The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam

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The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam

Volume 1. The Prophet Between Doctrine, Literature and Arts: Historical Legacies and Their Unfolding

Edited by

Denis Gril
Stefan Reichmuth
Dilek Sarmis

BRILL

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Contents

Acknowledgements IX
List of Figures and Tables XI
Notes on Contributors XV

The Presence of the Prophet: General Introduction 1
Rachida Chih, David Jordan and Stefan Reichmuth

The Prophet between Doctrine, Literature and Arts: Introduction to Volume I 14
Denis Gril, Stefan Reichmuth and Dilek Sarmis

PART 1
Images of the Prophet in* Qurʾān, Ḥadīth*, and* Sīra/Maghāzī*, and their Cultural Embedding

1 The Prophet in the Qurʾān
An Attempt at a Synthesis 37
Denis Gril

2 Dating the Emergence of the Warrior-Prophet in *Maghāzī* Literature
Second/Eighth to the Fourth/Tenth Century 79
Adrien de Jarmy

3 *Ḥadīth* Culture and Ibn Taymiyya's Controversial Legacy in Early Fifteenth Century Damascus
Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī and His al-Radd Al-Wāfir (*d. 842/1438*) 100
Caterina Bori

4 "There Is Matter for Thought"
The Episode of the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension in the Sīra ḥalabiyya*, at the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century* 115
Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen

PART 2

Towards a Theology of Devotion to the Prophet in Sunnī Islam

5 Theology of Veneration of the Prophet Muḥammad
Knowledge and love in the Shifā *of al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ* (*d. 544/1149*) *between ḥadīth, philosophy and spirituality* 153
Ruggero Vimercati Sanseverino

6 "Special Features of the Prophet" (*Khaṣāʾiṣ nabawiyya*)
From Jurisprudence to Devotion 197
Michele Petrone

7 Modèle prophétique et modèle de sainteté dans le soufisme ancien
Quelques exemples 229
Pierre Lory

8 L'éducation par « la lumière de la foi du Prophète » selon le *shaykh* ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh (m. 1332/1719)
D'après le Kitāb al-Ibrīz *de Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak* (*m. 1156/1743*) 244
Jean-Jacques Thibon

PART 3

The Prophet in Shīʿī Doctrine and in Islamic Philosophy

9 The Prophet Muḥammad in Imāmī Shīʿism
Between History and Metaphysics 273
Mathieu Terrier

10 The Prophet Muḥammad and His Heir ʿAlī
Their Historical, Metahistorical and Cosmological Roles in Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism 299
Daniel De Smet

11 La dimension éthique et politique de la révélation prophétique chez les *falāsifa* 327
Meryem Sebti

PART 4
The Splendour of Words: Exaltation of the Prophet in Islamic Literatures

12 "I Have Mandated It to Fly to You on the Wings of My Ardent Desire"
Letter to the Prophet Written by Lisān al-Dīn ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 776/1375) on Behalf of the Naṣrid Ruler of Granada 351
Nelly Amri

13 Les poèmes d'éloge du Prophète de Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khāṭīb (713-776/1313-1374 ou 75) 378
Brigitte Foulon

14 Présence du Prophète dans l'art du panégyrique (*madīḥ*) et de l'audition spirituelle (*samāʿ*)
Approche thématique 411
Mohamed Thami El Harrak

15 Timurid Accounts of Ascension (*miʿrāj*) in *Türkī One Prophet, Two Models* 431
Marc Toutant

16 Miʿrāciyye
The Ascension of the Prophet in Ottoman Literature from the Fifteenth to the Twentieth Century 460
Alexandre Papas

PART 5
The Prophet in the Mirror of the Verbal, Scriptural and Pictorial Imagery: Aesthetics and Devotion

17 The Reality and Image of the Prophet according to the Theologian and Poet ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī 501
Samuela Pagani

18 The Prophet as a Sacred Spring: Late Ottoman *Hilye* Bottles 535
Christiane Gruber

19 Visualising the Prophet – Rhetorical and Graphic Aspects of Three Ottoman-Turkish Poems
Süleymān Çelebi's Vesīlet en-Necāt, *Yazıcıoğlı's* Risāle-i Muḥammedīye, *and Ḫāḳānī's* Ḥilye 583
Tobias Heinzelmann

20 The World of al-Qandūsī (d. 1278/1861)
Prophetology and Calligraphy in Morocco During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century 620
Francesco Chiabotti and Hiba Abid

Index of Names of Persons and Places, Titles, and Subject Notions 679

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Figures and Tables

Figures

15.1 The fate reserved for wine-drinkers according to the BNF manuscript, Supplément turc 190, fol. 65 v 437

15.2 Page from the manuscript of Nawā'ī's Khamsa, describing the beginning of the Ḥayrat al-abrār miʿrāj. University of Michigan – Special Collection Library, Isl. MS. 450, p. 16 441

18.1 Inscribed glass bottle containing a miniature Qurʾān placed on a stand and surrounded by decorative beads, Ottoman lands, late 19th century. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, G.Y. 913 536

18.2 Glass bottle with a *hilye* showing a depiction of Mecca, Ottoman lands, late 19th century. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, G.Y. 1413 538

18.3 Glass bottle with a *hilye* showing a depiction of Medina, Ottoman lands, late 19th century. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, G.Y. 1413 540

18.4 Metal plaque containing a *hilye* of the Prophet and other amuletic inscriptions and designs, Ottoman lands, late nineteenth or twentieth century. Halûk Perk Collection, Istanbul, unnumbered. Left: the original printing plaque, with writing in reverse; and right: the plaque digitally flipped to render the script legible 541

18.5 Lines of Persian poetry in the *hilye* bottle illustrated in figures 18.2 and 18.3 542

18.6 Lines of Persian poetry in the *hilye* bottle illustrated in figures 18.2 and 18.3 543

18.7 First side of icon, *hilye* bottle with a stopper covered in red silk and a rope and chain wrapped around its neck, Ottoman lands, late 19th century. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, G.Y. 954 544

18.8 Second side of icon illustrated in figure 18.7 545

18.9 Detail of the backsides of the *hilye* panels included in the bottle illustrated in figures 18.7 and 18.8 547

18.10 Hilye bottle with a metal wire attached to the verbal icon, Ottoman lands, late 19th century. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, G.Y. 429 548

18.11 Inscription on the first side of the *hilye* bottle illustrated in figure 10 550

18.12 Inscription on the second side of the *hilye* bottle illustrated in figure 10 551

18.13 The Prophet Muḥammad's *hilye* with directions of use attributed to al-Tirmidhī, included in a prayer book, Ottoman lands, 18th or 19th century. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, E.H. 996, folios 10v–11r 553

18.14 A double-page depiction of Mecca and Medina, the latter showing smudges over the Prophet Muḥammad's tomb, al-Jazūlī, *Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt*, Ottoman

lands, late 18th century. Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, MS. 419.2007, folios–18r 555
18.15 A heavily smudged double-page painting of Mecca and Medina, al-Jazūlī, *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*, Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul, Hacı Mahmud Efendi 3986, folios 12v–13r 556
18.16 Conical straw bundle containing the soil from Medina, before 1958, Oosters Instituut (The Oriental Institute), Leiden, The Netherlands, RMV B106–49 560
18.17 Glass bottle containing Zamzam water, before 1958, Oosters Instituut (The Oriental Institute), Leiden, The Netherlands, RMV B106–88 562
18.18 Plastic bottles filled with Zamzam water, offered for sale in a store of devotional goods near the Eyüp shrine, Istanbul. Photograph by author, summer 2016 563
18.19 Terracotta cup inscribed with Sūrat Yā-Sīn, Ottoman lands, 19th century. Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi Collection, Istanbul, cat. no. 120 565
18.20 "Spring of the Miraculous Fishes at Baloukli," included in Robert Walsh, Constantinople and the Scenery of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor Illustrated in a Series of Drawings from Nature by Thomas Allom (London and Paris: Fisher, 1838), pages 50–51 568
18.21 The sacred spring and icon of the Virgin Mary and Christ Child in the "Fountain of Life" (Zoodochos Pege) crypt church in Balıklı, Istanbul. Photograph by author, summer 2018 570
18.22 Plastic water bottle impressed with the name of the Zoodochos Pege sacred spring and an image depicting the Virgin Mary and Christ Child. Bottle acquired at the holy spring by the author in summer 2018 572
18.23 "Vue de Indjiuli-Kiosk," image included in Choiseul-Gouffier, Voyage pittoresque dans l'Empire ottoman, en Grèce, dans la Troade, les îles de l'Archipel et sur les côtes de l'Asie-mineure (Paris: J.-P. Aillaud, 1842), volume 2, plate 72 573
18.24 Icon bottle showing the Virgin Mary and Christ Child with Saint Eleutherios, Monastery of the Virgin Evangelistria, Tenos, Greece, 19th or 20th century. Bottle acquired in Istanbul by the author in summer 2017 575
18.25 Icon bottle depicting the Passion of Christ, made in Hungary, nineteenth or twentieth century. Bachkovo Monastery Museum, Bulgaria. Photograph by author, summer 2018 576
19.1 Recent Facsimile Edition of Süleyman Çelebi, *Mevlid-i Şerif*. Vesiletü'n-Necat, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Ankara 2008 589
19.2 Yazıcıoghlı, *Risāle-i Muḥmmediyye*, author's copy, Ankara, Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü, 221livaA, banner of the Prophet on the right margin 594
19.3 Bursalı İsmā'īl Ḥaḳḳı's copy of Yazıcıoghlı, *Risāle-i Muḥmmediyye*, İnebey Kütüphanesi, Bursa, Genel 58 (1121/1709), 133a; copy of the banner of the Prophet on the left margin with reference to the original 595

19.4 *Risāle-i Muḥammediyye*, Banner of the Prophet, Ankara, Milli Kütüphane, Ankara, B 960 (1057/1648), 152b 595
19.5 *Risāle-i Muḥammediyye*, Fan-shaped arrangement of verses, Istanbul, TSMK HS 93, 241b–242a 596
19.6 *Risāle-i Muḥammediyye*, oval, eye-shaped calligraphic arrangement of verses, with a dot in the middle of each oval visualizing the Prophet's vision of God, Istanbul, TSMK HS 93 (908/1502), 238b–239a 597
19.7 *Risāle-i Muḥammediyye*, Birth of the Prophet, Ms Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Maṣriyya (DKM), Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22, 48a 599
19.8 *Risāle-i Muḥammediyye*, Prostration of the new-born Prophet at the Kaʿba, Ms Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Maṣriyya (DKM), Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22, 48b 600
19.9 *Risāle-i Muḥammediyye* – The Prophet's encounter with God during the miʿrāj, DKM Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22, 66b 601
19.10 *Risāle-i Muḥammediyye* – The Prophet's and Abū Bakr's refuge in the cave during the hijra, DKM Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22, 82a 602
19.11 *Risāle-i Muḥammediyye* – The Prophet's and Abū Bakr's refuge in the cave during the hijra, from a print copy, Istanbul 1294/1877, 125 603
19.12 *Risāle-i Muḥammediyye* – The Prophet's and Abū Bakr's taking refuge in the cave at mount Thawr during the hijra, hidden behind a spider's web; printed version, Istanbul 1300/1882–3 604
19.13 *Risāle-i Muḥammediyye* – *hilye* text, printed Cairo (ref.? date?), 64 606
19.14 *Ḥilye-i Khāḳānī*, selected verses as a panel (muraḳḳaʿ), by the calligrapher Arabzade Mehmed Saadullah, from Derman, Letters in gold, 102f 610
19.15 Khāḳānī, *hilye*, printed Istanbul 1264/1848, introductory pages 611
19.16 Khāḳānī, *hilye*, Rose as symbol of the Prophet. Hamidiye Library, endowment of Sultan ʿAbdülḥamīd I (reg. 1774–1789), SK Hamidiye 1075 612
19.17 Khāḳānī, *hilye*, "Seal of Prophethood" (mühr-i nubuvvet), SK Şehid Ali Paşa 2755, completed Tuesday, 18 ZA 1075/2 June 1665 613
19.18 *Ḥilye* compilation, Istanbul, Ms SK Hüsrev 36 615
20.1 Fez, Qandūsī's painting at the tomb of Moulay Idris 623
20.2 *Ta'sīs* II, fol. 77a. The encounter with Shamharūsh 634
20.3 *Ta'sis* II, fol. 83a. The tetragram "Muḥammad" 639
20.4 Detail of the outlining of letters in Qur'ān 12613, from vol. 12, f. 12a 647
20.5 Detail of the outlining of letters in Qur'ān 12613, vol. 11, f. 36a 647
20.6 Writing "Muḥammad" – vol. 9, f. 46b 648
20.7 Writing "Muḥammad", vol. 11, f. 14a 649
20.8 Writing "Muḥammad" – vol. 11, f. 36a 649
20.9 Qur'ān 12613, vol. 9, f. 116a 650
20.10 f. 69a: Marginal gloss about the autograph copy 653
20.11 f. 87b: Marginal glosses about the autograph copy 653

20.12 Examples of crossing out and clumsiness in the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* 399K 654
20.13 Qandūsī's prayer in microscopic writing between the stems of monumental letters, f. 20b 657
20.14 Illuminated opening pages of volume 9 of the Qur'ān 12613, Sūra 30, ff. 1b–2a, al-Ḥasaniyya Royal Library 661
20.15 Illuminated opening pages of volume 11 of the Qur'ān 12613, Sūra 46, ff. 1b–2a, al-Ḥasaniyya Royal Library 662
20.16 Illuminated opening pages of volume 12 of the Qur'ān 12613, Sūra 62, ff. 1b–2a, al-Ḥasaniyya Royal Library 663
20.17 Double page of text of volume 12 of the Qur'ān_Sūra 62, 63, ff. 4b–5a, al-Ḥasaniyya Royal Library 664
20.18 Double page of text with sūra golden title of volume 12 of the Qur'ān 12613, Sūra-s 68, 69, ff. 38–39a, al-Ḥasaniyya Royal Library 665
20.19 Writing of the ʿayn in volume 9 of the Qur'ān 12613, Sūra 37, al-Ḥasaniyya Royal Library_109b 666
20.20 Illuminated double frontispiece of the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* J634, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco, ff. 1b–2a 667
20.21 Double page of text with the use of gold and coloured inks and ornamental motives, *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* J634, ff. 59b–61a, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco 668
20.22 Illuminated opening pages of the text of the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* K399, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco, ff. 20b–21a 669
20.23 Double frontispiece of the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* 399K, f. 12b–13a, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco 670
20.24 Representations of the sanctuaries of Mecca and Medina in the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* 399K, ff. 17b, 18a, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco 671
20.25 Representations of the Prophet's sandals (*al-naʿl al-nabawī*) in the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* 399K, ff. 18b–19a, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco 672
20.26 Monumental writings of the basmala and the profession of faith in the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* 399K, f. 19b–20a, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco 673
20.27 Monumental inscription of the names of Allāh and the Prophet, *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* 399K, ff. 20b–21a 674

Tables

2.1 Percentages of traditions mentioning Muḥammad (including various asānīd) in the *kutub al-maghāzī* or *ḥadīth* collections 96
5.1 Sources for the knowledge of the Prophet's reality in the first part of the *Shifā'* 165

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The Presence of the Prophet: General Introduction

Rachida Chih, David Jordan and Stefan Reichmuth

Attachment to the Prophet Muḥammad is shared by all the various individuals, groups and communities that define themselves as Muslims, whether Sunnī, Shīʿī, Ibāḍī or others, whether attached to the letter or to the spirit of Islam, whether they are proponents of Islamic reform or secular Muslims. As a focus for personal emulation and normative precedence and as a source of hope for salvation and of cultural identity and socio – political empowerment, the Prophet of Islam continues his presence among the Muslim believers.

In his function as messenger of both divine mercy and wrath and as intercessor on behalf of his community in the present and in an eschatological future, the Prophet of Islam stands out as a necessary intermediary between God's transcendence and the human realm. The belief in Muḥammad's intermediacy engendered a constant tension between the superhuman and human aspects of his person and message, which increased with the growing historical distance from him. The engagement with this tension ushered in the development of prophetology, and in diverse and sometimes contested forms of devotion to the Prophet. These have aimed to revivify his memory and his tradition, to directly or indirectly identify with him, and to look for encounters with him in blessings, dreams and visions.

The objective of this series is not another historical study of the life of the Prophet and of the origins of Islam. It rather approaches the significance of his image for his community with its diverse group affiliations and identities, in the course of history. What have been the foundations of the Muslims' attachment to the Prophet, and the modalities of his presence within their religious endeavours? What has been the role of his figure and memory in the construction of their identities and expectations?

1 Academic Research and the Prophet

In its quest of the "Historical Muḥammad", academic research has largely pursued the aim of comprehending and reconstructing his historical personality as closely as possible, in the context of the beginnings of Islam, with all the tools of philological and historical criticism available for an assessment of

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the extant sources.[1] Since the nineteenth century this has led a considerable number of scholars, including some Muslims, to write full biographies of the Prophet, with tendencies that clearly reflect their own world views and their academic formation in the context of their times. The classification applied by Arthur Jeffery to this literature already in 1926,[2] with its distinction between "pathological lives", "political and economic lives", "advanced criticism", "mythology", "eschatological lives", "apologetic lives", and "mysticism", would seem to have retained its usefulness even today.

The image of the Prophet as it was established in Muslim religious and historical tradition had, despite many critical objections, remained for a long time at the centre of historical reconstruction and dominated both positive and more critical accounts of the "Life of the Prophet". But in recent decades this image has been questioned and overshadowed by other research attempts. These locate the origins of Islam and the emergence and development of the Qurʾān in the context of the multireligious culture of the Middle East in late antiquity, and try to break fresh critical ground in the methodological approach toward these early developments. The resulting revision of the basic framework of both the textual genesis and collection of the Qurʾān, of the history of the early religious community from which Islam finally emerged, and of the life and role of the Prophet himself, puts great stress on the apocalyptic and eschatological dimensions of the early message. It assumes a redaction process of the Qurʾān which lasted until the end of the seventh century.[3] In this new tableau of the emergence of Islam, the role of the Prophet appears more or less reduced to that of a shadowy military leader of an apocalyptic movement, which took on a specific religious shape only by its interactions with the different religious communities in the conquered regions of the Middle East.

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1 For a highly useful collection of articles representing this field, Motzki, ed., *The Biography of Muḥammad*; for a recent critical overview of the historiographical approaches to the Prophet, Shoemaker, "Les vies de Muhammad".

2 Jeffery, "The Quest for the historical Muhammad"; used again extensively by Shoemaker in his critical overview of the biographical literature on the Prophet, "Les vies de Muhammad" 212–26.

3 The monumental collection *Le Coran des Historiens* (3 vols. including a critical commentary of the Qurʾānic suras) edited recently by Muhammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Guillaume Dye (2019) can be regarded as a collective product of this approach, which finds its recent programmatic expression in the general introduction written by Amir-Moezzi and Dye (21–37) and in Stephen J. Shoemaker's chapter "Les vies de Muhammad" (183–245). The beginnings of this approach can be identified with the works of John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies* (1977), and *The Sectarian Milieu* (1978), with Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism* (1977), and with Patricia Crone's subsequent publications.

Another approach to the Qur'ān has been followed by Angelika Neuwirth, who remains by and large attached to the chronological framework of its textual development as established in the Islamic scholarly tradition and further developed by Theodor Nöldeke in the nineteenth century. But she also explicitly attempts to disentangle the analysis of the Qur'ān from its connection with the received Prophetic *vita*.[4] Looking at the Qur'ānic text as product of an interaction between the Prophet and his audience, she attempts to reconstruct the emergence of the Islamic community in the mirror of its chief document. The text itself conveys a prophetology which for her can be followed in its development. Its beginning can be read as transcendent addresses to a human individual, and it leads towards the affirmation of universal authority for a messenger who unites and supersedes all the previous channels of divine communication with mankind in his own person and in his script.[5] Despite her strong opposition against "revisionist" assumptions and their chronology, one gains the impression that, in her works on the Qur'ān, too, the Prophet seems to lose his agency and to merge with both text and community ("Gemeinde"). She thus can be found in some vicinity to Fred Donner with his attempt at a reconstruction of an early "Believers' movement" which shaped the beginnings of Islam before and after the the Prophet' death.[6]

A comprehensive exploration of the biography of the Prophet of Islam and of the development of his image in the Arabic biographical and pious literature attached to his person was undertaken by Tilman Nagel (2008, 2010).[7] His works stand in clear opposition to the historical devaluation of the Arabic sources for the life of the Prophet and for the beginnings of Islam in contemporary research, which is strongly criticised by him.[8] According to Nagel a clear difference in character can be observed between the early *sīra* and *maghāzī* works and the reports about the Prophet enshrined in the *ḥadīth* literature, which to him represents a later stage in the de – historicising of his image. He therefore proceeds to develop his own critical approach to the Arabic source materials and their relation to the Qur'ān. His image of the entanglement of religious and political factors in the life of the Prophet remains highly critical of both his personality and of that of his companions. In this respect Nagel's work can be seen as a continuation from older biographical accounts like those

4 See Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, 107–122; 333–339; 407–413; *Der Koran* 2/1, 44ff.; it is telling that, in the first mentioned book, neither "Prophet" nor "Muḥammad" figure in the index, cf. 841, 845.

5 See especially Neuwirth, *Der Koran* 2/1, 44ff.

6 Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*; see esp. Ch. 2, 44–89.

7 Nagel, *Mohammed. Leben und Legende*; *Allahs Liebling*; *Mohammed. Zwanzig Kapitel*.

8 Nagel, *Mohammed. Leben und Legende*, 35–43.

of Sprenger, Buhl, and others. His critique also includes the Muslims' dogmatic and ahistorical attitude to their Prophet as it developed since the Umayyad period, which he sees as still at work in the current political and ideological uses of his image.

The Muslims' pious attachment to their Prophet, on the other hand, has certainly received some attention by Islamicists and anthropologists, especially since the beginnings of the twentieth century. The pioneering overviews of Max Horten (1916, 1917–18) and Tor Andrae (1918) have retained much of their value.[9] They already presented a panorama of early and medieval doctrines, traditions and beliefs concerning the exemplary figure of the Prophet with its strong supernatural touches in learned as well as popular culture within both Sunnī and Shīʿī Islam. This broad perspective was only further developed and augmented in the 1980s by Annemarie Schimmel (1981, 1985) with a close view on Sufi culture and poetry in different languages well into the modern period.[10] Recent works with a more comprehensive approach like Brockopp (2010) and Fitzpatrick and Walker (2014) also take the Muslims' attachment to the Prophet into account.[11] But it has to be stated that this perspective has remained marginal, in Islamology and even more so in the sociology of religions in general, and it was only rarely that scholars attempted to understand the nature of the bonds which have attached the Muslims to their Prophet until the present.

2 Research on the Muslims' Attachment to the Prophet: Objectives and Approaches

The increased attachment of the Muslims to the Prophet in recent times has certainly reinforced and deepened the existing fractures within Islam, and also the tensions and conflicts with non – Muslims, which have gained in intensity whenever the Prophet and his image are at stake. Under these circumstances, a major task for further research on the Prophet of Islam and on the continuous presence of his figure among the Muslims seems to lie in an exploration of the rich and varied historical and contemporary patterns of attachment to him, which have contributed to the formation of the Muslim individual and to the development of Islamic culture and politics. The three collective volumes

9 Horten, *Die religiöse Gedankenwelt der gebildeten Muslime*; Horten, *Die religiöse Gedankenwelt des Volkes*; Andrae, *Die Person Muhammads*.

10 Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*; in German: *Und Muhammad ist Sein Prophet*.

11 Brokopp, ed., *Cambridge Companion*; Fitzpatrick and Walker, eds., *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture*.

which are presented here, the product of a joint French-German research project, are dedicated to this task.[12] They focus on the early modern as well as the modern period, which are taken here to cover the time spans between 1450–1850 and 1850 to the present, respectively.[13] Taken together, both periods were a time of expansion but also decentring of Islam and of the Muslim world. With view to the *longue durée* of certain doctrines and attitudes connected with the Prophet, it was necessary sometimes to direct our attention also to earlier periods (especially in Volume 1).

In addition to the study of the normative dimensions of Islam pursued by philological and juridical research, and of the political history of the Muslim world, the three volumes deal with the social and cultural dynamics of living Islam, with a view to the fact that religious norms and practices themselves, far from being fixed and defined once and for all, are at the heart of social action and in constant flux and adaptation. Masses and elites equally participate in this process of social interaction leading to the construction and redefinition of societal and religious norms. The Muslims' relations to the Prophet have yet to find their place in the history of mentalities and representations, and in the history of the Muslim world in general.

Rather than following the simplistic distinction between "popular Islam" and "scholarly Islam" which has long dominated research on Muslim societies,[14] veneration and piety connected with the Prophet should be seen on a continuum which includes different social and cultural formations, at times producing a "Prophetic culture" of considerable social cohesion, shared between masses and elites. Equally, it would be fruitless to look for a homogenised figure of the Prophet Muḥammad agreed upon by the whole of the Muslim community. His image was often determined by Sufi concepts and activities but also by religious milieus which were in opposition to Sufism.

Our task, then, is rather to account for the plurality of representations of the Prophet, which evolved in the course of Muslim history along with sometimes fierce debates and polemics. This is why we have chosen to gather specialists from different disciplines and methodologies around a threefold thematic focus on *doctrinal and aesthetic representations*, *power relations*, and *devotional*

12 "The Presence of the Prophet: Muhammad in the Mirror of his Community in Early Modern and Modern Islam", joint ANR-DFG project (2017–2020); see also its website https://prophet.hypotheses.org.

13 This periodisation follows the use of the *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit*, Friedrich Jäger ed., published 2005–2012, extended since 2017, and its English edition, *Encyclopedia of Early Modern History Online*, Graeme Dumphy ed., then Andrew Colin Gow, since 2016.

14 For two influential representatives of this approach, see Geertz, *Islam Observed*; Gellner, *Muslim Society*.

practice and experience. The interdisciplinary dialogue on these themes will hopefully contribute to a clarification of the Muslims' relation to their Prophet, and of the modalities of his presence among them in the past as well as in the contemporary world.

This presence of the Prophet, described by Tilman Nagel (2008) as "spiritual presence and universal ideological authority", includes eschatological beliefs about him which connect the beginnings of Islam (and for some also the origin of the whole created world) with the present time and the end of days.[15] Eschatology is meant here to include not only future expectations of the end of times, but, in a sense already well established for Christianity, a certain fulfilment unfolding already in the present, sometimes called "realised" or "inaugurated eschatology".[16] Regarded by some as the first created being in the world, as "Muḥammadan Light" or "Muḥammadan Reality", the Prophet is even imagined as encompassing and reflecting the whole cosmos.[17] By implication, he can assume the role of mediator, intercessor and addressee for the inner life of the believer in pious practice and mysticism. These eschatological beliefs, too, confer an important position to the descendants of the Prophet (*al-sāda al-ashrāf*) as reputed trustees of his sacred rank and heritage, and as "living links" to him (Morimoto).[18] An auratic mediation between the historical distance of the Prophet and the presence of his words is evoked by the transmitted Prophetical sayings, which speak to the believer, provide edification and admonition, and demand obedience to his orders along with those of the Qurʾān.[19] They suggest blessing and even victory in this world for those who keep hold of the Prophetic *sunna* ("Vergegenwärtigung heilswichtiger Aussagen")[20] and the moral and legal authority derived from his tradition has obvious political implications. The immediate encounter with the words and deeds of the Prophet can nourish the above-mentioned eschatological beliefs, but it can equally be experienced and maintained in strict distance from them.

15 "Spirituelle Gegenwärtigkeit wie auch ideologische Allzuständigkeit Mohammeds", Nagel, *Allahs Liebling*, 119.

16 Cullmann, *Heil als Geschichte*; Kuhn, *Enderwartung und gegenwärtiges Heil*; Filoramo *et al.* "Eschatologie".

17 Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light".

18 Morimoto, *Sayyids and Sharifs*.

19 For this notion of an "aura" created by the interplay of distance and closeness in the experience of a sacred or aesthetic object, which was brought up by Walter Benjamin, see his *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* [*The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*]; Rochlitz, *Disenchantment of Art*; Spangenberg, "Aura"; Beil, Herberichs, Sandl, eds., *Aura und Auratisierung*.

20 Schöller, *Mohammed*, 74, quoting Nagel.

A point of departure for our project was the intensification of Prophet-centred patterns of piety in different cultural fields since the fourteenth century, which can be observed in virtually all regions of the Muslim world. This development increased with the emergence of the large Muslim empires of the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals and of a number of other Muslim regional states.[21] In a period of intense religious and socio-political struggles, eschatological expectations gained in fervour among Muslims, Christians and Jews on both sides of the Mediterranean, in larger parts of the Middle East and in Central and South Asia.[22] Patterns of this piety had already emerged in the preceding centuries, and henceforth the Prophetic model increasingly moved among Muslims into the core of personal and collective efforts to strengthen the individual and to renew and expand Islamic culture and politics.

In general terms, piety can be understood as a personal and often affective commitment and effort to realise certain religious ideas, values and instructions in individual and collective life through a specific way of living. It includes both the living practice itself and its reflection and propagation.[23] The three volumes aim to highlight the Muslim attachment to the Prophet and the attempts at his representation in quite diverse individual and collective ways of living, based on both affective and intellectual bonds, within and beyond the Muslim world. This broad concept of a "Prophetic piety" includes both religious practice and doctrinal and institutional settings. It also extends to literary genres like prayer, praise poetry, juridical and Sufi treatises, to literature and the arts, and also to the political sphere.[24] For all its manifold forms and expressions, attachment to the Prophet can be found mainly in the three key modes of *imitation*, *identification*, and *interaction*, which may serve as a taxonomy for the categorisation of Prophetic piety.

Throughout history, Muslims have emphasised the salience of *imitating* the Prophet Muḥammad as an "excellent model" (*uswa ḥasana*, Qurʾān 23:21) for personal behaviour as well as for public action, by accepting his message and following his *Sunna*. The focus later shifted to his acceptance as the best of human beings, to the duty to love him and to acquire as many traits as possible of his noble character. The above-mentioned concept of the "Muḥammadan

21 For an overview see Reichmuth, "Aspects of Prophetic Piety"; for the Safavid and Mughal empires, Moin, *Millennial Sovereign*.

22 See Subrahmanyam, "Du Tage au Gange au XVI^{e} siècle".

23 Hamm, "Frömmigkeit als Gegenstand theologiegeschichtlicher Forschung", 466. For a general discussion about the ambiguity of the term piety and the difficulty of defining it in a Christian context, see Fassbinder, "Frömmigkeit". For an influential study on modern Muslim female piety, see Saba Mahmoud, *Politics of Piety*.

24 Reichmuth, "Aspects of Prophetic Piety", 129f.

Light" as the first creation (found already with al-Tustarī, d. 283/896) reflected a cosmological turn in the view of the Prophet which developed among Sunnīs through close exchange with Shīʿī thought. The shift towards a more personal orientation vis-à-vis the Prophet, which found its most articulate expression in the twelfth century with al-Qāḍī ʿIyād (d. 544/1149) and his *Kitāb al-shifāʾ*, was to deepen over the following centuries. It can be observed that even those critics of Sufism who fiercely struggled against Muḥammad's cosmic and superhuman idealisation came to share an increasingly "Prophetocentric" worldview with their adversaries. Their strong emphasis on the human character of the Prophet, whose biography and tradition reach a paradigmatic role for nearly all aspects of daily human life, can today be observed among Sufis, Islamists, and in the discourse of the global *daʿwa* alike. With this "Sunnatisation of lifeworlds",[25] imitation of the Prophet has become important in the construction of modern Muslim individual and collective identities worldwide.

Building on this imitation, the Prophet and also his family (*ahl al-bayt*) became central figures of *identification* and pride and a source of authority among Muslim individuals and communities. Whether religious scholars and jurists, Sunnī or Shīʿī religious leaders, Sufis, reformists, and even rulers, they all directly or indirectly identified as heirs of the Prophet and in this way derive legitimacy as his rightful successors as well as transmitters and trustees of his heritage. This often involved the claim to a calling as a "renewer" (*mujaddid*) of the *Sunna* and of the Muslim community, and also of an authentic representation of the Prophet himself. The identification with the person of the Prophet also remains strong in the secular political movements of the twentieth century, and even in Muslim accounts of his life which show their – sometimes rather critical – engagement with Orientalist scholarship.[26]

Claimants of Prophetic authority often undergirded their cause through the ownership and use of Prophetic relics and vestiges (hair, teeth, footprints, mantles, swords, banners), ignoring the strong reformist critique against such uses. The bodily visualisation of these items functions as a powerful tool in order to create an aura of protection and blessing for the owner and the audience through their immediate and physical presence. A direct identification with the Prophet, and "living links" to him are also offered by his descendants (*al-sāda al-ashrāf*), who, as mentioned above, have often enjoyed a special social and religious status as bearers of his outward and inward perfection,

25 See for this Malik in Malik and Hinnells, eds., *Sufism in the West*, 3.

26 Like those of Muḥammad Haikal (d. 1956), *Ḥayāt Muḥammad*, and Hisham Djait (b. 1935), *al-Waḥy wa-l-Qurʾān wa-l-nubuwwa*; *Tārīkhiyyat al-daʿwa*. On Djait and his views on the Prophet and the Qurʾān see Sinai, "Hisham Djait".

moral purity, and blessing. From the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, the number of claimants to Prophetic descendance and their impact on social and political life increased tremendously across various societal spheres in the Islamic world, henceforward strongly shaping Muslim society and culture as they could enhance Islamic legitimacy through a sanctified genealogical link to the Prophet.

Many Muslim individuals and communities, finally, show a desire for *interaction* and communication with the Prophet in prayers, dreams and visions and also in recitations of his sayings or of poetry in his praise, which seems to have increased during the early modern period. Dreams and visions continue to have a special role in Islam as the only part left of prophecy (*mubashshirāt*), and as a crucial element of personal religious experiences evoking the Prophet's presence (according to widespread theological conviction the Prophet is believed to remain alive in his grave)[27] and even allowing for union with him. Literary reports about such encounters abound throughout history, and they are still searched for, transmitted and discussed today in pious circles of both Sufi and Salafi orientation. Believers secure personal access to relics, vestiges, and historic places connected with his life, surround themselves with calligraphic representations of his names and his reported personal appearance (*ḥilya*), and constantly say the benediction upon him (*al-ṣalāt ʿalā an-nabī*) whenever his name is mentioned. Hope and prayer for his intercession (*shafāʿa*) at Judgement Day and his approachability for calls for help (*tawassul, istighātha*) in everyday life became dominant, though often contested, theological issues. Poems in praise of the Prophet (*madīḥ* or *naʿt*) were since the later middle ages conceived as precious gifts to him, connected with the hope to be rewarded with his intercession for author, performers and audience alike.

The artful recitation of poetry in praise of the Prophet, performed especially on his birthday (*mawlid*), thus became a powerful means of bringing about an encounter with him. The auratic character (on which see above) of the ensemble of discursive and sonic performances can evoke profound sensations, like the feeling of being moved to his tomb in Medina.[28] The aforementioned transmission and recitation of the Prophet's sayings appears to convey a similar auratic impression to Sufis, non-Sufis and anti-Sufis alike; an impression that does not seem to be diminished by its "technological reproducibility", quite in contrast to what Walter Benjamin would describe for the fate of art in modern society.[29]

27 Meier, "Auferstehung Muḥammads".

28 Eisenlohr, *Sounding Islam*.

29 Benjamin, *Kunstwerk*; Rochlitz, *Disenchantment*.

3 Thematic Overview of the Three Volumes of This Series

The first volume of the series focuses on the figure of the Prophet as presented and discussed in Islamic knowledge and doctrine, which was constructed and progressively established in the formative age of Islam, and further re-read and re-appropriated in early modern and modern times. As mentioned above, the reconstruction of these formative doctrinal elements and their impact required a good number of thematic recourses to earlier Islamic times. Doctrinal developments are viewed in this volume in interaction with the different modes of aesthetic representation of the Prophet in literature and the arts. Here, as in the field of doctrine, the focus is on the tension between the divine and human realms, connected in the person and message of the Prophet, and their mediation in different forms of textual and aesthetic representation. The complementary focus joining doctrinal, literary and artistic perspectives has only rarely been attempted until now. It promises to provide fresh insights into the interplay of knowledge and culture in Muslim communities, both in their historical and contemporary dimensions.

The theme of the second volume is the role played by the heritage and model of the Prophet Muḥammad as a successful and divinely guided war leader and statesman, which inspired many Muslim communities of different times and regions in their manifold and often opposing political projects. This included the foundation and running of imamates, sultanates and rural and tribal federations, right down to the modern nation states and to secular political movements. Special attention is given to the descendants of the Prophet and their leading roles in various societal spheres, and their emergence as political leaders and founders of states in different parts of the Muslim world, especially in the early modern period.

The volume equally highlights another important dimension of the Prophetic model. That is his significance for the self-empowerment of Muslim individuals and communities in their resistance against foreign powers, and even against their own governments. Reference to his model and life served to justify an opposition that often included the elaboration of radical political ideologies and of militant action. It has also frequently come up in communal struggles, and in the attempted founding of Islamic states by militant Islamic movements in recent times. The image of the Prophet thus appears as a mirror of the conflictual forces within contemporary Muslim societies, and of their strained relationships with the non-Muslim world.

The third volume, by interlacing historical and anthropological approaches, explores the different practices of piety and devotion connected with the Prophet, whether as individual activities or as group expression. Its focus is on festivals and celebrations, especially those of the Birthday of the Prophet

(*mawlid al-nabī*) in different countries, religious and social milieus. The volume also discusses the debates around these celebrations and other forms of veneration of the Prophet and his descendants, which have gained in vigour over the last century and have created a novel Muslim debate over the ways of thinking of the Prophet and of connecting with him, in contexts which are strikingly different from those of the medieval polemics.

The volume also highlights the impact of the Prophetic model on individual and collective identity formation among Muslims. The focus will be particularly on Western Europe, and on the role of the Prophet for Muslim religiosity in European secular societies. Other forms of Muslim attachment to the Prophet will also be discussed. They include the devotion to his reputed bodily traces and relics, which survives until today in many parts of the Muslim world, the articulation of his presence in reported dreams and visions, and the religious and emotional framework connected with benedictions for him and with poetry and chanting in his praise.

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The Prophet between Doctrine, Literature and Arts: Introduction to Volume 1

Denis Gril, Stefan Reichmuth and Dilek Sarmis

The Muslims' relationship with the Prophet Muḥammad, as reflected in their daily lives, in devotional practice, in scholarly, legal and political activities and in literary and artistic expression, largely derives from a rich doctrinal and cultural heritage that was shaped over the centuries by diverse societal and regional contexts. Approaching this relationship therefore requires taking full account of the plurality of, and sometimes competition between, different representations of the Prophetic figure, and of the changing modalities of Prophetic piety over the course of Islamic history.

The first volume in the series is devoted to the figure of the Prophet as it was established and transformed since the beginnings of Islam, then throughout the Middle Ages and in modern times, up to the turn of the twentieth century. This volume aims to show that doctrinal representations of the Prophet are inseparable from those prevailing in literature, music and the visual arts, and that both doctrinal and aesthetic images of him have existed in a state of constant interaction. Along with the general focus of the French-German project on the Prophet in the mirror of his community in the early modern and modern periods (see the General Introduction above), this volume also discusses earlier doctrinal, spiritual and literary developments that retained their importance in the development of the image of the Prophet and for Muslim piety in later times. The studies largely go back to two conferences held by the project in 2017, with some additional contributions which were specially requested.[1] With its combined attention paid to doctrinal, literary and artistic expressions, the volume will hopefully shed new light on the interactions between the different cultural spheres in Muslim societies, and it will confirm – if need be – the artificial nature of any division between learned and popular religious orientation and practice.

1 *Between God and Man: The Representations of the* Prophet *in the Construction of Islamic Knowledge*; Paris, 5–6 July 2017, https://prophet.hypotheses.org/workshop-paris-july-2017; *Between God and Man: Representations of the Prophet in Literature, Arts, and Media*; Bochum, 9–10 November 2017, https://prophet.hypotheses.org/between-god-and-man-representations-of-the-prophet-in-literature-arts-and-media.

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Without even attempting to be exhaustive, this first volume seeks to underline the diversity of the scholarly, literary and artistic forms of representation of the Prophet in various temporal and cultural contexts and in different parts of the Muslim world, with a clear preponderance of Arabic and Turkic literatures. Some of the contributions concern a specific time and place, while others highlight the maturation of doctrines and the adaptation of topics and genres to novel requirements in a diachronic perspective. The volume thus includes a wide range of representations of the Prophet, from the Qurʾān and the early *maghāzī* literature to literary samples and devotional and calligraphic artefacts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, combining in-depth case studies with overview articles. By juxtaposing the development of Sufi orientations towards the Prophet with the place given to him, along with ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib in Twelver and Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism, and with the very specific views of the Muslim philosophers on prophethood, this book seeks to open up perspectives on the cross-connections between multiple attitudes towards the figure of the Prophet. The literary and artistic expressions of veneration and love for the Prophet which have been gathered here, might likewise offer a promising field for further comparative research on the actualisation of his presence in different cultural, medial and linguistic settings in the course of Muslim history.

The volume's five sections begin with a focus on the representations of the Prophet in Qurʾān, *ḥadīth* and *sīra/maghāzī* literature and their cultural embedding in Muslim societies (Part 1). This is followed by a closer look at the developments leading towards a theology of veneration of the Prophet in Sunnī Islam (Part 2). The images and functions of the Prophet in Shīʿī doctrine and in Islamic philosophy are then presented in a comparative perspective (Part 3). The two concluding sections discuss the poetic exaltation of the Prophet across different Islamic literatures (Part 4), and the strikingly common characteristics of his aesthetic representation in literary, scriptural and pictorial imagery (Part 5).

This structural and thematic approach made it impossible to bring all the contributions into a strictly diachronic arrangement, which would show an undeniable progression and deepening of scholarly and devotional prophetology and an increasing personal attachment to his person. Nevertheless, within each section, a certain chronological order has been observed to illustrate such a development as closely as possible. Along with its thematic perspectives, the book thus documents an observable historical process, albeit one that appears to have been far from continuous. There was no shortage of reactions to manifestations of devotion deemed excessive over the centuries; reactions which, however, have followed their own Prophet-centred agenda and have only belatedly reversed a pious trend that had been largely driven by Sufism

over centuries. In many respects such anti-Sufi prophetologies can be seen as belonging to the same trend towards a Prophet-centred piety that they otherwise detested. It is in the second volume, devoted more specifically to the early modern and contemporary periods, that these controversies are more fully discussed.[2]

In general terms, this first volume attempts to reflect some of the early developments of Islamic prophetology and devotion and their fanning out into different fields of doctrinal, literary and artistic expression. With the Qur'ān and the early *maghāzī* literature as points of departure, the underlying historiographical framework first touches the period between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. It can be considered as formative both for the emergence of a prophetological doctrine encompassing elements of *fiqh*, *kalām* and Sufism, and for a turn in Sufism itself which attempted to explore and imitate the "inner states" (*aḥwāl*) of the Prophet for its journey towards God. This is also the period when the concept of the "Reality" (*ḥaqīqa*) of the Prophet as a metaphysical and cosmogonic principle gained its strength and maturity.[3] Quite significantly, the celebrations of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid al-nabī*) were also established during that period, first by the Fatimid rulers of Egypt in the eleventh century and then, in a different way, by Sunnī rulers.[4] Such an interplay between the different Sunnī and Shīʿī doctrinal and devotional traditions also made itself felt in prophetological thought in later times with the adaption of Sunnī theosophical ideas by Shīʿī theologians and philosophers.[5]

The next focus is on the period between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, with its flourishing culture of *ḥadīth* transmission and scholarship, its unprecedented abundance of literary expressions of Prophetic praise and devotion, and the emergence and flourishing of pictorial representations of the Prophet.[6] A time which equally saw the transformation of the *Khaṣā'iṣ al-nabī* literature from a legal to a devotional literary genre.

The last period covered by this volume includes studies related to authors and devotional and artistic developments from the seventeenth to the nineteenth (and in one case twentieth) century, with a focus on the Ottoman realm and on Morocco. Veritable cultures of Prophetic piety can be identified for both Ottoman and Moroccan societies during these times, which

2 *Heirs of the Prophet: Authority and Power in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam*, edited by Rachida Chih, David Jordan, and Stefan Reichmuth.

3 See for this in particular Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints*, 134–50.

4 Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday Festival*; Holmes Katz, *Birth of the Prophet Muhammad*.

5 See for this e.g. Knysh, *Sufism: a New History*, 36–44, 106ff.

6 Hazan, *Le prophète Muhammad*; Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*; Gruber, *The Praiseworthy One*.

are documented here by Sufi writings, by the literary genre of the Ottoman *miʿrāciye*, in the pious and artistic uses of the *ḥilye* (i.e. the description of the Prophet's appearance and character) in Ottoman lands, and in Moroccan calligraphic art.[7] Scholarship on the Biography (*sīra*) of the Prophet can be found taking on an encyclopaedic outlook, reacting, so it seems, to increasing criticism of the Muslim pious traditions and practices. At the same time, devotion to the Prophet seems to have become a remarkable catalyst for both literary and artistic activities in this period.

The rather selective thematic profile of our volume can only provide some explorative perspectives on a general chronological framework for the history of Islamic prophetology and Prophetic piety. Such a framework remains to be fully worked out; for the first Islamic centuries as well as for the early modern and modern periods until the present.

1 Part 1. Images of the Prophet in Qurʾān, *ḥadīth*, and *sīra/maghāzī*, and Their Cultural Embedding

The first part of the book opens with studies on the image of the Prophet as presented in the Qurʾān and in other early foundational texts of Islam and of Islamic historiography, which highlight the tension between the ordinary human nature of the Prophet, and his universal mission and authority over the destiny of mankind. At the same time, it attempts to trace the embedding of this image and the negotiation and transmission of the Prophetic tradition in Muslim cultural life in different historical contexts.

While the usefulness of the Qurʾān as a source for a historical biography of Muḥammad has been questioned, it nevertheless has much to say about the Prophet, sometimes touching on highly personal matters. Without going into the current controversies about the beginnings of the Qurʾānic text and its early development, we can nevertheless note that the Qurʾān, in its final form as a *textus receptus*, seems to contain, both explicitly and allusively, many of the themes that are discussed in the three volumes of our series. As Denis Gril shows in *The Prophet in the Qurʾān: An attempt at synthesis*, the mentioned tension between the human nature of the Prophet and the superhuman aspects of his mission pervades the whole book. His Lord sometimes treats him severely, reminding him of his powerlessness and of his election. It is because he is a humble servant of God that he has been distinguished to receive the revelation and to be taken away to see "some of Our signs" (Q 17:1) and has become

7 This could certainly be further documented for other regions like Central and South Asia.

"a beautiful model" (Q 33:21) for his followers. The Qurʾān establishes a certain form of identification between the Prophet and the other prophets, a mirror effect which in the tradition will turn into an outspoken superiority, particularly with regard to the *miʿrāj*. On the other hand, the text very clearly enjoins believers to devote full obedience and profound veneration to the Prophet. It therefore forms the basis for much of what our research seeks to bring out in the writings, practices and experiences of Muslims.

If the Qurʾān emphasises above all the mercy of the Prophet, it nevertheless sometimes also shows him as a leader and combatant in an uninterrupted chain of military expeditions, a role in which he is found in the *sīra* throughout the Medina period. Adrien de Jarmy argues that the emergence and development of the *maghāzī* literature describing the battles of the Prophet and his successors enhanced this representation as a war leader. He observes that this coincided with the transition period between the Umayyad and Abbasid regimes, which saw increased pressure on the borders of the empire (*Dating the Emergence of the Warrior-Prophet Character in the Maghāzī Literature* (*Second/Eighth – Fourth/Tenth Century*). In this context of a revived *jihād* against external enemies, the refocusing of the Islamic narrative on the figure of the Prophet as a fighter in defence of his community and a guarantor of its cohesion, the nascent *maghāzī* and *sīra* literature became part of a general trend that can also be identified in early jurisprudence.

The transmission of Prophetic Traditions remained of major importance for Muslim scholarship and religious life long after the establishment of the canonical collections of *ḥadīth*. The dynamics of this persisting institutional as well as extra-institutional transmission after these collections has remained a rather neglected theme in Islamology.[8] Caterina Bori offers an illustration of this open-ended process in *Ḥadīth culture and Ibn Taymiyya's controversial legacy in fifteenth century Damascus: Ibn Nāṣir al-dīn al-Dimashqī and his al-Radd al-wāfir*. She recalls the whole "culture of *ḥadīth*" that can be observed since the Ayyubid period in Damascus, and that created a community of *ḥadīth* transmitters and scholars who by their *isnād* links strove to remain in a lasting connection with the Prophet. As in the case of Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī (d. 842/1438), director at the Madrasa Ashrafiyya, a leading institution for the teaching of *ḥadīth* in Damascus, and his defence of Ibn Taymiyya, this community was

8 See for this e.g., Davidson, "Carrying on the Tradition". With view to the persistent search for sound Prophetic Traditions outside the canonical collections, and to the controversial discussion of canonised *ḥadīth* material that has been going on until the present, one could even argue that the canonisation of *ḥadīth* itself was never fully concluded.

also seen as maintaining its attachment even to more controversial members. Nāṣir al-Dīn, contemporary and friend of Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), resolutely defended the *mawlid* celebrations against Ibn Taymiyya's fierce criticism. At the same time, he could afford to accept the legitimacy of the latter's honorific title of *shaykh al-islām*, for his valuable contributions to the scholarly and devotional activities of this group of *ḥadīth* transmitters. As a basis for personal and collective links to the Prophet, *ḥadīth* could thus play an integrative and conciliatory role within the religious milieu of fifteenth century Damascus.

The *sīra* fulfils a similar but broader function, by telling of the exemplary and incomparable life of the founder of Islam, attempting to satisfy a scholarly as well as a more general readership. It is also a conciliatory role that Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen brings out for the *sīra* written by the Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī (d. 1044/1635) at the beginning of the seventeenth century (*"There is matter for Thought". The episode of the Night Journey and the Celestial Ascension in the* Sīra ḥalabiyya). Tributary of the earlier *sīra*s, in particular those of Ibn Sayyid al-Nās (d. 734/1334) and al-Ṣāliḥī (d. 942/1536), Ḥalabī draws on many other sources. He reworks a rich Mamluk heritage in order to recast it in his own version. The section on the night journey and the heavenly ascension illustrates how the author, a lawyer, theologian and Sufi, seeks to reconcile the different versions of the story, to give a satisfying explanation to its controversial elements and to bring out its spiritual dimensions. From a certain point of view, "the *Sīra ḥalabiyya* portrays the author as much as the Prophet." But it is no less true that al-Ḥalabī quite successfully responded to the expectations of his audience. The *sīra* and, through it, the Prophetic figure serve as a mirror for the believers; and the superiority of the Prophet, evident in the story of *isrā'* and *miʿrāj*, radiates upon his entire community.

2 Part 2. Towards a Theology of Devotion to the Prophet in Sunnī Islam

The emergence and standardisation of a fully-fledged Islamic prophetology can be regarded as a major theological change in Sunnī Islam, that is attested for the sixth/twelfth century. It went along with a gradual shift from doctrinal to devotional orientation vis-à-vis the image of the Prophet. The history of Sufi teaching and practice already shows this increasing focus on the Prophet and his example since the fourth-fifth/tenth-eleventh centuries, a development that in later times led to the emergence of a Sufi trend that attempted to cultivate an education for a spiritual life in the presence of the Prophet himself.

Ruggero Vimercati-Sanseverino analyses al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's classical book *al-Shifāʾ bi-taʿrīf ḥuqūq al-Musṭafā* and its comprehensive prophetological synthesis (*Theology of veneration of the Prophet Muḥammad: Knowledge and love in the* Shifāʾ *of al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ* (*d. 544/1149*)). The author, Qāḍī of Sabta/Ceuta under the late Almoravids, marshals for this several disciplines: *ḥadīth, sīra, dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*kalām*). By demonstrating the high rank of the Prophet and his status as God's elect among the creatures, he reminds the believers that, according to *ḥadīth*, the love of the Prophet is a condition of faith and thus becomes a religious duty. Although only God knows the true value (*qadr*) of His messenger, Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ explains to the Muslims how to find in the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* sufficient reasons for the veneration and love of the Prophet, by referring to his virtues and his excellent character, to his miracles as well as to his promised intercession at the day of judgement. The *Shifāʾ* thus reinforces the Sunnī idea of a community of believers united in the love of the Prophet for attaining happiness in both worlds. Unquestionably, the book has contributed greatly to the rise of a prophetic piety whose modes of diffusion and expression are discussed in this volume.

In his *"Special Features of the Prophet"* (Khaṣāʾiṣ nabawiya): *From Jurisprudence to Devotion*, Michele Petrone outlines the evolution of a literary genre that was extracted from the religious source texts. It elaborated and discussed the legal privileges (*khaṣāʾiṣ*) granted to the Prophet to the exclusion of the rest of mankind. This genre was first cultivated in particular by Shāfiʿī jurists interested in a clarification of the legal implications of these *khaṣāʾiṣ*. It later came under the influence of other categories of writings on the Prophet, such as the *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* of Khargūshī (d. 406/1015–6) and the *Shifāʾ*, and other writings which emphasised the superiority of the Prophet over the rest of mankind. The three works of Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) reflect the different stages and indeed a turning point of this shift from the juridical to the devotional domain, finally focusing on the Prophet's centrality in the whole cosmos and on his spiritual role for mankind. The Sufi influence on the genre, also expressed in poetical contributions like those of ʿĀʾisha al-Bāʿūniyya (d. 922/1517), further expanded during the Ottoman period, when it came to provide materials for prayer books like those of Ibn ʿAẓẓūm of Kairouan (d. 959/1552).

Which place does the reference to the Prophet occupy among the early spiritual masters of Islam? Based on the biographical material collected in the *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* of Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1037), Pierre Lory states that, for the early representatives of the movement of renunciation (*zuhd*) in the first two Islamic centuries, the love of God seems to be exclusive, the Qurʾān shows the way to Him, and the *sunna* serves to attain an inner conformity to the teaching of the Prophet. (*Modèle prophétique et modèle de sainteté dans le*

soufisme ancien: quelques exemples). Sufism would later deepen the concept of *walāya* and to develop it into a "friendship with God". Lory identifies a hagiographic vision of *walāya* as sainthood and sacred heritage, which includes the Companions of the Prophet, the first ascetics and the early Sufi masters. A turning point is marked by the assimilation of the Sufi tradition of Baghdad to that of Khurāsān, as testified by the *Lumaʿ* of Sarrāj (d. 378/988). Emphasis was now increasingly placed on the imitation (*ittibāʿ*) of the Prophet and the internalised observance of the prophetic model, including his legal prescripts, his manners (*ādāb*) and virtues (*akhlāq*), his spiritual states (*aḥwāl*), and his insight into the higher realities (*ḥaqāʾiq*). But this did not go as far as in later Sufism, and the early orientation towards the One God Himself was vigorously maintained.

The focus of Sufi instruction on the Prophet gained unprecedented force in the twelfth/eighteenth century in the book of the Fāsī scholar Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak al-Lamaṭī (d. 1156/1743) on the teachings of his illiterate master ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh (d. 1132/1719). This is discussed by Jean-Jacques Thibon (*L'éducation par 'la lumière de la foi du Prophète' selon le shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh* (*m. 1132/1719*) *d'après le* Kitāb al-Ibrīz *de Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak* (*m. 1156/1743*). Noting, like Pierre Lory, that there is little reference to the Prophet in ancient and classical Sufism, he also mentions the growing institutional expression of the master-disciple relationship along the model of the Prophet and his companions from the twelfth/thirteenth century onwards. He observes that, in al-Lamaṭī's book, the old centrality of the Sufi master gives way to a direction of the disciple towards a spiritual education leading to the living and transforming presence of the Prophet himself. Spiritual education according to this author and his Sufi master was to be based on the capacity of the disciple to form a direct link to the Prophet. Al-Dabbāgh, the illiterate saint claiming Khaḍir, the itinerant prophet, as his master is quoted with often highly original guidance and advice, and for his own continuing relationship with the Prophet. From this experience he derived a peculiar concept of Sufi training (*tarbiya*), supposed to lead the disciple via the master into the immediate presence of the Prophet, who would then occupy his entire mind and horizon. The influence of this book came to be widely felt in the Muslim world. It testifies to a culmination of Prophet-centred mystical doctrine and piety that can be documented for different parts of the Sunnī world between the seventeenth and the early nineteenth centuries.[9]

9 For this see, among others, Meier, "Mystic Path"; and his *Taṣliya in sufischen Zusammenhängen*; also Radtke, "Sufism in the Eighteenth Century"; Reichmuth, "Quest for Sufi Transmissions"; Chih, *Sufism in Ottoman Egypt*, 84–92.

3 Part 3. The Prophet in Shīʿī Doctrine and in Islamic Philosophy

In the first two sections, the figure of the Prophet, in its various aspects, is considered from the point of view of the foundational texts and of some of the disciplines of knowledge that directly spring from their interpretation (such as *fiqh* and *kalām*), and with respect to his growing centrality in Sunnī devotional life and in Sufi thought and practice. The third section turns to other doctrinal configurations in Twelver Shīʿism, Ismāʿīlism, and philosophy, which combined strands of cosmological thought with a salvation history based on reputed hidden knowledge of the Prophet and his descendants (in the case of Shīʿism) or with a general framework of a universal ethical and political order for mankind (in the case of the philosophers).

Whereas in Sunnism a cosmic and esoteric reality of the Prophet took several centuries to be commonly accepted, this dimension appears in Shīʿism from the very beginning as the foundation of the doctrine of the imamate and the *walāya* (to be roughly translated in the Shīʿī context as "friendship" and "trusteeship"), and its necessary connection with prophethood. The founding narrative of Shīʿism closely linked the Prophet to his family and descendants, especially to ʿAlī and the Imams as trustees of the hidden meaning of the revelation. For all their historical differences, Twelver Shīʿism and Ismāʿīlism continued to share this relational structure of the doctrine of the Imamate.

Philosophy maintained a special position towards the Prophet and towards Islamic knowledge and doctrine as a whole, as it had to adapt its doctrines, which were derived from Greek and Hellenistic sources, to the Islamic tradition. It may be said that the result was a figure of the Prophetic law-giver and ruler that appeared more functional than personal.

If Sunnism, and Sufism in particular, acknowledge a particular closeness of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib to the Prophet and accept his excellence in virtue and knowledge, this cannot be compared to his place in Shīʿite doctrine as Muḥammad's closest ally and friend (*walī*) and his designated trustee and inheritor (*waṣī*). His status as "God's Friend" (*walī Allāh*) is made explicit even in the Shīʿite profession of faith, and Shīʿī veneration for ʿAlī and his descendants, the imams, came to outweigh the respect paid to the Prophet himself. The way in which the relationship between the Prophet and ʿAlī is expressed in Twelver Shīʿism follows to some extent its history and its general intellectual development, as Mathieu Terrier shows in his chapter, *The Prophet Muḥammad in Imami Shīʿism: Between History and Metaphysics*. The life of the Prophet is inextricably connected with that of ʿAlī and his family and descendants, with whom he shares his primordial and luminous reality, and his central role in a salvation history of suffering. But Shīʿism does not neglect the figure of the Prophet,

whose life prefigured the historical fate of ʿAlī, his sons and the other Imams: he predicted their death and died of poison himself. As the founding principle of revelation, he is also connected with them on the metaphysical level, where the imams are regarded as the actualisation of the Prophetic original potentialities. His veneration thus remains inextricably linked to that of the Imams.

Despite its similarity to Imamism, the doctrinal vision of the Ismāʿīlī authors concerning revelation and prophethood, which is described in the overview presented by Daniel de Smet (*The Prophet Muḥammad and his Heir ʿAlī: their historical, metahistorical and cosmological roles in Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism*), appears first and foremost to be shaped by the concept of a sacred and cyclical history. Some of them tended to equate the "Five" (i.e., Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn) with cosmic principles structuring the universe. Fāṭimid ideologues, bent on maintaining the hierarchical precedence of the Prophet, regarded his relationship to ʿAlī in analogy to that between male and female, reflecting "pen" (*qalam*) and "table" (*lawḥ*) of the original creation. Later Nizārī authors placed the authority of ʿAlī over that of the Prophet. Their doctrine also found expression in a triad consisting of ʿAlī, Muḥammad and Salmān. ʿAlī's esoteric knowledge represented divine authority for them, and he took clear precedence over Muḥammad, with Salmān serving as the "Proof" (*ḥujja*) of the Imams. Nizārī authors expected a future unveiling of the Imam's quasi-divine reality and finally the abolition of the Law. Among the Ṭayyibites, closer to the Fāṭimid stock, a certain balance was maintained between the Prophet, his Trustee, and the Imams, between their human nature (*nāsūt*) and their veiled reality in the divine sphere of the universal intellect (termed here *lāhūt*).

The concerns of the Muslim philosophers with respect to the Prophet are summarised by Meryem Sebti in her *La dimension éthique et politique de la révélation prophétique chez les falāsifa*. It was not the historical or sacred figure of the Prophet which interested them, but rather the question of what it means in philosophical terms to have among men the bearer of a law of divine origin. Al-Kindī saw the Prophet Muḥammad as an embodied perfection of intellectual and rhetorical ability, as bringer of a Law that ensured a virtuous life for mankind. Fārābī also considered the ethical and above all the political dimension of the revealed Law. For Avicenna the preservation of the "Virtuous City" depended more explicitly on revelation, and on prophecy as the perfection of the human soul in its theoretical and practical dimensions. The efforts of the philosophers to bring philosophy and religion into harmony found their culmination with Averroes. Perhaps more than his predecessors, he insisted on the need to maintain the teachings of religion for success in this world and for salvation in the other, as well as for the preservation of the community. The Prophet's mission was to bring otherwise unattainable knowledge and laws to

mankind. For Averroes and for his philosophical predecessors, the role of the Prophet and of religion itself thus seems to have been above all of a practical, ethical and political nature.

4 Part 4. The Splendour of Words: Exaltation of the Prophet in Islamic Literatures

The image of the Prophet that was conveyed by the foundational texts of Islam as well as by theology, jurisprudence, Sufism and philosophy, deeply permeated the Muslims' general orientation and beliefs. It shaped sensitivity, heightened hope, nurtured reverence and aroused love for a Prophet who was perceived as close to the believers and to their community at large. The increase in Prophetic piety that can be observed since the sixth-seventh/twelfth-thirteenth centuries is all the more evident in poetry, *belles-lettres* and in the arts, as they affected both intellectual and aesthetic sensibilities. The art of letter writing, long elaborated by the chanceries of the Muslim states, came to be used to address even the Prophet himself. The narrative of the Prophet's Ascension (*miʿrāj*), in turn, particularly inspired poets as well as miniaturists. The stylistic wealth and diversity of the poetry in praise of the Prophet, which was taking root in a multitude of different languages, shows the extent to which he had moved to the centre of poetical imagination and virtuosity. This poetry also became a cherished object of musical performance in the art of *samāʿ*.

The devotional use of the epistolary genre for addressing the Prophet, which enjoyed particular popularity in al-Andalus and in the Maghreb, is described by Nelly Amri in her article on the famous scholar, *adīb* and statesman Lisān al-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb (*'I have commissioned her to fly to you on the wings of my ardent desire'. Letter to the Prophet written by Lisān al-Dīn b. al-Khaṭīb (d. 776/1375) on behalf of the Naṣrid ruler of Granada*). For the Andalusians and North Africans, letters addressed to the Prophet were a means of expressing their longing for the distant holy cities and their love for the Prophet, and of asking him for his help and intercession, as pilgrims otherwise do during their *ziyāra* to his tomb. Ibn al-Khaṭīb brought this literary genre to perfection in letters written on behalf of a ruler of Granada, whose realm was increasingly threatened by his Christian neighbours. The request for divine assistance through the mediation of the Prophet was ever more urgent. Recalling the Medinese roots of the Naṣrid dynasty (tracing itself back to the Anṣār) also serves to enhance their legitimacy. Apart from this political context, the letter conveys a widely shared "Prophetic culture" centred around the holy cities, the life and mission of the Prophet, his virtues and his primordial reality, his support in this world and his

intercession in the other. It also includes a more personal imagination of an interior *ziyāra* as a journey of the heart.

Brigitte Foulon adds a study of three further poems in praise of the Prophet written by Ibn al-Khaṭīb during his stay in Morocco (*Les poèmes d'éloge du Prophète de Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khāṭīb*). She recalls that, after the life of the Prophet, eulogies were rather addressed to members of his Family by poets of Shīʿite tendency. It was not until the sixth/twelfth centuries, particularly in Andalusia, that poems in praise of the Prophet came to be written again. In the following century, the *Burda* of Būṣīrī (d. around 695/1296) marked the blossoming of this literary genre. Its links to the commemoration of the *mawlid* gave rise to a derivative branch of its own, the *mawlidiyyāt*, in which Ibn al-Khaṭīb also distinguished himself, like many poets of his time in Andalusia and Morocco. In the Marinid kingdom, these manifestations of the veneration of the Prophet went along with the growing importance of his descendants, the *ashrāf* or *shurafāʾ* in the social and political sphere. In these poems the whole art of the panegyrist consists in reorienting the themes of the classic *qaṣīda* towards the thwarted but sublimated desire to meet the Prophet, finally culminating in his praise and in a plea for his help.

The literature of the stories of the night journey and the celestial ascension of the Prophet, inspired by allusions in the Qurʾān and by the longer narratives attested in *ḥadīth* and *sīra*, constitutes one of the most eloquent testimonies to the cross-cultural veneration of the Prophet.[10] Marc Toutant demonstrates this in his article on the *miʿrāj* in Timurid court literature (*Timurid Accounts of Ascension* (miʿrāj) *in Türkī. One Prophet, Two Models*). The choice of Eastern Turkish, and of the Uyghur alphabet in the case of the first text, illustrates the importance attached by the Timurids to their Genghisid origins. The first text, which is abundantly illustrated, closely renders the traditional story with its first-person narrative, and ends with a vivid description of Paradise and Hell, with obvious moral intentions that tie in with the political program of Shāhrūkh (1405–1447). The five *miʿrājiyya* poems of Mīr ʿAlī Shīr Nawāʾī (1441–1501), court poet and chief adviser of the next Timurid ruler Ḥusayn Bayqara (1469–1501) in Herat, pursue an entirely different line. Inspired by the major Persian poets Sanāʾī (d. 1131) and Niẓāmī Ganjawī (d. early seventh/thirteenth century), the author describes the *miʿrāj* as a mystical journey of love (*safar-i ʿishq*) through the cosmos with its heavens and planets, leading to the vision of God and ending in a "non-place" beyond existence, where all duality has vanished. The dissemination of these two different, but by no means contradictory,

10 Cf. Gruber and Colby, eds., *The Prophet's Ascension*.

types of narrative went far beyond the Timurid court, and both seem to have met the expectations of much wider audiences.

Alexandre Papas tracks the remarkable continuity of the Ottoman *miʿrāciyye* in verse or prose from the fifteenth century until the final period of the Ottoman Empire (Miʿrāciyye: *The Ascension of the Prophet in Ottoman literature from the fifteenth to the twentieth century*). These texts are characterised by a relative simplicity of style, which served their didactic scope. The authors, most of them connected with or influenced by Sufism, presented the *miʿrāj* as a spiritual ascent. Over and again, they return to the questions raised by the Prophet's ascension: did it take place in a dream or awake, in body or in spirit? What was the nature of this encounter and exchange with God? The age-old debates about the reality of the celestial ascension had not been brought to a close and could be re-opened with any new intellectual turn: consequently, the figure of the Prophet remained a contested heritage. The Ottoman *miʿrācnāme* or *miʿrāciyye*, often including praise (*naʿt*) and descriptions of the Prophet (*ḥilye*), did not cease until the end of the Empire to contribute to the renewal of Ottoman literature, exalting the Prophet with poetic musicality, conveying a feeling of celestial harmony and of beatific joy that makes one think of a Mevlevī *semāʿ*. In the last phase during and after the *Tanẓīmāt*, apologetic interests came increasingly to the fore.

Mohamed Thami El Harrak's overview article brings us to contemporary Morocco, heir to a long tradition of religious poetry, song and music, where the Prophet constitutes the axial topic (*Présence du Prophète dans l'art du panégyrique* (madīḥ) *et de l'audition spirituelle* (samāʿ). *Approche thématique*). These poems are recited or sung in mosques, *zāwiya*s, mausoleums or private houses, and during important public or private events. They accompany Muslim life from the cradle to the grave. The repertoire goes back to various periods and regions, from the Near East as well as from al-Andalus and the Maghreb, including classical poetry, Andalusian *muwashshaḥ* and *zajal*, and Moroccan dialectal poetry (*malḥūn*). The typology of themes – which often go together in a poem – distinguishes *mawlidiyyāt* (narrating birth and childhood of the Prophet); *shamāʾiliyyāt* (evoking his outer appearance and inner qualities); *taṣliyāt* (prayers on the Prophet); *muʿjizāt* (on his miracles); *ḥijāziyyāt* (expressing the longing for the visit of his tomb in Medina), and *istishfāʿiyyāt* (asking for his intercession). The author furthermore divides the poems into more popular *madīḥ* (praise) for larger audiences on the one hand, and into Sufi *samāʿ* on the other. *Samāʿ* is restricted to Sufi circles and much more allusive and exuberant in its language of bacchic (*khamriyya*) or erotic (*ghazal*) poetry. The poetic and musical performance evokes and celebrates the beauty (*jamāl*) of the Prophet and expresses and invites joy (*faraḥ*) and love (*maḥabba*) for

his person. This interplay of esthetical perception and religious emotionality might serve as an exemplary case for the cultural embedding of Prophetic praise, with obvious parallels in other Muslim regions and literatures.

5 Part 5. The Prophet in the Mirror of Verbal, Scriptural and Pictorial Imagery: Aesthetics and Devotional Uses

Together with its rich poetic imagery, the representation of the Prophet also came to involve visual elements, whether in the form of figurative illustrations enhancing his memory and majesty, of calligraphic compositions evoking his name and description, or in the display of acknowledged relics like his mantle, sandals or footprints which served to conjure his symbolic presence.[11] Such visual displays also involved his assimilation to ritual practices that were accepted as Islamic but, at the same time, included patterns that were clearly inherited from earlier religious traditions. Calligraphy and book art also served to enhance the aesthetic effect of texts dedicated to the memory and glory of the Prophet, and the beauty of letters, words and texts might appear as his own beautiful reality, reflected by the heart and hand of the calligrapher. Textual descriptions, calligraphic compositions and painted images were thus merging in the figure of the Prophet, as visual or textual icons in the service of devotional imagination. This interplay of verbal, pictorial and calligraphic iconography can be found as far back as the thirteenth century, when depictions of the Prophet are first attested. The tendency moves from his naturalist depiction to veiling and to further spiritualisation and abstraction, and finally to a notable preponderance of calligraphic and verbal icons and abstract forms and symbols representing Muḥammad.[12] Devotional aesthetics may endow them with the aura of sacred objects, which radiate their blessing and sacralise their surrounding space as well as their owners and visitors.

The reality and image of the Prophet according to the theologian and poet ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), by Samuela Pagani, leads us to a leading Sufi figure of Ottoman Syria in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), representative of the school of Akbarian Sufism and imbued with the mystical poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235), was a highly prominent Damascene scholar and spiritual master and, at the

11 See the overview in Gruber, *The Praiseworthy One*, 302f.

12 See the introduction to Gruber, *Praiseworthy One*, 3–33 for an overview of this long-term development. She also notes that the veiling of the face of the Prophet began only with the Safawids in the sixteenth century (p. 20).

same time, one of the most productive poets of his time. Both his Sufi teaching and his poetic oeuvre have the luminous "Muḥammadan Reality" (*ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*) as their main axis, which can be experienced in dreams or visions in a waking state, linked to the intermediary sphere between the spiritual and material worlds (*barzakh*), where divine and higher realities take on visible forms. In such visions the Prophet can be perceived in an authentic way, either in his physical appearance as described in *ḥadīth* (the so-called *ḥilya*), or in purely symbolic and imaginary forms. This is where poetry with its rhetorical figures (*badīʿ*) and images comes in to exalt the "Muḥammadan Reality" in the language of love and passion. For Nābulusī, the interior immersion in the presence of the Prophet justifies all forms of devotion and can manifest itself even in Christian imagery, as attested in his own poems. Pagani draws remarkable parallels between his theory of a spiritual and symbolic Muḥammadan imagery and the Christian theology of iconic images, as developed in Arabic already by Abū Qurra (d. 830), bishop of Harran, in an Islamic context.[13] She also refers for this to ʿAbd al-Ghanī's substantial intellectual exchange with one of the leading Christian Orthodox bishops and theologians of his time in the Levant.

Christiane Gruber reconstructs a ritual practice involving glass bottles filled with devotional objects and ornaments, among them a calligraphic description of the Prophet, which survive in the Palace Library at Topkapı and elsewhere and which in some cases can be dated to the early nineteenth century (*The Prophet as a Sacred Spring: Late Ottoman* Hilye *Bottles*). The gilded *ḥilye* panels which were included together with poetic texts represent a highly popular calligraphic icon of the Prophet, based on a famous *ḥadīth* of ʿAlī who describes his appearance and character. In one of the samples, a miniature Qurʾān is included instead. The bottles, whose scrapped gold dust remains were collected and used for curative procedures, can be related to a whole set of practices consisting in impregnating or even absorbing *materia prophetica* in order to benefit from its blessing and its prophylactic and healing effects. In Istanbul, the water used to wash his relics like the footprints of the Prophet and his cloak was equally collected and distributed for such uses. Gruber furthermore draws a parallel to the Christian Orthodox icon bottles and to the veneration of sacred fountains (Greek *hagiasma*, Turkish *ayazma*) in Istanbul itself, in which Muslims also participate. This shows the common anchoring of such practices in local culture. The bottles also prove that devotion to the

13 On the impact of Christian iconography on the imagery of the Prophet in Ilkhanid painting in the fourteenth century, Gruber, *Praiseworthy One*, 92ff, 105ff, 120.

Prophet touched all classes of society, from the Palace of Topkapı to the popular districts of Istanbul.

Along similar lines, Thomas Heinzelmann analyses three life stories and eulogies of the Prophet that were among the most widely read texts in the Ottoman Empire (*Visualising the Prophet – Rhetorical and graphic aspects of three Ottoman-Turkish poems* (*Süleymān Çelebi's* Vesīlet en-Necāt, *Yazıcıoġlı's* Risāle-i Muḥammediyye, *and Ḫāḳānī's* Ḥilye). Composed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they were widely copied and distributed, consecrated as pious foundations, and read but also viewed to admire their layout and beautiful calligraphy, which was deemed to be worthy of the beauty of the Prophet. Some unique abstract illustrations symbolising the Prophet and his Companions are also attested. The three books were written by authors of diverse backgrounds, all of them, however, representatives of an Ottoman spiritual book culture centred on the figure of the Prophet. The *Risāle-i Muḥammediyye* was the object of particular veneration. The original, kept at the author's mausoleum in Gelibolu (Gallipoli), was constantly copied. One of these copyists, the famous Sufi scholar Ismā'īl Ḥaqqı (m. 1137/1725), was also keen to reproduce, from the original, the drawing of the "Banner of Praise" (*liwā' al-ḥamd*), an eschatological symbol of the Prophet's intercession. The manuscripts show that, over the centuries, such images were touched and kissed, and thus used for a physical contact with the Prophet, which was sought for blessing and salvation, testifying to the use of such abstract images as devotional icons.

As indicated above, calligraphy itself could also serve as a medium for identification with the Prophet and for an immersion in his message. The fusion of mystical experience and calligraphic expressivity is brought out for al-Qandūsī (d. 1278/1861), a Sufi herbalist and calligrapher who lived and died in Fes, by Francesco Chiabotti and Hiba Abid (*The World of al-Qandūsī* (*d. 1278/1861*). *Prophetology and Calligraphy in Morocco* (*first half of the nineteenth century*). Attracted from his Algerian home *zāwiya* to Fes by the presence of its founder, Moulay Idrīs, Qandūsī earned his life as a drug-seller. He remained dedicated to his ecstatic and visionary experience and to his calligraphic activities that uniquely show the impact of his contemplations. His case is also important for his personal reflections on the all-compassing "Muḥammadan Reality", which shaped his personal experience as well as his struggles with the calligraphic form of the letters. His efforts led to the development of a unique and quite spectacular calligraphic style which is now highly appreciated in the Maghreb. Qandūsī saw himself in hidden but close contact with the Prophet and even considered the name Muḥammad as the Supreme Name of God. The calligraphic and codicological analysis of his works shows how the design and tracing of the letters, especially for the name Muḥammad, combined

the expressive potentials of the Maghribī script with the inventiveness of the visionary, where the wonders of the eye and the devotion to the Prophet would feed off each other.

6 Concluding Remarks

Reading the studies in this volume will show how much their themes and findings intertwine and converge, despite their different sources, disciplines and historical and regional contexts. The "theology of veneration", elaborated by the Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, enhanced a reverential attitude of love towards the Prophet, which was interpreted by a great scholar like Ibn al-Khaṭīb with great brilliance as an heir to the long Andalusian tradition of epistolary eloquence and poetic refinement. Much later, the poetry and metaphysics of the Muḥammadan Reality were expressed in a similar language of love passion. The narratives of the *mawlid* and *miʿrāj* transmitted by traditionalists, such as Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, and arranged and argued later in the *Sīra ḥalabiyya*, fed into the register of the Moroccan singers, just as they inspired the imagination of Timurid and Ottoman poets. Spiritual fulfilment could be expressed in the *miʿrāj* model (as in the poems of Nawāʾī), in musical performances celebrating the beauty of the Prophet, and in Qandūsī's visionary calligraphy.

As already stated at the beginning, a recurring theme of the volume is the interplay between the human and the divine aspects of the Prophetic Reality. The Qurʾān constantly recalls the human nature (*basharīyya*) of the Prophet while alluding to the pristine light which he embodies, and his closeness to God. It thus sacralises his presence. This double face of the Prophetic person, one immediately perceptible, the other more veiled, is encountered at several levels. Ancient Sufism distinguishes between the external and internal aspects of the *sunna*, complementary but inseparable in the imitation of the Prophet. The distinction between the exterior and the interior (*ẓāhir/bāṭin*) dimensions runs through many contributions. It can be traced as much to these two divine names as to the attitudes toward the Prophet himself, and it might also be reflected in the literary genres and their attunement to their popular or initiated audiences, as in the case of the Timurid *miʿrāj* texts. Personal predilections of the respective authors also played their role here, as in the case of Ibn al-Khaṭīb's letters to the Prophet or of Ḥalabī's *Sīra*. From this point of view, Shīʿism, in its ancient spiritual version, and Ismailism occupy a place apart from but consistent with this foundation of Muslim spirituality: the external and internal faces of reality veil and complement each other. In the

case of Shīʿism, Muḥammad as Prophet was largely identified with the exoteric aspects of the revelation, whereas ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and the Imams became the guardians of its esoteric dimension. In Sunnī spirituality, mediation passes, if not exclusively, at least mainly through the Prophet. But the role of the Shīʿīs as forerunners of pious emotional and ritual practice related to the Prophet, as in the case of the *mawlid* celebrations, still remains a matter for further research.

Esoteric vision cannot be separated from more essential functions of the Prophet, such as his intercession at judgement day for all believers. It may be expressed in terms reserved for an elite but nevertheless concerns the whole community when an Ismāʿīlī author like Muʾayyad al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī compares the relationship between the Prophet and ʿAlī to that of a male-female couple and their position vis-à-vis the believers as that of father and mother. The set of stories that have nourished the *Sīra* literature, especially those of the battles and warlike expeditions, aims at uniting the community in the face of the trials that it has to face. The *miʿrāj* narratives highlight the superiority of the Prophet over all his peers and magnify his sublime rank above them. Explicitly or implicitly they also affirm the primacy of the Muḥammadan community over the earlier ones. The evolution of the *khaṣāʾiṣ* literature also goes into this direction. In a more subtle way, the author of the *Sīra ḥalabiyya* also intended to unite the community around its Prophet, by discussing and harmonising narrative variants and diversities of interpretation. The Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, in promoting "the veneration of the value of the Prophet" pursued a comparable goal which, judging by the success of his *Shifāʾ*, was largely achieved. Strangely enough, this integrative function of the Prophet for the Muslim community is not much reflected in the sources themselves; with the notable exception of the philosophers (*falāsifa*), who show themselves to be strongly interested in the ethical and political role of the Prophets as lawgivers for the "Virtuous City", and of the Prophet Muḥammad for the Muslim polity.

As indicated above, a major starting point for our collective research was the observation of a general increase of Prophetic piety since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which strongly gained in momentum in the early modern period and still persists in different and sometimes diverging forms to this day. This went along with a growing personal and collective focus on the metahistorical reality of the Prophet, which has emerged before in esoteric teaching. In early Sufism up to the eleventh and even the twelfth century, the exclusive love of God blurred the love of the Prophet, which was only later advocated as the major way to God. This trend seems to be undeniable, even if it still requires closer periodisation and contextual embedding. The role of the *Kitāb al-Shifāʾ* as a watershed in this respect becomes clearer now, and its contribution to the

emergence of a Prophetic model of spirituality in Sunnī Islam, which coincided with the diffusion of the writings of Ghazālī, in the West as elsewhere, should obviously be re-evaluated.

In the blossoming of a "Prophetic culture" in which scholarly literature, Sufism, poetry, arts and devotional practices were intertwined, the period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries was crucial, and it was to have a strong impact on the next centuries. The later Ottoman and Moroccan cases, which are discussed in this volume, show a further intensification of the individual commitment to the Prophet in mystical, literary and artistic activities. The studies suggest that personal identification with the Prophet could sometimes go far. At the same time, an expansion and diversification of the devotional patterns of Prophetic piety can be documented, and its expressions clearly increased in fervour. The tendency towards a symbolic and abstract allusion to the Prophet, which evokes his presence and blessing in pictorial as well as in expressive calligraphic forms, has already been highlighted for Ottoman art since the seventeenth century;[14] it is further confirmed in this volume and can also be extended to Morocco. Even if not discussed here, oral as well as written poetry in praise of the Prophet also greatly increased in a growing number of languages in the early modern period,[15] a process that continues to the present day and which will be further addressed in Volume Three.

This volume does not deal with the reactions and polemics against the Sufi doctrines of the Muḥammadan Reality, and against the devotional practices that went along with them.[16] These criticisms, which have gained in public acceptance and political virulence in the course of the twentieth century, will be further discussed in the other volumes (especially in Volume Two). In the face of Salafī/Wahhābī "elephants in the room" in so many Muslim states and societies, and also in research on contemporary Islam, the studies gathered here will hopefully help the reader to overcome the prevailing backward-looking tunnel vision dominated by a search for Salafī and "reformist" predecessors of the present state of Muslim culture.[17] It should have become clear by now that religious and political trends, even "liberal" or "secular" ones, which crystallised since the late nineteenth century in Muslim social and political life, owed as much to the growth of Prophet-centred pious trends as to the

14 Gruber, *The Praiseworthy one*, 269–303.

15 Many samples and quotations from such poetry in different languages can be found in Schimmel, *Und Muhammad ist Sein Prophet*; Sperl and Shackle (eds.), *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia & Africa*.

16 See for this e.g. Lewis, *Balance of Truth*; Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*.

17 For a fierce critique of the prevailing focus on Wahhābism in the historiography of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Islamic scholarship, see Dallal, *Islam without Europe*.

active contributions of both Sufis and their adversaries.[18] The responses of this Prophetic piety to the transformations of the Muslim lifeworlds and polities in early modern and modern times remain a topical and indeed urgent matter for further inquiry.[19] In any case, the interplay between doctrine, literature and arts, that has been the topic of this volume, clearly shows that Muslim individuals and communities all over the world have continued to reflect and define their own identity in the mirror of the Prophet and his established biography, and in the beauty and grandeur of his celestial experience.

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PART 1

Images of the Prophet in Qurʾān, Ḥadīth*, and* Sīra/Maghāzī*, and their Cultural Embedding*

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1

The Prophet in the Qurʾān

An Attempt at a Synthesis

Denis Gril

"Only the proclamation is incumbent upon the Messenger." (Q 5:99)[1] This verse relieves the Prophet of all responsibility in the reception of the message. However, in this restrictive form it could lead one to imagine that his mission, above all, was to perform this transmission. But the Qurʾān assigned many other functions to the Prophet. He was the first to receive the divine Word, and was constantly called upon to recite it.[2] The presence of the Prophet in the Qurʾān also manifests itself in other ways; above all in the stories of prophets that are addressed to him personally, or in allusions to his own history and that of his people and his opponents, in Mecca or in Medina.

Muḥammad is merely a man, and at the same time he is God's elect: "Glory be to my Lord! Am I aught but a human being, a messenger?" (Q 17:94) Although his humanity is affirmed, and all possibility of confusing it with divinity is swept away, there is no shortage, in the Qurʾān, of allusions to the exceptional graces that God offers him. Along with the numerous missions that he is charged with, the praise of him in the Qurʾān explains the veneration accorded to the Prophet, both during his life and through subsequent centuries. The *sunna*, and particularly the hadiths in which the Prophet speaks of his own election, have also contributed to a nurturing of love and respect for his person; a study such as the present one should complement this. The Qurʾān's discourse explicitly concerning the Prophet is already very dense; in addition, we will have to examine and interrogate the parts that relate to him implicitly. This will allow us to provide a picture of the relationships between Muḥammad and the other prophets.

We will look at the Qurʾān as a whole, as it has been received by believers from the moment it took shape as a book, and we will sometimes take

1 This chapter is a condensed version of one that will appear in a forthcoming collection of articles, 'Ecrits sur le Prophète'. We have removed a number of citations and references to similar Quranic verses. The translations of these verses are taken from Hossein Nasr ed. *The Study Quran.*

2 334 verses or phrases begin with the imperative: 'Say!' (*qul*).

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into account its division into Medinese or Meccan Suras or verses insofar as this makes sense for our purposes. Our approach is analytical and thematic, attempting to provide an account of all that the Qur'ān says about the Prophet. This study was undertaken in the framework of a collective project of research into the ways in which Muslims have seen the Prophet in his human and metahistorical reality, from the origins of Islam to the present day. The current contribution asks: how did the Qur'ān, the first witness of the prophetic presence and its representation, inform these ways of seeing?

In our thematic presentation we move from the explicit towards the implicit. We begin with the Qur'ān's insistence on the Prophet's humanity, in order to observe how the Revelation takes charge of his person, that it might assume diverse functions (going well beyond the transmission of the message): for his people, for his community and for all of humanity. The gift of election that God gives him, in his closeness to God and to his Word, then determines the forms of his presence in the community of prophets and in his own community.

1 An Ordinary Man?

1.1 *A Man Like Any Other*

In the Qur'ān it is said to the Prophet that "Surely thou wilt die, and surely they will die" (Q 39:30). Like all the other prophets, he must eat and go to market to obtain food (Q 25:7 and 20). The Qur'ān reminds him of his imperfections and limitations: before receiving the Revelation he was unaware of it, and he must fear God's punishment if he contravenes His commandments (Q 6:15). He has no understanding of the course of events, and cannot do either good or harm to himself (Q 7:188), or to anyone else (Q 73:21). Given the task of announcing the Final Hour, he doesn't know its timing any better than anyone else does, and would be unable to hasten its advent (Q 6:58). Sometimes he experiences doubts (Q 10:94); he is not immune to the criticism and challenges that are aimed at him. In fact, his humanity and the weaknesses inherent in it play an essential role in his prophetic mission.

1.2 *A Human Being and an Envoy*

The affirmation of his humanity goes with a parallel affirmation of his mission: "Say, 'I am only a human being like you. It is revealed unto me that your God is one God. So whosoever hopes for the meeting with his Lord, let him perform righteous deeds and make no one a Partner unto his Lord in worship.'" (Q 18:110). This verse simultaneously affirms the Prophet's humanity and reminds believers of what is required of them. In order to take on his function

and serve as an example to humanity, the Prophet must be part of humanity. The combined insistence on the fact that the Prophet and prophets in general were men like any others, and on their prophetic missions, also answers a possible objection: why did God chose such a man to exercise this supreme authority? When challenged to produce miracles, the Prophet is obliged to reply: "Glory be to my Lord! Am I aught but a human being, a Messenger? And nothing hindered men from believing when guidance went unto them, save that they said, 'Has God sent a human being as a Messenger?' Say, 'Were there angels walking about upon the earth in peace, We would have sent down upon them an angel from Heaven as a Messenger.' Say, 'God suffices as a Witness between you and me. Verily, of His servants He is Aware, Seeing.'" (Q 17:93–96). The prophetic mission springs from God's election and from divine science.

1.3 *Does the Prophet Sin?*

The Qur'ān does not affirm that the Prophet is without sin; in the Medinese context it only promises him protection for the accomplishment of his mission: "O Messenger! Convey that which has been sent down unto thee from thy Lord, and if thou dost not, thou wilt not have conveyed His message. And God will protect thee (*ya'ṣimuka*) from mankind …" (Q 5:67). Weakness is part of the human condition, and the Prophet, like all men, must ask God's forgiveness for his weaknesses: "Know then that there is no god but God, and ask forgiveness for thy sin and for the believing men and the believing women …" (Q 47:19). It is true that the Sura *al-Fatḥ* (Victory) offers him absolution from all sin: "Truly We have granted thee a manifest victory. That God may forgive thee thy sins that went before and that which is to come, and complete His Blessing upon thee with a mighty help." (Q 48: 1–4). However, this promise does not contradict the mention of actions that the Prophet is reproached for – on the contrary. God warns him against those in Mecca who would seek to distract him from his strict fidelity to the Revelation (Q 17:74–75). In the Prophet's case, his failings are often providential; for example, bearing witness to his meekness and revealing the truth about the 'hypocrites' who did not take part in the Tabūk expedition: "God pardon thee! Why didst thou grant them leave before it became clear to thee who spoke the truth and who the liars were?" (Q 9: 43) If the Prophet was sheltered from Satan's suggestions, the Qur'ān would not request that he ask for protection: "And should a temptation from Satan provoke thee, seek refuge in God. Truly He is Hearing, Knowing." (Q 7:200). He is taught a prayer for protection, one that believers then appropriate for their own uses: "And say, 'My lord! I seek refuge in Thee from the incitements of the Satans. And I seek refuge in Thee, my Lord, lest they should be present with me.'" (Q 23:97–98).

2 The Training of a Prophet

The Prophet is exemplary because he is the elect, but also because of what he learns from the Qurʾān. Like a benevolent but intransigent teacher, the Qurʾān trains its disciple; it commands and forbids, exhorts and admonishes, counsels and consoles. One cannot train others without first having oneself been trained.

2.1 *Following the Revelation*

The Prophet will only be followed if he follows the Revelation himself: "… Say, 'I only follow that which is revealed unto me from my Lord …'" (Q 7:203). He must adhere firmly to its tenets (Q 43:43) and keep himself from following the inclinations of his own soul, or any other opinion not founded upon the Revelation (*hawā*, pl. *ahwāʾ*). In the Meccan Suras the Qurʾān insists that he avoid all compromise with polytheists; in the Medinise Suras he is told not to follow the ideas of the People of the Book (Q 6:56–57 and 5:48).

2.2 *The Demands of the Revelation*

The Prophet, once trained by the Qurʾān, must observe a certain decorum towards the Revelation. Even if most of the stories recounted in the Qurʾān are familiar from earlier books and traditions, he must cleave to what has been revealed, without reference to the People of the Book, as, for example, he is told regarding the Companions of the Cave (Q 18:22–23). Despite his desire to receive the Revelation, he must not try to hasten it (Q 75:16–19). In order to receive and transmit it, he must be completely taken over by God and renounce all individual effort. The *ʿAbasa* (He Frowned) Sura reproaches him with having turned away from one of his companions, who was poor and blind, in order to speak with a rich Qurayshite whom he wanted to convince. The nobility of his motives is insufficient to justify such an attitude (Q 80:1–12). He is shown a path that always leads to poverty, the renunciation of his freedom of choice, and conformity to Divine command.

2.3 *The Prophet is Taken under His Lord's Wing*

Called to follow the Revelation, the Prophet receives instructions that can be general or specific, positive or negative. Each believer can also receive these, though they concern the Prophet primarily, and make of him a being whose entire life is directed and controlled by his Lord: "Say, 'I have only been commanded to worship God, and to not ascribe partners unto Him. Unto Him do I call and onto Him is my return.'" (Q 13:36). Outwardly and inwardly his orientation must follow Abraham's model as restorer of the primordial and immutable

religion: "Set thy face to religion, as a ḥanīf, in the primordial nature from God upon which He originated mankind – there is no altering the creation of God. That is the upright religion, but most of mankind know not." (Q 30:30). This is a request for the instigation of ritual prayer (for example, Q 17:78–82), and for a ritual re-orientation in the direction of the Kaʿba (Q 2:144), and comes from a discourse addressed first and specifically to the Prophet.

The night prayer (*qiyām al-layl*) is among the obligations imposed on the Prophet. The first verses of the *al-Muzzammil* (The Enwrapped One) Sura address him thus: "O thou enwrapped! Stand vigil at night, save a little, half of it, or add to it; and recite the Qur'ān at a measured pace. Truly We shall soon cast upon thee a weighty Word. Truly the vigil of the night is firmest in tread and most upright for speech. For truly by day you have lengthy affairs. So remember the Name of thy Lord and devote thyself to Him with complete devotion – Lord of the East and the West, there is no God but He, so take Him as a guardian (*wakīl*).' (Q 73:1–10).

The final verse of this Sura, which was evidently inserted during the Medinese period, calls on the elite among believers to practice such a prayer in the way that the Prophet did. The Qur'ān teaches him to adore God, as he will himself teach his companions.

Often, and only in Meccan Suras, the call to adore and glorify God comes after an order to be patient and endure troubles. Patience (*ṣabr*), combined with confidence in God (*tawakkul*), is among the cardinal virtues of the prophets. The Qur'ān inculcates these in the Prophet in the form of imperatives – "Be patient!", "Trust in God" – the way a master addresses a disciple to shape his character and show him the path he must follow. In the same way, Muḥammad receives orders: "So be steadfast, as thou hast been commanded – and those who turn in repentance along with you – and be not rebellious." (Q 11:112). The fact of holding oneself upright, or of rectitude (*istiqāma*), conforming perfectly to God's orders, brings together all of the virtues to which the Prophet, and the believers who follow him on this path of perfection, must lay claim.

2.4 *Amendments to the Prophet's Character*

Even though the Qur'ān praises the Prophet for the happy predispositions of his character (*khuluq*), he must nevertheless persevere in the acquisition of what Muslim tradition calls the "noble virtues" (*makārim al-akhlāq*). The necessary amendments to his character concern his relationships with God and with humankind, and relate particularly to his transmission of the message: "Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation. And dispute with them in the most virtuous manner …" (Q 16:125). This divine training of the Prophet is even more evident when it applies to his relationship with his

Companions. Even when they unreservedly recognise his authority, he must, especially in difficult situations, still take into account their weakness. In this respect, the Prophet is simply modelling his own behaviour on that of God towards humanity; this is the absolute foundation of Qurʾānic ethics: "Then [it was] by a Mercy from God that you were gentle with them. Hadst thou been severe [and] hard-hearted they would have scattered from about thee. So pardon them, ask for forgiveness for them and consult them in affairs. And when thou art resolved, trust in God, truly God loves those who trust." (Q 3:159).

2.5 *The Prophet Reprimanded*

The Prophetic mission demands unfailing engagement. But the Prophet is not immune to doubt: "So if thou art in doubt concerning that which We have sent down unto thee, ask those who recite the Book before thee. The truth has certainly come unto thee from thy Lord. So be thou not among the doubters. And be not among those who deny the signs of God, lest thou shouldst be among the losers." (Q 10:94–95). This is a powerful warning, perhaps intended to purify the messenger's soul. If so, how do we understand this next admonition, which is even more radical, concerning, as it does, faith in the one God? "And let them not turn thee from the signs of God after they have been sent down unto thee. But call to thy Lord and not among those who ascribe partners unto God. And call not upon another god along with God. There is no god but He …" (Q 28:87–88). One may, along with some commentators, read such verses as being addressed to the Prophet as the first recipient of a discourse ultimately intended for all of humanity. Or one may see in this a more personal teaching, a purification in the Prophet of all internal orientation towards anything other than God.

We can also ask why, in the sequence of orders and interdictions in *Sūrat al-Isrāʾ* (Q 17:23–39), some are addressed to the Prophet and others to a "thou" that designates all of humankind. The warnings addressed in the second person imply that the Prophet's own behaviour and character have already been perfected by Revelation: "And let not thine hand be shackled to thy neck; nor let it be entirely open, lest thou shouldst sit condemned, destitute. Truly thy Lord outspreads and straightens provision for whomsoever He will. Verily of His servants He is aware, seeing." (Q 17:29–30). The practice of virtues such as generosity must remain measured, without the vanity of attempting to rival divine qualities. In the search for science, as in the external attitude, humility always remains the primary quality for the servant: "And pursue not that whereof you have no knowledge. Truly hearing, and sight, and the heart – all of these will be called to account. And walk not exultantly upon the earth; surely

thou shalt not penetrate the earth, nor reach the mountains in height. The evil of all this is loathsome unto thy Lord." (Q 17:36–38).

2.6 *Renunciation*

Although the Qur'ān provides the Prophet with all sorts of virtues, it also takes away any hope for him of guiding humanity, despite the fact that this is the sum of the message that has been confided to him. Muḥammad experiences the painful and paradoxical proof of this when God refuses to send him the miraculous signs that his people challenge him to produce: that water should spring from the ground, the sky should fall, God and the angels appear, a palace should be decorated, that he should be elevated to the heavens and bring back a book (Q 17:90–93), and many more. The Qur'ān's response to this is invariably: what good are external signs (*āyāt*), if humanity does not believe in the signs/verses of the Book, and if they don't recognise that God has sent them a messenger? God alone can open the eyes of faith and bring belief in His signs, whether these consist of miracles or of the Revelation itself. The Prophet would nevertheless like to receive one or more miraculous signs, like those sent to the prophets whose stories are told in the Qur'ān, but he is told that this did not prevent those prophets, like him, from being called imposters. In the verse on the nocturnal journey (*isrā'*), nothing about the miraculous events is attributed to the Prophet: "Glory be to Him who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. Truly He is the Hearer, the Seer." (Q 17:1). The Prophet is not only stripped of all agency, but also of any initiative in the perception of the signs; it is really God who has heard and seen.

2.7 *The Prophet Must Avoid Standing between God and Humankind*

This paradox becomes more extreme when the Prophet is tasked with a mission that appears impossible: how can he call people to God if God has not opened their hearts to faith? In the Meccan Suras, the Qur'ān reproaches the Prophet with having so despaired that his life itself is endangered: "Yet perhaps thou wouldst destroy thyself with grief for their sake, should they believe not in this account." (Q 18:6). The Prophet must admit that God's command and his own wisdom do not necessarily agree: "Had God willed, He will have gathered them all to guidance – so be not among the ignorant." (Q 6:35). Here again the warning is a severe one, and even though the Prophet has been sent to guide humankind, it is made explicit to him: "Surely thou dost not guide whomsoever thou lovest, but God guides whomsoever He will …" (Q 28:56). Any guidance comes only from God's grace – and the Prophet is again challenged: "And had

thy Lord willed, all those who are on earth would have believed all together. Wouldst thou compel men till they become believers?" (Q 10:99). Through the Revelation and the trials and accusations he must face, the Prophet is ordered, directed, corrected, exhorted, deprived, and even erased; there are no concessions, he is moulded and trained by an absolute exigency. This process is aiming to make him the inwardly perfect servant of God, as much as it is preparing him to take on the various functions relating to the mission of a Prophet (*nabī*) and a messenger (*rasūl*).

3 The Missions of the Prophet

3.1 *Warning, and Announcing the Good News* (nadhīr, bashīr)

According to tradition, one of the very first revelations directed the Prophet was thus: "O thou who art covered, arise and warn (*fa-andhir*)!" (Q 74:1–2). The earliest Suras revealed in Mecca often appear as warnings: the end of the world, the imminence of Judgement Day, short evocations of peoples who were punished for rebelling. It is said of the Prophet, as he faces his people's denial: "Thou art only a warner (*nadhīr*)." (Q 11:12) In pre-Islamic Arabia, the *nadhīr* was the one who warned his tribe of imminent danger. This term is quickly paired with *bashīr*, the one who announces good news – in the tribal context, the person who announces a victory over another tribe, or the arrival of a caravan, or who goes to meet the caravan (Q 12:96, about Jacob). These two terms are often associated, in either order, and doubles such as *mundhir* and *mubashshir* occur frequently too. The very numerous occurrences in the Qurʾān of words derived from the roots *N-DH-R* and *B-SH-R*, in their respective meanings of warning and good news, would merit a study in themselves. They are almost always used about the Prophet, who, like other prophets, has the double function of warner and announcer of good news; God, the angels and the Qurʾān also perform these functions. The fact that these tasks have been delegated to the Prophet makes him the interpreter of divine justice and mercy.

3.2 *Prophet and Messenger* (nabī, rasūl)

What shades of meaning, what differences exist between these two terms designating the person whom God has chosen among men to receive and transmit his Word? The act of receiving is more closely related to prophecy (*nubuwwa*) and to the transmission of the prophetic mission (*risāla*), which is the transmission of a message (*risāla*). The Prophet is called *al-nabī*, or addressed by this term, in his relationships with his family members, his Companions, and with people in general, whereas *al-rasūl* often pre-supposes an interaction based on

an authority associated with that of God. One frequently finds it alongside the name of God in the expression "God and His messenger" (*Allāh wa rasūluhu*), which is not the case for *nabī*. In any case, the transmission of the message is the work of the *rasūl*: "O Messenger! Convey that which has been sent down unto thee from thy Lord." (Q 5:67). In his mission to transmit, the Prophet passes on the entirety of the Word that has "descended" into his heart via Gabriel and according to a process described in the *al-Shuʿarā'* (The Poets) Sura: "And truly it is a revelation of the Lord of the worlds, brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit, upon thine heart – that thou mayest be among the warners – in a clear Arabic tongue. It is indeed in the scriptures of those of old." (Q 26:192–196). The oral nature of the Prophet's passing on of what he has received is underlined by the repetition of the imperatives: "Say!" (*qul*), "Recite!" (*iqra'*) in the first revelation (according to tradition) (Q 96:1 and 3), or of *utlu* "Recite!", which mostly introduces the accounts of the holy story (Q 5:27 etc.).

The fact that the Messenger's role is that of simple transmission does not mean that while playing it he does not perform, at least occasionally, some mediation between the Enunciator of the Word and those for whom it is destined. The questions that are asked of the Prophet, and the responses that are revealed to him, make this process a locus of interaction between the divine and the human. "They question thee about the Hour, when it will set in. Say, 'Knowledge thereof lies only with my Lord. None save He shall manifest it at its proper time. Heavy shall it weigh upon the heavens and the earth. It shall not come upon but suddenly.' They question thee as if you knew it well. Say, 'Knowledge thereof lies only with God, but most of mankind knows not.'" (Q 7:187). In the Medinese Suras, especially *Baqara* (The Cow), the Prophet is interrogated on the subject of the Law,[3] to such an extent that a verse occurs to put the brakes on this inclination towards questions about the details of the Law, with which the children of Israel are reproached: (Q 2:67–71 and 108): "O you who believe! Ask not about things which, if they were disclosed to you, would trouble you. And if you ask about them when the Qur'ān is being sent down, they will be disclosed to you. God has pardoned this and God is Forgiving, Clement." (Q 5:101).

Although the Revelation defines itself as a clear (*bayān*) expression, the Book and the verses being qualified as "enlightening" (*mubīn*, *bayyināt*, *mubayyināt*), the Prophet is also given the task of making it more explicit: "… And We have sent down the Reminder (*al-dhikr*) unto thee that thou mightest clarify

3 Q 2:189, 215, 217, 219, 220, 222; 5:4; 8:1. The expression *yastaftūna-ka*, 'they ask you your opinion on …' introduces responses to questions on the Law, on orphans, and on inheritance in the absence of direct heirs (*kalāla*); Q 4:127 and 176. From this we get the term *fatwā*.

(*li-tubayyina*) for mankind that which has been sent down unto them, that haply they may reflect." (Q 16:44). This clarification can be understood as an explanation of a particular verse, or else as the exemplary nature of a life that conforms to the Revelation; the Prophetic *bayān* thus prolonging the transmission of the message.

3.3 *Calling on God*

"Say, 'This is my way, I call unto God with clear sight – I, and those who follow me. Glory be to God! And I am not among those who ascribe partners unto God.'" (Q 12:108). Unlike prophecy and the prophetic mission, which come about only through divine election, the call unto God (*al-daʿwa ilā llāh*) is something that those who follow the Prophet's path can take on. However, the phrase on transcendence that concludes this verse suggests that, even when given to humanity, this function remains in the power of God alone. This is why the Prophet is named "one who calls unto God by His Leave" (Q 33:46). This asking for leave (*idhn*) guarantees that the call will be made in the name, and the sight, of God. The Prophet is entrusted with a message and sent back to mankind.

3.4 *Reminding, Purifying, Teaching*

The Revelation is a call and a reminder. The Qur'ān calls itself *dhikr*: memory, mention, invocation, recall and reminder. In the *Maryam* Sura, the Prophet is told: "Mention (*udhkur*) in the Book Mary …", and similarly for Abraham, Moses, Ishmael and Enoch (Idrīs) (Q 19:16, 41, 51, 54 and 56). This could also be translated as: "Remember …" because the *dhikr* is at once an interior act and an enunciation. In its factitive form the verb *dhakkara* takes the meaning "reminding". While the Prophet is told of the limits of his humanity, he also receives an order to remind people who resist the Revelation of what they have forgotten – their ultimate fate: "We know best that which they say. Thine is not to compel them. So remind, by means of the Qur'ān, those who fear My Threat." (Q 50: 45).

The Prophet's role with regard to believers is not limited to transmitting the Word. The impact of his recitation transforms them inwardly, and they learn the letter of the text and its meaning at the same time, as well as how to put it into practice: what the Qur'ān calls "wisdom" (*al-ḥikma*): "Even as we have sent among you a Messenger from among you, who recites Our signs to you and purifies you, and teaches you the Book and Wisdom, and teaches you what you knew not." (Q 2:151). In the case of compulsory charitable giving, purification on the material level, as well as the spiritual, is obtainable through the Prophet: "Take thou a charitable offering from their wealth, cleansing them

and purifying them thereby (*tuṭahhiru-hum wa tuzakkī-him bi-hā*), and bless them. Truly thy blessings are a comfort for them." (Q 9:103).

4 Revelation and Authority

It is the reception and transmission of the divine message that confer upon the Prophet the authority to found a new religion and community. This authority is also affirmed in the Qur'ān's replies to the Prophet's adversaries who, in Mecca, had rejected belief in an afterlife, and accused him of being possessed by a djinn, of being a magician, poet or diviner; in Medina they contested his status as the Elect or refused the new order that he founded.

4.1 *Belief in God and in His Prophet; Obedience to God and His Envoy*

In the creed, the claim of divine unity takes the form of a negation, while the recognition of the Prophet's mission is completely affirmative: "There is no god but God, Muḥammad is the Messenger of God". In the Qur'ān, faith in God and in the Prophet is expressed positively: "So believe in God and His Messenger and the light We have sent down. God is aware of whatsoever you do." (Q 64:8). Faith in the Revelation and in the Prophet's mission must be expressed though obedience to the Qur'ān's commandments, in which the authority of God and that of the Prophet are sometimes united and sometimes distinguished from one another. In the verses on obedience (all Medinese), the Prophet is always designated by the term *rasūl*, that is, as a transmitter but also as a law-maker.

Obedience to God and His Messenger is a pledge that brings bliss to all people of God: "Whosoever obeys God and the Messenger, they are with those whom God has blessed, the prophets, the truthful ones, the witnesses, and the righteous. What beautiful companions they are." (Q 4:69). When the Prophet recites the Qur'ān or speaks in God's name, it is one single word that one must hear, and a single authority being exercised: "O you who believe! Obey God and His Messenger, and turn not away from him, even as you hear. And be not like those who say, "We hear", though they hear not." (Q 8:20–21). It is especially important for believers to recognise this unity of authority when the Prophet makes a judgement. The *al-Nūr* (Light) Sura emphasises this obligation at length, and questions the faith of any who do not submit to it. 'We believe in God and in the Messenger, and we obey. Then a group of them turn away thereafter, and believers they are not. And when they are called to God and His Messenger, that He/he may judge between them, behold, a group of them turn away. But if the right is theirs, they come unto Him submissively. Is there a disease in their hearts? Or do they doubt, or fear that God and His Messenger will

deal unjustly with them? Nay, but it is they who are the wrongdoers. The only words of the believers when they are called unto God and His Messenger, that he may judge between them, will be to say, 'We hear and we obey." And it is they who shall prosper. Whosoever obeys God and His Messenger, and who fears God and reverences Him, it is they who shall triumph." (Q 24, 47–52). The repetition of the sequence: "… God and His Messenger, that He/he may judge …" with the pronoun agreement in the singular, is particularly notable, underlining that the Prophet's authority is identical with that of God. Obedience to this authority must not proceed from external constraints, but from inner faith and a fear of God.

This way of affirming that the authority of the Prophet is none other than God's also amounts to a reminder that it confers no personal power on the Prophet, as would be the case with guidance. With one hand, God invests the Prophet with power, with the other he removes it and maintains him in a state of servitude: "Whosoever obeys the Messenger obeys God, and as for those who turn away, We have not sent thee as their keeper." (Q 4:80).

However, other passages confer upon the Prophet an authority of his own, held jointly with God. After a legal interdiction on wine and gambling, the following is said: "Obey God and obey the Messenger, and be wary. But if you turn away, then know that only the clear proclamation is incumbent upon Our Messenger." (Q 5:92). The distinction made between God's authority and that of the Prophet allows the transmission of these words to his followers, to "those in authority among you" (*ulū l-amr minkum*), scholars or community leaders: "O you who believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you differ among yourselves concerning any matter, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day. That is a better, and fairer, *dénouement* (*aḥsanu ta'wīlan*)."[4] (Q 4:59). Subsequently one observes that God's authority and that of the Prophet, having been separated, are re-united. Those who oppose the Envoy are warned as follows: "O you who believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger and let not your deeds be in vain." (Q 47: 33). The same distinction and relationship is established between the authority of the Revelation and that of the Prophet: "And when it is said unto them, 'Come unto that which God has sent down, and unto the Messenger", they say, 'Sufficient for us is that which we have found our fathers practising.' What! Even if their fathers knew naught and were not rightly guided …" (Q 5: 104).

The Prophet's authority comes from the Revelation, and from divine inspiration when he is meting out justice: "Verily We have sent down unto thee

4 In the Quran, *Ta'wīl* means interpretation (Q 3:7), but its literal significance is "to make something reach its end", thus the translation as a "*dénouement*".

the Book in truth, that thou mightest judge between men according to what God has shown thee. So be not an advocate for those who betray their trust." (Q 4:105). If the Prophet's decision is based on divine inspiration, then to accept it without disputing it is an act of faith: "But no, by thy Lord, they will not believe until they have made thee the judge between them in their disputes, and find no resistance in their souls to what thou hast decreed, and surrender with full submission." (Q 4:65). The Revelation is the foundation of the Prophet's own authority, and makes him a source of the Law: "Whatsoever the Messenger [may] give you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids to you, forgo, and reverence God. Truly God is severe in retribution." (Q 59:7).

4.2 *Prophecy and Combat*

Even if the Prophet is not explicitly called God's lieutenant on earth, as was the warrior prophet David (cf. Q 38: 26 and 2:251), he nevertheless performs a comparable function. At a certain point, he must constrain those who do not recognise that it is his role to submit to the order that he is charged with establishing. In the Meccan context, the Prophet's fight is based on this discussion: "And had We willed, We have sent a warner to every town. So obey not the disbelievers, but strive against them by means of it with a great striving (*wa jāhid-hum bihi jihādan kabīran*)" (Q 25:51–52); "by means of it" refers to the Qur'ān.[5] Up to the end of the Medinese period, the term *jihād* keeps its general sense of a conflict that is not necessarily armed. The Prophet is not involved in a physical battle with "hypocrites" when it is said of them: "O Prophet! Strive against (*jāhid*) the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be harsh with them …" (Q 9:73). And when the context is one of war, the Prophet is called to combat personally, an order that he must pass on to believers: "So fight (*qātil*) in the way of God. Thou art accountable only for thyself, and urge on the believers. It may be that God will restrain the might of the disbelievers …" (Q 4:84).

4.3 *Authority Contested*

Before the time of battles, during the entire Meccan period, the Qur'ān constantly defends its own authority and that of the Prophet, responding to any attacks that call into question the divine nature of his inspiration. Members of the Prophet's tribe say he is a diviner or reader of oracles (*kāhin*), or that he is possessed by a djinn (*majnūn*). Because of the beauty of the Suras' rhythms they call him a poet (*shāʿir*), an ambiguous status more feared than respected. Even worse, people say he's a magician (*sāhir*), or has been bewitched. By challenging these accusations, the Qur'ān confirms that he is under divine inspiration, since God is undertaking his defence and that of the Revelation. This is

5 Tabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, XIX, 15.

also the case when the Prophet is accused of lying or forgery, or of drawing his inspiration from the myths of the Ancients (*asāṭīr al-awwalīn*). The Qur'ān's reply affirms its revealed nature as proceeding from divine mystery: "And the disbelievers say, 'They spoke fables of those of old, which he has written down, and they are recited to him morning and evening.' Say, 'He has sent it down Who knows the secret in the heavens and on the earth. Truly He is Forgiving, Merciful.'" (Q 25:4–6).

The Qur'ān also defends the Messenger's integrity, and that of its own complete transmission by affirming that if he were to attribute to God words that were not His Word, he would deserve immediate death (Q. 69:44–47). To those who ask him to produce a different Qur'ān, or to change what he has reported, he must reply: "Say, 'It is not for me to alter it of my own accord. I follow only that which is revealed unto me. Truly I fear, should I disobey my Lord, the punishment of a tremendous day.' Say, 'Had God willed, I would not have recited it unto you; nor would He have made it known to you. Indeed, I tarried among you for a lifetime before it. Do you not understand?'" (Q 10:15–16). The Qur'ān consistently argues in the Prophet's favour, affirming that neither he nor his people have knowledge of what is Written: "There are among the accounts of the Unseen that We reveal unto thee. Thou knewest not of them, neither thou nor thy people, beforehand." (Q 11:49). The Qur'ān affirms that the expression "the unlettered Prophet" means that he could neither read nor write, nor did he know of the Writings or of any other thing: "And thou didst not recite before this any Book; nor didst thou write it with thy right hand, for then those who make false claims would have doubted." (Q 29:48).

The Qur'ān's repeated allusions to the attacks on the Prophet, and its varied refutations of these, whether based on argument or on authority (affirming the reality of the Revelation), all aim to reinforce the truthfulness of the Prophet and the fidelity of his transmission.

In the Medinese Suras, it is not his inspiration that is contested, but his authority inside or outside of the Medina community, where "Hypocrites" (*al-munāfiqūn*) make up an internal opposition that weakens it. In most verses, this is portrayed as opposition to both God and His Messenger; sometimes it concerns only the Prophet. In either case, opposition to the Prophet is seen to lead to a bad end, and the divine authority vested in him is confirmed.

5 Model or Mediator

For believers, true faith does not merely mean obedience and recognition of an authority. The Qur'ān calls on them to follow a path towards God, in the

footsteps of the Messenger. By doing this, they are obeying God's will: "Truly this is a reminder; so let him who will, take a way unto his Lord. And you do not will but that God wills. Truly God is Knowing, Wise." (Q 76:29–30). To what extent does the Prophet intervene in the journey believers make towards God?

5.1 *Following the Prophet*

The Prophet is the first to be called to follow the Revelation: "Follow that which has been revealed unto thee from thy Lord …" (Q 6:106), and believers must follow him to benefit from God's guidance: "So believe in God and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, who believes in God and His Words, and follow him, that haply you may be guided." (Q 7:158).

As the above-cited verse Q 12:108 enjoins him, the Prophet must call upon people to follow him. Conformity to the Prophetic path brings with it an internal discernment and prepares one to succeed the Prophet in the call to God. The Prophet transmits what he has received from his Lord to those who follow him, and this places him at the heart of the relationship between God and those who adore Him. Adoration begins as obedience, becoming gratitude (Q 2:172) and then love, in imitation of the Prophet. Indeed, the believer would not know how to lay claim to God's love unless he had first followed the Prophet along the path that leads to Him: "Say, 'If you love God, follow me', and God will love you and forgive you your sins" (Q 3:31).

5.2 *The Model*

Believing in the Messenger, obeying and following him, imitating him … this means taking him as an interior and exterior model. Unlike the *sunna*, which teaches imitation of the Prophet in all things, the Qur'ān underlines interior emulation: "Indeed you have in the Messenger of God a beautiful example (*uswa ḥasana*) for those who hope for God and the Last Day, and remember God much." (Q 33:21). This beautiful example is based on the essential orientation towards God, and the pure adoration, of the *ḥanīf*s. The Qur'ān highlights the identity of the Abrahamic and Muḥammadan models: "There is indeed a beautiful example for you in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people, "Truly we are quit of you and all that you worship apart from God …" "You have a beautiful example in them for whosoever hopes for God and the Last Day …'" (Q 60:4, 6). After an account of Abraham's rejection of the astral lights in order to turn towards God alone, and a reference to the lineage of the prophets, the Prophet is told: "They are those whom God has guided, so follow their guidance (*fa-bi-hudā-humu 'qtadih*)." (Q 6:90). By modelling himself on the Prophet, the believer follows a path that guides him towards the *tawḥīd*, an affirmation and realisation of divine unity at the deepest level of his

being. This explains the increasing importance of the Prophet's mediation in spiritual realisation. The prayers upon the Prophet composed by Sufi masters will become the interpretations of this interior model.

6 The Sacredness of the Prophet

Those who received the Qurʾān from the Prophet's own mouth, as the Word of God descended on his heart, could not but feel that they were in the presence of a being who was charged with the divine presence. Reminders of his ordinary humanity have, as we have seen, coexisted with affirmations of his function; further signs of his election could only increase his companions' conviction that he was a sacred being. The Qurʾān sometimes praises them for respecting his person, and sometimes warns them against treating him in too familiar a fashion. Thus, it sets in place an attitude of veneration that has not lessened over the centuries.

In the Qurʾān this respect is a pre-condition for faith. It is their behaviour towards the Prophet that distinguishes true believers from the 'hypocrites': "Only there are believers who believe in God and His Messenger and who, when they are with him in a collective affair, go not forth until asking his leave. Truly those who ask thy leave, it is they who believe in God and His Messenger (…) Do not deem the Messenger's calling among you to be like your calling to one another. Indeed, God knows among you who steals away under shelter. So let those who contradict his command be wary, lest a trial befall them or a painful punishment befall them." (Q 24:62–63).

None of the believers, not even his wives, ever calls the Prophet by his name; instead, they refer to his function: "O Prophet of God!"; "O Messenger of God!" The *al-Ḥujurāt* (The Chambers) Sura, which refers to the chambers of his wives, with whom he passes successive nights, mentions several rules of decorum whose observation, or otherwise, makes a difference to one's posthumous existence. These verses place the Prophet at the heart of the relationship between God and humanity, and, as a criterion of faith, people's attitude to him is a determinant: "O you who believe! Advance not before God and His Messenger, and fear God. Truly God is Hearing, Knowing. O you who believe! Do not raise your voice above the voice of the Prophet, nor address him in the manner that you address one another, lest your deeds come to naught, while you are unaware. Truly those who lower their voices before the Messenger of God, they are the ones whose hearts God has tested for reverence (*taqwā*). Theirs shall be forgiveness and a great reward. Truly those who call thee from behind the

apartments, most of them understand not. Had they been patient until thou camest out unto them, it would have been better for them." (Q 49:1–5).

Believers must never give way to the least familiarity in the Prophet's presence, nor seek to become intimate with him, even just to observe what he eats. The simplicity of his way of life must not blind his followers to the sacredness of his person. This also applies to attitudes to the Prophet's wives. They are the "Mothers of believers" (Q 33:6) because of the respect that is due them, and because it is forbidden to marry them. The *al-Aḥzāb* (The Parties) Sura speaks in a single verse of the lack of discretion shown by several Companions when the Prophet married Zaynab and of the obligation for believers to speak to the Prophet's wives from behind a veil, in order to preserve them from any indiscretion. The Qur'ān emphasises the importance of this rule 'in the sight of God', because this is not about social convention, but about faith: "… And when you ask anything of his wives, ask them from behind a veil. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And you should never affront the Messenger, nor marry his wives after him. Truly that would be an enormity in the sight of God." (Q 33:53).

Verses from this Sura stress the exceptional character of the Prophet's person. He is human, but must not be treated like other men. In Medina these marks of respect (and therefore of faith) consolidate the community around the Prophet: "Truly We have sent thee as witness, as a bearer of glad tidings, and as a Warner, that you may believe in God and His Messenger, and support him and honour him, and that you may glorify Him morning and evening." (Q 48:8–9). We shall come back to the question of the ambiguity of the final pronoun, even if it does unequivocally refer to God.

7 The Intercessor: The Eschatological Figure of the Prophet

7.1 *Asking for Forgiveness*

The Prophet is commanded to ask forgiveness for believers; this is a very clear manifestation of his function as mediator. Not only does he transmit God's message to humanity and help people to receive and apply it, he also prepares them for their future lives and their encounters with God. As a human being, he must – as we have seen – ask forgiveness for himself and his brothers and sisters in faith (Q 47:19). His intercession is particularly important for those who repent: "… If, when they had wronged themselves, they had but come to thee and sought forgiveness of God, and the Messenger had sought forgiveness for them, they would surely have found God Relenting, Merciful." (Q 4:64). In

the same way, he asks forgiveness for believers who request permission to leave him (cf. Q 24:62), for believers who make a pact with him (cf. Q 60:12) and for some Bedouins who, of their own accord, bring him the obligatory alms: "And among the Bedouin are those who believe in God and the Last Day, and regard that which they spend as nearness unto God and the blessings of the Messenger (*qurubāt ʿinda llāh wa ṣalawāt al-rasūl*). Behold! It shall surely be nearness for them. God will cause them to enter into His Mercy. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful." (Q 9:99). Through his words of peace and salvation the Prophet is a sort of guarantor of God's mercy and reconciliation with His servants: 'When those who believe in Our signs come to thee, say, 'Peace upon you! Your Lord has prescribed Mercy for Himself, that whosoever among you does evil in ignorance and thereafter repents and make amends, He is truly Forgiving, Merciful.'" (Q 6:54).

And hypocrites, on the contrary, turn away when they are called for the Prophet to ask forgiveness on their behalf (Q 63:5–6). The Prophet's presence in itself protects from punishment in this world, while his requests for forgiveness do so in the next, as it is said of his people: "But God will not punish them while thou art among them. And God will not punish them while they seek forgiveness." (Q 8:33).

Do these verses relate only to the Prophet's time on earth? Undoubtedly some have understood them in this way, but for others the Prophet is still as present among believers as the Revelation itself. Visiting his tomb in Medina has come to be considered, on the basis of traditions and anecdotes, a guarantee of his intercession.

7.2 *The Witness*

The prolongation of the Prophet's presence within his community and in the afterlife is also expressed in his function as a witness in this world and the next. He is called "witness" (*shāhid*) in Q 48:8, and more often described as *shahīd*, a term that brings together the active and passive participles, because he is a witness who is also being witnessed by God. In addition, he bears witness, and this draws the witnessing of those for whom he does so. After him, his community becomes the bearer of a responsibility towards humanity: "… That the Messenger may be a witness for you, and that you may be witnesses for mankind …" (Q 22:78).

In the *al-Baqara* Sura the community's witnessing precedes or accompanies that of the Prophet: "Thus did We make you a middle community (*wasaṭan*), that you may be witnesses for mankind and that the Messenger may be a witness for you." (Q 2:143). This verse and the one before it underline the mirroring effect that exists in this double witnessing.

All prophets perform this witnessing function for their communities, and its principle is divine, since "God is witness over all things." (Q 4, 33). The Prophet also does so in the beyond, for all prophets and for all of humanity: "How will it be when We bring forth a witness from every community, and We bring thee as a witness against these? On that Day those who disbelieved and disobeyed the Messenger will wish that they were level with the earth, and they will conceal no account from God." (Q 4:41–42). The Prophet may bear witness in favour or against, but mercy embraces everything.

7.3 *The Merciful Prophet*

In response to the hypocrites' accusations that he listens to any and all of those who address him, the Qur'ān praises the Prophet's solicitude for his community, and warns them of the eschatological consequences of attacking his honour: "And among them are those who torment the Prophet and say, "He is an ear." Say, 'An ear that is good for you. He believes in God and has faith in his believers, and he is a Mercy to those among you who believe.' And those who torment the Messenger of God, theirs shall be a painful punishment." (Q 9:61).

In the same Sura, the Prophet is described as having two divine qualities: mercy and compassion: "A Messenger has indeed come unto you from among your own. Troubled is he by what you suffer, solicitous of you, kind (*ra'ūf*) and merciful (*raḥīm*) unto the believers." (Q 9:128).

The mercy that is incarnate in the Prophet is not reserved exclusively for believers. In the Sura *al-Anbiyā'* (The Prophets), after the mention of the graces or qualities of each prophet, it is said to the Prophet: "And We sent thee not, save as a Mercy unto the worlds (*al-'ālamīn*)." (Q 21:107). Commentators differ as to how universal *al-'ālamīn* is meant to be; it can also signify "all of humanity". However, reading other verses leaves no doubt as to the universality of the Prophetic mission.

7.4 *Sent to All of Humanity*

The universality of the Prophetic mission is affirmed in the Meccan Suras: "Blessed is He Who sent down the Criterion (*al-furqān*) upon His servant that he may be a Warner unto the worlds." (Q 25:1); or, "And We sent thee not, save as a bearer of glad tidings and a Warner to mankind entire (*illā kāffatan li-l-nās*). But most of mankind know not." (Q 34:28). Although this second phrase suggests that humanity will not recognise his mission, the Prophet must nevertheless address it in its entirety: "Say, 'O mankind! Truly I am the Messenger of God unto you all – Him to Whom belongs Sovereignty over the heavens and the earth. There is no god but He. He gives life and causes death. So believe in God and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, who believes in God and His

Words; and follow him, that haply you may be guided.'" (Q 7:158). To believe in the Prophet and follow him means encompassing within a single faith all of the Revelation and all those who have received it and who are identified with God's words.

Because not every person on earth will recognise the Prophet's mission, God makes himself its witness: "He is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth to make it prevail over all [of the] religion. And God suffices as a Witness.' (Q 48:28).

8 God's Elect

8.1 *His Servant* (ʿabduhu)

An ordinary human being and God's messenger: the Qurʾān constantly recalls the Prophet's status as God's elect alongside his complete dependence on his Lord. This is especially true when he is termed "servant" (*ʿabd*) – as well as referring to a slave, this can mean one who adores, or one who has nothing (not even liberty), and who acts only on his master's orders. It is because he is stripped of all individuality and is a servant that the Prophet is worthy to receive the graces of God, and becomes a model. What is ordinary joins with what is exceptional, and vice versa. The reason he is God's elect is because he is God's servant, and the inverse is also true. The first of the consecutive Suras *al-Isrāʾ* (The Nocturnal Voyage) and *al-Kahf* (The Cavern) begins with supreme elevation, and the second with the descent of the Book: "Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night." (Q 17:1). This verse begins by affirming divine transcendence, for God is above all human elevation, no matter how high it may reach; the following Sura begins with praise, listing the qualities that proclaim the Revelation, as incarnated by Muḥammad, who is "ceaselessly praised": "Praise be to Him Who sent down the Book unto His servant …" (Q 18:1). Although the Prophet is once referred to as "the servant of God" (Q 72–19), this is an annexation of the servant to the divine self (*ʿabdu-hu*: His servant) and it marks his elect status. In relation to his people he is called "your companion": "Your companion has neither strayed nor erred." (Q 53:2), and when he is alone with God he is called "His servant": "Then He revealed to His servant what He revealed." (Q 53:10).

8.2 *The Markers of Elect Status*

Before even receiving the gift of Revelation, Muḥammad possessed a "magnificent character" (*khuluq ʿaẓīm*) that predisposed him to receive it as a gracious gift: "*Nūn*. By the pen and that which they inscribe, thou art not, by the blessing

of thy Lord, possessed. Truly thine shall be a reward unceasing. And truly thou art of an exalted character." (Q 68:1–4). By assimilating the divine word, the Prophet never stops magnifying his initial gift; this work shapes his character to the extent that his wife, ʿĀ'isha, witness of his private life, replies to those who ask her about the Prophet's character, "His character was the Qur'ān."[6] The epithet "magnificent", a divine name and a qualifier of the Qur'ān, makes the Prophet the mirror of divine attributes.

The *al-Aḥzāb* (The Parties) Sura contains a few allusions to the specific excellence of the Prophet. Within his community he maintains a superlative closeness to believers: "The Prophet is closer to the believers than they are to themselves, and his wives are their mothers …" (Q 33:6). Legally, this proximity makes him the heir of anyone who dies with none, and the guarantor of those who cannot pay their debts; his wives cannot remarry when he is gone, for their marriage to the Prophet has given them a sacred status. However, the verse is also referring to a proximity on a much more intimate, inner level.

In the Prophet the absence of a male heir, which for Arabs in particular was seen as a failing, is turned into a supreme privilege: "Muḥammad is not the father of any man among you; rather, he is the Messenger of God and the Seal of the prophets. And God is Knower of all things." (Q 33:40). This is a double election, because the seal (*khātam*) authenticates and concludes (*khātim*) prophecy.[7] We will not examine here the many meanings of this expression; it suffices to say that it confers upon the Prophet and his community an important and unique place in the economy of prophecy and salvation.

The verse that establishes the prayer upon the Prophet confirms this election by inscribing it in ritual practice and the devotional relationship: "Truly God and His angels invoke blessings upon the Prophet. O you who believe! Invoke blessings upon him, and greetings of peace!" (Q 33:56). "Truly God and His angels invoke blessings …" The verbal form situates this prayer, and its object the Prophet, in an intemporal present. By responding to this divine injunction, the believer himself enters into the presence of God, the angels and the Prophet in a ritual timeframe that is beyond mundane time.

The first verses of the *al-Fatḥ* (Opening, Victory, Conquest) Sura proclaim the divine grace and support of God, as much in the context of His Revelation[8] as in the spiritual and eschatological fields: "Truly We have granted thee a

6 Among the different versions of this tradition, see Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, VI, 54, 91, 111. For other versions, see Wensinck, *Concordance*, II, 74.

7 For more on the origins of this expression, and the developments that sprang from it, refer to Sangaré, *Le scellement de la prophétie*.

8 The Ḥudaybiyya episode and subsequent events.

manifest victory, that God may forgive thee thy sins that went before and that which are to come, and complete His Blessing upon thee, and guide thee upon a straight path; and that God may help thee with a mighty help." (Q 48:1–3).

These markers of his elect status are signified or announced to the Prophet, but it may also happen that he is called upon to proclaim them himself, in order to affirm a quality, or his function, or his place in the prophetic cycle, especially in the Abrahamic lineage: "Say, 'Truly my Lord has guided me unto a straight path, an upright religion, the creed of Abraham, a *ḥanīf*, and he was not of the idolaters.' Say, 'Truly my prayer and my sacrifice, my living and my dying are for God, Lord of the worlds. He has no Partner. This I am commanded, and I am the first of those who submit.'" (Q 6, 161–163) What primacy is this? Are we dealing with a mere expression of excellence?

8.3 *Beyond Election, the Prophet's Reality*

To avoid all possible confusion between the divine and the human, the Qur'ān emphasises the Prophet's humanity and that of the other prophets, while also evoking their elect status and the specific graces with which they are blessed. But what about their human nature, and the Prophet's in particular? Jesus calls himself the "servant of God" (Q 19:30), but, because of the nature of his conception, is also the Word and the Spirit of God (Q 4:171). In the Prophet's case, it is his luminous nature that is explicitly or allusively at stake. "Light" (*nūr*) has become one of his names. After having been designated Seal of the Prophets, he is called upon as follows: "O Prophet! Truly We have sent thee as a witness, as bearer of glad tidings, and as a Warner, as one who calls unto God by His Leave, and as a luminous lamp (*sirājan munīran*)." (Q 33:45–46).

This last qualifier brings together two types of light: self-generated solar light (symbolised by the lamp), and the reflected light of the moon, called "light" (Q 25:61; 71:16). Whether the lamp symbolises divine light or that of the Revelation (the Qur'ān is also called a light), the Prophet is identified with this light and also projects it upon others. This similarity between the Revelation and the luminous nature of the Prophet appears in another context, too: the call to the People of the Book to recognise his mission.

> O People of the Book! Our Messenger has come unto you, making clear to you much of what you once hid of the Book, and pardoning much. There has come unto you, from God, a light and a clear Book, whereby God guides whosoever seeks His Contentment unto the way of peace, and brings them out of darkness into light, by His Leave, and guides them unto a straight path.
>
> Q 5:15–16

The first verse brings together the Book and the light, while keeping them distinct from one another, because here the light clearly designates the Prophet. In the second verse, the light is associated with guidance – first that of God, and then that of the Prophet, since one could not say of God that he "brings them out of darkness into light, by His Leave". The second guidance is the Prophet's, and his illuminating function is clearly affirmed here.

What was to become the doctrine of "Muḥammadan Light", along with its later developments, surfaces here in the Verse of Light, and in the commentaries of the first exegetes: "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is a niche, wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as a shining star kindled from a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor the West. Its oil would well-nigh shine forth, even if no fire has touched it. Light upon light. God guides unto His Light whomsoever He will, and God sets forth parables for mankind, and God is Knower of all things." (Q 24:35).

According to Tabarī, Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, upon being questioned by Ibn ʿAbbās on the beginning of this verse, replied: "The symbol of his light is that of Muḥammad; he is like a niche … the lamp is his heart, and the glass his chest … "Its oil would well-nigh shine forth": not much more would be required for Muḥammad to appear as a prophet, even if he had not yet spoken."[9]

The explanation of this verse given by Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) is at once physical and symbolic. The symbol is that of the light of Muḥammad. The niche represents the loins of his father, ʿAbdallah, where this light was deposited, and the glass is Muḥammad's body. The blessed olive tree is Abraham, from which Muḥammad has been "lit", for he is one of Abraham's descendants. Like Abraham, he is neither oriental (praying to the east, like Christians), nor occidental like the Jews [sic], but oriented towards the Kaʿba. Muḥammad might well have prophesied before receiving the Revelation, "even if no fire would have touched him" if he hadn't received the Revelation: this is a Prophet born among a prophet's descendants.[10]

Although another Companion, Ubayy b. Kaʿb, interprets this symbol in a more general sense, as representing the heart of the believer, its identification with the luminous interior reality of the Prophet attests to the ancient nature of this concept. The interpretation of "even if no fire has touched it" as a reference to a predisposition to prophecy even before the Revelation supports what we have already revealed on the subject of the Prophet's "magnificent character".

The luminous reality of the Prophet, whether clearly expressed or deduced through interpretation, can be linked to another aspect of his person that is

9 Ṭabarī, *Jâmiʿ al-bayān*, XVIII, 105–6.

10 *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, III, 199–200.

either suggested or deduced from context. The Prophet is not only announced in the Writings (Q 7:157), his coming is requested by Abraham: "Our Lord, raise up in their midst a messenger from among them, who will recite Thy signs to them, and will teach them the Book and Wisdom, and purify them. Truly Thou art the Mighty, the Wise'" (Q 2:129). It is also predicted by Jesus: "And when Jesus son of Mary said, 'O Children of Israel! Truly I am the Messenger of God unto you, confirming that which came before me in the Torah and bearing glad tidings of a Messenger to come after me whose name is Aḥmad.'" (Q 61:6). Prediction does not in itself imply a preceding existence, except, perhaps, in God's science. But in one ḥadīth, the Prophet refers to the two above-cited verses in order to affirm his luminous reality as a principle:

> I was God's servant, and indeed the Seal of the prophets, when Adam was still lying in the clay.[11] I will tell you of the announcement of this: the invocation of my father, Abraham, the good news announced by Jesus to his people, and the vision of my mother, who saw a light shining from her and illuminating Syria, for the mothers of prophets have such visions.[12]

The Prophet is mentioned before his predecessors in more than one Qur'ānic passage, as in: "Verily, We have revealed unto thee, as We revealed unto Noah and the prophets after him, and as We revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and unto David We gave the Psalms; and messengers We have recounted unto thee before, and messengers We have not recounted unto thee; and unto Moses God spoke directly." (Q 4:163–164). The place of the Prophet seems even more significant when it is located just after the above-cited verse on the proximity of believers: "And when We made with the prophets their covenant, and with thee, and with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary; We made with them a solemn covenant." (Q 33:7). Regarding this verse, Ṭabarī reports the commentary by Qatāda: "It has been mentioned to us that the Prophet of God – grace and peace be upon him – said: 'I am the first of the prophets to have been created and the last to have been sent.'"[13] Mujāhid said simply: "In the loins of Adam (*fī ẓahr Ādam*)",[14] which seems

11 This sentence's two propositions are simple noun phrases, which accentuates their intemporal character.

12 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, IV, 127, after (according to) al-'Irbād b. Sāriya. Another version of the *ḥadīth* follows, in which the Prophet's mother sees this light as she is in labour.

13 Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, XXI, 79. Qatāda (d. around117/735) was a disciple of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Ibn Sīrīn in Baṣra.

14 *Ibid.* Mujāhid, disciple of Ibn 'Abbās in Mecca, died during the early years of the second century of the hijra (between 100 and 104/718).

to allude to the primordial pact (Q 7: 172). Muqātil comments along the same lines: "The first in the pact, and the last in the sending," and continues with an explicit mention of this pact.[15] There is also a similar interpretation of these verses of the *al-Shuʿarāʾ* (The Poets) Sura: "And trust in the Mighty, the Merciful, Who sees thee when thou standest, and thy movement within those who prostrate." (Q 26:217–220). The translation follows an interpretation attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās: "… that is to say within the loins of thy fathers: Adam, Noah and Abraham, until God brought him out as a prophet."[16]

The first generations of Muslims thus drew on the Qurʾān to ask themselves about the nature and reality of the Prophet. Is not the Prophet called "true", or "truth" (*ḥaqq*), a polysemic term sometimes used to refer to God, but more often indicating the Revelation, as in this verse: "How shall God guide a people who have disbelieved, having borne witness that the Messenger is truth, and the clear proofs having come to them? And God guides no wrongdoing people." (Q 3:86).

In more than one verse the pronouns can apply grammatically to either God or the Prophet. This voluntary ambiguity may have several meanings, according to context. It can be a way of saying that what is vested in the Prophet is none other than God's authority: "O you who believe! Obey God and His Messenger, and turn not away from him, even as you hear. And be not like those who say, 'We hear', though they hear not." (Q 8:20–21). To turn away from the Prophet is to turn away from God; to hear his words as those of an ordinary man is to fail to understand that God's will is expressed through him.

A little further on we find: "O you who believe! Respond to God and the Messenger when he calls you unto that which will give you life. And know that God comes between a man and his heart, and that unto Him shall you be gathered." (Q 8:24). Responding to the Prophet's call as one that comes from God will give new life to one's heart. To be separated from one's heart brings about a loss of awareness of God and of the afterlife, where ultimate human destiny is decided. The presence of the Prophet revives the heart. He is the vector of divine mercy and light: "O you who believe! Reverence God and believe in His Messenger; He will give you a twofold portion of His Mercy, make a light for you by which you may walk, and forgive you – and God is Forgiving, Merciful." (Q 57:28).

8.4 *The Locus of Divine Presence*

In another case of grammatical ambiguity, this discourse is addressed first to the Prophet, and then to believers. When the solemn pact was made at

15 Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, III 475.

16 Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, XIII 144.

Ḥudaybiyya, the support and veneration due to the Prophet became adoration of God. The description of the sealing of the pact, during which the Prophet, holding his hand uppermost, takes the hand of the person who is engaging him, confirms the theophanic dimension of this moment:

> Truly those who pledge allegiance unto thee pledge allegiance only unto God. The Hand of God is over their hands. And whosoever reneges, reneges only to his detriment. And whosoever fulfils what he has pledged unto God, He will grant him a great reward.
>
> Q 48:10

The inward effect of this pact is described: "God was content with the believers when they pledged allegiance unto thee beneath the tree. He knew what was in their hearts and sent down Inner Peace (*sakīna*) upon them and rewarded them with a victory nigh and abundant spoils …" (Q 48:18–19). Through the divine presence that is then vested in him, the Prophet communicates a beatific state to his adepts, along with divine satisfaction and a victory that recalls the one announced to the Prophet at the beginning of the Sura, which, as we have seen, may have an interior or an exterior meaning. The same is true of this promise to believers.

During the battle of Badr, the Prophet threw a handful of gravel towards his enemies; this brought about their defeat. In the Qur'ān, it is the intervention of God, rather than the thaumaturgical nature of the gesture, that is emphasised:

> You did not slay them, but God slew them, and thou threwest not when thou threwest, but God threw, that He might try the believers with a beautiful trial from Him. Truly God is Hearing, Knowing.
>
> Q 8:17

The believers fought; the Prophet made a symbolic gesture that could properly be qualified as theurgical. "When thou threwest" attributes the gesture to the Prophet; "but God threw" reveals that his being was erased, and he became the locus of a divine act. This is the interpretation of this verse made by spiritual masters.

9 The Prophet and the Revelation

Everything about the Prophet that seems to go beyond the ordinary human condition is due to his status and function as God's envoy. On one occasion

he is called: "A Messenger from God (*rasūlun min Allāh*) reciting scriptures purified wherein are books upright." (98, 2–3) How to understand this phrase, *rasūlun min Allah*? Elsewhere, the Prophet is said to come "from you" or "from yourselves"; this signifies his fully human nature and exact equivalence to those to whom he has been sent. Does the exceptional nature of this expression have to do with the recitation of the Revelation in its superior phase?[17] Only God and his angels could bear witness to such a recitation: "But God Himself bears witness to what He has sent down unto thee – He sent it down with His Knowledge – and the angels bear witness. And God suffices as a witness." (Q 4:166).

9.1 *The Reception of the Word*

Several verses evoke the trying nature of the Revelation, as though the Prophet's inner being was obliged to get used to receiving "a weighty word" (Q 73:5) which is hard for him. "Ṭā-Hā We did not send down the Qur'ān unto thee that thou shouldst be distressed." (Q 20:2). It is because the Qur'ān is a heavy Word that its memorisation and recitation are said to have been facilitated by God (Q 54:17, 22, 32, 40; 73:20). The Prophet's tongue, in the sense of the organ and of the language, was the instrument of this facilitation: "We have only made this easy upon thy tongue that thou mayest give glad tidings unto the reverent thereby, and that thereby thou mayest warn a contentious people." (Q 19:97).

9.2 *Between the Qur'ān and the Prophet*

God has vested in both the Prophet and the Qur'ān the same function, one of announcement and of warning. This is expressed in these verses underlining the close linguistic relationship between the Qur'ān and the Prophet: "A Book whose signs have been expounded as an Arabic Qur'ān for a people who know, as a bringer of glad tidings, and as a Warner. But most of them have turned away, such that they hear not." (Q 41:3–4). Both are reminders (*dhikr*), and the ambiguity of the pronouns in the following verses suggests a certain shared identity between the messenger and the message:

> And We have not taught him poetry; nor would it benefit him. It [or "he"] is but a reminder and a clear Qur'ān, to warn Whomsoever is Alive, and so that the Word may come for the disbelievers.
>
> Q 36:69–70

17 Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, XX, 142–3.

> God has certainly sent down unto you a reminder: a Messenger reciting unto you the clear signs of God to bring those who believe and perform righteous deeds out of darkness into light.
>
> Q 65:10–11

The Qurʾān and the Prophet both bring Truth (*ḥaqq*), and both are called by that name. The ambiguity is all the more significant here because it occurs in one of only four verses where the name of Muḥammad is used:

> And those who believe and perform righteous deeds, and believe in what has been sent down unto Muḥammad – and it/he is the truth from their Lord – he has absolved them of their evil deeds and set their state aright.
>
> Q 47:2

9.3 *The One Who is Intimate with God*

While the Qurʾān is presented as the word of God, spoken to his Prophet, this prophet does not, like some, find himself in a dialogue with God. However, the word is addressed to him most directly in what is traditionally accepted as the first revelation: "Recite in the name of thy Lord!" (Q 96:1). The way he is addressed and exhorted to complete his mission: "O thou who art covered!" (Q 74:1), or to rise and pray at night: "O thou enwrapped!" (Q 73:1), is understood as divine familiarity towards him.[18] In the context of the difficult beginnings of his predication, the *al-ḍuḥā* (Morning Brightness) Sura appears as consoling words addressed to a sorely tried friend whom one attempts to comfort:

> By the morning brightness, and by the night when still, thy Lord has not forsaken thee; nor does He despise [thee]. And the hereafter shall be better for thee than this life. And surely thy Lord shall give unto thee, and thou shall be content. Did He not find thee an orphan and shelter, find thee astray and guide, and find thee in need and enrich? So as for the orphan, maltreat not. And for the one who requests, repel not. And as for the blessing of the Lord, proclaim!
>
> Q 93:1–11

In the Meccan Suras, we have already noted the numerous occurrences of the imperative "be patient!", often used in a conclusion and followed by a call to give oneself over to adoration. The interrogative "and what has made thee aware of what … is?", used on the subject of the realities of the next world, and

18 Qurtubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, XIX, 33.

a single time to refer to a spiritual event, the so-called Night of Destiny (*laylat al-qadr*, Q 97:3), can be read as a reminder of an experience whose secret is shared by the locutor and the interlocutor: "Hast thou seen…?" or "Hast thou not seen…?" In any case these interpellations give the text a familiar and personal tone, like the questions that introduce accounts of the Prophet:[19] "Hast thou heard tell of…?" While the *ḥadīth* and the *sīra* often cite the role of Gabriel in the transmission of the Revelation, this is mentioned infrequently in the Qur'ān, which gives the opposite impression – that the Prophet immediately retransmits the divine Word as soon as he receives the order, "Say!" This imperative gives one an impression of proximity between the Envoy and his Lord. This oath on the Prophet's life, inserted into the story of Lot, is even more surprising: "By thy life, they wandered confused in their drunkenness." (Q 15:72). To swear by the life of the Prophet implies that the story of Sodom is to some extent a warning for his tribe, the Qurayshites. Commentators underline the fact that the Prophet is the only human being in whose name the Almighty has sworn.[20] In the Medinese Suras, he is mostly referred to by his function as Prophet (*yā ayyuhā l-nabī*), in contexts that are often linked to combat or to his conjugal life, rather than to his function as Messenger (*yā ayyuhā l-rasūl*). Such solemn vocative forms as the call to obey the Prophet consecrate him in his functions as legislator and leader of the community. At the same time and in the same Suras, especially *al-Aḥzāb*, the Prophet's soul is stripped bare, and in the reproachful tone of the verse on the delicate question of Zaynab's repudiation by Zayd, and her subsequent remarriage to the Prophet, one can also see the intimate bond that unites him and his Lord:

> When thou saidst unto him whom God has blessed and whom thou hast blessed, "Retain your wife for yourself and reverence God" thou wast hiding in thyself that which God was to disclose; and thou didst fear from people, though God has more right to be feared by thee …
>
> Q 33:37

In the *al-Taḥrīm* Sura (The Forbidding, 66) the Prophet is reproached for being too kind to his wives, and then receives the grandiose support of God, Gabriel, the believers, and all the angels. From this emerges an image of a person whose private life[21] is part of a universal and sacred story. Contradictory models of

19 And, once, an eschatological tone, Q 88:1.

20 Tabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, XIV, 30.

21 For more on the conjugal events that tradition relates to the revelation of this Sura, see Gril, "Le Prophète en famille" 41–3.

women, unworthy (the wives of Noah and of Lot) and perfect (Pharaoh's wife, Mary), appear at the end of the Sura, presented for all of humanity as paradigms of either impiety or faith.

9.4 *Revelation and Sacred Story*

By referring to such intimate aspects of the Prophet's life as his emotions and his relationships with his wives, the Qur'ān presents a man whose entire self is identified with the Revelation. When, throughout the Suras, it alludes to different episodes in his life, it is putting in place the first reference points of a sacred history that will be completed by the ḥadīth, amplified and coordinated by the *sīra*, and repeated in the big universal histories of Tabarī and those who followed him. These references are just evoking events allusively, in ways that would often be difficult to grasp without exegesis. To examine them all would take too much space, although in the context of this study it would have been interesting to have done so, in order to observe how these diverse elements contribute successive details that cast light on aspects of the Prophetic figure.

Whereas the *Sīra* gives details of the important episodes and military campaigns of the Medinese period, the Qur'ān uses these events to speak of significant moments in the relationship between God and His Prophet. The account of the hijra is a single verse reminding believers of the divine aid associated with the Prophet's function. References to the Prophet taking refuge in the cavern show him with full confidence in the Lord and reassuring his Companion, thanks to the divine presence (*sakīna*) and the angels that have descended upon him, and to the promise that God's Word will triumph (Q 9:40). Here, as elsewhere, one discovers the image of a being whose will and destiny invariably follow God's design.

Whether it is referring to major events or apparently minor facts, by touching on these specific details the Qur'ān actualises the presence of the Prophet, inscribing recollection of him alongside that of the other prophets whose sacred history he founds anew and brings to a perfect end.

10 The Prophet and the Prophets

To what extent does the Qur'ān's discourse on the other prophets cast light on the way in which it, and Muslims, picture the Prophet? We know how important accounts of the prophets are in the Qur'ān, especially in the Meccan Suras. They are often related to the Prophet as examples, encouragements or consolations, as reminders of the trials that confronted his predecessors and of the promise of divine salvation. Is the Prophet just one among many prophets, or do these numerous prophets meld together into a single unique model that

the Prophet represents *par excellence*, as could be understood from the insistent repetitions in certain accounts? Couldn't we also postulate that the relationships (often more implicit than explicit) between what is said of some of the prophets and what is said of the Prophet himself contribute to an enriched image of him without, for all that, erasing the specific characteristics of his predecessors as put forward in the Qur'ān? Let us above all remember what the Qur'ānic prophets teach us about the Prophet.

10.1 *The Community of Prophets*

The Qur'ān demands faith from all messengers and prophets. On the one hand it announces: "We make no distinction among any of them." (cf. Q 2:136), and on the other: "Those are the messengers. We have favoured some above others" (Q 2:253). To be a prophet is to belong to the same single class in the hierarchy of beings, but this does not exclude the possibility of specific gifts of grace. On the subject of the battle of Uḥud, during which the Prophet's life was endangered, the Qur'ān recalls that he, like all prophets, is mortal: "Muḥammad is naught but a Messenger; messengers have passed before him. So if he dies or is slain, will you turn back on your heels?" (Q 3:144). Faced with those who deny him, the Prophet owes it to himself simply to remember that he is but one envoy in the lineage of those who preceded him, and no more: "Say, 'I am not an innovation among the messengers (*bidʿan min al-rusul*), and I know not what will be done with me or with you. I only follow that which has been revealed unto me, and I am naught but a clear Warner'" (Q 46:9).

Unlike other people, whom God did not want to see constituting a single community,[22] God's envoys belong to a unique community united by one mission and a common election (cf. Q 23:51–52). The Prophet starts with himself when he proclaims his membership of this prophetic community, on whose principles his own community is founded:

> Say, "We believe in God and what has been sent down upon us, and in what was sent down upon Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes (*al-asbāṭ*), and in what Moses, Jesus, and the prophets were given from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them, and unto Him we submit (*wa naḥnu lahu muslimūn*)." Whosoever seeks a religion other than submission (*al-islām*), it shall not be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he shall be among the losers.
>
> Q 3:84–85

22 Q 5 :48; 11:118; 16:93; 42:8; 43:33. On the division of what had originally been a single human community, Q 2:213; 10:19.

In this community of those whom God has chosen to receive his Word, the last of the prophets occupies the first place in an order that has already been seen in the account of the pact between God and the Prophets (cf. Q 33:7), although there it is in the context of a comparison. In the *al-Nisāʾ* (Women) Sura the list of prophets begins with Noah and goes on at length to include even all those of whom the Qurʾān doesn't explicitly speak: "Verily We have revealed unto thee, as We revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and unto David We gave the Psalms, and messengers We have recounted unto thee before, and messengers We have not recounted unto thee; and unto Moses God spoke directly." (Q 4:163–164). Beyond these enumerations of prophets in the Qurʾān there are those used to punish the people when they had rebelled against God and the Messenger; here the Meccan Suras frequently rehearse their history: Noah; Hūd, prophet of ʿĀd; Ṣāliḥ, prophet of Thamūd; Lot, and Shuʿayb, prophet of Madyan. The confrontation between Pharaoh and Moses is sometimes included along with these five. It appears evident that these accounts are used in direct support of the Prophet, who was faced with Qurashī opposition. The advent of the Arab Prophet inserts the prophets of the Arabian Peninsula into universal sacred history.

10.2 *A Common Destiny*

Should we read these frequent lists of prophets as an account of the assimilation of these biblical and Arab figures with the Prophet himself, or see the earlier prophets rather as auxiliaries to his prophecy, or as phases in the completion of the prophetic cycle? What is certain is that the Qurʾān multiplies the similarities between the Prophet and the other prophets in the accomplishment of their missions. The parallel is very clearly highlighted in the same Sura: "Is aught incumbent upon the Messenger save the clear proclamation?" (Q 16:35), and, on the subject of the Prophet: "Then if they turn away – only the clear proclamation is incumbent upon thee" (Q 16:82). The same formulations are often employed about the five prophets cited above, in order to accentuate the archetypical and repetitive nature of their histories. For example, they utter the same affirmation in defence of the disinterested nature of their missions: "And I ask not of any of you any reward for it; my reward lies only with the Lord of the worlds." (Q 26, 109, 127, 145, 164, 180). For his part, the Prophet receives an order to follow the model of his predecessors, especially that of their disinterest: "They are those whom God has guided, so follow their guidance. Say, 'I ask not of you any reward for it. It is naught but a reminder for the worlds'." (Q 6:90).

All of the prophets undergo the same trials at the hands of their opponents, who accuse them of lying. If we set to one side the poetry that is characteristic of the Prophet's milieu, elsewhere we find the same attacks, though they are less systematic (except in the case of accusation that Moses, too, is a magician). All of them have been victims of their peoples' derision: "Messengers have surely been mocked before thee. Then those who scoffed at them were beset by that which they used to mock." (Q 6:10).

If opposition to the prophets is expressed among their adversaries in the same ways, believers, too, adhere to prophetic messages in ways that resemble each other. Their faith must make them follow the messengers without fail (*ittabaʿa*). Unquestionably, the Qurʾān aims to unify a certain conception of prophecy, involving critics and trials and the rapid teaching of its content to the Prophet: "And We sent no Messenger before thee, save that We revealed unto him, 'Verily, there is no god but I; so worship Me!'" (Q 21:25). On the one hand, the Qurʾān shapes earlier prophecies to its own mould, and on the other it calls on the Prophet to model himself on his predecessors, especially as concerns a fundamental and constantly recalled virtue: "So be patient, as the resolute among the messengers were patient." (Q 46:35). The relationship between the Prophet and the other prophets creates a mirror effect, at least as regards their functions in this world – for in the next world, as we have seen, the Prophet is distinguished from his peers by his function as a witness.

10.3 *Muḥammad in the Mirror of the Prophets*

The fact that a model (of prophecy repeating itself through history and realising itself in the Prophet's mission) was set up is not enough to explain the growth and development of prophetic accounts during the Meccan period, and the relative reduction in their numbers during the Medinese period, when new challenges appeared and new responses thus became necessary. The repetition and pregnant nature of these accounts are the results of the need for them to pass from one person's memory to another's. Often the Suras that are made up in part of the history of one or several other prophets begin and end with an address to the Prophet, as in the case of the *Yūsuf* (Joseph) Sura. In the *ṬāHā* Sura, devoted mostly to Moses, the account ends with this address to the Prophet: "Thus do We narrate unto thee some of the accounts of those who have come before. And We have given thee a Reminder from Our Presence. Whosoever turns away from it, verily he shall bear it as a burden on the Day of Resurrection." (Q 20:99–100).

The verb translated as "to narrate", *qaṣṣa*, also has the concrete meaning of cutting or of cutting again, and of following someone's footsteps (cf. Q 18:64).

From this verb the term *qaṣaṣ*, account/narration, is derived; this is also the name of a Sura whose first section is devoted to the story of Moses (Q 28:25). Also derived from *qaṣṣa* is *qiṣṣa*, pl. *qiṣaṣ*, meaning story or history, especially that of a prophet. In the Qurʾān, *Anbāʾ*, the plural of *nabaʾ* – the fact of announcing – designates the announcement of events from the past as well as those that belong to the future (Q 78:2). Thus the account aims to recall, to restore a memory that is conserved by those whom the Qurʾān calls the "People of Memory" (*ahl al-dhikr*); these are generally identified with the People of the Book (Q 16:43 and 21:7), but they are received by the Prophet, who is underlining the direct nature of the reception, with the words: "on Our behalf" (*min ladun-nā*). In the second verse of this Sura, this reminder and the memories it evokes are the path of salvation, and to refuse it leads to the opposite path. Thus the Prophet receives a memory of the past, one that primarily concerns him as a prophet. Every account first finds its echo in the Prophet, before becoming the concern his entire community, to whom he transmits it. Once the message is passed on, the fate of each person, and of humanity, hinges upon it.

Adopting this perspective on the foundation of memories to explore all of the Qurʾān's histories of prophets is beyond the scope of the present chapter. The few examples that follow may reveal one or other of the bonds constructed, explicitly or not, between a prophet and the Prophet, thus casting light on one of the facets of his reality. But this does not imply some sort of absorption of all previous prophetic models, erasing their individual traits. Instead, one should understand these histories as an invitation to follow the path of "those who were before thee", addressed to the Prophet and to all believers.

The command made to the Prophet to ask forgiveness for his sins (Q 4:106; 40:55; 47:19) puts him in a similar situation to that in which his ancestor Adam, the first sinner, found himself. In another verse, Noah is reproached by his people because he is followed only by the humble (Q. 11:27), which recalls the beginning of the *ʿAbasa* (He Frowned) Sura, mentioned above (Q 10:1–10), or else the order to the Prophet to be patient in the fellowship of his poor companions rather than turning to the conceited rich in the hope of winning them over to Islam (Q 18, 28). In the Qurʾān, Abraham is represented as the one who freed himself and those close to him from all forms of idolatry with no concession. He and the Prophet are both called a "fine model" (*uswa ḥasana*) "… for those who hope for God and the Last Day" (Q 33:21). The repetition of this expression aims to demonstrate the extent to which the Prophet is part of the Abrahamic heritage, especially in the restoration of the pure cult of the sole God, and the tradition of the *ḥanīf*. Abraham himself also presages the hijra when he says: "Truly I am fleeing unto my Lord" (Q29:26). Facing the Qurayshites in Mecca, Abraham incarnates the restoration of a forgotten tradition; facing the People

of the Book in Medina he justifies the foundation of something new, based on new principles – something that the Prophet will claim for himself: "Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian, but rather was a *ḥanīf*, a submitter, and he was not one of the idolaters" (Q 3:67–68). We could also cite the passage from the *al-Baqara* (The Cow) Sura, in which the purification of the House of God, the foundation of the sacred territory, the building of the Kaʿba, and the institution of the pilgrimage with the participation of Ishmael, are all Abrahamic traditions (Q 2:124–141). In this long extract, which precedes and justifies the reorientation of ritual towards the sacred Temple, Abraham is not confused with the Prophet, but comforts him in his [the Prophet's] position as founder and renewer of a tradition, in opposition to Jews and Christians, from whom he distances himself, while maintaining their integration within a certain vision of monotheism. From this point of view, Abraham plays an essential role in the image that the Qur'ān presents of the Prophet. Equally fundamental in a different way is the figure of Moses, appearing at the two critical moments of his mission: facing Pharaoh and with the Children of Israel. The relationship between Moses and Muḥammad needs to be developed in detail and over a long period, for Moses is by far the most frequently cited person in the Qur'ān, followed by Pharaoh. The similarities between oppression by the Qurayshites and that exercised by Pharaoh is clearly suggested in a single Meccan Sura. First it is said of the people of the Prophet: "And they were about to incite thee from the land, in order to expel thee therefrom, whereupon they would not have tarried after thee." (Q 17:76), and then, about the Children of Israel faced with Pharaoh: "And he desired to incite them from the land; so We drowned him and those with him all together" (Q 17:103). The difficulties that Moses had with his own People act as a warning to believers to avoid behaving in the same way towards the Prophet; for example, by asking him endless questions: "Or do you wish to question your messenger as Moses was questioned aforetime? Whosoever exchanges belief for disbelief has gone astray from the right way." (Q 2:108). These examples make Moses a model and precursor for the Prophet, demonstrating resistance to oppression and showing how difficult the conduct of a community can be.

In this way, a prophet's history can present a model of actions to avoid imitating; it still communicates to the Prophet an experience of the prophetic mission that to a certain extent reflects his own experience. The repeated reminders to be patient and endure the denial and opposition of his own people relate to his task and mission among all peoples. From this point of view, the story of Jonas appears at the same time as a counter-model and a sort of illustration of God's divine solicitude for, and election of, those he chooses to send to humankind:

> So be patient with thy Lord's Judgment and be not like the companion of the fish, who cried out while choking with anguish. Had he not had the blessing from his Lord he would surely have been cast upon the barren shore still blameworthy. But his Lord chose him and made him among the righteous.
>
> Q 68:48–50

The Jesus of the *Maryam* Sura, written during the Meccan period, presents himself from birth as the precursor of the Prophet: "He said, 'Truly I am the servant of God. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet. He has blessed me wheresoever I may be, and has enjoined upon me prayer and almsgiving so long as I live'." (Q 19:30–31). It is also announced that he represents mercy (Q 19:21), while the Medinese Suras emphasise the specificity of the Speech and Word of God (Q 3:45; 4:171). Seen in this light, only a sort of identification of the Prophet's reality with the Qur'ān itself, or with the Spirit – in that it proceeds from God's order – could allow the Qur'ānic Jesus to appear as the hidden face of the Prophet. However, the parallel between the Disciples of Jesus and the Prophet's companions is clearly affirmed:

> O you who believe! Be helpers of God, just as Jesus son of Mary said to the apostles, 'Who are my helpers unto God?' The apostles replied, 'We are thy helpers unto God (anṣār Allāh)'.
>
> Q 61:14

11 The Prophet and His Community

As a member and witness of the community of prophets, Muḥammad appears in the Qur'ān surrounded by this, his own community. As we have seen regarding the other prophets, here we can also discover the ways in which the people around the Prophet participate in and prolong his presence in the world.

11.1 *"Those Who Are with Thee"*

Among the Prophet's companions, only Zayd is named: his freed slave and beloved adopted son, whose filiation was abrogated – this meant that the remarriage of Zayd's first wife to the Prophet became legal (Q 33:4–5 and 37). Still in the *al-Aḥzāb* Sura, after the mention of the Prophet's wives, the purification of the people of the Prophet's house (*ahl al-bayt*) is announced (Q 33:33). The angels who announced to Abraham's wife that their posterity would be blessed used the same term (Q 11: 73). The Prophet's family circle is thus sacralised by the Revelation and by his Abrahamic antecedents. Earlier, in

a Meccan Sura, the Prophet feels entitled to expect that his community should love his relations: "Say, 'I ask not of you any reward for it, save affection among kinsfolk.'" (Q 42:23).[23] However, none of those who were close to the Prophet are, in the Qur'ān, described as sharing greater intimacy with him and with God than his companion during the hijra, Abū Bakr: "If you help him not, yet God has already helped him. Remember when those who disbelieve expelled him, the second of two. Yea, the two were in the cave, when he said to his companion, 'Grieve not; truly God is with us.' Then God sent down His Presence (*sakīna*) upon him, and supported him with hosts you see not. And He made the word of those who disbelieve to be the lowliest, and the Word of God is the highest. And God is Mighty, Wise." (Q 9:40). This verse places the Prophet at the central point in an axis that elevates those who are high and sends down those who are low, and God's salvation flows along this axis. In these circumstances the proximity of the Prophet's second-in-command, Abū Bakr, makes him the first witness. The hijra, or journey from Mecca to Medina, is in preparation for combat along God's path, "so that the word of God might be the most high", as defined by the Prophet.[24] During this combat the first community is forged, both witnessing and acting as a vector for divine salvation: "He it is Who supports thee with His Help, and with the believers" (Q 8:62). These are the people who are prepared to follow the Prophet whatever the circumstances, on whom he can count absolutely: "O Prophet! God suffices for thee and those believers who follow thee". (Q 8:64). The Prophet has followed the Revelation and the example of earlier prophets; his Companions, in their turn, have followed him, and they are called the "Followers" (*al-tābiʿūn*) and then the "Followers of the Followers". This expression echoes a Prophetic tradition relating to the excellence of the first three generations, due to the fact that they followed, which guarantees their conformity and the truth of their transmission.

In this context, the Companions are described in the same way and compared – to their advantage – with the lukewarm rear-guard: "But the Messenger and those who believe with him strive with their wealth and with their selves. And it is they who shall have good things, and it is they who shall prosper." (Q 9:88). To believe with the Prophet is to be part of a community whose final realisation will take place in the next world.

Those who seek to follow the Prophet's spiritual path towards his Lord are also mentioned, specifically as regards the prayer of vigil, which indicates

23 Ibn ʿAbbās understands this relationship as that which ties the Prophet to different Qurayshi clans. Later, ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn (Zayn al-ʿābidīn) identifies the relationship with the *Ahl al-bayt*; Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, XXV, 15–17.

24 Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, *ʿilm* 45 n° 123, *jihād* 15 n° 2810.

a deep spiritual engagement: "Truly thy Lord knoweth that thou dost stand vigil well-nigh two-thirds of the night, or a half of it, or a third of it, as do a group of those who are with thee …" (Q 73:20). The final verse of the *al-Fatḥ* (The Opening, or Victory) Sura describes those who, following the Prophet's example, have fully embodied the models of Moses and Christ, as included in the Muḥammadan mission. In this respect, it is not only the privileged Companions who can be with the Prophet, since their models precede them and are universal:

> Muḥammad is the Messenger of God. Those who are with him are harsh against the disbelievers, merciful to one another. You see them bowing, prostrating, seeking bounty from God and contentment; the mark upon their faces is from the effect of prostration. That is their likeness in the Torah. And their likeness in the Gospel is a sapling that puts forth its shoot and strengthens it, such that is grows stout and rises firmly upon its stalk, impressing the sowers, that through them He may enrage the disbelievers. God has promised forgiveness and a great reward to those among them who believe and perform righteous deeds.
>
> Q 48:29

This path to holiness demands a rectitude resembling that of the Prophet and his close Companions in Mecca:

> So be steadfast, as thou hast been commanded and [as are] those who turn in repentance along with you …
>
> Q 11:112

11.2 *Being with God and the Envoy*

Being with the Prophet; believing with him; returning to God with him: these are all so many ways of being with God. The requisite combat and sacrifice demand a total engagement. Those who, for various reasons, find themselves incapable of undertaking this are exempted "If they are sincere toward God and his Messenger" (Q 9:91), for this requires an act of faith, of fidelity to an inner promise or deposit that the believer must protect scrupulously in order not to betray it, as the general meaning of this verse makes clear: "O you who believe! Betray not God and the Messenger, and betray not your trusts knowingly". (Q 8:27).[25] In the context of the Medinese foundation, the slightest

25 For more on the various interpretations of this verse, see Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, IX, 145–7 and Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, VII, 394–5.

weakness or preference for this life over the next could be an act of betrayal both of self and of community, as, for example, occurred with the scattering of the Muslims at the battle of Uḥud: "When you were climbing, casting a glance to no one, while the Messenger was calling you from your rear" (Q 3:153). In this difficult context, the believers found themselves called upon to choose: "Say, 'If your fathers, your children, your brothers, your spouses, your tribe, the wealth you have acquired, the commerce whose stagnation you fear, and dwellings you find pleasing, are more beloved to you than God, and His Messenger, and striving in His way, then wait till God comes with His command'" (Q 9:24).

From this perspective, combat is merely a trial of the sincerity of the engagement that ties each believer to God and to he whose love is inseparable from God's. The Ḥudaybiyya episode, recounted in the *al-Fatḥ* Sura, subjected the Companions to another test – this time obliging them, despite themselves, to refrain from battle. Those who are totally engaged with the Prophet obtain God's satisfaction, and inner peace (*sakīna*) descends upon them (cf. 48, 18). Then this inner peace, which was divine presence and power in the Arch of Alliance, descended anew on the Prophet and the believers (Q 48:26), and refreshed them during the battle of Ḥunayn, when the Muslims had previously vacillated for a moment (Q 9:26).

Thus the Qur'ān presents the formation of the Muslim community as the descent of divine support upon the Prophet and the Companions at the intense and privileged moments that establish an exemplary history. These Companions will constitute the foundation and the model for a spiritual elite whose bonds of love and inner engagement attach them to the Prophet. Whereas Jesus is followed by disciples who take a path of monasticism, "to seek God's Contentment" (Q 57:27), and their successors cannot themselves follow the same path, Muslim believers are called to seek this divine gift through faith in their Prophet (Q 57:28).

11.3 *"And Know That the Messenger of God Is among You …"*

Although the Prophet consolidated the earliest foundation of Islam alongside a privileged core of totally engaged followers, his community, as we have seen, extends in principle, and in the next world, to all of humanity. As God's envoy he is situated between He who sent him and those to whom he is sent. As a human being, he is also himself a member of this community: "God certainly favoured the believers when He sent them a Messenger from among themselves …" (Q 3:164). The insistence in several verses on the fact that the Prophet is one of them ("from yourselves or from your own souls" in Q 9:128) and is sent among them, allows one to believe that his presence in the heart of his community is not necessarily limited to the duration of his earthly life. When

the believer hears this: "And know that the Messenger of God is among you …" (Q 49:7), how will he react? The Qur'ān also addresses believers thus: "How can you disbelieve, while God's signs are recited unto you and His Messenger is among you?" (Q 3:101). It is likely that some members of the community are not open to perceiving the Prophet's presence inside themselves. Yet the prayer "upon" the Prophet, a prolonging of an act of grace by God and the angels, aims to permanently reproduce this act, and to hail him as one would a living being, with no temporal limits: "Truly God and His angels invoke blessings upon the Prophet. O you who believe! Invoke blessing upon him, and greetings of peace!" (Q 33:56). The ritualisation of this practice, especially in the last phase of the ritual prayer, but also in many other circumstances, cannot but be understood as a desire to interiorise the presence of the Prophet.

Existing between God and his own community, by his presence the Prophet actualises the effects of the divine Attributes, particularly mercy. As he is the ideal mediator, even his mere presence brings one closer to God: "When My servants ask thee about Me, truly I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me. So let them respond to Me and believe in Me, that they may be led aright". (Q 2:186).

United as they were by shared battles and trials, the Medina community was also brought together by the institution of rites, as is expressed after the order is given to the Prophet to exact obligatory and purifying alms. God's gaze upon the believers who perform rites or good works for Him also passes through the Prophet's eyes and those of the community: "Say, 'Perform your deeds. God will see your deeds, as will the Messenger and the believers …'." (Q 9:105). God is essentially the only Protector (*walī*) of believers, but once this protection (*walāya*) returns to God it is diffused via the Prophet over all the community of believers, and ensures its cohesion: "Your protector is only God, and His Messenger, and those who believe, who perform the prayer and give alms while bowing down. And whosoever takes as his protector God, and His Messenger, and those who believe – the party of God, they are the victorious ones!" (Q 5:55–56).

12 Conclusion

We have attempted, in this brief overview, to discern the person of the Prophet by examining and re-ordering material that is dispersed throughout the text of the Qur'ān, but still it escapes us. His person escapes us in his interiority, even if, for the sake of exemplarity, some of his soul's movements are revealed to us; his exteriority is just as remote from us. We learn nothing of his physical

appearance, his style of clothing, those who surround him (friends or enemies, family and wives), apart from a few barely sketched glimpses. He is described to us mostly through a network of relationships that reflect back upon his person: his relationships with his Lord, his Companions, his community, mankind, and the community of prophets. Our investigation has been constrained by our initial choice to restrict ourselves to Qur'ānic verses in which the Prophet is mentioned or addressed. We have strayed from these constraints only where similarities and comparisons with other prophets seemed likely to cast light on the figure of the Prophet himself. By passing from the explicit to the implicit we could have extended and deepened our research. Our examination of the Prophet's relationship with his community, for example, could have considered such verses as: "You are the best community brought forth unto mankind, enjoining right, forbidding wrong, and believing in God …" (Q 3:110), and thus established an underlying link with the excellence of the Prophet, which is here also suggested without being made explicit. Doubtless it was preferable to avoid setting out in this way, in order to preserve the clear and explicit (*bayān*) nature of the Qur'ān's text. Here and there we have used *ḥadīth* to indicate how a meaning that was virtually present was to be developed by the *sunna*. The Qur'ān remains silent about many of the characteristics and actions of the Prophet that have been transmitted by tradition and celebrated by pious Muslims, such as the miracles attributed to him by the *sīra*, which the Qur'ān refuses to recognise as signs of his mission. One would be obliged to delve to an equal extent into the *ḥadīth* and the *sīra* to grasp how believers perceive and experience the reality of the Prophet. But how can one define the limits of the corpus in question? Such research should permit one to compare two types of texts whose style and perspective are different, although they resonate with each other. Quite apart from any questions of faith, the Qur'ān's discourse presents the Prophet in a manner that is familiar but distant, as if seen from above – whereas the *sunna* offers a more horizontal discourse, that of a human being speaking to other human beings, even when the Prophet evokes aspects of himself that surpass ordinary humanity.

To conclude, we could ask ourselves what the results of this preliminary enquiry have been: do we have a better understanding of what a prophet is, and of who the Prophet is? Perhaps the Qur'ān leaves the question open for the Prophet himself to answer when it says to him: "Truly the One who ordained the Qur'ān for thee shall surely bring thee back to the place of return. Say, 'My lord knows best those who bring guidance, and those who are in manifest error'." (Q 28:85). What is this "place of return" that the Qur'ān announces? Will it be the place in which the mystery of human destiny is unveiled – since, as the Qur'ān demonstrates, for the Prophet it was always a mystery that was

there to be questioned? Prophecy is a bridge between divine transcendence and human immanence. How does one grasp it? The manifold ways in which believers experience the presence of the Prophet are more accessible for us. How and to what extent do they anchor these in the Qurʾānic text? This is what the present study has sought to demonstrate and sometimes to suggest.

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2

Dating the Emergence of the Warrior-Prophet in *Maghāzī* Literature

Second/Eighth to the Fourth/Tenth Century

Adrien de Jarmy

1 Contextualising Early *Maghāzī* Literature

1.1 *"Prepare to Fight with All Your Might!"*

These words, spoken in the first person, and emphasising the narrative tension before battle, were used by Muḥammad to galvanise the Muslims as they prepared to face the Quraysh in Badr (2/624), according to the account in the *Kitāb al-maghāzī* by al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823).[1] In *maghāzī* texts, the famous battles, such as Badr, Uḥud (3/625), al-Khandaq (5/627),[2] and al-Fāṭḥ (8/629–30)[3] are the highlights of the Prophet's mission. He is represented as a valiant warrior, whose role as intercessor between earth and heaven is decisive in bringing the Believers (*muʾminūn*) to victory. The earliest sources we have on the life of Muḥammad are the *maghāzī*, but they are far from being a consistent literary genre because they encompass a mix of different types of texts: lists of martyrs, poetry, Qurʾānic explanations, anecdotes resembling those found in the Bible, and of course accounts of military expeditions. The principal characteristic of this literature is the omnipresence of subjects related to war: its rules, the eagerness in combat against the infidels, the distribution of spoils, stereotypes about the peoples who were conquered (mainly the People of the Book). *Maghāzī* literature began to take shape at the end of the Umayyad era, in the first decades of the second/eighth century: the conquests were receding into memory and the need to write down the key features of historic Islamic military successes arose. The end of the conquests had opened up space for a reflexive discourse on the past and origins of Islam, within the close relationship between Umayyad power and the first scholars to shape its memory.[4]

1 Wāqidī, *The Kitāb al-maghāzī*, 100.
2 The Battle of the Trench.
3 The conquest of Mecca.
4 Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir. L'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides*.

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During the same period, the end of the Umayyad state was brought about by a succession of military crises on the borders of the Empire.[5] Since the Prophet emerged as a literary character in this historiographical context, it's no surprise that some of the earliest representations of the Prophet Muḥammad depict him as a warrior.[6]

It is now clear that this historiography was born during the reign of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 65/685–86/705), through knowledge gathered by ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 94/712–13).[7] However, for this era it is difficult to evaluate which form of transmission is more important, oral or written. Throughout the second/eighth century, scholars debated the value of writing, either because – for them – the authority of oral transmission was paramount, or because the Qurʾān was considered to be the only valid corpus recorded in writing. This could explain their reluctance, until the end of the Umayyad era, to write down Prophetic traditions.[8] So how can we date the emergence of the character of the Warrior-Prophet in *maghāzī* literature, if the historiography seems so hazy? Gregor Schoeler submitted an interesting model to overcome this problem: in denying ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr's authorship of a *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, he stated that scholars of the time still favoured oral transmission. The texts they did write were far from being structured works (*syngrammata*) intended to be publicly read, as we expect later productions to be; instead, they wrote down notes, which served as reminders (*hypomnēmata*). During Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī's (d. 124/742) lifetime, and through the course of his work, an important transition occurred.[9] According to one of his students, Mālik b. Anas, he had disliked the idea of writing traditions down.[10] But another of his students, Maʿmar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770), reported that one of al-Zuhrī's companions, Ṣaliḥ b. Kaysān (d. after 140/757–8), had stated that al-Zuhrī encouraged followers to put Prophetic traditions in writing, leading Gregor Schoeler to deduce that the scholar had changed his mind towards the end of his life,

5 Blankinship, *The End of the Jihad State*.

6 We insist on the relationship between representations of Muḥammad as a warrior and the birth of a military historiography, because representations of Muḥammad might have emerged differently had they been based on other material. See, for instance, the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock, Tillier, "'Abd al-Malik, Muḥammad et le Jugement dernier".

7 Horovitz, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and Their Authors*, is the first study in which this theory was clearly expressed; it was confirmed more recently by Gregor Schoeler and Andreas Görke, see Schoeler *et al.*, *Die ältesten Berichte über das Leben Muhammads*.

8 Cook, "The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition in Early Islam".

9 Schoeler, "al-Zuhrī et la consignation par écrit des traditions", 52–56.

10 Schoeler, "al-Zuhrī et la consignation par écrit des traditions", 43–45.

under the impetus of a general change in attitudes to the written word and the benefits it could provide.

The two decades around the transition from the Umayyad to the Abbasid dynasty were crucial, marking a step change in Islamic tradition, and in perceptions of the character of Muḥammad. Two of Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī's students, Maʿmar b. Rāshid and his famous contemporary, the scholar Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767), are well-known: the first for having composed a *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, and the second for the *sīra*.[11] The fact that these works encouraged their own (sometimes altered) re-transmission in later recensions (*riwāyāt*), through which they have come down to us,[12] proves both that they existed as written productions and that they were successful as authoritative works. Maʿmar b. Rāshid's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* was the basis of the *Muṣannaf* by his student ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣānʿānī (d. 211/826),[13] and the *sīra* was presented in the work of Ibn Hishām, (d. 213/828 or 218/833), who was born in Baṣra but appears to have lived most of his life in Egypt.[14] On the basis of the *terminus post quem* of their dates of death, and putting aside very complex and sometimes fragile methods such as the *isnād-cum-matn*,[15] logically we can conclude that both works give us a representation of the Prophet that dates from the earliest days of the *miḥna*, which started in 217/833. However, each of these two works has been transmitted to us by very different means: Ibn Hishām's *sīra* is taken from a recension by al-Bakkāʾī of Kūfa (d. 183/799), whereas ʿAbd al-Razzāq's work was composed directly from the teachings of his master Maʿmar, who established himself in Ṣanʿāʾ after the fall of the Umayyad state. Although we know very little of Ibn Hishām's life,[16] the time elapsed between the date of Ibn Isḥāq's death (150/767) and his own (c. 213/828) makes it very unlikely that the two

11 It is not clear whether Ibn Isḥāq called his own work the *Sīra* or if this was the title given it by Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833), who composed the summary. For two different points of view on the subject, see Hinds, "*Maghāzī* and *Sīra* in early Islamic scholarship" 57–66, and Jarrar, *Die Prophetenbiographie im islamischen Spanien*.

12 The work is known to us from the summary by Ibn Hishām. There are other well-known recensions, such as the work by Salama b. al-Fāḍl al-Abrash of Ray (d. after 190/805–6), which survived in the *Taʾrīkh* by al-Ṭābarī (d. 310/923), and Yūnus b. Bukayr of Kūfa (d. 199/815). For a list of recensions of the *Sīra*, see the introduction of Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*.

13 Rāshid, *The Expeditions*. See also ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. al-Ṣanʿānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, and index.

14 Our work rests on three editions of the text: *al-Sīra*, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld; *Das Leben Muhammads*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā *et al*; and *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salam Tadmurī.

15 Motzki, "Dating Muslim traditions", and "The Muṣannaf of ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. al-Ṣanʿānī as a source of authentic *āḥādīth* of the first century A.H."

16 See Hinds, "al-Maghāzī" and Ravens, "Sīra".

ever met, or, in any case, that they could have had a close relationship such as existed between Maʿmar and ʿAbd al-Razzāq.

The purposes of these different recensions are also quite distinct: Ibn Hishām's text is the result of a rearranged summary, and he specifies that he left a great deal of his source to one side. The whole work is built on a chronological account of Muḥammad's life, in an approach similar to that adopted in al-Waqidī's *Kitāb al-maghāzī*. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, on the other hand, chose to include his teacher's *Kitāb al-maghāzī* in his own collection of *ḥādīth*: this project took him in another direction. Ignoring much of the chronology, and depriving the text of dating, he was content to transmit the raw bulk of traditions according to his teacher. Certain features of his work, such as his direct relationship with his master, the fact that Maʿmar lived at the Umayyad court before leaving for Ṣanʿā, and the archaic framework of the text, make it more plausible that ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *Kitāb al-maghāzī* reflects Maʿmar's vision, and thus presents something of the state of historiography in the last decade of the Umayyad dynasty.

Untangling the facts behind the composition of Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* is a much more difficult process. The text is comprised of many different segments, and Ibn Isḥāq was known to have found caliphal patrons in the new Abbasid capital of Baghdād, while Maʿmar left for Yemen. Historiography was an activity that had been sponsored by the court since the early Umayyad era,[17] meaning that while these stories may have been circulated orally between scholars, some of them also spread in the form of written texts and, thanks to state patronage, were recognised as part of the canonical account. All of this makes it more likely that literary representations of the *sīra* gained authority between the first decade of the Abbasid dynasty and the composition of Ibn Hishām's *Sīra*. This offers a context, and solid ground on which to base an argument that the emergence of a Warrior-Prophet character in the *maghāzī* literature was a dynamic and non-linear process.

The first half of the third/ninth century saw the appearance of many well-known texts, such as the *Kitāb al-maghāzī* by al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823), transmitted through the recension by Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), who also wrote the *Ṭabaqāt*.[18] During the same period, Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) included a *Kitāb al-maghāzī* in his *Muṣannaf*,[19] a practice that was also followed, among people compiling collections of *ḥādīth*, by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) in his

17 Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds*, 46; Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, "Umayyad Court" 659–663.

18 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt al-kubra*.

19 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*.

famous *Ṣaḥīḥ*. In these texts Prophetic traditions became much more complex, and accounts of supranatural events such as the miracles of the Prophet became frequent. This form of devotion towards Muḥammad is best reflected in Ibn Saʿd's *Ṭabaqāt*, and in certain chapters of a much later work: al-Ṭabarī's (310/923) *Taʾrīkh*,[20] which offers lists and descriptions of Prophetic relics, war-related or not. We also argue that unlike Maʿmar's *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, the *kutub al-jihād* and *siyar* that emerged in the first half of the third/ninth century, and were included in re-collections of *ḥādīth* – made up for the most part of Prophetic traditions – were inspired by the revival of *jihād* at that time, and by its formalisation in famous treatises on the subject.

The representation of a Warrior-Prophet – and of Muḥammad in general – only gradually begins to stand out in the historiography. In this study we will demonstrate general tendencies, highlighting the historical background that supported the development of this character of the Warrior-Prophet in *maghāzī* literature. To do this, we have avoided *asānīd*-centred methodologies and favoured a more comparative approach, examining similarities and differences between the texts recounting traditions, that is to say the *mutūn*. To evaluate the presence of the Prophet in the sources, we applied both quantitative and qualitative analysis. First, we will build our argument on statistics relating to traditions mentioning Muḥammad, in samples taken from re-collections of *ḥādīth*. In this way we will confirm various important stages in the evolution of this character between the last decades of the Umayyad era and the first century of the Abbasid. We will then address the issue of the chronology of Muḥammad's expeditions, showing that the way chroniclers chose to order these shaped the military memories of the origins of Islam that were current in the first half of the third/ninth century. Finally, we will examine the subject of the Prophet's relics of war as they appear in later texts: their presence in these indicates a growing devotion to the character of the Warrior-Prophet during the second half of the third/ninth century and up until the work of al-Ṭabarī.

2 The Warrior-Prophet: A Subject That Gradually Gained Importance in Historiography

As we suggested above, Maʿmar b. Rāshid's *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, collected in the *Muṣannaf* of his direct student ʿAbd al-Razzāq, may reflect the state of historiography before the collapse of the Umayyad dynasty. Compared to later sources, this *Kitāb al-maghāzī* is a very brief text, comprising only 147

20 Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History*, 119.

traditions in total.[21] At that time, historiography was far from encompassing the huge number of traditions that Abbasid scholars would later collect. The number of the traditions in this *Kitāb al-maghāzī* that mention Muḥammad is, however, comparatively high. The Prophet is present in 91 traditions, and in 27 of the 31 chapters (*bāb*) of the text. He is thus mentioned in 61.9% of the traditions, and in 73% of the chapters.[22] Muḥammad occupies almost two-thirds of this entire text dedicated to the military history of the origins of Islam, making it possible that Maʿmar's work reflects a historiographical stage that had already made progress in this direction, through a process that was initiated by his master, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (and perhaps others).[23] Thus the earliest literary representations of Muḥammad emerged in a war literature, expressing nostalgia for the great victories of the past, such as Badr or the conquest of Mecca, which is already called *al-Fatḥ* in Maʿmar's *Kitāb*.[24] In *The End of the Jihād State*,[25] Khalid Yahya Blankinship proposed that the Umayyad Caliphate based its expansion on the doctrine of *jihād*; this brought about the Empire's fall because imperial power lived beyond its means during the reign of Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 105/724–125/743) and ended up consuming itself. In cases where the theory of a centralised *jihād* as early as this has been debated,[26] historians such as Michael Bonner have agreed on the momentum of this collapse during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik's son, during which al-Zuhrī and Maʿmar b. Rāshid had a teacher-student relationship, and caliphal armies suffered a number of setbacks. In fact, the second siege of Constantinople preceded this period, occurring in 98/717–99/718, after which the Byzantines retaliated by attacking Syria. In the west, the Battle of Tours held back Umayyad armies in 113/732. At the same time, a number of revolts arose in the border regions of the newly conquered Empire: the Khazars killed the Arab governor of Armenia in 107/726, Transoxiana rose violently between 109/728 and 111/730, and the Berbers revolted in North Africa in 122/740–124/742. The Umayyad Empire,

21 In "The *Kitāb al-maghāzī* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣanʿanī", Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort estimated a higher number of traditions in the book. However, as Sean W. Anthony noted in the introduction to Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, a number of these are actually commentaries by ʿAbd al-Razzāq on the traditions collected by his master.

22 See the chart in the appendix at the end of this chapter.

23 On this matter, we would have liked to read Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort's dissertation *Between History and Legend*. But, according to worldcat.org, only four universities in Europe have copies of the dissertation, mainly in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, so it was unavailable for our purposes.

24 Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 94.

25 Blankinship, *The End of the Jihād State*.

26 Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History*.

hitherto victorious, faced its first major defeats and the tremendous momentum of their expeditions, which had begun in the previous century, slowed to a halt.[27] At this time, Muslim scholars living in the entourage of caliphal power, such as al-Zuhrī, and Maʿmar after him, were collecting military traditions dating from the beginnings of Islam. The correlation between the emergence of a widespread Islamic military historiography in the form of written works (*syngrammata*) and the collapse of the Umayyad dynasty underlines the role a Warrior-Prophet could play for them as a historiographical hero.

Anyone looking for epic narratives and battles in the likes of Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* and al-Wāqidī's *Kitāb al-maghāzī* would, however, be truly disappointed. There is nothing of the sort in Maʿmar's text, in which we find only the raw skeleton of military traditions; this demonstrates that *maghāzī* literature was, at this point, still in its early stages. Furthermore, the story doesn't end with the death of Muḥammad, since more than a third of the work is dedicated to subjects such as the reign of Abū Bakr and his expeditions,[28] ʿUmar's expeditions,[29] anecdotes concerning expeditions carried out by ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya,[30] and to an account of the battle of al-Qādisiyya (14/636).[31] Building on these facts, we would like to suggest two closely related hypotheses: although Muḥammad was already the main character of Maʿmar's *Kitāb*, statistics confirm that *maghāzī* literature wasn't entirely associated with Muḥammad's own biography until a much later date, maybe not until al-Wāqidī's *Kitāb al-maghāzī*. In addition, Muḥammad could have existed as merely one character among many others until the point at which he acquired complete authority in this literature, during the first half of the third/ninth century. Coming back to the chart, only 55.1% of the traditions in the *Kitāb al-maghāzī* that makes up part of Ibn Abī Shayba's *Muṣannaf* mention Muḥammad. In the case of this text, determining a chronology is much more difficult than in that of Maʿmar's *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, because the origins of Abī Shayba's sources are more numerous and wide-ranging, and the text covers more ground. In Ibn Abī Shayba's work, the absolute number of traditions quoting Muḥammad is much larger: over 319 from a total of 579, and such quotations occur in all 47 chapters, highlighting the evolution in historiography after Maʿmar's smaller *Kitāb*. In the *Kitab al-maghāzī* within Ibn Abī Shayba's *Muṣannaf*, Prophetic traditions occur throughout the text. Nevertheless, a significant part of the work is dedicated to various other

27 Hoyland, "Retrenchment and revolt", 170–206.

28 Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 192–215.

29 Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 252–261.

30 Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 216–237. See also the dispute between ʿAlī and al-ʿAbbās, 241–251.

31 Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 266–271.

topics: the conversion of many Companions,[32] the reign of Abū Bakr and the *Ridda*,[33] the reigns of ʿUmar,[34] ʿUthmān[35] and ʿAlī.[36] It seems that, at a time when Ibn Hishām and al-Wāqidī structured their texts entirely around the figure of the Prophet in a process that would lead to the canonisation of these texts in the Islamic tradition, Ibn Abī Shayba was still continuing to transmit a different version of Islamic historiography, closer to the trend that was in fashion in the final decades of the Umayyad era. It's possible that Ibn Isḥāq also continued to follow this trend, as, according to Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 384/995 or 387/998), he may also have transmitted traditions concerning the expeditions of the Successors and Umayyad conquests.[37] Ibn Hishām may have decided to put these to one side, in order to restrict himself to writing mostly about Prophetic traditions.

Besides the well-known sources that we have quoted here, during the first Abbasid century many other scholars were attracted to Islamic military historiography, such as Abū Maʿshar Najīḥ b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sindī (d. 170/786), ʿAbd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr (d. 176/792), ʿAlī b. Mujāhid (d. 182/798), Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd al-Umawī (d. 194/809), al-Walīd b. Muslim al-Umawī (d. 195/810), and ʿAbd Allah b. Wahb (d. 197/812). If scholarly works of Islamic military historiography were scarce and underdeveloped during the first half of the second/eighth century, the Abbasid era was blessed with the opposite phenomenon, seeing a huge development in *maghāzī* literature. This era was also marked by the formative period of the doctrine of *jihād* and its rules,[38] as danger arose on the borders of the Empire, putting pressure on the community of Muslims and *Dār al-Islam*. The Umayyad conquest offensive ended with their dynasty, and war under the Abbasids evolved; they adopted a more defensive approach, concentrated on the border 'hot spots' located on the margins of the territory. Michael Bonner has shown that this period was marked by a revival in the Empire of the ideology of *jihād*, in connection with the emergence of the notion of borders (*thugūr*) in Islam during the first century of the Abbasid caliphate, motivated by pro-Umayyad revolts and conflict with the Byzantine Empire.[39] As soon as the Abbasid dynasty came to power in 132/750, Syria, the Jazīra, and the region of Wāsiṭ in Iraq rose up under the influence

32 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, 37580–37604....
33 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, 38039–38052.
34 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, 38053–38071.
35 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, 38072–38089.
36 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, 38090–38097.
37 Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadīm*, 200.
38 Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History*.
39 Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War*, 43–135.

of pro-Umayyad governors who rejected the new rulers.[40] Between 133/750 and 137/755, the Byzantine emperor Constantine V took advantage of this moment of weakness to attack the border in northern Syria and the fortresses of Malaṭya, Shimshāṭ, and al-Maṣṣīṣa, which were deep in Anatolian territory.[41] Byzantine attacks on the border resumed in 168–70/785–86 and the Muslim defensive system was jeopardised and threatened to collapse. The border was then extensively reorganised under the reign of Ḥārūn al-Rashīd (763–809), who established a line of fortresses from al-Maṣṣīṣa[42] to Malaṭya, as well as an army (*jund*) specially assigned to this region. The Arab-Byzantine border then became known as *al-ʿĀwāṣim*,[43] a province in its own right and a buffer zone against the enemy. Between 130/750 and the first decades of the third/ninth century, the Byzantine threat therefore weighed heavily on the *Dār al-Islam*.

Surely, the evolution of Islamic military historiography and the concomitant increase in the production of *maghāzī* texts can be related to the revival of *jihād* ideology during the period leading up to the third/ninth century. This revival must also have played a role in the increase in the number and importance of Prophetic traditions in such texts. Statistics drawn from Ibn Abī Shayba's *Kitāb al-maghāzī* indicate that at the time of its composition this process was on-going. However, the absolute number of traditions mentioning Muḥammad grew significantly, as witnessed by his presence in every chapter of Ibn Abī Shayba's text. What's more, during the same period al-Wāqidī chose to include only the Medina years of Muḥammad's life in his *Kitāb al-maghāzī*. Al-Bukhārī, who died in 256/870, travelled from a very young age in order to collect the Prophetic traditions that he included in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. He chose to write a *Kiṭab al-maghāzī* centred almost exclusively on the Prophet's life and traditions relating to it, including over 402 prophetic traditions (out of a total of 488), 88,3% of the traditions cited. In the case of this text, 87 of the 90 chapters (96.6%) mention Muḥammad. In their works, these scholars completed the association between *maghāzī* literature and the biography of Muḥammad, represented as a Warrior-Prophet.

Thus, the representation of Muḥammad as a Warrior-Prophet very gradually and progressively became important in the historiography presented in the *maghāzī*. This phenomenon had its roots deep in the evolution of the military context that existed between the end of the Umayyad era and the

40 Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War*, 45.

41 Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War*, 50–51, quoted the following sources: "al-Ṭabarī, III, 121; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 186, 199; Azdīn, 142; Yaʿqūbī, II, 435; Khalīfa, 626. For Christian sources: Pseudo-Dionysos, 55–65; Michel the Syrian, II, 518, and Theophanes, 427, 429".

42 Mopsuestia.

43 Meaning the defence or the protection.

first Abbasid century, and it influenced a rearrangement of the chronology of Muḥammad's expeditions.

3 The Chronology of the Prophet's Expeditions: A Teleological Construction in Sources from the Third/Ninth Century

Several researchers have dedicated important studies to the chronology of Muḥammad's expeditions. As early as 1957, J. M. B. Jones published an extensive survey, comparing the dates given by al-Wāqidī in his *Kitāb al-maghāzī* with data from other sources, particularly the *Sīra*.[44] Uri Rubin, from the other side of the historiographical spectrum, tackled the subject differently in an epilogue to *The Eye of the Beholder*, assessing numerical patterns that emerged from the chronology, a similar process to that found in the Jewish biblical tradition.[45] Assuming that the chronology of Muḥammad's expeditions could only be understood as it echoed past Jewish theology, he left behind the historical context in which these texts were produced and based his study solely on literary representations. Letting go of all historical positivism, the influence of John Wansbrough was here very clear, and as he stated that Muslim chronology could only be grasped through its relationship with a past referent, his work led to epistemological relativism.[46] Without denying the theological project that supported the construction of the chronology of Muḥammad's expeditions, we shall insist here on a related but distinct purpose: teleology.

Looking at the chronology in the *kutub al-maghāzī* of Maʿmar b. Rāshid and Ibn Abī Shayba, one can't help but notice how incomplete it is, and how little it corresponds to the order established by Ibn Hishām – or possibly by Ibn Isḥāq before him – and by al-Wāqidī. Thus, Maʿmar b. Rāshid's text begins with the

44 Jones, "The Chronology of the *Maghāzī*". For a more complete survey of other studies on the chronology of Muḥammad's life, see Conrad, "Theophanes and the Arabic Historical Tradition" 16–20. We owe this reference to Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 189.

45 Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 189–214.

46 Epistemological relativism is a scientific position that prioritises the relationships between different known facts and stipulates that an experience has meaning only in its relationship with a preceding experience that echoes it. The value of something known is understandable only through these relationships, which also determine its function, regardless of whether what is known is considered to be true or false. Grammar seems to us to be a good analogy: we separate a word's function from its meaning, with its function being much more volatile. The accusation of epistemological relativism was first laid against the historian of the sciences, Thomas Samuel Kuhn. See Lakhoff G. et al., *Metaphors we Live By*.

excavation of the well of Zamzam by ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib,[47] then makes a jump through time to the expedition of Ḥudaybiyya (6/628).[48] Then the story flashes back to the battle of Badr (2/624) and continues in chronological order until the expedition of Ḥunayn (8/630),[49] before opening an ellipsis concerning the Believers who emigrated to Abyssinia, an episode dating from the Prophet's life in Mecca.[50] The story then resumes, and there is another parenthetical return to the past with an account of the battle of al-Khandaq (5/627).[51]

The framework of Ibn Abī Shayba's *Kitāb al-maghāzī* is more consistent. Nevertheless, in the last chapter of this book (*bāb*), after having narrated the reigns of the Prophet's Successors, the compiler flashes back to the first oath of ʿAqaba.[52] However, on the contrary, in the texts of Ibn Isḥāq and al-Wāqidī temporality and chronology are structural elements. The order of the main expeditions is strictly the same, with differences existing only among accounts of minor expeditions. The chronological organisation of the narrative served a teleological purpose: to underline the stages in which Islam, and its protagonist Muḥammad, achieved victory. Perhaps this history of origins, focused on the Prophet, met the new Abbasid dynasty's need for legitimisation, as did their kinship with Muḥammad through his uncle al-ʿAbbās, a claim that was widely circulated at the beginning of their reign.[53] Even in the early fourth/tenth century, the affiliation between Abbasid power and the Prophet's history made sense in al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh*, a narrative that starts from the Creation and early days of biblical history and extends to the year 293/905–6. It is possible that a universal history was already in the making with Ibn Isḥāq's text. According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Ibn Isḥāq also wrote a *Kitāb al-mubtada'*.[54] It is difficult to know if this was part of the *Sīra* or constituted a separate manuscript. However, during the Abbasid era, universal history became the subject of greater attention as more scholars thought about the implications of including Muḥammad's life in a broader, biblical scheme.

A number of elements related to dating confirm that chronology had a teleological purpose. In the most well-known sources written during the Abbasid

47 Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 2–25.

48 Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 26–49.

49 Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 50–111.

50 Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 112–129.

51 Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions*, 160–165.

52 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, 38098–38105.

53 Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*. Although their theory was understandably received with much controversy, their repeated references to *Rasūl Allāh* in the Abbasid caliphal title in letters and poetry at least underlined their desire to link their ideology more closely with Muḥammad's authority.

54 *Ibid*.

period, the dates of the expeditions are always given. John Wansbrough has pointed out this feature in the texts of Ibn Isḥāq-Ibn Hishām and al-Wāqidī in *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*. Wansbrough saw this as proof of a gradual transition to a normative and legal literature that is based on the dating of the first events, and follows a logic that is useful for jurisprudence.[55]

However, the dates of the expeditions are much rarer, or absent, in the *kutub al-maghāzī* which are integrated into the *muṣannafāt* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba. One could argue that these two men were traditionalists above all, and that their goal was to compile normative traditions and integrate them into the great compilations of *ḥādīth*, thus shaping the *sunna*. One could also say that at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century the work of Ibn Hishām, al-Wāqidī and al-Ṭabarī, although it diverged in other ways, was like that of historians, whose role is crucial for the dating of events, but – at first sight – had a very minor influence on the formalisation of the *sunna*. Without fully rejecting this argument, it can be noted that the work of Maʿmar b. Rāshid, whose work was transmitted in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf*, did resemble that of Ibn Isḥāq, who (unlike him, and working barely a decade later, at the start of Abbasid reign) did transmit the dates of the expeditions. In addition, al-Bukhārī, a famous traditionist, adopted the classic chronology for the expeditions in his *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, integrated within the *Saḥīḥ*, whose writing dates at the latest from the years preceding his death in 256/870. This great traditionist places at the beginning of his book the expedition of al-ʿUshayra (2/623),[56] one of the first expeditions of the Prophet in the main texts of *maghāzī*, before continuing the story with the battle of Badr[57] and subsequent major military events, until the Prophet's death.[58] It is difficult to know whether al-Bukhārī adopted the chronological model established in the first decades of the Abbasid era. However, the fact that this model is included in the largest compilation of Sunnī *ḥādīth* shows that it acquired authority in the Muslim world in his time.

55 "[…] in the *maghāzī* literature proper an explicit and meticulous chronology is not merely attested but becomes its organising principle. It is thus that each episode is introduced: 'and that was [so many] months after the *Hijra* (*ʿalā raʾs … ashur min muhājarat rasūl allāh*).'"; "A further, and equally significant, impulse is evident: a concern to fix the dates of first occurrences (*awāʾil*), e.g. the first battle standard (*liwā*) bestowed by Muḥammad (Wāqidī, 9: to Ḥamza), the first shot fired in the cause of Islam (Wāqidī, 10: to Saʿd). Solicitude for 'origins' eventually produced a genre of Arabic literature whose *raison d'être* was not so much historical as juridical.", in Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 30, 31.

56 *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 59, 285.

57 *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 59, 286–362.

58 *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 59, 741–745.

In the writings of Maʿmar b. Rāshid, ʿAbd al-Razzāq, and Ibn Abī Shayba, the presence of numerous temporal ellipses and the frequent absence of dates for the events recounted indicate that chronology was not yet a major concern. Unlike the *Sīra*, whose title[59] reflects an insistence on the chronological sequence, and therefore on the biography of the character, there is no 'life path' in these texts, but rather an accumulation of traditions relating to expeditions that took place during the beginnings of Islam, and within which the Prophet plays an increasingly important role. It is only in later texts that the Prophet becomes the sole subject of the *maghāzī* and that his life story is structured chronologically. Contrary to what Wansbrough argued, here chronology has a true narrative purpose and does not serve only as a transition from narrative to normative texts.

4 Prophetic Relics of War

This complete focus on the character of Muḥammad in *maghāzī* literature during the first half of the third/ninth century led to the development of devotional traditions, and a focus on a series of relics that personified the qualities of the Warrior-Prophet. Let us consider some traditions that appear late in the formalisation of Muḥammad's biography: short chapters dedicated to the description of his possessions, organised in the form of lists and generally accompanied by comments from the writers of traditions. We shall focus more specifically on weapons and mounts, traditions that shaped the image of Muḥammad in the sources. The descriptions of the Prophet's weapons confirm not only his image as a warrior – despite there being very little actual single combat in the narration of traditions – but also the royal features of this character, similar in appearance to the caliphs. If parts of the Prophet's armoury were already mentioned occasionally in older sources, the first appearance (to our knowledge) of this type of chapter occurs in Ibn Saʿd's *Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, and this was followed in the next century by al-Ṭabarī, who explicitly quotes his predecessor in the *asānīd*. The appearance of these chapters in the biography of the Prophet can therefore be situated at the time of the writing of the *Ṭabaqāt*: the first decades of the third/ninth century. Indeed, Ibn Saʿd dedicates one chapter to Muḥammad's swords,[60] another to his coats of mail,[61] one to

59 Literally, "the way", also meaning "the [written] life" of a character, the protagonist's life becoming a model for the Muslim community.

60 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*, I, 417–419.

61 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*, I, 419–420.

his shields,[62] and one to his bows and spears.[63] Al-Ṭabarī copied this structure exactly, but nevertheless tended to group and to synthesise the various *asānīd*.[64]

The majority of the Prophet's weapons have their own individual names: the three swords drawn from the armoury of the Banū Qaynuqā – one of the three Jewish tribes of Yathrib – are called *Qalaʿī*,[65] *Battār*,[66] and *al-Ḥatf*.[67] The two swords taken with the booty from the sanctuary of al-Son are *al-Mikhḏam*,[68] and *Rasūb*,[69] and there is also *al-ʿAdhb*,[70] which was used in the battle of Badr. The Banū Qaynuqā armory also housed three bows, named *al-Rawḥā*,[71] *al-Bayḍā'*,[72] and *al-Ṣafrā'*,[73] and three coats of mail: *al-Saʿdiyya*,[74] *Fiḍḍa*,[75] and *Dhāt al-Fuḍūl*.[76] This nominal census of the Prophet's weapons had several functions: first, for memory, because the name personalised the object by underlining the exceptional singularity of its manufacture, or its deadly aim.[77] In addition, the very fact of naming the object made of it something literally extraordinary. In synthesising the *asānīd* collected from the work of Ibn Saʿd, al-Ṭabarī generally presented the objects in groups of two or three in his chapters. We can suspect that this choice wasn't random, instead emanating from stylistic processes and aiming to provide a mnemonic device rather than a repository of historical precision. The second function of this presentation is linked to the reliquary potential, and possible magical and supernatural properties, of these weapons.

In a paper devoted to the Prophet's relics, Tayeb El-Hibri showed that there was a turning point in the development of historiography around them during the first decades of the third/ninth century, encouraged by the growing interest of the Abbasid caliphs, who relied on their kinship with Muḥammad to establish their legitimacy.[78] Tayeb El-Hibri devoted a passage to the famous

62 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*, I, 420.
63 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*, I, 421.
64 al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, 1786–1788.
65 'Taken by force'.
66 'Very sharp'.
67 'The death'.
68 'Sharp'.
69 'Piercing'.
70 'Sharp'.
71 A place 60km from Medina.
72 'The white'.
73 'The yellow'.
74 A place near to Medina, famous for the quality of its metallurgy.
75 'Silver'.
76 Called this because it was very large.
77 For a translation of these names, see al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume IX*.
78 El-Hibri, "The Abbasids and the Relics of the Prophet", 62–96.

sword *Dhū al-Faqār*,[79] obtained in spoils at the battle of Badr.[80] This sword, commonly represented with two pointed tips, was already mentioned in the *Sīra*, although Alfred Guillaume considers the passage in which this mention occurs to be an addition by Ibn Hishām, which would confirm that this type of tradition was not integrated into the biography of the Prophet until a very late date.[81] *Dhū al-Faqār* is also known for its magical properties. In the account given by al-Ṭabarī, the Prophet entrusts it to ʿAlī during the battle of Uḥud, and the sword puts ʿAlī into a warlike trance, giving him superhuman strength on the battlefield.[82] After Muḥammad's death, ʿAlī inherited the sword, and it is said he will brandish it during the Last Judgement. In an article published in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, the scholar Jean Calmard underlined the importance of *Dhū al-Faqār* in medieval Shia literature, the magic sword being one of the *regalia* of ʿAlī, another sign of his legitimacy as successor of the Prophet.[83] The support that populations originating from Fars provided for the Abbasid revolution, as well as the vagueness maintained in reports of their support for the Alids, might have contributed to the development of this figure in the literature of the *maghāzī*. Generally speaking, *Dhū al-Faqār* is therefore a sign of authority, a symbol of the political heritage, and the conquests, of Muḥammad.

The anecdote of the magical shield, which is less familiar to historians, reminds those who know it that the Prophet is placed under the best auspices. In this short chapter, where only one tradition is reported by ʿAttāb b. Ziyad – ʿAbd Allāh b. Mubārak – ʿAbd al-Raḥman b. Yazīd b. Jābir – Makḥūl, the Messenger of God expresses his hatred of the ram's head (*rās kabsh*) depicted on one of the shields taken in spoils. One night, when no one is watching, Allāh makes the figure to which the Prophet had objected disappear.[84] The miracle reminds us that Muḥammad is indeed the chosen one and favourite of God, and that He also acts according to His good will. The story also contributes to the mystery surrounding the Prophet's weapons and relics, underlining the supernatural that assists him in his every need.

Finally, we can note that some of these lists are dedicated to the mounts of the Prophet: his racehorses, mules and camels.[85] The presentation of his entire prestigious stable brings the Prophet closer to the way in which caliphs are represented, and tends to distance him from the figure of a more ascetic Prophet.

79 A famous sword with its point divided into two parts.
80 El-Hibri, "The Abbasids and the Relics of the Prophet", 82–83.
81 Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 756.
82 al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, 1402.
83 Calmard, "*Dhū al-Faqār*".
84 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*, I, 420, and al-Ṭabarī, 1787–1788.
85 Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*, I, 421–425, and al-Ṭabarī, 1782–1786.

But to understand the importance of this type of addition in the biography of the Prophet, we need to return to a broadly comparative approach. Not surprisingly, the first books dealing with the art of war and *jihād* in Islam already included chapters that dealt with fighting on horseback and the importance of mounts. Above all, the noble (aristocratic and/or brave) fighter is associated with his mount, which distinguishes him socially from the infantrymen, in a common stereotype that was already to be found in pre-Islamic poetry such as the *Ayyām al-ʿArab*.[86] This association is found in a number of chapters in ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī's *Kiṭab al-jihād* and in Ibn Abī Shayba's *Kitāb al-siyār*.[87]

What is more interesting is that this type of war literature relating to Muḥammad emerged between the very end of the second/eighth and the beginning of third/ninth century, when Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/797–98) wrote his *Kitāb al-siyar*, the first normative work of its kind, dealing with the rules and stereotypes of war according to new Islamic standards. ʿAbd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba followed this trend in their respective *muṣannafāt*, which confirm the integration of chapters of this type in major compilations, based on *ḥādīth*, between 210/820 and 230/840. As we have seen, this period corresponds to one of the high points in the struggle between the Abbasids and the Byzantine Empire, between the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809) and that of al-Muʿtaṣim (r. 833–842). The great *al-ʿĀwāṣim* border defence policy launched by Hārūn al-Rashīd confirmed that the army, and the rules of war, were at the centre of his state's concerns, reflecting the evolution of the geopolitical context. Although the figure of the Warrior-Prophet was already central in the *Sīra*, at this point Muḥammad's authority began to spill over from the realm of narration and to support a normative approach to the rules of war in the various *kutub al-jihād* and the *kutub al-siyar* of the following century. This may explain why such chapters as these did not appear until a comparatively late date. It is not certain that the study of *asānīd* could allow us more precisely to establish the relationship between books of the rules of war and this type of chapter in the texts of Ibn Saʿd and al-Ṭabarī. On the contrary, transmitters of the various *asānīd* only rarely met, even if this point deserves further study. However, the parallel emergence of these chapters in the biography of the Prophet in the *kutub al-jihād* and the *kutub al-siyar*, as well as the geopolitical context surrounding this historiography, make it likely that these traditions spread among traditionists during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd. Finally, we can note the presence of traditions relating to the weapons and mounts of the Prophet

86 'The Days of the Arabs'.

87 See, for instance, ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, 9313–9325, and Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, 33109–33126.

in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*, written at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century. By explicitly taking up traditions from the *Ṭabaqāt*, al-Ṭabarī participated in the establishment of important *topoi*: that is to say, of canonical representations of the Warrior-Prophet. The continuity of these traditions over more than a century shows that these stories had gained authority in the Islamic tradition.

5 Conclusion: The Warrior-Prophet in Historiography: A Character Competing with the Ṣaḥāba?

The diachronic perspective is an important approach to the study of the birth of historiography in the first three centuries of Islam. The many years that elapsed between the time of the first expeditions and their narration certainly favoured the rewriting of history. Within the scope of this military history, the character of a Warrior-Prophet emerged only gradually. Recovering the different stages, and the chronology, of the appearance of this figure in historiography is a difficult undertaking, and we can only sketch the main trends of this process. However, taking the *kutub al-maghāzī* into consideration, but also the *kutub al-jihād* and the *kutub al-siyar* that are included in the *muṣannafāt* by 'Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Shayba, opened up new perspectives and allowed us to go back further in time. The comparison with classical sources shows that the story was not completely centred around the figure of the Prophet until a very late era, suggesting that there was a time when Muḥammad was only one character among many, and it was only afterwards that the story of his life and his expeditions became exclusive in historiography. This approach also encouraged us to touch on other topics. In his famous study on the formation of Islamic law and jurisprudence in the first centuries of the hijra, Joseph Schacht postulated a much-debated phenomenon, that of competition for authority among the great figures of Islam.[88] According to him, the various schools of law that were still taking shape until the third/ninth century led jurists and traditionists to refer first to the authority and *ḥādīth* of the Companions (*Ṣaḥāba*) – even if this made it necessary to manufacture them to order – and then to those of the Prophet. Very gradually, and passing through different stages, the authority of the Prophet became dominant and exclusive, a key element of the *sunna*. Putting aside the question of the authenticity of the traditions in question, statistics indicate that in the realm of historiography there may have been rivalries among the great figures of the beginnings of Islam. To ignore this phenomenon could lead to a risk of denying all tensions

88 Schacht, *The Origins of Muḥammadan Jurisprudence*.

in the construction of an Islamic military historiography, which would result in a very problematic understanding of the dynamics around the evolution of Muḥammad's authority in the Islamic tradition.[89] To pursue a comparative approach would lead to a better understanding of the role of *maghāzī* texts in the development of the *sunna*.

Appendix

TABLE 2.1 Percentages of traditions mentioning Muḥammad (including various *asānīd*) in the *kutub al-maghāzī* or *ḥadīth* collections

Collection and traditionist	Number of traditions in the whole text (*kitāb*)	Number of traditions mentioning Muḥammad in the text	Number of chapters (*bāb*) in the text	Number of chapters mentioning Muḥammad in the text	Percentage of traditions mentioning Muḥammad in the text	Percentage of chapters mentioning Muḥammad (at least once)
Muṣannaf of ʿAbd al-Razzāq	147	91	31	27	61.9%	73%
Muṣannaf of Ibn Abī Shayba	579	319	47	47	55.1%	100%
Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī	488	402	90	87	88.3%	96.6%

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89 On the issue of authority in the Islamic tradition, see Brockopp, "Theorizing Charismatic Authority in Early Islamic Law".

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3

Ḥadīth Culture and Ibn Taymiyya's Controversial Legacy in Early Fifteenth Century Damascus

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī and His al-Radd Al-Wāfir (*d. 842/1438*)

Caterina Bori

1 *Ḥadīth* and Devotion towards the Prophet in Post-canonical Times

In post-canonical times, *ḥadīth* transmission became a pervasive social and cultural phenomenon, the mechanics of which have recently started to attract the attention of scholars. Despite the fact that, from the eleventh century onwards, the growing authority of the written canon challenged the function of the *isnād* and the indispensability of the oral transmission, such transmission did not die, rather it deeply changed opening the way to new modes and literary genres that expressed the concerns and aims of post-canonical transmission. Supported by a powerful ideology that justified transmission as a unique mark bestowed by God upon the Muslim community, transmitting the Prophet's words transformed into a pervasive expression of piety and devotion; an effective way of bringing oneself close to Muḥammad and through him to God; as such "the Prophet's words" became a most precious social and cultural capital worth of special investment and accumulation.[1] From this perspective, *ʿulūw* (elevation in the *isnād*), that is proximity to Muḥammad in the chain of transmission, became the quality most eagerly sought after by scholars and transmitters. *ʿUlūw* allowed not only transmitters but also their auditors to move spiritually near to the Prophet. Such proximity was a source of spiritual benefit as well as social prestige.[2]

This process was already well on its way in Ayyubid times and was to blossom in the so called "middle period". Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, Damascus and Cairo hosted some of the most outstanding *ḥadīth* experts of all times. Ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (d. 1245/643) and al-Nawāwī (d. 676/1277), al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) and al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341), Ibn Ḥajar

1 See Dickinson, "Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī and the Isnād", and now also Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*. The expression "post-canonical Ḥadīth culture" is from Davidson's work.

2 On "elevation", Dickinson, "Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī and the Isnād"; Witkam, "High and Low"; Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 1–77.

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al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), these scholars defined the boundaries of the field and the protocols of transmission, produced commentaries, dictionaries and works of *ḥadīth* criticism, some of which were destined to remain standard reference for the times to come.[3]

The high regard in which scholars as al-Nawawī and Ibn Ṣalāḥ were held, and the foundation in Damascus in 1233 of the Dār al-Ḥadīṯ al-Ashrafiyya – the school where both al-Nawawī and Ibn Ṣalāḥ taught – also point to this state of affairs. The Ayyubid ruler al-Ashraf Mūsā (d. 635/1237) erected this prestigious madrasa dedicated to the study of *ḥadīth* within the city walls, near to his own residence. By his decision, the madrasa housed a sandal (*naʿl*) of the Prophet which al-Ashraf had been bequeathed a few years before. The relic became an object of veneration, which attracted visits and devotional display; at least one case of *ḥadīth* -reading by the sandal itself is recorded by the sources.[4] Clearly, *ḥadīth* and the charismatic relic provided believers a special connection to the Prophet. The idea that the prophet's agency could be activated at the advantage of his community by means of *ḥadīth* recitation is also witnessed by the chronicles of the period which attest to an increasing ritual use of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* in particular. Readings of Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* are recorded in collective prayers for rain (*istiṣqāʾ*), in times of danger or even to celebrate a happy event, like the birth of a boy to the Sultan.[5] Other than this, recent literature has shown that communal *ḥadīth* readings and the transmission in public or private spaces was a massive phenomenon of the period. Invested by the tremendous religious authority and charisma of the Prophet, practices of *ḥadīth* transmission itself became increasingly ritualised.[6] In sum, *ḥadīth* boosted, *ḥadīth* was everywhere. Symptomatic of this situation was the steady growth in construction of schools dedicated to the study of *ḥadīth* (*dār al-ḥadīth*) in Damascus between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.[7]

3 Beyond the already mentioned works of Dickinson and Davidson, see Brown in *The Canonization of al-Buḫārī and Muslim*; Lucas, *Constructive Critics*.

4 Dickinson, "Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī and the Isnād", 481–84; Heller, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria*; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, ii: 276; mentioned by Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands*, 53, 78 fn. 39.

5 For instance, al-Birzālī (d. 738/1339), *al-Muqtafī ʿalā kitāb al-rawḍatayn, al-maʿrūf bi-taʾrīkh al-Birzālī*, ii: 424 and 4: 354. Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, xiii: 32; al-Jazārī (d. 738/1337–1338), *Taʾrīkh ḥawādith al-zamān*, i: 44.

6 On the ritual use of the *Ṣaḥiḥayn*, Brown, *Canonization*, 338–49 and Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 117–23. On the phenomenon of *ḥadīth* reading in public spaces, see especially the corpus assembled by Leder, Sawwās, and al-Ṣāġarjī, *Muʿjam al-samāʿāt al-dimashqiyya*; Leder, "Spoken Word and Written Text".

7 See al-Nuʿaymī (d. 927/1521), *al-Dāris fī taʾrīkh al-madāris*, i: 15–90.

2 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī (d. 842/1438)

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī (d. 842/1438) was a prominent Shāfiʿī *ḥadīth* specialist who, towards the end of his life, was appointed *shaykh* at the prestigious Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafiyya, the same school just mentioned above. The longest biography we have of him is that of al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497) who describes him as a learned gentleman, a polite and friendly person, of strong forbearance, certainly the most authoritative transmitter and expert in the field of Prophetic traditions of the time in Damascus. He was in fact known as *ḥāfiẓ al-shām*.[8]

"He undertook the task of spreading *ḥadīth* – writes Sakhāwī – so that people benefitted from him; he transmitted a lot in his town, in Aleppo and other places. He even transmitted with our shaykh (i.e. Ibn Ḥajar) in Damascus …".[9] al-Sakhāwī is especially keen to stress the bond of reciprocal esteem between him and his own mentor, the towering Shāfiʿī Chief Judge, historian and *ḥadīth* specialist Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 8452/1449).[10] This gives us a measure of the respect that Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn enjoyed among the leading *ḥadīth* scholars of the day. Next to this, the image of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn that his biographies deliver is also that of a scholar who cultivated a genuine interest in people's religious needs. Two aspects that well converge in his writings.

The name of Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn passed to posterity because of a bitter confrontation he had with a Ḥanafī-Matūridī colleague, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī (d. 842/1438), in the year 835/1432.[11] The latter had arrived in Damascus in 832/1429–30 and written a stern pamphlet titled *Muljimat al-mujassima* (*The Bridle for the Corporealists*), where he exposed the opinions that according to him had led Ibn Taymiyya to unbelief.[12] We do not possess details on the actual contents of the quarrel between Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn and ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī, but we are told that ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī's not only declared Ibn Taymiyya to be an unbeliever, but also uttered that whoever acknowledged to Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) the title of *shaykh al-islām* was an unbeliever as well. Following this, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn responded with a broad collection of evidence, gathering instances of 85 scholars from all schools of law having actually applied to Ibn Taymiyya this honorific (i.e. *shaykh al-islām*). The point being that such a great number of people certainly could not all be considered unbelievers.

8 Sakhāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, viii: 103–106.

9 Sakhāwī, *Ḍawʾ*, viii:103.

10 Sakhāwī, *ibid.* and *al-Jawāhir wa-l-durar*, i: 181 and ii: 595.

11 Cf. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-ghumr*, viii: 258–59. Sakḫāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*, viii: 104 and ix: 292–293.

12 Bukhārī, *Muljimat al-mujassima*.

This writing is titled: *al-Radd al-wāfir ʿalā man zaʿama anna man sammā Ibn Taymiyya shaykh al-islām kāfir* ("The Ample Refutation of the person who claims that whoever calls Ibn Taymiyya *shaykh al-islām* is an Unbeliever").[13] Judging from its certificates of auditions and transmission, its *taqārīẓ* (statements of endorsements) and other materials appended to its various manuscripts, *al-Radd al-wāfir* enjoyed considerable success, especially among Ḥanbalīs and Shāfiʿīs. It was read in Damascus, Aleppo, Ḥomṣ and Cairo, and it circulated at least up to the nineteenth century. We possess a license of transmission (*ijāza*) by the well-known Ḥanbalī Syrian jurist al-Ḥijjāwī (d. 968/1560), whereas the Egyptian Ḥanbalī Marʿī ibn Yūsuf al-Karmī (d. 1033/1624) put together an abridged calque of *al-Radd* entitled *al-Shahāda al-zakiyya fī l-thanāʾ ʿalā Ibn Taymiyya*. The book was also copied in Mecca as late as 1285/1869 at the request of Siddīq Ḥasan Khān (d. 1307/1899) from a copy written by the Ḥanbalī muftī Ibn Ḥumayd al-ʿĀmirī (d. 1295/1878).[14] Throughout the centuries and up to modern times, *al-Radd al-wāfir* has been commonly understood as a defence of Ibn Taymiyya, and Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn viewed as one of Ibn Taymiyya's followers.[15] And yet between these two scholars there's a whole untold story of divergences revolving around issues of prophetic devotion. In what follows, I shall try and recount this story which cannot be properly understood if we do not take seriously into account the intense *ḥadīth* culture of the period of which Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was part.

3 Divergences

A somewhat prolific *mawlid* author, in his massive *sīra*-oriented work titled *Jāmiʿ al-āthār fī mawlid wa-siyar al-mukhtār*, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn shows highly sympathetic attitudes towards *mawlid* celebrations as well as a firm belief in the benefits deriving from visiting the Prophet's grave.[16] Celebrating the Prophet's birth – he writes at the beginning of *Jāmiʿ al-āthār* – is "a good innovation" (*bidʿa ḥasana*), for *mawlid* festivals are commendable and joyful manifestations of love for Muḥammad as much as a way of showing thankfulness to God for having bestowed upon humanity the grace of His Messenger. *Jāmiʿ*

13 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Radd al-wāfir*.

14 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Radd al-wāfir*, 139–195. Marʿī b. Yūsuf, *al-Shahāda al-zakiyya*.

15 Marʿī ibn Yūsuf al-Karmī's *al-Shahāda al-zakiyya* is itself an early testimony of such an understanding. Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1317/1899), *Jalāʾ al-ʿaynayn*, 68, lists Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn among Ibn Taymiyya's followers. Among modern scholars, e.g. Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie*; Gril, "De la *ḫirqa* à la *tarîqa*", 67; El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 354.

16 For Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn on *mawlid*, see Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, 96–97.

al-āthār itself was inspired by *mawlid*. It is a huge *sīra*-like work which was meant to foster feelings of salvific love towards the Prophet.[17]

As for the Prophet's grave, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn makes it clear that copious *ḥadīth* converge on pointing to the Prophet's burial place as a charismatic space of conjunction between his person and believers, a place where believers are summoned with the promise of intercession and eternal salvation. Accordingly, in a great number of traditions the Prophet voices requests to believers to visit his grave and promises intercession for those who will visit him.[18] Despite the defective nature of many of these *ḥadīth*, according to Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, such traditions can nonetheless be abided by because of their exhortative character towards acquiring merit (*thawāb*). In this regard, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn writes:

> In what we have presented, there is awakening of one's desire (*tarġīb*) for the excellence of *ziyāra* which the community performs for religion as its distinctive sign. In fact, visiting the grave of the Prophet – the best of prayers and peace be upon Him – is one the *sunna* of the people of Islam, it is an agreed upon deed which draws close to God (*qurba mujmaʿ ʿalayhā*), a desirable and recommendable meritorious action (*faḍīla muraġġab fīhā mandūb ilayhā*). Its *ḥadīth* are met with approval and consensus even if in some of their chains there is contention (*maqāl*). Nobody discusses them by what rejects them, but the forsaken [*makhdhūl*]. And nobody discredits them with the charge of fabrication, but the doubtful ignorant [*murtāb jahūl*]. We seek refuge in God from abandonment, misery and deprivation (*ḥirmān*).[19]

The point made here by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn deserves some attention. In a short work in defence of a special prayer supposedly prescribed by the Prophet (*al-Tarjīḥ li-ṣalāt al-taṣbīḥ*) Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn more thoroughly illustrates the principle he mentions above. Weak *ḥadīth* in matters of *targhīb* and *tarhīb* (exhorting people to the pleasures of Paradise and frightening them with the prospect of Hell punishment), *ḥadīth* reporting edifying stories and parables (*al-qiṣaṣ wa-l-amthāl*) and those conveying admonishments (*mawāʿiẓ*) or relating the meritorious values of certain actions (*faḍāʾil al-aʿmāl*) can be transmitted, and if they can be transmitted they can also be acted upon; many scholars have done it before and this is the opinion of the majority; it is in fact the

17 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Jāmiʿ al-āthār*, i: 63–68.

18 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Jāmiʿ al-āthār*, viii: 101–144, especially 129–141.

19 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Jāmiʿ*, viii, 141.

rule he applies here.[20] In fact, Ibn Nāṣir did embrace a majoritarian position according to which devotional practices generating merit were given priority to issues of weaknesses in transmission.[21] And yet, at least the polemical voice of one notorious Ḥanbalī of the previous century disagreed on this point. The forsaken and doubtful ignorant who rejects the *ziyāra* traditions and charges them with fabrication Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn alludes to is certainly Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya, although his name is not explicitly mentioned in this passage. The allusion to his unpopular yet well-known position against travelling with the purpose of visiting the graves of pious men, the Prophet *in primis*, is unmistakably there.

Ibn Taymiyya's elaborations on *ziyāra* have been described and discussed in detail by Niels Henrik Olesen and more recently Christopher Taylor, but there is at least one point which deserves further attention because it lays at the foundation of Ibn Taymiyya's refusal to acknowledge the implications of those very same 'prophetic' traditions to which Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was deeply attached.[22] As seen, for Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn the traditions recommending *ziyāra* belonged to the realm of exhortation and dissuasion (*targhīb/tarhīb*) which did not require soundness to produce effective meaning. On this point, Ibn Taymiyya articulated his own peculiar view:

> The words of Aḥmad – *Whenever a tradition deals with the licit and prohibited, we are strict with its chains, and whenever it deals with exhortation and dissuasion, we are lax with them* – also apply to what the scholars think about acting upon a weak *ḥadīth* regarding the virtues of action. The intended meaning of these words is not the establishment of legal recommendation (*istiḥbāb*) by means of a *ḥadīth* that cannot be used as authoritative evidence (*lā yuḥtajju bihi*). In fact, legal recommendation is an institution based on the revealed normativity (*ḥukm sharʿī*) that is established exclusively by a proof which originates from it (*dalīl sharʿī*). Whoever relates about God that He loves an action on the basis of a proof which does not conform to such normativity has legislated regarding religion what God did not give permission for.[23]

20 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *al-Tarjīḥ li-ḥadīth ṣalāt al-tasbīḥ*, 36. The work is discussed by Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad*, 96–100.

21 See Brown, "Even If It's Not True It's True", 12f. on Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn.

22 Olesen, *Culte des saints et pèlerinages chez Ibn Taymiyya* (*661/1263–728/1328*) and Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 169–218.

23 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā*, xviii: 65.

In sum, for Ibn Taymiyya *istiḥbāb* and *targhīb/tarhīb* are not to be conflated. *Targhīb* encourages towards actions that generate reward and *tarhīb* dissuades from deeds that generate punishment; but the legal status of actions is otherwise established by a text (*naṣṣ*) or consensus (*ijmāʿ*), he writes a few lines below the passage just quoted above. Ibn Taymiyya exemplifies his position with a metaphor:

> The person wishes *that* reward or is afraid of *that* punishment, and its various types, like the man who knows that trading will bring [him] profit, but is then told that it will bring [him] *great* profit. If he believes in this, it will be beneficial to him, if not, it will bring him no harm.[24]

Thus, *targhīb* and *tarhīb* are about actions that are beneficial if performed, and yet unharmful if left unperformed, but their legal qualification (*istiḥbāb*, *karāha, ījāb or taḥrīm*) is established by other means. Accordingly, in the realm of persuasion and dissuasion, weak *ḥadīth* – as long as they are not fabricated – can be transmitted and acted upon, but cannot be used to establish whether an action is legally recommendable or not.[25]

Now, contrary to what is usually ascribed to him, Ibn Taymiyya qualified *ziyāra*, or better a certain type of *ziyāra*, precisely as a legally recommended action (*mustaḥabba*).[26] But, in view of what we have just seen, some of the beliefs and practices more commonly associated with *ziyāra* in his time, like the request for intercession, had for him no foundation because they were based on *ḥadīth* that Ibn Taymiyya deemed weak, or fabricated.[27] To put it otherwise, those very *ḥadīth* that were so meaningful to Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn had no import in defining the legal qualification of the action for Ibn Taymiyya. And yet, according to Ibn Taymiyya, *ziyāra* is a legally recommended action (*mustaḥabba*) providing that it is carried out in compliance with his idea of the religious normativity (*ziyāra sharʿiyya*). That is, a visit in which the visitor salutes the dead and performs a supplicatory prayer (*duʿāʾ*) for him/her – as the Prophet used to do for the martyrs of Uḥud – or a visit in which the visitor is reminded of the Hereafter and contemplates the imminence of death, but *not* a visit which has at its centre the fulfilment of one's needs or requests, lest graves and cemeteries be transformed into places of worship (*ziyāra bidʿiyya*).[28]

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24 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā*, xviii: 66.

25 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā*, xviii, 65–68. Brown, "Even If It's Not True It's True", 25–27.

26 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā*, xxvii, 242, 330–331, 376, 377–381, 415–416 et passim. Taylor, *Vicinity*, 191–192.

27 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā*, xxvii, 29–34, 35–36, 119.

28 Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā*, xxvii, 30–32, 70–71, 72; 322, 376–77.

The importance of this point cannot be underestimated for it carries with it a dramatic difference of visions between somebody like Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn and so many of his peers, and the fourteenth century Ḥanbalī scholar.

In drawing a distinct boundary between the dead and the living, in relocating the purpose of *ziyāra* from invocations for one's own benefit to invocations for the dead only, in re-orienting man's requests and needs to God's mercy rather than to those who, because they had left this life, were already close to God, Ibn Taymiyya was perceived and accused of robbing the Prophet of his auspicious power of mediation. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, who showed a marked concern for the religiosity of ordinary people, must have felt that if the Prophet was somehow divested of his unique capacity of mediator, then believers too were deprived of the many possibilities engendered by such mediation: the possibility of accessing God's blessings, of being agents of their own salvation, cultivating feelings of love and closeness to Muḥammad, the possibilities – finally – of hope and relief.

In short, on the desirability, usefulness and legitimacy of *mawlid* celebration as well as the meaningfulness of visiting the Prophets' grave, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was clearly and deeply at odds with Ibn Taymiyya, and yet this did not hamper him from composing a text like *al-Radd al-wāfir* in which he supported the idea that Ibn Taymiyya deserved the honorary title of *shaykh al-islām* and branded as a foolish and extravagant absurdity the proclamation of unbelief for all those who did so.

How could this be? It was again the legacy of the Prophet that allowed Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn to rescue Ibn Taymiyya despite his disagreement on the points illustrated above. In order to see how this happened we need to move back to *al-Radd al-wāfir*.

4 The Transmission of the Prophet's Legacy as a way of Rehabilitating Ibn Taymiyya

Al-Radd al-wāfir can be thematically divided in three sections: an introduction, the body of the evidence and a final corpus of endorsements (*taqārīẓ*) that in time were annexed to the text, and thus became part and parcel of it.

A point of the introduction which is useful to recall here is Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn's definition of the expression *shaykh al-islām*. After illustrating a range of possible meanings, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn declares that a *shaykh al-islām* is a scholar of outstanding knowledge of Qur'ān, *sunna* and related branches and, at the same time, a strikingly humble and modest individual. It is not only a scholarly pedigree that is required to be entitled to this honorific, but also a rigorously

upright way of being. The individual who fulfils these requisites is a *shaykh al-islām*, and every generation had its own share of them. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn does provide a brief list of names arranged by periods and places and when he gets to the generation of his teachers' teachers, he praises a small group of Shāfiʿīs and Ḥanbalīs for whom the appellation is well-known and verified (*mashhūra wa-muḥaqqaqa*). Ibn Taymiyya's name is among them.[29] On the whole, the definition, of the term offered by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn is quite generic and it serves the purpose of demonstrating that the title was applicable to Ibn Taymiyya.

In fact, the evidence Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn provides in order to uphold his standpoint consists in listing 85 personalities from the fourteenth century or the beginning of the fifteenth century (mostly scholars) presented in alphabetical order, who applied the honorific to Ibn Taymiyya.[30] He does that by presenting excerpts from biographical notices (*tarājim*) of Ibn Taymiyya written by these people and in which the Ḥanbalī theologian and jurisprudent is always presented as *shaykh al-islām*,[31] by quoting lines of poetry in which Ibn Taymiyya is praised or addressed with that title,[32] and by reporting pieces of *ijāzāt* or records of auditions (*ṭabaqāt al-samāʿ*) in which Ibn Taymiyya's name, with his honorifics, appears in different roles: as the certifying teacher (*musmiʿ*) who granted the hearing certificate, among the listeners present at an audition (*al-sāmiʿūn*), or as one of the readers (*bi-qirāʾat … qāriʾ*).[33]

Sometimes Ibn Taymiyya's comment on the transmission of a specific *ḥadīth* is quoted.[34] In other examples it is his own transmissions which are recalled,[35] sometimes together with their *takhrīj*.[36] In all instances, Ibn Taymiyya's name always appears as accompanied by the title of *shaykh al-islām*. Clearly, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, who was committed to the transmission of *ḥadīth*, had access to this documentary material which he reproduces in excerpts. Thanks to a recent corpus of growing research, we know that by the time Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was writing, audition records (*samāʿāt*) and licenses of transmission (*ijāzāt*)

29 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 22–24.

30 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 26–136.

31 Some instances Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, … 53, 54, 68, 70, 73, 78, 82, 84–85, 89, 91, 96, 97, 99, 100, 104, 110, 115, 127.

32 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, … 90, 91, 126 …

33 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 28, 28–29, 32, 38–39, 40–41, 42, 46, 48, 62, 81, 98, 101, 102, 113, 116, 118, 120, 129–30.

34 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 108.

35 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 111, 112.

36 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 38, 44, 105.

had become the most widespread way for validating *ḥadīth* transmission.[37] *Al-Radd al-wāfir* is yet another piece of evidence confirming this picture.

Here is one example of a typical audition record quoted by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn and bearing Ibn Taymiyya as one of its actors:

> I [i.e. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn] also found an audition certificate of the *Juz'* of Ḥasan ibn ʿArafa written by the previously mentioned Amīn [al-Dīn] al-Wānī. It read as follows (*ṣūratu-hā*): 'The whole of this *Juz'*, that is the *ḥadīth* of Ḥasan ibn ʿArafa al-ʿAbdī was heard under the direction of twenty-two teachers [among these] the Imam … *shaykh al-islām* … Taqī al-Dīn … Ibn Taymiyya al-Ḥarrānī'. Then he mentioned the rest of the auditing session (*ṭabaqat al-samāʿ*) and the auditors (*al-sāmiʿīn*), and said: this session (*ṭabaqa*) was written by Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Wānī and his brother Aḥmad in the fourth year.[38]

There is a great deal of information we learn from this short passage. First, the Juz' of Ḥasan ibn ʿArafa (d. 257/870–71) is the collection of *ḥadīth* where Ibn Taymiyya's name appears most frequently as a transmitter in *al-Radd al-wāfir*.[39] As a matter of fact, other sources confirm that Ibn Taymiyya was among the local transmitters of this collection, and also that he transmitted its *ḥadīth* samples with elevated chains (*ʿawālī*), which in turn were selected and transmitted by al-Dhahabī. The manuscript of this *ʿawālī* selection from Ibn ʿArafa, today edited, preserves its audition register bearing the names of two hundred people.[40] It was – it seems – a selection whose transmission sessions were rather well attended.

Furthermore, the name of Amīn al-Dīn al-Wānī (d. 735/1334) appears as that of the *kātib* of the audition record translated above. He was a Ḥanafī prominent *muʾadhdhin* and a *ḥadīth* transmitter who was in some way associated with Ibn Taymiyya. In fact, he was the person who put together the chains

37 See Davidson, *Carrying on the tradition*, 79–191; Görke-Hirschler, *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*; Leder's many articles on the subject as well as his *Muʿjam al-samāʿāt al-dimashqiyya*; Gardiner, *Esotericism in a manuscript culture*, 124–135; Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, "Ijāzāt al-samāʿ fī l-makhṭūṭāt al-qadīma". More bibliography in Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition*, 216–19.

38 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 38–39.

39 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 28, 38–39, 40–41, 62, 98, 113, 116, 120.

40 *al-Aḥādith al-ʿawālī min Juz' Ḥasan ibn ʿArafa al-ʿAbdī rìwāyat shaykh al-islām al-ḥāfiẓ Ibn Taymiyya intiqā' al-imām al-ḥāfiẓ Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī*, 31–49. For al-Dhahabī's statement: "I have studied with him the section of Ibn ʿArafa more than once", see Bori, "A new source for the biography of Ibn Tyamiyya", 347.

of transmission of his forty *ḥadīth*s, which amounted to a *mashyakha* for Ibn Taymiyya. Specifically, this *mashyakḥa* presented forty of Ibn Taymiyya's most distinguished chains together with the text of the *ḥadīth*. *Mashyakha*s in this format were quite widespread. They conveniently allowed for the composition and transmission of somebody's best chains in a quick and handy way, and similarly allowed a swift transmission and reception of such materials.[41]

Ibn Taymiyya's forty *ḥadīth* appear more than once in *al-Radd al-wāfir*. We learn when and where they were read, and by whom, and the collection thus acquires a life previously unknown. Moreover, being the object of a *mashyakha* also meant for a transmitter – Ibn Taymiyya in this case – to be at the centre of considerable respect. Apart from al-Wānī, also a certain Ibn al-Fakhr al-Dimashqī (d. 732/1332) was said to have collected "for the shaykh Taqī al-Dīn a selection of his elevated transmissions".[42] All this conveys a profile of Ibn Taymiyya as an appreciated *ḥadīth* transmitter.

The auditing records and licenses transcribed by Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn are many and detailed.[43] They tell us where, when, what, to whom and from whom Ibn Taymiyya audited or transmitted a certain work. The transmissions of Ibn Taymiyya which appear most frequently in *al-Radd al-wāfir* are the following: The *Juz'* of *Ibn ʿArafa* and the *mashyakha* just mentioned above, Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*,[44] the *Six Books* and Aḥmad's *Musnad*,[45] a selection (*muntaqā*) of one hundred traditions from al-Buḫārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* including the latter's *thulāthiyyāt* (chains of three transmitters). Apart from a variety of elevated *isnād*s,[46] some lesser-known collections are also mentioned.[47] On the whole, these *samāʿāt* attest to Ibn Taymiyya's participation in the local culture of *ḥadīth* transmission, especially with respect to the transmission of elevated isnāds such as the *thulāthiyyāt* of Bukhārī just mentioned above, the so called *Ghaylāniyyāt* and the elevated chains of the *Musnad* of al-Ḥārith b. Abī Usāma (d. 282/895–96).[48] The *Ghaylāniyyāt* being a popular collection of traditions with chains of four

41 For a definition of *mashyakha*, see a al-Kattānī (d. 1962), *Fihris al-fahāris*, i, 67–68, ii, 624. Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 192–208 discusses the proliferation and functions of this specifically *ḥadīth*-related literary genre.

42 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 105.

43 See note 32.

44 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 29, 101 where Ibn Taymiyya is one of the seven *shaykh*s who conducted the final reading (*khatam*) of Muslim's *Ṣaḥiḥ*.

45 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 101.

46 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 111, 112.

47 For instance, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 42, 46, 81, 102, 130.

48 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Radd*, 48, 130.

links, of which Ibn Taymiyya produced his own selection. The Sessions where he transmitted them were very well attended.[49]

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn thus discloses a hidden world of auditing meetings that depict Ibn Taymiyya as involved in the local transmission of *ḥadīth*. In so doing, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn shows that Ibn Taymiyya was a committed transmitter. It is worth noting that his many biographical accounts, while emphasising his outstanding knowledge of *ḥadīth*, do not usually mention such ordinary transmissions, preferring the more sensational aspects of his life. In *al-Radd al-wāfir*, on the other hand, Ibn Taymiyya steps out of the extra-ordinary aura that is typical for his biographies and becomes part of an urban texture of *ḥadīth* transmission, together with the devotional, moral and social import that derive from it.

Put otherwise, *The Ample Refutation* promotes a normalisation of Ibn Taymiyya; on one hand by passing over the contentious legal and theological issues that distinguished his thought and life, on the other hand by bringing in his participation in the culture of *ḥadīth* transmission that was so intense at his time. By elaborating the specific contents attached to the honorific title of a *shaykh al-islām*, Ibn Nāsir al-Dīn demonstrates that Ibn Taymiyya, among others in his time, morally and intellectually met the standards for such an award, and thus indicated that it was nonsense to charge him with *kufr*.

5 Conclusion

Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was a voice of that grand and invaluable enterprise which was the transmission of the Prophet's legacy in the later middle period. He contributed to the rich set of ideas that scholars had been building since the fifth/eleventh century with the aim of reconceptualising the need for transmission in a time in which *ḥadīth* had been collected, written down, and sifted; a time in which some collections had reached the status of authoritative references and had become unsurpassable models of authenticity.

In the opening pages of *Iftitāḥ al-qārī li-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, a short apology of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, perhaps meant as the introduction to a commentary on al-Buḫārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* which is no longer extant, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn emphatically describes *ḥadīth* transmitters as "The lovers of the Messenger of God, the

49 Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition*, 268–269. Al-Dhahabī also relates that Ibn Taymiyya transmitted the *Ghaylāniyyāt*; see Bori, "A new source for the biography of Ibn Taymiyya", 337f. (Arabic text).

chevaliers of religion, protectors of Islām, custodians of the Law",[50] a conclusion he reaches after unfolding a cascade of traditions where the mission of "the people of *ḥadīth*" is invested with a variety of highly symbolic meanings.[51] He qualifies *ḥadīth* scholars as the "Successors of the Prophet" (*khulafāʾ rasūl allāh*), God's "Substitutes" (*abdāl*) on earth, and His "friends" (*awliyāʾ li-llāh*); and as those who will divert affliction (*al-balāʾ*) from the community with their search for *ḥadīth* (*bi-riḥlat aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*). They are the group (*firqa nājiya*) that will be saved on the Last Day among the 73 (doctrinal) groups, and the guardians (*ḥurrās*) of the earth.[52] In short, the transmission of the Prophet's legacy is invested with a dense set of symbolic promises – guidance, protection and salvation – that make it an indispensable task.

Despite his divergence with Ibn Taymiyya on some of the latter's most typical battlefields, *mawlid* and *ziyāra* in particular, Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn somehow rehabilitated the controversial Ḥanbalī scholar. Most importantly, he rescued all those who acknowledged that Ibn Taymiyya deserved the honorific of *shaykh al-islām*. He did this both by avoiding delving into any controversial Taymiyyan issues and by reporting materials that shed light on Ibn Taymiyya's commitment and participation in the local culture of *ḥadīth* transmission. Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn was a respected and rather mainstream voice of the post-canonical *ḥadīth* culture of the time, and yet his ability to eschew polarities and embrace a strategy of accommodation is an interesting episode in the history of Ibn Taymiyya's legacy. His standing by his vociferous Ḥanbalī colleague, as well as the texture of his work as a whole, cannot be understood without taking his scholarly and devotional commitment to the Prophets' legacy into account.

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50 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Iftitāḥ al qārī*, 329.

51 Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn, *Iftitāḥ al qārī*, 323–328.

52 *Ibid.*

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4

"There Is Matter for Thought"

The Episode of the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension in the Sīra ḥalabiyya*, at the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century*

Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen

> All this, they argued, had to have been part of a single artistic vision that worked its way through the epic's many themes and episodes.... Where some people see chaos and incoherence, others will find sense and symmetry and wholeness....
>
> I talked about ring composition, that remarkable narrative technique that weaves the present and the past together, that allows the account of a specific episode in a character's life to expand to encompass his entire life.
>
> DANIEL MENDELSOHN, *An Odyssey: a Father, a Son, and an Epic*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2017, p. 72.

1 Introduction: A Conciliatory *Sīra* and a Weapon

Egyptian *shaykh* ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥalabī[1] was over 60 years old when he accepted shaykh al-Bakrī's request to write the biography of the Prophet. He completed his *Sīra* in 1043/1633, undoubtedly aware it would be his last work. He died soon after on 29 shaʿbān 1044/February 17, 1635. *Insān al-ʿuyūn fī sīrat al-amīn al-maʾmūn* was a decisive work and yet was presented modestly as an imperfect compendium of two main sources from the Mamluk era.

The first source was the *ʿUyūn al-athar fī l-funūn wa-l-shamāʾil wa-l-siyar* by Ibn Sayyid al-Nās (d. 734/1334). Actually, Ḥalabī wrote a gloss of it instead of a compendium. He used Ibn Sayyid al-Nās's *Sīra* as the main framework for

1 See Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-hādī ʿashar*, III, 122–24.

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his own, much longer narrative.[2] Though Ḥalabī chose a chronological over a thematic structure and honours Ibn Sayyid al-Nās's vast knowledge in terms of *ḥadīth*s and chains of transmission, he does not adopt the latter's tone and spirit. As demonstrated by Tilman Nagel, Ibn Sayyid al-Nās rehabilitated the oldest sources, Ibn Isḥāq/Ibn Hishām and al-Waqīdī, carefully expunging the *ḥadīth*s he deemed too weak.[3] None of this, nor Ibn Isḥāq/Ibn Hishām, nor al-Waqīdī preoccupied Ḥalabī. As he explains in his introduction, the scholarship of his predecessors allowed him to forgo the chains of *ḥadīth* transmissions and write a more accessible text, where even weak or forged *ḥadīth* had a role to play – without necessarily being validated. In writing his own *sīra* at the beginning of the fourteenth century, three centuries before Ḥalabī, Ibn Sayyid al-Nās had already expressed the desire to write a simpler *Sīra*, one that did away with repetitions. Ḥalabī's version, infinitely more complex, was written for a variety of readerships and addressed a multitude of issues that were the battle lines of his day.

The second main source of the *Sīra ḥalabiyya*, the *Subul al-hudā wa-l-rashād fī sīrat khayr al-ʿibād* by al-Shāmī al-Ṣāliḥī (d. 1536) was written a century earlier and was known as *al-Sīra al-shāmiyya*. Ḥalabī used it for what it was, an immense encyclopedia of *ḥadīth*s grouped by theme. Here too, he avoided a thematic construction in order to maintain the focus on the meaning he conferred onto his own *Sīra*. Despite his apparent deference to his two predecessors, Ḥalabī did not always take the trouble to verify the details in their texts,[4] because his own vision of the Night Voyage led him to use other authors he considered more pertinent than Ibn Sayyid al-Nās and al-Shāmī. Ḥalabī rallied his vast Sufi culture in his final work. Having studied under a number of masters, he had, in his youth, been the disciple of shaykh Muḥammad al-Bakrī (d. 1586), the shaykh of the Bakriyya family and father to shaykh Abū l-Mawāhib (d. 1628), the same person who had commissioned Ḥalabī's *Sīra*.[5] Ḥalabī

2 The edition 1356/1937 *ʿUyūn al-athar* – published in Cairo and quoted by F. Rosenthal in his article in the *Encyclopédie de l'islam*, 2nd edition – was deemed faulty by the critical edition that appeared in both Beirut-Damascus and Medina around 1997, which we consulted. There is also a 1966 edition from Beirut of the *ʿUyūn al-athar*, which Tilman Nagel used in *Allahs Liebling*.

3 Ibn Sayyid al-Nās also used lost or obscure sources such as Mūsā b. ʿUqba, Ibn ʿĀʾidh, Abū ʿAruba, Abū Bishr al-Dawlabī. See Nagel, *Allahs Liebling*, 218–229.

4 For example, on the question of the opening of the Prophet's chest, Ḥalabī writes, "I saw that he [al-Shāmī] had gathered this in a part titled 'The light of the moon in what has been written during the opening of the chest' (*Nūr al-badr fī-mā jāʾa fī shaqq al-ṣadr*), but I went no further. And God is most knowledgeable", 1, 518.

5 On the Bakrī, see Mughazy and Sabra (eds.), *Manāqib al-Sāda al-Bakrīya*. Sabra, Adam, "Household Sufism in Sixteenth-Century Egypt: The Rise of al-Sāda al-Bakrīya" 101–118.

was thus tied to Cairo's Turkish-Ottoman aristocracy: his courses at Al-Azhar brought together "the virtuous (*al-fuḍalāʾ*) and the noble of spirit (*al-nubalāʾ*) [… for …] he was respected by both the elite and the masses." [6]

Ḥalabī had also been the disciple of the Egyptian Shāfiʿī mufti, Shams al-Dīn al-Ramlī (d. 1596), which placed him within the great Shāfiʿī, Ashʿarī, and Shādhilī traditions of Egypt during the Mamluk era.[7] The combination of fiqh, *ḥadīth*, and Sufism that characterised the works of Egyptian scholars at the end of the Mamluk era and the beginning of the Ottoman era – a combination whose coherence has been deftly demonstrated by Éric Geoffroy[8] – is the foundation of Ḥalabī's *Sīra*.[9] Ḥalabī often quotes the Egyptian authors from the fifteenth century,[10] especially Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 1449), whose *Fatḥ al-bārī*, commentary of Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, is used but whose title is never cited. Another constantly mentioned source are Suyūṭī's (d. 1505) two books: *al-Khaṣāʾiṣ al-kubrā* and *al-Khaṣāʾiṣ al-ṣughrā*. Though the *Ṣaḥīḥ*s by Bukhārī and Muslim, the *Musnad* by Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, and sometimes the work of al-Shāfiʿī ("our Imam"), appear in these discussions, it is through the compilations of Ibn Ḥajar and Suyūṭī that Ḥalabī offers a new reading of the *ḥadīth*s. To a lesser extent, he cites the *Imtāʿ* by the historian Maqrīzī (d. 1442)[11] and *al-Mawāhib al-laduniyya* by al-Qastallanī (d. 1517). Ḥalabī also mentions Sufi authors from the beginning of the Ottoman era, such as al-Shaʿrānī (d. 1565), notably concerning angelology. It is partially through al-Shaʿrānī that he also used Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240). Finally, despite the prevalence of Egyptian authors, Ḥalabī, along with Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, readily quotes two works by Moroccan authors of Andalusian origins in the twelfth century: the famous *Shifāʾ* by Qāḍī

6 See Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-hādī ʿashar*, III, 122–124. Translation by Pascale Pinel-Cahagne, *Le merveilleux dans la biographie de Muḥammad* (*sīra*) *due à Nūr al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī. Choix d'épisodes*, 71.

7 On Ramlī, see *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-hādī ʿashar*, III, 342–43. Shams al-Ramlī was the son of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ramlī (d. 957/1550), disciple of Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī (d. 1520).

8 Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie sous les derniers Mamelouks et les premiers Ottomans*.

9 The majority of Ḥalabī's work deals with devotion to the Prophet with a commentary on the forty *ḥadīth*s of Nawawī (d. 1277), another on the *Burda* by Būṣīrī (d. 1294), and a third on *al-Shamāʿ il al-nabawiyya*, by Tirmidhī (d. 279/892). See Ḥājjī Khalīfa (1609–1657), *Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asmāʾ al-kutub wa-l-funūn*, I, 180. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur* II, 307 and *Supplement*, II, 418.

10 Ḥalabī generally references with either the name of the author or the title of the work, very rarely both. Often, quotes are indicated with simply "it has been said" or "in a version", which does not situate them at all.

11 Maqrīzī, *Imtāʿ al-asmāʿ bi-mā li-l-nabī min al-aḥwāl wa-l-amwāl wa-l-ḥafada wa-l-matāʿ*.

ʿIyāḍ (d. 1149) and the *Rawḍ al-unuf fī sharḥ al-sīra al-nabawiyya li-Ibn Hishām*, by al-Suhaylī (d. 1185).

In sum, aside from his main sources – one "chronological" (*ʿUyūn al-athar*) and the other "thematic" (*al-Sīra al-shāmiyya*), Ḥalabī did not use the *Sīras* to write and certainly not to shape his arguments. He very rarely quotes Ibn Isḥāq (sometimes mentioning his name, sometimes merely the title, *al-Sīra al-hishāmiyya*) and when he does, it is generally by referencing Ibn Sayyid al-Nās. Ḥalabī did not necessarily equate old and biographical *Sīras* with truth and thus, he was less interested in the oldest sources (Waqīdī, Ṭabarī, or Ibn Saʿd), preferring the more recent Ibn Sayyid al-Nās. When opinions diverge or interpretative crossroads appear, Ḥalabī reverts to debates between *ḥadīth* specialists of the Mamluk era or uses a Qurʾānic *tafsīr*, that of Tustārī (d. 896), the *Kashshāf* by Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), Bayḍāwī (d. 1286), al-Jalāl al-Maḥallī (d. 1460), first author of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* – all are quoted by Ḥalabī;[12] whereas Ibn Sayyid al-Nās cited the *tafsīr* by ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 827) and that of Yaḥyā Ibn Sallām.[13] Ḥalabī also draws on the extensive history of the prophets by Ibn Kathīr, in *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*. After presenting contradictory versions of an episode, he often concludes by quoting verses from the *Tāʾiyya* by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 1370) and from the *Hamziyya* by Buṣīrī (d. 1294) because the dense and elegant style of devotional poetry helps Ḥalabī discuss the meaning of the miraculous episodes of the Life of the Prophet.

Grounded mainly in the Mamluk era, Ḥalabī grappled with many Islamic debates at the beginning of the seventeenth century. There was something new: his *Sīra* was written for an educated readership and thus needed to be deliberately and carefully constructed. Shaykh al-Bakrī most certainly commissioned the work in response to the ideas of the Qadızādeli. The group of Qadızādeli were hostile to Sufism and their ideas were defended in Istanbul by the Sultan Murād IV.[14] This work was also a chance to present to an elite a unification of the Islamic sciences: Qurʾānic sciences, Arabic philology, fiqh, Sufism, *ḥadīth*, and *adab*, in the name of a Sufi synthesis oriented towards

12 The chronological order of the works cited by Ḥalabī, which I have listed here for more clarity, was of no importance to Ḥalabī. Though he took great care to order the sequences and events of Muḥammad's experiences, he was not interested in dating his sources. Works were given equal standing regardless of their dates of publication, with the most recent often considered the most interesting as they offered the most information. Age was never linked to authenticity.

13 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, I, 250–51.

14 The sultan knew of Ḥalabī thanks to a short treatise from 1630 on the reconstructions of the Kaʿba, translated into Ottoman Turkish and sent by the Governor Mehmed Pasha. See Mayeur-Jaouen, "La *Sīra ḥalabiyya* (1633)".

the Prophet that transcended and subsumed them. In 1633, Ḥalabī was convinced that only such a synthesis could convince the Ottoman *honnête homme*, imbued with Sufism but also taken with rationality and logic, and who had perhaps started to criticise the legendary series of hagiographies and the overflow of *ḥadīth*s, pointing out the contradictions and impossibilities. Perhaps the reader had gone so far as to doubt the miracles of the Prophet when rereading Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) who categorically refused the possibility that the fully conscious Prophet could physically see God with his own eyes. The *Sīra ḥalabiyya*, on the contrary, depicts Muḥammad, as described by Tilman Nagel, as "an always intervening intermediary of knowledge necessary to our salvation".[15]

Ḥalabī was fighting on several battlefronts to win over readers with diverse positions. To convince fastidious traditionalists who would potentially point out the dubious nature of different *ḥadīth*s, he began undermining their arguments in his introduction: Ḥalabī acknowledges that the authenticity of *ḥadīth*s is important in legal matters, however, the *Sīra* required greater flexibility. He thus justified the fact that he did away with the chains of transmission of the *ḥadīth*s that his predecessors had scrupulously quoted. Ḥalabī strengthened his position by explaining he was merely accommodating a period that was unfortunately less scholarly that that of his predecessors. His goal was to simplify the reading of the *Sīra* for the Ottoman elite and for scholars (but not necessarily the ulama) who needed to be convinced of the exceptional nature of the Prophet and his House and of the reality – or at least the plausibility – of the Prophet's miracles. Ḥalabī thus never hides the suspicious or forged nature of a particular *ḥadīth* or *isnād*; instead, he replaces it with a plausible and trustworthy version of the events. The *Sīra* must make sense. The *Sīra ḥalabiyya* skillfully handles the divergent and sometimes conflicting versions of the same event – without ever pretending to offer a definitive answer. It offers a synthesis that is acceptable to the rational mind of the faithful. Ḥalabī's *Sīra* reconciles rather than summarises. It does not aim for a single unique truth, but rather, it focuses on opening the Muslim mind to a field of possibilities and plausibilities that take into account all at once a firm demand for rationality and logic (in terms of a chronological succession or the non-simultaneity of events), a thirst for history (situating events in a plausible narrative arc), and the recognition that supernatural and miraculous elements must be compatible with logic and reason in order to convince the more determined *esprits forts*.

15 Nagel, *Allahs Liebling*, 230.

Ḥalabī was wary of fantastical tales and allusions. His account of the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension did however take into account (without ever citing it) a text that he had commented on elsewhere, *al-Ibtihāj fī l-kalām ʿalā l-isrāʾ wa-l-miʿrāj* by the Egyptian shaykh Najm al-Dīn al-Ghayṭī (d. 1576), the most widespread *Miʿrāj* narrative of the beginning of the seventeenth century.[16] Ghayṭī's *Miʿrāj* was so short and allusive that multiple interpretations and glosses were more than justified. It had also been commented by Aḥmad al-Qalyūbī (d. 1659), an Egyptian shaykh who was Ḥalabī's contemporary, in a text that was further studied a century later by the famous shaykh al-Dardīr (d. 1786).[17] Far from being written to convince a hesitant readership, Qalyūbī's commentary was addressed to devout, faithful Sufis.[18] The same would later hold true for Dardīr's commentary. When Qalyūbī commented on the Kaʿba's roof splitting open, he began with the declaration that everything "would be extraordinary" during this miraculous night.[19] Ḥalabī, on the contrary, proclaimed that the *kharq al-ʿāda* could not be excessively used, and not without some sort of analysis.

The Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension are so well known that Ḥalabī did not bother to narrate or comment on everything. Instead, he quickly mentions certain passages, such as the visions of the damned, that occupied a central place in al-Ghayṭī's work. What did matter to Ḥalabī was the general meaning of the events, situating the Prophet among other prophets, placing his Community within other communities, and convincing his readers of the reality of the Night Journey, the Heavenly Ascension, and ultimately the Beatific Vision.

We will be studying the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension in the *Sīra ḥalabiyya*; comparing Ḥalabī's method and narrative with his known models (Ibn Sayyid al-Nās and al-Shāmī), as well as with al-Qalyūbī's commentary of al-Ghayṭī's *Miʿrāj*. Such a comparative reading allows us to measure on the

16 According to Muḥibbī, in an unfinished commentary of the *Shamāʾil*, Ḥalabī "clearly explained what can be found in the *Miʿrāj* by shaykh Najm al-Dīn", see Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-hādī ʿashar*, III, 122–124. Ḥalabī was responding to ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Munāwī (d. 1622) who, in 1591, had written two commentaries on the *Shamāʾil*. See Chouiref, *Soufisme et ḥadīth dans l'Égypte ottomane. ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Munāwī (m. 1031/1622)*, 100.

17 Qalyūbī quoted the Qāḍī ʿIyād and Ibn Kathīr – as did Ḥalabī, Ibn Ḥajar, and Suyūṭī, but he wrote for a different public and with different goals. Shaykh al-Dardīr (d. 1786) added nothing conclusive. The work was published (with no mention of al-Qalyūbī) with the title *Ḥāshiyat Abī l-barakāt Sīdī Aḥmad al-Dardīr ʿalā qiṣṣat al-Miʿrāj li-l-Ghaytī*. In this article, the 1289 H. edition was used and cited as *Ḥāshiya*.

18 *Ḥāshiya*, 2.

19 *Ḥāshiya*, 3.

one hand the differences in the writing of the *Sīra* between the Mamluk era and the seventeenth century, and on the other, the differences in writing a key episode of the *Sīra* at a single moment in time – the first half of the seventeenth century. The analysis will offer us a glimpse of Ḥalabī's intentions in the writing of his *Sīra* and the particular image he offers of the Prophet.

1.1 *A Method*

The *Sīra ḥalabiyya* follows the "chronological" *Sīra* by Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, whose citations are introduced by the mention *qāla* and completed, when needed, by *ḥadīth*s collated by al-Shāmī and others. Though Ibn Sayyid al-Nās's text was his main model (*al-aṣl*, in his words), Ḥalabī's version is considerably longer. The published version of the *ʿUyūn al-athar* devoted fifteen short pages to the Night Journey whereas that of the *Insān al-ʿuyūn* runs to 72 pages.[20] Ḥalabī often intervenes in the account (*aqūlu*) to offer a generally conciliatory conclusion between several contradictory hypotheses.

In the episode of the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension, Ḥalabī takes certain liberties when quoting Ibn Sayyid al-Nās's text: he dismantles the narrative framework and reorganises the elements in a completely different manner. Ibn Sayyid al-Nās followed the sequence of events very loosely and juxtaposed, with numerous repetitions, the most authentic *ḥadīth*s possible. Inspired by Ibn Isḥāq/Ibn Hishām, he reveals very little of himself in the text, despite occasionally stating his positions. His concision stands in contrast with Ḥalabī's project. The latter pays scant attention to Ibn Isḥāq/Ibn Hishām and constructs his narrative in a literary, scholarly, sophisticated, and highly personal fashion. Ḥalabī, in contrast to his predecessors, is much more attached to a logical chronology in his narrative. Taking into account the various debates, he avoids abrupt conclusions and we can often find statements such as "This is what he has said, giving matter for thought and God is the wisest" (*hādhā kalāmuhu fa-l-yutaʾammal, wa-Llāhu aʿlam*). Ḥalabī's writings are highly organised and he generally saves the author with whom he agrees for the end. For Ḥalabī, the last to speak (or more precisely, whom he has speak) is the wisest. However, he does not impose his opinions without having first discussed contrary opinions, going so far as rendering them such that both alternatives are possible *together*. When a conciliation between the various versions (*jamʿ bayna l-riwāyāt*) is impossible, he at least highlights the contradictions in the sources and the texts in order to better appeal to the reader's intelligence and guide him towards the conclusion.

20 The *ʿUyūn al-athar* had two volumes and the *Insān al-ʿuyūn* three. See al-Nās, *ʿUyūn al-athar* I, 241–56 and Ḥalabī, *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 514–86.

To explore his method, let us take a closer look at two examples. The first is the scene where God opens the Prophet's chest. Ḥalabī begins with Umm Hānī bint Abī Ṭālib's testimony of the Prophet's mysterious absence in the night and of his mysterious return. Muḥammad had fallen asleep at her home in Mecca and yet, at dawn, he tells her that he had slept that night in the sanctuary (*al-masjid al-ḥaram*). As another text states, "in the Ḥijr", Ḥalabī attempts to render possible these multiple locations. Three angels arrive while the Prophet is resting in the sanctuary in Mecca, lying between his uncle Hamza and his cousin Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib. Transported to Zamzam, his chest (*al-ṣadr*) or stomach (*al-baṭn*) is opened and his heart (*qalb*) is purified. Gabriel asks Mikāʾīl to bring a vessel (*ṭist*) of Zamzam water to purify Muḥammad's heart, which he extracts, washes three times of whatever impurities (*adhā*) it still contained. Ḥalabī interrupts his narrative to point out difficulties. First, the Prophet has had his chest opened perhaps three times:[21] the first when Muḥammad was a child with his wet-nurse, the second was when he was ten, the third was during the prophetic mission. It is possible that the opening had been repeated, but – Ḥalabī emphasises – the extraction of the blood clot only took place the first time and the later stain is different from the clot removed in his childhood.[22]

Once this logical and chronological (for Ḥalabī, the two go hand in hand) confusion resolved, he examines the meaning of the events. After having brought three vessels of water from the Zamzam, Mikāʾīl brings a vessel "full of wisdom and faith" and pours in into the Prophet's chest. Ḥalabī compares this version to that of the purification of the Prophet's heart when he was with his nurse. God stamped him with the Seal of the Prophet, but there are three divergent versions concerning the location of the seal: his heart, his chest, or between his shoulders.[23] The Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ refutes the possibility that the Prophet's chest was once again opened during the night of the *isrāʾ*; for him, it was a unique event. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī suggests that "the versions can coincide" (*al-riwāyāt tawāradat*), all the more so in that he sees a different wisdom (*ḥikma*) each time. In the end, Ḥalabī concludes with, "I say" (*aqūlu*). He suggests that Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's refusal of the *shaqq's* repetition only pertains to the clearly unique moment when the angel extracted the black clot from the Prophet's heart.[24]

21 The *Ḥāshiya* goes so far as suggesting four openings of the Prophet's chest: the fourth in order to receive the revelation and that of the Night Journey would then be the fifth, *Ḥāshiya*, 4.

22 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 517.

23 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 517.

24 Should a distinction be made between the Prophet's heart being washed and his chest being opened? They took place at the same time, offers Ḥalabī, even if certain versions

A second example of the method used in the *Sīra ḥalabiyya* is the location of each prophet in the various heavens during the Heavenly Ascension. Ḥalabī points out the various versions and offers an ingenious solution, certain prophets descended from their own heaven to welcome the Prophet during his ascent, whereas others rose from theirs to meet the Prophet during his descent. Ibn Ḥajar, however, refuses this conciliation (*lā yarā al-jamʿ*) by choosing the most authentic version (*aṣaḥḥ al-riwāyāt*). Ḥalabī counters by stating, "I believe that this is to be taken into consideration" (*wa-ʿindī fīhi naẓar ẓāhir*), "for conciliation is preferable to affirming a contradiction, especially between the most authentic (*al-aṣaḥḥ*) and the authentic (*al-ṣaḥīḥ*), even if the authentic is unique (*shādhdh*), for we do not give precedence to the *aṣaḥḥ* over the *ṣaḥīḥ*, unless conciliation excuses it. There is matter for thought". What is to be gleaned from all these versions is that each of the prophets who met Muḥammad had his own heaven, "here is a wisdom (*ḥikma*) that would take too long to discuss in detail".[25]

Thus, by considering both the *ḥadīth*s and the readings of his illustrious predecessors, all of whom had become "primary sources" of sorts, Ḥalabī offers up a synthesis of the multiple versions that acknowledges then minimises the contradictions, adds details and rivers of scholarship, suggests without overburdening theological or mystical points, and imposes no simplified ideology – but rather, admits several narrative possibilities.

1.2 *The Reality of the Night Journey: Affirming the Dogma and Dispensing Proof*

The fluidity of the narrative allows Ḥalabī to focus on what matters most. His primary goal is to convince his readership that the Night Journey did indeed take place. Where Ibn Sayyid al-Nās attacks *in medias res* with the *ḥadīth* of Umm Hānī bint Abī Ṭālib woken by the Prophet and where al-Ghayṭī begins with the Prophet sleeping in Kaʿba between his uncle and his cousin, Ḥalabī prefigures his account of the Night Journey with a preamble on the reality of the miracle, supported by the Qurʾān (Sura 17 *al-Isrā'* and Sura 53 *al-Najm*). In Ḥalabī's chapter on the Night Journey, the Qurʾān is cited more frequently than usual in the *Sīra ḥalabiyya*, proving the polemical nature of such a subject in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Ḥalabī affirms that there are no disagreements concerning the *isrā'*, since it is narrated in the Qurʾān and that thirty Companions, men and women,

abbreviate the narrative by only mentioning one of the two events. The *baṭn* designates the chest (*ṣadr*), *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 517.

25 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 561.

recounted the episode. The *isrā'* is established fact.[26] Ḥalabī goes on to say that the ulamas also agree on the fact that the *isrā'* took place after the Prophet's mission, when he was in a corporal and conscious state.[27] This is the leitmotif that is found at the end of his account of the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension.

As is often the case in his writings, once a general affirmation is stated, waves of contradictions and possibilities immediately unfurl. How many *isrā'āt* were there? How many took place corporeally versus spiritually? Perhaps there were several night journeys?[28] Shaʿrānī (d. 1565) suggests that there were 34 *isrā'āt*, of which only one was undertaken corporeally. By organising his citations, Ḥalabī suggests that many *isrā'* were possible as long as they did not impugn on the dogma he deems supported by the Qur'ān: the *isrā'* – at least one – did indeed take place in body and mind.

Ḥalabī then accumulates proof that corroborates or explains the Qur'ānic text. As with his contemporaries, for whom Ḥalabī wrote, the inhabitants of Mecca were sceptical about the Prophet's return. Not only did the Qurayshi pagans question the Prophet's story, but some of the first Muslims apostatised due to the story's improbability. Only Abū Bakr believed and thus became the Truthful One (al-Ṣiddīq).[29] Ibn Sayyid al-Nās mentions the Qurayshites's incredulity at the beginning of his text,[30] but Ḥalabī moves this element to *after* narrating the Night Journey and *before* discussing the Heavenly Ascension. This renders the Qurayshites' questions about Jerusalem more comprehensible; however, by placing the administration of proof here, he also introduces a hiatus between the two events and the two stories (the *isrā'* and the *miʿrāj*). Ḥalabī, like the majority of Sufi commentators, attempted to unify the two episodes. He suggests that Muḥammad made the Night Journey to Jerusalem so that the Meccans could question him with full knowledge of the facts.[31] Why though would the Meccans be satisfied with questioning Muḥammad only about his Night Journey and not also wish to know more about his Heavenly Ascension? Perhaps, says Ḥalabī, it was because they had elements of information about Jerusalem and the means to verify them; which was not the case for the seven heavens. Therefore, once the first story was authenticated, the second became

26 Not everyone agreed on this. Certain scholars argued that several verses of the Qur'ān state that Muḥammad is merely an annunciator who warns and announces. See Gilliot, who summarised Nöldeke in "Coran 17, Isrā', 1 dans la recherche occidentale", 2–3.

27 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 514.

28 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 514.

29 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 532.

30 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 241–43.

31 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 534.

plausible. This clever interpretation, suggested by Qastallanī in his *al-Mawāhib al-laduniyya*, implicitly suggests the hiatus.

To test the Prophet, the Quraysh who knew Jerusalem well questioned him about the Temple, which Muḥammad had never visited. Overwhelmed by their questions, the Prophet had a revelation (*tajallī*) in which God showed him the Temple so he could describe it in detail. Still sceptical, the Quraysh asked him for a sign (*āya*, or an *ʿallāma* in Ḥalabī's gloss).[32] Muḥammad declared he had met up with a specific caravan in a wadi, where the Burāq had frightened a she-camel who then ran off. The Prophet had guided the Bedouins until they found her.[33] The caravan arrived in Mecca soon after and confirmed Muḥammad's tale, eliciting a range of emotions from the Quraysh ("He's a magician!"). Ḥalabī quotes the Qurʾān, *al-Isrāʾ*, 60: "We did not make the sight which We showed you except as a trial for the people" (*wa-mā jaʿalnā al-ruʾyā al-latī araynāka illā fitnatan li-l-nās*), and comments: "this indicates that the vision (*ruʾyā*) of the *isrāʾ* is truly a vision seen with his own eyes, if the vision of the *isrāʾ* had been a dream, we would not have denied it".[34] Ḥalabī highlights the difference between the different versions and nevertheless, he continues to try to render them plausible and compatible.[35] He concludes that the accounts are not contradictory.

Later, more proof appears with the testimony – which neither Ibn Sayyid al-Nās nor al-Ghayṭī/Qalyūbī mention – of Abū Sufyān questioning Qayṣar (Caesar, Byzantine emperor) about the Night Journey: "Muḥammad says he travelled", states Abū Sufyān, "from our holy land – Mecca – to your temple – Jerusalem – and back in one night when even our fastest camels need two months for the round-trip journey". Caesar answers that indeed, a door of the Temple had remained open that night and that, in the morning, the Rock with Burāq's imprint and marks had been found. The ancient sciences, remembers Caesar, announced that a prophet would ascend into the heavens from the Temple: this was a sign (*āya*).[36] The Heavenly Ascension thus belongs to a very ancient history in which the previous monotheist religions (here, Christianity) announced Islam.

At the end of this chapter, after the Heavenly Ascension, Ḥalabī again discusses Muḥammad's return home.[37] He takes advantage of the opportunity to

32 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 1, 243.
33 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 535.
34 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 537.
35 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 536.
36 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 523.
37 He quotes the passages from the Qurʾān that were revealed during the descent from the heavens to earth: *al-Ṣāfāt*, 164; *al-Zakhruf*, 45, and perhaps the last two verses of the

offer more proof from the Qurʾān concerning the *isrāʾ* and the *miʿrāj* in body and mind: "who made his servant travel", says *al-Isrāʾ*, 1; the servant is present in body and soul as we can see in "Have you seen the one who forbids a servant when he prays?" (*al-ʿAlaq*, 9–10), as well as in "… And when the slave of Allah stood up in prayer to Him …" (*al-Jinn*, 19). If the *isrāʾ* had been nothing but a dream, the Qurʾān would have specified: "by his servant's soul (*bi-rūḥ ʿabdihi*)". Furthermore, a steed such as the Burāq is not mounted by spirits but by bodies. More proof from the Qurʾān, "The sight (*al-baṣar*) did not swerve, nor did it transgress its limit" (*Najm*, 17). Ḥalabī does however admit that this may have been an allusion to the vision of the heart.

1.3 *The Importance of Time and Chronology, of Space and Cosmogony*

To anchor his narrative even more firmly within an irrefutable reality, Ḥalabī dedicates long explanations to dates and places, tangible proof of veracity and also one of the main sources of contradictions in the *ḥadīth*s. Ḥalabī carries out a meticulous study of possible chronological sequencing and spatial arrangements (how can a single event have taken place at two different moments and/or in two different places). Paying close attention to his narration and the order of his text, he attempts to do away with contradictions and extraneous statements. His efforts for harmony in his search for the credible also results in a temporal sacrality and a sacred cosmogony, in this other time and this other world where prophets can bend time and space.

Constantly concerned with chronology and temporal sequences, Ḥalabī starts with dates. When did the bodily Night Journey take place? He uses Ibn Sayyid al-Nās's[38] propositions and adds others: was it the night of 17 or 27 Rabīʿ 1? Of 27 Ramadan or the 27 Rabīʿ 11? In Shawwāl or in Dhū l-ḥijja? The 17 Rajab, as believed by al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Ġanī al-Maqdisī (d. 1203), whose opinions were accepted by the majority to commemorate the event (*wa-ʿalayhi ʿamala l-nās*)? Shaʿrānī argues that all the *isrāʾ* took place the same night, one, two, or three years before the Hijra. Was it before the journey to al-Ṭāʾif (as written by Ibn Isḥāq), or after? "There is clearly matter for thought" (*wa-fīhi naẓar ẓāhir*)[39] and disagreement over this point, notes Ḥalabī. The same holds true for the day of the *isrāʾ*. Did the Night Journey take place Friday, Saturday, or Monday? Ibn Diḥya (d. 1235) favours Monday because that is the day the Prophet was

al-Baqara Sura. Ḥalabī reminds us that the Sura was revealed at the Distance of two bows (*Qāb al-qawsayn*), 1, 577.

38 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, ed. 1997, 249–51.

39 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 515.

born, the day of his mission, the day of the Hijra, and finally of his death "and", concludes Ḥalabī, "there is matter for thought" (*fa-l-yuta'ammal*).[40]

As for the length of the Night Journey, it cannot be evaluated by earthly time. Ḥalabī quotes the *Tā'iyya* by Subkī who has the Prophet say, "I returned and everything had taken place in the space of a single moment". As is often the case with Ḥalabī, Sufi poetry offers the ultimate answer, one that opens onto another interpretation of the world – far from the legal arguments rooted in the science of the *ḥadīth* or the rational arguments to which he is so attentive. With his characteristic discretion, Ḥalabī reminds the reader that God lengthens short lapses of time and "bends" long stretches for the saints of his community and that many stories discuss this bending of time (*ṭāyy al-zamān*), which is all at once a mysterious period of time, the absence of a specific length of time, and a temporal layering.

Just like time, places must also be organised rationally; however celestial geography is infuriating and difficult to understand, given the contradiction of the various versions and the awkward repetition of episodes. One of Ḥalabī's goals is to establish an organised topography, linked to Earth and the very real places that were familiar to his Ottoman readers: Mecca and its surroundings, Jerusalem, the Nile, Euphrates. Ḥalabī considers the complex cosmogony of the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension, between Heaven and Hell. For example, one version (cited by Ibn Sayyid al-Nās[41]) describes Adam seated between the door of Hell and that of Heaven, both guarded by lions, as he passes judgement over the souls of faithful (destined for Heaven) and those of pagans (destined for Hell). The same description exists in al-Ghayṭī's text but Qalyūbī does not ask the same questions as Ḥalabī: why do both doors exist in the first heaven when the Fire is on the seventh level of Earth and Heaven above the seventh heaven? Ḥalabī offers ingenious solutions.[42]

Every stage elaborates a complex system to match up Heaven and Earth, the tangible world and the imaginal one. The Heavenly Ascension starts with the Ladder that the souls of the sons of Adam must climb after their death. In a passage from the *Mawāhib* cited by Ḥalabī, Qastallānī talks about the Door to Heaven, called "the Angels' ladder" that is said to stand facing the temple of Jerusalem and which can be used to climb directly to Heaven. According to Ibn Kathīr, this Ladder suggests that the Heavenly Ascension did not include the Burāq, contrary to Buṣīrī's suggestion.[43] Qalyūbī deferred to Suyūṭī and stated

40 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 515.
41 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, I, 248.
42 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 550.
43 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 549.

that the Burāq remained attached to the door of the Temple of Jerusalem and the Prophet rode it again only to return to Mecca. This also seems to be Ḥalabī's opinion.

According to Ibn Ḥajar, each heaven has a house (*bayt maʿmūr*), and in the "heaven of the *dunyā*", an image (*ḥayyāl*) of the Kaʿba can be found. The different "homes" are linked between each other in a topography that combines Heaven and Earth: the Kaʿba to Mecca, the Temple of Jerusalem, the heavenly *bayt maʿmūr*.[44]

At the end of the Heavenly Ascension, Gabriel leads Muḥammad to the Lote tree in the seventh heaven, from which spring all the celestial rivers. Contrary to other *Sīras* authors, and despite barely evoking Zamzam, Ḥalabī discusses these rivers at length. This singular passage, one of the virtuoso pieces in Ḥalabī's text, was deemed important enough to be specifically cited by Shaykh al-Dardīr in his commentary.[45] Dedicated to rendering heavenly geography clear and stable, Ḥalabī starts by citing Ibn Sayyid al-Nās: at the foot of the Lote tree of the furthest limit four rivers spring forth, two "internal" rivers (*bāṭin*) – hidden when they arrive in Heaven states Ḥalabī in a gloss – and two "external" ones (*ẓāhir*) – visible when flowing through Paradise. The two "external" rivers are the Nile and the Euphrates, which cut across Paradise while the two "internal" rivers, the Sayḥān and the Jayḥān do not. Ḥalabī digs deeper (the name of the rivers, their source, on Earth or in Heaven, visible or hidden). The Sayḥān and Jayḥān, in one version, do not start at the foot of the Lote tree and the rivers designated as "the internal rivers" were likely al-Salsabīl and al-Kawthar, as stated by Muqātil (d. 767). The *Sīra shāmiyya* follows this logic and quotes Qurṭubī who suggests that the Sayḥān and Jayḥān were only branches of the Nile and the Euphrates. Ḥalabī has reservations[46] because Muḥammad had seen the Nile and the Euphrates in the first heaven,[47] as well as their source. This, however, contradicts what is said elsewhere, that the Prophet saw at the foot of the Lote tree of the furthest limit four rivers, including the Nile and the Euphrates. It is possible, offers Ḥalabī, that the source (*manbaʿ*) begins under the Lote tree of the furthest limit, when their point of departure (*ʿunṣur*) can be found lower in the heaven of *dunyā*, and therefore after their route through Heaven and before they flowed onto the world.

44 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 534.

45 *Ḥāshiya*.

46 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 562.

47 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 562. The Nile in Egypt and the Euphrates along the banks of Kūfa, specifies Ḥalabī, who mentions a *ḥadīth* quoted by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201) in *al-ʿIlal al-mutanāhiya fī l-aḥādīth al-wāhiya*, according to which not a day goes by that water does not flow from Heaven into the Euphrates.

It is also said that the source (*ʿayn*), al-Salsabīl, can be found at the Lote tree of the furthest limit. From there flow two rivers, the Kawthar and the River of mercy (*nahr al-raḥma*). Both *bāṭin* rivers could thus flow from the roots of the Lote tree of the furthest limit but not from the same place as the Nile and the Euphrates. Is the Kawthar a branch (*qism*) of Salsabīl? This goes against Muqātil who suggested it was an accompanying but not secondary river, a consort (*qasīm*) of sorts. If the Sayḥān and the Jayḥān rivers flowed from the same spot, then there would be six rivers flowing from the Lote tree of the furthest limit. This possibility would allow al-Qurṭubī's interpretation to be included (all rivers in Paradise flow from the foot of the Lote tree), if we accept that the Sayḥān and the Jayḥān are derived from the Nile and the Euphrates. It would also include Ṭabarānī's text that describes four rivers by their contents: water (the Sayḥān), milk (the Jayḥān), wine (the Euphrates), and pure honey (the Nile), the last point was confirmed by Kaʿb b. al-Aḥbār. Ibn Abī Jamra[48] suggests that if these heavenly rivers flow from the Lote tree of the furthest limit, this would then mean that the tree is planted in Heaven. As for their names, Qaḍī Iyāḍ explains that Sayḥūn refers to Sayḥān and Jayḥūn to Jayḥān, which Ibn Kathīr contradicts – as does Nawawī – with a list of four distinct rivers (Sayḥūn, Sayḥān, Jayḥūn and Jayḥān).[49] Ḥalabī points out that Kawthar is issued from the Salsabīl source, at the foot of the Lote tree of the furthest limit, which is not contradictory with its previous existence as a Heavenly river.

This long, rather overwhelming passage about the rivers of Heaven could be taken as a useless digression, as can be found in a work of *adab*. Here, however, nothing is left to chance. It is important to Ḥalabī to establish a framework in which he can place the account of the Heavenly Ascension, a framework that corresponds to and explains the realities of the Middle East of his time. In this version of the Night Journey, the importance of Moses and Joseph – two prophets who travelled through Egypt – correlate and support the significance of the Nile. Ḥalabī was Egyptian after all.

1.4 *The Prophet, Blessed among All Prophets*

Within this temporal and geographic framework, which organises and links the earth below with the heavens above, Ḥalabī establishes one of the major themes of the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension: the ties between the Prophet and the prophets who precede him and his superiority over them. The role of the Prophet, already and always present, in the past history of prophets and of humanity, within the alliance between God and men, explains how

48 A Sufi of Andalusian origin who died in Cairo in 1300.

49 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 564.

and why the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension make sense in the history of redemption, in the alliance between God and men, in the future of the Muslim community.

The Prophet knows the prophets and they recognise him. When the Prophet prays in Jerusalem before the other prophets, Gabriel informs Muḥammad of their identity. According to Ḥalabī, these presentations do not contradict the fact that Muḥammad already knew and recognised most of them. How is it then that later during the Heavenly Ascension, Gabriel had to, once again, present these same prophets to Muḥammad?[50] Ḥalabī believes, as does Ibn Kathīr, that the two events are not contradictory. Perhaps the prophets in heaven do not have the same form or appearance (*ṣuwar*) as they did in Jerusalem because the *barzakh* is the imaginal world (*ʿālam al-mithāl*). The vision of the prophets in heaven would be a vision of their spirits, *arwāḥ* (except Jesus and Idrīs, who rose to heaven body and soul), whereas in Jerusalem, Muḥammad would have seen their terrestrial bodies, *ajṣād*, resuscitated for the occasion.[51]

Ḥalabī examines the specificities (*khaṣāʾiṣ*) of the Prophet. Did other prophets have their chests opened, as al-Shāmī's believes, or was it only Muḥammad?[52] "I respond" (*ujību*) answers Ḥalabī before going back to the origins, discussing the Arch of the Banī Isrāʾīl that God brought down to earth with Adam, which was handed down from prophet to prophet until Moses placed inside the Torah, his staff, Aaron's turban, the fragments of the Tablets, and the golden vessel of Paradise that had been used to wash the heart of the prophets. This is the proof that the washing of his heart was not unique to the Prophet Muḥammad, but rather was shared (there was *mushāraka*) with certain prophets. Ḥalabī contradicts Suyūṭī's *khaṣāʾiṣ* here (the latter onsiders the opening of the Prophet's chest to be one of his specificities), aligning himself with al-Shāmī's.[53]

As for the Burāq, Ḥalabī wonders if the pre-Muḥammadan prophets had already ridden it, as believed by Bayhaqī (d. 1066) and Shaʿrānī. For Nasāʾī (d. 915), only the prophets preceding Jesus had ridden it but none between Jesus and Muḥammad. Ḥalabī suggests that this *ishtirāk* (the sharing of characteristics between the Prophet and other prophets) is proven by the *ḥadīth* on the Burāq:[54] "and [the Prophet] tied it at the gate of the mosque, using the ring

50 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 526. The same conciliation as in Qalyūbī's *Ḥāshiya*.

51 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 527.

52 Qalyūbī wonders the same thing in his commentary of the *Miʿrāj* by al-Ghayṭī: *Ḥāshiya*, 1289 H., 4.

53 Concerning this particular point, he states he ignored al-Shāmī's opinions and the conclusions are his. *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 518.

54 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 241.

by which the prophets tied it before him". However, Suyūṭī says in the *Khaṣā'iṣ ṣughrā* that only the Prophet had ever ridden the Burāq. Ḥalabī offers an ingenious hypothesis: perhaps Suyūṭī was simply saying that Muḥammad was the only one to have ridden the Burāq saddled and harnessed.[55]

Ḥalabī is less interested in establishing the singularities of Muḥammad compared to all other prophets than in studying his relationship to the other prophets in Jerusalem. Ḥalabī examines a *ḥadīth* quoted by Ibn Sayyid al-Nās: "God has resuscitated for me (*nushira lī*) a group of prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus",[56] and the Prophet prays at the head of them all. Ḥalabī adds that "the wisdom of this precision is clear", Abraham personifies Hanifism, Moses Judaism, Jesus Christianity. It is important to establish the heritage of Islam and its supremacy over the preceding monotheisms – this is one of the key lessons of the Night Journey to Jerusalem.[57] The life of the prophets beyond the grave is detailed: Jesus was not resurrected as he was not dead. Ḥalabī takes the opportunity to underline the strength of the link between body (*ajsād*) and spirit (*arwāḥ*), since the prophets are in the *barzakh,* a form of existence that resembles our earthly lives (the *dunyā*).[58] This bit of information or this reminder, inserted in a flood of scholarly debates, is characteristic of Ḥalabī's tendency to mention important theological elements, as if in passing.

Another clue from the Night Journey is the sun standing still for the Prophet, this is backed up by a verse of Subkī's *Tā'iyya*. Ḥalabī offers a wealth of details to answer whether or not the sun stood still only for the Prophet. Did it also refrain from setting for David, as suggested by a (weak) *ḥadīth*? For Solomon? And for Yūsha' b. Nūn b. Yūsuf al-Ṣiddīq (Joshua), the son of Moses' sister? Ibn Sayyid al-Nās declares that this miracle only took place for Joshua and Muḥammad,[59] but Ḥalabī recopies a story from *ʿArā'is al-Majālis* by al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1035): the story of the Israelites attacking and massacring the Canaanite giants in Jericho.[60] He goes back to the forty-year Exodus of the Israelites in the desert[61] and proceeds to tie it into the *al-Mā'ida* Sura (Cor. v, 23–28). According

55 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, i, 520.

56 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, i, 241.

57 "The entirety of the narrative must be considered as an initiation into prophetic functions," writes Schrieke, "Die Himmelsreise Muhammeds", 21. Ḥalabī does not mention Idrīs and Elijah, whose ascensions are discussed by Qushayrī; he simplifies the prophetic landscape. See Böwering, "From the word of God to the Vision of God", 208.

58 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, i, 524.

59 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 244.

60 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, i, 538–539.

61 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, i, 539–540.

to Ḥalabī, the legend told by Thaʿlabī, just like the narrative of the Exodus in Damirī's (d. 1405) *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān*, is merely an explanation of Sura 5.[62]

Always careful to link the texts to his readership's direct experience, he opens up other possibilities by quoting *al-Uns al-jalīl* by Mujīr al-Dīn al-ʿUlaymī (1456–1522) – Ḥalabī's source for anything in relation to Palestine – that offers details on Jericho.[63] Ḥalabī also seizes the opportunity to retell the episodes of the Mosaic saga, which is the backdrop for the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension. Moses was getting ready to walk to the Holy Land with the bones of the Prophet Joseph, because he did not want them to be left in Egypt, and planned on burying them in the Holy Land in accordance with Joseph's final wishes. Moses had promised the Banū Isrāʾīl to leave when the moon rose but asked God to delay its appearance (and thus the setting of the sun) in order to find Joseph's bones, buried in an unmarked grave.[64] This Mosaic precedent furthers the underlying dialogue between the Qurʾān and the *Sīra*, between the stories of the prophets and the story of the Prophet, between Moses and Muḥammad.

Moses appears again in the sixth heaven during the Heavenly Ascension. Ḥalabī quotes Ibn Sayyid al-Nās: Moses cries when he learns that a young man sent after him (Muḥammad) will usher into Paradise more members of his community than will enter the members of Moses' community.[65] This explicit competition is one of the recurrent themes of Ḥalabī's narrative, which retells that of Suyūṭī. The comparison of the eschatological roles of the Prophet and Moses refers to the *al-Māʾida* Sura.[66]

Muḥammad meets another "Egyptian" prophet, Joseph, in the third heaven. Once again, the comparison between the two is to the advantage of the Prophet. Had Joseph received half the beauty of "people"? Or rather, with his mother, the third of the beauty of the world? Or two thirds or even nine tenths as stated by Wahb b. Munabbih? For Halabī, it is clear that the mention of "people" necessarily excludes the Prophet, whose beauty cannot ever be fractioned as indicated by the author of the *Burda* (Būṣīrī): "for the essence of the beauty in him cannot be divided". The poet Ibn al-Munīr (d. 1153) states however that Joseph had received the same amount of beauty as the Prophet, a point of view

62 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 539–540.

63 This is *al-Uns al-jalīl li-tārīkh al-Quds wa-l-Khalīl*, see Little, "Mujīr al-Dīn al-ʿUlaymī's Vision of Jerusalem in the Ninth/Fifteenth Century" 237–247.

64 According to *al-Uns al-jalīl*, a 900-year old woman shows Moses where to find Joseph's grave in the middle of the Nile. As the Nile flows over the grave, it spreads its *baraka*, irrigating all of Egypt. *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 542.

65 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, I, 248.

66 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 558.

adopted by the commentator of Subkī's *Tā'iyya*. It is also stated that Joseph inherited the beauty of Isaac, who had received his from his mother Sarah, who in turn had inherited her beauty from Eve. Joseph, as beautiful as an angel, looked like Adam the day God created him and had inherited half or a third of his beauty. The final conclusion places Muḥammad in the lead: according to the *al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-ṣughrā* by Suyūṭī, the Prophet had received all the beauty of the world, whereas Joseph had only received half. Ḥalabī concludes with a *ḥadīth*, God had never sent a prophet (*nabī*) who was not beautiful and gifted with a beautiful voice, but our Prophet had the most beautiful face and the most beautiful voice.[67]

The Heavenly Ascension recapitulates all the prophets and their recognition of Muḥammad. At each of the heavens they visit, Gabriel presents Muḥammad to the prophet who lives there and confirms that Muḥammad had been invested with a prophetic mission. The variations (which prophet lives in which heaven) do not detract from a rather stable cosmogony – that of Ibn Sayyid al-Nās and adopted by al-Ghayṭī/al-Qalyūbī. At the first heaven, Muḥammad meets Adam who judges the souls of his descendants, the faithful are sent to the heaven of ʿIlliyīn whereas the infidels are sent to Sijjīn (a valley in Hell). In the second heaven, Muḥammad meets Jesus and John the Baptist. Ḥalabī quotes the *ḥadīth*s that are favorable to Yaḥyā. In the *Kashshāf*,[68] while the Companions discuss the comparative merits of the prophets, Muḥammad speaks up to highlight those of Yaḥyā. He will be the one to slit death's throat – death in the shape of a ram – on Resurrection Day.

Joseph is in the third heaven and in the fourth dwells Idrīs who recognises in Muḥammad a "pious son". Idrīs, descendant of Seth, who was the first of Adam's descendants to be sent, is the ancestor of Noah according to some. However, Idrīs was neither Noah's grandfather nor one of the Prophet's ancestors, Ḥalabī quickly amends. Idrīs was raised to the heavens, perhaps from Egypt as stated in the Qurʾān (*Maryam*, 57).[69] Back on earth, Idrīs called all creatures to God in 72 different languages, taught them the sciences, and was the first astrologer. Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240) underlines the fact that no passage of the Qurʾān supports the hypothesis of Idrīs's mission as an emissary. Noah was the first prophet (*nabī*) to have received a message (*risāla*) from God; before him, each prophet lived according to the law of his Lord.[70]

67 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 555.
68 Ḥalabī often quotes the *tafsīr* by al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144).
69 Ḥalabī is quoting Ibn Sayyid al-Nās: *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 246.
70 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 556.

In the fifth heaven, Aaron is surrounded by the Banū Isrāʾīl.[71] The sixth heaven is home to Moses; Ḥalabī describes his thick hair, his anger, his animal gait. The seventh heaven is that of Abraham, sitting facing the doors of Paradise.

As with his prophetology, Ḥalabī's angelology – often inspired by that of Shaʿrānī – carefully examines hierarchy and precedence: Did the Prophet ride the Burāq behind Gabriel, or did Gabriel simply guide the steed? And what of the role of Mikāʾīl? Here, Ḥalabī deploys the *Shifāʾ* by Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* by Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 965), and the *Sharaf*,[72] readings that result in several hypotheses. Perhaps Gabriel had at times ridden and at times guided the Burāq, standing to its right. Perhaps Mikāʾīl had also taken the reins of the Prophet's steed but to its left. Ḥalabī finally quotes the opinion of Damīrī: Gabriel did not ride the Burāq, because this is one of the particularities of the Prophet (or of certain prophets).[73]

2 The Burāq, the Rock and the Houris: Discretion on the Enchantment

As usual, Ḥalabī is more interested in the relationship between the Burāq and the Prophet than in the Burāq itself. Faced with sceptics and opponents, Ḥalabī concentrates on proving the truth of the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension, searching for it in a sort of rational plausibility supported by the Qurʾān and the Sunna. He therefore talks little of the legendary and fantastic aspects that generally accompany accounts of the Night Journey. When discussing the legendary Burāq, Ḥalabī prefers to deal with the subject as a scholarly lexicographer (the Burāq is thus named because of its radiance or its speed, the name of its coat states that it is black and white, with a black that is close to red) and discusses the way the animal flies, lands, its gait. Quoting Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, he describes an incredibly rapid animal that is between a donkey and a mule in size. Between earth and sky, the Burāq places its hooves at the farthest boundary of its gaze.[74] It bucked when the Prophet approached and was admonished by Gabriel.[75] Ḥalabī continues half-heartedly, because of his *sanad ḍaʿīf*, by quoting the description of the Burāq by Thaʿlabī (d. 1038):

71 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 557.

72 This is certainly a reference to Saʿd ʿAbd al-Malik al-Khargūshī's work, *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* (or *ʿUyūn al-ḥikāyāt fi sīrat Sayyid al-bariyya*).

73 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 521.

74 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 245.

75 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 244. Insān al-ʿuyūn, 1, 519–521.

its ears like those of an elephant, its snout like that of a camel, its elephant-like chest, its eagle wings, its horse hooves, and camel tail. Another description gives the creature a human face, a horse's body, and bull hooves. "And we must reconcile these versions to appreciate the truth (*wa-yuḥtāj ilā l-jamʿ bayna hādhihi l-riwāyāt ʿalā taqdīr al-ṣiḥḥa*) concludes Ḥalabī prudently.[76] Unlike Qalyūbī, he does not discuss the ten animals that entered Heaven[77] and offers no details concerning the Burāq's saddle and halter.[78] Ḥalabī does not dwell on a fantastical Burāq, offering up instead a Burāq that remains miraculous while playing only a minor role.

The same holds true for the Rock. When the Prophet arrives in Jerusalem and attaches the Burāq to a ring, Gabriel uses his fingers to make a hole for him in the Rock (*al-ṣakhra*).[79] Maqrīzī's *Imtāʿ*, quoted by Ḥalabī, mentions that people continue to place their hands on the imprint.[80] The Rock is said to come from Heaven, near the palm tree under which Āsiya and Maryam bint ʿUmrān organise banquets until Resurrection Day, according to a *ḥadīth* that Ḥalabī mentions was rejected by al-Dhahabī (d. 1348): "its *isnād* is obscure and it is a proven lie". Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1148), the legal scholar, in his commentary of the *Muwaṭṭāʾ*, clearly affirms that the Rock of Jerusalem is one of God's miracles because it stands in the middle of the *Masjid al-aqṣā*, with, on one side, the imprint of the Prophet's foot when he climbed onto the Burāq, and on the other side, the marks of the angel's fingers.[81] However, Suyūṭī (d. 1505), when asked if Muḥammad's footprint in the stone had been attested in the *ḥadīth*, answered negatively.[82] In sum, without directly denying the miracles dear to the faithful devotees, Ḥalabī leaves ample room for criticism of the devotions that dominated Islam during his lifetime.

Ḥalabī also refrains from encouraging an abusively emotive vision of Heaven. There is even a legendary element, present in other *Sīras*, that Ḥalabī passes over: Gabriel's invitation to visit the Houris. The description of the Lote tree of the furthest limit remains sober, as does that of Heaven. Though he does state that Muḥammad enters Heaven with its pearl domes and soil of musk,[83] its pomegranates and birds. Despite being absent from Ibn Sayyid al-Nās's version, Ḥalabī adds the pomegranates to explain the fruits in Heaven: according

76 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 521.
77 *Ḥāshiya*, 8.
78 *Ḥāshiya*, 7.
79 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, I, 248. *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 522.
80 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 522.
81 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 523–24.
82 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 524.
83 Ibn Sayyid al-Nās stops here, *ʿUyūn al-athar*, I, 247.

to a *ḥadīth*, they are the same fruits found on earth, but in Heaven they are perfectly sweet and ripe. Ibn ʿArabī explains that the fruit of Paradise, neither cut nor forbidden, are eaten without being picked. This does not mean that once cut, another fruit grows in its place, as some have believed, but rather that the essence (*al-ʿayn*) of what the servant eats is indeed the essence of what Ḥalabī sees "and this is matter for thought".[84]

During his journey, the Prophet, guided by Gabriel, passed by a threatening djinn who calls out to him in vain. For Qalyūbī, this is an opportunity for Gabriel to teach the Prophet apotropaic formulas, which he then explains in detail. Such is not the case for Ḥalabī.[85] The episode of the hairdresser of the Pharaoh's daughter (Muḥammad smells the fragrance emanating from her tomb) occurs soon after. Ḥalabī sums it up in only five words whereas al-Qalyūbī recounts the event with a multitude of legends.[86] Perhaps Ḥalabī is showing restraint for tales that neither the Qurʾān nor any *ḥadīth* support. Or perhaps, the legend of a Jewish or Christian mother martyred with her children because of her faith (an allusion to the Maccabees developed by Syriac hagiography) was not conducive to establishing the superiority of the Prophet and of the Muslim community – one of the main goals of the Night Journey.[87]

Ḥalabī thus limits the fantasy that grounds an entire genre of Egyptian literature in the seventeenth century.[88] Ḥalabī remains focused on the goal of the Night Journey: glorifying the Prophet and his community.

2.1 *The Prophet and his Community: The Damned, the* fiṭra *and Eschatological Roles*

Ḥalabī narrates the Prophet's encounters and visions after Muḥammad prays in Jerusalem and right before the Heavenly Ascension. His choice is theologically motivated. Strengthened for his mission through his prayers before the other prophets, the Prophet is thus ready to face the temptations of the *dunyā*, the devil, the Christian and Jewish missionaries trying to convert his community,

84 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 561.

85 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 543. *Ḥāshiya*, 9. Qalyūbī underlines that the formulae protect from all ills coming from the sky (trials and ordeal – *al-balā'* – descend to punish rebels that have provoked the anger of God) and from all earthly evils: snakes, scorpions, temptations during the day and night, (*fitan al-layl wa-l-nahār*), in other words all attachment to earthly things – wealth, children, spouse, pleasures – anything that distances us from God.

86 On the hairdresser of the Pharaoh's daughter, al-Qalyūbī develops the legends of the ten newborns who spoke from their cradle. Some of these legends (Jirjīs in his hermitage, the martyr of young converts) come from Syriac Christian legends.

87 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 544.

88 Such fantasy went at least as far back as the Mamluk era, see Thomas Herzog, "Mamluk (Popular) Culture. The State of Research (2012)".

and to face the punishment awaiting sinners. Having these episodes take place in Jerusalem also corresponds to a cosmological analysis: since Hell is under the seventh layer of the Earth, how could it appear in Heaven? In the *qiṣṣā* by al-Ghayṭī adopted by al-Qalyūbī, the text is very similar, but the order of episodes is markedly different. The Prophet meets the damned and the tempters (the Jew, the Christian, the *dunyā*, Iblīs, the old lady) on the road to Jerusalem *before* and not after his prayer before the other prophets.

After the Prophet has already embarked on his Heavenly Ascension, there is another vision of the damned enduring unbearable punishment.[89] Ḥalabī is determined to reconcile the descriptions of the damned that the Prophet met in Jerusalem – thus on earth during the Night Journey – with these new descriptions seen in the first heaven of the Heavenly Ascension. An ulterior repetition occurs when Muḥammad once again sees the damned condemned for their aspersions and gossip on his way down after the Heavenly Ascension. Ḥalabī is keenly aware of the awkwardness of these repetitions and suggests the very frequency of this particular sin explains the recurrences.[90] Unusually laconic, Ḥalabī does not comment on these successive visions, nor does he give in to his customary examinations of contradicting *ḥadīth*s.[91]

Al-Ghayṭī/al-Qalyūbī enumerates the damned before the "Jewish missionary" (*dāʿī al-yahūd*) and the "Christian missionary" (*dāʿī al-naṣārā*) call out to the Prophet. The Prophet is then tempted by a beautiful woman (the *dunyā*), then by Iblīs, and after an old lady (the other face of the *dunyā*) calls out to him. Ḥalabī modifies the encounters, changing their order. He starts with the calls from the Jew and the Christian and follows them by the damned, then the *dunyā* as a beautiful woman, then as the old lady, saving Iblīs for later.[92] Ḥalabī is clearly concerned with coherence as he organises his Divine Comedy differently.

In the Night Journey, Ḥalabī is looking for that which makes sense in the history of salvation within the Muslim community. After seeing the damned and undertaking the Heavenly Ascension, the Prophet must choose, depending on the versions reported by Ḥalabī, between milk and honey, between wine and milk,[93] or between three jugs of wine, milk, and water.[94] Each time, the Prophet chooses milk, the drink of the *fiṭra* – in other terms, explains Ḥalabī, of Islam. Wine, states Gabriel, will be forbidden to the community, after having

89 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 551–552.
90 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 571.
91 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 543–544.
92 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 544–546.
93 This is the only version quoted by Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *ʿUyūn al-athar*, I, 241 and 245.
94 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 547.

first been allowed. There is debate around where these different choices took place: in Jerusalem or in Heaven? Ḥalabī deems that both possibilities are plausible because nothing is an obstacle (*lā māniʿ*) to this repetition before the Prophet leaves Jerusalem and after, right before the Heavenly Journey.[95] Neither is there a contradiction (*wa-lā taʿāruḍ*) in the possibility that the receptacles contained different liquids.[96]

Having harmonised and arranged the fairly confusing accounts of what happened in the hereafter, choosing to make no commentary on the situation of the damned, Halabī can dwell longer than al-Ghayṭī or Ibn Sayyid al-Nās on the eschatology revealed during the Heavenly Ascension. One of the differences between the *Sīra ḥalabiyya* and other *Sīras* is that the Prophet is informed of the situation of people in Heaven and Hell. He smells the musk and hears the gentle music from Heaven before being attacked by the putrid stench and the cacophony from Hell. Only then does the text mention Muḥammad's encounter with Iblīs, without any further details.[97]

Halabī then indulges in a short theological excursus. He refutes the Muʿtazilites who believe that God did not create Heaven or Hell and that He will not create them before Judgement Day because God cannot create these two places before their inhabitants are created. Ḥalabī argues that, on the one hand, "the virtuous man struggles for a created reward (*thawāb makhlūq*) and to avoid a created punishment (*ʿiqāb makhlūq*)" and that on the other hand, God did not include Heaven and Hell in *al-Zumar*, 68 ("and here are those who will be in Heaven and those who live on earth will be struck with lightning, except for those chosen by Allah"). The stroke of lightning, in other words death, concerns only those with a spirit (*rūḥ*).[98]

Laconic concerning the fate of the damned and their spectacular punishments, with barely a word about Iblīs, Ḥalabī is loquacious concerning Heaven and the place therein for the Muslim community. There are 120 clans (*ṣaff*) in Heaven, 80 of which belong to "this community" (*hādhihi l-umma*) and only 40 to the other "communities". Each community will have certain members in Heaven and others in Hell, except for "this community" (the Muslim community), which will be in Heaven in its entirety. This statement contradicts Muḥammad's vision during the Night Journey, when he sees sinners from his

95 Qalyūbī, in the same vein as Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Ḥajar, believes that the choice between two recipients was repeated on other occasions.

96 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 547.

97 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 546.

98 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 573.

Community in Hell. Ḥalabī eludes the contradiction by suggesting in his text the hierarchy of resurrected believers.

In the seventh heaven, the Home (*al-bayt al-maʿmūr*) – the heavenly image of the Kaʿba – is peopled with a horde of angels, the number ranging from 70,000 to 70 times 70,000.[99] After, there is a discussion of limbo for infants. Ḥalabī quotes Suhaylī, who in turn had quoted a *ḥadīth* used by Bukhārī in the *Kitāb al-janāʾiz*, the children of the faithful or the infidels who die in their infancy were seen by the Prophet in the seventh heaven and are under the protection of Abraham.

The Prophet also sees his community split into two equal parts (*shaṭrayn*), one in white, the other in grey. He enters into the *bayt maʿmūr* exclusively with those dressed in white. Ḥalabī comments that both parts cannot be equal because that would mean that the number of sinners in his community is equal to the number of faithful. The gatekeeper of the seventh heaven, Abraham, predicts the Community will grow as they are rooted in the good soil of Heaven, made of *lā ḥawla wa-lā quwwata illā bi-Llāh* or, in a variation, of *subḥāna Llāhu wa-l-ḥamdu li-Llāh wa-lā ilāha illā Llāh wa-Allāhu akbar*.[100]

At the end of the Heavenly Ascension, Gabriel stays behind and Muḥammad, in a cloud, rises to the Throne in a light where he hears the sound of pens (*ṣarīf al-aqlām*), and then climbs onto the *Rafraf* to rise towards the Vision (*al-ruʾya*) and hearing the Word that is addressed to him (*al-khiṭāb*). Ibn Sayyid al-Nās barely talks of the realities of Heaven and skims the difficult subject of the vision.[101] In contrast, Ḥalabī places eschatological realities at the heart of his narrative (even if, due to fear of anthropomorphism, he does not depict God sitting on the Throne). These realities allow for the introduction of the Prophet's ineffable approach to God. Muḥammad goes through 70,000 veils before hearing the voice of Abū Bakr, "Stop, your Lord is praying". This passage is commented further in the text when the discussion focuses on *al-Aḥzāb*, (Q 33:43) and in the comparison with Moses. For Ḥalabī, an angel, using Abū Bakr's voice, had called out to Muḥammad to warn him of the divine presence.[102]

While Muḥammad ponders the message, a voice calls out, "Approach, Oh pinnacle of all creation, approach Oh Aḥmad, approach Oh Muḥammad". As said in the Sura *Najm*, 8–9: "Then he approached and hung above suspended until he was two bows' length away, or (even) nearer" (*thumma danā wa-tadallā fa-kāna qāba qawsayn aw adnā*). Ḥalabī immediately quotes the *Khaṣāʾiṣ*

99 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 558–559. *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 246.
100 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 559–560.
101 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, I, 247.
102 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 566.

ṣughrā by Suyūṭī, the Prophet is also singular due to the *isrā'*, to the fact that he was the only one to have travelled the seven heavens all the way to a distance of two bows' length (*qāb al-qawsayn*), and of all the prophets and angels, he is the one who has stood closest to God. This suggests that the Prophet is the acting subject of "approached" (*danā*) and "hung above suspended" (*tadallā*). A different author has God approaching Muḥammad. Ibn Ḥajar, quoting al-Bayhaqī, relates a *ḥadīth* that supports this interpretation. Ḥalabī explains that the meaning of the approach *by* God is similar to the meaning of the station of descent (*maqām al-tanazzul*) among the mystics (*ahl al-ḥaqā'iq*), when God descends to talk to his servants with their own words, out of kindness and concern for them. To avoid any accusation of anthropomorphism,[103] Ḥalabī specifies that for the mystics, these expressions are realities (*ḥaqīqa*), whereas for Him, they are a metaphor (*majāz*). Ḥalabī also discusses an author who designates Gabriel as the subject of *danā* ("approached") and Muḥammad the subject of *tadallā* ("hung above suspended"). Still another designates the *Rafraf* as the subject of *tadallā* and Muḥammad the subject of *danā*: the *Rafraf* – cushion of light – was suspended so that Muḥammad could sit.[104]

God placed his hand between the Prophet's shoulders (Ḥalabī specifies that the phrase is not literal) and gave him the knowledge of the firsts and the lasts. Though Muḥammad must keep silent (*kitmān*) about certain sciences, God allows him to teach others (*tablīgh*) in order to instruct humans, djinns, and angels. God asks Muḥammad what Gabriel would like: to help Muḥammad's community on the *Ṣīrāṭ*, the Bridge over Hell on Judgement Day. God grants Gabriel his wish, but only, he stipulates to Muḥammad, "for those who love you and accompany you".[105] An undifferentiated salvation is thus not extended to the entire community; we have here a gradation in the intercession, one that Ḥalabī carefully defines. "Those that accompany you" are "those that obey Muḥammad in his religion and practice the *sunna*". The salvation of Muslims who do not practice their religion cannot be as dazzling as that of the devout who respect the law. Perhaps even, salvation is not guaranteed, as indicated by the display of the damned.

2.2 *Establishing Prayer and the Beatific Vision*

According to one version, upon seeing God, Muḥammad falls down in prostrate adoration, and God "reveals to him what he reveals" (a paraphrase of the

103 Van Ess, "Le *Miʿrāj* et la vision de Dieu", 33.

104 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 566.

105 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 567.

Sura *al-Najm*, Q 53:10)[106] – including the fifty daily prayers. After his celestial meeting, the Prophet goes back down to find Gabriel at the Lote tree of the furthest limit, then on to Abraham, and then to Moses. The last sends Muḥammad back up to request fewer prayers because he had experienced something similar with the Banū Isrāʾīl.[107] Ḥalabī summarises the trips the Prophet makes between Moses and God, and opens a debate about whether there had been a rescission, how, why, and was it valid for the Prophet or for his community.[108] He continues with a number of *ḥadīth*s concerning other instructions given during the Heavenly Ascension (ablutions, *zakāt*, loans).

At the end of the passage of his *Sīra* on the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension, Ḥalabī returns to the institution of prayer.[109] On the morning of the night of the *Miʿrāj*, Gabriel teaches Muḥammad the prayer: it was the *ṣalāt al-ẓuhr*, thus named because it was the first to "appear" or because it is performed when the sun is at its zenith.[110] Ḥalabī embarks on a legal discussion (he quotes "our imam al-Shāfiʿī"), concerning the *qibla*: the Kaʿba, Jerusalem, or even the Kaʿba placed between the Prophet and Jerusalem, during his prayer. There is also a discussion about Muḥammad's exact location when he prayed – at which of the Kaʿba's doors;[111] about the definition of a day and the moment of prayers as defined by al- Shāfiʿī.[112] While Ibn Sayyid al-Nās dedicates a third of the *ʿUyūn al-athar* (five out of fifteen printed pages) to the five prayers and their times,[113] Ḥalabī allots less than one tenth of his *Sīra*.[114] Contrary to his predecessor, he is most interested in the correspondence between the five moments of prayer and the different prophets (Adam, David and Isḥāq, Solomon and ʿUzayr, Jacob or Jesus, Jonah).[115]

After having reached the summit of the Heavenly Ascension, it is time to summarise, thanks to the six lines of the *Hamziyya*, what the *Sīra* had just explained in detail over the previous fifty pages, from "the folding of the earth" for the Prophet during his journey on the Burāq's back to how he achieved a

106 This is also a quote by Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 567. *ʿUyūn al-athar*, I, 246. Ḥalabī gives a list of Qurʾānic revelations that had occurred: the *al-Baqara* Sura, the verses of the *al-Ḍuḥā* Sura, and the verse *al-Aḥzāb*, Q 33:43.

107 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 568. Ḥalabī quotes Bayḍāwī's *tafsīr*, then Suyūṭī's gloss.

108 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 569.

109 *Uyūn al-athar*, 251–56.

110 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 579.

111 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 580–81.

112 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 582.

113 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 251–56.

114 Six pages out of 72, *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 580–86.

115 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 580–86.

degree of perfect contentment that knows neither penury nor excess.[116] Ḥalabī returns to why Moses wept upon meeting the Prophet. "I state," he concludes, that this meeting between Muḥammad and Moses demonstrates "the pre-eminence of our Prophet and the pre-eminence of his community, in that he is the best of the prophets and his community the best of the communities" (*iẓhār faḍīlat nabiyyinā wa-faḍīlat ummatihi, bi-annahu afḍal al-anbiyā' wa-ummatihi bi-annahā afḍal al-umam*).[117] Ultimately, for Ḥalabī, this is the meaning of the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension, along with the requirement to pray, establishing a religion above all others that had come before, and the Prophet above all other prophets.

Of all the realities of the Hereafter the Prophet experienced, the Beatific Vision remains the most enigmatic and debated. According to Ḥalabī, Ibn Sayyid al-Nās states that there is *ikhtilāf*, but the majority of ulama agree that the Prophet saw God with his own eyes.[118] This explains the admittedly questionable *ḥadīth* (*muḍtarab al-isnād wa-l-matn*), "I saw my Lord in the most beautiful form" (*ra'aytu rabbī fī aḥsani ṣūra*). A mystic would have said that God, when examining the hearts of men, did not find one that pined for him as much as Muḥammad's heart – this is why he rewarded him with the *Miʿrāj*, with sight and speech. ʿĀ'isha, followed by the Companions and the ulama, denied the vision, deeming it a frightful lie. However, according to al-Dārimī (d. 869), the majority of Companions, and many traditionalists and theologians, approve of the reality of the vision – as stated by Ibn Sayyid al-Nās in a single line, "he saw Him, and no one but Him, with his eyes and fully conscious, not metaphorically". ʿĀ'isha refutes the possibility of the *ru'ya*, using the verse from the *al-Anʿām*, 103 Sura: "eyes cannot grasp him" (*lā tudrikuhu al-abṣār*). Masrūq apparently replied with this verse, "he had already seen Him during a different descent" (*al-Najm*, 13). However, does the pronoun-object ("he saw him") designate God or Gabriel? Did the Prophet see God two different times?[119] The repetition of the vision would correspond to the Distance of the two bows and to the Lote tree of the furthest limit, suggests Suyūṭī in *al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-ṣughrā*, which concludes by stating that Muḥammad was the only prophet to see God (twice) but shares with Moses the honour of having been spoken to by God.[120]

116 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 570.

117 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 570.

118 Ḥalabī reworks his source: Ibn Sayyid al-Nās gives more importance to the *ikhtilāf*. *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 250–251.

119 On this interpretation of the *al-Najm* Sura between anthropomorphists and transcendantalists, see Van Ess, "Le *Miʿrāj* et la vision de Dieu" 39.

120 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, I, 574. On this parallel between Muḥammad who saw God twice and Moses who was called by God twice, see Van Ess, "Le *Miʿrāj* et la vision de Dieu" 38.

ʿĀ'isha affirms having questioned the Prophet, "Have you seen the Lord?". To which Muḥammad is said to have replied, "I saw Gabriel." Ibn Sayyid al-Nās mentions that a Companion, Abū Ḏarr, also questioned the Prophet who is said to have replied, "I saw a light".[121] Ḥalabī explains that the light prevented Muḥammad from seeing God because God is not light, rather he uses it as a veil (*ḥijāb*), as written by Muslim. In *al-Nūr*, 35 ("God is the light of the heavens and earth"), we are to understand that God is the "possessor of light" (*dhū nūr*). Qādī ʿIyāḍ refutes the idea that light is the essence of God (*ḏātuhu*), for light is an accident (*aʿrāḍ*).[122]

How then should we approach ʿĀ'isha's fierce rejection of what so many Sufi authors agree upon? Ibn Sayyid al-Nās suggests that Muḥammad saw God with his heart (*fuʾād*) and not with his own eyes. God then created a vision or a view (*baṣar*) in the Prophet's heart. Ḥalabī opts for this elegant solution to save the idea of a conscious vision and to refute ʿĀ'isha's Qurʾānic argument in *Anʿām*, 103: "grasped" (*idrāk*) is not "vision" (*ruʾya*). When asked about ʿĀ'isha's rejection of Muḥammad's vision of God, Imam Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal focuses on the *ḥadīth*, "I saw my Lord". What the Prophet said trumps anything ʿĀ'isha may have recounted. However, for Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) (very rarely quoted by Ḥalabī), Imam Aḥmad designates here a dream vision (*ruʾyat al-manām*); an authentic vision, yet it was not seen with his bodily eyes and in a state of consciousness. According to Ibn Taymiyya, pretending that the vision was a corporal vision is a fantasy, and the People of Sunna all agree that none can see God with their eyes here on earth. None of the major *ḥadīth*s (*mashhūr*) on the Night Journey indicates that Muḥammad saw God – or if so, they are *ḥadīth*s from a forged *isnād*. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* says, "Know that none among you can ever see our Lord before you die and that it was refused to Moses when he asked for it".[123] These arguments, which couldn't be easily dismissed, are clearly more important to Ḥalabī than the biased testimony of ʿĀ'isha.

How to conclude? Al-Qurṭubī left the question in suspense (*waqf*), because there is no clear proof (*dalīl qāṭiʿ*), and the contradictory arguments of both sides (*al-farīqān*) are often subjects to comment (*qābila li-l-taʾwīl*). A decisive argument would be needed if belief in a physical vision was part of the tenets (*muʿtaqadāt*),[124] whereas the vision is one of the things that must simply be believed such as the resurrection and the coming together of humans on

121 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 250, quoted by *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 574.
122 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 574.
123 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 575.
124 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 575.

Judgement Day (*ka-l-ḥashr wa-l-nashr*).[125] Suyūṭī's *Khaṣā'iṣ ṣughrā* places the vision of God among the greatest of the Prophet's *khaṣā'iṣ*, in accordance with *Najm*, 18 (*la-qad ra'ā min ayāti rabbihi al-kubrā*, "He saw certain of God's most important signs"). Ibn Diḥya (1150–1235) already considered the vision and proximity to God as part of the Prophet's attributes and Nawawī (1233–1277) concluded that the most plausible explanation was that Muḥammad had seen God with his own eyes. As for his dream vision, Suyūṭī includes it among the Prophet's *khaṣā'iṣ*, an opinion corroborated by Nawawī who adhered to the Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ.[126]

The Beatific Vision the day of Resurrection will belong in principle to all creatures, humans and djinns, men and women, faithful and infidels, angels and others. There is however a disagreement (*ikhtilāf*), notes Ḥalabī, on the "vision by women" (*ru'yat al-nisā'*) of Paradise. Perhaps they will not see God because they will remain in their tents; or perhaps they would only see him on feast days, as compared to the men who would see him every Friday, and the chosen (*al-khawāṣṣ*) who would see him every day, morning and evening.

The dissociation between *isrā'* and *miʿrāj*, and the fact that the *al-Isrā'* Sura does not mention the *miʿrāj* are problematic – a situation that Ḥalabī is not the first to try to resolve. According to Suhaylī, quoted by Ibn Sayyid al-Nās,[127] then by Ḥalabī, the *isrā'* took place corporally and the *Miʿrāj* spiritually. This is why the Prophet told the Qurayshites only about the *isrā'* and not about the *miʿrāj*. Ḥalabī penned a lengthy discussion:[128] according to him, rather than two distinct events, there are two distinct accounts because the Prophet's account of the *miʿrāj* did not take place at the same time as that of the *isrā'*. If Muḥammad first talked about the Night Journey, it was a pedagogical strategy of progression since the Heavenly Ascension was a greater miracle and the Prophet wanted the Quraysh to evolve in their faith. Only when they believed in the Night Journey did the Prophet inform them of the Heavenly Ascension.

Contrary to what al-Dimyāṭī (d. 1305–1306) suggested[129] (that the *miʿrāj* took place during Ramadan and the *isrā'* in Rabīʿ 1), the two events took place the same night, affirms Ḥalabī, who backs up his statement with the title used by Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*: "How prayer was imposed on the night of the *isrā'*". As the five daily prayers were imposed during the *miʿrāj*,[130] there is only one

125 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 576.
126 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 576.
127 *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 242–244.
128 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 578.
129 Al-Ḥāfiẓ ʿAbd al Mu'min al-Dumyāṭī (d. 705/1305–1306), who was one of the shaykhs of Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, wrote *al-Mukhtaṣar fī sīrati Sayyid khayr al-bashar*.
130 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 578.

event. Ḥalabī mentions other authors who argue that the *isrā'* took place twice, once in dream and once awake; or starting in Mecca and not Jerusalem, and in full daylight.[131] Re-examining Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, who in turn quotes Bukhārī, Ḥalabī returns to the *ḥadīth*'s brief account of the Heavenly Ascension – with no mention of the Journey to Jerusalem, "the roof of my home opened, while I was in Mecca, Gabriel descended … and holding my hand, flew up into the heavens".[132] Ḥalabī ingeniously renders the different versions compatible.

He does however disqualify other hypotheses. It is strange to say that the conscious *miʿrāj* was repeated. Why would the gatekeepers of each heaven ask each time whether or not Muḥammad had already received his mission? Why would Muḥammad reiterate his questions to Gabriel? And finally, how could God repeat the obligation to pray? As for pretending that the dream *miʿrāj* prepared for the conscious ascension was simply the result of contradicting versions (*manshā' ikhtilāf al-riwāyāt*). Ḥalabī is thus conscious of the risks of forcefully reconciling texts that are simply juxtaposed with no explanations. This must be avoided, and a path must be chosen. Following the example of Ibn Kathīr, Ḥalabī concludes, the Prophet accomplishes a single *isrā'* in mind and body (but perhaps with the eyes of his heart, adds Ḥalabī) and fully conscious.[133] Ḥalabī does not ever return to this debate nor to this final affirmation. This is his final answer to the main theme announced at the very start of his narrative.

3 Conclusion

The *Sīra ḥalabiyya* is as much a portrait of its author as it is of the Prophet. We can only agree with the words of al-Muḥibbī (1651–1699) on Ḥalabī several decades after his death, "He was a mountain of knowledge, a bottomless ocean of intelligence, a remarkable scholar, he embodied all sorts of excellence. He spent most of his life proposing and furthering useful knowledge and thus acquired an unrivalled prestige…. He dove deep in his studies thanks to a sharp understanding and strong ideas, he carefully examined the fatwas, and linked knowledge to action (*ʿilm wa-ʿamal*). He was a serious man who applied himself to the *ijtihād*."[134]

131 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 578.

132 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 579. *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 247.

133 *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, 1, 579. On Ibn Kathīr and the *Miʿrāj*, see Van Ess, "Le *Miʿrāj* et la vision de Dieu" 40.

134 See Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar*, 122–124. Our quote is based on Pinel-Cahagne's translation, 71.

As noted by Tarif Khalidi, *al-Sīra al-ḥalabiyya* was an immediate bestseller.[135] A century later, the Syrian Sufi ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (1641–1731) had already identified Ḥalabī as the "author of the famous Sīra".[136] It was first published as an Ottoman Turkish translation by Būlāq in 1833, two years before the benchmark Arabic edition of *A Thousand and One Nights*, and more than a century before the first edition of Ibn Sayyid al-Nās's *Sīra*. It would take another thirty years for the original Arabic text of the *Sīra ḥalabiyya* to be published in Cairo in 1863 and twelve more before a definitive edition was published by Būlāq in 1292/1875, thanks to a proofreader from Būlāq, the Azhar Sufi Shaykh Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Ghaffār al-Disūqī (d. 1883). The work's three volumes displayed in their margins *Al-Sīra al-nabawiyya wa-l-athār al-muḥammadiyya*, written by a contemporary, the Shāfiʿī mufti from Mecca, Sayyid Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān (d. 1886). In a decidedly Sufi and anti-Wahhabi vein, Daḥlān declared he had relied on the commentaries of *Shifāʾ*, on the *Mawāhib* by al-Qastallānī and their commentary by Zurqānī (d. 1710), and also on the most trustworthy *siyar* (*aṣaḥḥ al-kutub al-muʾallafa fī hadhā l-shaʾn*): those of Ibn Sayyid al-Nās and Ibn Hishām, the *Sīra shāmiyya* and the *Sīra ḥalabiyya*.[137] This goes to show that the *Sīra ḥalabiyya*, which summarised the three previous *Sīra*s quoted by Daḥlān, was the pinnacle of what could be written on the subject for a Sufi scholar at the end of the nineteenth century. The same holds true for Orientalists.[138] In 2009, Palestinian historian Tarif Khalidi, born in 1938 in Jerusalem to an illustrious family, deemed the *Sīra ḥalabiyya* was still the most consulted. His opinion is not factually supported, but it is a reflection of the cultivated Muslim aristocracy in which he grew up. Recent editions attest to the fact that the *Sīra ḥalabiyya* is still – or is once again – being used to defend the Prophet. However, it has become too long, too complex, and also too Sufi. The twentieth century witnessed the decline of its reputation.

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135 Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*, 238–240.

136 ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, *al-Tuḥfa al-nābulusiyya fī l-riḥla al-ṭarābulusiyya*, in *Die Reise des ʿAbd al-Ghanī an-Nābulusī durch den Libanon*, and [illegal?] reprint Maktabat al-thaqāfa al-dīniyya, 79–81. There is also another edition: ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, *al-Ṣulḥ bayna l-ikhwān fī ḥukm ibāḥat al-dukhān*, 99–100. I would like to thank Samuela Pagani for this reference.

137 Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān, in the margins of *Insān al-ʿuyūn*, Būlāq, ed. 1875.

138 Certain scholars seem to have not read any further than the fascinating episodes of the beginning of the life of the Prophet, his birth, and his childhood. Their analysis of the *Sīra ḥalabiyya*, a book of *adab* (Schöller, *Mohammed*, 86–87) or the compilation of legends (Pinel-Cahagne, *Le merveilleux dans la biographie de Muḥammad* (sīra) *due à Nūr al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī. Choix d'épisodes*) is thus affected, whereas Ḥalabī's study of the Night Journey, for example, is very different. Tilman Nagel has a more balanced analysis of the *Sīra ḥalabiyya*.

Far from being a *Sīra* infatuated with fantastical events as it has sometimes been described, the *Sīra* by Ḥalabī is a work of the highest calibre, which, as stated Tarif Khalidi, focuses on conciliation using techniques to critique the *ḥadīth*s without ever being enslaved by them. This form of rationality and logic prevails when organising material, but it never excludes the possibility of a miracle – or perhaps by concentrating on the miracles that count, those of the Prophet. Theology, criticism of the *ḥadīth*s, Sufism and fiqh, the holy story was placed in perspective in a highly personal quest for coherence. The desire to reconcile divergent versions of the same event led Ḥalabī to display extreme ingenuity, but never to the point of dissimulating the oppositions and impasses when they occurred. At such moments, he chose to delve ever further rather than dismiss or attenuate differences. There is nothing peremptory in Ḥalabī, as opposed to Ibn Kathīr before him and Nabhānī after him, who in 1894 hammered home what we are supposed to think, believe, and say about the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension.[139] When Ḥalabī discusses divergent opinions of certain authors, his progressive layout unveils the leanings of his heart, a heart that does not forget rational order, strives for harmony, and still takes into account contradictory debates. He goes so far as to quote Ibn Taymiyya – who was the most obvious opponent of the prophetic miracle.

With Ḥalabī, we are far from the concise narration of Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, far from the accumulation of *ḥadīth*s by al-Shāmī, the concise and lively storyline of the *Miʿrāj* by al-Ghayṭī, or its pious commentary by Qalyūbī. "It's as if Muḥammad's *Sīra* was integrated into the Qurʾān as matter for the most advanced exegesis" (Tarif Khalidi). It is not because it is more recent, with the advantage of a vaster sedimentation of material over time, that Ḥalabī's *Sīra* is more developed than its predecessors. It is because its author made personal choices that he had long weighed amidst the ocean of texts and knowledge at his disposal in order to offer his fellow Muslims an orientation within the tradition. There is nothing left to chance in the *Sīra ḥalabiyya*, which was a commissioned work and perhaps even a work destined to be wielded on the battle lines of his day.

By discretely skipping over certain legends and avoiding the useless and the superfluous, Ḥalabī stands out from his predecessors (Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, al-Shāmī) and a portion of his contemporaries (Qalyūbī). His singularity is further underlined through a historicising format that is attentive to the logical coherence and the chronological succession of events, through his reflection on the providential inscription of the Prophet in the ancient history of prophecies, and finally through his insistence on the meaning of the Night Journey

139 Yūsuf al-Nabhānī, Al-Anwār al-muḥammadiyya min al-Mawāhib al-laduniyya, 332 sq.

and the Heavenly Ascension. When his contemporary al-Qalyūbī stated simply that "all these things must be believed" (*wa-kullu hādhihi al-umūr yajibu al-īmān bihā*) because they flow from the divine power,[140] Ḥalabī sought to offer rational proof, and appeal to his readership's intelligence, all the while rendering tangible and proximate the realities of Heaven that are mysteriously linked to those here on earth. By putting aside the fantastical elements and discretely distilling a vision inspired by Sufi authors, he studies numerous – often contradictory – versions that suggest a multitude of possible figures of the Prophet. He ignored none. Yet, the figure of the Prophet as seen by Ḥalabī emerges. His Prophet is not a fabulous, triumphant hero who climbs onto the fantastical Burāq and goes from heaven to heaven, surrounded by angels, like in the Persian or Ottoman miniatures of his time. Instead, we meet "this extraordinary man", unique in his beauty and humility, who is woken in the middle of the night to experience the ineffable, which must be told nevertheless. Proof needed to be found of this incredible experience, unique moments that made Moses cry and left Gabriel at the Lote tree of the furthest limit. For Ḥalabī, the Prophet did truly undertake, at least once, the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension in mind and body. Night Journey and Heavenly Ascension culminate in the Vision of God, also real, where Muḥammad approaches God because he wished for it more deeply than anyone else (it is the only moment in the narrative where Muḥammad is fully an actor of his own story). Recognised as the Prophet among prophets in Jerusalem, Muḥammad travels through the seven heavens and learns the sciences revealed by God; he becomes the initiator of daily prayers and the eschatological intercessor for his community.

For Ḥalabī, the goal of this chapter was to prove the reality of the Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascension by Muḥammad, in body and mind, as well as the reality of the Beatific Vision with his eyes – perhaps the eyes of his heart. There are no authoritative arguments, but he offers the possibility of a miracle. As an exegete of the *Sīra*, Ḥalabī, like the Prophet before him, leads his readers where he chose to guide them: closer to God.

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PART 2

Towards a Theology of Devotion to the Prophet in Sunnī Islam

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5

Theology of Veneration of the Prophet Muḥammad

Knowledge and love in the Shifā *of al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ (d. 544/1149) between ḥadīth, philosophy and spirituality*

Ruggero Vimercati Sanseverino

1 Rethinking the Scope of Sunnī Prophetological Discourse

> It suffices for the intelligent reader to realise that we did not collect all that is in our book for those who deny the prophethood of our Prophet, or for those who slander on his miracles, so that we would need to engage in proofs […], but we wrote it for the people of the Prophet's community who respond to his call and believe in his prophethood, in order to affirm their love for him (*taʾkīdan li-maḥabbatihim lahu*) and that their deeds may increase and their faith be reinforced.[1]

The Moroccan Mālikī scholar Abū al-Faḍl ʿIyāḍ al-Yaḥṣubī[2] (d. 544/1149), commonly called *al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ*, explains in this way the purpose of his treatise *al-Shifāʾ bi-taʿrīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā* ("The healing through the recognition of the rights of the chosen Prophet"), which can rightly be considered the major reference text of Sunnī prophetology and one of the most widely read and diffused works in the history of Islamic literature. Despite this explicit indication of the author, studying the *Shifāʾ* with regard to its purpose to induce the love for the Prophet in the Muslim community has not yet attracted any attention in academic research on this important work. As astonishing as this might seem, it is, in fact, understandable when bearing in mind the background from which the general theme of the *Shifāʾ* – that is, the veneration of the Prophet – has been considered. Just to give a few examples, even for such a sensitive observer like the Neo-Thomist historian of Muslim theology Louis Gardet, the veneration of the Prophet has its basis in the dichotomy between

1 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 150. Translations are by the author. There are a variety of non-academic translations into major Western languages, for example in English with the Arabic text by Hibah, *Ash-Shifa*.

2 See in particular Serrano, "ʿIyāḍ" and as primary sources, ʿIyāḍ, *Taʿrīf* and Maqqarī, *Azhār al-riyāḍ*.

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popular and learned Islam, and is clearly a phenomenon related to the first.[3] More recently, Tilman Nagel opts for an Islamicised version of the "priest fraud" theory ("Priesterbetrugstheorie") and argues the other way around, namely that the veneration of the Prophet was constructed by the *ʿulamāʾ* in order to enforce Islamic norms on the Muslim community: The *Muhammadglauben* ("belief in Muḥammad") and its implied veneration of the Prophet serves in fact the "self-reassurance" (Selbstvergewisserung) of the Muslim masses.[4] Both theses, which underly a large proportion of academic writing about Muslim attitudes towards the Prophet, have the idea in common that the veneration of the Prophet, and the belief in his pre-eminence, serve to fulfil, in one way or another, the needs of the uneducated and uncritical Muslim masses; hence, they do not represent a genuinely theological or intellectual theme of Islamic thought.[5]

It is not surprising, then, that against this background, the veneration of the Prophet has, with notable exceptions,[6] not attracted much interest in academic research until recent political events made evident the mobilising force

3 Gardet, *Théologie musulmane*, 201. He equally speaks of a Muslim "hyperdulia cult" (226–27) and argues that "the absolute pre-excellence of the Prophet upon any creature does not enter the usual perspective of kalam" (206). I would argue that this thesis can be traced back to the influence of protestant biblical studies and its theory of the "biographical process" on early orientalism, as exemplified by Josef Horovitz's "The Growth of the Mohammed Legend" of 1920. See also Van Ess, *Miʿrāj*, 27–28 who credits early Islam with having been less affected with a subsequently constructed exaltation of its founder than early Christianity, but at the same time closes his study with the remark that "it was resolutely decided to exalt him, but the events of his life had already anticipated this exaltation" (*Miʿrāj*, 56).

4 Nagel, *Allahs Liebling*. Tilman Nagel, for whom the *Shifāʾ* establishes "Muḥammad as the source of Muslims' production of meaning and existential determination" (*Allahs Liebling*, 22), devotes a whole chapter to the *Shifāʾ* in his study, under the title "The dogmatisation of the prophetic vita" (135–98), albeit without discussing its central notions and concepts, and from his particular, sometimes polemical perspective.

5 One could add that this sociological preconception, founded on the dichotomy between learned and popular Muslims, is more or less consciously associated with a historical one according to which the veneration of the Prophet does not belong to the "original Islam", the latter being sharply distinguished from Islam as constructed by Muslim traditions. It is interesting to note, however, how this conception of "original Islam" does represent numerous similarities with the Neo-Salafist concept of "the Islam of the origins".

6 Besides the pioneering work of Tor Andrae of 1918, notably not a scholar of Islamic studies in the first place but a theologian and a historian of religions, it is above all the specialists of Sufism who have been interested in this theme. See in particular Schimmel, *Und Muhammad* (1981), Chodkiewicz, "Modèle prophétique" (1994); Gril, "Corps du Prophète" (2006); Katz, *Birth of the prophet* (2007) and Addas, *Maison du Prophète* (2015).

of the reference to the Prophet,[7] in this way pushing academia to acknowledge the necessity of obtaining a deeper understanding of Muslims' relationship to their Prophet.[8] What applies to the theme of veneration of the Prophet is even more true for the notion of love (*maḥabba*) as the evident core of an attitude of veneration for the Prophet, despite its being ever-present in Islamic literatures and cultures. Far from representing merely a moral or sentimental device for the masses, love for the Prophet is the notion through which Islamic sources, beginning with the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth*,[9] qualify the relationship of the Muslim community to its founding figure and the normative character of its commitment and reconnection to him.[10]

As the *Shifāʾ* illustrates, the concept of *maḥabbat al-nabī* is part of a highly sophisticated scholarly discourse which traverses various Islamic disciplines and traditions. So besides being a genuinely theological issue, the veneration of the Prophet constitutes also a *topos* which relies heavily on the *ḥadīth* tradition, on philosophical thought and on Muslim spirituality. With about 1800 narrations, the *Shifāʾ* draws heavily on the corpus of Prophetic Tradition and adopts in many ways the views of traditionalist scholarship which became prominent amongst "reformed" Māliki scholars of this period.[11] But although the *Shifāʾ* is sometimes referred to as a work of *ḥadīth* or *sīra*, it is far more than a simple thematic or biographical anthology in the framework of that

7 In the first place, the Danish caricature affair of 2005 and the jihadist justification of terrorist activities through the figure of the Prophet, beginning with al-Qāʿida and leading to ISIS. See Vimercati Sanseverino, *Combat Prophetology*.

8 Since Annemarie Schimmel's groundbreaking *Und Muhammad ist Sein Prophet* (1981, English translation 1985), there has been a flourishing of monographs presenting historical outlines of the Muslim view of the Prophet for a wider readership, beginning with Schöller, *Mohammed* (2008); Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad* (2009); Safi, *Memories of Muhammad* (2010); Brown, *Muhammad* (2011); Ali, *Lives of Muhammad* (2014). See also Görke, "Introduction", 2015.

9 In Q 9:24, probably addressed to "those Muslims who remained in Mecca after the migration" (*Study Quran*, 511), love for the Prophet Muḥammad, here in the sense of giving preference to him, appears as a mark which distinguishes his most loyal followers: "Say: 'If your fathers, your children, your brothers, your spouses, your tribe, your wealth you have acquired, commerce whose stagnation you fear, and dwellings you find pleasing are more beloved to you than God and His Messenger (*aḥabba ilaykum min Allāh wa rasūlihi*), and striving in His way, then wait till God comes with His command' […]". Examples from the *ḥadīth* are certainly more numerous, the most famous being the tradition found, amongst others, in Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *kitāb al-īmān, bāb ḥubb al-rasūl min al-īmān*, N° 14, "Nobody has faith until he loves me more than his father, his child and the whole of mankind". See also in particular Gril, "Attitude des Compagnons".

10 For the paradigmatic significance of the reconnection to the Prophet, see Graham, "Traditionalism".

11 See Fierro, "Proto-Malikis".

literature. Its thematic and argumentative structure appears to be determined by a sophisticated theological reasoning,[12] partly influenced by philosophical thought and by notions from Islamic spirituality.

The text of the *Shifāʾ* is organised in four larger parts (*aqsām*) which cover both doctrinal and practical aspects of Islamic prophetology. The first part is concerned with the status and rank of the Prophet Muḥammad and includes sections on Qurʾānic evidence, on his miracles, on his virtuous and physical appearance or his announcement in previous religious scriptures. This part is informed by various genres of prophetological discourse and literature and is primarily exegetical, although it also includes elements from philosophical ethics and purely prophetological considerations inspired by *taṣawwuf* or *kalām*. The second part is dedicated to the "rights of the Prophet" and expounds how Muslims should behave towards their Prophet, and which attitude they should adopt. This part in fact develops practical consequences of the pre-eminence of the Prophet and elaborates on the implementation of its meaning for Muslims. It represents the most unique and original part of the *Shifāʾ*, as it draws on such varied discourses and genres as *kalām*, *fiqh* and *taṣawwuf*. In particular, one has to note a very long part on the theme of love for the Prophet, probably pioneering in Islamic literature. Part three deals with the prophetic reality of Muḥammad and its theological articulation in terms of what must be affirmed about the Prophet, what is impossible to affirm and what can be possibly affirmed with regard to him. This part represents a classical *kalām* approach to prophetology, but with a particular focus on the crucial question of the relationship between the human nature and the prophetic authority of Muḥammad.[13] The theme of the Prophet's impeccability and infallibility is treated in detail, including for example the issue of the so-called "Satanic Verses".[14] The last and fourth part discusses the violation of the rights of the Prophet and is concerned with the normative regulations concerning blasphemy. Hence, it deals with the collective implementation of the rights of the Prophet and their social and political aspects, and addresses more specifically the duties of an Islamic government. Unlike the other chapters, it is characterised by a purely *fiqh* approach. But again, with regard to this topic,

12 Interestingly, the "secret" (*sirr*) of the work, as the author himself explains in the introduction (*Shifāʾ*, 16), is to be found in the third part which develops the classical *kalām* theme of *nubuwwāt* (prophetology) and discusses in particular the complex relationship between the human nature of Muḥammad and his prophetic authority.

13 See Vimercati Sanseverino, „Wer dem Gesandten gehorcht", 63–38.

14 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 294–299. For this issue, see the study by Ahmad, *Before Orthodoxy*.

the *Shifāʾ* is recognised as one of the reference works, with a particularly severe stance against blasphemy.[15]

This concise overview shows how the *Shifāʾ* draws on multiple types of literature and discourse about the Prophet Muḥammad in order to present a coherent, comprehensive and systematic prophetological work.[16] But al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ does not contend himself to merely collect and compile these elements. He uses these in a new way, developing a new approach to prophetology, and therefore, besides synthesising what was before him, he at the same time marks a new phase of prophetological writing. Whereas previous literature was chiefly concerned with either the significance or the content of the prophetic teaching and mission, the *Shifāʾ* focuses on the person of the Prophet and its meaning for religious life.[17] In this way, the author endeavors to offer, in the context of dramatic political and religious upheavals,[18] an answer to the following interrogation: how should Muslims, individually and collectively, relate to their Prophet, and what meaning does this relationship have? In other words: what kind of relationship should Muslims have to their Prophet?

As a synthesis and culmination of a discursive tradition concerning the Prophet Muḥammad in Sunnī Islam, the *Shifāʾ* represents a landmark in the history and literature of "Prophetic piety"[19] or "Muḥammadan spirituality"[20] and prophetology. It has been extensively referred to in academic research, mainly

15 On this topic see Wagner, "Non-Muslims who insult", and Nagel, "Tabuisierung". Kattānī (*Madkhal*, 188–193) collected statements of scholars who refrained from reading this part in public for "fear for the laymen (*khawfan ʿalā al-ʿāmma*)".

16 Shawwāṭ, *ʿĀlim al-maghrib*, 117–54, offers a list of sources from various disciplines used by al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ based on analysis of the *Ghunya*, the *Shifāʾ*, his commentary on Muslim's *ḥadīth* compilation and his *ḥadīth* handbook.

17 This is evident for the *ḥadīth* literature as well as for the *sīra* and the *dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* literature. As for the *shamāʾil* literature, which is indeed concerned with the description of the person of Muḥammad, it does not offer any theological elaboration on the soteriological, eschatological or spiritual significance of the prophetic person. This step is undertaken in the *Shifāʾ*, as will be shown later.

18 In the present study, we will not dwell upon the historical circumstances which motivated or influenced the redaction of the *Shifāʾ*. Besides the already existing studies (see below), a further study on this important question, considering in particular al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's project of a revival of Sunnī identity against the politico-religious developments of his time, is currently in preparation.

19 We owe this helpful expression to Stefan Reichmuth; see Reichmuth, "Prophetic Piety". The *Shifāʾ* certainly needs to be considered as participating in the profusion of prophetological writing in al-Andalus in the fourth-seventh/tenth-thirteenth centuries. On this last phenomenon, see Jarrar, *Prophetenbiographie* and Fierro, "Kitāb al-anwār".

20 This expression is used by Tilman Nagel to describe the transition from "Sunnī piety" to a spirituality characterised by its strong reference to the Muḥammadan personality in the sixth/twelfth century. According to Nagel, this evolution explains how the inviolability of

by historians of al-Andalus who are interested in the religious-political context of the Islamic West during the Almohad period and who have insisted on the polemical scope of the *Shifāʾ*,[21] as well as by historians of Muslim thought and literature who have referred to the *Shifāʾ* as an important source for the history of representations of the Prophet.[22] However, a systematic and in-depth study of its theological concepts and argumentation or of the use of sources and discursive traditions, remains a desideratum. While not pretending to fill this gap in an exhaustive manner, this study focuses on two core themes of the *Shifāʾ* which have not been analysed so far. On the one hand, this is the question of man's knowledge of the Prophet's status, dignity and reality, and of the conditions and sources of this knowledge. On the other hand, corresponding to the purpose of the work according to its author, it is the theme of love for the Prophet, its meaning and its normative character. As the study will show, both themes are in fact interconnected, and the argument of the *Shifāʾ*, as well as the issue of the veneration of the Prophet in general, cannot be understood without considering them in relation to each other. Besides the fact that these two themes constitute the nodal points of the work's argumentative structure, their originality and their impact[23] alone justify an analysis of the *Shifāʾ*'s doctrinal content for the history of Islamic ideas. Considering the way al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, as a major representative of both *ḥadīth* and theology in the Maghreb of the sixth/twelfth century,[24] uses various Islamic genres and discourses, this study analyses how the author develops his argumentation in order to demonstrate the pre-eminent status of the Prophet and to argue the duty for Muslims to adopt an attitude of love and veneration for him.

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the Person of Muḥammad began to be dogmatised, see Nagel, "Tabuisierung", 482, and Wagner, "Problem of Non-Muslims", 531f.

21 See Fierro, "El tratado" and Iruela, *Veneración*.

22 In particular Andrae, *Person Muhammeds*; Schimmel, *Und Muhammad*; Nagel, *Allahs Liebling*; Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad*.

23 There is yet no specific study about the reception of the *Shifāʾ* and of its themes, but even then, it can be safely assumed that the incredible success of the work is due, among other things, to his elaborating on the knowledge of the Prophet's status and on love for him. For the popularity and the diffusion of the *Shifāʾ*, Kattānī, *al-Madkhal ilā kitāb al-Shifāʾ* offers useful indications.

24 See in particular Turābī, *Juhūduhu fī ʿilm al-ḥadīth*; Shawwāṭ *ʿĀlim al-maghrib*; Al-ʿAbdallāh, *Juhūduhu al-kalāmiyya*; Serrano, "Diffusion de l'ashʿarisme"; Vimercati Sanseverino, "Transmission, ethos".

2 Knowledge of the Prophet's Pre-eminence

> It is clearly apparent for anyone who has any practice of science (*ʿilm*) or has the slightest degree of understanding (*fahm*) that God exalted the dignity of our Prophet (*taʿẓīm Allāh qadr nabiyyinā*), and that He singled him out with countless virtues, beautiful character traits and illustrious deeds, and that He acclaimed his exalted dignity with what the words and pens cannot express.[25]

At first sight, this introductory remark, which al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ places at the beginning of the first part of the *Shifāʾ*, does not represent anything unusual. The theme expressed in this passage constitutes a common *topos* in Islamic literature dealing with Muḥammadan prophecy. In fact, the issue of the latter's authenticity, role and status is commonly approached in terms of the Prophet's pre-eminence, expressed through notions like "nobleness" (*sharaf*) or "favour" (*faḍl*). The pre-eminence of the Prophet Muḥammad is presented as evidence of the authenticity of his prophetic mission and of the revelation he claimed to have received. It is the pre-eminence of the Prophet, his superiority towards the other prophets, his function as a seal of prophethood, but also his physical, moral and spiritual excellence, which give evidence of his claims to be a messenger from God. Furthermore, the discourse of pre-eminence is meant to demonstrate that Muḥammadan prophethood constitutes the apogee of the history of salvation. Showing that Muḥammad is the creature most beloved and esteemed by God aims to prove the superiority of the Prophet's religion over the other religions.

According to previous research, the early prophetological treatises articulating this conception were designed to respond to the contestation of Muḥammad's prophetic status from other religions.[26] However, this interpretation has since been considerably nuanced by Mareike Körtner in her study of the *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* literature. She shows that these works were not merely polemical, i.e., intending to convince or defeat a theological opponent, but that it was constitutive for the formation of a distinct Sunnī identity.[27] Now

25 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 19.

26 "Muhammad's claim to prophecy triggered a Jewish and Christian attack on his prophetic qualifications, which forced the Muslims to establish a system of vindication of Muhammad's prophecy. The existence of this system obliged the Christians to respond with 'the negative signs of true religion,' their own version of the 'signs of prophecy', this response in its turn influenced later Muslim depiction of Muhammad and of early Islamic history" (Stroumsa, "Signs of Prophecy", 101–14).

27 Koertner, *Clear Signs*.

al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ integrated the various prophetological genres and discourses, even those originally developed in an apologetical context, into a mainly intra-Muslim one. As indicated in the passage quoted above, and as will become clear when analysing the topics and the argumentative structure of the *Shifāʾ*, he based his elaboration of the theme of Muḥammad's pre-eminence on three interrelated postulates. The first was that the reality of Muḥammad's status is wholly determined by God's will and work, the second, that God accorded to Muḥammad the most eminent status amongst His creatures, and the third, that, in its divine determination, the reality of this status is beyond human comprehension and expression. The theme of Muḥammad's pre-eminence no longer serves to argue and to demonstrate the authenticity and superiority of his prophetic claim against non-Muslims, but to disclose the soteriological meaning of Muḥammad's prophetic status to those who believe in him and follow him. Thus, from this perspective, the pre-eminence of the Prophet is not merely the sign of his veracity, but of his unique relationship to God.

2.1 *The Notion of Qadr and the Issue of the Prophet's Status*

Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's new approach is visible in his use of a distinctive term in order to address the theme of the Prophet's pre-eminence. The notions of *qadr al-nabī* ("the status, worth and dignity of the Prophet") and of *ʿaẓīm qadrihi* ("the immense and exalted reality of his dignity") refer to the Qurʾānic term *qadr*[28] as used in Q 65:3, "God gave to every thing its measure (*qadr*)", and in Q 39:67, "And they did not give God the measure/value (*qadr*) which is truly His".[29] While the first reference identifies the *qadr* as the particular and divinely determined reality of a thing, the second reference relates the *qadr* to the quality of man's relationship to God. Without stating it explicitly, the term *qadr* applied to the Prophet suggests an analogy between the failure to recognise God's status as omnipotent Creator, and the negligence towards the Prophet's eminent status and dignity.

The use of the term *qadr* for Muḥammad's status can equally be traced back to a *ḥadīth* that al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ mentions in the chapter relating narrations which attest to the Prophet's eminence: "It is narrated from Abū Muḥammad al-Makkī, Abū al-Layth al-Sarmaqandī and others that Adam said when he disobeyed God: 'My God, by the right (*bi-ḥaqq*) of Muḥammad, forgive me

28 In his extensive commentary of the *Shifāʾ*, the Egyptian scholar Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī (d. 1069/1659) explains this notion as follows: "The *qadr* of a thing is its measure (*miqdār*) and its nobleness (*sharaf*) and rang (*rutba*); it means the magnification (*taʿẓīm*), as in God's word 'and they do not give God the measure that is His' (Q 39:67), i.e. they did not magnify God the magnification which is truly His" (*Nasīm*, 1, 92).

29 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 19.

my fault!' [...] and in another version: "God asked Adam: How do you know Muḥammad?" and Adam answered: "When You created me, I raised my head to Your throne and I saw inscribed on it 'There is no divinity except God, Muḥammad is His messenger' and I understood that there is nobody whose status is greater in Your sight (*aʿẓam qadran ʿindaka*) than he whose name You associated to Yours [...]".[30] The semantic field of the term *qadr* shows how it allows al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ to treat the soteriological significance of Muḥammad's prophethood and its reality as determined by God, as well as to emphasise the practical and normative meaning of the Prophet's pre-eminence. In this way, the recognition of the Prophet's *qadr* becomes constitutive for Islamic faith and is shown to determine the quality of a Muslim's relationship to the person of the Prophet.

If the aim of the first part of the *Shifāʾ* consists in the knowledge of the Prophet's *qadr*, the question arises how his *qadr* can be known? This is indeed theologically important, since it determines how the relation between revealed and human knowledge on the Prophet can be conceived. Al-Qāḍī ʿIyād answers this question through the structure of this part. Its title "The exaltation (*taʿẓīm*) of the Chosen Prophet's dignity with God the Most High through word (*qawlan*) and deed (*fiʿlan*)"[31] expresses the idea that the Prophet's status is exalted and thus not comparable to the status of any other creature, but also that this exaltation is caused and carried out by God Himself.[32] In other words, the exalted status of the Muḥammadan person is rooted in nothing other than God's creative action and grace. The titles of the four chapters of this part further indicate explicitly that the Prophet's *qadr* is made known and disclosed by God. In order to be apprehended and known by mankind, the exalted and immense reality of the Prophet's status needs to be made manifest through God's manifestation (*iẓhār*), in order to become intelligible for human understanding.

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30 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 112. The earliest source for this *ḥadīth* is al-Ḥākim al-Nisabūrī, (m. 405/1014) *al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn, kitab al-tafsīr*, N° 3042. For the various sources of this *ḥadīth* and the controversy it gave rise, see Ibn al-ʿAlawī, *Mafāhim*, 129. As we will see later, this understanding of the term of *qadr* is further confirmed by al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's use of the term of *ḥaqq*/*ḥuqūq* (rights), which is also mentioned in this *ḥadīth*, but for which he probably was inspired by al-Muḥāsibī's work on Sufism, *al-Riʿāya li-ḥuqūq Allāh* (The observance of the rights of God).

31 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 19. See also, 16, where the author explains how he has structured the *Shifāʾ*.

32 Al-Khafājī explains that "the magnifications of God indicate the nearness (*qurb*) of the Prophet to Him and that who loves Him, has to make [the Prophet] his utmost concern as if the Prophet was always with God" (*Nasīm*, I, 92).

This way of presenting the evidence of the Prophet's status is consistent with the Ashʿarī conception of prophecy as a divine gift.[33] However, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ in fact thinks through the Ashʿarī approach to prophethood to its end, and at the same time establishes in this way the theological basis of the Prophet's pre-eminence as well as of the practice of his veneration. Considering prophecy as a divine gift, and thus as the result of God's work of grace and not of man's moral or intellectual excellence, has precise consequences for the possibility of prophetological knowledge: if the reality of prophethood has a supra-human cause and reason, it cannot be explained in purely human or naturalistic terms, and therefore it is necessarily beyond human understanding. This entails the incapacity of the human mind to grasp the reality of the Prophet's status on its own. Mankind is in need of a divine communication as the only effective and truthful source for the knowledge of the reality of Muḥammad's *qadr*.

This conception of the reality of prophethood in general, and of Muḥammad's prophetic dignity in particular, is further buttressed by the use of the adjective *ʿaẓīm* in order to qualify the *qadr* and the *manzila* of the Prophet Muḥammad.[34] Firstly, because *ʿaẓīm* is considered to be one of God's 99 "most beautiful names".[35] Secondly, because it is equally an attribute of the Qurʾān, that is, the divine word.[36] And thirdly, because *ʿaẓīm* is associated in the Qurʾān with the inner nature, the *khuluq*, of the Prophet Muḥammad.[37] The concept of *ʿaẓīm* then, denoting the idea of immensity and applied theologically to the incommensurability between the transcendent and the contingent, symbolises a commonality between God, the revelation and the Prophet.[38] It is what they have in common, so to speak, even if the "Creator's essence, names, acts and attributes" have nothing in common with those of created beings except for the

33 See Gardet, *Théologie Musulmane*, 179–80; Rahman, *Prophecy*, 96.

34 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 19, 21, and in particular 145 of the chapter "Concerning the God's ennobling him with names from His own beautiful names and His qualifying him with His own attributes" where the author explains that "the meaning of *ʿaẓīm* is attributed to the one whose affair is elevated above everything else and God says 'You are truly of an exalted character (*khuluq ʿaẓīm*; Q 68:4)'".

35 See for example Q 2:225 and Gimaret, *Noms divins*, 208–10. According to Gimaret, "that which no intelligence can grasp is the *al-ʿAẓīm al-muṭlaq*, God" (209).

36 See Q 15:87. *The Study Quran*, 652, translates "And We have indeed given thee the seven oft-repeated, and the Mighty Quran (*al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*)".

37 Q 68:4. The *ḥadīth* tradition confirms the characterisation of Muḥammad's prophetic personality with the Qurʾānic revelation, for example in the *ḥadīth* 'His character was the Qurʾān' (Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb ṣalāt al-musāfirīn, bāb jāmʿ ṣalāt al-layl*, N° 746.). See especially Gril, "Corps du Prophète".

38 On this point, see also the considerations by Gril concerning "L'homme révélé" in "Révelation et inspiration", 755.

correspondence of appellation (*min jihat muwāfaqat al-lafẓ al-lafẓ*)".[39] It seems that it is this "correspondence" which al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ wants to stress by using the term *ʿaẓīm* in this context. And in fact, he uses it very often in various forms, the most frequent variation being the factitive form *taʿẓīm*, "God's rendering the Prophet *ʿaẓīm*".[40] The idea that God bestows certain effects or meanings of a divine attribute to the Prophet evidently has important consequences for the significance of the Muḥammadan person for the community of the believers. It seems as if the author of the *Shifāʾ* insinuates that the believer has to consider the Prophet's significance for his salvation in an analogous manner to the significance of his faith in the Qurʾān and in God.[41]

If the reality of Muḥammad's prophetic dignity, and consequently the scope and nature of his pre-eminence, are not graspable by the human mind, the question remains: how can mankind obtain knowledge of them? In the following passage, the author of the *Shifāʾ* answers this question by distinguishing between the two categories of sources for the knowledge of the Prophet's pre-eminence: "Amongst [the favours that God bestowed on the Prophet] are those which God enunciates explicitly (*ṣarraḥa*) in His book [...] and those which He made manifest (*abraza*) to the eyes".[42] Considering the chapters of the first part, it appears that the divine word corresponds to the revelation of the Qurʾān, and that divine action is represented by the creation[43] of the Prophet's miracles (*muʿjizāt*), character traits (*maḥāsin khuluqan*) and appearances (*khalqan*), these three latter categories corresponding to evidence which is empirically perceivable. The third chapter on "What is mentioned in sound and well-known reports (*ṣaḥīḥ al-akhbār wa-mashhūrihā*)" equally belongs to this category,[44] in the sense that the *ḥadīth*s are understood to be textual testimonies of the *sunna* which, according to the Sunnī tradition to which al-Qāḍī

39 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 148. Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ quotes here the Sufi and theologian Muḥammad b. Mūsā Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (d. ca. 320/923) who was a follower of Junayd al-Baghdādī and specialised in this theme. See Silvers, *Soaring Minaret*.

40 This expression actually figures in the title of the first part, see ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 19. There is also a long chapter in al-Bayhaqī's (d. 458/1066) famous *ḥadīth* compilation *Shuʿab al-īmān*, 11, 193–234, with the title *taʿẓīm al-nabī*, constituting "the fifteenth branch of faith".

41 This goes even so far that al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ deemed it necessary to add a subchapter about the incomparability between creator and Creator, even if no Muslim scholar would rank any being next to God, nor to God's word, see ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 148–49.

42 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ* p. 19.

43 Al-Qādī ʿIyāḍ uses the terms *iẓhār* (making manifest) for miracles and *takmīl* (making perfect) for the Prophet's characters and appearance. In both cases, God is the sole agent.

44 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 107–49.

ʿIyāḍ counted himself, has the status of revelation (*waḥy*)[45] and therefore is the result of divine agency.[46] At the same time, these reports belong to "empirical" evidence in the sense that they claim to be based on visual or auditive testimonies. The same holds for the topics of the two other chapters, i.e., the Prophet's miracles and his personality, since these are manifested in history and knowable as historically transmitted reports (*akhbār*).[47]

It is clear that the perspective on which these considerations are grounded presupposes a theological and occasionalist conception of history. This is not surprising, since such a conception is inherent to the *ḥadīth* tradition and to the dynamics of its transmission. As Abdallah Laroui points out, the *ḥadīth* constitutes a form of historical writing and conveys a theological conception of history, with "specific understandings of continuity, time, event, finality, etc.".[48] In this way, "history appears as a perfect unity, where the origin and the end, the promise and the accomplishment coincide".[49] Hence, "the origin and the end of history are known, the sense of each event is already given, the historical account is, in its whole, merely a metaphor that the chronicler registers and the theologian interprets".[50] So even if the author does not use the term "history", it is clear that these three chapters, dealing with evidence "which He made manifest to the eyes", concern evidence from history if the latter is defined in theological terms as salvation history or as the working of God in human history. As al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ is never tired to repeat, the events and qualities mentioned in these chapters are created by God and have their origin in His acts.

To resume this significant point, the structure of the first part shows how the *Shifāʾ* argues that the two sources for knowledge of the Prophet's reality are revelation and salvation history, corresponding respectively to God's word and

45 However, it seems that the Qurʾān and the *sunna* belong to two different categories, the first being in reality a purely scriptural revelation the scriptural form of which is part of the divine revelation itself, whereas the *sunna* is revelation through God's inspiration of the Prophet's words, acts and consents, so not scriptural in the strict sense. This would explain why the third chapter does not belong to the category of evidence from the divine word, but to the category of evidence from divine acts.

46 For al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's elaboration on this point, see Vimercati Sanseverino, "Transmission, ethos".

47 Al-Khafājī interprets this passage in very similar sense, but includes the *ḥadīth qudsī* to the first category, see *Nasīm*, I, 114–15.

48 *Islam et Histoire*, 38, see also Nagel, "Vernichtung der Geschichte".

49 Laroui, *Islam et Histoire*, 94.

50 Laroui, *Islam et Histoire*, 94–95. On the role of *ḥadīth* for the origin of historical writing, see Khalidi, *Historical thought*, 17–83.

to His acts. As a consequence, the thematical and argumentative structure of the first part of the *Shifā'* represents the following scheme:

TABLE 5.1 Sources for the knowledge of the Prophet's reality in the first part of the Shifā'

Part 1: God making manifest the Prophet's pre-eminence ...		
– through word (*qawlan*)	– ch. 1: Qur'ānic evidence	revelation
– and act (*fi'lan*)	– ch. 2: evidence from the Prophet's appearance and character traits	salvation history
	– ch. 3: evidence from testimonies regarding his pre-eminence	
	– ch. 4: evidence from his miracles	

2.2 *God's Word and Revelation*

Looking now more closely at the first chapter, "Regarding God's praise of him (the Prophet) and His making manifest the Prophet's exalted status with Him (*iẓhārihi ʿaẓīm qadrihi ladayhi*)",[51] the word *iẓhārihi* requires special attention. Expressing the idea that it is God who makes the eminent dignity of the Prophet evident and manifest, it can be considered the hermeneutical key of the Qur'ānic exegesis that al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ develops in the *Shifā'*. In fact, he is not the first who expounds the idea that God reveals in the Qur'ān the eminent dignity of the Prophet Muḥammad. For example, in Kharkūshī's (d. 406/1015) *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* there is a whole section about "The nobleness of the Prophet according to the Qur'ān".[52] And Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1039) begins his *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa* with a chapter titled "What God revealed in his book about the Prophet's precedence (*faḍlihi*)", that is, the favour bestowed on him by God.[53] This idea has also been expressed in other genres. Shāfiʿī speaks in his famous *Risāla* about "God's clarification of the station in which He put His Emissary" in order to argue the soteriological and therefore normative meaning of the prophetic Sunna.[54] Further, the idea that the Qur'ān unveils the

51 'Iyāḍ, *Shifā'*, 21.

52 Kharkūshī, *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā*, IV, 93–190.

53 Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, 39–56.

54 Lowry, *Epistle on legal theory*, 27, 63. This important work is an example illustrating how prophetological themes elaborated in the *Shifā'* are in fact already present in various Islamic discourses: "God has rescued us from demise through [the Prophet Muḥammad] and placed us in 'the best community brought forth for the people' (Q 3:110), adherents of His religion, the religion of which He approved and for which He elected His angels and those of His creatures whom He graced. No act of grace has touched us – whether

Prophet's reality reminds one of Sahl al-Tustarī's Sufi exegesis of the prophetic light,[55] which al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ cites at some places in the *Shifāʾ*.[56]

What distinguished al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ is that he makes this idea, namely that the Qurʾān expounds the Prophet's exalted status, the very foundation of his prophetology in both its doctrinal and practical dimensions. Accordingly, the purpose of revelation and meaning of God's speaking to mankind is not limited to the proclamation of divine attributes and commands, but equally includes the disclosure of the Prophet's status (*qadr*), and of his "rights" (*ḥuqūq*). As the Qurʾān presents itself as guidance (*hudā*),[57] this means that for al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ this prophetological knowledge is part of divine guidance and therefore belongs to those essential issues that humanity needs to know for the attainment of salvation. In other words, the knowledge of the Prophet's exalted status is part of the Qurʾānic message and therefore of God's ultimate message to mankind.

The Qurʾānic evidence that al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ presents about Muḥammad's exalted status is manifold. It concerns the event of revelation as an act of divine communication itself, as well as the content of this communication and its linguistic form and style. Regarding the first aspect, the event of revelation, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ treats it mostly in the chapter on the Qurʾānic miracle (*iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*) which we will discuss below when treating the chapter on miracles. In this first chapter, though, the focus is largely on how God addresses Himself to the Prophet and how He speaks about him. So, we are told how the Qurʾān does in fact involve God's praise (*al-thanāʾ*) of the Prophet Muḥammad. When God qualifies him as the instrument of His mercy (*raḥma*)[58] and favour, when He names him "light" and "a lamp spreading light",[59] etc. He does so in order to unveil the exalted dignity and the pre-eminence of the Prophet. In the third

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outwardly or inwardly, and through which we attain benefit in religion and this world or have averted from us what is evil in one or both of them – of which Muḥammad was not the cause, the leader to its blessing, the guide to its proper route, the one who protects us from perdition […]" (Lowry, *Epistle on Legal Theory*, 9).

55 Böwering, *Mystical Vision*, 149–153, and Keeler, *Tafsīr*, xxx–xxxiii. The influence of al-Tustarī's exegesis on the *Shifāʾ* has already been noted by Böwering, *Mystical Vision*, 37, 65–66, 157–158, 160–161.

56 See for example *Shifāʾ*, 23. Tustarī is also quoted regularly in other contexts, for example with regard to the spiritual meaning of the *ittibāʿ* (*Shifāʾ*, 226, 230, 232). According to his son (*Taʿrīf*, 42), he even received an *isnād* of Tustarī's sayings through Abū ʿAlī al-Ṣadafī (d. 514/1120), one of his most important teachers in *ḥadīth* (see Shawwāṭ, *ʿĀlim al-Maghrib*, 76–78; Turābī, *Juhūduhu fī ʿilm al- ḥadīth*, 126–132).

57 See for example Q 2:2.

58 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 22.

59 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 23.

sub-chapter, for example, "What God's speech (*khiṭāb*) to him contains of tender treatment (*mulāṭafa*) and benevolence (*mabarra*)",[60] the author makes use of classical exegetical resources in order to bring out the singular delicacy of God's dealing with the Prophet, even when rebuking him.

Considering the various themes of the first chapter, including Qurʾānic oaths,[61] the allusions to the Prophet's role as a witness of mankind,[62] to his rank amongst the prophets,[63] or to his divine protection and the protection from divine punishment through him,[64] there appears a vision of the Qurʾān which presents it as an intimate dialogue between God and His most beloved creature. Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ visibly seeks to make evident the intimacy that characterises the relationship between God and his Prophet as it appears in the Qurʾānic text. For the author of the *Shifāʾ*, this shows the Prophet's nearness to God, expressed in a privileged and unique relationship that characterises him in an exclusive way so that no other creature enjoys a comparable relationship with Him.

This opens a distinctive prophetological hermeneutics of the Qurʾānic text which had not been developed systematically.[65] He invites the reader to read the Qurʾān along this line and argues that, in this way, the Qurʾān becomes the principal source of knowledge of the Prophet's reality. As his usual fashion, the author insists that this has quite practical implications for the reader: "It is incumbent upon every Muslim who struggles against his lower soul and whose character is restrained by the bridles of sacred law that he educates himself through the education of the Qurʾān (*adab al-Qurʾān*) in all his words, acts, endeavours and engagements, because it is the archetype of truthful insights and the garden of worldly and religious education".[66]

60 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 29–31.

61 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 31–36.

62 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 26–29.

63 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 37–39.

64 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 39–40.

65 As already mentioned, it is obvious that al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ took up certain chapters from the *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* literature, in particular from al-Iṣbahānī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, 39–48, which shows strong similarities with the *Shifāʾ* in this respect, and the chapter on "The nobleness of the Prophet in the Qurʾān" of Kharkūshī, *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* IV, p. 93–179, which develops both aspects mentioned above through the description of the Prophet's singularity, and God's oaths on him (IV, p. 180–185). However, on these themes, the *Shifāʾ* appears to be much more elaborate than previous works.

66 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 29–30.

2.3 *God's Acts and Salvation History*

Turning now to the second category of evidence for the Prophet's pre-eminence, i.e. the signs "which God made manifest (*abraza*) to the eyes",[67] the question of how God's acts on the Prophet, as manifested in salvation history, are to be considered as sources of prophetological knowledge, is most obvious in the case of the prophetic miracles (*al-muʿjizāt*).[68] Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ devotes a very long chapter of Part 1 to this topic, with the title "Concerning the miracles which God made appear through his [i.e. the Prophet's] hands, and the singularities and favours through which He honoured him".[69] As explained by Daniel Gimaret, in Ashʿarī theology, the "miracle has the purpose of attesting the veracity (*ṣidq*) of the one in whom it is manifested"[70] so that miracles are considered to be proofs of the authenticity of prophecy. However, the probative force of miracles has been put into question by philosophers and theologians alike.[71] Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ apparently sticks to the usual Ashʿarī concept as a doctrinal position. In the introductory section dealing with the meaning of prophecy, revelation and miracle, he explains that "the miracle along with the challenge [to the deniers of Muḥammad's prophecy] (*taḥaddī*) takes the place of God's statement "my servant has said the truth, so be obedient to him, follow him and attest to his veracity in what he says"".[72]

At the same time, the author seems to admit the relativity of the probative force of miracles when he states:

> What we have presented of the Prophet's beautiful qualities, of testimonies of his state, the truthfulness of his sayings […] has been enough for more than one for his submission (*islāmihi*) and faith in him. We have narrated from Tirmidhī and Ibn Qāniʿ and others through their lines of transmission, that ʿAbdallāh Ibn Salām[73] (d. 43/663), when he entered

67 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 19.

68 Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ elaborates a precise definition of this term as "that what a creature is incapable of performing", either "because of God's act disabling them (*taʿjīzuhum ʿanhu fiʿl li-llāh*)" or because "its being beyond human capacities (*khārij ʿan qudratihim*)" (*Shifāʾ*, 153).

69 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 150–224.

70 Gimaret, *Ashʿarī*, 461–462.

71 See Gardet, *Théologie musulmane*, 197–201. Ibn Rushd and even scholars like Ibn Taymiyya criticised the theologians' claim that Muhammad's miracles prove his prophethood. Even Ghazālī differed on this point from early Ashʿarīs. On "Prophetical Miracles and the Unchanging Nature of God's Habit" in Ghazali's thought and its reception, see Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 194–201.

72 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 152.

73 A known Rabbi of Medina who converted to Islam.

> Medina, reported that "I came to him in order to see him and when his face appeared clearly to me, I knew that his face cannot be the face of a liar.[74]

A little further on, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ cites an interpretation of a passage from the Qurʾānic light verse: "Its oil would almost glow forth, though no fire touched it" (Q 24:35). He states that "this is a parable set by God for His Prophet meaning that his sole sight (*manẓaruhu*) would indicate his prophethood without the Qurʾān having been recited by him, as Ibn Rawāḥa (d. 8/629)[75] declaimed: 'Even if he had not possessed clear signs, his mere sight had proclaimed the message'".[76] Rather than the miracles in themselves, it is God's working of grace on the personality of Muḥammad which constitutes the most manifest evidence of his prophetic dignity.[77]

In light of the fact that, as stated before, the *Shifāʾ* was written for Muslims, it becomes clear that the chapter on miracles has no apologetical or polemical purpose, but an edificatory one. Miracles are integrated into the discourse about the Prophet Muḥammad's pre-eminence. The probative value of the miracles is not the real subject here. The function of the miraculous powers that God granted to His Prophet is to unveil the latter's eminence, his *ʿaẓīm qadr*. From this perspective, miracles are essentially palpable signs of the Prophet's nearness to God and of the privileged relationship the Prophet enjoys with the Creator of mankind.[78]

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74 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 150.

75 A Companion from Medina and secretary of the Prophet, known for his poetry.

76 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 151.

77 It is interesting that al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ did not refer to Ghazālī's doctrine. As Frank Griffel explains, "in his autobiography, for instance, al-Ghazālī says that the experience (*tajriba*) of the positive effects of a prophet's work on one's soul generates necessary knowledge (*ʿilm ḍarūrī*) of his prophecy. In this case, the judgment of experience is established by the repeated concomitance between performing the Prophet's ritual prescriptions and the positive effects this practice has on one's soul. That resulting judgment, namely, that Muhammad can effectively heal the soul through his revelation, establishes certainty about prophecy (*yaqīn bi-l-nubuwwa*) and results in belief that equals the power of knowledge (*al-īmān al-qawī al-ʿilmī*)" (*Philosophical Theology*, 208).

78 It is possible that the author of the *Shifāʾ* in fact develops here the idea already present in Iṣbahānī's "Evidences of prophecy" that miracles indicate the Prophet's status and position with God: "God almighty supported Muḥammad with what he had not supported any one of the two worlds, and He distinguished him with what surpassed the boundaries of the miracles of the prophets and the stations of the saints for the signs of prophecy are in accordance with his [i.e. the prophet's] station and position with God. There is no sign (*āya*) and no indicator (*ʿalāma*) more exceptional and more marvellous than the signs

While the various sub-chapters treat the different categories of prophetic miracles which can be found in previous *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* works, the *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*[79] is presented as the most significant miracle and thus the most evident indication of the Prophet's pre-eminence.[80] But unlike in the first chapter, it is not the content of the Qurʾān which is taken here as evidence of the Prophet's pre-eminence, but the very fact of its revelation to him. The *iʿjāz* applies principally to the Qurʾān's language, composition and content,[81] but also to the impact that the Qurʾān continues to exercise on both those who contest it and those who believe in it. Whereas the first are faced with the impossibility of profaning it and continue to be affected by perplexity when listening to it,[82] the believers continue to experience the "sweetness of its recitation" without ever getting annoyed by it.[83] In the argumentative framework of the *Shifāʾ*, the miraculous character of the Qurʾān and its singularity amongst revealed scriptures is evidence for the pre-eminence of its receiver and transmitter, that is the Prophet Muḥammad. An interesting aspect of this argument is the continuing actuality of this miracle which is stressed by the author,[84] as it indicates that the miraculous character of the Qurʾān remains a source for prophetological knowledge even after the Prophet's death. It is, so to say, evidence that never ceases to speak of the Prophet's pre-eminence to the believers, in any time and place.

In the third chapter on evidence from the *ḥadīth*, the topics treated are the Prophet's election, his night journey and ascension (*al-isrāʾ wa al-miʿrāj*), his

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of Muḥammad, and that is the eloquent Qurʾan […]" (Iṣbahānī, *Dalāʾil*, 134, translated by Körtner, *Clear Signs*, 213).

79 It is possible that he based himself on Baqillānī's (d. 403/1013) famous *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* treatise. However, even if there is a preponderance of the rhetorical aspect of the *iʿjāz*, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ refers to the various aforementioned conceptions of it (see Kermani, *Ästhetische Erleben*, 247).

80 On the *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* as evidence of the authenticity of Muḥammad's mission, see Gardet, *Théologie musulmane*, 218–21.

81 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, distinguishes two aspects of this topic, the unveiling of unknown things (*al-mughayyabāt*) (162), and the information about past events and scriptures etc. (162ff.).

82 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 164ff.

83 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 166–67. In the following pages, other examples of the *iʿjāz* are discussed, such as the facility to learn the Qurʾān by heart, the unparalleled force of its argumentation etc.

84 He speaks for example of the fact that the Qurʾān "constitutes a sign which subsists and never ceases to be as long as this world subsists, in virtue of the guarantee of God's preservation" (*Shifāʾ*, 166). Of course, there is nothing unusual in mentioning this aspect, but it acquires a new significance within the prophetological framework of the *Shifāʾ*, as explained in the remark that follows.

eschatological pre-eminence,[85] his superiority vis-à-vis the other prophets, and the favours attached to his names, in particular through their relation to God's attributes.[86] The section dedicated to the night journey and ascension occupies the most space.[87] It has an evident interreligious significance for, amongst other things, Muḥammad's night journey involves the demonstration of his role as leader and chief of the prophets in Jerusalem. Moreover, the author discusses at length the controversial questions of whether the Prophet undertook the ascension with his body and in the state of wakefulness,[88] both of which affirmed, taking thereby a markedly traditionalist stance within the theological discussions. Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ equally dedicates a whole sub-chapter to Muḥammad's vision (*ruʾya*) of God,[89] to their conversation (*munājāt*)[90] and to his extreme rapprochement (*al-dunuww*) to Him.[91] While mentioning, in his usual fashion, the different opinions on these issues, the author of the *Shifāʾ* himself argues that reason and scripture establish that the Prophet saw his Lord, that he conversed with Him without any intermediary, and that he was in proximity to God as no other creature before or after him:

> In truth, the extreme rapprochement (*dunuww*) has no limit and the rapprochement of the Prophet to his Lord and his proximity to Him is a clear elucidation of his exalted status and of the ennoblement of his rang, as well as of the shining [on him] of the lights of knowledge of God and of the vision of the secrets of His incommensurability and power; from God this [rapprochement] means benevolence, intimacy, generosity and honouring [...].[92]

In last analysis, the Prophet's vision of God marks his singular status amongst mankind, since this favour has not been accorded to anyone before him: "Of every sign that prophets have received, our Prophet has received its equivalent

85 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 128–39. This topic, which is beyond our scope here, has a major importance for the argument of the *Shifāʾ*.

86 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 144–48.

87 Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ engages in a lengthy discussion about the variant narrations of this event. For a study of the sources of the narration and their reception, see Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's Night Journey*.

88 *Shifāʾ*, 120–22.

89 *Shifāʾ*, 122–26. On this issue in particular, see Van Ess, "Miʿrāj".

90 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 126.

91 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 127–28.

92 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 127.

and he is distinguished amongst them through the favour of the direct vision [of God]".[93]

Considering the place conceded to both themes, revelation and ascension appear, amongst the evidence accessible through testimonies in history, as the most valuable signs allowing knowledge of the Prophet Muḥammad's *qadr*. It seems that, for the author of the *Shifāʾ*, the descent of God's word and the ascension to His proximity make God's work on the Muḥammadan personality visible in the most manifest and effective manner.[94]

3 Love for the Prophet

Besides the exegetical and theological elaboration of a prophetology based on the notion of *qadr*, the second particularity of the *Shifāʾ* consists in the exposition of the meaning of the Prophet's eminence for the religious life of the believers through the notion of *ḥaqq*/*ḥuqūq* figuring in the title of the book. The eminent status of the Muḥammad's prophetic personality requires the adoption of a certain attitude and behaviour towards him. In other words, it requires the fulfilment of the duties defined by the "rights (*ḥuqūq*) of the Prophet" such as faith (*īmān*) in him, obedience (*ṭāʿa*) to him, taking him as orientation (*ittibāʿ*), veneration and respect (*tawqīr*) of the sacred character (*ḥurma*) of his person, praying for him, visiting his grave, and respecting people associated with him, such as the members of his family and his descendants.

Amongst these rights, the *ḥaqq* which demands love for him (*maḥabba*) represents one of the core elements of the *Shifāʾ*. As we have seen, the author indicated that the strengthening of the Muslim community's love for the Prophet Muḥammad constituted the principal purpose of writing the *Shifāʾ*. It is therefore not surprising that the chapter on love represents perhaps the most elaborated one among those dealing with the Prophet's rights. Concerned with the substantial driving force and the fulfilment of the believer's relationship to the Prophet, it is situated in the middle of the book and thematically binds together the different parts while representing their topical climax. Indeed, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ himself emphasises the pivotal significance of love by arguing that the fulfilment of the other rights results from it:

93 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 124. The statement is attributed by the author to Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal.

94 In both cases, one can indeed speak of a "transfiguration" of the prophetic personality, see Gril, "Corps du Prophète", 49, who speaks of "consummation" and Van Ess, "Miʿrāj", 29–30, who prefers to speak of "glorification".

> Know that whoever loves anything, gives preference to it and prefers to conform to it; otherwise he is not sincere in his love and is just pretending. He who is sincere in his love for the Prophet, its sign (*ʿalāma*) will appear on him. The first sign consists in his taking [the Prophet] as a model, applying his Sunna, following him in his words and acts, complying with his orders and shunning the things he prohibited, observing his way of behaviour (*adab*) in hardship and relief, in adversity and prosperity. The witness of this is God's word: "Say: If you love God follow me and God will love you" (Q 3:31).[95]

3.1 *The Prophet's "Rights" (ḥuqūq al-nabī) and the Love That Is Due to Him*

Despite the very obvious originality of the concept of *ḥuqūq al-nabī*, there is no discussion in research about this notion or about this part of the *Shifāʾ*.[96] Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ himself does not offer any explication; he simply develops what these *ḥuqūq* are and what they imply for the religious life of Muslims. However, the relevance of the theme is rhetorically justified in the introduction through the demand of an unknown person to write a compilation including the definition of what the Prophet Muḥammad "is entitled to (*mā yajibu lahu*) as regards respect (*tawqīr*) and honouring (*ikrām*)".[97] Furthermore, in the *ḥadīth* already mentioned in which Adam supplicates God after the expulsion from paradise, the notion of *ḥaqq Muḥammad* is already present. Although here it does not explicitly refer to the relationship of the believers to the Prophet, but is rather to be understood in the sense of the Prophet's "reality" and the singular consideration that God has for him. In any case, the narration shows the relation between the concept of *qadr*, which is more directly alluded to in the *ḥadīth*, and the concept of *ḥuqūq*: Both ensue from the consideration that God has for the Prophet Muḥammad. The use of the term *ḥaqq* in the sense of "right" is further supported by its use in the *ḥadīth* literature.[98] Probably even more significant is the fact that al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ quotes a passage from the Qurʾānic exegesis

95 *Shifāʾ*, 235.

96 In Vimercati Sanseverino, „Wer dem Gesandten gehorcht", 70–73, a few aspects of this notion with regard to the theme of the Prophet Muḥammad as God's mercy have been discussed.

97 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 13.

98 For example, in the *Sunan* of Tirmidhī, one can find sub-chapters on *ḥaqq al-wālidayn* ("the right of the parents") and on *ḥaqq al-jiwār* ("the right of the neighbour") in the *Abwāb al-birr wa al-ṣila* (25).

of the Sufi and *ḥadīth* scholar Abū ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) with the expression "the negligence of his [the Prophet's] right (*ihmāl ḥaqqihi*)".[99]

As Anver Emon explains, the term *ḥaqq* (pl. *ḥuqūq*) has a complex meaning in Islamic thought: "Among the definitions advanced by premodern lexicographers, one is that the term *ḥaqq* refers to something incumbent upon one to do (*ḥaqq ʿalayya an afʿala dhālik*). […] The term *haqq* signifies both an obligation on one person and a claim of right on another."[100] As for the "rights of God" and the "rights of individuals", these "constitute a legal heuristic that jurists used to ensure that the sharīʿa as a rule of law system upholds and, when necessary, balances both society's needs (i.e. the social good) and private interests."[101] However, the legal meaning of *ḥuqūq* is probably less significant for al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's notion of the Prophet's rights, even if the last chapter of the *Shifāʾ* and the issue of blasphemy seems to have some relevance to the relation between the private and public dimensions of socioreligious taboos. The *ḥuqūq al-nabī* rather remind of al-Muḥāsibī's (d. 243/857) concept of *ḥuqūq Allāh* which he expounded in his famous treatise *al-Riʿāya li-ḥuqūq Allāh* ("The observance of the rights of God"). The text was widely read in the circles frequented by al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ[102] and constituted, next to al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ*, the major reference of spiritual practice in the Maghreb of the sixth/twelfth century.[103] The originality of the work resides in the fact that al-Muḥāsibī establishes the concept of the *ḥuqūq* of God as a key concept of Islamic spirituality:

> What concerns the question of the rights (*ḥuqūq*) of God, know that this is an enormously important matter which is neglected by most men of our time. For God has taken His prophets and saints into custody because of this matter, as they respected His covenant and obeyed His commands. […] So God has ordered His servants to respect and fulfil every right (*ḥaqq*) He imposed on them, whether it concerns themselves or their fellow human beings. […] God has made the respect of these rights the key for blessing in this and in the other world […], so all creatures are bound

99 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 242.

100 Emon, "Ḥuqūq Allāh".

101 Emon, "Ḥuqūq Allāh", 327.

102 The author of the *Shifāʾ* has studied the work of Muḥāsibī with the Andalusian Sufi Muḥammad Ibn Khamīs Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Sūfī, amongst others, as he mentions in his intellectual auto-biography, remarking that "I used to sit with him very often" (*al-Ghunya*, 92).

103 See Vimercati Sanseverino, *Fès et sainteté*, 535–537. According to Casewit (*Mytics of Andalus*, 32), the *Riʿāya* was introduced in al-Andalus by the theologian and poet Aḥmad al-Ilbīrī (d. 429/1037). See also Vizcaino, *Obras de zuhd*, 427.

> to know the rights of God, with all their requirements, moments, purposes, duties and their order.[104]

By putting the notion of *ḥuqūq* at the centre of religious life, Muḥāsibī identifies it as a core issue of prophetic missions and of the history of salvation. The diagnosis that these rights were neglected by his contemporaries led Muḥāsibī to write a book on this theme. Moreover, the passage shows clearly how he transposes this notion into the domain of spiritual practice and thus makes evident the correlation between spirituality and normativity. Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's use of the term of *ḥuqūq* and its application to the Prophet[105] is to be understood in the same line. It implies that the rights of the Prophet belong to those duties which God asks His servants to fulfil and which have been neglected by the contemporary Muslim community.

This sheds some light on the somewhat unexpected idea that love for the Prophet constitutes a "right". The implicit analogy between love for God and for the Prophet is certainly voluntary. It is based on the idea that man's relationship to God cannot be considered independently from his relation to the Prophet; the quality of the first is conditioned by the quality of the latter. This is so, because God has established the Prophet as the intermediary and mediator between mankind and Himself,[106] a fact which, according to al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's line of argumentation, is demonstrated by the eminence that God accorded to the Prophet Muḥammad.

Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ corroborates his elaboration on the normative character of the love for the Prophet Muḥammad with scriptural evidence that is usually related to the theme. Of course, the theme of love for the Prophet as such is not

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104 Muḥāsibī, *al-Riʿāya*, 37–38. It should be noted that for Muḥāsibī, these rights are not limited to the accomplishment of ritual or legal norms, but include spiritual attitudes such as sincerity, confidence and awareness.

105 However, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ is not the first author to have made this transposition, even if he is the one who developed it in a systematic manner as the key notion of the normative aspect of his prophetology. In the sub-chapter "On his affection for his community and compassion for it", which is part of the chapter on "Love for the Prophet" of his *Shuʿab al-īmān*, Bayhaqī quotes his source Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥalīmī (d. 403/1012): "If the reasonable person reflects on the benefits that God conferred on His servants through the Prophet in this world, and what He conferred to them through his favour of his intercession in the other world, he knows that there is no right, after the rights of God, more incumbent (*lā ḥaqqa awjab*) than the right of the Prophet" (*Shuʿab al-īmān*, II, 165). See also Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab al-īmān*, II, 193.

106 Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ explicitly uses this theologically strong expression of intermediary (*al-wāsiṭa*), notably in order to explain the meaning of Muḥammad's human nature and of the inner reality of his prophetic authority, see *Shifāʾ*, 277.

new. It forms the topic of sub-chapters in various *ḥadīth* compilations, such as Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*.[107] In this context, love for the Prophet appears to be a sign of the quality of one's faith, or the condition for its plenitude.[108] In the *Shifāʾ*, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ quotes these *ḥadīth*s in the same sense, most importantly the *ḥadīth* "None of you has faith until he loves me more than his child, his father and the whole of mankind", and in another version "None of you has faith until he loves me more than his own soul [or: than himself]".[109] What is new in al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ presentation is that love for the Prophet is not simply related to faith, but that it is specified as an attitude that is due to the Prophet in virtue of his eminence, in analogy to the rights of God the fulfilment of which represents the core of Islamic spirituality. This argument becomes more explicit in al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's considerations on the meaning and source of love for the Prophet Muḥammad.

3.2 *Meaning and Source of Love for the Prophet* (*maḥabbat al-nabī*)

Similar to the concept of *ḥuqūq al-nabī*, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's elaboration of the theme of love for the Prophet, appears to be a creative adaptation of the theme of love for God, besides being the first of its kind in doctrinal sophistication and depth. By the time and within the milieu of al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, Ghāzālī's elaboration of the theme in his *Iḥyāʾ* constituted the primary doctrinal reference.[110] In fact, it appears very clearly that the author of the *Shifāʾ* drew inspiration in

107 Cf. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-īmān*, chapter 16 "Concerning the obligation of love for the Messenger of God".

108 See below.

109 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 232. Both versions can be found in Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, kitab al-īmān, bāb ḥubb al-rasūl min al-īmān*, N° 15 and *kitab al-aymān wa al-nudhūr, bāb kayfa kānat yamīn al-nabī*, N° 6257. Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ gives his own *isnād* for the first version with a slight variation in the order between "father (*wālid*)" and "child (*walad*)" corresponding to the version of Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, kitab al-īmān, bāb wujūb maḥabbat al-rasūl*, N° 70. In his commentary of Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ offers an interesting explanation of the two *ḥadīth* mentioned in this sub-chapter: "The categories of love are three: love due to reverence and exaltation as love for the father, love due to mercy and affection as love for the child, and love due to benefaction (*istiḥsān*) and alikeness (*mushākala*) as love between people. And the Prophet reunites all these in himself. [...] And from what we said it ensues that faith does not become complete without realising (*taḥqīq*) the elevated dignity (*qadr*) and rank of the Prophet above every father and child as well as above every benefactor. Whoever is not convinced of this and believes something else is not a believer (*laysa bi-muʾmin*)" (*Ikmāl al-Muʿallim*, 1, 280–81).

110 His important teacher Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148) is, among the contemporaries of Ghazālī, "the most important source of information about al-Ghazālī's life and his teachings" (Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 62). On the role of Ibn al-ʿArabī for the evolution of theological thinking in the Islamic West, see Serrano, *Diffusion*.

several ways from the magnus opus of the great Persian theologian and Sufi. Similar to Muslim philosophers inspired by Neo-Platonism, Ghazālī argues that the knowledge of an object or a person increases love for it.[111] This elucidates very well the argumentative connection between the first and the second part of the *Shifāʾ* in view of its overall purpose: the knowledge of the Prophet's *qadr* expounded in the first part leads the reader to increase his love for him.

Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ first defines love in a chapter on God's love for the Prophet Muḥammad as it is expressed in the latter's specific designation *ḥabīb Allāh* ("the beloved of God") mentioned in a *ḥadīth*:[112]

> The root (*aṣl*) of love is the inclination towards what is in harmony with the lover (*al-mayl ilā mā yuwāfiq al-muḥibb*).[113] As for God's love for a creature, it means enabling him to attain felicity, protecting him, guiding him to success, providing him with the means to draw closer to Him, and bestowing His grace upon him, and finally to take away the veil from his heart so that he perceives Him (*yarāhu*) with his heart and gazes (*yanẓura ilayhi*) towards Him with his inner sight (*baṣīra*), until he is as [God] said in the *ḥadīth* [*qudsī*] 'and when I love him, I am his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, and his tongue through which he speaks […]'.[114]

If applied to God's supreme object of love, which according to al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ is the Prophet Muḥammad, the *ḥadīth* shows how to love the Prophet means to love the one whose whole being is animated and transcended by God's love.

The chapter on love for the Prophet deals more specifically with mankind's love for the Prophet Muḥammad. Here al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ devotes a complete subchapter to the "meaning (*maʿnā*) of love for the Prophet".[115] Again, Ghazālī's

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111 Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, IV, 392. "It is not possible to imagine the existence of love except after perception and knowledge; hence, the human being loves only what he knows". See also Abrahamov, *Divine Love*, 70.

112 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 130–133: "[…] am I not the beloved of God, without any pride?". There is no full *isnād* given by al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, but the *ḥadīth* is to be found amongst others in the *Sunan* of Tirmidhī, *Kitāb al-manāqib*, *bāb fī faḍl al-nabī*, N° 3616.

113 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 132. It is possible to translate also "the inclination towards what corresponds to the lover".

114 *Shifāʾ*, 132. The *ḥadīth* is transmitted by al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *kitab al-raqāʾiq*, *bāb al-tawāḍuʿ*, N° 6137. Al-Ghazālī also cites it in his section on "God's love for the servant" and discusses it at length in order to develop the concept of *qurb* or nearness to God through the assimilation of divine attributes as expressed in the prophetic "noble characters" (*makārim al-akhlāq*), *Iḥyāʾ*, IV, 431–33, and also 405.

115 *Shifāʾ*, 238–39.

elaboration of the meaning and sources of love for God seems to have informed the argumentative basis of the *Shifāʾ*. For Ghazālī, love is the supreme spiritual station to which all the other spiritual stations aim and thus it is the climax of man's relationship to God. His intention is to prove that only God is worthy of love and that every kind of love has its real origin in love for God.[116] He enumerates five causes (*asbāb*) of love in general, and corresponding causes of the love for God in particular.[117] Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ does not transpose all of these five causes to the Prophet, but chooses three of them and adapts them, since the five causes of love for God are based on the relationship between Creator and created. The author of the *Shifāʾ* bases his elaboration on an albeit anthropologically orientated version of the definition of love mentioned above: "The inclination of the human being towards what is in harmony with him (*al-mayl ilā mā yuwāfiq al-insān*)".[118] He distinguishes three forms of the "harmony" (*muwāfaqa*) which engender love and correspond to the three reasons or sources of man's love for something or somebody: 1) harmony consisting of the pleasure felt through the "perception (*idrāk*) of beautiful forms (*al-ṣuwar al-jamīla*)" through the senses, 2) or of the pleasure felt through "perception of noble interior meanings (*maʿānī bāṭina sharīfa*) through the intellect and the heart", or 3) of the benevolence and the favour that it represents to him, for "the souls are fashioned in a way that they love the one who acts beautifully towards them (*man aḥsana ilayhā*)".[119] According to al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, the Prophet Muḥammad combines the three meanings/reasons of love in the most accomplished manner through 1) the beauty of his exterior appearance, 2) the perfection of his inner character, and 3) his favours and bounties on his community.[120] The author of the *Shifāʾ* concludes that the Prophet is the worthiest creature of being truly beloved.[121]

In this way, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ is able to argue that love for the Prophet Muḥammad is not something which needs to be imposed from the exterior, but that it is anthropologically rooted. A sound knowledge of the Prophet's eminence will naturally engender love for him in the human being, because the inclination for beauty is natural for humans. Ghazālī's definition of beauty, as "existence of all possible perfections in an object means its being in an utmost degree of

116 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, IV, 398.
117 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, IV, 392–397. See also Abrahamov, *Divine Love*, 45–51.
118 *Shifāʾ*, 238. See al-Ghazali's definition of love: "Love is the expression for the natural inclination for a thing which produces pleasure", *Iḥyāʾ*, IV, 392.
119 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 238.
120 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 238.
121 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 238–39.

beauty",[122] is influenced by Platonic and Stoic philosophy. It is certainly helpful to grasp this argument: if love is related to beauty and the pleasure produced by its perception, beauty is in reality an expression of perfection, so that love is ultimately engendered by perfection. In this sense, the perfection of the prophetic person is the reason for the pleasure that the perception of his beauty engenders in the one who has knowledge of it. For Ghazālī, the quality of being free from defects and vices necessitates love, which explains man's love for prophets and righteous people and finds its perfection only in God.[123] Considering this argument, the connection in the *Shifāʾ* between Part II on the Prophet's rights (*ḥuqūq*), and Part III on his infallibility (*ʿiṣma*) becomes clear: the fact of knowing that the Prophet is free from defects necessitates and increases love for him. While this quality finds its perfection in an absolute sense only in God as expounded by Ghazālī,[124] in the domain of creation, it finds its perfection in the Prophet only.[125] This line of thought shows how the theme of love to the Prophet is directly related to the consideration of the prophetic appearance and virtues expounded in Part I.

3.3 *The Prophetic Appearance and the Perception of His Beautiful Forms*

The second chapter of Part I, "On God's perfecting [the Prophet's] physical and interior qualities and His singularly unifying all religious and worldly favours in him",[126] is explicitly addressed to the "lover of this noble Prophet and seeker of the details of the beauty of his exalted status".[127] The various subchapters consist mainly of thematically arranged *ḥadīth*s and draw the image of a human being endowed by God with the realisation of perfection in every aspect of its existence. This perfection, however, not only has an anthropological significance as it establishes the Prophet as a human ideal worthy of emulation. It equally conveys a prophetological meaning related to divine revelation. If the descriptions of "the beauty of his physical constitution"[128] reproduce late-antique Arabian aesthetic ideals,[129] they also convey the transfiguration of the Muḥammadan being by the revelation of the divine word. His personality

122 Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, IV, 396. See also Abrahamov, *Divine Love*, 49.

123 Abrahamov, *Divine Love*, 56.

124 *Al-mustaḥiqq li-l-maḥabba huwa Allāh waḥduhu*, "He who is worthy of love is God alone" (Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, IV, 398).

125 See also Bayhaqī who writes in his *Shuʿab al-īmān* "he [the Prophet Muḥammad] is the most worthy of love (*huwa aḥaqqu bi-l-maḥabba*)", *Shuʿab al-īmān*, II, 133.

126 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 44.

127 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 44.

128 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 46–48.

129 See especially the summary that al-Qaḍī ʿIyāḍ gives of the various detailed descriptions of his physical appearance, *Shifāʾ*, 46–47.

becomes a mirror of divine severity and awfulness (*jalāl*), and, at the same time, of His gentleness and beauty (*jamāl*).[130]

The testimonies of those contemporaries who had an intimate relationship with the Prophet, such as ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, are particularly expressive: "Whoever saw him, he spontaneously had a reverential awe of him, and whoever mixed and got acquainted with him, loved him",[131] and "I have never witnessed his peer, either before or after him".[132] Abū Hurayra is reported to have said: "I saw none better and more beautiful (*aḥsan*) than the Messenger of God. It was as if the sun was running in his face, and when he laughed, he radiated and his gleam reflected on the wall".[133] His hygienical and ritual "purity",[134] manifested for example through the unique perfume that his body exhaled and through the innate conformity to the Abrahamic model of bodily hygiene, reflects the immaculateness of humanity's primordial nature (*al-fiṭra*) which Islam claims to restore. As with the motive of physical beauty and harmony, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ insists on the singularity of Muḥammad's personality:

> God favoured him with traits and attributes found in no one else, and then perfected them with the purity of revealed religion (*naẓāfat al-sharʿ*), and with the ten qualities of primordial nature (*khiṣāl al-fiṭra al-ʿashr*).[135]

His superior intelligence and wisdom,[136] and its manifestation through "the force of his senses" and his eloquence,[137] shows how God's grace was fully manifested in the personality of the Prophet Muḥammad. Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ illustrates this by quoting, among others, the known transmitter of *ḥadīth* and of biblical material, Wahb Ibn al-Munabbih (d. 110/728 or 114/732):

130 Both notions, classically used to categorise the divine names, are regularly employed by al-Qāḍī ʿIyād with regard to the Prophet Muḥammad, for example *Shifāʾ*, 44 where he evokes the "qualities of gentleness/beauty and perfection", and *Shifāʾ*, 45 where it is question of the Prophet's "qualities of perfection and severity/awfulness". See also Gril on "De la crainte révérentielle à l'amour" in "Attitude des Compagnons", 33–37.

131 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 48.

132 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 48.

133 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ* 48.

134 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 48–51.

135 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 48. The latter are not mentioned in detail, which shows that the author presumes that the reader knows the relevant *ḥadīth*s. The same applies for the other descriptions of the Prophet's appearance which he only summarises.

136 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 51–52.

137 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 53–60.

> I have read seventy-one religious scriptures and they unanimously stated that compared to the intellect (*al-ʿaql*) of the Prophet, God has not allotted to mankind, from the beginning of this world to its end, but a grain of sand from the world's sands.[138]

The theme of noble ascendance,[139] treated in the consecutive sub-chapter, connects the Prophet Muḥammad with the universal history of salvation and the community of prophets, sages and civilising heroes, and demonstrates the conclusiveness of his message.[140]

However, by presenting a detailed description of the Muḥammadan person, the *Shifāʾ* does not, in fact, introduce a wholly new theme, nor does this reflect an innovative conception of prophetology. In her groundbreaking study on the veneration of the Prophet in Islamic piety, Annemarie Schimmel has referred explicitly to the concept of the Prophet's beauty, both "physical"[141] and "spiritual"[142] as an ongoing theme and preoccupation in Islamic thought, especially with *ḥadīth* scholars and Sufis. The specific conception of the Prophet's body, to which the considerations of his physical beauty and perfect constitution are obviously related, can in fact be found well before the *Shifāʾ*. The particular significance of the Prophet's body in Islamic sources has been elucidated by Denis Gril, who explains: "The body of the prophets, and of the Prophet in particular, therefore reveals qualities and virtues that transcend ordinary humanity, just as their lives are identified with the mission in which they are invested".[143]

This is further explained by him as follows:

> Thaumaturgical property of the prophetic body […] goes hand in hand with the eschatological hope that attaches itself to it […]. It is normal for a body through which the [divine] Word flows to be penetrated by its power of regeneration and healing. However, the attention given first by

138 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 51.

139 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 60–61.

140 See Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*, 7.

141 On "The Prophet's physical beauty", see Schimmel, *And Muhammad*, 33–45. Schimmel refers herself directly to al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ whom she qualifies falsely as "noted enemy of the Sufis" (33), repeating thereby a view that is based on a remark by al-Shaʿrānī (d. 973/1565) the origin of which "must be understood as a mix-up of historical facts, anecdotes and overly interpretative assumptions, chiefly motivated by concerns not related to ʿIyāḍ's work, biography or legacy" (Eggen, "A book burner" 106).

142 On "The Prophet's spiritual beauty", see Schimmel, *And Muhammad*, 45–55. See also Andrae, *Person Muhammeds*, 199–228.

143 Gril, "Corps du Prophète", 37–57.

> the Companions and then by subsequent generations of Muslims to the physical aspect of the Prophet and his character is also explained by the idea that each of his traits may have meaning, in accordance with the laws of physiognomy, and that the impression of harmony and balance that emerges from his person reflects his physical and spiritual perfection.[144]

Luca Patrizi shows how a comparative perspective from the history of religions allows to understand the iconographic function of the descriptions of the prophetic person:

> In Islam, writing takes the place of iconography, and as long as the Qur'ān is the word of God made book, Qur'ānic writing takes the place that the icon in particular, and the image of Christ in general, has in Christianity. In place of images, moreover, there is the use of the physical description of the Prophet Muḥammad, taken from the reports made by his companions.[145]

The *shamā'il* thus compensate the physical disappearance of the Prophet and allow post-prophetic generations of Muslims to experience a visual encounter with the Muḥammadan personality.

What is particular to the *Shifā'*, is the fact that this discourse on the prophetic person is integrated into a systematic elaboration of the meaning of these descriptions for the religious life of Muslims, in particular in its normative dimension as it is expressed through the concept of *ḥuqūq* and more specifically in its relation to love for the Prophet.[146] Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ inserts the *shamā'il* genre of *ḥadīth* literature into an argumentative framework based on the relation between the perception of beautiful forms and love for the Prophet. He speaks explicitly of the impact that these descriptions have on people's "hearts"[147] and, while treating the "qualities of perfection", he begs God "to illuminate my heart and yours and to increase my love and your love for this noble Prophet".[148] For the author of the *Shifā'*, the elucidation of the

144 Gril, "Corps du Prophète", 45.

145 Patrizi, "Impronte, ritratti", 92. On this theme see also the recent thesis by Hiba Abid, *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*, 278–97.

146 Comparing Tirmidhī's *Shamā'il* and the *Shifā'*, Tor Andrae remarks that al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ has "overcome the ritualistic exteriority" of the first and succeeded in expounding the "ethical value" of these descriptions, see *Person Mohammeds*, 204–5.

147 *Shifā'*, 45.

148 *Shifā'*, 46. Examples such as these could be multiplied. It is striking that the author seems to aim specifically the "heart (*qalb*)" of the reader, and less his reason (*'aql*). Even if he

Prophet's physical appearance and of his personality clearly has a theological and a spiritual function. It is expected to have an impact on the religious life of the Muslim community in its fulfilment of the Prophet's rights.

3.4 *The Prophet's "Beautiful Character" and the Perception of His "Noble Meanings" and of His Benevolence*

The same can be said of the second source of love for the Prophet, which is identified by al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ as "the perception of noble interior meanings", by which he means the Prophet's virtues and his character or *khuluq*.[149] The reason for this lies, according to the author, in the fact that "the human being is naturally inclined towards being very fond of [saintly people, scholars and virtuously acting people] to the extent that certain people are led to partisanship (*taʿaṣṣub*) and others to sectarianism (*tashayyuʿ*)".[150] This remark again establishes an anthropological foundation of love for the Prophet Muḥammad, as for al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ the latter is obviously the most eminent of saintly and righteous people. And indeed, in the corresponding section of the Prophet's description, the author seeks to demonstrate that the personality of Muḥammad encompasses the totality of those qualities on whose excellence both reason and revelation agree:

> They are called 'the beautiful character' (*ḥusn al-khuluq*) and this is the equilibrium of the soul's faculties and attributes, and their just balance without any inclination towards the transgression of their limits. The totality of these qualities was the character of our Prophet, with regard to the culmination of their perfection and to their accomplished equilibrium, to the extent that God praised him in His statement "And verily, you are of an exalted character" (Q 68:4). ʿĀʾisha said: "His character was the Qurʾān, he was satisfied by its satisfaction and he was discontent by its discontentment",[151] and he said "I was sent to accomplish the noble

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constructs a reasoning in order to strengthen his argument, he seems to consider that the presentation of scriptural evidence, with its descriptive, edificatory and narrative elements, is more effective for impressing the religious consciousness of his readership than discursive deliberations.

149 *Shifāʾ*, 238.

150 One could see here a hidden criticism of the religious-political circumstances of his time. However, this conception is probably taken from Ghazālī according to whom "spiritual qualities are beloved and the person qualified by them is by nature beloved by whoever knows his qualities. The proof for this is the fact that people by nature love prophets, the Companions of Muhammad, the heads of the schools of law, such as Shāfiʿī, although they did not see them" Abrahamov, *Divine Love*, 49.

151 See Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *kitāb ṣalāt al-musāfirīn*, *bāb jāmʿ ṣalāt al-layl*, N° 746.

> character traits".[152] And Anas [Ibn Mālik] said that the Messenger of God was the most beautiful of men in character, and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said the same. As the veritable knowers (*al-muḥaqqiqūn*) remember him, he was fashioned on these [beautiful character traits] in the root of his constitution and of his immaculate original nature (*awwal fiṭratihi*); he did not obtain them through acquisition or exercise, but only by divine generosity and lordly election, and this is true for all the prophets.[153]

It is interesting to see how the author mingles philosophical and theological ethics. In fact, he mentions at various places the "insightful thinkers" (*ʿuqalāʾ*) or the "people of sound reason (*aṣḥāb al-ʿuqūl al-salīma*)" as an authority complementary to the revealed law (*al-sharʿ*) for the appreciation of attributes and characters.[154] Already Tor Andrae[155] alluded to the influence of Aristotelian ethics as elaborated in Islamic terms by Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), probably through the mediation of Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ*,[156] but also to the impact of pre-Islamic Arabian ethical ideals like the *muruwwa* (chivalry). Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ indeed begins, in the manner of the philosophers, the list of virtues with the Prophet's intellect (*ʿaql*) by explaining that it "constitutes the root of the branches [of the beautiful character], the origin of its sources and the centre of its sphere".[157] But unlike the philosophers, the author of the *Shifāʾ* considers the

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152 See Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-mufrad, bāb ḥusn al-khuluq*, N° 273 and Niṣābūrī, *al-Mustadrak, kitab al-tawārīkh, bāb āyāt rasūl Allāh*, N° 4221. However, in both sources the *ḥadīth* is narrated with the wording *ṣāliḥ al-akhlāq* (virtuous character traits).

153 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 68–69.

154 See, for example, at the beginning of the section of the *akhlāq* (*Shifāʾ*, 68). However, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ précises immediately afterwards that it is the revealed law that commands their acquisition and elucidates their soteriological meaning: "The revealed law praises all of them, commands their acquisition and promises the eternal beatitude for the one who assimilates them (*al-mutakhalliq bi-hā*) and qualifies himself with some of them, for the reason that they represent a part of prophecy" (*Shifāʾ*, 68).

155 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 206–12.

156 On this transfer of virtue ethics "from philosophy to scripture" through Miskawayh and Ghazālī, see Zargar, *Polished Mirror*, 79–105. For a discussion of this theme in al-Ghazālī, see Abul Quasem, *Ethics of al-Ghazali*.

157 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 71. The author admits that this chapter is somewhat a repetition of what he stated in the section of the Prophet's constitution, and of what he will state in the section on the Prophet's miracles. This shows how important it was for al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ to deal with this theme, probably in view of demonstrating to his philosophically orientated contemporaries the eminence of the Prophet Muḥammad, and his superiority towards the Greek masters of rationality.

prophetic intellect and the various aptitudes which issue from it with regard to the Qur'ānic doctrine of Muḥammad's illiterateness:[158]

> According to his intellect, he had knowledge of everything God taught him and made him understand, including the science of what has been and of what will be, of the wonders of His power and the immensity of His transcendent realm, as God says 'and He taught you what you did not know and God's favour upon you is immense' (Q 5:113). [Human] intelligences became perplexed at measuring God's favour on him and the tongues fell into silence when attempting to express a comprehensive description of this.[159]

While affirming in this last sentence, as in various other places, the relativity of philosophical knowledge with regard to prophetology, the author does not disdain to use philosophical ethics in order to make sense of the various capacities and powers attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, such as the little amount of sleep and food[160] he needed, or his ability to handle wealth and to deal with political matters. This argumentative structure allows al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ to make the Prophet Muḥammad appear as a superior and divinely inspired version of the philosophical ideal of the philosopher-king. It is conceivable that the author of the *Shifā'* intended thereby to argue, against the rationalist-minded amongst his contemporaries, the superiority of the Prophet Muḥammad over the philosophers and the incomparability between the two types of knowledge.[161]

158 See Q 7:157. Al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ explains that the Prophet Muḥammad obtained knowledge about previous scriptures, divine commandments, virtuous conduct, the guidance of people etc. "without teaching or study, the reading of previous scriptures or the company of its scholars, nay, he was an illiterate prophet (*nabī ummī*) who did not know anything of this until God opened his breast, made clear his affair, taught him and made him recite" (*Shifā'*, 72). In the time of al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, there has been a famous controversy in al-Andalus concerning the position held by the *ḥadīth* scholar Abū al-Walīd al-Bājī (d. 474/1081) that the Prophet knew how to write, as suggested by a *ḥadīth*, but that this ability was not the result of an ordinary acquisition, but the fact of a miracle (*mu'jiza*). See Blecher, *Said the Prophet*, 21–29.

159 *Shifā'*,72.

160 *Shifā'*, 61–62.

161 He thereby is in line with the theological criticism of philosophical prophetology as analysed by Zouggar, *Philosophes*. On the polemics over the "acquisition of prophecy" in al-Andalus in the fifth–sixth/eleventh–twelfth centuries, see Casewit, *Mystics of al-Andalus*, 39–42.

Despite their philosophical relevance, these and the other qualities are obviously above all related to the prophetic mission and dignity of Muḥammad. His forbearance, generosity, courage, modesty each elucidate an aspect of the prophetic function and of its Muḥammadan specificity.[162]

However, the sub-chapter on "his compassion (*shafaqa*), his mercy (*raḥma*) and affection (*ra'fa*) for the entire creation"[163] certainly has a particular significance. The theme of the Prophet's mercy[164] is indeed one of the major motives of the *Shifā'* as it draws through all its parts.[165] Its importance stems from the fact that the Prophet's unconditional mercy constitutes an obvious indication of the singular role that God has assigned to him and thus of his eminence.[166] According to al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, who takes up a common theological argument, this is demonstrated in particular by the fact that by characterising the Prophet Muḥammad with mercy, God attributes to the latter His own name and quality.[167] At the same time, the theme of the Prophet's mercy also very clearly shows the soteriological significance of his personality, and thus the normative status of veneration and love for him. Mercy equally has a central significance because it represents the essential element of the third source of love mentioned by al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, namely "the benevolence and the favour that somebody represents to man" corresponding to the Prophet's "favours and bounties on his community".[168]

Considering the presentation of the Prophet's character traits in general, it is striking how al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ constantly stresses their divine cause, as for example when explaining in the case of the Prophet's longanimity and forbearance that "all this is from how God educated His Prophet".[169] This insistence can be understood to have a double meaning. Firstly, as explained in the first part, it

162 See *Shifā'*, 72–97. A precise analysis of each character trait and virtue from this perspective would certainly yield fruitful results which would deepen and differentiate our understanding of the Muslim perception of the Prophet Muḥammad. However, this cannot be done here for reasons of space, and must be kept for further studies.

163 *Shifā'*, 83–85.

164 According to al-Khafājī, the term *raḥma* as applied to a human being is explained as "the softness (*riqqa*) of the heart with regard to the concern of a person", *Nasīm*, I, 152.

165 See *Shifā'*, 21–23, 39, 83–85, 142, 145. In the sub-chapter discussed here, the mercy motive is explained in terms of its ethical meaning as characterising the way the Prophet engaged with people, whereas in the other sections, the Prophet's mercy is considered more in terms of the meaning of his sending. See also Vimercati Sanseverino, "Wer dem Gesandten gehorcht", 68–70.

166 See Part I of this chapter.

167 See *Shifā'*, 145.

168 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifā'*, 238.

169 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifā'*, 72.

demonstrates again the Prophet's pre-eminence and secondly, it goes against the philosophical conception of prophetology which considers prophecy as a state conferred by God on account of intellectual and moral qualities. Here, very clearly following Ashʿarī theology,[170] the author of the *Shifāʾ* emphasises that the prophetic virtues represent the consequences of divine election and revelation for the prophetic person. There is no causal relation between human qualities and prophecy – both are nothing other than effects of God's will and grace.

At the same time, the influence of Sufi ethics is visible through the various quotations and also through certain themes.[171] Whereas the great majority of attributes concern the Prophet's relation to people, there is only one category which exclusively concerns his relation to God, namely one of the last sub-chapters dealing with "his fear of his Lord, his obedience towards Him and the intensity of his adoration".[172] The *Shifāʾ* seems to emphasise a certain type of spirituality which reflects the spiritual and ethical ideal of al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's milieu and time. Detachment from worldly affairs (*zuhd*), combined with a rigorous and intense ritual practice, and the vigilant fear of God as the principal modality of knowledge of God, correspond to the ideal of the ascetic scholar-saint characteristic for the Islamic West of the fourth-sixth/tenth-twelfth centuries.[173]

From these considerations it becomes clear how al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ skilfully arranges these various discursive genres towards a common theme, that is the love for the Prophet. A more normative approach is visible in the sub-chapter on "The signs of love for the Prophet",[174] the longest of this whole chapter and, to my knowledge, the first of this kind in the history of Sunnī literature. The theme of "signs" offers criteria in order to verify the sincerity (*ṣidq*) of love for the Prophet Muḥammad. Even if there are no explicit indications, the question arises whether the author had in view false claims of love for the Prophet in

170 On al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's Ashʿarīsm, see Serrano, *Diffusion de l'ashʿarisme* and also Al-ʿAbdallāh, *Juhūduhu al-kalāmiyya*; Shawwāṭ, *ʿĀlim al-Maghrib*, 46–56.

171 A specific study on the influence of Sufism on the *Shifāʾ* is yet to be undertaken. At this stage of research, the work gives the impression of a certain preponderance of quotations attributed to Sahl al-Tustarī. Regarding themes besides virtues like renunciation or fear of God, one can mention the issue of the Prophet's characterisation with divine names and the elaborations on love for the Prophet. For the latter theme in early Sufism, see Thibon, "Transmission du *ḥadīth*".

172 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 95–97.

173 See Vimercati Sanseverino, "Hagiographie marocaine"; on the "Renunciant Tradition in Seville" in particular Casewit, *Mystics of Andalus*, 30–33. However, even later prophetological works such as Qasṭallānī (d. 963/1517), *al-Mawāhib al-laduniya* (see II, 83–115), adopt the same scheme.

174 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 235–238.

his time and whether this theme possibly contains a veiled critique against a certain group which, in al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's view, claimed to represent the Prophet's authority and to be attached to him, without laying importance on the requirements of "prophetic piety".[175] In any case, the "signs" that he mentions illustrate very concretely the effects of love for the Prophet on religious life: the preference for the Prophet and for conformity to him, continuous mention of him (*dhikrihi*) and desire to meet him, especially when one hears his name, love for those associated to him like his family and companions, love for the Qurʾān and finally compassion for his community.[176] Far from being merely an interior attitude, the *maḥabbat al-nabī* requires the whole being of the believer, in order to be truthful (*ṣādiq*). In fact, love for the Prophet represents for the author of the *Shifāʾ* a comprehensive and programmatic vision of the practice of Islam, involving the interior life of the individual believer as well as his exterior behaviour and his relationship to the community. This comprehensive character of the love for the Prophet results from its normative meaning:

> Know that who loves something accords preference to it and conformity to it, otherwise his love is not truthful, but he pretends only to it. He who is sincere in his love for the Prophet is the one on whom its signs appear, and the first sign is taking him as a model, putting his Sunna into practice and following his words and deeds, as well as conforming to his commands and interdictions, educating oneself according to his behaviour in facility and difficulty, as well as in pleasant and unpleasant things; the evidence of this, is God's word 'Say: If you love God, then follow me and God will love you (Q 3:31)'. And [love for the Prophet] is also apparent through giving preference to what he legislated and urged to do, against what conforms to one's own passions and desires.[177]

In the sub-chapter "On the reward (*thawāb*) for love for the Prophet",[178] interestingly placed at the very beginning, al-Qāḍī ʿIyād dwells in particular on the eschatological meaning of the fulfilment of the duties connected with this love. The argument developed through the various *ḥadīth* is that loving the

175 One could think of both, the current of Mālikism which preferred to stick the authority of its scholars and thereby neglecting the *ḥadīth* (see Fierro, "Proto-Malikis"), or the Almohads who sought to place the Mahdī as normative and theological reference for the Muslim community (see Fierro, "El tratado").

176 For all these see ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 236f.

177 *Shifāʾ*, 235.

178 *Shifāʾ*, 232–33.

Prophet means being associated with the one who will be in the most blissful position in paradise: "Whoever loves me, will be with me in paradise".[179]

In this relatively small passage, the soteriological argument of the *Shifāʾ* and of its prophetology comes more fully into light. The theme of "reward" allows the writer to expound what the Prophet's pre-eminence means for his community, and how the fulfilment of his rights constitutes the modalities through which his community can itself benefit from it. If "being with the Prophet" is the supreme reward of love for him, and thus the true goal of the fulfilment of his rights in general,[180] then because it means to be associated to the grace for which God singled out the Prophet Muḥammad. It is in this sense, that the *Shifāʾ* argues that the quality of a believer's relationship to God is dependent upon the quality of his relationship to the Prophet, which is proportionate to his love for him. In other words, the believer's relationship to God is only a relationship of effective proximity and love if it is goes along with an effective relationship to the most near and beloved creature to God, which is the Prophet Muḥammad. Because God loves the Prophet, to love the Prophet means to participate in God's love for him.

4 Conclusion

One of the results of this study is certainly to have shown the theological complexity and sophistication of a work that has too often been treated as a polemical or apologetical text whose purpose resided in promoting extravagant beliefs to credulous Muslim masses. Focusing on the central notions of *qadr* and *ḥuqūq*, as well as the themes of knowledge and love, this analysis of the *Shifāʾ* has attempted to demonstrate how the veneration of the Prophet Muḥammad represents a genuine theological and intellectual concern within Sunnī scholarly discourse. Drawing on the rich textual material of the various genres of prophetological literature, the *Shifāʾ* uses sciences and approaches as diverse as *ḥadīth*, philosophy and Sufism in order to show how evidence for Muḥammadan prophethood is first of all soteriologically meaningful for the religious life of Muslims. Developing the prophetological scope of various discursive traditions, the *Shifāʾ* thus reflects the end of the formative period.

179 *Shifāʾ*, 233.

180 This conclusion is further confirmed by the other chapters, especially the final, very ample, chapter of Part II which concerns the practice of *taṣlīya* or "praying for the Prophet" (*al-ṣalāt ʿalā al-nabī*) and wherein various *ḥadīth*s are mentioned to this effect. For the theme of *taṣlīya* see the excellent study of Hamidoune, *Prière sur le Prophète*.

In the context of the emergence of schisms and of the threats to the territorial integrity of the Islamic West, it participates in the consolidation of a distinct Sunnī identity shaped by "Muḥammadan spirituality".

The study of the *Shifāʾ* allows for a more differentiated understanding of the Muslim discourse on the Prophet's pre-eminence. For those who believe in Muḥammad's prophetic claim and strive to follow him, the latter's exalted dignity means, foremost, the possibility to participate in the Prophet's nearness to God – hence, proximity to the Prophet implies proximity to God. If Part I shows that through the Prophet Muḥammad the believer has access to a privileged relationship with God, Part II responds to the question how this participation is possible, namely through the fulfilment of his rights, love for the Prophet representing their ultimate fulfilment.

What is striking is the epistemological consistency of this prophetology: If it is God Himself who imparts knowledge about the Prophet's pre-eminence to mankind, man cannot attain this knowledge by himself – at least in its depth, variety and veritable meaning. Consequently, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ organised his prophetology according to the loci of God's exaltation of the Prophet, i.e., God's speech to the Prophet, and the Prophet's person and miraculous acts as transmitted by tradition. If al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ presents revelation and salvation history as sources for the knowledge of the Prophet's pre-eminent status, the question arises which role he accords to reason or *ʿaql*? While further analysis is needed on this point, it can be already affirmed in a general manner that reason as a purely human source of knowledge seems to have only a secondary epistemological significance, which is limited to demonstrating the plausibility of an argument rather than allowing for certainty with regard to its truth. So rather than a source of knowledge, reason appears as a hermeneutical instrument needed for making the meaning and coherence of the mentioned sources evident in view of a certain theme. Hence, al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's "concessions" to philosophical ethics are in fact only relative: if reason is able to appreciate the Prophet's virtues and to elucidate their excellence through systematic elaboration, it is incapable of recognising their true meaning and the reality of the Prophet's realisation of them. However, if the value of reason for the knowledge of the Prophet's eminent reality appears to be relative, one should not conclude that for al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ the *ʿaql* is negligible. The third part of the book, which, according to its author, contains the "secret" of the whole work, shows that the use of reason is indispensable for an accurate understanding of the subtleties of prophetology.

Despite the insights yielded by this study, it is clear that the *Shifāʾ* requires further analysis of the other two parts and of certain aspects, in particular the theme of *ḥadīth* transmission which occupies a central place for al-Qāḍī

ʿIyāḍ's self-understanding and activity as a scholar. If the *Shifāʾ* argues the soteriological necessity of the Muslim's relationship to the person of the Prophet, the *ḥadīth* represents one of the major means through which this relationship is established.[181] Another aspect to be inquired further is the influence of Ghazālī's thought on al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, and of philosophical ideas and of Sufi teachings in general. If the *Shifāʾ* shows obvious parallels to both, the concrete genealogy of certain ideas has to be elucidated further. Against the background of a more comprehensive understanding of the *Shifāʾ*, it will be possible to relate its argument as expounded in this study more concretely to al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's diagnostics of the Muslim community's situation in his time.[182] It is the latter which elucidates how for al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ the inappropriate or incomplete understanding of the prophetic reality of Muḥammad's personality constitutes the real cause for the neglect of the Prophet's rights in the Muslim community, and hence the root of the latter's critical situation.

Certainly, the most singular feature which this study has brought to light is the elaboration of a veritable theology of veneration of the Prophet in the *Shifāʾ*. One can speak of a theology in the sense that the conceptualisation of veneration is grounded in the divine determination of prophetic dignity, which is only known by God's revelation and working. Love for the Prophet, as al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ presented it, is ultimately based on God's exaltation of the Prophet in words and acts. For a scholar like al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, the *maḥabbat al-nabī* is not merely a moral device or an emotional impulse related to the socio-religious or psychological needs of the Muslim community but has its foundation in revelation and tradition and thus can be substantiated through theological reasoning. Furthermore, it is a theology because it develops a comprehensive vision of Islamic religious life founded on the Muḥammadan model and personality. The latter appears as an ideal of human perfection, allowing thereby for an anthropological basis of veneration: the human being inclines naturally to what is beautiful and good, and the Prophet Muḥammad, reuniting in him the outer and inner qualities of perfection with benevolence towards mankind, represents the supreme object of love in the created world. It is this vision which most likely explains the singular success of the *Shifāʾ*, as well as its continuing relevance and force of attraction.

181 See my forthcoming study on this aspect of the *Shifāʾ* and of *ḥadīth* transmission in M. Gharaibeh, ed. *Beyond Authenticity*, forthcoming.

182 This is certainly to be understood in view of what Maribel Fierro calls "spiritual alienation", see Fierro, "Spiritual alienation" and Vimercati Sanseverino, "Transmission, ethos" 46–51.

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6

"Special Features of the Prophet" (*Khaṣā'iṣ nabawiyya*)

From Jurisprudence to Devotion

Michele Petrone

The figure of Muḥammad has received unparalleled attention from Muslim scholars, who have scrutinised every aspect of his life, public and private, in order to reconstruct a viable *uswa ḥasana*, a "good model" for believers.[1] Major collections of *ḥadīth* can be considered to be fragmented accounts of the Prophet's life, narrated and classified according to the various points of view of the transmitters. In *sīra* texts (a notion often translated as "biography"), which deal with the Prophet's life and actions, the variability of perspectives is limited by the author, and the chronological arrangement of events shifts the focus of such texts away from the potential legal relevance of Muḥammad's actions to their exemplary and exceptional character.

A narrower approach to the figure of Muḥammad can be found in *Shamā'il* literature, which centres on the physical appearance of the Prophet and on the perfection of his character. One of the fundamental texts of this genre, written by Tirmidhī,[2] covers every aspect of the physical existence of Muḥammad, from his birth to his death, including a final section on the *ru'yat al-Nabī*, the Messenger's vision, which took place during a dream. His acts and decisions are seen through the lens of description, because he is an *exemplum* for the believers. Strictly legal aspects are not discussed, and the description is designed to offer the reader a lively image of the absent Prophet.

Maghāzī literature[3] could be said to stand on the opposite side of the spectrum of literature about the Prophet from works of *Shamā'il*. It is focused on the actions, military expeditions and raids of the newly established Muslim community. Here, description is functional, serving a chronological narration of the military events that occurred during Muḥammad's life.

1 Translation of this expression does not express its full lexical complexity, that alludes not only to the exclusive aspect of some legal dispositions, but also to the *khāṣṣa* as an élite, and to the exceptional character of the one marked by a *khaṣīṣa* (pl. *khaṣā'iṣ*).

2 Tirmidhī, *Shamā'il*.

3 Jones, "Maghāzī Literature".

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His function as God's Messenger, and related proofs, are discussed by *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa* texts, "Proofs of Prophecy", in which miraculous deeds and episodes are seen as signs confirming the genuine nature of Muḥammad's mission.[4] This genre started as a form of apologetics, defending developing Islamic (*sunnī*) doctrine from the challenges of Isma'īlīs and Christians.[5] The structure of these works is fairly consistent: following the path of the Prophet's life, they enumerate miracles and their varying contexts and circumstances. Among these, miracles linked to the Qur'ān and its inimitability occupy a prominent place. The apologetic attitude is clear in the frequent comparisons between Muḥammad and other messengers, where their miracles are considered as more tenuous versions of those granted by God to His beloved. In this sense, the *Dalā'il* can be seen as a development of the *sīra*, focusing on specific aspects of Muḥammad's life.

In this study I propose to analyse the development of the literature dealing with a slightly different set of exceptional aspects of *sīra*, called *khaṣā'iṣ nabawiya*. I will try to show how this genre evolved from niche works of jurisprudence into spiritual and devotional poetry. Starting from early juridical texts, the attention of *fuqahā'* has been on the identification of reliable traditions and methods of interpretation that would allow judges and rulers to govern a society that was becoming more complex and stratified. Establishing guidelines for the interpretation of primary sources was an intellectual task performed by a restricted *élite* of specialists in Prophetic tradition. The consequences of these interpretations, on the other hand, involved a far larger public, ideally the entire Muslim community. In this perspective there is a distance between the approach to traditions within *dalā'il* (where the discussion relates only to miracles performed by Muḥammad and other prophets) and that of jurists, which would primarily refer to traditions valid for the whole *umma*, with the aim of deriving general rule of conduct and laws.

In any case, there is a small number of normative *ḥadīth* in the latter domain that define rules that are valid only for the Prophet, and not suitable for or applicable to any other member of his community. These few traditions have no practical relevance to believers, applying as they do only to the Prophet, but they are still discussed in earlier sources as *khaṣā'iṣ*, "exclusivities of the Prophet".[6] The interaction between the status of these traditions and the

4 Koertner, "Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa Literature"; Tottoli, "Segni della Profezia"; Stroumsa, "Signs of Prophecy".

5 Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian*, 80f.; Tottoli, "Segni della Profezia".

6 Translation of this expression does not express its full lexical complexity, that alludes not only to the exclusive aspect of some legal dispositions, but also to the *khāṣṣa* as an élite and to the exceptional character of the one marked by a *khaṣīṣa* (pl. *khaṣā'iṣ*).

dalāʾil al-nubuwwa texts is the starting point of this study. Here I will try first to show how *khaṣāʾiṣ* literature developed, starting from pure juristic discussion and ending with a specific genre focused on the figure of Muḥammad, and on his community, as exceptional in religious world history. In the late Mamlūk period, this genre saw the unprecedented development of new collections of traditions, and of commentaries on and re-writings of these works. The nature of this second step deserves specific attention, as it is characterised by a shift from a legalistic approach to a more devotional one. The figure of Muḥammad becomes the focus of the attention of Sufi practices; the prayer on the Prophet played a central role in the rituals of Sufi brotherhoods (*ṭuruq*, sing. *ṭarīqa*). In the background of this shift lies the progressive involvement of *ʿulamāʾ* with Sufism, which has deeply influenced the way authors represented Muḥammad. In this analysis I will try to show how *khaṣāʾiṣ* literature can serve as a platform for scrutinising the increasing influence of Sufism on the construction of thematic collections of *ḥadīth* and *akhbār*.

The sources used for this study cover almost ten centuries of Islamic history and therefore cannot be considered exhaustive. I have given preference to earlier sources that have been quoted by later authors as main references. For Mamlūk-period sources, I gave precedence to those from which other texts derived, but also consider less prominent ones as evidence of the diffusion in the genre in that period.

1 The Origins of the Discourse in *Khaṣāʾiṣ*

The legal discourse in *khaṣāʾiṣ* has its roots in Shāfiʿī's *Kitāb al-umm* (d. 204/820) and Muzanī's (d. 264/878) commentary thereon. The latter gives, at the beginning of the *Kitāb al-nikāḥ*, a short summary of what Shāfiʿī considered to be an exclusive prerogative of the Prophet, solely concerning marriage. Muzanī introduces the *khaṣāʾiṣ*, saying:

> When God the most high chose Muḥammad for His revelation (*waḥy*) and made clear which were the duties of His creatures, i.e. to obey Him, [He] made incumbent [on the Prophet to perform] some actions that were not compulsory for His [other] creatures; [He decreed this] to draw Prophet near to Him, and [He] made lawful to him things that He prohibited to His creatures …[7]

7 Muzanī, *Mukhtaṣar*, 218f.

This can be considered the first discourse about *khaṣā'iṣ* in Islamic literature, and it already mentions the main criterion of classification that will be the basis of later literature on the same topic: rules specific to Muḥammad alone, due to his peculiar status as last of the Prophets. In this passage, Muzanī identifies two sub-categories: obligations and prohibitions. Another element that will become central in later discussions is the merit ascribed to these acts, seen as a favour God has bestowed specifically on his beloved.

Māwārdī (d. 1058) in his *Kitāb al-ḥāwī al-kabīr fī fiqh madhhab al-imām al-Shāfiʿī*,[8] which is a commentary on al-Muzanī's *Mukhtaṣar*, goes a bit further in the organisation of the *khaṣā'iṣ*. Discussing some of Shāfiʿī's assertions about the wives of the Prophet, he associates some of their characteristics with miracles (*karāmāt*) performed by Muḥammad. One example is Māwārdī's commentary on Shāfiʿī's affirmation that the wives of the Prophet were called "mothers of the believers" (*ummahāt al-mu'minīn*) and that, because of this, for anyone else to marry them after the Prophet's death would imply committing incest. For this reason, it was prohibited for believers to marry the Prophet's widows. In *al-Ḥāwī*, Māwārdī says that this counts among the Prophet's miracles, because the women are Muḥammad's wives, and so associated with him. The merits of being *ummahāt al-mu'minīn* come to them only through having married Muḥammad, and their daughters were given in marriage to other Muslims, despite (arguably) being their "sisters". The theme of *nikāḥ* (marriage) and specifically of the number of wives, is of paramount importance in the earlier discussions of the *khaṣā'iṣ*. Indeed, the fact that Muḥammad could marry more than four women constitutes one of the clearest exceptions to the Islamic norms that were valid for the rest of the *umma*. Almost all later authors followed Māwārdī and tried to find further traditions related to the special status of the *ummahāt al-mu'minīn*.

Bahyaqī (d. 458/1066), for instance, in his *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*,[9] devotes an entire chapter to this topic. The focus remains on the *nikāḥ*, and he gives accounts of several details not analysed in previous literature, such as the fact that the Prophet did not need witnesses for his marriages. This list of *khaṣā'iṣ* is also the first to include Prophetic prerogatives not connected to marriage, such as the possibility, for him, of entering Mecca without being in state of *iḥrām*,[10] or the right to kill someone who offended him; what's more, it mentions only things that are exclusively permitted to the Prophet, omitting any exclusive prohibitions and miracles. An interesting example, which already

8 Māwārdī, *al-Ḥāwī*, IX, 18–20.

9 Bayhaqī, *Sunan*, VII, 86–120.

10 *Iḥrām*, the state of purity that believers must respect when entering the sacred site.

demonstrates the broadening of the scope of *khaṣā'iṣ*, is that the Prophet is permitted to omit ablutions after sleep.[11] The tradition quoted as a proof of this exception is the well-known saying, 'My eyes sleep, but my heart doesn't.'[12] The theme of *wuḍū'* (ritual purification) is part of the basic discussion of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and, as purity is a compulsory condition to perform prayer, it involves all believers. It is also related to specific physical and spiritual features of the Prophet that recur in the literature of *Shamā'il*.[13] This intersection between two different genres is not uncommon and can be considered a consequence of the fact that all collections of traditions related to the Prophet and his function draw from a common set of primary sources. The same Prophetic tradition can be read from different angles: as simply describing Muḥammad's conduct, or as considering specific examples of that conduct to be exceptions to common practice based on Islamic law. In this way, literature about *khaṣā'iṣ* introduces different readings of traditions that were already used in other contexts.

It must be noted that in these earlier works (and in many of the later ones) there is no definition of *khaṣīṣa*, whether formal or simply delimiting the domain of these exclusivities. This relates to the objection among some *'ulamā'* that expending much effort in examining questions that have no practical advantage for the *umma* is rather pointless. Only later authors, such as Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804/1401) in his *Ghāyat al-sūl fī khaṣā'iṣ al-rasūl*,[14] report the opinions of predecessors who tried to justify discussing these topics.[15]

Ibn al-Mulaqqin reports that Ibn Khayrān (d. 431/1040) prohibited (*mana'a*) the discussion of traditions related to *khaṣā'iṣ* about marriage and imamate (*nikāḥ wa-imāma*). The same opinion was shared by Māwardī (d. 449/1058)[16] and his master Ṣaymarī (d. 386/996): the latter maintains that these legal dispositions do not affect the community, as the Prophet is not alive anymore, and that therefore there is no point in discussing them. Ibn al-Mulaqqin also reports another opinion from Ghazālī and Juwaynī. The latter says, in his *Nihāyat al-maṭlab fī dirāyat al-madhhab*: 'It is not permissible to establish the exclusive dispositions and characteristics of the Prophet – peace be upon him – based on comparisons that are used to derive general legal dispositions.'[17] In this perspective, further research in the direction of adding new *khaṣā'iṣ* is

11 Bayhaqī, *Sunan*, VII, 99.
12 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3376.
13 al-Tirmidhī, *Shamā'il*, 164.
14 Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ghāyat al-sūl*, 68f.
15 See, for example, Ibn Kathīr, *Fuṣūl*, 279ff.
16 Who, as we have seen, discussed them anyway, in *al-Ḥāwī*.
17 Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ghāyat al-sūl*, 69.

then discouraged. Later authors, such as Ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (d. 643/1245), considered the study of such exclusivities permissible only for the general public, but not for specialists who were actively occupied in deriving legal dispositions to be used in actual juridical practice.[18] Nawawī (d. 675/1277) seems to have allowed the discussion of *khaṣā'iṣ* with no restrictions. According to Ibn al-Mulaqqin, Nawawī even considered it almost compulsory to analyse them, giving as his reason that establishing what was permitted or prohibited only to Muḥammad was necessary in order to avoid allowing anyone else to act according to those rulings.

From a more general point of view, it is noteworthy that Ibn al-Mulaqqin is the first to report any information about previous authors' attitudes towards the genre and its permissibility. Later authors rely mainly on his *Ghāyat al-sūl* and pay little or no attention to this topic, either considering it licit in itself, or framing it in the context of *faḍā'il* or *tafḍīl al-nabī*, as Kharkūshī did in *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* [19] or ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām in *Bidāyat al-sūl*.[20]

As is evident from the texts mentioned so far, the discourse on *khaṣā'iṣ* seems to have started in the circles of *Shāfiʿī* schools and, as we shall see, it remained mostly in this domain. It is not clear, at this early stage of research, if there is a specific penchant in the *Shāfiʿī* approach to jurisprudence that led them also to focus on legal dispositions specific to the Prophet. It seems more likely that discussion of the topic only in sources belonging to a single juridical school means that this concern was confined to adherents of that school. This may have been caused by other factors, such as the limited practical utility of the *khaṣā'iṣ*, and doubts concerning their legitimacy.

2 Kharkūshī and Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ

Literature on the figure of Muḥammad evolved significantly during the tenth and eleventh centuries, in parallel with the progressive adherence of *ʿulamā'* to Sufism, which brought about the incorporation of some Sufi spiritual doctrines into general Islamic religious science; this process culminated with Ghazālī (d. 504/1111). Also in this line of development, we find Abū Saʿd al-Kharkūshī (or al-Khargūshī, d. 407/1016). He was a *Shāfiʿī* jurist from Nishapur, known

18 Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ghāyat al-sūl*, 69. It must be noted that this opinion contrasts with those of the many who denied the usefulness of writing about *khaṣā'iṣ*, and opens up the possibility, for the more general public, of looking at the Prophet from a different angle, more focused on the miraculous and exceptional features of his personality.

19 Kharkūshī, *Sharaf al-muṣṭafā*.

20 ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām, *Bidāyat al-sūl*.

as a *wā'iẓ* (preacher) and as the author of a collection of early Sufi sayings, *Tahdhīb al-asrār*.[21] He also composed a lengthy work on the Prophet, *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā*,[22] gathering every kind of information about Muḥammad, his figure and his functions. This text combines *sīra*, *maghāzī*, *dalā'il* and *faḍā'il* and aims to be comprehensive, but without placing too much emphasis on *isnād*s (chains of transmission of Prophetic traditions), which places it outside the bounds of proper scholarly literature. Nevertheless, this is one of the earliest examples of literature that looks at Muḥammad from more than one angle (not merely biography, description of his physical appearance, or examination of the legal relevance of his sayings and deeds). Collections of *ḥadīth* report traditions about all these topics, alongside chains of transmission and variants. In the *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* these are left to one side, making room for a more complex construction of discourse about Muḥammad, where the intervention of the author in organising and defining topics is both more relevant and more evident.

Khaṣā'iṣ are first discussed, sparingly, in two chapters called *Jāmiʿ abwāb Sharaf al-Nabī* [...] *fī l-Qur'ān al-karīm* and *Jāmiʿ abwāb faḍl al-Nabī*.[23] In the former, al-Kharkūshī lists several verses of the Qur'ān that explicitly or implicitly grant Muḥammad a special position within humankind. Some are obvious, such as God's forgiveness of all his sins past and future. Others include the comparisons with other prophets, as in the case of Qur'ān 33:7, where, al-Kharkūshī comments, "Muḥammad was the last to be called to prophecy, but [in this verse] he is mentioned before the others".[24] The rest of the chapter proceeds in the same way, using Qur'ānic quotations to prove Muḥammad's excellence.

The sections devoted to the *khaṣā'iṣ*[25] are of interest because they do not deal with *fiqh*-related topics. In fact, they appear only as a reiteration of arguments already presented, without stressing comparisons with other prophets. One element that appears here for the first time, and that will become a *topos* of later *khaṣā'iṣ* literature, is the separation between the characteristics that make Muḥammad exceptional in this world and those that relate to the afterlife (*ākhira*).[26]

21 Melchert, "Khargūshī".

22 ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, "Critical Edition"; Kharkūshī, *Manāhil al-shifā'*.

23 Kharkūshī, *Manāhil al-shifā'* IV, 191.

24 Kharkūshī, *Manāhil al-shifā'* IV, 95–6.

25 Kharkūshī, *Manāhil al-shifā'* IV, 208–34.

26 Kharkūshī distinguishes only the ones related to the *ākhira*: Kharkūshī, *Manāhil al-shifā'* IV, 213.

The general aim of al-Kharkūshī is to show how God had favoured (*faḍḍala*) Muḥammad over other prophets. The argument is clear in a chapter whose complete title is *Bāb jāmiʿ fī faḍl al-Nabī ṣalla llāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam wa-mā warada* [*sic*] *min al-ḍalāla ʿalā tafḍīlihi ʿalā sāʾir al-anbiyāʾ wa-l-mursalīn* (Chapter on the merit of the Prophet and the reported proofs of his excellence over the other prophets and messengers).[27] The proofs proposed are the same as those used in the *dalāʾil* section. Among them is the classical *uʿṭītu khamsa* narrative,[28] in which Muḥammad affirms that he has been given five (or seven, or more) things that were given to no other prophet.

At the beginning of this section, al-Kharkūshī says: *Qāla baʿḍuhum khaṣāʾiṣ al-Nabī ʿalayhi al-ṣalāt wa-l-salām ghayr muḥṣāt* ('Some say that the *khaṣāʾiṣ* of the Messenger cannot be counted').[29] This can be interpreted as a reference to earlier literature on the topic, seen from a perspective that is not merely legalistic, because that would imply a limit to the number of *khaṣāʾiṣ*. Thus, Kharkūshī's work appears as part of a pre-existing trend, of texts that consider *khaṣāʾiṣ* as a topic separate from jurisprudence, and as part of a discourse about the Prophet himself. Here, the countless prerogatives of Muḥammad become a reason for increased love and admiration for him, regardless of their legal relevance.

Another text that marks a similar turning point, and has known more success than the *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā*: Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's (d. 543/1149) *Kitāb al-Shifāʾ bi-taʿrīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā*.[30] The two works and their authors differ in several respects: Kharkūshī lived in the east of the Islamic world, while Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ was active in the Maghreb. The former belonged to the Shāfiʿī Islamic school, the latter was a Mālikī. Al-Kharkūshī was a preacher, and was acquainted with Sufism (or he was himself a Sufi), while Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ was a judge and was even related in some sources to have approved the burning of Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*.[31]

27 Kharkūshī, *Manāhil al-shifāʾ* IV, 191.

28 Kharkūshī, *Manāhil al-shifāʾ* IV, 193–97; Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥadīth* no. 335 reports one of the many different lists of these five (or more) gifts from God to Muḥammad: 'The Prophet said, "I have been given five things which were not given to anyone else before me. Allah made me victorious by awe (by frightening my enemies) for a distance of one month's journey. The earth has been made for me (and for my followers) a place for praying and a thing to perform *tayammum*, therefore anyone of my followers can pray wherever the time of a prayer is due. Booty has been made lawful for me, yet it was not lawful for anyone else before me. I have been given the right of intercession (on the Day of Resurrection). Every Prophet used to be sent to his nation only, but I have been sent to all mankind."'

29 Kharkūshī, *Manāhil al-shifāʾ* IV, 208.

30 Gomez-Rivas, "Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ".

31 Gomez-Rivas "Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ" 329. For the complex history of the introduction of the *Iḥyāʾ* in al-Andalus, see Safran, "Politics of book-burning"; Ruano, "Why Did the Scholars of al-Andalus Distrust al-Ghazālī?".

As for the aims of the two works, their introductions contain particularly important differences. Al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ says, in the introduction of the *Shifāʾ*:

> You have repeatedly asked me to write something that gathers together all that is necessary to acquaint the reader with the true stature of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, with the esteem and respect that is due to him, and with the verdict regarding anyone who does not fulfil what his stature demands, or who attempts to denigrate his supreme status, even by as much as a nail-paring. I have been asked to compile what our forebears and Imams have said on this subject, and I will amplify it with *āya*s from the Qurʾān and other examples.[32]

Here the reasons adduced by Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ are mainly legal: he wants to define the boundaries of what it is permissible to say about the Prophet, giving a complete account of the sources exalting his status and function. On the other hand, in the introduction of the *Sharaf* Kharkūshī states: "What urged me to compose the *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* is love for Muḥammad the Messenger and affection in speaking of him, because a person who loves something speaks of it quite often".[33]

The difference between the two is quite patent: in the case of Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, the necessity for such a composition is presented as coming from outside himself; for Kharkūshī it is his inner spiritual state that urges him to write a book about the Prophet. This, however, is not reflected in the actual success and readership of the two works. The *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* has circulated mainly among learned men of *ḥadīth*, and we find it mentioned by later authors, such as al-Suyūṭī; very few manuscript copies are extant. Compare this with the enormous success encountered by the *Shifāʾ*, which enjoyed a steady diffusion and was credited with miraculous properties, such as it protecting ships carrying it from sinking, or it healing the sick.[34] Its transformation from a legal text into one of the most copied and sold works on the Prophet Muḥammad was an unsought and – possibly – unexpected consequence for Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ.

The section of the *Shifāʾ* about *khaṣāʾiṣ* is not structured on the basis of juridical categories, revolving instead around miracles. After a list of traditions about the Prophet's principal miracles, and an analysis of the use of the term *muʿjiza*, al-Qādī ʿIyāḍ devotes an entire section to the *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* (inimitability of the Qurʾān),[35] followed by an analysis of the *inshiqāq al-qamar* (splitting of the

32 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, vi.
33 Kharkūshī, *Manāhil al-shifāʾ*.
34 See Gomez-Rivas, "Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ".
35 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifāʾ*, 358–96.

moon),[36] of the water flowing from Muḥammad's fingers,[37] and other miracles. Then the discussion moves to cover the *ʿiṣma* (immunity from error and sin) of Muḥammad, and to other "explicit" (*bāhira*) miracles. To indicate miracles Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ uses *muʿjiza* in most cases, along with *karāma* and *dalīl*, without any distinction in meaning, while the terms denote different phenomena. This lack of proper functional distinction implies that the author's aim is to discuss the exceptional character of certain events as part of a more general description of the Prophet. The analysis of legal or doctrinal subtleties is avoided in most cases, as it is any contextualisation of the episodes narrated. For example, there is no discussion at all, in the section devoted to the *khaṣā'iṣ*, of questions regarding the wives of the Prophet.[38] Little of Qāḍī ʿIyād's *Shifā'*, then, can be counted alongside books of *khaṣā'iṣ nabawiyya*, except for the discussion of the miraculous events that characterised the life of the Prophet. The author also avoids any form of comparison with other prophets, focusing only on Muḥammad as the main character of his work.

Neither the *Shifā'* nor the *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* belongs to the genre of *khaṣā'iṣ*. Nonetheless, these texts played a fundamental role in defining a different approach to literature about Muḥammad, one that exceeded the boundaries of collections of *ḥadīth* or *sīra*. Here, different genres are included, and transcended, in a multi-faceted description of the Prophet, including many (if not all) aspects of his personality and functions. This shift in writing about Muḥammad would inspire later authors of *khaṣā'iṣ* works, giving legitimacy to an expansion of the set of sources on which they drew, and of the number of characteristics examined.

3 *Khaṣā'iṣ* Literature at the Dawn of the Mamlūk Period: Ibn Diḥya and ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Salām

As far as our information can allow us to reconstruct the diffusion of *khaṣā'iṣ* texts, it seems that the Mamlūk period witnessed an extraordinary flowering of this genre. Its development appears to have started just before the formal beginning of Mamlūk rule in Egypt and Syria (648/1250). These texts seem to continue the tradition started in *Shāfiʿī* circles, as all their authors – with one significant exception – belong to this *madhhab*.

36 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifā'*, 396–401.
37 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifā'*, 402–10.
38 ʿIyāḍ, *Shifā'*, 511–15.

The first text we know of is Ibn Diḥya al-Kalbī's (d. 633/1235) *Nihāyat al-sūl*.[39] Its author was born in al-Andalus, lived part of his life there, and was a pupil of Ibn Bashkuwāl (d. 578/1183).[40] He travelled to the east and became head of the Ayyūbid *Dār al-ḥadīth* in Cairo. We have no information about his affiliation to any specific *madhhab*. His Andalusian origins and sojourn in the Maghreb suggest that he may have belonged to the *Mālikī* school, but it's also possible that he adhered to local *Ẓāhirī* circles. During his travels he probably met *Shāfiʿī* scholars and read books from this school, becoming acquainted with their legal approach to *khaṣā'iṣ* issues. He is also the author of the text considered to be the very first *mawlid*, the *Tanwīr fī mawlid al-sirāj al-munīr*,[41] together with other works, about the *miʿrāj* and the Names of the Prophet.[42] His *Niḥāyat al-sūl fī khaṣā'iṣ al-Rasūl* is not conceived as a work of devotion, as the others, mentioned above, have often been considered. In his introduction, Ibn Diḥya states that the book is about 'the exclusive aspects of the Messenger of God',[43] clearly defining the thematic boundaries of his discourse. As he came from al-Andalus, he was probably acquainted with the *Shifā'*, and we have no information as to whether he knew, and drew inspiration from, the *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā*. The only possible reference in Ibn Diḥya's text to the context in which Kharkūshī lived and wrote is the mention of Khorasan and Baghdad at the end of his introduction,[44] suggesting that Ibn Diḥya's text could have been written during or after his eastern trips.[45]

The text itself starts with some *khaṣā'iṣ* about Muḥammad's wives, and continues by listing *khaṣā'iṣ* touching on different points: from God swearing by the Prophet's life[46] to more technical ones, such as the possibility (for Muḥammad) of judging without referring to the Qur'ān itself. Almost every *khaṣīṣa* is followed by a long discussion based on Qur'ānic and *ḥadīth* quotations. For example, the section about Muḥammad having been assigned the

39 On him see *EI*^{2}, III, 747.

40 This connection is particularly intriguing, as Ibn Bashkuwāl is the author of a fundamental work on the prayer of the Prophet, *Kitāb al-qurba ilā Rabb al-ʿālamīn*; see Ibn Bashkuwāl, *Qurba*.

41 Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 152.

42 The text is not extant. See Katz, *Birth of the Prophet Muhammad*, 51.

43 Ibn Diḥya, *Nihāyat al-sūl*, 34. This edition of the text presents several inconsistencies and allows only for a more general discourse, as details of the text (such as its subdivision into chapters, and the order of the topics) seem to have been re-elaborated by the editor.

44 Ibn Diḥya, *Nihāyat al-sūl*, 37.

45 It should be noted that this period precedes Ibn Diḥya's trip to Erbil in 1207, when he was present at a *mawlid* festival and wrote his *Tanwīr*. See *EI*^{2}, III, 747.

46 Ibn Diḥya, *Nihāyat al-sūl*, 39–42.

Kawthar river in paradise[47] appears to be a lengthy commentary on *sūra* 108, giving etymologies and cases of previous uses for words, and precise definitions of the nature of the river. Legal decisions (*aḥkām*) are considered from two points of view: those that apply only to the Prophet and those that apply only to the *umma* (with the exception of other communities in the past).[48]

The section on miracles[49] is separate from the rest of the discourse, but it nevertheless maintains the same attitude as the rest of the text. Here, Ibn Diḥya analyses the nature of miracles, comparing those of Muḥammad to miracles performed by other prophets. The approach differs from that of al-Kharkūshī; here the *tafḍīl* argument stays in the background of the discourse, and the author uses the similarity between miracles as proof that they are genuine. For example, the fact that water flowed from a stone that Moses struck with his staff confirms the truth of the episode of water flowing from Muḥammad's fingers.[50]

In this section, as in many others, Ibn Diḥya digresses several times, sometimes on subjects only remotely connected to the main topic. Concluding his work, he discusses the merits of making supplications to God (*duʿāʾ*), including a tradition about *dhikr* circles.[51] This in itself does not suffice to support a postulation that he was involved with Sufism and Sufi practices, but it at least shows that for Ibn Diḥya they could be included in the discourse about *khaṣāʾiṣ*.

ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām (d. 660/1262) was the last author of texts about *khaṣāʾiṣ* to have been active before the advent of Mamlūk power in Egypt and Syria. He was a *Shāfiʿī* jurist and an *Ashʿarī* theologian, considered the *mujtahid muṭlaq* of his age.[52] He was acquainted with Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardi (d. 632/1234) and the circles of the Egyptian Shādhiliyya, whom he joined in *samāʿ* sessions.[53] Sources are unclear regarding his formal affiliation to a *ṭarīqa*, but his approval of *ṣūfī* practices is undoubtable.

His *Bidāyat al-sūl fī tafḍīl al-Rasūl* is a short collection of traditions that consider the *faḍāʾil* (merits) as a specific form of *khaṣāʾiṣ*. At the beginning of the work, commenting on the fact that Adam will be under Muḥammad's

47 Ibn Diḥya, *Nihāyat al-sūl*, 144–69.

48 Ibn Diḥya, *Nihāyat al-sūl*, 280, 353.

49 Ibn Diḥya, *Nihāyat al-sūl*, 169.

50 Ibn Diḥya, *Nihāyat al-sūl*, 182.

51 Ibn Diḥya, *Nihāyat al-sūl*, 483.

52 *EI*^{2}, IX, 812–13. For the notion of *mujtahid* and *ijtihād*, see Hallaq, "On the Origins". The *mujtahid muṭlaq* is the jurist who is able to derive the positive doctrines of Islamic jurisprudence directly from primary sources.

53 He often visited both the founder of the ṭarīqa, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), and his successor, Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (d. 685/1287).

banner on the Day of Resurrection, ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām says that "Those *khaṣāʾiṣ* point to the height of [Muḥammad's] degree over Adam and the other [Prophets], considering that *tafḍīl* (preference) means being characterised (*takhṣīṣ*) by miraculous deeds (*manāqib*) and degrees (*marātib*)".[54] This idea clearly deviates from the legal character of other works on the same topic, and marks the passage of the *khaṣāʾiṣ* from a jurisprudential to a more devotional outlook by discussing the spiritual stature of Muḥammad. In the analysis of the last of the forty traditions[55] regarding the status of *jawāmiʿ al-kalim*,[56] Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām states that no one knows the nobility of the Prophet unless they are favoured by Muḥammad himself, echoing a typical Sufi attitude.[57] Here the believer is put into a direct relationship with the Prophet, who is granting specific knowledge of purely spiritual issues.

From this point on, in part because of the fame of ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām, we see a flowering of texts about *khaṣāʾiṣ nabawiyya*; these texts share with the *Bidāya* an attention to the spiritual aspects of the figure of Muḥammad. These works also often make use of the *tafḍīl* argument as part of the discussion of *khaṣāʾiṣ*, reflecting the assumptions made by ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām.

4 Suyūṭī and *Khaṣāʾiṣ* Literature in Mamlūk Egypt

The adoption of a more spiritually aware attitude towards the Prophet does not automatically imply that *khaṣāʾiṣ* were considered only to be manifestations of the unique metaphysical status of Muḥammad. This genre would always remain rooted in the domain of jurisprudence and *ḥadīth*. For instance, attention to variants of the same tradition, and discussion of the *isnād*, would not disappear during the Mamlūk period. What we observe is the shifting of primary focus, from the determination of legal dispositions valid only for Muḥammad to the depiction of his exceptional status among other prophets and the rest of humankind.

To improve our understanding of this shift in works on the *khaṣāʾiṣ*, from a legalistic to a spiritual approach, it is necessary to consider the social conditions under which *ʿulamāʾ* produced their scholarly works at that time. As has

54 ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām, *Bidāyat al-sūl*, 8.

55 ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām, *Bidāyat al-sūl*, 23ff.

56 This expression refers to the fact that the Qurʾān is considered to epitomise and contain all previous revelations.

57 The doctrine of the so-called *ṭarīqa muḥammadiyya* appeared quite late in the Islamic world. On the other hand, the mediating role of the Prophet was recognised from the time of the early development of *taṣawwuf*; see Addas, *Maison muhammadienne*.

been clearly described by Yaacov Lev,[58] relationships between Muslim scholars and Mamlūk *amīr*s were symbiotic. On the one hand, political power needed religious legitimisation that could only be provided by the class of scholars who preserved and elaborated the Muḥammadan tradition. On the other, *ʿulamāʾ* needed public jobs in order to support their lives and studies. This symbiosis found its most obvious expression in the institution of the *waqf*, which allowed Mamlūks – who were formally slaves, and thus not allowed to inherit according to Islamic law – to preserve the goods that they obtained in return for their services to the state, and pass them on to their progeny. The profits of their fiefs could be allotted to the benefit of a mosque, a *madrasa*, or other pious institution. Their family members and descendants were appointed as supervisors of their *waqf*, with significant remuneration. *ʿUlamāʾ* could then aspire to play a role in the growing system of *awqāf* (pl. of *waqf*) and, more generally, in the expanding apparatus of the Mamlūk state.

The competition for these positions was fierce. The ability to establish relations with key figures among the Mamlūks was essential. Also, fame and public favour played an important role in establishing the pre-eminence of one *ʿālim* over his colleagues. This part of the battle was fought through public debates, polemics such as the one that arose around Ibn al-Fāriḍ's verses,[59] and the publication of books that demonstrated the vastness of one's knowledge in one of the many fields of Islamic science.

From this point of view, the *khaṣāʾiṣ* constituted a perfect battlefield, as they had virtually no doctrinal or juridical implications (not in an almost totally *sunnī* environment, at least) and were thus open to the addition of new traditions, as well as some traditions of relatively dubious authenticity. This does not imply that the bulk of *khaṣāʾiṣ* works produced during the Mamlūk period must be considered as merely the result of academic competition, because if that were the case, the whole corpus of Islamic literature of this period would have to be considered in the same way. The tendency to amass more traditions has to be considered alongside the growing importance of Sufism among *ʿulamāʾ*.[60]

Polemic pamphlets against Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poems and doctrines[61] addressed theological issues that were also relevant to discussion of *khaṣāʾiṣ*. On the other side of the polemic, al-Suyūṭī and others continued to publish works in

58 Lev, "Symbiotic Relations".
59 Homerin, *From Arab Poet to Muslim Saint*.
60 Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie*, 89–101; 149–50; 452–74.
61 Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī*, 210–224.

defence of the orthodoxy of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's verses.[62] The initiation of polemics was one of the strategies commonly used by Mamlūk *'ulamā'* to discredit adversaries and gain credibility with the general public and the *amīr*s. Such a strategy could be hazardous, turning against the person who set the polemic in motion. *Khaṣā'iṣ* were a more neutral field than Sufi poetry, and battles in this field were fought over the increasing number of traditions that showed facets of Muḥammad's figure that had until then remained unexplored. This matched the growing importance that the figure of the Prophet had gained in Mamlūk Sufism. The expansion of the doctrine of the "Muḥammadan way" (*al-Ṭarīqa al-muḥammadiyya*)[63] as the core of the Sufism of the *ṭuruq* is already reflected, though often vaguely, in the work of Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām. His reference to the mediation of the Prophet in his own acquisition of knowledge of his degree of nearness to God was clearly inspired by the Sufi doctrine of spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) and shows how the idea of *tawassul* (intercession) started to be considered a necessary means of obtaining metaphysical knowledge.

Judging from the list reported by Ḥājjī Khalīfa, it seems that the *Bidāya* was the starting point for the expansion of the *khaṣā'iṣ* genre. This coincidence of timing does not imply a cause-and-effect relationship. It seems more plausible that the work of Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām responded to the exigencies of the *'ulamā'*, who wanted to have a new and fertile battlefield in which to compete, one that also had a certain social resonance in Sufi milieus. The *Kashf al-ẓunūn*, in the passage devoted to Suyūṭī's *al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā*,[64] lists a number of similar works by other authors of the Mamlūk period. Some of these seem to be lost, such as those of Yūsūf b. Mūsā al-Masadī (d. 663/1265), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Bulqīnī (d. 824/1421), and Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shāmī (d. 874/1470). Ḥājjī Khalīfa also mentions a work attributed to Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 853/1449), *al-Anwār* [*bi-khaṣā'iṣ al-mukhtār*], that is attested elsewhere in the *Kashf al-ẓunūn*.[65] To these works, all lost, should be added others that are still extant and could help to trace a possible path for the development of the *khaṣā'iṣ* genre in the Mamlūk period.

While it is not a work devoted solely to our topic, it is nevertheless worth mentioning the shorter version of the *Sīra*, written by Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), called, in its printed edition, *al-Fuṣūl fī sīrat al-Rasūl*.[66] A section of this biographical work on Muḥammad, written by one of Ibn Taymiyya's most

62 Suyuṭī, *al-Barq al-wāmiḍ*.
63 Geoffroy *Le soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie*, 101–105; Addas, *Maison muhammadienne*, 104–108.
64 Ḥājjī Khalīfa, *Kashf*, 706.
65 Ḥājjī Khalīfa, *Kashf*, 195.
66 Ibn Kathīr, *Fuṣūl*.

influential disciples, is devoted to *Shamā'il* and *khaṣā'iṣ*.[67] The latter are divided into two main groups: those distinguishing Muḥammad from the other prophets, and those defining his difference from his *umma*. The latter grouping is, in its turn, divided into books on different topics (*kitab al-īmān*, *kitab al-ṭahāra*), organised according to the usual order of *fiqh* treatises. The book on marriage includes three sections about what is permitted, prohibited and compulsory for the Prophet in this respect. This organisation by topic is discussed in the introduction of the section: Ibn Kathīr defends the legitimacy of writing about *khaṣā'iṣ*, reporting that this is the opinion of *jumhūr al-aṣḥāb*, the majority of the followers of Shāfi'ī.[68]

Ibn Kathīr[69] follows previous authors of jurisprudence books by putting the discussion of *khaṣā'iṣ* in the chapter devoted to marriage. Other authors pay less attention to *nikāḥ* and related issues, focusing more on miracles. In this regard it is noteworthy that Ibn Kathir does not use the word *mu'jiza* (miracle) at all in this section, preferring the more neutral *faḍā'il* (merits), used in the sense of God's favours, and not in the context of the *tafḍīl* argument. Considering Ibn Kathīr's tepid attitude towards Sufism, and towards devotional practices in general, which he probably derived from his master, Ibn Taymiyya, this is anything but surprising.

The first work of the Mamlūk period devoted exclusively to *khaṣā'iṣ* was Ibn al-Mulaqqin's *Ghāyat al-sūl fī khaṣā'iṣ al-Rasūl*. The assonance of the title with the those of works by Ibn Diḥya and Ibn 'Abd al-Salām clearly expresses the author's desire to inscribe his text in the line of an established tradition. Ibn al-Mulaqqin also benefited from Ibn Kathīr's notes on the organisation of the topics. In the *Ghāya* he extends the distinction, dividing every section into two parts: one reporting characteristics related to marriage and one to those that are not so related. His interest in Sufism[70] is not reflected in specific attention to miracles, but can be seen in his discussion of the possibility of seeing the Prophet in dreams. Starting from the famous tradition saying that the devil cannot take Muḥammad's form,[71] Ibn al-Mulaqqin continues by describing different types of visions that were said to have occurred under various conditions. Ibn al-Mulaqqin is not the first writer to deal with this topic; Ibn

67 Ibn Kathīr, *Fuṣūl*, 278–332.

68 Ibn Kathīr, *Fuṣūl*, 280.

69 Ibn Kathīr, *Fuṣūl*, 278–79.

70 He composed a work on the generations of Sufis, Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā'*. In biographical sources there is no mention of his affiliation to any Sufi order, while Hofer reports that he was buried in the Sufi cemetery outside Bāb al-Naṣr, in Cairo; see Hofer, "Ibn al-Mulaqqin".

71 Ibn al-Mulaqqin, *Ghāyat al-sūl*, 290.

Diḥya[72] had already briefly discussed a similar tradition. The difference lies in the approach, because Ibn Diḥya did not consider visions to be part of the discourse on *karāmāt*. This is certainly not a definitive argument for a clear influence of Sufi doctrines and debates on *khaṣā'iṣ* literature. However, the inclusion of spiritual experiences in the domain of jurisprudence and *ḥadīth* criticism is a phenomenon that is clearly visible in the development of works of *khaṣā'iṣ*.

Ḥayḍarī's (d. 888/1483) *al-Lafẓ al-mukarram fī khaṣā'iṣ al-Nabī*[73] is part of this trend, despite the fact that its author was not himself a Sufi.[74] He was a prominent, though controversial, judge and *muḥaddith*, of Damascene origin, who developed his career in Cairo under the guidance of his master, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1448). The *Lafẓ*[75] is subdivided into different *anwā'* (types of *khaṣā'iṣ*). Every section is divided into two parts, according to the usual subdivision: one devoted to traditions regarding marriage, and one to other traditions.[76] The whole is preceded by a long introduction in which the author follows Ibn al-Mulaqqin in justifying having written about *khaṣā'iṣ*. The first section, about *wājibāt*, opens with a discussion of the famous *ḥadīth al-nawāfil* used by al-Ḥayḍarī to justify the large number of acts made compulsory for the Prophet in the light of the higher reward granted for *farā'iḍ* (religious legal obligations).[77] The fact that this tradition is commonly used by Sufis to urge *murīd*s (disciples) to consider the importance of obligatory *'ibādāt* (acts of

72 Ibn Diḥya, *Nihāyat al-sūl*, 344.

73 Ḥayḍarī, *al-Lafẓ al-mukarram.*

74 But apparently he wrote a work about the prayer on the Prophet, *al-Liwā' al-mu'allam bi-mawāḍin al-ṣalāt 'alā l-Nabī 'alayhi al-ṣalāt wa-l-salām*, mentioned in Khayḍarī, *al-Lafẓ al-mukarram*, 38.

75 Brockelmann and Lameer, *History of the Arabic Written Tradition*, Suppl. II, 120; GAL II, 98, S II, 116; Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian*, 271.

76 It seems that Ibn al-Mulaqqin used *karāma* instead of *mu'jiza* without sensing the distinction made between the miracles of the saints (*karāmāt*) and those of the Prophet (*mu'jizāt*). This would prove that, for Ibn al-Mulaqqin, the discourse about sanctity was not related to the one about prophecy.

77 The text of the *ḥadīth* is as follows: "Allah has said: Whoever treats a friend (*walī*) of mine with enmity, I declare war on him. There is nothing by which my servant draws close to me that is dearer to me than that which I have imposed (*iftaraḍtu*) upon him; and my servant does not cease to draw close to me by supererogatory works (*nawāfil*) until I love him, and when I love him, I become his hearing (*sam'*) by which he hears, his sight (*baṣar*) by which he sees, his hand by which he forcibly seizes, and his leg by which he walks. If he asks me, I give him, and if he seeks my refuge, I grant it to him. There is no action of mine in which I waver more than [taking] the soul of a believer: he hates dying, and I hate doing him wrong". For a discussion of the importance of this tradition in Sufi milieux, see Ebstein, "Organs of God".

worship) shows how this point of view played a certain role in a text that is primarily a work of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* criticism. For instance, the discourse on miracles related to marriage,[78] discussing in detail all the merits of Muḥammad's wives, is purely legalistic, avoiding any reference to their spiritual stature or their roles as intermediaries for the community of believers.

All the works discussed up to this point appear to have maintained a focus on jurisprudence, and they seem to have considered *khaṣā'iṣ* as a sub-topic of *fiqh*, one that was worthy of discussion among specialists. The appearance of some relatively unimportant references to Sufi themes does not imply a full shift of *khaṣā'iṣ* from legalistic to devotional literature. In any case, the broadening of the scope of jurisprudence is evident in these texts through the shift from the presentation of the Prophet as a model for Muslim society to the presentation of Muḥammad's life as the occasion on which God's favour manifested itself in its fullest and most perfect form. It is this broadening that allowed *khaṣā'iṣ* to become a preferred genre for authors for whom spiritual awareness was important.

For an assessment of the increasing influence of Sufi discourse on *khaṣā'iṣ* we can refer to Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) works. Suyūṭī is a crucial figure in the development of the Islamic literary and intellectual tradition.[79] His involvement in *taṣawwuf* was not publicly advertised, but it is clear from many of his works; for example, *Ta'yīd al-ḥaqīqat al-ʿaliyya fī tashyīd al-ṭarīqa al-Shādhiliyya*,[80] or his *fatāwā* on Sufi doctrinal points, such as the existence of the hierarchy of saints.[81] Suyūṭī wrote three works on *khaṣā'iṣ*, the most famous being the *Kifāyat al-ṭālib al-labīb fī khaṣā'iṣ al-Ḥabīb*,[82] better known as *al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā*. The work was abridged by its author in the *Unmūdhaj al-labīb fī khaṣā'iṣ al-ḥabīb*.[83] A third work, textually independent from the other two while maintaining the same approach, is the *Ṭarḥ al-saqaṭ fī naẓm al-luqaṭ*.[84]

The simple fact that he devoted three of his many works to the same topic is quite significant in itself. Each of the texts has a different structure, responding to different exigencies. The major one aims at being an all-encompassing

78 The last chapter, about miracles, seems to be incomplete in the printed edition, as two sections are announced (one about miracles related to marriage, and one about the others), but only one is present.

79 See Sartain, *Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti*; Ghersetti, *Al-Suyūṭī*; Skreslet Hernandez, *Legal Thought.*

80 Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie*, 150–52; 337–39; 391–96; 516; Suyuṭī, *Ta'yīd al-ḥaqīqa*.

81 Suyūṭī, *al-Khabar al-dāll*.

82 Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā*.

83 Suyūṭī, *Unmūdhaj*.

84 Suyūṭī, *Thalāth rasā'il*.

text about the Prophet, using the *khaṣā'iṣ* as a theme to guide the reader from a section devoted to *sīra* and military campaigns[85] to a list of Muḥammad's miracles, signs (*ayāt*) and invocations (*ad'iya*).[86] Only after this point does Suyūṭī start the discussion of *khaṣā'iṣ*. The change of paradigm from previous works is evident in the different subdivisions of the topic, extending the *tafḍīl* argument to the whole domain of the specific characteristics of the Prophet. Suyūṭī starts by listing the *khaṣā'iṣ* that make Muḥammad different from other prophets,[87] and also from his community, because of the duties only he has to fulfil (*wājibāt*).[88] A further distinction is made between the Muslim *umma* and the communities of all the other prophets.[89] This subdivision excludes other juridical categories, such as permissions and prohibitions (or does not explicitly include them); these are merely interspersed among the other *khaṣā'iṣ*, following the example of the *sīra*, and the book ends with the fact that Muḥammad is living in his tomb, and with the signs connected with his death.[90]

The scheme used in the *Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā* is essentially preserved in the *Unmūdhaj*.[91] The *sīra*-related part, which constitutes the bulk of the *Kifāya*, is completely absent in this abridgement.[92] The work focuses on the *khaṣā'iṣ*, organised in two main chapters: one on the character traits that distinguish Muḥammad from other prophets, and one that relates the differences between him and his community. The first[93] is divided into four sections on the essence of the Prophet and his community, in this world and the hereafter. The second chapter deals with the Muslim community only,[94] including sections on duties, prohibitions, permissible acts and miracles.

The third text is the shortest. Internal evidence clearly shows that it was written after the other two,[95] and it focuses on clarifying issues connected with the tradition that the Prophet was sent with both the law (*sharī'a*) and the spiritual reality (*ḥaqīqa*). The *Ṭarḥ al-saqaṭ* begins with some *khaṣā'iṣ* distinguishing Muḥammad from the other prophets, such as the fact that the

85 Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā*, I, 5 – II, 213.
86 Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā*, II, 214 – III, 102.
87 Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā*, III, 125.
88 Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā*, III, 251.
89 Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā*, III, 338.
90 Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā*, III, 403.
91 Suyūṭī, *Unmūdhaj al-labīb*.
92 The printed edition is one hundred and twenty pages long, much shorter than the one thousand two hundred pages of the *Kifāya*.
93 Suyūṭī, *Unmūdhaj al-labīb*, 11–52.
94 Suyūṭī does acknowledge some overlap with the previous chapter: *Suyuṭī, Unmūdhaj al-labīb*, 53.
95 The work makes explicit reference to the *Unmūdhaj* (Suyuṭī, *Thalāth rasā'il*, 71; 86).

Qur'ān encompasses all previous revelations.[96] The discussion is organised as a dialogue with a fictitious[97] opponent, who denies that the unity of *sharī'a* and *ḥaqīqa* is a proper *khaṣīṣa*. The opponent's question is based on the argument that saints also have knowledge of both law and spiritual reality, so this knowledge is not exclusive to Muḥammad. This characteristic of the Prophet is absent in all works written before Suyūṭī, and in the *Ṭarḥ al-saqaṭ* we see clearly how the *khaṣā'iṣ* themselves, and the issues they raised, were part of an environment in which Sufism and the spiritual facets of Muḥammad's figure played an essential role. Suyūṭī, quoting Ibn Diḥya's *Nihāya*,[98] mentions the fact that the Prophet could, without clear proof, kill anyone who committed adultery, while this was prohibited to anyone else. He then reports that a saint killed his parents' servant because it was revealed to him (*kushifa*) that the latter might become an unbeliever. The reference to the episode about al-Khiḍr, narrated in the Qur'ān, is quite clear,[99] and this constitutes the final argument allowing Suyūṭī to distinguish between Muḥammad, the other prophets, and Muslim saints. Acknowledging this, Suyūṭī also accepts knowledge acquired through *kashf* as a hermeneutic category in the field of jurisprudence.

Towards the end of this brief text Suyūṭī clarifies his position regarding the meaning of *ḥaqīqa*. He says that he refers to the notion elaborated by Sufis, with one major difference: quoting Ibn ʿAṭā'Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 708/1309), he states that prophets have knowledge of the inner reality of matters (*ḥaqā'iq al-umūr*), while saints only look at their imaginal aspects (*mithāl*).[100] This affirmation has specific doctrinal implications that are beyond the remit of the present chapter, but in any case, its existence confirms the shift of *khaṣā'iṣ* literature, from a purely legal domain to one that is spiritual and metaphysical.

These three works by Suyūṭī reflect three different stages in the evolution of the genre. In the *Kifāya* he re-links the *khaṣā'iṣ* to the domain of the *sīra*, broadening the scope of inquiry: here the context of the *khaṣa'iṣ* is no longer the exceptional character of some legal dispositions regarding marriage,[101] but the figure of Muḥammad in its entirety. In the *Unmūdhaj*, with its alteration of the usual structure of legal argumentations, the emphasis is on the relationship

96 Suyuṭī, *Thalāth rasā'il*, 70. It is interesting to note that this *khaṣīṣa* is quoted directly from the *Unmūdhaj*.

97 Considering Suyūṭī's numerous opponents, it is possible that the whole work is a response to an objection coming from one of his contemporaries.

98 Suyuṭī, *Thalāth rasā'il*, 74.

99 Suyūṭī, some lines below, considers him among the prophets who have been sent to rule according only to the *ḥaqīqa*, while Moses could rule according only to the *sharī'a*.

100 Suyuṭī, *Thalāth rasā'il*, 87.

101 In fact, *nikāḥ*-related issues are scattered throughout the text.

between the Prophet, the other *anbiyā'*, and the Muslim community. Marriage issues, and events relating to Muḥammad's birth and death, are almost all in the *karāmāt* section at the end of the work,[102] which changes the model for such discussions: the central theme of *khaṣā'iṣ* is now the Prophet as a unique event in the history of creation. In the third text, the *Ṭarḥ al-laqaṭ*, we see how a specific issue, such as the possibility, for Muḥammad, of judging according to his own knowledge of the hidden reality of things, already mentioned in earlier works, is now the point of departure for a discussion of the different degrees of knowledge possessed by Muslim saints and other prophets. This centrality of Muḥammad is not new in Islamic literature and it is possible to see a similar attitude in such works as Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ's *Shifā'*. What's interesting here is the evolution of a genre that has moved from a strictly legal framework to a discussion of the spiritual status of Muḥammad. From this point of view, such texts may be considered a form of devotion expressed through legal argumentation and *ḥadīth* criticism. These texts are not lyrical or inspiring, like the poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, or the prayers of the Shādhiliyya and the Aḥmadiyya, but are rather the expression of a diffused tendency to consider the Prophet as the centre of an Islamic religious experience. Suyūṭī defended the practice of *mawlid*,[103] but did not write any devotional works as such, always maintaining the scholarly attitude that he considered fitting in his own role as the *mujaddid*,[104] the reviver of Islamic tradition. Thus, we can consider these works as the expression of Suyūṭī's own attitude towards Muḥammad, a way for him to help establish once and for all the exalted stature of the Prophet of Islam. This attitude was shared by his contemporaries, and by *'ulamā'* of subsequent generations, to the point that almost all other works on *khaṣā'iṣ* in the Ottoman period were re-elaborations of Suyūṭī's.

5 *Khaṣā'iṣ* after Suyūṭī

The *Unmūdhaj* and the *Kifāya* were particularly influential texts, despite the polemics that surrounded them and their author. Suyūṭī accused Qasṭallānī's (d. 923/1517) *Mawāhib al-laduniyya bi-l-minaḥ al-muḥammadiyya* of containing plagiarism of some of his (Suyūṭī's) works on *khaṣā'iṣ*.[105] The structure of

102 Suyuṭī, *Unmūdhaj al-labīb*, 77–89.

103 Suyuṭī,*Ḥusn al-maqṣid*, 1985b.

104 Sartain, *Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti*, 24; 70–1.

105 Qasṭallānī, *Mawāhib*. Suyūṭī discussed this plagiarism in his maqāma called *al-Fāriq bayna al-muṣannif wa-l-sāriq*, Suyuṭī, *al-Fāriq.* Qasṭallānī does mention his sources for the *khaṣā'iṣ*, including al-Ḥayḍarī but not Suyūṭī; see Qasṭallānī, *Mawāhib*.

Qasṭallānī's text is clearly inspired by al-Suyūṭī's *Kifāya*: it starts with *sīra* and then moves on to more specific topics. However, the section about *khaṣā'iṣ* is quite incidental in the general plan of the work.[106] In the *Mawāhib*, for example, the different names of the Prophet are listed and commented on,[107] and there is also a chapter devoted specifically to the *mi'rāj*.[108]

Qasṭallānī's *Khaṣā'iṣ* chapter opens with a discussion of miracles, followed by a discussion of *wājibāt* that, as in the *Kifāya*, includes a number of other issues. The final section is devoted to the *umma*, which is distinguished from other religious communities by virtue of its Prophet. Neither the structure nor the content of this section has any novel characteristics in comparison with the *Kifāya*. Qasṭallānī's overall attitude can be grasped from the presence of chapters about the compulsory nature of love for the Prophet (*wujūb maḥabbatihi*),[109] which include a substantial section about the prayer on the Prophet.[110] In this section we find lists of different ways of practising the *taṣliya* and of the best moments for performing it (at the end of ritual prayer, during the visit to Medina, when one has forgotten something, or even during sexual intercourse). Prayer on the Prophet had been a subject for *khaṣā'iṣ* since Ibn Diḥya,[111] but not in the context of love for Muḥammad. The practice was simply considered commendable in earlier times, but its importance grew to the extent that Qasṭallānī, despite his aversion to *taṣawwuf*, devoted an entire chapter to the *taṣliya*. It should to be noted that, like Ibn Diḥya, he considered only prayers that were attested in more or less sound prophetic traditions, avoiding those used in Sufi rituals, such as were established by Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī al-Shūnī (d. tenth/ sixteenth century).[112]

The work ends with a number of chapters[113] on the *fiqh al-ʿibādāt* (legal regulation of acts of worship), based on the *exemplum* of Muḥammad; this work aims to be an all-encompassing treatise on Muḥammad. What matters for our purposes is that the *Mawāhib* also includes references to devotional

106 Qasṭallānī, *Mawāhib*, II, 490–735.

107 Qasṭallānī, *Mawāhib*, II, 9–72. It should be noted that Suyūṭī, too, wrote about the Names of the Prophet.

108 Qasṭallānī, *Mawāhib*, III, 7–118.

109 Qasṭallānī, *Mawāhib*, 267–392.

110 Qasṭallānī, *Mawāhib*, 319–56.

111 Ibn Diḥya, *Nihāyat al-sūl*, 205–10.

112 He was one of the masters of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī, and he established the practice of reciting a large number of prayers on the Prophet on Friday night, in the mosque of al-Azhar; see Winter, *Egyptian Society*, p. 157; Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie*, 101–4.

113 These occupy the entire fourth volume of the printed edition we consulted.

practices, such as the prayer on the Prophet, that are clearly separate from the *khaṣā'iṣ*; these thus gain their own independent status.

Although the *Mawāhib* deals only partly with *khaṣā'iṣ*, Suyūṭī's works also inspired other authors to write about this topic. Chronologically, the first of these was the famous historian Shams al-Dīn Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 943/1546).[114] In his *Murshid al-muḥtār fī khaṣā'iṣ al-Mukhtār*[115] he clearly stated his debt to his teacher, saying that the work is a *talkhīṣ* (lit. a *précis*) of the *Unmūdhaj*.[116] Ibn Ṭūlūn repeats the justifications of *khaṣa'iṣ* from earlier works such as Ibn al-Mulaqqin's *Ghāya*, and subdivides the work strictly, following Suyūṭī. Even the discussions of some specific topics are taken verbatim from the *Unmūdhaj* or the *Ṭarḥ al-laqaṭ*. He clearly consulted the latter text when discussing the issue of ruling according to the *sharī'a* and the *ḥaqīqa*, as both he and Suyūṭī quote the same tradition from Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1310).[117] Ibn Ṭūlūn elaborates on the topic, expanding the discussion presented in the *Ṭarḥ al-laqaṭ* with quotations from al-Ṭabarī (used as a counter-argument) and other earlier sources such as Abū 'Umar al-Dimashqī,[118] who acknowledged the parallel between the prophets' miracles and the *karāmāt* of the saints.

A confirmation of the interest inspired by Suyūṭī comes from a work that may be the most interesting elaboration of *khaṣā'iṣ* derived from his works, the *Durar al-ghā'iṣ fī baḥr al-mu'jizāt*, by 'Ā'isha al-Bā'ūniyya (d. 922/1517).[119] The author's father Yūsuf was a *Shāfi'ī* jurist and chief judge in Damascus, where she was born. Despite being a woman, she was admitted to study the traditional curriculum for the sons of prominent families, studying Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and poetry. Her family was also linked to the Urmawī Qādirī Sufi order, and she wrote a large number of works in different branches of the spiritual sciences, both in poetry and prose.[120] Her commitment to Sufism is evident from the

114 *EI*^{2}, III, 957f.

115 Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Murshid al-muḥtār*.

116 Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Murshid al-muḥtār*, 11.

117 Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Murshid al-muḥtār*, 234.

118 Possibly to be identified with Taqī al-Dīn ibn Qāḍī al-Shuhbī al-Asadī al- Dimashqī al-Shāfi'ī (d. 852/1448).

119 I want to thank prof. Emil Th. Homerin for drawing my attention to this manuscript and for sharing a digital copy of it with me.

120 For a complete biography of 'Ā'isha Bā'ūniyya, see Homerin, *Aisha al-Ba'uniyya*. Homerin also translated a selection of her poetic works, Homerin, *Emanations of Grace*, and her Sufi manual, Homerin, *Principles of Sufism*. The manuscript is Dār al-Kutub 558 *ḥadīth*, 70 folios, acephalous. It is not dated and the colophon reads: نجز المنظوم المفتوح به على يد على من افاضه عليها وفتح عليه به العاشيه بالله عايشه المنسوبه الى يوسف بن احمد الباعونى فى الخلق والى القطب الكبير اسماعيل الحوارى فى الحق زاد الله من تواصل مدده ادام

opening of the *Durar*, where, after the ritual praises to God and the Prophet, she invokes blessings on her master in *taṣawwuf*; she defines al-Urmawī as: *tājī wa-minhājī wa-shaykhī wa-qudwatī / wa-nūrī wa-miʿrājī li-ḥaḍrati man barā* "my crown, my pattern, my master, my model, my light and my ladder of ascent to the presence of the Creator".[121] She describes her work as being based on Suyūṭī's book,[122] which she chose to put into verse after falling in love (*shughiftu*) with the *Unmūdhaj* while reading it (*ṭālaʿtuhu*). In this poem, ʿĀ'isha aims to present the contents of the *Unmūdhaj* in a more succinct way (*lafẓ wajīz*), so that readers might understand it more easily. The *Durar* are part of a long tradition of versification of scholarly works[123] with the specific aim of creating a tool for study and memorisation. In the text, Bāʿūniyya defines her work as *naẓman yustaladhdhu samāʿuhu / wa-yaghdū li-ḥifẓi l-nāsi sahlan muyassarā*, "a poem that will be a delight to hear, becoming easy and simple for people to memorise".[124] The text continues with ʿĀ'isha al-Bāʿūniyya invoking the *madad* (spiritual support) of the Prophet and of her Sufi master,[125] relying, for the rest, on Suyūṭī's words and on his selection of *khaṣā'iṣ*, without adding any new *khaṣā'iṣ* or specifications of her own.

What makes ʿĀ'ishā al-Bāʿūniyya's work special is not its content, but the framework in which she placed the theme of *khaṣā'iṣ*: the switch from *fiqh* to *taṣawwuf* and devotion is complete here. This can be demonstrated by quoting a verse that closes the introduction and opens the versification: *bi-jāhi lladhī anshā l-wujūda li-ajlihī / wa-awjadahū li-l-faḍli wa-l-jūdi maẓharā*, "By the rank of the one for whom He made existence begin and brought him to existence as a manifestation of (His) favour and generosity".[126] Here, the accent is more *akbarian*, connected to a vision in which the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya* is the first

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ريحان شراب محبته عل يده فعل ذالك لوالده عبد ... فى ذريته ... على محمد ولربه انه ارحم الراحمين (f. 70r): "the spiritually illuminated poem has been completed by the hand of the one who has been invested by spiritual flood and enlightenment by these verses, living (*ʿā'isha*) by God ʿĀ'isha, descendant of Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Baʿūnī in creation, friend (*walī*) of the great pole Ismāʿīl al-Ḥawwārī in Reality, may God increase the uninterrupted flux of his spiritual support and make eternal the perfume of the drink of love for him, from his hand; make that to his father ... and his descendants and ... on Muḥammad and for his Lord, the Most compassionate of the Merciful". This may imply that the copy is an autograph of ʿĀ'isha al-Bāʿūniyya, but as we lack other elements to confirm this it is more prudent to wait for additional evidence before accepting this as fact.

121 Dār al-Kutub 558 *ḥadīth*, f. 3r. Foliation is based on the microfilm.

122 Dār al-Kutub 558 *ḥadīth*, f. 3v.

123 See Sanni, *Arabic theory of prosification*.

124 Dār al-Kutub 558 *ḥadīth*, f. 3v.

125 Dār al-Kutub 558 *ḥadīth*, ff. 4r–4v.

126 Dār al-Kutub 558 *ḥadīth*, f. 4v.

thing brought into existence by God. At the end of the poem the theme of love appears. In the final supplication for blessings on the Prophet and his family, she asks God to grant that her love for him should continue throughout eternity (*sarā l-ḥubbu muʾtharā | madā al-dahri*).[127] This accent is completely absent in previous works on *khaṣāʾiṣ*. Unfortunately, it seems that the literary and spiritual heritage of ʿĀʾisha al-Bāʿūniyya did not find the echo it deserved, and the genre of *khaṣāʾiṣ* subsequently followed a more scholastic evolution.

6 Later Developments of the Genre

In the seventeenth century other works were inspired by the *Kifāya*, both in their structure and in their approach to the figure of Muḥammad as a whole. The well-known traditionist ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Munawī (d. 1031/1621)[128] devoted a commentary to the *Unmūdhaj*, called *Fatḥ al-raʾūf al-mujīb fī sharḥ unmūdhaj al-labīb*,[129] and later, aiming to clarify his previous attempt, wrote a supercommentary called *Tawḍīḥ fatḥ al-raʾūf al-mujīb*.[130] Both works are of limited originality, being word-by-word explications of lexicon and grammar. Nonetheless, the fact that al-Munāwī says that his first commentary was not well-received, and was considered to be narrow and shallow, could imply that *khaṣāʾiṣ* were still popular in early Ottoman Cairo.[131]

To this commentary should be added at least the *al-Khaṣāʾiṣ al-kubrā* attributed to Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Raḥmānī al-Ḥanafī (fl. 1039/1630).[132] We know very little about this author, but the fact that he is classified as *Ḥanafī* implies that the *khaṣāʾiṣ* genre had exceeded the boundaries of the *Shāfiʿī*s

127 Dār al-Kutub 558 *ḥadīth*, f. 67r.

128 For more on him, see Hamdan, "La vie et l 'oeuvre".

129 I have knowledge of this work only from its commentary by al-Mūnawī.

130 Still unpublished. I have consulted three manuscripts: Michigan 954, dated 1074/1664; Dār al-Kutub *ḥadīth* 206 *muḥāfaẓa*, dated 1272/1856; Dār al-Kutub *ḥadīth* 852, acephalous, ends *ex abrupto*, n.d.

131 Michigan 954, ff, 1v–2r; Dār al-Kutub 206, ff. 2v–3r; Dār al-Kutub 852, ff.

132 The only extant manuscript, up to now, is al-Azhar, 907 *ḥadīth*. The colophon (f. 266v) states that the copy was made on the 7 Muḥarram 1039/27 August 1629 (*al-farāgh min tabyīḍ hādhihi al-nuskha li-muʾallifihā*). What was originally written in red ink is completely unreadable in the microfilm. Frequently entire pages are blurred, and hence impossible to read. The manuscript presents frequent writing mistakes, such as the exchanging of sīn with ṣād, that may possibly mean that it was dictated to an ill-educated copyist. The text, too, seems to be the result of an interpolation, as at f. 26r the work seems to end with a final formula of *istighfār*, unless it reprises with the discussion of *faḍāʾil*. About the author and the attribution to him of the work see Kaḥḥāla, *Muʿjam*, III, 28.

by the seventeenth century. The work survives in a single manuscript,[133] and probably did not become well-known in its time. He structured his text on the model of the *sīra*, leaving more space for his personal views on the topic, and using the expression *aqūlu* (lit. "I say"). After the introduction,[134] Raḥmānī discusses *faḍā'il*, such as God swearing by the name of Muḥammad,[135] or the fact that Muḥammad was recognised as (a) Prophet by Jewish *'ulamā'*.[136] While the parts of the introduction that are still legible do not say this, al-Suyūṭī's *Kifāya* provides the background of the text; for example when, in a discussion of the Prophet's intercession, it says, after listing many references to his work: *qāla al-Jalāl* [*al-Suyūṭī*] *wa-hādhā fī ghāyat al-ḥusn fīhi*, 'As al-Jalāl [al-Suyūṭī], said, this is extremely good.'[137]

An interesting feature of the *al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā*, part of the more evident presence of its author in the text, is the frequent insertion of poetry, mainly by Raḥmānī himself. He even mentions the title of one of his *dīwān*s, *al-Madīḥ fī l-Nabī al-malīḥ*, and the titles of two poems, *Madḥ al-muḥkam 'alā ḥurūf al-mu'jam* and *Qaṣīdat al-isrā'*.[138] The internal organisation of the text is event-oriented rather than being formally structured, and is not based on the usual division of *khaṣā'iṣ*. It is possible to identify only four main sections. The first (up to f. 111v) roughly follows the biography of Muḥammad. The second is focused on miracles, and the third on the death of the Prophet; in this section, interestingly, Raḥmānī defends the permissibility of visiting the tombs of saints,[139] a typical Sufi theme. The final section deals with the Companions, considering also their *khaṣā'iṣ*, and the obligation for believers to love them.[140] Here al-Raḥmānī's sources are mainly early Sufis such as al-Qushāyrī, Junayd, or even al-Muḥāsibī.

As a product of later literature on the Prophet, written in a period when Sufi orders and practices were fully acknowledged as part of the Muslim tradition and shared way of life, al-Raḥmānī's *Khaṣā'iṣ* represent the ideal accomplishment of the scholarly tradition of the genre. Some later authors, such as Ahdal (d. 1241/1825),[141] were still to devote their efforts to delineating the sources of

133 See previous note.
134 F. 8. Previous folios are almost unreadable.
135 Al-Azhar, 907 *ḥadīth*, f. 8r.
136 Al-Azhar, 907 *ḥadīth*, f. 10v.
137 Al-Azhar, 907 *ḥadīth*, f. 16v.
138 Al-Azhar, 907 *ḥadīth*, f. 24r.
139 Al-Azhar, 907 *ḥadīth*, ff. 187r–216v.
140 Al-Azhar, 907 *ḥadīth*, f. 242v–256r.
141 Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Bāri' al-Ahdal, a member of a prominent family of Yemen. He was better known as a commentator of the *Ājurrūmiyya*. For more on him,

al-Suyūṭī's *Kifāya*, confirming the fact that this work, with its abridgements, had become a watershed in the evolution of the genre.

7 Instead of a Conclusion, a Different Evolution

We have shown how the *khaṣā'iṣ nabawiya* passed from being a matter of legal discussion, considered to be of dubious utility, to a promising field of literary competition for *'ulamā'* with a strong attachment to Sufism. In the Mamlūk period these texts acquired a more spiritual character, and the figure of the Prophet moved to the centre of a search for new topics that would be suitable to help increase the believer's love for him. As far as this aspect of such texts is concerned, 'Ā'isha al-Bā'ūniyya's versification of the *Unmūdhaj* represents the acme of this process. She expressed her spiritual aspirations clearly, and she found in Suyūṭī's words the best means to represent the exceptional aspects of her spiritual lover.

But there is a final twist in the development of the genre, that shows how the *khaṣā'iṣ* became the form *'ulamā'* used to express devotion to Muḥammad. The *Tanbīh al-anām fī bayān 'uluww maqām sayydinā Muḥammad*[142] is a collection of some five thousand prayers on the Prophet, in the form of reiterations of *Allāhumma ṣalli wa-sallim 'alā sayyidina wa-mawlānā Muḥammad wa-'alā āl sayyidina wa-mawlāna Muḥammad*,[143] to which phrases referring to an episode or a characteristic of the Prophet is added. The work was composed in the first half of the sixteenth century by the Tunisian *'ālim*, Ibn 'Aẓẓūm al-Qayrawānī (d. 959/1552). He belonged to a well-known family of local *qāḍī*s, and in the scanty biographical data we have there is no mention of his being affiliated with any Sufi order.[144] This work is novel in the landscape of literature about the Prophet, combining *sīra*, *mawlid*, *shamā'il* and *khaṣā'iṣ* in a compendium that, according to the author, had to be recited and memorised.[145] Prayers are not in *saj'*, but tend to follow a certain rhythm. Starting from the chapter on

see GAL II, 652, and the introduction of the edition of his work on *khaṣā'iṣ*, al-Ahdal, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Bārī' 1406, 5–13; Loimeier 2009, 190.

142 This work has been published and edited several times, starting with the 1912 edition from Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya and the 1927 edition from the Maktaba wa-Matba'at Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣubayḥ wa-Awlādihi, both in Cairo. Presumably still in the 1920s (the date is based on a guess, as the book itself is not dated) the Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya printed another version of the *Tanbīh*, followed by al-Maktaba al-Tijāriyya. All these editions report the same text exactly, with slight variations in print and typeface.

143 "Oh God pray and give peace to our master and lord Muḥammad and his family".

144 Kaḥḥāla calls him a Sufi, see Kaḥḥāla, *Mu'jam*, II, 49; Kīnānī, *Takmīl al-ṣulaḥā'*, 23–25.

145 Ibn 'Aẓẓūm, *Tanbīh al-anām*, 8.

khaṣā'iṣ and *aḥwāl*, the text focuses on topics that are clearly taken from such works as Suyūṭī's *Kifāya*. The flow of arguments seems to be dictated by Ibn ʿAẓẓūm's inspiration, as the *khaṣā'iṣ* begin with a description of Muḥammad being informed that his mosque would be burned, and continue with an enumeration of the diverse merits of the Prophet and his community.[146]

The similarities to books of *khaṣā'iṣ* are limited, as Ibn ʿAẓẓūm does not organise the prayers in his text according to the usual subdivision. What matters here is that all the legalistic aspects have completely disappeared, giving way to a lengthy section about Muḥammad's birth and his pre-existence before the creation of Adam. The only relationship to the genre is the fact that miracles are placed in the chapter directly after the *khaṣā'iṣ*. For the rest, here we see the three genres of *mawlid*, *ṣalāt ʿalā al-Nabī* and *khaṣā'iṣ* converge. The latter has at last become part of the bulk of literature written solely to express a form of devotion to the Prophet, completing its process of transformation. Finally, it is remarkable that, in the two cases in which this transformation is most evident (the *Durar* by ʿĀ'isha al-Bāʿūniyya, and the *Tanbīh*), the authors both had a background in Islamic jurisprudence and, in the case of Ibn ʿAẓẓūm, there was not even a clear affiliation to any Sufi order.

The *Khaṣā'iṣ*, then, show how devotional attitudes towards the Prophet have progressively found their way into the domain of *fiqh* literature, gradually changing the shape of the genre. In addition to this development, which can be regarded as internal to the genre itself, there is also a change in the intended readership of the works, which moved from learned *fuqahā'* (finding its final, sterile, version in al-Munāwī's works) to pious men who wanted to express their love for Muḥammad and know more about his exceptional nature. Finally, the merging with the prayer on the Prophet did not occur by chance, as that genre had followed a similar path, developing from discussions on the merits of *taṣliya* to such complex works as the *Tanbīh*. Further studies in this direction will probably shed more light on this part of Islamic religious literature, one that has too often been relegated to the popular (and consequently not fully literary) domain.

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7

Modèle prophétique et modèle de sainteté dans le soufisme ancien

Quelques exemples

Pierre Lory

1 Introduction

Que signifiait l'imitation du Prophète Muḥammad pour les mystiques les plus anciens, au IIe/VIIIe siècle ? Comment la vénération du Prophète a-t-elle été exprimée durant cette période initiale ? Et comment cette conception a-t-elle évoluée ? Ce modeste article voudrait apporter quelques éléments à un domaine de recherche déjà bien parcouru par les spécialistes. Les réponses dépendent bien sûr de la définition donnée au terme « mystique » – lui-même si discuté en langue française. Il est généralement admis que la mystique n'est pas l'équivalent d'une simple dévotion, même très intense. Elle ne s'identifie pas non plus à l'ascèse, même sévère. Beaucoup a été écrit sur la démarcation entre le renoncement dit *zuhd*, et la mystique correspondant au soufisme proprement dit[1]. On peut en tout cas aisément démarquer les œuvres sur le *zuhd* comme celles de Ibn al-Mubārak (m. 181/797) ou de Ibn Ḥanbal (m. 241/855) de la mystique soufie. En bref, posons la mystique comme une recherche expériencielle de la présence divine dès ici-bas. Ce qui modifie profondément le vécu religieux : la perspective eschatologique en particulier diffère de celle du croyant ordinaire. Si la présence miséricordieuse de Dieu est approchée dès ici-bas, l'éternité devient de quelque manière déjà présente ; même sans parler ici d'union mystique.

Quand et comment la mystique au sens strict est-elle apparue en islam ? Était-elle présente dès les premières générations ? Clairement, il est impossible d'affirmer quoique ce soit en ce sens pour ce qui est du premier siècle, de la génération des Compagnons et des Suivants. La vaste littérature accumulée à ce sujet dépend de reconstitutions dues à des traditionnistes des générations ultérieures sur lesquelles l'historien n'a pas véritablement prise. Les récits et paroles concernant par exemple Salmān al-Fārisī, Abū al-Dardā', Ḥudhayfa ibn

1 Voir en particulier les études de Melchert, notamment "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism" et Sviri, "Sufism: Reconsidering Terms, Definitions and Processes".

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al-Yamān, voire Ḥasan al-Baṣrī lui-même, sont riches d'enseignements, mais difficiles à intégrer dans l'ordre de l'histoire. Un exemple éloquent est celui de Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, dont la figure hagiographique a récemment été déconstruite par Suleiman A. Mourad[2]. Quoiqu'il en soit, on peut raisonnablement admettre que vers le VIII^e^ siècle, commença à apparaître l'idée d'une pluralité des niveaux de la foi. A une foi ordinaire, simple acquiescement (*taṣdīq*) aux deux *shahāda* et au dogme commun, s'opposa une exigence personnelle de conformer sa vie entière au seul être, à la seule cause qui mérite le total don de soi : le service de Dieu. Une sorte d'élite spirituelle émergea parmi les croyants : ascètes, prédicateurs, fervents qui attirèrent rapidement beaucoup de croyants, qui discernaient en eux la réalisation d'un idéal de foi. En bref, se diffusa l'idée d'une alliance particulière, voire d'une amitié divine – *walāya* – accordée à ces personnes. Cette *walāya* avait vocation à prolonger la vertu du Prophète. Mais en quels termes ? C'est la question posée ici. Que représente l'imitation du Prophète pour les premiers mystiques ? Ils se sont posés comme héritiers des prophètes – mais en quoi consiste cet héritage ? En quoi se différencie-t-il, voire s'oppose-t-il au courant « traditionniste »[3] ? Bien sûr, on ne peut pas faire abstraction du fait que les sources sur ces premières générations de mystiques sont elles aussi bien tardives : X^e^ et XI^e^ siècles, pour celles que nous allons citer. Y recourir n'est pas une opération sans risque méthodologique. Notons toutefois que la mémoire transmise par la littérature hagiographique au sujet des plus anciens spirituels a gardé bien des traits archaïques. Par exemple, le lexique technique des expériences spirituelles (*aḥwāl*, *maqāmāt* etc) est peu détaillé, voire inexistant dans les notices consacrées à ces « anciens ». A la place, nous lisons des énoncés directs, parfois paradoxaux, exprimés directement en termes coraniques.

Un point fondamental pour notre sujet réside dans la paucité des mentions de Muḥammad chez ces mystiques anciens. Cela contraste avec les textes soufis plus récents, où la référence au modèle muḥammadien est tout à fait explicite, comme nous le verrons *infra* avec le *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* de Sarrāj. Ce point doit être interprété à la lumière des circonstances historiques. Au VIII^e^ siècle, le sunnisme n'existait pas encore de façon constituée. Ce n'est qu'au siècle suivant que les *ahl al-sunna wa-al-jamāʿa* se définirent comme majorité consensuelle dotée d'une doctrine cohérente et stable. Il s'agissait de lutter contre les affirmations des shīʿites revendiquant pour leurs Imams l'autorité religieuse absolue ; et des muʿtazilites, affirmant notamment la prééminence de la raison

2 Mourad, *Early Islam between Myth and History: Ḥasan al-Baṣrī*.

3 Sur ce dernier point, voir Melchert, "The Piety of the Hadith Folk" et "Early Renunciants as Hadīth transmitters".

comme outil exégétique. Dès lors, l'affirmation fondamentale de l'inerrance du Prophète, du caractère absolu du modèle qu'il offrait devint la colonne vertébrale de la pensée majoritaire sunnite. Mais au siècle précédent, la vision de ce modèle n'était pas l'horizon immédiat des premiers mystiques. Bien connue est la réplique de Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (m. 185/801), interrogée sur son amour envers le prophète Muḥammad, et qui répondit : « Je l'aime, mais mon amour du Créateur m'a détournée de l'amour de ses créatures »[4]. Son cas n'est pas unique. L'accent était mis sur la première *shahāda*. Que représentait alors la seconde *shahāda*, ou l'idée de *sunna*, pour une perspective mystique ?

Pour le cadre limité de ce chapitre, et pour ne pas se disperser sur des ouvrages d'intention trop hétérogène, notre propos se limitera à deux oeuvres choisies comme un simple échantillonnage : d'une part la *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* de Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī[5], source considérable pour notre connaissance du soufisme ancien. Puis d'autre part, par contraste, nous aborderons le *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* d'Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, pour renseigner un exposé sur les représentations plus récentes.

Abū Nuʿaym (m. 430/1037) était lui-même un savant *muhaddith* de formation classique. Il représente une tradition tout à fait sunnite. Il a notamment rédigé un recueil de *ḥadīth* concernant les qualités du Prophète, le *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, qui connut un vaste succès. La *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* est une véritable encyclopédie de spiritualité musulmane, fournissant 689 notices sur autant de personnalités religieuses, depuis les premiers Compagnons et Suivants jusqu'aux soufis contemporains de l'auteur, et incluant notamment les fondateurs d'écoles de droit (mais non Abū Ḥanīfa toutefois). Plus tard, Ibn al-Jawzī dénoncera cette composition comme une confusion, ou une récupération[6]. Tout en louant le propos général d'Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, Ibn al-Jawzī critique l'attribution du soufisme à des personnes qui n'ont aucun rapport avec lui. Ibn al-Jawzī rappelle qu'il existe une différence entre le *zuhd* au sens strict – et toutes les personnes citées étaient bel et bien des *zuhhād* – et le *taṣawwuf*, qui est une école (*madhhab*) bien précise. Abū Nuʿaym apporte en effet des citations de *ḥadīth* à l'appui, mais de façon assez désordonnée, parfois douteuse[7]. La conclusion de Ch. Melchert sur les sources d'Abū Nuʿaym est que les sources (= les *isnād*-s) d'Abū Nuʿaym sur les ascètes ne sont pas les mêmes que celles

4 ʿAttar, *Le mémorial des saints*, 92 ; cf. Masotta, "Les premiers ascètes en Islam", 449.

5 Ed. Beyrouth, Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1988, 10 vol. Voir Khoury, "Importance et authenticité des textes de *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*" ; Melchert, "Abū Nuʿaym's Sources for *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*" ; Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism*, 41-67.

6 *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, 13 : *Iḍāfat al-taṣawwuf ilā kibār al-sādāt* (…) *wa-laysa ʿinda hāʾulāʾi al-qawm khabar min al-taṣawwuf*.

7 Ce que lui reproche du reste Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, 12.

sur les soufis. La dernière partie de la *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, consacrée aux soufis, au sens strict, est selon lui assez mal organisée et comme plaquée assez artificiellement sur la précédente[8]. Mais la question est ailleurs. Il semble que le but de Abū Nuʿaym n'était pas de montrer que tous les grands Anciens étaient des mystiques, mais qu'il existe une cohérence globale dans l'ensemble de la pensée spiritualité islamique autour de la notion d'amitié à Dieu (*walāya*). Chez lui, le modèle muḥammadien serait comme intériorisé dans les exemple vécus des grands saints. Ce qui conduit le propos d'Abū Nuʿaym à certaines audaces. Ainsi, à propos du sujet qui nous occupe, mentionne-t-il une affirmation attribuée à Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq : « Celui qui vit selon l'aspect extérieur de l'Envoyé est *sunnī* ; celui qui vit selon la dimension intérieure de l'Envoyée est *ṣūfī* »[9]. Une synthèse importante sur ce point a été apportée par Kabira Masotta-Naït Raïss dans une thèse récente sur la *Ḥilya*[10]. Elle développe l'idée de la *sunna* comme imitation intérieure du Prophète, à laquelle se conforment les ascètes *stricto sensu* comme les mystiques (soufis). Il s'agit d'atteindre, au-delà de la pratique extérieure, l'éveil d'une *fiṭra* qui permet le contact avec Dieu.

Nous allons prendre quelques exemples, parmi des dizaines, voire des centaines d'autres possibles. Il s'agit de trois grandes figures représentant trois générations : Mālik ibn Dīnār (m. vers 131/745), qui fréquenta Ḥasan al-Baṣrī et marqua les premières formulations d'une expérience mystique[11], ʿAbd al-Wāḥid ibn Zayd (m. sans doute après 150/767), qui enseigna un début de doctrine[12], et Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyāḍ (m. 803), dont l'influence fut particulièrement marquante[13]. Ces figures se sont toutes placées au sein du courant sunnite. Ainsi Abū Nuʿaym

8 Melchert, "Abū Nuʿaym's Sources for *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*".

9 *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* I, 20-21 : *Man ʿāsha fī ẓāhir al-rasūl fa-huwa sunnī wa-man ʿāsha fī bāṭin al-rasūl fa-huwa ṣūfī*. Ce à quoi Abū Nuʿaym ajoute avec nuance : *arāda Jaʿfar bi-bāṭin al-rasūl akhlāqa-hu al-ṭāhira*.

10 Masotta, "Les premiers ascètes en Islam", 408-31.

11 Masotta, "Les premiers ascètes en Islam", 134-37.

12 C'est du moins l'opinion de Massignon, "*Essai sur les origines du lexique technique*", 213-14. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid ibn Zayd aurait été disciple de Ḥasan : "… *wa-kāna mimman yaṣḥabu al-Ḥasan*" (selon Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 45). Les dates semblent un peu compliquer les choses : le très jeune ʿAbd al-Wāḥid aurait pu rencontrer Hasan à la fin de sa vie ; mais il y a plutôt là l'indice d'une volonté d'établir des enchaînements d'enseignements initiatiques (voir Mourad, *Early Islam between Myth and History*, 100-101, sur la construction des *isnād*-s). Plus vraisemblablement, il aura été le disciple de Mālik ibn Dīnār. Voir aussi Masotta, "Les premiers ascètes en Islam", 140-41.

13 Jacqueline Chabbi a mené une enquête fouillée sur la biographie et les dires attribués à ce personnage illustre ("Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyāḍ, un précurseur du hanbalisme", 331-345). Elle voit en lui un ascète réformiste, non un mystique au sens soufi du terme. Nous estimons toutefois que Fuḍayl représente précisément une figure de passage vers la mystique proprement dite. Voir aussi K. Masotta, "Les premiers ascètes en Islam", 158-59.

prête-t-il à Fuḍayl la déclaration : « Engage-toi dans la bonne vie – l'islam et la *sunna* »[14]. On notera d'emblée la formulation inhabituelle : on s'attendrait au couple Coran/*sunna* ou *islām*/*īmān*. Apparaît ici comme une suggestion de différenciation entre un islam représenté par l'adhésion au Coran, et une *sunna* dont les contours sont encore imprécis, mais qui en tout cas ne fait pas complètement corps avec la religion au sens usuel. Où situer alors la *sunna* du Prophète ? On notera la rareté des références au Prophète dans les évocations de la vie ascétique et mystique de ces personnages. Si des *ḥadīth* sont cités, nous l'avons vu, l'exemple prophétique est peu invoqué. Bien sûr, il serait bien peu rigoureux de tirer une conclusion à partir d'un silence des textes. Tâchons alors de prendre un angle un peu décalé et demandons nous en quoi consistait la voie spirituelle de nos trois mystiques. Et alors, en quoi celle-ci reflèterait un modèle muḥammadien.

Dans les trois cas, il s'agit d'ascètes. Leur voie est donc très marquée par la privation. Je me bornerai à quelques remarques.

1) La voie de nos ascètes était très axée sur la privation de nourriture. Il s'agissait de manger le moins possible, et le moins souvent possible. Le cas de Mālik ibn Dīnār est resté fameux[15], Or l'exemple prophétique n'est pas du tout en jeu ici. Certes, la pureté rituelle de l'alimentation (et des vêtements, etc) était un point essentiel pour tous. Mais il est aisé de constater que leurs jeûnes dépassaient largement l'enseignement muḥammadien tel qu'il sera fixé dans les *ḥadīth* canoniques. Ils relèvent plutôt d'une piété ascétique qui imprégnait toute l'époque de l'Antiquité tardive, d'un *Zeitgeist* qui n'était pas particulièrement islamique. On y retrouve une vision spiritualiste de l'homme et des rapports âme/corps, une conscience aiguë de l'imminence eschatologique, qui était partagée par bien des milieux chrétiens, gnostiques, ou manichéens.
2) De même, la valeur accordée au célibat est une tendance bien peu muḥammadienne. Mālik Ibn Dīnār aurait affirmé : « L'homme ne devient un juste (*ṣiddīq*) que s'il laisse sa femme comme à l'état de veuvage, et va demeurer dans les décharges fréquentées par les chiens »[16]. Lui-même semble être resté célibataire. Ce qui est à retenir, c'est sa radicalité dans le détachement. Or femme et famille impliquent des liens très exigeants. Il aurait répondu à quelqu'un qui lui demandait pourquoi il ne se mariait

14 *Usluk al-ḥayāt al-ṭayyiba, al-islām wa-al-sunna*, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* VIII, 99.

15 *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* II, 366-77, 369, 370.

16 *Lā yablugh al-rajul manzilat al-ṣiddīqīn ḥattā yatruk zawjatahu ka'annahā armala wa-ya'wī ilā mazābil al-kilāb, Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* II, 359.

pas : « Si je le pouvais, je répudierais mon âme »[17]. Mālik n'était pas le seul à avoir agi ainsi. Ibrāhīm ibn Adham a quitté sa famille après sa soudaine conversion[18]. Fuḍayl a laissé le souvenir du seul et unique sourire de sa vie – au moment de la mort de son fils[19]. Or Muḥammad a vivement condamné, voire anathémisé ces attitudes. Il a réprouvé le célibat pour des causes religieuses[20]. Le sacrifice, l'ascèse suprême, c'était de se préparer au combat. Selon un *ḥadīth* célèbre rapporté par Ibn Ḥanbal : « Tout prophète a son monachisme (*rahbāniyya*) ; et la *rahbāniyya* de cette communauté est le combat au service de Dieu »[21]. En fait, ce n'est que petit à petit que cette méfiance à l'égard de la vie conjugale a évolué dans les milieux piétistes ; on en trouve d'ailleurs des traces dans des époques plus récentes.

3) Enfin se pose la question de la référence aux *ḥadīth*. Il arrive que des *ḥadīth* soient cités par nos ascètes dans le texte de la *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*. Ils vont généralement dans un sens d'ascèse et de spiritualité. Ce qui nous amène à nous interroger sur la fonction de ces références. Fuḍayl avait lui-même acquis une véritable formation de *muḥaddith*. Sulamī – qui, il est vrai, a tendance à vouloir faire de chaque grand soufi un transmetteur de *ḥadīth* – mentionne dans sa notice sur Fuḍayl la transmission d'un ḥadīth de portée ascétique, sur le bénéfice de la souffrance pour les saints[22]. Selon Abū Nuʿaym, Fuḍayl était d'ailleurs fiable en *ḥadīth*. Cependant, Abū Nuʿaym nuance cette affirmation en précisant que la transmission des *ḥadīth* suscitait en lui une crainte révérencielle (*kāna … shadīd al-hayba li-l-ḥadīth*) et du coup lui pesait beaucoup (*kāna yathqulu ʿalayhi al-hadīth jiddan*)[23]. Le transmetteur d'un récit sur Fuḍayl, Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm, ajoutait : « Il me disait souvent qu'il préfèrerait que je lui demande un *dirham* plutôt que je lui demande des *ḥadīth*. Un jour, il me

17 *Law istaṭaʿtu la-ṭallaqtu nafsī, Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* II, 365. Voir Benkheira, *La maîtrise de la concupiscence*.

18 *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* VII, 368-69.

19 Il aurait répondu à ceux qui l'interrogeait à ce sujet : "Dieu a aimé une chose, et j'ai aimé ce que Dieu a aimé", *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* VIII, 100.

20 Au verset coranique 5, 87 : "Ô les croyants : ne déclarez pas illicites les bonnes choses que Dieu vous a rendues licites …", les commentateurs donnent plusieurs noms de personnes tentées par l'ascèse en matière de nourriture, de sommeil, voire de femmes. Dans son *tafsīr*, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān cite : ʿAlī, ʿUmar, Ibn Masʿūd, ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, ʿUthmān ibn Maẓʿūn, al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad, Abū Dharr, Salmān, Ḥudhayfa et d'autres. Muḥammad a vivement condamné, anathémisé ces attitudes (voir Gilliot, "Le Coran avant le Coran", 165).

21 *Musnad* V, 266, XVI, 26. Cl. Gilliot, "Le Coran avant le Coran", 167-75.

22 *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 9.

23 *Kāna ṣaḥīḥ al-ḥadīth ṣadūq al-lisān, Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* VIII, 86-87.

> dit qu'il lui serait plus agréable que je lui demande de l'argent (*danānīr*) plutôt que des *ḥadīth*. Je lui répondis que s'il me transmettait des *ḥadīth* où je trouverais des bénéfices dont je suis privé, je préfèrerais cela à recevoir de lui le même nombre de dinars. Il me dit : "Tu es égaré (*maftūn*) ! (…) Si on te présente de la nourriture et que tu jettes chaque bouchée que tu prends derrière ton dos, quand seras-tu rassasié ?" »[24]. En d'autres termes, s'occuper de colliger des *ḥadīth* les uns après les autres sans les mettre en pratique, revient à un profond gâchis spirituel.

Une distinction radicale semble exister entre la vraie *sunna* – intérieure, celle qui à la limite se transmet dans le silence du cœur – et la science mondaine du *ḥadīth*, celle qui ne sert à rien d'un point de vue spirituel[25]. On peut interpréter : en multipliant la diffusion des paroles du Prophète, on leur fait perdre leur efficace. Elles échappent à l'âme, ne la nourrissent plus, au contraire. La même idée se retrouve chez Mālik Ibn Dīnār : le *ḥadīth* n'a d'utilité que s'il aide à la pratique spirituelle. Ses paraboles sont expressives : « J'ai lu dans un livre de Sagesse qu'il est pour toi sans utilité de savoir une science, puis de ne pas mettre en œuvre ce que tu sais. C'est comme un homme qui va ramasser du bois, rassemble un fagot qu'il ne peut soulever, et lui ajoute alors un autre »[26]. Mālik Ibn Dīnār aurait transmis un certain nombre de *ḥadīth* notamment de Anas ibn Mālik. Leur contenu est éloquent : il vise souvent les mauvais sermonnaires qui disent et ne font pas, et ceux qui n'ont pas honte de leur tiédeur, laquelle est blasphématoire au fond[27]. Ce genre de diatribes semble anachronique par rapport à l'époque muḥammadienne, mais il est significatif de l'opposition ultérieure entre ascètes et savants. Les réunions de *muḥaddithūn* provoquaient chez Mālik Ibn Dīnār une sorte d'angoisse ; « Lorsque j'entends la voix des transmetteurs de *ḥadīth*, je suis pris par l'envie d'uriner, par terreur »[28].

Une autre explication de ces réticences à l'égard des *ḥadīth* réside dans la prévalence accordée au Coran. Abū Nuʿaym signale une réplique de Fuḍayl qui vit un homme (un *muḥaddith* peut-on supposer) qui riait, et lui dit : « Veux-tu que je te transmette un *ḥadīth* bon (*a-lā uḥaddithuka ḥadīthan ḥasanan*) ? Oui, répondit l'autre. Fuḍayl récita "Ne te réjouis pas, Dieu n'aime pas ceux

24 *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* VIII, 86-87.

25 K. Masotta, "Les premiers ascètes en Islam", 426-29.

26 *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, II, 375.

27 *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, II, 386. Dénonçant les corruptions de son époque, Mālik Ibn Dīnār cite toutefois aussi un *ḥadīth* remontant à Anas ibn Mālik demandant de ne pas prier contre les gouvernants, mais de prier Dieu pour les améliorer, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, II, 388.

28 *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, VIII, 94, 95.

qui se réjouissent" »[29]. Or il s'agit d'un verset du Coran, XXVIII 76. Certes, le terme « *ḥadīth* » est plurivoque, il ne désigne pas nécessairement une parole prophétique. La réplique mérite néanmoins réflexion. Le *ḥadīth* n'a au fond de valeur que s'il vient prolonger la parole coranique. Le Coran est la base du chemin spirituel. La méditation profondément coranique de Mālik est évoquée par Sarrāj[30] : « Quelqu'un a dit – je crois que c'est Mālik Ibn Dīnār : J'ai mâché le Coran pendant vingt ans, puis j'ai pris plaisir à sa récitation pendant vingt ans »[31]. Et de fait, Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyāḍ professait quant à lui explicitement la prévalence du Coran sur la *ḥadīth*. Ainsi sa parole : « Si j'avais reçu dès mon début sur la voie la grâce de la compréhension du Coran et des méditations de nuit que j'ai acquise maintenant, je n'aurais pas écrit un seul *ḥadīth* (*mā katabtu ḥadīthan qaṭṭ*), et je me serais consacré au seul Coran »[32]. Nous touchons ici un point fondamental de l'évolution de la spiritualité musulmane. Il ne s'agit pas d'une appréciation sur le *ḥadīth* en tant que tel, ni d'une dévalorisation du modèle prophétique. Nous avons ici plutôt une affirmation précise de la fonction du saint, investi directement par la grâce divine. Le saint est « porteur du Coran », c'est-à-dire, des sens profonds du Coran. C'est cela sa mission, sa fonction, sa grâce. Le saint est porteur du message divin, directement. Et pour être plus précis : ce message coranique n'a pas à être médiatisé par un *ḥadīth* qui ne fait que creuser une distance supplémentaire entre la conscience du croyant et la source divine.

Ce rôle est illustré par un certain nombre de *ḥadīth qudsī* que Fuḍayl semble sortir de sa propre autorité. Leur contenu mystique n'est pas indifférent : la nuit, Dieu descend du ciel et cherche ceux de ses fidèles qui ne dorment pas. Il s'adresse à ces veilleurs qui sont ses vrais amants, Il Se laisse contempler, manifeste sa présence et leur promet le Paradis[33]. L'absence d'*isnād* à propos de ces paroles est-elle un simple effet d'habitude ? Ou bien Fuḍayl s'attribue-t-il une autorité d'inspiré divin ? Ou s'agit-il simplement d'un artifice littéraire ? Un autre *ḥadīth qudsī*, fort connu, souligne également ce rôle d'intermédiaire prophétique des saints. Il apparaît cité par ʿAbd al-Wāḥid ibn Zayd, lequel le fait remonter à Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, et il commence par : « Lorsque mon serviteur est sans cesse préoccupé par Moi, Je mets son bonheur (*naʿīmahu*) et son plaisir dans mon évocation (*dhikrī*), et lorsque Je mets son bonheur et son plaisir

29 *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, VIII, 108. Le verset est adressé à Qārūn et à ses gens, ce qui précise l'intention de Fuḍayl dans sa citation.

30 *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 67.

31 *Madaghtu al-Qurʾān ʿishrīna sana, thumma tanaʿʿamtu bi-tilāwati-hi ʿishrīna sana* ; également *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, II 358, 378.

32 Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, I, 76.

33 *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, VIII, 92-93, 99-101.

dans mon évocation, il M'aime avec passion et Je l'aime avec passion (*ʿashiqanī wa-ʿashiqtuhu*). Et lorsqu' il M'aime avec passion et que Je l'aime avec passion, Je lève le voile entre Moi et lui, et Je deviens un signe devant ses yeux ; et il n'est pas distrait quand les autres hommes sont distraits. Ceux-là, leur parole est la parole des prophètes »[34]. Ces dernières paroles, plus que la mention de l'amour passionnel, soulignent la position des mystiques[35].

Dès lors nous pouvons nous demander : dans quel domaine précis les mystiques situent-ils l'autorité prophétique muḥammadienne ? Comment et par qui cette autorité est-elle transmise depuis sa mort ? Ce lourd problème théologique et politique, soulevé par les kharédjites et les shīʿites, contient en germe une bonne partie de la théologie du sunnisme. Nos anciens mystiques n'intervenaient qu'occasionnellement dans les questions politiques. Leur vision concernait une dimension plus ésotérique du déroulement historique de la *umma*. Ainsi, Mālik Ibn Dīnār exprime dans une remarque cinglante une contestation de la situation issue de la « Grande Discorde », typique des ascètes *zuhhād* de cette génération. Pour lui, les musulmans auraient agi comme les chrétiens après la mort de Jésus : « Nous savons que lorsque Jésus fils de Marie a été envoyé, il a renversé l'ordre du monde (*al-dunyā*). Après lui, les gens l'ont remis en place ; jusqu'à ce que Muḥammad soit envoyé, et renverse l'ordre du monde. Après lui, nous l'avons redressé en l'état »[36]. Mais alors, qui redressera la situation à présent ? Qui va réhabiliter l'ordre prophétique muḥammadien ? Le futur sera redoutable en effet, car la fin des temps est déjà engagée. Lorsque viendra l'Heure, les croyants découvriront que leurs savants, leurs chefs, étaient en réalité des pervers, selon Mālik Ibn Dīnār : « A la fin des Temps, les vents et les ténèbres terrifieront les gens qui iront trouver leurs savants (*ʿulamāʾuhum*) ; et ils les trouveront métamorphosés sous des formes monstrueuses (*fa-yajidūnahum qad musikhū*) »[37]. Cette allusion au *maskh* est évidemment d'une lourde portée, car elle fait allusion à la transformation des damnés. Il y a là une terrible dénonciation de la responsabilité des oulémas.

De nombreuses citations en ce sens sont à mettre au dossier de la lutte verbale entre les mystiques et les juristes ou *muḥaddithūn*. A un homme qui disait que les savants étaient les héritiers des prophètes, Fuḍayl répondit : « Les sages

34 *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, VI, 165, l. 7. Ce *ḥadīth* ressemble bien sūr dans sa composition à celui dit "des *nawāfil*". Abū Nuʿaym juge toutefois avec réserve la qualité de ce *ḥadīth mursal*, d'autant que la réputation de ʿAbd al-Wāḥid dans le domaine aurait été faible.

35 Voir sur ce point Masotta, "Les premiers ascètes en Islam", 118.

36 *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, II, 381.

37 *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, II, 382 ; on trouve une attitude analogue chez Fuḍayl, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, VIII, 92, 100.

(*al-ḥukamāʾ*) sont les héritiers des prophètes »[38]. Quand on parle de « lutte », il ne s'agit pas forcément de discuter de politique, ou de prestige religieux. Il ne s'agit pas non plus de remettre en cause le rôle des règles de droit. Il s'agit plutôt d'une attitude à la fois plus profonde et plus insaisissable : qu'est-ce qui fait l'essentiel de la foi ? Fondamentalement, qu'est-ce qui est demandé à l'homme croyant, à la communauté des musulmans ? Quel est le sens à donner au verbe « obéir » à Dieu ? Et dès lors, qui est le vrai croyant, au sens plein ? C'est là où se situe la césure entre les deux attitudes. Fuḍayl affirme : celui qui n'incorpore pas complètement son rapport au Dieu vivant dans sa propre vie, qui ne quitte pas tout autre désir que d'obéir à Dieu, ne peut être guidé. Du coup, qui suivre, qui est le guide ? Une chose est sûre, ce ne sont pas les *ʿulamāʾ* officiels. Les savants mondains sont aux yeux de Fuḍayl comme des « renégats ». Fuḍayl pourfend avec violence les *aṣḥāb bidʿa*. Nombreuses sont les citations sur le danger des *bidʿa*s, sur le fait qu'il ne faut pas fréquenter ces gens, les éviter complètement. Plus, il faut les haïr, les maudire, ils détruisent l'islam[39]. Mais qui pointe la critique de Fuḍayl exactement ? En quoi s'opposent-ils à la *sunna*, et que représente en fait l'idée de *sunna*[40] ? Sont-ce les premiers muʿtazilites qui sont visés ? Peut-être. Mais il est loisible d'identifier de façon plus radicale encore les *bidʿa*s que dénonce Fuḍayl, avec ces compromissions avec « le monde ». Nous sommes ici dans une perspective spirituelle, mystique, non théologique ou juridique. On est en droit de comprendre : le vrai musulman recherche la Sagesse, c'est là son orientation primitive, celle que montrait l'islam primitif, le Coran. La *bidʿa*, c'est ce qui en éloigne. Autrement dit, la *bidʿa* va bien au-delà de doctrines "nouvelles" ; elle représente tout ce qui fait dévier de l'intention première, du service exclusif de Dieu. Or celui qui se confie aux *ḥadīth*, transmis de façon purement « académique », dévie de cette manière, aussi paradoxal que cela puisse paraître. Au lieu de se tenir ici et maintenant dans la présence du Dieu vivant, il se crée un espace religieux d'où la divine présence se trouve mise à l'écart, voire absente.

On pourrait aboutir au point suivant, qui sera une première conclusion : l'imitation du Prophète chez le *walī* consiste précisément à ne pas se mimétiser à lui. Il s'agira plutôt d'actualiser en soi-même le *ḥāl* prophétique, au lieu et au moment précis où vit le saint. Il s'agit de faire passer en acte tout ce qui est su[41]. Ceci suppose une totale disponibilité à la grâce divine dans l'instant, une

38 *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, VIII, 92.

39 *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, VIII, 103-4, 108. De nombreuses autres citations sont apportées par J. Chabbi dans son article cité *supra* "Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyāḍ, un précurseur du hanbalisme".

40 *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, VIII, 104.

41 K. Masotta, "Les premiers ascètes en Islam", 404-5.

complète orientation de l'esprit vers Dieu à l'exclusion de toute autre science. Cette position sera explicitée par les théoriciens ultérieurs.

Les auteurs soufis plus tardifs ont explicité et commenté cette idée de *sunna* prophétique mystique. Le *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* d'al-Sarrāj en particulier nous fournit un exposé systématique, qui correspond à l'essor du soufisme proprement sunnite[42]. Dans une importante introduction, il commence en effet par situer le rôle du saint, du *ṣūfī* au sens plein, comme véritable héritier muḥammadien, de manière plus profonde et plus légitime que le juriste ou le *muḥaddith*. A la différence des mystiques évoqués plus haut, la référence muḥammadienne est donc appuyée. Mais de quel « prophète Muḥammad » exactement le soufi est-il l'héritier, quel est l'aspect de la prophétie qui est mis en avant ? Dans le *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, un chapitre important est intitulé "Livre de l'imitation (*al-uswa wa-al-iqtidāʾ*) de l'Envoyé"[43]. En effet, les soufis suivent la voie de Muḥammad. Sarrāj rappelle la nécessité absolue de cette imitation, fondée d'après lui sur une série de versets coraniques. Un verset en particulier fait autorité, Coran 3, 31 : "Dis : « Si vous aimez vraiment Dieu, suivez-moi, Dieu vous aimera alors et vous pardonnera vos péchés. Dieu est Pardonneur et Miséricordieux ». Il est impossible de prétendre aimer Dieu, suivre le Coran sans suivre également la *sunna* du Prophète telle qu'elle est formulée dans les *ḥadīth* sûrement établis. Il existe une harmonie, une hiérarchie, une union liant ainsi l'amour de Dieu aux hommes. Ceci est évidemment valable pour tous les musulmans. Mais plus particulièrement pour les soufis, souligne Sarrāj[44]. La sainteté, pour Sarrāj, peut se concevoir comme une "muḥammadisation" de la personne du soufi. De quelle imitation s'agit-il au juste ? Sarrāj établit une gradation dans l'imitation soufie du Prophète : 1) suivre la *sunna*, pour le commun. C'est l'imitation à laquelle tout musulman est invité à se conformer. 2) imiter les règles de vie, les *ādāb* du Prophète, pour les pratiquants exigeants, allant jusque dans les détails de l'imitation, dans l'ensemble des rapports sociaux notamment ; 3) imiter ses *akhlāq*, pour ceux qui veulent lui ressembler intérieurement en observant les mêmes vertus morales. Enfin, par l'adhésion complète à cette pratique et à son intention, certains parviennent au niveau 4) de l'imitation des *aḥwāl* du Prophète, de ses états spirituels, dans son cheminement mystique. Par cette imitation, ils peuvent atteindre 5) ses vérités ultimes (*ḥaqāʾiquhu*). C'est ici le point ultime, final, le propos central de Sarrāj[45].

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42 *Kitāb al-lumaʿ* ; voir aussi la traduction allemande par R. Gramlich, *Schlaglichter über das Sufitum*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990, riche en notes et références.

43 *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 130.

44 Qui donne une vibrante évocation de la grandeur de cette imitation du Prophète (*Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 133).

45 *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 143.

Ceci dit, on ne peut comprendre où Sarrāj veut en venir si on ne suit pas la description qu'il trace des vertus concrètes du Prophète. Sarrāj énumère les qualités du Prophète que les soufis imitent. Il commence par la pauvreté, et y insiste très fortement. Ceci doit nous interroger : il existe entre l'idée même de "possession" et la voie mystique une barrière. Sarrāj commence par noter que Muḥammad choisit d'être un prophète-serviteur "qui parfois est rassasié et parfois a faim", non un prophète-roi, sur le conseil de Gabriel[46]. Il aurait pourtant pu le devenir, à l'instar de David ou Salomon. Par ailleurs, Muḥammad ne conservait aucune nourriture pour le lendemain. C'est toute la question de la remise à la providence divine, du *tawakkul*, qui appartient à des débats assez vifs au II et III^e^ siècle AH[47]. Muḥammad s'habillait de laine, poursuit Sarrāj. Autres signes de pauvreté : il montait sur un âne, trayait les chèvres, recousait ses sandales et son vêtement – il n'en possédait qu'un – et balayait le sol de sa maison. Parfois, il n'avait que des dattes ou de l'eau à manger, même pas de pain, pendant un ou deux mois. Il dut s'attacher une pierre sur le ventre pour moins sentir la faim. Comme les autres prophètes, il ne laissa aucun héritage. Muḥammad détestait la richesse. Ceci par choix, car Dieu aurait pu lui fournir des montagnes d'or[48]. Bref, en tout point il valorisait positivement la pauvreté[49]. D'ailleurs, il aimait la pauvreté et les pauvres. Sarrāj cite le *ḥadīth* : « Ô mon Dieu, fais-moi vivre pauvre, fais-moi mourir pauvre, ressuscite-moi parmi le groupe des pauvres »[50].

Certes, tout ceci entre en contradiction avec bien d'autres *ḥadīth* concernant la personne du Prophète. Nous avons ici bien sûr affaire à une « stratégie hagiographique ». C'est en ce sens que Sarrāj fait une remarque à propos du *ḥadīth* connu : « Trois choses m'ont été données à aimer dans votre monde, *ḥubbiba ilayya min dunyā-kum thalāth* … ». On pourrait croire que Muḥammad était attaché aux belles choses de ce monde, en l'occurrence les femmes et les parfums. Mais Sarrāj pointe la formulation choisie par lui « votre bas-monde », laquelle indique que Muḥammad lui-même s'en excluait. Muḥammad vivait dans le monde, mais il n'appartenait pas à ce monde[51]. La remarque est essentielle, on le comprend. Elle détermine pour une bonne part l'attitude du soufisme classique : détachement, mais non ascèse trop extrême. C'est un point de différence, voire de rupture avec les ascètes dont nous venons de parler. D'autres

46 *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 134. Le *ḥadīth* apparaît dans le *Musnad* de Ibn Ḥanbal.
47 *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 134-35. Le *ḥadīth* est cité chez Tirmidhī et Ibn Ḥanbal.
48 *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 134.
49 *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 134-35, 136, 127 ; le *ḥadīth* est cité par Ibn Hanbal.
50 *Allāhumma, aḥyinī miskīnan wa-amitnī miskīnan wa-ḥshurnī fī zumrat al-masākīn*, cité chez Ibn Māja et Tirmidhī.
51 *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 138.

ḥadīth vont affirmer que Muḥammad aimait le commerce, les beaux habits, les parfums etc. Sarrāj y fait allusion[52]. Pour lui, comme pour toute une partie de la tradition sunnite, c'était pour que son exemple soit plus facile à suivre par les musulmans qu'il proclamait cela. Sinon, l'islam n'aurait pas été praticable, et les passions auraient finalement dominé les croyants. Mais, affirme-t-il, les prophètes sont tous complètement indépendants face aux avoirs matériels. On oscille toujours entre l'image terrestre et la référence céleste des prophètes. Inutile de dire que cet avis de Sarrāj ne s'appuie que sur sa propre conviction, mais celle-ci est largement partagée en milieu soufi. Notons que pour Sarrāj, Muḥammad aurait eu toutes les qualités, même contradictoires. Il était d'un naturel souriant, sans s'esclaffer[53]. Mais, selon Sarrāj, il était aussi toujours triste et préoccupé : de sa poitrine sortait un bouillonnement comme celui d'une marmite[54]. Là aussi, le paradoxe s'explique par la "complétude" nécessaire du Prophète comme Homme Parfait. Cette manière soufie de suivre le Prophète, de l'imiter, est une voie vers les plus hautes connaissances. Sarrāj explique qu'à ceux qui ont suivi le Coran et la *sunna* dans la rectitude s'ouvrent des portes nouvelles, d'une nouvelle science (*ʿilm mā lam yaʿlamūhu*).

Nous voyons dans les considérations de Sarrāj à la fois une continuité et des ruptures avec les ascètes des premiers siècles. Une continuité : il s'agit de faire en sorte de tout consacrer à Dieu sans aucune réserve ni aucun partage. Mais pour avoir accès à Dieu, il importe de se conformer à l'état intérieur du prophète Muḥammad – ce dont les anciens mystiques ne parlaient guère. Bien sûr, le Prophète n'est pas divin en lui-même. La rencontre avec la présence divine ne peut avoir lieu que par une grâce venant de Dieu. Mais selon Sarrāj, cette expérience surnaturelle ne peut avoir lieu en-dehors d'un cadre naturel, humain, qui est celui de l'exemple prophétique. Ce passage de l'humain vers le divin peut être résumé par une citation que Sarrāj fait de Dhū l-Nūn à qui l'on demandait comment il avait connu Dieu : « J'ai connu Dieu par Dieu, et j'ai connu ce qui n'est pas Dieu par l'Envoyé de Dieu »[55].

Nous pouvons conclure ce bref exposé en situant le débat dans l'ensemble de la vision sunnite de la foi. Revenons à l'introduction de la *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* par Ibn al-Jawzī. Ibn al-Jawzī dénonce l'absence dans l'ouvrage d'Abū Nuʿaym de la mention du premier des *zuhhād*, à savoir Muḥammad. Ibn al-Jawzī qualifie Muḥammad de « seigneur des ascètes, chef de tous, modèle de la création (…)

52 *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 141-43.

53 Cependant d'autres *ḥadīth* cités par Bukhārī affirment que lorsqu'il riait, "on voyait ses molaires".

54 *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 139.

55 *ʿAraftu Allāh bi-llāh, wa-ʿaraftu mā siwā Allāh bi-rasūl Allāh*, *Kitāb al-lumaʿ*, 45.

celui dont la voie doit être suivie et l'état doit être imité »[56]. La précédente critique qu'il adressait à Abū Nuʿaym était la confusion entre ascèse/*zuhd* et mystique/*taṣawwuf*. Le *taṣawwuf* représente pour Ibn al-Jawzī une simple école (*madhhab*) – et il renvoie pour les distinctions particulières à son *Talbīs Iblīs*. Cette remarque nous permet de situer les limites externes que le sunnisme en général a donné au soufisme. Le soufisme n'est pas condamné, il peut même être loué sous bien des rapports. Mais, contrairement à ce qu'affirmait Sarrāj, il ne représente qu'une discipline parmi d'autres dans le dispositif religieux de l'islam, il n'est pas l'héritier direct et principal de la prophétie. Au fil des siècles s'est produit un phénomène central : la consolidation, l'expression ouverte de l'intermédiation du Prophète. Mais intermédiaire dans quel domaine exactement, et à quelle fin ? Entre qui et qui ? Chaque courant a pu discerner sa propre épiphanie prophétique, selon la pluralité doctrinale admise à l'époque classique de l'islam.

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8

L'éducation par « la lumière de la foi du Prophète » selon le *shaykh* ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh (m. 1332/1719)

***D'après le* Kitāb al-ibrīz *de Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak* (*m. 1156/1743*)**

Jean-Jacques Thibon

Au moins jusqu'au Ve/XIe siècle, les soufis exprimaient leur amour de Dieu de manière directe tandis que leur amour du Prophète était plus discrètement mentionné, à quelques rares exceptions. Ainsi la longue section de la *Risāla* de Qushayrī (m. 465/1072) sur l'amour (*maḥabba*) ne parle pas de l'amour du Prophète, mais exclusivement de l'amour de Dieu. Cet amour, chez Sarī al-Saqaṭī, est tel qu'il ne laisse plus la moindre place à rien d'autre[1]. Et le contenu des traités de soufisme de même époque, autour des Xe et XIe siècles, suit la même logique. Kharrāz, maître bagdadien mort autour de 280/895, voyant le Prophète en rêve, s'excuse de ne pouvoir lui consacrer plus d'amour tant il est occupé par l'amour de Dieu[2]. À propos de l'épisode célèbre où Abū Bakr, ayant apporté tous ses biens au Prophète, répondit à celui-ci qui lui demandait ce qu'il avait conservé pour sa famille : « Dieu et son Prophète », Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (m. après 320 /932), disciple de Junayd (m. 297/910) qui partit s'établir à Marv où il finit sa vie, fit le commentaire suivant : « Si ce n'était par pudeur en présence du Prophète, il n'aurait pas dit 'et son prophète' mais aurait mentionné seulement l'Unique »[3]. Formulé de manière plus prosaïque : Dieu seul eût suffi, nul besoin de mentionner son Prophète.

Même dans l'expression des fondements de la voie spirituelle, le rôle du Prophète est somme toute restreint ; il ne lui est du moins accordé aucune centralité. Il suffit pour s'en convaincre de rappeler les propos de Sahl al-Tustarī, l'un des tout premiers à en énoncer les principes. Certes, il place fort logiquement l'imitation de la *sunna* prophétique, après un attachement sans faille

1 "Le cœur qui contient ces cinq choses ne peut rien abriter d'autre : la crainte de Dieu seul, l'espoir en Dieu seul, l'amour pour Dieu seul, la honte devant Dieu et l'intimité procurée par Lui seul" ; Thibon, *Les générations*, n° 30, 70.

2 Qushayrī, *al-Risāla*, 634 (*bāb al-maḥabba*).

3 Thibon, *La voie des Hommes sincères*, 27-64, § 13, 39.

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au Livre de Dieu. Mais à la suite de cette référence à la *sunna*, au demeurant assez vague quant à son contenu, figurent six autres principes, qui tranchent par leur précision et dont il est difficile de dire s'ils sont énoncés par ordre d'importance : manger de la nourriture licite, s'abstenir de nuire, s'écarter des transgressions de la loi, se repentir, s'acquitter des devoirs[4]. On constate que les considérations d'ordre social, ou du moins relevant des relations humaines et de la vie en société occupent une place non négligeable. Dans le même ouvrage, les cinq principes qui, selon Junayd, distinguent son école (*uṣūl madhhabinā*), ne mentionnent ni le Prophète ni sa *sunna*[5]. Se plaçant sur un autre plan, mais plus radical dans l'expression, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (m. 148/765) n'admet aucun intermédiaire ni la moindre diversion quand il affirme : « La voie spirituelle (*ṭarīq*) va du cœur à Dieu, en se détournant de tout ce qui est autre que Lui »[6].

Une telle attitude est révélatrice d'une époque où, quand il est question de *fanā'*, l'extinction, et Kharrāz déjà cité fut l'un des premiers à en parler, il s'agit de l'extinction en Dieu, le *fanā' fī Allāh*. Quant au Prophète, il apparaît principalement dans nos sources comme un modèle à suivre. Ainsi Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī, (m. 245/860) affirme : « L'un des signes (qui révèlent) l'amoureux de Dieu, c'est l'imitation (*mutāba'a*) de l'Aimé de Dieu dans ses vertus (*aḫlāq*), dans ses actes, dans ses prescriptions (*awāmir*) et dans le détail de sa règle de vie (*sunan*) »[7]. Dans ces premiers siècles, les pratiques ascétiques, veille, jeûne et silence, représentent pour beaucoup de spirituels mentionnés dans les manuels du soufisme le fondement d'une spiritualité qui n'a d'autre horizon que l'amour de Dieu[8].

La proximité avec la période prophétique explique en partie que la vénération du Prophète, assurément bien présente, emprunte d'autres modalités[9]. L'une des rares exceptions est représentée par Ḥallāj exprimant son amour

4 Voir Orfali et Saab, *Sufism*, 222.

5 Orfali et Saab, *Sufism*, 223.

6 Orfali et Saab, *Sufism*, 222.

7 Thibon, *Les générations*, n° 12, 50. Un peu plus tard et plus à l'est du monde musulman, il sera repris par Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Warrāq l'un des grands maîtres de Nishapur, mort avant 320/932 disant : "La marque de l'amour de Dieu c'est de se conformer (*mutāba'a*) à son bien-aimé", Thibon, *Les générations*, n° 12, 235.

8 Le chapitre 35 de l'ouvrage mentionné précédemment, intitulé "Les fondements de leur école", réunit diverses citations de spirituels des trois premiers siècles qui, chacun à sa manière, énumère les principes fondamentaux du soufisme : le Prophète est quasiment absent, mis à part la référence à la *sunna* que nous avons évoquée, voir Orfali et Saab *Sufism*, 222-4. Sur cette question voir aussi, Radtke, "The eight rules of Junayd", 490-502.

9 Et son amour aussi, même si parfois cela apparaît de manière indirecte, par exemple Ḥātim al-Aṣamm (237/851-2) qui affirme : "[…] et celui qui prétend à l'amour du Prophète sans aimer la pauvreté est un imposteur" ; Thibon, *Les générations*, n° 25, 97.

du Prophète à travers son éloge[10]. Les choses vont évoluer qui vont donner au Prophète une plus grande centralité dans la vie spirituelle. Cela passa par des manifestations publiques, comme la mise en place des festivités du *mawlid*, mais surtout par l'émergence puis l'affirmation de la figure du maître spirituel dont les contours vont s'affiner au fil des siècles pour finalement s'imposer aux alentours du Ve/XIe siècle[11]. Ce dernier occupe ainsi envers ses disciples une place similaire à celle du Prophète avec ses Compagnons, en tant que dépositaire de son héritage. Cela explique l'autorité quasi-absolue dont il jouit et l'attachement de plus en plus exclusif du disciple à sa personne. Il ne transmet pas seulement un savoir, fut-il celui de la vie intérieure, mais prend en charge la transformation progressive de ses disciples invités à suivre toutes ses directives. Ces nouvelles attributions conduisirent progressivement à une inflexion dans la conception de la voie spirituelle et même dans le rôle du *shaykh*. Les soufis, centrés au départ directement sur Dieu, ajoutèrent une étape supplémentaire dans la voie spirituelle, passant dorénavant par la médiation prophétique. Il serait sans doute intéressant de tenter de circonscrire plus en détails les raisons qui ont conduit à cette réorientation. Ce n'est pas ce qui nous occupera ici. J'ai choisi d'évoquer un ouvrage qui montre que la place occupée par le Prophète dans l'enseignement des maîtres soufis a considérablement évolué au point de devenir l'élément central, et même, pourrait-on dire, exclusif de celui-ci.

1 L'ouvrage : son auteur et son maître

Dans la littérature doctrinale du soufisme, le *Kitāb al-ibrīz* dont le titre complet est *al-Dhahab al-ibrīz min kalām Sayyidī al-Ghawth ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh*[12], est un ouvrage qui n'a pas d'équivalent. Il consigne les réponses du *shaykh* ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Masʿūd al-Dabbāgh, considéré comme un saint illettré (*ummī*)[13],

10 En particulier dans le recueil factice des *Ṭawāsīn*, et notamment le premier opuscule intitulé *Ṭā Sīn al-azal*, voir la traduction dans Massignon, *La passion de Husayn Ibn Mansûr Hallâj*, 300-306.

11 Sur cette question définie par Ibn ʿAbbād al-Rundī comme le passage du *shaykh al-taʿlīm* au *shaykh al-tarbiya*, qu'il date du Ve/XIe siècle, voir Meier, "Khurāsān" in Meier, *Essays*, 189-219 et Meier, "Qusayrī's *Tartīb al-Sulūk*" 93-133. L'attribution de ce texte à Qushayrī a été remise en cause, voir Stern, "On the Authenticity of the Mystical Treatise *Tartīb al-Sulūk*" 65-95. Également, Thibon, *L'œuvre d'Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī*, 242-43.

12 Muḥammad ʿAdnān al-Shammāʿ en a donné une excellente édition avec des annotations marginales qui en facilitent la consultation.

13 Sur le sens à donner à ce terme, voir O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, 930. Sur ce type de sainteté, Chodkiewicz, "Le saint illettré" § 8 et Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Égypte et en*

aux multiples questions que lui pose l'un des grands savants marocains de son temps, Abū l-ʿAbbās, Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak al-Sijilmāsī al-Lamaṭī, né autour de 1090/1679 et mort en 1156/1743, qui s'est fait son disciple pour recueillir un savoir qu'il n'avait trouvé nulle part ailleurs[14]. Le cas de saints n'ayant pas suivi un enseignement de sciences religieuses n'est pas isolé, de nombreux exemples jalonnent l'histoire du soufisme[15]. De même le cas de savants ayant comme tuteur spirituel un illettré n'est pas unique : le grand soufi égyptien du seizième siècle ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī (m. 973/1565) eut pour maître ʿAlī Khawwāṣ al-Burullusī (m. 939/ 1532), un tresseur de feuilles de palmier, considéré lui aussi comme *ummī*[16]. Devançant Ibn al-Mubārak, Shaʿrānī a également consigné dans deux opuscules les réponses de son maître à ses questions ainsi que les consultations qu'il lui soumettait[17].

L'ampleur des questions abordées et la singularité des réponses apportées confèrent à cet ouvrage, commencé en 1129/1717 et achevé après la mort du maître, son caractère bien souvent énigmatique et singulier. Malgré une traduction partielle en français[18], une traduction intégrale en anglais[19] et une autre en turc[20], cet ouvrage a été assez peu étudié. Avec toutefois une exception notable, le travail irremplaçable réalisé par B. Radtke qui a abordé cet ouvrage à travers quatre articles[21]. Selon lui, le *Kitāb al-ibrīz* est une sorte de bible des néo-soufis qui inspira des figures majeures des XVIII^e^ et XIX^e^ siècles, comme Aḥmad Tijānī (1737-1815), Aḥmad b. Idrīs[22] (1749-50/1837) et ses disciples

Syrie, 299-307. L'appartenance de Dabbāgh à une famille de notables, nous allons le voir, conduit à s'interroger sur le sens à donner à ce terme dans son cas. Outre le fait que nous savons qu'il savait lire et écrire (O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, n. 6, 116), il est assez peu probable qu'il n'ait suivi aucun cursus d'enseignement religieux.

14 Pas seulement car al-Lamaṭī commente, parfois abondamment les propos de son maître, mais parfois livre également son propre exposé sur une question, comme par exemple dans le chapitre sept dont la section principale constitue un véritable traité de théologie dans lequel Dabbāgh ne joue aucun rôle, O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, xviii.

15 Voir par exemple les noms mentionnés par Chodkiewicz, "Le saint illettré" § 9.

16 Sur lui Geoffroy, *Le soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie*, 304-7.

17 Shaʿrānī, *Durar al-ghawwāṣ* et *al-Jawāhir*, ainsi que la notice qu'il lui consacre dans *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 150-69.

18 Zouanat, *Paroles d'or*.

19 L'ouvrage d'O'Kane et Radtke, déjà cité, représente un travail considérable de près d'un millier de pages. Par ailleurs, les éditeurs ont donné un aperçu très complet du contenu de l'ensemble des chapitres en introduction de leur traduction, O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, 1-114.

20 Yildirim, *el-Ibriz*.

21 Radtke, "Ibrīziana" 113-58 ; "Der Ibrīz Lamaṭīs" 326-33 ; "Syrisch" 472-502 ; "Zwischen Traditionalismus und Intellektualismus" 240-67.

22 Radtke, "Aḥmad b. Idrīs". Il parle de deux voies muḥammadiennes : l'une, classique est celle de l'imitation prophétique, tandis que l'autre (dont nous aurons à reparler avec

Sanūsī (1787-1859), Muḥammad ʻUthmān al-Mīrghanī (1793-1852) et Ibrāhīm Rashīd (1813-74)[23]. C'est dire son importance pour la période contemporaine[24].

Dès sa parution, ce livre parut inclassable aux yeux des contemporains, tel le chroniqueur Muḥammad al-Qādirī (m. 1187/1773) déclarant que son contenu « contredit les voies des soufis »[25] et recommandant de ne le mettre qu'entre les mains d'un public averti. Le même auteur rédigea une notice sur al-Lamaṭī dans laquelle il indique que ce dernier arriva dans la ville de Fès en 1110/ 1699-1700. Il en deviendra l'une des autorités religieuses les plus respectées, donnant des cours à la Qarawiyyīn. Al-Qādirī suivit ses cours, l'écoutant lire et commenter plusieurs ouvrages, en particulier *al-Shifāʾ* du Qāḍī ʻIyāḍ. Il mentionne également les maîtres d'al-Lamaṭī et cite les titres de quelques uns de ses ouvrages, dont aucun n'est a priori édité. Pour ce qui est du *Kitāb al-ibrīz*, il indique que, selon lui, ceux qui l'ont désapprouvé sont plus nombreux que ceux qui l'ont défendu et que l'un de ses maîtres en a écrit une réfutation. Ce chroniqueur indique aussi que Lamaṭī fut enterré à côté de Dabbāgh, à Fès, dans le cimetière situé à l'extérieur de Bāb al-Futūḥ[26].

Quant à son maître, son nom complet est Abū Fāris, ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz b. Masʻūd al-Dabbāgh al-Idrīsī al-Ḥasanī[27] (1090-1132/1679-1719)[28]. Son surnom ne renvoie pas à la profession de tanneur mais à une taxe dont sa famille aurait bénéficié de la part des tanneries de Salé, ville dont elle est originaire. Elle s'est ensuite installée à Fès au début du IXe/XVe siècle et devint une famille de notables respectés[29]. La première rencontre de Ibn al-Mubārak avec son futur maître date de rajab 1125 (juillet-août 1713).

La description détaillée du contenu de ce livre proposée par J. O'Kane et B. Radtke nous dispense de reprendre ce point. Rappelons seulement que l'objet premier de l'ouvrage est de consigner les réponses que le *shaykh* Dabbāgh

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Dabbāgh) vise à établir un contact direct avec le Prophète, considéré comme encore vivant et accessible.

23 Radtke, "Ibrīziana" 113-4. Il précise que Aḥmad b. Idrīs revendique une affiliation à la voie *khaḍirī* qui le rattache à la spiritualité de Dabbāgh, "Ibrīziana" 119.

24 Sur la réception de l'ouvrage, O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, xxi-xxii.

25 Muḥammad al-Qādirī, *Nashr al-mathānī*, vol. 3, 245-46 et O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, xiv.

26 La traduction de cette notice est reproduite par les traducteurs, O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, xi-xiii. Voir aussi Muḥammad al-Kattānī, *Salwat al-anfās wa-muḥādathat al-akyās*, vol. 2, 228-30.

27 En plus des références déjà mentionnées, voir sa notice dans la *Salwat al-anfās*, vol. 2, 222-28. Voir également Vimercati Sanseverino, *Fès et sainteté*, 376-83. Et l'article de Pierre Lory, "al-Dabbāgh".

28 Kattānī hésite sur la date de sa mort et indique 1131 ou 1132, voir *Salwat al-anfās*, vol. 2, 228. Zouanat donne 1142/1720, il s'agit sans doute d'une erreur, Zouanat, *Paroles d'or*, 9.

29 O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, xiv.

apporte aux questions que lui pose al-Lamaṭī, et accessoirement des savants de son entourage. Toutefois, l'ouvrage ne se réduit pas à cela, car ce dernier, par ses commentaires et sa vaste érudition des questions religieuses, remet le plus souvent en perspective le savoir de son maître, exposant parfois le point de vue savant sur un sujet particulier, non d'ailleurs dans le but de briller en exhibant son savoir, mais au contraire en vue de montrer la supériorité du savoir inspiré de son maître. Cet ouvrage démontre de manière exemplaire qu'entre *'ulamā'* et *awliyā'*, entre les tenants d'une science livresque et les dépositaires d'une science inspirée, la confrontation et la concurrence ne sont pas les seules modalités régulant leur rapport[30].

1.1 *L'itinéraire spirituel de Dabbāgh*

Le sujet que nous avons choisi de traiter, l'éducation spirituelle dans l'enseignement du *shaykh* Dabbāgh, nous impose comme préalable de mentionner quelques uns des événements qui balisèrent son propre itinéraire spirituel et influencèrent sa conception de la direction spirituelle. En résumant ce qu'il en dit lui-même, nous retiendrons les points suivants : au cours d'une première phase qui dura douze ans, il va d'un maître à l'autre ne rencontrant que désillusions et insatisfactions (entre 1109 et 1121 H.). Tout change lorsqu'il rencontre al-Khiḍr[31] qui lui donne comme litanie quotidienne une invocation qu'il doit répéter sept mille fois et dans laquelle il demande à Dieu de le réunir avec le Prophète dans ce monde et dans l'au-delà[32]. Cet élément est doublement capital : dès lors Dabbāgh ne s'inscrit pas dans les lignages habituels du soufisme mais, initié par al-Khiḍr, il réactive un type de filiation amené à se développer par la suite[33]. Filiation qui justifie le qualificatif de *ummī* pour indiquer que, comme al-Khiḍr, son savoir est d'inspiration divine (*'ilm ladunnī*, en référence à Cor. 18:65) et ne relève pas d'un apprentissage livresque. Ensuite, cette mise en présence du Prophète, recherchée par l'invocation expérimentée par Dabbāgh et clef de sa transformation, constitue par la suite l'axe central et l'aboutissement du cheminement spirituel, et par là même le critère suprême

30 Voir Chodkiewicz, "Le saint illettré" § 14-17.

31 Sur ce personnage voir la volumineuse étude de Franke, *Begegnung mit Khidr*.

32 Le texte de cette invocation est : "*Allahuma yā rabbi bi-jāh sayyidinā Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh ṣallā Llāh 'alayhi wa-sallam ijmaʿ baynī wa-bayna sayyidinā Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh fī l-dunyā qabl al-ākhira*", (Mon Dieu, ô Seigneur, par considération envers notre maître Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh, que Dieu répande sur lui la grâce et la paix, réunis-moi à notre maître Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh dans ce monde-ci avant l'autre), Ibrīz, 1/52.

33 Cette filiation n'est pas nouvelle, elle a été revendiquée au moins par Ibn 'Arabī qui en plus d'une investiture directe par al-Khaḍir mentionne une autre affiliation à un maître ayant lui-même reçu la *khirqa* des mains d'al-Khaḍir, voir Addas, *Ibn 'Arabī*, 53 et pour le texte arabe, 36.

de la sainteté. En effet, trois ans plus tard (en 1125 H.), trois jours après le décès de ʿUmar b. Muḥammad al-Hawwārī (m. 1125/1713), le gardien du sanctuaire de Sīdī ʿAlī b. Ḥirizhim[34] auquel al-Khiḍr l'avait confié, il connaît l'illumination. Il décrit en détail cette expérience rarement mentionnée dans les sources[35]. La lumière y joue un rôle décisif, par la vision hors du commun qu'elle procure à Dabbāgh. Mais ce n'est pas la fin de son itinéraire qui se poursuit sous la conduite et les directives de ʿAbdallāh al-Barnāwī[36] jusqu'au moment où il voit le Prophète en rêve. A ce moment-là, son dernier maître est rassuré sur le devenir de son disciple, car, si celui qui a vécu la première illumination est susceptible de retomber dans les ténèbres, il n'y a plus rien à craindre pour celui qui a connu « l'illumination dans la contemplation du Prophète »[37]. Il n'a plus besoin de maître et celui qui l'a conduit jusqu'au terme peut donc regagner son pays sans crainte pour le devenir spirituel de son disciple. Les étapes essentielles de cet itinéraire influenceront de manière décisive l'enseignement du maître.

2 Présence prophétique et éducation du disciple

Deux chapitres abordent plus particulièrement le sujet que nous avons choisi de traiter : le chapitre cinq qui porte sur la fonction de guide spirituel et l'aspiration du disciple à suivre une voie (*irāda*) et le chapitre six consacré au maître éducateur (*shaykh al-tarbiya*)[38]. Par la suite, nous nous intéressons plus particulièrement à la place dévolue au Prophète dans l'enseignement et l'éducation

34 Selon la prononciation berbère, pour d'autres vocalisations ; O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, n. 56, 129.

35 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/51-5 ; Zouanta, *Paroles d'or*, 39-46 ; O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, 128-34.

36 Sur lui, O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint*, 41. Il le mettra également à l'épreuve, par exemple en lui apparaissant sous les traits d'une belle femme qui tente de le séduire. Al-Barnāwī lui expliqua ensuite la raison d'une telle épreuve. Pour anecdotique qu'elle soit, la réponse n'en demeure pas moins révélatrice de données sociologiques : "du fait de ce que je connais de l'inclination des Chorfas pour les femmes ", et Dabbāgh faisait partie de ces Chorfas, ceux qui ont une ascendance prophétique comme son nom l'indique, Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/56.

37 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/55, *ilā an yaqaʿa lī l-fatḥ fī mushāhadat al-Nabī* ("jusqu'à ce que survienne en moi l'illumination dans la contemplation du Prophète"). La valeur de la préposition *fī* est problématique : indique-t-elle la circonstance, la causalité, ou la concomitance ? Zounat, *Paroles d'or*, 46 "jusqu'à ce que je connaisse l'illumination de la vision du Prophète" ; O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, 133-34, "until I should experience the illumination of beholding the Prophet". Voir aussi Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/400, où il est question de "contempler la station du Prophète" ou "d'arriver à la station du Prophète".

38 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/ 47-182 et O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, 611-747.

des disciples afin de comprendre comment se renouvelle la maîtrise spirituelle tout en restant inscrite dans la tradition du soufisme classique.

2.1 *Les directives spirituelles de Dabbāgh*

Une des premières questions posées au chapitre cinq est celle de la maîtrise spirituelle. Elle n'est pas nouvelle car, d'après ce que rapporte Ibn al-Mubārak, Aḥmad Zarrūq (m. 899/1493) déclarait qu'à son époque l'initiation dans sa forme conventionnelle n'existait plus, car les imposteurs se sont multipliés et qu'il est devenu difficile de démêler le vrai du faux. Seule subsiste une initiation par l'énergie spirituelle (*himma*) et par l'état spirituel (*ḥāl*)[39]. Le *shaykh* Dabbāgh, modulant cette assertion, s'emploie à indiquer les caractéristiques du maître authentique. Trois éléments le caractérisent : le discernement spirituel (*baṣīra*), la maîtrise des passions humaines et être à l'abri des diverses formes d'illusion. Il résume en affirmant que le véritable éducateur (*murabbī*) est celui qui connaît les états spirituels du Prophète, celui qui a été abreuvé à sa lumière[40]. A celui-là on peut confier la conduite de l'esprit du disciple, car il est capable de l'élever jusqu'à l'amour du Prophète. Cette référence aux *aḥwal al-nabī* n'est pas originale. Sept siècles plus tôt Sulamī affirmait déjà dans ses *Manāhij al-ṣūfiyya* : « La première chose par laquelle l'aspirant commence, c'est d'imiter les états spirituels du Prophète »[41]. Pour Dabbāgh, cette connaissance des états spirituels du Prophète est centrale et représente le point autour duquel s'articule tout l'enseignement de cette voie *dabbāghiyya*, dont on remarquera qu'elle n'est pas qualifiée de *ṭarīqa muḥammadiyya*, expression que l'on ne trouve pas dans ce livre[42].

2.2 *L'amour du maître*

Les deux chapitres consacrés à la relation du maître au disciple accordent une attention particulière à la nature du lien (*rābiṭa*) qui unit l'un à l'autre[43]. Son importance est soulignée dans une phrase de Dabbāgh qui résume les étapes de la progression régissant le cheminement spirituel :

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39 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/51 et *sq* ; *Pure Gold*, 614 et *sq*.

40 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/54.

41 Thibon, *La voie des Hommes sincères*, 43. Texte arabe édité par Kohlberg sous le titre *Manāhiǧ al-ʿārifīn*, page 30 pour la citation. Sur cette question de l'ancienneté de la référence au Prophète dans le parcours spirituel, voir Chodkiewicz, "Le modèle prophétique" 201-26.

42 Radtke pense que son contenu permet de l'appliquer à la doctrine de Dabbāgh, mais cette appellation nous semble impropre, Radtke, "Ibrīziana" 123.

43 Radtke renvoie à l'étude de Meier qui a abordé la nature de ce lien chez les Naqshbandiyya, Radtke, "Ibrīziana" 123, n. 42.

> Nul ne peut aspirer (*yaṭma'*) à connaître Dieu sans connaître le Prophète et nul ne peut aspirer à connaître le Prophète sans connaître son maître et nul ne peut aspirer à connaître son maître sans avoir au préalable fait la prière des morts sur l'ensemble des humains (de l'humanité)[44].

Le renoncement au monde qui en constitue le point de départ n'est pas sans rappeler, par la radicalité de son expression, Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (m. 261/875), le grand maître du Khurāsān, qui disait aussi avoir fait la prière mortuaire sur ce monde, mais il affirmait également : "J'ai connu Dieu par Dieu et j'ai connu tout le reste par la lumière de Dieu"[45], perspective radicalement différente de celle de Dabbāgh comme nous le verrons par la suite. La lumière divine, qui agit directement chez Bisṭāmī, est médiatisée pour Dabbāgh par la qualité de la foi de celui qui la transmet, le Prophète, puis le maître pour enfin toucher le disciple.

Quant à la connaissance du maître, elle repose très largement sur l'amour, selon Dabbāgh qui s'inscrit ainsi dans une tradition remontant aux premiers temps du soufisme qui le considérait déjà comme l'un des moteurs les plus efficaces du cheminement. Mais si l'amour de Dieu, voire du Prophète, était mis en avant comme nous l'avons vu, pour le cheikh Dabbāgh tout l'être du disciple doit prendre comme orientation, comme *qibla*, l'être du maître afin de devenir le réceptacle de celui-ci qui alors le fécondera comme l'homme avec la femme. Il parviendra à l'extinction dans l'amour du maître et le lien les unissant deviendra si fort et si exclusif[46] que le disciple imitera, à distance, ce que fait son maître à tout instant, ni le temps ni l'espace n'étant susceptibles de les séparer. Voilà la condition pour prétendre à son héritage[47]. Toutefois Dabbāgh met en garde le disciple contre un amour vicié par des considérations mondaines : ce dernier ne doit pas l'aimer pour ce qu'il a, ses charismes, sa sainteté, sa science ou son secret, mais pour ce qu'il est[48].

Aussi le maître éprouve-t-il la sincérité du disciple en vue de l'amener à adhérer totalement et aveuglément à sa personne, quelles que soient les apparences sous lesquelles il se présente à lui. Cette absence de discernement de la

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44 Et il poursuit : "Quand il ne se préoccupera plus d'eux dans ses paroles, dans ses actes et dans toutes ses affaires, alors lui viendra une miséricorde d'une manière qu'il n'avait absolument pas prévue", miséricorde qui désigne le Prophète, voir n. 67 et Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/152. Et une version à peine différente, Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/81.

45 Thibon, *Les générations*, n° 18, 81.

46 Formulée sous forme de règle : "L'amour est sans partage (*al-maḥabba lā taqbal al-sharika*)", Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/76.

47 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/72-73.

48 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/75-76.

part du disciple, caractéristique de l'amoureux envers l'aimé, qui le conduit à voir la perfection dans tout ce qui émane du maître est l'une des marques de l'amour et de l'engagement total du disciple, comme le sont également la vénération qu'il lui porte et l'adab dont il ne se départit point en sa présence[49]. Ces points ne sont pas nouveaux, les deux derniers par exemple étaient déjà énoncés quelques siècles plus tôt[50], mais ils trouvent toute leur cohérence dans la place dévolue au Prophète, comme nous allons le voir.

L'action du maître sur son disciple est rendue possible par l'amour que celui-ci lui porte : il peut dès lors lui faire accomplir ce processus de purification intérieure destiné à chasser progressivement les ténèbres coulant dans les veines qui irriguent tout corps humain. Dabbāgh, par la plume d'Ibn al-Mubārak, identifie dix ténèbres qui affectent la nature argileuse de l'être et que chaque homme doit surmonter pour se purifier avant d'accéder à la lumière[51]. Les deux dernières, les plus importantes donc, découlent, pour l'une, d'une méconnaissance, qualifiée de légère, envers la personne du Prophète – mais aucun manquement envers lui ne peut être "léger"- et, pour l'autre, d'une ignorance avérée envers lui. Pour dissiper ces ténèbres intérieures, les exercices habituels de l'ascèse ne sont pas exclus, jeûne, retraite ou veille, mais ce qui compte le plus semble-t-il, l'essentiel, c'est l'amour absolu que le disciple doit apprendre à porter à son maître car il n'accédera à l'amour du Prophète qu'à travers lui. Toutefois, cet amour du maître ne doit pas être attaché à sa personne (*dhāt*[52]), sinon il ne pourra profiter de lui qu'en sa présence. Au terme de ce processus, le disciple aboutira à la pureté du regard et à la plénitude de la lumière de la vision intérieure (*ṣafā naẓaruhu wa-tamma nūru baṣīratihi*)[53]. Ce n'est qu'à la condition d'avoir expulsé de son être toute noirceur qu'il pourra accéder à la vision du Prophète.

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49 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/77-78.

50 Par Sulamī par exemple, Thibon, *L'œuvre*, 240.

51 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/266-70.

52 Précisons certains termes étudiés par Radtke, car le *shaykh* Dabbāgh fait un usage très fréquent en particulier de deux termes *dhāt* et *rūḥ* qui ont chez lui une signification particulière : *dhāt*, c'est la nature humaine (*basharīyya*) qui comprend le corps, l'âme et l'esprit, dans la perception sensible que l'on peut en avoir. Mais c'est aussi souvent l'aspect corporel et Dabbāgh parle ainsi de la nature argileuse, faite de terre (*dhāt turābiyya*). Cette *dhāt* appartient à la partie sombre du monde (*ẓalām*). Un voile la sépare de l'esprit (*rūḥ*), la partie la plus élevée de l'être humain qui relève elle de la lumière et détient les facultés humaines les plus élevées, l'intellection et la science. A la mort, l'esprit quitte le corps (*dhāt*) et rejoint le monde intermédiaire (*barzākh*), Radtke, "Ibrīziana" 119-27 et Zouanat, *Paroles d'or*, n. 3, 125.

53 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/56.

2.3 *Le Prophète*

Dans tout ce processus d'éducation, le Prophète occupe une position centrale. Rien de surprenant dans la mesure où cela ne fait que refléter la centralité cosmique du Prophète. Ce dernier est le secret de cette existence et toutes les créatures procèdent de lui, tirent leurs connaissances de la sienne et toutes sont créées de sa lumière[54]. Celle-ci est elle-même le produit des lumières des noms divins les plus beaux (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*)[55]. La fonction de Muḥammad est ainsi totalisante et occupe tout l'horizon du croyant, a fortiori du disciple. Aussi ce dernier doit par exemple avoir en permanence l'esprit occupé par le Prophète ou être absorbé par sa présence[56]. La conformité à la *sunna* du Prophète, l'orthopraxie, est ainsi déplacée d'une conformité à un texte ou à sa mise en pratique à une expérience vécue dans une forme de contact direct. Le *shaykh* Dabbāgh revendique d'ailleurs ce lien permanent avec le Prophète qui lui permet de l'interroger quand il ignore la réponse à une question[57].

Dabbāgh conseille à ses disciples de se pencher fréquemment sur la vie du Prophète afin d'en connaître plus exactement les détails et d'en approfondir les diverses étapes, pour mieux se le représenter mentalement, car l'objectif est de rendre proche le Prophète et plus précise la représentation que le postulant s'en fait[58]. Mais ce n'est pas la seule raison. Car les détails du déroulement historique des événements n'importent que dans la mesure où ils conditionnent les arcanes de l'histoire sacrale de l'humanité, où ils participent à une meilleure compréhension de l'architecture invisible du monde dont il faut comprendre les ressorts pour en bénéficier. Ainsi, l'heure de réunion de l'assemblée des saints, le *dīwān al-ṣāliḥīn*, est fixée au dernier tiers de la nuit, correspondant au moment de la naissance du Prophète. C'est pour la même raison que Dieu exauce les invocations dans ce laps de temps[59]. De même, le moment privilégié du vendredi, au cours duquel les demandes sont exaucées, est celui où le Prophète faisait le prêche sur sa chaire dans la mosquée de Médine[60]. Les effets de l'histoire prophétique ne sont donc pas limités à la période historique au cours de laquelle ils se déroulèrent mais continuent d'agir sur la marche

54 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/208-9.
55 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/187.
56 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/285.
57 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/130.
58 Sulamī mentionnait déjà ce qu'il nommait un compagnonnage (*ṣuḥba*) avec le Prophète et même un comportement chevaleresque (*futuwwa*) envers lui, les deux termes paraissant d'ailleurs en grande partie interchangeable, signe d'une relation à cette présence prophétique toujours vivante voir, Sulamī, *Adab al-ṣuḥba*, 80 et des référence plus complètes dans Thibon, *L'œuvre*, 369.
59 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/18.
60 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/18 et 23-24.

du monde. Non seulement ils sont en lien avec l'histoire de l'humanité, mais ils en constituent le principe organisateur. La lumière prophétique, source et origine du monde, demeure éternellement présente dans tous les éléments de la création[61]. L'importance du cycle solaire dans la cosmologie de Dabbāgh reflète cette omniprésence de la lumière qui est avant tout la lumière prophétique. D'où l'importance du chiffre 366 : c'est le nombre de formes différentes dans lesquelles peuvent se projeter les plus grands saints[62] ; de même les sept lectures du Coran, liées selon Dabbāgh à sept dispositions de la nature prophétique comportent 366 aspects (*wajh*)[63]. Le corps humain lui aussi comprend 366 veines, chacune porteuse d'une spécificité, en général blâmable et que le disciple devra transformer en qualité[64].

2.4 *La question de la foi*

Nous avons évoqué précédemment ce que Zarrūq avait appelé l'éducation par l'énergie (*himma*) et par l'état spirituel (*ḥāl*). Dabbāgh apporte des précisions essentielles pour notre propos, il explique :

> La *himma*, celle du maître accompli, c'est la lumière de sa foi en Dieu. Par elle, il éduque et fait progresser son disciple. Si l'amour que le disciple porte à son maître provient de la lumière de la foi de ce dernier, alors il l'assiste qu'il soit présent ou non, même après sa mort et même après des milliers d'années. C'est pour cela que les saints, à chaque époque, recherchent l'assistance de la lumière de la foi du Prophète (*nūr īmān al-nabī*). Celle-ci les éduque et les fait progresser car leur amour pour lui est un amour pur et exclusif provenant de la lumière de leur foi[65].

Nous avons dans cette citation un point d'articulation essentiel de l'hagiologie de Dabbāgh. La référence au *nūr Muḥammad*, à la lumière muḥammadienne, trouve son fondement dans le texte coranique et a été abondamment reprise

61 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/54.

62 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/27.

63 Ce point est tiré de l'une des plus longues discussions de l'ouvrage, au chapitre 1, portant sur le *ḥadīth* qui traite des sept lectures du Coran, généralement compris comme les sept manières de le lire, mais qui sont reliées pour Dabbāgh à sept dispositions de la nature prophétique selon lesquelles le Coran fut révélé, O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, xvii et 205-306, Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/128-231. Ces sept dispositions correspondent par exemple au nombre de jour de la semaine ; elles ont chacune une face tournée vers Dieu et une autre vers les hommes et représentent autant de lumières. Elles confèrent au Prophète une fonction de médiation sur tous les plans de l'existence, Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/130.

64 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/54.

65 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/58.

et commentée, pas seulement d'ailleurs par les représentants du soufisme[66]. La nouveauté dans l'expression résulte de l'adjonction du terme *īmān*, la foi, comme origine ou vecteur de cette lumière. Qu'apporte l'insertion de ce terme dans l'expression précédente, alors qu'il représente l'un des plus riches du lexique coranique, aux définitions multiples et objet de débats parfois virulents entre les différentes écoles théologiques[67] ? A ce qu'il semble, Dabbāgh n'a pas jugé utile de l'expliciter. La compréhension usuelle définit la foi comme l'adhésion à un ensemble de croyances et éventuellement une mise en œuvre de ce credo. Mais si ce terme ne s'inscrit pas chez Dabbāgh dans les débats théologiques, il lui est assigné un rôle capital dans l'accession à la sainteté[68]. Ce n'est pas sur les exercices spirituels, ou sur la réforme patiente et douloureuse des caractères que le cheikh met l'accent, même si bien sûr il ne les conteste ni ne les néglige, mais fondamentalement le premier élément, celui qui est indispensable pour que s'enclenche tout le reste, c'est la foi et celle-ci procède de la fonction prophétique. C'est cette foi, acte d'adhésion au message, totalement dépendante du Prophète en tant que transmetteur de la parole divine, qui est la source de tout bien, qui concentre toute l'attention. Ce n'est pas seulement une foi dans la vérité du message mais une adhésion à la personne de son transmetteur. La place spécifique reconnue à Abū Bakr, insurpassable même pour ceux qui ont connu la grande illumination, tient justement à la qualité de sa foi et à cette adhésion immédiate et sans réserve à la parole du Prophète comme à sa personne[69]. Cette adhésion, qui ne relève ni de la raison ni du recours à la tradition savante, est inscrite dans la nature la plus intime de l'individu[70]. Elle est l'expression ou le vecteur de la destinée humaine, le moyen pour que se réalise en particulier sa dimension eschatologique, et finalement elle procède de l'élection divine opérant la répartition entre les bienheureux et les damnés.

La conception de la foi que nous propose Dabbāgh pourrait paraître fort éloignée de celle soutenue par Ibn ʿArabī quand il affirme : « La science est une

66 Sur ce point et les diverses références, Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints*, 79-88.

67 L'expression apparaît à de nombreuses reprises dans le texte.

68 Il affirme par exemple : "Sans lui (le Prophète), notre foi en Dieu n'aurait aucune valeur, ni rien des bienfaits de ce monde ou de l'autre", Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/270.

69 O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, 537 et *Ibrīz*, 1/456.

70 A rapprocher du terme *qābiliyya*, sur lequel Dabbāgh est interrogé, prédisposition à devenir aspirant, indispensable pour que se noue un lien entre un disciple et un maître. Elle comporte des degrés. Cette prédisposition pourrait paraître une inclination naturelle vers la voie ou le maître, mais elle est avant tout une élection qui relève de la destinée de chacun. Elle est indispensable pour que se crée le lien (*rābiṭa*) entre le maître au disciple ; Mubārak, *al-ibrīz*, 2/61-2.

des conditions de la sainteté ; la foi n'en est pas une condition »[71]. Toutefois les mots ne doivent pas nous abuser. Dans un petit traité, Sulamī définit la foi comme "la science de la réalité divine" et aussi comme « la station de l'invisible »[72]. Pour Dabbāgh, affirmant par ailleurs que les connaissances sont une des caractéristiques des saints, cette foi, qualité essentielle et qui s'applique également au Prophète, est bien comprise dans le sens où Sulamī l'entendait : une science des réalités divines, qui n'est certes pas celle des oulémas, et qui ouvre sur la contemplation de l'invisible. Plus largement, la vision de Dabbāgh débouche sur un autre débat : si la foi véhicule des connaissances intuitives qui sont fondamentales dans le parcours de l'aspirant, quelle place revient à l'apprentissage des sciences traditionnelles ? Quelles sont les relations entre sciences inspirées et sciences traditionnelles transmises selon les voies habituelles de l'enseignement ? Dabbāgh assurément se situe exclusivement dans le registre des premières, tandis que son disciple Ibn al-Mubārak tente dans cet ouvrage de dépasser ce clivage en démontrant que ces deux modalités, loin d'être incompatibles, sont au contraire convergentes et ne se contredisent point. Bien plus, il reconnaît la supériorité de la première sur la seconde. Quoi qu'il en soit, pour le *shaykh* Dabbāgh, la foi prime sur tout le reste ; elle est la source ou le vecteur de la lumière prophétique et elle seule conditionne le devenir ultime du cheminant. Mais ce dernier a-t-il un moyen de la modifier par la discipline spirituelle ? Même si l'amour semble à même d'infléchir ce cheminement, en dernier ressort, la foi, et la « qualité » de celle-ci, procède du décret divin et de ce que Dieu octroie à chaque être.

La citation qui a constitué le point de départ de ce débat nous offre une autre conclusion : de même que le Prophète continue d'être présent au monde et agissant au-delà de sa mort physique, de même le maître, qui en est l'héritier, continue à veiller sur ses disciples après avoir physiquement quitté ce monde. A condition toutefois que l'amour du disciple provienne de la lumière de la foi du maître. Dans ce cas, il pourra en profiter, présent ou absent, et même au-delà de la mort, car le maître l'assiste et le secourt par la lumière de la foi du Prophète donc il est le vecteur. C'est l'esprit (*rūḥ*) de l'un et de l'autre, non leur enveloppe corporelle, qui perdure. Cela signifie qu'il n'est nul besoin pour le disciple de s'attacher à un autre maître au décès du premier, à condition toutefois que l'amour qu'il lui portait ait dépassé sa seule personne pour parvenir à l'amour de celui qu'il incarnait, le Prophète.

71 Cité par Chodkiewicz, "Le saint illettré dans l'hagiographie islamique" § 12. Voir Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 2, 52.

72 Ce traité est intitulé *al-Farq bayna ʿilm al-sharīʿa wa-l-ḥaqīqa* ; Thibon, *L'œuvre*, 341.

2.5 *Le secret* (sirr)

Un autre terme revêt une importance cruciale dans le lexique de Dabbāgh bien que son contenu précis, ici encore, ne soit pas explicité. Il s'agit du mot *sirr*, le secret. Quand Dabbāgh définit l'objectif de l'éducation spirituelle, il précise : « elle vise à amender la nature humaine et à la purifier de toutes ses exigences, afin qu'elle puisse porter le secret »[73]. Cette définition, simple dans sa formulation, nous invite à parler d'éducation initiatique, dans la mesure où sa finalité réside dans la transmission d'un *sirr*, le seul but d'un maître étant de trouver le disciple susceptible de porter son *sirr*[74]. Dabbāgh brosse à grands traits les différentes phases de l'histoire de l'éducation initiatique (*tarbiya*) en islam, montrant par là qu'il a bien conscience de s'inscrire dans un processus historique évolutif : pour les trois premiers siècles, explique-t-il, les âmes, du fait de leurs qualités propres, n'avaient pas besoin d'intermédiaire pour se purifier, les hommes étant attaché à la quête de Dieu qui agissait directement en eux ; l'initiation spirituelle était donc inutile. Il suffisait au maître de chuchoter à l'oreille de son disciple et futur héritier pour lui transmettre son secret et provoquer l'illumination. Dans la phase suivante, l'attrait des plaisirs mondains corrompit les âmes et les maîtres imposèrent à leurs disciples la retraite, la remémoration de Dieu et la frugalité afin de rendre leurs âmes aptes à supporter le secret. Ensuite, la corruption gagna même les maîtres ou prétendus tels, les faussaires se multiplièrent à l'époque de Zarrūq l'obligeant, lui et ses semblables, à mettre en garde les aspirants et à les ramener vers « le Livre et la *sunna* ». Mais pour Dabbāgh, cela ne signifie nullement que la voie de l'initiation ait disparu, car la lumière prophétique demeurera à jamais[75]. Toutefois, le terme *sirr*, comme celui d'*īmān* reste difficile à saisir ou plutôt est susceptible de plusieurs acceptions : soit il désigne l'héritage spirituel que le maître transmet au disciple qu'il investit comme son successeur, soit il désigne les connaissances suprasensibles auxquelles accède celui qui a connu l'illumination majeure. Enfin, dans un sens plus général, il désigne tout ce qui est voilé à une perception sensorielle ou n'est pas accessible de manière directe[76]. Mais le plus énigmatique reste que le Prophète est désigné comme « le secret de Dieu de cette existence »[77].

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73 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/52. Dans le contexte qui est le nôtre, ce terme ne désigne pas la partie la plus secrète du cœur, parfois traduit, en reprenant la terminologie des mystiques chrétiens, par "la fine pointe de l'âme".

74 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/169.

75 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/52-4 ; Zouanat, *Paroles d'or*, 266-67 ; O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, 614-15.

76 Sur ce dernier point Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/186.

77 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/209.

Un épisode important de la vie spirituelle de Dabbāgh est lié à ce terme *sirr*. Dans l'éducation des disciples, les récits édifiants (*ḥikāyāt*) que rapporte le maître tiennent une place non-négligeable. Cela n'a rien de nouveau, elles font partie de l'arsenal éducatif employé depuis toujours dans la formation spirituelle qui se modèle d'ailleurs sur le discours coranique, particulièrement riche de ces récits et paraboles (*mathal*) propres à tout discours religieux. Mais Dabbāgh donne un fondement nouveau à ce mode d'enseignement en relatant son introduction dans l'assemblée des saints[78]. Lors de sa première participation, il lui fut rappelé la nécessité absolue de la discipline de l'arcane (*kitmān al-sirr*) et celui qui présidait cette assemblée ordonna à chacun de ses membres de conter une histoire illustrant ce sujet. Ils en racontèrent près de deux cents, précise Dabbāgh, ce qui suggère que même les saints complètent leur formation ou leur savoir par le biais de ces récits[79]. Si les maîtres utilisent ce langage, ils sont fondés à leur tour à en user avec leurs disciples pour les instruire. Dabbāgh ne s'en prive pas ; au regard de la profusion des *ḥikāyāt*, présentes tout au long de l'ouvrage, il semble même que ce soit un moyen privilégié du *shaykh* pour illustrer son enseignement. Quant à ce qu'il convient de sceller, Dabbāgh reste muet sur ce point.

2.6 *L'attitude avec ses disciples*

Notons encore un point caractéristique de cette éducation : si depuis longtemps certains maîtres demandent à leur disciple de ne rien leur cacher de ce qui survient dans l'intimité de leurs pensées ou des épreuves qu'ils ont affrontées, il est plus rare que le maître s'impose la même franchise en retour envers ses disciples[80]. Dabbāgh explique que son silence sur ces points ne serait de sa part qu'une tromperie. Il érige en règle cardinale du compagnonnage spirituel (*ṣuḥba*) que les deux parties ne dissimulent rien de leurs états intérieurs. Celui-ci n'établit donc pas de relation hiérarchique entre le maître et le disciple[81]. D'ailleurs, pour Dabbāgh, ce n'est pas le disciple qui est redevable envers son maître mais bien l'inverse : si l'amour que le maître porte à ses disciples suffisait, alors tous parviendraient au terme de la voie, ce qui n'est pas le

78 L'assemblée des saints (*Dīwān al-ṣāliḥīn*) occupe tout le chapitre 4. Sur ce point, voir Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints*, 112-13.

79 Mubārak dit n'en avoir entendu que huit rapportées par son maître, *Ibrīz*, 1/59.

80 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/154.

81 Il demande à ses disciples de ne pas le considérer comme un *shaykh* mais comme un frère, car ils ne sont pas à même de s'acquitter des règles de convenance (*adab*) à avoir envers un *shaykh*, Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/159.

cas. Ce sont donc bien les qualités inhérentes au disciple et son amour pour le maître qui rendent possible l'action de ce dernier[82].

3 Les suprêmes étapes

Après avoir présenté quelques uns des points essentiels de l'éducation spirituelle telle que le *shaykh* Dabbāgh la conçoit et la pratique, intéressons-nous maintenant à ce qui constitue la finalité et le terme de la voie.

3.1 *L'illumination*

L'illumination est une étape essentielle, pour ne pas dire la finalité principale de ceux qui suivent la voie[83]. Ce processus d'illumination (*fatḥ*) est complexe et le Prophète y joue là encore un rôle essentiel[84]. Il y a une illumination mineure et une autre qualifiée de majeure. Dabbāgh explique que le cheminant ayant reçu une illumination est confronté à de multiples dangers jusqu'à ce qu'il parvienne à la contemplation de la vision de la station du Prophète, il est alors assuré de la félicité, à l'abri des dangers[85], car le Prophète est la seule créature à bénéficier d'une puissance d'attraction pour amener à Dieu et qu'il est la Miséricorde de Dieu[86]. Le disciple est ainsi assuré d'atteindre l'objectif ultime : la vision de Dieu[87]. La sainteté selon Dabbāgh se mesure à l'aune de la proximité avec le Prophète, ou plutôt à l'adéquation à la personne du Prophète. Ainsi, l'autorité suprême en ce monde, *al-Ghawth*, le Secours suprême, n'accède à ce statut qui fait de lui le primat de la hiérarchie spirituelle, que parce

82 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/77.

83 Cette question, qui est centrale dans tout l'ouvrage, est traitée dans l'introduction et dans le chapitre 9. Sur ce point voir aussi, Radtke, "Der Ibrīz" 330.

84 Pour signaler la différence avec l'enseignement *shādhilī*, rappelons le conseil d'Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (m. 1309) : "Si tu veux obtenir l'illumination (*al-tanwīr wa-l-ishrāq*), renonce à toute gouvernance (*tadbīr*)", *al-Tanwīr fī isqāṭ al-tadbīr*, 115.

85 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/277.

86 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/55. Expression que l'on trouve dans les paroles que son maître ʿAbdallāh al-Barnāwī lui adresse avant de le quitter, après qu'il eut connu l'illumination suprême.

87 Dabbāgh distingue ensuite deux groupes : ceux qui s'anéantissent dans la contemplation de Dieu et un autre groupe, plus parfait, jouissant simultanément d'une double contemplation : leur esprit (*arwāḥ*) s'anéantit dans la contemplation de Dieu tandis que leur être contingent (*dhawāt*) s'anéantit dans la contemplation du Prophète, qualifiée de plus agréable que d'entrer au Paradis ; Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/286-87.

qu'« aucun être (*dhāt*) n'a bu[88] de l'être du Prophète autant que lui »[89]. De manière générale, Dabbāgh précise encore que celui à qui il sera donné de pouvoir le contempler devra auparavant avoir été abreuvé par les secrets de sa personne (*dhāt*)[90]. Ce langage figuré, volontairement abscons, ne fait pas référence à l'imitation du Prophète, à la mise en œuvre de la *sunna*, mais à une véritable identification à sa personne. Il renvoie également à un temps originel où tous les croyants, et pas seulement les musulmans, ainsi que les prophètes des communautés antérieures furent « arrosés » de la lumière prophétique en huit étapes successives, antérieures à leur création terrestre[91]. La différence entre les croyants vient de ce que chacun en a reçu. Selon une vision universaliste qui ne partage pas le monde entre musulmans et non-musulmans mais entre croyants et non croyants, la part muḥammadienne de chaque homme détermine son appartenance à la communauté des croyants, quelle que soit la croyance, et son degré dans la hiérarchie spirituelle. L'action du Prophète dans ce monde et sur les hommes ne débute pas avec son apparition historique et la propagation de son message, mais participe de la destinée de chacun, selon le Décret divin, dès avant sa venue à l'existence.

3.2 *La vision du prophète*

Pour le *shaykh* Dabbāgh, le rêve occupe une place importante dans l'économie de la voie spirituelle[92]. L'une des marques de l'illumination mineure peut être la vision du Prophète en rêve. Celle-ci répond à une typologie[93] : on peut voir son essence pure et noble ou seulement les multiples images de celle-ci ; ses diverses manifestations sous le visage des autres prophètes ou des saints, ou encore, pour le disciple, sous la forme du maître. Leur interprétation, toujours

88 Dans un autre passage, il explique que c'est par la contemplation du Prophète que s'opère ce transfert décrit par la métaphore de l'absorption d'un liquide ; Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/286. Le terme employé pour désigner cette opération est *saqy*, également utilisé pour "l'infusion" des noms divins ; Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/176-7. Radtke croît cette notion identique à celle de *fayḍ* chez les Tijāniyya ; Radtke, "Ibrīziana" 127.

89 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/301 ; O'Kane et Radtke, *Pure Gold*, 872. Non seulement ceux qui ont obtenu la grande illumination ne commettent plus de faute, mais les fautes antérieures qu'ils auraient pu commettre sont transformées en bonnes actions. Leur impeccabilité provient du fait que, contemplant Dieu en permanence, ils ne lui désobéissent plus, semblables en cela aux anges.

90 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/57.

91 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/191.

92 Katz, "Dreams", 270-84. Ce phénomène est très ancien. Katz a par exemple étudié les récits de 109 rêves rapportés dans un ouvrage de Muḥammad al-Zawāwī (m. 882/1477), Katz, *Dreams, Sufism and Sainthood*.

93 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/279-82.

ambivalente, dépend du parcours spirituel du rêveur. Dabbāgh donne des clefs d'interprétation, bien qu'il répugne à interpréter les rêves, car cela relève d'une science qui doit demeurer scellée[94] : il s'agit presque à chaque fois d'une confrontation entre l'entité lumineuse du Prophète et la part de ténèbres qui demeure chez le rêveur. Cela oriente l'explication des circonstances dans lesquelles le Prophète apparaît. Seuls ceux qui ont obtenu l'illumination majeure (*al-fatḥ al-kabīr*) sont gratifiés de la vision du Prophète à l'état de veille. Cette possibilité de voir le Prophète à l'état de veille deviendra par la suite, selon Radtke, une caractéristique du soufisme tardif[95].

Le plus souvent le veilleur voit la forme apparente du Prophète, non l'essence de son être (*ʿayn al-dhāt*) qui se manifeste sous différentes représentations ou formes (*ṣuwar*) et peut être vue en rêve ou à l'état de veille, car La lumière du Prophète est partout. Il n'est pas un lieu qui soit dépourvu de sa lumière. C'est cette lumière qui fait apparaître sa forme comme le miroir révèle l'image de celui qui s'y regarde. Ainsi on peut le voir en même temps à l'est et à l'ouest, au nord ou au sud.

Ces divers éléments de l'enseignement spirituel de Dabbāgh : l'amour du maître, l'omniprésence du Prophète, l'illumination comme terme de la voie ou le caractère initiatique que manifeste cette importance attachée au *sirr* ne sont pas tous marqués du sceau de la nouveauté. Une étude des influences qui se sont exercées sur le maître de Fès ferait sans doute apparaître quelques personnages, comme Abū Yaʿza, ʿAbd al-Salam b. Mashīsh[96] ou des lignages confrériques, en particulier les éléments *shādhilī*s[97]. Mais il faudrait un travail approfondi pour mieux appréhender comment Dabbāgh a infléchi et modifié l'héritage de ses prédécesseurs.

3.3 *Quelques éléments de prophétologie*

Pour compléter ce rapide tableau, précisons encore la position de Dabbāgh sur la relation entre prophétie et sainteté. Muḥammad est désigné dans le Coran comme un flambeau qui éclaire (Cor. 33, 46). Cette référence au *nūr*

94 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/282.

95 Radtke, "Ibrīziana", 122.

96 Les orientations de Dabbāgh présentent une corrélation forte avec sa célèbre prière, au contenu doctrinal particulièrement riche, commentée dans l'ouvrage, Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/183-4. Sur cette prière, Zouanat, *Ibn Mashīsh*, 76-112. Sur Ibn Mashīsh, voir les travaux d'un colloque tenu à Tétouan en 2008, Sulamī et Saʿīdī, éds., *ʿAbd al-Salām b. Mashīsh*.

97 Les réponses que donnent Dabbāgh à un juriste qui l'interroge sur les voies de Shādhilī et de Ghazālī, sur leur méthode respective et sur celle qui a la précellence sur l'autre, ne laissent aucune ambiguïté sur celle qu'il juge supérieure, à savoir la première, même s'il reconnaît la validité de la seconde ; Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/59-61.

muḥammadī fut pour les spirituels de l'islam une source de méditation permanente qui, par étapes, de Ja'far al-Ṣādiq et Sahl al-Tustarī, en passant par le *Kitāb al-shifā bi-ta'rīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā* du Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ (m. 544/1149), conduit avec Ibn 'Arabī à la doctrine de la *Ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*[98], puis à ses développements, en particulier dans le cadre de la confrérie *shādhilī*. Ce qui me semble nouveau avec Dabbāgh, c'est que le Prophète soit présenté comme porteur d'une triple lumière correspondant à la nature même des trois types de discours qu'il produit[99] : le *ḥadīth* provient de la lumière établie dans sa nature humaine (*dhāt*), lumière qui ne se soustrait jamais à son regard, provenant elle-même des lumières divines, aussi inhérente à l'essence prophétique que la lumière solaire l'est au soleil en tant qu'astre. Quand les lumières divines se répandent et affectent cette nature, au point qu'il quitte son état habituel, il s'agit du Coran. Mais si ces lumières ne le font pas sortir de son état, alors il s'agit de paroles saintes (*ḥadīth qudsī*)[100] qui proviennent de l'esprit (*rūḥ*) du Prophète. Dans tous les cas, la parole prophétique est nécessairement accompagnée des lumières de la Vérité et tout ce qu'il dit procède d' une inspiration qu'il reçoit (*waḥyun yūḥā*)[101].

Ces précisions sont nécessaires pour appréhender les rapports entre prophétie et sainteté chez Dabbāgh. Ces derniers sont complexes et furent abordés par les premiers soufis. Ainsi Sulamī affirme dans ses *Manāhij al-ṣādiqīn* : « Les plus infimes demeures de la prophétie sont séparées des demeures les plus élevées de la sainteté »[102] et il en donne la raison : les prophètes sont soutenus par une inspiration qui n'est affectée d'aucune illusion ni du moindre doute. Cette frontière nette entre prophétie et sainteté est soulignée à de nombreuses reprises par le cheikh Dabbāgh. Il affirme que le saint, quel que soit son degré, ne peut prétendre accéder au degré de connaissance du Prophète[103]. Un passage permet d'appréhender sa position[104] :

> Le bien qui émane du saint ne vient que de la *baraka* du Prophète car la foi, qui est la source de ce bien, ne lui est parvenue que par l'entremise (*wāsiṭa*) du Prophète. La nature humaine (*dhāt*) du saint n'est pas

98 Comme l'a montré Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints*, 85. Voir aussi Addas, *La Maison muhammadienne*, 38 et sq.

99 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/286.

100 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/117-18.

101 En référence à Cor. 53:4.

102 Thibon, *La voie des Hommes sincères*, § 19 et texte arabe, 30.

103 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/213.

104 De manière assez inexplicable Zouanat a omis ce passage capital alors qu'elle a traduit ce qui précède et ce qui suit, Zouanat, *Paroles d'or*, 281.

> différente de celle des autres hommes, contrairement aux prophètes car ils sont pétris d'impeccabilité et leur nature originelle (*fiṭra*) les porte à la connaissance de Dieu et à la crainte si bien qu'ils n'ont nul besoin d'une loi à suivre, ni d'un enseignant dont ils tireraient profit car la Vérité qui habite leur être, – et c'est cela la caractéristique suprême de la prophétie selon laquelle ils ont été façonnés – les guide sur le chemin bien tracé et la voie droite[105].

Si la notion d'impeccabilité n'a rien de nouveau dans la définition de la prophétie, déclarer que le Prophète, les prophètes, n'ont pas besoin de la loi, de par la nature fondamentale de leur être, paraît une affirmation audacieuse si on la rapproche de la lettre du verset dans lequel Dieu fait dire au Prophète : « Je ne suis qu'un homme semblable à vous, recevant une inspiration » (Cor. 18:110). Le verset coranique fait de l'inspiration divine la seule marque distinctive de la prophétie quand Dabbāgh en ajoute une autre : une *dhāt*, une nature qui est finalement différente de celle du commun de l'humanité. D'ailleurs, selon lui, il n'y a pas de voile entre le *dhāt* et le *rūḥ* chez le Prophète, contrairement aux autres humains. On entrevoit toutes les conséquences théologiques qui peuvent découler de cette position. Relevons aussi que l'indépendance à l'égard d'un *muʿallim* réduit à peu de choses le rôle de l'ange, chargé de transmettre la Parole divine.

La réponse que Dabbāgh donne à son disciple qui l'interroge sur les *gharānīq*[106], démontre que ce maître ne tire pas seulement ses connaissances d'une inspiration, ou d'une vision intérieure (*kashf*). Il se montre aussi, dans certains cas, capable d'user d'un discours théologique ou du moins rationnel. Sur cette question, sa réponse est sans appel : les différentes traditions qui évoquent cette question sont pour lui sans fondement, car dans le cas contraire c'est tout l'édifice de la prophétie qui s'effondrerait[107].

Sur de nombreux points, le *shaykh* Dabbāgh s'inscrit dans la tradition du soufisme même si sa prophétologie présente quelques aspects singuliers qui mériteraient d'être approfondis. Ses directives ne sont pas radicalement nouvelles, mais elles donnent une importance totalisante au Prophète qui perdura par la suite.

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105 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/ 91.

106 En référence à un groupe de versets ou pseudo-versets de la sourate *al-Najm* ne figurant pas dans la recension ʿuthmānienne en relation avec les déesses mecquoises et connus de nos jours sous l'appellation de "versets sataniques".

107 Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/377.

4 Conclusion

L'ouvrage de Ibn al-Mubārak ne prétend pas restituer l'enseignement de son maître Dabbāgh dans sa totalité. D'abord parce que son rédacteur apporte de nombreux compléments à l'enseignement qu'il consigne, le plus souvent pour rappeler la littérature savante qui s'y rapporte, et parfois pour pallier au silence du maître. Néanmoins, la matière même du livre en est pour l'essentiel les propos de son maître et en particulier les réponses aux questions qu'il pose, lui et parfois d'autres savants. Ensuite, parce que Ibn al-Mubārak a reformulé, par son travail d'écriture, un enseignement oral dont on peut supposer qu'il était en dialecte, langue absente de l'ouvrage. C'est donc l'enseignement de Dabbāgh que rapporte l'ouvrage mais à travers la compréhension qu'en eut son plus prestigieux disciple, Ibn al-Mubārak. Elément supplémentaire que ce dernier signale : tout ce que dit le maître ne s'écrit pas et certaines choses ne doivent pas être transmises, d'autres enfin ne le sont qu'oralement[108]. Ainsi malgré une fidélité qu'il n'y a aucune raison de récuser, ce que nous transmet Ibn al-Mubārak ne représente qu'une partie de l'enseignement qu'il reçut, renonçant, par choix ou sur ordre du maître, à transmettre la totalité de ce qu'il entendit de lui. Malgré ce que laisseraient croire les apparences, Ibn al-Mubārak n'est pas un simple transmetteur car il a mis en forme les propos de son maître et en a organisé l'agencement. Il est dès lors difficile de savoir avec précision ce qui est redevable à l'un ou à l'autre dans ce volumineux document.

Paradoxal, le livre l'est à plus d'un titre. Il l'est dans la confrontation entre une tradition savante, celle du rédacteur, et le discours inspiré d'un maître ayant accès à un monde invisible et insoupçonnable au commun des mortels. Le duo qu'ils forment n'est pas original et présente des modèles antérieurs. De même, le monde imaginal de Dabbāgh n'est pas totalement singulier, il n'est pas coupé de la tradition du soufisme, il s'y inscrit au contraire pleinement, croyons-nous, mais avec des particularités qui font tout son intérêt : le rôle du maître ou de la foi, la place du Prophète et son rôle totalisateur, la symphonie des lumières prophétiques qui transforme le saint en visionnaire inspiré, la nature des prophètes qui les distingue du commun des mortels. Ces divers points ne constituent que quelques uns des aspects les plus caractéristiques d'un maître dont l'originalité dépasse de beaucoup ces seuls éléments et qui ouvrit une voie nouvelle d'accès à la sainteté ne s'inscrivant pas dans le cadre des institutions confrériques, dans la mesure où il ne fonde pas une confrérie (*ṭarīqa*) mais une tradition spirituelle[109]. Son type spirituel n'est ni

108 Par exemple, Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 1/398, 1/401 et 2/ 210.

109 Radtke, "Ibrīziana" 119.

celui des saints-savants ni celui des saints-ravis (*majdhūb*) qui, plus ou moins, représentent les deux pôles entre lesquels s'inscrivent la plupart des saints en islam[110]. Si les fous en Dieu ont représenté une forme d'alternative au légalisme desséché des docteurs de la loi[111], Dabbāgh n'appartient en aucune manière à ce type de spirituel, il n'en a ni le discours, ni les apparences, ni le comportement. Et il n'appartient pas non plus à cette catégorie des savants du type de son disciple, Ibn al-Mubārak.

Dans le cadre d'une suspicion déjà ancienne envers la maîtrise spirituelle et ses dérives, exprimée par exemple par Zarrūq, Dabbāgh court-circuite, ni plus ni moins, les instances habituelles de la transmission et de l'éducation spirituelle. Il ne récuse pas la maîtrise spirituelle, la totalité de l'ouvrage démontrant de fait le contraire, mais en confiant, en dernier ressort, le devenir du disciple à sa capacité à tisser un lien direct avec le Prophète, il restreint le rôle des lignages spirituels et de leurs institutions. Finalement, il ramène la maîtrise à son fondement prophétique et réinstalle le Prophète comme présence vivante et transformante au centre d'une histoire universelle de la réalisation spirituelle. Servi par la plume d'Ibn al-Mubārak, il installe la figure du visionnaire, au sens premier du terme, comme un modèle de sainteté supplémentaire et alternatif aux carences du temps et des institutions soufies. Mais ce projet est-il bien celui du maître Dabbāgh ou est-ce celui de son disciple, Ibn al-Mubārak ? Car, comme nous l'avons souligné, il est finalement très difficile d'apprécier son rôle exact dans la formulation de cette somme. Ce dernier, nous l'avons vu, complète le discours de son maître, le conforte par ses références savantes, le cautionne finalement de bout en bout. Ce faisant, n'est-ce pas lui qui impose la voie de son maître comme une alternative possible pour sortir le soufisme des innombrables critiques auxquelles il est confronté depuis plusieurs siècles ? Ne fallait-il pas sa caution savante pour que cette voix fasse émerger une voie ? L'ouvrage ne propose pas de réponse explicite à ce type de question. Les nouvelles voies qui, aux siècles suivants, s'inspirèrent de cet enseignement démontrent l'efficacité de ces nouvelles orientations, qui, à défaut de faire taire la critique, ont puissamment contribué au renouvellement doctrinal du soufisme. Toutefois, il reste encore beaucoup à faire pour prolonger les travaux engagés par Radtke et mieux appréhender l'impact d'*al-Ibrīz* sur les auteurs soufis postérieurs.

110 Dabbāgh explique la différence entre le cheminant (*sālik*) et le ravi-extatique (*majdhūb*), Mubārak, *Ibrīz*, 2/34-36.

111 Sur le *majdhūb* comme figure de sainteté alternative, Amri, *Croire au Maghreb médiéval*, en particulier 85-193.

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PART 3

The Prophet in Shīʿī Doctrine and in Islamic Philosophy

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9

The Prophet Muḥammad in Imāmī Shīʿism

Between History and Metaphysics

Mathieu Terrier

Although Imāmī or Twelver Shīʿīs have always proclaimed that they are faithful to the person and the message of the Prophet Muḥammad, they have faced constant accusations from Sunnī heresiographers that they neglect the Prophet in favour of the Imām. They themselves hold that the Sunnī perception of the Prophet is lacking an essential dimension: his relationships with the "People of [his] Family" (*ahl al-bayt*). These are Muḥammad's cousin and son-in-law ʿAlī Ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), the first Imām; his daughter Fāṭima (d. 11/632); his two grandsons, the children of ʿAlī and Fāṭima, called al-Ḥasan (d. 49/669) and al-Ḥusayn (d. 61/680), respectively the second and third Imām; and nine male descendants of the latter up to Muḥammad al-Mahdī, the twelfth Imām, in occultation since 329/940–1. In the Shīʿī credo (*shahada*), mention of God and His Prophet Muḥammad is followed by the name of ʿAlī, "God's close ally" (*walī allāh*).

In Shīʿī as in Sunnī Islam, the representation and veneration of the Prophet Muḥammad are founded less on the Qurʾān than on the *ḥadīth*, the set of Prophetic traditions as relayed by witnesses or reliable reporters. Shīʿīs, however, reject most of the traditions recounted by the Prophet's companions (*ṣaḥāba*), whom they consider to be traitors; for them the only true traditions are those established by the "People of the Family", the Imāms and their followers. As a result, from the very beginning the Shīʿī corpus of *ḥadīth*s is very different from that of the Sunnī majority.[1] Here the figure of the Prophet is omnipresent, but inseparable from those of the *ahl al-bayt*, particularly ʿAlī. The Prophet shares with them the *ʿiṣma*, the virtue of impeccability and infallibility conferred directly by God. Together they make up the pleroma of the fourteen 'Impeccable Ones' (*maʿṣūmūn*), without whom the person and function of the Prophet are incomprehensible. According to these traditions, Prophecy (*nubuwwa*) does not exist without the Alliance or Divine Friendship

1 See Kohlberg, "Shîʿî Hadîth" 299-307; Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin dans le shîʿisme originel*, 48–70 [Eng. Transl. *The Divine Guide in Early Shi ʿism*, 19–28].

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(*walāya*), which makes up the nature and sacred mission of the Imām;[2] each Law-bearing prophet (*nabī rasūl*) is accompanied by a close ally (*walī*) who is also his heir (*waṣī*) and his lieutenant (*khalīfa*), and will himself be at the origin of a succession of allies and heirs. ʿAlī's mission was to be Muḥammad's *walī*, and the Imāms descended from them also share this mission.

In order to shed light on the Imāmī figure of the Prophet, we will draw on sources belonging to four phases in the history of Shīʿism:[3]

A. The formation of Imāmism under the historic Imāms until the Occultation; from this period we find the first collections of *ḥadīth*s and *Tafsīr*s on the Qurʾān, the latter equally composed of *ḥadīth*s attributed to the Imāms.[4]

B. The establishment of Twelver Shīʿism during the Buyid period (334–447/945–1055); this period includes the work of the traditionalist Shaykh Ṣadūq, who began to prune away the elements of the corpus of *ḥadīth*s considered to be too irrational and 'exaggerated' (*ghālī*).[5]

C. The preservation of Imāmism under Sunnī hegemony from the fifth/eleventh century to the seventh/thirteenth, during which time many large-scale works on the lives of the fourteen Impeccable Ones were composed.[6]

D. Finally, the pre-Modern and Modern periods, marked by the revivification of Imāmī Shīʿism after the Mongol invasion, and then by its institutionalisation as a state religion in Safavid Iran (907–1134/1501–1722); this period saw the emergence of Shīʿī gnosis (*ʿirfān* or *ḥikma*), which drew on the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and the Sufism of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240),[7] as well as the rebirth of Imāmī studies of *ḥadīth*.[8]

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2 On the meaning and place of *walāya* in Shīʿism, see Amir-Moezzi, *La preuve de Dieu*, 45–52.

3 For more on this evolution of Imami sources, see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, Introduction, 13–71 [*Divine Guide*, 5–28].

4 From this period we can date most of the book attributed to Sulaym b. Qays al-Kūfī (d. *ca* 76/695–6), *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*; see also al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–3), *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*; ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. *ca* 307/919), *Tafsīr al-Qummī*; and Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī (d. 328/940), *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. For more on these texts, see Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant*.

5 Al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (Ibn Bābūya) (d. 381/991), *al-Amālī*, *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, and *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-niʿma*. From the same period, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), *al-Irshād*.

6 Al-Shaykh al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), *Iʿlām al-warā bi-aʿlām al-hudā*; Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192), *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*; ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā al-Irbilī (d. 693/1293), *Kashf al-ghumma fī maʿrifat al-aʾimma*.

7 Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 782/1381), *Jāmiʿ al-asrār wa manbaʿ al-anwār*; *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ al-fuṣūṣ*; *Tafsīr al-Muḥīṭ al-aʿẓam*. Also al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī (d. after 813/1410–1), *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn fī ḥaqāʾiq asrār amīr al-muʾminīn*; Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī (d. *ca* 906/1501), *Mujlī mirʾāt al-munjī fī l-kalām wa l-ḥikmatayn wa l-taṣawwuf*; Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679), *Kalimāt maknūna*.

8 Among many others, Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī (d. *ca* 906/1501), *ʿAwālī l-laʾālī fī l-aḥādīth al-dīnīyya*; Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*.

According to an axial vision of Imāmī Shīʿism, every sacred thing resembles God himself in possessing both an apparent, exoteric aspect (*ẓāhir*) and one that is hidden and esoteric (*bāṭin*).[9] The biological and physical relationship of the Prophet with his family, especially ʿAlī, thus becomes the reverse side of an ontological and metaphysical relationship, and has theological implications. The biographies of the Prophet, his family, friends and descendants are swallowed up in a historiosophy, i.e. a teleological philosophy of history, that embraces the entire temporal arc of Creation from pre-eternity to the final Resurrection.[10] The oldest texts (A and B, above) adopt both perspectives equally. During the medieval period (C), the historical figure of the Prophet came to the fore, doubtless as a result of the dialectical conflict with Sunnism. During the latter period (D) the Prophet's metaphysical dimension developed again, thanks to the influence of external mystical and philosophical ideas, as well as to a return to scriptural sources. Although these two contrasting and complementary perspectives are inseparable within the Shīʿī consciousness, the following pages, for greater clarity, will present first the Imāmī account of the Prophet's history followed by the metaphysical concepts that underlie it.

1 The History of the Prophet in Shīʿī Traditions

In the same way as there is no established Shīʿī Qurʾān other than the shared Vulgate, there is no specifically Shīʿī version of the Prophet's *sīra*. The main episodes recounted in Ibn Hishām's *sīra* are recognised by Shīʿīs, too, but as with the Qurʾān they have their own particular interpretations of these. The oldest texts (A) contain disconnected snatches of information on the circumstances of the Revelation, the birth, and the death of the Prophet. In later monographs on the fourteen Impeccable Ones (C), the life of the Prophet is recounted in its entirety, but this takes up only the first part of a series of biographies, relatively modest in extent in comparison with that devoted to the Imām ʿAlī. In all of this historiography, the centre of gravity of the Prophet's life is his close relationships with his Holy Family, especially with ʿAlī.

9 Amir-Moezzi and Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le shî'isme?*, 27–40.

10 For more on the pre-existence and super-existence of the Imām, see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, Parts II and IV [*Divine Guide*, id.]; and *La religion discrète*, 109–133 [Eng. Transl. *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam*, 133–168].

1.1 *The Prophet's Birth and Childhood*

As in the Sunnī *sīra*, the Shīʿī account of the Prophet's life associates numerous miracles with the historical moment of his birth.[11] However, here the miracles are already prefiguring the equally miraculous birth of ʿAlī. According to one tradition, when Muḥammad's mother Amīna spoke of the apparition of the angel Gabriel and of the light emanating from the new-born baby's head, Abū Ṭālib told his own wife, Fāṭima bint Asad, that in thirty years' time she would give birth to a son who would resemble this infant, except that he would not be a prophet.[12]

According to the commonly agreed version, Muḥammad was six years old when he became an orphan and was adopted by his uncle Abū Ṭālib.[13] What little information there is on his childhood imbues his grandfather ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, and his adoptive father Abū Ṭālib – who, according to the Shīʿī sources, eventually converted to Islam – with a sacred character.[14]

1.2 *Muḥammad and ʿAlī*

Muḥammad was thirty years old when ʿAlī was born. Shīʿī traditions have it that the Prophet was the first living being that the newborn infant saw when he opened his eyes;[15] on one occasion when Fāṭima bint Asad was ill, he allowed ʿAlī to feed by sucking his (Muḥammad's) tongue.[16] Here we encounter an initiatic practice called *taḥnīk*, "the giving of saliva", that the Prophet is said to have used, as we shall see, with all of the *ahl al-bayt* during his lifetime.[17] When ʿAlī was six years old, a few years before the Prophet began his mission (*risāla*), Muḥammad adopted him.[18] For Shīʿīs, ʿAlī's proximity (*qarāba*) to the Prophet is an important argument in support of ʿAlī's right to succeed Muḥammad; but above all, as far as we are concerned, this proximity is an essential characteristic of the Shīʿī figure of the Prophet. This extremely intimate relationship had an esoteric, initiatic dimension, as expressed in this declaration attributed to ʿAlī:

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11 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, II, 175–176.

12 Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 271, § 1; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, I, 116.

13 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, V, 82–83.

14 Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 268, §§ 28–29; Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Kamāl*, 172, § 30. Sunnī tradition has it that Abū Ṭālib died an infidel.

15 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, V, 82.

16 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, V, 55–56.

17 Amir-Moezzi, *Religion discrète*, 41–43 [*Spirituality of Shīʿī Islam*, 37–39].

18 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, V, 83–84, underlines the parallels between the two childhoods.

> You know how close I was to God's Messenger. He welcomed me into his bosom when I was a child. He held me against his heart, wrapped me in his bed, had me touch his body and breathe his smell, chewed things up and had me swallow them [...] I followed him as a child follows its mother. Each day he showed me a sign among his habits, and commanded me to imitate him.[19]

ʿAlī was ten years old when Muḥammad received the first revelations. He is said to have been the first male person to convert to Islam; moreover, to have been the first receiver of the revelation. According to numerous traditions, ʿAlī had privileged access to the Prophet, visiting him for an hour each night, as no one else was allowed to do.[20] As one account attributed to him has it:

> When I asked the Prophet questions he replied, and when my questions dried up, then he started [speaking]. Not one verse [of the Qurʾān] came down to the Prophet, by day or by night [...], that he didn't give it to me to recite, that he didn't dictate to me so that I could write it out in my own hand. He taught me its spiritual interpretation as well as its literal explanations (*taʾwīlahā wa-tafsīrahā*).[21]

The exclusive closeness of the Prophet to ʿAlī is again demonstrated in an episode that was also known to Sunnī historians: the 'pact of chosen brotherhood' (*muʾākhāt*), probably accompanied by the exchange of blood, practised by the Prophet among the Muslims of Mecca before the Hijra, or between *Muhājirun* and Anṣār upon his arrival in Medina.[22] In both versions, Muḥammad chose ʿAlī as his brother, declaring: 'You are my brother in this life and the Hereafter.'[23]

1.3 *The Prophet and His Direct Descendants*

Imāmī sources report that the Prophet had two sons with Khadīja, who apparently both died in infancy, and also four daughters. Shīʿī biographers only mention in passing Muḥammad's son with Maria the Copt, Ibrāhīm, whose premature death is emphasised in the Sunnī sources;[24] they concentrate all of their attention on Fāṭima, although this does not prevent her reported date of birth from varying wildly. According to one frequently upheld tradition, she

19 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, v, 84.
20 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, v, 206–207.
21 Qummī, *Baṣāʾir*, i, 710, § 740.
22 Amir-Moezzi, *Religion discrète*, 39–40 [*Spirituality of Shi ʿi Islam*, 32–33].
23 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, v, 100.
24 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, ii, 133; Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 139–141.

was conceived after the Prophet's 'celestial ascent' (*miʿrāj*), commonly held to have occurred two years before the Hijra, an account difficult to reconcile with the fact that Fāṭima bore two of the Prophet's grandsons while he was still alive. Nevertheless, this tradition, which is attributed to the sixth Imām, is important for Imāmī representations of the Prophet. It recounts that the Prophet was in the habit of kissing Fāṭima on the mouth, and that when ʿĀ'isha reproached him for doing this, the Prophet said:

> When I was elevated into the heavens, Gabriel admitted me to paradise, led me to the tree Ṭūbā, and gave me one of its fruits, an apple. I ate it, and it was transformed into a drop of semen in my loins. When I descended to the earth again, I coupled with Khadīja, and she fell pregnant with Fāṭima. Each time I desire to rediscover paradise, I kiss her and put my tongue in her mouth; there I taste the scent of paradise and of the tree Ṭūbā.[25]

The Prophet makes ʿAlī his son-in-law (*khatan*) when he gives his daughter Fāṭima to him in marriage.[26] In numerous *ḥadīth*s, he declares that ʿAlī and Fāṭima are the two beings he loves the most.[27] Consequently, the births of his two grandsons are major events in the Prophet's life. According to ancient traditions, it is he who, at God's command, baptises them al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, translations of the names of Aaron's sons, Shabar and Shubayr; the angel Gabriel is said to have told the Prophet: 'ʿAlī is to you what Aaron was to Moses.'[28] The Prophet always calls al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn his sons, perhaps because they are his only surviving male descendants.[29] Thus, in a paradoxical anthropological situation, the Prophet considers ʿAlī to be by turns his son, his brother, and the second father of his sons.

The Prophet's relationship with his two (grand-)sons is inscribed within the hagiographies of the second and third Imāms.[30] His love for them is at once the proof that for him they were his spiritual and temporal heirs, and the vector transmitting that inheritance. Like the love he felt for ʿAlī and Fāṭima, his emotion for his grandsons is inseparable from his person and his prophetic mission, which is why every Muslim is under an obligation towards them. The

25 Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 150; Majlisī, *Biḥār*, VIII, 120, § 10; XVIII, 364, § 68 and XLVIII, 6, § 6; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, VIII, 62.

26 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, V, 57.

27 Irbilī, *Kashf*, I, 95; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, VIII, 51–52; Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 149–150.

28 Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām al-warā*, 210–211 and 218.

29 See, for example, Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 218–219; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, V, 49, 56; Irbilī, *Kashf*, I, 525.

30 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, IX, 43–58.

Prophet is said to have declared, indicating the two boys, 'Who loves me loves these two.'[31] In Imāmī doctrine, love (*tawallī*) for the *ahl al-bayt* is a fundamental pillar of faith, with the Prophet himself providing the first example of this love.[32]

These relationships were as physical and initiatic as those that preceded them. One day, when the Muslims were thirsty, Fāṭima brought al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn to see the Prophet. He offered his tongue first to al-Ḥasan and then to al-Ḥusayn, who sucked it until their thirst was quenched.[33] It is even said about al-Ḥusayn, through whose descendants the Imamate was to be transmitted, that "he was not breast-fed by Fāṭima, nor by any woman. The Prophet would go to him and put his thumb in his mouth; by sucking it al-Ḥusayn could get enough nourishment for two or three days. Thus al-Ḥusayn was formed from the flesh and blood of the Prophet."[34]

The fusional and sacred relationships of the Prophet with his close family are synthesised in a famous tradition: one day, in Umm Salama's house, Muḥammad called ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, put a cloak over them, and himself joined them underneath it. Then he said: "O God! These are the people of my house [...] keep them away from what is unclean, and purify them completely!" And then verse 33:33 was revealed: "Remain in your houses; and display not your finery, as did the pagans of old. And perform the prayer, and pay the alms, and obey God and his Messenger. People of the House (*ahl al-bayt*), God only desires to put away from you abomination, and to cleanse you."[35] Consequently, these five members of the "Holy Family" (*ahl al-bayt*), including Muḥammad, would be designated "The People of the Cloak" (*ahl al-kisāʾ*).[36]

1.4 *Muḥammad's Premonitions*

Another of Muḥammad's essential personality traits is his prescience and his tragic sense of what was to come throughout history. In spite of their fatalism, Shīʿī historians and theologians count his predictions among his "miracles of speech" (*muʿjizāt aqwālihi*).[37] For example, in a tradition said to be passed down from the fourth Imam, while ʿAlī and his family were visiting him, the

31 *Ibid.* IX, 46.

32 Amir-Moezzi, *Religion discrète*, 198–203 [*Spirituality of Shīʿī Islam*, 262–270].

33 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, IX, 53.

34 Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 278–279.

35 Qummī, *Tafsīr*, III, 829–830; Majlisī, *Biḥār*, XXXV, 206–207, § 1; al-Shaykh al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, IV, 356–357.

36 See Amir-Moezzi, *Religion discrète*, 44–45 [*Spirituality of Shīʿī Islam*, 40–42].

37 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, I, 327–328; Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 33–34.

Prophet broke down and wept, saying to the little al-Ḥusayn, "My son! For you I have rejoiced with an unmatched joy. But Gabriel has come to tell me that you will be killed, and suffer many cruel twists of destiny".[38] So the Prophet was particularly haunted by his prediction of the murder of al-Ḥusayn in Karbalāʾ (which occurred in 61/680). A tradition attributed to the sixth Imām holds that the angel Gabriel announced both al-Ḥusayn's birth and his violent end (at the hands of his own community, after the Prophet's death) to Muḥammad at the same time. At first the Prophet was devastated, but when the angel told him that God had established that the Imamate, and thus the divine Alliance (*walāya*) and the Prophetic heritage (*waṣiyya*), would be passed down through the line of this child's descendants, he was reassured, then communicated the angel's message to Fāṭima, who also accepted it.[39] According to another tradition, it was after al-Ḥusayn's birth that the Prophet had a dream-vision of his murder, waking up terrified and holding a handful of bloody soil from Karbalāʾ.[40]

The Prophet's life was haunted by other premonitions, such as the one in which he saw monkeys climbing on his mosque's *minbar*, which announced the ill-omened reign of the Umayyads; after this vision, the Prophet was never again heard to laugh.[41] His prophetic prescience about his family's destiny and that of Islam as a whole must have been painfully affecting for a man as sensitive as Muḥammad. This confirms what the *ḥadīth* says: "No prophet has suffered as I have suffered".[42]

1.5 *The Prophet's Battles*

The Prophet's belligerent actions and gestures interest Shīʿī historians insofar as, on the one hand, they attest to ʿAlī's bravery, and on the other, they foreshadow the final battle of the Mahdī; the battle of Badr (2/624) is one example of both these concerns. Sources report that during the battle of Uḥud (3/625) Muḥammad fell to the ground. The Muslims were in disarray when, all alone, ʿAlī rebuffed the infidels with his sabre. On this occasion the angel Gabriel is said to have uttered the phrase, now liturgical for Shīʿīs, "There is no brave youth (*fatā*) but ʿAlī and there is no sword but *Dhū al-Faqār*".[43] At the battle of Khaybar in 7/628, the Muslims were defeated twice, first when led by Abū Bakr and then by ʿUmar. The Prophet then chose ʿAlī as his standard-bearer, curing his conjunctivitis by spitting in his eyes, and the Muslims won the battle.

38 Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 34; Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Āmālī*, 105.
39 Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 278, §§ 3–4.
40 Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 32. See below for the epilogue of this tradition.
41 Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ*, III, 424, exegesis of v. 17, 60.
42 Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, III, 43; Kāshānī, *Kalimāt*, 195.
43 Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 81–82; Shaykh Mufīd, *Irshād*, 72–79, §§ 3–4 and 6–8.

This episode demonstrates the Prophet's magic powers, but also that he could appear indecisive.[44]

In Shīʿī historiography, the Prophet is not presented as an invincible being. His vulnerability is even theorised as a way of justifying ʿAlī's quietism when faced by the first three Caliphs. Temporary powerlessness (*ʿujz*) is the destiny both of prophets and of Imāms, and it does not detract from their impeccability (*ʿiṣma*); the Qurʾān says that all the prophets were powerless at times, and Muḥammad too was constrained by fear (*khawf*) when he sought refuge in the cave of Thawr (v. 9, 40).[45]

According to these sources, the Prophet's biggest triumph after Badr was not military; it was the trial by ordeal (*mubāhala*) to which the Prophet invited the Christians of Najrān in 10/631, as evoked in Qurʾān 3:61: "And whoso disputes with thee concerning him, after the knowledge that has come to thee, say: 'Come now, let us call our sons and your sons, our wives and your wives, our selves and your selves, then let us humbly pray and so lay God's curse upon the ones who lie'." According to Shīʿī *Tafsīr*s, "our selves" refers to Muḥammad and ʿAlī, "our wives" to Fāṭima, "princess of this world and of the final life", and "our sons" to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn – together making up "the Five of the Cloak".[46]

Finally, the meaning of the Prophetic wars becomes at once exalted and relativised in a tradition reported by ʿAlī at the Battle of Ṣiffīn (37/657), according to which the Prophet told him long before, "You will fight for the spiritual interpretation (*taʾwīl*) [of the Qurʾān] as I fought for its literal revelation (*tanzīl*)."[47] From the Shīʿī perspective, the wars of the Prophet and those of the Imām are two halves of a single history, and both the apparent success of the earlier battles and the evident failure of the later ones should be looked at in a nuanced way. History's tragedy will finally be understood only with the coming of the twelfth Imām, who will bear Muḥammad's name and features, and fulfil his mission.

1.6 *The Prophet's End*

The end of the Prophet's life is taught in the most ancient Shīʿī sources; it is at the heart of an account that is essential to the definition of Imāmī Shīʿism. On his return from his farewell pilgrimage (10/631), in a place called Ghadīr Khumm, the angel Gabriel ordered the Prophet to designate ʿAlī as the leader

44 Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 99.

45 Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, *Rafʿ al-munāzaʿa wa l-khilāf*, 79–80.

46 Qummī, *Tafsīr*, I, 156; Shaykh Mufīd, *Irshād*, 151–154; Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 158; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, IX, 12–20.

47 See Amir-Moezzi, *Religion discrète*, 238 [*Spirituality of Shīʿī Islam*, 317–318].

(*imām*) who would succeed him. As the Prophet hesitated, fearing that the community would oppose this, Gabriel spoke: "O Messenger, deliver that which has been sent down to you from your Lord; for if you do not, thou wilt not have delivered His Message." (5:67). So Muḥammad had ʿAlī come to him, and convened a meeting of the Muslims, declaring to them: "I leave you two precious objects (*thaqalayn*); if you take good care of them, you will not go astray. These objects are the Book of God and my descendants, the people of my family (*ʿitratī ahl baytī*)."[48] He added, "Let he who considers me to be his master, take ʿAlī here to be his Master (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa-hādhā ʿAlī mawlāhu*). O my God, love the one who loves him [ʿAlī] and be the enemy of whosoever is hostile towards him".[49] Then verse 5:3 was revealed to Muḥammad: "Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam for your religion". These declarations and verses are considered by Shīʿīs to be incontestable scriptural proofs of the truth.

With regard to Muḥammad's mysterious and fatal illness, the poisoning thesis is generally retained among Shīʿīs,[50] since the Prophet had predicted it, as well as foreseeing the martyrdom of his four family members.[51] Some sources relay the information, known also to Sunnīs, that a Jewish woman was supposed to have served a poisoned meal to the Prophet after the conquest of Khaybar; the shoulder of mutton (*shāt*) spoke to warn Muḥammad that it was poisoned, but the few mouthfuls he had already eaten were enough to kill him. In spite of this fatal result, the episode is counted among the miracles attesting to Muḥammad's status as a prophet.[52] According to other sources, the poisoners were none other than two of the Prophet's wives, Ḥafsa and ʿĀ'isha, with their respective fathers ʿUmar and Abū Bakr, after the Prophet had imprudently confided the details of a premonitory dream to Ḥafṣa.[53] Although this very serious accusation disappears from later sources, the betrayal of Muḥammad by his closest companions and wives is a central theme in the Shīʿī representation of the Prophet. This opposition among those who surround him, between

48 On this tradition, see Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 93–98.

49 See Amir-Moezzi, *Religion discrète*, 202–203 [*Spirituality of Shīʿī Islam*, 269–270].

50 See Kohlberg, "Shīʿī Views of the Death of the Prophet Muhammad", 77–86; Ouardi, *Les derniers jours de Muhammad*, 164–178.

51 Qummī, *Baṣā'ir*, II, 804, § 5; *Kitāb Sulaym*, 233; Majlisī, *Biḥār*, XXII, 516, § 21 and XXXIII, 266–267, § 534.

52 Qummī, *Baṣā'ir*, II, 804–805, §§ 5–6; Ṭabrisī, *I'lām*, 25–26; Majlisī, *Biḥār*, XXII, 516, § 22. For more on this subject, see Kohlberg, "Shīʿī Views" 79.

53 Qummī, *Tafsīr*, III, 1082–1083; Majlisī, *Biḥār*, XXII, 239, § 4 and 516, § 23; *Ibid.* XXVIII, 20–21, § 28; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī (third/fourth/ninth/tenth centuries), *Revelation and Falsification: the Kitāb al-qirā'āt of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī*, 36 and 103, n. 128; Kohlberg, "Shīʿī Views" 82–83; Ouardi, *Derniers jours*, 329, n. 51.

the impeccable people of his family and his felonious companions, is evidence of an outlook that is fundamentally dualistic.

It is to ʿAlī that the Prophet confided his premonition of approaching death, telling him that he alone should wash the cadaver, since any other man who saw the Prophet's nudity would be blinded by it.[54] Weakened, he tried in vain to distance Abū Bakr and ʿUmar from himself in his final days.[55] Then, according to a well-known tradition, he called for pen and paper, saying to the Muslims, "I will write something for you, after which you will never go astray". However, ʿUmar did not allow this to happen.[56] Shīʿīs believe that at this time the Prophet wanted to designate ʿAlī as his rightful successor, in a final attempt to prevent the ineluctable fate of his family and his community.[57]

ʿAlī is said to have been with the Prophet during the last moments of the latter's life; and according to the sources, these final moments of intimacy present a gnoseological aspect, as well as a dimension of reported sensory experience. Thus, "the Prophet never stopped embracing ʿAlī until the moment when his soul departed"; "he was on ʿAlī's knees when his soul departed"; "his soul [...] poured out into the palm of ʿAlī's hand, and ʿAlī put it back in [the Prophet's] mouth".[58] When he was asked what the Prophet had said to him, ʿAlī replied, "He taught me the keys to a thousand doors into Knowledge [or to a thousand chapters of Knowledge], each of which leads to another thousand doors [or chapters]."[59] In one tradition, Fāṭima was present, and the Prophet in his death throes consoled her by telling her she would soon become the first of his family's people to join him.[60]

The events that followed the Prophet's death no longer belong to the story of his life, but put a tragic seal upon it nevertheless. Before he was even buried his last wishes had been betrayed by his former companions, during the Saqīfa event.[61] Three months later Fāṭima died as a result of an attack ordered by Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.[62] And, according to the epilogue of a source cited

54 Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 134.

55 Shaykh Mufīd, *Irshād*, 169–170; Ouardi, *Derniers jours*, 70–73.

56 *Kitāb Sulaym*, 210; Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 135; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, II, 344–345. See Ouardi, *Derniers jours*, 130–146.

57 On this tradition, see Miskinzoda, "The story of 'Pen and Paper' and its interpretation in Muslim literary and historical tradition" 231–249.

58 Shaykh Mufīd, *Irshād*, 172–173; Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 136; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, II, 347–348.

59 *Kitāb Sulaym*, 213; Qummī, *Baṣāʾir*, II, 146, § 2, 149, ḥ. 8 and 153, ḥ. 13; Shaykh Mufīd, *Irshād*, 33; Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 136; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, V, 107.

60 Shaykh Mufīd, *Irshād*, 173; Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 136.

61 This is the central topic of the *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, possibly the earliest book of the Shiʿīs. See Amir-Moezzi, *Coran silencieux*, part I, 27–61.

62 *Kitāb Sulaym*, 78–93.

above, the murder of al-Ḥusayn brought about the reappearance, or even the resurrection, of the Prophet: the night after the Karbalāʾ massacre, the Prophet, stricken, appeared to Umm Salama in a dream, announcing that his son al-Ḥusayn had been killed with the people of his family, and that he [the Prophet] had just buried them with his own hands.[63]

2 The Metaphysical Prophet, from Early Shīʿī Tradition to Pre-modern Thought

Let us now examine the metaphysical ideas that underlie these historical accounts and extend them into a metahistorical "time". These ideas were already present in the oldest sources (A and B) and were developed in ways that were both more rational and more mystical by later thinkers (C and D), who imported philosophical and mystical ideas from outside the early Shīʿī tradition.

2.1 *The Pre-eternity of Muḥammad and of ʿAlī*

According to early Imāmī doctrine, the historic birth of the Prophet on earth, and that of Imam ʿAlī, were signs of an event that occurred in pre-eternity, before the creation of the world. Numerous traditions attributed to the Prophet report that the first thing God created was a column of light, which He placed in the loins of Adam; this divine Light was transmitted, in its purest state, to ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, at which point God divided it in two, sending one half to the loins of ʿAbd Allāh and the other to those of Abū Ṭālib. From the first was born the Prophet and from the second ʿAlī; these two halves were re-united in al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the children of ʿAlī and Fāṭima.[64] In other versions the singular original Light contained 'the Five of the Cloak' or all fourteen of the Impeccable Ones.[65] All the variants of this tradition express the idea that the first Entity to be created was of a spiritual nature, and contained within it the essences of Muḥammad and ʿAlī. It is notable that this common origin is always affirmed by the Prophet himself, as in the synthetic tradition: "Alī is part of me and I am part of him' (*ʿAlī minnī wa-anā minhu*).[66] Muḥammad and ʿAlī are therefore pre-eternal twins, in spite of the thirty years that separate their historic, earthly, births.

63 Ṭūsī, *Āmālī*, 278, § 635; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, x, 37.

64 Shaykh Ṣadūq, *ʿIlal*, 1, *bāb* 159, ḥ. 11, 562.

65 Irbilī, *Kashf*, 1, 458; Kāshānī, *Kalimāt*, 192. For more on these traditions, see Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, 101–110 [*Divine Guide*, 40–43].

66 Shaykh Mufīd, *Irshād*, 77, § 4; Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām*, 158.

This ancient Shīʿī concept may be at the roots of the mystical Sunnī concept of the 'Light of Muḥammad' in Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 273/886), then of the 'Muḥammadan Reality' (*al-ḥaqīqa al-muḥammadiyya*) in the works of Ibn ʿArabī.[67] In a reciprocity of histories, this doctrine was then taken up and adapted by Imāmī thinkers such as Sayyid Haydar al-Āmulī (d. after 782/1385–6), Ḥāfiẓ Rajab al-Bursī (d. after 813/1410–1), and numerous later philosophers, who integrated the essence of ʿAlī into the Muḥammadan Reality.

Thus the words of the Prophet, "What God created first was my Light",[68] are also associated with "What God created first was the Intellect (*al-ʿaql*)",[69] and in addition with "Alī and I come from one and the same Light." When God established the pre-existential pact with the prophets (*mīthāq al-nabīyīn*) and asked "Am I not your Lord?", Muḥammad was the first to reply "Yes, I testify!" (see Qurʾān, v. 7:172).[70] This is why he says "I am the first of the prophets to have been created, and the last to have been sent [to men]."[71] In conceptual terms, "God's Messenger (Muḥammad) preceded all the other prophets in true reality (*min ḥayth al-ḥaqīqa*), and he succeeded them in formal existence (*min ḥayth al-ṣūra*)."[72] But the Prophet is also reported to have said: "ʿAlī was commissioned with all of the prophets secretly, and with me openly."[73] Moreover, the well-known *ḥadīth* of Muḥammad, "I was a Prophet when Adam was still between water and clay" is echoed in the *ḥadīth* of ʿAlī, "I was an Ally [of God] (*walī*) [variant: heir (*waṣī*)] when Adam was still between water and clay."[74]

From the metaphysical viewpoint, ʿAlī necessarily accompanies Muḥammad, as divine Alliance or Friendship (*walāya*) necessarily accompanies Prophecy (*nubuwwa*). By virtue of this consubstantiality, the successive Imams are also considered to be emanations of the Prophet. Numerous traditions have the Prophet announcing that twelve Imāms will descend from him, leading to the eschatological Saviour (*al-qāʾim*) who will bear his name: Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Mahdī.[75]

67 Lory, *La dignité de l'homme face aux anges, aux animaux et aux djinns*, 218.
68 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *ʿAwālī*, IV, 99; Bursī, *Mashāriq*, 60, 62, 121, 214.
69 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *ʿAwālī*, IV, 99.
70 Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 335, § 1.
71 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *ʿAwālī*, IV, 122; Kāshānī, *Kalimāt*, 86.
72 Āmulī, *Muḥīṭ*, III, 248–249.
73 Āmulī, *Jāmiʿ*, 386, 401.
74 Āmulī, *Jāmiʿ*, 401, 460; Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *ʿAwālī*, IV, 121, 124; Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, 1341–1342.
75 Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Kamāl*, 248–249; Kāshānī, *Kalimāt*, 192.

2.2 *The Seal of Prophecy and the Seal of the Alliance*

Ancient Imāmī tradition affirms that Muḥammad is the last of the five messengers 'with firm resolution' (*ulū l-ʿazm*), after Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus; he is the Seal of prophets as the Qurʾān is the Seal of holy books.[76] The parallel statement that ʿAlī is 'the Seal of the allies (or friends) of God' (*khātam al-awliyāʾ*) appears later. Ḥaydar al-Āmulī borrows from Ibn ʿArabī the idea of a distinction between an absolute and universal Prophecy (*nubuwwa muṭlaqa*) and a determined one (*muqayyada*); and between an absolute divine Friendship or Alliance (*walāya muṭlaqa*) and a determined one. According to a formula borrowed from Neo-Platonism, the absolute Prophet (Muḥammad) is to the determined prophets as the primary Intellect is to the partial intellects of men in the world; in the same way, the absolute Ally [of God], i.e. ʿAlī, is to the determined allies as the universal Soul is to the partial souls of men in the world.[77] Correcting Ibn ʿArabī, al-Āmulī identifies the absolute Seal of the divine Alliance (*walāya*) as ʿAlī and the determined Seal of the divine Alliance as the Mahdī, using two of the above-mentioned traditions to justify the symmetry between the absolute seals of the Prophecy and the Alliance: "I [Muḥammad] was a Prophet when Adam was still between water and clay,' and, 'I [ʿAlī] was an Ally [of God] when Adam was still between water and clay."[78]

In line with this doctrine, Prophecy is the exoteric aspect of divine Alliance (*walāya*), and divine Alliance the esoteric aspect of Prophecy. Prophecy is a mediation between God and His followers; Alliance is an unmediated relationship with God, through which the Prophet receives his prophecies and the Law. Every prophet is therefore first – not chronologically but ontologically – an ally of God, but every ally is not necessarily a prophet, and Muḥammad cannot take on the role of both Seals at once:

> Thus did Muḥammad receive his prophecy from his absolute Alliance. But as the Seal of the prophets, the manifestation of absolute Prophecy, it was not possible for him to manifest his Alliance in its fullest measure at every time [...]. He had therefore to designate a deputy for this Alliance, and for his own succession (*khilāfa*), in the person of the man who was closest to him in form and in spirit, and that was [...] ʿAlī.[79]

76 Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 98–100, §§ 3–4.
77 Āmulī, *Naṣṣ*, III, 1298.
78 Āmulī, *Naṣṣ*, I, 226–395 et III, 1942–1943.
79 Āmulī, *Naṣṣ*, III, 1264–1268.

This concept of the double Seal underwent major elaborations during the Safavid period while being linked to ancient philosophical ideas. In the following passage, by Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1630), we can observe that the attempt to establish a hierarchy between the Prophet and the Imām always leads back to their fundamental identities:

> The primal Intellect is the light of the soul of the Seal of Prophecy […] [The Prophet] says, in a *ḥadīth*: 'That which God created first was the Intellect', and in another '… my Light'. The proofs of the necessity of the Prophet's mission […], by virtue of Heavenly providence, bring about an analogous judgement on the necessity for the Prophet to have an heir […] who is his lieutenant (*khalīfa*) and like his soul, so that the divine Emanation (*al-fayḍ al-ilāhī*) might be propagated through him […], in the same way as the Soul is the lieutenant of the Intellect in the conjunction of the divine Emanation with the worlds of Existence. […] The Prophet sent to men is like the heart of the world's body; his heir and lieutenant [ʿAlī] is like its brain and spinal cord […] The primal Intellect is therefore the Light of the Seal of the prophets, and the second Intellect is the light of the Seal of the heirs. Or, to put it better, the first Intellect is the Light of both of them together, for they are as a single soul. [The Prophet] says: "Alī and I come from one and a single light."[80]

The Seal of the prophets is also conceptualised as the end, or the goal (Greek *telos*), of creation. For Ibn Abī Jumhūr, in Avicennian terms, the Prophet is the final cause of the existence of the created beings designated by the *ḥadīth qudsī*: 'Without you, I would not have created the [celestial] spheres'; he is the goal of eternal Providence (*al-ʿināya al-azaliyya*), which pushes everything to realise its own perfection and contribute to the perfection of the whole.[81] For al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, in Akbarian terms, the Muḥammadian Reality or Aḥmadian Light is the origin and the end of all realities. The perfecting of all the sons of Adam depends on his perfection and tends towards it, as indicated in the *ḥadīth*, "I am the Prince of the children of Adam."[82] The Prophet is the goal of all of

80 Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Kashshī, *Rijāl al-Kashshī – Ikhtiyār maʿrifat al-rijāl, maʿa taʿlīqāt Mīr Dāmād*, 1, 232. The parallel between man as microcosm (*ʿālam ṣaghīr*) and the world as Great Man or *macranthropos* (*insān kabīr*) is an idea with Pythagorean and neo-Platonic origins, diffused into Islam by the *Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ* and then taken up by Ibn ʿArabī.

81 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, 177–178.

82 In one of the most ancient versions: 'I am the Prince of the children of Adam, ʿAlī is the Prince of the Arabs, Fāṭima is the Princess of women, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn are the

God's acts, according to the same *ḥadīth qudsī*: "Without you, I would not have created the spheres."[83]

However, if Muḥammad is the goal of creation and his prophecy is the final aim of all prophecy, Muḥammad and his prophecy are not a goal or final aim for themselves. According to several ancient Imami traditions, the ultimate aim of Muḥammad's own mission is none other than ʿAlī himself: 'The angel Gabriel came to me and said: "Muḥammad! Your Lord had designated for you the love of ʿAlī and the proclamation of his Alliance [with God]."'[84] Al-Bursī takes up this version as follows:

> All prophets sent to men called to Him [God], announced the good news of the coming of Muḥammad [...], and were attached to the Alliance of ʿAlī [...]. God sent His Prophet Muḥammad, thus sealing the existing (*al-mawjūd*), as He had also, through him, initiated being (*al-wujūd*) [...]. God ordered him to ask his community to be guided by the love of ʿAlī, for this love is 'the straight path' (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*).[85]

In the ancient eschatological traditions on which later thinkers reflected, ʿAlī and the Imāms play the principal roles, and the Prophet almost disappears from the image of the End of Times, of which he was the annunciator.[86] This corroborates M. A. Amir-Moezzi's recent hypothesis according to which, at least for early Shīʿīs, Muḥammad came to announce the End of Times and the coming of ʿAlī as the Messiah; however, the death of ʿAlī and the postponement of the End of Times led them finally to assign the messianic function to the twelfth Imām, or Mahdī.[87]

2.3 *The Knowledge of the Prophet and of the Imām*

In al-Kulaynī's *Book of Proof*, the Prophet Muḥammad is designated as the "Proof of God [for His creatures]" (*ḥujjat allāh*).[88] However, this function, which is ontological as much as it is pedagogical, is not exclusive to the Prophet,

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Princes of the young people of paradise.' *Kitāb Sulaym*, 116, 209; Shaykh Ṭūsī, *Amālī*, 528, § 1240.

83 Kāshānī, *Kalimāt*, 190–191.

84 Qummī, *Baṣā'ir*, 1, 297–298; Amir-Moezzi, *Religion discrète*, 148 [*Spirituality of Shīʿī Islam*, 188]; Amir-Moezzi, *Preuve de Dieu*, 218–219.

85 Bursī, *Mashāriq*, 215–216.

86 For more on this, see Terrier, "Anthropogonie et eschatologie dans l'œuvre de Muḥsin Fayḍ Kâshânî: l'ésotérisme shî'ite entre tradition et syncrétisme" 743–780.

87 Amir-Moezzi, "Muḥammad le Paraclet et ʿAlī le Messie. Nouvelles remarques sur les origines de l'islam et de l'imamologie shi'ite" 19–54 [now in Id., *Ali, le secret bien gardé*, ch. 2].

88 Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 95, § 2.

because the Imāms, as theophanic men, are also "proofs of God", since the world is never without a Proof.[89] It is true that a distinction is made between the Prophet Messenger (*nabī rasūl*) and the one of whom the angels speak (*muḥaddath*), the Imām. The Messenger sees the angel in dreams and with his own eyes, and he hears the angel's voice; the Imām hears the angel's words but sees it neither with his own eyes nor in a dream.[90] But one prophetic tradition (among many) still calls into question this subtle distinction while maintaining the exclusivity of prophecy: "O ʿAlī, you hear what I hear and you see what I see, except that you are not a prophet."[91] Later in al-Kulaynī it is stated that Prophets and Imāms are the only human beings to possess the "holy spirit" (*rūḥ al-qudus*), through which they know all things.[92]

One of the prophetic traditions most frequently quoted by Shīʿīs is "I am the city of Knowledge (*madīnat al-ʿilm*) and ʿAlī is its gate (*bāb*); whoever wishes to enter the city must pass through its gate." In other words, knowledge of the Prophet comes only through the Imām. This *ḥadīth* is then associated with one already cited and attributed to ʿAlī: "He [God's Messenger] taught me the keys to a thousand doors into Knowledge [or to a thousand chapters of Knowledge], each of which leads to another thousand doors [or chapters]."[93] It suggests that, if all of the Imām's knowledge comes from that of the Prophet, then the Imām develops, extends, and perhaps even surpasses the Prophet's knowledge. From the Shīʿī viewpoint, the Prophet brought only the literal revelation (*tanzīl*) of the Qurʾān ; it was the Imāms who provided its spiritual interpretation (*taʾwīl*), and they were specifically assigned this task by verse 3:7: "none knows its [the Book's] interpretation, save only God and those rooted in knowledge."[94] Without doubt, as we have seen above, it was Muḥammad who taught ʿAlī the *taʾwīl*, but it was the Imāms who dispensed the *taʾwīl* in their *ḥadīth*s.[95]

The Prophet is also reported to have said: "We, the prophets, have been commanded to speak to men according to the measure of their intelligence,"[96] whereas the Imāms declare: "Our teaching is arduous; the only ones who can withstand it are a prophet sent to men, an angel of Proximity, or an initiated

89 Amir-Moezzi, *Preuve de Dieu*, in particular 159–166.

90 Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 99, §§ 1–2.

91 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *ʿAwālī*, IV, 122–123.

92 Kāshānī, *Kalimāt*, 84–85; Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 156, §§ 1–3; Amir-Moezzi, "Les Cinq Esprits de l'homme divin. Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine XIII." 297–320; *Preuve de Dieu*, 226–227.

93 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *ʿAwālī*, IV, 123.

94 Arberry's translation, modified in accordance with the Shīʿī interpretation of this verse. On this, see Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 100.

95 On this conception, see Amir-Moezzi, *Coran silencieux*, especially 101–168.

96 Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 17, ḥ. 15; Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Amālī*, 305, ḥ. 6; Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *ʿAwālī*, IV, 125–126.

one whose heart has been tested by God for faith."[97] They also say: "Our teaching is arduous; neither a prophet sent to men nor an angel of Proximity can withstand it."[98] Some traditions have it that if the Imām must observe the keeping of secret (*taqiyya*) when teaching his knowledge, this is precisely to avoid being identified with a prophet.[99] And if there are numerous traditions attributing omniscience or divine Knowledge to the Imāms, by contrast, in the following quotation the Prophet recognises the limits of his own knowledge: "If you knew God with a true knowledge, solid mountains would crumble from the effects of your prayer. No one attains the essential foundations of knowledge of Him." Muḥammad was then asked, "Not even you, O Messenger of God?" He replied, "Not even I! God is too high and too great for anyone to embrace the foundations of knowledge of Him."[100] The omniscience of the Imām, and the possibility that he may possess knowledge superior to that of the Prophet, appear as sacred and taboo beliefs in Imāmī Shīʿism; beliefs whose open expression would be considered to partake of "exaggeration" (*ghulūw*).

2.4 *The Celestial Ascent of the Prophet and Its Esoteric Meaning*

The account of the celestial ascent (*miʿrāj* or *isrāʾ*) is incontestably important in Prophetic hiero-history, marking the superiority of Muḥammad over the other prophets. In Imāmī Shīʿī versions of the story, it is also an attestation of the pre-eminence of ʿAlī over even the Prophet himself. According to one of these accounts, when the Prophet was raised by God to the ultimate degree, "two bows'- lengths away – or nearer" (Q 53:9), God spoke to him in ʿAlī's language. Then God had Muḥammad pass through the worlds of the *Mulk*, of the *Malakūt*, and of the *Jabarūt* – respectively the worlds of Nature, Soul and Intellect – before arriving in the world of the divine entity (*al-lāhūt*), where ʿAlī was set on his shoulders.[101] In another version, reported by al-Qāḍī Saʿīd al-Qummī (d. 1103/1691), Muḥammad, having gone beyond the limits of the world of composition and then contemplated and left behind the ranks of the intellective Soul, saw in the highest level of the divine Soul a luminous and

97 Qummī, *Baṣāʾir*, I, 131–142; Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *ʿAwālī*, IV, 129; Kāshānī, *Kalimāt*, 229; translated in Amir-Moezzi, *Divine guide*, 5.

98 Bursī, *Mashāriq*, 351 and 418; see also Kulaynī, *Uṣūl*, 239, §4, and Amir-Moezzi, *Preuve de Dieu*, 263.

99 Bursī, *Mashāriq*, 127–128.

100 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *ʿAwālī*, IV, 132.

101 Bursī, *Mashāriq*, 217.

divine man (*insān ilāhī*) penetrating the veil of Light, and within it the Prophet recognised ʿAlī's back.[102]

For Ibn Abī Jumhūr, important declarations about the Knowledge of the Prophet and of the Imām originate in the Prophet's celestial ascent: "About the knowledge that the Prophet had of the [original] point of existence, on the night of his celestial ascent, he said, 'I hold the knowledge of the beginnings and the ends [...].'"[103] And about the knowledge that ʿAlī had of these things, ʿAlī said, "I am the point beneath the *bā'* [of the *bismillāh*, the opening formula of the Qur'ān]," and, "Ask me what is to be found beneath the throne."[104] This suggests that it was nothing less than the principality of ʿAlī that was revealed to the Prophet on the night of his ascension, and that the Imām, though he was initiated by the Prophet, at that point gained knowledge only of himself.

According to another account, the Prophet, having reached paradise, entered a sumptuous palace in the centre of which was a coffer made of light, which Gabriel opened. Inside it he discovered poverty (*faqr*) and a patched cloak (*muraqqaʿa*). The Lord said to him, "O Muḥammad, these are the things I chose for you and your community from the moment I had created them, and I give them only to those whom I love." Facing God, the Prophet put the garments on, and then, while coming back from his celestial ascent, clothed ʿAlī in them, on God's command. The patched cloak, commonly called *khirqa*, was to be transmitted from Imām to Imām until the Mahdī, along with the other legacies of the prophets.[105] During the pre-modern period (D) such traditions are adopted by the defenders of a reconciliation between Sufism and Shīʿism, upholding as they do an Imami genealogy for Sufism.[106] For supporters of this view, the transmission of this archetypical *khirqa* gave rise to three Sufi initiatic paths, via three *khirqa* that were transmitted by the Imāms to their disciples: by the sixth Imām, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) to Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/874); by the seventh, Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799), to Shaqīq

102 Al-Qāḍī Saʿīd al-Qummī, *Al-Ṭalā'iʿ wa l-bawāriq*, 281; Jambet, "'L'Homme parfait. Métaphysique de l'âme et eschatologie selon Qāḍī Saʿīd Qummī", 417. For more on similar traditions, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Religion discrète*, 136–140 [*Spirituality of Shīʿī Islam*, 171–176].

103 Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, 193 [*Divine guide*, 76].

104 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, IV, 1338–1339.

105 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *ʿAwālī*, IV, 130.

106 For more on this thesis, see Terrier, "The Defense of Sufism among Twelver Shīʿī Scholars of Early Modern and Modern Times: Topics and Arguments" 27–63. On the history of this tradition, see Gril, "De la *khirqa* à la *ṭarīqa*. Continuité et évolution dans l'identification et la classification des voies" 57–81, especially 65–66.

al-Balkhī (d. 194/809–10); and by the eighth, ʿAlī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818), to Maʿrūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815).[107]

The same thinkers also referred to words attributed to the Prophet by a tradition that appears not to be of Imāmī origin: "The Law (*sharīʿa*) is my words; the Path (*ṭarīqa*) is my acts; and Reality (*ḥaqīqa*) is my [spiritual] states." This citation offered them a scriptural proof of the reconciliation of exoteric religion, identified with the Law, with Sufism, identified with the Path, and with philosophical gnosis, identified with Reality. In the longer version the list continues, and concludes with "Poverty is my glory (*al-faqr fakhrī*), and I am proud of it among all the prophets sent to men [before me]."[108] This tradition is particularly prominent among dervish Shīʿī orders such as the modern-period Khāksārs, who lay claim to the spiritual and material poverty of the Prophet.[109] Thus the account of the Prophet's celestial ascent plays a determining role in Imāmī Shīʿism in general, and in Shīʿī Sufism in particular.

2.5 *The Prophet, the Imām and the Divine Names*

Shīʿī thinkers influenced by Ibn ʿArabī also conceive of the Prophet and the Imām as manifestations of the Divine Names.[110] According to them, each of the prophets makes manifest a particular Divine Name, and Muḥammadan Reality is the manifestation of the synthetic name *Allāh*. At the level just below, the Prophet Muḥammad and the Imām ʿAlī are manifestations, respectively, of the Names *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm*, which are based on the same root. So, according to al-Āmulī, "'the Merciful" (*al-Raḥmān*) is none other than Muḥammad and his essential universal reality, [he is] designated as "the Seal of the Prophets", just as "the Compassionate" (*al-Raḥīm*) is formally none other than "the Seal of the friends of God" [ʿAlī] […]. The Merciful occupies the rank of the first Intellect, the Compassionate that of the universal Soul."[111]

Al-Bursī writes:

> The prophets are manifestations of the Names of God. For the one among them who is the manifestation of a universal name, his Law is universal, too. As we know, all the Names can be reduced to the synthetic name, *Allāh*. [In the same way,] all the prophets and messengers can be reduced

107 Āmulī, *Jāmiʿ*, 225, 431 and 614–615; Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, 1245–1246.

108 Āmulī, *Jāmiʿ*, 346; Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *ʿAwālī*, I, 39 and IV, 125–126; Id. *Mujlī*, 1073.

109 See "Two Khāksār treatises of the 19th century. The Booklet of Poverty", transl. M. Arabestani, 333–338.

110 See Terrier, "Noms divins et hommes divins dans la gnose shîʿite imâmite (VIII^{e}/XIV^{e}–XI^{e}/XVII^{e} siècles)" 335–356.

111 Āmulī, *Naṣṣ*, 1307.

> to the seven names that are Adam, Idris, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and Jesus [...]; all of these seven can be reduced to the single synthetic name Muḥammad.[112]

However, later in the same work, a citation from the Prophet himself is used to accord precedence to the name and person of ʿAlī, and al-Bursī comments audaciously:

> The Prophet declared: 'The one who wants to contemplate Seraphiel (*Isrāfīl*) in his elevation, Michael in his rank, Gabriel in his grandeur, Adam in his gravity, Noah in his patience and supplication, Abraham in his generosity, Moses in his courage, Jesus in his goodwill has only to look at ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.' This indicates that [ʿAlī] is the supreme Name that runs through all things, that everything created by God has ʿAlī as its master and meaning, for he is the Word of the necessary Being, the shining Light in the sky of existence and of what exists.[113]

Here again, it is Muḥammad himself who recognises the superiority and divinity of ʿAlī. We are here at the core of Shīʿī esotericism, the expression of which is often considered as 'exaggeration' (*ghulūw*), even among Shīʿī scholars, since these are the most sacred and secret beliefs of Imāmi Shīʿīs.

2.6 *The Prophet, the Imām and the Perfect Man*

This line of thinking leads to the identification of the Prophet and the Imām combined into the perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), another concept inherited from Ibn ʿArabī. For Ibn Abī Jumhūr, the Prophet is the most perfect of the created beings in that he contains a synthesis of the perfections possessed by each of the prophets and allies of God. Unlike al-Āmulī, Ibn Abī Jumhūr even calls Muḥammad the "Seal of Law-giving prophecy and of the divine Alliance".[114] But in his explanation of the Prophet's doubleness, both human and divine, historical and metaphysical, the figures of the Prophet and of the Imām are mixed together anew, resulting in a paradoxical representation of the perfect Man:

> Know that the lieutenant of Muḥammadan Reality is the Pole of poles [...]. His status as Lord of the world comes from the divine attributes that his rank accords him. As for his impotence, his quietism (*quʿūd*) and any of the defects that could be ascribed to him, they are a function of his

112 Bursī, *Mashāriq*, 66–67.
113 *Ibid.* 196–197.
114 Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, III, 1047–8.

> humanity, a humanity that came about through [his] determination and descent to the inferior world, in order to envelop the peculiarities of the apparent world with his own apparent dimension and the peculiarities of the hidden world with his own hidden dimension. Thus he is at the confluence of two seas, and in him are made manifest the two worlds. His abasement is also his perfection, just as his elevation to his original station is his perfection.[115]

This concept of the perfect Man allows the Prophet and the Imām to be embraced together and kept distinct at the same time, as in this passage by Ibn Abī Jumhūr:

> The Prophet is the first Intellect in which are made manifest the properties of His Name that is specified for him, 'the Merciful.' This is because He makes himself manifest, from the esoteric point of view (*maʿnā*), within the perfect Man exercising governing control (*al-mutaṣarrif*), in a manifest manner and in a hidden manner, in the Unseen and in the visible world, designated as the Caliph, whereas from the apparent point of view the place in which He makes himself manifest is the Throne. The perfect Man is the first locus of manifestation [of God] for the spiritual world, as the Throne is for the physical world. […] Among the horizons [the macrocosm] there are two Caliphs: the primary Intellect and the universal Soul, who are loci of manifestation for the Merciful and for the Compassionate […]. Among souls [the microcosm] there are also two Caliphs: the Prophet and the Ally [of God], in whom are made manifest the Merciful and the Compassionate. […] Humankind as a whole is a locus of manifestation of God in potentiality, but his nobility and grandeur appear only in His [God's] actual locus of manifestation, which is our Prophet among all the prophets, and ʿAlī among all the allies [of God].[116]

For al-Kāshānī:

> The perfect Man is either a prophet or an ally [of God] […]. Absolute Prophecy is true prophecy that has arrived through eternity past and subsisting, for eternity yet to come […]. The holder of this position is called supreme Caliph, the Pole of poles, great Man, true Adam, supreme Calamus, primary Intellect, and supreme Spirit. This is what these words

115 *Ibid.* III, 1049–1051.
116 *Ibid.* III, 1051–1052.

> of his mean: 'What God created first was my Light'; 'I was a Prophet when Adam was still between water and clay'. [...] The esoteric aspect of this prophecy is the absolute Alliance [with God]. [...] This is what these words of the Prophet mean: "Alī and I are from a one and single Light'; 'God created my spirit and that of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib two thousand years before the rest of creation'; "Alī was commissioned with all of the prophets secretly, and with me openly'; along with this *ḥadīth* of Imām ʿAlī: 'I was an Ally [of God] when Adam was still between water and clay'[117]

Finally, let us reiterate that Muḥammad and ʿAlī always appear as impossible to dissociate from each other, and functionally equal, but that it is always for the Prophet to say so. In the order of discourse, if not in the order of reasons, Muḥammad remains the primary source and the ultimate reference.

3 Conclusion

Thus, throughout its evolution and in its different currents, Imami Shīʿism has never neglected the figure of the Prophet – far from it, as he has been essentially linked with the Holy Family and coupled with Imām ʿAlī. In Shīʿism from its origins to the present, and for scholars as for simple believers, Islam is not a religion that was revealed to and by a single man, a historic figure and messenger prophet, but one revealed to and by two men who share the same spiritual and eternal substance, the Prophet and the Imām, Muḥammad and ʿAlī. To bring together the historical and metaphysical, the exoteric and esoteric, one can say that the position of the Prophet is that of origin, foundation or principle of Revelation, but that the Imām is its final aim, completion or *télos*. In philosophical terms, the Prophet is the potentiality of the Imāms, and the Imāms are the full actualisation of the Prophet. The veneration of the Prophet, inseparable from that of the Imāms, is thus at the very core of Shīʿī Islam.

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117 Kāshānī, 188–189.

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10

The Prophet Muḥammad and His Heir ʿAlī

Their Historical, Metahistorical and Cosmological Roles in Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism

Daniel De Smet

1 An Ismāʿīlī *Sīrat al-nabī*

The Prophet Muḥammad is a central figure in the Ismāʿīlī movement, as in all Islamic currents. Nevertheless, it is exceedingly rare for any Ismāʿīlī text to focus on the 'historical' details of his mission. One exception to this rule is the first volume of *ʿUyūn al-akhbār wa funūn al-āthār* by Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn (d. 872/1468), which is entirely devoted to the Prophet's life from conception to death.[1] This *sīrat al-nabī*, which cites many Sunnī sources (again, a rare approach in Ismāʿīlī literature), depicts the founder of Islam as a historical figure whose biography, overflowing with legends and full of hagiographical embellishments, follows the example of the best Sunnī historians.

Nevertheless, Idrīs is still presenting a Shīʿī version of this biography, as is evident in the very title of the volume: 'Presentation of the life of the chosen Prophet, of his heir (*waṣī*) ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, killer of infidels (*qātil al-kuffār*), and of the lives of his family, the pure ones'. As early as the introduction, the author mentions the *waṣiyya*, the 'sacred legacy', entrusted by the Prophet to ʿAlī and transmitted down the uninterrupted lineage of the Imams.[2] It is true that the second volume of the *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* is entirely devoted to ʿAlī, but even while reading the first it is clear that in the decisive moments of the prophet's life (revelations, battles, ambassadorial missions, organisation of the community), he never operated alone, but always in tandem with his 'friend' (*walī*), confidant and advisor ʿAlī. Their close interaction is emphasised in many *ḥadīth*s, including those that report words spoken by the prophet to ʿAlī; for example, 'You are to me what Aaron was to Moses, except that there is no prophet after me', or, "Alī is part of me and I am part of him, he will be the friend of every

1 Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, vol. 1. For a general introduction to the history, currents and doctrines of Ismāʿīlīsm, see Farhad Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismāʿīlīs*; De Smet, *La philosophie ismaélienne*.

2 Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, 10–13.

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man and woman who believes after me.'[3] Thus the entire *sīra* builds up to the apotheosis of the two men's relationship when, at Ghadīr Khumm while returning from the farewell pilgrimage, Muḥammad is said to have officially designated ʿAlī as his heir, declaring 'Whoever is my friend is ʿAlī's friend' (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa-Alī mawlāhu*). For this reason, shortly before his death, the Prophet put into place the most important religious obligation (*farīḍa*), which would become the cornerstone of all the 'pillars of Islam', the *walāya*: loyalty to ʿAlī and the Imāms among his descendants. For, as Muḥammad said, "ʿAlī is the rope (*ḥabl*), one end of which is in God's hands and the other in the hands of the believers".[4]

It is true that all these traditions are shared by many other Shīʿī currents, and there is nothing in this *sīra* compiled by Idrīs that is specific to Ismāʿīlīsm. It is no doubt for this reason that the volumes of the *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* appear in the curricula established by the Ṭayyibī community, to which Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn belonged, as works that were *ẓāhir*, 'exoteric', meaning even beginners could read them and they entailed no obligation to secrecy.[5]

Asrār al-nuṭaqā' ('the secret of the Enunciators') by Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 346/957), another Ismāʿīlī work, is quite different, although this text does also focus on Muḥammad's 'story' (*qiṣṣa*). In Jaʿfar's writings, we are no longer on the historical level, but closer to meta-history, or even hierohistory. Muḥammad first appears in Arabia as Jesus's cycle is coming to an end. The Syrian monk Baḥīrā, the last Imam of that cycle, is the 'terminator' (*mutimm*) whose task is to finalise the *daʿwa* (mission) of the Christians and to prepare the advent of Islam. To facilitate this, Baḥīrā is assisted by two 'dignitaries' (*ḥudūd*) of his *daʿwa*: the prophet's wife Khadīja, and Abū Ṭālib, his uncle and ʿAlī's father. In her role as *ḥujja* ('Proof'), Khadīja reveals to Muḥammad that he will be the new prophet, Jesus's successor; Baḥīrā and Abū Ṭālib then help him to get settled and to organise his *daʿwa*. When the time comes, they will officially transfer power to him, as a prophet. As soon as this happens, Muḥammad will choose his own dignitaries, whom he will send to the twelve regions (*jazā'ir*) of the earth to carry out propaganda in his name and train more disciples.[6] Drawing inspiration from an episode in the *sīrat al-nabī* that was related by, among others, the Sunnī historians Ibn Isḥāq and al-Ṭabarī (the young Muḥammad, accompanied by his uncle Abū Ṭālib, visits the monk

3 Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, 408, 496.

4 Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, 480–87, especially 483–85. For more on this notion of *walāya*, which is central in Shīʿism, see Amir-Moezzi, *La religion discrète*, 177–207.

5 Fyzee, "The Study of the Literature of the Fatimid *daʿwa*", 239.

6 Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Sarā'ir wa asrār al-nuṭaqā'*, 229–40; cf. Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qur'ān*, 96–98.

Baḥīrā, someone who will help Khadīja understand the prophetic task of her husband),[7] Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman depicts Muḥammad as a chief of the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwa*, the secret mission in favour of the Imam, which sends its agents to each of the twelve regions in which, ideally, the organisation functions, in order to recruit new converts. In the *Asrār al-nuṭaqā'*, Muḥammad's story is preceded by those of the previous Prophets, including the five 'Enunciators' (*nuṭaqā'*) who each revealed a Law: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus.[8] Each of them proceeded in the same manner, following a stereotyped programme that was reproduced on each occasion from Adam to Muḥammad. This programme conveyed a prophetology and imamology that is specifically Ismāʿīlī.

At the time of his designation (*naṣṣ*) by his predecessor (usually the last Imam of the previous cycle),[9] the Enunciator (*nāṭiq*) receives an influx from the intelligible world. Through a complicated process[10] he transforms this nonverbal influx into articulate speech in the language of the people to whom he is sent; he expresses himself in images and symbols adapted to his listeners' level of understanding: this is the *tanzīl*, the 'descent' of the revelation. The Enunciator will then surround himself with 'dignitaries' (Jesus's Apostles, Muḥammad's Companions …) whose mission is to write down the revelation, organise the *daʿwa*, and spread propaganda in the name of their prophet. But each Enunciator must face one or more adversaries (*aḍḍād*) sent by Iblīs in order to sabotage his *daʿwa* and falsify the text of his revelation (Pharaoh versus Moses, Judas versus Jesus, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar versus Muḥammad and ʿAlī). To oppose the sinister actions of his adversaries and guarantee the integrity of his revelation after his death, each Enunciator ties himself to an Heir (*waṣī*). Thus, pairs were formed: Adam and Seth, Noah and Shem, Abraham and Ishmael, Moses and Aaron or Joshua, Jesus and Simon Peter and, finally,

7 Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 79–83; Watt and McDonald, *The History of al-Ṭabarī* VI, 44–46, 68–73. There is a vast literature on the Christian and Muslim versions of the legend of the monk Sergius Baḥīrā; for example, see Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahira*; Szilagyi, "Muḥammad and the Monk".

8 The story of Jesus receives by far the most extensive treatment; for a preliminary study of this, see De Smet, "Marie, Marie Madeleine, Zacharie, Jean-Baptiste et Simon-Pierre", 59–79.

9 Of course, there is a problem in the case of Adam, but the question of whether he was one of the Enunciators was a controversial one; see De Smet, "Adam, premier prophète et législateur?". As for Muḥammad, in Ismāʿīlīsm he is not considered to be the final messenger: his cycle will end with the *Qā'im* or Resurrector, who will reveal the esoteric meanings of all previous revelations.

10 In which process the three mysterious hypostases, *al-Jadd, al-Fatḥ* and *al-Khayāl*, participate; see De Smet, "La fonction noétique de la triade".

Muḥammad and ʿAlī. Each Enunciator confides the entirety of his revealed text to his Heir, both on the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) level – giving the correct form of words and phrases (as opposed to the falsification, *taḥrīf*, of the Writings) – and on the esoteric level (*bāṭin*), offering his exegesis (*taʾwīl*) of the text (as opposed to the false interpretations of the *mufassirūn*, the 'exotericist' commentators).[11] The Heir will then transmit this science to the Imam who succeeds him; this continues for as long as the cycle of each Enunciator lasts. The Terminator, or last Imam of the cycle will, with his dignitaries, install the next Enunciator.[12]

In this cyclical conception of hiero-history, consisting of a succession of prophetic cycles joined together by an uninterrupted line of Imams, Muḥammad and ʿAlī personify the Enunciator-Heir couple, *nāṭiq – waṣī*, as well as all the other related pairs of concepts such as *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, *tanzīl* and *taʾwīl*. This couple manifests itself through different people, with different names, throughout humanity's religious history. If Fatimid Ismāʿīlī authors are prudent on this subject, they are nevertheless well aware of the numerous Shīʿī *ḥadīth*s that endorse the pre-existence of Muḥammad and ʿAlī as beings created by God well before the creation of the world, who manifest themselves in the physical vessels of the successive Prophets and Heirs.[13] Ismāʿīlī authors even flirted with the audacious thought of the Mukhammisa, according to which divinity shows itself to creatures under the guise of the five *ahl al-bayt*: Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn;[14] they also tried to adopt the triad of Essence (*maʿnā*), Name (*ism*) and Gate (*bāb*), respectively personified by ʿAlī, Muḥammad and Salmān, and mostly propounded in the Nuṣayrī doctrine.[15] While ancient traditions regarding the pentad and the triad reappear in the Ṭayyibī and Nizārī currents respectively, Ismāʿīlīs, as we shall see shortly, generally preferred the pairing *nāṭiq – waṣī*, represented by Muḥammad and ʿAlī.

In the pages that follow we shall examine how Ismāʿīlī literature elevated this pair beyond meta-history, making them into eternal cosmological principles that have become an integral part of the very structure of the universe. Two thorny questions then remain to be asked: what is their relationship with

11 The question of the falsification of the text and meaning of the Qurʾān has been a preoccupation for Ismāʿīlīs, as for other Shīʿīs; see De Smet, "Le Coran: son origine, sa nature et sa falsification".

12 Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismāʿīlīya*, 18–37.

13 For a detailed study of such traditions and their doctrinal background, see Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin dans le shîʿisme originel*, 73–112.

14 Bear in mind that the main reference text for the doctrine of the Mukhammisa, the Persian treatise *Umm al-Kitāb*, was transmitted by Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs from Central Asia; see Anthony, "The Legend of ʿAbdallāh ibn Saba'".

15 Halm, "Das 'Buch der Schatten'", 263–65.

God? And which of the two takes precedence over the other, Muḥammad or ʿAlī?

2 Muḥammad and His "Spouse" ʿAlī Are the Parents of Believers

Fatimid authors, close to the political and religious powers in Cairo, generally kept their distance from Shīʿī currents that upheld the superiority of ʿAlī and the Imams over the Prophet Muḥammad. This doctrinal stance had clear political implications. If it is the case that Muḥammad represents the letter (*ẓāhir*) of the Qurʾān and of the sharīʿa, and ʿAlī their esoteric meaning (*bāṭin*), to accord precedence to the latter would imply a preference for esoteric exegesis over outward practice of religion and law. This could lead to antinomianism, a well-known phenomenon among 'extremist' Shīʿī movements (*ghulāt*), but one that might be suicidal for a Muslim empire claiming allegiance to Ismāʿīlīsm.[16]

Given that this was the case, it's hardly surprising that al-Muʾayyad fi l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078), missionary in chief (*dāʿī al-duʿāt*) of the Fatimid *daʿwa*, in one of his sermons, criticises "certain depraved and mendacious Shīʿīs", who spread the "heresy" (*ilḥād*) according to which the Qurʾān was revealed to ʿAlī and not to Muḥammad, and asserted that the verses in the Qurʾān making reference to this were falsified following the example of the *taḥrīf* practised by Jews and Christians.[17] For al-Muʾayyad, there is no doubt: the entire revelation (*ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*) was given to Muḥammad, who then transmitted it to his Heir, ʿAlī.

In order to clearly underline ʿAlī's inferiority to the Prophet, al-Muʾayyad identified ʿAlī's role with that of woman, the subordination of whom to man is clearly stated in the Qurʾān, in particular in Sūra 4, 'Women'. The entire argument is based on an exegesis of verse 4:1 "Mankind, fear your Lord, who created you of a single soul (*min nafsin wāḥidatin*), and from it created its mate (*zawj*), and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women." Al-Muʾayyad explains that according to the *mufassirūn* (exotericist commentators) the 'single soul' refers to Adam and the 'mate' refers to Eve (Ḥawwāʾ), created by God from Adam's rib, and that this couple had many descendants, both male and female.[18]

16 For more on the antinomianism of radical Shīʿī movements, see Asatryan, *Controversies in Formative Shīʿī Islam*, 157–61.

17 Muʾayyad, *Majālis*, 1, n° 17, 80–81.

18 Muʾayyad, *Majālis*, 1, n° 17, 81. Bear in mind that neither the name of Eve nor the story of her creation from Adam's rib are mentioned in the Qurʾān. However, commentators were aware of the Biblical story, and it was indeed in that sense that they understood Q 4:1 and similar verses; see Guiraud, "Ève", 291.

However, the *ahl al-taʾwīl* (Ismāʿīlīs who practise esoteric exegesis) have a more complex reading of this verse, which can be superimposed on the exoteric interpretation. In this version, Adam corresponds to Muḥammad: just as Adam is the first human form (*ṣūra bashariyya*) endowed with the gift of 'speech' or 'reason' (*nuṭq*), Muḥammad is the first form with the gift of speech established in the 'true community' (*al-milla al-ḥanīfa*) of Islam. Eve, Adam's spouse, corresponds to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet's 'spouse'. ʿAlī embodies the 'spouse' "… because of his subtle soul and not because of his opaque body, that he may receive [from the Prophet], the deposit (*amāna*) of his religion, and that he may be depository (*mustawdaʿ*) of the secrets of his revelation, as the woman receives the sperm of the man and becomes pregnant." What's more, Qurʾān 4:1 must be understood in light of the *ḥadīth* in which the prophet says: "You and I, O ʿAlī, we are the parents of the believers." The many men and women born of this couple are none other than all believers: here 'men' means the dignitaries of the *daʿwa* whose function will be to teach the science of salvation to the 'women', who are the neophytes receiving teachings that bear fruit within them. For al-Muʾayyad the conclusion is inevitable: since the difference (*farq*) between Muḥammad and ʿAlī is equivalent to the difference between men and women, how could we accept that the Qurʾān should descend on ʿAlī and not on the Prophet, especially since ʿAlī was created from one of the Prophet's ribs?[19]

Several of al-Muʾayyad's other sermons developed this same theme of 'sexual relations' between the Prophet and his Heir, or between the Imam and his followers, while specifying that these interactions are not at all physical, but exclusively 'spiritual relations'.[20] Aside from Qurʾān 4:1 and the aforementioned *ḥadīth*, this is founded on Qurʾān 33:6: "The Prophet is nearer to the believers than their selves; his wives are their mothers." In this case, the paternity of the Prophet is a religious paternity (*ubuwwa dīniyya*); 'his wives' refers to the Heir and his Imams, who bring forth believers in a spiritual birth (*wilāda nafsāniyya*).[21] Muḥammad is 'father' inasmuch as he procures by means of the revelation (*waḥy*) the 'divine sperm' (*al-nuṭfa al-ilāhiyya*) for his 'spouse'

19 Muʾayyad, *Majālis*, 1, n° 17, 81–82; cf. Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 117, 164, 184–85.

20 The metaphor of the sexual act to describe the relationship between master and disciple, or an Imam and his dignitaries, is often used in 'extremist' Shīʿī groupings such as Nuṣayrism and Druzism, and this is one reason such currents are often accused of preaching libertinism and homosexuality; see Tendler-Krieger, "Marriage, Birth, and *bāṭinī taʾwīl*". But such metaphorical language also appears in Ismāʿīlī exegesis; see Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qurʾān*, 72–73.

21 Muʾayyad, *Majālis*, 1, n° 17, 82.

ʿAlī, in whom it is deposited, becomes fruitful and then passes on to the Imams of his descendance.[22]

Just as Adam is "the cause of bodily descendance" (*ʿillat al-nasl al-jismī*), each Prophet, within his own cycle, plays the role of Adam, as the "cause of religious descendance" (*ʿillat al-nasl al-dīnī*). The words "unique Soul" in Qurʾān 4:1 refer to the Prophet as the father of religion; his spouse is the Heir, pregnant with his science and his secrets; this pregnancy leads to the birth of "men" and "women". The "men" are the "scholars who give benefits" (*al-ʿulamāʾ al-mufīdūn*), whereas the "women" refer to the "students who obtain access to the benefits" (*al-mutaʿallimūn al-mustafīdūn*). The masculine element thus refers to Muḥammad, the Imams and the dignitaries (*ḥudūd*) of the *daʿwa*; the feminine element is found in ʿAlī and in the Respondents (*al-mustajībūn*), the neophytes who answered the call of the *dāʿī*. As for the order of precedence among them, the Qurʾān is clear: 'Men are the managers of the affairs of women for that God has preferred in bounty one of them over another.' (Qurʾān 4:34) In consequence, the Heir is subordinate to the authority of the Prophet, just as the student must obey the teacher.[23]

Al-Muʾayyad here introduces a notion that is fundamental in Ismāʿīlī doctrine: the distinction between *ifāda* and *istifāda*, 'to give and to receive a benefit'. These concepts fit into the emanationist and hierarchical scheme according to which the Ismāʿīlī universe is constructed, which is profoundly rooted in Neo-Platonism. An uninterrupted influx is propagated from the first created being (since the Creator is not a principle of emanation, as that would ruin his transcendent state). This influx is transmitted by different entities (called *ḥudūd*) that structure the intelligible world (universal Intellect, universal Soul), the physical world (celestial bodies and spheres, minerals, plants and animals), and the religious world (Prophet, Heir, Imams, dignitaries of the *daʿwa*). With the exception of the first created being who, as the source of the emanation, transmits this influx without receiving it, and of the neophyte who receives it without transmitting, all the other ranks are simultaneously *mufīd* and *mustafīd*, givers and receivers of the influx. As givers they are masculine, but when they are receiving they become feminine. This results in what Karen Bauer called a *gender hierarchy* in which most of the ranks are 'bisexual'.[24] Now we understand why, in this 'world of religion' (*ʿālam al-dīn*), Muḥammad confiding the revelation to ʿAlī, and the Imams teaching esoteric knowledge

22 Muʾayyad, *Majālis*, I, n° 99, 495; cf. Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, 181–82.

23 Muʾayyad, *Majālis*, I, n° 79, 386–88.

24 Bauer, "Spiritual Hierarchy", especially 37–39; cf. De Smet, « La valorisation du féminin », especially 110–13.

to the dignitaries of the *daʿwa*, and these same dignitaries transmitting this knowledge to neophytes, are all called 'men', whereas ʿAlī and the neophytes are cast as "women".[25]

In a similar way, al-Muʾayyad compares the relationship between Muḥammad and ʿAlī to that between the Pen (*qalam*) and the Tablet (*lawḥ*). Remaining faithful to Muslim Neo-Platonism,[26] he identifies these Qurʾānic notions respectively with the Intellect and the universal Soul. As a pure act, the Intellect, like a pen, writes out the "forms of the heavens, of the earth, of the mountains and of minerals" on the "tablet" of the Soul, which receives them as models according to which it will construct the physical world. Similarly, the Prophet writes down his revelation on the 'tablet' that is his Heir, to whom he confides the demiurgy of the "world of religion". Just as the writing innate in the pen cannot be fixed without the tablet, the revelation brought by the Prophet needs to be fixed by the Heir. In other words, without the Heir and his Imams, religion would be inconceivable.[27]

Our author then goes even further in his comparison. He tells his readers that if the Intellect and the universal Soul are the intellects of the intelligible world, the Prophet and the Heir are the intellects of the world of nature (*ʿālam al-ṭabīʿa*). However, while the universal Intellect and the intellect of the Prophet are perfect in essence and in act, the universal Soul and the intellect of the Heir are perfect in essence, but their act is only perfect in potentiality. In order to be actualised and become perfect intellects in actuality, the universal Soul and the Heir must be 'coupled' with their respective partners. This "coupling" (*izdiwāj*) with the Prophet will allow ʿAlī and the Imams of his descendance to operate as intellects in actuality, and thus they will themselves be able to actualise the potential intellects of their followers.[28]

This particular way of conceptualising the relationship between Muḥammad and ʿAlī, which is elevated to a cosmic level inasmuch as it reflects here below the relationship between the Intellect and the universal Soul in the intelligible world, is not unique to al-Muʾayyad. It also appears in the work of his contemporary Nāṣir-e Khosraw (d. after 462/1070). After having, in his *Wajh-e dīn*, given the same exegesis as al-Muʾayyad of the *ḥadīth* "You and I, O ʿAlī, we are

25 In a complementary way Muḥammad is feminine in relation to the entity from the intelligible world from whom he receives revelation, and ʿAlī is masculine in relation to the Imam who succeeds him, and so on.

26 Wakelnig, *Feder, Tafel, Mensch*, *passim*; De Smet, *La Quiétude de l'Intellect*, 383–84.

27 Muʾayyad, *Majālis*, I, n° 33, 162; n° 36, 176–78.

28 Muʾayyad, *Majālis*, III, n° 17, 51; cf. Alexandrin, *Walāyah*, p. 130. Imams play the role that the *falāsifa* attribute to the agent Intellect of Aristotelian tradition, that of allowing the human intellect to move from potentiality to actuality; see De Smet, *Quiétude*, 355–60.

the parents of the believers" and of Qurʾān 33:6, Nāṣir-e Khosraw undertakes a *taʾwīl* of the "pillars of Islam", of which there are seven in the Ismāʿīlī tradition.

1) The profession of faith (*shahāda*) symbolises the Preceder (*sābiq*) or universal Intellect, ultimate source of the emanation of the universe and simultaneously the source of the revelation, through whom the Prophet-Enunciator (*nāṭiq*) receives the correct form of *tawḥīd* (the profession of the unity and unicity of God).
2) The prayer (*ṣalāt*) is a reference to the Follower (*tālī*) or universal Soul, who is put in charge of the demiurgy (*tarkīb*) of the world and transmits the influx (*mādda*) of the inspiration (*taʾyīd*) to the Enunciator; this allows the latter to compile the sharīʿa.
3) Alms (*zakāt*) signifies the Enunciator who names the Base (*Asās*) and confides his revelation to him.
4) The fourth 'pillar', that of pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), symbolising the Base (or Heir), completes the construction of the 'house of religion', built on these four foundations and composed of four walls.

The remaining pillars – (5) fasting (*ṣawm*); (6) jihad; and (7) loyalty (*walāya*) – refer respectively to the Imam, to the Proof (*ḥujja*) and to the missionary (*dāʿī*).[29]

The goal of this equation between the two pairs: Intellect (male)/universal Soul (female), and Prophet (male)/Heir (female) is clearly to provide a cosmological basis for Muḥammad's superiority to ʿAlī. The Prophet's masculinity makes him the absolute master of humanity. Nāṣir-e Khosraw could not be clearer on this point:

> Those versed in esoteric understanding (*ahl-e bāṭin*) are like men, but the true man is the Prophet whom God the Exalted set over all mankind, all of whom are in relation to him on the level of women, because of his manliness. And since in the Law women are obliged to be obedient to men, and obedience to the Prophet is obligatory, it is clear that man is [at the level of] the Prophet, while all human beings in relation to him are in the position of women.[30]

3 An Ambiguous Primacy: The Four Principles of al-Sijistānī

Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971), an Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī*, was a member of the Qarmatian movement that considered the Fatimids to be imposters, though

29 Nāṣir-e Khosraw, *Wajh-e dīn*, 203–6.

30 Nāṣir-e Khosraw, *Kitāb Jāmiʿ al-ḥikmatayn*, 297; translated by Ormsby, *Between Reason and Revelation*, 262.

he joined their cause at a relatively late stage of his career.[31] It was perhaps because of his former affiliation that Fatimid authors tended to suspect him of heterodoxy. On the delicate question of the relationship between the Prophet and his Heir, al-Sijistānī remains prudent. In his function as Envoy (*risāla*), the Prophet knows all of the 'truths' (*ḥaqā'iq*), whereas the very function of Heir (*wiṣāya*) implies that ʿAlī's science is a tributary of that of the Prophet, and that ʿAlī knows only what he receives from Muḥammad. The conclusion seems obvious: the Prophet is superior to the Heir and not vice versa.[32]

Nevertheless, in the "Book of Sources" (*Kitāb al-Yanābīʿ*), al-Sijistānī elaborates his theory of the four principles with an ambiguity that leads to some divergent interpretations. These four principles are: the two "foundations'" (*aṣlān*) of the intelligible world, the Intellect and the universal Soul (also called the Preceder and the Follower, or the Pen and the Tablet), and the two "Bases" (*asāsān*), of the earthly world, the Enunciator and the Heir. Through these four principles divinity manifests itself in the universe.

Like all Ismāʿīlī authors, regardless of affiliation, al-Sijistānī insists upon the inaccessibility and total transcendence of the Creator (*mubdiʿ*). Unknowable and ineffable in himself, by an act of origination (*ibdāʿ*) that also escapes all understanding he creates a first creature who carries every name and attribute that the revealed texts ascribe to God. This primary creature, who is the God of revelation, is identified with the universal Intellect, the Preceder, or the Pen. Al-Sijistānī's system does contain one quite particular aspect (rejected by most Fatimid writers): here Intellect is preceded by a created entity, linked to the act of creation and called *Allāh*, the Word (*kalima*), the Imperative (*amr*), or the Will (*irāda, mashīʾa*). In any case, the ontological status of this intermediary between God and the Intellect, between the Creator and his creature, remains fluid.[33]

These four principles by which the revealed God is expressed in the universe, are contained in the four letters of the name *Allāh*:

> I say that the letters of the word *Allāh* are indications of the four wellsprings that derive from God's absolute unity [...]. The *alif* is the analogue of the Preceder who is the wellspring of divine inspiration (*ta'yīd*); the

31 As with most Ismāʿīlī *duʿāt*, we possess very little reliable information on his life; see De Smet, "From Khalaf to Ḥasan al-Ṣabbāḥ", especially 445–46.

32 Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Iftikhār*, 138–50 (on the *risāla*) and 151–66 (on the *wiṣāya*); Id. *Kitāb al-Maqālīd*, 296: only the Enunciator knows all of the *ḥaqā'iq*; cf. Walker, *Early philosophical Shiism*, 26–27, 131–32.

33 De Smet, "Le Verbe-impératif", 397–412; for more on the rejection of this theory, notably by Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, see De Smet, *Quiétude*, 142–44.

> first *lām* is the analogue of the Follower, who is the wellspring of physical composition (*tarkīb*); the second *lām* is the analogue of the Enunciator, who is the wellspring of scriptural compilation (*taʾlīf*); and the round spherical *hāʾ* is the analogue of the Base (*asās*), who is the wellspring of interpretation (*taʾwīl*).[34]

In other words, the Intellect is the source of the universe's emanation; the universal Soul composes the physical world; the Enunciator writes the book of revelation and the Base (or Heir), leads the procession back to its starting point through his exegesis, as indicated by the circular shape of the letter *hāʾ* to which he corresponds.

The four principles also occur in the four words that together form the *shahāda*, the Islamic credo. Al-Sijistānī explains this by interpreting a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet is supposed to have said: "*lā ilāha illā Allāh* is the key to Paradise". According to our author, paradise is none other than the divine Word (*kalimat Allāh*) by which God has originated (*abdaʿa*) all things *ex nihilo*. The Preceder (*sābiq*) or Intellect is the key to all spiritual and material beings, whose shapes or archetypes flow from him by emanation. The Follower (*tālī*) or universal Soul is the key of beings possessing structure and harmony, because he is the principle of order that reigns in this sense-perceptible world inasmuch as he realises forms in matter. The Enunciator (*nāṭiq*) is the key to all of the statements relating to the forms of the Intellect and the compositions of the Soul that feature in the revelation and in religious law. Finally, the Base (*asās*) or Heir is the key of that to which the forms of Intellect, the compositions of Soul and the regimes (*siyāsāt*) of the Enunciators are brought back (*jamīʿ mā āla ilayhi*).[35]

The key to Heaven has four teeth, which are the four words of the *shahāda*. The negation *lā* is the tooth that corresponds to the Base; these two letters represent exactly half the letters of the affirmation *Allāh*, the tooth that corresponds to the Preceder, for 'the Base leads to the appearance (*abraza*) of half of that which flows from the Preceder into the Enunciator'. While the arguments are far from clear and the text most likely corrupt, we propose the following interpretation: The four letters of *Allāh* correspond to the Preceder. Existing at the summit of perfection, the forms that he receives from the Word are not divided or split within his essence, but combine into perfect unity, which is expressed by the perfection of the number four. The tooth of the key that

34 Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Yanābīʿ*, § 10, p. 9; trans. by Walker, *The Wellsprings of Wisdom*, 45 (slightly modified).

35 Sijistānī, *Yanābīʿ*, § 138–40, pp. 70–71; trans. Walker, *Wellsprings*, 91–92.

corresponds to the Enunciator is *ilāh*, composed of three letters – one fewer than *Allāh*, which signifies that it is situated at an inferior level. In his position as 'lieutenant to the Preceder in the physical world' (*khalīfat al-sābiq fi l-ʿālam al-jusmānī*), he does not have the fullness of powers that the Preceder possesses (a fullness symbolised by the number four), but has only three ranks: that of Envoy (*risāla*), of Heir (*wiṣāya*) and of Imam (*imāma*). The Follower corresponds to the particle of exclusion, *illā*, which implies that he brings about the appearance of physical beings to the exclusion of spiritual beings. Finally, the word that refers to the Base, the negation *lā*, only contains two letters, which indicates that it occupies the lowest rank of the four principles.[36]

Despite the complexity of the text and the somewhat forced nature of the exegesis, the intentions of the author appear clear. The four principles emanate from the Word in a specific and descending hierarchical order: the Intellect and the Soul in the intelligible world, followed by the Prophet and the Heir in the physical world. It is explicitly stated that the Prophet is the 'lieutenant' of the Intellect in the physical world, which implies the Heir here represents the Soul. The Prophet is superior to the Heir because he combines in his being prophecy and imamat, *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, whereas the Heir does not possess the gift of prophecy. Consequently, here we find ourselves in the direct line of Fatimid orthodoxy.

However, it would be uncharacteristic of al-Sijistānī to fail to be somewhat ambiguous in his ideas. In this same "Book of Sources", he returns once more to his four principles, the "carriers of unity" (*ḥawāmil al-waḥda*), which he detects in the four letters of the word *kalima*, the divine Word that operates as the primary cause of all beings. He retraces the broad lines of the exegesis previously applied in his analysis of the four letters of the name *Allāh*. The letter *kāf* here corresponds to the Intellect, principle of emanation of all superior and inferior beings, in which resides spiritual and physical form. This represents the summit of perfection and is nothing other than the true essence (*ḥaqīqa*) of what the Qurʾān calls *kalām Allāh*, the speech of God. However, here the author also specifies that 'the Base is united with the Preceder because of esoteric exegesis (*taʾwīl*)'. The privileged relationship is no longer between Intellect and Prophet, but between Intellect and the Prophet's Heir.[37]

The letter *lām* now corresponds to the Soul, which shines the light of the Intellect into the physical world; the *mīm* refers to the Enunciator, and, just as with the name *Allāh*, the circular letter *hāʾ* indicates the Heir. In addition,

36 Sijistānī, *Yanābīʿ*, § 141, pp. 71–72; trans. Walker, *Wellsprings*, 92–93.

37 Sijistānī, *Yanābīʿ*, § 178, pp. 90–91; trans. Walker, *Wellsprings*, 107; cf. De Smet, 'Le Coran', 242–44.

the Enunciator's function changes and fluctuates: revelation alters from one Prophet to the next. Each Prophet has access to the revelation only to the extent that he is himself pure, and he writes a law that takes into account his own era and his own cycle. In these actions, he clearly behaves differently from the universal Soul, which organises the world in a constant and invariable way, just as he is different from the Heir, whose esoteric exegesis also remains unvaried, for 'Pure knowledge (*ʿilm maḥḍ*) is unsullied by divergence and contention. Divergence and contention exist, therefore, only in its exposed and not in its concealed aspects.' In other words, the *bāṭin* of the knowledge of the Heirs and the Imams is one and unvarying in the face of the contradictions and dissonances of the literal religions established by the Prophets, which, because of this, are imperfect.[38]

The four letters of *kalima* inspired al-Sijistānī to find other correspondences. There are four modes of existence: essences (*dhawāt*) and psychic concepts (*humūm*) in the intelligible world, speech (*qawl*) and writing (*kitāba*) in the physical world; there are four activities: *taʾyīd* and *tarkīb* on high, *taʾlīf* and *taʾwīl* here below. Each element of these two series is respectively associated with Intellect, Soul, Enunciator, and Heir. However, al-Sijistānī tells us that the writing that supports the *taʾwīl* of the Heir has its equivalent in the essences and the *taʾyīd* of the spiritual world that comes from the Intellect. We can thus obtain the following order: Intellect – *taʾyīd* – *taʾwīl* – *kitāba* – Heir.[39] Although not explicitly mentioned in the text, it follows from this that the other series will necessarily be composed thus: Soul – *tarkīb* – *qawl* – Enunciator. We are thus in the presence of a complete reversal of what al-Sijistānī had previously said: here, the Heir corresponds to the Intellect and consequently is superior to the Prophet, whose alter ego is the universal Soul.

One last series of equations confirms all this, and indicates the reason for this reversal: Angels – *taʾyīd* – Intellect / Jinn – universal Soul / demons (*shayāṭīn*) – Enunciators, inasmuch as they are associated with the exoteric/men (*ins*) – Heirs as depositories of the esoteric. The author explains:

> The 'devils' designate those who cling to the outward aspect (*ẓāhir*) of the Enunciators without penetrating to its true reality. In this they are far from the truth, having gone astray, 'And led astray many, and now again have gone astray from the right way.' (Q 5:77). 'Humans' designate the people of truth, who are conversant with the interpretation and are

38 Sijistānī, *Yanābīʿ*, § 179–81, pp. 91–92; trans. Walker, *Wellsprings*, 107–8.

39 Sijistānī, *Yanābīʿ*, § 182–84, pp. 92–93; trans. Walker, *Wellsprings*, 108–9.

> saved from doubts and uncertainty. The interpretation has become their cave and place of refuge.[40]

The Prophet's inferiority to the Heir is thus founded on a critique of exoteric religion and laws, which are considered to be punishments, to constitute an earthly hell.[41] This attitude, which takes its place in a long tradition of Shīʿī antinomianism, can probably be explained by al-Sijistānī's Qarmatian past.

To sum up, al-Sijistānī's theory of the four principles is ambiguous in that it allows two readings. Either we recognise in it a vertical scheme of emanation, with decreasing levels of perfection: Intellect, universal Soul, the Prophet, the Heir – or we interpret the scheme as circular, a Neo-Platonic cycle in which the procession (*processio*) brings with it a return (*reditus*) to the source. The functions attributed to each principle tend to plead in favour of this latter alternative: the Intellect is the principle of the procession of emanation (*taʾyīd*); the universal Soul acts as the demiurge of the physical world (*tarkīb*); the Prophet takes charge of the demiurgy of the world of religion (*taʾlīf*), whereas the Heir is the principle of the return to the source (*taʾwīl*). Since this is the case, ʿAlī forms a pair with the Intellect, as both are sources of procession and of return, whereas Muḥammad and the universal Soul constitute a pair of demiurges. In both interpretations, the Prophet and the Heir have become cosmic principles, 'loci of manifestation' of the divine Word.

4 The Nizārī Reversal and the Downgrading of the Prophet

The proclamation of the 'Great Resurrection' by the Nizārī Imam Ḥasan *ʿalā dhikrihi al-salām*,[42] in the Alamūṭ fortress in 559/1164,[43] was part of a drastic 'alteration' of Ismāʿīlī doctrine as formulated by moderate Fatimid authors such as al-Muʾayyad and Nāṣir-e Khosraw. After this time, the predominance of the Imam over the Prophet is absolute and the pairing of Muḥammad and ʿAlī is made into a triad with the addition of Salmān in his role as "Proof" (*ḥujja*) of the Imam.[44]

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40 Sijistānī, *Yanābīʿ*, § 185, p. 94; trans. Walker, *Wellsprings*, 109 (slightly modified).

41 De Smet, "Ismaʿili-Shiʿi Visions of Hell", 250–55.

42 Oddly, this eulogy seems to make up part of the Imam's name; he is generally so designated in Nizārī texts, and secondary literature follows this style.

43 Much has been written about this singular event; see, among others, Jambet, *La grande résurrection d'Alamût*.

44 Salmān, nicknamed "the Persian" (*al-fārisī*), is said to have been the first of his compatriots to embrace Islam. Faithful companion of the Prophet, and favouring ʿAlī, he became

Nizārī Ismāʿīlīsm, of which the Avicennian philosopher Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) was one of the most important theorists, returns to the ancient concept of a divine Imperative or Word that mediates between God and the Intellect, an idea already found in al-Sijistānī, but that had been rejected by most subsequent Fatimid authors. Divinity, understood as the ultimate source of existence, so transcends the universe that it cannot be its cause; not being a cause, it cannot produce an effect. It rises above existence and non-existence, temporality and eternity, necessity and contingence; no attribute of essence or of relation can apply to divinity. Unknowable and ineffable in himself, God is made manifest by his Imperative (*amr*) or Word (*kalima*), which acts as a first cause and receives all the qualifications of perfection and completeness that were previously denied to divine essence. In other terms, the divine Word is the revealed God, the divinity of which the revealed texts speak. As first cause the Word produces the first Intellect, and through it the universal Soul. Perfect in its essence and its actions, the Intellect governs the intelligible world, whereas the Soul, which is imperfect by comparison with the Intellect, governs and animates the sense-perceptible world.[45]

However, each being in the intelligible world (or "world of the Imperative", *ʿālam al-amr*) has its equivalent in the physical world (or "world of creation", *ʿālam al-khalq*). The intelligible entity is the source (*maṣdar*) of the existant, to which it corresponds in the world of the senses, which is its locus of manifestation (*maẓhar*). Moreover, the Word, the Intellect and the universal Soul are respectively the archetypes of the Imam, the Proof (*ḥujja*) and the Prophet: this is the ʿAlī – Salmān – Muḥammad triad seen as entities that precede the creation of the physical world. These three entities necessarily have a *maẓhar*, a locus of manifestation, here below: the uninterrupted succession of countless Imams, Proofs and Prophets who have made their mark on the hierohistory of our world.

> The elevated Word, the first Intellect and the universal Soul each have a locus of manifestation (*maẓhar*) in this world. The locus of manifestation of the elevated Word is the Imam who is situated beyond representation and imagination (*taṣawwur wa taṣwīr*) and rises above description (*waṣf*) and negation [of the attributes] (*tanzīh*). The locus of manifestation of the first Intellect is the highest Proof (*ḥujja*) of the Imam, giving

an emblematic figure of Muslim esotericism, equally respected by Shīʿīs and Sunnī Sufis; see Massignon, "Salmān Pāk".

45 Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Sayr wa sulūk*, § 24–27, 30, pp. 35–37, 39; Id. *Rawḍat al-taslīm*, 8–20; Jambet, *Convocation*, 129–46.

> form to perfection. The locus of manifestation of the universal Soul is the Prophet, who, at the beginning of the cycle, gives souls the capacity to receive this form, which is ultimate perfection.[46]

The three 'loci of manifestation' take the form of a human being with ever-changing features, appearing at times as a newborn child and at others as a haggard old man, and in the four corners of the earth.[47]

> All the Imams are just the same as ʿAlī [...]. It is he, who has neither a beginning nor an end, but in relation to the people he may appear as a father, as a son, or as a great-grandson. Sometimes he appears as a young person, as a child, or in a mother's womb; [sometimes] in concealment or manifest, as a king, in poverty or oppression, or forgiving and merciful. He makes all these appearances to human eyes from a physical perspective, so that all creatures may sustain their existence.[48]

They take on themselves a body that must submit to the vicissitudes of biological functions (ageing, sickness, suffering, death), but they live in it as one lives in a house, without maintaining any substantial link to this body: this is the so-called "Docetism" that is so dear to ultra-Shīʿī movements.[49]

In the ʿAlī – Salmān – Muḥammad triad, the Imam ʿAlī is the revealed God, the divine Word, to whom the ineffable God has delegated his powers and his attributes: "God dressed him in the habit of his own unity and granted him his own eternal existence beyond being".[50] The Imam is thus the centre of the heavens and the pole of the earth, without his presence, the world could not subsist for even a single instant. The angels, the jinn and humankind are placed under his command.[51]

As for Salmān, the Proof of the Imam, who receives the influx of science from him as the moon receives the light of the sun, his function consists in organising the *daʿwa* and acting as intermediary between the Imam and his disciples. Corresponding to the agent Intellect of the philosophers, his teaching actualises the potential intellect of the dignitaries (*ḥudūd*), so that they are

46 Ṭūsī, *Rawḍat*, § 330, p. 95; Jambet, *Convocation*, 282.

47 Ṭūsī, *Sayr*, § 31–37, pp. 40–43; Id. *Rawḍat*, § 359, p. 106; Jambet, *Convocation*, 302; cf. *ibid.* 103–13.

48 Ḥasan-e Maḥmūd-e Kātib, *Haft bāb*, § 34, p. 63.

49 De Smet, "Les racines docétistes"; Jambet, *Convocation*, 96–97.

50 Ṭūsī, *Rawḍat*, § 351, p. 102; Jambet, *Convocation*, 294.

51 Ṭūsī, *Rawḍat*, § 350–351, p. 102; Jambet, *Convocation*, 293–95; Ḥasan-e Maḥmūd-e Kātib, *Haft bāb*, § 11–13, pp. 52–53.

able in their turn to move the intellect of neophytes from a state of potentiality to one of actuality.[52]

Finally, Muḥammad, the Prophet, occupies a more modest rank, but is nevertheless indispensable to the economy of salvation. As he is "the man of the Law" (*ṣāḥib al-sharīʿa*), he belongs to a different 'realm' from that of the Imam and his Proof, who are placed under the sign of the Resurrection.[53] In Nizārī thought, Law and Resurrection, *sharīʿa* and *qiyāma*, are antithetical principles that nevertheless coexist over long periods and ultimately complement each other: "Religious law (*sharīʿat*) means the path, which is derived from *shāriʿ*; resurrection is destination (*maqṣad*)".[54] In hiero-history's cyclical timespan there is an alternation between 'cycles of occultation' (*adwār al-satr*) and "cycles of manifestation" (*adwār al-kashf*). The ideal cycle of occultation contains six prophetic cycles, each initiated by a Prophet-Legislator who imposes a legalistic religion while the esoteric science that is indispensable to the resurrection of the believer is discreetly taught by the Imam and his Proof to an elite of initiated people, who must keep this secret (*taqiyya*). At the end of the last of these prophetic cycles, the Imam breaks the *taqiyya* by publicly proclaiming his divinity; he then abrogates the sharīʿa and opens a cycle of manifestation, during which there is neither Prophet, nor Law, nor worship.[55] This is exactly what occurred at Alamūṭ in 1164.

Just as the universal Soul must undertake the unrewarding task of manipulating the matter of the physical world, the Prophet must sully himself with the law and submit to his own prescriptions. But his work is as necessary and beneficial as the demiurgic operation of the universal Soul: without a sharīʿa, humanity could not survive during a cycle of occultation, because human fury would destroy the world and the path of salvation would be closed to all – for without revealed texts and legal prescriptions, there would be nothing from which to extract gnosis by means of esoteric exegesis (*taʾwīl*).[56] In addition, the Ghadīr Khumm episode illustrates the complicity that exists between Muḥammad and ʿAlī: the unification of the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*, of legalistic religion and the science of resurrection, for the entire duration of the cycle of Islam.[57] And, on the model of the universal Soul receiving the forms of the

52 Ṭūsī, *Rawḍat*, § 381–84, pp. 111–13; Jambet, *Convocation*, 311–13; cf. *ibid.* p. 317 n. 13–14.

53 Ṭūsī, *Āghāz wa anjām*, § 14–15, p. 56.

54 *Ibid.* § 15, p. 56.

55 Ṭūsī, *Rawḍat*, § 174–75, pp. 54–55; Jambet, *Convocation*, 214.

56 Ṭūsī, *Rawḍat*, § 317–35, pp. 92–97; § 412–18, 118–20; Jambet, *Convocation*, 278–85, 324–26; cf. Badakhchani, *Spiritual Resurrection*, 22–23.

57 Ṭūsī, *Rawḍat*, § 425, p. 121; Jambet, *Convocation*, 329.

Intellect, the Prophet received revelation from the Proof, Salmān, traditionally identified with the angel Gabriel.[58]

The subordinate role of the Prophet, supposed to be stated explicitly in Qur'ān 13:7, "Thou art only a warner",[59] is accentuated in Nizārī literature written after the destruction of Alamūṭ by the Mongols in 654/1256. *Faṣl dar bayān-e shenākht-e imam*, by Khayrkhwāh-e Harātī (d. after 960/1553) opens thus:

> The book on the recognition of the Imam, who is the locus of manifestation of the Imperative, of the Proof who is the locus of manifestation of the universal Intellect, of the missionary (*dāʿī*), of the higher licentiate (*ma'dhūn akbar*), of the lower licentiate (*ma'dhūn aṣghar*) and of the respondent (*mustajāb*), who are the loci of manifestation of the universal Soul.[60]

When we compare this to the similar passage from al-Ṭūsī's *Rawḍat al-taslīm* cited above, the absence of the Prophet is obvious; here, his place as *maẓhar* of the universal Soul is taken by the dignitaries (*ḥudūd*) of the *daʿwa*.

In fact, this means that here the Prophet Muḥammad is explicitly designated a *dāʿī*. The angel Gabriel is none other than the *ḥujja* Salmān, who brings the revelation to the Prophet – that is, he trains his missionary for the mission with which he is to be tasked: the elaboration of the sharīʿa of Islam. The *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, "If Abū Dharr knew what is in Salmān's heart, he would condemn him as an infidel", is explained as follows: if Abū Dharr were to learn from Salmān that his (Salmān's) position was superior to that of the Prophet, and that ʿAlī is the creator and former (*khāliq wa muṣawwir*) of the world, he would consider him to be an infidel and kill him.[61] The author then reports a curious tradition in which ʿĀ'isha (!) declares that she never saw the Prophet ascend to the heavens, or receive a visit from the angel Gabriel. In fact, she is said to have reported that Salmān came to see the Prophet occasionally to whisper things in his ear. Afterwards, the Prophet would say that Gabriel had descended and revealed to him such or such a verse from the mouth of God himself.[62]

Like all his predecessors, the Prophet Muḥammad is the man of law who, during the night preceding the dawn of the resurrection, veils the Imam and the

58 Ṭūsī, *Rawḍat*, § 470, p. 133; Jambet, *Convocation*, 348–49; cf. *ibid.* p. 319 n. 20.
59 Ṭūsī, *Āghāz*, § 14, p. 56.
60 Khayrkhwāh, *Faṣl dar bayān-e shenākt-e imām*, 13.
61 Khayrkhwāh, *Faṣl*, 17; cf. Jambet, *Convocation*, 108–9. Abū Dharr was one of the Prophet's companions. He favoured ʿAlī and was thus held in high esteem by Shīʿīs.
62 Khayrkhwāh, *Faṣl*, 18.

Proof with his sharīʿa. However, if we take into account their superior position to that of the Prophet, the Imam and his *ḥujja* are not obliged to observe this law, to the extent that Salmān openly broke it, in front of everyone. On the other hand, ʿAlī, despite his divinity, pretended to conform to the law and, after the Prophet's death, swore loyalty to Abū Bakr. If he had done otherwise he would have destroyed Muḥammad's mission, for no one would have followed the sharīʿa, and the world would have gone to its end, since the time of resurrection had, at that time, not yet arrived. Elsewhere, the sharīʿa is compared to the chain or rope that controls an obstinate donkey. In creating an instrument to keep his adversaries on their toes, the Prophet had usefully contributed to the public good. The treatise ends on this antinomian note, which is characteristic of radical Shīʿism.[63]

Khayrkhwāh-e Harātī is a representative of Persian Nizarism. On the Indian subcontinent, Nizārī Ismāʿīlīsm, or *Satpanth* (the "straight Path"), which was spread by the *Pīrs* in the name of their Imam, who lived in Iran, was the vehicle for similar ideas, very much influenced by Hinduism. Thus, the 'brief' version of the famous *ginan Dasa Avatāra* ("the ten avatars"), attributed to Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn (end of the eighth/fourteenth century) uses grandiose images borrowed in part from Hindu mythology to celebrate ʿAlī's sparkling divinity, presenting him as none other than the tenth and final avatar of the god Vishnu. On the other hand, 'Nabī Muḥammad Muṣṭafā' is mentioned only a single time here, as the "*guru* of the world".[64] Muḥammad also takes on this subordinate role as *guru* in the 'long' version of the *Dasa Avatāra* that circulated under the name of Imām Shāh (d. 919/1513). Identified with Brahma, *Guru* Muḥammad takes his place as a vizir alongside Shāh ʿAlī, who is 'seated upon cushions' as the tenth avatar of the supreme God Vishnu: "Then, as the tenth form [of Vishnu], the name of the Lord Murtaḍā ʿAlī has been taught [...]. Then know that the *guru* is the Prophet Muḥammad Muṣṭafā."[65] At the Last Judgement, the Shāh will refuse requests to intercede in favour of people if they have been proffered by *guru* Brahma, (Muḥammad): ultimately, as a divinity, ʿAlī is in sole charge and is under no obligation to obey his advisors.[66]

63 Khayrkhwāh, *Faṣl*, 14, 21–23.

64 Hooda, "Some Specimens of Satpanth Literature", 112–15. For more on the literature of the *ginan*, religious hymns in different Indian languages, including Gujarati, see, among others, Asani, "'Ismāʿīlī *ginān*s".

65 Khakee, *The Dasa Avatāra*. 474–75; cf. *ibid.* 69, 376, and the commentaries by Khakee, 43–44. As a *guru*, Muḥammad occupies the same rank as Pīr Shams al-Dīn, the celebrated author of *ginān*s, and is thus considered to be a close collaborator of the Imam; see Khakee, *The Dasa Avatāra*, 62, 64, 72, 87.

66 Khakee, *The Dasa Avatāra*, 436.

5 Divinity (*lāhūt*), Humanity (*nāsūt*) and Covering (*ghilāf*): The Ṭayyibī Triad

Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, whom we have to thank for the only Ismāʿīlī biography of the Prophet, of which we spoke at the beginning of the present chapter, was also the author of an impressive manual of esoteric Ṭayyibī doctrine, *Kitāb Zahr al-maʿānī*.[67] Unlike the Nizāris, the Ṭayyibis (their rivals) had always wanted to perpetuate the Fatimid tradition, including the use of the Arabic language. For them there was no question of downgrading the Prophet Muḥammad and making him ʿAlī's subordinate. The founding father of Ṭayyibism, Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāmidī (d. 557/1162) himself left no room for doubt on this topic: the three "loci" (*maqām*) of the world of religion, the Prophet, the Heir and the Imams, are all on an equal footing.[68]

This being the case, Ṭayyibī authors frequently cited *ḥadīth*s illustrating this equality between Muḥammad and ʿAlī. For instance, the latter is said to have declared: "Muḥammad is the topaz (*al-yāqūt al-ṣafrāʾ*) and I am the sapphire (*al-yāqūt al-ḥamrāʾ*)". Another example: "I and Muḥammad come from one unique light, the light of God the Most High. God ordered that this light should split into two parts. He told the first half: 'Be Muḥammad!' and the second half: 'Be ʿAlī!'"[69]

The content of this second tradition demonstrates that the Prophet and the Heir are considered to be eternal, or rather pre-eternal, principles: God created them a long time before He made the earth. To support this, Ṭayyibī authors draw on a large stock of ancient ultra- Shīʿī *ḥadīth*s, some of which stem from the movement of the Mukhammisa (disciples of Abu l-Khaṭṭāb), which expanded the Muḥammad – ʿAlī pairing to include the five *ahl al-bayt*.[70] With this aim, Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn cites a long *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet declares:

> God created me and he created my brother ʿAlī when there was neither heaven, nor earth, nor paradise, nor hell, nor Tablet nor Pen. When he wanted to create us, he uttered a word (*kalima*), which became a light and a soul (*nūran wa rūḥan*). He mixed them together and created ʿAlī and me from this mixture. From my light, he made the Throne – I am superior to the throne – and from the light of ʿAlī he created the light of

67 Hamdānī, "A Compendium of Ismāʿīlī Esoterics".

68 Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāmidī, *Kitāb Kanz al-Walad*, 200–201.

69 Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Ḥārithī, *Kitāb al-Anwār al-laṭīfa*, 123.

70 This renewal of ancient pre-Fatimid doctrines and traditions is a wide-spread phenomenon in Ṭayyibism; see De Smet, "The Intellectual Interactions", 299–321. For more on Abu l-Khaṭṭāb and the Mukhammisa, see Asatryan, *Controversies*, *passim*.

> heaven, ʿAlī being superior to heaven. From al-Ḥasan's light he created the light of the moon and from al-Ḥusayn's light he created the light of the sun, establishing them both [the sun and the moon] as lights for the inhabitants of the earth. [...] From the light of Fāṭima, God Most High created something that took the shape of a candelabrum, and suspended it from the ring (*qurṭ*) of the Throne, so that it would illuminate (*azharat*) the heavens and the earth. For this reason, Fāṭima is called 'the radiant one' (*al-zahrāʾ*).[71]

Thus were created the "silhouettes of light" (*ashbāḥ nūrin*), which represent the divinity (*lāhūt*) of the Prophet, of the Heir and, by extension, of the Imams who descend from him. On this subject, Idrīs cites a conversation between the fifth Imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, and his disciple Jābir b. Yazīd al-Juʿfī. The Imam teaches that the true essence (*ḥaqīqa*) of Muḥammad, which never ceases to exist, is none other than the first created being, the Preceder (*sābiq*) or universal Intellect. This essence is immutable and imperceptible to the senses, as is mentioned in Qurʾān 7: 198: "Thou seest them looking at thee, unperceiving." In order to manifest himself to humanity and bring it the guidance it needs, Muḥammad's *lāhūt* takes human shape; this is Muḥammad's 'humanity' or *nāsūt*. It is a "noble form, subtle and luminous" that believers may perceive if they are pure of soul. Finally, the *nāsūt* is made manifest within a bodily covering (*ghilāf*) that all can perceive – a covering that is susceptible to suffering and death. Al-Bāqir goes on to say that what applies to Muḥammad applies also to Fāṭima. All the calamities that befell her were calamities in appearance only (*ʿalā l-khayāl*): they touched only the veil (*satr*) that hides her divinity. The same is true for the other *ahl al-bayt*, ʿAlī, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. Idrīs then confirms what the Imam says by invoking Qurʾān 4: 157, the famous verse on the crucifixion: the Jews crucified and murdered the bodily envelope of Jesus, but not his divinity.[72]

Idrīs and the other Ṭayyibī authors clearly indicate how the *lāhūt* of the Prophets, the Imams and the Heirs should be understood. It does not mean that the transcendent Creator (*mubdiʿ*) "incarnates himself" in a human figure – this thesis is unanimously rejected as an "exaggeration" (*ghuluww*) and

71 Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, *Kitāb Zahr al-maʿānī*, 176–77.

72 Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, *Zahr al-maʿānī*, 179–82; cf. De Smet, "Racines docétistes", 105–6. A recurrent ambiguity occurs in Ṭayyibī texts because of the fact that they refer to Shīʿī *ḥadīth*s that make a distinction only between the *lāhūt* and the *nāsūt*, while Ṭayyibism adds a third level, that of the *ghilāf*. Although it is considered to be a subtle body, the *nāsūt* is also corruptible. However, it does not experience sickness and bodily suffering – unlike the carnal covering in which it manifests itself.

condemned as "faithlessness" (*kufr*). The divinity of Muḥammad, of ʿAlī and of the Imams is the universal Intellect; they appear on earth in successive prophetic cycles under different names and appearances, but always in their roles as "loci of manifestation" (*maẓhar*) of the Intellect.[73] This is a "manifestation" and not an "infusion" (*ḥulūl*) of the divine principle, for there is neither incarnation, nor union of substance. Once again, we find the Docetism that we have already observed in the Nizārī tradition: the divinity "inhabits" the bodily covering just as we live in a house; this house is not part of us and is not physically bound to our body.[74]

Their *nāsūt*, however, is a subtle and luminous body in human form, which serves as a veil (*ḥijāb*) to "mask and soften the blinding light of the *lāhūt*", of which it is the *maẓhar*.[75] Often described as a "camphorous body" (*jism kāfūrī*), it can only be perceived by believers, "the holders of divine science and true knowledge". But everyone who perceives it does so through the lens of his own disposition and according to the purity of his soul. Thus these scholars are in disagreement about the colour of ʿAlī's *nāsūt*: some see it as white, some as brown and others in other colours.[76] Generated by a complex celestial alchemy, this luminous body is mortal; at the death of a Prophet or an Imam, the subtle substances that make it up return to the celestial bodies and are reused to make the *nāsūt* of a subsequent Imam.[77] After this, the *nāsūt* is veiled and protected by a bodily covering (*ghilāf*) that is visible to all. Most Ṭayyibī authors consider this to be a flesh and blood body, mortal and corruptible, although a more Docetic minority sees it as a mere cast, without biological functions.[78]

If the material bodies of Prophets and Imams are to some extent denigrated as mere external coverings, their *lāhūt* and *nāsūt* are on equal footing with each other, because they reflect the equivalence between Muḥammad and ʿAlī, between the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*. Thus, Idrīs quotes a tradition according to which the sixth Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, responds to a question from Muḥammad b. Sinān[79] about the Prophet Muḥammad and ʿAlī. The Imam declares that the name Muḥammad refers in fact to *Allāh*, the first creature, who proceeds

73 Al-Ḥāmidī, *Kanz al-Walad*, 200–201.

74 Al-Ḥārithī, *al-Anwār al-laṭīfa*, 121.

75 Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, *Zahr al-maʿānī*, 279–80.

76 Al-Ḥārithī, *al-Anwār al-laṭīfa*, 112.

77 For a detailed study of this process, see De Smet, "La naissance miraculeuse de l'Imam ismaélien".

78 De Smet, 'Racines docétistes', 100–108.

79 Muḥammad b. Sinān is an emblematic figure of so-called 'extremist' Shīʿism; see Halm, "Buch der Schatten", 236–40.

from the light of the Creator. Muḥammad is consequently the interior divinity (*al-lāhūt al-bāṭin*), hidden, but made manifest by the name ʿAlī, which refers to the apparent form (*al-ṣūra al-ẓāhira*) of the *nāsūt*. Muḥammad and ʿAlī are thus the two faces of a single reality, the *bāṭin* made manifest by the *ẓāhir*, the *lāhūt* exteriorised by the *nāsūt*. This is said to be the esoteric meaning of the *ḥadīth* of Ghadīr Khumm, "Whoever is my friend is ʿAlī's friend": Allāh, or Muḥammad, is hidden in his *bāṭin* but is made manifest by his *ẓāhir*, ʿAlī, who represents his *nāsūt*.[80] This complementary relationship between Muḥammad and ʿAlī, between the *lāhūt* and the *nāsūt*, is present in the essence of each Prophet and Imam.

6 Conclusion

For Ismāʿīlīs, in keeping with an outlook that is widespread in Shīʿism, the figure of the Prophet of Islam is inseparable from that of his Heir, ʿAlī, who is the guarantor of the esoteric dimension of the revelation. Their relationship easily becomes metahistorical, since Muḥammad and ʿAlī exemplify all the Prophet – Heir pairings that have succeeded each other since the time of Adam and Seth. Simultaneously, they are elevated to the cosmological level in relation with the Intellect and the universal Soul.

Ismāʿīlīsm is the direct heir of the Shīʿī currents of the early centuries of Islam, often originating from Kūfa, and often accused by their adversaries of exaggerating the status of the Prophets and the Imams to the point of deifying them. This accusation of *ghuluww* (exaggeration) was, inevitably, extended to the Ismāʿīlīs, who refute it unanimously. Despite all their doctrinal differences, they agree on one vital point: God, the ultimate Creator, remains inaccessible and cannot manifest himself directly in his messengers. These messengers are the 'loci of manifestation' (*maẓhar*) of the first created principles, such as the Word, the Intellect or the Soul.

The nature of the Muḥammad–ʿAlī pairing is, however, conceived in different ways during different periods and within different religious currents. "Fatimid

80 Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, *Zahr al-maʿānī*, 163–64. This tradition, reported by Muḥammad b. Sinān, is part of the beliefs of the Khaṭṭābī current, which considered Muḥammad to be the *bāṭin* of God, and ʿAli or the Imams to be his *ẓāhir*. This does not conform to Ismāʿīlī doctrine, in which, inversely, Muḥammad is associated with the *ẓāhir*, and ʿAlī or the Imams with the *bāṭin*. But Idrīs reclaims this tradition in order to illustrate the complementary nature of the relationship between the two poles of this pairing. This kind of recycling of ancient traditions drawn from different Shīʿī movements introduces some elements of confusion into Ṭayyibism.

orthodoxy" wanted at all costs to avoid the antinomianism that follows from an overvaluation of esoteric exegesis over the letter of the law. Missionaries from this current, such as al-Mu'ayyad and Nāṣir-e Khosraw, upheld the superiority of Muḥammad, who combines the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*, over ʿAlī and the Imams, whose science depends entirely on the Prophet. Corresponding to the Intellect and the Pen, the Prophet, as the giving principle, represents the male element, whereas his "joint companion" ʿAlī, as the receiving principle (associated with the universal Soul and the Tablet), forms the feminine component of the pair. This couple exists under Qur'ānic law, so the woman, of inferior status, submits to the man and must obey him.

However, this vision was not shared by all Ismāʿīlīs of the Fatimid period, and some dissenting voices were still heard. One example is the former Qarmatian, al-Sijistānī, who was well-known for his antinomianism and who, with his theory of the four principles, opened up the possibility of a shift in the balance of power between Muḥammad and ʿAlī. The sequence: Intellect, Soul, Prophet, Heir, corresponding respectively to the procession of emanation (*ta'yīd*), the demiurgy of the material world (*tarkīb*), the composition of the revelation (*ta'līf*) and its return through esoteric exegesis (*ta'wīl*), lends itself to a hierarchically vertical reading – in which case ʿAlī is at the bottom of the ladder. However, the author also encourages a cyclical reading, on the model of the Neo-Platonic cycle of procession and return. In this reading, ʿAlī, the principle of return, finds himself corresponding with the Intellect, principle of the procession, whereas Muḥammad takes the place of ʿAlī on the lowest echelon, corresponding with the universal Soul.

This inversion becomes the position of Nizārī Ismāʿīlīsm. The Great Resurrection of 1164 marks the beginning of a 'cycle of manifestation' and the abrogation of the sharīʿa; it represents the triumph of esoteric religion over the law. The Imam openly proclaims his 'divinity': he is the divine Word, and his companion, the Proof, is the universal Intellect. The Prophet, the 'man of the law' who is useful in his own time, is relegated to the lowest rank: he corresponds to the universal Soul, if he is not downgraded to the status of simple "missionary" or *guru*, as in Nizārī texts dating from after the fall of Alamūt. The former triad of the *ghulāt*: *ʿayn* (ʿAlī), *mīm* (Muḥammad) and *sīn* (Salmān), is once more primal, but in a modified order that accentuates its radical nature: *ʿayn, sīn, mīm* – with Muḥammad being inferior to both ʿAlī and Salmān.

The rival branch of Ṭayyibis, however, expresses its intention of staying loyal to Fatimid tradition by claiming an equivalence between Muḥammad and ʿAlī. But, following the example of the Nizāris, it also returns to ancient Shīʿī traditions exalting the Prophet, ʿAlī and the other *ahl al-bayt* as five principles that existed before the creation of the material world. These archetypes, which are

connected to the first Intellect, represent the divinity (*lāhūt*) of the Prophets and Imams, who show themselves to their followers in human form (their humanity or *nāsūt*), within luminous bodies that are inside a covering (*ghilāf*) of flesh and blood. The relationship between Muḥammad and ʿAlī thus typifies that between the *lāhūt* and the *nāsūt* of each Prophet and each Imam: at the heart of each pairing there is strict equality and perfect balance.

It is clear from this study that after the fall of the Fatimid Empire Ismāʿīlīsm returned to the ancient Shīʿī traditions from which it sprang, although the Nizārī and Ṭayyibī branches did so on paths that were divergent and sometimes contradictory.

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11

La dimension éthique et politique de la révélation prophétique chez les *falāsifa*

Meryem Sebti

1 Introduction

L'héritage grec a nourri et influencé en profondeur une tradition philosophique en langue arabe[1]. Les œuvres éthiques et politiques d'Aristote, dont *l'Éthique à Nicomaque* – qui aura une influence déterminante sur la pensée éthique et politique des philosophes musulmans –, sont traduites ; des extraits de la *République* et les *Lois* de Platon deviennent accessibles en arabe.

Il est dorénavant d'usage de qualifier de « classique » cette période, qui va du IXème au XIIème siècle. C'est durant cette époque que cet héritage grec est réinterprété par les philosophes musulmans. Pour notre propos, nous nous limiterons à cette période classique et aux philosophes qui ont revendiqué leur lien explicite avec l'héritage grec et notamment avec Aristote. Ils sont nommés *falāsifa*[2]. Dans le monde musulman, cette science a été tôt caractérisée comme étant allogène[3], attestant par leur nom même le lien avec le monde grec. Il n'en reste pas moins que le traitement par les *falāsifa* de la question de la prophétie aura une influence déterminante sur certains théologiens ashʿarites, et que la synthèse avicennienne constitue une étape majeure dans la constitution de la prophétologie islamique, de telle sorte qu'on peut considérer qu'il y a un avant et un après Avicenne, pour ce qui est de la doctrine de la prophétie dans le monde musulman[4].

A moins de simplifications hâtives, il n'est pas possible d'esquisser les contours d'une prophétologie qui serait commune à tous les *falāsifa*. Al-Kindī

1 Pour l'histoire du mouvement de traduction gréco-arabe, cf. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*. Pour la transmission des œuvres de Platon en arabe, voir l'article de Gutas, "Platon. Tradition arabe".

2 Shahrastānī (m. 1158), *Kitāb al-milal wa-l-niḥal*, III, 501-636. Cf. Shahrastānī, *Le livre des religions et des sectes*, 363-67.

3 Peter Adamson, indique que c'est ainsi qu'ils sont caractérisés par al-Khwārizmī dans son *Mafātiḥ al-ʿulūm* (écrit autour de 977), Adamson, Al-*Kindi*, 21.

4 Ayman Shihadeh montre comment la doctrine de la prophétie avicennienne a influencé celle de Rāzī, *The Theological Ethics* ; voir aussi Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*.

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(m. après 870), Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (864-925) al-Fārābī (m. 950), Avicenne (980-1037), Ibn Bājja (m. autour de 1138), Ibn Ṭufayl (1110-1185) et Averroès (1126-1198) ont néanmoins, en dépit de leurs différences et de leurs différents, tenté de rendre compte rationnellement du phénomène de la prophétie ; l'intégrant – pour certains d'entre eux – dans une cosmologie complexe de type émanatiste. La position d'Abū Bakr Rāzī sur la prophétie n'est connue qu'au travers de l'œuvre de son adversaire, l'ismaélien Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī qui la rapporte dans son *Kitāb aʿlām al-nubuwwa*[5]. En règle générale, ce qui intéresse les *falāsifa* ce n'est pas tant le personnage historique ou sacré du prophète Muḥammed qu'une analyse de ce que signifie d'un point de vue philosophique la présence parmi les hommes d'un homme porteur d'une Loi dont l'origine est divine. Leur approche de la prophétie demeure généralement dans la lignée de la tradition philosophique grecque, dans la mesure où ils cherchent à rendre compte rationnellement de l'expérience prophétique. Les principes de leur épistémologie permettent d'expliquer les visions prophétiques et le mode de transmission de la révélation (*al-waḥy*). Cependant, alors que Fārābī demeure dans une description générique de la prophétie, Avicenne, notamment dans le livre X de la *Métaphysique du Shifāʾ,* identifie clairement le prophète avec le prophète de l'islam par la médiation duquel le Coran a été révélé aux hommes.

2 Raison et foi

Ce qui caractérise la *falsafa*, c'est la conviction inébranlable que la raison humaine peut accéder par ses propres moyens au fondement ontologique et métaphysique de la réalité. L'acte créateur de Dieu, Sa providence, l'unicité absolue de Son essence : toutes ces questions sont du ressort de notre humaine raison. Dès lors, se pose de façon aigue la question de savoir pourquoi donc la prophétie et le message qu'elle révèle aux hommes sont nécessaires alors même qu'une certaine catégorie d'hommes – les philosophes – ont accès, par la ressource de leur seule raison, à la vérité ultime. On est en droit de se demander si la prophétologie n'est pas pour les philosophes un exercice de style obligé, destiné à satisfaire un auditoire musulman. Bien que légitime, cette question reçoit une réponse négative. Tous affirment la nécessité de la prophétie, même

5 Rāzī, *Kitāb aʿlām al-nubuwwa*. Contrairement à l'idée longtemps soutenue sur la base de l'ouvrage de son adversaire selon laquelle Abū Bakr Rāzī rejetait la prophétie, Marwan Rashed montre de façon convaincante que Rāzī accorde au prophète une fonction éthique d'éducation des âmes, cf. Rashed, "Abū Bakr Rāzī" 169-82.

si les arguments qui fondent cette nécessité sont conçus différemment par les uns et les autres.

Leur conviction commune est que la philosophie, qui exprime mieux que toute autre science la puissance de la raison, n'est pas muette face aux données de la révélation. Elle n'est pas là certes pour s'y substituer, mais elle peut les fonder rationnellement et même leur apporter un poids supplémentaire, notamment lorsqu'il s'agit de dogmes sujets à controverse avec d'autres religions. La philosophie vient renforcer la révélation. Elle vient attester par le pouvoir de la raison sa véracité. Ainsi, pour al-Fārābī et Avicenne, la particularité du prophète doit être rationnellement fondée ; elle s'inscrit dans une métaphysique et une cosmologie qui permettent de rendre raison des capacités singulières du prophète, notamment noétique.

Al-Kindī dans son ouvrage *Risāla fī kammiyyat kutub Arisṭūṭālīs*[6] distinguait déjà la connaissance du prophète de celle des autres hommes. Celle du prophète vient directement de Dieu par révélation ; elle ne s'acquiert pas dans le temps alors que les hommes doivent entreprendre un long apprentissage pour atteindre la connaissance philosophique. Cependant, bien qu'al-Kindī distingue le mode d'accès à la connaissance du prophète de celui des hommes ordinaires, il ne dit pas que la connaissance à laquelle parviennent les prophètes est différente de celle à laquelle accèdent les philosophes. Les philosophes l'acquièrent par l'effort et l'étude et le prophète instantanément par révélation. Cette doctrine aura une influence déterminante sur les doctrines noétiques des *falāsifa* qui viennent après lui. L'intellect étant la plus noble des facultés humaines, celle qui le distingue des animaux et le rend semblable aux êtres célestes, il va de soi que le prophète, qui est le plus noble des hommes, doit avoir un intellect parfaitement accompli. Al-Fārābī et Avicenne lui attribuent aussi une imagination singulièrement développée, qui lui permet de transcrire les intelligibles reçus de l'intellect agent en symboles, accessibles à ceux dont la capacité intellectuelle ne leur permet pas d'avoir accès aux démonstrations apodictiques de la métaphysique[7]. Averroès lui accorde, en sus d'un intellect

6 *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafiyya*, 373 ; traduction anglaise dans Adamson and Pormann, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*.

7 Il existe néanmoins une différence importante entre la doctrine de l'imagination prophétique de Fārābī et celle d'Avicenne. En raison des particularités de sa cosmologie, Avicenne établit une connexion entre les images contenues dans les âmes des sphères célestes, qui sont dotées d'imagination, et l'imagination des hommes et en particulier avec l'imagination du prophète, qui est pleinement réceptive à cette donation. Fārābī considère quant à lui que l'intellect agent émane des formes intellectuelles sur l'intellect et que l'imagination les transforme en images. Il récuse l'existence d'âmes des sphères. Cette distinction entre les doctrines des deux philosophes a une conséquence importante sur le statut des images reçues par l'imagination du prophète.

pleinement réalisé, la maîtrise de l'outil rhétorique qui lui permet de s'adresser au peuple par métaphore et d'être aisément compris de lui. Selon lui, le prophète donne à méditer aux hommes du commun (*al-ʿāmma*) des symboles qui permettent à tout un chacun d'avoir une représentation imagée de la vérité ultime sans être déconcerté par l'âpre rigueur de la vérité métaphysique[8]. Le prophète apparaît dès lors comme un médiateur nécessaire sans lequel la vie en commun basculerait dans le chaos. Grâce à la *sharīʿa* en effet, la Loi divine dont il est le transmetteur, les hommes du commun peuvent mener une vie vertueuse. Quant aux autres, l'élite des hommes (*al-khāṣṣa*) à laquelle appartiennent les philosophes, ils se doivent de chercher à connaitre le fondement de la réalité à l'aide de la méthode démonstrative : selon Averroès, il s'agit là pour eux d'une obligation légale. C'est néanmoins la Loi révélée qui sert de ciment social et permet la vie en commun : elle assure la constitution et la pérennité de la *umma* (la communauté religieuse). Dans son *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, Averroès insiste sur le fait que les versets autour desquels il y a consensus dans la communauté musulmane ne peuvent être discutés par les philosophes[9].

3 Éthique et politique

L'homme est un animal social qui ne peut survivre hors d'une communauté politique[10]. Or, la cité musulmane est régie par la Loi révélée, la *sharīʿa*, qui est transmise aux hommes par le prophète. Ainsi que le montre Muhsin Mahdi[11], la

8 "Les choses qui, en raison de leur abscondité, ne peuvent être connues que par la démonstration, Dieu a fait à Ses serviteurs qui n'ont pas accès à la démonstration, à cause de leurs dispositions innées, ou de leurs habitudes, ou à défaut des conditions [qui leur eussent permis] cet apprentissage, la grâce de leur en présenter des symboles et des allégories, et de les convier à accorder leur assentiment à ces symboles, car à ceux-ci il est possible d'assentir au moyen des arguments qui sont communs à tous, c'est-à-dire les dialectiques et les rhétoriques", Averroès, *Traité décisif*, 140 (arabe); 141 (français).

9 "Notre propos a fait apparaître qu'il y a dans la Révélation des énoncés auxquels il faut attribuer leur sens obvie et qu'il n'est pas permis d'interpréter, et dont l'interprétation est infidélité si elle met en cause des principes [dogmatiques] fondamentaux ; ou innovation blâmable si elle met en cause quelque chose en deçà de ces principes", *Traité décisif*, 140-142 (arabe) ; 141-43 (français).

10 Aristote définissait l'homme ainsi : "L'homme est par nature un animal politique", *Politique*, 1253 a 2-3, La *Politique* d'Aristote n'a pas été traduite en arabe, néanmoins cette définition de l'homme comme "animal politique" a été connue des *falāsifa*. Sur la question de la traduction de la *Politique* en arabe, cf. Brague, "Note sur la traduction arabe de la Politique", 423-33. S. Vasileos affirme que quelques fragments de la *Politique* auraient existé en arabe, cf. "A Note on the Transmission of Aristotle".

11 Muhsin Mahdi, "The Political Orientation".

sharīʿa enjoint aux hommes de se considérer comme étant, bien que créatures privilégiées auxquelles Dieu d'adresse par l'intermédiaire de son prophète, les éléments d'un ensemble qui les inclut et les dépasse. Répondre aux réquisits de la *sharīʿa* nécessite une attitude vertueuse de la part de l'homme. Il lui incombe de mettre de côté les exigences de son individualité pour permettre la bonne marche de la *umma*. C'est là, comme le remarque Muhsin Mahdi, une exigence commune avec la démarche philosophique, qui requiert de l'homme une attitude vertueuse afin de pouvoir satisfaire à la rigueur de l'exercice de la philosophie, lequel ne peut être accompli par un homme que mènent ses passions. Ainsi la cité religieuse et la cité philosophique sont toutes deux des cités vertueuses[12]. Al-Fārābī a été le premier à concevoir une interconnexion étroite entre le travail éthique sur soi et la dimension proprement politique de la vie humaine. Cette doctrine, qui est au cœur de sa pensée, aura une influence décisive sur ses successeurs, en particulier sur Avicenne et Averroès. Ainsi, al-Fārābī affirme dans *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda* que « philosophe », « princeps », « roi », « nomothète » et « imam » ont la même signification[13]. Dans la philosophie grecque comme dans le monde musulman, une place centrale est accordée à la loi, et c'est cet idéal commun qui permet à Fārābī de réaliser une synthèse entre la source grecque et islamique.

La lecture des œuvres politiques et éthiques grecques a conduit Fārābī et ses épigones à saisir plus complètement le caractère politique de la *sharīʿa* en islam[14]. Pour ces philosophes, comme le montre Muhsin Mahdi, la révélation n'est pas seulement la communication directe entre Dieu et l'homme ; une transmission de croyances, un dialogue entre un Dieu personnel de justice et d'amour à un homme qu'il a créé à son image ; c'est surtout et avant tout une Loi qui engage l'homme qui doit vivre dans une société politiquement organisée afin de pouvoir réaliser pleinement sa destinée. Cette Loi est conçue par les *falāsifa* comme étant celle de la cité idéale. Elle englobe tous les détails de la vie, de la codification des mariages et des divorces à la préparation de la vie éternelle. Elle permet à l'homme de bien vivre ici-bas et de préparer sa vie dans l'au-delà. Ce double aspect de la *sharīʿa* est ce qui permet de la caractériser

12 Muhsin Mahdi, "The Political Orientation" 5.

13 "Ainsi, 'imam', 'philosophe' et 'nomothète' (*wāḍiʿ al-nawāmīs*) ont la même signification", *Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*, 92.

14 Dimitri Gutas, considère, notamment contre Muhsin Mahdi et beaucoup d'autres, que la dimension politique de l'œuvre de Fārābī a été exagérée et qu'elle mériterait d'être revue, cf. Gutas, "The meaning of madanī". Pour la transmission des œuvres politiques d'Aristote en arabe, on peut consulter, Janssens, "Ibn Bājja and Aristote". Dans cet article, Jules Janssens se réfère à *l'Éthique à Nicomaque*, à la *Rhétorique* et *à l'Histoire des Animaux* d'Aristote et étudie l'influence de ces ouvrages sur la pensée politique d'Ibn Bājja.

comme Loi idéale. Aucune autre loi conçue par un nomothète humain ne pourrait réunir ces deux aspects pourtant indissociables de la vie humaine. La *sharīʿa* permet de fonder la cité idéale, comme la *République* était pour Platon l'état idéal.

La *sharīʿa*, par l'intermédiaire du prophète, offre les lois de bonnes conduites ; les lois qui permettent à l'homme d'être vertueux. Tous les *falāsifa* n'ont pas jugé nécessaire que l'homme vive dans une cité vertueuse pour atteindre la perfection intellectuelle. Ibn Ṭufayl, dans son *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*, rompt avec la doctrine élaborée par al-Fārābī selon laquelle le philosophe doit penser les conditions de la cité vertueuse qui permet à tous de mener une vie vertueuse et au philosophe de réaliser la pleine perfection de son intellect. Même si Avicenne et Averroès avaient réinterprété cette doctrine, chacun différemment, elle n'en restait pas moins un horizon doctrinal à partir duquel ils orientaient leur propre doctrine. Pour Ibn Ṭufayl, au contraire, le philosophe doit cheminer dans la solitude afin d'atteindre sa perfection.

Pour les *falāsifa*, l'éthique et le politique sont indissociables (à l'exception peut-être d'Ibn Ṭufayl). Cette doctrine a une forte incidence sur leur prophétologie, puisque le prophète est celui qui transmet la loi morale, loi sans laquelle la vie commune – la vie politique donc – n'est pas possible. Le prophète est donc le garant de la vie politique. Ce sont les lois qu'il a reçues par révélation qui cimentent la vie commune et organisent la cité.

Cette interconnexion entre l'éthique et le politique trouve sa source dans la pensée de Platon ainsi que dans la conception proprement musulmane de la *sharīʿa*. Il existe néanmoins des nuances importantes entre les différents *falāsifa*. Au cours de cet article, je vais exposer brièvement la conception de l'éthique d'Avicenne puis celle d'Averroès pour montrer comment, malgré un socle doctrinal commun, chacun de ces deux philosophes conçoit différemment la fonction éthique et politique du prophète.

4 Éthique et prophétie selon Avicenne : une esquisse

C'est dans un exposé consacré à la prophétie dans la *Métaphysique* du *Shifāʾ* qu'Avicenne cherche à fonder sa nécessité. Ce chapitre qui constitue le deuxième chapitre du livre X de la *Métaphysique* est intitulé « *Fī ithbāt al-nubuwwa wa-kayfiyyat daʿwat al-nabī ilā Allah taʿālā, wa-l-maʿād ilayhi* »[15] (De la preuve de la prophétie et de la manière dont le prophète appelle à Dieu qu'Il soit exalté, et du retour à Lui). Suivons le philosophe dans son argumentation : l'homme,

15 *Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt*, 441-43.

note-t-il – dans la droite lignée de Platon[16] – se distingue des autres animaux par le besoin (*al-ḥāja*) qui est le sien de vivre en société. L'homme ne peut vivre hors de la société, car c'est dans cette structure organisée que chacun fournit à l'autre ce dont il a besoin pour sa survie. Ainsi, les hommes doivent nécessairement vivre en association (*mushāraka*), or toute association doit reposer sur un système de transactions réciproques (*wa-lā tatimmu al-mushāraka illā bi-l-muʿāmala*). Les transactions réciproques ne peuvent se réaliser que si la loi et l'équité prédominent (*wa-lā budda fī-l-muʿāmala*[17] *min sunna wa ʿadl*), or la loi et l'équité requièrent un législateur et un dispensateur de justice qui les définisse et les applique. Ce législateur doit pouvoir s'adresser aux hommes afin de les contraindre à adhérer à la loi. Il doit donc être un homme (*wa-lā budda min an yakūna hādhā insānan*). Il ne peut pas laisser les hommes à leurs opinions concernant la loi, car alors ils divergeraient, chacun considérant être dans son bon droit. Ainsi, pour la survie de l'espèce humaine – qui ne peut s'accomplir qu'en société – l'existence d'un tel homme est absolument nécessaire. Il est impossible que la Providence divine qui nous a octroyé tellement de bienfaits non nécessaires ne nous dispense pas ce bienfait nécessaire à notre survie[18]. Par conséquent, le législateur doit exister et doit être un homme. Il doit aussi posséder une caractéristique (*khuṣūṣiyya*) que n'ont pas les autres hommes afin qu'on puisse le reconnaître[19]. Puis Avicenne affirme en guise de

16 Pour Platon, *République*, II, 369 a, le besoin (χρεία) est le principe fondateur de la cité : les hommes ne peuvent individuellement se suffire à eux-mêmes. Ils doivent s'associer pour échanger le produit de leur travail. La cité est donc en premier lieu un échange de services, une association d'intérêts entre les particuliers. Sur les traductions de Platon en arabe, cf. Gutas, "Platon 'Tradition arabe'". Plus spécifiquement sur les traductions arabes de la *République*, cf. Reisman, "Plato's *Republic* in Arabic".

17 *Al-muʿāmalāt* est un terme de *fiqh* désignant : "toutes les matières de droit au sens occidental du terme – statut personnel, droit commercial, droit pénal, etc. – et vise à mettre l'ensemble des relations humaines en harmonie avec les enseignements de la sharia", voir Chaumont, "Sharia" 829.

18 Ce raisonnement est courant dans les discussions juridiques et théologiques du Xe siècle, notamment chez les Shāfiʿītes. Sur ce point, cf. Shamsy, "The wisdom of God's Law". Shamsy observe: "The primary justification for the assumption that the sacred law was intended for the benefit of humankind appears to have been the divine attribute of wisdom (*ḥikma*)" 24.

19 Voici la traduction en entier de ce passage de la *Métaphysique du Shifāʾ* : "Nous disons à présent qu'il est bien connu que l'homme se distingue du reste des animaux en ce qu'il ne peut avoir une vie convenable s'il s'isole seul en tant qu'individu, administrant ses affaires sans associé pour l'aider à [satisfaire] ses besoins fondamentaux. [Il est aussi bien connu] que [l'activité] de chaque homme doit être complémentaire (*mukfiyyan*) [de celle] d'un membre de son espèce ; [l'activité] de cet autre étant également complémentaire de celle du premier et [de celle] de l'un de ses semblables. Ainsi, l'un fournirait des légumes à l'autre et ce dernier fournirait du pain au premier ; celui-ci ferait de la couture pour l'autre

conclusion : « Il est donc nécessaire qu'un prophète existe, et il est nécessaire que ce soit un homme (*fa-wājibun idhan an yūjada nabī wa wājibun an yakūna insānan*) »[20].

Il nous faut comprendre pourquoi Avicenne conclut ce raisonnement en affirmant que l'existence du prophète est nécessaire. Pourquoi sans le prophète ne peut-il y avoir de *sharīʿa*, entendue comme loi éthique et politique ? Et pourquoi sans cette loi, ne peut-on envisager une authentique société humaine au sein de laquelle la justice est possible ? Notons le lien étroit établit par Avicenne entre éthique et politique. Cette interconnexion est due au fait que, comme le notait Muhsin Mahdi, l'accent mis sur le devoir éthique de l'homme est le principe fondamental de la vie politique et sociale telle que la conçoivent aussi bien les philosophes que la Loi divine. La vie politique et la vie sociale se caractérisent par le devoir d'agir de façon vertueuse[21].

Si seul le prophète est à même d'être le nomothète, c'est parce que la loi qui régit la cité est à la fois un code éthique et un code politique ou plutôt un code politique en tant qu'elle est un code éthique. Il nous faut essayer

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et cet autre lui procurerait l'aiguille pour coudre, de sorte que lorsqu'ils se réuniraient leurs affaires seraient complémentaires. C'est la raison pour laquelle [les hommes] ont considéré comme nécessaire d'établir des cités et de former des associations. Quiconque parmi eux n'a pas fait attention dans la fondation de sa cité à la connaissance requise des règles nécessaires [pour fonder] une cité, et avec ses compagnons, s'est limité à [fonder] une simple assemblée serait d'un genre très dissemblable à celui des hommes et nierait leurs perfections. Quoi qu'il en soit cette sorte d'homme est obligée de former des assemblées et de chercher à ressembler aux citoyens des cités. Puisque cela est manifeste, il est nécessaire pour l'existence de l'homme et pour sa survie de s'associer. L'association ne s'achève qu'à travers la transaction réciproque (*al-muʿāmala*), de même qu'il est nécessaire pour [réussir cette association] d'user de toutes les autres causes dont [l'homme] dispose. Afin de pouvoir pratiquer des transactions, il est nécessaire de disposer de loi (*sunna*) et d'équité. Afin d'avoir la loi et l'équité, il est nécessaire d'avoir un législateur et un dispensateur de justice. Ce dernier, en tant qu'il s'adresse aux hommes et les incite à adhérer à la loi doit nécessairement être un homme. [Le législateur] ne peut pas laisser les hommes à leurs opinions concernant la loi, car alors ils divergent, chacun considérant comme juste ce que les autres lui doivent et injuste ce qu'il doit aux autres (*fa-yakhtalifūn wa yarā kullun minhum mā lahu ʿadlan wa mā ʿalayhi ẓulman*)", *Shifāʾ, Ilāhiyyāt*, X, 2, 441. La dernière affirmation de ce passage de la *Métaphysique du Shifāʾ* est proche de celle qu'on trouve dans un pseudépigraphe arabe attribué à Platon, "L'ignorant (…) s'imagine que ce qui appartient à autrui est à lui", cf. Aflāṭūn, *Kitāb al-nawāmīs*, 198. Georges Tamer a établi qu'Avicenne connaissait très probablement cet ouvrage, qui aurait été rédigé dans des milieux ismaéliens et soufis au X[ème] siècle, cf. Tamer, "Politisches Denken".

20 *Shifāʾ, Ilāhiyyāt*, X, 2, 442.

21 "The emphasis on man's duty is also the overarching principle of political and social life as seen by both the philosophers and the divine law. Political and social life are constituted by the duty to act in a virtuous way", Muhsin Mahdi, "The Political Orientation" 5.

de comprendre pourquoi seul le prophète est à même de révéler les lois qui servent de fondements éthiques et politiques à la cité.

Le prophète est un don de la providence divine[22]. Il apporte une loi, la *sharīʿa*, qui guide les hommes, règle leur comportement éthique et fonde le pacte politique. Ce sont les lois révélées par le prophète qui permettent aux hommes de ne pas laisser leurs corps dominer leurs âmes et l'empêchent de sombrer dans le mal moral. Le mal à l'égard des autres est donc d'abord et avant tout un mal envers soi-même ; c'est un inversement des rapports de domination : les puissances concupiscibles et irascibles prennent le dessus et étouffent les élans de l'âme rationnelle. Un homme chez qui un tel inversement a lieu ne peut qu'être injuste envers ses concitoyens étant donné que seule la satisfaction de ses instincts lui importe. La justice est donc une vertu qui se cultive d'abord en soi-même en redonnant à ses puissances psychiques l'ordre de préséance qu'elles méritent[23].

Cependant, alors même que les lois sont indispensables à la bonne marche de la cité, seul le recours à la providence divine peut leur conférer une réelle nécessité. En effet, les normes éthiques, selon Avicenne, ne sont pas accessibles à l'intellect humain par ses propres efforts contrairement aux lois physiques et mathématiques qu'il est en mesure de connaître en se tournant vers l'Intellect agent. Ainsi, des propositions telles « le tout est plus grand que la partie » sont universelles et peuvent être découvertes par l'intellect humain, qui va procéder par syllogisme et obtenir le moyen terme – de l'Intellect agent. Avicenne nous explique que ce mode de connaissance ne concerne pas les propositions éthiques telles que « la justice est bonne » ou « provoquer la douleur est mal ». Les propositions de ce type font partie des opinions louables (*ārāʾ maḥmūda*)[24]. Ces propositions ne peuvent servir de prémisses aux syllogismes démonstratifs (*qiyās burhānī*) ; leur seul fondement est le fait d'être notoires (*lā*

22 Sur la question de savoir comment la providence divine rend nécessaire l'existence du prophète, cf. Sebti, "Causalité secondaire". Le prophète est également présenté comme un don de la providence divine dans le traité pseudépigraphe arabe attribué à Platon (Aflāṭūn), *Kitāb al-nawāmīs*.

23 Cette caractéristique permet de comprendre pourquoi la question du mal moral est abordée par Avicenne aussi bien dans les petits traités d'éthique de jeunesse (*al-birr wa-l-ithm* ; *al-akhlāq*), dans ses commentaires coraniques (*sūrat al-nās*, *sūrat al-falaq*), que dans le dernier chapitre de la *Métaphysique du Shifāʾ*, qui constitue l'exposé le plus complet de sa doctrine politique.

24 Dans son ouvrage intitulé *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics* Sophia Vasalou fait une analyse remarquable de la doctrine avicennienne de la nature des propositions éthiques. La présentation qui suit doit beaucoup à son travail, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics*, 58 et ss.

ʿumdata lahā illā al- shuhra)[25]. Avicenne explique que la conscience morale, avec tous les jugements qu'elle implique, ne repose sur rien d'autre que sur des conventions sociales inculquées depuis le plus jeune âge aux hommes[26]. C'est

25 "Quant aux propositions notoires (*al-mashhūrāt*) qui relèvent de cet ensemble, certaines sont aussi ces propositions premières (*al-awwaliyyāt*), (…) et d'autres sont les points de vue appelés les points loués (*al-maḥmūda*). A ces derniers, nous pourrions bien donner en propre le nom de propositions notoires (*al-mashhūra*), car elles n'ont d'autre pilier que la notoriété. Il s'agit de points de vue tels que, si quelqu'un s'isolait avec son intellect détaché du reste, son estimative et ses sens, s'il n'était pas éduqué à recevoir des propositions relatives à [ces points de vue] et à les reconnaître, si l'induction n'inclinait pas son opinion forte à un jugement à cause de la multiplicité des particuliers et si ce qu'il y a dans la nature de l'homme en fait de miséricorde, de honte, de pudeur, de sens de l'honneur, etc. n'appelait pas ces points de vue, l'homme ne se déciderait pas pour eux par soumission à son intellect, son estimative ou ses sens. Il en est ainsi, par exemple, lorsque nous jugeons que voler à un homme son bien est laid et que le mensonge est laid, tel qu'il ne faut pas s'y engager. De ce genre est l'appréciation qui se présente en premier à l'estimative de nombreuses personnes – quoique la loi religieuse (*al-sharʿ*) en détourne beaucoup de gens – sur la laideur de l'égorgement des animaux – et cela conformément à ce qu'il y a de tendresse (*riqqa*) dans l'instinct – aux yeux de celui qui a pareil instinct. Il s'agit de la plupart des gens. Or rien de tel n'est imposé nécessairement par l'intellect pur. Si l'homme se représentait lui-même dans son estimative comme créé tout d'un coup avec un intellect achevé, comme n'ayant rien écouté en fait d'éducation, comme n'ayant été soumis à aucune passion psychique ou à aucun trait de caractère, il ne déciderait rien à propos de pareilles propositions, bien plus, il lui serait possible de les ignorer et de suspendre [son jugement] à leur sujet. Il n'en est pas ainsi quand il décide que le tout est plus grand que la partie", *Ishārāt*, 1 351-352. Ce passage a été traduit par Sophia Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics*, 59. Je reprends ici la traduction de Maroun Aouad dans "Les prémisses rhétoriques", 297-98.

26 A la fin de ce passage, il a recours à une démonstration problématique, semblable dans son articulation à la fameuse expérience de "l'homme volant". Avicenne affirme la possibilité pour l'homme de revenir à sa *fiṭra*, à sa nature originelle. En revenant à cette nature, l'homme prendrait alors conscience du fait que toutes les propositions éthiques ne sont rien d'autres que des conventions sociales dues à son éducation. L'argumentation avicennienne repose sur la possibilité de retrouver une nature humaine première, "nue" et pure de toute influence sociale ou culturelle (cet argument soulève de nombreux problèmes qui sont évoqués par S. Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics*, 60 et ss.). Sur la notion de *fiṭra*, voir Griffel, "Al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition'", en particulier 11-32. F. Griffel note à juste titre que ce qui intéresse Avicenne n'est pas tant la question de la connaissance a priori que la connaissance qu'ont tous les êtres humains en commun lorsqu'ils n'ont que la perception sensible à leur disposition et sont dénués de toute influence sociale. Faut-il voir dans la conception de la *fiṭra* avicennienne une influence de la conception coranique de la *fiṭra* selon laquelle Dieu aurait créé l'homme selon une nature unique et immuable qu'aucune des vicissitudes de l'histoire ne saurait transformer ? L'examen de cette question dépasserait le cadre de cet exposé. (Sur la notion de *fiṭra* dans le Coran, cf. 30:30 : *fiṭrata llāhi allatī faṭara al-nās ʿalayhā*. Le Coran contient de nombreuses occurrences de la racine *fṭr* et une seule (celle sus-mentionnée) de *fiṭra*. La

donc l'éducation qui inculque aux hommes dès l'enfance les normes éthiques leur permettant de vivre en société conformément à l'intérêt commun[27].

Les propositions éthiques n'ont d'autres fondements que l'éducation et le conditionnement social. Cette caractérisation n'a pas pour effet de rendre ces propositions superflues. Nous avons vu, qu'Avicenne affirme clairement dans le chapitre 2 du livre X de la *Métaphysique* du *Shifā'*, qu'il n'y a de vie possible pour l'homme que sociale, et que la vie en société ne peut se concevoir sans être encadrée par des normes éthiques. Sans ces normes, l'injustice la plus brutale régnerait et ruinerait tout projet de vie commune. Ainsi, Avicenne distingue deux points de vue ; un point de vue épistémologique selon lequel les normes éthiques ne sont pas premières et sont le produit d'une expérience et d'un conditionnement social ; un point de vue proprement politique suivant lequel aucune vie citoyenne n'est concevable sans elles. Ce qui est important pour notre propos, c'est la doctrine selon laquelle ces normes éthiques – au vue de leur statut épistémologique – ne peuvent être déduites par la raison théorique. Si l'homme devait les déduire par sa raison pratique, ce serait par le biais d'une faculté psychique appelée par Avicenne « faculté estimative ».

Pour comprendre cela, il faut se remémorer quelques-uns des principes de la psychologie avicennienne. L'âme humaine a deux faces : l'une, son intellect théorique, est tournée vers le monde intelligible, l'autre, l'intellect pratique, est penchée vers le monde sensible. Ce qui relève du rapport de l'homme au monde sensible est du ressort de la faculté psychique « estimative ». Cette faculté psychique[28] est une faculté judicative qui intervient dans tous les jugements relatifs au sensible. Ainsi, elle intervient dans les jugements mettant en cause des émotions comme la colère, la peine, le désir, etc. Pour Avicenne c'est de cette faculté psychique que procède la plupart des activités animales[29]. Le jugement (*ḥukm*) porté par l'estimative sur le sensible ne peut être identifié ni

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notion de *fiṭra* occupe une place importante dans les débats des théologiens musulmans. Cf. Gobillot, *La conception originelle*.

27 "L'intérêt commun (*maṣlaḥa*) exige que parmi tous les actes qu'il peut accomplir, l'homme s'abstienne d'en accomplir certains. [Les hommes] apprennent cela lorsqu'ils sont jeunes et sont éduqués en ce sens. Ils s'habituent à entendre depuis le temps de leur enfance qu'ils ne doivent pas les accomplir, de sorte que cette croyance (*i'tiqād*) devient pour eux comme un instinct (*ka-l-gharīzī*). Ces actes sont appelés "mauvais" (*qabīḥ*), alors que les actes que l'on doit accomplir sont appelés 'bons' (*jamīla*)", *Shifā', Kitāb al-nafs*, v, 1, 183.

28 Sur la doctrine des sens internes d'Avicenne, voir Sebti, *Avicenne*, 53-91.

29 "L'estimative est la puissance de jugement la plus importante chez les animaux ; elle juge au moyen d'une impulsion qui provient de l'imagination, sans que ce jugement soit vérifié. C'est ce qui advient à l'homme qui éprouve une répulsion pour le miel en raison de sa ressemblance avec la bile. L'estimative juge qu'il en est ainsi et l'âme la suit même si l'intellect désapprouve. Les animaux, et les hommes qui leur sont semblables, ne suivent

à l'affection sensorielle, ni au jugement intellectuel (*al-taṣdīq*), qui porte sur les intelligibles. Ainsi, les jugements issus de la faculté estimative peuvent entrer en conflit avec ceux de l'intellect. Dans la partie de la logique de la *Najāt* correspondant aux *Seconds Analytiques* d'Aristote, Avicenne explique que parmi les jugements issus de l'estimative, certains sont vrais et d'autres faux[30]. Si l'homme devait fonder lui-même les normes éthiques, il dépendrait de cette puissance psychique dont les jugements sont aléatoires. C'est alors l'estimative qui lui ferait paraître « comme juste ce que les autres lui doivent et injuste ce qu'il doit aux autres »[31]. La conséquence serait désastreuse car l'ordre social serait impossible à fonder. C'est la raison pour laquelle la providence divine intervient, pour assurer la possibilité de la vie citoyenne et donc la vie même de l'homme, puisqu'il n'y a pas de vie possible pour l'homme hors de la cité.

Pour ce qui est de sa vie éthique et politique, l'homme dépend de la révélation prophétique, qui seule peut lui enseigner comment fonder et maintenir une société juste : une société où chacun agit de manière vertueuse pour son bien propre (ici-bas et dans l'au-delà)[32] et pour celui de la communauté.

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dans l'accomplissement de leurs actions que ce jugement qui ne contient pas de discernement rationnel, mais résulte seulement d'une impulsion", *Shifā', Kitāb al-nafs*, IV, 3, 162.

30 Comme exemple de jugement faux, Avicenne donne : "Le monde se termine dans le vide". En ce qui concerne les jugements vrais de l'estimative, c'est par exemple le fait que cette puissance ne peut se représenter deux corps dans un même lieu, l'intellect juge alors qu'un même corps ne peut être en même temps dans deux lieux différents. La force des jugements issus de l'estimative est telle qu'ils restent valides pour l'estimative, alors même qu'ils sont infirmés par l'intellect : "Ces jugements sont extrêmement puissants pour la pensée discursive. Seul l'intellect détruit certains de ces jugements qui, bien qu'ils soient détruits, demeurent dans l'estimative. C'est la raison pour laquelle ils ne se distinguent pas au commencement des prémisses rationnelles. Leur ressemblance est due au fait que la disposition naturelle (*al-fiṭra*) les certifie de la même manière qu'elle certifie les prémisses rationnelles", *Najāt*, 98-99. Ce passage est analysé par Hasnawi dans "La conscience de soi", 287-89. Pour cette partie de la citation, j'ai repris la traduction de Hasnawi.

31 *Shifā', Ilāhiyyāt*, X, 2, 441.

32 C'est grâce à la religion et à ses cultes que les hommes peuvent surmonter leurs vils instincts et vivre ensemble en harmonie. Comme nous pouvons le voir dans le dixième livre d'Avicenne de la *Métaphysique* du *Shifā'*, la Loi révélée par le prophète concerne les dogmes et les questions de dévotion, ainsi que les lois familiales, les transactions commerciales et les questions économiques (on retrouve la distinction bien connue des juristes musulmans entre *mu'āmalāt* et *'ibādāt*). Le coran contient trois cent cinquante versets connus sous le nom de *āyāt al-aḥkām*. Parmi eux, cent quarante concernent le dogme et les questions de dévotion, soixante-dix le mariage, le divorce et la paternité ; encore soixante-dix, les transactions commerciales (vente, prêt …) et dix des questions d'économie, *Shifā', Ilāhiyyāt*, X, 2, 443-55.

L'un et l'autre étant indissociables. Il n'y a donc pas de salut hors de la cité[33]. Cependant, alors que pour Fārābī, la cité est le lieu où l'homme réalise sa pleine perfection d'être rationnel, pour Avicenne, il ne s'agit que de la perfection morale de l'homme. Aussi, pour Avicenne, contrairement à ce que pensait son illustre prédécesseur, la fonction du philosophe et celle du prophète ne sont pas similaires. Le prophète apporte la *sharīʿa* sans laquelle la vie sociale et politique est impossible. Il transmet aux hommes une connaissance inaccessible au philosophe. La fonction de nomothète et de princeps chez Avicenne n'est plus assignée au philosophe mais au prophète.

5 Éthique et prophétie selon Averroès : une esquisse

Averroès traite également à plusieurs reprises la question de la prophétie[34]. Dans son traité sur le raisonnement religieux, *al-Kashf ʿan manāhij al-adilla fī ʿaqāʾid al-milla* ou *L'explication des différentes sortes de preuves dans la doctrine religieuse*, il mentionne souvent la prophétie comme fondement de la doctrine religieuse. Ce sujet est également abordé à plusieurs reprises dans son *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* ou *Incohérence de l'Incohérence*. La prophétie est également abordée dans son *Traité décisif* (*Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl wa-taqrīr mā bayna al-sharīʿa wa-l-ḥikma min al-ittiṣāl*).

Averroès rejette la possibilité d'une double vérité, l'une pour la religion et l'autre pour la philosophie et la sagesse (y compris la science). D'où sa célèbre sentence dans le *Faṣl al-maqāl* : « Car la vérité ne peut être contraire à la vérité, mais s'accorde avec elle et témoigne en sa faveur »[35].

Le philosophe cordouan considère que le discours du prophète agit à un autre niveau que celui du philosophe. Il ne s'adresse pas aux mêmes personnes que le discours philosophique. Averroès établit une division psychologique des êtres humains en trois groupes. Il y a ceux qui sont touchés par la rhétorique de la persuasion émotionnelle, à travers des récits qui affectent le cœur et l'imagination. D'autres donnent leur assentiment à un raisonnement dialectique fondé sur des postulats religieux, ce qui donne lieu à des interprétations

33 Cette dernière assertion est un écho à Fārābī selon lequel, point de salut hors de la cite vertueuse, cependant, il y a une difference de taille entre les deux philosophes que Miriam Galston résume parfaitement : "for Alfarabi, cities exist to make men good; for Avicenna, citizens are made good so that cities can exist", Galston, "Realism and Idealism" 570.

34 Pour un exposé de la doctrine de la prophétie d'Averroès, voir Taylor, "Averroes" 287-304.

35 *Traité décisif*, traduction M. Geoffroy, 118 (arabe); 119 (français). Sur cette question, cf. Taylor, "Truth does not contradict truth".

conformes à la tradition religieuse. Le troisième groupe se compose de ceux qui sont des intellectuels bien informés et formés dans les arts philosophiques et qui utilisent le raisonnement de la logique et la méthode de la démonstration :

> En effet, il existe une hiérarchie des natures humaine pour ce qui est de l'assentiment : certains hommes assentent par l'effet de la démonstration ; d'autres assentent par l'effet des arguments dialectiques, d'un assentiment similaire à celui de l'homme de démonstration, car leurs natures ne les disposent pas à davantage ; d'autres enfin assentent par l'effet des arguments rhétoriques, d'un assentiment similaire à celui que donne l'homme de démonstration aux arguments démonstratifs[36].

Les deux premières donnent leur assentiment par des moyens qui peuvent en fait s'approcher de la vérité bien qu'il ne soit pas nécessaire qu'ils impliquent la vérité. La troisième, cependant, par la méthode même de la démonstration avec l'utilisation de prémisses connues pour être nécessaires et vraies et avec l'emploi d'une forme syllogistique valide peut atteindre la vérité en soi et nécessairement.

Ainsi, il n'y a qu'une seule vérité, mais elle est transmise de manière différente en fonction des capacités de chacun. Averroès insiste sur le fait que la révélation contient les trois niveaux de production de l'assentiment :

> Et que la finalité de la Révélation n'est autre que d'enseigner *tous* les hommes, il fallait nécessairement que le Texte révélé comprît *tous* les types de méthodes de production de l'assentiment et de la représentation[37].

Cela exige qu'en cas de désaccord sur des questions qui font l'objet d'études et d'enquêtes à la fois religieuses et philosophiques, la priorité soit donnée à l'interprétation philosophique et scientifique proprement dite. Pourtant, la majorité des gens ne sont pas capables de saisir cette distinction de discours et de concilier une telle interprétation avec le discours religieux, car ce dernier, de par sa nature même, se veut émotif et dialectiquement persuasif.

Bien sûr, Averroès affirme clairement que certains principes fondamentaux de la religion sont tels qu'ils doivent être acceptés par les gens des trois niveaux, à savoir l'existence de Dieu, son envoi de prophètes à l'humanité et une vie après la mort dans laquelle récompense et punition sont octroyées :

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36 *Traité décisif*, 116 (arabe) ; 117 (français).

37 *Traité décisif*, 152 (arabe) ; 153 (français).

> La reconnaissance de l'existence de Dieu, des prophéties, de la béatitude et des tourments dans l'au-delà; car ces trois dogmes fondamentaux, les trois types d'arguments par l'effet desquels se produit immanquablement l'assentiment de tous les hommes à ce que la Loi les engage à connaître, les arguments rhétoriques, dialectiques et démonstratifs, aboutissent [également à en établir la véracité][38].

Averroès précise que certaines interprétations philosophiques peuvent semer le doute chez les gens ordinaires et les mener à une confusion dévastatrice. Pour cette raison, ces raisonnements ne peuvent être partagés en dehors du cercle du troisième groupe, celui des philosophes. Pour ceux qui sont incapables de comprendre à ce niveau le plus élevé, ces interprétations représenteraient une menace sérieuse pour les croyances religieuses, ce qui pourrait même mener à l'incrédulité. C'est le cas de la question de la nature et du sens de l'au-delà :

> Et voilà la raison de notre opinion suivant laquelle l'interprétation pratiquée par des gens auxquels il est fait obligation de croire en le sens obvie, est infidélité : parce qu'elle conduit à l'infidélité. Quant aux hommes habilités à interpréter, et qui divulguent ces interprétations à l'intention de ces gens, ils les provoquent à l'infidélité. Or qui provoque à l'infidélité est un infidèle[39].

La distinction du discours soutient donc la vie pratique des membres de la société, qui sont guidés par les enseignements religieux vers le bien dans leur vie d'individu ou de membre de communauté des croyants. Elle permet également que les enseignements religieux soient interprétés par ceux qui possèdent des compétences qualifiées, à condition qu'ils ne nuisent pas à ceux qui sont moins capables de comprendre :

> Il nous faut savoir que la finalité de la Révélation se ramène à ceci : enseigner la science vraie et la pratique vraie (*taʿlīm al-ʿilm al-ḥaqq wa-l-ʿamal al-ḥaqq*). La science vraie, c'est la connaissance de Dieu – Béni et exalté soit-Il- et de l'ensemble des étants tels qu'ils sont – en particulier les plus sublimes d'entre eux -, et la connaissance de la béatitude et des tourments dans l'au-delà. La pratique vraie consiste dans l'accomplissement

38 *Traité décisif*, 138 (arabe) ; 139 (français).
39 *Traité décisif*, 144 (arabe) ; 145 (français).

> des actes qui assurent la béatitude, et l'évitement des actes qui valent les tourments. La connaissance de ces actes se nomme la science pratique[40].

Dans le *Faṣl al-maqāl*, la nécessité de la prophétie est affirmée à maintes reprises tout au long du texte, de même que la division des niveaux de signification qui convient aux trois groupes de personnes que j'ai mentionnés. Averroès affirme que les trois catégories ont la capacité de connaître (*al-maʿrifa*) de manière affirmative l'existence de Dieu, son envoi de prophètes à l'humanité et la récompense et le châtiment dans l'au-delà. Telles sont les croyances fondamentales qui conduisent les êtres humains à l'action appropriée et toutes sont affirmées dans le Coran. Ainsi, éthique et politique sont intrinsèquement liées. Une société juste est une société qui donne à chacun, selon ses capacités intellectuelles, la capacité d'agir dans le sens de la justice. Il n'y a pas de politique sans éthique et la loi révélée, la *sharīʿa* permet la réalisation de ces deux niveaux.

Dans le *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, l'affirmation de la prophétie est supposée tout au long du texte. Averroès y affirme que les miracles sont des principes de la religion qui ne doivent pas être remis en question ou mis en doute parce qu'ils sont au-delà de toute appréhension humaine. Leur valeur réside dans le fait de guider les êtres humains vers la vertu : ils ont donc une fonction centrale dans l'établissement de la science pratique. Néanmoins, les miracles accomplis par les prophètes ne doivent pas être considérés comme la réalisation de ce qui est logiquement impossible, mais peut-être plutôt ce qui est possible en soi mais pas possible pour les êtres humains. Cependant, le plus sûr de tous les miracles est le Coran lui-même selon Averroès, qui par cette affirmation demeure fidèle à l'orthodoxie musulmane[41] :

> Le plus clair des miracles est le Vénérable Livre d'Allah, dont l'existence n'est pas une interruption du cours de la nature assumée par la tradition, comme la transformation d'un bâton en serpent, mais sa nature miraculeuse est établie par la perception et la considération de chaque homme qui a été ou sera jusqu'au jour de la résurrection. Ce miracle est donc de loin supérieur à tous les autres[42].

De plus, la vraie réalité de la nature du prophète en tant que prophète se trouve "dans l'acte de faire connaître le mystérieux (*al-iʿlām bi-l-ghuyūb*) et d'établir

40 *Traité décisif*, 150 (arabe) ; 151 (français).

41 Sur le dogme de l'inimitabilité du Coran, cf. Urvoy, "Inimitabilité du Coran" 419-20.

42 Averroès, *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, 515-16.

des lois (*waḍʿ al-sharāʾiʿ*) qui sont conformes à la vérité et qui produisent des actes qui détermineront le bonheur de l'humanité entière"[43]. La véritable affirmation du prophète réside en cela et non dans le fait d'accéder à des connaissances cachées au moyen de rêves, connaissances qui peuvent avoir des explications naturelles[44].

> Les lois religieuses qui proviennent de Dieu, par les prophètes, ainsi que de la raison humaine naturelle sont nécessaires pour la construction de la bonne structure politique et sociale. Les principes de base communs à toutes les religions reçus des prophètes et des législateurs tirent leur valeur du fait qu'ils orientent les êtres humains pour les éloigner du vice et les diriger vers des actions vertueuses[45].

Dans le *Kashf* l'affirmation de la nécessité du prophète repose sur deux principes : l'existence évidente des prophètes en tant que porteurs des lois religieuses à travers la révélation, qui permet de faire connaitre les actions justes pour atteindre le bonheur, et la fonction évidente des prophètes en tant que dépositaires des lois religieuses dans la révélation de Dieu[46]. Il n'est pas nécessairement vrai que tout faiseur de miracles soit un prophète comme le pensent les théologiens, mais il est vrai que le Coran lui-même avec sa connaissance des lois religieuses, du bon comportement humain et de la nature de Dieu est considéré comme miraculeux pour ses conséquences. En cela, la preuve du prophète de Dieu est le bienfait inestimable du Coran pour guider les êtres humains, tout comme la preuve de l'utilité du médecin réside dans la guérison réelle des malades.[47]

L'existence et la nature de la prophétie sont considérées comme évidentes dans l'expérience des êtres humains en relation avec le message du Coran, qui fournit des lois religieuses pour guider l'humanité vers le bien.

Dans son commentaire sur la *Métaphysique* d'Aristote, Averroès affirme explicitement que la forme la plus parfaite de culte de la Divinité se trouve dans

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43 Averroes, *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, 516.

44 Averroes, *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, 533.

45 "La catégorie qui est appelée "messagers" et "prophètes" est connue par elle-même. Cette catégorie d'homme est celle qui établit les lois (*al-sharāʾiʿ*) pour les hommes par une révélation venant de Dieu et non par un enseignement humain (…) Il y a là des individus parmi les hommes à qui une révélation est donnée par laquelle ils transmettent aux hommes des choses concernant des connaissances et des actes vertueux grâce auxquels est achevée leur béatitude ; ils leur interdisent des croyances mauvaises et des actes vils. Telle est l'action des prophètes", Averroes, *Kashf*, 215.

46 Averroes, *Kashf*, 213.

47 Averroes, *Kashf*, 202.

la connaissance de Dieu et des créatures dans la science de la métaphysique. Cette connaissance est une obligation religieuse spécifique aux philosophes (*al-sharīʿa al-khāṣṣa bi-l-ḥukamāʾ*). Il semble donc raisonnable de conclure qu'Averroès considère la philosophie et ses sciences comme étant le contenu de vérité le plus complet et le plus précis ; le plus haut niveau de connaissance et de compréhension accessible aux hommes. Dans cette perspective, la religion – qui est indispensable au développement politique humain[48] – est comme une science pratique aristotélicienne en ce qu'elle concerne la bonne et juste conduite dans la réalisation d'un but que l'on atteint par l'action, et ne concerne pas la connaissance en soi de la vérité. La révélation transmet à *tous* les hommes, philosophes comme hommes ordinaires, la connaissance des trois vérités que j'ai évoquées (reconnaissance de l'existence de Dieu, des prophéties, de la béatitude et des tourments dans l'au-delà) – connaissances qui de toutes façons seraient accessibles aux philosophes ; cependant, elle est indispensable dans sa fonction éthique et politique dans la mesure où sans elle, les hommes du commun ne pourraient avoir de normes pour réguler leurs actions et vivre avec leur semblables dans l'harmonie.

Je ne peux, dans le cadre de cet article, entrer dans les détails de ce qui différencie la prophétologie d'Avicenne de celle d'Averroès. Notons toutefois que pour Avicenne, le contenu du message prophétique n'est pas accessible autrement que par la révélation et que, de ce fait, le prophète est supérieur au philosophe dans la mesure où, outre la connaissance noétique qu'il partage avec ce dernier, il est porteur d'une autre connaissance – émanant des âmes célestes et reçue par son imagination. La valeur éthique (et donc politique) du message prophétique pour Avicenne ne tient donc pas au fait que le prophète rende accessible aux moyens de symboles et d'images une vérité métaphysique qui ne serait accessible qu'aux philosophes, mais au fait que le prophète est le seul homme à bénéficier de cette connaissance du monde invisible (*ʿālam al-ghayb*), et qu'il est celui à qui la Loi est révélée. En ceci, la thèse d'Avicenne est radicalement distincte de celle d'Averroès. Néanmoins, on retrouve chez les deux philosophes, ainsi que nous l'avons vu, l'affirmation de la fonction éthique et politique du prophète. Bien qu'à l'instar des autres *falāsifa* Avicenne rende compte rationnellement de la fonction du prophète, notamment des modalités épistémologiques de réception de la révélation, le fait qu'il considère que le prophète est supérieur au philosophe – lequel ne peut se substituer au premier en tant que nomothète – confère à sa prophétologie un statut à part.

48 Averroès, *Tahāfut at-tahāfut*, 582-583.

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PART 4

The Splendour of Words: Exaltation of the Prophet in Islamic Literatures

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12

"I Have Mandated It to Fly to You on the Wings of My Ardent Desire"

Letter to the Prophet Written by Lisān al-Dīn ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 776/1375) on Behalf of the Naṣrid Ruler of Granada

Nelly Amri

The literary genre of letters addressed to the Prophet in his tomb (*al-rawḍa al-nabawiyya*), hailing him and asking for his intercession in worldly and eschatological matters (*wa al-tashaffuʿ bihi ilā Allāh fī l-maqāṣid al-dunyawiyya wa l-ukhrawiyya*) (al-Qalqashandī), was particularly popular in al-Andalus;[1] the author of the *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā* describes this genre as a speciality of the people of the Maghrib because, he writes, of the remoteness of their homeland (*buʿdi bilādihim wa nuzūḥ aqṭārihim*).[2] The immediate motivation for the writing of such letters seems to be the inability of their authors, and of the people commissioning them, to visit the holy places of the Ḥijāz and perform the *ziyāra* at the Prophet's tomb; these letters also provided an opportunity for their authors to express in a direct style their feelings of yearning at being far from Medina and the holy sanctuary of Mecca, and their love for and attachment to the Prophet, whose noble virtues and eminent qualities they praise, along with the marks of his election by God; they also express their personal worries, grievances and complaints. They seek a guarantee of *baraka*, but beyond this they wish for some consolation, comfort, and support in the here and now, and intercession in the next world. These letters make up a specific genre,[3] one that has something in common with the literature of *madāʾiḥ* (panegyrics),

1 I would like to thank Denis Gril for his enlightening insights and suggestions for the translation of certain passages.

2 Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā*, 6:469. Although Andalusians were particularly fluent in this genre, it was not unknown in Ifrīqiyā, where scholars did not hesitate to write such letters addressed to the Prophet in his tomb when they had undergone some trouble, or as a sign of gratitude or grace, or, finally, to express their yearning and love for the Prophet. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Muḥammad b. al-Ṭawwāḥ (d. after 718/1318), a Sufi scholar from Tunis, was comforted, when he was suffering a crisis (*ubtulītu bi-baliyyatin*) in 704/1304, by a dream-vision of the Prophet, and wrote a letter to him in his tomb, entitled *Nuzhat al-aḥdāq wa rawḍat al-mushtāq*, which is published *in extenso* in Ibn al-Ṭawwāḥ, *Sabk al-maqāl,* 97-101.

3 See below. For more on this type of letter, classed among "religious letters" (*al-rasāʾil al-dīniyya*), see (notably) Falāḥ al-Qaysī, *Adab al-Rasāʾil*, 194-98.

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khaṣā'iṣ, and *shamā'il* (treatises of prophetology). The eighth/fourteenth century was marked everywhere in the Maghrib by an upsurge of forms of piety and devotion to the Prophet: starting in the seventh/thirteenth century, across the east and the west of the Muslim world, including the Naṣrid court, the celebration of the Prophet's birth (*mawlid*) was the most outstanding example of this. In addition, his heirs (or presumed heirs) came to be subjects of particular veneration and recipients of economic and social privileges; in the construction of authority and legitimacy the status of the *sharaf* (ancestry dating back to the Prophet) becomes an important reference point. From the sixth/twelfth century, a whole literature on the merits of the prayer on the Prophet (*faḍl al-ṣalāt ʿalā al-nabī*) develops, especially in al-Andalus: just for the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries no fewer than fourteen treatises of this type have been accounted for; nine of these were specifically Andalusian.[4] From the eighth/fourteenth century there was a measurable increase in the production of such texts across the whole Muslim world, both east and west.[5]

According to al-Qalqashandī, the letter written in the name of the Naṣrid sovereign of Granada[6] Abū al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf b. Ismāʿīl b. Naṣr (r. 733–55/1333–54)[7] by Ibn al-Khaṭīb, the text of which al-Qalqashandī published *in extenso* in his *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā*,[8] was "the best he has ever seen" (*min aḥsani mā raʾaytu fī al-maʿnā*) in the genre of letters addressed by people of the Maghrib to the Prophet after his death.[9] Ibn al-Khaṭīb wrote another letter to the Prophet, this time on behalf of the son of Yūsuf I, al-Ghanī bi-llāh Muḥammad b. Abī al-Ḥajjāj (r. 755–60/1354–9 and 763–93/1362–91); the two letters, published by Ibn al-Khaṭīb himself in the *Iḥāṭa*[10] and in *Rayḥānat al-kuttāb wa-nujʿat al-muntāb*[11] were reissued by al-Maqqarī in his *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*[12] (and have since been cited mostly from this source); the letters share a similar structure and touch more or less

4 Hamidoune, "La pratique de la 'prière sur le Prophète'", 49-51.

5 Hamidoune, "La pratique de la 'prière sur le Prophète'", 52 and subsequent.

6 The Naṣrid kingdom in the far south of Spain covered the area that is now the eastern part of Cadiz province and the provinces of Malaga, Granada, and Almeria. Al-ʿUmarī, the author of the *Masālik al-Abṣār* and a contemporary of the Naṣrid ruler Yūsuf I, travelled throughout al-Andalus in 738/1337; at the time it took three days to cross the width of the Naṣrid kingdom on foot, and ten days to cross its length; see Arié, "Al-Andalus", 165. For more on the history of the Naṣrids, see Latham, "Naṣrides", 1022–30, A.

7 For more on him, see Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Aʿmāl al-Aʿlām*, Second Section: 264–5, and, from the same author, *al-Lamḥa al-badriyya*, 127–138.

8 Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā*, 6:469–76.

9 Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā*, 6:469.

10 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Iḥāṭa*, 5: 859–78 for the first letter, and 879–928 for the second.

11 Ibn al- Khaṭīb, *Rayḥānat al-kuttāb*, 1:55–62 for the first letter, and 1:62–80 for the second.

12 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6; respectively 354–360 and 360–379.

on the same themes, but the second of them focuses on an account of the battles and victories of Muḥammad al-Ghanī bi-llāh[13] that dominates the entire text. This second letter, written at the beginning of 771/1369,[14] was carried by a messenger to the holy places of the Ḥijāz the same year, during the month of Rabīʿ al-awwal (the month of the Prophet's birth). The messenger who carried it[15] also brought two other missives from the Naṣrid, one addressed to *Ṣāḥib Makka*, ʿAjlān ibn Asad al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl Rumaytha b. Muḥammad b. Abī Saʿd Al-Ḥasanī[16] and the other to the Prince of Medina,[17] informing them of the letter to the Prophet in which, he says, details of Muslim victories (*nuʿarrifuhu bi-hādhihi al-barakāt*) are "brought to his attention". With these letters were sent bells that had been taken in the battles (*nawāqīs al-faranj*), so that they could be displayed to pilgrims as a reminder of these glorious victories, and so that "prayers and invocations might be addressed to God in those noble places, that victory over their enemies should be granted to the armies of Islam (*tastadʿī al-imdād bi-l-duʿāʾ wa taqtaḍī bi-tilka al-maʿāhid al-sharīfa al-naṣr ʿalā al-aʿdāʾ*)".[18] Unfortunately, we do not have any comparable information about the first letter, written in the name of Abū al-Ḥajjāj. This first letter is not dated, but in it the memory of the Naṣrid battles against the "Catholic kings" is still fresh. The Naṣrids were unable to face the intrigues of their Christian neighbours alone, and in the absence of effective support from the Egyptian

13 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6: 367–378 (almost two thirds of the letter).

14 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Iḥāṭa*, 5:879. Not 761/1359 as stated in Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rayḥānat al-kuttāb*, 1:63; for obvious reasons of chronology, the victories related in the letter date from 768/1366–7 and 769/1367–8.

15 Might this be the *faqīh* Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bannā, the same messenger who had during the previous year (770/1368), in the month of Rabīʿ II, carried a letter and gifts to the Hafsid Sultan of Tunis, Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Abī Bakr (r. 751–70/1350–69) (for more on him, see Zarkashī, *Tārīkh al-dawlatayn*, 187–212), informing him of the victories of al-Ghanī bi-llāh (Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rayḥānat al-kuttāb*, 1:179)?

16 ʿAjlān (d. 777/1375) succeeded his father Rumaytha in 746/1345 in an atmosphere of bitter competition between himself and his brothers, especially Thaqaba. At the end of his life he passed power on to his son, Aḥmad; see the entry on him in al-Fāsī, *al-ʿIqd al-thamīn*, 6:58–73. In Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rayḥānat al-kuttāb*, 1:206, his genealogy, claiming descent from Abī Saʿīd al-Ḥusaynī, is incorrect; the *sharīf*s of Mecca are descended from the Ḥasanite branch (which goes back to Qatāda b. Idrīs al-Ḥasanī, see al-Fāsī, *al-ʿIqd al-thamīn*, 6:58), whereas those of Medina are descended from the Ḥusaynite branch, see below.

17 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rayḥānat al-kuttāb*, 1:213–5. The prince in question appears to be ʿAṭiyya b. Manṣūr b. Jammāz b. Shīḥa b. Hāshim b. Qāsim b. Muhannā b. Ḥusayn, who, according to Sakhāwī's account, became Prince of Medina in 759/1358; the following year (760/1359) his investiture by the Mamluks took place. In 773/1371 he was removed from power by a nephew, and returned to lead the Holy City in 782/1380, dying the following year. See Sakhāwī, *al-Tuḥfa al-laṭīfa*, 1:56–7, and Maqrīzī, *Durr al-ʿuqūd al-farīda*, 1:569.

18 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rayḥānat al-kuttāb*, 1:212.

Mamluks, who proved to be "purely passive",[19] their dependence on help from Morocco's Marinid Sultanates, solicited directly in Abū al-Ḥajjāj's letters,[20] increased; this assistance was often decisive.[21] The *jihād* on the frontiers played a central role in the rivalry for legitimacy and recognition of Caliphal dignity between the monarchs of the two countries.[22] Ibn al-Khaṭīb's letter is part of a genre, and many of its themes, and even its structure, arise from that genre – but it also contains community motifs that are closely related to the situation in which the Naṣrid Sultanate of Granada found itself, motifs of "political" significance, with, in the background, the Caliphal pretensions of the monarch, and also some more personal motifs relating to the economy of salvation. These give Ibn al-Khaṭīb's letter a certain specificity. Written as a result of particular circumstances, and seeking to project a certain image of the sovereign and his relationship with the Prophet, which is the basis of his authority and his political and religious legitimacy, Ibn al-Khaṭīb's letter is nevertheless part of the devotion to the Prophet that developed strongly from the twelfth century, especially devotion to his figure as a source of succour here and in the next life. It is this figure on whom the faithful (ʿulamāʾ, scholars, political figures etc.) call in times of adversity, and to whom they address grievances and complaints. How do the contingencies and demands of the times interact with this devotion, and with its unvarying elements: expressions of profound love and veneration for the Prophet and his merciful figure that here take the form of letters addressed to him? Such letters demonstrate the permanence of the

19 Rachel Arié writes: "No effective aid was ever envisioned in order to save Islam in Spain, which was dying"; for more on the relationship with Egypt's Mamluks, see Arié, "Les relations diplomatiques", 93–7. On the Naṣrid search for support from the Mamluks in order to reduce the kingdom of Granada's dependence on its southern neighbour in the struggle against the Christians, see Dejugnat, "La mer, miroir de la légitimité", 85–101.

20 As happened twice in 750/1349, see Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rayḥānat al-kuttāb*, 1:359–65 and 365–72.

21 See Latham, "Naṣrides", 1025. According to some authors, the support offered by the Marīnid Sultanate to the Naṣrids for the survival of the kingdom of Granada should not be over-emphasised; more important might have been the role played by "the social and political instability that affected Castile during the last decades of the thirteenth century and all of the fourteenth", Torremocha Silva, "Les Naṣrides de Grenade", 78. The rivalry between the kingdoms of Castile, Portugal and Aragon is also cited.

22 See Dejugnat, "La mer, miroir de la légitimité", 85–101. Ibn al-Khaṭīb, who calls both Abū al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf and the Marīnid by the title *Amīr al-Muslimīn* (prince of Muslims), adds, on the subject of Abū ʿInān, who succeeded his father Abū al-Ḥasan, that he had adopted the Caliphal title *al-Mutawakkil ʿalā Allāh*; Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Lamḥa al-badriyya*, 131. For his part, the Naṣrid Yūsuf I had adopted the Caliphal honorific with *billāh*, *Muʾayyad billāh*, Dejugnat, *op. cit.* and Latham, "Naṣrides", 1022. His successors, Muḥammad V, Yūsuf II (r. 793–4/1391–2) and Yūsuf III (r. 810–20/1408–17) were respectively to adopt the names *al-Ghanī bi-llāh*, *al-Mustaghnī bi-llāh* and *al-Nāṣir li-dīn Allāh*, *ibid.* (See below).

Prophetic presence, constantly actualised by the practice of the *tawassul* and the *istighātha*. We will examine these questions here.

We propose first to outline the contours and structure of a literary genre that was already at least three centuries old in our author's day, and examine some of the models from which he drew inspiration. Then we will evoke the man known as *Dhū al-wizārataynˌ* (the one who unites the two functions of Vizier, that of the army and that of the pen) whose biography is very well-known, focusing on his relationship with the commissioner of the letter, the Naṣrid Sultan, and on the context in which this occurred. In a third section we will analyse the letter itself, considering it in its entirety, as a literary production, examining particularly its representation of the Prophet and his figures, his role in this world and in the economy of salvation, as well as the marks of his active and living presence in the community. We will take a special interest in the Prophetic heritage claimed for the Naṣrid, notably in the context of *jihād*. We will also study the personal, intimate and affective relationship between the sender and the Prophet, and the devotional aspect of the text, referring to the ritual of the *ziyāra*.

1 A Genre and Its History

This particular epistolary genre was not new in the eighth/fourteenth century. It had blossomed in the fifth/eleventh century, in the specific conditions that obtained in al-Andalus after the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba and the fragmentation of power during the era of the Taifa kingdoms (399–483/1008–1090), with their constant wars that were followed by Christian offensives against Islamic possessions in the Iberian Peninsula. The genre developed continuously through the subsequent centuries, alongside an upsurge of practices expressing devotion to the Prophet, spurred by the increasing difficulty of travelling to the Holy Places in Mecca and Medina: in the specific circumstances of the Muslim west, giving priority to *jihād*, numerous Maghribi jurists had reached decisions (*fatwā*-s) that had effectively forbidden the performing of the *ḥajj* (pilgrimage) for people from this region;[23] undertaking the pilgrimage was ruled to bring no reward to those who persisted, in spite of everything, in accomplishing it; they were enjoined to put

23 As a reaction to these consultations, the Moroccan Sufi Abū Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ (d. 631/1234), with the help of his sons, put in place a network of stages and relays to make it easier for Maghribi pilgrims to get to Medina; Dhahbī, *Abū Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ*, 64–80; Ferhat, "Le culte du Prophète", 90–91.

off their travels.[24] In spite of the encouragement, under the Marinids, to begin making the pilgrimage again,[25] it remained difficult to fulfil this canonical obligation: the routes were perilous by land and sea; by sea it was often necessary to embark on Christian ships. The principal deterrent, though, was the need to practise *jihād*.[26] In his letter to the *Sharīf of Mecca*, Ibn al-Khaṭīb emphasises: "*jihād* and pilgrimage are two brothers [...], of almost equal worth and bringing almost equal reward (*wa-yakād an yatakāfa'ān fī al-muḥāsaba*)".[27]

In al-Andalus from the fifth/eleventh century, a *risāla* was any writing addressed by a secretary (*kātib*) to another person. This "writing" could even be a poem,[28] leading some to assert that the genre is closer to poetic writing than to prose.[29] Thus it is not surprising that letters to the Prophet, such as the one written by Ibn al-Khaṭīb, often begin with a poem. By the eighth/fourteenth century the genre was already well-respected and al-Maqqarī, in his *Azhār al-riyāḍ fī akhbār ʿIyāḍ*, mentions numerous ʿulamā', poets, and scholars from the Maghrib and al-Andalus whose letters became famous. One of the earliest such letters was written by the *faqīh* and secretary (*al-kātib*) Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Jadd (d. 415/1024), who writes as a pilgrim who has just left the sanctuary in Mecca and the Prophet's tomb in Medina, and is expressing his love for the Prophet (*wa qalbī bi-ḥubbi-ka maʿmūr wa-ma'hūl*), allowing free reign to his regret at having left the holy tomb behind, and describing his deep longing for it now that he is far away (*laḥiqanī min al-asaf li-buʿdi mazāri-ka*). The author invokes the Prophet directly (*fa-lā tansā lī yā rasūl Allāh*), both as refuge and recourse, and by describing his haste to visit the tomb, that he might be granted the Prophet's *shafāʿa* on Judgement Day. Al-Jadd invokes God, asking Him to facilitate a return to the Holy Places, and a new visit to the Prophet's tomb, again so that he might be blessed with the Prophet's intercession on Judgement Day.[30] Among the best-known authors of letters to the Prophet is Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Masʿūd b. Abī al-Khiṣāl (d. 540/1146), a *faqīh*, traditionist, historian, poet and Andalusian Vizier, known as "*Dhū*

24 Wansharīsī, *Miʿyār*, 1: 432. In fact, this was a debate on the legal obligation to undertake the *ḥajj*; the undertaking was subject to the individual's capacity to reach the Holy Places safely; Ibn Rushd had already considered this not to fulfil the canonical conditions (*li-ʿadam al-istiṭāʿa*) required to make this *farḍ* licit (*wa-hiya al-qudra ʿalā al-wuṣūl maʿa al-amn ʿalā al-nafs wa-al-māl*).

25 "The opportunity to fulfil this sacred duty had not presented itself for a long time", writes Ibn Khaldūn, cited in Arié, "Les relations diplomatiques", 103.

26 For more on this debate, see Ḥaqqī, "*Al-ḥajj fī l-Maghrib wa al-Andalus*" 84–101.

27 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rayḥānat al-kuttāb*, 1:209.

28 Falāḥ al-Qaysī, *Adab al-Rasā'il*, 79.

29 Falāḥ al-Qaysī, *Adab al-Rasā'il*, 80.

30 Ibn Bassām, *al-Dhakhīra,* II, 1:286–8 and Falāḥ al-Qaysī, *Adab al-Rasā'il*, 194–48.

al-wizārataynʾ.[31] Al-Maqqarī's *Azhār al-riyāḍ* preserved the text of the letter al-Khiṣāl wrote (on his own behalf) to the Prophet,[32] as well as the text of a letter he wrote for a certain ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Ṣayrafī, of Cordoba, who suffered from paralysis – as soon as this letter arrived in Medina, al-Ṣayrafī was immediately healed.[33] Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ (d. 544/1149) himself addressed a letter to the Prophet's tomb, which is also reproduced by al-Maqqarī in his *Azhār*.[34] Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyūsī (d. 521/1127) (sometimes transcribed as al-Baṭalyawsī), a *faqīh*, traditionist, philosopher, poet and grammarian,[35] also sent a letter to the Prophet's tomb. Another Andalusian who excelled in the genre was Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Ghammād (d. 530/1135); so did Abū Zayd ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Fazāzī (d. 627/1229–1230). A letter to the Prophet is also attributed to Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. al-Jannān al-Andalusī al-Anṣārī (d. in Bijāya between 646/1248 and 648/1250); he was a traditionist, jurist, and writer of prose and poetry. He was born in Murcia and in 641/1243 sought refuge in Sabta after the seizure of his home city by Alphonse of Castile. Eventually he settled in the Ifrīqiyan port city of Bijāya, where he remained until his death. He was known to be *shāʿir al-madīḥ al-nabawī* (a panegyrist of the Prophet).[36] The existence of these scholars and writers, who wrote letters to the Prophet not just for themselves but also for others, confirms the idea of a veritable genre, in which ordinary people, as well as the élite and sovereigns, took part.

These letters share an easily recognisable structure whose elements can be found in the letter by Ibn al-Khaṭīb. Authors begin with the *basmala* and the *taṣliya* or "prayer on the Prophet"; this is followed by a list of the qualities, attributes, names and noble characters that God has given him, concentrating especially on his eschatological figure and the universal dimension of his mission, and on his miracles and other specific graces. Then the object of the letter is detailed, along with a presentation of its author and of his firm respect for the *sunna* and attachment to the Prophet's message, his love and yearning for the Prophet and his profound sorrow and regret that he has been unable to visit his tomb. Some authors, such as Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, confess their sins of omission and commission, and their disobedience, at this stage. When the Prophet's

31 Ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl, *Rasāʾil*.

32 Maqarrī, *Azhār al-riyāḍ*, 4:20–29.

33 Maqarrī, *Azhār al-riyāḍ*, 4:29–31.

34 Maqarrī, *Azhār al-riyāḍ*, 4:11–20.

35 For more on him, see Maqarrī, *Azhār al-riyāḍ*, 3:103 and subsequent.

36 For more on him, see Maqarrī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 7:415; see also Ghubrīnī, *ʿUnwān al-dirāya*, 349, footnote 108; Ibn al-Jannān, *Dīwān*. For more on his *madīḥ nabawī* or *al-nabawiyyāt*, see Ibn al-Jannān, *Dīwān*, 25–30; in addition, its editor has written several works on Ibn al-Jannān and his *madīḥ nabawī*, the references for which feature in this text.

tomb is mentioned, the memory of the Holy Places of the Ḥijāz and their sacred Prophetic history is invoked (the descent of the revelation, the Night of Power, etc.). There follows a series of invocations to God, in order to facilitate the *ziyāra* and obtain for the author the sweetness of proximity, with protection and forgiveness of sins, and guidance on the path of the Prophet. Then the writer addresses the Prophet directly, requesting his intercession on the Day of Judgement by virtue of his "praised estate" (*al-maqām al-maḥmūd*), because of which his succour is sought; the author then calls on his letter to stand in for him, so that by the Prophet's mediation God might convey upon him the benefits of having visited the tombs of the Prophet and his two companions (buried at his side), the first Caliphs Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (r. 11–13/632–4) and ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–644); he will also receive the benefits of having visited all the places that are closely linked with the holy history of Muḥammad, the people of his house, his wives, his *aṣḥāb*, (in some letters, such the one written by Ibn Abī l-Khiṣāl, these Companions are mentioned specifically). Finally, the letter ends with an invocation asking God to offer a profusion of salutations and blessings to the Prophet.

2 The Man and the Letter in Their Time

2.1 *Ibn al-Khaṭīb*

Regarding Ibn al-Khaṭīb[37] I repeat what E. Chaumont wrote about Ibn Khaldūn: "he is a personality who no longer requires any introduction".[38] In fact, the two men were friends and have a great deal in common. Here I will discuss only the part of Ibn al-Khaṭīb's life that concerns us, while he was in the service of the Naṣrid Yūsuf I, in whose name he addressed this letter to the Prophet. Ibn al-Khaṭīb entered the service of the seventh monarch of the Naṣrid state of Granada, Sultan Abū al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf b. Ismāʿīl, as a secretary after the death of his father at the battle of Rio Salado (Ṭarīfa) in 741/1340. He and the Sultan were almost the same age (*wa sinnī yawma'idhin qarībun mi sinnihi*);[39] they were close, and he was a favourite with the young monarch, but he was under the administrative and technical direction of the Vizier Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Jayyāb. When the latter died of plague in 749/1349, Ibn al-Khaṭīb was elevated to the function of *kātib al-inshā'*, chief of the royal chancellery,[40] with

37 For more on him, see Bosch-Vilà, "Ibn al-Khaṭīb", 859–60.

38 Chaumont, "l'Ego-histoire d'Ibn Khaldūn", 1041.

39 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Aʿmāl al-Aʿlām*, 265.

40 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Al-Lamḥa al-badriyya*, 129.

the title of Vizier. He retained these functions under the reign of *al-Ghanī billāh*, Yūsuf's son, who acceded to the throne after his father's assassination in 755/1354; it was at this time that the elevation of his rank and category led him to take the title of *Dhū al-wizāratayn*. The letter whose contents we analyse and attempt to understand is not some trivial text: it comes from a man of whom it has been said that he offered "almost unique witness to history and culture at the end of the seventh/thirteenth century and through most of the eighth/fourteenth";[41] this was a culture in which the presence of the Prophet and the signs of veneration of his person occupied an important place: did not Ibn al-Khaṭīb himself compose numerous panegyrics to the Prophet and many *mawlidiyyāt* to be recited (especially at the court of Abū l-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf[42]) during celebrations of the Prophet's birth? Ibn al-Khaṭīb was a man who belonged to the intellectual, literary and political élites, all deeply impregnated with Sufism. These different circles to which the author belonged interact in the contents of the letter, beyond the formal and stylised elements common to many missives of this type.

2.2 *The Context*

As we have mentioned, the letter composed by Ibn al-Khaṭīb for the Naṣrid Abū l-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf bears no date. It could have been written at any time between 749/1349, the year in which the writer replaced his master Ibn al-Jayyāb as Vizier and *kātib al-inshā'*, and 755/1354, the year in which Abū l-Ḥajjāj was assassinated; it may even have been composed during Ibn al-Jayyāb's lifetime, when our author had already assumed the function of *kātib* for the young monarch, since it was as bearer of this title that, in 748/1347, he accompanied the Naṣrid sultan on a tour of the eastern limits of his kingdom.[43] In any case, the context is redolent of the last battles of the Naṣrid against his Christian neighbours, whose echoes are present in the letter to the Prophet. In the entry devoted to Yūsuf I in his *Aʿmāl al-Aʿlām*, Ibn al-Khaṭīb informs us that Yūsuf I led the battle of Ṭarīfa (Rio Salado) in 741/1340 alongside the Marīnīd Abū al-Ḥasan (whose son had just died in one of the skirmishes), facing the armies of Alphonse XI of Castile and his brother-in-law Alphonse IV of Portugal; the battle ended in defeat for the two Muslim armies.[44] Subsequently, Abū al-Ḥasan retreated to his home in Morocco, while Yūsuf returned to Granada. On both sides the

41 Bosch-Vilà, "Ibn al-Khaṭīb", 860.

42 See Kaptein, *Muhammad's Birthday*, 131–2. For more on these *mawlidiyyāt*, see Nūriyya, "*Mawlidiyyāt* Lisān al-Dīn", 115–136.

43 This tour was recounted by Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Khaṭrat al-ṭayf*, 31–56; see also Dejugnat, "La mer, miroir de la légitimité" *op. cit.*

44 See also Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Lamḥa al-badriyya*, 130–1.

retreat had profound repercussions: the Muslims had not faced such a defeat since al-ʿUqāb (Las navas de Tolosa, in 609/1212);[45] the Christians, on the other hand, were reminded of that very victory, which marked the beginning of their ascendency over the Muslims and the gradual loss of Muslim territories in al-Andalus. The reign of Yūsuf I would be marked by additional defeats, as Ibn al-Khaṭīb testifies: Qalʿat Yaḥṣub, also called Qalʿat Banī Saʿīd, north-east of Granada (today's Alcala la Real), and al-Jazīra al-Khaḍrā' (Algesiras);[46] this last defeat came after a lengthy siege in 742/1341; in taking the city, Alphonse XI benefited from reinforcements from across Europe, including England. Because of its strategically important location at the southern-most tip of al-Andalus, Al-Jazīra al-Khaḍrā' had been the link between the province and the rest of the Muslim west; in fact, Ibn al-Khaṭīb calls it "the gate of al-Andalus" (*bāb al-Andalus*).[47] Its loss contributed to the isolation of the last Muslim possessions in Iberia, and cut off the route for assistance arriving from the Maghrib by sea, though in 744/1344, Yūsuf I did obtain a ten-year truce from Alphonse of Castile after the fall of al-Jazīra al-Khaḍrā'. Nevertheless, danger continued to menace the Naṣrid state and its possessions. The *Khaṭrat al-ṭayf* (748/1347) speaks of the permanence of conflict and the anxiety created among the populations of the borders (especially the inhabitants of Vera)[48] by frequent Castilian incursions. After the victories mentioned above, the king of Castile breached the treaty, and even menaced Jabal al-Fatḥ (the Strait of Gibraltar); the entire province of al-Andalus, according to Ibn al-Khaṭīb, very nearly fell into the king's hands.[49] Alphonse succumbed to the Black Death in 1350; his son and successor, Peter I, agreed a treaty with Yūsuf, whose relationship with the Marinids was decaying.[50]

45 Ibn al-Khaṭīb writes of Alphonse XI of Castile: *awqaʿa bi-l-muslimīn al-waqīʿa al-ʿuẓmā bi-Ṭarīf* ("He inflicted upon the Muslims the great defeat of *Ṭarīf*"), *al-Lamḥa al-badriyya*, 133.

46 *Wa laqiyat ayyāmuhu shidda li-tamalluk al-ʿadūw Qalʿat Yaḥṣub wa-l-Jazīra al-khaḍrāʾ*, Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Aʿmāl al-Aʿlām*, 265, see also *al-Lamḥa al-badriyya*, 135.

47 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Lamḥa al-badriyya*, 135.

48 *Baldatun ʿaduwwuhā mutaʿaqqib wa sākinuhā khāʾif mutaraqqib*, Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Khaṭrat al-ṭayf*, 44, and Dejugnat, "La mer, miroir de la légitimité", *op. cit.*

49 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Lamḥa al-badriyya*, 133. The Naṣrid was twice to call on the Marīnīd Abū ʿInān for help in 750/1349, notably for Jabal al-Fatḥ and the town of Runda; Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rayḥānat al-kuttāb*, 1:359–365.

50 For more on these events, see Latham, "Naṣrides", 1025–6.

3 Analysis of the Letter

A 33-verse poem precedes the prose section of the letter. These verses express the longing of the author for the places of pilgrimage from which he is so distant: the Holy Places of the Ḥijāz and the sanctuary of Mecca, especially the well of Zamzam and al-Ḥaṭīm, also called Ḥijr Ismāʿīl,[51] with which he literally feels at one (*fa-zamzamuhu damʿī wa-jismī ḥaṭīmuhu*: "its Zamzam is my tears, and my body its Ḥaṭīm"). He speaks of his ardent desire to visit the Prophet, to whom he addresses his supplications. Other themes include the Prophet's light, his ontological primordiality, and his role in cosmogenesis, as well as the pre-eminence of the Prophet above other envoys, and the excellence of his character. Then the poem addresses the Prophetic heritage of al-Ḥajjāj (*wa lī yā rasūl Allāh fīka wirāthatun*), and his genealogy (*nisba*), which goes back to the *Anṣār* of the Khazraj.[52] This heritage is also recalled in the prose section of the letter. After this, Ibn al-Khaṭīb denounces the factors that keep the Naṣrid sultan away from the Prophet's tomb, in particular the war waged by the Kingdom of Castile, against whom the Sultan is leading *jihād* in the face of a much more powerful enemy (*ummatan hiya l-baḥru yuʿyī amrahā man yarūmuhu*), thus following in the Prophet's footsteps (*fī sabīlika*). This theme will also be developed and amplified in the prose section of the letter; had it not been for the protection afforded by the Prophet, qualified as "refuge for mankind" (*maljaʾ al-warā*), the reserved territories would have been frightened, and the protected dependencies violated (*la-rīʿa ḥimāhu wa-stubīḥa ḥarīmuhu*[53]). After this the author begs the Prophet not to snap the cord that

51 A small semi-circular wall north of the Kaʿba; tradition has it that it was there that the Prophet lay sleeping the night that Gabriel came to find him for his nocturnal voyage; see Lings, *Le Prophète Muhammad*, 171.

52 Anṣār: "The 'Auxiliaries' is the usual designation for those inhabitants of Medina who supported Muḥammad; this distinguishes them from his Meccan partisans, the Muḥājirūn or 'emigrants'. After the conversion *en masse* of the Arabs to Islam, the former name, Banū Qayla, which referred to both al-Aws and al-Khazradj, fell from use, being replaced by Anṣār (singulative Anṣārī) (see Qurʾān, IX, 100–1, 117–18). Thus was the memory of the first services rendered to Islam by the Medinese honourably perpetuated. Anṣār is probably the plural of *naṣīr*. The Khazraj are one of the two principal tribes of Medina; along with the al-Aws [*q.v.*], they constitute the Banū Qayla of the pre-Islamic period and the Anṣār [*q.v.*] or auxiliaries (of Muḥammad) under Islam"; see Montgomery Watt, "al-Anṣār".

53 Originally, during pre-Islamic times, the *ḥimā* was pasture reserved for the nobles of the tribe. The Prophet and the first Caliphs used the word to refer to reserving the use of certain pastures for the mounts of the Muslim armies, the camels acquired for the Treasury, and the small herds of the poorer Muslims (Chelhod, cited in ʿAkkām, "Des fondements de la propriété", 30). The notion applies to all land whose use is reserved; the same is true of the *ḥarīm*, that can also mean the "dependencies of a location" over which rights of

binds them together, and returns to the themes of his longing and his distance from the Prophet's tomb. Adding a mention of all the complaints and anxieties with which his missive has been entrusted (*wakkaltu bihā hammī*), he pleads with its addressee not to forget him and, finally, ends his poem with the prayer on the Prophet.

Addressed directly to the Prophet: "To God's (*al-Ḥaqq*) envoy, to the totality of all creatures (*al-khalq*), to the cloud of mercy (*ghamām al-raḥma*)", the prose section of the letter will develop and amplify the ideas of the poem, many themes of which also occur in other letters of the same type that share a structure with Ibn al-Khaṭīb's epistle, such as the Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's *risāla* of a few centuries before, or that of Ibn Abī l-Khiṣāl, in both of which the first paragraph is devoted to their addressee (*ilā rasūl al-Ḥaqq*, etc.) and to an evocation of his sublime traits and the signs of his elect status. After this long paragraph addressed to the letter's recipient, the Prophet Muḥammad, the sender presents himself. Here again the structure is the same as in older letters, and even the phrases used resemble each other strongly; this section of Ibn al-Khaṭīb's letter particularly resembles that of Ibn Abī l-Khiṣāl.[54] After this the author gives the reasons for having composed the letter, detailing his yearning, compunction and sorrow at not being able to perform the *ziyāra* at the Prophet's holy tomb (*turbatika*[55] *al-muqaddasat al-laḥd*). Once again, Ibn al-Khaṭīb is clearly inspired by his predecessor Ibn Abī l-Khiṣāl,[56] notably in his mention of *al-mashāhid wa al-maʿāhid*, places that were once familiar to the Prophet, sanctified by his presence and visited by pilgrims: he praises Mecca and Medina, laden with the Prophet's sacred history, where revelation came down upon him. The author then describes the reasons that prevent him from undertaking a pilgrimage to the Holy Places: the enemy already mentioned in the preceding poem. Here the letter takes on an epic flavour. After this, the author writes of the *ziyāra* ritual itself, tasking the letter with accomplishing it in his place; then he addresses God through the mediation of the Prophet, exalting his election by God and his dignity. This once again resembles the genres of *khaṣāʾiṣ* (the Prophet's particular traits) and *shamāʾil* (the physical and moral

usage apply. These are therefore common lands, or land reserved for the use of the village community. For more on the legal status of real estate in Muslim law, see Lagardère, "Terres communes et droits d'usage" 43–54.

54 See Maqqarī, *Azhār al-riyāḍ*, 4:23–4.

55 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rayḥānat al-kuttāb*, 1:60; Maqqarī, *Azhār al-riyāḍ*, 4:41; and Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā*, 6:473. Maqqarī, in, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:357 gives *turbika*: literally the earth; *turbat* signifies mausoleum only by metonymy; the *laḥd* is the sloping part of the tomb in which the body lies, Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, 13:176–77.

56 Maqqarī, *Azhār al-riyāḍ*, 4:25.

characteristics of the Prophet). The author, writing in the name of Abū l-Ḥajjāj, then details the latter's genealogy, going back as far as Saʿd b. ʿUbāda, the oldest member of the Prophet's *Anṣār*, begging the Prophet to take account of this noble descent so that even if Abū l-Ḥajjāj had no praiseworthy actions to his credit, [the purity of] his intentions would count in his favour. In the course of this plea the recent and current political and military situations dominate. The letter ends with the *taṣliya*, prayer of blessings on the Prophet, on his allies (*aḥzābika*), on those close to him (*Ālika*),[57] and on the two companions buried near him, as well as on his cousin and son-in-law ʿAlī.[58]

4 The Representation of, and Relationship with, the Prophet

Here we will attempt to tease out a number of themes that are developed in the letter, notably the representation of the Prophet Muḥammad, his presence, and the relationship with him.

4.1 *The Supra-Terrestrial and Sacred Person of the Prophet*

The universal nature of Muḥammad's message (with reference to Q 34:28) is underlined right from the first lines of the letter: "he is God's envoy to all creatures" (*rasūl al-Ḥaqq ilā kāffat al-khalq*), as is his apostolate's function of mercy (*wa ghamām al-raḥma*); he is the seal of prophets, and the author exalts his ontological primacy ("He was a prophet when Adam was between water and mud" (*man wajabat lahu al-nubūwa wa Ādam bayna al-ṭīn wa-al-māʾ*),[59] his status as intercessor for "sinners laden with faults" (*shafīʿ arbāb al-dhunūb*), and his function as mediator between mankind and God the Omniscient (*al-wasīla ilā ʿAllām al-ghuyūb*).[60] As in the traditions of *shamāʾil* and *khaṣāʾiṣ al-nubūwa*, the author lists the attributes and functions of the Prophet, concentrating on the economy of salvation; he also enumerates the signs of his elect status and of his perfection. He evokes Muḥammad's role in cosmogenesis, his nocturnal voyage and celestial ascension, and his primordial light that is the origin of all light (*man al-anwāru min ʿunṣuri nūrihi mustamadda*). Following the *Mawlidiyyyāt* tradition this time, Ibn al-Khaṭīb writes of the luminous and miraculous signs that accompanied the Prophet's birth: "At his

57 On the interpretation of the word *Āl*, see Addas, *La Maison muhammadienne*, 144–54.

58 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:354–60.

59 For more on the ḥadīth "*kuntu nabiyyan …*" ("I was a prophet when Adam was between water and mud"), see Addas, *La Maison muhammadienne*, 47–55.

60 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:356.

birth the fortresses and palaces of Syria were illuminated" (*wa aḍā'at li-mīlādihi maṣāniʿu al-Shām wa quṣūruhu*); he also recounts the Prophet's miracles (*dhū al-muʿjizāt*).[61]

> Lord, You have made of him the first of prophets in spirit and the last in body; You have granted him the banner of praise; Adam and all his descendance walk in his unfolding shadow; You granted to his community the earth that You folded for him [so that he saw its easts and its wests].[62]

This representation of the Prophet is very close to that seen in the letter attributed to Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, and it indicates the existence of a "prophetic culture" that was fairly widespread in scholarly and Sufi circles in the Maghrib, as in other regions of the Muslim world.

4.2 *The Shadow That Covers All of His Community*

The prophet is the shadow that covers all of his community (*al-ẓill al-khaffāq ʿalā ummatihi*).[63] This protective aspect of the Prophet is praised particularly strongly in these times of disturbances and war, circumstances that are evident throughout Ibn al-Khaṭīb's letter. Ibn al-Khaṭīb underlines the superior forces of the enemies of the little Naṣrid state; it is under siege from all sides, its strength cannot be compared in extent or numbers to the massed contingents of its adversaries (*ʿadūw tatakāthafu afwājuhu*): the dust from their horses' hooves masks the sun's light at its zenith (*wa yaḥjubu al-shamsa ʿinda al-ẓahīrati ʿajājuhu*). Despite the modesty of their means,[64] the Muslim combatants display magnanimity in the face of troops that the author compares to the armies of Caesar and Kisrā: "They exchange blow for blow with troops as numerous as those of Caesar or of Khosrow" (*wa yuqāriʿūna wa hum al-fiʾatu al-qalīla*[65] *jumūʿan ka-jumūʿ Qayṣar wa Kisrā*). Thanks to the Prophet's support, these believers (*al-muʾminūn*) arm themselves with patience; their complete

61 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:356–7.

62 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:359; on the final phrase, see the *ḥadīth*: "*Inna Allāh zawā lī l-arḍ fa-raʾaytu mashāriqahā wa maghāribahā*", "Allāh folded the earth so much for me that I saw its easts and its wests. The kingdom of my community will reach as far as the earth was flooded for me" in Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-fitan wa-ashrāṭ al-Sāʿa*, *ḥadīth* n° 2889.

63 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:356.

64 This theme has virtually become a literary motif, found throughout eastern historiography, see Arié, "Les relations diplomatiques", 98–9.

65 *Al-fiʾa al-qalīla* refers to Q 2:249: the 313 companions of Saul who held fast in the face of Goliath's army, the number of whom anticipates that of the Companions of Badr: "How many a little company hath overcome a mighty host by Allah's leave! – Allah is with the

surrender to God and the Prophet, from whose approbation they draw their strength, is their armour (*labūsuhum*); they have exchanged this earthly existence for the final life.[66] This quasi-epic invocation of battles between Muslim armies and their enemies[67] awakens echoes of the battle of Badr,[68] with the actions of the Prophet and his Companions in the face of the Qurayshis, and also of the wars that later pitted the young Muslim state against the Byzantine and Sassanid Empires. Through references to events that are foundational for the entire community, collective memory is mobilised in the present, not only by invoking the symbolic power of those events, but also by the quest for a *mimesis* of those excellent men whose vigorous faith and abandonment to God brought them victory.

Indeed, is it not surprising that among the grievances addressed to the Prophet, the ongoing political and military situation in al-Andalus constitutes a sort of recurring leitmotif, emphasising and exalting his protective functions:

> Do not forget me, nor the inhabitants of this isle that was conquered by the sword of your word (*al-muftataḥa bi-sayfi kalimatika*),[69] by the best men of your community; we are but a trust beneath one of your locks; may the face of your Lord preserve us from neglecting [your rights]; we breathe the perfume carried on the breeze of your protection and await your agreement, through which we will repel a despotic and oppressive enemy who, through his harassment, has attained his aim; the constant trials to which we are exposed have wearied our historians; and the sea has silenced all our cries for help (*wa l-baḥr qad aṣmata man istaṣrakha*) [...] The enemy is resolute and the ally[70] is deficient (*al-ʿaduww muḥalliq wa l-walī muqaṣṣir*);[71] in the name of the consideration you possess [from

steadfast – (*kam min fiʾatin qalīlatin ghalabat fiʾatan kathīratan bi-idhni llāh wa llāh maʿa l-ṣābirīn*)" trans. Pickthall, *Holy Qurʾān*, 45.

66 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:358.

67 This evocation is nevertheless much less extensive than the description that takes up several pages in the letter written in the name of Abū l-Ḥajjāj's son and successor, al-Ghanī billāh; see above.

68 For more on this battle, see Lings, *Le prophète Muhammad*, 243–253.

69 For more on the Arab conquest of Spain, see Guichard, "La conquête arabe de l'Espagne", 377–389; on the existence of Arab scholars in al-Andalus during the second/eighth century, often alongside early military settlements, and on the Islamisation of al-Andalus in general, especially the Algarve, see Marín, "À l'extrémité de l'Islam médiéval", 361–381.

70 *Walī* is here intended to mean the ally from whom one awaits aid; for more on the vast semantic field covered by the root w.l.y., see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, 15:281–5.

71 Apparently Ibn al-Khaṭīb is playing on the two senses of *ḥallaqa* and *qaṣṣara*: the first meaning that comes to mind is that of the bird of prey circling in the sky (*ḥallaqa*) before

> God], we reject [a yoke] that overwhelms our forces, and thanks to your care we tend those whose religion has weakened, that they might recover [their belief]; do not abandon us, do not neglect us; invoke your Lord for us: "Our Lord! Impose not on us that which we have not the strength to bear" (Q 2:286). Your protection suffices to preserve the safety of groups that belong to your community; has not your Lord said: "But Allah would not punish them while thou wast with them" (Q 8:33)?[72]

After having initially spoken of the great feats of arms accomplished by Muslim forces under the Naṣrid banner (since *jihād* remains one of the fundamental duties of a sovereign, and the seal of his legitimacy), the admission of impotence in the final plea, and the Sultan's confession that he is not up to accomplishing this duty in the defence of Islam, read more like a common and current motif in prayers on the Prophet, not necessarily to be taken literally. In any case, such avowals would reinforce the image of a pious, magnanimous, and valiant ruler, who humbly recognises his own limitations, even his failures, and who faces overwhelming forces: an external enemy and the wavering faith of his own people. All of these elements would be likely to inspire sympathy and help from Islam – such help as was cruelly lacking for the Naṣrid.

With regard to the theme of the presence of the Prophet, the verse Ibn al-Khaṭīb chooses to quote is significant: the bonds between the Prophet and his community have not been broken by the former's death and disappearance from the stage of history; he lives on in and through his community, and

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diving onto prey that is powerless (*muqaṣṣir*) or not doing enough to save itself. The second meaning relates to a well-known episode in the *sīra*; according to Abrahamic tradition, pilgrims who had consecrated animals to sacrifice were obliged to perform the sacrifice within the sacred territories, and then to shave their heads. After the signing of the treaty of Ḥudaybiyya with the Qurayshis, which prevented believers from accomplishing the pilgrimage until the following year, the Prophet commanded them to sacrifice their animals and shave their heads. The believers were disappointed at having to skip the pilgrimage for a year and break the Abrahamic ritual, and did not obey. Later, they did follow the Prophet's example – except for a few, who only cut a few strands of their hair (*qaṣṣarū*). The Prophet is said to have invoked God: "O Allāh, have mercy on those who have themselves shaved." (*Allāhumma irḥam al-muḥalliqīn*); He repeated this *du'ā'* three times, despite the protestations of those who had only cut a few strands of hair; on the fourth repetition he added, "and on those who clip their hair!" Later, when he was asked why he had initially invoked pity only for the *muḥalliqīn*, he replied: "because they did not doubt!" Ibn al-Khaṭīb, in using these two words, almost certainly wants to refer to this episode and say that the enemy is resolute and the Muslims are in a state of doubt; for more on this episode in the *sīra*, see Lings, *Le prophète Muhammad*, 416–7.

72 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:360. For English translations of verses, see Pickthall, *Holy Qur'ān*, 54 and 200.

his bodily and/or his spiritual heirs, in particular, perpetuate the Prophetic charisma.[73] According to one exegesis of the verse cited (Q 8:33), and the one that follows it, "*wa mā kāna muʿadhdhibahum wa hum yastaghfirūn*" (Nor will He punish them while they seek forgiveness),[74] the Prophet said, on the subject of these verses and the two conditions that preserve Muslims[75] from God's punishment, "Allah sent down two guarantees of safety for the benefit of my Umma (*anzala Allāh ʿalayya amānayn li-ummatī*). So when I pass, I leave seeking forgiveness among them until the Day of Resurrection."[76] From this point we can address the genuinely eschatological dimension of this letter.

4.3 Tawassul *in This World and Intercession in the Hereafter*

Tawassul (the invocation of God through the mediation of the Prophet) is very present in this letter, confirming what we have observed in other written production: the *istighātha* (call for succour) addressed to the Prophet is required as much for "worldly" issues as for eschatological reasons. The Prophet's mediation may be sought in order to confront community enemies whose power is crushingly superior, to whip up tired and sore souls and wake them from their lethargy, or to "heal sick hearts" (isn't he called "the doctor of hearts", *ṭabīb adwāʾ al-qulūb*?); however, he can also be asked to intercede for the Day of Counting, of which this letter shows great awareness, evoking certain episodes from the Last Judgement as well as the eschatological figure of the Prophet; the letter contains no fewer than eight occurrences of eschatological themes.

Initially these motifs appear with regard to the collective: the Prophet is called *shafīʿ arbāb al-dhunūb* (the intercessor for human beings weighed down with sins); he carries the unfolded banner on the Day of Resurrection (*ṣāḥib al-liwāʾ al-manshūr yawm al-nushūr*); he is the answered intercessor – literally the one whose intercession is received – on the Day of Facing God (*al-shafīʿ al-mushaffaʿ yawma l-ʿArḍ*);[77] his is the most certain assistance on the Day of Great Fear (*al-mafzaʿ al-amnaʿ yawm al-fazaʿ al-akbar*). All of these episodes (the resurrection, the great gathering *al-ḥashr*, the presentation in ranks before God, *yawm al-ʿArḍ*) are part of the "events" of the Last Judgement, affecting the

73 See Gril, "Prophétie et charisme en islam", 27–36.

74 Trans. Pickthall, *Holy Qurʾān*, 200.

75 And not only the Meccan Qurayshis who, according to the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (context of revelation) were the original addressees: see Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2:372.

76 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2:372.

77 *Al-ʿarḍ*, on the Day of Last Judgement, also refers to the idea of an examination of man by God, as in Q 18:48, "And they are set before thy Lord in ranks" (trans. Pickthall, *Holy Qurʾān*, 331) (*wa ʿuriḍū ʿalā Rabbika ṣaffan*).

collective fate of all the dead.[78] Another element is the calling and appearance of individuals before God, to be questioned (*al-musā'ala* or *al-su'āl*) and have their actions weighed in the balance (*al-mīzān*) according to the books or registers (*al-dawāwīn*) in which the sins and merits of each are noted;[79] all of these episodes relate to the fate of the individual. However, according to a Prophetic tradition, from the moment of the opening of each one book (and according to whether the human being receives his book into his right or his left hand, Q 17:71), and when he is crossing the bridge (*al-ṣirāṭ*), each human being is entirely alone. At this stage, the Prophet cannot help even his own People.[80] Nevertheless, the letter solicits the intercession of the Prophet for the Naṣrid: "My God, accord me the assistance of his intercession on the day I take up my book (*Tadāraknī bi-shafā'atihi yawma akhdhi kitābī*)",[81] referring to Q 17:13–14 ("and We shall bring forth for him on the Day of Resurrection a book which he will find wide open. Read thy Book. Thy soul sufficeth as reckoner against thee this day"). His prestigious descent from the *Anṣār* via his ancestor Sa'd b. 'Ubāda, mentioned a few lines further down, is what gives the Naṣrīd sultan this right and this privilege with the Prophet: "By my genealogy, which goes back to the eldest of your Auxiliaries, Sa'd [b. 'Ubāda], I benefit from recourse to privileged and manifest favour from you (*fa-lī bi-ntisābī ilā Sa'd, 'amīdi anṣārika, maziyya wa wasīla athīra khafīya*)".[82] Even the terms used to present the Naṣrid bear witness to this genuinely eschatological dimension: *'atīq shafā'atihi*, the one who is freed [from fire] through the Prophet's intercession – this refers to a tradition from the *Ṣiḥāḥ* (canonical collections),[83] according to which at the Last Judgement all the prophets from Adam onwards will recuse themselves from intercession, and it will revert to Muḥammad. By virtue of this tradition, the Prophet obtains from God the ability to deliver sinners "in whose hearts there is faith even to the lightest, lightest mustard seed" from the fires of Gehenna.

78 Amri, *Les saints en islam*, 53–56.

79 Amri, *Les saints en islam*, 55.

80 Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, vol. VI, fasc. 16:43, cited in Amri, *Les saints en islam*, 55–6.

81 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:359.

82 On the etymology of the word *khafā*: to manifest, make apparent or extract (*khafaytu: aẓhartu*), see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, 5:116–8.

83 Notably for Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, 9:149–150 and 160–161 (these *ḥadīth*s are, respectively, numbers 7440 and 7510).

4.4 *Prophetic Heritage and Its Mobilisation*

Without going into too much detail about Naṣrid genealogy, let us just remain aware that genealogists and chroniclers, including Ibn al-Khaṭīb,[84] ascribe to them a descent from Qays b. Saʿd b. ʿUbāda al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī al-Sāʿidī al-Madanī, the chief of the Khazraj (*sayyid al-Anṣār*) in Yathrib, to whom al-Dhahabī attributes the titles of *Sayyid* and *sharīf*.[85] The letter underlines this prophetic heritage twice.[86] There is an abundant literature on the merits of the *Anṣār* (*faḍā'il al-Anṣār*), who are mentioned in the Qurʾān (for example, Q 8:72, 8:74 and 59:9) and in traditions.[87] The Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* that followed both praised the merits of the *Anṣār*,[88] "the Auxiliaries of Allah and His Envoy (*Anṣār Allāh wa Anṣār rasūlihi*):" they are "those who took in [those who believed and left their homes and strove for the cause of Allah] and helped them", and who, along with the Émigrés, fought in the path of God, "these are the believers in truth" (Q 8:74), an idea that is re-stated in a *ḥadīth* we have already mentioned;[89] a variant of this *ḥadīth* reported by Anas b. Mālik has the Prophet saying: "The very sign of faith (*Āyat al-īmān*) is love for the *Anṣār*; to detest them is a sign of hypocrisy." When, in the Qurʾān, the Banū Naḍīr depart and the Prophet distributes their lands to the Émigrés, the selfless friendship of the *Anṣār* for the Émigrés is praised: "Who love those who flee unto them for refuge and find in their breasts no need for that which hath been given

84 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Lamḥa al-badriyya*, 57.

85 Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 1:270–9. According to the *sīra*, when the Prophet went on an expedition the first person designated among his Companions to take on the responsibility for Medina in his absence was the Khazrajī leader, Saʿd b. ʿUbāda (Lings, *Le Prophète Muhammad*, 226); on the day of the conquest of Mecca the Prophet had given him his standard; this was carried by his son Qays (*ibid.* 488). After the death of the Prophet, the *Anṣār* (both Aws and Khazraj) who were in the *Saqīfat* Banū Sāʿida, a clan directed by Saʿd, were about to swear allegiance to Saʿd; the latter refused his allegiance to Abū Bakr, and again, later, to the second Caliph, ʿUmar; he left Medina for Syria, where he died in Ḥawrān in 14/635 or 16/637, Lings, *Le Prophète Muhammad*, 560–1 and Dhahabî, *Siyar*, 1:277 and 279.

86 If we look at both the poem and the prose letter that follows it.

87 See the *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet about the Anṣār and reported by Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ, Bāb ḥubb al-Anṣār*, 5:39–40, according to Al-Barāʾ b. ʿĀzib: "No one loves them except a believer and no one hates them except a hypocrite. Allah loves whoever loves them and hates whoever hates them."

88 See the book composed by the Andalusian *qāḍī* Abū Bakr ʿAtīq b. al-Firāʾ al-Ghassānī al-Andalusī (d. 698/1298), *Nuzhat al-abṣār fī faḍā'il al-Anṣār*.

89 Indeed, the canonical collections in the *Kitāb al-īmān* (the Book of faith), devote a section (*bāb*) to the *Anṣār* and the love that is due to them as an article of faith; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-īmān, Bāb al-dalīl ʿalā anna ḥubb al-Anṣār wa ʿAlī min al-īmān*; Bukhārī, in his *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-īmān, Bāb ʿalāmat al-īmān ḥubb al-Anṣār*. Elsewhere the latter devotes a section to the Anṣār "titles of glory": *Bāb Manāqib al-Anṣār*, and to the merits of the role they played (*Bāb faḍl dawr al-Anṣār*).

them, but prefer [them] above themselves though poverty become their lot" (Q 59:9). After the battle of Ḥunayn, the Auxiliaries who resented their modest booty in comparison to that lavished by the Prophet on Qurayshi chiefs and other tribes (in order to win them over to Islam) are said, according to a tradition recorded in the canonical collections, to have been comforted thus: "Is it not enough for you, Oh Auxiliaries, while these people take away sheep and camels, that you take God's Envoy with you to your homes? If every human except the Auxiliaries took one path and the Auxiliaries took another, I would take the Auxiliaries' path. May God have mercy on the Auxiliaries, on their sons and the sons of their sons!"[90] According to another, clearly eschatological, *ḥadīth*, which is considered authentic, the Prophet addressed the *Anṣār* as follows: "Arm yourselves with patience in order to meet me again at the Basin (*al-ḥawḍ*)."[91]

Ibn al-Khaṭīb's reference to his monarch's Prophetic heritage would be inherently supportive of the claims of the Naṣrids, especially Yūsuf, to the title of Caliph, and affirm the latter's religious and political authority;[92] the text of the inscription on the funeral stele of Sultan Yūsuf, which was also written by Ibn al-Khaṭīb, assigns to his grandfather, Abū Saʿd Faraj b. Ismāʿīl ibn Naṣr, the

90 This tradition is considered authentic; one version is to be found in Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 5:38. Another *ḥadīth* is also attributed to the Prophet: "May God forgive the Anṣār, their sons and the sons of their sons", *Allāhumma ighfir li-al-Anṣār wa abnāʾ al-Anṣār wa abnāʾ abnāʾ al-Anṣār* (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Bāb faḍāʾil al-Anṣār, ḥadīth* 2506).

91 Bukhārī, Saḥīḥ, *Bāb Manāqib al-Anṣār*, 5:41, *Bāb qawl al-nabī* [...] *li-al-Anṣār : iṣbirū ḥattā talqawnī ʿalā al-ḥawḍ*.

92 For more on this claim, see the above-cited article by Dejugnat: "María-Jesús Rubiera has recently demonstrated that the Naṣrids laid claim to the title of Caliph. Yūsuf I does indeed have a Caliphian honorific name (*laqab*), with *bi-llāh*, *Muʿayyad bi-llāh*, and his official pangyrists, Ibn al-Jayyāb and Ibn al-Khaṭīb, call him Caliph with a noticeable frequency, although they never accord him the official titles of 'Lieutenant of God's messenger' (*khalīfat rasūl Allāh*) or 'Commander of the faithful' (*amīr al-Muʾminīn*) [only referring to him as *Amīr al-Muslimīn*]. [...] According to María-Jesús Rubiera, the Naṣrids lay claim to the Caliphate from the time of Ismāʿīl I (r. 1314–1325). In any case, the use of this claim was mostly internal, or even private, in that it would not have done to rub the Marīnids the wrong way, since they were a vital source of support for the kingdom in the face of the Christians, and they also laid claim to the Caliphal title."; see also Rubiera Mata, "El Califato Nazārī", 293–305. Let us also recall that before the Marīnids and Naṣrids, one of the Ḥafṣids of Tunis, *al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh* (r. 647–675/1249–1277), the son of the dynasty's founder Emir Abū Zakariyāʾ, had pronounced himself Caliph (he took on the Caliphal name of the Abbasid Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr, d. 640/1242) and received his Ḥijāz *bayʿa* as brought by the Sufi Ibn Sabʿīn in 655/1257, and from al-Andalus; Tunis became, for a time, the capital of the Caliphate; "such competition between capitals to occupy the centre of the world" (Dejugnat "La mer, miroir de la légitimité") would be extended to Fez and Granada.

attribute of *Kabīr al-khilāfa al-Naṣrìyya* (the Senior of the Naṣrid Caliphate).[93] The claim to the title of Caliph assumes full significance when seen from an eschatological perspective and in the context of a war with Christian kingdoms and *jihād* at the frontiers of the *Dār al-Islam*, which it is a sovereign's duty to pursue. By virtue of the above-cited traditions, such noble descent provides the assurance of salvation; on the Sultan's funerary stele Ibn al-Khaṭīb also invokes God, that He might "welcome him to Paradise by the side of his ancestor Sa'd b. 'Ubāda [...] and resuscitate him with his forefathers, the Anṣār, thanks to whom He brought about the triumph of the faith and saved them from the Fire".[94]

4.5 *The Living Presence of the Prophet and the Intimate Love Shared with Him*

This letter also merits attention to its quasi-private dimension, to which the epistolary genre lends itself. Here our author gives free reign to an outpouring [of love] and describes an intimate relationship with the Prophet Muḥammad, one that has echoes of Muḥammad's relationship with his Companions.[95] This participation in the Prophet's life, and this desire for communion with the Prophet, also appears in the evocation of the most intimate part of the spiritual and divine experience of the Envoy himself, his conversations with the Archangel Gabriel. Before stating the nominal identity of the letter's sender (Sultan Abū l-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf), Ibn al-Khaṭīb expresses a series of attitudes, credos, ways of being, and above all facts and gestures, drawn from daily life, that are signs not only of the living presence of the Prophet, but also of this quasi-intimate relationship with him, a relationship in which love plays a big part:

> On behalf of the one [Sultan Yūsuf] who is freed [from the fire] thanks to his [the Prophet's] intercession (*'atīq shafā'atihi*), slave of obedience [to the Prophet's prescriptions] (*'abd ṭā'atihi*), firmly attached to him; from the one who believes in God and then in him, find in his invocation a remedy for his suffering (*al-mustashfī bi-dhikrihi kullamā ta'allama*), bring down the divine blessings on him each time he speaks, and, if he [the Prophet] is mentioned in front of him [Sultan Yūsuf], he pictures his appearance, among his Companions and the People of his House. If a scented breeze blows, he [Sultan Yūsuf] thinks it the scent of his [the Prophet's] friendship, and if he hears the call to prayer he remembers the

93 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Lamḥa al-badrìyya*, 136.
94 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Lamḥa al-badrìyya*, 136.
95 Gril, "Comme s'il y avait des oiseaux sur leur tête" 25–40.

> voice of his muezzin [Bilāl], and if the Qurʾān is recited [he] pictures Jibrīl seeking him [the Prophet] in the places he was wont to go, or that were familiar to him (*bayna maʿāhidihi wa khilālihi*); he [Yūsuf] embraces the earth [that shelters the Prophet's remains] (*lāthim turbihi*)[96] and hopes for his proximity (*muʾammil qurbihi*); he is a hostage to obedience [to the Prophet's injunctions] and to his love [for the Prophet] (*rahīn ṭāʿatihi wa ḥubbihi*), and invokes divine consent by his mediation (*al-mutawassil bihi ilā riḍā llāh Rabbihi*), Yūsuf b. Ismāʿīl b. Naṣr.[97]

Love for the Prophet is very present in this letter, on the individual and the collective level. Love for his person "replaces breath for souls" (*wa jarā fī l-nufūs majrā l-anfās ḥubbuhu*),[98] and is also consubstantial with Muḥammad's community; this love itself is also inscribed in a soteriological finality, as expressed in the terms of this invocation addressed to God in the Naṣrīd's name:

> You brought me forth in his *umma* whose substance and primary nature are love [of the Prophet] (*al-majbūla ʿalā ḥubbihi l-maftūra*); You increased my desire to visit the places that are sanctified by his presence and You gave my tongue the task of praying on him (*wa wakkalta lisānī bi-l-ṣalāt ʿalayhi*), and my heart a yearning for his *ziyāra* […]. Do not break the cord that attaches me to him, do not deprive me of the rewards of his love, and grant me his intercession on the Day I receive my book.[99]

In a similar way, the familial metaphors very often used about the Prophet surface here, too, notably his representation as a father whose compassion and mercy would "melt the souls of the fathers in commiseration" (*law kāna li-l-ābāʾi raḥmatu qalbihi, dhābat nufūsuhum ishfāqan*).[100]

4.6 *Before the Tomb of the Prophet: Letter and Ziyāra*

"I have mandated it to fly to you on the wings of my ardent desire" (*istanabtu ruqʿatī hādhihi li-taṭīra ilayka min shawqī bi-janāḥin khāfiqin*), writes Ibn al-Khaṭīb in the name of his king. He has this missive make all the gestures

96 See this verse from the *Burda* by al-Būṣīrī, "no perfume is sweeter than the earth that shelters his remains; happy is he who breaths its odour and rubs his face in it" (*lā-ṭība yaʿdilu turban ḍamma aʿẓumahu/ṭūbā li-muntashiqin minhu wa multathimi*), this is the equivalent of embracing it, *lathima*, commentators add: Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Shifāʾ al-qalb al-jarīḥ*, 163; for another commentary on this verse, see Ibn Marzūq, *Iẓhār ṣidq al-mawwadda*, 1:288–91.

97 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:357.

98 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:356.

99 Or book drawing up the accounts on the Day of Judgement; Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:359.

100 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:356.

of humility and devotion he would himself have made on a *ziyāra*, gestures laden with a powerful emotional burden and with a quest for a "physical" contact; they express both veneration and love: "rubbing one's cheek against" (*wa tuʿaffiru al-khadda fī turbika wa tumarrigh*) the earth sheltering the Prophet's remains.[101] He tasks the letter with transmitting his grievances (*fa-tuʾaddī ʿan ʿabdika wa tuballigh*),[102] reciting a series of invocations addressed directly to the Prophet, in his roles as "succour for his community" (*ghiyāth al-umma*) and "cloud of mercy" (*wa ghamām al-raḥma*), that the Prophet might pity the writer's *ghurba* (exile) and *inqiṭāʿ* (isolation);[103] if the first word (*ghurba*) seems once more to refer to the origins of the Naṣrid, that go back to the *Anṣārs* of Medina, the second (*inqiṭāʿ*), following and emphasising the word *ghurba*, signifies the rupture of the sender's ties with his people, and his isolation.[104] He also asks the Prophet to approve this delegation or "mandating" of the letter (*qābil bi-l-qabūl niyābatī*).

5 Conclusion

Love and profound veneration for the Prophet are largely considered to be unvarying; however, letters addressed to him may rightly be seen as an expression of the specifically Muḥammadian devotion that developed from the sixth/twelfth century, and became widespread during the seventh/thirteenth century; the profoundly uncertain circumstances in the Sultanate of Granada in the eighth/fourteenth century served to emphasise the Prophetic figure of succour, protection, and intercession in difficult times. When Ibn al-Khaṭīb was writing, such letters addressed to the Prophet from this part of the Muslim world were, through their common themes and even in the organisation of their discourse, already a veritable genre, one from which our author drew much inspiration and that, specifics aside, remained very consistent.

Yet if we put the letter composed in the name of the Naṣrid Yūsuf I back into the context of other missives addressed to the Prophet, just such specifics do appear. Ibn al-Khaṭīb's epistle was written at a difficult time, in the name of a sovereign who was at war with Christian kingdoms, and while the Muslim side seemed demoralised, weakened by divisions and contradictions. This mood is perceptible in the text of Ibn al-Khaṭīb's letter, which contains themes that

101 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:359.

102 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:359.

103 Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, 6:359.

104 "One says of the stranger in a country that he is cut off from his relations, so is he dissociated from them" (*uqṭiʿa ʿan ahlihi iqṭāʿan fa-huwa muqṭaʿun ʿan ahlihi wa munqaṭiʿ*), Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, 12:140.

are absent in its predecessors; here *jihād* is simultaneously: an obstacle to the accomplishment of *ziyāra* at the Prophet's tomb; a destiny that is inscribed in a Prophetic history of which the Sultan is at once the depositary and the heir; a title to glory in the service of Islam and its Prophet – reinforcing the legitimacy of its possessor when he exercises this right – and, finally, an object of *istighātha* (a request for succour) addressed to the Prophet. What's more, a certain image of the monarch is fashioned here: he is pious, humble and magnanimous; jealous of his territorial sovereignty and of the integrity of the *Dār al-Islām*; a worthy continuer of the acts of his pious predecessors, and a king whose love and respect for the Prophet are at the centre of his piety, his daily life, and his hopes. The Prophetic heritage claimed by the author for the Naṣrid, especially in a context of *jihād*, reveals the importance that is henceforth accorded to a spiritual or physical link with the Prophet: this will act as a guarantee at once of *baraka*, of salvation, of legitimacy, and of participation in a sacred history, that of the Prophet and his Companions. This being said, and despite the fact that this letter was composed on behalf of a monarch, the individual and personal dimension that is very present in letters such as those of Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ or Ibn al-Jannān is no less important here: Ibn al-Khaṭīb gives his sensibility and emotions free reign, along with his complaints and his outpourings that are often lyrical and always marked by a tone of great sincerity. One cannot help but think that here, screened by his prince, it is the individual man, Ibn al-Khaṭīb, who is expressing himself, and thus offering us much insight into his perception of the Prophet's interior reality and the sacredness of his person, as well as into his own love for the Prophet and faith in his assistance here below, and his intercession in the next world. Couldn't one compare these representations, which our author shares with his predecessors, with the manifestations of devotion to the person of the Prophet and to the figure or figures of the Prophet that were in general circulation in the scholarly and Sufi circles of eighth/fourteenth century Granada? All of this is part of what one can henceforth consider to be a genuine and growing "Prophetic culture", nourished by a literature centred on the Prophet that, starting with Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ's *Shifāʾ* and amplified in all the prophetology that followed, takes its doctrinal form in the writings of Ibn ʿArabī. This Prophetic culture is profoundly cohesive, crossing social and geographical boundaries and informing the spirituality of mystics, scholars and humble pious people alike. Researchers become accustomed to considering the manifestations of piety, empathy and emotion that this veneration brings forth to be particular to a "popular" Islam, so-called; in fact, these manifestations are common to the masses and the élites.

The interpretation of such letters in the light of the debate concerning Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 728/1328) writings on the *ziyāra*, the contested authenticity of

the *ḥadīth* on the visit to the Prophet's tomb, and the Damascene jurist's opposition to the practice of the *istighātha*,[105] demonstrates that in the Maghrib the *ziyāra* at the Prophet's tomb, the writing of letters addressed to the Prophet, and the practice of *tawassul* and *istighātha* were widespread, among the people as among jurists and Māliki scholars of the best tradition.

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105 A debate that led Subkī (d. 756/1355) to write his *Shifā' al-sīqām fī ziyārat khayr al-anām*; Hamidoune, "La pratique de la 'prière sur le Prophète'", 54.

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13

Les poèmes d'éloge du Prophète de Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khāṭīb (713-776/1313-1374 ou 75)

Brigitte Foulon

Dès le début de la prédication coranique, le Prophète Muḥammad a été loué par les poètes qui avaient pris fait et cause pour la religion naissante. Le plus célèbre de ces laudateurs est sans nul doute Ḥassān b. Thābit[1], qui avait déjà acquis une grande renommée de panégyriste avant l'islam, notamment auprès des rois lakhmides et ghassānides. Kaʿb b. Zuhayr[2], descendant d'une famille s'étant illustrée par la poésie durant la *Jāhiliyya*, se distingua aussi dans ce domaine. Sa célèbre *qaṣīda*, *Bānat Suʿād*, première d'une série de *Mantle odes*, pour reprendre l'expression de Susanne Pinckney Stetkevych, fut composée alors qu'il était menacé de mort après avoir satirisé le Prophète. Cette première *Burda*, qui relève du sous-genre « poème d'excuses » (*iʿtidhāriyya*) et s'inspire de la célèbre *qaṣīda* d'al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī[3] adressée au roi lakhmide al-Nuʿmān[4], met l'accent sur les qualités guerrières du Prophète en l'assimilant à un lion féroce. Elle respecte totalement la structure tripartite des poèmes antéislamiques en faisant précéder l'éloge (le *gharaḍ* du poème) par un *nasīb* et un *raḥīl*.

Après la mort du Prophète, le panégyrique du Prophète (*madīḥ nabawī*) entama une longue évolution et ne fut guère fixé avant la période post-classique[5]. Les *madāʾiḥ* composés durant la période classique virent essentiellement le jour dans le cadre de la poésie d'éloge shīʿite, centrée autour des figures de ʿAlī et des *ahl al-bayt*. Certaines caractéristiques de ces compositions shīʿites annoncent déjà les textes de la période ultérieure. C'est le cas des thèmes de supplication et des demandes d'intercession, ou encore du ton hautement émotif, associé à un degré de lyrisme traduisant une dévotion personnelle, qui deviendra la

1 Mort autour de 40/660. Voir ʿArafāt, "Ḥassān b. Thābit". Voir aussi Monroe, *The Poetry*, 368-373.

2 Voir Basset, "Kaʿb b. Zuhayr" ; Stetkevych Pinckney, *The Mantle odes*, en particulier le chapitre 1 : "Kaʿb Ibn Zuhayr and the Mantle of the Prophet" 1-69 et Stetkevych Pinckney, "Pre-Islamic Panegyric" 1-49.

3 Poète préislamique, voir Arazi, "al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī".

4 Cette célèbre *dāliyya* fut intégrée par certains anthologues parmi les *Muʿallaqāt*.

5 Voir Zakī, *Al-Madāʾiḥ al-nabawiyya*, et Zwettler, *The Poet and the Prophet*, 313-387.

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règle dans les poèmes post-classiques. Du point de vue stylistique, ces derniers se caractérisent par un emploi intensif du *badīʿ* associé, depuis l'âge classique, à l'hégémonie religieuse, culturelle et politique de l'islam. L'exemple le plus emblématique de cette production relativement tardive est sans nul doute le poème communément dénommé la *Burda* de Sharaf al-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Saʿīd al-Būṣīrī[6] (m. 694-96/1294-97)[7]. Suzanne P. Stetkevych a montré que l'éloge du Prophète puisait à diverses sources religieuses : le Coran, la *Sīra*, le *ḥadīth* et notamment les *Shamāʾil* de Tirmidhī (m. 278/892) réunissant des traditions sur les qualités physiques et morales du Prophète. S'y ajoute le concept de Lumière muḥammadienne, développé plus tard sous le nom de Réalité muḥammadienne (*al-ḥaqīqa l-muḥammadiyya*) à l'origine du monde, tout comme le Prophète, "Sceau des prophètes," intercède pour les hommes lors du Jugement dernier.

Toutefois, nombre d'éléments de ces éloges proviennent aussi de la tradition du *madīḥ* de cour existant depuis la *Jāhiliyya*. Poétisés et non narrativisés, tous ces éléments servent dans le cadre de la polémique contre les ennemis de l'islam. On assiste donc, selon cette chercheuse à une transformation d'une présentation prosaïque, historique et narrative en mythisation qui confère à ces matériaux une dimension métaphysique et métahistorique, cosmique et mythique.

Dans l'Occident musulman, le genre ne fut guère cultivé avant le VI^e^/XII^e^ siècle, même si la *sīra* du Prophète suscita l'intérêt des Andalous. Deux ouvrages furent d'une importance déterminante pour son développement : *al-Shifāʾ fī l-taʿrīf bi-ḥuqūq l-Muṣṭafā*, du Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ b. Mūsā (m. 544/1149) et le *Rawḍ al-unuf*, glose de la *sīra* d'Ibn Hishām, d'Abū Zayd ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Suhaylī (m. 581/1185). Selon Maḥmūd Makkī, qui a retracé la genèse de ce genre poétique dans cette partie du Dār al-islām[8], les premiers *madāʾiḥ nabawīya* andalous auraient été l'œuvre d'Ibn al-Sayyid al-Baṭalyawsī (m. 521/1127), mais c'est surtout Muḥammad b. Masʿūd b. Abī l-Khiṣāl[9] (m. 540/1146) qui, avec un poème de 366 vers intitulé : *Miʿrāj al-manāqib wa-minhāj al-ḥasab al-thāqib*, aurait donné un élan décisif à ce genre[10]. Ces poèmes exaltant le

6 Voir "al-Būṣirī" 158-9.

7 Ce poème a fait l'objet d'une étude détaillée de la part de Pinckney Stetkevych, dans le chapitre 2 ("al-Buṣīrī and the dream of the Mantle") de son ouvrage *The Mantle odes*, 70-150.

8 Makkī, *al-madāʾiḥ al-nabawīya*.

9 Juriste, traditionniste et lettré andalou, mort en 540/1146.

10 Ce poème évoque la généalogie du Prophète, sa biographie, les miracles qui lui sont attribués et les vertus de ses compagnons. Il est reproduit par Maqqarī dans *Azhār al-riyāḍ*, avec le *takhmīs* composé par Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Mursī (m. après

voyage mystique sur la route du pèlerinage furent particulièrement populaires en al-Andalus. Makkī mentionne également les compositions de Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Jannān al-Mursī (m. 646/1248), qui dut quitter Murcie pour Ceuta en 640, avant de s'établir à Bougie, ainsi que les compositions d'Ibrāhīm b. Sahl al-Ishbīlī (m. 649/1251)[11] *takhmīsāt* avec rime en ʿā (*samʿā*).

Il semble probable que ces compositions datant des VI^e^/XII^e^ et VII^e^/XIII^e^ siècles aient profondément influencé les poètes ultérieurs et servi de matrice à leur production sur ce thème, même si, comme nous le verrons, un fait majeur, l'instauration et la généralisation de la célébration de la fête du *Mawlid* en Occident musulman, sera venu entretemps enrichir la thématique des poèmes d'éloge au Prophète[12].

Notre étude se propose de se pencher sur les poèmes dédiés au Prophète (*nabawiyyāt* ou *madāʾiḥ nabawiyya*) composés par le célèbre polygraphe grenadin de l'époque naṣride Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khāṭīb (713-76/1313-74 ou 75)[13] qui, pour certains, relèvent du sous-genre *mawlidiyyāt*. Nous procèderons à l'analyse de trois *qaṣīda*-s emblématiques de cette veine[14] : une *dāliyya* de 82 vers[15], une *ḥāʾiyya* de 39 vers[16] et une *bāʾiyya* de 54 vers[17].

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679) (Maqqarī, *Azhār al-riyāḍ*, 5 : 173-249). Sur L'auteur, Ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl, voir Maqqarī, *Azhār al-riyāḍ*, 5 : 167-172. Celui-ci est aussi l'auteur de poèmes intitulés *al-nabawiyyāt* ainsi que de cinq thrènes du Prophète pastichant ceux de Ḥassān b. Thābit.

11 Deux de ses *qaṣīda*s, en particulier, s'inscrivent dans ce genre. Chacune d'entre elles comprend 30 vers. La première est construite sur le mètre *ṭawīl* (rime en *ʿā*) et la seconde, composée juste avant la chute de Séville et appelant au *jihād*, sur le mètre *kāmil* (rime en *rī*). Voir Ibn Sahl al-Ishbīlī, *Dīwān*, 207-212, pour la première, et 157-161, pour la seconde. Ibn Sahl est aussi l'auteur d'une *takhmīsa* avec rime en ʿā (*samʿā*) dans la même veine.

12 Voir sur l'histoire de cette célébration : Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet*.

13 Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿīd ibn ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿīd b. ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Salmānī al-Lawshī, plus connu sous le nom de Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb. Voir à son sujet : Vidal-Castro, "Ibn al-Khaṭīb, Lisān al-Dīn" ; Knysh, "Ibn al-Khaṭīb" 358-371 ; Arié, *L'Espagne musulmane* ; du même auteur, "Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb" 69-81 ; Tahtah, *Al-ġurba wa-l-ḥanīn*, 317-341 ; Abbādī, *Muʾallafāt Lisān al-Dīn ibn al-Khaṭīb*, 247-53 ; Rodríguez Gómez, Peláez, and Boloix Gallardo eds. *Saber y poder en al-Andalus* ; Santiago Simón, *El polígrafo granadino Ibn al-Jaṭīb* ; Tiṭwānī, *Ibn al-Khaṭīb*.

14 Il s'agit là d'une première étape de notre recherche et nous souhaitons, à plus long terme, analyser l'ensemble de ces poèmes et les comparer à ceux composés à l'occasion d'autres fêtes rituelles et, plus généralement, aux poèmes dits *sulṭāniyyāt* de l'auteur.

15 Ce poème, sur le mètre *ṭawīl*, figure dans Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-Ṭīb*, 6 : 451-55, dans Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Iḥāṭa*, 4 :392-96 et dans Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Dīwān*, 1 : 345-350.

16 Pour ce poème, sur le mètre *kāmil*, voir : Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-Ṭīb*, 6 : 449-51 ; Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Dīwān*, 1 : 241-44 et *Iḥāṭa*, 4 : 390-392.

17 Pour ce poème, sur le mètre *ṭawīl*, voir Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-Ṭīb*, 6 : 361-63, Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Dīwān*, 1 : 156-59 ; *Iḥāṭa*, 4 : 467-70.

1 Un contexte spécifique

Pour mettre en lumière les enjeux de ces textes, il nous faut en premier lieu évoquer la spécificité du contexte, tant historique que personnel, dans lequel ils virent le jour. Sur le plan historique, d'abord, la période est marquée par l'influence exercée sur le Royaume nasride de Grenade, pour le compte duquel travaillait Ibn al-Khatīb, par la dynastie mérinide[18] (Banū Mārīn), qui règne alors sur le Maroc, et avec laquelle notre auteur entretint des relations très étroites. L'activisme de cette dynastie dans le domaine religieux ne manqua pas, en effet, d'avoir des répercussions sur la production littéraire qui nous occupe.

Dépourvus, au départ, d'une idéologie religieuse, les Mérinides furent confrontés à un problème de légitimité. Pour se démarquer du mahdisme almohade et affirmer leur autonomie par rapport aux Ḥafṣides au pouvoir à Tunis, ils adoptèrent une double stratégie. Ils encouragèrent d'abord le retour en force du malékisme, qui avait été marginalisé par le pouvoir almohade[19]. Dans le même temps, ils introduisirent dans leur état le système des médersas, qui s'était développé dans l'Orient sunnite dès le milieu du Ve/XIe siècle, faisant de ces écoles, toutes officielles et étatiques, les rouages de transmission de leur propagande. Par ailleurs, ils veillèrent particulièrement à la promotion de leur réputation de piété et d'équité et à l'affirmation de leur engagement dans le *jihād*. Poussé par son aspiration au califat, Abū ʿInān (749-759/1348-1358) n'épargna guère ses efforts pour paraître digne de cette institution, allant jusqu'à faire dire à ses biographes qu'il « se comportait envers ses sujets comme le Prophète »[20]. Mais, surtout, ces souverains assurèrent la promotion d'un chérifisme servant leur cause, rompant ainsi avec la vision qui avait été celle des périodes précédentes, durant lesquelles la généalogie chérifienne, toujours associée au Mahdisme, était l'objet d'une suspicion tenace[21]. La chercheuse marocaine Halima Ferhat résume en une formule le tournant pris sous les Mérinides : « c'est la dynastie des Mérinides qui transforme le chérifisme en fond de commerce »[22].

Les sultans mérinides s'inspirèrent en la matière de l'exemple d'Abū l-Qāsim al-ʿAzafī qui s'était révolté contre les Ḥafṣides en 647/1249 à Ceuta en s'appuyant sur le chérifisme, ce qui lui avait permis de fonder une dynastie

18 Cette dynastie commença à régner sur le *Maghrib* occidental (Maroc) à compter du milieu du VIIe/XIIIe siècle. Voir Shatzmiller, "Marīnides".

19 Voir à ce sujet : Kably, *Société, pouvoir et religion*, 279-314, et Buresi et Ghouirgate, *Histoire du Maghreb*.

20 Kably, *Société, pouvoir et religion*, 291.

21 On se souvient qu'Ibn Tūmart revendiquait une généalogie chérifenne.

22 Ferhat, "Chérifisme" 473-482.

qui allait régner durant près d'un siècle sur la ville. Il avait, la même année, instauré la fête du *Mawlid*, jusqu'alors inconnue au Maroc, déclarant vouloir contrer ainsi l'influence des fêtes chrétiennes. Cette alliance avec les chérifs avait aussi tout, semble-t-il, d'une « démarcation idéologique »[23].

Abū l-Qāsim suivait en cela l'exemple de son père, Abū l-ʿAbbās al-ʿAzafī[24], auteur d'un ouvrage, *al-durr al-munaẓẓam fī mawlid al-nabī al-muʿaẓẓam*[25], considéré comme fondateur du culte du Prophète dans la région, mais aussi à visée polémique, puisqu'il s'agissait, avec cette fête du *Mawlid*, de concurrencer le Noël chrétien et d'autres fêtes populaires. Ceuta, qui avait accueilli de nombreux Andalous, était à l'époque un brillant centre de savoir[26]. C'est là qu'avaient été rédigés, dès le XII^e^ siècle, plusieurs ouvrages importants sur le Prophète, dont le très célèbre *Kitāb al-shifāʾ* du Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ que nous avons évoqué plus haut[27].

Pour promouvoir le chérifisme, les Mérinides se tournèrent à plusieurs reprises vers les chérifs du Ḥijāz[28]. Halima Ferhat montre que, suite à ces initiatives, de nombreux chérifs arrivèrent de Médine et d'Irak, qui se virent accorder par le pouvoir, des rentes et des dispenses fiscales. A l'occasion de la fête du *Mawlid*, ces chérifs recevaient de nombreux présents et des vêtements d'apparat. Ainsi, sous Abū ʿInān, chaque chérif percevait une rente annuelle de 100 dinars or[29]. Les souverains finirent néanmoins par s'intéresser davantage aux chérifs du Maroc, qui pouvaient s'intégrer plus facilement au système[30]. Jusqu'au XIV^e^ siècle, les soufis restèrent indifférents à cette promotion des chérifs car, pour eux, le mouvement était « politique et perçu comme tel »[31].

En 691/1292, les Mérinides décrétèrent à leur tour le *Mawlid* fête officielle et publique dans leurs états, prenant en charge l'ensemble des frais afférents à cette célébration. C'est en cette occasion qu'étaient récités les poèmes dits *mawlidiyyāt*, auxquels était intégré un éloge du souverain[32]. On note que, dans toutes ces manifestations, un lien était soigneusement entretenu par

23 Kably, *Société, pouvoir et religion*, 286.

24 Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn Ibn Abī ʿAzafa l-Lakhmī, *amīr* de la ville de Ceuta (m. 633).

25 Voir Fernando De la Granja, "Las fiestas cristianas".

26 Ferhat, "Sabta", Ferhat, *Sabta des origines au XIV^e^ siècle*.

27 M. 544/1149, voir Talbi, "ʿIyāḍ b. Mūsā".

28 Cette ouverture sur le Hedjaz se produisit à deux reprises : en 703/1303 et 736/1335. Voir à ce sujet Kably, *Société, pouvoir et religion*, 110-112 et 292.

29 Ferhat, "Chérifisme" 478-479.

30 Voir Kably, *Société, pouvoir et religion*, 293.

31 Ferhat, "Chérifisme" 480.

32 Voir aussi : Salmi, "Le genre des poèmes de Nativité".

leurs instigateurs avec la célèbre *Burda* d'al-Būṣīrī. Selon Maḥmūd ʿAlī Makkī, c'est au cours du VIII^e^/XIV^e^ siècle que le *Mawlid* devint l'une des fêtes les plus importantes au Maghreb, notamment sous l'égide du sultan Abū Ḥammū Mūsā b. Yūsuf al-Zayyānī[33], roi de Tlemcen, aucun poète ne pouvant alors faire l'impasse sur ce genre de composition.

Le succès de la célébration du *Mawlid* fut très clairement l'un des facteurs de la diffusion du culte du Prophète. Les deux phénomènes, la montée en puissance du chérifisme et la généralisation de la célébration de l'anniversaire de la naissance du Prophète, contribuèrent à ériger le respect et l'amour des *ahl al-bayt* en impératif social.

Cependant, comme l'a montré Halima Ferhat, le développement de ce culte fut aussi favorisé par l'encouragement du pèlerinage à La Mecque[34]. Celui-ci fut, en particulier, impulsé par un homme, Abū Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ[35], vénéré par beaucoup comme un « saint ». Originaire de Safi, il conçut une organisation rigoureuse du voyage vers les Lieux saints à l'intention des pèlerins marocains. La caravane, nommée *rakb al-ḥajj*, partait du *ribāṭ* de Safi. Les pèlerins devaient se conformer à des règles très strictes : port du chapelet, d'une gourde, d'un bâton, psalmodies de prières et de chants durant le voyage. Des étapes étaient prévues tout au long du parcours. Les Maghrébins furent de ce fait de plus en plus nombreux à Médine, et la visite du tombeau devint aussi importante à leurs yeux que le séjour à La Mecque. Cependant, pour tous ceux qui ne pouvaient pas partir, une tradition, remontant, d'après H. Ferhat, au moins aux Almoravides, consistait à envoyer des messages à Médine (dit *ḥijāziyyāt*). Certains de ceux-ci, rédigés par des personnalités de premier ordre, tel le Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, Ibn Abī l-Khiṣāl, Abū l-Qāsim al-ʿAzafī et Ibn Khalas jouissaient d'une grande notoriété. A l'époque naṣride, ces lettres pouvaient prendre la forme de suppliques priant Dieu d'épargner et de sauver le Royaume de Grenade. Ibn al-Khatīb lui-même se plia à cet usage[36].

33 Makkī, *al-madāʾiḥ al-nabawiyya*, 127-128. Membre de la dynastie des Banū ʿAbd al-Wād, il régna entre 760/1359 et 791/1389. Fin lettré, il est lui-même l'auteur de *mawlidiyyāt*, consignées dans son ouvrage *Wāsiṭat al-sulūk*. Makkī cite un passage du *Naẓm al-durar wa-l-ʿiqyān fī bayān sharaf Banī Zayyān*, d'Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Tanasī l-Tilimsānī qui décrit le faste de la fête du *Mawlid* à la cour de ce sultan. Sur cette dynastie, voir Marçais, "ʿAbd al-Wādides".

34 Ferhat, "Le culte du Prophète" 89-97.

35 M. 631/1234. Voir : Gril, "Abū Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ".

36 Voir Addas, *La maison muhammadienne*, 27.

2 Contexte personnel

Si les *madā'iḥ nabawiyya* relèvent de la poésie de circonstance destinée à être déclamée dans le cadre des manifestations officielles, que ce soit à la cour des Nasrides ou à celle des Mérinides, entretenant de ce fait une étroite parenté avec le genre du panégyrique, dans lequel Ibn al-Khaṭīb s'est illustré tout au long de sa vie[37], il n'en reste pas moins que les trois poèmes que nous nous proposons d'analyser portent la marque du contexte personnel dans lequel se trouvait leur auteur au moment de leur composition et du tournant pris par sa vie à cette période. Les trois odes furent, en effet, composées lors de son séjour au Maghreb, entre 760/1360 et 763-4/1363.

Destitué en 1360, le souverain nasride Muḥammad V s'était réfugié à la cour mérinide de Fès[38]. Ibn al-Khaṭīb put bientôt à son tour s'installer au Maroc, où il bénéficia de la protection du Mérinide Abū Sālim Ibrāhīm, qui lui octroya une généreuse pension[39]. Toutefois, plutôt que de rejoindre Fès, il préféra voyager à travers le pays et finit par s'établir à Salé, ville dans laquelle vivaient de nombreux mystiques[40] et où il demeura presque deux ans[41]. Le climat particulier régnant dans cette ville exerça sur lui une forte influence et l'on assista alors à une montée en puissance de sa poésie religieuse[42]. Il s'agit donc là d'une période très importante pour sa production poétique et intellectuelle. Le décès de son épouse (en 762/1361) qui, selon ses biographes, le marqua profondément, accentua encore cette mutation. Ibn al-Khaṭīb ne quitta Salé qu'à regret lorsque, Muḥammad V ayant recouvré son trône (en 763/1362), il fut contraint de le rejoindre à Grenade[43].

37 Comme c'est le cas pour la grande majorité des poètes de l'époque, le panégyrique constitue le genre le plus cultivé par Ibn al-Khaṭīb et occupe la plus grande partie de son *Dīwān*.

38 Sur les détails de ces événements politiques, voir Arié, *L'Espagne musulmane*, 106-118.

39 Cette pension se montait à 500 dinars d'argent mensuels : voir Knysh, "Ibn al-Khaṭīb" 359.

40 Le plus célèbre de ces soufis était à l'époque Ibn ʿĀshir. Voir : Faure, "Ibn ʿĀshir".

41 Voir Ferhat, "Salā". La cité avait été prise par les Castillans en 658/1260 qui l'avaient saccagée en massacrant une partie de la population. Le Mérinide Abū Yūsuf (656-85/1258-86) se porta au secours de la ville et participa à l'édification des remparts qui n'avaient pas été relevés par les Almohades (Voir Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Kitāb al-Bayān*, 418-425 et A. Huici-Miranda, *La Toma de Salé*).

42 La prolifique bibliographie d'Ibn al-Khaṭīb compte un ouvrage partiellement consacré au soufisme : *Rawḍat al-taʿrīf bi-l-ḥubb al-sharīf*. Néanmoins, pour qualifier sa relation à cette mouvance, il faut plutôt parler d'attirance que d'adhésion, l'homme fort de Grenade n'ayant jamais renoncé au faste et aux privilèges de la vie de cour.

43 Voir l'introduction au *Dīwān Ibn al-Khaṭīb* de Muḥammad Miftāḥ.

3 Analyse des trois poèmes

3.1 *Les circonstances de leur composition*

La *ḥā'iyya* n'est pas datée et nous ignorons pour quel souverain elle fut composée. Néanmoins, dans son ouvrage *al-Iḥāṭa fī akhbār Gharnāṭa*, Ibn al-Khaṭīb précise qu'il s'agit de l'une de ses premières compositions sur ce thème (*min awwaliyyāt naẓmī fī dhālika l-gharaḍ*)[44].

La *dāliyya*[45], quant à elle, est présentée dans le *Dīwān* comme une *qaṣīda mīlādiyya* adressée par l'auteur depuis Salé à Fès. Dans *al-Iḥāṭā*[46], une indication supplémentaire est donnée : l'auteur nous informe qu'il a déclamé cette ode devant le « sultan du Maghreb durant la nuit de la célébration de la naissance du Prophète de l'an 763 » (1362)[47]. Le destinataire du poème est le sultan mérinide Abū Sālim Ibrāhīm, qui avait accueilli en exil le souverain nasride Muḥammad V et son vizir après le coup d'état de 760/1359.

Enfin, Lisān al-Dīn précise que la *bā'īya* figurait en tête d'une épître écrite au nom du sultan nasride Muḥammad V al-Ghanī bi-llāh et adressée au mausolée du prophète (*ilā l-ḍarīḥ al-nabawī l-karīm*) en 762[48].

Ces données attestent donc qu'au moins les deux derniers poèmes ont été composés durant le séjour d'Ibn al-Khaṭīb à Salé.

3.2 *Structure des poèmes*

Dans son ouvrage intitulé *The Mantle Odes*[49], Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych distingue deux types de poèmes d'éloge au Prophète : le premier rassemble des odes dites de « supplication », structurées selon le modèle tripartite du panégyrique en vigueur depuis l'Antéislam. Celles-ci se composent d'un *nasīb* permettant au poète d'évoquer une passion profane dont il a décidé de se détourner, d'un *raḥīl* à caractère initiatique marquant la rupture entre les anciennes allégeances du poète et le cheminement vers un nouveau pôle, sorte d'acte de contrition dans lequel le poète exprime les regrets quant à sa conduite passée et sa soumission à un ordre nouveau et, enfin, d'un éloge intimement mêlé à la supplication. Ce type de poème est représenté, en particulier, par les deux célèbres *Burda-s*, celle de Ka'b b. Zuhayr et celle d'al-Būṣīrī que cette chercheuse

44 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Iḥāṭa*, 4 : 390.

45 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Dīwān*, 1 : 345-50.

46 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Iḥāṭa*, 4 : 392.

47 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *al-Iḥāṭa*, 4 : 392, *Anshadtu l-sulṭān malik al-Maghrib laylat al-mīlād al-a'ẓam min 'ām thalāthata wa-sittīn wa-sab'imi'atin hādhihi l-qaṣīda*. On trouve la même précision dans le *Nafḥ*, qui reprend *al-Iḥāṭa*.

48 Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Dīwān*, 1 : 157.

49 S. P. Stetkevych, *The Mantle odes*.

a analysées en détail. Le second type est représenté par les poèmes relevant du courant soufi, dont le meilleur représentant, à l'époque post-classique, est sans aucun doute l'Égyptien Ibn al-Fāriḍ[50]. Ces poèmes de *ghazal* mystique sont d'un bout à l'autre dominés par un lyrisme dévotionnel que l'on peut qualifier de « statique », dans lequel le poète est paralysé par le désir qui le submerge. Ils se caractérisent également, comme l'a montré Jaroslav Stetkevych[51], par une extension du *nasīb* à l'ensemble du poème, la *qaṣīda* prenant alors la forme d'un long *nasīb*[52].

A laquelle de ces deux catégories appartiennent les *madāʾiḥ* d'Ibn al-Khaṭīb sur lesquels nous nous penchons ? Que pouvons-nous dire de leur structure ? Et, d'abord, quelle place y est accordée à l'éloge du Prophète ? Dans la *dāliyya*, celui-ci n'occupe qu'une partie relativement modeste, bien que centrale, se réduisant à une séquence de 17 vers (v. 42-59) sur un total de 82 vers. C'est en outre le seul des trois poèmes à se conclure par un panégyrique de facture classique, adressé au sultan mérinide. Dans la *ḥāʾiyya*, l'éloge du Prophète ne débute qu'au vers 19, tandis que, dans la *bāʾiyya*, les évocations de celui-ci sont disséminées à partir du v. 18[53].

Des trois odes, c'est la *ḥāʾiyya* qui présente la structure se rapprochant le plus de celle, tripartite, de la *qaṣīda* classique. Elle débute en effet par un *nasīb* de 10 vers, de type *ṭalalī*, qui se clôt sur une mise en exergue du nom *manāzil* (« demeures »), particulièrement représentatif de ces prologues focalisés sur l'évocation d'une demeure disparue :

هُنَّ المَنازِلُ ما فُؤادي بَعْدَها سالٍ وَلا وَجْدي بِها بِمُرِيحِ[54]

Commence ensuite la deuxième séquence, que nous pouvons identifier comme un *raḥīl* (v. 11-19). D'emblée, celui-ci est présenté comme imaginé, réalisé uniquement, en pensée (v. 11). Pourtant, dès le vers 13, le poète, qui décrit ce périple nocturne (*suran*) en utilisant des verbes à l'accompli, semble rechercher un effet de réel qui bâriqin les frontières entre rêve et réalité :

وَدُجُنَّةٍ كادتْ تُضِلُّ بِيَ السُرى لَوْ لا وَميضَ بارِقٍ وَصَفيحِ[55]

50 M. 632/1235. Voir Nicholson et Pedersen, "Ibn al-Fāriḍ".

51 Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd*, 89.

52 Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd*, 79-102.

53 Il s'agit des v. 18 et 19, 33, puis 36-54.

54 *Ḥāʾiyya*, v. 10 : "Ce sont les demeures : jamais mon cœur ne pourra se consoler de leur perte ni la passion que j'éprouve pour elles s'apaiser".

55 *Ḥāʾiyya*, v. 13 : "C'était une nuit très sombre et, n'était l'éclat lumineux d'un éclair et de la lame d'une épée, le voyage nocturne aurait pu me faire perdre tous mes repères".

Nous retrouvons, dans cette séquence, quelques uns des motifs les plus fréquemment utilisés pour évoquer le *surā* : le scintillement tremblant des étoiles, comparé à celui de pièces de monnaie dans la main d'un avare (v. 14), l'assimilation de l'obscurité ambiante à une mer sans fond (v. 15) et l'évocation de l'aurore sous la forme d'une main effleurant le visage du matin (v. 16). Ce périple se termine par l'arrivée à Médine, arrivée dont le statut est tout aussi ambigu (v. 19).

Enfin, une troisième et dernière séquence est consacrée à l'éloge du Prophète, séquence dans laquelle, comme nous le verrons, le sujet intervient à plusieurs reprises.

La *ḍāliyya* présente une structure plus complexe. En effet, son *nasīb*, plus long (23 vers), inclut deux micro-récits ayant pour acteurs des éléments naturels et qui détournent un moment le destinataire de l'attention portée au sujet élégiaque. Ibn al-Khaṭīb se conforme ainsi à la tradition poétique andalouse qui substituait régulièrement au *maṭla' ṭalalī* une séquence donnant à voir une scène printanière ou une évocation florale narrativisée.

Le premier micro-récit (v. 2-6) met en scène un éclair et un nuage, tous deux personnifiés. Le premier, du genre masculin (*wamīḍ*), est investi du rôle du séducteur, tandis que le nuage, du genre féminin en arabe (*ghamāma ou baḥriyya*), se voit confier celui de la belle courtisée[56] :

وَميضٌ رأى بُرْدَ الغَمامةِ مُغْفَلاً فَمَدَّ يدًا بِالتِّبْرِ أَعْلَمَتِ البُرْدَ
تَبَسَّمَ في بَحْرِيّةٍ قد تَجَهَّمَتْ فَما بَذَلَتْ وَصْلاً وَلا ضَرَبَتْ وَعْدا
وَراودَ منها فارِكًا قد تَمَنَّعَتْ فأَهْوى لها نَصْلاً وهَدَّدَها رَعْدا
فَأَغْرى بِها كَفَّ الغِلابِ فَأَصبَحَتْ ذَلولاً وَلَمْ تَسْتَطِعْ لِإِمْرَتِهِ رَدّا[57]
فَحُلَّتُها الحَمْراءُ مِنْ شَفَقِ الضُحى نَضاها وَحَلَّ المُزْنُ مِنْ جيدِها عِقْدا[58]

56 C'est la raison pour laquelle nous avons opté, dans notre traduction et pour davantage de lisibilité, pour l'emploi du nom "nue".

57 Ce vers ne figure pas dans l'*Iḥāṭa*.

58 "Voyant le manteau de la nue dépourvu de tout ornement, un scintillant éclair tendit une main poudrée d'or qui marqua le manteau / Il adressa un sourire à une nue renfrognée, mais celle-ci refusa toute union et s'abstint de toute promesse / Il força alors à se donner une épouse pleine de haine qui se refusait à lui, lui décochant une flèche et la menaçant du fracas de son tonnerre / Puis il activa à son encontre la main de la domination qui la rendit docile, incapable de contrer son autorité / Il la dépouilla alors de son vêtement pourpre [taillé] dans le rougeoiement du soleil matinal, tandis que le nuage chargé de pluie dénouait le collier de son cou".

L'entreprise de séduction comporte plusieurs phases ; dans un premier temps, l'éclair tente d'amadouer la nue en brochant d'or son « manteau ». Mais il se heurte à la résistance de la belle qui arbore un visage renfrogné (*tajahhamat*) et ne veut pas entendre parler d'union. La seconde phase de l'entreprise s'apparente à un processus d'intimidation, l'éclair lançant ses flèches sur la récalcitrante et la menaçant de son tonnerre. On passe alors de la séduction à une lutte qui se traduit par une agression et aboutit à la soumission totale de la nuée. La seule façon d'accéder à l'objet de son désir est donc, pour l'éclair, le recours à la violence. Notons que cette méthode est en totale contradiction avec celles de l'amant ʿudhrite, dont les seules armes sont la constance et l'abnégation, et du mystique aspirant à l'union avec son aimé. Le dénouement de cet épisode orageux n'en est pas moins heureux, puisque le substantif *muzn,* qui apparaît dans le dernier vers du passage, indique l'arrivée de la pluie toujours perçue, dans l'imaginaire arabe, comme une bénédiction. Les images déployées dans ces vers font écho aux représentations favorites des poètes paysagers andalous, tel Ibn Khafāja[59], qui utilisait fréquemment le procédé consistant à narrativiser l'arrivée de la pluie.

A partir du vers 7, un second micro-récit prend le relais, dont l'acteur principal est de nouveau un éclair (*barq* et *wamīḍ*). Son éclat est comparé à la lueur d'un briquet allumé par la main d'un veilleur frigorifié. Il s'agit là d'une comparaison qui, avec des variantes, est présente dans la poésie arabe depuis les temps les plus anciens. La scène qui conclut le micro-récit (v. 9-10) nous montre l'averse, déclenchée par l'éclair, métamorphoser la terre en jardin. Elle aussi se situe en droite ligne des représentations paysagères développées par les Andalous et, en particulier, par Ibn Khafāja. Cette fois, c'est le substantif *bilād* qui est utilisé pour nommer la demeure tant aimée par le sujet, terme assez vague pour entretenir, comme nous le verrons, une grande ambiguïté quant à sa nature et à sa localisation[60].

La séquence du *raḥīl* commence au vers 24, avec le participe *murtaḥil* introduit par un *wāw rubba,* dont la fonction consiste à marquer la transition entre deux parties de la *qaṣīda.* Cette fois, et à la différence de la *hāʾiyya* il est clair que le périple est entrepris par d'autres que le sujet, contraint de renoncer à son projet, et qu'il s'agit donc, en quelque sorte, d'un voyage « par procuration ». A partir du vers 38 débute la partie consacrée à l'éloge du Prophète. Cependant, au sein de cet éloge s'insèrent huit vers focalisés sur le sujet. Ceux-ci sont suivis par une courte séquence (4 vers) évoquant la naissance du Prophète. Enfin, le poème se termine par un panégyrique (13 vers) adressé au mérinide Abū

59 Mort 533/1138.
60 *Ḥāʾiyya*, v. 11.

Sālim. La structure de cette *dāliyya* peut donc être qualifiée de quadripartite, puisqu'elle renferme deux éloges, le premier destiné au Prophète et le second au protecteur du poète.

Qu'en est-il, enfin, de la structure de la *bā'iyya* ? Notons d'abord que son *nasīb* est plus bref que celui des deux autres odes (7 vers) et qu'il met avant tout l'accent sur la distance physique séparant le sujet et le lieu auquel celui-ci se sent lié. Ce dernier est désigné par le pluriel *ma'ālim* (« signes », « marques »), autre nom du répertoire *talalī*. Le huitième vers, avec l'entrée en scène du chamelier et de ses bêtes, semble marquer le début du *raḥīl* :

وَيَتْبَعُ آثارَ المَطِيِّ مُشَيِّعًا وَقَدْ زَمْزَمَ الحادي وَحَنَّ نجيبُ[61]

La mention de la caravane de pèlerins (*rikāb al-ḥajj*, v. 10) précise la nature du périple évoqué. Cependant, la suite du poème est un ensemble assez hétéroclite, où alternent les confessions d'un sujet révélant son incapacité à effectuer ce voyage et les invocations du Prophète. Cette spécificité tient sans aucun doute au fait que, comme nous l'avons dit, ce poème constituait l'en-tête d'une lettre rédigée au nom du naṣride *al-Ghanī billāh*, lettre relevant d'un genre ayant notamment comme fonction de compenser l'impossibilité d'accomplir le *ḥajj*. Tout aussi spécifique est la manière dont se conclut le poème, puisque la dernière partie de la *qaṣīda* (v. 38-54) est dédiée à l'évocation des efforts accomplis par le souverain naṣride pour défendre l'islam et réduire ses ennemis.

Les trois poèmes que nous avons sélectionnés présentent donc des structures assez différentes. Un point commun les réunit néanmoins : la multiplicité des interventions du sujet lyrique qui leur confèrent une tonalité particulièrement élégiaque.

3.3 *Deux pôles*

En effet, ces poèmes sont organisés autour de deux pôles, à savoir le sujet lyrique, d'une part, et l'objet de sa dévotion, le Prophète, d'autre part. Or l'espace occupé par le premier s'y avère proportionnellement plus important que celui dévolu au second, au point que l'équilibre entre les deux pôles s'en trouve souvent rompu. Cependant, le sujet mis en place par le poète se caractérise par son caractère foncièrement hétéronome : contrecarré par de nombreux obstacles, il est, comme nous allons le voir, condamné à l'inaction.

Dans un premier temps, nous nous intéresserons aux séquences focalisées sur le pôle « sujet », essentiellement localisées dans la première partie des

61 *Bā'iyya*, v. 8 : "Et il suit les traces des montures brûlant du désir de les rejoindre, [guidé par] les modulations du chamelier et le gémissement de la noble chamelle".

*qaṣīda*s. C'est là aussi que se met en place une atmosphère « arabique », caractéristique du style des *madā'iḥ nabawiyya*.

3.4 *Une atmosphère arabique*

Les éléments paysagers émaillant les trois odes sont, en effet, tous en relation avec un contexte désertique. Et une atmosphère arabique est créée dès les premiers vers. Dans la *dāliyya*, le Najd est cité à deux reprises dans le premier vers (*najdiyyan* et *najdan*). Si, dans la *bā'iyya*, cette atmosphère arabique est plus discrète, la *ḥā'iyya* fait, quant à elle, deux fois référence au parfum de l'armoise du Ḥijāẓ[62] porté par le vent (v. 2 : *shīḥ al-Ḥijāẓ* et v. 3 : *shīḥ*), tandis que le nom *falāt* (v. 3) désigne sans ambiguïté un espace désertique.

L'utilisation de toponymes reliés au pèlerinage constitue, par ailleurs, un signe d'appartenance au genre *madā'iḥ nabawiyya*. Cette tradition, qui permet de créer une atmosphère spirituelle, remonte à al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (m. 406/1016) et à son élève Mihyār al-Daylamī (m. 428/1037). Elle s'est ensuite particulièrement développée dans la poésie soufie.

Néanmoins, cet espace arabique, dont le Najd est le symbole le plus marquant, se caractérise par une absence-présence. En effet, le sujet insiste avant tout sur la distance qui le sépare de ces lieux évoqués avec tant de passion. Ainsi, le premier vers de la *bā'iyya* est construit sur l'opposition entre la proximité désirée et la distance avérée, même si le désir est capable d'annuler, dans une certaine mesure, cette distance :

دعاك بأقصى المَغرِبَيْنِ غريبٌ وأنتَ، على بُعْدِ المَزارِ، قريبُ[63]

Ce motif de la distance et de l'éloignement est, notons-le, consubstantiel à la production poétique andalouse. Nombreux sont en effet les lettrés de ce territoire à avoir exprimé le sentiment douloureux de vivre à la périphérie du *Dār al-Islām*, très loin du Centre, de l'Orient, d'où cette familiarité avec la notion de *gharāba,* véritable leitmotiv de cette production poétique[64].

Ce motif ressurgit plus loin dans la *bā'iyya* : faute d'être en capacité de rejoindre ces terres désirées, le sujet espère voir ces dernières se rapprocher de lui :

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62 Si cette plante, caractéristique du biotope désertique, pousse partout dans le monde arabe et au Maroc, le poète prend le soin de préciser sa provenance par une annexion.

63 *Bā'iyya*, v. 1 : "Depuis l'extrême Occident, un étranger t'a invoqué, toi si proche malgré la distance qui nous sépare de ton tombeau".

64 Dans une autre *qaṣīda mawlidiyya*, le lieu cristallisant le désir du sujet est, dès le premier vers, spécifié comme lointain : *wa-l-diyāru nawāziḥū* (Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Dīwān*, 224, v. 1).

أ يُجِدُ نَجَدٌ بعدَ شَحطِ مَزارِهِ ويكثُبُ بعد البُعدِ منه كثيبُ[65]

3.5 *Le déclenchement du désir*

Le sujet mis en place dans les trois poèmes peut avant tout être caractérisé comme un être désirant. Le déclenchement de son désir se produit au tout début du poème, suite à l'intervention d'un élément naturel. Dans la poésie arabe, deux motifs sont traditionnellement investis, dans le prologue (*nasīb*), de la fonction d'éveiller la nostalgie et/ou le désir du sujet : l'éclair et la brise parfumée.

C'est le premier qui est convoqué dans la *dāliyya*. Si le terme le désignant (*wamīḍ*) n'apparaît qu'en incipit du deuxième vers, il est néanmoins le sujet grammatical du verbe qui ouvre le poème (*ta'allaqa*). Le sujet lyrique, quant à lui, prend la place du complément (*adhkaranī*), ce qui le place d'emblée en position de sujet hétéronome. Cette hétéronomie est réitérée dans le second hémistiche. Le désir (*shawq / wajd*) qui s'empare du sujet confère au prologue une tonalité élégiaque qui dominera l'ensemble du poème :

تألّقَ نجديًا فأذْكَرَنِي نَجْدًا وَهاجَ لِيَ الشَّوْقَ المُبَرِّحَ والوَجْدا
وَميضٌ رأى بُرْدَ...[66]

Dans la *ḥā'iyya*, c'est le vent parfumé qui remplit cet office :

هَلْ كُنتَ تَعلمُ في هُبوبِ الريحِ نَفَسًا يُؤَجِّجُ لاعِجَ التبريحِ[67]

Si, dans ce vers, le sujet interpelle un interlocuteur, il semble bien, qu'en réalité, il s'adresse à lui-même.

En revanche, le sujet de la *bā'iyya*, qualifié d'étranger (*gharīb*) dans le premier vers, est plus actif puisque c'est lui qui prend l'initiative d'interpeller des éléments naturels, la lune et le soleil, et les charge de transmettre son salut à l'objet de son désir :

65 *Bā'īya*, v. 14 : "Se peut-il que le Najd me vienne en aide et se rapproche, [pour annuler] la distance [qui me sépare] de son tombeau, et que la dune fasse de même ?".

66 *Dālīya*, v. 1 et 2 : "En Provenance du Najd, la lueur d'un éclair a illuminé [le ciel] et m'a rappelé le Najd, réveillant en moi un douloureux désir et une violente passion".

67 *Ḥā'īya,* v. 1 : "Reconnaissais-tu, dans les rafales du vent, un souffle réveillant la flamme de l'ardent désir ?"

دَعاكَ بِأقصى المَغْرِبَيْنِ غريبُ وَأَنتَ على بُعْدِ المَزارِ قريبُ

(…)

يُكلِّف قُرْصَ البدرِ حَمْلَ تحيّةٍ إذا ما هوى، والشمسَ حينَ تغيبُ[68]

Le sujet, dont le désir s'est réveillé, se déclare dévoré par une passion brûlante et nombreux sont les lexèmes dénotant cette dernière dans les trois poèmes : *wajd*, d'abord, installé dans la *dāliyya* à la rime du premier vers et qualifié, dans la *bā'iyya*, de « vainqueur » (*ghālib*)[69], mais aussi *lā'ij al-tabrīḥi*[70] et *jawan*[71]. Les motifs traduisant cette passion dévorante ne diffèrent guère de ceux en usage dans la poésie amoureuse 'udhrite. L'amant, qui entretient une relation exclusive avec son aimé, souffre du mal d'amour et d'une soif inextinguible que seul celui-ci est susceptible de guérir : il est donc à la fois la source de ses souffrances et son seul espoir de guérison, de rédemption :

غليلٌ ولكن من قُبولك مُنهَلٌ عليلٌ ولكن من رضاك طبيبُ[72]

De la même façon, quand il s'agit de rendre compte du vertige dans lequel le plonge cette passion, les images convoquées sont très proches de celles de la poésie bachique. En effet, le verbe *rannaḥa* sert aussi à décrire les effets de l'alcool, tandis que le motif du rameau fléchissant sous l'action de la brise est omniprésent lorsqu'il s'agit de représenter l'ivresse et le plaisir :

تُرنّحُني الذكرى ويَهفو بِيَ الجَوَى كما مال غُصنٌ في الرياض رطيبُ[73]

Notons que, dans ce dernier vers, le sujet, représenté par des pronoms affixes compléments, est montré comme étant le jouet de ses affects et privé de toute autonomie.

68 *Bā'īya*, v.1 et 3 : "Depuis l'extrême Occident, un étranger t'a invoqué, toi si proche malgré la distance qui nous sépare de ton tombeau / Il charge le disque de la pleine lune, à l'heure de son couchant, et le soleil, lorsqu'il décline, de transmettre un salut".

69 *Bā'īya*, v. 24.

70 *Ḥā'īya*, v.1.

71 *Bā'īya*, v. 23.

72 *Bā'īya*, v. 12 : "Assoiffé, mais [trouvant] en ton agrément une source ; malade, mais [trouvant] en ta satisfaction le médecin [capable de me soigner]".

73 *Bā'īya*, v. 23 : "Le souvenir m'étourdit et la passion m'emporte, tel un rameau humide ployant dans un jardin".

3.6 *L'expression de la passion*

Comme c'est le cas dans la poésie mystique, on retrouve, dans l'expression de la passion éprouvée par le sujet, les motifs et le style caractéristiques du *ghazal ʿudhrī*[74].

Dans la *dāliyya*, le poète consacre une séquence conséquente à cette expression (v.15-23), dans laquelle figure expressément, d'ailleurs, l'expression *al-hawā al-ʿudhrī*. Le sujet s'y représente en esclave de l'amour (*ʿabd*) :

ومن عاشقٍ حُرٍّ إذا ما استهالَه حديثُ الهوى العُذريِّ صيَّرَهُ عبدا[75]

L'*ethos* de l'amant courtois est complété dans les vers suivants (v. 17-18), qui mentionnent la fidélité aux engagements (*li-l-ʿahdi ḥāfiẓ*), la constance (*ṣabūr*), mais aussi la transformation physique provoquée par l'absence et le désir, muant un roc solide en un être faible et émacié (v. 21) :

وَقَدْ كُنْتُ جَلْدًا قَبْلَ أَنْ تُذْهِبَ النَوى ذَمايَ وَأَنْ تَسْتَأْصِلَ العَظْمَ وَالجِلْدا[76]

Le sujet décrit ensuite en détail les larmes alimentées par sa passion inassouvie (v. 22-24).

Dans la *ḥāʾīya*, le poète introduit, au vers 4, le motif de la colombe, désignée par une métonymie (*khaḍībat al-minqār*) :

وَخَضيبةِ المِنْقارِ تَحْسِبُ أنّها نَهَلَتْ بِمَوْرِدِ دَمْعِيَ المَسفوحِ
باحَتْ بما تُخْفي وَناحَتْ في الدُّجى فرَأَيْتُ في الآفاقِ دعْوَةَ نوحِ
نَطَقَتْ، بما يُخْفيهِ قَلْبي، أدْمُعي وَلَطالما صَمَتَتْ عَنِ التصريحِ[77]

Cet oiseau, dont le roucoulement monotone évoque, dans les compositions élégiaques, le mal d'amour, est traditionnellement montré en empathie avec le sujet amoureux.

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74 Cette appellation désigne la poésie amoureuse dite "courtoise" ou platonique, focalisée sur l'expression d'un amour unique et malheureux qui consume l'amant.

75 *Dāliyya*, v. 15 : "D'un amant libre, le discours de la passion platonique a fait, après l'avoir amadoué, un esclave".

76 *Dāliyya*, v. 21 : "J'étais inébranlable avant que la distance vienne emporter ce qui me restait de vie et m'arracher la peau et les os".

77 *Hāʾiyya*, v. 4-6 : "On dirait que [la colombe] au bec comme] teinté de rouge s'est abreuvée à la source du flot de mes larmes/ Elle a révélé ses secrets et s'est lamentée dans les ténèbres de la nuit ; et j'ai vu, à l'horizon, l'appel de Noé /Mes pleurs ont révélé ce que mon cœur cachait, après avoir longtemps préféré se taire".

Dans la *bā'iyya*, un paroxysme dans l'expression de cette passion brûlante est atteint lorsque le poète fait appel à deux éléments, l'Eau et le Feu, lesquels sont communément convoqués, dans la poésie amoureuse, pour décrire les manifestations du mal d'amour enduré par l'amant. Sont alors évoqués le feu intérieur qui le consume et les flots de larmes qui, bien qu'inondant son enveloppe corporelle, attisent le brasier plutôt que de l'éteindre :

فُؤادٌ على جَمْرِ البعادِ مُقَلَّبٌ ۔ يُماحُ عَلَيْهِ لِلدُموعِ قَليبُ
فَوَاللهِ ما يَزْدادُ إلاّ تَلَهُّبًا ۔ أَأَبْصَرْتَ ماءً ثارَ عَنْهُ لَهيبُ[78]

3.7 *Le rakb al-Ḥijāz*

Les trois poèmes évoquent la caravane de pèlerins en partance pour les Lieux saints, le *rakb al- Ḥijāz*, qui apparaît aussi sous l'appellation de « caravane de Médine » (*rakb Ṭayba*)[79]. C'était, nous l'avons vu, un élément primordial du dispositif mis en place pour inciter les croyants à effectuer le pèlerinage. Ce motif constitue à la fois une sorte de trait d'union symbolique entre le sujet et l'objet de son désir et une cause de déchirement pour lui puisque, comme nous le verrons, des obstacles l'empêchent de rejoindre le convoi. Dans la *dāliyya*, la mention des pèlerins sur le départ (*murtaḥil*) est introduite par un *wāw rubba* :

وَمُرْتَحِلٍ أَجْرَيْتُ دَمْعِيَ خَلْفَهُ ۔ لِيُرْجِعَهُ فَاسْتَنَّ في إِثْرِهِ قَصْدا[80]

Tout le passage qui suit (v. 24-30) est marqué par la tension entre l'intention exprimée par le sujet de se joindre à ces hommes et son impuissance à réaliser cette aspiration. L'atmosphère bédouine et arabique du poème est renforcée par l'insertion de toponymes (v. 29 : Najd, une nouvelle fois, Ḥājir), de noms faisant allusion à des personnages liés à l'Arabie (v. 29 : Da'd et Su'dā, noms de femmes fréquemment employés dans la poésie ancienne), de termes techniques dénotant la marche des montures (v. 30 : *al-naṣṣ wa-al-wakhd*) et du nom *ḥimā*.

Dans la *bā'iyya*, la caravane est évoquée à deux reprises (v. 10 et 21), l'accent étant mis sur la fatigue, l'éreintement et les frayeurs endurés par ce cortège :

78 *Bā'iyya*, v. 33 et 34 : "Un cœur que l'on retourne sur les braises de l'éloignement ; Sur lui [a été creusé] un puits duquel on tire les larmes / Par Dieu ! Cela ne fait qu'attiser le brasier ! As-tu déjà vu de l'eau faire jaillir des flammes ?".

79 *Dāliyya*, v. 35-36.

80 *Dāliyya*, v. 24 : "J'ai lancé mes larmes à la poursuite d'un homme en partance pour le faire revenir ; elles ont volé vers lui en le suivant à la trace".

وَيَلقَى رِكابَ الحجِّ وهي طلائحٌ طِلاحٌ، وقد لَبَّى النِّداءَ لبيبُ
(...)
ذَكَرتُ بِهِ رَكبَ الحجاز وجيرةً أهابَ، بِها نَحْوَ الحَبيبِ، مُهيبُ[81]

3.8 *Un sujet empêché*

Dans les trois poèmes, le sujet se déclare donc impuissant à réaliser son souhait le plus cher, à savoir rejoindre la caravane qui lui permettrait de se rapprocher de l'objet de sa passion. La ferme volonté affirmée (*dāliyya*, v. 32 : *rumtu*, *i'tazamtu*) est contrecarrée par des obstacles qui empêchent cette dernière de se traduire en actes. Si le destin (*dāliyya*, v. 32 : *miqdār*), comme c'est souvent le cas, est présenté comme l'opposant ou le Tiers-actant s'employant à l'empêcher de partir, le sujet insiste aussi sur des fautes ou péchés (*ʿuyūb*) commis et rendant son départ impossible (*dāliyya*, v. 33 : *raqīqun badat li-l-mushtarīna ʿuyūbuhu*). Il procède ainsi à une autocritique qui tourne à l'auto-flagellation, s'accusant d'avoir trop longtemps vécu dans la légèreté et la frivolité, comme dans ce vers de la *ḥā'iyya* :

لَهْفي على عُمرٍ مَضى أَنْضَيْتُهُ في مَلْعَبٍ للتُّرّهاتِ فَسيحِ[82]

Le portrait qu'il brosse de lui-même dans la *dāliyya* est tout aussi peu flatteur. Aux raisons déjà invoquées pour expliquer sa paralysie s'ajoute celle de son âge déjà avancé[83] :

إلى كَمْ أراني في البَطَالةِ كانِعًا وعُمريَ قد وَلّى و وِزْرِيَ قد عُدّا
لَعَلَّ زَماني في لَعَلَّ وَفي عَسى فلا عَزْمةٌ تُمْضى ولا لَوْعةٌ تَهْدا
حُسامُ جَبانٍ كُلّما شِيمَ نَصْلُهُ تَراجعَ بَعدَ العَزْمِ والتزمَ الغِمْدَ[84]

81 *Bā'īya*, v. 10 et 21 : "Il rencontre la caravane du pèlerinage : chameaux éreintés, exténués, alors que l'homme avisé a répondu à l'appel [...] Il m'a rappelé celui qui appelait à grands cris les chameaux de la caravane du Hedjaz et des voisins de Dieu, [sur le chemin] les conduisant à leur aimé".

82 *Hā'īya*, v. 25 : "Hélas ! J'ai gâché ma vie passée en m'adonnant à toutes sortes de jeux frivoles".

83 La vieillesse n'est qu'un facteur parmi tous ceux qui, non précisés, peuvent constituer un obstacle. Dans tous les poèmes de ce type, Ibn al-Khaṭīb cultive le flou quand il s'agit de nommer ce qui l'empêche de partir. Voir à ce sujet F. Tahtah, *Al-ghurba wa-al-ḥanīn*, 334.

84 *Dālīya*, v. 59-61 : "Jusqu'à quand me verrai-je garroté, [contraint à] l'inaction, alors que ma vie me tourne déjà le dos et que pèse sur moi le fardeau de mes péchés ? /Ma vie s'est épuisée dans des 'peut-être' et des 'il se peut', sans jamais voir une résolution se traduire

Pour être en capacité de partir, le sujet devrait au préalable avoir « purgé ses dettes » (*bā'iyya*, v. 15 : *wa-tuqḍā duyūnī ba'da-mā maṭala al-madā*). Cette condition lui paraissant impossible à remplir, il n'a donc pas d'autre choix que celui d'accepter le départ et l'éloignement de la caravane. Son seul adjuvant, pour lutter contre la tristesse (*asan*) et la séparation (*bayn*), est sa constance (*ṣabr*). Tristesse, séparation et constance sont personnifiées sous la forme de combattants, mais la bataille qui s'engage tourne vite à l'avantage des deux premiers :

وما بِيَ إلاّ أَنْ سَرى الركبُ مَوْهنًا وَأَعْمَلَ في رَمْلِ الحِمى النَّصَّ والوَخْدا
وجاشَتْ جُيوشُ الصَّبْرِ والبَيْنِ والأسى لَدَيَّ فكان الصّبرُ أَضْعَفَها جُنْدا[85]

Ce départ provoque chez le sujet une violente émotion (v. 30-31) qui l'amène à s'identifier à un oiseau aux ailes blessées incapable de suivre ses congénères :

مُخلَّفُ سِربٍ قد أُصيبَ جَناحُهُ وطِرْنَ فلم يَسْطِعْ مَراحًا ولا مَغْدى[86]

3.9 *Le raḥīl imaginaire*

Dès lors, on assiste à une sorte de dédoublement du sujet, de disjonction de son corps et de son esprit, le premier étant contraint à l'immobilité tandis que le second s'envole vers son but[87]. Ainsi, dans la *dāliyya*, le sujet envoie ses larmes et son cœur en émissaire au-devant de la caravane (v. 24-25). Dans la *ḥā'iyya*, l'ambiguïté est encore plus grande : en effet, après avoir précisé que, contraint de renoncer à se rendre physiquement au Ḥijāz, son voyage s'effectuera par la pensée :

حَسبي وُلوعًا أنْ أزورَ بِفِكْرَتي زُوّارَها وَالجِسمُ رَهْنُ تُزو تُزوحِ[88]

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en action et sans jamais voir s'apaiser mon tourment / A peine la lame d'une épée d'un lâche est-elle tirée du fourreau qu'elle le réintègre, revenant sur sa résolution".

85 *Dālīya*, v. 30-31 : "J'ai dû me résigner à [voir] la caravane s'ébranler pour son voyage nocturne, au cœur de la nuit, et lancer ses montures, dans le sable du *ḥimā*, à vive allure / Les armées de l'affliction, de la séparation et de la constance en moi se sont ébranlées, mais la constance était l'armée dont les soldats étaient les plus faibles".

86 *Dālīya,* v. 35 : "Touché à l'aile, l'oiseau a été laissé en arrière par ses congénères ; eux ont pris leur envol, mais lui n'a jamais pu [les rejoindre]".

87 Fatima Tahtah parle de "scission" (*infiṣāl*), voir *Al-ghurba wa-al-ḥanīn*, 323.

88 *Hā'iyya*, v. 11 : "Mon désir ardent devra se contenter de rendre visite à ses visiteurs par la pensée, tandis que l'éloignement gardera mon corps en gage".

Cependant, à partir du vers 13, le sujet évoque, ce périple sur le mode du réel, décrivant, à la manière traditionnelle, l'atmosphère dysphorique d'une pérégrination nocturne, si bien que son arrivée à Médine semble relever d'une expérience vécue. Parmi les procédés narratifs mis en œuvre pour renforcer cette impression figure l'usage de l'accompli :

لمّا حَطَطْتُ لِخيرِ مَن وَطِئَ الثَّرى بِعِنانِ كُلِّ مُوَلَّدٍ وَصَرِيحِ[89]

De ce fait, il est difficile, dans ce texte, de percevoir où se situe la frontière entre passé et présent, imaginaire et réalité, expérience et rêve, tant le poète brouille les pistes.

Cette ambiguïté est moins prégnante dans la *dāliyya*. Le périple y est, en effet, clairement annoncé comme étant réalisé « par procuration », puisque le sujet s'adresse directement aux pèlerins (*nashadtuka yā rakba l-Ḥijāz*), en utilisant la figure stylistique de l'*iltifāt*, pour leur souhaiter de trouver sur leur route de riches pâturages, de l'ombre et des aiguades, d'être épargnés par les bêtes sauvages et d'arriver au terme de leur voyage sans encombre[90]. Par ce biais, nous suivons donc la caravane depuis son départ jusqu'à son arrivée à Médine (Ṭayba)[91]. C'est alors que le sujet charge cette caravane imaginaire de le représenter auprès du Prophète :

فَنُبْ عن بعيدِ الدارِ في ذلك الحِمى وأذْرِ بِهِ دَمْعًا وعفِّرْ به خَدّا
وقُلْ: يا رسولَ اللهِ عَبْدٌ تَقاصَرَتْ خُطاهُ وَأَضْحى مِنْ أَحِبَّتِهِ فَرْدا[92]

Dans ce poème, le sujet revient encore une fois au-devant de la scène après l'éloge du Prophète, placé au centre de la composition. Une séquence introduite par la formule *a-lā layta shi'rī* nous projette de nouveau dans un *raḥīl* imaginaire montrant le sujet en route vers l'Arabie. L'atmosphère bédouine est renforcée par l'usage de termes relatifs aux camélidés : *qilāṣ*, pluriel de *qalūṣ*, qui désigne une jeune chamelle déjà apte à être montée mais n'ayant pas encore perdu ses dents de devant, *ḍāmir* et *shimilla*, qui mettent respectivement l'accent sur la minceur et la rapidité à la course de cet animal.

89 *Hā'iyya*, v. 19 : "Lorsque j'ai fait halte pour la meilleure [personne] ayant jamais foulé la terre, tenant les rênes de [ma monture], animal croisé ou pur-sang".

90 *Dāliyya*, v. 36-37.

91 *Dāliyya*, v. 39.

92 *Dāliyya*, v. 40-41 : "Sois le représentant, dans ce *ḥimā*, de celui qui est loin de la maison ! Verses-y des larmes et macule une joue de poussière ! / Et dis : 'Ô Envoyé de Dieu ! Un de tes serviteurs, impuissant à venir jusqu'à toi, a exposé [à sa place] l'un de ses amis'".

La présence insistante, dans ces deux vers, de ce lexique bédouin confère à ceux-ci une tonalité archaïsante :

أَلا لَيتَ شِعري هَل أَرَانِيَ ناهدًا أَقودُ القِلاصَ البُدْنَ والضامرَ النَّهْدا
رَضيعَ لِبانِ الصِّدقِ فَوْقَ شِلَّةٍ مُضمَّرةٍ وُسِّدْتُ مِنْ كُورِها مَهْدا[93]

Le sujet s'imagine au sein de la caravane, scandant la marche des chameliers de ses poésies :

فَتُهْدى بِأَشْواقِي السُّراةُ إذا سَرتْ وَتُحْدى بِأَشعاري الرِكابُ إذا تُحْدى[94]

3.10 *L'objet : une ambiguïté persistante*

Nous allons à présent nous intéresser au second pôle autour duquel ces poèmes s'organisent : l'objet du désir et de la quête. Une certaine ambiguïté règne quant à sa nature. Plus exactement, celle-ci n'est dévoilée au récepteur que progressivement. Ce procédé est conforme à la tradition de la poésie mystique, qui entretient le flou quant à l'identité de l'aimé.

L'objet apparaît sous plusieurs formes dans ces odes. Il est d'abord présenté comme un lieu cristallisant la nostalgie du sujet et son désir brûlant. Ce lieu se révèle par la suite être la métonymie de celui auquel il est intimement relié, à savoir, bien sûr, le Prophète.

Ainsi, dans la *dāliyya*, la première évocation de l'objet intervient au v. 11 et inaugure une nouvelle séquence. Le nom *bilādun*, placé en incipit de ce vers, nous informe que l'objet de la nostalgie du sujet est un pays auquel son âme est liée et qui est responsable de ses insomnies :

بِلادٌ عَهِدْنا في قَراراتِها الصِّبا يَقِلُّ لِذاكَ العَهْدِ أَنْ يَأْلَفَ العَهْدا[95]

93 *Dāliyya*, v. 63-64 : "Ah ! Me verrai-je un jour, me précipiter [vers ces lieux], à la tête de jeunes chamelles grasses et d'une autre très mince mais néanmoins charnue / Nourri du lait de la sincérité et montant une chamelle rapide à la course et dressée à la docilité, sa selle en guise de berceau ?".

94 *Dāliyya*, v. 65 : "En chemin, les voyageurs nocturnes sont guidés par mes désirs, et les montures sont stimulées par mes poésies".

95 *Dāliyya*, v. 11 : "Un pays qui fut le théâtre de notre amour de jeunesse ; bien rarement tenus sont les engagements pris en ce temps [de la jeunesse]". On note, dans ces vers, la présence obsédante de la racine *ʿhd*, qui met l'accent sur la notion de pacte et de fidélité, même si, dans le second hémistiche, nous sommes en présence d'une paronomase (*jinās tāmm*) qui répète le nom *ʿhd* dans des acceptions différentes. Un peu plus loin, au vers 14, on note l'emploi des deux verbes *ʿāhada* et *ʿāqada* qui renforcent encore cette insistance.

Mais quel est ce pays ? On pourrait d'abord penser que le poète s'apprête à évoquer son pays natal, le Royaume de Grenade. En effet, ce lieu est d'abord présenté comme le pays des amours juvéniles (*ṣibā*). Néanmoins, dès le vers suivant, nous découvrons que cette terre est plantée d'espèces végétales arabiques : le saule (*al-bān*), l'armoise (*al-shīḥ*) et la myrte ou bois d'aloès (*al-rand*). Plus loin, l'ambiguïté est totalement levée, dévoilant que ce pays vers lequel convergent tous les sentiments nostalgiques du sujet n'est autre que l'Orient :

لِيَ اللهُ كَمْ أَهْذي بِنَجْدٍ وَحَاجِرٍ وَأَكْنِي بِدَعْدٍ في غَرامِيَ أَوْ سُعْدى[96]

Plus loin encore, un procédé de focalisation resserre l'espace autour du tombeau du Prophète (*al-qabr al-muqaddas, al-laḥd*), lieu qui diffuse une lumière capable de soigner les cœurs les plus durs et les yeux chassieux :

إذا أَنتَ شافهْتَ الدِّيارَ بِطَيْبَةٍ وَجِئْتَ بِها القَبْرَ المُقَدَّسَ وَاللَّحْدا
وَآنَسْتَ نُورًا مِنْ جَنابِ مُحَمَّدٍ يُداوي القُلوبَ الغُلْبَ وَالأَعْيُنَ الرُّمْدا[97]

De cet espace sans pareil auquel aspire si fortement le sujet, émane un parfum délicieux :

إلى أَنْ أَحُطَّ الرَّحْلَ في تُرْبِكَ الذي تَضَوَّعَ نَدًّا ما رَأَيْنا لَهُ نِدّا[98]

Dans la *ḥā'iyya*, de la même façon, il est tout d'abord question d'un lieu qualifié de *ḥimā*, terme complexe et répété deux fois dans le premier hémistiche du neuvième vers :

جادَ الحِمى بَعْدي، وَأَجْراعَ الحِمى جَوْدٌ تَكِلُّ بِهِ مُتونُ الرِيحِ[99]

Depuis la période préislamique, où il désignait un riche pâturage déclaré interdit d'accès et d'usage par celui ou ceux qui s'en étaient arrogé la jouissance[100],

96 *Dāliyya,* v. 28 : "Dieu ! Combien de fois [m'entend-on] délirer à propos du Najd et de Ḥājir, et appeler Da'd et Su'dā sous le coup de la passion !".

97 *Dāliyya,* v. 38-39 : "Lorsque tu t'es approché des demeures à Médine et que tu t'es rendu au tombeau sacré / Et que tu as été baigné par une lumière [irradiant] l'espace de Muḥammad, laquelle guérit les cœurs insensibles (car trop épais) et les yeux chassieux".

98 *Dāliyya,* v. 65 : "Jusqu'à ce que je pose le pied sur ta terre, qui exhale un parfum d'ambre gris et ne ressemble à rien de ce que nous connaissons".

99 *Ḥā'iyya,* v. 9 : "Qu'après moi le *ḥimā* et ses terrains sablonneux reçoivent une pluie si abondante que le vent peinera à la charrier".

100 Voir Chelhod, "Ḥimā".

le nom *ḥimā* est investi d'une forte charge symbolique, liée à l'idée d'un lieu protégé et défendu. Ce vers reprend une thématique traditionnelle du *nasīb ṭalalī* exprimant le vœu que ce lieu vers lequel vont toutes les pensées du sujet bénéficie, en son absence, de la clémence des éléments et soit copieusement arrosé.

Dans le vers suivant, le lieu cristallisant la nostalgie est évoqué, cette fois, par un nom dénotant les demeures par excellence, celles auxquelles on est viscéralement attaché : *al-manāzil* :

هُنَّ المَنازِلُ ما فُؤادي بَعْدَها سالٍ ولا وَجْدي بِها بِمُرِيحِ[101]

Ce n'est que beaucoup plus loin dans le poème que la nature de ce *ḥimā* est précisée par une annexion et que ce lieu est ainsi mis directement en relation avec le tombeau du Prophète :

لِي فِي حِمى ذاك الضَّرِيحِ لُبانةٌ إنْ أَصْبَحَتْ لُبنى أنا ابْنُ ذَرِيحِ
وَبِمَهْبِطِ الرُّوحِ الأَمينِ أَمانةٌ اليُمْنُ فيها والأَمانُ لِروحي[102]

L'allusion faite dans ces vers à un couple mythique d'amants « courtois », Lubnā et le poète Qays b. Dharīḥ (m. 68/680), sert à illustrer la nature exceptionnelle du lien qui relie le sujet, qui s'identifie à Qays, au tombeau, assimilé à la femme aimée, Lubnā. Mais l'on ne trouve nulle trace ici du sentiment d'insécurité pouvant naître d'une passion contrariée. Bien au contraire, trois occurrences de la racine *ʾ-m-n* (amīn, amāna et amān) mettent, dans le second vers, l'accent sur le sentiment de sûreté et de confiance sans égal qui témoigne de la qualité du lien qui rattache le sujet au lieu.

Dans la *bāʾīya*, en revanche, l'identification de l'objet du désir ne passe pas par la phase de la métaphorisation. Si, dans le premier vers, le pronom personnel de deuxième personne, *anta*[103], relayé dans les vers suivant par le pronom affixe de même personne, peut encore prêter à confusion, toute ambiguïté est levée au vers 18 :

101 *Ḥāʾiyya*, v. 10 : "Ce sont les demeures : mon cœur, séparé d'elles, ne saurait se consoler, ni ma passion se calme".

102 *Ḥāʾiyya*, v. 28-29 : " [je brûle] d'un ardent désir pour le *ḥimā* du tombeau et s'il se muait en Lubnā, je serais Ibn Dharīḥ / En ce lieu où l'esprit sûr est descendu, règnent la sécurité et la félicité, et mon esprit s'y sent protégé".

103 Voir *infra*.

ولكنّك المَوْلى الجَوادُ وجارُهُ على أَيِّ حالٍ كانَ ليسَ يَخيبُ[104]

3.11 *L'éloge du Prophète*

Les séquences des poèmes dévolues à l'éloge du Prophète à proprement parler ne se départissent pas du ton de dévotion lyrique qui empreint l'ensemble de la composition. L'existence d'un lien privilégié et individuel unissant le poète et Muḥammad y est sans cesse réitérée. Dans la *dāliyya*, l'adresse au Prophète, comme nous l'avons dit, se fait par l'intermédiaire des pèlerins dont nous avons suivi la progression jusqu'au Ḥijāz. L'éloge (*midḥa*) y est présenté comme le seul moyen dont dispose le sujet, contraint de vivre le moment de la rencontre à distance et par procuration, pour rejoindre le Prophète. C'est une manière, pour Ibn al-Khaṭīb, de nous dire la capacité du discours poétique à effacer la distance, permettant ainsi à la clémence (*raḥma*) de Muḥammad de l'atteindre :

وَلَم يَسْتَطِعْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ما بَعُدَ المَدَى سِوَى لَوْعَةٍ تَعْتادُ أَوْ مِدْحةٍ تُهدى
تَدارَكْهُ، يا غَوْثَ العِبادِ بِرَحْمَةٍ فَجُودُكَ ما أجدى وَكَفُّكَ ما أَندى[105]

Contrairement à ce qui se passe dans d'autres *madā'iḥ nabawiyya*, il n'est pas question, dans cette *qaṣīda*, des miracles (*mu'jizāt*) attribués au Prophète[106]. L'éloge se concentre avant tout sur les vertus exceptionnelles qui lui ont été conférées par Dieu, les *shamā'il* ou *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* qui, depuis le début du XI[e] siècle, étaient convoquées en prose comme en poésie quand il s'agissait de désigner le Prophète[107]. La générosité et la protection des croyants sont les premières évoquées. Le vers 43, que nous venons de citer, met l'accent sur la première (*fa-jūduka mā ajdā wa-kaffuka mā andā*), tandis que le vers 44 insiste sur la seconde :

104 *Bā'iyya*, v. 18 : "Mais tu es le seigneur généreux, et, quelle que soit sa situation, celui qui vit près de lui ne pourra jamais être déçu".

105 *Dāliyya*, v.42-43 : "Réduit, du fait de la distance, [à vivre dans] un tourment sans merci et [à dire] des louanges vers toi guidées / Offre-lui réparation, Ô toi dont la clémence porte secours aux hommes, car rien n'est plus salutaire que ta générosité et rien n'est plus généreux que ta main".

106 Ainsi, la Burda d'al-Būṣīrī utilise de nombreux éléments dérivés de la *Sīra*, dans lesquels les miracles, à savoir le Saint Coran, l'ascension nocturne etc … sont incorporés comme des extensions à l'éloge.

107 Voir Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 32-33 et 180-181. L'auteur mentionne que ces qualités et vertus furent rassemblées à cette époque par les savants (par exemple Tha'labī (m. 427/1035)) et constituées en genre littéraire.

أَجارَ بِكَ اللهُ العِبادَ مِنَ الرَّدَى فَبَوَّأَهُمْ ظِلاًّ مِنَ الأَمْنِ مُمْتَدّا[108]

Dans les deux cas, les images convoquées (la main ruisselante, l'ombre étendue) constituent des réminiscences des motifs les plus fréquemment usitées dans le *madīḥ* depuis l'époque la plus ancienne mais font aussi écho à des expressions coraniques[109].

Ces vertus sont aussi les premiers traits attribués au Prophète dans la *bā'iyya*. Il y apparaît, comme nous l'avons vu, sous l'appellation d'*al-mawlā al-jawād* (v. 18). Dans ce vers et le suivant, le poète insiste sur la fiabilité de la protection accordée par le Prophète : nul ne sera déçu ni ne se sentira oppressé en sa proximité (voir v. 19) :

ولكنّك المَوْلَى الجَوادُ، وجارُهُ على أيِّ حالٍ كانَ، ليس يَخيبُ
وَكَيْفَ يَضيقُ الذَّرْعُ يَوْمًا بِقاصِدٍ وَذاكَ الجَنابُ المُسْتَجارُ رَحيبُ[110]

Dans la *dāliyya*, le poète évoque ensuite la manière dont Dieu a élevé la personne de Muḥammad au rang d'être exceptionnel : Il lui a accordé la satisfaction, l'a couronné et revêtu de gloire, a purifié son cœur, l'a couvert de lumière et l'a doté d'une droiture sans égal :

حَمى دينُكَ الدُّنْيا وَأَقْطَعَكَ الرِّضا وَتَوَّجَكَ العُلْيا وَأَلْبَسَكَ الحَمْدا
وَطَهَّرَ مِنْكَ القَلبَ لَمّا اسْتَخَصَّهُ فَغَلَّلَهُ نورًا وَأَوْسَعَهُ رُشْدا[111]

La représentation du Prophète sous la forme d'un être de lumière est une constante que nous trouvons dans l'ensemble de la poésie soufie[112].

Le vers suivant insiste sur le zèle mis par Muḥammad à répondre à l'appel divin et à suivre la voie qui lui a été indiquée, ainsi que sur les privilèges qui lui ont été consentis. Ainsi, la soif lui a été à jamais épargnée et son coeur a été préservé contre toute dépravation, nulle rouille ne pouvant l'entacher.

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108 *Dāliyya* : v. 44 : "Dieu t'a fait le protecteur des hommes contre la mort, les plaçant ainsi sous de spacieux ombrages, [leur assurant] la sécurité".

109 L'expression *ẓill mumtadd* est un intertexte coranique (*ẓill mamdūd*, Q 56 : 30).

110 *Bā'iyya*, v. 18-19 : "Mais tu es le seigneur généreux et, quelle que soit sa situation, celui qui vit près de lui ne pourra jamais être déçu / Comment se pourrait-il qu'un jour quelqu'un venant à toi se sente réduit à l'impuissance, alors que l'espace [où s'étend ta] protection est si spacieux ?".

111 *Dāliyya*, v. 45-46. Nous remarquons que le poète passe, dans ces vers, de la deuxième à la troisième personne pour désigner le Prophète, à la faveur du procédé de l'*iltifāt*.

112 Voir à ce sujet : Schimmel, *And Muhammad is his Messenger*, 126-127.

دَعاهُ فَما وَلّى، هَداهُ فَما غَوى سَقاهُ فَما يَظْما، جَلاهُ فَما يَصْدا[113]

Le vers qui suit, quant à lui, traduit l'adhésion d'Ibn al-Khaṭīb à la théorie de la préexistence du Prophète Muḥammad[114] :

تَقَدَّمْتَ مُخْتارًا تَأَخَّرْتَ مَبْعَثًا فَقَدْ شَمِلَتْ عُلْياؤُكَ القَبْلَ وَالبَعْدا[115]

Un degré supérieur est encore atteint quant à la nature supra humaine du Prophète lorsque celui-ci est présenté comme la « la cause de l'univers » (*ʿillat al-kawn*) et le « but ultime de tout » (*anta l-qaṣdu fīhi*) :

وَعِلَّةُ هذا الكَوْنِ أَنْتَ وَكُلَّما أَعادَ فَأَنْتَ القَصْدُ فيهِ وَما أَبْدَى
وَهَلْ هُوَ إلاّ مَظْهَرٌ أَنْتَ سِرُّهُ لِيَمْتازَ في الخَلْقِ المُكِبُّ مِنَ الأَهْدى[116]

Le Prophète est présenté comme appartenant tant au monde des secrets (*ʿālam al-asrār*) qu'au monde sensible (*ʿālam al-ḥiss*). Dans le premier, son être diffuse la lumière qui provoqua l'effondrement du *ṭawd* lorsqu'elle lui apparut, tandis que, dans le monde sensible, il est un refuge pour tous ceux qui cherchent la guérison et la guidance[117].

Des procédés stylistiques confèrent à l'ensemble de la séquence une expressivité qui, sans nul doute, visait à produire un effet sur l'assemblée lors de la déclamation de ces odes en public. On note ainsi l'emploi de l'anaphore, avec la répétition de la formule *ʿalayka ṣalāt Allāh*[118], qui était considérée comme un passage obligé dans ce type de poèmes, et l'introduction d'une série d'annexions qualificatives introduites par le vocatif qui présentent le Prophète

113 *Dāliyya* v. 47 : " [Dieu] l'a appelé et il ne s'est pas dérobé, Il l'a guidé et il ne s'est pas égaré, Il l'a abreuvé si bien qu'il n'a jamais connu la soif, Il l'a poli de telle façon que nulle rouille ne l'a jamais entaché".

114 Voir à ce sujet Addas, *La maison muhammadienne*, 28, et Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 132-133.

115 *Dāliyya*, v. 48 : "Tu fus le premier élu et le dernier envoyé ; ta gloire englobe l'avant et l'après".

116 *Dāliyya*, v. 49-50 : "Et tu es la justification de cet univers, et tout ce qu'Il a fait, que ce soient des premières fois ou des répétitions, tu en es le but ultime / Cet [univers] est-il autre chose qu'une scène dont tu es le secret afin que, dans la création, celui qui marche le visage abattu soit distingué de celui qui est le mieux guidé". On note dans ce dernier vers un intertexte coranique qui fait écho au verset : *a-fa-man yamshī mukibban ʿalā wajhihi ahdā am man yamshī sawiyyan ʿalā ṣirāṭin mustaqīm* (Q 67 :22).

117 *Dāliyya* v. 51-52.

118 *Dāliyya*, v. 56-58.

successivement comme « le meilleur des envoyés », « le guide le plus noble », « celui qui rend la vue aux aveugles » :

عليكَ صَلاةُ اللهِ، يا خَيْرَ مُرْسَلٍ وَأَكْرَمَ هادٍ، أَوْضَحَ الحَقَّ وَالرُّشْدا[119]

Cependant, au sein même de l'éloge, le sujet intervient pour réitérer son aveu de faiblesse et d'impuissance. Il se représente, en grand danger, suspendu au bord de l'abîme de l'enfer (*hāwin ʿalā shafan min al-nār*)[120]. Après avoir déclaré pouvoir se rapprocher de son but ultime grâce à la louange, il minimise à présent cette possibilité dans la mesure où, ayant été loué par Dieu lui-même, le Prophète n'a nul besoin d'un éloge supplémentaire :

بِماذا عَسَى يُثْنِي عَلَيْكَ مُقصِّرٌ وَلَمْ يَأْلُ فيكَ اللهُ مَدْحًا وَلا حَمْدا[121]

Selon Annemarie Schimmel, la formulation « Dieu lui-même l'a loué » a beaucoup embarrassé les poètes[122], car il était périlleux de chercher à surpasser les louanges du Prophète figurant dans le Coran.

On retrouve cette problématique dans la *ḥāʾiyya*, où le sujet insiste sur son incapacité à rivaliser avec le texte coranique, dont la *faṣāḥa* est inégalable et inégalée :

مَدَحَتْكَ آياتُ الكِتابِ فَما عَسَى يُثْنِي عَلى عُلْياكَ نَظْمُ مَديحي
وَإِذا كِتابُ اللهِ أَثْنى مُفْصِحًا كانَ القُصورُ قُصارَ كُلِّ فَصيحِ[123]

Cette déclaration d'humilité fait toutefois partie des *topoï* de la poésie laudative et relève de la figure de la prétérition : se prétendre incapable de décrire ou louer un être parfait (qu'il s'agisse, comme ici, du Prophète ou, ailleurs, d'un souverain) n'empêche pas le poète de se livrer à cet exercice. Et c'est ainsi que, dans la *dālīya*, il entame, à partir du vers 67, une nouvelle séquence d'éloge de six vers ayant pour objet, cette fois, la naissance de Muḥammad. Néanmoins, seuls quelques éléments du riche récit concernant cet évènement sont évoqués.

119 *Dāliyya a*, v. 56 : "Que la bénédiction de Dieu soit sur toi, ô meilleur des envoyés et plus noble des guides, manifestation la plus claire de la vérité et de droiture".

120 *Dāliyya*, v. 55.

121 *Dāliyya*, v. 55 : "De quels moyens un homme réduit à l'impuissance dispose-t-il pour te célébrer, alors que Dieu t'a couvert de louanges et de gloire ?".

122 Schimmel, *And Muhammad is his Messenger*, 176-177.

123 *Ḥāʾiyya*, v. 36-37 : "Les versets du Livre t'ont loué et, de ce fait, les vers de mon panégyrique sont bien incapables de chanter ta gloire / Là où le Livre de Dieu a loué avec éloquence, l'insuffisance est le degré le plus abouti [que peut espérer atteindre] un homme éloquent".

Parmi eux, figure des événements considérés comme des « miracles ». Cette naissance provoque ainsi en premier lieu un ébranlement du monde et l'illumination des palais de la ville syrienne de Boṣrā[124] :

بِمَوْلِدِكَ اهْتَزَّ الوُجودُ وَأَشْرَقَتْ قُصورٌ بِبُصْرى ضاءَتْ الهَضْبَ وَالوَهْدا[125]

Il est fait référence ici à une tradition selon laquelle la mère du Prophète, Amina, aurait vu, au moment de l'accouchement, sortir de son corps une vive lumière éclairant l'Orient et L'Occident et illuminant jusqu'aux palais de Syrie[126].

Suit l'évocation du vent de panique s'emparant de symboles particulièrement emblématiques du monde préislamique, les idoles et le palais de Chosroès. Terrorisées, les premières se prosternent tandis que le second s'effondre :

وَمِنْ رُعْبِهِ الأَوْثانُ خَرَّتْ مَهابةً وَمِنْ هَوْلِهِ إيوانُ فارِسَ قَدْ هُدَّا[127]

Enfin, les rivières abaissent leur niveau en signe d'humilité et de respect, tandis que l'on assiste à l'extinction du feu des Perses :

وَغاضَ لَهُ الوادي وَصَبَّحَ عِزُّهُ بُيوتًا لِنارِ الفُرْسِ أَعْدَمَها الوَقْدا[128]

Notons que ces événements furent assez tôt incorporés au récit de la naissance du Prophète. Ils figurent, par exemple, chez Ṭabarī[129] et sont aussi présents en poésie : ainsi, al-Būṣīrī les intègre dans sa *Burda* et insiste sur l'ébranlement des

124 Ville de la Syrie méridionale, fondée par les Romains, Boṣrā était à l'époque un centre commercial important.

125 *Dāliyya*, v. 67 : "Ta naissance a provoqué l'ébranlement du monde et une illumination des palais de Boṣrā qui irradia dans toute la région".

126 Voir Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger*, 149. Elle signale que Ḥassān b. Thābit avait déjà évoqué cette lumière dans l'un de ses vers. Au IXe siècle, celle-ci est déjà traitée comme une réalité matérielle par l'historien Ibn Sa'd. Ibn al-Jawzī (m. 597/1200-1) fit mention de l'illumination des palais de Boṣrā par cette lumière intense. Et lorsque le Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, dont l'œuvre, comme nous l'avons vu, fut fondamentale dans le développement de la dévotion du Prophète dans l'Occident musulman, décrit la naissance de celui-ci, il ne mentionne qu'un seul « miracle » : cette lumière irradiante.

127 *Dāliyya*, v. 68. L'effondrement de l'*Īwān* de Chosroès servit aux Arabes de métonymie à la chute de l'empire perse, le nom arabe pour l'empereur perse, Kisrā, évoquant la racine arabe *k-s-r* (« casser »). Notons que le verbe employé ici (*hudda*) est coranique (Q 19 : 90).

128 *Dāliyya*, v. 69 : "L'eau de rivière pour lui disparut dans le sol et sa gloire salua au matin les maisons [abritant] les foyers des Perses, dont elle avait anéanti le feu".

129 Voir Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet*, 39-40.

colonnes du palais de Chosroès, l'extinction du feu des Perses et le tarissement de leurs sources intervenus le jour de la naissance du Prophète[130].

Le vers 72 de la *dāliyya* sert de transition entre l'éloge du Prophète et celui du *mamdūḥ*, le sultan mérinide Abū Sālim Ibrāhīm. Dans ce panégyrique de facture traditionnelle, dont le nom est cité à deux reprises[131], l'accent est mis sur la légitimité religieuse de cette dynastie, notamment avec l'emploi de la racine *kh-l-f*, sur laquelle sont formés les substantifs *khilāfa* (califat) et *khalīfa* (calife). Les Mérinides sont décrits châtiant sévèrement leurs ennemis et remettant les hommes en perdition dans le droit chemin. Le poète exalte aussi, sans surprise, leurs bienfaits notoires et leur sagesse exercée sans ostentation[132]. Le poème se termine par une déclaration d'allégeance du poète au sultan.

Dans la *ḥā'iyya*, l'éloge du Prophète, qui se déploie entre les vers 20 et 29, se caractérise par l'emploi de formules davantage empreintes d'une tonalité soufie. Néanmoins, Lisān al-Dīn se focalise sur les vertus et propriétés du Prophète déjà observées, à savoir : son rôle de protecteur irremplaçable auprès des croyants (*ruḥmā ilāhi l-ʿarshi bayna ʿibādihi* et *kahf al-anām*[133]). Il est présenté comme « le meilleur conseiller et l'être le plus digne de leur confiance » (*yā khayra muʾtamanin wa-khayra naṣīhī*)[134], « le plus fiable transmetteur de la parole divine » (*wa-amīnihi l-arḍā ʿalā mā yūḥī*)[135], « le maître de la véracité » (*rabbu l-maqāmi l-ṣidqi*)[136]. Occupant une place unique auprès de Dieu (*yā ṣafwata Allāhi l-makīna makānuhu*)[137], il en est le signe le plus évident, qui répand sa lumière sur le monde :

وَالآيةُ الكُبْرَى التِي أَنْوارُها ضاءَتْ أَشِعَّتُها بِصَفْحةِ يُوحِ[138]

La *bā'iyya* se démarque quelque peu des deux autres poèmes dans sa partie dévolue à l'éloge. Nous n'y trouvons pas, en effet, de panégyrique « en règle » du Prophète, même si celui-ci est aussi désigné comme « le sceau de la prophétie » (*a-yā khātima l-rusli*, v. 32). L'accent y est plutôt mis sur la défense de l'islam et la lutte contre l'infidèle, ce passage entrant en résonance avec la

130 Al-Būṣīrī, *Burda*, 70-71, v. 61-64.
131 *Dāliyya*, v. 79.
132 *Dāliyya*, v. 77-78.
133 *Ḥā'iyya*, v. 20 et 23.
134 *Ḥā'iyya*, v. 30.
135 *Ḥā'iyya*, v. 20.
136 *Ḥā'iyya*, v. 22.
137 *Ḥā'iyya*, v. 30.
138 *Ḥā'iyya*, v. 21 : "Et le signe suprême dont les rayons de lumière éclairent la face du soleil".

valorisation du *jihād* caractérisant la période mais aussi, plus généralement, la poésie d'al-Andalus[139]. Cela s'explique sans doute en grande partie par le fait que, comme nous l'avons mentionné, ce poème introduisait une épître rédigée au nom du sultan nasride Muḥammad V al-Ghanī bi-llāh. Ainsi, après avoir rappelé la menace planant sur les Musulmans, représentée par des scorpions s'efforçant d'éteindre la lumière de l'islam allumée par le Prophète[140], le poète évoque les martyrs de la foi tombés lors des batailles menées pour défendre cette religion :

فَكَمْ مِنْ شَهيدٍ، في رِضاكَ، مُجَدَّلٍ يُظَلِّلُهُ نَسْرٌ وَيَنْدُبُ ذيبُ
تَمُرُّ الرِّياحُ الغُفْلُ فَوْقَ كُلومِهِمْ فَتَعْبَقُ مِنْ أَنْفاسِها وَتَطيبُ[141]

La foi et la dévotion envers le Prophète sont présentées comme un atout essentiel quand il s'agit de mener bataille et d'engranger les victoires contre les Chrétiens :

وَلولاكَ لَمْ يُعْجَمْ مِنَ الرومِ عُودُها فَعُودُ الصَليبِ الأَعْجَمِيِّ صَليبُ
مَنابِرُ عِزٍّ أَذَّنَ الفَتْحُ فَوْقَها وَأَفْصَحَ لِلْعَضْبِ الطَّريرِ خَطيبُ[142]

4 Conclusion

A l'issue de notre étude, comment pouvons-nous caractériser les poèmes d'éloge du Prophète d'Ibn al-Khaṭīb ? L'une de leurs spécificités réside dans leur caractère composite qui brasse des motifs et des styles appartenant à divers genres poétiques arabes : l'élégie préislamique, le panégyrique de cour traditionnel, la poésie soufie, les *Ḥijāziyyāt* du XI[e] siècle, la poésie paysagère andalouse, la

139 Cette thématique, nommée *istinjād*, est très présente, par la force des choses, dans la poésie d'al-Andalus et se développe au rythme des victoires chrétiennes. L'une des références en la matière est sans conteste la *qaṣīda* d'Ibn al-Ābbār (m. 658/1260) adressée au souverain ḥafṣide de Tunis au moment où Valence était assiégée par les armées chrétiennes.

140 *Bā'iyya*, v. 38-39.

141 *Bā'iyya*, v. 40-41 : "Combien de martyrs, jetés à terre, pour ton agrément, [reposant] à l'ombre des vautours et pleurés par les loups / En passant au-dessus de leurs blessures, les vents insouciants s'imprègnent de leurs effluves et embaument".

142 *Bā'iyya*, v. 44 : "Sans toi, Le bois des Chrétiens n'aurait pas été marqué de points diacritiques, car le bois de la croix étrangère est solide" et 47 : "Chaires de gloire du haut desquelles la victoire a appelé à la prière, et où le prédicateur a prononcé un prône éloquent [adressé] à des épées extrêmement tranchantes".

thématique de *l'istinjāḍ*, lui aussi très lié à la production d'al-Andalus, etc … Ibn al-Khaṭīb manie avec virtuosité toutes ces composantes et les fond dans des compositions très cohérentes organisées autour de la relation individuelle et privilégiée liant le sujet au Prophète.

Si nous nous référons de nouveau à la distinction établie par Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych entre éloges du prophète d'inspiration soufie et odes dites « de supplication », il apparaît clairement que les textes qui nous occupent sont beaucoup plus proches du premier type que du second[143]. En effet, il n'est pas question, dans ces poèmes, d'une évolution du sujet, d'un trajet qui le mènerait d'une position à une autre. La structure de ces *qaṣīda*s peut être définie comme cyclique, les retours au pôle « sujet » se multipliant et constituant une sorte d'antienne. Ceux-ci ont pour conséquence une rupture d'équilibre entre les séquences élégiaques centrées sur le sujet et celles dédiées à l'éloge du Prophète à proprement parler, au détriment de ces dernières. Ce déséquilibre entre thuriféraire et objet de l'éloge n'est pas, loin s'en faut, chose nouvelle dans la poésie arabe. C'était d'ailleurs l'une des marques des panégyriques d'al-Mutanabbī. En al-Andalus, Ibn Darrāj al-Qasṭallī composa, durant la *Fitna* du début du V^e^/XI^e^ siècle, des panégyriques qui, à l'instar de ceux de son prédécesseur oriental, auquel il fut souvent comparé, accordaient la part belle au sujet qu'il y installait, la *shakwā* y prenant nettement le pas sur la louange.

Quoiqu'il en soit, nous espérons que l'analyse de l'ensemble des *mada'iḥ nabawiyya* et *mawlidiyyāt* de Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb, que nous projetons, nous permettra d'affiner ces premiers résultats.

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143 Même si la *dāliyya* se clôt par un panégyrique des plus classiques, adressé au sultan mérinide. En effet, cette dernière séquence apparaît comme une sorte d'appendice obligatoire bien plus que comme une partie constitutive du *madīḥ nabawī*.

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14

Présence du Prophète dans l'art du panégyrique (*madīḥ*) et de l'audition spirituelle (*samāʿ*)

Approche thématique

Mohamed Thami El Harrak

Pour suivre les traces de la présence du Prophète dans l'art du panégyrique, il faut observer la manière dont se dessinent les traits de sa personne dans des textes destinés à être chantés[1]. Dans ces textes s'interpénètrent poésie, mélodie, mesure rythmique et chant. Ils sont produits et reçus dans divers contextes religieux et dans certains lieux : mosquées, zaouias, mausolées et maisons privés. Leur production est soumise à certaines conditions et aménagements qui favorisent l'impact de ces chants sur les âmes et les esprits à la mesure des significations et des valeurs qu'ils véhiculent. Si nous considérons le corpus poétique du panégyrique et de l'audition spirituelle, nous trouvons d'un côté des textes qui chantent la présence prophétique et de l'autre, des textes soufis ou « parole des initiés » (*kalām al-qawm*) dont l'objet est la présence divine. La composition de ces textes s'étend sur des siècles et leurs auteurs ont vécu dans divers temps et lieux, entre Orient, Andalus et Maghreb. On a également affaire à plusieurs genres : poésie classique, *muwashshaḥ*, *zajal* andalou et *malḥûn* maghrébin. Ces textes sont chantés dans toutes sortes de circonstances religieuses et sociales, privées et publiques, dans les moments de joie et de tristesse. Ils accompagnent le musulman en général et le musulman marocain en particulier du berceau à la tombe. Il est donc impossible de rendre compte de tous les aspects que revêt dans ces textes la figure de l'Élu de Dieu. C'est pourquoi notre présentation consistera à relever les principaux thèmes où se manifeste plus particulièrement la présence du Prophète et par lesquels ils exercent une fonction spirituelle et esthétique, tant sur le plan individuel que collectif.

A propos de ces chants, il faut tenir compte des deux faces de cet art : la première, comme on l'a dit axée sur la présence prophétique, est partagée par tous, le grand public et les initiés, car elle n'est pas exposée à la critique dont peuvent être l'objet les poèmes destinés aux initiés, caractérisés par leur langage allusif et symbolique, bachique et érotique, expression d'une

1 Cet article est une version traduite et adaptée par Denis Gril d'une conférence donnée en arabe lors du colloque de Marrakech "Présence et héritage du Prophète" en novembre 2018.

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connaissance ésotérique. De tels poèmes sont exclusivement chantés dans les séances de *dhikr*, réservées à ceux qui peuvent goûter ces réalités spirituelles. C'était une règle de ne pas les divulguer de crainte qu'ils ne soient pas compris et taxés d'hétérodoxie. Pour cette raison on parle plutôt des « louanges au Prophète (*al-amdāḥ al-nabawiyya*), plutôt que de « parole des initiés » ou de « pure audition spirituelle » (*al-samāʿ al-mujarrad*) ou simplement *samāʿ*.

Par delà cette distinction, il est possible d'affirmer que les poèmes dédiés au Prophète tournent autour de trois axes : la joie, l'amour et la beauté. Tous en effet chantent la joie que procure l'évocation du Prophète (*al-faraḥ bi-rasūl Allāh*). Suyūṭī dans son *Durr al-manthūr*[2] et d'autres rapportent d'après Ibn ʿAbbās cette interprétation du verset : « Dis : de la grâce de Dieu et de sa miséricorde, de cela qu'ils se réjouissent … » (Coran 10:58) : « La grâce de Dieu, c'est la science et sa miséricorde, Muḥammad – sur lui la prière et le salut – ». Et ceci est le summum de la joie pour al-ʿIzz b. ʿAbd al-Salām (m. 660/1262)[3] car « la grandeur de la joie est à la mesure de celui dont on se réjouit »[4]. Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (m. 686/1288), en parlant de la joie provoquée par le Prophète, faisait cette subtile distinction : « Les prophètes sont un don (*ʿaṭiyya*) à leurs communautés et notre prophète est pour nous un cadeau (*hadiyya*) et il y a une différence entre les deux : le don est pour les nécessiteux et le cadeau pour les bien-aimés. L'Envoyé de Dieu – sur lui la prière et le salut – a dit : « Je suis une miséricorde offerte en cadeau » (*innamā ana raḥmatun muhdāt*) »[5]. Cette joie manifeste l'amour des musulmans pour le Prophète, amour qui une condition de la foi selon le *ḥadīth* : « Aucun d'entre vous ne sera véritablement croyant tant qu'il ne m'aimera pas plus que ses enfants, son père et tous les hommes »[6] ou encore la réponse du Prophète à ʿUmar quand celui-ci lui dit : « Je t'aime plus que toute chose sauf mon âme. – Non, lui dit le Prophète, par celui dans la main duquel se trouve mon âme, tant que tu ne m'aimeras pas plus que ton âme. – Maintenant, répondit ʿUmar, je t'aime plus que mon âme. – Maintenant, il en est ainsi, ô ʿUmar »[7]. C'est pour inciter à cette joie et à cet amour, que les poèmes à la louange du Prophète chantent sa beauté physique et spirituelle, extérieure et intérieure, visible et invisible, comme le dit l'imam des panégyristes du Prophète, Sharaf al-Dīn al-Būṣīrī (m. 695/1295) dans sa *Hamziyya* (vers n° 157), évoquant ces deux faces de la beauté :

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2 Suyūṭī, *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, III 308.

3 ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām, *Shajarat al-ʿārif*, 128.

4 Voir par exemple Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, IV 31.

5 Ibn ʿAṭāʾ āllāh, *Laṭāʾif al-minan*, 148-9. Ce *ḥadīth* est cité, entre autres, par Dārimī, *Sunan*, I 9.

6 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *īmān*, 69-70.

7 Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *aymān wa nudhūr*, 3.

Splendeur voilée par la splendeur. Merveille : beauté occultant la beauté

C'est la beauté de la poésie et de son accompagnement musical qui permet de représenter extérieurement et de saisir intérieurement la beauté muḥammadienne. Elle est comme l'isthme où se rencontrent l'amour du Prophète et la joie provoquée par son évocation. Tous les thèmes du *madīḥ*, portés par la poésie, le chant et l'accompagnement musical concourent par leur beauté à manifester la beauté sensible et spirituelle du Prophète car l'homme aime spontanément la beauté. L'art du *madīḥ* vise donc à appeler les musulmans à se laisser imprégner par les traits et les vertus intérieures de la beauté muḥammadienne.

1 Les thèmes du *madīḥ*

L'étude des champs sémantiques que recouvrent les thématiques du *madīḥ* nous invite à distinguer dans une certaine mesure ce qui relève du panégyrique à proprement parler et ce qui relève plus précisément d'une orientation plus spécifiquement initiatique, comme on l'a déjà relevé. Toutefois on ne saurait non plus établir de limite stricte entre l'un et l'autre domaine car tous deux sont l'expression d'une sacralité qui englobe la présence prophétique et la présence divine. Il importe ici de remarquer que la poésie arabe ancienne et classique, à quelques exceptions près, n'a guère pris en compte la dimension religieuse jusqu'au VII^{e}/XIII^{e} siècle[8]. A telle enseigne qu'Ibn Khaldūn dans sa *Muqaddima* considère que « la poésie consacrée à Dieu et au Prophète (*al-rabbāniyyāt wa l-nabawiyyāt*) est généralement de qualité médiocre, à l'exception de quelques grands poètes et chez un petit nombre d'entre eux, avec difficulté, car leurs thématiques sont largement connues »[9]. Il y a dans ce jugement quelque justesse mais aussi la volonté d'écarter de nombreux textes et en particulier ceux des soufis soupçonnés d'être influencés par la philosophie, tels Ḥallāj, Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Shushtarī et ibn al-ʿArabī[10]. Cette opposition ancienne a contribué à faire oublier la dimension poétique du discours soufi et donc à l'écarter de la poétique arabe[11]. A ceci s'ajoute le fait que la poésie était conçue comme un art respectant des règles fixes, notamment dans la description du monde extérieur, alors que la poésie pour les soufis est avant tout l'expression

8 Mubārak, *al-Madāʾiḥ al-nabawiyya*, 8.
9 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 746.
10 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 592 et *Shifāʾ al-sāʾil*, 212-221 ; Miftāḥ, *al-Khiṭāb al-ṣūfī*, 102-5, 107, 111-13 ; Ḥilmī, *Ibn al-Fārid*, 117-19.
11 Belqāsim, *Adūnīs*, 75.

d'une expérience de l'Être, jaillissant d'une âme poétique s'exprimant dans un langage allusif et symbolique. Cet oubli de la poésie soufie est double, celui de sa dimension poétique et celui de sa profondeur intellectuelle et spirituelle[12]. De ce fait la poésie religieuse, et soufie en particulier, a été longtemps négligée, en dehors de ceux qui la pratiquaient et pour qui elle constituait un texte de référence méritant d'être expliqué, imité et enseigné car il fait le lien entre ce qui est d'ordre esthétique et ce qui relève de l'éducation et de la connaissance spirituelles.

Cette dimension de la poésie religieuse se retrouve dans bien des poèmes chantés à diverses occasions. Cependant, nous aborderons surtout les différents thèmes abordés dans les poèmes à la louange du Prophète, pour commémorer et actualiser sa présence, selon cette classification thématique : naissance du Prophète, vertus prophétiques, prières sur le Prophète, miracles, visite de Médine et demandes d'intercession. Hormis les deux célèbres panégyriques d'al-Būṣīrī (m. 697/1298), la *Burda* et la *Hamziyya*[13], les poèmes cités sont extraits d'une anthologie représentative du répertoire marocain, le *Fatḥ al-anwār fī bayān mā yuʿīnu ʿalā madḥ al-nabī al-mukhtār*, de Muḥammad b. al-ʿArabī al-Dilāʾī (m. 1285/1868)[14].

2 La commémoration de la naissance du Prophète (*mawlidiyyāt*)

Ces textes ont été composés pour chanter la naissance et l'enfance du Prophète à partir du moment où l'on a commencé à commémorer le Mawlid. C'était l'occasion pour les poètes de se faire connaître devant les souverains et le public qui assistaient à ces festivités. Mais l'inspiration de ces poèmes doit beaucoup également au soufisme et aux voies spirituelles pour lesquelles le Mawlid constituait un moment exceptionnel dans le cadre de manifestations officielles ou populaires où ces poèmes, déclamés ou chantés, jouaient un rôle essentiel. Le genre des *mawlidiyyāt* où s'entrecroisent parfois prose et poésie, a connu pour cette raison un développement considérable, notamment sur le plan musical, tant auprès des chanteurs que dans les cercles de *dhikr* collectif. Nous nous limiterons ici aux poèmes modulés qui évoquent l'ascendance du Prophète, sa naissance et les signes miraculeux qui l'ont accompagnée, ainsi que son enfance et les prémices de sa mission. Ils exultent la joie à l'arrivée de

12 Benʿammāra, *al-ṣūfiyya*, 48-49 et Belqāsim, *al-Kitāba wa l-taṣawwuf*, 131.

13 Voir l'étude de Stetkevych, *The Mantle odes*.

14 Dilāʾī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*. Dilāʾī est un disciple de Muḥammad al-Ḥarrāq (m. 1261/1845), lui-même un des successeurs de Mūlāy al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī (m. 1239/1823).

rabīʿ I, mois de sa naissance, moment sanctifié dans la mémoire et la sensibilité des musulmans, annonçant la venue au monde de l'Élu comme lumière, guidance et miséricorde pour tous les êtres. On trouvera ici quelques exemples de la manière dont sont traités les différents thèmes abordés dans ces poèmes.

Aḥmad b. Saʿīd al-Maghribī chante ainsi la noble ascendance[15] du Prophète :

> Aḥmad, le Guide, l'Envoyé, L'Élu, arbre glorieux et source de noblesse
> Généreux par son origine, père et mère, par ses dons, ses vertus et ses ancêtres
> Parmi les pères de la plus haute ascendance, parmi les fils le plus pur descendant
> Fils de ʿAbdallah, postérité des généreux, revêtus de la plus haute des gloires
> Soleils et lunes dans le ciel, alors que les étoiles des hommes étaient dans la pénombre[16].

La *Burda* d'al-Būṣīrī (vers 60-5) évoque à propos du Mawlid les signes miraculeux qui ont coïncidé avec la naissance du Prophète, tels l'ébranlement du palais de Chosroès, l'assèchement du lac de Sāwa et l'extinction du feu des mages.

> Sa naissance a dévoilé l'excellence de son origine. Quels excellents début et conclusion !
> Le jour où les Persans pressentirent qu'ils avaient été avertis de la venue du malheur et de la vindicte.
> Le palais de Chosroès se trouva fissuré, tout comme ses compagnons désunis.
> Le feu, essoufflé, s'éteignit de désespoir et le fleuve retint sa source, de regret.
> Sāwa fut affligé de voir son lac se vider. L'assoiffé venu s'abreuver s'en retourna courroucé.
> Comme si le feu, de tristesse était de l'eau sans humidité, et l'eau du feu sans flamme.

Al-Būṣīrī dans sa *Hamziyya* (vers 23-7) mentionne quelques faits remarquables lors de la venue au monde du Prophète, telle la bénédiction des anges lorsqu'il éternua, comme l'a rapporté la sage-femme al-Shaffā' ou sa naissance la tête

15 Sur ce thème, voir Qāḍī ʿīyāḍ, *al-Shifā'*, 77-78.

16 Dilā'ī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 64.

levée regardant vers le ciel ou encore la descente vers lui des étoiles et l'apparition d'un jaillissement de lumière, comme l'aperçut Umm ʿUthmān b. Abī l-ʿĀṣ :

> Les anges l'ont béni quand sa mère accoucha de lui ; al-Shaffā' en le disant nous a comblés.
> Il leva la tête et cette élévation indiquait en lui toute sa noblesse.
> Levant les yeux vers le ciel, comme celui dont le regard vise au plus haut.
> Les étoiles brillantes descendirent vers lui et éclairèrent de leur éclat toute contrée.
> Les palais de César se montrèrent au lointain ; on les vit de la vallée de la Mecque.

Al-Būṣīrī poursuit dans la *Hamziyya* (vers 28-33), à propos des grâces dont le Prophète orphelin fut l'objet, et lors de son allaitement :

> Durant son allaitement se manifestèrent des miracles qui ne sont pas cachés aux regards
> Les nourrices le refusèrent car il était orphelin, pensant qu'il ne leur servirait de rien.
> Une jeune femme de la tribu de Saʿd vint le trouver, à cause de sa pauvreté, les familles des nourrissons l'avaient rejetée.
> Elle l'allaita de son lait, abreuvée elle et ses enfants du lait des brebis.
> Elle connut la prospérité après la misère, car par elle le Prophète fut nourri.

Un peu plus loin (vers 41-4), c'est l'épisode de l'ouverture de la poitrine et de la purification de son cœur par Gabriel :

> On fendit son cœur et on en sortit après l'avoir lavé un morceau de chair tout noir.
> La main de l'ange fidèle apposa le sceau et fut déposé en lui ce dont il n'avait pas eu l'annonce.
> Le sceau protégea ses secrets contre toute découverte et divulgation.
> Ascèse, adoration et retraite lui furent familières dès l'enfance, comme les êtres d'exception.

Un autre miracle, signe avant-coureur de sa mission prophétique, dont Ḥalīma al-Saʿdiyya fut le témoin ainsi que son épouse Khadīja, est souvent évoqué

dans les *mustaʿmala*[17] du *Fatḥ al-anwār*[18] : un nuage l'abritait de la chaleur du soleil. En voici un exemple :

> Fiancé du Jour de la Résurrection, clé de la porte de la félicité,
> Le nuage le recouvrait de son ombre, l'abritait de la chaleur du désert
> Muḥammad gratifié de charismes et de miracles authentiques
> Il m'a versé une coupe de son amour, alors que je souffrais d'un mal
> Quand son amour s'installa dans ma poitrine, il dissipa ma rancœur.

À côté de ces évocations, les *mawlidiyyāt* sont traversés d'expressions de joie et de bonheur à l'arrivée du mois de sa naissance et de sa lumière, comme cet extrait tiré de *Fāḥa l-miskuʿ fāḥ* (Le musc a exhalé son parfum) d'Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥalabī (m. 1120/1708)[19] :

> La lumière a brillé de la naissance de ṬāHā
> Qui a surpassé les créatures en gloire et dignité
> Par lui le Seigneur a défié tous les êtres
> Le Bien-Aimé, le très Généreux, mon seigneur Muḥammad
> Bienvenu sois-tu, mois de rabīʿ al-awwal
> Tu as été revêtu de splendeur, que tout soit facile ou difficile
> Comme tu es beau, ô rabīʿ, et sublime
> Tu as amené l'Intercesseur, mon seigneur Muḥammad[20].

Dans *Yā maʿshar al-ḥuḍḍār* (Ô vous qui êtes présents), du même auteur :

> Splendeur et lumière brillent lors de la naissance du fils de ʿAdnān[21]
> Le Hāshimite, l'agréé, qui illumine les créatures
> Le recours des justes, l'Élu, le Bienheureux
> Le soleil matinal, le Choisi, notre Maître Muḥammad[22]

Dans les poèmes sur le Mawlid, la louange du Prophète comme lumière devient un thème et un champ sémantique en soi et cette tendance s'accentue quand

17 *Mustaʿmala* : pièce de poésie chantée dans le répertoire marocain.
18 Dilāʾī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 67.
19 Cheikh originaire d'Alep qui finit sa vie et fut enterré à Fès. Il est l'auteur d'un important *dīwān* consacré au Prophète, cf. GAL, suppl. II 683-4 ; Kaḥḥāla, *Muʿjam al-muʾallifīn*, I 263 ; Kattānī, *Salwat al-anfās*, II 184-7 n° 601.
20 Dilāʾī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 117.
21 ʿAdnān est l'ancêtre lointain du Prophète.
22 Dilāʾī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 146.

les soufis y introduisent la doctrine de la Réalité muḥammadienne (*al-ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyya*) :

> Muḥammad paré de toutes distinctions, principe et lumière de l'existence
> Son secret très sublime, de lui procède la manifestation de toute chose
> Le sait un homme averti, inondé de lumière par le flux de ses mers
> Ô mon cœur, par Dieu, tourne-toi vers lui et coupe les liens avec tout autre
> Ne penche pas vers autre que lui et plonge dans la mer de son évocation[23].

C'est au Prophète, origine de tous les êtres, qu'Aḥmad ʿĀshūr al-Ribāṭī (m. 1250/1834)[24] consacre la seconde partie de sa *baryūla*[25] *A man hawāh sākin qalbī* « Ô toi dont l'amour habite mon cœur » :

> Tu es l'existence, tu es l'existant * tu es la quête, tu es son objet * tu es la cause de toute existence
> N'était toi, il n'y aurait ni Paradis ni Enfer * ni ciel ni planète
> Vois-tu mon œil * Le monde exhale et embaume de la senteur de son parfum
> En est garante ma certitude * Je n'ai pas trouvé qui aimer si ce n'est lui
> Par Dieu, que mon œil te garde * fiancé de la Résurrection, Envoyé de Dieu !

Ainsi les chants du Mawlid reposent principalement sur l'annonce de sa naissance et son enfance et les signes miraculeux qui les accompagnent, sur l'évocation des lumières qui témoignent de sa mission : faire sortir les hommes des ténèbres vers la lumière et sur sa préexistence comme « poignée lumineuse et miséricordieuse » (*qabḍa nūrāniyya raḥmāniyya*) dont procède tous les existants et par laquelle ils ont été manifestés.

3 Les vertus du Prophète (*shamā'iliyyāt*)

La plupart des textes du *madīh* font le lien entre la naissance du Prophète et la mention de ses qualités physiques et la perfection de son caractère, ce que

23 Dilā'ī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 102.
24 Cf. *Mawsūʿat aʿlām al-Maghrib*, VII, 2548.
25 Poème chanté en dialectal marocain, du genre *malḥūn*.

recouvre le terme de *shamā'il muḥammadiyya*. Comme le dit al-Būṣīrī dans sa *Burda* (vers 41-2) :

> Il est celui dont parfaits sont le sens et la forme
> Le créateur des âmes l'a élu comme bien-aimé
> Il n'a pas d'associé dans ses qualités
> La substance de la beauté en lui ne peut se diviser

Évoquer les qualités du Prophète, c'est comme le voir car l'oreille tient lieu des yeux et l'amant voit avec l'œil de son ouïe les vertus de son aimé, selon l'expression d'Ibn al-Fāriḍ (m. 632/1235) dans sa *Fā'iyya* (vers 46-7) :

> Assiste-moi, mon frère, et chante-moi ses paroles,
> Répands sur mon ouïe ses parures et réjouis-moi
> Pour que je vois de l'œil de mon ouïe le témoin de sa beauté
> En esprit. Fais-moi ce don et cet honneur[26].

Se représenter l'aspect et les qualités du Prophète peut conduire à sa vision en rêve. « Certains amoureux du Prophète, raconte al-Dilā'ī, se remémoraient la beauté de ses traits, se les représentaient et les actualisaient jusqu'à ce qu'ils s'impriment dans leur être intime et que cela conduise à la vision du prophète en rêve. Ceci est une faveur insigne car, comme dit al-Būṣīrī : « tous ceux qui l'ont vu ne connaîtront pas le malheur »[27]. Ainsi entendre ses vertus provoque leur dévoilement, but recherché par ceux qui composent ces poèmes et ceux qui les chantent, tout en reconnaissant leur incapacité à décrire le Prophète, comme le fait Ibn al-Fāriḍ dans le poème précédemment cité :

> Parfaites sont ses qualités. S'il donnait son éclat
> à la pleine lune, jamais elle ne serait éclipsée.
> En dépit de l'art de ceux qui décrivent sa beauté
> Le temps s'épuiserait et il y aurait toujours en lui quoi décrire[28].

Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb (m. 776/1375) compose sur ce thème en faisant allusion au verset : « Tu es selon un caractère magnifique » (Coran 68, 2).

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26 Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Dīwān*, 273.

27 Būṣīrī, *Al-Hamziyya*, vers n° 153 ; Dilā'ī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 194.

28 [Vers 42-3], Dilā'ī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 164.

Ô toi qui fus élu avant la création d'Adam,
Alors que les verrous de l'univers n'avaient pas encore été ouverts
Une créature pourrait-elle te louer après que
Le Créateur ait fait l'éloge de tes caractères[29].

Nombreux sont les poètes qui expriment la même perplexité, ce qui ne les empêche pas de dire leur amour pour le Prophète, leur joie et d'être subjugués par sa beauté :

C'est le Prophète magnifié, l'Élu, quel excellent imam !
Éclatant de blancheur, ennobli, privilégié parmi les créatures
Son visage parfait est comme le disque de la pleine lune
Il nous a apporté la félicité, que prie sur lui le Seigneur des serviteurs
Tant que l'oiseau fera entendre sa plainte, plein de nostalgie et de désir[30].

Citons enfin, comme exemple parmi beaucoup d'autres, le *murabba'*[31] d'Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥalabī :

Lisse sa joue * marqué de collyre son regard * belle sa bouche *blanches ses dents, comme des camomilles
Aucun des grands * n'a été élevé comme Aḥmad * aucun généreux * ne l'a surpassé en libéralité
Bienvenu à l'Envoyé * clé de tout agrément * ouvrant à tout demandeur * la porte de la félicité
Il a apporté la direction * aux créatures, Aḥmad * Il a montré la justesse * par sa vertu, Aḥmad
Le guide, l'intercesseur * à la beauté splendide * à la main superbe * annonçant le succès
Aucun longanime * ne l'a été comme Aḥmad * aucun sage * n'a jugé comme Aḥmad
Son odeur parfumée * son teint éclatant * embaume et s'empare * des êtres de beauté[32].

29 Dilā'ī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 97.
30 Dilā'ī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 106.
31 Poème sur quatre colonnes à rime finale alternée et rimes internes.
32 Dilā'ī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 1.

4 Les prières sur le Prophète (*al-taṣliyāt*)

La prière sur le Prophète confère à l'art du *madīḥ* une légitimité religieuse en répondant à l'ordre divin appelant à la pratiquer. Elle est présente dans tous les genres du panégyrique le plus souvent en introduction ou en conclusion. Elle représente aussi un genre en soi dans des poèmes dont elle constitue le thème principal. Elle peut être prise également comme refrain, comme cette formule souvent reprise par les chanteurs :

> Dieu a magnifié la dignité de Muḥammad
> Il lui fait don auprès de lui d'une grâce immense
> Dans sa révélation, il l'a confirmé en disant à ses créatures :
> Priez sur lui et saluez-le sans cesse[33].

Autre formule :

> Priez sur le soleil de la prophétie et sa clarté matinale
> Priez sur la lune lumineuse qui se lève
> Priez sur lui et mentionnez-le sans cesse
> Pour que mon cœur et mon ouïe s'en réjouissent[34].

On retrouve ce genre de refrain dans des compositions à cinq strophes se terminant toute par le refrain :

> Priez sur le guide * priez sur lui de désir
> Voici une de ces strophes (*adwār*) :
>
> Ô pauvres en Dieu * mes seigneurs levez-vous
> Profitez de ce rappel * fièrement et magnifiez
> Muḥammad, la bonne nouvelle * priez et saluez
> Ô mon ami, prie * sur la meilleure des créatures
> Priez sur le guide * priez sur lui de désir[35].

Parmi les *baryūla*, on peut citer celle d'Aḥmad b. ʿAllāl al-Sharābilī (m. 1200/1786)[36] :

33 Dilāʾī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 79.
34 Dilāʾī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 87.
35 Dilāʾī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 107.
36 Un des maîtres du *malḥūn* à Marrakech.

Que Dieu prie sur le Hāshimite, le glorifié, TāHā
Les colliers d'or et de joyaux brillent de sa beauté
Ainsi que la perle éclatante
Fais l'éloge du Choisi, le repos et le souhait de mon âme
De mon adoration, de ma voie et de ma religion, je lui fais don
Dans tout ce qui pénètre les cœurs
Que Dieu prie sur lui tant que le soleil répand sa clarté
Et de même tant que la nuit s'obscurcit et s'écarte après l'aube
Ainsi que les constellations[37].

À peu près tous les *barāwil* (pl. de *baryūla*) dans le recueil du *Fatḥ al-anwār* débutent par la prière sur le Prophète, ce qui montre l'attachement des Marocains à cette pratique et leur volonté de l'encourager pour répondre à l'appel de Dieu, par amour pour le Prophète et pour observer sa loi et sa *sunna*.

5 Les miracles (*al-muʿjizāt*)

Nous entendons par là les poèmes qui traitent en particulier des miracles dont le Prophète est gratifié ou qu'il opère pour affirmer sa prophétie et conforter son appel à Dieu. Ces poèmes s'inspirent d'épisodes rapportés dans la Sīra ou dans les traditions rapportant les vertus et caractéristiques du Prophète (*shamā'il*). Nous donnerons ici quelques exemples traitant d'un miracle en particulier ou en mentionnant un certain nombre comme le fait al-Būṣīrī dans la *Burda* et la *Hamziyya*. Dans celle-ci, le poète traite aussi bien du Coran comme miracle majeur du Prophète que de toute une série de faits miraculeux racontés par la tradition, comme l'eau coulant des doigts du Prophète, ou les palmiers plantés par lui pour Salmān qui donnèrent des fruits l'année même, le caillou glorifiant Dieu dans sa main, l'accroissement de la quantité d'or pour l'affranchissement de Salmān, la guérison des malades par un simple toucher de sa main ou la vue rendue à Qatāda b. al-Nuʿmān :

L'eau a jailli, les palmiers ont donné leurs fruits l'année
Même. Le caillou a glorifié dans sa main
Sa main a sauvé de la mort ceux qui n'avaient plus rien
La troupe n'avait plus ni nourriture ni eau
Un boisseau a suffi à nourrir mille affamés
Un boisseau a abreuvé mille assoiffés

37 Dilā'ī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 90-1.

L'équivalent d'un œuf en or a suffi à payer
La dette de Salmān quand vint son échéance
On l'appelait esclave mais il fut affranchi quand
Les régimes de ses palmiers vinrent à maturité
N'excusez-vous pas Salmān quand
A son évocation, la fièvre s'empara de lui
En le touchant, la main du Prophète enleva un mal
Qui dépassait médecins et thérapeutes
Elle passa sur des yeux couverts de chassie
Et leur fit voir ce que ne voyait pas al-Zarqā'[38]
Elle rendit à Qatāda son œil
Qui resta jusqu'à sa mort le plus perçant[39].

Le *muwashshaḥ Ṣallū ʿalā Muḥammad* (priez sur Muḥammad) évoque trois miracles : la pierre qui a salué le Prophète, l'arbre qui s'est empressé vers lui et la lune qui s'est fendu sur un signe de lui :

À la Mecque une pierre * a salué Muḥammad
Quand il l'appela * l'arbre s'empressa vers Muḥammad
La lune s'est fendue * pour toi, ô Muḥammad
Seigneur unique dans son immense valeur
Par Dieu, ô Muḥammad, ta face est jouissance paradisiaque[40].

Dans toutes les manifestations religieuses animées par le chant et l'éloge du Prophète et prises en charge par les zaouias, le récit de ses miracles tient une place importante, tout particulièrement l'épisode du Voyage nocturne et de l'Ascension céleste avec toute la signification symbolique qu'il revêt dans le soufisme.

6 La visite des lieux saints (*al-ḥijāziyyāt*)

On les appelle aussi al-*mushawwiqāt* « qui suscitent le désir nostalgique » car ces textes évoquant les lieux du pèlerinage et la visite du Prophète à Médine expriment les sentiments de ceux qui sellent les montures pour se rendre auprès de la Kaʿba et se suspendre à ses voiles, pour embrasser la terre pure

38 Femme d'al-Yamāma, réputée pour l'acuité de son regard.
39 Būṣīrī, *Dīwān*, 57 [vers 167-175).
40 Dilā'ī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 66.

de Médine ou visiter le cimetière d'al-Baqīʿ et poser sa face contre le sol de la Rawḍa, par amour du Prophète, tant ces lieux sont chargés de significations symboliques dans la mémoire et la sensibilité des musulmans. La distance qui sépare le Maroc de la Mecque et du Hedjaz n'a fait qu'accroître une charge affective dont les traces sont encore sensibles. Ces poèmes sont chantés en particulier dans les maisons privées lors du départ pour ces lieux sacrés et lors du retour. Ce fait explique la richesse de ce thème dans le *samāʿ* au Maroc depuis l'époque mérinide, comme le relève Ibn Darrāj al-Sabtī dans son ouvrage sur le *samāʿ*. Ce thème occupe aussi une place remarquable dans la *nawba* instrumentale appelée *raml al-miʾa* à la suite des transformations réalisées par Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Fāsī (m. 1164/1751)[41]. Les textes de *ḥijāziyyāt* n'ont cessé de se féconder et de se multiplier pour exprimer ce désir toujours renouvelé de visiter les lieux saints et le Prophète. Les textes cités dans le *Fatḥ al-anwār* montrent combien ce thème a inspiré les poètes marocains.

Un des exemples les plus connus, en poésie classique, est la *qaṣīda* de Ḥasan al-Yūsī (m. 1102/1691) :

> Force ta marche vers elle, tu ne seras point blâmé
> Voici Ṭayba et voici la station
> Territoire sacré où s'établit un Prophète généreux
> A ses côtés un imam et un preux
> Majesté, crainte révérencielle et dignité
> Splendeur, élévation et vénération
> Ici attache ton cœur pour que s'apaisent
> Des brûlures aggravées par les flammes de l'amour
> Meurs ici de passion, d'extase, de désir
> Et d'amour ; tu n'encourras aucun blâme[42].

A la Kaʿba, Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥalabī s'adresse comme à une belle dont on chante la beauté :

> Une belle entre al-Ṣafā et le rocher[43]
> La beauté, son maître la lui a réservée
> Meurtriers ses coups d'œil, séductrice

41 Kattānī, *Salwat al-anfās*, I 364, n° 324. L'auteur relève l'étendue de ses connaissances dans le domaine musical. Voir sur ce genre l'étude de Davila, "Yā Qātilī bi-l-Tajannī".

42 Dilāʾī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 152.

43 De Marwa. Entre Ṣafā et Marwā, on accomplit des allers et retours après les tournées autour de la Kaʿba.

C'est elle qui ouvre la porte d'une insigne passion
Si la brise rencontre le pan de sa robe,
Elle la soulève fièrement avant l'aube
Qui es-tu, mon espoir ? lui-je demandai-je
Le visage épanoui parmi les plantes, dit-elle[44]
Es-tu le soleil matinal ? lui demandai-je
Certes et le soleil est la mère de la lune[45], dit-elle
Es-tu la branche sur la dune ? demandai-je
Sur la branche, toutes sortes de fleur, répondit-elle
Combien as-tu anéanti d'amants ? demandai-je
Qui peut dénombrer les cailloux et les pierres ? répondit-elle
Combien d'énamourés sont passés à trépas ? demandai-je
En voyant ma face, ils ont été comblés, répondit-elle[46].

Dans cette pièce de *zajal*, la nostalgie de la Mecque se mêle à l'amour du Prophète et au désir de se tenir dans sa Rawḍa à Médine :

Le désir nostalgique m'obsède * lassitude et maladie m'assaillent
Et les péchés me retiennent
Chaque jour je prends une résolution * et serre ma ceinture * pour voir Zamzam
Les chameliers conduisent de leur chants les montures * ô regret de mon cœur souffrant
L'amour de la plus belle des créatures m'a ravi * le Prophète, le Guide, le ʿAdnānī
Ah si je pouvais me lever * et me tenir à la porte de la Rawḍa
Je dirais avec ma langue ces mots :
Ô Envoyé de Dieu * ô fils de ʿAbdallah * la meilleure des créatures de Dieu
Je suis le serviteur pécheur et fautif * Je suis venu à toi pour que tu ne m'oublies pas
L'amour de la plus belle des créatures m'a ravi * le Prophète, le Guide, le ʿAdnānī[47].

Ainsi le désir de visiter le Prophète prend souvent la forme d'une complainte d'amour, comme dans cette *baryūla*, d'Aḥmad b. ʿAllāl al-Sharābilī :

44 *Qālat ribāṭ al-bishri bayna l-shajar* : le sens a échappé au traducteur.
45 En arabe, le soleil est féminin et la lune de genre masculin.
46 Dilāʾī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 120.
47 Dilāʾī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 79-80.

Le prince de l'amour a mis mon cœur à l'épreuve, cautérisé à la chaleur des tisons
Toute la nuit durant, le sommeil s'est envolé de mes paupières, tant la passion me brûle
Mes larmes sont telles des vagues, mon état ne connaît ni repos ni remède
Mon amour s'est enflammé ; pardonnez mon état ; je n'ai plus de force
Sans maladie, il m'a anéanti ; par celui que j'aime, le sommeil s'est envolé
Sa passion s'est installée à l'intérieur de moi, malgré la maladie d'amour, j'ai enduré
Je l'ai cachée mais en vain, est apparu ce que je cachais, beauté éclatante
Quand verrai-je de mes propres yeux la station du très-vénéré, en allant le visiter
Je n'ai plus besoin de témoin, quand mon pauvre corps se tord d'amour
Il est la pleine lune dans la pénombre. Il me possède ; je n'ai contre son amour de remède
Par sa beauté radieuse, le pauvre cœur de tout amoureux comme moi est brûlé
Mon amour s'est enflammé ; pardonnez mon état ; je n'ai plus de force

De tels poèmes sont particulièrement chantés lorsqu'on entre dans les mois du pèlerinage chaque année.

7 Poèmes de demande d'intercession (*al-istishfāʿiyyāt*)

Ces poèmes se réfèrent explicitement ou implicitement aux traditions où le Prophète annonce à sa communauté son rôle d'intercesseur lors du jugement dernier. Composer un poème en l'honneur du Prophète constitue en soi une manière de solliciter son intercession. Mais la demande d'intercession n'en est pas moins formulée avec insistance dans de nombreux poèmes, comme le fait al-Būṣīrī dans la *Burda* (vers 148-9 et 152-3) :

À Dieu ne plaise qu'il refuse à celui qui espère en lui ses dons généreux
Ou que celui qui se met sous sa protection ne s'en retourne sans être honoré
Depuis que je consacre mes pensées à faire son éloge
J'ai trouvé qu'il est pour mon salut le meilleur à qui s'adresser [...]

Ô toi, la plus généreuse des créatures, je n'ai personne auprès de qui me réfugier

Si ce n'est toi, quand surviendra l'évènement qui touchera tous les êtres
Ô Envoyé de Dieu, ton crédit auprès de Dieu ne sera pas trop étroit pour moi
Quand le Généreux se manifestera sous le nom de Vengeur.

Dans une *baryūla*, Aḥmad ʿĀshūr al-Ribāṭī exprime cette même attente de l'intercession du Prophète dans l'au-delà :

L'éloge de l'Envoyé dissipe ce qui trouble le cœur
Prononce-le en secret et ouvertement
Celui qui le loue, il l'abreuvera de sa main de l'eau du Kawthar[48]
Le jour où tu verras les hommes ivres de peur
Il sera son intercesseur et lui accordera sa protection
De sa lumière un phare sera allumé
Notre Seigneur le comblera et plus encore
Après tout ce qu'il aura souhaité
La grâce du Généreux embrassera ses serviteurs
Il récompensera ceux qui ont bien agi par mieux encore
Priez sur le Prophète et priez encore
Muḥammad est l'épousé du Paradis
Le jour où tous les envoyés monteront sur sa chaire
Des hommes s'agenouilleront tout autour
Bienheureux ses compagnons et ses auxiliaires
Dieu lui annoncera une bonne nouvelle
Aujourd'hui ce que vous avez planté donnera de beaux fruits
De leurs yeux ils l'ont vu promptement[49].

Dans un court *muwashshaḥ*, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Fāsī implore ainsi l'intercession du Prophète :

Mon trésor et mon soutien * ne sont que Muḥammad
Ma foi me fait espérer * son intercession demain
Sur toi je me repose * ô repère de guidance
J'ai recours à ta dignité * et à celle des envoyés
Des compagnons et de ta famille * Suffis-moi, ô mon garant[50].

48 Fleuve du Paradis.
49 Dilāʾī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 99.
50 Dilāʾī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 90.

On voit dans cette seconde partie d'une *baryūla*, comment l'auteur reprend certains éléments du *ḥadīth* de l'intercession, comme la prosternation du Prophète, louant son Seigneur, intercédant pour les pécheurs de sa communauté :

> Le jour où l'intercesseur des créatures dira : elle est pour moi, je m'avance * L'autorisation m'en a été donnée dans ce jour promis
> Qu'il est grand ce jour où l'Élu se lèvera protecteur * Le Seigneur se montrera aux créatures avec ses armées
> Dieu, dont la qualité est le don, l'appelle : * Lève la tête, demande, il te sera donné
> Intercède, ton intercession sera agréée
> C'est le jour du talion et du don * Toutes les créatures recevront
> un livre incrusté
> De lignes et de lettres tracées * où sont écrits ceux qui ont obéi et ceux qui ont fauté
> On ne pourra en revenir
> Puis tous les envoyés s'appelleront * Paix et sauvegarde * Mon âme, sans demander au sujet d'un père ou d'un enfant
> Nous demandons au Tout Miséricordieux, par l'Élu * Que Dieu prie sur lui et le salue * Qu'il nous mette dans son groupe ; nous n'avons d'autre but[51].

8 Conclusion

Ces exemples montrent combien l'art du *samāʿ* et son répertoire reflètent les références spirituelles et la sensibilité de la communauté musulmane dans son ensemble, et au Maroc tout particulièrement, dans la mesure où ces chants sont destinés à être entendus par un large public. Ils illustrent la présence du Prophète dans tous les genres et les thèmes du *madīḥ*. Comme on l'a remarqué dès le départ, ces textes destinés à être chantés expriment une joie, celle de la présence du Prophète, émanant de son amour. Le chant vise à provoquer joie et amour dans l'âme de l'auditeur, en évoquant la beauté du Prophète sur différents plans : physique et spirituel, humain prophétique, voir transcendant. L'expression poétique et musicale y concourent ainsi que d'autres éléments, tels les vêtements des chanteurs et du public, les fumigations d'encens, le caractère sacré des temps et des lieux, l'attitude recueillie des auditeurs, tout

51 Dilāʾī, *Fatḥ al-anwār*, 101.

ceci est de nature à susciter l'amour du Prophète, à porter à son imitation et à fixer son image dans les esprits. De ce fait le *samāʿ* joue un rôle essentiel dans l'éducation et la conduite des individus et d'une société où l'amour et la beauté ont leur place. Inutile de dire combien les sociétés musulmanes et humaines ont besoin, dans le contexte actuel, d'entendre un tel message.

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15

Timurid Accounts of Ascension (*miʿrāj*) in *Türkī*

One Prophet, Two Models

Marc Toutant

About three years after his accession to power in the province of Fars (which included the towns of Shiraz, Yazd and Isfahan), where he reigned from 1409 to 1414, Iskandar Sulṭān, grandson of Tamerlane, prepared a questionnaire touching on various theological points and sent it to the Sufi shaykh Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī Kirmānī (d. 1431) and the theologian Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī (d. 1413–14). Several of the queries it contained related to the celestial ascension of the Prophet: had the *miʿrāj* taken place in the physical sense? What was the nature of Burāq, the Prophet's winged mount who was half donkey and half mule? Why did Burāq and the angel Gabriel stay behind when Muḥammad had reached the highest sphere? The Timurid prince also asked about Heaven and Hell, and about the rewards and punishments that awaited human beings in the next world. At the end of his questionnaire, Iskandar Sulṭān asserted that he desired clear answers. He felt that although these subjects had very often been discussed, the theologians (*ʿulamāʾ*) analysing them had never managed to come to any agreement.[1] The Prophet's journey into the spheres of the next world interested him a great deal, and in 1410 he may have asked his court panegyrist of the period, Mīr Ḥaydar, to compose a version of this story.[2] This text has not survived, but if it was indeed written then the question arises of its possible influence on a *Miʿrājnāma*, composed in 1436 in Eastern Turkish (*Türkī*) at the court of Tamerlane's heir, Shāhrukh (r. 1405–47).[3] The many miniatures that illustrate this text, and the Uighur script in which it was transcribed, have for a long time interested orientalists and scholars: Christiane Gruber is one distinguished example. Her research reveals that accounts of ascension remained a favourite theme and source of inspiration for the poets

1 Aubin, "Le mécénat timouride à Chiraz" 71–88; Binbaş, "Timurid experimentation with eschatological absolutism: Mīrzā Iskandar, Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī, and Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī in 815/1412", 277–303.

2 Gruber, *The Timurid 'Book of Ascension'* (Miʿrājnāma)*: A Study of Text and Image in a Pan-Asian Context*, 262–65.

3 Gruber, *The Timurid 'Book of Ascension'* (Miʿrājnāma)*: A Study of Text and Image in a Pan-Asian Context*, 264–65.

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and painters of the princely courts from the second half of the fifteenth century until the fall of the dynasty at the beginning of the following century.[4]

Why did Tamerlane's heirs take so much care to ensure the diffusion of accounts of this episode in the Prophet's career? Why was it important for them that the account of ascension be written in Eastern Turkish (Chagatay), their mother tongue, instead of in Persian, still the pre-eminent written language? This linguistic dimension is especially significant because the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma* was not copied out in the Arabic characters that were traditionally used to transcribe the Turkish language, but used instead the Uighur script that was bound to remind readers of the links between this dynasty and the empire of Genghis Khan.[5] In addition to these formal elements, the account itself differs in certain details from its Persian- and Arabic-language predecessors; this implies that for its audience it came to fulfil a specific purpose. For example, one of the elements that sets this version apart from its models is the way in which Hell is painted in particularly bright colours and vivid detail. The carefully-presented tortures inflicted upon sinners, which the reader or spectator of this manuscript discovers through the Prophet's own eyes as he witnesses them, indicate to the believer what awaits him in the next world if he goes against religious law (at least as it is conceived by the prince on earth). This illustrated paraenesis, which looks like a soteriological guide, may also be linked to the religious politics of a sovereign who wants, despite his Turco-Mongolian origins, to appear here as a renewer of the Prophet's religion. We shall return to this subject later in this chapter.

Half a century later, a series of poems that looked at the ascension in a completely different way was written at the court of another Timurid prince. Their author was the great polymath Mīr ʿAlī Shīr Nawāʾī (1441–1501), who was then perceived as the most influential figure in the cultural life of Herat. These *miʿrājiyya*s appear in the prologues to each of the five narrative poems of the *mathnawī* type that make up his *Khamsa*, also written in Eastern Turkish between 1483 and 1485 and dedicated to Sulṭān Ḥusayn, the last great sovereign of the dynasty, who reigned from 1469 to 1506. Here Hell is no longer at issue, nor indeed is Heaven, because the entire story is centred on the mystical union between the Prophet and his Creator: Muḥammad's marvellous voyage becomes an allegory for the path that the Sufi is called upon to follow in his quest for God. Nawāʾī's texts belong to the Persian lyrical tradition in

4 Gruber, "L'ascension (*Miʿrāj*) du prophète Mohammad dans la peinture et la littérature islamiques", 55–79.

5 The Uighur script was adopted for administrative purposes by the Mongols during the thirteenth century.

which authors since Sanāʾī (who died around 1131) had inserted *miʿrāj* within the preambles of their narrative poems, omitting from the *miʿrāj* certain episodes, such as the visits to Heaven and Hell, in order to concentrate on the process of spiritual initiation.[6] Although the links between these accounts of ascension and the narratives they precede are merely allegorical, contemporary readers were far from considering the *miʿrāj* to be secondary, as is demonstrated by the fact that these are among the few episodes thought worthy of being illustrated with miniatures.[7]

The *Miʿrājnāma* written at the court of Shāhrukh in 1436 and the five *miʿrājiyya*s composed by Nawāʾī from 1483 to 1485 make up the principal corpus accessible to today's scholars of Timurid accounts of ascension in Eastern Turkish.[8] Alongside these Turkic versions there are accounts in Persian.[9] We have chosen not to include these in the current study in order to explore the singularity embodied in the choice of a Turkic language as a means of composition. It is certain that the use of this idiom in this specific dynastic context bound each work even more closely to the prince for whom it was created. The importance of these texts is also underlined by the fact that both the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma* and Nawāʾī's five poems were widely diffused, well beyond the frontiers of Timurid domains.[10]

An examination of the specifics of the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma* and of Nawāʾī's *miʿrājiyya*s, and of the tradition to which each belongs, along with a comparison between the two texts, will allow us to answer the following questions: How did the Timurids appropriate this fundamental event in the career of the Prophet? What image of Muḥammad is offered in these two types of text? What example does the Prophetic figure come to represent to the audiences of these widely-diffused accounts?

1 Two Timurid Versions of the *Miʿrāj*

The prose text of 1436 has been the object of several studies, foremost among which is the work of Christiane Gruber that we have already mentioned, and

6 Mayel-Heravi [1996], 199–203.

7 Gruber, "L'ascension (*Miʿrāj*) du prophète Mohammad dans la peinture et la littérature islamiques", 71.

8 Gruber, *The Timurid 'Book of Ascension'* (Miʿrājnāma)*: A Study of Text and Image in a Pan-Asian Context*, 330–336.

9 For example, see Felek, "Reading the *Miʿrāj* Account as a Theatrical Performance: The Case of *Maʿārij al-Nubuwwa*".

10 Pavet de Courteille, *Mirâdj-Nâmeh*, I–XVI; Toutant, *Un empire de mots*, 34.

to which we refer the reader who would like to know more about aspects that we do not discuss here. The poems of Nawā'ī have not yet been translated, nor have they been commented upon in any other way, so we will examine these in greater depth.

1.1 *The 1436 Miʿrājnāma*

A comparison between the 1436 manuscript and the 1511 copy that is conserved in Istanbul[11] brings out the specificities of the appearance of the original text, which was probably commissioned by Shāhrukh. The Istanbul manuscript is written in Arabic characters, which were traditionally used for the re-transcription of Eastern Turkish, whereas the original *Miʿrājnāma* uses a late Uighur script,[12] and is among a number of texts copied in this alphabet over a period of about fifteen years during Shāhrukh's reign.[13] The original contains about sixty miniature illustrations, while the Istanbul manuscript has none. Almost every folio of the original contains a miniature, and a few have two;[14] they often take up more space than the text. The importance of the visual here indicates a desire to stir the public, who thus become spectators as much as readers or listeners.

The author, who remains unknown to us, affirms in his introduction that the work is a translation of the *Nahj al-farādīs* (The Path to Paradises), a Persian text composed around 1358 in forty sections, each of which starts with one of the Prophet's sayings. The author of the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma* was inspired specifically by the sections of the *Nahj al-farādīs* dealing with the ascension and the visits to Heaven and to Hell.[15] As was often the case during this period, the text is not so much a translation as an adaptation. Like the *Nahj al-farādīs*, the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma* begins with a *ḥadīth*, on which it relies to attest to the truth it relays. The author himself indicates that this *ḥadīth*, almost identical in the two texts, comes from the *Maṣābīḥ al-sunna*, by Baghawī.[16] Thus the Timurid *Miʿrājnāma* presents itself as part of the *Ḥadīth* literature. It is a narrative amplification of one of the Prophet's sayings. Because of this, the narration is in the first person: the Prophet is describing events that he has witnessed

11 Eckmann, "Die kiptschakische Literatur" 292; Scherberger, *Das Miʿrāǧnāme*, 36–38.

12 Deny, "Un Soyurgal du timouride Šahruḫ en écriture ouigoure", 254.

13 Sertkaya, *Islâm devrenin uygur harfli eserlerine toplu bir bakış*; Clauson, "The Muhabbatnāma of Xwārazmī", 243; DeWeese, "The Predecessors of Navā'ī in the Funūn al balāghah of Shaykh Aḥmad b. Khudāydād Ṭarāzī", 87–88.

14 Masuya, "The Miʿrādj-nāma reconsidered", 40, 52.

15 Tezcan and Zülfikar, *Nehcü'l-ferādīs*, 38–50.

16 Supplément turc 190, fol. 1 v.

and people he has met; the author sometimes interrupts these descriptions to provide translations and clarifications.

Thus, Muḥammad says that the angel Gabriel appeared to him one night, accompanied by an animal that was saddled and bridled and answered to the name of Burāq. Mounted on this creature, the Prophet undertakes a nocturnal journey, going first to Jerusalem where he meets all of his predecessors from Adam to Jesus. Because he is the seal of the prophets, it is natural for him to lead their prayers. His superiority is explicitly affirmed by Abraham's recognition of his pre-eminent rank. Here begins the ascension itself. Muḥammad reaches the celestial spheres along a ladder of light (*miʿrāj*). A door guarded by an angel restricts entrance to the first heaven. Gabriel knocks on this door, and when the angel learns that he is accompanied by the Prophet he hails and admits them. Similar scenes take place when the Prophet is admitted to the other celestial regions, to paradise and to Hell.

Each of the celestial spheres is described, and each is composed of its own unique substance. Such descriptions are absent from the *Nahj al-farādīs*, and from Rabghūzī's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, which was also composed in Eastern Turkish (around 1310), and contains one section devoted to the *miʿrāj*.[17] This aspect of the text recalls the version attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, in which each celestial sphere has a specific name and is described according to its constituent element.[18] Most importantly, the attention the author pays to these details reveals that his aim is to give readers a concrete impression of the hereafter.

Gabriel and Muḥammad meet thousands of angels in the celestial spheres, some of whom are extraordinary to look at. One is a being whose body is half fire and half ice; another has sixty-six heads and as many tongues. The inclusion of these figures is significant, because they do not appear in the *Nahj al-farādīs*. In this Timurid version Gabriel and Muḥammad move through a topography of marvels, witnessing the many strange phenomena that animate it, such as gigantic oceans floating in the sky.

When the Prophet reaches the highest sphere, the celebrated episode of his meeting with God takes place. Muḥammad is now travelling alone, for this privilege is reserved for him only. He asks that the sins of his community be absolved. Following the advice of Moses, he also negotiates the number of prayers to be required daily, succeeding in reducing it from God's initial fifty down to five. In this account there is a genuine dialogue between God and His creature; the text informs us that God uttered no fewer than ninety thousand words. It is worth remarking that the author divides these into three parts in a

17 Al-Rabghūzī, *The Stories of the Prophets*, 538–563.
18 Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's Night Journey*.

way that is influenced by mystical terminology. The Prophet relates that thirty thousand among God's words concern the *sharīʿa* (law), thirty thousand the *ṭarīqat* (path), and thirty thousand the *ḥaqīqat* (truth). The text further specifies that whereas God commands him to speak to everyone about the religious law, and to evoke the initiatic path only to those whom he will choose, the Truth is different, and he must keep it completely secret. It's clear that these allusions to mysticism are intended to reaffirm the primary importance for the whole community of the religious literalism of the *sharīʿa*, while restricting the Sufi mystical experience to just a few individuals chosen by the Prophet.

These divine instructions, which seem to be specific to the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma*, since they do not occur in any subsequent text, bring the meeting between God and Muḥammad to a close. The author follows this with his explanation of how the Prophet was able to visit Heaven and Hell, citing a *ḥadīth* from Baghawī's account that reminds the reader that it is earthly conduct that determines the soul's salvation:

> Paradise is conquered through difficult works. One must fast, pray, undertake pilgrimage and holy war, submit to spiritual exercises and follow the practices of religion in the most punctilious way. Hell must also be won, through the demands of the ego and all sorts of desires.[19]

The description of Heaven in this *Miʿrājnāma*, though brief, contains a few interesting details (the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* does not describe paradise). Here the text tells us that birds sometimes come to rest on the heads of women described as wondrously beautiful, some of them picking flowers and others riding camels. The Prophet even converses with a few of these women, who ask him to find them husbands. However, it is on the description of Hell that the most care has been lavished. Fifteen forms of punishment are enumerated, where the *Nahj al-farādīs* had mentioned only nine. To those already mentioned in this model, the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma* adds punishments for stealing from orphans, for the refusal of alms, and for the consumption of wine. Each torture is described according to the grounds on which it is inflicted. Here are wine-drinkers who died without repenting:

> I also saw several people who had chains around their necks. Angels were pouring poison down their throats and violently tormenting them. I asked who these people were. Gabriel replied that they had drunk wine and then died without having repented.[20]

19 *Miʿrājnāma*, MS Paris, BN, Suppl. turc 190, fol. 44v.
20 *Miʿrājnāma*, MS Paris, BN, Suppl. turc 190, fol. 65v.

FIGURE 15.1 The fate reserved for wine-drinkers according to the BNF manuscript, Supplément turc 190, fol. 65 v

This particularly detailed vision of Hell is illustrated with three times more miniatures than illustrate the vision of paradise. One of the work's principal aims is evidently to shock and frighten readers by displaying the fate reserved for believers who fail to live as they should. In order, perhaps, to support this, the author has removed a doctrinal explanation of the nature of the Prophet's vision during his encounter with God; in the *Nahj al-farādīs* this episode is placed just before the description of Hell.[21] There it dealt with the representation of God and the ways in which scholars (*'ulamā'*) had interpreted Muḥammad's vision, on the basis of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*s. Here the author of the 1436 *Mi'rājnāma*, in order to maintain the dramatic momentum of his narrative, choses to ignore a debate that was crucial at the time, opposing the 'vision of the heart' to the 'vision of the eyes'.[22] In any case, when one comes face to face with the evocative power of the miniatures in this work it is difficult to know whether these were realised as illustrations for the words, or whether it is the text that serves as a series of extended captions for the images. The account ends with Muḥammad's visits to Mount Qāf and to the towns of Jābalsā and Jābilqā, where he meets followers of Moses and effortlessly converts them to Islam.

If this text avoids weighing itself down with reflections on the nature or authenticity of the *mi'rāj*, it is because the author has no intention of deviating from the work's main objective: above all, the viewer and listener must be persuaded of the absolute necessity of scrupulous obedience to the rules of the Prophet's religion, as expressed in its exoteric aspect. The observation of the *sharī'a* is the only method that will allow the faithful to avoid the torments of Hell, depicted here with such care and fervour. In this respect, this *Mi'rajnāma*, produced within Shāhrukh's entourage, is an eschatological guide that presents events from the point of view of the strictest religious legalism; the primary purpose of this account of the Prophet's celestial journey is to show how good and bad believers are rewarded or punished.

1.2 *The Five Mi'rājiyyas of Nawā'ī (1483–85)*

The 1436 *Mi'rājnāma* is not mentioned in any Timurid-period sources, and it is therefore not possible to be certain that Nawā'ī was aware of it. However, the work was conserved in the Sultan's library in Herat, and it is therefore very likely

21 Tezcan and Zülfikar, *Nehcü'l-ferādīs*, 44; Gruber, *The Timurid 'Book of Ascension'* (Mi'rājnāma)*: A Study of Text and Image in a Pan-Asian Context*, 285.

22 In the final pages of the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* the author sums up the arguments about the authenticity of the *mi'rāj* and comes down firmly on the side of its genuine reality (Al-Rabghūzī, *The Stories of the Prophets*, 558–60).

that the Timurid poet had laid eyes upon it at some point. Nawāʾī's accounts of the Prophet's ascension include a prologue (*dibācha*) for each of the five narrative poems (*mathnawī*), which are called *Ḥayrat al-abrār* (The Perplexity of the Just) *Farhād u Shīrīn*, *Laylī u Majnūn*, *Sabʿa-yi sayyār* (The Seven Travellers), and *Sadd-i iskandarī* (The Alexandrine Wall). These *miʿrājiyya*s are based on those of the Persian poets, particularly those used by Niẓāmī Ganjawī as a preamble to his celebrated Pentalogy (*Khamsa*), written at the end of the twelfth century. Nawāʾī may also have drawn inspiration from versions by ʿAbduraḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492) and by Amīr Khusraw Dihlawī (d. 1325), who had both composed imitations of Niẓāmī's *Khamsa*.

In the prologue of *Makhzan al-asrār* (c. 1166), the first of the five narrative poems (*mathnawī*) that make up his Pentalogy, Niẓāmī presents the *miʿrāj* as a spiritual ascension whose most important aspect is the vision of God; this approach seems to have been influenced by Qushayri's *Kitāb al-miʿrāj* (written before 1072), but also, and especially, by the *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqat* of Sanāʾī (d. 1131). In this poem, Sanāʾī used a wide range of imagery to laud the Prophet's exceptional character, exalted by God to the first rank through his ascension. Above all, Sanāʾī gave shape to a new model of the *miʿrāj*, in which the account of episodes such as the visits to Heaven and Hell no longer featured.[23] The apocalyptic aspects of the *miʿrāj* were eliminated because of the new role played by this story: intended to serve as an allegory for the account that it preceded, the ascension of the Prophet took on the form of a mystical initiation. Muḥammad adopted the characteristics of an itinerant whose path took him on a cosmic journey through planets and stars before leading him to mystical union with the Creator. It was for this reason that Niẓāmī, in the prologue of his *Makhzan al-asrār*, refers to a *safar-i ʿishq* (journey of love) when speaking of the *miʿrāj*.[24]

Each of the sections (*bāb*) that make up the five *mathnawī* of Nawāʾī's *Khamsa* is preceded by a heading (*sarlawḥa*), including those relating the *miʿrāj*. The headings of the five *miʿrājiyya*s function in several ways: the first is to provide a Qurʾānic basis for the developments that are to follow. Thus, the headings of the *Ḥayrat al-abrār* and *Sadd-i iskandarī miʿrājiyya*s include passages from Suras 17 (The Night Journey) and 53 (The Star), passages on which these accounts, in part, rely.[25] The headings also inform the reader of the nature of the experiences to be related: the ascension of the Prophet is a journey that

23 Fouchécour, "The Story of the Ascension (*Mi ʿraj*) in Nizami's work", 179–188.

24 Niẓāmī Ganjawī, *Kulliyāt-i Niẓāmī Ganjawī*, 9.

25 Nawāʾī, *Khamsa*, MS Michigan, 450, 16 and 353.

goes beyond the intellect (*ʿaql*) and reason (*khirad*), and even beyond imagination (*khayāl*).[26] Finally, the heading for the *miʿrāj* of *Laylī u Majnūn* announces a major theme, that of the union between the Prophet and God; significantly, here the term *waṣl* (union) is cited twice.[27]

The accounts of the five *miʿrājiyya*s all begin with descriptions of the night of ascension. This night, intended and prepared specifically for this event, is such that any comparison could only put daylight to shame.[28] It basks in the perfume of innumerable houris, from the curls of whose loosened hair emanate the scents of musk and amber. Their faces glow like flames in the darkness – they want to captivate the Prophet with their finery. Here the poet depicts a context appropriate to the expression of desire, introducing the theme of mystical union. Meanwhile, Muḥammad is hidden in the home of his host Umm Hānī and compared to the sun yet to rise.[29] It is thanks to this surrounding darkness that the Muḥammadan light is able to shine. Nawāʾī is also telling the reader that the Prophet is the light of the world, and that the flame of the union (*waṣl shamʿi*) with God burns within him.[30] While the Prophet is resting, he is shown to be devoting all his thoughts to the well-beloved (*maḥbūb khayālī*).[31] In the *miʿrajiyya* of *Sabʿa-yi sayyār*, just before the arrival of Gabriel, one can read that:

> His heart began to boil at the thought of union
> His heart, boiling like the sea, made him cry out[32]

Thus, when the angel Gabriel descends with Burāq to visit the Prophet, it is to transmit the message, or rather the 'supplication' (*istidʿā*') of a lover (*muḥibb*), God, who is longing for His beloved (*maḥbūb-i jānī*). It was indeed God who first desired this union; Gabriel confirms this in *Ḥayrat al-abrār*:

> He says: 'O treasure of the secrets of ardent desire
> God has expressed the ardent desire that you unite with Him'[33]

26 MS Michigan 450, 536.
27 MS Michigan 450, 262.
28 MS Michigan 450, 262.
29 MS Michigan 450, 112, 263, 353 and 537.
30 MS Michigan 450, 112.
31 MS Michigan 450, 263.
32 MS Michigan 450, 16.
33 MS Michigan 450, 16.

FIGURE 15.2 Page from the manuscript of Nawā'ī's *Khamsa*, describing the beginning of the *Ḥayrat al-abrār mi'rāj*. University of Michigan – Special Collection Library, Isl. MS. 450, p. 16

The intensity of the shock is so great that Muḥammad loses consciousness, although he makes a rapid recovery. In the *Sadd-i iskandarī*, it is Gabriel who urges the Prophet (addressed as *ḥabībi*, beloved) to rise, using the mystical terminology of separation and reunion:

You must cross the expanses of separation
You must arise and make your way to union[34]

Muḥammad mounts Burāq and they take flight. Here begins the journey through the fixed stars, plunging the reader into the universe of Islamic cosmology. Muslim astrologers conceived of the universe as a series of concentric circles whose centre was the earth. In the text by Qazwīnī, *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt wa gharāʾib al-mawjūdāt* (The marvels of creation and the strangeness of all that exists), written in the second half of the twelfth century, the earth is surrounded by a certain number of spheres (*aflāk*). The first seven of these correspond to the orbits of the planets as they were then known.[35] The moon's sphere is closest to the earth, followed by Mercury (*ʿUtārid*), Venus (*Zuhara*), the sun, Mars (*Bahrām*), Jupiter (*Mushtarī*), and Saturn (*Zuḥal*). The eighth sphere is that of the fixed stars (*al-kawākib al-thābita*), containing the twelve constellations of the zodiac. According to Qazwīnī, the 'Greatest Sphere' (*al-falak al-aʿẓam*) can be found beyond this, regulating the orbits of all other heavenly bodies, and containing the throne of God. These cosmic spheres are also the strata of a moral and eschatological universe inhabited by angels, the souls of saints and sinners, and the spirits of various prophets.[36]

The account, in the poems by Nawāʾī, of the ascension through the mobile planets shows the effect of the *miʿrāj* on these planets' behaviour. Neither the world nor the cosmos remains the same once the Prophet has passed through. This upheaval is all the more remarkable because astrology normally holds that it is the planets that have an influence over bodies and their environment. The reactions of Mercury when the Prophet reaches the second heavenly sphere are notable. This planet is often associated with the figure of the scribe (which is why it is sometimes called *Munshī* (the Scribe). Consequently, in the *miʿrājiyya* of *Farhād u Shīrīn*, when Mercury is so happy to see Burāq and his rider, he lets his papers and writing implements be blown away by the wind.[37] In *Laylī u Majnūn*, Mercury throws his ink in Saturn's face.[38] In *Sabʿa-yi sayyār* Burāq's granite hoof splits Mercury's reed pen, and in *Sadd-i iskandarī* his inkwell and reed pen spontaneously break into pieces.[39] But the Prophet's effect goes beyond Mercury's behaviour and belongings: the very nature of the planet also undergoes a profound upheaval. According to astrology, this planet

34 MS Michigan 450, 354.
35 The moon and the sun were considered to be planets (Carboni, *The 'Wonders of creation'*).
36 Carboni, *Following the Stars*, 3.
37 MS Michigan 450, 113.
38 MS Michigan 450, 263.
39 MS Michigan 450, 537 and 354.

was a hypocrite, since Mercury had no specific positive or negative influence. Here the poet affirms, in *Ḥayrat al-abrār*, that 'Mercury the scribe' was so honoured to be on the Prophet's path that he 'let go of his chameleon outlook'.[40] As for the musician of the skies, Venus, her instrument (a *daf*) is torn when the Prophet's horse reaches the third sphere.[41] In fact, when one reads these poems in the order in which they were composed, the reaction of Venus goes from joy to fright: the planet initially, in the *Ḥayrat al-abrār*, plays a joyful air and sings a congratulatory song,[42] while the *miʿrājiyya* of *Laylī u Majnūn* tells the reader that Venus plays more quietly when she sees the Prophet arrive.[43] The account in the *Sabʿa-yi sayyār* says that fear drives Venus to hide her harp,[44] and the *Sadd-i iskandarī* has the planet hiding inside a tent in order to sing from there.[45] The reaction of the planet Mars (*Bahrām*), in the fifth heavenly sphere, also demonstrates the effect on the universe produced by the *miʿrāj*. The negative influence and effects of this planet were considered second only to those exercised by Saturn, which is why it was sometimes called *al-naḥs al-aṣghar* (the minor misfortune), while Saturn was referred to as *al-naḥs al-akbar* (the larger misfortune). In *Farhād u Shīrīn*, when the Prophet passes through the fifth sphere Mars becomes *saʿd-i akbar* (the most fortunate), receiving the nickname generally given to Jupiter, the planet reputed to have the most beneficial effects.[46] But more often the poet indicates that the reaction of Mars is to return his sword to its sheath: the planet stops spilling blood and puts himself in the service of the Prophet.[47] When Muḥammad arrives in the sixth heavenly sphere Jupiter's happiness (*saʿādat iktisābi*) increases;[48] when he reaches the next sphere all the miseries of Saturn are erased and fortune (*saʿādat*) becomes his slave.[49]

The Prophet's ascension continues into the eighth sphere, that of the fixed stars and signs of the zodiac, and here also his presence has a positive impact on the behaviour of the stars. Nawāʾī plays with the relationship between signifier and signified and has the reactions of the signs of the zodiac accord with those of the figures (usually animals) that they represent. Thus Aries (ram)

40 MS Michigan 450, 16.
41 MS Michigan 450, 113.
42 MS Michigan 450, 16.
43 MS Michigan 450, 263.
44 MS Michigan 450, 537.
45 MS Michigan 450, 354.
46 MS Michigan 450, 113.
47 MS Michigan 450, 354 and 537.
48 MS Michigan 450, 263.
49 Because of its negative associations, astrologers associated Saturn with the colour black and said that it had control over the most remote geographical regions.

and Taurus (bull) offer themselves as sacrifices,[50] while the Gemini twins put on their belts to show that they are ready to enter into Muḥammad's service.[51] Here the text often adopts a humorous tone: the lion, Leo, symbol of power and strength, suddenly takes fright and runs away, or hides in a corner, or else becomes like a tame hunting-dog.[52] Virgo, also called *Sunbula* or *Khūsha* (the ear of wheat),[53] offers herself as fodder for Burāq,[54] like Capricorn, the nanny-goat, who gives him her best milk.[55] Scorpio finds an antidote to his own venom.[56] Sagittarius, generally represented as a centaur arming his bow, abandons his warlike pose to undertake a retreat for forty days of ascesis (*chilla*).[57] The water poured out by Aquarius (*Dalw*)[58] is transformed into a 'water of life' (*āb-i zindagānī*), in which the fish Pisces comes to live a new life, praising the man 'who will never come to death'.[59] As for Libra, the scales, they return to equilibrium thanks to the justice emanating from the Prophet.[60]

Then the Prophet arrives at the throne of God (*ʿarsh*). This level includes the entire physical universe, and is the ninth heavenly sphere, the sphere without stars.[61] Here the emblems of divine power – *ʿArsh*, *Kursī* (Steps), *Lawḥ* (Writing Tablet), and *Qalam* (Reed Pen) – all express how honoured they are by the Prophet's arrival. The poet tells us that the Throne became a crown in which Muḥammad was the pearl.[62] Burāq then continues his ascension and the Prophet crosses into the *Lā Makān* (Non-Place). In order to reach God, he must leave Burāq and Gabriel behind and continue on the *rafraf*, which embraces his feet in an expression of joyous respect.[63] Now Muḥammad rids

50 MS Michigan 450, 16, 113, 263, 354, 537.

51 MS Michigan 450, 354.

52 MS Michigan 450, 16, 263, 354 and 537.

53 The Virgin is so-called after the brightest star in this constellation, *sunbula*, 'ear of wheat'.

54 MS Michigan 450, 16 and 263.

55 MS Michigan 450, 16 and 113.

56 MS Michigan 450, 16 and 263.

57 MS Michigan 450, 16, 263 and 537.

58 *Dalw* means 'pail for drawing water'.

59 MS Michigan 450, 263 and 355.

60 MS Michigan 450, 355 and 537.

61 This is Ibn 'Arabī's conception of the ninth sphere. His thinking had a profound influence on Islamic cosmology, and on the mystical notions of Nawā'ī and of his master, Jāmī. Cf. Morris, "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabî and the Mi 'râj" (1987) 629–652, and Morris, "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabî and the Mi 'râj" (1988) 63–77.

62 MS Michigan 450, 113.

63 The term *rafraf* has been interpreted in many different ways. As Colby remarks in a footnote, in some versions of the *miʿrāj* this is taken to be the proper name of some sort of winged mount, playing a role similar to that of Burāq (Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's Night Journey*, 244). It would appear that this is also Nawā'ī's interpretation.

himself of the 'clothing of existence' and puts on 'the belt of nothingness'.[64] He says goodbye to his self, and discards the dust of his selfhood. Relieved of existence (*wujūd*) and nothingness (*ʿadam*), his heart is emptied of everything, occupied by love alone. It is only now, the poet says, that he can find 'the sign of the place for which he longed'.[65] According to the traditional mystical conception of thinkers such as Ghazālī or Ibn ʿArabī, intimacy with the Divine is accompanied by a sensation of renunciation of all that is not God.[66] It is only once the Prophet has been annihilated in the divine presence that he can truly contemplate his Most-Beloved. Once he finds himself within two bow lengths (*qāba-qausayn*) of the object of his quest, he no longer has either a body or a soul.[67] The 'breeze of union' (*nasīm-i waṣl*)[68] opens the seventy thousand layers of the 'veil of the secret',[69] and the 'hand of goodwill' draws him up into the sanctuary of unicity (*ḥarīm-i waḥdat*).[70]

This moment is the peak of the mystical experience. Nothing is visible except God; nothing exists outside of God. This is where the author places the episode of the communication with the Creator. But the poet includes no dialogue – he is even careful to mention that this was not a dialogue. For Nawāʾī, to say 'them, they' would be an error, for, he affirms, duality (*ithnayniyat*) could not intervene between the Prophet and God.[71] The concept of duality becomes obsolete, there is only a 'single pure unity'.[72] The prophet becomes speaker and listener simultaneously, and because of this, when he wants to make his supplication known – the remission of the sins of the community of believers – it is from himself and to himself that the plea is delivered.[73] The poet writes that the Prophet interceded in his community's favour with God's own tongue.[74] There can therefore be no obstacle to the Prophet's requests. In fact, the text of the *Laylī u Majnūn* indicates that the more requests the Prophet expressed, the more quickly they were fulfilled, even before having been fully formulated.[75] But more important than the granting of his pleas was the fact that the Prophet

64 MS Michigan 450, 263.
65 MS Michigan 450, 113.
66 Deladrière, *Ghazâlî. Le Tabernacle des Lumières*, 9–31.
67 MS Michigan 450, 264. The distance of two bow lengths (*qāba-qausayn*) corresponds to that assigned by the Qurʾān (53: 9).
68 MS Michigan 450, 113.
69 MS Michigan 450, 537.
70 MS Michigan 450, 113.
71 MS Michigan 450, 264.
72 MS Michigan 450, 355.
73 MS Michigan 450, 264.
74 MS Michigan 450, 114.
75 MS Michigan 450, 264.

was able to reach the spiritual union he had so desired: this interview is, above all, a reunion between the lover and the beloved.

After this, Muḥammad can return to earth. He encounters Gabriel and Burāq again. All of the celestial beings are euphoric, and want to contemplate the Prophet and kiss his feet. Nawāʾī emphasises the transformation of Muḥammad. He had been a bud, now he is a rosary; he had been a particle of light, now he is a sparkling sun.[76] He has become the inherently unique one (*aḥad*).[77] The author underlines that everything the Prophet did was done for the sake of his community.[78] In *Laylī u Majnūn*, the Prophet returns with the *barāt*, 'key of deliverance', given to him by God for all sinners.[79]

The Prophet's return also provides an opportunity for Nawāʾī to come back to his more controversial points. The poet re-affirms that this really was a physical journey. In support of this, the verses of the *Ḥayrat al-abrār* say that his physical body was present throughout, because his body was all soul, 'from the head to the feet', while the verses of *Farhād u Shīrīn* explain that the Prophet's soul (*jān*) remained with God, as only his body was destined to make the return journey.[80] And, when Nawāʾī recalls the extraordinary nature of the events depicted, which lasted but an instant (*bir ān*),[81] and which the intellect (*ʿaql*) remains unable to comprehend, he chooses to imitate his Persian predecessors (notably Niẓāmī, and ʿAṭṭār) by quoting Q 53:17, 'his eye swerved not; nor swept astray', in order to demonstrate the concrete reality of what the Prophet had seen.

Nawāʾī's use of these Qurʾānic quotations, along with other elements, shows that he considers himself part of a specific tradition of Persian *miʿrājiyya*s. The thing that seems to distinguish the poems of the Timurid writer is the emphasis he places on the union, as evinced by the recurrence in his texts of the terms *waṣl* and *wiṣāl* (union). If we compare his writings with those of his various exemplars, this distinction is clear. In Nawāʾī's five *miʿrājiyya*s, the term *waṣl* occurs no fewer than thirteen times, and *wiṣāl* appears five times. In Niẓāmī's poems on the ascension, *wiṣāl* occurs just once,[82] while *waṣl* and *wiṣāl* are completely absent from the *miʿrajiyya*s of Amīr Khusraw of Delhi,[83]

76 MS Michigan 450, 17.
77 MS Michigan 450, 355.
78 MS Michigan 450, 17.
79 On the *barāt* cf. Fouchécour, "The Story of the Ascension (*Mi ʿraj*) in Nizami's work" 181.
80 MS Michigan 450, 17 and 114.
81 MS Michigan 450, 17.
82 Niẓāmī Ganjawī, *Kulliyāt-i Niẓāmī Ganjawī*, 8.
83 Cf. Amīr Khusraw Dihlawī, *Maṭlaʿ al-anwār*, 20–27; *Shīrīn u Khusraw*, 11–14; *Majnūn u Laylī*, 17–21; *Hasht bihisht*, 12–15; *Āyina-yi iskandarī*, 8–10.

and from those of Jāmī.[84] The very infrequent instances of these two terms in the Persian texts that our Timurid poet drew upon does not mean that the theme of union between God and his messenger was absent from their poems on the ascension. Jāmī, for example, writes in his *miʿrājiyya* of *Yūsuf u Zulaykhā* that just before the encounter with God the angel Esrafil built a bed of draperies around Muḥammad, resembling a nuptial chamber; this shows that Jāmī also conceived of this meeting as a union.[85] For this reason, the recurrence in Nawāʾī's writings of terms having to do with union has less to do with any originality of viewpoint, and more with his preoccupation with the pedagogical value of his work.

Thus, in the same way as the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma* is distinct from its models through the importance it gives to depictions of Hell, the five 1480 *miʿrājiyya*s are singular in their insistence on the mystical theme of union; this indicates that these two types of text aimed to 'function' as 'effective narratives' (*récits efficaces*).[86] By unequivocally underlining a single principal idea, each of these authors could fulfil a didactic role at the heart of the 'educational institution' that was the court of a prince.[87] This similarity of rhetorical style does not, however, diminish the differences between the specific ideas that each aimed to put forward.

2 Two *Exempla* with Divergent Aims

The texts that make up our corpus can be placed within a fairly traditional Sunnī outlook on the event portrayed. For example, both authors begin their accounts in the home of Umm Hanī. Both follow Ṭabarī's interpretation in insisting that there was a physical and material journey, not merely one taking place within Muḥammad's heart. These are not the only common points: we have seen that each author is equally concerned with emphasising the narrative drive of the tale, to the possible detriment of its doctrinal aspects. In this respect, the sense of the marvellous plays an important role. What is particularly significant is that the use to which this sense is put is markedly different in these two texts.

84 Cf. Jāmī, *Mathnawī-yi Haft awrang*, 377–379; 584–586; 805–807; 916–918.
85 Jāmī, *Mathnawī-yi Haft awrang*, 586.
86 Berlioz, "Le récit efficace".
87 Burke, "L'homme de cour" 163.

2.1 *The Significations of the* Miʿrāj: *From Salvation to Union*

In the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma* the reader discovers a bestiary that is completely absent from the five later *miʿrājiyya*s. The white cockerel whose head reaches the throne of God while its feet rest on the earth doesn't feature in those, nor are there polycephalic angels in any of Nawāʾī's five accounts, where the wondrous elements are concentrated in the descriptions of celestial bodies and their behaviour. In this respect the effect each author seeks to have on his readers is not the same. The reactions of the planets and signs of the zodiac would be likely to awaken a reader's sense of the marvellous, and perhaps make him smile. The other text, in prose, is completely different, relying as it does on a 'rhetoric of fear' (to borrow Jacques Le Goff's expression).[88] This is particularly noticeable in the description of the visit to Hell, which assumes great importance in this version. An interesting aspect of this is the fact that here the torments inflicted on the damned are known to the Prophet even before he visits them. The reader sees Muḥammad weeping on his arrival in the first sphere of Heaven, when he sees a group of sinners, whose unenviable fate already awakens his sympathy. Gabriel later tells the Prophet that the sea of fire they see in the fifth sphere will pour into Hell on the day of resurrection, there to torment the damned. In the seventh celestial sphere, the Prophet is invited by Abraham to enter a vast palace. On his way in, he notices that, of the two groups of Muslim believers he sees standing outside the edifice, only those wearing white tunics are invited to enter; those with black stripes on their clothes may not come in. And the account of the infernal regions, once the Prophet reaches them, does not spare the reader. Here he finds the angel Mālik, prince of darkness, standing in the entrance. In the centre stands the *Zaqqūm*, that gigantic tree (to walk around it would take five hundred years) whose fruits resemble the heads of demons. Next comes the description of the fifteen tortures. This detailed presentation of Hell is particularly remarkable because, as we have seen, Heaven does not receive the same treatment.[89]

In the poems of Nawāʾī the Prophet visits neither Heaven nor Hell. Hell is not even mentioned, and the existence of paradise is only evoked by allusion; for example, at the beginning of the *Sabʿa-yi sayyār miʿrājiyya* the poet writes that the Prophet 'strives to return to the lands of paradise'.[90] A scattering of mentions occurs in the other poems, in expressions such as 'a breeze

88 Le Goff, "L'*exemplum* et la rhétorique de la prédication aux XIII^{e}–XIV^{e} siècles".

89 The visit to paradise takes up two folios (49 and 51), while that to Hell is eight folios long (53, 55, 57, 59, 61, 63, 65 and 67).

90 MS Michigan 450, 536.

from paradise'[91] or 'garden of paradise',[92] when giving initial details about the specifics of the night of ascension; the expression 'angel of paradise' is also used to describe Burāq.[93] These few mentions demonstrate that while paradise does exist for Nawā'ī, he has accorded it no importance in the economy of his accounts. As for the houris, here they are more similar to the celestial souls of Sufi allegorical interpretation than to the voluptuous women depicted in the 1436 *Mirājnāma*.[94] Nawā'ī aligns himself with the current of mystical interpretation according to which supreme happiness does not consist of tasting the sensual pleasures available in paradise, but rather of approaching an experience that culminates in fusion with God. In the light of this, if the poet does not give many details of paradise this is because mystics had an increasing tendency to consider paradise and its pleasures as distractions that would distance them from God.[95] What's more, mystics refused to venerate God in the mere hope of thus acceding to Heaven. Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya, for example, affirmed that her adoration of God was never motivated by fear of Hell or desire for paradise.[96] The desire for spiritual union with the well-beloved is stronger than conventional aspirations, and it abolishes notional opposites such as Heaven and Hell.[97] In his *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* (The Beloved of Hearts), a prose work written fifteen years after the *miʿrājiyya*s, Nawā'ī was to write that if a believer managed to free himself from all that was not God, then the pleasures of paradise would have as little effect on him as the torments of Hell.[98]

We have observed that, whether from the point of view of the uses of the marvellous or from that of conceptions of the after-life, the accounts of Nawā'ī are the opposite of those of the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma*. This is also true of their approaches to the encounter with God. In the *Miʿrājnāma* a genuine dialogue occurs, during which the Prophet negotiates the number of daily prayers to be performed by believers. God's words are even reported in the direct style. In Nawā'ī's poems there are no re-transcriptions of the words exchanged

91 MS Michigan 450, 16.

92 MS Michigan 450, 353.

93 MS Michigan 450, 263.

94 Although the Qur'ān does feature concrete mentions of paradise, it does not give many details of the creatures that inhabit it (see, for example, 3:136; 56:12–26). The theological literature on houris is in fact the product of a prolific classical exegesis, essentially founded on the historical data in certain *ḥadīth*s; these contain abundant descriptions of the garden, its residents, and their pleasures. (Berthels, "Die paradiesischen Jungfrau (Ḥûrîs) im Islam" 263–287; Al-Azmeh, "Rhetoric for the Senses", 165–82).

95 Föllmer, "Beyond Paradise" 592; Vakily, "Some notes on Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī", 407–417.

96 Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*, 30.

97 Föllmer, "Beyond Paradise", 593.

98 Nawā'ī, *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, 88.

between the Prophet and his Creator. Nawā'ī's accounts are aligned with the classical Sufi interpretation of the encounter, in which this moment is strictly ineffable.[99] One of Nawā'ī's contemporaries and models, Jāmī, writes in his *Yūsuf u Zulaykhā* about the impossibility of transcribing the meeting between the Prophet and God in the form of dialogue:

> There he heard that which utterance cannot express in sounds
> There were only pure ideas and accumulated mysteries[100]

Words are powerless to report on this communion that was born of two desires: that of the Prophet to see God, and that of He who is beyond need, but who needs His beloved companion. In the *miʿrājiyya*s of the mystical poets, God is presented as the Sufi lover who wishes to enter into a profound communion with the beloved.[101] The traditional roles are reversed: the beloved (*maʿshūq*) becomes the lover (*ʿāshiq*), and the lover the beloved. This transformation indicates the central importance of love in the ascension of Muḥammad.

These marked differences: in the uses of the marvellous; in the roles of Heaven and Hell; and in the descriptions of the interview with God, reveal that these two types of text were intended to fulfil different, and divergent, functions. The first of them reflects a literalist vision of religion. Presenting itself as a guide for the salvation of souls, it tells the reader what to do during earthly life in order to avoid the torments of Hell. The *miʿrājiyya*s, on the other hand, invite one to consider earthly conduct as being, above all, a mystical experience. The text of the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma* is presented in a style of discourse that resembles catechesis and the sermon (and preachers were very important figures in Herat[102]). This approach recalls the way in which predicators borrowed from the traditional literature of the *ḥadīth*s to feed the mass imagination with notions drawing on the realm of the wondrous, offering detailed descriptions of the pleasures of paradise and the pains of Hell. This incorporation of the wondrous not only gives spice to a lesson on the salvation of souls, it weakens the intellectual resistance of its audience, particularly when it elicits fear by depicting the terrors of Hell. There is a marked contrast with the poems of Nawā'ī, concerned as they are with mystical intimacy rather than religious legalism, and providing as they do a completely different form of example.

99 Böwering, "From the Word of God to the Vision of God" 213.

100 Jāmī, *Mathnawī-yi Haft awrang*, 576.

101 The first verse of Sura 17 of the Qur'ān describes God as having caused the ascension of the Prophet.

102 Paul, "The Khwājagān at Herat during Shāhrukh's Reign" 243.

When these two texts are compared and confronted, we see that they offer differing visions of the Prophet, who now embodies two different models.

2.2 *One Prophet, Two Models*

'You have a fine example in the Prophet of God', reveals Sura 33 of the Qurʾān. An examination of the model offered by the Prophet's behaviour in these accounts of his ascension is all the more legitimate in that the episode of the *miʿrāj* appears as an initiatic experience that makes the Prophet at once an extraordinary man and an ideal upon whom one should model oneself.[103]

In all of the accounts the ascension consecrates the Prophet, but the way in which this happens is not the same in different types of text. The 1436 *Miʿrājnāma* establishes Muḥammad's superiority over the other prophets. This is why, after having met Abraham, Moses and Jesus in Jerusalem, Muḥammad is invited by Abraham to lead them in prayer in front of a ladder, set up to facilitate his ascension. His consecration is then confirmed by the reactions of the prophets that he encounters during his journey from the first to the seventh celestial sphere. The author makes a point of underlining the superiority of Muḥammad to Moses, making use of the well-known episode during which the Hebrew prophet weeps on realising that the Muslim elect outnumber his own people.[104]

This element of apologetics is absent from Nawāʾī's text. Other prophets are not mentioned in his *miʿrājiyya*s, except by allusion. For example, the poet writes in the *Sadd-i iskandarī* that when the Prophet meets the constellation Aries, this ram senses great goodwill and declares that he no longer needs a shepherd such as Moses.[105] It's true that the superiority of Muḥammad over other prophets is occasionally evoked at the beginning of the account, but we never see them performing an act of allegiance as they do in the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma*. For Nawāʾī, as for his Persian predecessors, the important thing is the power of the Prophet over the entire cosmos. When he ascends into the heavens he is ceaselessly exalted by the celestial creatures he meets. He bestows his own radiance on the stars, and the planets he meets prostrate themselves before him. In every way, his journey through the universe of heavenly entities has the impact of a genuine cataclysm.

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103 There is nothing in the Qurʾān that would permit the attribution to Muḥammad of particular gifts or supernatural qualities (cf. 18:110). It is his ascension that confers upon him some divine characteristics, and this, for simple believers, made of him the guarantee of ultimate truths and the mediator of salvation.

104 *Miʿrājnāma*, MS Paris, BN, Suppl. turc 190, fol. 24 and 26.

105 MS Michigan 450, 354.

Thus, there are different approaches to celestial topographies, and to the heavenly bodies' attitudes to the Prophet, in the economies of the different accounts. If both types of text affirm the unique position of Muḥammad among all creatures, his impact upon them is not the same in the different versions. In this respect, in the *Miʿrājnāma* the Prophet appears more like a spectator of the spheres that mark the progress of his ascension. For example, verbs of vision predominate and recur (*kördüm*, 'I saw') making Muḥammad's eyes the lenses through which the reader of the 1436 text participates in this guided tour of the beyond. In Nawāʾī's *miʿrājiyya*s, the Prophet appears more like a conqueror who masters the constellations and plants 'his banner' (*ʿalam*) at the summit of the divine throne, and then returns like the leader of a conquering army.[106]

What's more, the attitude of the Prophet is not identical across the two versions, and neither is the example he is setting for readers to follow. In the *Miʿrājnāma* the Prophet's outlook is that of any human being faced with such marvels as are presented to him. He is wonderstruck or frightened according to what he sees. He appears to conclude, like Gabriel, that anyone who hears the description of paradise will not rest until it has been attained, and that Hell is indescribable because of the extent and variety of its torments.[107] He responds as any believer might, and this identification is reinforced by the fact that the account is narrated in the first person, in accordance with the traditions of *ḥadīth* literature and the apocalyptic genre. Here the believer is invited to reproduce the reactions of the Prophet, and to feel the same emotions, as the text underlines:

> The Prophet, salvation be upon him, says: 'Oh people of my community, weep ceaselessly because of the terror that hell inspires in you, and perform those deeds that will ensure your place in the next world; for the torments of hell are truly terrible!'[108]

This inward focus allows the reader to enter the beyond through the eyes of the Prophet. When this vicarious experience approaches the point at which he will stop seeing the world through this prism, because the account is coming to an end, he is exhorted not to leave this identification with the Prophet behind completely. If the reader wants to avoid the tortures of Hell, he must imitate the Prophet's conduct as much as possible. God Himself expresses it thus:

106 MS Michigan 450, pp. 537–538.
107 *Miʿrājnāma*, MS Paris, BN, Suppl. turc 190, fol. 44 v.
108 *Miʿrājnāma*, MS Paris, BN, Suppl. turc 190, fol. 67 r.

> O Muḥammad, now that you have seen my powers, go and report this to your community. Promise paradise to believers, and warn infidels, hypocrites and wrong-doers by awakening their fears of the torments of hell.[109]

In the moral of the final episode, in which Muḥammad has visited Mount Qāf and converted the followers of Moses, the Prophet describes what it means to follow his path:

> Live at all times in fear of God the most high; do not allow your hearts to swell with pride; submit to the law.[110]

It is significant that the text ends with these lines. The term used for 'law' (*parmān/farmān*) does not belong to a specifically religious vocabulary; the injunction could thus also be interpreted as a reminder of the duty of obedience to the temporal law of the prince.

In Nawā'ī's *mi'rājiyya*s, the account of the ascension presents the Prophet as the archetype of the seeker after God. This is an initiatic voyage that will bring about profound changes in the one who undertakes it. It is for this reason that the poet emphasises the transformations that Muḥammad undergoes during the ascension; nothing is written on this subject in the prose version of 1436. The marvellous voyage here becomes an allegory of the mystical path, on which the traveller progressively renounces all his worldly riches while approaching his ultimate goal.[111] In this case, conforming to the Prophet's example means experiencing the highest form of love. In his *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, written a few years later, Nawā'ī would describe the form of union so perfectly exemplified and illustrated in the *mi'rāj*, and ascribe it also to the 'truthful people' (*ṣiddīqlar*), among whom one finds the most noble form of love. According to Nawā'ī, they are called 'those who have obtained the desired union by love'.[112]

The accounts of *mi'rāj* in the prologues of the five *mathnawī*s thus present examples to be followed for the ascension of the soul. In an allegorical way they show the path that the heroes introduced in the *mathnawī*s (notably kings, including Bahrām Gūr in *Sab'a-yi sayyār* and Alexander the Great in *Sadd-i iskandarī*) will have to take in order to attain the perfection appropriate to their regal position. The celestial ascension of the Prophet holds up a mirror

109 *Mi'rājnāma*, MS Paris, BN, Suppl. turc 190, fol. 67v.

110 *Mi'rājnāma*, MS Paris, BN, Suppl. turc 190, fol. 68r.

111 Thibon, "L'amour mystique (*maḥabba*) dans la voie spirituelle chez les premiers soufis" 647.

112 Nawā'ī, *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, 98.

to the Timurid Sultan to whom these accounts are dedicated, and invites him to conform to this spiritual model. 'You, too, must know how to benefit from this union' (*bol sen daghī waṣldin barumand*), says the court poet in one of his *miʿrajiyya*s.[113] One is tempted to consider the argument that Gabriel puts to Muḥammad, when he visits to persuade him to undertake the *miʿrāj*, as a message from the Naqshbandi poet himself, addressed to his sovereign. Unlike the Prophet in the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma*, who calls on his readers to fear all that they have glimpsed through his eyes, and to submit 'to the prescriptions of the law' in order to ensure salvation for their souls, the *miʿrājiyya*s' Prophet, on his celestial travels, invites readers to a radical conversion that will transform the person experiencing it as much as it shakes up the cosmic order of things.

3 Conclusion

What is the historical significance of this opposition that divides the 1436 account from the poems composed in 1480? These texts written for sovereigns and their entourage were created in two very distinct periods for the empire. The composition of the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma* should be related to the religious policies of Shāhrukh (r. 1405–47). This son and heir of the conqueror wanted to project the image of a great Islamic sovereign (*padishāh-i islām*) and renewer of religion (*mujaddid*), as described by Jalāl al-Dīn Qāyinī (d. 1434 or 1435) in his *Naṣā'iḥ al-Shāhrukhī*.[114] For this reason, Shāhrukh banned prostitution, games of chance and the consumption of alcohol. With the aim of reviving the traditions of the Prophet, this Timurid Sultan became an avid patron of the science of *ḥadīth*s, of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and of Qur'ānic exegesis – all disciplines that were taught in the madrasas that he established in Herat.[115] It is therefore unsurprising that many of these ideas that preoccupied the Sultan can be found in the *Miʿrājnāma* that appears to have been written on his orders. We know that the ruler had a particular affection for the work by Qāyinī mentioned above, which included (as Christiane Gruber rightly reminds us) an entire section on the punishments for infidels, apostates and heretics.[116] The text of the *Miʿrājnāma* may well have been used in the court of Shāhrukh to promote a legalistic view of religion among the Timurid elite. His death in 1447

113 MS Michigan 450, 263.

114 Subtelny and Khalidov, "The Curriculum of Islamic Higher Learning in Timurid Iran in the Light of the Sunnī Revival under Shah-Rukh" 212.

115 *Ibid.*

116 Gruber, *The Timurid 'Book of Ascension'* (Miʿrājnāma), 262.

changed the situation. The rise to power of his successor, Abū Saʿīd Mīrzā, who took control of the empire with the support of the great Naqshbandi shaykh Khwāja ʿUbaydullah Aḥrār, brought with it an increasing Sufi influence on government.[117] Thus the reign, beginning in 1467, of the last great Timurid sultan, Sulṭān Ḥusayn Mīrzā Bayqara, was also marked by the growing power of the Naqshbandiyya. Thanks to his unique position at court, Nawāʾī, who was initiated into that order by the poet Jāmī, was able to communicate the aspirations of its representatives. The correspondence the poet maintained with Khwāja Aḥrār (who was then in Samarkand) and with Jāmī reveals concrete details of their intention to use his proximity to Sulṭān Ḥusayn to influence decision-making in favour of the interests and principles of the brotherhood.[118] The composition of his *miʿrājiyya*s makes up a part of the activities of a Sufi poet who did not hesitate to take advantage of his respected position at court in order to become the prince's counsellor at a time when mysticism was penetrating an increasing number of artistic domains (architecture, miniatures, literature) in the Timurid capital.[119]

Is this to say that the growing importance of mysticism at court had persuaded the Timurid elites to prefer the *miʿrājiyya* genre to the more legalistic texts, such as the 1436 *Miʿrājnāma*? Art history does indeed tell us that from the second half of the fifteenth century, images of the Prophet's ascension appear principally in poems of the type composed by Nawāʾī.[120] This seems to indicate that mystical incarnation takes the lead over eschatological guidance, and in this sense, taste follows the evolution of the empire. In the web of relationships that are woven between the prince and the account of ascension we observe a reversal in the role played by the tale: having begun as an instrument of state control, it becomes an invitation to a radical conversion of the person of the prince. Because of this, it is not surprising that from the first type of text examined to the second we should witness the development of a radically different vision of the events described, and that from the same figure, that of the Prophet, two models should arise that are different and, in many ways, even antagonistic.

117 Paul, "The Rise of the Khwajagan-Naqshbandiyya Sufi Order in Timurid Herat", 71–86.

118 Toutant, "La réponse du poète chaghatay Nawāʾī au poète persan Niẓāmī".

119 Toutant, *Un empire de mots*, 623–635.

120 Gruber, "L'ascension (*Miʿrāj*) du prophète Mohammad dans la peinture et la littérature islamiques", 71.

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16

Miʿrāciyye

The Ascension of the Prophet in Ottoman Literature from the Fifteenth to the Twentieth Century

Alexandre Papas

1 Introduction

More, perhaps, than any other society,[1] the Turkophone Ottoman world developed a specific aesthetic around the famous episode of the Prophet's celestial ascension, an aesthetic called *miʿrāciyye* and applying to literature, but also to religious music, calligraphy and the art of the miniature (although these latter three artistic domains are too vast to be covered in the present chapter).[2] One fact that provides a partial explanation for the longevity of the theme of the celestial ascension in Ottoman culture is the regular celebration of the night on which the ascension is said to have happened (*miʿrāc gecesī*), the 27th of the month of *rajab*; this celebration was officially instigated at the beginning of the seventeenth century at the same time as those for the other nights of vigil (called *kandil*, candle), celebrated through the course of each year.[3] Along with the recitation of prayers and Qurʾānic verses, and the drinking of rose-water (mirroring the episode in the *miʿrāc* in which the Prophet must choose a drink), these celebrations, which were at once both solemn and festive, included sung readings from the account composed for the purpose by the Mevlevī poet Nāyī ʿOthmān Dede (d. 1142/1729).[4] Additionally, and around the same time, the *Miʿrācnāme* was set to music by the scholar ʿAbdülbāqī ʿĀrif Efendī (d. 1125/1713).[5] Such musical compositions, recited

1 See the references furnished in Schrieke, Horovitz, Bencheikh, Knappert, and Robinson, "Miʿrād̲j"; Fouchécour, "Miʿrād̲j"; Amir-Moezzi, "ME'RĀJ i. DEFINITION"; Mayel-Heravi, "Quelques *meʿrāğiyye* en persan", 199–203.

2 Uzun, "Miʿrâciyye", 135–40; Gülüm, 'Türk edebiyatı'nda *miʿrâcnâmeler* ", 105–11.

3 Hagen, "Skepticism and Forgiveness", 217.

4 Kara, "Mîrâc, mîrâciyye ve Bursalı Safiya Hâtun'un vakfiyesi", 25–40.

5 For more on this poem, see Ayan, "Abdülbâkî Ârif Efendi'nin mi'râciyyesi", 1–11. The manuscript copy, MS 316, Suna Kıraç Library, Koç University, Istanbul, is accessible online: http://cdm21054.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/MC/id/114561/rec/1.

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by specialised performers (the *miʿrāciyyehān*), laid the groundwork for a relatively codified ritual tradition, enacted in *türbe*s and *tekke*s in Istanbul and across Anatolia, that lasted until they were closed down in 1925. The tradition re-appeared in 1951, but that is another story.

Little-known and seldom translated, almost absent from Western studies of the *miʿrāj*, Ottoman poets are nevertheless inexhaustible on this subject. From the beginning of the fifteenth century to the 1920s, numerous authors (inspired by Arabic and Persian works, but also by writings from Central Asia) devoted all or part of a text to the *miʿrāc*, most often in the form of a *methnevī* or a *qaṣīde* of varying length. To the list of thirty-three titles established by Metin Akar in his classic *Türk edebiyatında manzum miʿrâc-nâmeler* (*Miʿrāc* books in verse in Turkish literature) can now be added almost twenty texts that have been identified in the last few decades through the excellent work of Turkish researchers. Rather than undertaking an intertextual comparison in the hope of classifying themes that are present or absent and thereby deducing a typology for such texts, as Akar begins to do in the third part of his book, I will sketch a brief history of *miʿrāciyye* literature, focusing on authors, the characteristics of their writing, and the debates prompted by the ascension of the Prophet. Here again, the subject is much too vast to be exhausted in a single chapter. I will highlight the works that seem to me to be significant for the evolution of literary *miʿrāciyye*; that is, the poetic discourse around the figure of the Prophet. Finally, my competence does not extend to questions of metrics or poetics. What I will provide are the clearest possible translations of meaning, in order better to discover and understand the abundant imaginary worlds developed by the Ottomans around the episode of the *miʿrāc*.

Drawing on nine selected *miʿrācnāme*s written in Ottoman Turkish between the beginning of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the present brief study will attempt to establish a basic chronology of the subtle variations in literary style in this genre, as well as describing the tensions in the treatment of the figure of the Prophet that these texts reveal, and avoiding any over-simplification that would reduce the history of *miʿrāciyye* to a linear evolution going (for example) from predication to esoteric discourse. Our authors differ on the nature, spiritual or bodily, of the ascension; on whether the Prophet was awake or asleep; on what happened during the encounter between God and Muḥammad. And it is exactly this going over the ground of old debates and thus reformulating them and drawing them towards ever-new narrative horizons that gives us an indication of the intellectual vitality of the Ottomans.

2 An Inaugural Text and the Birth of a Tradition (From the Early Fifteenth to the Sixteenth Century)

Research in Turkey traditionally dates the history of Turkish *miʿrāciyye* to the eighth/thirteenth century and a text attributed to Ḥakīm Ata, a Khwarezmian Sufi supposed to have been a disciple of the famous Aḥmad Yasavī (d. 562/1166).[6] While not denying the Central Asian contribution to this tradition, to which one must add that of Arabic and Persian sources, let us here accept the ninth/fifteenth century as the founding period for Ottoman *miʿrāc* literature. A great many texts appear at this time, written in verse (according to the classical *ʿarūḍ* system)[7] and in prose, by authors whose lives remain for the most part little-known. The first prose *miʿrācnāme* composed in Ottoman Turkish is anonymous, existing in a single manuscript that was copied during the eighteenth century. This eighteen-folio *Risāle-i miʿrāciyye* describes the heavens through which the Prophet travels, especially the first four of these and the seventh, and furnishes many details on paradise and Hell, with the evident intention of making a strong impression on the reader.[8] Texts in verse were more numerous than such prose versions; among them the 494 distichs, sometimes attributed to the fourteenth/fifteenth century Mevlevī poet Aqsarāylı ʿĪsā, which explicitly refer to one of the Prophet's companions, Ibn ʿAbbās (d. ca. 68/687), to whom the Arabic-language founding text *al-Isrāʾ wa-l-miʿrāj* is apocryphally attributed.[9] Another long poem, comprising 566 distichs, was composed by ʿAbdülvāsīʿ (d. after 817/1414, better-known for his *Khalīlnāme*). This was published in a critical edition by Metin Akar, who considered it the first independent *miʿrācnāme* (that is, an ascension account that wasn't part of a larger selection of poems or tales) in Ottoman Turkish.[10]

2.1 *Tāceddīn Aḥmedī*

The subsequent discovery of a long version of Aḥmedī's (d. 815/1413) *miʿrācnāme* has to some extent undermined the above-mentioned assertion. At least two manuscript copies of his magnum opus, the *İskendernāme* (story of Alexander), include an account – 490 or 497 distichs long – of the *miʿrāc*, inserted after a *mevlid* (nativity of the Prophet). These accounts no longer form

6 Eraslan, "Hakîm Ata ve Miʿrâc-nâme'si", 243–304; Scherberger, "The Chaghatay *miʿrājnāma*", 192–205; Doğan, "Mirâc-nâme Harezm türkçesiyle mi yazılmıştır?", 52–98.

7 A classic study of this style is Köprülü's "La métrique *ʿarūż* dans la poésie turque", 2: 252–66.

8 Sır, "Eski Türkiye türkçesi devresine ait mensur bir eser: risāle-i miʿrâciyye", 2257–349.

9 Develi, "Eski Türkiye türkçesi devresine ait manzum bir miracnâme", 81–228.

10 Akar, *Türk edebiyatında manzum miʿrâc-nâmeler*, 325–83.

just a small part of a greater whole, instead constituting an autonomous work by a major author. Tāceddīn Aḥmedī is said to have come from Germiyan, in western Anatolia; after having studied in Cairo he placed himself in the service of various Anatolian sovereigns and then became court poet to the son of Bāyezīd I. A literary representative of the transitional period between the emirates and the foundation of the Ottoman Empire, Aḥmedī composed around a dozen works in verse, in Turkish or Persian.[11] He finished his *miʿrācnāme* in 808/1405; this makes it the first text of this type in Ottoman Turkish.[12] However, it is the originality of the work, more than its date, that persuades me to qualify Aḥmedī's poem as an inaugural text.

In the opening verses of the poem's first section, called *taḥqīq-i miʿrāc-ı resūl* (affirmation of the ascension of the Prophet), our author declares his intentions: one aim is the re-affirmation of the simple truth of the miracle of ascension, another the explanation of its secrets or hidden meanings.[13] This may indicate a persistence, during this period, of scepticism regarding the *miʿrāc* (a scepticism that the eruption of literary *miʿrāciyye* would confirm *a contrario*) or, at least, a prevailing curiosity about the way this event played out, its nature and meaning. Aḥmedī's account of the ascension consists of two main parts, (almost) equal in size: an exoteric account of the *miʿrāc* (ff. 17b–22b) and an esoteric account, entitled *der beyān-ı keşf-i esrār-ı miʿrāc-ı resūl*, or 'on the revelation of the secrets of the Prophet's ascension' (ff. 22b–28b).

Without going into the literal account in too much detail, let us nevertheless take note of the stance assumed by its author from the very beginning (*āghāz-ı qıṣṣa*). There were debates among medieval theologians over the question of whether the Prophet was awake during this extraordinary experience, or asleep and dreaming it. Most decided that he was in a wakeful state, though some mystics continued to interpret the *miʿrāc* as a visionary dream. As for Aḥmedī, he describes a state between sleep and wakefulness, and therefore beholden neither to diurnal experience nor to the oneiric moment.[14]

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11 Kut, "Ahmedî", 165–67.

12 Akdoğan, "Mi'rac, mi'rac-nâme ve Ahmedî'nin bilinmeyen mi'rac-nâmesi", 263–310; Tekin, "The *miʿrâj* miniatures of Venice Ahmadi *Iskandar-nâma*", 85–98. It is interesting to note that, under the influence of the well-known illustrated manuscript of the *Miʿrājnāma* composed in Herat in 1436 and conserved in Paris, two of the miniatures relating to the *miʿrāc* in the *İskendernāme* manuscript that is conserved in Venice show the Prophet's face, and even depict a hand reaching down from the sky – the hand of God.

13 MS Şâzeli Tekkesi 110, ff. 16b–17a. Copied by Aḥmad b. Tursun b. Maʿşūq in 864/1459.

14 MS Şâzeli Tekkesi 110, f. 17b. Aḥmedī is neither the first nor the only writer to describe the ascension thus. The compendia of Bukhārī and Muslim had already reported this tradition (being between sleep and wakefulness – *bayna l-nā'im wa l-yaqẓān*) of Mālik b.

On a night abounding in lightning and thunder
All creatures slept and woke not

The Prophet was neither asleep nor awake
His mind and senses were alert

Another debate, related to that on the state of the Prophet, concerned the exact nature of his experience: was it physical or spiritual? Most exegetes, following al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) *Tafsīr*, concluded that Muḥammad had travelled physically with his body, as well as in spirit.[15] Here again, Aḥmedī choses an intermediate solution, concluding the first part of his account by explaining that this experience was essentially dual, and that the reader should understand this nocturnal journey as having been on the one hand corporeal and exoteric and on the other spiritual and esoteric.[16]

Since I've spoken of the physical element of the ascension
Now listen, while I explain its spiritual dimension

Before going over aspects of the exoteric account in order to reveal their hidden meanings, the poet explains the general principles to be followed by those who want to understand the second part of his *miʿrācnāme*. They must approach what he has recounted as a sequence of allegories describing a journey that takes place outside of time and space:[17]

Within the words I have spoken are various allegories
Within these allegories [are] treasures of truth

Thus it was that the Prophet's ascension, [which] took place at night,
Until his arrival at Quds, lasted only an instant

The place that he reached was reached in no time
He reached this place, he reached no place

Ṣaʿṣaʿa's; as cited by Monnot, "Le commentaire de Rāzī sur le voyage nocturne", 63 and note 12.

15 Busse, "Jerusalem in the story of Muhammad's Night Journey", 1–40; Renaud, "Le récit du *miʿrâj*: une version arabe de l'ascension du Prophète dans le *Tafsîr* de Tabarî", 267–92.

16 MS Şâzeli Tekkesi 110, f. 22b.

17 *Ibid*.

The celestial ascension of the Prophet, which follows his 'horizontal' journey to Quds, is an intellectual progression during which he detaches himself from the senses, and that which can be sensed, in order to concentrate on the spirit and the spiritual. Taking as an example Muḥammad's winged mount, Burāq, brought to him by the angel Gabriel (here called the Holy Spirit), the poet explains that he represents the intellect of the Prophet, which is charged with bringing him towards God. In this interpretation of Burāq there are echoes of an Avicennian *miʿrācnāme*.[18] However, it is difficult to explore these ideas much further: our ignorance of Aḥmedī's sources is too great. Rapid, immaterial and silent, the Prophetic intellect is, as in the classical lesson of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) that Aḥmedī is imitating,[19] placed somewhere between that of an ordinary human and the divine intellect. With the help of the Holy Spirit it must free itself from the bonds of the senses, in order to become fully realised:[20]

> What is the act of following the Holy Spirit?
> [It is] the fact that he has renounced the world of the senses
>
> That which I have called Burāq is the active intellect
> Whose legs are long and whose face is white
>
> This intellect that has two long legs
> Goes quickly to the place it's heading
>
> For him there is neither space nor proper place
> Without [even] speaking, he knows how to return to the source
>
> [Burāq] is smaller than the horse and bigger than the donkey
> I will say what this means:
>
> This means that he is inferior to the universal Intellect
> But that he is superior to all partial intellects

18 Fouchécour, "Avicenne, al-Qošeyri et le récit de l'échelle de Mahomet", 187. Later in Aḥmedī's text, the mosque represents the brain, the muezzin the memory, the imam the power of thought – here again, terms recalling the Avicennian account.

19 Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Mathnavī-yi maʿnavī*, 1925–40, III:2572–30, IV:1960–63 and 65–68, V:459–61 and 463; Safavi and Weightman, *Rūmī's Mystical Design*, 30, 62, 73–74, 146, 167–71.

20 MS Şâzeli Tekkesi 110, ff. 23a–b.

As often related in the literature, the Prophet faced a trial during the journey, during which he had to choose between three goblets containing milk, water and wine. Our author understands this as an initiatic test confronting Muḥammad with three spiritual tendencies – need, elevation and temptation – that chime with a medieval concept, drawn from Galenic medicine, that was familiar to Ottoman writers: that of the *pneuma*.[21] Obviously, our hero chooses to drink the water, representing elevation:[22]

> The three cups, one filled with milk,
> One with water and one with wine, oh clairvoyant!
>
> Without doubt, the water is the natural spirit
> Springs flow faster because of it
>
> What is the wine? It is the animal spirit
> What is the milk? It is the human spirit
>
> The animal spirit resembles wine
> In it there is desire, greed, anger and malice
>
> The human spirit resembles milk
> Since it is a food as useful as it is pleasant
>
> This wine, that was the animal spirit,
> The Prophet refused to drink of it

Our author reaffirms his intentions in the final verses of his *miʿrācnāme*. The unveiling of the true meaning of the Prophetic journey must convince the reader to venerate the Prophet and hope to obtain his intercession. Therefore, one must not be satisfied with a merely literal interpretation of the *miʿrāc*, which would be catastrophically reductive, but neither may one deduce from this account that the Prophet's extraordinary experience can be accessible to anyone else. One may be his adept (*pey-rev*), but one is not his continuator:[23]

> To you, Aḥmedī has revealed
> The secrets of the ascension; if you have listened,

21 Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, 2:313 footnote 4.
22 MS Şâzeli Tekkesi 110, f. 24a.
23 MS Şâzeli Tekkesi 110, f. 28b.

You will know the different mysteries of unicity
You will make your heart an ocean of truth

These secrets, which were hidden from your soul,
I have exposed them to you for God's reward

That you may understand the rank of the Prophet
And that you may yourself become his adept

In order that he might intercede for you at the end of days
And that your [final] home should be raised to paradise

I think Aḥmedī's poem must be considered an inaugural text in three senses. Its structure and the language used are simple, confined to a didactic or even propaedeutic register. This concern for education also permeates the *İskendernāme*, as Marc Toutant has demonstrated.[24] In addition, the poet has reformulated and re-opened certain classical debates, adopting an intermediary position within these. One gets the impression that the Ottoman intelligentsia had continued, through its poets, to discuss the *miʿrāc*, while Arab, Iranian and Central Asian authors had moved on and stopped offering glosses on the Prophet's journey. Finally, far from laying claim to a scholarly authority drawn from the past, and taking advantage of a certain latitude permitted by poetry, Aḥmedī proposes a personal reading of the *miʿrāc*, which could be described as spiritual or interior rather than mystical. Simplicity of writing, continuity within debates, personal interpretation. These are the maker's marks found on Ottoman *miʿrāciyye* right up to the beginning of the twentieth century, as attested by the authors we will examine next.

2.2 *Ḥaqqānī*

The same simplicity characterises Ḥaqqānī's *miʿrācnāme*. Little is known about this author. He lived at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century, and was a *khalīfa* of a shaykh in the Bayramiyye Şemsiyye Sufi brotherhood, Aq Şemseddīn.[25] This poet's account of the *miʿrāc* comprises 95 distichs within his only known work, a *methnevī* 5129 distichs long, called *Manẓūme-i naṣā'iḥ alā meşrebi t-taṣavvuf* (Poem of advice towards

24 Toutant, "Le premier roman d'Alexandre versifié en ottoman", 3–31.

25 Koyuncu, "*Manzûme-i nasâih alâ meşrebi't-tasavvuf*' tan miracnâme türüne yeni bir örnek", 90–105; Ataseven, "Hakkânî'nin '*Manzûme-i nasâyih*' adlı eserinde manzum âyet ve hadis yorumları".

the disposition for Sufism). Please note that here again we are dealing with a didactic text. The *miʿrācnāme* is divided into two parts: 59 distichs of *der beyān-ı miʿrāc-ı Muḥammed Muṣṭafā* (on the ascension of Muḥammad); and 24 distichs of *güftār der nüzūl-i Bārī* (discourse on the descent of the creator). This text is much shorter than Aḥmedī's, and also differs from it on two essential subjects: the Prophet's state when he was visited by the angel Gabriel and the meeting between God and the Prophet.

On the first of these subjects, Ḥaqqānī affirms that the 'king of the two worlds' (the Prophet) was awake at the time, and had just finished praying and reciting the Qur'ān:[26]

> And so one night the king of the two worlds
> Found himself in the home of Umm Hānī
>
> He invoked the All-Powerful
> He pleaded with this Lord
>
> He pronounced the prayers to the Guide
> And he recited the divine Qur'ān

On the second point, the encounter between God and the Prophet, where Aḥmedī evokes only absolute otherness and a voice, Ḥaqqānī describes a face-to-face meeting with a tendency to anthropomorphism (one that we will also see in our next author). The first theologians had been divided in lively debate around the vision of God, a debate that appears to be re-opened here, among Ottoman writers. The problem of the anthropomorphist thesis had been resolved in three ways: the ascension had been but a dream; Muḥammad had seen God in his heart; God had not appeared as a figure, but as a dazzling vision.[27] In the following passage, the ascension is not a dream; the vision takes place in the soul and not the heart; God is not just light, but has a face (*dīdār*, *rūy*). Let us read:[28]

> [Gabriel] said: God is calling for you,
> Get up, let us go now, show yourself to Him.

26 MS Kıbrıs Milli Arşiv ve Araştırma Dairesi 81, ff. 137b–138a.

27 Van Ess, "Le *miʿrāǧ* et la vision de Dieu dans les premières spéculations théologiques en islam", 27–56. For more on the vision of God in a dream, see Lory, *Le rêve et ses interprétations en islam*, 191–200, 269–79.

28 MS Kıbrıs Milli Arşiv ve Araştırma Dairesi 81, ff. 138a, 139b, 140b.

(…)
When the secrets were unveiled in Aḥmad's heart
The face [of God] showed itself to his soul's eyes

God drew the veil from his own face
This King made his beauty clear to the soul

Glory to God, what a radiant light!
What a sublime appearance, God is great!

What a pure and sovereign face
What divine secrets exposed!

What a mirror for the pure heart and soul!
What a fit sight for he who sees God!
(…)
He left and made again for the divine light
He rejoiced to see the face of the Lord.

Ḥaqqanī was a Sufi, but he produced a more literal account than did his predecessor. Here Muḥammad is clearly awake, the ascension is a bodily one, and thus the encounter with God seems to be both physical and spiritual. Another very literal and narrative element of this version is the long passage devoted to the negotiations between God and the Prophet over the fifty prayers (reduced to five); Aḥmedī deals with this episode in a single distich. The poet's fidelity to an exoteric account of the *miʿrāc* does not prevent him from celebrating the beauty of God and the Prophet's visionary power, and it also allows him to imagine a visual, face-to-face encounter between them. As the Ottoman *miʿrāciyye* evolves through the sixteenth century this anthropomorphic tendency is accentuated.

2.3 *Mecīdī*

ʿAbdülmecīd b. Şeykh Naṣūḥ b. Isrā'il et-Tosyevī al-Amasyavī (d. 973/1565?) is a prolific author about whose life, paradoxically, little is known. His father, Şeykh Nasūḥ Efendī (d. 923/1517), was a master in the Zeyniyye Sufi brotherhood (a branch of the Suhrawardiyya), who gave his son a Sufi education. ʿAbdülmecīd, who wrote under the name Mecīdī, was born in Amasya and spent his life either there or in Kastamonu (both towns lay claim to him, and even to his tomb). Among the 55 or 57 works in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish that are attributed to him, most are *tafsīr*, treatises on *ḥadīth*s and the Names of God, or books of

taṣawwuf and *fiqh*.[29] His *miʿrācnāme* is contained in the Ottoman translation he made of the *Pend-nāme*, by ʿAṭṭār (d. 618/1221 or 627/1229); the manuscript of this translation was copied in 1170/1756. It is made up of 289 distichs, in a lyrical but comparatively simple style.[30]

As in other Ottoman *miʿrācnāmes*, the account is preceded by a *tawḥīd* bearing witness to the unicity of God (verses 1–55), and by a *naʿt* (praises of the Prophet) in verses 56–64. Right at the beginning of the account of the ascension itself, the poet affirms that this was a physical event:[31]

> That he made his ascent by bodily means
> Is something there is no need to prove

One characteristic of Mecīdī's account, which is already found in the *Tafsīr* attributed to Jaʿfar Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), and in other Turkish *methnevīs* that mention the *miʿrāc*,[32] is its attitude to mystical love, which partakes of incandescence rather than illumination, of flame rather than light. This indicates that the essence of the mystical experience being described is more devotional than intellectual. The poet takes up the classical image of the moth drawn to the flame, referring to the mystic attracted by God, specifying that the intellect is but a wick, an impassive knowledge of God. There is a notable example of this form of expression in the description of the moment when Gabriel is obliged to stop at the *Sidretü l-muntehā* (the lotus that marks the outer edge of the seventh heaven), leaving Muḥammad to continue his journey towards God – a sign of the Prophet's superiority to the angel:[33]

> If I [Gabriel] go beyond this boundary by even a fraction, O friend,
> Know [that] my feathers and my wings would burn in the fire
>
> For the Glorious One's beauty is forbidden to me
> This is my boundary; for you there are none

29 Erbaş, "Bir Osmanlı müfessiri: Abdülmecid b. eş-Şeyh Nasûh b. İsrâîl (ö. 973/1565) ve eserleri", 161–86; Hayta, "Hayatı ve eserleriyle Abdülmecîd B. Şeyh Nasûh Tosyevî", 343–67; Kuşdemir, "Abdülmecid b. Şeyh Nasûh Tosyevî'nin hayatı, eserleri", 305–23.

30 Demirkazık, "Mecîdî'nin *miraciye*'si", 849–86.

31 MS İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi TY 4009, f. 49b.

32 See Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, 183–88; Kuru, "Pious journey", 192–205.

33 MS İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi TY 4009, ff. 51b–52a. This anecdote comes from a *ḥadīth* that is not part of the canonical collections.

In truth, you have the intellect and the heart and the soul
Beyond this [boundary], the journey towards proximity is yours

In this place, make your intellect a friend of love
Until knowledge no longer veils the Friend

Know that the house of your intellect was a narrow one
For this reason, the smoke could not rise from the fire of love

The intellect was the wick, the ego the oil
Thanks to these two, the flame will shine

When Adam was created from these two [entities]
He thus became [more] gratified than the angels

Aḥmad said to Gabriel: you stay there
With ardour shall I go to meet the well-beloved

For you, these feathers and these wings are veils
I shall take this path, you must remain [and be] satisfied

On this path, the soul approached the beloved, who showed himself
Burning in the fire of love [the soul] saw the beloved

Those who are not burned by this fire do not reach the goal
Do not see the beloved, who conceals his existence

If the moth did not fly [towards] the flame
How could the union with God take place?

Later, alluding to the much-debated question of Muḥammad's vision of God, Mecīdī explicitly states that the Prophet contemplates God; there is no mention of a heart's gaze or spiritual gaze, such as would exclude any anthropomorphic ambiguity. Using the rhetoric of love, Mecīdī speaks of some sort of meeting of bodies, in spite of the reference, drawn from the *qudsī ḥadīth*, to the 'mantle of magnificence' that separates God from mankind, a mantle that here is eventually removed:[34]

34 MS İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi TY 4009, f. 52b.

He looked, and said 'I behold God'
For God was clothed in the mantle of magnificence

For a moment he stayed in the realm of perplexity
For he said to himself 'I am not God's confidant'

While the beloved remained in his [mantle] of magnificence
Muḥammad freed himself from Muḥammad
(…)
He said 'I remain in a state of stupefaction, O God
For you are the most eminent king of my orphan self'

'Take my hand to bring this orphan towards union
For he is your lover, O my ancient king'

'Your love has brought me to this shore,
Take pity on me, do not add wounds to the wound'

When the beloved affected reluctance
This lover flew even further from his soul

This eminent King took pity upon him
He drew back the veil and showed himself

Laying eyes on this, the beauty of the 'Be!',
At once [the Prophet] sang like a lark

Finally, the poet reports a long speech addressed by God to the Prophet, during which he receives his function of intercessor, but also his *raison d'être* as the cause of creation. This scene, in which God says to Muḥammad, 'Ask and it shall be given', is present in numerous accounts of the ascension, but here it receives a different treatment. The reader discovers an intimacy between God and Muḥammad, one that is at the very origin of the world itself:[35]

The Lord of all things spoke thus:
'Because of you I created the low and the high

35 MS İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi TY 4009, ff. 54a–b.

'If you had not existed, the world would never have been created
Nor the divine decrees, the word, the djinns, or Adam'

'Whatever you should want, O my darling, just ask for it
And I will give it to you, O my healer of [men's] pains'

'Your aim has been realised through my will
Generosities of all kinds have been granted to you'

'Your aim is also my own aim
I have forgiven you [for] I am justice [itself]'

'The ones you love are those whom I love
Those to whom you pay attention are the objects of my attention'

Mecīdī interprets the ascension of the Prophet as a mystical experience unique to him, during which Muḥammad is consumed by love but still manages to maintain a lengthy dialogue with God. This is more than a simple discussion of prayers – more, even, than a dialogue about the salvation of the community of believers. What is really important here is the insistence on the necessity of Muḥammad's passion for God. A non-literal and Sufi reading of the *miʿrāc* appears with Mecīdī, in a form that is at once similar to and distinct from that adopted by Aḥmedī, while describing a more intimate encounter with God than does Ḥaqqanī. More generally, we can conclude that the Ottoman literary *miʿrāciyye* was born during this period, from the beginning of the fifteenth and into the sixteenth century. At the apogee of the Empire, while the cultural life of court and Sufi lodge was becoming fixed, the figure of the Prophet (as brought to life by authors who were steeped in Persian poetry) awakened debates and flights of intellect within which, paradoxically, classical tropes (esoteric interiority, the beauty of God, love-metaphors) had to be simplified in order to define the experience of the Prophet.

3 Continuing Debates in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

The Ottoman poets of the next two centuries carried on the debates over Muḥammad's nocturnal voyage while at the same time renewing its narrative content. They did not invent new episodes but rather described existing ones differently, or revealed little-known details about them. Louis Bazin spoke of a 'restoration to youth for Ottoman literature' during the 1720s; this was

succeeded by a period of reaction that created an atmosphere of deep malaise in court poetry (of which the most obvious sign was the execution of the poet Nedīm and that of his protector Ibrāhīm Paşa in 1143/1730[36]). Our understanding of these periods can doubtless be refined by a careful reading of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Ottoman *miʿrācnāme*s.

3.1 *Naẓīm Yaḥyā Çelebī*

Naẓīm Yaḥyā Çelebī was a Sufi poet born in 1059/1649 in the Kumkapı quarter of Istanbul and educated at Enderūn (the school of the imperial palace), learning Arabic and Persian, but also (and perhaps above all) poetry and music. As a young man he was initiated into the Mevlevī *ṭarīqa* and for three years placed himself at the service of Arzī Meḥmed Dede, the shaykh of the Galata *mevlevīhane*, after which he served Neşaṭī Dede, shaykh of the Edirne *mevlevīhane*. Naẓīm Yaḥyā would have been living and serving as a *postnişin* in Edirne from 1670 to 1674, and he died in 1329/1727.[37] It seems that, apart from a text concerning the right to benefit mystically from the literature and music of the whirling dervishes, Naẓīm Yaḥyā composed five *divans*, which are collected in the *Dīvān-ı belāghat-ʿunvān-ı Naẓīm* (Collection of the eloquent Naẓīm), published in Istanbul in 1257/1841; two thirds of this collection consists of *naʿt*s. This shows how central the figure of the Prophet was. This collection also contains an 81-distich *miʿrācnāme*, written in a limpid style despite a certain influence from the baroque imagery of the then-fashionable *sebk-i hindī* ('Indian style').[38] This *miʿrācnāme* is made up of three parts. The first gives a long description of the night and of the miracle of the ascension. The second provides details of Umm Hānī's house, and of the *Sidretü l-muntehā*. In the third, the poet asks the Prophet to intercede on his behalf, formulates prayers and then concludes. There are few extraneous elements; the text is centred on celebration of the Prophet.

It is the nocturnal and musical atmosphere that is most striking in this text. Indeed, after a panegyric re-affirming the Prophet's singular status in creation and in the eyes of God, Naẓīm concentrates on the night of the *miʿrāc*, described as being illuminated and full of sounds and signs, alongside the installation of a mystical banquet (*bezm*). The personified night sky adorns itself with stars and lunar movement in order to celebrate the Prophetic traveller:[39]

36 Bazin, "La vie intellectuelle et culturelle dans l'Empire ottoman", 708–9; Macit, "Nedîm", 510–13.

37 Uzun and Özcan, "Nazîm", 452–53; Yıldırım, "Nazîm Yahya'nın bir aşk hikayesi", 1663–1700.

38 Bilkan, "Sebk-i hindî", 253–55. Among the Ottoman representatives of this style are Nefʿī (d. 1044/1635), Nābī (d. 1124/1712) and Nā'ilī (d. 1077/1666).

39 Naẓīm Yaḥyā, *Dīvān*, 163–64.

One night when the beautiful houri's cheek
was covered over by her black hair

On that night, the hand of the Powerful One offered
No adornment for the face of the world's bride

On that night, the stars rose
As though they wore black brocade

Suddenly they joined together in the sky
The moon's chalice completed its orbit

The moon was both goblet and drum at this banquet
Over there, Venus held a harp in her hand

The gentle melody was intoxicating
And inflamed the guests at the feast

From this whirling a black tent was stretched
All the shining stars were its golden pegs
(…)
O, the auspices of the most joyful night!
All of creation overflowed with blackest light

But on this night His majesty
The king of the land of intercession

On that night, this generous emperor,
This cause of the creation of the two worlds

This sovereign of the eternal kingdom
I mean the king of prophets, Muḥammad

On that night there was a feast for him
He was invited to the noble ascension

Later, Naẓīm describes the ascension of Muḥammad one celestial circle at a time, concentrating especially on the second and third circles. Here the Prophet makes himself into a poet and musician, with whom our author (perhaps) identifies – as does, in all probability, the Sufi reader, who, in turn,

is caught up in the movements of veneration and violent ecstasy. A *mise en abyme* authenticates the miraculous experience of the *miʿrāc*, although this had already, it would appear, been firmly established. Above all, the literary procedure operating here seems, through words and without resorting to plain re-description, to make the reader or listener participate in the experience described, while avoiding even the merest risk that one might confuse the fact of reading an account with one's lived reality as a reader:[40]

> Once again, in an instant, this nimble thunderbolt [Burāq]
> Fearlessly climbed to the second circle
>
> He [Muḥammad] took the reed-pen of Mercury in his hand[41]
> And he embellished the name of Mercury
>
> Following divine orders, full of ardour and joy
> He wrote out the [tale of the] noble ascension
>
> This singular king made a gift of
> A sweet ode, begging a hundred pardons [for his mistakes]
>
> This Khedive of pure extraction offered
> Deepest reverence to the third circle
>
> The musician of the banquet in the heavens
> Tore his drum-skin like a veil
>
> He shattered his lute
> As though his life had been taken
>
> He twisted his saz like a knee-joint
> As he bowed down in shame

At the end of the text, reflecting on the encounter between Muḥammad and God, the poet addresses the Prophet in his own quest for unicity through

40 Naẓīm Yaḥyā, *Dīvān*, 165.

41 In Niẓāmī's account of the *Haft paykar*, Mercury is the second planet (after the moon) passed by the Prophet during his celestial ascension. The name ʿUṭārid also alludes to a known episode in the Prophet's life, in which the poet ʿUṭārid b. Ḥājib is asked to challenge the Prophet to a contest of composition of panegyrics to God, but fails in his attempt (see Al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 68–69).

Muḥammad's intercession. Here, instead of the divine hand reaching out to the Prophet, we find the hand of the Prophet held out to mankind. As much as this intercession offers love to mystics, it also provides salvation for the community of believers. In passing, one can take note of the element of context represented by the mention of Christianity:[42]

O sharer of the mystery of God's proximity
O companion at the banquet of unicity

O repealer of the Christian religion
And of all those among which the 'Be!' is repealed

You, who are the gnostic of pre-extant subtlety
You, who have knowledge of the secret of wisdom

I am he who desires your pure beauty
I am he whose heart is broken in a thousand pieces

Offer grace to your slave, the wretched Nāẓim
This afflicted one whose heart is torn by a thousand blows

May the bird of the heart fly towards your love
May the soul be drawn towards your love

Make [of me] the one who reaps in the gardens of favour
Make [for me] the bliss of a compassionate glance

Do not drive this wretch from your door
He is brought low, hold out your hand [to him]

Pray do not abandon the forlorn stranger
My battered heart's fate [is] to belong to God

O intercessor of your community
The community's life is sacrificed on the path of intercession

O nature of the composer, full of turbulence
Enough, that's enough, silence, silence!

42 Naẓīm Yaḥyā, *Dīvān*, 166.

It is no exaggeration to say that this entire *mise en scène* of the celestial ascension could be interpreted as the model for a Mevlevī Sufi ritual session, in that (even if we disregard the author's personality) this account presents the fundamental characteristics of the Mevleviyye *semāʿ* (spiritual concert): it takes place at night and involves the practice of music. It's true that sessions of *dhikr* (ritual recitation) and Sufi concerts also often happened at night, or in the dark, but the inclusion of music was typical specifically of the Mevlevīs or 'whirling dervishes'. Sufis did not seem to use the harp, but lutes and (especially) drums were among the musical instruments that were in regular use in Sufi lodges. We should also note that the Mevlevī *semāʿ* reached its most perfect form at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth.[43] Importantly, at least two allusions to Rūmī have been slipped into the text, at the beginning and at the end: the expression *şeb-i feraḥ-zā* (literally, 'the night that brings joy') recalls *şeb-i ʿarūs* (literally, 'the wedding night'), which corresponds to the death of Rūmī and its annual commemoration by the Mevlevīs; *khāmūsh* (the silent one) is one of the signatures of the eponymous master.

Consequently, the *miʿrāc* can be seen as the ideal of the *semāʿ*, that is to say, as a night of initiatic realisation for dervishes. Without claiming to have experienced celestial ascension themselves, and sticking with the classical notion of the ascension as a metaphor for spiritual progression, for Naẓīm Yaḥyā Çelebī, Sufis feel the joy of the ascension during their spiritual concerts. This same joy is present throughout the next poem.

3.2 *Levḥī Bursalī*

Levḥī Ḥüseyin Efendī (d. 1165/1751) was born in the Ḥacı İskender quarter of Bursa. Nothing is known of his training, but we know that he worked as a *müderris* at the Ḥasan Paşa madrasa in Bursa, later becoming a scribe and then chief scribe at the court of justice in the town. Levḥī was initiated into the Celvetiyye Sufi brotherhood, a branch of the Bayramiyye. He wrote religious and mystical poetry in Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish.[44] Today only two of his works survive, a *dīvān* and a *miʿrācnāme*, of which at least three manuscripts exist, one of which is in the British Museum.[45] Levḥī's *miʿrāciyye* is made up of 125 distichs, the beginning and end of which consist of praises

43 Gölpınarlı, *Mevlevî âdâb ve erkânı*, 28, 78–94; Ambrosio, Feuillebois and Zarcone, *Les derviches tourneurs*, 139–42; Binbaş, "Music and samāʿ of the Mavlaviyya", 59–71.

44 Özbay, "Bursalı Levhî Divanı"; Okumuş, "Bursalı Levhî Efendi", 291–307.

45 Kaplan, "Bursalı Levhî ve mi'râciyye'si", 226–56.

of the Prophet. This version of the celestial ascension story has (at least) two notable characteristics.

First, in a reflection on the physical nature of the celestial ascension, the poet gives us a description of Muḥammad's body. This sort of physical description of the Prophet is typical of the classical Ottoman *ḥilye* genre,[46] but its inclusion in a *miʿrācnāme* indicates an original approach, one that may even be completely novel. This means that the entire account (not just its beginning and end) becomes a long glorification of the Prophet:[47]

> He is a divine grace that has come to this earth
> His advent is a source of mercy for the worlds
>
> [With] his fair substance, his natural quality is the high aspiration
> That has risen to the throne, he is the cypress in the garden of beauty
>
> Ornament of the world, Sultan of the prophets, [this] holy king whose
> Hair is musk, scented with amber and diffusing his graces
>
> His forehead is the dawn of the light of God the absolutely beloved
> His arched brows outline the seal of Prophecy
>
> His spirit is the secret of the moon's division
> Of which the nose is the sign and the finger the witness
>
> The kohl-dark eyes are those of the Sultan whose 'gaze swerved not'
> His gaze is on God with each breath, in each place and each hour
>
> From his mouth came an abundance of gnostic subtleties
> His mouth the source of the waters of Euphrates and the stream of gnosis
>
> His eyelashes of basil, his cheek of tulip, his curls of hyacinth and camomile
> His face of rose blossom is the sweet-scented witness of union

46 There is an abundant literature on this subject. Let us mention, among others, Uzun, "Hilye", 44–47; Erkal, "Türk edebiyatı'nda hilye", 111–30; Yazar, "Seyyid Şerîfî Mehmed Efendi ve hilyesi", 1026–1044; Erdoğan, "Hakim Mehmed Efendi'nin manzum hilyesi", 317–57; Özkafa, "Hilye-i şerife'nin dinî, edebî, estetik boyutları", 2041–53; Belken and Şener, 'Türk edebiyatında hilye ve Hayri'nin hilye-i şerifi", 1–14.

47 MS Millet Kütüphanesi Ali Emirî Efendi 386, f. 2a.

His ears of wild rose, angelic in nature, amber-scented
His crystalline neck is more pure than silver

He alone had his chest opened and possessed a pure light
This Sultan of the two worlds is the loftiest centre of glory

His hand is very long, his reach embraces the horizons
There is no doubting that his is a bounteous palm, wide and round

This king's body is entirely lustrous and finely-formed
He whose belly and navel are holy and free of hair

In passing, we may note the allusion to an episode of the *miʿrāc* drawn from Qurʾān 94:1, developed in the *ḥadīth*s and cited by other Ottoman authors, such as Ḥaqqānī and the poet of whom we will speak after Levḥī Bursalī: before taking his leave, Gabriel opened the Prophet's chest and washed his heart with *zamzam* water, then filled it with wisdom and faith before putting it back in its place. A second characteristic of this *miʿrācnāme*: as well as providing initiatic teachings, the Prophet's nocturnal voyage is also a beatific experience of mystical joy:[48]

On this night when ecstasy and the spiritual state were made manifest before heaven
Angels entered into heaven and it was a time of rejoicing

Levḥī does not devote much space to the stages of the ascension, but underlines the beatitude of the meeting with God:[49]

First He made Himself manifest to the beloved by his attributes
By way of the manifestation that is composed of personal names

And in person His abundance was a manifestation of beauty
No condition can express the joy that it brought

This Prophet and commander experienced a state that is impossible
To describe, for this is the banquet of the highest among the high of the union.

48 MS Millet Kütüphanesi Ali Emirî Efendi 386, ff. 2a–b.
49 MS Millet Kütüphanesi Ali Emirî Efendi 386, ff. 2b–3a.

The general air of glorification in Levḥī's poem was expressed in a context and period of rejoicing at Ottoman power, and, as was the case with other literary works of the time, presents a rapport between the Prophet and God that is full of this same confidence and optimism, and may sometimes even tip over into a religious lightness. As in Şeykh Ghālib's well-known *Ḥüsn u ʿaşq*, the beauty and the beatitude of the Prophet turn his celestial ascension into an aesthetic romance. It is important to remember that this text marks the high point of a carnal and happy way of representing the Muḥammadan adventure. The next *miʿrāciyye* we will examine is implicitly a rejoinder to Levḥī's text, and in this it resembles the objections against the transports of Ottoman lyric poetry raised by certain *ʿulamā'* during this period.

3.3 *ʿÖmer Ḥāfıẓ Yenīşehr-i Fenārī*

Historians know nothing of ʿÖmer Ḥāfıẓ Fenārī except that he came from Larissa in Thessaly and his *miʿrācnāme* dates from 1205/1791. The poem is written in a simple style, and is full of Qur'ānic quotations and of eulogies; it also represents a return to the tradition of lengthy accounts, being 319 distichs long. It exists in four manuscript versions, two in Istanbul and two in Ankara.[50] I would be inclined to consider this a neo-traditional work insofar as it adopts a forceful position on certain much-debated aspects of the *miʿrāc* story.

At the very beginning of his narration, Fenārī writes decisively on two issues that had preoccupied Ottoman literary *miʿrāciyye* since the beginning, namely the questions of whether the ascension was physical or spiritual, and whether the Prophet was awake or asleep at the time:[51]

> The narrators who have recounted the ascension are thirty-four in number
> [A single] one called it physical, the others [said it was] spiritual
>
> There was a wall on the west side of the Kaʿba
> One night this fine figure leaned against it
>
> The twenty-seventh night of the month of Rajab
> His master Gabriel arrived at dawn

However, it is the long dialogue between God and Muḥammad that is most striking in this *miʿrāciyye*. Alongside the classical themes of intercession and the rules for prayers, the majority of this dialogue is about asceticism, as in

50 Kaya, "Ömer Hâfız-ı Yenişehr-i Fenârî'nin Mi'râciyesi", 677–718.

51 MS İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi TY 1375, f. 2a.

a spiritual interview between a master and his disciple. The latter must first aspire to God (the Sufi concept of *raghbat*) in order to live the simple and sober life that is a necessary condition for spiritual existence; this life is made up of ritual repetition (*dhikr*), retreat (*khalwat*), and renunciation (*tark*):[52]

> [God] said: O Aḥmad, if it is me you desire,
> Be ascetic, turn away from the world
>
> To request the beyond, aspire to it
> [Muḥammad] said: O Lord, what is ascesis and aspiration?
>
> God said: diminish your habits, eating and drinking
> Gather your reserves and put them aside
>
> [God] said: O Aḥmad, you are like the infants
> Neither request nor desire everything you see
>
> Repeat [my name], practice retreat, reject the world
> [Muḥammad] said: give me a task and I shall act
>
> [God] said: eat at dawn; in the evening
> Just sigh and weep, at night sleep little

The lesson in asceticism continues in the following verses, which allude directly to Sufi poverty (*faqr*) while impugning believers who are not devout enough:[53]

> He who loves poverty loves Me
> He who is close to the destitute approaches me
>
> [Muḥammad] said: O Lord, who is this Fakir? Tell me
> [God] said: he [is the one who] endures, who sleeps and eats little
>
> He does not speak of his state, does not tell lies
> Does not get angry, he calls on Me for help
>
> Flee from wealth, do not adorn yourself with fine clothes
> Eat a good meal and want [nothing] more

52 MS İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi TY 1375, f. 5b.
53 MS İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi TY 1375, ff. 6a–b.

Do not care about the people of the world
Love the beyond and care for its people

[Muḥammad] said: O Lord, who are the people of the world?
And let me know who are the people of the beyond

God said: the people of the world laugh a lot
They eat and sleep a lot, they are among the attached ones

The word of God does not satisfy them, they don't accept it
They are enslaved by their imperious egos

Those who have no fear, and are indifferent to me
Will find no rest, they will stay in Hell

Both negatively and positively, God teaches the Prophet how an authentic mystic should be, and enumerates seven virtues: modesty, silence, fear, shame, ascesis, hatred of the world, and love of God.[54] Finally, the poet has God speak of love as devotion and ascesis:[55]

If someone says: I love God
Night and day his acts are only devotion

[He] practises consent, he cries and laughs little
His house becomes a mosque and he repeats [my name]

He fears me, always waiting for my approval
Frees himself from his ego and his sensuality

Knowledge becomes his companion, and he loves,
At all times he praises scholars and the poor

Friend of ascesis, he frees himself from sin
He remains silent, wears the cloak and practises sincerity

In short, Fenārī describes an exclusively spiritual *miʿrāc*, taking place in a wakeful state and ending with a dialogue in which God teaches Muḥammad to

54 MS İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi TY 1375, f. 7b.
55 MS İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi TY 1375, ff. 7b–8a.

follow an ascetic Sufi path. This presents a striking contrast with Levhī Bursalī's *miʿrāciyye*, the joyous frenzy of which is here opposed by the anxious rigour of the poet from Thessaly. The long epilogue devoted to the proofs demanded of Muḥammad on his return from his adventure – an episode that is classic in *miʿrāc* accounts, developed to varying degrees by different authors and based on Qurʾān 17:60[56] – may perhaps be an early indication of a Prophetic heritage that will have to defend itself against the challenges of modernity. Anxieties over the weakening of the Empire, the fall into desuetude of the grand epic, and the calling into question of Islam itself were already appearing among Ottoman poets at the end of the twelfth/eighteenth century, and they were only to increase in the century that followed.

4 The Ascension of the Prophet in the Modern Period (From the Nineteenth Century to the Beginning of the Twentieth)

4.1 *Diyārbekirlī Saʿīd Paşa*

Saʿīd Paşa (d. 1309/1891) was born in 1832 in Diyarbakır, into an old and intellectual family. After studying in a madrasa, he worked in the secretariat of the correspondence bureau (*taḥrīrāt qalemī*) of his home town from 1849. In 1868 he was put in charge of the province's general secretariat, then occupied various government posts in Elazığ, Maraş, Muş and Siirt, ultimately becoming governor of Mardin, where he died and was buried. Although he was far from the centres of power, Saʿīd Paşa nevertheless played an active part in its exercise, in various reform committees but also and especially by writing about a dozen texts, notably a *dīvān* (published in 1288/1871 and subsequently extended) and a volume of annals (*sālnāme*) on the history of the town of Diyarbakır, published in 1302/1885.[57] Saʿīd Paşa was an admirer of the writer Nāmık Kemāl (d. 1888); he knew Arabic and Persian but also, apparently, French, and was trained in logic and mathematics, a child of the Tanzimat, torn between Ottomanism and modernity – one could say, torn between faith and reason.[58]

His *miʿrācnāme* is a classic *qaṣīde* 119 distichs long, in three parts: the account of miracles performed by the Prophet and a defence of Islam against unbelievers; the account of the celestial ascension; and the last and longest part, an

56 See Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys, Earthly Concerns*, ch. 3.

57 Both works are available online: https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/islamic-heritage-project/catalog/40-990051453030203941; http://isamveri.org/salname/sayilar.php?sidno=D02375.

58 Kadıoğlu, "Said Paşa, Diyarbekirli", 450–451; Erdoğan, "Saîd Paşa divanı'na göre 19. yüzyıl divan şiirinde görülen bazı değişimler", 83–106; Kılıç, "Diyarbakırlı Saîd Paşa dîvanı'nın neşri üzerine notlar", 27–41; Ciğa, "Diyârbekirli Mehmed Saîd Paşa'nın bibliyografyası", 1–6.

attempt to demonstrate the reality of the *miʿrāc* in the face of contemporary scepticism, using both positivist and religious arguments.[59]

Let us leave the first part to one side. The second part ends with an account of the Prophet's return to earth and the way he convinced his community to adhere to Islam in the face of the hostile doubts of Abū Jahl. However, in verses 78–80 our author returns to the subject in order himself to prove, for his own contemporaries, the reality of the Prophet's voyage. To this end Saʿīd Paşa calls upon modern sciences while, naturally, never asking the scientific question as to the existence of God – instead, he underlines God's omnipotence, inaccessible to human understanding. In addition, the poet refers to an 'eminent Christian', perhaps accusing a specific European scientist, or else occidental rationalism more generally:

To dare thus to criticise this great matter
Is to mock God's all-powerful nature

An act that occurs thanks to the Creator
Is not one whose wisdom one dares to doubt

Attacking the Creator's wisdom, this is blindness, madness
When the whole world could not bring the least atom into being

These beings were invented on God's command
To be unable to grasp [this] is either infidelity or melancholy

Is it possible for Burāq to fly through the air like a bird?
The peerless Creator offers the power to fly like a bird

Four times around the world in a single second,
An electrical current travels this far with ease

Is [God] not capable of giving rapid movement to Burāq?
God has promoted electricity to the rank of speed

I heard a Christian, an eminent individual, say:
So what ladder did Muḥammad use to get to the heavens?

59 Erdoğan, "Klâsik mi'râciyyelerden farklı bir mi'râciyye: Said Paşa ve mi'râciyyesi", 163–85.

This eminent individual ought to say: he climbed the ladder
That Jesus once used to get to heaven!

In verses 84–93, to prove the reality of the *miʿrāc*, Saʿīd Paşa relies alternately on scientific data (with particular reference to astronomy, since the heavens are at issue) and on religious principles, while sometimes veering into a concordist outlook, as was fashionable during this period. However, he always ends by highlighting the ontological difference between the natural and the supernatural:

[For] those who, by observation, acquire skill in astronomy
In reality, this means that they speak only of a single sky

In truth, the space of the universe is without limits
Through what [scientific] research could a creature grasp this [divine] order?

All the heavens, the bodies and other beings that are described,
Behind [these] discoveries, is there not a power superior to such inventions?

With a telescope, perception is extended from earth to heaven
[But] the meaning that appears during the night of ascension is not known

His creature does not understand [divine] acts and judgements
Is His creature conscious of God's secrets?

If He wants, [God] creates a hundred thousand worlds in an instant
If He wants, He destroys the world with a single blow

When one compares the superior might of God
The understanding and strength of creatures vanish completely

Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī writes in his *methnevī*:
You must imagine earth and heaven as an apple

This apple grew from the tree of divine might
Picture your body as a worm in this apple

[Divine] acts and judgements are in the [mind of] the tree's gardener
So how could such a worm be informed [about these acts and judgements]?

Finally, in verses 95–105, Saʿīd Paşa leaves science behind to touch on morality. He confronts materialists and men of faith to remind them of the moral and existential risks run by those who are suspicious of religious beliefs, such as belief in the *miʿrāc*:

> A materialist once said: this era has no end
> Nature's need is what turns the world and what it holds
>
> In his mouth all [other] worlds are imaginary fables
> So-called hell and heaven, the supposed hereafter
>
> Are all a folly that man renounces for worldly pleasures
> Claiming there's a last judgement and a place of punishment is an illusion
>
> When a man of religion hears these senseless words
> In response, he formulates the following refutation:
>
> According to this madness, at the end [of life] we risk no injury
> If what the materialists claim is true
>
> [And then] men of faith disapprove, or they prate:
> At the last judgement, what nonsense will [this] wretched materialist say?!
> (…)
> Superior rank and power come from the Creator
> To call the ascension into question is a sin

Saʿīd Paşa Diyārbekirlī's *Miʿrāciyye* demonstrates that the age-old debates about the reality of the celestial ascension had not been concluded, or at least that they could be re-opened as intellectual history evolved: consequently, the figure of the Prophet was fragile and ever-changing. Over the long term we are witnessing histories of the *miʿrāciyye* in particular, and of the representation of the Prophet in general, that are anything but linear, made up of divergence, nuance and unexpected twists. The extent to which this extraordinary narrative continued to preoccupy the Ottoman spirit as it plunged into the nineteenth century is striking; the *miʿrācnāme* by our high-ranking civil servant was by no means unique in this respect.[60]

60 Apart from Seyyidī, other writers on this topic include Muḥammed Fevzī (d. 1238/1820) and Receb Vahyī (d. 1341/1922), cited by Akar, *Türk edebiyatında manzum miʿrâc-nâmeler*, 184–202 (the name of ʿAbdübāqī ʿĀrif Efendī (d. 1125/1713) must be removed from the list provided, because his account of the ascension was written between the end of the

4.2 *Kerkükī ʿAbdüsettār*

As Saʿīd Paşa Diyārbekirlī extended the geographical reach of the Ottoman *miʿrāciyye* to eastern Anatolia, so Kerkükī ʿAbdüsettār communicated it to the Arab provinces; his work also brings us to the beginning of the twentieth century. Born in 1275/1858, in the Begler district of Kirkuk, he began his studies at the madrasa there and then pursued them in Edirne, where he received his first diploma in 1294/1876, followed by a second, in religious sciences, in 1312/1894. ʿAbdüsettār then became a teacher (*müderris*) in several important provincial centres, such as Bursa and, from 1313/1895, Izmir. After the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 he returned to Kirkuk to lead a pious life, even attracting popular admiration. He also participated in official ceremonies alongside the town's principal *ʿulamāʾ*. He died in 1351/1932.[61]

Kerkükī ʿAbdüsettār wrote poetry, four firmans and two certificates (*icāzetnāme*), and published a *miʿrāciyye* in 1326/1908 that took the form of a 45-verse poem with a refrain (*tercīʿ-bend*).[62] This short and rhythmical poem's musical effectiveness relies equally on assonance and alliteration. It is a sign of the writer's times that he starts by praising the Prophet and then addresses a prayer to Sultan ʿAbdülḥamid II (d. 1918). After this he gives his reasons for composing the work: the glorification of the qualities of the Prophet through an account of his celestial ascension expresses the grandeur of the divine cosmos as well as hope for Muḥammad's intercession. At the end of the work, the author asks scholars to forgive him its defects. The *miʿrāciyye* is made up of four strophes (*bend*): 1) praises and prayers; 2) description of the mercy and might of the Creator/the Prophetic mission; 3), and especially 4) the *miʿrāc* itself, in which the telling of the actual story takes up only about a quarter of the text. Finally, let us note the refrain that punctuates each strophe: 'Day and night, I sing, pray and praise / for your blessed spirit, O Glory of humanity' (*Rūz u şeb dhikr-i lisānımdır ṣalāt ile selām / Ol mübārek rūḥına ey Ḥaḍret-i fakhrüʾl-enām*). When the author says here that he prays for the Prophet's

seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, and not during the nineteenth; see Uzun, "Abdülbâki Ârif Efendi", 195–98; Ayan, "Abdülbaki Ârif Efendi'nin mi'râciyyesi", 1–11); let us also retain the names of Aḥmed ʿIzzet Paşa (d. 1310/1893), governor of Edirne, Harputlu Raḥmī (d. 1301/1884), ʿOthmān Sirāceddīn (d. 1305/1888?) and Çerkeşîzāde Meḥmed Tevfîq (d. 1310/1893). For details, see respectively Yörür, "Edirne vasili Ahmed Izzet Paşa'nın mi'râciye'si", 136–45; Şener, "Türk edebiyatında mi'râciyye geleneği", 77–91; Ekinci, "Erzurumlu Osman Sirâceddin'in *Hayâl-i Bâl* adlı mi'râciyesi", 656–87; Yörür, "Çerkeşîzâde Mehmed Tevfîk Efendi'nin mi'râciye'si", 229–41.

61 Yıldırım, "Kerkükî Abdüsettâr Efendi ve mi'raciyye'si", 1163–80.

62 Kerkükī ʿAbdüsettār, *Miʿrāciyye dīvānī*. The text is accessible online: http://isamveri.org/pdfrisaleosm/RE13553.pdf.

spirit day and night, the musical and devotional qualities of the *miʿrāciyye* are enhanced. Here is the fourth strophe:[63]

In an instant he rose to heaven, he saw everything
And wrote thus: 'Glory be to the One, who has led his servant'

From the house of Umm Hānī he began [his] celestial ascent
Miraculously he passed through the constellation of the twins

There and back in the blink of an eye, and he woke up exhausted
In the space of a single breath he was at the al-Aqṣā mosque

First an army of angels came to see him one by one
All those who dwell in the highest heaven were honoured

They said 'Now we are glorified, by your arrival'
'Pinnacle of the prophets, you have reached the ultimate aim!'

'All the oppressed ones who have been killed and sacrificed'
'[Are] honoured, friend, accept lovers whose hearts are thirsty'

'Your eyes whose 'gaze swerved not' bring the dead back to life'
'Your command, when listened to, brings the dead heart to life'

His gracious gaze offered honour and grace to mankind
If he even glances at anyone they will find happiness

The poet asks for help with the composition of the ode
My so-generous God, bring me joy with that very intercession!

[I am] weak and incurable, drowning in a sea of turbulence
My God, forgive the trespasses of this wretched sinner!

In several respects Kerkükī ʿAbdüsettār's *miʿrāciyye* is a transitional work, bridging those of Saʿīd Paşa Diyārbekirlī and Meḥmed Bahāeddīn. First, it is a short text, and thus representative of a slow evolution of the Ottoman *miʿrāciyye* towards brevity of form. In addition, the poet tends – as do the authors of the works that precede and follow his version, and with the exception of a few

63 *Miʿrāciyye dīvānī*, 7.

narrative details – to pass over the stages of Muḥammad's nocturnal journey, concentrating instead on the encounter between the Prophet and the angels, and on his power to revive the faith. Finally, the text constantly converges on the glorification of the Prophet. Evidently, all *miʿrācnāme* have the traveller as their central figure, but modern production tended to eclipse all other characters (Burāq, Gabriel, angels, demons, etc.), while also setting aside the physical creature who was Muḥammad and retaining only his prophetic function. Essentially the formal character of this text, recalling the ambition of writers such as Naẓīm Yaḥyā Çelebī, is best expressed in its ritualised musicality. Perhaps Kerkükī was already preparing for a devotional existence, far from political events. A similar retreat from the world seems to have motivated our final author.

4.3 *Meḥmed Bahāeddīn*

We know that Meḥmed Bahāeddīn was a professor of Arabic and Persian at the imperial school (*mekteb-i sulṭānī*) in Amasya, in the Inner Pontus, and that he composed two works in verse: a debate (*münāẓara*) between the pen and the sword, published in 1339/1920, and a *miʿrācnāme* published in 1339–41/1920–22.[64] The 109 distichs that make up the *qaṣīde* can be divided into three sections: a *naʿt*, then 73 rather convoluted distichs called *miʿrāciyye*, followed by an address (*ʿarz*). Bahāeddīn's text shows almost no interest in narrating the *miʿrāc,* mentioning very few of its episodes; nor does it give details of the encounter between God and the Prophet. What interests our author echoes both Naẓīm Yaḥyā's work (seventeenth to eighteenth century) and Saʿīd Paşa's (nineteenth century), in that like the first of these writers he speaks at length about the starry night, and like the second he replaces any astronomical remarks with the starry night itself. And he speaks almost exclusively of the moon, sun, stars and planets.

In verses 7–16, the poet depicts an annunciatory night during which a sort of lunar cycle defines the Prophet's miraculous journey. From the dawn of the Muḥammadan day to the time of the full moon, the Prophet meets Gabriel, called the voice of the heavens/the invisible:

64 Çakıcı, "Mehmed Bahâeddîn'in Münâzara-i Seyf ü Kalem", 110–30; Dikmen, "Son mütakil miraciyelerden biri: Mehmed Bahâeddin ve miraciye'si", 237–60. He must not be confused with his homonym from Kırklareli in Thrace, who translated Omar Khayyam; see Avcı, "Mehmed Bahâeddin'in Hayyam'dan serbest tarzda yaptığı manzum rubai çevirileri", 78–97.

One night, in his dark kingdom with its pure seas
The white orb showed itself, like the moon

One night in the bright sweet-faced dawn, yes
The light of God's rising showed itself, like the sun

For in its darkness was hidden the black secret of bearing witness
And in its blackness was the dark brightness of solstice night

That victorious morning, the guide rejoiced that the encounter was celebrated
Prosperity is a clear sign of happiness

The curls of the dark night laid the veil over him
Nocturnal colours enhanced the adornment of the curls

The cup-bearer of light carried the night-dark pitcher
Hands decorated, joined, the palms of morning and of night

The expanse of the residence in which the covers of rest were held
That night, it was the house belonging to Umm Hānī

[In] the sweet night of eternal beauty, the eye of drunkenness
With its luminous vision, was in contemplation, O king!

The voice of heaven, scholar of the sacred, intimate friend of beauty,
Guardian of the mystery and envoy of superior light

Said: O light of the communities, immersed in the sea of witness
All those who dwell in heaven, and the angels, desire [to see] you

Later, in verses 37–41 and verse 68, the poet takes up the traditional structures of poetic cosmology,[65] without ever including its scientific version as Saʿīd Paşa Diyārbekirlī had deliberately done. Bahāeddīn speaks mostly of the first heaven to be attained by the Muḥammadian light as it was guided by the stars:

The first heaven was aglow with a perfect light
That instant, the full moon shone brightly in the dark morning

65 See Andrews, Black and Kalpaklı, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology*, 61–62.

At the centre of the circle of the pole of Cancer's tropic
Were Jupiter, the sun, the moon, stars and planets

The stars ʿĀzil and Rāmiḥ remained in his service
Like all the stars of high heaven's Pleiades

Along his path, he saw the lights of the stars
And just then the stars of Ursa Minor were near a third star

The Prophet's ascension is conceived as the journey of Muḥammadan light across the cosmos, in order to illuminate the world. This final known example of *miʿrāciyye* in Ottoman literature[66] renews the links established by Aḥmedī with esoteric tradition by deploying an imaginary cosmology. Indifferent to political upheavals in the Pontus region (the Amasya protocol in 1920, the massacres of Christian minorities, etc.), or at least choosing to remain silent about them, Meḥmed Bahāeddīn's poem exists outside of time. His indifference to his own times was equally conservative with regard to the fashions then current in poetic production, which were marked by European influence (that of French poetry especially), the rise of oral language, and themes that were either socio-political or romantic[67] – these may have given rise to a desire to escape reality that might be related to the imaginary world of his *miʿrāc*.

5 Conclusion

Here at the end of this journey into a journey, let us retain the following two principal lessons. The Prophet's ascension inspired the Ottoman social imaginary over the long term, in ways that defy any reductionist reading of Turkish literary history. It is no longer possible to adhere to the views of such scholars as Elias John Wilkinson Gibb,[68] of an Ottoman society in historical decline, caught between the Persian model and occidental modernism. This view falls before a more detailed analysis, one that pays attention to a culture of variation, such as was notably put forward by Walter Andrews.[69] Gibb's monumental

66 Two *miʿrācnāme* authors from the Republican period are also worthy of note: Abdullah Azmi Yaman and Hâce Muhammed Lütfi, according to Baş, "Yaklaşımların Hz. Peygamber ile ilgili dinî-edebî türlere etkisi: miraciyye örneği", 117–33.

67 For a detailed study, see Akyüz, "La littérature moderne de Turquie", 2:472–84, 513–26, 546–55.

68 Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, 1:4–5, 128–30; 3:2; 4:3–11.

69 Andrews, Black and Kalpaklı, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology*, 6–23.

work nevertheless opens up new and as yet untrodden paths for research. In retracing the lengthy history of Ottoman poetry, it asks questions about the Prophetic figure as literary subject. What place does the Prophet occupy, what role does he play, in the high literature, and even in the classical humanities, of the Ottoman world? In order to answer these questions, historians will have to read accounts of the ascension in parallel with nativities (*mevlid*), praises (*naʿt*), panegyrics on Muḥammad (*muḥammadiyye*), and portraits (*ḥilye*).[70]

In addition, the case of the poetic *miʿrāciyye* demonstrates that a sophisticated appreciation of nuance and of infinite variability did not preclude originality, or even audacity. As we have seen, Ottoman accounts of the Prophetic ascension were characterised by simplicity of style, deep engagement with the debates, and personal interpretations. One leitmotif does strike the reader: where Muslim mystics traditionally saw a metaphor for the initiatic journey, touched in places by the unsayable because the encounter between God and Muḥammad remains under the seal of the secret,[71] poets found many different ways to speak out. Our authors speak of a face-to-face relationship, describe intimate scenes, provide reports of a spiritual interview; they get both voices to speak, or allow us to hear their echoes, without settling only for exoteric content. In this way they renew their commitment to one of the primary functions of poetry.

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70 Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, 1:232–48, 396–410; 2:199, 208, 217–20; 3:50, 193, 195–98; 4:19–24. It is notable that examples of these different genres or sub-genres were often assembled into unique collections (*mecmūʿa*); for example, see Nahîfî, *Na't ve mi'râciyye mecmûası*; Akbaş, "Süleyman Nahîfî'nin mi'râciyyesi (metin-muhtevâ-tahlil)".

71 Abū ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī, *The Subtleties of the Ascension: Early Muhammad's Heavenly Journey*, 9–13, 60, 64, 83.

72 In order to ease identification of the Ottoman authors and their writings, their first names are quoted in full in this section.

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PART 5

The Prophet in the Mirror of the Verbal, Scriptural and Pictorial Imagery: Aesthetics and Devotion

∴

17

The Reality and Image of the Prophet according to the Theologian and Poet ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī

Samuela Pagani

Bright moons have spoken from darkest nights –
'Tell those who burn with desire:
For all who love Muḥammad,
sleep is forbidden!'

Qālat aqmāru al-dayājī – qul li-arbābi al-gharām
kullu man yaʿshaq Muḥammad – yanbaghī an lā-yanām[1]

On the night of 25 Shaʿbān 1324 (14 October 1906), the pious scholar, Ottoman poet, and judge Yūsuf ibn Ismāʿīl al-Nabhānī, who was born in Palestine in 1265/1849 and died in Beirut in 1350/1932, saw ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, who had died two centuries before, in a dream; they had a pleasant conversation. The following morning Nabhānī had forgotten what they had discussed, but rejoiced nevertheless, because, he said, Nābulusī

> is one of the greatest gnostic saints and the imam of practising scholars. His way of bringing together (*jamʿ*) the sciences of the apparent and the hidden (*ʿulūm al-ẓāhir w-al-bāṭin*) is unmatched among all the authors I know of who, from his day to our own, have surpassed themselves in knowledge and gnosis. From him one can gain a great deal in all the sciences, especially those that concern religion (*dīn*), the unicity of God (*tawḥīd*), divine gnosis (*al-maʿrifa bi-llāh*), and the exaltation of the rank

1 *Muwashshaḥ* by Nābulusī, reproduced in Nabhānī, *al-Majmūʿa al-Nabhāniyya*, 4: 400. Heard on 4 November 2018 in Marrakech, at the concert to which the organisers of the conference invited its speakers. Many thanks to them.

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(*ʿuluww qadr*) of the Lord of Messengers, may God bless him and bring him peace.[2]

In this passage, the "exaltation of the rank" of Muḥammad is presented as a domain of the religious sciences in its own right. At the beginning of the twentieth century Nabhānī published two monumental anthologies of prose texts and poems honouring the Prophet (*madāʾiḥ*), mostly by Mamluk and Ottoman authors who wrote in Arabic, but weren't necessarily Arabs.[3] Their variety gives the reader some idea of the importance of the veneration of the Prophet in the study of Islamic cultural and religious history during these periods. Nabhānī's anthologies invite us to rethink the historiographical categories and definitions of identity that have become standard in the contemporary period. The glorification of the Prophet defies all such divisions because it links theology and ritual, metaphysics and poetry, jurisprudence and Sufism, occurring in a wide variety of genres and registers, from erudite commentary to accounts of the miraculous birth of the Prophet (*mawlid*), from *qaṣāʾid* full of the figures of style prized by scholars to strophic poems (*muwashshaḥāt* and *mawāliyā*) sung at festivals and *dhikr* sessions.

Nābulusī, who lived in Damascus between 1050/1641 and 1143/1731, excelled in all of these genres, and features prominently in Nabhani's two anthologies.[4] A "gnostic" and poet, he was skilled both in speculation on the "reality" (*ḥaqīqa*) of Muḥammad, and in the poetic description of his "attributes" (*awṣāf*). His work is representative of the polemical issues raised by the veneration of Muḥammad, the vision of the world this veneration brought with it, and the practices centred on it. Nābulusī's engagement in these controversies provided Nabhānī with another reason to see him as an author who was still relevant. For Nabhānī, who was a civil servant of Ottoman justice during the Hamidian regime, promoting the cult of the Prophet also meant underlining one's support for the brand of Sunnī orthodoxy that was favoured by the state, against its reformist and Wahhabi opponents. Writing in 1909, he invites "Muslims" to read Nābulusī in order to be forearmed against the "infatuated ones" (*baʿḍ al-maftūnīn*) who spread the "innovations" of Ibn Taymiyya.[5] About fifteen years later, and still during Nabhānī's lifetime, the cemetery of al-Baqīʿ in Medina was destroyed by the Wahhabites after the Saudi conquest of the

2 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1231.

3 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, *al-Majmūʿa al-Nabhāniyya*.

4 See the extracts from Nābulusī in Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 2: 685–702; 3: 1060–97 and 1214–32; 4: 1355–66; and Id. *al-Majmūʿa al-Nabhāniyya*, 1: 12–15, 26, 25–31, 484–85; 3: 162; 4: 151, 248, 361–78, 393–96, 400, 406–409.

5 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 3: 1221.

Ḥijāz in 1924–25. Nābulusī lived and died before Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb had begun his predication, but even in his day voices were raised to remind the faithful that the cult of Muḥammad's person was competing with the legalist conception of what the properly "Islamic" practice of Islam should be: that of a religion that has cut all ties with its "idolatrous" environment. The *mawlid* does not, in fact, celebrate the birth of Islam, but that of Muḥammad, who was God's well-beloved even before his encounter with the angel Gabriel and, indeed, from before his birth. Some people rejected the doctrine according to which the "Muḥammadan light" (*nūr muḥammadī*) was transmitted from Adam to Muḥammad by an uninterrupted line of pure beings, objecting that the Prophet's parents were mere idolaters. This debate, which has been well described and studied by Joseph Dreher, also called into question Ibn ʿArabī's *Fantastische Philosophie*[6] and the ritual of the *mawlid*, which celebrates the Prophet as well as his Arab ancestors and his mother, Āmina. In one of his *mawālīd*, Nābulusī calls Muḥammad's mother "luminous beauty" (*bahja nūrāniyya*), "preserved from all harm in this world and the next" (*min kull sūʾ fī al-dārayn āmina*).[7]

In Nābulusī's time we can find a direct attack on the veneration of the Prophet in the Arabic-language sermons of the Anatolian preacher Aḥmad al-Rūmī al-Aqḥiṣārī (d. 1041/1631 or 1043/1634).[8] Drawing on Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, Aqḥiṣārī reminds his hearers that the ban on visiting tombs applies equally to the tomb of the Prophet.[9] He compares the veneration of tombs to the "idolatry" of "the people of the Book",[10] affirming that the rule (*ḥukm*) of Islam on the subject of mosques built over tombs is that they must be destroyed down to the ground (*an yanhadim kulluhā ḥattā yusāwā bi-l-arḍ*),[11] and mentions that the Caliph ʿUmar had the tree under which the Prophet received the pact of allegiance (*bayʿa*) cut down when he noticed that people were venerating it.[12]

Aqḥiṣārī was a Qadizadeli, and thus belonged to a current of opinion that Nābulusī would be confronting throughout his life. Iconoclastic attitudes such

6 Dreher, "Polémique", 296. Dreher takes up Balic's definition in *Das unbekannte Bosnien,* 223.

7 Nābulusī, *Ḥaqīqa*, 107. Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 3: 1063, reproduces the text of another *mawlid* in which Nābulusī recounts the legends of Āmina's pregnancy and Muḥammad's birth. For more on this theme, see Holmes Katz, *Birth*, 35–39, 54, 61, 169, 172.

8 Michot, *Against Smoking*.

9 Aqḥiṣārī, *Majālis*, 127 (*majlis* 17), 359 (*majlis* 57).

10 Aqḥiṣārī, *Majālis*, 127 (*majlis* 17).

11 Aqḥiṣārī, *Majālis*, 129.

12 Aqḥiṣārī, *Majālis*, 128.

as these, though rare at the time[13] – despite occasionally being exploited by those in power – spring from problems that go beyond questions of what is permitted or forbidden. I will leave juridical polemics in the background and concentrate on the aesthetic and literary dimensions of the presence of the Prophet in Nābulusī's work. This approach allows one to look deep into the impacts and effects of the veneration of the Prophet, especially as regards the place of the imagination in human experience. For Nābulusī the texts, objects, and rituals relating to the cult of the Prophet constitute a "patrimony" that is artistic as well as religious, and the defence of this patrimony must reflect deeply on the nature of the "Muḥammadan heritage" and the modes of its transmission and its appropriation, along with all the consequences these may imply for the conception of authority, and the relationship of Islam with the other "prophetic" religions, particularly Christianity.

1 Seeing the Prophet in a Dream

The best introduction to the study of the presence of the Prophet in Nābulusī's work may be through the theme of the dream-vision in which one encounters the Prophet. He writes of every aspect of such dream-visions, whether as experienced by ordinary believers or by accomplished mystics. He offers a general overview of the subject in his extensive dictionary on the interpretation of dreams (written in 1096/1685), which remained one of his most popular works and still enjoys a wide circulation today.[14] Nābulusī is not laying claim to originality in this book. He analyses the *ḥadīth*, "whoever sees me in a dream has really seen me" (*man raʾānī fī manāmihi fa-qad raʾānī ḥaqqan*), "whoever sees me in a dream will see me when awake" (*man raʾānī fī l-manām fa-sa-yarānī yaqẓatan*), using a slightly abridged transcription of Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī's commentary.[15] Nābulusī had already used an exact copy of this passage in a short treatise, still extant in manuscript form only, dated before 1089/1678.[16] This treatise is a *ḥilya*, a description of the physical and moral characteristics of the Prophet, made with the devotional aim of helping the

13 Heyberger, "Entre Byzance et Rome", 534: According to Catholic missionaries, Muslims were more respectful of holy images than were Huguenots.

14 Lory, *Le rêve*, 127–129.

15 Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *Ashraf al-wasāʾil*, 596–599; compare Nābulusī, *Taʿṭīr*, 2: 213–214. On the *aḥādīth* and their variants, see Lory, *Le rêve*, 46; on their interpretation, *ibid.*, 149–162. For the English translation of the canonical version see Muslim, *Sahīh*, 6, 123–124 (*k. al-ruʾyā* 10–11).

16 Nābulusī, *Izālat al-khafāʾ*, 6a–8b. On the date, see Aladdin, *ʿAbd al-Ġanī*, 1, 119.

reader to visualise him. Nābulusī says in his introduction: "I translate in the clearest terms the descriptions of the Prophet transmitted by tradition in order that the believer may familiarise himself with his qualities (*awṣāf*) and depict his appearance in imagination (*yarsum shaklahu fī khayālihi*), in the hope of seeing him in a dream (*ʿasā yarāhu fī manāmihi*)." This descriptive section is followed by a discussion on the "truthfulness" of dreams in which the Prophet appears. The framing of this is significant: since the *ḥilya* is a verbal portrait based on the *ḥadīth*, that is to say on a description validated by eye-witnesses, it can serve as the basis for a vision identical with Muḥammad's historical appearance, thus inscribing such dreams within a practice of preserving memory. But the passage that interests us here provides a corrective to this idea: in fact, it contains a critique of the opinions of a group of scholars that includes Ibn Sīrīn, the "father" of Arab dream-interpretation, according to whom the appearance of the Prophet in a dream is only authentic if he manifests the traditionally-attested qualities. The contrary opinion, adopted by a current that became the majority, was formulated as follows by the Andalusian scholar Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148):

> The vision of the Prophet that conforms to his description as we know it is an apprehension (*idrāk*) of reality (*ḥaqīqa*), whereas, if he is seen in another form, this is the apprehension of an image (*mithāl*). Since the earth [in which they are buried] does not corrupt prophets, the apprehension of the noble person (*dhāt*) of the Prophet is a reality, whereas the apprehension of his attributes is an image. […] When the Prophet says: "whoever sees me in a dream has really seen me", this means that if that person saw him when awake he would find a perfect correspondence with what he had seen while dreaming. The waking vision is authentic and real (*ḥaqqan wa-ḥaqīqatan*), whereas the dreaming vision is authentic and representative (*ḥaqqan wa-tamthīlan*).[17]

While the first outlook sets the truthful dream against the untruthful dream, according to the criterion of the dream's conformity with the description transmitted by tradition, the second distinguishes between the "reality" (in its proper sense) of the vision of the Prophet's person (his *dhāt*), and the figurative representation of his qualities.

> It is exaggeration and foolishness – continues Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī – to say that we see our dreams with the eyes of our heads; according to

17 Nābulusī, *Izālat al-khafāʾ*, 6b; Nābulusī, *Taʿṭīr*, 2: 213.

> certain theologians, however, dreams are perceived by the eyes of the heart, and they are a kind of metaphor (*innahu ḍarb min al-majāz*).[18]

This position implies that the *mithāl* is accorded the status of figurative representation of reality. Abū Bakr ibn al-ʿArabī, who, during his travels in the Near East, had studied with al-Ghazālī, takes the same position on this point as the latter had; it is synthesised thus by Pierre Lory: "the vision of the Prophet cannot be that of his physical person, nor of his spirit or essence, but that of a representation in a symbolic mode of this spirit, and this representation is fully true."[19]

This distinction between the symbolic representation of Muḥammad and his actual being lies behind Nābulusī's approach to the much-debated question of the waking vision of the Prophet. Nābulusī several times declares that he believes those of his contemporaries who say they have had such visions,[20] but he never, as far as I know, laid claim to having had one himself. The intimate relationship with the Prophet of which he writes, in works destined for an audience of Sufis, is not described as a vision of his person, but as an existential experience. In his commentary on a prayer on the Prophet attributed to Ibn ʿArabī, he described "joining" (*iltiḥāq*) with Muḥammad as reaching his "incorruptible reality", which he identifies with the *barzakh*, "the isthmus". Initiates may enter into this latter, which is "the threshold between the servant and his lord", while they are still alive:

> This *barzakh*, he says, is the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*: anyone who voluntarily dies to this world and to his carnal soul, and realises the station of Islam (*maqām al-islām*), enters into this *barzakh* which is his reality (*ḥaqīqa*), that is, the reality from which he has been created, the light of Muḥammad that comes from the light of God (*alladhī min nūr Allāh*), since earthly life has not changed it in any way (*lam tughayyirhā al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*).[21]

In a similar way, at the beginning of a treatise addressed to his Sufi "brothers", he says: "May God pray on Muḥammad, thanks to whom, by the blessing of his

18 Nābulusī, *Izālat al-khafāʾ*, 8a.

19 Lory, *Le rêve*, 150.

20 Nābulusī, *Ḥaqīqa*, 378; Nābulusī, *Wird*, 106a–b; Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 3: 1162 (Nābulusī specifies here that sometimes the Muhammadan reality "is embodied in human shape": "*tujassadu fī haykal basharī*"). See also Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 3: 1066.

21 Nābulusī, *Wird*, 60 a-b. For more on this text, written in 1141/1729, see Gril "*Jawāhir*", 49; Aladdin, *ʿAbd al-Ġanī*, 1: 233.

imitation (*barakat mutābaʿatihi*), God opens a little window (*kuwwa*) in the heart to the presence of the invisible (*ḥaḍrat al-ghayb*)."[22]

Here we can observe that the debate on the nature of the Prophet's image, which concerns both prayer and dreams, corresponds to the distinction between the two styles in which he is figuratively represented in miniatures, as studied by Christiane Gruber: the dream that conforms to the "transmitted description" corresponds to *memory images*, illustrations of episodes in the Prophet's life that are notable by their "verism", while the image of the Prophet as a reflection of his metaphysical reality corresponds to his symbolic representation as a figure of light.[23]

The symbolic dream has the same function as the icon: like the icon, it is not the "illustration" of a memory, but a reflection of an actual presence. The analogy between dream and icon is the opening theme of a famous essay by Pavel Florensky, a Russian orthodox theologian and coeval of Nabhānī, and a passionate defender of the aesthetic of the icon and its conceptual universe at a time and place when these were being swept away by the Soviet regime. For Florensky, every icon, even one that is "poorly executed", can be "a window on eternity", because "it *necessarily authenticates* perception of the world beyond the senses through an always *authentic* spiritual experience". Thus the copy of the prototypical icon has the same "spiritual content" as the original, "though it may be in a veiled, dimmed, or dulled medium".[24] In the same way, the Prophet, like the sun, can be seen at the same moment by many people, and his image varies according to the clarity or cloudiness of the heart that reflects it.[25] The Prophet, in other words, is the prototypical image of God that

22 Nābulusī, *Risāla*, 12a. This text is also transmitted under the title *al-Rusūkh fī maqām al-shuyūkh*; see Aladdin, *ʿAbd al-Ġanī*, 1:189.

23 Gruber, "Between logos", 229. For more on the opposition between "memory" and "presence", see Bettetini, *Contro le Immagini*, 101–102, 116–30. The question was already being asked in debates within Egyptian Monachism; see Camplani, "Il dibatitto sulla visione", 154.

24 Florensky, *Iconostasis*, 74. Later in the same passage, Florensky explains the relationship between the prototypical icon and its hand-made reproduction, as distinct from "mere servile mechanical reproduction", saying: "In a manuscript you write describing a country someone else has previously described in an earlier manuscript, you will see your own words and phrases in your very own handwriting; but the living basis of your manuscript is assuredly identical with that of the earlier one: the description of the country. Thus, the variations arising between successive copies of a prototypical icon indicate neither the illusory subjectivity of what is being depicted nor the arbitrariness of the icon-painting process but exactly the opposite: the living reality, which, remaining itself, nevertheless will appear with those variations that correspond to the spiritual life of the icon painter who seeks to comprehend that living reality".

25 Nābulusī, *Izālat al-khafāʾ*, 7b.

the dreamer copies within himself, and the "authenticity" of the copy does not depend on the exactitude of the reproduction.

In Nābulusī's work, the validation of symbolic dreams is connected to the defence of innovations in worship and a claim to spiritual authority conceived as a "Muḥammadan inheritance" (*wirātha muḥammadiyya*), accessible through a journey of individual transformation, without any need for the mediation of a formal hierarchy. These two levels are interdependent: it is as a "Muḥammadan inheritor" that Nābulusī allows himself to take a stand in the great and divisive debates of his time. In his dream-journal, he makes a detailed note of a dream-vision he had one night in the month of Rajab 1088/1677, in which the Prophet told him to speak publicly. He relates how, in this dream of investiture, he was at once himself and the Prophet.[26] The manuals of dream interpretation studied by Pierre Lory say that "for he who sees himself as the Prophet in a dream, this means that he will also pass through the trials that Muḥammad faced during his life."[27] In Nābulusī's case, these trials were the disapproval of his opponents, who resisted his "Muḥammadan" explications of the *sunna* and the *sharīʿa*: he completed his courageous treatise in defence of the *samāʿ* barely a month after having received this dream.[28]

As Pierre Lory indicates, the typological approach to the analysis of dreams contains traces of Christian Old Testament exegesis.[29] The typological method, which is also used in hagiography, offers a key to interpreting the individual's role in society. The "resemblance" between a saint and Muḥammad, and between the former and other prophets, takes on political implications once it is recognised by the saint's contemporaries. A considerable number of the dreams recorded in Nābulusī's journal are not his own but those of people around him who claim to have dreamed of him as the Prophet.[30]

2 Creative Imagination and Muḥammadan Inheritance

The tool Nābulusī uses to obtain public recognition is the written and spoken word. In the hagiography written about him at the beginning of the nineteenth century, his charisma relates to his power of persuasion, his ability to transform other people's "gaze" (*naẓar*), to bring out emotions, especially in his

26 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 441–442.
27 Lory, *Le rêve*, 152.
28 Compare Aladdin, *ʿAbd al-Ġanī*, 1, 108.
29 Lory, *Le rêve*, 159.
30 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 470–71, 472, 477–78.

polemical writings that "fulfil the hearts of those who have the knowledge, and tighten the chests of the incredulous or oppressive ones."[31]

In spite of the effectiveness of Nābulusī's pamphlets defending controversial practices, or of the theoretical treatises in which he seeks to help readers understand Sufi metaphysics, it is in his poetry, through which he experiences spiritual "realities" and makes others experience them, that his way with words is most powerful. His hagiography shows us the role of the creative or poetic imagination in the "Muḥammadan inheritance" to which Nābulusī lays claim, saying that he had entered the "land of the sesame seed" (*arḍ al-simsima*); the author draws his description of this immense and marvellous "land" from Ibn ʿArabī, transcribing a long passage from the *Illuminations of Mecca* that was made famous by Henry Corbin.[32] This "land", that is identical with the "imaginal world" (*ʿālam al-khayāl*), is located in the *barzakh*. As we have seen, to reach this world is, for Nābulusī, to achieve union with the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*. Let us pause a moment to try to cast light on the relationship between language and imagination, before we examine the literary aspect of the veneration of the Prophet in Nābulusī's work.

The mediating function of this "isthmus" or "in-between world", which is the place where opposites meet, is shared by all the forces or faculties that enable the relationship between the earth and the heavens (such as angels) or between the intellect and the senses (such as the faculty for imagination); this also applies to relationships between two subjects, which are mediated by language. The definition of the imaginal world as "the world through which spirits are embodied, and bodies spiritualised",[33] does indeed also apply to the act of communication. Ibn ʿArabī defines *ʿibāra* ("expression") as the transfer of the imaginal representation (*khayāl*) of the soul from the speaker to the listener, by means of words.[34] He underlines that the term *taʿbīr* indicates both the expression through which the speaker gives a formal and materially supported consistency to an invisible meaning, and the interpretation through which the listener accomplishes the inverse process, translating the words into an inner image. This demonstrates that all language is metaphorical, requiring interpretation, and thus that the imagination has a "mighty rank" (*ʿiẓam rutbat al-khayāl*), because it controls (*ḥākim*) all knowledge.[35]

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31 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 95.

32 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 515; see the translation of chapter 8 of the *Futūḥāt* (1, 126–131) in Corbin, *Corps spirituel*, 164–72 (English translation, 135–43).

33 Corbin, *Corps spirituel*, 109 (English translation, 84).

34 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3, 453–54.

35 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3, 454.

This passage from Ibn ʿArabī appears to be in dialogue with the Greco-Arab traditions of logic and philosophy. His definition of the term *taʿbīr* corresponds perfectly to the Greek *hermeneia*, which forms the title of Aristotle's *Peri hermeneias*; this can be translated as "On Interpretation", or "On Expression", as in the ninth century Arabic translation (*fī l-ʿibāra*).[36] This definition of *taʿbīr* also corresponds to that of poetic discourse in Arabic commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, where this discourse is called *takhyīl*, and defined as: "the creation of mental images (*khayālāt*) by the poet for the 'imagination' (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*) of the listener".[37] In the canon of Aristotle's works in late antiquity and then in the Islamic world, the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* were placed at the end of the *Organon*, the treatises on logic. For the *falāsifa*, poetic discourse is distinguished from logical propositions that are true, precisely because it engages the imaginative faculty, and thus contains an element of illusion. By extending the definition of poetic discourse to include all acts of communication, Ibn ʿArabī sets himself apart from the philosophical hierarchisation of discourse, but his attitude is not incompatible with a philosophical approach to rhetoric.[38] What he has to say about the power of the imagination recalls Averroes' words at the beginning of his commentary on the *Rhetoric*: like the other parts of logic, the science of rhetoric does not have a specific aim; it is a method, or instrument, that can be used in all the other sciences and is thus in some way associated with them.[39] According to Averroes, rhetoric and dialectics are to be distinguished from other aspects of logic, "since man does not use these two arts to converse with himself (*baynahu wa-bayna nafsihi*), as is the case for the art of demonstration, but uses them only with other people (*maʿa l-ghayr*)".[40] This definition also applies to poetry, not as *shiʿr*,

36 Compare the explanation of this double meaning of the Greek *hermeneia* by Grondin, *Introduction*, 20–21: "In 'expression' spirit, as it were, makes what is contained within knowable from without, whereas 'interpretation' tries to penetrate an uttered expression to see the spirit contained within it."

37 Heinrichs, "Introduction", 5.

38 See Lizzini, "Le langage de Dieu", 23: "Le modèle dualiste qui opposerait un langage non rhétorique et porteur de vérité à la langue des images et de la poésie semble incompatible avec la philosophie élaborée dans l'islam, qui doit pouvoir reconnaître la vérité (aussi) dans le langage rhétorique et poétique" ("The dualist model that opposes a non-rhetorical, truthful language and the language of images and poetry seems to be incompatible with the philosophy elaborated in Islam, which must be able (also) to recognise the truth in rhetorical and poetic language").

39 Averroès, *Commentaire*, 2, 1–2, par. 1.1.1. Thanks are due to Francesca Gorgoni for having brought this passage to my attention.

40 Averroes, *Commentaire*, 2, 1–2, par. 1.1.1.

which refers to an "intimate" discourse,[41] but as *naẓm*, a versified discourse. Among the "strange and marvellous" things that Ibn ʿArabī saw in the "land of the sesame seed" was a "vessel of stone" navigating a sea of sand. Claude Addas has pointed out that this apparently surrealist description is in fact a riddle, alluding to the classical ode (*qaṣīda*). Ibn ʿArabī brings about a double meaning by using technical terms from Arabic prosody in their concrete sense (for example, *baḥr*, which means both "sea" and "metre").[42] This fantastical metaphor is an example of *takhyīl*, in the specific sense that this term has had in Arabic criticism since the time of ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078 or 474/1081). Beatrice Gruendler defines it thus: "tropes with arresting fantastic features that purported to be true. They all shared the blurring of the borderline between reality and image and the interpenetration of these two planes with an illogical or fantastic effect, construed with logical tricks and figures of speech".[43] This manner characterises the "new style" (*badīʿ*) invented by poets from the beginning of the ʿAbbāsid period; through the same distinctive evolution, *badīʿ* moves to signify "rhetorical artifices". The imaginal world, in which, Ibn ʿArabī says, "a multitude of things exist which are rationally impossible",[44] is certainly a fitting locus for this "fantastic aesthetics". Ibn ʿArabī's approach is nevertheless quite distinct from that of a literary critic, such as Jurjānī, for whom this style perfectly demonstrates the maxim *khayr al-shiʿr akdhabuhu*, "the best poetry is that which 'lies' the most."[45] In fact, for mystical poetry the *takhyīl* tends rather to prove that it is possible to bring the real and the fictional together, and that this happens before our very eyes if we can perceive the invisible meanings of things by looking at them "subtly".

In the chapter in which Ibn ʿArabī defines the *taʿbīr*, he also explains that God reveals Himself to us through His Names and through similes (*ḍarb al-amthāl*), and through "the world of imagination", in order to establish a relationship with us: some people adore Him and never go beyond the form; other, less fortunate, people aspire to make the form into an abstraction, and the ones who are perfect unite the faith of the first with the intellect (*ʿaql*) of the latter.[46] Ibn ʿArabī's "literalism" sets him apart not only from philosophers but also from rationalist theologians.[47] In spite of this, he does not reject the analogy between rhetorical discourse and prophetic discourse,

41 Compare Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 1, 71: *al-shiʿr ḥadīth al-nafs fīmā tashʿur bihi min al-maʿānī*.
42 Addas, "Le vaisseau de pierre".
43 Gruendler, "Fantastic Aesthetics", 215; see also Heinrichs, "Introduction", 11.
44 Corbin, *Corps spirituel*, 166 (137 in English translation).
45 Heinrichs, "Introduction", 12.
46 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 3, 450–451.
47 Chodkiewicz, *Océan*.

which is part of the philosophical reading of prophecy – but he does emphasise the loving intention behind the exteriorisation of divine discourse, which means that its ends can be achieved even through the "imaginative" faith of non-intellectual believers. Ibn ʿArabī's attitude is incompatible with al-Fārābī's political interpretation of prophecy, according to which the Prophet's rhetoric, like Plato's myth, serves to govern the masses who are incapable of knowing the truth … but it does have things in common with the more nuanced positions of Avicenna and Averroes.[48]

3 Poetry and *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*

As we shall shortly see, these knotty questions are at the heart of Nābulusī's reflections on poetry and *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*. Nābulusī puts his fantastical poetry in the service of veneration of the Prophet in his account of a journey to Palestine, *al-Ḥaḍra al-unsiyya fī l-riḥla al-qudsiyya*, "the presence of intimacy in the journey to the Holy Land". As Gracia López Anguita has observed, this title refers to the holiness of Jerusalem, and of Palestine in its entirety, as an "intimate" pendant to the holy places of the Ḥijāz; these holy spaces are both analogues – because the stages of the Palestinian itinerary are "comparable" to those of the Ḥijāz – and complements: Nābulusī says, speaking of the al-Aqṣā mosque, "God has looked at this mosque with the eye of Beauty, and at Mecca with the eye of Majesty."[49] Right from the beginning of his book, Nābulusī affirms and upholds the legitimacy of this pilgrimage, in response to the attacks of Ibn Taymiyya and other scholars on the religious merits of Jerusalem and its prophetic relics. When describing its culmination, the visit to the Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat al-ṣakhra*), he examines the legends and polemics relating to the Prophet's footprint on the rock. Nābulusī first refutes sceptics in prose, presenting several arguments in support of the credibility of the account, which holds that when the Prophet was ascending from the earth the rock from which he rose melted with tenderness for him and sorrow at the parting. But the most important parts of Nābulusī's argument are expressed through poetry:

48 Ibn ʿArabī explicitly rejects al-Fārābī's position, without naming him, though he does mention the title of one of his books, in *Futūḥāt*, 3, 178. For more on this passage, see Rosenthal, "Ibn ʿArabī", 19; Brague, *La loi*, 299–300. On Avicenna's theory of the imagination, and his affinities with Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī: Michot, *Destinée*, 212–217. On the objections of Averroes to Plato's political philosophy: Leaman, *An Introduction*, 184–85. On Ibn ʿArabī's encounter with Averroes: Bashier, *Ibn al-ʿArabī's* Barzakh, 59–74.

49 López Anguita, "La *riḥla*", notes 38 and 53.

> Oh God's venerated boulder, the heart of love's slave does not stray from its passion for thee.
> Thou art a spirit emerging within my thoughts, a light embodied outwith mine eyes [...]
> How tender, this rock, for one who knows its virtue, but for he who does not it is so hard!
> Oh subtle secret that appeared from the sky's zenith, like the sun shining from the horizon!
> Although eyes see it coarsely because in human language it has assumed the name of "rock".[50]

The footprint in the rock says it will function only if the pilgrim detaches himself from appearances, and from the obvious meanings of words, and understands that it is a veil, or a threshold, between the visible and the invisible. However, we must specify that Nābulusī does not see the "gnostic's" perception as qualitatively different from that of the ordinary believer: for example, in a *qaṣīda* composed in Medina on the subject of the Prophet's tomb, he lists the many inspirations that the mystic draws from it and also the healing that it brings to the ordinary devout people who are clinging to the fence.[51]

The transformative power of Nābulusī's gaze surpassed that of alchemists, according to his biographer, who recounts that a Maghribi who was passing through Damascus offered to teach him Art (*al-ṣanʿa*), but in reply Nābulusī asked him to look out the window: there the visitor saw Mount Qasiyun turn to gold before his very eyes.[52] In the journal he kept during his travels to Egypt, Nābulusī transcribes a fantastical comparison whose subtlety had struck him (*takhayyul laṭīf*), and then imitates it, with the addition of an alchemical theme:

> According to this model we have imagined the following unparalleled concept:
> When the sun sets and the waves are moving
> brighter than the stars does the sea glow,
> just as silver melted by the flame's heat

50 Nābulusī, *Ḥaḍra*, 121: *yā ṣakhrata llāhi l-muʿaẓẓamata llatī – qalbu al-mutayyami ʿan hawāhā mā fatī/ rūḥun taṣawwara fī bawāṭini khāṭirī – nūrun tajassada fī ẓawāhiri muqlatī / [...] hiya ṣakhratun lānat li-ʿārifi faḍlihā – wa-qasat ʿalā l-juhhāli ablagha qaswatī / sirrun laṭīfun lāḥa min awji l-ʿulā – ka-l-shamsi fī l-āfāqi dhāti ashiʿatī / fa-hiya l-kathīfatu fī l-ʿuyūni li-annahā – aḍḥat tusammā fī l-warā bi-l-ṣakhratī.*

51 Nābulusī, *Ḥaqīqa*, 334.

52 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 509.

the elixir flows over it
and the alchemic ingots turn into pure gold.[53]

The institutionalisation of the *mawlid* propelled the *madīḥ nabawī* to greater heights, and perhaps stimulated new reflections on the relationship between "technique" and "inspiration" in poetry. The growth of the genre is demonstrated by the fact that Būṣīrī's *Burda* (mantel ode) became a set text for those learning the art of rhetoric, and the fourteenth century saw the invention of the *badīʿiyya* sub-genre, consisting of imitations of the *Burda* in which each verse exemplifies at least one rhetorical artifice (*badīʿ*).[54] When he was twenty-five, Nābulusī composed a *badīʿiyya*, which marked his entry into literary society in Damascus.[55] Nābulusī followed this poem with an extensive commentary, which is consultable today thanks to Pierre Cachia's work: he has extracted 180 detailed definitions of figures of style from it. This text gives us some idea of the level of elaboration that the art and science of *badīʿ* had reached by Nābulusī's time. Cachia calls this book "a full exposition of the science [of the *badīʿ*] and of the aesthetic perceptions attending it at a significant juncture in cultural history",[56] that is to say, some time before the dawn of a new literary period which would (among other things) rid itself of the *badīʿ*.

Yet Nābulusī's most important *madāʾiḥ* are closer to love poetry (*ghazal*) than to the neo-classical *qaṣīda* in the style of Būṣīrī. These poems are collected in his *dīwān* entitled *Nafḥat al-qabūl fī midḥat al-rasūl* ("Breath of the Southern Wind in praise of the Messenger"); there are 29 of them – one for each letter of the alphabet – and each poem comprises fifty verses. Here Nābulusī's style has similarities to that of Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235), whom he considered more eloquent than Būṣīrī; despite the latter's excellence in the art (*fann*) of describing the virtues of Muḥammad, Nābulusī believed that Ibn al-Fāriḍ was better at expressing how very indescribable these virtues are.[57] In the preface of this *dīwān*, Nābulusī underlines the fact that here he does not repeat any of the praises of the Prophet that he had previously composed, instead relying on

53 Nābulusī, *Ḥaqīqa*, 218: *wa-takhayyalnā naḥnu min hādhā al-qabīl hādhā l-maʿnā lladhī laysa lahu mathīl*: *li-l-baḥri waqta ghurūbi l-shamsi wa-ḍṭarabat – amwājuhu rawnaqun yazhū ʿalā l-shuhubi | ka-fiḍḍatin taḥtahā l-nīrānu mūqadatun – ḥattā ghalat baʿda mā dhābat ʿalā l-lahabi | fa-darra min fawqihā l-iksīru fa-nqalabat – sabāʾiku l-kīmiyā min khāliṣi l-dhahabi*.

54 See Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 70; Kilpatrick, "From *Literatur* to *Adab*", 214.

55 Aladdin, *ʿAbd al-Ġanī*, 1, 156 (n. 150); see also *ibid.*, 141, (n. 127), 152 (n. 145).

56 Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician*, 2.

57 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1071; Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 1, 116.

his talent for improvisation (*aʿmaltu qarīḥatī fi naẓmihā irtijālan*).[58] The main themes of these poems are the declaration of passionate love (*ʿishq*) for the Prophet, ardent desire (*shawq*) for the *ziyāra* in Medina, and the invocation of help against his enemies. The lyrical "I" of love's slave (*mutayyam*), hated and misunderstood by his peers, is identified with the Prophet at the time when his people rejected him. The identification of the poet/lover's censor with the Sufi's adversary is one typical motif of the mystical *ghazal*.[59] In the framework of the *madīḥ*, this theme takes on a particular polemical power, putting the censor in the same category as Muḥammad's Qurayshī adversaries. In the *dīwān's* preface, Nābulusī says that the motive (*bāʿith*) of its composition is his gratitude for the "healing" of a sickness.[60] The fact that this is a conventional theme does not mean he was not sincere in advancing it. The affirmation in this preface of the unmeasurable distance between poets' praises of the Prophet and the inimitable praises for him found in the Qurʾān corresponds to the feeling of yearning brought forth in the poems by the absence of the Prophet. What's more, the Prophet's reality surpasses all beauty and the art of language cannot express it; in fact, the eloquence and clarity (*balāgha* and *faṣāḥa*) of language itself were created by his light.[61] These statements represent a sort of profession of *tanzīh*, of the un-bridgeable distance that separates the suffering poet from Muḥammad's original light, and his poems from the words of the Qurʾān. Like the "opaque" dream, the poetic description of Muḥammad tells us more about the value (*qadr*) of the person praising than it does about the one being praised.[62]

In his preface to his *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, a retrospective essay looking back over his entire poetic production, Nābulusī also informs us about the place of the *madīḥ* in his poetry. Here he enumerates the four poetic genres that he cultivated, comparing them to the four "gates" of Paradise, and to the four "corners" (*arkān*) of the Kaʿba.[63] These genres are, in order, mystical poetry, the *madīḥ nabawī* (represented by the *Nafḥat al-qabūl*), the praises of contemporaries, and erotic poetry (*ghazal*). Although the last three of these genres are distinct in function and object, especially the *madīḥ nabawī*, because it is addressed to those who follow the spiritual path, for Nābulusī the essential distinction is not

58 Nābulusī, *Nafḥat*, 7.

59 See, for example, Nicholson, *Studies*, 139 (on the subject of Ibn al-Fāriḍ). For an example of the identification with the rejected Prophet, drawn from Ottoman mystics of Nābulusī's day, see Dreher, "Polémique", 298.

60 Nābulusī, *Nafḥat*, 7.

61 Nābulusī, *Nafḥat*, 5–6.

62 Nābulusī, *Nafḥat*, 6.

63 Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 15–17.

between sacred and profane poetry, but between mystical poetry, expressed in the "language of union" (*lisān al-jamʿ*), and the three other genres, all expressed in the "language of separation" (*lisān al-farq*).

Thus the *madīḥ nabawī* belongs in the same group as the "profane" *madīḥ* and *ghazal*: all three are indirect expressions of reality because of their separation and distance from God. A single internal criterion is therefore more important than distinctions based on genre: the mystical poem is not necessarily distinguished from other poems by its formal qualities, but by the state of the poet while writing it. Nābulusī clarifies this point in two further texts: synthesising it in an autobiographical letter written in 1099/1687 to the Egyptian Sufi master Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn al-Bakrī al-Ṣiddīqī, in which he speaks of his "realisation of the station of inheritance" (*taḥqīq maqām al-wirātha*) at the end of his retreat,[64] and discussing it at length in his commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān*, a commentary that covers more than 2000 pages in its unabridged version, which was only published in 2017.[65] A mature work completed in 1123/1711, this commentary is also somewhat autobiographical: between the verses by Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Nābulusī paints the portrait of a theologian-poet exactly resembling himself.[66]

In these texts, unlike in the *Nafḥat al-qabūl*, the emphasis is not on distance, but on the resemblance between the Prophet and his heir. For his "heir", Muḥammad is not just an object of devotion. He is also the model of the transformative experience through which a compiler-epigon becomes an "author" himself. The many passages on "Muḥammadan inheritance" in Nābulusī's work illustrate his conception of the continuity of prophecy. He emphasises the ever-renewed descent of the divine word onto the heart of the saint who becomes capable of translating it into human language.[67] The "heir", as an author who speaks in the first person, and whose words flow directly from his heart, bears witness to the relevance of prophecy. He is not imitating a model from the past, but has become a new "locus of manifestation" of "Muḥammadan light".[68]

The "internal" similarity with the Prophet is the ultimate source of "authority". In his commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Nābulusī often insists that the "psychic 'I'" (*nafsānī*) of the poet has become a *rabbānī* "I"; the adjective is derived from the word *rabb*, meaning lord or master. In the Qur'ān, this term relates to teaching and to study (Q 3:79), and it is also related to the verb *rabbā* (to make [people] grow, to raise), from which we get the verbal noun *tarbiya* (education).

64 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 399–408.

65 Nābulusī, *Kashf*.

66 See the fine analysis by Homerin, "On the Battleground". Most of the extracts from Nābulusī in Nabhānī's *Faḍā'il* come from this text.

67 Nābulusī, *Ḥāmil*, §§ 55–58; Gril, "*Jawāhir*".

68 Nābulusī, *Natīja*, question 1. See also *Dīwān al-ḥaqā'iq*, 2, 34.

These meanings are semantically close to the Latin terms *auctor* and *auctoritas* (derived from *augeo*). As Hannah Arendt has shown, the function of *auctoritas* in Latin culture is precisely that of constantly "augmenting" the tradition established by the founders; it is incompatible with the violence that is the prerogative of power (*potestas*).[69] For Nābulusī, religion springs from this domain of authority (*auctoritas*), rather than from power, and it must be imposed by the word, without recourse to force or constraints.[70]

The "heir" also resembles the Prophet outwardly, in his way of speaking. The Prophet and the "heir" both address their "people" (*qawm*) in the people's own language, translating divine speech (*kalām*) into a figurative language communicating through that which is "other" than God. Nābulusī calls this language *lisān al-ghayr* and *lisān al-siwā*, and also the "language of separation" (*lisān al-farq*), distinguishing it from the "language of union" (*lisān al-jamʿ*). Thus the first three terms refer to the consciousness of the separation between subject and object, between God and the world.[71] Using an expression that recalls the philosophical interpretation of prophecy, Nābulusī says that prophets guide people by "wrapping the things [of this world] in symbols from the imagination" (*labisū tamāthīla l-khayāl ʿalā al-siwā*).[72] This figurative language is not "poetry", but, because of its formal aspects, it is associated (*ishtaraka*) with poetry, and therefore its true nature risks being misunderstood.[73] In the same way that the Prophet was not a poet, the poetry of his "heirs" is not poetry, but a form of inspired discourse.[74]

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69 Arendt, "What is authority", 120–22.

70 Pagani, "Défendre", 322.

71 Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 10–11; compare Ghazzī, *Wird*, 408. This distinction corresponds to that between the Qurʾān and the *Furqān*. Elsewhere (*Kashf*, 2, 744), Nābulusī says that the former is God's "interior discourse" (*al-kalām al-nafsī*), which does not belong to the genre of letters and sounds. The *Furqān*, on the other hand, is the descent of this discourse "through our letters, our words, our meanings". Among human beings there is also an interior language (*nuṭq*) ("the discourse and the meanings that we conceive in our souls through imaginative power") and a proffered language (*al-nuṭq al-lafẓī al-lisānī bi-al-mādda al-hawāʾiyya*). Compare the Stoic's distinction between *logos endiathetos* and *logos prophorikos*: Grondin, *Introduction*, 21. For more on this distinction in the *uṣūl al-fiqh*, see Weiss, *Search*, 68: "The Qurʾān is the internal speech (*al-kalām al-nafsī*) of God embodied in a phonic speech (*al-kalām al-lisānī*) which is of God's own making. […] In the case of the *sunna*, the internal speech of God comes to be embodied in a phonic speech or in acts and endorsements that are of the Prophet's making".

72 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 399.

73 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 407–408; Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 13.

74 Ghazzī, *Wird*, 407–408; Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 13; 2, 134 (*wa mā anā shāʿir wa-jamīʿ naẓmī baʿīd ʿan madā shiʿr al-mughannī*); Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 1, 71, 132, 136–137. See also Homerin, "On the Battleground", 408; Addas, "Le vaisseau".

Nābulusī applies this idea throughout his commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ: it is because Ibn al-Fāriḍ is a *rabbānī* poet that the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya* speaks in the first person in his mystical poetry, or speaks "with his tongue" in his seemingly profane *ghazal*.[75] In one remarkable passage, he describes the spiritual and poetic itinerary of Ibn al-Fāriḍ as a circular path: in the first phase, when the poet, through his perspicacity (*baṣīra*), discovers that the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya* is the source of light, his tongue is untied (*yanṭaliqu lisānuhu*) "and he composes figurative poetry (*al-shiʿr al-badīʿ*) according to his mastery of the poetic arts and literary sciences (*ʿalā ḥasab mā ʿindahu min maʿrifat al-ṣināʿa al-shiʿriyya wa-l-ʿulūm al-adabiyya*) [...], even if his discourse should be called a divine science rather than poetry". Then, when he passes into the state of annihilation (*fanāʾ*), his discourse separates itself from him (*yanqaṭiʿu minhu al-kalām*) and he openly proclaims the union (*ittiḥād*) with God, believing himself to have passed the stage of the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*. But once he becomes settled in this station, he discovers that it does, in fact, belong to the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*, to the facet of it that is turned towards absolute unity, called *ḥaqīqa aḥmadiyya* by Nābulusī. At this point, and henceforth conscious that love for Muḥammad and love for the true being (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqq*) are one and the same, speech returns to him (*yarjiʿu kalāmuhu*), and he begins once again to compose erotic poetry and celebrate the beauty of the apprehensible world, as he had at the beginning, except that now the person speaking is the only true speaker.[76] This means that when the poet expresses his passion for the beautiful faces of boys or girls, even if this passion resembles that of a lover put to the test by "the love of images" (*ʿishq al-ṣuwar*), the source and goal of his words is always the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*.[77]

Essentially, understanding the nature of the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya* means grasping the continuity or co-existence of "subtlety" and "density", of the spirit and the body. This means that "reality" can be perceived by the five senses, as it can be perceived by spiritual intuition.[78] In fact, Muḥammad is the principle within which the spirit and the light, the two ways of exteriorising the invisible, join together.[79] Nābulusī sometimes describes "Muḥammadan light" as the "primal matter" (*mādda hayūlāniyya*)[80] from which God, as demiurge

75 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1075–1076; 1080–82.

76 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1092–1094; Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2, 833–834 (Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Tāʾiyya*, verse 334).

77 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1094–97; Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2, 835–36 (Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Tāʾiyya*, verse 335).

78 Homerin, "On the Battleground", 385–86. Nābulusī also comments on the verses translated by Homerin, in *Wird*, 13a–b.

79 Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2: 831–832; Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1091–92 (Ibn al-Fārid, *Tāʾiyya*, verse 333).

80 Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 3, 1162.

(*ṣāniʿ*), fashioned the world;[81] the clay from which Adam's body was made also comes from the flow (*fayḍ*) of this luminous material.[82] Importantly, the body's "luminous" origin means that the original legal assessment of all things is "indifference" (*al-aṣl fī l-ashyāʾ al-ibāḥa*), while any interdiction is secondary or accidental.[83] This principle is the basis for the defence of listening to music, and of the "gaze", and also fits in with the *malāma*, "avoiding distinguishing oneself from the common believers", and refraining from avoiding (for fear of scandal, for example) the company of "people who are lost and corrupt" (*ahl al-ḍalāl wa-al-fasād*).[84]

The positive nature of the body also means that the entire human being, spirit, soul and body, is made in God's image, and therefore sacred, even if the individual is not a saint. Of course, this applies to Muḥammad, the archetype,[85] but in fact it applies to every human being, which implies that one must adopt every recourse available in law in order to avoid bloodshed. Ibn ʿArabī affirms this in the chapter on Jonas in the book "The Bezels of Wisdom". Nābulusī's commentary on this passage underlines the fact that the lieutenancy of God generally belongs to all human beings (*khilāfa ʿāmma*), and not only to those who exert inner spiritual authority or external worldly power.[86]

It could be said that in some ways artists exercise this "lieutenancy" in the external domain, because they partake of God's "creativity". Ibn al-Fāriḍ himself suggests this in the two groups of verses that follow – the first of these concerns Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*, the summit of the prose *badīʿ*:

> My coining parables for thee time after time concerning my state is a favour from me to thee.

81 Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2, 832; Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1091–92.

82 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1088–89; Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2, 812 (Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Tāʾiyya*, verse 313). This idea had been formulated as early as the ninth century by Sahl Tustarī: see Holmes Katz, *Birth*, 14.

83 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1088–89; Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2, 812.

84 Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 2, 563 (Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Tāʾiyya*, verse 80).

85 Nābulusī, *Jawāhir*, 309: Ibn ʿArabī says that Muḥammad is "triple" (*muthallath al-nashʾ*) because his constitution is based on three principles, *wa-huwa al-haykal al-sharīf alladhī ẓāhiruhu jismānī wa-bāṭinuhu rūḥānī wa-barzakhuhu nafsānī, wa-kull wāḥid min al-thalātha allatī fīhi ʿayn al-ākhar min wajh wa-ghayruhu min wajh*.

86 Nābulusī, *Jawāhir*, 2: 190. "Anthropomorphite" monks of the fourth and fifth centuries also believed that all men carry the imprint of God's image within their physical forms: see Camplani, "Il dibattito sulla visione", 161. Like Ibn ʿArabī and Nābulusī, they drew important legal and ethical conclusions from this belief: Del Cogliano, "Situating Serapion's Sorrow", 404.

> Consider the *Maqāmāt* of the Sarūjite and draw a lesson from his variety (of disguise) [...].
> And thou wilt perceive that the soul in whatever form and shape she appears, inwardly masks herself in sensation;
> And if his (Ḥarīrī's) work is fiction, yet the Truth makes of it a parable.[87]

The second group of verses concerns shadow-theatre:

> And beware of turning thy back on every tinselled form or unreal and fantastic case;
> For in the sleep of illusion the apparition of the shadow-phantom brings thee to that which is shown through the thin (semi-transparent) curtains.[88]

On the subject of these latter verses Nābulusī says that all these things are "examples and parables forged for you, by the creative action that God realises through human hands" (*ʿibar wa-amthāl maḍrūba laka bi-khalq Allāh taʿālā ʿala aydī al-nās*).[89] Ibn ʿArabī remarks that human creations spring from the divine Names: the Name *al-Badīʿ* (the Originator) corresponds to the man who "has invented [something] within himself, then made it appear";[90] from the Name *al-Bārī* (the Creator) "derives the inspiration for painters in bringing beauty and proper harmony to their pictures".[91]

In his commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ, Nābulusī wants to create an original work: in fact, he proposes to fuse the two distinct readings that men of letters

87 Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Tāʾiyya*, vv. 655–58 (trans. Nicholson, *Studies*, 200), in Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 3, 1172. *Wa-ḍarbī laka l-amthāla minnīya minnatun – ʿalayka bi-shaʾnī marratan baʿda marratī | taʾammal maqāmāti l-Sarūjiyyi wa-ʿtabir – bi-talwīnihi* [...] | *wa-tadrī ltibāsa l-nafsi bi-l-ḥissi bāṭinan – bi-maẓharihā fī kulli shaklin wa-ṣūratī | Wa-fī qawlihī in māna fa-l-ḥaqqu ḍāribun – bihī mathalan* [...]. Nābulusī mentions elsewhere that the Egyptian scholar Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī was asked for his legal opinion on whether a person who says that Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* are lies should be declared an infidel because in so doing he would ridicule knowledge (*li-istihzāʾihi bi-l-ʿilm*): Nābulusī, *al-ʿUqūd*, 24.

88 Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *Tāʾiyya*, vv. 679–80 (trans. Nicholson, *Studies*, 202), in Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 3, 1187f.: *wa-iyyāka wa-l-iʿrāḍu ʿan kulli ṣūratin – mumawwahatin aw ḥālatin mustaḥīlati | fa-ṭayfu khayāli l-ẓilli yuhdī ilayka fī – karā al-lahwi mā ʿanhu al-satāʾiru shaffati*. The symbolic interpretation of the shadow theatre has been further taken up by one of Nābulusī's disciples: see Aladdin, "'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī", 43f., referring to Baytamānī, *Kashf al-asrār* fol. 281a. On this manuscript, see Māliḥ, *Fihris*, 2, 503f.

89 Nābulusī, *Kashf*, 3, 1188.

90 Abdel-Hadi, "Unexplored Concepts", 73, translation of Chapter 558 of the *Futūḥāt*.

91 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, 2, 424, translated in Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier*, 7. On this passage from the *Futūḥāt* see further Puerta Vílchez, *Aesthetics*, 814.

and "Akbarians" have of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poetry, while avoiding the excessively technical elements of either group's approach.[92] Nābulusī's accessible and discursive style is closer to the *adab* than to the *ʿirfān*.[93] As Denis Gril has said, Nābulusī has a place of his own in the tradition of interpreters of Ibn ʿArabī, who are mostly of Persian culture and have a more philosophical style. Not only are Nābulusī's explanations addressed to a non-specialised audience, but his commentaries include many personal touches that allow the reader to glimpse his originality and the things he holds dearest.[94]

Two of Denis Gril's comments are particularly interesting for our purposes. The first has to do with terminology: alongside *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*, a technical term from Ibn ʿArabī, Nābulusī also often uses the older term *nūr muḥammadī*, an indicator of his preference for a language that is closer to the *ḥadīth*. The second of Gril's insights is stylistic: in order to explain the expression "word of God", Nābulusī compares the utterance of the divine verb with the human act of language, thus emphasising the physical dimension of this process.

It could be said that interest in the "form" of revelation, the letter, body of the word, is one aspect of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching to which Nābulusī pays more attention than do Persian commentators. In doing so, he aligns himself not only with the "Arabic" poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, but with the "realism" of traditional exegesis, which is linked to a belief in the representability of God in human form, and to the identification of the Qurʾān with the word of God. This proximity goes beyond the literary: in Damascus, Nābulusī frequented the Hanbali circles of the Ṣāliḥiyya quarter, among which a pietist tradition that was open to Ibn ʿArabī's mysticism had been cultivated since the beginning of the Ottoman period.[95] This is not surprising: the Hanbali refusal of the rationalist allegorisation of the figurative expressions in the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* is not incompatible with a symbolic and mystical interpretation, and in fact this outlook encouraged the early rapprochement between religion and love poetry in devout traditionalist circles.[96] This form of devotion, common

92 Homerin, "On the Battleground", 359–60.

93 See, as a contrast, Scattolin, "The Key Concepts", 78–79.

94 Gril, "*Jawāhir*".

95 El-Rouayheb, *Intellectual History*, 262–264, 285–294; Voll, "'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī", 195–209.

96 Vadet, *L'esprit courtois*, 379–430. More recently, Williams, in "A Body Unlike Bodies", 44, underlined that classical Sunnī traditionalism is not iconoclastic, but exists in continuity with the "transcendent anthropomorphism" of the Bible, the Near East, and the Qurʾān. In addition, Jokisch, *Islamic Imperial Law*, 503–508, compares the controversies between Sunnīs and their Jahmite and Muʿtazilite adversaries with those between Byzantine iconophiles and iconoclasts during the same period.

to Sufis and medieval Hanbalis, has been accused of anthropomorphism and resemblances with Christianity.[97] Since I have alluded several times to the conceptual affinities between the cult of icons and the veneration of the Prophet, I will now expand on this point. The defenders of icons were obliged to prove to their adversaries that the image of Christ could be venerated in a material support – the wood of the icons or the bodies of living saints – without this support being made divine in itself. The first formulation in Arabic of these arguments can be found in the treatise on the subject by the bishop of Ḥarrān, Theodor Abū Qurra (c. 755–830), who was active in the movement to translate Greek philosophy into Arabic. His demonstration has a typological argument at its heart: Christian exegesis considers the anthropomorphic descriptions of God by the prophets of the Old Testament to be prefigurations of the incarnation of the Word. Therefore, before the incarnation these descriptions are authentic "images" of the eternal model. In the same way, icons and saints are "images" of the model after the incarnation.[98] This equivalence is based on a metaphorical conception of language, perhaps inspired by the *Peri hermeneias*: Abu Qurra says that names and "images" (*ṣuwar*), have the same signifying function[99] – in fact:

> written names are symbols (*ashbāh*) and images (*aṣnām*) of sounds (*alfāẓ*), and these latter are symbols of imagined figures (*ashbāh al-awhām*), and these imaginations (*awhām*) are symbols of things (*ashbāh al-ashyāʾ*), as the *falsafa* [var.: *al-falāsifa*] affirm.[100]

By the term *ṣūra* Abū Qurra indicates at once the "types" of Christ in the Old Testament and icons. Indeed, in Greek, *eikon* is often used as a synonym for *typos*, and Latin retains this synonymy, translating *typos* as *figura*.[101] According to Frances Young, the exegesis of the school of Antioch should be called "iconic" rather than "typological", in order to highlight the fact that it does

97 Compare the quotation from Jāḥiẓ in Corbin, *L'imagination créatrice*, 205 and 275, note 323; see also Holtzman, "Anthropomorphism", 53b.

98 Abuqurra, *Traité*, Ch. 5, 11, 21. Abū Qurra refers in particular to the vision of the throne of Ezekiel (5: 12; 11: 30–37), which has fed both Christian and Jewish mysticism. This vision is recalled in the *Kitāb al-Zuhd* by Aḥmad ibn *Ḥ*anbal, in a tradition by Wahb ibn Munabbih, according to which God says to Ezekiel: "The fearful and tender heart of the believer contains me" (*wasiʿanī qalb al-muʾmin al-wāriʿ al-layyin*). See https://library.tebyan.net/fa/Viewer/Text/136381/80 (text online from Qom edition: Muʾassasat tibyān, 1387).

99 Abuqurra, *Traité*, Ch. 12, 2.

100 Abuqurra, *Traité*, Ch. 12, 18. Compare Aristote, *De l'interprétation* 1 (16a), trans. Tricot, 78–79.

101 Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 192.

not limit itself to establishing correspondences between the Old and the New Testaments, but constitutes a hermeneutic key to revelation and nature: the "contemplation" (*theoria*) that it encourages is distinguished from Alexandrine allegorism because it focuses on singular examples rather than on philosophical concepts.[102] What's more, Abū Qurra's treatise demonstrates how this iconic or figural approach relates to hagiography. The way he conceives the "presence" of the archetype in the prophets and saints is very close to the Prophetic model of sainthood in Islam, in which the "reality" of Muḥammad is the source of sainthood, and is reflected in the prophets who preceded his full earthly manifestation and in the saints that came after it.[103] On the one hand, this concept implies that earlier prophets retain an exemplary function for saints, and on the other that the advent of the "supreme form" (*ṣūra ʿaẓīma*)[104] of God does not bring the believer's personal relationship with God to an end, but rather reinforces it by mediating it.

It is true that Nābulusī, in a *mawlid*, says of Muḥammad: "he destroys churches, synagogues, hermitages, and abrogates all other laws".[105] But elsewhere he specifies that even if Muḥammad has abrogated all other religions, "he only abrogated them with respect to legal acts. As for professions of faith, he did not use abrogation on them".[106] This passage occurs within a commentary on a poem by the Andalusian Sufi Shushtarī (d. 668/1269), in which Nābulusī justifies the use of Christian symbols and terms in Sufi poetry; icons are notable among the symbols he mentions. In the introduction to this treatise, he synthesises the ideas laid out by Ibn ʿArabī in Chapter 36 of the *Futūḥāt*, about the Muslim saints who follow Jesus's model (*ʿīsāwiyyūn*). This chapter contains a passage on the "doctrine of images" (*al-qawl bi-l-ṣūra*), the importance of which has been revealed in detail by Michel Chodkiewicz.[107] In a commentary on Shushtarī's verse "They shall give thee the key of the church in which their monks have painted Jesus figuratively" (*wa-aʿṭawka miftāḥa al-kanīsati wa-llatī – bihā ṣawwarat ʿĪsā rahābīnuhum shaklan*) Nābulusī tackles the subject:

> They shall make thee understand the images in which divine reality is made manifest to them in their spirits (*afhamūka al-ṣuwar allatī fī nufūsihim taẓhar lahum fīhā al-ḥaqīqa al-ilāhiyya*): they declared its

102 Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 192–201.
103 Chodkiewicz, "Le modèle prophétique".
104 Compare Nābulusī, *Jawāhir*, 308.
105 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1063.
106 Urvoy, "Les thèmes chrétiens", 108; Nābulusī, *Radd*, 632–633.
107 Chodkiewicz, *Sceau*, 97–98. See further: Abdel-Hadi, "Unexplored Concepts".

> transcendence (*yunazzihūnahā*) by virtue (*bi-ḥukm*) of "There is nothing that resembles Him" (Q 42:11), and they declare its resemblance (*yushabbihūnahā*) by virtue of "And He is the hearer, the clairvoyant" (Q 42:11). This is similitude according to the Law (*al-tashbīh al-sharʿī*), that which brings the meaning that God [alone] knows (*alladhī warada bi-l-maʿnā alladhī yaʿlamuhu Allāh*). For on this subject He has said that He has one face, by his own Word: "Wherever thou turnest, the face of God is still there" (Q 2:115), and that He has one hand, by his own word: "The hand of God is above their hands" (Q 48:10), and other, similar, expressions, whereas, in all this, declaring His transcendence (*tanzīh*) is necessary. Comparable ambiguous (*mutashābih*) expressions can be found in the Gospels.[108]

In other words, the "key" to understanding icons is the symbolic exegesis of the Qurʾān's verses on "resemblance". Through this equivalence between the veneration of icons and the contemplation of the figurative expressions in the Qurʾān, Nābulusī offers an Islamic "translation" of Christian spiritual practice. At the same time, this passage presents striking similarities to Abū Qurra's treatise. First comes the fairly exact correspondence of Nābulusī's commentary with Chapter Five of this treatise. In the modern edition this is entitled "The bodily attributes of God that are found among Muslims must bring them to understand what we aver on the subject of Christ."[109] Here Abū Qurra alludes specifically to the Qurʾānic verses on "resemblance" that Nābulusī mentions: "The non-Jew who claims to be a believer [that is to say the Muslim] will say: I don't accept any of these things! Nevertheless, he asserts that God is seated on the throne, and that He has a face and a hand, and other things that we don't have space to mention here."[110]

The second similarity is in the polemical aim of both texts: Abū Qurra refutes the objections of outsiders (*barrāniyyūn*), meaning Jews and Muslims, but is also proposing to help Christians who are turning away from icons under the influence of the criticism of outsiders to return to the right path. Thus he reminds his Christian readers that what really differentiates Christians from followers of other religions is the spiritual intelligence of the Scriptures, which he contrasts with "carnal intellect" (*al-ʿaql al-jasadānī*).[111]

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108 Nābulusī, *Radd*, 636.

109 Abuqurra, *Traité*, 106: *mā jāʾa ladā al-muslimīn min awṣāf mujassima li-Allāh yajib an tuqarrib lahum fahm mā naqūluhu fī al-masīḥ*.

110 Abuqurra, *Traité*, Ch. 5, 16; see also Ch. 9, 35–37, where the prosternation of angels before Adam, Q 2:30, is discussed.

111 Abuqurra, *Traité*, Ch. 5, 4; see also Ch. 18, 18–19.

As for Nābulusī, he refutes the objections of exoteric Muslims to the poetry of poet-saint *ʿīsawī-muḥammadī* Shushtarī, by explaining that the Christian practices of which he speaks (the cult of images is the one that interests us here) do not make their followers infidels (*kuffār*) if one understands their authentic meaning. Those gifted to understand these authentic meanings are spiritual masters (*rabbāniyyūn*), and as such are distinct from those who are dominated by their carnal soul (*nafsāniyyūn*). This distinction also applies to Christians, so that the *rabbāniyyūn* among them are not, in fact, infidels (*kuffār*), unlike their *nafsāniyyūn*.[112] From this we can deduce that the Christian *rabbāniyyūn* may also themselves be a source of "correct" intelligence on the cult of images. It is therefore possible that Nābulusī was familiar not only with Ibn ʿArabī's approach to "the doctrine of images", but also with the Christian sources themselves.

Here Nābulusī also introduces interesting thoughts on the expression of Christian concepts in the Arabic language: given that each prophet speaks the language of his own people, and that the language of Jesus was Syriac, the Arabisation of Syriac words is not enough to make them understandable in the language of Muḥammad. Thus, a poet such as Shushtarī, who draws his inspiration from the *ḥaqīqa ʿīsāwiyya-muḥammadiyya*, speaks in Arabic, but in the "Syriac tongue" (*lisān suryānī*), in other words, unclearly (*ghayr mutabayyin al-maʿnā*). What's more, in the Sufi lexicon, *Suryāniyya* means a language understood by saints and unintelligible to others; Nābulusī plays on both senses. In the same way, the translation of the Gospels into Arabic, and the creation of an Arab-Christian lexicon (*iṣṭilāḥ*) remain in "Syriac" unless one also translates them conceptually, by explaining how they correspond to "secrets" and spiritual stages for insightful Muslims.[113] For example, in "Muḥammadan" Arabic the Messiah corresponds to the Spirit and Mary to the Well-Preserved Tablet.[114] The inverse operation is also possible: for example, when a *ʿīsāwī-muḥammadī* saint reads the Qurʾānic verse 19:34, its "Syriac" meaning becomes apparent, which probably means that this verse will be understood to say "This is Jesus, the son of Mary, the Word of Truth about whom they doubt", rather than "Such was Jesus, son of Mary: (this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt".[115]

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112 Nābulusī, *Radd*, 63: *al-naṣārā alladhīna kafarū kānū nafsāniyyīn lā rabbāniyyīn*.

113 Nābulusī, *Radd*, 632.

114 Nābulusī, *Radd*, 637.

115 Nābulusī, *Radd*, 633–34: *wa-qāla taʿālā: "dhālika ʿĪsā ibnu Maryama qawl al-ḥaqq alladhī fīhi yamtarūn"* [Q 19:34]: *fa-akhbara subḥānahu anna al-imtirāʾ ḥāṣil fī hādhihi al-kalima al-suryāniyya al-ʿīsāwiyya fa-idhā takallama bihā al-muḥammadī min al-mashrab al-ʿīsāwī ẓaharat suryāniyya kamā kānat li-annahu taʿālā lā mubaddila li-kalimātihi.*

It is likely that these considerations were prompted by events in Christian culture during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Arabic was confirmed as the liturgical language of most Arabic-speaking Christians in Syria.[116] The Arabisation of the liturgy was accompanied by an increased tendency to translate the classical languages of Levantine Christians – Greek, Syriac, and Armenian, as well as Latin, under Rome's influence – into Arabic; Arabic linguistic and literary traditions were also re-appropriated and adapted for a Christian public.

As Hilary Kilpatrick notes, literary history has neglected to place the renaissance in Christian literature that occurred during this period in the context of contemporary Arabo-Muslim culture; thus we lose sight of the role played by the intellectual exchanges and aesthetic syntony between Christians and local Muslims.[117] A verse by Germanus Farḥāt (1670–1732) on the Virgin Mary, "Faultless pearl, thou wert created – as though according to thine own desire thou wert created" (*khuliqti durratan lā ʿayba fīhā – kaʾannaki mithlamā shiʾti khuliqti*),[118] that appears to take as its model the prototypical *madīḥ nabawī*, the poem by Ḥassān ibn Thābit (*khuliqta mubarraʾan min kull ʿaybin – kaʾannaka khuliqta kamā shiʾta*), demonstrates the relevance of Nābulusī's reflections on the relationship between "Muḥammadan" Arabic and "Christian" Arabic.

Nābulusī maintained a theological correspondence with a Christian dignitary whom we can probably identify as Athanasius Dabbās (d. 1136/1724). He was the Melikite patriarch of Antioch, and one of the protagonists of the cultural renewal among Syria's Christians. He translated patristic works by John Chrysostom and Basil of Caesarea from Greek to Arabic, and founded the first printing house in Aleppo to use Arabic characters.[119] At the beginning of his epistle, Nābulusī addresses his correspondent as "one of the brothers of spiritual detachment" (*ikhwān al-tajrīd*).[120] The *dhimmī*s who had the gift of inner faith (*al-īmān bāṭinan*) were also "brothers", in a treatise in which Nābulusī takes up and amplifies a short passage in the *Futūḥāt*, from the chapter on the *ʿīsawīyūn*, the same one in which icons also feature.[121] In it Ibn

116 Kilpatrick, "From *Literatur* to *Adab*", 203.

117 Kilpatrick, "From *Literatur* to *Adab*", 203; for example, in the library of a Lebanese monastery there was a glossed copy of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's *Dīwān*: Walbiner, "Monastic", 473.

118 Ayoub, "L'hyperbole", 17.

119 Aladdin, "Deux fatwā-s"; Rafeq, "Religious Tolerance", 7. On the translations, see Graf, *Geschichte*, 3: 127–133.

120 Aladdin, "Deux fatwā-s", 9 (French), 22 (Arabic).

121 Nābulusī, *Qawl*, 216a: the *dhimmī*s who believe inwardly pay the *jizya* "to help their Muslim brothers" (*iʿānatan li-al-muslimīn min ikhwānihim*). Lejla Demiri is preparing a critical edition of this text.

ʿArabī suggests that the people of the Book who submit to the *jizya* will go to paradise.[122] Nābulusī defends this idea, arguing that God has no obligation to put his threats into practice; he supplements this theological reasoning with a linguistic argument: he contests the authority of his anonymous adversary, whom he derisively calls "Turk", to interpret the Qurʾān, maintaining that he is incapable of understanding the spirit of the Arabic language, whereas Ibn ʿArabī and the Arab *ʿulamāʾ* whom he inspires do, on the contrary, understand it perfectly. The Arabic language has always been the inner language of revelation (*waḥy*),[123] exteriorised with the advent of Muḥammad, the prophet of compassion (*raḥma*). It is not sufficient to know the rules of its grammar in order to master it; one must have a natural disposition and spontaneity (*ṭabīʿa* and *salīqa*): this is why an illiterate Arab is considered more noble than an erudite non-Arab (*aʿjamī*).[124] In spite of their extensive study, most foreigners must make huge and painful efforts in order to speak Arabic. Even worse is to be "a non-Arab at heart" (*aʿjamī al-qalb*),[125] to lack the ear to speak in the accents of mercy in the language of revelation.

In other words, the approach of the "Turk" or "non-Arab at heart" to the Arabic language and the Qurʾān is one of strict normativity, both grammatical and Islamic. People whose mother tongue is Arabic, even if they are illiterate and/or not Muslims, are closer to the matrix from which the language sprang. In this respect the original version of Germanus Farḥāt's Arabic dictionary is suggestive in containing two long explanations of the expressions *al-raḥma al-jasadiyya* (physical compassion) and *al-raḥma al-rūḥiyya* (spiritual compassion); these were substantially abridged by the dictionary's modern editor, who judged them to be based on Christian doctrine rather than on the study of the language itself.[126] However, spirituality before the *nahḍa* was not formally divided from *adab*, and Nābulusī's œuvre demonstrates how it can function as a component of a shared conceptual syntax.

122 Chodkiewicz, *Sceau*, 101.

123 Nābulusī, *Qawl*, 58a.

124 Nābulusī, *Qawl*, 63a.

125 Nābulusī, *Qawl*, 84a. Conversely, a saint who can't speak Arabic is "Arab in spirit" when he speaks in his own language under inspiration, as Nābulusī says explaining the saying: "I slept as a Kurd and woke up as an Arab", attributed to an illiterate shaykh admired by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī: See Sukkar, "al-Nābulusī", 155.

126 Kilpatrick, "From *Literatur* to *Adab*", 208.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, for Nābulusī, celebrating and glorifying the Prophet means celebrating Sufis, celebrating Arabs[127] and, especially, celebrating Arabic literary culture.[128] And being "like the Prophet" means being an "author". His exaltation of his own literary production in prose or verse, and in all genres, is not, despite his work's importance for the city, associated with leadership ambitions, or the foundation of a *ṭarīqa*, but with his aim to persuade and educate his readers – both profane and specialist – both aesthetically and spiritually.[129] In his image of himself, the eclecticism of the accomplished man of letters is part of the universalism of the perfect man.[130] At the same time, his reflections on the space in religious life for imaginative representation mean that Muḥammad becomes not only the object of poetical, visual and musical production, but also (in a way) the patron of these expressions that are as devotional as they are artistic. Nābulusī's reflections on God's manifestation in human language and human form are at the heart of his concept of Muḥammad's "reality"; they also carry unmistakeable marks of his familiarity with the Christian culture of the Syrian people, and of his concern to "translate" religious symbols in order to encourage intellectual and emotional exchange with Christian Arabs.

Nabhānī admires Nābulusī very much, but he differs from him on some of the latter's most characteristic attitudes. For example, he prefers, in the *madīḥ nabawī*, to set very narrow limits on the use of the *ghazal* (especially those addressed to young men).[131] He also takes care to distinguish the veneration of Muḥammad from that practised by Shīʿīs and Christians, since one must ultimately avoid confusing poetic hyperbole with dogma.[132] Finally, although he had 40,000 copies of an engraving of the Prophet's Sandal printed[133] (mechanical reproduction had by now brought an end to the time when each copy was a unique exemplar, an "original"), he also wrote a pamphlet against images.[134] This text, published in 1906, illustrates the profound cultural rupture that had

127 See his exaltation of the Arab *qabāʾil* in a *mawlid* improvised for the people of Nābulus: Nābulusī, *Ḥaqīqa*, 106–107.

128 In another *mawlid*, he celebrates as blessings from God a lengthy series of books that "flows" from the prophetic source, starting with the *Futūḥāt*. Yet the series also includes a book in Persian, the *Mathnawī* by Rūmī. See Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1060–64. On Nābulusī's commentary on the Arabic preface to the *Mathnawī*, see Sukkar, "al-Nābulusī", 152–56.

129 Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 6, 16.

130 Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 11–12; 2, 24.

131 Nabhānī, *al-Majmūʿa al-Nabhāniyya*, 14, 24–31.

132 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 1 and 3.

133 Nabhānī, *Faḍāʾil*, 931, 972, 975–76.

134 Nabhānī, *Taḥdhīr*.

occurred since the time of Nābulusī. When speaking of images, Nābulusī drew on the classical heritage of the Near East, whereas this seems to have disappeared from Nabhānī's points of reference. In what may be a reaction to a 1903 text by Muḥammad ʿAbduh, in which the Egyptian Mufti celebrates European painting while implying a critique of the cult of saints as potentially being "idolatry" (*shirk*),[135] Nabhānī can find no better response than to attack the idolatry of Christians, expressing his disapproval of both religious and secular images. The supposedly "historic" critique, in which he describes Christian adoration of images as a survival of paganism, and his reference to Protestant criticism of this "innovation", lead one to speculate that he may have been influenced by a book written by the American pastor Benjamin Schneider (1834–77), who was then living in Aintab with the aim of encouraging the Armenians who populated the region at the time to return to the straight path.[136]

And yet Nabhānī makes an exception for the shadow theatre, praising the beauty of an anonymous couplet that alludes to the teachings contained in this form of spectacle.[137] Despite his scruples on the subject of the *ghazal*, Nabhānī finally decides not to exclude them from his collection of *madāʾiḥ*, because:

> Considering that this is present in a great many admirable poems, my soul did not permit me to deprive this collection of such well-aligned pearls, and to deprive these excellent poets of such a noble station and such immense merit, for, if they have erred, they have nevertheless also done right in praising the Prophet, and only God can know their intentions.[138]

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135 ʿAbduh, *Aʿmāl*, 2, 198–200.

136 Schneider, *Rayḥana*. This book is still honoured in a recent publication on the correct way of imitating the Prophet: Ḥāmid, *Muqaddimāt*, 116–40.

137 Nabhānī, *Taḥdhīr*, 1: *raʾaytu khayāla al-ẓilli akbara ʿibratin – li-man kāna fī ʿilmi l-ḥaqīqati rāqī | shukhūṣun wa-ashbāḥun tamurru wa-tanqaḍī – wa-tanfā jamīʿan wa-l-muḥarriku bāqī*. Nābulusī wrote an imitation of these verses: see *Dīwan al-ḥaqāʾiq*, 1, 341.

138 Nabhānī, *al-Majmūʿa al-Nabhāniyya*, 14–15.

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18

The Prophet as a Sacred Spring: Late Ottoman *Hilye* Bottles

Christiane Gruber

Among its vast collection of manuscripts, the Topkapı Palace Library in Istanbul preserves four large glass bottles filled with devotional objects and ornaments. Three of these bottles contain *hilye*s, or verbal descriptions of the Prophet Muḥammad, while a fourth contains a miniature Qurʾān displayed on a wooden stand decorated with colorful beads (Figure 18.1). Executed by the under-glass painter Muḥammad Rifʿat and dated 1308/1891, the Qurʾān bottle has at least four companion pieces held in two other museums in Istanbul.[1] Although Qurʾān bottles will not be discussed in the present essay, their production alongside *hilye* bottles suggests that these glass containers were intended to house both the icons of God (via His holy book) and the Prophet (via his verbal icon).

At present, *hilye* bottles remain understudied. While about a dozen exist in international collections,[2] one bottle emerged on the art market some years ago under the title "lodge *hilye*" (*tekke hilyesi*)[3] and another *hilye* bottle dated 1219/1804–5 is currently on display in the Mevlevihane Museum in Galata, Istanbul.[4] As is evident from the Topkapı Palace materials, however, *hilye*

1 Two bottles are held in the Sadberk Hanım Museum, nos. 18257 and 18258 (cat. nos. 218–219). Like the Topkapı Qurʾān bottle, these two items are signed by Muḥammad Rifʿat and dated 1308/1891; however, neither contains any objects, which may have been lost or removed. Two other inscribed bottles are published in Şentürk, *Cam altında yirmi bin fersah*, 20, 112. The bottle on page 20, now held in the Museum of Turkish Calligraphic Art (Türk Vakıflar Hat Sanatları Müzesi) in Istanbul, is especially noteworthy as it, too, contains a miniature Qurʾān displayed on a stand.

2 Among others, see the four *hilye* bottles held in the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum in Istanbul, published in *Türk ve İslâm Eserleri Müzesi Rehberi*, 36–37, nos. 1072–1075.

3 See the nineteenth-century *hilye* bottle offered for sale in *Alif Art*, 26, available online at: http://www.lebrizimages.com/img/glrs/0369/web/muz0809/html/muz0809.html#26/z (accessed in 2018; website no longer active). Moreover, a rosewater bottle, filled with decorative elements and dated 1321/1903–4, also displays similarities to *hilye* icons and suggests the water's use in Sufi rituals; see Işın and Özpalabıyıklar, *"Hoş gör yâ hû"*, 142–143.

4 See the *hilye* bottle on display in the Galata Mevlevihane Müzesi, Istanbul, acc. no. 299, dated 1219/1804–5.

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FIGURE 18.1 Inscribed glass bottle containing a miniature Qur'ān placed on a stand and surrounded by decorative beads, Ottoman lands, late 19th century. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, G.Y. 913

bottles should not be restricted to Sufi lodges alone. Rather, these relatively rare objects appear to have been used for both talismanic and curative purposes in various contexts and milieus, including royal ones.

Although the origins of late Ottoman-Islamic icon-bottles remain open to speculation, these objects recall Byzantine and post-Byzantine Christian

artworks and ceremonies linked to Constantinople's holy springs, or *hagiasmata*. Such springs, known in Turkish as *ayazmas*, have served as sacred sites to Muslims over the centuries as well. Still today, Istanbul's *ayazmas* are filled with decorated icons and bottles containing images of the Virgin Mary – herself considered a sacred source of life – and Jesus Christ. These icons, bottles, and their sacred spring water were, and still are, believed to intercede on believers' behalf and to secure miraculous cures.

Such Christian traditions appear to have been adopted and adapted within Ottoman spheres, where other types of bottles meant to contain holy liquid – among them Zamzam water bottles and magico-medicinal vessels – merged to create a larger corpus of Islamic devotional and curative objects during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus, as will be argued in what follows, these *hilye* bottles in essence provided a new kind of Prophetic pharmacon, whereby Muḥammad was reified – and symbolically ingested – by pious devotees, who conceptualized the Prophet's flask-encased verbal icon as the ultimate *elixir vitae*.

1 Protecting Home and Producing Gold

Since *hilye* bottles remain unexamined to the present day, a detailed analysis of their constituent forms, materials, and current states of preservation enables a better understanding of their symbolic functions and uses in late Ottoman Islamic devotional spheres.

Measuring 42 cm in height and topped with a (now lopsided) golden finial wrapped in a green silk ribbon, the first bottle is the largest in the group (Figure 18.2). Its interior is lavishly decorated with a vertical gilt rod, whose horizontal posts provide perches for dangling pearl ornaments. Other decorations fill the interior of the blown glass bottle; these include wicker branches, flowers made of brown and white fabric, and round beads made of green and red plastic, the latter a modern material. This panoply of decorative items comes together to form what we might call *hilye* installation art, itself intended to remain undisturbed thanks to the wax sealing the flask's neck. In this instance, the bottle's contents were meant to remain inaccessible.

Two of the four bottle's sides display the *hilye*, which records ʿAlī's verbal description of Muḥammad's physical and moral characteristics set into the diagrammatic format invented by the famous seventeenth-century Ottoman calligrapher Hafiz Osman (d. 1698 CE).[5] Here, the typical *hilye* layout, with its

5 On *hilye* panels and paintings, see in particular Taşkale and Gündüz, *Hz. Muhammed'in Özellikleri*; Zakariya, "The Hilye of the Prophet Muhammad", 13–22; and Stanley, "From Text to Art Form in the Ottoman Hilye".

FIGURE 18.2 Glass bottle with a *hilye* showing a depiction of Mecca, Ottoman lands, late 19th century. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, G.Y. 1413

central omphalos (*göbek*) surrounded by medallions inscribed with the names of the four *rāshidūn*, is readily recognizable (Figure 18.3). Also quite typical is the inclusion of depictions of Mecca and Medina as top pieces as well as the Qurʾānic verse praising Muḥammad with the exclamation: "We sent you as nothing but mercy to all the universes" (21:107). More intriguingly, the *besmele* at the top of each *hilye* panel is surmounted by the Qurʾānic expression "Indeed it is from Solomon" (27:30). Because this clause can refer to Solomonic white magic, it is frequently found inscribed in Islamic talismans, chief among them the "seal of Solomon."[6]

The Solomonic statement hints at the item's apotropaic use, and indeed *hilye*s were often used as talismans in Ottoman lands during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some, like the panel of cut-out (*kat'ı*) work in the Sadberk Hanım Museum, include a number of talismanic statements and devices that promise protection to their owners and viewers.[7] Still other *hilye*s were printed from metal plaques, as attested to a number of items preserved in the Walters Art Museum[8] and the Haluk Perk Collection (Figure 18.4).[9] Known as matrices, these metal plaques were engraved with textual and visual content, and were used to produce printed amulets. Just like other *hilye*s painted on panels or included in illustrated manuscripts, these metal objects were outfitted with designs and Qurʾānic verses believed to be particularly protective.

The first *hilye* bottle's talismanic and prophylactic qualities are further elucidated in the verses of Persian poetry affixed to the bottle's two other sides (Figures 18.5 and 18.6). The verses include some misspellings, thereby suggesting Ottoman authorship, and read as follows:

> Oh Lord, place this divine shadow on the throne of perpetuity,
> And illuminate the sun of the royal sky in perpetual heaven.
>
> Whoever keeps this beautiful *hilye* at home will be saved from
> spiritual suffering, poverty, sadness, persecution, and calamities.
> When God, His pure being, out of mercy allows it,
> Then without a doubt [the owner] benefits very much from his
> [the Prophet Muḥammad's] descriptions.

6 On the seal of Solomon, see Dawkins, "The Seal of Solomon", 145–50.

7 Taşkale and Gündüz, *Hz. Muhammed'in Özellikleri*, 21; Çağman, *Kat'ı*, 250–51; and Bilgi, *Gönülden Bir Tutku*, 81.

8 See the talismanic *hilye* plate (a metal matrix to stamp talismans), which currently is incorrectly identified as a pilgrimage certificate, at: https://art.thewalters.org/detail/11417/plaque-for-printing-a-pilgrimage-certificate/ (accessed February 28, 2021).

9 The talismanic plaque illustrated in Figure 18.4 is unpublished; for a similar example in the Haluk Perk Museum, see Perk, *Osmanlı tılsım mühürleri*, 36f. cat. no. 1.1.01.

FIGURE 18.3 Glass bottle with a *hilye* showing a depiction of Medina, Ottoman lands, late 19th century. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, G.Y. 1413

FIGURE 18.4 Metal plaque containing a hilye of the Prophet and other amuletic inscriptions and designs, Ottoman lands, late nineteenth or twentieth century. Halûk Perk Collection, Istanbul, unnumbered. Left: the original printing plaque, with writing in reverse; and right: the plaque digitally flipped to render the script legible

The first panel of Persian poetry praises God through a series of celestial and cosmic metaphors, while the second panel addresses the bottle's owner directly by reminding him or her of the *hilye*'s shielding capacities. Moreover, by stressing the supremacy of God, these verses make it clear that this item is not to be considered a tool in the practice of black magic, but rather a permissible form of harnessing protective energies according to the Solomonic method. As a result, the first *hilye* bottle encases a verbal icon of the Prophet Muḥammad and turns it into an amuletic form of installation art meant to protect individuals within a domestic setting.

The second *hilye* bottle similarly preserves two icon panels, but here the paper folios are mounted onto wooden boards separated by a long rod wrapped

FIGURE 18.5
Lines of Persian poetry in the *hilye* bottle illustrated in figures 18.2 and 18.3

FIGURE 18.6
Lines of Persian poetry in the *hilye* bottle illustrated in figures 18.2 and 18.3

FIGURE 18.7 First side of icon, *hilye* bottle with a stopper covered in red silk and a rope and chain wrapped around its neck, Ottoman lands, late 19th century. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, G.Y. 954

in red silk, a detail to which we will return subsequently (Figure 18.7). In addition, the bottle is outfitted with a rope and metal chain, and so appears to have been suspended or carried on occasion, rather than permanently exhibited on a flat surface such as a table or shelf. The *hilye* text is largely placed within an

FIGURE 18.8 Second side of icon illustrated in figure 18.7

omphalos girdled by a gold crescent, surrounded once again by the *rāshidūn*. In this instance, however, no mention of Solomon is made. Rather, the first panel's horizontal registers running along the frame include the *besmele* and the Qur'ānic verse of mercy. The second panel (Figure 18.8) also includes at its top the famous "*Law Lāka*" *ḥadīth qudsī* that states: "Were it not for you [oh

Muḥammad], I would not have created the heavenly spheres." It also provides the signature of the calligrapher, a certain Munlā (Molla/Mevla) Muḥammad.

Inscribed in their vertical frames, these two *hilye* panels are augmented with Ottoman devotional poetry in honour of the Prophet. Although their metre is not entirely correct, the first two verses read as follows: "Your pure name is on the highest throne, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā / Your figure is [like] the cypress of Ṭūbā, your stature reaches from there to Muntahā" (*Nām-i pākın ʿarş-ı aʿlā'da, Muḥammed Muṣṭafā | Ḳāmetin bir serv-i Ṭūbā ḳaddin andan Müntehā*). Here, the Prophet is said to have his name inscribed on God's throne – a motif rather pervasive in Islamic ascension texts and poems – and his cosmic stature is so vast that it is said to stretch from the upside-down Tuba Tree (*shajarat al-Ṭūbā*) to the Lote Tree of the Limit (*sidrat al-muntahā*). The next two verses, although they include misspellings, can be identified as the work of the famous sixteenth-century Ottoman poet Zati (d. 1546 CE). They exclaim: "Oh, Embellishment of the Garden of Illocality, your stature is a cypress of light; it casts no shadow on the ground" (*Ḳāmetin ey bustān-ı lā-mekān pīrāyesi | Nūrdan bir servidür düşmez zemine sāyesi*).[10] In these verses, the Prophet Muḥammad is described as a fine-figured entity made from light that bears no shadow as well as an embellishment of a heavenly garden not bound by time or space.

Taken altogether, the figures of speech and motifs used in all four Ottoman Turkish verses added to this *hilye* make clear reference to Muḥammad's celestial ascension, the celebration of which occurred in palace quarters to the accompaniment of praise poetry and the illumination of hanging lamps (*kandil*s). Perhaps it can be surmised, then, this *hilye* bottle was suspended or ritually carried during *miʿrac*, *mevlid*, or other religious festivities held in Topkapı Palace.[11]

Other evidence for its potential use is suggested by the vertical rod that resembles a perfume dauber. When rocked back and forth by its removable cap, this interior rodule scrapes the backsides of both *hilye* panels, in the process producing a gold dust that could have been collected and extracted from the bottle thanks to the slightly dampened red silk fabric (Figure 18.9). Indeed, the gold flecks at the bottom of the flask do not appear to be the haphazard result of wear and tear over time. Rather, it becomes clear from the object's material

10 On Zati on his poetry, see Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, III, 47–69, especially p. 54; and for the first verse of this poem, see *Başlangıcından günümüze kadar büyük Türk klâsikleri*, vol. 3, 296, Gazel XV, line 1.

11 For a discussion of hanging lamps and praise poetry in Ottoman Islamic festivities, see Zarcone, "*Mevlid Kandili*", 307–20.

FIGURE 18.9 Detail of the backsides of the *hilye* panels included in the bottle illustrated in figures 18.7 and 18.8

makeup that the main goal of the glass bottle consisted in the production of gold *hilye* dust. In order to produce an auric powder, the artisan affixed gold-painted papers to the back of both wooden *hilye* panels: one still retains its gold pigments in relatively good condition while the second has witnessed the near-total loss of its gilt backing, no doubt due to repeated chafing at the same angle. Thus, unlike the first *hilye* bottle that was intended for artful display and protection in the home, this item was meant to be used in some fashion or another.

The third and last *hilye* bottle must have fulfilled a similar function (Figure 18.10). It contains only one wooden panel whose two sides are affixed with folios containing Muḥammad's verbal icon. Its first side includes the title "The Features of our Beloved" (*ṣifat ḥabībinā*) while its second side includes some of the names of the Prophet's ten companions who were promised paradise

FIGURE 18.10
Hilye bottle with a metal wire attached to the verbal icon, Ottoman lands, late 19th century. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, G.Y. 429

(*al-ʿashara al-mubashshara*), itself a widespread Sunnī Ottoman textual motif used in contradistinction to Safavid praises of the twelve Shīʿī imams.[12]

Several other details are noteworthy. First, and most conspicuously, this bottle is neither sealed shut nor is it provided with a removable cap, like the first two examples. Instead, the *hilye* panel is affixed to a metal wire that curves in the flask's neck, and rises slightly above the opening of bottle. This metal handle must have been used by an individual to set in motion, shake, or rock the *hilye* within its container, which resulted in visible interior scrape marks and a loss of gold pigment on the bottle's lateral sides. Those very same sides carry deeper symbolic importance, as they are covered in monumental inscriptions that proclaim: "Verily, He [God] illuminated the world with the light of Muḥammad" (Figures 18.11 and 18.12). Here, God's creation of the Prophet's light as a radiant flux appears equated with gold pigment ornamenting the flask's sides. This lustrous, high-luxury material in turn could be transformed into gold dust or powder by setting Muḥammad's verbal icon to motion within the glass container.

A close examination of these three *hilye* bottles leads to a few preliminary conclusions. Depending on use and location, such items could be shut closed, opened on demand, or permanently kept ajar. One functioned as a Muḥammad-centred talismanic art object intended to protect an individual and his/her home. In the latter case, no further interactions were necessary. In other cases, however, a chain and rope suggest more ritualistic uses, including carrying or suspension in festive commemorations of the Prophet or other religious holidays, including the celebration of his birth or celestial ascension. In such cases, a removable cap and silk-covered stopper enabled the collection and extraction of gold flecks, rubbed off the gilt papers lining the *hilye* panels' back sides. Last but not least, in at least one instance, this gold dust or pigment is equated with the *nūr Muḥammad*, itself the primordial and generative element used by God to create the entire world.[13]

Taken all together, these newly uncovered *hilye* bottles raise a number of questions concerned with late Ottoman artistic traditions as these intersect with devotional practices dedicated to the Prophet Muḥammad, especially in a larger Constantinopolitan setting. Perhaps the two most important queries that arise are: first, what were the uses and purposes of creating gold dust, and,

12 For a discussion of the *al-ʿashara al-mubashshara* as an Ottoman Sunnī retort to the Safavid emphasis on the Shīʿī imams, see Gruber, *The Praiseworthy One*, 292–98, especially figures 5.19 and 5.22.

13 On the *nūr Muḥammad*, see Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light"; and Gruber, "Between Logos (*Kalima*) and Light (*Nūr*)".

FIGURE 18.11
Inscription on the first side of the *hilye* bottle illustrated in figure 18.10

FIGURE 18.12
Inscription on the second side of the *hilye* bottle illustrated in figure 18.10

second, what are the origins and hence symbolic meanings of these icon bottles? Examining related artistic evidence can help us expand and refine our range of possible interpretations, chief among them the bottles' likely use in late Ottoman magico-medicinal practices that involved the mixing of sacred dust or soil with holy water in order to produce liquid suspensions and curative potions believed saturated with Prophetic blessings or *baraka*.

2 Collecting, Rubbing, and Ingesting Materia Prophetica

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *hilye*s were believed to protect individuals, their belongings, and their homes. Their talismanic energies were believed latent and activated through a number of practices, most especially their viewers' gaze, rubbing, and kissing. A number of late Ottoman illustrated prayer books include specific directions on how to make use of such optic and haptic practices, which were believed to unleash the dormant blessings contained in Muḥammad's verbal icon, his relics, and his other marks and traces.[14]

For example, one devotional miscellany transcribed during the eighteenth or nineteenth century includes a double-page depiction of the Prophet's *hilye* topped by the widespread invocation seeking refuge from the cursed devil (Figure 18.13). The icon's position as a potent source of protection is further strengthened by the presence of a short instructional text attributed to the famous *ḥadīth* compiler al-Tirmidhī (d. 892) located at the bottom of each *hilye* panel and continuing on the manuscript's subsequent folios. Here and in other cases,[15] al-Tirmidhī is recorded (in Ottoman Turkish) as informing the reader that the Prophet's seal contains many virtues or merits. Among them, we are told that whoever looks at it in the morning after having performed ablutions will be protected from all disasters and catastrophes until the end of the day. The same holds true for the beginning of the month and year as well as at the launch of a trip. Finally, whosoever gazes upon it during the year of his death will end his life in faith by the grace of God the Almighty. In still other prayer books, al-Tirmidhī is cited on the necessity of rubbing (*sürmek*) the seal of prophecy to one's face or eyes, thus proving that looking intensely at Muḥammad's icon and his other signs, combined with the scraping of their pigments, was believed to help the pious believer guard against tragedy.

14 On this subject, see Gruber, "'Go Wherever You Wish, for Verily You are Well Protected'".

15 See the nineteenth-century "seal of prophecy" inscribed with al-Tirmidhī's statement in *Aşk-ı Nebi: Doğumunun 1443. Yılında Hz. Peygamber*, 128, cat. no. 23 (Topkapı Palace Library, G.Y. 1500).

FIGURE 18.13 The Prophet Muḥammad's *ḥilye* with directions of use attributed to al-Tirmidhī, included in a prayer book, Ottoman lands, 18th or 19th century. Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul, E.H. 996, folios 10v–11r

Such ardent forms of caressing sacred images also extended to depictions of Mecca and Medina, both of which are intimately associated with the Prophet's life and career.[16] A number of late Ottoman manuscripts of al-Jazūlī's (d. 1465) *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* (Proofs of Good Deeds) and other prayer books include double-page paintings of the two holy cities, at times tarnished with smear marks that appear as if strategic strikes. For example, one late eighteenth-century copy of al-Jazūlī's text displays a loss of black pigment from the *kiswa* cloaking the Kaʿba as well as blue-and-white smudges tainting the dome over the Prophet's grave in Medina.[17] Another contemporary copy of the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* shows similar abrasions, which appear as if caused by the wet flick of the finger first placed above the dome and then curved kinetically across

16 On this topic, see Göloğlu, "Touching Mecca and Medina".

17 See the rubbed images of Mecca and Medina within a *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* made in 1207 AH/1793 CE now held in the Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi Collection, Istanbul, VIII/4, folios 28v–29r.

the grilled chamber containing Muḥammad's tomb (Figure 18.14). And still another late Ottoman illustrated manuscript of the same text suggests that viewers scraped pigments off of paintings of Mecca and Medina with great vigour, perhaps with the ultimate aim of collecting these sacred pigments on their fingers and lips (Figure 18.15).[18]

From Muḥammad's seal of prophecy to depictions of Mecca and Medina, the painterly evidence thus points to late Ottoman practices of rubbing and kissing sacred images – along with the collecting and/or ingesting of the pigment debris – associated with the Prophetic corpus and presence.

Such physically enacted devotions are supported by textual evidence as well. For example, writing during the seventeenth century, the Ottoman explorer Evliya Çelebi (d. 1682) records in his *Seyahatname* (Travel Book) the pietistic engagements of pilgrims in Mecca and Medina, including his own. Launching into his multi-volume oeuvre, he first pleads God to protect him during his sojourn with the rhetorical question: "Might I roam the world? Might it be vouchsafed to me to reach the Holy Land, Cairo and Damascus, Mecca, and Medina, and to rub my face at the Sacred Garden, the tomb of the Prophet, Glory of the Universe?"[19] In Evliya Çelebi's introductory remarks, it appears as if the ultimate goal of his journey is none other than the overlaying of his visage with a Prophetic patina extracted from the blessed soil, textiles, grille, or other materials anointed by Muḥammad's inhumed body.

Arriving in Medina, Evliya Çelebi then makes his way to the railing encircling Muḥammad's tomb, telling his reader that: "There I kissed the threshold, prayed beseechingly, and knelt down."[20] He then petitioned the Prophet for intercession and nearly fainted. Besides osculating the grille, he also kissed the ground at Muḥammad's tomb in Medina, all the while asking for his intercession.[21]

The pious traveller also records practices of devotional rubbing, above all in and around Medina. For instance, he includes a short description of a small shrine, known as "The Station of the Noble One" (*makam-i hazret*), located outside of Medina, shaped like a small prayer niche and housing the impression of the Prophet's head. There, he goes on, "pilgrims rub their faces (*yüz sürerler*) on this holy place."[22]

18 Göloğlu, "Linking, Printing, and Painting Sanctity and Protection", figure 8.
19 Gemici, "Mecca in the *Seyahatnâme*", 146.
20 Gemici and Dankoff, *Evliya Çelebi in Medina*, 30–31.
21 Gemici and Dankoff, *Evliya Çelebi in Medina*, 105.
22 Gemici and Dankoff, *Evliya Çelebi in Medina*, 26–28.

FIGURE 18.14 A depiction of Medina showing smudges over the Prophet Muḥammad's tomb, al-Jazūlī, *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*, Ottoman lands, late 18th century. Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, MS. 419.2007, folio 18r

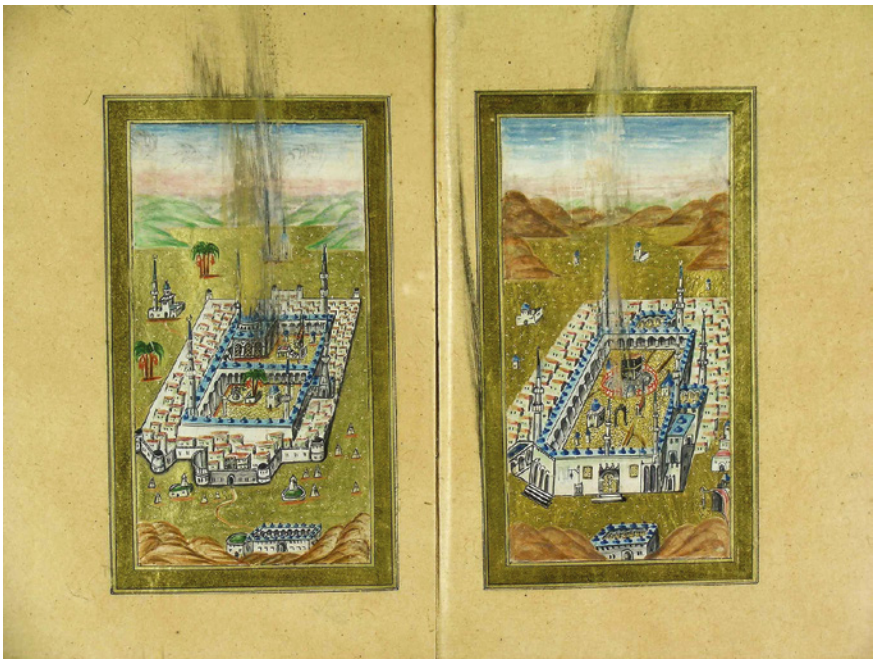

FIGURE 18.15 A heavily smudged double-page painting of Mecca and Medina, al-Jazūlī, *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*, Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul, Hacı Mahmud Efendi 3986, folios 12v–13r

Such popular practices of kissing and rubbing were not at all frowned upon or prohibited at the time. Rather, they were actively sponsored by royal Ottoman patrons who lavished great gifts upon Islam's holy cities and even ordered the construction of new gates to the Medina mosque, including one inscribed with the poetic verses: "God forbid that he who rubs his face on your grave should not go free."[23]

Ottoman devotees' practices of kissing the *kiswa* and Black Stone in Mecca along with the rubbing of soil and the golden grille in Medina in order to secure the blessings and intercession of God and Muḥammad also appear to have occurred within these sites' visual representations, as the painterly evidence strongly suggests. Although it is clear that such images were touched in various ways, one question still lingers: where did the now-missing pigments of this *materia prophetica* go? Upon affectionate kissing, did these pigments mix in with saliva and were they thus ingested by the faithful? Were the pigments

23 Gemici and Dankoff, *Evliya Çelebi in Medina*, 52–53: *Ḥāsha li-llāh ḳabrine yüz süren āzād olmaya.*

smudged with wet fingers and then perhaps touched to the believer's lips or tongues? Or were they collected as Prophetic ingredients to be mixed in with other liquids or potions? In other words, what are the whys and wherefores of these fugitive pigments, and how might they shed new light on the meanings and functions of *hilye* bottles?

I would like to suggest that these bottles – just like other contemporary devotional icons devoted to the Prophet[24] – provided a material mechanism to make and gather gold pigments. The fact that one of them mentions the *nūr Muḥammad* leads us, in part, to associate such pigments with the Prophet's primordial light. That two bottles included *hilye*s meant to scrape at the inside walls further strengthens this hypothesis. In addition, during the late Ottoman period, collecting the water run-off from the ritual washing of the Prophet's footprint and mantle was a well-known practice in Ottoman palace quarters. This Prophetic liquid was then preserved in small flasks, imbibed to break the evening fast during Ramadan, and administered as a curative potion throughout the year.[25] Libations that came into contact with Muḥammad's relics were understood as the ultimate panacea, and such magico-medicinal liquids quite possibly included other tonics and potions into which were mixed gold Prophetic precipitate extracted or poured from *hilye* bottles.

Textual sources support the alchemical belief that gold in particular contained transformative and restorative powers, a belief that appears to have been relatively common in late Ottoman lands. For instance, one manuscript that records the recipes for medicines and potions produced in the Topkapı Palace pharmacy includes various antidotes, potions, pills, pastilles, syrups, ointments, and balms to help with a variety of ills.[26] Most relevant for our purposes, this royal pharmacopeia also includes a number of recipes for compound medicines made from precious metals and stones, including gold, silver, ruby, amber, and pearl.

One recipe that stands out is the so-called *maʿcūn-ı kırmız*, or red potion or paste.[27] Among other things, its ingredients include apple juice, rose water, sugar, amber, lapis, pearl, cinnamon, musk, aloe, ruby, and gold and silver leaf (*altun varaḳ* and *gümüş varaḳ*). We are told that its curative and restorative powers are many and that, as a general cure-all, it is especially useful in helping with problems related to the head, heart, liver, and stomach. Moreover, it

24 For a study of devotees rubbing and kissing visual representations of the Prophet in Ottoman traditions in particular, see Gruber, "In Defense and Devotion", 95–123.

25 For a discussion of the topic, see Gruber, "A Pious Cure-All", 134–35.

26 Terzioğlu, *Helvahane Defteri ve Topkapı Sarayı'nda Eczacılık*.

27 Terzioğlu, *Helvahane Defteri ve Topkapı Sarayı'nda Eczacılık*, 69, no. 51b.

is believed to cure forgetfulness and vertigo; to make the face lighter in tone; to help pregnant women to prevent miscarriages; to lessen colic and indigestion in children; and to alleviate illness during plague and other epidemics. The treatise also gives directions for production of this panacea containing crushed gold leaf, and its use, including the boiling of liquids, the pounding in of various ingredients, the draining of water and cooling in order to create a paste, the latter eventually preserved in jars. Whenever needed, this healing blend was doled out in small amounts and mixed in with sherbet to be imbibed by those suffering from a wide range of ailments.

This recipe's inclusion of gold leaf along with its mention of pounding its constituent ingredients suggests that the palace's pharmacy housed rare materials, including leaves of gold, which comprise a stable consolidation of this precious metal that then could be ground into a (more volatile) powder when demand arose to manufacture new potions. The use of gold leaf in the production of "red paste" also continued into the late eighteenth century, as attested to by a list of recipes drawn up in 1198/1784.[28] Specified as exclusively reserved for the sultan, the recipe for *maʿcūn-ı kırmız* calls for the inclusion of a leaf of gold. This archival document is telling on at least two counts: first, it shows that the "red paste" consistently included a certain amount of gold and, second, that this paste was restricted to royal spheres only.

Gold pigments, flecks, and even debris are a hallmark of two of the *hilye* bottles, while one in particular includes a gold leaf backing that is now entirely lost due to pulverisation by the interior dauber covered in red silk. It is thus not unlikely that this dauber was moistened, and the gold flecks gathered, perhaps to be mixed into curative elixirs like the so-called "red paste." In such cases, the gold's therapeutic potential could be seen as exponentially more effective, having derived from the Prophet's blessed icon, itself encased in a pellucid, decanter-like vessel.[29] Individuals in turn could ingest or imbibe this auratic precipitate, whose *baraka* possibly was thought to somatically fuse with the flesh and body of the believer.

Other extant objects support this hypothesis, among them jugs containing soil and dust gathered from the Prophet Muḥammad's tomb in Medina as well as bottles preserving water extracted from the Zamzam well in Mecca. These containers pay tribute to the late Ottoman Muslim belief in the blessed and

28 Topkapı Palace Museum Archives, Istanbul, no. 93/1–3, document giving directions for the production of medicinal pastes bearing the summary title "*Hekimbaşının hazırladığı ve kim tarafından yazıldığı bilinmeyen macun tarifleri*." I wish to thank Akif Yerlioğlu for drawing my attention to this document.

29 On the auratic qualities of glass vessels in general, see Liu, "Glass Containers' Aura".

curative qualities of the two holiest cities of Islam, especially if their gathered natural matter – namely, soil, dust, and water – are preserved, ingested, and hence symbolically vivified within the physical body of pious Muslims. The belief in the curative power of certain substances also is attested to in other objects, among them magico-medicinal bowls and cups used in theurgical practices involving the Qurʾān, itself considered the "Best of Healers" (Q 17:82).

During the nineteenth century in particular, soil and dust from Medina were collected in jugs and vessels or else mixed in with straw and made into portable bundles, which could be worn as amulets (Figure 18.16).[30] In addition, curative tablets containing the soil of Medina believed to be mixed with Muḥammad's saliva – itself described as curing battle wounds and inflammations of the eyeballs,[31] as well as having been mixed into the mortar of the dome of Hagia Sophia to stop it from collapsing[32] – were promoted as all-purpose pills. One, for instance, includes the following inscription: "May the soil of our land and the saliva of some among us, God willing, be curative."[33] Much like the dust and soil gathered from Muḥammad's mausoleum and tomb, the gold powder preserved in and extracted from *hilye* bottles must have been considered similarly talismanic and salutary, especially if mixed into a liquid suspension involving the Prophet's saliva or water associated with the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

In this regard, during late Ottoman times vessels were made to preserve holy water as well. For example, one jug includes a statement noting that it contained the water used to clean Muḥammad's tomb, which was poured out or dried up over time. Sources likewise tell us that, upon the completion of the ritual cleaning of the Prophet's mausoleum, the remaining water was disposed

30 On jugs containing soil from the tomb of the Prophet, see Aydın, *Pavilion of the Sacred Relics*, 190; on the amuletic bundles of soil and straw as illustrated in figure 18.16, see Mols and Vrolijk, *Western Arabia in the Leiden Collections*, 81; and on powder in magico-medical practices, see Flood, *Technologies de dévotion dans les arts de l'Islam*, 73–79.

31 On Muḥammad's saliva mixed in with dust to cure ulcers and wounds, see Elgood, "Tibb-ul-Tabi or Medicine of the Prophet", 155; and Flood, "Bodies and Becoming", 469. A number of *ḥadīth* describe Muḥammad's spittle as healing wounded eyes and bodies, especially during the battles of Khaybar and Badr. These sayings are listed among Muḥammad's "saliva miracles" in al-Yahsubi, *Muhammad, Messenger of Allah*, 160 and 178f.

32 Ottoman chronicles describe Byzantine efforts to reinforce the church's dome after an initial collapse. Among such narratives, we are told that the Byzantines used a special mortar comprising sand from Mecca reinforced with the Prophet's saliva. See Matthews, "From the Fifteenth Century to the Present Day", 82.

33 Aydın, *Pavilion of the Sacred Relics*, 192.

FIGURE 18.16 Conical straw bundle containing the soil from Medina, before 1958, Oosters Instituut (The Oriental Institute), Leiden, The Netherlands, RMV B106–49

of outside of the tomb-mosque complex, where it was taken away by those waiting expressly for the purpose of collecting this blessed contact relic.[34]

In addition, many vessels were used to store the consecrated water of the Zamzam well in Mecca. Known as *Zamzamiyya*s, these flasks were made of both transparent glass and opaque porcelain, their necks often fastened shut with a rope or thread in a manner reminiscent of the *hilye* bottles (Figure 18.17).[35] Textual records reveal that Zamzam water was poured on individuals' bodies and the shrouds of the deceased. Evliya Çelebi also specifically notes that the well's water was deemed useful to people suffering from gall bladder problems.[36]

The belief in the sacred and curative qualities of Zamzam water goes back to pre-Islamic times.[37] During the Jāhiliya period, the Zamzam well was considered a sacred spring and home of the dead spirits.[38] At the advent of Islam, the well was given new meaning as it intersected with the narrative of Hajar desperately seeking a water source to quench her and her son Ismāʿīl's thirst, when both were left to wander in the hot and arid Arabian desert. Since the water's miraculous appearance saved both mother and child from dying of dehydration, it has been considered a salvific substance granted as a blessing from God.

Still today Zamzam water bottles are offered for sale in Mecca as consecrated *ḥajj* souvenirs and gifts,[39] and they also can be purchased from stores of devotional goods surrounding the Eyüp shrine in Istanbul (Figure 18.18). A religious twist on today's portable water bottles, these contemporary *Zamzamiyya*s underscore the tenacious belief in the healing powers of water, especially if touched by a holy relic or drawn from a sacred well. These vessels materially relate to and further sustain a substance often conceptualized as the "water of life" (*āb-ı ḥayāt*), itself a notion that pervades many world cultures and religions. Within Ottoman spheres, water vessels in general were thought as containers for this primal source of wellbeing; some such jugs therefore include inscriptions that encourage their owners to drink water in order to

34 Aydın, *Pavilion of the Sacred Relics*, 191.

35 On Zamzam bottles, see inter alia Aydın, *Pavilion of the Sacred Relics*, 197–98; Gök and Taşkın, *Ab-ı hayat*, 137, cat. no. 24; Gülsoy, *Haremeyn: hac – mukaddese yolculuk*, 302; Porter, "Gifts, Souvenirs, and the Hajj", 102, figure 5; Faroqhi, *Travel and Artisans in the Ottoman Empire*, 89f.; and Flood, "Bodies and Becoming," 472. On the item illustrated in figure 18.17, see Mols and Vrolijk, *Western Arabia in the Leiden Collections*, 70.

36 Faroqhi, *Travel and Artisans in the Ottoman Empire*, 89–90.

37 On the Zamzam well, see Hawting, "The Disappearance and Rediscovery of Zamzam and the 'Well of the Kaʿba'".

38 Rubin, "The Kaʿba", 110ff.

39 On contemporary *ḥajj* souvenir flasks containing Zamzam water, see Khan, "Souvenirs and Gifts", 236f, figures 19 and 21.

FIGURE 18.17 Glass bottle containing Zamzam water, before 1958, Oosters Instituut (The Oriental Institute), Leiden, The Netherlands, RMV B106–88

FIGURE 18.18 Plastic bottles filled with Zamzam water, offered for sale in a store of devotional goods near the Eyüp shrine, Istanbul
PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR, SUMMER 2016

find remedy.[40] Related to *Zamzamiyya*s and other *āb-ı ḥayāt* vessels, *hilye* bottles expand this corpus of special flasks to promote the Prophet as the ultimate cure-all.

The devotee's possible drinking or ingestion of Prophetic *baraka* via a liquid or potion containing *hilye* gold dust might be argued by some as belonging to the realm of folk or popular belief. However, during Ottoman times this practice of seeking propinquity to – and even a physical fusing with – the Prophetic corpus could be conceptualized as meritorious and hence falling squarely within Sunnī traditions. Among the precedents that could validate the theological acceptability of such objects and their associated practices

40 Gök and Taşkın, *Ab-ı hayat*, 132.

was the tradition of ingesting the Qurʾān. As Travis Zadeh has shown, blowing (*nafth*) verses of the Qurʾān over water and/or erasing (*maḥw*) them in water for ingestion by a person in ill health was considered a normative, salubrious, and divinely sanctioned practice since the emergence of Islam.[41] As Zadeh stresses in this regard, "the very act of ingesting the trace of the written word dissolved in water represents a desire to draw the sacred power of the divine into the body."[42]

There existed a number of material ways to draw both the Qurʾān and the Prophet Muḥammad into the flesh and body of the believer. While *hilye* bottles could tend to the task of the latter, a number of other vessels could fulfil the needs of the former. For example, besides the ample corpus of magico-medical bowls,[43] which are well-known and studied, there also exist ceramic cups inscribed with Qurʾānic verses. Such is the case for a nineteenth-century Ottoman terracotta cup, whose interior walls are entirely covered with *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* (Q 36), whose verses spiral from the cup's top rim to its base (Figure 18.19).[44] Although intended for use in medicinal libation rituals, this exemplar's inscriptions remain in rather pristine condition, the water damage limited to a microscopic area of the vessel.

Considered one of the most apotropaic chapters of the Qurʾān, *Yā-Sin* is often found on amulets and talismans.[45] However, when inscribed within a cup, the verses most likely were destined for erasure (*maḥw*) in water. A number of Islamic textual sources support this practice: for example, one *ḥadīth* records the Prophet Muḥammad relating the following about *Yā-Sīn*: "Whoever writes it and then drinks it, the *sūra* puts inside his belly a thousand remedies."[46] Building upon this *ḥadīth*, the early Sunnī theologian Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) goes further, declaring that "a man without a bit of the Qurʾān in his belly is like a broken-down house."[47]

Much as believers were in the habit of drinking the word of God, it appears that they also wished to put a little bit of the Prophet in their belly as well. Late Ottoman Qurʾān and *hilye* bottles appear to have facilitated such acts

41 Zadeh, "An Ingestible Scripture", 101 and 109; and idem, "Touching and Ingesting", 464.

42 Zadeh, "Touching and Ingesting," 466.

43 On magico-medicinal bowls, see in particular Perk and Paksoy, *Duanın Sudaki Gizemi Şifa Tasları*, 11, 108, 118, 134–135, and 139; Savage-Smith, *Science, Tools & Magic*, part 1, 72–97; Ittig, "A Talismanic Bowl", 79–94; and Spoer, "Arabic Magic Medicinal Bowls", 477–80.

44 This cup is published in Tanman, *Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi, 1899–1984*, 268, cat. no. 120.

45 On the inclusion of *Yā-Sīn* and other Qurʾānic chapters and verses in Islamic amulets, see Leoni, "Sacred Words, Sacred Power", 53–65.

46 Zadeh, "An Ingestible Scripture," 108 (cited in Mustaghfirī's [d. 432/1041] compendium of *ḥadīth*).

47 *Ibid*.

FIGURE 18.19 Terracotta cup inscribed with Sūrat Yā-Sīn, Ottoman lands, 19th century. Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi Collection, Istanbul, cat. no. 120

of corporeal actuation and animation by establishing a material merging between holy scripture, the Prophet Muḥammad, and the believer's body. As Finbarr Barry Flood notes in this regard: "Whether the object of desire is the *baraka* emanating from prophet, saint, or logos, the ingestion of the sacred has as its ultimate end not a mimetic imitation of the sacred but a merging of the self with it."[48] Late Ottoman *hilye* bottles and related vessels suggest that one of the "means of merging" with the Prophetic corpus included rituals of rocking verbal icons, pulverizing gold pigment, and creating a sacred substance meant for ingestion and absorption in the human body at a near cellular level. This conceptualization of water and word as especially powerful appear in Byzantine traditions as well.[49]

3 Christian Holy Springs and Curative Icon-Bottles

Hilye bottles formed part of the larger lifeworld of Istanbul during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at which time late Ottoman-Islamic

48 Flood, "Bodies and Becoming," 483.
49 Nilsson, "Words, Water, and Power".

devotions to the Prophet Muḥammad appear to have coincided with the cult of healing waters shared by the city's Christian and Muslim dwellers. The belief in water's sacred and curative powers can be traced back much further in time to the numerous ancient Near Eastern holy springs, lakes, and caves spread across the Mediterranean Basin and Anatolian plateau.[50] Sacred water sources became central to Christianity as well, as attested to by the rite of baptism, baptismal fonts, and the spread of holy springs associated with churches and chapels. In Greek, such springs are known as "holy water," or *hagiasma* (plural, *hagiasmata*), and they are founded in the memory of Christ's baptism or dedicated to a particular saint. At one time, Istanbul counted more than two hundred such springs; unfortunately, today most have disappeared under road, rail, and building construction.[51]

After the conquest of the city by Ottoman forces in 1453, the growing local Muslim population also came to consider such springs miraculous and therapeutic[52] – the belief in sacred water in Islam stretching back to the earliest narratives about the Zamzam well having saved Hajar and Ismāʿīl from death. In Ottoman and modern Turkish, these springs are known as *ayazma*s, a term etymologically indebted to the Byzantine Christian *hagiasma*s in the city. Still today, a number of *ayazma*s in Istanbul are in operation and remain quite popular. Once a week, and on feast days and special occasions, they host visitors of all faiths and nationalities who come to these sacred water sites in order to make wishes, seek blessings, or ask for healing via the practices of visitation, prayer, and votive donation. These *ayazma*s are filled with decorated icons and bottles containing images of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. Most germane to the theme at hand, some bottles are filled or impressed with an icon of Mary and/or Christ, revealing the extent to which *hilye* bottles appear indebted to Constantinopolitan Christian and Islamic sacred spring traditions and their associated devotional objects.

Today, a number of *ayazma*s host Christian and Muslim pilgrims as well as visitors of all religious persuasions and none. The most important of these are: The Virgin as "Fountain of Life" (*Zoodochos Pege*) sacred spring and church in Balıklı; The St. Demetrios shrine and spring in Kuruçeşme; the "curing" (*Panagia*) spring located within the "First of the Month" (*Ayın Biri*) Church in Unkapanı; St. Catherine's holy spring in Moda; and the St. George Monastery in

50 See in particular Harmanşah, *Of Rocks and Water*.

51 Değer, *İstanbul'un şifalı suları*, 126.

52 On the Muslim visitation of Christian sanctuaries during late Ottoman times, see Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, vol. 1, 63–74.

Büyükada, the largest of the Prince's Islands.[53] At each site, a number of devotional and votive traditions continue to flourish today, offering contemporary ethnographic evidence that can help shed some light on previous holy spring traditions. These springs likewise may illuminate the symbolic uses and meanings of icon-bottles in both Christian and Muslim spheres.

The oldest, most important, and best known *hagiasma* in Istanbul is that of the Virgin as the "Fountain of Life" or "Life-Giving Source" (*Zoodochos Pege*). This church-spring complex was founded close to the city's defensive walls in the fifth or sixth centuries, either by the Byzantine emperor Leo I (r. 457–74) or Justinian (r. 527–65).[54] Textual sources inform us that the church-spring effectuated 47 miracles and cures between the years 450 and 950.[55] During the Ottoman period, the church was destroyed and rebuilt several times, at which time a story about a fried fish (*balık*) miraculously returning to life after jumping in its spring waters endowed the *hagiasma* with its present Turkish name, "The Fish [Spring]" (*Balıklı*).[56] The site was particularly active during the nineteenth century, at which time its church, chapel, and crypt were fully rebuilt and inaugurated in 1835 after its destruction during the Greek Revolution in 1821.[57] In the wake of its reconsecration, the complex was visited by the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808–39),[58] who extended financial support and showed respect to various Christian churches, their holy springs, and religious ceremonies.[59]

Around this time, an image made by Thomas Allom and published in Robert Walsh's 1838 travel narrative to Constantinople depicts this so-called "Spring of the Miraculous Fishes at Baloukli" populated by various visitors, some of whom dip their feet into the holy spring or use vessels to drink its curative waters (Figure 18.20).[60]

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53 For the most detailed discussion of the city's Christian *hagiasmata*, see Atzemoglou, *T'hagiasmata tēs Polēs*. The author wishes to thank George Manginis for translating key portions of this Greek-language publication.

54 Narratives relate a story of Leo I and a blind man, as well as Justinian seeking a cure for a urinary tract infection. See Talbot, "Holy Springs and Pools in Byzantine Constantinople", 164ff. For further information on the Zoodochos Pege complex, see Atzemoglou, *T'hagiasmata tēs Polēs*, 64–67; Değer, *İstanbul'un şifalı suları*, 100–106; and idem, "Holy Springs," 129ff. Further references follow below.

55 Kimmelfield, "The Shrine of the Theotokos at the Pege", 300.

56 Kimmelfield, "The Shrine of the Theotokos at the Pege", 308.

57 Talbot, "Holy Springs and Pools in Byzantine Constantinople", 172.

58 Atzemoglou, *T'hagiasmata tēs Polēs*, 67.

59 Sultan Mahmud II will be discussed subsequently.

60 Walsh, *Constantinople and the Scenery of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor*, plate located between pages 50–51.

FIGURE 18.20 "Spring of the Miraculous Fishes at Baloukli," included in Robert Walsh, *Constantinople and the Scenery of the Seven Churches of Asia Minor Illustrated in a Series of Drawings from Nature by Thomas Allom* (London and Paris: Fisher, 1838), pages 50–51

As Walsh relates in his text, this lively spring was visited by both "Greeks" and "Turks." At the water source, he continues:

> Priests stood around the Spring with pitchers in their hands, which they constantly filled, and handed up to those close to them. They were eagerly seized by every person who could catch them, and poured with trembling emotion on their heads and breasts, where they were rubbed, so that every particle of the life-giving fluid might be imbibed by the pores of the skin.[61]

Today, the Balıklı spring retains some of its most salient features, including an icon of the Virgin Mary and Christ Child located immediately above the sacred waters (Figure 18.21). The silver-encrusted wall painting above the water depicts Mary as a life-giving spring, as she bursts forth out of a source of water, from which Christian priests, warriors, and devotees seek relief and cure.[62] Moreover, in its foreground, a man in a red robe is shown holding a vessel and pouring the spring's sacred water into the eyes of a man most likely suffering from ophthalmological problems – a depiction that is befitting for this *hagiasma* since its foundation story includes a miraculous cure for blindness.

Although today the image appears as a wall painting, Byzantine sources describe a mosaic icon of the Virgin Mary instead. This mosaic, we are told, reflected in the spring's water, making it seem as if the image were incubating within it and thus endowing it with life. As Robert Ousterhout notes, it must have been difficult for visitors to differentiate the mosaic depiction from its aquatic reflection, so "perhaps it is best to say that the two – the image and the water, the icon and the substance – worked in concert."[63] Filled with the figural image of a saintly figure as well as charged with its healing powers, this new holy amalgam yielded what might be best called "icon water."

While the icon water of the *Zoodochos Pege* spring was most likely collected and distributed in metal jugs and glass vessels in previous centuries, today's visitors – Christian, Muslim, and other – are encouraged to make a monetary donation in exchange for a plastic bottle, into which they gather the consecrated substance. Many cheap and mass-produced bottles line one of the walls in the spring's crypt, waiting to be put to good use. Of hand-held size and thus highly portable, each bottle identifies the *hagiasma* by name in an oval

61 *Ibid*, 52.

62 On depictions of the Virgin Mary as a "Life-Giving Source," see Teteriatnikov, "The Image of the Virgin Zoodochos Pege", 225–33.

63 Ousterhout, "Water and Healing in Constantinople", 73.

FIGURE 18.21 The sacred spring and icon of the Virgin Mary and Christ Child in the "Fountain of Life" (Zoodochos Pege) crypt church in Balıklı, Istanbul
PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR, SUMMER 2018

that frames an icon of Mary and Christ emerging from the "fountain of life" (Figure 18.22). This icon impressed upon the translucent body of the plastic container generates a similar effect to the mosaic image reflected within the sacred spring: that is, it appears that the image is incubating within the water or, alternatively, that the icon is coming to life with every ripple of the liquid. These holy souvenirs are then taken away and imbibed by individuals seeking remedy or relief – their disparate faiths and worldviews united in the universal belief in water's healing powers.

Centuries-old thalassotherapeutic traditions include bathing in springs, lakes, and seas, as well as mud cures. Within a Mediterranean context they are best attested by the Asklepion, a famous Roman medical centre located in Pergamon. Built in honour of Asklepios, the Roman god of healing, during the second century, the Asklepion included a number of spa-like cures based on a local sacred water source, which has been shown to contain particularly curative properties. Water treatments, mud baths, and the drinking of water counted among its medical treatments; such remedies then carried over to Christian sacred springs, especially those located in close proximity to water and sand. During the Ottoman period, hydrotherapy was similarly practiced at the famous Ottoman hospital in Edirne, which also included music therapy.

Within Constantinople, one *hagiasma* that included water and mud cures was the spring of St. Saviour Philanthropos, located in the St. George monastery complex. The structure was built in the twelfth century between the sea and the city's maritime walls (Figure 18.23). Because of its particular location, it was referred to as the "*ayazma* of the rampart" (*ayazma de la muraille*) by French travellers, including Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (d. 1708). Around 1700, de Tournefort recorded the Ottoman Sultan's visit to the sacred spring and his observing of its mud cures during the Feast of Transfiguration, noting:[64]

> They [the Greeks] believe that this water cures fever and also the gravest sickness, both present and future. It is for this reason that they both bring the ill to [this holy spring] to have them drink [of its waters] and also bury them into the sand up to their necks, exhuming them immediately thereafter.

64 De Tournefort cited in Demangel and Mamboury, "Le monastère et l'ayasma du Saint-Sauveur", 62, fn 6: *Non seulement ils croient que cette eau guérit la fièvre, mais encore les maladies les plus fâcheuses tant présentes que futures. C'est pour cela qu'ils ne se contentent pas d'y amener les malades pour les faire boire; ils les enterrent dans le sable jusques au col et les déterrent un moment après.*

FIGURE 18.22 Plastic water bottle impressed with the name of the Zoodochos Pege sacred spring and an image depicting the Virgin Mary and Christ Child. Bottle acquired at the holy spring by the author in summer 2018

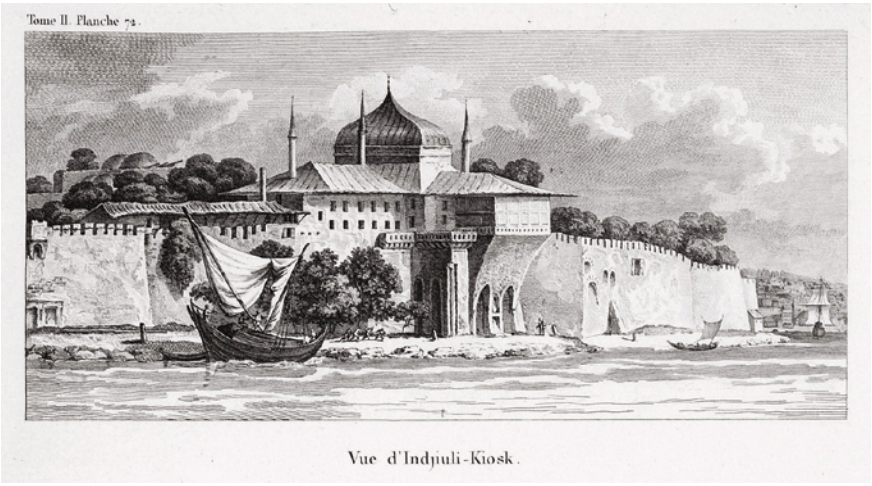

FIGURE 18.23 "Vue d'Indjiuli-Kiosk," image included in Choiseul-Gouffier, *Voyage pittoresque dans l'Empire ottoman, en Grèce, dans la Troade, les îles de l'Archipel et sur les côtes de l'Asie-mineure* (Paris: J.-P. Aillaud, 1842), volume 2, plate 72

Located in the Mangana/Sarayburnu area of Constantinople, this "*ayazma* of the rampart" was in fact located on the grounds of Topkapı Palace during Ottoman times; hence, it was in close proximity to the seat of power and the royal library, where the *hilye* bottles are preserved today.

Textual sources inform us that several Ottoman rulers visited this spring, to which they added a Turkish fountain in the sixteenth century.[65] Thereafter, the *ayazma* became known as the "Pearl Pavilion" (*İncili Köşk*) and the "Pavilion of the Garden Superintendent" (*Bostancıbaşı Köşkü*). During the nineteenth century, Christians visited the spring, even though it was on palace grounds.[66] Likewise, Sultan Mahmud II showed great respect to the church and holy spring of St. Saviour Philanthropos: in 1816, for example, he supported its Feast of Transfiguration, which included a number of mud cures performed on the seaside.[67] Unfortunately, it is now impossible to know whether this "royal *ayazma*" included icon-bottles as it was raised to the ground in 1871 in order to make way for the construction of a new railroad.[68]

65 Water fountains proliferated in Istanbul from the sixteenth century onward; indeed, during the eighteenth century, at least 365 Ottoman fountains were built. See Hamadeh, "Splash and Spectacle", 123–48.

66 Ousterhout, "Water and Healing in Constantinople", 71–72.

67 Demangel and Mamboury, "Le monastère et l'ayasma du Saint-Sauveur", 57.

68 Demangel and Mamboury, "Le monastère et l'ayasma du Saint-Sauveur", 56.

Other surviving Christian icon-bottles associated with monasteries, churches, and sacred springs both within and beyond Turkey suggest that these types of religious wares would have been readily available to both Christian and Muslim individuals. Within Turkey, local Greek inhabitants owned their own sacred water bottles, at times having brought back such items from pilgrimages abroad. For example, one undated bottle displays icons of the Virgin Mary and Christ Child with Saint Eleutherios (the patron saint of pregnant women) on one side of its icon panel, while its other side depicts the Annunciation and Saint George (Figure 18.24). Tucked between the two latter scenes appears a representation of the monastery of the Virgin Evangelistria (of the Annunciation) on Tenos, one of Greece's Cyclades islands. This sacred architectural complex includes the Church of the "Virgin Mary With All Graces" (*Panagia Megalochari*), which is dedicated to the Annunciation. As one of the foremost Christian pilgrimage sites in Greece, the church includes a miraculous icon of Mary, which was "discovered" in 1823 and now is placed over an *hagiasma*.

This bottle was most likely acquired in the nineteenth or early twentieth century by a Christian Istanbulite, who wished to own a keepsake from his or her pilgrimage to the miraculous icon as well as to bring the blessings associated with its nearby water source back home. This icon bottle thus continues and adapts the centuries-old production of Christian pilgrimage flasks. More to the point, this Christian icon-vessel recalls the first *hilye* bottle (see Figures 18.2 and 18.3), which similarly is sealed shut, displays architectural representations of pilgrimage sites, and includes a number of ornaments, such as wicker branches and plastic beads. In the exemplar from Tinos, however, such decorations include glitter and dried flowers, which have fallen off the icon and deteriorated into dust at the base of the object.

Other Christian icon-bottles appear as a diminutive form of installation art. For example, one item made in Hungary is now on display in the museum of the Bachkovo Monastery in Bulgaria (Figure 18.25).[69] Sealed shut, the bottle's interior includes a small-scale sculpture showing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, around which are placed a number of objects associated with his passion. Known collectively as the *Arma Christi* (Weapons of Christ), these instruments were used to torment Christ before his death and include nails, the Crown of Thorns, and the Spear of Longinus, among others.[70] In addition, much like the Tinos complex, the Bachkovo Monastery preserves a holy icon to which today's Christian visitors perform pilgrimage and make pious entreaties, including for increased good health.

69 For further information about the site, see Kissyov, *Bachkovo Monastery*.

70 For a general discussion of the *Arma Christi*, see Cooper and Denny-Brown, *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture*.

FIGURE 18.24
Icon bottle showing the Virgin Mary and Christ Child with Saint Eleutherios, Monastery of the Virgin Evangelistria, Tenos, Greece, 19th or 20th century. Bottle acquired in Istanbul by the author in summer 2017

As for Istanbul's *ayazma*s, today they are visited by thousands of Christians and Muslims on their respective feast days, as is the case for 2 July celebrations at the Ayvansaray holy spring.[71] Moreover, the keeper of the church at St. George Monastery in Büyükada is a Muslim woman, who informs visitors

71 Değer, *Istanbul'un şifalı suları*, 130–32; and idem, "Holy Springs," 143–44. Shared Christian and Muslim pilgrimage and water rituals also take place in Lebanon; see Farra-Haddad, "Shared Rituals through *ziyarat* in Lebanon", especially p. 46 on water rituals.

FIGURE 18.25 Icon bottle depicting the Passion of Christ, made in Hungary, nineteenth or twentieth century. Bachkovo Monastery Museum, Bulgaria
PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR, SUMMER 2018

that Saint George is equated to Khiḍr, the Muslim saint who is said to have discovered the spring of life.[72] Moving to the Anatolian side of Istanbul, the *ayazma* of Saint Catherine in Moda also hosts Muslim pilgrims, including one woman who is recorded as having visited the site in order to break a spell cast upon her.[73] Moving up the Bosphorus, visitors to the St. Demetrios shrine walk through an underground passage to its sacred spring, which is believed to be effective in helping children overcome speech disorders. This passage includes a ceiling and walls from which water drips down. As they proceed forward, visitors of all stripes take the liberty to inscribe graffiti along the walls, some of which issue the following requests: "I wish my in-laws did not interfere with my life," "I wish to lose weight without losing my health," "I wish to get married soon," and "I wish to become a house owner."[74] Last but not least, during two summer 2017 visits to the *ayazma* of the "First of the Month" (*Ayın Biri*) Church in Unkapanı, I myself witnessed Christian and Muslim women symbolically opening Christian icons with small metal keys prior to collecting the spring's holy water in purpose-made plastic bottles. A Muslim visitor's unlocking of a Christian icon's power and her collecting of this Christian spring's sacred water prove especially noteworthy when one considers both the origins and functions of late Ottoman *hilye* bottles.

As a result, the Christian belief in the therapeutic power of holy spring and icon water appears to have carried over into Ottoman Muslim beliefs and practices, which, to a certain extent, still remain visible in Istanbul's *ayazma*s of today. The cult of water in the city (and across the region) goes back centuries; however, during the nineteenth century, encounters between Christians and Muslims, including at their shared sacred springs, must have prompted an increased exchange in symbolic objects as well, especially after the eighteenth century. Among them can be counted Christian icon-bottles, which may have catalysed *hilye* bottles – the latter transforming a figural icon of Christ into a verbal depiction of Muḥammad. Whether catering to the Christian or Muslim faith, these types of curative icon-bottles are nevertheless united in their indebtedness to age-old hydrotherapeutic traditions, to which they creatively added new twists.

72 Değer, *Istanbul'un şifalı suları*, 133.
73 Değer, "Holy Springs", 138.
74 Değer, "Holy Springs", 132.

4 A New Prophetic Spring

Based on a close analysis of these newly discovered *hilye* bottles, related Ottoman icons and paintings, vessels for Zamzam water, and Constantinopolitan holy spring culture and objects, it appears likely that Islamic icon-bottles essentially provided a new type of Prophetic pharmacon in Ottoman quarters, including royal ones, during the late nineteenth century in particular. At this time, the Prophet's verbal icon transformed from an amuletic object of visual meditation to an encased relic, whose golden by-product was most likely mixed into medicinal paste or Zamzam water destined to be ingested and therefore alloyed with the body of the faithful. Like the famous Meccan well, the Prophet therefore could symbolically function as a spring, or *ʿayn*, of belief and cure.

While other *hilye* bottles remain to be studied in greater detail, it nevertheless seems that these objects were quite rare and linked to an Ottoman palace milieu. If two of them were indeed used for the production of gold powder, this powder may have been blended into the "red paste," which an archival document of the late eighteenth century notes as exclusively reserved for the sultan. In such a case, these objects should be considered royal products, and their use and inspiration may have been connected to the seaside "Pearl Pavilion" spring that was located on palace grounds.

In the end, *hilye* bottles facilitated a number of pious engagements with a "Bottled Prophet" of sorts. Such engagements involved multiple senses, especially sight, touch, and taste as well as various "rituals of incorporation,"[75] which may have included feast-specific prayers and libations. Late Ottoman multisensorial practices that involved the consumption of Prophetic *baraka* thus heralded a new turn in Muḥammad-centred devotional products as these intersected with medicinal practices in elite spheres. Like other healing tonics, these products essentially provided a new kind of Prophetic antidote, promising a cure for illness and a long life. They also reasserted Muḥammad's supreme standing as a wellspring of belief and the ultimate healing agent ready to be primed, gathered, absorbed, and thus fully embodied by his pious followers.

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75 Flood, "Bodies and Becoming", 482.

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19

Visualising the Prophet – Rhetorical and Graphic Aspects of Three Ottoman-Turkish Poems

Süleymān Çelebi's Vesīlet en-Necāt, *Yazıcıoğlı's* Risāle-i Muḥammedīye, *and Ḫāḳānī's* Ḥilye

Tobias Heinzelmann

Narrative and panegyric poems about the Prophet Muḥammad were among the most widely read texts in the Ottoman Empire. They made the Prophet accessible to a broad readership; they were recited during rites; and the acts of copying them with one's own hand, reading them, and presenting them as endowments promised reward on the day of judgement. There also was a strong visual aspect to the production and usage of these manuscripts: the beauty of the Prophet, the beauty of the (spoken) word, and the beauty of the handwriting were interrelated. Much can therefore be learned about the image of the Prophet Muḥammad in Ottoman society, and specifically in Ottoman book culture, by analysing this interrelation.

In my study I focus on three poems, which are preserved in large numbers in manuscript collections all over the world, and which were published in several printed editions – Süleymān Çelebi's *Vesīlet en-Necāt* (812/1409), Yazıcıoğlı Muḥammed's *Muḥammedīye* (853/1449), and Ḫāḳānī's *Ḥilye* (1007/1598–9). These have several features in common: their topic (the biography and/or the physiognomy of Muḥammad); their form (poetry); the fact that the texts are transmitted with the signature of their author; and a precise date. However, the authors employed very different strategies to visualise the Prophet, and so did the copyists, calligraphers, and illustrators.

The three texts are analysed successively. Each section begins with a short survey of the intention of the authors as described in prefaces or colophons, and, if relevant, later biographical and hagiographical texts. Then the structure of the texts and narrative, along with their poetical and rhetorical characteristics, will be described, and, in a concluding step, the interrelation with graphic aspects of selected manuscripts and printed copies is explored.

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1 Süleymān Çelebi's *Vesīlet en-Necāt*

Süleymān Çelebi presents his *Vesīlet en-Necāt* (Means to Salvation), which is commonly known as *Mevlid* (The Prophet's Birthday), to his readers with a standard set of information about himself – his name (Süleymān), the date (812/1409), and the location (Bursa) where he finished the text. His remarks about his motivation and intention are also quite commonplace – according to the introduction he wanted to transmit knowledge about the Prophet Muḥammad, to seek God's reward, and to request intercession from his readers on his behalf.[1]

Already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the authors of biographical encyclopaedias had some difficulties identifying Süleymān Çelebi.[2] They agreed to locate him in proximity to the Sultan's palace. Laṭīfī's *Teẕkiret eş-Şuʿarā* (953/1546) asserts that he was the son of ʿIvaż Paşa, a grand vizier of Murād II (reg 824–855/1421–1451). According to Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī's *Künh el-Aḫbār* (ca. 1008/1600) he himself was member of the council of Sultan Bāyezīd I and, after the Sultan's death, imam of the Great Mosque in Bursa.[3] It is also in Laṭīfī's *Teẕkiret eş-Şuʿarā* where we find a detailed narrative about the occasion which led the author to write his poem: It was a conflict over the hierarchy of prophets and of Muḥammad's distinguished and outstanding position among them.[4] According to the narrative, a preacher in Bursa had claimed that all prophets were equal before God and referred to Q 2:285. Therefore, Süleymān Çelebi decided to write a poem about the outstanding rank of Muḥammad.

Süleymān Çelebi's text has a special focus on the creation and birth of Muḥammad – but is not restricted to these themes, as the commonly known title *Mevlid* might suggest. It contains narrative and panegyric passages and is written in a plain Old-Ottoman-Turkish language. The poetic form of Süleymān Çelebi's *Vesīlet en-Necāt* is the *meşnevī*. The transmitted text is characterised by a high degree of variance: there exist versions of 150–200 verses and others of 1200–1300 verses.[5] In 1306/1888 a certain Rıżā Efendi published a collated edition, which is the first claiming to reconstruct the "original version". This

1 Ateş, *Süleymān Çelebi*, 95 and 143–7.

2 Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 49ff.

3 Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī, *Künh el-Ahbar*, 5, 115–6.

4 Laṭīfī, *Teẕkiret eş-Şuʿarā*, 133ff.

5 Ateş, *Süleyman Çelebi*, 61. Pekolcay also compiled her edition as her PhD-thesis in the 1950s. However, it was first published only in 1980. Pekolcay's edition again focusses on a reconstruction of the "original text", but does not give an adequate impression of its variance.

edition was reprinted several times.[6] But it is only the edition of Ahmed Ateş in 1954 that succeeds in giving an impression of the broad variance of the text.

The chapter about Muḥammad's birth begins with an easily intelligible narrative:[7]

> Āmine ḫatun Muḥammed annesi
> Ol sedefden ṭoğdı ol bir dānesi
> Hem Muḥammed gelmesi oldı yaḳīn
> Çoḳ ʿalāmetler bilürdi gelmedin
> Çünki ʿAbdullāhdan oldı ḥāmile
> Vakt ėrişdi hafta ve eyyāmile
> Ol-gėcesi kim ṭoġdı ol ḫayrü l-beşer
> Annesi anda neler gördi neler
> On ikincisi Rebīʿü l-Evvelüñ
> Ol düşenbe gėcesi idi bilüñ

In the translation of Elias John Wilkinson Gibb this reads as follows:[8]

> Lady Ámine, Muhammed's mother she,
> (From this Shell it was yon Pearl did come to be.)
> When Muhammed's time to come was near at hand,
> Ere he came were many signs seen through the land.
> Now by ʿAbd-ulláh his sire had she conceived,
> And the passing weeks and days the term achieved.
> In the night wheron was born that Best of Men[9]
> Many a marvel passed before his mother's ken.
> On the twelfth 'twas of the First Rebí' it fell,
> On a Monday night it tided, wot ye well!

Süleymān Çelebi's text does not particularly emphasise the physiognomy of the Prophet. References are, however, detectable in a few isolated cases. In the chapter about the miracles Süleymān Çelebi explains that Muḥammad

6 Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 127–8. According to Özege, *Eski Harflerle*, 2:1131–2, Süleymān Çelebi's *Vesīlet en-Necāt* was printed 26 times. Rıżā Efendi's edition is dated 18 Muḥarrem 1306.

7 The transcription follows the Turkish text in Gibb's *Ottoman Poetry*, 6:22; cf. Rıżā Efendi's edition, 1306, 7, Ateş, *Süleymān Çelebi*, 103–4, and Pekolcay, *Mevlid*, 76.

8 Gibb, *Ottoman Poetry*, 1, 243.

9 Footnote by Gibb, *Ottoman Poetry*, 1, 243: "Khayr-ul-Besher or Khayr-ul-Enám, i.e. 'Best of Mankind' is a frequent title of Muhammed."

did not cast a shadow, since his body was made of pure light. In Süleymān Çelebi's *Vesīlet en-Necāt* this statement is important for his argument for why Muḥammad differs from the other prophets:[10]

Muʿcizātın diñleñüz şevk ile ḫōş
Gerçi cümle nūr idi ol pāk-i ẕāt
Ḥaḳ anı ayruḳ nebīye vėrmedi
Evvelā ol kim mübārek cisminüñ
Nūr idi başdan ayaġa göğdesi

Tā ki ʿaḳl-ü cān ḳıla cūş-u ḫurūş
İllā her ʿużvında vardı muʿcizāt
Hīç biri ol ėrdügine ėrmedi
Gölgesi düşmezdi yėre resminüñ
Bu ʿayāndur nūruñ olmaz gölgesi

Translation:

Listen with pure desire about his miracles
His pure existence was all of light
Which God didn't give the other prophets
First of all, his blessed body
His body was of light from top to toe

So that your mind and soul will burn and flame
In all his limbs a miracle could be found
Which none of them had archived like him
Didn't cast a shadow on the ground
It's obvious, light has no shadow

2 The Rhetoric of the Word and the Graphic Aspects of the Manuscript

The layout and graphic characteristics of manuscripts and printed issues of Süleymān Çelebi's *Vesīlet en-necāt* seem quite common at first sight. They follow classic, basic strategies to communicate the poetic form and rhetorical devices of the text. Copyists and printers neither illustrated it nor developed sophisticated calligraphic forms for it. The *Vesīlet en-necāt* therefore contrasts with the manuscripts and prints of the two following texts – Yazıcıoğlı's *Muḥammedīye* and Ḫāḳānī's *Ḥilye*. However, a closer look can help to decode the graphic strategies.

10 Ateş, *Süleyman Çelebi*, 113; Pekolcay, *Mevlid*, 100f.

One of the general characteristics of the layout in Ottoman manuscripts and prints is that poems are organised in two "pseudo-columns" for the two semi-verses (*miṣrāʿ*). In contrast to usual columns (true columns) the two semi-verses are read line for line across the columns.[11] There are rare cases where this classic layout is changed to "true columns", with the semi-verses arranged one below the other, or a three-column scheme, where every second verse is divided by a line break, because one line contains three semi-verses.[12] Two such cases are documented for Yazıcıoğlı's *Muḥammedīye* and Ḫāḳānī's *Ḥilye*, but not for Süleymān Çelebi's *Vesīlet en-necāt*. This, however – considering the rarity – does not mean that such *Vesīlet*-manuscripts do not exist. But it is still one more indication of a rather frugal layout and illumination for this text. In both cases – "true columns" and a three-column scheme – the poetic form is disguised by the layout, for which a reason is not easily found. Maybe the copyist or editor wanted to attract the readers' attention and encourage him to engage via language and poetic form with the content of the text.[13]

Two aspects of the reproductions of Süleymān Çelebi's *Vesīlet en-necāt* demonstrate the desire for an authentic text transmission, as well as the copyist's respect for author and text, namely the vowel signs and the aesthetic of the handwritten text. Manuscripts and prints of Süleymān Çelebi's poem are fully vocalised, which should be seen far more as a graphic marker than as an aid to decipher and understand it. Even if the vowel signs still had an important function in Old-Ottoman-Turkish orthography, due to a frequent defective writing of vowels, these were no longer necessary after the transition from a phonological to a morphological orthography of the suffixes, and there remained no option for a reasonable vocalisation of a text written in New-Ottoman-Turkish orthography.[14] The fully vocalised text was – consciously or not – chosen as a marker, which reminded the readers of the most familiar model, the Qurʾān,

11 Daub, *Formen und Funktionen*, 49, Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts*, 146f. and 177ff., Deroche, *Islamic Codicology*, 173.

12 Daub, *Formen*, 103 and 113. Cf. *Ḥilye-i Ḫāḳānī*, printing shop of Maḥmud Beg, Istanbul 1307/1309/1891, 50 pages. In the same year an official printing shop (Maṭbaʿa-yi ʿĀmire?) edited the *Ḥilye-i Ḫāḳānī* with traditional layout (44 pages). For a *Muḥammedīye*-manuscript in three columns cf. Millet Kütüphanesi, Istanbul, Ali Emiri Manzum 876/1, copied by Muḥammed el-Ḥalīm b. Yaḥyā el-Üsküdārī, 1125/1713.

13 Cf. in this context the *ḫātime* in Maḥmud Beg's edition of the *Ḥilye-i Ḫāḳānī* from 1307/1309/1891, in which the readers are encouraged by the editor to recite the text aloud like the *evrād* – i.e. verses from the Qurʾān used for daily prayer and devotions.

14 Cf. Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 111f.

in which – in contrast to Ottoman-Turkish writings – the vowel signs are an essential aid to read and understand the text.

Most prints of Süleymān Çelebi's poem used lithography, which enabled the reproduction of a handwritten manuscript and facilitated the addition of vowel signs. However, it is significant that even prints with movable type were fully vocalised – and in this case, that made the printing process more complicated. But we also have evidence that it was not only technical or economic considerations which made lithography – and in the twentieth century also facsimile prints – the preferred printing technique. The notion of proper respect for the author, for the text, and thereby the religious content, viz. the Prophet Muḥammad, was also an important factor.[15] Also relevant is the blessing conferred by the process of copying with one's own hand. That concerns not only calligraphic copies in a narrow sense (i.e. copies in the classical ductus *nesiḫ*, *ṣülüṣ*, or *taʿlīḳ*), but handwritten copies in general.

Regarding the reproduction of handwritten copies, three printed editions of Süleymān Çelebi's *Vesīlet en-necāt* from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are revealing. Ahmed Ateş edited the text in 1954 in Latin characters, but he included a black and white facsimile of his codex optimus, SK Fatih 5430/1, which dates from 967/1560. In this reproduction the margins outside the frame are cut off, which shows that the focus lies more on the philological aspects of the text than on its graphic and material appearance. In 1980, Pekolcay's edition – in Latin characters – included also a black and white reproduction in Arabic characters of a contemporary Turkish calligrapher (Turan Sevgili), who "modernised" Ottoman-Turkish orthography. In this edition, the handwritten copy in Arabic characters is rather meant to strengthen the attachment to the religious content of the poem.[16] In 2008, the publishing house of the Directorate of Religious Affairs printed a facsimile of a manuscript of Süleymān Çelebi's *Vesīlet en-necāt*, which was copied by the famous calligrapher Aḥmed Kāmil [Akdik] in 1349/1931 – two years after the introduction of Latin characters in Turkey. The copy was commissioned by Emīre Zibā [Tugay], daughter of field marshal Ḥasan Paşa. The text is based on Rıżā Efendi's edition, and the manuscript has been masterfully written in *nesiḫ* and richly illuminated. While it documents Emīre Zibā's esteem for Aḥmed Kāmil's calligraphic art, the choice of the *Vesīlet en-necāt* is also telling: it is an indication for her respect for this text, its author and the topic – the Prophet Muḥammad. In the reproduction

15 These factors for the choice of printing techniques in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will be studied in an ongoing research project.

16 Pekolcay, *Mevlid*, 177, gives the names of the calligrapher (Turan Sevgili), the calligrapher of the front page (Hüsrev Subaşı), and the illuminator (Sadi Kucur).

FIGURE 19.1 Recent Facsimile Edition of a Mevlid-manuscript, copied by the famous calligrapher Ahmed Kamil Akdik in 1931, *Vesiletü'n-Necat*, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Ankara 2008

of 2008, the process of text transmission receives an additional layer – introductory chapters about author, text, calligrapher, illuminator and purchaser locate Süleymān Çelebi's poem and Aḥmed Kāmil's copy in the context of an Ottoman book culture in the early Turkish Republic.

3 Yazıcıoğlı's *Risāle-i Muḥammedīye*

Yazıcıoğlı Muḥammed, the author of the *Risāle-i Muḥammedīye* (Muḥammadan Treatise), which is commonly known as *Muḥammedīye*, gives very detailed information about himself and his work in his introduction and colophon.[17] He wrote the poem in Gelibolu (Gallipoli) and finished it 853/1449. According to the introduction, he was asked by his contemporaries to write a reliable book on the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad, based on exegesis of the Qur'ān

17 Çelebioğlu, *Muhammediye*, 2,7 and 2, 598–606, VGM 431A, (003) and (322–4). Cf. Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 73ff.

and the prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*). At first, he was hesitant, because he thought that a large number of "mevlid books" (*mevlid kitābı*) already existed. But eventually, he received the mission directly from the Prophet himself in a dream. Yazıcıoghlı emphasises that his poem is a translation of his own work *Maghārib al-zamān* (Descendants of time) – a treatise which he had written in Arabic prose. In his preface he also names some of his teachers, among them the Sufi shaykh Hacı Bayram Velī, who was also his guide (*mürşid*), and the *ḥadīth* scholar ʿAlī b. ʿAbdullāh b. Aḥmed Zeyn el-ʿArab.[18] He thus points to his Sufi lineage and places himself in a scholarly context as well.

All this information helps to locate his work among Turkish texts on the biography of the Prophet: 1. His reservation vis-à-vis the *Mevlid*-texts, and his esteem for Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*, 2. The reference to the Arabic version, a larger part of which indeed consists of *ḥadīth* texts, and 3. The claim that he was commissioned by the Prophet himself, even if the vision of Muḥammad in a dream is a well-known topos.[19]

Yazıcıoğlı Muḥammed is already mentioned in the earliest biographical encyclopaedias, such as the appendix of Lāmiʿī's translation of Jāmī's *Nafaḥāt al-Uns* (927/1521) or Ṭaşköprizāde's *Shaḳā'iḳ al-Nuʿmāniyya* (965/1558).[20] Both refer to his famous work *Muḥammedīye* and his miracles as a Sufi saint. Taşköprizāde additionally underlines the reliability of his citations of *ḥadīth* texts.[21] Both statements confirm the points already brought up by the author himself. Yazıcıoghlı's *Muḥammedīyye* combines different poetic forms, such as the *meṣnevī* and the *ḳaṣīde*. The text is structured in two parts: 1. Creation, the history of the prophets, the biography of Muḥammad (verses 1–4756); and 2. Eschatology, the day of judgement, paradise and hell (verses 4757–9008).[22] It combines narrative and panegyric texts. In the narrative passages the language is a plainly understandable Old-Ottoman-Turkish, typical for fifteenth-century literature. Striking, however, is the vocabulary, which includes rare terms that refer to the wording of the *ḥadīth* and makes the source of the respective passage recognisable to experts. The author was aware of the fact that these terms were not understandable for a broader audience, and already in the author's

18 Çelebioğlu, *Muhammediye*, 1, 18–9, Çelebioğlu, *Muhammediye*, 2, 603, Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 74.

19 Sirriyeh, *Dreams*, 2015, 140–57, in particular 146: "Despite the great importance attached to seeing the Prophet in dreams and waking visionary encounters, the phenomenon appears to have been relatively rare in the late medieval period." But the topos as such was still well-known and attested, e.g. in the works of Ibn ʿArabī.

20 Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 77, Lāmiʿī, *Fütūḥ*, 710, Taşköprizāde, *al-Shaḳā'iḳ*, 110f.

21 Taşköprizāde, *al-Shaḳā'iḳ*, 110f.

22 The enumeration of the verses follows Çelebioğlu, *Muhammediye*, 1, 95.

manuscript glosses by the author's hand provide linguistic explanations.[23] For example the beginning of the chapter on the night journey (*miʿrāj*) of the Prophet reads as follows:[24]

> Ḫaber vėrdi resūlü ʻllāh ki yatmışdum Ḫaremde ben
> Ḥaṭīmde ıżṭıcāʿ ėdüb ėrişdürdi naẓar Allāh
> İşāda ėrdi Cibrāʾīl selām ėrgürdi Allāhdan
> Seni Allāh oḳur dėdi buyurmışdur sefer Allāh
> Ṭutub pes ṣadrumı yardı ki tā göbegüme ėrdi
> Çıḳardı yüregüm derḥāl daḫı diñle ne-dėr ol şāh
>
> The messenger of God told us, "I slept in the Ḫaram,
> and when I was lying at the Ḥaṭīm, God looked at me.
> That evening Gabriel brought greetings from God.
> 'God calls you', he said, 'God orders you to travel.'
> He seized my chest, and tore it apart down to the belly,
> and pulled out my heart." Listen, what the king [Muḥammad] said.

In these three verses, two terms might have been difficult to understand to the reader – *Ḥaṭīm* and *ıżṭıcāʿ*. In the author's manuscript *Ḥaṭīm* is explained as "the upper side of the Kaʿba" (*Kaʿbenüñ uluğı ṭarafı*), and *ıżṭıcāʿ* as "lying on one's back" (*arḳası üstine yatmaḳ*). Ḥatīm is indeed the proper name of a place near the Kaʿba; experts might have recognised *ıżṭıcāʿ* (verbal noun from the Arabic verb *iḍṭajaʿa*) as a reference to a particular *ḥadīth*:[25]

> According to Ḳatāda, according to Anas b. Mālik, according to Mālik b. Ṣaʿṣaʿa, may God be pleased with them: "The Prophet, god bless him and grant him salvation, told them about the night, 'in which he was made to travel by night' [Q 17,1]: 'I slept lying (*muḍṭajiʿan*) at the Ḥaṭīm' maybe he said 'at the [black] stone', 'when somebody came to me and split me open from here to here' which is from the throat to the pubic hair 'and pulled out my heart'."

23 Cf. Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 185–92, for a detailed discussion of the vocabulary in the margins of the author's copy and later manuscripts and prints.

24 Çelebioğlu, *Muhammediye*, 2, 133, VGM 431A, (090), Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 166.

25 For the Arabic version of the *ḥadīth* in Yazıcıoğlı's *Maghārib al-Zamān*, cf. e.g. manuscripts Süleymaniye Library, Nuruosmaniye 2593, 218a, or Konya Yazma Eserler Kütüphanesi, Akseki 132, 464. This scene is the beginning of a narrative describing the purification of Muḥammad's heart.

In contrast to the narrative passages, which are written in a plain and easily understandable Turkish, the panegyric verses in Yazıcıoğlı's poem are very elaborate. One of the most famous texts is a *ḳaṣīde* in praise of the Prophet.[26] It is *müstezād*, which is a special poetic form where each of the two semi-verses includes an appendix (*ziyāde*). The text in question is even more densely structured, since each semi-verse is once more divided by an internal rhyme. Subsequently every verse consists of six sections. The first three verses read as follows:

Cihānuñ cānı ve cānuñ	Muḥammeddür çü cānānı
	ki ḳāṭı'dur maḳālātı
Ol ola çünki cānānı	nice sevmeye cān anı
	ki sāṭi'dur delālātı
Odur cānān yaradan cān	ėdindi çün anı cānān
	ki maḥbūb ėtdi ẕātına
Sever anı ḳamu cānān	odur bu cānlaruñ cānı
	ki cāmi'dür kemālātı
Odur bu cānlaruñ cānı	odur serverlerüñ ḫānı
	çün ol sulṭān-ı kevneyndür
Odur gevherlerüñ kānı	o bildi buldı sulṭānı
	ki ṣādıḳdur risālātı

The soul of this world and the beloved of the Living Soul is Muḥammad. / What he says is definite.
He is indeed the beloved, why should the Living Soul not love him? / The evidence is obvious.
It is the Living Soul, Who created the beloved and adopted him as His beloved. / He made him His beloved.
All souls [all beloveds] love him. He is the living soul of the souls. / Whose perfections are encompassing.
He is the living soul of all living souls, he is the sovereign of all princes. / Because he is the sultan of both worlds.
He is the mine of all gems. He found and knows the sultan. / His message is true.

The *ḳaṣīde* plays on Sufi terminology – Muḥammad is characterised as the "living soul of the world" (*cihānuñ cānı*) and the "beloved of the Living Soul (i.e.

26 Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 95, cf. the short hagiography, which is part of all lithographic *Muḥammedīye* prints since 1262/1846 for a reference to this *ḳaṣīde* as one of Yazıcıoğlı's most famous texts.

God)" (*cānuñ cānānı*). Additionally, the poem focusses on the trustworthiness and definitiveness of Muḥammad's words.

3.1 *The Interrelation of Narrative, Rhetorical, and Graphic Aspects in Yazıcıoğlı's Muḥammedīye*

Compared with the other two poems, Yazıcıoğlı's *Muḥammedīye* stands out due to the rich variety of graphic elements, which visualise narrative and rhetorical aspects of the text. Three main types are to be distinguished: the first follows the author's copy, which was venerated as a saint's relict, fairly closely. The second type is limited to a short period of approximately one century and is characterised by specific methods to visualise the rhetoric of the text. The third type is preserved in only two illustrated manuscripts, which both date from the first half of the nineteenth century. These latter illustrations, however, had a remarkable influence on the *Muḥammedīye* prints in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

3.2 *The Author's Manuscript and Its Influence on the Format of Later Copies*

The author's manuscript of Yazıcıoğlı's *Muḥammedīye* was preserved at his tomb in Gelibolu (Gallipoli) until the Second World War. In 1942, it was transferred to the archive of the Directorate General of Pious Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*) in Ankara.[27] The location of this copy at the saint's tomb in Gelibolu and evidence for its veneration by pilgrims have been documented in historiographic and hagiographic texts since the sixteenth century.[28] The manuscript is a draft with numerous additions and emendations in the author's hand. One double page shows scorch marks, which were interpreted as traces of the saint's miracle. A deep-drawn sigh, which he gave out of his enormous love for God, had set the page on fire. The manuscript also contains a sketch of the "banner of praise" (*livā el-ḥamd*), which Muḥammad will carry ahead of the believers when entering paradise on the day of judgement, and a calligraphy of the three lines which are written on the banner – the formulas of invocation (*besmele*), praise (*ḥamdele*), and creed (*şehādet*). The page with the banner bears traces of touching or kissing; it was obviously an object of an increased degree of veneration – probably because of its visualisation of the prophet's role on the day of judgement.

The banner of praise was seen as part of the (author's) text by most copyists and hence included in their manuscripts. In a smaller number of cases some space was left blank to complete the page later, or only the three lines were written in the *sülüş*-like calligraphy of the author's copy. The famous scholar

27 Çelebioğlu, *Muhammediye*, 1, 41, Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 322.

28 Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 322–33.

FIGURE 19.2 Yazıcıoğlı, *Risāle-i Muḥmmedīye*, author's copy, Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü, Ankara, MS. 431/A, fol. 221, banner of the Prophet on the right margin

and Sufi shaykh Bursalı İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı, who had copied Yazıcıoğlı's manuscript during his stay in Gelibolu 1121/1709, even wrote a marginal note next to his own sketch, in which he explicitly pointed out that it corresponded to the original.[29]

Even if the sketch of the banner is included in most manuscripts, its overall shape varies considerably: some images remain close to the original, some are more elaborate, some are more naturalistic, and some adopt a totally different form. In a copy from 1057/1648, the banner of praise is depicted in the shape of a tulip, which again bears clear traces of touching and kissing.[30] The manuscript is therefore a telling example showing that the "banner of praise" was an object of veneration not only in the author's manuscript but also in some later copies. Sitting or standing in front of these images, the readers, viewers, and devotees came into contact and touched a copy of the Sufi shaykh's sketch, which released a blessing on its own. At the same time, the sketch of the banner – and object of veneration – is a visualisation of Muḥammad and his intercessory role on the day of judgement.

29 Bursalı İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı documented narratives about the manuscript in several marginal notes in his copy. These were orally transmitted at the tomb, cf. Heinzelmann, "Anfänge", and Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 322–25.

30 Cf. Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 323, concerning Bursalı İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı's marginal notes about pilgrims touching or kissing the author's manuscript.

FIGURE 19.3 Bursalı İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı's copy of Yazıcıoğlı, *Risāle-i Muḥmmedīye*, İnebey Kütüphanesi, Bursa, Genel 58 (1121/1709), 133a; copy of the banner of the Prophet on the left margin with reference to the original

FIGURE 19.4 *Risāle-i Muḥammedīye*, Banner of the Prophet, Ankara, Milli Kütüphane, Ankara, B 960 (1057/1648), 152b

3.3 *The Faḳīh Tradition*

A corpus of *Muḥammedīye*-manuscripts from the sixteenth century was – according to the colophons – produced in a *faḳīh* context; a person in the patronym of the copyist bears the title *faḳīh* (scholar of Islamic law", or in Ottoman-Turkish in a broader sense "religious expert). I therefore call them "the *faḳīh* manuscripts". These are characterised by a distinctive graphic layout: the text is structured by calligraphic figures, which visualise the poetics and rhetoric of Yazıcıoğlı's poem – e.g. rhyme, assonance, and iteration. Iterations at the beginning of subsequent verses or rhymes are in most cases written only once and the rest of each of the dependent semi-verses branches out from this single word or phrase. The verses thus assume the shape of a fan (see Figure 19.5 below). Additionally, iterations – e.g. the pronoun "He" for God – are written in red or in different colours, which helps to structure the text during recitation, especially in passages particularly dense with poetic figures. The manuscripts are not copied in one of the classic ductuses of Arabic calligraphy, but still in an attractive, fluent hand typical of the sixteenth century.

One of these manuscripts is preserved in the library of the private chamber of the Sultan (*ḫāṣṣ odası*) at the Topkapı-Palace in Istanbul (TSMK HS 93). It

FIGURE 19.5 *Risāle-i Muḥammedīye*, Fan-shaped arrangement of verses, Istanbul, TSMK HS 93, 241b–242a

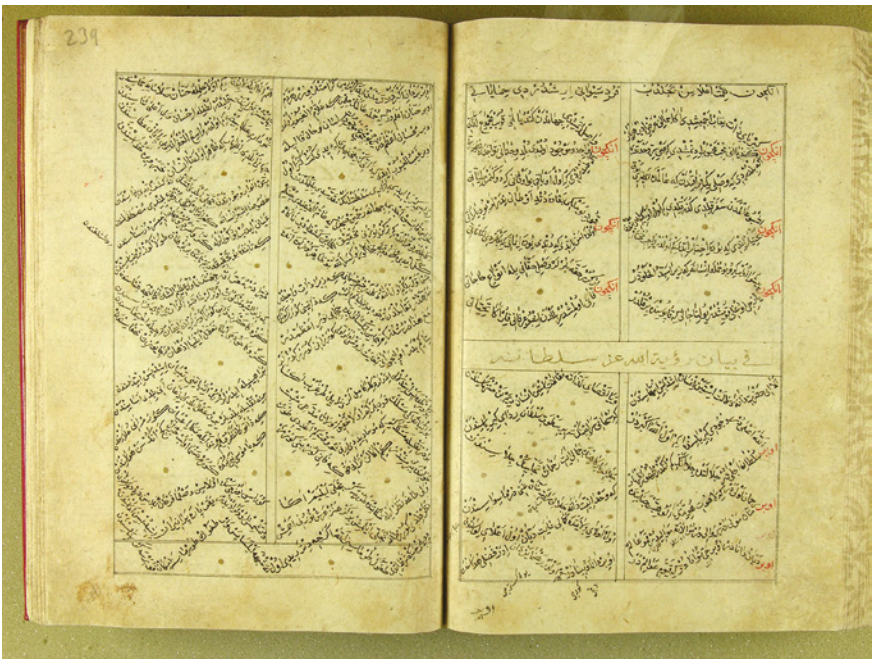

FIGURE 19.6 *Risāle-i Muḥammedīye*, oval, eye-shaped calligraphic arrangement of verses, with a dot in the middle of each oval visualizing the Prophet's vision of God, Istanbul, TSMK HS 93 (908/1502), 238b–239a

was copied 908/1502 by a certain Ḥacı Yaʿḳūb b. Muṣṭafā Faḳīh. Apart from the title *faḳīh* in the copyist's patronym, we have no information about the social context or location. Later, the manuscript was donated as an endowment to the private chamber by a certain Sarıḳçı ʿAlī Ağa, key bearer of the Sultan, who was by his rank one of the privileged few to be allowed to enter this part of the palace.[31]

The manuscript TSMK HS 93 shows the characteristic aspects of the *faḳīh* tradition – the fan-calligraphy visualising rhetorical figures. Though most of the manuscripts which originate from a *faḳīh* context feature elaborate illumination, the copy, which later ended up in the Sultan's palace, is extraordinary in terms of the materials used (the headings and illuminations in gold and various colours). Additionally, it is the most impressive example among the *faḳīh* manuscripts for the interrelation of theme, rhetoric and graphic. All the *faḳīh* manuscripts use an oval, eye-shaped calligraphy of two subsequent semi-verses, with a dot in the middle of the oval, to visualise Muḥammad's vision

31 TSMK HS 93 (908/1502), 273b.

of God (*rü'yet Allāh*). They also use a netted, interwoven shape of the semi-verses to visualise the *müstezād* pattern of the panegyric *ḳaṣīde*. Special about TSMK HS 93, however, is the combination of both. Besides the first narrative of Muḥammad's vision of God in the chapter on the night journey, Yazıcıoğlı brings the topic up a second time in the eschatological part of his poem, following and complementing the panegyric *ḳaṣīde*. In TSMK HS 93, a double page is filled with the netted interwoven structure of the *ḳaṣīde*, which also picks up the eye-shaped arrangement of the semi-verses.[32] On this double page the calligrapher not only visualises the rhetoric of the poem, but also connects and emphasises the author's praise of the magnitude and beauty of Muḥammad.

3.4 *The Illustrated Versions of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*

In March 1822 a certain Naṣūḥ b. Ṣāliḥ finished a copy of Yazıcıoğlı's *Muḥammedīye*, which is outstanding due to its illustrations (DKM, Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22). The manuscript contains fifty schematic miniatures, which depict the narrative of Muḥammad's biography as well as the eschatological chapters in Yazıcıoğlı's work. It is the first manuscript copy of a graphic tradition, which had a significant influence on the printed editions of Yazıcıoğlı's work. But it is probably already a copy of an earlier version.[33] The colophon has neither a localisation nor any information about the social background of the copyist. The manuscript is part of the collection of Aḥmad Ṭalʿat (d. 1347/1927) – a member of the Turkophone elite in Egypt – which is now preserved in the Egyptian National Library.[34]

Some of the illustrations are based on earlier patterns – e.g., the sketch of the "banner of praise", which is part of the author's text, or sketches of the Prophet's relics or topographic diagrams in the chapters about the biography of the Prophet, which are most probably adapted from the manuscripts of other texts.[35] The larger part, however, is to my knowledge unprecedented, as it uses small circles representing the Prophet Muḥammad and his contemporaries. These circles are situated in schematic sketches of buildings and places. The

32 TSMK HS 93 (908/1502), 238b–239a.

33 DKM Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22 includes a few short citations from Bursalı İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı's commentary *Feraḥ er-Rūḥ*. It is also in the printed edition of İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı's commentary, not in the printed edition Yazıcıoğlı's original, where we find the earliest published version of the illustrations. This might give us some – still rather vague – evidence that the illustrations are originally from İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı's commentary.

34 Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 29, Sayyid, *Dār al-kutub*, 60, Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlam*, 1:137.

35 On miniatures of the Prophet's relics or the topography of Mecca and Medina in devotional texts and prayer manuals, cf. Witkam, *Vromheed*, passim, Witkam, "The Battle", passim, Gruber, "A Pious Cure-All", passim, Maury, "Ottoman Representations", passim.

circles may recall of name tags in diagrams visualising the lineage of ancestors (*silsile*), but they are something new as part of illustrating a narrative. In the same manuscript we have schematic illustrations of paradise and hell in the eschatological chapters of the book.

A closer look at four of the illustrations reveals the different strategies to visualise the dynamic of the narrative. The first two pictures depict Muḥammad's birth by a schematic sketch of a domed building, which contains two circles labelled *Āmine* (the name of Muḥammad's mother) and *resūl ʿaleyhi s-selām* (the Prophet, peace be upon him). On the following page, a topographic sketch of the Kaʿba illustrates the verse that describes that Muḥammad prostrated himself in front of his Lord (*çünki ṭoġdı anasından secde ḳıldı rabbine*), when he left his mother's body.[36]

The sketch of the Kaʿba is one of those based on earlier patterns, which can be found in manuscripts of other texts or on tiles, too.[37] The two sketches are part of a single narrative element, i.e. Muḥammad's reorientation at his birth from his mother to God – in the Turkish verse apparent due to the two cases,

FIGURE 19.7 *Risāle-i Muḥammedīye*, Birth of the Prophet, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya (DKM), Cairo, Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22, 48a

36 DKM *Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat* 22, 48a–b.

37 DKM Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22 and SK İzmir 601. Cf. Maury, "Ottoman Representations", passim.

FIGURE 19.8 *Risāle-i Muḥammedīye*, Prostration of the new-born Prophet at the Kaʿba, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya (DKM), Cairo, Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22, 48b

ablative "from his mother" (*anasından*) and dative "to his God" (*rabbine*). In the printed versions the two pictures are arranged in one line, side by side. In the print from 1300/1882–3 – and in later prints – the picture(s) are added captions, which read "Āmine", "Picture of the Kaʿba", and in the middle between the two the inscription "The Prophet". It is striking, however, that the house, where Āmine gave birth, turned into her tomb – showing a sarcophagus inside. Muḥammad remains in this version present only in the caption, and the perspective is now that of contemporary believers looking at two locations for their pilgrimage.[38]

Equally remarkable is the illustration in the chapter on the Prophet's night journey, which depicts the moment of Muḥammad's vision of God. Within a rectangular frame, three circles are arranged in a triangle; in the lower two corners two silver circles are labelled as "Gabriel" and "Messenger of God", respectively.[39] In the middle of the upper side of the rectangle, two thin concentric golden circles remain unlabelled, obviously representing God. The text of the salutation formulas links the three circles and can be read as an illustration of the dialogue.

38 *Muḥammediyye*, print 1300, 76.

39 DKM Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22, 66b.

FIGURE 19.9 *Risāle-i Muḥammedīye* – The Prophet's encounter with God during the *mi'rāj*, DKM, Cairo, Ma'ārif 'Āmma Turkī Ṭal'at 22, 66b

In the chapter about the migration to Medīna (*Hijra*), the dynamic of the narration is emphasized by a special layout – two circles labelled "Prophet" and "Ebū Bekir" peregrinate across the pages, two thin lines marking their way. For example, the verses about Muḥammad and Abū Bakr hiding from their pursuers is accompanied by a picture of the cave at Mount Thawr as an abstract rectangle.[40] The circles of the two protagonists wander from the right to the left side of the page, change their direction several times and finally pass the rectangle. At the entrance of the rectangle the abstract representation of the spider is located, which by God's miracle hastily built its web to hide the two, and a tree, which grew to hide the entrance. Above the rectangle two circles are labelled "Surāḳa" – one of the pursuers – and "Satan".

The representation of the Prophet and his contemporaries by circles obviously reflects a hesitation to add figural or naturalistic pictures to Yazıcıoğlı's text. Still, they indicate that there existed a desire to visualise the narrative about the Prophet, which had been transmitted for almost four centuries with only one single illustration – the "banner of praise". To my knowledge there is only one other manuscript copy of Yazıcıoğlı's *Muḥammedīye*, which includes

40 DKM Ma'ārif 'Āmma Turkī Ṭal'at 22, 81a–83b.

FIGURE 19.10 *Risāle-i Muḥammediyye* – The Prophet's and Abū Bakr's refuge in the cave during the Hijra, DKM, Cairo, Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22, 82a

the fifty illustrations (SK İzmir 601, 1260/1844).[41] The structure is very similar, but the circles in some of the pictures are situated in a scenery that presents a certain degree of naturalism. Still, the enormous influence on the printed editions is striking. In 1258/1842 the printing shop in Bulāḳ/Cairo published *Feraḥ er-Rūḥ* – Bursalı İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı's commentary on Yazıcıoğlı's *Muḥammedīye* – with the illustrations in question. It was printed with movable letters, but the pictures were integrated as lithographic prints. İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı's commentary was reprinted with the same illustrations in 1294/1877 in Istanbul. In contrast to the manuscript DKM, Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22, the circles in the prints are not labelled, which means that the interpretation of these printed pictures required more imaginative power.

Between 1258/1842 and 1326/1909 more than 29 lithographic prints of Yazıcıoğlı's *Muḥammedīye* were published in Istanbul, and between 1845–1903 more than ten prints with movable types were published in Kazan.[42] These prints all included the illustration of the "banner of praise" and additionally in

41 Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 200ff.

42 The numbers refer to my catalogue from 2015, Heinzelmann, *Populäre*, 451–7. Since then I have seen additional prints at old booksellers.

FIGURE 19.11 *Risāle-i Muḥammedīye* – The Prophet's and Abū Bakr's refuge in the cave during the Hijra, from a print copy, Istanbul 1294/1877, 125

FIGURE 19.12 *Risāle-i Muḥammedīye* – The Prophet's and Abū Bakr's refuge in the cave at mount Thawr during the Hijra, hidden behind a spider's web; printed version, Istanbul 1300/1882–3, 129

a preface a schematic sketch of the different levels of paradise. The latter followed a pattern from manuscripts of Erzurumlu İbrāhīm Ḥaḳḳı's *Maʿrifetnāme* (Book of Gnosis).[43] This synthesis of two graphic patterns – the banner of praise from the *Muḥammedīye*-tradition and the levels of paradise from a different text – was, in contrast to others, obviously successful. These prints, however, were soon outstripped by the richly illustrated version, which adapted the sketches from the edition of İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı's commentary from Būlāḳ. Starting from the tenth edition from 1279/1863 all the lithographic prints of Yazıcıoğlı's *Muḥammedīye* in Istanbul included these illustrations, in which the circles representing the protagonists were again not labelled.

In 1300/1882–3 the first edition with a variant of the illustrations was published in Istanbul. More prominent than in the manuscript SK İzmir 601 are the circles, which represent Muḥammad and his contemporaries, embedded in a

43 On Erzurumlu İbrāhīm Ḥaḳḳı and his *Maʿrifetnāme* cf. Çağrıcı, "İbrâhim Hakkı Erzurumî"; Topaloğlu, "Mârifetnâme". On the diagrams in the *Maʿrifetnāme* cf. Karamustafa, "Cosmological diagrams"; Gruber, "Signs of the hour", 54f.

naturalistic scenery or in buildings foreshortened for perspective. The illustration of the migration to Medīna, in which Muḥammad and Abū Bakr hide in a cave, presents a naturalistic scenery, too. At the entrance of the cave, we can clearly recognise a spider web. In the scene of Muḥammad's night journey, we see a small white circle on a flying carpet above a naturalistic desert landscape.[44] The circles for Gabriel and God are lacking. The artist seems to have expected less imaginative power from his readers; however, the contrast between the schematic symbol of the circle and the naturalistic environment remains apparent.

3.5 *The Manuscripts DKM Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22 and SK İzmir 601 and the Two Prints of İsmāʿīl*

Ḥaḳḳı's commentary also includes five *ḥilye*-illustrations – the *ḥilye* of the Prophet in the chapter on his passing and funeral, and those of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs in their respective chapters. The latter are adaptations of the Prophet's *ḥilye* with a description of their physiognomy in the central circle.

These *ḥilye* diagrams constitute a germane transition to the next section on the *Ḥilye-i Ḥāḳānī*. In the case of the *Muḥammedīye* and its commentary, these *ḥilye* diagrams are more than a straightforward illustration – they are more likely the interpolation of another text, since the diagrams include two *ḥadīth* texts, namely a *ḥadīth* about the meaning of the Prophet's *ḥilye* and the *ḥadīth* describing his physiognomy.[45] The *ḥadīth* on the meaning of the Prophet's *ḥilye* is, moreover, translated into Turkish *verses* imitating Yazıcıoğlı's style. The texts are neither part of Yazıcıoğlı's original or traditionally transmitted *Muḥammedīye* text, nor of İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı's commentary.[46] In fact the pages in question document a synthesis of different traditions to visualise Muḥammad.

In the manuscript DKM *Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat* 22, heavy traces of touching or kissing indicate that in this case the *ḥilye* played an important role in the veneration of the Prophet. The printed versions of Yazıcıoğlı's *Muḥammedīye*, however, adapted the illustrations without the *ḥilye* diagrams.

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44 *Refref* is here interpreted as flying carpet. For *refref* as a means of travel on Muḥammad's night journey cf. Dehkhodā, et al. *Loghatnāme-i Dehkhodā*, s.v. "*rafraf*". The depiction as flying carpet needs further research.

45 See the section about the *Ḥilye-i Ḥāḳānī* below.

46 Cf. the author's manuscript of the Yazıcıoghlı's *Muḥammedīye*, Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü, Ankara, 431A, ca. 196–99 (the manuscript is not paginated, therefore these are the numbers of the slide) and the author's manuscript of İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı's *Feraḥ er-Rūḥ*, İnebey Kütüphanesi, Bursa, Genel 61, ca. 593–626.

FIGURE 19.13 Graphic of the *ḥilya* in Bursalı İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳī's, Feraḥ er-Rūḥ – hilye text, printed Cairo 1258/1842, 64

4 *Ḥilye-i Ḫāḳānī*

The author of the *Ḥilye-i Ḫāḳānī* lived more than 150 years after the other two poets. His text was widely read, yet never as popular as Yazıcıoğlı's. Ḫāḳānī Meḥmed Beg (d. 1015/1606–7) was an official in the Ottoman administration.[47] His *Ḥilye* includes a dating (1007/1598–9) and signature of the author under his pen name – Ḫāḳānī. The author and his work are mentioned in biographical encyclopaedias already in the seventeenth century. Even if there are some differences over his family background, they agree concerning his career: he held several offices at court and in the provincial administration (including the position of a *sancaḳ* governor).[48] The text is based on al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), *al-Shamā'il al-muḥammadiyya*. This author compiled – alongside his comprehensive *ḥadīth* collection – this smaller compendium devoted to *ḥadīth* texts about the physiognomy and character of the Prophet.[49]

The title – *Ḥilye* – refers to a *ḥadīth*, quoted in the introduction, which relates that the Prophet presages the effect which a dream vision of his "sheen" (*ḥilya*) will have:[50]

> It is passed down according to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, who said: "The Prophet said, 'if anybody sees my *ḥilya*, after I have passed away, it is, as if he sees me. And from those, who see it having a true desire for me, God will withhold the fire, and he will save them from the torment of the grave, and they will not be judged naked on the day of judgement.' And according to another tradition he said 'nude on the day of judgement'".

Tirmidhī's collection *al-Shamā'il al-Muḥammadiyya* contains a whole chapter about dream visions of Muḥammad – especially the famous saying "whoever sees me in his dream, has seen me in reality, because Satan is not able to take my shape" (*man ra'ānī fī l-manām fa-ḳad ra'ānī fa-inna al-shayṭān lā yatamaththalu bī*).[51] Although the *ḥadīth* at issue cannot be found in Tirmidhī's collection, it was central for Ḫāḳānī's text.

In his poem, Ḫāḳānī translates, paraphrases and comments on nine more *ḥadīth* texts depicting the physiognomy and the character of the Prophet Muḥammad. He follows traditions which are based on Tirmidhī's.[52] Ḫāḳānī

47 Uzun, "Hakani", 166–168.
48 Uzun, "Hakani", 166ff.
49 Nagel, *Allahs Liebling*, 276–88.
50 Ḫāḳānī, *Ḥilye*, Istanbul 1264, 12, Ḫāḳānī, *Ḥilye*, Istanbul 1308, 10.
51 Cf. the chapter on the vision of the Prophet, Tirmidhī, *al-Shamā'il*, 194–198.
52 On Ḫāḳānī's sources cf. Uzun, "Hakani", 166ff.

cites the attributes of the Prophet from the Arabic original, then translates and comments on each of them in nine to twenty-three Turkish verses. The following example comments on the attribute *azhar al-lawn* (bright of hue):[53]

Kāna rasūl Allāh ṣallā Allāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam azhar al-lawn

İttifāḳ ėtdi bu maʿnāda ümem — ezherü l-levni idi faḫr-i ʿĀlem
Yüzünüñ ḫāliṣ idi ağı ḳatı — ruḫları ṣāf idi ṣāfı ṣıfatı
Reng-i rūyu gül idi yek-dil ile — gül gibi ḳırmızıya māʾil idi
Ḳaplamışdır yüzünü nūr-ı sürūr — sūre-i nūr idi yā maṭlaʿ-i nūr
Muṣḥaf-i ḥusn idi ol-vech-i cemīl — ḫaṭṭ-ı ruḫsārası naṣṣ-ı tenzīl
Gün yüzünden utanub āb-ı ḥayāt — meskenin ėtdi verāʾ-i ẓulmāt
Vech-i berrāḳınıñ aṣḥāb-u ṣafā — ḥumreti gālib idi dėr ḥattā
Gökde olmuşdu o ruy-i rengīn — şemʿ-i cemʿ-i ḥarem-i ʿilliyīn
Aña vėrmişdi kemāl-i zīnet — Kātib-i çehre-küşā-yı fiṭret
Garḳ-ālūd olıcaḳ ol sulṭān — Gül-i pür-jāleye beñzerdi hemān

In Elias John Gibb's translation this passage reads as follows:[54]

[The messenger of God – God bless him and grant him salvation – bright of hue][55]
All the folk hereon agree
That the Pride of the world was bright of blee.
Full sheen was the radiance of his face
His cheeks were lustrous with lustre's grace
One of heart with the rose was his face's hue;
Like the rose, unto ruddiness is drew
Yclad his face in the light of delight,
'Twas the Chapter of Light or the dawn of light.
The scripture of beauty was that fair face;
The down on his cheeks was the verse of grace.
Shamed by his visage bright as day,
Life's fountain hid in the dark away.
Well may the comrades of joyance call:
'The sheen of his visage conquers all!'
Yon radiant face shone in the sky
The light of the harem-feast on high.
The Portrait-painter of Nature gave

53 Gibb, *History of Ottoman Poetry*, 6, 178.
54 Gibb, *History of Ottoman Poetry*, 3, 197f.
55 Complements of the author.

Thereto all beauty that man may have.
When the sweat upon that sultan stood
He was forsooth like the rose bedewed.

In the last twenty to thirty years of the seventeenth century – a few decades after Ḫāḳānī's death – a type of panel calligraphy developed in the Ottoman Empire, which is also named *ḥilye* or more precisely *ḥilye-i şerīf*.[56] The central element of this type of calligraphic panel is a *ḥadīth* about the physiognomy of the Prophet Muḥammad. This *ḥadīth* is written in a circle in the middle of the panel, in the corners four smaller circles with the names of the Rightly Guided Caliphs are situated, and at the top and the bottom two rectangles with verses from the Qur'ān. The basic element – the *ḥadīth* in the middle of the panel – obviously provides a link to Ḫāḳānī's poem, as well as to the common source – a citation from the *Shamā'il*-literature. But apart from the common source the two are at first sight independent.

4.1 *Beauty as a Common Link*

In the manuscripts of Ḫāḳānī's *Ḥilye*, an interrelation between topic, rhetoric and graphic design is self-evident. The topic is the physiognomy of the Prophet, which is to say, his beauty. The poet desires to translate the beauty of the *ḥadīth* narratives into Turkish verses. The copyist and calligrapher pursue the same task when they write the verses down. Consequently, Ḫāḳānī's text became popular among Ottoman calligraphers. The beauty of the script visualises the beauty of the Prophet. As mentioned above, we have to distinguish here between Ḫāḳānī's poem *Ḥilye*, and *ḥilye* as a genre of panel-calligraphy. In fact, the calligrapher of the *ḥilye* panel omits the poet and refers directly to the *ḥadīth* text.

The interrelation of theme, rhetoric and graphic elements in the manuscripts of Ḫāḳānī's poem can be classified into three types: 1. manuscripts and prints visualising theme and rhetoric by classical calligraphy, 2. manuscripts including illustrations, which belong to a broader repertoire of calligrams and pictures as visualisations of the Prophet (e.g. the seal of prophecy and the blossom of a rose), 3. manuscripts combining Ḫāḳānī's text with calligraphic figures, known from the *ḥilye* panels.

4.2 *Poetry and Calligraphy*

Ḫāḳānī's *Ḥilye* was a popular text for calligraphers. But only a small number of the extant manuscripts (e.g., in collections like the Süleymaniye Library or the

56 Cf. Elias, *Aisha's Cushion*, 270–82, Gruber, *The Praiseworthy*, 285–301, Taşkale and Gündüz, *Hz. Muhammed'in Özellikleri*, passim.

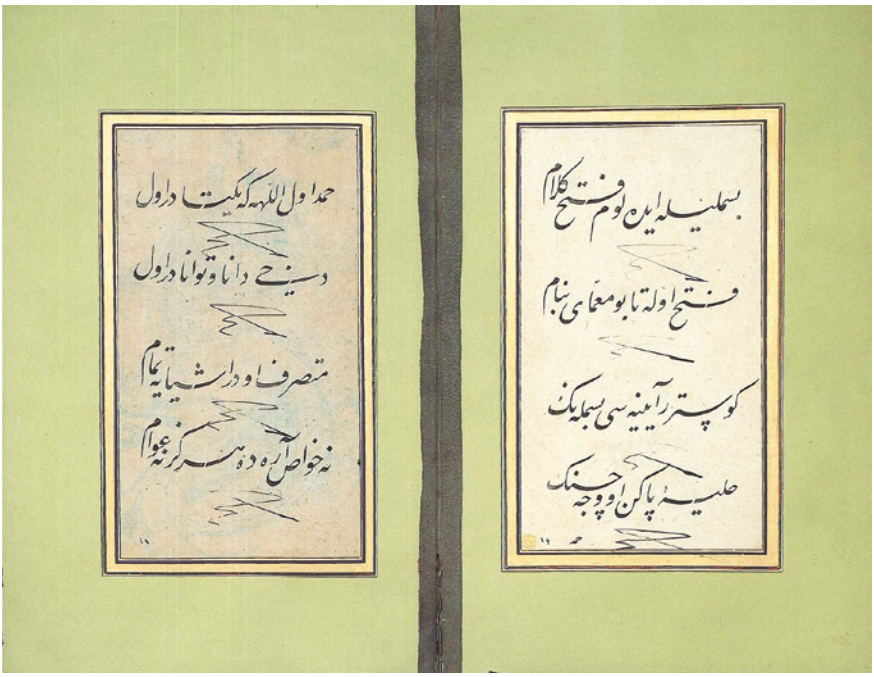

FIGURE 19.14 *Ḥilye-i Ḥāḳānī*, selected verses as a panel (*muraḳḳaʿ*), by the calligrapher ʿArabzāde Meḥmed Saʿdullāh, SSM (Sakıb Sabancı Müsesi), 120–0379

library of the Topkapı Palace) were written by professional calligraphers. These usually wrote selected verses on panels (*levḥa*) and in albums (*muraḳḳaʿ*). In the latter, the topic – Muḥammad's physiognomy – and the beauty of the language provided incentives to make the handwriting more elaborate).[57] Exercising handicraft and artistry was linked to reflections on the beauty of the Prophet.

The first printed version of the *Ḥilye-i Ḥāḳānī* has to be seen in this context. In the 1830s and 1840s, a competition on the most beautiful movable types had developed among the official printing shops in Istanbul and Cairo.[58] According to the colophon of the first *Ḥilye* print, it was the Ottoman Sultan who gave the order to the Imperial printing press in 1264/1848 to design new types for the ductus *taʿlīḳ*. The two pages of the colophon explained the task in detail. Due to the large number of ligatures, this had to be an extraordinarily elaborate type font.[59] The experts at the printing press designed it on the model of one

57 Derman, *Letters in Gold*, 102f.

58 Heinzelmann, "*Taʿlīḳ*-Drucke", passim.

59 Ḥaḳānī, *Ḥilye*, Istanbul 1264, 53ff., Birnbaum, "An Ottoman printing puzzle", passim, Derman, "Yazı San'atının", passim, Faulmann, *Das Buch der Schrift*, 108–111, Heinzelmann "*Taʿlīḳ*-Drucke", 220ff.

FIGURE 19.15 Ḫāḳānī, *Ḥilye*, printed Istanbul 1264/1848, introductory pages

of the most famous Iranian masters of the *taʿlīḳ* ductus (in Persian *nastaʿlīḳ*), Mīr ʿImād al-Ḥasanī al-Ḳazvīnī (d. 1024/1615).[60] When they had finished the task, they chose the *Ḥilye-i Ḫaḳānī* as the first text to be printed with the new font. The colophon of this first edition of the *Ḥilye-i Ḫaḳānī* reveals that it has to be seen in a long calligraphic tradition, where this text served to exercise the calligrapher's own handwriting – and offered during this process the chance to be inspired by the beauty of the Prophet.[61]

4.3 Ḥilye *Manuscripts with Illustrations*

Only a few manuscripts of Ḫāḳānī's *ḥilye* include illustrations.[62] A luxury copy of the text is kept in the Hamidiye Library in Istanbul, as an endowment of Sultan ʿAbdülḥamīd I (r. 1774–89). SK Hamidiye 1075 is richly illuminated with floral patterns, using gold and different colours. It was copied 1130/1717 in an experienced, fluent *taʿlīḳ*-ductus, and after the end of Ḫāḳānī's text the miniature of a rose covers two thirds of the page. The signature under the

60 On Mīr ʿImād cf. Blair, *Islamic calligraphy*, 437ff.
61 Cf. Gruber, *The Praiseworthy*, 301ff.
62 Cf. Gruber, *The Praiseworthy*, 297.

FIGURE 19.16 Ḫāḳānī, *Ḥilye*, Rose as symbol of the Prophet. Hamidiye Library, endowment of Sultan ʿAbdülḥamīd I (r. 1774–89), SK Hamidiye 1075

rose – "work of Kelek Meḥmed" (*eṣer-i Kelek Meḥmed*) probably refers to the whole manuscript; the wording, however, is more that of an artisan than of a "copyist" – even if it is not possible to draw a strict line between the two according to this colophon/signature. The rose must be read as a reference to the above-cited verse "One of heart with the rose was his face's hue / Like the rose, unto ruddiness is drew" (*Reng-i rūyu gül idi yek-dil ile/gül gibi ḳırmıżıya māʾil idi*). Additionally, in the eighteenth century, it is a familiar image used to visualise the Prophet and can therefore also be regarded as an associatively chosen illustration of Ḫāḳānī's text.[63]

Ḫāḳānī's *Ḥilye* is a short text, which is frequently found as part of multiple-text manuscripts. Some of these collections contain a rich diversity of religious texts; some are exclusively *ḥilye* collections. The volume SK Şehid Ali Paşa 2755

63 Gruber, "The Rose of the Prophet", 228.

FIGURE 19.17 Ḫāḳānī, *Ḥilye*, "Seal of Prophethood" (mühr-i nubuvvet), SK Şehid Ali Paşa 2755, Istanbul, completed Tuesday, 18 ZA 1075/2 June 1665

belongs to the former category.[64] It is part of the *vakf* library of the grand vizier Şehid Ali Paşa, (d. 1128/1716), and dated 1075/1665.[65] The first three texts are Ḫāḳānī's *Ḥilye*, a poem on the *ḥilye* of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs (*Ḥilye-i Çār Yār-i Güzīn*) by Cevrī İbrāhīm Çelebi (d. 1065/1654), and a treatise in prose about the Prophet's *ḥilye* by a certain Şemseddīn Sivasī – probably the famous Ḫalvetīye shaykh of this name (d. 1006/1597).[66] The remaining 26 texts of the volume, however, constitute a heterogeneous mixture of theological and Sufi treatises – by authors such as Birgivī or Kemālpaşazāde.

The copy of Ḫāḳānī's *Ḥilye* stands out due to a picture of the "seal of prophethood", which follows the colophon of the text and covers the rest of the page.[67] (Figure 19.17 – Seal of Prophethood.) Above the picture, the seal's apotropaic effect is explained: "Everybody who bears this picture upon him/her, and looks at it from time to time, will be saved from the fire of hell, and

64 SK Şehid Ali Paşa 2755, Tuesday, 18 ZA 1075/2 June 1665 (date on 34b).

65 Şemseddīn Sāmī, *Sicill-i Osmanî*, 1, 274.

66 Aksoy, "Şemseddîn Sivsâsî", 523–526, however, the *ḥilye*-treatise is not listed among his works.

67 Gruber, "Go Wherever You Wish", passim.

he/she will be respected among the people, and God will not deny those who write it and bear it upon them Muḥammad's intercession" (*her kim işbu mühr-i nübūveti yanında getürse ve gāh gāh naẓar ėtse ḫaḳḳ taʿālā anuñ bedenini cehennem odına ḥarām eyleye ve ḫalḳ içinde ʿazīz ola ve yazanı ve götüreni ḫaḳḳ taʿālā ḥażret-i Muḥammed şefāʿatından maḥrūm eylemeye*). Like the *ḥilye* sketches in the *Muḥammedīye* manuscripts, this picture of the seal of prophethood is not an illustration of Ḫāḳānī's poem in a narrow sense. We rather have to understand it as just one more text in this multiple-text manuscript. Still, the connotation of the Prophet's *ḥilye* with the seal of prophethood and its apotropaic effect is striking. In this context, the caption – as well as the instruction for its use – picks up the idea that God saves those who see Muḥammad's *ḥilye* in their dream – or the users of the apotropaic diagram of the seal – from the fire of Hell (*bedenini cehennem odına ḥaram eyleye* vs. *ḥarrama Allāhu ʿalayhi al-nār*).

4.4 *Ḫaḳānī's Text and the Panel Calligraphy*

In contrast to the previous volume, SK Hüsrev 36 is a multiple-text-manuscript, which exclusively contains *ḥilye*-texts – two copies of the *Ḥilye-i Ḫāḳānī*, one copy with and one without vowel-signs, Cevrī's *Ḥilye-i Çār Yār-i Güzīn* (*ḥilye* of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs), Neşāṭī's *Ḥilye-i Enbiyā'* and some unidentified, shorter *ḥilye*-texts in verse and prose. The whole volume is most likely copied by the same hand in an elegant *nasḫī*-ductus, and it is dated 1196/1781–2, and kept in the *vaḳf*-collection of grand vizier Ḫüsrev Paşa (d. 1271/1855). The manuscript SK Hüsrev 36 is one of the rare manuscripts that documents a synthesis of the traditional layout of Ottoman poetry and the panel calligraphy of the *ḥilye-i şerif*. In addition to the poems and treatises in prose, the manuscript contains several circular shaped calligraphies of *ḥadīth*-text about the physiognomy of the Prophet and the four Rightly Guided Caliphs in the original Arabic, clearly reminiscent of *ḥilye*-panels. I would not interpret these calligraphic diagrams as illustrations of one of the mentioned texts, but rather as texts in their own right.

SK Hüsrev 36 – as a *ḥilye* compilation – might therefore have functioned just like one of the *muraḳḳaʿ* albums. On the one hand, the copying of the *ḥilye* texts is an act that brings about blessing. On the other hand, it is a deliberation upon the aesthetic aspects of the script – and, concomitantly, the aesthetic of the language and the beauty of the Prophet. In this regard, the two copies of the *Ḥilye-i Ḫāḳānī* – one with vowel signs and another without – are especially striking. Most of the vowel signs are – due to the vowel harmony – not very helpful for Ottoman-Turkish, except for those marking the Persian *iżāfet* or, in a few cases, those on the first syllable of a word. The vowel signs indicate

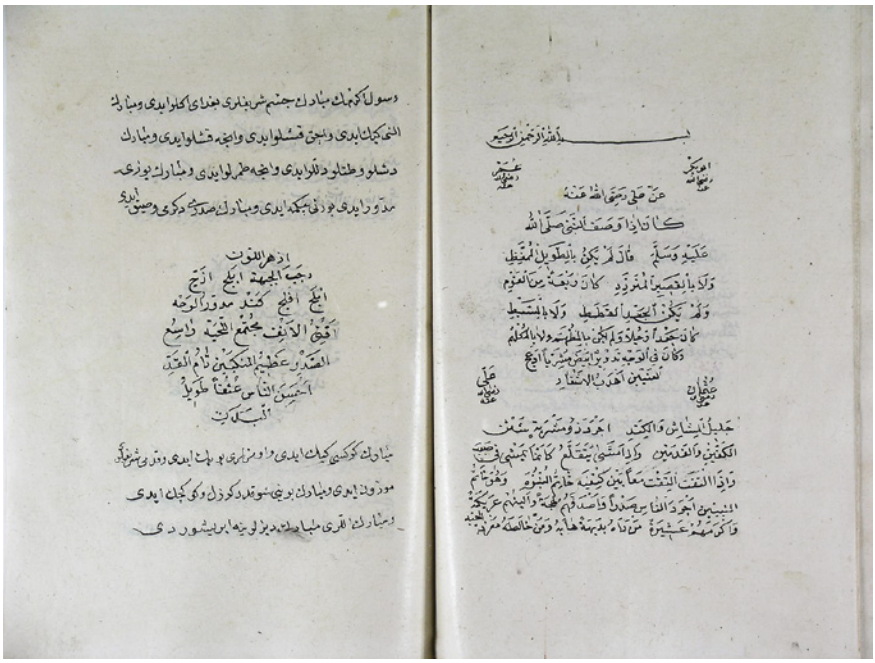

FIGURE 19.18 *Ḥilye* compilation, SK Istanbul, Hüsrev 36

rather the users' respect for certain texts – e.g., the Qur'ān. In case of the manuscript SK Hüsrev 36, they might also be the consequence of the calligrapher's deliberation on the vocalised text versus un-vocalised texts. In a further step, the calligrapher's process of aesthetic deliberation adapted the circular shaped diagrams of *ḥadīth* texts from the *ḥilye* panels. In contrast to the illustrations in Yazıcıoğlı's *Muḥammedīye*, neither illustrations like the blossom of the rose nor the elaborated logograms found their way into the printed editions.

5 Conclusion

The manuscripts and printed editions of the three poems – Süleymān Çelebi's *Vesīlet en-Necāt*, Yazıcıoğlı Muḥammed's *Muḥammedīye*, and Ḫāḳānī's *Ḥilye* – differ considerably in their graphic characteristics. In contrast to the other two texts the copies of Süleymān Çelebi's poem are characterised by their frugal layout, which follows the classical two-column structure for poetry and represents basic techniques employed by Ottoman book culture to visualise the interrelation of content, rhetoric, and poetic form – especially the aesthetic

aspects of handwritten calligraphy or markers like vowel signs. They indicate respect for the author, the text and the topic, and provided a visual marker of the authenticity for the copy.

The task of visualising the beauty of the Prophet through the beauty of calligraphy is quasi inherent in the topic of Ḫāḳānī's *Ḥilye*. Compared with Süleymān Çelebi's *Vesīlet en-Necāt*, copies of Ḫāḳānī's text developed more elaborate patterns of calligraphy, and became a preferred text for calligraphers. In some examples of multiple-text manuscripts, it is also combined with the *ḥilye* logograms already known in Ottoman panel-calligraphy. Ḫāḳānī's text is, in a few examples, also combined with other strategies to visualise the Prophet Muḥammad – a painting of a rose, and a sketch of the "seal of prophethood". None of the latter was so influential that it was adapted in printed editions.

Yazıcıoğlı's *Muḥammedīye* is distinguished by a broader variety of strategies to visualise the interrelation between graphic, rhetoric, and theme (the Prophet Muḥammad). The "banner of praise" – as a visualisation of Muḥammad – can already be found in the author's manuscript but it is also a constant in the text transmission through the centuries. Some of the graphic patterns developed later were restricted to a short period – like the fan calligraphy of the *faḳīh* tradition which had been developed to visualise the rhetorical peculiarities of the text.

An extraordinary graphic pattern – the visualisation of the narrative of Muḥammad's biography through circles representing the Prophet and his contemporaries – is (virtually unprecendented) first documented in the early nineteenth century, but became remarkably successful in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century prints. These schematic illustrations differ in the manuscripts and the printed versions concerning the scope of captions and labels, and the (schematic or naturalistic) depiction of the environment/surroundings. This means that the interpretation of these pictures required a different scale of imaginative power from the readers. They reveal a figural impulse, which is subsumed in a schematic rendering.

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20

The World of al-Qandūsī (d. 1278/1861)

Prophetology and Calligraphy in Morocco During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century

Francesco Chiabotti and Hiba Abid

> Each degree of existence is the mirror of the degrees beneath it … [this refraction continues] until it reaches the Master of Existence (*sayyid al-wujūd*), Peace and Blessings upon him! For he is the Universal Mirror. All those who are your superiors are, for you, so many mirrors; their gaze sees into you according to how well-polished the mirror is. And this is what the [Prophet] is alluding to when he says "The believer is the mirror of the believer".
>
> QANDŪSĪ, *Ta'sīs*

∴

Many articles have been written that seek to assess what might be defined as the "piety of the calligrapher" in Islam. It has already been demonstrated that behind the institution of other branches of Islamic knowledge it is possible to find traces of devotional and ethical practices based on attachment to the Prophet; this is also true in the case of calligraphy. Two important articles discuss the spiritual conception of calligraphy in the Muslim east. First, Annemarie Schimmel, in her study on the "primordial point", quotes an eighteenth century Naqshbandī calligrapher, Mustaqīmzāde, who explains the spiritual compass of individual letters through the secrets contained in the numerical values of the Arabic alphabet: "And how could one deny the mystical meaning of letters and calligraphy […] since the numerical value of the word *khaṭṭāṭ* equals that of the full profession of faith, namely, 619, and the second half of the *shahāda*, *Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh*, is equal to *al-kātib*, the scribe, 454?"[1] According to this sacred numerology, the scribe is identified with the profession of faith. Does Muḥammad therefore represent both a source of inspiration and a goal to be

1 Schimmel, "The primordial dot", 352.

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attained through the practice of the art of writing? A few centuries earlier, the Persian poet Jāmī (d. 898/1492) expressed the symbolism of letters by establishing a parallel between the name of the Prophet, 'Aḥmad', and the first letter of the alphabet, *alif*:[2]

> The beginning of the foreword of this alphabet
> Is the first letter which is in Aḥmad.
> When the dot of unity showed its stature
> And became an alif for Aḥmad's sake,
> the diameter of its upright alif
> cut the invisible circle of (Divine) Ipseity into halves:
> One half is the primordial world,
> The other half the contingent word which looks towards non-existence.

In a poem by Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī (d. 1587–88), the *Ādāb al-mashq*, Carl W. Ernst also found a symbolic conception of the calligraphic art, one whose rules are here interpreted as so many images of the initiatic journey. Ernst writes that the "*Ādāb al-mashq* belongs to a special class of writings by calligraphers about calligraphy, but it stands out by its relatively greater emphasis on the internal aspects of the art".[3] The Prophet is remarkably present throughout this poem. The calligrapher offers him a special blessing and recognises his central place in the "Book of Existence": the Prophet is the source of the cosmological principles of the "Well-Guarded Tablet" and the "Reed Pen". Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī emphasises the purity that the calligrapher must attain (for purity of art derives from the purity of the artist's heart) and reveals the secrets of the calligraphic art. He also proposes an initiatic method that leads the disciple to realise the *mashq khayālī*, a completely interiorised calligraphic practice: here the disciple no longer follows an established external model for his calligraphy, but only an inspiration that comes exclusively from within. From this will spring a beauty that is no longer imitative but the product of an inner contemplation. Ernst concludes his study by postulating that the diffusion of Sufism must have had a profound influence on Persian calligraphers and their circles. The conclusions reached by Christiane Gruber on the basis of research conducted for her monograph on the history of visual representations of the Prophet in Islamic art confirm this.[4]

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2 Schimmel, "The primordial dot", 356.

3 Ernst, "The Spirit of Islamic Calligraphy".

4 Gruber, *The Praiseworthy One*, especially pp. 155–164, for the Naqshbandī order and its specific book culture.

Nonetheless, one question remains: would it be possible to find parallels from the western part of the Muslim world for these quotations from eastern and Persian sources? Does Maghribi Sufism encounter the calligraphic art? More precisely, did this encounter take the form of a calligraphic expression in which the Prophet played a central role? We can now respond to these questions in the affirmative. In 2009 Morocco's Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs published a volume containing the opening pages and paintings from the *Dhakhīrat al-muḥtāj*, a summary in several dozen volumes of prayers on the Prophet, richly illustrated with figures symbolically representing the metaphysical and cosmic aspect of the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiya*, Muḥammadan Reality.[5] In his note at the beginning of the edition, the Minister for Religious Affairs, Ahmed Toufiq, emphasises that the publication of this work, along with the facsimile reproduction elsewhere of other illuminated manuscripts from the culture of devotion to the Prophet in Maghribi Islam (al-Jazūlī's *Dalā'il al-khayrāt* and al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ's *Shifā'*) aims to "bring out a particular aspect of Moroccan culture: a deeply rooted and defining piety that comes from the profound attachment that Moroccans feel for the blessed person of the Prophet".[6] This attachment, supported by the milieu of the *zawāyā*, also contributed to the development of the art of the book in Morocco. Specifically, the *Dalā'il* and the *Dhakhīra* demonstrate a particular aesthetic, thanks to which certain aspects of the Prophet's physical being can be expressed in a symbolic or allusive manner without ever literally being represented. These works were fundamental in the history of prophetology in the Maghrib and beyond, but we must also speak of the work of a less well-known calligrapher: Abū al-Qāsim al-Qandūsī (d. 1278/1861 in Fez). Each of the authors of the present chapter came to his work independently: Francesco Chiabotti discovered the *Sharāb Ahl al-ṣafā* (published by Ḥammādī in 2008 and then cited by Ruggero Vimercati Sanseverino in his history of Sufism in Fez) while he was trying to establish a *corpus* of Islamic sources on the Names of the Prophet Muḥammad (*asmā' al-nabī*). The originality and audacity of the master's doctrine demanded further study. Hiba Abid was studying the calligraphy of Qandūsī's *Dalā'il al-khayrāt* as part of her doctoral thesis, and was struck by the calligrapher's strong personality.[7] Ḥammādī then made important advances in the study of the Kenadsa region and society, and the Zāwiya Ziyāniyya from which Qandūsī came. The next step in the rediscovery of the Kenadsa master was the research on manuscripts undertaken by Abdulaziz Suraqah, along

5 Sharqāwī, *Dhakhīrat al-muḥtāj*.
6 Sharqāwī, *Dhakhīrat al-muḥtāj*, 9.
7 Abid, *Les* Dalā'il al-Khayrāt.

FIGURE 20.1 Fez, Qandūsī's painting at the tomb of Moulay Idris, photo by Francesco Chiabotti

with his translations, including an English version of the *Sharāb* and the publication online of several passages from Qandūsī, with the aim of reviving interest in the master's work.[8] The present contribution springs from an extensive preliminary examination of manuscripts attributed to Qandūsī, undertaken during several trips to Rabat financed by the ANR/DFG PROPHET project.[9] The questions that project is examining helped guide the approach adopted in our work: we seek to understand how a nineteenth century spiritual man could envisage his art as the emanation of a specific kind of prophetology, and of an intimate relationship with the person of the Prophet. We use two methods: Francesco Chiabotti examines Qandūsī's life and his relationship with the Prophet, and presents the texts in which calligraphy becomes an initiatic art, one through which man can achieve full realisation under the Prophet's own guidance. In the second part of the chapter these doctrinal elements are put side by side with the author's manuscript and calligraphic production. Here Hiba Abid undertakes a paleographic study on *al-khaṭṭ al-qandūsī*, in order better to define the extent of rupture and continuity between Qandūsī's work and the Maghribi calligraphic school.

1 Seeing the Prophet. Biographical Elements[10]

Qandūsī's first biographers highlight the discreet nature of this character's life, drawing a portrait of a master whose spiritual work remained largely unknown outside a small group of disciples, until the time, towards the end of his life, when his states of extreme ecstasy revealed the nature of his sanctity and his teaching. His doctrine, especially his prophetology, springs from visionary and ecstatic experience. His first biographer, Muḥammad al-Fāṭimī al-Sqallī,

8 We are indebted to Abdulaziz Suraqah, who shared with us some manuscripts he had collected.

9 The Royal Library (*al-Khizāna al-ḥasanīyya*), in the person of its director Ahmed Binbin, and of Khalid Zahri, who at the time was curator of the library, assisted us greatly, and facilitated our access to the manuscripts preserved in their collections. The National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco has also been of great help, and recently digitised and catalogued its manuscripts by Qandūsī, most of which come from the Kattānī collection (shelved under K). Here we would like to offer special thanks to Nozha Bensaadoun, head of manuscripts. The care and solicitude offered us by the personnel of the department were remarkable; Aziz Laghzaoui helped us verify the codices attributed to Qandūsī.

10 Some exploratory work and reconstitution of Qandūsī's life was realised by ʿAbd Allāh Ḥammādī al-Idrīsī (*Al-Fayḍ al-quddūs*) in 2018. We have based our work on sources he discovered, enriched by the publication of autograph biographical documents and completed by notes drawn from Qandūsī's *Ta'sīs*.

presents Qandūsī as one of the Solitary Ones of his time (*min al-afrād*), who was touched by the mystical divine and then put the experience into writing. The biographer leaves the nature of these writings fairly vague, speaking only of a notebook containing Qandūsī's inspirations.[11] The exploration of the manuscripts attributed to the master allows us to understand the nature of his writing better: at times it does approach ecstasy, thus confirming al-Sqallī's impression. The second aspect of Qandūsī's life that is mentioned in his biography is his activity as a calligrapher. His calligraphy became part of spiritual life in Fez: "he was in the habit of writing down, in a majestic and pleasant style, Qurʾānic verses, acts of faith or similar things; these would be hung in saints' tombs. He was the one who created the Name of Majesty that is hanging in the tomb of Moulay Idrīs." Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Kattānī specifies that this large drawing of God's name, *Allāh*, is in the place where the *Risāla* (al-Qayrāwānī's?) is read, between the prayers for sunset and night.[12] Most of this information is also presented by Jaʿfar b. Idrīs al-Kattāni, who was Qandūsī's disciple, in his biographical collection on the saints of Fez, *Sharāb al-Muḥtaḍir*. He does add a few precious details on Qandūsī's life; for example, his origins in the region of Kenadsa (al-Qanādisa), a palm grove oasis about a day's journey from Figuig. He says that the hidden aspects of the master's personality remained unknown to most people,[13] despite the fact that Sufi masters had recognised his spiritual rank and been taught by him. He mentions the title of Qandūsī's treatise, *al-Taʾsīs*, extracts of which were published by Muḥammad b. Jaʿfār al-Kattāni in his *Salwat al-anfās*. The *Salwa* gives an explanation for the typology of Qandūsī's sanctity: "his state was that of the people of Blame (*malāmatī*). He displayed acts and words that were externally incongruous, but internally just, by which he hid himself from the rest of mankind."[14] The sources agree on his profession: he sold herbs in the herb market. Decades after Qandūsī's death, Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad al-Kattānī still knew the works of his that were conserved in part in the Kattānī's private library and was thus able to consult texts that Qandūsī had copied. He mentions the well-known copy of the Qurʾān in twelve volumes, the final volume of which he was able to consult; he also cites a certain number of copies of al-Jazūlī's *Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt*, two of which are still extant. Qandūsī died at the end of 1861 (Jumādā al-ūlā 1278 H). The exact location of his grave is unknown. Kattānī's sources say he is

11 *Wa-qad waqaftu ʿalā juzʾ min wāridātihi*, Ḥammādī, *Fayḍ*, 7.
12 Kattānī, *Salwat al-anfās*, 3:55.
13 *idhā jalasa bayna al-nās yakhfā ʿanhum amru-hu*.
14 Kattānī, op. cit.

buried in the Bāb F'tūḥ cemetery, in the plot of the Sarrāj family.[15] Qandūsī's presence in Kattānī's memoirs is mostly due to his ties with Muḥammad b. al-Kabīr al-Kattānī (d. 1277/1872), who was initiated into the *ṭarīqa qādiriyya* by Qandūsī. His influence is mostly apparent in the doctrine of Muḥammadan Reality, and subsequent studies could well go into more detail on the reach of his transmission. The Kattāniyya library possessed numerous manuscripts by Qandūsī, now held in the National Library in Rabat.

The information in these biographical notices is important because it indicates the aspects of the master's personality that made the biggest impression on his contemporaries. But none of them address the central element of Qandūsī's life: his perpetual relationship with the Prophet. In order to grasp the modalities of this relationship, we must examine the writings of the master himself, for disseminated throughout the margins of Qandūsī's manuscript we can find personal notes bearing witness to his visionary universe that is defined by the omnipresence of the Prophetic reality. We will now return to the story of his life and allow him to speak for himself.

In a note conserved in the autograph pages of manuscript 399K in the National Library in Rabat, he indicates his ancestry as follows: "Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim b. Aḥmad al-Qandūsī, son of the pious saint known by the name of Sayyidī Aḥmad, who is buried in Béchar, near Kenadsa. I am a descendant of the Aws and the Anṣār […]."[16] Qandūsī's ways of writing his father's name demonstrate the difficulty we face in trying to recover details of his life: Ḥammādī finds three variants (Qāsim, al-Qāsim, Abū l-Qāsim), all of which appear in the autograph manuscripts.[17] As one works on Qandūsī's œuvre, one begins to understand that such uncertainty is an important aspect of his way of writing. As we shall see, he admits that he does not pay attention to the formal side of writing. The copyist of the manuscript of the *Sharāb ahl al-ṣafā* claims to have corrected the language in the text to make it conform to the rules of Arabic grammar.[18] But uncertainty is not just a linguistic problem: it also opens the door to a world in which the Prophet himself is communicating and establishing identity. In the colophon of the large Qurʾān in twelve volumes, he signs himself Muḥammad b. Abī l-Qāsim al-Qandūsī *mansha'an*: he comes from Kenadsa, where he grew up before migrating to Fez. In Kenadsa, he was initiated into the *Shādhiliyya-Nāṣiriyya-Ziyāniyya* Sufi Path by the master

15 *Rawḍat awlād Sarrāj*. Al-Fāṭimī adds "near the mausoleums" (*bi-l-qibāb*). According to the author of the *Salwa*, his tomb is covered with zellige tiles.

16 MS 399 K, National Library of Rabat, fol. 7.

17 Ḥammādī, *Fayḍ*, 21.

18 Qandūsī, *Sharāb*, 55.

Muḥammad, called (*al-madʿū*) Ibn ʿAbd Allāh, from the lineage of *nāṣirī ziyānī* masters.[19] But to this he adds that he is descended from the Medinese tribe of the Aws, something that has been communicated to him in an unveiling (*kashf*) by the Prophet himself.[20] In other texts he specifies that this unveiling took place in a dream vision (*ruʾyā*):[21] "[…] Know that thou art descended from the Anṣār, and among the Anṣār, [from] the Aws […]" In this dream the Prophet explains how the Medinese reached the land of Béchar, and then Kenadsa. He tells Qandūsī: "the Anṣār are my support and my well-beloved ones; thou art one of them by the surfeit of love thou bearest me and by the abundance of the prayers thou addressest to me. Only the Devil could contest thine ancestry; have a care never to doubt it!"[22] An account of a second vision follows, in which Qandūsī's spirit accomplishes a mystical ascension to the seventh heaven – normally associated with Abraham – where he encounters the Prophet sitting on a carpet. The Prophet then takes the shape of a white pearl (*durra bayḍāʾ*), while Qandūsī perceives himself as resplendent lights.[23]

In other passages, Qandūsī emphasises the opposition he has had to face from the people of Fez, who were clearly not ready to take his word for all this, even though, for our author, the communication came directly from the Prophet. He insists on the question of ancestry in his principal work, the *Taʾsīs*, in which he adds a few words received from the Prophet:

> Among the graces that the Very Generous One (*al-Karīm*, God) has granted me: confirmation directly from the Prophet of my descent (*nasab*). We are close to him as much through our descent as through our merit (*nasab wa-ḥasab*); we know this thanks to the words he (peace and blessings upon him) addressed to us: "Thou art truly my son (*anta waladī ḥaqqan*), if thou desirest speak; or if thou preferest, be quiet." I then [wanted] to complain to my Master about certain people who contested my descent, but before I could even bring it up he replied: "Those people are demons

19 See Ḥammādī's research on the Ziyāniyya *zāwiya* in Kenadsa, Ḥammādī, *Ḥāḍirat al-qanādisa*.

20 *Al-awsī nasaban kashfan mimmā talaqqā ʿan sayyid* [sic] *ṣālla Allāh ʿalayhi wa-sallam*. Muṣʾḥaf al-Qandūsī, MS Khizāna al-ḥasaniyya 12613–12, fol. 138a–b. The text was published by Ḥammādī, *Fayḍ*, 92. The same affirmation occurs in a line in which Qandūsī signs a brief note about a prayer received in Bāb Ftūḥ (see below), MS BNRM 1688 D, *Taqāyīd*, 10: "*Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim al-Qandūsī al-Anṣārī al-Awsī wa-lā fakhr fī taḥqīq al-nasab al-anṣārī ʿan sayyid ṣalla Allāh ʿalayhi wa-sallam*".

21 MS 399 K, *fol.* 7: […] *min al-ruʾyā al-sharīfa fī taḥqīq al-nasab al-anṣārī* […].

22 MS 399 K, fol. 7a.

23 MS 399 K, fol. 7b: *fa-ʿarijat rūḥī ilā l-samāʾ al-sābiʿa fa-wajadtu-hu ṣalla Allāh ʿalayhi wa-sallam fī biṣāṭ wa-huwa al-durra al-bayḍāʾ bi-jamʿ ahl al-ḥaḍra wa-anā anwār* (*sic*) *sāṭiʿa*.

> among the djinns and humankind, do not feel oppressed because of their hearts." And with his noble tongue he told me, "I love thee, and I love those who love thee." On another occasion he again spoke to me, saying, "I am your guarantor, fear nothing." I am only recounting this with the aim of spreading knowledge of God's good actions (*al-taḥadduth ʿan niʿmat Allāh*), [and] as a sign of gratitude to Him [...][24]

We can find echoes of this confirmation from the Prophet in other, similar, accounts of the visions or dreams of masters, in which they found themselves in the personal presence of the Prophet, and had experiences that formed the basis of, or transformed, their identities. For example, the case of Emir Abdelkader (d. 1883) is well known. In the *mawqif* 13, he says: "[...] I was invoking Allah when I was overwhelmed by sleep. I had a vision in which the noble person of the Prophet blended with my own self to such an extent that we became a single being: I looked at myself and I saw him, transformed into me."[25] In the *mawqif* 83, the Emir describes several encounters with the Prophet – first hearing him, and later seeing him. The first word he received from the Prophet once he had arrived in Medina and was standing in front of the Rawḍa was: "Thou art my son and I am satisfied with you!"[26] Since at least the time of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh (d. 1717), then of Tijānī and Aḥmad b. Idrīs, *fāsī* Sufism was characterised by a direct attachment to the Prophet. Ruggero Vimercati

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24 *Ta'sīs* 1, p. 19 There are two versions of the *Ta'sīs*. The first was published by Layachi Serbout, the owner of Qandūsī's autograph manuscript; this version was completed in 1252/1837, in the month of Dhū al-qāʿda. The title it was given is: *al-Ta'sīs fī al-madākhil ʿalā masāwī al-dunyā wa-mahāwī Iblīs*. The publisher established the text and initially printed it on demand, under the title of *Satan Tools against the religion of Allah*. Qandūsī's name does not appear on the cover, only inside the cover. Despite this lack of academic rigour, which diminished the visibility and distribution of the book (we have observed that the title has since been withdrawn from the site in question), the text is correct, and is accompanied by numerous explanatory notes on the author's vocabulary and dialect; it also contains images from the autograph manuscript, and these make it possible to establish its provenance. A second manuscript of the *Ta'sīs* is preserved in the National Library of Rabat, shelved under 2526 K; this has the title *al-Ta'sīs fī masāwī al-dunyā wa-mahāwī Iblīs*. This copy was created in 1255/1840 during the master's lifetime, by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Salām al-Ghumārī. It is considerably longer than the original 1252/1837 version, which probably means that Qandūsī dictated the *Ta'sīs*, and made commentaries on it to his disciples. In addition, the contents of this second version are sometimes less clear. We will call the first version, from 1252, published by Serbout, "Ta'sīs I", and we will refer to the version copied by Ghumārī in 1255 only where it contains material that is absent from the autograph text. We will call this second version "*Ta'sīs* II".

25 Chodkiewicz, *Écrits spirituels*, 163–65.

26 *Anta waladī wa-maqbūl ʿalayya*, Jazāʾirī, *Kitāb al-mawāqif*, 1: 160.

Sanseverino has studied the relationship between this phenomenon and the foundation of new spiritual Paths. In the cases of the Emir and of Qandūsī, the Prophet's intervention is not linked to the establishment of a "Muḥammadan" order; nevertheless, Qandūsī's Prophet-oriented Sufism is part of the history of the *Ṭarīqa muḥammadiyya*. Vimercati recalls Abū Sālim al-ʿAyyāshī's (d. 1090/1679) definition:

> It is called al-Muḥammadiyya because of our lord Muḥammad, may salvation and the peace of God be upon him. It is special because of the attachment to him, even though all the Paths come from him. The adept progresses through his rectitude and in conformity with the Qurʾān and the *sunna*, and through the fact of his devotion to the prayer on the Prophet until love for him takes possession of the adept's heart, and his entire conscience is submerged in veneration for him. Then he trembles when he hears [the Prophet's] name, and the vision of the Prophet takes over his heart; the Prophetic form (*mithāl*) then appears before his inner eye, and God fills him with His interior and exterior blessings. He ascribes no merit to any creature but the Prophet, and sees him when awake as much as in dreams, and asks him for what he desires.[27]

Please note that Qandūsī himself ended his second copy of the *Taʾsīs* with a reflection on the Muḥammadan Path. He speaks of his treatise as "this noble Muḥammadan flow" (*hādhā al-fayḍ al-sharīf al-muḥammadī*). The *Taʾsīs* carries the Muḥammadan stamp, that:

> Stamps with its seal (*ṭābiʿ*) everything that it seals, but nothing can seal it. Its coin is pure gold and a crown decorated with diadems [...] The 'Muḥammadan' station surpasses all other stations, its aspiration is Muḥammad, it sees only Muḥammad, it desires nothing but Muḥammad, it is annihilated only in Muḥammad, its Paradise is Muḥammad, its life is Muḥammad, its food, its drink, its drunkenness and its sobriety are Muḥammad.[28]

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27 Vimercati, "Penser la voie muḥammadienne", 122. For more on the *Ṭarīqa muḥammadiyya*, see the historic overview in Chih, "A New Historiographical Outlook on the *Tarīqa Muhammadiyya*", in J. Malik and S. Zarrabi-Zadeh, eds, *Sufism East and West: Mystical Islam and Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Modern World*, Boston – Leiden, Brill, 2019, 104–126.

28 *Fa-ṭuruqāt hādhihi al-risāla ṭābiʿuhā muḥammadī yaṭbaʿu kulla ṭābiʿ wa-lā yuṭbaʿu ʿalayhi, fa-sikkatuhā ibrīzan wa-tājan mukallal* [...] *fa-maqāmu al-muḥammadī aʿlā wa-aʿlā fa-himmatuhu Muḥammad wa-lā yanẓuru illā Muḥammad, wa-lā ʿishquhu illā fī Muḥammad,*

Let us return to Qandūsī's reasons for settling in Fez. In the 1899 codex in the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco there is an autograph page by Qandūsī, published by Ḥammādī, in which he recounts the following:

> When I entered into the Holy Idrisid Presence(*al-ḥaḍra al-idrīsiyya*, the town of Fez) – may peace, mercy and God's blessing be upon it and on its inhabitants! – after a period of wandering and privation (*siyāḥa wa-tajrīd*) that led me to decide to visit [Moulay Idrīs II] in order to go to the Home of God and seek shelter and refuge there, [then] on behalf of my Master [the Prophet] – peace be upon him! – I received direct permission to remain in the presence of the Sultan of the people of God, Moulay Idrīs – may God be satisfied with him, and with us through him! – in the supreme service of God (*al-jānib al-ʿalī bi-llāh*). My Master assured me that I would obtain the divine grace that I was seeking, which is granted to the pilgrim who decides to remain in the Temple of Mecca. He also assured me that this reward was reserved for me, by his side. So I obeyed the order. I was then given permission to marry and to work as a seller of herbs in the souk. And then I married according to the *sunna* of God and his Prophet [...][29]

We know little about Qandūsī's life and training before he arrived in Fez. An autobiographical note contained in BNRM 1688 D is, however, eloquent on how he had amassed his esoteric knowledge on the personal realisation of Muḥammadan Reality. After having acquired the science of Letters from his masters, Qandūsī recounts having been "taken away" (*jadhb*) from this science by God, through the Prophet, who drew him into the science of Absolute Unity (*ʿilm al-waḥda*), steeped in the Reality of Muḥammad:

> I rid myself of all other knowledge beyond this one, I wanted nothing else in its place, nevermore did I turn towards the applications [of the science] of names since the theophany of the essence of the Named One. [...] Everything that is not the source of Muḥammadan essence is but an outer crust (*qishr*). Since God plunged heart, intellect, and spirit in the direction of the Well-beloved Lover, Peace and blessings upon him, the

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wa-lā yafnā illā fī Muḥammad, fa-jannatuhu Muḥammad, wa-ḥayātuhu Muḥammad, wa-akluhu wa sharābuhu wa-sukruhu wa-ṣaḥwuhu Muḥammad, Ta'sīs II, fol. 159b–160a.

29 MS BNRM 1699 D, fol. 1a, passage published by Ḥammādī, *Fayḍ*, 63. The passage continues with a list of his children and his wives, with dates of birth and death; a number of his children died when they were very young.

> secret of his reality shines brightly on the essence of my reality; thanks to this, God has made me so that I need no other but him (*aghnānī bihi ʿan ghayrihi*). […] Muḥammad is our Prophet and the essence of our first original determination (*taʿayyununā al-awwal al-aṣlī*), the substance of our primordial matter (hylé, *hayūlā*), the flood that overflows from the Holy presence of our Lord through the intercession of His first original determination […] in us he is the first, the last, the apparent, the hidden, it is he who brings about his own epiphany in us. In our hearts, God mentions nothing except Muḥammad; no one other than Muḥammad adores God in our primordial matter (hylé). Nothing stirs in us except Muḥammad, all that rests in us is only Muḥammad. All that thine eyes can see, of that of which God has determined the existence, proceeds only from Muḥammad, whether through uniting or separating.[30]

After this passage, the initiatic journey is described as a voyage through symbolic letters to discover their kernel, which is "the Master", the Prophet:

> O thou who wanderest on earth, on sea and in deserts, the earth and the sea are within thee! Travel through thine earth and sea, board the vessel of thine ocean, thou shalt find in thyself that which will guide thee, thou carryest in thyself the pearl and the hyacinths, the pure gold, the antimony, the coral, thou hast Paradise and Inferno within thee, soul's desire and eye's delight. Cease being (*zul ʿanka*), thou shalt see thine earth and thy sea, thou art thine own veil, correct the letter of thy *nūn*[31] if thou desirest thy grace, set thyself in motion, lower thy voice. The one whose being has truly been absorbed is the one who has made the reality of his letter *nūn* disappear, who has fathomed his earth as well as his sea, and has resolved the enigma of his manifest form – the one who has broken its crust and eaten its kernel. Thy crust is the letter of thy *nūn* and thy kernel is thy Master, the letter *hāʾ* of thine end (*intihāʾuka*). The letter *hāʾ* cannot be found unless the letter *nūn* disappears. Thy *hāʾ* is thy treasure, the *nūn* is thy veil, the *nūn* is thy passion, the *hāʾ* thy secrets, the *nūn* thy fire, the *hāʾ* thy Paradise, the *nūn* is thine external form. The *hāʾ* is thy life, the *nūn* is thy soul's aspect (*nafsāniyyatuka*), the *hāʾ* thy spiritual aspect,

30 MS BNRM 1688 D, *Taqāyīd*, 7 (from the pdf furnished by the library). This is a collection of Qandūsī's writings, notes and more polished texts. The page in question is numbered "fol. 3", but it is not the third one in the collection; we were unable to consult the codex in question directly.

31 This is probably a reference to the letter *nūn* in "*nafs*".

> the *nūn* is thine earthly kingdom, the *hā'* thy celestial reign, the *nūn* is thy night, the *hā'* thy day, the *nūn* is thy sight, the *hā'* thy clairvoyance, correct thy gaze, open thy clairvoyant gaze! Leave the earth and travel in thy heaven, be like a celestial bird [...].[32]

Fez remained the site of Qandūsī's "simple" life as a seller of herbs and calligrapher. This was the town of Moulay Idrīs, to whom he vowed a particular devotion – as an autograph poem demonstrates.[33] He must have been writing his works during much of the time he was in his shop (he produced nearly two thousand folios; these haven't yet been systematically recorded). At the end of his *Ta'sīs* he himself says:

> O thou who shalt find this document, to whom God has granted clairvoyance! If thou seest errors therein, correct them! The unlettered one has a great many excuses, he knows no part of the external sciences, and still less of grammar! [...] The state of the reunited opposites, the physical and the intelligible, is very subtle [...] I have composed this book in the herb-sellers' souk, where I buy and sell to earn my living. I write, and a client comes to me and asks for a dirham of absinthe, of thyme, of fenugreek, of nigella. So then I put down the page, I serve the client, then I return from [the world of] the senses to [that of] the spirit, for if it hadn't been through God's power I could never have written a single word on my own, because bringing opposites together is difficult, and opposites can only be united with the support of God and his Envoy ... This is something that is well-known among the masters and the initiates (*al-qawm*), that the spiritual sense is like a bird; as soon as something from the world that we apprehend with our senses disturbs it, it quickly flies away ...[34]

Writing is the fruit of divine inspiration, and of spiritual support from the Prophet, as Qandūsī avers in another collection of various notes: "All of the essential truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) contained in this blessed collection come directly from the inspiration that God has granted us and from the support of my Master, peace and blessings upon him, and the same is true of all our other works."[35] The souk is also a place where the Prophet – Qandūsī's interior

32 *Ta'sīs* I, 19–20.

33 MS BNRM 2127–2 K fol. 15a (l. 1 of the poem): "*a-mawlāya yā Idrīs* [...]".

34 *Ta'sīs* I, 297–298.

35 MS BNRM 1688 D, *Taqāyīd*, 10 (from the pdf): "*wa-kullu mā hunā min al-ḥaqā'iq fī hādhā l-majmūʿ al-mubārak fa-kulluhā min fatḥ Allāh ʿalaynā wa-madad sayyidī wa-kadhālika kullu mā lanā min al-ta'ālīf fī ghayrihi*".

Prophet – can manifest himself and come to meet our author. A personal note relates his waking encounter with the Prophet:

> After having said my afternoon prayer, I was sitting in my stall in the herb sellers' souk. I was seized by a state that was imperceptible to all others. Therefore, seized by such a state, I rose and left my shop to go to the great mosque, I mean the Qarawiyīn, without even perceiving that I had been seized. I found him [the Prophet] – peace and blessings upon him – seated with the four Caliphs – may God be satisfied with them, *āmīn*! – So I sat down facing him, and he said, "From me and for me! (*minnī ilayya*)" [...] From him I received the prayer of the Divine Essence (*al-ṣalāt al-dhātiyya*). He said to me – peace and blessings be upon him – "Repeat this:
>
> > *O God, grant thy uniting grace to the resplendent, essential, perfect light, the secret of which circulates within existence.*[36]
>
> He repeated this phrase three times, and I in my turn recited it three times while he listened to me. He told me: "I have established thee in the Station of the Choice (*maqām al-takhyīr*); if thou desirest to speak, speak, if thou desirest to remain silent, remain silent. [...]." I remained there, sitting with him until the call to the sunset prayer, then I rose to pray with the men [...]. He went out with his companions. His Noble Image (*ṣūratuhu al-sharīfa*) stayed with me until I performed the night-time prayer [...][37]

This "resplendent light" mentioned above is the form in which Qandūsī perceived himself during his Ascension (described above). Without saying so explicitly, he identifies with the Prophetic manifestation. Another manuscript bears witness to Qandūsī's attachment to this prayer received directly from the Prophet. In a commentary in which Qandūsī explains his ties of love with the Prophet, he writes: "When thou sayest '*O God, grant thy uniting grace to the resplendent, essential, perfect light* [...]', this light is a pure love, the contemplation of which plunges thee into a direct vision of the well-beloved until thou seest the beauty of everything that exists, included within his Presence

36 *Allāhumma ṣalli ʿalā al-nūr al-ṣāṭiʿ, al-dhātī, al-kāmil, al-sārī sirruhu fī al-wujūd*. This formulation has similarities with a prayer attributed to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, which is itself attested with numerous variants: *Allāhumma ṣalli wasallim wa-bārik ʿalā sayyidinā Muḥammad al-nūr al-dhātī wa-al-sirr al-sārī fī sāʾir al-asmāʾ wa-l-ṣifāt*. See Nabahānī, *Afḍal ṣalāwāt*, 113–4. See also Le Baot, "Quelques variants".

37 MS 399K, fol. 7b.

FIGURE 20.2 Ta'sīs II fol. 77a. The encounter with Shamharūsh

and never separate from it, because it encompasses the whole."[38] In the manuscript this vision is followed by a second account: Qandūsī relates that one of his acquaintances, the brother in God, the *sayyid*, the *faqīr* Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Qandūsī,[39] came to visit him while he was asleep in the morning after sunrise, and announced to him "Be aware that my Master – peace and blessings be upon him – has sent me to bring you the good news that while you're awake you will meet him!" Qandūsī confirms that he met the Prophet again in the Qarawiyīn, in the *miḥrāb*.

Fez is also the setting for another extraordinary visionary encounter, with the long-lived jinnī Shamharūsh (Figure 2), who met the Prophet Muḥammad in person and, because of this, is a *ṣaḥābī*.[40] Let us note that (in the copy of the *Ta'sīs* made by Ghumārī) the jinnī's name is richly calligraphed and detached from the rest of the writing. This graphic process highlights the passage into a parallel world:

38 *fa-kāna hādhā al-nūr ḥubb maḥḍ fa-innahu yastaghriquka shuhūduhu fī mushāhadat jamāl al-maḥbūb ḥāttā tarā jamāl kull mawjūd mundarij fihi wa-lam yabraḥ min ḥaḍratihi fa-qad ḥawā al-kull fa-fham*. This commentary is called *al-nūr al-sāṭi ʿ fī l-ʿilm al-nāfiʿ*, and is at the beginning of codex 2135K, which also contains another treatise by Qandūsī, the *Bawāriq al-aḥmadiyya fī l-ḥaraka wa-l-sukūniyya*. The passage cited can be found in folio 1a. Abdulaziz Suraqah furnished the transcription of this text.

39 It would be useful to undertake further research on the presence in Fez of people from al-Qanādisa.

40 This jinnī's nature, role and function have been discussed in several classical sources. See Ḥammādī, *Fayḍ*, 57–63 for an overview of this literature. The cave in which Shamharūsh died, on Mount Toubkal in the Moroccan Imlīl region, is much visited; see Maarouf, "Saints and Social Justice in Morocco".

> One night, I saw in the specular world (*al-ʿālam al-mirāʾī*) the Master Shamharūsh the Jinn, the Prophet's Companion, in a pleasant form, in the town of Fez near the entrance to the mosque that is in "Janyāra" street, to the right of the fountain called the *miʿrāḍ*, which everyone in Fez knows.[41] He addressed me: "O thou!"; "Here is where I am!", I replied. He continued, "I see that thou lovest to pray on God's envoy, therefore I wanted to grant thee a privilege that springs from his grace, and that I have never granted to anyone else except for the shaykh Tāwdī b. Sūda,[42] who received it from me, and I wish to transmit it to thee as well. Except for the two of you, no one has received it from me since I received it directly from the Prophet. Here it is: One day I was speaking with the Prophet – peace and blessings be upon him – about the merits of prayer. He asked me, 'If a man has been written down as damned even in his mother's belly, is there any remedy for his damnation?' I replied, 'God and his Prophet have greater knowledge!' [The Prophet] continued, 'If the man has been written down as damned even in his mother's belly, and he is born into the world and engages in praying upon me, this request for grace will transform his damnation into bliss in the Hereafter.[43]

Qandūsī's visions must have been numerous; for example, he recounts having suffered unbearable pain from an abscess in his jaw, near his temple. He was obliged to stay in bed, not eating or drinking except for a little bit of soup (*ḥarīra*). Then he turned away from the physician:

> I concentrated my energy on the freshness of my eyes, he who is the supreme doctor (*al-ṭabīb al-aʿẓam*). The bitterness of pain was softened until I could no longer feel it. Then the Master of Existence came to me after I had said the night prayer, when I was lying on my bed half asleep (but more awake than asleep) [...] I saw him in front of the bed on which I lay, seated facing me. He spoke to me – peace and blessings upon

41 We have been unable to identify this place.

42 Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Tāwdī b. Sūda (d. 1209/1794) directed a Nāṣiriyya *zāwiya* in Fez (see Vimercati, *Fès et sainteté*, chapter entitled "Le savant et imām de la communauté", online at https://books.openedition.org/cjb/538). Other sources tell of the transmission between Ibn Sūda and Shamharūsh, see Kattānī, *Sharḥ al-shamāʾil al-muḥāmmadiyya*, 64 n. 3. ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī lays claim to a chain of transmission related to the way the Prophet put on his turban, which goes back to the Prophet through Shamharūsh. The note mentioned above contains a long biography on the role of Shamharūsh as a transmitter of hadith. Most of its sources date from the eighteenth century.

43 Qandūsī, *Taʾsīs* I, 79; *Taʾsīs* II, fol. 77a.

> him – 'God will heal thy pain in an instant, by His strength and His power.' [The Prophet] took an instrument [...] of light out from under his cloak and asked me to open my mouth.[44]

Another very sacred place in Fez, Bāb F'tūḥ cemetery, is also mentioned in Qandūsī's manuscript notes. He claims to have received a special type of prayer on the Prophet "in the presence of the people of God, in Bāb F'tūḥ, in Fez, in the morning of Friday, the seventh day of the month of Muḥarram 1274/1857". This prayer is a variation on the Prayer of "Divine immensity" (*al-ṣalāt al-ʿaẓīmiyya*) transmitted by another master from Fez and a contemporary of Qandūsī's, Aḥmad b. Idrīs (d. 1253/1837).[45]

There are several remarkable elements in these accounts, only parts of which we have translated. First, they confirm the concealed nature of Qandūsī's states. The notion of love is also central. The life of the master from the herb sellers' souk is governed by this reciprocal bond of love and desire between himself and the Prophet. Qandūsī's accounts of his visions (in a wakeful or in a sleeping state) end with a short note on a period of three consecutive months during which he lived in an intoxication of ecstasy that led him to contemplate the Prophet in himself. However, he cannot and will not recount what he experienced, for the men of his day are no longer suited to receiving such inspiration.[46] Taking up a theme that is very old, but is strongly re-affirmed and actualised by our author, he observes that now and henceforth God has veiled the hearts of mankind, preventing them from knowing holiness: "the greatest of saints live among them, but men do not perceive them."[47]

An apparent contradiction attracts our attention. Qandūsī declares himself to be a descendant of the Aws, but at the same time the Prophet apparently confirms that he has Sharifian ancestry (*anta waladī ḥaqqan*, in the *Ta'sīs*;

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44 Qandūsī, *Ta'sīs* I, 100; *Ta'sīs* II, fol. 94a.

45 *Allāhumma ṣalli ʿalā sayyidinā Muḥāmmad ḥaqqa qadrihi wa-miqdārihi wa-khalqihi wa-khuluqihi al-ʿaẓīm wa-ʿalā ālihi wa-ṣaḥbihi wa-sallim.* Qandūsī adds: *Wa-hiya miftāh al-qalb al-muẓlim lam tazal taftaḥuhu min aghlāqihi ḥattā taftaḥahu fat'ḥan mubīnan wa-tamla'ahu nūran wa-sirran ka'anna ṣāḥibahā* [...] *tuftaḥu lahu abwāb al-janna al-thamāniya yadkhulu min ayyihimā* (*sic*) *shā'a. Wa-tarfaʿu qadrahu wa miqdārahu wa-taḥsunu khuluquhu wa-khalīquhu ḥisssan wama ʿnan wa- Allāh dhū l-faḍl al-ʿaẓīm.* MS BNRM 1688 D, *Taqāyīd*, 10 (from the pdf).

46 *Wa-ammā al-mushāhada fiyya lahu – ṣalla Allāh ʿalayhi wa-sallam – fī ḥāl sukr alladhī kuntu fīhi fī* (*...?*) *fī thalāthat ashhur min rajab ilā ramaḍān wa-anā fī al-sukr fīhi, fa-dhālika lā yalīqu wa-lā yufshā li'anna al-qulūb fī zamāninā hādhā jubilat ʿalā al-inkār wa-l-ḥirs* [...], MS 399 K, fol. 7b.

47 *Ḥattā aʿmā Allāh qulūbahum ʿan maʿrifat al-awliyā' al-kibār wa-hum bayna aẓhurihim wa-lā shuʿūr lahum bihim*, MS 399 K, fol. 7b.

minnī ilayya, in this last passage). Ḥammādī says that the Kattānī are wrong to think that Qandūsī is a *sharīf*. In fact, his fusion with the Prophetic being goes beyond the question of genealogy. At heart, by affirming that Qandūsī is of him and returns to him, the Prophet is referring to the doctrine described in the *Ta'sīs*, according to which everything comes from the metaphysical reality that is the Prophet. These encounters are moments of full realisation of this elective and ontological bond. Qandūsī's Sufism is a path that blends art, devotion to the Prophet, and esoteric sciences behind the veil of the simple life of a shopkeeper in the souk. We have already observed how this occultation in the eyes of other people is wished for by our author. He also emphasises that he moves in the circles of trades and corporations. Qandūsī draws on the life of a small shopkeeper in the souk for his metaphors and symbols, and for the advice he offers. For example, in a passage in the *Ta'sīs* he asserts that the master craftsman (*muʿallim al-ṣanʿa*) benefits from an initiatic secret comparable to that of the spiritual master. The apprentice's mastery may go beyond that of the artisan, just as the disciple's spiritual degree may outstrip the master's.[48] The reasoning behind this analogy once again goes back to the ontological "first determination" that is Prophetic reality. Specifically, Qandūsī refers to "the derivation of secrets and light's penetration" (*ishtiqāq al-asrār wa-infilāq al-anwār*), the expression with which the *Ṣalāt mashīshiyya* begins.[49] Different trades and occupations draw their secrets from this initial division of the original secret, the Prophet's secret; he is the "primordial handful" (*qabḍa*).[50] The *Sharāb ahl al-ṣafā* is a little manual composed by our author, in which he proposes an original method for practising the prayer on the Prophet (*al-ṣalāt ʿalā al-nabī*); this requires one to transform all of life's events numerically into a specific number of prayers on the Prophet. For example, he advises readers to change the price of a purchase or the address of a shop into a corresponding number of prayers in order to receive the Prophet's blessings.[51] This path is evidently rooted in Qandūsī's surroundings and class, although the notables of his time also associated with him. The Vizier Idrīs b. Idrīs, of whom we will speak in the second part of this chapter, commissioned from him the great Qur'ān in twelve volumes. Al-Manūnī says that Qandūsī corresponded with the governor (*ʿāmil*) of Fez, Idrīs b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sarrāj al-Ḥumayrī (d. 1887/1304).

48 Qandūsī, *Ta'sīs* I, 168.

49 For more on this prayer, attributed to the Moroccan master ʿAbd al-Salām b. Mashīsh (d. 625/1227), see Hamidoune, *La pratique de la "prière sur le prophète" en Islam*, p. 302.

50 *wa-aṣl dhālika kulluhu ma'khūdh min ishtiqāq al-asrār wa-infilāq al-anwār min al-qabḍa al-muḥammadiyya wa-sāra sirr dhālika fī furūʿ hayākil min ṣinā'āt al-ẓāhir wa-al-bāṭin*, Qandūsī, *Ta'sīs* I, 168.

51 Qandūsī, *Sharāb ahl al-ṣāfā*, 37 and subsequent.

This correspondence is said to have been collected by Qandūsī's disciple, Vizier Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ṣanhājī al-Fāsī (d. 1891/1309), who offered Qandūsī the title *al-Fatḥ al-quddūsī fī-mā fāḍa bihi Sayyidī Muḥammad al-Qandūsī*. This text is said to have been found in the possession of a family from Marrakesh, but we do not know its present location.[52] However, the attribution to Qandūsī of the *ijāza* in the *Dalā'il* given to Sultan Moulay Sulaymān b. Muḥammad is not authentic; Qandūsī's name does not appear anywhere in this work.[53]

Finally, the emphasis on the form adopted by the Prophet (a white pearl, or simply the "noble image", *ṣūratu-hu al-sharīfa*) is linked with the efforts Qandūsī invested in retransmitting these images through his manuscripts, and in his symbolic designs (graphics, graphemes, calligraphic style). It is through this visual and aesthetic fusion that the link between the spiritual master and the master calligrapher is created. In the next section we will examine a number of important passages.

2 Making the Prophet Visible: Calligraphy as a Means of Spiritual Realisation

The first text we will examine is quoted at the head of this chapter, and it defines the "universal mirror" (*mir'āt al-kull*), an absolutely pure surface that is the origin of everything and towards which every image returns by refraction. This way of presenting the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya* is both well-established in Maghribi Shādhili Sufism (we have mentioned its expression in the opening of the *ṣalāt mashīshiyya*) and also very personal, for it springs from the "visionary" sensibility of a calligrapher. Qandūsī demonstrates this great sensitivity to forms in his best-known works: his monumental Qurʾān and his copies of al-Jazūlī's *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* are those that we will examine here. Let us take as an example the name of the Prophet and its link to the name of majesty, Allāh. Ghumārī's copy of the *Ta'sīs* contains a passage on the esoteric meaning of the grapheme "Muḥammad". As with the encounter with the jinn Shamharūsh, the writing in this passage changes its appearance and the name of the Prophet, the tetragram "Muḥammad" (Figure 20.3), is highlighted in red. This passage describes the nobility of the human being, whose physical form derives from that of the name Muḥammad. Qandūsī goes further. By transforming

52 Manūnī, *al-maṣādir al-ʿarabiyya*, 2: 134, cited by Ḥammādī, *Fayḍ*, 85.

53 The catalogue of the National Library in Rabat refers to this as a work by Qandūsī; MS 2795 D, fol. 361a.

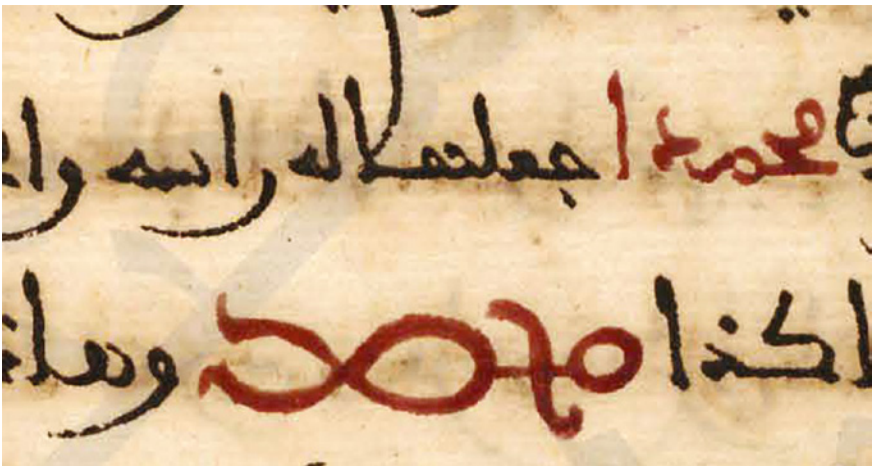

FIGURE 20.3 Ta'sis II, fol. 83a. The tetragram "Muḥammad"

the letters, he relates the name Muḥammad to the name Allāh. To differing degrees, all existence derives from the name "Muḥammad":

> The name Muḥammad comes from the Name of majesty, "Allāh". The tail comes from the *alif*, for humans have a tail like all the other animals, but it is not apparent, because this makes [humans] look more perfect. The two arms and the two legs come from the two *lām*s. The letter *hā'* is the head. The Name of majesty is made manifest in the form of the name "Muḥammad". It also appears in the fingers of the hand [...][54]
>
> Beings come from the letters of the name Muḥammad. Some of them come from the *ḥā'*, some from the double *mīm*, some from the *dāl*, some come from two letters and some from three. Human beings come from the four letters, because God linked Adam and his descendants to His Well-Beloved Muḥammad.[55]

This quest for understanding through the realisation of the superior meaning of the name of the Prophet is also at the centre of Qandūsī's *Sharāb*. In this text he transmits his particular understanding of the Qur'ānic verse "To God belong the Names Most Beautiful" (Q 7 : 180, Arberry):

54 Qandūsī, *Ta'sīs* I, 85; *Ta'sīs* II, fol. 83a.
55 Qandūsī, *Ta'sīs* I, 88; *Ta'sīs* II, fol. 86a.

> If we enlarge our reflection on this noble verse we observe that its ocean is immense and takes in not only the 99 names of God related by tradition (*al-wārida*). In reality, grace attains the name by which the 100 names are completed, and that name is the name of His well-beloved Muḥammad, peace and blessings upon him! – for the name of His well-beloved is never separated from the name of God. […][56]
>
> He who knows the name of Muḥammad – peace and blessings upon him! – in its essence and not merely by its attributes knows the supreme name of God, for the name of the well-beloved is the essence of the divine names […]. For he who invokes God by the name of His well-beloved – peace and blessings upon him! –will see his prayers answered.[57] […]
>
> The names all together are the name of the well-beloved, and the name of the well-beloved is the supreme name of God.[58]

From this realisation of the name of God is born a particular method for the practice of the prayer on the Prophet, which we have mentioned above: each moment of daily life can be linked to the name of the Prophet through a numerical calculation and a specific number of prayers. This "union" between the names of God and of Muḥammad is explained masterfully by Qandūsī in a special prayer called "The Great Elixir". Its opening lines refer again to alchemical elements already mentioned in an autobiographical passage on the realisation of the inner Prophet:

> O God, grant Thy uniting grace, Thy salvation and Thy blessing to the one in whose name Thou hast poured the ambrosia of Thy supreme name Allāh, our master Muḥammad, God's Envoy! These two noble and majestic names were exalted above all other noble names. They are the root of every branch, the quintessence of every essence, the supreme wine of all wines, the secret of every secret, the knowledge of all knowledge, the wisdom of all wisdom, the light of all lights, the elixir of all elixirs, the alchemy of all alchemy, the red sulphur of all red sulphurs, the theriac of all theriacs, the magnet of all magnets, the antimony of eyes, the hyacinth of all Brahmanic hyacinths, the pearl of all pearls, the jewel of all jewels, the gem of all gems, the carnelian of all carnelians, the coral of all corals,

56 Qandūsī, *Sharāb*, 27.

57 Qandūsī, *Sharāb*, 29.

58 Qandūsī, *Sharāb*, 30. In the *Ta'sīs* Qandūsī also refers to the name Muḥammad as the one-hundredth divine name after the ninety-nine names in the Tradition of the 99 Divine Names; *Ta'sīs* 1, 289.

> the peridot of all peridots, the pure gold of all pure gold, the pure silver of all pure silver, the silk of all silks, the brocade of all brocades, the musk of all musks, the camphor of all camphors, the perfume of all perfumes, the fragrance of all fragrances, the balm of all balms, may God grant him His uniting grace and salute him, along with his family.
>
> O God, grant Thy uniting grace, Thy salvation and Thy blessing on he whose name, Aḥmad, you have steeped in the secret of Thy name, the All-Merciful, through *Lā ilāha Illā llāh Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh*.[59]

The bond between God's name and the Prophet's, and the anthropomorphic form of the latter, are ancient themes, which can be found, for example, in the *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā*, by Khargūshī, a Nishapurian master who died in 1015–16. Khargūshī devotes a chapter in his book to the question of the Prophet's names, and maintains that the name "Muḥammad" derives from the praise-names "al-Ḥamīd" and "al-Maḥmūd". Then he cites a poem that he attributes to Abū Ṭālib, which gives the impression that the privilege implicit in such a name was already evident when the Prophet was born: "In order to magnify him, God derived his name from His Name. The Master of the Throne is Maḥmūd, and this one is Muḥammad!" Then Khargūshī establishes a parallel between each letter of the name Muḥammad and the human body.[60] Much has been written about the relationship between the Prophet's names and those of God. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 1424), in his *Kamālāt*, affirms explicitly that the name Allāh *is* the name Muḥammad. Another, later, master of the Akbarian school, ʿAbd al-Ghānī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), gives a detailed explanation in a text devoted to the esoteric explication of the "pillars" of Islam. In one chapter, he sets himself to explaining the inner and hidden meaning of the profession of faith: *lā ilāha illā llāh Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*. Although, according to external law, each part of the profession of faith has its own status and implications (divine unicity and affirmation of the prophecy), their true esoteric meaning is unique and indivisible:[61]

> God has made Muḥammad manifest among us and Muḥammad has likewise made God manifest among us, like the light that cannot be known

59 This extract was edited and translated by Suraqah, *The Grand Elixir*, 15–16. The *Sayf al-ʿināya* is made up of various chapters that bring together particular modes of prayer on the Prophet. The manuscript is preserved in the National Library of Rabat, shelved under 1699 D (*majmūʿ awwalu-hu taqālīd fī ism Allāh al-aʿẓam*).

60 al-Khargūshī, *Manāhil al-shifā*, 1, 69.

61 *Wa-ammā bayān al-ḥāqīqa fa-inna hātayn al-shahādatayn tadākhalatā biḥaythu ṣāratā shahādatan wāḥidatan wabaynahumā talāzum maʿnawī.*

> without darkness, or shadows that cannot be known away from the light. For this reason, God states that "he who obeys the Envoy has obeyed God". […] He who meditates will see that the whole universe is in accordance with the Muḥammadan form and the word of majesty (*ʿalā al-ṣūra al-muḥammadiyya wa lafẓat al-jalāla*). If it was not thus, no superior reality could establish itself in this world, and for this reason those who held that "the name is the essence of the named" spoke the truth, for otherwise, if it was not its essence, the image of the named would not be able to impose itself in the heart of the person hearing the name. The entire world is the form of the name Muḥammad and the form of the name Muḥammad is the form of the name Allāh […][62]

As well as casting light on the "genealogy" of a doctrine, in such texts it is also interesting to note what was unique to Qandūsī. And it is the graphic approach that is our master's defining quality. Although ideas around the esoteric ties between the divine and the Muḥammadan realities, as made manifest in their names, are already present in earlier esoteric literature, Qandūsī realises these concepts through and in his calligraphy. One example of these ties is an introductory page preceding his personal copy of the *Dālāʾil al-Khayrāt*, MS 399K, which we will shortly examine in greater detail (see Figures 22–27).

The border between being and writing is a subtle one; the calligrapher wants to *become* writing. In one passage in the *Taʾsīs*, the practice of calligraphy and the craft of the copyist become symbolic images of the spiritual master:

> The spiritual master undoes the knots of the disciple's inner being (*bawāṭin*), he acts within him like a skilled copyist who perfectly masters the art of [resolving] difficulties around terms and letters, one letter at a time (*ḥarfan ḥarfan*). He knows how to open their hollow eyes (*fatḥ ʿuyūnihā al-mujawwafa*).[63] He knows which letter needs one dot, which other letter needs two or three dots. [He knows which letter] deserves to

62 al-Nābulusī, *Asrār al-sharīʿa*, 233–236.

63 *Mujawwafa* letters, which are rounded, have an "obscure" side – at least according to an imagined dialogue between this earthly world and the Devil, in the course of which the latter says, "On the day God created Adam and formed him from clay, I was overwhelmed by jealousy of him. I went towards this form [Adam] and I pricked it lightly in the middle with my beak, and I heard a sort of hollow sound (*fa-samiʿtu ḥasīsahā mujawwafatan*). I realised that I had a way in to each letter that contains a concavity (*jawf*). I penetrated the letters *ṭāʾ*, *mīm* and *ʿayn*, and I cleaned them out; then a word appeared and I pronounced it. It was the name of all perdition for Adam and his descendants: *ṭamaʿ*, covetousness." (Qandūsī, *Taʾsīs* I, 255).

> be written in silver and which other deserves gold. Every shape has an intelligible meaning, willst thou understand this? Therefore, respect the holiness of the masters if thou desirest that thy writing be drawn in pure gold (*dhahab ibrīz*). Do not stop short at the colours of the illuminations (*zakhārif*) until thou art written down in Gold, for [writing in Pure Gold] never fades and nothing can corrupt it. Therefore, be alert to the subtle art (*tadqīq*) of the master.

This is very far from being an abstract metaphor. It is important to note that Qandūsī never created the illuminations in his calligraphed copies; their appearance shows that they are someone else's work. Gold is used in them, but it is not applied by his hand. This transformation of the being into writing is what the calligrapher asks from God in prayers such as those we cite above. This identification of the body with the writing process recurs in one late passage in the *Ta'sīs*, in which the metaphor employed is that of writing out the Qur'ān on wooden tablets (*lawḥ*, pl. *alwāḥ*). This traditional method for the teaching and learning of the Qur'ān (in which passages are written, read, corrected and re-written by the students, and then erased to make way for the next passage), becomes the symbol of the purification of the body through the double labour of erasing and re-writing. In this passage the supreme master is the Prophet himself:

> [...] Go find the master of the children at the Qur'ānic school, attach thyself to him and observe how he is with the children, how he educates them and how the children recite [the Qur'ān written down on] their tablets before erasing it. [Observe] how they erase the tablets, and how they rub the clay upon them, and how they dry them. [...] Imagine thyself as one of these children before the master. If thou dost not manage to imagine thy master, [know that] in fact he is the Prophet. Begin by reciting what's on the tablet, look with thine own eyes and recite [to thy master] what is written there [...][64]

This passage carries on over several pages. As with the prayer of transformation presented above, for each part of the body Qandūsī describes the process of "reading" its contents to the master, and then the correction, the erasing and the final re-writing. The human being is re-written by the "Muḥammadan ink".[65]

64 Qandūsī, *Ta'sīs* I, 215.

65 *Wa-ma'nā ḥibrika alladhī tuktabu bihi ayḍan min al-midād al-muḥammadī*, Qandūsī, *Ta'sīs* I, 219.

In this section we are examining Qandūsī's calligraphic style in order better to understand the link between the spiritual conception of writing extolled in the texts and the calligraphic œuvre of the master.

3 The Formation of the "*khaṭṭ al-Qandūsī*"

Aside from his importance in Moroccan religious life, Qandūsī also distinguished himself through his calligraphic talent. In fact, he changed the premodern codes of calligraphy in the Maghrib. In his hagiographical dictionary, al-Kattānī briefly mentions Qandūsī's calligraphic works, including his copies of the Qurʾān and of the famous book of prayers on the Prophet, the *Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt*, by the Moroccan mystic Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Jazūlī (d. 869/1465):

> He had a particularly beautiful and well-made line, which he used when he wrote out several *Dalāʾil*, and I was told that he had also written out a Qurʾān in twelve volumes that people say is unequalled anywhere on Earth.[66]

Oddly, in spite of the exceptional nature of Qandūsī's art and of the innovations he introduced into the eighteenth and nineteenth century *maghribī* ways of writing, relatively few copies of works formally identified as being by him exist today. Equally, there are few writings in existence that give us information on his activities as a copyist, apart from the scattered remarks the calligrapher left in the margins or introductory pages of his manuscripts, and a few commentaries by hagiographers or modern specialists in Moroccan books. Among the latter, Fawzī ʿAbd al-Razzāq[67] and Muḥammad al-Manūnī[68] mention a copy of the Qurʾān signed by the master's hand in 1266/1850[69] and seven manuscripts of the *Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt*, some of which were made for the royal family. However, F. ʿAbd al-Razzāq gives neither catalogue numbers nor the location in which the copies of the *Dalāʾil* are preserved, while Muḥammad al-Manūnī wrongly attributes to Qandūsī several copies of the *Dalāʾil* that are held in the Royal Library.

66 *wa kāna lahu khaṭṭun ḥasanun jayyidun, kataba bihi ʿiddat al-dawālīl* [Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt], *wa-ukhbirtu anna-hu kataba muṣḥafan fī ithnay ʿashara mujalladan qīla an lā yūjad naẓīruhu fī l-dunyā*, Kattānī, *Salwat al-anfās*, III, 54.

67 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *The Kingdom of the Book*, 32.

68 Manūnī, *Tarīkh al-wirāqa*, 173–5.

69 This Qurʾān 12613 in twelve volumes, held at the Royal al-Ḥasaniyya Library of Rabat.

In order to grasp Qandūsī's creative process, we have decided to limit this study to two copied texts signed by the calligrapher – these are representative of his art and yet they reveal two distinct approaches. The first manuscript, a Qur'ān in twelve volumes from the Royal Library in Rabat (reference 12613) was the result of an official commission, while the second, the *Dalā'il* held in the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco under the reference 399K, seems to have been produced by the calligrapher for his personal use.

The Qur'ān 12613 was finished on a Friday at the end of the month of Shawwāl 1266/September 1850, in response to a commission from a certain Idrīs b. Muḥammad Idrīs al-ʿAmrāwī al-Zammūrī al-Idrīsī (d. 1295/1878), as the colophon at the end of the twelfth volume states (ff. 138a–138b). The patron is not unknown to us: he was a scholar and diplomat in the service of the Makhzen and came from one of the grandest families of Fez. Born in 1208/1794, he was the son of Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-ʿAmrāwī (d. 1263/1847), who himself became the personal secretary of the Alawite Sultan Mulāy Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (r. 1238–1276/1822–1859). As early as 1277/1860, Idrīs b. Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-ʿAmrāwī was Minister of Foreign Affairs under the reign of Mohammed IV (r. 1276–1290//1859–1873); the following year he was sent as the Sultan's emissary to France, in order to report back on the progress of modernisation at the time of the industrial revolution. He spent some time in Paris, and visited the Château of Versailles, the Paris Mint, the National Library and the official printing works of the French Government. In his report on the journey, *Tuḥfat al-malik al-ʿazīz bi-mamlakat Barīz* (*The Jewel of the well-beloved King in the Kingdom of Paris*),[70] he devotes several pages to the printing press, which he sees as one of the French technological advances that could profitably be developed in the Sharifian Empire.[71] At the same time, he was also worried that such technological progress could not be adapted to an Arabo-Muslim society. His account of his trip does reveal that in spite of his strong attachment to local religious traditions, al-ʿAmrāwī felt a certain attraction to modernity.

70 Published in 1909, the account of the journey has been translated from Arabic to French by Luc Barbulesco under the title *Le paradis des femmes et l'enfer des chevaux: relation du voyage d'Idriss al-Amraoui à Paris*.

71 Barbulesco (tr.), *Le paradis des femmes*, 60–65. When he returned to Morocco, al-Amraoui proposed the idea of installing a printing press to the Alawite Sultan, thus bringing about the creation of the country's first printworks in 1864. "On our part, we pray to God that he should inspire Our Majesty, the Commander of Believers, to endow Morocco with such a printing press, and thus to add to the number of its benefits. He has already left signs of his generous actions, may he thus give new strength to religion and follow in the footsteps of the great Imams. *Āmīn*."

This makes it easier for us to understand why such a dignitary, close to the *Makhzen*, would want to acquire a manuscript of the Qurʾān from Qandūsī, whose style he must have recognised and appreciated as being singular and innovative for the period. As the calligrapher says in the colophon, the Qurʾān was finished in 1266/1850, about ten years after al-ʿAmrāwī's departure for France in spring 1277/1860. The quality of its execution is remarkable, both as regards the materials used for its illuminated decorations and for the originality of its calligraphic style. Each of the ten volumes still preserved at the Ḥasaniyya[72] opens with a double page of text, the treatment of which is distinguished not only by its thick and mannered writing in a style unique to Qandūsī, but by the illuminated decoration that frames the text (Figures 20.14–16). It was usual in Qurʾānic manuscripts over several volumes to insert an ornamental and calligraphic accent in the first double page spread of each section.[73] In Qandūsī's pages the writing, despite the monumentality and excessive thickness of the line, has a fluid vibrancy as a result of the shifting balance between the thickness of the letters and their slender, very sinuous tails. In order to achieve this effect, Qandūsī traced the outline of the letters, and their tails, with a fine black quill, and, very certainly, painted in these outlines with a pointed brush (Figures 20.4 and 20.5). This technique is uncommon in Maghribi manuscripts. It can be found for much earlier periods in the Muslim West, and was used to remarkable effect in the famous "Nanny's Qurʾān" (*Muṣḥaf al-Ḥāḍina*) copied in 410/1019–20[74] by the nanny of the Zirid Emir al-Muʿizz b. Bādis (r. 407/1016–454/1062), in which the entire text has been traced according to this process.[75]

In the rest of this text Qandūsī sets the paintbrush aside and traces the words with a reed pen, on a smaller scale – about nine lines per page. (Figure 20.17). At first glance the completely original nature of the calligraphy (through the great plasticity of the formation of letters) might lead one to question its origins, and its links with local Maghribi traditions. However, careful observation allows one to uncover the calligrapher's attachment to the classical principles of the way of writing called *maghribī al-mabsūṭ*. The ordinary writing on these pages takes its form from the handwriting that was often used in medieval Maghribi Qurʾāns, as evidenced, for example, by the atrophied tails of certain letters, the particular punctuation of the letters *fāʾ* and *qāf*, the large opening in the *nūn* and that of the *ʿayn/ghayn*.[76] Qandūsī even refers to an ancient form

72 Of the twelve *ajzāʾ*, only volumes 3 to 12 are still preserved at the library; the first two volumes were offered as a gift by the Royal Library.

73 Waley, "L'ornementation du livre", 255.

74 Déroche, "Les emplois du Coran" 60; *Id.* "Cercles et entrelacs" 606–7.

75 Déroche, "Le Prince et la Nourrice" 18–33.

76 Khemir, "The Art of the Book", 116.

FIGURE 20.4 Detail of the outlining of letters in Qur'ān 12613, from vol. 12, f. 12a

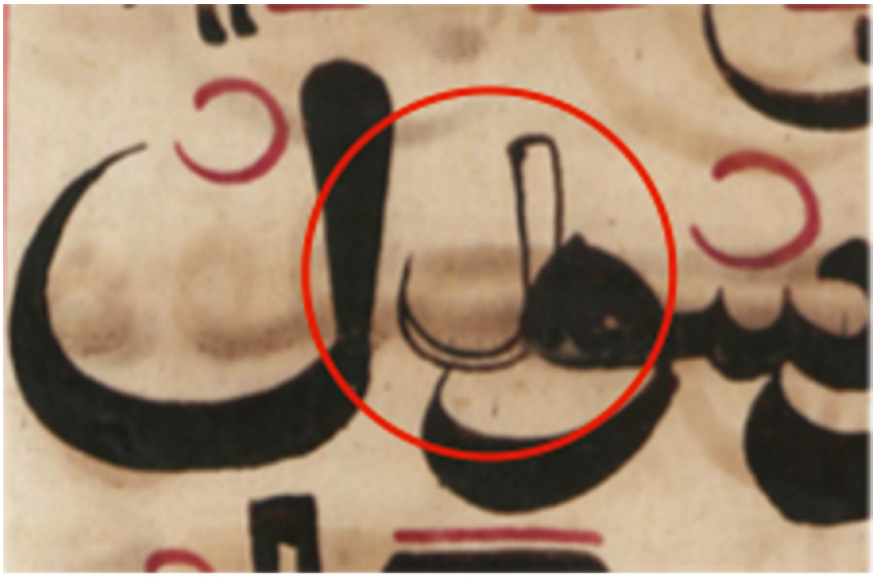

FIGURE 20.5 Detail of the outlining of letters in Qur'ān 12613, vol. 11, f. 36a

of *maghribī* to draw the *hamza*, marking the *hamzat al-waṣl* with a large orange (or, less frequently, yellow) dot and the *hamzat al-qaṭʿ* with a green dot. It is clear that we can assume that the herb-seller benefited from a solid apprenticeship in Maghribi calligraphy, and that he takes care, in this official commission, to perpetuate its codes while adopting his own personal style.

Apart from a parsimonious use of gold and coloured inks in the titles, vocalisation marks and diacritical marks, Qandūsī's work is resolutely sober in appearance, in contrast to the great finesse of its execution (Figure 20.17). In addition, it may appear surprising that the separators between the verses are absent throughout all twelve volumes. We are tempted to ascribe this intentional restraint on the part of the calligrapher to the above-cited observations that he formulated in the *Ta'sīs*, on the importance of avoiding all distraction of the spirit that might be caused by the *zakhrafa* (illumination) and the colours in manuscripts, and of avoiding all excessive use of these techniques.

Essentially, it is through his tracing of the name *Muḥammad* that he enhances these pages and gives free play to his art. In the *Muḥammad*, *al-Fatḥ* and *al-Aḥzāb* Suras, he brings out the Prophet's name by amplifying the size of its letters and painting it using a technique similar to that employed for the first double page of each volume (Figures 20.6 and 20.8). For another occurrence he uses a no less original approach, tracing the contours of the name *Muḥammad* in bright red ink and painting it in with black, thus giving it volume and making it stand out (Figure 20.7).

All of these practices contribute to enchanting the eye when it sees the Prophet's name, and to making its letters stand out from the rest of the text. What's more, the structure of the consonantal skeleton (*rasm*) of the name itself is surprising, to say the least. The initial *mīm* floats above the letter *ḥā'*.

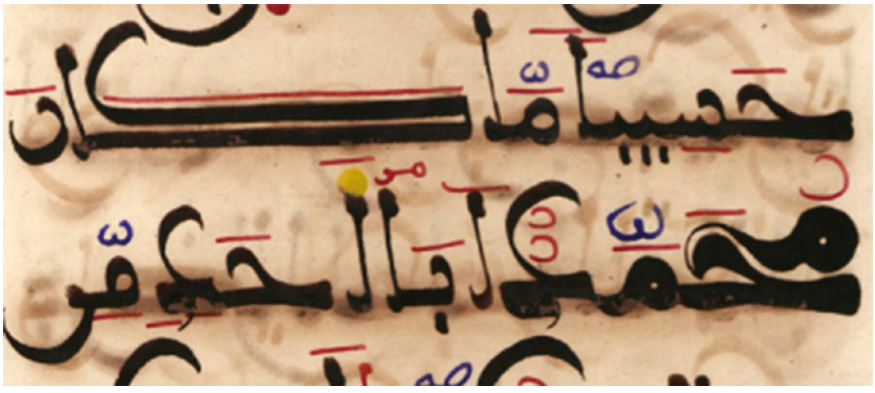

FIGURE 20.6 Writing "Muḥammad" – vol. 9, f. 46b

FIGURE 20.7 Writing "Muḥammad", vol. 11, f. 14a

FIGURE 20.8 Writing "Muḥammad" – vol. 11, f. 36a

This latter is designated by two curls that mirror each other, creating an additional echo in the negative space between the black lines. The great plasticity of the letters, especially the *mīm* above the *ḥā'*, and the *'ayn* in a median position, almost suggests recognisable forms or images. In the colophon of this Qur'ān, Qandūsī devotes a few lines to the hidden powers of letters, and some of these passages recall the idea of the anthropomorphism of writing that he developed in his treatise, *al-Ta'sīs*. Indeed, in f. 138a, he compares the letters of

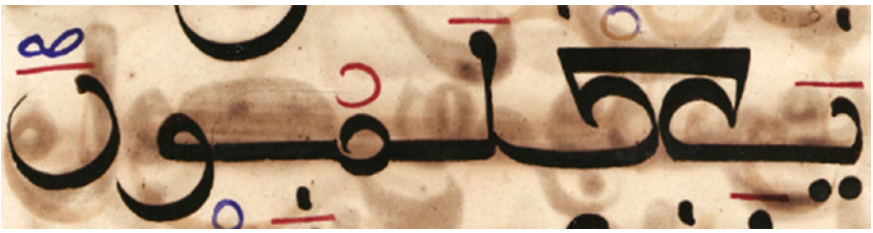

FIGURE 20.9 Qur'ān 12613, vol. 9, f. 116a

the Qur'ān to a fountain (*al-khaṣṣa*) from which gushes (*al-dāfiqa*) the power of their hidden meanings (*sirr al-ḥurūf*), like a spring (*'ayn*) from which everyone can drink. Thus, one should drink from each letter as much as one wants (*ighraf minhu mā shi'ta*) in order to achieve healing from all diseases and from anything else (*wa-stashfi bihi min amrāḍika wa-min kulli mā shi'ta*).[77]

If we examine the shapes of letters carefully, bearing this in mind, certain comments can be made (Figure 20.11): The grapheme ع (*'ayn*) in the median position in a word is formed of the meeting of two definitely concave, and symmetrical, marks, topped by a strong thick convex (or, in certain contexts, completely straight) line.

At each appearance of the letter *'ayn* the two strokes that form it are extended so that they skim the base-line, making the letter look like a stylised fountain, as described in the colophon, where he compares the shapes of letters to that of a spring, "*'ayn*" in Arabic (Figure 20.20). This sort of treatment of writing is rare in the Muslim west, unlike in the *Mashriq*, especially in Iran, where calligraphers conceived pictorial writing; there the border between writing and painting is very permeable.[78] As early as the tenth/sixteenth century, zoomorphic calligraphy, formed by a word or phrase (often a pious formula) that was stretched and deformed so as to depict an animal figure, was very popular in Iran. Another technique, micrography, also consisted of the formation of an image from a written text, using a microscopic handwriting called *ghubārī*.[79]

77 *Li-kawnihi al-ghinā' yansha'u min tajwīf ḥurūfihi kamā hum maftūḥīna fa kull-ḥarf yanba'u min-hu 'aynan* [*sic*] *ka-l-khaṣṣa al-dāfiqa yashrabu minhā kullu man yariduhā mimmā dhakarnāhu min qaḍā' al-ḥawā'ij wa-daf' al-maṣā'ib* [...] *kamā afṣaḥnā bihi wa-khtaṣarnāhu tarā sirr al-ḥurūf wa-'adhb mā'ihim* [*māyihim*] *al-mutadāfiq min kulli ḥarf ighraf minhu mā shi'ta wa-stashfi bihi min amrāḍika wa-min kull mā shi'ta wa-aqḍi bihi mā shi'ta.*

78 Blair, "Pictorial writing".

79 Although this tiny writing is mostly encountered in manuscripts produced in Turkey during the tenth/sixteenth century (Vernay-Nouri, "Marges, gloses et décor"), the technique is very occasionally adopted in a few copies made in the Maghrib. In those instances, it is

Although our calligrapher's graphic experiments were more restrained than those eastern creations, his observations on the anthropomorphism of letters, as expressed in his *Ta'sīs* and reiterated in the colophon of this Qurʾān, remain no less original in the Maghribi calligraphic tradition.

This Qurʾān displays many aesthetic qualities, but in addition, our copyist uses the final two pages of the twelfth volume to tell readers of its talismanic functions. In the colophon he specifies that these twelve volumes are laden with blessings (*baraka*) for whoever carries them, turns their pages, or reads them. It will ensure the healing of all sickness, preserve from "all troubles", protect from demons (*al-shayāṭīn*), permit victory in battle (*ḥamalahu li-l-ḥarb wa-nawā bihi ʿazīmat al-juyūsh*), and even ward off the danger of drowning at sea (*ḥamalahu fī safīna li-l-najāt min al-gharāq fi-l-baḥr*). We can assume that the realisation of a copy of the Qurʾān that is explicitly endowed with such thaumaturgical and protective properties is the result of a clearly expressed desire on the part of the person commissioning the work and we know of the diplomatic activities and extensive (and sometimes dangerous) European journeys undertaken by Idrīs b. Muḥammad Idrīs al-ʿAmrāwī al-Zammūrī al-Idrīsī.[80]

4 Forming the Letter, an Act of Prophetic Devotion

The second manuscript we examine in this study, the copy of al-Jazūlī's *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* [399K in the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco] also contains talismanic elements. *Kitāb Dalā'il al-Khayrāt wa Shawāriq al-anwār fī dhikr al-ṣalāt 'alā al-Nabī al-mukhṭār* (*The signs of benefits and resplendent lights in the enunciation of the prayer in honour of the chosen Prophet*) is a collection of prayers and invocations of the Prophet that was put together towards the middle of the ninth/fifteenth century by the Moroccan mystic Muḥammad

applied to marginal notes, written in a tiny hand and organised in such a way as to form the shapes of recognisable or ornamental objects. See the collection of texts called *Kitāb siḥr al-balāgha wa-sirr al-barā'a*, by ʿAbd al-Malik b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿālibī, probably written in Algeria in 1051 H/1643. Guesdon and Nouri, *L'Art du livre arabe*, 67.

80 Although the use of the Qurʾān as a talisman was strongly condemned by some jurists, the most famous of whom was Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), the practice became common very early throughout the Muslim world. This may have been (in part) inspired by the last two Suras of the Book (Q 113 and 114), as in the following verses: "I take refuge with the Lord of the Daybreak from the evil of what He has created, from the evil of darkness when it gathers, from the evil of the women who blow on knots, from the evil of an envier when he envies." (Q 113:1–5, trans. Arberry). In such cases the use of the Qurʾān as a talisman rests on the recitation of this text, or the writing of it. For more on this, see "L'usage talismanique du Coran" 83–95; *Id.* ed., *Coran et talismans*. (change the font).

b. Sulaymān al-Jazūlī (d. 869/1465). Unusually, the book contains illustrations representing the funerary chamber of the Prophet in the Medina mosque, and it rapidly became one of the most popular devotional books in the entire Sunnī Muslim world; reading it was considered to bring numerous blessings, as was the act of copying it.[81]

Qandūsī himself seems to have devoted much time and affection to copying this breviary, if we are to believe the tally established by specialists in Moroccan books, of seven copies by Qandūsī. Some of these were made for the royal family, or for important dignitaries in the Kingdom. We can assume that manuscript copy 634J in the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco, finished in 1267/1850, was created for an important commissioner; it employs expensive materials and completely original and complex techniques or writing; it also features an abundance of illuminated decoration, certainly by an artist other than Qandūsī (Figure 20.20). As well as wanting to create beautiful copies of the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*, our calligrapher also demonstrates a real care for the authentic transmission of this manual of *taṣliya* on the Prophet, and seems to have a remarkable mastery of its text (Figure 20.21). In his copy 399K (Figure 20.22), he inserts numerous marginal annotations in order to provide the reader with precise information about the *hadiths* on which the prayers in the book are based.[82] Another sort of note refers to the autograph copy of the book of prayers (*al-nuskha al-sahliyya*),[83] in order to attest to the authenticity and conformity of the text that he has re-read, corrected, and copied.

This preoccupation with conforming to the autograph copy demonstrates the extent of Qandūsī's familiarity with al-Jazūlī's text. This also seems to have been recognised by his contemporaries, who ask him to re-read copies of the breviary made by other hands, in order to verify that they are authentic. We have identified a note in Qandūsī's hand just after the *explicit* of another copy, certainly not made by him, of the collection of prayers, *Dalā'il* 5920, held in

81 For more on the manuscript tradition of the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* in the Muslim west, see Abid, "*Les Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*".

82 For example, he attaches the first prayer, *al-ṣalāt al-ūlā* (f. 50a), to the *Shifā'* and to the *Muwaṭṭa'*; the second *ṣalāt* (f. 51a), is attached to the *Shifā'*, the *Muwaṭṭa'* and the *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, or else to the fifth prayer (f. 52b), in the *Shifā'* by the Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ.

83 The copy called "al-sahliyya" is the manuscript that would have been copied in 862/1457–8 by Muḥammad al-Ṣughayyir al-Sahlī (d. 917/1511–12), disciple and close companion of Shaykh al-Jazūlī, after this latter had spent several years composing and checking his text. Many manuscripts, especially in the *Mashriq*, contain marginal references to the *nuskha al-sahlīya* in order to attest to the authenticity of the text: Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 177. See also Chapter 3, "La copie autographe: al-Nuskha al-Sahliyya", in Abid, *Les* Dalā'il al-Khayrāt, I, 64–66.

FIGURE 20.10 f. 69a: Marginal gloss about the autograph copy

FIGURE 20.11 f. 87b: Marginal glosses about the autograph copy

the Royal al-Ḥasaniyya Library and dated *Dhū al-Qaʿda* 1200/August 1786.[84] The calligrapher has added a few lines in which he attests to the conformity (*taḥqīq*, *taṣdīq*) of this copy to the autograph copy that is authoritative (*taḥqīq sanadihi*), and assures the reader that he has completed an expert re-reading and careful correction of the copy. Amine Hamidoune, in his thesis, alerts us to the presence of two other Moroccan copies of the book of prayers that contain similar attestations from Qandūsī, the *Dalāʾil* 7959 in the Royal al-Ḥasaniyya Library, and J634 in the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco, dated Friday 4 Muharram 1267/9 November 1850.[85] Incontestably, our calligrapher was considered to be a legitimate *muḥaqqiq* of the *Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt*.

84 This manuscript was identified and analysed in Abid, *Les* Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt, I, 307 and II, 141–3.

85 We discovered this information too late to include these versions in the present chapter; we hope to consult and make use of them in future research.

FIGURE 20.12 Examples of crossing out and clumsiness in the Dalā'il al-Khayrāt 399K

Among all the copies of the *Dalā'il* attributed to Qandūsī, manuscript 399K from the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco is the most singular, differing in several ways from most of his other artistic production. Unlike in the works we have evoked above, here the calligrapher undeniably frees himself from the habitual modalities of copying and illustration for a book of prayers, and also from the classical norms of Maghribi writing. This can probably be explained by the fact that Qandūsī made this copy for himself, as he says in the colophon: *katabahu li-nafsihi* (f. 154a); this formula was used in Arabic manuscripts copied by someone for his own use.[86] This allows us to understand the presence of a plethora of marginal inscriptions throughout the book, along with the evident clumsiness of his writing of the main text. The calligrapher's line is often irregular, and the shape and lengths of the joins between the letters of individual words are not harmonised. On some pages he squeezes the words together, when the space remaining to finish a line is too small (*al-tabyīn*, f. 174b), and in several other places he has crossed out segments (Figure 20.12). All this leads one to conclude that Qandūsī made this copy quickly, without an initial assessment of the page layouts.

This copy opens with several pages covered with prayers, alongside accounts of events in the religious life of Fez, or of the calligrapher's mystical experiences. Following this we find a series of pages covered with illuminations and writings, the sometimes uneven treatment of which, as in the rest of the book, indicates that they were very probably executed by the calligrapher himself. The first double carpet-page centres on a rectangle between two horizontal bands, containing a title announcing the Prophet's genealogy (Figure 20.23). This is

86 Déroche, "Copier des manuscrits", 133–4.

part of a cycle of complex illuminated calligraphic compositions. Qandūsī is almost certainly the author of the paintings evoking the figure of the Prophet, because their style corresponds so closely with that of the text and the illuminations. Pages 17b and 18a contain a topographical view of the sanctuary in Mecca and an interior view of the mosque in Medina (Figure 20.24). The latter image is made from an intimate view-point, but the former allows the reader to see the monument in Mecca in its entirety, with the different elements of its architecture set around the Kaʿba, which is at the centre of the composition. These illustrations are followed by a representation of the Prophet's sandals (ff. 18b–19a), among the most popular relics in Islam, particularly venerated in the Maghrib and since the medieval period (Figures 20.26 and 20.27).[87] Prophetic traditions describe the Prophet's sandals (*niʿāl*) in detail, and have been recounted in *qaṣāʾid* that explain their benefits.[88] Travellers from the Maghrib went to Damascus, where the sandal attested to have belonged to the Prophet was held, in order to make precise drawings of it. These drawings were considered to have thaumaturgical and healing properties similar to those of the object itself.[89] As a result, images of the relic began to circulate, especially in North Africa and al-Andalus; such images were regularly included in works of devotion to the Prophet, such as the *Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt*.

In our copy, two representations of the relic are placed vertically, on facing pages (18b–19a), framed by a wide yellow band with oblique segments in black. In the centre of each image is an oval cartouche surrounded by a red band in which is a monumental inscription in yellow *thuluth*:

> *Umarrighu fī l-mithāli bayāḍa wajhī * fa-qad jaʿala al-Nabiyyu lahā qibāla*
> *wa-mā ḥubbu l-niʿāli shaghafna qalbī * wa-lākin ḥubbu man labisa al-niʿāla*
>
> I rub the whiteness of my face against the sandal, for the Prophet himself set it before him.
> This not from love for the shoe, but for he who wore it.

This formula is frequently associated with the drawings of the sandals in copies of the *Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt*, and bears witness to the intense devotion to the Prophet that is expressed through the contemplation of his relic.

87 Meri, "Relics of Piety and Power", 106–112; Margoliouth, "The relics of the Prophet Mohammed", 20–27.

88 Al-Mizzī, *Tuḥfat al-aṭrāf bi-maʿrifat al-aṭrāf*, cited in Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 321.

89 Al-Maqqarī *Fatḥ al-Mutaʿāl*, 289.

After these images, Qandūsī inserts an imposing and surprising passage of writing in black ink that covers two successive double-page spreads, 19b–20a (Figure 20.26) and 20b–21a (Figure 20.27). He uses the same technique as in Qur'ān 12613 but amplifies it still further here: he traces the contours of the letters, their sinuous extremities, and the vocalisation (*ḍamma*, *fatḥa*) and diacritical (*shadda*) marks with a fine reed pen, before blocking in the large surfaces in black with a paintbrush.

The first double page (Figure 20.26) features the *basmala* and the profession of faith, which extends from the right-hand side of the first page to the second page. For the first three letters of the *basmala*, the copyist stretches the vertical tail of the *mīm* along the whole height of the page, so that it lies beside and to the left of the rest of the *basmala*, forming, with the final *mīm* of "*al-raḥīm*", two parallel lines. In contrast with this page's parallel vertical lines, formed by the stems of the letters (*bi* in *bismillāh*, the *alīf lām*s of *al-raḥmān* and *al-raḥīm*), the left-hand page offers a denser, more "enveloping" composition, obtained by the pronounced and repeated curves in the letters *lām* and *alīf*, and the *rā'* of *rasūl*, which rolls itself around the *sīn* and the *wāw* and ends with a sinuous descending tail; finally, the *lām* embraces the name of "*Allāh*".

The following double page (Figure 27) is devoted to the names of Allāh and Muḥammad, written in a thicker, more monumental mode than the preceding pages. This composition is strongly reminiscent of a calligraphed sign bearing the monumental inscription *Allāh*, created by Qandūsī for the mosque of Moulay Idrīs II in Fez (see Figure 20.1 above).[90] In manuscript 399K the divine name is deployed in a manner that is equally imposing, and takes up almost the entirety of the double page spread, while the name of Muḥammad is tucked in under the final *ha* of *Allāh*, thus accentuating (as Blair has pointed out) its semantic importance.[91] Here, with the *mīm* floating above the *ḥa*, the *rasm* of the name Muḥammad is identical to what we have observed in Qandūsī's other productions, as if he had codified this way of writing the name. Here, however, the exceptionally monumental nature of the writing, and its great plasticity, particularly in the tracing of the Prophet's name, liken this more to a painting intended to be seen and contemplated than to words meant to be read. In this way the calligrapher transcends the acts of writing and reading, showing us something beyond just the word as a word.[92] This is underlined in the blocks of very small writing, similar to a *ghubārī* (*munammal*), disseminated in the

90 The original panel executed by Qandūsī has been replaced by a recent reproduction, which hangs on one of the internal walls of the Moulay Idrīs II mosque.

91 Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 569.

92 Gonzalez, "Interprétation phénoménologique", 162.

FIGURE 20.13 Qandūsī's prayer in microscopic writing between the stems of monumental letters, f. 20b

spaces left between the stems of the letters (*alīf* and *lām*) and under the final *hā* (Figure 20.13). In these we can read the following:

> Allāhumma, O Lord, I ask you by Thy Name Allāh Allāh Allāh: hold my heart, my spirit, my intellect, my spiritual energy, my reflection, my conscience, my bones, my fingers, my brain, my veins, my blood, my flesh, my skin, my hair, and my nails by the light of Thy immense and majestic Name Allāh Allāh Allāh in order that its tint should correspond to the tint of the love that I bear Thee and to the love of Thy Envoy – peace and blessings be upon him, his family, and his companions, O All-Merciful One! Thy Word is truth! "We have taken on the colouration of God; and who better than God to offer such a tint"?[93] (Q 2 : 138), *Āmīn*! [...].

This is a very elaborate prayer. It springs from the practice of calligraphy and draws on the main ritual formulas of Islam. But the calligrapher fills the voids between the letters with a request for a physical transmutation through which each detail of his body will take on the tint (*ṣibgha*) that God attributes to Himself in the Qur'ān. The passage would gain in clarity if we translated *ṣibgha* as "colour", but (speculatively) the implication may also be drawn, from the insistent use of black in these pages, that in this world the light of the Name of God can only be represented by its opposite, darkness. The Qur'ānic passage to which Qandūsī refers, verse 2:138[94] is, according to early commentators, part of an anti-Christian polemic: the *ṣibgha* is said to be an "unction" used to baptise newborns. God attributes the "best of unctions" to himself. The term also refers to a dye used to mark the foreheads of the faithful, and has previously been understood in an allegorical manner: Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), among others,

93 Author's own translation.

94 "*Sibghat Allāh wa man aḥsanu min Allāh ṣibghatan wa naḥnu lahu 'ābidun*."

understands the term to signify the Abrahamic religion (*ḥanīfiyya*) or primordial nature (*fiṭra*).[95] Sufi commentators see it as spiritual "mark"; for Qushayrī (d. 1074), "the *ṣibgha* of spirits and of the intimate secrets is the light of spiritual realisation" (*anwār al-taḥqīq*).[96] For Qandūsī, this metaphor becomes a physical process, transfiguring his being.

By choosing this term whose common meaning is "colouration", Qandūsī establishes an immediate link between the technique used to elaborate the name of Allāh and the Prophet on the one hand (black paint applied with a brush), and his ardent supplication, on the other.

Unlike the preceding examples, which were produced in response to a commission, the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* 399K was the result of an act of personal devotion on the part of the calligrapher. It bears all the signs of having been executed by Qandūsī with the aim of bringing himself closer to the figure of the Prophet, and gaining access to the divine presence. Its iconography multiplies indicators of the Prophet's presence such as his tomb, sandal, *minbar*, *miḥrāb*, family tree, etc. Aesthetically, this manuscript announces itself through its concept of a calligraphic style that is unprecedented in the history of Maghribi writing and was elaborated specifically to express Qandūsī's piety. Writing down the Prophet's name, and that of Allāh, is indeed considered by copyists to be an act of piety that is full of benefits. Elsewhere, Prophetic traditions celebrate the benefits assured to the copyist who writes the *basmala* in a beautiful hand. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib records the Prophet as having used these words (which are widely read and commented on, notably by Ibn Khaldūn in his *Muqaddima*):[97] "*man kataba bismillāhi l-raḥmān al-raḥīm bi-ḥusni al-khaṭṭi, dakhala al-jannata bi-ghayri ḥisāb*" (Whosoever writes the *basmala* in a beautiful hand [*ḥusn al-khaṭṭ*] will enter Paradise without judgement).[98] Here this means shaping the pious formulas, and the names of Muḥammad and Allāh, with a tool, the paintbrush, that is exceptional in the Muslim West; for Qandūsī this unusual approach is justified by his hope of being soaked in the light of the *Ism al-Jalāla* in the same way as he soaks his paper with black paint.

Finally, the general impression of neglect of the rules for laying out a page, for writing or for the design of the decoration, of which we have spoken above, leads one to believe that Qandūsī was working in a hurry. Is it therefore possible that he made this copy in a state that could be called ecstatic, inspired by

95 Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, III, 117–20.
96 Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, I, 112.
97 Rosenthal (tr.), *Ibn Khaldûn, The Muqaddimah*, 388–9.
98 Schick, "The Content of Form", 174.

luminous visions? The *malāmatī* calligrapher provides accounts of visionary episodes of this sort in the pages preceding the text of the *Dalā'il*, in which he evokes, among other experiences, the moment the Prophet appeared to him and conversed with him, one day when he was sitting in his stall in the Fez herb market.

5 Conclusion

Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim b. Aḥmad al-Qandūsī's œuvre is a precious study resource for both Islamologists and historians of Islamic art. For the former it contains the prolific literary production by the *malāmatī* himself, most of which has not yet been printed or published; it has much to contribute to the study of Sufi doctrines and practices in thirteenth/nineteenth century Morocco. This œuvre also asks important questions about the circulation and mixing of knowledge, styles and ideas, making possible – indeed, necessitating – the breaking down of barriers between different approaches and methods. In the same way, the historian of Islamic art finds the opportunity to study the circumstances of the emergence of an aesthetic and way of writing that were completely novel in the history of art in the Maghrib, a cultural space that is generally held to be very conservative artistically. What's more, nowhere else in the Moroccan context is it possible to read the original work of the artist in the light of his own comments on calligraphic practice, which appear in filigree in his treatises, or in the margins and colophons of his manuscripts; this information is all the more valuable for being rare even in the eastern part of the Muslim world, where, despite the existence of treatises devoted to the production of inks or to bookbinding, theoretical texts on the art of calligraphy are few. This is in contrast with the situation in the *Mashriq*, where numerous such texts were produced from as early as the fifth/eleventh century;[99] the genre flourished there during the eleventh/seventeenth century. This means that Qandūsī's remarks in his *al-Ta'sīs* – few and tenuous though they are – on the subjects of the use of colours, or the ways of shaping letters, make an incalculable contribution to the history of cultural attitudes to the art of calligraphy in the Maghrib.

99 In his poem *al-Qaṣīda al-Rā'īya*, Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. 1022) writes as follows: "*yā man yurīdu ijādata al-taḥrīri / wayarūmu ḥusna l-khaṭṭi wa-l-taṣwīri*", O thou who aspirest to beautify thy writing/ and desirest the line of beauty [*ḥusn al-khaṭṭ*].

An approach combining Islamology, codicology and the history of Islamic art has allowed us to bring out Qandūsī's doctrinal positions, which bridge the gap between a classical religious training, as revealed by his reading and his teachings, and, breaking through in his accounts of his ecstatic states or his encounters with the jinn Shamharūsh, a concept of Islam that is often less dogmatic. As we have seen, this synthesis in his thinking is also confirmed in his calligraphic art, in which, beyond the seeming rupture represented by his monumental and mannered graphic style, he is perpetuating the traditional graphic principles of the *maghribī*, and even reverting to archaic rules, particularly in his twelve-volume Qur'ān.

Additional Figures

FIGURE 20.14 Illuminated opening pages of volume 9 of the Qur'ān 12613, Sūra 30, ff. 1b–2a, al-Ḥasaniyya Royal Library

FIGURE 20.15 Illuminated opening pages of volume 11 of the Qur'ān 12613, Sūra 46, ff. 1b–2a, al-Ḥasaniyya Royal Library

FIGURE 20.16 Illuminated opening pages of volume 12 of the Qur'ān 12613, Sūra 62, ff. 1b–2a, al-Ḥasaniyya Royal Library

FIGURE 20.17 Double page of text of volume 12 of the Qur'ān_Sūra 62, 63, ff. 4b–5a, al-Ḥasaniyya Royal Library

FIGURE 20.18 Double page of text with sūra golden title of volume 12 of the Qur'ān 12613, Sūra-s 68, 69, ff. 38–39a, al-Ḥasaniyya Royal Library

FIGURE 20.19 Writing of the ʿayn in volume 9 of the Qurʾān 12613, Sūra 37, al-Ḥasaniyya Royal Library_109b

FIGURE 20.20 Illuminated double frontispiece of the Dalā'il al-Khayrāt J634, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco, ff. 1b–2a

FIGURE 20.21 Double page of text with the use of gold and coloured inks and ornamental motives, Dalā'il al-Khayrāt J634, ff. 59b–61a, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco

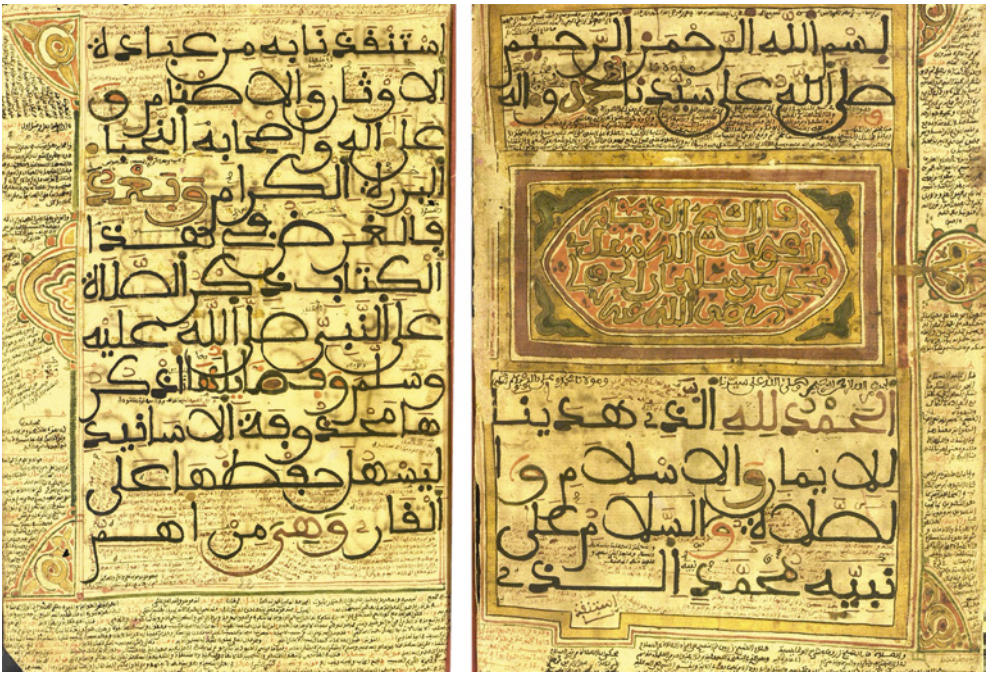

FIGURE 20.22 Illuminated opening pages of the text of the Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt K399, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco, ff. 20b–21a

FIGURE 20.23 Double frontispiece of the Dalā'il al-Khayrāt 399K, f. 12b–13a, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco

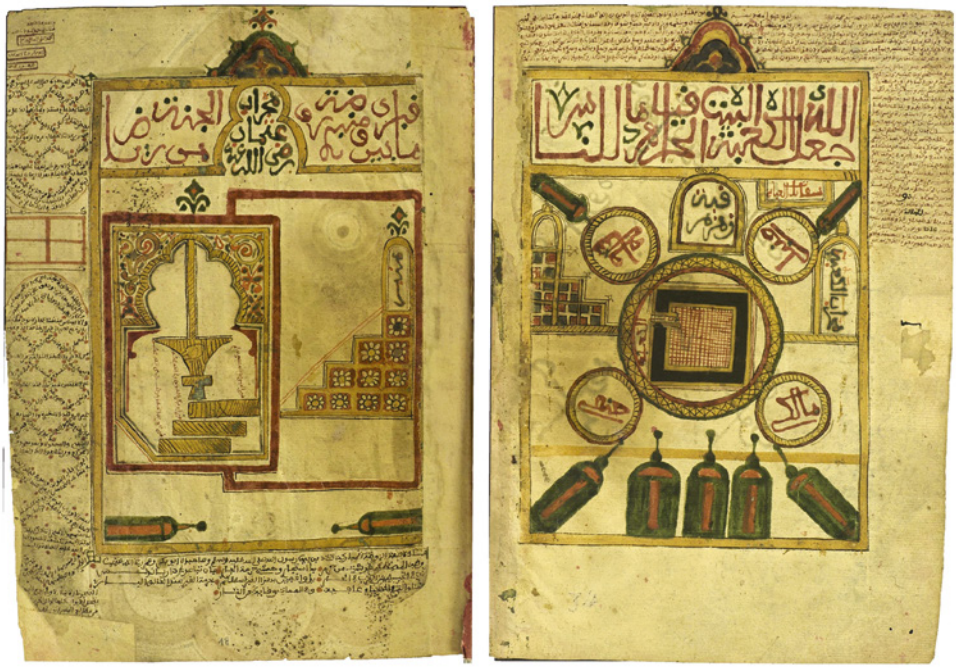

FIGURE 20.24 Representations of the sanctuaries of Mecca and Medina in the Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt 399K, ff. 17b, 18a, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco

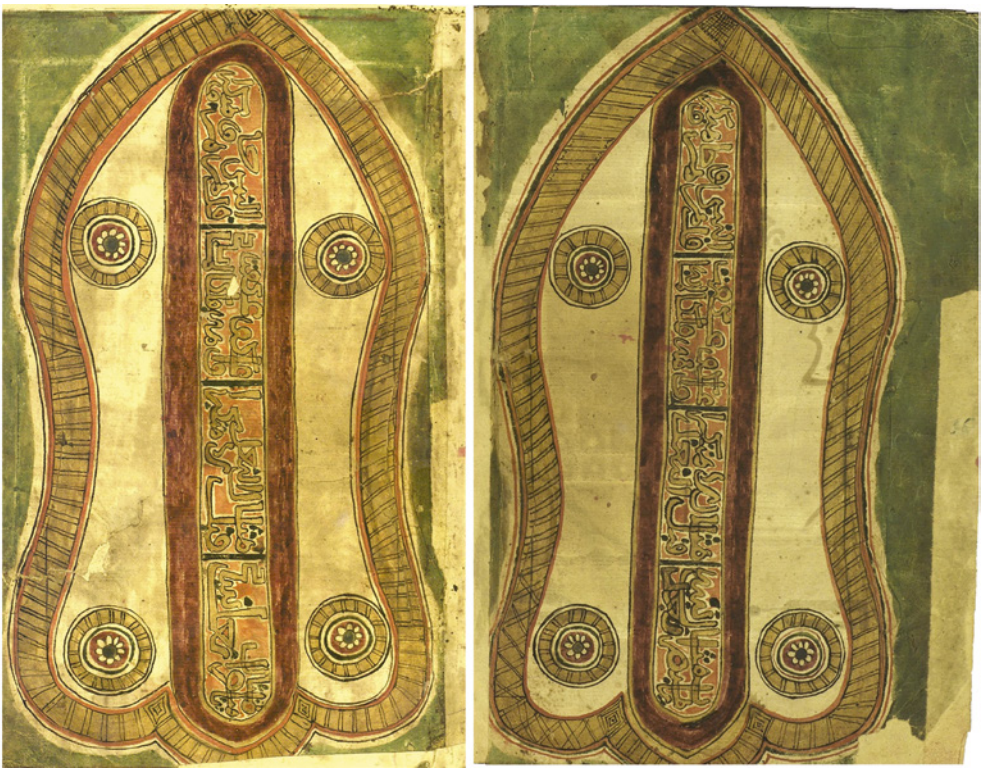

FIGURE 20.25 Representations of the Prophet's sandals (al-naʿl al-nabawī) in the Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt 399K, ff. 18b–19a, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco

FIGURE 20.26 Monumental writings of the basmala and the profession of faith in the Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt 399K, f. 19b–20a, National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco

FIGURE 20.27 Monumental inscription of the names of Allāh and the Prophet, Dalā'il al-Khayrāt 399K, ff. 20b–21a

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Index of Names of Persons and Places, Titles, and Subject Notions

Abbasid caliphate
  legitimisation of 89, 92
  military expeditions of 86–87
  military traditions in 94
  transition to 81
ʿAbd Allāh b. Mubārak 93
ʿAbd Allāh (father of the Prophet) 284
ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dabbāgh 628
ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī 146
ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī 641
ʿAbd al-Malik, Umayyad Caliph 80
ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib (grandfather of the Prophet) 284
ʿAbd al-Raḥman b. Yazīd b. Jābir 93
ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Fawzī 644
ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī 118
  see also Muṣannaf
ʿAbd al-Salām b. Mashīsh 262n96
ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd 232, 236–237
ʿAbdallāh al-Barnāwī 250
ʿabduhu (The Prophet as God's servant) 56–58
ʿAbdülbāqī ʿĀrif Efendī 460
ʿAbdülḥamīd I, Ottoman Sultan 611
ʿAbdülmecīd b. Şeykh Naṣūḥ b. Isrā'il et-Tosyevī al-Amasyavī (Mecīdī) 469–473
ʿAbdülvāsīʿ 462
ʿAbdüsettār, Kerkükī 488–490
āb-ı ḥayāt (water of life) 561, 563
Abid, Hiba xviii, 29–30, 620–674
Abraham/Ibrāhīm, prophet
  in Ismāʿīlī literature 301–302
  in *miʿrāj/isrā'* 131, 139, 435, 448
  in Qur'ān 60, 70–71
Abrahamic traditions 70–71
Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. al-Jannān al-Andalusī al-Anṣārī 357, 374
  see also Ibn al-Jannān
Abū ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī 174
Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥalīmī 175n105
Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī 135, 176n110, 505–506
Abū Bakr al-Rāzī 328
Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq 73, 124, 244, 256, 283
Abū al-Dardā' 229
Abū Dharr 142, 316
Abū Fāris, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Masʿūd al-Dabbāgh al-Idrīsī al-Ḥasanī *see* al-Dabbāgh, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz
Abū al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf b. Ismāʿīl b. Naṣr, Naṣrid ruler *see* Yūsuf I, of Granada
Abū Ḥammū Mūsā b. Yūsuf al-Zayyānī 383
Abū Ḥanīfa 231
Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Jayyāb 358
Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bannā 353n15
Abū al-Ḥasan, Marīnīd Sultan 359
Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī 328
Abū Hurayra 180
Abū ʿInān, Sultan of Morocco 360n49, 381
Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Abī Bakr 353n15
Abū Jahl 485
Abu l-Khaṭṭāb *see* Mukhammisa
Abū l-ʿAbbās al-ʿAzafī 382
Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī 412
Abū l-Qāsim al-ʿAzafī 381–382, 383
Abū Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ 383
Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī 20–21, 165, 167n65, 231–239, 241–242
Abū Qurra, Theodor 28, 522–523, 524
Abū Saʿīd Mīrzā, Timurid ruler 455
Abū Sālim Ibrāhīm 384, 385, 406
Abū Sufyān 125
Abū Ṭālib 641
Abū Ṭālib ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib 276, 284
Abū Yaʿza 262
Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī 252, 291
Abū Yūsuf 94
account/narration (*qaṣaṣ*) 70
acts of worship, legal regulation of 218–219
Ādāb al-mashq (Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī) 621
Adam, prophet
  in *ḥadith*s 160–161
  in Ismāʿīlī literature 301–302, 303–304
  in *khaṣā'iṣ* literature 208–209
  in *miʿrāj/isrā'* 127, 133
  in Qur'ān 70
al-Ahdal, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Bāri' 222–223
ahl al-dhikr (People of Memory) 70

ahl al-bayt/*ehl-i beyt* (People of Prophet's house)
in general 273
identification with 8–9
in Ismāʿīlī literature 302, 318
Prophet and 277–279
in Qurʾān 72
see also under specific members
ahl al-kisāʾ (People of the Cloak) 279, 281, 284
ahl al-kitāb (People of the Book) 40, 58, 70, 527
Aḥmad ʿĀshūr al-Ribāṭī 418
Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥalabī 417, 420, 424
Aḥmad b. ʿAllāl al-Sharābilī 421–422, 425–426
Aḥmad b. Idrīs 247, 628, 636
Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Fāsī 424
Aḥmad b. Saʿīd al-Maghribī 415
Aḥmedī, Tāceddīn 462–467
ʿĀʾisha bint Abū Bakr
betrayal of Prophet and 282
on kissing of Fāṭima 278
on Prophet's character 183
on Prophet's vision of God 142–143
ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt wa gharāʾib al-mawjūdāt (Qazwīnī) 491–492
ʿAjlān b. Asad al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl Rumaytha b. Muḥammad b. Abī Saʿd Al-Ḥasanī 353
Akar, Metin 461, 462, 487–488n60
akhbār collections 199
ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī 102–103
al-ʿālamīn (the worlds) 55
ʿAlī b. ʿAbdullāh b. Aḥmed Zeyn el-ʿArab 590
ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib
in Badr, battle of 280
on *basmala* 658
dans panégérique shīʿite 378
Divine names and 292–293
in *miʿrāj*/*isrāʾ* 290–291
as Perfect Man 293–295
pre-eternity of 284–285, 302, 318–319
Prophet and
in general 23, 279, 283
in Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism
in general 321–322
as Enunciator-Heir couple 302
four principles of al-Sijistānī 308–312, 322
Hindu mythology and 317
as husband and spouse 303–306
Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn on 299–300, 318–321
Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman on 300–301
Khayrkhwāh-e Harātī on 316–317
al-Muʾayyad fi l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī on 303–306
Nāṣir-e Khosraw on 306–307
Nizārī doctrine and 312–317, 322
Nizārī Ismāʿīlīsm 322
as pen and tablet 306–307
al-Sijistānī on 307–312, 322
superiority of ʿAlī 311–312, 313–317
superiority of Prophet 303–307, 308–311
Ṭayyibī doctrine and 318–321, 322–323
al-Ṭūsī on 313–316
in Twelver Shīʿīsm 276–277, 279, 283
Prophetic knowledge and 289
on Prophet's character 183
on Prophet's *ḥilya* 607
on Prophet's physical beauty 180
Revelation and 303
as seal of alliance 286–287
superiority of 290–291
mention of 273
ʿAlī Khawwāṣ al-Burullusī 246
ʿAlī al-Riḍā 292
alīf (letter) 656
Allāh *see* God/Allāh
Allom, Thomas 567
alms (*zakāt*) 307
Alphonse IV, of Portugal 359
Alphonse XI, of Castile 359–360
Aʿmāl al-Aʿlām (Ibn al-Khaṭīb) 359
Amīn al-Dīn al-Wānī 109
Āmina/Āmine (Muḥammad's mother) 276, 405, 503, 599–600
Amīr Khusraw Dihlawī 439, 447
Amir-Moezzi, M. A. 2n3, 288
amour *see* love/amour
al-ʿAmrāwī, Muḥammad b. Idrīs 645

al-ʿAmrāwī al-Zammūrī al-Idrīsī, Idrīs b. Muḥammad Idrīs 645, 651
Amri, Nelly xvi, 24, 351–375
amulets 559
al-Āmulī, Ḥaydar 286, 292, 293–295
Anas b. Mālik 183, 369
al-Andalus 351, 359–360, 364–366, 379–380, 408, 411
Andrae, Tor 4, 184
Andrews, Walter 492
angels 139, 435
announcer of good news (*bashīr*) 44
al-Anṣār (Helpers of the Prophet in Medina) 361, 363, 368, 369–370, 626–627
anthropomorphism
  letters and 649, 651
  miʿrāj literature and 139, 140, 468
  names of God and Prophet and 641
  religions and 521–522
antinomianism 303
appearance, Prophetic
  ḥadīth texts about 585
  Ḥilye-i Ḥāḳānī on 609–610
  shamāʾil literature on 197
  in *Shifāʾ* 179–183
  Vesîlet en-Necât on 585–586
  see also beauty, Prophetic; *ḥilye* texts
Aq Şemseddīn 467
al-Aqḥiṣārī, Aḥmad al-Rūmī 503
al-ʿaql (Intellect) 306, 308–315, 319–320
  see also lāhūt
al-Aqṣā mosque (Jerusalem) 512
Aqsarāylı ʿĪsā 462
Aquarius (water-bearer) 444
Arabic language
  Christian concepts in 525–526
  al-Nābulusī on 527
ʿArāʾis (al-Thaʿlabī) 131–132
Arendt, Hannah 517
Arié, Rachel 354n19
Aries (ram) 443–444
Aristotle 327, 343, 510
Arma Christi (Weapons of Christ) 574
ʿArsh (throne of God) 444
Arzī Meḥmed Dede 474
ascension, Prophetic *see isrāʾ*/*miʿrāj*
ascèse/asceticism
  définition 229
  dissipation des ténèbres 253
  imitation du Prophète 233
  mention des hadiths 234–235
  modèle 232
  privation 233–234
  see also zuhd/*tark*
asceticism *see* ascèse/asceticism
Ashʿarism 162, 168, 187, 327
al-Ashraf Mūsā, Ayyubid Sultan 101
Asklepion (Pergamon) 571
Asrār al-nuṭaqāʾ (Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman) 300–301
Ateş, Ahmed 585, 588
Athanasius iii Dabbas, Patriarch of Antioch 526
āthār (vestiges) *see* relics/vestiges (*āthār*), Prophetic
Aṭiyya b. Manṣūr b. Jammāz b. Shīḥa b. Hāshim b. Qāsim b. Muhannā b. Ḥusayn 353n17
ʿAttāb b. Ziyad 93
ʿAṭṭār 470
attributes, Prophetic *see* character/attributes, Prophetic
audition records (*samāʿāt*) 108–109, 110
audition spirituelle (*samāʿ*) 380, 411–429
authority, religion and 516–517
autograph copies 652–653
Averroes (Ibn Rushd)
  en général 23–24, 328
  éthique et prophétie 339–344
  raison et foi 329–330
  on rhetoric 510, 512
Avicenne (Ibn Sīnā)
  en général 23
  éthique et prophétie 332–339
  falāsifa 328
  Métaphysique du Shifā 328, 332, 337
  raison et foi 329
al-Aws 361n52, 626–627, 636
ayazmas (sacred springs) *see* springs, sacred
Ayın Biri (First of the Month) Church (Unkapanı) 577
ʿ*ayn* (letter) 642n62, 646, 648, 650
ʿ*ayn* (spring/source) 650
al-ʿAyyāshī, Abū Sālim 629
azhar al-lawn (bright of hue) 607–608

Azhār al-riyāḍ (al-Maqqarī) 357
ʿaẓīm 162–163

Bāb F'tūḥ cemetery (Fez) 636
Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī 621
Bachkovo Monastery Museum (Bachkovo) 574
badīʿ (rhetorical artifice) 379, 511, 514
al-Badīʿ (the Originator, divine name) 520
badīʿiyya poetry 514
Badr, Battle of 62, 79, 280
Baghawī 434, 436
Bahāeddīn, Meḥmed 490–492
Baḥīrā, Sergius 300–301
Bahrām (Mars) 443
Bahyaqī 200–201
bāʾiyya poetry 380, 385–407, 514
al-Bakkāʾī 81
al-Bakrī, Muḥammad 115, 116, 118
Balıklı (The Fish [Spring]; Istanbul) 567, 569, 571
al-Balkhī, Shaqīq 291–292
banner of praise (*livā el-ḥamd*) 29, 593–594, 602, 604, 616
Banū Mārīn 381
Banū Qayla 361n52
Banū Qaynuqā 92
Baqillānī 170n79
al-Bāqir, Muḥammad 319
baraka (blessings) 651
barāt (key of deliverance) 446
al-Bārī (the Creator, divine name) 520
baryūla/*barāwil* (poème chanté en dialectal marocain, du genre *malḥūn*) 421–422, 425, 427, 428
barzakh (the isthmus) 506, 509
bashīr (announcer of good news, name of the Prophet) 44
basmala/*besmele* ("In the name of Allah") 357, 539, 545, 656, 658
battles, Prophetic 280–281
Bauer, Karen 305
al-Bāʿūniyya, ʿĀʾisha 20, 219–221, 223
Bayḍāwī 118
Bayhaqī 175n105
Bayramiyye Şemsiyye (Sufi *ṭarīqa*) 467
Beatific Vision 119, 142–144, 171–172, 468–469, 471–472, 600
beauty, Prophetic
  in general 179–189
  calligraphy and 609, 614–615, 616
  see also appearance, Prophetic
the beloved of God (*ḥabīb Allāh*) 177
bestiary 448
betrayal of Prophet 282–283
bezm (mystical banquet) 474–475
bidʿa (innovation in Islamic doctrine and practice, laudable or blameful) 103, 238
al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya (Ibn Kathīr) 118
Bidāyat al-sūl fī tafḍīl al-Rasūl (ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām) 202, 208–209, 211
biographies, Prophetic *see sīra* literature
birth, Prophetic 276
Blankinship, Khalid Yahya 84
blasphemy 156–157
blessings (*baraka*) 651
body, writing process and 643–644
Bonner, Michael 84, 86
Bori, Caterina xiv, 18–19, 100–112
Bostancıbaşı Köşkü (Pavilion of the Garden Superintendent; Istanbul) 573
bottles
  *ḥilye*s in *see ḥilye* bottles
  icons on/in 536–537, 569, 571, 574
  Qurʾāns in 535
  for sacred water 559, 561, 569, 571
bowls, magico-medical 559, 564
bows, Prophetic 92
bright of hue (*azhar al-lawn*) 607–608
brotherhoods/confrérie (*ṭarīqa*) *see under specific brotherhoods*
al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl
  on love for Prophet 155n9
  Ṣaḥīḥ of *see Ṣaḥīḥ* (al-Bukhārī)
Burāq (Muḥammad's horse)
  in Mamluk literature 125–126, 127–128, 130–131, 134–135
  in Timurid literature 431, 435, 442, 465
Burda (al-Būṣīrī) 127, 132, 379, 383, 385, 405, 414–428, 514
Burda (Kaʿb b. Zuhayr) 378, 385
Bursalı İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı 593–594
al-Bursī 288, 292–293
al-Būṣīrī, Sharaf al-Dīn
  works of

Burda 127, 132, 379, 383, 385, 405, 414–428, 514
Hamziyya 118, 412, 414–428

Cachia, Pierre 514
caliphates *see under specific caliphates*
calligraphers
in general 620–621
border between being and writing 643–644
Sufism and 621–622
see also under specific calligraphers
calligraphy
Maghribi 26, 648, 651, 654, 658, 660
maghribī al-mabsūṭ 646, 648
names of God and Prophet in 638–641, 656, 658
Prophet and
in Iran 620–621
in Morocco 622
visualisation of, through 609, 614–615, 616, 642–643
of al-Qandūsī 644–674
styles of, *ḥilye-i şerīf* 609, 614
zoomorphic 650
see also micrography
Calmard, Jean 93
Capricorn (mountain goat) 444
celestial circles 475–476
celestial rivers 128–129
célibat 233–234
Celvetiyye 478
Cevrī İbrāhīm Çelebi 613
Chagatay *see* Eastern Turkish
character/attributes, Prophetic
in general 41–42, 212
en général 418–420
beauty of 183–189
bright of hue 607–608
divine cause of 186–187
imitation of 233, 240–241
intellect *see under* Intellect
knowledge of law and spiritual reality 215–216
merits of *see* merits (*faḍā'il*), Prophetic
premonitions 279–280
shamā'il literature on 197, 418–420
Shifā' on 183–189
see also khaṣīṣa; miracles, Prophetic
chérifisme/sheriffism 381
Chiabotti, Francesco xviii, 29–30, 620–674
chiffre/number 366 255
childhood, Prophetic 276
chivalry (*muruwwa*) 184
Chodkiewicz, Michel 523
Chosroès (palais) 405, 406, 415
Christianity
anthropomorphism and 522
concepts of, in Arabic language 525–526
traditions in
cult of icons 522–523, 528–529
icon-bottles 569, 571, 574
sacred springs 536–537, 566, 575, 577
chronology, in *maghāzī* literature 88–91
circles, as visualisation of Prophet 598–601, 602, 604–605, 616
cloak (*khirqa*) 291–292
coats of mail, Prophetic 92
colour (*ṣibgha*) 657–658
communication
Averroes (Ibn Rushd) on 510
between God and Prophet 435–436, 439, 445, 449–450, 481–483
communities
Muslim 138–139
of Prophet 72–76, 365–366
of prophets 67–68
compagnonnage spirituel/spiritual companionship (*ṣuḥba*) 259
Companions (*Ṣaḥāba*)
authority of *ḥādīth*s and 95
betrayal of Prophet and 282–283
in *khaṣā'iṣ* literature 222
on Prophet's vision of God 142
in Qur'ān 72–75
Companions of the Cave 40
confrérie/brotherhoods (*ṭarīqa*) *see under specific brotherhoods*
Constantine v, Byzantine Emperor 87
constellations 443–444
Coran *see* Qur'ān/Coran
Corbin, Henry 509
corruption 258
covering (*ghilāf*) 319–320, 323

creativity 519–520
the Creator (*al-Bārī*, divine name) 520
cups, magico-medicinal 559, 564

al-Dabbāgh, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz
amour du maître 251–253
conception de l'illumination 260–261
directives spirituelles 251
disciples et 259–260
famille 248
itinéraire spirituel 249–250
place de la foi 255–257
place du Prophète 254–255
prophétologie 262–264
relation avec al-Mubārak 246–249, 265–266
secret 258–259
tradition du soufisme 263
vision du Prophète et 261–262
mention of 21
Daḥlān, Sayyid Aḥmad Zaynī 145
Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt (al-Jazūlī)
in general 651–652
authograph copy of 652–653
devotional rubbing/kissing and 553
MS *Dalāʾil* 5920 652–653
MS *Dalāʾil* 7959 653
al-Qandūsī's copies of
in general 622, 625, 638
as act of personal devotion 658
calligraphy in 644, 654–658
commissioning of 652
depictions of Prophet's sandals in 655
for his own use 654
illustrations in 655
marginal annotations in 652
MS 399K 642, 644, 651, 652, 654–655, 658
MS 634J 652
names of God and Prophet in 656, 658
tracing outline of letters in 656
writing in ecstasy and 658–659
dalāʾil al-nubuwwa literature
in general 157n17, 198
khaṣāʾiṣ literature and 203
Sunnī identity and 159
Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa (Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī) 165, 167n65, 231
dāliyya poetry 380, 385–407
Damascus
ḥadīth culture in 18–19, 100–112
madrasas in 101, 102
al-Damirī 132, 134
the damned 137–138, 448, 635
Dār al-Ḥadīṯ al-Ashrafiyya (Damascus) 101, 102
al-Dardīr 120, 128
darkness/ténèbres 253, 262
Dasa Avatāra (Hindu concept of the Ten Avatars, imagery adopted by Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs) 317
David, Prophet 49
De Smet, Daniel xv, 23, 299–323
descendants, Prophetic *see ahl al-bayt*
description, Prophetic 479–480
see also ḥilye
al-Dhahabī 100–101, 109, 369–370
Dhakhīrat al-muḥtāj (al-Sharqāwī) 622
dhāt (être, nature/being, nature, essence) 253, 261, 263–264, 505
dhikr (remembrance/reminder) 46, 63, 412, 482
dhikr circles 208
Dhū al-Faqār (sword of Prophet) 93, 280
Dhū l-Nūn 241, 245
diacritical marks 656
al-Dilāʾī, Muḥammad b. al-ʿArabī 414, 419
al-Dimyāṭī, al-Ḥāfiẓ ʿAbd al Muʾmin 144
Dīvān-ı belāghat-ʿunvān-ı Naẓīm (Naẓīm Yaḥyā) 474–478
Divine Alliance of Friendship (*walāya*) 230, 232, 273–274, 280, 285–286
divine revelation (*kashf*) 216, 627
divinity (*lāhūt*) 290, 313, 319–321, 323
see also Intellect
Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq (al-Nābulusī) 515
djinn (*majnūn*) 49
Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat al-ṣakhra*) 512
Donner, Fred 3
dream-visions/visions (*ruʾyā*)
in general 9
icons and 507
interpretation of 508
of Prophet

en général 250, 261–262
pour al-Dabbāgh 261–262
formes 262
modèle de sainteté 265
Nābulusī on 504–506, 508
of al-Qandūsī 627–628, 633, 635–636
Tirmidhī on 607
by Prophet
in general 212–213
of God 119, 142–144, 468–469, 471–472
see also visions
Dreher, Joseph 503
duʿāʾ (supplications to God) 208
duality (*ithnayniyat*) 445
ductuses 588, 610, 611, 614
dunyā (temporal world and its earthly concerns) 137
Durar al-ghāʾiṣ fī baḥr al-muʿjizāt (al-Bāʿūniyya) 219–221
al-Durr al-manthūr (Suyūṭī) 412
duties, Prophetic (*wājibāt*) 213, 215
Dye, Guillaume 2n3

Eastern Turkish (*Türkī*, Chagatay), literature in 431–432, 433, 435
école/school (*madhhab*) 231, 242
éducateur (*murabbī*) 251
éducation initiatique (*tarbiya*) 259
El Harrak, Mohamed Thami 26–27, 411–429
Eleutherios, Saint 574
El-Hibri, Tayeb 92–93
Elijah 131n57
éloge du Prophète *see madīḥ*; panégérique; poème dédiés au Prophète
Emir Abdelkader 628
Emon, Anver 174
Encyclopaedia Iranica 93
The End of the Jihād State (Blankinship) 84
End of Times 288
énergie spirituelle/spiritual energy (*himma*) 251, 255
enlightenment, spiritual (*fatḥ*) 260–261
Enoch *see* Idrīs
Enunciators (*nuṭaqāʾ*/*nāṭiq*) 301–302, 308–312
epistemological relativism 88
Ernst, Carl W. 621
erotic poetry (*ghazal*) 386, 515–516, 518, 528, 529
Erzurumlu İbrāhīm Ḥaḳḳı 604
eschatology
ʿAlī and 288
Prophet and 2, 6–7, 53–56, 138, 139, 367
esprit/spirit (*rūḥ*) 257, 263, 264
états spirituels/spiritual states (*ḥāl*) 238, 251, 255
ethics 184, 187
Euphrates 128–129
Eve (Ḥawwāʾ) 303–304
Evliya Çelebi 553–554, 561
exhortation/dissuasion (*targhīb*/*tarhīb*) 104, 105–106
expeditions, Prophetic 88–91
chronology of
in ʿAbd al-Razzāq 90, 91
in Bukhārī 90
in Ibn Abī Shayba 89, 90, 91
in Maʿmar b. Rāshid 88–89, 90, 91
teleological purpose of 89–90
studies on 88
see also maghāzī literature
expériences spirituelles/spiritual experiences 229, 230, 235, 241
see also dream-visions/visions
expression (*ʿibāra*) 509
external/exoteric (*ẓāhir*) 128, 275, 302, 303, 320–321
The Eye of the Beholder (Rubin) 88

fāʾ (letter) 646
faḍāʾil (merits), Prophetic 208–209, 212, 222
faith *see* foi/faith
fāʾiyya 419
faḳīh tradition 596–598
falāsifa (Islamic philosophy)
auteurs 327–328
see also philosophy
définition 327
éthique et politique 330–332
éthique et prophétie 332–344
raison et foi 328–330
faqr (poverty) 240–241, 482–483

al-Fārābī
en général 23, 328, 339
on prophecy 512
raison et foi 329, 331, 332
farāʾiḍ (religious legal obligations) 213
Farḥāt, Germanus 526, 527
Faṣl dar bayān-e shenākht-e imam (Khayrkhwāh-e Harātī) 316
fatḥ (spiritual enlightenment) 260–261
Fatḥ al-anwār fī bayān mā yuʿīnu ʿalā madḥ al-nabī al-mukhtār (al-Dilāʾī) 414–428
Fatḥ al-bārī (Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī) 117
Fatḥ al-raʾūf al-mujīb fī sharḥ unmūdhaj al-labīb (al-Munawī) 221
Fāṭima bint Asad 276
Fāṭima bint Muḥammad (daughter of the Prophet) 273, 277–278, 279, 283
see also ahl al-bayt
Fatimid caliphate 303
al-Fazāzī, Abū Zayd ʿAbd al-Raḥmān 357
Feraḥ er-Rūḥ (İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı) 602, 605
Ferhat, Halima 381, 383
Fez/Fès
en général 248
Bāb F'tūḥ cemetery in 636
Moulay Idrīs's tomb in 625, 630, 656
al-Qandūsī and 630, 632, 636
Shamharūsh and 634–635
fiqh al-ʿibādāt (legal regulation of acts of worship) 218–219
first heaven 491–492
First of the Month (*Ayın Birı*) Church (Unkapanı) 577
The Fish [Spring] (*Balıklı*; Istanbul) 567, 569, 571
fiṭra (innate nature) 137–138, 232
Flood, Finbarr Barry 565
Florensky, Pavel 507
foi/faith
en général 230, 231
chez Dabbāgh 255–257
essence 238
four words of 309–310
chez Ibn al-Mubārak 257
philosophie et 328–330
as pillar of Islam 307
pluralité des niveaux 230
profession of 641–642
raison et 328–330
vision sunnite 241–242
Followers (*al-tābiʿūn*) 73
footprints, Prophetic 135, 512–513
forgiveness 53–54
Foulon, Brigitte xvi, 25, 378–408
Fountain of Life (*Zoodochos Pege*; Istanbul) 567, 569, 571
four principles, of al-Sijistānī 308–312, 322
France 645
Fuḍayl b. ʿIyāḍ 232–233, 235–236, 237–238
functions/roles, Prophetic
in general 1
ʿAlī and 288
eschatological 2, 6–7, 53–56, 138, 139, 367
as goal of creation 287–288
as God's messenger 44–46, 63, 75–76, 198
as intercessor/mediator 31, 53–56, 107, 356, 358, 445, 476–477, 593, 594
as mirror of the prophets 18, 69–72
nadhīr/*bashīr* 44
as Perfect Man 293–295
as proof of God 288–289
prophecy and combat 49
reminding, purifying and teaching 46–47
as role model 51–52, 197
as seal of prophecy 286–287
as Warrior-Prophet *see* Warrior-Prophet
al-Fuṣūl fī sīrat al-Rasūl (Ibn Kathīr) 211–212
Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam (Ibn ʿArabī) 519
al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya (Ibn ʿArabī) 509, 511, 523, 526

Gabriel/ Jibrāʾīl, angel
in Ismāʿīlī literature 316
in *miʿrāj*/*isrāʾ*
in general 416, 431
in Mamluk literature 122, 128, 130, 133, 136
in Ottoman literature 465, 470–471, 480
in Timurid literature 435, 440–442, 448
in Qurʾān 65
in *sīra* literature 276, 280, 281–282

Gardet, Louis 153–154
Gemini (twins) 444
Geoffroy, Éric 117
George, Saint 574, 577
al-Ghammād, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. 357
al-Ghanī bi-llāh Muḥammad b. Abī al-Ḥajjāj, Naṣrid ruler 352–353, 359
gharānīq (Satanic Verses) 264
Ghāyat al-sūl fī khaṣā'iṣ al-rasūl (Ibn al-Mulaqqin) 201, 202, 212–213
Ghaylāniyyāt 110–111
ghayn (letter) 646
al-Ghayṭī, Najm al-Dīn 120, 123, 127, 133, 137, 147
ghazal (erotic poetry) 386, 515–516, 518, 528, 529
al-Ghazālī
on beauty 178–179
Iḥyā' of 176–177, 184, 204
on intimacy with God 445
on *khaṣā'iṣ* 201
on knowledge and love 176–179, 183n150
on nearness to God 177n114
on Prophet's healing powers 169n77
ghilāf (covering) 319–320, 323
ghubārī handwriting 650, 656
Gibb, Elias John Wilkinson 492–493, 585, 608
Gimaret, Daniel 168
glorification, Prophetic *see* veneration, Prophetic
God/Allāh
comparability/incomparability of 524
creativity through 519–520
intimacy with 445
lieutenancy of 519–520
name of
in calligraphy 638–641, 656, 658
letters of 308–309
nearness to 177n114
Prophet and
gifts from God to 204
God's love for 177
as intercessor/mediator 445, 476–477
Prophet as elected by 56–58
Prophet as messenger of 44–46, 63, 75–76, 198
Prophet calling on 46
Prophet's authority and 47–50
Prophet's communication with 435–436, 445, 449–450, 481–483
Prophet's intimacy with 64–66, 167
Prophet's meeting with 139–141, 472–473, 480
Prophet's union with 440–442, 444–447, 449, 450, 453
Prophet's vision of 119, 142–144, 171–172, 468–469, 471–472, 600
al-Qandūsī's meeting with 633
rights of 174–175
as universal Intellect 308–309
visions of, by women 144
gold 557–558
see also ḥilye gold dust
good model (*uswa ḥasana*) 7–8, 197
graves *see* tombs
"The Great Elixir" (prayer by al-Qandūsī) 640–641
Greek heritage/héritage grec 327–344
Griffel, Frank 169n77
Gril, Denis xiv, 17–18, 37–78, 181–182, 520
Gruber, Christiane xvii, 28, 431, 433–434, 507, 535–578, 621
Gruendler, Beatrice 511
Guillaume, Alfred 93

ḥā' (letter) 632–633, 648–649, 656–657
ḥabīb Allāh (the beloved of God; name of the Prophet) 177
Hacı Bayram Velī 590
Ḥacı Yaʿḳūb b. Muṣṭafā Faḳīh 596
Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqat (Sanā'ī) 439
ḥadīth literature/collections 157n17, 197, 199
ḥadīth al-nawāfil 213
ḥadīth qudsī (sacred *ḥadīth*s)
en général 236, 263
on goal of creation 287–288
Law Lāka 545–546
mantle of magnificence in 471
*ḥadīth*s
on acquiring merit 104–105
on al-Anṣār 368
Aucun d'entre vous ne sera véritablement croyant 412
authority of 95

*ḥadīth*s (cont.)
on *basmala* 658
communal readings of 101
Coran et 235–236
on dream-visions about Prophet 504–505, 607
on equality of Prophet and ʿAlī 318
experts/scholars 100–101, 112
of Ghadīr Khumm 300, 321
as historical writing 163–164
de l'intercession 428
Je suis une miséricorde offerte en cadeau 412
Lorsque mon serviteur est sans cesse préoccupé par Moi 236
on love for Prophet 155n9, 176–177
lumière du Prophète 263
in *Miʿrājnāma* (1436) 434, 436
on night journey 591
Ô mon Dieu faites moi vivre pauvre 240
on parents of believers 304
on pre-eternity of Prophet and ʿAlī 318–319
on Prophet, rules specific to 199–200
see also khaṣāʾiṣ
on Prophetic knowledge 289
on Prophet's appearance 585, 605
on Prophet's *ḥilye* 605, 607
on Prophet's luminous reality 60
on Prophet's status 160–161
on Prophet's tomb 104
on Prophet's vision of God 143
re-collections of 83
on resuscitation of prophets 131
on Salmān's heart 316
Shīʿī corpus of 273
source de l'éloge du Prophète 379
sunna et 236, 239
Tout prophète a son monachisme 234
transmission of
in general 18–19
ritualization of 101
sīra literature and 116
social status of 100
validating of 108–109
weakness of 104–106
transmitters of
Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn as 102
Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn on 111–112
Ibn Taymiyya as 109–111, 112
see also Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī
Trois choses m'ont été données à aimer 240
use/utilisation 233, 234–236, 238
on *Yā-Sīn* 564
see also ḥadīth literature/collections; *ḥadīth qudsī*
Hafiz Osman 536
Ḥafsa bint ʿUmar 282
hagiasmata (sacred springs; Turkish *ayazma*) *see* springs, sacred
ḥāʾiyya poetry 380, 385–407
ḥajj (pilgrimage) 307, 354
Ḥājjī Khalīfa 211
Ḥākānī *see Ḥilye-i Ḥāḳānī*
Ḥakīm Ata 462
al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī 161n30
ḥāl (états spirituels) 238, 239, 251, 255
al-Ḥalabī, ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm
in general 19, 115, 145
ideas on fantastic tales of 120
Sīra ḥalabiyya of *see Sīra ḥalabiyya*
Sufi conviction of 116–117
Ḥalīma al-Saʿdiyya 416–417
Ḥallāj 245–246, 413
ḥallaqa (circling/shaving) 365–366n71
Haluk Perk Collection 539
al-Ḥāmidī, Ibrāhīm 318
Hamidoune, Amine 653
Ḥammādī al-Idrīsī, ʿAbd Allāh 622, 637
*hamza*s 648
Hamziyya (al-Būṣīrī) 118, 412, 414–428
Ḥanbalīs 521–522
ḥaqīqa (mystical truth) 216
ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya (Muḥammadan Reality)
ʿAlī and 285
doctrine 418
al-Kattānī and 626
al-Nābulusī 517–518
poetry and 220–221, 512–527
al-Qandūsī and 622, 630–632
use of term 521
see also nūr muḥammadī
ḥaqq (truth) 61, 64
Ḥaqqānī 467–469
Ḥarīrī 519–520

al-Ḥārith b. Abī Usāma 110
Ḥārūn al-Rashīd, Abbasid Caliph 87, 94
Ḥasan *ʿalā dhikrihi al-salām* (Nizārī Imam) 312
Ḥasan b. ʿAlī 273, 278, 279, 280, 284
see also ahl al-bayt
Ḥasan b. ʿArafa 109, 110
Ḥasan al-Baṣrī 230, 232, 236
Ḥassān b. Thābit 526
Ḥaṭīm (semi-circular wall at the north-western side of the Kaʿba) 591
Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān (al-Damirī) 132
Ḥayḍarī 213
heart, Prophetic, purification of 122, 130, 416, 480
Heaven (Paradise)
in *Khamsa* (Nawāʾī) 448–449
in *Miʿrājnāma* (1436) 436
in *Muḥammedīye* printed editions 604
in *Sīra ḥalabiyya* (al-Ḥalabī) 135–136
see also first heaven
Heinzelmann, Thomas xvii, 29, 583–616
Heir (*waṣī*) 301–312, 321
Hell, in *Miʿrājnāma* (1436) 432, 436, 438, 448
héritage grec/ Greek heritage 327–344
hermeneia (interpretation, Greek term) 510
Ḥijāz, chérifs du 382
ḥijāziyyāt (poems expressing the longing for the visit of the Prophet's tomb in Medina) 383
al-Ḥijjāwī 103
hijra (migration to Medīna) 73, 600, 605
Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ (Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī) 20–21, 231–232
ḥilye bottles
in general 28–29, 535–536, 549, 552, 564–565, 578
Christian origins of 536, 573
ḥilye texts on 536, 544
interiors of 536
nūr Muḥammad and 549, 557
poetry on
Ottoman 546
Persian 539, 541
with rope and chain 544
sacred spring traditions and 566
uses of
ritualistic 546–547, 549
talismanic 539, 541, 549, 558, 559, 563
ḥilye gold dust 546–547, 549, 563
ḥilye texts (verbal descriptions of Prophet, also called *ḥilye-i şerīf*)
on metal plaques 539
as panel-calligraphy 609, 614
in prayer books 552
talismanic use of 552, 593, 605
see also under specific ḥilye texts
Ḥilye-i Çār Yār-i Güzīn (Cevrī İbrāhīm Çelebi) 613, 614
Ḥilye-i Enbiyāʾ (Neşāṭī) 614
Ḥilye-i Ḫāḳānī (Ḫāḳānī Meḥmed Beg)
in general 607–609, 616
beauty as link in 609–610
manuscripts of
SK Hamidiye 1075 611
SK Hüsrev 36 614–615
SK Şehid Ali Paşa 2755 612–614
printed editions of 610–611
himma (énergie spirituelle) 251, 255
Hinduism 317
Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik, Umayyad Caliph 84
holiness *see* sainteté/holiness
Holy Spirit 465
Horten, Max 4
Houris 135, 440, 449
Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān 229–230
humanity (*nāsūt*) 319–321, 323
ḥuqūq/*ḥaqq* (rights) *see* rights
Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī 273, 278, 279–280, 283, 284
see also ahl al-bayt
Ḥüsn uʿaşq (Şeykh Ghālib) 479, 481
Ḫüsrev Paşa 614
hydrotherapy 571
see also springs, sacred

ʿibāra (expression) 509
Iblīs 137, 138
Ibn ʿAbbās 59, 435, 462
Ibn ʿAbd Allāh 627
Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb 503
Ibn Abī Jamra 129
Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī 287, 291, 293–294

Ibn Abī l-Khiṣāl 356–357, 362, 383
Ibn Abī Shayba *see al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*
Ibn ʿArabī
on communication 509
on divine discourse 511–512
on faith 256–257
on fruits of Paradise 136
on Idrīs 133
on imagination 510–512
influence of 117
on intimacy with God 445
on men's creativity through God 520
al-Nābulusī on 521
on ninth sphere 444n61
on People of the Book 527
terminology used by 521
works of
Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam 519
al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya 509, 511, 523, 526
mention of 285, 286, 292, 293, 413
Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī 216, 219
Ibn ʿAẓẓūm al-Qayrawānī 20, 223–224
Ibn Bājja 328
Ibn al-Bawwāb 659n98
Ibn Darrāj al-Qasṭallī 408
Ibn Darrāj al-Sabtī 424
Ibn Diḥya al-Kalbī 126–127, 144, 207–208, 216
Ibn al-Fakhr al-Dimashqī 110
Ibn al-Fāriḍ
in general 27–28
poetry of
en général 386
fāʾiyya 419
influences sur 413
on men's creativity through God 519–520
al-Nābulusī on 514, 516, 518, 520–521
mention of 210–211
Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī
in general 19
as *ḥadīth* expert 100–101
on heavens 128
Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn and 102
influence of 117
on location of prophets during *miʿrāj* 123
on meeting between God and Prophet in 140
on purification of Prophet's heart 122
Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī' 504
Ibn Ḥanbal 110, 117, 143, 229, 234, 564
Ibn Hishām 81–82, 116, 121, 146, 379
Ibn Ḥumayd al-ʿĀmirī 103
Ibn Isḥāq 81–82, 86, 89, 116, 118, 121
Ibn al-Jannān al-Mursī, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad 380
Ibn al-Jawzī 241–242
Ibn Kathīr 118, 120n17, 127, 129, 211–212
Ibn Khafāja 388
Ibn Khalas 383
Ibn Khaldūn 413
Ibn al-Khaṭīb, Lisān al-Dīn
en general 24–25, 378–408, 419
letters to Prophet by
on behalf of Muḥammad V 352–353
on behalf of Yūsuf I
in general 352, 353–354, 373–374
addressee in 362
context of 359–360
intimate love for Prophet in 371–373
Naṣrid state in 364–366
poetry section in 361–362
prestigious descent of Yūsuf I in 361, 363, 368, 369–371, 374
Prophet and his community in 365–366
Prophet in 363–364
prose section in 362
reasons for 362
sender in 362
tawassul in 367–368
life of 358–359
poèmes dédiés au Prophète
en général 380
analyse des poèmes 385–407
contexte général 381–383
contexte personnel 384
works of
Iḥāṭa 352
Khaṭrat al-ṭayf 360
Aʿmāl al-Aʿlām 359
Rayḥānat al-kuttāb wa-nujʿat al-muntāb 352

Ibn Khayrān 201
Ibn al-Mubārak 229, 244–266
Ibn al-Mulaqqin 201, 202, 212–213
Ibn al-Munīr 132–133
Ibn al-Nadīm 86, 89
Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Dimashqī
in general 18–19
ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī and 102–103
on *ḥadīth* scholars 112
as *ḥadīth* transmitter 102
on *ḥadīth* transmitters 111–112
Ibn Ḥajar and 102
Ibn Taymiyya and 102–103, 105–107
on *mawlid* celebrations 103, 107
on *shaykh al-islām* 102, 107–108, 111, 112
works of
Iftitāḥ al-qārī li-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 111–112
Jāmiʿ al-āthār 103–104
al-Radd al-wāfir 103, 107–111
on *ziyāra* 104–105, 107
Ibn Rawāḥa 169
Ibn Rushd (Averroes) 23–24, 510, 512
Ibn Saʿd 82–83, 91–92
Ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī 100–101, 202
Ibn al-Sayyid al-Baṭalyawsī 379
Ibn Sayyid al-Nās 19, 146
see also Uyūn al-athar fī l-funūn wa-l-shamāʾil wa-l-siyar
Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyūsī [al-Baṭalyawsī] 357
Ibn Sīrīn 505
Ibn Taymiyya, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad
in general 19
as *ḥadīth* transmitter 109–111, 112
honorific of 102, 107, 108, 111, 112
Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn and 102–103, 105–107
on Prophet's vision of God 119, 143
quoting of 147
on talismanic use of Qurʾāns 651n79
unbelief of 102–103, 111
on *ziyāra* 105–107
Ibn Ṭufayl 328, 330
Ibn Ṭūlūn, Shams al-Dīn 219
Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Ghaffār al-Disūqī 145
Ibrāhīm b. Sahl al-Ishbīlī 380
Ibrāhīm Rashīd 248
al-Ibtihāj fī l-kalām ʿalā l-isrāʾ wa-l-Miʿrāj (al-Ghayṭī) 120, 123, 127, 133, 137, 147
icons
on bottles 536–537, 569, 571, 574
cult of 522–524, 528–529
dream-visions and 507
spiritual content of 507
Idrīs (Enoch) 131n57, 133
Idrīs b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sarrāj al-Ḥumayrī 637
Idrīs b. Idrīs 637
Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn 299–300, 318–321
Iftitāḥ al-qārī li-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn) 111–112
Iḥāṭa (Ibn al-Khaṭīb) 352
Iḥyāʾ (al-Ghazālī) 176–177, 184, 204
ijāz al-Qurʾān 170
ijāzāt (licenses of transmission) 103, 108–109, 110
illiteracy, Prophetic 185
Illuminations of Mecca (Ibn ʿArabī) *see al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*
imagination
Ibn ʿArabī on 510–512
language and 509
al-Nābulusī and 509
Imām Shāh 317
Imāms
khirqa transmission by 291–292
as proof of God 288–289
Prophetic knowledge and 289–290, 291
in Twelver Shīʿīsm 273
see also under specific Imāms
īmān *see* foi/faith
imitation
ādāb 239
aḥwāl 239
akhlāq 239
ḥāl prophétique 238
ḥaqāʾiquhu 239
mystiques anciens 229–242
qualités du Prophète 233, 240–241
sources 230
suivre la *sunna* 239
sunna 239
impeccabilité/impeccability 264
Impeccable Ones (*maʿṣūmūn*) 273, 284
Imtāʿ (Maqrīzī) 117
"In the name of Allah" (*basmala*/*besmele*) 357, 539, 545, 656, 658

İncili Köşk (Pearl Pavilion; Istanbul) 573
ingesting
of Prophetic materials 554, 556–557, 558, 563
of Qurʾān 564
innate nature (*fiṭra*) 137–138, 232
al-insān al-kāmil (Perfect Man) 293–295
Insān al-ʿuyūn fī sīrat al-amīn al-maʾmūn (al-Ḥalabī) *see Sīra ḥalabiyya*
Intellect (*al-ʿaql*)
primal 285, 286–287, 294
of Prophet 181, 184–185, 465, 471
universal 306–315, 319–323, 465
see also divinity
intercession, Prophetic 426–428
internal/esoteric (*bāṭin*) 128, 275, 302, 303, 320–321
interpretation (*hermeneia*) 510
intimacy
with God 64–66, 167, 445
with Prophet 371–373
al-Iṣbahānī, Abū Nuʿaym 20–21, 165, 167n65, 169n78
Iskandar Sulṭān, Timurid ruler 431
İskendernāme (Aḥmedī) 462–467
Islam
celebrations of ascension of Prophet in 460–461
see also isrāʾ/miʿrāj
cosmology in *see* Islamic cosmology
cult of icons in 523–524
emergence of 2
icon-bottles in 535
see also ḥilye bottles
ingesting of Materia Prophetica in 554, 556–557, 558, 563
miʿrāciyye literature in *see miʿrāj* literature
sacred springs in 567, 573, 577
sainthood in 523
see also Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism; Sufism/soufisme; Twelver Shīʿism
Islamic cosmology 435, 442–444, 452, 491–492
İsmāʿīl Ḥaḳḳı, Bursalı 602, 605
Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism
in general 321
Enunciators in 301–302
pillars of Islam in 307
Prophet and ʿAlī in
in general 23, 321–322
ʿAlī superiority and 311–312, 313–317
as Enunciator-Heir couple 302
four principles of al-Sijistānī 308–312, 322
Hindu mythology and 317
as husband and spouse 303–306
Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn on 299–300, 318–321
Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman on 300–301
Khayrkhwāh-e Harātī on 316–317
al-Muʾayyad fi l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī on 303–306
Nāṣir-e Khosraw on 306–307
Nizārī doctrine and 312–317, 322
as pen and tablet 306–307
Prophet's superiority 303–307, 308–311
al-Sijistānī on 307–312, 322
Ṭayyibī doctrine and 318–321, 322–323
al-Ṭūsī on 313–316
sharīʿa in 315
see also Twelver Shīʿism
isrāʾ/miʿrāj (Night Journey/Ascension)
in general 25
Abraham in 131, 139, 435, 448
Abū Sufyān in 125
Adam in 127, 133
angels in 139, 435
bestiary in 448
Burāq in 125–126, 127–128, 130–131, 134–135, 431, 435, 442, 465
celebration of 460–461
celestial rivers in 128–129
celestial spheres in 475–476
the damned in 137–138, 448
date/day of 126–127
dunyā in 137
first heaven in 491–492
fiṭra in 137–138
Gabriel in *see* Gabriel/ Jibrāʾīl, angel
God in *see* God/Allāh
ḥadīth in 434, 436
Heaven in 135–136, 436, 448–449

Hell in 432, 436, 438, 448
Houris in 135, 440, 449
Iblīs in 137, 138
Idrīs in 131n57, 133
Islamic cosmology and 435, 442–444, 452, 491–492
Jesus Christ in 131, 133
John the Baptist in 133
Joseph in 132–133
Kaʿba in 120, 128, 139, 141
Ladder in 127
length of 127
in Mamluk literature *see miʿrāj* literature
Moses in 131, 132, 142, 435
mystical love and 470–471
night of the ascension 440, 474–475, 490–491
other prophets in
location of 123
Muḥammad and 129–134, 142, 435, 451
in Ottoman literature *see miʿrāj* literature
as physical or spiritual experience 123–126, 144–145, 438, 439, 446, 464–465, 468–469, 481
prayers in 141–142
Prophet in
attitude of 452–453
consecration of 451
God and
dialogue between 435–436, 439, 445, 449–450
meeting with 139–141
union between 440–442, 444–447, 453
visions of 142–144
influence on planets and constellations 442–444
mysterious absence and return of 121
proofs demanded from 484
prophets and 129–134, 142, 435, 451
purification of heart of 122, 130, 480
return to earth of 446
wakefulness of 463–464, 468, 481
al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ on 171
Qayṣar in 125
reality of 123–126, 485–487
the Rock in 135
scepticism regarding 463
Shīʿī interpretations of 290–291
tests during 466
in Timurid literature *see miʿrāj* literature
true meaning of 466–467
Umm Hānī bint Abī Ṭālib in 121
see also miʿrāj literature
the isthmus (*barzakh*) 506, 509
istighātha (call for succour) 9, 355, 367–368, 374, 375
al-istishfāʿiyyāt (poèmes exprimants la demande d'intercession) 426–428
ithnayniyat (duality) 445
iʿtidhāriyya (poème d'excuse) 378
ʿIyāḍ b. Mūsā al-Yaḥṣubī (Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ)
en général 248, 379, 382, 383
on celestial rivers 129
as enemy of Sufis 181n141
khaṣāʾiṣ literature of 204–205, 217
letters to Prophet by 357, 362, 364, 374
on Prophet's vision of God 143, 144
on purification of Prophet's heart 122
quoting of 120n17
Shifāʾ of *see al-Shifāʾ bi-taʿrīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā*
mention of 8
*iżṭicā*ʿ (lying on one's back) 591
ʿIzz al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Salām/al-ʿIzz b. ʿAbd al-Salām 202, 208–209, 211, 412

Jābir b. Yazīd al-Juʿfī 319
al-Jadd, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. 356
Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr al-Yaman 300–301
Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq 232, 245, 291, 319, 470
Jāhiliyya 379
Jalāl al-Dīn Qāyinī 454
Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī 465
al-Jalāl al-Maḥallī 118
Jāmī, ʿAbduraḥmān 439, 447, 450, 455, 621
Jāmiʿ al-āthār (Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn) 103–104
Jarmy, Adrien de 18, 79–96
Jayḥān 128–129
al-Jazūlī, Muḥammad b. Sulaymān 553, 622, 651–652
Jeffery, Arthur 2
Jericho 131–132

Jerusalem 512
Jesus, prophet
en général 237
disciples of 75
images of 569, 571, 574
in Ismāʿīlī literature 301–302
in *miʿrāj*/*isrāʾ* 131, 133
in Qurʾān 58, 60, 72
Weapons of 574
jihād
formative period of doctrine of 86
letters to Prophet and 361, 371, 374
pilgrimage and 355–356
revival of 83, 86, 87
Umayyad Empire and 84
use of term 49
John the Baptist 133
Jones, J. M. B. 88
Joseph, Prophet 132–133
Joshua (Yūshaʾ b. Nūn b. Yūsuf al-Ṣiddīq) 131
Judgement Day 9, 31, 44, 138, 144, 356, 358, 593, 594
Junayd 244
Jupiter (*Mushtarī*) 443
jurisprudence (*fiqh*)
devotional attitudes to Prophet in 224
khaṣāʾiṣ literature and
as separate from 204
as sub-topic of 214
juristes (*muḥaddithūn*) 237–238
al-Jurjānī, ʿAbd al-Qāhir 511
Jurjānī, Sayyid Sharīf 431
Justinian, Byzantine emperor 567
Juwaynī 201

Kaʿb b. al-Aḥbār 59, 129
Kaʿb b. Zuhayr 378
Kaʿba
in *miʿrāj*/*isrāʾ* 120, 128, 139, 141
in *Muḥammedīye*-manuscripts 599–600
upper side of 591
kāhin (reader of oracles) 49
kalām al-qawm (parole des initiés) 411
kalima (Word) 310–311, 313
Kamālāt (ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī) 641
Kāmil [Akdik], Aḥmed 588
karāmāt (miracles of saints) 213n76
al-Kāshānī, al-Fayḍ 287, 294–295
kashf (divine revelation) 216, 627
Kashf al-sirr al-ghāmiḍ fī sharḥ dīwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ (al-Nābulusī) 516
Kashf al-ẓunūn (Ḥājjī Khalīfa) 211
ḳaṣīde (Ottoman) 590, 592, 598
al-Kattānī, Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar 625–626, 637, 644
al-Kawthar 128–129
Kenadsa (al-Qanādisa) 622, 625, 626
key of deliverance (*barāt*) 446
Khadīja (wife of Muḥammad) 277, 278, 300–301, 416
Khāksārs 292
Khalidi, Tarif 146
khalwat (retreat) 482
Khamsa (Nawāʾī) 438–447
in general 432–433
celestial spheres in 442–444, 452
context of 455
effects on reader of 448
function of 447, 450–451, 453–454
headings of 439
Heaven in 448–449
Houris in 440, 449
influences on 439
night of the ascension in 440
Prophet in
attitude of 453
communication between God and 445, 449–450
consecration of 451
influence on constellations of 443–444
influence on planets of 442–443
return to earth of 446
superiority over other prophets of 451
union between God and 440–442, 444–447, 453
sense of the marvellous in 447–451
Khamsa (Niẓāmī Ganjawī) 439
Khāqānī *see Ḥilye-i Ḥāḳānī*
kharédjites 237
al-Kharkūshī/Khargūshī, Abū Saʿd 20, 165, 167n65, 202–204, 205, 641
Kharrāz 244, 245

al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā (attr. al-Raḥmānī al-Ḥanafī) 221–222
al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-kubrā (al-Suyūṭī) 117, 211, 214–215
khaṣā'iṣ nabawiyya literature 197–224
in general 20, 198–199
academic competition and 210–211
after Suyūṭī
al-Bā'ūniyya 219–221, 223
Ibn Ṭūlūn 219
al-Munawī 221
Qasṭallānī 217–219
al-Raḥmānī al-Ḥanafī 221–222
works influenced by 217–223
dalā'il literature and 203
early developments in
Bahyaqī 200–201
al-Kharkūshī 202–204, 205
Māwārdī 200, 201
Muzanī 199–200
Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ 8, 204–205, 217
Shāfi'ī 199–200
influences on
of earlier texts 199–206
of Sufism 212–213, 214
jurisprudence and
as separate from 204
as sub-topic of 214
letters to Prophet and 362, 363
maghāzī literature and 203
before Mamlūk rule
Ibn Diḥya al-Kalbī 207–208
'Izz al-Dīn b. 'Abd al-Salām 202, 208–209, 211
during Mamlūk rule
in general 209–210
Ḥayḍarī 213
Ibn Kathīr 211–212
lost works 211
Suyūṭī 214–217
poetry in 222
prayer on the Prophet and 218, 223–224
prohibition/justification of 201–202, 212, 213, 219
Shāfi'ī school and 199–200, 202, 206
shamā'il literature and 201, 223
shift from legalistic to devotional in 209, 217, 220, 223, 224
sīra literature and 203, 215, 216, 223
themes in
dream-visions of Prophet 212–213
duties, Prophetic 213, 215
marriage, Prophetic 200, 212, 216–217
merits, Prophetic 208–209, 212, 222
prayer on the Prophet in 218
versification of 219–221, 223
see also character/attributes, Prophetic
al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-ṣughrā (Suyūṭī) 117, 133, 142
khaṣīṣa (special qualities of the Prophet)
definition of 201
merits as specific form of 208–209
see also character/attributes, Prophetic; *khaṣā'iṣ nabawiyya* literature; miracles, Prophetic
Khaṭrat al-ṭayf (Ibn al-Khaṭīb) 360
Khayrkhwāh-e Harātī 316–317
al-Khazraj 361n52
al-Khiḍr 216, 249, 577
khilāfa 'āmma (lieutenancy of God belonging to all human beings) 519–520
khirqa (cloak) 291–292
Khwāja 'Ubaydullah Aḥrār 455
Kifāyat al-ṭālib al-labīb fī khaṣā'iṣ al-Ḥabīb (Suyūṭī)
in general 211, 214–215, 216
works influenced by 217–223
Kilpatrick, Hilary 525–526
al-Kindī 23, 327, 329
kissing, devotional 553–554, 556, 593, 605
Kitāb a'lām al-nubuwwa (al-Rāzī) 328
Kitāb al-ḥāwī al-kabīr fī fiqh madhhab al-imām al-Shāfi'ī (Māwārdī) 200
*Kitāb al-*ibrīz (al-Mubārak) 244–266
Kitāb al-jihād ('Abd al-Razzāq) 94
Kitāb al-jihād (Abū Yūsuf) 94
Kitāb al-luma' (Sarrāj) 231, 239–241
Kitāb al-maghāzī (al-Waqīdī) 79, 82, 87, 88
Kitāb al-mi'rāj (Qushayrī) 439
Kitāb al-mubtada' (Ibn Isḥāq) 89
al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf (Ibn Abī Shayba)
kitāb al-maghāzī in
in general 82
chronology in 89, 90, 91
military traditions in 86
Warrior-Prophet in 85–86, 87, 96
kitāb al-siyār in 94, 95

Kitāb al-nikāḥ (Muzanī) 199
Kitāb al-Shifā' bi-taʿrīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā (Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ) 8, 153–196, 204–205, 217
Kitāb al-siyār (Ibn Abī Shayba) 94
Kitāb al-umm (Shāfiʿī) 199
Kitāb al-Yanābīʿ (al-Sijistānī) 308–312
Kitāb Zahr al-maʿānī i (Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn) 318–321
knowledge (*ʿilm*)
  acquired through *kashf* 216
  love and 176–179, 183n150
  Prophetic 185, 289, 291
Körtner, Mareike 159
kufr *see* unbelief
al-Kulaynī 288–289
Künh el-Aḫbār (Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī) 584
Kursī (Steps) 444
kutub al-jihād 94, 95
kutub al-maghāzī
  in general 95
  of al-Bukhārī
    in general 82–83
    chronology in 90
    Warrior-Prophet in 87, 96
  of Ibn Abī Shayba *see al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*
  of Maʿmar b. Rāshid
    chronology in 88–89, 90, 91
    military traditions in 85
    transmission of 81–82
    Warrior-Prophet in 83–84
  of al-Wāqidī 79, 82, 87, 88
    see also sīra (Ibn Isḥāq)
kutub al-siyar 94, 95

Lā Makān (Non-Place) 444
Ladder 127
al-Lafẓ al-mukarram fī khaṣā'iṣ al-Nabī (Ḥayḍarī) 213
lāhūt (divinity) 290, 313, 319–321, 323
  see also al-ʿaql
lām (letter) 656
al-Lamaṭī, Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak 21, 247, 248
language
  imagination and 509
  of separation 517
  of union 517
Laroui, Abdallah 164
Last Judgement 367–368
Laṭīfī 584
law schools
  authority of *ḥādīth*s and 95
    see also under specific schools of law
Lawḥ (Writing Tablet) 444
legal regulation of acts of worship (*fiqh al-ʿibādāt*) 218–219
Leo (lion) 444
Leo I, Byzantine emperor 567
letters
  anthropomorphism of 649, 651
  hidden powers of 649–650
  mujawwafa 642n62
  mystical meaning of 620–621, 632–633
  pictorial writing of 650
  Prophet's name and 639, 641
  tracing outline of 646, 656
    see also under specific letters
letters to the Prophet
  in general 24–25, 351–352, 373–375
  history of genre 355–357
  by Ibn al-Khaṭīb *see* Ibn al-Khaṭīb, Lisān al-Dīn
  khaṣā'iṣ al-nubuwwa literature and 362, 363
  shamā'il literature and 362, 363
  structure of 357–358
Levḥī Ḥüseyin Efendī 478–481
Libra (scales) 444
licenses of transmission (*ijāzāt*) 103, 108–109, 110
Light of Muḥammad *see* Muḥammadan Light
liquid, Prophetic 557
lisān al-farq (language of separation) 517
lisān al-jamʿ (language of union) 517
literature
  in Eastern Turkish (*Türkī*, Chagatay) 431–432, 433, 435
  on Prophet 2, 352
    see also khaṣā'iṣ nabawiyya literature; letters to the Prophet; *maghāzī* literature; *shamā'il* literature; *sīra* literature
lithography 588

livā el-ḥamd (banner of praise) 29, 593–594, 602, 604, 616
logic, philosophy and 510
López Anguita, Gracia 512
Lory, Pierre xiv, 20–21, 229–242, 506, 508
Lot, prophet 65
Lote tree (in seventh heaven) 128–129
see also sidretü l-müntehā
louanges du Prophète *see madā'iḥ nabawiyya*
love/amour (*maḥabba*)
en général 244
complainte 425–426
divin 252
for God
in general 175
Ghazālī on 176–179
knowledge and 176–179, 183n150
du maître 252–253
of Prophet, for *ahl al-bayt* 278–279
for Prophet
in general 155
al-Bukhārī on 155n9
effects of 187–188
of God 177
*ḥadīth*s on 155n9
in letters to Prophet 371–373
in *Shifā'* 172–189
in general 155–156, 172–173, 191
effects of 187–188
meaning and source of 176–179
Prophet's appearance and 179–183
Prophet's character and 183–189
Prophet's mercy and 186
as Prophet's rights 173–176
rewards for 188
see also veneration, Prophetic
three meanings/reasons of 178
Lumaʿ (Sarrāj) 21
lumière/light
divine 252, 263
see also fatḥ; *nūr muḥammadī*
lying on one's back (*iżṭicāʿ*) 591

maʿcūn-ı kırmız (red potion) 557–558
madā'iḥ nabawiyya (poetry in praise of Prophet)
badīʿiyya sub-genre in 514
blossoming of genre 25, 514
on *ḥilye* bottles 546
of al-Nābulusī 514–515
see also Burda (al-Būṣīrī); *madīḥ*
madhhab (école) 231, 242
madīḥ (panégyrique) 378–408, 411–429
see also madā'iḥ nabawiyya
madrasas
in Damascus 101, 102
see also Dār al-Ḥadīṭh al-Ashrafiyya (Damascus)
Maghārib al-zamān (Yazıcıoğlı Muḥammed) 590
maghāzī literature
in general 18, 197
chronology in 88–91
jihād revival and 83, 86, 87
khaṣā'iṣ literature and 203
Warrior-Prophet in
Abbasid context of 86–87
early development of 85–86
emergence of 79–83
growth of importance of 87–88
Umayyad context of 79–80, 84–85
see also expeditions, Prophetic; *sīra* literature
Maghribi calligraphy 26, 648, 651, 654, 658, 660
maghribī al-mabsūṭ 646, 648
magic, Solomonic white 539, 541
magicians (*sāhir*) 49
maḥabba *see* love/amour
maḥabbatat-nabī *see under* love/amour
Maḥbūb al-qulūb (Nawā'ī) 449, 453
Mahdi, Muhsin 330–331, 334
Mahmud ii, Ottoman Sultan 567, 573
maître éducateur (shaykh al-tarbiya) 250
maître spirituel 246
majdhūb (saint-ravi) 265
majnūn (djinn) 49
Makhzan al-asrār (Niẓāmī) 439
Makkī, Maḥmūd 379, 380, 383
malékisme 381
malḥûn 411
Mālik b. Anas 80
Mālik b. Dīnār 232–235, 237
Mālikī school of law 204, 207

Maʿmar b. Rāshid
kitāb al-maghāzī of
chronology in 88–89, 90, 91
military traditions in 85
transmission of 81–82
Warrior-Prophet in 83–84
student of al-Zuhrī 81, 84
on al-Zuhrī 80
Mamlūk sultanate
ulamāʾ during
in general 209–210
academic competition and 210–211
Man, perfect 293–295
Manāhij al-ṣādiqīn (Sulamī) 263
al-Manūnī, Muḥammad 637, 644
Manẓūme-i naṣāʾiḥ alā t-taṣavvuf (Ḥaqqānī) 467–469
Maqāmāt (Ḥarīrī) 519–520
al-Maqdisī, al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Ġanī 126
al-Maqqarī 352, 357
Maqrīzī 117
see also Imtāʿ
marginal annotations 652
Marʿī b. Yūsuf al-Karmī 103
Maʿrifetnāme (Erzurumlu İbrāhīm Ḥaḳḳı) 604
Marīnids/Mérinides 25, 354, 381–383, 406
Maroc *see* Morocco/Maroc
marriages, Prophetic (*nikāḥ*) 200, 212, 216–217
Mars (*Bahrām*) 443
Maʿrūf al-Karkhī 292
Mary, Virgin 526, 569, 571, 574
Maṣābīḥ al-sunna (Baghawī) 434, 436
*mashyakha*s 110
Masotta-Naït Raïss, Kabira 232
maʿṣūmūn (Impeccable Ones) 273, 284
materials, Prophetic, ingesting of 554, 556–557, 558, 563
mathal (parabole) 259
Mawāhib al-ladunìyya bi-l-minaḥ al-muḥammadiyya (al-Qasṭallānī) 117, 125, 127, 217–219
Māwārdī 200, 201
mawlidiyyāt 414–418
mawlid/mevlid celebrations 103, 107, 246, 380, 382–383, 503
Mayeur-Jaouen, Catherine xvi, 19, 115–148
Mecca/ Mecque
curative powers of substances from 558–559
depictions of
in *Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt* 655
on *ḥilye*s bottles 539
rubbing/scraping of 553–554
devotional rubbing/kissing at 556
pélerinage à 383
Mecīdī (ʿAbdülmecīd b. Şeykh Naṣūḥ b. Isrāʾil et-Tosyevī al-Amasyavī) 469–473
mediation, Prophetic, call for (*tawassul*) 9, 211, 355, 367–368, 375
Medina
curative powers of substances from 558–559
depictions of
in *Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt* 655
on *ḥilye*s bottles 539
rubbing/scraping of 553–554
devotional rubbing/kissing at 554, 556
migration to 73, 600, 605
Melchert, Christopher 231–232
memory images 507
Mendelsohn, Daniel 115
Mercury (*ʿUtārid*) 442–443
mercy, Prophetic 186
Mérinides/Marīnids 25, 354, 381–383, 406
merits (*faḍāʾil*), Prophetic 208–209, 212, 222
merits (*thawāb*) 104–105
meşnevī 584, 590
Messenger from God 44–46, 63, 75–76, 198
metal plaques 539
Mevlevihane Museum (Istanbul) 535
Mevleviyye *semāʿ* 476–477
Mevlid (Süleymān Çelebi) *see Vesīlet en-Necāt*
mevlid books (*mevlid kitābı*) *see Vesīlet en-Necāt*
micrography 650
Mihyār al-Daylamī 390
military historiography *see* expeditions, Prophetic; *maghāzī* literature; war, Prophetic relics
mīm (letter) 639, 642n62, 648–649, 656
Mīr Dāmād 287
Mīr Ḥaydar 431
Mīr ʿImād al-Ḥasanī al-Ḳazvīnī 610

miʿrāciyye literature *see miʿrāj* literature
miracles, Prophetic (*muʿjiza*)
en général 422–423
Ibn Diḥya al-Kalbī on 208
al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ on 168–170, 205–206
miracles, saintly (*karāmāt*) 213n76
Miʿrācnāme (Nāyī ʿOthmān Dede) 460
miʿrāj literature
in general 25–26
anthropomorphism and 139, 140, 468
brevity of 489
description of Prophet in 479–480
Mamluk
by al-Ghayṭī 120, 123, 127, 133, 137, 147
by al-Ḥalabī *see Sīra ḥalabiyya*
by Ibn Sayyid al-Nās *see Uyūn al-athar fī l-funūn wa-l-shamāʾil wa-l-siyar*
as Mevleviyye *semāʿ* 478
Ottoman, in general 460–461, 493
Ottoman, 1400–1600
by Aḥmedī 462–467
birth of tradition 462
by Ḥaqqānī 467–469
by Mecīdī 469–473
Ottoman, 1600–1700
in general 473–474
by Levḥī Ḥüseyin Efendī 478–481
by Naẓīm Yaḥyā Çelebī 474–478
by ʿÖmer Ḥāfıẓ Fenārī 481–484
Ottoman, 1800–1920
by ʿAbdüsettār 488–490
by Bahāeddīn 490–492
by Saʿīd Paşa 484–487
ritualised musicality of 488–489
Sufi path and 432, 453–454, 455
Timurid
in general 455
Khamsa (Mīr ʿAlī Shīr Nawāʾī) 432–433, 438–447
Miʿrājnāma (1436) 431–432, 433, 434–438
Miʿrājnāma and *Khamsa* compared 447–454
see also isrāʾ/miʿrāj
*miʿrājiyya*s *see miʿrāj* literature
Miʿrājnāma (1436) 434–438
in general 433
bestiary in 448
celestial spheres in 435, 452
context of 454
effects on reader of 448
function of 447, 450–451, 452–453, 454
ḥadīth in 434, 436
Heaven in 436
Hell in 432, 436, 438, 448
illustrations in 434, 438
influences on 434
language and script of 431–432, 434
observation of *sharīʿa* and 438
Prophet in
attitude of 452–453
communication between God and 435–436, 449
consecration of 451
superiority over other prophets of 451
sense of the marvellous in 447–451
al-Mīrghanī, Muḥammad ʿUthmān 248
Miskawayh 184
mission, Prophetic (*risāla*)
in general 44–47
universality of 55–56
al-Mizzī 100–101
models, Prophetic
in general 10–11
good model 7–8
self-empowerment and 10
Mohammed iv, Alawite Sultan 645
Morocco/Maroc 25, 411, 422, 428
see also Maghribi calligraphy; Marīnids/Mérinides; al-Qandūsī, Abū al-Qāsim
Moses, prophet
in Ismāʿīlī literature 301–302
in *miʿrāj/isrāʾ* 131, 132, 142, 435
in Qurʾān 71
mothers of the believers (*ummahāt al-muʾminīn*) 200
Moulay Idrīs ii, Imam of Morocco 29–30, 625, 630, 656
Moulay Sulaymān b. Muḥammad, Sultan of Morocco 638
mounts, Prophetic 93–94
movable types 588, 602, 610–611
muʾākhāt (pact of chosen brotherhood) 277
al-Muʾayyad fi l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī 303–304

al-Mubārak *see* Ibn al-Mubārak
muḥaddithūn (juristes) 237–238
Muḥammad, Prophet
Abrahamic traditions and 70–71
abrogation of other religions by 523
ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib an *see* ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib
ascension of *see isrāʾ/miʿrāj*
biographies of *see sīra* literature
birthday of *see mawlid/mevlid* celebrations
character/attributes of *see* character/attributes, Prophetic
Companions of *see* Companions
creation of 549
descendants/family of *see ahl al-bayt*
descriptions of 479–480, 535
see also ḥilye; *ḥilye* bottles
état spirituel 251
footprint of 135, 512–513
functions/roles of *see* functions/roles, Prophetic
God and *see* God/Allāh
identification with 8–9
illiteracy of 185
images of *see* representations/images, Prophetic
imitation of *see* imitation
interaction with 9
intimacy with 371–373
in Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism *see* Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism
light of *see nūr muḥammadī*
literature on *see under* literature
love for/of *see under* love/amour
marriage of 200, 212, 216–217
merits of 208–209, 212, 222
miracles of *see* miracles, Prophetic
names of, in calligraphy 638–641, 656, 658
pauvreté 240–241
pious attachment to 1, 4–7, 157, 188
see also veneration, Prophetic
prayers on *see* prayers on the Prophet
pre-eminence of *see* pre-eminence, Prophetic
pre-eternity of 224, 284–285, 302, 318–319
al-Qandūsī and *see* al-Qandūsī, Abū al-Qāsim
in the Qurʾān *see* Qurʾān
representations of *see* representations/images, Prophetic
rights of *see under* rights
rules specific to 201, 208–209
in Sufism 211
superiority of *see under* superiority
tawassul and *istighātha* and 9, 211, 355, 367–368, 374, 375
in Twelver Shīʿism *see* Twelver Shīʿism
veneration of *see* veneration, Prophetic
visualisations of *see* representations/images, Prophetic
Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Salām al-Ghumārī 628n24
Muḥammad ʿAbduh 529
Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ṣanhājī al-Fāsī 638
Muḥammad b. al-ʿArabī al-Dilāʾī 414, 419
Muḥammad b. Masʿūd b. Abī l-Khiṣāl 379
Muḥammad b. Mūsā Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī 163n39
Muḥammad b. Sinān 319
Muḥammad al-Mahdī 273
Muḥammad Rifʿat 535
Muḥammad al-Ṣughayyir al-Sahlī 652n82
Muḥammad V, of Granada 352–353, 359, 384, 385, 407
Muḥammadan inheritance (*wirātha muḥammadiyya*) 508, 509, 516
Muḥammadan Light (*nūr muḥammadī*) 7–8, 58–61, 263, 285, 287, 402, 417, 503, 516, 518–519, 521
see also ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya
Muḥammadan Reality *see ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*
Muḥammadan stamp 629
Muḥammedīye-manuscripts *see Risāle-i Muḥammedīye*
al-Muḥāsibī 174–175
al-Muḥibbī 145
al-Muʿizz b. Bādis, Zirid Emir 646
Mujāhid 60–61
mujawwafa letters 642n62
muʿjiza (miracles)
use of term 205–206, 212
see also miracles, Prophetic
Mukhammisa 302, 318

Mukhtaṣar (al-Muzanī) 200
Muljimat al-mujassima (ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Bukhārī) 102
al-Munawī, ʿAbd al-Raʾūf 221
Munlā (Molla/Mevla) Muḥammad 546
Muqaddima (Ibn Khaldūn) 413
Muqātil b. Sulaymān 59, 61
murabbī (éducateur) 251
Murād iv, Ottoman Sultan 118
muraḳḳaʿ albums 614
Murshid al-muḥtār fī khaṣāʾiṣ al-Mukhtār (Ibn Ṭūlūn) 219
muruwwa (chivalry) 184
Mūsā al-Kāẓim 291
Muṣannaf (ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣānʿānī)
kiṭab al-jihād in 94, 95
kitāb al-maghāzī in
in general 81–82
chronology in 90, 91
Warrior-Prophet in 83–84, 96
Museum of Turkish Calligraphic Art (Türk Vakıflar Hat Sanatları Müzesi; Istanbul) 535n1
Muṣḥaf al-Ḥāḍina (Nanny's Qurʾān) 646
Mushtarī (Jupiter) 443
Muslim *see Ṣaḥīḥ* (Muslim)
Musnad (Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal) 110, 117
Musnad (al-Ḥārith b. Abī Usāma) 110
Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī 584
al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh, Ḥafṣid ruler of Tunis 370n92
Mustaqīmzāde 620
müstezād 592, 598
al-Mutanabbī 408
al-Muʿtaṣim, Abbasid Caliph 94
muʿtazilites/Muʿtazila 230
muwashshaḥ (poésie classique) 411, 427
al-Muzanī 199–200
mystical banquet (*bezm*) 474–475
mystical poetry 515–516
mysticism *see* mystique/mysticism
mystique/mysticism
apparition dans l'islam 229–230
définition 229
imitation du Prophète 229, 237
juristes et 237–238
mentions du Prophète 230–231
soufisme ancien 229–242
zuhd et 229
al-Nabhānī, Yūsuf b. Ismāʿīl
anthologies published by 502
on images/icons 528–529
on al-Nābulusī 501–502, 528
on shadow-theatre 529
al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī 378
al-Nābulusī, ʿAbd al-Ghanī 501–529
in general 27–28, 502, 528
account of journey to Palestine 512–513
alchemical theme in work of 513–514
on Arabic language 527
badīʿiyya of 514
on Christian concepts in Arabic 525
on dream-visions about Prophet 504–506, 508
Ḥanbalī outlook of 521–522
on Ibn ʿArabī 521
on Ibn al-Fāriḍ 514, 516, 518, 520–521
on images/icons 523–525, 529
imagination and 509
madāʾiḥ of 514–515
on men's creativity through God 520
on Muḥammadan inheritance 516–517
on Muḥammadan Reality 517–518
al-Nabhānī on 501–502, 528
on *nūr muḥammadī* 518–519
place of *madāʾiḥ* in 515–516
on Prophet's abrogation of other religions 523
on Prophet's names 641–642
on religion and authority 516–517
terminology used by 521
way with words of 508–509
works of
Dīwān al-ḥaqāʾiq 515
Kashf al-sirr al-ghāmiḍ fī sharḥ dīwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ 516
Nafḥat al-qabūl fī midḥat al-rasūl 514–515
nadhīr (warner) 44
Nafḥ al-ṭīb (al-Maqqarī) 352
Nafḥat al-qabūl fī midḥat al-rasūl (al-Nābulusī) 514–515
Nagel, Tilman 3–4, 6, 116, 119, 154, 360
Nahj al-farādīs 434, 435, 436, 438
naissance du Prophète *see mawlid/mevlid* celebrations
Najd 390

names, Divine
in calligraphy 638–641, 656, 658
letters and 308–309, 639, 641
in Twelver Shīʿism 292–293
Nanny's Qur'ān (*Muṣḥaf al-Ḥāḍina*) *see* Qur'ān 12613
Naqshbandiyya (Sufi ṭarīqa) 455
Naṣā'iḥ al-Shāhrukhī (Jalāl al-Dīn Qāyinī) 454
nasḫī-ductus 614
nasīb 378, 385, 386, 387
Nāṣir-e Khosraw 306–307
Naṣrid Sultanate of Granada 352–354, 359–360, 364–366
see also Muḥammad V, of Granada; Yūsuf I, of Granada
Naṣūḥ b. Ṣāliḥ 598
nāsūt (humanity) 319–321, 323
Nawā'ī, Mīr ʿAlī Shīr 25–26, 432–433
see also Khamsa (Nawā'ī)
al-Nawawī 100–101, 129, 144, 202
nawba 424
Nāyī ʿOthmān Dede 460
Naẓīm Yaḥyā Çelebī 474–478
Neşaṭī Dede 474
nesiḫ-ductus 588
Neuwirth, Angelika 3
Night Journey (*isrā'*) *see isrā'*/*miʿrāj*
night prayer (*qiyām al-layl*) 41
Nihāyat al-maṭlab fī dirāyat al-madhhab (Juwaynī) 201
Nihāyat al-sūl (Ibn Diḥya al-Kalbī) 207–208, 216
nikāḥ (marriages of Prophet) 200, 212, 216–217
Nile 128–129
Niẓāmī Ganjawī 439
Nizārī Ismāʿīlīsm 313–317
Noah/Nūḥ, prophet 70, 301–302
nocturnal journey (*isrā'*) *see* Night Journey
Nöldeke, Theodor 3
al-Nuʿmān, Qatāda b. 378, 422–423
number/chiffre 366 255
numerology 620
nūn (letter) 632–633, 646
nūr muḥammadī (Muḥammadan Light) 263, 285, 287, 402, 417, 516, 518–519, 521, 549, 557
see also ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya
nuṭaqā'/*nāṭiq* (Enunciators) 301–302, 308–312

An Odyssey: a Father, a Son, and an Epic (Mendelsohn) 115
O'Kane, J. 248
Olesen, Niels Henrik 105
ʿÖmer Ḥāfıẓ Fenārī 481–484
the Originator (*al-Badīʿ*) 520
Ottoman Empire
icon-bottles made in *see ḥilye* bottles
rulers of, visits to sacred springs by 567, 573
see also under miʿrāj literature; poetry; *under specific rulers*
Ottoman-Turkish language 614
Ousterhout, Robert 569

pact of chosen brotherhood (*mu'āḫāt*) 277
Pagani, Samuela xv, 27–28, 501–529
panégyrique (*madīḥ*) 378–408, 411–429
see also madā'iḥ nabawiyya
panel calligraphy 609, 614
panels, of cut-out (*kat'ı*) work 539
Papas, Alexandre xvii, 26, 460–493
parabole (*mathal*) 259
Patrizi, Luca 182
pauvreté/poverty (*faqr*) 240–241, 482–483
Pavilion of the Garden Superintendent (*Bostancıbaşı Köşkü*; Istanbul) 573
Pearl Pavilion (*İncili Köşk*; Istabul) 573
Pekolcay, N. 588
pélerinage à La Mecque 383
Pend-nāme (ʿAṭṭār) 470
People of Memory (*ahl al-dhikr*) 70
People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*) 40, 58, 70, 527
People of the Cloak (*ahl al-kisā'*) 279, 281, 284
People of the Prophet's house *see ahl al-bayt*/*ehl-i beyt*
Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) 293–295
personality, Prophetic *see* character/attributes, Prophetic
Petrone, Michele 20, 197–224
philosophers, Prophet and 23–24
philosophy

logic and 510
prophétie et 327–344
see also falāsifa
physiognomy, Prophetic *see* appearance, Prophetic
pictorial writing 650
piety, definition of 7
piety, Prophetic 1, 4–7, 157, 188
see also veneration, Prophetic
pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) 307, 355–356
pillars of Islam 300, 307
Pīr Ṣadr al-Dīn 317
Pisces (fish) 444
plagiarism 217
planets 442–443
Platon/Plato 327, 332, 333
pneuma (spirit/soul) 466
poèmes dédiés au Prophète (poems dedictaed to the Prophet)
3 thèmes 412
atmosphère arabique 390–391
bā'iyya 380, 385–407, 514
courant soufi 386
dāliyya 380, 385–407
désir 391–392
excuse 378
ḥā'iyya 380, 385–407
madā'iḥ nabawiyya *see madā'iḥ nabawiyya*
mawlid 414–418
miracles 401, 405, 422–423
objet ambigu 398–400
passion 393–394
prières 421–422
rakb al-Ḥijāz 394–395
thèmes 411–414
vertus 401, 418–420
visite des lieux saints 396–398, 423–428
see also panégérique
poésie classique (*muwashshaḥ*) 411, 427
poetry
forms/styles
ḳaṣīde 590, 592, 598
mesnevī 584, 590
müstezād 592, 598
qaṣīda 380, 386, 408
genres
fā'iyya 419
ghazal 515–516, 518, 528, 529
i'tidhāriyya 378
mi'rājiyya 25–26, 432–433, 438–447
muwashshaḥ 26, 411, 427
mystical 515–516
in praise of Prophet *see* éloge du Prophète; *madā'iḥ nabawiyya*; *madīḥ* (panégérique); poèmes dédiés au Prophète
zajal 28, 411, 425
in letters to Prophet 361
Ottoman
on *ḥilye*s bottles 546
layout in manuscripts 587
Prophet in 492–493
see also Ḥilye-i Ḥāḳānī; *Risāle-i Muḥammedīye*; *Vesīlet en-Necāt*
Persian, on *ḥilye*s bottles 539, 541
poets (*shā'ir*) 49
pomegranates 135–136
poverty (*faqr*) 240–241, 482–483
prayer books
depictions of Mecca & Medina in 553–554
*ḥilye*s in 552
prayers (*ṣalāt*)
in general 9
of the Divine Essence 633
of Divine immensity 636
in *mi'rāj*/*isrā'* 141–142
night prayer 41
as pillar of Islam 307
see also prayer books; prayers on the Prophet
prayers on the Prophet (*taṣliya*)
en général 421–422
collections of 223–224
see also Dalā'il al-Khayrāt
in *khaṣā'iṣ* literature 218
literature on 352
method for practising of 637
al-Nābulusī on 506
al-Qandūsī on 636, 637, 640
in Qur'ān 57
Sufi brotherhoods and 199
pre-eminence, Prophetic
in general 156
Shifā' on 159–172

pre-eminence, Prophetic (cont.)
in general 159–160, 190
ʿaẓīm and 162–163
Prophet's exalted status and 161–162
qadr and 160–161
sources for
in general 163–165
God's acts and salvation history 168–172
God's word and revelation 165–167
pre-eternity, Prophetic 284–285, 302, 318–319
premonitions, Prophetic 279–280, 282–283
Priesterbetrugstheorie (priest fraud theory) 154
printing presses 645
Proof (*ḥujja*) 288–289, 313–317
prophétie/prophety
et philosophie 327–344
héritage grec 327–344
sainteté et 229–242, 262–264
prophets
location in *miʿrāj*/*isrāʾ* of 123
Muḥammad and
in general 66–72
superiority over 60–61, 129–134, 142, 290–291, 435, 451
resuscitation of 131
see also under specific prophets
pseudo-columns 587
purification, of Prophet's heart 122, 130, 416, 480

Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ *see* ʿIyāḍ b. Mūsā al-Yaḥṣubī
al-Qādirī, Muḥammad 248
Qadızādeli 118, 503
qadr 160–161, 173
qāf (letter) 646
Qalam (Reed Pen) 444
al-Qalqashandī 351–352
al-Qalyūbī, Aḥmad 120, 127–128, 133, 135, 136–137, 147–148
al-Qandūsī, Abū al-Qāsim
in general 29–30, 659–660
ancestry of 626–628, 636–637
calligraphy of 644–674
see also Dalāʾil al-Khayrāt; Qurʾān 12613
as expert of *Dalāʾil* text 652–653
Fez and 630, 632, 636
grave of 625–626
ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya and 622, 630–632
al-Kattānī and 625–626
Prophet and
in general 636–638
dream-visions of 627–628, 633–634, 635–636
views of
on calligraphers becoming writing 642–643
on letters of the Qurʾān 649–650
on names of Allāh and Prophet 638–641
on prayers on the Prophet 636, 637, 640
works of *see Sayf al-ʿināya*; *Sharāb Ahl al-ṣafā*; *al-Taʾsīs*
al-Qandūsī, Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān 634
qaṣaṣ (account/narration) 70
qaṣīda (Arabic) 380, 386, 408
al-Qaṣīda al-Rāʾīya (Ibn al-Bawwāb) 659n98
qaṣṣara (cutting) 365–366n71
al-Qasṭallānī 117, 125, 127, 217–219
al-Qatāda 60
Qatāda b. al-Nuʿmān 378, 422–423
Qays b. Dharīḥ 400
Qays b. Saʿd b. ʿUbāda al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī al-Sāʿidī al-Madanī 361, 363, 368, 369
Qayṣar (Caesar, Byzantine emperor) 125
Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ (Rabghūzī) 435, 436
qiṣṣa/*qiṣaṣ* (story/history) 70
qiṣṣat al-gharānīq (satanic verses/story of the cranes) 264
qiyām al-layl (night prayer) 41
qiyāma (Resurrection) 315
qualities, Prophetic *see* character/attributes, Prophetic
Qubbat al-ṣakhra (Dome of the Rock) 512
Qurʾān 12613 (al-Qandūsī)
calligraphy in
in general 644
lack of separators 648
maghribī al-mabsūṭ 646, 648
Prophet's name 648–649
tracing outline of letters 646

commissioning of 645–646
illuminations in 646
Qur'ān bottles 535
Qur'ān verses
2:67–71 45
2:108 45, 71
2:115 524
2:124–141 71
2:129 60
2:136 67
2:138 656
2:143 54
2:144 41
2:151 46
2:186 76
2:189 45n3
2:213 67n22
2:215 45n3
2:217 45n3
2:219 45n3
2:220 45n3
2:222 45n3
2:251 49
2:253 67
2:285 584
2:286 365
3:31 51, 173, 188, 239
3:45 72
3:61 281
3:67–68 71
3:79 516
3:84–85 67
3:86 61
3:101 76
3:110 77, 165n54
3:144 67
3:153 75
3:159 42
3:164 75
4:1 303–304, 305
4:33 55
4:41–42 55
4:59 48
4:64 53
4:65 49
4:69 47
4:80 48
4:84 49
4:105 49
4:106 70
4:127 45n3
4:157 319
4:163–164 60, 68
4:166 63
4:171 58, 72
4:176 45n3
5 131–132
5 :48 67n22
5:3 282
5:4 45n3
5:27 45
5:48 40
5:55–56 76
5:67 39, 45, 282
5:92 48
5:99 37
5:101 45
5:104 48
6:10 69
6:35 43
6:54 54
6:56–57 40
6:58 38
6:90 51, 68
6:103 142, 143
6:106 51
6:161–163 58
7:157 60
7:158 51, 56
7:172 61, 285
7:180 639
7:187 45
7:188 38
7:198 319
7:200 39
7:203 40
8:1 45n3
8:17 62
8:20–21 47, 61
8:24 61
8:27 74
8:33 54, 365, 366
8:62 73
8:64 73
8:72 363
8:74 363

Qur'ān verses (cont.)
8:108 235–236
9: 43 39
9:24 75, 155n9
9:26 75
9:40 66, 73
9:73 49
9:88 73
9:91 74
9:99 54
9:103 47
9:105 76
9:128 55, 75
10:1–10 70
10:15–16 50
10:19 67n22
10:58 412
10:94 38
10:94–95 42
10:99 44
11: 73 72
11:12 44
11:27 70
11:49 50
11:112 41, 74
11:118 67n22
12:96 44
12:108 46, 51
13:7 316
13:36 40
15:72 65
16:43 70
16:44 46
16:82 68
16:93 67n22
16:125 41
17 123, 439
see also isrāʾ/miʿrāj
17:117, 43, 56, 126, 591
17:13–14 367
17:23–39 42
17:29–30 42
17:36–38 43
17:60 125, 484
17:71 367
17:74–75 39
17:76 71
17:78–82 41
17:82 559
17:90–93 43
17:93–96 39
17:94 37
17:103 71
18:1 56
18:6 43
18:22–23 40
18:28 70
18:64 69
18:65 249
18:110 38–39, 264
19:16 46
19:21 72
19:30 58
19:30–31 72
19:41 46
19:51 46
19:54 46
19:56 46
19:97 63
20:2 63
20:99–100 69
21:7 70
21:25 69
21:107 55, 539
22:78 54
23:21 7
23:51–52 67
23:97–98 39
24:35 59, 142, 169
24:47–52 48
24:62 54
24:62–63 52
25:1 55
25:4–6 50
25:7 38
25:20 38
25:51–52 49
25:61 58
26:109 68
26:127 68
26:145 68
26:164 68
26:180 68
26:192–196 45
26:217–220 61
27:30 539
28:25 70

28:56 43
28:76 235–236
28:85 77
28:87–88 42
29:26 70
29:48 50
30:30 41
33 648
33:4–5 72
33:6 53, 57, 304, 307
33:7 60, 68, 203
33:21 18, 51, 70
33:33 72, 279
33:37 65, 72
33:40 57
33:43 139
33:45–46 58
33:46 46, 262
33:53 53
33:56 57, 76
34:28 55, 363
36 564
36:69–70 63
38:26 49
39:30 38
39:67 160
40:55 70
41:3–4 63
42:8 67n22
42:11 524
42:23 73
43:33 67n22
43:43 40
46:9 67
46:35 69
47 648
47:2 64
47:19 39, 53, 70
47:33 48
48 648
48:1–3 58
48:1–4 39
48:8 54
48:8–9 53
48:10 62, 524
48:18–19 62
48:26 75
48:28 56
48:29 74
49:1–5 53
49:7 76
50:45 46
53 123, 439
see also isrāʾ/miʿrāj
53:2 56
53:8–9 139
53:9 290
53:10 56, 141
53:13 142
53:17 126, 446
53:18 144
54:17 63
54:22 63
54:32 63
54:40 63
57:27 75
57:28 61, 75
59:7 49
59:9 363, 370
60:4 51
60:6 51
60:12 54
61:6 60
61:14 72
63:5–6 54
64:8 47
65:10–11 64
66 65–66
68:1–4 57
68:2 419
68:4 183
68:48–50 72
69:44–47 50
71:16 58
72:19 56, 126
73:1 64
73:1–10 41
73:5 63
73:20 63, 74
73:21 38
74:1 64
74:1–2 44
75:16–19 40
76:29–30 51
78:2 70
80:1–12 40

Qur'ān verses (cont.)
93:1–11 64
94:1 480
96:1 45, 64
96:3 45
96:9–10 126
97:3 65
98:2–3 63
113 651n179
113:1–5 651n179
114 651n179
cups inscribed with 564
Q 65:3 160
Qur'ān/Coran
apocalyptic message in 2–3
copies of
by al-Qandūsī *see* Qur'ān 12613
see also Muṣḥaf al-Ḥāḍina
curative powers of 559
function of 63–64
ingesting of 564
letters of 649–650
miniatures of, in bottles 535
miracle of 170
persons in
Companions 72–75
Prophet
in general 17–18, 37–38, 76–78
authority of 47–50
character of 41–42
divine presence and 61–62
as God's elect 56–58
his community and 72–76
as intercessor/mediator 53–56
intimacy with God of 64–66
luminous reality of 58–61
missions of 44–47
as model 51–52
as ordinary man 38–39
prophets and 66–72
Qur'ān's function and 63–64
Revelation and 40–41, 48–49, 62–66
sacredness of 52–53
training of 40–44
prophets
common destinies and 68–69
community of 67–68
mirror of 18, 69–72
see also under specific prophets
Prophet's wives in 53, 65, 72
7 lectures 255
source de l'éloge du Prophète 379
as source for Prophet's reality 165–167
teaching and learning of 643
textural development of 2–3
verses of *see* Qur'ān verses
Qurayshites 124–125
qurb (nearness to God) 177n114
al-Qurṭubī 128–129, 143
Qushayrī 244, 439

rā' (letter) 656
Rabghūzī 435
Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya 231, 449
rābiṭa (lien) 251
al-Radd al-wāfir (Ibn Nāṣir al-Dīn) 103, 107–111
Radke, Bernd 247, 262, 265
raghbat concept 482
raḥīl 378, 385, 386, 388, 389, 396–398
al-Raḥmānī al-Ḥanafī, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm 221–222
rakb al- Ḥijāz 394–395
al-Ramlī, Shams al-Dīn 117
rāshidūn (first four Caliphs) 539, 544
rasūlun min Allāh (Messenger from God) 63
Rawḍ al-unuf fī sharḥ al-sīra al-nabawiyya li-Ibn Hishām (al-Suhaylī) 118
Rawḍat al-taslīm (al-Ṭūsī) 313–316
Rayḥānat al-kuttāb wa-nujʿat al-muntāb (Ibn al-Khaṭīb) 352
reader of oracles (*kāhin*) 49
red potion (*maʿcūn-ı kırmız*) 557–558
relics/vestiges (*āthār*), Prophetic 8, 9, 91–95
see also footprints, Prophetic
religion, authority and 516–517
remembrance/reminder (*dhikr*) 46, 63, 412, 482
renunciation/renoncement (*zuhd*/*tark*) 43, 229, 231, 237, 242, 482
see also ascèse/asceticism
representations/images, Prophetic
academic research on 1–4
banner of praise as 593–594, 602, 604, 616

circles as 598–601, 602, 604–605, 616
historicising of 3
in letters to Prophet 363–364
in miniatures 507
plurality of 4, 14
roses as 611
through calligraphy 609, 614–615, 616, 642–643
see also ḥilye
Resurrection (*qiyāma*) 315
retreat (*khalwat*) 482
Revelation
ʿAlī and 303
Prophet and 40–41, 48–49, 62–66
rhetoric 510
rhetorical artifice (*badīʿ*) 379, 511, 514
al-Riʿāya li-ḥuqūq Allāh
(al-Muḥāsibī) 174–175
rights (*ḥuqūq*/*ḥaqq*)
of God 174
of Prophet 156, 172–176, 189
use of term 172, 173–174
risāla (Prophetic mission) *see* mission, Prophetic
Risāla (Qushayrī) 244
Risāla (Shāfiʿī) 165
Risāle-i miʿrāciyye (anon.) 462
Risāle-i Muḥammedīye (Yazıcıoğlı Muḥammed)
in general 29, 589–593, 616
manuscripts of
of author 593–595
dkm Maʿārif ʿĀmma Turkī Ṭalʿat 22 598–601, 605
faḳīh context of 596–598
sk İzmir 601, 1260/1844 601–602
tsmk hs 93 (908/1502) 596–598
narrative/graphic aspects in 593
printed editions of 602–605
vocabulary of 590–592
ritual purification (*wuḍūʾ*) 201
Rıżā Efendi 584, 588
the Rock (Jerusalem) 135
roses 611
rubbing, devotional 553–554, 556, 593, 605
Rubin, Uri 88
rūḥ (esprit/spirit) 257, 263, 264
Rūmī 478
sacred legacy (*waṣiyya*) 299
sacredness
of Prophet 52–53
of springs *see* springs, sacred
of water *see* water, sacred
Sadberk Hanım Museum (Istanbul) 535n11, 539
Safi 383
Sagittarius (archer) 444
Ṣaḥāba *see* Companions
Ṣaḥīḥ (al-Bukhārī)
*ḥadīth*s in 176n109
Ḥalabī's use of 117, 144
kitāb al-maghāzī in
in general 82–83
chronology in 90
Warrior-Prophet in 87, 96
on love for Prophet 155n9
readings of 101
transmissions of Ibn Taymiyya for 110
Ṣaḥīḥ (Muslim)
*ḥadīth*s in 176n109
Ḥalabī's use of 117
transmissions of Ibn Taymiyya for 110
sāḥir (magician) 49
Saʿīd Paşa, Diyārbekirlī 484–487
saint illetré (*ummī*) 246–247, 249
sainteté/holiness
illumination et 260–261
prophétie et 229–242, 262–264
saint-ravi (*majdhūb*) 265
saints, visiting tombs of 222, 503
al-Sakhāwī 102
Salama b. al-Fāḍl al-Abrash 81n12
al-ṣalāt al-ʿaẓīmiyya (prayer of Divine immensity) 636
al-ṣalāt al-dhātiyya (prayer of the Divine Essence) 633
Salé 384, 385
Ṣaliḥ b. Kaysān 80
al-Ṣāliḥī, al-Shāmī 19, 116
Salmān 313–317, 322
Salmān al-Fārisī 229
al-Salsabīl 128–129
Salwat al-anfās (al-Kattānī) 625
samāʿ (audition spirituelle) 380, 411–429
samāʿāt (audition records) 108–109, 110
Sanāʾī 433, 439

sandals, Prophetic 101, 655
Sanseverino, Ruggero Vimercati 622, 628–629
Sanūsī 248
Sarıḳçı ʿAlī Ağa 596
al-Sarrāj, Abū Naṣr 21, 231, 239–241
satanic verses/story of the cranes (*qiṣṣat al-gharānīq*) 264
Satpanth (straight Path) 313–317
Saturn (*Zuḥal*) 443
Sāwa (lac) 415
Sayf al-ʿināya (al-Qandūsī) 640–641
Sayḥān 128–129
Ṣaymarī 201–202
al-Ṣayrafī, Abd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq 357
Schacht, Joseph 95
Schimmel, Annemarie 4, 181, 404, 620
Schneider, Benjamin 529
Schoeler, Gregor 80–81
school/école (*madhhab*) 231
scripts *see* ductuses; Uighur script
seal of prophethood 286–287, 613–614
Sebti, Meryem xv, 23–24, 327–344
secret (*sirr*) 258–259
The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History (Wansbrough) 90
Şehid Ali Paşa 612–613
Şemseddīn Sivasī 613
servant (*ʿabduhu*) 56–58
Seven Sleepers 40
seven virtues 482
Sevgili, Turan 588
Seyahatname (Evliya Çelebi) 554
Şeykh Ghālib 481
Şeykh Nasūḥ Efendī 469
al-Shādhilī, Abū al-Ḥasan 633n35
Shādhiliyya (Sufi *ṭarīqa*) 208, 262, 263, 626
shadow-theatre 520, 529
al-Shaffāʾ (sage-femme) 415, 416
Shāfiʿī 165, 199
Shāfiʿī school of law
khaṣīṣa and 199–200, 202, 206
proponents of 202, 204, 207, 208
Shāh Niʿmatullāh Walī Kirmānī 431
shahāda *see* foi/faith
shāhid (witness) 54–55
Shāhrukh, Timurid ruler 431, 434, 454
shāʿir (poet) 49
al-Shaḳāʾiḳ al-Nuʿmāniyya (Ṭaşköprizāde) 590
Shamāʾil (Tirmidhī) 197
shamāʾil literature
in general 157n17, 197
en général 418–420
iconographic function of 182
khaṣāʾiṣ literature and 201, 223
letters to Prophet and 362, 363
Prophet in 201
see also character/attributes, Prophetic
al-Shamāʾil al-Muḥammadiyya (al-Tirmidhī) 585, 607
Shamharūsh 634
Sharāb Ahl al-ṣafā (al-Qandūsī) 622, 626, 637, 639–640
Sharāb al-Muḥtaḍir (al-Kattānī) 625
Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā (al-Kharkūshī) 20, 165, 167n65, 202, 203, 205, 641
al-Shaʿrānī, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb 117, 126, 181n141, 246
sharīʿa (law) 315, 330, 331, 332, 334, 335, 438
al-Sharīf al-Raḍī 390
shaykh al-islām 102, 107–108, 111, 112
shaykh al-tarbiya (maître éducateur) 250
sherifism/chérifisme 381
shields, Prophetic 93
al-Shifāʾ bi-taʿrīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā (Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ) 153–191
in general 20, 155–156, 189–191
en général 248
on blasphemy 156–157
Ḥalabī's use of 117–118, 134
importance of 157–158
influences on
of Aristotelian ethics 184
of chivalry 184
of Ghazālī 176–177, 183n150, 191
of Sufi ethics 187
love for Prophet in 172–189
in general 155–156, 172–173, 191
effects of 187–188
meaning and source of 176–179
Prophet's appearance and 179–183
Prophet's character/attributes and 183–189
as Prophet's rights 173–176
rewards for 188

Prophet's pre-eminence in
in general 159–160, 190
ʿaẓīm as expression of his exalted statusand 162–163
qadr and 160–161
sources for
in general 163–165
God's acts and salvation history 168–172
God's word and revelation 165–167
purpose of 153, 157, 172, 205
sources for 157
structure of 156
mention of 8, 217, 622
Shīʿism
autorité du Prophète 230, 237
panégérique du Prophète 378
reconciliation between Sufism 291–292
see also Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism; Twelver Shīʿism
Shuʿab al-īmān (Bayhaqī) 175n105
Shushtarī 413, 523, 525
ṣibgha (colour) 657–658
Siddīq Ḥasan Khān 103
Sidretü l-muntehā (the lotus that marks the outer edge of the seventh heaven) 470–471
al-Sijistānī, Abū Yaʿqūb 307–312
silk fabric, used with *ḥilye* bottles 544, 546, 558
sīn (letter) 656
sin, Prophet and 39
sincerity (*ṣidq*) 187–188
Sīra (Ibn Isḥāq) 81–82, 86
Sīra ḥalabiyya (al-Ḥalabī)
in general 19
fiqh, *ḥadīth*, *adab*, Sufism and 117, 118–119
goals of 118–119, 123, 131, 136
ḥadīth in 119
miʿrāj/*isrāʾ* in
in general 120–121
angels in 139
Burāq in 130–131, 134
celestial rivers in 128–129
chronology and cosmogony in 126–134
damned in 137–138
date/day of 126–127
dunyā in 137
fiṭra in 137–138
Gabriel in 122, 128, 130, 136
Heaven in 135–136
Iblīs in 137, 138
Kaʿba in 139
length of 127
meeting between God and Prophet in 139–141
method used for 121–123
Moses in 131, 142
Muslim community in 138–139
other prophets in 123, 129–134, 142
as physical or spiritual experience 123–126, 144–145
prayer in 141–142
Prophet in 129–134
the Rock in 135
sun standing still in 131–132
topography of 127–129
visions of God by Prophet 142–144
reputation of 146–147
sources for 115–118
al-Sīra al-hishāmiyya (Ibn Isḥāq/Ibn Hishām) 118
sīra literature (Prophetic biograpies)
in general 19, 157n17, 197
of ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥalabī 115–116
descriptions of his possessions in 91–92
ḥadīth in 119
of Ibn Isḥāq 118
of Ibn Sayyid al-Nās *see Uyūn al-athar fī l-funūn wa-l-shamāʾil wa-l-siyar*
khaṣāʾiṣ literature 203, 215, 216, 223
of al-Ṣāliḥī 116
source de l'éloge du Prophète 379
Twelver Shīʿism and
ahl al-bayt and Prophet 277–279
ʿAlī and Prophet 276–277
battles of Prophet 280–281
birth and childhood of Prophet 276
fatal illness of Prophet 282–283
premonitions of Prophet 279–280
after Prophet's death 283–284
succession of Prophet 281–282
see also dalāʾil al-nubuwwa literature; *khaṣāʾiṣ nabawiyya* literature; *maghāzī* literature; *miʿrāj* literature; *under specific titles of books*

al-Sīra al-nabawiyya (Ibn Hishām) 275
al-Sīra al-shāmiyya (al-Shāmī al-Ṣāliḥī) 116
sirr (secret) 258–259
Solomonic white magic 539, 541
Soul 306, 308–312, 313–315
spirit/esprit (*rūḥ*) 257, 263, 264
spiritual companionship/compagnonnage spirituel (*ṣuḥba*) 259
spiritual energy/énergie spirituelle (*himma*) 251, 255
spiritual experiences/expériences spirituelles 229, 230, 235, 241
see also dream-visions/visions
spiritual states/états spirituels (*ḥāl*) 238, 251, 255
springs, sacred (*hagiasmata*/*ayazmas*)
in general 536–537
*ḥilye*s bottles and 566
important sites of
in general 566–567
Asklepion (Pergamon) 571
First of the Month (*Ayın Biri*) Church (Unkapanı) 577
The Fish [Spring] (*Balıklı*) 567, 569, 571
St. Catherine spring (Moda) 577
St. Demetrios shrine (Thessaloniki) 577
St. Saviour Philanthropos spring (Istanbul) 571, 573
visits to
by Christian and Muslims 575, 577
by Ottoman rulers 567, 573
al-Sqallī, Muḥammad al-Fāṭimī 624–625
St. Catherine spring (Moda) 577
St. Demetrios shrine (Thessaloniki) 577
St. George monastery complex (Istanbul) 571, 573, 575
St. Saviour Philanthropos spring (Istanbul) 571, 573
status, Prophetic *see* pre-eminence, Prophetic
Stetkevych, Jaroslav 386
Stetkevych, Suzanne Pinckney 378, 379, 385, 408
story of the cranes/satanic verses (*qiṣṣat al-gharānīq*) 264
story/history (*qiṣṣa*/*qiṣaṣ*) 70
straight Path (*Satpanth*) 313–317
Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā (al-Qalqashandī) 351, 352
Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn 118, 127, 131, 133
Subul al-hudā wa-l-rashād fī sīrat khayr al-ʿibād (al-Shāmī al-Ṣāliḥī) 116
succession, Prophetic 281–282
succour, call for (*istighātha*) 9, 355, 367–368, 374, 375
Sufism/soufisme
anthropomorphism and 521–522
brotherhoods (*ṭuruq*) 199
see also under specific brotherhoods
calligraphers and 621–622
définition 231–232
ethics in 187
expériences spirituelles 229, 235
influence of
on *ḥadīth* and *akhbār* 199
on *khaṣāʾiṣ* literature 212–213, 214
*miʿrājiyya*s and 432, 453–454, 455
poverty in 482–483
Prophet in 211, 628–629
raghbat in 482
reconciliation between Shīʿism 291–292
al-Suhaylī 118, 144
see also Rawḍ al-unuf fī sharḥ al-sīra al-nabawiyya li-Ibn Hishām
ṣuḥba (compagnonnage spirituel) 259
Sulamī 257, 263
Süleymān Çelebi
identification of 584
see also Vesīlet en-Necāt
Sulṭān Ḥusayn Mīrzā Bayqara, Timurid ruler 432, 455
al-Sunan al-Kubrā (Bahyaqī) 200
sunna
chez Dabbāgh 254, 261
chez Fuḍayl 233, 236, 238
*ḥadīth*s et 236, 239
Maroc 422
chez al-Tustarī 244–245
Sunnism
autorité du Prophète et 231, 237
soufisme et 242
vision de la foi 241–242
superiority
of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib 290–291, 311–312, 313–317

of Prophet
over ʿAlī 303–307, 308–311
over other prophets 60–61, 129–134, 142, 290–291, 435, 451
supplications to God (*duʿāʾ*) 208
Suraqah, Abdulaziz 622, 624
al-Suyūṭī
in general 20
on Burāq 131
on *khaṣāʾiṣ* 214–217
on meeting between God and Prophet 139–140
on Prophet's beauty 133
on Prophet's vision of God 142, 144
on the Rock 135
as source 117
works of
Durr al-manthūr 412
al-Khaṣāʾiṣ al-kubrā 117, 211, 214–215
al-Khaṣāʾiṣ al-ṣughrā 117, 133, 142
see also Kifāyat al-ṭālib al-labīb fī khaṣāʾiṣ al-Ḥabīb
swords, Prophetic 92, 93

Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā (Ibn Saʿd) 82–83, 91–92
al-Ṭabarī
en général 405
on ascension of the Prophet 464
on Kaʿb al-Aḥbār 59
on Qatāda 60
quoting of 219
on *ṣibgha* 657–658
on weapons of Prophet 91–92, 93
works of
Tafsīr 464
Taʾrīkh 81n12, 83, 89
taʿbīr 509–510
al-tābiʿūn (Followers) 73
Tafsīr (Jaʿfar Ṣādiq) 470
Tafsīr (al-Ṭabarī) 464
Tafsīr al-Jalālayn (al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī) 118
Tahdhīb al-asrār (al-Kharkūshī) 203
Ṭāʾiyya (Subkī) 118, 127, 131, 133
takhyīl (creation of mental images) 510, 511
Ṭalʿat, Aḥmad 598
taʿlīḳ-ductus 610, 611
talismanic functions
of *ḥilye*s 552, 593, 605
of *ḥilye*s bottles 539, 541, 549, 558, 559, 563
of Qurʾāns 651
Tanbīh al-anām fī bayān ʿuluww maqām sayydinā Muḥammad (Ibn ʿAẓẓūm al-Qayrawānī) 223–224
Tanwīr fī mawlid al-sirāj al-munīr (Ibn Diḥya al-Kalbī) 207
tanzīh (God's incomparability) 524
tarbiya (éducation initiatique) 259
targhīb/tarhīb (exhortation/dissuasion) 104, 105–106
Ṭarḥ al-saqaṭ fī naẓm al-luqaṭ (Suyūṭī) 214, 215–216, 217
Ṭarīfa, battle of (Rio Salado) 359
Taʾrīkh (al-Ṭābarī) 81n12, 83, 89
Ṭarīqa muḥammadiyya 209n7, 211, 629
tark *see zuhd/tark*
taṣawwuf *see* mystique/mysticism
tashbīh (God's comparability) 524
al-Taʾsīs (al-Qandūsī)
in general 625, 632
on ancestry 627–628
autograph manuscript of (i) 628n24
on calligraphers becoming writing 642–643
on calligraphy 659
al-Ghumārī copy of (ii) 628n24, 638
on letters of the Qurʾān 649–650
Muḥammadan stamp in 629
Shamharūsh in 634–635
Ṭaşköprizāde 590
taṣliya *see* prayers on the Prophet
Taurus (bull) 444
tawassul (invocation of God through the mediation of the Prophet) 9, 211, 355, 367–368, 375
al-Tāwdī b. Sūda, Abū ʿAbd Allāh 635
Tawḍīḥ fatḥ al-raʾūf al-mujīb (ʿAbd al-Raʾūf al-Munawī) 221
Taylor, Christopher 105
Ṭayyibī Ismāʿīlism 318–321
ténèbres/darkness 253, 262
Terrier, Mathieu xiv–xv, 22–23, 273–295
tests 466
tetragram 638–639
Teẕkiret eş-Şuʿarā (Laṭīfī) 584

al-Thaʿlabī 131–132, 134–135
thalassotherapy 571
see also springs, sacred
thawāb (merit) 104–105
Thibon, Jean-Jacques xv–xvi, 21, 244–266
three-column scheme 587
throne of God (*ʿarsh*) 444
Tijānī, Aḥmad 247
Timurid dynasty 431–432
al-Tirmidhī 197, 552, 585, 607
tombs
of Moulay Idrīs ii 625, 630, 656
of Prophet 103–104, 107
visiting of 103–107, 222, 423–424, 503
Topkapı Palace Library (Istanbul) 535
Topkapı Palace Pharmacy (Istanbul) 557–558
touching, devotional 553–554, 556, 593, 605
Toufiq, Ahmed 622
Tournefort, Joseph Pitton de 571
Toutant, Marc xvii, 25–26, 431–455, 467
transmissions
transition from oral to written 80–81
of works of
ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣānʿānī 81–82
Ibn Isḥāq 81–82
true columns 587
truth (*ḥaqq*) 61, 64
Tuḥfat al-malik al-ʿazīz bi-mamlakat Barīz (al-ʿAmrāwī) 645
Türk edebiyatında manzum miʿrâc-nâmeler (Akar) 461
Türk Vakıflar Hat Sanatları Müzesi (Museum of Turkish Calligraphic Art; Istanbul) 535n1
Türkī *see* Eastern Turkish
ṭuruq/*ṭarīqa* *see under specific brotherhoods*
al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn 313–316
al-Tustārī, Sahl 118, 166, 187n171, 244–245, 285
Twelver Shīʿism
*ḥadīth*s in 273
Prophet in
in general 22–23, 273–275
Divine names and 292–293
isrāʾ/*miʿrāj* and 290–291
knowledge of 288–290
Perfect Man and 293–295
pre-eternity of 284–285, 302
as seal of prophecy 286–287
in *sīra* literature *see sīra* literature
see also Ismāʿīlī Shīʿism

Ubayy b. Kaʿb 59
Uighur script 431–432, 434
ulamāʾ
during Mamlūk rule
in general 209–210
academic competition and 210–211
al-ʿUlaymī, Mujīr al-Dīn 132
ʿulūw (elevation in the *isnād*) 100
ʿUmar 283
ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb 358, 503
ʿUmar b. Muḥammad al-Hawwārī 250
Umayyad Empire
maghāzī literature and 79–80
major military defeats of 84–85
Umm ʿUthmān b. Abī l-ʿĀṣ 416
ummahāt al-muʾminīn (mothers of the believers) 200
ummī (saint illetré) 246–247, 249
unbelief (*kufr*) 102–103, 111
union (*waṣl*, *wiṣāl*), between God and Prophet 440–442, 444–447, 449, 450, 453
universal histories 89
Unmūdhaj al-labīb fī khaṣāʾiṣ al-ḥabīb (Suyūṭī) 214, 215, 216–217
al-Uns al-jalīl (al-ʿUlaymī) 132
ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr 80
uswa ḥasana (good model) 7–8, 197
ʿUtārid (Mercury) 442–443
uʿṭītu khamsa narrative 203
ʿUyūn al-akhbār wa funūn al-āthār (Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn) 299
Uyūn al-athar fī l-funūn wa-l-shamāʾil wa-l-siyar (Ibn Sayyid al-Nās)
miʿrāj/*isrāʾ* in
on Burāq 134
on celestial rivers 128
framework/chronology of 121
*ḥadīth*s use by 123, 131
Moses in 132
prayers in 141
Prophet's vision of God in 142–144
Qurayshites in 124

sun standing still in 131
as source, for al-Ḥalabī 115–116, 118, 126

veneration, Prophetic
in general 502–504
attacks on 503–504
in Maghribi 352
poetry on *see madā'iḥ nabawiyya*
purpose of 153–154
see also kissing, devotional; letters to the Prophet; love/amour
Venus (*Zuhara*) 443
vertus du Prophète *see* character/attributes, Prophetic
Vesīlet en-Necāt (Süleymān Çelebi)
in general 584–586, 615–616
layout/graphic aspects in 586–589
column schemes for 587
handwritten reproductions of 588–589
lithographic reproduction of 588
vowel signs in 587–588
vestiges (*āthār*) *see* relics/vestiges (*āthār*), Prophetic
Vimercati-Sanseverino, Ruggero xiv, 20, 153–191
Virgin Evangelistria monastery (Tenos) 574
Virgo (maiden) 444
virtues, Prophetic *see* character/attributes, Prophetic
Vishnu 317
visions *see* dream-visions/visions (*ru'yā*)
visualisation of Prophet *see* representations/images, Prophetic
vocalisation marks 656
vowel signs 587–588, 614
vulnerabilty, Prophetic 280

Wahb b. al-Munabbih 132, 180–181
Wahhabites 502
Wajh-e dīn (Nāṣir-e Khosraw) 306–307
wājibāt (duties of the Prophet) 213, 215
walāya (Divine Alliance of Friendship) 21, 230, 232, 273–274, 280, 285–286
Walsh, Robert 567, 569
Walters Art Museum (Baltimore) 539
al-Wānī 110
Wansbrough, John 90, 91
waqf sytem 210
al-Waqīdī
Kitāb al-maghāzī of 79, 82, 87, 88
mention of 116
war, Prophetic relics 91–95
warner (*nadhīr*) 44
Warrior-Prophet
in *maghāzī* literature
in general 95
Abbasid context of 86–87
early development of 85–86
emergence of 79–83
growth of importance of 87–88
Umayyad context of 79–80, 84–85
see also kutub al-maghāzī
waṣī (Heirs) 301–312, 321
al-Wāsiṭī (Abu Bakr) 244
waṣiyya (sacred legacy) 299
waṣl *see* union
water, sacred
bottles for 559, 561, 569, 571
curative powers of
in general 559, 561, 563
origins of belief 566
water of life (*āb-ı ḥayāt*) 561
wāw (letter) 656
weapons, Prophetic 91–93
Weapons of Christ (*Arma Christi*) 574
wirātha muḥammadiyya (Muḥammadan inheritance) 508, 509, 516
wiṣāl *see* union
witness (*shāhid*) 54–55
wives of the Prophet *see under specific wives*
women, visions of God by 144
Word (*kalima*) 310–311, 313
wuḍū' (ritual purification) 201

Yaḥyā Ibn Sallām 118
Yazıcıoğlı Muḥammed
biography of 590
tomb of 593
see also Risāle-i Muḥammedīye
Young, Frances 522–523
Yūnus b. Bukayr 81n12
Yūsha' b. Nūn b. Yūsuf al-Ṣiddīq (Joshua) 131
al-Yūsī, Ḥasan 424

Yūsuf I, of Granada
in general 352, 359–360
letter to Prophet on behalf of *see* Ibn al-Khaṭīb, Lisān al-Dīn
prestigious descent of 361, 363, 368, 369–371, 374
Yūsuf u Zulaykhā (Jāmī) 450

Zadeh, Travis 564
Ẓāhirī school of law 207
zajal poetry 28, 411, 425
zakāt (alms) 307
Zamakhsharī 118
Zamzam water/well (Mecca) 122, 480, 561
Zamzamiyyas 561, 563
Zarrūq, Aḥmad 251, 258, 266
Zati 546
Zāwiya Ziyāniyya 622
Zayd (Prophet's adopted son) 65, 72
Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn al-Bakrī al-Ṣiddīqī 516
Zaynab bint Jahsh (Prophet's wife) 53, 65, 72
Zeyniyye 469
Zibā [Tugay], Emīre 588
ziyāra (tomb visitations) traditions 103–107, 222, 423–424, 503
see also letters to the Prophet
zodiac, signs of the 443–444
Zoodochos Pege (Fountain of Life; Istanbul) 567, 569, 571
Zuḥal (Saturn) 443
Zuhara (Venus) 443
zuhd/*tark* (renoncement/renunciation) 43, 229, 231, 237, 242, 482
see also ascèse/asceticism
al-Zuhrī, Ibn Shihāb 80–81, 84