory function as the final cause of knowledge and of the service of adoration. Ibn Abī Jumhūr, commenting on remark of Suhrawardī (see above), repeats that this function, contrary to that of the Prophet, is independent from the exercise of political power: "Whether political power (*al-siyāsa*) is in his hands, in such a way that it is manifest, with an extended hand, or in the hands of another, he is the guardian of the esoteric order (*al-amr al-bāṭinī*) without which the exoteric (*al-ẓāhir*) cannot be accomplished."<sup>67</sup> So in the transhistorical attributes of the imam, pole or sage, there is the sign of the historical figure of 'Alī, which is of abstention or political powerlessness.

Ibn 'Arabī's conception of sainthood or of the divine Alliance (*walāya*) also had a major influence on the historiography of late Shi'i thinkers. It is well known that for Shi'i esotericism, after the sealing of prophecy with Muḥammad, the cycle of *walāya*, the imamate of 'Alī and his successors had begun.<sup>68</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, on his side, posited a distinction between absolute or universal (*muṭlaqa*) Alliance, coming about in pre-eternity (*al-azal*) and continuing into post-eternity (*al-abad*), and the defined (*muqayyada*) Alliance of Muḥammadan Law; and affirming the existence of a 'seal of Alliance' (*khātam al-walāya*) analogous to the 'seal of prophecy', Muḥammad, he identified the seal of absolute Alliance with Jesus and suggested that he himself was the seal of the defined Alliance.<sup>69</sup> Ḥaydar Āmulī, in his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, accepted

66 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujli*, IV, pp. 1344-1345.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 1520.

68 H. Corbin, *En islam iranien*, t. 1; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*.

69 Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. 'A. 'Afīfī, Beirut, 1423/2002, pp. 62-64; Id., *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, 8 vols., Beirut, Dār al-fīkr, 1431-2/2010, I, pp. 447-448.

the idea of the double Alliance and of the double seal but contradicted Ibn 'Arabī: the seal of absolute Alliance can be none other than 'Alī and that of the determined Alliance none other than the twelfth imam al-Mahdī.<sup>70</sup> This attribute of 'Alī is based on *hadīths* of the Prophet quoted *ad libitum*: “What God created first was the Intellect”; “What God created first was my light”; “Alī and I were one light in the hands of God”; “I was a Prophet when Adam was still between water and clay”; and of 'Alī: “I was the Ally [of God] when Adam was still between water and clay.”<sup>71</sup>

Finally, the role of 'Alī in Shi'i historiography appears in all the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* of Ashkevarī, a monumental history of wisdom in three books (*maqāla*), the first on the pre-Islamic sages, the second on the sages, philosophers and mystics of Islam and the third on the Shi'i imams and religious scholars. The first book begins with the Adam's witness at the moment of his creation to the ontological and theological precedence of 'Alī, and ends with the account, seen above, of the caliph 'Alī's kindness to the last Greek philosopher. The second book concludes with a eulogy to a whole series of Sufi masters, true philosophers and disciples of the imams, who derived their knowledge from the historical 'Alī. The third book starts with the miraculous birth of 'Alī and concludes with a declaration that his metaphysical essence is the principle and the end of the movement of existence and in which he is identified with the 'dot under the *bā* of [the formula] *bi-smi-llāh*.<sup>72</sup> This leads us to the consideration a new dimension of 'Alī, cosmic and anthropological, albeit still metaphysical.

## 2.2 *'Alī in Cosmic Anthropology and Anthropogony*

In countless philosophical works, written mostly, but not only, by Shi'i authors, there is a conception, Pythagorean in origin, of man as the 'small world' or microcosm (*'ālam ṣaghūr*) and of the universe as the 'big man' or *macranthropos* (*insān kabūr*). This theory, first proposed in Islam by Jābir b. Ḥayyān (3rd/9th century), the Ikhwān al-ṣafā (4th/10th century) – two collectives of Shi'i obedience – and Ibn 'Arabī, was largely digested and further developed by Imami philosophers in Safavid Iran. All link this conception with the Akbarian concept of the perfect Man or universal Man (*al-insān*

70 Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ al-Fuṣūṣ*, ed. M. Bidārfār, 3 vols., Qumm, 1394 h.s./2015-16, I, pp. 271-341, included and summarized by Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*, pp. 189-190. See on this issue H. Corbin, *En islam iranien*, III, pp. 197-200.

71 Āmulī, *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ*, III, pp. 1794 et 1802-1803, index s.v. *awwalu mā khalaqa Allāh...*, *kuntu anā wa 'Alī...*, *kuntu nabīyyan wa Ādam...*, *kuntu walīyyan wa Ādam...* See also, among many other possible examples, Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, v, pp. 1915 and 1920, Index s.v. idem; al-Ḥāfīz Rajab al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn fī ḥaqā'iq asrār amīr al-mu'minīn* ed. 'A. Ashraf al-Māzandarānī, Qumm, 1384 h.s./2005-06, pp. 501 and 508, Index s.v. idem; Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*, pp. 189-190. On the pre-existence of 'Alī and the imams, see also M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, partie II, pp. 73-112.

72 See M. Terrier, *Histoire de la sagesse et philosophie shī'ite*, pp. 91-95, 111-115, p. 249, pp. 277-278, 726-727.

*al-kāmīl*) by identifying him with 'Alī, or rather with his metaphysical entity, theophany and receptacle of the divine Effusion. These speculations on the man-microcosm often, and even systematically, referred to some verses attributed to the historical 'Alī, considered in this respect to be authentic (whilst the apocryphal character of the *Dīwān* is no secret). Kamāl al-Dīn Mīr Ḥusayn Maybudī (d. 909/1503-04), author of a commentary on the *Dīwān* whose affiliation to the Shi'ī is doubtful, quotes the following:

Your remedy is in you and you do not understand it,  
 Your sickness is of you but you do not see it  
 It is you who are the visible book whose letters manifest the hidden  
 You who claim only to be a little body, the great world is enveloped in you<sup>73</sup>

The philosopher Mīr Dāmād, who does for once refrain from citing these verses, nevertheless accepts this cosmic anthropology by placing 'Alī at its centre, in his commentary on a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet recorded by the sixth imam and deemed to be perfectly authentic: "Alī is the example among you [or: in my community] of the verse, 'Say: "He is God, He is One" in the Quran'" (112:1).<sup>74</sup> Relying on an analogy dear to Ḥaydar Āmulī, between the book of God, the book of the 'horizons' or of the world, and the book of the soul or of man (– see Quran 41: 53 "We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their souls" ...) – Mīr Dāmād writes:

The rational human soul, accomplished in both its knowledge and its practice, is at the highest level of its perfection, that of the highest rank of acquired Intellect, for it is in itself alone, within the limits of that rank, an intelligible world (*'ālam 'aqlī*) comprising the whole world of existence, alike it in its gathering together of all things, a book of lucid synthesis, like that universal Book which is the order of the worlds of existence (...). That is why it is said that the truly cognisant man (*al-insān al-'ārif*) is the macrocosm, and that the whole world is the micranthropos. [...] ['Alī] declares in the language of his spiritual state (*bi-lisān ḥālīhī*) what is expressed by "Say: He is God, He is One" in the language of words. Now the language of the spiritual state is the clearest and its testimony the most eloquent. That is why this saying has wetted his tongue (to say): "This [Quran] is the silent Book and I am the speaking Book". 'Alī is this the surah *al-Ikhlāṣ* ('the

73 Maybudī, *Sharḥ-e Dīwān*, p. 456 and 458. Among countless occurrences in the works of Shi'ī philosophers: Shaykh Bahā'ī (Bahā' al-Dīn al-'Āmilī), *al-Arba'ūn ḥadīth*<sup>an</sup>, Qumm, 1431/2009-2010, p. 205, verse 1 and 3; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, IV, p. 334; Ashkevarī, *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, I, pp. 229-230; Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalīmāt maknūna*, p. 134.

74 Mīr Dāmād, *Sharḥ ḥadīth tamthīl al-imām 'Alī bi-sūrat al-tawḥīd*, in *Muṣannaḥāt Mīr Dāmād*, vol. 1, ed. A. Nūrānī, Tehran, 1381 h.s./2003, p. 563; Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, xxxix, p. 270.

fundamental religion') or *al-Tawhīd* ('the divine unicity') [Quran 112] in the book of the world, he is an intelligible and clear book, like the book of the system of existence.<sup>75</sup>

In this text Mīr Dāmād here brings Shi'ī esotericism and Avicennism together. The concept of Alī as the 'Speaking Book of God' (*kitāb allāh al-nāṭiq*), the hermeneut of the Quran, without whom it would remain a 'dumb book',<sup>76</sup> is of course derived from the Shi'ī doctrine. From Avicenna he takes the belief that the perfection of the rational soul consists in its becoming an intelligible world.<sup>77</sup> As he writes (in Persian) elsewhere, quoting the end of Avicenna's *Metaphysics of the Shifā'*:

The perfect sage (...), deified and sanctified (*mota'alleh motaqaddes*) (...), having achieved in his second nature the most perfect portion possible of acquired intellect, becomes an intelligible world comparable to the synthetic order of the universe (...). Whether he has the attributes of prophecy, or the mission of the lawgiver, or of the sealing of prophecy (*khātimiyyat*), or the rank of the testamentary mandate (*veṣāyat*), or the heritage of the seal of prophecy (*verāthat-e khātim al-nubuwa*) (...), he is God's lieutenant upon earth; and as our predecessor as the master of Islamic philosophy, he said (...) "he becomes almost a human Lord (*rabban insāniyyan*) and to serve him would be lawful after that of God Most-High".<sup>78</sup>

Mentioned above by Ashkevarī, the *logion* of 'Alī which most inspired Shi'ī Gnostics and philosophers in the field of anthropology and anthropogony, lent itself perfectly to Neoplatonist interpretations and to esoteric speculations, and combined hermeneutics with the 'science of letters', is the following: "I am the dot under the *bā'*, that is, the *bā'* of *bi-smi-llāh* ['in the name of God']".<sup>79</sup> Āmulī based his belief in the consubstantiality of 'Alī with the 'Muḥammadan Light', the first created being, on this and other traditions, and to make the link with the historical 'Alī, wrote:

In essence, the secrets of the *bismillāh* are not likely to be fixed and put into writing. Of this level of reality, it is said: "Existence (*wujūd*) was manifest from

75 Mīr Dāmād, *Sharḥ ḥadīth tamthīl al-imām 'Alī bi-sūrat al-tawhīd*, pp. 563-564.

76 On this subject see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux*.

77 Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt al-Shifā'*, p. 425.

78 Mīr Dāmād, *Jadhawāt wa mawāqit*, pp. 20-21. Quotation in Arabic in the text: Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt al-Shifā'*, p. 455.

79 Quoted notably by Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, pp. 411 and 563; Rajab al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*, p. 31; Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, IV, pp. 1340-41 and p. 1504; here: Epilog, n. 6.

the *bā'* of *bi-smi-llāh al-rahmān al-rahīm*"; and it is said: "By the *bā'*, existence has manifested itself, and by the dot [under the *bā'*], the servant (*al-'ābid*) has been distinguished from the Lord (*al-ma'būd*). The Prince of the faithful (...) says: "I am the dot under the *bā'*" for he is like the dot with regard to the first concretisation (*al-ta'ayyun al-awwal*) which is the veritable Muḥammadan Light, by virtue of the word [of the Prophet]: "What God created first was my light called *al-rahīm*" and his [other] saying: "Alī and I are from one single light". Indeed, the Prophet is like the *bā'* and 'Alī is like the dot underneath it, for the *bā'* becomes a reality only with it and through it, just as the Prophet achieves his perfection only with and through the Alliance (*walāya*), even though the Ally [the Imam] (*walī*) is inferior in rank to the Prophet. This is what the Prince of the faithful [or the initiates] indicated when he said: "Knowledge is a dot that the ignorant multiply". This means that the veritable science is a dot or that the access to real science depends on the knowledge of this dot as well as of modalities of its manifestation, of its loci of apparition and of its ranks; but the ignorant ones multiplied it, ignoring and rejecting his companion ['Alī]. "And to whomsoever God assigns no light, no light has he." Quran 24:40<sup>80</sup>

Ibn Abī Jūmhūr uses the same traditions to describe the cosmogonic and gnoseological status of 'Alī. His argument draws on the Neoplatonic double theme of emanation from the One (*próodos*) and of the conversion or return to the One (*epistrophé*). He also hints at one of the most esoteric, secret and sacred theses of Shi'ism: the superiority of the knowledge of the Imam over that of the Prophet:

He one who wishes to know the horizons [the world] necessarily has to know the first given and its reality, which is with the *bā'* and its dot. That is why 'Alī says: "Science is a dot which the ignorant multiply". This knowledge follows two paths: either it goes from unity towards multiplicity, from the principle to the end, following the path of descent and manifestation (*zuhūr*); or it proceeds from multiplicity towards unity and from the end towards the principle, following the way of elevation and of interiority (*buṭūn*). [...] Of the knowledge that he received from the dot of existence during the night of his celestial ascension (*laylat al-mi'rāj*), the Prophet said: "I learned all the forms of knowledge from the first and the last" (...). And of the knowledge he had of them himself 'Alī said: "I am the dot under the *bā'*," and "Ask me about what is under the Throne."<sup>81</sup>

80 *Āmulī, Jāmi' al-asrār*, pp. 563-564.

81 Ibn Abī Jūmhūr, *Mujli*, IV, pp. 1338-1339.

Ibn Abī Jūmhūr also links this *ḥadīth* and the historical person of ‘Alī as the source of initiatory chains, which include not only the imams and the ‘pillars of Shi‘ism’, but also Sufi masters, considered, according to Suhrawardī, to be “philosophers in the real sense.”<sup>82</sup> ‘Alī appears here again as the alpha and omega of historiosophy, the history of both wisdom and sainthood:

He who says, “I am the dot under the *bā*”, is ‘Alī and none other of all the perfect ones. This is said of him by greatest companions such as Salmān, Abū Dharr, Kumayl b. Ziyād,<sup>83</sup> and his children have recorded it from him in a long sermon called “the sermon of glory” (*al-iftikhārīyya*), in which he says something even more tremendous: “I am the face of God, I am the side of God, I am the hand of God, I am the speaking Quran, I am the truthful demonstration, I am the preserved Table, I am the same supreme Pen (...), I am the dot under the *bā* ...”.<sup>84</sup> Sacred intelligence bears witness to the truth of it. Every intellectual man recognizes through his intelligence that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is the prince of the unitarians (*sayyid al-muwahhidīn*), the pole of the real Gnostics (*quṭb al-‘ārīfīn*), their head and their guide. Al-Shiblī, Junayd, Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī<sup>85</sup> (...) and other masters have plunged into the ocean of his knowledge and of his testimony. Furthermore, every spiritual pilgrim (*sālik*) is affiliated to him and to his pupils; whoever has no relationship to his initiatory mantle (*khirqā*) does not enter this community [of Sufis]. [...] This dot may designate the dot of Prophecy or the dot of the divine Alliance attributed to the Prophet and ‘Alī, for both universal and absolute Prophecy, and universal and absolute Alliance, are reserved to those two beings and this by virtue of the saying of the Prophet, “I was a Prophet when Adam was still between water and clay”, and of the saying of ‘Alī, “I was an Ally when Adam was still between water and clay”. Both are indissociable, as is proved by the intellect, tradition, revelation and testimony.<sup>86</sup>

82 Suhrawardī, *Kitāb al-Taḥwīḥāt al-lawḥīyya wa l-‘arshīyya*, in *Œuvres philosophiques et mystiques*, tome 1, ed. H. Corbin, Paris/Tehran, 1952, pp. 73-74.

83 Salmān al-Fārisī (d. ca 35/655-6), Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 32/652-3) and Kumayl b. Ziyād, loyal companions of ‘Alī, are also held to be transmitters of his spiritual teachings to the Sufis. See M. Terrier, “The Defence of Sufism among Twelver Shi‘i Scholars”, pp. 35-44.

84 This proposition is however absent from the known version of the “sermon of glory” (*khuṭbat al-iftikhār*). On this sermon and similar ones, see *infra*, nn. 87-90.

85 The mystics Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/946), Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/911), Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī, (d. 200/815), are held to be direct or indirect disciples of the imams; see M. Terrier, “The Defence of Sufism among Twelver Shi‘i Scholars”, pp. 35-44.

86 Ibn Abī Jūmhūr, *Mujlī*, IV, pp. 1340-1342.

The 'sermon of glory' quoted and commented on here is one of the sermons described as "theo-imamosophical" by M.A. Amir-Moezzi.<sup>87</sup> These sermons consecrating 'Alī as both subject and object of the sermon on the perfect Man, are rejected as 'extremist' forgeries by rationalist Shi'i jurists-theologians, but considered to be authentic by Shi'i Gnostics such as Rajab al-Bursī (d. after 813/1410-11), who quotes them at length,<sup>88</sup> Ḥaydar Āmulī, who links them to the ecstatic sayings (*shaṭḥīyyāt*) of such Sufi masters as Ḥallāj;<sup>89</sup> Fayḍ Kāshānī, who, in Safavid times, quotes them to affirm the truth of the 'science of proximity' against the authority of *ijtihād*, the rational interpretation of the Law by jurists-theologians.<sup>90</sup>

One last meditation on the *ḥadīth* on the dot under the *bā'* is a witness to the longevity of the theme of the cosmogenic 'Alī in Shi'i philosophy. It is the work of Mīr Dāmād, who quoted it alongside other *ḥadīths* discussed above in support of an idea which linked Avicennian metaphysics, Akbarian theosophy and the esoteric 'science of letters':

It is known that in the world are inscribed the letters of a book. The raw material is the dot, analogous to the numerical unit. The first element is the *alif*, analogous to the numerical one; it denotes the divine Order, the merciful Breath (*nafas-e raḥmānī*), the initiating Influx (*ta'thīr-e ebdā'ī*). As for the *bā'*, which is the first development of the *alif*, it occupies the place of the first Intellect, which is the first being originating from the original Order and the first letter of the explicit Book of the universal system of being. Thanks to his familiarity with the light of the essential realities, the secret of the noble saying of the speaking Book of God ['Alī] [is known]: "I am the dot under the *bā'*", after the truth which [Muḥammad,] the Seal of Messengers and Prince of the universe (...) spoke was made manifest; "What God created first was the Intellect", "What God created first was my light", and also "Alī and I are one single light."<sup>91</sup>

87 M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine I. Remarques sur la divinité de l'imam", in Id., *La Religion discrète*, pp. 89-108; here chap. 4.

88 Rajab al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*, pp. 309-321. On this thinker, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Al-Durr al-thamīn attribué à Raḡab al-Bursī", *Le Muséon* 130 (1-2), 2017, pp. 207-240; here chap. 8; M. Terrier, "Bursī, al-Ḥāfīz Rajab al-", in H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Medieval Philosophy*, 2018, online: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1151-5\\_586-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1151-5_586-1).

89 Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, pp. 205-206. These words of ecstasy, in which the mystic identifies himself with God, are translated as "locutions théopathiques" by Louis Massignon (*Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, Paris, Le Cerf, 1999 (reprint)), and "paradoxes inspirés" by Henry Corbin (introduction to Rūzbehān Baqlī Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ-e shaṭḥīyyāt*, ed. H. Corbin, Paris – Tehran, 1966, pp. 1-46, see pp. 10-19).

90 Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalīmāt mahnūna*, pp. 197-201.

91 Mīr Dāmād, *Jadhawāt wa mawāqīf*, pp. 189-190. For the two first traditions cited, see Majlisī, *Bīḥār al-anwār*, 1, p. 97; and for the third, *Ibid.*, xxxv, p. 34.

The cosmogonic function of 'Alī and his role in historiosophy give him a prominent place in the philosophical eschatology which Fayḍ Kāshānī found to be consistent with the original Shi'ī esotericism:

The destruction of this world (*al-dunyā*) occurs only in the absence of the perfect Man from it and the creation of the other world (*al-ākhirā*) occurs only through his existence in it. Indeed, the sole purpose of the existence and the subsistence of the world is the perfect Man and the just Imam who is the lieutenant of God on His earth, just as the purpose of the organisation of the body (*taswiyat al-jasad*) is the [existence of the] rational soul (*al-naḥs al-nāṭiqā*) [in it]. As the body perishes and disappears when the rational soul separates from it, so God (...) only reveals himself in these lower worlds through an intermediary; with the interruption of this mediation, the influx (*imdād*) which, coming from Him, enables the existence and the perfection of this world, is interrupted. [...] The Prince of the faithful [or the initiated] says: "The earth is never deprived of a man administrating the proof [of God], be he manifest and known or fearful and unknown."<sup>92</sup>

So 'Alī, the 'speaking book' (*al-kitāb al-nāṭiq*), is identified with the speaking or rational soul, as necessary to the survival of the world as is the soul to the survival of the body. In this belief Shi'ī imamology and philosophical anthropology are united or harmonised. And 'Alī, the subject and object of this doctrine, is seen to be the ontological and philosophical proof of the existence of God.

### 2.3 *'Alī, Human Lord and Divine Man*

If the Islamic notion of the perfect Man or the universal Man has its roots in Shi'ism as well as in philosophy and in Sufism, its identification with 'Alī is very specifically the work of Imami philosophers of the Ikhānid and Safavid periods.<sup>93</sup> According to Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Ṣadrā, it was Ibn Sīnā who was the first to have seen in the person of 'Alī, the Divine Man or Godman in the Platonic sense of the term: "The master and the head of the philosophers of Islam, Abū 'Alī Ibn Sīnā, in his *Treatise of the Celestial Ascension* (*risālat al-mī'rāj*), says, 'The Prince of the faithful 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib – blessings be upon him – is the centre of wisdom, the sphere of true reality, the

92 Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalīmāt makhnūna*, p. 140. The first part of this utterance is borrowed from a Sufi Sunni commentator of Ibn 'Arabī: 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492), *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ*, ed. W. Chittick, Tehran, Tehran, 1380 h.s./2001-2, pp. 96-97. For the *ḥadīth* attributed to 'Alī, see *supra* n. 62.

93 Pierre Lory and M. Terrier, "*al-Insān al-kāmil*: l'Homme parfait dans la culture arabe classique", in H. Touati (ed.), *Encyclopédie de l'humanisme méditerranéen*, Brill, 2017, online: <http://encyclopedie-humanisme.com/?insan-kamil-248>.

treasure of the Intellect. He was already among the companions [of the Prophet] as is the intelligible in the middle of the sensitive (*ka-l-ma'qūl bayna l-maḥsūs*).<sup>94</sup>

Mīr Dāmād later pursued this idea by quoting the conclusion of the *Metaphysics of the Shifā'*, albeit slightly modified: "The deified man having achieved perfect theoretical wisdom through the holy faculty and having assumed the powers of prophecy almost becomes a human Lord to serve whom would be akin to serving God. He is the sovereign of the earthly world and the lieutenant of God in this world."<sup>95</sup>

The theophanic, deified or, to put it more simply, divine character of 'Alī is also sustained by the speculations of Shi'i thinkers on the divine Names.<sup>96</sup> Rajab al-Bursī, in particular, plays on the similarity in Arabic between the name 'Alī and the divine Name 'the Most High' (*al-'Alī*), and also on the notion of the indivisibility of the name and the person named:

Considering the [divine] Names and the Attributes, we find no name more eminent than these three: the Name of the Essence, the Name of the Attributes, and the Name which is the secret of the Essence and the spirit of the Attributes. [It] is the Word which permeates all existing brings; it is the secret of the Essence as well as of the Attributes; it is through it that the engendered are acted upon. The Name of the Essence is *Allāh*; it is the sanctified Name, the proper name of the Essence of the True One. The Name of the Attributes is 'the One, the Unique One' (*al-aḥad al-wāḥid*), and it is *Muḥammad*. The Name that is the spirit of the Attributes and the secret of the Essence is 'Alī; he is the Light of lights. Every one of these names is the supreme Name. The Name of Majesty is the sanctified and venerated Name [*Allāh*]. The Name *Muḥammad* is the exoteric form of the supreme Name (...). The Name 'Alī is the exoteric form of the esoteric and the esoteric form of the exoteric (*ẓāhir al-bāṭin wa bāṭin al-ẓāhir*); it is thus the supreme Name of essential Reality, as it combines the secret of divine Lordship, the secret of Prophecy, the secret of divine Alliance, the secret of Power and of Royalty, the secret of the world of Omnipotence and of divine Supremacy, the secret of divine Free Action. This is declared by the word of God: "*His is the loftiest likeness in the heavens and the earth*" (Quran 30:27), and he is 'Alī, blessings be upon him.<sup>97</sup> [...]

94 Mīr Dāmād, *Nibrās al-dīyā' wa tiswā' al-siwā' fī sharḥ bāb al-badā' wa ithbāt jadwā al-du'ā'*, ed. Ḥ.N. Eṣfahānī, Tehran, 1374 h.s./1995 p. 31; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, vol. 1, p. 466. The work mentioned here is not the Persian *Mī'rāj-nāmeḥ* attributed to Avicenna, it is probably an apocryphal writing.

95 Mīr Dāmād, *Ibid.*, p. 31.

96 See M. Terrier, "Noms divins et hommes divins dans la gnose shi'ite imamite (VIII<sup>e</sup>/XIV<sup>e</sup> et XI<sup>e</sup>/XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles)", *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, 150/IV, 2018, pp. 335-356.

97 Rajab al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*, pp. 296-297.

Let me stress here the identification of 'Alī with the 'secret of the divine Essence' and 'the Light of lights', a synonym of God in Suhrawardī's work. 'Alī is identified with the perfect and complete theophanic being, expressing the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of God according to the Quran 57:3 ("He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward"). Bursī confirms it with an extract from a 'theo-imamosophic' sermon: 'The proof of the veracity of these speculations and of the esoteric meaning [of the verse] is found in a saying (...) of the Prince of the faithful [or the initiates] ['Alī]: "By my Name all engendered beings were created; in my Name have all the prophets prayed. I am the Tablet, I am the Pen, I am the Throne, I am the Pedestal, I am the seven heavens, I am the most beautiful Names and the noblest Words".<sup>98</sup>

Mullā Ṣadrā also says that the theophanic nature of 'Alī is confirmed by his proper name: "There is a subtle distinction here: 'Alī (...) is the perfect Man, the most perfect created being. There is no difference between him and the ally [of God] Muḥammad in the esoteric domain of Prophecy and of the divine Alliance. The perfect Man is created in the form of the Name *Allāh*; in him are the signs of the sovereignty and the power of manifestation of the Names and Attributes. God has named him with this Name from amongst the Names, taken from His own Name 'the Most High, the Highest' (*al-'Alī al-'alā*)."<sup>99</sup>

This philosophical deification of 'Alī is even more explicit in an account of the heavenly ascension of the Prophet recorded by Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī. It is said that Muḥammad, after having crossed the heavens which are the end of the world of composition [i.e. the material world], first saw the lower rank of the intellective soul (*al-naḥs al-'aqliyya*) in the form of the Ṭūbā tree and the cedar of the limit; then the middle rank of the intellective soul in the form of camels and she-camels descending endlessly from the upper world; finally, "at the distance of two bowshots or even less, he saw a luminous human (*basharan nūriyyan*), a divine man (*insānan ilāhiyyan*) who entered the veil of light; he saw his back, like the back of the Prince of the faithful ['Alī]; this is the highest rank of the divine soul (*al-martaba al-'alā li-l-naḥs al-ilāhiyya*)."<sup>100</sup> To see the divinity and the pre-eminence of 'Alī proclaimed by the Prophet himself is conclusive. The celestial ascension is described philosophically as a conversion in the Neoplatonist

98 *Ibid.*, p. 301.

99 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, III, p. 253; on the esoteric conception of the imam by Mullā Ṣadrā, see Ch. Jambet, *Le gouvernement divin. Islam et conception politique du monde*, 2016, p. 105 et pp. 249-250.

100 Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī, *Al-Ṭalā'ī wa l-bawāriq*, in *al-Arba'īniyyāt*, p. 281. See translation and commentary in Ch. Jambet, "L'Homme parfait. Métaphysique de l'âme et eschatologie selon Qāḍī Sa'īd Qummī", *Annuaire EPHE, Sciences religieuses*, t. 125 (2016-2017), pp. 411-423, see p. 417. On the setting of 'Alī's presence to Muḥammad during the *mī'rāj* in Imami traditions see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "L'imam dans le ciel. Ascension et initiation", in Id., *La Religion discrète*, pp. 135-150, voir pp. 136-140.

sense, an ascent of the intellective soul towards its divine principle. Already identified with the Intellect and to the rational soul, 'Alī is now seen to be identified with the divine soul, the essence of the perfect Man, whose distinction from the intellective or rational soul, proper to man, was attributed to him in a tradition summed up above.

Finally, it is to Fayḍ Kāshānī that we owe the clearest expression of the double dimension, historical and metaphysical, anthropological and theophanic, of 'Alī, the most revealing feature of the osmosis of Shi'ī imamology and philosophy. In a long tradition attributed to the sixth imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who was being asked why "Alī is the one who divides between paradise and hell" (*qasīm al-janna wa l-nār*), replied that, "The love of 'Alī is faith and hatred of him is infidelity (*kufr*)", and further added, "All the prophets, messengers and faithful loved 'Alī; all their adversaries hated both him and those who loved him."<sup>101</sup> Fayḍ Kāshānī, quoting an anonymous scholar comments: "What is meant by the love of the Prince of the faithful is what is inspired by knowledge of his stature (*maqām*), for it is he who guides (*yusāwiqu*) faith; it is not love for him as an individual, existing in this world for a certain time, [an individual] perceptible to the imperfect senses, but the true and divine love for him (*maḥabbatuhu al-ḥaqīqiyya al-ilāhiyya*), [the love] of his intellective universal rank (*maqāmuhu al-'aqlī al-kullī*) prior to the creation of men."<sup>102</sup>

### 3 Conclusion

At the end of this journey with 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib through the history of Islamic philosophy, from its beginnings to the end of the Safavid renaissance,<sup>103</sup> we conclude that he was no mere puppet, a convenient symbol of authority. A historical personage but, crucially, a spiritual and mystical figure, it was around him that the Greek idea of the divine sage, the very ideal of philosophy in an Islamic monotheistic world, would be renewed. This doctrine could only offend Sunni upholders of an orthodoxy founded on the pre-eminence of a mortal Prophet. So it was Shi'ī philosophers of early modern and modern Iran who give it its fullest expression.

His fundamental trait, the most philosophically significant, is the porosity, the circulation between his words and his being. The word of 'Alī, like that of God, is ontologically performative: what he says, he does; and what he is, he says: the macrocosm, the

101 Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*, pp. 182-183.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 184.

103 The study of the ramifications of these ideas about 'Alī among Iranian Shi'ī philosophers from the 19th-20th centuries, or among the thinkers of the Shaykhi school deserves its own research.

speaking Quran, the Proof of God or the dot under the *bā'* of the *bi-smi-llāh* formula: and he is also what his name, a divine Name, says and makes of him. Like Pythagoras or Socrates in Greek philosophy, 'Alī is present in Islamic philosophy concurrently as the subject, the object and as a source of a discourse of truths about man, the world and God. In other words, his identification in Shi'ī thought with the Divine or Perfect Man, is not only an act of faith, but also a philosophical decision. His insistent, not to say obsessive, presence in the works of the Shi'ī and non-Shi'ī philosophers and mystics discussed here, is proof both of the enduring vitality of the ancient philosophical tradition in Islam, and of the unique character of Islamic philosophy itself.

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# Index

In this index, the Arabic article “al”, the abbreviation b.= ibn (i.e. “son of”) and diacritic characters will not be taken into account in the alphabetical ordering. Furthermore, words that are too frequently used in this work (e.g., ‘Alī, Coran, Hadith, imam, islam, Shi’ism, Shi’i, Sunnism, Sunni, etc.) do not appear in the index.

- Aaron 92, 93, 186, 187  
*A‘azz mā yutlab* attributed to Ibn  
Tūmart 285  
‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib 94, 103, 109  
‘Abbās b. ‘Abdallāh b. Ma‘bad 94  
Abbassid(s) 7, 18, 43, 77, 194, 227, 264, 289  
‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr 63, 109  
‘Abdallāh b. Mu‘āwiya 194  
‘Abdallāh b. Rawāḥa 153  
‘Abdallāh b. Saba’ 153  
Abdal Musa 280  
‘Abd al-Malik/‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān  
75-77, 187, 264  
‘Abd al-Mu‘min 286  
‘Abd al-Raḥīm Damāvandī 42  
‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Kathīr al-Hāshimī 162,  
165  
‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī 42  
‘Abd Manāf 90, 93  
‘Abd Shams 93  
al-Ablaq 71  
Abraham 36, 39, 92-93, 134, 226  
*abtar* 75  
Abū l-Aswad al-Du‘alī 89, 108  
Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī 286  
Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Shādhilī 286  
Abū Bakr 4-6, 71, 85, 86, 88, 94, 95, 164, 166,  
194, 211, 220-222, 226, 268, 270, 299  
Abū Baṣīr 125-126  
Abū Dāwūd 97  
Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī 153, 310  
Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī 89  
Abū l-Khaṭṭāb 150, 186  
Abū l-Ma‘ālī al-Balkhī 188  
Abū Maṣṣūr al-Ijlī 186  
Abū Mikhnaf 82  
Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī 216  
Abū Lahab 29, 30  
Abū Riyāsh al-Qaysī 193  
Abū Sa‘īd Abū l-Khayr 232  
Abū Ṭālib 90, 98, 107, 109, 301  
Abū Turāb 78, 82  
Abū Yaḥyā ‘Umar b. Tawba al-Ṣan‘ānī 162  
Abyssinia 258, 259  
*Acta Archelāī* 145  
*Acts of Thomas* 145  
Adam 31, 33, 35, 36, 91, 128, 133-135, 164, 166,  
226, 276, 306, 310  
*‘aduwv al-imām* 226  
Afandī/Efendī 206-207, 209-210  
‘affān 83  
*aḡrād* 153  
Āghā Bozorg Ṭīhrānī 64, 131, 210  
*aḡadiyya* 299  
*aḡdāth* 268  
*ahl al-bayt* 18, 24, 78, 92, 94, 98-100, 108-109,  
211, 215-216, 235, 268, 270  
*ahl al-ḡadīth* 109  
*ahl al-ḡaram* 96  
*ahl al-iḡrāṭ* 206  
*ahl al-kisā’* 99, 107-109, 217  
*ahl al-taḡrīṭ* 206  
*ahl al-walāya* 34  
Ahl-ḡaqq/Yāresān 1, 41  
*Aḡmad* 64-65, 188-189, 256  
Aḡmad b. Muḡammad b. Abī Naṣr [disciple  
of imam al-Riḡdā] 29  
Ahura Mazdā 148  
*a‘immat al-nūr/a‘immat al-ḡalām* 226  
*‘ajam* 29, 292  
*Akḡbār al-dawla al-‘abbāsīyya* 85  
*ākḡhir* 38, 79, 137, 170  
*ākḡhira* 56, 312  
*ākḡhir al-zamān* 52  
*akhīs* 281  
*akḡthar* 196, 210, 227  
*āl al-nabī* 18, 108  
*āl al-rasūl* 18, 108  
*āl Muḡammad* 108, 156, 163, 167, 219, 222  
*‘ālam ‘aqlī* 307

- ‘ālam al-aẓilla* 35, 164  
*‘ālam al-dharr* 164  
*‘ālam al-ghayb* 217  
*‘ālam al-shahāda* 217  
*‘ālam ṣaghīr* 306  
 Alevis 41, 279-281  
*Alawīyūn* (followers of ‘Alī) 34  
 ‘Alī b. Anjab Tāj al-Dīn Ibn al-Sā’ī 269  
 ‘Alī al-Hādī (10th imam) 248  
 ‘Alī ilāhī 280  
 ‘Alī al-Riḍā (8th imam) 29, 136, 206, 240, 243  
 ‘Alī Mu‘ayyad 275  
 ‘Alī the Persian 263  
*‘Alī posht o panāhat* 251  
*‘Alī shāh-e mardān, mard-e meydān* 251  
 Alids 5-6, 9, 17-18, 21, 43-44, 60, 71, 75, 78, 80, 82, 85, 87-89, 99, 108-109, 162, 220, 264  
*alif-lām-mūn* 136, 137  
*‘ālim* 111, 137, 140, 157-158, 170, 175, 207  
 Almohads 265-266, 286  
 Almoravids 265  
*Amal al-‘āmil* 207  
 ‘Āmili, Ḥ al- 8  
 Amir Arjomand, S. 49  
*amīr al-mu‘minīn* 72, 137, 165, 205, 261, 289, 292  
 ‘Ammār b. Yāsir 20, 81, 153  
*amr* 33-34, 47, 51, 70-72, 137, 157-160, 165-175, 183, 220, 261, 305  
*amr al-dīn* 34  
 ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ 294  
 ‘Amr b. Yathribī al-Ḍabbī *al-rājiz* 81-82  
*amr ilāhī* 33  
 Āmulī/Āmolī, Sayyid Ḥaydar 42, 130, 131, 203, 256, 272, 294, 296, 299, 303, 305-308, 311  
 Anatolia 178, 279-282  
 Andalousia 285, 288  
 Andrae, T. 49  
 Anthony, S. 152  
 Apocalypse of Bahīra 54  
 Apocalypse of Zorobabel 53  
 Apocalypse of Pseudo-Athanasius 54  
 Apocalypse of Pseudo-Esdras 54  
 Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodus 54  
*aqall* 196  
 ‘Aqīl b. Abī Ṭālib 88  
*‘aql* 111, 141-142, 145, 150-155, 246, 315  
*al-‘aql al-fa‘āl* 155  
 Arabia 55, 57, 92, 96, 101, 104, 194, 258-259, 262  
 Aramaic 58, 62, 71, 108, 258  
 Arianism 56  
 ‘*arīf/‘arīfūn* 56, 206-207, 307, 310  
 Arius 39-40  
 ‘*arrāf* 101  
*Asadallāh/Asadullāh* 231, 245  
 Asās 41  
*asbāb al-nuzūl* 24, 214  
 al-Aṣḅagh b. Nubāta [disciple of ‘Alī] 29, 242  
*aṣḅāb al-yamūn/aṣḅāb al-shimāl* 226  
 A ‘shā Maymūn 102  
*al-ashbāḥ al-khamsa* 216  
 al-Ashkevarī Quṭb al-Dīn 291-292, 294, 298, 302, 306, 308  
 ‘Āshūr, ‘A. 210, 217  
*al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* 121, 123, 137  
*Asmā’ amīr al-mu‘minīn min al-Qur’ān* 214-215  
*asmā’ wa ṣifāt* 224, 237  
*Asrār al-a‘imma* 208  
*Asrār al-ḥurūf* 208  
*Asrār al-nabī wa Fāṭima wa l-a‘imma* 210  
 al-Astarābādī Sharaf al-Dīn 215  
 al-Aswad al-‘Anṣī 194  
 al-Aṭīyya b. Bilāl 80  
 Averroes/Ibn Rushd 293  
 Avicenna 206, 304, 308, 313  
*al-awwal/awwalīyya* 38, 79, 127, 137, 170, 250, 306, 309  
*al-āya al-kubrā* 39  
*āyat al-mubāhala* 94, 221  
*al-Āyāt al-nāzila fī ahl al-bayt* 216  
*al-Āyāt al-nāzila fī dhamm al-jā’irīn* 216  
*ayīn-i cem* 280  
 ‘*ayn al-yaqīn* 137, 299  
 ‘Aynīyya 41  
*Āy al-Qur’ān al-munazzala fī amīr al-mu‘minīn* 215  
 Ayoub, M. 74  
 ‘*ayyārūn* 268  
 al-‘Ayyāshī 120  
*āzifa/yawm al-āzifa* 48, 74

- Bāb* 186, 298  
*bāb allāh* 39, 122, 127  
*bāb madīnat al-ʿilm* 300  
 Bābā' 41  
*al-Badr wa l-ta'rikh* 120  
 Badr (battle) 75, 88, 136, 137, 211, 262  
 Baffioni, C. 17  
 al-Baghawī 101  
 Baghdad 89, 266, 269-271, 283, 285, 288, 302  
 al-Baghdādī, 'Abd al-Qāhir 70  
 Baḥīra/Baḥīrā 54, 192  
 Baḥrānī, Hāshim b. Sulaymān 241  
 Baḥrānī Mitham 272, 294, 296  
 Bektashi/Bektāshīyya 1, 41, 246-247, 256, 281  
 al-Balādhurī 5, 85, 88-89, 100, 109  
 Banū 'Abd Shams 18, 90, 93, 97, 260  
 Banū 'Adī 88  
 Banū Ghālib 38, 137  
 Banū Hāshim 18, 75, 88, 97, 100, 260  
 Banū Isrā'īl 91-93  
 Banū l-Muṭṭalīb 97, 100  
 Banū Nawfal 97  
 Banū Sā'ida 5  
*baqīyya* 93  
 Bar Penkayē, Jean 61  
*barā'a* 226  
*baraka/tabarruk* 106  
*baraqlītus* 63  
 Bardesanes (Bardayšān)/Bardesianians 262  
*Bašā'ir al-darajāt* 35, 152, 156, 163, 185, 239  
 Bashear, S. 49, 52  
*Basmala* 160, 216, 217, 256  
 al-Bastāmī Abū Yazīd 124  
 al-Bastāmī 'Abd al-Raḥmān 274  
*bāṭin* 22, 23, 32, 34, 38, 41, 123, 137, 196, 227,  
 237, 293, 305, 309 (*buṭūn*), 313  
 bāṭinism 68  
*baṭīn* 210, 217  
 Bayān b. Sam'ān 186  
*bayt* 92, 98, 137  
 Beeston, A.F.L. 95  
 Benkheira, M.H. 65  
*berceau de l'Islam (le)* 95  
 Berque, J. 45, 62, 160  
*Bihār al-anwār* 117, 205  
 al-Bīrūnī 188  
 Bobzin, H. 190  
 Bolūkbāshī, 'A. 235  
 Buyid 7, 9, 196-197, 266  
 Boyarin, D. 58  
 Bravmann, M.M. 84, 85  
 Brock, S. 61-62  
 Bruce Codex 144  
 al-Bukhārī 191, 293  
*al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* 241  
 Busse, H. 95  
*buṭūn* 309  
 Byzantium/byzantine(s) 53, 57, 258-264  
 Caetani, L. 82, 102  
 Casanova, P. 52, 60, 74-75  
 Chabbi, J. 2, 101  
 Camel (battle) 6, 81-83, 88  
 Chelhod, J. 95, 106  
 Chelkowski, P. 235  
 Chishtis (soufis) 271  
 Chittick, W. 126  
 Christ, Second Christ, Christology 1, 11, 39-  
 44, 62-70, 79, 136, 143, 154-155, 173, 186,  
 189-190, 218, 253, 261, 264  
*Chronography* by Theophanes 263  
 Cirillo, L. 154  
 Clement of Alexandria 179  
 Colpe, C. 115, 189  
*Commentary of the Book of the Wisdom of  
 Illumination* 299  
 Companion(s) (of the Prophet) 1, 4-7, 20,  
 24, 27, 42-43, 107, 164-166, 181, 188, 191,  
 210, 226-227, 245, 257, 262, 264, 270,  
 279, 288-290, 309-310, 313  
 Conte, E. 100, 103  
*Contra Celsum* by Origen 59  
*Contra Haereses* by Ireaenus 59  
 Cook, D. 52, 60  
 Cook, M. 49, 59, 257  
 Corbin, H. 116-117, 129-130, 179, 204-206,  
 208, 224  
*corporales sensus* 146  
 Crone, P. 59, 257  
 Crow, D.K. 138, 142, 150-151  
 Cuypers, M. 52  
 Cyril of Jerusalem 180  
 Cyrus the Second 147  
 al-Dajjāl 51  
*dār madīnat al-ḥikma* 300

- darūra* 177  
*darūriyyāt al-madhhab* 129  
*Das Siegel der Propheten* 189  
*dast-e 'Alī negahdārat* 251  
 Davānī Jalāl al-Dīn 274  
 David 92-94, 108, 157  
*da'wā hādīya* 270  
*dawr al-kashf* 194  
*dawr al-sitr* 194  
*al-dayyān* 38, 126, 134, 245  
*dayyān yawm al-dīn* 70, 126, 137  
 De Smet, D. 39, 181  
 Demiéville, P. 145  
*Dēnkart* 146-147  
*Deus Revelatus* 123  
 al-Dhahabī 7  
 Dhahabi/Dhahabiyya (soufi order) 41, 235-240, 243, 246  
*dharr* 164  
*dhāt* 223-224, 237, 283  
*dhihn* 150-151  
*dhikr* 88, 94, 151, 216, 236, 238, 241, 243, 245  
*dhikr-e 'Alī* 235, 238  
 Dhū l-faqār 10, 231, 232, 243, 267  
 Dhū l-qamayn 134, 137  
*dhū l-qurbā* 93, 97  
*dhukā* 150  
*ḍidd*, pl. *aḍḍād* 226  
*dīn 'Uthmān* 85  
*dīn al-'atīq* 86  
*dīn Ḥasan* 110  
*dīn Ḥusayn* 110  
*al-dīn huwa ma'rīfat al-rijāl* 214  
*disciplīna arcani* 179  
 Djebli, M. 178  
 Docetism/docetist 253  
*Doctrina Jacobi/Didascaly of Jacob* 60, 62  
 Donner, F. 52, 59-61, 74-75  
 Druze(s) 41, 255  
*du'ā* 168  
 Dubois, J.D. 138, 146  
*dunyā* 126, 290, 312  
 Dye, G. 45, 56, 59, 161, 259  
  
 Ebionites 57-59  
 Ebstein, M. 154, 196  
 École Pratique des Hautes Études 204  
  
*Écrits gnostiques/La bibliothèque de Nag Hammadi* 189-190  
 Edebali, Dervish 271  
 Elijah/Ilyās 166  
 Elisha 92  
 elkasaite 58  
*Enneads* by Plotinus 156, 249  
 Epicurus 290  
 Epiphanus 59, 144  
*eschaton* 260  
 Ethiopia/Ethiopian 53, 55, 58, 101, 161, 258  
  
*Faḍā'il anīr al-mu'minīn* 210  
 al-Faḍl b. al-'Abbās b. 'Utba b. Abī Lahab 88  
*Faḍl innā anzalnāh* 162  
*Faḍl sūrat innā anzalnāh* 162  
 Faḍlallāh Astarābādī 203, 255, 275-276, 281, 283  
 Fahd, T. 101  
*fahm* 141, 150, 158  
 Faivre, A. 181  
*falsafa* 198, 288-293, 301, 304  
 al-Fārābī 206  
 Farazdaq 85, 193  
 Fārūq 2, 49, 71, 75  
*al-fārūq al-akbar* 38, 126  
*faṣl al-khiṭāb* 38, 126, 137  
*Faṣl al-khiṭāb* by Muḥammad Pārsā 268  
*Faṣl al-maqāl* 293  
*fath* 152-153, 232  
 Fath 'Alī Shāh 132  
 Fāṭima 3-4, 18, 25, 27, 31-33, 75, 90, 94-95, 99, 104, 107-109, 153, 173-174, 211, 213, 215, 217, 221, 231, 239, 241, 270, 273, 278, 283-287  
 Fatimid(s) 265-266, 284-286  
*faḡ* 93, 97  
*faḡḡ* 303  
 al-Fayḡ al-Kāshānī 42, 130, 207, 297, 299, 301-302, 311-312, 315  
 Fez 284, 287  
*fikr* 151, 153, 241  
 Filippini-Ronconi, P. 152  
*fiṭna* 141, 150  
 Five of the Mantle 221  
 Friedländer, I. 148  
 Friedmann, Y. 187, 190, 192-194

- Furāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī 120, 182, 214  
*Fuṣūs al-ḥikam* 305  
*futuwwa* 10, 251, 267-271, 281, 284
- Gabriel (angel) 37, 72, 133, 140, 155, 158, 162, 163, 165, 169, 171, 183, 185, 231, 240, 278
- Gallez, E.-M. 59, 67
- Ganjaviyān 236
- gēlī* 147
- Ghadir/Ghadir Khumm 26, 88, 221-222, 263, 286
- Ghawr al-unūr* 150, 151
- al-Ghazālī Abū Ḥamid 292-293
- Ghevond the Armenian 108
- Ghudar 220
- ghuluww, ghālī, ghulāt* 41, 68, 117, 152, 186, 206-207, 218, 296
- ghutththā'* 111
- Gilliot, C. 56, 105
- Gimaret, D. 19, 128
- Gnostic(s), Gnosticism 6, 40, 66, 68-69, 119, 144-156, 173, 189, 196, 241, 255, 262-263, 297-299, 308-311
- Gobillot, G. 56, 151
- Gobineau, comte Arthur de 178
- Goldziher, I. 95, 99, 108, 178
- Golshan-e rāz* 241
- Gospel(s) 38, 70, 135, 144, 146, 298
- Gospel of Barnabas 154-155
- Gospel of Eve 144
- Gospel of John 39, 63, 64, 190
- Gospel of Thomas 144
- Grenet, F. 147
- Grimme, H. 49
- hadith of the two fingers 50
- ḥadīth al-labīna* 191
- ḥadīth mā al-ḥaqīqa* 299
- ḥadīth al-manzila* 186
- ḥadīth al-nuqṭa taht al-bā'* 255-256, 277
- ḥadīth qudsī* 302
- ḥadīth al-thaqalayn* 213, 221
- Hagarism* 49
- ḥajj* 55
- al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf 76-78
- al-Ḥākim al-Ḥaskānī 28, 215
- al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī 216
- al-Ḥākim al-Tirmidhī 138, 150, 155, 197
- al-Ḥalabī al-Shāfi'ī 131
- al-Ḥallāj 124, 186, 302, 311
- Halm, H. 148, 152
- hamaj* 111
- ḥamalāt al-'arsh* 135
- Hāmān 220
- ḥanafism, ḥanafits 21, 177, 215
- ḥaqq* 28, 103, 127, 137, 222, 241, 282
- ḥarf*, pl. *ḥurūf, aḥruf* 22
- al-Ḥārith b. Sa'īd 194
- al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī (2<sup>d</sup> imam) 4, 18, 25, 27, 31, 33, 75, 89-90, 99-100, 105, 107, 110, 153, 165, 167, 169, 215, 217, 221, 231, 270, 278, 284-286
- al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (11th imam) 182, 198, 279
- al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī 101
- al-Ḥasan Jūrī Shaykh 275
- al-Ḥasan al-Khaṭīb al-Kirmānī 207
- al-Ḥasan (b.) al-Ṣabbāḥ 131
- hasana* 28, 222
- Ḥasanid(s) 273, 286
- Hāshim 90, 93, 97-99, 104, 108. *See also* Banū Hāshim
- Hāshim b. al-Ḥakīm *al-muqanna'* 194
- Hāshimīyyāt* of al-Kumayt 97-98, 108, 193
- ḥashw* 117
- Ḥassān b. Thābit 96
- ḥawāmūm* 136, 137
- Hawāzin 103
- Ḥaydar* 117, 231-232, 256
- Ḥaydar Āmoli/Āmulī. *See* Āmoli/Āmulī
- Ḥaydar Shaykh 281
- ḥaykal* 64
- Henninger, J. 95
- Heraclius 53
- al-Ḥibārī, al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥakam 24-27, 31, 214
- al-Hidāya al-kubrā* 119
- ḥifẓ* 141, 150-153
- ḥifẓ al-sirr* 180
- ḥijāb* 37, 127, 217, 220, 278
- ḥijāba* 96
- Ḥijāz 55, 59, 263
- ḥikāyāt-e darvīshī/ḥikāyāt-e ḥaqīqī* 251
- ḥikma* 71, 292-293, 300, 303
- ḥikma al-'ilmīyya* 294
- al-Ḥikma al-khālida* 289
- al-ḥikma al-khalqīyya* 295

- Ḥilf al-fuḍūl* 97  
 Ḥilla 205  
*ḥilm* 111, 133, 137  
 Ḥilmī Dede Bābā 247-248  
 Hind b. 'Amr al-Jamalī 81  
 Ḥīra 40, 149, 262, 264  
 Hirschfeld, H. 65, 190  
*ḥirz* 302  
 Hishām b. al-Ḥakam 159, 249  
 Hodgson, M.G. 148  
 Holy Spirit 12, 40, 66-67, 139-145, 153-159, 162, 171, 174-175, 183, 185, 197. *See also rūh al-quds*  
 Horowitz, J. 190  
*ḥubb/ḥubb ahl al-bayt/ḥubb 'Alī* 37, 72, 218, 222  
 Hūd b. Muḥkim/Muḥakkam 101  
*ḥujja/ḥujjat allāh* 9, 39, 122, 137, 173, 183, 216, 224  
*ḥukm* 94  
 Ḥunayn (battle) 103, 136-137  
 Ḥunayn b. Ishāq 290  
 al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī 82, 206, 207  
*ḥurūb al-riḍḍa* 194  
 Ḥurūfiyya 41, 203, 246, 255, 275-277, 281-283  
 al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī (3<sup>d</sup> imam) 3-4, 18, 25, 31, 33, 75-76, 80, 90, 99-100, 105, 107, 110, 123, 153, 165, 169, 215, 217, 221, 231, 263, 270, 276, 278, 281, 284  
 ḥusaynid 254  
*huwa* 69, 127, 158, 193. *See also* 'Alī 255, 277  
*Hymn of the Pearl* 66  
  
 Ibn 'Abbās 22, 24-26, 28, 50, 90, 106-107, 109, 222  
 Ibn Abī Jumhūr 42, 203, 304-310  
 Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd 7  
 Ibn Abī l-Thalj 214  
 Ibn Abī Shayba 51, 83, 191  
 Ibn Abī Ya'lā 85-86  
 Ibn 'Arabī 197, 203, 205-206, 272, 299, 303-306, 312  
 Ibn al-Athīr 101  
 Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī 215  
 Ibn Bābūya al-Ṣadūq 182, 187, 236, 239  
 Ibn al-Biṭriq 215  
 Ibn Ḍab'ān al-Kalbī 83  
  
 Ibn Durayd 81-82  
 Ibn al-Faḥḥām al-Nīsābūrī 216  
 Ibn Ḥabīb 103  
 Ibn al-Ḥaḍramī 101  
 Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī 65  
 Ibn Ḥanbal 50-51, 86, 88, 191  
 Ibn al-Ḥarīsh al-Rāzī 163-166, 170, 175  
 Ibn Hishām 5, 63, 102-103, 192  
 Ibn Ishāq 63-64  
 Ibn al-Juḥām 215  
 Ibn Kathīr 107, 191  
 Ibn Kathīr al-Hāshimī 162  
 Ibn Khaldūn 286  
 Ibn Khallikān 7, 286  
 Ibn al-Murtaḍā 188  
 Ibn al-Nadīm 146  
 Ibn Qasī 266, 285  
 Ibn Qutayba 65  
 Ibn Rushd. *See* Averroës  
 Ibn Sa'd 65, 94, 101, 191  
 Ibn Shahrāshūb 110, 130  
 Ibn Shammūn al-Kātib 215  
 Ibn Taymiyya 177  
 Ibn Tūmart 285-286  
 Ibrāhīm (son of Muḥammad) 192  
*Iconografia dell'Ahl al-bayt* 235  
 Idrīs b. 'Abd Allāh 284  
 Idrīs II 284-285  
 Idrissids 284, 300  
*'iffa* 295  
*iḥdāth al-nubuwwa* 170  
*ijmā'* 293  
 Ikhwān al-ṣafā 306  
 Ilbā' b. al-Haytham al-Sadūsī 81  
*ilhām* 135, 157, 196  
 'Ilīyyūn 136  
 Ilkhanate/Ilkhan/Ilkhānīd 271, 275  
*'ilm* 106, 111, 125, 140-141, 150, 157, 170-172, 219, 273, 278, 291, 300, 303  
*'ilm al-a'dād* 300  
*'ilm al-awliyā'* 150  
*al-'ilm al-awwal wa l-'ilm al-ākhir* 170  
*'ilm al-ghayb* 185  
*'ilm al-ḥurūf* 273  
*'ilm al-manāyā wa l-balāyā* 126, 131  
*al-'ilm al-mustafād* 172  
*'ilm ladunī* 298  
*'ilm al-sā'a* 62, 74

- Ilzām al-nāṣib* 130, 131  
*Imageries populaires en Islam* 235  
*inām al-muttaqīn* 137, 222  
*inām maʿṣūm* 217, 285  
*inām nūrānī/inām-e nūrānī* 254  
 Imbert, F. 55, 257  
*imitatio Christi* 189  
*al-ʿināya al-ilāhiyya* 303  
*al-insān al-kāmil* 115. *See also* Perfect Man  
*insān kabīr* 306  
*Institutions du droit public Musulman* 96  
*intellectuales uires* 146  
 Isaac 92  
 Isaiah (Book of) 92, 142-144, 147, 155  
 Ishmael 92  
*ishāra* 299  
*Islamic Political Thought* 96  
*al-ism al-aʿzam/al-ism al-akbar* 41, 220  
 Ismaili(s)/Ismailian 1, 9, 14, 21, 31, 32, 41, 69, 130-131, 138, 149, 151-155, 159, 179, 194, 198, 255, 266, 270, 272, 284-285, 292  
 Ismāʿīl Shāh 282-283  
*isnād* 150  
 Israel/Israelites 36, 56, 93, 186, 188, 222, 226, 227  
*Ithbāt al-hudāt* 207  
*ʿitra* 18  
 Ivanow, W. 152  
  
 Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (6th imam) 35, 68, 111, 122, 123, 125, 138-141, 148-152, 157, 162-165, 168, 170-171, 174, 180, 183-184, 187, 194, 212, 214, 219, 228, 249, 315  
 Jabir b. Ḥayyān/jābirian 119, 125, 306  
 Jābir b. Yazīd al-Juʿfī 150  
 Jabris 229  
 Jacob 64, 92-94  
*jadd* 152-153  
 Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman 69, 138, 151-152  
 Jaʿfariyān, R. 273  
*Jāhiliyya* 55, 95, 97, 110  
 al-Jāhīz 288, 290  
*jahl* 84, 141, 150, 151  
 al-Jalūdī al-Baṣrī 215  
*Jāmāsp Nāmaq* 53  
*Jāmiʿ al-asrār* 130  
 James of Edessa 62  
*janb* 122  
  
 Jānī (ou Jāʿunī) Qurbān 275  
 Jarīr 193  
*Jāvidān-nāma-yi kabīr* 276-277  
*al-Jawāhir al-sanīyya* 207  
 Jazūlī, Abū ʿAbdallāh 286  
 al-Jazūliyya (sufis) 286  
 John the Stylite 62  
 John the Baptist 39, 93, 190  
 Jeffery, A. 190  
 Jerusalem 58, 59, 61, 64, 75, 77, 136, 147, 180  
*jihād* 21  
 Jirjis 135, 137  
 Job 92, 134  
 Johnson, P.C. 181  
 Jonah 36, 92  
 Joosten, J. 154  
 Joseph 92  
 Joshua 135, 136  
 Jubayr b. Muʿīn 97  
 Judeo-christian(s), judeo-christianism 39-40, 44, 57-63, 67, 71-72, 76, 115, 149, 189-190, 196, 259  
 Jew/Jewish 53, 57-62, 67, 71, 77, 96, 108, 115, 140, 147, 197, 218, 258-260, 300-301  
 Judaism 43, 48, 53, 56, 77, 259  
 Julian 53  
 Junayd al-Baghdādī 310  
 Junayd Shaykh 281  
*junūd al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl* 151  
*junūd al-rūh/al-qalb/al-maʿrifā* 150-151  
 Justin 39  
 Juynboll, G.H.A. 84  
*juzʿ ilāhī* 33, 69  
  
 al-Kafʿamī Taqī al-Dīn 206  
*al-Kāfī* by al-Kulaynī 141, 151, 163, 172, 210  
*kahāna* 104  
*kāhin* 101-104  
*kalām allāh al-nāṭiq* 291  
*Kalām al-mahdī* 278-279  
*kalima* 221  
*kalimat allāh al-kubrā* 69, 220  
*Kalimāt maknūna* 130  
*karāmāt* 296  
 Karbalā 76, 78, 110, 276, 281  
 Karīm b. ʿAfif al-Khathʿamī 82  
 al-Kashfī Jaʿfar 132-137  
*Kashkūl* of Shaykh Bahāʾī 301

- al-Kashshī Muḥammad b. ‘Umar 110, 119  
 Kasimirski, A.F.I. de Biberstein 45, 160  
 Kawthar 9, 256  
 Kaysāniyya 41, 119  
 Kāzīm al-Rashtī 117, 130  
 Kephalaia 145  
*khab’* 125, 177, 181  
 Khadija 102  
 Khaḍīr/Khiḍr 298  
*Khafi/Akhfā al-asrār* 208  
 Khāksār/Khāksāriyya (sufis) 41, 246, 251  
*khalifa* 127, 265  
*khalifat allāh* 39, 122, 137, 303  
 Khalil Samir, S. 190  
*khāliq* 38, 70, 137, 217  
 Khārījīs 6, 71, 85, 109, 177, 187, 222  
*Khaṣā’iṣ al-wahy al-mubīn* 215  
*Khaṣā’iṣ amīr al-mu’minīn fi l-Qur’ān* 215  
*khāṣṣa* 196  
*khātam/khātim al-nabiyyin* 159, 188-195  
*khātim al-walāya* 305  
*khātim al-waṣṣiyyīn* 222  
*khatm al-nubuwwa* 13, 194  
*khayāl* 152-153  
 Khaybar (battle) 97, 232  
*khayr* 28, 160, 193  
*khirqa* 310  
*al-Khiṭaṭ* of al-Maqrīzī 51  
*khums* 93, 97  
 Khurāsān 206, 232  
*khūṭba* 70  
*khūṭbat al-aqālīm* 130  
*khūṭbat al-ashbāh* 131  
*khūṭbat al-bayān* 38, 117, 120, 129-132, 137  
*khūṭbat al-iftikhār* 129, 131-132, 207, 310  
*al-khūṭba al taṭanjīyya* 129, 132, 207  
 Khuzistān 264, 278, 279  
 Kh<sup>w</sup>ānsārī 206, 207  
 al-Kindī ‘Abd al-Masīḥ 51  
 Kippenberg, H.G. 179  
*kırklar cemi* 280  
 al-Kirmānī, Ḥamid al-Dīn 21, 179  
 Kister, M.J. 52, 95  
*Kitāb al-Alfayn fi wasf sādāt al-kawnayn* 208  
*Kitāb al-ghārāt* 214  
*Kitāb al-haft wa l-aḥilla* 149  
*Kitāb ḥikmat al-ishrāq* 303  
*Kitāb al-ishtiqaq* 81-82  
*Kitāb khal’ al-na’layn* 285  
*Kitāb al-qirā’at/al-Tanzīl wa l-tahrīf* 167  
*Kitāb al-sunna* 86  
*Kitāb al-tanbih* 177  
*Kitāb al-tanzīl fi l-naṣṣ ‘alā amīr al-mu’minīn* 214  
*Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays* 27, 72, 110  
*Kitāb thawāb innā anzalnāh* 162  
*kitmān* 125, 177, 181  
 Kohlberg, E. 180  
 Krinis, E. 154  
 Kubrawī/Kubrāwiyya (sufis) 272, 277  
 Kūfa 29, 37, 38, 40, 83, 86, 89, 105, 108-109, 126, 133, 148, 187, 205, 242, 262, 264  
 al-Kulaynī 29, 68, 139-142, 150-156, 166, 168, 172, 182-188, 210, 236, 288  
 Kumayl b. Ziyād 299, 300-301, 304, 310  
 Kumayt b. Zayd 97, 108, 193  
*kunya* 78, 82, 126, 171  
 Kuthayyir ‘Azza 108  
*Lā fatā illā ‘Alī, lā sayf illā Dhū’l-faqār* 10, 267, 360  
*laban al-faḥl* 104  
*lāhūt* 39, 79, 121, 126, 217, 220, 225  
 Lammens, H. 95, 96, 99  
*Lawāmi’ al-nūrāniyya fi asmā’ amīr al-mu’minīn al-qur’āniyya* 28, 216  
 Lawson, T. 130, 204, 205  
 Late Antiquity 12, 39, 142, 149, 156, 159, 173, 198, 258  
 Lecker, M. 95  
 Leo III 78  
*Letter on Heresis to Quodvultdeus* 59  
*liqāh wāhid* 104  
*lisān* 22, 122, 124, 137, 171  
*līwā’* 96  
*Logos* 39, 79, 145, 173  
 Lory, P. 130, 204, 205  
 Lot 92, 93  
 Lüling, G. 257  
*Mā nazala fi ‘Alī min al-Qur’ān* 215  
*Mā nazala fi l-khamsa* 215  
*Mā nazala fi l-Qā’im* 216  
*Mā nazala min al-Qur’ān fi ahl al-bayt* 24, 215

- Mā nazala min al-Qurʾān fī amīr al-muʾminīn* 24, 214, 216
- Mā nazala min al-Qurʾān fī ṣāhib al-zamān* 215
- maʾrifatī bi l-nūrāniyya* 238
- Maʾrūf al-Karkhī 310
- Maʾšūma (saint) 239
- Madelung, W. 7, 31, 80, 82, 86, 88, 89, 94, 98-99
- Maghreb 266, 273, 283-286
- al-Maḥajja fī mā nazala fī l-qāʾim l-ḥujja* 216
- Maḥbūb al-qulūb* 291, 306
- al-Mahdī* 49, 70, 135-137, 215, 278-279, 285, 306
- Mahgraye* 62
- Maḥmūd b. al-Faraj 194
- Majlā* 70, 220, 237
- al-Majlisī 83, 110, 117, 207, 208, 301
- majmaʿ al-nūrayn* 105
- malaka* 295
- malak muqarrab* 186
- malakūt* 158
- al-Malaṭī 177
- malḥama*, pl. *malāḥim* 43, 52, 120, 131-132, 191, 261
- Mandala 250
- Mani/Manichean/Manicheism 12, 39-40, 48, 56-57, 66, 142-149, 151, 159, 188, 189, 196-197, 258-259, 262
- al-Maqrīzī 51, 97, 105
- Marcion/Marcionites 40, 148, 262
- Mary 62, 67, 108, 174, 253
- Mary the Copt 192
- maʾrifā al-rijāl dīn allāh* 214
- Marīnid(s) 286
- Marwān 77
- al-Masāʾil al-maknūna* 150
- Mashāriq al-amān* 209-210, 217
- Mashāriq al-anwār* 203-204
- al-masīḥ* 44, 59-62, 69, 70
- al-masīḥ al-thānī* 70
- maskh* 218
- Massignon, L. 116, 119, 131
- maʾšūm* 33, 217
- al-mathal al-aʿlā* 39, 122, 220, 254
- Mathnavī* 241
- mawlā* 26. *See also man kuntu mawlāh* 31, 207, 286
- Mawlā ʿAlī son of Muḥammad b. Falāḥ 278-279
- Mawlavi Jalāl al-Dīn Balkhī Rūmī 241
- Mawlid al-nabī wa ʿAlī wa Fāṭima* 210
- al-Maybudī Kamāl al-Dīn 307
- Maytham/Mītham al-Baḥrānī 272, 294, 296
- maḥzar* 70, 118, 137, 220, 237, 245, 246
- Mecca/Meccan 4, 77, 87, 96, 103, 136, 166, 168, 239, 259
- Medina 4, 40, 77, 87, 102-104, 195, 259, 262
- Melvin-Koushki, M. 273, 274
- membra dei* 146
- Mēnōg* 147-148
- Metaphysics of the Shifāʾ* 304, 308, 313
- mīʾrāj* 256, 309, 312, 314
- Mīʾat kalima* 288
- Michael (angel) 133, 158, 183, 240
- Mimouni, S.C. 57
- Mingana, A. 61
- Minḥāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya* 177
- al-Miqdād b. Aswad 53
- Mīr Dāmād 300, 302, 307-308, 311-313
- Miskawayh/Ibn Miskawayh 289-291
- mīthāq* 35, 133, 164
- mīzān* 28, 137
- Moghul India 255
- Monarchianism 56
- Montanism 56
- Morimoto, K. 273
- Moses 36, 92, 93, 135-136, 186, 190, 223, 225-226
- Motzki, H. 2
- Muʿāwiya 6, 20, 21, 61, 76-77, 82, 86-88, 90, 95, 100, 105, 110, 222
- Muʿtazilite 216, 297
- muʾakhāt* 102-104, 107
- Muʿayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shirāzī 130
- mubāhala* 94, 221
- Mubashshir b. Fātik 292
- al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī 83, 119, 150, 214
- mufahham* 153, 186
- al-Mufid al-Shaykh 23, 110, 215, 228, 242
- mufriṭūn* 218
- al-Mughīra b. Saʿīd 194
- muḥaddath* 156, 163, 171, 183, 184, 196
- muhājirūn* 62, 260
- Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Jawād (9th imam) 164

- Muḥammad al-Bāqir (5th imam) 26, 35, 68,  
85, 111, 120, 140, 148, 150, 153, 166, 169,  
171, 173, 180, 187
- Muḥammad Bek 275
- Muḥammad b. Falāḥ 276, 278-279, 283
- Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya 83, 119, 274, 294
- Muḥammad b. Ḥassān al-Rāzī  
al-Zaynabī 162
- Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl 194, 195
- Muḥammad is not the father of any of your  
men* 193
- Muḥammad b. Makkī al-Āmilī 275
- Muḥammad b. Sa'īd *al-maṣlūb* 194
- Muḥammad Taqī Mirzā (Qajar prince) 132
- Muḥammad b. 'Ubayd b. Abī Umayya 86
- Muḥammad Zamān 'Ārif (Sāqī) 208
- muḥkam/mutashābih* 21
- mujāhid* 21, 212, 213
- al-Mukhammisa 41, 153
- Mukhtār b. Abī 'Ubayd 83, 194
- Mukhtār al-ḥikam* 292
- mulk* 93-94, 105
- Mullā Na'imā Ṭāliqānī 42
- Mullā Ṣadrā/Mollā Ṣadrā 21, 42, 291-293,  
297-298, 312, 314
- mu'min muntaḥan* 35, 186
- al-mu'min imtaḥana llāhu qalbahū li  
l-īmān* 35, 171, 238
- muntaḥanūn* 35
- munāfiqūn* 262
- mundhir* 73, 169
- munḥamannā* 63-66
- al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* 293
- muqarrabūn* 35
- muqātil* 213
- Muqtaḍab al-athar* 215
- Murji'is 229
- mursalūn* 35
- Murtaḍā 'Alī 251, 283
- Mūsā al-Kāzīm (7th imam) 213, 283
- muṣāfaḥa* 184
- muṣāhara* 100
- al-Muṣannaḥ* of Ibn Abī Shayba 83
- Musaylima 194
- muṣḥaf 'Alī* 23, 78
- mushāfahatan* 37, 73
- mushāhada* 299
- Musha'sha'iyya 41, 278-279, 282-283
- muslim/muslimūn* 77, 260
- al-Musnad* d'Ibn Ḥanbal 50-51
- musūkh/maskh* 136, 218
- Mu'tazilis 229
- al-Muṭṭalib 90, 93, 96, 97, 100
- muwālāt* 30
- al-naba' al-'azīm* 127, 220
- al-Nabāṭī al-Bayādī 256
- nabi/anhbyā'/nabiyyūn* 18, 19, 126, 163, 171,  
184, 186, 191-192, 227, 306
- nabī ākhir al-zamān* 52
- nabī/rasūl al-malḥama* or *nabī al-  
malāḥim* 43, 52, 191, 261
- nabī al-ḥaram* 64
- nabī mursal* 186
- nadwa* 96
- nafas-e rahmānī* 311
- al-naḥs al-'aqliyya* 314
- al-naḥs al-nāṭiqa* 312
- al-Nafs al-Zakiyya Muḥammad 284
- Nagel, T. 98
- Nahj al-balāgha* 7, 8, 20, 117, 123, 131, 187,  
288-289, 291, 294, 297
- Nahrwān (battle) 6
- Najm al-Dīn Kubrā 206, 273
- al-namṭ al-awsaṭ* 206
- Naqā'id* of Jarīr and al-Farazdaq 85, 193
- naqqāl* 230
- Naqshbandi/Naqshbandiyya (soufis) 268,  
271
- nasab* 96, 100
- naṣārā* 57
- nāṣibī*, pl. *nawāṣib* 7, 71, 218
- nāsikh/mansūkh* 21
- Nasīmī 'Imād al-Dīn 276, 277
- Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh 230, 246
- Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh 268-273
- al-Naṣṣ al-jalī fi arba'īn āya fi sha'n 'Alī* 28,  
216
- nāsūt/nāsūtiyya* 39, 79, 120, 126, 217, 225
- nāṭiq* 24, 41, 79, 124, 173, 213, 291, 308, 312
- Nativity of Jesus 161, 173
- al-Nawbakhtī, al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā 71
- Nawfal 90, 93, 97
- Nazareans/Nazoreans 57-59
- Neoplatonism/Neoplatonist(s) 303, 308-  
309, 314

- Nestorianism 56  
 Nestorius 40  
 Ni'matullāhi/Ni'matullāhiyya (soufis) 41,  
 131, 246, 273  
 Ni'mat Allāh Walī 273  
 Nizāri(s) 270, 272  
 Noah 63, 70, 91, 92, 134  
 Nöldeke, T. 23, 84, 101  
 New Testament 55, 57, 64, 66, 154  
 Nowrūz 263  
 Nu'mān b. al-'Ajlān al-Anṣārī 83  
*nubuwwa* 13, 34, 79, 141, 170, 182, 188, 194,  
 197, 227, 272  
*nubuwwa takwīniyya* 197  
*nubuwwa tashrī'iyya* 197  
*nubuwwat al-tashrī'* 198  
*nubuwwat 'amma/muṭlaqa* 198  
*nuqṭa* 255, 256  
*al-nuqṭa taht al-bā'* 256, 277  
 Nuṣṭawīyya 41  
*nūr* 33, 69, 80, 105, 137, 171, 188, 223, 226,  
 246  
 Nūr 'Alī Shāh 131  
*nūrāniyya al-imām/nūrāniyyat-e imām* 235,  
 238, 254  
 Nūrbakhsh Sayyid Muḥammad/  
 Nūrbakhshiyya 131, 275-283  
 Nuṣayri-Alawīs 41, 119, 127, 130, 153, 174, 186,  
 255  
*Nuzūl al-Qur'ān fī sha'n amīr  
 al-mu'minīn* 215  
 Nyberg 145  
  
 Omayyads 61, 90  
 Origen 39, 40, 59, 143, 179  
 Ottoman(s) 178, 247, 255, 265, 271, 281  
 Ouārdī, H. 2  
  
 Palestine 53  
 Panarion of Epiphanius 59  
 Papyrus of Deir el-Bala'izah 144  
*Pardeh/pardeh dār* 230  
*parda-ye darvīshī* 251  
 Paret, R. 99  
 Pellat, C. 133  
 Perfect Man 115-116, 142, 146, 205, 219, 224,  
 289, 305-306, 311-316. *See also insān  
 kāmil*  
  
 Persia, Persian(s) 131, 133, 146, 147, 153, 207,  
 208, 216, 230, 239, 240, 251, 255, 263  
 ("Ali the Persian") 279, 289, 308, 313  
 Peshitta/Peshittā 64, 142  
 Pharaoh 136, 222, 225  
 Philo of Alexandria 39  
 Pines, Sh. 131, 154  
*Pistis Sophia* 144  
 Plotinus 156, 249, 303  
 Powers, D.S. 190, 193  
 Prémare, A.-L., de 57, 77, 257  
 Proclus 303  
*Psalter* coptic 144  
 Pseudo-Denys the Areopagite 180  
 Puech, H.-C. 144-146  
 Pythagoras/Pythagorean/  
 Pythagoreanism 149, 300, 306, 316  
  
*al-qābiḍ* 38, 135, 137  
*qadar/Qadaries* 160, 229  
 al-Qaḍī Sa'īd al-Qummī 131, 314, 315  
 Qādirī (soufis) 106  
 Qāf (Mountain) 135, 137  
 Qajar 132, 230, 235, 238, 246, 255  
*qalb* 22, 35, 122, 150, 171, 236-238  
 Qanbar b. Kādān 153, 231-232  
*qarāba* 87, 89, 100, 107, 111  
 Qarmat(s) 70, 119, 194  
*qasīm al-janna wa l-nār* 9, 70, 126, 127, 137,  
 315  
 Qawwālī 256  
*qayyim al-qiyāma* 70, 137  
*qiyāma* 126, 272  
 Qizilbash 279, 281-282  
 Qumm 140, 239, 302  
 al-Qummī, 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm 120, 182  
*Qur'ān/kitāb nāṭiq/kitāb ṣāmīt* 24, 79, 124,  
 173, 213, 276, 291, 308, 312  
 Quraysh 4, 29, 30, 96, 98, 99, 164, 212, 260,  
 261, 262  
*qurrā'* 95  
 Quṣayy 90, 96  
*quṭb* 207, 303, 310  
*al-quwwa al-ghaḍabiyya* 295  
*al-quwwa al-shahawīyya* 295  
  
*rabb* 127, 137, 157, 160, 217, 223, 225, 278  
*rabbān insāniyyan* 308

- Rafī'a Nā'inī 42  
 Ragg, Lonsdale & Laura 154-155  
*rahīm* 104  
*rahūm* 38, 137, 160, 309  
*rahmān* 38, 137, 160, 217, 309  
 Rajab al-Bursī 13, 42, 129-131, 203ff., 256,  
 311-314  
*Rajaz/rājiz* 81  
 Ramadan/Ramaḍān 135, 137, 161-162, 167-168  
*Rāshidūn* 43, 84-86  
*rasūl* 43, 52, 67, 76, 94, 125, 127, 137, 157, 158,  
 171, 184, 188, 191, 210, 227  
 Rāwandīyya 71  
 Rayy 278  
 Rāz Shirāzi Mirzā Abū l-Qāsim 242-243  
*Reconquista* 154, 266  
 Reitzenstein 145  
*religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale*  
 (les) 178  
 Retsö, J. 55  
 Ries, J. 189  
*Rifāda* 96  
 Rippin, A. 52  
*Risāla of Mir Faḍilī* 283  
*Risāla fi kayfīyyat al-tawḥīd wa l-ṣalāt 'alā*  
*l-rasūl wa l-a'imma* 210  
*Risāla fi l-ṣalawāt 'alā l-nabī wa ālihi*  
*l-ma'šūmīn* 210  
*Risāla fi ziyārat (li-) amīr al-mu'minīn* 209  
*Risālat al-mi'rāj* 312  
*Risālat al-mukhtaṣara fi l-tawḥīd* 210  
*Rīsh mellē* 61  
 Robin, C.J. 55  
*Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar*  
*Epoch (The)* 235  
*al-ru'ya bi l-qalb* 236-237  
 Rubin, U. 63, 95, 96, 191, 193, 197  
 Rufā'a b. Shaddād al-Hamdānī 83  
*rūḥ* 150, 157, 160, 170, 183  
*rūḥ al-amīn* 155  
*rūḥ al-'aql* 153  
*rūḥ al-badan* 140  
*rūḥ al-fikr* 153  
*rūḥ al-ḥayāt* 140, 153  
*rūḥ al-ḥifẓ* 153  
*rūḥ al-'ilm* 153  
*rūḥ al-īmān* 139, 153  
*rūḥ al-jabarūt* 153  
*rūḥ-i kull* 153  
*rūḥ al-madraj* 139, 145  
*rūḥ al-quds* 12, 63, 139, 141, 153, 155-158, 183.  
 See also Holy Spirit  
*rūḥ al-quwwa* 139, 153  
*rūḥ al-shahwa* 139, 145, 155  
*rukḥṣa* 177  
 Sa'īd b. al-Musayyib 97  
*al-sā'a* 74  
 Saba'iyya 82  
*sabb al-ṣahāba* 220, 227  
*sabīl* 28, 126  
*sābiq/sābiqīn* 127, 152  
*sābiqa* 87, 89  
 Sachau, E. 103  
 Sacy, Silvestre de 119  
*ṣadaqa* 93  
 Sadighi, Gh.H. 110  
*ṣadr* 171  
 Safavid(s) 42, 204, 208, 255, 265, 271, 281-  
 283, 289-291, 299, 300, 304-306, 311-312,  
 315  
 al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī 34, 120, 140, 150, 152,  
 156, 163, 168, 170, 182, 185, 236  
*ṣāhib al-amr* 168  
*ṣāhib al-arḍ* 169  
*ṣāhib al-ta'wīl* 228  
*sāḥir* 101  
 Saint Basil 179  
*saq'* 45  
*sakīna* 93  
*ṣalāt* 55, 168, 210  
*Ṣalāt-nāma* 283  
 Ṣāliḥ 93  
*sālik* 310  
 Salmān the Persian 153, 279, 310  
 Solomon 92-94, 157  
 al-Sāmīrī 222  
 Samson, Apostolic missionary 64  
*sāqī* (of Kawthar) 9, 256  
 Saracens 60  
*Sarā'ir wa asrār al-nuṭaqā'* 151  
 al-Sarakhsī, Shams al-Dīn 177  
 Sarbadār/Sarbedār 206, 274, 275, 282  
 Sassanid(s) 232, 263-264  
*sāye-ye Murtaḍā 'Alī bar sarat* 251  
 al-Sayyārī 31, 167, 182, 212, 222

- sayyid* 279  
*sayyid al-fityān* 10  
*sayyid al-mu'minīn* 137, 222  
*sayyid al-'uqalā'* 293  
 Schaeder 145  
 Sebeos 59  
*Secrets of Rabbi Shim'ōn ben Yoḥai (The)* 53, 61-62  
 Segovia, C. 52, 63  
 Seraphiel (angel) 240  
 Serjeant, R.B. 84, 95-96  
 Seth/Shīth 135, 164  
 Shabistārī Sa'd al-Dīn Maḥmūd 241  
 Shādhili/Shādhiliyya (soufis) 286  
*shafī'* 9  
 Shāh Sulaymān 208  
 al-Shahrastānī 188  
 al-Shahrazūrī Shams al-Dīn 293, 299-300, 303  
 Shāhrukh 278  
*shā'ir* 101  
*shajā'a* 295  
*shamā'il* 230-251  
*shaqq al-qamar* 171  
*sharḥ/inshirāḥ al-ṣadr* 171  
 al-Sharīf al-Raḍī 7-9, 117, 187, 288  
*sharīf/shurafā'* 273, 284, 286, 287  
 Sharon, M. 85, 98-99, 108-109  
*shaṭḥ/shaṭaḥāt* 124, 311  
 Shaṭṭārī/Shatṭāriyya (soufis) 271  
*Shawāhid al-tanzīl* 215  
*shay'/shay'yya* 121, 171  
 al-Shaybī, K.M. 204, 205  
 Shaykh Bahā'ī 301, 307  
 Shaykh Khalīfa 275  
 Shaykhiyya 41, 130  
*Shi'ism and Late Iranian Arts* 233  
 Shibli 310  
 Shimr/Shamir 276  
 Shoemaker, S. 50, 52, 59, 60  
*shūrā* 94  
*ṣibgha* 219  
*ṣiddīq* 71, 192  
 Ṣiffīn 6, 20, 83, 85, 87-88, 95, 105  
*silsila* 267  
 Simmel, G. 181  
 Simon 135  
*siqāya* 96  
*Sīra* 52, 64, 74, 85, 105  
*ṣirāṭ allāh* 39, 122  
*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm/al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* 28, 31, 218, 256  
*sirāj* 137  
*sitr* 37, 127, 194  
*sīyāsa* 305  
 Snouck Hurgronje 49  
 Socrates 291, 295, 303, 316  
*Sophia of Jesus-Christ* 145  
 Sprenger, A. 50, 51, 65  
 Strothmann, R. 99  
 Stroumsa, G.G. 189  
 Suhrawardī Abū Hafs 'Umar 269-270  
 Suhrawardī Shaykh al-ihrāq 206, 218, 299-305, 310, 314  
*ṣulb* 104  
*sunnat 'Alī* 75, 85  
*sūra* 43-45, 52, 55, 136, 160-162, 210-211, 220, 255-256  
*ṣūra* 128, 246, 277  
*ṣūrat i fikriyya* 241  
*al-Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd 51  
 al-Ṭabarī 5, 70, 80-83, 88, 99-100, 105, 119, 191  
*tabdīd al-'ilm* 125, 181  
*tafakkur* 241  
*Tafsīr sūrat al-ikhhlās/al-tawḥīd* 209  
*Tahāfut al-falāsifa* 293  
*taḥnīk* 105-107  
*taḥrīf* 44, 78, 211  
*tāj* 281  
*tajallī* 305  
*taklīf* 297  
 Talḥa 88  
 Tamerlane 274, 278  
*tanāsukh* 69, 71  
*Tanbīh al-ghāfilīn* 216  
*Tanqīḥ al-maqāl* 129  
*tanzīl* 19, 23, 196, 226, 227  
*taqdīr* 168  
 Taqī al-Dīn 'Abdallāh al-Ḥalabī 210  
*taqīyya* 13, 21, 82, 85, 125, 171, 177-199, 215  
*taqlīd* 292  
 Tardieu, M. 146, 189  
*Ta'rikh al-rusul wa l-mulūk* 70, 80  
*tashbih* 121, 126, 224  
*ta'tīl* 224

- Tavārikh-i Āl-i ʿOthmān* 271  
*tawāsīn* 136, 137  
*tawhīd* 225, 255, 297, 299, 308  
*taʿwīl* 19-21, 23, 122, 137-138, 196, 213, 226-228, 276-277  
*Taʿwīl al-āyāt al-zāhira fī faḍāʾil al-ʿitrat al-ṭāhira* 215  
*Taʿwīl mā nazala min al-Qurʾān fī ahl al-bayt* 24, 215  
 Taym (clan of Quraysh) 164  
*taʿẓīya* 10  
 Terrier, M. 14, 42  
 Tertullian 145, 190  
*Testament of the Twelve Apostles* 54  
*Thalia* of Arius 40  
 Thamūd 93  
 al-Thaqafī 214  
*Thawāb innā anzalnāh* 162  
*The succession to Muḥammad* 89  
 Théophanes the Confessor 53, 61, 263  
 Tjijdens, E.F. 152  
 Timurids 271, 274  
 Tirmidh 150  
*Traité Chavannes-Pelliot* 14  
 Ṭūbā (Tree) 314  
*Tuḥfat al-mulūk* by Jaʿfar al-Kashfī 132, 133  
 Ṭulayḥa b. Khuwaylid 194  
 Turābiyya Sabaʿiyya 82  
 Turka Iṣfahānī 273, 274  
 Ṭūs/Mashhad 206  
 Tyan, E. 96  
 ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād 77, 78  
 ʿUbayd b. al-Khaḍīr 101  
 Ubayy b. Kaʿb 188  
*udhn* 122, 171  
 Uḥud (battle) 10, 267  
*ʿulamāʾ ummatī ka-anbiyāʾ banī isrāʾīl* 186  
*al-ʿulamāʾ warathat al-anbiyāʾ* 186  
 ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb 1-6, 20, 42, 60, 65, 71, 75, 85, 101, 164-166, 184, 211, 220-222, 226, 261, 270, 294  
 ʿUmar II 78  
 ʿUmar b. Tawba 162  
 Umayya Ibn Abī al-Ṣalt 192  
*Umm al-kitāb* 137, 149, 152-153  
 Umm Jalil bint al-Mujallal 105  
*ʿumra* 55  
 Urbach, E.E. 197  
*al-ʿurwa al-wuthqā* 39, 122, 254  
*al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī* 172  
 Uṣūlī/uṣūliyya 132, 197  
 ʿUthmān/ʿUthmānian Vulgate 6, 29, 77, 85, 88, 97, 110, 188, 210, 211, 222, 270  
 ʿUthmān b. Maẓʿūn 153  
*ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* 239-240  
 Van Ess, J. 179  
 Van Reeth, J. 40, 56, 66  
*vaqt-i zuḥūr* 275  
 Veccia Vaglieri, L. 7-9  
*vejhe/wijha* 235-245  
 Vesel, Z./Vesel collection 230, 232, 237, 243, 248, 250  
*Vohu Manah* 66  
 wahlhābis 177, 178  
 al-Wāḥidī 50  
*waḥy* 135, 137-138, 188, 196  
*wajh/wajh allāh* 122, 124, 137, 238-241  
*al-walāya bātin al-nubuwwa* 34  
*walāya takwīniyya* 42, 197  
*walāya tashrīʿiyya/iʿtibāriyya* 197  
*walī al-amr* 169, 172  
*walī, awliyāʾ* 19, 26, 28, 33, 83, 100, 111, 169, 175, 224, 226, 228, 254, 283, 306, 309  
 Wansbrough, J. 190, 257  
*wāqīʿa* 27, 48, 74  
 Wāqifi(s) 120  
*waṣī/awṣiyāʾ* 86-89, 140, 163, 197, 222, 251, 278, 284  
*waṣīyya* 33-35, 40, 69, 197  
*Waṣīyyat-nāma* 276  
 Wasserstrom, S.M. 195  
 Watt, W.M. 96, 118  
 Wellhausen, J. 95, 102  
 Widengren, G. 66  
 Woods, J. 273  
*Xuāstvānīft* 189  
*xwarnah/farrah* 147  
*yā ʿAlī madad* 251  
*yāʾsūb* 38, 127, 137  
*yad Allāh* 122, 124, 137  
*yatīm/yatīmīyya* 153

- yawm al-raj'a* 219  
 Yazdī Ḥā'irī 130-131  
 Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya 76, 110, 276, 280-281  
 Yemen 53, 57, 104, 110, 158, 185, 258, 259  
  
 Zachariah 71, 92-94  
*zaghāb al-mālā'ika* 184  
*zāhīr* 22-23, 32, 34, 38, 41, 123, 137, 196, 217,  
 227, 237, 243, 305, 313  
*zakāt* 55, 93  
  
*Zand-ī Wahman Yasn* 53  
 Zayd 29  
 Zaydi 1, 24, 120  
 Zayd b. Şūḥān 81  
*ziyāra* 170, 209, 239  
 Zoroastrian(s) 54, 146, 147, 178, 258  
 al-Zubayr 88  
 al-Zuhri Ibn Shihāb 76, 97, 109  
*zuhūr* 275, 309  
 Zurayq 220